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Jnana Vignana Yoga and Akshara Brahma Yoga as Expounded in the Gita

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to have an overview of principles of the Bhagavad Gita with special emphasis on Jnana Yoga and Akshara Brahma Yoga. Instances of allegory in the Mahabharata, the main function of an incarnation of God on earth, the qualities of the imperishable Brahman have also

been discussed. Following the principles of Akshara Brahma Yoga leads to steadiness of mind, improvement of cognition and concentration, achievement of personal and professional goals, balance of mind, mental equanimity and finally liberation from the endless cycle of birth and death.

Keywords: Allegory, Incarnation, Brahman, prana, Cosmic Consciousness

Introduction

The Mahabharata by Sage Vyasa is held to be the fifth Veda. The Bhagavad Gita finds a place in this stupendous record of human activities, aspirations, and achievements. Chapters twenty-five to forty-two of the Bhishma Parva constitute this immortal discourse. The Gita contains eighteen chapters and 1700 verses (Chidbhavananda, 2018) ^[1]. Some modern scholars hold that the Bhagavad Gita is an interpolation in the Mahabharata. But the internal evidence does not bear any testimony to this contention. Both in diction as well as in development of the subject there is homogeneity all through. The philosophy of the Gita explained and expanded becomes the Mahabharata. Conversely, Mahabharata condensed into philosophy becomes the Gita. What the heart is to the human body, the Gita is to the Great Epic. So, any attempt to trace a separate origin of the Gita serves no purpose. The Law of Incarnation of God is not selective and solitary but happens whenever or wherever the need arises in society. The entire Universe sentient and insentient comes out of God. An incarnation is God's special manifestation. God takes birth as a human being in this mundane world to clarify the spiritual and moral laws governing life. Through the drama in human life, Krishna demonstrated the divine principles which are irrevocably linked with progress in life. On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, human endeavours reap their corresponding results.

Allegory in the Mahabharata

Several instances of allegory can be found in the Mahabharata, the first being the instance of Kaliya, the black serpent which had poisoned the rivers of the Yamuna. Krishna not only subdued Kaliya but freed him from his fear, sins and other evil tendencies which he had accumulated in numerous past lives (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014) ^[2]. Sixteenth century saint and poet Srila Rupa Goswami in his book *Stavamala*, compares Kaliya to the human mind which like Kaliya brandishes its hundred heads of poisonous desires. Just as Kaliya always harmed others with his teeth, the poet laments that he continues to harm others with his desires and negative thoughts. Just as Krishna subdues Kaliya by leaving his footmark on his head, the poet requests Krishna to leave his footmark on the head of his mind thereby quietening his restless mind and subduing his poisonous desires which are only harming himself and others around him. The second instance of allegory is when the Lord Hanuman comes disguised as a monkey, when the Pandavas are living in exile in the forest, to test Bhima's patience and subdue his arrogance about his strength and prowess. Lord Hanuman then promises to stay on Arjuna's flag on his chariot and protect him from harm during the Kurukshetra war. The third instance of allegory is the incident of Jambavan, the bear king whose arrogance is crushed after Krishna defeats him in battle. (*Krishna story*).

The Main Function of an Incarnation

During Arjuna's conversation with Krishna in the battlefield, Krishna informed him that he taught the yoga of supreme, imperishable wisdom to Manu, who has been immortalised by the composition of his Smriti or the code of conduct. Manu had in turn taught it to Ishvaku, the first among the kings of the solar dynasty. When the rulers of kingdoms came to know of this supreme wisdom, they tackled the world problems more diligently. Later this yoga was handed down in regular succession to the royal sages. Unfortunately, due to efflux of time, this yoga decayed. When right type of men become scarce, the right system also dwindles away. It was this yoga which Krishna was now transferring to Arjuna. This constitutes the fourth chapter of the Gita.

Krishna informed that the bound souls are born to work out their karma. But the lord is above Karma. Though the Lord is unborn and imperishable, he can incarnate himself as a human being through the power of *maya*. This *mayashakti* has her part to play both with the *jivatman* and the incarnations of Ishwara, but with different functions. She enslaves the *jivatman* but is enslaved by the Incarnations of Ishwara. It is by manipulating his *mayashakti* that an Incarnation puts on the appearance of being born and of growing. The collective karma of the society as it ought to be, gets itself embodied in the Incarnation. He does not stand in the need of making any experiments with the various factors of life. His advent simply explains the sublime plan and purpose of human life. He stages holy activities for the good of the world. Spiritual men intuit these *lilas* and go beyond the cycle of birth and death. Krishna said that he who knows His divine birth and action in true light, drops his body and merges in Him.

Krishna went on to further explain that for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *dharma*, he is born age after age. When the wicked become more in number, *dharma* cannot strive in their midst. War, pestilence, famine, and similar forces inevitably come in both to strike a balance of the population and to set right the pervers. Among the three *Gunas*, of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Thamas* the predominance of *Rajas* and *Thamas* aggravates *adharma* which threatens to topple down the social fabric. The function of the Incarnation is to induce *Sattva*, the chief and foremost of the three *gunas* in society. And along with it *Dharma* begins to thrive. A balance of the three *Gunas* is necessary for social order to work on right lines (Chidbhavananda, 2018) [1]. In Sri Ramkrishna's words, "A viceroy is deputed by the monarch to quell lawlessness and disorder on his land. Similarly, an Incarnation is the man of authority sent by *Ishwara* into society. He comes to put in order all lapses and deviations in the practice of *dharma* (Gupta, 2012) [3].

Jnana Yoga according to Lord Krishna

Following the path as described in the Jnana Marga Yoga helps one see the glory of God, attain the knowledge of spiritual wisdom and helps him to achieve perfection and happiness in his life (Hartanto & Nurhayati, 2018). Lord Krishna expounded Jnana Yoga by telling Arjuna that the Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect, and egoism constitute the Lord's *Apara Prakriti*. The life principles, that is the *Jeevatman* constitute the Lord's higher *Prakriti*. If we talk in comparative terms, the smoke that emanates from the fire is its lower nature whereas the spark is its higher nature.

Jivaprakriti is utilizing *Jadaprakriti* as its body and upholding it. The *para* and *apara prakriti* are the womb of all beings and the Lord is responsible for the origin and dissolution of all beings. He is found in the radiance of the sun and the moon. The sacred syllable "Om" is in the sacredness of the Vedas, in the sound in ether and in the manliness of man.

According to the Mandukya Puran, an ancient Hindu text, chanting of 'Om' relieves stress and other psychological disorders. Studies have found that 'Om' is beneficial for treating hypothyroidism, memory enhancement, improving cognition, improved lung functioning and enhancement of the life (Rajput & Girase, 2022). Krishna exhorted Arjuna that Supreme Brahman is in the fragrance of the earth, the brilliance in fire, life in all living beings and in the austerity of the ascetics. He is also the eternal seed of all beings, in the intelligence of the intelligent, in the splendour of the splendid. Because of the *Gunas* of *Prakriti*, this world does not know who the Supreme Being is. Those who take refuge in God alone can surmount this divine illusion created by God, that is *maya*, made up of the three *Gunas*. The lowest of men engrossed in *maya* who are of demonic nature, do not take refuge in God because they are steeped in ignorance. Their way of thinking is to let go of the good thoughts and hold fast to only to negative thoughts. According to the Gita, four kinds of people are drawn to the Lord: man in distress, man seeking knowledge, the man seeking wealth and the man seeking wisdom. The man imbued with wisdom, ever steadfast and wise excels. The seeker though the path of evolution, devotion, and knowledge, can reach, realize the Lord and finally become merged in him, losing his individual identity. The salt doll trying to measure the depth of the ocean, finally becomes the ocean itself (Gupta, 2012) [3]. The Lord assures the fruits of action according to a person's desires and efforts. Some worshippers go to the Lord seeking worldly pleasures, but those who seek the Lord alone are merged within the Lord without rebirth. One must have a discerning mind and practice selective absorption. A yogi's knowledge and devotion at the time of death reveal themselves, and the yogi's steadfast mind realizes God himself.

Swami Vivekananda elucidated on Jnana yoga at his address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He said that man is essentially divine manifested on earth. A person who is a Jnana Yogi is a philosopher who wants to go beyond that which is visible, he is not satisfied with a worldly existence. He arrives at the ultimate conclusion that Supreme Reality is Sat-Chit-Anand that is existence, knowledge and bliss, which is not affected by time, space and causation (Yogeshwar, Giridhar, 1994) [6].

The Qualities of the Imperishable Brahman According to Krishna

This conversation is expounded in the eight chapter of the Gita. On Arjuna's question about *Brahman*, *Karma* and *Adhyatma*, Krishna replied that the imperishable is *Brahman*.

According to (Meshkov & A.A., 2018) [5], the Gita has three subsystems knowledge of the divine reality, attainment of this divine reality through yoga, and description of the highest state of bliss where there is union of Atman and Brahman. The Absolute Reality is *Brahman*. It is supremely above time, space and causation which are the characteristics of the universe. The senses and the intellect

cannot gain access to it. For this reason, it is called *paramam* – the Supreme. As the screen is the background for a moving picture in a cinematograph, Brahman is the substratum, basis and background of the panorama of the universe. The changes that take place in the universe do not affect *Brahman*. It is ever Itself, the Being behind the becoming of the universe. It is therefore called *aksharam*: the imperishable. Just as the nature of the sun is to put forth beams of light, the intrinsic nature of Brahman is to appear as the multitudinous conscious beings as the *Jivatman*. This assumption of the role of the *Jivatman* is called the *Adhyatma*. The vibration or the act of becoming that is taking place in the universe is karma. The action that is the immediate cause of man having come into existence and of his making progress in life is technically called karma. Whatever work promotes the welfare of man is karma. Karma is the only all-powerful agency for man's origin, growth, and prosperity.

Swami Vivekananda had explained Karma Yoga at the Parliament of Religions by expostulating that Karma yoga teaches us how to work only for the sake of work without being attached to the results because he feels it is good for him to do so and he has no other objective beyond that. The word Karma has its origin in the Sanskrit root word 'Kri' which means to perform action. All action is thus Karma (Yogeshwar, Giridhar, 1994)^[6]. The five elements-ether, air, fire, water and earth are designated as *adhibhuta*. In contrast to *Brahman* which is imperishable, these elements are perishable. The physical structure of Brahman or the Supreme Reality is made up of these five elements. Though these five elements are insentient by themselves, they get their distinctiveness by clinging to the sentient. All living beings require the five elements for their embodiment (Chidbhavananda, 2018)^[1].

Elucidation on How to Keep the Mind Steadfast on the Supreme

Whoever at the time of death remembers the Lord, attains the supreme state of *Ishwara*. Whatever a man thinks at the time of death, that alone he attains. The person who constantly thinks of the Lord attains salvation after his death. Practice of chanting the lord's name is recommended here to have the Lord's name uttered at the end of life to attain salvation. Preparation for it must go on throughout the life. He who is absorbed in the thought of the Lord while departing from the body gets merged in the Cosmic Consciousness. And this is *mukti* getting which there is no more return to mundane life. This is the universal law; there is no doubt about it. If a man who does not think about the Lord, but gets fixed on other thoughts at the time of his death, then whatever being a man thinks of at the last moment when he leaves the body, that alone he attains. Dream is only a projection of the mind and it has no corresponding external reality. But dream is the indicator of the trend of the mind of an individual; it cannot be recast or pre-arranged according to one's will and pleasure. Just as the dreamer is, while in a dream, a creature of his own mental makeup, so does the dying man assume at the time of death, a mental make up based on his bent in the course of that career. The gross manifestation, at a suitable time and environment, of that mental structure is what is called the next birth. Man is therefore always the architect of his destiny. Therefore, at all times, man must think of Him only and fight. With mind and understanding set on Him, he will

immediately come to Him. Every individual must discharge faithfully the duty that is his. There are people who neglect their earthly duties on the plea that they have taken to spiritual life. And there are others who excuse themselves from spiritual practices on the plea that during their worldly engagements they don't have time for anything else. The sacred and the secular are incompatible in their view. But a true devotee is one who does or thinks only for the glory of his Maker. Just as a singing mendicant on the street plays on the stringed instrument with one hand and with the other carefully beats the drum fastened round his neck, one ought to discharge his worldly duties carefully and at the same time be inclined Godward. He should imbibe godly tendencies more and more. With the mind not wandering after anything else, made steadfast on the yoga of constant practice, he who meditates on the Supreme, finally reaches Him. The omniscient, the Ancient, the Ruler, smaller than an atom, the Supporter of all, of Form inconceivable, Effulgent like the sun, and Beyond all darkness; he who meditates on this Resplendent, Supreme Purusha, at the time of death, with a steady mind, devotion and strength of Yoga, well fixing the entire prana in the middle of the eyebrows, he reaches him.

A man endowed with spiritual strength is fully equipped for the battle of life. Knotty problems of life are all solved by him as a matter of course. Death is no terror to him. He puts it on par with life and faces both the same with equanimity. The yogi is ever himself, both in life as well as death. Life energy of the ordinary man leaves the body at death through the apertures. But it goes out differently when the yogi departs from the body. It gets concentrated between the eyebrows and exits through the skull. The last event is also the outcome of the strength of yoga. As the river enters the ocean, the individual consciousness of the yogi merges in the Cosmic Consciousness, which is Brahman. The activities of the body and the senses all cease, as when going to sleep. As a bird return to a tree to roost, the mind of a yogi gets settled in his heart at the time of death. Contrary to this, the mind of the worldly wanders woefully on mundane things. Cold spreads all over the body as prana leaves it. As a traveller goes to a vehicle station, the prana of the yogi finally comes to the head. For this region the yogi's head is the last region from which warmth vanishes. It is the tendency of the mind to be fixed on the God at the time of departure. The sound vibration "Om" persists then. The spiritual content of this vibration is experienced as Infinite Bliss and the Brilliance of Pure Consciousness. This Brahmanirvanam is the Supreme Goal attained by the yogi (Chidbhavananda, 2018)^[1].

Conclusion

In the words of Sr Ramkrishna, the formative thought that dominates the mind of the one who leaves the body is the factor that governs and contributes to the next birth of the individual. Spiritual discipline is therefore imperative to one and all. The devotee of the Lord is ever immersed in the thought of the God. Being firmly fixed on it, he reaches the God on leaving the body. By following the doctrine of Akshara Brahma Yoga, the individual gets supreme spiritual strength to face all hurdles in life.

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