Samatva Yoga: The Fundamental Teaching of Jainism and Gitā

Our is the age of tremendous growth of knowledge and scientific discoveries. Paradoxically, at the same time, we can call it also the age of anxiety and mental tension. Our traditional values and beliefs have been eroded by this growth of scientific knowledge. We know more about the atom than the values needed for a meaningful and peaceful life. We are living in a state of chaos. Our life is full of anxiety, excitement, emotional disorder and value-conflicts. In this age of anxiety American people alone are lavishly draining out more than 10 billion dollars per annum on wine and other alcoholic drugs. Today, what is needed for man is the mental peace and the capacity for complete integration with his own personality and with his social environment. This can only be achieved through the practice of samatva, i.e. mental equanimity or calm disposition. The theory of samatva yoga has been preached in India more than two thousand years ago by Lord Mahāvira and Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Concept of Samatva in General

The concept of samatva is the cardinal one of Jainism and Gitā. It pivots the ethics of Jainism and Gitā. In English, we can term it as excellent blend of equality, equilibrium, harmony, integration and rightness. But none of these terms depict the true meaning of the word samatva and the exact sense in which it is used in the context of Indian philosophy, hence better to use it without translating it into English. The word samatva has different meanings in different contexts. Sometimes it means a balanced state of mind, undisturbed by all kinds of sorrows and emotional excitements, pleasures and pains and achievements and disappointments. Sometimes it refers to the quality of a personality, completely free from the vectors of aversion and attachment, or that with mental equilibrium (वासना न्यूनता). The word samatva also denotes the feeling of equality with the fellow-beings (आत्मवाद सामाजिक). Loosely speaking, it also conveys the meaning of social equality and social integration. Ethically, the term sam or samkyak suggests rightness (सम्यक्षता). We must be aware of the fact that in all its different imports the term samatva is associated with some kind of mental psychological state, having some impact on our social and individual adjustment.

Concept of Samatva in Jainism

In a Jain text Vyasprajñaptisūtra there is a conversation between Lord Mahāvira and Gautama. Gautama asks Mahāvira: "What is the nature of soul?" Mahāvira answers, "The nature of soul is samatva (आत्मवाद सम्यक्षता)"

Gautama again asks, "What is the ultimate end of soul?" Mahāvira replies, "The ultimate end of soul is also samatva (आत्मवाद सम्यक्षता).

This view, the real nature of soul is samatva, is further supported by Ācārya Kundakunda. In his famous work Samayasāra he deals with the nature of soul. Probably, he is the only Jaina Ācārya who used the word samaya or Samayasāra instead of Ātman or Jiva. The Ācārya has purposely used this word for Ātman. So far as I know, no commentator of Samayasāra has raised the question as to why Kundakunda and used the word samaya for Jiva or soul. I think the word 'samaya' may be a Prākrit version of Samskṛt word sam: य which means one who has the quality of samatva. Further, the word Samayasāra may also be defined in the similar fashion. It can be concluded, therefore, that one who possesses samatva as his essential nature is called samayasāra (समञ्जस्व त्व), Ācārya Kundakunda also equated the word 'samaya' with svabhāva or essential nature. He used the words sva-samaya and para-samaya. Sva-samaya means inner characteristics and para-samaya means resultant characteristics. Sva-samaya has been explained as an ultimate end. In this way, according to Kundakunda too, the nature and ultimate end of soul is samatva. Further more, according to the Jaina Ethics the way through which this ultimate end can be achieved is also samatva, known in Prākrit as sāmāyika (समायिक) or sāmāhi (सामाहि). In this way, the three basic presuppositions of Jaina Ethics, the moral agent (वात्स्य), the ultimate end (समन्त) and the path through which this ultimate end can be achieved (साधना मार्ग), are equated with the term samatva. In Jaina ethics end and means are not external to the moral agent, but part and parcel of his own nature and potentially present in him. Someone may ask: "What is the difference between a siddha and a sādhaka?" My humble answer to this question is that the difference between those two is not qualitative but quantitative in nature. It is a difference between capability and actuality. By means of sādhanā, we
can exhibit only what is potentially present in us. That is the whole process of sādhanā is the transforming of capability into actuality. According to the Jaina tradition, if samatva is not our real intrinsic nature, we cannot achieve it by means of sādhanā, because sādhanā is nothing but a practice of samatva. The three-fold path, of right knowledge, right belief and right conduct, depends entirely on the concept of samatva for its rightness. The three-fold path is only an application of samatva to the three aspects of our conscious activities, i.e. knowing, feeling and willing. According to the Jain Ethics, samatva should be a directive principle of the activities of knowing, feeling and willing.

**Concept of Samatva in Gitā**

The Ethics of Gitā also is solely based on the concept of samatva. The words sama and samatva and their various forms occur in Gitā more than hundred times. The Gitā contains many references, suggesting that the real nature of God is sama and so on. The Gitā equates sam with Brahmā, the ultimate reality. Ācārya Śankara explained this by showing an identity between sam and Brahmā, while Rāmānuja and others interpret that the sam is the quality of Brahmā. But for our present purpose it hardly makes any difference. The Gitā mentions that the God the aṁśi (अंशी) of which, we are aṁśa (अंश), exists in the heart of every individual as a quality of samatva. Not only this but the way through which we can realise that ultimate reality of God is also samatva-yoga. In this way, the three basic presuppositions of the Ethics of Gitā— the moral agent, the ultimate end and the path through which this ultimate end can be achieved, are also equated with the term samatva.

**Gitā as a treatise of samatva yoga**

A question may be asked why samatva-yoga is to be considered as the fundamental concept of Gitā. Among the commentators of Gitā, there is a serious controversy; whether it is a treatise of jñāṇa-yoga or bhakti-yoga or karma-yoga. Among these commentators, Śankara is the supporter of jñāṇa-yoga. To him the knowledge alone can lead us to the realization of ultimate reality, the Brahmā, While Rāmānuja and others held the view that it is only Bhakti through which we can realise God. Tilaka and Gandhi supported a third view that fundamental teaching of Gitā is, neither jñāṇa-yoga nor bhakti-yoga but karma-yoga. Dr. Rādhakṛṣṇa and some others have tried to bring out harmony among these divergent views. But I think the basis on which we can reconcile these views is still missing. How can we reconcile the views of jñāṇa-yoga, karma-yoga and bhakti-yoga without any common element? My humble suggestion is that only with the concept of samatva can we reconcile these different viewpoints, because samatva is a common reconciling factor. Though the question why samatva-yoga is to be considered as the main theme of Gitā?is still un-answered, I would like to submit some arguments in support of my view that the Gitā is a treatise of samatva-yoga.

(1) In the Gitā the term yoga has been used at many places and in different contexts, we have only two definitions of yoga in the whole of Gitā. The first one is 'Samatvam yoga ucyate' (समत्वम योग उच्यते) and the second one is 'yogah Karmasu Kauśalam' (योगः कर्मसू कौशलम्). But the second one cannot be considered as a categorical definition of yoga it is only a conditional or a relative definition, because the term Karmasu shows a condition. It only tells us that with reference to certain activity (कर्मं), the skillful performance is to be called yoga. But this is not the case with the first one. It may be considered a categorical definition of yoga. It simply states that mental equilibrium is to be called yoga.

(2) Secondly, in the 6th chapter of Gitā Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna 'Thou must be a yogi because a yogi is superior to jñāṇin, karmin and tapasvi'; The question is what type of yoga does Kṛṣṇa want to teach Arjuna? It can neither be a jñāṇa-yoga nor a karma-yoga for the simple reason that here yogi is considered superior to jñāṇin and karmin. I think here Kṛṣṇa is asking Arjuna to practise samatva yoga which is the supreme yoga.

(3) Thirdly, the concepts of jñāṇa, karma and bhakti interrelate their value by samatva only. It is the 'samatva' which gives them value and validity. Without samatva they are like a cheque or a paper currency, having no intrinsic value of its own. In the absence of samatva, jñāṇa can be a mere knowledge of scriptures but not jñāṇa-yoga, and the same is true with karma and bhakti also.

(4) Fourthly, jñāṇa, karma and bhakti are the mere means for realization of ultimate end, namely, God. But samatva is not only a means but an end itself. It is not for some thing else which stands outside of it. I think according to the Gitā the sam, the brahman and God are one. Thus, we can say that the concept of samatva is the sole basis of the ethics of the Gitā.

**Organic Basis of Samatva Yoga**

What is the justification in saying that our essential
nature and our aim of life is samatva, or that samatva should be the directive principle of our life? What is the ground for its justification? To answer these questions, first of all we must understand the human nature. By human nature I mean his organic and psychological make-up. What do we mean by a living organism? By living organism we mean an organism that has a power to maintain its physiological equilibrium. In Biology, this process has been known as Homeosyntasis, which is considered as an important quality of a living organism. The second essential quality of a living organism is its capacity of adjustment with the environment. Whenever a living organism fails to maintain its physiological equilibrium and adjust itself with its environment it tends towards death. Death is nothing but failure of this process. It follows where there is life, there are efforts to avoid unequilibrium to maintain equilibrium.

Psychological basis of Samatva

Nobody wants to live in a state of mental tension. We like no tension but relaxation, no anxiety but satisfaction. This shows that our psychological nature is working for a mental peace or a mental equilibrium. Freud accepts that there is a conflict between our Id and Super ego but at the same time he agrees that our ego or conscious level is always working to maintain an equilibrium or for the adjustment between these two poles of our personality. It is a fact that there are mental states such as emotional excitement, passions, and frustrations, but we cannot say that they are our intrinsic nature because they do not exist for their own sake; they exist for satisfaction or expression. Secondly, they owe their existence to some other external factors. An important process of our personality is the process of adjustment and adjustment is nothing but a process of restoring peace, harmony and integration. In this way, we can say that the concept of samatva has a sound basis for its justification in our organic and psychological nature.

Samatva as a Directive Principle of Living

Some one may remark that the Darwinian theory of evolution goes against the concept of samatva. Darwin presented a theory of the evolution of life, in which he suggested that 'Struggle' for existence is the basic principle of living. Apparently, it is true that there is a struggle for existence in our world and nobody can deny this fact. But due to certain reasons, we cannot call this as directive principle of life. To the question; "Why is it so?" my humble answer is that first of all this theory is self-contradictory because its basic concept is subsisting on others, that is, 'living by killing'. Secondly, it is opposed to the basic human nature and even animal nature to some extent. Struggle is not our inner nature (स्वभाव लक्षण) but it is only a resultant one. It is imposed on us by external factors. Whenever we have to struggle we do it out of necessity and not out of nature, and what is done in compulsion cannot be a guiding principle of our life, for it does not emanate from our inner nature. Thirdly, it goes against the judgements of our faculty of reasoning and the concept of natural law. If nobody has right to take my life, then on the ground of the same reasoning I have no right to take another's life.

The theory of 'live on others', is against the simple rule that all living beings or human beings are potentially equal. According to Lord Kṛṣṇa the concept of equality and union of all living being (आत्मवत्त सर्वभूताः) can give us a right directive principle of living with fellow-beings and according to Lord Mahāvīra the directive principle of living is not 'live on others', but 'live with others' or 'live for others' (स्वर्गरोपयो जीवनात्म-तत्वायं सूत्र).