

THE SECRET OF ACTION ACCORDING TO THE GITA

Menaka Deorah



Spiritual Significance : Perfect Surrender
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Problem reviewed

Life on earth is a life of action: its entire means and stuff is constituted by action. Action of thought, action of emotion and action of the body itself; action of the individual and action of the collective; action too of the many universal forces. Action is movement, the first fundamental of life. Therefore every action determines the kind of life we will have. But why is action accompanied by pain? Why is life not perfect? Why is it so hard to act rightly? Why is it so difficult to decide what to do? The Gita holds action at the centre of everything and affirms in no dubious terms, that although the problem of action seems an impossible one, it is possible to have perfect action.

Action as we know it is governed by three forces, says the Gita: *sattwa*, the law of the ideal of mind, *rajas*, the law of the ideal of life, and *tamas*, the law of matter, inertia and nescience. Even though we seem to act in liberty and make our own choices, the truth is that we are no more than puppets in the crafty hands of the three gunas! The gunas control everything in the universe, and operate in the individual through his separative ego sense.

Tamas slows us down, resists change, languishes in imperfection and opposes any kind of light and forward movement. It is the element of inertia and obscurity. *Rajas* is the source of kinesis, energy and will. It creates passion, desire, craving and attachment. Its action usually results in excitement, pleasure, anxiety, insecurity, disappointment, stress, want and dissatisfaction.

Sattwa is the highest of the three gunas and is responsible for order, restraint, intellectual activity, idealism, seeking after knowledge, truth, light, balance and the right order of things. We are under the incessant and compulsive influence of the three gunas, each trying to get the upper hand on our actions. A varying combination of the gunas is the motive force behind all our decisions. Action is nothing but the verdict of the debate of the gunas.

Today, *rajas* has assumed enormous and unhealthy proportions. We are governed by this extravagant will to be, possess, overpower and overthrow. *Sattwa* and *tamas* strive to subdue *rajas* but to no lasting effect. The result is that either mind stifles life and makes of it an unreal tower-house or *rajas* rules supreme to make of life a filthy show of power, stress and destruction. The rich grow miserable and the wise ineffective. A balanced *sattwic* life hardly exists. Because the individual is in a state of high discord the group is also in strife. As a race, we fall out of the evolutionary harmony.

The gunas, says the Gita, are only a means for a higher end. We have allowed them to be the end itself. They are not to be the initiators of action but the executors of action. There is an inherent ignorance in us of this critical fact. The Gita is here to dispel this ignorance and enthrone the real knowledge. The problem of action is not only the severity and complexity of the tyranny of the gunas but also equally our ignorance of the true place of the gunas and the true master of the gunas and the whole game plan.

It is not surprising then that most of our actions are semi-effective if not wholly futile! Our object is hardly ever met with success and even when we do succeed the consequences of our acts overcast the results with grim unwanted effect. The object of our action too is a vehement and compulsive need of one of our gunas! Neither the goal nor the means stem from the right source, nor the right understanding of the relation and order of things. The Gita sets this right. It affirms that action can be perfect if we station ourselves above the gunas, *traigunatita*. And it is our glorious destiny to carry out that perfect action where mind and life coexist in effective harmony.

But how does one remain in a life of action, which is driven by the gunas, and yet be above the gunas? It seems impossible.

A hopeless dejection overcomes and a quivering voice betrays me, "In all this fury of the gunas, where is my will? Where is the 'me'? Is there a 'me' at all? I am too crippled by my limitations; I have no desire to rise. I cannot master myself, how shall I conquer my world? What hope is there for me? Am I only this writhing creature? Who am I?"

Self redefined

We are not, reveals the Gita, this mass of confused gunas alone. There is in us another reality. There is a Presence within that wears the garb of our

personality. The Gita calls this presence the *purushottama*, the lord of our being, an individualisation of the lord of the worlds. This deeper presence is our true identity but it is hidden from us. It is the part that is free from all bondage and capable of the perfection we envisage. It is time now to recover this knowledge and live by the new Self. Behind the law of the gunas we have our very own law of being and law of action, our *swabhava* and our *swadharma*, our true luminous nature. This is the secret of our freedom and perfection. Our first business is to find this out. All our education and upbringing must aid this discovery. With a conscious increase of *sattwa* and a growing self-surrender we can uncover and activate this sacred law.

In other words, the field of operation is the gunas but the centre of operation is above the gunas. To be *traigunatita*, stationed beyond the gunas, through a gradual dissociation with our current sense of 'me' and a parallel identification with the true sense of 'me' is the beginning of perfect action. It is to be noted that since this is the real constitution of our being we need not struggle to make it happen, we need only to unveil that reality through a shift of focus. This unveiling is a triple process of god-knowledge, god-adoration, and god-action, held together by a faith and longing for the master of our being. This inherent seeking is present in each of us in different forms and degrees. It has only to be revived, rekindled and remembered. This revision of our customary self adds up to the critical process of de-personalising. It is only when we have learnt to live in the non-personal mode that we can hope for any real and lasting change. This individual enlightenment becomes the crucial pivot around which a new future shall be built.

Thus, the Gita, in one stroke of heroic vision, deconstructs the impossible condition of our action into one single proposition. It proposes a grand shift. A shift of the onus of action from the shaky means of our personal will to the solid wisdom of the Godhead within. We can now look upon ourselves as a larger reality with a larger purpose and a larger hope.

God restored

The God of the Gita is within, not in far off beatitudes. He is personal, intimate, friend and guide, eager to help and love and empower. He is here and now. We need not struggle to please him to receive his boons. God is our very own self and not something other than us, though in the beginning it may appear so. All we need to realize this fact of facts is the faith and intent, the *shraddha*, as the Gita would call it.

In moments of intuition and inspiration, we often catch a glimpse of this greater power presiding over our days, working out things for us or intimating us from behind the veil of things forgotten. This quiet presence is the fount of extraordinariness in us. This inner being, which awaits entry into our active life, is the portion of the omnipotence that guides the world. It is the very

substance of this world and the hidden goal towards which everything moves in its unending cycles. All is That and That is all.

Therefore it is fascinating to find that everything, without exception, is a derivation, dilution or diminution of that Godliness. Anger, for example, has its source in divine power, greed and desire have their source in divine oneness, *tamas* is a lesser representation of divine peace, and pleasure a distortion of divine delight. The trick is to be able to trace everything back to its divine source for that is the only truth behind everything. God is no more the hound of heaven waiting to bind us in chains and make of us his sullen slaves but our comrade who waits to embrace us and carry us at every step. He is seated in our very heart as our very own self.

The gap between god and man is gone. The chasm between heaven and earth is bridged. Man and God stand united in the Gita's divine warrior.

Life revisited

Mind and life are reconciled in the spirit. Gradually in all our nature there emerges a growing surrender, efficacy and purity to receive and carry out the will of the inner being. Life becomes a field for working out the higher will and not the ego will. The thrust of life is shifted from outside to inside. The movement of life is now a *nivritti*, not a *pravritti*. The *gunas*, content and pacified in manifesting the *swadharma*, no more play havoc with us. The perception of the senses is made larger and complete so that nothing is viewed in fragments but in its entire reality. Each element and each individual, having found its true calling, makes life a rich symphony of melodies.

Action replayed

When Sri Krishna opens out his arms to us and in a world embrace calls out to us to abandon all notions of right and wrong, all standards of good and bad and submit our whole self to Him, there is in us an upsurge of overriding love, surrender, emptiness, relief, redemption, an utter dissolution of our effort and struggle, a remoulding of our old self into a new splendour. Each time we hear this call from the maker of the worlds we are recast into a fuller image of Himself. Everytime we concede to the Godhead we establish a new high and collaborate with the evolutionary Intent. The Gita foretells us that the glory we receive, as fruit of this submission, is far more ecstatic, both in quantum and quality, than any human pleasure we now know.

Action, says the Gita, is a synthesis of knowledge and devotion. It is rendered perfect when performed with the right knowledge and a corresponding adoration and yearning for the divine. Only then can we act without expectation of the fruit of our action. Only then can we consecrate every act to the master of our being. Then the Godhead steps up and takes charge. More than the act itself

it is the spirit of surrender that determines the result of the act. We can be doing anything at all as long as it is done with the right consciousness. Even if we fail miserably in the act, it does not matter as long as it was consecrated to the Lord.

Action is *kartaavyam karma, sahajam karma, niyatam karma*. Action must be performed without preference and expectation, as a duty towards the Godhead within. That action is best for us which is born within us as the right law of our being, with the right force and rhythm, with the right objective. The Gita puts forth a tremendous positivity and ease in the ideal of action. It makes action a happy and powerful means of our progress. Action evolves from an egoistic personal action to a rightful ethical action and finally assumes fullness in a spiritually free and perfect action.

Secret restated

The Gita is not a sermon, nor even a scripture; it is a direct spiritual action from the profoundest source accessible to man. Therefore it is a thing to be practiced, experienced and lived. The secret of action according to the Gita is a multiple shift: A shift of the station of God from distant heavens to the intimacy of the heart; a shift of the onus of action from our personal effort to the wisdom of the godhead within; a shift from ego-subjection to soul-submission; a shift of the object of action from the guna-gratifying result to a god-fulfilling outcome; a shift of the sense mind's gaze from a restless out-flowing tendency to a settled inward direction; a shift of the very condition of action from an ignorant unconscious personal one to a consecrated, enlightened and impersonal one; a shift from the impossible complexity of our personality to the simple luminosity of divine nature; a shift from the feverish way of self enjoyment to a consecrated way of god enjoyment; a shift in the perception of failure from an unwanted personal stigma to an occasion for growing into godliness; a shift in the understanding of success from ego value to soul value; and finally, a shift from being the personal doer of action to being an impersonal channel of divine will.

One shift leads to the other, spontaneously, for it is the natural direction of our being. The shift is not an abandoning of all that is dear to us but a marvelous heightening, an unthinkable intensifying, a glorious multiplying of all our ecstasies. The Gita's path is of a grand action and growth and achievement, not one of puny passions and meager meanderings.

The result of such a shift is a huge unburdening and a magnificent optimism and security. Man emerges free, empowered and enthusiastic about life, ready to take on the immediate everyday action as a fiery means to unite with the godhead he feels within himself and all around. It adds much value to his tasks and rids him of the weight of ethical failure and moral pleasure. He finds himself to be the instrument of the Lord, working on his very own assignment. He grows in true self-worth and finds that there is dignity and

honour in whatever he does. When he is thus overcome and consumed by divine energy of right action he fits better into his collectivity and serves better the world welfare, *lokasangraha*. He then becomes a centre for the furtherance of this divine way of life. The fire catches on to those who are open and the secret of action perpetuates.

Practical and real-time, the Gita's way of action is meant for all. It is a master act that we can take on right away, as we are and where we are. A shift of interest is all it asks, "Lay your interest in Me alone, feel Me in your passions, offer Me all your thought, hope and desire; see Me in everything, call Me when in difficulty, sense Me in all sensations, bring to Me all failings and all success, open to Me the doors of your being; watch Me fly in the bird and see Me move in the worm, ask Me why and how, show Me your travails, take Me on your journeys, come to Me when you advance, allow Me to caress when you fall and hurt; I am waiting to receive you for I am you from time immemorial. You shall come to Me whenever you are ready, for you are already in Me. Fear not. Take refuge in Me alone and I will do all for you."

This is the only promise of the Gita.

All the problems of human life arise from the complexity of our existence, the obscurity of its essential principle and the secrecy of the inmost power that makes out its determinations and governs its purpose and its processes. If our existence were of one piece, solely material-vital or solely mental or solely spiritual, or even if the others were entirely or mainly involved in one of these or were quite latent in our subconscious or our superconscious parts, there would be nothing to perplex us; the material and vital law would be imperative or the mental would be clear to its own pure and unobstructed principle or the spiritual self-existent and self-sufficient to spirit. The animals are aware of no problems; a mental god in a world of pure mentality would admit none or would solve them all by the purity of a mental rule or the satisfaction of a rational harmony; a pure spirit would be above them and self-content in the infinite. But the existence of man is a triple web, a thing mysteriously physical, vital, mental and spiritual at once, and he knows not what are the true relations of these things, which the real reality of his life and his nature, whither the attraction of his destiny and where the sphere of his perfection.

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