

Seventeenth Chapter

INTRODUCTION

The Lord, in the twenty-third verse of the sixteenth chapter, declared that he, who having cast aside the ordinances of scriptures, acts in an arbitrary way, according to his sweet will, attains neither perfection nor happiness, nor the Supreme Goal. Listening to the Lord's statement, Arjuna thinks that only a few people know those ordinances. A majority of people do not know these ordinances, but they worship the gods according to their caste, social order (āśrama), family tradition and innate faith. Due to their disregard for the ordinances of the scriptures, they should be regarded as demoniac, but due to their faith, they could be considered men of divine traits. So Arjuna wants to know, where such people stand. Therefore, he puts a question to Lord Kṛṣṇa, in the first verse.*

अर्जुन उवाच

ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः ।

तेषां निष्ठा तु का कृष्ण सत्त्वमाहो रजस्तमः ॥ १ ॥†

* To treat this (seventeenth) chapter as an explanation of the twenty-seventh verse of the ninth chapter (Whatever you do and whatever you offer, do that as an offering to Me) is not reasonable because the twenty-seventh verse of the ninth chapter is included in the topic 'offerings to God' which begins from the twenty-sixth verse and is concluded in the twenty-eighth verse with the result of these offerings. But here is the topic of faith.

† Here the topic is based on the twenty-third verse of the sixteenth chapter because in both the verses there is the mention of 'having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures'. Instead of 'under the impulse of desire' here the expression 'endowed with faith' has been used; similarly instead of 'acts' the expression 'performs sacrifice' and instead of 'attains neither perfection, nor happiness nor the Supreme Goal' the sentence 'What is their position—Sattva, Rajas or Tamas have been used.

arjuna uvāca

**ye śāstravidhimutsrjya yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ
teṣāṁ niṣṭhā tu kā kṛṣṇa sattvamāho rajastamaḥ**

Arjuna said:

Those who not caring for the ordinances of scriptures, perform sacrifice (yajña) in good faith—what is their position, O Kṛṣṇa! Is it sattvic (goodness), rajasic (passion) or tamasic (ignorance)? 1

Comment:—

'Ye śāstravidhimutsrjya....sattvamāho rajastamaḥ'—The gospel of the Gītā, in the form of the dialogue, between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, is for the welfare of all beings. Both of them, had people of the Kali age in view, because the Dvāpara age, was coming to an end. So Arjuna thinking of the people of Kali age, asks Lord Kṛṣṇa, the position of those who have good feelings and are also endowed with faith, but they have not acquired accurate and elaborate knowledge of scriptures.* So, they disregard the ordinances of scriptures, through ignorance. People in general, will have little knowledge, of the scriptures. Moreover, it will be difficult for them to get company of saints and great souls, as they will be rare in Kali age. In spite of their being rare, if anyone wants to get their company, he can have it. But the trouble is, that in Kali age several hypocrites, disguise themselves as saints. Thus, it becomes difficult to recognize them. So it becomes very difficult to have company of real saints, and to derive benefit from them. Therefore, such people neither know the ordinance of scriptures nor have the association of saints and great souls. But, they worship gods and perform austerities, with innate faith. So Arjuna asks, about their position. Is it, of goodness, passion or of ignorance?

'Sattvamāho rajastamaḥ'—The mode of Sattva (goodness),

*The ordinances of the scriptures are neglected by (1) ignorance (2) indifference (3) opposition.

is included in divine nature, while the modes of *raja* (passion) and *tama* (ignorance) are included in demoniac nature. The mode of passion, resembles the mode of ignorance, in certain respects.* In the sixty-second and sixty-third verses of the second chapter in the *Gītā*, it is mentioned, that anger springs from desire, which is a mode of passion, while from anger arises delusion, the mode of ignorance. Similarly, in the twenty-seventh verse of the eighteenth chapter, a doer, who is swayed by sorrow and who is given to violence, is said to be passionate, while in the twenty-fifth verse of the same chapter, violence has been called, a mark of the mode of ignorance, and in the thirty-fifth verse, sorrow, a mark of firmness of the mode of ignorance. Thus several signs of the mode of ignorance and of passion, are similar.

Sāttvika feelings, thoughts and conduct, are included in divine nature, while the *rājasika* and *tāmasika*, are included in demoniac nature. A man's position, is decided in accordance with, his nature. Here, by the term 'position', Arjuna wants to know what is the fate of such a man, as he also asked, in the thirty-seventh verse of the sixth chapter.

Here, Arjuna addresses the Lord as *Kṛṣṇa* (One who attracts). He wants to ask, of what status, He will consider such a man i.e., what is his status and what is his end.

Now a question arises, whether the Lord attracts persons, or whether they are attracted, according to the fruit of their actions. The answer is, that a man receives the fruit of his actions, but the controller of those fruits, is the Lord. He awards the fruits, according to their action. But, being a disinterested friend of all, He throws them into hell, to purify them, of their sins, and then

* *Sattvaguṇa* (the mode of goodness) is ten times superior to the *Rajoguṇa* (the mode of passion) while the mode of passion is ten times superior to the *Tamoguṇa* (the mode of ignorance). It means that the mode of goodness is a hundred times superior to the mode of ignorance.

he attracts all of them, towards Him. So the Lord says, for the people of demoniac nature, that those deluded beings, instead of attaining Him, go down to lower planes (16/20). It means, that the Lord is sad, when he sees that human beings, instead of attaining Him, go down to lower states.



Link:—A man, who does not know the ordinance of the scripture, is endowed with faith, of one type or the other. The three kinds of that innate faith, are described in the next verse.

श्रीभगवानुवाच

त्रिविधा भवति श्रद्धा देहिनां सा स्वभावजा ।
सात्त्विकी राजसी चैव तामसी चेति तां शृणु ॥ २ ॥

śrībhagavānurvāca

trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehinām sā svabhāvajā
sāttvikī rājasī caiva tāmasī ceti tām śṛṇu

The Blessed Lord said:

The faith of human beings, born of their own nature, is of three kinds—sāttvika (good), rājasika (passionate) and tāmasika (ignorant). Now hear about this. 2

Comment:—

[Arjuna put the question to know, where they stand, while the Lord answers his question, according to their faith, because they stand, as is their faith.]

'Trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehinām sā svabhāvajā'— Faith is of three kinds. Now the question arises, whether that faith is born of company, learning of scriptures, or of innate nature. The answer is, that it is born of their nature. By having this faith, people worship the gods etc.

'Sāttvikī rājasī caiva tāmasī ceti tām śṛṇu'— The faith born