



ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

श्रीमद्भगवद् गीता मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः Chapter 18 Volume 10

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Sri Krishna is talking about वर्णधर्मs - the natural occupational duties of the four groups of people called ब्राह्मणs, क्षत्रियs, वेश्यs and शूद्रs, constituting the ancient Vedic society.

As pointed out last time, one's स्वभाव गुण is the cause for one's वर्णधर्म - occupational duties in the Vedic society. The in-born nature of a person - the spontaneous tendencies which a person exhibits from one's very birth, and which characterize the person uniquely throughout one's life, that in-born nature is called one's स्वभाव. That स्वभाव is the result of one's पूर्व संस्कारs, which means, the accumulated impressions, the वासनाs left behind in one's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि by one's past कर्मs, education, training and cultivated awareness, both in one's



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present life and all of one's previous lives. These impressions are constantly being generated and getting accumulated and integrated into one's already existing **गुण** of the individual, thus accounting for the continuous change in one's **गुण** throughout one's evolution.

Thus, one's **गुण** at any particular time is the integrated result of all of one's **पूर्व संस्कार**s - impressions left behind by all of one's past **कर्म**s. Consequently, the integrated result of one's **पूर्वसंस्कार**s at the time of one's death, uniquely determines both one's **वर्णधर्म** as well as **स्वधर्म** at one's next birth as a human being. **वर्णधर्म** is the category of occupational duties in society, in which a person naturally fits, by virtue of one's past actions. In that category, **स्वधर्म** is the particular kind of occupational duties in which the person fits naturally by virtue of one's immediate disposition of mind and **बुद्धि** at one's current stage of personal evolution.

Thus, having pointed out the origin of one's **वर्णधर्म**, **भगवान्** now talks about the **वर्णकर्म**s - the mandated duties of the four occupational groups of people, namely the **ब्राह्मण**s, the **क्षत्रिय**s, the **वैश्य**s and the **शूद्र**s constituting the entire Vedic society.

At this point, it is important to digress a little, to point out that there were no groups of people called "Untouchables" in the ancient Vedic society. There is no mention of any such groups of people either in the **भगवत् गीता** or in all the Upanishads we have seen already. The appearance of such groups of people, as we have seen them in the present day Hindu society in India, is obviously a phenomenon of only recent origin, in relative terms. And, it is just a manifestation of the social degradations born of false values, erroneous notions, improper desires and spiritual indifference, which have been growing in the entire social fabric for a long time now.

This self-destructive phenomenon in our society will naturally disappear ONLY when the intelligentsia in our society are meaningfully educated in **सनातन धर्म** - the **ब्रह्मविद्या** knowledge, which is the very basis of the Hindu Society. At least, that is how I see our society as it is today.



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Now, we return to भगवत् गीता. With respect to कर्म itself, there is nothing superior or inferior. With this clear understanding, let us now listen to what Sri Krishna says with respect to वर्ण कर्मs - the mandated duties of the different groups of people in the Vedic society.

शमो दमः तपः शौचं क्षान्तिः आर्जवमेव च ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानं आस्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥

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ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् - Arising from the first ORDER sequential combination of गुणs, the ब्राह्मण कर्म in the Vedic society naturally manifests itself in the person involved as follows:

शमः मनो निग्रहं - control and mastery over one's mind, one's ways of thinking

दमः बाह्य इन्द्रिय निग्रहं - control and mastery over all of one's external organs of perception and action

तपः - personal discipline at all levels - discipline at the body level in general, and speech level and mind level in particular

शौचं - purity inside and outside - cleanliness and purity of अन्तः करण् - mind and बुद्धि, and also cleanliness of one's body and surroundings at all times

क्षान्तिः - forgiveness, accommodation and forbearance at all times

आर्जवम् - straightforwardness in thought, word and deed at all times. As the Veda mantra says

वाङ् मे मनसि प्रतिष्ठिता मनो मे वाचि प्रतिष्ठितं - Let there be complete identity between what I speak and what I think. Let there be complete accord between what I do and what I think. Let there always be proper alignment, clarity and focus in all my thoughts, words and actions - That is being आर्जवम् - straight forward in thought, word and deed at all times.



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ज्ञानं - total commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, both objective knowledge and Upanishad knowledge.

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये (मु 1 - 1 - 4) - Both these two kinds of knowledge (अपरविद्या followed by परविद्या) are to be acquired, understood, appreciated, realized and recognized, that is ईश्वर शासनं - a Vedic mandate for everybody.

विज्ञानं विशेष ज्ञानं - total commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and service at the highest possible level through spiritual striving, rooted in सत्यं, धर्मम्, तपस्, ब्रह्मचर्यम्, सम्यक् आत्मविचारं and सम्यक् ज्ञानं, as we have seen already in detail in Mundaka Upanishad (3 - 1 - 5 and 6)

आस्तिक्यं - continued cultivation of आस्तिक्य बुद्धि

आस्तिक्य बुद्धि - cultivation of आस्तिक्य बुद्धि involves, as pointed out by कठोपनिषत् (6 -13)

आस्तीत्येव उपलब्धस्य तत्त्वभावः प्रसीदति ।

First you learn to realize that आत्मा अस्ति - Atma exists, परमेश्वर exists. Then you learn to recognize आत्मा अस्मि - That Atma I am, That परमेश्वर I am. That means, the true nature of myself is परमेश्वर Itself. A बुद्धि which is capable of such realization and such recognition is आस्तिक्य बुद्धि. Cultivation of such आस्तिक्य बुद्धि is possible only through

- श्रद्धा in understanding and appreciation of Vedic commands as ईश्वर आदेश - as the very commands of परमेश्वर Itself, as the very commands of The Pure Consciousness already in oneself
- recognition of भगवत् गीता and The Upanishads as the valid means of knowledge about जीव, जगत् and ईश्वर; and



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- gaining परमेश्वर ज्ञानं - ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वम् ज्ञानं - वासुदेवः सर्वम् इति ज्ञानं - ब्रह्म एव इदं विश्वं ज्ञानं through Upanishad teachings.

ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् - all the above, together are ब्राह्मण कर्मस - कर्मस natural to the स्वभाव of ब्राह्मणस in the Vedic society, says Sri Krishna.

We may note here that the foregoing statement is as much a description of what makes a person a ब्राह्मण, as what the mandated occupational duties are for a ब्राह्मण. Still, Sri Krishna presents this statement as ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् - the mandated duties for ब्राह्मणस in Vedic society.

Therefore, the message here is two-fold. Please understand this:

1. If only one already has all the above personal qualities, namely शमः, दमः, तपः, शौचं, क्षान्तिः, आर्जवम्, ज्ञानं, विज्ञानं and आस्तिक्यं, or, one diligently cultivates, or at least desires to cultivate those personal qualities, ONLY THEN is one a ब्राह्मण, otherwise NOT.

2. For such a ब्राह्मण, the mandated occupational duties in the Vedic society are ONLY to maintain, and further cultivate those personal qualities towards maturity (this aspect is called स्वाध्याय), and when one is qualified enough to do so, practice and teach the cultivated वेद-उपनिषत् knowledge to others also in the society (this aspect is called प्रवचन) so that others may also learn, cultivate, and utilize those personal qualities for their own material and spiritual progress, because, all the above personal qualities are मोक्षसाधनं - they are the means helpful for gaining मोक्ष- Total Fulfillment in life, which is indeed the ultimate goal for every individual person in society.

Thus, स्वाध्याय and प्रवचन together (स्वाध्याय-प्रवचने) constitute the ONLY occupational duty for a ब्राह्मण in Vedic society. Taittiriya Upanishad calls attention to



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this two-fold duty (स्वाध्याय-प्रवचने) again and again, twelve times (1 - 9), which is an indication of its extraordinary importance to the health, welfare and progress of the entire society as a whole.

In the vision of गीताशास्त्र, The ब्रह्मविद्या, every person in the society, irrespective of one's वर्णधर्म - one's occupational duties in society, arising from one's स्वभाव गुणs, every person in the society should try to uplift oneself spiritually to become a ब्राह्मण by disposition, which means, to uplift oneself to the First Order sequential combination of सत्त्व-रजस्-तमस् गुणs, because, only that disposition can enable one to ultimately transcend all गुणs, including the First Order sequential गुण combination, and become a truly enlightened person, a ज्ञानी, in one's own life time. In the long and uneven history of our own society, there are many well-known examples of people who, irrespective of their वर्णधर्म at birth, gained enlightenment and exalted sainthood in their own lives, uplifting the entire society at the same time.

In order to gain such enlightenment in one's बुद्धि, one need not change one's वर्णधर्म - one's स्वकर्म - one's occupational category of duties into which one is born in the society by virtue of one's पूर्वजन्म संस्कारs. Whatever कर्म in which one naturally finds oneself from time to time, one should do that कर्म joyfully and enthusiastically, for its own sake, being in परमेश्वर consciousness, and doing every कर्म as best as one can, at all times. Such being and doing is योग in itself - योगः कर्मसु कोशलं, as Sri Krishna said before (2-50). Such excellence in action itself will surely and naturally uplift oneself both materially and spiritually, transcending all गुणs, ultimately. We will talk more about this aspect of the glory of वर्णधर्म next time.

Next, Sri Krishna talks about क्षत्रिय कर्म in Vedic society. The क्षत्रियs have a leadership role in Vedic society. They are the kings and queens, administrators and army commanders in their respective kingdoms, whose primary duties are to protect the



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kingdom from outside aggression, and also to protect धर्म, which means to maintain law, order, justice and peace in the society within the kingdom. Consequently, the क्षत्रियs must have certain personal qualities which make them fit for क्षत्रिय कर्म in society. Calling attention to such qualities, भगवान् says:

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥

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क्षात्र कर्म स्वभावजम् - Arising from the SECOND ORDER sequential combination of गुणs, the क्षत्रिय कर्म in the Vedic society naturally manifests itself in the person involved as follows:

शौर्यम् शूरस्य भावः शौर्यम् - Bravery, the skill and capacity to face the enemy, bravely in warfare, or in times of internal social turmoil

तेजः - self-confidence, not being frightened by any situation

धृतिः - firmness of mind and बुद्धि, sustained enthusiasm in doing one's duties, never yielding to a sense of depression or defeat

दाक्ष्यं - being able to handle sudden and unexpected situations, quickly, skillfully, powerfully and decisively

युद्धे च अपि अपलायनम् - not running away from the battlefield, not showing one's back to the enemies in the battlefield, or social turmoils involving violence, never retreating from one's duties in the battlefield or in situations of social turmoil

दानं - generosity in the art of public administration, ability to give up freely and fearlessly, even one's life if necessary, and

ईश्वर भावः च - natural ability to exercise power and authority as the ruler, as the person in charge of the situation; the natural ability to manifest one's power and authority in defending one's rights, one's kingdom and one's protégé, and in protecting धर्म in society, which means enforcing law, order and justice in the society, without any fear or favor.



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क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् - all the above are क्षत्रिय कर्मs, कर्मs natural to the स्वभाव of क्षत्रियs in Vedic society

Now about वैश्य कर्म and शूद्र कर्म, which arise respectively from the third ORDER and fourth ORDER sequential गुण combinations. भगवान् says:

कृषिगोरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥

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कृषि - All activities connected with cultivation of land and production of food and other agricultural products

गोरक्ष्य - all activities connected with protection of cows and other milk-yielding household animals. It is not cattle-farming for subsequent slaughter; what we are talking about is cattle protection. That which you protect also protects you. The society protects धर्म - and, in turn, धर्म protects the society. Similarly, the society protects the cows and, in turn, the cows protect the society. Thus the protection of cows is a sacred and enormously important function in the Vedic society, which is primarily an agricultural society

वाणिज्यं - all activities connected with trade, industry and commerce, which produce all kinds of material wealth, both to oneself and to the society as a whole

वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् - all these activities constitute the natural occupation of वैश्यs in Vedic society. Further

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्य अपि स्वभावजम् - The very wide variety of कर्मs needed as auxiliary duties, support services, in all walks of the society constitute the natural occupation of शूद्रs in the Vedic society. These शूद्रकर्म वर्णधर्मs are so extremely important for the normal functioning of the society that they are like the hands and legs for the normal functioning of the body vehicle of a person. Consequently, by their very nature, शूद्रs constitute functionally the most essential segment of population in the Vedic society, because, without their effective cooperation and active participation, no real progress in community life is possible.



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From the foregoing descriptions of वर्णधर्म, it should be clear that ब्राह्मणकर्म, क्षत्रियकर्म, वैश्यकर्म and शूद्रकर्म are not simply four mutually distinct कर्मs, but they are four mutually distinct classes of कर्मs, and within each class, there can be, and indeed, there are, infinite variations and gradations to fit the peculiar inherited and cultivated dispositions and qualifications of every individual person in the society, at every stage of one's life. Further, one's जीवन कर्म - the कर्म one does at any particular time to earn one's living is not a matter of accident of birth or circumstances of life. It is entirely a natural expression of one's own ever-changing, ever-evolving स्वभाव गुण. From the point of view of one's spiritual growth, the purpose of every कर्म is the same for everybody, and that is to gain अन्तःकरण शुद्धि - cleanliness and restoration of the inherent purity of one's mind and बुद्धि, which makes a person fit for gaining पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं.

For that purpose, as pointed out already, one need not, and one should not try to change one's वर्ण धर्म, which is one's स्वधर्म, स्वकर्म, one's कर्म arising from one's स्वभाव गुणs - natural in-born tendencies. One has to change only one's attitude in doing whatever कर्म that has come to one naturally - तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः - as the Upanishad says, and enjoy doing whatever has been left for you to do by परमेश्वर.

Sri Krishna gives this message again in the next verse:

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।
स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तत् शृणु ॥

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We will see this verse in detail next time.