

THE METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLE IN THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ 2.27

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Abstract: A metaphysical principle is stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.27, which deals with the relationship between the first and the last of the six vikāras (modes) of bhāva (being). But, none of the traditional commentators of the Bhagavadgītā could grasp the exact meaning and significance of this metaphysical principle. These commentators turned the metaphysical principle erroneously into a theory of cycle of birth and death in the saṃsāra governed by law of karma. The traditional commentators are not actually faithful to the nuances of the terms and syntax of the verses due to their prior doctrinal commitments, which prevent them from seeing the meaning present in them. The modern commentators like Angelika Malinar see Bhagavadgītā 2.27 as part of a Kṛṣṇa's speech of consolation for grieving Arjuna. This reading is also problematic. If Kṛṣṇa's speech in Bhagavadgītā 2.11-30 is a speech of consolation then given the kind of metaphysical statements are included in the speech, it would also automatically become a speech for justification of killing and war. It will be argued in the present essay that the metaphysical principle stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.27 is necessary for explaining the idea of yajña karma, which is collective institutional action.

I. Introduction

A metaphysical principle is stated by Kṛṣṇa for Arjuna in the first line of Bhagavadgītā 2.27: *jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca / tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvam śocitum arhasi //*.

The semantic syntax of the verse is as follows: *jātasya* (masculine, genitive singular) 'of the born'; *hi* (indeclinable particle) 'indeed, truly'; *dhruvas* (neuter nominative singular) 'certain, undoubted'; *mṛtyus* (masculine nominative singular) 'death'; *dhruvam* (neuter nominative singular) 'certain, undoubted'; *janma* (neuter nominative singular) 'birth'; *mṛtasya* (masculine nominative singular) 'of the dead'; *ca* (indeclinable conjunction) 'and'; *tasmāt* (ablative singular) 'from this'; *aparihārye* (masculine locative singular; gerundive *a+pari+√hr̥*) 'in the unavoidable, in the inevitable'; *arthe* (masculine locative singular) 'on account of'; *na* (indeclinable negation) 'not'; *tvam* (nominative singular) 'you'; *śocitum* (infinitive *√śuc*) 'to grieve'; *arhasi* (2nd singular pr indic act *√arh*) 'you should, you are obliged'.

If we keep the semantic syntax of the verse, then the translation is as follows: "Of the born death is indeed certain and birth is certain of the dead. Therefore, you should not grieve on account of the unavoidable." The first line states the metaphysical principle that regulates the Vedic metaphysics, which is also the metaphysics of the

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Bhagavadgītā, and the second line is the injunction following from the acceptance of the metaphysical principle. The aim of the present essay is to explain the metaphysical principle and its significance.

II. Traditional Interpretation of the Metaphysical Principle

This metaphysical principle is in no way related to the cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *samsāra*, rather it is related to collective institutional actuality and collective action required in it. The collective institutional actuality is explained in the Bhagavadgītā admitting *sat* (eternal-ethical-actual) and *asat* (non-eternal-non-ethical-non-actual). The immanent and transcendent formless institutional person (*Puruṣa*), which is *sat* and has timeless being (*bhāva*) and of which there is no *abhāva*, and its ever temporally transforming manifest forms, which are nothing, but mere *vikāras*, which are *asat*, and, hence, have non-being (*abhāva*). The metaphysical principle covers both *sat bhāva* of immanent and transcendent formless institutional person (*Puruṣa*) and *asat vikāras*, which are manifest forms of institution, in its negative and positive formulation respectively. It is the action that relates the two realms so that through action the institution as person, which is *sat* and is in being eternally without beginning and without end, manifests itself in the *asat* forms, which come to exist having a beginning and end.

But unfortunately, all the traditional interpreters mixing up the realm of *sat* and *asat*, taking them as separate realms, have turned the metaphysical principle stated in 2.27 into a principle of temporal cycle of birth and death of *jīva* (the individual self) in *samsāra* as if the principle states that birth (*janma*) is temporally followed by death (*mṛtyu*) which in turn is followed by rebirth (*punṛjanma*) and re-death (*punarmṛtyu*) and the cycle goes on. This kind of reading of the metaphysical principle stated in 2.27 is erroneous and the reason to call such interpretation erroneous will be discussed below. Śāṅkarācārya's gloss on 2.27 is as follows: "To that which has had birth, death happens without failure, and birth is sure to happen to that which is dead. Since birth and death are unavoidable, therefore you ought not to grieve regarding such an unavoidable thing. If death is natural to that which has had birth, and if birth is natural to that which has had death, the thing is unavoidable. Regarding such an unavoidable thing you ought not to grieve."¹ It is quite clear due to the tenses of verbs in the sentences that Śāṅkarācārya is reading the verse 2.27 as saying that death inevitably follows birth and birth inevitably follows death and hence he is implying a cycle of birth – death – (re)birth – (re)death.

Rāmānujācārya understands the metaphysical principle stated in 2.27 as follows: "Death of that which is born is certain – inevitably seen. In the same way birth of

¹ *jātasya hi labdhajanmano dhruvo avyabhicārī mṛtyuḥ maraṇam; dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca / tasmād aparihāryaḥ ayaṃ janmamaraṇalakṣaṇaḥ arthaḥ, [yasmāt, tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvaṃ śocitumarhasi / janmavato nāśaḥ nāśavato janma iti ca svābhāvikaścedaparihāryaḥ so'rthaḥ /] tasmīn aparihārye arthe na tvaṃ śocitum arhasi /* Translated by A. Mahādeva Sāstri in *the Bhagavad-Gītā with the Commentary of Śrī Śāṅkarācārya*, seventh edition, Samata Books, Madras, 1977.

dead is inevitable.”² Rāmānujācārya answers the question: “How is this [inevitable] birth of dead established?”³ He answers: “Birth and death are the particular states of *sat dravya* (real substance) ... when a substance having a state called ‘birth’ obtains another opposite state then it is called ‘death’ ... every changing substance’s succession of change is inevitable. There a substance-in-a-prior-state obtaining the subsequent-state is its [the substance-in-the-prior-state’s] death, and that [obtaining the subsequent second state] is its [the-substance-in-the-second-state’s] birth.”⁴ So, every real substance is caught in this indefinite series of births and deaths. Rāmānujācārya is erroneously taking the self as substance albeit a real one. He is saying something, which contradicts Bhagavadgītā 2.20, and also Kāṭha Upaniṣad verse 2.18.

In Madhvācārya’s Bhāṣya on the Bhagavadgītā the mixing up of *sat* and *asat*, thereby turning the metaphysical principle stated in 2.27 into a cycle of birth and death, comes out clearly. Commenting together on 2. 26-28 Madhvācārya writes in his Bhāṣya on the Bhagavadgītā: “Thus, even though the self is eternal, because of its association with and dissociation from body (experiences as it were), birth and death as being certain. Thus, He speaks in the verse. Why should one not grieve? Because of it (death) being according to settled order, thus, He says in the verse. In this manner, He explains in the verse ‘*avyaktādīni*’.”⁵ The cycle of birth and death of the *saṃsāra* comes out much more explicitly in his comments on the same three verses from *Bhagavadgītā*, i.e. 2.26-28 in his *Tātparya Nirṇaya*: “Thus exists this expansive *saṃsāra*. Until the *Jiva* finds deliverance, birth and death (of the body) are according to (established) order, and which you, [Arjuna], would agree as the natural order. Therefore, even after such little knowledge, you do not deserve to get worried. ‘Eternal, permanent (it is) said to be, and also eternal and ever according to established order’ thus according to *śabda nirṇaya*. Here (also) it is according to established order. ‘For one who is born, (death) is certain...’ thus having been expressed. Therefore, in this context there is no cause to be surprised.”⁶

The verse 2.27 of vulgate recension of the Bhagavadgītā occurs as verse 2.28 in the recension of Bhagavadgītā commented upon by Bhāskara. Commenting upon the verse Bhāskara writes: “whose birth and origin is by *karmas* his future death is certain by destruction of *karmas*. And the possible association with body of the dead in future

² *utpannasya vināśo dhruvaḥ avarjanīya upalabhyate / tathā vinaśtasya api janma avarjanīyam /*

³ *katham idam upalabhyate vinaśtasya utpattiḥ iti /*

⁴ *utpattivināśādayaḥ sato dravyasya avasthāviśeṣāḥ ... utpattiyākyām avasthām upayātasya dravyasya tadvirodhyavasthāntaraprāptiḥ vināśa iti ucyate ... pariṇāmidravyasya pariṇāmaparamparā avarjanīyā / tatra pūrvāvasthasya dravyasya uttarāvasthāprāptiḥ vināśaḥ; sā eva tadavasthasya utpattiḥ /*

⁵ *astvevamātmano nityatvam / tathā’pi dehasaṃyogaviyogātmakajunamṛtīsta eva / ityata aha atha iti / kuto ’śokaḥ? niyatatvātityāha – jātasya pati / tadeva spaṣṭayati – avyaktādīni iti /*

⁶ *tīṣṭhu yāvadaḥ viśtāraḥ / yāvanmokṣaṃ jīvasya janmamarāṇe svayameva manyase, na tu niyamena / tathāpi tāvanmātreṇāpi jñānena śocituṃ nārhasi // nityaṃ sanātanaṃ proktaṃ nityaṃ niyatameva ca / iti śabda nirṇaye // atra tu niyatam / jātasya hi dhruva / iti prakāśanāt / tasmād nātrā’ścaryabuddhiḥ kartavya //*

is necessary. From the presence of the ‘another cause’ of the beginning of transmigration into another body again a body and again *karma* [acquired] from the beginningless cycle of *saṃsāra*. This is how the explanation of the meaning of the verse ‘*dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya (ca)*’ works. In the explanation emanating from the *nairātmyavādidarśana* [Buddhism] there is absence of rebirth of the dead, it [the referred explanation] is not an established.”⁷ It is clear that Bhāskara is not only taking the metaphysical principle under consideration into a cycle of birth-death-(re)birth in *saṃsāra* he is reading the traditional theory of *karma* (*karmavāda*) in it.

The verse 2.27 of vulgate recension of the *Bhagavadgītā* also occurs as verse 2.28 in the recension of *Bhagavadgītā* commented upon by Abhinavagupta. His gloss on the verse is as follows: “After birth is death and after death is birth. Thus, this is extended like cycle of birth and death. How much can one grieve about this?”⁸ This is the clearest example of interpretation of the metaphysical principle as cycle of birth and death, but unfortunately such interpretations have not only prohibited commentators from discerning the logic of development of thought in *Bhagavadgītā* but also have prohibited finding a meaning of the text that can show the unity of the text, which is so essential for any textual hermeneutics.

III. Cycle of Birth and Death of *Jīva* in *Saṃsāra* (Transmigration)

Now the question must be faced: In face of such supposedly authoritative unanimous interpretations of *Bhagavadgītā* as that of Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Bhāskara, Abhinavagupta and others how can one, like the present author, claim that their reading of the verse 2.27 of the *Bhagavadgītā* is erroneous? Is there any textual evidence from the *Bhagavadgītā* to claim that it does not advocate the theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *saṃsāra*? The reply to the second question is in the affirmative, which reply in turn answers the first question too.

The theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *saṃsāra* as is traditionally understood does not follow automatically from the metaphysical principle stated in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27. To convert the metaphysical principle into the traditional theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *saṃsāra* depends on many other presuppositions. The first presupposition is that which has been pointed out by Madhvācārya in his *Bhāṣya* on *Bhagavadgītā*: “Thus even though the self is eternal, because of its association with and dissociation from body (experiences as it were), birth and death as being certain.”⁹

⁷ *yena karmaṇā janmārambhas tasya karmaṇaḥ kṣaye dhruvo bhāvī mṛtyuḥ / mṛtasya cāvaśyambhāviśarīragrahaṇam / śarīrāntarārambhakāraṇānām anyeṣāṃ vidyamānatvāt punaḥ śarīraṃ punaḥ karmeti*

saṃsārakrasyānāditvāt / evaṃ vyākhyāyamāne dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya (ca) iti ślokārtho 'vakalpate / nairātmyavādidarśanābhyupagamena vyākhyāne mṛtasya punarjanmābhāvād anupapattiḥ syāt //

⁸ *janmana evānantaram nāśo nāśādanantaram janma iti cakravadaḥ janmamaraṇasantāna iti kiṃparimāṇaṃ śocyatāmīti //*

⁹ *astvevāmātmano nityatvam / tathā 'pi dehasaṃyogaviyogātmakajunamṛtīsta eva /*

IV. Separation of Soul from the Body

Now the question emerges: Is such ontological separation of the soul from the body, which can admit the possibility of union of the two in time and also admit subsequent possibility of separation of the two in time again, advocated in the Bhagavadgītā?

The relationship of *sat-dehin* (*sat-ātman*) and *asat-deha* is explicitly discussed and it is made clear that there is no ontological separation of the two so that one can talk of their union and separation in time. This is made clear in the verse 2.13 of the vulgate recension of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is verse 2.14 of the Kashmir recension, which says: “Just as in this body the embodied (Self) passes into childhood and youth and old age, so does He pass into another body. There the wise man is not distressed.”¹⁰ The possibility of ontological separation of *dehin* from *deha* is explicitly denied in the verse even when it is admitted that *dehin* is conceived to be permanent substratum (ground) of changing *deha*. This denial is by way of bringing in the analogy of *deha* and its various states, as there is no possibility of ontological separation of the *deha* from its changing states.

Had there been any indication of ontological separation, then the prevailing theory of transmigration of soul, i.e. migration of *dehin* from one *deha* to another *deha* would have been a clear enough example by itself. There was no need of giving the analogy of 2.13, which is indicating deviation from that theory. Had the prevailing theory of transmigration been accepted in Bhagavadgītā, with possibility of separation of *dehin* from *deha* there would have been no need to bring in the analogy of relation of *deha* with its changing states: childhood, youth, and old age. The example of the *deha* with its changing states is precisely to emphasize the permanence in the change without the ontological separation of the permanent from what is changing in it, as *deha* cannot be separated from the changing states of it, as that is inconceivable, i.e. it is inconceivable that there can be *deha* which is not in any of its changing states. The way the verse is formulated, this example is primary, and on the basis of this example one has to think of the relation of *dehin* with *deha*, i.e. *deha* is changing but *dehin* is permanent and we are not to think of *dehin* as existing ontologically separated from *deha* ever. *Dehin*'s being is like that of the numbers. Even though a number is distinct from the same number of things, yet number is not separable from the same number of things. Even if these things perish, the number is present in another same number of things. That is to say the *dehin* if not with this *deha* then it is with another *deha*.

As there is no ontological separation of embodied individual self and the body, so there is no question of the self becoming embodied in a body (birth), followed by it getting separated from that body (death) and after that, the same individual self getting embodied in a different body (re-birth), and followed by its separation from the new body (re-death). The same cycle repeated again and again for the same individual self. So, the traditional reading of the Bhagavadgītā (vulgate) 2.27/(Kashmir) 2.28 appears to be erroneous.

¹⁰ *dehino 'smin yathā dehe kaumāraṃ yauvanaṃ jarā / tathā dehāntaraprāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati //*

V. The Metaphysical Principle as a Part of a Speech of Consolation

The verse under consideration is restated with some modification much later as *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 20.29¹¹ to receive the translation: “Those who are born are sure to die, and those who have died are sure to be born again. This is inevitable, and no associate can follow a man (in his passage through mundane existence).”¹² This verse in *Viṣṇu Smṛti* occurs in a group of verses (*Viṣṇu Smṛti* 20.1-53) which is meant to be recited in the funeral ceremony to console the bereaved. *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 19.24 says regarding this group of verses: “The mourners, who lament the loss of a relative, shall be addressed by men gifted with a tranquil frame of mind with such consolatory speeches as I shall now recite to thee, O Earth, who art cherished to my, mind.”¹³

According to Olivelle, the *Viṣṇu Smṛti* was composed by a single Brahmin, who was a devotee of Viṣṇu and an expert in the Dharmasāstra tradition, most likely between 700 and 1000 CE on the ground that (1) the text cites the centrality of written documents and events which occurred in the Common Era, (2) the text uses a vocabulary which emerged in the Common Era - for example the word *pustaka*, used in *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 18.44, was first used by a sixth-century astronomer, (3) the text mentions *satī* and deals comprehensively with *tīrthas*, which is a late development, as no other Dharmasāstra deals with them, and (4) the text gives a description of *Vaiṣṇava* images, which uniquely correlate with the specimens found only after the eighth century in Kashmir.¹⁴

The time, when the *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27 was receiving the traditional interpretation as principle of temporal cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *saṃsāra*, was also the likely time, when *Viṣṇu Smṛti* was composed. Hence, it appears that it is this traditional erroneous interpretation of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27 that lead to its incorporation in the speech of consolation in the *Viṣṇu Smṛti*, as that interpretation of the verse fits with it being consoling to the bereaved, as testified by the translation of *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 20.29 by Julius Jolly given above

Taking cue from *Viṣṇu Smṛti*, regarding the group of verses *Bhagavadgītā* 2.11-30 Angelika Malinar writes, “Thus, whether one thinks of the self as eternal or as being constantly born or dead, the conclusion is the same: there is nothing to grieve for. This message is conveyed like a refrain: ‘You must not grieve’ (*na socitum arhasi*; 2.25, 26, 27, 30), which is a perfect conclusion of this speech of consolation, drawing on the style of funeral oration. That consolation is the main purpose of these

¹¹ *jātasya hi dhruvo mrtyur dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca / arthe duṣparihārye 'smin nāsti loke saḥāyatā //*

¹² Translated by Julius Jolly in his *The Institutes of Vishnu*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.7, Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1880.

¹³ *duḥkhānvitānām mṛtabāndhavānām āśvāsanam kuryur adīnasattvāḥ / vākyais tu yair bhūmi tavābhidhāsyē vākyāny ahaṃ tāni mano 'bhirāme //* Translated by Julius Jolly in his *The Institutes of Vishnu*.

¹⁴ Patrick Olivelle, “The Date and Provenance of the *Viṣṇu Smṛti*,” *Indologica Taurinensia*, 33 (2007), pp. 149-163.

verses is corroborated by their inclusion of the *Viṣṇusmṛti* (*ViS*), one of the later manuals on *dharma*. In this text, the verses are cited as an example of words of consolation that should be addressed to mourners (cf. *ViS* 19.24). Almost all the verses in the *BhG* are cited, with slight variations and certain omissions, as a repertoire of aphorisms to be used on such occasions.”¹⁵ Malinar also compares Kṛṣṇa’s speech in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.11-30 with Vidura’s speech of consolation in *Mahābhārata* 11.2.3ff. She continues the quoted passage, “It is probable that the authors of the *BhG* [*Bhagavadgītā*] are drawing on an extant stock of teachings as is the case in other passages from the *MBh* [*Mahābhārata*],”¹⁶ and clarifies that she is referring to Vidura’s speech of consolation in *Mahābhārata* 11.2.3ff.¹⁷ She further explains, “Here, the refrain *tatra kā paridevanā* (‘Why should one complain?’) is frequently used, as is the case in the *BhG* 2.”¹⁸

To interpret *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27 as mere part of a funeral speech on the basis of *Viṣṇu Smṛti* is anachronistic and to interpret it by comparing Kṛṣṇa’s speech *Bhagavadgītā* 2.11-30 with Vidura’s speech of consolation in *Mahābhārata* 11.2.3ff is to miss the significance of the metaphysical principle, which is not just meant for consolation of Arjuna, but meant for clarification of the manifestation of the collective institution as person and the very nature of collective institutional action and what is involved in the performance of such collective institutional action, which I will try to show in this essay.

That Kṛṣṇa’s speech in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.11-30 is not to be interpreted as speech of consolation, even though he is addressing the grieving Arjuna, is indicated in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.10, which is a report by Saṃjaya: “To him who was grieving in the midst of the two armies, O descendant of Bharata, Hṛṣīkeśa as if smiling, spoke these words.”¹⁹ Since Kṛṣṇa is reported to be speaking as if smilingly precludes his speech being a speech of consolation. Malinar’s translation of the verse is as follows: “To him who sat desperate between the two armies, Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa) spoke almost bursting out in laughter.”²⁰ One speaking almost bursting out in laughter and at the same time consoling is incongruous. Hence Kṛṣṇa’s speech could not have been a speech of consolation if we go by Saṃjaya’s report, even though Kṛṣṇa’s speech appears to be a speech of consolation on the surface when seen in light of *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 20.1-53 and Vidura’s speech of consolation in *Mahābhārata* 11.2.3ff

Simon Brodbeck articulates Arjuna’s anxiety as presented in the first chapter in the following words: “... he expresses his misgivings first of all in terms of anticipated loss of *śreyas* (the good, 1:31), *prīti* (joy, 1:36), and *sukha* (contentment, 1:37). These terms seem to indicate the existential problem of living with himself

¹⁵ In his *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007, pp.65f.

¹⁶ *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, p.66

¹⁷ *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, p.66, fn.20.

¹⁸ *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, p.66, fn.20.

¹⁹ *tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva bhārata / senayor ubhayor madhye viṣṭāntam idaṃ vacah //*

²⁰ *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*, p.64.

thereafter. This is then tied to kinship responsibility: the anticipated act is contrary to *kuladharmā* and *jātidharmā* and will precipitate *varṇasaṃkara* and *kulakṣyaya* (class-mixture, tribal destruction, 1:39-42) through the corruption of the *kula*'s womenfolk (1:41). *Kula* is conceived here as containing the already dead and the yet to be born, each group dependent on the other in equal measure. *Naraka* (hell, 1:42, 44) denotes the oblivion of this particular *kula* as an entity, as well as serving as a postmortem location (in contrast to *pitṛloka*) for its individual members.²¹ It is this anxiety that is making Arjuna grieve. Had there been a direct attempt to address Arjuna's grief then there should have been an attempt on the part of Kṛṣṇa to respond to Arjuna's anxieties directly. He does not respond to these anxieties of Arjuna. Therefore, it cannot be said that Kṛṣṇa in his speech in Bhagavadgītā 2.11-30 is trying to console Arjuna, as that attempt would require responding to his anxieties, which were never addressed by Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā.

VI. Argument from Bhagavadgītā 2.18-19

If Kṛṣṇa's speech in Bhagavadgītā 2.11-30 is a speech of consolation, then given the kind of metaphysical statements included in the speech, it would also automatically become a speech for justification of killing and war. Consider for example what Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavadgītā 2.18-19: "These bodies of the embodied, who is eternal, indestructible and unknowable, are said to have an end. Do fight, therefore, O descendant of Bharata. Whoever looks upon Him as the slayer, and whoever looks upon Him as the slain, both these know not correctly. He slays not, nor is He slain."²² If eternity of the embodied in temporally ending (and also temporally beginning) bodies can be consoling then it can also be inciting for war, as the very first verse makes it obvious through the injunction on first reading. Similarly, if the thesis that the self can neither be a slayer nor can be slayed be consoling, then the thesis can be equally be taken as license for killing indiscriminately. After all no one slays, and no one gets slayed.

The turn of thought from 2.18 to 2.19 has stumped every commentator classical as well as modern. Classical commentators saw a contradiction in injunction to some being who neither can act (kill) nor can be an object of action (nor can be killed), while modern commentators saw it as an injunction to kill freely as no one kills or gets killed actually. None of the commentators could meaningfully reconcile the injunction to act with the idea that it is an injunction for the being that neither can act nor can be an object of action. Therefore, neither these verses can be read as consoling nor can they be read as inciting to war or killing.

Rather, these verses are primarily meant for clarifying the metaphysics of institutional action, which here is fighting in the war, in which Arjuna is refusing to

²¹ Simon Brodbeck, "Calling Kṛṣṇa's Bluff: Non-attached Action in the Bhagavadgītā," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 32 (2004), p. 83.

²² *antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ / anāśino 'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata // ya enaṃ vetti hantāraṃ yaś cainaṃ manyate hatam / ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate //*

participate even after he has entered the arena of war, has declared his intention to fight in the war by blowing his conch called Devadatta (1.15) and has taken up his bow at the time of taking out the weapons²³ (1.20). The collective institution as person does not kill by itself, it is the members of the institution who act on its behalf, similarly institution as person does not get killed, it is only the members who get killed. Embodied is the collective institution as person, who has multiple members in it body politic, who are born and who die, and hence the injunction to fight is the injunction to perform the institutional action that is required to be performed at the time by the member.

VII. Significance of Three Errors in the Plot of the First Chapter

Furthermore, in the development of plot of the first chapter multiple errors²⁴ are woven in the verses put in the mouth of Duryodhana and Arjuna to frame the progression of discussion in the Bhagavadgītā between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, which precludes the possibility of Kṛṣṇa's speech in Bhagavadgītā 2.11-30 being a speech of consolation.

Duryodhana makes the first two errors. The two verses 1.10 & 11 of the *Bhagavadgītā* put in the mouth of Duryodhana are incongruous and erroneous: "This power (or army) of ours protected by Bhīṣma is inadequate, whereas that power (or army) of theirs which is under the protection of Bhīma is adequate. And therefore, do you all, occupying your respective positions in the several divisions of the army, protect Bhīṣma only."²⁵ Bhīṣma was leading an army of eleven *akṣauhīṇī* while Bhīma was leading an army of seven *akṣauhīṇī*. Therefore, Duryodhan's claim that the army of his own led by Bhīṣma is inadequate, whereas the army of Pāṇḍavas, which is under the leadership of Bhīma, is adequate, is erroneous. Bhīṣma had the boon from his father that he will die only if he himself wishes. No one can kill him. It was precisely for this reason that he was chosen to lead his army by Duryodhana despite his old age and yet Duryodhana orders all to protect only Bhīṣma (*bhīṣmam evābhirakṣantu*). This is incongruous.

Both I.10 and I.11 are erroneous as spoken by Duryodhana, but as sentences of Vedavyāsa these state the truth. When Duryodhana introduced the members of the army in verses 1.3-9 he identified them in the modern way as individuals. That is to say Vedavyāsa depicts Duryodhana in the first chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* as having a modern individualist outlook. But it is also depicted that in the process of

²³ *pravṛtte śāstrasampāte dhanur udyamya*

²⁴ Cf. Binod Kumar Agarwala, "The Significance of Three Errors in the First Chapter of Bhagavadgītā," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Volume 32, No. 1 (2015), Pp. 19-30; "Errors Revisited in Light of the Balanced Contrast of Two Polarities in the First Chapter of Bhagavadgītā," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* Vol. 32, No.3 (2015), Pp. 335-357.

²⁵ *aparyāptaṃ tad asmākaṃ balaṃ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam / paryāptaṃ tv idam eteṣāṃ balaṃ bhīmābhirakṣitam // ayaṇeṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgam avasthītāḥ / bhīṣmam evābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi //*

introducing the heroes in the two armies individually he could not see the institution (organization) that army is, for it was for him a power of individuals collected and protected under one individual (*balam bhīsmābhirakṣitam, balam bhīmābhirakṣitam*) and yet he expected to win in the forceful settlement of social organization (*saṃgrāmaṃ*) when he had no conception of institutional arrangement of social organization. He expected to win in *yuddha* to create a collective power, under the supremacy and protection of one individual, i.e. Duryodhana himself, when he had no conception of institution that army is. So, in spite of the numerical superiority he realized that behind the smaller power protected by Bhīma there is something extraordinary in the person of Kṛṣṇa, which Duryodhana had witnessed already, when he tried in vain to arrest Kṛṣṇa when Kṛṣṇa went to Kaurava court with peace mission, which of course he can't fathom as he was blind to the collective institutional personality of Kṛṣṇa. Duryodhana failed because there is no way he can arrest the person that is institution. He had seen the *tejas*, the capacity of the institutional personality of Kṛṣṇa for impelling and moving people, without understanding or accepting what this personality of Kṛṣṇa is. The author Vedavyāsa puts across this truth through the first error of Duryodhana.

Kṛṣṇa himself represents the abstract person of the institution in general in the *Bhagavadgītā*, and this is represented as divinity (*aiśvarya*) of Kṛṣṇa in the language of the *Bhagavadgītā*. In 11.43 when it was stated regarding the *viśvarūpa* of Kṛṣṇa by Arjuna that '(for) your equal exists not; whence another, superior to you, even in the three worlds (you are) imageless manifest-being of unequalled/unprecedented influence?'²⁶ he was rephrasing the Patañjali's definition of *īśvara*, which as per definition, is unrivaled by any superior or equal power just like the sovereign conceived by Jean Bodin in the beginning of modern period in Europe. But in Vedic thought in general and the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular what is unrivaled by any superior or equal power is the abstract institution as person in general and not any human person as it was in Jean Bodin. That's why *aiśvarya* is neither sovereignty of human person nor so-called people's sovereignty; rather it is the sovereignty of imageless (abstract) being of the institution, which is person. Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya*, i.e. sovereignty of Kṛṣṇa, as invisible dark institutional personality, is one of the central themes of the *Mahābhārata*. The narrative develops the flaw in the character of Duryodhana, which is his opposition to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, his blindness to Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya*, his blindness to sovereignty (= *aiśvarya*) of *sui generis* institution as person that Kṛṣṇa is. But Duryodhana had witnessed Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya* when he tried to arrest Kṛṣṇa, but he cannot understand this abstract institution as person in Kṛṣṇa and his *aiśvarya* (=sovereignty), which is the source of strength of the army under the protection of Bhīma. Hence, Duryodhana is afraid of the army protected by Bhīma. It is this unknown fear of Duryodhana that is highlighted by his error in 1.10. Behind the explicit error of Duryodhana is his error of non-recognition of Kṛṣṇa's *aiśvarya*, which is making him fearful enough to commit a different but explicit error. The author Vedavyāsa puts across this truth through the first error of Duryodhana in 1.10. Without the presence and recognition of this error and recognition of what is behind

²⁶ *na tvatsamo 'sty abhyadhikah kuto 'nyo; lokatraye 'py apratimaprabhāva,*

the error in 1.10 there is no question of ever understanding the development of the argument of Vedavyāsa in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The error of Duryodhana in verse 1.11 highlights a different but related truth of Vedavyāsa. Duryodhana made his army *bhīsmābhirakṣitam* (protected by Bhīṣma) in the *yuddha* (battle) precisely because, as mentioned before, he cannot be killed by anybody, as he had the boon from his father to die at his own wish. So, for him *yuddha* (battle) is not *saṃgrāmaṃ*, i.e. forceful settlement of institution. That view he cannot have as *grāmaṃ* (settlement) involves setting up of institutions, but of which Duryodhana has no inkling, as he is modern individualist in outlook. For him *yuddha* (battle) is primarily to kill the recalcitrant opponents to establish the superiority of one's own individual power to subdue and control all to make them accept the superiority of his power. Since, essence of *yuddha* (battle) for Duryodhana is not *saṃgrāmaṃ*, i.e. forceful right settlement; rather it is killing or getting killed, he is haunted by the fear, despite the knowledge of the boon, that may be Bhīṣma will be killed in the battle and hence, he makes the error of ordering everyone in his army to protect only Bhīṣma. This is the truth regarding Duryodhana that Vedavyāsa highlights through this second error of the former in 1.11.

This is a common error that has led many commentators to claim that the *Bhagavadgītā* justifies killing in battle. For example, Ambedkar claims that Krishna offers a philosophic defense of war and killing in war in the *Bhagavadgītā*.²⁷ Vedavyāsa was far sighted enough to take care against such misreading of what he advocates. For him war itself is a practice, but a practice at a limit point, where solidarity and reason of institutional practice is about to break or broken. It is an ambiguous point. So, war is a practice, where every other way of practice like the practice of dialogue has failed, to restore institutional practice. So, it has its own *dharma* as practice. Its *dharma*, its essence, and its ideation have nothing to do with killing or being killed. It is an accidental extra added in the situation of war, to the ideation of war. Killing and getting killed is only an accidental contingency in *saṃgrāmaṃ* 'the forceful right settlement'. Plato also accepts this point in his *Republic* where he makes Socrates refute Polemarchus by claiming that the justice of war is not in hurting the enemy but in setting enemy right with force.²⁸ This idea is presented in the *Bhagavadgītā* in the figure of Bhīṣma in the first chapter who cannot be killed as he is portrayed as someone who can die only if he himself wishes. If essence of war is to kill and be killed, then Bhīṣma being the commander of one army is a logical contradiction in war. What this contradiction is meant to highlight is that killing and be killed, dying and causing death is not the *dharma* of war. In the first chapter itself the presence of Bhīṣma in the war was underlined through the two errors of Duryodhana as mentioned above.

The third error presented in the first chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* is put in the mouth of Arjuna in the verse 1.36: "O Janardana, what delight shall be ours after

²⁷ Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar-Writings and Speeches, Vol 3, p 361.

²⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 334a ff.

killing the sons of Dhritasashtra? On killing these felons (*ātatāyinaḥ*), sin only will take hold of us.”²⁹

Vaśiṣṭhasmṛti III. 16 says: “One who sets fire, gives poison, attacks with weapon in hand, plunders the property, dispossessed others of their territory as well as of their women, i.e. does these six are evil-doers *ātatāyinaḥ*.”³⁰ With regard to such a heinous criminal, the Manusmṛti VIII. 350-351 says: “Whether he be a teacher, an infant, an old man or a much learned brahmin, if he comes as a criminal (*ātatāyi*), one should kill him without any consideration. There is no sin in killing a criminal (*ātatāyi*).”³¹ He is said to be killed or socially dead by his own outrageous conduct. Now, in the light of the story of the *Mahābhārata*, the Kauravas, had committed not one but all the six heinous crimes. In the epic narrative the Kauravas had set fire to the house of the Pāṇḍavas, given poison to Bhīma, deprived them of their property and kingdom, taken away and insulted their wife in open royal court, and were ultimately planning to launch an armed attack on them. They had further thwarted all attempts made by Kṛṣṇa for a peaceful settlement of the dispute by refusing to accept the request of giving even five villages, the bare minimum for the five Pāṇḍavas. They have, therefore, rightly been called criminals (*ātatāyinaḥ*) by Arjuna in the verse under consideration. The error of Arjuna is that even when he recognizes the *ātatāyinaḥ* and uses the appropriate term to refer to them and yet he says “on killing these felons (*ātatāyinaḥ*), sin only will take hold of us.”³² The action in which there is no sin he is associating sin. The error of Arjuna in 1.36 is that where it is appropriate (*dharma*) to kill, i.e. *ātatāyinaḥ* can be killed without sin, he is not thinking of killing, for he rhetorically asks “O Janardana, what delight shall be ours after killing the sons of Dhritarashtra?”³³ This error is put by Vedavyāsa to highlight and to draw attention of readers to the contrasting error of Arjuna that where it is not appropriate (*dharma*) to associate killing, i.e. with *yuddha* or *saṃgrāmaṃ*, there he is all the time thinking of killing and getting killed. Even though essence of *yuddha* is *saṃgrāmaṃ* ‘forceful right settlement’ and killing or getting killed is not its essence (*dharma*), Arjuna is associating killing and getting killed with *yuddha* just like Duryodhana. That is to say he has not understood what it means to join and fight in a war, which is a collective institutional action.

So, the issue of grief due to killing and getting killed does not arise for discussion by Kṛṣṇa, rather it is the nature of institutional action that is the issue for Kṛṣṇa’s discussion from 2.11 onwards. Had grief of Arjuna were an issue then the anxieties that lie behind the emergence of grief in Arjuna would have been taken care of by Kṛṣṇa to allay his grief, which Kṛṣṇa did not do at any place in the Bhagavadgītā.

²⁹ *nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana / pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ//*

³⁰ *atha^api^udāharanti(ud-ā-hṛ-) /agni.das^gara.das^ca^eva śastra.pāṇis^dhana.apahas^(c)/ ksetra.dāra.haras^ca^eva ṣaṭ^ete ātatāyinas^(c)//*

³¹ *guruṃ vā bālavṛddhau vā brāhmaṇaṃ vā bahuśrutam / ātatāyinaṃ āyāntaṃ hanyād evāvicārayan // nātātāyivadhe doṣo hantur bhavati kaś cana /*

³² *pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyinaḥ*

³³ *nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana*

Just as Duryodhana was blinded by his modern individualist outlook to think about right forceful settlement of institutional practice, Arjuna is also blinded by his clannish (or tribal) outlook to think correctly about right forceful settlement of institutional practice.³⁴ So it is this blindness to institutional action that Kṛṣṇa is seeking to remove from the very beginning, i.e. from 2.11.

VIII. An Exegetical Principle

What may appear as a speech of consolation in the mouth of an ordinary mortal is something else in the mouth of Kṛṣṇa, who is presented as a divinity. The verses spoken by Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgītā* are spoken in language of deities (*devavāṇi*), which is very indirect (*parokṣa*). *Bhagavadgītā* is firmly rooted in the Brāhmaṇical tradition in this regard. *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.1; 1.1.7; 1.3.19) states not less than 9 times: “The deities indeed love, as it were, the indirect/mediated [names], and hate the direct/immediate [names].”³⁵ The same statement also occurs in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.6.11.2 (= *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.2.2). *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.12.2; 3.12.4) and *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.49 also state the first part: “The deities indeed love, as it were, the indirect/mediated [names]”³⁶.

The *Bhagavadgītā* itself declares the truth that what it declares is not on the surface, at the level of direct word meaning, which can be available to anyone. Rather, it is indicated *nine times* that its truth is *guhya*, hidden, just like *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* states nine times that deities love indirect speech.³⁷ The teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā* is described as *rahasyam* (4.3), i.e. secret. It is *rājaguhyaṃ* (9.2), i.e. the administrative secret. It is *guhyanām jñānam* (10.38), i.e. hidden knowledgeable resolve. It is *paramaṃ guhyamadyātmasamjñitam* (11.1), i.e. the most secret song of *adyātma*. The *Bhagavadgītā* itself is *guhyatamaṃ sāstraṃ* (15.20), i.e. the most secret instrument of instruction (text). According to the *Bhagavadgītā* (18.63) Arjuna was given *guhyaḍ guhyataraṃ jñānam*, i.e. knowledgeable resolve more secret than the secret one. The advice of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna was *sarvaguhyatamaṃ* (18.64), i.e. the greatest of all secrets, *paramaṃ guhyaṃ* (18.68), and *guhyaṃ param* (18.75), i.e. the ultimate secret

In the colophon at the end of every chapter the *Bhagavadgītā* is declared to be *Upaniṣad*. The expression *Upaniṣad* means ‘hidden connection’ (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.9.26; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.13.4; 3.11.3; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.3.1; *Kena Upaniṣad* 4.7-9; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.16). It also means *rahasyam* ‘secret’. In *Nṛsimhatāpanī Upaniṣad* 8 it is said four times in succession *iti rahasyam*, instead

³⁴ For the contrast between the individualist outlook of Duryodhana, the clannish (or tribal) outlook of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa’s institutional outlook cf. Binod kumar Agarwala, “Errors Revisited in Light of the Balanced Contrast of Two Polarities in the First Chapter of *Bhagavadgītā*,” *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* Vol. 32, No.3, Pp.336-346.

³⁵ *parokṣapriyā iva hi devā bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣaḥ //*

³⁶ *parokṣapriyā iva hi devāḥ*

³⁷ It may be just a coincidence, but nonetheless it is a striking coincidence.

of the earlier usual form *iti upaniṣad* as in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2 and 3 and *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* 62, 63, 64. In older passages also where mention is made of Upaniṣad texts, such expressions are used as *guhya ādeśāḥ* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.5.2), *paramam guhyam* (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.17; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.22), *vedaguhya-upaniṣatsu guḍham* (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 5.6), *guh yatamam* (*Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.29).

One needs to master the hermeneutics appropriate to the *Bhagavadgītā* to fathom its secret meaning, which is hidden in the words, some aspect of which is being explained the present essay. What it implies is that the hidden meaning emerges when the whole text is *nirmathya*, i.e. churned or rubbed, just like the hidden butter emerges from milk when it is churned (*nirmathya*) or hidden fire emerges from wood sticks when they are rubbed (*nirmathya*). This is the model of exegesis where a text is studied and interpreted to find its hidden meaning, meaning not on the surface but hidden in the words of the text, like butter in the milk or fire in the wood. Getting such hidden meaning is a task of great and acute insight. As a part of exegesis of *Bhagavadgītā* one must realize that many verses in the *Bhagavadgītā* use words which have two meanings a later *rūḍha* meaning and an earlier Vedic *yogaja* meaning; the most obvious of them, i.e. *rūḍha* occur to the reader first and thus throw the reader off the scent which should actually lead him to the actual sense, which is the Vedic sense. But when and how to use this principle in exegesis is a matter not of arbitrary decision of the exegete, but a matter of judgment on the basis of the whole text that is churned or rubbed (*nirmathya*) guided by hermeneutic circle of whole and parts.

Here we have to keep in mind also that the context of the discussion in the *Bhagavadgītā* is just the beginning of the Great War (*Mahābhārata*) according to the epic *Mahābhārata*, in which the *Bhagavadgītā* is embedded. In the epic *Mahābhārata*, the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas was a *yajña*, i.e. *raṇa-sattra* (*Mahābhārata* 3.242.14), *raṇayajña* (*Mahābhārata* 5.57.12 & 5.154.4) and *śastrayajña* (*Mahābhārata* 5.139.29). In our understanding war is an institutional action. Kṛṣṇa is explaining the nature of *yajña-karma* (institutional action) to Arjuna in terms the connection between birth and death. Since death has yet to occur in the war, there is no question of speech of consolation in the line of funeral speech at this stage. The grief of Arjuna is emerging not because death has occurred but because of misunderstanding the very nature of the collective action required in war and his thinking of it as an individualistic action.

IX. The Argument from 2.13 and 2.22

The most important argument, against the view that the group of verses 2.11 to 2.30 are meant to console Arjuna and in support of the view that these verses are meant to lay down the metaphysics of collective institutional action (*yajña-karma*), comes from the verses 2.13 and 2.22 included in the group of verses under consideration.

In verse 2.13 the analogy is between the passing from childhood to youth to old age and passing from one body to another. We saw one aspect of this analogy above, but there is a second aspect too. In transition from childhood to youth to old age there is a continuous passing. There is no abruptly dividing and demarcating the line

between childhood and youth and also between youth and old age. In the analogy the transition of the embodied from one body to another also have to be thought of as a continuous transition like transition from childhood to youth and from youth to old age. What self is that which experiences this kind of change of body where there is no abrupt change and continuity is maintained in change? In the traditionally understood theory of transmigration no individual *jīvātman* is conceived to be transmigrating from one body to another as described in Bhagavadgītā 2.13. It is only the collective institutional self that has body with features like this. For collective body [politic] of the institutional self does change but not abruptly and discretely, i.e. over a period of time maintaining continuity. The body (politic) of the institutional self-changes continuously over a long period of time like the change from childhood to youth and from youth to childhood.

So, inseparability self from the body and continuity of change of body, just like the inseparability of body from its state and continuity of bodily states, are exhibited by the institutional self and its body (politic) only. The individual *jīvātman* and the body of the *jīva* do not exhibit such properties. So, the issue under discussion in the verse vulgate 2.13 (or Kashmir 2.14) is not regarding the individual *jīvātman* and its changing bodies, rather it is the institutional self and its changing body (politic) that is at issue here.

Hence inclusion of the verse 2.13 in the speech of consolation in *Viṣṇu Smṛti* as verse 20.49 appears to be because of erroneous understanding advocated by traditional commentators from Śaṅkarācārya onwards. All traditional commentators including Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Bhāskara and Abhinavagupta take the analogy of *deha* and its states with self and its body as meant merely to highlight that as one states of *deha* gives way to another state and for passing away of the earlier state of body we do not grieve because the individual-self remains unchanged through the changing states of body, in the similar way one body of the self gives way to another and the individual-self remains unchanged while passing from one body to another. Hence, we should not grieve for the old discarded body. This brings us now to Bhagavadgītā (vulgate) 2.22 / (Kashmir) 2.23: “As a man casts off worn out clothes and takes on new ones, even so the embodied [Self] discards worn out bodies and enters into new ones.”³⁸

The traditional commentators have unanimously read vulgate 2.22 (Kashmir 2.23), just like vulgate 2.13 (Kashmir 2.14), as concerned with the *jīvātman* and its body. But their reading is erroneous as these are dictated not by logic of the verse but by their prior commitment to the cycle of birth and death of *jīvā* in *saṃsāra* governed by law of *karma*. But their kind of reading of the verse is erroneous because none of them has taken into consideration semantic syntax of vulgate 2.22 (Kashmir 2.23), which determines the meaning of the analogy given in it. The expression ‘*naro*’ and *dehī* are in singular but expressions *vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni, navāni ... 'parāṇi, śarīrāṇi ...jīrṇāny, anyāni... navāni* are in plural indicating that man has many old garments which he discards and he acquires many new garments and similarly a single *dehīn*

³⁸ *vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya; navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāṇi / tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny; anyāni saṃyāti navāni dehī //*

has many old bodies which he discards and it acquires many new bodies. This feature of having many bodies at a time like the man having many garments at the same time is satisfied by the institutional self or institution as person, but not by *jīvātman*. The traditional thinkers having commitment to the cycle of birth and death of *jīva* under the control of law of *karma* assume that multiplicity of bodies of *dehin* is due to sequentially discarded or acquired bodies but one at a time and then they account for the multiplicity of garments of a man in the same way. But this is not a natural reading as it is reading backwards as if the issue under discussion is the garments of man which is to be understood in analogy to bodies of *jīvātman* (=man), which are sequentially acquired and discarded one at a time in the cycle of birth and death under law of *karma*. But that is not the issue at all. The issue is that of discarding and acquiring (not acquiring and discarding) of many bodies by a single *dehin* which has to be understood in analogy to discarding and acquiring of many garments by man. Then the natural reading is that the *dehin* is the institutional self or person and it discards many old bodies as many human beings die in the body-politic of the institution as person and it acquires many new bodies by birth of many human beings in the collective body politic of the institution as person. So, the traditional commentators are not actually faithful to the nuances of the terms in the verses and the semantic syntax of the verses due to their prior doctrinal commitments, which prevent them from seeing the meaning present in the verse due to its semantic syntax.

It is the metaphysics introduced in Bhagavadgītā 2.11-30, which enables Kṛṣṇa to say in Bhagavadgītā 13.1-2: “This, the body, O son of Kunti, is holistically thought of as *Kṣetra*; him who feelingly knowingly resolves it, they, who feelingly knowingly resolve of them, call *Kṣetrajña* (knowledgeable resolver of *Kṣetra*). And you also penetratively knowledgeably resolve Me as *Kṣetrajña* in all *Kṣetras*, O Bharata.”³⁹ It is interesting to note that in 13.2 *kṣetrajñam* and *mām* are in singular just like ‘*naro*’ and *dehī* in 2.22 and in 13.2 *sarvakṣetreṣu* is in plural just like *vāsāmsi jīrṇāni, navāni ... ‘parāni, śarīrāni ...jīrṇāny, anyāni... navāni* in 2.22. It may further be noted that *sarvakṣetreṣu* is in locative case meaning (in all *kṣetras*) making the *kṣetrajña* related to *kṣetra* just as *dehin/śarīriṇa* is related to *deha/śarīra*. Now the important question arises: why is it first declared that *śarīra* is holistically thought of as *kṣetram* then it is declared that Kṛṣṇa is the one *kṣetrajña* in all the multiple *kṣetras* instead of straightaway saying that Kṛṣṇa is the knowledgeable resolver of body in all bodies? The answer is that once the vocabulary of *kṣetras* is introduced then the possibility of Kṛṣṇa being in the bodies one after another is dispelled, as *kṣetras* do not admit of being successive in time rather these are simultaneous in time. So, Kṛṣṇa is in all bodies (*sarvakṣetreṣu*) simultaneously making it obvious that Kṛṣṇa is the collective self in all bodies at the same time, dispelling the idea that *dehin/śarīriṇa* is individual *jīvātman* as Kṛṣṇa is the *dehin/śarīriṇa*.

Therefore, the conclusion of the above discussion is that the assumption of the theory of cycle of birth and death, which is the traditional theory of transmigration of soul, is not advocated or justified in Bhagavadgītā; rather the vocabulary of prevailing

³⁹ *idam śarīram kaunteya kṣetram ity abhidhīyate / etad yo vetti tam prāhuḥ kṣetrajña iti tadvidah // kṣetrajñam cāpi mām viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata /*

theory of transmigration of soul is utilized, neutralizing some features of it, to clarify the metaphysics behind the collective institutional action and institutional actuality.

X. Argument from the Vedas

The theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīvātman* is explicitly denied in Upaniṣads. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (Kāṇva 3.9.28:4-7, and Mādhyandina 3.9.30-34) says explicitly: “When a tree that was felled grows again, a new one [grows] from the root. A mortal when felled by death – from which root does he grow up again? Don’t say ‘from semen,’ [for] it is produced in a living man. A tree springs also from the seed; after it is dead it certainly springs again [from the seed]. If a tree is pulled out with its root, it no more sprouts. A mortal when felled by death – from which root does he grow up again? After he was born [once], man is not born [again], who should engender him again?”⁴⁰

Īśa Upaniṣad (Kāṇva 12; Mādhyandina 9) also rejects the theory of cycle of birth and death: “They enter blind darkness who worship *asambhūtim*, and into even greater darkness that [enter they] who are delightfully engrossed in *sambhūti*.”⁴¹ Those who worship *asambhūtim* refers to those who worship to overcome the cycle of birth and death not to be born again, i.e. worship birth-less-ness; and those who are delightfully engrossed in *sambhūti* refers to those who following the cycle of birth and death want to be born again and again for enjoyment. Both are suffering from nescience, the later even more than the former, as their presupposition of the cycle of birth and death is erroneous and is giving rise to futile endeavors of both kinds of people.

The two analogies for unchanging *dehin/śarīriṇa* with changing *dehas/śarīras* in 2.13 and 2.22 as discussed above are based on Vedavyāsa’s deep understanding of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4: “Just as a leech supported on a grass/leaf when reaches the end of it draws itself together, takes hold of another support and, so does the self throw this body aside - make it senseless – draws itself together and take hold of another support. Just as a goldsmith takes apart a little quantity of gold and fashions another-a newer and better-form, so does the self throw this body away, or make it senseless, and make another-a newer and better-form suited to the Manes (three generations of ancestors) or the gandharvas, or the deities, or descendants of Prajāpati, or originating from Brahman, or other existents.”⁴² Vedavyāsa in

⁴⁰ *yad vṛkṣo vṛkṣo rohati mūlān navataṛaḥ punaḥ / martyaḥ svin mṛtyunā vṛkṣaḥ kasmān mūlāt prarohati // retasa iti mā vocata jīvatas tat prajāyate / dhānāruha iva vai vṛkṣo 'ñjasā pretya sambhavaḥ // yat samūlam āvṛṣeyur vṛkṣaḥ na punar ābhavet / martyaḥ svin mṛtyunā vṛkṣaḥ kasmān mūlāt prarohati // jāta eva na jāyate ko nv enaṃ janayet punaḥ /*

⁴¹ *andhaṃ tamaḥ praviśanti ye 'sambhūtim upāsate / tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u sambhūtyāṃ ratāḥ //*

⁴² *tad yathā ṛṇajalāyukā ṛṇasyāntaṃ gatvānyam ākramam ākramyātmānam upasaṃharati | evam evāyam ātmedaṃ śarīraṃ nihatyāvidyāṃ gamayitvānyam ākramam ākramyātmānam upasaṃharati || tad yathā peśaskārī peśaso mātrām apādāyānyan navataram kalyāṇataram rūpaṃ tanute | evam evāyam ātmedaṃ śarīraṃ nihatyāvidyāṃ gamayitvānyan navataram*

Bhagavadgītā captures the essence of the second analogy of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 in his first analogy given in the verse 2.13 of *deha* with its changing states. The second analogy of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 by bringing in the analogy of lump of gold and its changing form is denying the feature of separation of soul from body as it is denied in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.13. The lump of gold is never without a form. The soul analogously is never without a body. The example of the lump of gold with its changing forms is precisely to emphasize the permanence in the change without the ontological separation of the permanent from what is changing in it, as lump of *gold* cannot be separated from the changing forms of it, as that is inconceivable, i.e. it is inconceivable that there can be *a lump of gold* which is not in any of its changing forms. In *Bhagavadgītā* Vedavyāsa in his analogy of man discarding old cloths and acquiring new cloths in 2.22 captures the essence of the first analogy of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 under the influence of *Īśa Upaniṣad* 1: “All this is for habitation [*vāsyam*= ‘to be clothed’, ‘to be worn as garment’ and ‘to be inhabited’] by the Sovereign Lord, whatsoever is in movement in the world of movement.”⁴³ In the first analogy of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 caterpillar discards the old shelter of grass leaf to move to a new shelter of different grass leaf. So, Vedavyāsa in 2.13 and 2.22 is recovering the relation of soul and body as advocated in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4, which goes against the theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīvātman* (=man) in *saṃsāra* under law of *karma*. In fact, reading the traditional doctrine of cycle of birth and death of *jīvātman* (=man) in *saṃsāra* under law of *karma* is an importation from *śramaṇa* tradition.

This theory is a post *Śrīti* importation into brāhmanical thinking, which has been erroneously claimed to be present in *Śrīti* by scholars.⁴⁴ The so-called transmigrating self is the collective self of the institution. Two analogies Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 are given to explain the relation of institutional self to institutional body politic. In the first analogy the movement of self is described taking the two bodies to be present at the same time: the self draws itself together and wholly moves from one straw to another when it comes to the end of the first body. But this first analogy is balanced immediately by the second analogy, in which there is no transformation in the self, but body changes: the self is like a gold smith, who without getting transformed himself, transforms a given lump of gold from one shape to another better shape. The criterion of new and more beautiful body is its better suitability to “the Manes (three generations of ancestors) or the *gandharvas*, or the deities, or descendants of Prajāpati, or originating from *Brahman*, or other existents.” This criterion is applicable to body politic of a collective institution rather than an individual human being’s physical body. When the two analogies are read together it is not a description of what is traditionally taken as the transmigration of self rather a denial of it. It is an attempt to explain the changing body politic of the institution as

kalyāṇataram rūpaṃ kurute | pitryaṃ vā gāndharvaṃ vā daivaṃ vā prajāpatyaṃ vā brāhmaṇaṃ vānyeṣāṃ vā bhūtānāṃ ||

⁴³ *īśā vāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat /*

⁴⁴ It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss and justify this point, which will be taken up in a different essay.

person (*puruṣa*). For collective body (politic) of the institutional self is not only inseparable from the person that the institution is but also the collective body politic does not change abruptly but over a period of time maintaining continuity without any sharp demarcating line anywhere in the long period of change. Two different analogies of Bhagavadgītā (2.13 and 2.22) and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.4.3-4) to explain embodied-body relation are meant to cancel out some aspects of each other by mutual contradiction. Instead of one analogy the ṛṣi in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3-4 and ṛṣi Vedavyāsa needed two analogies to explode some features of them by mutual collision to make the two analogies suitable for explaining embodied-body relation.

XI. The Law of Karma

The traditional theory of cycle of birth and death requires the assumption of law of karma, which comes out clearly in Bhāskara's discussion of Kashmir 2.28. Commenting upon the verse Bhāskara writes: "whose birth and origin is by karmas his future death is certain by destruction of karmas. And the possible association with body of the dead in future is necessary. From the presence of another cause of the beginning of transmigration into another body again a body and again karma [acquired] from the beginning less cycle of *samsāra*. This is how the explanation of the meaning of the verse '*dhravaṃ janma mṛtasya (ca)*' works."⁴⁵ So, the law of karma (*karmavāda*) presupposed by the traditional theory of cycle and birth is explicitly used by Bhāskara to interpret Kashmir 2.28.

The Bhagavadgītā denied doctrine of *karma* explicitly in the verse 5.14: "Neither agency nor action of people does the *Prabhu* send forth, nor union of the fruits and actions. But it is own being that behaves."⁴⁶ When according to the Bhagavadgītā there is neither agency, nor actions, nor union of fruit and action for people, then it is not clear how one can read the traditional *karmavāda* (the traditional theory of *karma*) in it. Even if there is occasional talk of *punarjanma* (rebirth) and overcoming of it, it has a different meaning and it is not meant to be read as traditional *karmavāda*, as it is denied in no uncertain terms in 5.14. All the traditional commentators on Bhagavadgītā have given at best erroneous interpretation and at worst completely outlandish interpretation of this verse as all of them accepted the doctrine of *karma*. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss and refute the traditional interpretation of Bhagavadgīta 5.14.⁴⁷

One may still argue that cycle of birth and death of *jīva* is advocated in

⁴⁵ *yena karmaṇā janmārambhas tasya karmaṇaḥ kṣaye dhruvo bhāvī mṛtyuḥ / mṛtasya cāvaśyambhāviśarīragrahaṇam / śarīrāntarārambhakāraṇānām anyeṣāṃ vidyamānatvāt punaḥ śarīraṃ punaḥ karmeti samsāracakrasyaṇāditvāt / evaṃ vyākhyāyamāne dhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya (ca) iti ślokaṛtho 'vakalpate /*

⁴⁶ *na kartṛtvaṃ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ / na karmaphalasaṃyogaṃ svabhāvas tu pravartate //*

⁴⁷ The interpretation of Bhagavadgītā V.14 will be discussed separately in another essay.

Bhagavadgītā. One may cite for support 8. 23-27: “Now, in what time, departing Yogins go, not to return, as also to return, that time will I tell you, O chief of the Bharatas. Fire, light, daytime, the bright, the six months of the northern solstice movement, there, departing creatures, who feelingly know Brahman reach Brahman. Smoke, night, and the dark, the six months of the southern solstice movement, there, yogin return receiving the lunar light. Because these bright and dark movements of the world are conceived as eternal; by the one a thing goes not to return, by the other it returns again.

Knowingly resolving these (*sṛtī*), O son of Pritha, no Yogin is deluded. Therefore, at all times be harnessed with Yoga, O Arjuna.”⁴⁸ According to the traditional commentators like Śāṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Bhāskara, Abhinavagupta and others the two paths mentioned are respectively path of liberation from the law of *karma* and cycle of birth and death and path of remaining in bondage of law of *karma* and cycle of birth and death for enjoyment of pleasure and pain in the this world. But this is not the meaning as the law of *karma* has been denied in 5.14. Once again it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the traditional commentators’ interpretation of Bhagavadgītā 8. 23-27 and to discuss the meaning of *Devayāna* and *Pitryāna* described in Vedas.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding the arguments given above, diehard supporters of cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *samsāra* may still claim that this doctrine is present in Bhagavadgītā and may cite the verse 4.5 put in the mouth of Kṛṣṇa: “Many births of mine have passed, as well as of yours, O Arjuna; all these I know, you do not know, O harasser of foes.”⁵⁰ But one should not forget in the very next verse, i.e. verse 4.6 Kṛṣṇa apparently contradicts 4.5 and declares: “Though I am unborn, imperishable self”.⁵¹ Therefore, verse 4.5 cannot be utilized for supporting a theory of cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *samsāra*.⁵²

⁴⁸ *yatra kāle tv anāvṛttim āvṛttim caiva yoginaḥ / prayātā yānti taṃ kālaṃ vakṣyāmi bharatarṣabha // agnir jyotir ahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyanam / tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavido janāḥ // dhūmo rātris tathā Kṛṣṇaḥ ṣaṇmāsā dakṣiṇāyanam / tatra cāndramasaṃ jyotir yogī prāpya nivartate // śuklakṛṣṇe gatī hy ete jagataḥ śāśvate mate / ekayā yāty anāvṛttim anyayāvartate punaḥ // naite sṛtī pārtha jānan yogī muhyati kaś cana / tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu yogayukto bhavārjuna //*

⁴⁹ The meaning of *Devayāna* and *Pitryāna* from the Ṛgveda to the Bhagavadgītā will be taken up in another essay.

⁵⁰ *bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cārjuna / tāny ahaṃ veda sarvāṇi na tvam vettha paraṃtapa //*

⁵¹ *ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā*

⁵² It is beyond the scope of this paper to interpret the first six interrelated verses of chapter IV of Bhagavadgītā, where Kṛṣṇa is speaking as *kāla puruṣa* and via the identity of the two, i.e. identity of Kṛṣṇa with Arjuna from X.37, to Arjuna also as *kāla puruṣa*, who is also interjecting. The verse IV.5 is merely presenting a cyclical conception of time and not a cycle of birth and death of *jīva* in *samsāra*. Verse IV.5 has to be read in light of Ṛgveda 6.9.1: *ahaśca kṛṣṇamahararjunam ca vi vartete rajasī vedyābhiḥ / vaiśvānaro jāyamāno na rājāvātirajjyotiṣāgnistamāṃsi //* “One half of day is dark, and bright the other, both extended rotate on by skilled devices. Agni Vaiśvānara, when born as king, has with his luster overcome

XII. The Explanation of the Metaphysical Principle

The metaphysical principle stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.27 is regarding the relationship between the first and last of the *ṣaḍ bhāva vikāras* (six modes of being). Of that which has *ṣaḍ bhāva vikāra* it is said that it *jāyate asti vardhate vipariṇamate apakṣīyate vinaśyati* ‘takes birth, exists, grows, transforms, declines, dies’.⁵³ In the list of six modes of being birth and death are the first and last. The first quarter of the verse states the first part of the metaphysical principle: *of that which is born it is certain that it has death, or of that which has a beginning it is certain that it has an end*. The first part of the principle by itself does not indicate any temporal ordering of birth and death such that death will follow the birth in time. The first quarter of the verse merely says that there is indissoluble connection between birth and death, or between beginning and end. Hence, in reverse it is also stated in the second quarter of the verse: *of that which is dead it is certain that it has birth, or of that which has come to an end it is certain that it has beginning*.⁵⁴ The second part of the metaphysical principle also by itself does not indicate any temporal ordering of death and birth such that death will be followed by birth (rebirth) in time.

This sequence of death and birth (rebirth), i.e. death followed by birth (rebirth) in time have been read erroneously in the principle by scholars because of their prior commitment to the cycle of birth and death in *samsāra*. The second quarter merely states that if something is dead or has come to an end then it has birth or beginning too. The second quarter of the verse also merely says that there is indissoluble connection between death and birth, or between end and beginning.

There is no doubt that one finds in Vedas both kinds of ordering of birth and death in time: birth followed by death, and death followed by birth. But the two orderings of birth and death in time do not indicate any cycle of birth and death as understood in traditional theory of *karma* according to which one is born again and

the darkness.” The context of mantra, i.e. sūkta 6.9 makes it clear that here Agni Vaiśvānara is spoken of as Agni in yajña and Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna represent time, specially two parts of day. Verse IV.5 has to be read in light of Ṛgveda 10.21.3 also: *tve dharmāṇa āsate juhūbhiḥ siñcatīr iva / kṛṣṇā rūpāṇy arjunā vi vo made viśvā adhi śriyo dhiṣe vivakṣase* // “The supports rest by you, as ’twere with ladles that o’erflow. Black and white forms, all the glories you have created in your exhilaration, will declare to you.” The context of the mantra, i.e. sūkta 10.21, makes it clear that the Agni here is again the Agni in yajña. So, the verse IV.5 is presenting a rudimentary idea of cyclical time fit for institutional actuality which is yajña represented by Agni in the two Ṛgveda mantras.

⁵³ Yāska’s Nirukta 1.2: *ṣaḍbhāvavikārā bhavanīti vārṣyāyaṇiḥ / jāyate’sti vipariṇamate vardhate’pakṣīyate vinaśyati* // “According to *Vārṣyāyaṇi*, there are six modifications of being: takes birth, exists, transforms, grows, decays, and gets destroyed.”

⁵⁴ This metaphysical principle has received late recognition in Gadamer. He writes, “Between these two, beginning and end, stands an indissoluble connection. The beginning always implies the end. ... The end determines the beginning, and this is why we get into a long series of difficulties. The anticipation of the end is a prerequisite for the concrete meaning of beginning.” (Gadamer 2001: 15)

again, to reap the fruits of his action. When Vedas correlate birth and death such that in time first there is birth and then afterwards there takes place death then the issue is of what we normally interpret as birth and death of an individual living being, or beginning and end of any existent thing. But when death is followed by birth. When Vedas correlate birth and death such that in time first there is death and then afterwards there takes place birth, then the issue is of what we normally take as an action performed by individual living being, such that death represents beginning of that action and birth represents the completion of that action. We will show below, how in Vedas, every action is conceived as beginning with death of the agent followed in time by agent's birth, which is the completion of one cycle of action, which may be repeated again.

What the metaphysical principle in the entire first line of the verse 2.27 of Bhagavadgītā says is that there is indissoluble connection between birth (or beginning) and death (or end) so that if a thing has one of these two poles then it inevitably has the other pole too. If it does not have one pole, then it does not have the other pole too. This comes out in the negative formulation of the metaphysical principle. In negative formulation it takes the following form: *If a thing has no birth, then it is certain that it has no death, or if a thing has no beginning it is certain that it has no end; if a thing has no death then certainly it has no birth or if a thing has no end then certainly it has no beginning.*

The metaphysical principle in both versions denies the possibility of something that is *anādi* (beginning-less) but has an *anta* (end); it also denies the possibility of something that is *jāta* (born) or has *ādi* (beginning), but has no *mṛtyu* (death) or has no *anta* (end). So the metaphysics accepted by the Bhagavadgita, which is Vedic Metaphysics, admits only two types of things: the existence of those, which have both beginning (or birth) and end (or death), and being of those, which have neither beginning (or birth) nor end (or death).

The two kinds of things being governed by the same metaphysical principle in its positive and negative formulations are also interrelated as stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.18: "These bodies of the embodied, who is eternal, indestructible and unknowable, are said to have an end. Do fight, therefore, O descendant of Bharata."⁵⁵ The bodies of the embodied have end and hence have beginning too, while the embodied being eternal has no end and hence has no beginning either. But what is important is that bodies and the embodied being governed by the same one principle in positive and negative formulations respectively also represent a unity, i.e. the unity of bodies and the embodied. Another point to be noted about 2.18 is that the verse draws an injunction for action: "do fight, therefore, O descendant of Bharata,"⁵⁶ from the statement of the eternity of the embodied and the temporal beginning and end of bodies. This indicates that the metaphysical principle regarding the indissoluble connection between the birth (or beginning) and death (or end) is behind the very

⁵⁵ *antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ / anāśīno 'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*
//

⁵⁶ *tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*

conception of action in the Bhagavadgītā, which will be explained shortly in the essay.

This principle of indissoluble connection of birth (or beginning) and death (or end) comes from Īśa Upaniṣad (*Kāṇva* 14, *Mādhyandina* 11): “Birth and destruction – he who feelingly knowledgeably resolves both these as [belonging] together – having crossed death by destruction, he enjoys life by birth.”⁵⁷

XIII. The Positive and the Negative Formulation of the Metaphysical Principle

The metaphysical principle in its positive formulation as stated in 2.27 is actually and meaningfully applicable only in the realm of *asat* (non-eternal-non-ethical-non-actual). This comes out in the explanation that is given in the next verse, i.e. Bhagavadgītā 2.28: “Existents are unmanifest in their beginning; they become manifest in the middle, O Bharata; and they become unmanifest after death. So why grieve over them?”⁵⁸ The explanation makes it clear that the principle is to cover only the realm of *bhūtāni* ‘existents’, which is the realm of *bhāva vikāras* (modes of being) and the realm of *asat* (non-eternal-non-ethical-non-actual). It is noteworthy that in Bhagavadgītā 2.28 there is no talk of manifestation of the same *bhūta* (existent) again and again. It is categorically stated that an existent was unmanifest before birth and will become unmanifest after death and it is manifest in the middle only. There is no mention of any repetition of birth, or repetition of death, or repetition of manifestation of the *bhūtāni* (existents) in the context of the metaphysical principle. Since a cycle is same everywhere the idea of beginning, end and the middle used in the verse 2.28 prohibits the applicability of the idea of cycle of manifestation or birth and rebirth in the context.

No doubt it is mentioned in 2.26 regarding self: “And even if you think it to be regularly born and regularly dying, O mighty-armed Arjuna, you should not grieve for it,”⁵⁹ but it is only a hypothetical statement, which is meant to be dispelled by the metaphysical principle stated in 2.27 with explanation in 2.28. The metaphysical principle has nothing to do with theory of re-birth or temporal cycle of birth and death, which has a different basis. This becomes clear from the negative formulation of the metaphysical principle, which is not explicitly formulated in Bhagavadgītā.

In the negative formulation the metaphysical principle covers the realm of *sat* too. It is therefore applicable to Brahman, Ātman (self), Dehin (embodied), Śārīriṇa (embodied), or Puruṣa (person), regarding whom it is stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.20: “It is not born, nor does it ever die; after having been, it does not cease to be or again will be. Unborn, eternal, unchangeable and primeval, it is not slain when the body is

⁵⁷ *sambhūtim ca vināśam ca yas tad vedobhayaṃ saha / vināśena mrtyuṃ tūrtvā sambhūtyāmṛtam aśnute //*

⁵⁸ *avyaktāḍḍīni bhūtāni vyaktamadhyāni bhārata / avyaktanidhanāny eva tatra kā paridevanā //*

⁵⁹ *atha cainam nityajātaṃ nityaṃ vā manyase mṛtam / tathāpi tvaṃ mahābāho nainaṃ śocitum arhasi //*

slain.”⁶⁰ This is a slightly modified Kāṭha Upaniṣad verse 2.18⁶¹ without changing the meaning. The way the verse 2.20 is stated it is clear that self is never born nor does it die and therefore there is no question of its multiple births or deaths or any cycle of birth and death. But this negatively formulated principle does not imply existence of any substance at all times, for existence is only a *vikāra* (mode) of *bhāva* (being). The metaphysical principle negatively formulated applies to that which is only *sat* (eternal-ethical-actual) and has only *bhāva* (being) without any *vikāra* (modes) and hence implies that it applies to that which is in *akhaṇḍa kāla* (indivisible time) or – to put it differently in ordinary language – which is timeless.

Absence of two poles – beginning and end – together with respect to Brahman, Ātman (self), or Puruṣa (person) comes from the Śruti tradition. One can offer the following examples from śruti⁶²: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.25⁶³; *Kāṭha Upaniṣad* 2.18⁶⁴; *Kāṭha Upaniṣad* 3.15⁶⁵; *Maitrī Upaniṣad* II.4⁶⁶; *Maitrī Upaniṣad* V.1⁶⁷; *Maitrī*

⁶⁰ *na jāyate mriyate vā kadā cin; nāyaṃ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ / ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo; na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //*

⁶¹ *na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścīn nāyaṃ kutaścīn na babhūva kaścit / ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //* “The wise one – he is not born, he does not die; he has not come from anywhere; he has not become anyone. He is unborn and eternal, primeval and everlasting. And he is not killed, when the body is killed.”

⁶² Emphasis added in boldface in footnotes by the present author.

⁶³ *sa vā eṣa mahān aja ātmājaro 'maro 'mṛto 'bhayo brahma | abhayaṃ vai brahma | abhayaṃ hi vai brahma bhavati ya evaṃ veda //* “That great, birth-less self, un-decaying, immortal, death-less, fear-less and the Brahman. Brahman, surely, is fear-less and a man who knows it as such becomes fear-less Brahman.”

⁶⁴ *na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścīn nāyaṃ kutaścīn na babhūva kaścit / ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṃ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //* “The wise [self] is not born, he does not die; he has not come from anywhere; he was not anything. He is unborn and eternal, everlasting and ancient. And he is not slain, when the body is slain.”

⁶⁵ *aśabdān asparśam arūpam avyayaṃ tathārasaṃ nityam agandhavaś ca yat / anādy anantaṃ mahataḥ paraṃ dhruvaṃ nicāyā tan mṛtyumukhāt pramucyate //* “It is soundless, touchless, formless, undecaying, so tasteless, eternal and scentless, beginningless, endless, beyond the *Mahat*, and constant, knowing that, man escapes from the mouth of Death.”

⁶⁶ *yo ha khalu vāvopariṣṭhaḥ śrūyate guṇeṣvivoradhvaretasaḥ sa vā eṣa śuddhaḥ pūtaḥ sūnyaḥ śānto 'prāṇo nirātmānanto 'kṣayaḥ sthiraḥ śāśvato 'jaḥ svatantraḥ sve mahimni tiṣṭhyanedam śarīraṃ cetanavat pratiṣṭhāpitam pracodayitā vaiṣo 'pyasyeti /* “He who in the śruti is called ‘standing above,’ like desireless ascetics amidst the strands [of prakṛti], he, indeed, the pure, clean, void, tranquil, breathless, selfless, endless, imperishable, firm, everlasting, unborn, own-loom-one, stands in his own greatness, and by him has this body been set up in possession of intelligence, and he is also the driver of it.”

⁶⁷ *atha yatheyaṃ kautsāyanī stutiḥ / tvaṃ brahma tvañca vai viṣṇustvaṃ rudrastvaṃ prajāpatiḥ / tvamagnirvaruṇo vāyustvamindrastvaṃ niśākaraḥ // tvamannastvaṃ yamastvaṃ pṛthivī tvaṃ viśvaṃ tvamathācyutaḥ / svārthe svābhāvike 'rthe ca bahudhā saṃsthitistvayi // viśveśvara namastubhyaṃ viśvātmā viśvakarmakṛt / viśvabhugviśvamāyustvaṃ viśvakṛīḍāratiprabhuḥ // namaḥ śāntātmāne tubhyaṃ namo guhyatamāya ca / acintyāyāprameyāya anādinidhanāya ca //* “Therefore, then, this is Kutsāyana’s hymn of praise: ‘You are Brahman, and you are Viṣṇu, you are Rudra, you are Prajāpati. You are Agni, Varuṇa, Vāyu, you are Indra, you are the night-maker (moon). You are food, you are Yama, you are the earth, you are all, you are

Upaniṣad VI.17⁶⁸; *Maitrī Upaniṣad* VII.1⁶⁹; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.11⁷⁰; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.4⁷¹; *Amṛta-bindu Upaniṣad* 8-9⁷²; *Mahābhārata* 12,224.55+671.1⁷³; Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* 1.1⁷⁴; *Viṣṇusmṛti* 20.21⁷⁵

unshaken. In you all things exist in many forms for own sake and for the sake of own-being. Lord of all, glory to you! You are the self of all, you are the doer of all actions, enjoyer of all, you are all life, and the lord of all play and amorous delight. Glory to you, the tranquil self, the most secret, the unthinkable, the immeasurable, without beginning and without end.”

⁶⁸ *brahma ha vā idamagra āsīdeko'nantaḥ prāgananto dakṣiṇato'nantaḥ praścyananta udīcyananta ūrdhvañcā'vāṅ ca sarvato'nanto na hyasya prācyādidiśaḥ kalpante'tha tiryagvāṅ cordhvaṅ vānūhya eṣa paramātmā'parimito'jo'tarkyo'cintya eṣa ākāśātmaivaīṣa kṛtsnākṣaya eko jāgarītyetasmādākāśādeṣa khalvidam cetāmātraṃ bodhayatyanenaiva cedam dhyāyate'smiṃśca pratyastam yātyasyaitadbhāsvaram rūpaṃ yadamuṣṇinnāditye tapatyagnau cādhūmake yajjyotiścitratararamudarastho'tha vā yaḥ pacatyannamityevaṃ hyāha yaścaīṣo'gnau yaścāyaṃ hrdaye yaścāsā āditye sa eṣa ekā ityekasya haikatvameti ya evaṃ veda // “In the beginning Brahman was this [world]. He was one, and endless, endless in the East, endless in the South, endless in the West, endless in the North, above and below and everywhere endless. East and the other regions do not exist for him, nor across, nor below, nor above. The Highest Self is not to be fixed, he is unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, not to be conceived. He is like the space (everywhere), and at the destruction of the universe, he alone is awake. Thus, from that space he awakes all this world, which consists of thought only, and by him alone this is thought, and in him it is dissolved. His is that luminous form which shines in the sun, and the manifold fire in the smokeless fire, and the heat, which in the stomach digests food. Thus, it is said: ‘He who is in the fire, and who is in the heart, and who is in the sun, they are one and the same.’ He who knows this becomes one with the one.”*

⁶⁹ *agnirgāyatraṃ trivṛdrathantaraṃ vasantaḥ prāṇo nakṣatrāṇi vasavaḥ purastādudyanti tapanti varṣanti stuvanti punarvīśantyanarvivareṇekṣantyacintyo'mūrto gabhīro gupto'navadyo ghano gahano nirguṇaḥ śuddho bhāsvaro guṇabhug bhayo'nirvṛtiryogīsvaraḥ sarvajño magho'prameyo'nādyantaḥ śrīmānajo dhīmānanirdeśyaḥ sarvasṛk sarvasyātmā sarvabhuk sarvasyeśānaḥ sarvasyāntarāntaraḥ // “Agni, the Gāyatra (metre), the Trivṛt (hymn), the Rathantara (song), the spring, the life breath (prāṇa), the Nakṣatras, the Vasus – these rise in the East; they warm, they rain, they praise, they again enter into and look out from an opening. He is unthinkable, formless, unfathomable, concealed, unimpeachable, dense, impenetrable, devoid of strands, pure, brilliant, enjoining the [play of the three] strands, awful, not caused, a sovereign yogī, the omniscient, the munificent, immeasurable, without beginning or end, illustrious, unborn, wise, indescribable, the creator of all, the self of all, the enjoyer of all, the sovereign of all, the inmost of inmost of all.”*

⁷⁰ *jñātvā devaṃ sarva-pāśāpahāniḥ kṣīṇaiḥ kleśair janma-mṛtyu-prahāniḥ / tasyābhidhyānāt tṛṭīyaṃ deha-bhede viśvaiśvaryaṃ kevala āpta-kāmaḥ // “When one has known the deity, all the fetters fall off; by the eradication of the blemishes, birth and death come to an end; by meditating on him, one obtains, at the dissolution of the body, a third – the sovereignty over all; and in the absolute one's desires are fulfilled.”*

⁷¹ *nīlaḥ pataṅgo harito lohitaḥkṣas taḍid-garbha rtavaḥ samudrāḥ / anādimat tvam vibhutvena vartase yato jātāni bhuvanāni viśvā // “You are the dark blue bird, the green one with red eyes, the rain-cloud, the seasons, and the oceans. You live as one without a beginning because of your pervasiveness, you, from whom all things have been born.”*

⁷² *tadeva niṣkalaṃ brahma nirvikalpaṃ nirañjanam / tadabrahmāmiti jñātvā brahma sampadyate dhruvam // nirvikalpamnantam ca hetudraṣṭāntavarjitam / aprameyamanādim ca yajjñātvā mucyate budhaḥ // “That alone is brahman which is without parts, non-differentiated*

XIV. The Context of the Metaphysical Principle

The verse 2.27, which states the metaphysical principle, as we have seen forms part of the speech of Kṛṣṇa in 2.11-30, which according to Malinar is for consoling grieving Arjuna, a view we questioned above. Then the question emerges: what is this speech of Kṛṣṇa response to?

The speech of a dialogical partner is always in response to the previous speech of the other dialogical partner guided by the thing, which is opened up for discussion. But unfortunately, one fails to follow this hermeneutic principle of interpretation of a dialogue in the Bhagavadgītā, because one tends to take cue from the external report of the dialogue by Saṁjaya. The way Saṁjaya reports the dialogue it tends to take attention of the reader off from the topic of discussion, even though he is reporting the dialogue faithfully. This is because of the compositional style of Vedavyāsa to make the message *guhya* (hidden) in the text.

The very first verse in Chapter 2 in the mouth of Saṁjaya is an external report about the dialogue, and it is not the dialogue itself. It says: “To him, who was thus filled with pity with eyes full of tears and agitated, the destroyer of Madhu spoke this.”⁷⁶ Hearing this one jumps to the conclusion that the dialogue is intended for addressing this emotional state of Arjuna. To use the vocabulary from the ritual context we can say that the emotional state of Arjuna is the *prasaṅga* and not the *tantra* of the dialogue.⁷⁷ The topic is the *tantra* that unifies the dialogue by weaving the dialogue on it. Emotional state is only the *prasaṅga*, the accompaniment of the dialogue, but it is not intended positively or negatively in the dialogue and does not serve the dialogue as direct or indirect topic. Once again Saṁjaya in verse 2.9-10 reports about the dialogue and this report is not the dialogue except the quotation of

and un-smear. One surely attains the Brahman, realizing ‘I am Brahman’. On realizing which non-differentiated, endless, having neither prompter, nor example, immeasurable, beginningless, the comprehensor is liberated.”

⁷³ *ṛṣayas tapasā vedān adhyaiṣanta divānīśam / anādinidhanā nityā vāg utsṛṣṭā svayambhuvā / ādau vedamayī divyā yataḥ sarvāḥ pravṛttayaḥ //* “The ṛṣis by intensification were studying Vedas day and night; in the beginning the divine, eternal word, without beginning or end, consisting of the Vedas, was poured forth (pronounced) by Svayambhū—all activities proceed from it.”

⁷⁴ *anādinidhanam brahma śabdattvaṁ yad akṣaram / vivartate 'rthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ //* “That imperishable/syllable beginning-and-end-less Brahman, which is word-and-thatness, rolls apart by being that which is sought by seekers, from which [is] the derivation-activity of the [well-formed] world-of-movement.” This quotation also indicates that the metaphysical principle regarding the indissoluble connection between the birth (or beginning) and death (or end) is behind the very conception of action as one finds in the Vyākaraṇa tradition, which also follows the Vedic Metaphysics.

⁷⁵ *anādyantatvāt kālasya //* “For Kāla (time) is without either beginning or end.”

⁷⁶ *taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭam āsrupūrṇākulekṣaṇam / viṣḍantam idaṁ vākyam uvāca madhusūdanaḥ //*

⁷⁷ For the distinction between *tantra* and *prasaṅga* Cf. Binod Kumar Agarwala, “Pāṇini Sūtra: *svatantraḥ kartā* (Aṣṭādhyāyī 1.4.54): A Note on Sanskrit Grammarians’ Comments,” *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, forthcoming.

what Arjuna says: “Having spoken thus to Hṛṣīkeśa, Guḍākeśa, the tormenter of foes, said to Govinda, ‘I will not fight,’ and verily remained silent. To him who was grieving in the midst of the two armies, O descendant of Bharata, Hṛṣīkeśa as if smiling, spoke these words.”⁷⁸ Here too the report that Kṛṣṇa is speaking to grieving Arjuna misleads the reader to think that Kṛṣṇa is going to address Arjuna’s grief and going to console Arjuna, consolation is only a *prasaṅga* and hence not intended in the speech, which is woven by the *tantra*, which is the topic.

The topic for discussion emerges when Arjuna asks in 2.4: “O slayer of Madhu, how shall I assail in battle with arrows Bhīṣma and Droṇa, who are worthy of worship, O slayer of enemies.”⁷⁹ The traditional commentators interpret it as a rhetorical question by Arjuna, intended as a statement of objection against fighting with Bhīṣma and Droṇa. But this is not how the verse is to be interpreted. In this verse Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa as *Madhusūdana* (O slayer of Madhu). The address for Kṛṣṇa in the mouth of Arjuna is erroneous as it is an epithet of *Viṣṇu* according to *Viṣṇusahasranāmastotram*. There is no story in Indian literature in which Kṛṣṇa ever killed the demon Madhu. It was Viṣṇu who killed demons Madhu and Kaitabha. In the above verse Arjuna addressing Kṛṣṇa as *Madhusūdana* is erroneous as Kṛṣṇa’s identity with Viṣṇu is not known to Arjuna yet, which will be revealed to him in 10.21 when Kṛṣṇa will state: “of the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu”.⁸⁰

Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā did not know about Kṛṣṇa’s previous births till 4.4 where he asks Kṛṣṇa: “Your birth is later, and the birth of Vivasvat was earlier; how am I to understand that you told this Yoga in the beginning?”⁸¹ and was told about previous births of Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā not before 5.5. So, Arjuna could not have addressed Kṛṣṇa as *Madhusūdana* in verse 2.4 of the Bhagavadgītā on its own terms and yet the author has made Arjuna address Kṛṣṇa in that way in this verse. But the important question is what is the significance of presence of this error, which Vedavyāsa deliberately puts in the verse. The significance is for hermeneutics suitable for interpreting the verse. The general hermeneutic principle is that the verses, where the errors are present, are not to be read merely as verses as spoken by the characters in Bhagavadgītā in whose mouth it is put, because as put in the mouth of the character the verse is erroneous. Another hermeneutic principle for proper reading of the verses is that in such verses without stating it explicitly what is conveyed is that the interpreter cannot ignore the fact that these verses are verses of Vedavyāsa, who is the author of Bhagavadgītā. Through such erroneous verses the author is directly gesturing to the readers. So, the meaning emerges only when one interprets the verses taking them simultaneously as spoken by the character in the text but also composed

⁷⁸ *evam uktvā hṛṣīkeśaṃ guḍākeśaḥ paraṃtapa / na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha // tam uvāca hṛṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva bhārata / senayor ubhayor madhye viṣṇudantam idaṃ vacaḥ //*

⁷⁹ *kathaṃ bhīṣmam ahaṃ saṃkhye droṇaṃ ca madhusūdana / iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārhāv arisūdana //*

⁸⁰ *ādityānām ahaṃ viṣṇur*

⁸¹ *aparaṃ bhavato janma paraṃ janma vivasvataḥ / kathaṃ etad vijānīyāṃ tvam ādau proktavān iti //*

by Vedavyāsa. As composition of Vedavyāsa, the verse is a perfect question and not an objection. The question is: how to perform the action of fighting in the war? The question is regarding how to perform the institutional action, as fighting in the war is an institutional action. This is the topic, which from the very beginning is the *tantra* of the dialogue that is opened up for discussion and not Arjuna's grief, which is merely a *prasaṅga*. The error in the address for Kṛṣṇa in the mouth of Arjuna is erroneous, yet it is the correct address otherwise because Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu, who is the *yajña puruṣa*⁸² (institution as person). Kṛṣṇa being actual *yajña puruṣa*, understands Arjuna's question not as rhetorical question but as an actual question put to *yajña puruṣa* (institution as person) signaled by the address *Madhusūdana*: how to perform institutional action (*yajña karma*)? It is this question that is being addressed by Kṛṣṇa from 2.11 onwards.

That Arjuna does not know how to perform collective institutional action is presented in his very performance through what he says in 2.7-8 and what he does, as reported by Saṁjaya in 2.9. The action of Arjuna here is as simple as action of seeking advice. Arjuna seeks advice in 2.7: "My being contaminated by the taint of miserliness, my mind confounded about Dharma, I ask you: Tell me with certainty what is good. I am your pupil. Instruct me, who have sought your shelter."⁸³ He has already given the reason for seeking advice: his mind is confounded about *dharma*. He further elaborates the reason for seeking advice in 2.8: "I do not indeed see what can dispel the grief which dries up my senses, even after attaining unrivalled and prosperous dominion on earth or even lordship over gods."⁸⁴ That his mind is confounded about *dharma* is demonstrated in this second reason as on the one hand he is seeking advice about *dharma*, but at the same time already assuming that the business of *dharma* is to dispel grief but he does not know what that *dharma* is whose performance is going to dispel his grief and thereby trying to restrict the range of the advice that is to be given by Kṛṣṇa. This is not the proper way to seek advice on *dharma*, when one is already self-confessedly confounded about *dharma*. When one is confounded about *dharma*, he does not know what circumscribes the possibilities of *dharma* available to him.

As Arjuna is confounded about *dharma* he should not have circumscribed the possibilities of what is *dharma* for him by the condition that the possibilities of *dharma* for him is what removes his grief. Secondly it is *dharma* of seeking advice that one who is seeking advice should postpone his decision till the advice is given within a reasonable time limit. But Arjuna commits error here too. Saṁjaya reports in

⁸² In Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa the expression *yajño vai viṣṇuḥ*, i.e. identification of *yajña* with Viṣṇu, is repeated not less than 50 times e.g. 1.1.2.13, 5.2.3.6, 5.4.5.1 etc. In one place, i.e. 14.1.1.6 it is stated: *sa yaḥ sa viṣṇuryajñāḥ saḥ / sa yaḥ sa yajño 'sau sa ādityaḥ*. In Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa 4.2, 1.8, 18.14 and in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1.3.4 the identification of *yajña* and *viṣṇu* is repeated. In Bhagavadgītā 9.16 says: *ahaṁ yajñāḥ* "I am *yajña*."

⁸³ *kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ; pr̥chāmi tvāṁ dharmasammūḍhacetāḥ / yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me; śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ prapannam //*

⁸⁴ *na hi prapaśyāmi māṁpanudyād; yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām / avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam r̥ddham; rājyaṁ surāṇām api cādhipatyam //*

2.9: “Having spoken thus to Hṛṣīkeśa (Kṛṣṇa), *Guḍākeśa* (Arjuna), the tormenter of foes, said to Govinda, ‘I will not fight,’ and verily remained silent.”⁸⁵ Arjuna had already recognized inadequacy of his own thinking and surrendered himself to Kṛṣṇa to be advised, guided, and taught by him as to what is correct course of action for Arjuna. He should have waited for Kṛṣṇa to give him an answer. But he went on to express his anxious misery by way of an argument in 2.8 and concluded with the decision ‘I will not fight’ (2.9). The very taking of the decision about the subject on which advice is sought, irrespective of what decision is taken, is wrong on the part of the seeker of advice, without waiting for the adviser’s response. The very making of the decision by himself on the part of Arjuna after he has requested Kṛṣṇa to guide him in the decision is wrong, as it violates the *dharma* of dialogue, the teacher and taught relation, the advised and adviser relation etc. indicating a deep seated ignorance regarding how to perform as simple an action as seeking advice. This error is so deep seated that Kṛṣṇa will be able to tackle this error only by the end of chapter 18. The error is that Arjuna is trying to perform action out of *ahaṃkāra*, as his own individual action, even while the action under consideration is a collective social action. Kṛṣṇa will tell Arjuna in reply in 18.59: “If, indulging egotism, you think ‘I will not fight,’ this resolve of yours is in vain; nature will engage you.”⁸⁶ So the issue is not grief of Arjuna but the error in performing social action as individual’s own action. Kṛṣṇa is addressing this issue from 2.11 onwards.

That Arjuna’s *ahaṃkāra* is preventing him from performing collective institutional act is dramatically highlighted in the very first chapter itself even before the grief had set in. Arjuna has entered the arena of war, has declared his intention to fight in the war by blowing his conch called Devadatta (1.15) and has taken up his bow at the time of taking out the weapons⁸⁷ (1.20), then the right course of action would have been to take the arrow out of quiver and to mount it on bow and start shooting. But he was so puffed with his own prowess, that instead of fighting, out of *ahaṃkāra* Arjuna opened his mouth to order Kṛṣṇa to place the chariot in the middle of the two armies so that, he further tells, he can see who are the opponents who had the temerity to stand in opposition to him to engage him in battle.

Samjaya’s report of this in 1.20-23 is as follows: “Then seeing the people of Dhṛtarāṣṭra organized, while the discharge of weapons began, the son of Pandu, whose ensign was a monkey (i.e. Arjuna), O king of earth, took up his bow and said thus to Kṛṣṇa, ‘O Acyuta (Kṛṣṇa), place my chariot between the two armies, till I may inspect those who stand here desirous to fight, with whom I must fight in this business of battle. I will see those who are assembled here and are about to engage in battle desirous to do service in war to the evil-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra’.”⁸⁸ No doubt

⁸⁵ *evam uktvā hṛṣīkeśaṃ guḍākeśaḥ paraṃtapa / na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha //*

⁸⁶ *yad ahaṃkāraṃ āśṛitya na yotsya iti manyase / mīthyaiṣa vyavasāyasa te prakṛtis tvāṃ niyokṣyati //*

⁸⁷ *pravṛtte śāstrasampāte dhanur udyamya*

⁸⁸ *atha vyavasthitān dr̥ṣṭvā dhṛtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ / pravṛtte śāstrasampāte dhanur udyamya pāṇḍavaḥ // hṛṣīkeśaṃ tadā vākyam idam āha mahīpate / senayor ubhayor madhye*

Kṛṣṇa spoke as if smilingly (almost bursting out laughing) at the erroneous behavior of Arjuna as reported by Saṃjaya in 2.10. Grief was not the issue of discussion for Kṛṣṇa, as grief had set in due to anxieties regarding fighting in the war as his own individualistic action. *The ahaṃkāra had emerged in Arjuna even before the grief had set in.* It was the erroneous way of performance of social action as individual action out of *ahaṃkāra* that led to anxieties and subsequent grief. So, it was the erroneous way of performance of social action as individual action out of *ahaṃkāra* that is the issue of discussion and not the grief of arjuna, which was the *prasaṅga*, while *ahaṃkāra* was the *tantra* for Arjuna in which he was weaving his activities. So, the *tantra* of the entire dialogue of Kṛṣṇa was negatively the *ahaṃkāra* and positively the collective *yajña karma*, as Kṛṣṇa is explaining to Arjuna how to perform *yajña karma* abandoning *ahaṃkāra*. The indissoluble connection between birth and death is involved in the performance of collective social action as Kṛṣṇaṃ in 2.11-30 is discussing the metaphysics of social action (*yajña karma*).

XV. Death and Birth in *Karma* in *Bhagavadgītā* 8.3

That the discussion of indissoluble correlation of birth and death in the *Bhagavadgītā* is meant for clarification of *yajña-karma*, i.e. collective institutional action, crucially depends on the very idea of action in it. Kṛṣṇa defines action in *Bhagavadgītā* 8.3: “The emission which originates (springs up) the being of existents is called action (*karma*).”⁸⁹ What is significant in this definition is that action is an emission (*visarga*) and it originates (springs up) the being of existents (*bhūtabhāvodbhavakara*). The expression *visargaḥ* in Sanskrit also designates *member virile* or penis of man. So, emission (*visarga*) involved in the definition of *karma* in the *Bhagavadgītā* 8.3 is in homology with *discharge* of semen from which originates the child.

The discharge of the semen from which originates the child provides the fundamental model for action in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The discharge of the semen in sexual union from which originates the child is understood as *yajña-karma* in the Vedic literature. Consider Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.6.2.10: “they (i.e. two libations) enter woman and make her vagina their sacrificial fire...and the semen their pure libation..., and for him who, knowing this, approaches his mate, the agnihotra comes to be performed. The son who is born therefrom is the reascent ‘world’: this is the agnihotra, there is nothing higher than this.”⁹⁰ *Bhagavadgītā* has crystalized the definition of action from ideas that occur in Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. As part of doctrine of five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*) *Jāiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.45 says: “Woman is

rathaṃ sthāpaya me 'cyuta // yāvad etān nirīkṣe 'haṃ yoddhukāmān avasthitān / kair mayā saha yoddhavyam asmin raṇasamudyame // yotsyamānān avekṣe 'haṃ ya ete 'tra samāgatāḥ / dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddher yuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ //

⁸⁹ *bhūtabhāvodbhavakaro visargaḥ karmasamjñitāḥ //*

⁹⁰ *te striyamāvīśataḥ tasyā upasthamevāhavanīyaṃ kurvāte ... reta eva śukrāmāhutiṃ / te striyaṃ tarpayataḥ sa ya evaṃ vidvānmithunamupaityagnihotrāmevāsya hutam / bhavati yastataḥ putro jāyate sa lokāḥ pratyuthāyeta dagnihotraṃ / ... nātaḥ paramastīti ... /*

Agni Vaiśvānara. Its fuel is the vagina, its flame the vulva, its smoke desire, its spark the feelings of enjoyment, its coals the coitus.

In this same Agni Vaiśvānara the deities offer semen. From this oblation when it has been offered Man (*puruṣa*) comes into existence.”⁹¹ In the description of doctrine of five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*) we hear in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 6.2.13: “A fire—that’s what a woman is, Gautama. Her firewood is the vulva; her smoke is the pubic hair; her flame is the vagina; when one penetrates her, that is her embers; and her sparks are the climax. In that very fire gods offer semen, and from that offering springs a man (*puruṣa*).”⁹² Similarly in doctrine of five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*) Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.8.1-2 says: “A fire—that’s what a woman is, Gautama. Her firewood is the vulva; when she is asked to come close, that is her smoke; her flame is the vagina; when one penetrates her, that is her embers; and her sparks are the climax. In that very fire gods offer semen, and from that offering springs the fetus.”⁹³

It may be noted that not only the definition of action in Bhagavadgītā 8.3 but also the factors of action mentioned by Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā 18.13-14⁹⁴, especially the deity (*deva*) as the fifth factor, fit with the above model of action from the doctrine of five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*).

It may be argued: If the Bhagavadgītā’s conception of action is modeled on the basis of doctrine of five fires (*pañcāgni vidyā*) as described above then one can at most relate birth to action but not death. The reply is that the Vedic literature relates death and birth to *yajña-karma* through the idea of *punarmṛtyu* ‘re-death’ and *punarjanma* (re-birth), which we will present now.

One comes across the idea of *punarmṛtyu* ‘re-death’ in the Jāiminiya (or Talavakāra) Brāhmaṇa 1.46. This idea of re-death is elaborated in the Jāiminiya (or Talavakāra) Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa^[SEP] III.11.1-4: ‘Verily, thrice man dies, thrice he is born. Then he dies for the first time, when the seed, emitted, comes into being. He is converted into breath; he is born into space. Then he dies for the second time, when he consecrates himself. He is converted into meters; he is born unto the sacrificial gift. Then he dies for the third time, when he dies. He is converted into faith; he is born into [his]

⁹¹ *striyo vā agnir vaiśvānaraḥ / tasyopasthaṃ samid yonir jyotir iṣyā dhūmo ’bhinando viṣphuliṅgāś saṃsparśo ’ṅārāḥ / tasminn etasminn agnau vaiśvānare ’harahar devā reto juhvati / tasyā āhuter hutāyai puruṣas saṃbhavati //*

⁹² *yoṣā vā agnir gautama | tasyā upastha eva samit | lomāni dhūmah | yonir arcīḥ | yad antaḥ karoti te ’ṅārāḥ | abhinandā viṣphuliṅgāḥ | tasminn etasminn agnau devā reto juhvati | tasyā āhutyai puruṣaḥ saṃbhavati //*

⁹³ *yoṣā vāva gautamāgniḥ | tasyā upastha eva samit | yad upamantrayate sa dhūmah | yonir arcīḥ | yad antaḥ karoti te ’ṅārāḥ | abhinandā viṣphuliṅgāḥ || tasminn etasminn agnau devā reto juhvati | tasyā āhuter garbhāḥ saṃbhavati //*

⁹⁴ *pañcāitāni mahābāho kāraṇāni nibodha me / sāmḥye kṛtānte proktāni siddhaye sarvakarmaṇām // adhiṣṭhānaṃ tathā kartā karaṇam ca pṛthagvidham / vividhāś ca pṛthakceṣṭā daivaṃ caivātra pañcamam //* “These five factors in the accomplishment of all action, you understand from Me, O mighty armed, as proclaimed in the *Sāmḥya* which ends/completes action. The ground/seat and agent and the various organs/instruments, and the separate functions of various sorts, and the deity also, the fifth among these.”

world.’⁹⁵ So the idea of *punarmṛtyu* ‘re-death’ is homologized with emission of semen and initiation etc. in the Vedic literature.

Corresponding to the idea of *punarmṛtyu* ‘re-death’ in Jāiminīya (or Talavakāra) Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa^[SEP] III.11.1-4 are one also comes across the idea of *punar-janma* ‘re-birth’ in Āitareya Upaniṣad 2.1-4: “At the beginning, this *garbha* comes into being within a man as semen. This radiance gathered from all limbs he bears as self (*ātman*) in self (*ātman*). And when a man emits it in a woman, he gives birth to it. That is his first birth. It becomes one with the woman’s self (*ātman*), as it were her own limb. As a result it does not harm her. And she nourishes this self (*ātman*) of his that has entered her. As she nourishes him, so he should nourish her. The woman carries him as the *garbha*. At the beginning, he nourishes the child even before its birth. When he nourishes the child even before its birth, he thereby nourishes self (*ātman*) for the continuance of these worlds, for it is in this way that these worlds continue. That is his second birth. And he – this self (*ātman*) of his – is appointed to carry out holy actions, while his other self, after it has done all it has to do, becomes old and departs. As soon as he departs, he is born again. That is his third birth.”⁹⁶

Why is emission of semen homologized with death and also birth in Vedic Literature? Here we have to keep in mind that according to the Vedic literature the man carries in himself, his soul, as his own *garbha*, which goes out of his body to be deposited in as the *garbha* of the wife. In Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 6.4.20 the man says to his wife: “Come, let us two clasp together, together let us deposit the semen, to get a male, a son.”⁹⁷

In 6.4.21, i.e. in the next passage: “Then he spreads apart her thighs, saying: ‘Spread apart, earth and sky.’ He slips his penis into her, presses his mouth against hers, and strokes her three times in the direction of her hair, as he says: May Viṣṇu prepare your womb, and Tvaṣṭṛ mold the forms; May Prajapati impregnate you, and Dhātṛ lay the *garbha* in you. Lay the *garbha*, Sinīvālī,^[SEP] lay the *garbha*, you with broad plaits. Lay the *garbha*, you two Asvins,^[SEP] lay the *garbha*, you two with lotus wreaths.”⁹⁸ He continues to speak in 6.4.22: “The golden fire-drills with which the

⁹⁵ *trir ha vai puruṣo mriyate trir jāyate/ Sa hāi 'tad eva prathamam mriyate yad retas siktaṃ sambhūtam bhavati/ sa prāṇaṃ evā 'bhisambhavati/ āśām abhijayate/ athāi 'tad dviṭīyam mriyate yad dīkṣate / sa chandānsy eva 'bhisambhavati/ dakṣiṇām abhijāyate/ athāi 'tat tṛtīyam mriyate yan mriyate/ sa śraddhām evā 'bhisambhavati/ lokam abhijāyate/*

⁹⁶ *puruṣe ha vā ayam ādīto garbho bhavati yad etad retaḥ / tad etat sarvebhyo 'ṅgebhyas tejaḥ sambhūtam ātmany evātmānaṃ bibharti / tad yadā striyāṃ siñcaty athainaj janayati / tad asya prathamam janma // tat striyā ātmabhūyaṃ gacchati yathā svam aṅgaṃ tathā / tasmād enāṃ na hinasti / sāsyaitam ātmānam atra gataṃ bhāvayati // sā bhāvayitrī bhāvayitavyā bhavati / tam strī garbhaṃ bibharti / so 'gra eva kumāraṃ janmano 'gre 'dhi bhāvayati / sa yat kumāraṃ janmano 'gre 'dhi bhāvayaty ātmānam eva tad bhāvayaty eṣāṃ lokānām santatyai / evaṃ santatā hīme lokāḥ / tad asya dviṭīyam janma // so 'syāyam ātmā puṇyebhyaḥ karmebhyaḥ pratidhīyate / athāsyaīyam itara ātmā kṛtakṛtyo vayogataḥ praiti / sa itaḥ prayann eva punar jāyate / tad asya tṛtīyam janma //*

⁹⁷ *tāv ehi saṃrabhāvahai saha reto dadhāvahai / puṃse putrāya vittaya iti //*

⁹⁸ *athāsya ūrū vihāpayati -- vijihīthāṃ dyāvāpṛthivī iti / tasyām arthaṃ niṣṭhāya mukhena mukhaṃ saṃdhāya trir enām anulomām anumārṣṭi -- viṣṇur yoniṃ kalpayatu tvaṣṭā rūpāni*

Aśvins churned the fire; That I invoke as the garbha for you, for delivery in the tenth month. As fire lies a *garbha* in the earth, and rain in the sky. As the wind is the *garbha*^{SEP} of the cardinal points; So I place this *garbha* in you, So-and-so.”⁹⁹ This shows that in Vedic literature the *garbha* is carried within the male and subsequently and emission of semen is the emission of the *garbha* from the body of the male into the womb in the female. The male is conceived as bearing himself, i.e. his own soul, as *garbha* within himself prior to his discharge into the womb of the wife. According to Āitareya Brāhmaṇa 7.13.9: “The husband enters as an embryo his wife; having become again new in her he is born in the tenth month (=the twelfth month). Then the wife (*jāyā*) becomes wife (*jāyā*) when he is born of her again.”¹⁰⁰ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 12.4.3.1 also says, “The father is the same as the son, and the son is the same as the father.”¹⁰¹ Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra 2.3.2 makes a man say with respect to his son: “From my every limb you spring; out of my heart you are born. You are my self (*ātman*) called ‘son’; live a hundred autumns!”¹⁰² Jaimīnīya Brāhmaṇa 1.17 says: “The human womb is the human world. It is the generative organ of the woman. Out of that progeny is born. Therefore, also one should desire a good wife (thinking:) ‘Let my Self come into existence in something good.’ Therefore, also one should seek to watch over one’s wife (thinking:) ‘Lest in my womb, in my world somebody else come into existence’.

When he is about to come into existence (during the coitus) the lifebreaths enter first, then the seed is emitted.”¹⁰³ Āitareya Brāhmaṇa 7.13 eulogizes the son as the new birth of the father: “The husband enters the wife; becoming an embryo he enters the mother. Becoming in her a new man again, he is born in the tenth month. A wife is called ‘wife’ (*jāyā*), because in her he is born again (*jāyate*).

The gods said to men: ‘She is your mother again’. A sonless man has no world.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly Mahābhārata 1.68.36, 47-48 informs us: “Because a husband enters his wife and is born (*jāyate*) again from her, the poets of old knew that this is the ‘wifehood’ (*jāyātva*) of a wife (*jāyā*) ... A son, the wise say, is the man himself

piṃśatu / ā siñcatu prajāpatir dhātā garbhaṃ dadhātu te / garbhaṃ dhehi sinivāli garbhaṃ dhehi prthuṣṭuke / garbhaṃ te aśvinau devāv ādhattām puṣkarasrajau //

⁹⁹ *hiraṇmayī araṇī yābhyāṃ nirmanthatām aśvinau / taṃ te garbhaṃ havāmahe daśame māsi sūtaye / yathāgnigarbhā pṛthivī yathā dyaur aindreṇa garbhiṇī / vāyur diśāṃ yathā garbha evaṃ garbhaṃ dadhāmi te 'sāv iti //*

¹⁰⁰ *patirjāyāṃ praviśati garbho bhūtvā sa mātaraṃ; tasyaṃ punar navo bhūtvā daśame māsi jāyate / tajjāyā jāyā bhavati yadsyāṃ jāyate punaḥ //*

¹⁰¹ *ya u vai putraḥ sa pita yaḥ pita sa putraḥ*

¹⁰² *aṅgād aṅgāt saṃbhavasi hṛdayād adhijāyase / ātmā vai putranāmāsi sa jīva śaradaḥ śatam*

¹⁰³ *sā yā manuṣyayonir manuṣyaloka eva saḥ / tat striyai prajānanam / ato 'dhi prajāḥ prajāyante / tasmād u lalyānīm jāyāṃ icchet kalyāṇe ma ātmā saṃbhavād iti / tasmād u jāyāṃ jugupsen nen mama loke 'nyas saṃbhavād iti / tasya vai saṃbhaviṣyataḥ prāṇā agrāṃ praviśanty atha retas sicyate / See also Baudhāyana Dharmasāstra 2.2.3.34; Āpastambha Dharmasāstra 2.13.7; Mānava Dharmasāstra 9.7-9; Yājñavalkya Dharmasāstra 1.81.*

¹⁰⁴ *... patir jāyāṃ praviśati garbho bhūtvā sa matsaram / tasyāṃ punar navo bhūtvā daśame māsi jāyate // taj jāyā bhavati yad asyāṃ jāyate punaḥ //... devā manuṣyān abruvann eṣā vo janāni punaḥ // nāputrasya loko 'sīti...*

born from himself; therefore, a man will look upon his wife, the mother of his son, as his own mother. The son born from his wife is like a man's face in a mirror."¹⁰⁵ This conception of one's Self entering the womb of wife and then getting born as one's son comes from the Ṛgvedic idea that the father himself is reborn in his progeny.

The ṛṣi prays to Agni in Ṛgveda 5.4.10: "As I, remembering thee with grateful spirit, a mortal, call with might on thee Immortal, Vouchsafe us high renown, O Jatavedas, and may I be immortal by my children."¹⁰⁶ The ṛṣi in Ṛgveda 6.70.3 says: "Whoso, for righteous life, pours offerings to you, O Heaven and Earth, ye Hemispheres, that man succeeds. He in his seed is born again and spreads by Law: from you flow things diverse in form, but ruled alike."¹⁰⁷ Chāndogya Upaniṣad 2.13.2 says: "When in this manner a man knows this Vāmadevya Sāman woven upon copulation—he becomes proficient in copulation and regenerates himself through every copulation."¹⁰⁸

Āpastamba Dharmasāstra 2.9.24.2 says: "Now it can also be perceived by senses that the father has been reproduced separately in the son."¹⁰⁹ The emission of the soul from the body is death. Since the male carries his own soul in the body, when he emits that soul in the form of semen into the womb of the female it is also death. This comes out explicitly in Jāiminiya- Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa 3.10.4: "When the father thus emits him as having become semen into the womb, then the sun thus emits him as having become semen in the womb. He there lords over this death."¹¹⁰ These quotations make it obvious that the self (*ātman*) when seen as going from inside of the body in the form of semen it is death, but the same movement when seen as coming out of the body it is birth. So death and birth are indissolubly interrelated as these are the two aspect of the same movement which is a boundary crossing, i.e. crossing the boundary of a body.

Now we can see what Kṛṣṇa is saying in 2.13 when he says that as the embodied experiences in the body the transition from childhood to youth to old age similiary he experiences the transition from one body to another body. The embodied is the self here, which is present as *garbha* in the body of man and this self as *garbha* experiences the transition from one body, i.e. male body, to another body, i.e. female's body. Experience of this transition by the self is exactly like its experience of transition from childhood to youth to old age in the body. The continuity of the

¹⁰⁵ *bhāryāṃ patih sampraviśya sa yasmāj jāyate punaḥ / jāyāyā iti jāyātvaṃ purāṇāḥ kavayo viduḥ // ... ātmātmanaiva janitah putra ity ucyate budhaiḥ / tasmād bhāryāṃ narah paśyen mātṛvat putramātaram // bhāryāyāṃ janitah putram ādarśe svam ivānanam*

¹⁰⁶ *as tvā hṛdā kīriṇā manyamāno 'martyam martyo johavīmi / jātavedo yaśo asmāsu dhehi prajābhir agne amṛtatvam aśyām //*

¹⁰⁷ *yo vām ṛjave kramaṇāya rodasī marto dadāśa dhiṣaṇe sa sādhati / pra prajābhir jāyate dharmaṇas pari yuvoḥ siktā viśurūpāni savratā //*

¹⁰⁸ *sa ya evam etad vāmadevyaṃ mithune protaṃ veda / mithunī bhavati / mithunān mithunāt prajāyate /*

¹⁰⁹ *atha-api sa eva-ayaṃ [virūḍhaḥ pṛthak pratyakṣeṇa-[upalabhyate [drśyate ca-api sārūpyaṃ dehatvam eva-anyaṭ /*

¹¹⁰ *sa yad dha vā enam etat pita yonyāṃ reto bhūtaṃ siñcaty ādityo hāi 'nam tad yonyāṃ reto bhūtaṃ siñcati / sa hā 'sya tatra mṛtyor tse /*

transition of self from one body to another body is continuous without a demarcating line because in copulation the penis is inserted in the vagina the male and female body overlap and get joined, and therefore, there is no exact demarcating line when the self has made the transition from one body to another. It may be kept in mind this is the description of *prajanana karma*, which is a *yajña karma* according to *pañcāgni vidyā*, and it is a collective action as both male, female and deities are involved together in it. This provides the model for all actions in the Vedic tradition, which is followed by the Bhagavadgītā.

Hence, what is true of emission of semen, also true of other actions in Vedic literature. In Dīkṣā (i.e. initiatory consecration for the Soma yajña) womb and gestation symbolism are conspicuously present. The *dīkṣita* (i.e., he who undergoes the Dīkṣā) is placed in a hut in which he spends much of his time. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1.3.1 notes: ‘The hut of the *dīkṣita* is the womb of the *dīkṣita*; verily thus they [i.e., the priests] conduct him to his own womb.’ The text also notes: ‘Him whom they cause to undertake the Dīkṣā, the sacrificial priests make into an embryo again.’ The *dīkṣita* is covered with a garment. ‘The garment is the caul (i.e., *ulba*) of the *dīkṣita*; verily thus they cover him with a caul. Above that is the black antelope skin; the placenta (i.e., *jarāu*) is above the caul; verily thus they cover him with the placenta.’ Other Brāhmaṇa texts also use the symbolism of self-sacrifice and death while describing the consecrated yajamāna [i.e., the *dīkṣita*]. Taittirīya Saṃhitā 7.4.9 explains Dīkṣā as a sort of slow self-sacrifice. The text notes at 7.4.9.1: “They kindle themselves with Dīkṣās.” Being kindled through the Dīkṣā, the body is enveloped by flames.

Since Dīkṣā involves fasting, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.6.5.1 states, “Hunger is death.” Further Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.1.8.4 states, “When he [i.e. the yajamāna] enters on a fast, he thereby gives himself up to the gods... for he becomes an oblation to the gods.” So in nutshell the practices of the *brahmacārin* and the *dīkṣita* when successfully performed amount to death and rebirth. So, the Vedic idea of multiple deaths (re-death) and births (re-birth) is involved in multiple kinds of actions of taking initiation as explained above.

The idea of symbolic death in the action of initiation is present from the Vedic saṃhitā period. The student spends three nights in the womb of the teacher according Atharva veda 11.5.3: “The teacher, welcoming his new disciple, into his bowels takes the Brahmachāri. Three nights he holds and bears him in this belly. When he is born, the deities convene to see him.”¹¹¹ Atharva Veda 11.5.14 further states that the teacher is death.¹¹² Atharva Veda 6.133.3 a mantra explicitly prescribed for use at the Upanāyana, notes that the *brahmacārin* is the student of Death.¹¹³ Atharva Veda 8.1,

¹¹¹ *ācārya upanayamāno brahmacāriṇaṃ kṣute garbham antaḥ / taṃ rātrīs tisra udare bibharti taṃ jātaṃ draṣṭum abhisamṃyanti devāḥ //*

¹¹² *ācāryo mṛtyur...*

¹¹³ Atharva Veda 6.133.3: *mṛtyor ahaṃ brahmacārī yad asmi niryācan bhūtāt puruṣaṃ yamāya / taṃ ahaṃ brahmaṇā tapasā śrameṇānayainaṃ mekhalayā sināmi //* “As I am now Death's Brahmachāri claiming out of the living world a man for Yama, So with Austerity and Prayer and Fervour I bind this Girdle round the man before me.”

also a mantra prescribed by Kauśika Sūtra for use at the Upanāyana, states, ‘Step up here... loosening the fetters of death’ (verse 4)¹¹⁴ and ‘make now (this one), O gods, pass up out of death’ (verse 18)¹¹⁵.

Further in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 11.2.1.1 rebirth is also symbolic: “Verily, man is born thrice, namely in this way: first he is born from his mother and father; and when he to whom the sacrifice inclines performs offering he is born a second time; and when he dies, and they place him on the fire, and when he thereupon comes into existence again, he is born a third time.”¹¹⁶ Jāminīya (or Talavakāra) Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa¹¹⁷ III.14.8 notes: “Verily unborn is man in so far as he does not sacrifice. It is through the sacrifice that he is born; just as an egg first burst.”¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that one is born through *yajña-karma*. The image of egg bursting here is instructive, for egg born like the birds are specifically termed *dvi-ja* ‘twice born’, in the Vedic texts. They are born first when they are laid as eggs and born a second time when the eggs burst. Through the funeral pyre the dead one is reborn as a *pitṛ*, i.e. as ancestor.

That rebirth of creatures is symbolic ritual rebirth becomes clear from Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.8.4.18¹¹⁸ where significantly, the sacrifice is viewed as a mechanism of repeated birth or more exactly continuing rebirth. This indicates that the symbolism of death and birth is related to the very idea of action in the Vedic tradition. The successful undertaking of initiation for studentship is birth and death, i.e. begins in death and ends in birth. Similarly, successful undertaking of initiation for *yajña* is birth and death, i.e. begins in death and ends in birth. Since the one undertaking initiation has to be in condition of embryo in the womb for three nights the modern scholars have wondered whether the embryo presents the essence of life through birth or essence of death through being placed in the womb.¹¹⁹ But if we keep in mind the

¹¹⁴ *ut krāmātaḥ puruṣa māva patthā mṛtyoḥ paḍvīṣam avamuñcamānaḥ / mā chitthā asmāl lokād agneḥ sūryasya samdrśaḥ //* “Up from this place, O man, rise! sink not downward, casting away the bonds of Death that hold thee. Be not thou parted from this world, from sight of Agni and the Sun.”

¹¹⁵ *ayaṃ devā ihaivāstv ayaṃ māmutra gād itaḥ / imaṃ sahasravīryeṇa mṛtyor ut pārayāmasi //* “Here let this man, O Gods, remain: let him not go to yonder world. We pass him out him from Mrityu with a charm that hath a thousand powers.”

¹¹⁶ *trirha vai puruṣo jāyate etannveva mātuścādhi pituścāgre jāyate'tha yaṃ yajña upanamati sa yadyajate taddvītyaṃ jāyate'tha yatra mriyate yatra namagnāvabhyādadhāti sa yattataḥ sambhavati tatrītyaṃ jāyate tasmātrih puruṣo jāyata ityāhuḥ /*

¹¹⁷ *ajāto ha vāi tāvat puruṣo yāvan na yajate, sa yajñenāi 'va jāyate / sa yathā 'ṇḍam prathamamirnhīṇnam evan eva /*

¹¹⁸ *athātyupayajati / sa yannātyupayajedyāvatyo haivāgre prajāḥ sṛṣṭāstāvatyo haiva syurna prajāyerannatha yadyupayajati praivaitajanayati tasmādimāḥ prajāḥ punarabhyāvartam prajāyante /* “He then makes additional by-offerings. Were he not to make additional by-offerings, there would only be as many living beings as were created in the beginning; they would not be propagated; but by making additional by-offerings he indeed propagates them; whence creatures are again born here repeatedly.”

¹¹⁹ Walter O. Kaelber writes in his essay, “The ‘Dramatic’ Element in Brāhmaṇic Initiation: Symbols of Death, Danger, and Difficult Passage,”¹¹⁹ History of Religions, Vol. 18, No. 1

metaphysical principle then it follows that the condition of the *garbha* in the womb represents both death (due to placing into womb) and life (due to birth) simultaneously as the two are metaphysically interrelated as one is not without the other.

In the Vedic literature the symbol of the womb carries the bivalent imagery of death and life. The fast of the *dikṣita* is a death as hunger is death (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.6.5.1), yet the Brāhmaṇas also note that the *dikṣita* fasts because “embryos live in the womb without taking food”¹²⁰ (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.3.1.4). Further Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 8.4.2.1 notes that “Prajāpati became pregnant with all beings; whilst they were in his womb, death seized them.”¹²¹ Even more strikingly, at Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.6.5.4¹²², Prajāpati desires to be reproduced. It is here Death, which carries Prajāpati as a *garbha* for a year and after that time gives birth to Prajāpati, thus effecting his rebirth.

Bhagvadgītā 8.3 is also seeing action to be a kind of boundary crossing when it states: “Brahman the Imperishable (Akṣara), the Supreme One’s own being is said to be the transcendent Self (Adhyātma). The emission which springs up the being of existents is called action (Karma).”¹²³ Emission (*visarga*) that is action (*karma*) involves departure-from something or leaving something behind or getting rid of something or freeing something from itself. It is the time of departure-from required for action that is indicated by *prayānakāla* (7.30; 8.2; 8.10). Who or what is the *prayātā* (8.23; 8.24) that departs (*prayāti*: 8.5; 8.13) in action (*karma*)? The definition of action (*karma*) makes it clear that it springs up the being of existents (*bhūta bhāva udbhavakara*), and it was also clarified that the one’s own being is said to be the

(Aug. 1978), pp. 58f, “Both Oldenberg and Hauer argued that at both the Upanāyana and the Dikṣā symbols of rebirth are preceded by a symbolic representation of death. Lommel, however, consistently maintains that rebirth at these rituals is not preceded by symbols of death. The intricacies of this “debate” between Hauer, Oldenberg, and Lommel need not be detailed, except to say that the major argument revolves around the issue of whether the embryo is a symbol of new life, “the essence of life” (as it is for Lommel), or a symbol of death or a deathlike condition which precedes new life (as it is for Oldenberg and Hauer). It appears, however, that the crucial issue has been overlooked. The issue is not whether the embryo represents “the essence of life” or death but rather that it represents both simultaneously.”

¹²⁰ *garbhā anaśnanto jīvanti*

¹²¹ *etadvai prajāpatiretasminnātmanaḥ pratihite sarvāṇi bhūtāni garbhyabhavattānyasya garbha eva santi pāpmā mṛtyuragrḥṇāt*

¹²² *so’kāmayaṭa dviṭīyo ma ātmā jāyeteṭi sa manasā vācam mithunaṃ samabhavadaśanāyāṃ mṛtyustadyadreta āsīṭa saṃvatsaro’bhavanna ha purā tataḥ saṃvatsara āsa tametāvantaṃ kālamabibharyāvāntsaṃvatsarasametāvataḥ kālasya parastādasṛjata taṃ jātamaḥbhivyādādāṭsa bhāṇakarotsaiva vāgabhavat*

“He desired, ‘May a second self be produced for me.’ By his mind he entered into union with speech, --(to wit) Death with hunger: the seed which was produced became the year, for theretofore there was no year. For as long as the year he (Death) carried him (within him), and at the end of that time he produced him. He opened his mouth (to devour) the new-born one, and he (the child) cried ‘bhā’; thus, speech was produced.”

¹²³ *akṣaraṃ brahma paramaṃ svabhāvo ’dhyātmam ucyaṭe / bhūtabhāvodbhavakaro visargaḥ karmasamjñītaḥ //*

transcendent Self (*adhyātma*), so it follows that in every action by the *bhūta* (existent) its own being (*sva-bhāva*) which is the self in the body (*adhyātma*) that springs up and hence the self of the *bhūta* (existent) is the *prayātā*, who *prayāti* (departs). In every action when the self of the existent departs then it abandons or frees what? In every action the self of the existent departs leaving the body (*tyaktvā dehaṃ*: 4.9) or freeing the cover of the body (*muktvā kalevaram*: 8.5). In the *Bhagavadgītā* the discussion in terms of *prayānakāla* (7.30; 8.2; 8.10) or *antakāla* (2.72; 8.5) and the movement of soul *muktvā kalevaram* (8.5) or *tyaktvā dehaṃ* (4.9) ‘abandoning the body’ is not actually a discussion regarding what happens at actual death. Similarly, neither *prayātā* (8.23; 8.24) refers to the one departing from the world nor *prayāti* (8.5; 8.13) refer to actual dying. In *Bhagavadgītā* 4.9 the event of *tyaktvā dehaṃ* ‘leaving the body’ does not mean actual death *mṛtyu*. Rather it means beginning of *yajña karma*, which is homologized with death.

Does this metaphysical explanation of action (*karma*) make sense in the *Bhagavadgītā*? It may be recalled that in 8.3 the definition of *karma* is preceded by explanation of the self-inside (*adhyātma*) equated with own being (*svabhāva*), which in turn is preceded by the declaration that own being is the supreme *Brahman*. So, it is the *Brahman* that is in movement in all action. So, it fits with what *Bhagavadgītā* says regarding *yajña-karma* in 3.14-15: “... sacrifice is born of action; penetratively knowledgeable resolve that action comes from *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* comes from the *Imperishable*. Therefore, the all-pervading *Brahman* ever rests in sacrifice.”¹²⁴ So action originates in *Brahman* the Self of the *bhūta* (existent), and also it is the *Brahman* the Self which is in movement in action, and the action along with the *Brahman* the Self gets deposited in the *yajña*, making *Brahman* the Self ever established in *yajña*. The emission that is called action is not merely departure of *Brahman* the Self from inside the body (death) but also movement to the *yajña* outside the body (birth), making this emission of *Brahman* the Self as *yajña-karma*, just as described in the doctrine of five fires given above. We also hear in *Bhagavadgītā* 4.24: “*Brahman* is the offering, *Brahman* the oblation; by *Brahman* is the call given in the fire of *Brahman*; verily the destination of that (call/caller) absorbed in *Brahma-karma* (action of *Brahman*) is *Brahman*.”¹²⁵

What the *Bhagavadgītā* is trying to say is that since it is the same self, which is in all *kṣetras* it is a collective self, which is in all bodies. All action, which is *yajña karma*, is the manifestation of this collective self. As manifestation is nothing but movement from hiddenness to openness, it is simultaneously death (emission from hiddenness) and birth (emission into openness), involving crossing the boundary that separates hiddenness from openness. Here it is of interest to note that emergence of self from the body is emergence from hiddenness because of the very meaning of *deha* in Sanskrit. ‘*Deha* has been derived from the root- ‘*diḥ*’ which primarily means ‘to gather, collect or pile-up’. The act of gathering, collecting and piling of is in fact

¹²⁴ ...yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ // karma brahmodbhavaṃ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam / tasmāt sarvagataṃ brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam //

¹²⁵ brahmārpaṇaṃ brahmahavir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam / brahmaiva tena gantavyaṃ brahmakarmasamādhinā //

the act of what we call in English harvesting, which act in turn leads to the experience of 'growth, increase, prosperity'. This, in fact, is an alternative meaning of the root 'dih' which also means 'to increase, grow, prosper'. But there is a third meaning of root 'dih', which is 'to cover.' To cover also means to hide, to conceal, to anoint, to plaster and smear.

When what is harvested is piled up much of it is hidden as the surface hides and covers the pile. This meaning of *deha* is visible in the word '*saṁdeha*', meaning doubt. *Samdeha* has two components: '*sam*' and '*deha*'. The word '*sam*' is a prefix, which refers to the experience of completeness, totality and perfection. We also see this in the English word 'sum'. The next component is '*deha*', meaning concealing or covering. The word *Samdeha*'s root sense is 'perfect concealment or covering'. So, in a state of doubt, consciousness is perfectly clouded, the reality is covered or concealed, the truth is hidden, and thus there is no clarity of vision. One is confused and is groping in the dark. The body is called *deha* in Sanskrit because it is a cover for the *dehin* (the embodied). It conceals the *dehin* within as the *dehin* gathers, collects and piles *deha* up and *deha* increases and grows.

The speech of Kṛṣṇa in 2.11-30 is preparation of metaphysics of *yajna karma* is indicated by the fact that the next verse, i.e. 2.31.¹²⁶ which brings in the idea of *svadharma* related to *karma* is not a sudden change of topic marking the closing of a topic at 2.30 as Malinar thinks. Rather the speech of Kṛṣṇa 2.11 to 2.38 is one topic as claimed by Kṛṣṇa in II.39: "This reasoning has been expressed to you by Sāṁkhya. Now listen to it in Yoga, yoked by which reasoning you will cast off the bond of action."¹²⁷ From 2.11 to 2.38 it was one topic in Sāṁkhya, as proper performance of *karma*, which is same as *dharma*, is also falls in Sāṁkhya, which is the completion of action (*sāṁkhye kṛtānte*).¹²⁸ In this topic first the metaphysics of performance of *karma* is given upto 2.30 and it is related to *dharma* from 2.31 to 2.38, then the transition is announced in 2.39 and new idea of how not to get bound by *karma* is begun from 2.40. But still the discussion from 2.11 to 2.72 is concerned with *karma* is indicated when 2.72, which is the last verse of the chapter, says: "This is the Brāhmī condition [the condition of being one with Brahman], O son of Pritha. Attaining to this, none is deluded. Remaining in this condition even at the time of end, one obtains the liberation of Brahman."¹²⁹

In *karma* the liberation (*nirvāṇa*) of *Brahman* from the body takes place at the time of end, which here is the end of the relation with the body. Here *nirvāṇa* is not coming from Buddhism but coming from archery. The expression *nirvāṇa* [*nir+vāṇa*] means releasing the arrow (*vāṇa*) from the bow. In 2.72 the expression

¹²⁶ *svadharmam api cāveṣya na vikampitum arhasi / dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate //* "Having regard to your own *dharma* as you ought not to waver. For, to a *kṣatriya*, there is nothing better than a battle from *dharma*."

¹²⁷ *eṣā te 'bhihitā sāṁkhye buddhir yoge tv imāṁ śṛṇu / buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṁ prahāsyasi //*

¹²⁸ Bhagavadgīta 18.13

¹²⁹ *eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṁ prāpya vimuhyati / sthityāntakāle 'pi brahmanirvāṇam ṛcchati //*

brahmanirvāṇa stand for releasing the arrow of Brahman from the bow of body. As the structure of action is stated in Kaṭha Upaniṣad VI.17: “A person the size of a thumb, the inner self, sticking in the hearts of men; him one should extract from one’s own body, like the arrow from the reed with determination.”¹³⁰ Or in terms of Maitrī Upaniṣad VI.28 one should “release” and “let fly” from the body like an arrow from the bow. So, discussion of *deha/śarīra* and *dehin/śarīriṇa* relation in 2.13 and 2.22 is for preparing the idea that *karma* amounts to releasing of *dehin/śarīriṇa* from *deha/śarīra*.

Because of not heeding to the hermeneutic principle that the Bhagavadgītā is in language of deities (*devavāṇi*) which is indirect (*parokṣa*) and hence makes the meaning available not directly but indirectly, we do not succeed in penetrating its actual meaning and tend to take the statement regarding death and birth as if the Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā there is speaking of what happens at death of man. But that is not the case; he is talking about *yajña karma* as explained above. Just to give one more example, Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgita* 7.29 states: “Whoever depending on Me (*māmāśritya*) strive for liberation from *jarā* and *maraṇa*, they feelingly knowledgeable resolve that *Brahman*, in full the Inner-Self and all action.”¹³¹ Here the *Brahman* spoken of is Brahman of Sāṃkhya.¹³² Kṛṣṇa is speaking in very indirect (*atīparokṣa*) speech of deities here. For scholars *jarāmarāṇa* directly in a straightforward manner does refer to ageing and dying, but that is not the meaning of the expression in the mouth of Kṛṣṇa. The expression *jarāmarāṇa* is used indirectly to refer to praise and origin of institutional action (*yajña-karma*).

The meaning of *jarā* here is coming from *R̥gveda* 1.27.10¹³³; 1.38.13¹³⁴ and 10.32.5¹³⁵. Yāska in *Nirukta* 10.8 explains: “*Jarā* means praise; it is derived from (the verb root) *jr*, meaning to praise.”¹³⁶ In *Nighaṇṭu* 3.14 the expression *jarate* (in some manuscripts *jarati*) is included in synonyms of ‘fortyfour actions of praise.’¹³⁷ Since,

¹³⁰ *aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo 'ntarātmā sadā janānām hṛdaye saṅgniviṣṭaḥ / taṃ svāc charīrāt pravṛhen muñjād iveṣīkām dhairyena /*

¹³¹ *jarāmarāṇamokṣāya mām āśritya yatanti ye / te brahma tad viduḥ kṛtsnam adhyātmaṃ karma cākhilam //*

¹³² Cf. Binod Kumar Agarwala, “Errors Revisited in Light of the Balanced Contrast of Two Polarities in the First Chapter of Bhagavadgītā,” *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* Vol. 32, No.3, p.341, fn.7.

¹³³ *jarābodha tad viviḍḍhi viśe-viśe yajñiyāya / stomaṃ rudrāya dṛśīkam //* “Help, thou who knowest lauds, this work, this eulogy to Rudra, him adorable in every house.”

¹³⁴ *acchā vadā tanā girā jarāyaī brahmaṇas patim / agnim mītraṃ na darśatam //* “Invite thou hither with this song, for praise, Agni the Lord of Prayer, him who is fair as Mītra is.”

¹³⁵ *pra vo 'cchā ririce devayus padam eko rudrebhir yāti turvaṇiḥ / jarā vā yeṣv amṛteṣu dāvane pari va ūmebhyaḥ siñcatā madhu //* “The Pious One hath reached your place before the rest: One only moves victorious with the Rudras’ band. To these your helpers pour our meath, Immortal Gods, with whom your song of praise hath power to win their gifts.”

¹³⁶ *jarā stutir jarateḥ stuti karmaṇaḥ /*

¹³⁷ *catuṣcatvāriṃśad arcatikarmāṇaḥ*

oldage was a matter of praise the expression *jarā* is also used for oldage.¹³⁸ But Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgītā* 7.29 uses the expression *jarā* in the sense of praise as the context is that of sharing the institution as person, i.e. *yajña puruṣa*. The action performed in the *yajña* is to be accompanied by the praise recitation for its *rūpasamṛddhi* “enrichment of the form” of *yajña-karma*.¹³⁹ Similarly Kṛṣṇa uses the expression *marāṇa* in *Bhagavadgītā* 7.29 in the sense of origin of *yajña-karma*, as the self is making a transition from one body to another. We have already explained that in the Vedic tradition, which is also accepted by the *Bhagavadgītā*, action is conceived as discharge of self. We also explained that discharge of self is homologized with death. So, *jarāmarāṇamokṣāya* means ‘for liberation from praise and origin of action’, which means that *jarāmarāṇa* ‘praise and origin of action’ is not attributed to the performer of these actions, rather these are vested on the institution as person (*yajña puruṣa*). This meaning fits well with what is stated in the verse.

The expression *mām āśrītya* means ‘taking shelter under me,’ i.e. taking shelter under the institution as person, i.e. *yajña puruṣa*, which is same as sharing the institution which requires action along with praise mantra, but man has to be free from the binding of these actions of speech and body, so that these are vested on the institution. Those people, who taking shelter under the institution as person make effort to free themselves from praise and action, i.e. actions of speech and body respectively, which is *yajna karma* (collective institutional action). What Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavadgītā* 7.29 is nothing but amplification on what he stated in *Bhagavadgītā* 3.9: “Except the case of action for the sake of *yajña* (institution), otherwise this world is binding by action. Perform action for the sake of that [*yajña*], O son of Kunti, free

¹³⁸ This is not only true of the Vedic civilization, but also true of the ancient Greek civilization where old age was considered venerable and a matter of eulogy. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in his *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*, translated by Chris Dawson, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 16: “The ancients practiced the festive custom of eulogy in which recognizably laudable things received public praise: Gods and heroes, love or fatherland, war and peace, justice, wisdom—even old age, which used to be something laudable and not, like today, something almost shameful, a defect, a cause of embarrassment.”

¹³⁹ The rationale of recitation of mantras in *yajña* is stated as what is called *rūpasamṛddhi* “enrichment of the form of *yajña*” and is described in *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* I. 13: *etad vai yajñasya samṛddham yad rūpasamṛddham yat karma kriyamāṇam ṛg abhivadati*, “that, verily, in the *yajña* is perfect which is perfect in form, i.e., the [*yajña*] karma being performed is described by the Ṛg verse being recited”. It is also quoted [with slight modification by addition] accepted by Yāska in *Nirukta* 1.16: *etad vai yajñasya smṛddham yad rūpa samṛddham yat karma kriyamāṇam ṛg yajur vā abhivadati iti ca brāhmaṇam* / “that, verily, in the *yajña* is perfect which is perfect in form, i.e., the [*yajña*] karma being performed is described by the Ṛg verse or Yajur formula being recited” also [stated as] *brāhmaṇa*.” *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.2.6: *etad vai yajñasya samṛddham yad rūpasamṛddham yat karma kriyamāṇam ṛg yajur vābhivadati svasti tasya yajñasya pāram āsnute ya evaṃ veda* / “that, verily, in the *yajña* is perfect which is perfect in form, i.e., the [*yajña*] karma being performed is described by the Ṛg verse or Yajur formula being recited. He who feelingly resolves thus, successfully enjoys the far end of the *yajña*.”

from attachment.”¹⁴⁰ Once again the discussion in 7.29 is a discussion regarding collective institutional action in terms of *jarāmaraṇa*, which is a step in the development of ideas from 2.11 via 3.9 to final definition of *karma* in 8.3. In between the development of the topic the metaphysical principle regarding the unbreakable relation of death and birth is stated, as action involves crossing the boundary of bodies by the self as it exits one body (death) to enter another body (birth).

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¹⁴⁰ *yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra loko 'yaṃ karmabandhanaḥ / tadarthaṃ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara //*

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