

Concept of ‘Lokasamgraha’ – Lokmanya Tilak’s Perspective

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Abstract

Lokasamgraha is a well-known concept of Bhagvadgita which means welfare of all (society). The leader of the society has to be efficient, effective for the social integration and peaceful society. Bhagvad Gita describes the essential qualities of the effective leader. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, great visionary, political and social leader who was the commentator on Bhagvadgita and always followed the path of action(Karmayog) throughout his life.

The article intends to show the vision of Lokmanya Tilak, as to how the teachings of Bhagavad-Gita are the guiding force for inculcating the value of public good in the modern era. Social integration is a harmonization of individual existence and sustenance in the society. It is highly desirable for good moral life. The answer to today’s social and cultural problems lies in integrating the human fold society. Thus inculcation of free spirit of universal brotherhood is an imperative or the ‘dharma’ i.e. ‘duty’ for each one of us, to preserve and promote peace and harmony in the society. The effective leaders can set their examples before their followers by their own actions. Whatever the excellent and best ones do, the commoners follow.

The article tries to bring out the concept of Lokasamgha according to Lokamanya Tilak,s perspective.

KEYWORDS: Lokasamgraha, Jnyani, Social Wellbeing/ Welfare, Bhagvadgita, Karmayoga, Political Leader, Political will, Leadership etc.

Introduction:

Lord Krishna explains the concept of ‘Lokasangra’ in Bhagvadgita. Lokmanya Tilak , eminent commentator on Bhagvadgita. In the article it is discussed that how an individual is responsible to protect the social order. The social aspect of dharma is the duty of every individual to protect and maintain the harmony, peace and order in the society. To achieve these objectives the concept of effective leadership is discussed. These concepts are discussed with reference to Lokmanya Tilak’s perspective who justifies the concept of Lokasamgraha by his own behavior and ideal leadership.

The life and work of socio-spiritual leaders and political activists contributed a lot to bring before the people and the thinkers the Gita-message of Loksamgraha. The ideal leadership is expounded mainly in Bhagvadgita’s third chapter- Karmayoga.

Swami Vivekananda made ‘social service’ as an integral part of the work programme of the Ramakrishna Mission. Tilak explained at length why Lokasamgraha centered karma-yoga was the main teaching of the Gita, and when he acted accordingly for the independence of the country’s independence, leading to his imprisonment, he willingly went through the sufferings. Aurbindo elaborated this further and incorporated the Lokasamgraha-approach (with some modification) in his integral yoga also. Gandhi on the basis of his extensive experiments made non violence – an

essential prerequisite for lokasamgraha. In other words, the concept of Lokasamgraha was updated so as to suit the needs of the country.

Bhagavad-Gita proclaims to everybody though nominally to Arjuna, perform lifelong our several worldly duties according to our respective position in life, desirelessly, for the universal good (Loksamgraha). In this context the underlying teaching of the Gita is that mere theoretical knowledge about what is good and real is not enough unless this knowledge is reflected in one's conduct¹

Bhagavad-Gita advocates at least three paths of conduct for the seeker of perfection-niskama karma or unselfish work, jnana or knowledge and bhakti or devotion to a supreme being. The main question is of priority, as which one to follow first. Lokmanya Tilak follows the path of action (karmayog)

The concept of niskama karma is believed to be the central point of teaching of Gita. The concept of niskama karma is based on the Universality of action that no man alive is free from performing his dharma directed towards his own release and the welfare of the world. All human actions are motivated by the desire to attain happiness, whether material or spiritual. Tilak distinguishes between desires of two types: - 1) desire for the fruit of our action and 2) desire which motivates us to the right action. Device or skill (kaushalam), of giving up only selfish desire for the fruit which causes unhappiness, and for performing one's duty (right action) according to one's status in life, is known as yoga or karma-yoga. The Gita according to Tilak, asks us to give up only selfish desire or attachment to the fruit but not all desires nor all actions.

While nishkama karma provides the technique of performing one's duty, Lokasamgraha provides the goal, direction and therefore also the content of actions that constitute the duty.

In Manusmriti, it is mentioned about ' Rashtra –samgraha' which is an apt parallel for what is called today as national integration.²

Lokmanya Tilak was the first Gita-commentator to have identified and highlighted this important concept which occurs in the third chapter of the Gita-in the verses from 20 to 26. The Lokmanya looks upon 'Gita Rahasya'- his commentary on Bahagvadgita, as a measure towards fulfilling his duty as a karmayogin in the life that he lived as a political leader.

The compound word Lokasamgraha means social-harmony and welfare as well as world presentation because its two component words loka and samgraha have more than one meaning each. For eg., 'Loka' denotes mankind or the world, and 'Samgraha' stands for protecting, keeping, regulating etc. Lokasamgraha thus epitomizes, in the Gita, the social and universal dimension of Krisna's teaching.

Tilak is the first commentator on the Gita to write in a detail on the importance of Lokasamgraha. It is true that Tilak's interpretation of Lokasamgraha was from 1919

¹ Bhagvad Gita (3.21)

² Manusmriti (7.114)

onward, modified by Gandhi in the sense that ahimsa was made an inseparable element therefore. However, Tilak's conflict with the British authorities had come to head almost a quarter of a century prior to the Gandhi era. And Tilak's biographers as well as those associated with the English translation of his marathi writings believe that Tilak put into practice what he thought was the real meaning of the Gita. For eg. Sukhtankar who translated Tilak's Gitarahasya into English says in the translator's preface:-

'The Late Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a spiritual and an intellectual giant. He was a monumental figure in the history of India, and it is a question whether he was more a philosopher than a politician and statesman, in as much as his statesmanship and his political activities would appear to have been based on the karmayoga and the principals of ethics, which he believed to have been expended in the Gita. In fact, the Gita and its teachings would seem to have been the guiding beacon of his life, and if one considers what he did for India and compares it with what he has preached in Gita Rahasya, one will come to believe that he has practiced what he preached, (which few people do) and that his political activities were a concrete example of that 'Universal Welfare' (Lokasamgraha), which according to him, was preached by the Gita to be the basis of karmayoga'.³

The revolutionary interpretation of the Bhagavad-Gita was primarily the work of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the father of Indian-Nationalism. It fulfilled the urgent need to endow the people as a whole with a new ethic and a message for social action to discover a dynamic doctrine while providing people with modern social ideals, could enable them to transform their society. Thus the philosophy was interpreted by Tilak as a dynamic doctrine for action for the welfare of the world-the Gita Rahasya gave to modern India a scripture which at once orthodox and universality accepted, a handbook of revolution.

Lokasamgraha or the welfare of the world as the motive and object of all actions is special contribution of the Gita to Hindu religious and social thought. It follows naturally from the unattached action (niskama karma) which is the central theme of Krishna's teaching. If the action is to be selfless and is to be without reference to the fruit thereof (in relation to the actor) then the question naturally arises-why should anyone persists in a course of action? According to the theories of yajna-the action is to be performed to please the Gods and to derive worldly benefits through them. But as it is not niskama karma, Gita gives answer to this question as-the object of all actions should be Lokasamgraha or the welfare of the world.

The social theory behind the Lokasamgraha doctrine of the Gita is most important. The conception of the world order which is the duty of the individual to uphold by dedicating his activity towards that end runs through all the teachings of the Gita. Bhagavad-Gita emphasizes the welfare of the world as the purpose of all actions. The doctrine of sacrifice is thus given a wholly different meaning in the Gita, where action dedicated to God is called "Brahmayajna".

Tilak's elaboration of Lokasamgraha was intended to show to the social reform oriented, educated Indians that their attempts at copying the west arose only because

³ B.G.Tilak, Gita Rahasya. Tilak Brothers, Poona Sixth edn., 1986. P.IX

they had not understood their own scriptures properly. Lokmanya Tilak chooses to awaken the people to their right to freedom and their duty to fight for it. He realizes that Gita offers a ready weapon that is sure to reach out to the people of the country irrespective of caste, creed or even religion.

Tilak was the first Indian leader to initiate the political application of the Gita, to obtain mass support in the freedom struggle. In order to do this successfully, Tilak gave a new interpretation to the overall message of the Gita as well as to many terms and concepts that occur therein. Tilak told his countrymen that Sri Krishna taught the Gita not only to Arjuna but to all of them.

It is well known that when Tilak was imprisoned in Mandalay and thus was cut off from the field of active life in journalism and politics, he engaged himself in preparing this work. The fact that confined to a solitary imprisonment, he could recall the works of various philosophers-Eastern and Western. The constant refrain of his work was that it is the duty of the man of knowledge to awaken the people to their duties in life.

Following the Gita, Lokmanya Tilak insists that it is the duty of the man of knowledge to guide people in raising the level of their lives in terms of social and political good. Lokmanya Tilak asserts that the men of knowledge who have attained the level of Niskama have to serve as the philosopher-guide to people. According to Lokmanya Tilak, it is important to present before people the ideal of the man of action, who is free of personal interests because of his knowledge of fundamental truths. Lokasamgraha i.e. the integration of life forces around the concept of the good is a feature of karmayoga and cuts at the root of the exclusive claims of sanyasa. Karmayoga does not take a negative attitude either to sanyasa or bhakti. In fact knowledge is the basis and bhakti is universality of feeling, constitutes the spirit of karmayoga. The broad based karmayoga mingled with the essentials of jnyana and bhakti is advocated by Gita as the unexceptional rule of morality for all men under varied circumstances. And the Lokmanya Tilak exerts himself to bring out this truth to serve the interests of the people. This is the Lokasamgraha according to Gita.⁴

It is therefore asserted that, the need for the leader to be sensitive to the physical and mental status of his people, his behaviour must be fine-tuned to their understanding capabilities. That he is focusing on performing karma without getting entangled in the bondage of earthly desires, must be obvious to all so that they can reorient their behaviour towards salvation in emulating him. True salvation is often achieved through work, rarely without. Tilak says, 'It is an important duty of a man who has become a jnyanin, to remain himself in worldly life for the purpose of Lokasamgraha, in order to give a living example of performing righteous, desire less action'.⁵

Thus a visionary leader must also be a missionary, extremely practical, intensively dynamic and capable of translating dreams into reality. This dynamism and strength of a true leader flows from an inspired and spontaneous motivation to help others.

⁴ Satya P. Agrawal, 'The Social Role of Bhagavad-Gita', Pg.10

⁵ B.G. Tilak, 'Gita Rahasya', Pg.561-2

Tilak says, the jnyanis perform all actions according to their dharma for the purpose of universal welfare (Lokasamgraha), looking upon it as an objective of the utmost importance and necessity, and though they may not need to perform such actions for their own benefit.⁶

The despondent position of Arjuna on the first chapter of the Gita is a typical human situation which may come in the life of all men of action sometime or the other. Lord Krishna by sheer power of his inspiring words raised the level of Arjuna's mind from the state of inertia to the state of righteous action, from the state of faithlessness to the state of faith and self-confidence in the ultimate victory of Dharma (duty). They are the powerful words of courage of strength of self-confidence, of faith in one's own infinite power, the glory of valour in the life of active people and the need for intense calmness in the midst of intense action. These will enable the individual to acquire not only his own peace of mind but such people will help others also to have a peaceful life.

Interdependence is also a main characteristic of Lokasamgraha. It is there not only in the organizations but in the society as well. One is never independent. Others are affected by what he does and vice-versa. If he does not do what is expected from him, his duty, someone else is going to suffer. His freedom is limited by the impact of his actions will have on others. Even in a position of authority, he cannot do whatever he wants to do. He cannot be arbitrary.

*“yadi yahyam na varteyam jatu karmanyat itindritataha
Mama vartanat anuvartante manushyah partha sarvashaha”*⁷

It means, if I ever failed to engage in carefully performing prescribed duties, certainly all men would follow my path.⁸ If I do not take part in action, all men will follow in all respects the path followed by me'.⁹

The society cannot thrive without proper work by the individual. Work with sincerity and devotion for the progress of society is true service of an individual towards the unity and welfare of mankind. While endeavoring for the right to work, it is expected of the people that by working for their own betterment they will strive as well for the noble ideal of social betterment i.e. the Gita's concept of Lokasamgraha.

All our thinkers, leaders were having their own ideologies but which are based on various ethical ideals. The ultimate goal of everyone was to render a peaceful living for all i.e. Lokasamgraha.

To quote a few examples –

Vivekanand translated Lokasamgraha as 'working for the good of others', and added that this is "a very powerful idea-which has become the ideal in India".¹⁰

⁶ B.G. Tilak, 'Gita Rahasya', Pg.491

⁷ Bhagavad-Gita(3.23)

⁸ Swami Prabhupada, 'Bhagavad-Gita-as it is', Pg.170

⁹ B.G. Tilak, 'Gita Rahasya', Translation by B.S. Sukhtankar, Pg.928

¹⁰ Swami Vivekananda, complete works-Vol-I, Pg.468

Aurbindo translates Lokasamgraha as the “holding together of the people”. However as he moves from the status of a karmayoga to that of a purnayoga his concept of Lokasamgraha undergoes a modification.

Radhakrishnan says, “Lokasamgraha stands for the unity of the world, the interconnectedness of the society, the Gita requires us to lay stress on human brotherhood.”¹¹

Vinoba interprets Lokasamgraha as “keeping people together and on the right path: He says that Karma Yoga technique of getting rid of selfishness by the method of diffusion. A personal, individual desire may be given a general, social application in order to cross over from attachment to non-attachment.”¹²

Since Lokasamgraha means bringing about a unity of purpose and co-operative effort in the society for a just cause, Sri Krishna asks the wise men not to be content by their own actions, but also to encourage others to act as well.

*“na bhudhi bhedanam janayed ajnanam
jo sayet sarvakarmani vidvan yuktah samacaran”¹³*

The underlying message here is not to push people around, against their will but it is to perpetuate their ignorance. The place is in favour of a slow and steady effort to educate common people and to encourage them to follow voluntarily the example of the wise.

By adopting the approach of the Gita, Gandhi achieved considerable success in obtaining mass support for his satyagraha movements based on the technique of ahimsa, which for him was a matter of deep conviction and practice.

Tilak has interpreted Gita in such a way as to assert, firstly, that its main message is Lokasamgraha centered karma-yoga, and secondly, that everyone, small or big, should by performing svadharma in accordance with the teachings of the Gita, contribute to one or the other aspect of Lokasamgraha. For him the freedom and upliftment of the Indian people was more important than just the individual liberation. At that time India was under the realm of British rule. To awake the Indian people from their stagnancy to convince them the importance of action and encourage and activate them to strive for the freedom was the urgent need of that time. Tilak tried to meet this need by interpreting the Bhagavad-Gita as the theory of Niskama-Karmayoga. Similarly, with political freedom of India, he also wanted India to be socially mature, progressing, marching towards good values, which can never take place without leaders who act what they preach. Tilak wanted to create such ideals from Indian society only. With these intentions he placed before the society the ideal of karmayogi sthita-pradnya and also an ideal of Lokasamgraha.

The present problem of Bhrashta (corrupted) leadership is due to not going beyond ‘selfish’ goals-creating chain of social evils. The solution lies in change in the attitude of both the leaders and the followers. The shift from ‘selfish’ to ‘selfless’

¹¹ Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavad-Gita, Pg-139

¹² Vinoba, “The Steadfast Wisdom-Pg-20-23.

¹³ Bhagavad-Gita (3.26)

attitude is possible by understanding and practicing the philosophy of swadharma and lokasamgraha. Our society needs such kind of leadership today. With this kind of attitude, personality, freedom and interdependence, the objectives of Lokasamgraha, can be achieved today in all the fields – social, economical and political and will lead to the welfare of all.

To perform our duty towards society, i.e. the duty of Lokasamgraha or our duty towards social welfare the attempt has been made to explore the concepts of 'yajna', 'freedom' with reference to the wellbeing of the society. Bhagavad-Gita provides us effective guidelines to have effective social leadership. Our actions have to be conducive toward maintenance of the social and worldly order. The fundamental criterion of moral goodness is the promotion of dharma or order, and the result of it is peace, happiness and harmony.

Therefore the political goals if based on ethical goals, always lead to the goal of Lokasamgraha. It is due to the purification of desire, which makes every individual to perform his swadharma and which ultimately will lead to the welfare of the society. It is the need of the hour that our political goals should be firmly based on ethical goals which will not only lead to the welfare of the human beings but of the other creatures on the earth as well, and we can attain the ideal of Lokasamgraha in true sense.

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