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## The social application of karma yoga of the Bhagavad Gita by swami Vivekananda

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### Abstract

The social message of karmayoga plays an important role in bringing about a vital change in the society through selfless action. The basic message of this paper is to show that the social applications of karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita can effectively lead to all round development and progress in the social, and cultural field. But it requires explanation of the rise of karmayogins who are guided, not by considerations of selfish or family gain but by the desire for the welfare of all. The Gita contains a very important message relevant to finding a solution for the social and political deadlock confronting modern India and that message can be summarized as 'loksamgraha' literally involvement with the world and more broadly the willingness of people to perform action especially selfless action (niskamakarma) on behalf of the community in which they find themselves. It is a yoga or a way of spiritual discipline. So according to karmayoga, one should perform work without attachment and guided by a spirit of surrender to God.

**Keywords:** karma yoga, loksamgraha, yoga, non-attachment, renunciation

### Introduction

Some great thinkers, religious and political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Vivekananda and so many great men have greatly influenced by the ideal of karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita. The role of Karma Yogda has played in lives and activities of these thinkers and its inspiration and ideal guided their way of lives and thoughts. These great men of India heartily worked against the social evils as well as they worked for the good of all, i.e. through the Loksamgraha in terms of karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita. Swami Vivekananda was not of the Karma Yogins whose life and activities was also guided by the ideal of the karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita <sup>[1]</sup>. Subsequently Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the holy man Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva who taught him in the proper way for doing good to the mankind and to serve the humanity as a whole with compassion. According to him, service to humanity is nothing but the worship of God and for him, 'Jiva is none else than Siva' <sup>[2]</sup>. The Lord explains the word 'Lokasamgraha' as:

Saktah karmanyavidvamso yatha kurvanti bhārata II  
kuryadvidvamstathasaktascikirsurlokasamgraham II <sup>[3]</sup>

### 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

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in the explanation of different schools of philosophy (Pal, 2004) [4]. 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 bhutabhavadbhavakora 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) [25]. 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 actphenomena 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 samaskara 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) [4]. 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) [2]. 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.

### 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, prevision 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) [20].
2. 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 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.

3. 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) [12].
4. 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 Kriyamana Karma.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 Bhagavadgita, 2.47). Thus, Niskama karma is neither Naiskarma (inaction 0 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.

This verse points out two-fold objectives of action without attachment. Firstly, this is yoga, a way of spiritual discipline. Such action is not meant for securing pleasure. Secondly, it maintains social order. It is the whole duty of man to remove the stain of attachment from that work and to perform work for the humanity as a work. This is karmayoga.

### Discussion

The writings and the ways of life of some great Hindu thinkers, religious and political leaders showed their awareness of a need to preserve an Indian identity. The vital role of the Gita is to achieve their success in the socio-spiritual, ethical revolution and political independence. The main social problems facing India before the arrival of the British were 'widow burning', 'the treatment of untouchable', the role of the Muslim in a Hindu society, 'the sati', 'child marriage', 'want of education', 'superstition', 'the role of the women', and of 'the Adivasis' and so on. Several problems have remained since independence. Lokasamgraha is applied not only in the development of man's mental discipline, but also to the formulation and ways of attaining goals that a modern society has to envisage, such as the wise management

of environmental resources, the maintenance of a desired level of mental health, legal system etc. The concept of Lokasamgraha has been applied to develop economic condition on the village level and to give a foundation for protecting endangered environment against pollution and natural calamities. The concept is especially powerful when it is invoked to join people together with a sense of common purpose and construct them into one community, through it is local, regional, national or global [4].

### **Vivekananda met Sri Ramakrishna**

Swamiji met the holy man Sri Ramakrishna in 1880 for the first time. After a long discussion of spiritual matter Swamiji was struck by the incomprehensible power of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji gradually felt that Sri Ramakrishna is worthy of respect. Afterwards Sri Ramakrishna gradually prepared to be the head of the group of sincere devotees who would carry out the master's mission. Sri Ramakrishna taught Swamiji that the proper way of doing good to mankind is to serve man with compassion i.e. service to man should be performed as worship to God - 'Jiva is none else than Siva'. Sri Ramakrishna also explained to Swamiji the secret of reconciling worldly life with spiritual development, which is in the Bhagavadgita, has been identified as the technique of non-attachment or renunciation of the egoistic feeling of doership.

### **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, p92) [17]. 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 nyanam samnyasam kavayo viduh, i.e. The sages know that sannyasa 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 Bhagavad Gita 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.

### **The social problems of India identified by Swami Vivekananda**

According to Swamiji, the social problem of India is realistic because he acquired first-hand knowledge about the poverty, ignorance, disease and misery of the masses after wandering all over the country for years. Afterwards he turned his sight to the common people for whom the struggle for survival itself is the basic reality. In his travels, he was constantly brought into contact with the sorrows, the desires, the abuses, the miseries, the rich and the poor and feverishness of living men. He also observed India where millions of people live on the flower of the Mahua plant, a million or two of sadhu and a hundred million or so of Brahmins suck the blood of these poor people and where huts and palaces exist side by side, piles of refuse in the near proximity of temples, the sannyasi wear with only a little torn-cloth walking by the well-dressed the hunger-stricken at the well-fed.

The social problems of India may be analyzed out of different angles as economic, political, sociological, historical, cultural, religious and spiritual aspect. Swamiji had the greatest emphasis on religious and spiritual problems. Religious perversion appeared in the ugly forms of exclusiveness and untouchability. Vivekananda identifies the root cause of misery as the lack of proper education. By education he meant, not the huge amount of information that is put in the brain and run rot there, undigested, all through life. What he wanted is life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. This was not possible because we had no hold on the education of the nation, neither secular nor spiritual. According to Swamiji, the education that we are getting now is entirely negative because one thing is that our guardians are fools, second things is that our all teachers are hypocrites, as a result, by the time, a student is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless, i.e. such types of education has not produced one original man.

### **Swamiji's plan of action based on Karma Yoga**

After coming back from the west to India, Swamiji had made up his mind to initiate a plan of action based on the harmonization of spirituality and social service. By making special mention of the Upanisads and the Gita, Swamiji made it clear that his plan represents a harmonization of Vedanta and karmayoga and he also called it real worship as he explained in his address at the Rameswaram temple. He taught that external worship is only a symbol of internal worship; but internal worship and purity are the real things and it is the gist of all worship to be pure and to do good to others.

The same message was conveyed by Swamiji as 'Daridra-Narayana' which means that the service of the poor is the service of God, i.e. 'Jiva as Siva'. Swamiji said to explain it that one sees Siva (God) in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased really warships God. One who serves and helps one poor man without thinking of caste, creed or race, God is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in the

temple. By having faith in God, one gives up the fruits of work unto God and worshipping Him, one does not expect any reward for the work. According to Swamiji, everybody should eradicate that idea out of mind that you are doing something for the world because the world does not require any help. Expecting no reward for work done, as taught by the Gita is the easier way of giving up attachment to the fruits of work. Swamiji gives so much importance to self-confidence for achieving success in his plan of action and self-confidence plays the same role a faith in God.

#### **Commitment to social service performed by Vivekananda**

Swamiji used the ideal of karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita 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. His vision of utilizing the energies of the monks for spreading education among the illiterate, helping the poor to fight against poverty and disease, removing social evils and inequalities and raising them to a higher level of morality etc. mean and innovation in the monastic practices.

Ramakrishna Mission is one of the most remarkable institutions was established by great monk Swami Vivekananda in 1897. It was distinguished itself as a religious organization in modern India which adopted social service as one of its main goals and which drew inspiration for this mainly from the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Gita and so on. Swamiji gave a concrete shape to the social service programme of the Ramkrishna Mission following the teaching of his master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva. Swamiji strongly emphasized the path of karmayoga, based ultimately on the Bhagavadgita in the entire approach of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In April, 1898, when Swamiji was in Darjeeling to recover his health, news reached him about the outbreak of plague in Calcutta. Although his health was not good, he thought that he might be of help to the people. People were fleeing in panic; troops are called to subdue riots. Swamiji grasped the gravity of the situation at once and on the day of his arrival at the Matha he drafted a plague manifesto in Bengali and in Hindi because he wanted to start relief operations immediately to help afflicted. In 1899 the disease, plague again broke out and the Ramakrishna Mission undertook relief work under the leadership of sister Nivedita and others. According to Jadunath Sarkar, historian, an eyewitness said that when the sweepers had fled away, sister Nivedita was clearing the streets, lanes etc. with broom and basket and whose courage and sense of civic duty inspired the local youths. More than ninety years have elapsed since Ramakrishna Mission faced initial challenges of rendering service to the needy under the most difficult situation.

The aims of the Mission are to preach those ideal truths which are mainly extracted from the Niskama Karma or karmayoga of the Bhagavad Gita for the good of humanity to demonstrate the practical life of Sri Ramakrishna. The method of action of the Mission is to train and to make men competent for teaching of such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses. Secondly, to provide and encourage arts and industries and thirdly, to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas. So, the aims and ideals of Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian and which had no connection with politics <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **Conclusion**

It has been found in this world that man who tries to work for public-welfare without desire becomes a Yogai. When once the ideal that all persons are in Him and that He is in all persons has been deeply rooted in one's mind, the question whether self-interest is distinct from the interest of others does not arise at all and starts to achieve the good of others. Moreover, it is said that when the sun is giving light to others it also gives light to itself, in the same way, a saint's activities are done through his benevolence. The saints who continue their beneficent activities without caring for crisis and without trying to discriminate between whether it is better to suffer adversity or to give up public welfare and if situation arises, they are even ready to be indifferent about sacrificing their own lives. This is known as universal welfare and this is the true karmayoga.

#### **Practical relevance of Niskama Karma Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita**

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 Bhagavad Gita 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 <sup>[2]</sup>. 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 <sup>[3]</sup>. 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 <sup>[4]</sup>. 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 leaf 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 nonhuman in an inviolable manner and cause bondage. They consider know.

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