

Srī Kṛṣṇāyanamaha
A Paper On
Doctrine of work and Development of work culture

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Introduction:

Sve Sve Karmanyabhiratah Samsiddhim Labahte Narah || Gītā- 18-45 ||

Svakarmanā Tamabhyarcha Siddhim Vindati Mānavah || Gītā - 18-46 ||

“Men attain salvation by performing the duties prescribed to the respective category, as the worship of God”.

The activities of every living being begins soon after one is ushered in this world. The life of every being is full of activities from beginning to end. The activities of human beings differ from other species of life. Now let us contemplate on the work concerning the human beings.

Gītā says (3-5) Brahman, when first created human species in the world, along with that he also created work (activities). He promulgated instructions to perform Yajnas (Sacrifices). Through the Sacrifices they should offer oblations to Supreme God and other gods (Devas). The Devatas govern various parts of nature like rain, soil, crops, water, weather, food articles, health, grains, cotton, rivers, mountains, sea and so on. The Devas would be pleased through sacrifices and grant what all is needed to the people to lead a happy living in this world. You offer prayers, perform prescribed duties and respect Devas through Yajnas and they will in turn take care of all your concerns. The Yajnas would involve all the four categories of the people since each sacrifice has specific role, in the conduct of Yajnas.

Upanishad by name Īshavāsya advocates that one should wish to live a hundred years performing one's duties with dedication to God. Regularly performing the prescribed duties with dedication to God will not be binding one in Sansar (life and death cycles). Non-performance of duties will certainly lead to sin. Also man is advised to lead a contented life in what God has given him. One should not be envy on others wealth, since everyone is depending on Him only.

The Upanishads, Gītā, Bhāgavata, Rāmāyaṇa, Dwādaśa Stotra and so on have stressed on the performance of prescribed duties and also the consequences of non-performance of duties. Thus the work or activity is the very nature of a man ‘Udyogam Purusha Laksanam’. The work has a respectful place. Similarly a working person also has a place of respect in the society as compared to a lazy person.

Gītā says “No one will stay without activity even for a moment. They keep on working being induced by God and depending on their innate nature (Prakriti)”. This work or activity is called ‘Karma’ in Sanskrit. The human world is bound by Karma. What Srī Kṛṣṇa teaches in Gītā is popularly known as **Karma-Yoga** or the ‘**Doctrine of work**’ or the ‘**Karma Siddhānta**’.

The context of descent of Gītā:

The Karma-Yoga was taught to Arjuna in the battle field. Perhaps, this is the only serious type spiritual teaching done in a tension torn place. Everything is possible only to Lord Kṛṣṇa when He minds to do. When the two forces were standing face to face in readiness to fight, out of inquisitiveness to take a stock of opponents who had come to fight with him, Arjuna requested Kṛṣṇa to position his chariot in between the two armies. Kṛṣṇa did so. There, to Arjuna the opponents looked like his relatives, friends and Gurus instead of enemies.

Consequently he became dejected and got disinclined to fight. He laid down his arms and sat down in his chariot. Having seen the depressed condition of Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa retorted to him to get over the weakness which is not fit for a warrior at this critical time. To this Arjuna said, he was in a deeply confused state of mind and he requested Kṛṣṇa to instruct him the right action.

In response, the advice given by Kṛṣṇa at that time involved the very philosophy of life. All our worldly activities which we perform in our day to day life, big or small, are composite in nature. All activities are ultimately intended for spiritual welfare and upliftment of man. For this purpose normally knowledge is declared as the supreme means. Therefore it appears to be a better course to go by Jñānamārga.

Conveying right knowledge (Sāṅkhya):

Kṛṣṇa first gave the discrimination between body and soul. Then He imparted correct knowledge of Paramātman and Jīvātman. The former is independent, full of auspicious attributes, free from blemishes, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, He is the creator and controller of the universe, regulate all the souls, bestows salvation, imperishable (Aksra), Sarvottama, etc. While the Jīvātman is dependent on Him, takes shelter in Him, subjected to four types of destruction (Ksara), although body perishes soul remains eternal. Hence soul is called eternal (Nitya) and God is called eternal of eternals (Nityo Nityanam). He reveals to Jīvātman at His will. Ultimately He grants salvation.

From this point of view fight with the conviction that it is the worship of God, maintain the equilibrium of your mind irrespective of win or lose, gain or loss. With such a dedicated mind you will not incur any sin. This knowledge of soul and Super soul is designated as Sāṅkhya system.

Knowledge of Yoga:

After instructing Sāṅkhyaknowledge, Kṛṣṇa next imparts the knowledge of Yoga. Yoga is the means which leads to God realisation (Bhagavat Sāksatkāra). Activities (Swadharma) which are not done as reward oriented, dedicated to Him as His worship is called Yoga. If the Swadharma is performed with self - control and dedication, it will lead to God realisation and further to salvation.

Doctrine of work or Karma-Yoga:

Any orderly society will have its social and religious obligations to fulfil. Gītā says, depending upon the ability and innate nature of the individuals, human race is classified in to four categories. The Kṣatriya class is recognised as fighting class. Here Arjuna is a Kṣatriya by birth. Fighting a war is his Swadharma. A prescribed duty for a Kṣatriya. Kṛṣṇa says, war occurs rarely by chance as an opportunity in Kṣatriyas life. Hence he should be ready to do his duty. If he wins he will enjoy the kingdom; if he dies he is sure to get a covetous place in

the heavens. While doing duty, do it as a worship of God without desiring for the reward and dedicate all the actions to Him. By gradually acquainting with His glory and cultivating deep respectful love (bhakti), through His grace, one will not only get fruits of action but even more. Here Kṛṣṇa declares the famous tenet of **Karma-Yoga**. **Oh, Arjuna you have the right to perform your duty and no right to desire/claim the fruits of action. Do not work for the sake of results alone, nor should you desist from your duty.**

People involved:

Kṛṣṇa is aware that the knowledge of Sāṅkhya and Yoga is not meant for all. As can be seen He visualises three types of people 1) A common man (Ajanāni), 2) Adhering to spiritual practice (Parokṣa Jnāni), 3) A realised soul (Aparokṣa Jnāni).

It is the common knowledge that every living being is active in one way or the other from the beginning to end. If anyone renounces from work even the sustenance of life may be difficult. All these are works performed with exceptions of results unaware of any other aspects. There are some people who do not understand Sāṅkhya or Yoga because they never believe in God. They are least interested to pay attention to these finer aspects. But they are seriously interested in doing their work either for the sake of their comforts or for others sake for material benefit or fame. Such people, Kṛṣṇa said should be encouraged in their ways alone. They should be given their due rewards and recognition for their work. Their interest in working should neither be imbalanced nor discouraged. They cannot rise beyond that.

Kṛṣṇa said just like a common man does his work with result motive, in contrast to that a knowledgeable person should perform the work without desiring for the fruits of action and with devotion to God, so that it would be the guidelines for others to follow.

God induces the work according to the nature of the individual. But the egoistic people under illusion think that they do everything by themselves.

Those who think that they function independently in all the respects (unaware of God's interaction) indulge themselves in the works leading to worldly pleasures, such people should not be diverted from that conviction by the wise who is aware of the truth.

Efficacies of Karma-Yoga:

Gītā explains different types of Yoga such as Karmayoga, Jnānayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Dhyānayoga etc. The knowledge of Sāṅkhya and Yoga are the pre-requisite to practice any Yoga. A harmonious pursuit of these will lead to right knowledge and right action. Since Gītā discusses all these Yoga's, it is called Yogaśastra. Among these Yoga's, the Karmayoga is specially emphasised here. The Karmayoga has been used in two senses; 1) Performance of one's prescribed duties (Karmānusthana), 2) in wider sense it is used as Karmayoga or Philosophy of action or doctrine of work. It consists of four aspects viz. 1) performance of the prescribed duties, 2) acquisition of right knowledge (Jnāna) through Śravaṇa, Maṇana etc., 3) subduing wrong emotions like passion and hatrecy (Rāgādi Varjanam) and also motivelessness in one's endeavours, 4) offering the fruits of one's activities at the feet of God (Tyāga). In other words Karmayoga is a composite of right action, right knowledge, right motivation and right goal. That was the Karmayoga which Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna to follow.

What are the prescribed duties?

Here a question arises as to what is proper or prescribed Karma to each category of people. An orderly society has always its own code of conduct for the members to follow. They identified four Varnas and four Aśramas. Śrutis and Dharmasūtras have prescribed the duties. These are in vogue even today. Kṛṣṇa insists that every member belonging to any Varnāśrama should strictly carry out respective duties. He employs the expressions ‘**Niyatam Kuru Karma tvam**’, ‘Sastra Vidhānoktam Karma’, ‘Sastravidhi’, etc. He disapproves ‘Asastravidhi’, ‘Vidhiḥīna’, i.e. violation of Sastras. He lays emphasis that one should adhere to one’s own Varnāśrama. Adhering to one’s own duty (in spite of imperfection), is much better than that of transgressing in to someone else’s duty; it is a sin to do so. The services concerning family, society, Nation are complimentary to those prescribed.

One should clearly learn to distinguish ‘action’, ‘inaction’ and ‘wrong action’ (Karma, Akarma and Vikarma). Both in Karma and Akarma one has to think that although one’s doing the work, God’s invisible hand is associated with it. Vikarmas are prohibited actions. Actions consists of physical, mental and verbal. All these are Sātvik, Rājasik and Tāmasik type. Yajna, Dāna, Tapah are the different kinds of activities. The Gods are pleased by the Yajnas and take care of the mankind. Observing Yajna, Dāna, discharging Varnāśrama duties will purify people. In short, Karma consists of all those activities that are necessary for physical, mental, moral, spiritual growth and welfare of an individual and society. Abandoning one’s duty is Adharma and observing the same is Dharma. Transgressing in to someone else’s duty is also Adharma.

Karma Yoga and Jnāna Yoga:

The karma yoga and Jnāna yoga apparently appear to be two separate paths leading to spiritual upliftment. However it is explained Karmaprachuro Yogah=Karmayogah. Jnānaprachuro Yogah=Jnanayogah. The Karmayoga essentially include Jnāna; while Jnānayoga is not totally devoid of Karma. It is only relative degree of proportion of activities. King Janaka is said to be a Karmayogi and sage Sanaka is said to be a Jnānayogi. Kṛṣṇa keeps on explaining the efficacy of the Karmayoga up to the eighteenth chapter with little shade of difference.

Development of work culture:

Having explained the right knowledge (Sāṅkhya) and the means of achieving it (Yoga), Kṛṣṇa gives certain useful guidelines for a Karmayogi in particular and in general for others for a good life. The most important requirement of a man to function as a good social being (gentleman) is the refinement of his emotions. He has to elevate himself from animal level to human level. The qualities like passion, greed, envy, hatred, egoism, enmity, cheating, etc. have to be tamed and the mind has to be channelized in right direction. Unless one appreciates the benefits of the good qualities he will never make any attempt to change over his lower ones. Therefore Gītā emphasises the need to develop equanimity of mind and consciously control the wrong emotions. Some of the impressive expressions of Gītā are ‘Indriyāṇi Niyamya’, ‘Sukha Dukhe Same kṛtvā’, ‘Sidhyasidhyo Samo Bhūtvā’, ‘Samabuddhi’, ‘Advesta Sarvabhūtānām’, ‘and Nirvairah Sarvabhūteshu’, etc. There are a number of similar noteworthy phrases of advises meant for self – training. Perhaps the first and the fundamental lesson to practice peace is that ‘Do not provoke any one nor get provoked by any one’. This seems to be the foundation of all good conduct.

Karmayoga has to be developed in the working culture. Attitude of the individuals has to be re-oriented in to a new class of work culture. The refined code of conduct is applicable to some extent to the common man who may not be strictly a Karmayogi. Kṛṣṇa depicts these qualities throughout His teachings of Karmayoga. Gītā elaborately analyses the nature of men and matter as Sātvika, Rājasa and Tāmasa. This is reflected in food, thought, attitude, activity, goal, ambitions, expressions, associations and in every other aspects of life. The treatment of this topic can be seen in chapters 16, 17, 18. This analysis helps one to introspect and improve. One should know one's men who one commands.

As regards the nature of one's duty (prescribed) one cannot decide it for oneself nor he cannot go on changing it on his own. Here the Śastras (Śruti and Smṛti) are our guidelines. One has to adhere to one's prescribed activities. One should not transgress in to others duties. Hence Kṛṣṇa repeatedly stresses 'Niyatam Kurukarmatvam', 'Swadharne Nidhanam Śreyah', 'Swakarmana Tamabhyartha', and so on. Gītā conveys three important aspects on the philosophy of action; 1) Do your duty courageously and faithfully 2) Do not transgress in to others duty 3) Do not withdraw from your duty out of fear or failure, be bold to reach your goal. Individuals trained on the above said doctrine of work or philosophy of action emerging with a renewed work culture will be the assets of the nation.

The conclusion:

By practicing on the principles of the Karmayoga as revealed in the Gītā, a person becomes a Karmayogi; an individual of excellence and gradually becomes a realised soul (Siddhapurusa or Sthitaprajna). No expenditure what so ever is involved for a person to become Karmayogi except proper knowledge, faith and earnest following. There is a great need of such Karmayogins who can lead the nation in all walks of life.

OM TAT SAT

May Lord Kṛṣṇa be pleased