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LOKASAMGRAHA AND AHIMSA IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The *Bhagavad Gītā* has been rightly described by Klostermaier as "a book of crisis."[1] Śrīkṛṣṇa speaks to Arjuna when the latter is *viṣame samupasthitam* (II. 2) or engulfed in a crisis. Of course, the teaching, though nominally given to Arjuna, is for all mankind. Arjuna's initial questions, like those of ordinary human beings, are framed within the context of narrow personal problems. They have three main elements, namely, how not to incur sin (*pāpam*), how to obtain release from sorrow (*śokam*), and how to attain *śreyas* (the good of the individual, possibly extended to kinsmen, *svajanam*). In reply thereto, the initial teaching of the *Gītā* concentrates on the way to achieving individual goals. The focal point of this teaching is the doctrine of *niskāma karma*, or performance of *svadharma*, one's duty, without attachment to the fruits of one's action. Immediately thereafter, Śrīkṛṣṇa stresses, on His own initiative, the importance of widening one's vision and of having not only individual goals, but also social and universal goals (III. 20). The compound word *lokasaṁgraha* means social harmony and welfare as well as world preservation, because its two component words *loka* and *saṁgraha* have more than one meaning each. For example, "loka" denotes mankind or the world, and *saṁgraha* stands for protecting, keeping, regulating, etc.[2] *Lokasaṁgraha* thus epitomizes, in the *Gītā*, the social and universal dimension of Śrīkṛṣṇa's teaching, which is particularly relevant to the crisis that we are facing at present. Perhaps it should be clarified that the *Gītā* does not speak of the wider goals at the expense of the individual goals; rather, in the synthetic approach of this scripture, the individual, social and universal goals are harmonized, as being equally important and inter-linked.

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1. Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1989, p. 105.
2. B.G. Tilak, *Gita Rahasya*, Tilak Brothers, Pune, 1986, p. 456.

The Gita and the Social Causes

Before we identify the various aspects of *lokasaṁgraha* which need to be highlighted under present conditions, it seems to be appropriate to mention that the *Gītā* has been the principal source of inspiration and new ideas to religious and social reformers as well as to freedom fighters. Confining our attention to the last two centuries, one of the earliest recorded references to the *Gītā* in support of a social cause of All-India importance is in the writings of Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). Roy looked for those elements in the Hindu scriptures which could help face the challenge of modernization, which confronted India in the form of British rule and proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries, strengthened by their social service programmes. Roy published translations of the Upaniṣads into Bengali and English, and argued that original Hinduism was free from corruptions which were then rampant in the Hindu society. The Brahmo Samāj which Roy founded in 1828 was influenced by both Indian and Western sources. However, when Roy was asked to prove on the basis of Hindu scriptures that the sutee custom (widows burning themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres) was against the real principles of their religion, he took the help of the *Gītā*.[3] Not that there is any direct reference to the sutee custom in the *Gītā*; but the basic approach (*buddhi-yoga and niṣkāma karma*), when applied to the problem in hand, enabled Roy to argue his reform proposal forcefully, authoritatively and convincingly. As D.S. Sarma puts it, *buddhi-yoga* implies, among other things, "ability to rise above the mere letter of the books."[4]

The next major occasion when the *karma-yoga* teaching of the *Gītā* was invoked for the furtherance of a social cause was the establishment of the work programme of the Ramakrishna Mission, by Vivekananda in 1897. The "social service" component of the Mission's programme was based largely on the *Karma Yoga* ideal of the *Gītā*, re-inforced by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the Buddha. The aim of the Mission was "to preach the truths which Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for the good of humanity, preached and taught by the practice of his own

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3. E.J. Sharpe, *The Universal Gita: Western Images of the Bhagavad Gita, A Bicentenary Survey*, La Salle: Open Court, 1985, Appendix.

4. D.S. Sarma, "The Path of Yoga in the Gita," In *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. III, H. Bhattacharyya, ed., The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1983, p. 404.

life, and to help others to put them into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual progress." Although the Vedantic teaching-component of the Mission's aim-received unanimous support from all the colleagues of Vivekananda, the inclusion of "humanitarian service" was agreed to by many of the monks only grudgingly. Romain Rolland says:

> At times they were still seized with longing for their contemplative life and for *their* Ramakrishna, the King of Ecstasy. They would have felt it sweet to turn the Ramakrishna Mission again into a cult of the Temple with its contemplative inaction. But Vivekananda roughly shattered their dream, and said:
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> Do you want to shut Shri Ramakrishna up within your own limits? . . . Study, public preaching, and doing humanitarian works are, according to you, Maya . . . but I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen immersed in Tamas, to stand on their own feet and be men immersed with the spirit of Karma-yoga.[5]

Vivekananda strengthened the "selfless service" component of the Ramakrishna Mission programme by coining the famous phrase *Daridra-Nārāyaṇa* which meant that the service of the poor was the service of God, or in Vivekananda's own words: "The only God that exists, the only God in whom I believe . . . my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races."[6] Lest there should be any doubt in the minds of any of his followers about the adequacy or completeness of the Mission's programme, Vivekananda assured them that it would contribute not only to the welfare of the world but also to one's own spiritual perfection, or as he put it:

ātmano mokṣārtham jagadhitāya ca

In his final message, shortly before his death in 1902, Vivekananda stressed not only the *Karma-yoga* ideal of renouncing the fruits of action but also the establishment of social unity and harmony (or *lokasaṁgraha* in language of the *Gītā*). Incidentally, the word *lokasaṁgraha* does not occur in the Upaniṣads, but the corresponding idea is conveyed in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4. 4. 22) by the term *"lokānām asaṁbhedaḥ"* which can be translated as "protecting the worlds from falling apart."

5. Romain Rolland, The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel. Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1970, pp. 123–125.

6. Ibid., p. 285.

Although Vivekananda recognized the religious and social importance of *Karma-yoga*, he insisted that the Ramakrishna Mission, being purely spiritual and humanitarian in character, would have no connection with politics. However, Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi in the early twentieth century, presented, in their own ways, the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a nationalist manifesto. Besides referring to the Karma yoga ideal, these three leaders also interpreted other elements of the *Gītā* in political terms. For example, referring to the svadharma concept of the *Gītā*, Tilak identified *swarāj* as his svadharma and said that any means used to achieve it in the battle-field, Kurukṣetra, of the whole of India, is a moral means. Tilak's *Gītā-Rahasya* interpreting the *Gītā* as *Karma-yoga-śāstra* and highlighting *lokasaṁgraha* as the most important goal, stirred the entire nation. Aurobindo narrated the vision of Kṛṣṇa he had while he was in the Alipore jail as a political prisoner. He said that Kṛṣṇa placed the *Gītā* in his hands and so deep and overwhelming was the entire experience that everywhere around him he saw only Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. Aurobindo appealed to his countrymen to come forward and offer *yajña*, sacrifice in the cause of freedom. He also justified the use of violent means if they became necessary for the performance of *svadharma*.

Gradually when the leadership of the nationalistic struggle passed on to Gandhi, the emphasis on the *Gītā* and its *Karma-yoga* ideal continued except that, in Gandhi's view, the use of non-violent means was an intrinsic characteristic of a *Karma-yogin*. Gandhi also linked the *Svadeśi* movement with *svadharma*. Throughout the independence movement, those who were imprisoned for political causes drew inspiration from the fact that Kṛṣṇa Himself was born in a jail. Although the main thrust of the nation's struggle under Gandhi's leadership was political, a social issue also arose as to whether the Hindu scriptures supported the practice of untouchability or were against it. Gandhi justified the removal of untouchability by referring to the ninth chapter of the *Gītā* which states that, in God's eyes, there are no distinctions of caste, sex, method of worship, and even past conduct; all that counts is sincerity of devotion and genuine faith. Gandhi also referred to the *Gītā* ideal of *"samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu"* (an attitude of equality towards all creatures), and the place of honour given to *"dayā bhūteṣu"* (compassion towards all) in the divine qualities.

In post-independence India, *Gītā*-based appeals to exhort people to participate actively in programmes of social and economic development

have been made. The most well-known of such programmes was the *Bhoo-dāna* (land-gift) movement started by Vinoba Bhave, for which inspiration was drawn from a new interpretation of terms used in the *Gītā*. Although Vinoba uses a traditional word *'dānam'* (meaning charity, gift), his interpretation (drawing support from Śaṁkara) gives it a modern flavour. Śaṁkara defines *dānam* as *saṁvibhāgaḥ* or equal division or sharing. Vinoba says that when he accepts land on behalf of the poor, he is not accepting it as charity from the rich. Rather he is offering a peaceful alternative to the rich to save themselves from a violent revolution. Vinoba also links the concept of *dānam* or equal distribution to *samadṛṣṭi* or equal vision, which is described in the *Gītā* (V. 18) as a characteristic of a man of true knowledge. He goes so far as to interpret the *Gītā* as *"samya-yoga*, which is both the art and the philosophy of equality, equanimity and identity."[7] By focussing on the problems of the landless people (who are usually the poorest), Vinoba gives a practical shape to the Sarvodaya ideology. It is true that after several years of intense activity, the full momentum of Vinoba's movement could not be maintained. In Arapura's opinion, the real significance of the movement lies not so much in measurable economic gains but rather in its attempt to build a spiritual and moral basis to the social life:

> The real aim of this movement is to put humanity through a spiritual discipline calculated to *humanize* it and to cure the basic ills that mar the spiritual image of man in the context of social existence.[8]

The Gita and Ahimsa

Just as Vivekananda made the most significant contribution towards incorporating *sevā* (social service) in modern Hinduism, and Tilak brought the concept of *lokasaṁgraha* to the forefront from a scholarly viewpoint, similarly for putting forth the message of *ahiṁsā* (non-violence) based on a new interpretation of the *Gītā* we have to highlight the role of Gandhi. This was by no means easy because the *Gītā* teaching was given on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, and the entire *Mahābhārata* speaks of the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. How was Gandhi able to see

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7. Vasant Nargolkar, *The Creed of Saint Vinoba*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1963, p. 58.

8. J.G. Arapura, "Sociological Alienation and Gandhian Philosophy". *Panchshila*, Vol. I, No. 4 (1956), p. 24.

the message of *ahiṁsā* in the midst of such war-like situations? Brief extracts from his own writings, strengthened by his life-long practice of *ahiṁsā* both as an individual and as a national leader, answer this question in the following manner:

> Under the guise of physical warfare, the Gita describes the duel that perpetually goes on in the hearts of mankind ..."I have felt that the Gita teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. ... Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and *ahimsā*. ...
>
> "When the Gita was written, although people believed in *ahimsā*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between wars and ahimsa. ... With every age, the important words of the Gitā will carry new and expanding meanings.[9]

Scholars including Tilak, Radhakrishnan and Rajagopalachari feel that Gandhi is "stretching" the ordinary meaning of the *Gītā* verses to read the message of *ahiṁsā* therein. Also, there are differences of opinion as to whether ethical standards suitable for individuals in their private lives could be extended to collective conduct. For example, Tilak says, "A mere high religious ideal does not prove very useful in practical politics." Iyer characterizes Tilak as a relativist and Gandhi as an absolutist.[10] Regarding the difference between Radhakrishnan and Gandhi, Betai says:

> Radhakrishnan agrees that the Gitā preaches *ahimsā*, but it is not *ahimsā* of Gandhiji's ideal and definition. He means to suggest that when a man of action takes to an attitude of samnyasa and does his works in perfect detachment, as a duty, as social service, and as work of God, be it the worst of its kind, it is *ahimsā*. Here he accepts that there can be *niskama himsa* but wants to suggest that niskama himsa is ahimsa. Gandhiji would not agree with Radhakrishnan here.[11]

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9. Mahadev Desai, *The Gospel of Selfless Action* or *The Gita according to Gandhi*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1977, pp. 127–134.
10. Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 52.
11. Ramesh Betai, *Gita and Gandhiji*, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, 1970, p. 242.

Similarly, Rajagopalachari does not like Gandhi's idea of interpreting the *Gītā* and the *Mahābhārata* only as an allegory and then deriving the doctrine of *ahiṁsā* therefrom. He suggests, in stead, that "We should forget the battle scene when we study the Gita as a scripture of *sanatana dharma*. ... The *Gītā* as a scripture of Hinduism stands apart from the Mahabharata."[12]

Whatever might be the academic differences between Gandhi and other interpreters of the *Gītā*, the vast "practical experiments" with *ahiṁsā* which Gandhi conducted and the degree of success which he achieved, did help in putting forth the *ahiṁsā* doctrine as a *yugadharma* for the modern age. Ursula King goes so far as to say that "Hindu religious teaching today makes use of the ideal *karmayogin* symbol by applying it both to the classical Krishna and the contemporary Gandhi. ... The continued usage and widespread presence of this symbol are a sign of the creativity of Hinduism and of its religious activity, sensitive to the needs of modern men."[13] Since *lokasaṁgraha* epitomizes the needs and goals of humanity and the world, a gradual recognition of *ahiṁsā* as a *yugadharma* (or *dharma* relevant to present age) would help appreciate the complementary nature of the contributions made by Tilak and Gandhi towards interpreting the *Gītā* for the current crisis. P.M. Thomas expresses his own agreement with Raj Krishna's statement to the effect that Tilak tried to supply the philosophical proof and Gandhi the practical demonstration that action for the welfare of the world could be direct means of liberation.[14] Perhaps this observation can be elaborated further by saying that Tilak's scholarship helped focus attention on *lokasaṁgraha*, while Gandhi's life-long experiments raised the possibility for *ahiṁsā* to be gradually recognized as the basic means for achieving that goal. Sissela Book as well as Devaki Jain (in separate articles) envisages widespread applications of *ahiṁsā* within small groups, to begin with, and its gradual extension to wider issues and territories:

> I am most interested in the Gandhian alternative. Gandhi, far from denying the presence of violence in the world, meant to

12. Ibid., p. 243.
13. Ursula King, "Who is the Ideal Karmayogin? The Meaning of a Hindu Religious Symbol." In *Religion*, Vol. X, Spring 1980, pp. 52–55.
14. P.M. Thomas, *Twentieth Century Indian Interpretations of Bhagavad Gītā: Tilak, Gandhi, and Aurobindo*, Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Delhi, 1987, p. 193.

carve out spaces, territories in human interaction, where violence would nevertheless not be used. . . . Once these territories have thus been carved out, they can be enlarged, extended, and become models for others. . . ."[15]

"A women's united platform need not be completely issue-based, but could well be methodology-based (for example, based on the way of non-violence)."[16]

Environmental concerns linked with yajna and ahimsa

It is clear from the above that the *Gītā* concepts utilized by Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhi and Vinoba are partly common (like *niṣkāma karma, buddhi yoga*), but that the emphasis on some of the other concepts (like *bhakti, jñāna, yajña*) vary from one interpreter to another. Perhaps the greatest variety of interpretation is associated with the term *yajña*, which in the Vedas, was the most important element of *Karma-kāṇḍa*. The *Gītā* retained the same term but drastically modified its meaning, firstly, by emphasizing that *yajña* should not be performed for the fulfilment of selfish desires, and secondly, by giving greater importance to *japa-yajña* and *jñāna-yajña* than to the traditional *dravya-yajña* (which used material wealth). Tilak says that "doing a particular *karma*, in which there is no selfish purpose, with a pure frame of mind, is a *yajña* in itself."[17] Aurobindo's use of this concept to appeal to his countrymen about the need to make sacrifices in the freedom struggle has already been referred to. Subsequently, in his *Essays on the Gita* he emphasizes the symbolic meaning of *yajña* and says: "For the man who has knowledge and lives and acts in it, there can be no binding works, no personal and egoistically appropriated action."[18] Obviously, the new meanings of *yajña* bring it closer and closer to lokasaṁgraha.

A significant point to note is that Gandhi's interpretation of the concept of *yajña* also reflects a deep concern with environmental issues. For example, he suggests the abandonment of the traditional way of performing a *yajña*, namely, burning of wood. Although fire was the symbol of

15. Sissela Bok, "Toward a Practical Ethic of Nonviolence," *In Speaking of Truth*, Diana Eck and Devaki Jain, eds., New Society Publishers, 1987, p. 256.
16. Devaki Jain, "Gandhian Contributions towards a Feminist Ethic," *In Speaking of Truth*, pp. 290-291.
17. B.G. Tilak, *Gita Rahasya*, p. 407.
18. Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gītā*. Śri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1980, p. 113.

yajña in Vedic times and is still so considered by religious organizations like Ārya Samāj, the *Gītā* envisages the possibility of using fire in a symbolic sense (IV. 24). Gandhi tries to create public opinion in favour of subjecting every religious practice to the test of relevance in modern times. He gives the following comment on the *yajña*-related verses of the *Gītā*:

> I cannot understand the idea that one can perform a yajna by burning a few sticks. It does not do to say that doing so purifies the air. There are many other ways of purifying the air. Why should we at all pollute the air? But this is not the aim behind a yajna. When the Aryans first came to this country, they tried to civilize the non-Aryan races. Maybe the idea of yajna was originally conceived for the uplift of the latter. There were big forests in those days, and it may have been regarded as everylone's duty to help in clearing these forests, for it was a social necessity. And because the work was regarded as a duty, it came to be looked upon as a means of attaining mōkṣa. Innumerable ceremonies were devised, all of which required the lighting of fire. In burning wood in this age, we misuse the capital of our forefathers, or we show ourselves witless pedants by understanding the things in a literal sense.[19]

Vinoba carries further the Gandhian approach and argues that Chapter XVII of the *Gītā*, in which *yajña*, *dānam* and *tapas* are viewed as "triple duty," should be interpreted with reference to three levels of creation, namely, nature, society, and body. According to this interpretation, *yajña* represents the effort made to replenish nature's loss, *dānam* is the help given through body, mind, material resources and other means to discharge the debt to society, and *tapas* is self-discipline needed for removing the deficiencies and distortions in the body caused by normal wear and tear. Explaining further the role of *yajña* in maintaining the purity of nature, Vinoba says:

> Every day we make use of nature. If a hundred of us crowd together in one spot for a day, that part of nature appears spoilt. We foul the atmosphere and mess up the whole place. In eating food, we consume creation, little by little. We should make up for it. It is for this that the institution of yajna is created. To make up for the harm that has been caused to creation – this is yajna. . . .

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19. M.K. Gandhi; *The Bhagavad Gita*; Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, pp. 79–80.

> Another purpose is to purify the things we use. We use the well and make the place all around it dirty and slushy. This part of creation, thus disfigured, we should clean up.... "In addition to these, we should do a little direct construction. If we wear clothes, we should spin a little every day and make something new. Growing cotton, raising crops, spinning and weaving, all these are acts of yajna.[20]

An interesting and novel application of the non-violent approach to the protection of forests in India has been made by the "Chipko movement" (Chipko means hugging the trees). In the Himalayan hills area, when all efforts for preventing the cutting of trees failed, ordinary women and men "hugged" the trees and flung their bodies before the axes. These people were inspired by Gandhi's example. A local organization called "Lakshmi Ashram" helped organise the people to bring about socio-economic change through peaceful methods. Radha Bhatt writes about the success achieved, not only in the Chipko movement but also in other activities aimed at protecting the environment, saving cultivated land and drinking water supply:

> The hill-people's action gave birth to the famous non-violent ecological movement known in India and throughout the world as "Chipko." Similar action was taken by the women of Khirakot when they fought against the businessman and the government who had started a soapstone quarry on their village land, which had spoiled their village forest, their cultivated land, their drinking water, and the footpaths to their fields. ... They succeeded ... But where are the roots of this non-violence? I believe they are rooted deep in the culture and religion of our people.[21]

Seven aspects of Karma for lokasamgraha

Lokasamgraha denotes a wide spectrum of social and universal goals, ranging from social harmony to world preservation. The importance of social harmony is evident because of the seriousness of caste conflicts as well as inter-religious tensions and apathy between the rich and the

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20. Vinoba, *Talks on the Gita*. Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1978, p. 202.
21. Radha Bhatt, "Lakshmi Ashram: A Gandhian Perspective in the Himalayan Foothills," *In Speaking of Truth*, p. 185.

poor. Social unrest can also be linked to difficulties caused by population explosion, and by pulls and counter-pulls between the forces of tradition and modernization. At the other end of the spectrum, all life and entire civilization is threatened by environmental pollution, and a big question is: What sort of future awaits our children and grand-children? All these are big issues, and neither the *Gītā* nor any other source can provide magical solutions. All that we can learn from the scriptures is the right attitude, and a firm resolve to chalk out and implement an appropriate action programme. But what does action or karma for *lokasaṁgraha* stand for? A problem-oriented study of the *Gītā* suggests the following seven aspects of such *karma*:

a) Protective aspect
b) Cohesive aspect
c) Service aspect
d) Productive aspect
e) Stability aspect
f) Ethical aspect
g) Educative aspect

The protective and world-preservative aspect of *karma* for *lokasaṁgraha* is highlighted by Śrīkṛṣṇa when he says that, if he were to cease such work, the lokas as well as the people would be destroyed (III. 24). While the divine spirit and the natural phenomena have created the proper environment for life in all forms to be sustained – that is, mankind, animals, birds, plants, sealife – man-made threats in the form of nuclear weapons, chemical pollution, population explosion, indiscriminate tree-felling, excessive consumerism, careless habits causing waste and environmental degradation, etc. are becoming more and more serious. The problems are undoubtedly vast but a coordinated effort to tackle the threats from all angles must be made before it is too late.

Karma for *lokasaṁgraha* has to fulfill the basic purpose of keeping people together, not by force but voluntarily. As a pre-requisite for this, grievances of one group of people against another have to be looked into, and resolved in such a manner as not to disrupt social unity and harmony. Reducing gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth by peaceful means would form part of this. A legal approach can have only a limited role in achieving this. A non-official mechanism for resolving disputes peacefully also needs to be considered. These

are big issues for which easy solutions do not exist. But tendencies to foment hatred and rivalry have to be discouraged. The *Gītā* has warned against getting entangled in a chain of hatred rooted in *ahaṁkāra* (XVI. 18–19).

Rendering of selfless service to the needy is a very important aspect of *lokasaṁgraha*, and the phrase *sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ* (meaning persons who rejoice in doing good to all creatures) occurs twice in the *Gītā* (V. 25, XII. 4). Upadhyaya thinks that the message of selfless service to the world draws its inspiration from three sections of the *Gītā*, namely, (i) *lokasaṁgraha*, (ii) divine origin of the world, and (iii) wheel of *yajña* or sacrifice:

> God himself is cited as an ideal who without any interest of his own is engaged in the work of maintaining the world-order . . .
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> "As the origin of the world is traced to God, it becomes the duty of man to live in the world and promote its welfare . . . "The wheel of the world, according to the Gita, goes on by means of sacrifice or renunciation, and one who does not discharge his selfless service to the world lives only in vain.[22]

The ideal of selfless service is also strengthened by bhaktiyoga, and the age-old tradition of saints moving from place to place, preaching the gospel of love and human brotherhood, and providing a concrete demonstration thereof by their own deeds. Vivekananda also linked this ideal with his new interpretation of Vedānta, which he called 'practical Vedānta.' It was through his initiative, pursued against the escapist attitudes of the traditionalists, that the Ramakrishna Mission identified service to the needy as worship of the divine. While describing how Vivekananda was able to give this new orientation to Hinduism in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Ursula King also mentions that he (Vivekananda) even extended the social service idea to the *bodhisatva* ideal of giving priority to the salvation of others before one's own:

> The karma-yogi wants everyone to be saved before himself. His only salvation is to help others to salvation . . . This true worship leads to intense self-sacrifice.[23]

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22. K.N. Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1983, p. 488.

23. Ursula King, "Who is the Ideal Karmayogin?", *op. cit.*, p. 45.

In a poor country like India, *lokasaṁgraha* would remain an empty dream if basic needs like food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, health and education, are not fulfilled. The best way of doing this would be to ensure that able-bodied persons of working age have productive and useful work in their hands. If the productivity aspect of karma is ignored, the society would be ruined. Of course it is true that man does not live by bread alone, but it is equally true, as Śri Ramakrishna said, that "religion is not for empty bellies."

To appreciate the stability aspect of *lokasaṁgraha*, it is necessary to see how the *Gītā*, as interpreted by modern commentators, tries to strike a balance between tradition and change. Stability does not mean inflexibility or perpetuation of injustice, but, equally, the *Gītā* does not believe in creating confusion and disorder in society, in an attempt to bring about changes too rapidly. Using the terminology of Robert N. Bellah, India's response to the challenge of modernity can be called "reformism" which has been defined by Bellah as "a movement that re-interprets a particular religious tradition to show not only that it is compatible with modernization but also that, when truly understood, the tradition vigorously demands at least important aspects of modernity."[24] For example, the modern concept of "efficiency" can be linked to the *Gītā's* characterization of yoga as *karmaṣu kauśalam*. Similarly, "rationality" can be linked to *buddhi-yoga*. However, while attaching great importance to buddhi-yoga, the Gītā also warns against creating *buddhi-bheda* or confusion which can arise when traditional beliefs and practices are subjected to unsympathetic argumentation. As Radhakrishnan says,

> Traditional forms charged with historical associations are the vehicles of unspoken convictions, though they may not be well understood . . . . It is true that every one should reach the highest level but this can be attained generally by slow steps and not by sudden jumps.[25]

An individualistic variant of the problem of instability which has become serious in modern times can be expressed in terms of psychological disbalance. In the chain of unhappiness mentioned in the *Gītā*, a crucial factor is unrealistic desires for personal benefits, (or consumerism in modern societies) which, when not matched by acquisitions, lead

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24. Robert N. Bellah, "Epilogue" in Religion and Progress in Modern Asia, ed. by him. Free Press, New York, 1965, p. 215.
25. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973, p. 142.

to frustration. In old days, family support and sympathy was a good healing factor, but excessive individualism, on the one hand, and traditional restrictions, on the other, offer little comfort for disturbed minds. In the ultimate analysis, family instability and social instability are interlinked.

In order that social stability is understood in a comprehensive sense, Śrikrīṣṇa explains that things of beauty and splendour (that enrich the society culturally) constitute special revelations of the Divine (X.41). The use of the phrase *satyam śivam sundaram* for identifying truth, goodness and beauty as attributes of perfection, should help remind us not to forget the role of art and culture in social development and stability.

Karma for *lokasaṁgraha* has to be such as may "wean people from the tendency to take to the path of wrong," using Śaṁkara's definition. Vinoba also stresses the need to keep the people on the right path. For this, the action itself has to be morally right. When verse III.21 speaks of setting an example, the ethical aspect of karma is implicit in it. All the while, the *niṣkāma karma* ideal has to be kept. So, an underlying assumption is that whatever one does for *lokasaṁgraha* is done as a duty, without entertaining any desire for selfish gains. Kaveeshwar argues that sometimes, "giving up the desire for selfish gains" might not be enough to guarantee that the action itself is morally right, and that therefore the right-wrong consideration of an action should not be relegated to a secondary stage[26]. Another argument in support of the ethical content of *karma* is that an *avatāra* (God's incarnation) works for re-establishing righteousness, by supporting the good and by punishing the evil (IV.8). Fighting against evil and injustice is thus a part of *karma* for *lokasaṁgraha*, and the possibility of doing this by peaceful means (as attempted by Gandhi) re-inforces the ethical principle.

Since *karma* for *lokasaṁgraha* is absolutely voluntary, the only possible way to give it the form of a mass movement is by creating favourable public opinion. Furthermore, some of the underlying concepts like the preservation of a clean environment can be conveyed even to children in an appropriate manner. Both of these actions are included in the general term "educative" which constitutes an important aspect of *karma* for *lokasaṁgraha*.

26.G. W. Kaveeshwar, *The Ethics of the Gita*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1971, p. 245.