Jnana and Bhakti in the Bhagavad Gita: A Dialogue between Shankara and Ramanuja on Peace and Social Unity

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ABSTRACT

The Bhagavad Gita articulates yoga not only as a means of individual liberation but as a philosophical framework capable of addressing the deeper causes of human conflict. Among its classical commentators, Shankaracharya and Ramanujacharya represent two major interpretive traditions that emphasise Jnana and Bhakti Yoga, respectively. This paper undertakes a comparative study of their commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, placing them in a philosophical "dialogue" to examine how these distinct yogic paths contribute to the ideal of global peace. The term "dialogue" is used in a hermeneutical sense to indicate an interpretive engagement between their positions rather than a historical interaction. Shankara locates the roots of violence and discord in ignorance (avidya) and ego-centered identity, arguing that the realisation of the non-dual self dissolves rigid distinctions between "self" and "other," thereby fostering sama-darsana, an equal vision of all beings. Ramanuja, while affirming the reality of plurality, grounds peace in loving devotion to a personal God who indwells every creature, cultivating compassion, humility, and universal responsibility through bhakti and surrender (prapatti). Though their metaphysical assumptions differ, both traditions converge in identifying the disciplined transformation of consciousness as the necessary precondition for lasting peace.

The study advances three principal findings. First, Jnana and Bhakti address complementary dimensions of human psychology; cognitive and affective, thereby offering a holistic yogic strategy for reducing fear, hatred, and the will to dominate. Second, both commentators regard the transcendence of ego (ahankara) as essential to overcoming the mental patterns that generate collective violence. Third, the coexistence of their divergent interpretations within the Gita tradition exemplifies a non-exclusivist philosophical model capable of sustaining unity amid diversity, a condition increasingly vital in a culturally plural and politically fragmented world.

By demonstrating how inner integration through yoga can generate ethical universality and empathy across boundaries of nation, religion, and culture, this paper argues that the Gita's dialogical philosophical heritage offers enduring conceptual resources for the cultivation of global peace.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, global peace, sama-darsana, ahankara, yogic consciousness, social unity

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most revered texts of the Hindu philosophical tradition, occupies a unique position in the history of world philosophy. Situated within the epic narrative of the Mahabharata, it presents a profound dialogue between the warrior prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the eve of the Kurukshetra battle. This dialogue addresses not merely the immediate crisis of Arjuna's moral paralysis but extends to questions of ultimate reality, the nature of the self, duty, liberation, and the proper ordering of human life. For roughly two thousand years, the Gita has served as an inexhaustible source of philosophical and spiritual reflection, inspiring commentaries across diverse schools of Indian thought.

Among the most significant commentators are Shankaracharya (eighth century CE), the champion of Advaita Vedanta, and Ramanujacharya (eleventh to twelfth centuries CE), the founder of Vishishtadvaita Vedanta.

Their respective readings of the Gita diverge sharply on questions of metaphysics, the nature of liberation, and the relative supremacy of different yogic paths. Where Shankara foregrounds Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge, as the highest means of realising the non-dual Brahman and attaining moksha, Ramanuja emphasises Bhakti Yoga, the path of loving devotion, as the most direct and universally accessible route to union with a personal God (Ishvara) who is both transcendent and immanent.

Yet, despite these differences, both thinkers share a common concern: the transformation of human consciousness as the foundation of genuine ethical action in the world. This paper brings their positions into a comparative philosophical dialogue (not a historical conversation, but an interpretive engagement mediated by the shared text of the Gita) to explore how Jnana and Bhakti Yoga, understood individually and in relation to each other, can serve as resources for the promotion of peace, both inner and social. In an era marked by rising nationalism, communal violence, ecological crisis, and geopolitical instability, this inquiry carries considerable contemporary relevance.

The paper proceeds through the following sections: a conceptual clarification of Jnana and Bhakti Yoga as presented in the Gita and its two commentarial traditions; an analysis of Shankara's epistemological approach to peace through non-dual knowledge; a corresponding analysis of Ramanuja's devotional approach to peace through love and surrender; a comparative synthesis that identifies convergences and productive tensions between the two paths; and a concluding reflection on the significance of this dialogue for contemporary efforts at building inclusive and peaceful societies.

Conceptual Clarification: For the purposes of this study, "peace" is operationalized at two interconnected levels: (1) Inner peace, defined as the psychological and spiritual state of freedom from the afflictions (kleshas) of ahankara (ego), kama (desire), and krodha (anger); and (2) Relational peace, defined as the absence of structural violence and the active presence of sama-darsana (equal vision) in social interactions. "Social unity" is defined not as cultural or religious homogenization, but as non-exclusivist pluralism: a cohesive social arrangement where diverse groups coexist with mutual respect, grounded in the recognition of a shared ontological or theological dignity.

METHODOLOGY

Comparative Hermeneutics and Dialogical Approach

This study employs a comparative hermeneutic methodology, treating the commentaries of Shankara and Ramanuja not as historical artifacts to be merely described, but as active philosophical interlocutors in a "dialogue." Drawing on frameworks of comparative philosophy (Ganeri, 2011; Nicholson, 2010), this dialogical approach seeks a "fusion of horizons," where the distinct metaphysical assumptions of Advaita and Vishishtadvaita are allowed to illuminate complementary dimensions of a shared problem: the cultivation of peace.

The criteria for selecting specific Gita passages for close analysis were twofold: (1) the verse must explicitly address the psychological roots of conflict (e.g., ego, fear, attachment) or the mechanisms of social cohesion (e.g., equality, devotion, surrender); and (2) the verse must have received substantial, yet distinct, interpretive attention in both the Shankara-Gita-Bhashya and the Ramanuja-Gita-Bhashya. This targeted selection ensures that the comparative analysis remains grounded in primary textual evidence rather than generalized secondary claims.

BACKGROUND

The Bhagavad Gita and Its Major Commentarial Traditions

The Bhagavad Gita as a Philosophical Text

The Bhagavad Gita comprises 18 chapters and 700 verses, structured as a dialogue between Krishna, who serves as Arjuna's charioteer and spiritual guide, and Arjuna himself. The immediate dramatic context, namely

the moral dilemma of a warrior who must fight and kill his own kinsmen, serves as the entry point into a wide-ranging philosophical inquiry. The Gita does not resolve this dilemma through a simple ethical prescription but through a systematic teaching on the nature of the self (atman), the cosmos (Brahman), the law of action and consequence (karma), and the various paths by which human beings can attain liberation (moksha) and live righteously in the world.

The Gita integrates multiple yogic paths: Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), Karma (action), and Dhyana (meditation), presenting them not as mutually exclusive alternatives but as complementary dimensions of a comprehensive spiritual discipline. The plurality of paths reflects the plurality of human temperaments and capacities, and the Gita's philosophical richness has enabled its appropriation by thinkers of widely divergent persuasions across the centuries (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Zaehner, 1969).

Shankaracharya and Advaita Vedanta

Shankaracharya (approximately 788–820 CE), widely regarded as the most influential systematic philosopher in the history of Hindu thought, composed a detailed commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (the Gita-Bhashya) as part of his broader project of establishing Advaita Vedanta as the definitive interpretation of the Upanishadic tradition. For Shankara, the fundamental teaching of the Gita, as of the Upanishads, is that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is one, without a second (advaita), and that the individual self (jiva) is, in its deepest nature, identical with Brahman.

The apparent diversity of the world (the multiplicity of selves, objects, and relations) is attributed to maya. This beginningless cosmic illusion superimposes distinctions upon the undifferentiated ground of pure consciousness. Ignorance (avidya) of this non-dual truth is the root cause of all suffering, conflict, and moral failure. Liberation (moksha), therefore, consists in the direct, experiential knowledge (jnana) that the individual self is not a separate, bounded entity but the infinite, self-luminous Brahman itself. This realisation dissolves the root of ego-identity (ahankara) and, with it, the basis of all conflict and violence (Gambhirananda, 1984; Deutsch, 1969).

Ramanujacharya and Vishishtadvaita Vedanta

Ramanujacharya (approximately 1017–1137 CE) composed his commentary on the Gita (the Gita-Bhashya) as part of his systematic presentation of Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, the philosophy of qualified non-dualism. For Ramanuja, the ultimate reality is not an undifferentiated, featureless Brahman but the personal God Vishnu-Narayana, who is infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and supremely blissful. Individual selves (jivas) and the material world (prakriti) are real and distinct from God, yet they subsist within God as his "body" (sharira), wholly dependent on and qualified by him.

Liberation, for Ramanuja, does not consist in the complete dissolution of individual identity but in the eternal, beatific union of the liberated self with God, a union characterised by love, knowledge, and bliss (Carman, 1974; van Buitenen, 1956). The path to this liberation is primarily Bhakti Yoga (loving, total dedication to God), culminating in prapatti, the complete surrender of self-will to divine grace. Through devotion and surrender, the devotee transcends the narrow ego, cultivates compassion for all creatures as the body of God, and participates in a community of love and mutual service.

Jnana Yoga and the Epistemology of Peace: Shankara's Perspective

Avidya as the Root of Conflict

Shankara's analysis of human conflict begins with a diagnosis of its deepest cause: avidya, or metaphysical ignorance. In his commentary on the Gita (especially on chapters two, three, and thirteen), Shankara argues that the ordinary human being, under the sway of maya, mistakenly identifies the self with the body, the senses, the mind, and the ego-complex (ahankara). This misidentification generates a fundamental sense of separation from others and from the totality of being. From this root error flow, the passions such as desire (kama), anger

(krodha), greed (lobha), and fear (bhaya), that drive individuals and collectivities into competition, domination, and violence.

Arjuna's paralysis at the opening of the Gita is, for Shankara, a paradigm case of this ignorance. Arjuna is attached to his bodily and social identity, to his kinsmen as "his own," and to the preservation of these bonds at the cost of his dharmic duty. Krishna's teaching, as Shankara reads it, is designed progressively to dismantle this attachment by revealing the true nature of the self as the deathless, formless atman, wholly distinct from the transient body and its social relations (Gambhirananda, 1984, pp. 45–72).

Sama-Darsana: The Vision of Equality

The culminating vision of Shankara's Jnana Yoga is expressed in the concept of sama-darsana, the equal vision of all beings. In his commentary on Gita 5.18, where Krishna says that the wise person sees with equal eyes a learned brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and one who eats the dog, Shankara emphasises that this equality of vision is not a social or political programme but an ontological recognition: at the level of ultimate reality (paramartha), the same undifferentiated Brahman is the inner self of all beings.

This non-dual vision has profound ethical implications. One who has realised the identity of all selves with Brahman can no longer regard any being as a genuine "other" against whom violence or domination would be justified. The psychological root of hatred (the perception of irreducible difference between "self" and "enemy") is dissolved by the recognition that the apparent other is, in truth, one's own deepest self. As Shankara writes in his commentary on Gita 6.29, the yogi who sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self is established in eternal peace (Gambhirananda, 1984, pp. 243–246).

Limitations and Critiques

Critics of Shankara's approach, including Ramanuja himself, have objected that an ethics grounded in the negation of plurality risks dissolving the very categories necessary for moral agency and social responsibility. If all distinctions are ultimately illusory, it is not clear how the jnani, having realised the non-dual Brahman, can be motivated to act compassionately in the world or to work toward social justice. Shankara's response, developed through his doctrine of vyavaharika (conventional) and paramarthika (ultimate) levels of reality, attempts to preserve the moral domain within the sphere of conventional reality while maintaining the supremacy of non-dual knowledge at the ultimate level. However, this two-level framework has been a persistent site of philosophical controversy (Deutsch, 1969; Thibaut, 1904).

Bhakti Yoga and the Ethics of Devotion: Ramanuja's Perspective

The Personal God as the Ground of Universal Love

Ramanuja's approach to peace begins not with a critique of ignorance but with a theology of love. For Ramanuja, the fundamental reality is not an impersonal Absolute but a God of infinite love, who creates the world not out of necessity or illusion but out of an overflowing desire to share his bliss with finite beings.

This theological conviction shapes Ramanuja's reading of the Gita at every level: the path to liberation is not the austere, intellectualist route of Shankara's Jnana Yoga but the path of total, loving devotion to the personal God who is the inner self (antaryamin) of all creatures.

Ramanuja's commentary on Gita 11, in which Arjuna receives the vision of Krishna's universal form (vishvarupa), is particularly instructive. Ramanuja interprets this vision as a direct disclosure of the fact that all of reality (gods, humans, animals, the cosmos itself) is the body of God. To see this is not merely to see an ontological truth but to feel it as a call to love: if every creature is part of God's body, then harm done to any creature is harm done to God, and compassion for any creature is an act of worship (van Buitenen, 1956; Carman, 1974).

Prapatti and the Dissolution of Ego

The culminating act of Bhakti Yoga in Ramanuja's system is prapatti, total self-surrender to God. This

surrender is not a passive resignation but an active reorientation of the will: the devotee releases the grip of ahankara (the illusion that one is an autonomous, self-sufficient agent pursuing one's own ends) and entrusts oneself entirely to God's grace and guidance. As Ramanuja comments on Gita 18.66, "Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in me alone; I will liberate you from all sins," this surrender is the highest act of freedom, for it is only by surrendering the false ego that the individual self discovers its true dignity as a beloved child of God.

The ethical implications of prapatti are far-reaching. The individual who has surrendered the ego no longer acts out of fear, pride, or desire for domination. Having recognised the divine indwelling in all creatures, and having surrendered personal self-will, the devotee acts with humility, compassion, and a spirit of service (seva) toward all beings. Ramanuja's commentary consistently links devotion to God with care for the suffering: the devotee who truly loves God cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of God's creatures (Carman, 1974, pp. 128–155).

Bhakti, Plurality, and Social Inclusion

One of the most significant features of Ramanuja's bhakti theology, from the perspective of social unity, is its relative inclusivity. In his commentary on Gita 9.32, where Krishna declares that even women, vaishyas, shudras, and those of sinful birth can attain the highest goal through devotion, Ramanuja emphasises that the path of bhakti is open to all, irrespective of caste, gender, or social status. The democratic impulse of devotion (the conviction that God's love is universally available and that each soul has an irreplaceable dignity) provides a theological foundation for social equality that Shankara's less explicitly inclusive emphasis on jnana does not as readily supply.

The Bhakti movement in medieval India, which drew heavily on the theology of thinkers like Ramanuja and his successors, gave rise to a rich culture of devotional poetry and music in which ordinary people, including farmers, weavers, women, those of low-caste status, gave voice to their direct experience of God's love. This tradition represents an important historical instance of how bhakti theology can function as a force for social inclusion and nonviolent resistance to oppression (Lorenzen, 1995; Novetzke, 2008).

Nuancing Historical Practice: While Ramanuja's textual doctrine in the Gita-Bhashya is radically inclusive, it is methodologically necessary to distinguish this philosophical ideal from historical institutional practice. As scholars of South Asian religion have noted, later historical developments within the Sri Vaishnava tradition sometimes replicated the very caste-based exclusions that the theology of bhakti ostensibly challenged (e.g., debates over temple access and the Vadakalai-Tenkalai divisions). Acknowledging this gap between normative theological inclusivity and historical sociological reality prevents the idealization of the bhakti tradition and grounds the analysis in rigorous historical awareness (Novetzke, 2008; Lorenzen, 1995).

Close Textual Engagement: A Comparative Analysis of Key Gita Passages

To ground the preceding thematic analyses in primary textual evidence, it is necessary to examine how Shankara and Ramanuja interpret specific, pivotal verses of the Gita. A close reading of these passages reveals how their distinct metaphysical frameworks yield complementary approaches to peace and social unity.

- **Gita 2.11–30:** Shankara interprets Krishna's instruction to Arjuna as a rigorous epistemological correction: grief arises from misidentifying the eternal *atman* with the perishable body. Ramanuja agrees the soul is eternal, but frames it relationally: the soul's eternal nature is one of *sesha* (servitude) to the Lord, making grief over the body a failure to recognize one's true divine belonging.
- **Gita 5.18 & 6.29 (*Sama-darsana*):** For Shankara, seeing a learned brahmin, a cow, or a dog with equal eyes is an ontological recognition that the same undifferentiated Brahman is the inner self of all. For Ramanuja, this equality is rooted *in sharira-shariri bhava* (the body-soul relationship); all beings are the "body" of God, making harm to any creature an affront to the Divine, thereby demanding active, relational compassion.
- **Gita 9.32:** Ramanuja heavily emphasizes this verse to demonstrate that *bhakti* transcends social hierarchies, explicitly granting spiritual access to women, *vaishyas*, and *shudras*. This provides a textual

basis for social leveling that is less explicitly foregrounded in Shankara's jnana path, which historically presupposed the social and ritual qualifications (*adhikara*) of the traditional seeker.

- **Gita 11 (*Vishvarupa*):** Shankara reads the terrifying universal form as a pedagogical tool to shatter Arjuna's attachment to worldly outcomes and reveal the inexorable workings of maya and kala (time). Ramanuja interprets the same vision as a revelation of cosmic intimacy: the universe is the divine body, inspiring awe, love, and total surrender rather than mere existential dread.
- **Gita 18.66:** Shankara interprets "abandon all dharmas" as the renunciation of ritualistic *karma* in favor of exclusive dedication to Self-knowledge. Ramanuja interprets this as the pinnacle of prapatti (surrender), where the soul, acknowledging its absolute incapacity to achieve liberation through its own effort, throws itself entirely on divine grace.

Comparative Synthesis: Convergences, Tensions, and Complementarity

Convergence on the Transcendence of Ego

Despite their metaphysical differences, Shankara and Ramanuja converge on a crucial point: the ego (ahankara), the delusive sense of being a separate, self-sufficient agent, is the primary source of the psychological distortions that generate conflict and violence. For Shankara, ahankara arises from the fundamental misidentification of the self with the body and the mind; its dissolution through jnana reveals the infinite, undivided nature of the true self. For Ramanuja, ahankara is the illusion of self-sufficiency, namely the failure to recognise one's essential dependence on and belonging to God; its dissolution through prapatti opens the soul to the transformative power of divine love.

In both cases, the transcendence of ego produces a reorientation of the subject's relationship to others: the fear of the other, the desire to dominate, and the will to violence lose their psychological grip when the isolated, defended self discovers either its identity with all selves (Shankara) or its beloved membership in the community of all God's creatures (Ramanuja). This convergence suggests that the yogic traditions represented by these two commentators share a common diagnosis of the root cause of social conflict and a common prescription (inner transformation) as its cure.

Cognitive and Affective Dimensions: A Holistic Psychology of Peace

The complementarity of Jnana and Bhakti Yoga can be understood in terms of a holistic psychology of peace that addresses both the cognitive and affective dimensions of human consciousness. Shankara's Jnana Yoga operates primarily at the level of understanding: it corrects the fundamental error of misidentification and replaces it with the direct, experiential knowledge of non-dual reality. Ramanuja's Bhakti Yoga operates primarily at the level of feeling and will: it transforms the motivational structure of the person through love, gratitude, humility, and surrender.

A complete psychology of peace requires both dimensions. Cognitive insight into the unity of all being, without affective transformation, risks becoming a cold, detached intellectualism incapable of generating the warmth of compassion and the will to serve.

Conversely, affective devotion, without philosophical grounding, can degenerate into sentimental exclusivism: a passionate love for one's own community that intensifies hatred of outsiders. The dialogue between Shankara and Ramanuja suggests that genuine peace requires both the clarity of non-dual vision and the warmth of universal love, both the intellectual dissolution of the false self and the affective surrender to a reality larger than oneself.

The Gita as a Model of Non-Exclusivist Pluralism

The coexistence of Shankara's and Ramanuja's interpretations within the living tradition of Gita commentary exemplifies what might be called a non-exclusivist philosophical pluralism: the recognition that multiple interpretive traditions, each illuminating different facets of the same inexhaustible text, can coexist and enrich

one another without requiring the suppression of any one voice. This model has important implications for contemporary interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

In a world where religious and cultural diversity is frequently experienced as a source of conflict, the Gita's tradition of diverse commentaries demonstrates that profound philosophical differences need not generate hostility. The very disagreements between Shankara and Ramanuja, concerning the nature of Brahman, the reality of the individual self, the supremacy of jnana over bhakti, have been conducted within a shared framework of commitment to the liberation of all beings and the promotion of dharma. Their dialogue models a mode of philosophical engagement that combines intellectual seriousness with mutual respect, a combination that is urgently needed in contemporary public discourse (Nicholson, 2010; King, 1999).

Yoga, Inner Transformation, and Global Peace: Contemporary Implications

The Inner Roots of Violence

Contemporary research in conflict studies, social psychology, and peace education increasingly corroborates the Gita's philosophical diagnosis that the roots of violence lie not primarily in material scarcity or structural inequality (though these are important contributing factors) but in the patterns of consciousness that generate fear, dehumanisation, and the will to dominate. Studies of genocide, sectarian violence, and ethnic conflict consistently identify processes of identity polarisation (the rigid demarcation of "in-group" versus "out-group") as central mechanisms by which ordinary human beings become capable of extraordinary cruelty (Staub, 1989; Volkan, 1997).

The yogic analysis of these processes, as articulated by both Shankara and Ramanuja, points to the same root: the over-identification of the self with a particular, bounded identity (national, religious, ethnic, caste-based) at the expense of the wider, more inclusive identity that yogic practice seeks to cultivate.

For Shankara, this over-identification is ultimately a cognitive error, correctable through the discipline of viveka (discrimination) and vichara (inquiry). For Ramanuja, it is a motivational distortion, correctable through the reorientation of love toward its ultimate object, the God who dwells in all.

Yoga as a Practice of Peace Education

The implications for contemporary peace education are significant. Both the Jnana and Bhakti traditions suggest that sustainable peace requires not merely institutional reform or legal constraint (though these too are necessary) but a transformation of the inner life of individuals and communities. This insight resonates with contemporary approaches to peace education that emphasise the cultivation of empathy, perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and a sense of shared humanity as preconditions for nonviolent coexistence (Harris & Morrison, 2003; Bajaj, 2008).

Yogic practices offer concrete, time-tested methods for cultivating these inner capacities. While a growing body of preliminary neuroscientific research suggests correlations between sustained contemplative practice and enhanced emotional regulation, empathy, and reduced amygdala reactivity (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), critical scholarship cautions against neuro-reductionism.

Scholars warn against overstating the generalizability of laboratory-based mindfulness findings to complex, real-world social conflicts, or treating meditation as a panacea for structural violence (Van Dam et al., 2018). Therefore, this paper posits yogic inner transformation not as a replacement for institutional and political reform, but as a necessary psychological and ethical complement to it.

The Dialogical Heritage as a Resource for Intercultural Understanding

The dialogue between Shankara and Ramanuja, as recovered and extended in this paper, also offers a model for intercultural and interreligious understanding. One of the most persistent obstacles to global peace is the tendency of religious and cultural communities to regard their own traditions as uniquely and exclusively valid, dismissing alternatives as error or inferiority. The Gita's tradition of diverse interpretations

demonstrates that a single sacred text can sustain multiple, genuinely different readings, each illuminating aspects of the truth that others may obscure.

This hermeneutical insight (that truth is inexhaustible and that no single interpretation can exhaust it) provides a philosophical foundation for the kind of genuine dialogue between traditions that global peace requires. It does not entail relativism: Shankara and Ramanuja each believed that their interpretation was correct, and their disagreements were real and substantive. But it does suggest that intellectual engagement across differences, motivated by a shared commitment to the liberation of all beings, is both possible and productive. In this sense, the dialogical heritage of the Gita is not merely a historical curiosity but a living resource for the work of peace-building in the contemporary world (Ganeri, 2011; Dalmiya, 2016).

Limitations and Scope

This study is primarily conceptual and hermeneutical in nature, and its scope is intentionally focused. First, it concentrates on the classical Gita-Bhashyas of Shankara and Ramanuja, and does not exhaustively engage with later sub-commentaries or modern reinterpretations (e.g., those by Gandhi, Aurobindo, or Radhakrishnan). Second, while the paper draws parallels between yogic psychology and contemporary peace studies, it does not present empirical, quantitative data on the efficacy of these practices. Finally, the argument that inner transformation is a precondition for peace should not be misread as a claim that it is a sufficient condition; addressing structural inequality, political disenfranchisement, and institutional violence requires robust socio-political action alongside individual ethical cultivation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has undertaken a comparative philosophical analysis of Shankaracharya's Jnana Yoga and Ramanujacharya's Bhakti Yoga as presented in their respective commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, with a view to exploring the contributions of these yogic paths to the cultivation of peace and social unity. Three principal findings have emerged.

First, the two paths explore different sides of human psychology (the thinking part and the feeling part) and together form a complete yogic approach for inner change. Jnana Yoga's critique of avidya and its promotion of sama-darsana target the intellectual causes of conflict; Bhakti Yoga's focus on love, humility, and prapatti addresses the emotional and motivational causes. Both are essential for a full teaching of peace.

Second, despite their profound metaphysical disagreements, Shankara and Ramanuja converge on the centrality of ego-transcendence as the necessary condition for genuine peace. Whether the ego is dissolved through the knowledge of non-duality or through the surrender of self-will to divine love, its transcendence results in a reorientation of the individual's relationship to others, from competition and domination to recognition and compassion.

Third, the coexistence of these divergent interpretations within the Gita tradition exemplifies a non-exclusivist philosophical pluralism that is of considerable value for contemporary intercultural and interreligious dialogue. In affirming that the same sacred text can sustain multiple, genuinely different readings, the Gita tradition models a mode of philosophical engagement that combines intellectual rigour with mutual respect, a combination urgently needed in a world increasingly divided by religious and cultural difference.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to existing scholarship by moving beyond a mere comparative contrast of Advaita and Vishishtadvaita metaphysics. Instead, it frames their dialogue as a complementary, non-exclusivist psychological and ethical framework uniquely suited for modern peace studies. By bridging classical Indian hermeneutics with contemporary peace education, this study offers a dual-path model: it demonstrates that sustainable social unity requires both the cognitive deconstruction of rigid identity boundaries (Shankara's jnana) and the affective cultivation of universal, active compassion (Ramanuja's bhakti). In doing so, the Gita's dialogical heritage is shown to be not merely a historical artifact, but a living, adaptable resource for addressing the root causes of conflict in a culturally plural and politically fragmented world.

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