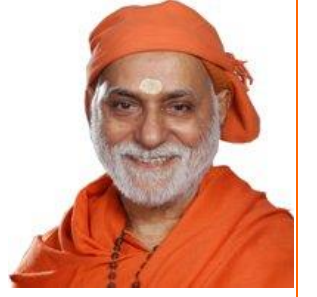


varṇāśrama dharma in The Bhagavatam

prabhāta-raśmiḥ

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Harih Om Tat Sat. Jai Guru.

Sri Krishna's instructions to Uddhava, which mainly is the theme in the 11th skandha of Srimad Bhagavatam consisting of 12 skandhas, I generally say this contains everything from salt to camphor. "Salt to camphor" is a kind of an idiom we make use of when we refer to something like head to foot. Whatever is to be done in a particular context or with regard to a particular event, when every detail is covered it is called "from salt to camphor." Camphor is used for burning before an idol or God. Salt is an ingredient indispensable for our food. So, everything from this level to the highest divine level, all are covered. Similarly, Krishna's instruction covers everything from salt to camphor, of what we call Hinduism or Hindu dharma. It is very interesting and enlightening from every point of view. I think, every one of you should read this book and know what are we and what kind of a tradition or lineage or heredity we have.

In Bhagavad Gita, it is not so. Bhagavad Gita happens to be a gospel which suddenly sprang up in an emergent situation like the commencement of war. Krishna could not take much time to speak also. Nevertheless, it contains 18 chapters whereas the Dwaraka gospel contains 24 chapters. Krishna was very leisurely. There was an emergency because Uddhava had to leave Krishna which he was unable to do. And the purpose of the gospel was to enable, empower, and enlighten Uddhava to leave Krishna, leave Dwaraka, and leave his own family before Krishna departed from the world. So, emergency was there but it was a very leisurely gospel. So you find a lot of detail is incorporated there. In one important section, two chapters or more, Sri Krishna speaks about the *varṇāśrama dharmas*. What does it mean? It is actually a description of the whole humanity in two different ways, a vertical division at the time of birth called *varṇa*.

We are born with a certain character, and a set of tendencies. Both these are inherited biologically and psychologically from the parents, and the parents themselves have such kind of inheritance which also you will find will be double ... double ... double ... like that. So, the birth of a child is a very complex amalgamation of two divergent personalities, two divergent lineages. And how complex it can be, you can decide. That being the case, we cannot do anything about it. Now, the child may be born in a particular family or in a particular class. Does it mean, he will always be of that class, and

that kind? How to find it out? There is no way. By examining the blood, you will only know the blood group, but how to know the mind group and intelligence group? It is not possible. So, our *śāstras* always help us to find out what is not otherwise evident. That a child born in a brahmin family, is a *brāhmaṇa*, I don't think anybody has to tell us. A child born to you, will be after you. We know it. But the *śāstras* say it is not so; need not be so. So, if you want to call anybody a *brāhmaṇa* or *brahma-svabhāmin*, be governed by these prescriptions, the *śāstras* say. What are the prescriptions? The tendencies that will be at work or should be at work in a *brahma-svabhāmin* are these, and these tendencies will give rise to this kind of activities and compulsions. So, you go into his taste and tendencies and also the resultant actions and activities. Then try to understand where he belongs to.

So, there is a vertical division - *brahma-svabhāva*, *kṣātra-svabhāva*, *vaiśya-svabhāva*, and *śūdra-svabhāva*. Now there is another division. That another division you have to make. What is that division? Horizontal division. So, put 5 lines and you will find 4 columns inside. You write *brāhma*, *kṣātra*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*. Then put another 5 lines horizontally. There you will find a child born in the first group, may, when examined, belong to the next group, the second, the third or the fourth. Similarly, a child born in the second group may, by virtue of his tendencies and activities, belong to the first, third, or fourth. Like that, when you go to the last group, a child may belong to, by virtue of his tendencies, belong to the *brāhmaṇa* group, or *kṣatriya*, or *vaiśya*. Like that you will find the vertical and horizontal divisions exist parallelly. The horizontal divisions are what the *śāstras* reveal. This is called *varṇa*. Now Bhagavata says, Krishna says that in spite of this division there will be some people who are absolutely reckless and careless. They are called the people standing or occupying the lowest positions. They don't want to worry about anything. They are called *antevasāyins*, people who are at the last rung of the ladder.

Now in order to find out who belongs to what, the prescriptions are made. A *brahma-svabhāmin* will have these characteristics and these tendencies; the *kṣātra* will have these, the *vaiśya* will have these, the *śūdra* will have these, and those who are outside these, will have these. Now, he prescribes what are the duties to be performed by these people. The one point that all of you are likely to miss is this - these tendencies are not man-made. These classifications also are not man made. Just like the blood group, it is inherent in our system. Whenever a child is born, it is born with a certain inheritance. That inherited tendencies and inherited activities, being prone to them, these are the important points. Now, why are the *śāstras* say this? In order to identify oneself and perhaps the others, the parents and the others. A set of parents may have four or five children. All of them may not be like them. Just like you find one interested in mathematics, and another interested in defence services, a third interested in fine arts. Like those tendencies, here also there are tendencies possible. This divergence has to be recognized by the parents, and the parents will have to reconcile themselves to that. They should not always think that the children born to us will be after us or like us. **Not necessarily!** Whenever there is a classification, better recognize it, and get adjusted to it. This is the important point that we have to understand.

Now, there are some people who do not belong to all these things. A mother used to come here and she said her son happened to be in our ashram. So I used to tell this boy many things about cleanliness, standards, etc.. He had a habit, even a clean place he will take a dirty cloth and wipe, and make it dirty. Then he will go for cleaning it. So, I said why is it that you are making things in a disorder and then change it into an order? And he doesn't do it well. So, one day while I was talking like this something, the mother was saying, "Swamiji please see, this boy has never inherited anything that I want to have or I have." So that is also possible. This is something very clear. You should not grieve over it because in the birth, you have practically nothing to do. You can have some disciplines and refinements by virtue of which, you can intend to have a good child of your choice. This is primarily done at the time of impregnation, before that, and while the child is growing in the womb. This is something very very important. So, it is to enlighten the people and enable them to live in harmony with divergent tendencies in their children that the *śāstras* enlighten us. The purpose is that.

Now in regard to marriage etc., the *śāstra* says first of all one should be given a sacred thread when he reaches the age ripe for learning. It should be between 5 and 7 years. If there is a precocious child, you can even give him the sacred thread at the age of 5 or 6 because after investing the sacred thread, he has to abide by some religious disciplines and practices. If he is ready and he wants to do it. he can adopt it. And then he is freely sent home to the Guru's family to become a member there, so to say. Now also we are admitting children to some boarding schools. There it was a boarding not for one year or two years with holiday in between. He was simply sent. In order to have the child learn the best, you know our parents clearly knew that learning cannot be done under the parents. Learning has to be done under the teachers, under their custody. So they sent the child after upanayanam. Upanayana marks the second birth. Birth of the body we know. The birth of the inside factor, that is called upanayana, second janma. That is why they are called *dvijas*, people who have two births. Then under the teacher, he goes on learning. There are two kinds of brahmacharins - *upakurovāṇaḥ* and *naiṣṭhika*. After learning, he learns Vedas, knows all about Brahman, God etc. If he thinks that "I am not going to go back. I will devote my life, and my body, my service completely to my Guru. If this resolution is there, he doesn't go back. He is called *naiṣṭhika brahmacārī*. Otherwise, he will go back and after entering the house back, he must marry. He must follow one ashrama after the other.

So, the first is a classification made. The second are four stages to be undergone by all human beings. So, brahmacharya is the life of learning, following that the householder life and the householder life is defined in this manner. He must go and accept a girl. And what is that girl? The girl must be *sadrśīm bhāryām*, who will be compatible with him. That is one. *yavīyasīm* - younger than him, *ajugupsitām* - who should not have anything in the way of a fallen trait, so it should be morally and ethically a defect free child, compatible and also younger. These are the prescriptions made. Now while marrying, they should generally marry from the same class. But he also says they can marry one step below. A *brahma-svabhāmin* can marry a girl from the *kṣātra* group, a *kṣātra* man can marry

from a still lower group, like that. The *śūdra* will not have any other group to marry, so he has to marry from his own group. These are the three.

Now it says that while marrying in this manner, we divide the marriages into anuloma and pratiloma. anuloma is the one I told you. Man marrying a girl from the lower level. Suppose it so happens that the girl from the lower section marries a higher one, it is called pratiloma marriage. Manu and the others have clearly said that this is not desirable. Why you may ask? Generally, women get adjusted to men, but men seldom get adjusted to women. So there will be always a kind of a decline or degeneration. Now these are the very important points that the discussion covers so far as *varṇāśrama dharmas* are concerned. And how a *brāhmaṇa* can conduct his life without any dependence on anybody , still he can preserve his inner brilliance, inner freedom, that inner sovereignty - that is also mentioned. He should collect grains from the paddy fields which are left over by the farmers and which should be a disturbance to them, or he should go to the marketplaces where grains have fallen, and they will be strewn on the streets, footpaths etc. All of them he should sweep through and bring back, and then clean it up and take. Now this is called *śilavṛtti* and *umcaṇṇvṛtti*. If he feels that any kind of reward a given by anybody will be bad, then this is what he should resort to. When I read all these, my imagination becomes very very profound. I would like all of you to know that you belong to a country and a lineage, a society which had cherished these, evolved these, abided by these, and which always remained enriched, inwardly sovereign at every point of time in life.

Harih Om Tat Sat. Jai Guru.

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