



Research Paper

## A Study on Karmayoga in Bhagavad Gita

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**Abstract:** *The philosophy of 'karma' is a doctrine to consider being the foundation stone of the entire Indian Philosophical outlook. The Bhagavad Gita is most beloved scripture of Indian thought and one of the prime chapters of this scripture is the 'law of karma'. According to it, every man profit from what he does and suffers from what he does. Karmayoga is mainly based on niskam-karma but not the mere renunciation of Karma. We have to give up the attachment and the fruit regarding the action. So, the action is our Svadharma, fruit or result is not our concern. The Gita said that the nature of Karma was natural, inherent in man's existence and everybody has to work. Hence an attempt is made here to discuss the law of karma as considered by the Bhagavad Gita.*

**Keywords:** Karma, Niskama-karma, Svadharma.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I shall deal with the concept of "Karma-Yoga in Bhagavad-Gita". The Bhagavad-Gita is a part of Mahabharata; it is regarded as one of the most sacred book of the Hindus. Be it noted here that if the Gita is regarded as an excellent religious work, it is no less excellent as an ethical one.

Bhagavad-Gita literally means 'The Lord's Song' i.e., the philosophical discourse of Lord Krishna to persuade the reluctant Arjuna to fight. To fight against evil is the duty of man. To make the situation relatives and beloved friends and revered elders stand on both sides and Arjuna has to vindicate his claim, he has to follow his Svabhava and Svadharma.

The Gita lays down the different paths of realization of God. Its teaching is universal and intended for all persons of different temperaments. Some are predominantly men of action and they ought to follow the path of action or karma yoga. Some are predominantly emotional and they ought to follow the path of devotion or bhaktiyoga. And some are predominantly intellectual. They ought to follow the path of knowledge or jnanayoga. Action, devotion and knowledge lead to union with God.

In Bhagavad-Gita the supreme duty is action without desire. Action without desire does not mean unmotivated action but acting with a sagacious intention of submission to God. The Gita represents a unique synthesis of Action, Knowledge, and Devotion. Man is a complex of intellect, will and emotion; he is a being who thinks, wills and feels. Intellect has given rise to the philosophy of Knowledge; will to the philosophy of Action; and emotion to the philosophy of Devotion. Karmayoga is not opposed to jnanayoga; in fact, the former is possible only when the latter is attained.

I have divided this project work into following sections, which are as follows:

In *Introduction*, I gave a brief explanation of Bhagavad-Gita as a synthesis of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti yoga. All these three paths are interrelated with each other.

In the *Section I: Philosophy of Karma*, I deal with the concept of karma and its different classifications. Karma generally means 'to do' something. The law of karma is said to be based on the law of causation to the sphere of human conduct. There are different classifications of Karma, as voluntary, non-voluntary, sakama, niskama, etc. are explained in this chapter.

In the *Section II: Karma in Bhagavad-Gita* is explained in very elaborately. Here I also expound the concept of 'karma-yoga', 'niskama karma' and 'lokasamgraha' in the context of Bhagavad-Gita.

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In the *Section III: Karma-yoga in contemporary time*, I discuss the social application of Karma-yoga of the Bhagavad-Gita by contemporary thinker Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Gandhi, and Tilak.

In the *last section*, I *conclude* that the Bhagavad Gita is not a mere Hindu sastra of universal wisdom, meant for all possible situations. Irrespective of age, sex, religion and status it offers varieties of spiritual insights and disciplines, so that everyone at every level of evolution can get nourishment from it to evolve further. The importance of the Gita and its eternal message of *niskama karma*, we think, is relevant even today.

## SECTION I PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA

Karma is one of the most important and fundamental principle of classical philosophy and all classical Indian schools of thought except Carvaka believe in the principles of karma unquestionably. The most important presupposition of morality on which the entire Indian ethical thought is based is called the law of Karma. The idea of the Gita is not negation of action, but performance of action with detached mind. This section is divided into three parts: Part I – Meaning of Karma, Part II – Classification of Karma, and Part III – Theory of Karma.

### PART I

**Meaning of Karma:** Now the question is what is exactly meant by the word ‘Karma’? It is not easy to answer to the question because we find that there is no agreement among the scholars on this issue. This is simply because the word karma has been used to mean different senses in different contexts. There is no particular meaning of it. So it may be stated that in order to realize the meaning of the word ‘karma’ we must go through its different uses found in the explanation of different schools of philosophy (Pal, 2004). The word karma is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘kr’ etymologically and this word means ‘to do’ and therefore karma means by derivation an action, a work, a deed, etc (ibid).

Explanation of karma in the *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* is *bhutabhavodbhavakora visargha karmasamjnitha* (The Gita 8.3), i.e., the sacrifice which release the creative forces of the universe is known as karma. In this verse the meaning of the word ‘visargah’ is ‘visaryan’, i.e., immersed and different substances as ghee, cake; fruits etc. are given up without desire of fruits for the sake of god. Thus the commentators take decision to give up the substances as ghee, cake; fruits etc. to the God without desire are a main cause of attaining liberation. So if one performs sacrifices maintaining Vedic commands gets heavenly pleasure (Tiwary, K. (1998). Keeps on transmigrating from one life to another along with the soul till liberation is attained.

The concept of karma is also used to signify two different meanings as casual and ethical sense. The casual sense, the use of karma is descriptive in character because it describes the casual character of act-phenomena and its asserts that every action has natural, casual result and the effect of karma is never destroyed till it is realize by doer of karma and before its realization it exists in the form of *samskara* which cannot be perceived by our sense organs. While the non-theistic karmavadins think that *samskara* resides in soul and when it is ripened it automatically starts giving result mechanically without the role of any divine agency (Pal, J. (2004).

According to Swami Vivekananda, the word karma has come from the root ‘kr’ and the meaning of root ‘kr’ is to do ‘ so all action are karmas’ (Vivekananda, S. (2001). Etymologically the word karma means the effect of actions. So with all our actions and feelings.

Karma is the most tremendous power that man has to deal with and all the actions that we see in the world, all the movements in human society, all the works that we have around us are simply the display of thought, the manifestation of the will of man and this is caused by character and character is manufactured by karma. Karma is the manifestation of will (ibid).

### PART II

**Classification of Karma:** Karma literally means action of any kind done by human being. But actions which are morally significant are known as voluntary actions.

**Karma may be classified into various ways according to the Indian thinkers**

**1. Voluntary Action or Aichhika Karma :** voluntary action is an action performed knowingly and willingly by self conscious and self determining person with desire, pre-vision and free choice of means and ends voluntary action is done by a spring of action and this action is also done by feeling of want.

The bodily actions produce changes in the external world and these changes are called consequences (Sannyal, J. 2006).

**Non-voluntary Action or Anaichhika Karma :** non-voluntary actions are those actions which are devoid of moral quality and cannot be judged as right or wrong. Non-voluntary action is also considered as reflex actions or automatic actions which responses to sensory stimulation and these actions are not controlled by consciousness. By repetition non-voluntary actions are fixed as habits and become automatic (*Ibid.*, pp.26-30).

Every karma or voluntary action is divided into three classes as (a) Sancita karma or reserved stock (b) Prarabdha karma or fruit bearing action and (c) Kriyamana karma or current action.

**Sancita Karma (Reserve Stock):** Every action performed in the form of a potentially (ardsta0 which results pleasurable or painful experience to the doer in a subsequent birth or in the present birth. Sancita karma or accumulated potentially is responsible for the good and evil impulse of our mind (Godyandka 2007).

**Kriyamana Karma (Current Action):** A karma which is being performed with some interested motive as well as with attachment, sense of doership and which is being gathered in this life is called kriyaman karma.

**Prarabdha Karma (Fruit Bearing Action):** Huge stock of accumulated action, consisting of virtuous as well as sinful deeds, an action is taken out to serve one life time and this action which has begun to bear fruit and which will be exhausted only on their fruit being enjoyed and not otherwise, is known as prarabdha karma.

According to Indian thinkers, further division of action is sakama karma, i.e. attached or desirous action and niskama karma, i.e. non-attached or selfless action.

**Sakama Karma:** Sakama karma, i.e. attached action is that action when one does not realize that real essence of the object of the world and which is performed with some desires. So actions which come under the influence of the law of karma are those which are performed with the conscious desire of achieving of worldly pleasure are known as attached action.

**Niskama Karma:** niskama karma, i.e. disinterested actions are those actions which are performed without any conscious intention, i.e. completely devoid of desire.

The ideal of niskama karma may be taken as a synthesis between pravrtti and nivrtti in Indian ethical system. Pravrtti is the path of active life with the object of attaining heaven. On the other hand, nivrtti is the path of total renunciation of works.

The Gita says in this regard in the following way:

Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana !

Ma karmaphalaheturbhurma te sangostvakarmani!!( *The Bhagavadagita*, 2.47)

Thus niskama karma is neither naiskarma (inaction0 nor karma (action) with an eye upon the fruit thereof. Thus according to the Bhagavadgita, The ideal of niskama karma is realized by performing selfless action, surrender the fruits of actions to God.

### **PART III**

**The Theory of Karma:** The law of karma is considered to be one of the most fundamental features of Indian philosophy. The theory of karma is a general theory of moral conduct that has been built with the ethical world view. The law of karma is mainly related to human conduct in the normal sense of the term. So action means intentional action and this will be its meaning in the analysis of the law of karma. The domain of the operation of the law of karma is said that to be the entire universe which means that it is applied to both human and non-human beings (Tiwary, K. (1998). *Classical Indian Ethical Thought*).

The law of karma is said to be based on the law of causation to the sphere of human conduct. The law of causation means every event of the world is determined by its cause. So everything that happens in the moral world is regulated beforehand. The law of karma is said to be an extension of the law of causation to the world of action because it claims that every action has some effects, i.e. actions are as good cause as non-actions. The law acquires its distinctive significance by being an extension in the moral direction.

According to Hiriyana, the doctrine of karma signifies not merely that the events of life are determined by their causes, but also that there is absolute justice in the rewards and punishment that fail to our fate. The rewards and punishments which fail to our fate are the consequences of our actions (*Rajendra Prasad, Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality Indian Council of Pholosophical Research, 1989, pp.21*)

The law of karma has been emphasized by all the interpreters of Indian philosophy. For Radhakrishnan, according to the law of karma there is nothing uncertain in the moral world, 'we reap what we sow'. The attempts to overleap the law of karma is as fruitless as the attempt to leap over one's shadow (*Rajendra Prasad, Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality Indian Council of Pholosophical Research, 1989, pp.210-213*)

Action produces result indirectly . The process is as soon as an action, right or wrong, is performed, a subtle result of karma, merit or demerit, is produced. So the action may legitimately be regarded as the independent determinant of the consequences (Hiriyana, M. (1949). *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin, p 248).

The consequences of one's action as happiness and suffering, the doer experiences not only as a matter of fact but also as a matter of propriety since he deserves them. As we understand the term 'reward' and punishment', anybody's just rewards and punishment are also deserved by him on account of his actions.

Since there is no digression is possible in getting consequences, Hiriyana says that the theory of karma signifies not only the events of our life, but also that there is absolute justice in the rewards and punishment that

fall into our life (Rajendra Prasad, *Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1989, pp.218-219*).

So man as the moral being, endowed with consciousness of ought and ought not, right and wrong, good and evil and moved by the conception of some ideals capable of being by means of his voluntary efforts. It has given rise to the conception of the law of karma. It is a belief in the principle of justice underlying the course of our life and the world. Man as a moral being cannot stake off this belief and hence cannot but formulate some such law. Thus the rational mind of man find itself in a position in which it can neither give up the belief in the law of karma nor can accept it in any definite form.

## SECTION II

### Karma-Yoga in Bhagavad-Gita

It is necessary to properly realize the meaning of the word 'Karma yoga,' we should define some important words and otherwise many difficulties subsequently may arise. Which is also describe in the second chapter for this reason, we should first examine and explain the meaning of the word 'Karma' and 'Yoga'. This section is divided into three parts – Karma and Yoga, Niskama Karma; and Lokasamgraha.

#### Part I

**Karma and Yoga:** The word 'Karma' comes from the root 'Kr' which means 'doing', 'affairs', or 'activity' and that same ordinary meaning is intended in the Bhagavad-Gita. It prescribes some action for realizing Isvara in each and every religion. According to the ancient Vedic religion, this action is sacrificial ritual (Tilak, *SrimadBhagavadgitaRahasya or karmayogasastra, pp. 71-72*).

The word 'yoga' comes from the root 'yuj' which means 'to join ' and its root meaning is 'the state of union ', 'combination', 'addition' or 'co-existence', or 'staying together' and later on it has also come to mean the 'means', 'device', 'method' or 'thing to be done' etc.

In the Gita, the word 'yoga', yogi or other compounds from the word 'yoga' have occurred so many times. We find almost everywhere the word used more or less in the meaning of 'means', 'skilful device', 'method', 'the thing to be done', 'union' etc. And it must be said that this is one of the comprehensive words used in the Gita. In order to explain what particular skill, means, method or process is mainly signified in the Gita by the use of the word yoga. This word has intentionally been clearly defined in the Gita as: 'yogahkarmasukausalam'(The Gita, 2.50), i.e., here 'yoga' means a special skill, device, intelligent method or graceful way of performing actions.

#### Part II

### MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NISKAMA KARMA

The concept of niskama karma is a composite concept because it is made up of two different concepts, i.e., 'niskama' and 'Karma' and it has been used in various senses in Indian system of thought. But in the Bhagavad-Gita the concept of karma has been used without any ambiguity in the sense of action and action is that what is done. The word 'niskama' is also a composite concept because it is made up of two different concepts as 'nihi' and 'kama'. The word 'kama' means desire or 'kama' is highly a vague concept because this word has been used in different senses in different contexts. But in the Bhagavad-Gita, it is generally used in the sense of sensuous desires. So when niskama karma translated in terms of desireless action, it should be taken mean an action done by the doer in desireless spirit.

In the Gita, it has been stated that to live for a moment in the world is to do some sorts of krama. It is not possible for one to abandon action, i.e., if one has to live in the world, in the land of action, can one escape from action? We see ourselves that thirst, hunger and other desires do not leave us so long as our body lives. If the path of renunciation gives us the liberty of performing a disgraceful action like begging for satisfying desires, then according to sastrathere is no inconvenience to perform all worldly actions with a desirelessframe of mind. According to the Gita, all abandonment of actions made when the mental control is not perfect and all abandonment of actions is the result of ignorance.

It has been stated in the Gita that the saints who have known the identity of Brahman and the atman performs all activities in the illusory world merely by their body or merely by their organs and it has also being stated that the real abandonment of actions consists in performing actions with unattached mind without entertaining the hope of reward merely as a duty and non-performance of action is not a real abandonment of action. So there is no problem of performing actions through the bodily organs with disinterested mind.

Some persons raise a further objection that when the mind has become desirless as a result of the acquisition of knowledge and all desires have been destroyed. There remains nothing which moreover, in support of this argument, it has been stated in the Uttara Gita:

Jnanamrtenatraptasyakrtakrtyasyayoginah |

Na castikinचित्तव्यamasticennasatattvavit|| (Uttaragita,1.23)

That is, a man who has become jnani (krtakrtya) as a result having drunk the rector of knowledge, no further duty remains and if further duty remains that man is not a real jnani or tattvajnani. So someone thinks that the Bhagavad-Gita accepts this position that karma leaves a man of its own accord after the acquisition of knowledge.

The root cause of our suffering is attachment which is a part of desire not merely a wish. According to the Gita, instead of killing desires of all kinds, one should only give up the attachment to the object of desire and go on performing all actions. Though one may be free from desires of all kinds, it is not possible that activity comes to an end. We see that whether there is desire or not, constant actions like breathing etc. go on. Even for a single moment is an action by itself. So it is not possible for us to become free from karma after acquisition of perfect knowledge as well as the destruction of desire of all kinds. And that why it has been stated in the Gita: 'na hi kascitksanamapijatutisthatyakarmakt' (ibid. 3.5), no one can remain alive without performing action.

In the third chapter of the Gita (3/17-19), the Gita has said that there is no duty for the jnani after the acquisition of knowledge of his own. Someone says that the two propositions as the jnani is free from duty and the jnani does not escape from karma are mutually contradictory. So as the jnani has more duty for himself, it is now necessary for him to perform all his duties without desire.

It is true that the hope for fruit may thus be destroyed by means of knowledge. So it is true that the jnani should, after acquisition of knowledge, perform those very actions which are performed by the ignorant with a hope for fruit but looking upon advantages or disadvantages, happiness or unhappiness as one and the same with courage and one should perform it with pure reason Being indifferent in the matter of fruit according to his own authority and purely as a matter of duty.

If it is thus proved that the jnani must, so long as life lasts, desirelessly perform all duties which befall him in the course of life, having given up the hope for result. And therefore the last and most important advice of the Lord of Arjuna in support of the doctrine of Karma yoga is that: 'lokasamgrahamevapisampasyankartumarhasi', (The Gita 3.20) i.e., one must perform action without attachment for the public benefit. It is true that the word 'lokasamgraha' ordinarily means the benefit of human beings, and it also means that the man is superior to the other created beings in the world.

Harmonisation of Action (karma) and Renunciation (Tyaga): According to the Gita, though the Karma yoga is superior to renunciation for attaining salvation, nowhere in the Gita has been shown any dishonour for that path. The lord has clearly stated that both the path of renunciation and the path of action equally lead to salvation, that is to say, they are both of the same value. And therefore the Lord has stated that 'ekamsamkyam ca yogam ca yah pasyati.' (The Gita, 5.5) The jnani (wise man) says that if any one path is properly followed, the same result of both is achieved and where the follower of the samkhya path reach, the follower of the action reach the same goal. A person who realises that jnana and karma is the same thing may be said to have seen the true principle. Moreover in the Karma yoga, one has to renounce the hope for the fruit of action. 'nahyasamnyastasamkalpoyogi bhavatikascana,' (Ibid., 6.2) i.e., unless one performs sannyasa i.e., tyaga of the samkalpa of the hope of reward or fruit in the shape of desirous mind, he does not become a yogi (Karma yogi). In this way the Lord has skilfully harmonised as far as possible between these two paths. But from the point of view of worldly affairs, the most superior mode of life is to keep renunciation in the mind itself and to go on performing the lifelong action which is beneficial to the world through the medium of bodily organs because the Lord has definitely said that both renunciation and action are found in the same place.

Karmanabadyatejanturvidyayatupramucyate |  
Tasmatkarma nakurvantiyatayahparadarsinah ||

The proposition : 'karmanabadyatejanturvidyayatupramucyate means karma neither binds nor releases anybody; rather man is bound by karma as a result of his hope for fruits or by his own attachment. So it is not necessary to give up action because when this attachment is given up, one stands released and then he may perform action by his extranal organs. In this way the Gita has harmonised between knowledge and action.

In the Vedic religion the two independent paths of karma sannyasa, i.e., renunciation and desire less action, i.e., yoga are equally good alternatives through the Karma yoga is superior to the path of renunciation. Thus the synthesis between karma and jnana has been shown in the Gita.

It has been drawn that if the main object of the Gita is to harmonise knowledge with devotion to support the path of Karma yoga on that basis, then all this apparent inconsistencies disappear and one cannot but admire the super human wisdom of the Gita in bringing about a fusion among knowledge, devotion and Karma yoga in most comprehensive way. Whatever it may contain, the Karma yoga ultimately remains the main subject matter of the Gita.



### **Part III**

#### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE GITA'S IDEAL (Lokasamgraha)**

**Meaning of Lokasamgraha:** The word 'lokasamgraha' is a compound word with two components as 'loka' and 'samgraha.' Here 'loka' means, in different contexts, either human being or the world. The other word 'samgraha' has more than one meaning ranging from keeping together, to protecting as also to regulating etc. Balgangadhar Tilak has suggested two meanings, one referring to mankind and another referring to various worlds. Tilak is the first commentator to highlight, most forcefully and with a detailed explanation of the concept of lokasamgraha in the Gita.

Sri Aurobindo translates 'lokasamgraha' as the holding together of the people. Sri Aurobindo finds in the lokasamgraha ideal a message that works have to be done with the same desirelessness after liberation and perfection. Radhakrishnan interprets 'lokasamgraha' as maintenance of the world, the interconnectedness of society. The emphasis of the Gita on lokasamgraha, Harmony of the world requires changing the whole pattern of life.

All the activities of the sthitaprajna as the sole source for the benefit of the world. It has been stated that the saints who have acquired the highest knowledge are engrossed in bringing about the welfare of all created beings, all the activities of sthitaprajna are directed towards more and purifying the minds of all the persons forming a society and thereby enabling such persons to ultimately reach the perfect state he himself has reached. This is the highest and the most sattvika duty of mankind (Balgangadhar Tilak, SrimadBhagavadgitaRahasya or Karmayoga Sastra, vol. I, pp. 529-532).

Comparative Discussion between the Ethics of Immanuel Kant and the Bhagavad Gita: In Kantian ethics the moral interest is supreme. Kant teaches that higher spiritual truths are not intelligible in terms of the concepts and categories of senses and understanding. He emphasises the purity of will and its freedom from any empirical content. For him, the good will is a jewel which shines by its own. The same idea is elaborately and with frequency of emphasis defined and vindicated in the Bhagavad-Gita. Purity of motive is the basis of ethical conduct in both Kant and the Gita and Both of them emphasise with equal strength and force the need of the control of the senses and the inclinations, the emotions and the passions constituting the lower self of man.

The Gita lays emphasis on regulating and controlling the senses and adjusting and directing them to higher values and purposes in life. On the other hand, Kant also teaches that the man as a slave to the senses and inclinations cannot pursue the higher goal and purpose of life. For Kant, The doctrine of categorical imperative which teaches that duty has to be performed for the sake of duty. The Gita says that how the path of niskama karma is only the path of discipline for achieving integrity, balance proportion and harmony in life.

### **SECTION III**

#### **KARMAYOGA IN CONTEMPORARY TIME**

The basic message of this chapter is to show that the social applications of karma yoga of the Bhagavat Gita can effectively lead to all round development and progress in the social, economic, political and cultural field. Bhagavatgita has played an important role for guiding modern man in the performance of day-to-day duties. That involvement with the world is expressed by the term lokasamgraha. The term covers amplitude of social and spiritual forms of behavior and attitudes of mind.

Some great thinkers, religious and political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, Balgangadhar Tilak, Swami Vivekananda and so many great men have greatly influenced by the ideal of karmayoga. The role of karmayoga has played in lives and activities of these thinkers and its inspiration and ideal guided their way of lives and thoughts.

In this section I will discuss on (i) The Karma-yoga Based Socio-Spiritual approach of Vivekananda, (ii) Aurobindo's Social aspects of Karma-yoga, (iii) Karma-yoga in thought and action of Gandhiji, (iv) Karmayogin Tilak.

The role of the Gita has played in the lives and activities of these thinkers and its inspiration and new ideas guided their thoughts and there is a role of the Gita to achieve success in the social-spiritual, ethical revolution and political independence. These great men of India heartily worked against the social evils mentioned above and they worked for the good of all through the concept of lokasamgraha of the Bhagavadgita.

#### **Socio-Spiritual approach of Vivekananda**

The socio religious activities of swami Vivekananda are marked with diversity and continuity and the elements of diversity are obvious from the fact that the focus of activity shifted from socio-religious reform to social service. Swamiji used the ideal of karmayoga of the Bhagabatgita as the only source of inspiration and new ideas to achieve success in the social movements of the day and the fact that the Gita is utilized to help push forward a variety of social movements for a long period.

After a good deal of clarification of his views, he proceeded to give institutional shape of his plan of action under the ideal of karmayoga. Formally established the Ramkrishna Mission with some specific aims and

objective of actions. The aim of the Mission is to preach those ideal truths which are mainly extracted from the niskamakarma or karmayoga of the Bhagavadgita for the good of humanity to demonstrate the practical life of Sri Ramkrishna, to help the poor, diseased etc. to put these truths into practical in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.

Swamiji strongly believed that the spirit of karmayoga and he respected the person who served and helped other without caring for his own services and helps others without caring for his own bhakti and mukti.

It is of great interest to note that the social work of Ramkrishna Mission now covers as many as six board areas namely, (a) educational work, (b) health, (c) cultural activities, (d) rural uplift (f) tribal welfare and (g) youth movement (Patel, I. (1992). *Vivekananda's Approach to Social Work*, p 92).

According to Swami Vivekananda , renunciation and service are the twofold national ideals of modern India and to practice and preach these ideals is the work of Ramkrishna Mission and the chief workers of the Mission are Monks and sannyasins. The highest love for God can never be achieved without renunciation. Even the Gita says : kanyanam karmanam nyasam samnyasam kavayo viduh , i.e. The sages know that sanyasa to be the giving up of all works that have desires for its end (*Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works of Vivekananda Advaita Ashram, 5 Delhi Entally Road, Kolkata, 1963 Vol. VI, pp. 504-505*).

The Bhagavadgita has a very significant role in the life and works of Vivekananda. The most significant elements from the teaching of the Gita, which Vivekananda explained to his followers, listeners and readers and himself utilizes his work are contained in his book entitled karmayoga, is to become ready to sacrifice himself for others, expecting no personal gain in return. Swamiji recognized that krishna as the first man who opens the door of religious to every caste.

#### **Aurobindo: Social aspect of karmayoga**

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, a great freedom fighter, social worker was initially inspired by karmayoga of the Bhagavadgita and later he found there substantial elements of purnayoga also.

**Importance and significance of Lokasamgraha in the 'Essays on the Gita':** Sri Aurobindo presents a new interpretation of the Gita based on new ideas associated with purusottama, prakrti and sat-cit-ananda. Aurobindo attaches special importance to purusottama in the Gita as :

Yasmat ksaram atitoham aksarad api cottamah

Atosmi loke vede ca prathitah purusotommah | *The Gita, 15.18*.

That is there are three purusas namely the ksara, the aksara and the purushottama. The purusottama is the Lord in the ksara. He is in the heart of the every creature and is manifested in his countless bibhutes. The kshara , the personal, the purusa self –subjected to prakrti, is only one aspect of the purusottama. Another aspects of the purusottama is the aksara, the impersonal, the inactive, immutable self of all.

The purusottama is the cosmic spirit in time and that gives the command to the divine action of the liberated human spirit (*Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Arya Publishing House, Kolkata, 1949, p. 222*).

The Gita makes a deep and momentous distinction which is the practical basis of all its yoga, the distinction between the two natures as phenomenal nature and the spiritual nature. The spiritual nature is designated by srikrishna as paraprakrti, the purusottama, the supreme Being, the supreme soul, the Transcendent and universal spirit. The original and eternal nature of the spirit and its transcendent and originating sakti is what is meant by the paraprakrti and the origin of the world is the active power of his nature and this is the womb of all beings, etadyontni bhutani (Gita 7.6). The lord is the birth of the whole world and so too its dissolution and there is nothing else beyond him.

Sri Aurobindo thinks over the para prakrti as the infinite, timeless consciousness power of self existent being. Out of which all the objects of the world are manifested and come out of representing a synthesis of the vedantic concept of sat-chit- ananda. Harmonizing 'chit' or consciousness is referred to as chit-sakti or consciousness force.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the main message of the Gita is founded upon the concepts of purusottama and paraprakrti and his new interpretation of the Gita is irrevocably linked with action performed for purposes of lokasamgraha. He explains the famous verse.

Karmanye vadhikaraste maphalesu kadacana

Ma karmaphalheturbhurma te samgostatvakarmani | (Gita 2.47)

That is, we have a right to perform action only but have no right to fruits of action. When Sri Aurobindo characterizes the call to action as a right , it does imply that he is encouraging inaction. Sri Aurobindo quotes

the lords warning that none can stand even for a moment without doing work because everyone is made to do action. So action cannot be avoided.

Sri Aurobindo gives a good deal of attention to yajna and the eternal truth of god and the worlds and works which also helps him to explain special significance of purosottama. Aurobindo thinks that if the sacrifice were to be offered to the impersonal Brahman, then there is a risk that works may be reduced to a minimum and the nature of the works may not receive it deserves.

According to Sri Aurobindo, lokasamgraha means the holding together of the people. In his view, this great march of the people towards a far-of divine ideal has to be held together, prevented from falling into the bewilderment, confusion and utter discord of the understanding which would lead to dissolution and destruction and to which the world moving forward in the night or dark twilight of ignorance would be too easily prone if it were not held together, conducted, kept to the great lines of its discipline by the illumination, by the strength, by the rule and example, by the visible.

**Collective Liberation form integral yoga** : The purpose of the present study shows that the integral yoga or punayoga of Aurobindo has important social implication. According to Aurobindo meaning of the word integral yoga is to denote the technique by which one can ascend to the supramental plane and then descend back to the material plane with a view to helping others to achieve a similar spiritual evolution as quickly as possible.

Sri Aurobindo was primarily inspired by the karmayoga of the Bhagavadgita and later he found there substantial elements of punayoga also.

According to Aurobindo the main message of the Gita is irrevocably linked with action performed for the purposes of lokasamgraha. Aurobindo's comment on the Gita is primarily a work of religion though it was a wide social significance with emphasizing ethical nature of Gita's teaching (Sri Aurobindo, *The Integral Yoga*, p 23).

As a karmayoga, Sri Aurobindo joined the uprising against the Bengal-partition as the high priest of new nationalism, the chief traits of new cult. R.C. Majumder explains that the elevation of patriotism into religion and transformation of religion into patriotism by convincing the motherland not only as mother, but as Supreme Being whose service is the only way to salvation and belief in God as the leader of the movement in complete freedom as goal.

### **Mahatma Gandhi: Ideals of karmayoga in thought and action**

Gandhi was greatly influenced by the Bhagavadgita, Gandhiji was enthusiastic for applying the message of the niskama karma of the Gita to the political problems of the country and his insistence on viewing truth and nonviolence as the basis of all social and political activities. The Gita had become a spiritual reference book and we ever fail to act in perfect accord with the teaching (Agarwal, S. P. (1997). Gandhiji idea of nonviolent fight for independence of India from a foreign rule has close links with the Gita doctrine of swadharma.

Gandhiji technique of waging non-violent fights for social and political causes take a concrete shape in South Africa during the years 1906-14 and his own spiritual, moral and mental preparation for making such a new experiment.

**Role of Bhagavad Gita:** Contribution of Gandhiji in regard to the application of karmayoga of the Gita to social causes is that he developed the technique of Satyagraha based on Ahimsa. While Gandhiji was busy experimenting with many applications of Ahimsa to deal with issues of social injustice, discrimination and exploitation, just then Tilak completes his commentary on the Gita emphasizing karmayoga and lokasamgraha as the main teaching thereof.

According to Gandhiji the practical application of karmayoga of the Gita means the Voluntary acceptance and enthusiastic fulfillment of duties that naturally comes one's way, i.e. Swadharma. The Gita further insists on cultivating an attitude of equanimity, a state of perfection is represented in the personality of a Sthitaprajna. This is also meant Satyagrahi. So he thought that patriotism is for him a stage on his journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace.

Another concept of the Gita which helps Gandhi strengthen the social aspect of the teaching is yajna and he values the approach of the Gita of modifying the meaning of yajna. The Gita envisages the possibility of using fire in a symbolic sense, but Gandhi tries to create public opinion in favour of subjecting every religious practice to the test of relevance in modern times (ibid pp.232-235).



### **KARMAYOGIN BALGANGADHAR TILAK**

Balgangadhar Tilak, a great freedom fighter, social worker was born at Ratnagiri in 1856. Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak was a spiritual and intellectual giant.

**New Ideas of Tilak on Social Action and Lokasamgraha :** The common interpretation of kuruksetra is that kuruksetra became sacred because the Mahabharata war was fought there to establish dharma and justice. In the Gita, the word Ksetra, occurs in the thirteen chapter, means 'human body'. The word 'dharma' in the Gita has two separate aspects namely, 'individual' and 'social' or 'universal' aspects. The meaning of the individual aspects of dharma is not to determine what is right or what is wrong and the meaning of the social or universal aspect of dharma is to protect justice or dharma.

Tilak emphasizes dharma as a moral law which maintains the society and warns against the evil consequences of dharma. Tilak said that if this dharma is ceased to be observed, the binding ropes of the society may become loose and if the binding ropes are loosened, society will be in the same position as a ship would be on the ocean without a steering. According to Tilak, the whole of India is dharmaksetra, the field of righteousness of modern India (Tilak, B. (1935). *Srimad Bhagavadgita Rahasya or Karmayoga Sastra*, pp. 90-91).

Tilak recognizes that the Gita advocates at least three paths of conduct for the seeker of perfection and one of them is *niskama karma* or disinterested work. The concept of *niskama karma* is based on the universality of action and no man is free from performing his dharma or work directed towards his own release and the welfare of the world. All human actions are motivated by the desire to attain happiness. Tilak distinguishes between desires of two types (a) desire for the fruit of our action and (b) desire which motivates us to perform right actions.

According to Tilak, the concept of *niskama karma* may be specifically related to our castes, but that it applies nevertheless to all persons in all societies with or without caste. So the caste rules are not the final source of duty in modern India. The duty which has fallen on one's shoulders may have been taken up by one as a duty with own choice becomes a moral duty (*Ibid.* p. 697). So *niskama karma* provides the technique of performing one's duty.

Tilak was one of the commentators who gave a new interpretation to the overall message of the Gita. Tilak thought that the Lord taught the Gita not only to Arjuna but to all of us. Tilak extended the meaning of Arjuna so as to include everybody and he also explained the word 'kuruksetra', the place where the pandavas and kauravas was fought. The Gita speaks of kuruksetra as dharmaksetra or the sacred ground. Many commentators before Tilak had tried to explain the same. But Tilak adopted a new approach and boldly stated the whole of India is a 'dharmaksetra' for modern India.

According to Tilak, *niskama karma* is the main teaching of the Gita which is based on the universality of action and where it was said that no man can live free from performing activities of dharma directed towards his own release and the welfare of the world. The Gita itself encouraged to arise the desire of Arjuna which sprang from his discontentment, but that was a desire to know the manifestation of the divine (*ibid.* p. 697).

Tilak interpreted this as the final culmination of all yogas as *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*. From the ethical point of view, under any circumstances evil doers should be punished by the Lord in the interest of general welfare. God himself appears as avatara or incarnation to destroy evil doers and to protect virtuous people.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The Bhagavad Gita is not a mere Hindu sastra of universal wisdom, meant for all possible situations. Irrespective of age, sex, religion and status it offers varieties of spiritual insights and disciplines, so that everyone at every level of evolution can get nourishment from it to evolve further. The problem faced by Arjuna, at the outset of the Mahabharata battle, is the problem we face at every moment of existence. Like Arjuna, if one takes refuge to God (buddhi) by surrendering his ego and ignorance, then the Lord (viveka buddhi) will take care of him, leading the right way out.

While *niskama karma* provides the technique of performing duty, *lokasamgraha* provides the goal, the direction and therefore also content of actions that constitute the duty. Tilak was the first commentator of the Bhagavadgita who identified and highlighted this important concept which occurs in the third chapter of the Gita. The word *Lokasamgraha* means social harmony and welfare and world preservation. The welfare of the world as the motive and the object of all action is a particular contribution of the Gita to the Hindu religious and social thought. If action is to be selfless and is to be without reference to the fruits thereof, then the question naturally arises, why should anyone persist in a course of actions? The theory of *yajna* or sacrifice has given a simple answer: action is to be performed to please the God and to derive worldly benefits through them. But the Gita has rejected it and provided the answer that the object of all action should be the welfare of the world. For the first time the Gita gives a social content to religion and emphasizes the welfare of the world as the purpose

of all actions. The doctrine of sacrifice is thus given a completely different meaning in the Gita, where action dedicated to god.

**Practical Relevance of Niskama Karmayoga of the Bhagavadgita:** The importance of the Gita and its eternal message of niskama karma, we think, is relevant even today. It needs more propagation and review. The Gita contains a very rich and multi sided thought. It manifests a realization of different aspects of the ethical and spiritual life. It can even be said that it contains most of the main clues of the secret of the reconciliation of the supreme state of consciousness. It demands the battles of life in which we find ourselves all time but particularly at critical moments. The Gita is a great religious book of the world and it is given as an episode in an epic history of the nations and their wars and deeds.

The Bhagavadgita declares that we have right to perform our prescribed duty only but we are not entitled to have the fruits of actions. We should never consider ourselves the causes of the result of the activities. Inaction is sinful so we should never attach to not doing our duty. We should perform our duty equipoised, abandoning all attachment to success or failure and such equanimity is called yoga. That is to say, we should act in accordance with the principles of yoga. Yoga means to concentrate the mind upon the Supreme by controlling the ever-disturbing sense. The Supreme is the Lord. We have nothing to do with the result of our prescribed duty. Gain and victory are God's concern. We are directed to act according to the advice of God.

It is universal in its appeal. It is relevant for all mankind at all time to come. (2) It helps the man to know himself, that is, knows his real nature, his duties and responsibilities for self and the society, the concept like svadharma, svabhava, paradharma, varna, niskama karma etc. are key concepts are discussed in the Gita to make one aware of his duties, to lead a better life in the society with freedom here and hereafter. (3) It also commands and inspires man to devote himself to lokasamgraha, i.e., to work for the betterment of the fellow beings. Thus it contributes to social harmony and peace. (4) It is sacrifice (tyaga) which constitutes the quintessence of the Gita. One has to sacrifice his ignorance, attachments for worldly enjoyment and egoistic blindness so that his divine nature like love, fellow-feeling, feeling of oneness will shine. The teaching of the Gita is having universal value, which not only protects the society from spiritual deadlock, but also propotes the universal brotherhood and peaceful co-existence in the globe.

According to all classical Indian systems of thought except the Carvaka, whatever is done by an individual leaves behind it some sorts of potency which has the power to produce happiness or pain either in the present life or in the future life. The Law of karma operates in the entire domain of universe-human and non-human in an inviolable manner and cause bondage. They consider knowledge and non-attached action as the necessary conditions for attaining freedom from the obstacles of karma.

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