

## **GITA'S CONCEPTS OF SOUL, SELF AND MAN: AN ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract**

*It is seen that sometimes the concepts, namely, soul and self are found to be used interchangeably. The understanding is found as that the self represents the 'atman' and so also the soul taking the immortality and pure spiritual aspect of it. It is also well known that the concept 'self' refers to the jiva or the individual being. The individual being or the man has to witness his destiny as a human person (man). In the later understanding the link with the karmic nexus is quite clear whereas it is no way there in respect of the former understanding. This creates an obscurity in the proper understanding of the Gita's stand. In this context Prof. Radhakrishnan's use of the concepts of 'subject-man' and the 'object-man' appears to be very much important for better understanding. The paper intends to make an exposition and analysis of the three concepts of the Gita to decide whether the obscurity is apparent or real one.*

### **Keywords**

*Soul, self, man, subject-man, object-man*

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The study of the metaphysics of the Bhagavad Gita invites the proper understanding of the concepts, namely, soul, self and the man. It is seen that the two terms self and man are used synonymously and so also the concepts of soul and self. It amounts to finding the sense of equality between soul and man that establishes pure spiritualistic philosophy, reducing man to either to soul or self and nothing beyond. In such a frame the placement of the most important karmic doctrine of the upanisadic tradition creates confusion. The man who is to reap his consequences has to be both spiritual and physical. In order to remove the confusion, it is intended to make an analysis of the three concepts in the light of the Gita's stand.

### **The concept of Atman (soul/self)**

It has been mentioned in the Gita that the text carries the gist of all other Upanisads. Let us have a look the concept of the Gita in relations to the upanisadic view. The Katha Upanisad holds the view that the self is the controller (charioteer) of the body (chariot). The persons well-being and liberation depends on the charioteer who controls the senses by firmly holding and that leads the soul to its supreme destination rather than getting lost in the cycle of birth and death. This upanisad emphasizes that the goal of self-knowledge and control over the senses help the being to reach at the ultimate spiritual. The Taittiriya Upanisad distinguishes the five stages matter, life, mind, intelligence and bliss (*anna, prana, mana, vijñana and Ananda*) where only one stage refers to be physical. Mind .. are all successive layers of sheaths or koshas of the true self and in saying that these are culminating in the realisation of Brahman, the ultimate reality is pure bliss Ananda. This upanisad describes the spiritual journey to reveal the deeper self.

It has been said that these layers are ultimately manifestation of Brahman. Brahman is that from which all things are born, by which they dissolve. Here the seeker can realise Brahman as the foundation of all existence and all the state of perfection, joy and freedom are experiencing oneness with the universe. Again the statement of Taittiriya Brahman that "Sattvam, Jnanam and Annantam Brahman, Brahman as supreme truth, wisdom and infinity is the embodiment of bliss".

It advocates seeing the self in everything and everything in the self, asserting the individual soul is not separate but an integral part of this universal oneness. This upanisad teaches that we should "see all being in ourself and ourself in all beings". Hinduism teaches that our soul is divine, all beings have the same divine soul within them making as all ultimately, the same and unified. He who knows at the same time both knowledge and not- knowledge ( ignorance) overcome death through ignorance and obtains immortality through knowledge. Ishopanisad has attached emphasis on the oneness of the soul or self. However, though we find different descriptions

regarding soul or self in the different Upanisads the common understanding is that the soul or self is immortal and non-different from one individual to another. The soul is the life/conscious element of the person which is immortal.

The commonly accepted view about it, of the Gita, is that the body is mortal whereas the soul or self is immortal (as the clothing are changed when those go turned the body also changes its atman- ii/22). It is explained in the Gita that: soul passed in this body through childhood, youth and old age, even so it is taking on the another body (II-13). The same thing explained in Vishnu smriti that the human being makes himself fit for immortality by passing through the series of births and deaths, the changes in the body don't mean changes in the soul. The Divine dwells in every individual as the life element. It is the view of the Gita that "A fragment of My own self, having become a living soul, eternal, in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, that rest in nature." The Supreme Soul/Self manifests itself in every one being known as individual-self and also as the doer and enjoyer. Because of ignorance the individual-self is unable to identify with the Supreme Soul/Self. Gita's stand has been explained by Radhakrishnan as: "The individual self is a portion of the Lord, a real, not an imaginary form of the Supreme, a limited manifestation of God. The soul which derives from the Supreme Iœvara is not so much an emanation as a member of the Supreme. It draws its ideal from this superior principle which is like a father who has given it existence. The soul's substantial existence springs from the Divine intellect and its expression in life is effected by virtue of its vision of the Divine who is its father and its ever-present companion. Its distinctiveness is determined by the divine pattern and the context of the senses and the mind which it draws to itself. The universal is embodied in a limited context of mental-vital-physical sheath."

### **Concept of Man**

The individual person or man is an integrated being of two distinct elements, body and soul sharing the essences of the two higher forms: nature and spirit. Going to more details man represents a multi-functional being. In man one can find matter, consciousness, intelligence, life and above all the divine spark. Man, alone can aspire for freedom because he has the capacity to choose the good. He is given with the instinct that is linked with his desires. Man can bring control over his desires by application of his jnana/ vijnana. The man is the psychic being continues its living of its own with the scope of ascending to the stage of the spiritual existence. Till the attainment of such a state the link with the body and the exposor to the birth-death cycle cannot be avoided.

It is understood in Bhagavad Gita that man as a composite being that consists in physical body called sarira, mind or manas, intellect or buddhi and the eternal self. It describes soul is eternal and indestructible while the physical body is temporary and subject to birth and death. This a person must realise their true nature beyond the material body. Human behaviour is influenced by three separate gunas: sattva (purity and knowledge), rajas (activity and passion) and tamas (ignorance or inertia). These qualities come from prakriti that binds the eternal soul to the body. Therefore one should control over body, mind and senses to gain true knowledge and strive for self-realization to achieve spiritual freedom.

In the above explanation we find the soul and self has been used synonymously in respect of the Supreme. But in respect of the individual aiming at the doership or enjoyer the use of the term 'self' becomes a necessity. It means in respect of Supreme the difference between soul and self cannot be done whereas in case of the individual being the difference between soul and self is tenable. But the 'self' as referring to the individual also refers to the 'person' or 'man'. Thus, the term 'self' appears to lead to the obscurity or ambiguity in the sense it sometimes refers to the 'soul' and sometimes to the 'individual' when 'soul' and 'individual' cannot be conceived to be same.

In order to get rid of such ambiguity/ obscurity Radhakrishnan has explained the Gita's stand in the following manner. He has used the term empirical self to represent the individual who is the part of the world. 'Self', representing the soul is the part of the Supreme. Its nature is creative. The individual self is also the free participant of the world and worldly affairs where he needs to apply his acquired buddhi. The creative-self acts upon the not-self which is passive. The realm of not-self connected with the causal nexus of the karmic principle and bounded by determinism. Radhakrishnan writes that "Man, the subject, should gain mastery over man, the object. Object indicates determinism from without; subject means freedom, indetermination. The ego, in its self-confinement, in its automatism, psychical and social, is a distortion of the true subject."

Thus, it may be concluded that in the explanation of Radhakrishnan the Gita's stand becomes clearer in respect of the understanding of the three concepts, namely, soul, self and man. It is quite suggestive in the sense man is neither God dependant nor a toy in God's hand. Man is capable of choosing good to proceed towards freedom. The expression '*jatheichhaishi tatha kuru*' supports this stand. Man is distinct being to act on his own. Man can choose good or evil. Gita suggests to acquire proper knowledge so that one can choose good and ultimately realize the true nature of the inner self.

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