

Svadharmas and Paradharma: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Svadharmas usually means both in traditional and modern setting that one's own dharma, duty and responsibility. Every person has unique duties and responsibilities. *Svadharmas* is unique to that person because every one has different capacities and righteousness.

Svadharmas and specific social obligations of different types of man according to the Bhagavad Gita, is found to have been indicated in the doctrine of *caturvarna* on the scheme of four social orders.

Sreyan Svadharmo Vigunah para-dharmat Svanusthitat

Svadharme nidhanam sreyah para-dharmo bhayavahah¹.

It means, better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty, the duty of another is productive of danger. For, the duty of another leads to danger such as hell (naraka).

Ya enam vetti hantaram yas caiman manyate hatam

Ubhau tau na vijanito nayam hanti na hanyate².

It means, whoever looks upon Him as the slayer, and whoever looks upon him as the slain, both these know not aright. He slays not, nor is He slain. Being immutable (*avikriya*), the self is neither the agent nor the object of the action of slaying.

Hanta cen-manyate hantum, hata's cen-manyate hatam;

Ubhau tau na vijnanito , nayam hanti na hanyate³.

It means, if the slayer thinks "I slay" and if the slain thinks, "I am slain" then both of them do not know well. This slays not nor is this slain.

In other words, such adoption by the mass of the traditional saying seems to be nothing other than blind imitation of the usual inquisitive mind of the individual person. If one goes with the Gita's saying that "*Paradharma is bhayabahah*", then the blind adoption of the tradition without independent rational foundation can't be defensible. Is it not something anomalous and self-stultifying?

INTRODUCTION

Svadharmas usually means both in traditional and modern setting that one's own dharma, duty and responsibility. Every person has unique duties and responsibilities. *Svadharmas* is unique to that person because everyone has different capacities and righteousness. It appears that sticking to one's own dharma need not suggest a sense of egoism or aloofness from social relationship but is commensurate with the socio-individual relationship.

Svadharmas and specific social obligations of different types of man according to the Bhagavad Gita, is found to have been indicated in the doctrine of *caturvarna* on the scheme of four social orders. But all social orders is supposed to have equitable status of different members of the society to sustain the classification of *Varna* in effective manner.

Sreyan Svadharmo Vigunah para-dharmat Svanusthitat

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Now, let there be a probe into the concept of *svadharmā* and *paradharmā* as enunciated in the Gita. It is said that *Svadharmā* is *sreya* (preferable as good) and *paradharmā* is *bhayabahab* i.e. dangerous or unpreferable. By implication such rendering of both the concepts suggest that *svadharmā* has the sole sense of goodness and *paradharmā* has the sole sense of avoidance. It seems, such radical dichotomy between the two is neither practical nor reasonable.

¹35, Karma yoga, the Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya, Samata Books, Madras-1977.

Though one is to concede that blindly and dogmatically imitating other’s thought and action is irrational. So also, blindly sticking to one’s own view is unreasonable and breeds a sense of egotism. The balancing feature would be both, from practical and rational point of view, for a mutual reciprocity between two approaches that would surely be practically worthy.

For instance, in our daily life a student is tutored by teacher/ an expert for fruitful guidance so that he can be well-informed (about the issue) and also is to cultivate the sense of rational investigation independently and judiciously. This amounts to saying that *paradharmā* is not necessarily dangerous.

If one agrees with the above said noting on the Gita, it would be fair to judge that the Gita’s view needs reconsideration.

Ya enam veti hantaram yas caiman manyate hatam

Ubhau tau na vijanito nayam hanti na hanyate².

It means, whoever looks upon Him as the slayer, and whoever looks upon him as the slain, both these know not aright. He slays not, nor is He slain. Being immutable (*avikriya*), the self is neither the agent nor the object of the action of slaying.

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²19, Samkhya Yoga, The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya, Samata Books, Madras-1977.

³ 1– ii Kathopanisad, Swami Chinmayananda, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai-400072

As per the tradition of both *Gita and Upanisad* (as mentioned earlier) the soul is eternal. The death of the body is not the death of soul. This is the general meaning which is conveyed by the classical Indian philosophical tradition of the aforesaid trend. And it is also interesting to note that such a trend is more or less adopted both by the mass and also some group of intelligentsia. If such adoption is efficacious and also reasonable in an open setting, then it is surely not blind adoption. But, as we find such adoption is more unprejudiced imitation than is based on the test of reason. Ordinarily we mean that death occurs to someone when body, mind and the show of consciousness become defunct. Body is no more alive and we say the being is dead. But here the traditional setting redefines that the being survives the body as the distinct soul. Here, the soul bereft of body and mind is conscious as such and can be regarded, by “implication” person or individual.

In accordance with the doctrine of *karma* the soul is bound to be a person/individual and it carries the sense of rebirth and also the sense of remembrance in certain specific cases. All this amounts to the saying that the person continues beyond the existing body. This surely rests on a metaphysical stipulation which is neither practically evident nor scientifically justifiable.

In other words, such adoption by the mass of the traditional saying seems to be nothing other than blind imitation of the usual inquisitive mind of the individual person. If one goes with the Gita’s saying that “*Paradharmā* is *bhayabahab*”, then the blind adoption of the tradition without independent rational foundation can’t be defensible. Is it not something anomalous and self-stultifying?

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