

Chapter XXIV. The Divine Body

Fourfold division of mankind

The sociological basis of Indian (*Bharathiya*) culture has to be clearly understood. Mankind falls into four groups, when innate nature and inclinations are considered. They are named *brahmin*, warrior (*kshatriya*), trader (*vaisya*), and labourer (*sudra*). This demarcation is not a selfish, crooked conspiracy designed to make the “superior” trample upon the “inferior”. Nor is it the consequence of an envious plot to obstruct human progress. It is best to judge it as a plan to promote the expansion of human achievement by fostering the trends and traits of each person. It is the royal road for the attainment of human progress. It works only for the promotion and regulation of human activity in such a manner that harmony and social well-being are ensured.

As readers already know, the teacher of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna, declared,

I created the four castes (*varnas*), the *brahmin*, the warrior (*kshatriya*), the merchant (*vaisya*), and the laborer (*sudra*), on the bases of natural disposition and vocation of each. Know Me to be author of these, as also the non-author, the Unchangeable.

*Chaathurvarnyam mayaa srishtam, guna karma Vibhaagasah, tasya karthaaramapi maam
Viddhi akarthaaram avyayam.*

The system of caste is thus founded on attributes and activities. The world was in the very beginning predominantly pure (*sathwic*) in nature and, as a consequence, all were only *brahmins*. Later, through the adoption of various vocations and the development of various inclinations and preferences, types of people got demarcated as castes. The one and only *brahmin* class of sages (*rishis*) had later to be sectionalized, in the interest of social justice and harmony, when qualities of character varied. In the *Santhi Parva* (*Mahabharatha*), Sage Bhriгу elaborately answered a question raised about this development by Sage Bharadwaja. It runs as follows:

“*Brahmins* who are fond of worldly pleasures, affected by egotism, and subject to anger, lust, and other passions have passionate qualities (*rajoguna*) mixed with their innate pure (*sathwic*) nature, so they were classified as warriors (*kshatriyas*). In fact, all *brahmins* cannot be predominantly pure (*sathwic*) in nature, nor can all of them be devoted to pure ritual activity. Those who do not adhere to the pure (*sathwic*) ideal of truth and who evince the qualities of dullness (*thamoguna*) mixed with passionate (*rajasic*) traits, those who are mostly both dull (*thamasic*) and passionate (*rajasic*), were classed as merchants (*vaisyas*). The rest, who spend their lives in occupations involving violence, who don’t practise cleanliness, and who are bogged down in passive (*thamasic*) means of livelihood were classed as labourers (*sudras*). Thus, the *brahmins* denoted various castes and ensured the safety and security of human society. This is the assertion of the revealed scriptures (*sruthis*).”

Those endowed with pure (*sathwic*) characteristics are *brahmins*. Those with passionate (*rajasic*) qualities and, as a result, equipped with courage and heroism, are warriors (*kshatriyas*), who can protect mankind from harm. Those who have neither valour nor heroism but who are proficient in persuasive talent and the tactics of commerce and eager to use these skills in proper methods are traders (*vaisyas*). In this class, the passionate and passive qualities (*rajoguna* and *thamoguna*) are blended.

The others, who have no inclination for undergoing asceticism or acquiring scholarship, who do not prac-

tise spiritual discipline (*sadhana*), who have no physical stamina and mental courage necessary for battle, who do not possess the special skill needed for trade and commerce, are passive (*thamasic*) in nature and so engage themselves in *thamasic* professions. These are labourers (*sudras*). They fulfil themselves by their labour, through which they contribute to world prosperity and peace.

Four castes: limbs of divine cosmic energy

The four castes are only limbs of one body; they are not separate entities. There is no basis to consider one superior and another inferior. Each performs its function so that the body can be healthy and happy, so that each can win the highest state of consciousness from its own role. So, the ancient *Vedic* caste (*varna*) organization based on such broad ideals was taken to be the divine plan. The plan witnessed the truth that the four castes were the four limbs of the one divine cosmic Person (*Purusha*).

This truth becomes clear when we consider the divine statement in *Purusha Sukta* found in the *Rigveda*:

The *brahmins*, those with pure (*sathwic*) nature and established in higher knowledge or wisdom, are the face of the cosmic Person;

The warriors, those who are predominantly courageous, physically strong, having in their nature pure and passionate (*rajasic*) qualities, are the arms of the cosmic Person;

The merchants, those who have a passionate (*rajasic*) nature mixed with inertia (*thamas*) and are efficient in the arts of commerce, are the thighs of the cosmic Person;

The labourers, those who are active and engaged in physical labour and are endowed with dullness (*thamas*) are the feet of the cosmic Person.

Braahmano sya mukham aseeth

Baahuu raajanyah krithah

Uuruu thadhasya yadhvaisyah

Padhbyaam shuudhro ajaayatha.

The Lord is thus described in the *Rigveda* as the wondrous and splendrous embodiment of such components.

But this holy and profoundly significant caste (*varna*) organization fell into the hands of unintelligent selfish people with restricted outlook and narrow ideals; they expounded it in writing as their fancy dictated. Thereby, they brought about great harm to the world. As a result, the system is interpreted today as a plan designed by the majority to suppress the minority!

An integrated vision of society

Caste is the cosmic Person Himself, manifesting as human society. It is the visible form of the Lord, charming in every limb. It is a great pity that this truth is not widely recognized. It is the good fortune of this land, India (Bharath), that in this vision the Lord, as the physical integration of the “caste limbs”, is promoting peace, harmony, prosperity, and well-being for all mankind. Not aware of this truth, people declare that this system is only a man-made contrivance and that, in fact, all people are equal. They base this conclusion on external characteristics and breed agitations on the basis that all mankind is one species.

Of course, it is true that all people are of one species. But distinct groups do emerge as a result of differences in character and the professions they adopt. This is an inevitable development. No one can deny this. All are not pure (*sathwic*) in this world of humanity; only a very few are of this nature. Judging from mere appearance, one can't declare that all people are one. We have to distinguish and discriminate and group those with pure, passionate, and dull (*sathwic*, *rajasic*, *thamasic*) natures, or combinations of one or more of those natures, separately. No one can say this is wrong.

In a general way, predominantly dull (*thamasic*) natures are grouped as labourers (*sudras*); but, among them, don't we have many who are of pure (*sathwic*) quality? Among those who are grouped as *brahmins*, the pure *sathwic* type, don't we have many who are predominantly dull (*thamasic*)? Therefore, the *Vedic* religion of India (Bharath) has clearly laid down that appearance alone or birth to a family alone cannot decide caste; it has to be determined on the bases of character and occupation.

The four castes (*varnas*) are the limbs of the divine body, of the one and only Lord. Each is important and indispensable for its own role. The goal of each is to serve the Lord by serving humanity, rendering service in accordance with its *dharma*, the accredited mores of conduct and modes of behaviour.

Some people assert that *brahmins* and not labourers (*sudras*) have the right and responsibility to practise spiritual disciplines or austerities (*tapas*). What we have to remember here is that the restriction is for the labourer nature, not for individuals born as labourers; the permission is for the *brahmin* nature, not for all individuals born as *brahmins*.

Cows are useless as animals for riding; horses are useless as yielders of milk. These statements are based not on hatred of the species or malice against any of them but on the nature and characteristics of the animals concerned. Both are quadrupeds. However, their distinct natures decide that one is useful for the milk it yields and the other for riding purposes. The castes are based not on race or birth but on innate nature and tendencies and the profession adopted and pursued.

Unity of individual and cosmic spirit

All sparks are fire. They cannot be declared separate, nor is there a need to assert that they are not separate. So too, people or individualized beings are not separate from the Universal Absolute (*Brahman*), nor is there a need to assert that they are not separate. There is only one caste, humanity.

The relation between *Brahman* and the individual soul (*jiva*) is not one of identity or oneness but of cause-effect. Until liberation is attained, the particular is distinct, separate. When liberated, since the cause of individualization is absent, the individual soul (*jiva*) is one with *Brahman*. Separation and oneness of the individual soul and *Brahman* are the consequences of the delusion of bondage and the awareness of freedom.

Brahman is self-effulgent, self-illuminating. It is not the "object" of consciousness; It cognizes all objects. All things and beings belong to the category of "seen" or "observed" or "known". It is the seer, not the seen. When the form is the "seen", the mind is the "seer"; when the mind and the activities of the intellect are the "seen" or "observed", then the witnessing consciousness is the "seer".

This witness can be seen by no one. All things cognizable are the body of the *Atma*, not the *Atma*. They are name-form combinations like pots and pans of clay, which impinge on the consciousness as "seen" or delude it like the "silver" on "mother of pearl". The *Atma* is; It exists by and for Itself. The universe is the "other", for

others; it is “real” and available for others. The universe has no innate reality. It emanates from *Brahman*, and its reality is based on the reality of *Brahman*. So, its reality is lower than that of *Brahman*.

The illusion created by a magician for deluding others cannot affect the magician himself. In the same manner, since the universe is contrived by *Brahman*, it is clear that it cannot affect *Brahman* Itself.

Maya: ideational superimposition of Reality

The universe appears to have emanated, as being experienced as such, and as disintegrating. These three are but superimposed ideations upon the One modification-less reality, just like the snake superimposed upon the rope, at dusk. This ideation is illusion (*maya*), for it hides and reveals at the same time. Illusion cannot be said to be unreal. The rope appearing as snake is known again as rope when the snake disappears. But the universe does not disappear in the same manner. Its existence cannot be explained away. It is a unique phenomenon; we cannot compare it with any other. We cannot dismiss it as unreal or accept it as real. It is truth-untruth (*sat-asat*), not untruth. That is to say, real-unreal, not unreal.

It persists for some time and is therefore real. It does not persist for all time and is therefore unreal. A thing can be true only as long as it is not something different; while dealing with it on the temporary practical relative level, the universe remains as universe. It is relatively real. Truth is one, it has one feature only. The universe has manifold features through time, space, and causation, so it is unreal. Sankara proclaimed the universe (*jagath*) to be unreal. When the highest truth is known, the universe is revealed as but an appearance on the Real and as distinct from the basic *Brahman*. Since the universe is imposed by the mind on the *Brahmic* truth, it too is to be treated as a *Brahmic* phenomenon. “All this is indeed *Brahman* (*Sarvam Khalvidham Brahman*).”

Brahman, the Cause of all causes

In fact, *Brahman* and illusion (*maya*) have an intimate relationship. Truth, once established and fixed, is ever unaffected. And illusion is not fundamentally true. What is learned by the impact of appearance is pseudo-knowledge (*mithya jnana*); it is non-knowledge (*a-vidya*). The illusion (*mithya* or *a-vidya*, ignorance) will vanish as soon as the appearance is negated and the truth is grasped. Illusion is neither invalid nor valid.

The universe appears to each in accordance with the point of view or the angle of vision. It has no independent existence, apart from the ideations that are projected by and from the observer. Its support and sustenance is *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the unaffected cause. The effect will not have any effect on It. Illusion is the effect that is prone to inevitable change.

Brahman is the one supreme truth, which has assumed the manifoldness of the universe (*jagath*), consequent on the influence of illusion. When *Brahman* is cognized as with illusion, It becomes the material cause of the universe. It is in the universe as the universe. *Brahman* is said to be the instrumental cause of the universe, but illusion is the prompting influence. *Brahman* is beyond both cause and effect. It cannot be a cause, either instrumental or material.

The universe can be conceived as a picture; the plain canvas is *Brahman*, and the colours spread on it form the universe. The appearances immanent on the canvas, the human figures, are dark. The individual soul (*jiva*) is the experiencer of pain and grief through involvement with the universe. He is the “seen”, “the observed”. *Brahman* is truth; the universe is the play, the pantomime, the sport. It is the manifestation of the will that is latent in

Brahman. To recognize the will behind the play is to attain liberation.

Four prerequisites for the Vedantic path

Meditation (*dhyana*), worship (*puja*), rites and rituals, and other activities are laid down for those too dull to recognize this will. Only those who can renounce triple fruits of worldly endeavour can claim the right to follow the path of wisdom (*jnana*). Spiritual seekers on the *Vedantic* path must be equipped with:

- (1) discrimination to distinguish the transient from the eternal,
- (2) determination to desist from worldly and other-worldly pleasures,
- (3) sense control, self control, detachment, fortitude, faith, and equanimity, and
- (4) keen yearning for liberation.

All things have to be viewed as products of the Divine Will and used with the reverence that this knowledge will kindle in the consciousness.

The paths of holy activity (*karma*) and intellectual discrimination (*jnana*) are intended for different spiritual seekers. It is not possible to mix the two and follow them together. Righteous living can confer new life; prosperity is the gift of the knowledge of *dharma*; liberation is the gift of the knowledge of *Brahman*. The awareness of *Brahman* does not demand for its continuance and constancy the practice of any spiritual practice (*sadhana*). It does not depend on the performance of any specific duties and chores.

Liberation is of two kinds: immediate and gradual. The first is the result of the attainment of wisdom (*jnana*). The second is the result of worship (*upasana*), spiritual study, and spiritual discipline. Wisdom (*jnana*) is pure, unmixed, monistic experience. Devotion (*bhakti*) is of the nature of supreme love, characterized by love for God, for the sake only of the Lord.