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## Present Day Relevance of the Karmayoga of Bhagavad Gita

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### Abstract:

In the battle-field of Kuruksetra, after looking his relatives such as Bhishma, Drone etc. in the side of his enemy, Arjuna expressed his desire that he is not ready to fight. Then Lord Krishna gave him the advice of Gita. We find all the essences of Upanisadas in the Gita. Lord Krishna told that the advices are not new. Many years ago, He gave this advice to Vivaswan, Vivaswan again gave it to Manu and Manu gave it to Iksaku. As Arjuna is the friend of Lord Krishna, so He is going to give this advice to Arjuna. As Upanisadas, Gita and Brahminsutra are the three pillars of Hinduism, so these are altogether called Prasthanatrayi. It is said that, family men can attain liberation by following these three sastras.

In the one hand, there is true reality and in the other hand, there is the tension between merit and demerit. Man becomes confused in such a situation and here the Gita tries to show him the right path. The world is full of violence. To establish peace in the world, man should follow the *niskama karmayoga* of Gita. In this paper I shall explain the relevance of *niskama karmayoga* of Gita. Whether *niskama karmayoga* is applicable in the present day society or not, is also explained here.

**Keywords:** Karma, Niskama karma, guna, svadharma, caturvarna.

The word 'karma' is used in the *Gita* in a very large sense. By the term 'karma' the *Mimamsakas* tried to mean sacrifice. In the *Gita* it is said that the life of a man is full of action. No man can live for a moment without doing any action. In the verse no. 47 of the second chapter of the *Gita* Lord Krishna said,

“*Karmany eva 'dhikaras te  
ma phalesu kadacana  
ma karmaphalahetur bhur  
ma te sango 'stv akarmani'*” i

That means, man has right only in action. Man should not do action with the desire for fruit and man should not reject *karma* also. Lord Krishna mentioned here two types of action- action with desire and action without desire. Lord Krishna advised man to do desire-less action. According to Sri Krishna, action is the cause of production and for the development of animal's action is necessary. In ancient India, we find two paths related to action- *pravritti marga* and *nivritti marga*. *Mimamsakas* were the supporters of - *pravritti marga* and they supported the path of action of *Veda* and mentioned sacrifices as religion. The *Gita* does not support this view. “Vedic rituals are not necessary for liberation. The specific duties of an individual ought to be performed without any desire for fruits. When all desires are resigned to God, and duties are performed in a disinterested spirit by an aspirant, he is said to be a *yogin*.”

ii The *Samkhya* philosophers were the supporters of the path of knowledge and said that it is better to take *sanyas* by rejecting all types of *karma*. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna tried to reconcile both the two paths. The main advice of Sri Krishna was about the rejection of the desire for fruit of action and not rejection of action. “The ideal of *Gita* is not negativism, ascetism or escapism. It is not negation of actions, but performance of actions in a detached spirit. It is not *naiskarma*, but *niskama Karma*. The giving up is not of action itself, but of interest, desire, fruit, attachment regarding action.” iii

No man can stay for a moment without performing action. Performance of action is better than non- performance of action. Sri Krishna said,

“*na hi kascit ksanam api  
jatu tisthaty akarmakrit  
karyate hy avasah karma  
sarva prakritijair gunaih'*” iv

According to Sri Krishna, actions which are not concerned with religious sacrifices are causes of bondage. So, Lord advised Arjuna to perform action only for sacrifice and without the desire for fruit. “Those who hanker after fruits are objects of pity. We should dedicate all our actions to God. We should perform our duties with equanimity without any consideration of success or failure.” v

Generally, 'sacrifice' means 'Vedic sacrifice'. But in the *Gita*, this word is not used in this sense. When a person understands that God is the creator and regulator of everything, then he dedicates the fruits of all actions to God and performs action without attachment.

Then his action is called sacrificial action. Such types of actions are not causes of bondage. Lord *Krishna* said that at the time of creation, when the creator created the world, then He also decided the principles of action for men. This is called sacrifice. In the verse no. 48 of the second chapter of the *Gita* Lord said:

“*yogasthah kuru karmani  
sangam tyaktva dhanamjaya  
siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva  
samatvam yoga ucyate.*” vi

We are bound to do action. But the question is: what type of action we should perform? *Sri Krishna* said that actions should be performed with meditation. Thinking success or failure as equal is called *yoga*. We should not be too much pleasure-full in success and not too much unhappy in failure. We have to do work after rejecting the thinking of success and failure. He, who can reject the desire for fruit, can act by rejecting the thinking of success and failure. The advice of Lord Krishna is that we have to think success or failure as equal and by rejecting the desire for fruit, we have to do work. Those, who do work for fruit, are extremely poor and pity. If the reason of the doer be steady, then the fruit of action whether it be good or bad, cannot touch him. He then will not be the enjoyer of the fruit of action. To judge the goodness or badness of action, at first we have to judge in what purpose and for which end the action was done.

Ascetics think that action is the cause of bondage. So they say that if we want to attain liberation, we have to reject all types of *karma*. On the other hand, the *Gita* teaches that action is not actually the cause of bondage, only the desire of the result is the cause of bondage. A *niskama-karmayogi* thinks success and failure as equal. He acts dispassionately. As action gives result, so we should not reject action; we should only reject the desire for fruit of action. A *niskama-karmayogi* can attain liberation because he is able to reject the result of action.

The main theme of the *niskama karmayoga* of the *Gita* is that we have to reject the desire for fruits of action, we have to think success and failure as equal. We should also stop such type of thinking ‘I am the doer of action’ and we have to think that all actions are God’s action. A *niskama karmayogi* will not be blissful in his successful activity and will not be sorrowful in his unsuccessful activity. ‘I am doing action and I will enjoy the fruits of actions’ – such type of thinking is called egoism. A *niskama karmayogi* will be free from all types of ego. ‘To surrender all actions to God’ means that at the time of action, a person should think that he is doing action not for his own desire, but by the desire of God he is doing God’s action. *Niskama karma* is not aim-less, its aim is to protect the creations of God. So, *niskama karma* is actually the action of God. A *niskama karmayogi* gives all the fruits of action to God. He considers all the works as the works of God. A person who thinks in this way is described as a *sthitaprajna* in the *Gita*. Lord *Krishna* said,

“*dukkhesv anudvignamanah  
sukhesu vigatasprihah  
vitaragabhayakrodhah  
sthitadhir munir ucyate*” vii

That means, a sage is called *sthitadhi* if his mind is untouched by sorrow, pleasure, passion, fear etc.

*Sri Krishna* divided actions into three types- *karma*, *akarma* and *vikarma*. Not to perform any action is *akarma* and not to perform action when it is necessary to do action is *vikarma*. According to Lord *Krishna*,

“*karmany akarma yah pasyed  
akarmani ca karma yah  
sa buddhiman manusyesu  
sa yuktah kritsnakarmakrit*” viii

It means, he who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, is really a wise man and he is a real *yogi*. A real intelligent man does not think himself as the doer at the time of action. His action is actually inaction. He is also free from all types of ego. Ego is a cause of bondage. A person cannot be free if he rejects action and not ego. Inaction is also one type of action with ego. A *niskama karmayogi* does work after rejecting the desire for fruit, rejecting egoism and by combining his will with the will of God. So Lord *Krishna* said,

“*gatasangasya muktasya  
jnanavasthitacetasah  
yajnaya caratah karma  
samagram praviliyate*” ix

Total renunciation of action and its fruit is the renunciation of desire totally. The action of *karmayogi* is sacrifice. His action is not the cause of bondage.

Now-a-days, we find the presence of violence everywhere in the world. State to state clash, community to community scuffle, differences of opinions among persons etc. become regular facts. In newspaper, almost every day we find the news about rape, gang-rape, murder etc. Human society and civilization are in front of endangered situation. Two world wars were occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Human civilization is witness of their demonic violence. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have seen the destruction of world trade centre. Terrorist activities also become a regular fact. The friendly relation among men is vanished. Man always engages himself to achieve some material goal, to fulfill his own desire. If we want to rescue human civilization from this crucial situation, then we should practice the *niskama karmayoga* of the *Gita* in our life. “We should, however, remember that *Sri Krishna* is really addressing

all men through his devotee, *Arjuna*; and the teaching, as already observed, is not restricted in its application to the particular situation that gave rise to it. Its appeal is to all men that find themselves placed in a similar dilemma in life.” x

From age to age the *karmayoga* of the *Gita* affects the thinking of human beings. The *Gita* does not support in-action. Hard reality is in the one side and the realization of merit and demerit is on the other. Man becomes confused within these two situations. We find a fight between the words of our heart and the external world in our life. When man becomes confused to determine ‘what is his duty and what is not’, then the *Gita* can show him the right path. That path is not the path of in-action. The *Gita* says that staying within his own religion man should perform action without any desire for fruit. Man does not enjoy the result of disinterested action. In the verse no 35 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the *Gita*, *Sri Krishna* told to *Arjuna*,

“*sreyan svadharmo vigunah  
paradharmat svanusthitat  
svadharme nidhanam sreyah  
paradharmo bhayavahah.*” xi

Here ‘*svadharma*’ means the action determined by the psychological make-up of persons. The action which can match with the nature of a human being is his own action. The equilibrium of the three *gunas*- *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* is called *Prakriti*. The world is the manifestation of *Prakriti*. In the world, the three *gunas* do not remain equally everywhere. Variation of *gunas* is the root cause of creation of all things. These three *gunas* are also present among all men, but they do not present among them equally. In some persons, *sattva* is dominated, in others *rajas* and in others *tamas*. A *tama* dominated person always engaged himself with lethargy, always feel sleepy and covered by ignorance. Such persons are not able to perform the action of *sattva* or *rajas* dominated persons. So, nobody should try to perform the actions of other persons. In this context we can remember the word of Lord,

“*caturvarnyam maya sristam  
gunakarmavibhagasah  
tasya kartaram api mam  
viddhy akartaram avyayam.*” xii

Lord *Krishna* said that the fourfold order was created by Him according to the divisions of quality and work of men. Here the term ‘*guna*’ is used to mean the three *gunas*- *sattva*, *rajas* and *tama*. *Brahmins* are *sattva* dominated persons and their work are learning and teaching, *Ksatriyas* are *raja* dominated and so their works are fight, politics etc., *Vaisyas* are also *raja* dominated though among them *tamas* is also present and their works are business etc., *Sudras* are *tama* dominated and so their work is to serve for the three other *varnas*. Thus, by the quality of persons, actions were divided and the four-fold order was created. That means, Lord *Krishna* divided human beings into four categories by their four types of character.

It is very much logical to divide human beings into four categories by their four types of characters, because all persons cannot be equal in respect of their qualities. Actions of humans are different as all persons are not able to do the same type of work. Here we should remember that in the *Vedic* age the caste system was not present in the society. In the subsequent time when population was increased, then for the division of works the caste system was originated. The caste system was not hereditary. Members of the same family might be *Brahman* and *Ksatriya* and *Sudra* if they did the works of these castes. In the age of *Puranas*, the caste system became hereditary. That means, the four-fold caste system which Lord *Krishna* was created through the *guna* and *karma* of human beings, was changed by man for their own interest and it became hereditary. Now-a-days, the son of a *Brahman* is addressed as *Brahman*, the son of a *Ksatriya* is addressed as a *Ksatriya* etc. Thus, the path of the *Gita* is practiced as defectively. The caste system is an inseparable feature of Hinduism. Here if we follow the path of *Sri Krishna*, then we shall be able to remove the defects of caste system from the society. Without thinking about the result of action if a person does the works of his own caste, then the welfare of all human beings will become possible.

Actually, *sakama karma* is not able to do welfare of the whole world. *Sakama karma* is able to do welfare of only individual persons or certain communities. The result of a *sakama karma* is not desirable for all human beings. The result of a *sakama karma* may produce happiness to one, but the same result may be sorrowful to others. If we want to do action for all human beings, then we have to reject the desire for fruit. To perform action only for the sake of action is really a good action. For the welfare of the world, we have to perform such type of actions.

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