

Can Japanese Ikigai, Indian Concepts of Dharma and Seva, and Lokmanya Tilak's Geeta Rahasya Contribute to Educational Transformation? A Comparative Study and Its Educational Implications

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Abstract

As educational institutions worldwide seek to cultivate not only skilled professionals but also ethical, resilient, and socially responsible citizens, there is increasing interest in drawing upon indigenous knowledge systems and philosophical traditions. This paper explores the educational relevance of the Japanese concept of *Ikigai* and the Indian concepts of *Dharma* and *Seva*, while incorporating Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita in *Geeta Rahasya*. Through a comparative philosophical analysis, the paper argues that these traditions collectively offer a holistic framework for education centred on purpose, duty, action, service, and social responsibility. The study proposes that integrating these concepts into contemporary educational practice can foster meaningful learning, ethical citizenship, mental well-being, leadership, and global responsibility. The paper concludes by proposing a Purpose–Duty–Action–Service framework for educational transformation in India, Japan, and beyond.

Keywords: Ikigai, Dharma, Seva, Geeta Rahasya, Lokmanya Tilak, Karma Yoga, Educational Philosophy, Character Education, Well-being, Indian Knowledge Systems

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed remarkable technological progress alongside growing concerns regarding student well-being, ethical leadership, social fragmentation, and loss of meaning among young people. Educational institutions increasingly recognize that academic achievement alone is insufficient for preparing learners to navigate complex global challenges.

Traditional philosophical systems offer valuable resources for addressing these concerns. The Japanese concept of *Ikigai* encourages individuals to discover purpose and meaning in life. Indian philosophy emphasizes *Dharma* (righteous duty) and *Seva* (selfless service) as foundations of individual and social well-being.

A particularly significant contribution emerges from Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak's *Geeta Rahasya*, written during his imprisonment in Mandalay. Tilak reinterpreted the Bhagavad Gita as a philosophy of active engagement with society through *Karma Yoga*. Rejecting purely ascetic interpretations, he argued that fulfilment lies not in withdrawal from the world but in performing one's duties selflessly for the welfare of society.

This interpretation provides a powerful educational framework that complements both *Ikigai* and the broader Indian traditions of *Dharma* and *Seva*.

2. The Philosophical Foundations

2.1 Ikigai: Purpose as the Foundation of Life

Ikigai represents the reason for living that motivates individuals to engage meaningfully with the world. It is often described as the intersection of:

- What one loves
- What one is good at
- What society needs
- What creates value

Educationally, Ikigai encourages students to discover meaning in learning and align their personal aspirations with societal contribution.

2.2 Dharma: Education as Ethical Responsibility

Dharma refers to the moral and social responsibilities that sustain individual and collective well-being. Rather than merely a set of rules, Dharma guides individuals toward ethical conduct and responsible action.

In education, Dharma promotes:

- Integrity
- Accountability
- Respect for diversity
- Civic responsibility
- Moral leadership

2.3 Seva: Learning Through Service

Seva emphasizes selfless service performed without expectation of reward. It encourages empathy, compassion, and social engagement.

Educational institutions can cultivate Seva through:

- Community service programs
- Service-learning projects
- Environmental initiatives
- Social entrepreneurship

3. Lokmanya Tilak's Geeta Rahasya: Education Through Purposeful Action

3.1 Tilak's Interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita

In *Geeta Rahasya*, Lokmanya Tilak challenged interpretations that viewed renunciation as the highest spiritual ideal. He argued that the central teaching of the Gita is Nishkama Karma Yoga—performing one's duties selflessly without attachment to personal gain.

Tilak wrote that the ideal individual does not withdraw from society but is one who actively contributes to it through righteous action.

For Tilak:

- Knowledge must lead to action.
- Duty must be performed courageously.
- Service to society is a sacred obligation.
- Personal fulfilment arises through contribution to the common good.

This philosophy transformed the Gita from a purely spiritual text into a guide for ethical citizenship and social responsibility.

3.2 Geeta Rahasya and Educational Philosophy

Tilak's educational philosophy emphasizes:

Learning for Action

Education should prepare students to address real-world problems rather than merely accumulate information.

Duty-Oriented Citizenship

Students must understand their responsibilities toward society, the nation, and humanity.

Character Formation

Knowledge without character can become socially destructive. Education must therefore cultivate ethical judgment and moral courage.

Social Commitment

Learners should be encouraged to apply knowledge for community development and social welfare.

4. Convergence of Ikigai, Dharma, Seva, and Geeta Rahasya

A comparative analysis reveals a remarkable convergence among these traditions.

Concept	Core Idea	Educational Goal
Ikigai	Purpose in life	Meaningful learning
Dharma	Ethical responsibility	Character formation
Seva	Selfless service	Social engagement
Geeta Rahasya	Duty through action	Responsible leadership

Together, they create a comprehensive framework for holistic education.

The student is encouraged to ask:

- What is my purpose? (Ikigai)
- What is my responsibility? (Dharma)
- How can I serve others? (Seva)

- How can I translate knowledge into action? (Geeta Rahasya)

5. Educational Implications

5.1 Purpose-Centred Education

Drawing from Ikigai and Geeta Rahasya, education should help students discover meaningful goals and connect learning with societal contribution.

5.2 Value-Based Education

Dharma provides a foundation for ethical reasoning, integrity, and responsible decision-making.

5.3 Service Learning and Experiential Education

Seva transforms education into active engagement with communities, enabling students to learn through service.

5.4 Leadership Development

Tilak's Karma Yoga encourages students to become proactive leaders who accept responsibility rather than remain passive observers.

5.5 Mental Well-being and Resilience

Purpose, duty, and service contribute to psychological well-being by fostering meaning, belonging, and self-worth.

5.6 Education for Sustainable Development

The integration of these philosophies encourages learners to balance personal success with social and environmental responsibility, supporting the goals of sustainable development.

6. Relevance to Contemporary Educational Reforms

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes:

- Holistic development
- Character formation
- Experiential learning
- Indian Knowledge Systems
- Community engagement

Similarly, Japanese educational philosophy promotes:

- Lifelong learning
- Social harmony
- Community participation
- Personal growth

The integration of Ikigai, Dharma, Seva, and Geeta Rahasya offers a unique India–Japan model capable of addressing global educational challenges while preserving cultural wisdom.

7. A New Educational Framework: Purpose–Duty–Action–Service (PDAS)

This paper proposes a Purpose–Duty–Action–Service (PDAS) Framework:

Purpose (Ikigai)

Helping learners discover meaning and direction.

Duty (Dharma)

Cultivating ethical responsibility and moral awareness.

Action (Geeta Rahasya)

Transforming knowledge into purposeful action through Karma Yoga.

Service (Seva)

Encouraging contributions to society and humanity.

The framework aims to develop:

Purposeful Learners → Ethical Citizens → Action-Oriented Leaders → Compassionate Global Citizens

8. Conclusion

The integration of Japanese Ikigai, Indian concepts of Dharma and Seva, and Lokmanya Tilak's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita in *Geeta Rahasya* provides a powerful philosophical foundation for educational transformation. While Ikigai inspires individuals to discover meaning and purpose, Dharma guides ethical responsibility, Seva promotes social commitment, and Geeta Rahasya emphasizes action-oriented citizenship through Karma Yoga. Together, these traditions offer an educational vision that moves beyond the narrow goals of examination performance and employability. They encourage learners to become purposeful, ethical, socially responsible, and globally aware individuals capable of contributing to the welfare of society. Such a framework is particularly relevant in an age where education must prepare students not only for careers but also for meaningful lives and responsible citizenship.

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