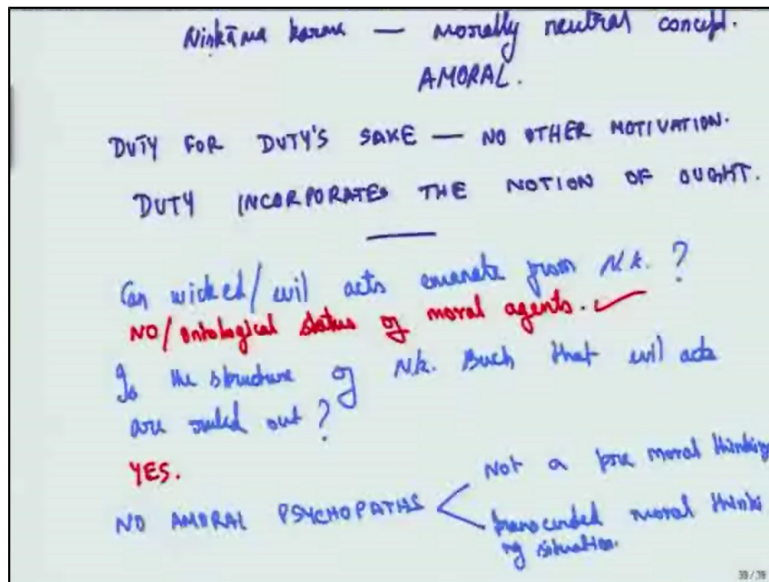


**Ethics**  
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**Module No. #01**  
**Lecture No. #25**  
**Nishkama Karma Part-2**

So, we were talking about, the Notion of Surrender. Now, Nishkama Karma talks about, renunciation in action. That is, it does not count on an attachment, with the fruit of the action. So, what is detached action. Detached action is action, without any attachment, with the fruits of the action. Now, we will talk about this Notion of Surrender, within a few minutes. That, what does it signify? What are the consequences of it? But, before that, let us also, quick look at, what Nishkama Karma is.

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Now, if you look at the screen, Nishkama Karma, as a morally neutral concept. Meaning, it is almost amoral. That, when we talk about Nishkama Karma, we do not classify actions of Nishkama Karma as, a moral, or amoral. What we are talking about is, a morally neutral action, or action that does not have any moral component. So, what you would like to appreciate or imagine, is that well, we find, for the Indian philosophical thinking, morality is not a final destination. Liberation is. Or, Moksha is.

So, considering that morality, or the domain of right and wrong, is given a status of a scaffolding, or a ladder, that allows you to reach the higher claim. Contrast is with the, western philosophical thinking where, morality is very often taken as the, very objective of living in life, having nothing beyond it, or it being an essential, an objective part of life.

In fact, it has very frequently been critiqued by Western Philosophers, that Indian system of thinking does not have, any ethical thinking at all. That is, perhaps one of the reasons, why this takes place is because, we find that, things are not clear. That, the Indian way of thinking, is the frontier is not confined to morality, or moral thinking. So, Nishkama Karma as a morally neutral concept, is that well, there is no moral component to these actions, which emanate out of Nishkama Karma.

So, it is postulating, a transcendental level. A level on which, actions are no more, right and wrong. They are bereft of any moral classifications. Or, even though, the same action, at a level of non-transcendence, would have been carrying a moral component. Now, what kind of action, does this Nishkama Karma talk about. Now, if you look at the slide, when we talk about Nishkama Karma, the closest alternative we can talk about, or comparison we can do, is with Immanuel Kant, who talks about duty, for duty sake.

That, when he talks about the categorical imperative, and he talks about the sense of duty, that emerges, that well, there is no other motivation for duty, except that it is your duty. Now, this is a kind of motivation, that is, well, very often seen with the armed forces. That where, all services, where duty is considered supreme. What one's duty is, automatically makes it an ought. That, duty incorporates the Notion of Ought, which you might like to take a look, that well. Duty incorporates, the Notion of Ought.

So, this kind of a duty for duty sake, is also compared with Nishkama Karma. Because, very often, the Hindu Ethics is criticised, as being almost like, particularly the law of karma, as being a retributive law. That where, every moral act, gets your dessert. And, it is that way, almost a heartless inconsiderate cold calculative equation. And therefore, when one starts earning a moral dessert, is earning with an aim, or with a goal of liberation.

So, it is not able to represent, the entire plethora of the moral life, that human beings have. It is becoming almost a simple transactionary deal, that well, where I keep on accumulating moral dessert, for my own benefit later. But here, look at it, when we talk about Nishkama Karma, where the law of karma is transcended. Where this karma, or these actions, were essentially these are all questions of moral agency, that what makes an agent, righteous or better off.

So, Nishkama Karma on the other hand then, is trying to postulate a transcendental level, where righteousness is a part of second nature. And, there are no moral desserts, that accumulate with actions done out of Nishkama Karma. So, it is a morally neutral concept. It is almost transcending, what is a moral claim. So, the closest comparison with this, as we mention, would be with Immanuel Kant's duty for duty sake, or Rigorism.

We see, elements of people, living their daily lives. When one commits oneself to an act, or takes up a duty. Conforming to the duty, becomes the only motive, whatever that duty be. So, a kind of a glorification in folklore, is made out of this kind of a commitment to duties. So, this is a kind of Nishkama Karma sense of duty. So, we talk about duty for duty sake as, a close comparison to Nishkama Karma.

Now, let us look at some exceptions. That, suppose we say, well, can wicked acts, or can evil acts, emanate from Nishkama Karma. I write it, NK for short. That, can evil acts, or wicked acts, emanate from Nishkama Karma. Or, is the structure of Nishkama Karma such that, evil acts are ruled out. Well. Of course, the answer to the first question is, no.

Wicked acts cannot emanate from Nishkama Karma. And, is the structure of Nishkama Karma, such that, evil acts are ruled out. Of course, the answer is, yes. Let us look at a justification, how is this possible. Now, let us imagine, evil acts or wicked acts, the moment we strip the moral component from actions, we tend to think amoral acts, as almost psychopathic acts, or trivial acts. How can acts, which are moral at one level, be free of moral component at another level.

Well. The answer to this, brings forth a little talk about agency, and about the consequences of

Nishkama Karma. What kind of a person, follows Nishkama Karma? Now, Nishkama Karma are not sporadic acts of agents. They are ontological status of agents. So, it is not that, I have done certain acts, which can recur to Nishkama Karma. And, I have certain acts, which do not. In fact, Nishkama Karma is supposed to be, a state of existence of the agent, from which naturally Nishkama Karma, or a kind of act, flow out.

So, it is an ontological status of moral agent. Can wicked or evil acts, emanate from Nishkama Karma. Well, answer of course is, no. But, how is it, no. Why is it, no. That well, first, when one attains the level, where one is not attached to the fruits of one's action, one has transcended one's perspective. When we talked about moral agency, moral agency confines us, or any agency confines us, to one particular perspective.

Now, the moment we transcend our perspective, or we reach an ontological status, where we are indifferent to our perspective, it almost brings in god's eyes view of the world. Let us look at an example. Perhaps, that would make this clear. Let us say, I have some money in my hand, which I do not require of anything immediately. Now, I see that, in a shop, there is a watch, that I like. I see a beggar, standing outside, expecting alms.

And, I see, in the news, that there has been an earthquake somewhere, and funds are being sought for the same. And, on the other hand, I see that well, there is an advertisement on a billboard, promising me a fantastic rate of return, on the deposit, that I make. Now, considering currency or money as a reservoir of resource, where would I like this reservoir of resource to be unloaded. Now, considering essentially, what are lesser morally appreciable acts, are acts which confine us to our perspective, and blind us to the perspective of others.

Perhaps, if you do, most of an analysis of our judgement of right and wrong, being selfish is considered wrong or banned, and being selfless is considered good. What is it, when we mean by being selfless. It is that well; we have transcended our perspective. Now, for me, I need the watch. Because, it looks good. I see that, if I invest in the bank deposit advertise, I will be able to get two watches, buy two watches, or maybe branded watch, in say, 2 years or 3 years of time, once my investment, once it is returned.

I see the beggar, asking for alms there. And, I give the money there, thereby feeding him for the day, or drawing satisfaction of giving something to the needy. Or, I put in the money to the earthquake victims, when considering that well, this money will immediately, or this resource will immediately be useful to people, who need it the most. The beggar could perhaps get alms, from somebody else, or could in any case, survive over the day.

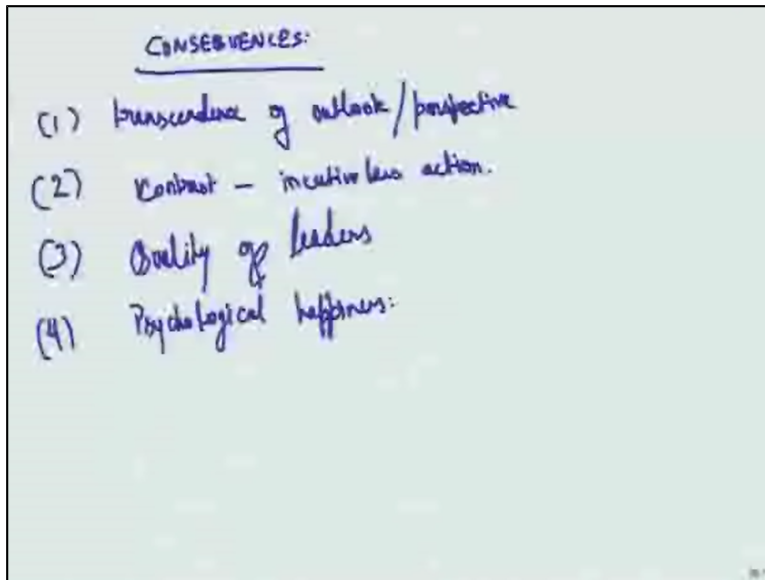
Now, when we take a decision, transcending our perspective. According to Nishkama Karma is, when we have transcended our perspective, that this boundary of agency, which gives us the perspective is diminished. Once that is done, we find that, the acts that flew out of a diminished sense of a bounded agency, or acts that flew out of a wider array of perspectives, tend to be acts, that go along well.

Now, we see that, when we continue with Nishkama Karma, or when we act out of Nishkama Karma, what arguing in favour of Nishkama Karma, or how they would reply is that, the structure of a transcendental perspective is such, that we do not have a scope for, getting into a selfish or in wicked situations. So, most of the evil acts can be, wicked acts can be understood as, a limited perspective problem.

Whereas, Nishkama Karma on the other hand, suggests for claims. That, once we have dropped our perspectives, only good acts, what would be qualified as good acts, by third person perspective, can be seen. And, nothing wicked flow out of it. So, yes, the ontological acts, if you see. Ontological state of moral agents, is a different ontological status.

And therefore, there can be no evil acts, that emanate from Nishkama Karma. And therefore, the structure of the Nishkama Karma, rules out such kind of an evil acts. So, there can be no amoral psychopath, as many of us would imagine. Somebody, who is no amoral psychopath's, because this is not a pre-moral thinking situation, rather a transcended moral thinking situation.

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Now, looking at, what can be the consequences of Nishkama Karma. Well. Let me list out the consequences. There are many more consequences, that you can imagine, and take it up as an exercise, and write it up. Well. First is the, transcendence of outlook, or perspective. First, we talked about, transcendence of outlook, or perspective. We are just talking about, right now, that the ontological status of the Nishkama Karmi is such that, she or he has transcended, his or her own perspective.

That, we are able to imagine a situation, that where, what is required, not from my perspective, but from a god's eyes view, or something which is far above. It is like, you are seeing the world order, and you find some missing blocks. And, you would like to place those missing blocks. It is not like, placing particular blocks would be, to your advantage. Look at it, this way. That, in fact, any assemblance of moral greatness always, incorporates this factor.

Now, John Rawls, Philosopher, who was written a book called, A Theory of Justice, which has brought forth Notion of Justice into heated debates, puts forth an interesting thought experiment about something, what he calls, the original position. The original position is a thought experiment, is an imagination. That, imagine, that you are about to enter a society. And, you have to design the rules for the society. But, you do not know, which position, you would play in the society.

You do not know, your gender, that would be assigned to you. You do not know, your social economic status. You do not know, your intelligence. You do not know, any of the qualities, that you have. And then, you design a system, that is eventually, wherein you can join. So, what is there, Rawls goes on to explain, that we would perhaps choose these certain principles, which she goes on to state as a Theory of Justice.

But, what is the point of mentioning the original position here, is that, I would only choose a fair system, if I do not know, what my position in that system be. I would only cut the cake, into equal pieces, if I were the last person to get the piece. So, the moment, we transcend our perspective, we find a much better, much more, just distribution taking place. Look at a town planner. Look at a leader. Now, if a leader, or a politician, or a planner, looks beyond his or her own individual games, he becomes a visionary.

Look at premieres of nations, who look beyond their national games, become world citizens. So, every time, that we transcend our perspective, it takes us, a few notches up, the moral ladder perhaps. So, Nishkama Karma is again, comparative to this that well, it gives us an ability to transcend our outlook or perspective. In fact, not that it gives us an ability, that it is a feature of Nishkama Karma, who can transcend his outlook or perspective.

Now, let us look at it. Let us contrast, this with incentive-less action. Now, as we talked about in the beginning of this class, that well, Nishkama Karma, it seems to be contrary common sense. Because, it talks about incentive-less actions. And whereas, the entire world order is premised on this domain, that we have incentivised actions. That, policies are designed to give incentives, and disincentives, to keep people from taking the kind of decisions, it wants to take.

So, incentive-less actions, perhaps being in this network of incentives and disincentives, we find that, we perhaps become opaque to a possibility there, where incentives are no more motivations for actions. In fact, the simple word called Seva, that even Gandhi talks about. It is a very common notion or service, which is taken as a sense of Seva, for those who are familiar with this Hindi term Seva, which denotes a kind of service, which is almost selfless, talks about.

So, this Notion of Seva is where, there is an absolute incentive-less action, where you have satisfaction of doing the job, yourself. But of course, Nishkama Karma goes a step ahead, that it does not even claim, that there is a satisfaction, that is the goal of any action. Rather, it is just that, the act needs to be done, and it is done. So, this does not make it a careless act, it makes it a detached act.

So, this seems to be an essentially interesting lesson, for those all, who are talking about incentives, and looking at the whole world order, by understanding incentives, that everything happens through incentives. So, Nishkama Karma is a welcome break, for the typical carrot and stick, or dog and bone policy, that seems to be the order of governing human behaviour, today. Well. Nishkama Karma can be seen as something, which is, we talked about, it is the quality of leaders.

So, in fact we just talked about it, that when leaders come up, or what makes a leader great, and not petty, is when that leader is able to transcend, his or her perspective, or his or her electorate, or the people, he represents. As long as, he represents the people, he has transcended his individual perspective. As long as, he transcends the region that he represents, he has become a larger-than-life leader. He is concerned about, what is the right thing to do.

It is a typical example, which accost me in the Indian scenarios, or political scenario is, when all the chief ministers of the states, bicker for funds, without considering that well, there is a possibility, that one states need may be, higher than the other need. And, we need to justify the same. But, if one represents stubbornly to the electorate, that has elected the leader, that leader would only be arguing for the welfare of that electorate.

So, it is all a tied up notion. When we come up with the Notion of Vasudeva Kutumbakam, which again stands for that, well, the whole universe is my kutumbh, or my community, or my home. So, Nishkama Karma is tied up with such notions that, where perspective is transferred. And, leaders can be leaders only, when true leaders of people, who can have this kind of an inkling, or a direction towards the Nishkama Karma.



And finally, of course, there are many more consequences, that you can yourself think of, and perhaps email me, or write to me. I would be delighted to know, or learn about perspectives, that you are able to take. And, of course, it is the source of all psychological happiness. In fact, the entire stress and strain of modern life, can very largely be rooted, to a very strong consequentialist strain, that whatever we required to do, or whatever we do, needs to deliver goods, deliver results.

So, as a result, human agency becomes totally responsible from, effort to results. And, if results are not being yielded, then we are losing out something. So, this causes a lot of stress and strain. Because, no matter how careful, or how elaborate you are in your effort, there is still a gap, between the effort and action. Perhaps, this is the Theistic input, of the Metaphysical scenario of Nishkama Karma, that where we find, the gap between fruits and action, is taken as a significant gap.

And, a human agency is critiqued or limited to, not being manufacturer of fruits, but as a component in the attainment of fruits. So, a lot of our stress and strain and psychological unhappiness, is done away with, when we have the consolation, that there is a stage, where actions can be performed, without any attachment to its results. Now, every action, just imagine, a schooling system, or a college system, which does not have grades, where you learn for the sake of learning.

You do not learn, for the sake of grades. So, as long as, it is an obvious, perhaps teachers would be more familiar, and students of course would be familiar with this, that as long as you see that, the grades that you get in a course, do not represent the effort, or you have put into it, you seem to be a disgruntled, disappointed. And, this is a complaint, that many teachers will be facing.

But, what was the objective of the course, is for you to give grades, or is it for you to learn something. So, how well you have learnt it, that is your credit, that you carry. Perhaps, this is all too idealistic notion, that we talk about. But then, Indian Philosophy does arise in a time of Idealism, and backed by an elaborate Metaphysical system. But of course, considering that, this as a possibility, is itself in a catharsis, and gives one a better frame of mind, and a more peaceful

existence around us.