



The Bhagavad Gita's insights on Morality for Contemporary Society

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Abstract

An attempt is made in the paper to deliberate on the right way to perform an action, as envisaged in the Bhagavad Gita. Further, the paper deduces the takeaways from the Bhagavad Gita's insights of moral action, for the contemporary society.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, moral action is intention/duty-based and not consequence/result-based. The intention/duty-based action leads to self-purification in individuals. The state of self-purification and its process have the potency to positively impact contemporary society. It brings about appropriate behaviour in individuals and enriches their personality development. It fosters innovation, creativity, self-motivation, self-governance, problem-solving ability and conflict resolution skills, in individuals. It mitigates negativities such as meaningless competition, hatred, fear, jealousy, blaming others and severe stress, in individuals. It also enriches the welfare of the society.

Moral action, as envisaged by the Bhagavad Gita, evolves the wellbeing of the individual and contemporary society.

Keywords: The Bhagavad Gita, Morality, Self-purification, Intention/duty-based action, Individual & Social welfare.

Introduction

Contemporary society is characterized by rapid technological advancements and global interconnectedness. Digital technologies have reshaped communication, education,



commerce and foster a global village where information and influence transcend borders. However, this progress has also heightened issues such as economic & gender inequalities, human rights violations, environmental pollution, social fragmentation and above all - moral degradation. Celebration of unrestraint materialism has thrown a severe challenge on the moral fabric of individual and the society. This situation necessitates a re-view on what constitutes moral action.

An attempt is made in the paper to deliberate on the Bhagavad Gita's vision on moral action and its take-away for contemporary society.

The Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the *Bhismaparva (Chapter 23-40)* of the great epic Mahabharata, authored by Sri Veda Vyasa. 'Bhagavad' refers to 'Divine/Lord' and 'Gita' refers to 'song'. Therefore, the 'Bhagavad Gita' is called as 'the song of the Lord/Divine'. It consists of 18 Chapters and 700 Verses. Even though a part of Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita is self-contained. It is considered as the Fifth Veda. The popularity of the Bhagavad Gita may be: (a) due to its dealing with day-today existential issues, (b) it is a scripture for all age groups and for all temperaments, and (c) it appeals irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

The Bhagavad Gita is a holistic practical manual that offers numerous guidelines for the various dimensions of human existence, including moral dimension. Let us now proceed to discuss the right approach towards action ie. Moral action, as envisaged in the Bhagavad Gita.

The Principle of Right Approach towards Action – Moral Action

According to the Bhagavad Gita, no one can remain idle without performing any action, even for a moment, as all are helplessly driven to action by nature-born qualities (*III.5, Volume 1, 260*). In fact, even the bare maintenance of the body will not be possible without performing action (*III.8, Volume 1, 263*). Therefore, everyone, by their nature, perform action at all times.

Now, the question arises: what is moral action (or) what is the right approach/way to perform any action?



The Bhagavad Gita identifies two ways of performing any action, namely, (a) performing action with the desire for its result, and (b) performing action as right/duty (*Svadharmā*) and without the desire for its result.

The Bhagavad Gita states: “Your right is only to be engaged in action, but never to its fruits. May you not be motivated by the fruits of actions.” (II.47, *Volume 1*, 177)

When actions are performed with the desire to enjoy its results, the desire binds the soul and becomes the cause for rebirth, resulting in bondage. (II.49, *Volume 1*, 192). When actions are performed as one’s own duty without the desire to enjoy its results, such action does not bind the soul into repeated rebirths, resulting in liberation (II.51, *Volume 1*, 208 & III.19, *Volume 1*, 282).

The Bhagavad Gita advocates the performance of action as one’s own duty (*Svadharmā*) without the desire to enjoy its results (*Phalatyaga*), terming it as *karmayoga* - the right approach to perform an action. Performance of action as one’s own duty (*Svadharmā*) is to be based on one’s own innate tendencies and abilities (*Svabhava*) (XVIII. 47, *Volume 3*, 315).

Thus, moral action is intention-based and not consequence-based, according to the Bhagavad Gita.

Takeaways for Contemporary Society

Let us now deliberate on the takeaways of the Bhagavad Gita’s perception of moral action for contemporary society:

The Bhagavad Gita states that performing actions, while giving-up attachment to the result, leads to self-purification (*atma/citta/sattva suddhi*) of an individual (V.11, *Volume 2*, 37). The important positive impact of self-purification may be enumerated as under:

(1) The process of self-purification brings about a behavioural change in individuals, wherein, one’s behaviour changes from the dominant state of *tamas* (characterized by laziness and ignorance) to that of *Rajas* (characterized by activity and desire) and from the dominant state of *Rajas* to that of *Sattva* (characterized by knowledge and calmness) (XIV.17, *Volume 3*, 114). This behavioural change, exhibiting assertiveness, would be a more appropriate behaviour in contemporary society.



(2) The behavioural changes brought out by self-purification, in turn, automatically leads to the personality development of individuals (*XIV.11-13, Volume 3, 110-111*). This personality development, show causing the actualization of inherent potentialities, would enable individuals to evolve as responsible citizens of contemporary society.

(3) Self-purification leads to self-awareness, self-realization (*III. 19, Volume 1, 282*) and freedom from bondage (*III. 9, Volume 1, 265*). Self discovery brings in the much-needed happiness and peacefulness in individuals, a necessity for contemporary society.

(4) The inner voyage of self-realization brings in the intuitive understanding/experience on the Oneness of all beings (*VI. 29, Volume 2, 151*), propelling the act of serving for the welfare of society (*III. 20, Volume 1, 284*). In fact, the Bhagavad Gita considers a person as thief who does not contribute to society after being nourished by it (*III. 12, Volume 1, 272*). This right attitude of service is much-needed for the contemporary society facing multiple existential and social issues.

(5) The Bhagavad Gita states that it is always better to perform one's own duty, even imperfectly, than other's duty, well performed. (*III.35, Volume 1, 313*). This insight would foster innovativeness and creativity, which are vital for contemporary society. Further, this perception would mitigate meaningless competition, hatred & jealousy among individuals in society.

(6) The Bhagavad Gita proclaims that one should raise oneself up by one's own efforts and should not let oneself down. One is both a friend and an enemy of oneself (*VI.5, Volume 2, 116*). This insight provides impetus to self-motivation, self-governance, and self-development for individuals in society. Further, it reduces the blaming game in contemporary society.

(7) The Bhagavad Gita points out that in the process of performing moral action, there evolves the control of the senses (*II. 58, Volume 1, 225*), desires (*III. 41, Volume 1, 331*) fear & anger (*II.56, Volume 1, 221*) and the mind (*II. 64, Volume 1, 236*), leading individuals to achieve a state of emotional stability (*II. 51, Volume 1, 208*). This perception of stress management, that enriches problem-solving abilities and conflict resolution skills, are vital for contemporary society.



(8) The Bhagavad Gita states that any action is dependent on the functioning of the five factors, namely, the body, the doer, the senses, the various efforts and divine providence (XVIII.14, Volume 3, 258). Under consequence-based action, the result is dependent on factors that are not under the control of the doer. Further, the result accrued is for all the factors and not for the doer alone. On the other hand, under intention-based action, what matters is the intention/duty alone, which is under the control of the doer. Therefore, intention-based actions are moral as well as logical actions.

Conclusion

From the above deliberations, one may be able to understand that moral/right action is intention/duty-based and not result/consequence-based, according to the Bhagavad Gita. Further, intention-based action leads to self-purification in individuals.

The potency of self-purification possess a highly positive impact on the behavioural pattern and personality development of individuals in society. It fosters freedom, happiness, the right notion of service and emotional stability. It enriches the skills of innovativeness, creativity, self-motivation, self-governance, problem-solving ability and conflict resolution skills. Further, it mitigates negativities such as meaningless competition, fear, hatred, jealousy, blaming others and stressfulness. It takes care of individuals as well as societal welfare.

In conclusion, it may be stated that adopting the Bhagavad Gita's insights of moral/right action, that fosters qualitative capabilities and mitigates the negatives of individuals, would make the contemporary society a better place to live in.

Reference:

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