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“THE BHAGAVADGITA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”



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ABSTRACT:

The word ‘Bhagavad-Gita’ in its literal sense means ‘song of God’. It appears in the form of conversation between Shri Krishna and Arjuna in the section called ‘Bhishma parva’ of India’s one of the greatest epic of Mahabharata. The Bhagavad-Gita is a beautiful book containing around 700 shlokas (Hymn) spread out in 18 chapters. Such a single beautiful visionary (unique) song of the God cannot be found in any of the languages of the world. The work in its distinctive form contains religious, moral and all visionary ideas and preaching’s.

The Bhagavad-Gita forms one of the bases for Hindu Philosophy. The Bhagavad-Gita is called the gist of Upanishads. It has tremendously influenced social, religious and philosophical thought process of India. It is considered as one among the great religious books at the global level. The Bhagavad-Gita belongs (resembles) to ‘smruti’ category and is considered as the noble part of our heritage.

KEYWORDS: Bhagavad-Gita , song of God , religious and philosophical .

INTRODUCTION:

During the course of the Mahabharata war between Kauravas and Pandavas, when Arjuna was compelled to kill his relatives, Gurus and the close ones and thinking of going back from performing his duties, his charioteer and the God-Shri Krishna awakens Arjuna towards the performance of his duties and gives the message of ‘Nishkama Karma’ that is action without any self-desires. This message of the Bhagavad-Gita is applicable to all people of all times. So it is based on eternal principles. Amongst all holy works of Hindu religion, the Bhagavad-Gita is a gem among them and contains the universal principles with the congregation of knowledge (Jnana), devotion (Bhakti), action (Karma) and Yoga in a balanced manner of way.

Mahatma Gandhiji while speaking about the Bhagavad-Gita said: “After the death of my mother, the Bhagavad-Gita has taken the position of my mother.” Shri Madan Mohan Malvia opined, “No living languages of the world contains the book as great as and as useful as the Bhagavad-Gita”. According to D.V. Gundappa, “the Bhagavad-Gita is called by our ancestors as ‘Mokshashastra’ but it is also ‘Jeevanashastra’ that is science of life.” The Bhagavad-Gita was first translated into English by Sir Charles Wilkins. This was first published by East India Company with the preface by Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India.

After understanding in brief about the Bhagavad-Gita, it is necessary to know the concept of “social justice” which forms the other part of this article. The word ‘society’ is taken from Latin word ‘socius’ which means to be in companionship with others. The word ‘justice’ has its origin from the Latin expression ‘justicia’ means collection of rules and regulations. The main central point of this article is to analyse the code of conduct of life among the companions or fellow human beings.

‘Justice’ not only protects every one’s personality and freedom but also directs equal rights, powers and duties to everyone who is living in the Society. ‘Justice’ is always impartial and urges to respect everyone of the society. In its totality, social justice may be summarised as distribution of all opportunities of the society equally to everyone without any discrimination. The question arises in Bhagavad-Gita if there are any distribution of equal opportunities and equal rules for everyone’s actions. But with respect to India, it is found that on account of race, sex, colour, caste, untouchability all opportunities are not distributed equally among its citizens in the country.

Karl Marks proposed social justice by the equal distribution of material wealth. John Rowel’s opined that social justice is possible by the equal distribution of all opportunities. Amartya Sen believed that only development of wealth does not lead to social justice, but social justice is based on welfare of all communities of society at all levels as per the development of wealth. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar suggested that social justice needs to be there in the society as per the rules apart from the distribution of wealth. He said that first one needs to prevent and eradicate, the threats to social equality like colour, caste, creed, untouchability and sex discriminations. Then it will be relevant to discuss the possibilities of social justice. It is necessary to know that who is referred a Shudra and Atishudra or who is untouchable before examining social justice in the holy Bhagavad-Gita.

The Hindu society is understood in two ways at two different periods of time. One is the social system in the traditional form of religion of Jnana Kanda of the Pre-Vedic period and another is the concept of Karma Kanda. During the Pre-Vedic only Dravidians inhabited in India. Then Aryans came to India from central Asia through Khyber Pass valley. After words there were many wars and conflicts between the Aryans and the Dravidians due to racial discriminations.

The Aryans had whitish and reddish skin whereas the Dravidians had blue or blackish skin.

Later on, over the period of time in the racial colours conflicts, the Aryans became victorious and in order to control the defeated Dravidians, they started the colour system. This group was alone in three categories as Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya based on their internal qualities of ‘Satva’, ‘Raja’ and ‘Tamas’ respectively.

In another phase of time, Brahmins and Aryans fought with Dravidians who were Kshatriyas under the leadership of Indra and in that battle Kshatriya Dravidians lost the battle. Yet they continued their fight. The defeated and surrendered Dravidians were considered as Shudras and there began a fourth group of the creed. The Dravidians who did not surrender were boycotted outside, the caste groups and were considered Atishudras, Anaryas, untouchables, the lowest type of Atishudras, chandalas and daemons.

Later on, these boycotted classes of people were called non-members of the tribe and a few researchers were of the opinion that these only later considered as untouchables. In the modern language, they are referred as ‘Harijans’ and ‘Girijans’ or and Dalits are called in the language of constitution as scheduled caste and scheduled tribe.

John Wilson in his research ‘Indian Castes’ has the following opinion. “The Aryans who came from the outside, destroyed the rights and duties of the native Dravidians and tribal groups of India and with jealousy and pride suppressed them and to keep them in a pitiable condition, they created four ‘Varnas’ (tribes) and imposed strict orders in the form of religious inscriptions. The country is becoming corrupted for the false logic and rituals in the name of religion and God. Yet caste system forms the basis for the life of Hindus”.

“The Dravidians refereed in the Vedas, mingled with Vaidic religion and became Atishudras. Those who could not mingle up became the untouchables and the chandals”¹ says Dr. G.S. Ghrye in his research work “Indian castes and occupations” (pg.52)

In the next part of my research article, the main theme ‘Social Justice in Bhagavad-Gita.’ will have to be discussed. Lord Krishna gives the assurance as:

“यदा यदा ही धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाभ्यहम् ॥”² (गीता, अ. ४. श्लोक-७)

“परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥”³ (गीता, अ. ४. श्लोक-८)

“Whenever the Varnashrama system based on four types of classification degenerate and mixed together and irreligious activities uphold, in those times by destroying the evil ones and protecting the good ones. I take incarnation as avatar and protect the Dharma.” Like this the God Shri Krishna only protects the Dharma (Varna system) without seeing everyone as equal, by protecting and respecting the glory of Brahmins and stamping the Shudratishudra to take them to sufferings. In a society when Brahmins dominate and Shudras and Atishudras are suppressed and subjugated, the question arises whether there is social justice to Shudras and Atishudras.⁴

“चतुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः

तस्या कर्तारमपि मां विद्धचकर्तारमव्यम् ॥”⁵ (गीता, अ. ४. श्लोक-१३)

In Bhagavad-Gita, Srikrishna says “the classification of Varans created by me based on the nature and work.” In the next shloka he says that one has to strictly follow their tribes and religions and perform the duties accordingly.

“श्रेयान् स्वधर्मोविगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥”⁶ (गीता, अ. ३. श्लोक-३५)

This shloka means, “though one’s religion has no qualities too, one needs to adhere to the same and needs to do the actions according to that religion Priest ship and Adharyana is Brahmins duty and similarly Kshatriya for protection, vaisya for agriculture and allocation of wealth and Shudra for doing the service or manual works. There may be some mistakes in one’s religion yet one need to stick to his religion. Everyone comes to his Varna or caste by the actions of his previous hereditary life. It is better to die in one’s religion as the other religion is more fearful”.

The strict classification of groups or Varnas, Shudras and Atishudras appears like social system of exploitation.⁷ In those days, there was power, respect and facilities to Brahmins and Kshatriyas and to some extent even to Viashyas also, had social status. But the Shudras Aitshudras had no choice of work even if they had abilities, their activities and occupations were treated as dirty. There was no respect for their work. There was no income to them. Hence, it is an issue to be discussed as to how the Bhagavad-Gita gives social justice to Shudras and Atishudras who belong to the lowest status in the Indian society.

“मां हि पार्थ व्यपश्रित्य येऽपि स्युः पापयोनयः ।

स्त्रियो वैश्यास्तथ शुद्रास्तेऽपि यानि परां गतिम् ॥”⁸ (गीता, अ.९. श्लोक-३२)

“O Arjuna, though women, Viashyas and Shudras are born with low status, if they believe me, they get great positions and it that is so, the virtuous, devotional Brahmins and rejastris also get such great positions.” From this it clear that except Brahmins and Kshatriyas everyone has committed sins. Then the social justice is doubtful in the Bhagavad-Gita when there are such debatable points.⁹

“कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचना ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सईगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥”¹⁰ (गीता, अ.२. श्लोक-४७)

In this Shloka, Srikrishan preaches that “doing actions Karma is his duty but he should not anticipate results for it. One should not leave his actions Karma.” Krishna also says that in the war, it is profitable if one wins or dies in the war. He preaches of Selfless action. These statements seem to be contradictory¹¹ and whether they give right messages to people carries lot of doubts.

“In Bhagavad-Gita Shrikrishna says that, he has created the four varnas and upholds the graded system of varnas. He justifies previous actions (Karmas) and previous lives and glorifies all religions scriptures. He proclaims that those who do not have faith in them destroy. He upholds the low status of woman, Vaishyas and Shudratishudras and also justifies their slavery”¹². When these facts are observed it is clear that the message from the Gita does not give any remedy for social justice.

Swami Vivekananda always used to condemn such classification of castes in his writings and words. “In the beginning of the varna system, Brahmins had the control of the political power. Later on the Kshatriyas took it by their physical force. Then onwards, those who had wealth, (vaishyas) began to rule. Then he forecasted that during the democratic period the Shudras, who were oppressed earlier, will rule.”¹³ That is, those who were deprived of the social justice, it rule the state and then it is possible to achieve social justice in future.

CONCLUSION:

The Bhagavad-Gita under the graded system of classification of society gives universal social justice but failed to give social justice in the Indian social set-up. That means, the present prevailing caste system, group and tribe system, untouchability, sex discrimination have failed to give social justice and limited only to glorify the status and respect of Brahmin and Kshatriyas and their socio-political positions.

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