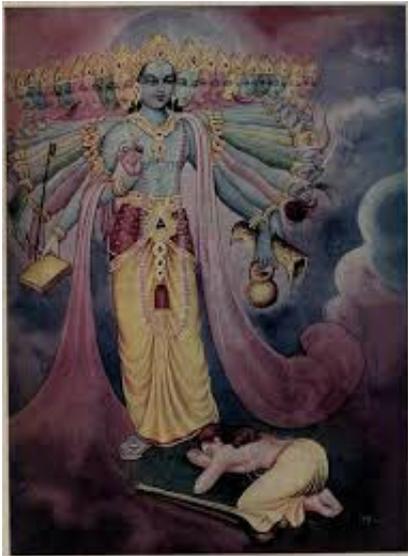
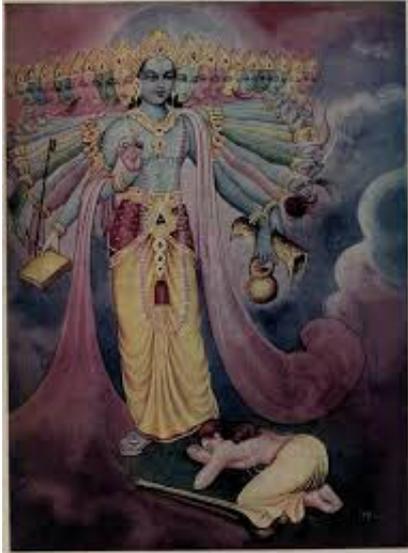


# Arjuna's sorrow

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Arjuna vishada yoga/Topic of Arjuna's sorrow ( Chapter 1)

If you look into the first chapter of the *Gita*, you will find the crown prince Arjuna making an entry into the battlefield as a real hero of the Hindi films. Unlike some modern versions of the *Gita*, one has to learn to look at Arjuna with some respect. He was a very competent warrior. In fact, in ancient India, *vajra-mushthi* warriors were considered the most competent of all human beings, the counterparts of samurai warriors in Japan. *Vajra-mushthi* was the source of all these martial arts, and among these warriors Arjuna was a *maharathi*, one of the most competent ones. There was nothing wrong with his thinking, with his feeling, with his action...

Many say that Arjuna had a crisis of confidence, that he was suffering from anxiety neurosis. Would you agree with that?

A diagnosis of anxiety neurosis can be made only if the symptoms persist for six months or so. The description in the Gita shows that he is overcome by some emotion. After this, Arjuna proudly demands from Krishna, who has agreed to be his charioteer, to place his chariot between the two armies so that he can have a good look at his opponents, so that he can decide who to engage with in battle. He does not want to waste time fighting the common foot-soldier; it is *maharathi to maharathi* combat here, hero to hero, the foot-soldiers can be taken care of by the foot-soldiers. Arjuna is full of confidence, there is no anxiety in him, he does not doubt his ability to destroy the enemy forces. For twelve years, all they have been doing while they have been living in the forest is talk about piling arms and preparing for this battle. He's ready for it; there's not an iota of fear or anxiety in this warrior.

However, a transformation takes place within Arjuna when he sees who the enemy is; the enemy are all kith and kin. He sees his great-grandfather Bhishma, on whose lap he grew up, on the opposite side; he sees his teacher Drona who taught him all about warfare. He sees cousins, relatives and he's overcome by great compassion. In fact, Vyasa writes that it was compassion and nothing else that was there in Arjuna's heart, and he says it in so many words—*Paraya kripaya aavishtaha*, meaning 'Overcome by great compassion'. Because Arjuna thinks 'Is it really worth it to acquire a kingdom after killing all these people? What is the point in getting a kingdom if I have to destroy Bhishma, Drona, etc...? If they are there, I'll enjoy the kingdom. If they are not there, I'm getting a kingdom tainted by the blood of these people, so it's really not worth it.'

Krishna seems to be literally pushing Arjuna to fight...almost seems like war-mongering...

Krishna is insisting on doing the right thing, on doing what is expected of you irrespective of personal feelings. The question of *dharma-adharma* cannot depend on personal feelings, but on more universally valid principles. The concept of right and wrong is universal though not absolute. One has to do what is appropriate, and not merely what one feels like doing.

In fact, the argument moves from here in the first chapter. From a mere personal issue it triggers off something more fundamental—the whole question of right and wrong. Then he says 'Well, forget the personal issues, now it's the question of right and wrong. On both sides, every able-bodied warrior from 18 to 120 years of age is on the battle field. His own son, Abhimanyu, a strapping young man who is just married is there on the battle-field; Bhishma, 125 years old, is there on the battle-field. Between them, the best of Indian manhood is there on the battle-field, and in this battle most of these people are going to be killed. If all these people are killed, who is going to live a life of dharma? The survivors will be ladies, very old men, and babies. Who will protect society? *Dharma* itself will be destroyed in the process. Remember, it's a civil war—you are not fighting an enemy outside the country, you are fighting within. Therefore, is it really worth fighting this battle for the sake of *dharma*, because *dharma* seems to be the first casualty here?

So would you then say that the Gita is about right and wrong?

The question shifts deeper still—what is dharma, adharma meant for? What is the very purpose of life itself? All of us struggle with the idea of right and wrong, which brings us to a more fundamental question—what is the purpose of my life? Now this can happen anywhere—I hear a friend has died, I go and help the family with all the practical issues, but as the funeral pyre is lit I start thinking, 'Where is this person gone? Where did he come from? He had so many desires yet to be fulfilled, what is going to happen to him?' Now I am thinking of the more fundamental questions that death has triggered in me about the very purpose of life itself.

The same thing is happening to Arjuna right there on the battle-field. He's thinking : What is the purpose of life? All my life I have been a wanting, incomplete human being, my life is full of desires, a lot of them I have fulfilled but the heart still seems empty. He says it in so many words—Forget this kingdom, this is a small little kingdom, only Hastinapura. Even if I become the king of the three worlds I don't think my heart will be full, because as a human being I am a finite person. This sense of finitude that I have doesn't seem to go away with anything that I add or anything that I chop off. All additions by themselves are finite; therefore, a finite being with a few more finite things is not going to become full and complete. Maybe what I need is something more than a finite thing. What I'm really seeking, the purpose of life, may not be a finite thing but the infinite...

Now the question has shifted from *dharma-adharma* to one of *moksha*, because discovering myself as a fulfilled being, not merely as a successful being, is what *moksha* is about.

Isn't *moksha* freedom from birth and death?

That's only a way of putting it...One has no control over either birth or death, and this causes a certain sense of helplessness in a human being. Freedom from this helplessness and freedom from finitude is what *moksha* is about. In fact, you could say that *moksha* is moving from success to fulfilment. Success is easy to gain, it doesn't call for much, fulfilment is a different ball game altogether. For fulfilment, I have to discover that I am that infinite being, because if there is an infinite entity it cannot stand apart from me, it has to include me. By its very nature, the infinite cannot be made up of parts. I cannot be a millionth part of the infinite, because if I'm a millionth part of the infinite, then the infinite becomes a finite entity. That means I have to be the infinite. The way space cannot be divided up, the infinite cannot be divided up. But if I'm infinite, why do I feel so finite?

It is here probably that Arjuna remembered the dialogues between his brothers and the *rishis* in the forest and he discovers the birth of the student in him, the one who wants to know what this fulfilled being is about and how does one come to gain it. As it is infinite and I have to be it, it has to be discovered through knowledge, and when the student is ready he discovers the teacher. In his friend, philosopher, and guide he discovers the teacher, and he turns to Krishna and says, 'I'm your student, please instruct me'. This is the setting and background of the *Gita*, which moves from a day-to-day problem of Arjuna to a universal human problem of wanting to seek fulfilment in life.

The question of *dharma-adharma* is left behind for the time-being, it will be picked up later and answered. The *Gita* then is not merely about Arjuna's problem, it is not a mere historical problem; the problem that the *Gita* deals with is one which is of universal interest. It is not even a Hindu problem, it is not even an Indian problem...As long as there is a human being, an entity, a living organism, which is self-aware and has got freedom of choice, such a person will be aware of one's sense of finitude, of one's existential issues, the purposelessness of life, the existential loneliness that all of us feel, the unwept sorrow in every human heart. The solution to this problem is the message of the *Gita* and, therefore, universally valid. It doesn't matter what religion you are, what culture you belong to....

In terms of Krishna's answer to this problem, Krishna handles it on two fundamental levels. One is called the knowledge of the truth. In other words, it's known as *Brahma-vidya*, the knowledge of the reality of what you are. It is dealing with the reality of what you are because your question is not merely about the problems of life, it's about the reality of life, about the reality about yourself and the world, the truth between you, world, and if there is a God then what this God is about. This would be the fundamental subject matter of the *Gita*. To discover this, you need a mature mind, and the *Gita* deals with a lot of issues that facilitate the maturity of the mind. Now what do I mean by a mature mind? A mind that can think clearly, feel strongly, and act decisively. This is what, in a nutshell, would be a mature mind. When you are talking of a mature mind, you can say the *Gita* is addressed to an *adhikari*, one who is competent. How do you become so competent that life's problems do not really bother you? This is also what the *Gita* helps you to do...

The *Gita* has enough insights into how to develop oneself into a competent human being. Therefore, there will be certain ideas addressed, popularly known as karma-yoga. It will talk about devotion to *Ishvara*, to the Lord, because without devotion there can be no real karma-yoga as we can see later....By devotion, I don't mean mere rituals or *bhajan*-singing, although these too have their own place. Devotion is an emotional response to my understanding of *Ishvara*. The more mature and informed I am about *Ishvara*, the more mature my devotion will be...

In our next post, we will move into the next chapter, one of the more important chapters in the *Gita*.

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