

Outline Lecture Nine—Hindu Values in the *Bhagavad-Gita*

Key Terms for Today's Lecture:

Moksha (Release)	Samsara (Cycle)	Karma (Action)	Bhakti (Devotion)	Dharma (Sacred duty)	Yoga (Discipline)
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I) The Emergence of a “Hindu” Religious Tradition

- a) Origin of the term “Hindu”?
 - i) Muslim invaders in 9th century C.E. referring to all indigenous traditions in India
 - ii) Core religious beliefs in India on the eve of Muslim invasion:
- b) “Hinduism” as a “Polydox” Tradition
 - i) Inclusive, syncretic, and *polycentric* history
 - ii) As such, no orthodox/heterodox distinctions possible
 - iii) Vibrant spiritual tug-of-war that preoccupied India ever since the 8th B.C.E.
 - (1) Vedic Brahmanic culture (15th to 8th centuries B.C.E.)
 - (a) *Rig Vedas*
 - (2) Upanishads (8th to 5th centuries B.C.E.)
 - (3) Jainism (Mahavira 6th century B.C.E.)
 - (4) Buddhism (Siddhartha Gautama 6th century B.C.E.)
 - (5) Innumerable popular local cults
- c) What was the unique appeal of Hinduism?
 - i) Hinduism's two “Norms” towards *Moksha*
 - (1) “Extraordinary Norm” or Renunciation (*Sannyasa*)
 - (2) “Ordinary Norm” or Disciplined Action (*Karma-yoga*)
 - (a) Act according to one's “dharma” or “sacred duty”

II) The *Bhagavad-Gita*

- a) Historical Content of the Philosophical Poem
 - i) Part of a much longer work, the war epic, *Mahabharata*
 - ii) Conflict set in the 12th century B.C.E.
 - (1) Pandava clan vs. Kaurava clan
 - iii) Arjuna's moral dilemma is between personal feelings and sacred duties
- b) Framing of the Narrative
 - i) The old blind Dhritra Rashtra's request to Sanjaya
 - (1) “Tell me what *my* sons and the sons of Pandu did when they met”
 - (2) Why does the poem open with such a *blatant* evasion of the question?
 - ii) Underscores essential theme of “sacred duty”
 - (1) One's *dharma* supercedes “family duty” and kinship ties
 - (2) “Flaw of pity” vs. pragmatic detachment
- c) Dialectic of Pragmatic Detachment (*Karma-yoga*)
 - i) Do what your sacred duty requires you to do—*karma* (action)
 - ii) “Detachment” from the “fruits of one's actions,” *phalam*
 - (1) “Be intent on action; not on the fruits of action”
 - iii) Disassociating Actions from Ego
 - (1) Cassandra's wisdom:

- (a) “You don’t have to overdo it, just do it. There are not many who take the work seriously—you do. This is your best and this is all that’s required of any of us. Not to overdo—not to outdo—but to do our best. This is enough. To try to do more is to dislocate God from the equation.”
- e) How all this applies to Hindu caste system
- i) Original *sva-dharma* of Brahmins
 - (1) Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras
 - ii) One’s “dharma” not universal but contingent on one’s caste
 - iii) Implications of this logic?
 - (1) Where is an individual’s “free will” or “freedom” in all of this?
- f) The Transcendence of “Self”
- i) Egocentric assumption of an autonomous self
 - ii) Self and discipline
 - (1) Without discipline, egotistical “self” is “like an enemy at war”
 - (2) Goal is to pursue action without desires—“karma without kama”
- g) The Way to the Disciplined Self—Bhakti
- i) Sublimation in Krishna
 - ii) The basis of Hindu polytheism
 - (1) Idea of the “divine eye”—Darsan
 - iii) The qualities of a “yogi”