

**Abstract of the thesis entitled “PARADIGM OF MORAL ACTION: A COMPARATIVE  
STUDY BETWEEN KANT AND BHAGAVADGĪTĀ”**

The concept of moral action plays a significant role in philosophy in general and ethics in particular. As a result of that, it has been equally developed both in the West as well as in the East. However, the perspectives are altogether different. Therefore, a comparative study remains worthy between West and East concerning moral action. The strategy of this thesis is to make a comparative study between Kant and *Bhagavadgītā*. Naturally, when we talk of moral action, it is primarily concerned with the self-conscious people. The term ‘self-conscious’ is very significant because an action done by a person cannot be evaluated from the perspective of morality so long the concerned person is not a self-conscious being. Moreover, every moral agent must enjoy the freedom of will and responsibility towards his action. The thesis initially begins with a general introduction where the concepts of moral action as well as different types of moral action from Western and Indian perspectives have been addressed.

After that, the thesis deals with the paradigm of moral action regarding Kant. Indeed I do claim that Kant actually set up a rigorous and stringent criterion of morality without which it would almost impossible to do moral action in the real sense of the term. We know that Kant was the proponent of deontological ethics where moral action is performed by a moral agent with the background of the moral dictum ‘Duty for duty sake’. As a result of that Kant has set up the supreme principles of morality which are extremely needed for moral action. While offering such supreme principles of morality, Kant not only enabled to deviate from conventional morality but at the same breath, he enabled to ensure moral universalizability as the central issue of deontological ethics. He characterizes moral action as unconditional, completely free from self-

interest, inclination, and emotion. In this regard, he brings the concept of ‘good-will’. He then says that there is only one unconditional good which shines like a jewel and it is ‘good-will’ alone. I think that in the case of moral action in Kantian, the motive of duty plays an important role. If the motive of duty is violated by any sort of inclination and sympathy, then no action can be regarded as moral action. Thus just by way of injecting various moral maxims and rules, Kant set up the paradigm of moral action where the moral action would be guided by categorical imperative and where duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law. For Kant, we need the formula of universal law which acts not as a mere means, but as an end in itself. It has to be autonomous and with the help of it, every rational being must regard himself as making universal law and must seek to judge himself as a member of the kingdom of ends. It is a stage where every moral agent must perform moral action with human dignity. I think that for Kant the ultimate motive of moral action is the duty for duty sake and there is no need for obedience to the commands of God.

What we term as *moral action* in Kantian ethics may be termed as desireless action or *niṣkāma karma* in the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā*. The concept of *niṣkāma karma* that has been developed in the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā* conforms with various sastras, such as, the Upaniṣads, the Rāmāyaṇas, the Mahābharata, the Purāṇas, and so on. However, in my thesis when I talk of *niṣkāma karma*, I am primarily concerned with the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā*. The whole perspective of *niṣkāma karma* of ethics of *Bhagavadgītā* is centered round with the story of the great battle of two families where Sri kṛṣṇa as the incarnation of God advises Arjuna to perform *niṣkāma karma*. In a nutshell, the story messages us the paradigm of *niṣkāma karma* in the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā*. In this context, the thesis deeply engages with various perspectives of moral action that had been revealed with the conversation of Sri kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Here Sri kṛṣṇa

represents Arjuna as a moral agent to give the lesson to the world how does a moral agent can perform *niṣkāma karma*. In this regard, the concept of *Lokasaṃgraha*, the concept of *guṇa*, *varṇa* system, the subtle distinction between *svadharma* and *śāddharana dharma*, the concept of liberation, etc, have been exemplified in great detail.

Thus the roadmap of this thesis is very clear. It explicates the view of Kant and the view of the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā* separately in the subsequent sequels. However, the treasure of the thesis actually hinges on the comparative studies between them. Indeed what I subscribe is that the concept of moral action as used by Kant is the outcome of rational justification based on practical reason where there is no role of God. On the other hand, the concept of *niṣkāma karma* that we come to know from the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā* is based on the dictation of God. The role of *kṛṣṇa* is the role of God who taught Arjuna about how to perform *niṣkāma karma*. Thus, I do reckon that the Kantian model of moral action is the outcome of the reason that every rational agent must follow. On the other hand, the concept of *niṣkāma karma* is more debatable to me because it is purely mystical in nature and the locus of it is based on sheer faith. Having said I think the objective of moral action of Kant and *niṣkāma karma* of the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā* remains the same in the sense that both are directed towards moral life. From this perspective, I do believe that the comparison between Kant and *Bhagavadgītā* about moral action is praiseworthy. The role of divinity and myths are the characteristic features of the ethics of *Bhagavadgītā*, which I think, is completely foreign in Kantian ethics. So my single line conclusion of the thesis is that the comparison is a philosophical attempt, but in no way it is out of begging question.