

Chapter VII

Dharma – its decline and resurrection; Arjuna as Krishna’s closest devotee; Arjuna wonders how Krishna could know Surya and Manu.

“When the *dharma* that has been laid down declines, I incarnate in a human form, from the state of formlessness, in order to revive it and protect it and save the good from fear,” said Krishna. Now, this statement might cause some misgiving. You may ask: will not common people then conclude that *dharma* is something liable to decline and decay? Will they not condemn *dharma* as neither eternal nor truth?

Well. You will grasp the importance of the task of protecting *dharma* only when you consider its origin and purpose. God created this world of change on His own initiative, and He ordained various codes for its upkeep and smooth running. There were rules of correct conduct for every being. These form the *dharma*.

The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri*, meaning “wear”; *dharma* is that which is worn. The nation (*desa*), the body of the Lord, is protected by the *dharma* it wears; the *dharma* also gives the body beauty and joy; it is the yellow garment, the holy apparel of India. It guards both honour and dignity; it protects from chill and lends charm to life. *Dharma* preserves the self-respect of this land. Just as clothes maintain the dignity of the person who wears them, so *dharma* is the measure of the dignity of a people.

Not only this country but every single thing in the world has its own special *dharma*, or uniqueness of duty, and nature. Each has its distinctive clothes! *Dharma* rules the group and the individual. Consider the five elements, the components of the world. Movement and cold are the *dharma* of water; combustion and light are the *dharma* of fire. Each of the five has its unique *dharma*. Humanity for humans, animality for animals, these *dhar-mas* guard them from decline. How can fire be fire if it has no power of combustion and light? It must manifest the *dharma* to be itself. When it loses that, it becomes a lifeless bit of charcoal.

Similarly, people have some natural characteristics that are their very life breath. They are also called abilities. People can be identified as humans only as long as these abilities are found in them. If these abilities are lost, one is no longer “human”. To preserve and foster such qualities and abilities, certain modes of behaviour and lines of thought, are laid down. *Dharma* will not decline if these precepts and procedures are kept up. *Dharma* is not imported from somewhere outside, nor can it be removed. It is your own genuine nature, your uniqueness. It is the thing that makes a human out of an animal. How to observe *dharma*? By being “yourself”. If a thing breaks loose from its *dharma* and behaves as the whim dictates, then it is doing *a-dharma*.

This inborn (*sahaja*) *dharma* of humanity was overpowered in course of time; those who supported it, encouraged it, and derived joy from it declined. So, in common parlance, it was said to have been “destroyed”, although it is something that cannot be destroyed. It is only like the weed overpowering the crop. So the “establishment of *dharma*” is only weeding the field. Now in this iron age (*kali-yuga*), *dharma* has become a mere matter of words. *Dharma* is not just the magical manipulation of words. This must be clearly understood. What has to be spoken is truth; what has to be acted is *dharma*.

“Speak the truth, do your duty (*sathyam vadha, dharmam chara*)” has been the clarion call of the *Upanishads*, the repositories of Indian culture. These glorious teachings have been forgotten today; they have been turned upside down. In fact, “speak *dharma*” is the order of the day! The first step in the decline of *dharma* is

this descent from deed to word, the belief that a thing is done when it is only uttered! In fact, this is not *dharma*.

But what is not practised cannot possess strength. The crocodile's strength depends upon its being in water; the strength of *dharma* depends upon its being practised. It becomes weak when it is taken out of practice and thrown on the sands of words. Truth is a matter of speech, it gets strength when it is practised in speech; it is difficult to practise it in action. "Strength" has two meanings here: animal strength and *dharmic* strength. Bhima had physical strength, but while his elder brother, Dharmaja, was by his side, Bhima's strength became *dharmic*. The Pandavas were saved by their adherence to *dharmic* strength! But for that, they would have suffered defeat even in the very beginning. The Pandavas, without Dharmaja, whatever their resources, would have been an easy match for their opponents. Just ponder over that. How were the Kauravas destroyed, in spite of their vastly superior resources? They did not have *dharmic* strength. All they could rely on was sheer animal strength. The day when Dharmaja and Bhima, those who had *dharmic* strength, moved into the forest, *a-dharma* penetrated into the land of the Kauravas.

So, the *dharma* that has now been exiled into the forest has to be restored to the villages and towns in order to establish plenty, prosperity, and peace to the world. From the reign of *dharma*-lessness, the world has to enter the era of *dharma*. Special effort is called for when you cultivate a crop; no effort is necessary when weeds and wild grass are allowed to grow. The valuable crop of inborn (*sahaja*) *dharma* has to be cultivated with all care and attention. When *dharma* is practised, the lack of *dharma* will decline by itself. No special exertion is needed for putting it out of action. Therefore, in this present context, the establishment of *dharma* means the growth of the practice of *dharma*.

What does it mean when people say, "the sun has set"? Only, "it is not visible to us." So too, simply because *dharma* is not evident, you cannot say it has gone out of existence. How can it go out of existence? If it goes, it cannot be truth or *dharma*. *Dharma*, since it is associated with truth, is indestructible. The real establishment of *dharma* (*dharma-sthapana*) is to make the *dharma* that has become hidden visible once again. Krishna is doing exactly that.

Using Arjuna as an instrument, He is bringing to light the codes of conduct and modes of thought that were laid down as *dharma* from the very beginning and once again enforcing their practice. This is referred to as the raising of *dharma* (*dharmoddharana*). He is reviving something that is lost. This work cannot be carried out by ordinary people. So, the universal Basis, the universal Lord, has to assume the task Himself. He alone is all-powerful. He is teaching the world through Arjuna.

If Arjuna were an individual like others, he could not be the recipient and transmitter of this great teaching. So, you must infer that Arjuna was really a great man. He is a hero who has defeated not merely the outer foes, but even the inner ones. Weak hearts cannot grasp the *Gita* and put it into practice. It is with this full knowledge and this high purpose that Krishna selected Arjuna as the vehicle and showered on him His Grace.

Once, while Krishna was conversing intimately with Arjuna, He made this statement (note the over-powering grace that Krishna showed!): "Arjuna, you are My closest devotee. Not only that; you are My dearest friend. I have no friend as dear as you are. That is why I taught you this supreme, secret teaching."

Reflect on this. Many in the world are only self-styled devotees. The Lord has not accepted them as such. To get the title from the Lord Himself is great good-fortune, and that is the highest credential. The devotee must melt the heart of the Lord and get from Him the acknowledgement of devotion. If the title is taken by oneself, it

gives paltry satisfaction, not genuine joy. Arjuna was the only person who got the title of devotee from the Lord Himself. So you can understand how pure-hearted, how deserving Arjuna was. You might say a hundred things about yourself; you might advance this claim and that; but you must show the acknowledgement from the Lord. Without that, all your talk is empty boast; devotion must be won by implicit obedience. But that alone is not sufficient. That is also why Krishna uses the word “friend (*mithra*)”. The friend has no fear; that makes him a more perfect recipient.

Now we shall resume the trend and go back to the *Gita*. When Arjuna listened to Krishna’s words, he developed a head full of doubts. He became agitated. Not only he but all people nowadays are worried by doubts. Moreover, in the complex spiritual field and the field of knowledge concerning Godhead, there are two possible interpretations: the outer and the inner. Ordinary people accept the outer, while those who have some experience of the Lord seek to know the inner.

As the saying goes, “like the mole in the eye, the stone in the shoe, the thorn in the foot, the faction in the home” is this “doubt in the brain”. When such doubts assail Arjuna, who is the representative human, it means they are humanity’s own doubts. They can be solved only by Madhava (Krishna), who is beyond and above humanity. That is why Krishna is ready, by Arjuna’s side, to remove any doubt and plant joy in the heart.

Now, what exactly is the doubt? Krishna was born at the end of the third era (the *dwapara-yuga*); Surya and Manu are people of the past. How then could these two meet Krishna? It cannot be a physical relationship, for many generations separate Krishna from the other two. Krishna is Arjuna’s contemporary, so how did Krishna teach this *yoga* to Surya? To sit quietly, listening to unbelievable stories, is itself a sign of poverty of intellect. Every moment, Arjuna’s uneasiness increased. This was observed by Krishna, who is everywhere and in everything. He said, “What is the cause of the restlessness that I notice in you? Tell Me,” prodding Arjuna with a smile.

Arjuna was glad he got a chance. “Madhava! I do not understand your words. They confuse me so much that I am losing a little of the faith that I have in you. But, I pray, excuse me for asking this, please solve my doubt. I cannot stand it any more,” Arjuna pleaded with folded hands.

Gopala (Krishna) was glad, and He asked him what the doubt was. Arjuna then said, “You said that this *yoga* was taught to Surya and Manu; of what distant past are these two? And to which age do you belong? Did you teach them while in this body? That is unbelievable, for Your body is only four or five years older than mine. You are not older than that. When did You teach them, without my being aware of it? And the Sun! He is greater than You, many times greater. He is there from the very beginning, from a past that is beyond our imagination. I cannot believe it; no, not even the most intelligent person can prove it true. Let it be! You may say. ‘This is not the body, this is not the age; it was while I was in another body and during another age’. That makes it still more strange. How can anyone remember what happened in a previous birth? If you say that it is possible to have such memory, then it must apply to me also, right?”

“The scriptures declare that only a few divine beings keep such things in memory; that mortals cannot hold them in remembrance. Well, I may accept that You are divine. But I have to accept that Surya, the sun, is also divine. How can two persons equal in divine status teach and learn from each other? When You teach and he learns, he becomes Your disciple, doesn’t he? You must then be taken to be superior to Surya. Let us take it to be so. I accept that you are the Lord God Himself. That creates further difficulties for me. For why should God be bound by birth and death and activity? When you assume the five-foot human form, is it not a limitation on the Limit-

less? From that infinite limitless Universal, why should God incarnate as the limited particular? No matter how I argue within myself, I cannot solve this doubt. Your words are meaningful for You only: they convey no meaning to me. My head is confused; give me some guidance, some convincing reply,” prayed Arjuna.

Krishna laughed within Himself, recognizing that the appropriate moment had come. He said, “Arjuna! what exactly do people mean when they say the sun has risen and the sun has set? It is only as far as their vision is concerned; that is all, is it not? The sun does not rise, it does not set. I am also like that. I am not born, nor do I die. People of ordinary intellect consider that I am born many times and that I do many deeds during each birth. Whenever there is the need for the uplift of the world, I become manifest, assuming a name and a form, that is all. So I am conscious of all My appearances, all My manifestations. I am Almighty, I am omniscient (*sarva-jna*). Not only I, even you know everything. But your power of wisdom is overwhelmed by ignorance. I am wisdom itself, so I know everything.

“When the sun is seen in a mirror, it loses neither its status nor its glory. It is unaffected; its glory is undiminished. So also I am reflected in nature; and that does not diminish any of My glory or status.

I remain as Almighty and as Omniscient (*sarva-jna*) as ever. I am birthless, immortal. Humans are born as a result of the merit and demerit of previous births. Perhaps you think that this holds true for *Avatars* also. No. Yours is a *karmic* birth; mine is a birth of divine play. Prayers of the good are the cause of My birth. The misdeeds of the wicked are also the cause!”