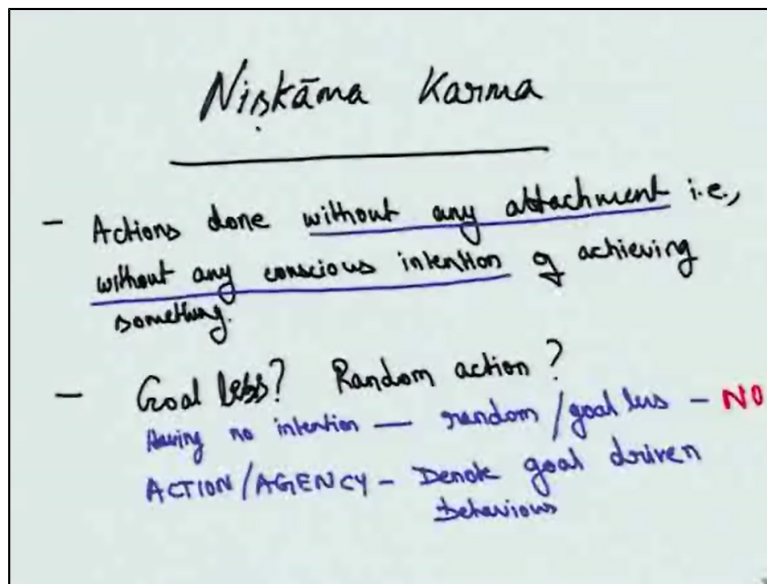


**Ethics**  
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**Module No. #01**  
**Lecture No. #24**  
**Nishkama Karma Part-1**

Continuing with our talk about the Theory of Karma, today we talk about, Nishkama Karma, as written on the screen, with a diacritical marks.

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The dot below S, makes it a sha. And, the line above A, makes it a longer pronunciation of A, as aah. So, it is called Nishkama Karma. Now, Nishkama Karma is something, that perhaps, most of us have heard, in our day-to-day talks, if you have been raised in the Indian cultural milieu. And, this is interesting, both as an Ethical Theory, and as a religious doctrine. That, what is prevalent, as a means of belief, as Nishkama Karma, or as a religious doctrine, is also very put in philosophical Ethical Theory.

Which in a way, also contrasts with, what is the practice today. Now, many people would read, Nishkama Karma as, having a fundamental conflict with, what is the basis of the economic system today, or the financial system today. The very fact that, are desire-less, or incentive-less actions possible. Now perhaps, the most preliminary understanding of Nishkama Karma would

be, that well, actions are ought to be done, without any incentives, or detached actions, or actions without any attachment.

And, now contrasted with the current scenario, that we are in. Perhaps, most of us would be working for a living, or would be doing something for a living. And, that is something, be it a profession, be it an entrepreneurial venture, may not be something, that we enjoy from end to end. We are perhaps doing it, to attain something, to attain our livelihood, to attain our comfort, to attain our luxury.

So, the very fundamental backbone of today's financial and economic world order seems to be, that well, every action should be incentivised, whereas every action that needs to be discouraged, should be punished. Now, let us look at it, this way. I would like this to be, as contemporary introduction, to the philosophy of Nishkama Karma, that why do we have this notion of fines. Fines as, if you are late for a due payment, you are asked to pay a fine.

And, if you pay it on time, sometimes you are given, a 2% or a 5% discount on the next bill. Now, what are these. Very elementary. We come across this, in various forms. You buy in bulk; you get some discount. You buy in a staggered fashion; you are made to pay a little extra. You pay in advance; you are given some discount. You pay in a staggered fashion; you are charged something else.

Apart from the financial component, or financial justification of these delays, there are places where, one simply is using, incentives and fines, as a means of moderating human behaviour. Now, any system, or any corporation, or any government, or any collective that works, would like to have some incentives, to encourage the behaviour it expects, and some disincentives to discourage the behaviour, that it does not want.

We have prisons to put in people, who were violated the law. We have awards and glory for people, who follow the expected behaviours. Right. So, these are very preliminary forms of a carrot and stick policy. You place a carrot, for a behaviour that you would like to take place. And, you punish with the stick, when you do not want see that behaviour to happen. Now, why as this.

This is fairly obvious. This seems to be, a very fundamental building block of the world order, we are in today.

Why am I talking about this? Well. Now, to bring in with this contrast, which is called the Nishkama Karma. Now, Nishkama Karma is a notion, that is explicated in the Bhagavad Gita, which is the part of the Mahabharata. And, the Bhagavad Gita consists of, very dense philosophical doctrines. It is a religious text also. And, it is a philosophical text too. Now, extracting the philosophical component, about this notion of Nishkama Karma, which is a very terse dense philosophical and ethical notion, discussed in Bhagavad Gita.

Which also draws its analogies, in the western tradition to, Immanuel Kant's Notion of Ethics of Duty, Ethics of Rigorism. Now, Nishkama Karma, on the other hand is saying, that well, incentives, do not affect an action. Now, wait. Does not that seem to be strange that, actions which are detached with the consequences. Let us take a look at, what Nishkama Karma would actually mean. Well. Nishkama Karma would mean, if you take a look at the screen, means actions done, without any attachment.

That is, without any conscious intention of achieving something. I am grateful to Kedarnath Tiwari, for the formulation of Nishkama Karma, as written on the screen. Now, without any attachment. When we mean that, there is no attachment, or any conscious intention of achieving something, what does it mean. Does it mean, goalless. That, there is no goal. Well. Okay. Let us look at this way, now.

When this doctrine of Nishkama Karma is claiming, that well, one should not be attached. Or, Nishkama Karma is that, which happens, when one is detached with the fruits of the action, and thereof in the action itself. Now, this is a continuation of the Karma Theory. Because, when we talked about the Karma Theory, we also critiqued it, as being retributivistic. That is, it was retributive. That is, whatever action I do, I will get a result of that action, either in this life, or in the next life.

Or, it becomes my moral baggage, which I need to carry. And, there is no loss of morality, in the

moral universe. It is internally closed or complete. Okay. Now, if this is the case with the Theory of Karma, that every good action that you do, yields results. And, every moral action that you do, be it praiseworthy, or condemn worthy, yields its own result. Then, are we not in an infinite loop. Or, of actions, we are continuously spinning off, into creating good actions, or bad actions.

And, that is all, that the loop is up to. Well. That is why, Nishkama Karma is in continuation with Theory of Karma. That well, that Theory of Karma is at a level, if you would remember the definition of karma, that we talked about as, actions that have originate, out of desire for certain fruits. Let me give an example. When I am acting, that I am distributing blankets, to the poor, in winter.

Say, I am acting with the desire that, the poor's stay happy, or that shallower still that, some credit comes to me. And therefore, I am distributing blankets, among the downtrodden. Now, this is an action, which is tied up with the desire, at a shallower level. It is desire about my own gratification, at a slightly deeper level, it is about seeing others happy. So, each of these action has a moral merit. And, I yield the fruit of this moral merit.

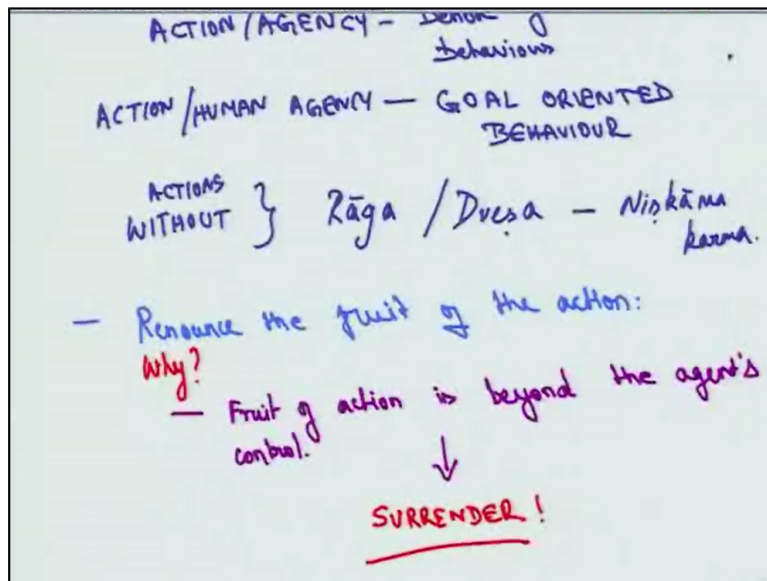
Now, what in contrast could be, a Nishkama Karma. That is, actions, which have transgressed the law of karma, which are no more following the Theory of Karma, because they have been liberated of attachment. Nishkama, that is without Kama. Kama meaning, in the sense, attachment or passion. So, without passion, and without attachment, the action done, becomes Nishkama Karma. And, that does not accumulate moral merit, either way.

So, this is what is known as, Nishkama Karma. So, let us look at, some of the features of Nishkama Karma. Now, the first thing, we were talking about, is that goalless? Is Nishkama Karma, meant by random actions. Because, the first, quality that we need to observe, and perhaps find, is that, what do we mean by, without any conscious intention, or without any attachment.

So, if you do not have any intention, having no intention, does it make the action, random or goalless. Well, the answer of course is, no. It does not make the action, random or goalless. Look at it, this way. That, when we are acting, of course there is no goalless action possible. The very

whole notion of action and agency denote, goal driven behaviour. Right.

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However, when we talk about any sense of action, or human agency, both determine goal oriented behaviour. Now, in the terms of Bhagavad Gita, the actions which are done, without actions, without Raga or Dvesa, or without attachment, or what is called as Nishkama Karma. It is nowhere claiming that, there is no goal. That, there are goals, or there is action. That, there is a goal to human action. But, there is no attachment, towards that goal.

So, that is fundamental about Nishkama Karma. That, we do have a goal. It is not random behaviour. But, there is a goal. And, that goal is however, not the source of attachment. So, when we are not attached to the fruits of action, and we still perform action, that could be called as a Nishkama Karma. That does not have a moral merit. That is, transcended beyond moral merit. Because, it is no more concern whether what result, whether it is able to yield the intended result or not.

Let us say, now this is a point, where perhaps, most of us would be a little, or quite a bit sceptical, that well, what do you mean. You mean, that well, I have a goal. And, I act towards the goal. And, I do not, or do it, in the goal. And, I am indifferent to the goal. Wait, this does not seem to be working. Why would I do something, if I am not attached towards the consequence, or the goal attained by that action. Now, let us look at it, this way.

First, because many of us would perhaps, find it psychologically impossible, to act towards a goal, about which we are not attached. I mean, if I am running a race, and I am not attached with winning, why would I be running a race. Now, well, let us try to get rid of, the dominant worldview today of action, that every action has to, be towards a goal, and towards the consequences, about which the agent is passionately attached, and that itself serves as the motivation for action.

There can be very simple various example. Say, you are a sales person. And, you are given a target to sell. That, you have to sell, so many units, in a month. And, if you sell so many units, you get a reward. And, if you are not able to sell, the minimum number of units expected, then you are given a certain disincentive. Now, that seems fair enough. That seems, how the world works.

That well, I am interested, in what comes about. And, I am trying hard, so that, if I attain, what I wish to attain, I get the rewards, I get the commission, I get the running race prize. Where is this possibility, that I am acting, without any attachment, to the results of the action? So, why should I act after all, if I am not anyway concerned with, what is the result of the action. It is here that, we need to take, a step to the side, stretch our imaginations, and imagine for a time, when this theory of Nishkama Karma was conceived.

That, this was a time, with a different world order. And, this world order is still being practised, or it can still be motivation for many number of people, around the world now. But, it is not the dominant world order, now. But, look at it, this way. Now, if you are taking a walk. If you are running without a concern, whether you win or lose, you are detached with the result. First, how is this possible. How would you know, that an action, originating out of Nishkama Karma?

First, you would know, that when, someone acts, when an agent acts, without being worried about, what result the action leads to. Whether it is attained, or not attained, it does not matter. That is a typical example of Nishkama Karma. That, the attainment, or the failure of the intended goal, does not affect the passions, or does not affect the agent. Now, yes, that does seem a little,

the triumph of winning, and the sorrow of defeat, are taken away. And, what else remains.

Well, according to this theory of the doctrine of Nishkama Karma, of course, a lot of it remains. And, a lot of what remains is that, that level of human behaviour and action, which is beyond this carrot and stick policy. That is, something you would do, because it is your duty to do so. In the Kantian perspective, it is called Duty Ethics. That well, when doing something, only for the sake of doing it. That is, not giving at a poor effort, but not tying the effort with the consequence, or not tying your passions with the action.

That, you would do something, and unless until the results yielded, it does not matter. So, this is basically what, Nishkama Karma is trying to say. That, if you look at the screen now, it says, renounce the fruit of the action. Well. When we renounce the fruit of the action, obvious question would come, why. And, I would like to answer it, by saying that well, renounce is not about me answering, of course, sorry. But, it is how the Nishkama Karma Theory would say because, well the fruit of action is beyond the agent's control.

So, this is very significant term, or significant claim, that well, why I be will talking about to renounce the fruit of action. Now, let us look at it, this way. When we talk about renouncing the fruit of action, what is our motivation. Why should one renounce the fruit of action? Well. That again, brings upon the metaphysical claims, that are tied up with the Ethical Theory of Nishkama Karma, is that well, who is the one, who does Nishkama Karma. The one, who has risen beyond the law of karma.

Who the one, who no more is attached to the action, or the result yielded by the action. And, why that person, would then act. Well. That person, acts as a sense of duty, and acts from a sense of duty. And, why does one renounce the fruit of action. Here is where, the metaphysical influence of the Bhagavad Gita in general, can be understood, when we talk about, that well, it is the gap, that between the fruit and the action, which is hinted at. That, the fruit of the action, does not necessarily follow from the action itself.

And, that is, what is the reason, why there is seems to be a gap between, the action and the fruit

of the action. So, as long as we understand, or we take into note, that the fruit of the action, does not follow from our action. Then, what does it follow from. Well. Of course, definitely, in the karmic influence, it all follows from the existence of god, or the cosmic world order, from which the fruits follow from the action. So, there is a gap, between the fruits and the action.

And, this further goes ahead to hint, a surrender to the notion of god. So, Nishkama Karma says, asks us to renounce, our interest in the fruit. Because, it finds a gap, between the fruit and the action. And, that gap is influenced by, cosmic world order, or god, or cosmos. And therefore, it asks us to surrender, that we are only a part of the consequence, that occurs. We can do our action, and not a claim, the results coming from this action. So, this in brief puts up, what we mean by Nishkama Karma, and why it says, that the fruit of action is beyond the agent's control.