



What should be the Moral Responsibilities of the Individual: A Philosophical Discussion on the Ground of Bhagavad-Gītā

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Abstract

There is a clear tendency in contemporary political thought to limit agency to individual agents, thereby denying the existence and relevance of collective moral agency in general, and corporate agency in particular. The paper examines the ethical conception of the most well-known and much discussed Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gītā, in the context of the Western distinction between duty ethics and virtue ethics. Most of the materials published on the Gītā make much of its conception of duty; however, there is no systematic investigation of the notion of virtue in the Gītā. The paper begins with a discussion of the fundamental characteristics of virtue ethics, before undertaking a discussion of the conceptions of duty and virtue in the Gītā. The paper clearly demonstrates that (1) both duty and virtue coexist in the Gītā, and (2) the Gītā accords virtue an important place.

Philosophers refer to people who have moral responsibility for an action as moral agents. Agents have the capability to reflect upon their situation, to form intentions about how they will act, and then to carry out that action. Moral obligation does not necessarily equate to legal obligation. A person is legally responsible for an event when a legal system is liable to penalise that person for that event. Although it may often be the case that when a person is morally responsible for an act, they are also legally responsible for it, the two states do not always coincide. Here our main aim is to determine the moral obligations to an individual on the ground of Bhagavad-Gītā.

Keywords: *Bhagavad-Gītā, Niṣkāma Karma, Swadharma, Moral Responsibility, and Legal Responsibility*

1. Introduction

The Bhagavad-Gītā is one of the celebrated sacred works of Hindus. It consists of the spiritual teaching of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna and thus acquires the name 'Bhagavad-Gītā' which means 'the songs of the Lord'. The Gītā comes to us as a part of Bhīṣma Parva of the Mahabharata, one of the grand Indian epics. The Gītā is narrated by Saṁjaya to the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and it contains seven hundred verses spread over eighteen chapters or discoverers. Not only by virtue of being a part of the Mahabharata, but also by its independent character, the Gītā is considered as an important piece of Smṛti literature. Keeping in view the significance of spiritual and moral teaching in it, the Gītā can be described as the heart of the epic. I think Bhagavad-Gītā is the only reliable source of Hindu Śāstras which can provide us an acceptable criterion for moral obligations of an individual.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the proposed study are as follows:

1. To promote social obligations,

2. To make tidy up culture on the ground of Bhagavad-Gītā.
3. To sketch a solution for future generation to get rid from corrupted India.

3. What is Moral Responsibility?

Making judgments about whether a person is morally responsible for her behavior, and holding others and ourselves responsible for actions and the consequences of actions, is a fundamental and familiar part of our moral practices and our interpersonal relationships.

Moral responsibility is exactly what it says, it is a person's responsibility behaves and generally conducts them in a way which is morally acceptable. For example, not take improper advantage of someone that is not able to protect themselves or their possessions, not to cause pain, suffering or distress to anyone. In short don't do to others what you wouldn't want done to you or your family (Prabhupāda, 1972). So, Moral responsibility is the simplest and the most difficult thing to attain. It is summarized here: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

4. Bhagavad-Gītā's View on Moral and Social Obligations

The very first chapter of the Gītā depicts Arjuna as a hero caught between the mandates of social code and obligations to his family and friends. Arjuna's dilemma is as follows: he belongs to the kṣatriya varṇa (warrior class) that demands that he fight in an impending battle involving members of his own family, but his familial duties and obligations dictate that he refrain from fighting - forming a terrible tension. Arjuna is overcome with grief. The thought of killing his kinsmen overwhelms him; he turns to his charioteer, his counselor (Lord Kṛṣṇa in human form, although Arjuna is not aware of his real identity at the time), and informs him that he has decided not to fight. Kṛṣṇa helps Arjuna to resolve his dilemma from both the absolute and relative standpoints. Kṛṣṇa reminds Arjuna that from the ultimate or absolute standpoint, the self is immortal, while the body of any human being is going to be destroyed sooner or later; hence to mourn over those bodies killed in battle is futile. The soul, on the other hand, is immortal; it transcends birth and death. From the relative standpoint, Kṛṣṇa reminds Arjuna that because he (Arjuna) belongs to the warrior class, it is his duty to fight. "Duty" (dharma) here is taken in its inclusive sense, in the context of its philosophical and religious foundations. In this story, moral and spiritual values are at stake; all amicable means of settlement have failed. It is thus the dharma of a soldier to fight in a righteous war in order to establish truth and righteousness, and to restore the moral balance of his society. So doing his dharma, fighting in the war, is the only right thing for Arjuna to do. One's dharma must be performed in a spirit of nonattachment to the results of one's actions; the agent should do his dharma for the sake of dharma, not for consequence.

The notion of Dharma or duty as the right course of action is repeated throughout the text. It is determined by one's stage in life as well as by one's position in society. It is important to remember here that the Gītā's conception of duty is very different from what we find in either Kant or Mill. In the Western context, irrespective of whether one is speaking from a Kantian or Utilitarian framework, the goal is to determine a single moral principle by which one can derive all second-order moral principles. That is, a single moral principle in duty ethics is supposed to work as the criterion by which one can decide what one ought to do in all situations. For Kant, this principle is the universalizability of maxims of action without contradiction; for Mill, it is the principle of utility. Duty ethics hopes to identify a principle from which all our duties can be

derived, so that all of our duties are finally applications of this single principle. Thus, whereas in the Western context norms for human behavior are derived from reason and are to be met by individuals, dharma, in the Hindu tradition, is comprised of rules that have been handed down over generations and are needed for social cohesion. There never has been any absolutely valid set of Dharmas; at most, the Dharmas have constituted a series of markers. However, the decision has had to be made as to how to apply these rules in practice. Dharma has never imposed a sort of discipline that exacts an obedience, which determines every significant decision that one makes. There has been considerable latitude on this count, and the question of how to reconcile the different dharmic niyama has arisen frequently. The rules of dharma are not derivable from a single principle, or even from a single set of principles; these rules are learned from scriptures, the only source of true knowledge in the traditional epistemology, and are ultimately individual (and hence, in an important sense, manifestly many). Two justifications are tradition-ally provided for this - first, that śabda (word) is an infallible source of knowledge, and second, that self-realization is the highest goal of human pursuit. A moral rule in the Hindu context is not a categorical imperative, that is, it is not an unconditional command - and the Gītā, too, supports this view. If one is, like Arjuna, a warrior by caste, then he should fight in battle if the cause is righteous. Similarly, if one were a priest by caste, then he should refrain from fighting (an action associated with another man's duty) and perform the duties prescribed for his own caste. However, these Dharmas are not universally obligatory for everyone, not even for members of the same community, but oblige only under certain circumstances. If one aims to go to heaven, for instance, or to attain mokṣa, then in order to realize these goals she will be obliged to perform certain duties corresponding to them. Hence the dharma imperatives in the Gītā are hypothetical imperatives; they assume the conditional form, "If you wish to achieve X, then you should do Y," rather than the simple declaration, "you ought to do Y." The latter, as an example of the strong Kantian notion of "ought" (which is completely independent of all consequences), is not available in Hindu thought. Dharma in the Hindu tradition is relative and contingent; it has a self-transcending and open-ended character because rules of dharma are thus by their very nature facilitative of constant change. The dharma of a given individual may change according to time, place, and circumstances. One set of rules may be applicable during a time of stress, which may be very different from the rules applicable during a time of peace and prosperity. In short, the Gītā is deontological ("duty for duty's sake") insofar as the motivation of an action is concerned. One should do her duty (dharma) without concern for the possible consequences to herself. The expected consequences of one's actions should not serve as the motivation for doing one's duty (or failing to do it). It is important to remember in this context that there are various kinds of Dharmas, not all of which are intended as a means to self-realization. Furthermore, in addition to those individual duties, which are conditional upon one's position in society and other contingent facts, there are universal or common duties, for example, to speak the truth, to act kindly, to act compassionately, and so on. These duties are binding upon all human beings, irrespective of their caste, station in life, creed, and the like. Finally, in this context it must be noted that the validity of the duty of fulfilling one's caste obligations or obligations attached to one's position in society is justified by the Hindu traditionalists by tracing them back to Śruti (heard texts) or to the Dharma Śāstras, for example, the Code of Manu. The philosophers, however, in addition, have worked hard to justify the epistemological thesis of Śabda pramāṇa in order to further bolster that argument; but, in this context, it must be noted that Śabda pramāṇa applies only to Śruti, and not to the Dharma Śāstras. Thus, there is no absolutely valid support for all the duties and obligations that define one's caste, for anything taught by the Smṛtis is in

principle fallible and revisable. Any purely analytic deduction of obligations from one's position in society has to proceed independently of invoking the support of ancient texts and may have to begin with a conceptual analysis of the roles and functions needed for the preservation of a society

5. How to decide right action of an individual?

After the initial feelings of anxiety, stress, and negativity from the diagnosis of diabetes, come feelings of confusion. This confusion relates to the dilemma of choosing the right path of action. Similarly, in the Gītā, Arjuna is confused and uncertain about what to do.

“How–shall I fight...?”

Śri Kṛṣṇa explained that how to decide right action of an individual by using the character “Arjuna” in Bhagavad-Gītā.

Arjuna told that “I am puzzled, confused about my duty, about what is wrong and right. I am your disciple and please guide me the right way.”

*kārpaṇya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ pṛcchāmi tvām dharmā-sammūḍha-cetāḥ
yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me śiṣyas te 'ham śādhi mām tvām prapannam (2:07)*

Lord Kṛṣṇa motivates Arjuna to fight, using a direct approach.

*klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitat tvayy upapadyate
kṣudraṁ hṛdaya-daurbalyaṁ tyaktvottiṣṭha parantapa (2:03)*

Lord Kṛṣṇa, while describing the immortality of the soul, sings verses which help us understand how to tackle illness. There is no better example of motivation to perform the right action, in an unbiased manner, than these Ślokas by Lord Kṛṣṇa. The first step, he states, is equanimity coupled with acceptance of reality.

*yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate (2:48)*

Finally the Lord says: When your mind is no longer disturbed by flowery language and it remains in a stance of self-realization, then you have attained divine consciousness.

*śruti-vipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścālā
samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi (2:53)*

Lord Krishna supports action, rather than grief or depression, as a means of coping with a stressful situation. Multiple ślokas of the Gītā reinforce this message, which is equally relevant for persons with diabetes.

“...stand up, Arjuna, determined to fight”

tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya, yuddhāya kṛtaniśchayaḥ. (2:37)

“...nor let your attachment be to inaction”

Mā karma phala he turbhūr, mā te saṅgastva karmaṇi ḥ (2:47)

The Gītā clearly states that one, who engages merely in materialistic pleasures and not in sacrifice, does not lead a meaningful life. The real meaning of life is in sacrifice and doing your karma rather than engaging in worldly pleasures. This narration gives meaning to life of a person with diabetes.

“He...who does not perform his duties,...he lives in vain.”

Aghāyur indriyārāmo moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati (3:16)

“...go on efficiently doing your duty...”

Tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ karya kāryaṁ samācara (3:19)

And lastly Lord gives us final criteria to determine a man’s character as follow:

duḥkheṣv anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣu vigata-sprhaḥ

vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ sthita-dhīr munir ucyate (2:56)

6. Conclusion

We, however, think that this observation of Bhagavad-Gītā may be deriving some lesson which we can apply in our lives for happy living. These are as follows:

- Wrong thinking is the only problem in life.
- Right knowledge is the ultimate solution to the entire problem.
- Selflessness is the only way to progress and prosperity.
- Every act can be an act of prayer.
- Renounce the ego of individuality rejoice in the bliss of infinity.
- Never give up on yourself.
- Have enough surrender to see the truth as it is.
- And lastly detach from Māyā and attach to divine.

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