



## Aligning Nishkama Karma Yoga with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Samir Diabagh<sup>1</sup>, Abhijit Bhattacharya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Bir Bikram Memorial College, Agartala, India, PIN-799004

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, Bir Bikram Memorial College, Agartala, India, PIN-799004

**Abstract-** Bhagavad Gita is set in a narrative framework of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna as they discuss issues of human ethics, societal morality and reasoning. According to the Bhagavad Gita, no one can escape from performing karma (action), as even when we're sleeping or breathing, we are doing karma. However, someone can practice Nishkāma Karma (action without desire). If someone is not attached to the consequences of their actions, then they are free from the bondage of karma. According to Lord Krishna, practicing Nishkāma Karma Yoga is the true path for realizing the truth. The need for the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita now is as great as ever. Its value has not lessened through lapse of time: and that is a mark of its greatness. That explains why the Gita is read with profit and interest by any individual, community, creed and nationality. Aligning Nishkama Karma with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 involves fostering a value-based education system that emphasizes ethical and moral growth alongside intellectual development of the students. In my paper, I have discussed how the practice of Nishkama Karma yoga cater to the needs of students with diverse talents, aspirations and professional requirements even if it's challenging for a student to engage in actions without attachment to personal outcomes or desires in this materialistic world. Nishkama Karma yoga is universal in nature and need to be applied to any situation in life. When an action is performed in a detached manner without any personal consideration, but is performed as a duty, the result it gives not only brings purity and perfection to the student; it universalizes the scope of the action of the agent which benefits the society. I have shown in my paper that how practices of Nishkama Karma yoga in the backdrop of NEP-2020 leads to a higher level of optimism, positive thoughts, emotions, holistic development and value based education amongst under graduate students. In my paper, I have recommended some practical steps, if incorporate properly in our daily life, can help us to perform Nishkama Karma and experience its transformative power. Selfless action is a continuous and consistent practice, doing what you were meant to do and feeling really fulfilled and it may take time to fully integrate these principles in our life. With patience, persistence one can cultivate a life filled with purpose, meaning and serving to others and live his best life.

**Keywords-** Desireless action, Selfless service, Prarabdha karma, Moral development, NEP-2020, Value based education, Character building, Holistic education.

### I. Introduction

Nishkāma Karma finds its origins in ancient Indian scriptures, particularly the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is a sacred Hindu text that presents a dialogue between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna. Lord Krishna explains the concept of



Niṣhkāma Karma to Arjuna, providing philosophical guidance in the context of the Kurukshetra War. The philosophy of Niṣhkāma Karma promotes selflessness, detachment, and surrendering the results of one's actions to a higher power or the cosmic order. It encourages individuals to focus on their duties and responsibilities, while letting go of desires, expectations, and attachments to the fruits of their actions. The term "Niṣhkāma" means "without desire," and "Karma" means "action" in Sanskrit. It is a significant concept in Hindu philosophy, emphasizing the importance of performing actions without attachment to the outcomes. According to Prof. M. Hiriyana (Sharma C.D., 2009), "the teachings of Gita stands not for renunciation of action, but renunciation in action."

Niṣhkāma Karma connotes the highest end of performing an action which is loksangraha (The Bhagavat Gita III: 20 & 25) or collective well-being. In an instance of Niṣhkāma Karma, the agent has to work only, in so far as it promotes loksangraha (The Bhagavat Gita III: 61) by suspending the sense of agency, construing oneself as mere instrument to fulfil the will of the providence and having renunciation of the desire for the fruit of the action (karmaphalatyaga). Duties should be performed for the betterment of all creatures (sarvabhutahita) (Korner 1995:138). The highest personal good is the highest social good. It is conducive to the attainment of God.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, no being can escape from performing karma (action), as even when we're sleeping or breathing we are doing karma. However, someone can practise Niṣhkāma Karma (action without desire). If someone is not attached to the consequences of their actions, then they are free from the bondage of karma. According to Lord Krishna, practising Niṣhkāma Karma Yoga is the true path for realising the truth. This yoga is also known as 'Yoga of Selfless Action'. It is worth noting that every chapter is suffixed with "Yoga". It means that any path leading to the state of the Summon Bonum is also termed as Yoga. In the act of Niṣhkāma Karma, one has no selfish expectations; a Niṣhkāma Karmi (someone who performs Niṣhkāma Karma) only gives with love, devotion and happiness.

The right to work only, but never to its fruits; let the fruits of action be not thy motive, nor let thy attachment to be inaction (The Bhagavat Gita II: 47). You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action or with the results. Niṣhkāma karma yoga does not advocate renunciation; it mentions renunciation in action. One must act. One should know the skill of doing an action which is known as karma yoga (Yoga Karmasu Kausalam) (The Bhagavat Gita II: 48). The only ethical paradigm of karma yoga is loksangraha. Any action that is good for collective well-being is declared good or virtues by the Bhagavat Gita. One should not give up action at any cost. Bhagavad Gita asks one not to have any motive of future benefit while performing the action, or bother about good or bad consequences of action.

With the body, with the mind, with the intellect, even merely with the senses, the Yogis perform action toward self-purification, having abandoned attachment. He who is disciplined in Yoga, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains steady peace. He who recognises inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a Yogi and a true performer of all actions (The Bhagavat Gita III: 25). According to the teachings of Bhagavad Gita, a Karma Yogi is someone who is good to the world around



them, someone who loves the world and all its Beings selflessly. A Karma Yogi is also aware of the fact that the body, mind, intellect and senses are all the properties of the Lord, given by Lord himself. Therefore, all the work done is for the benefit of the Lord, and not for the satisfaction of the human ego. Due to this misunderstanding, we begin to do things for our own benefit, to appease ourselves without the thought of appeasing God or practising good Karma. For example:- The tongue likes spicy and greasy food, so we undertake actions to satisfy our taste buds by eating food that may prove to be harmful in the long run. The sense of independent thought and ownership takes place, becomes familiar and strengthens our ego which directly opposes the power of Karma.

## **II. Transformative aspects of National Education Policy (NEP 2020)**

To cater to the needs of students with diverse talents, aspirations and professional requirements the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 seeks to establish a more flexible, inclusive and all-encompassing framework. Curriculum and pedagogical transformation are emphasised along with the importance of creativity, critical thinking, and experiential learning. In order to protect India's cultural legacy the policy also highlights the integration of Indian knowledge systems, such as classical language, literature and philosophical writings. Early introduction of ability enhancement courses, vocational education exposes student to practical experiences and internships that provide exposure to vocational skills. Focus on holistic growth and the integration of technology, equity and inclusion to prepare students for a dynamic future and make India a global knowledge hub in international arena.

## **III. The Pedagogical aspects of the Nishkama Karma yoga in Bhagavad Gita**

The Gita encourages a comprehensive approach to education that strikes a balance between action, knowledge and devotion. It highlights self-awareness and personal development, as well as self-realisation and self-knowledge. It prioritises moral and ethical education, stressing virtues like obligation, righteousness, integrity and honesty. With an emphasis on the student-teacher relationship and the value of supporting teacher-student interaction, the Gita encourages experiential learning and problem-based learning methodologies (Maharaj, 2021). The pedagogical aspects of the Bhagavad Gita are:

**Personal Growth and Spiritual Development:** By engaging in actions without attachment to personal outcomes or desires, individuals can cultivate qualities such as selflessness, compassion, and detachment. This promotes personal growth and spiritual development, allowing individuals to transcend their ego and connect with a higher sense of purpose in accordance with their moral obligations and responsibilities.

**Overcoming Ego and Attachment:** Niṣkāma karma helps the individual overcome the limitations of ego and attachment. When actions are performed without seeking personal gain or recognition, the ego's influence diminishes, leading to a greater sense of inner peace and freedom. By letting go of attachment to the results of their actions, individuals become more resilient and less affected by success or failure.



**Mindfulness & Awareness (Dhyana):** The practice of Nishkama Karma yoga involves being mindful and aware of one's thoughts, intentions and actions. Learners are encouraged to cultivate self-awareness and be present in the moment, avoiding distractions and maintaining focus on the task at hand (SBG verse 6.7).

**Pedagogy of Inclusivity and Equanimity:** Nishkama Karma yoga promotes inclusivity and equality. Learners are taught to treat all beings with respect and compassion, recognising the divine presence in everyone and understanding the interconnectedness of all life(SBG verse 2.48).

**Work is Worship:** Nishkama Karma in professional life focuses on the collective benefit of the organization and its stake holders. It involves prioritizing collaboration, empathy, and ethical conduct. By embodying Nishkama Karma, individuals can create a positive work environment. It helps build meaningful relationships and make a lasting impact through selfless contributions.

**Contributing to the Well-being of others (Seva):** In charity and social services, Nishkama Karma yoga encourages individuals in acts of kindness and service without seeking personal recognition or rewards. It emphasizes performing charitable deeds with pure intentions and a genuine desire to help others, rather than for personal gain. Nishkam Karma yoga promotes the idea of serving the needy and underprivileged without expecting anything in return. By practicing Nishkama Karma yoga in charity and social services, individuals can cultivate a sense of compassion, empathy, and selflessness. It allows for a deeper connection with the community and enables individuals to make a meaningful and lasting impact on society. An example of this can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when numerous individuals and organizations came forward to provide aid and support to those affected by the crisis.

**Aligning Nishkama Karma Yoga with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**  
In NEP 2020, skill enhancement courses have proposed to promote skills pertaining to a particular field of study. The purpose of these courses is to provide students life- skills in hands on mode so as to increase their employability, character building, spiritual growth, etc. Aligning Niṣkāma Karma yoga, the concept of selfless action, can be a transformative practices that brings peace, fulfillment, and a sense of purpose to students lives. To achieve the objective of NEP 2020, we have suggested some practical tips for incorporating Niṣkāma Karma into students daily life:

1. **Cultivating Mindfulness and Awareness:** To practice Niṣkāma Karma, it is important to develop mindfulness and awareness in every moment. Pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, and intentions before engaging in any action. Cultivate a sense of presence and observe the motivations behind your actions. By bringing conscious awareness to your choices, you can align them with selflessness and detachment from personal outcomes.
2. **Developing Compassion and Empathy:** Niṣkāma Karma encourages us to act with compassion and empathy towards others. Practice putting yourself in the shoes of others, understanding their needs and desires, and acting in a way that supports their well-being. Develop genuine concern for the welfare of others and



let it guide your actions. By doing so, you can cultivate a sense of interconnectedness and contribute to the greater good.

3. **Finding Meaning and Purpose in Actions:** One of the key aspects of Nishkāma Karma is finding meaning and purpose in our actions. Reflection what deeply matters to you and how your actions can contribute to those values. Consider how your talents, skills, and passions can be utilized to serve others and make a positive impact. When you align your actions with your values and a greater purpose, you infuse them with significance and fulfillment.
4. **Letting go of Expectations:** Nishkāma Karma emphasizes detachment from the outcomes of our actions. Instead of acting solely for personal gain or expecting specific results, focus on the intention and quality of your actions. Recognize that you have control only over your efforts, not the final outcomes. Let go of attachment to success or failure, and embrace a mind-set of surrender. By releasing expectations, you can reduce stress, cultivate equanimity, and act selflessly.
5. **Practicing Gratitude:** Expressing gratitude for the opportunities to engage in selfless action can deepen your practice of Nishkāma Karma. Develop a habit of recognizing and appreciating the interconnectedness of life and the abundance of blessings around you. Gratitude can shift your focus from personal desires to a genuine appreciation for the present moment and the ability to make a positive difference.

Incorporating these practical tips into your daily life can help you embody Nishkāma Karma and experience its transformative power. Remember that selfless action is a continuous practice, and it may take time to fully integrate these principles into your life. With patience, persistence, and an open heart, you can cultivate a life filled with purpose, meaning, and service to others.

According to Swami Vivekananda (Lal B.K., 1973), “The true Nishkama Karmi is neither to be like a brute, nor to be inert, nor heartless. He is not Tamasika but of pure Sattva. His heart is so full of love and sympathy that he can embrace the whole world with his love.”

A most practical story highlighting this attitude of desirelessness when doing good deeds has been told by Swami Brahmananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. According to him, “A true Karma-Yogin (selfless worker) will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking, even though it is of a most inferior kind. He is never actuated by the least desire of winning popular applause.” (Swami Brahmananda, 2005)

#### **IV. The Story of the Drowning Scorpion**

There was a holy man who used to practice meditation sitting on the bank of a river. One day he saw a scorpion being carried away by the current of the river. Out of compassion he grabbed hold of it and released it on the ground. As soon as he touched the scorpion it stung his hand, causing him terrible pain.

After a while the scorpion fell back into the water and was again about to be carried away by the current. Again the monk rescued it and was stung by the ungrateful



creature. A third time the scorpion fell into the river, and seeing its pitiable condition, the compassionate monk started to rescue it.

At that moment a bystander said to the monk: “Sir, I have been watching you. I saw how that scorpion stung you several times. Still you are trying to save its life?” The monk replied: “The nature of a scorpion is to sting, and the nature of a holy person is to do good to others, so I am following my nature. It is true the scorpion stung me, but that does not mean I must be cruel.” Saying so, the monk picked up the scorpion once more and carried it to a distant place so that it could not again fall in the water. The nature of a holy man is to do good to the world, and he never gives up this divine nature.”

Moral of Swami Brahmananda’s Story: We must help others because it is our very nature to assist, our automatic mental disposition and not because we expect gratitude, reward or recognition in return. Having even the slightest such expectation in mind, will only serve to fuel our ego, the main element in spirituality which we are trying to get rid of. Since the world is pervaded by one supreme entity (Isabasyam idamsarvam), the real happiness consists in renunciation or sharing with the other and coveting not the fortunes of others (tyenatyaktena bhunjitaa).

## V. Concluding Remarks

What is important to note here is that the desire for the fruits of action leads to bondage and renunciation of the desire for the fruits of action leads to liberation. Desiring is natural to human nature. At the same time the Bhagavat Gita has taught how to overcome the attachment with desires and becomes a karma yogi. The agent hangs between bondage and liberation, and it is his choice to be in party with any one of them. One of the important implications of Nishkama Karma is that it calls for a complete surrender of the human will to the Divine will. It is only then that one renounces the narrow selfish desires and cultivates the spirit of selfless pure action. It is worth to note that what one is doing is not so important, but how one is doing is important. The karma yogi consciously avoids the conflict of mind, stress, and attachment and surrenders everything to the Divine and experiences a feeling of indifference to pleasure and pain, victory or defeat, profit or loss, etc. This feeling is beyond comprehension, it is only realised. The Bhagavat Gita’s concept of Nishkama Karma is practical and conducive to self transformation from lower perfection to the higher perfection.

## References

1. Aurobindo, Sri, (1949), Essays on the Gita (First Series), Atya Publishing House, Calcutta.
2. Brahmananda, Swami, (2005), A Guide to Spiritual Life – Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmanand, Ramkrishna Mission Ashram, Patna.
3. Chinmayananda, S. (1996) The Holy Gita, Mumbai: Chinmaya Prakashan.
4. Korner, S., (1995), Kant, England: Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex.
5. Lal B.K., (1973), Contemporary Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.



6. Sharma C.D. (2009), A Critical survey of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarasi Dass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
7. Nishkama Karma Yoga and Value Based Education in NEP-2020.
8. The Relevance of Nishkama karma Yoga for Moral development in the context of NEP-2020