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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

अष्टादशोऽध्यायः - मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः

aṣṭadaśo 'dhyāyaḥ - mokṣa saṁnyāsa yogaḥ

Chapter 18

Volume 10

शमो दमः तपः शौचं क्षान्तिः आर्जवमेव च ।

śamo damaḥ tapaḥ śaucam kṣāntiḥ ārjavameva ca ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानं आस्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजं ॥ 18 - 42

jñānam vijñānam āstikyaṁ brahmakarma svabhāvajaṁ ॥

शौर्यम् तेजो धृतिः दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनं ।

śauryam tejo dhṛtaḥ dākṣyaṁ yuddhe cāpyapalāyanaṁ ।

दानं ईश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजं ॥ 18 - 43

dānaṁ īśvarbhāvaśca kṣātraṁ karma svabhāvajaṁ ॥

कृषि गौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्य कर्म स्वभावजं ।

kṛṣi gaurakṣyavāṇijyaṁ vaiśya karma svabhāvajaṁ ।

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजं ॥ 18 - 44

paricaryātmakaṁ karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajaṁ ॥

स्ये स्ये कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।

sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṁsiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ ।

स्वकर्मनिरातः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥ 18 - 45

svakarmanirātaḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tacchṛṇu ॥

Sri Krishna is talking about वर्ण धर्म *varṇa dharmas* - the natural occupational duties of the four groups of people called ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇas*, क्षत्रिय *kṣatrayas*, वैश्य *vaiśyas* and शूद्र *śūdras*, constituting the ancient Vedic society.

As pointed out last time, one's स्वभाव गुण *svabhāva guṇa* is the cause for one's वर्ण धर्म *varṇa dharmas* - 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 *svabhāva*. That स्वभाव *svabhāva* is the result of one's पूर्व संस्कार *pūrv saṁskāras*



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pūrva saṁskārs, which means, the accumulated impressions, the वासनस *vāsanās* left behind in one's अन्तःकरण *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* by one's past कर्मस *karmas*, education, training and cultivated awareness, both in one's 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 *guṇa* of the individual, thus accounting for the continuous change in one's गुण *guṇa* throughout one's evolution.

Thus, one's गुण *guṇa* at any particular time is the integrated result of all of one's पूर्व संस्कारस *pūrva saṁskārs* - impressions left behind by all of one's past कर्मस *karmas*. Consequently, the integrated result of one's पूर्व संस्कारस *pūrva saṁskārs* at the time of one's death, uniquely determines both one's वर्ण धर्म *varṇa dharma* as well as स्वधर्म *svadharma* at one's next birth as a human being. वर्ण धर्म *varṇa dharma* 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 *svadharma* is the particular kind of occupational duties in which the person fits naturally by virtue of one's immediate disposition of mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* at one's current stage of personal evolution.

Thus, having pointed out the origin of one's वर्ण धर्म *varṇa dharma*, भगवान् *bhagavān* now talks about the वर्ण कर्मस *varṇa karmas* - the mandated duties of the four occupational groups of people, namely the ब्राह्मणस *brāhmaṇas*, the क्षत्रियस *kṣatrayas*, the वैश्यस *vaiśyas* and the शूद्रस *sūdras* 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 *bhagavat gītā* 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 *sanātana dharma* - the ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* 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 *bhagavat gītā*. With respect to कर्म *karma* itself, there is nothing superior or inferior. With this clear understanding, let us now listen to what Sri Krishna says with respect to वर्ण कर्म *varṇa karmas* - the mandated duties of the different groups of people in the Vedic society.

शमो दमः तपः शौचं क्षान्तिः आर्जवमेव च ।

śamo damaḥ tapaḥ śaucam kṣāntiḥ ārjavameva ca ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानं आस्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजं ॥ 18 – 42

jñānam vijñānam āstikyam brahmakarma svabhāvajam ॥

ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजं *brahmakarma svabhāvajam* - Arising from the first ORDER sequential combination of गुण *guṇas*, the ब्राह्मण कर्म *brāhmaṇa karma* in the Vedic society naturally manifests itself in the person involved as follows:

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

दमः बाह्य इन्द्रिय निग्रहं *damaḥ bāhya indriya nigrahaṁ* - control and mastery over all of one's external organs of perception and action

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

शौचं *śaucam* - purity inside and outside - cleanliness and purity of अन्तःकरण *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, and also cleanliness of one's body and surroundings at all times

क्षान्तिः *kṣāntiḥ* - forgiveness, accommodation and forbearance at all times

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

वाङ् मे मनसि प्रतिष्ठता मनो मे वाचि प्रतिष्ठितं *vāṅ me manasi pratiṣṭhitā mano*

me vāci pratiṣṭhitam - 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 *ārjavam* - straight forward in thought, word and deed at all times.



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

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

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

आस्तिक्यं *āstikyam* - continued cultivation of आस्तिक्य बुद्धि *āstikya buddhi*

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

आस्तीत्येव उपलब्धस्य तत्त्व भावः प्रसीदति *āstītyeva upalabdhasya tattva bhāvaḥ prasīdati*

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

- श्रद्धा *śraddhā* in understanding and appreciation of Vedic commands as ईश्वर आदेश *īśvara ādeśa* - as the very commands of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, as the very commands of The Pure Consciousness already in oneself
- recognition of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* and The Upanishads as the valid means of knowledge about जीव *jīva*, जगत् *jagat* and ईश्वर *īśvara*; and
- gaining परमेश्वर ज्ञानं *parameśvarjñānam* - ईशावास्यम् इदं सर्वम् ज्ञानं *īśāvāsyam idam sarvam jñānam* - वासुदेवः सर्वम् इति ज्ञानं *vāsudevaḥ*



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sarvam iti jñānam - ब्रह्म एव इदं विश्वं ज्ञानं *brahma eva idaṁ viśvaṁ jñānam* through Upanishad teachings.

ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजं *brahmakarma svabhāvajaṁ* - all the above, together are ब्राह्मण कर्मसु *brāhmaṇa karmas* - कर्मसु *karmas* natural to the स्वभाव *svabhāva* of ब्राह्मणसु *brāhmaṇas* 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 *brāhmaṇa*, as what the mandated occupational duties are for a ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇa*. Still, Sri Krishna presents this statement as ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजं *brahmakarma svabhāvajaṁ* - the mandated duties for ब्राह्मणसु *brāhmaṇas* 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 *śamaḥ*, दमः *damaḥ*, तपः *tapas*, शौचं *śaucam*, क्षान्तिः *kṣāntiḥ*, आर्जवम् *ārjavam*, ज्ञानं *jñānam*, विज्ञानं *viññānam* and अस्तिक्यं *āstikyam*, or, one diligently cultivates, or at least desires to cultivate those personal qualities, ONLY THEN is one a ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇa*, otherwise NOT.

2. For such a ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇa*, 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 *svādhyāya*), and when one is qualified enough to do so, practice and teach the cultivated वेद-उपनिषत् *veda-upaniṣat* knowledge to others also in the society (this aspect is called प्रवचन *pravacana*) 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 *mokṣa sādhanam* - they are the means helpful for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in life, which is indeed the ultimate goal for every individual person in society.

Thus, स्वाध्याय *svādhyāya* and प्रवचन *pravacana* together (स्वाध्याय-प्रवचने *svādhyāya-pravacane*) constitute the ONLY occupational duty for a ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇa* in Vedic society. Taittiriya Upanishad calls attention to this two-fold duty (स्वाध्याय-प्रवचने *svādhyāya-pravacane*) again and again, twelve times (1 - 9),



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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 *gītāśāstra*, The ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā*, every person in the society, irrespective of one's वर्णधर्म *varṇa dharma* - one's occupational duties in society, arising from one's स्वभाव गुण *svabhāva guṇas*, every person in the society should try to uplift oneself spiritually to become a ब्राह्मण *brāhmaṇa* by disposition, which means, to uplift oneself to the First Order sequential combination of सत्त्व-रजस्-तमस् गुण *sattva-rajas-tamas guṇa*, because, only that disposition can enable one to ultimately transcend all गुण *guṇas*, including the First Order sequential गुण *guṇa* combination, and become a truly enlightened person, a ज्ञानी *jñānī*, 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 *varṇa dharma* 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 *buddhi*, one need not change one's वर्णधर्म *varṇa dharma* - one's स्वकर्म *svakarma* - one's occupational category of duties into which one is born in the society by virtue of one's पूर्व जन्म संस्कार *pūrva janma saṁskārs*. Whatever कर्म *karma* in which one naturally finds oneself from time to time, one should do that कर्म *karma* joyfully and enthusiastically, for its own sake, being in परमेश्वर *parameśvar* consciousness, and doing every कर्म *karma* as best as one can, at all times. Such being and doing is योग *yoga* in itself - योगः कर्मसु कौशलं *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*, as Sri Krishna said before (2-50). Such excellence in action itself will surely and naturally uplift oneself both materially and spiritually, transcending all गुण *guṇas*, ultimately. We will talk more about this aspect of the glory of वर्णधर्म *varṇa dharma* next time.

Next, Sri Krishna talks about क्षत्रिय कर्म *kṣatriya karma* in Vedic society. The क्षत्रिय *kṣatriyas* 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 kingdom from outside aggression, and also to protect धर्म *dharma*, which means to maintain law, order, justice and peace in the society within the kingdom. Consequently, the क्षत्रिय *kṣatriyas* must have certain personal qualities



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which make them fit for क्षत्रिय कर्म *kṣatriya karma* in society. Calling attention to such qualities, भगवान् *bhagavān* says:

शौर्यम् तेजो धृतिः दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनं ।

śauryam tejo dhṛtiḥ dākṣyam yuddhe cāpyapalāyanam ।

दानं ईश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजं ॥ 18 – 43

dānam īśvarbhāvaśca kṣātram karma svabhāvajam ॥

क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजं *kṣātram karma svabhāvajam* - Arising from the SECOND ORDER sequential combination of गुणसु *guṇas*, the क्षत्रिय कर्म *kṣatriya karma* in the Vedic society naturally manifests itself in the person involved as follows:

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

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

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

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

युद्धे च अपि अपलायनं *yuddhe ca api apalāyanam* - 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 *dānam* - generosity in the art of public administration, ability to give up freely and fearlessly, even one's life if necessary, and

ईश्वर भावः च *īśvara bhāvah ca* - 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 *dharma* in society, which means enforcing law, order and justice in the society, without any fear or favor.

क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजं *kṣātram karma svabhāvajam* - all the above are क्षत्रिय कर्मसु *kṣatriya karmas*, कर्मसु *karmas* natural to the स्वभाव *svabhāva* of क्षत्रियसु *kṣatriyas* in Vedic society



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Now about वैश्य कर्म *vaiśya karma* and शूद्र कर्म *śūdra karma*, which arise respectively from the third ORDER and fourth ORDER sequential गुण *guṇa* combinations. भगवान् *bhagavān* says:

कृषि गौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्य कर्म स्वभावजं ।

kṛṣi gaurakṣyavāṇijyaṁ vaiśya karma svabhāvajaṁ ।

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजं ॥ 18 - 44

paricaryātmakaṁ karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajaṁ ॥

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

गौरक्ष्य *gaurakṣya* - 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 *dharma* - and, in turn, धर्म *dharma* 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 *vāṇijyaṁ* - 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

वैश्य कर्म स्वभावजं *vaiśya karma svabhāvajaṁ* - all these activities constitute the natural occupation of वैश्या *vaiśyas* in Vedic society. Further

परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्य अपि स्वभावजं *paricaryātmakaṁ karma śūdrasya api svabhāvajaṁ* - The very wide variety of कर्म *karmas* needed as auxiliary duties, support services, in all walks of the society constitute the natural occupation of शूद्र *śūdras* in the Vedic society. These शूद्र कर्म वर्णधर्म *śūdra karma varṇa dharmas* 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, शूद्र *śūdras* 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 *varṇa dharma*, it should be clear that ब्राह्मण कर्म *brāhmaṇa karma*, क्षत्रिय कर्म *kṣatriya karma*, वैश्य कर्म *vaiśya karma* and शूद्र कर्म *śūdra karma* are not simply four mutually distinct कर्मs *karmas*, but they are four mutually distinct classes of कर्मs *karmas*, 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 *jīvana karma* - the कर्म *karma* 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 गुणसु *svabhāva guṇas*. From the point of view of one's spiritual growth, the purpose of every कर्म *karma* is the same for everybody, and that is to gain अन्तःकरण शुद्धि *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi* - cleanliness and restoration of the inherent purity of one's mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, which makes a person fit for gaining पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं *pūrṇa īśvara jñānaṁ*.

For that purpose, as pointed out already, one need not, and one should not try to change one's वर्णधर्म *varṇa dharma*, which is one's स्वधर्म *svadharma*, स्वकर्म *svakarma*, one's कर्म *karma* arising from one's स्वभाव गुणसु *svabhāva guṇas* - natural in-born tendencies. One has to change only one's attitude in doing whatever कर्म *karma* that has come to one naturally - तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः *tena tyaktena bhujñithāḥ* - as the Upanishad says, and enjoy doing whatever has been left for you to do by परमेश्वर *parameśvar*.

Sri Krishna gives this message again in the next verse:

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।
sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṁsiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ ।
स्वकर्मनिरातः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥ 18 - 45
svakarmanirātaḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tacchṛṇu ॥

We will see this verse in detail next time.