

## Linking Professionalism to *Nishkam Karma* and how it can Reshape the World We Live in

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**Abstract:** The world is continuously drowning in the ocean of “tamas” or dark ignorance, where the people or organizations are clashing with each other over petty material gains. This paper focuses on the impoartance of Nishkam karma i.e. detached involvement principle of the Bhagvad Gita.It attempts to apply the oriental philosophy of the Bhagvad Gita and western concept of “Categorical Imperative” on the professional scenario of modern world. The paper aims to show that professionalism based on self-interest and profit motive leads us to unethical practices, mindless consumerism and annihilation of resources. Professionalism based on Nishkam Karma can help us in resolving the tension between altruism andself-interest to pave the way for a more wholistic and ethical society.

**Keywords:** Nishkam karma, Bhagvad Gita, Categorical Imperative, Kant, Professionalism and Ethical Practices

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### I. Introduction

The world is continuously turning into the waste land. Anti-Values such as arrogance, anger, ill-will, depression, conflicts, stress, destructiveness, jealousy, covetousness, falsehood, prejudiced, wrongdoing, hate, violence and so on are super-powering the society. The world-order is decaying. Anti-Values are growing enormously in huge proportion. There is barely any sphere of public, political, economic and even pious activity that is free from deceit, dishonesty, and dirt of some kind. Modern man is entangled complexly in his worldly life. He does not have time to contemplate his metaphysical form and to be a better human being. What a mad pursuit? There is a dire need to do introspection. What is making modern man so irresponsible towards society? Why the value of human life is decreasing day by day and even the teenagers have no qualm in killing someone. Both electronic and print media daily tell the sordid tales of hatred, crime and human miseries. People cannot trust their neighbours or even relatives. Society has been turned into a rotten one, where even the small and innocent children are not safe and are very much prone to physical abuses. What kind of shameful society it is! How to pour out the corruption and its slag from every pore of human life?

### Objective

The degradation of society is the result of unprofessional practices in every field. Contemporary man, who has become a misanthrope, is ready for destruction due to the chaos of modern world. Extraordinary expectations from others without realizing one’s own duty towards them is the major problem of this envious world. For getting out of the maddening crowd and the mental agonies, the mankind takes reside in philosophy and religion which has the solution of his problems. Great philosophers and the learned people have always tried to show the right path and to find the cause and solution of this decaying world order. The objective of the paper is to discuss the viewpoints of different litterateurs and reaching on the conclusion that the Geeta’s *Nishkam Karma Yoga* can lead the society to peaceful living with high thinking.

### II. Methodology

To remove the anti-values from the society we need to ponder upon the Socratic question, “How should we live”? This question is cardinal to human existence and therefore discussed and re-discussed throughout the literature. The present paper involves a review and analysis of literature on the importance of *karma Yoga* of the Geeta which seems to be the only solution to get rid of the anti-values.

### Analysis

T.S.Eliot talked of the damaged psyche of humanity in his poems. He moved the problem of barren values and gave the solution in his poem ‘The Waste Land’ (1922): “Datta, dayadhvam, damyata” (Give, sympathise, control) under the section What the Thunder Said (Which is taken from *Brihadaranyaka*—

*Upanishad*). (Eliot) We will see further that the Geeta's message for the decaying humanity is to serve others without having any expectation from them and this will result in a balanced society.

Literature throughout the world raised the problem of non-values empowering the human mind for the petty gains. The fifth century B.C. playwright Sophocles heard the eternal note of sadness which is still penetrating the stormy and stressful mind of common man. Mathew Arnold in his poem *Dover Beach* (1867) lamented:

the world...Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
where ignorant armies clash by night. (Arnold)

The plight described by the English poet is conceived to have fallen upon the whole human race. Devoid of love and light the world is a maze of confusion where people are unable to distinguish between a friend and a foe.

Swami Vivekanand in the Bengali Journal "*Udbodhan*", dated 14 January 1899 quoted that the country is being day by day drowned in utter *Tamas* due to lifelong laziness of people who having a false desire for the highest knowledge which is beyond all activities either physical or mental. Vivekanand further said that people under the impact of *tamas* have no eye upon their own incapacity, but everyone is ready to lay the whole blame on others (Agarwal, 1998, p.63).

To get rid of mental perplexities, performing one's duty dutifully is the suggested path by Lord Krishna. The Bhagvad Gita's message of *Nishkam Karma* is the panacea of crumbling world peace. *Nishkam Karma* bears its corresponding message in today's concept of professionalism, which is a trait that is highly valued in workforce. It is defined as the strict observance of honesty and integrity. It has many attributes, including: focused understanding, competency, honesty and integrity, respect, accountability, and self-regulation. A professional being's the most important characteristic is his sincerity towards his duty and action. Professionals hold themselves accountable for their thoughts, words, and actions. Gandhi says that if a man wants happiness in his life there should be harmony in what he thinks, what he says, and what he does. According to him, work of man is judged by the spirit in which it is done, not by nature of the work which makes no difference.

Leaders understand the magnitude of action and duty. Robert W. Stevenson says that Bal Gangadhar Tilak in his work on the Gita, "*Srimad Bhagvad Gita Rahasya*", gave his longest commentary on *Karma Yoga* where he discusses the necessity of action & duty and the contribution of action to world maintenance. He concentrates on the development of *Karma Yoga* far more than any other theme. The theory of *Karma Yoga* tells us how this is the only path or discipline for achieving integrity, balance, proportion and harmony in life. Selfishness has to be abandoned in so far as man is an element in social organism, in seeking the social good he seeks his own perfection. The ethics of *Nishkam Karma Yoga* does not amount to the requirement that actions are to be performed in any manner one likes just because consequences do not play any vital role in performing them. Indeed, there can be no action without a purpose must be an all encompassing and self transcending one (Verma, 1980, p. 202). Professionals keep their word, and they can be trusted totally because of this. They never negotiate their principles and standards, and will do the right thing, even when they are involved in the most complex assignments.

According to Harold W. French Swami Vivekanand gives importance to the Gita's lesson of non-attachment to work. He inspires people to feel the craving for the beautiful lesson of duty and love in the Gita. He gives the example of Lord Krishna. "With Krishna Non-attachment is the central idea. He does not need anything. He does not want anything. He works for work's sake. Krishna fulfils His roles as a son, a king, and a father. Krishna lived the truth in the midst of the battlefield of life. Gita 4:18 is quoted as follows: "He who in the midst of intense activity finds himself in the greatest calmness and in the greatest peace finds intense activity that is the greatest Yogi as well as the wisest man""(p.139).

True professionals display reverence for the people around them in every role or situation. They show a high level of Emotional Intelligence by considering the emotions and needs of others. They can sense the feelings and wants of their clients. They are humble enough to admit their shortcomings and are always ready to learn from other experts. They are always reliable and keep their words at all times. They never make excuses or troubles, but focus on pronouncing the solutions. They set examples for their team workers and other fellows. They contribute in maintaining the world order perfect.

Karmanāiva hi Samsiddhim āsthītā janakādayaḥ  
lokasaṁgrahamevāpi Sampaśyan kartum arhasi.  
(*The Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter III, Sloka XX)

It says that everyone should do work with a view to the maintenance of the world. King Janak (King of Mithila, Father of Sita) set an example to others. He was a great believer of *lok samgraha* (world maintenance). The Gita points out that the great men are the path makers who blaze the trail that other men follow. It is the duty of the team leader to show with his actions the right path to his team workers. Ordinary people perform actions following the example set up by great men. Common people follow the standard set by them (Radhakrishnan, 2014,p.159).

The Kantian principle of universalizability says, "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same, will that it should become a universal law" (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral, 1785).

An action is morally acceptable if it can be universalized. It is part of the first formulation of his categorical imperative, which states that the only morally acceptable maxims of our actions are those that could rationally be willed to be universal law. The responsibility for the upkeep and proper functioning of society falls on the individual. If he shirks his responsibility, there will be confusion all around. It is a matter of general experience that people follow the examples of those who have accomplished their goals in life. One should act accordingly as he wants from the others to act. M. S Manhas gives the example of Lord Rama. In the Ramayan, Rama is shown as an ideal son, an ideal brother, an ideal husband, an ideal friend, an ideal enemy, and an ideal king. All His actions during His lifetime are universalized. They are the acceptable maxims of His actions which become the universal law. His sense of responsibility and duty make Him appreciated and beloved to everyone for all times. "He acted as a true *Karma Yogi* who would not abandon His duty even at the risk of pain, suffering and separation from those whom he loved, admired and respected"(p.136).

In *the Bhagvad Gita* Lord Krishna says, "I am engaged in activity (*Karman*). For if I were not ever tirelessly engaged in activity(*Karman*), son of Prthā, men on all sides would follow my path, these worlds would fall to ruin were I not engaged in activity (*Karman*). I would be author of confusion, I would do harm to these creatures" (Gotshalk 15). Once a person becomes successful in life, common people regard him as a worthy example to follow. Such a person should not try to look down upon them. He should not baffle them either with confusing remarks for personal gain. Instead he should himself engage in action in the spirit of commitment and dedication and promote others to do the same. A professional leader makes the success-path clear and visible for his followers with his actions. Professionals maintain the purity of their conduct.

The main emphasis is on purity of conduct in Kant as well as in *the Gita*. Kant says that the man as a slave to the senses cannot practice the elevated goals and purposes of life. He has to mount above the level of the senses. He has to go beyond his selfish interests in life. One should seek one's self in the self of others. Man should broaden his viewpoint to such a level that he can discover all beings in himself and himself in all beings. He must not take up an ambiguous conduct either in person or in public. This view which constitutes the finale of the moral principles or ethics of *the Gita* finds its reverberation in Kant's maxim of treating everyman as an end in himself and not as a means. Purity of motive is the basis of ethical conduct of Kant and *the Gita*.

Skill in action is mandatory for uniting to pure reason and thereby abandoning the imperfection and reaching the culmination in *yoga*. Professionals' actions are always skilled. A great professional attains the position of a yogi as he never gives priority to selfish mottos. According to Annie Besant and Bhagvan Das, Lord Krishna preaches and motivates the perplexed Arjun:

"Thy business is with action only, never with its fruits; so let not fruit be thy motive, nor be thou in inaction attached. Perform action, O Dhanan-jaya!, dwelling in union with the divine, renouncing attachments, and balanced evenly in success and failures; equilibrium is called yoga."(Besant & Das, 1950, p.45)

### **III. Findings**

One should perform prescribed duties. If a person does not perform his duties he brings sin upon himself. Action is the law in life and without action living is not possible. At the same time one cannot attain perfection without performance of one's duties. *Karma* is one's *Dharma*. *The Bhagvad Gita* takes people on a higher plane when it teaches that not only duties are to be performed but these are to be performed without any selfish motive, desire or anxiety for results of their actions. It means that result of action should not agitate their minds. The doer should also not demand the result. When the work is done without any selfish motive, it becomes a sacrifice which itself is a form of worship. Disinterested spirit in the work means that work should be done in high spirits without any personal interest. An individual's efforts for performance of work should not be influenced by his personal or impersonal work. Efforts should remain same irrespective of the type of work. The duties of a person are related as per his status in life. One has one's duties in the office or place of work, at home and as a member of the community or society one lives in. The idea of duty furnishes an unconditional standard by itself. If any action is our duty its explanation is to be sought in itself and not in any circumstances or condition outside it. Duty is absolute; it is not a relative concept. It is a value in its own right. Duty is categorically obligatory upon us. If moral experience is real and if we are moral agents, a certain set of duties have to be performed absolutely. It will be ridiculous to question why men love their children or why we should

do our work honestly or why one should speak the truth. For eg., it is one's duty to perform any given task by one's superiors with utmost sincerity, without any intention of gaining some extra benefits. Sincerity is its own reward.

Krishna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra reminds the disorientated Arjun that justice was at stake and it was his duty to 'right the wrong' by waging the righteous battle. Krishna reiterates when Arjun is facing the deep seated conflict that he should be adhered to social duty: "Think thou of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war...to forego thy duty and honour is to fall into transgression" (Gopalan, 1987,p.8)

One needs to be composed enough to keep one's calm, even during tense situations. This can be possible only if one is involved in one's duty with detachment i.e. duty for duty's sake, which is not a negative attitude. R K Langar says, "work done for *loka samgraha* not only prevents destruction of the world; it also contributes towards social efficiency...the difference between the ignorant and the wise is that the ignorant man works in his own interest, the enlightened man performs unattached work for the good of others." "Performing one's duty without any attachment also opens the door of happiness and bliss for the doer. Such person, who is working in the direction of maintaining the world order, feels the eternal bliss. ". . . No man, who performs beneficial Action, ever reaches an unhappy end." (Tilak, 2016,p.63)

#### IV. Conclusion

Professionalism based on self-interest and profit motive (which is absolutely unprofessional attitude) leads one to unethical practices, mindless consumerism and annihilation of resources. For example, some people buy fashion clothes unnecessarily for which animals are slaughtered, chemicals are used and the environment is exploited badly. It would be a mindless consumerism. However, when in need, a cruelty free purchase, though higher in price, would be called mindful consumerism. With unprofessional attitude one cannot urge to do selfless duty for maintaining the good world order. For fulfilling short term gains, unprofessional individuals set aside the vision of humanity, they become devoid of values. The basis of morally upright society is the people's professional attitude based upon the *Nishkam Karma Yoga of the Gita*. The personal accountability, closely tied with honesty and integrity, is a vital force in maintaining the goodness in the world. Such professionals who follow the path of *Nishkam Karma Yoga* are the true *Karma Yogi* and can help the society in resolving the tension between altruism and self-interest to pave the way for a more holistic and ethical society to live in. The *Nishkam Karma Yoga* makes the professionals serene. "... the karma yogin attains the tranquility, to be found in Me( Lord Krishna)" (Tilak, 2016,P.57)

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