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## **The Law of Karma and Salvation**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to maintain the view through analysis that nothing but the notion of niskama karma of the Bhagavat Gita leads us to the Salvation. Here I have discussed different types of karma according to the Indian philosophy. But such diverse types of karma do not conduct us to the salvation. These all are sakam karmas, which bounds us in the cycle of birth-rebirth. Here I have mentioned that non-action or the renunciation of action is impossible. I have also argued that on the ground of their way of life there is a basic difference between Sramana(Buddist)and the Bhagavat Gita. Sramana propounds the theory of non-action, which Bhagavat Gita does not propound anywhere. Non-action can never be the way to achieve salvation. Only Niskama karma generates us towards liberation.*

**Key Words:** *Niskama karma, lokasangraha, sakam karma, fatalism, freedom of will.*

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The theory of Karma is a fundamental doctrine in Hinduism. **Karma** (Sanskrit: कर्म, "act, action, performance") — is a noun-form coming from the root *kri* meaning "to do," "to make." The term Karma literally means action, work or deed. Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical, is regarded as Karma. It covers all that is included in the phrase "thought, word and deed". Involuntary, unintentional or unconscious actions, though technically deeds, do not constitute Karma, because volition, the most important factor in determining Karma, is absent. The term 'karma' is used to refer to volitional acts as well as the forces that arise from these acts. In its ultimate sense Karma means all moral and immoral volition. Karma is the sum total of our acts both in the present life and in the preceding births. Karma means not only action, but also the result of action. The consequences of an action are not a separate thing. It is a part of action and cannot be divided from it. The whole life centers on karma. No one lives without doing karma. Human beings are bound by work. If you are born, you have to perform karma. Karma is not optional, it is spontaneous. We are because of our karma. Karma embraces the whole meaning of living. Karma is associated with earthly existence. The doctrine of karma implies that, every soul embodied in a human being has the will to make decisions and choose what actions to take. Those decisions and actions generate karma.

The word 'karma' may appear to be small, but its meaning is profound. It has neither beginning, nor end. Just life is beginning less, karma to without beginning. Law of karma occupies central position in Indian philosophy. A common theme to theories of karma is its principle of causality. The concept of karma in Indian philosophy and religion is inextricably associated with the doctrine of rebirth. Karma is responsible for the entire chain of causes and effects. The concepts of rebirth, moksha and samsara are closely associated with the principle of karma. Rebirth, or saṃsāra, is the concept that all life forms go through a cycle of reincarnation that is a series of births and rebirths. It is considered as an impersonal law that cannot be abrogated by any person, but may be mitigated by God. The law of karma is not imposed from without; it is worked into very nature of human being. The human mind is unable to set him free from the effects of their very actions. The doctrine of karma provides causal explanations for the phenomena of life. Karma does not necessarily mean past actions. It embraces both past and present deeds. It serves as a foundation for ethical and religious understanding. The law of karma governs the universe and all beings within it; it acts impersonally and binds each atman (inner Self) to the world and in addition to the cycle of transmigration. According to the law of karma, a person's individual and collective actions determine the nature of his or her future existence in the present life or in a future life. The effects of our karma may be

experienced immediately or some later time in the life of an individual, or may accumulate and manifest themselves in some future rebirth. The past is the initiation of the present and the future. There is no escape from the results of karma. Everything we do, say or think, gives rise to an effect, which in due time will return to us. Therefore the vents of our future do not arise coincidentally; it is actually caused by the effect of our past and present actions. Our destiny is predetermined by our karma. If we understand this we can no longer blame anybody for what happens to us. It is not punishment, but simply an extended expression of natural acts. Karma distinguishes one person from another. Good intent and good actions contribute to good karma and future happiness, while bad intent and actions contribute to bad karma. Karma is a store of good and bad actions, accumulated over many lives. It binds one to phenomenal existence.

Karma is one of the important spiritual laws that govern our life experiences through principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, total cosmic justice and personal responsibility. Karma is not fate. The eastern people believe in fatalism. Fate is an overmastering power that predetermines the actions of man. Fatalism saps the very foundation of morality. Fatalism is the negation of morality. This doctrine undermines the freedom of the will. One can't use the word "pre-destination" or "fate" to substitute with Karma because they do not mean the same. Karma is not pre-destination. Karma is the underlying principle between Pre-destination and Freewill. You have free will. Karma works to develop our ability to handle free will responsibly. Karma operates impersonally, giving us the opportunity at every moment to become open to greater levels of love and compassion. No God or external force is controlling one's life. It is our own karmic creation. We are bounded by Karma in this and other lifetimes until we understand the complete consequences of all our actions. Every person is responsible for his or her acts and thoughts, so each person's karma is entirely his or her own.

As a man sows, he shall be reaping. This is the law of karma. Whatever you show by your actions come back to you. Your action in the past is responsible for your present condition. By free righteous actions men acquire merits. By free unrighteous men acquire demerits. They perform righteous and unrighteous actions freely. If the karma of an individual is good enough, the next birth will be rewarding, and if not, the person may actually devolve and degenerate into a lower life form.

According to the Indian scriptures, Karma can be divided into four parts called **Sanchita Karma, Prarabdha Karma, Kriyamana karma and Agama karma.**

**Sanchita Karma:** Sanchita Karma is the sum of all our karma in previous lifetimes, which set the stage for our condition in the current life. It is the aggregate sum of yet unseen Karmas committed during innumerable previous existences. Sanchita Karma is the vast store of piled-up Karma accumulated in the preceding and in all or you is reducing this cosmic debt. It is waiting to be fulfilled in your future births. So unless and until the Sanchita Karma of a Soul is zeroed, it keeps on birthing in new physical bodies, in order to exhaust its balance Sanchita Karma.

**Praarabdha Karma:** That portion of the Sanchita Karma destined to influence human life in one or the present incarnation is called Praarabdha. In other words, Praarabdha Karma is Karmic Template (of that portion of Sanchita Karma) that is ripe enough to be experienced by you and allotted for this lifetime for you to work on. If you work down you're agreed upon debt in this lifetime, then more past debts will surface to be worked on. And that much Sanchita Karma gets dissolved. Good deeds or positive karma can also help offset negative past karma.

**Aagami Karma:** Aagami Karma is the Karmic Map that is coming, as a result of the merits and demerits of the present actions of your current birth. In other words, it is the portion of Karma that is created because of the actions in the present life and that will be added to your Sanchita Karma. If you fail to work off your debt, then more debts are added to Sanchita Karma and they become more Karmic Seeds and are served to you in more future lives. Aagami karmas are the actions in our present lifetime that will affect our future lives or incarnations. Positive actions, following the precepts, charity, compassion, and practice all accumulate for optimum karma in future incarnations.

**Kriyamana Karma:** Kriyamana Karma is the daily, instant Karma created in this lifetime and that we create in our life because of our free actions. Kriyamana karma is the most intense form of karma, the one we see in our daily lives, where our current actions (good and bad) result in immediate consequences. Negative actions may result in retribution. Positive actions may, in this lifetime, be

returned in kind. Kriyamana is the instant daily *karma* that is being created in this lifetime for the future. The way our thought works in this life will affect our future life and incarnations. Kriyamana can be altered by correct attitude, as well as by particular rites. It is also known as immediate karma.

Here an important question could be raised, that if the law of karma is indomitable and every karma has its result, then Indian moralists has to face one important question- how can the liberation be achieved? Those who believe in law of karma , they think liberation is the highest purushartha that a man can achieve; but if karma is resultant then birth and rebirth must obviously be seen, and men can never achieve liberation. Just as an evil person has to take rebirth for his evil deeds, likewise an honest man too has to take rebirth for his honest deeds. So if the law of karma indomitable then a honest person too cannot escape from birth and rebirth and get liberation or salvation. So one question obviously comes to the mind that is the law of karma inconsistent with the concept of moksha?

To give the answer of this question we have to admit that there are two types of karma: Sakama karma and Niskamaa karma.

**Sakama karma:** The first stage of karma is doing sakama karma. It simply means that you do karma with the result in mind. Most of the human being lives in the world of sakama karma. Whole concept of samsara is based on the debits and credits of sakama karma. It binds us to the wheel of death and rebirth. Material desires, expectations, emotions make an average individual prone is doing sakama karma.

**Niskama karma:** The literal meaning of niskama karma is selfless action that means action performed without desiring or fearing the consequences; action performed with indifference to the outcome. It's used to describe the practice of doing actions without any expectation of the fruits (results or reactions or effects). Niskama Karma has been variously explained as 'Duty for duty's sake' and as 'Detached Involvement', which is neither negative attitude nor indifference.

"Niskama Karma" is the central message of Bhagavad Gita. The bhagavat-Gita is one source for hindu ethics of performing your duty without attachment to the fruits of your action. In the Gita Lord Krishna advocates 'Niskama Karma Yoga' (the Yoga of Selfless Action) as the ideal path to realize the Truth. Niskama Karma is another name for Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga prepares the mind for the reception of light and knowledge. When a man resolves to attain God-realization, his attachment and attraction for the world being to disappear. Attachment to pleasure and prosperity is the main obstacle to the attainment of a resolute intellect. Karmayoga expands the heart and breaks all barriers that stand in the way of oneness or unity. Karma Yoga is an effective Sadhana for Chitta Suddhi or purity of heart. A common man performs actions in order to fulfil his desires, which binds us to this world and it leads to rebirth. Actions which are prompted by desires, leads us to the bonds of karma. But a true karma-yogi performs actions having the aim of renouncing attachment. Attachment is the root of all vice.

There are no opposition between the path of true knowledge and the path of duties. They are depending upon them. True knowledge is supported by right performance of duties. Without the practice of karmayoga it is very difficult to succeed in the practice of jnanayoga. There is nothing as pure as knowledge. He who has controlled his senses, who has true faith on God and who attached to God, secures peace. The true knowledge of God destroys all karma in the sense that he who has perceived and realized the true nature of all things in God cannot be attached to his passions and desires as an ignorant man would be.

In the discipline of action Bhagavat Gita's main principal is "Action is superior to inaction". 'I have to do nothing'-this is also an action. The life of action is preferred by Lord Krishna. It was feared that Arjuna's sudden reluctance to fight and his decision to run away from the battle field was due to an attachment to a-karma. Bhagavat Gita propounds the philosophy of action. Krishna told Arjuna that even if one wishes to give up action, one cannot do so, because every man is bound by his own nature to perform action. If Lord Krishna argues for non-action, he would not have taught Arjuna the philosophy of karmayoga. Karmayoga consist in practice of the philosophy of niskam karma. Niskam karma is selfless or desire less action, which is performed without any expectation of fruits. Nothing is gained by the performance of such acts, but it is the incumbent duty of human beings to perform them.

In this context it is necessary to mention that the karma doctrine of the Bhagavat Gita was entirely directed against the Buddhist tradition. To achieve the goal of freedom Sramans had rejected to

perform the Vedic rituals and choose the life of non-action. The Sramans think that the renunciation from action is the only way to achieve freedom. Sramans thought that desire generates actions to obtain results which generate further desire that is thirst. From thirst to bondage again, that is the cycle of birth and re-birth. To break the cycle of birth and re-birth one should practice to give up desire to achieve the state of non-action. But the Bhagavat Gita supported the performance of Vedic rituals. The good of the society is sustained by the ritual acts. The renunciation of action consists in the giving up of action and giving up of action is equivalent to non-action which the Bhagavat Gita does not propound anywhere.

When an action is performed, for the welfare of others without any selfish motive, it is called 'Karmayoga' or the Discipline of action. In Karmayoga action is performed for the welfare of others, while 'Yoga' is for one's own self. When a person performed actions for himself, he is attached to the actions and their fruit. But when he performs these for others, actions and their fruit are related to others, while he is related to God. He realizes his real relation with God, the eternal. God-realization is the aim of human life. Action which is performed in order to attain an aim cannot be called an action with desire for fruit. The practice of Niskama karma yoga destroys sins and impurities of the mind and causes chitta suddhi or purity of the antahkarana. When he surrenders himself, his all, including his so-called mind and intellect etc., are naturally surrendered to God. When all is surrendered to God, then 'all' does not persist but only God remains-'Vasudevah sarvam'. In this way the salvation of a man is ensured even through mere disinterested action, much more so when Devotion is added to it.

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