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DA DA DA: SELF-CONTROL, CHARITY AND COMPASSION SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION OF *BRIHADĀRANYAKA UPANIṢAD* AND *BHAGAVADGĪTĀ*

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The purpose of this paper is to reveal the unity between the da da da (self-control, charity and compassion) of the *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* and the central significance of these three virtues in the *Bhagavadgītā* and how both are under the umbrella of the spiritual unity of the self with the divine. The *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* as a text is not sufficient in understanding this and the three-tiered self so explicitly laid out in the *Bhagavadgītā* must be appropriated and integrated for a proper understanding of da da da in its fundamental spiritual context. This integration will also bring out how it can be applied to our times and is indeed the call of the day to bring out a more harmonious world around us.

Trayāḥ prājāpatyāḥ prājapatau pitari brahma-caryam iṣuḥ, devā manuṣyā asurāḥ, uṣitvā brahmacharyam devā ūcuh; bravītu no bhavān iti:

On one occasion the gods, the human beings and the demons all observed self-restraint, Brahmacharya, Tapasya and austerity for the sake of gaining knowledge from the Creator. Having observed great austerity they went to Brahma, the Creator Himself, and said, "Give us instruction." Who went? Three groups. One group of the celestials, the gods, denizens of Indra-loka, paradise, who enjoy all sorts of pleasures, second the men of this earth plane, and third the demons, extremely cruel in their nature. To the gods he said, "I give you instruction. Listen! Da." He said but one word, "Da". "Do you understand what I say?" "Yes, we understand." "Very good! So, follow this instruction." Then he looked to the human beings, "Do you want instruction from me?" "Yes!" "Da," he said again. "Do you follow what I say?" "Yes, we understand." "Very good! Now go and follow this instruction." Then the demons were called and he said "Da" to the demons also, and the demons, like the others said, "Yes, we have understood what it is." "Go and follow this instruction." To all the three he told the same thing, but the meaning was taken differently by the different groups. "Da, Da, Da," he said. That is all he spoke.

The celestials, the people in paradise, are supposed to be revelling in pleasures of sense... They are addicted to too much enjoyment. So, the instruction to those people was Da-'Dāmyata'... restrain yourself...Do not go too much in the direction of the enjoyment of the senses. That was 'Da' to the celestials...

Human beings are greedy... So, to them 'Da' meant Datta – 'give in charity'. Do not keep with you more than what you need. Do not take what you have not given. Do not appropriate what does not belong to you...be charitable... So, to the human beings this was the instruction – Datta, give, because they are not prepared to give. They always want to keep. Greed is to be controlled by charity.

And to the demons, who are very cruel, who always insult, injure and harm other people 'Da' meant Dayadhvam – be merciful to others... Do not be cruel and hard-hearted... Anger is to be controlled by mercy.

So, these three letters Da, Da, Da instructed three types of individuals in three different ways. All instructions were conveyed by a single word only; a single letter, but the meaning was conveyed properly to the individual groups concerned. Wear the cap that fits –

....

These are the three great injunctions given by Prajāpati, the Creator, to three types of people. If this instruction can be followed in its spirit, then the desire, greed and anger of the personality can be sublimated by self-restraint, charity and mercy respectively. (Swami Krishnananda, *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 5.2)

This passage from the *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* signifies that the single word *Da* is instructive for the three layers of our personality. An individual is a blend of godliness, humanness and demoness. Each having an essential vice, which, if it goes unchecked, will only lead one into a blind alley.

The divine part in the individual qualifies one to revel in the pleasures and splendors through the senses. Without a restraint the individual will get addicted to sensual enjoyments and become egoistic. The human part is greedy and covetous. If not checked it makes one insensitive and selfish. The demonic part, which is cruel and aggressive, harms both the self and the other. Thus, Da-Da-



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Da, that is, self-control, charity and compassion were taught by the creator so that these vices in us could be sublimated and we could move towards our spiritual progress. This is what the theory of *puruṣārtha* also delineates.

“Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual” (Radhakrishnan, 1923, p. 24). The central message of the upanisadic philosophy is the realization of the oneness of the individual with the universal. Indulgence, greed and cruelty are impediments in this spiritual journey. “So comes the importance of the great teaching—*Dama*, *Dāna* and *Dayā* for the subdual of the urges of personality, for the purpose of fructification of the aspiration for the Supreme Universal” (Swami Krishnananda, *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 5.1).

Īśa Upaniṣad in the first two verses states that the *Brahman* pervades the world just as gold pervades gold ornaments. The *Brahman* dwells in the *Ātman* and thus the apparent notions of doership, enjoyership and ownership lose significance. For those who seek liberation as well as for those who wish to live for hundred years the prescribed *dharma* is detachment.

These three virtues have been extolled in the *Bhagavadgītā* where Sri Kṛṣṇa with a self-effacing demeanor stirs up the reader to sift through the dross and get clarity of vision. He reinstates the upanisadic instruction in the *Bhagavadgītā* in as many ways as possible. One such instance is when he declares ‘I, O Gudakeśa (Arjuna), am the self-seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of beings’ (Radhakrishnan, 1970, X.20 (p. 262)).

In section 1, I lay out the tri-partite structure of the self in the *Bhagavadgītā* as this is necessary for the understanding of the *dadada*, the three virtues being discussed in this paper. In section 2 I discuss *Dama* in the *Bhagavadgītā* as it emerges from the tri-partite division of the self and from the connection to the divine. In section 3 I turn to *Dāna* in the *Bhagavadgītā* and how the tri-partite division of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* leads to three types of charity. In section 4 I cite passages from the *Bhagavadgītā* that lay out *Dayā* as a central virtue that needs to be practiced. In section 5 I discuss how there is a sharp contrast as well as a stunning affinity between the radical and revolutionary rebellion against the prevailing Victorian moral order of the Dadaist movement of the European early 20th century movement and the DaDaDa of ancient Indian spirituality. I also discuss how DaDaDa as a prescription and practice can help in alleviating the major problems we face today. Hence, DaDaDa has a great practical significance. Section 6 is the conclusion.

1. Tripartite Self in the *Bhagavadgītā*

Bhagavadgītā has a three-tiered concept of the self. At the first tier self₁ is the body, which is the means of action with its five senses and five motor organs. At the second tier is self₂ the body and mind, which is the deliberator of the action which acquires knowledge and understanding and has the process of intentionality embedded in it. At the third tier self₃ is the integrated self in which the soul governs the mind and body to perform obligatory action.

At the tier of self₃ the soul is where the self is conscious of the physical and mental individual as well as self-conscious. It is simultaneously concretely individual and universal by being linked to divinity. So, “One should not rejoice on obtaining what is pleasant nor sorrow on obtaining what is unpleasant. He who is (thus) firm of understanding and unbewildered, (such a) knower of God is established in God.” (Radhakrishnan, 1970, V.20 (p. 182))

For Plato the three elements of the psyche, appetites, spirit and reason have the corresponding virtues of temperance, courage and wisdom respectively; similarly, the three parts of the psyche in the *Bhagavadgītā* have the three respective *guṇas* associated with each: “Threefold is the conviction of embodied beings, inherent in their own nature, classified as *Sattvic*, *Rajasic* and *Tamasic*” (Rāmānuja, 2013, 17.2 (p. 186)). But all three are qualities that bind the embodied self in its worldly existence: “*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* are the *Gunas* that arise from *Prakṛti*. They cause the bondage of the immutable Self to the body, O Arjuna” (Ibid., 14.5 (p. 164)).

The self has the quality of dullness (*tamas*) when it is controlled by the body alone; the quality of passion (*rajas*) when it is controlled by the mind alone; and the quality of goodness (*sattva*) when the mind and body are governed by the soul.

2. *Dama* or Self-Control in the *Bhagavadgītā*

Self-Control is what lies at the heart of the *Bhagavadgītā* teaching. “Without doubt, O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), the mind is difficult to curb and restless but it can be controlled, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), by constant practice and non-attachment” (Radhakrishnan, 1970, VI.35, (p. 206)). The whole notion of Karma yoga rests on this virtue of self-control. “Yoga is hard to attain, I agree, by one who is not self-controlled. It is attainable by striving through proper means” (Ibid., VI.36 (p. 206)). *Dama* or self-control is one’s awakening from the illusory world of matter and realizing that running after the objects of senses only lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. It is rising to the level of the integrated self, controlling the body and the mind. “The yogin is greater than the



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ascetic; he is considered to be greater than the man of knowledge, greater than the man of ritual works, therefore do thou become a yogin, O Arjuna” (Ibid., VI.46 (p. 210)).

The body is the performer of action, the mind with rigorous deliberation chooses the obligatory action. At the third tier of self₃ the soul as self-consciousness and universal guides the mind and body to perform the obligatory action. “He who is able to resist the rush of desire and anger, even before he gives up his body, he is a yogin, he is the happy man” (Ibid., V.23 (p. 183)). This is self-control.

The *Bhagavadgītā* provides a clear distinction between the seat of action which is the mind and body and the agent of action which is the integrated self with the soul guiding the mind and body. Since universality of ethical action is realized by the self-conscious soul in self₃, this is where something like Kant’s categorical imperative with its universality is seated, not in reason *qua* mind but in reason *qua* self₃ which includes the soul. “When one has conquered one’s self (lower) and has attained to the calm of self-mastery, his Supreme Self abides ever concentrate, he is at peace in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, in honour and dishonour” (Ibid., VI.7. (p. 190)).

The *Bhagavadgītā* distinction is not simply an archaic anthropological mooring of a religious text, it is a profound meta-ethical distinction that can explain the age-old problems in ethics of the gap between theoretical and practical action, *akrasia*, and the link between normative and applied ethics. Self-control as a structural feature of the human psyche takes care of *akrasia*. When there is self-control in the proper functioning of the three tiers of the self, *akrasia* is eliminated. *Akrasia* occurs when knowing what the right thing to do we actually choose to do the wrong thing. With self-control properly functioning this cannot happen. Self-control has to be attained through practice, as it will not automatically happen even though it is an ontic feature of the three-tiered self.

The *Bhagavadgītā* says, “whatsoever makes the wavering and unsteady mind wander away let him restrain and bring it back to the control of Self alone. For Supreme happiness comes to the yogin whose mind is peaceful, whose passions are at rest, who is stainless and has become one with God” (Ibid., VI.26-27, (p. 202)).

Coming back to the Upanisadic teaching, everything is pervaded with consciousness and it is a mistake to take the world of senses as real.

The *Atman* is the one Reality that masquerades in various forms and names, but this point is not understood. The mind that is finite, located and lodged in the body, does not understand the fact that finite objects that are outside are only appearances of a single indivisible Reality. So, the finite tries to cling to the finite, not knowing this fact of infinitude that is at the background of these finite forms. If this infinitude that is at the base of these finite forms is to be understood, realized and made part of one’s own being, then the realization accrues: This *Atman* is all - *idam sarvam, yad ayam atma.* (*Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad*)

Thus, we see the philosophical necessity for the practice of self-control to lead a happy life.

3. *Dāna* or Charity in the *Bhagavadgītā*

Traditionally in the scriptures *dāna* is defined as “any action of relinquishing the ownership of what one considered or identified as one’s own, and investing the same in a recipient without expecting anything in return” (Krishnan and Manoj, 2008). *Bhagavadgītā* urges men to act selflessly for the welfare of all. “Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment” (Rāmānuja, 2013, 3.19 (p. 43)). This means that the acts of *dāna* should never be given up because such acts purify the wise men.

The self has the quality of dullness (*tamas*) when it is controlled by the body alone; the quality of passion (*rajas*) when it is controlled by the mind alone; and the quality of goodness (*sattva*) when the mind and body are governed by the soul. Likewise, three kinds of charity are enunciated in accordance with these three kinds of *gunas*. “That gift, which is made to one from whom no return is expected, with the feeling that it is one’s duty to give and which is given in proper place and time and to a worthy person, that gift is held to be ‘good’” (Rāmānuja, 2013, 17.20 (p. 190)). “But that gift which is made with the hope of a return or with the expectation of future gain or when it hurts to give, is held to be ‘passionate’” (Rāmānuja, 2013, 17.21 (p. 190)). “And that gift which is made at a wrong place or time or to an unworthy person, without proper ceremony or with contempt, that is declared to be ‘dull’” (Rāmānuja, 2013, 17.22 (p. 191)).



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Sri Kṛṣṇa advises however “whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerities thou dost practice—do that, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), as an offering to Me” (Radhakrishnan, 1970, IX. 27 (p. 249)). This is only a reinstatement of the oneness of the absolute with the individual. One must see divinity in all for that brings peace to one who endeavours to give anything in charity.

One is reminded of the story of King Janusruti and Raikwa, the philosopher cart driver given in the Chhāndogya Upaniṣad. King Janusruti who was famous for his goodness and philanthropy once overheard the conversation of two birds. One bird was singing his glory while the other was praising the cart driver for having something which the king lacked. It was the peace of mind. The king who took pride in all his achievements at once felt the hollowness in his life and wished to meet Raikwa. When finally, his servants could locate the cart driver, the king went to him with precious gifts and requested him with folded hands to guide him as to who he should worship to attain the peace that he enjoyed. Raikwa showed his unhappiness on seeing the trading technique of the king to get spiritual knowledge and did not entertain him. However, when the King returned again seeking the same knowledge he could not refuse and told the king.

Various are the gods that people worship as the highest deity. The sweeping wind, the flaming fire, the breathing vital force are worshipped as gods by many. But the Spirit, itself uncreated, creates all and supports them. The Spirit eats not anything, it does not stand in need of anything, and is self-supporting and self-satisfied. All belong to the Spirit. All are but instruments carrying out its will.

O king! Have neither pride nor vanity for the charities that you dispense. Go thou, great king, to thy palace. Give but not with pride. Give generously but not with egotism. Give freely but not with an eye to fame. Give but not as something that is yours, but as something given to you by the Spirit for giving to others. He who sees this truth becomes a seer and to him nothing is wanting and he becomes the enjoyer of things. (Spiritual Paramhansa, 2018, p. 70)

The act of charity is motivated to bring in the welfare of all beings. A charitable person is committed to work for the benefit and integration of all beings in the world permeated with the divine.

4. Dayā or Compassion in the Bhagavadgītā

Sri Kṛṣṇa considers *dayā* as an important virtue. He says that a true devotee is “He who has no ill will to any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from egoism and self-sense, even-minded in pain and pleasure and patient” (Radhakrishnan, 1970, XII.13 (p. 296)). *Bhagavadgītā* however does not glorify *dayā* as blind love for the living beings but loving all in a detached manner. It says, “He who is equal-minded among friends, companions and foes, among those who are neutral and impartial, among those who are hateful and related, among saints and sinners, he excels” (Ibid., VI.9 (p. 192)). The virtue of *dayā* also springs from the same teaching which advocates *dama* and *dāna*. That is, the oneness of all beings with the supreme consciousness.

As has been illustrated in the *Bṛihadāryanka upaniṣad* humans have the demonic element as well which makes them unruly, cruel and unjust that needs to be controlled and corrected. The *Bhagavadgītā* states, “The demoniac does not know about the way of action or the way of renunciation. Neither purity, nor good conduct, nor truth is found in them” (Ibid., XVI.7 (p. 336)), and “Giving themselves up to insatiable desire, full of hypocrisy, excessive pride and arrogance, holding wrong views through delusion, they act with impure resolves” (Ibid., XVI.10 (p. 337)). Their psychology works on the principle “This foe is slain by me and others also I shall slay. I am the lord, I am the enjoyer, I am successful, mighty and happy” (Ibid., XVI, 14 (p. 338)). Sri Kṛṣṇa says, “Given over to self-conceit, force and pride and also to lust and anger, these malicious people despise Me dwelling in the bodies of themselves and others. These cruel haters, worst of men, I hurl constantly these evil-doers only into the wombs of demons in (this cycle of) births and deaths” (Ibid., XVI.18-19 (p. 339)). “The gateway of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul is threefold, lust, anger and greed. Therefore, these three, one should abandon” (Ibid. XVI.21 (p. 340)).

5. Significance of Da Da Da to contemporary life

Ironically there is an apparent sharp contrast and a stunning underlying affinity of the avant garde Dadaism of the 20th century and the Da Da Da of Indian spirituality discussed in this paper.

In the modern Dadaist movement what does the word ‘dada’ mean? “Nothing. ... and everything to an incoherent babbling baby of any nationality” (Kristiansen, 1968, p. 457). Hugo Ball, an artist, in 1916 reportedly arbitrarily picked the word from the dictionary and saw that it had different meanings in different languages.



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Ball (1916) said in his ‘Manifesto DaDa’: “Dada is a new tendency in art.... Dada comes from the dictionary. It is terribly simple.... Just a word and the word a movement.” The Da Da Da of this paper seems to be the antithesis of the Dada of Dadaism. While Dadaism is absurd and meaningless, Da Da Da captures the very meaning and purposefulness of life. Yet there is a stunning affinity between the Da Da Da of the ancient Indian tradition of spirituality and the avant garde Dadaism as a rebellion of 20th century European art, music and literature.

We can say that Dadaism is a rebellion against Victorian values and morals and let us not forget that the Victorian edifice existed alongside a simultaneous colonialism that robbed indigenous people around the world of their natural resources and livelihood along with their human dignity and identity. This was the tenor of Dadaism: “We had lost confidence in our culture. Everything had to be demolished. We would begin again after the *tabula rasa*.... we began by shocking common sense, public opinion, education, institutions, museums, good taste, in short, the whole prevailing order” (Janco, 1971, p. 36). Such rebellion is perfectly compatible with a return to the basic human values of charity and compassion which the Dadaist rebels would have approved of as many of them were also European revolutionaries who were against the colonization by their nations. They would welcome a return to any ancient tradition that had these two as the central values. It is not surprising then that Hugo Ball says in his manifesto: “Dada Dalai Lama, Buddha, Bible, and Nietzsche” (Ball, 1916).

Dadaism is against traditional religious morality and order; it is not against spirituality and it would welcome a spirituality which places charity and compassion at the center of our lives. Though anything about Dadaism is random and arbitrary by its own admission, I believe that there is no accident that Hugo Ball also says: “How does one achieve eternal bliss? By saying dada” (Ibid.) This is indeed the crux of my paper.

Well, not quite.

Instead of ‘dada’ it is ‘DaDaDa’. Dadaists would probably not accept self-control in the sense of self-discipline or in the sense of submission of the self to community or some world order. However, they do accept self-control in the sense of an existential creativity by the self. Nor do they deny self-control that arises from a spirituality that is not of a human order but that of a divine order, not a divine order created by humans but an authentically divine order. Self-control as discussed in this paper is not a surrendering of the individual to the divine but it is the merging of the self with the divine and the divine of Hinduism is not the monotheistic God of Western religions. This is the difference between the Judeo-Christian sense of divinity and the traditional Indian or Hindu sense but that is a topic for another paper so let me not get into it. The existential self is sustained in self-control; hence the Dadaists would accept it.

What prompts a person to act? Assuming we all act out of ‘rational self-interest’ (Matilal, 2002, p. 50) for that is more in tune with our common-sense intuition, we all want the welfare of society and we also have a conception of the ‘good’ of the society. However, when it comes to contributing for the social good, we wish to become ‘free-riders’ (Ibid., p. 50). We may be inclined to give back to society in whatever ways we can or be compassionate in times of crises or self-controlled in our phases of enjoyment but more than this inclination we love to entertain our wishful justifications for our inability to perform during those times. We expect others to be egoless, lust-free, compassionate, non-covetous, and so on, but we hardly reflect on the pattern of our behavior and actions. If we take the line of thought that “I want to do however I do not do so since as others are doing social good my inaction will not be noticed,” then we have headed for a very sorry state of affairs for “if everybody did this, nobody’s self-interest would be served because nobody would receive the intended benefit (Ibid., p. 50)” Weakness of will, an undeniable part of our nature makes an otherwise ‘morally alert agent’ behave or act against his/her moral convictions.

This attitude has taken out humanity from within us. We have not only become egoistic, aggressive, oppressive and competitive but have lost all our creativity. Understanding the teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* will do wonders and will make modern humans see things in the right perspective. “The Gita raises an uncompromising protest against discriminative social traditions, exploitative economic systems, aggressive political structures and dehumanizing religious practices” (Raeindigo.com, 2016). The three virtues extolled in the *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* and the way they have been explained in the *Bhagavadgītā*, if practiced, would probably change our attitude to look at things for these virtues work on the principle that every creature is tied to the bond of divinity. These teachings in the form of narratives, stories and poems, if properly grasped dig out ‘the best from our practical wisdom’ (Matilal, 2002, p. 69). “Such an integral world-view can be very healthy today, when humanity cuts itself apart through competitiveness, threatening to destroy the cosmic matrix of life” (Raeindigo, 2016).

With 10% of the World population still living below the poverty line, with the violence of terrorism and civil wars still raging around the world, with epidemic suicides of debt laden farmers, with oppression of women in a patriarchal world order still existing,



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what is the solution. The call of the hour is for compassion and charity. Hence, I would adapt the integration of *Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* with the *Bhagavadgītā* in the contemporary life context by reversing the order of DaDaDa.

First and foremost, we need *dayā* or compassion and empathy to see the human condition as it is and not from a selfish point of view. We need time for this. We need to be detached from our material and egotistical desires which take away most of our time.

Second, we need to practice *dāna* or charity, because compassion itself will not solve the world problems around us. We are fortunate to be earning what we do, for the wealth we have due to our inheritance or our education which we were privileged to have due to our being well placed in the social order. We must share this with those who do not have the fortune we have. By spending less on consumeristic goods that we do not need and being more frugal we can free up some of our finances for this purpose of charity and then dispense it for charity in a methodical and careful manner so that it does not get eaten up by those who do not need it.

If compassion and charity come naturally and spontaneously, nothing like it. But this does not happen even if we know that it is the right thing to do as *akrasia* creeps in. This is why we need *dama* or self-control. We need *dama* to not buy that 20th pair of shoes for ourselves, we need *dama* to not buy that Audi car we desire and make do with our basic car or no car at all. This will create a lot of wealth within our budget which we can then appropriately share as charity to alleviate the world's major problems.

The Dadaists are right as we should not accept the status quo that has led to the ills of the world that we are faced with every day, but we should combine the Dadaist analysis with the dadada proactive prescription and practice to eliminate dadagiri (bullying) in the world and return the world to its humane order in our attitudes and practices towards other humans and the environment.

6. Conclusion

I would like to end my paper with a significant passage from B. K. Matilal's article '*Dharma and Rationality*': "...although our ancients did not always seem right from our modern point of view, what is surprising is that they also often got it right. Today they seem to us to have been mistaken in many ways, but that they did sometimes hit upon the right note is worthy of our notice and praise (Matilal, 2002, p. 70)."

In this paper my goal has been to establish that the three virtues of self-control, charity and compassion which are integral to ancient Indian spiritual and philosophical tradition are also the call of the hour to return us to a natural humane order. I would go beyond Matilal to say that dadada that we derive from our ancients is not only worth of our notice and praise but it is the dire need of the hour to be practiced by all of us and then we can attain the world of John Lennon's "Imagine."

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