

THE DOCTRINE OF NIṢKĀMAKARMA OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ : AN ESTIMATE

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Abstract: In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of the *Bhagavadgītā* and to show its social implications. The Lord says that nobody in this world can escape from *karma*, one must perform all the duties giving up the desire for fruits i.e. with a state of renunciation. So it is clearly stated that it is never possible to abandon action in this world. It is stated in the *Gītā* that one should perform action for the benefit of people with equable reason and with a disinterested frame of mind without adopting *Samnyāsa of karma* even after the acquisition of true knowledge. So this path of action is called *karmayoga*.

Key-words: *Niṣkāma karma*, *sthitaprajña*, desirelessness, equable reason, special device, *pravṛtta karma*, *nivṛtta karma*,

Introduction: The *Gītā* has given a great importance to the desireless, equable and unattached reason of the doer than to the external result of the action. If the same principle is applied to the conduct of the *sthitaprajña*, it follows that the true principle is the equable reason (*buddhi*) with which he behaves towards his equals and subordinates and that the welfare of all created beings is required. This is the highest and most *sātvika* duty to mankind.¹

Meaning of the word 'karma': The word '*karma*' comes from the root '*kr*' which means 'doing', 'affairs', 'activity' etc. According to the ancient Vedic religion, this action is sacrificial ritual. According to Jaimini, the performance of this Vedic or *s'rauta* sacrificial ritual was the main and the ancient religion. Whatever a man does, must be done for the purpose of the *yajña*. If he earns money, he must earn it for the sake of the *yajña* and if he collects grain that also must be done for the *yajña*. But although these actions which are performed for the purpose of the *yajña*, yet the *yajña* itself leads to heaven and the performer of the *yajña* performs it willingly only in order to attain heaven.²

According to *Manu Smṛti* and other religious texts there are four castes, depending on the particular actions prescribed by the *Vedas*. For example, worshiping and divine contemplation (*tapasyā*) has been prescribed for the *Brāhmins*, fighting for the warrior i.e., *Kṣatriya*, trade for the merchant i.e., *vais'ya* and serving with heart the other castes for the *s'ūdra*. These have been for the first time systematically prescribed in the *Smṛti* and they are referred to as *smārta*

actions. Besides these actions prescribed by the *S'rutis* and *Smṛtis*, there are religious actions e.g. fasting, austerities etc. which have for the first time been described in detail in the *purāṇa* and it may therefore, be described as *paurāṇika karma*. All these actions are again subdivided into *nitya karma* (action done daily), *naimittika karma* (occasional action) and *kāmya karma* (action done for particular purpose).³ The action which must be performed everyday such as bathing and offering prayers at twilight are called *nitya karma*. By performing these actions no special purpose (*artha-siddhi*) is achieved but if they are not performed one incurs sin. *Nitya karma* means unconditionally obligatory for all time.⁴ *Naimittika karma*, i.e., occasional actions are to be performed on a particular occasion, such as, bathing at the time of solar eclipse is an example of *naimittika karma*.⁵ *Kāmya karma* means an action which we very often perform because we desire a particular thing and for acquiring that thing we perform this type of action. For example, sacrificial ritual for obtaining a son (*putreṣṭi yajña*). *Niṣiddha karma* means objectionable action such as drinking wine etc. which have been pronounced as totally objectionable and prohibited by the *s'āstras* and therefore it is known as *niṣiddha karma*.

The word '*karma*' used as the exposition made in the *Gītā* must not be taken in the restricted meaning of action prescribed by the *s'rutis* and *smṛtis*, but in a more comprehensive meaning. In short, all the actions which a man performs, e.g. eating, drinking, singing, hearing, walking etc. are all included in the word '*karma*' as used in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁶ It has been said in the *Gītā* regarding *karma* that: '*na hi kas'cit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt*','⁷ '*naiṣkarmaṁ na ca lokesmin muhurtam api labhyate*','⁸ i.e., in this world, no one can remain for a single moment without performing action and no one can escape from *karma* for a moment. Not only men but even the Sun and the Moon are continuously performing action. The Lord has said if one gives up action, it will be impossible to get foods to eat. So the Lord advises everybody in the name of Arjuna: *yaḥ kriyāvāna sa paṇḍitaḥ* i.e. the man who is a doer is truly learned man. Since nobody in this world can escape from *karma*, one must perform all the duties by giving up desire for fruits for the sake of God. So it is clearly stated that it is never possible to entirely abandon action in this world.

Meaning of the word 'yoga': The word '*yoga*' comes from the root '*yuj*' which means 'to join', 'the state of union', 'combination', 'addition' or 'co-existence', or 'staying together' and later on it has also come to mean the 'means, device', or 'method' or 'thing to be done' etc. The *Amarkoṣa* has given all these meanings of the word in this sentence: '*Yogaḥ samahanopāyadyāna saṁgati yuktisu*.'⁹ '*tesām tuktānām nityābhituktanam yogakṣemam vahāmyaham*.'¹⁰ Here the word '*yoga*'

in the phrase 'yogakṣemam' means acquiring such things as one has not got.

In the *Gītā*, the word 'yoga', *yogi* or other compounds from the word 'yoga' have occurred so many times. We find almost everywhere the word used more or less in the meaning of 'means', 'skilful device', 'method', 'the thing to be done', 'union' etc. and it must be said that this is one of the comprehensive words used in the *Gītā*. Still it is not enough even to say in a general way that *yoga* means 'means' 'skilfull device' or 'method' because it may mean renunciation or the control of mind (*cittanirodha*) or liberation (*mokṣa*) or of something else. For instance, the word *yoga* has been used in the *Gītā* itself to signify the divine skill of the Lord in creating the verigated perceptible world and on that account; the Lord has been referred to as *yoges'vara*. But this is not the main meaning of the word *yoga* in the *Gītā*. So in order to explain what 'particular skill', 'means', 'method' or 'process' is mainly signified in the *Gītā* by the use of the word *yoga*. This word has been clearly defined in the *Gītā* as: 'yogaḥ karmasu kaus'alam,'¹¹ i.e. 'yoga' means some 'special skill', 'device', 'intelligent method' or graceful way of performing actions.

In the *Saṁkarabhāṣya* on the phrase, 'karmasu kaus'alam' has been interpreted as tendency of *karma* to arrange for bondage. Generally there are numerous *yoga* or means of performing one and the same action but the best of all these methods, specially referred to, is *yoga*.¹² However the meaning of the word *yoga* as explained in the *Gītā* is as follows :

Firstly, the word 'yoga' appears for the first time in the second chapter of the *Gītā* and at that very place the meaning of the word is clearly explained as:

eṣā tebhītā sāmkhye buddhiryoge tvimāni sṛṇu |

buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandham prahāsyasi | I |¹³

This verse is of great importance in order to understand the import of the word *yoga*. The word 'sāmkhya' is not to be understood here as meaning Kapila *sāmkhya* or only Vedānta, nor is the word 'yoga' to be understood as meaning 'Pātāñjala yoga'. But *sāmkhya* must be taken here as meaning *sannyāsa* and *yoga* as meaning *sāmkhya* in the *karmayoga*. So the Lord starts to impart the knowledge relating to *karmayoga* or shortly *yoga* in continuing to perform action with a disinterested frame of mind without adopting *sannyāsa* even after the acquisition of true knowledge. So the path of action is called *karmayoga*.¹⁴

Secondly, the Lord defines the word 'yoga' through the 48th verse of the *Gītā*. The Lord says that a man should give up all attachments (*āsakti*) but should not think of giving up actions and should perform action to become steeped in the *yoga* (*yogastha*). So *yoga* means equability of mind towards success or failure.

Thirdly, further the Lord defines the word 'yoga' in accordance with the 49th verse of the

Gītā. Here the word 'yoga' means the equability of mind. Ordinary action performed with desire is greatly inferior to action united to the guidance of wisdom, therefore, O Dhananjaya, seek shelter in the ever directing wisdom. Miserable are those who perform actions only for their fruits.

The statement of *karmayoga* mentioned in the 49th verse, namely that the reason is superior to the action is of utmost importance. Some persons try to interpret the word *buddhi* here as meaning that *karma* is of less importance than *jñāna*, but this interpretation is not correct. Because, as the description of equability given in the 48th verse is continued in the 49th and some subsequent verses. The word 'buddhi' must be interpreted as meaning an equabilising *buddhi*. The goodness or badness of an act does not depend on the act itself. It becomes good or bad according to the good or evil intention of the doer. So reason is superior to action.¹⁵

With regard to the nature of yoga, it is stated in the *Gītā*: 'yogaḥ karmasu kaus'alam'.¹⁶ From this verse it becomes clear that the 'special device' mentioned earlier by the Lord for the sinless or virtuous performance of action is called *yoga*. That is to say, to perform an action with the help of this 'kaus'ala' or device in the *Gītā* is known as 'yoga'.

Sankarācārya himself has interpreted the word 'yoga' according to the definition given by the Lord as: 'samyagdars'anopāya karmānusthānam',¹⁷ and in the other place as 'yoga yukti'.¹⁸ At the end of the *sāntiparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, the words *sāṅkhya* and *yoga* have senses and it is explained how and why these two paths were created by the Lord in the beginning of the creation itself.

What is *karmayoga*? It has been stated in the *Gītā* that the saint who has the knowledge of the identity of *Brahman* and the *ātman* performs all activities in the illusory world merely by their bodies or by their organs and it has also been stated that the real abandonment of actions consists in performing actions with unattached mind without entertaining the hope of reward. Though *karma* belongs to the illusory world, the Lord has created it for some unintelligible reason and it is not within the power of any human being to stop it or to destroy it. It is within the power only of the Lord to do so. So it is certainly said that the performance of action merely by the body by keeping our mind unattached and it leads to salvation. So there is no problem of performing actions through the bodily organs with disinterested mind.¹⁹

But in view of *karmayogī*, these meanings, statements and arguments mentioned above are not correct because the *Gītā* does not accept the position that when a man has acquired knowledge, all wishes, desires must necessarily come to an end. The root cause of our suffering is attachment. According to the *Gītā*, instead of killing desires of all kinds one should only give up

the attachment to the object of desire and go on performing all actions. It is not that when the attachment is left, activity must also be simultaneously left. Though one may be free from desires of all kinds, it is not possible that activity comes to an end. So it is not possible for us to become free from *karma* after acquisition of perfect knowledge as well as the destruction of desire of all kinds.²⁰

The Lord has explained the mystery of the path of *karmayoga* in the following:

karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe māphalesu kadācana I
*mākarmaphalaheturbhūrmā te sangostvakarmaṇi II*²¹

That is, we have right to the performance of action only though we have no right to desire for fruit of action because obtaining or not obtaining the 'fruit of action is not within our control and we should not perform action with expecting fruit of action, i.e., our fruit of action should not be the cause of performing action and that is why we should not give up action as we have no hope for fruit.

The fourth part of this stanza are mutually complementary to each other and entire import of the *karmayoga* is explained in a short and beautiful form and these four parts of this stanza are certainly called *catuḥ - sūtra* of the *karmayoga*. It is stated to begin with that our right is to perform action only but as the fruit of an action is inseparable from the action, naturally doubt may be arisen that he who has right to perform action, has also right to take the fruit. The Lord has stated clearly in the second part of this stanza that our right should not extend to the fruits. Then the Lord has stated the third part of the above stanza that one should give up the hope for fruit but at the same time one should not give up doing action. So the meaning of this verse is that one should necessarily perform one's duty having not given up the action – '*tygo na yuktaiha karmasu napi rāgaḥ*'. The Lord now clearly defines the word '*karmayoga*':

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāni sangamtyaktvā dhanañjaya I
*siddhyasidhyoḥ samobhūtvā samatvañyoga ucyate II*²²

The word '*buddhi*' must be interpreted as an equalised *buddhi* (*samatvabuddhi*). The goodness or badness of action does not depend on the action itself and though the action may be one and the same, it becomes good or bad according to the good or evil intention of the doer. So the reason or *buddhi* is superior to action. The Lord has said that action should be performed to become steeped in the *yoga* (*yogastha*) with equanimity in success and failure. The Lord further says

dureṇa hyvaram karma buddhiyogād dhanañjaya I
*buddhau saranamanviccha kṛpanāḥ phalahetavaḥ II*²³

Here the word '*yoga*' has been clearly defined as meaning: *yoga* means equability of mind towards

success or failure and then He says that this *yoga* of equaility is better than performing actions with the desire for the fruit and that when the mind is equable, the doer is not affected by the sin or virtue of action and therefore *yoga* should be acquired. The Lord again defines the word *yoga* in the following way:

buddhiyukto jahātiha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte I
yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kaus'alam II ²⁴

That is to say, one who is united to cosmic wisdom goes beyond the effects of both virtue and vice, even here in this life. Therefore, devote thyself to *yoga* divine union. - is the art of propoer acion. He again defines *yoga* by the words: ‘*yogaḥ karmasu kausalam*’. Here it has been stated that the equable reason or *samatva* is the basic structure on which pure conduct or *karmayoga* is based and when a man performs action with this equable reason, there is no neglect of worldly activities, one can achieve complete perfection.

Yasmmodvijate loko lokoloknodbijate ca yaḥ I ²⁵

One of whom people do not concern and who is always cheerful and always free from the conflict of joy and sorrow, fear and dislike, happiness and unhappiness and is always content with himself. *Ātmāṁ cvāmanālusmah* ²⁶ or one whose reason is not moved by the three constituents or one for whom praise or adverse criticism, honour or dishonour is just the same and who realises the identity of one *ātman* in every individual. One who does his duty with an equal mind without attachment, courageously and enthusiastically or who is ‘*samaloṣṭās'makāncana*’, ²⁷ i.e., who looks upon earth, stone and gold as the same. This state is known as the state of the perfection (*siddhāvasthā*) or the *brahmisthitiḥ*. *Yogāvāsīṣṭha* and other thinkers refer to this state as the state of being free from rebirth (*jīvanmuktāvasthā*). Such a state of person is not imaginary, it is not a matter of ordinary occurrence and it can be accomplished by the control of the mind and effort in this life. Buddhists have said that just as the purest diamond does not require to be polished, in the same way, action of that person who has reached the state of *nirvāna* does not require to be limited by rules of conduct. In the *Gītā*, it has been said that one who has totally lost the feeling of ego (*ahamkāra*) is unattached by sin or merit and whose mind has become equable towards all created beings like that of *sthitaprañā* or *jīvanmukta* and whose all selfish interests have been merged in the interests of others – he may be said to have become self – enlightened.

Excellence of *karmayoga*: The Lord has clearly said that though the path of renunciation and the path of *karmayoga* are both equally helpful for attaining salvation, i.e., *nīḥsreyasa*, yet out of these two paths the worth or importance of *karmayoga* is greater, i.e., *visisyate*. There are several other

statements in the *Gītā* which contain advice to Arjuna such as ‘*tasmād yogāya yujyasva*’,²⁸ i.e., therefore the Lord advises Arjuna to adopt *karmayoga* or ‘*māte saṁgostvakarmani*’,²⁹ i.e., do not insist on not performing action, or

yastvindriyāni manasā niyamyārabharerjuna I
*karmendriyaiḥ karmayogaṁ asaktaḥ sa visisyate II*³⁰

That is, instead of abandoning action controlling the organs by the mind and using the organs of actions for performing actions with a desireless frame of mind is *vis'eṣa* because in any case ‘*karmajyāyo hy akarmaṇaḥ*’,³¹ i.e., action is superior to inaction or ‘*yogaṁatiṣṭhottīṣṭha*’, i.e., accept the path of action and stand up to fight or ‘*yogi jñānibhyo pi matodhikaḥ*’, i.e., the merit of the *karmayogī* is more (*adhikaḥ*) than that of the *jñānamārgī*, or ‘*tasmādyogī bhavārjuna*’³² i.e., become a *yogī*, that is *karmayogī*, or ‘*māmanusmara yudhya ca*’,³³ i.e., remember me and fight etc. and in that advice the clear words ‘*jyoyaḥ adhikaḥ*’,³⁴ have been used in order to show that the merit of *karmayogī* is higher than that of renunciation.

In *Sankarabhāṣya*, *Sankarācārya* has raised a question whether salvation is attained by means of knowledge or by combination of knowledge and action? He has expounded the import of the *Gītā* that salvation is attained by knowledge alone by the destruction of *karma* and that *karma* is not necessary for salvation. *Sankarācārya* says that the Lord Himself admit that *karma* becomes meaningless when one’s mind has become purified.

However, superiority of *karmayoga* has been proved by the historical illustration of Janaka as ‘*karmanaiva hi saṁsiddhimāsthita janakādayaḥ*’,³⁵ i.e., Janaka and others attained salvation only by performing action. *Sankarācārya* has re-established the Hindu religion by his super human intelligence and labour. The world itself came into existence when the Lord was ready to perform action and it has also been stated in the *Mahābhārata* that Marichi and other six mind-born sons came into existence out of the Lord and adopts the activistic path, i.e., *pravṛttimārga* till death without renunciation³⁶.

Synthesis of Action (*karma*) and Renunciation (*tyāga*): According to the *Gītā*, though the *karmayoga* is superior to renunciation for attaining salvation, nowhere in the *Gītā* has been shown any dishonour for that path. The Lord has clearly stated that both the path of renunciation and the path of action equally lead to salvation. The Lord has stated that ‘*ekam sāmkyam ca yaḥ pas'yati sa pasyati*.’³⁷ The saints say that if any one path is properly followed, the result of both is achieved and where the follower of the *Sāṁkhya* path reach, the follower of the action reach the same goal. Moreover in the *karmayoga*, one has to give up the hope for the fruit of action. ‘*na*

hyasamnyasta samkalpo yogi bhavati kas'cana ',³⁸ i.e. unless one performs *sannyāsa* i.e., *tyāga* of the *samkalpo* of the hope of reward and one does not become a *karmayogī* . In this way the Lord has skilfully harmonised as far as possible between these two paths. The Lord has definitely said that, in this way, both renunciation and action are found in the same place. Moreover *Vyāsa* has clearly expressed this meaning in the following verse:

*dvāvimāvatha panthānau yasmin vedah pratisthitah I
pravṛtilakṣaṇa dharmah nivṛtṭisca vibhāsitaḥ II* ³⁹

That is the two modes of life, such as one is the activistic path, i.e., *pravṛtti* and the other is of inaction or of renunciation, i.e., *nivṛtti* are equally supported by the Vedas. Even it is stated in the *Nārāyaṇīya* doctrine that this two paths have existed independently from the commencement of the world. In the *Gītā* it is clearly stated that the stanza '*dvāvimāvatha panthānau* ' etc. is of the same importance as the stanza '*lokesmin dvidhāniṣṭha* '. So the two modes of life as *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* are of equal value. Thus in the Vedic religion the two independent paths of *Karmasannyāsa* , i.e., renunciation and desireless action, i.e., *yoga* are equally good alternatives though the *karmayoga* is superior to the path of renunciation.

In the *Gītā*, it has been said that the path of renunciation and the path of *karmayoga* equally lead to liberation (*niḥs'reyaskara*) yet *karmayoga* is the best. So the conclusion has been drawn that if the principal object of the *Gītā* is to harmonise knowledge with devotion to support the path of *karmayoga* on that basis, then all these apparent inconsistencies disappear and one cannot but admire the super human wisdom of the *Gītā* in bringing about a synthesis among knowledge, devotion and *karmayoga* in most comprehensive way.

Critical Estimate : Some thinkers and critics point out that *niṣkāma karma* is not possible. In response to this question we can say that *niṣkāma karma* is undoubtedly and definitely possible. The question is: how is it possible? If someone can acquire in himself the non-difference between God's nature (*svabhāva*) and his own nature by continuous spiritual practices, he can perform *niṣkāma karma* in the true sense of the term because God is a *niṣkāma karmī* . He does not require performing any action. He is *purṇa kāma* , He has no want of anything. Nevertheless he is always engaged in action. He performs His duties of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the world. He performs other actions also for *lokasaṅgraha* . In like manner, we should do our duty or some kinds of actions for the service of the human welfare (*lokasaṅgraha*). At the time of performing all types of actions normal attitude concerning our action and behaviour. We should always have in mind that God is only the doer or authority of all kinds of actions with us as the

instruments in his hands. In other words we can say that we should give up our ego-feeling (*ahambhāva*) and this ego-feeling should be transformed into thou-feeling (*tvambhāva*) in course of performing of our action. We have right to perform our prescribed duty only but we are not entitled to have the fruits of action. We should never consider ourselves the causes of the result of the activities. Inaction is sinful, so we should never attach to not doing our duty.⁴⁵ We should perform our duty equiposed, abandoning all attachment to success or failure and such equanimity is called *yoga*. That is to say, we should act in accordance with the principles of *yoga*. *Yoga* means to concentrate the mind upon the Supreme by controlling the ever – disturbing sense. The Supreme is the Lord. We have nothing to do with the result of our prescribed duty. Gain and victory are God's concern. We are directed to act according to the advice of God.

Now a question may be arised- is God considered to be a *niškāma karmī* ? In response to this question *Sankarācārya* points out that God is a *sakāma karmī* who was born on the earth having strong desire for the protection of *Brāhminhood* for dominating the vicious persons and for ensuring stability of the world because if *Brāhminhood* is preserved, the Vedic religion is also preserved.

Attainment of Liberation: The duties like *nitya karma* prescribed by the *Smṛtis* have to be performed by all, irrespective of the castes and the stages of life and they are common factors in the lives of all spiritual aspirants and hence their existence need not be considered separately with regard to the house-holders. For the liberation of the house-holders, knowledge has to be combined with actions prescribed by the Vedas and *Smṛtis*. On the other hand, for the liberation of *Sannyāsins*, knowledge has to be combined with actions like *nitya karma* etc. prescribed by the *Smṛtis* only. According to *Sankarācārya*, combination of knowledge with actions may be of two kinds such as *karma-sammuccaya* and *saha-sammuccaya*. *Karma-sammuccaya* is the cause where an aspirant embraces renunciation by gradually passing through the different stages of life. This is an indirect combination of knowledge with actions. *Sankarācārya* concedes this in the case of some people. But the other alternative of *saha-sammuccaya* where knowledge is sought to be directly combined with actions. *Sankarācārya* rejects this standpoint.

For *Sankarācārya*, action and knowledge cannot be combined because of their extreme opposite nature and therefore the path of devotion has been explained in the *Gītā*. The path of devotion lies in both of them and therefore it removes all obstacles and this devotion is of three kinds such as devotion mixed with action, pure and mixed with knowledge. The performance of *sakāma karmī* done for personal gain is called *kāmya karma* and the prohibited action means

niṣiddha karma. After the cessation of sins, sorrow from the mind; there arises a sense of firm discrimination between the eternal and transient objects (*nityānitya vastu vivekajñāna*) and gradually follows detachment from the worldly objects called *vasikāra*, i.e., complete control over the mind and the organs. Afterwards renunciation is fully established through *sama*, i.e. limitation of the mind, *dama*, i.e. restraining the sense organs from their respective objects, *uparati*, i.e. not allowing the restrained organs by driving back to their objects, *titikṣā*, i.e. endurance, *s'raddhā*, i.e. faith, *samādhāna*, i.e. concentration of mind and *mumuksatva*, i.e. strong desire for attaining liberation. Thus the renunciation of all things produces a strong desire for liberation. Here good instructions from a good teacher lead to liberation of an aspirant. *S'ravana* (hearing), *manana* (thinking) and *nididhyāsana* (meditation) must be practised for attaining liberation and for the elimination of doubt etc. after the Advaita Vedānta. As a result the knowledge of Reality is attained through the realisation of Upanisadic sentence 'Thou art That' which means immediate knowledge of the identity of *Brahman* and the Self⁹⁰.

Through the power of knowledge of Reality (*tattva - jñāna*) the result of action done in the past lives that have not yet started bearing fruits (*anārabdha* or *sañcita karma*) get quite destroyed. The actions done in the present life will bear fruits in the future. Due to disturbance of *prārabdha karma* past impression (*vāsana*) does not get destroyed and here *samādhi* is quickly accomplished through special devotion to God. So an embodiment liberated being (*jīvanmukta*) becomes accomplished through constant practice of the three disciplines as knowledge of reality (*tattva - jñāna*), elimination of the modification of mind (*mana-nāsa*) and dissipation of past impression of all actions as a result of knowledge and has ever absorbed in *samādhi* and becomes knower of the *Brahman* and he is spoken of as having gone beyond the *guṇas*, a man of steady wisdom (*sthitaprajña*) and he is also called a transcendent of the castes and the stages of life and a delighter of the self.

The *Gītā*'s teaching on *niṣkāma karma* is not beyond mistake because there are contradictions in many places of the *Gītā*'s teaching. As the *Gītā* advises to perform action without fruits and on the other hand, the *Gītā* teaches to perform action for the sake of God, for protecting the creation of the world. In the other place of the *Gītā*, the Lord advises to adopt the path of *jñāna* and on the other hand He has tried to establish the supremacy of *karmayoga*. So it is very difficult to understand the right way to attain *mokṣa*.

Some modern thinkers like Rajendra Prasad raise some questions about *niṣkāma karma* in his book *Varṇa Dharma, niṣkāma Karma and Practical Morality*. He thinks that *niṣkāma karma* is binding because *niṣkāma Karma* produces fruits like *Sakāma Karma* admitted in the

Gītā. For Rajendra Prasad, every action must have a reason and that reason is to desire fruits and if *niṣkāma Karma* is a kind of *karma*, it must have a desire, i.e., the action of *niṣkāma karma* is not devoid of expecting fruits of his actions. According to Rajendra Prasad, *Srīkrṣṇa* advises Arjuna that fighting is his only duty. So he has to perform it but the common people do not always perform their actions as duty.

But inspite of some questions raised against the theory of *niṣkāma karma* of the *Gītā*, we cannot underestimate its message and ignore its present day relevance. We cannot forget the message of *lokasaṅgraha* (service for human welfare) of the *Gītā*.

This service or performance of action must be disinterested. In the present scenario, we see that almost all the political, social and even religious leaders and workers serve the people to gain name, fame and money. This is serious violation of the principle of *lokasaṅgraha* and accordingly that of *niṣkāma karma*. All the evils of the society are increasing day by day by the activities of such pseudo patriots and spiritualists. So we must bring the *Gītā* message of *niṣkāma karma* to light with strong force before the people as well as educated section of the society with a view to make them aware why the human society today is moving downwards day by day and being drowned into the ocean of evils. We also intend to convey that only political, social, ritualistic, religious awakening have no significant role in the betterment of human society without spiritual awakening as envisaged in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Social significance of *karmayoga* : The verses 3/22-24 of the *Bhagavad Gītā* where the Lord mentions his own example as working for *lokasaṅgraha*, are very important for understanding the meaning and scope of the word work. The Lord emphasises in these verses that the real purpose of *karma* is not to satisfy any narrow, selfish desire though the Lord need not have any *karma*. Although the Lord implicitly refers here to His *karma* as protector of the universe. In this context, Gandhiji says that the Lord serves the people for His whole life, a real servant of the world. His whole life is full of *karma*. As a child He is a cowherd and He is known to the world by the name of Gopala and He has neither sleep nor idleness. He keeps a sleepless vigil over the world.⁴¹

Conclusion: It has been found in this world that man who tries to work for public welfare without desire becomes a *yogī*. When once the idea that all persons are in Him and that He is in all persons has been deeply rooted in one's mind, the question whether self-interest is distinct from the interest of others does not arise at all and starts to achieve the good of others with the monistic idea that '*sarvam khalvidam brahman*'. As giving light is the inherent quality of the sun, so achiev-

ing the good of others become the inherent quality of the saint. Moreover it is said that when the sun is giving light to others it also gives light to itself, in the same way, a saint's activities are done through his benevolence. The saints who continue their beneficent activities without caring for crisis and without trying to discriminate between whether it is better to suffer adversity or to give up public welfare and if situation arises, they are even ready to be indifferent about sacrificing their own lives. This is known as universal welfare and this is the true *karmayoga*.

Notes and References

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2. *Jai. Sū* .,4.1.1
3. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra*, Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol.I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, p.362
4. Sri Sukhamay Bhattacharya Sastri Saptā-Tirtha, *Purva - Mīmāṃsā Darsan*, pp.90-91
5. *Ibid.*, p.91
6. The *Gītā* , 9.5
7. *Ibid.*, 5.9
8. *Ibid.*, 7.20
9. *Amarkoṣa* , 3-3-22
10. The *Gītā* , 9.22
11. *Ibid.*, 2.50
12. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra*, Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol.I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, p.72
13. The *Gītā* , 2.39
14. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra*, Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol. II, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, pp. 884-885
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18. *Ibid.*, 17.7
19. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra*, Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol.I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, pp. 442-443
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22. Ibid, 2.48
23. Ibid, 2.49
24. Ibid, 2.50
25. Ibid, 14.23
26. Ibid, 2.,55
27. Ibid, 14.24
28. Ibid, 2.50
29. Ibid, 2.47
30. Ibid, 3.7
31. Ibid, 3.8
32. Ibid, 6.46
33. Ibid, 8.7
34. Ibid, 5.2
35. Ibid, 3.20
36. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra* , Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol. I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, p. 87
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38. Ibid, 6.2
39. *Mahābhārata Sān.*, 260.6
40. *Gītā Bhasya* , 4.42
41. B.G Tilak, *Srīmad Bhagavad-Gītā Rahasya or Karmayoga Sāstra* , Tr. by Bhalchandra Sitaram Sukthankar, Vol. I, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1935, p. 345