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VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF KARMA

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Abstract

The concept of *Karma* is one of the most important concepts of the religious, ethical, cultural and philosophical thoughts of India. The Sanskrit term *Karma* is derived from the root verb 'Kri' which means to act. Taken in its literal sense, therefore *Karma* signifies action and refers to all actions whether of mind or body. Wherever there is action of any kind, it is *Karma*. Metaphysically viewed, *Karma* means that our present states of affairs are caused by our past actions.

In this paper an attempt is made to understand Vivekananda's concept of *Karma*. Vivekananda enquired into the way by following which one can find happiness. Like the *Gita* he says there are three ways- the *Jnana-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga* and the *Bhakti-Yoga*. His explanation of *Karma-Yoga* also is similar to *Gita's*. *Karma-Yoga* is the way for the house-holder. This Yoga means one has to perform actions but without attachment. *Karma-Yoga* will lead to the dispelling of ignorance in the one who is practicing it. It is ignorance because of which one remains unaware of oneness of individual soul with the ultimate soul. Ignorance makes one mistake pleasure as the goal of human life. *Karma Yoga* prepares mind for the reception of light or knowledge. It expands the heart and breaks all ignorance or barriers that stand in the way of unity or oneness of individual soul with ultimate soul.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Karma* is one of the most important concepts of the religious, ethical, cultural and philosophical thoughts of India. The Sanskrit term *Karma* is derived from the root verb '*Kri*' which means to act. Taken in its literal sense, therefore *Karma* signifies action and refers to all actions whether of mind or body. Wherever there is action of any kind, it is *Karma*. Metaphysically taken, *Karma* means our present states of affairs are caused by our previous actions.

Swami Vivekananda is one of the greatest thinkers of contemporary Indian philosophy. His philosophy is based on the practical aspect of Vedanta. According to Vivekananda, from the epistemological and metaphysical stand point, *Karma Yoga* and the *Law of Karma* Are like the two sides of the same coin. The thinker's ideal was a *Karmayogin*, a selfless, bold, strong and manly character, ordained to deal mostly with practical problems of everyday life. For him, selfless action is the motto of life. According to Vivekananda, if a man does action without any selfish desire and never thinks about the result of it, he gets the highest. According to Vivekananda, a man ought to live in this world like lotus leaf which grows in water but is never moistened by water.

TWO WAYS OF PERFORMING ACTION

According to Vivekananda there are two ways to perform our duties in this world. Firstly, we should think that this world is like a huge stage on which we are all playing different roles. God has created this world and therefore he is the director of this entire show and we are just instrument in his hands. Therefore whatever work He has assigned to us, we should do it as worship. We should never think that we are working for money or power. If we do our work as worship, with concentration, devotion, dedication, sincerity and perfection, it becomes *Karma Yoga*. Swami Vivekananda said that devotion to duty is the highest form of worship of God.

The second approach is known as practical Vedanta or Vedantic approach, which is the special contribution of Swami Vivekananda to modern society. Vedanta says God is in everything. It is He who has manifested Himself in the form different beings. So

Vivekananda says that our worship should not be confined only to the temples and images but we must learn to feel the presence of the Divine in everyone and offer our worship in the form of devoted service to them. According to him, we must give our body, mind and speech to the welfare of the world. He said, “You have read, ‘look upon your mother as God’, ‘look upon your father as God’, - but I say, the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted- let these be your Gods. Know that service to this alone is the highest religion”^[1]

FREEDOM THROUGH SELFLESS WORK

The goal of all nature is freedom Vivekanand says that all things of the universe are trying to get freedom from bondage. From the atom to the highest being of this universe are working for the one end- liberty for mind, for body, for spirit. The sun, the moon, the earth, the planets, all are trying to fly away from bondage. According to Vivekananda every unselfish work taken us towards the goal i.e. freedom. *Karma Yoga* is the path of action which leads to the identity of one’s self with *Brahman*. It is a system of ethics and religion pursued for the attainment of freedom. The goal of *Karma Yoga* is the realization of freedom through unselfish work. According to Vivekananda, every selfish action retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action taken us towards the goal. So which is selfish is immoral and which is unselfish is moral. Thus for him, an atheist may be a *Karmayogi*. Though the cosmic process will go on forever, we can become free from it and enjoy eternal bliss by performing selfless *karma*.

Karma Yoga tells us to never say “mine”. Whenever we say a thing is mine, misery will immediately come. We should enjoy the beauty of all the pictures in the world but not to identify ourselves with any of them.

Vivekananda holds that *Karma* means action and effect of action also. Every good action leads to the highest idea of eternal and entire self abnegation where there is no ‘I’ but only ‘thou’. *Karma Yoga* leads to this and thus *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* come to the same point. In *Karma Yoga*, work is not done as duty, which implies attachment. The *Karmayogi* works as a free being, Being unattached and considers his duties as God’s

duty. Duty is sweet only when love greases its wheels to avoid friction, and love shines alone in freedom. The secret of work is the identity of means and end.

KARMA YOGA AND HOUSEHOLDER

According to Vivekananda, *Karma Yoga* is mainly meant for the householders. He can achieve *Mukti* through his moral deeds done in the spirit of detachment. He lives amidst temptation of beauty, health and pleasure, yet remain unattached with that. *KarmaYoga* is the discipline of practicing detachment of the spirit while working in the world. A *Karmayogi* enjoys the beauty of the cosmos and yet remains unidentified with them. *Karma* and freedom are related to each other. According to Vivekananda, all social and humanitarian works, all works of self-abnegation are helpful for realizing man's freedom. Good works done for others welfare are one's own self purification. According to Vivekananda, we can realize eternal bliss by performing selfless actions

According to Vivekananda, *Karma Yoga* can be practiced not only in individual life, but it can be sincerely practiced at national level also. He advised householders to practice *Karma Yoga* in national level. He says, a householder who does not struggle to get wealth by good means for good purpose or welfare of society is immoral, because upon him depend hundreds. Vivekananda says that, going after wealth in such a case is not bad because that wealth is for distribution. Householder is centre of the life and society. According to Vivekananda, by digging tanks, by planting trees on roadside, by establishing rest –house for man and animals, by making roads and building bridges, goes towards the same goal as the greatest *Yogi*.

According to Vivekananda, every man is the architect of his own destiny. Others cannot make him happy unless he tries to make himself so. By dint of *Karma* one makes himself happy and prosperous. Without *Karma* life is bound to suffer. It is only out of ignorance that we blame others or our fate for such suffering. Thus Vivekananda accepts the Upanisadic view –“we reap what we sow” meaning we are the maker of our own fate.

NISKAMA KARMA OF GITA

Swami Vivekananda is highly influenced by the theory of *Niskama Karma* or work without desire of the *Gita*. The *Gita* says that man has right to work but not to aspire for any result. In the light of this version, Vivekananda held that man should leave all results to God, but he should do his work with utmost sincerity and devotion. According to him non-attachment is the essential key of *Karma Yoga*. Man should work for work's sake. One should not be deluded by any attachment to work, because it comes from expectation of a reward or fruit. Vivekananda said that works must be performed with a spirit of sacrifice or service for society.

Finally, Vivekananda says that man lives through action. It is impossible to be without working even for a moment. Since we cannot remain without work, it is better to learn the secret to work in order to highest things in life. Ordinary selfish work is the cause of bondage, but same work, if we do with the right attitude or without any attachment, leads us to salvation. Vivekananda said "He works best who works without any motive neither for money, nor for fame, nor for everything else. And when a man can do that he will be a Buddha. And out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of *Karma Yoga*"[2].

CONCLUSION

Karma Yoga is the way by means of which man's will power as expressed in action is utilized for spiritual development. Generally all action of men are selfishly motivated, which obstructs us from attainment of liberation, and due to this ignorance we forget the unity or oneness between individual self and ultimate self. According to Vivekananda *Karma Yoga* is a way which leads us to liberation through unselfish work. Man has to go through the school of duty before he is fit for higher development. Duty varies from man to man, from one state of life to another from time to time and from community to community. The Indian tradition therefore maintains that every order of life, whether of the householder or the *Sannyasin*, is equally good, if the

duties appertaining to it are properly performed. Proper performance of duty without selfish attachment leads to the spiritual progress. While love of God and resignation of all the fruits of one's action to Him and cultivation of a sense of being only His instruments are helpful in the practice of *Karma Yoga*. Even persons who have no such belief can become ideal *Karma Yogins* if they are motivated by pure love and goodness, if they are unattached in action, and seek no personal rewards for themselves.

Thus, we see that in the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda the notion of *Karma* has a significant place. Vivekananda considers *Karma Yoga* for the welfare of all Indian as well as the world. According to him, one can attain highest goal of men i.e. salvation or *Moksa* through the path of *Karma Yoga*. But this *Karma* must be *Niskama Karma*.

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