

# Metaphysics of *Mokṣa*: A Philosophical Anatomy of the Concept of Liberation in The *Bhagavad Gītā*

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## Abstract

The *caturvarṇa* structure of Indian society describes a passage through four stages of life (*caturāśrama*) for success in the attainment of four goals (*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*), laying the foundation of Hindu philosophy. Among the four goals, *mokṣa* is the ultimate goal of life. It is a metaphysical concept that owes its origin to the Upaniṣadic period of Vedic philosophy. Its ontology has been affected by various Indian philosophical speculations at different points of time.

This paper comprehends the concept of *mokṣa* by elucidating how the successful conduct of *trivarga* (the triad) can become the means to achieve *jīvanmukti* (liberation). It further deduces the ontology of *mokṣa* from various important philosophical speculations like *Nyāyavaiśeṣika*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vedānta*, etc. which have influenced and shaped Indian intellectual thought and the vision of life. Additionally, the paper comprehends *mokṣa* in the context of *Gītā-dharma* and *Yogaśāstra*; and discusses the ten different ways to achieve common wellbeing leading to *mokṣa*.

*Keywords*: Indian philosophy, *Bhagavadgītā*, *Mokṣa*, yoga, common wellbeing, Liberation

## I. Introduction

The *Bhagavadgītā* (*The Song Celestial*) emanated from the mouth of Lord Kṛṣṇa in response to the despondency of the warrior Arjuna at the advent of a great cataclysmic war (*the Mahābhārata* war). At the very sight of his kith and kin as enemy, Arjuna in grief and lamentation refused to fight. This forced Lord Kṛṣṇa, his charioteer, to teach him the universal principle of *karma* (action) for the performance of *svadharmā* (the righteous conduct and duty proper to his position) within the caste structure and stages of life (*varṇāśramadharmā*) prescribed by Hindu social conduct. The principles enunciated there are known as *Gītā-dharma* (principles of the *Bhagavadgītā*), the most famous of

which is the term *niṣkāmakarma* (selfless action). This was able to elevate the diminished warrior spirit of Arjuna from *na yotyē* (BG II.9; Edgerton 1996: 16) (I shall not fight) into *kariṣyē vacanāni tava* (BG XVIII.73; Edgerton 1996: 178) (I shall obey thy words/I shall fight).

In this regard it may be said that the *Gītā* is all about decision-making, which requires a whole array of resources such as philosophy, history, poetry, ethics, and even song. In the words of L.L. Patton: "In great literature, a decision can be a prism through which a culture is refracted into different modes of expression. So too with the *Gītā*: its contents include simple and moving poetry, dense philosophy, moral musings and an explosive description of God" (2008: viii, Introduction). The Lord's preaching is the outcome of the successful conduct of *puruṣārthachatuṣṭaya* or the four goals of human life, *dharma* (righteous conduct), *artha* (wealth and material prosperity), *kāma* (desire), and *mokṣa* (liberation), which are embedded in the *caturvarṇa* (*Brahmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Sudra*) and *caturāśrama* philosophy of Hindu social order.

The *Caturāśrama* system divides human life into four stages, with twenty-five years in each stage: (I) *brahmacarya āśrama* (the stage of celibacy), (II) *gārhsthya āśrama* (the stage of the householder), (III) *vānaprastha āśrama* (the stage of forest-dwelling), and (IV) *yativrata āśrama* (the stage of *sannyāsa* or renunciation). It is believed that crossing each of these stages successfully can help one reach the ultimate goal of life i.e., *mokṣa* (liberation). The Indian religious tradition recognizes the *Gītā* as an orthodox Hindu scripture possessing equal authority with the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtra*. These three together form the *prasthānatrayī* (triple canon).

## II. Objectives and Methods

Keeping *mokṣa*, the ultimate aim of human life in view, this paper attempts to analyse its socio-philosophical impact in finally shaping the cultural ethos of India through the *Gītā*. The objectives of this paper are to: understand *mokṣa* in the perspective of *puruṣārthachatuṣṭaya* and other Indian philosophical speculations; comprehend *mokṣa* in the context of *Gītā-dharma* and *yoga*; and correlate the principle of *mokṣa* with common wellbeing. This paper aims to meet these objectives through textual analysis and interpretation.

## III. *Puruṣārthachatuṣṭaya*: Mokṣa, a Metaphysical Quest

The word *Puruṣārtha*, signifying both human effort and the objects of pursuit (*artha*), means to reach out to the four aims of life. Primarily, the successful conduct of *trivarga* (the triad – *dharma, artha, and kāma*) leads human being to conduct a good life. The *dharma* (righteous conduct) helped promotion of *artha* (means of life), and both *dharma* and *artha* were needed for the successful realization of *kāma* (fulfilment of human desires) as per the

scriptural prescription. But at a later stage of the *śruti* (the *Vedas*), particularly in the time of the *Upaniṣads*, there was a socio-spiritual cry for the fourth goal. The *mokṣa* became the ultimate goal or *paramapuruṣārtha*, and the successful conduct of the triad became the means to achieve this end. During the period of *smṛti* (*Dharmasāstra*), some held *dharma* and *artha* to be the best means to a successful life, while others gave priority to *kāma* and *artha*, and still others prioritised either *dharma* or *artha*. But the truth is that prosperity and welfare (*śreyas*) are achieved by all three together (*Manusmṛti* II.224; Sastri 2012: 90).

In the context, *dharma* is a specific terminology which stands for religious beliefs and practices, as well as codes of social, economic and political conduct. It protects and preserves life – *dhriyate loko'nena, dharati lokani vāiti dharmah* (Apte 1985: 522). Medhātithi and Govindarāja in their commentary on Manu explain *dharma* to be fivefold: *varṇadharmā* (class duties); *āśramadharmā* (human duty at different stages of social life); *nimittakadharmā* (occasional and periodical rites and ceremonies including expiatory rites); *guṇadharmā* (specific duties); and *rājadharmā* (imperial duties). Other *dharmas* which may be included in the list are: *kuladharmā* (duties of family); *strīdharmā* (duties of woman); *jātidharmā* (caste duties); *śreṇīdharmā* (duties of corporations), etc. (Matilal 2014: 53-54). *Manusmṛti* (1.108) like the *Mahābhārata* (III.150.28) emphasises good conduct as the excellence of the *dharma-ācāra paramodharmah* (Nene 2012: 32). Prior to this *Kaṇvāda* explains it as the means for attaining an unsurpassed and elevated state of life – *yato' bhyudaya niḥśreyasiddhiḥ sadharmah* (*Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.1; Chakravarty 2003: 39).

*Artha* means the aim of acquiring wealth, property and the economic means of subsistence, and is the basis of prosperity and development. *Cāṇakya praṇīta sūtra* adds priority to *artha* in the triad and notes: *dharmasya mūlanī arthah* which means *artha* is the root of *dharma* (*sūtra* 2), and *arthasya mūlanī rājyaṇi* which means, kingdom is the source (root) of wealth (*sūtra* 3) (Gairola 2013: 775). One of the sources of *artha* is effort and exertion (*utthānam*). The *Kautilya Arthaśāstra* (KA) supports this idea and declares: *arthasya mūlanī utthānam*, which means that effort (activity) is the basis of material prosperity (KA Vol.1, 1.1.19.35; Kangle 2014: Vol. 1, 27). There it is further mentioned that *manuṣyānāṇi vṛttirarthah-tasyāḥ pṛthivyā lābhapālonopāyah* *śāstranarthaśāstramiti*, which means the source of human livelihood, is wealth. The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of earth is known as *Arthaśāstra* or the science of statecraft, economic policy and military strategy (KA Vol.1, 1.15.1.1-2; Kangle 2014: Vol. 1, 280). However, *artha* excludes wealth and property acquired through illegal means. It is declared to be tainted wealth and violation of property (*artha-dūṣaṇam*): “Not giving what belongs to others, taking away, destroying or abandoning property is violation of property. As between violation of property and physical injury, violation of property is worse, say the followers of Parāśara” (KA Vol. 2, 8.3.29-30; Kangle 2014: Vol. 2, 394).

*Kāma* signifies desire, longing, love, affection, and sexual pleasure. Unlike *artha* it does not bring about the sense of fulfilment – *na jātu kāmaḥ kāmanāmupabhogyen śāmyati* (*Manusmṛti* II. 94; Sastri 2012: 60). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV. 4.5) declares that a person is an embodiment of desires. One's desires build one's will, which becomes the motivating force for acquiring wealth (*artha*) for the fulfilment of one's essential physical needs for survival (Radhakrishnan 2012: 272). *Kāma* is also the sexual activity essential for immortality through progeny and the propagation of the race. It must conform to the laws of *dharma* that Kṛṣṇa declares – I am *kāma* in conformity with *dharma*. *Dharmāvīruddho bhūteṣu kāmo'smibharatarśabhaḥ* (*BG* VII.11; Edgerton 1996:74). Unbridled selfish desire (*trṣṇā*) is the antithesis of public wellbeing (*lokasaṅgraha*), which can only be controlled through *dharma*. The Hindu mythology therefore declares *kāma* to be the son of *Dharma* and *Śradhā* (Matilal 2014: 60).

*Mokṣa* means liberation and release from worldly bondage, from the cycle of birth and death. It has a transcendental effect which brings final closure to the effect of *karma* understood in three ways – *prārabdha*, *sañcita*, *kriyānāna*. After complete consumption of the effects of *karma* the individual soul gets liberated and becomes one with the supreme spirit. In the mundane world this is a sacred term for *kāmatṛṣṇā nirodhaḥ*, or freedom from the craving and the desires that affect human life. During the stage of *vānaprastha* (dwelling in the forest) and *yatīvrata* (renunciation) the elimination of desire can avert frustration and grant happiness. This ideal of *mokṣa* is *jīvanamukti*, in which one renounces all secular activities and leads a life free from attachment and desires, which is the antithesis of *artha* and *kāma*.

Traditionally *dharma* and *mokṣa* connote *alaukika* or spiritual values, as distinct from *artha* and *kāma* which stand for *laukika* or mundane values. However, *dharma* helps attainment of the *laukika kāma*. Then again, *artha* is the essential means by which *dharma* and *kāma* exercise their sway. *Kāma* provides the will to live and *artha* the means. The lack of both can beget no *puruṣārtha* at all. In the triad, all three are important and interrelated. Their values and priorities change at different stages of life, forming staircases for a gradual ascent to the top, discharging appropriate duties at each step. In *brahmacarya āśrama* when *dharma* is essential, *artha* and *kāma* play a minimal role. In *gārhasthya āśrama*, *kāma* is of paramount importance with adequate support of *artha*. *Yatīvrata* accompanied by *dharma* and *mokṣa* is the *paramāpuruṣārtha* where the role of *artha* and *kāma* are minimised. One *puruṣārtha* thus becomes the foundation for other *puruṣārthas* depending on the stages of life, and in this way the role of each ceases to be hierarchical. Y. Krishna notes:

While *artha* is the means to live and *kāma* is the will to live, *dharma* provides the disciplinary and regulatory milieu and the ideological inspiration for their healthy pursuit and fulfilment. In fact *dharma* is essential for *lokasaṅgraha*, an integrated society in which alone *artha* and *kāma* can be pursued meaningfully (Matilal 2014: 66).

#### IV. Indian Philosophical Speculation: *Mokṣa*, A Metaphysical Quest

Very subtle and difficult reasoning of the concept of *mokṣa* has been attempted in Indian philosophical systems at different points of time, and the idea remains mystical and esoteric. The theological principles of the *Gītā* consider *mokṣa* to be the ultimate goal of life, by which one is liberated from the bondage of the world and becomes one with the Supreme Soul i.e., the *Brahman*. Different metaphysical doctrines like agnosticism, atheism, monism, pluralism, intellectualism, etc. have influenced the *Gītā* philosophy of *mokṣa*. The teachings of the *Gītā* reconcile various philosophical and religious systems of worship in vogue and present a comprehensive eirenicon, which is not temporary but is for all times and all people (Radhakrishnan 1970: 75). This philosophy has the potential to forge unity in diversity in a conflicting, pluralistic Indian society. The ontology of *mokṣa* may thus be deduced from various important philosophical speculations which have influenced and shaped Indian intellectual thought and the vision of life. The term *mokṣa* has sometimes been rendered as *mukti*, *kaivalya*, *nirvāṇa*, *śreyas*, *apavarga*, etc. (Amarakoṣa I.8.289-90; Acharya 1987: 28). This is a non-moral value symbolising the status of freedom with regard to time, birth, death, and the suffering of worldly existence. While most philosophers agree on the above general points of its nature, they differ on other details.

The *Vedas* consider heaven to be the place of the highest joy in human life. This concept of *mokṣa* developed with the *Upaniṣads* was understood as an identity of the individual self with the Supreme Consciousness i.e., *Brahman*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* interprets it as the fulfilled state of the self without desire. Gauḍapāda in his *kārikā* on the *Māndūkya Upaniṣad* describes *mokṣa* as a state of absorption into the universal nature of the *Brahman*. The *Nyāyavaiśeṣika* calls this complete freedom from *kleṣas* (*rāga*, *dveṣa*, and *moha*), pleasure and pain, birth and death, merits and demerits. Therefore, according to *Nyāyavaiśeṣika*, liberation is only the cessation of all sufferings. According to *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, *mokṣa* is complete freedom from three kinds of sufferings: *ādhibhautika* (suffering caused by animals), *ādhidaiivika* (suffering caused by fate), and *āddhyātṃika* (spiritual suffering). *Mīmāṃsā* philosophy like *Nyāyavaiśeṣika* propagates a complete negative view of *mokṣa*, in which the soul becoming liberated simply relinquishes all accumulated merits and demerits, pleasure and pain etc. and is never expected to attain any state of bliss. Prabhākara, like Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, professes that *mokṣa* is the final riddance from future births brought in by the extinction of both *dharma* and *adharma* (Tiwari 2014: 153-156).

Propagating *Vedānta* philosophy, Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja assert that *mokṣa* is not only the cessation of sufferings and cycles of birth but also the attainment of a positive state of bliss, where the soul in its true nature is one with the *Brahman*. But according to Rāmānuja, the soul attains separate identity and becomes similar to the *Brahman*, but not *Brahman* itself. However, both

philosophers agree that the soul at this stage achieves the positive state of pure knowledge and eternal bliss.

In *Buddhist* philosophy, *nirvāṇa* is a negative concept meaning cooling down and blowing out. It states that passion (*kāmanā*) is the root cause of suffering. When the fire of passion is blown out or cooled down one attains liberation, where there is automatic cessation of the cycle of life. *Mokṣa* is considered a positive consequence of the soul in *Jaina* philosophy. The soul possesses four infinities (*ananta catuṣṭaya*) i.e., infinite bliss, infinite power, infinite faith, and infinite knowledge. This inherent nature of the soul is lost in mundane bondage and, after the attainment of *mokṣa*, the above transparent qualities are regained, putting an end to all kinds of sufferings automatically (Tiwari 2014: 157-60).

It is agreed upon by Indian philosophies that *mokṣa* is complete riddance from all sufferings such as cycles of birth, passions, and desires, in which the soul attains its original inherent nature, *atmasvarūpalābha* (Tiwari 2014: 159-61). The *Gītā* advocates that, action, free from desires, impelled by righteous conduct, with a spirit of sacrifice for the common good is *niṣkāmakarma*, which leads one to liberation from worldly bondage in this life (*jīvanamukti*) and union with the divinity thereafter.

## V. The Gita-Dharma: Mokṣa, A Metaphysical Quest

In the *Gītā* (II.47; Edgerton 1996: 24), Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna the performance of *niṣkāmakarma* (selfless action) as the way to attainment of perfection:

*karmaṇye vādhiḥkāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana I*  
*mā karmaphalāheturbhūḥ mā te saṁgostvakarmaṇi II*

According to *niṣkāmakarma*, one's right is that of action alone and never the fruit thereof. May we not (desire to) be the cause of the result of action, nor let there be any attachment to inaction. During the period of the *Gītā* the practice of renunciation was encouraged by Buddhism and Jainism. One cannot imagine a good society in which all good people renounce the world for the sake of liberation. The *Gītā* therefore gives a call not to renounce action, but concern or anxiety for the result of it, by becoming a *karmayogi* (person of action), which means that the desire-motivated actions lack concentration and are incapable of offering the best results. The Lord separates action from its result, since devotion to the result (fruit of action) is an antithesis of concentration.

When the human mind oscillates between the possibilities of success and failure, concentration on the action is disturbed, which adversely affects the attainment of the goal. The anxiety, tension, and fear for the result, once driven out of the mind, save a lot of energy for the successful execution of action. Therefore, the formulation of an action-plan needs to be result-oriented; but the stage of implementation of the same must be action-oriented, where full concentration is always given to the action and not to its result. A military

action-plan, once undertaken, follows in full stream without concern for its result. Action, with no concern for the result, is a scientific approach. Length, breadth, and height are the three dimensions of a space; and time is an accepted fourth dimension. The present is the centre point of time between the points of the past and the future. When the mind moves between past memories of an action and the future result of it, it loses control over the best results by relinquishing control of the action in hand (Garg 2003: 160-63).

In the above context, S. Paul Kashap postulates that no suitable person is expected to conduct any non-intentional action or work without desire. Desires are emotive by nature and are generated through the contact of the senses with external objects. In this way actions are related to desire, and the desires become associated with the emotions. Here it is suggested that the control of such emotions is necessary. In propagating the theory of *niṣkāmakarma* (selfless action), the *Gītā* emphasises the need to rule out such 'second-order desires' for the perfection of action and its successful completion (Matilal 2014: 126). Lord Kṛṣṇa further advises that the result of action should neither impel one to action nor repel one from action (*mā te saṅgostvakarmaṇi*). Here the term *karma* stands for both duties and the righteous principles of life. It is further emphasised that even wise people often fail to discern action (*karma*) and inaction (*akarma*) successfully:

*kini karma kimakarmeti kavayopyatra mohitā I*  
*tat te karma pravakṣāmi yaj jñātvā mokṣase'subhūt II*

"What is action, what inaction? About this even sages are bewildered. So I shall explain action to thee, knowing which, thou shall be freed from evil" (BG IV.16; Edgerton 1996: 44-45). Hence for the sake of truth one must understand the nature of action (*karma*), prohibited action/mis-action (*vikarma*), and inaction (*akarma*) (BG IV.17; Edgerton 1996: 44). In the next verse (BG IV.18; Edgerton 1996: 46), one finds a paradoxical statement with regard to the right course of action:

*karmaṇyarma yaḥ paśyed akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ I*  
*sa buddhimān manuṣyeṣu sa juktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt II*

One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among humans (*buddhimāna*), one is *yogī* (disciplined), accomplishing all actions. The above statement of the lord gives esoteric connotation to the meaning of *karma* and thereby shows that action and inaction are interchangeable. It pronounces that a person of wisdom is only capable of discerning and evaluating the difference between pleasant work (conducive to the senses) and noble work (conducive to the soul) for ultimate wellbeing. This reiterates the preaching ideals of the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* (1.2.1-4; Radhakrishnan 2012: 607-609), where distinction has been made by the seers between *śreyas* (good) and *preyas* (pleasant) for a person of discernment. Now it is clear that turning to inaction, abandoning action, or clinging to the path of renunciation (*sannyāsa*), are not solutions to the problem of action. Any action that conforms to the standard

of the *Gītā* must be selfless and spiritually dedicated. The selfless action must overcome greed, anger, hatred, jealousy and other such negative qualities. In the following lines of the *Gītā* (VI.29; Edgerton 1996: 66), it is said that *mokṣa* (liberation) can be achieved by a *karmayogī* (person of a disciplined action) by an attitude of evenness to all living beings:

*sarvabhūtasthāni ātmānāni sarvabhūtāni cātmani I*  
*īkṣate yogayuktātāmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ II*

The *yogī* who is disciplined in identity with the supreme consciousness, who has evenness of vision, beholds himself or herself existing in all beings and all beings in the self, is the real seer. Having taken refuge in God, those who strive for deliverance from old age and death know that *Brahman* (the absolute) is the totality of embodied souls and the entire field of action (BG VII.29; Edgerton 1996: 78). Realisation of the *Brahman* is a state of mind in which one is released from the slavery of the senses, becomes absolutely fearless, perfectly detached, full of bliss and love for all beings and becomes an instrument fit for the good of all (Radhakrishnan 2006: 171). This stage results in the complete change of vision and temperament brought about by right knowledge, right action, and right concentration. This is essentially an art of peaceful living which is an attainment in this world, and its eschatological implications are its necessary accompaniments.

A person with the attainment of *mokṣa*, enjoying complete peace and bliss, is described by various epithets: *sthītaprajña* (person of steady intelligence), *triguṇātīta* (who has overcome the three *guṇas* i.e., *sattva*, *rajas*, and *taṃas*), *bhakta* (devotee of the God), *jñānī* (enlightened person) or a *yogī* (united with God). Such a human being is liberated in life (*jīvanamukta*) and possesses sense control, non-attachment, equality of vision (*samadṛṣṭi*), good consciousness, and enjoys supreme peace with placidity of mind (*parāśānti*) in this life and a perennial abode of peace (*sthānāni śāśvatam*) in the afterlife. *Mokṣa* is the *summum bonum* of life, which is an outcome of the realisation of the true nature of both human and universe described in the *Gītā*. The ethical and psychological teachings of the *Gītā* are the only aids to this realisation (Radhakrishnan 2006: 171-72 cf. BG II. 55-72; Edgerton 1996: 26-29).

## VI. Ideals of Yoga: Mokṣa, A Metaphysical Quest

The *Gītā* is said to be the manual of *Yogaśāstra*, having psychological and metaphysical foundations in *Sāṃkhya* philosophy. In the words of Winternitz it is “the doctrine of absorption, and the method by which man can withdraw from the sense world and become entirely absorbed in the deity” (2009: 417). It explains *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* to be one, and one who is firmly established in either reaches liberation. The supreme state that is reached by *sāṃkhya* *yogī* is also attained by the *karmayogī*. Therefore, one who sees *sāṃkhya* *yoga* and *karmayoga* as identical with regard to their fruits is a perfect visionary of truth (BG V.4-5, Edgerton 1996: 52).



The *Gītā* explains *yoga* to be the harmonious combination of devotion, action, concentration, and knowledge. Considering the *sāṅkhyā* type of appearance to be exceptional, the *Gītā* emphatically asserts the necessity of selfless action in the scheme of harmonious spiritual growth, and Godspeed in the journey of life (BG III. 4-16; Edgerton 1996: 33-35). Work for profit or under duress does not serve a spiritual purpose. Therefore, the sacrificial conception of work is emphasised by the term *yajñārtha karma* in the following lines of the *Gītā* (III. 9; Edgerton 1996: 34):

*yajñārthāt karmaṇo' nyatra loko' yau karmavandhanaḥ I*  
*tadarthau karma kaunteya nuuktasaṅgaḥ samācara II*

Sacrifice is interpreted as the law of all higher life and developments. Some *karmayogīs* perform sacrifice with material possession; some in the form of austerities; others through practice of *yoga*; while some striving souls observing austere vows perform sacrifice in the shape of wisdom through the study of sacred texts (BG IV.28; Edgerton 1996: 48). *Niskāmakarma* (selfless action) is a special theme of the *Gītā* and a distinct feature of the *yoga*. Sage Janaka and others, by performing work for the common good without any attachment, were able to attain the supreme spirit (BG III.19-12; Edgerton 1996: 36). The spiritual ideal of selfless action presupposes the simultaneous practice of disciplines with harmonious blending of the culture of will, intellect, and emotion, which are known by the term *yoga*. *Yoga* when combined with 'insight' promotes skilfulness in actions - *yogaḥ karmasu kaśalam* (BG II.50; Edgerton 1996: 24). This spiritual path of devotion is followed by Lord Kṛṣṇa himself: *sāntini nirvāṇaparamāni matsthānamadhigacchati* (BG VI.14-15; Edgerton 1996: 62).

With the mind fixed on God (*maccitaḥ*), the *yogī* of disciplined mind attains supreme bliss. This spiritual path of devotion, passed down from the royal sages and Lord Kṛṣṇa himself, is lost to the contemporary world (BG IV.2-3; Edgerton 1996: 42). This insightful teaching shows that the best *yoga* of action is one that revolves around the Lord as its centre. In the words of Patton: "While *yoga* tends to mean the particular school of thought and practice . . . in the *Gītā* it has many connotations - an ancient secret teaching, the path of a disciplined meditation, a path of action joined to insight and a path of devotion to Kṛṣṇa" (2008: xviii, Introduction).

Swami Ramsukhdas postulates that the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā* titled as different *yogas* are popularly divided into three hexads - *karmayoga* (path of action), *jñānayoga* (path of knowledge), and *bhaktiyoga* (path of devotion) (Das Vikramasamvit 2067: 6 (ca)). This simply suggests the three stages of unification with the highest potential. Advocates of this view point to the summing up of the *Gītā* in the same way in its last chapter into *karmayoga* (BG XVIII.46 & 56-57; Edgerton 1996: 172 & 174), *jñānayoga* (BG XVIII.51-54; Edgerton 1996: 173-174), and *bhaktiyoga* (XVIII. 54- 55 & 65; Edgerton 1996: 174 & 176). The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (I.20.6; Dasa Samvat 2002: 705) also states that *jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti* are the ways to divine wisdom:

*yogastrayo mayā proktā nṛṇānīśreya vidhītsayā I*  
*jñānani, karma ca bhakti ca nopāyo'nyo' sti kutracit II*

The ultimate harmony of various ways of philosophy and worship (*upāsana*) prevalent in India is achieved by this triune unity (*jñāna*, *karma*, and *bhakti*). Ramsukhdas explains that *karmayoga* refers to the body (*aparā*/mundane), *jñānayoga* refers to the soul (*parā*/transcendental), and *bhaktiyoga* refers to the owner of both body and soul, i.e. to God, the 'Supreme Being'. By *karmayoga*, a person becomes useful to the world and works for the common wellbeing; by *jñānayoga* one works for his or her own self; and by *bhaktiyoga* one becomes useful in the service of God. In all these stages of the performance of any action, one must remain indifferent to both success and failure as the *Gītā* defines 'discipline' as 'indifference' – *siddhyāsiddhyoḥsamo bhūtvā samtvainiyoga ucyate* (II.48; Edgerton 1996: 24-25).

Commenting on *jñānayoga* and *bhaktiyoga*, Ramsukhdas teaches that there is no need for the presence of the term *yoga* with *jñāna* or *bhakti* as both of them represent *yoga* (*amatvam*) only. *Karma* (action) is *jaḍa* (without consciousness), which binds people in their objects of enjoyment, and needs *yoga* (*amatvam*/equanimity) to be added to it. Any action with a selfish motive is far inferior to *yoga* (equanimity). One should seek refuge in equipoise of mind. The above idea is depicted in the following lines of the *Gītā* (II.49; Edgerton 1996: 24-25):

*dūreṇa hyavarani karma buddhiyogāt dhananijaya I*  
*buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpāṇaḥ phalahetavaḥ II*

Here it is understood that *yoga* signifies *karmayoga* and, in the colophon of each chapter-end of the *Gītā*, the term '*yogaśāstre*' signifies the teaching of *karmayoga*. The first half of the term *karmayoga* stands for *karma* which connotes instrument and sincerity; the second half is *yoga* which signifies selflessness, skilfulness, and equality. In a civilized society the duty of a citizen becomes a right for others, so, for example, the duty of the orator becomes the right of the audience. The orator protects the right of the audience by the skill of his or her speech and the audience protect the right of the orator by patient hearing. By protecting the rights of each other, the citizens lose their indebtedness towards each other and attend *yoga* (*karmayoga*) (Dasa Samvat 2002: 5-6 (ñaca), Introduction). The protection of each other's rights signifies the unconditional offering of service for common wellbeing. In the *Gītā* equal importance is given to both *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga*, and both of them represent mundane truth and wisdom. In the case of the *sāṅkhyayogī*, the penance proceeds along the path of knowledge, and in the case of *karmayogī*, it proceeds via the path of action. One does not attain freedom from action (*naiṣkarmya*) without entering upon the action itself, just as no perfection of knowledge is possible merely by ceasing to act. (BG III.3-5; Edgerton 1996: 32).

Similarly, both *kṣara* (material world) and *akṣara* (the individual entity) represent the mundane truth of the universe – *dvāvīmau puruṣau loke*

*kṣaraścākṣara eva ca* — and God represents the supreme entity, *uttamapurīṣostvanyas* (BG XV.16-17; Edgerton 1996: 144). In this sequence *karmayoga* represents *kṣara*, and *jñānayoga* represents *akṣara*, whereby both are considered to represent the mundane world. Since *bhaktiyoga* (devotion) is with regard to the God, it is considered supramundane (*alaukika*). However, Gloria Arieira highlights this in a different way. The text titled *Bhagavad Gītā* represents *Upaniṣad*, which is known as *Vedānta* or the last part of the Veda. The quintessence of the teaching of the *Vedānta* is ‘*tatvamasi*’ (that you are); the first half of the text of the *Gītā* refers to ‘*tvam*’ (you); the second half refers to ‘*tat*’ (that), meaning thereby the *Brahman*, which is the omnipresent supreme consciousness; and the third part is ‘*asi*’, which is the identity between the two.

The *Gītā* teaches the *tatvamasi* philosophy of the *Upaniṣads* (Arieira 2016: xix). It presents ultimate harmony not only between *sāṅkhya* and *yoga*, but also between *mīmāṃsā* (ritualism) and *Vedānta* (doctrine of salvation through knowledge), as well as between *bhakti* (devotion - *vyakta upāsana*) and *jñāna* (knowledge - *avyakta upāsana*). The different steps and stages in the process as taught in the *Gītā* present a judicious combination of the above paths. Thus “the *Bhagavadgītā* teaches *jñānanūlaka-bhaktipradhāna-karmayoga* or a life of activation grounded upon knowledge and centralised around the adoration of the Lord which paves the highest way to salvation” (Radhakrishnan 2006: 149).

## VII. Common Well-Being: Mokṣa, A Metaphysical Quest

The results of actions depend upon the quality of the actions undertaken. The good or bad quality of an action depends upon the motive behind its performance. Selfish actions give rise to passions and desires, and create more and more agitations in life. It is by renouncing ego and our egocentric desires that our baser urges are eliminated. With their elimination only can one work with a spirit of dedication and sacrifice for a higher and nobler cause, known as *yajñārtha karma*. The power to co-operate with each other and work together is the root cause of social prosperity (*anena prasaviṣyadhvani*). In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa advises human beings to foster the *devas* (divine forces) through sacrifice so that the *devas* in return will foster the growth of human beings. Thus, by selflessly fostering each other people attain the highest good (BG III.9-11; Edgerton 1996: 34-35). Human beings can attain salvation by striving to perform their works in ten different ways, as enumerated by the *Gītā*:

1. *Avibhaktāṇi vibhakteṣu*: The unity of humankind is a noble work as it is considered the essence of *dharma* (righteous conduct). The vision of ‘*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*’ (the whole world is a family) is the ancient Indian ideal that invokes unity amid diversity. The same ideal is reiterated in the lines of the *Gītā* as *avibhaktāṇi vibhakteṣu*, which is an imperishable divine existence as equal and undivided in all individual entity. (BG XVIII.20; Edgerton 1996: 166-67). This clearly reflects the Vedantic philosophy of *tatvamasi* (You are

*Brahman*), *ahaiibrahmāsmi* (I am *Brahman*), and *sarvaii khalvidaii Brahma* (all things prevalent here are *Brahman*).

2. *Matkarma*: God's work is that of the sustainer of the world. In another expression, God is said to be '*sulḥḍanisarva-bhūtānām*' or friend to all beings (BG V. 29; Edgerton 1996: 58), who does well to all. In the *Gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa calls upon (Arjuna on of Pāndu) to participate in his work which is known as *matkarma* (my work): "Doing my work, intent on Me,/ Devoted to Me, free from attachment,/ free from enmity to all beings,/ who is so, goes to Me, son of Pāndu" (BG XI.55; Edgerton 1996: 119).

3. *Yogārūḍhavr̥tti*: Janaka, Vivaśvat (Sun), Manu, Iṣkuāku, are some of the exemplars of good work for the common wellbeing. (BG III.20 & IV.1; Edgerton 1996: 37 & 42). Their commendable conduct for the welfare of humankind is expressed by the term '*yogārūḍhavr̥tti*' (mounted to discipline). This is the spontaneous public work by those who have achieved spiritual perfection through any of the *yogas*, such as *karma*, *bhakti* or *jñāna*.

4. *Deśa-kāla-pātra*: The *Gītā* postulates that one should not stick blindly to the path of the example-setters on their conduct of public welfare without adopting suitable changes conducive to the required place, time and person (*deśe kāle ca pātre ca*) (XVIII.20; Edgerton 1996: 159). This means that any righteous conduct for public wellbeing must be relevant to the context. Usually, people of high status and ability are the example-setters in the act of social service. The *Gītā* states that a person of any social status is expected to conduct public welfare with regard to his or her capacity (*pauruṣam*), otherwise the act becomes *tāmasika* or harmful (BG XVIII.25; Edgerton 1996: 167). Furthermore, it declares that no work becomes great for its quantity, but for the genuine virtuous motive behind it (BG II.40; Edgerton 1996: 22).

5. *Sarvabhūtahitam*: The limitation of individual capacity is reflected by the prefix *sva* added to *dharna* and *karma* as *svadharna* and *svakarma*. In spite of such limitations, the *Gītā* declares the idea of a *sarvabhūtahitam* (good of all beings), which suggests that one should use one's optimum capacity to achieve the best on the path of good for all – *Brahma-nirvāṇa* is won/ By the seers whose sins are destroyed, /Whose doubts are cleft, whose souls are controlled, / Who delight in the welfare of all beings" (BG V.25; Edgerton 1996: 57).

6. *Lokasaṅgraha*: In addition to the term *sarvabhūtahitam*, the *Gītā* uses another expression, *lokasaṅgraha*, which means the good of the world and the maintenance of world order. The *Gītā* identifies two categories of desires that impel people to undertake work. One is *kāmakāmi*, one who works in the spirit of selfish gain, and the other is *niṣkāma karmayogi*, one who performs work without desire, as selfless service. It posits that wise people work without attachment to maintain the world order "*kuryādvidvāṅustathāsakta ścikirṣurlokasaṅgrahan*" (BG III.25; Edgerton 1996: 36). This establishes a strong relationship between *niṣkāmakarma* and *lokasaṅgraha*, the former representing the technique of work and the latter representing the purpose. Of all the

expressions for the common good, the term *lokasamgraha* occupies a place of prominence in the *Gītā* (Agarwal 2002: 239).

7. *Nirmamonirahaniikārah*: The concept of *svadharma* aims to achieve *sarvabhūtahitam* (the good of all), which also includes *sva-hitani* (one's own good). In view of the need of the priority for the social good, the *Gītā* teaches us to become *nirmama* (without self-interest) and *nirahaniikāra* (without egotism). Hence, "Abandoning all desires, what man moves free from longing/ without self-interest and egotism, he goes to peace" (BG II.71; Edgerton 1996: 29 cf. BG XII.13; Edgerton 1996: 123).

8. *Samadṛṣṭi*: The Vedānta philosophy preaches the relation of *ātmanā* (individual soul) and *Paramātmā* (the supreme consciousness) as one and the same, having difference in its manifestations, such as *vrkṣa* (tree) and *vana* (forest); *vindu* (waterdrop) and *sindhu* (ocean); *sphuliṅga* (spark) and *agniśikhā* (fire), etc. Since the *Gītā* preaches the Vedānta philosophy, it adjures one to practise the same by developing even-minded social behaviour, known by the term *samadṛṣṭi* or equal vision:

*vidyāvinaya samīpanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini I*  
*śuni caiva svapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ II*

In a Brahman perfected in knowledge and cultivation, the wise one sees the same thing in a cow, an elephant, and in even a dog and an outcast (BG V.18; Edgerton 56-57 cf. BG VI.29; Edgerton 1996: 66-67). This philosophy is also reflected in concepts like *samaloṣṭāsmakāncanaḥ*, to whom earth, stone and gold are all alike (BG VI.8 & XIV.24; Edgerton 1996: 60 & 138); *samabuddhiḥ*, eye of equanimity to all (BG VI.9 & XII.4; Edgerton 1996: 62 & 120); *samadulīkhasukhaḥ*, taking pain and pleasure alike (BG XIV.24; Edgerton 1996: 138); *samacittaḥ*, constant equipoise of mind in favourable and unfavourable circumstances (BG XIII.9; Edgerton 1996: 128); and *sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ*, engaged in the welfare of all beings (BG XII. 4; Edgerton 1996: 120).

The above philosophies seem to be inculcated by the incantation of the first *mantra* of the *Īsopaniṣad* (Radhakrishnan 2012: 567):

*īśāvāsyaṇīdani sarvaṇi yat kinicit jagatyāni jagat I*  
*tena tyaktena bluñjitaḥ nā gṛdhaḥ kasyacidghanam II*

9. *Āsurī sampat*: The *Gītā* warns people against antisocial elements that harm the peace of society by spreading anger, fear, hatred and injustice, vitiating the paths for the good of all. Any society remains a component of *sattva* (good), *rajas* (average) and *tamas* (bad) elements. The *tāmasika* elements are antisocial ones, which are dangerous and harmful for universal welfare; the *Gītā* names them *āsuri sampat* (demonic force), as they create disturbances in society by promoting insurgencies that reduce social solidarity. Their elimination can only create conditions for social development.

10. *Daivī sampat*: The promotion of *daivī sampat* (divine property) can only destroy the *āsuri sampat* (demonic force). The glorification of the virtues of human being is repeatedly presented in the description of *yogārūḍhavr̥tti*,

which are expected to overpower demonic forces. The most important virtues, such as non-violence, love, goodwill, compassion, equitable sharing, etc. can promote divine social power, which may control evil and spread the message of the good of all.

Thus the *Gītā* promotes the above ten universal principles of human conduct as the means for accelerating *niškāmakarma* for the elevation of society and universal welfare, leading humans to salvation (*mokṣa*).

### VIII. Conclusion

The metaphysical concept of *mokṣa*, originating in the Vedic age, exerted tremendous influence on the successive growth of various Indian philosophical systems. The root cause of worldly bondage and the way to liberation dominated the domain of knowledge in Indian socio-religious systems. The quintessence of its philosophical analysis found expression in the *Gītā*. The preaching of the *Gītā*'s theory of *niškāmakarma* (selfless action) is the outcome of the assimilation and absorption of the various socio-philosophical interpretations of this concept that came prior to it. The abstract speculative wisdom of *mokṣa* received a novel and dynamic interpretation in the theory of *karmayoga*, which stands for the practice of *niškāmakarma*. Any action becomes selfless when practised with a spirit of sacrifice that promotes common wellbeing. In this context the *Gītā* accepts the established social order and approves the practice of *svadharmā* of the different castes and stages of life (*BG XVIII.41-45* & *BG XVI.23-24*; Edgerton 1996: 170-171 & 152). However, "its sanctifying theory of desireless and devotional action does not make caste or condition a barrier, but an avenue to salvation" (De 2003: 49). Beside this, the *Gītā* harmonises various ways of worship like monism, dualism, pantheism etc. and promotes pan-Indian national and spiritual vision in the hearts of citizens. The theory of *niškāmakarma* is also appropriate to counter the fissiparous tendencies of religious diversity that have an adverse effect on national solidarity. This is noted from Lord Kṛṣṇa's pronouncement:

*ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁis tathai' va bhajāmy aham I  
mama vartmā' nūvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ II*

(In whatever way any one comes to me, I grant them favour in that way, oh Arjuna! All people follow my path in every way) (*BG IV.11*; Edgerton 1996: 44-45).

The location of the great utterance of any text is in the individual perception of the reader. Gandhi believed the description of *sthitaprajña* (*BG II.54-72*) to be the highest utterance, which received the support of his disciple Vinoba Bhave. The descriptions of *kṣara* (perishable body), *akṣara* (imperishable individual soul), and *paramapuruṣa* (the imperishable, omnipotent, and omnipresent supreme consciousness), (*BG XV.16-17*) are accepted by Aurobindo as the central theme of the *Gītā*. Radhakrishnan emphasises the description of the seers of truth about their wisdom of the real and the unreal

(BG II.16) as the central point of the *Gītā*. Lokamanya Tilak believes in *karmayoga*, Bhaktivedanta believes in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, and Vivekananda believes in the reconciliation of paths with *karmayoga* as the great utterances of the *Gītā* (Minor 1986: 225). All the above themes of the *Gītā* point to self-realization and selfless service as the two means for the liberation of human beings.

The application of the theory of *niṣkāmakarma* by various socio-political and socio-religious leaders vindicates its success. This philosophy has been applied time and again for the elimination of antisocial propensities and for the promotion of freedom movements in India and abroad. The *Gītā*'s simple, moving, philosophical and poetic utterances continue to influence the goals of individuals, as well as the aspirations of nations around the globe to liberate themselves from worldly bondage (i.e. socio-economic, socio-political, etc.) and to endow themselves with spiritual wisdom, leading humanity through peace and prosperity to *mokṣa*, the *summum bonum* of life.

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