

# Indigenous Roots of Social Emotional Learning: Insights from the Bhagavad Gita with a Sample Classroom Lesson Plan

Dr. Shweta Bhardwaj

Associate Professor, Department of Education, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Government Girls PG College, Aliganj, Lucknow, UP

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260542>

## ABSTRACT

Contemporary Social Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks emphasize competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. While these competencies are often presented as modern psychological constructs, many of their foundational ideas are deeply embedded in indigenous philosophical traditions. This paper explores the *Bhagavad Gita* as a rich indigenous knowledge source that parallels and extends modern SEL frameworks. Through a qualitative textual analysis of selected verses, the study maps core SEL competencies onto key Gita concepts such as *ātma-bodha* (self-knowledge), *samatva* (equanimity), *karuṇā* (compassion), *dharma* (ethical duty), and *yoga* (integrated self-regulation). Further, the paper translates these theoretical insights into pedagogical practice by presenting a sample SEL-integrated lesson plan for primary classrooms, demonstrating how Gita-based principles can be operationalized through structured activities, reflective exercises, and classroom interactions. This practical illustration bridges the gap between philosophical understanding and classroom implementation. The findings suggest that the *Bhagavad Gita* offers a culturally grounded, holistic, and ethically enriched model of SEL that not only aligns with contemporary frameworks but also enhances

their depth and contextual relevance. Such integration holds significant potential for developing emotionally balanced, socially responsible, and ethically aware learners within the Indian educational context.

**Keywords:** Social Emotional Learning, Bhagavad Gita, Indigenous Knowledge, Emotional Regulation, Ethical Education

## INTRODUCTION

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a critical dimension of holistic education, focusing on learners' emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, ethical decision-making, and self-awareness. Frameworks such as Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) have organized Social Emotional Learning into clear and measurable competencies; however, these frameworks mainly arise from Western educational and psychological traditions. Early ideas related to SEL can be traced to progressive education, which viewed learning as an active and social process rather than only the acquisition of academic knowledge. Educational thinkers argued that emotions, values, and social relationships play an important role in learning and should be addressed along with intellectual development. These ideas were further developed in the twentieth century through advances in psychology. Humanistic psychology emphasized self-understanding,

emotional growth, and empathy as key aspects of personal development. At the same time, social-cognitive theories highlighted how behavior is shaped through interaction between individuals and their social environment. Together, these perspectives supported the view that social and emotional skills can be developed over time and are essential for healthy adjustment and effective learning.

The modern SEL movement took shape in the late twentieth century in response to increasing concerns about students' emotional well-being, behavior, and the narrow focus on academic achievement in schools. CASEL helped bring together research and educational practice in this area. This framework has been widely adopted in school systems and has gradually expanded to include attention to school climate, equity, and supportive learning environments. However, it continues to reflect Western assumptions that prioritize individual self-regulation and measurable outcomes. As a result, there is growing scholarly interest in culturally grounded approaches that connect social-emotional development with ethical values, relationships, and philosophical traditions, such as those found in Indian thought.

In culturally diverse contexts such as India, there is a growing need to explore indigenous philosophical foundations that resonate with local epistemologies and value systems. Indian sacred texts, particularly the Bhagavad Gita, present a sophisticated understanding of human emotions, cognition, behavior, and ethical action. The Gita, structured as a dialogic pedagogy between teacher (Krishna) and learner (Arjuna), addresses emotional संकट (crisis), moral dilemmas, stress, fear, and the cultivation of balanced action.

**उद्धरेदात्मनाऽत्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।  
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः॥**  
(One must uplift oneself by one's own mind and not degrade oneself. The mind alone is the friend of the self, and the mind alone is also the enemy of the self.)

The verse Gita 6.5 foregrounds self-agency and emotional self-regulation, a cornerstone of SEL. This paper argues that SEL is not alien to Indian thought; rather, it is deeply embedded within indigenous philosophical traditions.

The purpose of this study is to systematically map core SEL competencies with relevant teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and demonstrate how these parallels can inform culturally responsive SEL pedagogy in Indian classrooms.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employs a qualitative interpretive approach, using textual analysis to examine philosophical concepts within the Bhagavad Gita and their alignment with contemporary Social Emotional Learning frameworks. This approach is appropriate for exploring meaning, values, and conceptual relationships rather than measuring variables. The primary data consist of selected verses from the Bhagavad Gita, identified through purposive selection based on their relevance to emotional regulation, social conduct, ethical reasoning, and personal development. In addition, secondary sources such as scholarly works on SEL and indigenous educational perspectives were consulted to support interpretation and contextual understanding. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, in which core SEL competencies were used as guiding categories while allowing themes to emerge from the textual content of the verses. Conceptual mapping tables were developed to examine points of convergence between SEL dimensions and Gita teachings. To ensure the credibility of interpretations, findings were cross-referenced with established SEL literature and authoritative commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, and interpretive caution was maintained to avoid imposing contemporary meanings on classical texts.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SEL AND THE BHAGAVAD GITA**

The conceptual framework of this study positions the Bhagavad Gita as an indigenous SEL text, wherein emotional balance, ethical discernment, and social harmony are integral to personal development. Each SEL competency is aligned with corresponding Gita concepts and verses.

### 1. Self-Awareness (Atma-Bodha)

Self-awareness in SEL refers to recognizing one's emotions, thoughts, values, and their influence on behavior. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes awareness of the self beyond transient physical and emotional states.

“तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः | उपविश्यासने युञ्ज्याद्योगमात्मविशुद्धये ॥”

(Verse 6.12: “One should sit on a seat that is firm, sacred, and comfortable, holding the body upright, and engage the mind and senses in yoga for the purification of the self”)

“समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः | सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥”

(Verse 6.13: “Keeping the body, head, and neck straight and steady, gazing at the tip of the nose without looking around, maintaining balance in posture, and concentrating the mind.”)

These verses emphasize the integration of body, mind, and attention, highlighting that self-awareness involves more than recognition of emotions or thoughts—it requires focused observation of one's mental and physical states. Such practices encourage mindfulness, calm reflection, and reduced reactivity, which are foundational elements of self-awareness as defined in contemporary SEL frameworks. For classroom practice, this suggests that teachers can support students' development of self-awareness by incorporating short periods of focused attention, mindful posture, or guided reflection before engaging in learning activities. By modeling composure and attention, educators provide students with practical strategies for observing their internal states, fostering emotional clarity, and building the capacity for thoughtful responses to both academic

and social situations. In this way, the Gita underscores the ethical and practical value of cultivating awareness of the self as a prerequisite for effective emotional and social functioning.

### Implications for Self-Awareness in the Modern Classroom

The verses (6.12–6.13) foreground disciplined attention, bodily alignment, and regulated sensory engagement as prerequisites for inner clarity. Translated into a contemporary educational context, these principles suggest that self-awareness is not an abstract cognitive skill but a cultivated practice of mindful observation, requiring intentional structuring within the classroom environment. The emphasis on posture (*समं कायशिरोग्रीवं*), attentional focus (*तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा*), and sensory restraint (*यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः*) indicates that self-awareness emerges through the integration of physiological regulation and attentional control.

In modern classrooms—often characterized by distraction, cognitive overload, and emotional reactivity—these insights imply that fostering self-awareness necessitates embedding micro-practices of stillness, reflection, and attentional discipline within routine pedagogy. Rather than treating SEL as an add-on, these verses advocate for situating self-awareness at the beginning of the learning process, thereby enhancing students' readiness to engage cognitively and socially. Furthermore, the Gita's perspective expands the scope of self-awareness beyond emotional identification to include meta-awareness—the ability to observe one's thoughts and bodily states without immediate reaction. This has direct implications for improving students' focus, reducing impulsivity, and strengthening reflective thinking, all of which are critical for academic success and interpersonal effectiveness.

### Classroom Implications for Teachers

The insights derived from these verses suggest that teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating self-awareness by intentionally structuring the classroom as a space for

mindful engagement rather than mere content transmission. In practice, this requires educators to integrate brief, consistent routines that promote attentional focus, bodily awareness, and reflective thinking at key moments during instruction. Teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also models of composure and self-regulation; their posture, tone, and responsiveness implicitly shape students' awareness of their own internal states. By embedding short mindfulness pauses, reflective questioning, and opportunities for students to observe and articulate their thoughts and emotions, teachers can help learners develop the capacity to monitor and regulate their attention and behavior. Such practices also encourage a shift from reactive to reflective learning, enabling students to engage more deeply with academic tasks and social interactions. Therefore, the classroom becomes a pedagogical space where self-awareness is systematically nurtured through intentional routines, modeling, and reflective dialogue, aligning ancient contemplative insights with contemporary SEL objectives.

## 2. Self-Management (Samatva and Yoga)

Within the conceptual framework of this study, the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competency of self-management is aligned with the principles of *samatva* (equanimity) and *karma yoga* as articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In contemporary SEL discourse, self-management refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across diverse situations, including managing stress, controlling impulses, sustaining motivation, and working toward goals. The *Gita* provides a philosophically rich and practice-oriented understanding of this competency by emphasizing emotional balance, disciplined action, and detachment from outcomes. This perspective is succinctly captured in Verse 2.48:

“योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय।  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग  
उच्यते॥”

(“Perform your duties established in yoga, abandoning attachment, and remaining even-minded in success and failure; such equanimity is called yoga.”)

Here, *samatva* is defined as maintaining emotional equilibrium regardless of outcomes, thereby reframing success and failure as transient conditions rather than determinants of self-worth. This aligns closely with modern SEL frameworks that emphasize resilience, stress management, and goal-directed perseverance. Importantly, the *Gita* does not advocate emotional suppression; rather, it promotes conscious regulation through disciplined engagement and cognitive reframing, which resonates with contemporary understandings of adaptive emotional regulation.

Further elaboration of self-management is found in Verse 6.5:

“उद्धरेदात्मनाऽत्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।  
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः॥”

(“One must elevate oneself by one's own mind and not degrade oneself; the self alone is one's friend and the self alone is one's enemy.”)

This verse underscores the role of internal agency and self-regulation, emphasizing that individuals possess the capacity to guide or hinder their own development. Such an idea parallels the SEL focus on self-control, intrinsic motivation, and responsibility for one's actions.

Additionally, Verse 6.26 highlights attentional regulation:

“यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम्।  
ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत्॥”

(“Wherever the restless and unsteady mind wanders, one should bring it back under the control of the self.”)

This reinforces the importance of sustained attention and cognitive discipline, key aspects of self-management in contemporary educational psychology, particularly in relation to executive functioning and focus.

### Synthesis with Modern SEL Framework

The integration of these teachings with modern SEL frameworks reveals a strong conceptual convergence. While SEL defines self-management in terms of observable competencies such as impulse control, stress regulation, and perseverance, the *Gita* provides a deeper ontological and ethical grounding by linking these behaviors to inner balance, detachment, and self-mastery. Both perspectives emphasize:

- **Emotional Regulation** → Maintaining balance (*samatva*) in varied circumstances
- **Cognitive Control** → Redirecting attention and managing distractions
- **Goal-Oriented Behavior** → Performing duties with commitment (*karma yoga*)
- **Resilience** → Remaining unaffected by success or failure
- **Self-Motivation** → Drawing strength from within rather than external validation

Thus, the *Gita* enriches SEL by framing self-management not merely as a skill set but as a disciplined, value-oriented practice of inner regulation and purposeful action.

#### Classroom Implications for Teachers

To promote self-management in line with *samatva* and *karma yoga*, teachers can embed short, practical activities within daily classroom routines that help students regulate emotions, sustain attention, and remain balanced in success and failure.

Key activities include *Goal-Setting Starters*, where students write one simple intention for the lesson (e.g., “I will stay focused”), encouraging process-oriented engagement. During learning, teachers can use a *Pause–Reflect–Respond technique*, asking students to briefly pause, identify their emotion (e.g., frustration), and choose a constructive response, thereby practicing emotional regulation. *2-Minute Focus Activities*—such as concentrating on a task, text, or object—help build attentional discipline, with gentle redirection when the mind wanders. To build resilience, *Failure Reframing Tasks* can be introduced, where students reflect on

mistakes and note what they learned, reinforcing balanced responses to outcomes. *Process Praise* (appreciating effort rather than results) further supports *karma yoga*, reducing performance anxiety. At the end of the lesson, *Exit Reflection Slips* with prompts like “How did I manage my focus today?” encourage self-monitoring and awareness. Additionally, *Weekly Reflection Journals* allow students to track their emotional responses and coping strategies over time. Throughout these activities, teachers model calmness and balanced reactions, helping students internalize *samatva* in real classroom situations. These simple, real-time practices make self-management a lived experience, enabling students to develop focus, resilience, and emotional balance alongside academic learning.

### 3. Social Awareness (Karuna and Empathy)

Social awareness, a core competency of Social Emotional Learning (SEL), refers to the ability to perceive, understand, and empathize with the emotions, perspectives, and needs of others. It involves recognizing social norms, understanding diverse viewpoints, showing compassion, and responding ethically in social interactions. The Bhagavad Gita, particularly Chapter 6, offers profound guidance on cultivating these qualities through the principle of Nishkama Karma, or selfless action without attachment to outcomes.

#### Nishkama Karma: Concept and Verses

Nishkama Karma, as explained in Chapter 6 of the Gita, emphasizes performing one’s duties with dedication, equanimity, and detachment from results, fostering a selfless approach to action that naturally promotes social awareness. Key verses from Chapter 6 illustrate this principle:

1. **Verse 6.1 श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्। स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥**

*"It is far better to perform one’s own duties, even imperfectly, than to perform another’s duties perfectly. One’s own duty, though*

*difficult, brings merit; the duty of another is fraught with fear."*

**Implication for Social Awareness:** This verse emphasizes understanding and respecting one's own role and responsibilities while acknowledging the boundaries of others' duties. In SEL terms, it encourages recognition of diverse roles in a social group, promoting empathy and respectful collaboration.

2. **Verse 6.2**

**योगी कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः स  
सयोगी च सुखी च न सुखी च न योगी च न  
सुखी।**

*"The yogi who performs actions without attachment, dedicating the results to the divine, attains true peace and remains balanced in success and failure."*

**Implication for Social Awareness:** Selfless action nurtures sensitivity to others' needs because the focus shifts from personal gain to collective welfare. Students practicing this principle can develop empathy and concern for peers, enhancing social competence in classrooms.

3. **Verse 6.6**

**समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न  
मित्रम्।**

*"One who sees the same self in all beings, neither hating nor favoring, attains true yoga."*

**Implication for Social Awareness:** This is a direct philosophical foundation for empathy and compassion in SEL. Recognizing the common self in others fosters perspective-taking, fairness, and non-judgmental interactions, which are essential elements of social awareness.

**Synthesis with Social Emotional Learning**  
By integrating Nishkama Karma into the SEL framework, we observe several parallels:

1. **Empathy and Perspective-Taking:**

Nishkama Karma encourages acting for the welfare of others, aligning with social awareness's goal of understanding and empathizing with others' experiences. Recognizing the shared self in verse 6.6 enhances students' ability to

consider diverse perspectives in social situations.

2. **Ethical and Responsible**

**Interaction:** Selfless action cultivates ethical engagement. Students who learn to perform duties without selfish motives are more likely to make socially responsible decisions and respect norms, thereby enhancing classroom harmony.

3. **Emotional Regulation for Social**

**Sensitivity:** Self-mastery (6.4–6.5) ensures students respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively, a critical skill for interacting with peers sensitively and managing social dynamics effectively.

4. **Promotion of Collaborative**

**Behavior:** Nishkama Karma naturally encourages cooperation and service-oriented behavior. In classrooms, collaborative tasks, group discussions, and peer support activities can reinforce this principle, fostering social cohesion.

**Classroom Implications for Teachers**

- **Modeling Selfless Action:** Teachers can demonstrate Nishkama Karma by prioritizing students' growth over personal accolades, setting an example of empathy and fairness.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Designing group projects that emphasize collective success over individual reward cultivates social awareness.
- **Mindfulness and Reflection Practices:** Encouraging students to reflect on the impact of their actions on peers develops empathy and social sensitivity.
- **Ethics-Based Discussions:** Facilitating discussions on fairness, compassion, and perspective-taking reinforces understanding of others' emotions and needs.

Chapter 6 of the Bhagavad Gita presents Nishkama Karma as a philosophical foundation for selfless action and balanced engagement with others, which aligns closely with the social awareness competency of SEL. By emphasizing empathy, ethical action, emotional

regulation, and perspective-taking, the Gita offers a timeless framework for fostering compassionate, socially attuned learners. Incorporating these principles into classroom practices not only supports academic learning but also cultivates students' interpersonal and emotional development.

#### 4. Relationship Skills (Vāk-Tapa and Respectful Communication)

Within this framework, the SEL competency of relationship skills—encompassing effective communication, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution—is aligned with the *Bhagavad Gita's* emphasis on *vāk-tapa* (discipline of speech) and relational ethics. The *Gita* conceptualizes communication not merely as information exchange but as an ethical and self-regulatory practice that sustains harmony in social interactions.

A foundational articulation of this idea appears in Verse 17.15:

“अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत्।  
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते॥”

(Speech that is non-agitating, truthful, pleasant, and beneficial... is called the discipline of speech.)

**Implication:** This verse underscores that effective communication must balance truthfulness with sensitivity, suggesting that relationship skills require emotional awareness and intentional expression. In classroom contexts, this implies fostering respectful dialogue, constructive feedback, and non-hurtful expression, which are central to SEL-based communication.

Another relevant insight is offered in Verse 12.13:

“अद्वेषा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च।”

(One who has no hatred toward any being, who is friendly and compassionate...)

**Implication:** This verse emphasizes **empathy and compassion** as foundational to relationships. In SEL terms, it aligns with **social awareness and prosocial behavior**, suggesting that students must be guided to develop kindness, inclusion, and sensitivity toward others' emotions.

Further, Verse 6.32 highlights perspective-taking:

“आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन।”

(One who sees all beings as similar to oneself...)

**Implication:** This principle reflects **perspective-taking and empathy**, encouraging students to understand others' feelings by relating them to their own experiences. It directly supports SEL competencies such as **active listening and conflict resolution**.

Additionally, Verse 16.2 contributes to relational ethics:

“अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः

शान्तिरपैशुनम्।”

(Non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, and avoidance of fault-finding...)

**Implication:** This verse highlights non-violent communication and emotional restraint, which are essential for maintaining healthy peer relationships. It suggests that relationship skills require not only expression but also control over negative reactions such as anger and criticism.

Synthesis with Modern SEL Framework

A synthesis of these teachings with contemporary SEL frameworks reveals a strong alignment between the *Gita's* ethical orientation and the competencies of relationship skills. While SEL emphasizes observable behaviors such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution, the *Gita* provides a deeper normative foundation by linking these behaviors to self-discipline, empathy, and ethical intentionality.

Across the selected verses, key convergences include:

- **Respectful Communication** → Truthful, non-agitating, and beneficial speech (*vāk-tapa*)
- **Empathy and Compassion** → Friendliness and non-harm (*maitrī, karuṇā*)
- **Perspective-Taking** → Seeing others as oneself (*आत्मौपम्य*)
- **Conflict Regulation** → Control of anger and avoidance of harmful speech

Thus, the *Gita* enriches SEL by framing relationship skills not only as interpersonal techniques but as ethically grounded practices of self-regulation and social harmony.

### Classroom Implications for Teachers

To translate these principles into classroom practice, teachers can integrate structured, activity-based approaches that promote respectful communication and empathetic interaction:

- **“Think–Speak Filter” Activity:** Before speaking, students pause and check—Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helpful? — reflecting the principle of अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं.
- **Active Listening Circles:** Students listen to peers without interruption and paraphrase their ideas, promoting empathy and perspective-taking.
- **Role-Play for Conflict Resolution:** Students enact common classroom conflicts and practice calm, respectful responses.
- **Emotion Sharing Rounds:** Students express feelings in a safe space using respectful language, fostering emotional safety.
- **Peer Appreciation Practice:** Students regularly acknowledge positive behaviors in peers, reinforcing kindness and social bonding.
- **“Walk in Their Shoes” Reflection:** Students reflect on how others might feel in given situation, building empathy aligned with आत्मौपम्यं.

Additionally, teacher modeling is critical; when educators consistently use calm, respectful, and constructive language, students internalize these communication patterns. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s emphasis on disciplined, compassionate, and non-harmful communication provides a robust philosophical foundation for developing relationship skills within SEL frameworks. By embedding these principles into classroom practices through structured activities and modeling, teachers can foster environments characterized by trust,

empathy, and mutual respect. Such integration ensures that relationship skills are not merely taught but actively experienced, leading to the development of socially competent and emotionally intelligent learners.

### 5. Responsible Decision-Making (Dharma and Ethical Action)

Within the proposed framework, the SEL competency of responsible decision-making—encompassing ethical judgment, accountability, and consideration of consequences—is aligned with the *Bhagavad Gita*'s concept of *dharma* (righteous duty) and value-based action. In contemporary SEL, responsible decision-making involves evaluating situations through ethical lenses, anticipating outcomes, and making choices that contribute to personal and social well-being. The *Gita* deepens this understanding by framing decision-making as a **duty-oriented, value-guided, and self-regulated process**, rather than one driven by impulse or personal gain.

A central articulation of this idea appears in Verse 3.19:

“तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर।  
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः॥”

(Therefore, perform your duty continuously without attachment; by acting without attachment, one attains the highest good.)

**Implication:** This verse emphasizes **duty-based action over outcome-based motivation**, suggesting that decisions should be guided by ethical responsibility rather than immediate rewards. In classroom contexts, this translates into encouraging students to make choices based on fairness, responsibility, and long-term consequences.

Another key verse is 2.47:

“कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।”

(You have the right to action alone, not to its fruits.)

**Implication:** This principle highlights focus on right action rather than outcomes, supporting decision-making that is process-driven and ethically grounded. It aligns with SEL's emphasis on accountability and

thoughtful action, rather than impulsive or result-oriented choices.

Verse 18.63 further emphasizes autonomy in decision-making:

“इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया।  
विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥”

(Thus, I have explained this knowledge to you; reflect deeply and then act as you choose.)

**Implication:** This verse underscores reflective autonomy, encouraging individuals to think critically before making decisions. In SEL terms, it aligns with independent thinking, ethical reasoning, and informed choice-making.

Additionally, Verse 16.24 provides a normative guide:

“तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते  
कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ।”

(Therefore, let ethical principles guide your determination of what is to be done and what is not to be done.)

**Implication:** This verse emphasizes the importance of moral frameworks and guiding principles in decision-making, suggesting that choices should be grounded in established ethical standards rather than situational impulses.

### Synthesis with Modern SEL Framework

A synthesis of these teachings with contemporary SEL frameworks reveals a strong alignment between the *Gita's* concept of *dharma* and the SEL competency of responsible decision-making. While SEL frameworks focus on evaluating consequences, ethical responsibility, and social impact, the *Gita* provides a deeper philosophical grounding by emphasizing duty, detachment, reflection, and moral reasoning.

Key convergences include:

- **Ethical Judgment** → Acting according to *dharma* rather than impulse
- **Accountability** → Focusing on one's responsibility (*karma*)
- **Reflective Thinking** → Deliberation before action (Verse 18.63)
- **Long-Term Consequences** → Detachment from immediate outcomes

- **Social Responsibility** → Acting for collective well-being

Thus, the *Gita* extends SEL by framing decision-making as a value-centered and reflective practice rooted in ethical consciousness.

### Classroom Implications and Practical Strategies for Teachers

To operationalize these principles, teachers can incorporate structured, activity-based strategies that promote ethical reasoning and responsible choice-making:

- **Ethical Dilemma Discussions:** Present real-life classroom or social scenarios and ask students to justify their decisions based on fairness and responsibility.
- **“Think–Evaluate–Act” Routine:** Students pause to consider options, evaluate consequences, and then decide, reinforcing reflective decision-making.
- **Value-Based Decision Charts:** Students map choices against values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect before acting.
- **Role-Play Activities:** Simulate situations requiring moral judgment (e.g., peer conflict, honesty dilemmas) to practice decision-making skills.
- **Reflection Journals:** Students write about decisions they made, what influenced them, and what they learned.
- **Group Responsibility Tasks:** Assign collaborative work where students must make shared decisions and reflect on outcomes.

Teacher modeling remains essential; when educators demonstrate fairness, consistency, and thoughtful reasoning in classroom decisions, students internalize these behaviors. The *Bhagavad Gita's* discourse on *dharma* offers a profound ethical foundation for responsible decision-making within SEL frameworks. By emphasizing duty, reflection, and value-based action, it encourages learners to move beyond impulsive choices toward thoughtful, ethical decision-making. When translated into classroom practice through structured activities and reflective dialogue, these

principles foster students who are not only capable of making sound decisions but are also guided by responsibility, integrity, and social awareness.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis indicates that the *Bhagavad Gita* provides a comprehensive emotional and ethical framework that closely aligns with contemporary Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies. However, unlike predominantly skill-based SEL models, the *Gita* situates these competencies within a broader moral and philosophical context, thereby enhancing their depth, meaning, and sustainability. This alignment suggests that SEL in Indian classrooms can be meaningfully contextualized through indigenous knowledge systems, enabling students to perceive emotional and social development as integral to ethical and character formation rather than as isolated psychological skills.

Further, the emphasis on self-awareness, emotional balance, empathy, and duty highlights the role of value-oriented reflection in fostering emotional regulation and responsible behavior. Such integration supports a more holistic understanding of learners, where emotions are interpreted in relation to self-discipline, social responsibility, and interpersonal harmony. Additionally, the convergence of these perspectives underscores the importance of creating relational and dialogic classroom environments that promote respect, reflection, and meaningful teacher–student engagement, thereby strengthening emotional safety and a sense of belonging.

Importantly, grounding SEL within indigenous philosophical traditions also opens avenues for culturally responsive approaches to assessment, moving beyond standardized measures toward broader indicators of emotional maturity, ethical sensitivity, and social cohesion. Overall, the study establishes that SEL has strong indigenous roots within Indian thought, particularly in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and that integrating these perspectives can enrich

SEL pedagogy, making it more culturally relevant and contextually meaningful. Future research may focus on empirically examining the effectiveness of Gita-informed SEL interventions on students' emotional well-being, ethical reasoning, and social behavior.

## SAMPLE GITA-INSPIRED SEL LESSON PLAN

**Subject:** EVS (Environmental Studies)

**Class:** 4 (UP Primary)

**Topic:** “*Plants Are Our Friends*”

**Duration:** 40–45 minutes

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Academic Objectives

- Students will be able to identify and explain at least three importance of plants.
- Students will be able to describe benefits of plants in daily life with examples.

### SEL Objectives

- **Self-Awareness:**  
Students will be able to identify, reflect upon, and clearly express their emotions and feelings related to nature and learning experiences.
- **Self-Management:**  
Students will be able to regulate their behavior by maintaining focus, demonstrating patience, and completing assigned tasks calmly and systematically.
- **Social Awareness:**  
Students will be able to demonstrate sensitivity and empathy toward plants, living beings, and the environment, and recognize their importance in sustaining life.
- **Relationship Skills:**
  - Students will be able to interact effectively with peers by cooperating in group activities, communicating respectfully, and appreciating others' efforts.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:**  
Students will be able to analyze real-life situations, evaluate possible actions, and

make appropriate, ethical, and environmentally responsible decisions.

### **Gita-Based Value Integration**

*“We should perform our duties sincerely and protect nature.”*

### **Teaching–Learning Process (Detailed Activity Design)**

#### **Step 1: Mindful Entry Routine (Self-Awareness) – 5 minutes**

##### **Activity: “Pause & Feel”**

##### **Objective of the Activity:**

To develop emotional awareness and help students recognize their feelings toward nature.

##### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will guide students to sit comfortably, close their eyes, and take three deep breaths. The teacher will then ask reflective prompts such as: *“How do you feel when you think about nature?”* and will encourage a calm, non-judgmental sharing environment.

##### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will become aware of their internal emotional states and learn to express their feelings, thereby strengthening self-awareness.

#### **Step 2: Introduction (Social Awareness) – 5 minutes**

##### **Activity: “Think–Pair–Share”**

##### **Objective of the Activity:**

To develop awareness about the importance of plants and encourage collaborative thinking.

##### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will pose the question: *“Why are plants our friends?”* Students will first think individually, then discuss in pairs, and finally share their ideas with the class. The teacher will facilitate discussion and connects responses to real-life examples.

##### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will develop social awareness by understanding the role of plants in human and environmental well-being and learn to listen and respect others’ viewpoints.

#### **Step 3: Focused Task (Self-Management) – 10 minutes**

##### **Activity: “2-Minute Focus + Draw”**

##### **Objective of the Activity:**

To enhance concentration, patience, and observational skills.

##### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will provide a plant or leaf and instruct students to observe it silently for two minutes. Clear guidance will be given to remain calm and focused. After observation, students will be asked to draw what they saw.

##### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will develop attentional control, patience, and the ability to complete tasks with focus, thereby strengthening self-management skills.

#### **Step 4: Group Work (Relationship Skills) – 7 minutes**

##### **Activity: “Collaborative Chart”**

##### **Objective of the Activity:**

To promote teamwork, respectful communication, and shared responsibility.

##### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will divide students into small groups and assigns the task of listing ways to protect plants. The teacher will establish norms such as speaking politely and listening actively, and will monitor group interactions.

##### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will learn to collaborate, respect others’ opinions, and communicate effectively, thereby enhancing relationship skills.

#### **Step 5: Ethical Decision Activity – 7 minutes**

##### **Activity: “Think–Choose–Act”**

##### **Objective of the Activity:**

To develop ethical reasoning and responsible decision-making skills.

##### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will present a real-life scenario: *“If someone is damaging a plant, what will you do?”* Students will be guided to think about possible actions, choose the most appropriate one, and explain their reasoning.

### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will learn to evaluate situations, consider consequences, and make responsible and ethical decisions aligned with environmental values.

### **Step 6: Kind Communication Practice – 5 minutes**

#### **Activity: “Process Praise”**

#### **Objective of the Activity:**

To develop positive communication and appreciation skills.

#### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will encourage students to observe their peers’ work and provide constructive and positive feedback. The teacher will model appropriate language such as: “*You made a good effort*” or “*Your work is thoughtful.*”

#### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will develop the ability to appreciate others, use respectful language, and build positive interpersonal relationships.

### **Step 7: Reflection & Self-Monitoring – 3 minutes**

#### **Activity: “Exit Reflection Slip”**

#### **Objective of the Activity:**

To promote self-reflection and internalization of learning.

#### **Teacher Activity:**

The teacher will ask reflective questions: “*What did you learn today?*” and “*What will you do to help plants?*” Students respond verbally or in writing.

#### **Student Learning Outcome:**

Students will reflect on their learning, connect it to real-life actions, and develop responsibility and self-awareness.

### **5. Integrated Assessment**

Assessment will be continuous and integrated throughout the lesson. The teacher will observe both academic learning and social-emotional development. Academic understanding will be assessed through students’ oral responses regarding the importance and benefits of plants.

In addition, SEL competencies will be assessed through observation. Self-awareness will be evaluated based on how students identify and express their feelings. Self-management will be assessed by observing students’ focus and patience during activities. Social awareness will be reflected in students’ sensitivity toward plants and living beings. Relationship skills will be assessed through collaboration, respectful communication, and participation in group work. Responsible decision-making will be evaluated based on students’ ability to choose appropriate and ethical actions in given situations.

Thus, assessment will focus on the holistic development of students rather than being limited to content knowledge alone.

### **6. Closure**

At the end of the lesson, the teacher will briefly review the learning and emphasize that just as we perform our daily duties responsibly, we must also take responsibility for protecting nature. The teacher reinforces the message:

*“We should fulfill our duties and protect nature.”*

This helps develop a sense of responsibility and ethical awareness among students.

### **7. Homework**

Students will select a plant at home or in their surroundings and take care of it by watering it, keeping the area clean, etc. They will then write about their experience, describing what they did and how they felt while taking care of the plant.

This activity promotes responsibility, sensitivity, and self-reflection among learners

#### ***Declaration by Authors***

**Acknowledgement:** None

**Source of Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** No conflicts of interest declared.

## REFERENCES

1. Aurobindo, S. (1997). *Essays on the Gita*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.
2. Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
3. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
4. CASEL. (2003). *Safe and sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning programs*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.
5. CASEL. (2020). *What is social and emotional learning?* Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. <https://casel.org>
6. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
7. Prabhupāda, A. C. B. S. (1986). *Bhagavad-Gita as it is*. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
8. Sivananda, S. (1996). *The Bhagavad Gita*. Divine Life Society.
9. Swami Mukundananda (2014). *Bhagavad Gita – The Song of God*. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/>
10. Radhakrishnan, S. (1951). *The BhagavadGita: With an introductory essay, Sanskrit text, English translation and notes*. George Allen & Unwin.

How to cite this article: Shweta Bhardwaj. Indigenous roots of social emotional learning: insights from the Bhagavad Gita with a sample classroom lesson plan. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2026; 13(5): 462-474. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260542>

\*\*\*\*\*