

## Mā Phaleṣu

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There is a well-known statement of Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna, contained in the 2<sup>nd</sup> canto of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which runs as follows:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ *Gītā* II.47

The first line of this verse is often quoted to mean that one has the right to work and not to the result. This is interpreted as a statement regarding work without any expectation of results. But this is not so. The actual meaning is that one has the right (*adhikāra*) to work, and no claim to the type of result that the work concerned will yield. In other words, the expression *adhikāra* has not been repeated in the line because in the first instance it means 'right' and in the second instance it means 'claim'. The intention of the statement envisages the idea that one has the entitlement to work as well as to the result, but the latter will depend on the evaluation done by somebody else, and not by the doer or the performer.

The first part of the second line of the verse makes things clearer. It brings forth the word *hetu*, meaning the cause. The part of the sentence refers to the cause (*kāraṇa* or *hetu*) and effect (*phala*) relationship of any activity (*karma*). This relationship is in the arrow-line linear movement, and not in the other way round. The cause will generate the effect, and not the effect will revert back. This doubtless supports the statement contained in the first line of the above mentioned verse. However, here the question of *adhikāra* has not been repeated.

Before we come to the proper interpretation of the second part of the second line of the verse it is important to clarify certain other things. The *Bhagavadgītā*, and for that matter any text of Indian culture, does not advocate for *niṣkāma-karma* (work without the result). In the *Bhagavadgītā* itself Kṛṣṇa has referred to the incentive that is there for Arjuna in fighting in the battle at Kurukṣetra. He states

that Arjuna will be entitled to the entry to the heaven in case he is killed in the battle, but will enjoy the sovereignty over the world if he is victorious.<sup>1</sup>

This is a clear endorsement of the fact that work will have always a result, positive or negative, expected or not so. Moreover, there are numerous other instances in the *Bhagavadgītā* itself to convey the idea that work always has its reward or reprimand. But the evaluation of the work has to be done by somebody else (may be God Himself) and not by the performer.

There is always a *phalaśruti* (the effect or result) for even all activities like *pūjā* (worship), *stuti* (eulogy or praise of God) and similar other activities. For instance, even for taking the *caraṇāmṛta* (the ambrosianic water of the feet of the God Viṣṇu) there is the incentive that such act will ensure safety against untimely death, and also will safeguard against all types of diseases.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to quote many other instances of the attachment of result with any activity that one performs.

The most important thought is contained in the second part of the second line of the above mentioned verse of the *Bhagavadgītā* that we are presently discussing. It says that after the work has been performed, the performer should not have any association (*sangaḥ*) whatsoever with his performance (*karma*). One can perhaps read in it the modality followed in the examination system in which the examinee is completely restricted to maintain any sort of association with the examiner. The evaluation should be impartial, non-dictated and also without any influence from any quarter. The evaluation should be a matter of natural result, and it should not have any effect of the time, space, personality and circumstances.

The last part of our discussion assumes much importance in the history of the philosophy of Indian art and thought. It is often stated that Indian visual art, particularly the non-literary ones, are anonymous in the sense that very seldom the names of the artists are found recorded in the pre-Islamic phase of the history of Indian sculpture, architecture and painting. There could be many reasons for this. But from the reading of the *Bhagavadgītā* passage we are of the opinion that the mind of the Indian artists might have been dominated by the ideology of the *Bhagavadgītā* that the artists should not have any association with their creative output, because recognition or appreciation will be there in any way irrespective of whether the names of the artists are there or not.

During my long journey through the corridors of the unpublished sources

of Indian art and culture, I have come across many startling statements recorded mostly in the post-colophon observations, may be of the composer of the text or of the respective scribes of the manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> I have discussed them separately elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> and therefore, will not like to bring that topic once again here.

But I can possibly include here a gist of some of the relevant observations to highlight the point of view that probably dominated the ethos of the Indian creative culture, it has been stated that expectations of the result of a creative activity is virtually the business (*vyāpāra*) with creativity. Moreover, such a business-like approach has been despised as prostitution (*gaṇikā-vṛtti*), which is completely subservient to name-tax (*nāmadāsi*) and is detached from emotions (*rasabañjikā*). Interestingly, such a business-like approach towards art with dictated appreciation has been condemned time and again in many of the instances. Also, there has been statement in which virtually a clear difference is made between Art (*kalā*) and Craft (*śilpa*) for which the former is referred to as containing aesthetic appeal (*kalā rasātmikā*), whereas *śilpa* is a mark tile product (*paṇya* or *vipaṇya*). It is not a proper context in which we can discuss all other such interesting observations. But we find that the Indian Cultural psyche in the pre-Islamic period of Indian History was to regard activity, completely free from any motivated control of the output of creative expressions after the performance. The artists, and for that matter any other doer or performer of a work, expected that results will come in its natural course, if at all. They knew that there should not be any maddening control or dictation of the God gifted talent or genius that they were fortunate to have. To borrow the words of the poet Kālidāsa from his *Meghadūtam*, it may be said that this approach is *Svādhikārapramattata*, which is dominated to have the results beyond credentials. The performer always has to remember that 'work will bring its own reward in accordance with the quantum and quality of the performance'. This is the essence of the message contained in the verse of the *Bhagavadgītā* mentioned above, and this is very pertinent in the present world of Indian creativity in which the artists, the cultural-maphias and misinformed and delinquent Indian people unfortunately have joined together to vitiate the priority of Indian cultural ethos today.<sup>5</sup>

## References

1. *Hatovā prāpsyasi svargaṃ jivā vā bhoksyase mahīm – Gītā, II.37*
2. *Akāla mṛtyu haraṇam sarva vyādhi vināśanam /  
Viṣṇupādodakam pītva śirasī dhārayāmyaham //*

3. I have mostly stated the Buddhist manuscripts of Vajrayāna-Tantrayāna denomination. The detailed lists of most of these manuscripts are given in my two publications, namely, *Tantric Buddhist Iconographic Source*, New Delhi, 1974, and *Studies in Buddhist Iconography*, New Delhi, 1978, given in the bibliography of original textual courses. Also, I have consulted many such documents in the India Office Library now known as (Common Wealth Library), London, about which some discussion has been carried out by me in my article entitled 'The Art Historical Importance of Hodgson's papers', published in the *Kalā*, Vol.IV.
4. These have been collated in my forthcoming book entitled *The Aesthetics of Tantric Buddhist Art* which awaits publication.
5. This observation of mine is in respect of many Indian artists of today who have a misconception that they enjoy the license of a so-called 'artists' freedom or liberty' which virtually is non-existence. However, this point can be debated further at an appropriate occasion.