

Concept of Duty in Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract—Duty is an ethical category in philosophy denoting a special form of moral obligation. It is a kind of moral obligation. It is a kind of moral obligation applied to every individual. . The Bhagavad Gita also mentions about the duty as an obligation by introducing the notion of Nishkama-Karma. Definite rights bring definite obligations along with them. Such moral obligations or duties may be expressed in the form of commandments. Just as there is a right corresponding to every duty, so there is a duty corresponding to every right. Rights and duties are co-relative to each other. All duties may be deduced from the fundamental duty that every person ought to realize his rational self.

Index Terms—Ethical, Duty, Bhagavad Gita, Rights, etc

I. INTRODUCTION

Bhagavad Gita means “Song of the lord” and is sometimes translated as “the song of the adorable one”. Believed to have been composed between the second and third century C.E., it is an epic poem of Indian culture and religion written by vyasar. The Gita is about a great battle. Through stories of the struggles of notable heros and gods, it relays much of the basic philosophy of life and states the guiding principles of Yoga.

The main theme of the Bhagavad Gita is “Nishkama Karma” and “Yoga- the attainment of union with the divine. Krishna distinguishes three forms of Yoga: of knowledge, action and devotion.

In Bhagavad Gita there are 18 chapters, 700 slokas and it comes under the Bhisma Parva of Mahabharata. The explanation of Bhagavad Gita occurs at Kurukshetra (Dharma Kshetra) where the fighting between Kaurava and Pandava takes place. The teaching of Bhagavad Gita centres around between two main characters:

Lord Krishna as a Teacher

Arjuna as a Disciple

And the other two characters are: Dhritarastra and Sanjaya.

700 slokas can be divided as,

Krishna speaks : 574 slokas

Arjuna speaks : 85 slokas

Dhritarastra and sanjaya : 41 slokas

In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna is referring to Duty as a general term. It could be either Professional, Personal, Religious or Ethical Duty. When Lord Krishna preached sloka 2-47 he referred to duty in a general way.

“If you do Karma (duty) as prescribed by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, Karma will become Yogam.”

It is instructive to note that the very first syllable in the Bhagavad Gita is “dhar” and the last, found at the end of chapter 18 is “ma”. From the combination of these two syllables, the word “dharma” is obtained, which encompasses the entire text of the Gita. Loosly translated, dharma refers to duty, which essentially, is the innermost constitution by which an individual lives. As member of society, we assume various roles at different points in time, with varying responsibilities and interactions. We also acquire and practice particular ethical and moral values. As such, the sum total of all these comprises our dharma.

II. DHARMA (SACRED DUTY)

Sacred duty refers to the moral order that sustains the cosmos, society and the individual. We can all use this idea to help us cope with our responsibilities in life and see them not as burdens, but as our sacred duties. Each and every one of us is born with the “sacred duty” that we must fulfill during the lifetime. For Arjuna, it was the duty of being a warrior at the time of war. But for us, it may be the duty of being a good daughter, sister or friend.

“Look to your own duty, do not tremble before it... Your own duty done imperfectly is better than another man’s done well”

III. DHARMA IN THE MAHABHARATA

Right from very ancient times, Dharma has been accepted as an ideal of human life and has accordingly fascinated and inspired the people. Almost all the systems of Indian philosophy and scriptures of India extol the virtues of life led as per Dharma. The Mahabharata of Vyasa is replete with various instances of Dharma. The epic gives the wisest practical advice and guidance on righteous living, i.e, living as per the principles of Dharma. The Mahabharata brings out the deepest experience of man in both the worldly and spiritual fields of life. The Bhagavad Gita, the most practical text on Dharma, appears in the Mahabharata.

In the narration of the history of Kauravas and Pandavas, Dharma is brought and, in many ways, in particular the advice given by Bhishma to Dharmaputra and Vidura’s advice. The council is useful for all people of all countries at all times to lead a good life. The Mahabharata is simultaneously an Arthasastra, Dharmasastra and Moksasastra.

In fact, it has been called as “fifth veda’ of the material, spiritual, physical and metaphysical life of the Indian masses.

IV. DHARMA IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

In the Bhagavad Gita, the term Dharma is used in a more definite and clear sense. Dharma is righteousness, the basis of all purusarthas. It is one’s duty ordained by the scriptures as per one’s varna and asrama, by properly performing which man attains both well-being in this world (abhyudaya) and highest good (nisreyasa). The term Dharma has been used in various senses in the Bhagavad Gita. Sometimes it has been used as synonymous with atmajnana or with karmayoga.

Lord Krishna states strongly in the Bhagavad Gita that he incarnates in all ages to establish dharma. This statement proves that Dharma is the key concept in the Bhagavad Gita. When Krishna says sarvadharmaparityajya giving up all the dharmas and come to my shelter alone, he means thereby all the worldly attachments and functions of sense organs. In

dharmaksetra and dharmayuddha the word Dharma is used in the sense of truth. Performing one’s own duty is the highest Dharma according to Bhagavad Gita.

Svadharmavidhanam sreyah paradharmobhayavahah. Once a person has adopted a particular profession, it is necessary for him to adhere to the duty enjoyed upon that profession even at the cost of his life. One should prefer death, while performing one’s own Dharma, to a change of professional duty. Not only this, but the opportunity of laying down one’s life while performing one’s duty is regarded as a golden chance for attaining liberation. This opportunity, particularly the Ksatriya’s opportunity of dying on the field, is considered very rare and is regarded as equivalent to the opportunity of entering open gates of heaven, as it were. Thus, when King Dhritarashtra refers to the battle field as the field of Dharma, he has in mind this background of the duty of courting death as the highest duty of a Ksatriya. Deviation from Dharma is regulated as the most hateful and heinous crime. In the first chapter Arjuna is perturbed, especially because war leads to the massacre of man, and the mass killing of men leads to the corruption of women, which would ultimately result in the destruction of all the ancient Dharmas. The importance of duty is stressed throughout the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in this great treatise of ethics and philosophy.

V. THE SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The Bhagavad Gita is a lengthy discussion on the nature of duty towards others and personal obligations, and it is also rich in metaphysical thought. The poem manages to interweave our yearning to know, to act and to have faith.

A personal god, Krishna emerges and his conversation with Arjuna is a call to action. The obligations and duties of life that Arjuna must observe – both in terms of his personal conduct and his duties as a warrior are not separate from the spiritual background of life and our spiritual purpose in the universe. In this context, action is always values and inaction is devalued, even condemned.

Because the modern age is fraught with frustration and quietism, the Gita’s call to action makes a special

appeal to our time. It is also possible to interpret ideal action in modern times as action that is humanitarian, altruistic and practical. According to the Gita, such categories are praiseworthy, but a spiritual ideal must lie beneath such actions. Also, action must be performed in a spirit of detachment, rather than with a concern for the results.

VI. THE INFLUENCE OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The Bhagavad Gita has had a deep influence on Hinduism. By the time, the Gita was written, Hinduism was many centuries old. The Gita brought together different parts of Hindu tradition. It offered people several paths to God. And it did so in beautiful language that has inspired countless people. The Gita remains hugely popular today. Many Hindus read parts of it every day. Like Arjuna, they find in Krishna's words the way to true peace and happiness. The National leader Mahatma Gandhi once wrote:

"The Gita is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks... When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies."

VII. DUTIES MENTIONED IN GITA:

War Is the Duty of Kshatriya:

Great importance has been attached to social consolidation in the Gita. People with knowledge and even Gods perform activities which are beneficial to the public. Gita maintains the theory of incarnation. It is a learned person who performs his ordained activities without any desire after having ended all attachments. The inherent duty of a kshatriya is to fight, thus it was Arjuna's duty to fight.

Voluntary Fulfilment of Duty:

The moral importance of approximating the object of Niskama karmayoga in different ways contained in eighteen chapters, is that a man should pursue his duties of his own volition. To be deviated from duty or to do it under obligation is immoral. Only that activity which is done with personal motivation and of free volition has any moral importance. Niskama

karma and fighting are not contradictory because nishkama karma means the fulfilment of God's order without any desire for the result. The kshatriya has been ordered by God to defend the society. Thus it is Arjuna's duty to fight without any desire for the result.

Directive of Daily Duties:

In view of the fact that Gita contains a long description of duties concurring to a number of different natures of man, it must be admitted that it affords assistance in the understanding of daily duties.

Doing one's Duty:

For Hindus, suffering and pain exist only in the world of birth, death and rebirth. The ultimate goal is to become free of the cycle of rebirth and one with God. The Gita teaches that there are several paths to God. One of these paths is embracing one's dharma or duty.

According to the Gita, different people have different duties in life. As a warrior-prince Arjuna has the duty of fighting. He is afraid of killing his relatives, but Krishna tells him that he must not worry about the results of his actions. When we act with some results in mind, we are listening to our own desires. Right action, Krishna teaches is different. Right action means accepting our duty and acting without any desires of our own. When we act in this way, we are no longer attached to the fruit (results) of our action. We start to become free of all earthly cares. We learn that the true self has no desires or no fears, no beginning and no end. We are then on the path to God. As Krishna tells Arjuna: "He... who is not disturbed by anxiety, who is steady in happiness and distress, is very dear to me"

VIII. VERSUS ABOUT DUTY IN BHAGAVAD GITA

one who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament. Considering your specific duty as a ksatriya, you should know that there is no better engagement for you than fighting on religious principles; and so, there is need for hesitation. If, however, you do not perform your religious duty of fighting, then you will certainly incur sins for neglecting your duties and thus lose your reputation as a fighter. You have a

right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

Karma-Yoga

Perform your prescribed duty, for doing so is better than not working. One cannot even maintain one's physical body without work. Work done as a sacrifice for Vishnu has to be performed; otherwise work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform your prescribed duties for his satisfaction, and in that way, you will always remain free from bondage. But for one who takes pleasure in the self, whose human life is one of self-realization and who is satiated for him there is no duty. A self-realized man has no purpose to fulfill in the discharge of his prescribed duties, nor has he any reason not to perform such work. Nor has he any need to depend on any other living being. Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment one attains the supreme. Kings such as Janaka attained perfection solely by performance of prescribed duties. Therefore, just for the sake of educating the people in general, you should perform your work. Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues. O son of Partha, there is no work prescribed for me within all the three planetary systems. Nor am I in want of anything, nor have I need to obtain anything – and yet I am engaged in prescribed duties. For if I ever failed to engage in carefully performing prescribed duties, O Partha, certainly all men would follow my path. If I did not perform prescribed duties, all the worlds would be put to ruination. I would be the cause of creating unwanted population, and I would thereby destroy the peace of all living beings. As the ignorant perform their duties with attachment to results, the learned may similarly act, but without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path. Those persons who execute their duties according to my injunctions and who follow this teaching faithfully, without envy, become free from the bondage of fruitive actions. It is far to discharge one's prescribed duties, even though faultily, than another's duties perfectly. Destruction in the course of performing one's own duty is better than engaging

in another's duties, for to follow another's path is dangerous.

Transcendental Knowledge

All the liberated souls in ancient times acted with this understanding of my transcendental nature. Therefore, you should perform your duty, following in their footsteps.

Action In Krishna Consciousness

One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the supreme Lord, is unaffected by sinful action, as the lotus leaf is untouched by water.

Dhyana – Yoga

The supreme personality of Godhead said: One who is unattached to the fruits of his work and who works as he is obligated is in the renounced order of life, and he is the true mystic, not he who lights no fire and performs no duty.

The Divine and Demonic Natures

One should therefore understand what is duty and what is not duty by the regulations of the scriptures. Knowing such rules and regulation, one should act so that he may gradually be elevated.

The Divisions of Faith

The sacrifice performed according to the directions of scriptures, as a matter of duty, by those who desire no reward, is of the nature of goodness. Charity given out of duty, without expectation of return, at the proper time and place and to a worthy person is considered to be in the mode of goodness.

The Perfection of Renunciation

All these activities should be performed without attachment or any expectation of result. They should be performed as a matter of duty, O son of Partha. That is my final opinion. Prescribed duties should never be renounced. If one gives up his prescribed duties because of illusion, such renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance. Anyone who gives up prescribed duties as troublesome or out of fear of bodily discomfort is said to have renounced in the mode of passion. Such action never leads to the elevation of renunciation. Arjuna, when one performs his prescribed duty only because it ought to be done, and renounces all material association and all attachment to the fruit, his renunciation is said to be in the mode of goodness. One who performs his duty without association with the modes of material nature, without false ego, with great determination and enthusiasm and without wavering in success or

failure is said to be a worker in the mode of goodness. It is better to engage in one's own occupation, even though one may perform it imperfectly, than to accept another's occupation and perform it perfectly. Duties prescribed according to one's nature are never affected by sinful reactions.

IX. CONCLUSION

The message of Gita is universally comprehension and everlasting. In today's atomic age, when human society is grievously endangered by excessive materialism, some of the messages of the Gita, the "nishkama karmayoga" have assumed an ever-greater importance. Gita treasures elements which can faithfully serve as motives to man of any society and any age.

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