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Article

Human Conducts and Rights in Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

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Abstract

Śrīmadbhagavadgītā starts from the word, dharma. In fact Dharma is the central theme in Śrīmadbhagavadgītā. Lord kṛṣṇa has explained dharma as sasvata or everlasting one which is indestructable and the supreme object of knowledge. All are transidental but dharma is eternal.

tvamakṣaram paramaṁ veditavyam
tvamasya viśvasya param nidhānam |
tvamavyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā
sanātanastvam puruṣo mato me | | (11.18)ⁱ

Dharma, elaborated in the Gita is some extent different from the updated nomenclature of rights. In Gita, dharma means the duty or code of conduct. Lord kṛṣṇa told arjuna in Gita that to safeguard the honests and to destroy the devils, dharma is established for

paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
dharmaśamsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge | | (4.08)ⁱⁱ

The Analects and the Bhagavad-gita stories both have the purpose to teach and have life lessons embedded within them. Though both pieces can be interpreted in different ways, they both teach positive moral values and practices. However, though they speak about similar themes, their

respective overarching messages are very different. This is due to the fact that the Confucius Analects were mainly a secular collection whereas the Bhagavad-gita is strictly a religious text. Both Confucius and Krishna mention the human lifecycle and speaks on it. Confucius said "At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning. At thirty, I took my stand. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the will of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned. At seventy, I follow all the desires of my heart without breaking any rule." (Analects 2.4). Confucius speaks about what a man can do to become virtuous member of society among other men. However, when Krishna talks about the human lifecycle to Arjuna, a different theme is brought up: "the embodied one passes through childhood, youth, and then old age, then attains another body; in this the wise are undeceived." (Bhagavad-gita 14). Krishna in this quote speaks about the human lifecycle with a lot less importance than Confucius. This is because in this religion, they believe in reincarnation and one of your lives is just a small fraction of a long cycle of reincarnation and rebirth.

Introduction

The teachings of the Analects and Bhagavad-gita both try to teach good morals and lessons, but their overarching purpose and beliefs are different and thus the interpretations of these texts are different. The supreme Lord brings forth as dharma. When obedience to His law collapses and human beings propagate their own illicit law, the Lord descends to protect the good citizens. It is clarified that dharma controls and determine the society. Right to life and security for the people is protected by dharma.

Subject matter

Hence, dharma in Gita is meant to safeguard the rights of the citizens. The kula-dharma (law of family)

kula-kṣaye praṇaśyanti kula-dharmāḥ sanātanaḥ |

dharme naṣṭe kulaṃ kṛtsnam adharmo' bhibhavatyuta | | (1.40)ⁱⁱ

and jāti-dharma (law of community)

doṣairetaiḥ kulaghnānām varṇasaṃkarakākaiḥ |

utsādyante jātīdharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāśvatāḥ | | (1.43)^{iv}

are focused in the Gita. In this context, it is presumed that there were group right and occupational right in the society during the period of the Mahabharata. The code of svadharma (one's own dharma) is spoken in the Gita.

śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃātsvanuṣṭhitāt |
svadharṃe nidhanaṃ śreyāḥ paradharṃo bhayāvahaḥ | | (3.35)^v
śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃātsvanuṣṭhitāt |
svabhāvanīyataṃ karma kurvaṇnāpnoti kilbiṣam | | (18.47)^{vi}

This svadharma referred to the conduct of a person to extend the rights of the rest others in a society. If the duty is performed scrupulously not expecting any reward, it leads to god-realisation .

sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṃsiddhiṃ labhate naraḥ |
svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṃ yathā vindati tacchrṇu | | (18.45)
yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānāṃ yena sarvamidam tatam |
svakarmanā tamabhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ | | (18.46)
śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃātsvanuṣṭhitāt |
svabhāvanīyataṃ karma kurvaṇnāpnoti kilbiṣam | | (18.47)^{vii}

One's own duty, though devoid of merit is preferable to the duty of another well-performed. Even death in the performance of one's own duty brings blessedness; another's duty is brought with fear. In Gita it is told that-

śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃātsvanuṣṭhitāt |
svadharṃe nidhanaṃ śreyāḥ paradharṃo bhayāvahaḥ | | (3.35)^{viii}

The system of cāturvarṇya will be discussed later. But, here in the doctrine of svadharma, the characteristics of human rights is reflected. i.e

nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate |
svālpamāpyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt | | (2.40)^{ix}

In this verse of Gita, dharma refers to equanimity. The verse means that the little practice of equanimity for god-realisation puts aside a man from ruthless fear.

In Gita it is told that- 'those who are engaged for the welfare of all beings verily attain me'. Here the concept of human welfare is involved a man from time immemorial has thought of his own pleasure and welfare. He hankers after luxury, honour, name and fame etc. and also wants to attain salvation. This tendency of personal gain enhances and strengthens his desire and attachments etc., which are the stumbling blocks to salvation.

karmajaṃ buddhiyuktā hi phalaṃ tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ |
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padaṃ gacchantyanāmayam | | (2.51)^x

In order to root out this tendency (nature), he should think of the welfare of all beings; how they should get rid of sufferings, how they should gain name, fame and honour and how they should attain salvation. This thought of the welfare of others roots out the thought self-interests and conduces him to apply all his riches and resources including his gross, subtle and physical bodies for the welfare of all beings. When all his riches and resources etc. are incorporated for the welfare of others, his desire and attachment are slowly renounced. When they are totally renounced, he attains God. The lord declares that- ‘those who are engaged in the welfare of all beings verily attain me’.

saṃniyamyendriyagrāmaṃ sarvatra samabuddhayāḥ |
te prāpnuvanti māmeva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ | | (12.04)^{xi}

Again the same thought is expored in the Gita- ‘those who are engaged in the welfare of all beings attain attributeless brahman’

labhante brahmanirvāṇamṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ |
chinnadvoidhā yatātmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ | | (5.25)^{xii}

Here the welfare of man means extending rights to mankind.

The allmighty, according to modes and actions divided humanbeings into four groups. ^{xiii} The conducts of the four social groups have been decided in accordance with their qualities and skills not on the basis of their birth. ^{xiv} The duty of each occupational group is identified as svadharma-

śreyān svadharmah viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
svadharmaḥ nidhanaṃ śreyah paradharmaḥ bhayāvahah | ^{xv}

In these contexts *Svadharmah* means own conduct and *paradharma* mean other’s conduct. Caturāśrama, the four stages of life is spoken in the Gita. The Gita advocated the four stages in life i.e. brahmacharya (celibacy), gārhastya (household), vānaprastha (retirement) and sanyāsa (renunciation). The thought of right is also reflected in Caturāśrama system. A Brahmacārī obtains and distributes knowledge. A Gṛhastha enjoys the life at home with renunciation and performs the duty to ensure the right of others. A Vānaprasthī stays in

the forest and dettaches himself from the material word. A Sanyāsī abandons all material pleasure and leads a systematized life and aspires for liberation.

Lord kṛṣṇa explained dharma as everlasting one. It is indestructible and the supreme object of knowledge. Every thing is transidental but dharma is eternal.

*tvamākṣaram paramaṃ veditavyaṃ
tvamasya viśvasya paraṃ nidhānam |
tvamavyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā
sanātanastvaṃ puruṣo mato me | | (11.18)^{xvi}*

This is ultimate pleasure. The deep study of Gita reveals that by performing one's duty, whether it is low or high, a man can attain the supreme goal, called self-realization or salvation.

*sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau |
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpamavāpsyasi | | (2.38)
tasmādasaktaḥ satataṃ kāryaṃ karma samācara |
asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ | | (3.19)
tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṃ nityatrpto nirāśrayaḥ |
karmaṇyabhipravṛtto'pi naiva kiṃcitkaroti saḥ | | (4.20)
sarvakarmānyapi sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayaḥ |
matprasādādapnoti śāśvataṃ padamavyayam | | (18.56)^{xvii}*

A person has to change neither the stage of life nor the way of worship as is generally thought. In what ever stage of life or social order he is he can attain salvation by performing his duty conscientiously without expecting any reward.

*sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṃsiddhiṃ labhate naraḥ |
svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṃ yathā vindati tacchrṇu | | (18.45)^{xviii}*

The Gita preaches the mankind the art of realizing the supreme goal by utilizing the available circumstances while living in the society. This art includes two important factors i.e. performing one's own duty and securing the right of others.

*karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana |
mā karmaphalaheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stvakarmani | | (2.47)
sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ |
anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo'stoiṣṭakāmadhuk | | (3.10)*

devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ |
parasparam bhāvayantāḥ śreyāḥ paramavāpsyatha | | (3.11)
iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ | | (3.12)^{xix}

Conclusion

After all, Lord kṛṣṇa declares that fall surrender to the supreme lord stands above the entire range of sacred duties known generally as dharma- ‘renouncing all the rights, take refuge in me alone. Have no regret, for I shall give you the freedom from all sins.

sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja |
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ | | (18.66)^{xx}

In Gita the conduct of a person is prominently focused and the claims for the right are disproved. In one sentence, it can be told that –‘one has got right to his own good conduct, but no right to get the result’.

One should safeguard the rights of his family and relatives etc. of his own accord without any interested motif. One should please others, comfort others and do well to others with full power, intellect, ability and resources. One should serve his parents, wife, sons, sisters and neighbors etc. But, he should not in the least expect others to behave or act according to him. One should rear the domestic animals such as cows, bullocks, camels, sheep, goats etc. and do good to them. One should protect the lives from rats, mosquitoes etc. which trouble others but no one has a right to kill them. Starting from humans ending with insects, every one has a right to live. This is the message of the Gita in regards to Human Rights.

End Notes

ⁱ śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 11.18

ⁱⁱ śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 4.8

ⁱⁱⁱ śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 1.40

^{iv} śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 1.43

^v śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 3.35

^{vi} śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 3.35, 18.47

- vii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 18.85
- viii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 3.35
- ix śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 2.40
- x śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 2.71
- xi śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 12.4
- xii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 5.25, 12.4
- xiii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 4.13
- xiv śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 18.41-44
- xv śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 3.35
- xvi śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 11.18
- xvii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 2.38, 3.19, 4.20, 18.56
- xviii śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 18.45
- xix śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 2.47, 3.10-12
- xx śrīmad bhagavadgītā, 18.66

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