

SOME ASPECTS OF NIṢKĀMAKARMA: A CRITICAL STUDY

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The objective of the paper entitled Some Aspects of Niskāmakarma: A Critical Study is to address some of the important problems regarding Niṣkāmakarma along with the logical solution to them. The questions which are often raised about Niṣkāmakarma are the following:

(i) Is Niṣkāmakarma, i.e. Karma without desire at all possible?

(ii) What is the importance of Niṣkāmakarma?

(iii) In which sense are we slave (dāsa) of God?

(iv) How can a dāsa who does not have any freedom of will be a moral agent?

This paper is a sincere attempt to reply to all these questions as logically as possible. This shows that all the questions and problems on Niṣkāmakarma mentioned above arise due to the lack of proper understanding of the same. Quoting the relevant slokes from Srimadbhagavadgītā a logical and consisted analysis has been carried out and there by all problems shown above have been resolved.

Śrīmadbhagavadgītā is one of the fundamental and popular Hindu religious texts. Day by day its popularity is growing up all over the world. Though we come across the discussion of *niṣkāmakarma* in different religious texts but the discussion of the same found in *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is profound and unparalleled. The concept of *niṣkāmakarma* draws our special attention on different important issues, e.g., what does exactly *niṣkāmakarma* mean? Is *niṣkāmakarma* at all possible? If the answer is positive then in which sense it is possible? Is the *niṣkāmakarma* at all the subject of moral judgment? If it is so then in which sense it is the subject of moral judgment? This paper is a sincere attempt to address these issues.

At the very outset I like to draw the kind attention of the readers regarding the importance of *niṣkāmakarma*. No one can deny the fact that our society has been turned into a hell. All conscious individuals are deeply concerned with the different types of evils we come across in and around our society. But we all know that nothing can be taken place without cause. What is the cause of it? Obviously, the members of our society themselves are the cause of it. More precisely to say the *sakāmakarmas*, i.e., the *karmas* for the satisfaction of our personal interest, performed by us have turned our society into a hell. But why are we getting motivated to perform the *sakāmakarmas* only? The only reasonable answer is that it is our present education system. The present education system makes us giant positively, but a selfish one. There is no room for others in the world of us. We are tightly engaged in different types of activities throughout the

day, but it is a pity that all our activities are exclusively centered in and around our individual interest. Unless and until we come out from the small boundary of our personal interest and thereby enter into the vast kingdom of impersonal and universal interest the problems prevailing in our society cannot be solved. But what is the way out? As far as my observation is concerned the only way out for the same is the proper teaching and implementation of the ideology of the *niṣkāmakarma* as it is depicted in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. In the course of our discussion, we shall see how the proper teaching and implementation of the same in our society will lead to the solution of our social problems.

It is worthy to note that the role and importance of *niṣkāmakarma* is far-reaching. The role of *niṣkāmakarma* is at least two-fold. The first one has already been pointed out. The second one is the attainment of *mokṣa*, the supreme goal as it is suggested by our *Śāstras*. The Hindu *Śāstras* prescribe for four *puruṣārthas*, viz, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. Among them *mokṣa* is considered as the supreme *puruṣārtha*. For the attainment of *mokṣa* generally four means, which are otherwise known as *mārgas*, have been suggested by the Hindu *Śāstras*. The *niṣkāmakarma* or *karmayoga* is one of them. It is worthy to note that this *yoga* has been considered to be the most superior by the *Gītā*. It says-

“*Tapasvibhyo 'dhiko yogī jñānibhyo 'pi mato 'dhikaḥ |*
Karmibhyaścādhiko yogī tasmād yogī bhavārjunall”¹

Now let us go to the first question mentioned above-what is meant by *niṣkāmakarma*? In reply to this question, it can simply be said that *niṣkāmakarma* is a *karma* which is done without having any desire for the enjoyment of its fruit or result. But this answer is nothing but a naive answer. So, it is better to go to the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* itself if we are to seek for the exact and appropriate answer. It is already mentioned that *niṣkāmakarma* is otherwise called *karmayoga*. In *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* we come across the answer in chapter two. It runs as “*Yogaḥkarmasukauśalam...*”². *Yoga* is a technique for work. But what type of technique does it refer to? The answer to this question is not available within a single *śloka* of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. Careful enquiry shows that the answer to the same is available in different *ślokas* throughout different chapters of the *Gītā*. The same question has been answered in different ways in different *ślokas*. It starts with the 47th *śloka* of the second chapter-

“*Karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana//*

¹*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*: 6/46

² *Ibid.* 2/50

Mā karmaphalaheturbhūrmā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi//"³

Śrīkṛṣṇa says to Arjuna that he has no right upon the fruit of his action; he has the right upon the action alone. Then he proceeds to the next *śloka* and says,

*"Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya/
Sidhyāsidhyayoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate//"*⁴

So in both of the *ślokas*, i.e., *śloka* no 47 and 48 one teaching is common that we have to perform our action leaving the desire for the enjoyment of the fruit of it. But in *śloka* no 48 we come across a new lesson that we have to treat our success and failure equally. It is also stated that this equal treatment is called *yoga*.

Śrīkṛṣṇa says to Arjuna that a person who performs his actions following the guidelines stated above then this person can be known in various ways like *yogī*, *sthitaprajña* or *muni*. Arjuna here gets little bit confused and in order to remove his confusion he asks to Śrīkṛṣṇa

*"Sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava/
Sthitadhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta kimāsīta brajeta kim//"*⁵

The answer to this question has been immediately given by Śrīkṛṣṇa in next *śloka*,

*"Prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān/
Ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate//"*⁶

Here in this answer, we find a new aspect of a *sthitaprajña* or *yogī* that his mind must be devoid of all desires and he will remain content with soul alone. It implies that though he lives in the material world he cannot have any attraction for the material things. Now Śrīkṛṣṇa thinks that Arjuna is yet to be completely free from his confusion. Therefore, he proceeds further to reply the same. He says,

*"Duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprahaḥ/
Vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate//"*⁷

One who is indifferent of both sufferings and pleasures, and devoid of all sorts of attachment, fear and anger, is called a *muni*. Śrīkṛṣṇa continues to reply to the same question in the rest of the several *ślokas* of the second chapter in different ways. The essence of this teaching is that a true *yogī* must control his senses and thereby transcend the boundary of the world of desire and attachment. Perhaps

³ Ibid. 2/47

⁴ Śrīmadbhagavadgītā:2/48

⁵ Ibid. 2/54

⁶ Ibid. 2/55

⁷ Ibid. 2/56

Śrīkṛṣṇa understands by seeing the face of Arjuna that the cloud of doubt and confusion from his mind is yet to be removed and therefore in the third chapter Śrīkṛṣṇa continues to reply to the same in various ways. In a nutshell what Śrīkṛṣṇa teaches here, in this chapter, is that he must turn his action into sacrifice (*yajña*). We come across a very straight forward answer to the same question in the sixth chapter. Here in the very first *śloka* of this chapter Śrīkṛṣṇa says,

“*Anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṁ kāryaṁ karma karoti yaḥ/
Sa sannyaṣi ca yogī ca na niragnirna cākriyaḥ*”⁸

Here so far as the first part of this *śloka* is concerned the teaching is nothing new since it says that a *yogī* must perform his action by giving up the desire for enjoyment of fruit. But so far as the second part of this *śloka* is concerned it gives an information which is not given so far. I think this information is highly essential for understanding *niṣkāmakarma* in the true sense. We come across some of the views which teach that the Vedic ritualistic activities called *yajña* are inseparably associated with some sorts of desire, and from this one may wrongly conclude that when the *Gītā* advises us to perform *niṣkāmakarma* then thereby it teaches us to be abstaining from doing these ritualistic activities. Again, some persons, particularly the *jñānavādins*, have some misconception that a true *yogī* or a *muni* should not perform any action and hence, he should avoid all sorts of activities. Here an attempt has been made by Śrīkṛṣṇa to make us aware about these misconceptions. Śrīkṛṣṇa categorically says that one who is abstained from performing Vedic ritualistic activities or abstained from doing all sorts of activities is not a true *yogī*. It clearly implies that a true *yogī* will perform all sorts of activities but he will do so without having any desire for enjoyment of the fruits of these actions.

The whole teaching of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* on *Karmayoga* and *Karmayogī* or *sthītaprajña* or *muni* dealt with so far can be summarized as follows:

- 1) A *Karmayogī* must perform his actions without having any desire for enjoyment of fruit.
- 2) A *Karmayogī* will consider success and failure as equal.
- 3) He will be independent of pleasure and pain.
- 4) He will control his senses.
- 5) He cannot have any attraction towards material world or material gain.
- 6) He will never think of the satisfaction of his personal interest.
- 7) He will remain content with the soul alone.

⁸*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*:6/1

8) He will turn all his actions into *yajña*.

Now the question is – why does Śrīkr̥ṣṇa advise Arjuna to perform *niṣkāmakarma*? It is already stated that the ultimate goal of us is to attain *mokṣa*, the supreme *puruṣārtha*. But *mokṣa* can be attained through *niṣkāmakarma*; it cannot be attained through *sakāmakarma*. There is a contradiction between *sakāmakarma* and *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* implies absolute cessation of rebirth, but *sakāmakarma* necessarily brings about rebirth. *Mokṣa* is a state which is absolutely devoid of sufferings and pains. But no such state can be achieved as long as we continue to take our birth. Birth means assuming a body. A body must be the subject of sufferings like disease, hunger, old age, death and so on. This clearly shows that attainment of *mokṣa*, a state completely devoid of pain and sufferings is impossible as long as we shall continue to take rebirth and thereby assume body. But our rebirth is a necessary and inevitable corollary of our *sakāmakarma*. The same can be explained in a better way with the theory of *karma* as it is explained in our *Śāstra*. As per the theory of *karma* an action positively produces its effect or result and one must enjoy the result of one's own *karma*. The result of the action done by one person cannot be consumed by another person. But it is worthy to note that the fruits of all the actions done in a particular life cannot be exhausted in that life, some of the fruits must be stored to be enjoyed in the next life. So, he has to take birth for the next time to consume the stored fruit of the actions done in his previous life. But in the next birth one must perform actions like the previous birth and at least some of the fruits of these actions must be stored. Therefore, to enjoy the same he must take his birth for the third time. Thus, the process of rebirth continues without any end. Consequently, attainment of *mokṣa* cannot be possible through *karma*.

But the theory of *karma* and rebirth is applicable only for the *sakāmakarma*, it is not applicable for the *niṣkāmakarma*. In fact, the contradiction is not between *karma* and *mokṣa*, contradiction is between the desire for the enjoyment of the fruit of action and *mokṣa*; since *niṣkāmakarma* is devoid of the desire it cannot be contradictory to *mokṣa*, rather it turns into the helping condition, *mārga*, for the attainment of *mokṣa*. It is a well-known fact that if a snake bite one then he will die, if proper treatment is not given in due time. But the same poison of snake which takes our life can be turned into a medicine which saves us from death. Milk is a cause of indigestion. But if the same milk is turned into curd, then it becomes a helping condition for digestion.

Likewise, as long as our *karma* remains *sakāma*, it continues to produce our next birth and thereby turns into an obstacle for the attainment of *mokṣa*. But if the same *karma* turns into *niṣkāma* one then it becomes a helping condition, i.e., a *mārga* for the attainment of *mokṣa*. If *sakāmakarma* stands for the poison of snake or milk then *niṣkāmakarma* stands for medicine produced from poison of snake or curd. In fact, *niṣkāmakarma*, as it is stated by *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, serves two-fold purpose at the same time – (a) it leads to the attainment of *mokṣa*, and (b) establishes the *lokasaṅgraha* or wellbeing of the whole society (*ātmamokṣārthamjagathitāya ca*). This two-fold purpose served by *niṣkāmakarma* has been beautifully and clearly depicted in the following *śloka*,

“*Karmaṇaiva hi saṁsidhvimāsthītā janakādayaḥ/
Lokasaṅgrahamevāpi saṁpaśyan karttumaharsi//*”⁹

So far as our discussion is concerned, I think, it becomes clear why performance of *niṣkāmakarma* has been proposed by *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā*.

Now let us address the next question – is *niṣkāmakarma* possible at all? Our day-to-day experience clearly shows that all our activities, without exception, necessarily presupposes some desire. No action without desire is possible. How can then *niṣkāmakarma* possible? No doubt, the question is very sound. But our close analysis of the *Gītā* shows that here the term *karma* in *niṣkāmakarma* has been used in a technical sense. Any type of desire has not been attributed as *kāma*. Some of our desires are called *kāma* and some of our desires are described as *prema*. Only the former one is undermined and blamed but the latter one is praise worthy and therefore encouraged to do. But what type of desire belongs to the first category and what type of desire belongs to the second category? I think we come across a beautiful answer to this question in *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*,

“*Ātmendriya prītivāncā tāre vali kāma/
Kṛṣṇendriya prīti icchā dhare prema nāma//*”¹⁰

The desire for the satisfaction of personal interest is called *kāma* but the desire for the satisfaction or pleasure of the God is called *prema*. I think ‘*prema*’ here includes the desire for the satisfaction of the interest of the whole society as well (*vahujanahitāya vahujanasukhāya*); otherwise, the incorporation of the term ‘*lokasaṅgraha*’ in the *śloka* no. 20 of chapter three quoted above cannot be accounted for. So, *niṣkāmakarma* is not devoid of all sorts of desire. It is devoid of only that particular type of desire known as *kāma* which is undermined and

⁹*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*: 3/20

¹⁰*Caitanyacaritāmṛta*: 4/165

blamed. But *niṣkāmakarma* is not devoid of the desire called *prema* which is praise-worthy. So, the objection raised that *niṣkāmakarma* is not possible since it is devoid of desire, does not hold good. Here one may raise another objection – both of the desires are desires, why then some of them are attributed as *kāma* and some as *prema*? And again, why the former one is undermined and blamed and suggested to give up, and the latter one, on the other, is described as *prema* and considered as praise -worthy? The answer, I think, is simple. If one asks – is a knife good or bad? The wise answer to this question is – nothing can be said independently of its use. If the knife is used for cutting vegetables and fruits for our daily use then it is good, but if the same knife is used for cutting the belly of a person, then it (knife) may be bad. It is worthy to note that here the terms ‘may be’ have been used. This is so because the act of cutting the belly of a person independently of its purpose again can be said neither good nor bad. Whether this act is good or bad purely depends upon its purpose. If the purpose is good then the act is good, but if the purpose is bad then the act is bad. If one cuts one’s belly by a knife with the purpose of killing him then the act may be bad, but if one doctor cuts one’s belly by knife with the purpose of curing him from disease then the act is good. Here again in the former case the terms ‘may be’ have been used, because even the act of killing one may be good or bad depending on its purpose. If a soldier kills his enemy for the sake of his country, then even the act of killing is good, but if a murderer kills one for money, then it is bad. Likewise, a desire in itself is neither good nor bad, it neither be blamed nor be praised. So, whether it will be good or bad purely depends upon the purpose of it. If the purpose of the desire is fulfillment of one’s individual and limited interest then the desire is bad, but if the purpose of the desire is the satisfaction of the pleasure of the God or ensuring the well-being of the society as a whole or both of them, then the desire is good and praise- worthy. In fact, *sakāmakarma* is the root of all the problems of our society and *niṣkāmakarma* is the solution to it. *Sakāmakarma* turns our society into a hell and *niṣkāmakarma*, on the other, turns it into a heaven. This is the reason why one desire is blamed and attributed as *kāma* and another desire is considered as praise- worthy and attributed as *prema*. Following *Kaṭhaponiṣad* it can be said that the object of *sakāmakarma* is *preya*, but the object of *niṣkāmakarma* is *śreya*.

Here *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* through the lesson of *niṣkāmakarma* teaches us that the object of our desire has to be replaced. The desire for the fulfillment of our personal interest should be replaced by the desire for the satisfaction of the pleasure of the God. But how can it be logically justified? If I am an agent of any

action then it is quite natural and logical that I shall do it for the sake of my own, why shall I do the same for the sake of the God or for the sake of others (*lokasaṅgraha*). The reply to this question needs a long elaboration. Śrīkrṣṇa says that in the true sense we are not a real agent of the actions we perform. If I am not a real agent of any action then I cannot deserve the fruit of it, more clearly to say I cannot and should not have any desire for the satisfaction of my personal interest. But who is the agent of the action I do? Śrīkrṣṇa says,

“*Prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ/
Ahaṁkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate//*”¹¹

Śrīkrṣṇa says that the agent of all actions is the *prakṛti* and its *guṇas-sattva, rajas,* and *tamas*. But people due to their ignorance wrongly consider themselves as the agent of actions. In fact, at the initial stage the philosophy of *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā* has a great similarity with *Sāṁkhya* Philosophy. We know that according to *Sāṁkhya* Philosophy *Prakṛti* is active but *Purūṣa*, the self, is inactive. So, no action can be done by *Purūṣa* who is inactive; all actions are performed by *Prakṛti* which is considered to be active. Thus, it is clearly shown that we, the souls, cannot be any real agent of any action, and therefore cannot deserve the fruit of it.

Here another problem crops up. It is stated that *Prakṛti* is the agent of all actions. But *Prakṛti*, in fact, stands for our body. So, to say *Prakṛti* is agent of an action amounts to say that our body itself is that agent and consequently, our body deserves the fruits of the same. In our day-to-day life we, in fact, offer the fruit of all sorts of actions to our body. In most of the cases whatever we do, we do so for the sake of our body. What is the problem then? But this is not sanctioned by the *Gītā*. According to *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā*, God alone deserves the fruits of all actions. Śrīkrṣṇa says,

“*Yat karoṣi yadśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat/
Yat tapasyasi kounteya tat kurūṣvamarpaṇam//*”¹²

How can it be justified then?

I think, for this, first of all we have to understand the metaphysics of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*. In our foregoing discussion it is already pointed out that the philosophy, particularly the metaphysics of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, has a great similarity with that of the *Sāṁkhya* philosophy. In both of them *prakṛti* and

¹¹*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*: 3/27

¹² *Ibid.* 9/27

Purūṣa have been admitted, and *prakṛti* has been considered active but unconscious and *Purūṣa*, on the other, as conscious but inactive. But it is worthy to note that the metaphysics of the *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā* is also different from that of the *Sāṃkhya* School to a great extent. There is no room for God in the latter but God (*Puruṣottama*) occupies the central position in the former. The *Purūṣa* and *prakṛti* of *Sāṃkhya* School are autonomous, but the same in *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā* are not autonomous, they are dependent upon and controlled by God, the *Puruṣottama*. We know that *prakṛti* stands for *māyā*, and *māyā* is always under the control of God. This is the reason that God is called *māyādhīśa*. So, *māyā* stands for *prakṛti*, and *prakṛti* here stands for our body. This clearly implies that since the *māyā* or *prakṛti* is controlled by God, our body is also controlled by God. So, our body is nothing but an instrument (doll) in the hands of God. If our body is a car then God is the driver of that car. So, the real agent of all actions is God Himself. If one stands first in a car-race then the credit and prize are given to the driver, not to the car, since the real agent of this act called car-race is the driver, not the car, though the race is carried out through the car. In the same way, though actions are done by *māyā* or *prakṛti* or body, it is not real agent, real agent is God. This is the reason why *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* advises Arjuna to offer fruits of all actions to God (*Yat karoṣi yadśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat/ Yat tapasyasi kounteya tat kurūṣvamarpaṇam//*). *Kenopaniṣad* also says the same,

“*Śrotrasya śrotram manaso mano yadvāco ha vācaṃsa u
prāṇasyaprāṇaḥ/Cakṣuṣaścakṣuratimucya dhīrāḥ pretyāsmāllokādamṛtā
bhavanti//*”¹³

Kenopaniṣada says that God or *Puruṣottama* is the ear of the ears, mind of the minds, mouth of the mouths, life of the lives, eye of the eyes. It implies that our sense organs and body are inactive without the help of the God. Our sense organs and body are controlled and directed by the God. Our body is something like the fan. The fan is moved by the electric power. Our body stands for the fan and God stands for the electric power. In that sense, the real agent of all the actions performed by our body/*prakṛti/māyā* is God. That is why God alone deserves the fruits of all actions done by our body.

The spirit of the metaphysics of *Upaniṣad* must correspond to that of the metaphysics of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, since the latter is the essence of the former. Due to this reason *Śrīmadbhagavatgītā* is also called *Upaniṣadas*. It is mentioned

¹³*Kenopaniṣad*:1/2

at the end of every chapter, ‘Śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyām yogaśāstre’...

Thus, the metaphysics of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā clearly shows why we should not have any desire for enjoyment of the fruit of actions, which turn all our actions into *niṣkāma*. In fact, our sense of ego or agent ship is the root cause of all the problems, individual as well as social. It is our sense of ego or agent ship which makes our actions *sakāma*. I cannot expect the fruits of the actions done by you. But I expect the fruits of the actions done by me since I believe that I am the real agent of the same. But the moment I can understand the whole metaphysics of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā I cannot consider myself to be the agent of any action any more, which will positively turn all my actions into *niṣkāma* and thereby all problems will be solved. Thus, it is seen that our ego is the problem and therefore, the solution consists in the destruction of our ego. Keeping this in view Rāmakṛṣṇa beautifully says, ‘*Āmi mole ghucive janjāla*’. Tagore says, ‘Religion is the self-denial for self-realization’. But Rāmakṛṣṇa cites a problem. He says that in fact our sense of ego, sense of ‘I’ and agent ship cannot be destroyed. It may appear today that my sense of ego is destroyed but tomorrow ‘I’ can see the same in a stronger form. It is something like the immature banana-tree. We all know that if an immature banana-tree is cut today then just tomorrow we come across a new germination from the very cutting root of the same. More or less the same holds good with our ego. What is the way out then? Rāmakṛṣṇa has offered a beautiful solution to this problem. He says that our master ego has to be turned into a slave ego. We have to consider ourselves as slaves of God. The same view is seen to be substantiated by the Vaiṣṇava philosophy in *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*. *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* says,

“*Jīvera svarupa hoy kṛṣṇer nityadāsa/*

Kṛṣṇer taṭsthā śakti bhedābheda prakāśa//”¹⁴

Śrīmadbhagavadgītā also says the same through the following śloka-

“*Mamaivāṁśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ/*

Manaḥsaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛsthāni karṣati//”¹⁵

“*Mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram/*

Hetunānena kounteya jagadviparivartate//”¹⁶

“*Gatirbhartā prabhuh sākṣī nivāsaḥ śaraṇam suhṛt/*

¹⁴ *Caitanyacaritāmṛta, madhyalīlā, vimśaparicceda.*

¹⁵ Śrīmadbhagavadgītā: 15/7

¹⁶ Ibid: 9/10

Prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ sthānaṁ nidhānaṁ vījamavyayam//”¹⁷

The above *śloka*s categorically say that we are nothing but the slaves of God. The whole world is created by God; and we are living in this world. We live on food, water and air, and all of them have been created by God. As a slave lives on the kindness of his master, so we live on the grace and kindness of God. The master ‘I’ is harmful, but a slave ‘I’ is not harmful at all. The former ‘I’ is selfish, but the latter ‘I’ is selfless. The first ‘I’ has the desire for the fruit of his action; therefore, his actions are *sakāma*. But the second ‘I’ does not have any desire for the fruit of his action, consequently, his actions are *niṣkāma*. The master ‘I’ is *asura* but the slave ‘I’ is *sura*. The former ‘I’ makes our society a hell but the latter ‘I’ turns our society into a heaven. The master ‘I’ is *tāmasika*, but the slave ‘I’ is *sāttvika*. If the master ‘I’ is poison then the slave ‘I’ is nectar. The master ‘I’ is Ratnākara, but the slave ‘I’ is Vālmīki. Former ‘I’ lives exclusively for himself, but the latter ‘I’ lives exclusively for others, for God and the society as a whole. The former lives for *bhoga*, but the latter lives for *tyāga*. The master ‘I’ considers himself as the real agent of an action. He thinks that he is doing his work himself. But the slave ‘I’ thinks that he is not a real doer or agent of any action he performs. He considers himself as an instrument at the hands of God, *Puruṣottama*. His feeling will be like the feeling of Rāmāprasāda and Rāmakṛṣṇadeva, ‘*sakali tomāri icchā, icchāmayī tārā tumi / tomāra karma tumi karo mā, loke vole kari āmi...*’. So, if we can perform all our actions considering ourselves as slaves (*dāsa*) of God, then all our actions will turn into *niṣkāmakarma* which will lead to the attainment of *mokṣa* and establishment of well-being of whole society. Our master ‘I’ stands for a wooden log which drawn us into the river called *Vaitaranī* but our slave ‘I’ stands for a boat made up of the same wooden log which helps us to cross the same and thereby leads us to our ultimate destination.

Now let us deal with another important problem. We know that freedom of will is one of the important and necessary presuppositions for moral judgment. All actions are not the subject of moral judgment. Only those actions which are done through the exercise of freedom of will are the subject of moral judgement. But a number of scholars particularly of the Western Philosophy raise an objection against the Indian school of morality and religion that in Indian school of morality and religion there is no room for freedom of will. It has already been stated that all actions of us are determined by God.

¹⁷ Ibid. 9/18

So far as our foregoing discussion is concerned it is seen that all our actions are ultimately determined by God. In this situation we should be praised or blamed for whatever we do. We should not deserve the fruits of our actions, since we are not the real agent. God is the real agent, therefore, only God deserves the fruits of all actions. This implies that our actions cannot be the subject of moral judgement. If this is true then virtue, sin, attainment of *mokṣa* etc. cannot be accounted for. But I think so far as the philosophy of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is concerned this problem can be solved. In our previous discussion we have seen that the metaphysics of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is similar to the metaphysics of *Sāṃkhya* School to some extent. In both of them *Purūṣa* is considered as conscious but inactive and *prakṛti* is regarded as active but unconscious. The world is produced through the process of evolution. But evolution is taken place when both *Purūṣa* and *Prakṛti* come in contact. *Prakṛti* alone is not capable of creating the world. From this it can be concluded that no action can be performed by *prakṛti* or our body alone, it can be done by both *prakṛti* / body and *Purūṣa* / soul. This fact has been reflected by the well-known story of the blind man and the lame man of the *Sāṃkhya* Philosophy. Neither the lame man nor the blind man alone is able to come out from the jungle, since the lame man could see but could not walk, the blind man, the other, could walk but could not see. But when the lame man sat on the shoulder of the blind man and gave the direction of path and accordingly the blind man walked following that direction they came out from the jungle. Here both of them have got equal contribution towards the fulfillment of their mission. In that sense both of them should be considered as agents of the same action. I think the truth of the same can be testified by our day-to-day experience. Suppose one likes to go from one place to another on foot. No one can deny the fact that the act of walking is taken place by our body. But it is also true that unless and until our soul gives direction to our body to do the same our body cannot walk. Thus, it is seen that both our body and soul are agents of one and the same activity.

The hints of the fact that in one sense *Purūṣa*/soul is *kartā*, is available in the thirteenth chapter. Here it is stated by Śrīkrṣṇa to Arjuna-

*“Idam śarīram kounteya kṣetramityabhidhīyate/
Etad yo veti tam prāhuḥ kṣetrajña iti tadvidah!”*¹⁸

This body is considered as the field of crop (*kṣetras*), and the knower of the field, soul, is regarded as the *kṣetrajña*. We know that in the field crops are cultivated,

¹⁸*Śrīmadbhagavadgītā:13/2*

but it is cultivated by the farmer. In that sense the farmer is the agent or *kartā*. Likewise, the soul here stands for the farmer who cultivates our body. Keeping this in view Rāmaprasāda says '*Mon re kṛṣi kāja jānonā/ Emon mānava jamin roilo patāta/ Āvād korle pholto sonā//*'. The truth of this observation cannot be ignored. Apparently, we may think that our body/ *prakṛti* is the source of all types of problem. But this is not the fact. The body has nothing to do with good or bad. Whether our body will be harmful or beneficial it purely depends upon its use. If it is used in the good purpose then it is good, but if the same body is used in the bad purpose, then it is bad. One killer uses his body for killing someone, but the same body was used by mother Teresa for nursing the patient. Through the same mouth one utters slangs, but another chants the name of God or tells the story of *Rāmāyana* or *Mahābhārata*. Through the ear one likes to hear slangs, but another likes to hear different religious talks. One person is interested to see the naked pictures through his eyes, but another person, on the other, is interested to see the pictures of God, or the natural beauty through his eyes. One goes to prostitution on his feet, but another goes to the temple on his same feet. Through mind one thinks of harming others, but through the same mind other thinks of serving the society or worshiping God. So far as our discussion goes it is seen that our body cannot be an agent in true sense. It is actually nothing but the instrument at the hands of our soul. If this is true then why does the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* claim that the agent is our body/ *prakṛti* (27/3)? I think the answer to the same needs some clarification. Here in the *Gītā* our body is considered as agent of action in a specific sense. Though our foregoing discussion shows that we are the real agent, our body is an instrument at our hand, it works at our will, but in most of the cases it is otherwise. In most of the cases our body is not controlled by us, rather we are controlled by our body, i.e., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. In fact, we are controlled by our *śaḍarīpus*, i.e., *kāma*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada* and *mātsarya*. All these *śaḍarīpus* are nothing but the properties of the *prakṛti* or *triguṇas*. So, we are controlled by the *śaḍarīpus*, it implies that we are, in fact, controlled by the *prakṛti*/body. In this case our body is not the instrument at our hands, rather we are the instrument at the hands of our body. Thus, the above statement of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* that *prakṛti*/ our body is the agent of the action we perform, is justified. Our day-to-day experience also substantiates this truth. In most of the cases we cannot control our greed, anger, and so on, rather we ourselves are controlled by them, and thereby turns to be the dolls at the hands of them. In this context Arjuna asks the question,

“Atha kena prayukto 'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati Pūruṣaḥ/

Anicchannapi varṣṇeya valādiva niyojitaḥ//”¹⁹

Arjuna says that one knows very well that what he is going to do is not morally right but in spite of that he cannot resist himself from doing the same. As if someone is pushing him from backside to do the same. He wants to know from Śrīkrṣṇa, the Lord, who is pushing him to be engaged in doing the immoral activities?

Śrīkrṣṇa in answering the same beautifully says-

*“Kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ/
Mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihā vairiṇam//”²⁰*

In reply the Lord Śrīkrṣṇa says that it is the desire and the anger which motivates and influences one to perform immoral activities against his will. This desire and anger is our real enemy.

It is also worthy to note here what is said by Duryodhana in this context ‘*Jānāmidharmamna ca me pravṛtṭiḥ, jānāmi adharma na ca me nivṛtṭiḥ*’. Duryadhana openly confesses that he knows very well what is right and what is wrong, but he does not have any inclination to do what is right and cannot restrain himself from doing what is wrong. But if this is taken to be true then the same problem mentioned above comes back. In this case one cannot be taken as responsible for whatever he does, since he is not the real agent, the real agent is the body/*prakṛti*. I think if we are to solve this problem then we have to put our attention to the advice of Śrīkrṣṇa. In the *Gītā* Śrīkrṣṇa repeatedly advises us to be a *yogī, muni, sthitaprajñā*. Only a common man, a man of ignorance, is controlled by our body/ *prakṛti*, i.e., *śaḍarīpus*. But a real *yogī*, man of knowledge, controls the same instead of being controlled by it. Our body or *śaḍarīpus* are under the control of a true *yogī*, this is why a *yogī* is called *jitendriya*. A real *yogī* or *sthitaprajñā* is indifferent of the pleasure as well as pain, he is devoid of all sorts of material attachment, fear and anger. Śrīkrṣṇa says-

*“Duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigatasprahaḥ/
Vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate//”²¹*

He further says-

*“jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kuṭastho vijitendriyaḥ/
Yukta ityucyate yogī samaloṣṭāśmakāncanaḥ//”²²*

¹⁹ Śrīmadbhagavadgītā: 3/36

²⁰ Ibid: 3/37

²¹ Śrīmadbhagavadgītā: 2/56

²² Ibid: 6/8

A real *yogī* is satisfied only with knowledge. His senses are under his control. Iron and gold are equal to him. Friend and enemy, criticism and praise are equal to him. In this context the *Gītā* says-

“*Samah̥satrou ca mitre ca tathā mānāpamānayoḥ*!”²³

Thus, it is seen that a *yogī* is not under the control of our body/ *prakṛti*, rather the body /*prakṛti* itself is the control of him. So, he is a real agent, he enjoys the freedom of his will. Whatever he does he does so with his own will. Such a person is responsible for his work. So far as our discussion is concerned, it is seen that only a *yogī* enjoys the freedom of his will, but an ordinary man, a man of ignorance, does not have any freedom of will. He is nothing but an instrument at the hands of his body/ *prakṛti*. If so then he, the man of ignorance should not be punished for what he is doing. But according to our *Śāstra* such a person is punished. He is sent to hell. How can it be accounted for then? The answer is simple. Here the person himself is responsible for his present condition. He did not try to overcome from this condition. A person who has turned into a *yogī* has done so at his own will. Likewise, an ordinary man, a man of ignorance, also would turn himself into a *yogī* if he could try his best. As he did not do so, he is worthy of being punished.

Now let us deal with another problem. So far as our discussion goes, we have seen that we are the real agent of our actions. If this is true, how can then the observation of Rāmaprasāda, Śrīrāmakṛṣṇadeva, *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* and *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* that we are the instruments at the hands of God be accounted for? If we are the car or chariot and God is the driver or charioteer then God should be responsible if any accident is taken place. Here the car or the chariot does not have any freedom of will. The same holds good with us, the human being. The murderer should not be punished since he does not have any freedom of will. No doubt this objection appears to be sound. But our careful reflection shows us a beautiful solution. The car or the chariot itself may be responsible to some extent for any accident. If on the way the break gets fail then in that case the responsibility of the car or the chariot cannot be denied. Besides this, the human being is not unconscious like the car or the chariot, it is very much conscious. By the very definition a conscious being enjoys freedom, otherwise it cannot be a conscious being. A triangle by the very definition must have three angles, otherwise it cannot be a triangle. The matter by the very definition must have some extension. Likewise, a human being must have some freedom of will, since

²³Ibid: 12/18

he is conscious. Here the comparison of human being with car or chariot has been made in a special sense. In fact, in Indian Ethics there is indeterminism within the boundary of determinism. There is no room for absolute freedom. We enjoy our limited freedom. I think the whole concept can be made clear with an example. In an industry there are a number of workers of different grades. All of them enjoy certain amount of freedom within their respective area. All of them perform their respective duty through the proper exercise of their own freedom. Accordingly, they are either rewarded with promotion or punished with demotion. But it is worthy to note that the freedom they enjoy is not unlimited. All of them are controlled by their higher authority, manager of the industry. In the same manner the manager also enjoys a lot of freedom. But his freedom again is not unlimited, since he is also controlled by the person who is the owner of that industry. Here we, our souls, stand for the manager, our bodies stand for the other workers and God stands for the owner of the industry. Another instance may be cited. In a football game all players enjoy freedom, but their freedom again is not unlimited. The freedom of them is limited by some rules exercised by the referee concerned. But though the freedom of the football players becomes limited by the referee, yet no one can say that they do not enjoy any freedom. Here one player passes the ball to any person he likes. Whether he himself will carry the ball up to the goal-keeper of the opponent party or he will pass the same to any person of his choice will be fully decided by himself. The rule or the referee has nothing to do. Our whole life is like a game. We are like the football players, and God is like the referee. As the football players are controlled by the referee, so we are controlled by the God. But in spite of being controlled by God we enjoy freedom like the football players. Third instance may be cited. We are like a cow tied with a rope in a field. Here the cow does not have unlimited freedom. Its freedom is limited by the rope. But yet it does not mean that the cow does not enjoy any freedom. Within the boundary of the rope the cow may exercise its freedom of choice. It may walk or run or sit down within the boundary of the rope. Likewise, we are also tied up by the rope of God. Here the 'rope of God' stands for the *vidhis* and *niṣedhas* laid down by the *Śāstras*. But in spite of that we enjoy our freedom of will like the cow.

Here one may raise an objection: Determined or limited freedom is not freedom at all. By the very definition, freedom cannot be limited or determined. Determined freedom is something contradictory like the son of a barren mother. No doubt, this objection seems to be sound. But our careful logical analysis shows that this

objection does not hold good. Our day-to-day experience shows that unlimited freedom is not a real freedom. Unlimited freedom turns into autocracy. True freedom must be determined. One at his home has the freedom to play his sound box with as high volume as he likes. But the son of his neighbor appearing at the H.S. examination has equal right and freedom to study without being disturbed by others. Here the enjoyment of unlimited freedom by the former robs the right and freedom of the latter, and thus it turns into autocracy in the name of freedom. A river gets the taste of the freedom of the flow of its water within the boundary of its banks. Had there been no boundary of banks a river could not have been a river. Water remains water as long as it is within the boundary of the temperature of certain degree. The moment it transcends this boundary the water will remain no more water, it will turn into vapor. Similarly, a man is a man so far as he lives within the boundary of the *vidhi* and *niṣedha* laid down by the *Śāstras*. The moment one transcends this boundary he will turn into a beast. Keeping this in view our *Śāstra* says-

“*Dharmenā hīnaḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*”²⁴

In fact, each and every state becomes meaningful due to its corresponding opposite state. Day is day because of the night. Pleasure is pleasure since there is pain and sufferings. Likewise, freedom is freedom because of bondage. Indeterminism is meaningful within the boundary of determinism. Thus, it is seen that the two objections mentioned above that there is no room for freedom of will in Indian Ethics, and indeterminism within the boundary of determinism is meaningless, do not hold good. It is worthy to note that if we are to construct an ideal society then the members of that society must enjoy limited freedom as it is suggested by our *Śāstras*. The moment one crosses the *lakṣmanrekhā* drawn by our *Śāstras* the society will turn into a hell. A true yogi, a *niṣkāmakarmī*, always works within the boundary of *lakṣmanrekhā*, he never crosses the same. Therefore, two-fold purpose is served by them -

(a) the wellbeing of the whole society (*lokasaṁgraha*) is established and (b) *Mokṣa* is attained.

²⁴*Suktisudha*