

24. The Divine Body

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

The Gitacharya, Lord Krishna, has declared, as readers already know, “*Chaathurvarnyam mayaa srishtam guna karma Vibhaagasah tasya karthaa-ramapi maam Viddhi akarthaaram avyayam.*”

“I have created the four Varnas, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra, on the bases of natural disposition and vocation of each. Know Me to be author of these, as also the non-author, the Unchangeable.”

The system of caste is thus founded on attributes and activities. The world was in the very beginning predominantly Sathwic in nature and as a consequence all were only Brahmins. Later, through the adoption of various vocations and the development of various inclinations and preferences, types of people got demarcated as castes. The one and only Brahmin class of Rishis and Sages had later to be sectionalised, in the interest of social justice and harmony, when qualities of character varied. In the Santhi Parva (*Mahabharatha*), Sage Bhrgu has elaborately answered a question raised about this development by Sage Bharadwaja. It runs as follows: “Brahmins fond of worldly pleasures affected by egoism, subject to anger, lust and other passions have Rajo Guna mixed with their innate Sathwic nature, and so they are classified as Kshatriyas. In fact, all Brahmins cannot be predominantly Sathwic in nature, nor can all of them be devoted to pure ritual activity. Those who do not adhere to the Sathwic ideal of Truth and who evince the qualities of Thamo Guna mixed with Rajasic traits, those who are mostly both Thamasic and Rajasic were classed as Vaisyas. The rest, who spend their lives in occupations involving violence, who do not practise cleanliness and who are bogged down in Thamasic means of livelihood were classed as Sudras. Thus, the Brahmins denoted various

castes and ensured the safety and security of human society. This is the assertion of the scriptures, the Sruthis.”

Those endowed with pure Sathwic characteristics are Brahmins. Those with Rajasic qualities, and as a result, equipped with courage and heroism are Kshatriyas who can protect mankind from harm. Those who have neither valour nor heroism but who are proficient in persuasive talent and the tactics of commerce and eager to use these skills in proper methods are Vaisyas. In this class, Rajo Guna and Thamo Guna are blended. The others who have no inclination for undergoing asceticism or acquiring scholarship, who do not practise sadhana, who have no physical stamina and mental courage necessary for battle, who do not possess the special skill needed for trade and commerce, are Thamasic in nature and so engage themselves in Thamasic professions. These are the Sudras. They fulfil themselves by their labour through which they contribute to world's prosperity and peace.

The above four castes are only limbs of one body, they are not separate entities. There is no basis to consider that one is superior and another, inferior. Each performs its function so that the body can be healthy and happy, so that each can win the highest state of consciousness from its own role. So the ancient Vedic Varna organisation based on such broad ideals was taken to be the divine Plan. The Plan witnessed the truth that the four castes were the four limbs of the one Divine Cosmic Person or Purusha.

This truth becomes clear when we consider the Divine statement in Purusha Sukta found in the Rig Veda.

*Braahmanasya mukham aaseet
Baahoo raajanyoh Krithah
Ooroo thad asya yad Vaisyah
Padbhyaam Soodro ajaayatha.*

In this declaration, those with pure Sathwic nature and established in higher knowledge or wisdom, that is to say, the Brahmins, are declared as the face of the Cosmic Person; those who are predominantly courageous, physically strong, having in their nature Sathwic and Rajasic qualities, the Kshatriyas, as the arms of the Cosmic Person; those who have Rajasic nature mixed with Thamas and are efficient in the arts of commerce, the Vaisyas, as the thighs of the Cosmic Person; those who are active and engaged in physical labour, those endowed with Thamas, the Sudras, as the feet of the Cosmic Person. The Lord is thus described in the *Rig Veda* as the wondrous and splendourous embodiment of such components.

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

Caste is the Cosmic Person Himself manifesting as Human Society. It is the visible form of the Lord, charming in every limb. It is a great pity that this truth is not widely recognised. It is the good fortune of this land, Bharath, that in this Vision, the Lord, as the physical integration of the “caste limbs” is promoting peace and harmony, prosperity and well-being for all mankind. Not aware of this truth, people declare that this system is only a manmade contrivance and that in fact, all men are equal. They base this conclusion on external characteristics and breed agitations on the basis that all mankind is one species. Of course, it is true all men are of one species. But distinct groups do emerge as a result of differences in character and the professions they adopt. This is an inevitable development. No one can deny this. All are not Sathwic in this world of humanity. Only very few are of this nature. Judging from mere appearance, one cannot declare that all men are one. We have to distinguish and discriminate and group those with Sathwic, Rajasic, Thamasic, or combinations of one or more of those natures, separately. No one can say this is wrong.

In a general way, predominantly Thamasic natures are grouped as Sudras. But among them, have we not many who are of pure Sathwic quality? Among those who are grouped as Brahmins, the pure Sathwic type, have we not many who are predominantly Thamasic? Therefore, the Vedic Religion of Bharath has clearly laid down that appearance alone, or birth in a family alone cannot decide caste. It has to be determined on the basis of character and occupation.

The four Varnas are the limbs of the Divine body, of the One and Only Lord. Each is important and indispensable for its own role. The goal of each is to serve the Lord by service to man, rendering it in accordance with its Dharma, the accredited mores of conduct and modes of behaviour.

Some people assert that the Sudras have neither the right nor the responsibility to practise spiritual sadhana or tapas and that the Brahmins have it. What we have to remember here is that the restriction is for the Sudra nature, not for individuals born as Sudra; the permission is for the Brahmin nature, not for all individuals born as Brahmins. Cows are useless as animals for riding. Horses are useless as yielders of milk. These statements are based, not on hatred of the species or malice against any of them but on the nature and characteristics of the animals concerned. Both are quadrupeds. However, their distinct natures decide that one is useful for the milk it yields and the other, for riding purposes. The castes are not based on race or birth but on innate nature and tendencies, and profession adopted and pursued.

All sparks are fire. There is only one Caste, Humanity. They cannot be declared separate nor is there any need to assert that they are not separate. So too, men or individualised beings are not separate from Brahman or the Universal Absolute. Nor is there any need to assert that they are not separate. The relation between Brahman and Jiva is not one of identity or oneness, but it is one of cause-effect.

Until liberation is attained, the particular is distinct, is separate. When liberated, since the cause of individualisation is absent, the Jiva is one with Brahman. Separation and oneness of Jiva and Brahman are the consequences of the delusion of bondage and the awareness of freedom.

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

This Witness can be seen by no one. All things cognisable are the body of the Atma, not the Atma. They are name-form combinations like pots and pans of clay which impinge on the consciousness as “seen” or delude it like the “silver” on “mother-of-pearl.” The Atma is; It exists by and for Itself. The Universe is the “other,” for others; it is “real” and available for others. The Universe has no innate Reality. It emanates from Brahman and its reality is based on the reality of Brahman. So, its reality is lower than that of Brahman.

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

The Universe or Jagath appears to have emanated, as being experienced as such and as disintegrating. These three are but superimposed ideations upon the One modificationless Reality, just as the snake superimposed upon the rope at dusk. This ideation is Maya, for it hides and reveals at the same time. Maya cannot be said to be unreal. The rope appearing as snake is known again as rope, when the snake disappears. But the Universe does not disappear in the same manner. Its existence cannot be explained away. It is a phenomenon that is unique. We cannot compare it with any other. We cannot dismiss it as unreal or accept it as real. It is Sath-asath, not asath. That is to say, Real-unreal, not unreal.

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

In fact, Brahman and Maya have an intimate relationship. Truth, once established and fixed, is ever unaffected. And Maya is not fundamentally true. That which is learnt by the impact of appearance is pseudo-knowledge, Mithya jnana; it is Avidya (non-knowledge). The Mithya (delusion) or Avidya will vanish as soon as the Appearance is negated and the Truth is grasped. Maya is neither invalid nor valid. The Universe appears to each in accordance with the point of view or the angle of vision. It has no independent existence, apart from the ideations that are projected by and from the observer. Its support and sustenance is Brahman. Brahman is the unaffected Cause. The effect will not have any effect on it. Maya is the effect that is prone to inevitable change. Brahman is the One Supreme Truth, which has assumed the manifoldness of the Jagath (Cosmos), consequent on the influence of Maya. When Brahman is cognised as with Maya, it becomes the material Cause of Jagath. It is in the Jagath as Jagath. Brahman is said to be the instrumental Cause of the Jagath but Maya is the prompting influence. Brahman is beyond both cause and effect. It cannot be a cause, either instrumental or material.

The Jagath can be conceived as a picture, of which the plain canvas is Brahman and the colours spread on it is Jagath, the appearance immanent on the canvas. The human figures are dark. The Jiva is the experiencer of pain and grief through his involvement with the Jagath. He is the “seen,” “the observed.” Brahman is Truth; Jagath is the

Play, the Pantomime, the Sport. It is the manifestation of the Will that is latent in Brahman. To recognise the Will behind the Play is the attainment of liberation.

Dhyana (Meditation), *Puja* (Worship), Karma (Rites and Rituals) and other activities are laid down for those too dull to recognise this Will. Only those who can renounce the fruits of worldly endeavour can claim the right to follow the path of Wisdom (Jnana). Sadhakas on the Vedantic path must be equipped with (1) the discrimination to distinguish the transient from the eternal, (2) determination to desist from worldly and other-worldly pleasures, (3) acquisition of sense control, self-control, detachment, fortitude, faith and equanimity and (4) keen yearning for liberation.

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

The path of holy activity and the path of intellectual discrimination, of Karma and Jnana, are intended for different Sadhakas. It is not possible to mix the two and follow them together. Righteous living can confer new life. Prosperity is the gift of the knowledge of Dharma. Liberation is the gift of the knowledge of Brahman. The awareness of Brahman does not demand, for its continuance and constancy, the practice of any sadhana. It does not depend on the performance of any specific duties and chores.

Liberation is of two kinds: Immediate and Gradual. The first is the result of the attainment of wisdom, Jnana. The second is the result of Upasana, spiritual study and sadhana. Jnana is pure unmixed monistic experience. Bhakthi or Devotion is of the nature of Supreme Love, characterised by the Love for God, for the sake of the Lord only.