

22. Caste depends more on qualities than on birth

So too, the four castes are four characteristics (*gunas*). According to their nature and their activities, the four castes have been ordained. Like the fruits on the same tree, some tender, some green, and some ripe, men are classified into four groups according to their stage of development, which is judged from their actions and character.

Those in whose thoughts and behaviour the pure quality (*sathwa-guna*) predominates are grouped as *brahmins*, who are progressing along the path toward Brahman. Those in whom the active quality (*rajoguna*) is dominant are referred to as protectors or warriors (*kshatriyas*). Thus, the scriptures (*sastras*) have spoken of ingrained qualities as the basis of caste, not otherwise. Why? The *Gita* itself proclaims that the four castes have been established by the Lord, taking into consideration (1) the dominance of any of the three qualities (*gunas*) and (2) the practice of actions (*karmas*) like repetition of the name (*japa*), meditation (*dhyana*), and other disciplinary duties!

Although born as a labourer (*sudra*), a person does attain *brahmin*-hood through the struggle toward Brahman and spiritual exercise. Although born as a *brahmin*, if that ideal and the effort to attain it is not found, one becomes a labourer.

Good conduct (*anushtana*) and strict discipline (*nishta*) are the criteria, the deciding factors.

The inner *Atmic* principle is the same in all. It knows no caste or class or conflict.