

THE RELEVANCE OF ŚRIMADBHAGAVADĠĪTĀ'S TEACHING OF LOKASAMGRAHA

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BhagavadĠitā is a valuable and rare work. It is an intellectual as well as moral wealth of Indian culture. The teaching of the *BhagavadĠitā* can help anybody. As S. Radhakrishnan beautifully says, “....It is a book conveying lessons of philosophy, religion and ethics.....if the hold which a work has on the mind of man is any clue to its importance, then the *Ġitā* is the most influential work in Indian thought.”¹ The book *BhagavadĠitā* teaches for the holistic welfare, not only the welfare of humans but also of non-humans. This holistic welfare is termed as “*Lokasamgraha*” in the *Ġitā*. Here the welfare is referred to the fruitful welfare of every aspect of reality: seen and unseen, human and divine, micro and macrocosm, animate and inanimate. In the language of Raimon Panikkar it aims at the cosmotheandric welfare.² That is why the name “*Lokasamgraha, the welfare of the worlds.*” There are mainly two *slokas*, the word ‘*Lokasamgraha*’ is used in explicitly besides many implicit references. In both the areas, it (*Lokasamgraha*) means “*the welfare of the worlds*”.

*Karmaṇaiva hi samsiddhim āsthītā janakādayaḥ/
Lokasamgraham evā 'pi sampaśyan kartum arhasi // (3/20)*

It was even by works (karma) that *Janaka* and others attained to perfection. Thou shouldst do works also with a view to the maintenance of the world.³

*Saktāk karmany avidvāṃso yathā kurvanti bhārata/
kuryād vidvāṃs tathā 'saktāś cikīrṣur lokasamgraham// (3/25)*

As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act, O *Bharata* (*Arjuna*), but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain the world-order.⁴ The word ‘*lokasamgraha*’ means *lokanām samgraha*, collecting/protecting the world together, or protecting or guarding the world together or maintenance of the world. In the derived sense we can express it as “*Holding the worlds together*” or the “*welfare of the worlds*”⁵. Thus, we can translate the word

¹ Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*, vol-1, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p-519.

² The term Cosmotheandric is coined by Raimon Panikkar to denote the complex inter-relatedness between nature (cosmos), divine (theos) and humans (anthropos). For more details, Raimundo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993).

³ Radhakrishnan S. *The BhagavadĠitā*, Blackie & son (India) Ltd., 1977, 139.

⁴ Ibid. p. 141.

⁵ Krishnaraj, 79. Lokamanya Tilak uses this meaning when he speaks of ‘*universal welfare*’ or the ‘*lokasangraha*’ in his *Ġitā-Rahasya*.

Lokasamgraha in the plural sense, ‘welfare of the worlds’. The word ‘worlds’ denotes not only the visible world where we live, eat and also have our beings, but also the world we are connected with or have our rational beings. The worlds summarize the totality of our existence and also their inter-connectedness to different spheres of our life. In this sense it may be cosmotheandric.

The importance of *Lokasamgraha* in the contemporary World: Working for the welfare of the worlds is a duty of all human beings. In the words of the *Bhagavadgītā*, “the one who does not help keep the wheel of creation in motion by sacrificial duty, and who rejoices in sense pleasures, that sinful person lives in vain.”⁶ Duty arises not only from a moral perspective but also from the ontology of our being. This is where authenticity comes into play.

Social Welfare: A realized person is a true *karmayogī* in which the three paths advocated in the *Bhagavadgītā* are conjoined such persons are capable of inspiring and bringing about revolution in society. If the person is not a true *karmayogī*,⁷ then that person will not be able to inspire people, although they may pursue the person without any conviction. These people can be called faceless people. For centuries, there have been various social evils that have prevailed in India: child marriage, the burning of widows (*satī*), the *zamindari* system, forced labor, caste system, dowry, untouchability, witchcraft, blind beliefs, entry ban and temple worship, etc. *Raja* Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) ushered in a new era of the Renaissance movement in India which tickled thousands of persecutors and persecuted. The people that followed Roy were Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1833), Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Vivekananda (1863-1902), Tilak (1856-1920), Gandhi (1869-1948)), Ambedkar and Annie Besant, just to name a few.

An important area where people fall behind is the lack of education. If the country is to progress, education is a basic requirement. Education should not only be at the indigenous level, but at the international level. The traditional Sanskrit language which was the hegemony of the people was replaced by the vernacular and

⁶ Prasad Ramananda , *The Bhagavad-Gītā: The Song of God* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2010), 48.

⁷ We see many of the modern gurus, social workers who claim that they are the real saviors of the world, are like “seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Mt. 13:13).

English. Christian missionary schools, Ramakrishna mission schools, and universities sprang up all over the country. This has brought about a revolution in people's thinking. Tilak, Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati took on leading roles in this. *Lokasamgraha* establishes the platform for a citizen to make the country a *Rāmarājya*, 'Kingdom of Rāma' without seeking a selfish motive, and work for the well-being of the country. Therefore, it sets a social standard. When a leader watches it, the follower automatically made to follow. Thus says the *Bhagavadgītā* "Whatever noble persons do, others follow. Whatever standards they set up, the world follows".⁸ Gandhi's non-violent movement for freedom in Africa and India is an uncompromised example for the same that can be cited here. There is a further duty of the enlightened person, "to inspire in all the works". The enlightened one must inspire others by performing himself all works efficiently and without attachment. S. P Agarwal says that, "by adopting the approach of *Gītā*, underlying the word *josayet*, Gandhi achieved considerable success in obtaining mass support for his Satyāgraha movement".⁹ It is this belief, practice and the role model displayed by Gandhi which led thousands of people to follow in his footsteps which eventually christened him, '*Mahātmā*'.

The duty of one implies the service for the other throughout life. The other includes first and foremost, oneself, then the family, society, the divine and also the cosmos. Therefore, the journey of life is a journey of duties to all beings. In a more rigorous sense, it is *yajña*, the cosmic sacrifice in which the desire for our personal interest is burned.¹⁰ One should work constantly without any expectation in return, like the sun shining without any hesitation or like the breeze that blows relentlessly or the river that flows without any break.¹¹ By His sacrifice, *Prajāpati* made the world, the beings and by our sacrifice we recreate the divine. The *Gītā* explains this as follows. At first, *Prajāpati*, having created men together with *Yajña* (selfless work

⁸ *Yad-yad acarati sresthas tad-tad eve taro janah/ sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*|| BG. III.21.

⁹ Agarwal, Sathya P. *The Social Role of the Gītā: How and Why*. Columbia: Urmila Agarwal Publishers, 1993.309.

¹⁰ The quality of fire is burning. In Yājñic terms, fire burns the impurities and creates anew. Fire also soothes one from chill and gives a pleasant experience. Heat in a harmonic right amount enables life to emerge from the embryo.

¹¹ Joshi, Shubhada A. "God, Man and Nature: Perspective of Bhagavadgīta," Gen's 17, no. 3 (7 January 2009), 34.

dedicated to God or Vedic sacrifice) as their duty (*dharma*), declared: “By this shall you multiply. May this be to you the Cow of Plenty yielding all your wants!” Also, it says, “You cherish the *Devas* with *Yajna*, and may the *Devas* in turn bless you (with rain and other desired gifts)! Thus, mutually cherishing, you shall attain the highest good.”¹² In other words, by faithfully carrying out our *dharma*, we participate in the Trinitarian fellowship of God in recreation, maintenance and sanctification. Hence, our *svadharma* also the work of *God (opus dei)*. It is said that this establishes the kingdom of *God*.

Political Welfare: When we talk about political well-being, it is not what we earn from the country that matters, but what we give to the country. It’s our duty to work for the country. *Lokasamgraha* is an attitude of ‘selfless giving’ without any attachment. Swami Vivekananda says: “In whatever you do for a particular person, a city or a state, assume the same attitude as you have towards your children, and expect nothing in return”.¹³ In the contemporary context, in the light of *Lokasamgraha*, a question arises about the emancipator acts of political leaders. The powerful becomes more powerful at the expense of the weak. Leaders, who are supposed to serve, seek to be served. Can we call it *Lokasamgraha*: erect statues of political leaders and logos of their parties for the sake of the voting and development bank? The word “minority” has become a vote bank for the powerful. Is it *Lokasamgraha* or *svārthasamgraha*?¹⁴ It is nothing other than deifying oneself.

Global development should be the motive of all political leaders in the country and thus establish peace and harmony in a diverse country like India. To achieve this, a just war may sometimes be necessary. But it should be “*last resort*” when all other possibilities for establishing peace are proven. Even in this act of just war, care must be taken that the damage done to humanity and the cosmos is minimal. A responsible national leader may have to make some decisions that could disturb certain sectors of

¹² *Sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā puro ’ vāca prajāpatiḥ/ anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo ’ stv iṣṭakāmadhuk|| devān bhāvayatā ’ nena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ/ parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ param avāpsyatha||* BG.III. 10-11.

¹³ Agarwal, Sathya P. *The Social Role of the Gītā: How and Why*, Columbia: Urmila Agarwal Publishers, 1993.308.

¹⁴ *svārthasamgraha* is the term we coined to signify the selfish greed which tries to amass power, politics, money etc.

society. But such decisions must be preceded by an open search for the well-being of all and by a sincere dialogue with all interested parties, as the *Gītā* itself states, “*that no taint of kāma, no element of egoism, should be at work in such decision.*”¹⁵ Hence, the dominant spirit of the leader should be equanimity, non-violence, compassion, *dvandvātīta* attitude (II.45, IV.22), *daya*, *karuṇa*, etc.

Ecological welfare: *Lokasamgraha* can be considered an ideal for preserving and protecting biodiversity. It makes us aware of our responsibility. Gandhi’s *ahimsa satyāgraha* influences Sunderlal Bahuguna to protect forests through the Chipko movement. It is a living example for environmental ethics specialists. So, it becomes a *yajña*. In Agarwal’s words, “*Lokasamgraha* ideal if properly understood, can make people aware of their responsibility and can provide ethical rationale for curbing unnecessary consumption and reducing pollution and waste”.¹⁶ The question is: what happens if the harmony (*rta*) of the cosmos is not preserved? *Kṛṣṇa* Himself answers this question in respect of karma for *Lokasamgraha*: “if I cease to work, the lokas as well as the people would be destroyed.” In other words, “I would be the cause for its confusion and destruction” (3.24). For the Lord, preserving the *loka* is a duty and therefore for us it is a divine duty. Therefore, if we fail to preserve the cosmic *rta*, we will not only fail in our divine duty, but also become cause for the doom of the cosmos.

Today, the global environmental crisis threatens humanity and the earth’s biodiversity. The amount of pollution from various vehicles, industries, mines and their waste creates an imbalance on the earth. Inappropriate monsoons, climate change, melting glaciers, depletion of the ozone layer that causes various diseases are real facts. To make matters worse, invisible pollution such as radiation and electronic waste both within the living earth and in outer space and its consequences are unimaginable. Therefore, the fragmentation of the earth is not only a question of the future of humanity, but also of the life of the earth; the degradation of complexity in interrelation is above all a moral and religious problem. The *Gītā* states that all

¹⁵ Painadath, Sebastian. ‘Does the Gita Advocate Violence?’, *Jnanadeepa*, Pune Journal of Religious Studies 5, no. 2 (July 2002), 29.

¹⁶ Agarwal, Sathya P. *The Social Role of the Gītā: How and Why*. Columbia: Urmila Agarwal Publishers, 1993.339.

creation is Divine. The Divine moves around the world. Fill the universe. The divine soul manifests in all creation in various forms. This is why various aspects of nature such as the banyan tree, tulsi, cow, monkey, garuḍa, lion, air, water, fire, etc., are symbolized as sacred. They are the mythological figures¹⁷ of the scriptures.

Conclusion

So far as our discussion is concerned we conclude that the *Bhagavadgītā's* vision of the world order is holistic. It covers all aspects of reality. It not only aims at the welfare of the visible world, but also at the invisible world. Therefore, the word *Lokasamgraha* is defined as 'welfare of the worlds'. This theme runs through the entire *Gītā* and can be the epicenter of a contemporary reading of it. Today the world needs an order, an order not only in human knowledge, in living conditions, in behavior, in culture, in politics and in the relationship with other human beings, but also in ecology and spirituality. A simple *jñānamārga* or *bhaktimārga* is not enough, as the Vedānta seers say. There is a need for a *karmamārga* mixed in the same way with the previous two that *Aurobindo* correctly indicated as integral yoga for rhythmic coexistence. *Lokasamgraha* is not just a new concept in the field of wellness. There are other similar concepts which are prevalent in India and which have had a greater influence on people. Some of them are, dharma, *satyāgraha*, *anāsakti*, *sarvodaya*, etc. Although *Lokasamgraha* is not as famous as these previous concepts, it is far superior to them. Furthermore, its greatness is in its complete nature, scriptural approval and eminent scholarship. It has the ability to stimulate people to a greater extent in matters relating to well-being. *Lokasamgraha*, when fully understood, aims at the well-being of the cosmos, human beings and the spiritual realm and their interrelationships. In this way, it aims for the well-being of all aspects of existence. Its starting point is always the individual self, from where it advances into the cosmic and metaphysical world. Thus, the concept can become an ideal tool for well-being in the liberation of the last, the last and the lost in the contemporary world. It is an ideal concept for our own well-being and the well-being

¹⁷ Myth can be understood in a deeper sense. Myths point to a yonder reality.

of others. It is an ideal for moral, social and also political life. It is above all an ideal for preserving ecology. It has a lot to contribute to the philosophy of liberation, trade and commerce and interreligious dialogue. Therefore, it can become an ideal goal of human existence by creating a just, loving and human society.

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