

## Synthesis of Action Devotion and Knowledge: Bhagavadgita's Relevance to Human Activity

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### Abstract

Bhagavad-Gita is an ancient scripture spreading its message about human existence, and the purpose of yoga of actions devotion and knowledge. The Gita's teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action. Suffering is inevitable and irrespective of one's position, humans throughout the world absorb the fluctuations and rise above personal level, become pragmatic and work towards the happiness of the society. Self enjoyment and social good, these two aspects should be balanced and one cannot lose sight of a purposeful life. The noble purpose of life is to seek a solution for the ignorance and dwell on knowledge to avoid chaos and pain. Knotty problems of life have to be understood in an analytical manner to handle the life's problems in a cool and calm manner.

**KEYWORDS:** Bhagavadgita, Action, Devotion, Knowledge, Humanity, Karma, Bhakti, Jnana, Trigunas, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha and Egoism

### Introduction

Bhagavad-Gita is an ancient scripture and its message distinctly added value to humanity of the universe. Located in the Bhisma-Parva of the Mahabharata, the greatest Sanskrit epic, the Gita's reflections deal with metaphysics, religion and ethics and has been rightly called the "gospel of Humanity". This treatise has attracted the attention of many a seer and notable among them are Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who wrote commentaries along with notable personalities such as Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Malavya, and Radhakrishnan of the contemporary period. All these have outlined its specialty and acknowledged the Gita's importance. The significant observation one makes is that the Bhagavadgita does not cater to any single religious discipline or any particular section of people, rather it contains the most intense philosophy providing comfort to many worldly human sufferings and offers remedial situations to the individual, the objective being to create harmony in the society and the world. It is no exaggeration if one views the Gita as a common base to endorse the feelings of the need of a world citizen concept much needed and prevailing now. Mankind has demonstrated a number of adjustments throughout the stages of evolution absorbing the fluctuations that arose with heritage, culture, religion and the modesty exhibited following the path of truth addressing the issues enroute has elevated the purpose. Every culture in the world can read and interpret the Bhagavad Gita because of the fact that the knowledge found herein directly provides information about the purpose of human existence, with the relationships of god and soul's immortality. Everyone benefits from these concepts. Every human being has a right to establish his divine relationship. Yoga of perfect actions, devotion and knowledge are the three distinct paths that throw light on the care and attention required.

It is necessary to further dwell upon the culture of the people of India where more than a billion people practice different religions, speaking different languages, and in spite of this variation, the humanity is kept together, not by coercion, not by dictatorship, but by a democratic process which protects the integrity and safety of the individual. All the faiths such as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians coexist with harmony and one can proudly say that it is the tradition of the country which echoes "one common family" view which has come down for the last thirty or forty centuries. There is no room for apprehensions, because the path ways may be different with twists and turns but all can use the spiritual landscape to approach their quests. Indian Culture transmits the spiritual ideals into life with a message for the whole of humanity. Some of the fundamental aspects of Indian culture are discipline, devotion, duty mindedness, and means of reaching god through Karma Marga, Bhakti Marga, Jnana Marga, yoga Marga and service to mankind; all these values are embedded in the scripture Bhagavad-Gita and will be addressed as we move along.

It will be well within the context when we talk about the factors that promoted diversity in unity in India; these are geographical diversity, racial, linguistic, religious, social and political. The factors that promoted unity in diversity are geographical, religious unity, linguistic, cultural, physical, and political and the togetherness that is exhibited by crores of people in the Pushkaras and Kumbha Melas. The Bhagavad-Gita touches upon the intellectual adventures and takes on the path of highest good and spreads universal love. Scriptures contain the essence and it is necessary for one and all to adhere to the values and observances projected in them. Many numbers of concepts applicable to well being of humankind are indicated. Scriptures serve two purposes, one, it should pertain the thought pattern of that period and the other, it should project ideas that become applicable in all periods of time and this eternal element makes the scripture everlasting. Bhagavad Gita possesses that kind of universality catering to the experiences of the people. Thus the approach one adopts to understand the Gita is significant, in the sense it always emphasized the fact that truth is one and eternal.

### **Gita and its Prominence**

Human nature and its understanding are necessary in order to have a completeness of the study of mind and in particular, the mind's behaviour in the modern times. Knowing the intellectual and emotional sides and study of life which is many sided in order to get a rational knowledge is essential, which in turn signifies that philosophy is the rationality, being the mother of all sciences, behind each of them. Living beings are destined to growth being subjected to an upward pull intellectually and put in effort to study the nature of the absolute Brahman. The Gita's dialogues are not merely to generate discussions but the intent is to provide insight into the spiritual truths and to expand one's vision and reach the essence of the Gita's profound message. The ideas embedded in the Gita are wide and convey rich experience. Gita is an application of the Upanisad ideal to the new situations, and the context in which the Gita is said to be delivered indicating a central purpose for solving life's problem and directing on to the right conduct.

Gita represents a unique synthesis of action, devotion and knowledge. 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. The teaching of the Gita is in

keeping with this view. Goal of salvation and its attainment is through these three different paths of knowledge, action and devotion and different people attempt these methods. The stage for the teaching of Lord Krishna was the battle field Kurukshetra and the fundamental metaphysical teaching of the Gita is that of the unreal there is no being and of the real there is no non-being. Gita indicates the indestructibility of the soul (Avinashi) carrying with it the ideas of eternal (nitya) unborn (aja) undiminishing (avyaya) all pervasive (sara-gata) immovable (achala) ancient (sanatana), unmanifest (avyakta), unthinkable (achintya) and immutable (Avikarya). Not being subject to birth and death, the soul cannot perish along with the body. S. Radhakrishnan says “Sir R.G. Bhandarkar thinks that the Gita is at least as old as the fourth century (B.C). Garbe assigns the original gita to 200 BC, and the present form of it to AD 200. Adi Samkara (ninth century AD) comments on it and Kalidasa knows it<sup>1</sup>. The context in which the Gita is said to be delivered points out how its central purpose is to solve the problem of life and stimulate right conduct. Bhagavadgita consists of the three important aspects of life and these are Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga and these three different paths of knowledge, action and devotion help the attainment of goal of salvation. Looking at these in brief; Jnana is essentially and predominantly the path of knowledge. Rising above the relish and desire, detachment to the sense objects and improving true knowledge; these will help the knower identify with his own Self. Karma is, that nobody can renounce actions which are generated by the constituent Gunas of Prakriti, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The impregnated idea is not to giving up action itself but the fruits of action. The Gita teaching stands not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action. Bhakti or devotion is viewed as disinterested service to God. Bhakti too, like Niskama karma can be performed only by a true Jnani. Lord says “Never does my devotee perish and”, the doer of good never comes to grief. The object of devotion is the personal God, the Purushottama on whose mercy the devotee has to throw himself utterly. Absolute dependence and faith are necessary.

### **Man, Pursuit and the Gunas**

Human lives find enormous scope for experiencing the earth and every step moves in the direction to make life more meaningful and the significant aim has been to add value to the civilization. Suffering is inevitable and irrespective of one's position, humans throughout the world absorb the fluctuations and rise above personal level, become pragmatic and work towards the happiness of the society. Self enjoyment and social good, these two aspects should be balanced and one cannot lose sight of a purposeful life. Individual human beings are to follow the destined paths. Each individual seeks security and pleasure which are called Artha and Kama. The two remaining Purusharthas – dharma and Moksa also need to be accomplished. Emotional, economical or social security is called artha in Sanskrit. Artha can be in the form of cash, real estate, home or relationships. Kama is a form of pleasure that satisfies senses and evokes appreciation. Dharma is action governed by the swabhava, the essential law of one's nature, the pure quality of the spirit. Moksa gives a vision of freedom as seeing oneself as a secure and happy person and free from being insecure and unhappy. Corliss Lamont says “Each of us will find a deeper and more sustained happiness in working for a noble purpose than in spending our fast flying years upon personal trivialities<sup>2</sup>. This noble purpose is to seek a solution for this ignorance and dwell on knowledge and the man otherwise is facing a life of chaos, pain, suffering, evil and constant change and death. Conflicting interests, struggle between righteousness, unrighteousness and the social, moral, religious, political disturbances

can be resolved by the human mind when humanity is understood and gita offers many a solution for all this. “According to the Sankhya philosophy accepted in this respect by the gita, three essential qualities or modes of the world – energy and therefore also of human nature, sattva the mode of poise, knowledge and satisfaction; rajas, the mode of passion, action and struggling emotion; tamas the mode of ignorance and inertia”<sup>3</sup>. These three gunas (qualities) i.e. sattva consisting of purity, reason and knowledge; Rajas consisting of desire, active and restless, and tamas consisting of qualities ignorance, laziness; all these gunas direct the individual’s existence and thought. Man predominantly dominated by rajas, attempts to use all the forces within his power to face the life’s battle, primarily to satisfy his ego, and tries to win over the struggle. Bhagavadgita in chapter-II, sloka 45 reads as

*“traigunyasaya veda nistraigunyo bhavarjuna nirdvando nityasattvastho niryogaksema atmavan”*.

“The subject matter of the vedas is related to the three qualities. Oh! Arjuna, be one who is free from the three – fold qualities, from (the sorrow of) the pairs of opposites, one who is ever established in sattvaguna, one who is free from the anxieties of acquiring and protecting, one who is a master of oneself”. P. George Victor says, “The ideal man described in the Gita is the Sthitaprajna (man of steadfast –wisdom). The Sthitaprajna is a wise man with equanimity, withdraws his senses from the worldly objects. He is the self-controlled person, free from desire and pleasure, equally sees the gold and lump of the earth, neither rejoice nor laments, seeks the welfare of all<sup>4</sup>. Human beings must exercise control over the senses and passions in order to acquire self-discipline and this is possible with a strong will.

### **Desire and how it relates**

Raga – dvesas are ever present and their presence makes contemplation very difficult. Happiness is possible only in a tranquil mind. Gita in chapter-II, verse 67 reads as:

*‘indriyanam hi caratam yanmano nuvidhiyate tadasya harati prajnam vayurnavamivambhasi’*.

“The mind that follows the moving senses indeed robs the person of his knowledge, just as the wind carries away a small boat on the waters”.

Desire is the ordinary motive of all human actions; it is non -attachment to the works one does with two vital requirements i.e. without clinging to the sense objects and the fruit of the works.

The doer invariably carries egoism in his actions and when this quality disappears, the works undertaken with this spirit, with a divine thought the Karma yogi realizes the impersonality of the action. Equal and impartial approach in the actions becomes possible only when the gunas are transcended and when the individual gets rid of the desire of possessions of sense objects. “Desire and passions that arise from desire are the principal sign and knot of ego. It is desire that makes you go on saying I and mine and subjects you through a persistent egoism to satisfaction and dissatisfaction, liking and disliking, hope and despair, joy and grief...<sup>5</sup> The Indian value tradition emphasizes on egolessness, detachment, goodness and insists on dharma in personal life and social organizations. Desire brings confusion of mind, is a menace and chief enemy of spiritual perfection.

## **Karma Yoga**

Karma binds with its limited results. Doing karma is useful, since a prepared mind can pursue knowledge. Karma Yoga neutralizes raga dvesas and provides knowledge for negating the doership. The word Naiskarmya is important because the state of actionlessness, freedom from action, is identical with what is called moksha, which is self-knowledge, atma-jnana. A general definition of Karma is that which is in the form of motion-calanamatkam karma. Nishkam karma or self-less or desireless action is an action performed without any expectation of fruits or results; creating a balanced approach to work, with an equanimity of mind provides satisfaction and personal excellence. When the attitude is “work is worship”, the environment of the work place displays commitment and ethical behaviour. Verse 47 of chapter 2, in the gita reads as

*‘Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana ma karmaphala heturbhurma te sango ‘stvakarmani’*

“Your choice is in action only, never in the results there of. Do not be the author of the results of action. Let your attachment not be to inaction”. Earlier on we have noticed that likes and dislikes, that is raga-dvesas, and karmas performed relate to this. One can perform an action or need not is a choice and all human beings have this choice, but none has choice over the outcome of the results. The necessity for karma yoga is because people are in the hands of raga-dvesas. Behaviour, activities, responses such as cultural, racial all these are controlled by likes and dislikes. Karma-yoga can be summed up as, results of your actions, there is sameness, samatva in your response and this attitude is dependent upon the recognition of Isvara as the Karma-phala-data, the giver of the fruits of all actions. Our choices to perform karma are based on the rules of dharma and adharma and these are universal; ‘samanya – dharma’. Sri Aurobindo says “the Gita’s solution is to rise above our natural being and normal mind, above our intellectual and ethical perplexities into another consciousness with another law of being and therefore another standpoint for our action...<sup>6</sup> Works done as a sacrifice to the Lord, are no longer our personal actions, refer to the Divine will.

## **Knowledge**

Yoga is union achievable with the help of works done with divinity, without desire and sacrificial attitude. Knowledge is not elevation of mind and intellectual application but in the Gita sense, it is growth into higher state of being. The word ‘jnana’ is used in Indian philosophy, in the yogic sense relates to supreme self knowledge to know the supreme, the self, the divine. To acquire this self-existent, intuitive, the Self experiencing, self revealing knowledge, one must conquer and control the mind and senses. Gita in chapter IV, verse 39 reads as

*‘Sraddhavamllabhate jnanm tatparah sanyatendriyah jnanam labhdva param santimacirenadhigacchati’.*

“One who has faith (in the sastra and in the words of the teacher, who is committed to that (knowledge, and) who is master of one’s senses gains the knowledge. Having gained the knowledge, one immediately gains absolute peace”.

Commitment and sense organ control are fundamental requisites to gain absolute peace. Jnana destroys the defects that arise out of sorrow and delusion. The

advaita philosopher Adi Shankara's primary importance to jnana yoga as "Knowledge of the Absolute (Brahman) while the Vishishtadvaita commentator Ramanuja regarded knowledge only as a condition of devotion. Intellectual knowledge contains incompleteness, and in the higher knowledge falsehood cannot enter when the attempts are to locate the 'truth', insisting on the relation between this knowledge and karma yoga. Classical advaita vedanta uses the four fold discipline to train and attain moksha, these are viveka, vaivagya, sama, and mumuksutva. Aurobindo says "Endurance, philosophic indifference, resignation are, we have said, the foundation of three kinds of equality, but the Gita's truth of knowledge not only gathers them all up together, but gives them an infinitely profound, a magnificently ample significance"<sup>7</sup>. An attitude of self surrender, oneness with all beings, and to see the divine in them; the acquired knowledge leads to this and Gita's teachings are directed to this.

### **Devotion**

The Bhagavadgita introduces bhakti yoga in combination with Karma yoga and jnana yoga. Bhaktiyoga is the path of systematized devotion for the attainment of union with the absolute. Gita in chapter IX, verse 34 reads as....

*"manmana bhava madbhakto madyaji mam namaskuru mamevaisyasi yuktaivatmanam matparayanah"*.

"May you become one whose mind is committed to me, who is devoted to me, whose rituals are offered unto Me and may you surrender to Me. Having yourself prepared in this way and being one for whom I am the ultimate end; you will reach Me, the self alone". True knowledge is to know with the inner being and is an awakening. This spiritual endeavour brings in the unification, of the divine with integral devotion. 'The divine inhabitant becomes himself the flame and the offering, because the flame is the God ward will and that will is God himself within us.'<sup>8</sup> The dualities and the sorrow there of is for the earthly preoccupations and the way to liberate oneself is to turn inward and move away from the material life. Ignorance should be replaced by knowledge towards the universality of the spirit. Bhakti can be done in four ways (i) Atma-Bhakti (ii) Ishvara Bhakti (iii) Ishta Bhakti and (iv) Guru Bhakti.

### **Synthesis of divine love, knowledge and action**

In action, the effort of the individual takes him to his spirituality, and the lower nature is transformed with the balance of the three gunas; sattva, Rajas and Tamas. When the ego personality is freed, aspiration to a higher nature develops. Knowledge and action need to be in combination with bhakti. Gita teaches that devotion consisting of knowledge and action takes one towards supreme unification. Apart from understanding these vital aspects of gita's enumeration, for purposes of spiritual upliftment, the synthetic ability becomes an intellectual capacity to find optimum solution for problems in the material world. Knotty problems of life have to be understood in an analytical manner to handle the life's problems in a calm and cool manner. The individual develops holistic and creative thinking to function in an ethical manner protecting the established human values and it is in this context the learning and understanding action, devotion and knowledge from the scripture Bhagavad-Gita takes prominence. A.N. Tripathi says "spiritual competence is of special relevance to our work life and professional life"<sup>9</sup> Bhagavad-Gita is a treasure and its benefits are ever available to the past, present and future.

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