

ARJUNA: THE DEFEATED HERO

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Abstract: The customary way of interpreting the dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad-Gīta is to consider it merely as an expression of the fear of the diffident Arjuna, who is depicted by almost all the commentators as being scared of fighting the battle, and Kṛṣṇa's ingenuous solution to it. This paper argues that this common way of looking at the conflict leaves the central theme of the debate unattained and unsolved. The debate can also be viewed as a statement of the confrontation between two ethics and two notions of the self. The claim is not that the customary interpretation is false, or that the present one is the only possible interpretation. It rather makes a much moderate claim that it is possible to give the text an alternative reading, which sheds some light on the nature of Indian ethics as such. It is long debated as to whether India had ever had an ethics. This paper claims to give some insight into the debate.

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA being the repository of the mainstream Indian ethics deserves special attention of anyone who is interested in the subject. It is debatable whether India had ever had an ethics, which, as it is ordinarily understood, is the study of the norms of conduct and their justification. It tries to discover, and sometimes invent, what is right and what is wrong, but always with some justification. Whether or not India had an ethics depends on what counts as an ethical justification. If mythological explanation together with testimony of reliable persons or revelation is to be counted as a valid source of justification, then India did have an ethics. Both in India and abroad ethics for several centuries derived its justification from religious and mythological sources. All religious texts have an ethics in this sense. What is written in the textbooks of Indian ethics are mostly a set of rules of human conduct. These rules are often collected from various law books like *Manusmṛhitā*, *Parāśrasmṛhitā*, etc. These texts provide us with some mythical story about genesis and also about the origin of these texts, which are claimed to be revelations to the ancient seers who percolated their wisdom, through their disciples, for the benefit of mankind. This provides us with a ground for following the norms stated in those texts. Once we accept this story of genesis, these norms become compelling for us, since these norms come directly from God, who created this universe with all its life-forms. So, it may be urged, the claim that Indian ethics does not provide justification in support of the norms prescribed in it, does not stand. But modern ethics after the enlightenment has never relied upon myths or revelation for justifying the theories proposed in it. Ethics, as construed in the contemporary

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Western thought, is a normative study of human conduct. It studies the righteousness and wrongness of human action and those of the norms guiding such conduct. But what is noticeable here is that the mere study of those conducts and the norms guiding them was never considered as ethics. It also requires some justification in support of those norms or the criterion (or criteria) validating those norms. In this sense it can be doubted whether India had ever had an ethics. This is not to claim that “ethics” cannot, or does not, have any other connotation. At the same time it must also be noted that this is one of the predominant, and philosophically interesting, senses of the term.

Taken in a wider sense, however, as the study of human conduct, India definitely had an ethics. The study of morality can be viewed from two different perspectives—first from the perspective of prescribing norms and providing justification for them, and second, from the perspective of describing the norms of the society we live in. The second perspective assumes that we live in a justice based society and, hence, we need not revise the norms of conduct prevalent in our society. The reason is that if justice is there, or if it has already been established in the society, then we need not set norms to establish or reestablish it, provided that a justice bases society is our goal. We bring about changes in, or seek to change, our social norms, where we find the existing norms to be deficient. On the other hand, if we confine the task of ethics just to describing the prevalent norms of the society and claim that there is no need to change those norms, we thereby assume that the existing norms can, at least potentially, establish justice. If description of norms of human conduct is to be considered as the task of ethics, then India did definitely have its ethics.

The traditional Indian society was considered to be a justice-based society, though the concept of justice was strikingly different from that advocated by the Western ethicists. Equality had never been a guiding principle of justice in India. Rather, the Indian ethics can be regarded as an ethics based on the principle of inequality. It holds that people situated differently due to their social and sexual identity deserve to be treated differently and have different ethical responsibility from the ethical perspective. It may not be as grotesque, as it appears to be, if we consider that in any hierarchical social order some people within the family have more ethical rights and higher responsibility than the other members. A naturalized form of ethics may confine itself to merely describing those norms.

The *Gītā* stands at the crossroad of Indian ethics. We find in the text many things that mark its difference from the ethical texts written earlier. Though the ethical implications of the philosophies of the *Upaniṣad*-s can be discerned by any serious scholar of the *Veda*-s, it is for the first time in the history of Indian ethics that we find in the *Gītā* a systematic attempt of justifying ethical claims on philosophical grounds. The *Gītā* raises the “why” question at the ethical sphere and tries to answer it in metaphysical terms. Thus ethics becomes supervenient on metaphysics. Second, the *Gītā* rebels against the earlier *Vedic* ritualism (*karmakāṇḍa*) and argues in support of the need for assimilating wisdom (*jñāna*), action (*karman*) and devotion (*bhakti*) for performing the right action. *Vedic* ritualism may be viewed as a sophisticated form of black-magic and has very little to do with ethics as the study of social conduct of human beings. It gives us only some imperatives for performing sacrifices (*yajña*-s),

which lead to some mundane gain (*abhyudaya*), like having more cattle, or some transcendental goal (*nihsreyasa*), viz. liberation. Such imperatives can hardly explain why a course of action is to be undertaken within a just society. Third, as against the consequentialist ethical practices of the *Vedic* cult it advocates deontologism, though at places we find verses, which indicate toward consequentialism. Kṛṣṇa urged, “O Conqueror of wealth (Arjuna) mere action is inferior to the practice of intelligence. Take recourse to intelligence. Those, who perform their action for the attainment of the desired goals, are weak (in character).”¹

The *Gītā* rightly points out that consequentialism advocates that our ethical practices should depend on our self-interest, and hence, it argues that it cannot be a proper guiding force for our ethical action. It also needs to be noted that personal liberty, which is considered to be one main objective of the entire Western ethics, had never been on the agenda for the Indian ethicist. Personal liberty in ethics and individualism in politics go hand in hand, one complimenting the other. The basic presupposition is that individuals living in societies have a separate existence conceptually prior to that of the society they live in. So, the domain of individual liberty is sacrosanct and should not be intervened by the society. The society reserves the right to interfere into one’s personal liberty only if the enjoyment of such so-called individual rights hinders others from enjoying their rights. Thus on this view the individuals are given supreme autonomy of will over and above the society. This supreme autonomy helps the individual develop her personality and also acts as an incentive towards the development of the society. Indian ethics, on the other hand, takes an organismic approach to the society and the individuals living in it. Just as the limbs of a person cannot be considered in isolation from the body the individual lives in and for the society. The individual can enjoy autonomy only within the restrictive and regulative norms of the society. These norms have been codified in the sacred law books, such as *Manusmṛti*. The purpose of a woman’s life, for example, is to help man attaining his mundane goal, like producing a male child to get the family lineage going. Since she lives for the society, she is morally obliged to perform her societal duty as a mother, or a wife. She has no right to decide what to do and what not to do. She enjoys freedom only to the extent to which she can decide when to do it or how to do it. Similarly, a man is obliged to perform the duties assigned to him on the basis of the caste he belongs to and the stage of his life he is going through. Everything, including his occupation, or the type of partner that he should take in his life, is thus predetermined to a great extent. He doesn’t have freedom to select his mate from any caste of his choice, though within the *suitable* caste he is free to select his bride, subject to the approval of his family. Neither is he free to choose his own calling.

The type of liberty and autonomy that was presupposed in modern Western ethics cannot be witnessed in Indian ethics, as moral agents have been ascribed only a limited autonomy in it. Autonomy and personal liberty are thought to be subservient to the social order in the Indian context. As we have already noted, the traditional Indian societies were guided by social norms later on codified by various law-makers

¹*Dureṇa hi avaraṁ karma buddhiyogāt dhanañjaya/
Buddhau śaraṇam anvichcha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ// Bhagavadgītā, 2/49.*

including Manu, Parāśara and Gautama. According to this approach, human beings can enjoy freedom to the extent to which the society ascribe it to them, and which has no discord with the social order. Indian ethics believes that rights and duties should depend on and be proportionate to one's station and social status. Individuals have the freedom of will and autonomy only in the restricted sense of enjoying one's rights and performing one's duties according to one's social position determined primarily by birth. This autonomy may be called as subservient autonomy as opposed to the supreme autonomy presupposed in the mainstream Western ethics. We shall see that the dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa raises the question of autonomy in a significant way.

Two types of duties are ascribed to individuals in Indian ethics—universal duties (*sāmānya dharma/sādhāraṇa dharma*) and particular duties (*viśeṣa dharma*). Absolute duties are those which are incumbent on the individual irrespective of his/her sex, birth and social status. Duties like nonviolence and truthfulness are supposed to be performed by everybody under all circumstances. Particular duties, on the other hand, depend on the position of the moral agent in the hierarchy of the social order depending on sex, birth and age of the moral agent. For example, the duty of a warrior is to protect the clan and to rule it. The rights and duties of a priest are to study and teach the *Veda*-s and to conduct and perform religious rites. It is noticeable that from the later Vedic era women had little autonomy, and consequently, had a very limited moral agency. The same is true about the other marginalized groups. The entire edifice of the hierarchy of duties (*dharma*-s) follows from scriptures in the Vedic tradition. No further justification is needed, since the scriptures are claimed to be incorrigible. Duties in this tradition have been defined as injunctions (of scriptures). Kṛṣṇa urged Arjuna to perform his duties. Now, which duty Kṛṣṇa was talking about? It is noticeable that Kṛṣṇa was asking Arjuna to perform his particular duty, i.e. his duty as a warrior, at the cost of not observing some of his specific duties, e.g. non-violence.

The *dharmaśāstra*-s contained very little or no discussion of normative ethics. They contained laws, including moral injunctions, governing all aspects of human life. The *Mahābhārata*, and the *Gītā* in particular, is perhaps the only major work where an explicit normative theory has been developed. The line of argumentation with the help of which the main doctrine has been justified in the *Gītā* is metaphysical in nature. However, an argument in support of the metaphysical basis on which the main line of argumentation depends is perspicuous in its absence in the text. We have to keep in mind that the *Mahābhārata* is an orthodox text. Anything that is supported by the *Veda*-s needs no further justification. The argumentative part of the *Gītā* is thus marked by the existence of different moral voices in the heterogeneous Indian society. Working within the bounds of the orthodox forms of life the *dharmaśāstra*-s presupposed that the existing societies to be more or less justice-based societies and are conducive to ethical good. We will argue that the *Gītā* is a major departure from this tradition.

The mainstream Western ethics presupposes a particular notion of the self. The entire ethical tradition of the West, as well as India, is parasitic upon the notion of the self. In the mainstream Western tradition moral agency is ascribed to an *autonomous*

and *detached* self, which can take independent decisions. By the expression 'independent decision' here we mean decisions that are not permeated by passions and are not influenced by the context in which it is taken. This moral agent is a pure form devoid of any content. No relation can move him, no emotion can touch him, and the flesh fails in its beastly endeavor of swallowing up its unambiguous rationality, which is so translucent that like a prism analyzing colors of a ray of light, it separates shades of virtues from those of vices of human conduct.

Here is a story, rather a thought experiment, of an *autombie* and a *senti*. They were not actual human beings, but looked like them. The *autombie* had a set of exclusive rules to guide its conduct. It was autonomous and unlike an ordinary zombie it was not controlled by any external agent, it was created by some external agent though. It had the *intention* of following rules and could report exactly its internal 'mental' states, including its intentions. The *senti* was a fleshy beast having no rules of conduct. Instinctive drive and gut feeling are the sole factors with the help of which it could assess a situation and decided a course of action. Both the *senti* and the *autombie* worked for a humanitarian organization as medical personnel in a war ravaged city of Afghanistan. The *autombie* had no facial expression of emotions. The *senti*, on the other hand, was full of emotions and that was expressed in its facial expression. The *autombie* used to distribute medicines among the patients of a local hospital and *senti* had the duty entrusted on it of doing beds of the patients. Both of them spent most of the money they earned on doing some good to the patients, like buying gifts for them. The *autombie* did it dispassionately, while the *senti* lacking reason did it by a gut feeling.

One elderly lady patient, Umbalica, loved both of them. The *senti*'s passionate eyes reminded her of her twenty-two year old daughter, whom she had lost along with her entire family in an air attack roughly one year back. Rather than resembling the aid providers, the *autombie*'s expressionless face and frigid movements resembled more closely with those of the inmates of the hospital. So, she could identify herself with the *autombie* more easily than with anyone else. She would wake up early in the morning and wait for them to come in the ward. The *autombie* was as punctual as was unerring about its duties. It would approach each bed, say, "Good morning!" wait for a reply, acknowledge it, pass the prescribed medicine on to the patient and then move on to the next bed. This entire act would roughly take two minutes for each bed. When the *autombie* is done with distributing medicines, it would return to its chamber. Umbalica often thought of asking the *autombie* about the incident that she thought had turned it into a piece of stone. The *senti* was often late at attending patients. It would spend some time at each bed, talk to them, take care of their individual needs, and then move on to the next bed. Soon it developed a personal relationship with each of them.

The day was exactly one year after Umbalica lost her family and she was extremely depressed. In the morning the *autombie* came to her bed, looked at her, checked her temperature and, as usual, moved on to the next bed after administering the prescribed medicine. Umbalica's helpless eyes had no effect on it, and it couldn't understand her mental condition. Nor it was required to understand that, as it was not a psychiatrist. A little later the *senti* came to her. It looked into her eyes intensely.

With its gut sense it could gauge the turmoil that was going on in her mind. It said nothing, just sat beside her holding her hand. Umbalica asked the senti if it were being late in attending other patients and reminded that it might be scolded by the ward mistress afterwards. The senti politely replied, 'Heavens will not fall if I attend other patients a little later. I want to spend some time with you now. Besides, I'm quite used to her scolding. You don't have to be bothered about that. I can manage such situations.'

It is quite clear from the story that the autombie was more dutiful than the senti and followed the principle of equality religiously. But the question still remains who was a better creature from the moral perspective?

Every moral agent has in herself an *autombie* and a fleshy beast. Depending on their respective theories of the self Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa assessed the war situation differently.

The *Gītā* deviates to a great extent from the mainstream Indian ethics in that it clearly propagates a theory of a detached self in support of the ethical doctrines advocated in it. The self in its pure form, as has been claimed, is devoid of all relations and is not permeated by passions and relations that infuse the mundane existence. Detachment of the self from its *other* has been proposed for the ascetic in the Indian ethics right from the days of the *Upanisad*-s. Perhaps, it was for the first time in the *Gītā* that it was proposed for the ordinary human beings as well. Kṛṣṇa urged in the *Gītā*,

*Vāsāmsi jīrnāni yathā vihāya navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāṇi/
Tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrnānyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī//2/22//*

Just as human beings change worn-out cloths and put on others that are new, the soul changes its abode and takes a new one after the former gets old. It can better be explained with the allegory of a snake casting off its skin. The relation between the self and the body is similar to that of a snake and its slough, the only difference being unlike the serpent the self is not perishable.

*Nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ/
Na chainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ// (Bhagavadgītā, 2/23)*

Swords cannot shred it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot drench it, nor can wind make it dry.

At the beginning of the first day's battle seeing his friends and relative Arjuna, on the other hand, stated his predicament in the following verses:

*Dr̥ṣṭvemaṁ svajānaṁ yuytsaṁ samupasthitam /
Sīdanti mama gātrāṇī mukhaṅca pariśuṣyati//1/28/
Vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jayate/
Gāṅḍīva sraṁsate hastat tvak chaiva paridahyate//1/29/*

“When I see my own people arrayed and eager for fight... [m]y limbs quail, my mouth goes dry, my body shakes and my hair stands on end.”²

Kṛṣṇa interpreted Arjuna’s predicament as the latter’s fear of fighting the battle. But if the arguments that would be presented in this paper were sound, then the attempt of discarding his arguments as frivolous would be besieged by doubt.

Arjuna raised a few serious questions with regard to Hindu ethics. He could see no mundane good, as attaining pleasure, in killing his rivals, who happened to be *his near and dear ones*. He tried to convince that (even on the injunctions of the sacred text) killing an assassin would still invite sin on part of the retaliator. Apparently, he doubted the acceptability of a retributive theory of punishment, one of the principal theoretical bases of a just war. He wondered whether an-eye-for-an-eye mode of punishment could bring about justice and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. This appears to be a serious question, which cannot possibly be answered simply by referring to the testimonial evidences that goes against it. Two reasons can be cited for this claim. First, Arjuna’s position is also supported by textual evidence. As in *Udyogaparva*, 38, 73, 74 of the *Mahābhārata*, it is said, “conquer anger by non-anger, conquer dishonesty by honesty, conquer a miser by gifts; conquer falsehood with truth.”³ Arjuna, however, didn’t give any testimonial evidence in support of his claim. One reason why he didn’t quote any text in his support was probably that he knew that an equal number of textual evidences might be cited against his argument. And the stronger reason was that it was the very same texts whose authority he was trying to challenge by his arguments. Quoting those very texts whose authority he was challenging might have made his position more vulnerable to adverse criticism. He made two points clear in his argument. First, he did not endorse the theoretical basis of a just war and second, he thought that moral prescriptions arising out of a concept of a related self would be markedly different from those based on the concept of an unrelated self. It was for the first time in his life that he got the insight that the concept of an unrelated self is a chimera, which led one nowhere, neither to his earthly wellbeing nor to any ethical good. He used the expression “my own people” (*svajanam*) four times in the first chapter of the *Gītā*. His arguments started at verse 28 of the first chapter of the text, where he reported that seeing his own people in the opposite side his body ached, and his mouth went dry. This first expression was a sudden outburst of emotion. Kṛṣṇa, who was a staunch supporter of the reason/emotion binary, developed his main line of argument on this statement.

Seeing his beloved and respected ones on the opposite side Arjuna became full of compassion and said, “my mind is reeling [from the path of the received knowledge of right and wrong]. I see the act of killing my own people to be the causes of producing results that are detrimental to good and righteousness. Nor do I see anything ethically desirable (*śreyo*) can be produced by killing my own people.”

²Radhakrishnan, S., *The Bhagavadgita*, HarperCollins Publishers India, New Delhi, 2004, p. 89.

³*Akrodhena jayet krodham, asādhuṃ sādhuṃ jayet/
Jayet kadaryam dānena, jayet satyena cānṛtam// Udyogaparva, 38, 73, Mahābhārata.*

Nowhere in the *Gītā* was it said that Arjuna was afraid of fighting the battle because of his own life. He was rather worried for the lives of his friends and relatives. Instead of seeing this emotion as a virtue of his character Kṛṣṇa considered it to be a weakness, which would lead Arjuna to the hell at the end. He (Kṛṣṇa), rather, endorsed the path of persuasion. He himself was convinced at the fairness of the ensuing war and was not open to any argument whatsoever. He wondered how Arjuna, who was an Aryan, could be so emotional like a non-Aryan. He instigated the latter to fight by saying that leaving the battle would cause him vice. Leaving the battle by a warrior is supposed to be a vice for the *kṣatriya* in all *Dharmaśāstra*-s. Kṛṣṇa was, perhaps, referring to that. This, however, couldn't solve Arjuna's worries. For one is not supposed to refute an adverse criticism with the help of the theses under scrutiny or by referring to the texts whose validity is the point at issue. Such solutions are considered to be suffering from the fallacy of being question-begging (*sādhyasama-doṣa*). We would see that the main strategy of the philosophy of the *Gītā* is that of persuasion rather than argumentation. The text is a gem of the art of persuasion and a literary work of equal merit.

Arjuna's view appears to be more congruent with the mainstream Indian approach to ethics. The Indian ethicists never took the ethical agent in isolation in judging her conduct. Arguably, situatedness runs through the entire Indian philosophy. It is for the first time in the history of *Dharmaśāstra*-s that the *Gītā* advocates detachment for a non-ascetic, a move that made Arjuna all the more perplexed. The *Dharmaśāstra*-s, a group of texts to which the *Gītā* belongs, clearly give us the impression that when it comes to the relation between the individual and the society, they clearly side with the latter. There is no scope for individualism and deontologism. Individual life, as we have already pointed out at the outset, is meant for and is directed towards the betterment of the society. The teleological or consequentialist underpinning of the prevalent views can easily be discerned in the texts. The ethical merit or demerit of an act depends on its conduciveness to the societal goal. No act can be considered to be ethically good by itself. Righteousness of an act depends on the end that it is directed to or the goal it seeks to attain. The *Gītā*, on the other hand, maintains that the ethical merit of an action is intrinsic to it. This, in turn, is justified by divine origin of the duties promoting those acts. Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna to follow the path of action (*karma*) done not for attaining any personal goal. Arjuna's arguments bring forth the inbuilt contradiction in Indian ethics—absolute autonomy of the self and its situatedness cannot go together. The poverty of the main line of argument of the text lays bare in the inarticulate questions raised by mumbling Arjuna.

However, this was a later revelation in the story. When Arjuna presented his arguments, he seemed to have no idea as to what Kṛṣṇa had in his mind and what type of theory of ethics he was going to uphold to refute the former's arguments. So, it would be ludicrous to claim that Arjuna was refuting deontologism, though his arguments went against it. His arguments rather stemmed from the mainstream Indian approach to ethics.

Arjuna further urged that he couldn't be happy killing his friends and relatives. It is noticeable that though he argued in favor of avoiding homicide in war, yet his

emphasis was clearly on not killing his own people, his near and dear ones. He further wondered how he could be happy in life by killing his own people.⁴ Apparently, he found no reason for fighting the battle, other than personal greed for enjoying the kingdom. This first argument can be understood better from a theoretical perspective of a conflict of ethics of a related and caring self with the ethics of a pure detached self. Most of the arguments that he presented subsequently stemmed from his practical concern, vis-à-vis moral concern, for the society he lived in. He was concerned about the extinction of family decent and was also worried about the treachery to his friends involved in the imminent war. He further mentioned that by destroying the families he would be destroying the traditional values maintained and nurtured through the family system and that destruction of those values would result in a surge of immorality into the society (*Bhagavadgītā*, 1/40-41).

Apparently, the last one is a moral argument, as Arjuna was arguing that fighting the battle would cause in a total rout of morality from the society. How far the arguments provided by Arjuna were moral in nature is an issue of constant debate. Commentators like Shri Girindra Shekhar Basu take much pain to show that none of Arjuna's arguments were moral in nature.⁵ He further claims that the arguments that Arjuna provided were solely a way of self-deception on the part of Arjuna, who either wedged the war due to personal greed without ever contemplating upon its consequences, or got anguished at the thought that he would have to kill his beloved ones. Arjuna repeatedly used the words "dharma" and "adharma" while in his arguments. Basu opines⁶ that these terms stand for social good and social evil respectively and do not have any moral connotation. I don't see why this should be so, while Arjuna repeatedly used the terms like "dharma," "adharma," "śreyo" and "pāpa" in his arguments. It is true that the terms "dharma," and "adharma," are often used, in Sanskrit, to respectively stand for a social duty or that, which leads to social good and a social obligation for refraining from doing something that leads to social evil. However, the terms "śreyo" and "pāpa" do hardly have any such social connotation. Furthermore, at the end of his argument Arjuna urged, "...I'm confused about what is morally good (*dharma-saṁmuḍha-cetā*)...guide me" (*Bhagavadgītā*, 2/11). If we interpret 'dharma' in this statement as social good or social duty, then we would have to claim that Kṛṣṇa's advices, at best, contained nothing that pertained to morality, or at worst, were totally irrelevant. The first alternative does not seem to be acceptable to any orthodox Hindu, who thinks his moral life draws heavily on the teaching of the *Gītā*. A charitable reading of the text must grant at least as much to Kṛṣṇa as to admit that his speeches contained something pertaining to morality. The second alternative is equally unacceptable. It is hard to believe that Kṛṣṇa, whose self-proclaimed omniscience was virtually endorsed by Arjuna, did not have a sense of relevance. If the latter did not put any moral question to him, and yet he started preaching Arjuna morality while in a battlefield, then surely he lacked a sense of relevance. Basu, however, does not address this issue.

⁴*Swanjanam hi katham hatvā sukhinah syān mādhave!* *Bhagavadgītā*, 1/39.

⁵Basu, Shri Girindra Shekhar, *Bhagavadgītā*, p. 27.

⁶*Ibid.*

It may be argued that though such words as “*śreyo*” and “*pāpa*” do not have any direct social connotation, yet they imply some social aspect of human life, since all aspects, including the moral aspects, of human life are ultimately related with the society such beings live in. Having said this, the objector has already distracted from her main contention that Arjuna’s arguments did not have any moral dimension. Besides, rather than refuting the thesis of the present paper, in a way it supports one of the claims made in this paper, that is, the Hindu ethics was developed the backdrop of the *unquestionable* presupposition that the traditional Hindu society as described in the sacred texts is a (morally) *just* society.⁷

The main stake of Arjuna’s argument was that fighting the battle would result into the destruction of the existing social order. This and several other similar instances in the *Gītā* can be cited in support of the hypothesis mentioned above. Arjuna further mentioned that the annihilation of the societal values would make the women of the society corrupt, which in its turn, would result in a hybridization of the castes of that highly stratified society. He mentioned that such acts, as wedging a war, would have a cumulative effect on the society destroying the traditional values and the societal order by producing mixed castes, resulting in a total rout of the practice of performing sacrifices for one’s ancestors. These things would suffice to lead an individual to hell.

If we consider Kṛṣṇa’s speeches that he delivered for Arjuna, after the latter submitted to him, as a disciple submits to an Indian seer, or a devotee submits to her *guru*, we will find that the former endorsed the path of persuasion rather than argumentation. As soon as Arjuna submitted to him, accepted him as his *guru* and sought his advice,⁸ he started rebuking Arjuna, calling him a pedantic. Kṛṣṇa’s initial reaction to Arjuna’s predicament had two reasons in its favour. First, he didn’t consider these people deserved any pity. Secondly, Arjuna was reminded that wise men wouldn’t think like him—the wise would not lament for those who were living, nor would he lament for those who passed away (*Bhagavadgītā*, 2/11). Arjuna was also rebuked for having compassion, for those who didn’t deserve it (Ibid) The second was a more general objection than the first one. Not only had these people, who, according to Kṛṣṇa, had chosen the path of vice (*adharmā*), deserved no compassion, but nobody in general deserved to have compassion of others. For, life and death of a person were supposed to be predetermined in accordance with the law of *karma*. Kṛṣṇa’s persuasive mood becomes all the more clear if we consider that earlier he reprimanded Arjuna for the latter’s “unmanliness” (*klaibyam*) caused by his emotions that were characteristic only of the non-Aryans. Kṛṣṇa contended that such petty

⁷The two crucial terms in this statement are ‘unquestionable’ and ‘just.’ I won’t say anything about the former. I think B. R. Ambedkar has said enough on the unquestionable nature of Hindu sacred texts. (See B. R. Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*, Chapter XXI, many editions). The presupposition that such a society is a justice-based society can be easily discerned throughout what is called Hindu ethics from the fact that any action that seemed to be in discord with its norms established by the sacred texts were considered to be immoral.

⁸ *Yacchreyaḥ syānniścitaṁ brūhi tanme śisyaste’haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam/ Bhagavadgītā*, 2/7.

emotions didn't suit Arjuna, who was rather known for his ability of inflicting pain upon his enemies. Kṛṣṇa even presented arguments, the validity of which he himself didn't accept. Kṛṣṇa argued that Arjuna's emotions would not lead him to heaven. This has a strong flavour of consequentialism, which goes against the basic contention of the *Gītā*. If we follow Kṛṣṇa's main line of argumentation, then we readily see that he left no stones unturned for rejecting consequentialism in favour of deontologism. This shows that he had only one agendum in mind, that is, instigating Arjuna into fight.

The general philosophical stance that the *Gītā* takes is that of deontologism. Kṛṣṇa's severe criticism of the consequentialism underlying the *Vadic* ritualism shows his allegiance to deontologism. But while refuting Arjuna's arguments he relied on consequentialism on several occasions. For, he had to convince Arjuna by hook or by crook. The jargon of consequentialism was known to Arjuna. So, Kṛṣṇa found it easier to convince Arjuna in terms of that jargon. Kṛṣṇa claimed that he was God and that if a person would think about him at the time of his death, since his mind would always concentrate on God, he would become identical with him [God] (*Bhagavadgītā*, 8/6). Arjuna was, therefore, asked to always remember him, and fight the battle (*Bhagavadgītā*, 8/7). Kṛṣṇa realized that Arjuna was enjoying his long metaphysical speech (*Bhagavadgītā*, 10/1) even though they were in a battlefield. He, however, was not sure whether Arjuna was convinced by it. He left no stones unturned to persuade Arjuna in the war. Finally, he made an emotional appeal, 'If [after listening to all that I have said] you are still unable to follow them, then at least do it for my sake; you will get success.'⁹ However, apart from its emotional appeal, this statement has a devotional aspect, which lies beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is pertinent for the present purpose is that in order to bring home his point, Kṛṣṇa relied on consequentialism in this instance as well.

In Chapter IX Kṛṣṇa described a cosmology, according to which everything that happens or exists in this world, was caused by him. He (Kṛṣṇa) is the root cause of what there is. However, his premises were not supported by arguments. Neither were they supposed to depend on any argument. He relied upon persuasion rather than argumentation, as he knew it well that persuasion was often more effective than argumentation. But Arjuna had to be persuaded, since he had already accepted Kṛṣṇa as his mentor and had surrendered to the latter unconditionally. In Chapter X Arjuna accepted everything that Kṛṣṇa said so far.¹⁰ In the light of this complete submission of Arjuna Kṛṣṇa made the appeal mentioned above.

What the present argument shows is that Kṛṣṇa's long speeches had great persuasive force, which could take the bereaved Arjuna under its spell, though the arguments that he provided missed out Arjuna's main contention, i.e. a sense of care arising out of the concept of a related self. The ethics of the *Gītā* starts where reason submits to persuasion, indoctrination supersedes ratiocination, personal liberty subsumes under social wellbeing following the parameters set by the sacred texts and

⁹*Abhyāse'pysamartho'si matkarmaparamo bhava/ Madarthamapi karmāṇi kurvan siddhimavāpsyasi// Bhagavadgītā*, 12/10.

¹⁰*Sarvam etad ṛtam manye yanmām vadasi keśava/ Bhagavadgītā*, 10/14.

customs including scriptural injunctions act as the sole guiding force of the individual life. It is perfectly in accordance with the mainstream classical Indian ethics, for which human life has a purpose to serve in the design of things and is subsumed under the social order. The type of autonomy of thought that was exemplified in “Arjuna-Visāda-Yoga” has no scope in Hindu ethics, since Hindu ethics is a *Prasthāna-Mīmāṃsā*, a mode of discourse with prior commitment.

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