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Svadharmā and the Ethics of Himṣā: Interpreting Ahimṣā in Bhagavad Gītā

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Abstract

The principle of Ahimsa in global ethical discourse is frequently interpreted as a complete repudiation of violence. Nonetheless, the Bhagavad Gita presents a nuanced dialectic that rigorously interrogates the distinctions between violence and morality. This study critiques the philosophical underpinnings of Justified Violence (Himsa), as articulated in the text, which simultaneously contests the principle of nonviolence while addressing the socio-political necessity of a just conflict. The inquiry is that the Gita offers a rigorous ethical framework grounded in the principles of Svadharmā (situational duty) and Nishkama Karma (selfless action). This paper will demonstrate that Justified Himsa is predicated on the elimination of psychological malice through a systematic investigation of the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. In this framework, bodily violence is deconstructed as a calculated action intended to avert a broader moral deterioration. This indigenous method significantly enhances contemporary social sciences and Just War theory by shifting the emphasis from external conduct to the internal psychological state of the agent. The research concludes that, within the ethical framework of the Gita, passive renunciation does not equate to genuine non-violence; rather, it signifies the active safeguarding of moral order. This reevaluation provides a nuanced comprehension of the mediation of traditional Eastern philosophy between individual conscience and societal obligation.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Ethical Dialectics, Just War, Non-Violence