

## VALUES EMBDDDED IN THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

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*Abstract: The Ethical philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā is centered on the assimilation of diverse values and it can provide a harmonized ethical view of life and hence it may be called Jīvangītā (song of life) which is proposed to be highlighted here. It rejects the extreme conditions of life. It does not accept the hedonistic attitude for the attainment of pleasure. The world of sense and sensibility is recognized by the Gītā. It brings harmony between reason and passion after solving the conflict (Srinivasachari, 1986: 34-35). In the Bhagavadgītā there is the harmonization of ascent and descent. It ascends to the transcendental from the empirical and descends from the absolute stage of realization of Supreme Self to the practical concerns of everyday life, which has some specific value of its own.*

It gives a synthetization of the values existing in spiritual excellence, mental efficiency and physical fitness. If someone wants to have spiritual excellence, he will have to depend on his mental efficiency and stability, which is again dependent on his physical fitness. All these have got some values, as they are 'valuable' for giving human pursuit. In order to keep the physical condition fit one will have to take food which is of *sāttvika* type. A particular quality of food generates a particular quality in an individual who takes it. In the *Gītā* it is advised to take *sāttvika*-food but not *rājasika* etc. as it associates an individual with life, energy, vigor, joy etc.<sup>1</sup> The *rājasika*-food, not being able to produce joy, etc., can produce only pain and grief. In the same way, the *tāmasa* are dearer to the ignorant persons in as much as they can produce inertia in them.<sup>2</sup> An individual enjoying the *sāttvika* food will have mental efficiency and stability. The main problem of the *gītā* is said to be how a diseased and disordered mind like that of Arjuna can be ordered through the development of moral health by supreme psycho-analyst like Krishna. It is urged that the disorder in the mind is due to the habitual repression of impulses from the outside and of the emotions of the mind. The accumulated and suppressed feeling shows itself in perspiration, palpitation, fear, grief etc. Krishna is said to cure the disease of Arjuna's mind by directing it to the attainment of the divine qualities (*daivī sampat*). The divine consciousness is then aroused and the mind is said to be cured. Arjuna in this position exclaims – *naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtirlabdha* (i.e. *my delusion is destroyed. I have now regained by memory*). (*Ibid*, 18/73)

From the above discussion it can be said that there should be harmony between physical fitness and mental tranquility for the attainment of spiritual bliss. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Ayuhsattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ/ rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthirā hr̥dyāḥ āharāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ// Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 17/8.

<sup>2</sup> *Katvamla - lavaṇātyuṣṇa - tīkṣṇa - rukṣa - vidāhinah / āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duhkha - śokāmāyāpradāh // Yātayāmam gatarasam pūti-paryuṣitaṅca yat / ucchiṣṭamapi cāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasapriyam //*, 17/9-10.

consumption of *sāttvika* food gives rise to the fitness of body after generating *sāttvaguna* in it which can provide one with mental stability. When an individual is possessed of *sāttvaguna*, he can have the awareness of *daivīsampat* existing in him, which induces him to do moral action. In the *Bhagavadgīta* sacrifice (*yajña*) which is included in the divine qualities is taken as the essence of ethical life. Without the sense of sacrifice an individual cannot think of serving others. In a society there can be harmony if each and every social being does not sacrifice for others. A real well being is possible if each and every social being finds some value in *achieving his own end* as well as *getting that of others*. Herein lies the question of sacrifice. The self is a social being and cannot sustain itself without social help.<sup>5,3</sup> In this way, it can be said that the world is a systematic unity in which there is no gap between self and society. All these are inter-connected. Sacrifice or *Yajña* is only a grateful offering made by the *Jīva* as the moral self to the universe for what it has received from it in its psycho-physical make up. It is a fact that one should perform duty to the ancestors (*pitryajña*), celestial world (*devayajña*), material world (*bhūtajajña*), society (*nṛyajña*) and preceptors, because each of them is essential for our existence. The practice of austerity is essential for bringing purification and perfection in an individual's thought (*mānas*), speech (*vāk*) and deed (*kārya*). After bringing perfection in thought, word and deed through austerity one can attain a balanced personality. "The perfection of body" implies "the practice of bodily purity, *ahimsa* regards for the holy men."<sup>4</sup> 'The perfection in speech' lies in speech which is polite and truthful (*satya* and *priya*).<sup>7,5</sup> The perfection in mind follows when there is the control of mind existing in freedom from anger, self-restraint and desire for social welfare.<sup>6</sup> If these values are assimilated, there will be a real perfection. The mind which becomes disciplined and well-balanced acquires an attitude of looking others as equal and hence he will feel for them. The moral self does not become the slave of desire, anger etc. but it attains moral autonomy (*jītmā*). An individual having such characteristics can construct a bridge between individualism and socialism.<sup>7</sup> An individual who is really a humanitarian is interested in social wellbeing. Because it is known to him that he cannot have his own well-being unless others are in peace. No man can attain peace if his neighbors are in distress. The materialists are not justified in the sense that they believe only in the physical well-being of all but not in spiritual well-being. Without the acceptance of spiritual values the work for the welfare and happiness

<sup>3</sup> *Yajño dānam tapaścaiva pāvanāni maṅṅīnaḥ*, 18/5.

<sup>4</sup> *Deva-dvija-guru-prājña-pūjanam śaucamārjavam/ brahmacaryamahimsā ca śārīram tapaḥ ucyate//* 17/14.

<sup>5</sup> *Anudvegakaram vākyam satyam priyahitaṅca yat/ svādhyāyābhyasanam caiva vānmāyām tapa ucyate//* 17/15.

<sup>6</sup> *Manah-prasādaḥ saumyatvam maunamātma-vinigrāhaḥ/ bhāva-samśuddhirityetat tapo mānasamucyate//*, 17/16.

<sup>7</sup> *Karmaṅaiva hi samsiddhimasthitā janakādayaḥ/ lokasamgrāhamevāpi sampāśyan kartumarhasi/ yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janaḥ/ sa yat pramāṅnam kurute lokastad-anuvartate//*, 3/20-21.

of people (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*) is not possible. It is possible only through enlightened self-love. Just as the harmony between physical well-being and spiritual well-being, the harmony between happiness of an individual as well as of others should be considered as essential. The happiness of others should be considered if the dignity of an individual is accepted. The justice can be done to others if such synthetization of values is done. Those who are engaged in doing welfare of others and of themselves are called the Dhārmikas. It has been stated in the Bhagavadgītā that self exists in all beings and all beings are in self (Sarvabhūtasṥam ātmānam sarvabhūtāni cātmani).<sup>8</sup> All the good qualities that are essential for the justice are originated from this notion of self. The qualities which make a man's life fruitful are called Sadguṇas (moral virtues). In the Mahābhārata it is stated that all these virtues are to be obtained for the development of complete harmony. The forgiveness (kṣamā), steadiness, non-violence, equality, truth, non-miserliness (akārpaṇya), shame (hrī) etc. are included in the Sadguṇas i.e. moral virtues. (*Mahābhārata*, Virāṭparva, 6/20) Due to the inclusion of akārpaṇya in the list it is said that, if somebody thinks of his own interest, this is due to his narrowness-called miserliness (kārpaṇya) which is not at all treated as a good quality. For, kārpaṇya indicates the lack of sacrifice (tyāga) in an individual. If sacrifice does not find room in a society, there will be conflict, malice, hatred, violence etc. leading to the society into astray. That is why; this selfishness or miserliness is described as a defect which counters the noble human nature (kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ). (*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, 2/7) The performance of sacrifice is the only way to prosper as pointed out by the Divine Teacher. A man can have all the desired objects through sacrifice, just as a man gets whatever he needs from a mythological cow (kāmadhuk). In this context the term "prosper" (prasaviddhvam) can be interpreted as both this-worldly and other-worldly prosperity. If we adhere to selfishness, we should be in a position when idleness may grasp us. That is why, it is the injunction of the Divine Teacher to forsake miserly attitude and idleness or inertia ("klaivyaṃ māsmā gamaḥ pārthaḥ") and enjoy the taste of broadness. (*Ibid*, 2/3) Moreover, one who enjoys something from others without giving them anything in return is a thief. ("... apradāyaibhyo yo bhūṅkte stena eva saḥ," because the said synthetization of values is not there.) (*Ibid*, 3/12)

The Divine Teacher's injunction to us is to do our business in a free and detached way without keeping fruit in view. We should not perform any work in which our personal motive alone is manifested. Each and every work performed without attachment is a sacrifice and hence a moral work. As war is the duty of a *kṣatriya* (warrior class), Arjuna should perform duty which is also described as a sacrifice in which war is the sacrificial fire and the warriors are the priests. In the light of the above argument it may be said that the duty of each and every social being should be taken as a sacrifice and hence he is treated as a priest of sacrifice if he performs duty being

<sup>8</sup> *Karmaṇaiva hi samsiddhimasthitā janakādayaḥ/ lokasamgrahamevāpi sampaśyan kartumarhasi/ yadyadācarati śreṣṥhastattadevetaro janaḥ/ sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokastad-anuvartate//*, 3/20-21.

detached from the result. If all men perform their duties in this way, they will get the result of their action automatically leading to this-worldly and other-worldly prosperity. If all social members prosper, they will have mutual cooperation, service, help, sympathy etc. which will lead us to the region of peace and harmony. Any type action performed out of lust or desire for having something in return for oneself will bind us, however good it may be. In this context the disinterested work will mean not a narrow desire, but the broader one. If I feel attachment for all, this is not vicious, but a virtuous one. If one feels attachment for his own 'good' but not of others, this is again vicious, but not a virtuous one. Work with the sense of detachment means work done out of broader attachment which is found only in the synthetization of values. The prescription of *niṣkāma karma* does not mean that all desires are to be eliminated. For Sri Krishna says – "In beings I am the desire not contrary to *Dharma* ('*Dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo*' *smi...*' 7/11)." The 'dissociation from desire' means dissociating himself from desire contrary to righteousness. All desires for the good of an individual and society are virtuous, if these do not conflict with the larger good of humanity. Moreover, Sri Krishna has made it clear that the aim of life is not to destroy desires but to regulate and control them judiciously (5/23).

From this it follows that a state of complete desirelessness is not possible to realize. Even if it were possible, it is doubtful if it will be desirable. Man cannot live without desire even for a day, as no activity is possible without the prompting of desire. An engineer who is required to construct a bridge will naturally desire to do a strong and handsome structure as economically and speedily as possible. How can anyone do his work properly unless he has aims, targets and plans? This shows that the goal of desirelessness is not taken literally. Among four human pursuits like *dharma*, *artha* etc. 'kāma' is also included. The *Gītā* recognizes the devotees who seek the fulfillment of their noble desires ('*arthārthī*', 7/16). Hence the word 'kāma' may be interpreted as 'prohibited desires' or 'self-full desires' which are to be eliminated. The entire creation is, in fact, a play of desires. The highest types of desires are there in which the ultimate aim is to serve themselves and society. Desires for self-improvement, for acquiring money, power etc. to serve mankind is virtuous while evil desires need to be got rid of. Hence, the synthesis of value is essential. In this way, we are going on assimilating values in the performance of our action which is found in every moral virtue. Why is non-injury (*ahimsā*) taken as value? The non-injury in the society is desirable by virtue of the fact that as a social being we want to live happily. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that our neighbors also want to live in the same way. As he does not want to hurt me, I do not want to hurt others. The good treatment which I get from others should be given back to them also. An individual can synthesize the values in his own life and society and will attain Divine nature after adhering to the Divine qualities like fearlessness (*abhayam*), charity (*dānam*), non-violence (*ahimsā*), renunciation (*tyāga*) etc. as said earlier. It is not true that only the saints can attain these values. One who attains these may be transformed to Divinity. This transformation to the Divinity is the attainment of the Divine qualities in an individual for being a perfect human being. One who lacks these qualities is *asūra*, a demon. One who possesses vulgarity or motivated

false values is a demon. A true human being must assimilate moral values. If a man cannot check his animal instincts, it is due to the fact that he has not assimilated the ethical values. These divine attributes which make us a real human being are the only means for discovering freedom. A person having these values becomes naturally calm and quiet and hence he is free from happiness and misery for the narrower reasons. To remain in this world after synthesizing values is a real freedom. Just as the string of a lyre can produce tune if it is connected with two poles, an individual should attain empirical and spiritual values, individual and universal value etc. This has to be kept in mind if someone wants to hear the Divine song. This theory is beautifully said in the Śloka of the Bhagavadgītā - “yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ/ tatra śrīrviḥayo bhūtirdhruvā nīrtirmama.” (*Ibid*, 18/78) i.e. where Krishna, the Lord of all yogis, remains and where Arjuna remains as wielder of his bows, there is beauty, victory prosperity and justice. In this context Kṛṣṇa Yogeśvaraḥ stands for knowledge and ‘pārthaḥ dhanurdhara’ stands for right attitude and action. The Bhagavadgītā concludes with the message that where knowledge joins right attitude and action, there remains wealth, glory, victory and justice. In this case also value existing in knowledge is conjoined with value associated with right conduct and attitude from which other values like justice etc. follow. Worldly happiness which is no less than spiritual bliss has got a prominent place in life. The goal set by the Gītā before mankind is not merely spiritual bliss but all round success and happiness. For the achievement of the goal the guidance through knowledge and the fighting or effort by the aspirant are necessary. If either of these two is absent, the ideal of the Gītā can never be implemented. It may be explained in a different way also. Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, the human and the Divine, stand together not as seers in the peaceful hermitage of meditation, but as fighter and holder of the reins in the clamorous field, in the midst of the hurtling shafts, in the chariot of battle. The Teacher of the Gītā is, therefore, not only the God in man who unveils Himself in the world of knowledge but the God in man who moves our whole world of action, by and for whom all our humanity exists and struggles and labors towards whom all human life travels and progresses. Hence a successful and happy life requires cooperation between Divine grace and work (Divinity as well as Puruṣakāra).

It is generally believed that men have free will as the possibility to act in accordance with a volition which is not determined by external causes. As a spiritual being a man is self-determined or free as he determines his own activity and thereby not determined by the external forces. But at the same time he is not absolutely free by virtue of the fact that he has got some limitations. In spite of this he can transcend even his limits into the means and materials of self-development and self-realization. Freedom is not indeterminism but self-determinism. The freedom of will may not be spoken of, but we should talk of freedom of the self. The denial of freedom overshadows the very foundation of morality. The agent’s will is always determined, not wholly by external forces, but his own character, and purposes that belongs to it. This is the foundation of morality. In the *Anūśāsana parva* of the *Mahābhārata* self-effort (*puruṣakāra*) and Divine will (*daiva*) are mentioned. It is said there that a man gets fruits of his actions, good or evil. Crops are produced when land and seeds combine.

Both are essential. Self-effort (*puruṣakāra*) can produce fruit in conjunction with the Divine will (*daiva*). *Puruṣakara* without being associated with *Daiva* cannot produce the desired fruit and *daiva* alone without *puruṣakāra* cannot achieve success. So when a man performs work by *puruṣakāra*, *Daiva* comes to his help, but *Daiva* alone cannot do anything. Therefore we need the need of the both. Both of them have their own parts to play. In the Mahābhārata the *Daiva* is compared to the land, sometimes to rain; and *Puruṣakāra* is to peasant's tilling land and sowing seeds. Indeed both are required to achieve a success. The *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa* also deals with the subject with the statement that our minds are endowed with creative power. In its creative activity the mind is absolutely free. We all attain to what we aspire after. In fact, our efforts guided by inspirations are the 'warp and woof' of our destiny. Thus we see that *Yogavaśiṣṭha* lays a great importance *puruṣakāra* (individual effort) and praises it in unequivocal manner. (Sarkar, 1999: 71-72) According to Ramakrishna, God has given some power to man. He said: "Is there anyone who has free will or anything like that? It is by God's will alone that everything has always happened and shall happen. Man understands it in the long run. When a cow is tied to a post with a long rope, it can stand at the distance of one cubit from the post or it can go up to the whole length of the rope according to its choice, so too it is with the free will of man. A man ties cow with an idea - 'Let her lie down, stand or move about as she likes within that area'. Similarly, God has given man some power. And he has also given him freedom to utilize it as he likes. That is why; man feels himself free. But the rope is fastening to the post. And mark this: If any one prays to Him in all humility, He may remove him to another place and tie him there, or He may lengthen the rope or even remove it completely from the neck."<sup>17</sup> (Jagadananda, 1990: 117) Such is the nature human freedom.

It may be argued that how an individual can synthesize the values if he has not freedom at all. In reply, the Divine Teacher has given a full freedom of choice to an individual. He has given a real picture of freedom as given above. In this text the synthetization of material value and spiritual value, Divinity and human effort, moral and economic value, even desire unopposed to morality (*dharmāvīruddho kāmaḥ*), sacrifice for the human (*nṛyajña*) and non-human world (*bhūta-yajña*) etc. have been shown for leading a peaceful and harmonious life in present day society. In the society each and every one is dependent on other from the morning to dusk and hence one should remain obliged to them. This sense of obligation goads him to do some service towards him in return and in this way reciprocal love and respect among all human beings becomes possible. If the sweepers or other persons doing some so called inferior work in the society go on strike, nobody can remain in the society, which makes us understand that all activities and the performers of such activities are to be taken as sacred. If it is realized then an individual being who is benefitted by their service must repay his indebtedness to them through service. This phenomenon is called "sacrifice to mankind" (*nṛ-yajña* or *nṛ-ṛṇa*). Human beings in the society are meant for themselves as well as others. If the cultivators do not till their land, if the shop-keepers close the shutters, others would not be able to survive in a society in spite of having sufficient money and property. In the same way it can be easily opined that without the active

cooperation of the animals and plants our environmental balance would be at stake. Environment is protected by both the worlds that are called *bhūta*-s and our indebtedness towards them is called *bhūta-ṛṇa*. Rabindranath Tagore has seriously felt the necessity of the plant and animal world for the protection of the earth. He feels that flowers get blossomed in the forest. But in order to enjoy the beauty of the flowers we need an enjoyer who is nothing but bird. Hence the birds should be taken back to the forest from the remote sky (“*Bane yadi phuṭlo kusum nei kena sei pākhī nei kena/ Kon sudūrer ākāś hate ānbo tare dāki/*”). If our indebtedness is not repaid to them, they must take revenge of the same leading to various natural disasters like earth-quakes, global warming, and tsunami etc. That is why; a time has come to protect them in the earth to save ourselves and hence various forestation programs, wild-life sanctuary, protection of wild-born property (*banaja-sampad*) etc. have been done very seriously by private and public sectors. In the *Bhagavadgītā* such indebtedness is called sacrifice or *yajña*, but not *ṛṇa*. But we believe that the indebtedness towards a particular community may be repaid only through sacrifice towards them. The term ‘*yajña*’ is to be taken in the sense of sacrifice. Whatever service is rendered to them from whom we are benefitted is a kind of sacrifice to them which is metaphorized as a *yajña*. In the same way, we can repay our indebted to our fore-fathers (called *pitṛ-yajña*) from whom we have come into being, to our seers (called *ṛṣi-yajña*) who are our lineage and deities (*deva-yajña*), the sources of our energy. In this way the Gītā asks us to repay personal and social our indebtedness to the concerned worlds.

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