

KARMA: "THE GITA" AND "THE GITA-RAHASHYA"

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Abstract

The philosophy of 'karma' is a doctrine considered to be the foundation stone of the entire Indian Philosophical outlook. The concept of karma is common to almost all traditional as well as contemporary Indian philosophical and religious systems. It is accepted as the dominating force throughout all the ages. Though the inquiry into the nature of karma and its significance takes us back to the Vedas in Indian philosophical tradition it is still a vibrating problem in philosophy. It has not only academic value but a clear understanding of karma has a perennial impact on life and existence even today. The Bhagavad Gita is the 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 profits what he does and suffers what he does. Good deeds must bear the fruits of happiness and good fortune whereas evil deeds must bear the fruits of sorrow, misery, and ill-fortune. Good and evil thoughts, feelings, and actions have their corresponding results but the action is the greater part of life. The Gita said that the nature of karma was natural, inherent in man's existence and everybody has to work. As work is inevitable in one's life, one should work without seeking the result and the work without attachment to fruit will lead him to the highest attainment of God's consciousness. So, no one can remain unoccupied even for a moment. Bal Gangadhar Tilak is a great exponent of the philosophy of karma in Contemporary Indian thought. The most religious percept of Bhagavad Gita was a characteristic feature of Tilak's teaching. Tilak holds that the role of the philosophy of karma, as expounded in the Gita is pivotal in Indian thought through the ages. Tilak gives a new interpretation of the law of karma. He defined the philosophy of karma in terms of karma-yoga and it is well described by Tilak in his work entitled "Gita-Rahashya" or the "Karma-yoga-sastra". Hence an attempt is made here to discuss the law of karma as considered by the "Bhagavad Gita" and the "Gita-Rahashya".

Key Words: Karma, Good, Evil, Yoga, Bhagavad Gita, Gitarahashya.

1. Introduction

The word 'karma' is derived from 'Kri' dhatu of Sanskrit. It means to do something. Metaphysically, it means which of our past actions were causes of our present states of affairs. The principle which determines the criteria of "Karma" is not a mechanical principle but a spiritual necessity.

The consequences of karma are inevitable. Every cause has its effect. It is a natural law we know that in the ordinary course of life it cannot be challenged. The Dharmasutras, Upanisads, and the Puranas are living testimony to this effect. Gautama in his Dharmasutra says that deeds do not perish. Sankara also refers to it in his commentary on Brahmasutra. Markandeya Purana says that man is not free from good or bad deeds without enjoying the fruits thereof. The Chandhyogya Upanisad also maintains that seeds of deeds are ingrained in the doer and when he leaves this world, as a resultant of the previous deeds he is reborn accordingly.

The philosophy of karma is a moral postulate which is based on the scientific doctrine of the conservation of matter and energy. Moral value is always associated with the law of 'karma'. It is also used to mean an imperceptible force that shapes the destiny of a living being. All these meanings of karma are interrelated.

The accumulated result and the force arising from an act can be called karma. The view of karma as founded in Indian philosophy pre-supposes that any karma is bound to produce some result positive and negative.

The Gita is the most popular and sacred book of the Hindus. It is the philosophical discourse of Lord Krishna. The original work arose about 200 B.C. and it was worked into its present form by some followers of the Vedanta in the 2nd century A.D. About the author of the Gita, we cannot say anything. Almost all the books belonging to the early literature of India are anonymous. However, the authorship of the Gita is attributed to Vyasa, the legendary compiler of the Mahabharata.

Lokamanya Tilak is "a most luminous and priceless gem which gives peace to affected souls and makes us masters of spiritual wisdom." (C.D. Sharma 32) According to Mahatma Gandhi, the Gita is the universal mother whose door is open to anyone who knocks. The Gita deals with metaphysics, religion, and ethics and has been rightly called the 'Gospel of Humanity'.

In the Gita, there is a unique synthesis of Karma, Jnana, and Bhakti. For the attainment of salvation, these three are the most prominent ways. So, karma-yoga is a prime chapter of this scripture. According to it, every man profit from what he does and suffers from what he does. Good deeds must bear the fruits of happiness and good fortune. But evil deeds must bear the fruits of sorrow, misery, and ill-fortune. Good and evil thoughts, feelings, and actions have their corresponding results but the action is the greater part of life. One is not held responsible for his feelings but his action. It is mainly his actions that construct his fate, they are the chief or the most forceful determinates of his bring and his future.

The third chapter of the Gita contains this Karmayoga. It is mainly known as the "Art of Working". Lord Krishna said about the nature of karma that, karma was natural, inherent in man's existence and everybody has to work. As Krishna says-

"Na hi kaccit ksanam api
Jatu tisthatya karmakrit
Karyate hyrasah karma
Savah prakritijair gunaih". (CH-III 5)

It means no one can remain unoccupied even for a moment. As work is inevitable in one's life, one should work without seeking the result and the work without attachment to fruit will lead to the highest attainment of God's consciousness.

Prakriti is composed of three qualities. They are-the quality of knowledge (sattva), the quality of action (rajas), and the quality of inertia (tamas). And nature is made out of these three elements. These three constituent parts oblige or favor for the individual to do work. Therefore no one will be able to live without work even it does not work without his hands. Sometimes people are sitting on a chair, moving their legs, or writing something without knowing unconsciously. It is the nature of man to do something-even a small child cannot sit without doing something, so also with the adults.

In the Gita, it is also said that we have the right to do work only, but none of its results. That is why we should act not with the expectation of reward for our actions. It is called "Niskama-Karma" and it is the best way of life for self-realization or God-realization. The Gita says-

"Karmanyeva dhikaraste
Ma phallus katakana
Ma karma phalahetur bhu
Ma te sango sti akarmoni". (CH-II 47)

According to the Gita, niskama karma or disinterested action brings together the attainment of the best here and thereafter, empirical goodness and transcendental goodness. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad

Gita that men and women are destined to work i.e. Svadharma. Svadharma of Arjuna requires him to engage in battle. Protection of right by the acceptance of battle, if necessary, is the social duty of the Kshatriya, and not renunciation. He has to maintain order by force and not become an ascetic by 'shaving of the hair'. Krishna tells Arjuna that for warriors there is no more ennobling duty than a fair fight. It is a privilege that leads to heaven. Karma-yoga is mainly based on niskama 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. Regarding Svadharma, Gita anticipates Bradley's conception of "My Station and Its Duties".

In practical life, we often find a righteous man suffering and wicked enjoying. But these sufferings and enjoyments may be a result of some past karma. They enjoy or suffer according as they act in their past lives. Therefore, the earth is called "karma-bhumi" and here alone man makes his future by performing good or bad actions. Even the man who does good karmas also has to exhaust the evil karmas of his past lives. Therefore, rebirth is necessary related to the doctrine of karma. Our present life is the result of our past life and the future life will be the result of our present life. The present is the child of the past and is pregnant with the future. And it is possible only when something remains in us even after the death of our body because the same soul has to consume the result of its actions. Hence the same soul remains in different lives. Krishna says about the indestructibility of the soul and the perishability of the body- just as a person casts off worn-out garments and put on others that are new ever, so does the embodied soul casts off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new. In this way, we see that karma and rebirth are intimately related to one another. And one is incomplete without the other.

The Bhagavad Gita gives us a relation by which the role of karma, the natural order of deed and consequence, can be transcended. There is no element of caprice or arbitrary interference of a transcendent purpose with the natural order. The teacher of the Gita recognizes a realm of reality. Here karma does not operate and if we establish our relations with it, we are free in our deepest being. The chain of karma can be broken here and now within the flux of the empirical world. We become masters of karma by developing detachment and faith in God.

The karma-yoga of the Gita is usually known as doctrine of niskama-karma and its result is superior to the results of the extreme forms of karma and Sannyasa. The extreme form of karma was represented in the lifetime of Sri Krishna by the so-called Vedic karma. It was always performed to secure profits in heaven. The extreme form of sannyasa is a state of inaction in the Pure Brahman. None of these had any bearing on living humanity and its sufferings. But the doctrine of niskama-karma was intended to help not only the doer of that karma but also the whole world. It developed the doer with the purification of his mind which is not possible in sakama karma. It also helps to improve the status of the social being in as much as the doer of the action does not claim the fruits of its action. But it dedicates them to society without retaining any personal interest in them.

"Gita-Rahasya", is, another prominent work about karma-yoga. Bal Gangadhar Tilak is the author of this book. This book is a strong philosophical and moral-religious support of the idea of selfless activity dedicated to liberation. Tilak states that 'karma-yoga' or the science of action is being taught for the persons who are inspired by the desire for knowledge. It teaches them how to act in the right way even while leading a worldly life. Tilak has put the whole emphasis on Gita's concept of karma-yoga and tried to apply the same for the upliftment of humanity as a whole. Though Tilak accepts the moral teaching of the Gita, he defined the philosophy of karma in terms of karma-yoga. Thus, he gives more importance to the value of karma-yoga and it is well described in his work entitled "Gita-Rahasya" or the "karma-yoga-sastra."

According to Tilak 'yoga' means some special skill, device, intelligent method of graceful way of performing actions. He also said that the doctrine of karma-yoga should discuss the qualities like the rules relating to action, the effects of action and while, the action is to be performed even after the purification of the mind. Tilak classified karma as 'nitya-karma', 'naimittika-karma' and 'kamyakarma'. Nitya-karma means daily duties. It includes those works which must be performed every day, such as bathing and offering prayers at twilight are called nitya-karma. By performing these, no special purpose is achieved when nitya-karma is performed, it gives no result, but non-performance of it is a sin. The naimittika actions are such as have to be performed because some occasion necessitating them has arisen. In addition to these, there are certain other actions which we very often perform because we desire a particular thing and for acquiring that thing as enjoyed by the Sastras. These actions are called kamyakarma, e.g. sacrificial ritual for causing rain or for obtaining a son.

According to Tilak, yoga means control of mental impulses by breath control or mental absorption or meditation. It is well described in the Gita itself as "yogah karmasu kaushalam", (2.50) that it means some special skill or graceful way of performing actions.

The cause of bondage is only the desire of mind for the reward and not the karma as such. In the karma-yoga the objects of pleasure are not given up after the purification of the mind. And karma is creation itself, so it cannot be given up. Action done without the desire for the fruit or as a dedication to Brahman, becomes a sacrifice (yajna). So, the karma-yogi performs all duties appropriate to his status, desireless and enthusiastically till his death. After realization, the karma-yogi takes sannyasa or renunciation in the shape of abandonment of the fruit of action. He performs his duties enjoyed in the scriptures with a peaceful frame of mind till death, for universal welfare (lokasamgraha).

The purpose of karma-yoga according to the Gita is public benefit or lokasamgraha. Tilak defines it as "making wise, those persons who behave recklessly as a result of ignorance and keeping them together in a happy state and putting them on the path of self-amelioration" (Gita-Rahashya 457). The central principle of karma-yoga is to determine whether a particular act is good or bad. The mystic impart of the karma-yoga is to give up the desire prompted actions and the performance of one's duties desireless. One who realized that the result of any action is controlled only by the Lord and performs an act desireless, unaffected by the positive or negative result is not affected by the sin or the merit of the action.

Tilak says that the karma-yoga is to be started by controlling the organs according to one's capacity. For a karma-yogi, it is necessary to spend some time every day in solitude. It does not mean that one should give up the activities of life. Such moments spent in solitude enable man to increase his controlling power to perform the activities of life with a desireless mind. Therefore, man must not lose his courage to perform his duties desireless. As man gradually acquires knowledge, the bondage of matter that appears to his life as a result of predestination, will gradually break-down, and at last, his Atman will be able to reach the perfect state of release.

According to Tilak, there are two possibilities for leading one's life after realization. The self-realized saint may be either abandon actions or perform actions without any desire for fruits. In karma-sannyasa, he renounces actions with the conviction that he has performed all that has to be performed and acquired all that has to be acquired. To this samkhya-yogi all actions of the illusory world are useless and inconsistent with knowledge, which to Tilak is the realization of the identity of Brahman and Atman.

The central principle of karma-yoga is to determine whether a particular act is good or bad. This can be ascertained by judging the purity of the practical reason. It becomes pure when the discerning reason becomes equable. The mystic impart of the karma-yoga is the giving up of the desire prompted actions and the performance of one's duties desireless. One who realizes that the result of any action is controlled

only by the Lord and performs an act desireless, unaffected by positive and negative results is not affected by the sin or the merit of the action. This equality of reason is known as 'yoga' which is the device of performing an act without sinning. The action need not be abandoned because this yoga itself leads to release. The person of such an equable frame of mind is called a Sthitaprajna (a steady-mind) and his intellectual state is known as the Brahma state, the state of being merged in Brahman. Tilak defines samkhya-yoga and karma-yoga as the two distinct paths followed by the realized and named them as "nisthas". He asserts that there is no duty for the samkhya-yogi and he need not even work for universal welfare. After realization, the karma-yogi continues to perform his duties.

Tilak said that for the attainment of swaraj, karma is needed, for the fulfillment of man swaraj is needed; therefore for the fulfillment of man's destiny 'karma' is needed. He has put the whole emphasis on the Gita's concept of karma-yoga and tried to apply the same for the upliftment of humanity as a whole. Thus, Tilak, the life-long fighter for Indian freedom became a karma-yogi himself. By his whole life, he endeavored to show the importance of the karma-yoga for the attainment of political as well as spiritual liberty. Karma is also the motto of his life. As a true follower of karma-yoga, he maintains that "the merit of karma-yoga is higher than that of Renunciation of Non-Action"(Gita-Rahashya 457).

2. Critical discussion

It is enough to say that karma-sannyasa and karma-yoga are individually equal productive of Release and that one is not the preliminary part of the other. Because if both of them are equally productive of Release, it follows that one may adopt whichever path he likes. Therefore, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna that though the path of Renunciation and the path of karma-yoga are both equally productive of Release, out of these two paths the Worth or Importance of karma-yoga is greater.

Tilak accepts fully the teachings of Advaita-"Brahma-Satyam jagan-mithya, jibabrahmaiva naparah". According to him, the absolute reality is Brahman which is non-dual, attributeless and actionless. It means that Tilak accepts Sankaras view. But Sankara has strongly refuted "jnana-karma-samuccaya-vada" in his Gita-bhasya. Some other critics like Brahmadata, Suresvara, Mahananda also refuted Tilak's view that jnana-karma-samuccaya is the means of realization of the non-dual Brahman. Ramaswami Sastri blames Tilak for having reduced the Gita into a pocket amalgam of philanthropic and patriotism and scientific speculation. The modern trend is to worship humanity with society serving as the temporary idol. But the Gita, Sastri points out that does not aim at the service of the perishable bodies of man. According to Sastri, by exalting karma-yoga Tilak has utilized the Gita to the practical needs. Karma-yoga is the mere performance of the enjoyed karma with a sense of dedication to God. But Tilak regards philanthropic and patriotic action as an independent means to release.

Ramgopal has pin-pointed the core of Tilak's conception of karma-yoga. In Tilak's view "at a time when the country was under the domination of a foreign power, working for swaraj was the best performance of duty, as propounded by karma-yoga." Just as the message of the Gita enabled Arjuna to fight, Tilak infused new spirit and asked his countryman to jump into the field of action and do their duty for the motherland.

3. Conclusion

Though the critics of the Gita-rahashya have given importance to the major issues, none of them point out the inconsistencies and self-contradictions in Tilak's definitions of samkhya-yoga and karma-yoga that have to lead to his conclusion that the Gita is a 'karma-yoga-sastra. Tilak has conceived yoga as different from marga, the two means of bhakti and jnana. He gives a formula of karma-yoga as equal to niskama-karma added to samkhya –yoga. In addition to this, Tilak talks off karma-yoga as a means of karma-yoga as well as for samkhya-yoga. Hence Sankara concludes that the Gita is a Moksha-sastra, the scriptures dealing with liberation. Tilak has committed a mistake when he equates the right action with

karma-performance of the right action without any type for its result as dedicated to the Lord. Therefore, the right action is not karma-yoga. According to Tilak, the subject-matter of the Gita is karma-yoga as it expounds on the two doctrines of acquiring the equability of reason by the realization of the universal identity of Atman in all the beings either by jnana or bhakti marga being engaged in action. Secondly, continuing the performance of one's duties even after realization without renouncing all actions. So karma-nistha is the best path of life and thereof should be the highest goal of a man.

It may be pointed out that the Gita justifies only karma-yoga and describes it to be superior to samkhya-yoga. But for Tilak, karma-yoga is the sum of samkhya-yoga and niskama-karma. Tilak accepts only two independent paths to Moksha. They are- the worship of the imperceptible (jnana-marga) and the perceptible (bhakti-marga). He positively states that there is no third path, karma only purifies the mind. It is stated that niskama-karma itself is devotion. Jnana-yoga or sacrifice of knowledge is the best of all yugas and the worship of the imperceptible is jnana-marga or the path of knowledge. But the Gita considers all the three i.e. jnana, karma, and bhakti as the best means for the realization of the highest goal which is called Liberation or Moksha.

In this way, as explained above an attempt is being made here to discuss a scenario regarding the law of karma as considered by these two-great works- The Gita and the Gita-rahashya.

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