

Śloka 13

चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।
तस्य कर्मारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ १३ ॥

*cāturvarṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ
tasya karmāramapi mām viddhyakartāramavyayam*

चातुर्वर्ण्यम्	<i>cāturvarṇyam</i>	the four-fold caste
मया	<i>mayā</i>	by Me
सृष्टम्	<i>sṛṣṭam</i>	has been created
गुण	<i>guṇa</i>	quality
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	activity
विभागशः	<i>vibhāgaśaḥ</i>	according to the differentiation
तस्य	<i>tasya</i>	thereof
कर्तारम्	<i>kartāram</i>	the author
अपि	<i>api</i>	also
माम्	<i>mām</i>	Me
विद्ध्य	<i>viddhi</i>	know
अकर्तारम्	<i>akartāram</i>	non-doer
अव्ययम्	<i>avyayam</i>	immutable

VERSES 13-14

The Fourfold Division in Humans Created by God as a Non-Doer

13

The four orders of society have been created by Me according to the classification of the *guṇas* (modes of *prakṛti*) and karma (action). Though I am its creator, know Me as a non-doer and immutable.

The creation is divided into four major classifications according to the predominance of *guṇa* (quality) and action.

First is the human class or *manuśyaḥ*. *Manuśyaḥ* comes from the word *manas* or mind. It means those who can think, discriminate, decide, and judge. Humans are *sattva guṇa* (quality of purity) predominant.

Second is the animal class or *paśuvaḥ*. *Paśuvaḥ* comes from the word *paśya*, which means “to see.” Animals cannot think like human beings, but they can see. This means the actions of animals are instinctive. They are *rajas guṇa* (quality of activity) predominant.

Third comes the vegetation classification or *auśadhi*, and fourth is the mineral class or *khaniḥ*. Both of these classifications are *tamas guṇa* (quality of inertia) predominant.

The human classification (*manuśyaḥ*) is further divided into four castes, which are created according to the predominance of the *guṇas* (modes of *prakṛti*) and *karma* (actions). They are:

1) *Brāhmaṇa*: This is the teaching class, made up of those who are *sattva guṇa* (quality of purity) predominant. Their work is to teach and to practice such attributes as self-restraint, purity, serenity, and devotion.

2) *Kṣatriya*: This is the ruling class, made up of those who are *rajas guṇa* (quality of activity) predominant. Their work is to rule and defend the country. They possess attributes such as power, splendor, firmness, and generosity.

3) *Vaiśya*: This is the trading and farming class, made up of those who are also *rajas guṇa* (quality of activity) predominant, but their inclination is toward trade. Wealth is their power.

4) *Śūdra*: This is the serving class, made up of those who are *tamas guṇa* (quality of inertia) predominant. Their work is to serve others.

The human mental disposition is created by the individual's predominance of the *guṇa*, or mode of *prakṛti*. The

mode of *prakṛti* is not always inherited from the parents, as the temperament of a father and son can be different. Consequently the classification of the human race into four divisions is not necessarily determined by birth. It is decided by the differentiation of a person's mental qualities and physical activities.

I am its creator, know Me as a non-doer - This appears to be inherently contradictory because a creator cannot be a non-doer. In fact, the Lord who is eternal, infinite, and all-pervading is not the doer or creator. It is *prakṛti* (primordial nature) that creates by being in proximity to the Lord (the Self or pure consciousness). The Lord is a creator in the sense that without the energy of the Lord, the three *guṇas* in *prakṛti* will not be activated and will not be able to create. The Lord is a non-doer because God does not take any direct part in the evolutionary process and yet God is present in all the functions of *prakṛti*. God is immutable and all-pervasive, like the sun, which does not create the earth and all its life forms but without which they cannot exist. Or like a tree which, without any intention, provides fruit, shade, and firewood.

Śloka 14

न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ।
इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्न स बध्यते ॥ १४ ॥

*na mām karmāṇi limpanti na me karmaphale sprhā
iti mām yo'bhijānāti karmabhirna sa badhyate*

न	<i>na</i>	not
माम्	<i>mām</i>	Me
कर्माणि	<i>karmāṇi</i>	actions
लिम्पन्ति	<i>limpanti</i>	tainted, contaminated
न	<i>na</i>	not
मे	<i>me</i>	My
कर्मफले	<i>karmaphale</i>	in the fruit of actions
स्पृहा	<i>sprhā</i>	desire
इति	<i>iti</i>	thus
माम्	<i>mām</i>	Me
यः	<i>yaḥ</i>	who
अभिजानाति	<i>abhijānāti</i>	knows
कर्मभिः	<i>karmabhiḥ</i>	by actions
न	<i>na</i>	not
सः	<i>saḥ</i>	he
बध्यते	<i>badhyate</i>	is bound

14

Actions do not taint Me, nor do I have desire for the fruits of action. He who knows Me thus is not bound by his actions.

A pitcher filled up to the brim cannot be filled any more. Similarly, the Lord is full and does not need anything. Consequently, the Lord does not desire any of the fruits of action, and all the Lord's actions are for the good of the creation. There is neither attachment, nor possessiveness, nor the ego of doership in the Lord's actions. There is not even a tinge of self-interest in the Lord's actions.

Actions do not contaminate Me, nor do I have desire for the fruits of action. - Actions contaminate a person only when they are performed with self-interest, attachment, and ego. Since all the actions of the Lord are free from desire, attachment, and the ego of being a doer, the Lord cannot be contaminated by actions. Therefore, all the works of the Lord are divine in character and do not cause any bondage.

He who knows Me thus is not bound by his actions - The Lord is desireless, egoless, and non-attached, and performs action only for the good of creation. One who identifies with their mind-body complex as "I am" cannot be free from desire, attachment, and ego, and as a result cannot identify with the divine character of God. Only a yogi who is free from desires and attachment, and has attained Self-knowledge, knows God in reality. Such yogis are not affected by their actions in the world and are free from the bondage of ignorance.

Śloka 15

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैरपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।
 कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात्त्वं पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥ १५ ॥

*evam jñātvā kṛtaṁ karma pūrvairapi mumukṣubhiḥ
 kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṁ pūrvaiḥ pūrvataram kṛtam*

एवम्	<i>evam</i>	thus
ज्ञात्वा	<i>jñātvā</i>	having known
कृतम्	<i>kṛtam</i>	(was) done
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	actions
पूर्वैः	<i>pūrvaiḥ</i>	by ancients
अपि	<i>api</i>	also
मुमुक्षुभिः	<i>mumukṣubhiḥ</i>	seekers after freedom
कुरु	<i>kuru</i>	perform
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	action
एव	<i>eva</i>	even
तस्मात्	<i>tasmāt</i>	therefore
त्वम्	<i>tvam</i>	you
पूर्वैः	<i>pūrvaiḥ</i>	by ancients
पूर्वतरम्	<i>pūrvataram</i>	in the olden time
कृतम्	<i>kṛtam</i>	done

VERSE 15

*The Lord Commands Arjuna to Follow the Path of
Selfless Action of Ancient Seekers*

15

Having known this, the ancient seekers of liberation also performed action; therefore, do you also perform action, as did the ancients in olden times.

Arjuna, who was a seeker of liberation, was thinking to renounce his actions on the battlefield. This was due to his idea that because all action creates sin (III: 1), all actions are binding, and all actions block the path to liberation. In III: 20 and IV:1-2, Lord Kṛṣṇa gave examples of ancient seekers such as King Jānaka, who attained liberation by performing selfless action. In the previous verse Lord Kṛṣṇa used Himself as an example of selfless action.

In this verse Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that the ancient seekers who attained Self-realization did not renounce action; instead they continued working in the world, both before and after attaining Self-realization, without self-interest, attachment, or desire. Since Arjuna is a seeker of liberation, and since several seekers in ancient times attained Self-realization by practicing the yoga of selfless action (**Karma Yoga**), Lord Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna that he too should follow in the footsteps of the ancient seekers and act in a detached spirit.

The essence of this verse is that this method of selfless service is not new. **Karma Yoga** has been practiced from ancient times in order to attain Self-realization. Since others have attained liberation by following this path, so too can Arjuna.

Śloka 16

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।
तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा योक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ १६ ॥

*kiṁ karma kimakarmeti kavayo'pyatra mohitāḥ
tatte karma pravakṣyāmi yajñātvā yokṣyase'subhāt*

किम्	<i>kim</i>	what
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	action
किम्	<i>kim</i>	what
अकर्म	<i>akarma</i>	inaction
इति	<i>iti</i>	thus
कवयः	<i>kavayaḥ</i>	sages
अपि	<i>api</i>	also
अत्र	<i>atra</i>	in this
मोहिताः	<i>mohitāḥ</i>	(are) deluded
तत्	<i>tat</i>	that
ते	<i>te</i>	to you
कर्म	<i>karma</i>	action
प्रवक्ष्यामि	<i>pravakṣyāmi</i>	(I) shall teach
यत्	<i>yat</i>	which
ज्ञात्वा	<i>jñātvā</i>	having known
मोक्ष्यसे	<i>mokṣyase</i>	(you) shall be liberated
अशुभात्	<i>aśubhāt</i>	from evil

VERSES 16-17

What Constitutes Action and Inaction

16

What is action? What is inaction? Even the wise are deluded by this. Therefore, I shall explain to you about action (the nature of action and inaction) by knowing which, you shall be freed from its evil effects (binding nature).

Generally, the functions performed by the body and its limbs are considered “actions” and when the limbs stop functioning, it is considered “inaction.” However, from a philosophical point of view, the concepts of action and inaction are established by the motive behind the action or inaction.

For example, taking care of a sick person with a selfish motive may appear to be a good and pure action, but in reality the action is impure. Actually, the action itself is neither pure nor impure, good nor bad. It is the motive behind the action that determines the quality of the action. The same is true regarding inaction. In renouncing action, the motive determines the quality of the inaction. Therefore, even those who are well versed in scriptures, and are learned and wise, get confused in discriminating between action and inaction.

Lord Kṛṣṇa promises here that He will expound the truth of **action and inaction** to Arjuna. By knowing this, Arjuna will not remain in the bondage created by the cycle of birth and death.