

## 2. Transcending The Gunas

*Seeking liberation, if man worships*

*A myriad deities, he will not get*

*Freedom from affliction.*

*If he destroys the ego in him,*

*He has no need to seek liberation.*

*He will be Liberation itself!*

Embodiments of Divine Love! The phenomenal universe that we perceive is the product of the three *gunas* (*Satwa, Rajas and Tamas*). It is sustained by the three *gunas*. The *gunas* again account for its dissolution. The *gunas* are the life-breath of the Cosmos. They are responsible for all that happens in the Cosmos.

Only through service to the Divine, cultivation of *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Virakthi* (detachment) can man transcend the three *gunas*: For this purpose, man has to acquire three qualities: *Anaasakthi* (desirelessness), *Virakthi* (detachment) and *Upeksha* (equanimity).

*Anaasakthi* is the absence of all desires except the desire of God. All other acquisitions are to be given up and one should rely only on the Divine. *Virakthi* does not mean renunciation of hearth and home and betaking oneself to the forest for penance. Giving up of bad thoughts and feelings is true *thyaga* (renunciation) and leads to *Yoga*. You may enjoy worldly things, but there should be no sense of possessiveness (of "mine" and "thine").

*Upeksha* is the absence of concern for the future. It is the freedom from expectations and hopes.

### **God looks after the welfare of true devotees**

The desire for worldly objects can plunge one in endless misery. Desires are like a green pumpkin which will sink in water. A desireless man will be like a dried pumpkin which will float in water. He will be able to overcome the pulls of the mundane world and even aspire for a Godly life. He may not be keen about *Mukti* (liberation) but he will not give up devotion. God looks after *Yogakshemam* (progress and welfare) of such a person here and in the hereafter; because being desireless and detached, his thoughts are centred on God. To secure the grace of the Divine in this way is itself a kind of *yoga*. To preserve that grace is to ensure one's *kshemam* (well-being). This is known in *Vedantic* parlance as "*Apraptasya Praapanam*" (securing what is not easily attainable). It can be got only through grace-filled human effort. Some spiritual exercises are necessary for this purpose.

### **The three Gunas**

As the universe is constituted by the three *gunas* (*Tamas, Rajas and Satwa*) and is permeated by them, the first stage in spiritual *sadhana* is to put to an end the *Tamasic* quality. The *Tamo Guna* is characterised by *Murkhatvam* (foolish obstinacy). A *Tamasic* person lacks intelligence and is inclined to indulge in meaningless questioning and argumentation. It is essential to get rid of such tendencies. Every issue should be deeply studied and the conclusions should be digested. Only then will the experience be rewarding. Endless verbal debates over every trivial matter should be avoided. Such controversies result only in provoking bitterness instead of harmony.

They do not serve to reveal the truth. The *Tamasic* person is incapable of perceiving the truth and cannot realise the Divine. He will be caught in an endless cycle of birth and death.

The person with *Rajo Guna* is one who is excessively happy when he gets what he desires. His ego gets inflated thereby. When his desires are not fulfilled, he develops hatred. Thus, for the *Rajasic* person, whether the desires are fulfilled or not, the effects are not good. He is consumed by anger and bitterness. *Rajasic* qualities make a person hot-blooded and hot-tempered.

The third quality is *Satwa*. Even this results in a form of bondage. It becomes a redeeming quality when all pure and meritorious actions are done as an offering to the Divine.

The three *gunas* are represented by different colours. *Tamas* is depicted in black. It symbolises darkness and ignorance. The *Rajo Guna*, which rouses anger and hatred in a person, excites his blood and turns his eyes red, is represented by the red colour. The *Satwa Guna* which is characterised by purity and dedication, is represented by the white colour.

Everyone in the world is the creature of one or the other of these three *gunas*. One's actions are based on these *gunas*. The *Varnas* (categorisation of men under different types) in the *Gita* has been made on the basis of their *Gunakarma vibhaagashah* (Respective qualities and actions). At birth every person is ignorant. When he dies he should die as a *Jnani* (a man who has perceived the truth). Likewise everyone is a *Sudra* at birth. This means he is an *Ajnani* (ignorant person). But when he dies he should die as a *Brahmana* (*ajnani*, who has realised Brahman).

### **No high or low among the *Varnas***

It is on this basis that the four *varnas* (*Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*) had come into existence. Those with predominantly *Tamasic* qualities comprise one group. Those who are prone to excitement and anger form another category. And those who are inclined to renounce everything and who are pure in thought, word and deed, form a third group. The ignorant and dull-witted were described as *Sudras*. The excitable, the courageous and the high spirited were described as the *Kshatriyas*. Those who were devoted to God and led a pure and sanctified life were described as *Brahmanas*. These categories were associated with qualities and actions.

Straying from this basic truth, the social system took a wrong turn. The result is that today society is riven by innumerable divisions and conflicts. Actually among the *Varnas* (groups), one cannot be called high and another low. For instance, Sage Vyasa classified the single corpus of the *Vedas* into four different collections. Among the four, can one be ranked higher than another? All have equal status and authority, are equally sacred and preach the same path of righteousness. Likewise, when men are classified according to their qualities and vocations, one category cannot be regarded as superior to another. No one is competent to determine such ranking. It is through narrow-minded interpretations that such distinctions and divisions have been made to the detriment of social harmony and progress.

### **Birth alone is not the basis of caste**

The right to interpret the *Sastras* is given to the *Brahmanas*. But *Brahmanas* have been defined as those who have made a thorough study of the *Sastras*, who have no self-interest and who live up to *Sastraic* injunctions. Anyone may acquire these qualifications. They are not confined to any caste on the basis of birth. Only qualities and actions are determining factors and not birth.

A *Kshatriya* is one who is prepared to lay down his life for his country. The nation's safety should mean more to him than the protection of his body. This attitude of sacrifice may be

displayed by anyone and he should be regarded as a *Kshatriya*. All those engaged in agriculture have been described as *Sudras*. Everyone needs food. If food is not grown by the so called *Sudras*, the world will perish.

The entire purpose of classifying people according to their qualifications and functions is to ensure that persons in each category carry on their duties with dedication. It is the failure to maintain the purity and sacredness of the system as envisaged by the *Sastras* that has resulted in indefensible divisions and social chaos.

### **Awareness of Oneness is highest knowledge**

All are children of God. He is the sole Lord of mankind. People may seem to differ in their names and forms and in their beliefs and practices. But the parent is One alone. Recognition of this basic truth of oneness is *Brahmajnana* (Knowledge of the Absolute). This knowledge is not gained by studying the scriptures and holding metaphysical discussions. What has to be recognised is the truth that every being in the universe is an embodiment of the Supreme. Awareness of the unity that subsumes the diversity is the highest knowledge. Mere bookish lore is of no avail.

Practical living is what matters. Expounding a philosophy is easy. Living up to it is difficult. He alone is a true *Siddhanti* (preceptor) who practices what he professes. Time is wasted on metaphysical dialectics. We need today men who practice what they have learnt. Such persons should explain to the common people the truth about righteous living and transform them into good and honest men.

There is a statement in the *Gita* that it is best for a person to adhere to his *Swadharma* and that following *Para Dharma* is fraught with danger. What is *Swadharma*? *Swa* refers to the *Atma*. *Swadharma* means *Atma Dharma* (the *Dharma* of the Spirit). Adherence to the Law of the Spirit is beneficial. It will protect one from any kind of danger. It will ensure peace.

What is *Para Dharma*? *Para* means that which is responsible for good and bad actions, namely, the body. *Para Dharma* means all actions based on the body-consciousness. All such actions have consequences which have to be gone through in successive lives. Men are caught up in this perpetual cycle of birth, death and rebirth. They do not know what is in store for them at any moment or place. This is the perilous state of man.

### **The correct meaning of Swadharma**

The *Gita* reference to *Swadharma* is ordinarily interpreted as meaning one's own *dharma* or duties attaching to the caste or community in which one is born. With regard to Arjuna, for instance, it is considered that he was a *Kshatriya* and should adhere to the *Kshatriya dharma*. This view is not correct. The *Gita* does not speak about the *dharma* of *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* or *Sudras*.

It only affirms that these categories are based on *Guna* and *Karma* (qualities and actions). Therefore, if a person has the *Tamo Guna* and indulges in actions of a *Tamasic* nature, he must be regarded as a *Sudra*, even if he is a *Brahmana* by birth. One who devotes his entire time to the contemplation of God and does sacred acts is a *Brahmana*, regardless of the caste in which he may be born. *Brahmana* is the one who seeks God.

Obsessed with distinctions of caste, creed and community and indulging in futile and meaningless controversies, people should not degrade humanity. All are brothers and sisters. It is the basic truth that must be propagated in our society today so that spiritual values may grow.

### **Bharathiya Dharma is eternal truth**

Bharathiya culture is not the product of ephemeral efforts. Bharathiya *Dharma* is the embodiment of unchanging and eternal truth, unaffected by time, place or circumstance. Without realising this supreme truth, people are polluting their minds with conflicts of caste and creed. All religions have taught what is good and everyone should lead a righteous life based on this knowledge. If the minds are pure, how can any religion be bad? Let every Bharathiya take heed of this fact. Every effort should be made to purify the mind.

All the religions are different paths, leading to one and the same destination. All devotees should experience this truth and live up to it in their daily lives, setting an example to the rest of the world. Their devotion should not be artificial. They should adhere to the right path, lead righteous lives and thereby experience enduring bliss. Only then will their spiritual effort be fruitful.

What use is there in meditation in which one counts the beads of a rosary while his thoughts are centred on some petty thing? Listen to the words of the wise, purify your thoughts and concentrate your mind on God. God can be installed only in a pure heart. The aim of all *sadhana* should be to purify the heart. All the available time and opportunity should be utilised for this purpose. It should not be wasted in any way.

### **Means to transcend the *gunas***

You have listened to this discourse for two hours. Only if you put into practice at least one or two of the things you have heard will the time you have spent here been worthwhile. First of all, banish from your minds differences based on caste and religion. Deepen your faith in God. Nourish the spirit of *Anaasakthi* (desirelessness). Cultivate *Virakthi* (detachment) and experience bliss. These are the means to transcend the three *gunas*.

The Lord, who is an embodiment of love, can be experienced only through love. As He is an incarnation of Truth and Righteousness, He can be realised only through *Sathya* and *Dharma* (Truth and Righteousness). Always bearing in mind the supreme importance of *Sathya*, *Dharma* and *Prema*, you should sanctify your lives by rendering dedicated and disinterested service.

The revered *Sadhus* present here have expounded to you profound truths in simple and intelligible language, with appropriate illustrations from real life. Their exposition and your listening would have served a useful purpose only if you try to practice at least some of the teachings. You have had a golden opportunity listening to them. You must make good use of it by directing your lives on the right path.

*Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium, 8 Jan 1988*

*Do not jump to conclusions, abdicating your discrimination and do not deny the validity of your own experiences, stand on your strength. Be unmoved, either by adulation or denigration. Follow my lead, I am unaffected by either, and march on alone,*

*undeterred and of my own accord. I am my own Guide and  
Witness. Have full faith in this.*

*Sathya Sai Baba*