

Karmayoga Analysed through Spinoza's Perspective on 'Eternity' and Bergson's 'Élan Vital'

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Abstract

This study aims to unveil the dimensions of *karmayoga* on duty and action exposed in the *Bhagavad Gita* from the philosophical perspective of eternity postulated by Spinoza and the concept of *élan vital* (the vital force or impulse of life) propounded by Bergson. The *karmayoga*, the yoga of action, postulates the theory of *niskama karma*, the action that disregards the results. Likewise, it also advocates for renunciation in action: performing actions without being mentally attached to them leads one to an ideal stage because what one thinks becomes one's will. If the doer performs actions with craving or desires, the purity of action manipulates itself. When the doer rises above these binding factors of action, the banalities of the mundane world become puny. Then one realizes that the creation dwells within, and attains liberation, attaining reality in the whole integrated form. The *karmayoga* paves the path for the welfare of living beings. This philosophy of action finds its vibrations in the philosophical tenets of Spinoza and Bergson. To explore these concepts, this study implements the qualitative approach to research and exploratory methods. Likewise, Spinoza's perspective of eternity and Bergson's *élan vital* have been applied as the major theoretical lens to unravel the

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underlying contents and themes of *karmayoga*. The study opens new perspectives to understand the concepts of the *karmayoga* from new standpoints.

Keywords: *Élan vital*, *karmayoga*, liberation, metempsychosis, *niskama karma*, renunciation

Introduction

The study undertakes a quest on the dimensions of *karmayoga* through the philosophical lenses of Baruch Spinoza's *deus sive natura* and Henri Bergson's *élan vital*. Bergson's *élan vital* is the life force or impulse of life which is a creative force, and its realization leads to the evolution. Spinoza's *deus sive natura* is "god or nature to denote the totality of what exists" (Grayling, 2019, p. 213). He encourages a person to see everything through the perspectives of eternity and totality. The *Bhagavad Gita* encompasses these ideations side by side with the concept of *karmayoga* (the yoga of action). The quest emerges when the *Bhagavad Gita* opens with a problem: Arjuna, the warrior, wants to abstain from the battle rather than kill his kith and kin. Lord Krishna, the chief speaker, addresses his despondency by positing a discussion on the desirability of action or renunciation in action. He crystallizes that active action without any expectation of results can lead to inner realization and inner evolution. The desireless actions are called *niskama karma*. This aspect of *karmayoga* consolidates the essence of renunciation in action not renunciation of action. The doer is liberated; the mundane concerns of the world do not bind the agent. One becomes part of the cosmos and engages in the *loksangraham* (welfare of humanity and the world). Through *karmayoga*, the *Bhagavad Gita* demands fearless adventures into the path of dutiful action not surrendering in front of ritual practices laid down by ethical or moral doctrines. It proposes a project of inner realization and evolution. All these essence and vibrations of *karmayoga* seemingly resonate in the philosophy of Spinoza and Henri Bergson. Spinoza's philosophy perceives things outside the world from the perspective of eternity. It means one is a part of the enormous whole thus prompting humanity to analyze them in a cosmic context. Henri Bergson's concept of *élan vital* focuses on the creative impulse for inner evolution. Thus, the present study reinterprets the *karmayoga* of the *Bhagavad Gita* in light of these philosophical lenses. The study answers these research questions to explore these aspects: a) what are the canons of *karmayoga*? b) How do the philosophical patterns

of Spinoza's perspective on eternity and Bergson's *élan vital* have similarities with the philosophy of action in the *karmayoga*?

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a "geet" (song) of "Bhagavat" (lord). It is "indeed a song—it is Krishna's song" (Rosen, 2007, p. x). The book has 18 chapters comprising 700 verses on multidimensional subjects. The book is an integral part of the epic *The Mahabharata* written in Sanskrit. The date of composition and the authorship of the *Bhagavad Gita* is unknown. Radhakrishnan (2010) opines that the date of composition could be during the fifth century BCE. The authorship is attributed to its compiler named Vyasa. The *Gita* embarks on the theory of *karma* (action) in an integrated way. It is the way to break from the bondage by realizing the context in totality. Capra (1991) consolidates the essence of *karma* and *karmayoga* when he says:

The dynamic force of the play is *karma*, *Karma* means 'action'. It is the active principle of the play, the total universe in action, where everything is dynamically connected with everything else. In the words of the *Gita*, '*Karma* is the force of creation, wherefrom all things have their life.

As long as our view of the world is fragmented, as long as we are under the spell of *maya* and think that we are separated from our environment and act independently, we are bound by *karma*. Being free from the bond of *karma* means to realize the unity and harmony of all nature, including ourselves, and to act accordingly. (p. 101)

This paper attempts to explore these tenets and vibes through the philosophy of *deus sive natura* and *élan vital* postulated by Spinoza and Bergson.

Review of Literature

The reading public of the world read the *Bhagavad Gita* through its English translation in 1785 A.D. by Charles Wilkins with an introduction by then governor-general of British India, Warren Hastings. Devdutt Pattanaik (2015) justifies, "By the 1980s, before the Internet explosion, there were an estimated 3,000 translations of The *Gita* in almost fifty languages, and nearly a thousand in English" (p. 27). At present, the number is increasing. The popularity of this book lies in its profundity in handling multidimensional subject matters as well as the versatility infused with its message via interpretations aligned with modern

discourses like Marxism, Eco-criticism, pedagogical strategies, and so on. However, the text has not been interpreted by Spinoza's perspective of eternity and *élan vital*. There is research based on the commentaries on *karmayoga*, but not comparative studies as in the current paper. Sargeant (2009) in his study of the *Bhagavad Gita* sees the text as a landmark in the arena of religion and philosophy. The poet, Emerson strengthens this idea when he says, "It was the first of the books; it was as if an empire spake to us, nothing small and unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence" (as cited in Goldberg, 2010, p.32). From the above descriptions, one could infer the philosophical depth and integrity of this work. Another poet Thoreau (2004) opines, "In the morning, I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavat Geeta*, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison, with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial" (p. 288). Thoreau finds sublimity in reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and concludes that modern philosophy pales in comparison to it. The present study attempts to verify his comments through an engagement of comparative philosophy.

Among the different Yogas explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*, *karmayoga* has its implications and fundamentals. T. S. Eliot in his work *The Four Quartets* muses on Lord Krishna and the practical aspect of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant—
Among other things—or any way of putting the same thing:
That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender
spray
Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,
Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been
opened.
O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to port, and whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgment of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.

Not farewell,

But fare forward, voyagers. (as cited in Rosen, 2007, p. 153)

Eliot in his poem emphasizes the power of the present moment against the past and the future. Time, he versifies, is a one-dimensional object that belongs to the 'now.' Eliot saw Eastern philosophy as a means of salvation and enlightenment for the West and he made it a point to refer to such philosophy in this poem. His concerns here are more on human mortality and impermanence which remain the major themes in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* describes *karmayoga* as the means to rise beyond mundane entanglement by subtracting the attachment and ego. Vivekananda (2011) finds *karmayoga* as the central teaching of the *Bhagavadgita*. He says, "The *Gita* teaches that all work should be done. . . . He who is one with the lord through yoga performs all his work by becoming immersed in concentration, and does not seek any personal benefit" (p.153). *Karmayoga* teaches the basic aspect of work as duty where the doer does not crave the benefits.

The *Bhagavad Gita* examines and exposes the essence of duty that a human should perform. Aldous Huxley (1972) says that the *Gita* is the systematic scripture to talk about perennial philosophy. *Karmayoga* embarks on the philosophical aspect of the life world, peace, and enlightenment. Robert J. Oppenheimer, known as the father of the atomic bomb, in an interview, delivered the essence of duty for him as a scientist to create the atomic bomb. He documents what he remembered after the first test of the atomic bomb at the Manhattan Project:

We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture the *Bhagavad Gita*. Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form and says, "Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of the worlds." I suppose we all thought that one way or another. (Atomic Heritage, 2015, July 10, YouTube)

His dilemma was like that of Arjuna in the *Gita*. Shri Krishna delivering the message of *karmayoga* suggests Arjuna must fight and kill his kith and kin to maintain righteousness by fulfilling the duty of a warrior and prince. Did Oppenheimer's sense of duty in creating the atom bomb to eliminate the ferocious rule of the Japanese imperial army at odds with the moral thinking of the world? Perhaps, the reason why he sought answers in the *Gita*: "I

suppose we all thought that one way or another.”

This study attempts to understand such mindsets by locating the *karmayoga* through different philosophical lenses to discover more interpretations.

Methodology

The article applies the paradigm of qualitative research because according to Pant (2018), such research methods provide deep insights and knowledge about the concepts (p.140). Besides, in this paradigm, there are no predetermined conditions to explore a concept, and it prioritizes new obscure issues. Kumar (2014) views that this approach to research aims to explore the diversity of a subject matter (379). Since this study aims to explore the aspects of *karmayoga* related to duty and action, the qualitative approach was selected. Spinoza's perspective of eternity and Bergson's concepts of *élan vital* have been used as the theoretical lens to explore the fundamentals of duty, action, righteousness, and wisdom that *karmayoga* exposes. The philosophical strands of Spinoza and Bergson have been integrated with the context. The exploration and interpretation of content have been regarded as the method. In this regard, The *Bhagavad Gita* remains the main source of primary concepts. The concepts regarding *karmayoga* have been selected by applying the method of purposive sampling. According to Croucher & Cronn-Mills (2015), purposive sampling focuses on specific concepts while excluding other concepts (p. 95). Books on philosophy by Russell, Tarnas, Law, Grayling, Gaarder, and Durant have been consulted and cited to relate the philosophical ideations of Spinoza and Bergson. Related criticisms, reviews, and online sources have been considered secondary sources.

Analysis and Interpretation

The subsequent sections analyze and interpret the dimensions of *karmayoga* from the philosophical perspectives of Spinoza and Bergson.

The Perspective of Eternity and Life Force in Karmayoga

The *Bhagavad Gita* exposes the essential aspects of the life world, human beings, and creations. The pilgrims have to leap into action shunning the preoccupations and the prejudices that have been rooted in their minds. Mehta (2006) views that the concept of *karmayoga* in the *Bhagavad Gita* opens “new dimensions of living

enabling us to scale new heights of human endeavor and to probe greater depths of human existence where the mystery of life stands revealed in all its grandeur for man to see" (p. 33). The discourse opens a new door for an individual to enter into the domain of spiritual liberation.

The *Bhagavad Gita* not only reveals forth the *brahmavidya* (philosophical interpretation), but also the *yogasashtra*, which is the practical application of the *brahmavidya* because the world is not only to be contemplated but also to be faced and lived on. So, the *Bhagavad Gita* upholds individual nature for the betterment of the world. When Arjuna hesitates to execute his authentic duty, Shri Krishna gives the philosophical interpretation of action and inaction. He also explains the *yogas* in a very coherent way to dispel Arjuna's hesitation. The whole discourse centers on "an exploration in the nature of action" (Devji, 2013, p. 119) that delivers the ways to transcend the physical world.

The word *yoga* means "harnessing or applying oneself to" (Hiriyanna, 2000, p. 19). The *yoga* of the *Bhagavad Gita* differs from the *yoga* of Patanjali, who defines it as a system to grow spiritually by the cessation of the mind. *Yoga* has its root in "yuj," which signifies "to bind together." In this regard, *yoga*, therefore, signifies "to yoke, harness, employ, set to work, coordinate, organize, and harmonize. It is based on a more basic root 'yu' meaning to unite and to separate; hence the idea of coordination" (Frawley, 1998, p. 208). In this way, it also becomes a way to attain the stage of divinity (*brahmasthiti*), and the eternity of God (*brahmanirvana*). Therefore, *yoga* means yoking together and controlling our passions, which ultimately opens the passage from the narrow personal ego into the realm of liberation and inner evolution. According to Zaehner (1982), *yoga* could signify spiritual practice and exercise, integration and moderation, along with method and power (p. xxi). In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna gives practical implications to the concept of *yoga* when he says, "*yogah karmasu kausalam* (Yoga is a skill in action)" (Sargeant, 2009, p. 135). Here, the word *yogah* refers to *karmayoga*. Then in the entire discourse of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *yoga* means *karmayoga*. In this way, the *Bhagavad Gita* becomes the source for the multifarious phases of *karmayoga* for liberation and evolution. To attain this stage of divinity with the evolution of the inner self, relying on the power of action, the *Bhagavad Gita* propagates the *yoga* of *karma*.

The word *karma* is derived from the Sanskrit word "kri" which

means “to do.” *Karma* then means action in its disciplined performance. The word *karma* holds multilayered meanings and interpretations. The *Bhagavad Gita* expounds the term *karma* as any action performed by body, sense organs, mind, and intellect. It is *yajna* (sacrifice), *tapas* (austerity), *dana* (liberality). *Karma* refers to *tyaga* (renunciation) in the *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 8, verse 3 where Lord Krishna says, “Karma is the force of creation, wherefrom all things have their life” (8:3; Mascaro trans., 1994, p.77). The *Bhagavad Gita* also modifies the conventional concept of *karma* as metempsychosis. It means *karma* does not entangle a human with the attachment of the gross world; rather it becomes a means to liberate one from the repercussions of *karmic* consequences. If it binds, then it also liberates.

The concept of *karmayoga* as defined by Shri Krishna is a method of realization and evolution of the Self. Such a realization is achieved by worldly actions without wishing for the consequences they bear. The action which is done out of selfless motive is the *niskama karma* (selfless action), and this takes an individual onto a higher plane. This is the central message of *karmayoga* that Shri Krishna postulates in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work.

Do thy work as in peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind--a peace that is never the same.

Work done for a reward is much lower than the work done in the Yoga of wisdom. Seek salvation in the wisdom of reason. How poor those who work for a reward!

In this wisdom a man goes beyond what is well done and what is not well done. Go thou therefore to wisdom: Yoga is wisdom in work (2: 47, 48, 49, 50; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 52)¹

The word “Yoga” signifies *karmayoga* in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Its discipline relies on taking an attitude of selfless action. It propagates the renunciation in action. The energetic performance brings positive vibrations while acting without any intention of pros and cons, reward, and profit blows the conch of benevolence throughout the world as well. The binding quality of action and metempsychosis can be transcended only by eliminating motive and desire for personal ego fulfillment. Only the *élan vital*, as

Bergson says, should be realized (as cited in Durant 462). The *niskama karma* of *Karmayoga* pleads that evolution does not start with the matter as the matter is outward; rather it flowers inward, which is similar to the concept of Bergson's *élan vital*. In this sense, life is not machinery. It is the power that can grow and restore itself, and at the same time reshape itself according to the circumstances. In this sense, life makes efforts. Durant (1961) justifies Bergson's philosophy by proposing that creation is not a mystery. The living experiences it in themselves when they act freely, consciously choosing actions. The struggles, sufferings, ambitions, defeats, pains, and yearnings to be better, and to transform into a higher state of life are only because of the role of *Élan Vital* which is in all humans (462). This is the truth that Shri Krishna inspires Arjuna to realize and which could be interpreted as the *élan vital* from a Western philosophical perspective. Above all, that impulse and urge to conduct desireless actions transform this world. *KarmaOyoga* postulates to act without the intention of reward is to become timeless. Such tunes are detected in Bergson's philosophy. To act in the spirit of selflessness and ego-lessness is *karmayoga*.

Performing action regardless of the motive detaches oneself from personal ego. It makes "one's self-conscious identity with the divine—are turn to action as a higher form of *karmayoga*" (Sartori, 2013, p. 61). By acting with a pure motive, and abiding by the role of zero personal gratification, one can break free from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Such an inner evolution is only the outcome of selfless action which guides one to act, renouncing the fruits of the action. This fundamental essence of *karmayoga* leads to what the *Gita* calls the ultimate reality. The Tao philosophy of Lao Tzu also justifies this essence as it becomes the convergent issue to justify the theme of *karmayoga* in this context:

To pursue the academic, add to it daily,

To pursue the Tao, subtract from it daily,

Subtract and subtract again,

To arrive at nonaction.

Through nonaction nothing is left undone.

The nonaction is the stage of nonattachment where the doer becomes impartial and natural. Non-attachment does not mean one owns anything; it means nothing can own one. So the doer or agent is liberated by being natural. Being natural is the ultimate

stage of finding the Tao—the ultimate path. The more one subtracts from the repercussions of the action, the more one becomes free from the gross attachment and contextualizes oneself in the cosmic scene. One becomes part of creation when one widens the horizon. This aspect of *karmayoga* liberates one from craving desires.

The realization of the ultimate path and self-evolution shines after rising above the domain of compulsive and ego-perverted action. Any action should be realized in the context of totality as Spinoza has stated “*sub specie aeternitatis*” (as cited in Gaarder, 1996, p. 255), which means perceived from the perspective of eternity. This is a way to live a life in action as prescribed by one’s *dharma* (individual’s duty and nature). This is another name for spiritual freedom that results when an individual knows the value of the action. *Karmayoga* teaches that renouncing all action is another illusion. One should not renounce the action but renounce its fruits. This is the reason why the rejection of action by Arjuna on the battlefield is an example of false rationalization. It bears a deep base, but it has “stemmed from mundane concern” (Mehta, 2013, p. 101). Arjuna fails to perceive that reality lies beyond the mundane domain of sensationalistic and rationalistic doctrine. On the other hand, handling the prescribed worldly duties offers an opportunity to realize spiritual freedom, which ultimately opens the gateway to the realization of the Self:

Better one's own duty, though imperfect,

Than another's duty well performed;

Better death in (doing) one's own duty;

Another's duty brings danger. (3: 35; Edgerton trans., 1994, p. 39) ²

The actions essential for an individual to exist also become beneficial for society. So, relying on one’s actions and nature is the best way to imitate the action of others. This is the way to maintain the cosmic order to establish a healthy society.

To maintain cosmic integration and a benevolent society, one should eliminate the ego. It is also an essential factor for the spiritual awakening of the inner self. A *karmayogi* is galvanized by these spirits of *karma*. With these spirits, the *karmayogi* attains the zenith of evolution. Leggett (2002) marks the spirits of *karmayoga* and *karmayogi*:

The yoga of action, karma-yoga, has three elements: (1)

Stoical endurance of changes in the world; (2) Performance of right actions without laying any claim to their further results (technically called 'fruits'); (3) Practice of the profound Samadhi meditation, in which mind is focused and still, undisturbed by anything external or internal. (p. 25)

One who follows the three categories with the true spirit of actions and attains the stage of being a real person of action. Lord Krishna suggests to Arjuna that for the *karmayogi* there is no significant difference between heat, cold, pleasure, pain, and other dimensions of opposites since he transcends these categories with the radiance of self-crystallization.

An individual mind with pure intentions maintains a harmonious relationship with the people along with the creatures around him. This becomes the gateway for the contribution to establishing social welfare—*loksangraham*. A person who does not abide by his *swadharma* (duty) simply creates disorder and disharmony in social and worldly integration. That is why, the essence of true *dharma* remains in performing the prescribed duty with total devotion to action only. The seeker does not crave any specific desire. The perpetual tension between two incompatible forces becomes the base for the creative process. This is the nature of reality. The moment one realizes that life is a struggle against evil, one conducts the duties prescribed by *dharma*. This is the path to liberation and evolution because the effects of action start to liberate the doer, peeling away the veils between the doers and reality by eliminating personal will for the sake of society and the world. Without being contaminated by egocentric desires, the *karmayogi* can feel the co-existence of all *dharma*.

Arjuna is ignorant of this pattern of *karmayoga* that demands harmony of all parts. A *karmayogi* possesses these qualities. In him, the patterns of duty and righteousness are integrated. This individual Self is really in the abode of the Supreme One. Shri Krishna recites:

They all attain perfection when they find joy in their work.
Hear how a man attains perfection and finds joy in his work.

A man attains perfection when his work is worship of God,
from whom all things come and who is in all.

Greater is thine work, even if this be humble, than the work
of another, even if this be great. When a man does the work

God gives him, no sin can touch this man.

And a man should not abandon his work, even if he cannot achieve it in full perfection; because in all work there may be perfection, even as in all fire there is smoke. (18: 45, 46, 47, 48; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 119) ³

When an individual knows the co-existence of *karma* with righteousness and values of spiritual well-being, then she\he can maintain stability in the world. It establishes as the ultimate means and path for the welfare of the secular and spiritual world. In this way, the essence and fundamentals of *karmayoga* prove to be the pathfinder of the ideal society and state.

To unveil this concept, it is necessary to analyse Spinoza's concept of "*deus sive natura*" which signifies "god or nature, to denote the totality of what exists. For him the universe is God or God is the universe, nature is God or God is nature; they are one and the same thing" (Grayling, 2019, p. 213). If Shri Krishna says that "when a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch this man" (18: 46; Masacro trans., 1994, p. 119), he means to say that highlights Spinoza's concept of god as a single substance exists in the action that a human is prescribed to perform. If a human conducts the assigned duty without any selfish motives, one is liberated. One transcends the craving desires and attainment. The more one subtracts from the personal will, one attains perfection. Spinoza's version also clarifies that "what we consider to be separate things are, in truth, not separate entities or substances in their own right, but, like ripples on a lake, mere temporary undulations in the one great substance" (Law, 2013, p.130). In this aspect, the law of action is the form of being part of this collaborative dance of society. One is integrated with the greater domain of life world and its affairs. Shri Krishna says, "But the man who knows the relation between the forces of Nature and action, sees how some forces of Nature work upon other forces of Nature, and becomes not their slave" (3:28; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 58). One must realize the whole pattern in totality. One is not apart but attains value in the integrated form.

Renunciation in Karma (Action) and the Self-Realization

Lord Krishna, in discourses III, IV, and V of the *Bhagavad Gita*, crystallizes and develops the concept and phases of renunciation in action and wisdom (*Sankhya*). During the discussion, he opens the path for an individual soul to establish an eternal union with the Supreme Soul. The moment an individual soul finds itself with

the body, it becomes oblivious to the eternal union. This is exactly the concept Spinoza in the discussion on the Metaphysics of the substance when he says, "This is the definition of God. So the great one substance is both the natural and the divine in a single, indivisible package" (Law, 2013, p. 131). If everything is the manifestation of a single substance, then the righteous action assigned in a particular context certainly becomes the various attributes of the single divinity. It is an indivisible package. Shri Krishna clarifies, "All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of Nature; but the man lost in selfish delusion thinks that he himself is the actor" (3:27; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 58). Every action is interwoven in the larger totality and context of nature and the world. If one detaches from this context and totality, one is deluded. This is one of the aspects where the *Gita* speaks of Spinoza's concept of *deus sive natura*.

It is the power of divine illusion (*maya*) that obstructs this realization. The soul as the source of consciousness and prime mover is always distinct from matter. The eternal prime mover and the cosmic consciousness that dwells within us become unattained while the material manifestation of the body and the world appears as the reality for us.

To unveil this ignorance, Lord Krishna has enunciated different disciplines in the *Bhagavad Gita* namely *karmayoga*, *jnanayoga* and *bhaktiyoga* (the *yogas* of action, knowledge, and devotion). Until and unless the ego persists, these different *yogas* appear distinct from each other. The instant ego is annihilated; the distinction vanishes because all lead to the same goal of the spiritual evolution and the transcendental One.

The *jnanayoga* (the *yoga* of wisdom) and the *bhaktiyoga* (the *yoga* of Devotion) could be self explanatory, but *karmayoga* (the *yoga* of action) might be problematic if one fails to perceive its implied meanings. It is also often confused and known to a limited group of readers. Lord Krishna clarifies:

Thus received in line of succession,
The royal seers knew it.
In a long course of time in this world this
Discipline became lost, scorcher of the foe.
This very same by Me to thee today,
This ancient discipline, is proclaimed.

Thou art My devotee and friend, that is why;

For this is a supreme secret. (Edgerton trans, 1994, p. 43) ⁴

Sri Krishna justifies that *karmayoga* disappeared from the earth as if it has been eclipsed. So its message has remained a “supreme secret”, and he is justifying its message in the larger context of the law of duty and actions.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also modifies and expounds the stereotypical concept of *karma* as the cause of metempsychosis. Lord Krishna does not prioritize the result-oriented actions that lead to material glory, victory, prosperity, heaven, and so on. One can transcend the repercussion of action simply by abiding by the path of renunciation in action. The actions prescribed in the Vedic scriptures only for the reward of beneficial consequences do not represent the real essence of *karmayoga*. He says:

There are men who have no vision, and yet they speak many words. They follow the letter of Vedas, and they say: ‘there is nothing but this.’

Their soul is wrapped with selfish desires, and their heaven is a selfish desire. They have prayers for pleasures and power, the reward of which is earthly rebirth. (2: 42, 43; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 52) ⁵

Heavenly delights never open the path to inner realization and eternal bliss. Being not on the path of liberation, it leads to metempsychosis. The *Bhagavad Gita* postulates the concept that one cannot escape from action from birth till death. This emphasis on action finds its tenets in philosophy and the application of philosophy into action. Tarnas (2000) clarifies that extreme focus on the idea of God might confuse a subject, rather a genuine philosophy that relies on action to transform the world is essential (p.314). This notion enunciates the spirit of *karmayoga* because it advocates for selfless action for the sake of humanity. It advocates for the realization of ideals of duty and action being free from any religious dogma.

The whole universe is replete with action, and an individual should go on conducting his or her action without being affected by the pleasure senses. No one is free from action. One should make oneself as Sartre (1848) says, “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (p. 28). This enables one to be conscious of his responsibility. The *Gita* proclaims that humans are bound by the law of *karma*. It has a cause and effect relationship that

hurdles the path of liberation and realization though the action may be a good one because we reap as we sow in this world. This is the law of the universe. Lord Krishna advocates:

For not even for a moment can a man be without action. Helplessly are all driven to action by the forces born of Nature.

Action is greater than inaction: perform therefore thy task in life. Even the life of the body could not be if there were no action. (5: 5, 8; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 56)⁶

Both of these verses focus on the importance of action because the modes of the entire creation are action-oriented. The significance of these verses comes out when we discuss the view of Ramanuja regarding the concept of *karmayoga*. He conceptualizes that *karmayoga* provides the awareness and realization of the self (as cited in Raghavachar, 2004, p. 33-34). In the above verses, the concept of actions as the binding forces and they are bondage for liberation has been eliminated. In this way, the *Bhagavad Gita* gives the positive theory of the realization of the self.

One should note that churning the proper order by overstepping and overreaching in others' duties is guilt and sin. On the other hand, the fulfillment of one's duty no matter despicable may maintain the cosmic order and help the person to realize the inner reality. The *Bhagavad Gita* expounds on the notion of evolutionary liberation that reverberates in Bergson's philosophy as the creative evolution and *élan vital*. Creative Evolution is the realization of the life force and the realization "of free will" (Grayling, 2019, p. 508). It is the power of transformation. This transformation is possible by following the footsteps of *niskama karma*. *Niskama's* theory calls for a person to be unmindful of the result of his action. This is possible with the right knowledge when an individual gives up interest in results while performing the actions. It is possible when one is freed from *vasanas* (passions). Chinmayananda (2017) writes:

Egocentric actions leave their impressions behind which ultimately persecute the little ego with their reactions. All egocentric actions which are always motivated by selfish desires leave their ugly footprints upon the shores of mind (*vasanas*) while actions which are not ego motivated leave no trail, as birds leave no foot prints as they move along in the sky. (as cited in Lepes, 2017, pp. 40-41)

The desireless actions (*niskama karma*) never acquire *vasanas*. When the mind frees itself from accumulated *vasanas*, then it starts slowly getting rid of them and becomes much purer. When the unwanted passions (*vasanas*) and desires dissolve, the personal ego merges into the realization of its essence, rising beyond the mundane concern into the realm of perfection. The condition for this is that our deeds should not be guided toward any particular result. This notion is known as *niskama* (the perception of desireless action) in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The dramatic presentation of the well-informed person like Arjuna's distress proclaims that on the verge of the higher life sometimes one gets disillusioned and misguided, failing to know that divinity is within us. That is why, Shri Krishna urges Arjuna to fight against the enemies like selfishness and stupidity to overcome contaminated personal ego. Then only a man can attain a height known as worklessness that "is only through work, for worklessness is not inaction but action that bears no fruit" (Hill, 1928, p. 60). Lord Krishna inspires:

Offer to me all thy works and rest thy mind on the Supreme.
Be free from vain hopes and selfish thoughts, and with inner
peace fight thou thy fight.

Those who ever follow my doctrine and who have faith, and
have a good will, find through pure work their freedom.
(Mascaro trans., 1994, pp. 58-59)⁷

Shri Krishna speaks such inspiring words to eliminate the false rationalization of Arjuna. The word "fight" can bring heated arguments. Being the Lord, how could Shri Krishna himself instigate his follower Arjuna to fight and kill? Such words shock the moralists. Had Shri Krishna praised Arjuna's despondency, the activist of non-violence would have become happier. How can a person who inspires to fight ever be a Lord, the pathfinder of righteousness? To unveil the reality underlying the word "fight," one should view it through the lenses of *karmayoga*. Unexamined life does not bear value. Life should be examined and tested. The voice of Shri Krishna reverberates in the words of Socrates (1997) when he views that the "unexamined life is not worth living. . . .The difficulty is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness No evil can happen to a good man, either in his life or after death" (as cited in Corliss, 1997, p.8). The Lord simply wants Arjuna to examine life. One can examine and test life by doing the assigned duty. The moments of life are the touchstone to examine one's

karmic consequences.

A person becomes from the *karmic* consequences when one knows that true renunciation transcends the mundane attributes of the world of senses. Renunciation is beyond attachment and detachment. True renunciation is the stage when one does not feel and think that one is renouncing the world and its affairs. Then one transcends the darkness of attachment and possessions as stated by Lord Krishna:

I have no work to do in all worlds, Arjuna—for these are mine. I have nothing to obtain, because I have all. And yet I work.

If I was not bound to action, never-tiring, everlastingly, men that follow many paths would follow my path of inaction.

If ever my work had an end, these worlds would end in destruction, confusion would reign within all: this would be the death of all beings.

Even as the unwise work selfishly in the bondage of selfish works, let the wise man work unselfishly for the good of all the world. (Mascaro trans, 1994, p. 58) ⁸

This is the spirit of renunciation that the wise should show to the world. Without even thinking of attachment, the wise should be the exemplary ones to maintain worldly affairs, the cosmic cycle, and its routines. Even God, when incarnated as a human being, has to conduct the assigned duty as a human being. In the same way, a perfect man should follow the parameters of action, realizing the true spirit of renouncement. Osho (2012) says, “True renouncement happens only when you do not feel that you are renouncing anything” (p. 459). One should perform one’s prescribed duties (*dharma*) without even being slightly conscious of their results and benefits. Renunciation must be involuntary because as Shri Krishna says, “In the actions of the best man others find their rule of action. The path that a great man follows becomes a guide to the world” (3: 21; Mascaro trans., 1994, p. 58). One must engage in the action of being the pathfinder rising beyond the polarities of attachment and detachment. An individual is centered on equanimity at this stage.

To renounce is not to be inactive. It is an active process of renouncement in action that signifies “going beyond both polarities. Going beyond both: attachment and detachment. You do not lean towards attraction, nor do you lean towards aversion;

because attraction is nothing but aversion standing on its head” (Osho, 2013, p. 461). It is by action that a personal consciousness merges with the supreme consciousness. The macrocosm becomes the microcosm. Only the conscious person of renouncement in action carries the divine mission for the welfare of humanity (*loksangraham*). Actions performed in the true essence of renouncement pave the way to mental equanimity. The renouncer goes beyond the zenith of mundane concern of phenomenal manifestations. This is the reason Shri Krishna wants Arjuna to “act as men of thought; think as men of action” (as cited in Corliss, 1997, p. 8). Even though an individual can perform another person’s work better than his own, he should never think to renounce his own. It ruins and churns the social order. An action that is done with the motive of reward binds the doer with the play of its consequences. This idea coalesces in Bergson’s philosophy because he also prioritizes the essence of action that is eminent in every person to realize *élan vital*. Russell (2013) clarifies:

The good which Bergson hopes to see realized in the world is action for action the sake of action. . . . Those who desire some provision of the end which action is to achieve are told that an end foreseen would be nothing new, because desire, like memory, is identified with its object. Thus we are condemned, in action, to be the blind slaves of instinct: the life-force pushes us from behind restlessly and unceasingly. (p. 722)

Only the renouncement in action liberates a person from the bondage and cycle of metempsychosis. Bergson’s identification of action for action’s sake matches the ideation of renunciation in action which is the essence of *karmayoga*. If action motives, attachment, and desires dominate the action, one becomes the ‘blind slaves of instinct.’ Only the essence of action leads us to evolution as Bergson justifies that life force (*élan vital*) “restlessly and unceasingly” makes us realize our essence and evolution. This is one of the fundamental principles of *karmayoga*.

Conclusions

The *Bhagavad Gita* centers on the importance of action in life and the world by shedding light on the different dimensions of *karmayoga*. The yoga of action focuses that one should act without any attachment to its results and fruits. Arjuna's problem is deep because he is trapped between *dharma* (morality and duty) and *karma* (action). The world is *dharmaksetra*, a battleground for

moral struggle; it is also *karmashetra*, a battleground for right action. When two incompatible aspects are in the process of perpetual tension, then creativity emerges. The mutual conflict between these aspects leads to development, and this is the way the cosmic process goes ahead. In this life, one has to go beyond the corporeal existence where every difficulty culminates in bliss. Every antagonism finds its resolution. *Karmayoga* centralizes that if the doer acts without desire, the action bears no repercussions. This is the way of renunciation in action. One can become a yogi without leaving or abandoning one's society if one conducts his or her inherent duty. The despondency of Arjuna erupts to pave the path for his inner evolution. The evolution of this creative process is within because his mind is in a state of tension that emerges out of the conflict between *dharma* and *karma*. By realizing this essence of *karmayoga* and the spirit of renouncement, he gets victory over the elements of imperfection, evil, and irrationality. The *karmayoga* postulates that evolution radiates not from outward; rather it is an inward process. This resembles the *élan vital* of Bergson because inner evolution is within. One is capable of transforming inwardly by realizing the potentiality. Only the recognition of individual intelligence is needed. The parameters of *niskama karma* enable the seeker to realize inner evolution. In this regard, Shri Krishna's postulation of *karmayoga* paves the vital intuitive footsteps to create a harmonious relationship in the entirety of the cosmic context. The *niskama karma* as desireless actions and the concept of renouncement in action suggest the seekers to visualize everything in the context of totality and integrated forms. This concept reverberates in Spinoza's philosophy to perceive everything from the perspective of totality and eternity because Spinoza views that *deus sive natura* manifests with infinite attributes. If a person finds himself in the cosmic context, the bondages of mine and thine vanish. The *karmayoga* advocates living in an integrated form. One should accept all the dimensions of life unconditionally. One should accept all the dualities choice-lessly. Then only one can embrace the whole by rejecting the fragments. To reject one for another is the cause of banalities in life. The *karmayoga* teaches that the whole world and its phenomena are just like the orchestra of various musical tunes and beats. When the opposite tunes and beats are integrated, then the enchanting music lures the world. Thus, only a fragment should not be prioritized at the cost of the whole. This is the point of confluence between Spinoza's perspective of eternity and the essence of *karmayoga*. One can

attain the perspective of eternity when one abides by the tenets of *niskama karma* and renouncement in actions that plead for selfless and desireless actions performed without any expectations of fruits and results. This is the ultimate way that *karmayoga* opens in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This book invites curious readers to explore multiple dimensions of not only *karmayoga*, but also of *jnana yoga* (yoga of wisdom), and *bhakti yoga* (yoga of devotion).

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End Notes

1. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, verses 47, 48, 49,50

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि || 47 ||

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय |
सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते || 48 ||

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनञ्जय |
बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः || 49 ||

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते |
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् || 50 ||

2. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, verse 35

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् |
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः || 35 ||

3. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 18, verse 45, 46, 47, 48

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः |
स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु || 45 ||

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ 46 ॥

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ 47 ॥

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।
सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ 48 ॥

4. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 4, verse 2, 3

एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥ 2 ॥
स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः ।
भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम् ॥ 3 ॥

5. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 2, verse 42, 43

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥ 42 ॥
कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।
क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥ 43 ॥

6. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, verse 5, 8

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ 5 ॥
नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः ॥ 8 ॥

7. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, verse 30, 31

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।
निराशीर्निर्नर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥ 30 ॥
ये मे मतमिदं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।
श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥ 31 ॥

8. The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3, verse 22, 23, 24, 25

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ 22 ॥
यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ 23 ॥

उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्या कर्म चेदहम् ।
सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥ 24 ॥

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।
कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसंग्रहम् ॥ 25 ॥