



# Bhagavad Gita–based ethical frameworks for carbon market sustainability

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## Abstract

This study examines how the moral and spiritual guidance offered in the Bhagavad Gita—particularly the principles of *Karma Yoga* (selfless action) and *Nishkama Karma* (acting without attachment to results)—can shape ethically responsible carbon trading mechanisms. Against the backdrop of escalating environmental harm and the growing reliance on market-driven climate strategies, the research underscores the necessity for an inner shift in the mindset of leaders, policymakers, and businesses. Adopting a qualitative and cross-disciplinary approach, it links Gita-inspired values with real-world Indian examples, including the Tata Group, the Sikkim Organic Mission, and Amul, to illustrate how dharmic approaches are already advancing sustainable progress. Ultimately, it proposes an ethical, dharma-oriented model for carbon governance that aligns with the aspirations of India's *Viksit Bharat 2047* vision.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, Nishkama Karma, Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, IGNOU

## Introduction

With the rapid intensification of climate change and the growing adoption of carbon markets as policy instruments, issues of morality and underlying intent have gained prominence. Although carbon trading can deliver market efficiency, it often suffers from a weak ethical foundation, resulting in practices such as greenwashing and profit-driven motives. The *Bhagavad Gita*, an enduring treasure of Indian philosophy, provides deep guidance on selfless service (*Karma Yoga*), mastery over emotions, and duty-centered ethics. This research seeks to bridge the ancient wisdom of the Gita with present-day environmental challenges, focusing on how its principles can be embedded into carbon trading models to promote authentic, long-term sustainability.

## Shloka

"कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥"

(*Bhagavad Gita*, 2.47)

*Your entitlement extends only to the performance of your assigned actions; the results of those actions are never within your claim. Do not see yourself as the sole cause of those outcomes, and avoid attachment either to results or to idleness.*

## Literature Review

Bhatia and Madabushi (2013) <sup>[1]</sup> investigate how philosophical insights from the Gita can be applied in mental health practices, comparing the guru–disciple tradition to the modern

therapeutic alliance. They emphasize that mutual trust, meaningful dialogue, and self-examination are key to personal growth. These same qualities can guide environmentally responsible governance by fostering honest negotiations, open stakeholder communication, and ethical conduct in carbon market systems.

Ghimire (2013) <sup>[2]</sup> explains the Gita's concept of "Vidya," or true knowledge, which places greater importance on inner discipline and self-awareness than on collecting academic titles. He draws a parallel between the Kurukshetra battlefield and the internal struggles of individuals, where conflicting duties are resolved through adherence to dharma. This analogy applies to carbon markets, where the temptation for immediate profit often clashes with the need for lasting ecological stewardship. His work suggests that moral vision should guide decision-making in climate-related trade mechanisms.

Shunmugam and Sukdaven (2014) <sup>[3]</sup> study ethical dimensions within Hindu thought as described in the Gita, distinguishing between *niti*—universal moral codes—and *niyama*—context-dependent rules. They argue that dharma evolves with circumstances, a notion that aligns with the flexible standards required in carbon trading as markets adapt to new technologies, shifting emission targets, and changing socio-economic realities.

Gurjar (2015) <sup>[4]</sup> positions the Gita as a model for educational innovation, advocating for experiential learning rather than repetitive memorization. For carbon market professionals, this would mean hands-on training and scenario-based exercises that cultivate ethical reasoning, much like Krishna's tailored counsel to Arjuna in the epic.

Sharma and Ramachandran (2015) <sup>[5]</sup> present the Gita as an all-encompassing educational framework that integrates Karma Yoga (selfless work), Jnana Yoga (knowledge), and Bhakti Yoga (devotion). They contend that real education develops moral integrity, emotional resilience, and intellectual sharpness alongside practical abilities. Applied to environmental governance, this suggests that effective carbon trading must blend practical action with ethical understanding and dedication to the collective good.

Mukherjee (2017) <sup>[6]</sup> explores how Karma Yoga principles benefit corporate talent management, showing that detachment from end results fosters commitment, honesty, and creative problem-solving. Within carbon trading systems, this philosophy implies that true success is measured by ecological and social impact rather than just market profitability.

Kalita (2018) <sup>[7]</sup> critiques the emphasis of modern education on economic productivity while overlooking value-based growth. He recommends integrating Gita values into curricula to nurture socially conscious citizens. For climate policy, this would mean creating regulatory structures that inspire market actors to value environmental protection above short-term financial rewards.

Lolla (2020) <sup>[8]</sup> examines the psychological strengths gained from learning the Bhagavad Gita during youth, such as resilience, empathy, and ethical awareness. He suggests that early exposure to these teachings prepares individuals to navigate complex moral challenges later in life. In the carbon trading sphere, such preparation would benefit policymakers, corporate leaders, and traders who must balance commercial goals with environmental ethics.

Subedi (2024) <sup>[9]</sup> provides evidence from Nepalese institutions showing that moral education rooted in the Gita fosters accountability, emotional balance, and social unity. This indicates that value-based training could be equally impactful in corporate sustainability programs and in shaping fair, transparent carbon trading practices.

Jana and Adhikary (2025) <sup>[10]</sup> explore digital tools as vehicles for delivering Gita teachings, noting that technology can expand access to moral and philosophical learning. Applied to carbon governance, AI-powered compliance and monitoring systems could embed dharma-inspired ethical standards into market operations, ensuring consistency and broad engagement.

### Research objectives

- To examine how the ethical values embedded in the *Bhagavad Gita*—with a focus on Karma Yoga (selfless action) and Nishkama Karma (detachment from results)—can shape and strengthen moral responsibility within contemporary carbon trading practices.
- To study Indian examples such as the Tata Group, the Sikkim Organic Mission, and Amul as living models of dharma-driven sustainability, offering guidance for creating ethical carbon governance in alignment with the vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

- To develop a proposed framework for carbon trading policies in India that is grounded in dharma, inspired by the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and informed by both philosophical insights and real-world case studies.

### Research methodology

This research follows a qualitative and interpretive approach, structured around three key components:

- **Textual analysis:** Selected verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* were examined alongside traditional commentaries and contemporary interpretations, with particular attention to concepts such as *Karma Yoga*, duty, and environmental stewardship.
- **Literature review:** Scholarly articles, policy documents, and credible reports were analyzed thematically, drawing from the fields of environmental science, Indic philosophical thought, and economics to frame the ethical considerations of carbon trading.
- **Case study approach:** Three Indian examples—the Tata Group's ESG initiatives, Sikkim's statewide organic agriculture program, and Amul's cooperative sustainability practices—were explored to illustrate how dharma-based principles are applied in practical sustainability contexts.

### Key findings

#### Objective I: Ethical foundations from the Gita in carbon trading

The concept of *Nishkama Karma*—performing one's duty without fixation on outcomes—offers a strong ethical compass for governing carbon markets. In the current landscape, many carbon trading systems lean heavily toward profit-driven objectives, often compromising fairness and openness. The Gita's counsel to act without greed provides a timeless philosophical basis for guiding stakeholders toward practices that are environmentally sound and socially just.

#### Objective II: Dharma-inspired case studies in governance

Indian examples such as the Tata Group, Sikkim's transition to organic farming, and Amul's cooperative model demonstrate how dharmic values—like ecological responsibility, equity, and integrity—can be effectively realized in practical contexts. Tata's enduring dedication to CSR and ESG embodies *Nishkama Karma* in corporate practice. Sikkim's complete shift to organic agriculture showcases leadership rooted in environmental ethics, while Amul's cooperative system highlights the strength of shared growth and collective responsibility. Together, these cases offer valuable models for embedding ethical principles within carbon market governance.

#### Objective III: Dharma-centric framework for policy this study proposes a three-level ethical approach to carbon policy:

- **Individual level:** Offer structured training for professionals in carbon markets, rooted in Gita-based ethical principles.

- **Corporate level:** Integrate ESG assessment tools that prioritize moral intention as well as compliance.
- **Policy level:** Craft carbon trading mechanisms that reward long-term environmental protection and discourage purely profit-oriented strategies.

### Challenges of the study

While this study underscores the profound ethical and philosophical guidance that the Bhagavad Gita can provide for sustainable carbon trading, several obstacles hinder the seamless application of these teachings in practice:

- **Philosophy-to-practice gap** – The Gita's wisdom is expansive and interpretive, which makes it challenging to translate into precise, quantifiable compliance criteria for carbon markets.
- **Cultural specificity** – Rooted in a distinct cultural and spiritual tradition, the Gita's principles may require careful adaptation to be effectively applied in diverse, multi-faith, and global market settings without losing their core meaning.
- **Resistance from stakeholders** – Participants driven by short-term profit goals may be reluctant to embrace dharma-based ethics, particularly if they view such frameworks as potentially limiting competitiveness.
- **Interpretive diversity** – Multiple interpretations and commentaries on the Gita create the possibility of varied or even conflicting applications of its guidance in environmental governance.
- **Complex policy integration** – Embedding Gita-inspired ethics into current global carbon trading regulations demands reconciling philosophical ideals with legal frameworks and market-driven economic structures.
- **Technology dependence concerns** – Although AI and digital platforms can aid ethical compliance, excessive reliance on technology without strong human oversight may result in symbolic adherence rather than genuine ethical engagement.
- **Scarcity of empirical validation** – Current discourse is largely conceptual, with a lack of concrete case studies or pilot programs directly linking Gita-based ethics to measurable improvements in carbon trading systems.

Overcoming these challenges will require collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts, real-world pilot initiatives for dharma-based compliance, and active engagement with all stakeholders to preserve the depth of the Gita's philosophy while ensuring practical, scalable solutions.

### Conclusion

The research establishes that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita—particularly the concept of *Nishkama Karma*—can act as a guiding framework for embedding ethics into carbon trading. Viewing carbon markets as a dharmic duty rather than merely an avenue for financial gain positions India to become a global leader in sustainability that balances efficiency with fairness. The examples of Tata Group, Sikkim's organic initiative, and Amul's cooperative model demonstrate that these values are

not confined to philosophy but can be successfully implemented in real-world contexts. As the nation advances toward its Viksit Bharat 2047 aspirations, weaving ancient moral insights into modern environmental governance can help ensure that sustainability initiatives remain rooted in honesty, inclusivity, and long-term accountability.

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