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The term 'Bhakta' in bhagavadgeetha

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Abstract

Bhagavad-Gita occurs in the famous Epic *Mahabharata* in the *Bhismaparva* as 25 to 42 chapters. It contains 700 verses. It sums up the basic philosophy of Hindus and is of perennial interest to the people of not only Indian but also to the entire world. The unique quality of *Gita* is that it raises problems of life and provides solutions which enable men to reach the supreme goal of life. In this respect it is a unique guide to the men. Ever since it came into existence it has influenced the thoughts and actions of the Indian people, because it beautifully synthesizes different concepts relating to *Moksa*. Though the views may be different, paths may vary, the ultimate goal is the same that is liberation of mankind from ignorance (*Ajnana*). This philosophy of *Bhagavad-Gita* is in tune with the famous saying that which exists is one, sages call it by various names.

Keywords: Epic, bhagavatgita, yagna, jnana, karma, bhakti, moksha, bhakta, yogarudha

Introduction

The concepts are basically the same and there is no contradiction among them. *Bhagavadgita* is considered as the essence to the *upanisadic* doctrines. In the introductory *sloka*s it is clearly stated "All the *upanisads* are the cows, the milker is Krishna, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, milk is the supreme nectar of the *Gita*"^[2].

Thus *Gita* is nothing but the *upanishadic* philosophy which the Lord has expounded in a lucid language as is understood by all. In this connection D.D. Kosambi rightly remarks "A similar attitude is reflected in the philosophy of the *Gita*. No violence is done to any preceding doctrine except *Vedic Yajna*. The Essential is taken from each by a remarkable keen mind capable of deep and synthetic study"^[3]. All are filled together with a consummate skill and literary genius and cemented by *Bhakti*. The greatest philosopher of this century Dr. Radha Krishnan vindicated the same position in a clear manner when he observed". The different elements which at the period of composition of *Gita*, were competing with each other within the Hindu system, are brought together and integrated into a comprehensive synthesis, free and large, subtle and profound. The teacher refines and reconciles the different currents of thoughts, the Vedic cult of sacrifice, the *upanishadic* teachings of transcendent Brahman, the *Bhagavata* theism and tender piety, the *Samkhya* dualism and the *Yoga* mediation. He draws all these living elements of Hindu life and brought into an organic unity. He adopts the method of not of denial but of penetration and shows how these different lines of thought converge towards the same end"^[4].

Three paths

I. Jnanamarga (ज्ञानमार्ग)

Discussing various schools of thought, *Gita* describes three paths which lead to liberation from *samsara* (Cycle of births and rebirths). They are known as *Jnanamarga* (The path of knowledge) *karmamarga* (The path of action) and

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Bhaktimarga (The path of devotion). All the three are considered to be equally efficacious. This is clear when Lord Krishna told Arjuna. "However men approach me, even so do I welcome them, for the path, men take from every side is mine "O! Partha" [5].

But it is observed that Krishna speaks each of it excelling the other and thus more prominence is implied. For example while speaking about the necessity of knowledge he says "knowledge sacrifice is superior to wealth sacrifice; all karma culminates in knowledge [6]. There is no purifier in the world like knowledge, He who is perfected in Yoga finds it is the self in due season [7].

The man who is full of faith obtains knowledge and he who has mastery over his senses, and having obtained knowledge, goes swiftly to the supreme peace [8]. Even if he is the most sinful of sinners, he can cross all sin by the raft of knowledge [9].

II. Karma marga (कर्ममार्ग)

Next dealing with the nature of *karma* he praises it in the same way as he has done in the case of knowledge. He declared "Janaka and others attained perfection by action and keeping in mind the welfare of the world also, one should perform action¹⁰. But he attaches a condition of non-attachment to action. Therefore one should perform action without attachment, then only he will reach the supreme [11].

III. Bhakti marga (भक्तिमार्ग)

The words *Bhakti* and *Bhakta* are derived from the root *Bhaj* to serve, devote, worship and pay homage by adding the suffixes *ktin* and *cta* respectively. The idea of *Bhakti* can be traced to the Vedas because the *Rsis* were greatly moved by seeing the benevolence of natural deities like *Savithru*, *Agni* etc. They described this benevolence of natural deities and phenomenal forces and exquisite beauty of the nature. The result is the Vedas. What we can understand from it is that the Vedas are devotional songs and these *rsis* are the great devotees. But in course of time, this *Bhakti* developed into a great system of philosophy with the advent of *Bhagavadgita*, *Bhagavata* and a number of works dealing with the efficacy of this *Bhakti* as a path to attain the supreme bliss of life. We come across the episodes of a number of *Bhaktas* in the Epics, *Puranas* who could get the grace of the Lord and attained *Moksa*. Thus India has become a land of sages and saints who imparted the invaluable nature of *Bhakti*. Thus the *Bhakti* movement assumed the nature of phenomena influencing the thoughts and actions of Hindus. It has helped us to forge unity among diversity and refine and elevate our minds and hearts. Apart from this, the *Bhakti* movement promoted human values like love, discipline and brotherhood among different sections of society. All this is made possible by the great discourse of the Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* in the form of *Bhaktiyoga* 12th chapter.

Though it contains twenty *slokas*, it is a marvellous exposition of this doctrine of *Bhakti* and *Bhakta*. The first five *slokas* describe the nature of worship in relation to abstract and embodied forms. The great fruits that accrue from *Bhakti* are dealt with in 6th to 8th *slokas*. The various means of control of body, mind and sense organs is summarised from 9th to 12th *slokas*. The traits and virtues of a real devotee are praised from 13th to 20th *slokas*. But we should not miss the fundamental doctrines in the preceding chapters as they are essential to understand the concept of *Bhakti* and *Bhakta* as they have a close relationship with *Bhaktiyoga*. Then only this

concept of *Bhakti* and *Bhakta* will be comprehensive and complete.

While discussing the path of devotion he recommends it as the best and the only means of liberation. He declares "Those who fix their minds on Him and worship him ever earnest and possessed of supreme faith, he considers them as the most perfect in *Yoga* [12]. He affirms" Those verily who renounce all actions in me and intent on me with whole hearted *Yoga*, I speedily lift up them from the ocean of Death and existence! O. *Parha!* their Minds ever fixed on me [13].

In the beginning of *Kuruksetra* war we see Arjuna in a state of utter confusion regarding his righteous nature of the war he is going to wage. He is in a dilemma whether to do it or not to do it. Krishna presents four states of saintly nature so as to remove the confusion of Arjuna. They are *sthitaprajna*, *Yogarudha*, the *Bhakta* and *gunatita*.

Now let us examine those saintly qualities.

The *sthitaprajna* is one, who lives in the world but is not of it. He wards off all the desires from his mind and feels full contentment in the self alone with a purified mind. He is one who does not worry in the difficulties and feel elated in the happiness. He crosses fear, love, anger and immerses only in the self, who treats all things with a sense of equality and who does not agitate in the favourable or unfavourable situations and is above hate and love, such a person is really a *sthitaprajna* [14]. He beautifully compares this natural and unstrained powers of self-control of the saint to that of a tortoise [15].

At this stage itself Krishna rightly points out the difficulty to control senses which waft us like a wild gale. They blow us along the hurricane of our desires. The ship will drift with the winds as the tides run [16]. If it is anchored properly there is no trouble. The ignorance stationing in the body of senses and mind like a wild enemy, destroys *Jnana* and *Vijnana* [17]. So he emphasises that it is a must to control his sense organs and the mind. The senses do not yield easily even to wise people and if they are obstructed, *kama* and *krodha* will arise and destroy our *Jnana*. As the smoke covers the flame, dust the mirror and the womb the unborn baby [18].

Krishna rightly points out the difficulty of controlling the senses and the mind and a way out is suggested for the people and this is possible only through constant practice and non-attachment (*abhyasa* and *Vairagya*) [19].

Self-will and ego in man are responsible for his obstinacy and waywardness. Krishna describes the chain reactions of the uncontrolled desires. This mental process is naturally stated" whoever dotes on the objects affording sense enjoyment at once gets attached to them. From attachment, longing for it springs up. When the desires are obstructed by their non-fulfilment, one becomes angry. Anger confuses the mind and confounds judgement, confusion makes one to forget the commands of the Scriptures, which results in the loss of moral sense. From the loss of moral sense and understanding, man perishes [20].

This Psychological process of mental degeneration is the result of lust which if it is not controlled in the incipient stage itself, it plays havoc with us and ultimately destroys us. While describing *yogarudha* also the process of self-control (*samyamana*) is depicted beautifully and this self-control is to be inculcated step by step without injuring the psyche or the body [21].

The method of acquiring *samyamana* is clearly pointed out. We are asked not to control the senses all at one stroke but proceed slowly in a phased manner. The preliminaries like moderation in food, recreation and sleep and the venue for the

practice of sense control are carefully brought out and the entire Yoga is described here ^[22].

For a true devotee it is not only necessary to have *sraddha* but also to be equipped with physical and mental discipline. All this leads to *Yoga* meaning communion with higher power. The word *Yoga* is explained in three different ways. First *Yoga* is the equanimity of mind with regard to success and failure ^[23].

The next definition is that *Yoga* is the skill in the execution of actions ^[24] and it is the state of equanimity with regard to success and failure, and achieving the highest end and this state of equanimity alone turns our actions into the means of achieving the highest end. Then there is the third definition of *Yoga* that it is the dissociation with the contact of pain²⁵ which is possible only through the state of equanimity with regard to pain and pleasure, success and failure. There is no much difference among these definitions. Thus *Yogarudha* is one who lives with restraints and uses things judiciously and not abstains from them. He maintains an equal temper, never flies into a rage and is unaffected by the reactions of others be they friends or foes ^[26].

In this context, Krishna clearly states that one's mind should elevate the soul and not repress it. The mind alone is the friend of the soul and mind is also the enemy. For him who conquers his mind by right knowledge, his mind is his friend and for him who does not subdue his mind, his mind turns his enemy ^[27]. Self-control is made possible by mind control. Mind control is effected by constant vigilance and the practice of dispassion. These two by themselves are not enough. Krishna insists on devotion to Him as he is the sovereign means for effecting sense control ^[28]. Yoga is yoking of the mind to the Lord with constant faith and devotion to him in the knowledge that he is supreme ^[29]. While discussing the nature of *sthitaprajna* and *yogarudha*, it is pointed out that devotion is the master discipline for regulating the senses and not the independent efforts of man nor his proud fortitude. It will be in the form of Lord's abounding mercy for erring humanity. Without this mercy of the Lord, the efforts of man alone will kindle the senses and inflate his ego.

As already indicated the nature of *Bhakta* is beautifully described in the 12th chapter of *Gita*. One significant virtue that Krishna insists in a devotee is the concern for his fellow men. He hates none and is kind and compassionate towards others, free from the feeling of I and Mine and is not troubled by pleasure or pain, he has forbearance for all. He is ever content, steady in contemplation, self restrained, firm in conviction, has consecrated his mind and understanding to the Lord. He is free from joy and anger, fear and anxiety. He has no desires, is pure and at the same time skilful, unconcerned and untroubled, and selfless in all his actions. He neither rejoices nor hates, neither grieves nor seeks. He is alike to foe and friend, in praise and denunciation, pleasure and pain; is silent and satisfied with whatever he has: he has no attachment to any place as his home and is ever devoted to the Lord ^[30].

Krishna firmly advocates that a devotee should have wider concern for humanity. He is not a selfish lump of earth to achieve his liberation being indifferent to the welfare of his fellow men. He must help them. The *Bhakta* should seek the good of all ^[31]. *Sarvabhutahite ratah*. He should not be unmindful of the life of his fellowmen. He must know the truth of indivisibility of happiness and realise that one cannot be happy unless all are happy ^[32].

The devotee must have a clear understanding of the Lord's majesty, infinite grace and supreme concern and his easy

accessibility and repose complete faith in Him and surrender to him. Devotion is the expression of the gratitude one owes to the Lord, for the countless benefactions he receives from Him. The Lord is adorable and he is the power by which the individual gets his life and lives in peace and is not torn in conflict and free from tension and strife and live in amity with fellowmen. Devotion is the infinite attachment to God. Egotism is the false assessment of one's abilities, talents, stature and disposition. If this is not checkmated in the beginning itself it assumes the form of vanity. This leads to false assumptions and indulgence in gossip and insult of others and always tries to project himself. The other illusions of egotism are the feeling of self-righteousness, looking down others and developing pride due to one's wealth, learning and power and a host of such other vices. It is the devotion which scatters these false assumptions and enables to understand the man's littleness when compared with the Lord's infinite attributes and unbounded compassion. It opens one's eyes regarding his utter ignorance and constrictions of the heart. It enables man to regain his self-knowledge and thereby to live wisely untutored by ambitions, not vexing the soul with impossible longings ^[33].

Devotion advocated by Lord Krishna is not a difficult proposition as it is within the reach of an ardent devotee. To practise *Bhakti* one need not do something special or give up the normal course of life, nor live away from the society. The devotion of Krishna is nothing but dedication of our normal activities as offerings to the Lord. The offering need not be rich. The Lord observes "I accept gifts of love, offered with devotion, from the pure minded, be they a simple leaf, a flower, fruit or water" ^[34] What is required is the will and absolute sense of surrender of all of us to Him. If this prerequisite is fulfilled, the devotee is assured of complete freedom from sorrow for ever, in the form of liberation ^[35].

Here the word *ekam* is very significant in that it implies that the devotee must give up the sense of agency and dedicate him as an unreserved instrument of God, give up the feeling of ownership of the act and must dedicate it to Him and also must be free from the feeling that his surrender to the Lord is the cause of his liberation. He must regard the Lord as both *upaya* and *upeya*.

Thus, when we compare the *Karmayoga*, *jnanayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga*, we can clearly understand that the *Bhakta* is the same as *yogarudha* and *sathitaprajna*. He is a *karmayogin*. He is asked not to suppress his legitimate desires that do not contravene the principles of *Dharma* but indulge them in moderation. Repression leads to surprising outlets and injures the psyche. So is the case of unlimited indulgence. Hence Krishna's accept of *Bhakti* advocated regulated indulgence in pleasures, to sublimate them and not to suppress them not to hush them up but to harness them to useful purposes, not to thwart them but to train them. Thus *Bhakti* is a positive movement, a harmonious synthesis of practical values with a practical foundation. A *Bhakta* is expected to tread this path of the Lord with all faith.

In *Bhagavata* nine elements of *Bhakti* are listed as

Sravanam kirtanam Visnoh
Smaranam padasevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam
sakhya atmanivedanam ^[36].

Five types of bhakthi

All these methods of *Bhakti* are nothing but easy ways of attaining the *paramatma* realising his eternal nature and when

a devotee does any of these, he should do it with a sense of dedication and surrendering every-thing to the God. *Acaryas* of great spiritual intuition have opined this *Bhakti* can be of five types like *Santabhakti*, *Dasyabhakti*, *Sakhyabhakti*, *Vatsalyabhakti* and *Madhurabhakti*. *Santabhakti* is nothing but the complete Surrender of one's self considering that *Bhagavan* alone is the reality. According to *Bhagavata*, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara are the devotees who obtained liberation according to this type. Sankara, kabir, Sriramatirtha are the great sages who attained eternal bliss following this *Santabhakti*. A devotee considering himself as the servant of the Lord comes under *Dasyabhakti* and Dhruva, Prahlada, Ambharisa, Hanuman, Bharata, Lakshmana, Satrugna, Kulasekhara, Ramanuja, Madhavacarya, Tulasidas, Jnanadeva, Namadeva, Samartha Ramadas, South Indian Alwars, Nandanar, Thyagaraja, Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi etc. are the great sages who attained liberation under this *Dasyabhakti*. Worshipping *paramesvara* as a life friend is called *Sakhyabhakti* and Bhisma, Arjuna, Cow herd Boys, Sugriva, Suradas are the devotees who followed this *Bhakti* and won the supreme grace of the Lord. Adoration of the Lord with the affection of a son is *Vatsalyabhakti* and Yasoda, Nanda and Vallabhacarya are the devotees who treaded this path. Worship of the Lord as one's own Lord of life (*Prananatha*) is the *Madhurabhakti*. Radha, Gopikas, Jayadeva, Chandidas, Chaitanya, Meerabai, Andal are the great devotees who attained liberation following this path of *Madhurabhakti*. Thus the history of *Bhakti* and *Bhaktas* is simply endless. It is a continuous national consciousness which has spread to all parts of our great nation.

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