

The Relevance of Uddhava Gita as a Guide to the Bhakti-Yoga

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Abstract

Context: The *Uddhava Gita* consists of a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Uddhava, found in the *Srimad-Bhagavat-Mahapurana*. This Gita consists of a total of one thousand and forty *shlokas*, even lengthier than the *Bhagwad-Gita* consisting of seven hundred *shlokas*. Sri Krishna imparted this invaluable teaching to his dear friend and devotee Uddhava shortly before the commencement of the *Kali-Yuga*. It encompasses Sri Krishna's final teachings, particularly bestowing upon Uddhava the knowledge about spiritual wisdom, the path of devotion (*Bhakti-Yoga*), renunciation, and liberation from the worldly sufferings.

Aims: The main aim of this paper is to understand and establish the relevance of *Uddhava Gita* as an important scripture for the path of the *Bhakti-Yoga*.

Materials and methods: An attempt has been made to present those details about *Bhakti-yoga* from the *Uddhava Gita* which are expected to be addressed in a *Bhakti-Yoga* scripture. Reputed commentaries and translations on The *Uddhav Gita* and *SrimadBhagvatam* were referred. Also, commentaries on other well-known Bhakti scriptures were used to support its value.

Results: We noticed that for the attainment of Liberation, various Yoga paths have been explained by Sri Krishna in the *Uddhava Gita*. However, he has emphasized the most on the path of *Bhakti-Yoga*. The qualities which devotees should develop, the characteristic signs of *Bhakti*, precautions and solutions to make *Bhakti-Yoga* easy and accessible have been told in this Gita. The foremost means to attain Sri Krishna as per *UddhavaGita*, is said to be through exclusive and loving devotion towards him.

Conclusion: Since this *Gita* explains *Bhakti-Yoga* in great detail, while covering the relevant topics which are of practical importance for those interested in scriptural guidance on this path, we can understand it to be a relevant scripture for the *Bhakti-Yoga* path.

Keywords: *Uddhava-Gita*, Devotion, *Bhakti-Yoga*, Sri Krishna, *Gita*

Introduction

The *Uddhava Gita* is found in the eleventh canto of the *Srimad-Bhagavat-Mahapurana*, also known as *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (SB), encompassing verses from the fortieth verse of the sixth chapter to the last verse of the twenty-ninth chapter. This *Gita* consists of a total of one

thousand and forty verses. Just as the *Bhagavad Gita* contains the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, the *Uddhava Gita* provides us with the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Uddhava. The teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* were imparted by Sri Krishna to encourage Arjuna for the battle at

Kurukshetra; however, for the completion and dissemination of that divine knowledge which He had not spoken even in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Lord instructed Uddhava.¹

Before knowing about what Sri Krishna has told about Bhakti-Yoga, we should understand why Uddhava chose only Him for these teachings. It has been explained that as long as the *jeeva* remains enslaved by the *gunas*, it will always live in fear of the God. When such a person, afflicted by the egoistic feeling (*ahamkara*), believes in the multiplicity of the soul and bondage, and without adopting renunciation remains engaged only in materialistic activities in the outside world, he will experience only sorrow and attachment (SB 11/10/33).² This is also true for the *Devatas* including Brahma (the creator as per various Puranas) and Human beings. Due to their identification with the body, they remain enchanted by God's illusion. They too mistakenly consider sensory experiences to be the truth. For this reason, Uddhava tells Sri Krishna (who was self-illuminated *Paramatma* himself) that there is no one apart from him, who can instruct him in the knowledge of the Self. After going through endless sufferings and becoming detached, Uddhava took refuge in Sri Krishna, because He was none other than Sriman-Narayana, who is unblemished, beyond time and space, all-powerful, all-knowing, imperishable resident of the *Vaikuntha* (a realm or state of consciousness beyond anxiety, fear, etc.) and the eternal friend of humans (SB 11/7/17 – 18).³

Bhakti as the highest achievement

It's worth noticing that Sri Krishna declares that His supreme devotion is the "highest achievement" possible (SB 11/19/40).⁴ Human life is exceedingly rare, and it is only upon obtaining it that the development of true knowledge (*TatvaJnana*) becomes feasible. Therefore, wise people should detach from the

attachments of the three *gunas* and dedicate themselves to the loving devotion of the God. All stages of human life are determined by the *gunas* and *karmas* of the *Prakriti*. When a person triumphs over these *gunas* manifested from their own consciousness, they become fully absorbed in the God through the practice of *Bhakti-Yoga* and eventually attain their true form, which is referred to as liberation (SB 11/25/32-33).⁵ *Bhagwad Gita Shloka* 14/26 also mentions that those who serve the God with unalloyed pure Bhakti-Yoga, rise above the three *gunas* of *Prakriti* and attain the level of the *Brahman*.⁶

Devotees of the God

Sri Krishna has explained the characteristics of his devotees, which inform us of the favorable qualities needed to progress on the Bhakti-Yoga path. It's quite obvious that as per circumstances, most of them should be gradually developed for someone to be a devotee.

The narration of God's pastimes (*Leelas*) and features is highly auspicious and purifies the whole creation, and devotees who continuously listens to, sings praises of, and remembers His divine pastimes, witnesses His manifestations and pastimes again through drama, surrenders to Him, and dedicates all the *karmas* to Him, certainly attains His unparalleled devotion (Even *Narada Bhakti-sutra* sixty-seven mentions "*bhaktāekāntinomukhyāḥ*", which means that those devotees whose only goal is God are the foremost or best kind of devotees⁷). If a person receives *bhakti* through the company of His devotees, then such a person is always engaged in His worship. Such a person can easily attain His abode, which gets revealed by His devotees (SB 11/11/23 – 25).⁸ *Narada Bhakti sutra* thirty-eight also says "*mukhyatastumahat-kṛpayai vabhagavat-kṛpā-leśādvā*" meaning one mainly acquires *bhakti* by the grace of saints (pure devotees), or by a miniscule spark of the God's mercy.⁹

Then Sri Krishna also elaborates on the qualities of a saintly devotee. He says that a saintly person is compassionate and does not cause suffering to others. Even if someone is aggressive, they remain tolerant and forgiving towards all beings. Their strength and firmness come from truth, they are free from jealousy, and they remain equal amidst material happiness and distress. They dedicate their time to the welfare of others. They are not confused by worldly desires and keep their senses under control. They are cheerful, far from harshness, always exemplary, and free from the sense of ownership. They do not strive for worldly affairs and maintain control over their dietary habits. They remain calm and stable. Such a saint considers God as the only refuge and is thoughtful in nature. Saintly persons are very vigilant in discharging their duties and are not subject to external changes, as they remain stable even in times of crisis. They conquer the six material qualities – sorrow, attachment, hunger, thirst, death and old age. They are free from the desire for reputation and are respectful to others. Such a person is adept in explaining the principles of the God and has the true knowledge of Him. He never deceives anyone, a well-wisher, kind friend to all and the most learned. He knows that the *dharmic* duties propagated in the scriptures help in purifying, and he knows that ignoring them creates disharmony in an individual's life. But, after taking full refuge in the lotus feet of the God, such an individual abandons even such normal *dharmic* duties and remains engaged only in His worship, and such a person is the saint of the highest order (SB 11/11/29 – 32).¹⁰

In the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagwad Gita*, *shlokas* 12/13 to 12/19, Sri Krishna similarly describes qualities which are present in the devotees which are very dear to Him.¹¹

The characteristic signs of *Bhakti*

Sri Krishna tells us that until this body is thrilled with love, the *chitta* melts and becomes overjoyed, tears of joy do not start flowing from the eyes, and the mind does not start drowning in the flood of devotion, there is no possibility of it becoming pure. When the speech starts getting overwhelmed with love, the *chitta* seems to melt and flow away, and even the flow of tears does not stop even for a moment; although from time to time he also starts laughing out loud, and leaving his reluctance aside might even start to sing or dance carefree. Such a devotee purifies not only himself, but “the entire world” (SB 11/14/23 – 24).¹²

This is also mentioned in *Narada Bhakti-sutra* sixty-eight “*kañṭhāvarodharomāñcāsruhbhiḥparasparamlapamānāhpāvayantikulāniḥprthivīmca*” meaning when such unalloyed devotees talk of the God, their throats choke, tears flow down, and their hair stands erect in ecstasy. The presence of such devotees sanctifies not only their families, but this whole Earth!¹³ In the *Bhagwad-Gita shloka* 10/9, Sri Krishna similarly says that the thoughts of his pure devotees remain fixed on Him only, and while serving their Lord with their lives devoted to Him, the devotees get immense contentment and *ananda* from conversing about the glories of their Lord.¹⁴

Effective solutions for the path of *Bhakti-Yoga*

Firstly, one should understand that there is nothing other than God. Whatever one observes is very much like a dream. Secondly, we need to focus our mind by contemplating on the God. We should give up thinking of other material means and their results. Following are some of the solutions and practices which are very useful for the path of *Bhakti-Yoga* :-

Japa/Chanting : When a person constantly contemplates on material objects, his *chitta* remains entrapped in

those material objects, and when a person contemplates on God, his *chitta* remains absorbed in Him (SB 11/14/27 – 28).¹⁵ By thinking about God and chanting His name, even great obstacles like lust and anger can be completely destroyed (SB 11/28/40).¹⁶

Devotional hymns and *Kirtans*: Sri Krishna says that whoever wants to acquire *Bhakti* for Him, needs to have firm faith in His divine pastimes; should constantly remember/repeat/sing His glories; have firm faith in His worship and praise Him through devotional hymns.

Worship/*Pooja*: The devotee should have great love and respect for God’s devotional worship and is advised to offer obeisance with the entire body.

Worship of Sainly devotees: Devotees are also advised to worship God’s pure devotees in a way which is even more superior to His own worship and also should be able to see God in all the creatures.

Burning mental desires through *karmas* done with *Bhakti*: Actions of all the organs should be directed towards Him, with speech and mind also directed towards Him only while sacrificing all the mental desires. Also sacrificing wealth, renouncing material sense gratification and happiness, and performing all desirable activities such as charity, *yajna*, *japa*, *vrata* and *tapas* only for the purpose of achieving Him.

It has been told that those human beings who follow these *dharmic* principles and have actually surrendered themselves to Him will very easily develop deep loving devotion to Him. It’s obvious that even “other achievements or goals” will then not remain unfulfilled for such a devotee (SB 11/19/20-24).¹⁷

Instructions for householders: Sri Krishna explains that as per their *dharma*,

they need to maintain purity, contentment, austerity, celibacy, and should be loving towards all the beings. Householders can engage in intimacy only with their own wives during appropriate time of their monthly cycles for procreation. Those who, with an undivided mind, remain engaged in serving God through their prescribed duties according to their *Varna* and *Ashrama* (stage of life), attain unwavering *Bhakti*. By properly adhering to their duties, householders purify their *Chitta* and come to understand the true knowledge and position of God, and with this knowledge, they can quickly attain Him. If *Bhakti* for God is also incorporated into the performance of these duties, then liberation can effortlessly be attained. That unwavering *Bhakti*, which increases day by day, will surely lead that householder to the realization of God (SB 11/18/43 – 47).¹⁸

Narada Bhakti-sutra sixty-two says that “*natatsiddhauka-vyāvahāroheyah kintuphala-tyāgas tat-sādhanam cakāryameva*” meaning until one attains perfection in *Bhakti*, roles and responsibilities should not be sacrificed, but the fruits of those *karmas* definitely need to be sacrificed, while doing *Bhakti-Sadhana*.¹⁹

Practicing indifference: Sri Krishna states that indifference/ complete detachment is the highest and the most beneficial. Only a selfless and detached person can attain His *Bhakti* (SB 11/20/35).²⁰ Thus, for steady progress detachment needs to be developed.

Refuge in the Saints: God is always present with us in the form of “saints”. Therefore, whoever takes refuge in the saints, their bondage of actions, fear of the world, and ignorance are completely alleviated. Just as the sun rises and grants sight to everyone, similarly saints provide inner vision for the perception of their true

self and the God (SB 11/26/31 and 11/26/34).²¹

Satsang: Sri Krishna further declares that from the very initiation of *Bhakti-Yogasadhana* there should also be engagement in “*satsang*”. Since there is no other means to cross the ocean of existence apart from these two practices, as the saints regard the God as their sole refuge, and the God always remains very closely associated to the saints (SB 11/11/48).²² *Narada Bhakti sutra* number forty-one tells “*tasmimstaj-janebhedābhāvāt*” meaning there is no difference between the God and his pure unalloyed devotee.²³ In *Sri Vishnu-Sahasranamam* the nine hundred twenty-ninth name of the God is mentioned as “*Santah*” which means that He appears in the form of saints to bless and guide the devotees.²⁴

Caution against *siddhis* : Development of *Siddhis* through Bhakti-Yoga has also been discussed. It has been told that wise men should take refuge in the lotus feet of the God and effortlessly attain various *siddhis*. The illusion (*Maya*) of God cannot harm such devotees, for they have no pride of engaging in *yoga-sadhanas* or rituals. In contrast, such yogis and people who only remain proud of their own efforts and simultaneously do not seek refuge at the lotus feet of the God are certainly ensnared by the God's *Maya*.

Sharanagati or Surrender: The God is ultimate friend and well-wisher for all. He even becomes submissive to His loving devotees who remain in His refuge. For example, even while exalted deities like Brahma place their divine crowns at His lotus feet but still, we notice that in His Rama *Avatara*, due to love, He maintains true and dedicated friendship with the monkeys, who seek His refuge in devotion. Thus, God bestows everything upon His devotees who take refuge in Him. Even in *Bhagwad Gita* 9/22 Sri Krishna tells that “Those who worship me with

pure unalloyed devotion, I provide them with what they lack and preserve what they already have.”²⁵

True devotees of the Lord even begin to worship the dust of His lotus feet. For such devotees, what could possibly be rare? God exists within everyone's heart as the *Antaryami* (inner controller) and, outwardly, as their *Guru*, annihilating all their sinful deeds and ultimately revealing His divine form before them (SB 11/29/3 – 6).²⁶

Dedication of negative emotions: Even if devotees dedicate the actions done on the occasions of grief and fear, such as crying and fleeing, to God with a selfless attitude (*Nishkaam Bhava*), these too become pious.

Thus, the wisdom of the wise and the insight of the sages lie in their ability to attain that eternal, truthful, and blissful *Ishwara* through this non-eternal, non-truthful and miserable material body (SB 11/29/21 – 22).²⁷

End goal of every *Yogic sadhana* : Even if a yogi strengthens the body through a dedicated long-term practice of *Hatha-yoga*, true wisdom lies in not being satisfied with only that much! They should ideally remain firmly engaged in the pursuit of the God. The practitioner who relies on the God and diligently follows the yogic principles as prescribed by Him, cannot be shaken or stopped by any obstacles. All their desires are destroyed, and they become immersed in self-joy attaining *Moksha* ultimately (SB 11/28/44).²⁸

The uniqueness of *Bhakti-Yoga*

A comparison has been made to the impurities of gold. Just as gold sheds its impurities due to the heat of fire, in the same way, *Bhakti-Yoga* works as fire for our impurities. The soul attains freedom

from the tendencies to initiate karmas, and thus ultimately unites with God.

It has been said that just like the eyesight is corrected by applying collyrium, which enables the eyes to perceive subtle objects, similarly as one sings and listens to the pastimes of the God, impurities of the *chitta* are removed, and one begins to perceive even the essence of subtle objects as told in SB 11/14/24 – 25.²⁹ Such a devotee will thus start seeing things as they really exist.

In Mahabharata, while Bhisma was lying on the bed of arrows after the war, he told Yudhishtir “*eṣa me sarvadharmāṅām dharmō dhikatamō mataḥ, yadbhaktiyāpūṇḍarīkāḥ śaṁstāvair arcenna raḥsadā*”, which means that the best *dharma* as per Bhisma is that one should devotedly offer prayers in admiration to the Lord whose eyes are like Lotus, with hymns of praise recited with devotion.³⁰ Whatever heavenly realms, liberation, *Vaikuntha* abode, etc., can be obtained through *dharmic* actions, renunciation, knowledge, penance, *yoga* practice, charity and other welfare means, a devotee of God can effortlessly attain them through his *Bhakti-Yoga*, if he wishes. However, if we talk about the real saintly devotees of the God, they do not need anything at all. Even if God wishes to give them something, they do not want to receive it. They do not seek worldly valuable possessions; in fact, they don’t even desire liberation or *Moksha*! Such saintly devotees only want to remain immersed in the “*Bhakti*” for the *Ishwara* (SB 11/20/32 – 34).³¹

Sri Krishna tells Uddhava that he should completely surrender to Him alone (who is the essence of all living beings), while abandoning the notions of scripture, their positive and negative injunctions, and even the subjects that are to be heard or have been heard, while cultivating the feeling of Him being everywhere. Because by taking shelter of Him, Uddhava will be freed

from fear forever (SB 11/12/14 – 15).³²

Similarly in the *Bhagavad Gita* 18/66, Sri Krishna tells “Abandon all forms of *dharma* and simply surrender to me alone, because I will liberate you from all kinds of sins. So, do not worry”.³³

Towards the end of the *Uddhava Gita*, Sri Krishna explains that when a person relinquishes all actions and surrenders to Him, then that person becomes particularly venerable. The God liberates him from the cycle of life and death, granting him the immortality of *Moksha*. Upon uniting with the *Ishwara*, he becomes in essence one with Him (SB 11/29/34).³⁴

Discussion

Just like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Uddhava Gita* emanates directly from Sri Krishna, who has been understood to be none other than Sri Vishnu or The God Himself, as per various scriptures like *Srimad Bhagvatam*, etc. The *Uddhava Gita*, which is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Uddhava, is considered extremely beneficial for all to study. It is natural for humans to regard sensory experiences as truth. Due to the ego associated with the false and impermanent body, individuals remain ensnared in countless sinful acts. Engaging in devotional practices such as the chanting of the Lord's name (*japa*), singing hymns (*bhajans*), and engaging in congregational worship (*sankirtans*) greatly facilitates the practice of *Bhakti-Yoga*. The inception of *Bhakti-Yoga* along with *satsang* (company of the saints) is also advocated by Sri Krishna, for where there are saints, God Himself is present. Sri Krishna has even stated that He exists in this world in the form of saints.

Detachment and selfless attitude seem to be extremely important for the attainment of *Bhakti*. The subjects we ponder upon are the ones that reside in our mind and heart. So, why not contemplate on the God and settle Him in our hearts? This appears to be a flawless solution for advancing on

the path of *Bhakti-Yoga*. Through devotion, a devotee can attain anything in this world and the hereafter, but through exclusive devotion to the *Ishwara*, one can attain *Ishwara* Himself!

We found that various types of yoga appear in the *Uddhava Gita* like *Karma-yoga*, *Sankhya-yoga*, *Jnana-yoga* etc. but Sri Krishna's emphasis was more on *Bhakti-Yoga* throughout this *Gita*. In any important *Bhakti* scripture we expect to find relevant details pertaining to the characteristics of the devotees, the nature and practices to be followed in the *sadhana*, precautions to be taken and finally the end goal worth achieving. We see all of this has been explained, while giving relevant examples of various saints

and devotees who appeared during that time. Thus its of great value for those interested in the *Bhakti-Yoga* path.

Conclusion

In the *Uddhava Gita*, *Bhakti-Yoga* has been explained in great detail in a way that motivates it's reader to take up this path. It has been told to be the highest achievement. Even the foremost path for attaining Sri Krishna has been told be that of *Bhakti-Yoga*. Since all the important aspects like instructions for the devotees, *Bhakti sadhana methods*, liberation through *Bhakti*, etc. have been explained in detail, it should be understood to be an important guide for those on the *Bhakti-Yoga* path.

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