Chapter IV

THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDIVIDUAL SELF IN
THE LIGHT OF ‘THE GITA’

Notwithstanding the fact that man has to go with the natural process of evolution as other species of the animal world do, his spiritual evolution or development takes him to a very special course of evolution because of the fact that man is naturally bestowed with a power by which he can transcend his bio-physical identity of the same nature. In this connection it may be mentioned that the aim of all philosophy, all religions and spiritual searches is one to delineate the development of man to a higher state of accomplishment or the revelation of the inherent spirituality in him. It is something like examining the need and scope of removing the veil of darkness from over the real nature of self. While for different philosophical system this veil obstructing the true knowing self is created by ignorance and illusion, for religions it is the over powering of the true self by one’s bodily considerations of pleasure, pain, lust, lure. But, nevertheless all the searchers are aimed at throwing light on the causes of the true essence of life being obscured.

However, it is easier said than done. Because even if the aim of all philosophy, religion and Society is the development of man to a better or higher state, all do not work in unison in respect of the ways for attainment of the goal. The problem is that many of them do not involve the spiritual or intuitive character of man. On the contrary the reforming authorities depend on the difference in culture, heritage,
community sanctions etc. They basically include the difference between one individual and the other on the basis of individual differences in consciousness, wisdom, feelings, and experiences. This is the reason why every religion has its own way of devising the path for spiritual upliftment. But these differences do not make man’s constant endeavour searching for the real meaning of his life a myth. In fact this is how the process of evolution works through him.

Now, if evolution has made man the searcher for a supreme form of life, the next stage of his goal can be only a form of ‘divinity’. This divinity however does not mean attaining the qualities of the heavenly gods or becoming the citizen of heaven, because they too are not free from impurities. The Gita says, There is no creature either on earth or again among the gods in heaven, which is free from the three modes that is Sattva, Rajah and Tama born of nature.2

So let us say, even the gods are required to try to achieve ‘divinity’ which comes through salvation. But as the human form is the only form suitable for the endeavour to attain salvation through the paths of knowledge and devotion, hence, the gods also desire to take birth in this world as a human being.3 What is important to note here is that even going by religious faiths and beliefs, the development process of the human soul has only its worldly existence to adhere to. If a human being wants to develop a more coveted state of his life, he has to achieve ‘Amritatva’ or eternality only through achieving the realization of the Supreme as his real self.4 This we may call ‘godliness’ which means the same as what religious faiths call
‘divinity’. This development does not mean attainment of the heaven of God, but the attainment of his real self in him.

The question is, can an ordinary man elevate himself to that state? The Gita is very clear about that. Its says—to elevate oneself to this godliness one does not need any outside support because even if one is a mortal being, there lies in every man an inherent godliness or the power to rise above the worldly self. The Gita says,

“karmany akarma yah pasyed  akarmani ca karma yah
sa buddhiman manusyesu sa yuktah krtsnakarmakrt”

“yasya sarve samarabhah kamasamkalpavarjitah
 jnanagnidagdharmanam tam ahuh panditam budhah”

This power comes from knowledge or jnana which breaks through the complacency feel over the success of worldly deeds.

We have seen that, as an intelligent being, man is the possessor of a supreme quality, namely, self enquiring and the feeling of one’s own self. No matter how he is placed in his worldly life, he lives through every moment of his efforts for the betterment of his state. This being a nonstop process of man’s striving for more, superseding the present, he develops a feeling of discomfort. He asks to himself– if this life is not the end of the process, than what he is up to? He searches for answers to such questions as ‘who am I?’ ‘Where did I come from?’ ‘Where shall I go after death?’ These questions
propel him towards the path of self-searching. The more he ponders about these queries, the more it is revealed that he is not happy even after enjoying the materialistic comforts to its fullest form. He realizes that, this so called ‘fullest’, is not free from the threat of being lost any day because of its temporary nature he finds in his day-to-day experiences. Hence he goes on to ask- is there any eternally happy state beyond this worldly life? This searching or query has been termed as ‘religious query’ by Maharshi Jaimini.\textsuperscript{7} Maharshi Vyas, in his Dharmasutra has called it ‘Divine Query’\textsuperscript{8}. This may appear to be an affair of only a gifted few because it does not easily go with normal worldly acts and experiences. But the Gita says–

\begin{quote}
“Karmajam buddhiyukta hi phalam tyaktva manisinah
Janmabandhavinirmuktah padam gacchanty anamayam”\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

- that means even in worldly conditions if one takes resort to reason instead of ordinary activities intending material gains, he attains a perfect sorrow-free state of life. And the play of reason giving rise to queries in this sense and the ‘query for the right life or dharma’ is not basically different. Because they are only two forms of the same drive man by nature continuously responds to. We may refer to the Upanishads about how this drive works in man.

Guided by the said query man realizes that beyond this worldly self there is a divinity, which if it can be attained will erase all the sorrows and tribulations of human life. This query leads man to the search for the endless, the limitless and the benevolent.\textsuperscript{10}
We have seen that man’s search for the ultimate goal of life cannot stop short of a permanent state of perfect happiness. And so far happiness is concerned, it cannot be derived from anything lesser than ‘Bhumaa’. This query also teaches man that this human body is a vehicle and it is run by a driver called the ‘soul’. The journey towards attaining the divinity begins as soon as a man realizes that his body is only the vehicle of the soul, and in the cover of the human body the soul is a part of the supreme self. According to the Upanishads, this “jivatma’ or the Supreme soul in the human body is like the Supreme Self which is beyond birth, death senility, grief, etc. If a man can relate himself to that soul only then can he attain that eternal divinity.

Now the question arises, how far it is a plausible proposition that man can transcend his limitations? And how far it is justified to think that man can at all be interested to do so?

As a biological species, the human body is created with elements similar to that of the animals. According to National Geographic Society “human beings have descended, at the vary least, from ape-like creatures, if not directly from apes.” Hence, a man is supposed to be like an animal and the animal-like qualities and needs of hunger, thirst, sex, possessiveness etc. chain him down to the mundane world. But if we look at the driving force of a human being working deep in him, we find that, unlike other species every man knowingly or unknowingly is working to secure a better form of life for
him than what he is living. May be this ‘better’ is not a very clear to him, nor exactly what might take him to the realisation of the Supreme self in his human self. Or even may be what he strives for rather harms his growth as a human being in the long run. But, nevertheless, the spirit of improvement is there. And it is this spirit that gradually creates in him an urge; to take a corrective measure and secure a state which is not subject to any kind of remorse and despair.

A sociological study carried out by a social activist group in 2008 among the cross-section of an Indian community reveals that this ‘urge’ in principle works in the same way in differently situated person of the society. Let us state two of such studies.

A poor daily rated worker was asked if he had any ultimate goal of life. He answered that, besides meeting daily requirements of his and his family with much difficulty, he always finds sometime to singing for the ‘Lord’ who according to him is the ultimate destiny of man. This reminds us of Tagore’s experiences narrated in ‘Man’s Nature’ where he tells about poor villagers offering water to keep his troubling motor car going from the paltry store of drinking water collected with much difficulty reeling under a state of draught and that too without any reward.

Again, a rich contractor and owner of a transport business finds hardly any time to listen to the so-called “Call of the spirit in him”. But he too takes leave of his business empire to enjoy the exclusive
moments of offering puja to the deities during specific festivals. And what is more, during festivals he shares quite a big part of his wealth with the needy people around him. Outwardly he does it as a matter of pride. But when he was asked- ‘what makes you proud?’ startling reply came from him. He said- ‘I want to make as many people as possible.’ According to him this gives him a feel of ‘good’ which is more than his own materialistic pride of accumulating more wealth. This reminds us of the Gita that;

“devan bhavayata nena te deva bhavayantu vah
parasparam bhavayantah sreyah param avapsyatha”

“istan bhogan hi vo deva dasyante yajnabhavithah
tair dattan apradayai bhyo yo bhunkte stena eva sah” 15.

This person may not be particularly following the path contained in these verses, but he is practically doing that. In fact this takes him away from his usual activities as a social being.

Some one may reasonably be skeptical in drawing a conclusion about anything like a spiritual search out of these studies, for nobody knows what will be the take of such study when the numbers of instances are increased. But if we view the inner significance of the proceedings of these case-studies, it becomes evident that man always tries to breakthrough his confinement. And a natural extension of the process is that he realizes that, it is impossible to break the chain of this materialistic shortcomings without attaining the divine knowledge or divinity, because divinity in the sense of realizing the Supreme Self
in oneself is the most perfect and the only true state of happiness where attainment of divinity means attaining completeness and purity through divine knowledge. Whoever knows the divine can attain the perfection of his self. This is the essence of the teachings of the Gita.16

About the realisation of Supreme Self in a materialistic self it is said, to realize the supreme self in this life, it is not enough that he leads a good life. He has to realize that this goodness at the highest state is the Supreme incarnate. How this process takes place? About this, the Gita says, Man does not have to derive any supporting material from the external world to attain divinity. Divinity is a manifestation of the real self in every human being. To be divine means to develop a consciousness of the real self in every mould of his life.17 And if this is achieved divinity manifests itself automatically.

Does this manifestation need a special effort? It can be seen from the above that for a man to cross the limits of the human life and the limitations of his biological body in order to attain divinity, there is a need for a special kind of development which is not a part of his daily life. But the Gita says, the various steps and ways that can be taken to attain divinity can very well be part of any ordinary living provided he adheres to the spirit of striving pursued through his natural way of work. The Gita says,

“sadrsam cestate svasyah prakrter jnanavan api
prakritim yanti bhutani nigrahah kim karisyati”18
According to Radhakrishnan, this verse seems to suggest the omnipotence of nature over the soul and requires us to act according to our nature, the law of our being. It does not follow that we should indulge in every impulse. It is a call to find out our true being and give expression to it. We cannot, even if we will, suppress it. Violated nature will take its revenge.

As to the question how one can break through the limitations of his socio-biological self, the Gita refers to true renunciation or samnyas. Commenting on this Radhakrishnan refers to Sankhya telling about which of the two ways, namely, renunciation of works and unselfish performance is better and says that, the intention of the Gita right through seems to be that the work to be abandoned is the selfish work which binds us to the chain of karma. But that is not to abandon all activities. We cannot be served ourselves by works alone, but works are not opposed to wisdom. It is mentioned in the Gita;

“samnyasah karmayogas ca nihsreyasakarav ubhau
tayos tu karmasamnyasat karmayogo visisyate”

The renunciation of works and their unselfish performance both lead to the soul’s salvation. But of the two, the unselfish performance of works is better than their renunciation. When a man leaves the pride of his human body and breaks the chains of desire, he can realize the higher form of his self. He is led to view a unity. The eternal feeling of union with the Supreme takes to feeling of oneness with everything.
About this feeling of ‘oneness’ Swami Vivekananda said, “Atmanah .Mokhshartham Jagadwitayacha”. If a person can realize the presence of the soul within his mind, he can break the chains of this human body. Hence to attain the complete divine knowledge and thus attain salvation one should have the feeling ‘whoever is within me is within all’. The Katha Upanisad says - whoever realizes this is freed from the cycle of birth and death and attains immortality.

Man as a social being loses touch with the divine because of his thought oriented by his socio-physical demands and becomes different from the divine. But when one starts contemplating on the real worth of his being he loses the feeling of his bodily confinements and realizes the self, and the thoughts of differences in him vanishes because of its inherent of limitedness. He realizes a sort of ‘sameness in variety’. The Gita also says;

“yada bhutaprhthagbhavam ekastham anupasyati
tata eva ca vistaram Brahma sampadyate tada.” (sec.13/30)

He feels himself as a bubble in the vast ocean. That eternal light is divine and its every particle is divine. He realizes that to think of himself as different from others is a false thought. He also realizes that whom he was worshipping as an idol in the temples is that divinity manifest in front of him.

The main objective of this discussion is to show that the revelation of the supreme soul in Jivatma and the manifestation of the
Divine soul (Paramatma) from the standpoint of Srimad Bhagabata
Gita is a natural process of happening in the life of man, whether
ordinary or specially gifted.

Up till now what has been discussed is about the process of
transition of the individual self to the state of the Divine self. And we
have seen that the Gita gives stress on the theoretical grasp of the
highest truth of life along with the practical methodology to
supplement it. A discussion on the views of the Gita therefore, takes
us to an altogether different plane where religion is one of such
method.

Let us remember that a spiritual search and following a
religious life are different. The former is based on supra-rational
approach whereas the latter is based on unconditional faith and
surrender. It may be seen that more people take to the second and are
divided different cells into sects by these religions. Now, what is
important here to see is whether a search for spiritual unity is at all
workable also by following a religious path of faith and surrender?
About this, the Gita has a specific answer. It says, if ‘Bhagavad
prapti’, that is, realization of the supreme in one’s worldly self is the
ultimate goal of Jiva and different religions through ages have come
forward to help men to attain it, then it is possible to reach that place
if man devotedly takes the support of any of these paths. Sri Krishna
has said, “In whatever form one takes refuge in ‘me’ shall receive ‘my’
benevolence in that form”.25 Here ‘me’ and ‘my’ may be taken for the
ultimate goal of man’s journey and not the goal of a particular
religious Idol. The personified form of it is only to show that the whole process of the journey of an individual human being towards achieving his goal is like merger of the ‘individualized’ form of the ultimate truth of the universe with the all-comprehensive one which accommodates it.

In so far the theory of creation is concerned, the Gita holds that evolution of this material world has taken place though different stages and through many years. The universe was not created in one day neither will its destruction take place in one day. If it is minutely observed we can find that the endless process of creation through destruction, birth and death, in the material and living world is continuing through every form of change.  

It may be worthwhile to mention that the saints of the Upanishads did not rest with observing the evolution of the non-living as a blind or unconscious causal chain. They were surprised at the result and discipline of evolution and endeavoured to find out the hidden power behind this evolution.

The occidental science failed to describe the primitive reason of the continuance of the world through the non-living factors. In fact, that is the reason why many of western thinkers had to take resort to the spiritual theories of the Upanishads which follows a design by the Divine Self. What led them to think so is not difficult to see if we refer to sciences.
Science tells us that energy is necessary to create something. But mere blind force or energy created by the fusion of different physical particles is not enough to explain the world of the living and the non-living in the harmonious way that it exhibits in every sphere of it. The food cycle, the role of water, air, earth and lots of other physical-chemical elements even all of them taken together prove insufficient to explain the emergence of consciousness as a natural phenomenon. Probably this was the problem faced by evolutionists like Herbert Spencer who realized that the complete strength which is manifest in the non-living world is manifest in man as consciousness. He found that he neither could prove it scientifically how unconscious elements could give rise to the creation of conscious creatures nor he could discover the source of that energy in the growth process of man. Even most recent efforts in this field have failed to solve the mystery of the transition of the pre-human to the human.

But then it does not mean that it was an inexplicable miracle, or a mysterious accident. That the growth process of conscious agents like human beings through the supposed unconscious elements pressed into fusion by the process of evolution also contained conscious element in a very subtle form, has been one of the most revolutionary discovery of the 20th century. In this connection some writers have referred to genetic science and engineering which according to them is engaged in tracing the total phenomenon of the emergence of conscious elements in living creature in the natural evolution of DNA and RNA in protein synthesis.
Indian saints realised it ages back that as man is conscious, hence the source of human life is also compelled to be conscious because the ‘unconscious’ can not be thought of giving birth to a conscious species without contradiction. The way the saints concluded in this regard was based on an argument from similarity. As a person can reach the source of a river by going against the flow, similarly the saints examined the strength behind the senses of every created object and going from vast to the minute; they could learn about the conscious self. 31. This strength is termed as divine in the Upanishads which is revealed in the living and non-living world alike.32

And the Gita says, birth, growth and destruction of the body do not touch the soul residing in the body because of the reflection of the Divine Self. 33 The supreme self is indestructible.

“acchedyo yam adahyo yam akledyo sosya eva ca
nityah sarvagatakah sthanur acalo yam sanatanah”34

Because the soul is not made of physical elements.

Scientifically speaking, this is another way of putting the theory of continuity. Nothing absolutely perishes, only there are changes of states. And so for the transition process in the biological world is concerned, we have seen that an element working as life force in a living creature through different stages dies only to initiate the next run of it in an improved form by a natural process of enrichment.
through information transmitted from the former state for an improved encounter process.\textsuperscript{35}

About this worldly phenomenon of continuance, the Gita says –

\textit{“Srotam caksuh sparsanam ca rasanam ghranam eva ca adhisthaya manas ca yam visayan upasevate”} \textsuperscript{36}

That means even if the supreme self is a part of the Divine Self it takes the human form and gets chained down to the mundane world of sufferings. He acts and has to bear the results of his actions. The main reason behind enjoying the results is desire. Hence, if a man relinquishes the desire for result then his actions will not chain him down.\textsuperscript{37} Thus it goes back to its real self. This is another way of stating the theory of continuity.

As for the role of an individual in this process of transformation, the Gita says, the Supreme Self is manifested in every particle ‘He’ has created. If one cannot feel the existence of that soul in every creature one cannot realize the supreme self in him.

\textit{“yaj jnatva na punar moham evam yasyasi pandava yena bhutany asesena draksyasy atmany atho mayi”} \textsuperscript{38}

Until one feels himself to be a part of all that he beholds, his ignorance will not be erased. This is why even if the contemplator has reached the highest point of spiritual life, Gita advises him to act ‘
free of all motive’ and to act ‘Sarvabhutahite’, that is ‘for the welfare of all.’

Here we find that our contention that man is basically a process of continuous progress in which nothing is uniquely new, on the contrary he is in an eternal progress of realizing the highest state of itself, has been supported by the related massages of the Gita.
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