**1. Episode Title: Episode 56 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 1, Episode 56)**

**2. Topics & Tags:**

* **TOPICS:** The preservation of arts and skills, the destruction of Indian societal systems, the purpose of social classifications (kula and jati), the misuse of power and knowledge, the concept of a single Almighty God for all beings, the meaning of equality, and the purpose of the Bhagavad Gita's first chapter.
* **TAGS:** Ancient art, Sculptures, Pyramids, Indian weavers, Kula (caste), Jati (race), Varnam (race), Dharma (righteous duty), British, Sri Bhagavad Ramanacharya Swami, Vedas, Dharma Sastras, Itihasas, Puranas, Vedavyasa, Brahma Sutras, Sri Vishnu, Vaishnava, Kali Yuga.

**3. Main Content:**

Jai Srimannarayana! Priya Bhagavad Bandhulara (Dear Devotees of God),

In ancient times, people made beautiful statues. When visiting an ancient temple, you will see beautiful statues. Observing them in detail, one can grasp the skill and diligence of the sculptor in those beautiful works. Whether they are stone-carved or metal-carved, in a metal-carved sculpture of God, one can appreciate the precision in the hands, the slenderness of the fingers, and the visibility of nails. One can also see intricate details in the eyes. In the neck, we see the lines clearly. The sculpting mastery is easily noticeable. These timeless sculptures are now termed antique and are valued at millions of rupees.

We see sculptures even today. However, they are shoddy and inanimate. A modern-day sculpture’s hand, for example, looks slapdash, like the hand of a person wearing a PPE kit. No detail is visible in these sculptures. It is rare to find impressive modern-day sculptures. Whereas in ancient sculptures, even a mini statue has all the intricate details in the head, nose, eyes, ears, teeth, and hair — every minute part of the sculpture. We think technology has advanced these days. There is technological advancement in every area. Even in machinery, there is computerization. Still, sculptural beauty is hard to find.

Sculptors lack patience; thus, there is no beauty in sculptures these days. However, this was not the case in the ancient days. Every sculpture was beautiful. Stone sculptures need no special mention. Even when humongous, they were still majestic and beautiful. In South India, you can see how far-and-wide these temples are. The stones used to build these temples are enormous. Big machines like cranes are available these days. Thousands of years ago, there were no such machines. How did people sculpt, build, and fix such huge structures with so much beauty?

One can see the wonderful Egyptian pyramids built around 8000 years ago. Top to bottom, what a sculptural marvel! With modern technology, you cannot bring that beauty or life into the art.

Why are we discussing this? To understand that when such arts are carefully preserved, their innate beauty remains intact, and their eternity is preserved. This is attributed to any object.

Approximately 125 years ago, an Indian weaver wrapped a 9-yard saree in a matchbox and presented it to the British queen. Imagine the skill of this great Indian weaver. Can you guess how he was rewarded? The queen invited him to her country to teach this skill to people there. Later, she ruthlessly severed his fingers so he could never exhibit his skill again. That is how the queen rewarded the Indian weaver. Similarly, all artistic skills of our country have been destroyed. The artistic pieces we see today are lifeless, spiritless, and useless. Yet, we think they are amazing.

Observing these ancient works, one cannot stop wondering how these magnificent structures were made. One can deduce the importance ancient cultures gave to the Arts. There was no machinery, neither computers nor present day advanced technology. The skill was in the sculptor’s hands. Because, they followed their dharma (righteous duty) and protected the skill associated with it. The roots of those skills and dharma are kula (caste) and ja:thi (clan/race).

Varnam, or ja:thi, translates to ‘race’. Caste is different. Castes preserve arts that come by the lineage, and race preserves what comes by birth. We want to preserve what comes by birth and by caste. We want race and caste to be intact. Why are the caste and race systems being destroyed? The country was prospering, so in order to ruin this society, these had to be destroyed. That was the thought. Even after independence, we haven’t changed, following the path of destruction.

Arguing that the caste system leads to fights, quarrels, ostracization from the society, and chaos is wrong. Ancient society was not like this. This discrimination started sometime later. Sometime back, these were created, fabricated in the societal fabric and brought about disparity, suppression and unrest in society. Who created this furore? Foreigners who could not accept the growth of this nation. Tyrants who occupied this land. Turks on one side and Englishmen on the other side. They joined forces to destroy these arts at once. In effect, they brought about differences we see in society. This was their scheme. It caused total damage to society. There were a few more such people in the annals of history.

Truly, systems of caste or race did not cause harm, but they were made to look destructive. A knife does not harm one, but the one holding it can if he’s mentally unstable. A doctor’s knife bestows life. Poison is not harmful, the person using it is. The same poison saves life when given at the verge of death. There is nothing in this world inherently harmful. Evil-minded persons misusing objects are the ones harmful to society.

Our teacher, Sri Bhagavad Ramanacharya Swami, observed these intricacies in the lifestyle taught by his predecessors. He postulated: “There is no need to abolish castes nor to bring reforms to ancient professions, nor to shun women.”

Then what has to be abolished? The dogma attached to them. To get rid of this, rise above it. There is no need to abolish castes, but it is necessary to live at a higher standard. How can we do this? We can continue following our caste, traditions, customs, and duties. However, one should respect a person irrespective of caste. One should not be respected for his caste or profession; he should be respected for qualities defining his character. One is respected not because of birth, but because of knowledge. One should not be respected for his origin, but how he puts his learnings into practice.

So, what is that we actually need? What knowledge? What character? What practices? We should realize that we all are the progeny of the One Almighty. All beings are born out of one God. There is no doubt about this. Not only humans, be it animals, insects, microbes, etc. - everything is born from God. However, putting the animal kingdom aside, and concentrating on humans alone, remember, humans are all offspring of one God. They may differ in color, shape or their work - or their journeys, however we are all the product of God alone. Hence, we are all brethren in a family belonging to one God. When will we realize this fact? When we see beyond the body, recognizing the existence of a God in each and every one of us.

Vedas and Dharma Sastras (scriptures discussing righteous practices), accentuate this point. Itihasas (history) and Puranas (ancient tales) as well, manifested to teach this essential message. They all conclude with the same. What is it? The visible body - a soul within the body - God behind the soul. We, the souls, are all His children. He does not play favorites; everybody is equal in His eyes. He wishes for everyone’s well-being. However, because of their past deeds, there are changes in their bodies. It is similar to how one’s position, wealth, seat, etc. are based on one’s merit in education. One may not pursue higher education even when given a chance, so according to his capabilities, he might earn minimally and live simply only on that. One may make very good use of life and accordingly, he is awarded with good results, and material comforts so he can prosper. Because of such a fault with a soul, there is change in the bodies for each soul. Hence, the merits of bodies are different; we should accept bodies and the resulting duties accordingly. The very reason for a body is for this purpose.

Thus, one should accept and carefully follow laws of this birth in this body as a responsibility. It is like a job. As long as you are on it, follow the rules defined. However, when you are not working, you and I are the same in a social setting. In a cinema theatre, why should there be any reason for both of them to not sit together? When both are working, they work in their own areas and spaces. For the bread and butter of the body, each one exercises different sets of duties. Hence, one should follow his duty with as much quality and skill as possible. As long as one learns and puts these into practice, he deserves respect and encouragement. Facilities and necessary training should be provided. Chances must be given. This is our society. That is the reason why caste, creed, etc. exist.

Do not mix caste, creed, work or profession into the equation. If opportunities and resources can be provided, let him take up his work. Professionally, everyone is doing different things. Otherwise, everyone is equal. Where is this scenario possible, only before God. Hence, before God, we are all equal. Everyone has the right to serve God. Everyone is eligible to serve Him. He accepts everyone equally. Hence, the happiness obtained is equal for everyone. He will not favor one above the other.

vaishamya nairgrunye na said Vedavyasa explicitly in Brahmasutras (scripture). Bhagavan cannot be said to display favoritism and cruelty. Hence, we need to conserve social traditions with a clarified view of recognizing who we are. Because of this, Saint Ramanujacharya shared mantra (sacred utterance) with everybody despite whether they were harijan (people of God) or girijan (people of the mountains). Everyone is one progeny of God and everybody is related to Sri Vishnu.

jagame: vaishnavama:yam (The entire world is a Vaishnava). This is established.

Whoever realizes this shares happiness with others and sorrows from others. This is how society lived until the 16th century. During the 15th and 16th century, when the British started ruling, they dismantled this system. Ever since we started looking only at bodily characteristics, difficulties rose among us. This created disparity, dominance, and disturbance across society that has continued to the present day. The politicians are still exploiting us based on this. Bhagavad Gita is about understanding this. It clarifies what these categories are, why they exist and how to live in relation to them. We are all equal in the eyes of God.

Arjuna questioned Sri Krishna if war might evoke disturbances in all social elements, and if he should really take part in such an act. Even if Arjuna wouldn’t fight, these disturbances were bound to happen because of the effect of Kali Yuga. Despite these forces, we need a protective shield that is Bhagavad Gita for society to withstand and thrive. Sri Krishna’s intention was to provide that shield, make Arjuna question ailments to society, and provide answers to these questions through Bhagavad Gita. Thus, these topics were brought up in Chapter 1 of Bhagavad Gita. Let us further delve into this.

Jai Srimannarayana!