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A CRITICAL STUDY OF GITĀ'S CONCEPT OF YOGA: KARMA-YOGA, JÑĀNA-YOGA AND BHAKTI-YOGA

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Abstract: The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is the one of the most ancient religious scriptures in India, not only India but of the World. It contains the direct message of God. It is a conversation between God and his closest devotee Arjuna. In the battleground of *Kurukshetra* the Kauravas and the Pandavas were present to clash for the kingdom. Srikrishna was the friend of Arjuna. When Arjuna sees his own friends and relatives in the battleground and comes to know that he has to kill them, then Arjuna declines to fight. The *Gītā* begins from here. The *Gītā* contains 18 chapters and 700 verses (*ślokas*). Most of it takes place as a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. The main idea of *Gītā* is action with detachment or *niskāma karma*. *Karma-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga* are the important yoga of *Bhagavad-Gītā*. *Karma-Yoga* is also known as *Karmamārga*. It says that one can attain liberation through action. *Karma-Yoga* suggests that one should be devoted to his duty. One should not think about success or failure or the consequences of his action. So Srikrishna advised to Arjuna to control his senses and to destroy his desires. Self-knowledge is the best knowledge. After achieving this knowledge Arjuna should perform desireless action which will lead him to attain liberation. *Jñāna-Yoga* is also known as *Jñānamārga*. *Jñāna-Yoga* gives emphasis on the knowledge of the supreme reality which is called self realization or *Brahman-jñāna*. By the *Jñāna-Yoga* we liberate ourselves from all kind of physical desires, from vicious circle of births and deaths. *Bhagavad-Gītā* has accepted *Bhakti* as one kind of *mārga* or path of liberation. It is a spiritual path by which we can obtain liberation or *Moṣka*. Through *Bhakti-Yoga* we can realize the ultimate reality or absolute truth.

Index Terms - *Bhakti-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga*, *karma-Yoga*, *nivṛtti mārga*, *pravṛtti mārga*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the *Gītā* we find different ways to reach liberation. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Lord Krishna advises his disciple Arjuna by telling him about three paths which are also called *yoga*. *Yoga* is a way to live in the world and at the same time maintains inner peace or peace of mind, which is the ultimate goal of human life. Here I shall discuss about the *karma-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga* of *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

II. KARMA-YOGA

In the third Chapter of the *Gītā* Srikrishna has explained the *Karma-Yoga*. Hinduism accepts various paths to attain liberation and *Karma-Yoga* is one among them. The word '*Karma-Yoga*' consists of two words '*karma*' and '*yoga*'. The word *karma* is derived from the Sanskrit word '*kr*'. The meaning of the term '*kr*' is action or work or deed. That means, whatever has done or is doing, is action. In philosophy, the word '*karma*' is used in the sense 'law of *karma*' because it has a relation with its fruits. But the word *karma* in the *Gītā* is not used in this sense. *Gītā* says that there is no direct contact of fruits with action or *karma*. On the other hand, the connection of one subject with another subject or object is usually referred to by the word '*yoga*'. But in the Indian philosophy, the word '*yoga*' is used in a special sense. "*The term 'yoga' literally means 'union, yoke' "*¹ Some thinkers opine that the meaning of the word '*yoga*' is the connection between the *jīvātmā* and *paramātmā*. Another way it can be defined as adding the self intellect to the intellect of God. To give signs of the *yoga*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* said, "*Yogah karmasu kaushalam*" (2/50). That means, the strategy of action is *yoga*. But the important point is that, *Gītā* does not define *yoga* as skill in action but explains the equability in action. Skill of *karma* refers to *karma* in the scientific way. This is the biggest meaning of action. Being involved in any kind of work is *karma-Yoga*.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *karma* has been divided into two groups - *sakāma karma* and *niṣkāma karma*. The action that is performed on the basis of desire for fruit is called *sakāma karma*. The *jīva* who is bound by *māyā* performs *sakāma karma*. In other words, it can be said that those who perform *sakāma karma* are bound in bondage. This *karma* is not destroyed without giving fruit. To enjoy the fruit of this action, the *jīva* has to be born again and again. As a result, it is not possible to get liberation by performing of *sakāma karma*. On the other hand, the action that takes place without desire of fruits is called *niṣkāma karma*. *Niṣkāma karma* is the way of liberation because it is desireless. When the *sanchita karma* is destroyed by performing *niṣkāma karma*, then the *jīva* becomes free or liberated. That means, if *jīva* is not attached to the result of his actions, then he will gradually and ultimately free from the bondage of *karma*.

¹ Michael. C. Brannigan (2010), *Striking a Balance: A Primer in Traditional Asian Values*, Rowman & Littlefield, P.18

According to Vedic instructions, *pravṛtti mārga* and *nivṛtti mārga* are two paths for human activities. *Pravṛtti mārga* means sense enjoyment. The lower animals follow only *pravṛtti mārga*. There is no conception of *nivṛtti mārga* in the life of lower animals and demons. *Pravṛtti mārga* says that a person has the tendency for sense propitiation. According to the directions of the Vedic injunctions, *pravṛtti* prescribes to live amongst worldly duties and interests with the sense and action. But on the other hand, *nivṛtti mārga* is the path of turning back. It is the path of turning towards spiritual *cogitation*. Here we place God at the middle of our presence after fulfilling our homely and professional duties. When we think that our supreme goal of life is existence and enjoyment of the world, then we forget the supreme truth. In that case there is no end of our desires. We are constantly hungry and thirsty. No worldly pleasure can satisfy us forever. That is why we should observe the *nivṛtti mārga*. The *pravṛtti mārga* has the trend to engage us towards the world, but the *nivṛtti mārga* takes us upwards towards divine consciousness. *Nivṛtti mārga* is the *mārga* through which we can overcome *māyā*.

The standard of our daily life has been promoted in the *Gītā's karma-Yoga*. According to the *Gītā's karma-Yoga*, human life is working life. No action should be taken without judging. We have seen that at the beginning of the *karma-Yoga*, Arjuna asked to Srikrishna that if the way of knowledge is better than action, then why Srikrishna is going to engage Arjuna to fight? Arjuna was confused by the words of Srikrishna as sometimes Srikrishna has praised about the way of action and sometimes has praised about the way of knowledge.

In this regard, in the verse no. 5 of the third chapter of *Gītā* Srikrishna said that nobody can remain even for a single moment without any activity. Even if someone remains inactive physically, but his mind and intellect will always be active or performing action. Everyone is bound to act by the *gunas* of *prakṛiti*. Man is always under the influence of triple *gunas* - *sattva*, *raja* and *tama*. On the basis of three *gunas*, action is also different - unactivity based on *sāttvic* quality, activity based on *rājasic* quality and inactivity based on *tāmasic* quality. *Rājasic* and *tāmasic* actions bind a man with the material world. But *sāttvic* actions help a man to attain liberation.

In the verse no 13 of the fourth Chapter, Srikrishna said that the fourfold caste of our society was formulated by Srikrishna on the basis of differentiation of *guna* and *karma*. The four casts are - *brāhman*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *sudra*. On the basis of four castes the professions of people were divided as teaching, administration, business and labour. *Gītā* says that each class of people is essential for the well being of the society. This caste system is originally good, because it makes a perfect human society. But this principle later on came to be misinterpreted by some people of the society and they gave a totally wrong meaning of caste system based on the birth. Every human being has his own duty and he should think his duty is good for society. It is better to perform one's own duty and it is the right path for his development. Death is regarded as better than performance of other's duty. Actions against one's own *dharma* are called *paradharmā* which is danger. There is more happiness in doing one's own duty. So we should act on the basis of *svadharmā*.

Srikrishna advised to Arjuna to act without attachment and for the good of all. Here Srikrishna is talking to Arjuna about the importance of *niṣkāma karma*. Srikrishna encouraged Arjuna to fight for two reasons. Firstly, Srikrishna gave the example of king Janaka. Though Janaka achieved knowledge, yet he performed action always and achieved liberation. Thus, a person can achieve liberation through the path of *Karma-Yoga*. So, Srikrishna advised to Arjuna to follow the path of action. Secondly, to save the creation we should perform action.

III. JÑĀNA-YOGA

The fourth Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* deals with *Jñāna-Yoga*. It is also known as *Jñānamārga*. It is a great *mārga* by which we can obtain liberation. It is one of the unique spiritual paths in Hinduism. That is why many traditional philosophical schools advised or mentioned this *mārga* for liberation. I shall discuss here briefly *Gītā's Jñāna-Yoga*. I shall also explain here some problematic questions related with *Jñāna-Yoga*. These are: What does *Jñāna* mean? What is the purpose of *Jñāna-Yoga*? Is *Jñāna-Yoga* related with *karma*? If so, how? Will *jñāna* and *bhakti* lead to the same goal or *mokṣa*? Is it possible to mix *Jñāna* and *Karma*?

The term "*Jñāna*" is a Sanskrit word that means "knowledge". In *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 'knowledge' refers to spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge means the knowledge of the Self. It is totally different from sophisticated knowledge that we get by learning and observation. Self knowledge is inseparable from divine. *Jñāna-Yoga* gives emphasis on self realization.

There are two types of knowledge - lower knowledge and higher knowledge. Lower knowledge is the knowledge that helps us to realize sensual desires and through which we become selfish. This is our limited identity. By this knowledge we fall into bondage. Some traditional Indian schools called lower knowledge as *avidyā* or ignorance. On the other hand, the knowledge which helps us to overcome selfish desires, limited knowledge about physical world, egoism, illusion etc. is called higher knowledge. It is also called absolute knowledge or self knowledge. "Srikrishna said that *Jñāna* is the purest and a discovery of one's *Ātman*. Truly, there is nothing here as pure as knowledge. In time, he who is perfected in yoga finds that in his own *Ātman*."² *Bhagavad-Gītā* asserts that the sacrifice of knowledge is higher than the physical sacrifices. So *Jñāna-Yoga* is the means by which we can obtain our end. The traditional Indian philosopher Adi Shankara who belongs to Advaita philosophy gave importance on the *Jñāna-Yoga* for the knowledge of the *Braman*.

In the first verse of the fourth chapter of *Gītā* Srikrishna said that he had described this knowledge to *Vivasvan* and *Vivasvan* told it to *Manu* and *Manu* had described it to *Iksāvaku*. As Arjuna is the friend of Srikrishna, so Srikrishna is going to describe this yoga to Arjuna. Srikrishna declared that this yoga is the best. To remove the confusions from the mind of Arjuna, Srikrishna has described the theory of *Avatār*. Srikrishna said that like Arjuna he has passed many lives. As Arjuna is an ordinary people, so he is not aware about his previous lives. Srikrishna is well aware about his previous lives as he is the immortal soul and the Lord. Here Srikrishna described himself as *Avatar*. Srikrishna said, "Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) Myself."³ When tiredness arises in *dharma*, the Lord manifests Himself as *Avatar* to remove that tiredness. Srikrishna said, "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I born in every age."⁴

² Jeaneane D. Fowler (2012), *The Bhagavad Gītā: A Text and Commentary for Students*, Sussex Academic Press, P.89

³ S. Radhakrishnan, *The BhagavadGītā*, page no. 154

⁴ T. N. Sethumadhavan, *Srimad Bhagavad Gītā*, Published in *Esamskriti.com & Medhajournal.com*, Nagpur, September 2010.

Religion becomes polluted in two ways – external way and internal way. If the evil or rogue will increase in our society, then the honest person will be molested and as a result *adharmā* is established in our society. When the empire is tyrannical, the spiritual life of normal human being decreases and increases *adharmā* in the society, then Lord manifests Himself as *Avatār*. Srikrishna declares the main purposes of *Avatār* which are the following -

- a) Protection of the life of His devotee.
- b) Protection of the person who utilizes his life for the community.
- c) Protection of the human being who lives his life for truth and righteousness.
- d) Destruction of all kinds of evil-doers, wrong tendencies, unrighteousness, dishonest and greedy person and all kinds of crimes.
- e) Lastly, the purpose of *Avatār* is the establishment of *dharma* in our society. *Dharma* means the protection of society from wickedness, evil, unrighteousness and it has a power to lead a spiritual life.

Srikrishna said that men can worship Him in various ways and He also gratifies them in their own ways. He fulfills the desires of the persons who worship Him with the desires to achieve something. In this world we find various types of men. Their natures are different, their processes of worship are different and also their Gods are different. Some persons worship Him to achieve something. But there are persons who worship Him without any desire. The ways of worship may be knowledge or action or devotion. Some are monists and some are polytheists. That means, some persons worship only one God and some worship many Gods. Though there are various types of worship, yet the heart of the devotee should be pure at the time of devotion. Srikrishna said that among the various types of devotion, dispassionate devotion is the best.

The process of dispassionate devotion is very hard. Everybody can not follow this path. To follow this path continuous practice is necessary. Srikrishna said that He had divided people into four casts after determining their quality and action. Though he has created the fourfold order, yet he should be regarded as the non-doer, because he is unattached. The three *gunas* of nature are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These three *gunas* are responsible for the fourfold division of persons. Srikrishna said that though He performs action for the benefit of people, yet actions do not touch Him as His actions are dispassionate. So Lord Srikrishna advised to Arjuna to perform such type of action.

Srikrishna explained about the way of action to Arjuna and said that He always acts for the preservation of the people. He is never refrained from doing His work. It's hard to understand the theory of action. Even big scholars cannot understand the theory of action, because sometimes they may be obsessed with ignorance. Scholars have often been confused to determine *karma*, *akarma* and *vikarma*. In this context Srikrishna said in the verse no 18 of the fourth Chapter of *Gītā* that who sees the *karma* in *akarma* and *akarma* in *karma*, he is intelligent in human society and he is yogi and real scholastic person. To speak about the characteristics of a wise person, Srikrishna said that the person who has no desire and who is driven by knowledge is called a scholar (*pandit*). Such a person is detached with his work, is non-arrogant, self-satisfied, continent.

Srikrishna discussed the theory of knowledge in the 4th chapter of the Gita in the verses from 24 to 34. The following problems are explained here: What is knowledge (*Jñāna*)? What is the way to gain knowledge? What is the result of knowledge? What are the signs of knowledgeable person? These issues are described in these verses. In relation to the nature of knowledge, Srikrishna said to Arjuna that knowledge is like the flaming of fire. As the flaming fire burnt wood, in the same way, the fire of knowledge also burnt all actions.

Srikrishna said to Arjuna that knowledge helps a person to see himself all over the world. For knowledge, he realizes that his soul is a part of God. If the knowledge is gained, then desire vanishes and all the sins of the person are destroyed. There is nothing sacred like wisdom in the world. Not everyone can possess this knowledge. A passionate *yogi* and continent person is able to achieve the true knowledge of self. He gained absolute peace by seeing his soul in God. A wise person is also bound to do action, but his action is desireless. His action is called *niṣkāma karma*. In this regard Lord Srikrishna said that if we abstain ourselves from actions through *yoga*, then no action will bind us and all kinds of doubts will be removed by knowledge and the *jīva* will come to realize that the Self is not other than *ātman* or *Brahman*.

Here we find a mixture between the *karma-Yoga* and *Jñāna-yoga*. When a man works without attachment and all his doubts have been removed through *Jñāna*, then he realizes the knowledge of *Brahman* or *ātman*. Srikrishna thus advised Arjuna to remove all doubts from his heart. Lord also advised that as Arjuna is a kshatriya, so it is his svadharma to war to destroy the evil doers and to protect the good people. Srikrishna said all these words in last verse of this Chapter and here *Jñāna-yoga* has ended.

IV. BHAKTI-YOGA

Now, I am trying to discuss briefly *Gītā's Bhakti-Yoga*. Here we can mention some questions related to *Bhakti-Yoga*. What is the literal meaning of *Bhakti-Yoga*? How can we get salvation by following *Bhakti-Yoga*? Is *Bhakti-Yoga* relevant for us? *Bhakti-Yoga* is discussed in the 12th Chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The term '*Bhakti*' was derived from the Sanskrit root '*bhaj*' which means 'to divide'. It also means devotion. It is an attitude of devotion through which the worshiper tries to satisfy his God. *Bhakti* cannot be defined by language. It is a matter of feeling and realization. *Bhakti* is the devotion or universal love that picks up us or soars us and changes us forever. The barriers which we have built among us are destroyed by the *Bhakti-Yoga*. So, *Bhakti-Yoga* is one form of union or a way of expressing love or devotion for the supreme power or God.

A devotee realizes the feeling of oneness with one spirit. Everything in the world, both material and non material came from the supreme consciousness or spirit or God. Here a devotee dedicates his all work to God. *Bhakti* creates infinite love, divine love or universal love and destroys the sense of separateness, selfishness.

In religion "*Bhakti*" means 'worship to God'. The way of worship is called *bhaktimārga*. *Bhakti-Yoga* means the practice of devotion through which we can attain oneness with God. In spiritual sense, intense love for God is described as *bhakti*. In the Vedic sacrifices we find the concept '*bhakti*'. *Bhakti* is the person who offers to God and *bhakti* helps him to perform sacrifices. So *bhakti* may be regarded as the root of Vedic sacrifices. In the first verse of 12th Chapter of *Bhagavad-Gītā* Arjuna said that there are two types of devotees- some worship the personal God and some worship the impersonal God. Arjuna asked to Srikrishna that between the two groups which is the best?

There are basic differences between the devotion of the unmanifest and the devotion of the manifest. The devotion is called unmanifest if the devotee meditates on something which has no form or impersonal God or *Brahman*. On the other hand, if the devotee meditates on something which has a form or *Ishwara* or the personal God, then it is called manifest devotion. So Arjuna's question is: which is better between the devotion of the impersonal God and devotion of the personal God? In the next verse Srikrishna has shown that there is actually no difference between these two types of devotion or devotees.

Srikrishna specified three important characteristics of a perfect devotee in the 2nd verse of the 12th Chapter. True devotees fix their minds to the Lord, always worship the Lord and have strong faith about God. At first, a devotee should fix his mind on the Lord. The mind's activity is manifested through thought. Srikrishna also said that a devotee should worship Him as the omniscient or the Lord or Absolute truth. Lastly, a devotee should have supreme faith on Him.

Those whose mind is focused on un-imaginable, formless *Brahman*, they have to suffer more for achieving liberation than those who work for God. It is very difficult for the common people to become attentive to the formless *Brahman*. Those who surrender their all action to the Lord and worship Him as an absolute truth can easily achieve Him. Srikrishna said to Arjuna to fix his mind on Him. A person may attain Him if he fixed his mind upon Him. If a person cannot able to fix his mind by meditation, then he can reach Him by the practice of *yoga*. Again if the person is not able to practice *yoga*, then he can dedicate all his action to the Lord and surrender himself to the Lord. Srikrishna wants to say that renunciation of fruits of action is better than meditation, knowledge and practice.

In the verse no. 14 to 20 of this Chapter, Srikrishna described the characteristic of an actual devotee. The characteristics of an ideal devotee are the following: a devotee will love to all, his temperament will be friendly, he will be compassionate and non-arrogant, he will treat happiness and sorrow as equal. A true devotee will forgive everybody and he will be self-satisfied and will restrain his sense-organs. Fear and anxiety will not touch him. In the last verse of this Chapter, Srikrishna said that those devotee who trust Him and follow His advice with respect, are His favorite devotee.

By reviewing the verses from 13 to 19, we are looking that Srikrishna has described the characteristics of a true devotee. A devotee can receive the Lord if he follows the ways as prescribed by the Lord. A devotee becomes the dear of Srikrishna if he is able to achieve the qualities as described by the Lord. Here we can say, "Bhagavad Gītā focus on the ultimate truth of the individual self and its loving relationship with a personal God."⁵

V. CONCLUSION:

It is important to remember that according to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, there is no contradiction among *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga*. Srikrishna said to Arjun in *Gītā* that a wise person by his knowledge, a *Karma-Yogi* by his action and a *bhakta* by his devotion can attain liberation. They are complementary with each other. In the conclusion, I support the *karma-Yoga*, because it *makes* people turn to God in the last phase. A *karmayogi* takes profit and loss, win and defeat, happiness and sorrow as equal. Feeling unconditionally after leaving the result of the whole work and continuously do the work are the basic principles of action. It is our duty. Wise person is the man who works for the protection of the creation. Otherwise, immorality and adultery will increase and there will not remain the rule of law in the society. If Srikrishna acts, everyone will follow him. If Srikrishna does not act, then the ignorant people will leave their job and the balance of the world will vanish. Therefore, Lord always works for the protection of people. The wise people are the ideal of society. Every ignorant person should follow them. That is why; every person should motivate others to act according to knowledge. In every society, the best people set the standard of action and the common man follows that knowledge of soul or *ātman* and works for the good of the world.

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⁵ Edwin. F. Bryant (2017), *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teaching from the Bhagavad Gītā Purana*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.