

Chapter Five

Concluding Remarks

Based on the above discussion I am now in a position to revisit the outcome of the thesis. The title of the thesis suggests a comparative study between Kant and Bhagavadgītā about moral action. It is important to note here that the timings of Kant and Bhagavadgītā are different. Kant was a German philosopher who appeared during the enlightened period. Bhagavadgītā appeared in the fifth century B.C. Thus the difference in timing is huge. Moreover, Kant has been regarded as a systematic philosopher who developed philosophy systematically. In one of his books, out of many books, Kant developed the concept of moral action. His book *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral* shows the paradigm of moral action. On the other hand, the authorship of Bhagavadgītā has been attributed to Vyāsa. According to s̄stras, Bhagavadgītā contains many Chapters out of which the actions of Sri Kṛṣṇa are taken into account as the paradigm of *niṣkāma karma*. So the comparative study here is justified from the perspective of Kantian moral philosophy particularly from his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral* and the moral action of Kṛṣṇa, particularly concerning Bhagavadgītā. In this thesis, I am primarily concerned with the systematic study beginning with the paradigm of moral action, followed by the paradigm of Kantian moral action, the paradigm of niṣkāma karma of Bhagavadgītā, and the comparative study between Kant and Bhagavadgītā about moral action. All these are based on theories developed in these systems.

Frankly speaking, we begin with the paradigm that both Kant and Bhagavadgītā developed about moral action and niṣkāma karma respectably. It is justified on the basis that the doctrine of moral action in Kant's ethics is deontological. As far as deontological ethics is concerned, every moral

action is determined based on universal rules and principles which are rigorous and more importantly which are universalizable. We think all these features are being fulfilled by Kantian ethics and that is why his ethics more often has been designated as deontological. The distinction between deontological ethics and teleological ethics is very clear and distinct and there should not be any confusion between them. However, ironically many contemporary thinkers confuse the distinction between deontological and teleological ethics. Even many would conceive deontology as virtue ethics. I do reckon that without virtue ethics there cannot be any deontological ethics. Thus to me, virtue ethics is the locus of all ethics. This does not, however, make sense to say that virtue ethics is at par with deontological ethics. However, what I like to mention here whether Kantian ethics is deontological or teleological or both or neither. In my sense, Kantian ethics is deontological backed up by virtue ethics. Based on that I have examined Kantian ethics as the paradigm of moral actions that are effective to perform desireless action (moral action). Such moral action cannot be performed by anybody. Only moral agent in the strict sense of the term can perform moral action and they can become a member of the *Kingdom of ends*. Thus it seems clear that Kantian moral action is guided by an absolute form of duty based on practical reason where there is no exception or vacation of violating such rules. That is why Kant famously used the philosophical coin 'duty for duty sake'. When we engage ourselves in making a comparative study between Kant and Bhagavadgītā, we have to know with critical outlook whether the concept of *niṣkāma karma* is based on deontological rules and principles or not. Let us see, whether the concept *niṣkāma karma* is based on the deontological concept or not. Many would say that the actions of Sri Kṛṣṇa of Bhagavadgītā are deontological. In this regard, I can refer to the great debate between Amartya Sen and John Rawls. According to Amartya Sen, the role of Sri Kṛṣṇa of *Bhagavadgītā* of *Mahābhārata* is deontological and the

concept of justice of John Rawls may be compared with the deontological nature of Kṛṣṇa of Bhagavadgītā. Beside Amartya Sen, I can assume that the apparent role of Sri Kṛṣṇa of Bhagavadgītā is deontological concerning niṣkāma karma. Otherwise, there is no point of making a comparative study between the moral action of Kant and niṣkāma karma of Bhagavadgītā. The crux of the matter is that if their methodologies are different then there is no relevance of making such a philosophically demanding comparison between Kant and Bhagavadgītā. However, the point is that Kantian ethics is purely deontological without question-begging; whereas the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of Bhagavadgītā is *supposedly deontological* by some scholars. Of course, many contemporary thinkers do engage in finding out the solution whether the concept of *niṣkāma karma* is teleological or deontological. However, here I have a very specific point to say. According to me, the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of Bhagavadgītā is neither teleological nor deontological and this is one of the important findings of this thesis.

Let me first specify why the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is not deontological. As far as deontological ethics is concerned, any action whatsoever is to be performed without a desire for the fruits of action. Now the question: Is the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* fulfilled this criterion? I do not think so. Let me specify why? To me, in *Bhagavadgītā* while doing *niṣkāma karma*, all kinds of desires are not eradicated. In Bhagavadgītā, *niṣkāma karma* may be used in a relative sense which goes against the pure form of deontology. While doing deontological ethics, some scholars used *niṣkāma karma* in an absolute sense. When *niṣkāma karma* is used in the absolute sense, it is taken as a deontological concept like the Kantian concept of duty. For Kant, if an action is done with a desire to the fruit of action, love, and sympathy, it is not a moral action. So if we apply the Kantian paradigm of

moral action in *Bhagavadgītā* then we surely do commit a great mistake. The reason of that Unlike Kant, some types of desires are acceptable in *Bhagavadgītā*. For example, the desire of *Lokasamgraha* (welfare of the world), the desire of *Mokṣa*, etc. Therefore, it seems to me that there is a desire in *Bhagavadgītā*, unlike Kant, as far as the paradigm of *niṣkāma karma* is concerned. The *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is not completely desireless and hence it cannot be regarded as deontological. On the contrary, the moral action of Kant is completely desireless.

Let me spell out why is the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* not teleological? Many would say that the *niṣkāma karma* is teleological. The entire teaching of *Bhagavadgītā* rests on the notion of dharma. Again the notion of the dharma of *Bhagavadgītā* logically rests on the notion of *Lokasamgraha* and *Mokṣa*. In other words, it can be said that the individual and social well being are structurally in build into *Bhagavadgītā*'s conception of *svadharma*. To me, *Lokasamgraha* is a non- personalistic and it has worldly ends. However, there is no conflict between *Mokṣa* and *Lokasamgraha* of *Bhagavadgītā*. It does not matter whether we relate the concept of *niṣkāma karma* with the notion of *Lokasamgraha* or with the notion of *Mokṣa*. It rests on the notion of an end. To me, the concept of *niṣkāma karma* cannot be interpreted in the absolute sense of the term. Therefore, it cannot be said to be a deontological concept. Neither can it be said to a teleological concept. I have already rejected the view that the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is deontological. To me, if it is supposed to be deontological then it would not be deontological in the Kantian sense. It may perhaps be conceived as *relative deontology* in my own sense.

I do claim that the concept of *niskāma karma* is not teleological unlike many would claim. Professor Jagat Pal in his paper 'The Concept of *Niṣkāma karma*: Teleological or Deontological?' arguably claims that the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is

teleological. According to Jagat Pal, the concept of *niṣkāma karma* cannot be interpreted in an absolute sense. It cannot be said to be a deontological concept, but it is a teleological concept. According to Pal, the doctrine of *niṣkāma karma* is a doctrine of action which was advocated to protect *dharma* in society. I have already stated that the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is not deontological like Kantian moral action. However, I certainly disagree with the view that the *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is teleological.

Let me specify the concept of teleology as understood by western thinkers. There would be some specific ends in every action under teleological ethics. The term *teleology* comes from the Greek terms ‘telos’ and ‘logos’. ‘Telos’ means ‘end’ and ‘logos’ means ‘science’. Thus teleological ethics is a theory of morality that derives duty or moral obligation from what is good or desirable as an end to be achieved. It is opposed to deontological ethics based on duty. Teleological ethics often be conceived as utilitarianism and hence very close to consequentialism as well. Thus teleological ethics is not free from end or desire. We have already stated that *niṣkāma karma* is not free from desires or ends. It consists of the desires of *Lokasamgraha* and *Mokṣa*. In this sense, one may say that *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is not deontological but teleological.

However, I do not think that the *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is teleological. This is another important finding in my thesis. Let me specify in what sense I deny the teleological aspect of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā*. In my sense, Western teleological ethics rests on some specific ends. That means the goodness of an action is judged based on its specific ends and nothing else. On the other hand, if we look at the concept of *niṣkāma karma*, we find that even though some specific ends of action referred but it states more than that besides specific ends. It says that besides specific ends, one should observe or strictly follow his own *svadharma*. *Svadharma* is

an integral part of *niṣkāma karma* according to *Bhagavadgītā*. Therefore, if anybody violates *svadharma* and engages with *paradharmā* then in such a situation his *karma* cannot be accepted as *niṣkāma karma*. The concept of *svadharma* and *paradharmā* are completely foreign in western philosophy or western teleological ethics. Therefore, I presume that what is teleological in western ethics may not be teleological in *Bhagavadgītā* while doing *niṣkāma karma*. The question, of course, is: Can the very perception of *svadharma* be revealed in some sense of others in western ethics? The answer is no. The reason for that the concept of *svadharma* is based on *guṇas*. The concept of *guṇas* is not accepted in western ethics. There we cannot apply some western teleological concept in the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā*. Therefore, my point is that the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is not teleological with regard to the western teleological concept or with regard to only some specific ends.

The question then is: What would it be at the end? In this regard, I can say that the concept of *niṣkāma karma* is a very *unique concept* that cannot be attributed or characterized as either a deontological concept or a teleological concept. However, I do prefer this unique concept of *niṣkāma karma* as the byproduct of neither of these systems because of its very nature. However, at the same time, I have a different perception when I am engaging with Kantian deontology. To me the nature of Kantian deontology is not based on *svadharma*, rather it is based on duty backed up by practical reason. Even though *svadharma*, as used in *Bhagavadgītā* while developing *niṣkāma karma*, maybe comparable at par with duty as used by Kant, but I find an insightful difference between them.

The other point which I find between Kant and *Bhagavadgītā* is that both are directed to make our life meaningful. According to Kant, a moral agent can perform moral action if and only if he would become a member of the *Kingdom of ends*. Only the members of the kingdom of ends

can perform moral action and by way of becoming the member of the kingdom of ends, one can treat himself and others as an end, never simply as a means. In this regard, Kant does not mention the concept of *Mokṣa* or the concept of *Lokasamgraha*. The concept of *Lokasamgraha* means the welfare of the world. Only *niṣkāma karmis* do perform for *Lokasamgraha*. Now the question is: can the member of the kingdom of ends be treated as *niṣkāma karmi* from the perspective of *Lokasamgraha*? To me, it needs clarification and amplification. According to Kant, any member of the Kingdom of ends cannot treat humanity simply as a means. This is the genesis of the member of the kingdom of ends. However, if we go through the concept of *niṣkāma karma*; we find that a *niṣkāma karmi* can use anybody simply as a means for protecting *dharma* or doing *lokasamgraha*. The phrase such as ‘simply as a means’ is adequately justified in *Bhagavadgītā*. It is said that even a *niṣkāma karmi* for the sake of *Lokasamgraha* kills anybody by performing *svadharma* then his action cannot be morally condemned; rather it would be treated as morally worthy as it was the case in the case of the great battle of *kurukṣetra*, where Arjuna with the advice of Sri Kṛṣṇa killed so many relatives as enemies.

In summing up I would like to add one more point from my own rational. A question may be raised from a practical point of view in favor of Kant and against *Bhagavadgītā*. The point is that the *niṣkāma karma* is based on *varṇa* systems. The concept of the *varṇa* system was promulgated at the time of *kurukṣetra* war. It was before the fifth century B.C. At that time the society was divided based on the *varṇa* system. The concept of *varṇa* was much pronounced and accepted within *sanātana dharma*. While characterizing *varṇa*, Sri Kṛṣṇa remarked that the fourfold *varṇas* was created by him according to the divisions of *guṇas* and *karmas*. At that time, everyone within the society had to accept the *varṇa* system. However, throughout history, the fourfold division which was originally based on *guṇas* and *karmas* eventually is misleadingly

linked with birth misleadingly. As a result of that, the society within the *sanātana dharma* faced conflicts in the name of *varṇa* systems. This actually vitiates the sanctity of the original *varṇa* system based on *guṇas* and karmas. Now the point is that if the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā* is accepted then what would be the hidden status of the *varṇa* systems? Is *niṣkāma karmi* would be a *karmi* of any *varṇa* based on the *varṇa* system?

According to *Bhagavadgītā*, if the *varṇa* system is based on *guṇas* and *karma* then any human being can be a *niṣkāma karmi*. However, if the *varṇa* system is misleadingly linked with birth then there is a problem that we face in our society in our day to day life. Moreover, Hinduism is a series of the jungle. It is very difficult to know who would be the real Hindus. In the present society, there is a legal system of becoming a *brāhmin varṇa* from other *varṇa*. Through the system affidavit, one can change one's surname. Even in a true sense, a *śūdra* can use a *brahmin's* surname with the help of an affidavit. Does it lead us to say that a *śūdra varṇa* according to the *varṇa* system be acquired the upper *varṇa* by the way of transforming his surname? These are some vital issues we keep in mind while dealing with the concept of *niṣkāma karma* of *Bhagavadgītā*. Frankly speaking, I do presume that we do not find the same problem while dealing with the paradigm of moral action in Kantian ethics. Moreover, we can say there are many religions, such as Jainism, Buddhism Sikhism, etc where there is no concept of *varṇa* system. Does it lead us to say that *Bhagavadgītā* is not relevant to these religions? We cannot say this. My point is that if *Bhagavadgītā* is predominantly concerned only with the so-called *varṇa* system then *Bhagavadgītā* perhaps may not be relevant to other religions. I do not think so. In summing up I can say that the comparison between Kant and *Bhagavadgītā* about the paradigm of moral action is desirable as well as praiseworthy, but at the same time, we need to

take a bit caution from the perspective of Philosophy. The role of divinity and myths are dominating factors in *Bhagavadgītā* and it is very much unlikely in Kant.