



Received: 19-08-2023  
Accepted: 29-09-2023

## International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

### Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga as Expostulated in the Bhagavad Gita

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#### Abstract

This paper attempts to have an overview of the doctrines of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga as expostulated in the Bhagavad Gita. Studies on select populations have revealed that implementing the various methods of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga leads to significant improvement in the physical and mental well-being. A sound body and mind leads to increase in the number of spiritually elevated people

in the society, in the community, in the state and finally in the nation, which is very important for the nation and its members to prosper and progress economically as well as spiritually as spirituality leads to happiness. According to Swami Vivekananda, downfall of civilisations have taken place whenever its members have forgotten and failed to follow the doctrines of Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.

**Keywords:** Emotion, Cognition, Will, Nishkamy Karma

#### Introduction

The teachings of the Gita do not exhort anyone to be a dualist or a monist. But it does exhort the reader of the Gita to wake up to his supreme consciousness and perform his duty with ease and spontaneity. In the Gita, Krishna says that a human being has not come into this world to drag a wretched existence. There is an inviolable and holy relationship between an individual and the world. It is through spiritual practises that an individual can make this relationship operative. The Gita exhorts every individual to become like the blazing sun with such an intellect that he will spread it to all those he comes in contact with. When the individual through rigorous and constant practices is filled with spiritual eminence, the doctrines of Advaita, Vishitadvaita and Dvaita all acquire equal importance in the individual's personality. In this manner Krishna exhorts all human beings to become yogis (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [3].

#### Definition of Karma According to Lord Krishna

God in his absolute state is beyond the ken of mind and speech. He is indefinable. But when is immanent in the universe, He is denoted as Sat-Chit-Anand: Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. That which is not affected by time, space and causation is Sat or Reality. But all the same, Reality puts on the appearance of getting entangled in time, space and causation. Limiting adjuncts are thereby created. It is because of these limiting adjuncts that the individual souls or *Jivatmans* have come being. The *Jivatmans* are the manifestations of the Supreme Reality, the *Paramatman*. These individual souls are moreover given to ceaseless activity. This ceaseless activity is known as Karma, and it is concomitant with human life. As light and heat happens to be part and parcel of the blazing sun, Karma is inherent in Jiva or the individual soul. Between the Jiva and his Karma, the explanation of one contains the explanation of the other. The first six chapters of the Gita deal with the principles of Karma Yoga and the category of the individual soul.

Thought is a subtle form of Karma. Each activity is actuated by will. There is no karma independent of the human will. Man wills to walk, to eat, to sleep, to wake up and so on and as a result action ensues. The gross manifestation of the will is action. The entire creation is the manifestation of the cosmic will. All forms of will ultimately resolve themselves into the will to live. It is the innate desire to preserve to preserve life that transforms itself into innumerable activities. Existence, not extinction is the essential nature of the soul. God is life. Souls have emanated from God. So, they attempt to assert life in the midst of the seeming extermination imposed by them by the play of Nature. Preserving life in the face of death and seeking permanence in the midst of perdition, are the workings of the will to assert existence. The assertion of existence is called Sat, and God is defined as Sat.

Both man Machines turn out work. But the sharp difference is that man has feelings while machines do not. Expressions like

friendship, fulfilment, admiration, and support are all positive aspects while dislike, enmity, frustration, jealousy, and opposition are all negative expressions. The positive aspects of emotion promote growth and evolution while the negative ones retard. Allegedly pure emotions become pure when directed towards God. Man's love for God increases in direct proportion to his being soaked in His glory. Supreme Bliss is *Anandam Brahman* – Bliss is Reality. It is in search of this bliss that souls struggle and hug life. But for its bliss life would not be tolerated for even a moment. It would be voluntarily liquidated. To sublimate evolution to the highest pitch is the summum bonum of life (Chidbhavananda, 2018)<sup>[3]</sup>.

The Bhagavad Gita is that guide which not only helps one in the spiritual path but also helps the individual to perform karma in every stage and situation in life. (Priyadarshi, 2022)<sup>[8]</sup>.

### Relationship between Emotion and Cognition

Inert matter like stones, broken seeds, buildings, etc exist; a living beings like plants, animals and humans also exist. The difference is that a living being is aware of its own existence while an inert matter is not. Highly evolved beings like humans have more of cognition while those in the early stages have it enshrouded in inertia. The difference between one life and another is the degree of cognition. This difference is one of degree, not of kind. A mounting release of cognition as well as a condensed intensification of it, is the plan of nature.

There is link between emotion and cognition. When iron is heated it melts and becomes soft. Instantly it gives out lustre. Emotion in living beings may be equated with the melting process in iron. The next point that must be admitted is the equation of lustre in the melted metal with cognition. This parallel of the molten state growing lustrous is drawn in inert matter. In case of living beings, emotion and cognition coexist; when emotion gets purified, cognition gets sharpened. Love and sympathy between two persons lead to an understanding better than the one that is commonly found among casual acquaintances. And the extent men understand each other affinity develops. This link between love and knowledge can be made used to strengthen the relationship between God and man. Love for God leads to more knowledge of him.

Terms like intelligence, awareness, cognition, consciousness, conscience relate to the same faculty. The divine light of Intelligence can be compared to the light of a burning lamp. By becoming brighter and brighter, a burning lamp reveals itself and its surroundings in an increasing measure. It also begins to throw increasing light on the objects brought to its presence. But if the lamp is placed in a glass case, coated with dirt, the brilliance of the light is slightly tarnished no matter how bright the flame is. The brilliance increases as the glass is cleansed of the dirt. Similarly, as the mental faculties undergo purification the inner light begins to shine with greater glory. It is ultimately realized by the seeker that what shines through the human frame is none other than the inextinguishable Cosmic Light. The yoga of knowledge contributes towards the purification of the faculty of understanding until it reaches its culmination in intuitive knowledge. *Sat-Chit-Anandam* or life, light and love are the inseparable three phases of the same Reality. Karma Yoga postulates Sat, Bhakti Yoga postulates Anandam and Jnana Yoga postulates chit. All the

three systems of yoga ultimately culminate in God. An individual is expected to follow all these three systems of yoga simultaneously until they find fulfilment in him as well. Perfection in him then becomes complete. He becomes one with God and God gets defined in him (Chidbhavananda, 2018)<sup>[3]</sup>.

### Karma Yoga as Described in Verse 16 of the Bhagavad Gita

Lord Krishna talks about two kinds of path, the path of knowledge and the path of action. When Arjuna was asked to fight in the battle of Kurukshetra, by Lord Krishna he felt that if knowledge is superior to action, why then should we perform action that is karma yoga. Krishna replied that it is important to discriminate action, forbidden action, and inaction. Good actions yield good results and bad actions yield bad results. To put an end to the wheel of birth and death, the way of action should be detachment to the fruits of actions. Having come to this world, if a man does not do what is expected of him, he amounts to nothing but a burden. The concept of moral and ethical values which is the basis of the Indian ethical and philosophical thought is called the law of Karma. The Gita teaches mankind not inaction but performance of the action with a detached mind, without expectation of results (Bhattacharjee, 2021)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Karma has risen from the Vedas and the Vedas have risen from the imperishable Brahman which is ever centred in yagna. The state of sound sleep is a negative state based on nescience. A pupil after education should derive the benefits of schooling by justifying the education he has got. The man who rejoices in the self after realisation has no obligatory duty. The very presence of an illumined person inspires everyone with a positive attitude. For a man merged in the self has no duty or action to perform. If *jeeva*, *jagath* and *Ishwara* are considered, as per the rule *Jeevas* should perform in the *Jagath* or world, such action so that *Ishwara* is pleased. By mere proximity *Ishwara* ensures progressive actions. The evil doers, the asuras with a negative attitude perform destructive actions causing harm to the universe. To stop such asuras *Ishwara* destroys them to protect the universe from destruction. Sages perform yagna and tapas for the well-being of the society. The river is active till it reaches the ocean. In case the river swells up it causes harm in the form of floods. The wheel of nature is set up by the lord for nursing, training, disciplining, and elevating all beings at various levels of existence. The mind of a man merged in atman, spreads peace and prosperity all over the world by performing yagnas, giving lectures, inspiring people for the protection of *Dharma* or righteousness in the world. In the proximity of *Ishwara*, by performing good karmas in the *jagat* or world, the *jiva* will merge in the *Ishwara*.

According to Karma Yoga most individuals end up wasting most of their energies because they do not know the secret of karma. Only those who work for society, for the country and the world dedicating their fruits to God, attain salvation through karma (Mishra, 2022)<sup>[7]</sup>.

This yoga of supreme wisdom was declared to Viviswat that is Sun God. The royal sages knew that this yoga was handed down in regular succession. It was this same ancient yoga which was told to Arjuna by Lord Krishna in this chapter of the Gita. The bound souls are born to work out their Karma. But the Lord is above Karma, though the Lord is unborn and

imperishable and the Lord of all beings. *Prakriti* came into being by his own *maya*. *Prakriti* or *maya shakti* has her part to play both with the *Jivatman* and the incarnations. She enslaves the former through his karma and is enslaved by the latter (the Lord). The collective Karma of the society as it ought to, gets embodied in the incarnation (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [3]. According to Swami Vivekananda, the downfall and the rise of a race or civilization can never be karmic neutral and the downfall of India began when the people forgot the ideals of Nishkamya Karma and started having the desire for fruits of their labours (Mishra, 2022) [7].

Lord Krishna says those individuals who are divine by birth and action in true light, drop their body and merge in Him. For an incarnation to come into existence, the unborn *Ishwara* puts on the appearance of birth and growth by his divine power. He sports the actionless entity and stages holy activities for the good of the world. Spiritual men intuit these *leelas* or divine plays and go beyond the cycle of birth and death. Krishna advised Arjuna not to treat the personalities of Radha, Krishna, Rama, or Sita as allegorical entities since their birth and actions were divine. Because of their spiritual perfection they seem fictitious than factual. These *leelas* of *Ishwara* are as one and the same as ocean and waves.

The fourfold caste was created by the Lord through the different distribution of *gunas* (*satva*, *thamas* and *rajas*) and *karmas*. Reference to the origin of the four castes from the four limbs of the creator, Lord Vishnu has been done in the *Purusha Sukta* (Alanzi, 2022) [1]. Though the Lord is the creator, he himself is actionless and changeless. Some offer ornaments, etc in the *yagna* while some offer positive sound waves through chants and incantations. The results of the former actions make the senses ineffective while the results of the latter actions make the senses super effective. Elaborate rituals during worship make a man earthly and not enlightened. Listening to the lectures of spiritually elevated persons and *jnana yagnas* intuit the *atman* and not the physical body. He is truly a man who is not a slave of money but has made money his slave. Enlightenment can be sought through prostrations, questions, and service to the wise beings who in turn will instruct us in the divine knowledge. If the aspirant is earnest, the Lord sees that the aspirant attains salvation with the guidance of an enlightened guru. Knowledge leads to unity with Brahman and ignorance leads to diversity. Verily, there is no purifier like knowledge (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [3].

### **Bhakti Yoga as Elucidated in the Gita**

Bhakti Yoga is the performance of right action which is one of the results of perfection in devotion. A wrong approach to the Conventional Morality leads to the birth of Moral Parasites, that is those who expect others to follow rules of morality and ethics but do not intend to do so themselves (Ranganathan, 2021). Even though there are some individuals who sincerely love God and want to attain liberation, the worship of God is very difficult for those devotees who are soaked in body consciousness. Since such a devotee thinks of himself with form, he cannot help thinking of God with form as well. The worship of Saguna Brahman (God with form) is easy. That devotee who adores Nirguna Brahman must be free from body consciousness right from the beginning. But the attainment of that state is not possible for all. The spiritually advanced soul alone rises

to that level. The easy and natural course for the ordinary devotee is to proceed with the worship of God with form. The body bound man should never say “I am Brahman”, as he is still bound by his body consciousness and he deceives himself and the world by such a statement (Gupta, 2012) [6]. The ignorant man who segregates himself from the Brahman invites complication and trouble to his earthly career. He, on the other hand, who attunes his personal life to the cosmic functioning, which is the sport of the *Ishwara*, gains spiritually and gets into the plenitude supremely above the wheel of birth and death. After *Jnana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* is considered as the last step to attain the knowledge about the existence of God and spirituality.

*Bhakti Yoga* is associated with both *Karma Yoga* and *Gnana Yoga* as without devotion towards God, it is not possible to attain the knowledge of Brahman and Self Knowledge. The Gita teaches this art of spirituality through service, detachment and surrender to God while being deeply engaged in all the worldly activities (Dhiman, 2019) [5]. In the *Bhakti Yoga*, devotion towards God is performed through the mind and the heart. Constant practice of this devotion leads one to perform selfless action and enhances the mental health and well-being of the individual performing those actions (Chuang, 2020) [4]. To feel the way of the mind and to decide is the way of the intellect. And these are the inner subtle organs of man. A man's residence need not be reckoned based on the locality or residence where he is staying. Man verily is where his mind is. There are those who live in hell on earth and those who make a heaven of this earth. It is the mind of man which makes it heaven or hell. Man is born with two tendencies, *Vidya Guna* and *Avidya Guna* – the noble and the base, dormant in him. The former leads him towards God and the latter makes him earth bound. In babyhood, both the tendencies are in equilibrium, as if equally distributed on the scale of a balance. If he grows in the life of the senses then, the scale of worldliness goes down with that base weight. If he emerges in spirituality, the scale in him or Godliness goes down towards the God with holy weight.

The devotee's devotion should be so staunch that it does not deviate from the Lord. Through constant practice the mind must be weaned away from the world. This constant practice which is known as *Abhyasa Yoga* which is practised ceaselessly until the mind is permanently reclaimed from its baseness. The impossible can be made possible through constant practice. Sri Ramakrishna gives a simple analogy: A man rearing a pet dog gave it a knock every time the dog tried to jump on a stranger's face. In the course of time the dog understood and changed its habit accordingly. Similarly unwanted desires and negative thoughts are nothing but an unruly dog which man has fondly revered. Repeated blows in the form of counter – thoughts and ideas are the only way to rectify it. Force of habit is too strong to be altered or curbed; it drags the man along its own way. A talkative man for example, may go on talking of God instead of on worldly topics. When a man changes his attitude and surrenders all his worldly and spiritual activities at God's feet, over a period, he is freed from bondage. Whatever work takes place through such a man is the work of the Lord, since he considers himself as just an instrument of the Lord. Attitude of this kind emancipates the aspirant (Gupta, 2012) [6].

Among virtues, unselfishness is the most paying. Godhood is the reward for complete self-abnegation. When the

devotee established in unselfishness meditates on God, he hastens with him. But selfishness dies hard. It persists in many unknown subtle forms and causes hindrance to meditation. This hindrance must be eliminated through *Abhyasa Yoga*. But if the selfishness be so deep-rooted that a man does not desire to get out of it, there is a way out for him as well. One cannot remain without doing work. One's inborn nature forces one to work. Therefore, all the worldly activities should be carried on as well. But if they are done without attachment, they take you Godward. One must not be affected by the pleasure or pain ensuing from such activities. Associate them with the Lord. This is the only way an individual immersed in worldliness can attain God. Studies have found that individuals indulging in several methods of Bhakti Yoga such as Om chanting, mantra japa, prayer and meditation have substantially improved and increased their pain tolerance levels (Balkrishna *et al.*, 2018).

Those who have fixed their minds on Him, who worship him with steadfast devotion, they are the ones who are considered perfect in Bhakti Yoga. Such a devotee is free from attachment, aversion, and angularities. Thought of the Lord alone dominates their hearts day and night. They are therefore perfect yogis (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [3]. Sri Ramakrishna, the 19<sup>th</sup> century of West Bengal, said that while worshipping on the formless God, one must not believe that only his conception of God is correct and the beliefs of others is erroneous. To meditate on him with form is also a method. One must realize that all paths lead to the same goal (Gupta, 2012) [6]. There are seekers of divinity who by concentrating on the glories of the Lord attain salvation. They adore the Lord as indefinable, the unmanifest, the omnipresent, the unthinkable, the unchangeable and the eternal. For instance, some get attracted towards the colour of the flower, some towards its physical appearance, some towards its fragrance and some towards its subtle qualities. Similarly, some worship the supreme Lord while some adore his divine qualities and worship his *lilas*. Both kinds of devotees are equally dear to him. In both types of devotion, the devotees are sanctified, the goal to reach the Lord is the same in both the cases.

Worshipping the Lord can be accomplished in many ways. The first type of worship is meditation on his *Nirguna* (formless) aspect. If the mind cannot meditate on the formless aspect, one must worship the idol form of the Lord. If one cannot worship that way as well, then it is enough that he dedicates the fruits of all his actions to Him. Thereby the seeker attains peace of mind as he cannot concentrate on the Lord while he is hankering after the fruits of action. The Lord expects complete surrender from a seeker, all his mental, physical, and intellectual abilities must be merged in Him. This is how the union of the devotee with the deity is attained. The devotee can practice any form of worship through *Madhura Bhava*, *Sakhya bhava*, *Dasya bhava*, and *vatsalya* to concentrate on the deity which intensifies the relationship between the devotee and the Lord. While following any of the above methods one must develop qualities that attract the Lord like hating none, always maintain satisfaction, calmness of mind, control of the senses and complete ego lessness. The quality by whom the world is not afflicted nor is he afflicted by the world attains liberation. Steadfast devotion removes delusion.

## Conclusion

The Law of Karma leads to bondage. Detachment to the fruits of Karma is essential to obtain freedom from this bondage. Following the principles of the Gita leads to the feeling of oneness and peaceful co-existence around the globe. The concepts of Karma Yoga and Bhakti have been elucidated in the Gita, to make individuals aware of their duties and work for the betterment of their fellow human beings. This not only contributes to harmony and peace but is essential for universal brotherhood, peaceful co-existence and enhancement of a nation's prosperity (Bhattacharjee, 2021) [2].

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