

## **THE CONCEPT OF LIBERATION (MOKSHA) IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA**

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**Abstract-** The Bhagavad Gita recognizes liberation (moksha) as the supreme goal. The Bhagavad Gita describes liberation or moksha as the attainment of individual's natural state by relinquishing its imposed state. Liberation is the supreme and highest status beyond good and evil. The Gita conceived liberation or moksha as the eternal and indestructible status and as the seat free from all troubles along with the freedom from birth and death. Liberation is the state where there is no pain. It is the state of supreme perfection. The state of liberation is explained as the transcendental perfection of the individual self, the attainment of God and inseparable union with him. The Gita maintains that liberation is supreme and highest bliss, which springs from union with god. Liberation or Moksha in the Gita is delight in the self, contentment with the self, selfrealization and self-fulfillment. It is free from moral obligations. As stated in the Gita, liberated person neither acts nor causes others to act. The liberated person may work for the good of humanity without moral obligation. To attain this liberation or moksha the Gita shows us a threefold path namely jnana, bhakti, and karma. The Gita understands moksha as freedom from kama. When we are free from kama and are united with the self, we begin to look at ourselves and the world from a divine point of view. We see "All things in the self, and the self in all things". Hence, in this paper an attempt has been made to discuss the concept of liberation in the Gita with reference to the threefold path which lead to attain liberation by individuals.

**Key words:** liberation, god, supreme perfection, three fold path.

The concept of liberation (moksha) is a very significant concept in Indian philosophy. As a necessary concept in Indian philosophy, the concept of liberation has occupied a significant place in the Bhagavad Gita also. The Bhagavad Gita recognizes liberation (moksha) as the supreme goal. The Bhagavad Gita describes liberation or moksha as the attainment of individual's natural state by relinquishing its imposed state. Liberation is the supreme and highest status beyond good and evil. The Gita conceived liberation or moksha as the eternal and indestructible status and as the seat free from all troubles along with the freedom from birth and death. Liberation is the state where there is no pain. It is the state of supreme perfection. The state of liberation is explained as the transcendental perfection of the individual self, the attainment of God and inseparable union with him.

The concept of liberation or release is to be understood in connection with the self (atman). It is said that liberation is the fundamentally pure state of the atman. The Gita talks about Brahmanirvanam. Brahmanirvanam means brahmatva-prapti, i.e.; attainment of Brahmanhood. So, the attainment of Brahmanhood is the true state of liberation. From this point of view, according to the Gita salvation means union of the soul with the Supreme. It is becoming one with Brahman. Moksha in the Gita means seeing, experiencing and living the divine life. Radhakrishnan says, "This is the highest form of religion or life of spirit, called jnana in the wider sense of the term."<sup>1</sup>

But a man in order to become one with the Brahman is in need of acquiring certain qualifications. The individual can become one with the Supreme only when his mind is purified and he can destroy egoism. He must have a pure intellect. He should control himself, turn away his mind from other objects of sense, should give up anger and malice. He should prefer to dwell in seclusion, should eat a very meagre quantity of food. He should control speech, body and mind and he should ever engage himself in meditation and concentration and should take refuge in non-attachment. He is also to abandon self-sense, force, arrogance, desire, anger and possession and thus by becoming egoless and tranquil in

mind, he becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman. A man becoming one with Brahman is not all. He should also attain supreme devotion to the supreme Lord. "Having become one with Brahman and being tranquil in spirit, he neither grieves nor desires. Regarding all beings as alike he attains supreme devotion to Me."<sup>2</sup> Liberation or freedom means in the Gita, unity with the supreme self.

There is no ego, no will, and no desire in the state of liberation. It is a state devoid of modes and qualities. It is a state of peace. It is not merely the state of surpassing death; but it is also a state of attaining the supreme state of being. Here the spirit becomes aware that it is superior to birth and death, that it is infinite and eternal and it is subject to no manifestation. In fact, to attain liberation, one of the pre-conditions is the perfection of the atman which amounts to peace. This peace is known as the divine state, which is a state of eternal life and there is no end to it. It is the state of perpetual release, emancipation and of total perfection that is also sometimes known as yoga. Liberation in the Gita is also explained as either 'coming to Brahman' or 'coming to Krishna'. Sometimes it is also described as 'being fit for Brahman's being ' or 'being fit for Krishna's being '. The liberated feels oneness with all things. The pervasive nature of the Atman becomes conspicuous in the state of release. The Atman is in all beings and all beings are in the Atman. The state of release may be called a state of perfection which is far better than the state realized by observing Vedic rites, sacrifices etc. This state also exceeds the state that results from righteousness.

In the Gita, the liberated is called by different names, each of which points out different angles from which the liberated is seen. The liberated is called jivan -mukta because he acquires the state of emancipation even when he is alive. He is called gunatta because he is above the gunas. He now realizes that he being purusa is distinct from prakrti and no activity belongs to him. He realises that all activities belong to prakrti. The liberated is also called sthitaprajna because he is not going to be affected in any way by worldly pleasures and pains. Neither joy nor sorrow can move him. He now remains in a balanced mood because he realizes that in all his actions it is only the gunas in the form of sense organs that act upon the gunas in the form of worldly objects. He is also aware of the fact that the Atman remains unaffected. He is called a bhakta because he has before him a supreme being when he cannot but show respect and reverence and to whom he is very

much loyal and faithful doing everything at his command. He considers himself to be an instrument of the Lord and so he thinks that he is not performing any 4 duties, it is only the Lord who acts in and through him. The liberated is also called Jnani because he reaches the Brahmi-sthiti and thereby he acquires the knowledge of Brahman. Thus a person who has reached Brahmi-sthiti or has purified his heart by the worship of the Lord is never again deluded. He becomes entitled to attain salvation which is equivalent to reaching or becoming one with the Supreme. The liberated is called a Karma-yogi too. “Those persons who after doing away with all sorts of desires remain unattached and unconceited attain into peace.”<sup>3</sup>

The liberated is not troubled by any thought of good and evil. He is not to pursue the ethical rules as he rises above it and he comes to the sphere of spiritual life which is one of light, largeness and power. He here is not to undergo another birth on earth, even if he performs an evil act which in usual course would have forced a rebirth. He is not to follow the ordinary rules and regulations of life. In this context Radhakrishnan observes, “Absolute individualism is the view of the Gita in so far as the end is concerned.”<sup>4</sup> But the truth is that the freed spirits of the Gita are not indifferent to the sufferings of the other beings though they are free from social obligations. Rather they are habitually to work for the welfare of the world. The liberated cannot cause vexation to others being himself above any vexation.

According to the Gita, then, the finite selves are eternal sparks of God who consciously dissociate themselves from their psycho-physical vestments when they seek liberation. All actions are actuated by Sattva, rajas and tamas, which are psychical impulses and basic springs of action. The Atman, the transcendental self transcends the gunas and is eternally pure and autonomous. “The association of the pure spirit with the unconscious mind-body complex is the cause of its embodied life and transmigration. Its complete detachment and isolation from the gunas and their modes brings about its release.”<sup>5</sup> At the state of release there is ingress of the finite spirit into the infinite spirit, and of the infinite spirit into the finite spirit.

The Gita maintains that liberation is supreme and highest bliss, which spring from union with god. Liberation or Moksha in the Gita is delight in the self, contentment with the self, selfrealization and self-fulfillment. It is free from moral obligations. As stated in

the Gita, liberated person neither acts nor causes others to act. The liberated person may work for the good of humanity without moral obligation.

To attain this liberation or moksha the Gita shows us a threefold path namely karma, jnana and bhakti. The Gita understands moksha as freedom from kama. These are known as three kinds of discipline: discipline of action, discipline of knowledge and discipline of devotion. When we render service to others without expecting any fruit, we have the discipline of action; when we have no affinity with the world, we have the discipline of knowledge and when we think nobody to be mine except God; we have the discipline of devotion. When we are free from kama and are united with the self, we begin to look at ourselves and the world from a divine point of view.

The first discipline is known as niskama karmayoga. This niskama karma is achieved when we offer the fruits of our actions to God. Then we attain everlasting peace. The second discipline is known as niskama jnanayoga. This is achieved when one fully controls one's senses and is exclusively devoted to spiritual practice and faith. The third discipline is known as niskama bhaktiyoga. It consists in the worship of God with exclusive devotion.

Of the many theories of the means to salvation, the jnana-yoga or the way of knowledge may be said to be a very effective and important theory. This is a very widely prevalent theory in ancient India. This is the theory which holds that "by perfect knowledge man can control his destiny." In other words it means that perfect knowledge enables one to be free. Most Indian systems of philosophy have belief in the magical power of knowledge. The Gita too has such belief in the power of knowledge. Further we can get rid of the evil consequences of actions with the help of knowledge. The fire of knowledge burns all deeds to ashes. Knowledge frees man from rebirth. We will no longer be subject to rebirth which is the consequence of deeds performed with selfish motive. Further the Gita says that knowledge as a sacrifice is better than any material sacrifice. It further says that all actions without any exception culminate in knowledge. Thus knowledge, according to the Gita consists in knowing God's true nature. One who knows truly the Divine birth and His works is not subject to rebirth.

Faith and control of the senses are necessary for obtaining knowledge and he who thus gains knowledge, he attains quickly the supreme peace. Thus it is through the path of

knowledge that we can attain salvation. Though the Gita allows validity to the severe and troublesome path of pure knowledge, yet we should remember that the Gita always looks for the easy-way to salvation. It is to be admitted that few people could travel the pure path of knowledge. Hence the Gita suggests other easier methods of salvation like the path of Karma and the path of devotion. It is a method or discipline of action which leads to salvation. It means performance of moral duties with total disregard to its consequences, in discharging one's normal duties; one should not keep any hope for its reward. One should perform one's duties without any interest whatsoever. There should never keep any attachment for the work done. One is to perform one's duties with indifference. The Gita says that action is indispensable for us. None can remain even for a moment without doing work. Further it says that action is better than inaction. Action is necessary even for maintaining our physical life.

The Gita suggests another alternative means of salvation for the mankind. This is the method of 'bhakti', 'devotion' or 'love of God'. The Gita makes no distinction of race, sex or caste. The path of devotion is open to men, women and persons of all castes. Even men of low caste, if they take refuge in God, may attain to the highest goal. This path is known as Bhakti Marga which implies that a man should give up not only the fruit of action but also the agency of action. As long as a person has a will of his own, he cannot give up the agency of his action. He can do this only when he surrenders his will to God in self-forgetting love. The Gita teaches us that by devoted love of God a man can know God and thereby he attains liberation. It says, "By devotion one comes to know Me, what my measure is and what I am in very truth; then knowing Me in very truth, he straightway enters into Me."<sup>6</sup> Unswerving devotion helps us to attain knowledge of God which in turn helps us to come into union with Him, i.e. to attain liberation. The Gita usually speaks of devotion as the immediate and all-sufficient way to final union with God. Radhakrishnan says, "It is quite as efficacious as any other method, and is sometimes said to be greater than others, since it is its own fruition."<sup>7</sup> The Gita says that by fixing one's mind on God and by being devoted to Him, by worshipping and revering Him and thereby disciplining one's soul in full devotion to Him, one can come in to God's being. One, who knows God as the imperishable source of all existences, is to worship Him with an undistracted mind.

Devotion, according to the Gita means believing in God and loving Him. It means bowing down before the Almighty God. It is to revere Him and to worship Him with true devotion. It also implies entering into God or coming in to union with Him. The bhaktimarga or the path of devotion is a pointer “To the law of the right activity of the emotional side of man.” Through devotion, we show reverence to the Supreme. The Gita lays more emphasis on the path of devotion.

According to the Gita, we may attain emancipation or reach God in several ways. It is by means of devotion, we may reach God. The Gita commands us to fix our mind on God and by doing so we are capable of living in Him. If we are unable to fix our thought steadfastly on God, then we can reach Him by the practice of concentration (that is by Yoga or disciplined activity). If we are incapable of practice, we may try to attain perfection by being wholly devoted to work for Him, by performing actions solely for God’s sake. If we are unable even to do that, we may take another alternative means of gaining salvation. This way is none other than the way of desireless action. By resorting to God’s discipline and by renouncing the fruits of all actions, we may attain the supreme. Thus the Gita speaks of several paths that lead to salvation.

The Gita maintains that all actions are actuated by sattva, rajas and tamas. Egoism (ahamkara) is a modification of the gunas. The Atman is the trans-empirical self or pure spirit which transcends the gunas and their modifications. The embodied soul becomes free from sufferings due to birth, old age and death, when it transcends the gunas which produce its body. The association of the self with the mind-body complex is the cause of the embodied life and transmigration. Its complete detachment from the gunas and their modes brings about its release. Complete transcendence of the three gunas is the prerequisite of the realization of the transcendental freedom of the finite spirit.

The Gita advocates the threefold method of Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga and jnanayoga. The union of the finite soul with God which is brought about through action, devotion and knowledge is complete transformation of the finite soul into a conscious instrument of the divine spirit. It must not be thought that action, devotion and knowledge are the three divisions of Yoga or that there is any hard and fast line between one division and another. The fact is that the various aspects of Yoga cannot be really separated from one another, any more than the various functions of our minds can be separated from one another. It is

only for purposes of analysis that we isolate the discipline of our will and call it Karma-yoga, the discipline of our emotions and call it Bhakti-yoga and the discipline of our understanding and call it jnana-yoga. Spiritual life is a whole and it involves the direction of the whole mind- our will, our emotions and our understanding. The path of light begins with right discrimination, goes through obedience to the law and moral action, and then through self-forgetting love and service, and ends in spiritual freedom, where the individual realizes that he is part and parcel of the all-embracing spirit.

According to the Gita emancipation transcends all conditions and necessities. Emancipation however can be achieved only through God's grace. Our desire for release is materialized only by his blessings. Although we are to exert efforts by ourselves to attain liberation, yet God's grace is necessary. But we can have this grace or blessing only when we can wipe out attachment. Again we have to think of the good, welfare and comfort of others with a view to gaining God's grace. We are to participate in his world redeeming effort. When the whole world will be redeemed we ourselves will be liberated and then no possibility of taking rebirth on the part of any being will be there.

Though the concept of liberation cannot be accepted from scientific point of view, yet it never means that this concept has no significance. The concept of liberation in the Bhagavad Gita advocates renunciation of desires and the worldly or earthly pleasures or in other words to renounce the thought of the world along with developing a spiritualistic attitude towards life in oneself. The concept of liberation is a matter of belief to a large extent. Though it can be justified by inference yet its empirical verification is not possible. That is why; most people do not accept this kind of concept. But the Gita has accepted the concept of liberation or salvation as a metaphysical a-priori concept as Kant has accepted it. The Gita has fixed the principles of ideal behaviour according to this concept. It is true that excessive materialistic attitude towards life and the world make the minds of people restless, unstable, diverted and imbalanced. As a result, people cannot realize the value of morality, spirituality and the life itself. The notion of liberation or salvation in the Bhagavad Gita is significant in demolishing or eradicating moral crisis, instability, mental stress, survival crisis and mental stress and strain from the present society. Therefore, Gita's concept of liberation though not acceptable in the etymological sense of the term, yet



its spiritual message enlighten and inspire our lives by which we can lead our lives towards preserving our moral or ethical values and dignities.

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