



## Spiritual confluence: Bhagavad Gita's tenets in Saul Bellow's novel Herzog

Devanshi Dave

Research Scholar, Department of English, Jai Narayin Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

### Abstract

The three main routes of Jnana yoga (knowledge), Karma yoga (activity), and Bhakti yoga (devotion) are used to explore the philosophy of the Gita. Jnana yoga, also known as the yoga of knowledge, refers to the understanding of Brahman, the one ultimate truth that is unaffected by differences and life's intricacies. The purpose of jnana, which is the finding of one's atman, is consciousness and self-realization. Karma yoga, also known as the yoga of action, is a method of achieving spiritual freedom via teaching people to follow their moral principles without worrying about the results. Bhakti yoga, also known as the Yoga of Devotion, describes how meditation and sacrificial practice lead to realization of God. This research paper focuses on understanding Saul Bellow's famous work *The Herzog* textually within the framework of the three yogas—Jnana, Karma, and Bhakti. This chapter draws comparisons and contrasts between Herzog's pursuit of the spiritual journey and the current instability. The Phenomenology of Spirit by Hegel, The Ethics by Spinoza, and Aurobindo's philosophy in regard to the Gita and Herzog are all covered in this paper.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, eastern philosophy, spiritual enlightenment, american literature, postmodernism

### Introduction

The ageless Bhagavadgita integrates ideas of truth, yoga, knowledge, action, and devotion. It is found in the epic Mahabharata. It provides a fundamental understanding of the three main routes to self-realization: Jnana (knowledge), Karma (activity), and Bhakti (devotion). It is distinct, unique, limitless, and permanent. Its use is not limited by geography, time, or language. The Gita is an extensive work that synthesizes, in a focused and useful way, the spiritual lessons found in the Upanishads and Vedas. "As the traditional chapter titles put it, the Gita is brahmavidya yogashastra, a textbook on the supreme science of yoga" (Fowler 48). It asserts that all deeds result in knowledge and create Samskaras, or accumulated inclinations from past lifetimes. The goal of the Gita is to offer many routes to spiritual enlightenment, with a focus on acquiring the correct knowledge—knowledge that has one as its object as the means of achieving enlightenment.

**The Gita offers four different paths to a spiritual life** Karma, Raja, Bhakti, and Jnana yoga. It lists issues, evaluates fixes, and describes approaches and strategies. For instance, Jnana yoga may be used to get the necessary information if the issue is ignorance of self-awareness. Raja yoga incorporates mental control and meditation if the issue is one of insufficient attention and concentration. Karma yoga is a useful tool for mind purification if impurity is the issue. The only way to strengthen purity of heart and mind is via bhakti yoga. The greatest method for achieving life and concentration is the Yoga of Devotion since wants can prevent enlightenment. Jnana yoga purifies the mind by substituting the correct knowledge for ignorance. "Bhakti yoga is about creating an intimate relationship with the Divine. It requires purification of one's mind and nurturing of love and affection for the Supreme" (Pandey and Navare 111). However, practice, or abhyasa, is the foundation of all of the aforementioned aspects of yoga (Jnana, Karma, Raja, Bhakti). The journey of spiritual realization is pointless and a waste of time without practice or abhyasa.

Hermeneutics is a theoretical framework for understanding and interpreting ancient writings, and it forms the basis of this study framework. It is used in religion, philosophy, and social sciences. This study backs up the reading of philosophical principles with textual evidence from the Gita and Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. Qualitative and exploratory methods are employed in the process to determine the aspects of Jnana, Karma, and Bhakti Yoga. In the novel *Herzog*, the protagonist Moses struggles to reconcile his contradictory ideas and contradictory existence in order to discover the truth. Moses experiences conflicting energies and ideas, but in the end, he shows that he can handle ambiguity. He chooses to embrace life's moments rather than fear death because he believes in their beauty, even if he faces the possibility of dying. *Herzog* mirrors the emotional journey of contemporary man in a contemporary Wasteland.

### The Bhagavad Gita and western philosophers

According to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the spirit/mind is the ultimate reality, and it seeks to become self-conscious and self-aware by using reason and self-determination. The Gita's concept of Brahman, which seeks to unite with God in transcendental awareness, is comparable to this philosophical notion. The Gita affirms Hegel's view that the human intellect is capable of realizing self-awareness, but it rejects the freedom of choice that all other animals possess. Although the spirit/mind is initially unconscious and existing in a state of non-awareness, it has the capacity to develop self-awareness and consciousness throughout time. The spirit/mind expresses itself into the created universe to fulfill its ultimate potential and to learn about itself. According to Hegel, the ultimate goal of the spirit/mind is to attain liberation or total self-knowledge, which may be done via increasing mental awareness. Humans have achieved self-knowledge throughout human history; this is the same process by which God knows his identity as God.

Bellow contends that history is the source of Hegel's essence of human existence, and that freedom is attained via the concept of civilization rather than awareness of our own mortality.

Herzog, in short, lives in a materialistic, a narcissistic, modern America, where everyone seems to be administering the common medicine now known as Reality or the Truth... meanwhile he offers to fight the battles of world historical thought, searching his way between lessons of Tolstoy... and those of Hegel. Herzog makes his journey, stumbles into error, attempts murder, hungers for relationships, misuses his opportunities, fails in his intentions. (Beverly 217)

Bellow's Herzog is a product of a culture in which people have become increasingly independent and estranged from the outside world due to external physical advancement, but where internal advancement and emancipation have been completely neglected.

Integral yoga, often known as Sri Aurobindo's yoga, is a systematic approach to self-perfection that seeks to reveal the potential that lies within each person. Integral yoga is centered on the full alignment of the individual—mind, body, and spirit—with the Absolute or Divine. Although intuitive knowledge is thought to be the essence of who we are, it has to be controlled and disciplined inside. Karma Yoga is an altruistic practice in which a person gives up their habitual behaviors via sacrifice and renunciation. In Saul Bellow's Herzog, running away from reality results in mental disarray and turmoil because reason and faith aren't balanced, which causes alienation, pain, and delusion. While Bhakti Yoga seeks the Self Supreme as a heavenly entity by devotion, Jnana Yoga promotes self-realization via introspection. A freed soul with selfless dedication, love, and intuitive insight is the pinnacle of Bhakti and devotion. The regeneration of equilibrium introduces contradictions between reason, religion, and morality in Bellow's Herzog. The Gita and Spinoza's Ethics both center on the idea of freedom and emancipation, with the idea that each person may become free by obtaining the appropriate knowledge, which is defined by an intuitive comprehension of the ultimate, the self, and existence as a whole. Three basic ideas are shared by both Spinoza and the Gita: knowledge and freedom, God and nature, and intuitive knowledge. The Gita holds that God is almighty, omnipresent, and omniscient, and that He is imminent in everything. The cosmos is run by the ubiquitous awareness. According to Spinoza, "Whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God" (Spinoza 1994) <sup>[6]</sup>. Thus, God is present in every mode and possesses infinite attributes, and is also present in every human being as an idea originating from the human mind and intellect, which is also one of the modes of God's infinite attributes. Thus, achieving self-knowledge is the path to self-liberation or realization according to the Gita, Spinoza, and Herzog. Understanding one's relationship to God and to the metaphysics of nature requires self-knowledge. In a same vein, Bellow's Herzog embraces spiritual rebirth in order to advance towards the correct understanding.

### **The Bhagavad Gita's philosophical tenets and Herzog**

American Jewish author Saul Bellow is the only person to have won the National Book Award for Fiction three times and the first person to receive the Nobel Literature Prize in 1976. Bellow, a multi-award winner, combines postmodernism, existentialism, realism, modernism, and ethical literary criticism in his writing philosophy. In

examining contemporary turmoil and the personal quest for a spiritual path, his literature frequently contrasts financial success with the emptiness of spiritual existence. Herzog by Saul Bellow is set in a postmodern American society marked by dwindling humanism, which causes the intellectual protagonists to suffer from mental difficulties. Regarded as "Bellow's most Jewish novel," (Marrouchi & Azmi 314) it depicts the inner journey of contemporary man in a 'Wasteland' that draws inspiration from T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland." A fictional figure named Moses Herzog restores trust in God, truth, and knowledge by acknowledging that the universe is temporary and that there is only one everlasting conscious 'Self.' Having seen death, he now appreciates the beauty of life and prefers to relish fleeting moments of delight over being afraid of dying.

The search for one's own truth and the difficulties of living in the postmodern era are examined in Saul Bellow's novel Herzog. Intellectual thinking has an impact on Herzog, which results in pain and delusion. According to the novel, one must be freed from thinking and reason while being rooted in tradition, culture, morality, and religion in order to pursue the infinite. The Gita claims that humans are dynamic and superior to all other living things, transcending matter, consciousness, and life. The subject exists in the environment, and matter is the creative energy that creates life with finite features. Bellow's portrayal of Herzog, is a reflection of the disorganized, alienated atmosphere of postmodern America, which rejects autonomy and order in favor of the advancement of the mind over matter and the pursuit of the infinite over the limited. Chaos and pain characterize Herzog's existence, and the deterioration of civility in American culture blinds his mind, causing him to seek different goals and remain ignorant of the reality. To quote the Gita,

Arjuna, in this Yoga (of disinterested action) the intellect is determinate and directed singly towards one ideal; whereas the intellect of the undecided (ignorant men moved by desires) wanders in all directions, after innumerable aims. (SMBG. 2.41) Seeking contentment and tranquility, or the purpose of existence, Herzog wanders aimlessly from one city to another, from one person to another, and from one notion to another.

According to the Gita, Brahman, also known as the infinite, is the source of all energy, consciousness, and ultimate truth. Since Atman functions on an individual basis, Jnana suggests many application values, including absence, tradition, verbal testimony, inference, self-perception, and inclusion. Dualities and life's intricacies are absent from Brahman's understanding, and everything that addresses these topics is constrained by the limited characteristics of humanity. Herzog lets the dualities of existence rule the mind, so resisting the infinite's outreach. The infinite characteristics of man are self-transcendent and transcendental, existing above empirical physical features; the cosmos deals with order and oneness. The finite component, in which the self is constantly aware of itself, defies the subject-object duality.

The Gita highlights that the realization of the higher self, where stimulation and environment are irrelevant, is the result of having the correct knowledge and acting in accordance with one's dharma. Herzog acts with no sense of accountability or resignation, and his mind is clouded with worry and fears. While vehemently disagreeing with this,

his buddy Sandor Himmelstein counsels him to purify the gates of perception by experience and self-awareness (Bellow 86). Herzog's inner fears, however, keep him from developing close bonds with friends, family, and society; as a result, he comes to believe that they are reliable and dismisses the actual quest for the infinite.

In Bellow's novel, the character Herzog finds himself ensnared in an intricate and tumultuous realm of the heart and intellect. He experiences a fractured society, a mechanical world of materialism, and self-disintegration as a result of reason and religion not being balanced. Having no idea what he wants and feeling empty, Herzog is left with no choice except to leave the actual world. He is erratic and complex due to his skepticism and inconsistencies. The Gita states that a person can be freed from the constraints of mere deeds by having an equipped mind with wisdom, regulated senses, and detached intents. The Gita teaches that the way out of the clashing outer world and the inner self is via inactivity. A real follower of karma yoga knows the difference between doing nothing, acting against the law, and acting solely. Problems are not solved by inaction; on the contrary, it causes more difficulty, confusion, and diversion. Releasing someone from responsibility and obligation is against their Dharma. Herzog develops an escapist mindset as a result of outside influences upsetting his inner harmony and serenity. Herzog finds serenity when he understands the importance of acceptance in life. A turbulence of impulsive wishes filled mind is brought to consciousness via an understanding of inner eternal quiet and human sorrow. This strengthens the connection with quiet, calm, happiness, and faith by reducing the distance between the inner and outward selves.

Herzog supported the harmony of reason and religion by holding that there is a relationship between the eternal Self and nature. He supported the ideals of romantic writers like Rousseau, who urged humanity to abandon the chaotic modern world and return to nature and tradition. Only when the outward and inner natures are in balance can inner issues be resolved, as he writes in one of his letters:

“Modern science, least bothered with the definition of human nature, knowing only the activity of investigation, achieves its profoundest results through anonymity, recognizing only the brilliant functioning of intellect. Such truth as it finds may be nothing to live by, but perhaps a moratorium on definitions of human nature is now best.” (Bellow 129)

In order to achieve spiritual satisfaction, Herzog highlights the significance of a natural balance between the heart and the intellect. He claims that commitment and conscious self-awareness via the heart and mind enable purity and intuitive wisdom.

Thus, the spiritual emptiness brought on by excessive rationalism and experimentation in postmodern American culture is examined in the novel Herzog. In an attempt to find purpose in life, he departs from reality, feels alienated, and falls into illusion. Following introspection, he looks to nature and spirituality for answers, discovering a balance between morality, reason, and faith. He gradually achieves self-regeneration by seeing the need of going back to nature, and he ultimately achieves self-awareness by striking a balance between reason, religion, and morality.

## Conclusion

In Saul Bellow's Herzog, the interaction of Jnana, Karma, and Bhakti Yoga, three philosophical foundations of the Bhagavad Gita, presents a multifaceted picture of moral reconciliation and self-discovery. Moses Herzog, Bellow's main character, struggles with the mental and emotional upheavals of contemporary life, much like the spiritual conundrums addressed in the Gita. From the perspective of Jnana Yoga, Herzog's journey towards self-awareness and enlightenment resembles the search for transcendental wisdom. He struggles with his disjointed identity and aims to get a more profound comprehension of himself and his role in the world. Herzog's path aligns with the ideals of Karma Yoga, which emphasize the value of deliberate activity and the repercussions of idleness. Herzog's escape-oriented behavior and issues with accountability highlight the need of acting in accordance with one's moral and spiritual obligations, as the Gita teaches. Herzog's quest for purpose and atonement via interpersonal connections and introspective thought is reflected in Bhakti Yoga's focus on love and devotion as routes to divine connection. Herzog's story is enhanced by Bellow's incorporation of these spiritual frameworks, which also serves as a criticism of the moral and spiritual viciousness that permeates postmodern American culture. The integration of Western existential concerns with Eastern philosophical notions highlights the universal pursuit of self-realization and the timeless significance of the Gita's teachings.

In the end, Herzog's path to self-awareness and the harmony of reason, religion, and morality mirrors the ageless lessons found in the Bhagavad Gita. The moral of the book is emphasized by Bellow's depiction of Herzog's journey from chaos to serenity: balancing the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life is the way to enlightenment. Herzog proves to be a testimonial to the ongoing need of moral clarity and spiritual development in navigating the complexity of contemporary life through this in-depth investigation.

## References

1. Bellow Saul. Herzog Penguin, 2007.
2. Fowler Jeanene D. The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students, Eastbourne: Sussex Academy Press, 2012.
3. Gross Beverly, Saul Bellow. “Bellow's Herzog.” Chicago Review, 1964:17(2/3):217.
4. Marrouchi Ramzi, Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi. “Madness and the Alienation of Intellectuals in Saul Bellow's World of Fiction.” International Journal of English Linguistics, 2019:10(1):314.
5. Pandey Ashish, Ajinkya V Navare. “Paths of Yoga: Perspective for Workplace Spirituality.” The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Fulfilment. Springer International Publishing, The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Fulfilment, 2018:1(2):101–126.
6. Spinoza B. A Spinoza Reader: The ethics and other works (Edited and trans. Curley, E.). Princeton University Press, 1994.
7. Srimad Bhagavad Gita (With English Translation & Transliteration). Gita Gorakhpur Press, 2016.