

# Bhagavadgīta

Jnani speaks to Jijnasu

Jijnasu Vasudeva

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Jnani speaks to Jīnasu

Jīnasu Vasudeva

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA YOGA ANUSANDHANA SAMSTHANA (SVYASA)**

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## *Preface*

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Considering that there may be students who would wish to study their subjects beyond the scope of academics, this is being made available as one of the reference books.

The book refrains from using religious parlance, and views Kṛṣṇa as a Jñāni rather than as the ultimate Godhead. This is not to refute such views, but since this is a study of the Gītā as a Yōgāśāstra intended for the students of the yogic *sciences*, all these are not pertinent here; it is only apt here to view Kṛṣṇa as a Yōgēśvara (master of yōga). In this regard, some of the little known aspects of Kṛṣṇa (from Mahābhārata and Śrīmadbhāgavatam) have been appropriately cited.

The 18 chapters of the Bhagavadgītā have been covered in 12 Units that have been grouped into 4 Blocks. Some chapters receive more elucidation than others, and therefore the eighteen chapters are not distributed evenly across the four blocks. The first six chapters constitute the first two blocks, and the remaining twelve chapters the next two blocks.

The analyses of the verses are based primarily on Śrī Śāṅkarabhāṣya (the commentary of Ādi Śāṅkarācārya on the Gītā) with contemporary allegories and explanations provided where relevant.

JIJNASU VASUDEVA

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## Block 1: Prelude and Chapters 1-2

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### Chapters covered:

- ✚ Chapter 1 (Arjuna Viṣāda Yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 2 (Sāṅkhya Yōga)

This block covers the first two chapters of the Bhagavadgītā (or shortly, Gītā) after a brief prelude.

The prelude section firstly sets the backdrop for the epic conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna by summarizing the events leading up to that crucial moment in the battlefield. Secondly, the obvious yet overlooked unique features of the Gītā among spiritual texts are highlighted. Thirdly, certain misconceptions that are widespread about the Gītā are countered with appropriate details from the Mahābhārata.

In this academic study of the text we can accomplish only an introductory analysis. Therefore, not all the chapters are explored equally deeply. Second chapter is generally acknowledged to be the most important, and will be covered with special attention in this block.

***"Krishna can never be understood until you have studied the Gita, for he was the embodiment of his own teaching."***

*- Swami Vivekananda*

# 1. Prelude - The Epic behind the epic dialogue

## 1.1. Introduction

Bhagavadgītā is by far the most popular scriptural text of Sanātana dharma. As you are already aware, it is a *Smṛti* (memory based text)<sup>1</sup>, a reiteration of the teachings of *Śruti* (direct revelations — the Vēdas). Indeed, Gītā is proclaimed by prominent scholars and realized beings (such as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya<sup>2</sup>) as the quintessence of the Vēdas (and particularly the Upaniṣats). We will begin our study of this sacred text with the following invocation chant which also serves as a basic introduction of the text.

ॐ पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयं  
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्ये महाभारतम् ।  
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीं अष्टादशाध्यायिनीं  
अंब त्वां अनुसन्दधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥

ōm pārthāya pratibōdhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇēna svayam  
vyāsēna grathitām purāṇamuninā madhyē mahābhāratam  
advaitāmṛtavarṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśādhyāyiniīm  
amba tvām anusandadhāmi bhagavadgītē bhavadvēṣiṇīm

**Translation:** Om. With which Pārtha (Arjuna) was illumined by Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself, which was composed within the Mahābhārata by the ancient sage, Vyāsa, which is the showerer of the nectar of Advaita, which consists of eighteen discourses, and which is the destroyer of rebirth—upon Thee, O Gītā, O affectionate Mother, I meditate!<sup>3</sup>

This invocation answers, in sequence, the following questions: Who was it taught to? Who taught it? Who documented it? Where was it documented? What is its subject matter? How long is it? And what is the outcome of studying it?

Naturally, the significant phrases here are "advaitāmṛtavarṣiṇīm" and "bhavadvēṣiṇīm", which are the very reasons for us taking to the study of this text. Gītā categorically imparts the knowledge of the existential *unity*<sup>4</sup>, and offers several paths to realize the dissolution of the apparent multiplicity.



<sup>1</sup> This does not mean to say that Kṛṣṇa was merely teaching something from his memory. This only indicates that Gītā (or rather the entire Mahābhārata) was documented later by Vyāsa from his memory.

<sup>2</sup> तदिदं गीताशास्त्रं समस्तवेदार्थसारसङ्ग्रहभूतं (श्री शाङ्कर भाष्य)

<sup>3</sup> English translations of the verses are based on the free online edition by Swami Shivananda (Divine life society).

<sup>4</sup> Here, "advaita" can be taken as an assertion of unity/oneness (yōga) rather than as a system of philosophy.



## 1.2. Background — The Mahābhārata

Bhagavadgītā appears within Mahābhārata, one of the two *Itihāsa* (historical records — one type of *Smṛti*) texts in the Sanātana tradition (the other being Rāmāyaṇa). A thorough study of the Mahābhārata and assimilation of the overall ambience of the situations therein is essential for one to appreciate the tone and teachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā; without it one is bound to pass erroneous judgements ("Gītā promotes war!") as is happening in our times. A study of this mammoth text (comprised of 100,000 verses) is anyway impossible within this course. We will nonetheless try to absorb the heart of the matter. Knowledge of the background story and the characters also makes the subject lively for the reader.

### 1.2.1. About the Epic

Mahābhārata is by far the longest epic on the planet. Rāmāyaṇa (24,000 verses), which is the second longest epic, is itself less than a fourth of the size of Mahābhārata. And Iliad and Odyssey, the two Greek epics, combined amount to only one tenth of its length. Mahābhārata primarily reports the eventful episodes associated with one particular dynasty. But around this main thread, Vyāsa has weaved—in the form of stories within stories—plenty of other legends from prior to his time (Satyavān-Sāvitrī, Naḷa-Damayantī, Śibi etc.), thus using Mahābhārata as a storehouse to preserve the historical records; in fact Mahābhārata also contains a condensed Rāmāyaṇa within it. Vyāsa has also used it as an opportunity to document several illuminating discourses by the wise ones (both ancient and contemporary ones to him) on spiritual and worldly affairs. Sanatsujātīya (teachings of Sanatsujāta to Dhṛtarāṣṭra) is an example of the former; Vidura nīti (teachings of Vidura to Dhṛtarāṣṭra) is an example of the latter. Mahābhārata also contains several beautiful stōtra compositions celebrating the opulence of the Supreme, the most popular one being Viṣṇusahasranāma (thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu). And of course, it hosts the glorious Bhagavadgītā.

Mahābhārata consists of 18 books or parvas. Bhagavadgītā appears in the Bhīṣma parva<sup>5</sup>.

1	Ādi parva	7	Drōṇa parva	13	Anuśāsana parva
2	Sabhā parva	8	Karṇa parva	14	Aśvamēdhika parva
3	Vana parva	9	Śalya parva	15	Āśramavāsika parva
4	Virāṭa parva	10	Sauptika parva	16	Mausala parva
5	Udyōga parva	11	Strī parva	17	Mahāprasthānika parva
6	Bhīṣma parva	12	Śānti parva	18	Svargārōhaṇa parva

<sup>5</sup> If interested in studying the Mahābhārata, one should take up Vyāsa Bhārata, and not some versions by later poets which have a lot of distortions. Vyāsa Bhārata also has different versions, but any version is fine for the first round of study.

### 1.2.2. Timeline

As far as a spiritual seeker is concerned, knowledge of the timeline of Bhagavadgītā (and thereby Mahābhārata) is of little or no consequence. Details on when it was told, and when it was documented are trivial as compared to the fact that it *is* available to us. However, here is the summary of what historians have been up to.

In the book *Astronomical Dating of the Mahabharata War*, Dr. E. Vedavyas surveyed the researches done by 120 scholars over the past hundred years. Sixty one of the scholars fixed the war as having occurred between 3000 and 3200 B.C. The next favoured time period—subscribed by forty of the scholars—was between 1000 and 1500 B.C.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2.3. Outline of the story

Mahābhārata is the story of the Kuru dynasty spanning five-six of its generations, with the limelight on Arjuna's generation. Without going into the complexities encountered at every stage of the storyline (the typical characteristic of Mahābhārata), and omitting some of the initial episodes, here is an outline.

Among the two successors of king Vicitravīrya—Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu—the younger son Pāṇḍu was coronated as the king of Hastināpura (the capital of the kingdom) as Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind by birth. Pāṇḍu had two wives (Kunti and Mādri) and he fathered five sons — Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna from Kunti, and the twins Nakula and Sahadēva from Mādri. Dhṛtarāṣṭra married Gāndhāri, and fathered one hundred sons and a daughter (born as test-tube babies from medicated vessels). Among these children, Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭhira was the eldest. Pāṇḍu had an untimely death (when Yudhiṣṭhira was around ten years old), and Dhṛtarāṣṭra ascended the throne in the absence of an alternative. All the children underwent training in weaponry under preceptor Drōṇa. Pāṇḍu's children (especially Bhīma and Arjuna) outclassed Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons in all the areas of weaponry. After their education was complete, Yudhiṣṭhira, being the eldest and the wisest, was declared as the crown prince. Subsequently, Bhīma and Arjuna went on a military campaign, and vanquished several of the traditional enemies of the Kurus, bringing great amount of wealth to the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest son Duryōdhana burnt in jealousy and hatred towards his cousin brothers. Knowing very well that he cannot defeat them face to face in a duel, he tries to murder them through crooked means several times. His first attempt was during their school days itself where he poisons Bhīma's food. After Yudhiṣṭhira was declared the crown prince, he makes another attempt on the lives of all the Pāṇḍavas (and Kunti) by trying to burn them alive in a house of wax. When that plan fails, he

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from publisher's note (p. xxi) in *God Talks With Arjuna* by Paramahansa Yogananda.

## Prelude

persuades his father Dhṛtarāṣṭra (who was always dancing to the tunes of his son) to send the Pāṇḍavas away into another part of the kingdom called Indraprastha (modern day New Delhi) which was an extremely underdeveloped locality in those days as compared to the capital city of Hastināpura. However, Pāṇḍavas, with the help of Kṛṣṇa, build a prosperous city from scratch and it attracts people from all over the country. Also, Pāṇḍavas get married to Draupadī<sup>7</sup> (daughter of king Drupada of the neighboring kingdom Pāñcāla), making them more politically powerful in the region. Subsequently, Pāṇḍavas perform the Rājāsūya Yāga and unify the subcontinent under their emperorship. Unable to bear the grandeur of Indraprastha and Pāṇḍavas' rise to prominence, Duryōdhana hatches another plan along with his maternal uncle Śakuni and friend Karṇa to break them. Pāṇḍavas are invited to play a game of dice<sup>8</sup>, wherein Yudhiṣṭira loses all his wealth and kingdom to a deceitful Śakuni. He subsequently gambles away his brothers, himself, and finally Draupadī<sup>9</sup>. In a culmination of their nastiness, Duryōdhana and his crew humiliate Draupadī attempting to disrobe her in the royal court. By then, Dhṛtarāṣṭra is terribly scared of the consequences of the deeds of his sons, and restores all that Yudhiṣṭira had lost back to him.

Human beings often fall into the vicious pit of becoming more aggressive and malicious to protect themselves from the consequences of their earlier malice. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons were victims to this very pattern. After the above episode, they continued to live in fear thinking that Pāṇḍavas will come back for revenge; and fear gave birth to further hostility. They invite Pāṇḍavas again for gambling, this time with the bet that whoever loses the game will be exiled into the forests for twelve years followed by one year of incognito; if they are found in that one year, the twelve plus one year period will be repeated. Yudhiṣṭira loses and Pāṇḍavas are exiled. Afflicted further by fear (that Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa may come back and blow them to bits) Duryōdhana and his friends become more hostile and try to follow the unsuspecting Pāṇḍavas and kill them in the forest. Vyāsa intercepts them and sends them back. A few years later Duryōdhana, Śakuni and Karṇa decide to go to the forest and ridicule the destitute condition of the Pāṇḍavas. However, their plan backfires. They end up having a battle with the Gandharva king Citraratha in the forest. Duryōdhana's so called best friend Karṇa flees the battlefield and Duryōdhana is captured. His soldiers go to Pāṇḍavas and request for help. Due to this dishonor to the Kuru family by an outsider, Yudhiṣṭira asks his brothers to keep the family feud aside, and rescue Duryōdhana. Bhīma and Arjuna defeat the Gandharvas and release Duryōdhana from captivity. Even after knowing what the original intention of Duryōdhana was in coming to the forest, Yudhiṣṭira speaks to him compassionately. Having been saved by the very people he was always trying to kill, Duryōdhana experiences

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<sup>7</sup> This is one of the rare incidents of polyandry

<sup>8</sup> As per the norms of the day, Kṣatriyas are not supposed turn down an invitation to gamble and fight.

<sup>9</sup> Wagering people was not uncommon then, but Yudhiṣṭira could have risen above the rigid patterns of the society. It is worth noting that Draupadī (or anyone else in the storyline) does not question/criticize Yudhiṣṭira for using her as stake. She only questions as to how Yudhiṣṭira could wager her *after* he had lost himself.

unimaginable shame, and decides to starve himself to death. But he is soon turned away from his decision by Śakuni, Karṇa and a group of Asuras. He returns to Hastināpura without an iota of improvement in his decadent attitude.

Pāṇḍavas complete twelve years of exile, and enter in disguise the Matsya kingdom ruled by Virāṭa to spend one year of their incognito. Months pass by and Duryōdhana is unable to find the Pāṇḍavas. At the juncture of the completion of the year, Kīcaka (the powerful and tyrant commander of Virāṭa) tries to violate Draupadī (who was disguised as the maid of the queen) and gets beaten to death by the mighty Bhīma. Because of this unusual incident, Duryōdhana gets a hunch that Pāṇḍavas may be hiding in the city of Virāṭa. Along with his ally, the Trigartas, he launches an attack on Virāṭa with the calculation that if Pāṇḍavas are in Virāṭa then they will surely come out to aid their king, and if they are not in Virāṭa then he would get an easy victory over Virāṭa in the absence of Kīcaka — profitable either way. However, four of the Pāṇḍavas, without getting recognized, help Virāṭa to face the Trigartas and defeat them. Before the Virāṭa army could return and recover, Duryōdhana attacks the kingdom from another side on the next day. What follows is one of the most dramatic episodes of the Mahābhārata. Arjuna, who had not been asked to join the battle with the Trigartas (because he was disguised as a eunuch), knowing that the one year period was over on that day, now surfaces in all his splendor and valor, and singlehandedly vanquishes the entire Kaurava army (consisting of warriors such as Bhīṣma<sup>10</sup>, Drōṇa and Karṇa).

Pāṇḍavas had fulfilled the conditions of the gambling, and were now ready to come back and rule Indraprastha. However, Duryōdhana disputes the calendar calculations despite all his elders disagreeing with him, and contends that the one year period was not yet over when Arjuna surfaced. In a series of talks that subsequently took place Duryōdhana ignores the advice of all the wise ones to give Pāṇḍavas what is rightfully theirs. As the final resort, Kṛṣṇa himself arrives at Hastināpura as an envoy to resolve the situation. When Duryōdhana refuses to give Indraprastha back to Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa tries to strike a deal by asking Dhṛtarāṣṭra to allocate just five villages to the Pāṇḍavas. When Duryōdhana declines this offer too with his infamous statement "I shall not give even five pinpoints of land to the Pāṇḍavas", an annoyed Kṛṣṇa suggests Dhṛtarāṣṭra to restrain his son, or else face the destruction of the entire clan in a colossal war. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and other elders express helplessness. An anxious Duryōdhana foolishly and unethically tries to arrest Kṛṣṇa and gets to witness Kṛṣṇa's extraordinary yogic powers. With this final peace attempt thus failed, war becomes inevitable.

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<sup>10</sup> The elder step-brother of Vicitravīrya and the grandfather of Pāṇḍavas and Duryōdhana. Arjuna had especially grown very fond of his grandfather and had even called him "father" in his childhood thinking that he is actually his father. Bhīṣma had given up the throne due to circumstances and had vowed to protect whoever rules Hastināpura from his brother's lineage.

Both the sides send requests to their relatives and allies to come to their aid. Pāṇḍavas are able to gather seven akṣauhiṇis (large units of military), and Duryōdhana's side (commonly referred to as the Kaurava side) manages to gather eleven. Bhīṣma and Drōṇa, despite knowing that Duryōdhana had wronged the Pāṇḍavas, fight from the Kaurava side due to their allegiance to the throne of Hastināpura. Kṛṣṇa, being a relative and friend of the Kuru family, is approached by Duryōdhana and Arjuna at the same time seeking aid. Kṛṣṇa asks them to make a choice — either him, unarmed or his elite army — and gives Arjuna the right to make the first choice as he was the younger between the two. Much to Duryōdhana's relief Arjuna chooses Kṛṣṇa and requests him to be his charioteer, a choice that sealed the fate of the war. On a decided date the two armies assemble in the battlefield of Kurukṣētra for the final showdown. In that last moment, looking at his beloved grandfather Bhīṣma and his revered teacher Drōṇa on the opponent's side<sup>11</sup>, Arjuna is overcome by grief and nervousness, and decides to back off. What followed was Bhagavadgītā, the celebrated dialogue with his best friend and charioteer.

#### **1.2.4. Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas**

Here are a few notes on the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas.

Kṛṣṇa was Pāṇḍavas' close friend, especially of Arjuna (both were of similar age). They were not educated together, but in some places Mahābhārata suggests that they were friends since their early days. For instance, in the Draupadi svayamvara episode Kṛṣṇa recognizes Pāṇḍavas who were in disguise when no one else does; this indicates he knew them quite well. Later Nārada also explicitly mentions their acquaintance since childhood. That is understandable as Pāṇḍavas were related to Kṛṣṇa from the maternal side — Kunti was Kṛṣṇa's father's sister.

The era of Mahābhārata is marked by excessive Kṣatriya mindset—valour, power, weapons—in the society<sup>12</sup>. Most of the kings were inflicted by the desire to become the most powerful. With many kings ruling across the subcontinent, conquests and battles were common phenomena during Kṛṣṇa's time. In the Pāṇḍavas Kṛṣṇa saw the exceptional blend of power and nobility, and thus an opportunity to unify all the kingdoms of the subcontinent and to realize peaceful times. He convinced his own kinfolk (Yādavas) to accept the emperorship of Yudhiṣṭira (when the latter performs Rājasūya Yāga), and helped Pāṇḍavas vanquish corrupt and powerful kings such as Jarāsandha of the Magadha kingdom. But alas, a dispute arose within the Kuru family itself, and it led to the biggest war of those times.

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<sup>11</sup> Arjuna had faced them in battle earlier, but now he knows that this war can end only one way - death.

<sup>12</sup> In contrast, today the world is excessively obsessed with economy. And in the Vedic age, the society was obsessed with self-realization.

The exceptional friendship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna requires a special mention on this occasion; it enables us to appreciate the chemistry between the two and thereby the tone of the conversation that we witness in the Bhagavadgītā. On several occasions Kṛṣṇa affirms that "I have no dearer friend on earth than Arjuna" (Sauptika parva, 12). Arjuna married Kṛṣṇa's younger sister Subhadrā with full consent and support from him. Kṛṣṇa happily concedes to Arjuna's request to become his charioteer (which is a lowly task for a warrior of his stature to perform) in the Mahābhārata war. Kṛṣṇa spends a sleepless night (the 13<sup>th</sup> night of the battle) contemplating as to how Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha—failure to accomplish which Arjuna had to take his own life—can be realized.

### **1.3. Uniqueness of the Gītā**

Bhagavadgītā is a highly regarded scripture, and all the prominent ācāryas have written bhāṣya (commentary) on it. But it stands apart from other spiritual texts in the following aspects.

- It came from a Kṣatriya (warrior) and a Gṛhastha (householder), not a Brāhmaṇa (educator, especially of spirituality), not a Sanyāsi (monk), not a Ṛṣi (seer — people who uncover truths through their meditative revelations). Upaniṣats generally consist of the teachings from the latter type of people who are also generally the authors of literary works such as the Brahmasūtra.
- Again, unlike Upaniṣats, Bhagavadgītā is a conversation between friends, not Guru-Śiṣya. But yes, Arjuna does surrender to Kṛṣṇa as a Śiṣya during the conversation.
- The path of Bhakti is also highlighted in the Gītā which makes it unique among the three prasthānas (śruti, smṛti and nyāya)
- It does not cite or quote other texts as much as a formal literary work does. Sāṅkhya is the only system that receives an explicit credit from Kṛṣṇa for some of the details he presents. However, some similarities can be seen, notably with Kaṭhōpaniṣat, and with Patañjali Yōga sūtra also (but it is debatable whether Kṛṣṇa quoted Patañjali or vice versa). Apart from these, the terms "vēda", "brahmasūtra" and "vēdānta" are uttered without referring to any specific details from these texts.

### **1.4. Misconceptions about the Gītā**

#### **1.4.1. Live narration by Sañjaya?**

When the Mahābhārata war was about to begin, Vyāsa visits the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and asks him if he would like to have the clairvoyance ability to know what is happening in the battlefield. Dhṛtarāṣṭra refuses the offer saying that he does not wish to watch his kin getting killed, but suggests that his



secretary Sañjaya be given the ability instead so that he can narrate the details. Thus, the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna is presented within the Mahābhārata as the narration by Sañjaya.

However there is a misconception about this. The TV serials usually show Sañjaya giving a running commentary of the Bhagavadgītā (and the details of the Mahābhārata war) to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. But the fact is that it was a compiled report. Sañjaya was in the battlefield participating in the battle, but was capable of knowing what is happening in all the corners of the field. During the 18 days of the battle Sañjaya travels to the palace four times—10th evening, 15th evening, 17th evening and 19th morning—and reports to Dhṛtarāṣṭra what has happened until that point. Thus, although Bhagavadgītā transpired on the first day of the battle, it was narrated by Sañjaya on the 10th evening.

#### **1.4.2. Time stoppage?**

This is a very fancy but popular claim about the Bhagavadgītā — that time stopped when Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were conversing. However we do not get any support for this in the Mahābhārata. When the Bhagavadgītā episode is over, Mahābhārata says "Seeing Arjuna taking up his weapons again, all his army rejoiced" (Bhīṣma parva, 43.6). This means that the Pāṇḍava army saw him putting down his weapons and were unhappy then, and were waiting eagerly as to what will happen next; they were not time-frozen!

Bhagavadgītā is 700 verses in total<sup>13</sup>. And it takes only about 1.5 hours for a conversation that long to take place. Rather than wanting time to stop, it is more sensible to say that all others simply waited for 1.5 hours. When individuals of that stature are engrossed in such an intense conversation, no one would dare interfere!

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<sup>13</sup> There are some claims that the actual conversation was smaller, and that it was Vyāsa who expanded it while documenting it; but we need not take this claim seriously yet as there is no considerable evidence for it.

## 2. The Warrior Trembles | Chapter 1

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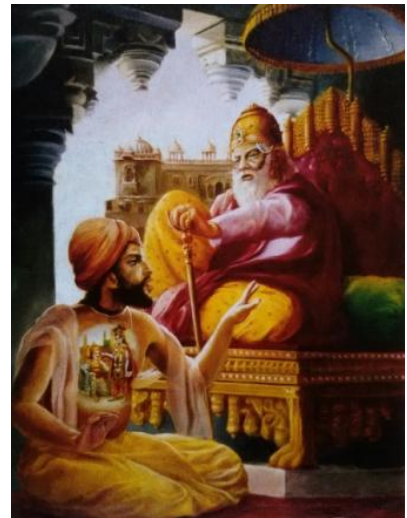
### Chapter Outline

- Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sañjaya to describe the events (of the last ten days) on the battlefield (1.1)
- Sañjaya's narration (1.2-20)
  - Duryōdhana approaches Drōṇa (1.2); Duryōdhana's statements to Drōṇa (1.3-11)
  - Description of war beats - conchs, trumpets etc. (1.12-19)
  - Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa (1.20)
- Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to place the chariot in between the armies (1.21-23)
- Sañjaya's narration - Kṛṣṇa keeps the chariot in front of Bhīṣma and Drōṇa; Arjuna is overcome by grief (1.24-27)
- Arjuna describes his anxiety, and argues against the battle (1.28-46)
- Sañjaya's narration - a depressed Arjuna sits down in the chariot throwing aside his weapons

### 2.1. Some Psychological aspects

The statements of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sañjaya and Duryōdhana (and of course Arjuna) showcase their psychological state.

- Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the King and the elder of the Kuru family, describes the two sides of the battle as "My people vs. Pāṇḍavas". This phrase neatly summarizes the cause of the battle. The rift "mine vs. other's" in his psychology among his own family is the source of the family feud. The elder of the family, being in a responsible position, should have been impartial towards younger members of the family. Instead, throughout his life, he tried to cheat (and even kill) his brother's children in order to favor his children. This is a lesson to us that over-identification with a specific entity is the potential reason for conflicts.
- Sañjaya is officially on the Kaurava side. But his statements show that his heart is with Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍavas. When there is a cricket match between India and Pakistan, by looking at how someone is describing the match, we can guess which country they belong to. Sañjaya relishes describing the Pāṇḍava side and their conchs in so much detail (six verses), and makes only a brief mention (one and half verses) about the war beats of the Kaurava side.



- Duryōdhana's statements reveal several things about his mindset. One, while describing both the sides to Drōṇa, he lists twenty warriors from the Pāṇḍava side, but names only seven from his side. Two, he uses negative words such as "given up their lives for me" to describe the kings on his side. This indicates that although his army was bigger in size, he did not see many powerful warriors on his side, and was unsure of his victory. Also, he describes his army as "protected by Bhīṣma" (who was the commander-in-chief) and Pāṇḍava army as "protected by Bhīma". This is amusing as Bhīma was not the commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava army, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Arjuna were. This shows that he was more afraid of Bhīma (as evident from the epic also) than anyone else in the Pāṇḍava side.

## 2.2. Arjuna's Arguments — Summary

Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa, in an apparently haughty manner, to place the chariot in between the two armies so that he can see who have come to support the "evil minded Duryōdhana" (1.23). And within a few minutes his haughtiness turns into grief and nervousness when Kṛṣṇa keeps the chariot in front of Bhīṣma and Drōṇa. Seeing his grandfather, teacher and other relatives on both the sides, he goes into an anxiety attack<sup>14</sup>, and subsequently argues as to why he should not wage this war:

- i. Those people (grandfathers, teachers, uncles, sons, grandsons etc.) for whose sake we earn wealth and kingdom are going to die in this battle. Therefore what is the point in waging and winning this war? How can we be happy by killing our own people?
- ii. We will be great sinners by killing these sinners.
- iii. Overpowered by greed, Duryōdhana and his people are not realizing the great destruction that will be incurred by the families in this battle. At least why can't we, being in a responsible position, withdraw?
- iv. This war will lead to large scale destruction of families. Due to this the ancient wisdom and ethos of the lineages will be lost. Adharma will creep into the families. Women of such families will become corrupt and this will lead to intermingling of the Varṇa (the purity of bloodlines will be tainted, and the societal framework will be upset). Ancestral rites will stop in such families, and their forefathers will fall. This puts into hell both families and the slayers of these families.



Having made these arguments, a dejected Arjuna concludes that he should not fight the battle even if his enemies kill him while unarmed. Throwing his weapons aside, he sits down in the chariot.

<sup>14</sup> Failing limbs, drying mouth, trembling body, goosebumps, burning skin, unable to stand, reeling mind (1.29-30)

## 3. Sāṅkhya Yōga - the Foremost Teaching | Chapter 2

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### Chapter Outline

- Kṛṣṇa's whipping words condemning Arjuna's weakness (2.2-3)
- Arjuna continues his arguments, but surrenders to Kṛṣṇa (2.4-8)
- Kṛṣṇa's teachings
  - Sāṅkhya yōga (the knowledge of the Self) (2.11-30)
  - Swadharma and other simple arguments (2.31-37)
  - Karma yōga (or Buddhi yōga) (2.38-53)
- Arjuna's question on the qualities of a sthitaprajña (2.54) and Kṛṣṇa's response (2.55-72)

### 3.1. Arjuna Surrenders

In response to Arjuna's elaborate moaning, at first Kṛṣṇa simply lashes out at him with sharp words — "From where did this disgraceful dejection come upon you in this decisive moment? Do not yield to this impotence; it does not befit you, Arjuna! Cast off this worthless weakness of your heart and stand up!"

But Arjuna continues his moaning for some more time saying that it is better to live begging for his

food rather than fight this battle and kill his elders. However, eventually he makes a major progress — he realizes and admits that he is in delusion and that he is not thinking clearly<sup>15</sup>. He surrenders to Kṛṣṇa as a disciple and asks for his conclusive advice as to what is good (śrēyas<sup>16</sup>) for him in this situation (2.7). It is only then that Kṛṣṇa imparts spiritual wisdom to his close friend<sup>17</sup>.



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<sup>15</sup> If someone is confused but does not realize/accept that he is confused then no one can resolve his confusion, for he will not listen to anyone. A deep realization of ignorance is therefore a major step towards enlightenment.

<sup>16</sup> Prēyas is that which is palatable (priya - like junk food), and Śrēyas is that which brings wellbeing (hita - like nutrient food). Mostly these two do not coincide. Arjuna's implication is that he is unable to see how waging this war is śrēyas. Backing off appears palatable to him at the moment.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that these two had been intimate friends for at least 50 years by then (they were in their 80s when the battle took place). And Kṛṣṇa, one of the greatest yogis to have ever walked the planet, had never instructed Arjuna with the knowledge of yoga until that point. Arjuna, the enthusiastic warrior that he was, was always busy acquiring newer weapons and fighting skills, and never had any time for spiritual learning (just like the most of us who spend our whole life earning a living, and have no time for anything more). He never asked Kṛṣṇa for it, and therefore Kṛṣṇa never taught him. It is only when Arjuna surrenders wholeheartedly that Kṛṣṇa enlightens Arjuna. Until the student surrenders and questions humbly, the teacher does not teach.

### 3.2. Sāṅkhya Yōga — The first teaching

But Arjuna's question was only about waging the war. What was the need for a spiritual teaching?

When he begins responding, Kṛṣṇa does not address Arjuna's arguments (summarized previously) directly. He does not tell Arjuna as to why this war has become inevitable, because it was too obvious a thing to tell to Arjuna who knows the entire background. From a personal standpoint, Arjuna knows how much of injustice was done to them by their cousins<sup>18</sup>. And from an overall standpoint, the fervent Kṣatriya mindset of the war-hungry kings, the deteriorating *dharma*<sup>19</sup> in those times (starkly marked by the disrobing of a queen in a packed royal court) etc. were also very well known to Arjuna. The socio-political situation of the subcontinent had gradually decayed itself towards this devastating climax. The family feud among the Kurus only became a trigger for the situation to erupt. Kṛṣṇa did try to avoid this cataclysmic crash by unifying the subcontinent under Pāṇḍava's rule. And later he again tried to avoid the battle by acting as the envoy with as small a proposal as five villages for the Pāṇḍavas. Everything had failed, and war had become inevitable. The inevitability of the situation has been discussed and acknowledged hundreds of times within the Mahābhārata by several prominent individuals (including Vyāsa Maharṣi) and it was too superfluous to tell all this to Arjuna again<sup>20</sup>. Thus, Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna addresses something more fundamental — when something unpleasant becomes inevitable and must be carried out, but the person—in spite of clearly knowing all about its inevitability—is still vacillating, what is the counsel that needs to be given?

Suppose someone is playing a game of chess, and has come to a point from where he cannot win at all. And you see him all stressed up and dejected for having to lose his pawns and ultimately the game. Then you naturally tell him — "Don't worry, it is just a game; it is not the end of the world. Coins are just going out of the board for a while, not annihilated". Well, it is the same counsel that Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna. However here it happens to be about life and death, and it is not easy to say "Don't worry, it is just death; it is not the end of the world. In death we just go out of physical existence for a while, but are not

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<sup>18</sup> Arjuna himself acknowledges in the first chapter that his cousins are "ātatāyi" (anyone who tries to take away your life, property or family by force — Duryōdhana had done all the three!). And the Kṣatriya norm of the day was that a warrior should kill such a person without any second thoughts. But amusingly Arjuna says "We will become sinners if we kill these ātatāyi"! Evidently he was quite deluded. There was no point in reminding him about the wrongdoings of his cousins. And therefore Kṛṣṇa doesn't talk about it at all.

<sup>19</sup> Dharma is a very profound word; it comes from the root "dhṛ" which means "to uphold". Simply put, it refers to upholding of the natural order of things. Social justice (nyāya) is only a part of the broader concept of dharma.

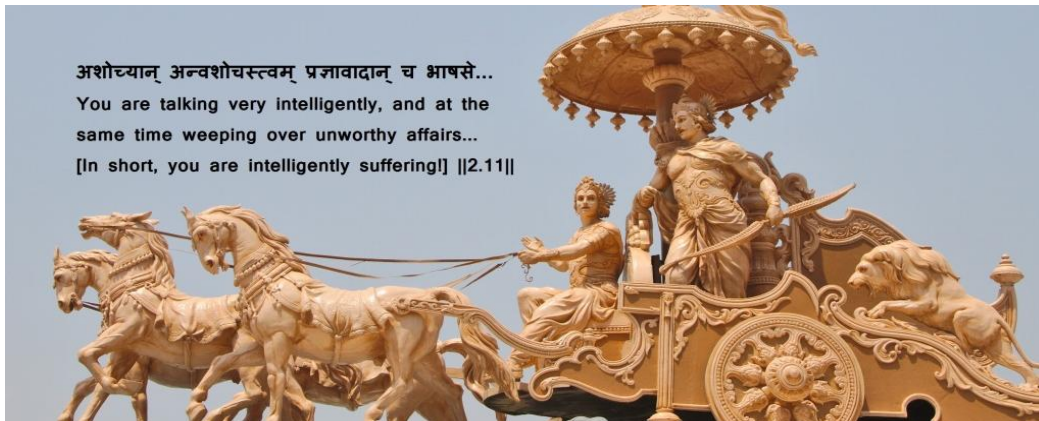
<sup>20</sup> Also, something amusing happens on the battlefield. Just a few minutes before Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira also gets depressed. Seeing the bigger army of Kauravas led by Bhīṣma, when Yudhisthira feels dejected, someone cheers him up with great confidence saying "There is no need to worry at all. Where there is Dharma, there is victory. Where there is Kṛṣṇa there is victory". Can you guess who that is? Arjuna! And few moments later he is himself depressed. Mere motivational speaking does not guarantee any inner stability.

annihilated". Only someone like Kṛṣṇa who has truly realized himself (and others) as beyond life and death can make this statement, not a mere intellectual who simply extrapolates the game analogy to life. In the former case it becomes the highest spiritual teaching, but in the latter case the same "don't worry, it is just death" becomes the highest level of insensitivity!

Also (just to reiterate), such statement about death is made *only* when the situation (such as a war) has become inevitable, not when it can be avoided. Therefore, such a statement that is made [to a soldier] when killing has become necessary is not to be taken as encouragement for killing. "It is just a game, it is alright to lose" is not an encouragement to lose; only after all attempts have been made to win if one is losing, such a statement is to be made. Kṛṣṇa, only after making all attempts to avoid this colossal war, makes this statement when it becomes a must. Thus, "Gītā promotes war" is a dimwitted conclusion coming out of half baked reading (or no reading!) of the Mahābhārata.

And thus Kṛṣṇa's very first teaching was about not taking the death of the physical body seriously. He affirms that death is not annihilation, and that the Self of all is indestructible. This teaching, the essence of the Upaniṣats, he calls as Sāṅkhya yōga<sup>21</sup> (2.39). In this way, Arjuna's sāmānya ādhi (stress) became a pretext for him to receive teachings that deal with sāra ādhi (fundamental ignorance of one's own nature).

Before he begins instructing this knowledge, Kṛṣṇa mocks Arjuna, with an apparent smile on his face (2.10), for being a mere intellectual in his arguments, but not wise enough to see beyond birth-death — "You are speaking very intellectually (prajñā vāda), and the same time grieving for those who are not worthy of it. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead" (2.11). This statement (especially the first half) can be generalized in that the more intellectual we become the more serious, stressed and long-faced we become! Our sharp intellect that we are so proud of hardly makes us joyful and lively. We are getting entangled in words and data, and intellect has turned into a nuisance. In summary we suffer life intelligently, or even worse, we are suffering our intelligence!



<sup>21</sup> This should not be equated to Sāṅkhya system of philosophy. Sāṅkhya was the common term in those days to refer to the path of Jñāna.



Then Kṛṣṇa's commences his teachings of Sāṅkhya yōga, the summary of which is as follows:

- There has been no time when we were not, nor will there be a time when we will be not (our essential being transcends the construct of space-time) (2.12)
- Just as the body (dēha) passes through different stages of life, or just as people discard old cloths and wear new ones, the embodied Self (dēhī) passes from one body into another (2.13, 2.22).
- The Self is imperishable, indestructible, all-pervading, immeasurable, unthinkable, unborn, eternal and immutable. Weapons cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it, air cannot dry it. Therefore you should not grieve (several verses).
- But that which is born—the physical existence—has death too. It is inevitable. Beings are unmanifest in the beginning (before birth), become manifest for a while, and become unmanifest again (after death). There is no need to grieve over this phenomenon (2.27-28).

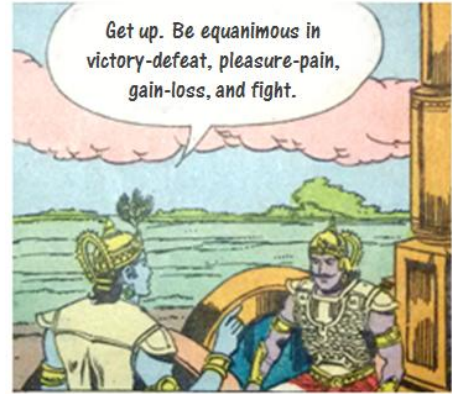
The significant point to be noted in these set of verses is that while Kṛṣṇa uses plural form for dēha, he always uses singular form for the Self, even when he uses the two terms within the same sentence — "these bodies of the Self" (2.18). Thus, he is not talking about many "souls".

### 3.3. Arjuna's arguments countered

Kṛṣṇa then makes some simpler arguments that begin to address Arjuna's arguments more directly:

- There is no higher śrēyas for a warrior than fighting in such a dharma yuddha—a battle fought for eliminating disharmonious elements and establishing order. If you die fighting in this battle, you will obtain heaven, if you win you will enjoy the earth. (with this Kṛṣṇa has answered Arjuna's request to tell him which is śrēyas)
- Everyone must fulfill their swadharma, and a warrior's swadharma is fighting for a cause (with this Kṛṣṇa overrides Arjuna's arguments on kuladharma)
- If you forsake your swadharma then you will become a sinner, not if you fight (with this Kṛṣṇa has countered Arjuna's arguments that he would become a sinner if he fought this battle)
- If you retreat now, your fame among people will be tarnished forever; for a respected person that is worse than death.
- Your enemies, who presently think very highly of you, will think you retreated out of fear. They will hold you lightly, abuse you and question your capability. (Arjuna said it is better if his enemies killed him while unarmed; Kṛṣṇa has countered that here — "they will not kill you, but only insult you thoroughly")

With these arguments (previous section and this section), Kṛṣṇa concludes by saying "Therefore, stand up and fight. Engage in the battle making pleasure-pain, gain-loss and victory-defeat even, and you will not incur any sin".



### 3.4. Karma yōga (or Buddhi yōga)

The mention of equanimity gives way to another related teaching of yoga. Kṛṣṇa now begins to describe the path of action (karma yoga) that is backed by an equanimous mind (buddhi yoga).

Before talking about karma yoga, Kṛṣṇa mentions the simplistic notion of karma prevalent in his times, and criticizes it. He condemns the propagators of "vēda vāda" (the karma kāṇḍa) who say that there is nothing apart from swarga<sup>22</sup> and are desirous of the pleasures of the heavens. He calls such individuals—who encourage various types of karma so that merits (puṇya phala) accrue and give you higher worlds and better births—as unwise. Then Kṛṣṇa clarifies that karma yoga is to reject the fruits of the action (karma phala — both merits and demerits) altogether.

Karma yoga is comprised of two interrelated facets — giving up of the fruits of the action *and* equanimity towards gain-loss, victory-defeat etc. Usually these two aspects are mixed up (because of a widespread misunderstanding of the term "karma phala") leading to a much distorted idea of Karma yoga (with absurd statements such as "don't expect *any* result"<sup>23</sup>). Here is some clarification in that regard.

Broadly speaking, any action has five types of outcomes: 1) Success or failure 2) Gross gain or loss (monetary) 3) Subtle gain or loss (praise-criticism, pleasure-pain etc.) 4) Experience/knowledge from the action and your personal growth, and 5) Invisible effects at a non-physical level. These are depicted in the figure.

The term karma phala refers specifically to outcome (5). Therefore when it is said that one is to *give up* karma phala, it

	Outcomes	Krishṇa's Advice
1	Success or Failure	Equanimity (Samatva)
2	Monetary Gain or Loss	
3	Praise or Criticism	
4	Personal Growth (Guaranteed)	Take Home!
5	Invisible effects - Merits/Demerits (Karma Phala)	GIVE UP (Phala Tyaga)



<sup>22</sup> Heaven — the concept of heaven in sanātana dharma is not the same as in other cultures. The heaven here is only a transient stage where one expends their accrued merits in exchange for higher pleasures, and then falls back to earth.

<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, action that is performed without bearing the results in mind is tāmasika karma! (18.25)

is only (5) that is to be given up, not all outcomes of the action. As for outcomes (1), (2) and (3), we are supposed to exercise *equanimity*. And (4) is anyway a guaranteed outcome in any action irrespective of success or failure — giving this up will be very absurd!<sup>24</sup>

Now let us try to understand what these two facets—giving up of karma phala *and* equanimity—mean. Both of them are in fact stated by Kṛṣṇa as definitions of Yoga.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जया  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते॥२.४८॥  
बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृत दुष्कृते  
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्॥२.५०॥

*yōgasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya/  
siddhyasiddhyōḥ samō bhūtvā samatvaṁ yōga ucyatē*||2.48||  
*buddhiyuktō jahātīha ubhē sukṛta duṣkṛtē/  
tasmādyōgāya yujyasva yōgaḥ karmasu kauśalam*||2.50||

**Meaning:** Perform action, O Arjuna, being established in Yoga, abandoning attachment and balanced in success and failure! Equanimity is called Yoga (48). Endowed with this wisdom (of equanimity), one casts off both good and evil deeds; therefore, devote yourself to Yoga; Yoga is skill in action (50).

The two definitions—"samatvaṁ yōga ucyatē" and "yōgaḥ karmasu kauśalam"—address two facets of Karma Yoga mentioned above.

**Samatva — Equanimity:** this pertains to the aspect of success or failure in our activities. Most of us think that success in our work is the source of our happiness (and consequently failure the source of misery). Therefore we allow the result to be the driving factor to kindle the *aliveness* in us. But the samatva aspect of karma yoga is drawing our attention to the fact that it is not the eventuality of an action that gives us joy, but the activity itself. It is activity itself that fires up the aliveness in us. We like to watch a cricket match between India and Australia; not India and Afghanistan. If it was only victory that we wanted, we would have watched the latter. But it is not so. We want the activity to be enticing, enlivening; result is secondary. It is the enthusiastic *effort* to win that gives us more thrill than winning itself. And it is the very *uncertainty* in the results that make the efforts thrilling. But we somehow delude ourselves into considering that the result is everything. Same is the case with our worldly affairs too. For e.g. we often see individuals changing their job simply because the previous job was not *challenging*. This means, the job is so easy for them that they are unable to enjoy working even though there is plenty

<sup>24</sup> Outcomes (1), (4) and (5) are always present. But outcomes (2) and (3) are sometimes absent. (5) can be dissolved through karma yoga, and the influence of (1), (2) and (3) upon us can be nullified through equanimity.

of success (and money) in it. Therefore, we should consciously recognize (buddhi yoga) that our inherent tendency is to enjoy the action more than the result. If the message of equanimity is strengthened within us, the turbulence associated with the result of the worldly affairs will attenuate. We will neither get excited with success, nor get depressed with failure; because the activity (the wholehearted effort to succeed) itself makes us so exuberant that it will engulf and trivialize the results. We will gracefully and joyfully perform actions as needed. Samatva is a state of tremendous exuberance, not mere placidity.

**Karmasu kauśalam — Skill in Action:** This phrase is usually picked out of context by many people and explained as the skillfulness in the *performance* of actions. But we need to see in what context Kṛṣṇa is making this statement. By *kauśalam* he does not mean the skill in action per se<sup>25</sup>. What he means is the skill in the *approach* behind any action so that one does not accrue more Karma as he lives in the world. If our left hand is in pain, we support it with our right hand neither with a sense of doership (kartṛtva) that "I helped this left hand", nor with a sense of enjoyership (bhōkṛtva) that "I got helped by right hand"; thus there is neither puṇya nor pāpa; there is no karma of any sort. One part of the system complements another part of the system. We are to see that this is true in a larger sense also, and that our individual personality, as one part of the system, is in complementarity with all other parts. This will make us realize that our sense of *individuality* is only apparent, but not existential. When our deluded sense of individuality is thus diffused, we experience a state of increased freedom from the shackles of Karma. This is the *kauśalam* that Kṛṣṇa is referring to; the skill of involving in the world without anything from there sticking to us; the skill of dissolving our Karma account<sup>26</sup>.

Of course, these two facets are related to one another. The implementation of one facet enables the implementation of the other.

In relation to the aspect of karma phala, the following verse is very popular. In fact it is the most popular verse from the text.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन  
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूः मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥२.४७॥  
*karmaṇyēvādhikārastē mā phalēṣu kadācana*  
*mā karmaphalahēturbhūḥ mā tē saṅgō:'stvakarmaṇi ॥2.47॥*

<sup>25</sup> Mere skillfulness in action is not Karma Yoga, but is just well performed Karma. If one follows Swadharma (inherent talents/tendencies), actions will naturally be skillful. Arjuna was already the most skilled warrior. There was no need of preaching him that aspect of the skill.

<sup>26</sup> This is easier when one offers himself to become a tool in the hands of another. When you act like the 'hand', an extension of another person, without personal choices of any sort, without likes and dislikes, your karma is no more yours. But such a sense of offering is difficult for a thinking mind to appreciate. For it is voluntary slavery! We can see verse 11.33 where Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to enjoy victory, kingdom and fame (outcomes (1), (2) and (3)), but to be a tool in His hands (i.e. relinquish (5)).

But because the concept of karma phala is misunderstood, this verse is also usually misunderstood as "you have no right over any outcome of your actions". One needs to understand this verse in light of the clarification provided above for karma phala.

There is another widespread misunderstanding in this verse. The term *adhikāra* is usually translated as "right". But it actually means *eligibility* or *qualification*<sup>27</sup>. It is worth noting that in Samskr̥ta language there is no word for "rights"! The ancient society functioned based solely on responsibility (swadharma) without anyone having to *demand* their rights. This is because performance of one's swadharma automatically fulfills someone else's needs; there was no need to demand it. This is a positive outlook towards the structuring of society, whereas "rights" gives a negative shade to the picture.

And thus the translation of the verse would be:

**Meaning:** Your eligibility is to action only, never to its fruits; do not become the cause of the fruits [by working with an individuality], nor let your attachment be to inaction.

Since it is said "do not become the cause of the fruits", some may sit idle and say "then I will not act at all". That is why Kṛṣṇa immediately asserts in the last quarter of the verse "do not sit idle". We should act to exhaust our saṁskāra (subconscious habitual tendencies) and dissolve the rigid patterns clouding our intellect. But with constant contemplation we should take care that our actions are not reinforcing the old saṁskāra, or developing new ones. This is the other way of looking at the *skill* of karma/buddhi yoga.

Kṛṣṇa concludes his teachings by saying "Arjuna, you are now a mere intellectual with a lot of information but no experience of yoga. When your intellect transcends the muddy delusion, and gets established in samādhi, you will attain yoga". That is, Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna that he may not understand right away everything that Kṛṣṇa said (that the Self is imperishable, immutable etc.). But for now he should engage in Karma yoga—act as per his swadharma with the *skill* and *equanimity* described above—which will make him eligible to grasp the Truth firsthand.

### 3.5. Qualities of a Sthitaprajña

Arjuna now gets curious with the phrase "intellect established in samādhi" and asks Kṛṣṇa the following question: "What is the description of a sthitaprajña? How does he speak? How does he sit? How does he walk?" (2.54) In the term sthitaprajña, sthita means "established", and prajña refers to consciousness, or the Self. Thus, it refers to an Enlightened being where the sense of exclusive individuality has dissolved.

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<sup>27</sup> This also is not the exact meaning. These ancient concepts (such as dharma and adhikāra) do not have any precise words in modern languages.

## Chapter 2

On a lighter note, this question by Arjuna to Kṛṣṇa is comical. Arjuna has been Kṛṣṇa's best friend for decades, and has witnessed his serenity and blissfulness first hand. Having spent so many years with a sthitaprajña, he is eventually asking the same sthitaprajña about the qualities of a sthitaprajña! This is like a husband asking his wife, who has cooked delicious food for him for several years "I wonder what a good cook is like!" It will surely be taken as a criticism by her. However, Kṛṣṇa responds very calmly without getting irritated at all. For he is a sthitaprajña without an ego wanting recognition by others.

The last eighteen verses of the second chapter are Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna describing the qualities of a sthitaprajña. The following is a summary of these qualities (with verse numbers in the bracket):

1. Has given up all mind-born desires (55); all desires enter him without causing any turbulence in him just as water enters the unmoving ocean (70)
2. Finds absolute contentment in the Self (55)
3. Is not anxious in adversities (duḥkha), and has no craving for pleasures (sukha) (56)
4. Neither rejoices on receiving good/auspicious, nor hates on receiving bad/inauspicious (57)
5. Is free from attachment, fear and anger (56)
6. Is not bound (anabhisnēha) by anything or anyone (57)
7. Withdraws the senses from the sense-objects like the tortoise which withdraws all its limbs (58)
8. And moves amongst objects with the senses under restraint (64)
9. Is awake to what is night (invisible) to other beings, and considers what the other beings are awake to as night (pale) (69)
10. Is free from the clutches of the identities of "Mine" and "Me" (71)

(1) and (2) basically means that a sthitaprajña is done with all the psychological drama, has transcended the realm of citta, and is established in the realization of his true being. Desires spring from a sense of incompleteness, and drive us to find fulfillment. But when one realizes he *is* complete by his own nature, desires lose their power over him. All the remaining qualities follow from this central quality. Note that most of us live our entire life giving so much importance to our mind and its acrobatics. Mind—which is just a tool to transact with the world—has become the entirety of our life, and we are not experiencing the actual "life", the throbbing chaitanya that we are.

(3) and (4) highlight the quality of samatva. This does not mean a state of inertness, but means stability. An inert entity cannot move at all (tamas), an unstable entity moves only where external forces make it go (rajas), and a stable entity moves where it wants to move (and not where others make it go — sattva). Since a sthitaprajña has realized himself as the perennial bliss, external phenomena do not *determine/direct* his movements anymore (towards pleasures and away from pain). This is like a war-tank



that simply goes where it wants to go no matter what is in front of it; the surroundings do not determine its movements. A sthitaprajña will act as per the larger good (dharma) without being disrupted by any personal pleasure or pain, whereas we are always guided by our personal pleasures and pains.

(5) and (6) continue the same idea. *Detachment* doesn't mean that he does not *involve* in the world; it only means that he does not get *entangled*. He involves with objects, people etc without getting carried away by them. Similarly, the compulsive forces of anger and fear no more dictate to him; but he may consciously use these as needed like an artist on a stage. He has mastery over the psychological elements.

Similarly (7) does not mean that he is devoid of sensations and is oblivious to the world. As (8) clarifies, he has mastery over the on-off switch of his senses. While we helplessly go on and on with the impulses of the sense organs, he can engage in the world but with the switch always under his control.

(9) is from a riddle like verse (69) and needs to be understood correctly. Whatever self-absorptive joy a Yogi is awake to is night for all the beings because they are *unable* to see it. But whatever psychological joy all the beings are awake to is night for the Yogi because he *sees* (paśyataḥ) it to be pale. Thus, the worldly experiences of ordinary beings is night for the yogi not because of his inability to experience it, but because he sees it to be trivial in front of his experience of the Self.

(10) is already covered by all the above. His actions are no more determined by personal joy or sorrow, gains or losses. His actions are always in tune with the larger picture of existence.

In general, one should always remember that spiritual qualities (such as "detachment") are never *negation*, but are *transcendence*. Extremes (like inertness and stability) look similar and people often confuse transcendence as negation. Being incapable of something is not spiritual!

### 3.6. Caution to Practitioners

While describing sthitaprajña, Kṛṣṇa also cautions the practitioners as to how the turbulent senses violently carry away the mind (and thereby the intellect) of even a wise man just as wind carries away a boat on waters (2.60, 2.67). He deciphers the sensual downfall step by step so that we can be careful when there is an onset of such a pattern in our mind:

ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते।  
सङ्गात् सञ्जायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते॥२.६२॥  
क्रोधात् भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः।  
स्मृतिभ्रंशात् बुद्धिनाशः बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति॥२.६३॥

*dhyāyatō viṣayān puṁsaḥ saṅgastēṣūpajāyatē|  
saṅgāt sañjāyatē kāmḥ kāmāt krōdhō:'bhijāyatē||2.62||  
krōdhāt bhavati sammōhaḥ sammōhāt smṛtivibhramah|  
smṛtibhramśāt buddhināśaḥ buddhināśāt praṇāśyati||2.63||*

**Meaning:** When a man thinks of the objects, attachment to them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire anger arises (2.62). From anger comes delusion; from delusion the loss of memory; from loss of memory the destruction of discrimination; from the destruction of discrimination he perishes (2.63).

Our dormant residua (vāsanā) become active when we are exposed to a situation/object/person conducive to that residua (Patañjali yōga sūtra 4.8). If it is something that is in the "like" (rāga) box, then that particular situation/object/person begins to run in the mind in a loop. Due to repeated thinking a compulsive stickiness develops with it; that cittavṛtti, the vortex, gradually becomes powerful and begins to suck us into it. With our energy flowing in the direction, a desire arises to physically possess the object/person. In some cases it may be possible to accomplish it, and in some cases we fail. If we succeed we will anyway start the process all over again with something new. But mostly our desires will be so lofty and unrealistic that they do not materialize. That leads to frustration and anger, which is nothing but temporary madness as we ourselves admit sometimes - "I am mad at you". This leads to delusion— veiling of our working memory (database) and rational brain (processor)—or "amygdala hijack" as modern neuroscience calls it. We see how friends who know each other since decades forget all the good moments between them in a flash when a misunderstanding arises; the memories which may have pacified the present situation is knocked out of the picture. Without proper data the "thinking brain" is paralyzed and makes wrong conclusions. With both database and processor disrupted, such a person talks and behaves irrationally and cannot be convinced of anything. He will become self-destructive in that intense delusion.

So, what is the solution? Not expose ourselves to the objects of the world at all? No. By constant practice, we are to develop the awareness so as to identify the above pattern right in the beginning where it is easy to snub it. Eventually the pattern itself will not recur.

## Block 2: Chapters 3-6

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### Chapters covered:

- ✚ Chapter 3 (Karma Yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 4 (Jñānakarmasannyāsa Yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 5 (Karmasannyāsa Yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 6 (Ātmasamyama Yōga)

The essence of Karma Yōga that was presented in the second chapter gets elucidated further in the next three chapters owing to questions by Arjuna; thus the term 'karma' in all these chapter names; the other terms (jñāna, sannyāsa) indicate the concepts discussed in the respective chapters (fourth chapter is sometimes called Jñāna Yōga). Key points in these chapters include the concepts of yajña, yajña cakra, karma-akarma-vikarma etc. Chapter six describes dhyāna yōga (yōga of meditation) as a prescription for someone who has purged himself of the outward bound tendencies of the mind through karma yōga.

As specified in the previous block, not all the chapters are explored equally deeply in this study material. In this block chapter six will be covered in more detail (similar to second chapter) as compared to the other chapters.

***"When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow"***

*- Mahatma Gandhi*

## 4. Karma Yōga - Act to Express, not Impress | Chapter 3

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### Chapter Outline

- Arjuna confused between Sāṅkhya yōga and Karma yōga (3.1-2)
- Kṛṣṇa elaborates the path of Karma yōga
  - Mere inaction leads to hypocrisy, not salvation (3.3-9)
  - One should fulfill their role in the yajña cakra, the cosmic cycle (3.10-16)
  - Only an ātmajñāni is exempt from this. However to set an example, even they act (3.17-29)
  - Swadharma (3.33-35)
- What compels humans to commit errors? Arjuna questions and Kṛṣṇa answers (3.36-43)

### 4.1. Sāṅkhya yōga or Karma yōga?

After listening to the teachings of Sāṅkhya yōga (the knowledge that the Self is imperishable, immutable etc.) and Karma yōga (practice of samatva buddhi & giving up karma phala), Arjuna gets confused between the two. Since Kṛṣṇa ends his teachings by praising ātmajñāna and sthitaprajña, Arjuna asks "If you say jñāna is superior to karma, then why are you engaging me in this terrible action? You are confusing me with your ambiguous words. Please tell me which is better for me" (3.1-2)

This can be considered as the central discussion of the Gītā the conclusion of which is of immediate consequence to Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa's response to this query is spread out across the Gītā (especially chapter 3-6) and needs an overall study.

From Arjuna's question we can infer the following:

- a) Although Kṛṣṇa did not explicitly specify this, Arjuna correlates the practice of Sāṅkhya yōga to renunciation of karma (karma sannyāsa and dedicating time for self-enquiry), and the practice of Karma yōga to performance of karma<sup>28</sup>. This correlation happens explicitly in the fifth chapter where Arjuna repeats the question (5.1-5).
- b) Arjuna is trying to draw a universal rule out of Kṛṣṇa's teachings — that karma sannyāsa is the better option for attaining ātmajñāna irrespective of who the individual is and what the situation is.

Kṛṣṇa agrees with (a) and rejects (b). Here is a compilation of what Kṛṣṇa explains in this regard:

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<sup>28</sup> Kṛṣṇa discusses karma sannyāsa and karma yōga in the Mahābhārata when Sanjaya comes to Pāṇḍavas for a peace treaty. Arjuna had heard it and he must have recollected it here.

- Sāṅkhya yōga and Karma yōga are two paths prescribed to people according to their temperament (3.3). Both of them lead to the same result (5.4-5). Śrī Śāṅkarabhāṣya clarifies this as follows. The general instruction of the Vedas is to follow householder life after student life (followed by retirement and renunciation)<sup>29</sup>; this is the path of karma yōga. But for a few mature individuals sannyāsa is allowed immediately after student life; this is the path of karma sannyāsa or sāṅkhya yōga.
- When one is not yet devoid of saṅkalpa (resolutions, intentions, motives) he must engage in karma yōga; once he has purged himself of such outward habitual tendencies of the mind through karma yōga, śama (withdrawal) or karma sannyāsa (sādhanā in solitude) is prescribed (6.3). Without going through karma yōga, sannyāsa is very difficult to accomplish (5.6).
- Thus, karma yōga is necessary for cittaśuddhi (cleansing the citta) (5.11). But karma yōga does not mean simply and compulsively diving into action. Only if karma is consciously performed with the proper awareness (samatva buddhi and giving up karma phala) it will lead to cittaśuddhi (5.12); or else it will lead to further entanglement (it will then become karma rōga, the disease of karma!).
- As per Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna is not ready for renunciation of karma — "Even if you try to quit the battlefield now, your inner tendencies will drag you to battle sooner or later" (18.59-60). This answers Arjuna's question "Which one is better for me?" Earlier in the fifth chapter too, when Arjuna insists that Kṛṣṇa should tell decisively which of the two is better for him, Kṛṣṇa answers "Both karma yōga and karma sannyāsa lead to salvation; but karma yōga is better between the two" (5.2) This does not mean that karma yōga is superior at all times and for everyone, but implies that karma yōga is suitable for Arjuna (Śāṅkarabhāṣya) as explicitly clarified in the eighteenth chapter.
- Someone whose outward tendencies are not yet subsided will not attain jñāna (naiṣkarmya - explained later) by merely renouncing activity (3.4). He will become a hypocrite (mithyācāri) who restrains his limbs on the outside but munches sensual objects within (3.6). Just like Arjuna, most of the society at any given point in time would not have the cittaśuddhi necessary for karma sannyāsa. Therefore almost all of us would be hypocrites if we renounced karma. That is why karma yōga is given more emphasis in the Gītā as compared to karma sannyāsa. The latter is described in chapters 6 and 13.
- Kṛṣṇa also tells an additional reason for why Arjuna should choose karma yōga (3.20-26) — Public follows whatever a leader or a great person does. Therefore to keep the larger system undisturbed, one (especially someone already in a prominent position in society) should act even if he has the eligibility to renounce. For this Kṛṣṇa gives the historical example of King Janaka, and a contemporary example of himself. Most people are not eligible for renunciation; therefore in order not to confuse them, a wise man (although he has no dependency on karma) must act and encourage others also to act.

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<sup>29</sup> The four stages or āśramas of life are Brahmacharya, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha and Sannyāsa.

## 4.2. Yajña Cakra

Since karma yōga is suitable for Arjuna (and most people), Kṛṣṇa first elaborates the concepts associated with this path. Among those, yajña cakra is explained in the third chapter (3.14):

"Beings come forth from food; food is produced from rain; rain from yajña; yajña is born of action"

The first aspect is obvious. As put forth in Brahmānandavallī of Taittirīya upaniṣat: "From earth were born the herbs. From the herbs was produced food. From food was born man. That man, such as he is, is surely a product of the essence of food" (2.1.1) Food not only supplies us energy to perform work, but also *becomes* the body. Beings are just food that they have consumed (and food in turn is just earth).

The second aspect also does not require any explanation. We know rains are essential for agriculture.

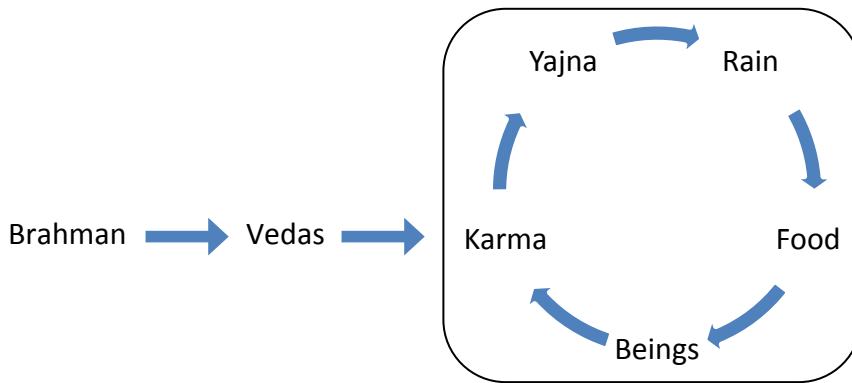
The third aspect is referring to daiva yajña (also called as dravya yajña; fire sacrifices) — a specialized technique that the Vedic civilization had discovered to maintain harmony with the energy forms (dēvatā) of the energy realm (adhidaiva). Presently we are too much preoccupied with the matter realm (adhibhūta) and manage only this part both individually and collectively. But just like we have subtler layers to our being (apart from the annamaya layer), creation at large also has subtler layers to it. Managing the material layer (food, clothing etc.) of our society, no matter how well done, is not the end of the game. In the Vedic civilization dravya yajña, which uses fire as a medium between matter and energy, was the technology that maintained the health of the system at the subtler layers, especially the energy realm (prāṇamaya). Energy in its nascent form is abstract, intangible and not in our direct experience; we experience energy only as the *activity* of the material sheath. Thus, health of the energy sheath would refer to the rhythms (regulated activity) of Nature. Earth is an organism and it has biological rhythms just like any living system that is part of it; disrupted rhythms would mean ill-health of the prāṇamaya sheath. Dravya yajñas saw to it that the rhythms of the planet remained resilient and healthy, an important aspect of which was timely rains<sup>30</sup>. "Rain is produced from yajña" should be interpreted as timely rains; rains in inappropriate amounts (excessive or scarce) and irregular timings do more harm than good.

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<sup>30</sup> There is much more to yajña than this; timely rain is just one aspect of the much bigger and deeper picture of this Vedic science. Inducing health in the energy layer by offering certain substances into fire, arranging certain material objects, chanting certain mantra, and other procedures is called *consecration*. Consecrated spaces are less prone to inauspicious events; they stabilize the psychology of the people who come into its sphere etc. Reading the epics we see how great an emphasis was laid on yajñas in ancient India. Every household was performing agnihōtra (a short fire sacrifice procedure) everyday along with other occasional daiva yajñas. This means entire civilizations lived in consecrated spaces. Every cell of the organism was engaged in some energy-processing which kept the energy of the overall system vibrant. Today although the procedures for these yajñas are still available, awareness about them is largely lost. Many ridicule them as baseless; it is just that we have become too insensitive to experience and appreciate any aspect of creation apart from gross matter.

Further, it is karma (as per the Veda) that makes a dravya yajña possible, and karma is performed by beings — here the cakra (cycle) is complete. Without this link (yajña performed by beings) the cycle remains broken and unsustainable. Therefore someone who does not follow this cycle is condemned as living a wasteful life (3.16). But remember that this is mandated only for householders (gṛhastha) following the path of karma yōga, not for karma sanyasī as clarified again by Kṛṣṇa (3.17-18)

Finally Kṛṣṇa says, since the yajñas are performed as instructed by the Veda, and since Veda is not from any individual but is from the source of creation, the all-pervading reality of Brahman is present in the yajñas (3.15). This means, one is in tune with the source when he performs the yajñas. Figure below depicts the summary of this discussion:



Although achieving harmony with the energy forms (dēvatā) is the primary purpose of the yajñas (3.11-12), dāna — distribution of food, clothes and other things is also an essential part of the yajñas. After the dēvatās are fed with the fire-sacrifices, and beings (humans, animals, birds etc.) with food, the performer of the yajña is supposed to consume the remainder (yajñaśiṣṭa). Kṛṣṇa declares that such a person liberates himself, whereas someone who cooks just for himself is a thief; he eats only sin (3.13; 4.31)

Presently human beings are mostly busy indiscriminately sucking resources out of the planet, and have lost the attitude of offering back to Nature. We do not recognize the interconnectedness and interdependency of the system, and have constipated ourselves into imagined individualities acting like some standalone entities without regard to fellow-beings<sup>31</sup>. In medical terms, we have become the cancer cells of the cosmic organism, and the organism would obviously work against us. Thus the teaching of

<sup>31</sup> We think by paying money for whatever we consume, we are done with our responsibility towards Nature. This attitude is only making our psychological boundaries stronger. Unless we offer something back wholeheartedly with gratitude, we will not open ourselves up to the rest of the existence. Today there is a trend in India wherein people feed animals because some astrologer advises them to do so to nullify their karma and eliminate their personal problems. The astrologer may not know why he is advising it, but it is an act of yajña nonetheless. This is not to promote astrology or anything, but only to highlight that we shouldn't need astrologers and the fear of planets to make us feed animals! And funnily enough, here too people just pay money to someone to feed the animals; yes, it is better than nothing, but why not feed them with our own hands and experience the connection?

yajñacakra becomes ever more relevant today. The process of yajña and dāna not only induces health in the cosmic organism, but also liberates the individual from his constricted identities by invoking a state of offering in him. When an individual opens himself up to the system and lives in tune with it, he is akin to a healthy cell of the organism, and a healthy cell receives all the necessary support from the organism. This can be called as "grace". Grace always is. It is just that we have to make ourselves available to it.

### 4.3. Swadharma

In the third chapter Kṛṣṇa ends his teaching with the following verse:

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।  
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥३.३५॥

*śrēyān svadharmō viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt |*  
*svadharmē nidhanam śrēyaḥ paradharmō bhayāvahaḥ ||3.35||*

**Meaning:** One's own dharma (swadharma), even if it is devoid of merit, is better than well-discharged dharma belonging to others (paradharma). It is better to die performing swadharma; paradharma is fearful.

Kṛṣṇa had already brought up swadharma in the second chapter when he said "If you forsake your swadharma then you will become a sinner". Here he is emphasizing it further. This concept is repeated and elaborated in the eighteenth chapter also which we will cover here itself.

Along with swadharma, Kṛṣṇa also uses words such as "swabhāva" and "swakarma". Swabhāva refers to one's inherent nature (specifically to talents and skills). Every system has parts, and every part has a specific role to play in the system. Every picture has colours, and every colour has a specific place in the picture. Similarly, every society has many individuals, and every individual has a specific skill that can fulfill the needs of the rest of the society. Some specific skills come naturally to each individual; only it must be noticed and harnessed during the process of education. Based on this observation the vedic society was categorized broadly into four varṇas — brāhmaṇa (teachers, researchers), kṣatriya (warriors, administrators), vaiśya (businessmen, farmers), śūdra (assist the other varṇas). Each varṇa had certain privileges and proportionate responsibilities. Just as there are no good and bad colours in a picture there are no good and bad varṇa (in fact varṇa literally means colour; it refers to the shade of the personality). It is only through the proper arrangement of all colours that the picture becomes meaningful. It is only through the proper arrangement of all the varṇas that a society becomes meaningful. If red tries to occupy the place of blue, or green that of yellow, that picture will look weird. Similarly, individuals are mandated to perform swadharma — actions in tune with their swabhāva, and are refrained from performing



paradharmā — actions not in tune with their core personality; even if they are attracted to paradharmā and do it well for the time being, in the long run they will find themselves in some deep friction (stress) within themselves (as is the case today with many people). Only swadharmā can lead one to effortless work and karma yōga. Thus Kṛṣṇa affirms:



स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥गीता १८.४६॥

BY HONOURING THAT (ONE REALITY) THROUGH SVAKARMA/SVADHARMA (A PROFESSION IN TUNE WITH ONE'S APTITUDE AND ATTITUDE), HUMAN GETS TO THE ULTIMATE ACCOMPLISHMENT ॥GITA 18.46॥

The idea of swadharmā is relevant at any time for any society. In summary a society that strongly acknowledges swadharmā and abides by it reaps the following benefits:

- The *amount* of remuneration becomes secondary to individuals following swadharmā; because they enjoy the work more than the reward<sup>32</sup>.
- It enables each individual to see the complementarity of the system and be grateful to everyone else and everything else in creation.
- Hence, the idea that one profession is superior to others will be absent in the psyche of the society.

<sup>32</sup> However, if someone is unable to make a living out of swadharmā, he is allowed to adopt paradharmā for the time being. This is called āpat-dharmā or emergency provisions. Perhaps most of us are following āpat-dharmā today! But we must make an attempt to move towards swadharmā as soon as possible, even if it involves lesser money than paradharmā.

- Work becomes more and more effortless, and thereby the sense of "doership" slowly vanishes, which leads one to karma yōga. That is why we see that many great achievers in their respective fields do not feel that they have done anything great; in their experience it is quite effortless! In contrast if we follow paradharma, even a small task looks like a great achievement. For instance, if a father looks after his baby for a day he will boast about it as a great achievement, whereas for the mother it is quite effortless. Mothering is not father's swabhāva!
- Individuals would act to merely *express* their swabhāva, and not to *impress* anyone else. A cuckoo sings melodiously not to impress anyone, but just to express itself; it is its nature to sing. Same would happen with human beings when swadharma is followed. One would depend no more on the "thanks" or on the appreciation of others to feel useful and uplifted. This means every individual has gratitude towards all others, but has no expectation that others be grateful to him. A lot of unclaimed gratitude! The whole society brims with such sāt̥tvik emotions.

The other point Kṛṣṇa brings out in relation to swadharma is that *all* actions have some inherent shortcoming (18.48). For e.g. a teacher's work involves punishing the students, a brāhmaṇa's life involves begging for food, a kṣatriya's life involves killing etc. Since these shortcomings are in the very nature of the karma, he clarifies that one who is following swadharma will not incur sin for these shortcomings. Kṛṣṇa is telling this in response to Arjuna's doubt that killing will make him a sinner.

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।  
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥१८.४७॥

*śrēyān svadharmō viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt |  
svabhāvanīyatam karma kurvannāpnōti kilbiṣam ||18.47||*

**Meaning:** Swadharma, even if it is devoid of merit, is better than well-discharged paradharma. He who performs actions ordained by his inherent nature (swabhāva) incurs no sin.

Note that the first half of this verse is same as that of 3.35. Repetition indicates that it is a significant teaching. Indeed, it is an essential stepping stone for the practice of karma yōga.

#### 4.4. Kāma and Krōdha — *The Enemy*

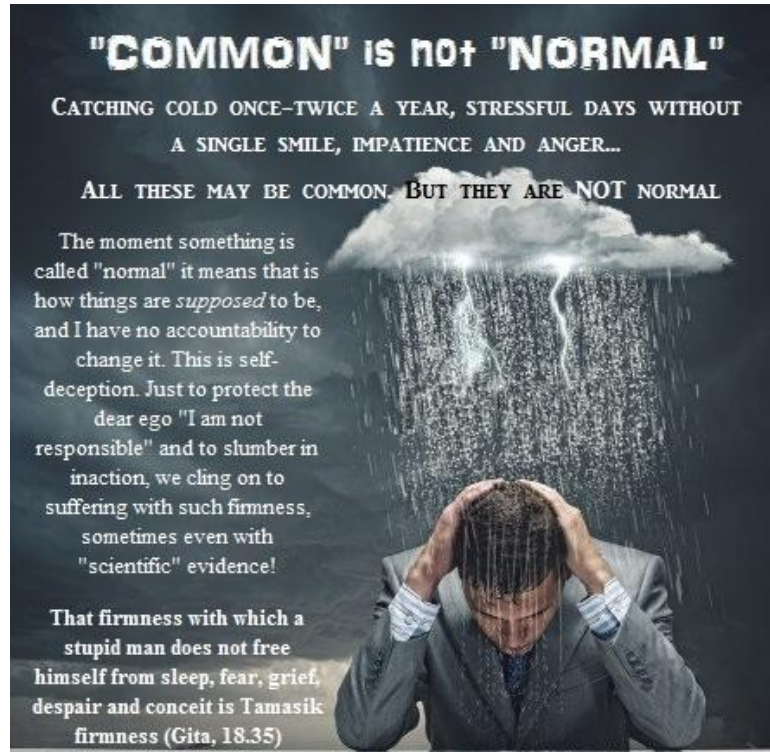
Arjuna then questions — "Then impelled by what does man commit sin, though against his wishes, constrained, as it were, by force?" (3.36) The clause "then" here refers to Kṛṣṇa's teaching in the third chapter; it indicates "If being in tune with the yajñacakra and following swadharma brings about harmony and spiritual growth, then why does one deviate from it and commit ignoble acts?"

### Chapter 3

To this Kṛṣṇa answers "kāma-krōdha" (3.37). Interestingly, he does not use dual form here, but uses singular indicating that desire and anger are one and the same; one is present in the other (see 2.62). He qualifies the couple as "born out of Rajas", "all-sinful" and "all-devouring" (or insatiable) and concludes that this is *the* enemy of human beings. Again in the fifth chapter he talks about the "mental speed born out of kāma-krōdha", and in the sixteenth chapter refers to kāma-krōdha-lōbha as the three doors to hell.

Here Kṛṣṇa is not blacklisting *all* desires. Later he himself endorses kāma that is in tune with dharma (7.11). It is the fundamental premise of the Vedic culture that worldly desires (kāma) and material wealth (artha) must strictly be within the framework of dharma for one to attain liberation (mōkṣa). But when one is not guided by the higher goal of spiritual accomplishment, he will obviously confer ultimate priority to the worldly affairs itself, and consequently develop indiscriminate desires to possess indefinitely — it is this *materialistic* attitude that Kṛṣṇa is condemning. Have a family, but only with the goal of self-realization; have wealth, but only with the goal of self-realization. When this is the guiding principle, we will naturally not invest more of ourselves into the worldly affairs. We will not sleep over them, but will invest in them only as much as to use them as staircase towards spiritual progress.

Sometimes people who have learnt about the concept of swabhāva and swadharma, idiotically argue that "Anger is my swabhāva, and therefore I must follow it to find fulfillment"! This is the same blunder as in relation to health — we have begun considering disease as normal, and health as an achievement. Similarly we consider anger, stress etc. as normal and as our swabhāva! But they are merely diseases eclipsing our actual swabhāva<sup>33</sup>, and thereby our natural state of ātmajñāna (3.39). Just because they are *common*, does not mean that they are *normal*!



<sup>33</sup> Consequently we say "I do not know what I like to do" as if there are two people within!

## 5. Inaction, In action, and Beyond action | Chapters 4-5

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### Chapters Outline

- Kṛṣṇa says he had imparted yōga to the ancient Kings (4.1-3); Arjuna questions (4.4)
- Kṛṣṇa declares that he is the Supreme born to establish Dharma (4.5-8)
- Teachings of Karma yōga continued
  - Karma-Akarma-Vikarma (4.16-23)
  - Generalization of the concept of yajña (4.24-32)
  - Supremacy of jñāna yajña (4.33-42)
  - How should a seeker approach a Guru (4.34)
- Arjuna repeats his previous question (5.1); karma yōga and karma sannyāsa (5.2-6)
- Witness attitude in karma (5.8-9)
- Spiritual accomplishment is to be done *here* before death (5.19, 23)
- Kāma and krōdha are vēga (5.23)

### 5.1. Kṛṣṇa Enters Yogic State

This chapter begins with an apparently odd affirmation from Kṛṣṇa — "I taught this Yōga to Vivasvān, he taught it to Manu, and Manu to Ikṣvāku. Yōga that was thus handed down through the royal sages was subsequently lost in time. What I am teaching you now is the same Yōga" (4.1-3). Vivasvān, Manu and Ikṣvāku were Kings in the Sūryavamśa (Sun dynasty), around twenty generations prior to Śrī Rāma. Therefore Arjuna promptly asks "You taught Vivasvān? How?! You are my contemporary, and he is an ancient King" (4.4). Here onwards, Kṛṣṇa's tone in the Gītā changes completely. Here onwards he is no more a personality with a specific identity, but the all-inclusive Supreme Being or the Lord (Īśvara).

Until this point in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa had been mostly<sup>34</sup> referring to the imperishable ultimate in third person terms 'that', 'this', 'brahma' etc. (e.g. 2.17, 3.15). But merely speaking of the ultimate takes a great yogi to that very state; his individuality would dissolve to find oneness (union, yōga) with the supreme<sup>35</sup>. That Kṛṣṇa was in the exalted state during Gītā was acknowledged by himself later in the Mahābhārata. After the war, when Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to repeat the teachings of the Gītā, he says: "I cannot repeat what I

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<sup>34</sup> Once in second chapter he refers to himself as the ultimate (2.61), and towards the end of the third chapter this affirmation becomes stronger (3.30). Fourth chapter onwards this becomes full blown.

<sup>35</sup> Any number of yogis have exhibited this. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a modern example. As he goes into devotional ecstasies sometimes he would point at himself and say "This is Mother herself" But *extremes look similar!* Even nut cases say such things, not because of dissolution of their individuality, but hardening of it!

preached you. I discoursed to you on Supreme Brahman, having established myself in Yōga" (Aśvamēdhika parva, chapter 16 [Anugītā])<sup>36</sup>

Established thus in a state of union with the Supreme, Lord Kṛṣṇa utters these very popular statements:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।  
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥४.७॥  
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।  
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥४.८॥

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata |  
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham ||4.7||  
paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṁ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |  
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yugē yugē ||4.8||*

**Meaning:** O Arjuna, whenever there is a decline of dharma and rise of adharma then I manifest Myself! For the protection of the noble, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma, I am born in every age.

For the devotional these verses give goose bumps, for someone who worries that the world is going to the dogs they assure of resurgence, and for the intellectual they reveal the fundamental nature of creation.

As pointed out earlier dharma is that which helps human beings to liberate themselves from limited identities and realize their true nature, and adharma is that which drags them compulsively into worldliness and entangles them. In the context of the society as a whole, dharma refers to a *sustainable* framework that facilitates human *enlightenment*; it refers to a system living according to which evolution of human consciousness is greatly and effortlessly catalyzed<sup>37</sup>. And when a society is unfavorable to such evolution, there is said to be a rise of adharma. Dharma vs Adharma should therefore be viewed as Consciousness vs Compulsiveness or Sustainable vs Unsustainable.

So, the Lord says — whenever there is a rise of adharma, I manifest Myself to set it right. And setting right may involve a major reboot as in Mahābhārata. We indeed see that whenever ignorance and

<sup>36</sup> This is not to refute the popular theory that Kṛṣṇa is an avatāra of Lord Viṣṇu, or to contest the claims of some schools that Viṣṇu is the ultimate God. Since this is an academic study of the Gītā as a Yōgaśāstra, all these are not pertinent here; it is only apt here to view Kṛṣṇa as a Yōgēśvara (master of yōga) rather than alluding to him as God.

<sup>37</sup> This is the most fundamental conception of dharma and is called as sanātana dharma (eternal dharma). All other conceptions of dharma—swadharmā, kuladharmā etc.—are rooted in this. Something that may look "wrong" on the surface may be well rooted in sanātana dharma. Today the idea of "good-bad" or "right-wrong" is very superficial and is not guided by such strong basis; thus the endless debates on every small issue. But if not spiritual enlightenment, we can at least consider *sustainability* as the basis of the definition of "good-bad"; this is indeed happening as United Nations recently set "Sustainable development goals" for itself.

adharmā rises, some individuals emerge to dispel it. The nature of their work may vary—some provide transformative guidance (like Buddha) and some engage in dynamic action (like Kṛṣṇa). The degree of their energy, reach and impact etc. may also vary. When the degree of manifestation of the Divine becomes very special in some, we call them vibhūti, and when it becomes extraordinarily exceptional, we call them avatāra (descent of the Divine).

Entropy or disorder is an inherent condition of Prakṛti. Any designed system needs to be constantly monitored for it to remain useful towards the intended purpose. Human societies are also subject to the same constraint. Unconsciousness (compulsiveness) keeps creeping in, and disorder enters into human minds and societies. And it is not that we set the direction once and it will keep running forever in that direction. Consciousness levels need to be constantly kept up. Even the Lord says here that he needs to manifest again and again to set things right! Īśvara too acknowledges the nature of Prakṛti. If things were set right in one stroke, Prakṛti would lose its meaning.

Lord manifests and acts out of no compulsion (4.6, 9, 14) and has nothing to be gained or achieved through karma (3.22); but we do. So these verses teach us an important message from the perspective of practice of karma yōga: we don't exist to improve the world; but the world exists to improve us. We are to use the world as a gym (and the challenges it throws as weights to be lifted) and mature ourselves. That is the primary objective of all our karma, not the improvements that it causes in the world. The support that is rendered to the world by our karma is only a byproduct, and is temporary. Even if we set something right, it is bound to relapse in due course of time. But the evolution of our consciousness that occurs in this process is fully ours and that cannot be reversed.

## 5.2. Karma-Akarma-Vikarma

The teachings of karma yōga continue in this chapter, foremost of which is that of karma-akarma-vikarma. There are various interpretations of these terms (and the related verses) by different commentators. Here we will base our discussion on Śāṅkarabhāṣya.

Kṛṣṇa opens up the topic by saying "Even scholars are confused in recognizing karma and akarma" (4.16) indicating that the concept is not straightforward. In the subsequent verse he adds "vikarma" to it, and further emphasizes that the nature of karma is very complex (4.17).

The word "karma" refers to śāstravīhita karma — activities prescribed by the śāstras for your role in the society (swadharmā). This includes nitya-naimittika karma (sandhyāvandana, agnihōtra etc.) that everyone should perform along with the specific activities as per their varṇa and the stage of life (āśrama).

"Vikarma" refers to niṣiddha or forbidden karma. For e.g. as discussed earlier, following paradharma is vikarma. Similarly, if someone in student life performs activities prescribed for householder life (mixing up of the āśrama dharma), it is vikarma. And karma such as stealing is a vikarma for anyone.

"Akarma" requires some explanation. Usually, the prefix "a" or "niḥ" in Saṁskṛta signifies negation (like the "un" or "im" in English). For e.g. anitya means impermanent. But in spiritual teachings these prefixes sometimes indicate not mere negation, but transcendence. For e.g. nirguṇa does not mean "devoid of guṇa", but means "transcendence from guṇa" (guṇātīta). If a simple example has to be given: movies are projected on a screen, but the screen transcends all the movies. The difference between negation and transcendence is that in negation there is absence, whereas in transcendence there is a leap to a higher context that supports the lower context but is untouched by it.

Thus the word akarma (or naiṣkarmya) can mean two things: 1) Inactivity (or actionlessness) 2) Transcendence from karma. Throughout the Gītā both the connotations are used by Kṛṣṇa and we should be careful to identify them. As a rule whenever he condemns it he is referring to "inactivity" (e.g. 2.47), and whenever he appreciates it he is referring to transcendence (3.3; 18.48).

In fact, he had laid the foundation for the karma-akarma discussion in the beginning of the third chapter. The phrase "naiṣkarmya sthiti/siddhi" is popularly used as a synonym to ātmajñāna<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, when Arjuna questions him as to why he should engage in karma if jñāna is the ultimate goal, although Arjuna did not explicitly use the word naiṣkarmya, Kṛṣṇa, as though reading Arjuna's mind, clarifies "One cannot attain naiṣkarmya by simply refraining from karma" (3.3). Here he is pointing out that naiṣkarmya means not negation of karma, but transcendence from it. In the fourth chapter he is addressing the same with special attention.

What does transcendence from karma mean? How is ātmajñāna a state of naiṣkarmya? We can look at it from two angles.

1) What we call as karma is basically *amplification*. For e.g. a car is designed in such a way that if I move my foot, an entire car moves. Movement is amplified several million times. Similarly, if we take this a step backward, it is the minute activity of the neurons that is amplified as the movement of the foot. If we take this further backward, as per some modern theories, it is the extremely minuscule spacetime events that cause neural firing. Thus karma is getting amplified in several levels. But it cannot be that it is an endless chain of smaller and smaller activity; there has to be an end, and the natural mathematical end to this is *stillness*. This is what the scriptures conclusively affirm too; our true nature is Stillness. But it is

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<sup>38</sup> Jñāna, Bhakti, Yōga and Naiṣkarmya are four names of the same enlightened state from the perspective of the four streams of yōga — Jñāna yōga, Bhakti yōga, Rāja Yōga and Karma yōga.

not inert stillness; it is the source of all karma! When we thus realize our true nature to be absolute Stillness, we transcend karma. We would be in naiṣkarmya although there is karma on the surface.

2) In ātmajñāna, extremes meet. De-identification from all specific entities leads also to identification with the whole existence at once<sup>39</sup> (our problem is that we are in between — identification with only a few particular things); and all-inclusive identification too implies transcendence from karma. Karma means an interaction of two entities. Any system has parts and when we are identified with certain parts only, we see activity (interaction with other parts). But when we embrace the whole system at once, karma is transcended. For e.g. I say I eat food as I see myself as a specific body. But the body is a piece of earth, so is the food I am eating. One part of earth is eating another part of earth. From the perspective of earth as a whole no eating is happening; the net effect is nil. Therefore an ātmajñāni, as he has an all-inclusive identification with the cosmos, transcends karma. He sees that the consumed, the consumer, the process of consumption etc. are all the same reality (4.24)

Now we are ready to take on a riddle like statement from Kṛṣṇa:

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येत् अकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।  
स बुद्धिमान् मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥४.१८॥

*karmanyakarma yaḥ paśyēt akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ |*  
*sa buddhimān manuṣyēṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt ||4.18||*

**Meaning:** He who sees akarma in karma and karma in akarma, he is wise among men; he is a Yogi and performer of all actions.

Here there are two parts:

a) Seeing akarma in karma — here akarma is being used in the profound sense, i.e. transcendence from karma. When someone has realized his true nature, he sees himself as absolute Stillness and is identified with nothing (or is identified with the entire existence). Hence for him there is no karma at all even if he is engaged in a lot of karma from a mundane standpoint (4.20).

b) Seeing karma in akarma — here akarma is being used in the simpler sense, i.e. inaction. For someone who has not realized his true nature, "I am not doing" is also happening out of a strong individuality and doership. Thus, this "not doing" is a doing; it is karma in the disguise of akarma (3.6).

<sup>39</sup> "When you attain jñāna, you will see all the beings within yourself" (4.35)



### 5.3. An Assortment of Yajñas

Subsequently, Kṛṣṇa generalizes the concept of yajña and lists many types of yajña.

- Daiva yajña: fire sacrifices (mentioned in the yajña cakra) to maintain harmony with the dēvatās
- Brahma yajña: dissolving the individuality into the one reality (ātmajñāna)
- Saṁyama yajña: offering the sense organs into the fire of restraint
- Viṣaya yajña: offering regulated sense-objects into the fire of the sense organs
- Ātmasaṁyamayōga yajña: offering all the activities of the senses and the prāṇa (inner functions) into the fire of self-restraint
- Dravya yajña: offering material objects to a noble cause
- Tapō yajña: offering oneself to self-imposed disciplines (vrata) such as fasting
- Yōga yajña: practice of prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra etc.
- Svādhyāya yajña: study of the Veda for enhancing knowledge
- Jñāna yajña: developing ātma-anātma vivēka (discrimination between self and non-self)
- Prāṇayāma yajña: offering prāṇa into apāna (inhalation), offering apāna into prāṇa (exhalation), and halting both prāṇa and apāna (retention)
- Niyatāhāra yajña: attaining mastery over a particular prāṇa through food regulation, and offering the remaining prāṇas into that

Kṛṣṇa praises all the people engaged in any of these yajña, and condemns an "yajña"—someone not engaged in any form of yajña—as undeserving of both this world and any other worlds<sup>40</sup> (4.31). Someone who is not disciplining himself in any form in the name of freedom is only becoming more and more compulsive, and regressing in evolution.

After listing all these yajña, in conclusion Kṛṣṇa extols Jñāna yajña — developing discrimination of the self and the non-self through scriptural study, guidance of the Guru, and contemplation (i.e. jñāna yōga). He praises jñāna yajña with the phrases "Jñāna yajña is superior to all types of material yajña" (4.33), "Eventually all karma culminates in jñāna" (4.33), "The fire of jñāna burns all karma into ashes" (4.37), "There is nothing in existence that is more sacred than jñāna" (4.38). He assures here that even the most sinful of all can cross over the ocean of sins with the boat of jñāna (4.36). Note that this is an assurance given to someone who is willing to change the course of their life, and is not an encouragement to commit more sins. *Assurance is never encouragement.* This will be discussed further in the next block.

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<sup>40</sup> We can apply this statement to the various forms of Yōga. It doesn't matter which school one is following, all are yōga practitioners; it is better than not practicing any form of Yōga.

## 5.4. How to approach a Guru

In the course of this discussion, Kṛṣṇa clarifies and resolves a significant issue in relation to questioning, śraddhā (faith/conviction), surrender and suspicion.

While emphasizing jñāna as the ultimate goal, he advises Arjuna that to attain ātmajñāna he should approach a Guru as a seeker. Here he lists three qualities of a seeker: 1) Praṇipāta (prostration, attitude of surrender) 2) Paripraśna (questioning) and 3) Sēvā (serving the Guru)

The first two are apparently contradictory. Our usual idea is that once you have surrendered to someone and have utmost faith in them, you should not question what they say. Whenever someone questions some tradition, elders usually say that it should not be questioned and should be followed with faith. This attitude exists because people have confused "questioning out of inquisitiveness" and "questioning out of suspicion". Since latter type of questioning is more prevalent (as in news channels), all questions get branded as against faith. But questions by themselves are not against faith. In fact sincere questions rise out of deep faith/conviction.

Questions arise because something seems odd, and you want an explanation for it. For e.g. if a physics professor is teaching General theory of Relativity of Einstein, many aspects of the theory will defy common sense. Therefore a student may raise a question about it. Here the student is asking the question not to *challenge* the theory (or Einstein or the professor), but to get explanations as to *how* it is so. Question is arising out of the conviction that the theory is right, not out of suspicion towards it. But if you fall into suspicion mode, the moment something seems odd, you will straightaway presume that something is wrong with the theory; thereafter no one can convince you what the theory really says as you have already made a [negative] *conclusion*. You will no more put any effort to understand the theory. All your questions and efforts thereafter will only be to challenge and ridicule the theory; no answer will matter to you anymore<sup>41</sup>. Thus Kṛṣṇa says "saṁśayātmā vinaśyati" (a suspecting man perishes) (4.40).

Thus we should question out of conviction. But how does the conviction come? Should we have conviction no matter what is said? In case of physics, theories are proved by experiments, and therefore a new student will naturally have conviction on its legitimacy. But what about spirituality?

For instance, spirituality claims "You are not the body or mind, you transcend both". Now this is an apparently odd claim. But just because it is counterintuitive we cannot brush it aside in a hurry. We may not be able to obtain objective proof (pratyakṣa pramāṇa) for such lofty spiritual claims in a laboratory as

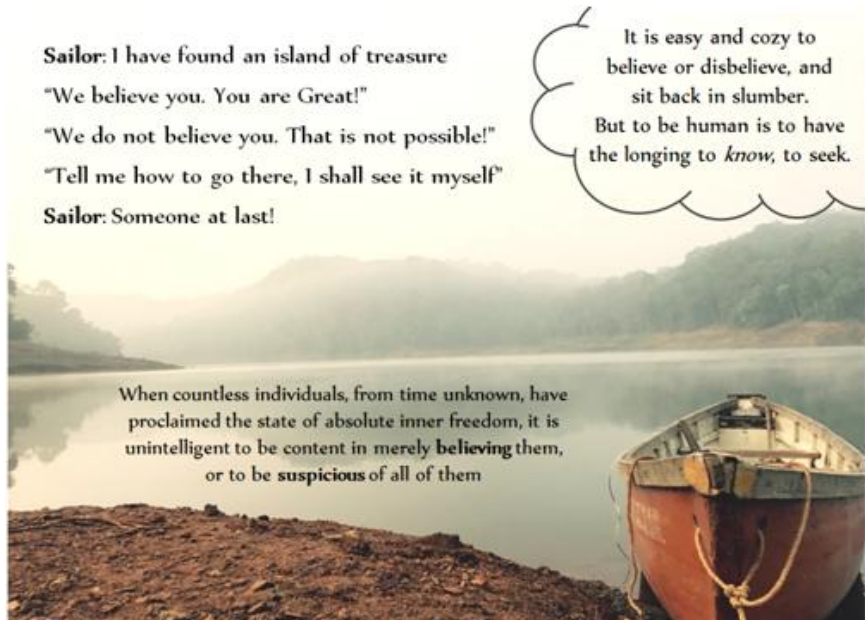
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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the major problem of today's generation is that we quickly yield to some conclusion without much exploration or study; impatient/lazy intellect is the trademark of this century. Most of the discussions reveal that people involved have already decided something, and are discussing only to assert.

in physics (because they are subjective experiences), but we surely can *infer* (anumāna pramāṇa) the higher possibilities—grand qualities such as equanimity amidst great turmoil—that have been exhibited by spiritual masters in every age. And consequently, the words of such beings become āgama pramāṇa<sup>42</sup>; for they not only claim that they have experienced something, but also explain how we can also get there<sup>43</sup>. Also, we should ask ourselves — if spirituality was all dummy without any substance to it, why is it that so many individuals in every age endorsed it? If it was fundamentally baseless, how is it that these spiritual disciplines survived for thousands of years without any forceful imposition by anyone? Therefore, suspecting and ridiculing the entire gamut of spirituality is outright idiocy.

On the other hand there is another problem of simply believing things without trying to experience them firsthand (because of laziness to put the efforts). Many people have great faith on Kṛṣṇa; but they do not attempt to study and adopt

the teachings of the Gītā! While some quickly suspect and disbelieve, some others quickly believe. Both are not very different in that both are ignorant and are not honest enough to accept that "I do not know". Believers simply utter the lofty statements present in the scriptures without any personal exploration or experience of



the same. This is like claiming marks for the derivation of an equation in the mathematics examination without actually deriving it, saying "I have complete faith on my teacher who derived it in the class!"

Therefore only when surrender and questioning go together something worthwhile happens. Śraddhā and questions are therefore complementary, not contradictory. "Śraddhāvān labhatē jñānam" (4.39) — a man of śraddhā surely attains jñāna.

<sup>42</sup> In fact even in case of science a new student has no personal understanding (nor the ability to understand) of the proof to begin with. She goes by inference (seeing the technological advancements) and faith on the scientists (because they provide a method to experiment and understand it ourselves), and only in the end comes to a direct understanding of the theoretical-experimental proofs. Similarly in spirituality a seeker goes by inference (seeing the human advancement in the masters) and faith (because of the methods provided for personal realization).

<sup>43</sup> But if someone claims that he has a spiritual realization that is reserved only for him, then there is no point in believing him, disbelieving him or questioning him. We may as well just ignore him.

### 5.5. Karma Yōga or Karma Sannyāsa?

Since Kṛṣṇa ends the fourth chapter by emphasizing jñāna and the phrase "sanyastakarmāṇam" (4.41), Arjuna gets confused again, and repeats what he had asked in the beginning of the third chapter — "Once you praise sannyāsa and another time yōga; tell me conclusively as to which is better for me" (5.1) This part of the text has already been discussed in section 4.1.

### 5.6. Sākṣī bhāva — Witness attitude

It is described in this chapter as to how a ātmajñāni performs actions.

While seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, excreting, seizing, and even opening and closing the eyes, convinced that it is merely the senses that are engaged in the sense-objects, a jñāni sees that "I do nothing at all". (5.8-9)

From the perspective of practice, this is akin to the idea of *mindfulness* popularized by the Buddha. Instead of being absent minded, one should be uphold awareness in the smaller activities of daily life. This cultivates the power of concentrate which can then be shone on any desired target object or idea. The keen observation of the bodily activity also lets one gradually realize the distance between "me" and the body and develops ātma-anātma vivēka.

### 5.7. Self-Realization — Here, Not in some other world!

There is a widespread notion among people that after death we go to God. Attaining to realization at the moment of death is certainly a possibility, but not a surety (this is discussed in chapter 8). Therefore, simply waiting until the death moment for it to happen is unintelligent, and is not sanctioned by Kṛṣṇa. The last verse of the second chapter says: "Someone who has attained to the state of Brahman will be established in it during death moment *also*" (2.72). This is telling us that the state is attained while alive, and that it is merely held onto during the moment of death.

In the fifth chapter this affirmation is very direct:

- "Creation (birth-death cycle) is overcome in this very world by those whose minds are established in equanimity" (5.19)
- "He who is able, while still here in this world, to withstand, *before* the liberation from the body, the speed born of desire and anger—he is a Yogi, he is a happy man" (5.23)

The latter verse also forms the basis for the Yogic definition of stress which has been elaborated in the study material of Yoga Philosophy and Health.

## 6. Dhyāna Yōga - The *Incoming* | Chapter 6

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### Chapter Outline

- Conclusion of the yōga-sannyāsa discussion (6.1-4)
- You are your friend, you are your enemy (6.5-6)
- Samtva emphasized (6.7-9)
- Description of Dhyāna and Dhyāna yōgi (6.10-32)
- Arjuna's question on the fickleness of mind (6.33-34) and Kṛṣṇa's response (6.35-36)
- Arjuna's question on yōgabhraṣṭa (6.37-39) and Kṛṣṇa's response (6.40-47)

### 6.1. And we are back to Sāṅkhya yōga

Having explained karma yōga in very much detail in three chapters, Kṛṣṇa now returns to sāṅkhya yōga (or karma sannyāsa) that deals with enquiring into one's true nature. However, since he clads the core sādhanā of self-enquiry with the prescriptions of āsana, prāṇāyāma etc. this chapter gets identified with Rāja yōga (supported by Haṭha yōga). In the Gītā it is called as Ātmasaṁyama yōga<sup>44</sup> or Dhyāna yōga.

As summarized in Unit 4, Kṛṣṇa concludes the yōga-sannyāsa discussion saying that when one is not yet devoid of saṅkalpa (resolutions, intentions) he must engage in karma yōga; and once purged of such outward habitual tendencies of the mind through karma yōga, he becomes meditative by his own nature; for such a dhyāna yōgi, śama (withdrawal) or karma sannyāsa (sādhanā in solitude) is prescribed (6.3). When this śama is complete, such a person engages no more in sense-objects and karma<sup>45</sup>, and renounces all saṅkalpa; then he is called as a yōgārūḍha (6.4). Ārūḍha means "ascended". Here the word yōgārūḍha is used with two connotations. In 6.3 it refers to someone who has ascended dhyāna yōga, someone whose śama is in progress and is turning more and more inward. In 6.4 it refers to someone who has ascended the final state of yōga, someone who is established in himself, i.e. an ātmajñāni<sup>46</sup>.

### 6.2. You are your friend, you are your enemy

Before going on to describe a yōgārūḍha, Kṛṣṇa utters a couple of verses to encourage Arjuna towards attaining the exalted state:

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<sup>44</sup> Recall that this was one of the yajña listed in the fourth chapter.

<sup>45</sup> Renunciation involves both of pleasures and actions. Giving up only actions but not pleasures is hypocrisy. Also, recall that some yōgārūḍhas may choose to engage in the world to lead others.

<sup>46</sup> This dual connotation is common. For e.g. "Bhakta" actually refers to someone who has dissolved himself in the object of his devotion. But it is also used to refer to someone who is on the path of Bhakti. Same with "Yogi".

One should uplift himself by himself; one should not let himself down. Because you alone are your friend, you alone are your enemy (6.5). Someone who has conquered himself (his citta) by himself is his friend; otherwise, just like an external enemy, he is his enemy (6.6).

Tāmasik personalities are a combination of [my problem is outside] + [someone else is responsible for it; I cannot do anything]. Rājasik personalities are [my problem is outside] + [I will take charge and combat them]. Sāttvik ones are [my problem is within me] + [I alone can take care of it]. Rajas is obviously better than Tamas, but Sattva is better than Rajas also. It is sattva that Kṛṣṇa is highlighting here.

Tamas is the despicable human habit to find some or the other external entity to blame for our condition. If things succeed, it is of course because of me; but if things fail it is that man over there. Or if there is no one down here that we can blame, then it is that big man called "God" up there. This is a foul game. It is like "Heads, I win; tails, you lose"!<sup>47</sup> We think that the moment someone else is blamed, we are free of accountability. But what we forget is that by doing so we also give up the freedom and possibility to change our life by ourselves.

In Rajas people take accountability for all their experience of life, but will consider external situations as the source of their inner experiences. So they will be determined to *make things happen* in the world. This is certainly better than tamas, but is not a solution; because no matter how well the world is managed, it will never be one hundred percent in our hands. We cannot hope to have the external situations exactly the way we want it always. If our inner state is dependent on the external situations, then we will be on a major rollercoaster trip with continuous ups-downs.

In the mode of Sattva, we come to realize that our inner experience of life is fully ours. No one is sitting within us to make us feel in a certain way. The external situations are merely triggers, and are not causes. We may consciously choose to respond to them in any way we want. But it is just that we have gone into an automated compulsive mode such that for a particular trigger we compulsorily feel and react in a certain way. Mere realization of this fact is a major step, and will spontaneously change the direction of our efforts. We will then endeavor to conquer our citta instead of conquering the world<sup>48</sup>.

In an organization, the employees down in the hierarchy complain about issues within the organization to the ones higher in the hierarchy. That is understandable. But suppose the CEO of the organization sits and whines about things in his own company! When some employee goes to him with a concern, the CEO

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<sup>47</sup> It is fine if someone remembers God at all times and surrenders all his karma to Him; that would become karma yōga fuelled by bhakti yōga. But doing it selectively is neither bhakti nor karma yōga.

<sup>48</sup> This does not mean that a Sāttvik person does not try to *make things happen* in the world at all. It is just that he does not consider it as the solution for his inner situation. Also, when someone conquers his own citta, external situations automatically get managed well as a natural by-product. Citta is our interface to the world; if that is fixed, the interactions with the world will also be fixed.

says "Yes, I know, but what can we do?" This would be ridiculous. A CEO should take action to correct things; if he does not have that power he is not a CEO.

Similarly, we should decide if we are servants of our life, or Kings of our life. Only servants complain and wait on others to correct things; Kings take action. Only then can we do justice to "Rāja yōga".

And as clarified above, here "taking action" does not refer to managing the world well (that is Rajas), but getting a hold on our citta. The CEO should manage his own company to solve his problem, not someone else's company; other companies will automatically have a good relation with him when he manages his company well. Similarly, to achieve inner wellbeing, we should become the Kings of our life, not someone else's life by trying to control them. When we have conquered ourselves, there is anyway no need to control others; they are spontaneously drawn and embraced.

### 6.3. Samatva — Prime quality of Yōgārūḍha

Whatever was referred to as sthitaprajña in the second chapter is referred to as yōgārūḍha in the sixth chapter. And similar to the qualities of sthitaprajña, Kṛṣṇa describes the qualities of yōgārūḍha (6.7-9; 29-32) with special emphasis on samatva. Here we will discuss them as pointers for our practice.

In verses 7-9, Kṛṣṇa enunciates three possible applications of samatva in our life.

1) Samatva towards experiences (6.7). This is further divided into three types:

Physical (hot and cold): This aspect is the easiest to practice samatva with, and a practitioner should start here. Yōga is not against comfort; it is only against compulsion with comfort<sup>49</sup>. Instead of imposing conditions on ourselves that "I necessarily need this much comfort", one should go about without paying much attention to the different physical situations that come and go (unless they threaten you survival!). There is a nice description in the Mahābhārata of how the young Pāṇḍavas, who were princes living in luxury, were least bothered when they had to spend a few months in a Brāhmaṇa's house begging for their food and sleeping on the floor (this is after they escape from the house of wax where Duryōdhana tries to burn them alive). They would lie down on the grass mats, speak about weaponry and battle formations, and go to sleep as if everything is normal!

Emotional (joy and sorrow) and Intellectual (praise and insult): As we are becoming more of psychological beings and intellectual beings, this aspect becomes more important. This would require a lot of explanation; a summary has been covered in the first block in the context of karma yōga. This is necessary because someone who wants to turn inward cannot afford to have the key to his joy kept

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<sup>49</sup> In fact this is a general rule. Yōga is never fundamentally against anything. It never brands something as universally *bad*. It is always only against compulsiveness, the only enemy of consciousness.

in the hands of the world. To begin with, at least the conviction that world is the source of my joy should be shaken up from its roots. Śrī Rāma stands out as an exceptional example in this regard. On a particular day, it is announced that he would be coronated as the crown prince the next day; the whole city rejoices, and amidst all the celebrations he is calm and composed. The next morning not only is the decision reversed, but he is also exiled into forest for fourteen years; everyone plunges into unimaginable sorrow, and he is again calm and composed without even a hint of worry on his face. Merely reading such episodes induces some *samatva* in us!

2) *Samatva* towards objects (6.8) — seeing stone, mud and gold with an equal eye. From the standpoint of a *yōgārūḍha* it refers to his realization that everything in the universe is basically different shapes of the same stuff. Another perspective is that every object in existence has its place, and no object is more important than others. A knife has its use and a needle has its. A stone has its use and a gold piece has its. None can do the job of the other.

3) *Samatva* towards people (6.9). Here he lists nine types of people that one encounters in life:

*Suhṛt* — Good hearted people, well-wishers; *Mitra* — Friend; *Ari* — Enemy; *Udāsīna* — Indifferent (they have nothing to do with you); *Madhyastha* — Mediator (between you and others); *Dvēṣya* — Hateful (for no apparent reason - there are many of these!); *Bandhu* — Relatives; *Sādhu* — Noble people in the society; and *Pāpi* — Ignoble people in the society (the last two do not necessarily have a personal relationship with you).

Here it must be noted that *equality does not mean uniformity*; and equal eye (*samadarśana*) does not mean uniform treatment (*samavartana*). The latter would just be a robot, not a conscious being.

For e.g. a mother with two children will respond differently to the different personalities of the children. Depending on the background and their attitude behind the actions, the mother may punish one for a mistake, and pardon the other for the same mistake. Note that different responses are coming not out of bias, but out of equal eye. Thus, different responses to similar situations do not necessarily mean discrimination as a superficially logical mind usually thinks.

Extending the same idea, a *yōgārūḍha* has no bias towards anyone because he sees just one undivided existence. He will respond to each type of person as needed by the situation; the difference in his response will be rooted in equal eye, not discriminatory eye.

The other qualities described in relation to *yōgārūḍha* are:

- *Jñānavijñānatṛptātāmā* (6.8) — no more searching for knowledge in scriptures or in the world
- *Kūṭastha* (6.8) — is so firmly rooted in the realization of the one that he is *immovable*



- Sees all beings in him, and him in all beings (6.29)
- Sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me (6.30) — the above is reiterated from the perspective of Bhakti
- Sarvatra ātma upamya (6.32) — treating all beings as how he would treat himself.

#### 6.4. Dhyāna yōga described

Kṛṣṇa's description of Ātmasaṁyama yōga or Dhyāna yōga can be divided into two parts: preparation for dhyāna, and the practice of dhyāna (similar to bahiraṅga and antaraṅga yōga of Patañjali's Aṣṭāṅga yōga).

##### 6.4.1. Preparations for dhyāna

General instructions: A dhyāna yōgi should be in solitude without possessing any objects and any desires to possess (6.10). He should be peaceful within (having purged the outward tendencies through karma yōga), fearless and be following the disciplines of brahmacarya (begging for food, serving the Guru etc.)

Food and sleep: Do not eat too much, nor avoid eating. Heaviness of stomach and starvation are both not conducive for meditation<sup>50</sup>. Similarly, do not sleep too much, nor become sleepless (6.16). Food, sleep, recreation, amount of exertion in the activities etc. should all be moderated by a practitioner (6.17).

Āsana (seat and posture): In a clean place one should make a seat for himself by laying kuśa grass, skin (of tiger, kṛṣṇamṛga [blackbuck]<sup>51</sup> etc.) and cloth on top. The place should be neither too high nor low from the surrounding area (6.11). Then he should sit steadily with his body, head and neck aligned (6.13).

Prānāyāma and Pratyāhāra: This was mentioned towards the end of the fifth chapter. Prāṇa and Apāna should be equalized by practice; i.e. automatic suspension of breath should be achieved. The external sensations should be kept external (5.27); this includes both cutting off sensations (by closing the eyes etc.), and not paying attention to any incoming sensations.

##### 6.4.2. Practice and development of dhyāna

Having sat in a steady posture and mastered the breathing process, without seeing anywhere else (i.e. without opening the eyes every now and then) one should focus on the point between the eyebrows (6.13)<sup>52</sup>. This is to develop concentration or dhāraṇa.

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<sup>50</sup> Here we may also add that sātṭvik food should be consumed as it supports dhyāna yōga. Sātṭvik food (and also rājasik, tāmasik food) is described in the seventeenth chapter.

<sup>51</sup> These skins are said to have a certain energy impact on us. But there is no need to get too caught up with this as it is only one of the aids. Also, this is being said in a time when forests were in abundance.

Then Kṛṣṇa talks of two options for directing this dhāraṇa: the dhyāna yōgi can either fix his mind on the Supreme, or on the Self.

a) First he says that the dhyāna yōgi should be *maccitta* and *matpara* (6.14). One may fix his mind on an object of enjoyment, but he does not (and cannot) consider it to be the ultimate. Only when there is the conviction that something is the ultimate, the dhāraṇa will be deep and steady. Therefore both *maccitta* and *matpara* are specified (Śāṅkarabhāṣya); the dhyāna yōgi should fix his citta on me, the Lord, acknowledging Me to the ultimate goal (para). Such a yōgi will attain nirvāṇa (6.15). This type of dhyāna is driven by Bhakti.

b) Or the dhyāna yōgi should fix his mind on his Self (6.18). By using willpower and the intellect (enquiry), gradually the mind should be subsided (turned inward) and fixed on the Self (6.25). Whenever the mind drifts away due to lack of firmness, it should be repeatedly brought back to the Self (6.26).

When the self-awareness is unbroken it becomes like the unwavering flame of a lamp in a windless place (6.19)<sup>53</sup>. Kṛṣṇa describes the state of self-realization in a set of verses (6.20-23):

- With practice the mind becomes quiet and niruddha<sup>54</sup> — inhibitive or inward bound, as opposed to exhibitivite or outward bound.
- The yōgi, seeing the Self by the Self, finds absolute contentment in his Self.
- He experiences limitless joy that is beyond the reach of the senses.
- Does not consider any other gain as superior to this.
- Having established in the Self, not even the greatest tragedy disturbs him.
- This is Yōga — *separation from the union with sorrow*.

Finally, to uphold that both Self-realization and God-realization are one and the same, Kṛṣṇa says that a yōgi "sees all beings in him, and him in all beings" (6.29) and "sees Me everywhere, and sees everything in Me" (6.30).

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<sup>52</sup> This verse uses the phrase "focussing on the tip of the nose". But prominent commentators agree that this refers to the point where nose begins (i.e. the point between the eyebrows), not where it ends. There is no significance given to the tip of the nose anywhere in the haṭhayōga texts, nor any mention of focussing on it. Also, "between the eyebrows" was mentioned earlier in the Gītā itself (5.27).

<sup>53</sup> Kṛṣṇa himself is an example for what he is teaching here. Yudhiṣṭhira once sees Kṛṣṇa absorbed in meditation, and this is what he describes: "What is this wonder of wonders, you are rapt in meditation! All the five prāṇas (like breathing) in your body are restrained. Your delighted senses are absorbed into your mind. And all the Guṇas are absorbed into your Self (kṣētrajña). The hair on your body stands erect. Your mind and intellect are both still. You are still like the flame of a lamp in a windless place, and as immobile as a rock" (Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva, ch. 46).

<sup>54</sup> The phrase "cittam niruddham yōgasēvayā" by Kṛṣṇa here is similar to "yōgaḥ cittavṛti nirōdhaḥ" of Patañjali.

### 6.4.3. Yōga defined in terms of viyōga

The above discussion contains the third explicit definition of Yōga in the Gītā<sup>55</sup>. The verse is as follows:

तं विद्यात् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योग सञ्ज्ञितम्  
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगो निर्विण्ण चेतसा॥६.२३॥

*taṁ vidyāt duḥkhasamyōgaviyōgaṁ yōga sañjñitam*  
*sa niścayēna yōktavyō yōgō nirviṅṇa cētasā*||6.23||

**Meaning:** Separation from the union with pain/sorrow is known as Yōga. This Yōga should be practised with determination and with an undesponding mind.

This is a unique definition wherein yōga (union) is defined in terms of viyōga (separation). And there is also a tinge of sarcasm in it. Human beings have mastered the art of misery, and are experts in becoming miserable no matter where we are placed, so much so that we are *one* with sorrow (duḥkhasamyōga). As pointed out earlier we begin to consider that grimness, stress etc. are *normal*. We constantly need something from the world (objects, people, situations... Wi-Fi!) to *charge* us with "joy"; and if we are left on our own without this supply from the world, we immediately fall back to some boredom and sorrow. But in self-realization this reverses. The union with sorrow is severed, and one becomes blissful by his own nature.

### 6.5. But mind is very restless!

When Kṛṣṇa finishes his discourse on dhyāna yōga, Arjuna asks a very basic question — "This yōga that you speak of, I don't see how firmness is possible in it. The mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding. I deem it as difficult to control as to control the wind" (6.33-34)

Kṛṣṇa does not disagree with him and says "asaṁśayaṁ" — undoubtedly the mind is restless and difficult to control; but it is not impossible. Through abhyāsa and vairāgya it can be restrained<sup>56</sup> (6.35).

The aspect of abhyāsa—perfection through continuous and long-term repetition—is not new to Arjuna. He had become the best archer of his times through relentless abhyāsa. He had pleased Lord Shiva through intense meditation and austerities. But all these were driven by the desires for worldly gains. He was a warrior who was determined to acquire weaponry and fighting skills. That aspiration made his focus steady and strong. He could meditate on Shiva to get weapons; but he is saying meditation is

<sup>55</sup> There are several implicit definitions as well. For instance in 2.53, yōga is described as samādhi, a state of absorption; in 10.7, yōga is mentioned as the power through which the Supreme manifests in the world.

<sup>56</sup> These two are presented as the fundamental aspects of yōga in the yōga sūtra of Patañjali also — "abhyāsa vairāgyābhyām tannirōdhaḥ" (1.12)

difficult if the goal is yōga! Similarly, all of us would undergo abhyāsa when there is some enticing worldly achievement at stake. But when it is to realize our true nature, the intensity vanishes and we say abhyāsa is difficult and that the mind is very difficult to control!

It is clear from this that the restlessness of the mind is rooted in disinterest. And this disinterest, in turn, is merely because, unlike the worldly endeavors, we have no idea what is at stake. Since we do not know the grandeur of the state of ātmajñāna, we do not get the necessary conviction to engage in abhyāsa towards realizing it. As discussed earlier unless we consider something as "para", the ultimate possibility, the mind does not get fixed onto it<sup>57</sup>.

But when one realizes the futility of trying to find fulfillment in the world one will naturally turn away from it. This is vairāgya, and is necessary for a practitioner of yōga. Until the saturation with the worldly affairs comes about, meditation on the Self or Supreme is a farfetched idea (because it would not be considered as the ultimate possibility); and when one gives up on the world as a solution to finding fulfillment, the longing for a true solution will also develop. Then, noticing that such a solution has been affirmed in every age by countless masters, the conviction for yōgābhyāsa towards ātmajñāna (or bhakti towards the Lord) will also come about.

## 6.6. Yōgabhraṣṭa

The last section of the sixth chapter addresses Arjuna's question on Yōgabhraṣṭa<sup>58</sup> — "If someone, though he has śraddhā, wanders away from yōga due to lack of efforts, then having failed to attain perfection in yōga what end does he meet? Fallen from both, does he not perish like a separated cloud, supportless and deluded on the path of Brahman?" (6.37-38). Here "both" refers to karma yōga and dhyāna yōga (Śāṅkarabhāṣya).

To this Kṛṣṇa's gives an assuring response:

Either in this world or in any other world, such a person (one who is committed to yōga) does not perish. None who does good (yōgābhyāsa) will ever come to an ill fate (6.40). After death he will attain to the worlds that the virtuous ones attain and live there for a long time. Subsequently, he will be born in a pious and aristocratic family (6.41). Or, he will be born in a family of yōgis; such a birth is very difficult to obtain (6.42). There he will come in touch with the knowledge that he had earlier acquired in

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<sup>57</sup> How much the mind delves into something depends on how much *significance* we have given to it. We cannot have great significance given to something and at the same time hope not to think much about it (or vice versa).

<sup>58</sup> *Yōgabhraṣṭa* does not mean, as Indian students may come to think, a corrupt Yōgi! Here *bhraṣṭa* refers to *fallen*.

## Chapter 6

the previous birth, and consequently strives even more for perfection in yōga (6.43). The momentum of the abhyāsa of his previous life will automatically draw him into it (6.44).

Here we are being reminded that just as there are worldly saṃskāras that pull us towards mundane affairs, we can also develop yogic saṃskāras through regular practice that drag us into yōga no matter how many lifetimes pass. No yōgābhyāsa is ever wasted. Furthermore, a conducive birth is also assured to a yōgi. A financially affluent family means that the yōgi need not spend any time taking care of his survival needs, and can straightaway concentrate on the practice of yōga. Or a family of yōgis (that is not necessarily wealthy) means that his spiritual inclination will receive all the support from the family (which is rare!); or it could also be so that his Guru is within the family itself (like in the Upaniṣat stories where father happens to be the Guru as well), which is a true jackpot for a spiritual seeker.

## Block 3: Chapters 7-12

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### Chapters covered:

- ✚ Chapter 7 (Jñāna vijñāna yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 8 (Akṣaraparabrahma yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 9 (Rājavidyārājaguhya yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 10 (Vibhūti yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 11 (Viśvarūpasamdarśana yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 12 (Bhakti yōga)

Among Jīva-Īśvara-Jagat—the fundamental entities in the Indian systems of philosophy—chapters 1-6 of the Bhagavadgītā are Jīva oriented (self-enquiry, dhyāna etc.), chapters 7-12 are Īśvara oriented (Bhakti), and chapters 13-18 are Jagat (Prakṛti and its Guṇas) oriented.

Chapter 7 begins with the introduction of vijñāna which leads to many of the concepts discussed in the upcoming chapters. As several concepts are common among chapters 7-9, they have been clubbed together. One of these concepts, vibhūti, is dealt with in detail in Chapter 10.

Chapter 11 comes as a testimony to whatever Kṛṣṇa had been telling Arjuna till now, wherein Arjuna witnesses the 'Cosmic form', a bewildering experience that he finds overwhelming. This naturally leads him to Bhakti, which is discussed in chapter 12.

One can find many things from the first six chapters that were stated in the language of Jñāna yōga, getting reiterated in the language of Bhakti yōga in chapters 7-12. We will be using the word *Supreme* instead of the popular word God. Supreme (पर, परम् or परम) is a frequently used word throughout the Bhagavadgītā (2.58, 3.19, 6.7, 8.8, 13.34 etc.), sometimes in conjunction with Self, Lord etc.

The student may have already noticed that although chapters have been grouped into blocks and units, it is only approximation, and not prescriptive; many concepts are spread across the text, and we will have to refer to chapters outside the block/unit, more so with this block, so as to make the study more coherent.

The following two blocks host double the number of chapters (twelve) from that hosted by the first two blocks. Hereafter individual chapters are not attended to with the same level of scrutiny. Therefore, going forward, we will not have a 'chapter outline', but only a generic 'unit outline'.

***"Do not go through the Gita. Let the Gita go through you"***

*- Swami Chinmayananda*

## 7. The Marvel of Vijñāna | Chapters 7-9

### Unit Outline

1. Vijñāna
2. Prakṛti and Puruṣa
3. Types of devotees
4. One in thousands
5. Yōgakṣēmaṁ vahāmyahaṁ
6. Moment of death
7. Neutrality of Īśvara
8. Assurance is not Encouragement
9. Are women of lower birth?

### 7.1. Vijñāna

This is what happened till this point — Arjuna goes into anxiety attack thinking about the death of his dear ones (Chapter 1), Kṛṣṇa affirms that Self is beyond death (Sāṅkhya yōga), describes the qualities of the one who realizes his true nature (sthitaprajña), prescribes Karma yōga (*samatva* and the *skill* in action) as the groundwork for that (Chapter 2), elaborates Karma yōga (Chapters 3-5), returns to Sāṅkhya yōga (self-enquiry), and ends by again describing the qualities of a realized being (this time referring to the state as yōgārūḍha) (Chapter 6). And we are done. Why 12 more chapters?

The seventh chapter is named jñāna-vijñāna yōga, and Kṛṣṇa begins by saying "I will tell you jñāna and vijñāna in its entirety" (7.2). The same statement recurs in the beginning of the ninth chapter (9.1). What is this vijñāna? The traditional illustration of the waves and the ocean shall help us understand this.

Ajñāna	There are many waves. Waves are real. I am one of the waves.	Multiplicity is assumed to be real. And I am identified with one of those multiple entities (a body-mind).
Jñāna	Water alone is. I am Water!  Seeing the <i>stuff</i> (ātma vastu) instead of the <i>shapes</i> .	"Nēti nēti" - the constantly changing world of multiplicity is rejected as unreal, and the identity with a specific body-mind complex is negated. Self is realized as the sole Reality.
Vijñāna	Water alone is, but there are transient waves on the surface. I am Water, but I can transact as a wave with other waves which are also existentially Water.	A jīvanmukta (liberated while alive) continues to live on the surface of reality with apparent multiplicity. The whole existence (including body-mind) which was originally left behind as unreal is acknowledged as part of the Self.

"The aspirant (abhyasi) starts with the definition, that which is real exists always; then he eliminates the world as unreal because it is changing. It cannot be real; 'not this, not this!' The seeker ultimately reaches the Self and there finds unity as the prevailing note. Then, that which was originally rejected as being unreal is found to be a part of the unity. Being absorbed in the Reality, the world also is Real. There is only *being* in Self-Realisation, and nothing but *being*." (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk 33)

Thus, vijñāna is experiential knowledge (Śāṅkarabhāṣya) — it is how a jīvanmukta, rooted in the existential unity, experiences the apparent multiplicity on the surface<sup>59</sup>. Established in jñāna, this experience of multiplicity is entirely different from the experience of multiplicity in the state of ajñāna<sup>60</sup>. A study of vijñāna paves the way for other concepts presented henceforth in the Gītā — Bhakti, Vibhūti, Prakṛti etc.

Since a vijñāni has realized that the reality is Water alone, he is no more bound by the limited identity of one particular wave, and he may change his identity<sup>61</sup> (or dissolve it altogether) as he wishes. This may thoroughly confuse an ajñāni, and this is what may happen to someone reading what Kṛṣṇa says in the Bhagavadgītā, especially from 7th chapter onwards. A vijñāni may choose to assume the identity of:

- i. A wave (infinitesimal amount of water) that is in awe of the ocean (infinite amount of water)
- ii. The ocean that is the creator, ordainer and destroyer of all the waves.
- iii. Any other wave acknowledging its unique characteristics
- iv. All waves at once
- v. Or dissolve all identities

(i) refers to the attitude of a jīva, an individual, towards Īśvara, the Lord Supreme. For e.g. we can say 8.22 is a momentary expression of (i), but this is not so prominently exhibited by Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā (although he can be seen talking that way in other places in the Mahābhārata). Most vijñānis mostly assume this identity — for e.g. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa<sup>62</sup>. The foremost among advaitins, Śāṅkarācārya too did not stop with the affirmation of the non-dual reality, and as a vijñāni, assumed the role of a devotee and composed sublime poetry praising the Supreme in various forms.

<sup>59</sup> When we say 'vijñāna is experiential' it does not mean that jñāna is not experiential. Here experience is specifically referring to how the world of diversity is experienced by the realized one. Also, note that the term vijñāna has other connotations in other contexts.

<sup>60</sup> When a man returns from his sleep, he is the same man who went into it. But when a man goes into Samadhi, if he goes into it a fool, he comes out a sage (Swami Vivekananda, CW Vol. 1).

<sup>61</sup> Identity means Water (Self without attributes) conditioned by some attribute. When we consider this at a very fundamental level - water conditioned by 'finitude' (wave) is jīva, and conditioned by 'infinite' (ocean) is Īśvara.

<sup>62</sup> The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is being called as 'Vijñāna Vēdānta'; because, although he was rooted in the unity, he strongly preferred being a devotee who acknowledges a duality on the surface.



(ii) is all over the Bhagavadgītā (for e.g. 4.6, 7.6-7, 9.7-8), but it is a very rare occurrence nonetheless. Even Śrī Rāma who is considered as God in the Indian culture never assumed this identity. While Kṛṣṇa assumes (i) very rarely, most others assume (ii) very rarely<sup>63</sup>. But even when assumed, this identity is usually declared within intimate circles (in fact that is what Kṛṣṇa is doing!). Only with certain people who have known you closely enough in a certain way, and seen how 'sane' you are, can such apparently insane statements<sup>64</sup> be made, so as to have some worthwhile spiritual impact (of invoking devotion) on them. After trying to impart self-enquiry, and Karma yōga to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa finally turns to Bhakti yōga by assuming the identity of (ii). The tinge of Bhakti had appeared earlier too (e.g. 3.30) as a facilitator to Karma yōga, but here onwards Bhakti takes on the driver seat.

(iii) refers to Vibhūti - special manifestations. Only someone who is established in the existential Unity, can acknowledge the surface Diversity as it is<sup>65</sup>, and that is true Equality. Every wave is appreciated for what it is — for its essential and unique features as compared to other waves<sup>66</sup>. Kṛṣṇa engages in this in chapters 7, 9 and then very elaborately in 10.

(iv) refers to Prakṛti. This is covered in the next section.

(v) was the very first thing Kṛṣṇa did before beginning the day as described in the Mahābhārata:

*"Awaking half yāma (1.5 hours) before sunrise, he entered into meditation. Fixing all his senses, he meditated on the eternal Brahma"* (Śānti parva, chapter 53)<sup>67</sup>

Before he took on any identity in the course of the day, he first established himself in the Self that is beyond identities; before playing with waves, he rooted himself in water. Despite his demanding role of a prince and politician, if he could meditate every day, can we claim to be too busy to do our daily practices?



<sup>63</sup> If you study the lives of spiritual masters thoroughly, occasionally you may see such statements from them. Patañjali yōga sūtra 3.49 describes omniscience as a siddhi that a yogi can acquire.

<sup>64</sup> Indeed, some 'rationalist' commentators of the Gītā have remarked that Kṛṣṇa is extremely egoistic!

<sup>65</sup> Conditioned by our identities (gender, race, nationality, language and so on), we invariably take sides and distort what we see (overstate, understate, selectively state etc.). Social media is abuzz with this identity-war.

<sup>66</sup> With no footing in the underlying Unity, diversity invariably leads us to divisiveness. And instead of recognizing the true problem (non-recognition of water in all waves), we try to remedy our sense of discrimination by attempting to achieve uniformity of waves, confusing that to be equality.

<sup>67</sup> His routine is also described in the Bhāgavatam: "Mādhava rose during the brāhma-muhūrta, touched water and cleared his mind to meditate upon the one, matchless, infallible, self-luminous Self beyond all darkness" (10.70)

## 7.2. Prakṛti

The fundamental entities in the Indian systems of philosophy are jīva-īśvara-jagat, and the very identity of each school is drawn from how they approach these three entities. Sāṅkhya philosophy does not include Īśvara<sup>68</sup> and considers prakṛti (jagat) and puruṣa (jīva) as the two fundamental realities. Sāṅkhya also provides a very specific illustration of prakṛti as being made up of 24 tattva (8 prakṛti + 16 vikāra).

Kṛṣṇa uses the sāṅkhya model of Prakṛti in the Gītā (chapters 7 and 13), but declares himself as the Īśvara (and sometimes Brahman), thereby deviating from sāṅkhya. Also, he uses a multitude of terminology across the text to refer to the same concepts, and the intermingling of words may bewilder the reader. Therefore, a summary has been presented in the table below along with brief notes.

Entity	Sāṅkhya	Chapter 7	Chapter 13	Chapter 15	Metaphor	Implication
Jagat	Prakṛti	Aparā prakṛti <sup>I</sup> (lower)	Kṣētra <sup>III</sup> / Prakṛti	Kṣara puruṣa (perishable)	All the wavy <i>shapes</i>	All objects
Jīva(s)	Puruṣa(s)	Parā prakṛti (higher)	Kṣētrajña/ Puruṣa	Akṣara puruṣa (imperishable)	<i>Water</i> that makes up the shapes	Limited consciousness of specific objects
Īśvara	---	Īśvara <sup>II</sup>		Puruṣōttama	Ocean	Consciousness of all there is <sup>IV</sup> (omniscience)

<sup>I</sup> Here Kṛṣṇa presents the 8 prakṛtis as per sāṅkhya (7.4) — 5 tanmātrā, mahat, ahaṁkāra and avyakta (as interpreted in Śāṅkarabhāṣya)

<sup>II</sup> From Śāṅkarabhāṣya. Kṛṣṇa just refers to himself (e.g. 7.6, 13.2)

<sup>III</sup> Here Kṛṣṇa presents the 24 principles of prakṛti as per sāṅkhya (13.5)

<sup>IV</sup> Furthermore, advaita philosophy would reduce all the three to just Brahman/Ātman/Self or the unconditioned Consciousness (*water*).

Kṛṣṇa makes different types of statements with regards to prakṛti - it is just a *part* of me (10.39, 10.42), it is *pervaded* by me, but I am untouched by it (8.22, 9.4-6), I am its Lord, Father and Mother (9.10, 9.17) etc. We may consider this as different modes of a vijñāni rather than as contradictory.

<sup>68</sup> It is incorrect to say that sāṅkhya darśana *rejects* Īśvara. It only states that the existence of Īśvara cannot be ascertained through the accepted means of knowledge (pramāṇa, anumāna and āgama).

Chapters 8 and 9 also talk of the cycles of prakṛti — how all of existence dissolves into an unmanifest state (avyakta) and manifests (vyakta) itself in a cyclical fashion, and how puruṣa is untouched by it (8.18-22; 9.7). In this instance, puruṣa refers to Brahman/Ātman/Self (Śāṅkarabhāṣya).

We can use the modern analogy of computer for understanding vyakta-avyakta. If the font colour of the text on a word document is made white, it becomes an undifferentiated blank document where nothing is visible. But all the data is available, and can be made to manifest by changing the font colour. The unmanifest data exists whether or not it is manifest on the screen. Here the differentiating principle of contrasting colours is analogous to mahat/buddhi — the first evolute out of avyakta as per sāṅkhya.

### 7.3. Types of devotees

Earlier Kṛṣṇa had told Arjuna to just surrender all his actions to him and fight the battle (3.30). This tone of Bhakti becomes the primary theme of the conversation starting with 7.1. We will discuss Bhakti yōga in the next unit, but currently look at one specific item presented in chapters 7 and 9.

Kṛṣṇa straightway acknowledges that not all approach the Supreme seeking salvation, and describes different types of devotees who adore the Supreme. This has been presented in two ways.

#### 7.3.1. Four types of devotees

Four types of devotees are listed in 7.16, and this is how Śāṅkarabhāṣya describes them:

- 1) Ārta - one who is in distress due to some worldly trouble (disease, loss etc.)
- 2) Jijñāsu - भगवत्त्वं ज्ञातुं इच्छति यः - one who seeks to *know* the Supreme
- 3) Arthārthī - one who seeks to gain wealth (can be generalized as any worldly possession)
- 4) Jñāni - one who *knows* the Supreme

(1) and (3) have not yet gone beyond the survival process, and only pray to the Supreme to fulfill their worldly needs rather than to know that Supreme. But at some point they will become (2). A jijñāsu has the inclination to know the Supreme, but has not the necessary resolve yet<sup>69</sup>.

Note that Kṛṣṇa does not criticize these three devotees in any way, and calls all the four devotees as virtuous and noble<sup>70</sup>. But he obviously glorifies jñāni above all the others because a jñāni is nityayukta (constantly rooted in reality) and ēkabhakti - he does not consider anything else worthwhile to *devote*

<sup>69</sup> We can also look at this as the three types of people who come to Yoga. Praśānti Kuṭīraṁ attracts three types of people - those afflicted with ailments, those who wish to make a career out of yoga, and those who are seekers.

<sup>70</sup> For it is better to come to yoga at least for therapy instead of resorting to pills; it is better to make a career out of yoga instead of some other profession; and it is better to have *some* resolve than no resolve!

himself in the ultimate sense; even if he engages in the world, it fails to swerve him. Kṛṣṇa further says that a jñāni is the dearest to him (and he is dear to a jñāni), and calls him his own Self (7.17-18).

### 7.3.2. Ananya bhakti and Anya dēvatā bhakti

Devotees are also classified by Kṛṣṇa as 'those who adore me' vs 'those who adore other dēvatā'. We will refer to these modes of devotion as *ananya bhakti*<sup>71</sup> (8.22, 9.22 etc) and *anya dēvatā bhakti* (9.23) respectively. Deluded by desires (children, wealth etc.) people worship various gods (7.20). This is prevalent in India even today. Results are quickly obtained with such worship (4.12) (hence people tend to take to this easily), but its results do not last long (7.23). "But as I am the Lord and sole receiver of all worship, these people are worshipping Me alone, albeit the approach is wrong" (9.23-24)

There is some room for analysis here. Note that there are two aspects in the process of bhakti: *a*) the *object* of devotion, and *b*) the *objective* of devotion. Which one takes precedence in qualifying an instance of bhakti as ananya or anya dēvatā?

Some schools go with the more stringent view of giving precedence to (*a*). According to them, those who adore Kṛṣṇa (or Viṣṇu) alone are deemed to attain salvation (because Kṛṣṇa clearly states "worship me"); if one is devoted to other forms (Dēvi, Śiva, Rāma etc.) it becomes anya dēvatā bhakti even if your objective is to attain to the Supreme.

We can also take a moderate view (in tune with what has been discussed earlier) that when Kṛṣṇa says that your object of devotion should be 'Me', it does not necessarily mean the specific identity (name and form) of 'Kṛṣṇa'<sup>72</sup>, but means Īśvara (represented in this instance in the form of Kṛṣṇa). Also Kṛṣṇa explicitly qualifies anya dēvatā bhakti with the worldly objectives of the devotee. Therefore, giving precedence to (*b*), we can say that when one has the longing to know the Supreme, devotion to any form (or formless) becomes ananya bhakti<sup>73</sup>; the Supreme is supreme enough to accept adoration in any form! Conversely, when the objective is worldly gains (ārta and arthārthī), devotion to any form becomes anya dēvatā bhakti. Indeed, how can the bhakti be *ananya* if we seek something from the Supreme as if we are *separate* from it? Seeking merger with it alone is ananya.

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<sup>71</sup> Ananya = Not being separate from. When intimately devoted to someone, we find *oneness* with them.

<sup>72</sup> Kṛṣṇa himself indicates later in 12.3 that the object of ananya bhakti can also be avyakta (formless)

<sup>73</sup> There are any number of examples throughout history who adored forms that are usually associated with some worldly aspect as the ultimate and attained. For e.g. an upaniṣadik sage invokes Indra (generally worshiped in ancient India as the god of rains) as the Supreme in the Śānti mantra "yaśchandasāmṛṣabhō..." In the modern times we have the prime example of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who adored the Supreme as Mother Kālī/Durga who is generally considered as the bestower of power-valour.

#### 7.4. One in thousands

While praising the jñāni bhakta, Kṛṣṇa says such great beings are extremely hard to find (7.19). And a few verses earlier this was stated:

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।  
यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥७.३॥  
*manuṣyāṅām sahasrēṣu kaścidyatati siddhayē |*  
*yatatāmapi siddhānām kaścinnmām vētti tattvataḥ ||7.3||*

**Meaning:** Among thousands of men, one strives for attainment; and among those strivers, one knows Me in essence.

Congratulations! You are already one among thousands who has taken to the spiritual path, and have become a jñāsu. But how soon it will culminate in jñāna will depend on the intensity of one's sādhana and Grace. Statements like these are merely indicative of a fact—that a great number of people get distracted from the path—meant to caution a seeker, not discourage<sup>74</sup>. It is the nature of prakṛti to relapse to set patterns, and it is the nature of consciousness to transcend them. The game is on, and a game is supposed to be challenging. If it is too easy, it isn't a game. "But if it is too hard people will give up!" To those who play wholeheartedly, many "Grace" points are promised (9.22, 10.10 etc). Play on!

#### 7.5. Yōgakṣēmaṁ vahāmyaham

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।  
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥९.२२॥  
*ananyāścintayantō mām yē janāḥ paryupāsatē |*  
*tēṣām nityābhiyuktānām yōgakṣēmaṁ vahāmyaham ||9.22||*

**Meaning:** Those who adore Me, contemplating Me as no different from them, those who are ever established in Me - I shall take care of their yōgakṣēma.

Yōgakṣēma is a common word used to refer to the worldly survival process, and should not be confused as some new kind of Yoga. Here yōga means acquiring that which is not acquired, and kṣēma means preserving that which is acquired (Śāṅkarabhāṣya) — a succinct representation of the mundane aspect of life. Recall that in 2.45 Kṛṣṇa had urged Arjuna to become "निर्योगक्षेम" - to transcend yōgakṣēma. Here the same is presented as "योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्" - a word of promise.

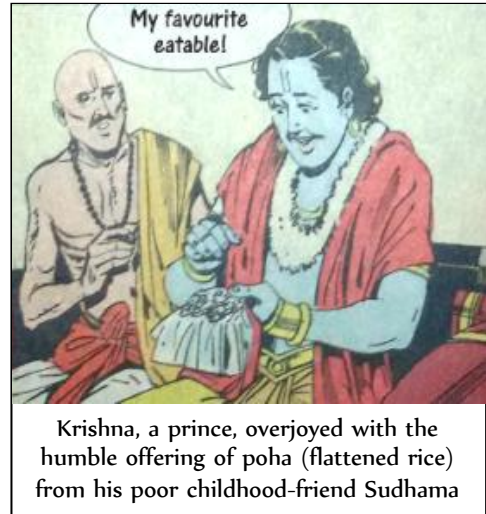
<sup>74</sup> This is a statistics that we see in nature itself. For e.g. how many of the mango flowers get to become fruits?

Devotee or otherwise, the mundane aspects of life will have to be taken care of. But an ananya bhakta's *reliance* is always on the source supreme, and he does not get fixated on the *means* (people, money, situations or even himself) through which his yōgakṣēma happens<sup>75</sup>. A worldly person on the other hand has his faith placed on himself and the means; he attempts to desperately hold on to them, most notably to money, confusing them to be the very source of his yōgakṣēma.

Entrenched in devotion, when our being is overwhelmed in resonance with the Supreme, we are no more a constricted identity living in a shell. Just as a healthy cell, although apparently an individual entity, is completely in tune with the parent organism (and thus in oneness with it), our individual being is aligned with the Cosmic being, and receives all the necessary support, as though magically. This verse is an explicit proclamation of the same. These words have been cherished and held dear by innumerable devotees throughout the ages, for whom it has been a living reality<sup>76</sup>.

A simple way to come out of our shells, liberate ourselves from our own web of identities, and become *receptive* is by invoking a state of *offering* in us. This has been beautifully presented in the subsequent verse—"When someone of pure heart offers even a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water to Me with utmost devotion, I accept it" (9.26)—indicating that what is offered is secondary, and that it is the sense of offering which opens our hearts, allowing the breeze of Grace to enter. This is the idea behind the culture of taking *some* offering with us when we go to temples or to saints and spiritual teachers.

But if offering to a form does not appeal to you, then "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever you practise as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering unto Me!" (9.27)



Worship of an image alone is not worship. You can also do your prāṇāyāma and āsanās with a sense of offering<sup>77</sup>, eat your food with a sense of offering, and serve others through work with a sense of offering.

<sup>75</sup> अन्य आश्रयाणां त्यागः अनन्यता (Narada Bhakti Sutra, 10) - Ananyata is giving up reliance on everything else

<sup>76</sup> It is best to read real life incidents to appreciate this. For example, student can refer to the Tari Ghat railway station incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda (available in several books). After all, reading about bhakti should invoke bhakti, not the intellect!

<sup>77</sup> These techniques of Haṭha yoga have come down from Lord Śiva. They should be practiced with the same sense of sanctity and devotion that one would worship Lord Śiva with.

## 7.6. Moment of death

Both second chapter and seventh chapter of the Bhagavadgītā end by alluding to yogis who attain the supreme state at the moment of death. In the former case Kṛṣṇa refers to it as the 'state of Brahman' (2.72), and in the latter case as 'attaining Me' (7.30).

Earlier Arjuna was troubled by "to act, or not to act"; so, the mention of moment of death does not catch his attention. But from sixth chapter onwards, his mental clutter regarding *karma* seems to have cleared up, and he begins to ask other questions. When Kṛṣṇa talks of 'moment of death' again, as if to give Arjuna another chance to explore the topic, Arjuna promptly asks him to elaborate<sup>78</sup> (8.2).

Note that in both instances Kṛṣṇa says "they will be established in Brahman/Me during the moment of death *also*" indicating that the supreme state is attained while alive, and that it is merely held onto during the moment of death. He is NOT asking us to simply wait until the moment of death. He is only reiterating the traditional view that a jīvanmukta becomes vidēhamukta at death.

Responding to Arjuna's request to elaborate, Kṛṣṇa explains "Whosoever, at the time of death, goes forth leaving the body remembering Me alone, he attains Me; there is no doubt about this" (8.5)

This verse is cherry picked by many, and is taken as a license to live life wantonly, because all that matters is remembering God at the moment of death!<sup>79</sup> But more crucial details follow: "Whoever leaves the body in whatever bhāva (state of being), *because of having constantly dwelled in a certain bhāva*, only to that bhāva will he attain" (8.6) "Therefore, remember Me at all times and fight the battle" (8.7) It is unmistakable that Kṛṣṇa is asking us to set our consciousness constantly on the Supreme (and not just during death), because whatever tendencies are dominant in us, they are more likely to play out at the moment of death<sup>80</sup>. He further emphasizes constant practice (8.8) and tells that one needs to be endowed with bhakti as well as the power of yoga at the moment of death so as to attain to the Supreme (8.10). 'Power of yoga' is described later as "Locking all the gates of the body, confining the mind in the Heart, fixing the prāṇa in the head (sahasrāra), engaging in yogadhāraṇā, and uttering the syllable Om" (8.12-13)

Why is the moment of death decisive for the future course of our being? Modern science is in an embryonic stage in studying death, and there is a niche area of research called necroneuroscience that studies brain death. There seems to be a surge of energy in the brain nearing death making it more active

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<sup>78</sup> He asks a series of 7 questions pertaining to the 7 terms Kṛṣṇa uses in the end of the seventh chapter. We will not be exploring them except for the question on the moment of death.

<sup>79</sup> This blunder seems to have happened in other cultures also. In India the story of Ajamiḷa (from Bhāgavata) has become popular in this regard, but a careful study will reveal more details in tune with what Kṛṣṇa says further.

<sup>80</sup> In this regard there are some ancient stories in India. In one, a King develops great affection to a deer cub towards the ends of his life, and leaves the body keeping the cub in his sight, and as a result is reborn as a deer!

than even in the waking state, resulting in heightened state of consciousness (Borjigin et al., 2013)<sup>81</sup>. It has also been found that death could be a unique experience for each individual (Norton et al., 2017)

It appears as though the moment of death is like the forceful blast-off before making a launch. And the direction and nature of the launch (as signified by the unique brain activity) decides where the individual will land next. We can conjecture that a yogi (who has not yet attained jīvanmukti) makes use of the natural surge of energy during death, and directs it (as described in 8.12) to attain the Brāhmī state to become a jīvanmukta (moments before death), and subsequently vidēhamukta<sup>82</sup>.

### 7.7. Neutrality of Īśvara

Kṛṣṇa says that his devotees are dear to him and are protected; and the deluded ones who carp at him are bound to perish (3.32, 16.16 etc.) Does this not mean that Īśvara has likes-dislikes, and is partial?

As if to answer this Kṛṣṇa says "The same am I to all beings; to Me there is none hateful or dear; but those who worship Me with devotion are in Me and I am also in them" (9.29)

The Supreme is like gravity. If we are in tune with gravity, we can sit, stand, walk, and even dance; if we are not, we fall and are hurt; but gravity is neutral. Similarly, a devotee is in tune with the Supreme ("he is in Me"), and others are not; but the Supreme is neutral. When an individual being is in tune with the cosmic being (like a healthy cell in the organism), he is automatically facilitated; when he is not (like a cancer cell), he faces hurdles and resistance from the system. This is just cosmic biology, so to speak, and the Supreme has no *intentions* as such behind the consequences that one reaps. The Supreme just IS.

### 7.8. Assurance is not Encouragement

Therefore, it does not matter how one has been till now; if he chooses to work towards coming in tune with gravity even now, he will quickly reap the freedom it gives. Accordingly, Kṛṣṇa declares that even the most sinful will soon attain to eternal peace if he develops ananya bhakti<sup>83</sup> (9.30-31) The case of Angulimala is a classic example in this regard. The murderous terrorist is transformed after encountering the Buddha, and is ordained as a monk in the Sangha, where he soon becomes one of the most serene and

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<sup>81</sup> This was a study on rats. This is yet to be found in humans.

<sup>82</sup> Ramana Maharshi had tried using the moment of death of certain individuals (even animals) to liberate them - he succeeded in few, and failed in others. The case of his own mother was a success, and one can read the dramatic details of the incident as narrated by him. One of the things that we can note is that he kept one of his hands on her chest, and another on the crown of her head (for several hours on end) - the points indicated in 8.12.

<sup>83</sup> What was said in 4.36 from the perspective of jñāna is being reiterated from the perspective of bhakti.



revered Bhikkus deeply devoted to Buddha. Another illustrious example is that of sage Vālmīki (author of Rāmāyaṇa) who was earlier a dacoit and was transformed because of Nārada Maharṣi.

Note that assurance is given to someone who is repenting their past ways, and are willing to change the course of their life; it is not an encouragement to continue the old ways<sup>84</sup>. *Assurance is never encouragement*. But human psychology is dicey, and often falls into this pit unconsciously. For e.g. if elderly people express a concern that they are too old to practice yogic techniques, you may tell them "There is no age-bar for yoga; it can be practiced at any age with proper guidance". This does not mean that you are encouraging youngsters to postpone their practice to old age! Similarly, health insurance is not to encourage unhealthy lifestyle and sickness<sup>85</sup>. One can think of many such examples.

### 7.9. Are women of lower birth?

Continuing his assurances, Kṛṣṇa makes an apparently controversial statement - "Taking refuge in Me, even pāpayōnis (those of sinful birth)—women, vaiśyas and sūdrās—attain the Supreme" (9.32)<sup>86</sup> This has led to negative remarks on Kṛṣṇa and the Gītā. But what people miss here is that the purpose of this verse is not to *assert* the label pāpayōni, but rather to tell that the label (that was perhaps in use in that society) is fundamentally meaningless.

Suppose I said today: "Even dalits<sup>87</sup> (untouchables) can practice yoga and attain enlightenment", and if this statement is picked up by someone a thousand years later (without studying the societal situation of our times), I will obviously be judged as a bigot. Because they will not know that 'broken'/'untouchable' is not my personal label of the people, and that I am simply using the term that is in use in my society. Also, I am using that word not to endorse it, but to refute it. My purpose is actually to highlight that the highest state is not the property of any sect or class of people (same is the case with 9.32), and that *even* dalits (pāpayōnayaḥ *api*), who are considered inferior by some bigoted people of my time, can attain to the

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<sup>84</sup> If the above verse is told to Duryōdhana, for instance, he will be very happy to continue his dreadful ways.

<sup>85</sup> The famous *Oregon Health Insurance Experiment* (Baicker et al, 2013) showed that the availability of health insurance increased the use of health care services, but had no significant impact on the physical health of the insured group as compared to the uninsured group. More people were diagnosed and treated in the insured group, but their health parameters were almost the same as the uninsured group. What does this indicate?

<sup>86</sup> This is how Śāṅkarabhāṣya looks at the verse. Some other commentators have translated it differently - "Taking refuge in Me, even pāpayōnis, women, vaiśyas and sūdrās attain the Supreme". Here pāpayōni is a separate item in the list, not an adjective to the remaining three. There is some substance to this translation, because pāpayōni literally means "sinful womb", and therefore can only be sect-specific, but not gender-specific (between a brother and a sister, how can only the sister be called as born of sinful womb?). This translation is less inciting than the other, but still *someone* is being labeled as pāpayōni, and the explanation for it is the same as presented above.

<sup>87</sup> Dalita is a Saṁskṛta word which means 'broken'.

highest. But that will somehow be overlooked, and a statement that intends to emphasize the fundamental equality will be unfortunately seen as divisive. This is what has happened with this verse.

If we study the ancient Indian texts, we can see terms like *pāpayōni*, *mūḍhayōni* etc. being used in various contexts<sup>88</sup>. It was not Kṛṣṇa's personal label or opinion of the *varṇas* or women. If it was, then Arjuna would have naturally questioned "Why are you calling these people as *pāpayōni*?" The fact that he does not question indicates that it was a part of the psyche of the society, and Kṛṣṇa is only countering that psyche<sup>89</sup>.

Also, it would be bizarre if we try to find discrimination in the statements of someone who has been talking of equality and equanimity all this while, and has led an exemplary life exhibiting the qualities of a *sthitaprajña*.

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<sup>88</sup> For e.g. a story in Śāntiparva (chapter 247) uses the term *pāpayōni* for *vaiśyas* and *śūdrās*.

<sup>89</sup> We do not find any gender bias in the Vedic society. Vedic mantras have come from Ṛṣikās just as it has come from Ṛṣis. Prominent among them is Gārgī Vācakanvī who challenges Yājñavalkya in a public debate on the subject of Brahman (Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣat, 3.6). But this situation seems to have deteriorated by the time of Mahābhārata. One can notice the same in the time of Buddha as well. In one instance Buddha's caretaker Ananda asks him "Is it possible for a woman to attain enlightenment?" for which Buddha answers "Beyond a doubt" (Old Path White Clouds, chapter 45). But the question says a lot about the society of that time.

## 8. Bhakti Yōga - The Science of Resonance | Chapters 10-12

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### Unit Outline

1. Bhakti
2. Vibhūti
3. Viśvarūpa
4. Saḡuṇa and Nirḡuṇa Bhakti
5. Qualities of a Bhakta

### 8.1. Bhakti

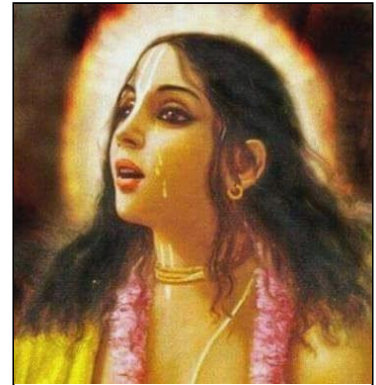
The essential process of Bhakti is presented in chapter 10, and elaborated in chapter 12.

While Jñānayōga is about *establishing* in the Self, Dhyānayōga about *inhibiting* the chitta, Haṭhayōga about *raising* the energies, Karmayōga about *renouncing* the ownership of the Karma account, Bhaktiyōga is about *dissolving* yourself<sup>90</sup>. The mundane merely fall in love, only to get to their feet in no time; but a devotee collapses into nothingness in his ultimate love for the Supreme<sup>91</sup>, where he is absent and That alone is.

Face beaming with ecstasies nameless, cheeks drenched in tears of bliss supreme, voice choked with emotions unspeakable, and body trembling with thrill unrivalled - beholding this irresistible sight of a devotee would itself rub off a taste of Bhakti onto us. Describing how devotees cherish their beloved, Kṛṣṇa spells out how they are led into realization:

"With their minds and prāṇa entirely absorbed in Me, enlightening each other [about Me] and always speaking of Me, they rejoice and find contentment. Upon them, who unswervingly worship Me with love, I bestow the yoga of discretion (jñānayōga) by which they attain Me. Out of compassion for them, I, dwelling within their Self, destroy the darkness born of ajñāna by the luminous lamp of jñāna." (10.9-11)

Whatever the object of our love, we find delight in thinking, listening and talking about it. This is the beginning of *losing* ourselves, and allowing something else to engulf us. If that something is money, power, mundane relationships etc., we become more and more rooted in physicality, and lose ourselves to



Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in devotional ecstasy

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<sup>90</sup> Different ways of describing the attainment of the supreme state

<sup>91</sup> Bhakti is supreme Love towards That (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra, 2)

the compulsions of the body and mind (as explained in 2.62-63), and be more bound; this is the mode of rajas and tamas. But if that something is spiritual knowledge, yogic personalities etc., we will become more rooted in consciousness, and lose ourselves to the exalted qualities found in those personalities, and be liberated (as presented above); this is the mode of sattva.

Bhakti is a process of *resonance* (as presented in YIC). Whatever you are devoted to, that will find expression through you. In fact, the word bhakti comes from the root word 'bhaj' which means 'sharing'<sup>92</sup>. The object of Bhakti and the Bhakta will share the same state of being (bhāva). When one is devoted to the Supreme (through some exalted manifestation such as Kṛṣṇa, or just as the unmanifest principle), he begins to manifest the qualities of samatva, anabhisnēha etc., and most importantly vivēka which enables him to realize his true nature (as the very Supreme principle)<sup>93</sup>.

Here Kṛṣṇa uses the word *anukampa* which generally means empathy. But if we look at the literal meaning, it means 'vibrate along' or resonance. When the Supreme resonates with you, your shell of identities collapses (like how bridges and buildings collapse because of resonance effect), or in other words *you*, the personality, dissolve, and the Supreme Self shines forth.

## 8.2. Vibhūti

Equality does not mean Uniformity, and in spiritual fervor ("All is one") one cannot turn a blind eye to the unfathomable diversity in Prakṛti. It is just that one should be rooted in the fundamental Unity (Self/Supreme) to truly appreciate its diverse manifestations (without any fear and guilt of getting discriminative and partial) and those distinct ones—the Vibhūtis—that are especially endowed with "essence, prosperity and exuberance" (10.41).

Vibhūti is presented in three places (chapters 7, 9 and 10), and there is something unique in each instance.

- In chapter 7 (8-12) it is mainly presented as the *essence* of something (e.g. "I am the intelligence of the intelligent") Chapter 15 also very briefly lists a few vibhūtis in this way.
- In chapter 9 (16-19) it is mainly presented as the complementary aspects of something (e.g. "I am the origin, and dissolution")
- In chapter 10 it is mainly presented as the foremost entity in a particular category (e.g. "Among beasts I am lion")

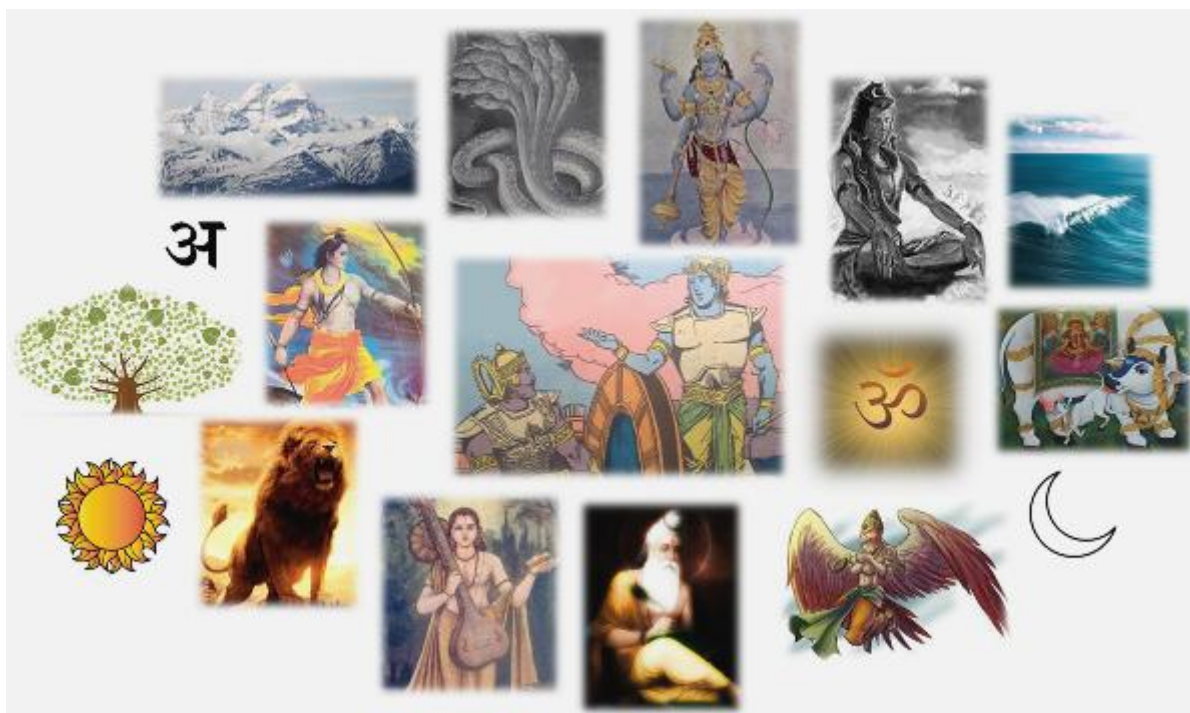
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<sup>92</sup> Similarly, upāsana (worship) means "being near". Worshiping is a process of getting intimate with the Supreme.

<sup>93</sup> Patañjali also advises this as one of the methods to overcome distractions and attain samādhi - to meditate upon a chitta [of an exalted being] that is devoid of attachments (1.37). And on two occasions he proclaims that surrender to Īśvara leads to samādhi (1.23 and 2.45)

Here we will explore only chapter 10. Here are some noteworthy vibhūti:

- The very first vibhūti that Kṛṣṇa utters, in response to Arjuna's request to elaborate, is "I am the Self in the hearts of all beings" (10.20) — He is referring to you!
- "I am the beginning, middle and end of all beings" (10.20) — while Kṛṣṇa himself assumes Īśvara bhāva here, he can be seen saying exactly the same about Lord Śiva to Arjuna later in the Mahābhārata - "He is the beginning, middle and end of all beings" (Sauptika parva, 17.9). Thus plays a vijñāni with identities and roles, living life like a Līlā.
- "Among the trees I am the aśvattha (peepal)" (10.26) — Certain trees, leaves, flowers etc. have some significance in Indian culture, and are said to aid a spiritual seeker in his path. Aśvattha is held sacred by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. It was an aśvattha tree sitting under which Gautama the Buddha attained enlightenment, thus giving it the name 'bodhi tree'.



- "Among months, I am the Mārgaśīrṣa" (10.35) — Similarly, certain times of the day, month and year are held significant in this culture. Mārgaśīrṣa is the time of the year (~ 22 Nov to 21 Dec) when earth is closest to the sun (winter solstice), and is said to have a certain energy impact upon the human system which a spiritual seeker can make use of.
- "Among knowledge, I am adhyātma vidyā (the knowledge of the Self)" (10.32) — This is not to be thought of as referring to some scriptural text. As the Muṇḍaka upaniṣat (1.1.3-5) clarifies, *all* articulated words, including the Vēda, are aparā vidyā (lower knowledge); parā vidyā (higher knowledge) is that by which the *imperishable* (the Self) is apprehended.

- "Among secrets I am silence" (10.38) — Silence is the greatest secret in the world, not because you will not tell it, but because it is untellable! You can only *be* silence.
- "I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intelligence, firmness and forgiveness in women" (10.34) — this can be understood in two ways: "among women" and "in women". The names mentioned here (kīrti, śrī, vāk, smṛti, mēdhā, dhṛti, kṣamā) are the names of historically venerated women in the ancient Indian purāṇas. Or these can be taken as the qualities especially manifest in women.
- "Among Pāṇḍavas I am Arjuna" (10.37) — Basically Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna "I am you".
- "Among Vṛṣṇis I am Vāsudēva" (10.37) — Vāsudēva is another name of Kṛṣṇa, and Vṛṣṇi is the name of his clan. Kṛṣṇa is referring to himself like a third person (like he referred to Arjuna), indicating that there is no more Kṛṣṇa the personality, but it is the Supreme that is speaking through Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa concludes the topic by saying — the diversity is endless, of which I have enumerated briefly, but still it is only a *part* of Me (10.40, 42). The strange mathematics of infinity. For e.g. there are infinite prime numbers, but it is still a small part of all the infinite numbers.

### 8.3. Viśvarūpa

Now comes, through Arjuna, a display of the true spirit of the spiritual legacy of India — "O Supreme Lord, however you have described yourself, it has to be true. But I wish to see your Divine form" (11.3) Arjuna exhibits here the impeccable combination of absolute trust on what the Guru says (śraddhā) and the longing to experience it firsthand (jijñāsā). After listening to such lofty things as what Kṛṣṇa has been saying, most would say either "I have complete faith in you, you are God" (believers) or "All this is illogical, you sound crazy" (disbelievers) and stop themselves from further exploration. But Arjuna struck the fine balance between conviction and questioning (recall section 5.4). It was possible mainly because of his history with Kṛṣṇa as his best friend.

Also, if someone states such glorious things as what Kṛṣṇa has been saying, the person should be in a position to enable the listener to have its firsthand experience. A teaching that cannot be a living reality for the student is not a teaching at all, it is just inconsequential gossip. Of course, the readiness of the student to bear the overwhelming experience is also a factor that decides whether the student can have the experience right away<sup>94</sup>. Arjuna too expresses doubt about his readiness to behold the cosmic form (11.4), in response to which Kṛṣṇa grants him the experience by enabling in him *divyacakṣu*, divine eye, a certain supersensory capability (11.8), indicating that he is ready.

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<sup>94</sup> If the student is not yet ready to withstand the jolt of the super-conscious experience, the Guru would guide the student to prepare and enable himself, and wait till the student matures.

Arjuna is asking Kṛṣṇa to show him what Kṛṣṇa had described himself as, which was "I am *all there is*". How can one be shown *all there is*? Suppose your mathematics teacher is teaching you the topic of sets, and introduces you to *universal set* as the set that contains *all* the numbers. You as a student ask the teacher to show you the universal set. But one cannot be shown all the numbers; it is an infinite set. The teacher would therefore tell you, "It has all the numbers; you can see *whatever* number you want". This is exactly what Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna. After briefly describing some vibhūti related details in his Cosmic form (11.6), he says "See the entire universe situated in one part of My body; and see whatever else you wish to see" (11.7) And what did Arjuna want to see?

When we enter sleep in an anxious state of mind, we see nightmares that exaggerate our mental state. Our dreams are our own, and we dream what we want to dream, although unconsciously. It appears as though something similar happened to Arjuna<sup>95</sup>. He is about to participate in a horrendous war, and moreover, he was extremely anxious just a few minutes ago thinking about the death of his kith and kin. And when the Cosmic form was shown, he saw death and destruction in such a horrifying way that it left even Arjuna, who had killed innumerable people in battles, absolutely terrified<sup>96</sup>.

At first Arjuna sees and describes a blazing form with many arms, stomachs, mouths and eyes endlessly pervading all directions, along with celestial beings (11.15-16). But his description soon turns fearful, starting with "Seeing your wonderful and terrifying form, the three worlds are trembling with fear" (20) He sees scary teeth (fangs) in the wide open mouths (23, 25), and then witnesses prominent warriors of both sides entering those mouths with some of them getting their heads squashed between the fangs (26-27). Arjuna sees people entering the flaming mouths just as rivers enter



<sup>95</sup> This is not to entirely equate the Viśvarūpa experience to a dream. Only one aspect is being compared. Dream is entirely sub-conscious (mostly a mere recycle of the wakeful state), but a spiritual experience is not. Here Arjuna subconsciously chose only the genre of his experience (death), but the experience itself was of super-conscious nature as evident from the description (such as prophecy and spherical vision - discussed below).

<sup>96</sup> One can remember here the story of Tenali Raman. To the childlike Raman the fierce form of the Supreme—Goddess Kali—appeared like a benign Mother. And here to the anxious Arjuna, the jovial, gentle and childhood friend Kṛṣṇa appeared ferocious!



the ocean, or as moths rush into fire for their own destruction (28-29), and the mouths smacking their lips (30). Absolutely terrified, he asks "Who are you in this fierce form?" (31), in response to which the Viśvarūpa says:

"I am Time that destroys worlds<sup>97</sup>. Even without you, none of these warriors will live. These are already slain by me. Nimittamātram bhava — be a mere instrument and fight. You will conquer your enemies in battle" (32-34)

This at once assures Arjuna [with the prophecy of victory] and deflates his ego. We can notice in the first chapter that Arjuna feels that the battle would not take place if he backs off. He clearly considers him the hero of the situation. Such ego may give a sense of pride, but can flip into guilt any moment. Arjuna suffered the same in the first chapter, considering himself as the *cause* of the death of so many people. The Viśvarūpa dissolves Arjuna's ego, the root of both pride and guilt, and renders him devotional. He realizes he is a mere tool in the hands of the Supreme, and surrenders with a choking voice (35)<sup>98</sup>. Still afflicted by the ferocious form, he requests Kṛṣṇa to withdraw the Cosmic form (45-46). Kṛṣṇa acknowledges and reverts to his gentle human form (50). And Arjuna regains his composure (51).

There are a couple of indications in Arjuna's descriptions that it was not the regular frontal vision, but an all round spherical vision. In the beginning he says that he is unable to comprehend directions (25) and later says "I bow to you from the front, from the back and from all directions" (40). The nature of the divine eye (situated between the eyebrows) is to behold all at once, as opposed to one thing at a time (Paramahansa Yogananda, 2002, p. 610)<sup>99</sup>. Also, he is able to see into the future and know of his victory.

After assuming his human form, Kṛṣṇa concludes by saying that one cannot get to see the Viśvarūpa by mere study of the Vēda, austerities, charity, or performance of yajñas; only through ananya bhakti can one see and know the Supreme in this way (53-54)<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> Kṛṣṇa had referred to himself as Time twice in the vibhūti yōga chapter (11.30 and 33).

<sup>98</sup> This is not about using surrender as a means to escape guilt, and do whatever is convenient. This is something experiential, and is a consequence of devotion. Trying to intellectually imitate only the consequence, without devotion in the heart will only lead to deception.

<sup>99</sup> In *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Ch. 14) one can also read Paramahansa Yogananda's own account of the super-conscious state (granted to him by his Guru Sri Yukteshwara Giri) endowed with spherical vision.

<sup>100</sup> Kṛṣṇa had also granted the Cosmic vision to his mother Yaśōdā when he was a child. Suspecting that he had eaten mud, she asks him to open his mouth, and within his mouth she sees "the entire universe with all beings, the sky in all directions, mountains, continents, oceans, the surface of the earth... the moon and the stars, the planetary systems... and also Vraja and herself" and was struck with disbelief. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 10.7.35-37) Unlike the anxious Arjuna who saw death and destruction in the Cosmic form, the affectionate mother Yaśōdā who was curious to inspect his mouth saw wondrous visions of the cosmos.

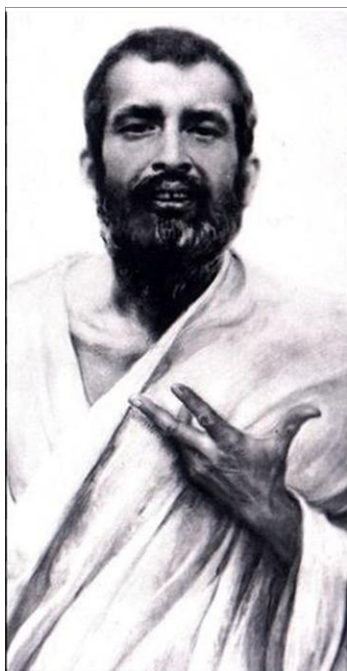


## 8.4. Saguṇa and Nirguṇa Bhakti

Till the sixth chapter, Kṛṣṇa mainly speaks of meditating upon the Self/Brahman devoid of any attributes (nirguṇa). Thereafter till the tenth chapter, he mainly speaks of adoring the Supreme with the attributes of omniscient, omnipotent, but still formless (saguṇa nirākāra). In the eleventh chapter, Kṛṣṇa shows the Cosmic form, and speaks of devotion to the form (saguṇa sākāra). And Arjuna promptly asks Kṛṣṇa "Between those who worship you (as the form - vyakta) and those who worship the imperishable Unmanifest (avyakta) - who are the better yogis?" (12.1)

In reply, Kṛṣṇa says those who worship Me (the Viśvarūpa), i.e. saguṇa upāsakas, are better (2), but not because the attainment of a nirguṇa upāsaka is any less; they too attain the same (3-4), but because they face more klēśa (afflictions)<sup>101</sup>; since we associate ourselves with a physical body, avyakta upāsana is very difficult (5). When the mind is soaked in the idea of "I am a form", it can readily relate to the Supreme too manifest as a form. Most minds are such, and it is much easier for them to become intense talking/thinking of Śiva, Kṛṣṇa etc. than of Pure Consciousness. Contemplating on the Self, for most minds, will be silent suffering!

There is a tendency in people to consider nirguṇa upāsana (or even nirākāra upāsana) as superior, and demean saguṇa-sākāra upāsana as a rudimentary (or even invalid) approach. But the great masters, including Kṛṣṇa, who are themselves established in the One, have constantly refuted this.



When Mahendranath Gupta (the author of "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna"), then a follower of the Brahma Samaj (who consider God as Nirguna), met Sri Ramakrishna:

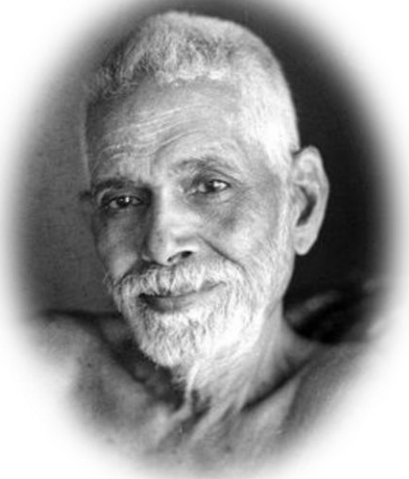
M: "Sir, one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is *not* God, and that, while worshiping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay"

Sri Ramakrishna (sharply): "That's the one hobby of you Calcutta [modern] people — giving lectures and bringing others to light... Who are you to teach others? He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone... will he not show people the way to worship Him? Suppose there is an error in worshiping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself."

M (to himself): "Yes, he has spoken the truth... Have I known God?... I know nothing about God, yet I am trying to teach others. What a shame! How foolish I am!"

(The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Chapter 1)

<sup>101</sup> It is not that saguṇa upāsakas have no klēśa; what is said is they have less klēśa as compared to nirguṇa upāsakas. Refer to Patanjāli yōga sūtra 2.3 for a technical description of klēśa.



Q: Bhagavan, people scoff at me, calling me a superstitious idolater.

M: Why don't you retort by calling them worse idolaters? For, do they not wash, dress, embellish, feed and thus 'worship' their body so many times a day? Is not the body the biggest idol? Then who is not an idol worshipper?

(Sri Ramana Reminiscences)

Q: Is there such a thing as a Personal God?

M: Yes, Ishvara.

Q (astonished): What? With eyes, nose, ears, etc.?

M: Yes, if you have them why should not God also have them?

Q: When I read in the Kabbala and the Puranas that God has these organs, I laugh.

M: Why don't you laugh at yourself for having them?

(Guru Ramana, Memories and Notes, p. 29)

D.: If God has no form is it proper to worship idols?

M.: Leave God alone because He is unknown. What about you? Have you a form?

D.: Yes. I am this and so and so.

M: If you are the body why do they bury the corpse after death? The body must refuse to be buried.

D.: No, I am the subtle jiva within the gross body.

M.: So you see that you are really formless; but you are at present identifying yourself with the body.

So long as you are formful why should you not worship the formless God as being formful?

(Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 121)

Thus upāsana can be according to one's temperament, rather than by rejecting some ways as invalid<sup>102</sup>. One can be a Jñānayōgi contemplating upon the formless Self, or a Bhaktiyōgi worshipping a form, or a combination of both. The masters usually acknowledge and follow both (not because they have to attain anything, but so that the world is not misguided because of their actions). Kṛṣṇa himself would engage in both the aspects of upāsana:

*Kṛṣṇa rose during the brāhma muhūrta, touched water and cleared his mind to meditate upon the One, matchless, infallible, self-luminous Self beyond all darkness. Then he offered oblations into the sacred fire and performed japa (repetition of a mantra). He then worshiped the rising sun, and propitiated the gods, sages and forefathers. (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 10.70)*

<sup>102</sup> "It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite alright. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form" (Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa to M in the Gospel, Chapter 1)

## 8.5. Qualities of a Bhakta

In the last eight verses of the twelfth chapter (13-20), for the third time in the Bhagavadgītā, Kṛṣṇa describes the qualities of a realized one, this time referring to him as a Bhakta. Essential qualities are the same as those described in regard to sthitaprajña and yōgārūḍha. While the qualities presented are those of an accomplished one, we will look at them from the perspective of sādhana.

- Samatva (13, 18, 19) - This has been discussed in detail in the yōgārūḍha section.
- Free of desires, neither rejoices on receiving auspicious, nor hates on receiving inauspicious, free of sorrow, anxiety, fear etc (15-17) - This has been discussed in the sthitaprajña section.
- Hates none (13) - Although each wave will have to be treated according to its shape and situation, one must have the fundamental acknowledgement that all is the same water. Hate, which is a strong divisive emotion, is not possible when this awareness exists, and maitri and karuṇā will dominate the background of our being.
- Friendly (maitri) and compassionate (karuṇā) to all beings (13) - In regards to how a yogi interacts with the world, till now Kṛṣṇa spoke primarily of the quality of being untouched by the world (anabhisnēha, withdrawal of the senses etc.), and of the quality of samatva. The state of samatva is always described through negative words — neither rejoices nor hates etc. Because of this, one may inadvertently begin to think of samatva as a state of passivity<sup>103</sup>. But it is not so, and a yogi is someone who is buzzing with life beyond the usual 'voltage' of awareness that we are presently in. In what way then, can we express a yogi's approach to the world in affirmative words? It is this question that Kṛṣṇa answers here by saying "maitri and karuṇā". His samatva towards the world is infused with tremendous sweetness, like that of a mother to all her children; he revels in such a blissful state that it submerges everything (pleasures and pains alike) that the world throws at him.

In passivity there is lack of involvement with the world. In passion there is selective involvement (what usually gets termed as *attachment*) towards a handful of people (and consequently aversion towards some others). And in compassion there is absolute involvement with whoever is encountered, for whatever little time, through whatever actions and emotions the situation demands. Therefore whenever a yogi is described as 'detached', 'untouched', 'dispassionate' etc., it should not be confused as a passive state. The phrase 'no attachment' negates only *selective* involvement, and not involvement itself! Thereby, in the parlance of yoga, *Dispassion is Compassion*, and not passivity.

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<sup>103</sup> It will be discussed later as to how tamas and sattva appear similar.

Passivity, which is tamas, comes with inertness and insensitivity towards the world. Passion, which is rajas, comes with sensitivity and instability due to all the commotion (likes-dislikes, excitements, disappointments etc.). Compassion, which is sattva, comes with sensitivity and a regal stability due to an inner state fulfilment which cannot be shaken by the commotion of the world. On the other hand, such a person influences those around with his karuṇā and infuses stability to them, even if they



Buddha and Kisagautami - an episode of sublime Karuna that transformed a grieving mother

are grief-stricken (while a man of rajas, attempting to counsel others, would himself get agitated by their grief and agony). Buddha is a prime example for the sublime display of karuṇā.

Now let us look at this from the perspective of sādhana. Although the inner state sweetness of a yogi with which he transacts with the world is always the same, his expression of it can broadly be classified into two. Taking a hint from Patañjali Yōga Sūtra (1.33) we may say that maitri is the expression towards pleasant situations, and karuṇā towards unpleasant ones. This division is irrelevant to a yogi; but a seeker can be aware of it this way (the sūtra is meant for a practitioner). Maitri is to be exercised on all the positive situations that we encounter; we should find delight in the success of others in endeavors that care for the world at large, or when possible, join hands with them. And karuṇā is to be exercised when we encounter negative situations (sorrowful or aggressive people). Whoever it is, they are only trying to find fulfillment, albeit unconsciously and haphazardly. Everyone is doing what think is the best way for them. When we are compassionate, even if someone is aggressive, we will only think in terms of how to *facilitate* them (to the best of your abilities) rather than how to *tackle* them. One may perform the needed action (care, or strictness, or even maintaining distance), but on the foundation of karuṇā, instead of being anxious, aggressive, or hateful.

Also, one cannot extol the artist and at the same time treat his art badly. Claiming Bhakti towards the Supreme, but being irreverent towards Prakṛti (animate-inanimate beings) is contradictory<sup>104</sup>

Karuṇā is a very profound subject by itself, and a lot of questions may arise in a practitioner. But remember that all these qualities (samatva, karuṇā etc.) are a *consequence* in a s̥hitaprajña because of a certain blossoming within. This is not something that can be *figured out* through the intellect. While

<sup>104</sup> "I am certainly not pleased when they who manage to worship Me in My deity form with all paraphernalia, are disrespectful towards other living beings" (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 3.29.24) - Lord Kapila in Īśvara bhāva instructing his mother Dēvahūti.

we can try to be aware of our emotions and exercise karuṇā, the actual thing to work upon is our inner blossoming. The Bhakti way of working towards our inner blossoming is to study the lives of yogis and resonate deeply with them. When we lose ourselves to them, their qualities manifest in us.

- Does not create udvēga (anxiety/agitation) in others, nor get agitated by others (15) - Our inner state is our own, and is generated by none else but us; external situation can only act like a trigger, not cause. A bhakta has realized this, and always chooses to be in bliss - satataṁ santuṣṭaḥ (14) External situations do not determine how he is, and they fail to agitate him; he is immune to the virus of anxiety. But the people around him may be susceptible to external situations, and their state of mind is determined by what other people do<sup>105</sup>. A bhakta is such that his very way of being not only does not create anxiety in others, but also diffuses any anxiety they may have and transmits serenity, stillness to them. Even animals that are generally very fearful and shy of humans seek their company.
- Not particular about things and place of stay (19) - as indicated in earlier instances, yoga is not against comfort, it is only against compulsion of any sort. When we become particular about food, clothing, bedding and so on, we are putting restrictions upon ourselves, and fixing our identities "this is how I am". When we ourselves draw our boundaries, we do not break them easily, because we cherish these self-imposed limitations as our treasured ornaments!
- Renounced all undertakings (16) - This has to be seen in light of other verses rather than literally. Recall that karma yōga is prescribed for someone who is not yet devoid of saṅkalpa (resolutions, intentions), and karma sannyāsa is prescribed to someone who has purged himself of such outward habitual tendencies of the mind through karma yōga. But an ātmajñāni has no prescriptions, and he may or may not choose to engage in the world. As clarified earlier - "All the undertakings of an ātmajñāni are devoid of desires and saṅkalpa" (4.19) Even if he performs action, it is as good as no karma, and nothing gets registered in the karma account; for it is the universe itself acting upon itself.

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<sup>105</sup> Because of this, anxiety generally gets transmitted from one to another in a chain-reaction (or suppressed for some time, and erupt later); unconsciously people try to handle others' agitation by themselves getting agitated. This is like handling another's sickness by getting sick ourselves!

## Block 4: Chapters 13-18

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### Chapters covered:

- ✚ Chapter 13 (Kṣētra-Kṣētrajña vibhāga yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 14 (Guṇatrayavibhāga yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 15 (Puruṣōttama yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 16 (Daivāsurasāmpadvibhāga yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 17 (Śraddhātrayavibhāga yōga)
- ✚ Chapter 18 (Mōkṣa sannyāsa yōga)

As indicated in the last block, among Jīva-Īśvara-Jagat, chapters 13-18 are primarily Jagat oriented, where Guṇas are discussed in great detail.

Chapters 13 and 15 describe Prakṛti using different terminology, and emphasize on transcending it.

Chapter 16 describes divine and demonic qualities, and a detailed account of someone steeped in compulsive materialistic tendencies is provided.

Chapter 14 introduces the concept of Guṇa, and applies that to twelve aspects of our life in chapters 17 and 18.

After the detailed discussion spanning 18 chapters covering different approaches, Kṛṣṇa concludes by offering specific instructions to Arjuna.

***“The Bhagavad-Gita is a true scripture of the human race, a living creation rather than a book, with a new message for every age and a new meaning for every civilization.”***

*- Sri Aurobindo*

## 9. Thou art *not* That | Chapters 13 & 15

### Unit Outline

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Introduction | 2. Kṣētrajña     |
| 3. Kṣētra       | 4. Jñāna sādhanā |

### 9.1. Introduction

Thirteenth chapter comes as a continuation to two of the previous discussion points:

1. In response to Arjuna's question on saṅga and nirguṇa bhakti, Kṛṣṇa highlights saṅga bhakti in chapter 12. Subsequently, nirguṇa bhakti, or in other words jñānayōga is described in chapter 13 so as to complete the discussion on Bhakti.

We can notice here a pattern in the way the conversation is flowing:

Jñāna yōga (chapter 2) → Karma yōga (chapters 3-5) → Jñāna yōga (chapter 6)

Jñāna yōga (chapter 6) → Bhakti yōga (chapters 7-12) → Jñāna yōga (chapter 13)

After covering Karma yōga and Bhakti yōga, Kṛṣṇa concludes each of those discussions by promptly returning to Jñāna yōga, as if to say, "all that is fine, but do not forget this essential thing"

2. Recall aparā and parā prakṛti (lower and higher prakṛti) mentioned in chapter 7. That is clarified further in this chapter by presenting them as kṣētra (the *field*) and kṣētrajña (the *knower* of the field) respectively. The key clarification is that realizing the difference between kṣētra and kṣētrajña is liberation (13.23, 34). To understand this, the table from previous block is reproduced here:

Entity	Sāṅkhya	Chapter 7	Chapter 13	Chapter 15	Metaphor	Implication
Jagat	Prakṛti	Aparā prakṛti (lower)	Kṣētra/ Prakṛti	Kṣara puruṣa (perishable)	All the wavy <i>shapes</i>	All objects
Jīva(s)	Puruṣa(s)	Parā prakṛti (higher)	Kṣētrajña/ Puruṣa	Akṣara puruṣa (imperishable)	<i>Water</i> that makes up the shapes	Limited consciousness of specific objects
Īśvara	---	Īśvara		Puruṣōttama	Ocean	Consciousness of all there is <sup>I</sup> (omniscience)

<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, advaita philosophy would reduce all the three to just Brahman/Ātman/Self or the unconditioned Consciousness (*water*).

One may come to think that both aparā prakṛti and parā prakṛti are to be transcended as both of them are 'prakṛti'. That is not the case. Although apparently there are four entities, viz. Jagat, Jīva, Īśvara and Brahman, essentially there are only two - the *shape* (waves on water), and the *stuff* (water itself). Both jīva (wave) and Īśvara (ocean) are essentially Brahman (water), one conditioned by finitude, and another by infinitude. While aparā prakṛti (jagat) refers to the shapes, parā prakṛti (jīva) refers to the water that makes up the shapes. When the *shape* and the *stuff* are clearly distinguished, the stuff is no more conditioned by the shape, and there is realization.

In chapter 15, the same is presented as kṣara and akṣara puruṣa (perishable and imperishable puruṣa). But there is another way to look at this classification in light of Sāṅkhya philosophy: Kṣara puruṣa = vyakta prakṛti; Akṣara puruṣa = avyakta prakṛti. All the manifestations of prakṛti are perishable, and its unmanifest seed is eternal.

## 9.2. Kṣētrajña

Similar to chapter 2, chapter 13 also hosts a detailed description of kṣētrajña, the Self. Some of the points are listed here. These lines are not to be read objectively directing the mind outward targeting an external entity. Kṛṣṇa is talking about *you*, the true you that is devoid of all the superimpositions.

- The Self shines forth through the functions of all the senses, but is devoid of all senses (14). All actions are that of prakṛti, not of the Self (29).

Just as a tree is an object in your consciousness, the process of seeing the tree and the idea that "I am seeing the tree" are all objects in your consciousness<sup>106</sup>. Just as a vegetable is an object in your consciousness, the process of cutting the vegetable and the idea that "I am cutting the vegetable" are all objects in your consciousness. Whatever you assume as 'myself'—the body, the role within the family or society, the complex mixture of attributes that you call 'my personality'—are all objects in your consciousness. When this awareness is sharpened and the entire jagat put into the 'object' bucket, that which is never an object, the Self will shine forth; and one would realize that just as the sun that illumines all the worlds, the Self merely illumines all objects (33), but is actionless.

- As it is extremely subtle, it is unknowable (15). As explained above, the Self cannot be an object of perception, because it *is* the one that perceives, right at this moment. In the process of perception there is a triad — perceiver-perceiving-perceived. But there is no such triad when you are aware of

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<sup>106</sup> The triad of perceiver-perceiving-perceived as put forth by Patañjali in yoga sutra 1.41



yourself. Your awareness of yourself is not perception in the normal sense; and thus you are called as unperceivable (apramēya), inconceivable (acintya), unknowable (avijñēya) etc. One cannot *know* the Self. One can only *be* that.

- Supports all, but is unattached; experiences all the guṇas, but is nirguṇa (14). Like space that is all pervading but does not get tainted by anything, the Self is everywhere in the body, is not tainted by it (32). Anything that has a quality of its own is bound to distort what it perceives. For instance, the visual of an object that we see through our eyes is a combination of that object and the nature of our eyes. An owl with a different visual apparatus would see the same thing differently. Therefore none is experiencing the world *as it is*. Only that which is beyond all qualities, the true *you*, can experience the world as it is.
- It is far off; it is also close by (15). Unconsciously equating ourselves to a personality, we may spend lifetimes wallowing in ignorance. But when the awareness decisively shifts from all the objects to that which is aware, it is the closest, or rather, there isn't a distance between you and you. And thus Vedānta declares "प्राप्तस्य प्राप्तिः" - attaining that which is already attained.

### 9.3. Kṣētra

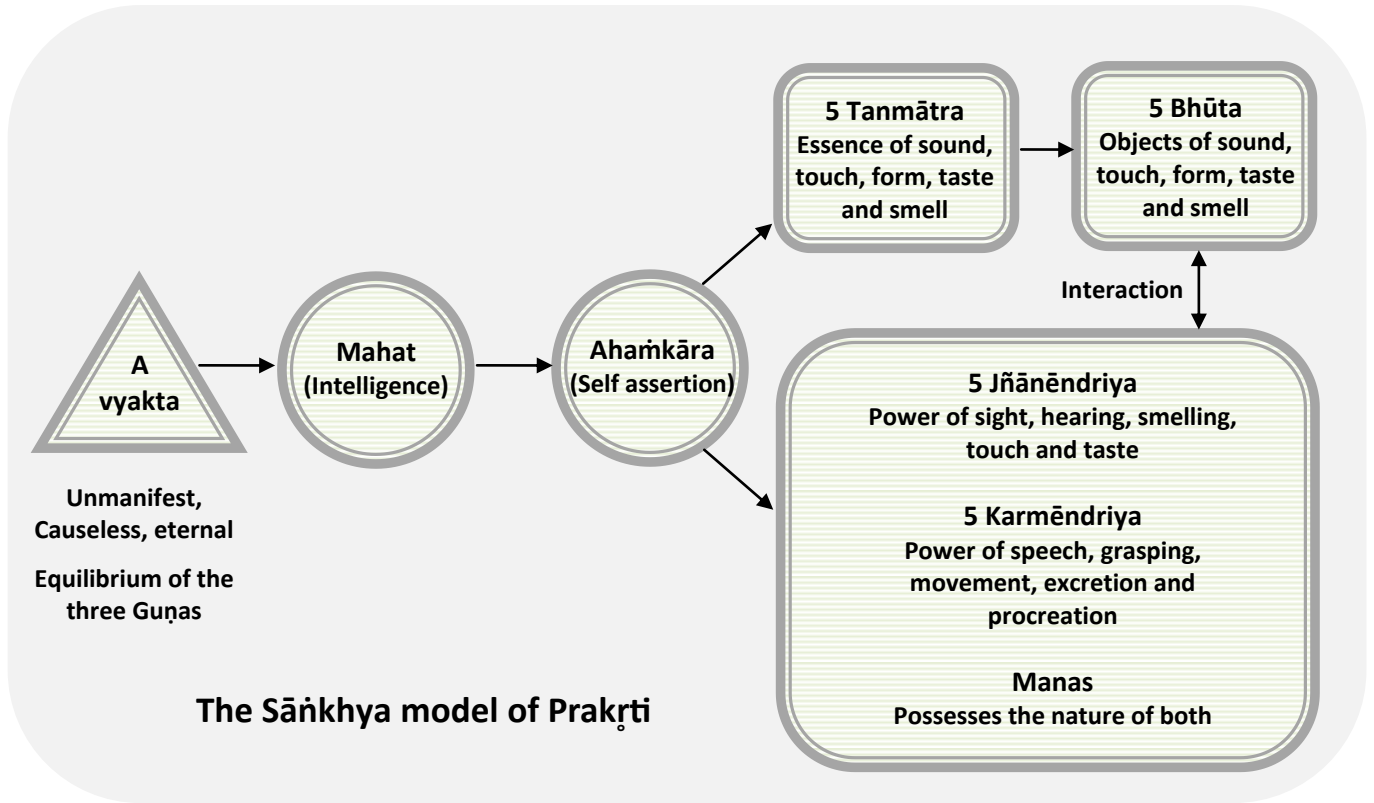
In order to facilitate de-identification from everything that is 'not me' (i.e. prakṛti), the traditional texts describe prakṛti in a variety of ways; for example, pañca kōśa (the five sheaths), avasthātraya (the three states), śarīratraya (the three bodies) etc. presented in the Upaniṣats. In the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa does not refer to any of these now-popular models<sup>107</sup>, but resorts to the Sāṅkhya model (7.4 and 13.5). He does, however, also refer to the allegory of the inverted tree that is available in the Kaṭha upaniṣat (2.3.1). Remember that, all the detailed description of prakṛti is only to emphasize "Thou art *not* that"

#### 9.3.1. The Sāṅkhya model

The list of entities in the Sāṅkhya model is more or less the same as that in the system of Vēdānta. The difference lies mainly in their order of fundamentality. Kṛṣṇa simply lists the 24 tattvas, and does not discuss the evolution of those tattvas as such; but here is a brief depiction of the Sāṅkhya model of prakṛti from a text named Sāṅkhya Kārikā:

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<sup>107</sup> Vedic knowledge evolved over time as revelations from seers were gathered and added into the repository. It is not a declaration of one individual at a particular point in time. It is akin to Physics wherein peer-reviewed scientific literature has built up over centuries. That is why the Vedas command great respect and authority as one of the decisive means of knowledge (alongside direct perception and inference). During the time of Kṛṣṇa, this editing work was still on as evident from "Vēda Vyāsa" (editor of Vedas) - the name of the author of the Mahābhārata. Hence we do not know in which form Upaniṣats were available in Kṛṣṇa's time, and which of the concepts were as popular as they are today.



Among these, Avyakta is the mūlaprakṛti or the root-evolvent from which everything else evolves.

Mahat, Ahaṁkāra and 5 Tanmātra are prakṛti-vikṛti. As evident from the diagram, they are both evolutes (from a previous principle) and evolvents (for further principles). Sometimes only the eight principles (these seven + avyakta) are mentioned as the essential ingredients of prakṛti as Kṛṣṇa does in 7.4.

The remaining 16 principles are vikṛti or mere evolutes that do not evolve into anything further. Furthermore, there are several vikāra, passing variations that happen to the 23 manifest principles due to the play of Guṇas - such as likes-dislikes, joy-sorrow etc. (13.6)

And finally, Puruṣa is neither an evolvent nor an evolute (do not look for it in the diagram; Puruṣa is the one looking at the diagram)

Thus, what the model is saying is that your intelligence, your sense of 'I am', your mind, all your sense organs and their activity, and all the variations they go through — they are all objects of your consciousness, and therefore not *you*<sup>108</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> There is no need to get too caught up with the technical details of Prakṛti. The sole intention of the texts in articulating them is to facilitate de-identification from them. "Just as one who wants to throw away garbage has no need to analyse it and see what it is, so one who wants to know the Self has no need to count the number of categories or inquire into their characteristics; what he has to do is to reject altogether the categories that hide the Self." (Ramana Maharshi in 'Who Am I?')

### 9.3.2. The inverted Aśvattha

In chapter 15, Prakṛti is depicted as an inverted aśvattha tree. The allegory is as follows:

Its roots are above and branches below (1) indicating that the source is transcendent, and that it descends into manifestation. The primordial Puruṣa is the one from who it streams forth<sup>109</sup> (4).

Its leaves are the Vedas, or knowledge (1). Leaves suck nourishment from the roots and sustain the tree. No knowledge is created afresh, but is only tapped from the ever present source. And it is knowledge that regulates and sustains a framework, be it forest or a society<sup>110</sup>.

Some branches go upward and some downward; they are nourished by the Guṇas (2). Although identified with the attributes of prakṛti, some individuals sense their transcendent roots, and tend to get drawn to it (sattva predominant). Others, entangled in the role play of life, tend to move farther away from the source (tamas and rajas predominant).

It has sense tendencies as its buds (2). There are buds almost all over the tree. When we cut a branch of a tree, especially an aśvattha, a bush of branches can be seen growing back with vengeance. Just so, latent tendencies, when an opportunity is presented, grow into new branches, which sometimes the person himself may not have imagined possible earlier.

This tree is avyaya (1), undecaying. If left unattended, this tree will flourish; compulsions (patterns of information) do not need any effort from our side to sustain within us; unless we become conscious, they can repeat themselves endlessly.

But at the same time the name aśvattha itself means "that which will not remain tomorrow", or ephemeral. It can be cut with the sturdy axe of dispassion (3). It is passion—a habitual, compulsive, discriminatory involvement in one more than the other—that entangles us in the world. When there is no selective involvement, the world cannot *bind* us, and the tree can be cut asunder<sup>111</sup>. One should seek refuge in the primordial Puruṣa from where this ancient tree has come forth, and have that supreme state as the goal, reaching which none returns (4); once there is realization of water, there is neither an individuality (identification with a wave<sup>112</sup>) that can *return*, nor is there *anywhere* to return; for all there is, is water.

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<sup>109</sup> If we go by Sāṅkhya, the source would be the Avyakta from which evolution proceeds.

<sup>110</sup> In case of plants and animals knowledge [and intelligence] belongs mainly to annamaya and prāṇamaya kōśa, and is mostly unconscious; but that there is knowledge and intelligence is unmistakable.

<sup>111</sup> Another meaning of dispassion would be renunciation and overall reduction in the worldly engagements itself. But as discussed in earlier chapters, this is suitable only for a few. Kṛṣṇa himself was not a renunciate, and showed absolute involvement in whatever came his way in life.

<sup>112</sup> Patañjali yōga sūtra calls this as 'vṛtti sārūpyam' (1.4), identity with citta vṛttis, or mental waves. The Self is wrongly assumed to be a compound of psychological attributes.

#### 9.4. Jñāna sādhanā

This sādhanā is explained in chapter 13 (7-11) in some detail wherein the qualities that a seeker should be aware of are listed<sup>113</sup>. This adds to the points presented in chapter 6. Some of them are:

**Amānitvam** - absence of self-adoration. Just as cats like fondling, ego likes getting fondled. When there is mānitvaṁ (narcissism), we feel superior to others, and host a sense of entitlement. As a consequence, one gets very touchy and gets offended very easily, and lives an insecure life. Such a troubled mind is miles away from being meditative.

**Adambitvam** - absence of show off. A Samskṛta saying goes "अन्तःसारविहीनानाम् भवत्याडम्बरो महान्" - when there is very little essence within, there is a lot of show off (to compensate that sense of littleness). Even when a human being loses himself to the ego, i.e. identifications with the body-mind, there is an intuitive knowledge within him of the boundless nature of the Self. As a result, the identities ("I am a man, an officer, a husband etc."), no matter how significant in the world, feel very small and inadequate in contrast to our true nature. But instead of recognizing the root cause of this sense of smallness, one foolishly tries to make that identity itself infinite! Thus results an array of follies such as mānitvam and dambitvam. These are like darkness, and exist in unconsciousness. Awareness puts an end to them.

**Ārjavam** - coherence of being, or integrity. When there is alignment among the various facets (thoughts, emotions etc.) of who we are (within ourselves, and while interacting with the world) we are in a state of coherence, and it becomes easy to notice the distance between ourselves and the mind, and de-identify from it. When the psychology is in a disjointed state, one easily loses himself within that messy heap.

There are three types of people in the world: saints, criminals and good people. Saints are same within and without. Criminals are also same within and without<sup>114</sup>. But the majority of us belong to the third category. We are neither criminals, nor saints; we are all good people - something within, something else without! When we were children, adults told us "If you talk like that you are a bad boy/girl"; they just tried to curb our talk instead of paying attention to its roots. And we understood the trick - we just have to keep everything inside to be good!<sup>115</sup> As we grew up, this pattern has taken deep roots in many of us.

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<sup>113</sup> One can read the book "Human Values" by Swami Visharadananda published by SVYP. The book elaborates all the twenty qualities listed by Kṛṣṇa in this section of the Gītā. Please note that the more *aware* we are, more natural these qualities are. It is not that we have to put effort and *develop* them as such.

<sup>114</sup> Extremes have similar characteristics. But one is sattva, another is tamas. One liberates, another binds.

<sup>115</sup> Obviously, this is not to encourage one to express out whatever comes to mind; it will lead to unpleasant consequences in the world and further turmoil. This is to encourage one to reach a state where being the same within and without has no unpleasant consequences.

Being upfront in the world is anyway a complex affair, and we cannot go by prescriptions. But can't I be upfront with myself? The incoherence with the external world has its roots in the incoherence within. It seems as though instead of simply seeing our state of mind as it is, we mostly do tremendous acrobatics to deny obvious things, or decorate it with some nice looking words<sup>116</sup>. We tend to hallucinate ourselves, and move away from the factual state of the mind. When we make a journey we can only start from where we *actually* are, not where we *conceptually* are. When I refuse to see the reality of my mind itself, is there a possibility of seeing the absolute reality beyond the mind?

**Janmamṛtyujarāvyaḍhi duḥkhadōṣānudarśanam** - constantly reflecting upon the suffering involved in birth, death, old age and diseases. When children fall down and are hurt, they cry as if the end of the world has come; but after a few minutes when the pain subsides, off they go to continue playing as if there is nothing like pain in existence. Just so are adults with greater miseries of life such as diseases, old age and death. When diseases come, when we think of the suffering involved in old age (when we witness it in others), and when we see others die, it makes us anxious, but in no time we are engrossed back in the world as if there is nothing like suffering or death<sup>117</sup>. This forgetfulness may appear like some noble trait, but it is *tamas*, not *sattva*. It is not that we are to live in constant fear and worry of old age and death, but we are to constantly reflect upon this fact of life and death. "There is so much suffering from birth to death. Is there a way out of all this?" Only if our present miserable condition is acknowledged thoroughly, will one truly attempt to transcend it<sup>118</sup>. If the acknowledgment of the problem is not intense enough, the enquiry for a solution will also not be intense enough. Accordingly, almost all spiritual schools begin with the acknowledgment of *duḥkha*. The very first "noble truth" in Buddhism is *Dukkha*.

**Anabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragrhādiṣu** - absence of a strong sense of identity with children, spouse, home etc. wherein you consider them *as yourself*. Remember that this is coming from Kṛṣṇa, himself a family man. After our body, family and home are perhaps our strongest identifications. With such identifications we not only create additional layers to the already hard shell of our individuality, but also get into

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<sup>116</sup> Call stubbornness as firmness, restlessness as energetic etc. The unit on Gunas will discuss this further. But please note that this is not about labeling yourself as good and bad. Being straight with yourself means simply being aware of the mind for what it is - no resisting it, no repenting it, no justifying it, no exaggerating it, no labeling it etc. (for all these are again new layers being fabricated in the mind). Then out of that awareness will spring the appropriate course of action, and not out of the recycle bin that is mind.

<sup>117</sup> In the Mahābhārata there is an episode called the Yakṣa praśna, where a Yakṣa asks a series of intriguing questions to Yudhiṣṭhira. To the question "What is the most astonishing thing?" Yudhiṣṭhira answers: "Day after day countless creatures are going to the abode of Death, yet those that remain behind believe themselves to be immortal. What can be more astonishing than this?" (Vana parva, 313.116)

<sup>118</sup> Simply uttering a statement "Life is beautiful" borrowed from someone else does not change our experience of life. "Life is beautiful" is to be realized, not imitated. And that realization can come about only after accepting how, in our present experience, life is full of suffering.

increased conflict with the world, and undergo unnecessary turbulence of mind<sup>119</sup>. But one can notice this basic fact: no matter who it is, spouse, parents, children, friends or whoever, and no matter how much you adore them, you do not like them sticking to you beyond a certain point. In fact, if it becomes extreme, you feel repulsive. You know intrinsically that your salvation lies within you, not with anyone else.

**Viviktadēśa sēvitvam** - dwelling in solitude. No matter how much one loves and clings to his family, friends, work and all the social commotion, once in a while there comes an urge to be by ourselves. The frequency and period may vary from person to person, but the yearning itself is undeniable. Many are so restless that they may not enjoy more than a few minutes of solitude; in such a case even the quietest place on the planet (or even outer space!) is useless. But for someone in whom the inner restlessness has subsided substantially, a quiet place becomes very conducive to turn inward.

**Aratiḥ janasāmsadi** - absence of taking delight in the company of people. Notice how Kṛṣṇa is asking us not necessarily to physically forsake the worldly affairs, but only to not revel in it. If needed have a family, but have anabhiśvaṅgaḥ. If needed interact with people, but do not revel in their company. A spiritual seeker always bears in mind that family and society are just external arrangements to meet certain needs and *facilitate* life; they are not the *goal* of life. A seeker is fixed upon...

**Adhyātmajñāna nityatvaṁ** - constantly contemplating upon the sense of 'I'. What is this strange awareness that illuminates everything? What is this intriguing 'I' that is aware of itself? What am I? Enquiring thus, the seeker uses the power of '?' to objectify all (body, mind, intellect etc.) that is presently considered as myself, and negates the hidden assumptions "I am this and that" ruling from within. And/or the seeker is soaked in...

**Mayi cānanyayōgēna bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī** - unfaltering bhakti towards Me with a sense of ananyata with Me. As is evident to the reader by now, Kṛṣṇa refers to the ultimate state as both Self-realization and God-realization. One can approach it according to their disposition. Ananya bhakti has been discussed in the previous block.

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<sup>119</sup> Just like Dhṛtarāṣṭra underwent due to his abhiśvaṅgaḥ with Duryōdhana. The entire war could have been evaded if only Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not over-identified with his son. When one considers his family-identity as the ultimate, his sense of inclusiveness comes to halt with a handful of people. This leads to psychological abnormalities. For instance, in such a condition one sees nothing wrong in adopting illicit means to amass ridiculous amounts of wealth, for the sake of family, as some politicians do. Since it is for my family, it makes it alright! What happens to others because of that is not my concern.

## 10. The Conscious and the Compulsive | Chapter 16

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### Unit Outline

1. Introduction
2. Daivī sampat
3. Āsurī sampat

### 10.1. Introduction

There was a brief mention of the daivī and āsurī nature in the ninth chapter (9.12-13). Chapter 16 elaborates on it. Literally daivī and āsurī translates into *divine* and *demonic*. This should not be taken in a moral sense of 'good and bad' or 'right and wrong' based on some societal or cultural values; this is not about how others are benefited from you or harmed by you. The basis for the classification here is very fundamental and self-oriented. As Kṛṣṇa himself clarifies, daivī sampat is that which liberates you, and āsurī sampat is that which binds you (16.5). Daivī nature is that which helps human beings to liberate themselves from limited identities and realize their true nature, and Āsurī nature is that which drags them into worldliness and entangles them. The more *conscious* you are, stronger the divine qualities are; the more *compulsive* you are, stronger the demonic qualities are.

What we call as 'animal nature' is well defined; animals live by instincts, and hardly any intellect. A kitten will grow into a complete cat if its basic needs are taken care of. It does not need to get trained to become a better cat in anyway. So it is with any other animal. Similarly what we call as 'divine' and 'demonic' are also well defined based on a certain criterion as above. But what we refer to as 'human' is a variable, and cannot be fixed. We see humans being animalistic, demonic, divine, or transcend all of it. This is perhaps the reason why śāstras declare human birth alone as having karmādhikāra (eligibility of karma). Human beings are endowed with the power of placing themselves in any coordinate of consciousness; they can be divine and transcend all limitations, or be demonic, animalistic and be confined.

### 10.2. Daivī sampat

A total of 26 daivī qualities are listed in verses 1-3. Some of them (ārjavam, amānitvam etc.) are same as those discussed in section 9.4. Some others (dānam, dhṛti etc.) will be covered in the next block when we discuss Guṇas<sup>120</sup>. Out of the remaining ones, a few are described here:

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<sup>120</sup> This is because these aspects can have three modes, and when it is listed as a daivī quality it is to be taken as the sāttvik mode of that quality. This explanation is better taken up separately.

**Jñānayōgavyavasthitiḥ** - Steadfastness in jñāna and yōga. Śāṅkarabhāṣya calls it the foremost daivī quality. According to the bhāṣya, jñāna here is the intellectual ascertainment of the Self from non-Self with the guidance of teachers and scriptures; and yōga is withdrawing within and realizing it. This is nothing but the process of śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana prescribed in the Upaniṣats (Bṛhadāraṇyōpaniṣat, 4.5.6).

**Abhayam** - Fearlessness. Manifestation of fear may be innumerable, but fundamentally it is one. "He then thought 'since there is nothing else than myself, of what am I afraid?' Thereupon his fear vanished... It is only from a second one that fear arises" (Bṛhadāraṇyōpaniṣat, 1.4.2). Realization of unity and fearlessness are therefore one and the same. The more established we are in our true nature, the less fearful we will be.

**Kṣamā** and **Akrōdha** - Forgiveness and absence of anger. The bhāṣya differentiates the two as follows. Akrōdha is when there is aberration within (while facing an unpleasant situation), but is subdued and not allowed to manifest out as anger. Kṣamā is when the inner aberration itself is absent.

When the courts see that the convict is mentally unstable, he is given treatment instead of punishment. But it is not that the rest of us are absolutely stable; we just have mutually accepted levels of instability. Most of us are not awake to our true nature, and this fundamental delusion manifests in the psychology as a variety of abnormalities (like dambha, insecurity, touchiness etc.). To a Buddha, the fully awakened one, the whole world is at different levels of mental instability, and he would only see how best the person can be treated. As sādhakas, the more awake we are, the more clearly we too would see the same with the world, and Akrōdha and Kṣamā will be natural consequences. Akrōdha and Kṣamā is not possible between two people who are equally unstable<sup>121</sup>!

**Alōluptvam** - No compulsiveness within even when the sense object is available for indulgence.

**Apaiśunam** - Absence of backbiting. Needs no explanation!

**Mārdavam** - Gentleness. This is sometimes missing even in "long time yoga practitioners". How you walk, how you cut a vegetable, how you switch on a light - all these indicate how crude or subtle you are. Crudity and rashness can exist only in unconsciousness. A conscious one tends to become more subtle and gentle<sup>122</sup> (not to be understood as weak and succumbing). If we are habitually rough with everything

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<sup>121</sup> A fight between an 18 year old and a 4 year old is very unlikely. The former would just ignore the latter's aggression. But a quarrel is very much likely between two 18 year olds or two 4 year olds. Conflict is possible only when two people are of the similar maturity levels. But this need not necessarily be related to their physical age; we sometimes see 4 year olds showing more maturity than a 40 year old.

<sup>122</sup> This is not a universal rule. There are yogis that are utterly rude in their disposition and look at everything (including themselves) with disdain. But they will be *always* be so, and they do not become gentle for personal convenience. There is a certain integrity in that harshness. But this way is not for the majority.



else, our abrupt gentleness with people is artificial<sup>123</sup>. With regards to people - as usual this is not about a uniform behavior at all times towards everyone. But just as we may have some level of harshness as our default setting, it is possible to have mārḍavam as our default setting; just as we may have an undercurrent of crudity which we try to cover with artificial gentleness (in 'civilized' and devious ways), it is possible to have mārḍavam as our undercurrent, and base all our actions (including a display of anger perhaps) on that.

**Hrīḥ** - Modesty. This is the opposite of dambha. Hrīḥ is the absence of the urge to flaunt one's knowledge, skills, possessions etc. Extraordinary ones are often *extra* ordinary! They would rather be a nobody in a gathering.

**Acāpalam** - Absence of compulsion in the limbs when there is nothing to be done (similarly in speech). It is not that many people do not have time to rest; it is just that they are restless by themselves. When they complain of work-stress if holiday is granted to them, they would feel lost without having anything to do, and would find something to engage themselves in.

**Adrōhaḥ** - Absence of the intention to cause harm to others.

### 10.3. Āsurī sampat

Majority of chapter 16 describes Āsurī sampat. After briefly listing some āsurī qualities (4)—dambha, atimānitva, pārūṣya (bitter, sarcastic speech) etc.—Kṛṣṇa delves into the attitude and lifestyle of āsurī people in detail (7-20).

Humans do not engage in anything without an intellectual basis for it; there has to be *some* philosophy behind their way of being. A thief has his philosophy, and a terrorist has his. The reasoning will be as profane or profound, unconscious or conscious as their intellect is. But whatever level of intellect they have has to be satisfied. The āsurī philosophy is as follows (based on Śāṅkarabhāṣya): "Everyone in the world is untruthful just as we are. There isn't anything like dharma (laws that uphold existence). There is no Īśvara that delivers the consequences of your karma. World exists because of sexual intercourse; lust alone is its cause" (8)

"Didn't you also do the same that day?" is perhaps the #1 defense strategy one adopts to justify what they do. In that regard, "That is how the whole world is" is a very sweeping statement, and this onetime justification can last a lifetime. But just because everyone is doing the same, will the karmaphala—

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<sup>123</sup> This is not necessarily intentional pretence, but is an unconscious disparity, a rift in our being. When Swami Vivekananda went to Maa Sharada (Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's wife) to seek permission to go to the US (for the Parliament of Religions), she asks him to handover the knife in the kitchen. Seeing the subtlety and gentleness in the way he hands over the knife, she says you are ready to go and spread the Master's message!

invisible effects at a non-physical level consequences of which will have to be borne later as per the laws of dharma—go away? What to do of that? Well, the āsurī philosophy simply refutes the existence of these invisible laws and consequences - it is just a physical world; there are no invisible layers to it; what is not in my perception does not exist, and cannot exist. Obviously therefore, we are all also merely physical beings, formed entirely from sexual union.

"Holding this view, they fall from their true nature, and become of superficial intellect. They engage in fierce deeds and come forth as the enemies of the world resulting in its destruction" (9) Even if many do not articulate it consciously, most of the world today is materialistic in their attitude, with the prime intention of sucking as much as possible from earth. The present generation has unquestionably caused the greatest damage (depletion of soil quality and water, chemicals, plastic...) to the planet in their aggressive endeavor to find fulfillment through external means. In this regard, whether we are aware of it or not, we all possess āsurī aspects.

Kṛṣṇa then describes how an āsurī person lives his life:

- They are restless with never-ending worries that end only at death. They feel certain that gratification of desires is the highest aim of life (11).
- Bound by hundreds of expectations, immersed in anger and lust, they strive to obtain wealth through unlawful means for sensual enjoyment (12).
- Deluded by ignorance they say "I acquired this today. Tomorrow I will acquire that too. I vanquished this enemy, I shall vanquish others too. I am free to do what I wish. I am perfect in all ways. I am powerful and happy. I have wealth. I have people. No one is equal to me. I perform yajña and give charity, and I enjoy life<sup>124</sup>" (13-15)
- Self-admiring, lacking humility, intoxicated and proud due to wealth, they perform Nāmayaajña (namesake yajña) just to show off, without following the injunctions (17).
- These malicious ones hate Me who is within them and others (18). Materialistic and compulsive ones are naturally opposed to the supremacy of Consciousness. For otherwise their fundamental philosophy of life would crumble. Most people do not express this explicitly, or are indifferent to it, for the fear that they would have to change their way of life.
- Succumbing to the āsurī ways, they fall into lower births. Then in a vicious cycle they become more and more unconscious (farther away from Me), and fall into further lower births (19-20).

Therefore, rely on the words of realized ones (śāstra), and decide your actions. (24)

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<sup>124</sup> This points out the conceit a religious person develops - "I go to temple, I have donated so much, I have performed these rituals in such a grand scale" This is only used to justify (and compensate) their materialistic philosophy of life, and to hush the conscience by saying to themselves "I am also spiritual".

## 11. Guṇa - Not Dual, but 'Tri'al | Chapters 14, 17 & 18

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### Unit Outline

1. Guṇa
2. Three modes of...
3. Guṇātīta

### 11.1. Guṇa

Guṇa is a foundational concept of the Sāṅkhya philosophy, and is now an integral part of Indian thought. This apparently simple truth has very deep implications, and can provide a great deal of clarity in our spiritual pursuit and our life in general.

Let us start with a purely physical example of electromagnetic spectrum. The low-frequency electromagnetic waves that occupy the beginning of the spectrum (radio waves, microwaves etc.) are invisible to the human eye. Thereafter, a certain range of frequencies (the seven colours of the visible light) is visible. And then again, the high-frequency waves that are at the end of the spectrum (x-rays, gamma rays etc.) are invisible to us. If we go by the criterion of visibility, there are only two types of waves - visible and invisible. But that would misrepresent reality, and may lead to misapprehensions. Radio waves are invisible because it is *below* the visible frequency, and gamma rays are invisible because it is *beyond* the visible frequency. The former is low energy, and the latter is high energy; they cannot be put into the same category just because both are invisible.

Just so, we can draw a spectrum of the mind that has three regions — dullness, turbulence and tranquility or tamas, rajas and sattva. Tranquility is not mere absence of turbulence and lack of energy, but is positive stillness and intensely energetic. It is dynamism and stillness at the same time, as generally presented in the allegory of a lamp in a windless spot (6.19) or the flow of oil.

Kṛṣṇa describes each of the Guṇa with certain key words<sup>125</sup> (14.6-13):

Tamas is characterized by Aprakāśa (darkness or no illumination); Apravṛtti (inertness); Mōha (delusion) - inability to differentiate; Pramāda (negligence or errors) - not doing what needs to be done, or doing that is not needed; Nidrā (sleep) and Ālasya (indolence)

Rajas is characterized by Pravṛtti - engaging in activity; Karma ārambha - initiating activity by myself (the tendency to do something or the other all the time); Aśama - inability to settle down; Lōbha - greed; Spṛhā/Tṛṣṇā - desire to acquire things.

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<sup>125</sup> Kṛṣṇa provides a detailed list in the Anugītā parva. Refer to block 1, unit 2 of "Yoga Philosophy and Health"

Sattva is characterized by Prakāśa (illumination) - clear perception; Jñāna - when mind is tranquil, a reflection of the pure awareness is experienced, and one goes into "I know" - this is not Self-knowledge yet, but still of the ego; Sukha (pleasantness) - again, the joy of absolute freedom of the Self that gets reflected in a tranquil mind as "I am blissful" is still of the ego.

Tamas is compulsive inactivity, Rajas is compulsive activity, and Sattva is being conscious. When in sattva one can consciously be active or inactive in the world as needed by the situation.



Understanding guṇas clarifies some deeper aspects pertaining to one's spiritual pursuit.

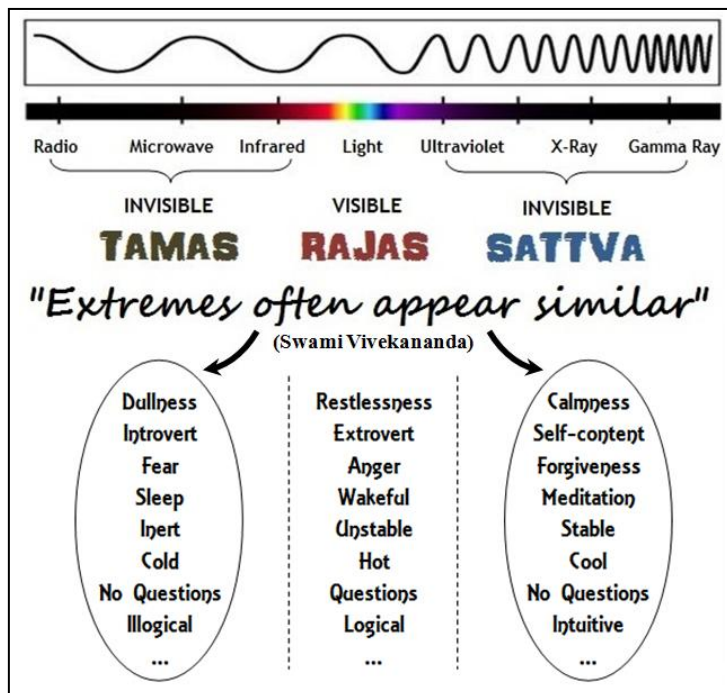
i. It is the proclamation of several schools that the Self is not attained, or reached; it is just a realization of what I already am. Therefore, the question arises as to what all the fuss about spiritual *path* is. Why is all the effort put in if the eventuality is effortless? If the Truth is beyond the mind, and can never be reached by the mind, why do so much sadhana with it? The answer is that the spiritual pursuit is to bring sattva guṇa to the forefront. In sattva, when the mind is clear and still, your true nature gets reflected better than in rajas and tamas, and one tastes the shadow of the Self through the mind. And it is in this state of sattva that one has the highest chances of an instant shift of attention from the object of awareness (the mind) to awareness itself. As the name itself indicates, sat-tvam ("you are *sat*, pure *presence*") is that which reminds you and directs you to your true nature.

ii. One may assume that with sadhana one day the mind will become permanently sāt̥tvik. But the guṇas are always in a flux trying to overpower each other (14.10). Cyclical nature is the very foundation of Prakṛti, and cannot be done away with. The force of rajas and tamas may weaken, but they are never fully

eliminated. Yoga sadhana is only to harness sattva, and to deepen and elongate it<sup>126</sup>, so that the need for sattva itself is eliminated one day. Sattva is not the goal of yoga, but only a means. It is important to understand this, because otherwise one would have unrealistic expectations about the mind; and since it does not come true, we may try to paint ourselves with artificial sattva. Presence of rajas and tamas will be simply denied, or argued against, or suppressed, or resisted. The longer one is into yoga, the stronger this hallucination could be. This also happens because of the pressure of the expectations from the world ("You are into yoga, still you get angry?") But if I cannot be upfront with the reality of my mind, where is the possibility of seeing the 'absolute reality' beyond the mind?

Although the personal experience of tamas and sattva are worlds apart, their outward expressions may *appear* similar to an onlooker<sup>127</sup>. This can be witnessed with several aspects of life as depicted in the figure. While the central strip is easily recognized as such, tāmasik and sāttvik expressions are often mixed up by people. One can notice this quite regularly in daily life, and this is one observation that can save us from plenty of intellectual clutter.

Furthermore, we must also make a clear distinction between the outward expression and the inner state. Just



because I express anger it need not mean that I am rājasik within. The inner state of the person displaying anger may be of any guṇa, and the anger may be driven by very different motives, and may have very different consequences. It may be anger being consciously expressed with serenity within, or anger that is impulsive and reactive out of irritation, or anger out of vicious hatred. Therefore, while we can say that the expression of anger is rājasik, the episode itself cannot be deemed rājasik in its entirety straightaway.

<sup>126</sup> The following conversation gives more clarity on this matter (Talks with Ramana Maharshi, Talk 52, 9-June-1935): Q: "My mind remains clear for two or three days and turns dull for the next two or three days; and so it alternates. What is it due to?" M.: It is quite natural; it is the play of brightness (sattva), activity (rajas) and darkness (tamas) alternating. Do not regret the tamas; but when sattva comes into play, hold on to it fast and make the best of it.

<sup>127</sup> "Extremes often appear similar" - Swami Vivekananda in *Raja Yoga* (p. 135)

This distinction of the outer and the inner is crucial. In the outer world all three guṇas are the integral part of life, and it is inappropriate to label tamas and rajas as negative there. For e.g. a soldier's job is rājasik in nature; but it does not necessarily mean that the soldier himself should be rājasik within him while he fights (or teaching, which is sāttvik in nature, may be done in the most tāmasik way). In fact, this is Kṛṣṇa's message to Arjuna - to fight with an equanimous mind. It may look strange - how can fighting be done in calmness? But this is what Chinese martial arts proved to the world - fighting (or any activity for that matter) is most efficient when we are calm within<sup>128</sup>.

## 11.2. Three modes of...

Considering this, Kṛṣṇa presents many aspects of our life in three possible modes (chapters 17 and 18), showing that some of the things we usually consider as positive/sāttvik, such as fortitude, charity etc., can also be driven by rajas or tamas. Out of the twelve aspects that he touches upon, let us explore a few.

**Āhāra:** Kṛṣṇa describes the three categories of food not as "these are sāttvik/rājasik/tāmasik food", but as "these are the foods that are dear to sāttvik/rājasik/tāmasik people".

That is, food is presented not as the ultimate factor that will make us sāttvik/rājasik/tāmasik, but as an assisting factor that will augment/weaken our state of mind. When our mind is in a certain mode, we naturally get inclined to eat the type of food that enhances that particular mode. It is only a support, and one need not get too obsessed with it, and feel proud that he follows a sāttvik diet! Also, Kṛṣṇa gives only a general guideline, and does not go into specific items. We can note some obvious foods from that, but over analysis would be never conclusive. It is best to explore this personally through awareness and experience of the body, rather than through the intellect.

Foods which increase lifespan, vitality, strength, health, joy and pleasantness, which are savory and oleaginous, that are enduring<sup>129</sup> and agreeable, are dear to the sāttvik people (17.8). The obvious items in this list would be raw vegetables, fruits<sup>130</sup>, nuts etc.

Foods that are excessively bitter, sour, saline, hot<sup>131</sup>, dry, spicy and burning in nature, are liked by the rājasik and they produce unpleasantness, sorrow and disease (9) - largely what we call today as junk food.

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<sup>128</sup> There is another important thing that one can note in this regard. We usually hear the phrases such as "be loving and kind to others". But we actually do not have to focus on becoming loving and kind outside. We just have to become pleasant and serene within, and that will naturally come out as love, kindness, strictness or whatever else as needed in a situation. Instead of that, if we focus on being loving and kind outside, we will continue to be unpleasant inside and only cloak it with some sāttvik looking actions. That is tiresome and exhausting!

<sup>129</sup> The word used is *sthira*. The commentary describes it as "that which remains in the body for longer period". It could mean protein and amino acids that act as the building blocks of the body.

<sup>130</sup> The Greek traveller Megasthenes (~300 BCE) and the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang (~600 CE) report that Indians grew and ate a lot of variety of fruits.

Food that is stale, dried out, putrid, rotten (one night has passed after being cooked), the remainder of a meal, that which is unsuitable for offering in yajña, is liked by the tāmasik (10).

**Tapas:** Austerity or disciplining of body, mind and speech.

Tapas that is performed with utmost shraddhā (~ faith, dedication) and resolve, without expecting rewards [from the world] for it is sātṭvik (17). Such tapas is aimed at sustaining and deepening sattva within.

Tapas that is performed with show off for gaining recognition, respect and veneration, that which is transitory and of unsteady results is rājasik (18). It is a comical trait of the human psychology to expect a reward or recognition from someone else for the disciplining he undergoes which will anyway have its own reward eventually. Children exhibit this with little things, and adults with bigger things of life. If no one recognizes, people boast it themselves - "I get up daily at 5 and practice yogasanas". The transitory nature of disciplining is also very commonly seen - "I practice, *off and on*"; but 'off' will be usually more than 'on'! Accordingly results reaped will also be unsteady.

Tapas that is performed out of some dimwitted reasoning, inflicting suffering upon himself, or for the sake of ruining others is tāmasik (19). While there are some scientific practices such a fasting in the ancient traditions, many superstitious ones have also crept in over the centuries in all the cultures around the world that consists of many forms of self-torture. And tapas for the sake of ruining others - we see this quite often - with what grit one goes through terrible hardships just to destroy someone else.

**Dāna** - Offerings or charity, which is usually considered as a noble act can also be rājasik or tāmasik.

That offering which is made to one who does nothing in return<sup>132</sup>, in a fit place and time to a worthy person, simply seeing that "This should be offered", is considered sātṭvik (20). We may debate endlessly on how we can be sure that someone is worthy. But we can agree that there needs to be some effort to see that the person is worthy, and offering is not made wantonly to someone random. Offering food to the hungry is an obvious example. And after offered, there is no mulling over it. In short, *offer mindfully, and then become mindless about it*. Rājasik and tāmasik offerings differ in this key aspect.

That offering which is made intending to receive something in return, or looking for a merit (puṇya phala), and given reluctantly, is said to be rājasik (21). This offering is made stressfully, and the mind remains occupied by it afterwards waiting for a return.

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<sup>131</sup> Perhaps 'excessively cold' can also be included in this. It is not mentioned as ice cream was not available then!

<sup>132</sup> When we are talking about offering, we can also speak of receiving. Can we receive without any sense of self-esteem when we need something? Or do we feel ashamed and uneasy? And even if we receive do we see it as "I owe them", or just as an instance of one part of the organism complementing another? For most people, giving is easier than receiving. As yoga practitioners we need to ponder over this. Even in receiving there could be tāmasik, rājasik and sātṭvik ways. And mostly we are rājasik receivers (attributes of self-esteem mentioned above), and some are tāmasik (simply trying to extract things from others).

That offering which is made at the wrong place and time to unworthy persons, [or if given to worthy persons] without respect or with insult, is considered tāmāsik (22). This whole affair is basically mindless and crude.

**Tyāga** - Renunciation. Here Kṛṣṇa refers specifically to renouncing actions (here onwards it's chapter 18).

Renouncing *essential* actions out of delusion is tāmāsik (18.7). The essential actions that Kṛṣṇa is referring to here are yajña, dāna and tapas (5). Yajña is action performed in such a way that it enables us to acknowledge the interdependency of the system, and to become a healthy cell of the cosmic organism. It includes swadharma (refer sections 4.2-3). Dāna also does the same. Tapas is systematic efforts to sustain sattva in us. It is such an attractive idea to give up all of this in the name of *renunciation!*

Renouncing actions because it is painful, and out of the fear of bodily hardship is rājasik, and one does not reap the fruits of renunciation (8). People passionately engage in the world, and then conveniently feel dispassionate, and resign when things get difficult. To cover it up, they would say they became *spiritual*, and developed vairāgya<sup>133</sup>. But when the going gets easy again, they would be back in the world. Such renunciation does not truly make them empty and liberated, which is the actual fruit of renunciation<sup>134</sup>.

Performing essential actions because they ought to be done, renouncing attachment with them and also the desire for rewards/merits, is sāttvik renunciation (9). Doing something not because it needs to be done, but because I *like* it, is binding; it strengthens the personality. And expecting merits/rewards for the essential acts (yajña, dāna and tapas) is self-contradicting; the idea of merit/reward strengthens the sense of individuality, when the very purpose of the essential acts is to diffuse it.

**Jñāna** - Perception/knowledge.

That by which one sees the *one* indestructible Reality in all beings, and not separate in all the separate beings, is sāttvik perception (20). Here the person accepts that there is something beyond the body and the mind, and consequently sees that the underlying reality is one. This refers to the realization of the unity. This is of course preceded by sāttvik intellect (buddhi), karma etc. as described next.

That by which one sees various entities of distinct kinds in all beings as existentially different from one another, is rājasik perception (21) Here too the person accepts that there is something beyond the body-

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<sup>133</sup> It is called abhāva vairāgya - momentary dispassion because of loss, failure etc.

<sup>134</sup> The 'fruit of renunciation' should be understood in the right sense. It is not a fruit in the usual sense that *belongs* to an individual. Rather, it is the diffusing of the very individuality. It refers to the outcome of renunciation, and not a benefit enjoyed by the individual.



mind, but concludes that the reality which transcends them is also numerous like them. This refers to the sāṅkhyas and the dvaitins who affirm multiplicity of puruṣa/ jīvātma<sup>135</sup>.

That which clings to one single thing as if it was the whole, without reason, without any basis, and trivial, is tāmasik perception (22). This refers to materialistic perspective that considers matter as everything<sup>136</sup>, or to the very primitive mind that says that the body itself is the Self, the stone image itself is God etc.

**Karma** - Action (yajña, dāna and tapas), which is free from attachment, performed without like or dislike, by one who is not desirous of any reward, is sātṭvik (23). As explained above, actions should become a means to fade away my individuality, not to strengthen it. The latter type is rājasik:

Action which is performed with much effort by one longing for the fulfillment of desires, or by the egoistic one, is rājasik (24). And tāmasik is senseless and crude action: Action which is undertaken from delusion, without regard to the consequences, loss, suffering, and one's own ability, is tāmasik (25).

**Buddhi** - Intellect. How a human being uses his intellect would decide how he would consequently perceive the world and himself (jñāna discussed earlier). Intellect being the key faculty accompanying the development of the human brain, the mode of intellect pretty much characterizes the human being.

That which understands the path of work and renunciation, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, [the causes of] fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation—that intellect is sātṭvik (30).

Sātṭvik intellect understands the subtleties of karma-akarma (phrased here as pravṛtti-nivṛtti) as explained in earlier chapters. Intellect functions upon memory, and based on earlier episodes, it should be easily evident to the intellect as to what is binding and what is liberating. But intellect gets fooled by the apparent variety of prakṛti, and remains in the cyclical rut. When awareness is dim, one repeats the same pattern (in apparently different forms) without realizing that it is eventually entangling and painful like it has been earlier<sup>137</sup>. When the intellect matures and begins to notice the same fundamental problem in what all it is doing, its power of discretion becomes sātṭvik - it realizes what is binding, and what is liberating.

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<sup>135</sup> Here if one pays attention primarily to the distinction between body-mind and his being, the theoretical conclusion of multiple puruṣas becomes irrelevant. Because the true intent of sāṅkhya is de-identification, and if that happens, one will see whatever the reality is. It will not require prior conclusions.

<sup>136</sup> Fervent materialistic philosophers don't just say that consciousness is the result of the brain activity, but go the extent of denying the very existence of conscious experience, including their own! One renowned philosopher has exclaimed thus - "I think we should feel very sober, and a little afraid, at the power of human credulity, the capacity of human minds to be gripped by theory, by faith. For this particular denial [of consciousness] is the strangest thing that has ever happened in the whole history of human thought, not just the whole history of philosophy." (Strawson, 2006, p. 5)

<sup>137</sup> People even come into 'yoga' and repeat the same old patterns there too - get identified with ideologies, feel superior to other schools, get aggressive to protect the identification with a particular path etc.

That by which one incorrectly understands Dharma and Adharma, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done—that intellect is rājasik (31). Dharma-adharma is another way of presenting liberating-binding (refer section 5.1). In this stage the intellect is puzzled and uncertain, but not in outright ignorance. Sensing the limitations of their present way of life, people try to take a step towards yoga, but cautiously. They will begin to *see* certain things, but resist other things with some mediocre logic.

In the tāmasik mode however, the intellect is dead sure about all its up-side down conclusions - That which, enveloped in darkness, views Adharma as Dharma and all things upside down—that intellect is tāmasik (32). Here the intellect concludes with certainty binding as liberating, and liberating as binding. Thus the slogans such as "Ignorance is bliss", "It is all natural" etc. to justify its present state of limitedness. Unfortunately most humans do not come to their senses (and explore the possibility of true liberation) until battered and cornered by life. This is why perhaps acknowledgement of suffering has been the starting point of most spiritual teachings.

**Dhṛti** - fortitude/firmness. Three modes of Dhṛti correspond to the three modes of Buddhi.

The unwavering firmness by which, through Yoga, the functions of the mind, the life-force and the senses are held is sāttvik (33). The phase between sāttvik buddhi and sāttvik jñāna is sāttvik dhṛti. Here the intellect has become aware as to what is liberating, but there is a phase of effort before perception of truth takes place. The state of realization itself is effortless (i.e. is not 'reached' through effort), but the realization of the simple truth "I am not the body-mind" requires one to first hold the body-mind effortfully. When a large part of the body-mind is unconsciously held, how can one let it go (see that "I am not them")? Only when something is held consciously, can it be dropped; when one does not even know that he is holding it, how can it be dropped? In that state the statement "I am not the body-mind" is of little consequence. Therefore, the practice of Yoga is to increase one's intensity to such an extent that his faculties are held fully consciously. When it is absolutely clear that "I am holding them" naturally one knows "I am not them".

That firmness by which, on account of desire for reward, one holds fast to dharma-*artha-kāma*<sup>138</sup> is rājasik (34). Here the firmness is displayed in worldly pursuits and achievements. Here even if the person practices the techniques of yoga, it will be to cure his backache, or develop concentration etc. so that he is more successful in the world<sup>139</sup>.

That firmness by which, a stupid man does not give up sleep, fear, grief, despair and conceit, is tāmasik (35). As described in tāmasik buddhi, one clings ardently on to the limited ways of his life with emphatic

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<sup>138</sup> Earning wealth and engaging in pleasures within the ambit of dharma.

<sup>139</sup> Also refer to section 6.2 where the three types of fortitudes are explained.

arguments. Today he may also have scientific research to back him<sup>140</sup>! Once people argue this way on *behalf* of their limitations, they are in a vicious cycle.

We may recall here the distinction between the inner and the outer. As far as the outer expression is concerned, being addicted to something is also *dhṛti*, but the inner state of the person is *tāmasik*;

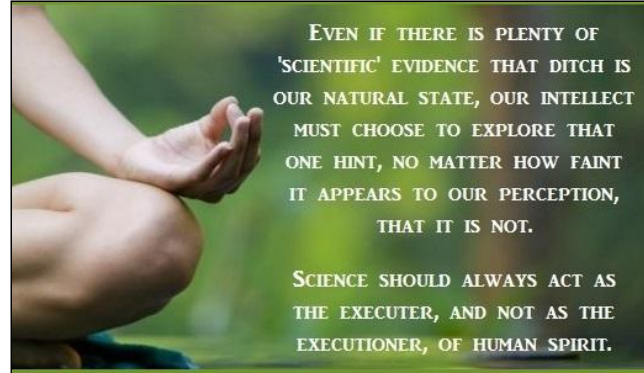
being passionate about something and being driven by rewards and recognition is also *dhṛti*, but the inner state of the person is *rājasik*. Next time someone calls his addiction or stubbornness as firmness, you will not be surprised!

**Sukha** - pleasure.

That in which one rejoices by practice and comes to the end of pain, that which is like poison at first but in the end like nectar, that which is born out of the inner pleasantness of self-realization is *sāttvik* pleasure (36-37). This can be understood in light of the discussions so far. The phase of *sāttvik dhṛti*, which involves effortful practice, is not a pleasant experience to begin with. It involves inner challenges as well as criticism from people - "You practice yoga, and still you get so angry?" But when *sāttvik jñāna* comes forth, it is true nectar, and there is no fear of losing it as it is not dependent on *anything*. It is *the end* of suffering.

That pleasure which arises from the contact of the sense-organs with the objects, which is at first like nectar and in the end like poison, is *rājasik* pleasure (38). There is a certain expenditure of energy that happens when sensations occur resulting in a certain experience - pleasurable or painful. Some sensations that are part of the survival process (such as eating, sex etc.) are pleasurable probably because otherwise sub-human species will not be driven to do it. But the incentive given by nature to ensure their survival has become problematic to humans; hooked on to their aspect of pleasure, we are trying to turn our senses, which are just meant to be *sensation* mechanism, into *happiness* mechanism. Being an error, it naturally does not fulfill our goal of happiness, and leads to suffering in the end.

That pleasure which at first and in the end is self-delusive, that which arises from sleep, indolence and heedlessness, is *tāmasik* pleasure (39). People claim that they 'enjoy' sleep, and sleep more than what is needed by the body. Sleep is basically lifelessness. We must decide whether we are here to relish life, or



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<sup>140</sup> It seems nowadays anything unhealthy can be proved to be healthy through research if there are enough people addicted to it who will ensure good sales.

the lack of it. Another kind of tāmasik pleasure is taking substances that dull the mind. But why would I want to dull my own mind? My mind has become so turbulent and problematic, that when I dull it, I experience a sense of freedom. But this self-delusive freedom binds me to that substance, and eventually ruins the health and vitality of my system.

With these detailed explanations from Kṛṣṇa, one can get an overview as to how to categorize anything into three possible modes based on Guṇa. This is not to go about labeling others, but to monitor ourselves. Also, the distinction of inner and outer needs to be kept in mind. On the outside, the Guṇas are not positive/negative by themselves, but may be appropriate/inappropriate based on situations.

After applying the three Guṇas to various aspects of life, Kṛṣṇa closes that discussion saying "there is nothing in creation that is free of the Guṇas" (18.40) Every *thing*, every object of awareness is subject to Guṇa, and all activity is of them; but *awareness* itself is unsullied (14.19).

### 11.3. Guṇātīta

Chapter 14 ends quite similar to chapter 2. When Kṛṣṇa talks of the possibility of transcending the guṇas (19-20), Arjuna asks "What are the marks of the one who has transcended the three guṇas? What is his conduct? And how does he go beyond these three guṇas?" (21) Here Sthitaprajña is referred to as Guṇātīta - one who is beyond the Guṇās<sup>141</sup>.

To the first question Kṛṣṇa answers "Illumination, activity and delusion—when they are present, he hates not, nor does he long for them when they are absent" (22) This provides some crucial details and busts a popular myth about the state of self-realization.

i. Until I recognize my true nature, I long for sattva in the mental realm. Until I see that I am pure space, I long for clear skies. Towards tamas I am fully repulsive, and towards rajas partially desirous (when there is tamas I may want rajas) and partially repulsive. But once the attention decisively *snaps* from the mind to myself, from the object of awareness to awareness, from the *shape* to the *stuff*, from the sky to the pure space, I would no more be particular about the type of clouds in the sky. Clinging onto sattva would be just another type of identification, and even that will be given up<sup>142</sup>.

ii. Kṛṣṇa's statement also clarifies that Guṇas remain in flux and keep alternating in the realm of the mind even when I am established in the Self. It is just that I am no more particular about them. This busts

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<sup>141</sup> In summary, an established yogi is described four times in the Bhagavadgītā - as Sthitaprajña in chapter 2, as Yōgārūḍha in chapter 6, as Bhakta in chapter 12, and as Guṇātīta in chapter 14.

<sup>142</sup> Patañjali calls this as para-vairāgya (1.16) or ultimate dispassion. Remember that this is prescribed as a second step, and one need not get enthusiastic about it right away. First thing is to deepen and sustain sattva in the mental space. Patañjali calls this as Abhyāsa (practice) and Vairāgya (dispassion with worldly affairs).

our possible assumption that a self-realized person is always sātṭvik. Another way of looking at it is — a yogi does not become *incapable* of experiencing rajas and tamas. He can taste them, but he does not get lost in them like we do<sup>143</sup>. He is always rooted



in the *center* whose very nature is bliss, an unfathomable bliss that is beyond the mind<sup>144</sup>. But let us not call our compulsion with rajas and tamas as our capabilities!

Clarifying this further Kṛṣṇa says "He remains like an udāsīna, and is not moved by the Guṇās. Seeing that 'Guṇās are acting' he remains established and unmoved" (23) Beneath the bustle of the mind, there is the immovable mountain of the Self which a yogi has become decisively aware of. He sees that all the three, perceived-perception-perceiver, are play of the Guṇās, and doesn't identify with them. He realizes he is the screen for all three entities alike, and is untouched by all of them. For e.g. suppose there is a scene projected on the screen where a player is kicking a ball. The ignorant one would not identify himself with the ball, but would identify with the player and the act of kicking. But a Guṇātīta has no bias; he applies the same rule to everything ("all are objects of awareness"), and sees he is none of them<sup>145</sup>

Here the word udāsīna is generally understood as *indifferent*. But the word literally means 'one who is seated above', which is another way of saying 'transcendent'. High above from the Self-sky, one sees the traffic in the mind-city, totally unaffected by it.

This is a mark of Guṇātīta that is not visible to others, and is an inner affair. But there are characteristics that are visible on the outside through his conduct. In that regard Kṛṣṇa speaks of samatva again (24-25) which has been discussed in earlier blocks. Answering the last question on how to go beyond the Guṇās, Kṛṣṇa briefly answers "Unswerving devotion to Me" (26). Perhaps Kṛṣṇa has realized that self-enquiry is not Arjuna's cup of tea! Here and also when concluding in chapter 18, Kṛṣṇa stresses upon Bhakti.

<sup>143</sup> A Guṇātīta may have rajas and tamas in the realm of the mind, but it does not mean that he is like us in all respects. There certainly are differences as described in several places (Sthitaprajña, Yōgārūḍha etc.)

<sup>144</sup> When Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was suffering from throat cancer and complaining of unbearable pain, one of his disciples, Hari (later Swami Turiyananda) tells him "Sir, whatever you may say, I see you as an infinite ocean of bliss". Master says to himself with a smile "This rascal has found me out!" (Swami Yuktatmananda, 2011) This is true in a reverse manner with us. No matter how joyful we are when with someone, there is turbulence deep down - fear of losing that person, uncertainty of future etc. In our case the two aspects (joy and fear) are merely two layers of the mind; both are limited and are subject to Guṇas. But in case of a yogi it is mind vs. Self, or limited vs. unlimited, or Guṇa vs. Guṇātīta.

<sup>145</sup> Or "I am all of them". Consistent eye is what differentiates jñāna from ajñāna.

## 12. Surrender, and Fight! | Chapter 18

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### Unit Outline

1. Kṛṣṇa summarizes the Gītā
2. Prescription to Arjuna
3. What is Surrender?
4. Conclusion

### 12.1. Kṛṣṇa Summarizes the Gītā

After applying the three Guṇas to various aspects of life, Kṛṣṇa applies it to the inherent nature (swabhāva) of people, and shows how we can make four divisions (varṇas) based on their natural qualities/activities. He then emphasizes swadharma and swakarma again (having done it once in chapter 3 - covered in block 2) indicating that Arjuna should engage in karma yōga, and not karma sannyāsa.

In 18.45-56 Kṛṣṇa summarizes what has been discussed till now:

Engage in karma yōga → venerate that one Reality through swadharma (bhakti) → attain *siddhi* (eligibility for karma sannyāsa) → self-disciplining and self-enquiry in solitude → Jñāna (realize that I am myself that Reality I have been seeking) or naiṣkarmya siddhi (transcendence from karma) → see Me in everything (vijñāna)

### 12.2. Prescription to Arjuna

All that has been discussed till this point, sets the stage for Kṛṣṇa to directly address Arjuna's original question "What is better for me - karma yōga or karma sannyāsa?" Till this point Kṛṣṇa was laying out the options before Arjuna. But now he gets personal, and knowing Arjuna's personality very well, makes specific prescriptions for him (18.57-62):

"Fix your mind on Me, and surrender all your actions unto Me" (57) "Even if you try to quit the battlefield now out of ego and delusion, your inner tendencies will drag you to battle" (59-60).

We can notice that Kṛṣṇa's prescription for Arjuna is Karma and Bhakti, and this is perhaps true for a large percent of us. Like Arjuna most of us are not yet eligible for karma sannyāsa, and we need to engage in the world till our outward tendencies run out of gas.

### 12.3. What is Surrender?

Many think of surrender as a means to fulfill our wants through God, when our efforts to do so fail. "Hands up - I give up - Now Mr.God, you're up" This isn't surrender. This is outsourcing. Surrender is actually quite the opposite. It is not holding on to wants and giving up actions; it is giving up wants and becoming fully available to actions. It is not making God my tool to get what I want; it is making myself a tool to make whatever is needed happen. Devotion is not about standing firm and making deals with the Supreme; devotion is where one becomes absent in his ultimate love for the Supreme. Kṛṣṇa's statements are quite clear in this regard right from the beginning. He has been saying "Offer all your actions to me and fight without a sense of 'me'" (3.30) He never said "You surrender and relax, I will fight for you"

The same attitude may extend into one's spiritual pursuit as well. Some use the idea of surrender to feel comfy and complacent, and thereby diffuse all their desperation for Truth. They surrender all their yoga sādhana also to God! (tāmasik tyāga as discussed earlier) True surrender makes one intense and overwhelmed, not put the mind to sleep. Such sleep will anyway be painfully shattered one day. This is tāmasik mode of surrender, wherein *devotion* becomes *deception*!

Having given Arjuna a personal prescription as well, Kṛṣṇa ends by saying "Having reflected over it fully, do as you wish" (63) This is significant. It tells us that even if the Supreme (in whatever form) appeared before me and asked me to surrender (as a solution to my problems), if I do not truly *surrender*, my experience of life remains the same. There is a fundamental *holding* that is at the same time the holder and the held. A knot. An individual. Me. And surrender means, this *hold* is loosened and eventually given up<sup>146</sup>. Or in other words I offer myself in sacrifice. In fact there is nothing else that we can offer. I can offer only myself. And only I can offer myself. God is relevant to me only to the extent I surrender. Thus, Kṛṣṇa says "do as you wish".

But then, again to stress that Arjuna is better off with Bhakti than anything else, Kṛṣṇa concludes with total emphasis on surrender with the very popular verse:

सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज  
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥१८.६६॥  
*sarvadharmān parityajya māmēkaṁ śaraṇam vraja*  
*ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpēbhyō mōkṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ ॥18.66॥*

**Meaning:** Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate you from all ills; grieve not.

<sup>146</sup> It requires tremendous energy to open up this deeply unconscious, rusted knot, and is not a placid affair. The devotee directs all his attention and energy on his Beloved, and offers himself *completely*. In that intense state of offering, the hold that is 'me' is also loosened. Jñānayōga or Self-enquiry achieves the same through the opposite means - a jñānayōgi puts all his attention and energy on the *hold*, the 'I', and it crumbles.

This verse is emphasizing the state of intense offering that we just discussed. Here "sarva dharma" refers to the entire mental content, and "ills" to the bondages-limitations (and all the ills that follow) that occur by identifying with it.

Prior to this verse, as if to intensify the state of devotion in Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa declares "Because you are dearly beloved to Me, I will again tell you what is good. Fix your mind on Me, devote yourself to Me, sacrifice yourself to Me. You will surely attain Me - truly I promise!" (64-65) The unbounded is inviting the bounded one to erase the boundaries, and assuring that it is not annihilation, but immortality.

## 12.4. Conclusion

Remember that Kṛṣṇa started his advice with the words "Aśōcyān anvaśōcastvaṁ" ("you are grieving for those who should not be grieved for"). Now in the above verse he aptly concludes with "Mā śucaḥ" ("grieve not"). Many scholars consider this portion (2.11-18.66) as the core part of the text.

Having concluded what he had to say, Kṛṣṇa describes the significance of what has just been unraveled through him (67-71) where he says "He who studies this sacred dialogue, by him I am worshiped through Jñānayajña". If the study of this text makes our consciousness *inbound*, we have performed jñānayajña, the greatest of all yajñas. He also says here that "these teachings should not be told to someone who is not austere, devoted etc." This is because a shallow and impatient intellect makes convenient or controversial deductions very quickly without trying to explore and reconcile apparent contradictions; profound instructions turn profane in no time. That is why spiritual wisdom was usually called as 'secret'<sup>147</sup>. It is to be imparted only to eligible students.

Kṛṣṇa then asks Arjuna "Did you listen to what I said with one-pointed mind? Has the delusion of your ignorance been destroyed?" (72) to which Arjuna answers in the affirmative. He stands up rid of all the symptoms of the anxiety that had hit him sometime back.

The last few verses in the text are Sañjaya's words (74-78). He feels overwhelmed for having been able to directly witness this momentous conversation, and also the Cosmic form shown by Kṛṣṇa, owing to the clairvoyance abilities given to him by Vyāsa Maharṣi<sup>148</sup>.

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<sup>147</sup> Kṛṣṇa too has uttered this word a few times in Bhagavadgītā. Chapter 9 has "Royal secret" in its title itself.

<sup>148</sup> As Mahābhārata describes, through the clairvoyance ability given to him, Sañjaya was capable of knowing what is happening in all the corners of the battlefield at once. Thus it seems as though it was no less than the 'divine eye' bestowed upon Arjuna, and Sañjaya was able to witness the Cosmic form as well.



Bhagavadgītā ends with the following verse from Sañjaya:

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।  
तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिः ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥१८.७८॥  
*yatra yōgēśvaraḥ kṛṣṇō yatra pāṛthō dhanurdharaḥ /*  
*tatra śrīrvijayō bhūtiḥ dhruvā nītirmatirmama ||18.78||*

**Meaning:** Where there is Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Yoga, where there is Arjuna, the archer, there is prosperity, victory, extraordinary occurrences and unfailing strategy; such is my conviction.

Remember that this is a secretary talking to his King, and he is essentially saying "You are doomed"!

Since Kṛṣṇa has chosen not to actively participate in the battle, and is playing the role of a charioteer, in this verse he can be thought of as symbolizing Consciousness that guides with immaculate clarity; and Arjuna as vitality. Clarity and energy is a rare and infallible combination. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda are an illustrious example of this in the modern times. Indeed, even if we look at it from a superficial perspective, these two elude each other — in youth there is bubbling energy but lack of clarity; and as one gains clarity with age, energy diminishes (generally). The greatest impact upon the world has been by people of great energy, and the impact has been negative when there was no clarity in them.

As we are represented by "Arjuna the archer" here, it is apt to quote the following mantra from Muṇḍaka upaniṣat:

*Pranava (syllable **aum**) is the bow; oneself is the arrow. **Brahman** is said to be its target. It is to be hit with absolute attentiveness. Thus one becomes **one** with it as the arrow [becomes one with the target] (2.2.4)*



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'Jijnasu' Vasudeva was an IT professional before joining SVYASA as a student of M.Sc. (Yoga) in 2011, which he completed with the 'Best student' award for academic excellence. Thereafter he volunteered as a lecturer for several years at Prashanti Kuteeram, and eventually served as Assistant Professor in DDE for a brief period of time. During his stay in the campus, he continued the study of the spiritual texts guided by the elders of the institute. He took special interest in the Bhagavadgita, and received first prize from Shringeri Sharada Peetham for successful memorization of the Bhagavadgita. He was also examined and honoured by SVYASA for being able to recollect Gita verses by using chapter & verse numbers, and for the ability to chant the verses in reverse order. Pursuing his interest in modern physics, he also authored an article on Uncertainty Principle (quantum physics) for a reputed scientific journal. His lectures and writings on the Gita and various other spiritual topics are available online at:

[youtube.com/jijnasu](https://www.youtube.com/jijnasu)

[instagram.com/jijnasuvadeva](https://www.instagram.com/jijnasuvadeva)



*“Krishna can never be understood until you have studied the Gita, for he was the embodiment of his own teaching.”*

*- Swami Vivekananda*

*“When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow.”*

*- Mahatma Gandhi*

*“Do not go through the Gita. Let the Gita go through you”*

*- Swami Chinmayananda*

*“The Bhagavad-Gita is a true scripture of the human race, a living creation rather than a book, with a new message for every age and a new meaning for every civilization.”*

*- Sri Aurobindo*