

Bhagavadgita on Self - A Study

KALO SONA ROY

Assistant Professor in Philosophy

Dr. Gour Mohan Roy College, Monteswar, Purba Bardhaman (W.B.) India

ABSTRACT

In order to excite a sense of unreality of things in the mind of Arjuna Lord Krsna teaches him spiritual science. According to the Gita, the self should be distinguished from the body. The self is indestructible, changeless, eternal, one and all-pervasive, whereas the body is limited, multiple and impermanent. The body is killed, not the self.

Key Words : Self, Body, Intellect, *Adhyatmvidya*, Samadhi

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of human civilization man wants to know what is unknown. He takes great interest in knowing his own self. Indian Philosophy, we see puts emphasis on the problems of man. But different systems of Indian Philosophy widely differ in explaining the nature of self. In the present paper the nature of self will be taken into consideration in the light of the Bhagavadgita.

The *Bhagavadgitopanisad* is the full title of the text. The *Bhagavadgita* is its short title. It is popularly known as the *Gita*. The *Gita* forms part of the Bhismaparvan of the *Mahabharata*. It is not looked upon as *sruti*, but is regarded as *smṛti*. It represents the *smṛti* school of Vedanta. The message of deliverance of the *Bhagavadgita* is simple. It teaches a method which is within the reach of all. Here Lord Krsna is presented as the teacher, Arjuna as the representative man, the battle-field of Kuruksetra as the human life and Kauravas as the enemies who impede the progress of the soul. In the first chapter of the *Gita* we see the passing mood of disappointed Arjuna who is unwilling to fight against his relatives in the battle-field of Kuruksetra. In order to excite a sense of unreality of things in the mind of Arjuna, Lord Krsna teaches him spiritual science that leads the mind of Arjuna from the dark night of the soul to the upward path in which Arjuna realizes the delight of spirit.

In the second chapter of the *Gita* Lord Krsna gives a full account of the nature of the self or *atman*. The materialists as also the common people believe that *atman* or the self is a body associated with consciousness. This view is supported by the direct experience “I am fat”, “I move” etc. But the *Gita* says the self is distinct from the body. The self or *atman* is devoid of last and first transformations, whereas the body does have both first and last transformations. *Atman* or self is indestructible (*avinasi*) because it is *avyaya* i.e. changeless. Destruction is possible through the loss of part or through the loss of attribute. But *atman* has no parts and attributes. So its destruction is not possible. Lord Krsna further says, *atman* is *aja* i.e. free from birth, because it is eternal (*nitya*). Birth is not noticed in the case of that which exists forever. So he asserts that *atman* cannot be the killer or the killed.¹ It is not killed when the body is killed.² He who thinks “I am the killer of this one” and he who thinks “I am killed with the destruction of the body” both of them identify the self with the body. They do not know that the self is changeless and is not an agent.

According to the *Gita*, the self is one and all-pervasive, but the body is limited and multiple. One self pervades all diverse bodies. The body should be distinguished from the self, otherwise the recognition (*pratyabhijna*) of “I” would not come into existence. The recognition (*pratyabhijna*) is a perceptual valid

cognition. It is caused by the sense-object contact and the impression (*samskara*) left by the previous cognition. Everybody may have common recognition that “ I who had perceived my parents in my boyhood, am perceiving my children in my old age”. But there is no slightest trace of recognition between the bodies of youth and old age. That which is constant must be different from that which is variable just like a string from the flower. The impression formed in somebody can not produce recognition in another body. So the “I” consciousness which is constant even in the variations of the bodies of youth etc. is different from the bodies. In the *Gita* Lord Krsna again seeks to convince Arjuna by saying that the difference between the self and the body can also be known from the dream experience. In dream state the dreamer while lying in his own bed often experiences that he is moving in a remote place. The body of the dreamer lying on the bed is empirically real, while the body experienced in a dream is empirically false. But the very same self remains in the waking and dream states. Again, Lord Krsna seeks to defend his position by citing the perception of the *yogin*. The *yogin* through the power of yoga may take the form of a tiger. While the tiger body and the human body of the *yogin* are different, but the self of the *yogin* is one.

Here a question arises in the mind of Arjuna that the self is indestructible, but the bodies are destructible. Battle is a destroyer of the bodies. How can he destroy the bodies of Bhishma and others which were the means of many meritorious deeds? Lord Krsna meets the question by saying that whenever the wearing cloth becomes old one throws it away and puts on a new cloth. Similarly, when the body become *jrna* i.e. unfit for one’s life’s purpose the embodied self rejects the old body and takes up a new body, i.e. it enters into another body in accordance with its destiny(*adrsta*) Ordinary people think they are the body. They are sorry to lose it. According to the *Gita*, the idea that they are the eternal self has not come to them yet. But a little awareness is there. That is why Lord Krsna advises Arjuna that death is something like change of dress.³ This is what we do every day with our dresses. And the self does that at the time of death. This cloth is old, this body is old, let me get a new one. The *Gita* firmly states that it would be wrong to think that the self living in a body gets destroyed when the body is destroyed. Weapon can cut the body, but it cannot cut the self. We associate ourselves with the limitations of the body and feel we are wounded. Fire burns the

body, but cannot burn the self. Similarly, all other means of destruction fail to destroy the self. The *Gita* teaches again and again that body may be valuable but the self is more attractive and valuable like a gem-box. The box looks very beautiful but the gem inside it is more valuable.

According to the *Gita*, the self is not a thing. It is eternal consciousness behind all things. It is eternal (*nitya*), omnipresent (*sarvagata*), changeless (*sthana*), unmoving (*acala*) and immutable (*sanatana*).⁴ As the self is eternal, it cannot be produced. As it is omnipresent, it cannot be acquired. As it is changeless, it cannot be transformed. As it is static, it is not subject to change of condition.⁵ The *Gita* further points out that the self is not perceptible as being formless it does not come within the range of organs. So it is *avyakta* i.e. unmanifest. It is *achintya* i.e. unthinkable. In our practical life we catch the things of the world through two sources- one is thought and the other is speech. When we give a speech and think of something we say we understand that thing. But the self or *atman* is unthinkable. If we think of the unthinkable we cannot catch that unthinkable at all. The perceptual cognition fails to reveal the very nature of the self. So the *Gita* calls it *achintya*. On the contrary, the bodies remain unmanifest in the beginning, they become manifest in the middle and after death they become unmanifest. So the self is not identical with the body.

In this context, I like to refer to the imagery of a chariot as described in the *Kathopnisad*. The sacred Upanisad declares:

atmanam rathinam viddhi sariram rathameva tu/
buddhim tu sarathim viddhi manah pragameva ca//
indriyani hayanahur visayan tesu gocaran⁶

The seer of the Upanisad gives a vivid picture of a moving chariot. Five horses are dragging a chariot. One person is sitting on its back seat. A charioteer is controlling the horses of the chariot by his rein. The horses are dragging the chariot as per direction of the charioteer. Ultimately, the person sitting on the back seat of the chariot (*rathin*) reaches his destination. Now if the charioteer does not control or fails to control the horses by his rein then the horses will drag the chariot anywhere according to their will. As a matter of fact, the sitting person will not be able to reach his destination. Here the seer of the Upanisad compares the chariot to the body (*sarira*), the man sitting on the back seat of the chariot to the self (*atman*), the charioteer to the intellect (*buddhi*), the rein to mind and five horses to five external sense-organs (*jnanendriya-s*). The Upanisad advises

an aspirant (*mumukshu vyakti*) to properly lead the external sense-organs by controlling his mind through intellect (*buddhi*). If he exerts control over his sense-organs and mind, then he would be able to be united with the Supreme Self. If anybody does not control his mind and sense-organs his union with the Supreme Self would be in futile. This verse nicely indicates that the self is distant from the body, intellect, mind and sense-organs.

The *Gita* holds that the self or *atman* is infinite. It pervades the whole universe. Things are created and destroyed, but the self cannot be destroyed at all. Behind the changing body-mind complex there is something eternal infinite in man. *Atman* or the self is eternal. When the body goes away it is always there. It is in everyone - in human beings, in animals, in insects, everywhere. The difference between human being and animal is, animal cannot realize the truth, while the human being has the organic capacity to realize the truth. The human being can know the truth of the world and the truth of his own self. The *Gita* tenders advice to all of us through Arjuna that although the self is not perceptual or inferable, it can be realized by the appropriate methods.

According to the *Gita*, it is impossible for an ignorant person to be a teacher. Similarly, a student who does not possess of such disciplines like *sama*, *dama* etc, is not competent to study the spiritual science. The teacher of spiritual science (*adhyatmavidya*) is wonderful. The student is wonderful. The realization of the nature of self is also wonderful. Through the instructions of the scriptures and the teacher and through the maturity of *samadhi*, a competent student visualizes the self as something comparable to a wonder. His realization of the self is like a wonder as it is a revealer of Truth. Anyone

who realizes the self is like a wonder to others. Speaking about the self, which is beyond all speech, is like a wonder. I like to conclude my paper by quoting the memorable verse of the *Gita*

ascaryavat pasyati kascid enam ascaryavad vadati tathaiva canyah/

ascaryavaccainamanyah srnoti srutyapyenam vada na caiva kascit // 7

REFERENCES

1. *nyam hani na hanyate – Bhagavadgita* 2. 19^b
2. *na hanyate hanyamane sarire- op. cit* 2. 20^b
3. *vasamsi jirmani yatha vihaya navani grhnati naroparani /tatha sarirani vihaya jirmanyanyani samyati navani dehi // - op. cit* 2. 22
4. *nityah sarvagatah sthanuracaloyam sanatanah- op. cit* 2.24^b
5. *avyaktoyamacintyoyamavikaryoyamucyate- op. cit* 2. 25^a
6. *Kathopanisad- 1. 3-4^a*
7. *Bhagavadgita – 2.29*

Bibliography

- *Bhagavadgita* with two commentaries *Sankarabhasya* and *Anandagiri*, ed. Pramathanath Tarkabhusan, Dav Sahitya Kutir, Calcutta (1368 B.S.)
- *Bhagavadgita* with *Gudarthadipika*, ed Nalinikanta Brahma, Nava Bharata Publishars, Calcutta (1986)
- *Kathopanisad* , ed. Brahmachari Medhacaitanya, Vivekananda Math, Barrakpore, North 24 Paraganas (1993)
