

The Concept of Shraddha - Unflinching Faith for Character Building

Col S.R. Dharwadkar

Abstract :

India is a multifaceted country having diverse cultural background. National integration is of paramount importance where different ethnically groups are co-existing. Character Building is a solution to the problem. Seventeenth chapter of Bhagavad Gita, exclusively deals with concept of Shraddha (the trust or faith). The attribute of this trust has been elaborated by the great personality, namely Adi Shankaracharya, and Swami Vivekananda, who have defined and used the word Shraddha to project their understanding as an attribute of Character Building. The student community and those imparting or moulding the Character of the youth are required to understand this concept of trust for development of Nation.

Key Words :

Character Building, Shraddha, Spiritual, Yoga sutra, Faith, Shaping life, Self-respect and National Integration.

Introduction :

Bhagavad-Gita imparts knowledge of self-realization and guides the sadhakas to negotiate and overcome any difficult situation. The holy Gita has been a practical workbook, useful in all walks of life, having significance in one's domestic, social and political arena. The divine song is essence of Vedanta, conveyed in concise form. Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1921) a renowned German philosopher, during his series of lectures on Bhagavad-Gita says 'Gita is Eastern stream, which has picked up the essence from Vedanta'. Seventeenth chapter of Bhagavad Gita entitled Shraddhatrayayoga exclusively deals with concept of Shraddha. The great personality namely Adi Shankaracharya, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Chinmayananda have defined and used the word Shraddha to project their understanding as an attribute of Character Building. The words in Sanskrit language have genetic origin, treated with grammatical marvel and have a significant meaning based on traditional uses (Rudhi and Parampara).

2 WHAT IS SHRADDHA?

Without going in to grammatical marvel of genesis of word Shraddha in Sanskrit language, it is suffice to say that it originates from the Shrat as an indeclinable prefix to root Dha. Dictionary meaning of Dha is swearing in or nourishment. This genesis connotes trust, faith, belief, confidence and above all significant usage of this word in Sanskrit literature and scripture. It conveys the meaning where in unflinching faith, unswerving belief and bliss is deposited. It is also a word which has been used in a Sanskrit literature in varied context and equally adopted in other Indian languages.

3 UNFOLDING SHRADDHA IN BHAGAVAD GITA.

There are eighteen chapters in Bhagavad-Gita and each chapter is having different theme. Each one follows sequence of thoughts which flows in to ultimate destination of Realization. The chapters are designated from Arjunvishadyoga to Moshasanyasayoga. The suffix yoga against each designated chapter indicates the expectation of deep commitment and concentration on the part of seeker and ultimate reunion with almighty. Seventeenth chapter entitled Shraddhatrayayoga (Threefold type of Shraddha) has twenty-eight verses. Apart from unfolding three categories of Shraddha, it reveals the secret of absolute truth.

The activities of food intake, sacrifice, charity and penance are dealt in this chapter with varied level of Shraddha, depending upon divergent temperament and tendencies of the seeker. The Shraddha is classified in to three categories as Sattvika (Hyperactive), Rajasika (Active) and Tamsika (Dull). Without explaining as to what is meant by qualities (guna) the understanding of shraddha will not be complete. The type of any activities depends on quality of Vasanas (Imprints on mind) promoting them. The Gunas refer to the three main types of vasanas as follows -

- (a) Satva: Hyper active - purity of action.
- (b) Rajas: Active - with sensual pleasures.
- (c) Tamas: Inactive - leading to the corrupt practices.

Satva is a state of serene and poised thoughts, Rajas is a state of passion, desire and agitation, whereas Tamas is a state of ignorance and inertia.

Coming back to our topic of Shraddha, Arjun who is quite intelligent himself, asks Lord Krishna in the beginning of the chapter 17th “As to those who worship against the dictates of scripture with Shraddha, what is their state?” By asking this question, Arjun is aware of these three Gunas or personalities, however he is not aware or ignorant about how Shraddha which is motivating force in our life is related to these three Gunas. Lord Krishna answers his question by confirming that Shraddha itself is threefold, depending upon the inherent nature of the individual, sanskaras and vasanas. So the Shraddha with which the individual performs his tasks will exhibit the category to which he belongs.

3.1 SHRADDHASEVENTEEN CHAPTER OF GITA.

In fact Lord Krishna answers Arjun's question straight way by stating that, worshipping against the scriptural practices with Shraddha is hypocrisy. Any amount of practices of austerities, which are not approved by the scriptures are hypocritical and egotistic. They are always riddled with power lust and attachments. The harsh practices and torturing self for the fulfillment of desires are against scriptural dictates. Such practices not only affect the self but hurts the lord itself who resides in soul of each individual. Ravana the king of Sri Lanka was a Brahmin, who was greatest in following the religious rituals but lacked in the Character of righteous man, hence whatever Shraddha he had was for materialistic gain and Sensual pleasures. His example can be sighted as misguided person with unbalanced Shraddha. He acted against the scriptures as far as his conduct or character is concerned. Similarly quite a few politician and antisocial elements can be identified, whose act against the ordnance of shastras has brought the country almost to the brink of collapse. Chapter 17 of Gita declares the various types of Sharddha in precise and concise form as follows.

3.2 FOOD INTAKE.

Lord Krishna explains the preference of food intake (ahara) in each of these categories. Food intake has an immense significance as far as the human physical body is concerned. Type of food consumed also makes different effect on behavior of an individual as well as health. The food intake, which promotes longevity, purity, strength, good health and happiness are the characteristic of to Sattvika. The type of food intake or preference, also indicates as to what category of guna the person belongs.

3.3 CHARITY.

Third quality which has materialistic connotation is Gift, which should be performed with Shraddha backed up by shastras. Gifts offered in the process of Austerity, sacrifices or otherwise, should be appropriate in all respect. Appropriate, here is referred to the deserving entity, place and time. Gift should be Satpatre, meaning with good intention to the deserving candidate, without attachment and expecting no return.

3.4 SACRIFICE.

Sacrifice is an appropriate word in English language, which describes the action taken without expectation of any fruit. Sacrifices which are hypocritical, deceitful and against the scriptures are bad. They lead to the Rajsika & Tamsika Tendencies. All activities are required to be performed in the spirit of Yajna.

3.5 AUSTERITY AND PENANCE.

Austerities are for self-discipline, whereas sacrifices are in public domain. Amongst qualities, Austerity is given utmost importance, because it is not ritual but way of life. Worshipping Gods, Gurus and learned and observance of cleanliness, uprightness, celibacy and nonviolence are the prime factors of austerities. Pleasant, truthful, beneficial and self-study of scriptures are also included in austerity. Austerities also cover equanimity and calmness of mind, gentleness, salience and self-restraint. Sattvika will pray to God, Rajsika to deny God and Tamsika to Ghosts and Spirits. Sattvika will have spiritual tendencies, Rajsika the materialistic afflictions and Tamsika will be bent upon corrupt practices. Apart from the literary meaning, that Sattvika will pray God, it necessarily conveys that he will worship noble virtues possessed by the Gods. Similarly Rajasika will be after deny Gods who are materialistic and power hungry, desiring wealth and fame, whereas Tamsika will indulge in worshipping vicious, evil and antisocial elements.

The Sanskrit word for Penance is Tapas and in the context of Shraddha it can be defined as 'Meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial of comforts in pursuit of noble cause.' Self-torture and penance for ulterior motive is prohibited by scriptures.

4. THE UTILIZATION OF SHRADDHA IN OTHER CHAPTERS OF GITA.

The word Shraddha in Bhagavad Gita is utilized on quite a few occasions, for examples in chapter 4 verse 39 and 40; chapter 6 verse 37; and chapter 18 verse 71 and so on, with different connotation of faith, conviction and belief.

4.1 THE EFFECT OF HAVING SHRDDHA.

The Chapter fourth of Gita deals with knowledge, the action and renunciation combined together in the form yajnas. Gitacharya in Verse 39 proclaims that one having Shrdhha is blessed with the knowledge (Shrdhaddhavanm Labhte jnanam). Now it up to individual to interpret what attributes are implied by word Shraddhavanm. The most important point which is stated further, is the requirement of total mastery over senses, meaning control over Sensory organs. Apart from faith and belief, what is more expected of Sadhaka is the earnestness and confidence with which he controls senses will be blessed with the knowledge. Moreover Shrdhavan itself connotes, the lucky one having Unflinching faith as a quality without having any prejudicial mind to begin with.

4.2 THE MARCH TOWARDS PERFECTION.

In sixth Chapter of Gita entitled Dhyanyoga (Meditational practice for achieving the Realization) the word Shrdhha has been used twice. Once by Arjun in verse 37, when he asks the Lord Krishna 'As to what is the condition of Sadhaka who is possessed by Unflinching faith but has not been able to subdue his passion and has a wavering mind?' The Lord answers him with firm conviction that 'One who worship him with Shraddha will ultimately reach to the perfection.' Now in both cases the Shraddha has different connotation. In the first case the longing for objective is clear but Sadhaka's mind has been shrouded by passion. Lord advises Arjun that Sadhaka should continue his Sadhana with Shraddha so that the short comings are eliminated. It is like student having desire to excel in his studies but gets entangled in worldly pleasure. The advice is, he should not give up and continue his efforts with same zeal so that the objective is achieved.

4.3 SHRADDH - ULTIMATE DICTATE.

In concluding 18th Chapter of Gita, The Lord advises Arjun that 'Shraddhavan should listen without any doubt or malice to this divine song for happy life as well as to motivate others for betterment of mankind.' This statement is guideline for any event. One should patiently listen and should not raise doubt either on self-confidence or the teaching of learned Guru or scripture to begin with.

5 SWAMI VIVEKANAND ON SHRADDHA.

Swami Vivekananda describes Bhagavad Gita as unique document of Universal religion. He further goes to emphasizes that, it is spiritual bridge between West and East. He strongly believed and advocated that self-confidence was key to successes. He sums up number of attributes, which goes on to develop self-confidence. These are encapsulated in unflinching faith the Shraddha. He does not attempt to translate the word Shraddha as he believes that, it would be a mistake; it is a wonderful word to understand and gives an example of Nachiketa from Kathopanisad. Shraddha or self confidence in words of Swami consists of number of attributes like conviction, hard work, will power, self-respect, communication, commitment, discrimination, definite goal, love, concentration and strength. Each of these attributes he deals in details by quoting examples. Like for conviction, he gives example of Sir Thomas Alva Edison, who made over 1000 experiments before succeeding in inventing the electric bulb. Though Nachiketa is perfect symbol of Shraddha, the present generation and the outside world can be given example from their known personalities. Fictional character like Robin Hood and legendary heroes like Shahid Bhagat Sing and recipient of Paramvir Chakra - 1971 hero Abdul Hameed can be sighted, explaining their unflinching faith in self and cause for which they devoted their lives. To illustrate the importance of Unflinching Faith in varied context some of his thoughts are quoted below with brief explanatory note.

5.1 INTENSE DESIRE FOR ACHIEVING THE DESIRED GOAL.

Swami during conducting class in America on Realization said that "Strong faith in God and consequent eagerness to reach him constitute Shraddha." To understand this aspect he narrates a short story of a thief, who is obsessed with the opportunity to steal

and his total devotion and mind is in seized that favorable moment with a strong desire. Similar to the devotee having Shraddha or intense desire to reach the Almighty. No doubt desire of thief is misconstrued but Swami wanted to draw attention to the intense desire for achieving the goal.

5.2 THE REASON FOR DIFFERENT PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER.

A very important point in Character Development is how to channelize the mind to follow the proven and traditional method. The child is so innocent that his behavior pattern is normally governed by observation of surrounding and following parental conduct. Moreover the scriptural dictate announces, that each soul is divine and same is reiterated empathically by Swami Vivekananda on number of occasions. This potential is required to be exploited to mold the character of an individual. However no standard formula can be applied especially keeping in view genetic and upbringing of individual. Therefore the Swami's statement comes handy in understanding as well as in molding the personality of individual. "What makes difference between man and man is difference in this Shraddha and nothing else. What makes one man great and another weak and low is this Shraddha."

6. SWAMI CHINMAYANAND ON SHRADDHA

Swami Chinmayanand the founder of the Chinmaya Mission describes Bhagavad Gita as a spiritual beauty which brings laughter and cheer in the world of fear and competitions, conflicts and confusions, joys and sorrows. Art of living is a theme of Gita which contributes to a total resurgence of moral and dynamic structure. He delves at length, why Gita Should be studied? And what is the urgency? He summarizes by stating that this divine song should be studied for rebuilding our nation.

Swami Chinmayananda echoes the thoughts projected by Swami Vivekananda by elaborating that the word Shraddha, though very expressive, it is difficult to be translated in any of the European languages. He explains Shraddha in Sanskrit language is expressive word pregnant with sacred suggestions. Adi Shankaracharya explains shraddha as unswerving faith in words of teachers, in teaching the scriptures. Chinmayananda further

clarifies that shraddha is vision of soul that powers the spiritual things. Without this faith no one can exist in this material world even for a day. We must first have faith in the scriptures and above all faith in our self.

7. ADISHANKARACHARYA ON SHRADDHA

Adi Shankaracharya in Vivekchudamani in verse 25 defines Shraddha as the truth enunciated by Shastra and the Guruvakyam (the precept or rule framed by the teacher of eminence). It is defined as 'Experiencing and ascertaining truth what is given in scripture or shastra and being taught by teacher of eminence. At another place Shankara defines the Shraddha as 'Positive oriented person (astikya buddhi)'. Such is the powerful concept without which there cannot be any scientific investigation nor any dealings related to normal life.

8. PATANJALI ON ULTIMATE STAGE OF MEDITATION.

A total bliss is obtained when Sadhaka reaches the ultimate state of Samadhi (meditative phase). It is normally accepted belief that one should be in continuous state of Samadhi irrespective of any activity being undertaken. If a student is studying, playing, listening to music and relaxing should be in state of Samadhi; though not exactly enunciated and meant by Patanjali but his Yoga Sutra (Aphorism) Chapter one, verse 20 spells out the qualities of which are equally applicable under all circumstance. These qualities are given below.

- Shraddha – This quality has been extensively elaborated.
- Virya – Latent and potent energy.
- Smriti – Memory, in this case it can be interpreted as cognitive faculty or mind.
- Prajna – Superlative acquired knowledge.

The original aphorism of Patanjali 1.20 is offered a new dimension as 'To get in to the absolute state of Samadhi the Sadhaka, has to apply his mind with Unflinching faith, Energy and knowledge.' Which are the hall-mark of Character Building.

9. CONCLUSION

India is a multifaceted country having diverse cultural background. National integration is of paramount importance where different ethnically groups are co-existing.

No other solution than Character Building is an answer to such a complex problem. Holistic description on Shraddha for Character Building is given in Bhagavad Gita. Those who dedicate themselves with Shraddha to carry out their worldly task are successful in their mission and attain the supreme. Any work done without Shraddha amounts to nothing but wastage of time and effort. Each of these categories of Shraddha will have tremendous bearing in shaping the life of each individual. They are widely discussed, interpreted and understood by number of learned personalities and Sadhakas. The views of the towering personality in brief are summed up to highlight the importance Unflinching faith in life of an individual.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to draw attention to the intense desire to achieve the goal. Moreover the scriptural dictate announces that each soul is divine and same is reiterated empathically by him on number of occasions. This potential is required to be exploited to mold the character of an individual. However no standard formula can be applied especially keeping in view genetic and upbringing of individual. Shankaracharya defined Unflinching Faith as the truth enunciated by Scriptures and the Guruvakyam. Shraddha is a used in a Sanskrit literature in varied context and equally adopted in other Indian languages.

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**B.E. (Civil), Acharya (Sahitya)
Vadodara, Gujrat**