

## Chapter IX

The caste system; the Lord shows no partiality; action versus inaction.

**A**lthough purity of mind is the primary thing, for the protection of society and the individual in the realm of the divine, the caste (*varna*) organization is also very important. It can never be blown off by ridicule, criticism, or condemnation, for welfare is essential for all. Therefore, rulers and scholars must give up feelings of anger and hatred, calmly delve into the pros and cons, and bring the organization into some good order. That is the thing to do. It is not proper for wise people and intelligent scholars to support the meaningless criticisms of the envious and ignorant. Those who deny caste are themselves forming a caste; those who deny religion are themselves forming a new religion. Even those who know much become prejudiced against castes and talk as if they are as ignorant as the rest. That is the wonder!

Every object has certain limits; if it exceeds the limits or breaks through them, it gets destroyed. What is the test of its identity? The coordination between its nature and its form. If it has the form but not the nature, then it is unreal, false. So too, if each class has no special limits, how can it be identified as a class? It will be neither this nor that, an amorphous mass, a confused group. The caste system is a divinely decided organization, so it was fostered and continued by the great sages, saints, and elders for many generations. But in this iron age (*kali-yuga*), the brainiest dismiss it as useless junk.

Without deep inquiry, without discrimination, if people look at this organization from the external, the individual standpoint, how can they arrive at the right conclusions? The sanctity and value of the caste system will be revealed if you have “inner sight”, a “universal outlook”, and an “inquiring spirit”. Just as the butter inherent in milk is made patent by the process of churning, so too the specific value of the four castes will become manifest only through the process of discriminating inquiry. Then, prejudices will perish and reality will be revealed.

The four castes are like the limbs of the same body. They have evolved out of the same divine body—the *brahmins* from the face, the warriors from the hands, the businessmen from the thighs, and the labourers from the feet. Of course, these expressions have a deeper inner meaning. Those who, like the guru, teach the principles of wisdom are the voice; they are the *brahmins*. The strong armed bear the burden of the earth; they are the warriors. The social edifice is upheld, as on pillars, by the businessmen, so they are figuratively described as emanating from the thighs of the divine Person. And, like the feet that are engaged in going about on all kinds of activities, the labourers are ever engaged in the basic tasks of society. The peace and happiness of society will suffer if even a single caste is slack in its task. All castes are worthwhile and valuable, just as all limbs are important. There is no higher or lower. Hatred and rivalry in society are as harmful as the stoppage of work by all the limbs in anger against the stomach!

A sugar doll is sweet all over. Break off its head and eat it; it is sweet. Break off a leg and eat it: it is as sweet as the head. Then how can the castes, which are the limbs of the self-same Divinity, be pronounced higher or lower? Limbs are different, but the very same red blood flows in all and animates all. There is no special variety for the hand or leg or face. The caste system is ordained by the *Vedas*, so there can be no injustice in it; it is not an artifice invented by people. So those who try to create differences and hatred by their inconsiderate remarks about it are only exhibiting their ignorance.

It looks as if those people who argue that “the abolition of the caste system will bring about human welfare”

are the only ones anxious to promote human welfare! They believe that those who consider the system to be beneficial are really eager to promote the downfall of the human society! Of course, both are delusions. But this much is true: those who support the caste system are really more interested in the promotion of human welfare. The others think that if castes go, they will be saving the country. That is a deluded belief. If only virtues and faults are analyzed carefully and without prejudice, there will be an end to this uninformed campaign of hatred and enmity. Then there will be a great change in the attitude of people toward the caste system.

Increased hatred will not benefit anyone. To pursue the ideal of “all are equal” is like running after the mirage to slake one’s thirst. It will only breed discontent. The rulers must now assemble and consult the representatives of the people —namely, pundits and experienced elders— and discuss the value of this ancient system of social organization. Instead, if they just decide on the basis of external forms and features that there is some poison in this and run into panic, that will only reveal their ignorance. The rulers, as well as the pundits, have the happiness of the people at heart; why, this caste system originated with that very end in view. It has led to comments because it was not practised according to the continued counsels of the wise.

Take one small example. Some nations have manufactured bombs that can wipe out a million people at one burst. Although they know this is bad, the rulers themselves encourage it. If the bombs are used as the whim takes them, ruin will fall on all. When chaos threatens, they are to be used only for self-defense; the purpose is not the destruction of the world but the protection of the values of one’s own country and culture. So also, the caste system is to be treated as strong armament to protect the country and culture. The rules and regulations, the restrictions and recommendations, are all to defend the people from ruin. They are disciplines that have to be honoured in the way they are laid down and followed strictly and correctly. To deal with them as the whim dictates, without regard to the directing bounds, limits, and boundaries, is to invite anarchy.

Therefore, the elders, the rulers, the great pundits, and the leaders of the community guarded and fostered this organization and preserved it; think of this for a while and the truth will flash on you, whether it is beneficial or not. If it was ruinous to society, would they have fostered it? Do you mean to say they were all foolish, or that they did not have the present type of scholarship, or that they were brainless?

No, no. Their intelligence, scholarship, and spiritual eminence, their spirit of inquiry, and their impartial, unprejudiced approach to social problems can be found only among one in a hundred today. Ascetics who dedicated all their intellectual and moral strength for the welfare of the world (a task that was the very breath of their life), *yogis*, spiritual warriors, and great seers who sought to confer true contentment to the human community —these were the framers of the social organization that the “moderns” condemn. They were not like the reformers of today, who yearn for welfare in a profusion of words but who undermine by their actions the very thing they profess to yearn for! This type of trick was unknown to the ancient sages. Modern ideas and plans are hollow and insincere. The present plans are all castles in the air. They cater more to the conceit of the planners and do not carry much meaning to others. The castles start falling down even while construction is proceeding in another place!

Just as the body is for the individual (*jivi*), the world is for the Lord. Whatever happens in any part of the body affects the soul; so too, all that affects any part of the world moves the Lord; He becomes cognizant of it and reacts to it. Just as you are interested in all the limbs of the body being in perfect trim, the Lord is interested in seeing that every country and every part of the world is happy and contented. Can He, will He, harm any country that is primarily a part of Himself? In matters relating to the Lord, all have equal rights, all are equal.

Yet, one limb cannot carry out the duties of another; each must do its allotted task. So too, each caste must carry out its allotted share of the activities of society and contribute its best to the welfare of the country. Just as the body has stages, society has castes. If all start trading, who will be the buyers? If all are engaged in fighting, who is to provide the wherewithal for their upkeep and maintenance—the food, armor, and equipment? So, each one has to do their share of social activity and ensure peace, harmony, and happiness. That is the wise course, the best organization of society.

Now, instead of attending to essential tasks, people are engaged in internecine struggle, fearing that the castes are great obstacles to progress. How can people who are unable to keep their body under control keep the country within limits? Consider that the fostering of the caste system, which was fostered for so long by the ancients, is the most beneficial thing that has to be done.

The Lord showed no partiality while organizing the caste system. He has no such trait in Him. Some people ask why the Lord should have such differences. No, He has no sense of inferior or superior. He is sweet all over, like a lump of sugar. All differences and distinctions are the property of individuals (*jivis*), who do not know the *Atmic* reality; they are the illusions of the individuals, who falsely identify themselves with the non-*Atma*.

Consider this example. A mother has four children, but she pays less attention to the other three than to the child in the cradle. Even if the baby does not call out for food, she is ever vigilant to feed it. The other three have to come and worry her for food and things to play with. Observing this, you cannot pronounce her a bad mother or a partial mother. The mother adjusts her activities to the capacity and ability of the child. So too, although the entire world is His, though all are His children, He has fixed upon each a part of the responsibility of the work of society according to capacity and ability. To ascribe faults to such selfless, sincere, simple, ever-blissful providence is like attributing darkness to the sun! Darkness and the rays of the sun cannot exist together; how then can the sun be the home of darkness? People who carp so at the sun do not know the sun at all. It is sheer folly, complete ignorance.

Really, from a deep spiritual (*adi-atmic*) point of view, the castes can be characterized in another way: those who are established in the contemplation of *Brahman* are *brahmins*; those who oppose untruth are warriors; those who systematically discriminate the true from the false are the business people; those who are ever active and follow truth in everyday life are the labourers. The happiness of humanity can be amply realized only when castes function in this way.

Now we shall revert to the subject. Krishna addressed Arjuna. “The four castes have been created by Me on the basis of quality (*guna*) and action (*karma*). Though I am the doer as far as they are concerned, I am still a non-doer! Pay attention to the fundamental principle, and then you will realize that action, which is basically consciousnessless and material, cannot affect the *Atma*, which is suffused with consciousness. The *Atma* is inherently devoid of attachment. It has no awareness of agency or of its own needs or nature of its possessions. It has no ‘I’ or ‘mine’, for these are marks of ignorance (*a-jnana*). Only those afflicted with ignorance will suffer from the ego or sense of ‘mine’. Although it may appear to ordinary eyes that I am the doer, I am a non-doer!

“Not only this. Action does not cease to affect the doer as soon as the action is finished. In fact, it is never finished. Action yields fruits; the fruits of action breed desire for them; desire results in impulses for further action; and the impulses bring about further births. Thus, action leads to the cycle of births and deaths; it is a vicious whirlpool, making you revolve round and round and finally dragging you down into the depths.

“Arjuna, listen well to another point also. Action (*karma*) as such has no capacity to bind; it is the conceit ‘I

am the doer' that brings about the attachment and the bond; it is the desire to earn the fruit that produces the bondage. For example, the zero gets value only with association with a digit. Action is zero; if agency or the feeling of 'doer' is associated with the action; then it breeds bonds. So, Arjuna, give up the sense of 'I', and the action that you do will never harm you. Action done without any desire for the fruits thereof will not produce impulses; that is to say, there will not even be impulse for birth. The aspirants of past ages performed action with this high ideal in view. They never felt that they were the 'doers' or 'enjoyers of the fruits' of any act. The Lord did, the Lord gave the fruit, the Lord enjoyed the fruit—that was their conviction. This world has only a relative value; it has no absolute existence; that was their faith. Arjuna! You too should cultivate that faith and earn that conviction. Do so; then your mind will become clarified and pure.

“Know also the distinction between activity (*karma*), wrong action (*vi-karma*) and nonaction. I will tell you the main points of difference now. Listen. Not all can grasp the distinction. Many aspirants get confused about this. They take it that one's own *dharma* is action and that all actions done not as duty (*dharma*) but with a view to earn self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*) are wrong actions! Whatever the action, if it is done in the darkness and confusion of ignorance, however hard you may have exercised your abilities during the activity, its result can only be worry, grief, and travail. It can never result in equanimity, balance, or calm. One has to win action in non-action and non-action through action. That is the hallmark of wisdom.

“Non-action means action-lessness, according to some. But to explain it in simpler language, understand that the activities of the limbs, the senses, intelligence, the feelings, the emotions, and mind are all actions. Now, non-action means among other things non-activity, too. That is to say, it is the attribute of the *Atma*. So non-action means the characteristic of the *Atma*. When you travel in a bus or train or boat, the illusion is created that the trees and hills on either side travel along and the person feels that he is stationary! The movement of the chariot imposes on hill and tree the quality of movement; so too, people who are unaware of the principles enunciated in the scriptures delude themselves into the belief that the *Atma* is doing all the activities of the senses and the body. Well, which is the genuine non-action or activity-lessness? The experience of *Atma* is the perfect activity-lessness; that is your real nature. It will not do if you simply desist from external acts. You should realize the *Atmic* fundamental, not merely renounce action, for it is impossible to be completely activity-less.”