



## श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

चतुर्थोऽध्यायः - ज्ञानकर्मसंन्यासयोगः

### Chapter 4

#### Volume 3

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुण कर्म विभागशः ।

तस्य कर्तारं अपि मां विद्धि अकर्तारं अव्ययम् ॥ 4 - 13

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्म फले स्पृहा ।

इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिः न स बध्यते ॥ 4 - 14

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म, पूर्वै रपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।

कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात्त्वं, पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥ 4 - 15

As we may recall, Sri Krishna said earlier:

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तान् तथैव भजाम्यहं ।

मम वर्त्म अनुवर्तन्ते, मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥

In whatever manner, in whatever form, with whatever motive, to whatever extent people worship ME – the परमेश्वर, I bless them exactly in the same manner, and precisely to the same extent.

Further, people, whatever be their kind, whatever be their goals in life from time to time, in whatever way they worship me, the परमेश्वर, to achieve their goals, all of them, so long as they follow the path of धर्म - the path of duty, propriety and gratitude, they are really living a life of मम वर्त्म - meaning मम धर्म - my धर्म - the परमेश्वर धर्म - the way of life ordained by ME the परमेश्वर, for the welfare and progress of the entire human society, which means, the परमेश्वर धर्म in its entirety, is assured of progress towards श्रेयस् - the परम पुरुषार्थ - the Highest Goal of Life - total fulfillment in life, naturally.

Now, what is this मम वर्त्म - the परमेश्वर धर्म - the natural order of life that भगवान् refers to here? That मम वर्त्म - the परमेश्वर धर्म is the universal वर्ण धर्म, the वर्णाश्रम



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धर्म, the सनातन धर्म - in the integrated social organization and community life of the ancient Vedic society. Referring to this वर्ण धर्म, भगवान् says:

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं, गुण कर्म विभागशः ।

तस्य कर्तारं अपि मां, विद्धि अकर्तारं अव्ययम् ॥

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In this verse, Sri Krishna refers to the four fold कर्म विभाग - natural occupational divisions, in the integrated community life of the ancient Vedic society, which is popularly known in the present day world as the four major caste divisions in the Hindu Society.

References to caste divisions in the Vedas and the Upanishads are widely misunderstood, and often, very effectively exploited by various groups and organizations for their own ends. Consequently, the existence of caste divisions in Hindu Society is often looked upon either defensively or resentfully, even by the well-meaning intelligentsia of the modern Hindu Society.

There is absolutely no reason, either to be defensive, or to be resentful about the concept of वर्ण धर्म - caste divisions in the organization of community life in human society, because, it is both natural and universally valid for all times, if only it is properly understood and properly practiced in its entirety, totally in accordance with धर्म.

Having said that, it must be pointed out clearly and emphatically, that references to वर्ण धर्म - caste divisions in our Vedas and the Upanishads, do not, in any way, justify or condone the improprieties, injustices, malpractices and sectarian loyalties which have crept widely and deeply into all levels of our social fabric under the name of caste divisions and sub-caste divisions.

Whatever spiritual and social degradations and their consequences in worldly life that we see in our society today, arise directly from ignorance and indifference to our scriptures and their teachings, such ignorance and indifference being cultivated, knowingly or unknowingly by generations of Hindu population in spite of the many isolated appearances of महात्माs, ईश्वर भक्तs, distinguished आचार्यs, गुरुs and teachers from time to time.

Why is this so? What is it that one can do - one must do, to arrest the continuing degradations in our society as a whole? This question should be a matter for serious thought for every educated Hindu who cares.



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In any case, in terms of **भगवत् गीता**, it is important for us to understand and appreciate the true nature and significance of **वर्ण धर्म** in the light of Upanishadic knowledge, to educate ourselves spiritually, and at the same time to dedicate, and rededicate ourselves to the service of our society, and indeed the entire humanity, including oneself. Let us now see briefly what **भगवान्** says here:

**चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुण कर्म विभागशः ।**

**चातुर्वर्ण्यं** - There are four **वर्ण**s -four broad groups of people in human society. These groups are not man-made. They are, Sri Krishna says,

**मया सृष्टं** - created by ME, the **परमेश्वर** - which means the existence of these four **वर्ण** s is natural to human society.

As we all know, in the ancient Vedic society, and so it is today, at least by name in the Hindu society, these four **वर्ण**s go by the names **ब्राह्मण**s, **क्षत्रिय**s, **वैश्य**s and **शूद्र**s. What is the basis for the existence of these four **वर्ण** s in human society? **भगवान्** says:

**गुण कर्म विभागशः** - Each **वर्ण** - each group is a **विभाग** (**भाग** means division, **विभाग** means a natural division, not man made division). Each **वर्ण** is a natural division. What kind of division? There are two factors governing this natural division. They are **गुण विभाग** and **कर्म विभाग**.

**गुण विभाग** is division based on one's **स्वभाव गुण** - natural mental disposition, quality of one's mind and **बुद्धि**, and **कर्म विभाग** is the division based on one's duty in the society. In Vedic society, these were duties carried out by each family from generation to generation, by choice, but nobody is bound to any **कर्म विभाग**.

One is born in a particular family by virtue of one's **गुण विभाग**, **स्वभाव गुण** at the time of birth. After birth, the **स्वभाव गुण** of the person continues to change and the person naturally takes up such duties in the society to which one is qualified by virtue of one's **गुण**s from time to time. Whatever be the person's occupation from time to time, the entire human society functionally operates under the four **वर्ण**s, whether or not these **वर्ण**s are called by any particular name, in any particular society.

Sri Krishna talks about **गुण विभाग** and **कर्म विभाग** in detail in chapters 14 and 18 respectively, which we will see later. Let us now consider the four **वर्ण**s from the point of



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view of गुण विभाग - one's mental disposition, governed by one's स्वभाव गुण. The स्वभाव गुण of a person is a mixture of सत्त्व गुण, रजस् गुण and तमस् गुण.

- ✓ सत्त्व गुण - accounts for a person's natural ability to think properly, discriminate, judge and acquire knowledge of all kinds, both objective knowledge and spiritual knowledge.
- ✓ रजस् गुण - accounts for a person's ability to act with vigor, leadership, heroism and generosity.
- ✓ तमस् गुण - accounts for a person's ability to remain inert, ignorant and insensitive.

Every person has naturally all these three गुणs to different extents. The precise texture of one's स्वभाव गुण changes continuously, due to the ever-changing गुण-गुण interactions. Depending on the relative predominance of each one of these three गुणs in one's mental make-up, four broad groups of people are possible in human society.

In the first group are people in whom सत्त्व गुण is predominant and it is strongly complemented by रजस् गुण; तमस् गुण in them is relatively weak and powerless. The people who have this combination of गुणs are said to have ब्राह्मण गुण.

In the second group are people in whom रजस् गुण is predominant and it is strongly complemented by सत्त्व गुण. Again, तमस् गुण in them is relatively weak and powerless. The people who have this combination of गुणs are said to have क्षत्रिय गुण.

In the third group are people in whom, again रजस् गुण is predominant, but it is strongly complemented by तमस् गुण, सत्त्व गुण in them is relatively weak and powerless. The people who have this combination of गुणs are said to have वैश्य गुण.

In the fourth group are people in whom तमस् गुण is predominant and it is strongly complemented by रजस् गुण. Again सत्त्व गुण in them is relatively weak and powerless. The people who have this combination of गुणs are said to have शूद्र गुण.

Since सत्त्व गुण and तमस् गुण are mutually opposed to each other, there cannot be a group of people in whom सत्त्व गुण and तमस् गुण complement each other. Thus there are, and there can only be, four groups of people - four वर्ण गुणs, based on



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combinations of सत्य, रजस् and तमस् गुणs, and within each group, there can be, and there are, infinite shades and variations.

Let us now consider the four वर्णs from the point of view of कर्म विभाग - natural division of duties in the Vedic society. Corresponding to each गुण विभाग, there is also a कर्म विभाग, natural division of duties in the society.

The ब्राह्मण गुण is particularly needed and appropriate for कर्मs which demand strict mental and physical discipline, total commitment to सत्यं and धर्म in daily life, together with the diligent pursuit of both objective knowledge and ब्रह्मविद्या knowledge, and serving society in teaching and practice of such knowledge in the society. Those who are fit for such and related कर्मs, and who carry on such duties properly and effectively in the society, are called ब्राह्मणाs.

The क्षत्रिय गुण is particularly needed and appropriate for कर्मs which demand heroism, vigor, firmness, military prowess, leadership in public life, maintenance of law and order, and protection of the weak and the disadvantaged in the society. Those people who are fit for such and related कर्मs and who carry on such duties properly and effectively in the society are called क्षत्रियs.

The वैश्य गुण is particularly needed and appropriate for producing wealth and material prosperity for the society through agriculture, industry, trade and commerce. Those people who are fit for such and related कर्मs, and who carry on such duties properly and effectively in the society are called वैश्यs.

The शूद्र गुण is particularly needed and appropriate for कर्मs demanding physical labor and also for कर्मs involved in all kinds of support services in every occupational group. Those people who are fit for such and related कर्मs, and who carry on such duties properly and effectively in the society are called शूद्रs.

When the गुण विभाग among people is properly aligned with the कर्म विभाग in the society, धर्म prevails in the society and the society as a whole prospers. When this alignment breaks, the society as a whole also disintegrates, giving rise to all kinds of अधर्म - social improprieties and degradations.



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We must understand that with respect to कर्म - duties in the society, there is nothing superior or inferior. All duties, the ब्राह्मण कर्म, the क्षत्रिय कर्म, the वैश्य कर्म and the शूद्र कर्म - all are equally important for the harmony, progress and the welfare of the society as a whole. Every कर्म well done in accordance with धर्म is a manifestation of परमेश्वर.

Popular notions on the perceived superiority or inferiority with respect to the above duties in the society arise only from ignorance, arrogance, and a false sense of exclusiveness. In every occupational group there are always people having predominantly ब्राह्मण गुण, क्षत्रिय गुण, वैश्य गुण or शूद्र गुण. That being the case, there is never any exclusiveness, either with respect to गुण or कर्म.

Whatever be one's mental make-up from time to time, and whatever be one's choice of duties in the society, every person is a mixture of ब्राह्मण गुण, क्षत्रिय गुण, वैश्य गुण and शूद्र गुण, each combination of गुणs manifesting itself in different ways at different times, in every one of one's actions in daily life. By following धर्म in everyday life, every one can progress towards greater and greater proportion of सत्य गुण in one's mental make-up, and ultimately transcend all the गुणs, transcend माया, and gain श्रेयस्, and BE ONESELF, the all-inclusive universal self that one really is.

That is the वर्ण धर्म - the मम धर्म - the परमेश्वर धर्म - the सनातन धर्म that Sri Krishna talks about in the first line of the verse, namely

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुण कर्म विभागशः ।

In the next line भगवान् says:

तस्य कर्तारं अपि मां विद्धि अकर्तारं अव्ययम् ।

तस्य कर्तारं मां विद्धि - Please understand that I, being परमेश्वर, I am the कर्त - I am the Doer, I am the creator of this चातुर्वर्ण्यं, these four वर्णs - these four groups of people in human society. At the same time,

तस्य अकर्तारं अपि मां विद्धि - I am also अकर्ता - I am also NOT the Doer, NOT the creator of this चातुर्वर्ण्यं - these four वर्णs in the human society, and

मां अव्ययं विद्धि - you must understand that I, The परमेश्वर remain actionless, changeless.



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Now, what does that mean? How can भगवान् say that "I am the कर्ता as well as the अकर्ता for these four वर्णस in human society". We must understand भगवान्'s statement here properly.

The existence of the four वर्णस in human society is not the result of any कर्म done by भगवान्. It is not the कर्म फल of any कर्म done by भगवान्. भगवान् ever remains कर्म-free.

Then how did the four वर्णस come into existence?

The four वर्णस arise directly from the very nature of माया - the inherent, infinite power of परमेश्वर, which माया is constituted of the three गुणस - सत्व, रजस् and तमस् गुणस. These three गुणस and their mutual interactions manifest themselves perceptibly as the four वर्णस in human society. Thus the immediate कर्ता for the four वर्णस is the माया of परमेश्वर itself. परमेश्वर ever remains अकर्ता.

But then, माया has no existence independent of परमेश्वर, while परमेश्वर exists independent of माया, and that makes परमेश्वर the ultimate source of all that exists in this creation - ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वं.

Therefore when भगवान् says "चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं " these four वर्णस are created by me, The परमेश्वर, what is pointed out here is a लक्षण of परमेश्वर, which means the natural existence of the four वर्णस in the human society is a ईश्वर विभूति - is a perceptible glory of परमेश्वर - as indeed, this entire creation is. This glory of परमेश्वर is to be realized and enjoyed.

That is how ईश्वर is both कर्ता as well as अकर्ता for the four वर्णस in the human society.

भगवान् tells Arjuna - Arjuna, if my statement that I am both the कर्ता as well as the अकर्ता for the four वर्णस in human society appears contradictory to you, this apparent contradiction will vanish naturally when you become mature enough to recognize and gain total identity with परमेश्वर within yourself. Until that time, all that you have to understand is the true nature of कर्मस with reference to Myself - The परमेश्वर.



न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति, न मे कर्म फले स्पृहा ।  
इति मां योऽभिज्ञानाति, कर्मभिः न स बध्यते ॥

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न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति - The सृष्टि कर्मs - the कर्मs in this creation, do not touch me at all. They do not taint Me in any way, because there is no notion of Doership in Me.  
न मे कर्म फले स्पृहा - consequently, there is no desire in Me for the fruits of सृष्टि कर्मs.

I am the Law of all Laws, governing all action in this creation. There is no कर्म involved on my part. Just as ब्रह्मन् - the परमेश्वर is अनादि, beginningless, the माया associated with ब्रह्मन् is also अनादि, beginningless. All जीवs arise from माया. Therefore the जीवs are also अनादि - beginningless. Every जीव is endowed with a free will. Whatever कर्म a जीव does, for that कर्म, a कर्म फल, a fruit of action occurs automatically. There is no action, or any partiality involved on my part as परमेश्वर.

Therefore one's गुण is the result of one's own कर्म. In this गुण विभाग - the nature of one's स्वभाव गुण at birth, and its continuing changes, because of the succession of one's कर्मs and कर्म फलs, I remain untouched either by कर्मs or the कर्म फलs, so says Sri Krishna, as परमेश्वर.

Therefore, we cannot, and we need not blame परमेश्वर for our गुणs at any time. They are entirely our own making. We can, and we must, upgrade our गुणs by our own efforts, through कर्म योग.

Now, if परमेश्वर can say " Even though I am the कर्ता of every happening in this creation, I am untouched by कर्म and कर्म फल which take place in this creation", then a जीव also can say " even though I am the कर्ता of all my कर्मs, and the भोक्ता - the enjoyer of all my कर्म फलs, I am also untouched by any of them", if only the जीव realizes one's identity with परमेश्वर in oneself, if only the जीव-ईश्वर ऐक्यं is realized by the जीव - the individual person. Therefore, भगवान् says:

इति मां यः अभिज्ञानाति - The one who realizes identity with my true nature, the one who realizes जीव ईश्वर ऐक्यं



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सः कर्मभिः न बध्यते – that person is not bound by actions. That person is as free as Myself – the परमेश्वर.

Thus, what Sri Krishna can say about Himself, any जीव - any person, can also say if only the जीव realizes identity with परमेश्वर in oneself.

That is exactly what Sri Krishna said earlier.

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यं एवं यो वेत्ति तत्यतः ।  
त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म, नैति मां एति सोऽर्जुन ॥

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which we saw last time. Thus भगवान् tells Arjuna:

Arjuna, this is not something new that I am telling you now. This fact has been known for a long, long time. Even before your present context today, people performed कर्म as कर्म योग, and then subsequently gained आत्म ज्ञानं, at which time they also recognized, each for oneself, what I am telling you now, namely,

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्म फले स्पृहा - actions do not touch me, nor do I have any thirst for कर्म फल. My part is only to be a participant in this creation as ordained by परमेश्वर - enjoying life in this world, totally dedicating all actions to परमेश्वर.

Therefore, O! Arjuna:

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैः अपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।  
कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात् त्वं पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥

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एवं ज्ञात्वा - realizing the true nature of one's own self in this manner, namely, that on gaining आत्म ज्ञानं one realizes

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति, न मे कर्म फले स्पृहा- इति-

कृतं कर्म पूर्वैः अपि मुमुक्षुभिः - all actions to be done were done by the freedom seekers – मुमुक्षुभिः - by the people committed to the pursuit of मोक्ष, even in olden times. Having



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correctly understood the nature of कर्म, as well as the Nature of परमेश्वर, people have been following कर्म योग from ancient times, as the means for gaining श्रेयस्, मोक्ष.

तस्मात् - therefore, you can also do likewise, namely

कुरु कर्म त्वं, एव - Do perform कर्म, do not try to run away from कर्म. You must perform whatever कर्म has come to you as your duty

पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतं - just as the Freedom seekers have been doing from ancient times

कर्म योग is a time tested and proven means for gaining आत्म ज्ञानं - self-knowledge - Self-realization. As it was pointed out earlier, कर्म योग is for अन्तःकरण शुद्धि - purification of your mind and बुद्धि before gaining आत्म ज्ञानं. And after gaining आत्म ज्ञानं, कर्म योग, is for the welfare of the world, in harmony with all existence. Therefore, कुरु कर्म - perform कर्म as कर्म योग at all times.

The Raja Rishis who ruled the kingdom before you, and the Freedom seekers throughout the ages have been doing कर्तव्यं कर्म - all actions to be done, as कर्म योग. Therefore, the कर्म योग that I have been teaching you today, is not anything new. You are a well-born and a well-brought-up क्षत्रिय, both by गुण and कर्म, and you seek श्रेयस् by virtue of your own maturity. कर्म योग is precisely for you.

Therefore, कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात् त्वं - **please do perform कर्म** as कर्म योग and that will ultimately take you to the श्रेयस् - the परम पुरुषार्थ, namely the मोक्ष that you seek. So saying Sri Krishna returns back to the main theme of his teaching, namely कर्म योग.

Having uplifted Arjuna to a higher plane of listening mood, and recognizing that Arjuna is still having difficulty in understanding the connection between कर्म and आत्म ज्ञानं, Sri Krishna now proceeds to explain the true nature of कर्म, any कर्म whatsoever, as it relates to ब्रह्मन् - आत्म ज्ञानं - ईश्वर ज्ञानं for a Freedom seeker. What Sri Krishna says about कर्म we will see next time.