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The Intentional Structure of Thought as Depicted in the Second Chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita

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Abstract:

In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze and evaluate the verses 2.11 to 2.30 of Bhagavad-Gita which are taken to be arguments for immortality of the soul. Arjuna was in the middle of the battlefield facing the armies and in that critical situation he refuses to participate in the war. From verse II.11 Kṛṣṇa's discussion with Arjuna started because Kṛṣṇa seeing Arjuna in such a situation reproved him and said that Arjuna's feeling of dejection at such a critical moment is not befitting him. Kṛṣṇa's discussion set forth with Arjuna is regarding the structure of thinking. But both ancient and modern interpreters and commentators think that in these verses the author is trying to prove immortality of the soul. This is not a correct way of looking at what Kṛṣṇa is saying. Instead Kṛṣṇa is trying to explain the thought process that is to be followed in thinking to perform action that time brings. Because to think correctly is to act correctly. Our attempt here is to examine the verses and find out what Veda Vyasa actually meant by the verses.

Keywords: *Puruṣa, Dehin, Śarīriṇaḥ, Dhira, Deha, Bhāva, Abhāva, Matrā-sparśaḥ*

Arjuna was overwhelmed with pity and was grieving for his own near and dear ones assembled in the battlefield to fight. He became so much grief stricken that he gives up the idea of fighting. He was sad as well as remorseful. His downcast eyes were filled with tears for his Svajana. He thought that instead of killing and hitting with arrows, people like Drona and Bhīṣma should be revered. He preferred to live with alms instead of killing his honored elders. Arjuna had doubts in his mind. He was already in the situation of war but Arjuna instead of participating in the situation of war wanted to run away from it. But Kṛṣṇa seeing Arjuna in such a situation reproved him and said that Arjuna's feeling of dejection at such a critical moment is not befitting him. Kṛṣṇa wanted to make Arjuna understand that the structure of his thinking was wrong.

In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā the author Veda Vyāsa is trying to establish the correct structure of thinking. Thinking has a structure, a pattern; that is thinking of something. In the structure of 'thinking of' something, there is something before or behind 'thinking of' which is doing the thinking and after 'thinking of' which is being thought about. Those whose life breathe has gone and those whose life breathe has not gone cannot be in the objective side of the 'thinking of'.

But both ancient and modern interpreters and commentators think that from verse 2.11 to 2.30, the author is trying to prove immortality of the soul. If these verses are thought to be arguments for immortality of the soul, then Kṛṣṇa's discussion in these twenty verses will be illogical and absurd. These verses of Bhagavad-Gita can give rise to an altogether different meaning. Because if souls are immortal then all will be free to continue killing and in that sense Bhagavad-Gita will be taken as a license to kill. The 11th verse which states, "aśocyān anvaśocas tvaṁ prajñā vādāms ca bhāṣase/ gatāsūn agatāsūms ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ/" istaken to be the beginning of an argument for the immortality of the soul. For them this verse indicates the beginning of an argument to arrive at the conclusion that self is immortal. So they think that Kṛṣṇa is trying to make Arjuna understand that he was sorrowing for those who are eternal. Arjuna in that war like situation was acting unwisely because paṇḍitāḥ, that is the knowers of Brahman do not grieve for those who have departed and those who have not departed. Thus most of the thinkers think that this verse and the later verses indicate the immortality of self. But this is not a correct way of looking at what Kṛṣṇa is saying. Instead Kṛṣṇa is trying to explain the thought process that is to be followed in thinking to perform institutional action. Even the next verse, that is the 12th verse of the second chapter clearly indicates that. The 12th verse states that – na tevāham jātu nāsam na tvaṁ neme jānādhipaḥ / na caiva na bhāviṣyāmaḥ sarve vyaṁataḥ param// "Never at any time, have I been not; neither you nor these rulers of men and never shall we all cease to be." ¹ From this verse we will go to the deeper side where Kṛṣṇa is trying to explain the correct structure of thinking that is the correct intentional structure of thought.

In all commentaries on Bhagavad-Gita we find commentators arguing that the topic is the immortality of soul here. But the author of Bhagavad-Gita tried to explain the two sides of the of relation in thinking of something. The subjective side of the 'thinkingof' is something permanent, unchanging but infinite. He wanted to draw attention of the readers to the nature of that which is in changing thoughts always the same, permanent, unchanging. Each one of us as dhīrah, thinker have been in all times. He is talking about the being which is permanent. While explaining the nature of human beings, Kṛṣṇa introduces the concept of permanence. There is a distinction between that to which something may or may not happen. That which may or may not happen is impermanent and to whom it may or may not happen is permanent. The question that arises here is – What is that which is permanent in changing thought?

The answer to this question is given in the next verse, that is the 13th verse. The 13th verse states: dehinó smin yathā dehe kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā/ tathā dehāntaraprāptir dhīrastatra na muhyati// “Just as the embodied self has in the body, childhood, youth and old age, so does it win another body. All thinking man is not bewildered by it.” There is a specific connotation of the term dehin. Deha conceals the dehin, the embodied. The embodied, that is the dehin in the deha experiences the different states like childhood, adulthood and oldage. Even though dehin is not visible (it is hidden) yet it is permanent. Along with dehin and deha the author emphasizes another word and that is dhīra(thinker). Dhīra is someone who has the capacity of dhī. A person who has the capacity of dhī is not distressed by and changing circumstances. Deha has to be in avastha. The avasthas of Deha indicates Life. Life is not independent of thought. Thought is always focused on something and thought is always of something changing. But the unthought which is present in the thought of something is hidden and it is permanent. The author of Bhagavad Gītā is bringing in the idea of dhīra to indicate thinker's side of the 'of' relation in thinking of something.

Śaṅkarācārya like the other Vedantins have thought that the verses from II.11 onwards are arguments for immortality of soul. He like the other thinkers tried to highlight the point that self is eternal. According to him, the embodied self which remains unchanged passes through the three changing stages, that is childhood, youth and old age. The unchanging self gets a new body at death, without dying himself. Only thinking persons are never deluded about these. This is the way in which all the commentators and interpreters understood these verses. They thought the author is trying to emphasize the undying self and thus they take the argument in these verses to be argument for immortality of the soul.

But the author is constantly making effort in these verses following II.11 to put forward the structure of correct thinking. Even in the 14th verse of Chapter 2, Veda Vyasa explained the other type of thought. The word 'Matrā-sparśaḥ' mentioned in this verse indicates that when there is matrā and sparśaḥ then there is limit. Limited things come and go. Even the feelings like cold and heat, pleasure and pain come and go. Thus they are impermanent. Such opposite feelings resist and replace each other. Only that feeling is there which is pure, unlimited which is not a feeling of this or that type. The author is emphasizing that feeling where there is neither pleasure nor pain, that is where these neutralize each other as such. Thinking and such pure feeling are one and is on the subjective side of 'of' in thinking of something. Without these two being identical, action cannot be generated from thinking. Thinking is always from Hṛday and Manas. Hṛday acts with Manas. Western philosophers have committed a mistake here in understanding thinking as distinct and separate from feeling. They separated thinking from feeling. So they have lost the capacity of proper thinking. After separating thinking from feeling, we do not listen. Instead of listening we hear only noise. Thinking has to be thinking of citta and hṛday together.

According to Bhagavad Gītā, the contact of the sense organs with the objects does not produce merely the cognition of sense objects but also produces pleasure and pain and other feelings like śita and uṣṇa. Sense object contact is not devoid of feelings. The feeling is produced by the object cognized. Just like dehin, deha and the different avasthas of deha are together, similarly the cognized, the object cognized and the feelings associated with the object cognized are together. We differentiate Sukha and Duḥkha and Śita from Uṣṇa which are transitory. In reality there is a unity and when pleasure and pain vanishes and become one then there will be Santa Rasa. Santa Rasa is pure, permanent and sustains us on thinker's side of thinking of something.

In the 13th verse, the author emphasizes the word 'Dehin' which is hidden yet it is permanent. In the same context, the author in the 15th verse emphasizes another word that is Purusa. In II.15, Kṛṣṇa says: yaṁ hi na vyathayanty ete purusaṁ purusaśabha/ sama duḥkha sukhaṁ dhīraṁ só mṛtatvāya kalpate// “O foremost among men, since these do not torment a wise person, to whom sorrow and happiness are the same, therefore he becomes fit for Immortality(Life)”. Kṛṣṇa is addressing Arjuna as Puruṣaśabha. Arjuna is Purusa as well as Pashu. As far as empirical cognition is concerned one is not different from Pashu. One can differentiate oneself from Pashu when he dwells in the realm of Dhī. Dhīra lives in the realm of 'Dhī' which is pure, holistic thinking of which Pashu is not capable of. For such a person pleasure and pain is same and instead of getting affected by feelings there is Santa Rasa. Kṛṣṇa is emphasizing the thinking which is pure, apriori in contrast to the empirical thinking. Empirical thinking is related to Mātrāsparśaḥ. Only the Purusatva in Purusa is apriori, pure, ideational.

In the 16th verse, the author discusses the metaphysical principle regarding Bhāva and Abhāva, Sat and Asat. He tries to bring out the distinction between them. Bhāva cannot be combined with Asat by itself. But when Asat is with Sat and Sat by itself can be combined with Bhāva. Similarly, Abhāva cannot be combined with Sat by itself. Bhāva and Abhāva distinction should not be equated with Existence/ Non-Existence. Bhāva have many modes. Existence is only a mode of Bhāva. On one side of the 'of' relation is the thinker's side where there is bhāva and no vikaras. This side of thought is not in time. Here emphasis has been given to the pure side

of thought when we are thinking of something that have all bhāva vikāras. What we are thinking of is in time and is with limits and come into existence and go out of existence.

The 16th verse of Bhagavad Gītā is expanded in the later verses. In II.17 verse, Kṛṣṇa says: avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idaṁ tatam/ vināśam avyayasyāsyā na kaścit kartum arhati// “On the contrary, know that to be imperishable by which all this is pervaded. None can destroy that which is Immutable.” All the commentators misunderstood this verse where the word ‘Tatam’ has been used to indicate Self as time. But they take it in the sense of pervaded. Even Śāṅkarācārya was not referring to time. The structure of thinking passes from temporal to non-temporal side. Both the temporal and non-temporal side of the intentional structure of thought are equally important. Śāṅkara declared it to be Adhyāsa. But the Gītā never used the term Adhyāsa. Śāṅkara dismissed the temporal side as illusory and loaded the entire reality on non-temporal side. According to him, what does not exist can never come to existence, if it appears then it is through superimposition. Kṛṣṇa tried to remove the delusion of the deluded. Śāṅkara probably could not grasp Kṛṣṇa’s declaration fully. Self which is the time has no origin nor does it ever dies. It is eternal, unchangeable, permanent. That which is permanent have bhāva but no vikāras.

The verses from 21st to 25th of the second chapter explains the nature of Puruṣa or Śārīriṇaḥ, to make readers understand the structure of thinking. But Śāṅkara along with the other thinkers think that through these verses the author is trying to highlight the undying Self. The analogy of garment with body is mentioned in the 22nd verse. Just like discarding worn out clothes a man takes up new one, in the same way the dehin proceeds to take up a new deha. The Self cannot be cut by any weapons, even fire cannot reduce it to ashes, no water can make it wet and no wind can dry it. Thus it is everlasting, eternal, all pervading, pure, ideational. The author here is trying to prepare an equation between śārīriṇaḥ, puruṣa and the institution as person. He indicates that knowing the nature of Self to be such Arjuna should not grieve thinking himself as the slayer of Puruṣa. He was thinking of the contingent things that has already arrived. As mentioned earlier which may or may not happen is impermanent, changing. But to whom it may or may not happen is permanent. Arjuna was overpowered by emotions because he was thinking of puruṣa as that which have all bhāva vikāras, that is in time, that is changing, impermanent. But Dhīra who has the capacity of Dhī is not affected by these changing thoughts and circumstances. Death and Birth are two unavoidable sequence. What manifest today will go out of manifestation again. The beginning of something is unmanifest then it comes into manifest by existence, their end too is unmanifest.

Kṛṣṇa’s aim is to make Arjuna fight in the battle. Considering his own dharma as a Kṣatriya, Arjuna should not waver. Because for a Kṣatriya there is no other means conducive to bliss than a battle. Dharma of war is not to kill. Neither one is present here as to kill or to be killed nor others are present here to be killed or to kill. The embodied in everyone’s body is not amenable to killing. Institutional personality is present in all that cannot be killed. Similarly, Institutional Self is present in all deha. Cosmos as an institution has institutional personality. Instead of killing, Dharma of war is Saṁgrāmaṇ - forceful settlement. Dharma is to participate in the forceful settlement without thinking about the consequences. Till verse II.30 Kṛṣṇa tried to remove Arjuna’s dejection by opening up the institutional structure of thought. But the commentators, interpreters thought that the author is giving arguments for immortality of the soul. Immortality of soul is presupposed to make the readers understand that the thought process of Arjuna was not correct and did not have correct structure of intension.

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