



Anthropology of Bhagavad Gītā: Death, Rebirth and Liberation

Anand Sadasivan

Assistant Professor, Amritadarshanam – ICSS, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri campus <anandpillai108@gmail.com>

KEYWORDS

Bhagavad Gītā, Death,
Rebirth, Liberation,
Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga

ABSTRACT

Vedānta philosophy is popular for its discussions on ideal action, ethics and self-realisation. Like life on earth, Vedānta gives importance to death and the transmigration of the soul. The much sought after text by aspirants of Vedānta, the Bhagavad Gītā encapsulates all these concepts. The problems that warrior Arjuna poses in Bhagavad Gītā represents the experiences that any individual may face in this world. Solution provided by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna's queries are suitable for people of various walks of life. Vedānta puts forward Self-realisation or liberation as the chief goal of human life. Albeit undergoing spiritual practise and understanding Vedāntic scriptures, aspirants may not achieve liberation. They pass through the inevitable cycle of death and rebirth. This article discusses the Vedāntic perspective of death, rebirth and liberation in the light of Bhagavad Gītā. Bhagavad Gītā discusses about the path traversed by a transmigrating soul. It proposes methods for individuals to purify oneself and attain a better birth that takes one closer to liberation. Finally, using Karma-yoga and Bhakti-yoga one can transcend various limitations and attain liberation.

Introduction

Indian Philosophy not only discusses spirituality and esoteric knowledge systems but also to a great extent discusses about life, wellbeing and afterlife of human beings. According to Raju (2013:16), “classical Indian philosophies may be characterized as philosophies of life. They form different traditions, representing different aspects and constituents of human nature, which form the many philosophical perspectives”. Deliberations regarding life on earth, death, transmigration of the soul to a yonder world, reincarnation, merits and demerits of actions are carefully considered by the chief philosophies of India like Sāṃkhya¹, Buddhism, Jainism and Vedānta. “Rather than looking for one central ‘source’ which was then embroidered by ‘secondary influences’ like a river fed by tributary streams, it would be better to picture the intellectual fountainhead of ancient India as a watershed consisting of many streams– each one an incalculably archaic source of contributing doctrines–Vedic, Ājīvaka [i.e. materialistic], Jaina, Dravidian, and tribal” (O’Flaherty, 1980:xviii as cited in Bodewitz, 2019:3) Meanwhile, Metaphysical, Ontological and Epistemological differences across these philosophies reflect in the dissimilitude of various concepts and beliefs that various philosophies present. Raju (2013:16) opines, “the philosophical traditions are the articulations, direct or indirect, of man and the world in the different perspectives or from different points of view”. Since these topics are vast, subtle and inclusive of various approaches by

1 IAST system of transliteration has been used.

numerous philosophies of India, the current study focuses on exploring the concept of death, rebirth and liberation according to Vedānta.

The essence of Vedānta philosophy has been expounded elaborately in the broad canon known as *Prasthānatraya*.² Among the vast collection of texts in *Prasthānatraya*, Bhagavad Gītā (BhG) seems to be the comprehensive but simple work that summarizes every aspect of Vedānta in just 700 verses. Mahābhārata composed by sage Vyāsa is considered as one of the two greatest epics of India, the other epic being Rāmāyaṇa. Among the 18 volumes of Mahābhārata, known as *parva*-s, BhG is included in the *Bhīṣma-parva*. BhG is mainly a conversation between the Pāṇḍava warrior Arjuna and his charioteer Kṛṣṇa, who is considered as the divine godhead. At the outset, BhG presents the warrior Arjuna being overcome by fear, delusion, sorrow and distress when a war is about to happen between two enemy clans of a family known as the Kaurava-s and Pāṇḍava-s. Deluded Arjuna tends to renounce his duty of fighting in the war and desires to become a mendicant. Arjuna believes that by fighting and killing the members of the Kaurava clan, he would incur sin. Arjuna developed this thought from the fact that even though Kaurava-s are the chief enemies of Pāṇḍava-s, they are his own relatives. Sensing a distress call from Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa advises him about the reality of life and the importance of adhering to one's prescribed duty. Kṛṣṇa's advice extends over wide range of topics like meditation, devotion, right action etc. and are categorically arranged under eighteen chapters known as 'yoga'. Any individual who seeks an answer to one's life problem acquires a solution from BhG. Therefore, Ācārya Śaṅkara (1977:44) says, "Kṛṣṇa wished to teach that knowledge for the benefit of the whole world through Arjuna".

According to BhG, the ultimate goal of human life is attainment of liberation from rebirth. This freedom is achieved through the realization that one's own self is the ultimate truth. Ācārya Śaṅkara (1977:44) posits, "Owing to an accumulation of merit and demerit, of dharma and adharma, the *samsāra*, which consists in passing through good and bad births, happiness and misery, becomes incessant. Grief and delusion are thus the cause of *samsāra*. And their cessation could not be brought about except by self-knowledge." Self-knowledge indeed is the realisation that the individual self is not different from the all-pervading universal consciousness. But the separation happens because of various limitations like one's physical body, mind and latent tendencies. Not all the human beings have the right mental disposition to transcend these limitations to realize the self. For such beings the path of selfless action is proposed as the approach for self-purification. While performing actions merits and demerits are achieved based on the results of actions. These results lead the transmigrating soul to various other subtle worlds and finally arrives back on earth to continue one's spiritual pursuit. The current paper investigates and sheds light on the concept of death, rebirth and liberation as propounded by BhG.

Objective of study

The study intends to investigate two aspects. Firstly, to review the three concepts such as Death, Rebirth and Liberation as expounded in BhG. Secondly, the study demonstrates BhG's perspective of breaking free from the cycle of death and rebirth to attain liberation.

Methodology

The methodology adopted explores the primary literature BhG to identify relevant verses with regard to death, rebirth and liberation. In addition, the study resorts to explore the Sanskrit commentary on

2 The term Prasthānatraya refers to the three authentic canonical texts of Vedānta philosophy. They are Upaniṣads based on Śruti-prasthāna as Upaniṣads are part of Śruti or Vedas, BhG which is considered as Smṛti-prasthāna since it is part of Mahābhārata composed by sage Vyāsa and finally Brahmasūtras which is considered as Nyāya-prasthāna as it logically explores Vedāntic concepts.

BhG composed by Ācārya Śāṅkara for interpretation of verses. Secondary sources like translations and interpretations by eminent scholars such as S. Radhakrishnan, M. Hiriyanna and other journal publications are also consulted.

Premise

In BhG, death, rebirth and liberation are associated with the theory of *karma*. The term ‘*karma*’ is a Sanskrit term which generally means action. *Karma* is explained in BhG broadly over various contexts such as, an individual’s action (BhG, 5.8-9), social duty (BhG, 2.31), deeds for the wellbeing of the world, termed as ‘*lokasaṅgraha*’ (BhG, 3.20) and rituals associated with Veda-s (BhG, 3.12-15). BhG advocates the performance of *karma* in an ethical manner. Ethical action is referred to as *sātvika*³ in nature performed with a mentality of renunciation, free from egotism, endowed with determination and enthusiasm, maintaining equanimity of mind on one’s success or failure. To observe equanimity of mind, one has to practise renunciation in action by focusing on the performance of a deed rather than the result (BhG, 2.47). Hiriyanna (1993:119) remarks, “the idea of the result, which is to ensue from the action, must be dismissed altogether from the mind before as well as during the act”. Meanwhile unethical actions are *rājasika* and *tāmasika*, which includes activities which are covetous, deceitful, violent and done without intense craving for results (BhG, 18.26-28). Activities of human beings can be categorised based on ethical and moral qualities viz. *daivika* (divine) and *āsurika* (demonic). Activities based on *daivika* qualities include charity, truthfulness, compassion, absence of covetousness, straightforwardness, lack of fickleness etc. (BhG, 16.1-3) and *āsurika* qualities are opposite to the *daivika* and include traits such as hypocrisy, arrogance, anger, conceit and cruelty (BhG, 16.4). Human beings are prompted to act in the quest to fulfill one’s unending desires. To satisfy one’s intense desire for material pleasure, one with *āsurika* quality may resort to unjust means. BhG (16.12-14) observes, ‘one goes to the extent of killing others to fulfill one’s desires and thinks oneself to be invincible’. Thus, one with *āsurika* disposition lacks discrimination about socially acceptable activities that are to be avoided.

Karma is further denoted as performance of activities prescribed by Vedas, termed as *yajna*-s. *Yajña* activities are set down to be performed as to please the deities, who in turn, bestow earthly beings with whatever they are desirous of. In addition, maintenance of the environmental cycle with timely rain and victuals, happens by the performance of *yajña*. BhG (3.11–13) mentions a reciprocity in the *yajña* activity where the deities fulfil all the wishes of those who please the deities by means of *yajña*. But those who merely enjoy the earthly pleasures without offering to the deities are thieves and they incur sin. Those who ignore the *yajña* activity and do not perform the routine offering to the deities are deprived of bliss neither on earth nor in the other world. On the contrary, by executing the *yajña* activity, an individual attains the *swarga* world where one attains the abode of Indra and enjoys all the pleasures of gods (BhG, 9.20).

It can be noted here that BhG gives due importance to *karma*. Kṛṣṇa advises to never abandon one’s social duty since it harms one’s reputation and leads to incurrance of sin. The infamy thus caused is much greater than death (BhG, 2.33–34). Performing one’s social duty qualifies one to attain the world known as *swarga* (BhG, 2.32 and 37) One lives happily in *swarga* until the merits accrued by one’s actions in the mundane world expire (BhG, 9.21). One who lives on earth is bound to act keeping in

3 Indian Philosophy generally accepts three dispositions known as *guṇa*-s viz. *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, innate in every being. BhG (14.6-8) elaborately discusses the nature of these three *guṇa*-s. *Sattva-guṇa* is of the nature of purity and is illuminating. It associates one with knowledge and the *jīva* who has predominance of *sattva-guṇa* is known as *sātvic*. *Rajo-guṇa* is of the nature of intense desire, passion and attachment. It associates one with actions and their results. Predominance of *rajo-guṇa* makes a *jīva* *Rajasic*. *Tamo-guṇa* is of the nature of delusion and ignorance. It deludes every *jīva* and associates one with error, sleep and inertia. A *jīva* with predominance of *tamo-guṇa* is known as *tamasic*.

mind the merits and demerits that accrue from one's action. Radhakrishnan (1963:67) opines,

it is not possible for us to abstain from action. Nature is ever at work and we are deluded if we fancy that its process can be held up. Nor is cessation from action desirable. Again, the binding quality of an action does not lie in its mere performance but in the motive or desire that prompts it [...] The Gītā advocates detachment from desires and not cessation from work.

It can be observed that Kṛṣṇa epitomizes the model of karma proclaimed by him and *walks the talk*. Kṛṣṇa says,

*na me pārthāsti kartavyam trṣṇu lokeṣu kiñcana
nānavāpta-mavāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi ||*

[Oh Partha ! there is nothing ought to be done by me in the three worlds nor do I have anything to be attained, but I am engaged on duty] (BhG, 3.22).

*yadi hyaham na varteyam jātu karmaṇyatandritaḥ |
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ ||*

[If at all I do not follow my duties, all human beings would follow my path] (BhG, 3.23).

Thus, BhG opposes indolence and invites every being to engage in activities towards general well-being of the world.

Like *karma* leads to the cycle of death, transmigration and rebirth of an individual, BhG proposes the approach to escape the bondage of *karma* to attain liberation. The attainment of liberation is termed as *mokṣa*. According to BhG, the source of sentience in every embodied being is the soul or *Jīva*. The sentient soul supports all the physical and mental activities including the flow of vital force in every individual embodied being. BhG (15.7) further indicates that it is the same soul that manifests in every being and also pervades the whole universe. This universal self, known as the Paramātman is the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent entity untouched by the effects of the ever-changing universe. "The integral undivided reality of the supreme appears divided into the multiplicity of the souls. Unity is the truth and multiplicity is an expression of it" (Radhakrishnan,1963:214).

How does the multifarious world come into existence? What is the power that triggers the creation? BhG states that god, an entity that is not distinct from the Paramātman, when associated with *māyā* acts as the creator (BhG, 4.6, 7.14, 14.3–4, 18.61). *Māyā* is the power under the control of god, possessing three *guṇa*-s namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (BhG, 7.14, 14.5). Vedāntasāra (1931:51), a compendium of Vedānta philosophy elaborates that *māyā* has the ability to conceal reality, the universal consciousness and project the multifarious world. It is *māyā* that prompts every individual to comprehend the world and act in their own ways forgetting the truth. Various physical and mental aspects and superimposition of various attributes by individuals on the self stems from one's association with *māyā*. In the prelude to his commentary on the Brahmasūtras, Śaṅkarācārya (1960:4) posits, "superimposition is the notion of that in something which is not that. Just as it is, for instance when a person superimposes on his self attributes external to his own self, i.e. when his son or wife are in sound health or otherwise, he considers himself to be similarly sound in health or otherwise, or when he superimposes the attributes of his body on his self, thus - I am stout or lean or fair [...] In this manner one superimposes that which experiences the 'I' or Ego viz. the mind on the universal self which is a witness of all the processes of the mind, and conversely superimposes the Paramātman on mind [...] which is of the nature of erroneous conception and which promotes the notion of the self as being an agent and experiencer". The goal of every human life is to break free from the limitations of body, mind and the connected superimpositions. One has to seek transcendence to finally realize oneness with Paramātman.

Death and Rebirth

BhG elaborates death in a lucid and comprehensible style. The first chapter of BhG reflects Arjuna's distress regarding killing his own kith and kin and his teacher. His anxiety towards death demonstrates the attitude of any worldly person towards one's own or of one's next of kin's demise. Arjuna's anguish is conspicuous from his statements like, "how can one be peaceful after killing one's relatives?" (BhG, 1.37), "to kill one's own relatives, desiring for material happiness and land, is the greatest sin" (BhG, 1.45). What is indeed death? It is a generally perceived fact that all living beings take birth, go through various changes and finally disappear. Kṛṣṇa elaborates the perspective thoroughly by using illustrations,

*avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyakta-madhyāni bhārata |
avyakta-nidhanānyeva tatra kā paridevanā ||*

[All beings were in an unmanifested state, they manifested and will disappear during dissolution. What is the need for lamentation?] (BhG, 2.28)

The disappearance of an embodied being is not a permanent condition. BhG uses illustration to clarify the point.

*dehinosminyathā debe kaumāram yauvanam jarā |
tathā dehāntara-prāptir-dhīrastatra na mukhyati ||*

[Like the individual soul passes through childhood, youth to old age, similar is the state of death where the soul passes into another body. The wise is not deluded by this.] (BhG, 2.13)

*vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vibhāya navāni grhṇāti naroparāṇi |
tathā śarīrāṇi vibhāya jīrṇānyanyāni samyāti navāni debī ||*

[Like a person changes one's dirty cloth and wears a fresh one, similarly does the soul leaves the worn-out body and takes up new one.] (BhG, 2.22)

Thus, death is clearly perceived as an uncomplicated process in BhG. Mātā Amṛtānandamayī (1996:195) opines, "Death is not complete annihilation. It is a pause. It is like pressing the pause button on a tape recorder in the middle of a song. Sooner or later, when pressed again, the pause button is released and the song continues. Death is only a period of preparation before the start of another life. You unpack your content only to re-pack it in a fresh new package, in which the ingredients will be the same [...] Life and death are the two major events in life, two intense experiences. Once you realize that birth and death are neither the beginning nor the end, life becomes infinitely beautiful and blissful".

The Hindu cosmology and Philosophy discusses concepts like creation and dissolution on two perspectives i.e. the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. These perspectives could be considered as an individual and universal viewpoint respectively. In the microcosmic perspective, every individual being takes birth, lives and dies which is equivalent to the universal concept of creation, sustenance and dissolution. On a macrocosmic level, the Hindu cosmological time cycle divides time into *Yuga*, *Mahāyuga* and *Kalpa*. The Viṣṇupurāṇa (1.3) expounds the time measurement and division in detail. There are four *yuga*-s viz. *Kṛta*, *Tretā*, *Dwāpara* and *Kali*. Completion of a cycle of these four *yuga*-s is known as a *Mahāyuga*. A set of thousand *Mahāyuga*-s is known as a *Kalpa* which is considered as a day of Brahma. Two *Kalpa*-s constitute a day and night of Brahma. In line to this, BhG (8.17-19) explains about the manifestation and absorption of the universe during the final deluge in accordance with the day and Night of Brahma respectively. Thus, as the day of Brahma begins, creation happens on earth and as the day ends the absorption occurs, which is known as deluge and this system of creation and deluge goes on in cycle.

On a microcosmic level, every *jīva* experiences one's own death and rebirth. On this regard, BhG elaborates two paths viz. *dakṣiṇāyana* the six months of southern solstice and *uttarāyana* the six months of northern solstice. Based on one's merits and demerits of actions accrued and based on one's spiritual potentiality achieved while living on earth a *jīva* advances on either of the paths. The six months of *dakṣiṇāyana* is the path meant for those who return back to earth. According to BhG (8.25), the *jīva* who moves through the *dakṣiṇāyana* passes through *dhūma* (smoke), *rātriḥ* (night) and *kṛṣṇa-pakṣa* (dark fortnight of the moon). After reaching the lunar light and experiencing the result of their actions, *jīva*-s return back to earth. Ācārya Śaṅkara (1977:235) posits that the entities like smoke, night, fortnight of the moon and *dakṣiṇāyana* represent the respective *devata*-s (divinities) presiding over the respective entities like smoke and the particular time periods like night, fortnight and *dakṣiṇāyana*.

BhG discloses that rebirth is an inevitable affair for the one who dies. A *jīva* has to advance through numerous rebirths but remains ignorant of one's previous births. Kṛṣṇa says,

bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna |
tānyaham veda sarvāṇi na tvam vetha parantapa ||

[Both you and I have gone through many births. I remember all of them but you don't remember any.] (BhG, 4.5)

Every being is tempted to choose activities or duties based on one's natural disposition. Hence rather than being desolate about death or dying, one's priority shall be in discharging one's duty. Abiding to one's duty is of paramount importance than renouncing one's duty or involving in the activities of another person. Kṛṣṇa therefore says,

śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt |
svadharme nidhanam śreyah paradharmo bhayāvabahaḥ ||

[Rather than performing duties prescribed to others in a perfect manner, it is better to perform one's own duty, even though filled with flaws. It is preferable to die discharging one's duty rather than following the path of others which is fraught with danger.] (BhG, 3.35)

An individual abiding to one's own duty shall achieve greatness in his current life as well as in one's future lives and one reaches the divine abode known as *swarga* by practising one's duty. After enjoying the result of their merits in the *swarga*, they return back to earth and take birth in a pious and prosperous family. Certain other *jīva*-s who have greater achievements based on their spiritual practices while living on earth, take birth in a family endowed with spiritual wisdom. Kṛṣṇa clarifies that there is no wastage of one's spiritual efforts (BhG 6.41-42). The merits accumulated are transferred to the next birth where a favourable situation is arranged to continue one's spiritual activities or discharge one's natural duties.

Birth of every individual *jīva* is brought about by the activity of the three *guṇa*-s namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. According to BhG (14.5) these *guṇa*-s bind the eternal soul to the perishable body. While living on earth, every *jīva* attains prominence in any of the *guṇa*-s. The succeeding birth or the lineage in which the *jīva* is reborn is directed by the prominent *guṇa*. BhG states,

yadā satve pravṛddhe tu pralayam yāti dehabhṛt |
tadottamavidām lokānamlānpratipadyate ||

[If a *jīva* dies when *sattva-guṇa* is in predominance, then the *jīva* takes birth in the family of pious and learned ones.] (BhG, 14.14)

rajasi pralayam gatvā karmaśaṅgiṣu jāyate |
tathā pralīnastamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate ||

[Death of a *jīva* with predominance of rajas would lead to the *jīva*'s birth in a family driven by intense activity and death of *jīva* with *tamas* as the predominant *guṇa* would lead to the *jīva*'s birth in an ignorant family.] (BhG, 14.15)

Thus, BhG reveals a series of events that repeats between birth, death and rebirth. The *jīva* who comprehends that the predominance of *sattva-guṇa* is to be sought out for a better birth performs righteous and ethical activities. Austerities and rituals based on Vedic and scriptural traditions too serve as a medium to enhance the *sātvic* quality to achieve a better birth.

Liberation

Manifestation of the material world is known to be primarily from the Paramātman. Liberation is in fact a realization that both the microcosmic and macrocosmic manifestations perceived by the beings are illusive. The illusive world is susceptible to change and disappears with the final dissolution. Hence the unchangeable reality, the Paramātman has to be sought out as the source of eternal bliss. The path for realization of Paramātman becomes strenuous because of bondage and multiple envelopes. The envelopes like lust, anger and desire that rises from the *rajo-guṇa* covers the Paramātman. They delude a *jīva* and pull one deeper into materialism. Therefore Kṛṣṇa identifies those emotions as enemies of a *jīva*

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ |

mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamīha vairiṇam ||

[Emotions like lust and anger, that is born out of *rajo-guṇa*, shall be known as the sinful and the all-consuming enemy of the world.] (BhG, 3.37)

Kṛṣṇa further states the effects of unending desires on a *jīva*.

āvṛtam jñānametena jñānino nityavairiṇā |

kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇa analena ca ||

[Knowledge is enveloped by this perpetual enemy, insatiable desires which are never satisfied and burns like fire.] (BhG, 3.39)

Thus, liberation is achieved by the *jīva* who renounces one's desires. One transcends mental attachment to the worldly objects and practices dispassion by transcending one's egocentric nature.

Kṛṣṇa states,

vihāya kāmānyaḥ sarvān-pumāmścarati niḥspṛhaḥ |

nirmamo nirahabaṅkāraḥ sa śāntimadbigacchati ||

[One who lives by renouncing one's desires and lives by avoiding greed, sense of proprietorship and egotism attains peace.] (BhG, 2.71)

Lord Kṛṣṇa continues to describe the 'attainment of peace' as the state of realization of Paramātman

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati |

sthitvāsyāmantakālepi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati ||

[One does not get deluded again after attaining the state of realization of Paramātman. Remaining in the state of realization during death, one escapes the cycle of death and rebirth and attains realization.] (BhG, 2.72)

A *jīva* avoids the cycle of death and rebirth by transcending various sorts of physical, social and mental limitations caused by aspects like *guṇa*-s, *karma* and *dharma*. These limitations urge a *jīva* to act in this world and finally lead one to bondage and to the distress that follows. Kṛṣṇa posits,

guṇānetānatītya trīṇdehī dehasamudbhavān |

janma-mṛtyu-jarā-dubkhair-vimukto amṛtam-aśnute ||

[By transcending the three guṇas associated with the body, a jīva becomes free from birth, death, ageing, misery and attains liberation.] (BhG, 14.20)

“Nīstraiguṇya or the transcendence of the three guṇa-s is the condition of release (liberation). The soul evolves through these three stages; it rises from dull inertia and subjection to ignorance, through the struggle for material enjoyments to the pursuit of knowledge and happiness. But so long as we are attached, even though it may be to very noble objects, we are limited and there is always a sense of insecurity since rajas and tamas may overcome the sattva in us. The highest ideal is to transcend the ethical level and rise to the spiritual. The good man (sāttvika) should become a saint (triguṇātīta). Until we reach this stage, we are only in the making; our evolution is incomplete” (Radhakrishnan, 1963:321–22).

Among the two paths, *dakṣiṇāyana* and the *uttarāyana* mentioned earlier, a liberated soul traverses the *uttarāyana* path. BhG (8.24) declares that the liberated soul who takes the *uttarāyana* path moves through *agnih* (fire), *jyotiḥ* (light), *abhaḥ* (day), bright fortnight of the moon and finally unites with Paramātmān. According to Ācārya Śaṅkara (1977:235), there are various presiding deities associated with various entities mentioned above; like fire, light, day etc. These presiding deities assist the passage of the soul through various places for the *jīva* to unite with Paramātmān and once united, there is no rebirth. Thus it can be concluded that liberation is a state attained by which a *jīva* attains oneness with Paramātmān and breaks the chain of birth and rebirth.

Methods to attain liberation

The ultimate and the most important goal to be attained through a human life is believed to be liberation. One seeking liberation has to undergo self-transcendence to realize the oneness of one’s own existence with the all-pervading consciousness, the Paramātmān. For a spiritual enthusiast seeking liberation, BhG offers two important paths as discussed below.

Karma-yoga (Path of action)

A silent and pure mind forms the foundation for liberation. To attain a silent state of mind one has to purify one’s mind by avoiding various extreme opposite alternations of emotions. Therefore, BhG advocates to understand the nature of sense organs

indryasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau |

tayor na vaśamāgacchetau hyasya pariṇāthinau ||

[The senses naturally experience attraction and aversion towards the sense objects. One shall never be controlled by the emotions since they are the obstructions in the path of liberation.] (BhG, 3.34)

Karma-yoga can be used as a method to purify and control one’s mind. This is by involving in actions with the right intent and focusing on mental equipoise i.e not being affected by the attainment or nonattainment of results. Kṛṣṇa states this as the chief aim of Karma-yoga, “*siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvam yoga ucyate*” (BhG, 2.48). It is a common scenario in the world that every individual has a motive while involving in an activity. Trying to achieve the end, one may get overwhelmed and be overpowered by stress. There are chances that one may choose an iniquitous path to achieve the result. To avoid all these possibilities and to maintain mental equipoise, BG suggests performance of action without expectation of results. The actions thus performed functions as a purifier and leads to

liberation as denoted here

kāyena manasā buddhyā kevalairindriyairapi |

yoginaḥ karma kurvanti saṅgam tyaktvātmasuddhaye ||

[Karma-yogi-s perform actions physically, using senses, mentally and intellectually without any attachment and for the sole purpose of self-purification.] (BhG, 5.11)

karmaphalam tyaktvā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīm

[One attains everlasting peace by renouncing expectation of results of one's actions] (BhG, 5.12)

“We have to take up work as they come to us and slowly make ourselves more unselfish every day in the primary years we shall find that our motives are always selfish, but the selfishness will gradually melt by persistence” (Vivekānanda, 2010:10)

Karma-yoga therefore is a preparatory step towards liberation. It helps one maintain a stable mind which further proceeds towards realisation of self.

Bhakti-yoga (Path of devotion)

One of the chief and easiest paths towards liberation is Bhakti-yoga (path of devotion). The term ‘*bhakti*’ in Sanskrit is etymologically derived from the root ‘*bhaja sevāyām*’ which means ‘to serve selflessly’ (Anand *et al.*, 2020:6989). Therefore, performance of one's actions, duties and austerities with complete surrender to god is *bhakti*. Kṛṣṇa says,

ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sanyasya matparāḥ |

ananyenaiva yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate ||

teṣāmaham samuddhartā mṛtyusamsārasāgarāt |

bhavāmi nacirāt pārtha mayyāveśita-cetasām ||

[Whoever surrenders one's actions to me, completely dedicated and meditates on me; I shall deliver them from the cycle of death and rebirth since their consciousness is completely united with me.] (BhG, 12.6–7)

People practise *bhakti* for various reasons. Few practise *bhakti* to avert difficulties of one's life, few others to achieve material prosperity, being curious about god certain individuals practise *bhakti* and there are devotees who realise the oneness of the whole universe with god and surrender oneself to thee. BhG (7.16) names each category of the above mentioned devotees as *ārta* (troubled person), *arthārthī* (desirous of gaining wealth), *jijñāsu* (desirous of knowing), and *jñānī* (one possessing wisdom) respectively. Among these devotees, Kṛṣṇa regards *jñānī* to be the worthiest since a *jñānī*'s devotion is one pointed and regards god as one's ultimate goal.

teṣām jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktirviśiṣyate |

priyo hi jñānīno'ryarthamaham sa ca mama priyaḥ ||

[Among various devotees jñānī is the foremost. A jñānī is very dear to me and vice versa.] (BhG, 7.17)

bahūnām janmanāmante jñānavān mām prapadyate |

vāsudeva sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ ||

[After many births of austerities does one become a jñānī and realizes god as everything and surrenders unto god. Such a being is rarely seen.] (BhG, 7.19)

Thus, the ultimate motive of *bhakti* is to seek oneness with god by fixing one's mind on god and surrendering each and every action unto god. "The path of *bhakti* is centered around love for the divine and ultimately leads to pure bliss, whether experienced as a bliss of union or a bliss of oneness" (Agrawal and Cornelissen, 2020).

yatkarōṣi yadaśnāsi yajjuḥoṣi dadāsi yat |
yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkuruṣva madarpaṇam ||

[Whatever you do, eat, offer as oblation in sacred fire, austerities that you perform; do them as an offering to me.] (BhG, 9.27)

"God is the deliverer, the saviour. When we set our hearts and minds on him, He lifts us from the sea of death and secures for us a place in the eternal. For one whose nature is not steeped in renunciation, the path of devotion is more suitable" (Radhakrishnan 1963:294).

Therefore, unwavering practise of devotion as discussed here could liberate one easily.

Conclusion

It can very well be perceived that BhG holds an all-embracing philosophy. The philosophy, which can be summarised as *pravṛtti-mārga* (path of activity) and *nivṛtti-mārga* (path of renunciation). Various aspects of *pravṛtti-mārga* discussed in BhG unfolds the right technique to conduct one's life peacefully, ethically and productively in this world. It distinctly declares about the effects of merits and demerits achieved while living. These effects are experienced by a *jīva* while traversing the other worlds and finally being born back on earth. The life on earth has the potentiality to associate one with the next birth based on the prominence of one's *guṇa*. Finally, the goal of human life shall be to attain liberation. For this, BhG refers to pragmatic paths like Karma-yoga and Bhakti-yoga. A spiritual aspirant purifies one's mind by transcending various mental dualities through *karma*. Through *bhakti*, one overcomes ego by means of spiritual austerities and service by surrendering to the divine god head. Thus, a *jīva* attains the final goal of human life which is to realise one's true nature, the *ātman*.

References

- Agrawal, J., & Cornelissen, R. M. (2020). Yoga and positive mental health. *MindRxiv*, June 16. <doi:10.31231/osf.io/j765m>
- Amritanandamayi, M. (1996). *Awaken Children: Dialogues with Sri Mata Amritanandamayi*, Vol 8, translated by Swami Amritaswarupananda, San Ramon, CA: Mata Amritanandamayi Math.
- Bhagavad Gītā*. (1963). translated by S Radhakrishnan, London: George Allen and Unwin. *Bhagavad Gītā* with commentary of Ācārya Śaṅkara. (1977). translated by Alladi Mahadeva Sastry. Madras: V. Sadanand.
- Bodewitz, H. (2019). "The Hindu doctrine of transmigration: Its origin and background". In *Vedic Cosmology and Ethics*, pp. 3-19. Netherlands: Brill.
- Brahmasūtras* with commentary of Śaṅkarācārya (1960). translated by VM Apte, Bombay: Popular book depot.
- Hiriyanna, M. (2005). *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Raju, P. T. (2013). *The philosophical traditions of India*. London: Routledge.
- Sadasivan Anand, Deepa H., Tapan Kumar Parida. (2020). "Is Bhakti, a sine qua non for Mokṣa? A Psychospiritual exploration of Bhaktiśatak". *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(8): 6986-6998.
- Viṣṇu purāṇa*. (1896). translated by Manmath Nath Dutt, Calcutta: Manmath Nath Dutt.
- Vedāntasāra*. (1931). translated by swami Nikhilānanda, Mayavati, Almora: Advaita Ashrama.
- Vivekananda, Swami. (2010). *Karma Yoga: The secret of work*. Hollister, MO: Yogebooks.