


The Grammar of the Disabled-Able Agency Construing ‘Hindu Studies’: Perusing the *Ashtavakra Gita*

Nandini Sahu * 
Professor of English,
SOH, IGNOU Former Director,
School of Foreign Languages New Delhi

ABSTRACT

The *Ashtavakra Gita* is a metaphysical treatise by Rishiraj Janaka and the able-disable Sage Ashtavakra in Indian mythology. It spans 20 chapters and 285 shlokas, focusing on the post-human and the disabled-able agency. The text is influenced by Hindu Studies and Indian knowledge systems, and its interconnection of ideas, cohesion, consistency, and logic are key research questions. The study explores themes such as the impact of Hindu Studies on Western literature, tangible and intangible identities, and the concept of province and region. The text also explores themes of femininity, iconography, nationalism, time, and regional poetics. The study also explores cultural paraphernalia, mythology, knowledge, detachment, liberation, and the Advaita philosophy. The paper will examine how the text constructs and conveys concepts of ability and disability through its narrative and philosophical discourse. Additionally, the paper will analyze the linguistic and grammatical frameworks employed to understand the interactions between disabled and able-bodied characters in the context of Hindu religious and philosophical traditions.

Keywords: *Hindu Studies, Ashtavakra Gita, Disability Representation, Linguistic Analysis, Grammatical Frameworks, Religious Narratives, Ability and Disability.*

The *Ashtavakra Gita* is the unswerving homily of the classical *Advaita Vedanta* sacred scripture which is a metaphysical treatise between Rishiraj Janaka, the father of Sita from *The Ramayana*, and the Sage Ashtavakra, the illustriously able-disable personae in Indian mythology. The text encompasses 20 chapters and 285 shlokas (Cantos). *Ashtavakra Gita* boons a penetrating, intensely logical and academic discourse between the two intellectuals with an orientation to the space of looking within and without for refurbishment of one’s life, beyond human feebleness. The text has a decisive disposition to the post-human, the agency being the disable body of Ashtavakra; in fact, after a thorough reading of the text, “No more can be said.” (Marshall 46). The text has multiple attributes like the *Bhagavad Gita*, but it

* Corresponding Author: Nandini Sahu

Email: kavinandini@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6607-0456>

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diverges from it in its devotion upon the viewpoint of the *Advaita*. To claim that one can focus on a particular idea or ideology and have just one hypothesis to interpret this multifaceted, multilayered text, will be unjustifiable, indefensible. Thus, the ideas/research questions of this study associated with the hitherto forgotten, rather discounted, very conclusive, substantial text, the *Ashtavakra Gita (AG)* are:

- The interconnection of ideas between the cantos
- The cohesion and coherence in the text
- Consistency, unity, rationality, logic and lucidity in the text
- Organization of thoughts vis-à-vis Green Cultural Studies
- The disabled-able agency in the *Ashtavakra Gita*
- Conflict of ideology in the *AG*
- The movement of the mind in the *AG*
- The ‘whatness’ of the discourse: refashioning identity
- The impact of Hindu Studies and Indian knowledge systems on Western literature
- Tangible and intangible identities—the question of original and retelling
- Idea of province and region—a transnational process in the *AG*
- Femininity, iconography and nationalism in *AG*
- Time attached to the calendar, and otherwise.
- *Dasha Mahavidya* icons and the *AG*
- Seasonal Gods and the *AG*
- Orature and folklore in the *AG*
- Identitarian politics and regional poetics in the text
- Identity as a postcolonial discourse vis-à-vis the *AG*
- Cultural paraphernalia, socio-political trappings, lifestyles and worldview in the text
- Mythology as hands-on isometrics in the *AG*
- Knowledge, detachment, liberation in the text
- Attachment with ‘calm indifference’: the *Advaita* philosophy
- Comprehensive depersonalization and the ultimate knowledge system in *AG*
- The idea behind “No more can be said.” (Marshall 46)

‘Hindu Studies’, as an academic discipline, refers to the academic exploration and examination of Hinduism in a very academic and scientific manner. Reading through New Historicism, this field of study encompasses a wide range of interdisciplinary subjects, including religious philosophy, literature, history, rituals, art and social aspects related to Hinduism, a way of life and not just a religion. Scholars engaged in Hindu Studies may approach the subject from various perspectives, including theology, theosophy, anthropology, history, philosophy, and cultural studies. Hindu Studies aims at examining the diverse philosophical traditions within Hinduism, such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Nyaya, Mimamsa and others, interpreting Hindu scriptures, including the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*, exploring the rituals, ceremonies and forms of worship practiced in Hinduism, including the significance of temples, festivals, and pilgrimage sites, tracing the historical development of Hinduism, including its interactions with other cultures and religions over the centuries, exploring the rich artistic and cultural heritage of Hinduism, including classical music, dance, sculpture, painting and architecture, analyzing the social structures, ethical teachings and moral values within Hinduism and their impact on individuals and communities, studying the contemporary relevance and influence of Hinduism in the modern world, including its diaspora communities and global impact. Hindu Studies is pursued at academic institutions through programmes in South Asian cultural studies or related fields. Academics in this field contribute to one’s understanding of Hinduism in a scientific manner, fostering intercultural dialogue and promoting a nuanced comprehension of this diverse and multi-layered tradition. *Ashtavakra Gita* is one of the seminal texts of Indian mythology; and this research aims at exploring the text from the lens of Hindu Studies.

During the translation of the Bible, King James framed a Translation Committee. The scholars worked in six committees, two based in each of the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, and Westminster. The committees took special care to include Puritan scholars as well as high churchmen. The original Bible was written in other languages like Hebrew, Armanic, Greek. The Translation Committee translated the Bible into Old English which has worked as a baseline for all other translations by progeny. Translation theorist Nida devised an approach to translation known as “Dynamic equivalence”. It was later called “functional equivalence.” (Nida 66) Dynamic equivalence was envisioned to produce translations that read naturally, were rooted in the local idiom and yet reserved

authenticity to the original Scripture of the Bible. On the contrary, coming to the multiple translations of the *Ashtavakra Gita*, --- in a country where the abstract ideas of ‘Desha’, ‘Nadu’, ‘Rajya’ and ‘Rashtra’ may never be concretized with easy binaries, and where there is even a state called ‘Maharashtra’ within the ‘Rashtra’(India), the translation of this seminal book from the genre of Hindu Studies is extremely stimulating, multilayered and challenging. There never has been a committee to translate this pivotal text from Sanskrit to English, but there have been multiple translations, transliterations and transcreations. My research will confine the primary source and all quotations thereof to Bart Marshall’s translation of the *Ashtavakra Gita*. (www.holybooks.in) The ‘whatness’ of the discourse and the refashioning of the identity of Ashtavakra may lead one to rethink the character of the protagonist and his standpoint from Disability Studies perspective. The disabled-able agency in the *Ashtavakra Gita*, Rishi Ashtavakra, focuses on the nature of the self (Atman), the concept of liberation (Moksha), and the nature of reality. In the context of disability, the *Ashtavakra Gita* may not explicitly address this topic as a standalone point of focus. The philosophical discussions within the text are nudged around the nature of consciousness, self-realization and the path to spiritual enlightenment. However, one could interpret and apply the teachings to the experience of disability in a broader sense. There are a few potential connections one might draw between Ashtavakra and the concept of disability discourses vis-à-vis the equality of the inner self when the homily between Janaka and Ashtavakra goes on the following lines:

“1.3 : You are not earth, water, fire or air. Nor are you empty space. Liberation is to know yourself as Awareness alone— the Witness of these.”

(Canto 1, AG)

“1.5 : You have no caste or duties. You are invisible, unattached, formless. You are the Witness of all things. Be happy. 1.6 : Right and wrong, pleasure and pain, exist in mind only. They are not your concern. You neither do nor enjoy. You are free.”

(Canto 1, AG)

“1.11 : It is true what they say: “You are what you think.” If you think you are bound you are bound. If you think you are free you are free.”

(Canto 1, AG)

Ashtavakra Gita emphasizes the idea that the true self (Atman) is beyond physical limitations and external circumstances. From this perspective, disability could be seen as a temporary condition of the physical body, while the inner self remains untouched and unaffected. Detachment yet complete acceptance of one’s ‘self’ is the leitmotif. Ashtavakra clarifies the position of detachment and acceptance of the present moment. Applying this to disability,

one might find succour in accepting the reality of their physical state by coming loose from societal judgments or limitations. For that matter, one has to go beyond body identification, that too through the body politics, like that of Metaphysical poetry. The text delves into the idea that true understanding goes beyond identifying with the body. Individuals with disabilities may find resonance in this teaching, recognizing that their worth and essence go beyond physical abilities or limitations. To achieve that, one has to realize the equanimity in adversity. *Ashtavakra Gita* promotes the idea of maintaining inner peace and equanimity in the face of challenges. People with disabilities may draw inspiration to navigate the unique challenges they encounter with a calm and galloped mind. It's important to note that these connections are interpretations, and the *Ashtavakra Gita* itself may not explicitly discuss disability. This philosophical text offers principles that can be applied broadly, and individuals may find personal meaning and inspiration in adapting these teachings to their own life circumstances, including experiences of disability.

The fundamental theme and the elemental idea of the book is *Advaita* philosophy. It deals with Non-Dual Reality (Brahman) when the discourse gets intense in the following lines:

“1.18 : That which has form is not real. Only the formless is permanent. Once this is known, you will not return to illusion. 1.19 : Just as a mirror exists both within and without the image reflected, the Supreme Self exists both within and without the body.”

(Canto 1, AG)

“5.2 : The universe arises from you like foam from the sea. Know yourself as One. Enter the peace of dissolution. 5.3: Like an imagined snake in a rope the universe appears to exist in the immaculate Self but does not. Seeing this you know: “There is nothing to dissolve.”

(Canto 5, AG)

“10.7: Prosperity, pleasure, pious deeds... Enough! In the dreary forest of the world the mind finds no rest. 10.8: For how many lifetimes have you done hard and painful labor with body, mind and speech? It is time to stop.”

(Canto 10, AG)

Attachment with ‘calm indifference’, the *Advaita* philosophy, is the circumstance of *Ashtavakra Gita*. Advaita asserts that there is one ultimate reality called ‘Brahman’ which is beyond all distinctions and dualities. Brahman is considered infinite, formless, and the source of everything in the universe. Ashtavakra clarifies that the individual self (Atman) is identical to the ultimate reality (Brahman). The apparent diversity in the world is seen as an illusion (Maya), and the goal of life is to realize this fundamental unit. Maya is the concept that the world is an illusion and what appears as a diverse and tangible reality is not the ultimate truth. This illusion is a result of ignorance (Avidya), and the path to enlightenment involves dispelling this ignorance to see the true nature of reality. Advaita recognizes various paths to

liberation (Moksha), including Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion), Karma Yoga (the path of selfless action), and Raja Yoga (the path of meditation). Ultimately, all these paths are seen as leading to the realization of the non-dual nature of reality. Advaita philosophy places a high value on the authority of the Vedas, particularly the Upanishads. Adi Shankaracharya (8th Century CE), the pioneering philosopher in the Advaita tradition, wrote commentaries on the *Upanishads* and other classical Hindu texts to elucidate and defend Advaita principles. Advaita employs the method of negation to describe the nature of Brahman. Through the process of *neti-neti*, or "not this, not this," it encourages seekers to negate all attributes and limitations, arriving at the understanding that Brahman is beyond all conceptualizations. One may effortlessly be transported to the idea of 'Negative Capability' of John Keats(1817) and assume the impact of this seminal Hindu Studies text on the British Romantics. 'Negative capability' is the capacity of artists to pursue ideals of beauty, precision and sublimity even when it leads them into rational ambiguity, as opposed to a preference for philosophical certainty over artistic beauty, as in the *Ashtavakra Gita*. Keats coined the term Negative Capability in a letter he wrote to his brothers George and Tom in 1817. Inspired by Shakespeare's work, he describes it as "being on uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and fiction"(Letters of Keats 28) T S Eliot takes it one step ahead when he writes in his essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent':

"Great works do not express the personal emotion of the poet. The poet does not reveal their own unique and novel emotions, but rather, by drawing on ordinary ones and channelling them through the intensity of poetry, they express feelings that surpass, altogether, experienced emotion. This is what Eliot intends when he discusses poetry as an "escape from emotion." Since successful poetry is impersonal and, therefore, exists independent of its poet, it outlives the poet and can incorporate into the timeless "ideal order" of the "living" literary tradition. Another essay found in Selected Essays relates to this notion of the impersonal poet. In "Hamlet and His Problems" Eliot presents the phrase "objective correlative." The theory is that the expression of emotion in art can be achieved by a specific, and almost formulaic, prescription of a set of objects, including events and situations. A particular emotion is created by presenting its correlated objective sign. The author is depersonalised in this conception, since he is the mere effecter of the sign. And, it is the sign, and not the poet, which creates emotion." (T S Eliot 2) Nonetheless, if one intends to think of the 'conflict' of ideology and

attribute that to the time attached to the calendar and otherwise, Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* may indistinctly be paralleled with *Ashtavakra Gita*. To validate the idea of complete attachment to life, of course in a most detached manner, a few lines from the text may suffice:

“16.9 : One who is attached to the world thinks renouncing it will relieve his misery. One who is attached to nothing is free and does not feel miserable even in the world. 18.75 : When a weak man gives up meditation he falls prey to whims and desires.”

(Canto 16, AG)

“17.4: Rare in the world is one who does not relish past enjoyments, nor yearn for enjoyments to come. 17.5 :Those who desire pleasure and those who desire liberation are both common in the world. Rare is the great soul who desires neither enjoyment nor liberation. 17.6 : Rare is the right-minded person who neither covets nor shuns religion, wealth, pleasure, life or death.”

(Canto 17, AG)

Siddhartha (1922), written by German-Swiss author Hermann Hesse, is a philosophical novel that reconnoitres the spiritual and empirical voyage of its ostensible character, Siddhartha. Set in ancient India during the time of Gautama Buddha, the novel probes into the protagonist's quest for self-discovery, illumination and the meaning of life, like *Ashtavakra*. Through Siddhartha's experiences, the novel offers intuitions into the nature of reality, human desires, and the path to true wisdom. The self-sufficing question of a whole lot of Western literary texts being inspired, enthused and stimulated by the *Ashtavakra Gita* comes to one's mind, very naturally, by reading the Preface to the text by Bart Marshall. The translator writes:

“For the next thirty-seven years that glimpse of infinite emptiness, so intimate, so familiar, kept me looking almost obsessively in esoteric books and far corners for an explanation of myself. Then, “suddenly,” the veil, as they say, was lifted. A few months after that occurrence, as my interest in reading began to slowly return, I found myself drawn mainly to the sayings and writings of old masters. What did Buddha have to say? What did Christ? Lao Tzu? Patanjali? I wanted to read them with new eyes. Oddly, in those thirty-seven years of seeking, I had never read the *Ashtavakra Gita*, and indeed was barely aware of its existence. Then recently, as I sat at the bedside of a dying friend and teacher, another friend placed it in my hands. I opened it and was astonished. Here, in one concise volume, was all that needed to be said. I immediately acquired other versions and poured over them. Each had its good points, but none of them spoke the way my inner ear was hearing.”

(Preface, Bart Marshall)

“There are a few conventions worth mentioning. Capitalized words like Self, Awareness, God, Absolute, Consciousness, Knowledge, Witness, That, This, Void, Light, All, One, Everything, Nothing, No-thing, Being, Me, You, It, Himself, Bliss, Supreme, Unity and Truth are used as synonyms, although sometimes in context subtle—and ultimately non-existent--differences may be intended. These words all point to What Is—the true nature of Reality.”

(Preface, Bart Marshall)

Thus, the idea of province and region—*Desha* and *Nadu* -- is a transnational process in the *Ashtavakra Gita*. Identitarian politics and regional poetics in the text lead the discourse

further to identity as a Postcolonial dissertation. There is a clear discourse analysis of cultural paraphernalia, socio-political trappings, lifestyles and worldview in the text. Hitherto, most promisingly, mythology is handed down as the hands-on isometrics. One is enriched with the ideology of knowledge, detachment and liberation by reading a text where renunciation and redemption are distilled moral value systems coming from Indian knowledge systems. The designs of gender discourses, femininity, iconography and nationalism in *Ashtavakra Gita* do invariably lead one to rethinking *Dasha Mahavidya* icons, the seasonal Goddesses and to the existence of orature and folklore in the Hindu Studies. As mythology goes, when Ashtavakra's father Kahoda narrated the powers of the *Dasha Mahavidya* icons to his pregnant wife Sujata, she was primarily betrothed to the ideas of inclusivity, compassion, power and gender equality. One is intrigued by Ashtavakra's mother Sujata's body-politics and the idea of *Dasha Mahavidyas* transmitted to the unborn child Ashtavakra, who, once born, becomes an icon of all those positively prevailing scruples. The *Dasha Mahavidyas* acknowledged as the Ten Mahavidyas, are a group of goddesses in Hindu Studies that represent various aspects of the divine feminine. These goddesses are worshipped in the Shakta tradition, which emphasizes the worship of the Goddess as the Supreme Divine. Each Mahavidya is associated with specific attributes, characteristics, and forms of Shakti (divine feminine energy). Kali, the first and foremost Mahavidya, is depicted as a fierce and powerful goddess. She symbolizes time, transformation and the power of evolution. Kali is portrayed with a dark complexion, multiple arms and a necklace of skulls. Scholars of Disability Studies have often been audacious to attribute intellectual and physical disability to Kali, which, of course, is contentious. Next, Tara is associated with compassion and is considered as the goddess who guides and protects devotees through the ocean of existence. She is portrayed as a gentle and serene deity, but she can also take on a more ferocious form. Tripura Sundari (Shodashi) represents the beauty of the three worlds and is associated with love, knowledge and the essence of consciousness. She is depicted as a sixteen-year-old goddess. Bhuvaneshwari is the goddess of the universe and is associated with the creation. She represents the divine space and the nurturing aspect of the feminine. Bhairavi is a fierce form of the Goddess associated with destruction and the annihilation of negative forces. She is depicted with a sword, symbolizing her power to cut through illusions. Chinnamasta is a unique Mahavidya who is depicted as a self-decapitated goddess, symbolizing the sacrifice of the ego. She represents the transformative power of spiritual self-sacrifice. Dhumavati is

often portrayed as a widow or an old hag, representing the aspects of life associated with sorrow, poverty, and suffering. She is seen as a form of the eternal widow, signifying the transcendence of worldly attachments. Bagalamukhi is allied with the power of *stambhana*, the power to paralyze or astonish her enemies. She is worshipped for protection and victory over adversaries. Matangi is akin with knowledge, music and fine arts. She is depicted as a dark-skinned goddess seated on a throne. Kamala (Lakshmi) is sometimes included as the tenth Mahavidya. She is connected with wealth, prosperity and financial security. The worship of the Dasha Mahavidyas is considered a potent means of spiritual growth and transformation in the Shakta tradition. In this ancestry, Sujata was seeking to connect with the different aspects of the divine feminine for various purposes, including spiritual knowledge, protection and liberation, which was transferred to Ashtavakra both intangibly and tangibly, before and after his birth. Each Mahavidya impacted his character as a manifestation of the ultimate reality, and their worship led to his realization of the Supreme Goddess.

In this regard, mythology served as the hands-on isometrics for Ashtavakra. While mythology is rich with symbolism and insights, it is important to note in the *Ashtavakra Gita* that it's not just a literal, hands-on training source; it has successfully led the discourse to Mythopoeia and Mythopoetic. It has been instrumental in conveying cultural beliefs, values and traditions. The text has been an archetypal exploration by identifying the archetypal characters and these archetypes do relate to one's own life experiences and challenges. In this sense, *Ashtavakra Gita* is a very contemporary, nonconformist and concomitant text. The reader can explore how the characters in the text overcome obstacles and apply similar principles to their journey. By comprehending the moral and ethical lessons, one may put on these moral lessons to one's own decision-making process, considering the potential outcomes of different choices. The symbolic interpretation does enable the reader to explore the representational elements in mythology, evading a monolithic interpretation and going towards a more inclusive process of the so called 'able' and 'disable' bodies, as well as Anthropocentrism and Anthropomorphism. The text makes one learn to consider how these symbols might represent deeper psychological or spiritual truths and then to apply symbolic thinking to understand and interpret aspects of one's own life symbolically. Mythological metaphors make the reader an expert at looking for metaphors in folklore that parallel real-life situations and then use these metaphors to gain insights into personal challenges,

relationships or goals. An avid reader of the *Ashtavakra Gita* can create personal metaphors, like W B Yeats, inspired by mythology to express and understand aspects of life and then incorporate mythological themes into personal rituals or practices that align with their values and goals. The reader can use mythological symbols or narratives to inspire mindfulness, meditation or self-reflection. Creative Expression is of utmost importance in the text, thus the reader can express thoughts and emotions through creative outlets, such as writing, art, or music inspired by mythopoeia. Even the *Ashtavakra Gita* scholar can create his/her own postmodern myth or narrative that reflects their personal experiences and aspirations. Adaptation of the valiant attitude of Ashtavakra and King Janaka is a possibility for drawing inspiration from the journeys of both the fabled protagonists. Embrace challenges with courage, perseverance and a willingness to learn and grow is the prospect. Anyway, a word of caution can be asserted here-- while *Ashtavakra Gita* can provide valuable insights, it's essential to balance metaphorical interpretation with a practical understanding of one's own conditions. *Ashtavakra Gita* serves as a guide, offering perspectives and wisdom, but the application of these insights to real-life situations requires thoughtful consideration and adaptation. Bearing in mind the standing of existential myth and folklore in the text and their practicality, pragmatism, one can substantiate these designs with the words of Bart Marshall:

“The words universe, world, creation and illusion are synonyms referring to the apparently real (but not) manifest world of physical objects, people, personal self, ideas, thoughts, gods, knowledge, concepts, myths, religions, history, memories, emotions, time, space—everything we perceive through the mind and senses, including the mind and senses themselves. Maya. Synonymous words and phrases used to denote a “person” who has realized Self, who knows Truth, who perceives the Real include: wise one, desireless one, liberated one, liberated soul, great soul, sage and yogi.”

(Preface, Bart Marshall)

This may perpetually lead the reader to rethink about the agency in the text:

“Little is known about the *Ashtavakra Gita*. *Ashtavakra* is a name that appears in Indian lore, but almost certainly he did not write it. The author, likely an anonymous sage, merely uses the characters of *Ashtavakra* and King Janaka to set up a classic dialogue between guru and disciple. It quickly becomes a guru-guru dialogue, however, because after the first salvo of wisdom from *Ashtavakra*, Janaka realizes his true Self, and from then on they get into an Advaitic jam session of the highest sort.”

(Translator's Introduction)

The agency, the ‘anonymous sage’ in the text, refers to the capacity of individuals or characters within the text to make choices, take actions and exert influence over events. It involves the ability of these entities to shape the narrative, impact the plot and contribute to the overall development of the narrative, the dialogue and discourse between *Ashtavakra* and King Janaka. The concept of agency is essential here in understanding how characters drive the plot forward and how their decisions and actions contribute to the meaning. Their choices lead to

consequences and resolutions, shaping the narrative flight. Here, the characters as agency possess a degree of autonomy, allowing them to act independently and make choices that reflect their individual perspectives and motivations. The level of agency a character enjoys influences how much they contribute to the development of the plot, and in *Ashtavakra Gita*, the agency is central to the plot's progression. The choices they make and the actions they take contribute to their evolving identities and roles. The narrative standpoint influences the portrayal of action, which Plato gives a cursory look in his text, *Republic. Allegory of the Cave* is an allegory presented by the Greek philosopher Plato in his work *Republic* to compare "the effect of education and the lack of it on our nature". (Plato 88) It is written as a dialogue between Plato's brother Glaucon and his mentor Socrates, narrated by the latter. In the allegory of the 'cave', like *Ashtavakra*, Plato talks about a group of people who lived chained to a wall of a cave throughout their lives, facing a blank wall and assuming different truths. Those people watch shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them and give names to these shadows. In *Ashtavakra's* words, they are 'timid minds':

"18.45: Timid men fear sensory experience much as they do tigers. They seek refuge in caves and try to un-think the world. 18.46 :Sensory experiences are like elephants who, upon encountering a desireless man, see him as a lion. They immediately turn on their heels, or if unable to escape, stay on to flatter and serve him."

(Canto 18, AG)

One can always go one step further and talk about the ideas of the Panopticon and Counter Panopticon vis-à-vis the *Ashtavakra Gita* where the mind plays the games of the imaginary storms:

"18.51 : When one realizes he is neither the actor nor the one who watches, the mind-storm is stilled."

(Canto 18, AG)

"18.56 :Though pleased he is not pleased; though pained he does not suffer. This wonderful state is understood only by those like him."

(Canto 18, AG)

Ashtavakra argues in favour of a life of action in pursuit of knowledge in order to get rid of these complex and confusing games that the heart does play:

"18.58 :Even doing nothing the dull one is anxious and distracted. Even amidst great action the wise one remains still. 18.61 : For the deluded one, even rest is an activity. For the wise, even action bears the fruit of stillness."

(Canto 18, AG)

"18.95 : The man of Knowledge seems to think, but has no thoughts. He seems to have sense perceptions, but does not experience. He seems to have intelligence, but is empty-minded. He appears to be a person, but is not.

18.96 :The man of Knowledge is neither happy nor miserable, neither detached nor attached, neither liberated nor seeking liberation. 18.97 : Even while distracted the blessed one is still. In meditation, he does not meditate. In ignorance, he remains clear. Though learned, he knows nothing.”

(Canto 18, AG)

The first-person narratives in *Ashtavakra Gita* provide insights into the inner thoughts and decision-making processes of the narrator Ashtavakra, showcasing him as an able-disabled agency. Both the characters, anyway, are influenced by the social and cultural contexts and in the process, they create the prevailing text and the contexts. Societal structures, norms and expectations do enable or constrain the characters' agency in many mythologies, but not in the *Ashtavakra Gita*. The authorial intent with varying degrees convey specific themes or messages in each canto. There is an interconnection of ideas between the cantos, the cohesion and coherence in the text sustain consistency, unity, rationality, logic and lucidity in the form of language as well as structure. Organization of thoughts vis-à-vis Green Cultural Studies—from going red to green, violence to peace -- is the food for thought for the readers of *Ashtavakra Gita*. The complexity to the characters and the overall text as a literary work is certainly and essentially intriguing. The tonal quality of the text has a finality about it when “comprehensive depersonalization and the ultimate knowledge system” in *Ashtavakra Gita* is concluded by saying, “No more can be said.” (Marshall 46) The euphonic language of the *Ashtavakra Gita* is such that it doesn't give a command to the reader to accept the treatise; it has multiple possibilities, being an open-ended discourse. Still, one is impelled to settle that the words of the *Ashtavakra Gita* are the ultimate truths, the alternative veracities.

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NOTES 1:

“The themes of the twenty chapters/cantos of the *Ashtavakra Gita* go like this, as mentioned by Bart Marshall in his ‘Translator’s Preface’ of the *Ashtavakra Gita*:

“Chapter 1: It all starts when King Janaka asks the sage Ashtavakra how he can attain Knowledge, detachment, liberation. Ashtavakra tells him.

Chapter 2: It works! Upon hearing Ashtavakra’s words Janaka realizes his true Nature. Enraptured, he describes the joy and wonder of his new state.

Chapter 3: Ashtavakra is delighted for Janaka but sees inconsistencies. He fires off a series of confrontational verses about attachment to worldly pleasure.

Chapter 4: Janaka asserts that the Lord of the Universe can do as he pleases.

Chapter 5: Ashtavakra does not disagree, but in a terse four verses points to the next step—dissolution.

Chapter 6: Janaka says “I know that already,” matching him in style and number of verses.

Chapter 7: Unable to leave it at that, however, Janaka goes on to further describe his enlightened state.

Chapter 8: Still hearing too much “I” in Janaka’s language, Ashtavakra instructs him in the subtleties of attachment and bondage.

Chapter 9: Ashtavakra continues to describe the way of true detachment.

Chapter 10: Ashtavakra hammers away at the folly of desire—no matter how elevated or subtle.

Chapter 11: Ashtavakra further describes the state of desirelessness to which he points.

Chapter 12: Janaka replies by describing the state of timeless stillness in which he now finds himself.

Chapter 13: Janaka, having been instructed by Ashtavakra in Chapter One to “be happy,” reports that he indeed is.

Chapter 14: Janaka then summarizes his exalted state with calm indifference.

Chapter 15: Impressed but not through teaching, Ashtavakra relentlessly points to the vast emptiness of Self.

Chapter 16: Ashtavakra attacks the futility of effort and knowing. Chapter 17: Ashtavakra describes the nature of one who is truly free. Chapter 18: Finally, Ashtavakra hits him with everything he’s got—100 verses of pure non-duality. If this doesn’t do it, nothing will.

Chapter 19: It works! Janaka no longer describes his enlightened state but can speak only in questions revealing absence.

Chapter 20: In a final flurry of questions pointing only at their own meaninglessness, Janaka

burns off the last vestiges of personhood and enters dissolution. He ends with: “No more can be said.”

Ashtavakra smiles, nods approvingly, and says no more.”

NOTES 2: MANY TEXTS AND CONTEXTS:(A few Translations of Ashtavakra Gita)

“Brij Nath Lala (1907) opened the discourse of this Gita into the English language in the Office of the Vaishya Hitkari.

Swami Nityaswarupananda has written a word by word translation from 1929 to 1931.

Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968) continued the discourse into English with his work posthumously published in 1971. Stroud (2004) wrote on the Astavakra Gita as a work of multivalent narrative.

The Heart of Awareness: A Translation of the Ashtavakra Gita (Shambhala Dragon Editions) translated by Thomas Byrom, 1990

Swami Chinmayananda] wrote a commentary on the Ashtavakra Gita, which has references to the Upanishads to help convey the meaning of the text.

John Richards published an English translation of the Ashtavakra Gita in 1997

Osho has given commentary on Ashtavakra Gita in a long series of 91 discourses named as Ashtavakra Mahageeta, given in his Pune Ashram.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has given commentary on Ashtavakra Gita in Hindi and English.

Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai has given commentary on Ashtavakra Gita through 60 discourses totalling more than 116 hours.

The Book has also been translated into Urdu language with the title of Mehak-e-Agahi (2021).”