

# No type-caste-ing

Author : Swami Brahmavidananda

Categories : [Freedom and renunciation \(ch.18\)](#)

Date : May 1, 2015



In the 41<sup>st</sup> verse of the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter, after having discussed everything about *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, Krishna talks about the famous or infamous caste system. Krishna has touched upon this earlier and readers will find a post on this in a previous chapter. The post refers to what the caste system was meant to be and what it has become, and there itself I had stated that what it has become is obnoxious, but what it was and what it was meant to be was something noble. Here, Krishna says, let us look at the system again from the point of view of the *gunas*. What are the types of jobs that people can do in keeping with one's *gunas*?

The *Brahmana*, by *guna* and not by birth or work, says Krishna, is predominantly *sattvic* but backed with *rajas* in the second place and *tamas* in the third place. Here he does not list out a single job or a profession

or a function for the *Brahmana*, he merely lists out qualities that are natural. For example, he says, they will have what is known as *kshama*, meaning inner quietude, a calm, mastered mind. They will have *dama*, physical restraint when necessary, mastery over the body; *tapas*—willingness to step out of their comfort zone; *shaucham* meaning inner and external purity, external in terms of body and environment, internal in terms of intentions, emotions etc.; *shanti*—forbearance, acceptance of people for what they are; *arjavam*—straightforwardness; *jnanam*—given to intellectual pursuits; *astikyam*—a sense of trust in life, in God, and in people. This, he says, is natural *karma* for the *Brahmanas*, meaning for those who are predominantly *sattvic*. These are qualities which can be used in any function, any job, any performance anywhere. Which means if you are predominantly like this, there is nothing you cannot do well. That is why the *Brahmana* is praised. Whenever the *Brahmana* is praised in the *shastras*, you must understand that it is these *gunas* for which he is praised, and, therefore, he can naturally pick up roles where these can come into greater play. Generally, this sort of person will pick up those types of functions which require a certain amount of intellectual keenness.

Krishna then moves on to the *Kshatriya*. They are predominantly *rajasic* but their *rajas* is backed by *sattva*. What does such a person have? Again, he doesn't mention a profession though most people associate *Kshatriya* with 'warrior'. The qualities he mentions are *shauryam*, courage; *tejas*—high energy; *dhrti*—the will to hold on and to get things done; *dakshyam*—your personal competence to get things done, meaning if this person is in a conflict situation, he will not retreat out of fear. He may have a tactical retreat if necessary, but not out of fear; *danam*—sharing, charity... this person is large-hearted. You cannot be a warrior and be small-hearted because you have to be willing to give up your life for the country. *Ishvara-bhavam*—a sense of lordship, a sense of power. All this is *Kshatriya karma*. This person will gravitate towards a function where these qualities can be exercised. You could be a good industrialist with this type of qualities. Wherever some kind of courage is involved, this person will naturally gravitate to this type of function. Therefore, for both, the person who is a *Brahmana* by *guna* and a *Kshatriya* by *guna*, Krishna doesn't mention professions because these two people can do well in any profession.

Further, those who are *Vaishya* by *gunas* are *rajasic*, but their *rajas* is not backed by *sattva* and is instead backed by *tamas*. For such people, Krishna mentions a profession. Agriculture, cow-protection (meaning cattle-herding and not literally cow protection), animal husbandry, trade and commerce are some of this type of person's roles. These are all profit-oriented and if you are *rajasic* backed by *tamas*, then naturally greed is good for this person. *The Wolf of Wall Street* will fall into this category.

As I have said in a previous post, a person may be born with few opportunities and, therefore, may not be able to enter a desirable profession, but he can still become *sattvic* in his life. He may be a garbage collector but with his positive attitudes of karma, yoga, professional pride, dignity etc, he can not only better his lot but become *sattvic*

The person who is a *shudhra* by *guna* is predominantly *tamasic*. This sort of person lacks the initiative to start his own entrepreneurship or own industry. Initiative is lacking in his case because he's too laid-back, too lazy for this sort of thing. Therefore, he says, these people can become the hands and legs in any industry, which is the vast majority of the working class. Krishna mentions jobs only for the *vaishya* and *shudhra* by *guna* because the others can do well anywhere.

As we said in the previous post, you could be a *shudhra* as far as your *karma* is concerned, but you could be a *sattvic* person, a *Brahmana*, by *guna*. As I have said in a previous post, a person may be born with few opportunities and, therefore, may not be able to enter a desirable profession, but he can still become *sattvic* in his life. He may be a garbage collector but with his positive attitudes of karma, yoga, professional pride, dignity etc, he can not only better his lot but become *sattvic*. We have said this in our earlier post. How is this possible? Krishna makes a very interesting comment in the 46<sup>th</sup> verse, the most important verse when we are looking at the caste system.

*Yatah pravrttirbhutanam yena sarvam idam tatam*

## ***Svakarma tamabhyarcya siddhim vindati manavah***

***Through one's duty, worshipping Him from whom is the creation of the beings, by whom all this is pervaded, a human being gains success. (Verse 46)***

That from which the whole universe is manifest, Krishna says, that from which it is sustained, and that into which it dissolves, that Lord you can worship through your *karma*. Meaning all your personal and professional actions are offered to the Lord as a worship and the result is taken as *prasad*. Such a person becomes predominantly *sattvic* in temperament and will know the truth. Therefore, the highlight is that irrespective of what you are doing, one needs to be more *sattvic* in temperament. How do you gain that *sattvic buddhi*? If a person is too *tamasic*, then he should be inspired with a few desire-prompted activities so that he will become more *rajasic* in nature. Once he is more *rajasic*, you bring in *Ishvara* into his understanding, you bring in the attitudes of *ishwara arpana* and *prasada buddhi*, and he then starts to become *sattvic*. With exposure to this knowledge, he will, sooner or later, gain self-knowledge, self-realization as people call it.

So it's a flexible and not a rigid system?

Krishna is talking here only about *gunas*, about qualities, he's not even talking about a system.

The caste system's degeneration started from the top. Under foreign rule, those who were intellectual, those who required some learning, education, etc., they were bought over by the foreign rulers. So they had positions of power and were the 'experts' for the foreign government that came to India. Naturally, they wanted to perpetuate that power and position, and, therefore, they started calling themselves the superior castes. Consequently, the other castes became the lower castes. There was no higher or lower in India, but it became corrupted, and I will be the first person to junk the corrupt version.

But the corruption need not always have come from a foreign source?

There were other internal causes also for this degeneration of the system, but foreign rule was a great contributor. Originally, the king would take advice from the intellectual. Soon, it became aspirational for people to become intellectuals, because you could become a person in a position of power. That was only aspirational whereas under the foreign rulers, they were given positions, etc. In the ancient system, a *Brahmana* had no position. There may be one *raja-guru* but there was no other position or post given to anyone, but, under foreign rule, they were corrupted by power. It is the system that got corrupted. Here, in the *Gita*, Krishna is talking only from the standpoint of *gunas*.

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