

---

**A Crucial Study of Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* in the Light of Self-Restraint and Purposeful Living Depicted in the *Bhagavad Gita***

---

**Dr. Vikram N. Patel**Sr. Assistant Professor, English  
Ganpat University, Gujarat, INDIA

---

**Article Received:** 20/03/2026**Article Accepted:** 27/04/2026**Published Online:** 29/04/2026**DOI:** 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.04.595

---

**Abstract:**

The *Bhagavad Gita* presents a complete ethical philosophy based on self-restraint, controlled action, detachment, and purposeful living. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s teachings stress the control of the mind, the regulation of desire, and the adoption of Dharma as the basis of significant living. In contemporary motivational writings, these ancient truths are often presented in a simplified story format. Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* tells the story of a lawyer who is materially successful but spiritually unhappy, and whose search for inner peace illustrates an ethical philosophy closely aligned with the *Gita*.

This paper critically analyzes Robin Sharma's writing in the context of the *Bhagavad Gita*, specifically in terms of the principles of self-restraint (संयम) and purposeful living. It seems that the novel, although not necessarily theological in nature, is structured around an ethical framework rooted in the *Bhagavad Gita*'s principles of governing one's mind, being detached from the results of action, and living in harmony with a higher purpose. Although made more accessible to a modern audience, the story is rooted in the timeless principles of the *Bhagavad Gita* as they pertain to modern ethical dilemmas of consumerism and psychological turmoil.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, Self-Restraint, Dharma, Karma Yoga, Purposeful Living, Detachment, Ethical Transformation

**Introduction:**

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most significant and widely accepted ethical texts in the world of philosophy. The text is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. It tackles a common human problem: how to act in the right way when there is confusion, fear, and attachment. The teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* does not promote a life of withdrawal but a life of disciplined engagement with the world through wisdom and self-control.

The modern world is a different kind of battlefield. Rather than physical combat, people face the challenges of competition, ambition, stress, and the demands of material success. The ethical problem remains the same: how to live a full and significant life without being dominated by desire or ego.

In Robin Sharma's *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*, this contemporary battlefield is exemplified in the story of Julian Mantle, a renowned lawyer whose external success masks his inner weariness. His breakdown and subsequent changeover parallels Arjuna's crisis and transformation. While the book itself does not contain any direct allusions to the *Bhagavad Gita*, its format mirrors key lessons of it, regarding control, detachment, and purposeful action.

This article examines the book as a modern tale that enshrines the moral lessons of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in particular, its two main aspects: self-control and purposeful living.

**The Crisis of Desire: The *Bhagavad Gita*'s Psychological Insight:**

The change that begins in Robin Sharma's novel is the crisis of desire. Julian is dissatisfied despite his wealth and status. This situation corresponds to the psychological sequence in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

क्रोधोद्भवतिसम्मोहःसम्मोहात्स्मृतिविभ्रमः।स्मृतिभ्रंशाद्बुद्धिनाशोबुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति॥२.६

३

From anger comes delusion; from delusion, loss of memory; from loss of memory, destruction of discrimination; from destruction of discrimination, one is lost" (Gita 2.62-63).

Krishna points out that unmanaged desire is the cause of turmoil in the mind:

कामएषक्रोधएषरजोगुणसमुद्भवः।महाशनोमहापाप्माविद्धयेनमिहवैरिणम्॥३.३७॥

"Desire, anger, born of passion, is the great devourer" (Gita 3.37).

Julian's past life illustrates this condition. His ego is tied to his status and acquisition. But the more he gets, the more dissatisfied he becomes. This story pattern illustrates the *Bhagavad Gita*'s understanding of the nature of desire.

The novel's commentary on consumerism corresponds perfectly with this message. "Material success without self-restraint leads not to peace but to mental fragmentation."

#### **Self-Restraint and Control of the Mind:**

One of the most important themes of the *Bhagavad Gita* is controlling the mind. Arjuna admits to Krishna:

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्णप्रमाथिबलवद्दृढम् । तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ ६.३४ ॥

"The mind is restless, turbulent, powerful and obstinate (Gita 6.34).

Krishna agrees that it is difficult to control but asserts that through regular practice and detachment, it can be done (6.35).

In Sharma's story, Julian discovers that the mind can be either mastered or enslaved. His change involves everyday activities to control his thoughts and bring clarity to his mind. This corresponds perfectly with Krishna's message:

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः । अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥ ६.६ ॥

"For one, who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, the mind will remain the greatest enemy" (Gita 6.6).

The moral importance of this teaching is empowerment. Self-control is not denial; it is liberation from compulsive drives. The novel reinforces this teaching by showing discipline as the key to inner power.

#### **Detachment and Redefinition of Success:**

The *Bhagavad Gita* redefines success through the teaching of Karma Yoga. Krishna says:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन । २.४७ ॥

"You have a right to action alone, but not to its fruits" (Gita 2.47).

Julian's former self was constructed exclusively on the basis of success; winning cases, recognition, and luxury. His crisis reveals the shaky ground on which this has been erected. His subsequent change indicates an alignment with value-based living rather than achievement-based identity.

This corresponds to Krishna's definition of the man of steady wisdom (sthita-prajña):

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः । वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ २.५६ ॥

"One whose mind is undisturbed in sorrow and free from longing in pleasure... is called a sage of steady wisdom" (Gita 2.56).

The prioritization of inner peace over external reputation in the novel is clearly in line with the *Bhagavad Gita*'s vision. Success becomes a matter of inner atonement rather than external accumulation.

#### **Dharma and Authentic Purpose:**

Purpose in the *Bhagavad Gita* is inextricably linked with Dharma. Krishna tells

Arjuna:

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मोविगुणःपरधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।स्वधर्मेनिधनंश्रेयःपरधर्मोभयावहः॥३.३५॥

“Better is one’s own duty, though imperfectly performed, than another’s duty well performed” (Gita 3.35).

This advice is a testament to the value of authenticity and taking responsibility for one’s actions. Authentic purpose is that which springs from comprehension of one’s place within a larger framework of morality.

Julian’s own journey is one of finding meaning outside the bounds of societal acceptance. He progresses from a copying of competitive values to a harmonization with more profound ones. His is a process of ego-based ambition transmuted into Dharmic awareness.

Purposeful living, in this way, is anything but passive spirituality. It is active ethical engagement rooted in awareness. The *Bhagavad Gita* is, throughout, highly critical of the notion of escapism. It advocates instead for engagement rooted in awareness.

### **Renunciation Reinterpreted:**

It would seem that the sale of the Ferrari is the renunciation in the literal sense of the word. But in the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is a clear distinction between external renunciation and internal detachment. Krishna says:

अनाश्रितःकर्मफलंकार्यकर्मकरोतियः।ससंन्यासीचयोगीचननिरग्रिर्नचाक्रियः॥६.१॥

“He who performs his duty without attachment is a true renouncer” (Gita 6.1).

Renunciation is a matter of the mind and not merely of material possessions. One can be actively engaged in the world and still be internally detached.

In Robin Sharma’s story, Julian’s physical renunciation is a symbolic start. But the real change is in the change of consciousness. His subsequent return to society shows that real change is a matter of perspective, not withdrawal.

This reading is in complete harmony with *Bhagavad Gita* ethics, where detachment and responsibility coexist.

### **Equanimity as the Sign of Ethical Maturity:**

The *Bhagavad Gita* again and again underlines the importance of equanimity (samatva) as the hallmark of yoga:

योगस्थःकुरुकर्माणिसङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय।सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योःसमो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते॥२.४८॥

“Established in yoga, perform your duties, O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, and remaining even-minded in success and failure. Such equanimity is called Yoga.” (Gita 2.48).

This is a state of balance amidst dualities of success and failure, gain and loss. The

---

disciplined person is not swayed because his identity is not dependent on external events.

The reflection of the superiority of serenity over luxury in the novel reflects this tenet. In this case, Julian's calmness later in the novel is in striking contrast to his earlier turmoil. His calmness is the result of controlled desire and focused will.

In this way, the ethical change in the novel reflects the *Bhagavad Gita's* model of ethical maturity.

#### **Critical Perspective: Adaptation of The *Bhagavad Gita* Ethics:**

Although the similarities are strong, there are also points of divergence. The *Bhagavad Gita* examines deep metaphysical ideas like Atman, Brahman, and liberation. The story told by Robin Sharma is more concerned with psychological and practical change.

Nonetheless, the ethical foundation is the same. The novel reduces complicated teachings to simple advice. It applies Karma Yoga and control to real life.

This adaptation of the *Gita* does not reduce its philosophy but instead shows its adaptability and relevance in the modern world. The ethical teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* are still valid across cultural and temporal boundaries.

#### **Contemporary Significance:**

The ethical issues raised in the *Bhagavad Gita*, attachment, desire, confusion about duty, are also valid in the contemporary world. Consumer culture fuels ambition but sometimes disregards personal growth.

The *Bhagavad Gita's* teachings on disciplined awareness and purposeful engagement provide a model for long-term success. The story told by Robin Sharma is universally relevant because it expresses this need in an accessible way. The moral is clear: control of self is prior to control of circumstance.

#### **Conclusion:**

A careful analysis of *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* from the ethical perspective of the *Bhagavad Gita* shows a profound conceptual synergy. The ideals of self-control, management of desire, action without attachment, and right purpose resonate with Krishna's counsel to Arjuna.

While being made more accessible for contemporary consumption, the book retains the fundamental principles of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It illustrates the process of change not as an avoidance of duty but as a shift in the realm of consciousness. Meaningful living is achieved through the disciplined regulation of consciousness and the fulfilment of Dharma.

In this context, the story of *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* can be interpreted as a

modern ethical fable that implicitly rests on the wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The story's moral asserts an eternal truth: success is not attained through acquisition but through the control of the self and the pursuit of meaningful action.

**Works Cited:**

*The Bhagavad Gita*. Translated by EknathEaswaran, 2nd ed., Nilgiri Press, 2007.  
Sharma, Robin. *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.