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**Spirituality And Society**

*The respect commanded by a community depends on its moral values. Moral bankruptcy leads to social degeneration. A community inspired by ethical mores survives forever. I exhort the brave sons of Bharath to remember the strength and value of morality.*

**Embodiments of Prema!**

**T**here is a widespread misconception that spiritual values have no place in modern society. It is erroneously supposed that spirituality is incompatible with secular society. Krishna removes this misconception in *sankhya yoga*. Many fallaciously imagine that spirituality is only concerned with salvation. Spirituality is, in fact, the backbone of society and is indispensable for social progress and solidarity.

Its importance for and relevance to society, cannot be exaggerated.

*Easwara* manifests Himself among individuals who aggregate together to constitute a community. Every individual is an aspect of *Easwara*. Likewise, society too has emerged from *Easwara*. An individual has form, but society has no such definable form. In the same manner, the world is visible, but *Easwara* is invisible. Though He is invisible, His existence becomes indisputable because there cannot be creation without a creator. Just as a fabric cannot come into existence without thread and a pot without mud, so also the universe cannot come into existence without the primordial substance of *Brahman*.

*Brahman* is the basis, the substance, the prime mover and also the “enjoyer” of the universe. Krishna exhorted Arjuna to comprehend the omnipresent and immanent essence of *Brahman*, the Godhead.

It is emphasized that we should not reject *swadharmā* or our own *dharma*. But what is this *swadharmā*? The *Bhagavad Gita* contains an elaborated and lucid exposition of the concept of *swadharmā*. Krishna enlightens Arjuna on the meaning and significance of *swadharmā*. *Swadharmā* is mainly concerned with individual attributes. *Vishwa dharma* is higher than *swadharmā*. *Vishwa dharma* is universally applicable *dharma*. *Vishwa dharma* is the cosmic *dharma* of *Brahman*. *Easwara dharma* emerges from *vishwa*

*dharma*. *Samajika dharma* or the *dharma* of society emerges from *Easwara dharma*, the *dharma* of God. *Vyakti dharma* or individual *dharma* emerges from *samajika dharma*, and this *vyakti dharma* is synonymous with *swadharmā*.

It is said “*samathvam yogamuchyate*”. The sentence is vibrant with thought and meaning. The word *samathva* may be roughly interpreted as equanimity. The popular meaning of *swadharmā* is the code of conduct or scale of values adopted by any particular caste, community, creed or religion. But this is not the correct interpretation and it is not acceptable to all groups of people. There are no universal and absolute norms of morality. Ethical relativity is an inescapable social phenomenon. Morality depends on the time, the place and the spirit of the age.

Differences are obvious in our mundane world. There are all sorts of people in the world. There are men, women and children of different age groups. There are infants, adolescents, young men and women and old men and women. The *dharma* of women cannot be the same as the *dharma* of men. There is, in nature, an inherent inequality. Thus, it becomes ridiculous to adopt a single ethical code for the entire mankind. Each individual has his own *dharma*, but it need not militate against the *dharma* of others.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna finds himself on the horns of a spiritual dilemma. He is worried about

his *swadharma*. He finds himself in an unenviable predicament. He hesitates to kill his own relatives and be guilty of fratricide. So, he begins to detest the homicidal glory of a battlefield. Then, Krishna teaches the importance of *swadharma*. *Swadharma* is individual *dharma* or a code of conduct in conformity with an individual's status in society. It is also determined by a person's natural instincts. *Easwara dharma* is God's universal *dharma* based on love and compassion. It is catholic and eclectic in its essence and is equally applicable to all castes, cults, creeds and communities.

*Swadharma* or individual *dharma* is transcended by a person who recognises and realises the immanence of *Easwara*. "*Easwara sarva bhutanam*". The moment you comprehend the truth of this cardinal aphorism, you realise *Easwara dharma*, the theocentric order in nature. Thus, *swadharma* is lower than *Easwara dharma* and *vishwa dharma*. When you recognise the divinity of every human being, you realise *Easwara dharma*. You will be subject to the dualities of pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, good and evil as long as you identify yourself with the perishable and mutable physical body.

Arjuna was afflicted with weakness of mind and heart. Krishna chastised Arjuna for his moral and spiritual cowardice. As long as you are weak and timid, you cannot achieve anything in life. Sentimentality and body consciousness should be avoided. As long as you think from the point of view of the perishable body,

you cannot overcome your spiritual pusillanimity. When you think from the point of view of the immortal *Atma*, you will have no feelings of weakness and timidity. By these exhortations, Krishna galvanised Arjuna into activity on the battlefield.

The world is a stage. We are all actors in the world drama. But all our actions are motivated by the Will of God, who controls our immortal souls and perishable bodies. And we must play the game without displaying any sort of weakness or timidity.

The duties, dichotomies, and relativities of the world do not affect the immortal *Atma*. The coexistence and juxtaposition of good and evil should be acknowledged. From the point of view of the *Atma*, good and evil are only phenomenal and not absolute.

*Deha* (the physical body) is composed of the five primordial elements of earth, air, water, fire and ether. Sooner or later, the *deha* will perish. But the *dehi* or the inner *Atma* has neither birth nor death. It is indestructible, imperishable and immortal. And this *dehi* is one with *Brahman*. *Atma* and *Brahman* are essentially identical. The identification of the *Atma* with *Brahman* is the *summum-bonum* of spirituality. Spirituality and equanimity go together. Social justice and spirituality are closely related. Spirituality is conducive to social justice and egalitarianism.

The realisation of the *Atma* is impeded by envy, malice, and jealousy which are caused by attachment to

the perishable physical body. All people do not derive the same benefit from the *Gita*. It all depends on the deservedness and purity of the individual. Ultimately, the individual is responsible for everything that he does. Human beings may not be able to even imagine the sublime bliss of spirituality as long as they prefer to wallow in the mire of slothfulness.

The *Bhagavad Gita* that we read today has been embellished and beautified by Vyasa's poetic genius. One need not memorise all its *slokas* to achieve the inner tranquillity of spirituality. A single *sloka* from the *Gita* is enough to transform our lives. Steadfastness (*sraddha*) is necessary for acquiring the knowledge of spirituality. The *Bhagavad Gita* exhorts us to become fitting instruments of God. It should be repeatedly read for intellectual illumination and spiritual enlightenment.

Liberation is the goal of all theists. The *Atma* manifests itself in a body. It must realise its divinity through devotion and finally merge with the ultimate source from which it has evolved. But very often man forgets his divine nature by yielding to the temptations of power and pelf.

An individual's response to good and evil in the world depends on his *karma*, which is a correct measure of his *gunas* (qualities). *Karma* is the key to liberation. But man forgets his real destiny by his attachment to his corporeal body. Once, Indra was born as a pig on account of a curse. He forgot his past glory, married a sow, and raised a family of little pigs. He felt supremely happy

and forgot his divinity. Narada took pity on him and made him realise his real destiny. Human beings also forget their divinity and attach themselves to sensual pleasures.

Krishna's exposition of the *Gita* benefited Arjuna, Sanjaya, Vyasa, and Hanuman. The same *Gita* fell on the deaf ears of Dhritarashtra. His attachment to his cruel sons blinded him to the justice due to the Pandavas.

Every *sloka* in the *Gita* is important. There are seven hundred *slokas* in all. A matchbox may contain as many as fifty sticks. But, a single match is enough to light a lamp, for dispelling the darkness in a place. Similarly, a single *sloka* from the *Gita* is enough to bring the light of wisdom and dispel the darkness of ignorance. But, without *sraddha* or perseverance, the *Bhagavad Gita* will remain a sealed book. There is no liberation and spiritual enlightenment for the slothful.

God is not confined to any single place. He is not only transcendental, but also immanent and omnipresent. Krishna told Arjuna, "You are not the killer in the real sense. You think that you are going to kill your enemies. Killing is only phenomenal. You are instrumental in this process of destruction, purification and the resurrection of *dharma*. You would not be unnecessarily perturbed if you were to remember that the corporeal body is transient and the incorporeal *Atma* is immortal." Real *Yoga* is the attainment of equanimity and control over the sensory organs which screen the ultimate reality. Weakness is death and strength is immortality.

Krishna's exposition of the *Bhagavad Gita* was necessarily brief. But, Vyasa elaborated the Song Celestial by his own illuminating comments for the benefit of posterity.

For instance, the words, "*Samatvam yogam uchyaate*" or 'equal-mindedness is called *yoga*', were expanded into twelve verses by Vyasa; the phrase "*Kshudram hridaya-daurbalyam*" or 'detestable is weakness of the heart' was elaborated into twenty-two verses; the verse "*anityam asukham lokam imam praapya bhajasva maam*" which means 'having got this transitory, miserable world, worship Me' was made into seven verses; and the aphorism, "*nayamatma balahinena labhyah*" or 'this *Atma* cannot be attained by the weak' was explained in nine different verses.

Hanuman, who was on the flag of Arjuna's chariot, overheard the *Gita* and expounded it in twenty-one verses in the Paisachi language.

The truth is one but its manifestations are many. The most essential prerequisite for a *sadhaka* (spiritual seeker) is infinite patience and perseverance. The *Bhagavad Gita* contains the quintessence of all scriptures. It should be studied assiduously by every spiritual aspirant. It should also be regarded as a book of great practical value in our daily lives. It has given solace to many and it will help your spiritual progress.