

Contemplative Meditation on “Kshetra” (Field) in Bhagavad-Gita, and its Unfolding in Modern Scientific Ideas

Shive K. Chaturvedi

*Associate Professor (Emeritus) Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and
Geodetic Science at The Ohio State University*

Corresponding author email: shive.chaturvedi@gmail.com

Abstract

The present article is aimed to focus on its multidimensionality in Bhagavan Krishna’s dialogues: it is a kind of contemplative meditation on the term, ‘kshetra’, its contents, and characteristics. It is very interesting to note that the opening verse in the Bhagavadgita introduces the mysterious kshetra (‘field’- English equivalent but in loose sense) through two highly loaded and pregnant terms- Dharma-kshetra (a multidimensional field of plurality of dharma) and Kuru-kshetra (the battlefield of Kurus). And the last word in the last verse, Niti-a characteristic of dharma-kshetra, stands as the manifestation, through its cyclic spiraling paths of convergence of the supreme value: prosperity, opulence, victory, and righteousness. In the thirteenth chapter Shri Krishna addresses the mystery of Supreme Gyana (Adhyatmic wisdom) through the science (Vigyanā) of kshetra, Kshetrajña, and knower of all the kshetras- adhibhautic and adhyatmic.

It is concluded that the multidimensional kshetra of Bhagavadgita unfolds and relates to some of the powerful notions of ‘fields’ in modern sciences. In material sciences, and studies of nature of mind and consciousness, for example, it can be shown that understanding and interpretations of various phenomena depend upon on the notions of material as well as non-material field entities. And this opens a new field of assessment of multitudes of ethical, moral, social, and other values hidden within the Vedic word kshetra, its derivatives, and cognates, and thus I propose to conceive this word ‘kshetra’ as the seed-shabda, the embryonic word.

Keywords: Bhagavad-Gita, Consciousness, Field, Kshetra, Meditation, Science.

1. Introduction

Ideas and concepts associated with the term, ‘kshetra’ are powerful, multidimensional, and they pervade various traditional texts that include-the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Epics, the Smritis, Yoga disciplines, Ayurveda, jyotish, sangeet, shilpa, tantra, sahitya, and of course the Bhagavadgita. Kshetra and its derivatives occur, for example, one hundred seventy-five times in Vedic texts alone, with wide range of meaning that include physical space, region, land, field, country, deity, etc. [1].

In the thirteenth chapter Shri Krishna addresses the mystery of Supreme Gyana (Adhyatmic wisdom) through the science (Vigyana) of kshetra, Kshetrajna, and knower of all the kshetras- adhibhautic and adhyatmic. The manifest as well as unmanifest Prakriti is kshetra; the sharira (body) is kshetra. This paper intends to demonstrate that within these fields there is a continuous play of dynamic interactions between various Samkhya-yogic contents and unfolding and enfolding within micro-fields and macro-fields. The sharira is not under static, or unchanging modes of existence, but goes continuously through multiple modes of dynamic changes, involving various kshetras. The supreme value of our existence can only be experienced directly, if we can continuously or perpetually keep reorienting our own kshetras in a way that can lead us toward the wisdom of entire spectrum of Gyana-kshetra and Kshetrajna, and to the state of Moksha from Prakriti-bandhana (bondage), and to finally achieve the Supreme abode.

Kshetra as neuter is recognized to be a derivative from the verbal root *ksi-* or *ksay-* to dwell (Nirukta X.14), to abide, to reside, to remain (Atharva-Veda XIX.10.10), to inhabit (Satapatha Brahman XIII.2.3.2). I begin to directly focus on the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita. Bhagavan Krishna starts with: This sharira is called the 'kshetra' and who knows it is known as the Kshetragya. This is followed by the next statement: know that I am the Kshetragya in all the 'kshetras', and knowledge of the 'kshetra' and 'Kshetragya' is the Gyan or true knowledge. Let us first see how these two verses are traditionally interpreted: I will quote Adi Shankaracharya, as translated by A.G.K. Warriar [1]:

- It is called the field (kshetra is from kshata trai - to protect) as it protects from wound (injury) from ksi (destruction) as it perishes or disintegrates, or as it gives rise to fruits of works just as a field does.
- The idea is that the field knower, present in and variegated by these countless fields, beginning from Brahma, and extending down to clumps, is devoid of all differences derived from adjuncts and is beyond the range of expressions like being and nonbeing. Since there is nothing to be known other than the truth of the fields, field-knower and God, my view, the view of the lord Vishnu, is that the content of the right knowledge is the fields and field-knower's.

Now look at Nilakantha's comments on the first verse [1]:

"O son of Kunti, this body, not being the Self, appearing like a jar, including the ego-sense, is of perishable nature." The kshetra (body) destroys the Self by ignorance and saves it by knowledge. This germinating place of the seed of works is called by the word kshetra.

Now what this field is; what are its modifications and transformations (vikaras), and which derives from which, and who He is (the knower of the field), what his powers and influences are, hear (now) from Me in brief. The Rishis have sung the characteristics of the field and the knower of the field in multiple ways, as Shri Krishna tells [3].

The following essential features can be delineated after contemplating on the above commentaries and interpretations.

- The linguistic terms used in the original Sanskrit text Bhagavadgita are highly technical in nature, and are loaded and pregnant with multidimensionality, and multiple perspectives within each of the dimensions.
- All shariras of living entities are kshetras. Kshetrgya, the knower of all the internal fields is associated with each of the kshetras, and Bhagavan Krishna is the knower in all the kshetras associated with each shariras.
- The traditional interpretations tend to go off tangent; are very limited in scope and depth, and to some degree confused and muddled, and fail to provide appropriate insights for explaining and understanding modern experiences. Further corruptions for various reasons have crept in through English translations.
- The Kshetragya is recognized to have its own field with its own unique characteristics.
- The knower of the field is independent of the sharira-field.

Now let us look at the characteristics, modifications, and transformations of the field, as delineated in the verses five and six.

The five gross elements (akasha, vayu, agni, jala, and pruthvi), the ahankar (I, maker), buddhi (intelligence), the unmanifest (hidden Prakriti), the ten senses(eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, speech, hand, feet, anus, and genitals), the manas, the five sense objects(shabda, sparsh, roop, rasa, and gandha), desire, hatred, happiness, misery, integrative composite entity pinda, induced consciousness, and dhriti (the ground and power to hold all the internal activities and interactions) comprise a brief description of the kshetra, together with their transformations.

Surprisingly, the verses seven through eleven describe the characteristics of the Gyana before discussing the Kshetragya. I propose that the term "Gyana" should properly be called as the "Gyana-kshetra", and opposite to these characteristics belong to the field of Agyana or Agyana-kshetra, and both the fields are grounded and become manifest within the sharira-kshetra.

Let me pause here to first unveil some deep hidden aspects of the Gyana-kshetra, and then move on to relate some of them to the corresponding fields in modern sciences of materials, biological as well as non-biological. Let us examine the sharira-field:

- Each of the elements of mahabhuta is itself a field and these together with the avyakta prakriti establish the ground for the material aspects of sharira as well as manifested cosmos. There are fields within the fields, interacting, transforming, and mutating, and remain in dynamic state of flux, yet maintain sharira as the integrative composite entity, through sanghata and dhriti fields.
- Each of the senses and associated sense objects is a field, complicated, complex, and dynamically interactive. They have some unique characteristic of their own and share some common characteristics with others.
- Each of entities Ahankar, manas, buddhi, sanghata, dhriti, and chetana or induced or emergent consciousness is a dynamic field, creates its own peculiar characteristics that interact with other fields.
- Some of the characteristics such as desire, hatred, happiness, and misery are the emergent fields due to interactions of several basic fields involving ahankar, manas, buddhi, and chetana, for example.
- In the context of modern sciences, some of the above fields can be called material but not in strict sense, even though they are meaningful only in the presence of matter, while others are non-material such as manas-field, ahankar-field, even some others may be called abstract. It must be emphasized however, that such a material and non-material classification or categorization pertinent to modern scientific understanding and investigation may be useful; however, it lends itself to vagueness, confusion, and limitations, while dealing with Bhagavadgita's classifications. It appears much better to build proper classification scheme or schemes through the recognition that these fields originate and get differentiated from the unified source what I would call the field of Prakriti or Prakriti-kshetra, unmanifest as well as manifest.

These fields can and need be structured and oriented through proper yogic practices and imbuelement of gyana-field and vigyana-field for achieving immortality, the highest Brahman, and finally, the Krishna's bhakta becomes qualified to attain His Prema-Bhakti.

2. Fields in the Material World

Let us now look at some aspects of the Prakritic field of Bhagavadgita as it unfolds in the modern sciences. It is interesting to observe that in the field of material sciences many entities are recognized to be non-material, even though they are all meaningful only in the presence of

matter, and they are called fields. These fields in fact are the characteristics of Mahabhuta-field, and include:

- ❖ Flow field of a moving fluid
- ❖ Electric and magnetic fields surrounding bodies
- ❖ The temperature fields
- ❖ The stress field within a loaded material body
- ❖ Acoustic field

There are some other adhibhautic entities not attached to matter, yet they are known as fields, and that include [2]:

- Gravitational force field
- Metric field in general relativity
- Radiation field
- Several abstract fields occurring in nuclear physics
- The probability field in quantum mechanics

The entity “mind” has been the subject of speculation, analysis, and philosophical theorization in the West for several hundred years, and heated debate continues till today, with no definitive conclusions about its existence, characteristics, and interactions with other psychological entities. Without discussing these theories, controversies, and contradictions here, it would be most appropriate to cite the following quote that reverberate the sentiments of many prominent thinkers, as summarized by Henry Margenau [2].

“It is a nonmaterial field. It does not have a definitive position in space. It is not an energy field in any physical sense. It is not required to contain energy to account for all the known phenomena in which mind interacts with brain.”

It appears appropriate to reiterate here that the entity ‘Mind’, as understood above is not the same entity - the ‘Manas’ of Vedic traditions. All those translations and interpretations of the term ‘manas’ as ‘mind’ have corrupted, and polluted the very semantic field of ‘manas’, entailing a very confused state of mutual understanding between various writers and thinkers working in this field.

3. Conclusion

From the very brief presentation delineated above born out of my contemplative meditation on the “Kshetra”, one can clearly see some fundamental similarities between the field entities of contemporary sciences, and the concepts and ideas that were propounded in Bhagavadgita long, long ago, before the advent of modern sciences. This critical observation must be understood not as the establishment of the correlations or a synthesis but the unfolding and/or sprouting of the very basic idea of ‘kshetra’ of the Bhagavadgita. Unfortunately, we, the custodian and innovators of Vedic Heritage, failed so far to bring out many hidden aspects of fields or kshetras of “Prakriti”, and “Purusha” that could explain, integrate, unify, as well as originate some new

insights and ideas that can address the question: how to effectively deal with seemingly disjointed fields of human experiences in this world, and beyond.

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