

## The value of mutual dependence<sup>1</sup>

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Today's era is characterized by dominance of individuality as a value of life. Joint families have given way for nuclear families. Children are constantly taught the virtue of one's own hard work leading to excellence in their studies and other pursuits in life. People with originality (often taken as a good measure for their individuality) are looked at with awe and inspiration. The society also views individual rights as an important element of growth and progress. Asserting individuals right and space in all matters of civil society seems to be the way forward to make a great country. The spirit of questioning everything (as opposed to the spirit of inquiry) and seeking one's own understanding of the issue is another aspect promoted today. In all these matters the common thread is to promote individuality either directly or indirectly.

Many other developments in the society also promote individual thinking, encouraging everyone to make their own choices in life and having an independent existence in the world. For example, the advent of credit cards and ATMs have cut several social fabrics and promoted individuality. Consider a situation where we face a medical emergency and are in need of cash urgently. Earlier we used to tap the neighbour or a relative for help. This way we felt strongly the virtue of mutual dependence. Today we do not need them as credit cards and ATMs will do the job for us. It is increasingly becoming fashionable for young boys and girls to make their own choices of life partners. Children at home need their own tables, chairs, bed, bedrooms, various personal gadgets such as cell phones etc. Elderly parents also need a separate room and TV for them. The list of things that breed the culture of individuality is endless.

### Perils of individuality as a value

The idea that begins as individuality will soon transform into selfishness as people become very sensitive to their possessions, wants and needs and begin to demand or bargain for these things in life. This will take away the culture of sharing as give and take is simply not easier to practice. Moreover, the way we approach life will be dominated by "what is in it for me?" An extreme position in this would be that family as a unit will become less meaningful as the wife will be as assertive with her own individuality as the husband and so will be the children. Broken marriages and homes, orphaned children, emotionally abused children are some of the outcomes of this. Slowly this idea will stretch further and the self centred nature of people will begin to affect even large systems. People will want their share of comfort and entitlements even at the cost of creating damage to nature and large scale social and public systems.

Mutual dependence is like a lubricating oil in a machine with multiple moving parts. In order for the parts to move in a coordinated smooth fashion without creating noise, friction and heat, oil is applied. Once individuality sets in, the oil is expunged. The machine will make

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creaking noise and will one day breakdown. We are already beginning to see many of these aspects in our current day living. Where is the problem and how do we rectify this issue and restore sense and peace in our minds? Let us turn to *Bhagavad Gitā* for some advice on this aspect.

## **Mutual Dependence – Critical for Sustainability**

If we observe nature carefully we will understand one aspect very clearly. The whole universe is inter-connected. The physical systems such as mountains, rivers, glaciers in the polar regions and mountains have profound effect on us. The plant kingdom and the animal kingdom too exert a considerable influence on us. When we consume mindlessly the nature and throw all pollutants back into the nature it will respond by acid rains, earth quakes and tsunamis. Just because this relationship is too complicated to understand or hard to see by direct observation, it does not mean we can ignore them or push them to the background.

Lord Krishna brings this aspect by advising Arjuna that in order to achieve ultimate prosperity and success in whatever we do we need to honour the principle of mutual dependence. The spirit of sharing and unconditional giving (*the virtue of Yajña*) is the basis on which everything in the world sustains. The Gods bless the living beings with this virtue and in turn the living beings give back to the Gods using this principle. *paraspara bhāvaḥ*, Lord Krishna says, is the one that guarantees us ultimate prosperity (*param śreyas*).

देवान्भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।

परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ 3.11

*devān-bhāvayātānena te deva bhāvanyantu vaḥ*  
*parasparam bhāvayataḥ śreyasḥ param-avāpsyatha*

The concept of mutual dependence is the corner stone behind ancient Indian living. Our ancestors were able to live in unison with other living beings (the plant and animal kingdom). In the current world order we have tended to ignore this principle and chosen to largely follow the western paradigm of exploiting the nature. In the name of modern living, human beings have lost their ability to live in harmony with nature and other living beings in the ecosystem. The number of animals that have become extinct or endangered in the last 200 years alone is far more than those in the previous 2000 years! This has landed us in deep trouble and currently the International political establishments are seriously engaged in climate summits to find a solution to the mounting problem.

## **Mutual Dependence is critical in many aspects of life**

If you are a manager or a leader in an organization, the first lesson you will learn to be successful in discharging your work is the value of mutual dependence. Your sub-ordinates are as important as you are. A happy and successful married life revolves around the husband and the wife understanding the value of mutual dependence. Particle physicists today have found out that both at the sub-atomic level (*Pinda*) and at the cosmos (*Anda*)

everything works in perfect harmony because of the universal principle of mutual dependence. Government and society have to honour the principle of mutual dependence. If the elected representatives of the government and the parliament do not honour this principle, some forces will act and remind them of the need for this. We witnessed this in the case of Lokpal bill related movement by Anna Hazare during 2011.

The principle of mutual dependence pervades much more than what we normally imagine. The man and nature have a strong relationship of mutual dependence. Living entities and non-living entities also are mutually dependent. Our ancestral wisdom and practices in everyday living seems to have understood this aspect and respected it. It is time we wake up to the reality and adjust our behavioural practices. Only then we will get prosperity as Lord Krishna proclaimed in the *Gītā*.