

THE THEORY OF KARMA AS DEPICTED IN THE BHAGAVADGITA

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ABSTRACT

The Bhagavadgītā, a sacred text of ancient Indian philosophy, expounds upon the profound concept of karma, which is central to understanding human actions, their consequences, and the path to spiritual liberation. This research article aims to delve into the nuanced understanding of karma as presented in the Bhagavadgītā, exploring its significance, implications, and philosophical underpinnings. The study begins by providing a comprehensive overview of the Bhagavadgītā, highlighting its historical and cultural context. It elucidates the fundamental concept of karma, which is the rule of reason and outcome governing the universe, asserting that each action, thought, and intention has consequences that reverberate through time. Moreover, it considers the difficult association between karma and dharma, emphasizing the importance of righteous actions in one's pursuit of spiritual growth. Furthermore, the article delves into the multifaceted dimensions of karma as depicted in the Bhagavadgītā. It explores the concepts of sāttvika, rājasika, and tāmasika karma, elucidating how actions driven by purity, passion, or ignorance respectively shape an individual's destiny and spiritual progress. The interplay between individual effort and the role of divine will, as illustrated through the doctrine of niṣkāma karma (selfless action), is also examined in depth. In addition, the research examines the transformative potential of understanding karma in the Bhagavadgītā. It discusses how a profound comprehension of karma can inspire individuals to cultivate self-awareness, responsibility, and ethical conduct. The article also highlights the role of introspection, detachment, and surrender in navigating the complexities of karma and fostering personal growth. Finally, the study concludes with a synthesis of the findings, emphasizing the enduring relevance and universal applicability of the concept of karma in the Bhagavadgītā. It underscores the significance of karma as a guiding principle for individuals seeking moral clarity, spiritual evolution, and harmonious coexistence. In summary, this research article offers a comprehensive exploration of the concept of karma in the Bhagavadgītā, shedding light on its philosophical depth, ethical implications, and transformative potential. By delving into the intricate relationship between actions, consequences, and spiritual growth, it provides valuable insights for scholars, philosophers, and individuals interested in understanding and applying the principles of karma in their lives.

Keywords: Bhagavadgītā, Karma, Cause and effect, Dharma, Sāttvika karma, Rājasika karma, Tāmasik karma, Niṣkāma karma, Selfless action, Spiritual growth, Detachment.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Karma' comes from the root 'Kṛ' and means 'doing', 'affairs' or 'activity'; and that same ordinary meaning is intended in the Bhagavadgītā. 'Karma' as used in the clarification made in the Bhagavadgītā must not be taken in the restricted meaning of actions approved by the

śrutis or the smṛtis, but in a more inclusive meaning. In short all the actions which a man performs, e.g. eating, drinking, playing, sitting, rising, residing breathing, smiling, weeping, seeing, speaking, hearing, walking, giving, taking, sleeping, killing, fishing, meditating or contemplating, impressive or objecting, giving acting sacrificial ceremonial, agriculture or commerce, designing, deciding, keeping quiet etc. are all included in the word 'Karma' as used in the Bhagavadgītā, whether those actions are bodily (kāyika) or vocal (vācika) or mental (mānasika)¹

In short, even the outstanding alive or the dying of the body itself, are actions, and as occasion arises, it becomes necessary to consider which of the two actions or 'remaining alive' or 'dying' is to be chosen. When this thought arises, the word 'Karma' (Action) can also be understood in the sense of duty (kartavya) or proper action (vihita-karma).² We have so far considered the actions of human beings. Going beyond this, the word 'Karma' is also functional to the activities of the movable and permanent world, that is to say, even of life less things. But this will be dealt with in the succeeding section on cause and effect (karma -vipāka prakriyā).

The Bhagavadgītā introduces itself as a treatise on Karmayoga or the path of action. The author of the Bhagavadgītā insists that, "Though both, renunciation (sanyāsa) and Karma (karmayoga), lead to one's welfare of the two Karma is better. Actions are unavoidable, however one may try, and one cannot refrain from performance the physical functions while living. Prakṛti itself leads him to actions. So the Bhagavadgītā teaches us as to how Karmas should be done. So that they may not prove binding and come in the way of salvation. Salvation is to be achieved not by restraining oneself from the performance of all actions through the abolition of desires, but by sublimating the desires and performing actions in an objective manner as one's duty."³ The central theme of the Bhagavadgītā, abridged in one verse sung by the Lord, viz. "In work be thin office, in their fruits must it never be. Be not moved by the fruits of works; but let not attachment to wordlessness dwell in thee."⁴

The definition of Karma in the eighth chapter of the Bhagavadgītā itself, as the action, whereby the variegated universe, such as, the five primeval foundations etc. come into survival out of the permanent parambrahman is known as 'Karma'. Karma has been used here in the comprehensive meaning of activity or action-whether it is performed by a human being or by the other objects in the world, or it is the activity comprised in the cosmos itself coming into existence. But whatever action is taken, its result always is that one name and form is changed, and another comes the fundamental material, which is covered by the name and form, never changes and always remains the same. For instance, by the action of weaving, the name 'thread' disappears, and the same substance gets instead the name of 'cloth' and by the action of a potter, the name 'pot' takes the place of the name 'earth'. Therefore in defining Māyā, Karma or action is sometimes not mentioned at all, and only name and form are included in Māyā. Yet when one has to consider Karma by itself, one has to say that the form of Karma is the same as the form of Māyā. Therefore, it is more suitable to make it clear in the very beginning Māyā, names and Forms, and Karma is essentially the same in nature. One can, it is true, and make the subtle distinction that Māyā is the common word, and its look has the specific name of names and forms, and its activity, the specific name of Karma. But as usually it is not necessary to make this distinction, these three words are very often used synonymously.

In the 3rd chapter of the Bhagavadgītā such as “karma brahmobhavam viddhi.”⁵ i.e. karma is created out of the Brahman or “yajñah karmasamudbhavam.”⁶ i.e. 'even the yajña springs out of Karma or “sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvāḥ”.⁷ i.e. the Brahmadeva created prajāḥ (sṛṣṭi) and yajña (karma) at the same time' mean that 'Karma' or yajña in the form of Karma, and the sṛṣṭi, that is prajāḥ (the formation) all came into existence at the same time.

“The effects of karma are unfathomable.”⁸ But even the persistence of karma is very difficult to get rid of. Nobody has got rid of Karma. The wind blows by Karma. The sun and the moon move on version of Karma, and Brahmā. Viṣṇu Śūnkara and other Gods also are all tied in Karma. All the more Indra and others. Qualified (Saguṇa) means defined by name and form means Karma or the result of Karma. In as much as it is not possible to say how Karma, in the shape of Māyā, first came into existence, it is also not possible to say when man first got involved in the cycle of Karma. But once he has got into that cycle, however, he may have got into it, he cannot later on, that is, after his named and formed body has been destroyed, escape taking up different forms in this world as a result of his actions. Because as material scientists have definitely established, the energy of Karma is never destroyed and that energy which appears today less than one name and form, reappears under another name and form when the former name and form has been ruined.

According to Bhagavadgītā, one should every time perform ones allotted duties without affection or aversion and any desire for enjoying their fruits.⁹ Being engrossed in worldly pursuits, a person is afflicted by the events of the world. But having attained the true knowledge of the self, a person's attachment to worldly objects is destroyed. Freedom from desire leads him to the attainment of equanimity of mind. Hence he is not overjoyed on attaining something good nor dejected when something evil comes,¹⁰ He casts off his likes or dislikes.¹¹ Gain or loss makes no difference to him.¹² He is in different to honour and dishonour.¹³ He thus remains no more a creature of conditions. Such a person is therefore known as dvandātita.¹⁴

The Bhagavadgītā teaches us that we cannot remain without work even for a moment. We are so constituted that we cannot but perform duties we are dependently driven to actions by our nature born qualities.¹⁵ Even breathing which is so essential for preserving our life is a kind of action and hence we are to perform our duties. It is further said that the actions are the causes of bondage. The Bhagavadgītā gives us the way by following which we can get rid of the bondage even though we perform our allotted duties. Duties performed without any hope of reward or fruits cannot bind us. So the Bhagavadgītā teaches us to perform duties without caring for the results it may yield. In other words the Bhagavadgītā teaches us to perform our duties with a total disregard to their consequences. This kind of activity is known as objective duties (Niṣkāma Karma). The Bhagavadgītā thus teaches us of the ideal of unbiased duties.

Karma as Conception:

In the Bhagavadgītā, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa, “kim karma puruṣottama?”¹⁶ That means Arjuna addressed Kṛṣṇa as Puruṣottama and asks what is karma? In answer to Arjuna's question, Kṛṣṇa says “bhūta-bhāvodbhava-karo visargaḥ karma-samjñitaḥ”¹⁷ That means karma is the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence. Karma is the creative impulse out of which life's forms issue.

Karma as Actions:

Karma means performance of actions. In the Bhagavadgītā there are mentioned three kinds of works which are to be performed- (a) sacrifice, (b) gift and (c) penance.¹⁸

(a) Sacrifice:

In the Bhagavadgītā sacrifice is described as the only duty to be done by an individual. However the word sacrifice carries a wider meaning in the Bhagavadgītā. It refers to both internal and external offering. External sacrifice refers to the rituals to be performed as stated in the Vedas. And internal sacrifice is described in the figurative sense, which means to restrain our sense organs. It is stated in the Bhagavadgītā that "from food, creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice, rain comes into being and sacrifice is born of work."¹⁹

(b) Penance:

Penance means punishment inflicted on oneself as an outward expression of repentance for wrongdoing. There are three kinds of penances that are to be performed according to the Bhagavadgītā. They are- The worship of the Gods, of the twice-born, of teachers and the wise, purity, uprightness, continence and non-violence, this is said to be the penance of the body. The utterance (of words) which gives no offence, which is truthful, pleasant and beneficial and the regular recitation of the Veda, this is said to be the penance of the speech. The serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control, the purity of mind, this is called the penance of mind.²⁰

(c) Gift:

A gift or a present is an item given to someone without the hope of payment or anything in return. According to Bhagavadgītā, there are three kinds of gifts. Therefore we should know the right way by which a gift should be offered. That gift, which is made to one from whom no return is expected, with the feeling that it is one's duty to give and which is given in proper place and time and to a worthy person, that gift is held to be 'good'. Lastly, that gift which is made at a wrong place or time to an unworthy person, without proper ceremony or with aversion, is declared to be 'dull'.²¹

Vikarma (Niṣiddha Karma):

Actions such as drinking, etc. which have been pronounced to be offensive by the śāstras are named niṣiddha (objectionable) actions or vikarma. Vikarma or niṣiddha karma is the action that is done against the injunctions of the religious scriptures, which inflict pain on other living entities. Such activities performed without consideration of future bondage or consequences are considered to be work in ignorance. Activities in the mode of ignorance lead to unhappiness, frustration, delusion and degrade the living entity to the hellish planets or a lower species of life. Then one has to work one's way up the evolutionary ladder to regain a human form of life. Anti-social work or vikarma is done by persons with demonic natures. By performing niṣiddha actions, one incurs sin. There are certain rules according to which man has to suffer the results of karma (actions) and vikarma. It is known as karma-vipaka (effect of karma) or law of karma.

Karma-Vipāka: (Effects of Karma or Law of Karma):

Another meaning of karma in the individual level is the effects, of which our past actions were the causes. According to the doctrine of karma, everyone is conditioned and determined by his conduct, as this is enacted over a period of innumerable births, deaths and rebirths: every deed that one performs has its effect in the world and forms a tendency (saṃskāra or vāsanā) within the doer which is the basis for his future deeds. Karma consists of all the deeds, both good and

evil, that one has done in his present and in any prior existence. One's life is a system of many activities that have originated in the natural process of evolution and have been transferred from generation to generation. The entire being of everyone is an accumulation of inherited functions that are modified by new experiences and deeds. Thus 'karma' constitutes one's nature. One is one's, own creator.

Akarma (Inaction):

Indecision (akarma) means the absence of bondage resulting from work because it is done without attachment. Works that don't incur karmic reactions are called akarma. Such activities can free one from the cycle of birth and death, because such activities are spiritual in nature, and are dedicated to the Supreme Lord. In the doctrine of akarma the actions are so defined that they apply to men who seek only liberation. It is stated in the Bhagavadgītā that one who has not given up the fruit of action would have to experience pleasant, unpleasant or mixed fruit of action, but for those who have renounced there is none.²² The performer of akarma is called akartā.

CONCLUSION

The concept of karma in the Bhagavadgītā reveals its enduring relevance and universal applicability as a guiding principle for human actions and spiritual growth. Through a comprehensive exploration of the Bhagavadgītā, this research article has shed light on the profound philosophical depth, ethical implications, and transformative potential of karma. The study has emphasized the fundamental understanding of karma as the law of cause and effect, where every action, thought, and intention carries consequences. It has highlighted the intricate relationship between karma and dharma, underscoring the importance of righteous actions aligned with one's duty in the pursuit of spiritual evolution. Furthermore, the research has delved into the multi-dimensional nature of karma, examining the distinctions between sāttvika, rājasika, and tāmasika karma. It has elucidated how these different qualities of action shape an individual's destiny and spiritual progress. The exploration of niṣkāma karma, the performance of selfless action without attachment to outcomes, has highlighted the interplay between individual effort and divine will. The transformative potential of understanding karma has been a central theme throughout the article. By comprehending karma in its entirety, individuals are inspired to cultivate self-awareness, take responsibility for their actions, and engage in ethical conduct. The practice of introspection, detachment, and surrender has been identified as essential for navigating the complexities of karma and fostering personal growth. In conclusion, the concept of karma in the Bhagavadgītā offers profound insights into the nature of human existence and the path to spiritual liberation. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the consequences of actions and the importance of righteous conduct. The principles of karma have timeless relevance and can guide individuals from all walks of life in their pursuit of moral clarity, personal transformation, and harmonious coexistence. This research article has contributed to a deeper understanding of the concept of karma in the Bhagavadgītā, presenting its philosophical underpinnings, ethical implications, and transformative potential. It is hoped that the insights gained from this study will inspire further exploration, reflection, and application of the principles of karma in the lives of individuals, scholars, and philosophers, fostering a more enlightened and compassionate world.

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