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A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF DUTY BETWEEN THE GITA AND KANT

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Abstract:

Man is an action performer. All human actions that are consciously done are called moral action. Moral actions are either good or bad. The main objectives of this research paper is to make a comparative exploration between the moral actions of Bhagavad Gita and Kant's moral actions. This paper outlined the concept of moral actions, the source of action, the aim of moral actions from the perspective of The Gita and Kant. After a general introduction, this paper focuses on similarities between The Gita's Niskamakarma and Kant's Deontology. Both respond the performance of duties for the sake of duty without being actuated by love, hatred, fear, anger, greed and other emotions. Both are based on the maxim 'Duty for duty's sake'. Both encourage the performance of duties without any desire for fruits or any consideration of ends and consequences. Further, we have seen that Kant's moral actions differ from the moral actions of Bhagavad Gita. The remarkable point here is that the sheds light on the point and issues on which the two ethical views differ. The difference in terms of teleological approach is very signification. Similarly, the Gita approach of love for humanity and the supreme self with deviationism accommodates feeling. i.e. self-realization, while Kant's categorical imperative does not accommodate that and thus ascetic, formal and rigorist. This is a good pointer towards the distinction between the two views. Lastly, it is believed that this work will be an important addition to the field of ethics of east and west and will be warmly received in India and abroad. However, there are some similarities and dissimilarities between them. To make a comparative study, let me spell out the similarities and dissimilarities about moral action concerning Kant and Bhagavad Gita.

Key words: Comparative, Duty, Bhagavad Gita, Kant, Moral

INTRODUCTION:

Immanuel Kant is a German Philosopher. His works on Moral Philosophy is 'Critique of Practical Reason'. In his critique, he claims the concept Deontology. The essay discusses Kant's ideas and views on moral philosophy from the perspective of Indian moral philosophy, especially that of Srimad-Bhagavad Gita. German philosopher Immanuel Kant as an ascetic who could comprehend the same moral insight as that of Lord Krishna, the epitome of Indian divinity and author of the greatest sacred holy book of India, the Srimad-Bhagavad Gita. The name "Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita", when translated into English literally, means "Song from (the mouth of) God". In this book, Lord Krishna explains the hints of ethico-religious life to his best disciple Arjuna, who expresses unwillingness to participate in the holy war at Kuruksetra since the opponents include his own cousin, brothers, grandparents, other relatives, and teachers. He prefers to leave his kingdom and survive by killing his own cousin, brothers, and relatives. Overwhelmed with grief, he seeks his friend Krishna's moral advice. At this point in time, Lord Krishna explains how Arjuna should use his reason, determines his duties, and performs them without any desire or concern for consequences (niskama karma). He has to fight evil and protect the innocent people as a king, because this is a king's duty. Kant's moral deliberations share many common concepts with the teachings of Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita. Both indicate how to attain person-hood by removing the barriers of individuality that arise out of our animalistic faculties, desire, and passion, giving rise to actions done under desire for the end (sakama karma).

MORAL ACTION OR VOLUNTARY ACTION:

Moral action which is performed by human beings intentionally, knowingly, deliberately, consciously, rationally, voluntarily or thoughtfully. In a wider sense the word moral means that in which have moral qualities like rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness is present, to determine the action is either right or wrong, good or bad. We have seen that some similarities between The Gita's Niskamakarma and Kant's ethics of 'duty for duty sake'. Both respond the performance of duties for the sake of duty without being actuated by love, hatred, fear, anger, greed and other emotions.



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Both encourage the performance of duties without any desire for fruits or any consideration of ends and consequences. Further, we have seen that Kant's moral actions differ from the moral actions of Bhagavadgita. The remarkable point here is that the sheds light on the point and issues on which the two ethical views differ. The difference in terms of teleological in relation to jural/legal approach is very signification. Similarly, the Gita approach of love for humanity and the supreme self with deviationism accommodates feeling. i.e. self-realization, while Kant's categorical imperative does not accommodate that and but it reflects ascetic, formal and rigorist. This is a good pointer towards the distinction between the two views. Lastly, it is believed that this work will be an important addition to the field of ethics of East and west and will be warmly received in India and abroad. However, there are some similarities and dissimilarities between them. To make a comparative study, let me spell out the similarities and dissimilarities about moral action concerning Kant and Bhagavadgita.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GITA AND KANT:

Similarities between the moral actions of Kant and Bhagavadgītā:

1. The first similarity between them is that both the ethics of Kant and the ethics of Bhagavadgītā on moral actions are based on some presuppositions.

In Kantian ethics, Kant accepted some postulations such as freedom of will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God for formulating his moral action. Kant has accepted freedom of will for establishing the possibility of the Categorical Imperative as a synthetic a priori proposition. There is nothing wrong to say that the Idea of freedom is a fundamental necessary postulation in Kantian ethics. According to Kant, a moral agent must be free and he must enjoy freedom. That is why he talks in favour of 'the freedom of the will'. It is a condition under which one's morality is possible. To establish morality, Kant also accepted the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. Here, it should be noted after Kant that to have moral worth in our action, we should not do our action for getting summum bonum rather we should do our action for the sake of action. Our ultimate end is the Duty, but not summum bonum.

On the other hand, in the case of niškāma karma of Bhagavadgītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa, like Kant, accepted some postulations for formulating the concept of niškāma karma. These are the freedom of will, svadharma, paradharma, sādharma, Varna Dharma, Ashrama Dharma, bondage, Mokṣa, and so on. We have also seen that there is an important role of svadharma in establishing moral action in Bhagavadgītā. In Bhagavadgītā, the freedom of will is also accepted as a postulation of moral action.

2. Another similarity between Kant's moral action and the moral action of Bhagavadgītā is that both Kant and Bhagavadgītā emphasize on actions.

For them, actions should be worshiped for a moral life. For Kant, if we do actions for the sake of actions then our actions can be treated as moral actions. One can led to moral life by doing moral actions.

On the other hand, Bhagavadgītā, like Kant, also holds that we have the right to act alone (karmanye vādhikāraṣṭe). We are always bound to do actions because we are created by three guṇas. For this reason, we are determined to do our actions. We can get a moral life by performing our prescribed actions. As a result of that, we can get a peaceful life.

Thus, the ethics of Kant and the ethics of Bhagavadgītā intended to say that we should do our moral actions for getting moral life even though the criteria of moral actions differ. That means if we accept either the moral action of Kant or the moral action of Bhagavadgītā then we can easily lead a moral life.

3. Another similarity between them is that according to both Kant and Bhagavadgītā, Moral action is needed to determine the true meaning of life.

For Bhagavadgītā, one can lead a good life if he would be a moral agent in the true sense of the term. This is where the relevance of Lokasamgraha actually hinges on.



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On the other hand, Kant also said about the meaning of life. However, the meaning of life of Kant is very similar to Bhagavadgītā. For Kant, a moral agent would be one who becomes a member of the kingdom of ends. He can find the meaning of real life. Therefore, according to both Kant and Bhagavadgītā, the genesis of moral action or desireless action is to determine the meaning of life and to reveal the reality in the true sense of the term.

Dissimilarities between the Ethics of Kant and the Ethics of Bhagavadgītā on Moral Actions:

1. The first dissimilarity between them is about the nature of moral action.

According to Kant, if an action is done for the sake of duty alone then it would be treated as moral Action. If an action is done with the desire of getting something then it would not be treated as moral action. If we do our action for the sake of some specific ends then such kind of action has no moral value. For Kant, such type of action can be treated as socially good, but it has no moral value.

On the other hand, in Bhagavadgītā, if an action is done with the desire for Lokasaṅgraha then it would be treated as moral action. Bhagavadgītā does not suggest us to do the action for the sake of duty alone. If an action is done without any egoistic desire to the result thereof then it would be treated as moral action.

2. The second difference between them is the notion of highest good.

We have seen after Kant that the highest good is good will. Good will is unconditional good. It is unqualified good. Its goodness is not dependent on any context. It has intrinsic value. It is good in itself. Under the human condition, a will is acting for the sake of duty is called good will. It should be noted that there is no necessary connection between good will and duty. We have also seen that it is also different from complete good or summum bonum. Summum bonum includes both Virtue and happiness. In Kantian ethics, it should be noted that Kant did not deny happiness. However, according to him, happiness must not be the motive for pursuing morality. It means that happiness can be accepted if it is not in conflict with the moral Law.

On the other hand, in Bhagavadgītā, Mokṣa is the highest good. One can get infinite bliss of contact with the Supreme Being in Liberation. According to Bhagavadgītā, We should do our action for getting the ultimate end, which is nothing other than Mokṣa.

3. Another difference between them is that Kantian ethics about action is known as the concept of Deontological but the Gita is not.

For Kant, an action is done from duty has its moral value, not in the intention to be attained by it. If an action is done solely from the principle of will then it has moral worth. For Kant, if an action is performed irrespective of all objects of the faculty of desire then it has moral worth. Kant's deontology is called rule Deontology by some scholars. For them, Kant did not accept any exception in his morality. He states only the maxim 'the duty for duty sake'.

On the other hand, we have seen that the ethics of Bhagavadgītā about moral action is not deontological. Let me explain, why is the concept of Niṣkāma karma not deontological? According to Bhagavadgītā, we should do our actions for Lokasaṅgraha. All desires would not be eradicated in Bhagavadgītā. If there is a desire in our action for getting Lokasaṅgraha then it has moral worth. That is why such type of action would be treated as moral action. Thus, Bhagavadgītā does not suggest us to do an action for the sake of duty alone. On the other hand, for Kant, an action should be done for the sake of duty alone. In this regard, we can say that the doctrine of niṣkāma karma of Bhagavadgītā is not deontological like Kant's theory of Moral actions.



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4. Another difference between them is that Kant did not recognize the concept of Svadharma in his ethics but Gita did it.

It means that Kant gave his moral theory for all rational Beings. It is not limited to any varṇa, creed, group, etc. According to him, one as a rational being should do an action for the sake of duty.

On the other hand, we have seen that Lord Kṛṣṇa holds that there are four varṇa in this world and they are created By Him based on guṇas and karma. There are some prescribed duties for every varṇa in society. These prescribed duties are called svadharma. For Kṛṣṇa, everyone is born in particular varṇa based on the result of actions of one's previous birth. So, we have to perform our svadharma. It is also noticeable that if an action is granted for a Brāhmana then it would not be granted for a kṣatriya. It means that an action may not be valid to all varṇas. A brāhmana's action is called paradharma for a kṣatriya. Paradharma means duty (dharma) of another person. For Kṛṣṇa, if any varṇa performs paradharma for Lokasaṅgraha then such type of actions do not lead to Lokasaṅgraha. It means that such type of effort is gone to vain. Paradharma is forbidden for every varṇa. Paradharma is bad for doer and society. It means that by performing paradharma one cannot get Mokṣa. Thus, we should do our svadharma for getting Mokṣa. However, there is no reference to the varṇa system in Kantian Ethics. Kantian ethics remain completely silent about the varṇa system.

5. Another difference between them is that there is no place of any desire to the result of an action that is either egoistic or altruistic in Kantian ethics for doing moral action, except reverence for the moral law but the Gita does not totally eradicate it:

According to Kant, if we act based on any desire which is either egoistic or altruistic then our maxim about action is to be treated as a material maxim. Material maxim is dependent on our sensuous inclinations. Such type of material maxim refers to the desire goals. It entails that if an action is done with material maxim then it has no moral value. Thus the maxim of an action is done for the sake of duty must not be material. However, it should be formal. A formal maxim is a kind of maxim that is not dependent on desire ends.

On the other hand, we have seen that Lord Kṛṣṇa did not advise to eradicate all desires in Bhagavadgītā. He just wanted to say through Arjuna that everyone should eradicate his egoistic desire for performing actions. When one can go beyond the Circle of 'I-ness and My-ness', then one can know one's real nature. As a result of that one can do lokasaṅgraha. By acting for Lokasaṅgraha one can get Mokṣa. According to Bhagavadgītā, if any action is enveloped with a desire for the welfare of the world (Lokasaṅgraha) then it gathers ethical value. Thus, according to Bhagavadgītā, egoistic desire should be sublimated. Those actions which are not concerned with egoistic ends, they should be treated as moral actions even if there are some desires behind them.

6. Another difference between them is that in Kantian ethics, according to the formula of the end in itself but the Gita is not:

We should always treat humanity as an end; never simply as a Means. It means that for Kant, we as rational persons should treat ourselves and also other rational beings as ends in themselves. In this regard, Kant remarks, 'I cannot dispose of man in my person by maiming, spoiling, or killing'. Here Kant may desire to say that we cannot kill any rational person for any reason. That is why, he did not accept any exception in his morality. For Kant, every rational being is an end in itself. We should be members of a kingdom of ends. Every rational being should act as a law-making member of a kingdom of ends. It means that if we treat any rational being simply as a means then our action is not treated as moral action. Thus, the killing of a rational being is not granted in Kantian ethics.

On the contrary, Bhagavadgītā holds that by performing own svadharma if one kills someone then it is morally granted. It means that for Lokasaṅgraha one can kill someone by performing svadharma. We have also seen that in the righteous battle(Dharmayudha/Kurukshetra), Lord Kṛṣṇa suggests Arjuna that you should prefer your svadharma. If you kill someone by performing your kṣatriya dharma then you would go to heaven and do help for the welfare of the world. As



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a result of that, you would not incur sin and get Mokṣa. For Kṛiṣṇa, we should do our svadharma. In performing svadharma one can get peace and perfectness. Thus, the killing of a human being is granted in Bhagavadgītā.

7. We find another difference between Kant's ethics and the ethics of Bhagavadgītā that according to Kant, if an action is performed by influencing senses then it has no Moral value but Bhagavadgītā prescribes actions with senses for Lokasamgraha.

According to Kant, Duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the moral law. Kant further says, 'What I recognize immediately as law for me, I recognize with reverence, which means merely consciousness of the subordination of my will to a law without the mediation of external influences on my senses'. Thus, if an action is done with reverence for the universal law then it has moral value. In other words, if an action is done by influencing senses then it has no moral value.

On the other hand, Bhagavadgītā holds that one should perform one's svadharma by way of conquering the senses (Jita- indriyah). In this regard, Lord Kṛiṣṇa claims that the yogins (men of action) act simply with the senses, abandoning attachment, only for the motive of purification of their souls. It means that according to Bhagavadgītā, if anyone performs his prescribed actions with his senses for Lokasamgraha or Mokṣa then such types of actions would be treated as moral actions.

8. Another difference between them is that Kant did not recognize the cycle of birth and death of the soul in his ethics but the Gita recognizes it.

Kant technically claims that the immortality of the soul is an endless duration of the existence and personality of the same rational being.

On the other hand, Bhagavadgītā accepted the cycle of birth and death of the soul. The cycle of birth and death of the soul is called bondage. It (bondage) is the fruit of the karma of previous karmas. We can get mokṣa from this Bondage by performing actions with niṣkāma manner.

9. Another noticeable difference between them is that the concept of existence of God.

Kant accepted the existence of God as a postulate of practical reason for protecting his morality. In this regard, Kant remarks, the realization of summum bonum in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law. He also claims, 'The summum Bonum is possible in the world only on the supposition of a Supreme Being having a Causality corresponding to moral character and that is God'.

On the other hand, we have seen after Bhagavadgītā that the ultimate end of our action is to attain God. For Bhagavadgītā, everything of this universe arises from Godly existence. In this regard, Lord Kṛiṣṇa asserts, 'I am the father of this universe, The mother, the support and the grandsire, I am the object of knowledge, the purifier, And the syllable om. I am also Rg, the Sāma, and the Yajur Vedas. It means that we should do our action in niṣkāma manner for attaining the Supreme Being. Attaining the Supreme Being is called Mokṣa'.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, both Kant and Gita advocate a non-consequentialism which states that moral action does not depends upon any consequence or result or outcome. This research article compares and contrasts the ethical systems of the Bhagavadgita and Kant. While both preach against following desires and uphold duty for its own sake, there are important differences. The Bhagavadgita's ethics are closely tied to its views of religion and metaphysics, seeing the world as relatively real but part of the higher absolute reality of Brahman. It reconciles free will and destiny by arguing we are free to control tendencies from past lives through reason. Like Kant, it emphasizes doing duty regardless of results. However, Kant sees



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freedom as an inference needed to conceive of a rational will, while reconciling freedom and causality by distinguishing how we are determined physically but free in our mind.

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