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Human Nature – Variety and Transcendence

‘Guṇa-traya’ – a spiritual concept

In the 14th chapter, Krishna discusses *guṇa-traya vibhāga* – the distinction of the three *guṇas*. The word *guṇa* is a spiritual concept with its unique spiritual relevance – it carries no physical, chemical or energetic connotation. As a spiritual postulate, its implications are profound – a point seekers should grasp well without fail. The descriptions of *guṇas*, the way each *guṇa* has its effect on the individual’s mind, intelligence, word and deed, what is to be done ultimately with these in the context of the seeker’s spiritual advancement – all these are beautifully explained in this chapter.

Guṇa-traya is a pet concept of Krishna in all his spiritual dialogues. The postulate of *guṇas* appears in the *sāṅkhya* philosophy of Kapila. Krishna refers to it first in the 2nd chapter (2.45), where he states that Vedas deal only with *prakṛti-guṇas* and their creations, asking Arjuna to be indifferent to them all – a statement and exhortation quite stunning and revolutionary!

In the 3rd chapter he made it clear that every one has his existence and function only under the empowerment *guṇas* provide. None can escape it (3.5, 27). But for the *guṇas*, none would remain active in the world. Krishna emphasizes the same point in later chapters as well. He goes to the extent of saying that there is nothing animate in the earth or in the heavens or among the heavenly denizens, which does not come under the sway of the three *guṇas* (18.40).

Here he elaborates upon the whole subject, showing what each *guṇa* is, its effect, means, and how within the framework of the three there still

reigns the required scope for achieving spiritual wisdom and freedom. In the fifth chapter he hinted at how the Knower remains free, unconditioned by the *guṇas* (5.8,9). Again in the 13th chapter too Krishna has pointed out how prakṛti lords over all activities everywhere (13.29). Now he discusses the topic thoroughly making it a full philosophy.

Freedom is not in negating the *guṇas*, but understanding their range precisely, and working one's way up in full attunement. This is the view Krishna has been propounding all along. He always speaks about transcendence, not annihilation or elimination.

It is interesting to study how he develops the theme, finally disposing of all doubts and speculations. As elsewhere, he prefaces his exposition with an alluring statement that he is disclosing the best of wisdom. By dint of this wisdom even Saints and Ascetics have attained supreme spiritual fruition. It has the potential to liberate the mind and intelligence from all cravings, doubts and speculations (14.1). And then:

इदं ज्ञानमुपाश्रित्य मम साधर्म्यमागताः ।
सर्गेऽपि नोपजायन्ते प्रलये न व्यथन्ति च ॥

*idaṃ jñānam-upāśritya mama sādharmaṃyama-gatāḥ ।
sarge'pi nopajāyante pralaye na vyathanti ca ॥*

(14.2)

By pursuing this wisdom, many have attained the Supreme.
Such people are not born during the cyclic creation and
dissolution, nor are they afflicted by the cycle.

Krishna begins by saying that all beings have originated from the same womb. The *pañca-bhūtas* and consciousness constituting creation have arisen from the Supreme. In other words, the entire creation consisting of amazing variety has emerged from a single source. Countless generations have come to be, adding variety and complexity to the creation, propelled by the same supreme source.

This fact, rather truth, gifts each individual with a graceful heredity. In other words, **every individual carries within him the supreme**

source of all creation, the Brahman. Only in the periphery prevails the transforming aggregate, designed and administered by prakṛti. Like the pith of trees, this Brāhmic core does shine in every one, unaffected by any external interactional impact. It is only the human that can discover this supreme source and express its splendour effectively, usefully.

The human personality presents a most complex picture of how the mind, intelligence and ego interact with the constituents of prakṛti, called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. These alone cause the bondage by overpowering the mind and intelligence, and breeding some kind of strong delusion and distortion (14.5).

Sattva, rajas & tamas – the three guṇas

Krishna delineates the qualities and properties of the three *guṇas*, with a view to throw light on the *sādhana* and facilitate its pursuit. This will enable the seeker to comprehend where and on what his efforts should be focussed.

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात्प्रकाशकमनामयम् ।
सुखसङ्गेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसङ्गेन चानघ ॥

*tatra sattvaṃ nirmalatvāt-prakāśakam-anāmayam ।
sukha-saṅgena badhnāti jñāna-saṅgena cānagha ॥*

(14.6)

Sattva, by dint of its purity, brilliance and immaculate nature, O sinless Arjuna, binds one with happiness and wisdom.

Sattva binds everybody by purity, light or wisdom and blemish-freeness, says Krishna. This kind of description about *sattva* should go deep into the seeker's heart. It means none can escape being pure, wise and guileless. In the potential to be so and the possibility to succeed in the effort, none can claim any insufficiency or incompetence. Like any other character or tendency, these features of *sattva* are also inescapably present in every individual.

That is why within a seemingly bad person, wicked or immoral, often we find the seed of purity, innocence and goodness. **None in this world stands condemned. Nobody can look at Nature and say: Why have you made me accursed like this?** Nature has equally bound every one, without distinction with *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Their proportion alone can differ.

Unless this basic variance is there, where is the role for individual effort at all? All the *guṇas* with their varying characteristics give the required scope for every one to exercise his option and strengthen that *guṇa*, which he chooses to imbibe. Understood well, this is the best arrangement one can think of to uphold individual freedom and its proper display.

Every one under this arrangement has a clear scope for gaining wisdom, live in its light, free himself of all mento-intellectual defects or lacks to experience the inner spiritual delight. The question is merely of availing the opportunity in time, making use of it diligently. None can plead or complain of any deficiency.

Thus, in the scheme of Nature, this *sattva* is juxtaposed with two other *guṇas*. Krishna also explains their implications. The analysis enables the *sādhaka* to examine and determine how much *rajas* and *tamas* are operative in him, how he can then diligently strive to moderate their influence, by reinforcing the share of *sattva-guṇa*. The presence of *rajas* and *tamas* should not dissuade anyone. In fact, it is they that induce and compel spiritual seeking and Self-knowledge.

Rajas binds one with passion, triggered by greed, possessiveness and the resulting attachment, leading to different types of intense activity. *Tamas* causes ignorance and delusion, leading to carelessness, lethargy and sleep. Present in every one, it acts as the strong cause of bondage for all.

Krishna adds that although all the three are present in every one, their proportions are subject to moderation and selective modification. This

option is given to humans only. All the rest of beings continue with their characteristics, none attempting to change their nature any time.

Sattva has the power to subdue *rajas* and *tamas*. Likewise, *rajas* also can predominate subduing *sattva* and *tamas*. Equally so, *tamas* has the power to dominate over *sattva* and *rajas*.

This is what makes people different in their natures and tendencies. But **the analysis is meant to help the seeker strive properly to make *sattva* pronounced, sublimating *rajas* and *tamas*, so that the quality of life becomes the best, brilliant and joyful.**

Krishna now elucidates the actual expression of each *guṇa*:

सर्वद्वारेषु देहेऽस्मिन्प्रकाश उपजायते ।
ज्ञानं यदा तदा विद्याद्विवृद्धं सत्त्वमित्युत ॥

sarvadvāreṣu dehe’smiṅprakāśa upajāyate ।
jñānaṃ yadā tadā vidyādvivṛddhaṃ sattvam-ity-uta ॥
(14.11)

When all the senses in the body become brilliant, then know it as the effect of *sattva-guṇa* enhancement.

In all the organs of the body there arises a unique brilliance, radiance. When *sattva-guṇa* becomes preponderant, a kind of spiritual brilliance and sensitivity engulfs the person. His senses as well as the mind and intelligence will be astute to display discretion, discrimination and sensibility. Ephemeral nature of the world and eternal character of the Soul will start guiding his interactions in every way. This will be a marked change.

When *sattva-guṇa* becomes sufficiently pronounced, it results in all-fold sublimity. In place of sensory enjoyment, the delight from the Soul within makes its appeal and persuasion. **The fact that the inner fullness is independent and unconditioned, adds magnificence to it.** Knowledge shines as Supreme, persuading the seeker to imbue spiritual refinement and sublimity to all that he does, be it any word, deed or

thought. It is that blessed state when wisdom begins to shine forth in all brilliance (14.11).

In contrast, greed, activity, craving for fresh undertaking every time, restlessness and yearning for enjoyment are the characteristics of preponderant *rajo-guṇa*. Predominance of *tamas* is marked by ignorance, dullness, inactivity, inattention and delusion.

With Krishna's enumeration as the yardstick, it becomes helpful and easy for a discerning seeker to know where he stands with respect to each of the *guṇas* in him. **After assessing the situation, the seeker must strive consistently to elevate himself to generate an abundance of *sattva*.** For this, he must first reflect upon the characteristics of the respective *guṇa* and then consistently and diligently work towards achieving a preponderance of *sattva* in him.

This is the greatness of the Bhagavadgītā. It verily describes the full-fledged course of *sādhana*. **It enables the *sādhaka* to know where he stands and where exactly he should reach. It also prescribes the requisite way or means to reach the destination.**

To strengthen the enunciation and make it more purposeful, Krishna also adds the possible after-death consequence, which each *guṇa* leads to. Whether one likes it or not, the thought of what will follow an individual after his bodily death has always been a genuine doubt and curiosity in the human mind. To be wisely indifferent to all such consideration by dint of enlightenment is the ideal, no doubt. But the ordinary mind looks for some assurance. That will naturally entail promises as well as threats, to become really useful. Unless such contrasting prospects become part of the religio-spiritual enunciation, the discussion will not be complete and effective.

To drop one's body when *sattva* dominates will be, says Krishna, to gain the best of higher worlds reserved for the noble and meritorious. *Rajas* will take one to the midst of those given to extreme attachment to action and sensory enjoyment. Likewise, *tamas* will throw him down into the lowest wombs.

Briefly put, good and noble actions have *sāttvika* and pure effect. *Rajas* on the other hand gives rise to grief and misery, while *tāmasika* actions will lead to sheer ignorance and delusion. Wisdom is the outcome of *sattva-guṇa*, greed of *rajas* and inattention and delusion of *tamas*.

The prudent seeker should thus foster a wholesome perception to guide him always:

ऊर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति सत्त्वस्था मध्ये तिष्ठन्ति राजसाः ।
जघन्यगुणवृत्तिस्था अधो गच्छन्ति तामसाः ॥

ūrdhvaṃ gacchanti sattvsthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ ।
jaghanya-guṇa-vṛttisthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ ॥

(14.18)

Sāttvika people go upwards, *rājasika* ones remain in the middle, while the *tāmasika* lot, given to basest qualities and activities, go downwards.

The general *sāttvika* influence of *prakṛti* will cause the birth and growth of individuals who will be imbued with preponderance of *sāttvika* characteristics. They will always strive for goodness, purity and evolution. Equally so, there will be those given to neither extreme purity nor its opposite. Governed by *rajo-guṇa*, its propensities, they will go after a variety of actions motivated by desire and the rest. As a counter to both, will be the others dominated by the *tāmasika* tendencies. They will be courting degeneration and downfall.

The world at any time will be a good mixture of all the three groups. *Prakṛti* is a charming blend of these three *guṇas*, resulting in the preservation of the good, the bad and the otherwise. To live in the world is to be accepting all these and being in harmony with them.

Understanding non-doership

This is where spiritual wisdom excels in its enunciation. It does not delude people by drawing a blemishless or all beautiful picture of the world, God or the relationship between the two. It tells you what the world is at its best, worst and in between. Every individual, whether he

likes it or not, will always be surrounded by an intriguing admixture of the *guṇas* and their tendencies. Given this inescapable situation, **every one has the option and freedom to choose his *guṇa* level and successfully pursue it to the fulfillment he aspires.** Is this possible? Does the world offer scope for it? In answer, Krishna says:

नान्यं गुणेभ्यः कर्तारं यदा द्रष्टानुपश्यति ।
गुणेभ्यश्च परं वेत्ति मद्भावं सोऽधिगच्छति ॥

*nānyaṃ guṇebhyaḥ kartāraṃ yadā draṣṭānupaśyati ।
guṇebhyaś-ca paraṃ veti mad-bhāvaṃ so'dhigacchati ॥*
(14.19)

When the Seer does not see anything other than the *guṇas* as the doer, and at the same time perceives that which reigns superior, then, transcending the *guṇas* he verily attains to My state.

As he explained the *jñeya* in the preceding chapter, Krishna here emphasizes how the whole *guṇa* display is to be viewed and evaluated by the seeker, so that it will help and empower his *sādhanā*.

Good and noble individuals do form part of the world. Their sight and thought will naturally stimulate the seeking mind towards those characteristics. At the same time the bad and ignoble individuals, who too have an inevitable place in the world, will evoke a negative response in the seeking mind. The question is: should the sight and experience depress and deter the seeker? Equally so, what about those who stand in the middle?

Krishna says that this kind of admixture of the society is a help and compulsion for the seeker to arrive at his ideal. When dealing physically or mentally with any individual or the society, consider that the characteristics displayed belong to *prakṛti*. *Guṇas* instill or instigate all actions everywhere, in every one. As *guṇas* are *prakṛti*'s constituents, **none can blame or credit anyone for anything.** In the matter of assessing anyone's goodness or badness, one should only discern *prakṛti*'s hand and its display.

Draṣṭā guṇebhyaḥ anyam kartāram na paśyati – The Seer does not see anything other than the *guṇas* as the doer.

The proposition Krishna makes is quite clear, emphatic. No doership of any kind should be ascribed to anyone. Why? All actions are instigated by the *guṇas* of prakṛti. What we see is but the peripheral aggregate in an individual, which is constituted by the complex prakṛti.

The seeker should go a step further, to be true to his sādhanā. He should search for and find out what lies beyond the *guṇas*. *Guṇebhyaśca paraṃ veti* are the words Krishna uses here. The seeker should discern with spiritual insight that the peripheral *guṇa* display is around a spiritual base or nucleus. And that is the focal base of the individual. In other words, **true individuality consists in the central *guṇa-atīta* state, not in the *guṇa* display level.**

Once this kind of perception dawns, whereby the seeker looks at the individual as beyond the *guṇas*, as the unconditioned and unaffected Soul, **he will then have no mental or intellectual confrontation with the world at all.** In seeking Self-knowledge as well as on having attained it, this kind of integral perception about the world becomes crucial.

It is, no doubt, a transcendental perception. To transcend does not mean to annihilate or eliminate. It verily means to be above what prevails. In this process, the *guṇa* display is left as it is. Only the seeker's perception about it undergoes significant change or evolution.



8

Transcending the Guṇas

Immortality – here & now

Krishna speaks of Immortality as a distinct goal to be attained here and now, in this very life. He also explains the process. Mind and intelligence alone are the means. The redemption, when gained, will reflect a wholesome harmony in one's personality. The knowledge of the *guṇātīta* Self is the foundation on which this spiritual redemption rests:

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।
जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥

*guṇān-etān-atītya trīn-dehī deha-samudbhavān ।
janma-mṛtyu-jarā-duḥkhair-vimukto'ṁṛtam-aśnute ॥*
(14.20)

Having gone beyond the three *guṇas* arising from the embodiment, one becomes freed of torments of birth, death and decrepitude, and experiences immortality.

The *guṇa* influences and interplay, says Krishna, are more an outcome of body-association and the involvement it brings about. These cannot be avoided. The seeker should learn to transcend them effectively.

One does not have any control or option over one's embodiment and what follows. **Allow then the *guṇa* influences to have their play, but transcend them with the help of spiritual wisdom.** Such a possibility is quite within every one's reach. This transcendence makes the seeker free of birth, death, decrepitude and grief.

With the dawn of wisdom the seeker realizes that he was never born; nor is there any death for him. It becomes evident that both birth and

death are hearsay only. At no time has anyone experienced his birth, nor will one experience his death.

Sorrow is an outcome of the non-sublimated mind. When the mind is enriched by spiritual wisdom, the impact of sorrow will decline steadily and inevitably dissolve too. Such dissolution of sorrow is the sure characteristic of liberation. It will be experienced without let or hindrance. Liberation will shine even through the incidences of sorrow and grief. These transitory notes will be like waves in water on which the seeker, due to the merit of his illumination, will remain afloat, waving his limbs of discrimination and dispassion.

The agonies of old age also will dwindle. They will not assail the Knower as they do the ordinary people. His *abhimāna* of the body will be minimal. Yet he will keep the body functional as much as possible for *loka-saṅgraha*.

As explained earlier, here too the transcendence is preserved in spite of these bodily notes. They cease to torment or dislodge the seeker because of his wisdom and the sense of freedom. Nothing is destroyed or displaced. It is only that the seeker gains the ability to rise above worldly afflictions, which are a part of embodiment.

Process of transcendence

Right at this point, Arjuna raises a question, as he did in the second chapter, when Krishna pictured the climax of Yogic sādhanā and accomplishment (2.53). If Arjuna's enquiry then was about the *sthita-prajñā* and *sthita-dhī* (one of stable-mindedness), here the enquiry is related to transcendence of the *guṇa* influences and effects. Arjuna's words are quite relevant and to the point:

कैलिङ्गैस्त्रीन्गुणानेतानतीतो भवति प्रभो ।

किमाचारः कथं चैतांस्त्रीन्गुणानतिवर्तते ॥

kair-liṅgais-trīn-guṇān-etān-atīto bhavati prabho ।

kim-ācāra: katham caitāṁs-trīn-guṇān-ativartate ॥

(14.21)

O Lord, what are the features through which one is able to transcend these three *guṇas*? How, and by undertaking what, does one transcend these three *guṇas*?

Arjuna wants to know the art and process by which the seeker can rise above the irresistible *guṇas*. What are the features and excellences that distinguish the Knower who is able to rise above the clutch of *guṇas*? Then, preserving his inner transcendence, how does he live and move in the world, how does he interact with the world? Arjuna also wants to know how spiritual *sādhana* can result in such evident victory over the powerfully operative *guṇas*. **Can the inner spiritual wisdom have such visible worldly effects?**

Krishna gives his answers unambiguously. His words are so well structured that they radiate as a beacon light for the *sādhaka*. Four verses constitute the clarification that Krishna gives:

प्रकाशं च प्रवृत्तिं च मोहमेव च पाण्डव ।
न द्वेष्टि सम्प्रवृत्तानि न निवृत्तानि काङ्क्षति ॥
उदासीनवदासीनो गुणैर्यो न विचाल्यते ।
गुणा वर्तन्त इत्येव योऽवतिष्ठति नेङ्गते ॥
समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ।
तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरस्तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥
मानापमानयोस्तुल्यस्तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।
सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥

*prakāśaṃ ca pravṛttiṃ ca moham-eva ca pāṇḍava ।
na dveṣṭi sampravṛttāni na nivṛttāni kāṅkṣati ॥
udāśīnavad-āśīno guṇair-ya na vicālyate ।
guṇā vartanta ity-eva yo'vatiṣṭhati neṅgate ॥
sama-du:kha-sukha: svastha: sama-loṣṭāśma-kāñcana: ।
tulya-priyāpriyo dhīras-tulya-nindātma-saṃstuti: ॥
mānāpamānayos-tulyas-tulyo mitrāri-pakṣayo: ।
sarvārambha-parityāgī guṇātīta: sa ucyate ॥*

(14.22-25)

Whoever neither resents nor looks forward to the prevalence or subsidence of sattva (light), rajas (activity) and tamas (delusion);

Seated firmly like a witness – uninvolved person – he who does not get unsettled by the play of *guṇas*, knowing clearly that they alone act (and not the higher central identity), he who remains well established, unshaken to the core;

Viewing sorrow and happiness alike, resting firmly in oneself considering a clod of earth, stone and a piece of gold with equal importance, evenly disposed towards the desirable and detestable, poised, regarding praise and blame alike;

One who is alike towards honour and dishonour, impartial towards friends and enemies, and has abandoned all forms of doership – such a one is said to have transcended the *guṇas*.

As described already, the three *guṇas* will continue to operate. *Sattva-guṇa* will shed light, wisdom and happiness, *rajo-guṇa* will arouse activity and its motivations like passion and prejudice, while *tamo-guṇa* will breed lethargy, ignorance and delusion.

These effects will follow one after another, depending upon the *guṇa* operating each time. Thus every one has to have the impact of sattva for a while, to be followed by those of the other two. Then again the former will take hold, leaving its place to the latter. Like day and night operating on the revolving earth, the seasons visiting one after another, like the incidence of hunger, its appeasement and further hunger, like the exit and entry of air into the lungs, the *guṇa* displays also will be alternating relentlessly.

So when sattva effects manifest, the discreet seeker should not be enamoured by it. Likewise, when rajas takes over, no disharmony should arise in the mind. There should be no resentment about the plight. Tamas also has to be met in the same manner, with poise and acceptability.

This means, one wholesome attitude of harmony should grace the seeker whereby he will be able to welcome each *guṇa* as it manifests and be at

home with it. **Neither the presence of any *guṇa* nor its absence should cause any unsettlement or concern.** In other words, like *sukha-duḥkhas*, these *guṇas* and their display are also fleeting.

To respond evenly to their predominance as well as subsidence, calls for true spiritual wisdom, which alone has the sublimity to infuse the mind with the spirit of transcendence and poise. Wisdom works from the inmost level. It is a powerful perception that generates a sustained integrity and harmony. No struggle, no dislodgment, no confrontation or disharmony is to be felt by the seeker. The whole process is one of **attunement and harmonization.**

The seeker has to know the complexity of Nature and he should make this knowledge a functional integrator and coordinator. As a result, the whole personality becomes a beautiful instrument performing and pursuing whatever is necessary from time to time. Like the earth itself revolving steadily and going round the sun ceaselessly, the enlightened individual remains attuned and sublime.

This bestows a great unshakable position on the Knower. He unconditionally accepts whatever comes and goes, nevertheless remaining what he verily is. He understands that *guṇas* alone operate, whether in an individual, group, the society at large or in the inert things like earth, water, fire, air and space, or their various combinations. Even the trees, clouds, hurricanes and cyclones are governed by the same law.

In short, in all events, planned or accidental, the *guṇas* in smaller or greater measure come to play. This fundamental awareness shines undimmed in the Knower, like the sun. That illumines the whole of his personality – the mind, its thoughts and emotions, the senses, their working and vagaries.

Krishna then goes on describing the different aspects of this great *guṇa*-harmony, to make matters clearer. But the description he makes and the words he uses for the purpose are the same as he has already given earlier. This shows clearly how the thread of the dialogue remains intact throughout.

For instance, Krishna describes the *guṇa-atīta* as a *svastha* (**self-seated**). Krishna adds that for this, he should be equally disposed towards *sukha* and *duḥkha*. But did not Krishna enjoin this point strongly while commencing the sāṅkhya yoga – *sama-duḥkha-sukham dhīram* (2.15)? In concluding the theme also, he stressed the same point – *sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā* (2.38). While presenting the model devotee in the 12th chapter, he emphatically laid down that he should be *sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ* (12.13).

Treating desirable and detestable, praise and blame alike (*tulya nindā-stutiḥ*) is another discipline and enrichment Krishna has insisted upon earlier (12.19). Does this not show beyond doubt that excellence of the devotee makes him a *guṇa-atīta* as well?

Equipose is an inevitable part of spiritual *sādhanā*, whatever be the path the seeker adopts. Krishna says that honour and dishonour should be met with equipose (*māna-apamānayoḥ tulyaḥ*). As he stressed earlier (6.7, 12.18), he brings it here too (14.25). To be equally disposed to the friend and enemy is a similar embellishment he pointed out while describing a model devotee (12.18). Krishna includes it here too, as a characteristic of the *guṇa-atīta* state (14.25).

Sarvāmbha-parityāgi is another paramount quality Krishna upholds (12.16 & now 14.25). This should not be construed as shunning all undertakings or pursuits. For, that is neither allowed by nature nor possible when otherwise thought of. To be active is a compulsion of our body. As long as the body is nourished and it generates blood and energy, activity has to result. Nature, says Krishna more than once, through its three *guṇas*, keeps every being irresistibly active. None can escape in this regard. In fact there is nothing in the universe which is stationary. It is an inexorable law of Nature to preserve creation.

Sarvāmbha-parityāgi thus means, like a Knower and a Devotee, the *guṇa-atīta* also should clearly feel the supremacy of Nature and safeguard against any kind of ego – the sense of doership and possessiveness – about whatever he does, thinks or speaks. **In effacing**

the ego lies the wholesome integration and harmony of spiritual life.

In the 5th chapter (5.8,9) as well as the 12th chapter (12.16) Krishna has included it in the descriptions of a Knower and a Devotee.

What is the summary message of all this, so far as spiritual sādhanā is concerned? The mind, given to strong notes of partiality, prejudice and resentment, should be steadily transformed to enable it **to function with full sublimity, harmony and integration.**

This is purely an inner process and achievement, resting solely upon the mind. Intelligence, imbibing the spiritual truths, should facilitate the process. The plural outlooks and responses of the mind should be integrated, unified. It will then be empowered to receive all world inputs to bring forth the timely outputs with confidence and clarity.

While the weak worldly mind totters and stifles before interactional inputs and outputs, the strong expansive *guṇa-atīta* mind stands ready to welcome anything and all, providing timely persuasions to ensure functional excellence. *Guṇa-atīta*, whenever needed, is a **Master Performer, Master Enjoyer and Master Sufferer!**

Look at the whole dialogue. It preserves the same focus. Right from the 2nd chapter, which portrays the *sthita-prajñā* and *sthita-dhī*, through the 12th which pictures an exemplary devotee, then in the 13th which presents the Knower (*tattva-vit*), we hear the same tune and song, as we find here for *Guṇātīta*.

It is of even-mindedness, of integration and inner harmony. On analysis, the whole plurality of the world, as it touches the senses, gets reduced to a mere set of five, corresponding to the five senses. The five types of sensory inputs, on reaching the mind, instantly sort themselves into a mere two – the mental *sukha-duḥka* duo, which is then sublimated by spiritual wisdom and introspection to shine as a homogeneous One. This makes the whole personality stand as an integrated whole. The intelligence, mind and the senses then begin to work in great harmony as mutual complements. To reach this state of Oneness, is the purpose of this entire description of *guṇas*.

The ego becomes expansive, refined and wholesome. In one sense it gets effaced. In another sense it engulfs the whole Universe, to be itself universal indeed! Imagine how effective is such an elevated inner framework, in actual interaction:

मां च योऽव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते ।
स गुणान्समतीत्यैतान् ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥

māṃ ca yo'vyabhicāreṇa bhakti-yogena sevate ।

sa guṇān-samatītyaitān brahma-bhūyāya kalpate ॥

(14.26)

Whoever takes to worshipping the Supreme with unflinching devotion will also be able to transcend the *guṇas*. He is fit for becoming Brahman in the end.

The last 6 chapters of the Bhagavadgītā dialogue, dwelling upon the essentials of Spiritual Wisdom and hence described as the 'wisdom section', are equally intertwined with devotional pronouncements. In the first 6 chapters also, delineated as 'karma yoga', Krishna did instill elements of devotion and knowledge, the *sthita-prajña* and *sthita-dhī* descriptions being the beginning of it. Picturing turbulent senses ready to pull the mind away any time, as does the hurricane a ship, he asked Arjuna "to regulate all the senses, integrate them and sit with inner absorption, thinking wholesomely of the Supreme (*yukta āsīta matparaḥ*)". As the dialogue advanced, Krishna brought in more of devotional elements. These became quite pronounced in the central six chapters – the 'devotional section'.

The same devotional undercurrent finds its prominence here too. Spiritual wisdom is always a corollary and climax of devotion and vice versa. There is no question of distancing devotion from spiritual wisdom. Both are mutual complements.

Despite its focus on God, **devotion in any form is an expression and effort of the devotee alone**. It is meant to **nourish, enrich and fulfil the devotee** himself, not God at all. This understanding of the basic nature of devotion is essential in spiritual sādhanā.

Devotion is a sādhanā. Karma yoga also is. Jñāna yoga is even more so. The seeker's personality – in its sensory, oral, mental, emotional and intelligential levels – is employed to interact with the world. The source and terminus of interactions is the same inner personality, which warrants improvement, enrichment and fulfillment. This truth should never be lost sight of.

Bhagavadgītā thus carries a full devotional thread throughout. In the last chapter, Krishna prefaces the devotional pronouncements with “I am disclosing to you the greatest of all secrets” (18.63,64). There is no spirituality without its full relevance to devotion. Nor is there any yoga without its strong devotional links.

