

CLASSIFICATION OF ACTIONS ACCORDING TO THE GUNAS

YOGACHARYA Dr ANANDA BALAYOGI BHAVANANI

CHAIRMAN: INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR YOGA EDUCATION & RESEARCH AND
YOGANJALI NATYALAYAM, PONDICHERRY, SOUTH INDIA-605 013

An important concept in Yoga as well as other systems of Indian philosophy (Yoga is one of the six revealed philosophical views of life or the **Shat Darshana** of **Sanathana Dharma**) is the knowledge that our mental make up, our actions and the material world we live in, can be understood better by developing a deeper understanding and a greater awareness of the **Trigunas**, the three-fold natural divisions of our inner and outer nature.

Yogeshwar Sri Krishna in Chapter 17 of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, the song celestial explains in great detail this three-fold natural division into the Gunas of **Tamas** (inertial ignorance), **Rajas** (dynamic and passionate ego centric activity) and **Sattwas** (pure goodness).

Lord Krishna says that the food we eat, the way we worship, the sacrificial offerings we do, the austerities we undertake and the charity we perform may all be sub-classified under the **Trigunas** according to the spirit and inner nature of the act itself.

TRIGUNAS AND WORSHIP: Each of us will have a tendency to worship 'THAT' which is closest to our inner nature and inner calling. In Verse 4 of Chapter 17 Krishna explains how those who are of the higher **Sattvica** nature or pure goodness will have a tendency to worship the Divine in different manifest and unmanifest forms. This is a reflection of their inner nature that deeply aspires to ascend to the higher states through the accelerated process of conscious evolution from animal-to-human-to-humane-to-ultimately becoming one with the Divine.

On the other hand, those who are of the **Rajasica** nature will be enamored by the passion aroused in the worship of the demons. Demons have tremendous powers and **Rajasica** passion and non stop activity is at its height in such beings. Both will power (**Ichha Shakti**) and the power of action (**Kriya Shakti**) is there in abundance, but the power of discriminatory wisdom (**Jnana Shakti**) is sadly lacking in such demonic beings. A good example of this is seen in modern times where rock stars and movie stars who live and behave like demons are worshipped by demonic fans in this mode of unbridled passion with no regard to consequences at all. Just go to any rock show or night club and you will for sure have a "Passionate trip to hell"!

Those in the mode of **Tamasica** ignorance tend to worship ghosts and spirits and this is prevalent in the primitive societies of the world where Witch doctors and Voodoo men have a great time taking control over the weak **Tamasica** minds. The lower minds are highly influenced by the neither world and this is often seen in the way 'spirits' take over villagers and then the local exorcist has a gala time exerting his control over everyone near and dear. The use of these lower entities for revenge and getting back at enemies is a classic example of how the **Tamasica** minds worship these lower entities.

TRIGUNAS AND FOOD: In the Verses 8, 9 and 10 of Chapter 17, Lord Krishna describes the **Gunas** and their relationship with the different types of food in detail. It is not only just the type of food but also the time, place and how it is partaken that matters. It is also important to understand the resultant effects of imbibing the different classes of food.

Sattvica foods that are dear to those in the mode of pure goodness are those that increase the duration of life, purify one's existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction to the person. The Bhagavad Gita describes such foods

as those that are juicy, fatty, wholesome and pleasing to the heart. These foods are the nutrients for the Yogic minded ones and help the mind to be calm, composed and ready for the higher states of consciousness and evolution. There is a deep relationship between food and mind and this is only now being slowly understood by western science. We are what we eat and so it makes sense to eat that which will make us a better person.

Rajasica foods are those that are very bitter, extremely sour, salty, too hot, pungent, dry and tasteless or burning. These foods are craved by those who are always on the move. It is therefore no wonder that such foods are popular amongst modern men and women who are forever on the move in their attempt to be the rat that wins the rat race! Lord Krishna warns us that such foods ultimately lead to distress, misery and disease. Truer words were never spoken considering the modern pandemic of food related diseases that are sweeping across the globe in gigantic proportions.

Food that has been prepared more than three hours before being eaten is considered the first of the **Tamasica** foods even if it is **Sattvica** or **Rajasica** in its constitution. As food ages, it starts to decompose and such foods are unsuitable for those seeking the higher states of consciousness. What to do in this modern time where most food is preserved, pickled or kept refrigerated for ages before being eaten? **Tamasica** foods also include those that are tasteless, decomposed and putrid. Food consisting of remnants and untouchable things is dear (**bhojanam tamasa priyam**) to those in the mode of darkness (**Tamasica Guna**) as it feeds their lower animal nature that loves to be inert and heavy. This lower nature avoids anything that may wake it out of its sound and deep sleep of animal hibernation where it resides for ages.

TRIGUNAS AND SACRIFICES: Verses 11, 12 and 13 of Chapter 17 detail the relationship between the performance of sacrificial offerings (**Yagna** or **Homa**), and the Gunas. Any offering or sacrifice that is done, can also be classified according to the Gunas based on how it is done, as well as by the reason for which it is done.

Those sacrificial actions and obligations that are performed without desire for reward and in accordance with the scriptural directions and with a sense of **Dharma** (righteousness) become those of the **Sattvica** nature of goodness. They are done for the sake of doing and not for the sake of anything else. As Pujya Swamiji, Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj used to say, "The reward for a job well done is to have done it well!" The **Sivapuraanam** one of the ancient Tamil scriptures tells us that, to even to bow to the Lord we need his blessings in the first place (**avan arulale avan thal vanagi**).

When such sacrifices are performed for some variety of material benefits or for the sake of pride they become those of the nature of Rajas or passion. The ego becomes involved in the action thus coloring the action with other elements of the individual nature rather than being of the Divine nature. These are the majority of sacrificial offerings seen today in most the religious places all over the world where even God is worshipped only for the sake of some benefit or the other! People bargain with God by saying, "I will do this for you if you do that for me!"

When such offerings are done with a total lack of faith and without regard for scriptural directions they become meaningless and when coupled with the lack of distribution of the offerings and without the chanting of **Vedic Mantras** and offering of **Guru Dakshina** they become of the nature of **Tamas** or ignorant darkness that has no intelligence, consciousness nor awareness. At many events such as modern weddings we find people instructing the Pundits to cut short the Pujas even if it descends to **Tamasica** proportions, so that other more important things such as flattering the egos of politicians can be done!

TRIGUNAS AND AUSTERITIES: There are three types of austerities (**Tapah**) mentioned in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. The first is the austerity of the body (**shaairam tapah**) that includes worship of the higher Self and its manifestations with cleanliness, celibacy and nonviolence. The second is austerity of speech (**vaangmayam tapah**) that implies the speaking of words that are truthful, pleasing, beneficial and non-agitating to others along with the regular recitation of

the **Vedas**. The third is austerity is that of the mind (**tapo maanasam**) that includes the inner qualities of satisfaction, simplicity, gravity, self-control, and purification of ones existence.

When this three-fold austerity is done with transcendental faith, without expectation of material benefits and for the sake of the Supreme alone, then it becomes the austerity of the goodness or that of the **Sattvica** nature. This is the type of austerity and **Tapah** that was followed by the ancient Rishis such as the ever youthful Rishi Dhruva who were concerned with the welfare of the entire universe, and were not filled with the ego centric craving for individual satisfaction at the cost of the downfall of everyone else.

When the penance is performed out of pride and for the sake of gaining respect, honour and worship it becomes **Rajasica** and is neither stable nor permanent. This was the type of **Tapah** done by most **Asuras** such as Ravana and Hiranyakashipu who wanted to conquer the world and used **Tapah** as a means to get the powers to help achieve their selfish aim.

When the penance is performed out of foolishness, with self-torture or to destroy or injure others is said to be of **Tamasica** nature. This was also seen in the types of **Tapah** done by the **Asuras** in ancient times and in more recent times in the barbaric sacrifices and sadomasochistic tendencies of modern people.

TRIGUNAS AND CHARITY: We normally think that all forms of charity are good but the Srimad Bhagavad Gita in Verses 20, 21 and 22 of Chapter 17, enlightens us on the three fold nature of charity that helps us become more aware and conscious of our actions.

In Verse 20, it is said that the charity (**daanam**) given out of duty and without expectation of return at the proper time and place, to a worthy person is that of the nature of Sattwas. It is important to realize that the time (**kale**), place (**desha**) and person (**paatre**) are important components to determine the nature of charity. Giving charity to an unworthy person, at the wrong time, or in the wrong way make the charity fall from its higher **Sattvica** nature to become one of a much lower nature.

Verse 21 tells us that when the charity is performed with expectation of some return or with a desire of the furtive results or in a grudging mood it is of the **Rajasica** nature. In modern times this type of charity is rampant as we often don't consider these aspects of time, place and person and just give charity for the sake of name, fame and other such egocentric considerations.

Charity performed at the wrong time (**akala**), in the wrong place (**adesha**), for the benefit of unworthy persons (**apaatre**), without proper attention and respect becomes that of the nature of **Tamasica** darkness. No good comes of such charity despite any claims to the contrary. This is made very clear in verse 22.

An understanding of this relationship between the **Gunas** and charity gives us a clue to a possible answer why so many of the social welfare projects and socialistic ideas have never been able to succeed despite the best of intensions. Until and unless we consider the multiple aspects of time, place and worthiness of persons involved in the act of charity, our best intensions are doomed but to fail.

IN CONCLUSION: When we deeply consider the Srimad Bhagavad Gita's classification of worship, food, sacrifices, austerities and charity we can conclude that there are some key elements that determine the **Trigunic** nature of not only these five but also the entire spectrum of actions and the materialistic world.

To be classified as being **Sattvica** in nature, our actions must be:

- done for the sake of common good,
- done without desire for the rewards or benefits arising from the action,
- done in accordance with scriptural rules,
- done with piety and devotion to the Divine,
- done with consideration for the right time and right place for the action, and

- done with due consideration of worthiness of the persons benefiting from such an action.

Our actions will be of the **Rajasica** nature if they are:

- done for the sake of the ego centric considerations,
- done for the mere self serving attainment of name and fame,
- done for material gains,
- done for self preservation,
- done grudgingly because we have no choice, and
- done without discriminatory intellect though they are done with great willpower and passionate action.
-

Such actions will be **Tamasica** in nature if they are:

- done in ignorance,
- done without consciousness,
- done without awareness,
- done without devotion or piety,
- done without considering the time and place,
- done without considering the worthiness of the persons being benefited, and
- done with the evil intent of destruction

AVOIDANCE OF RIGHT ACTION: SINS OF OMISSION. An additional element to all of this can also be the avoidance of action, called in Christian parlance as the "sin of omission." Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj used to teach us that the failure to do what should be done also has disastrous consequences. A **Sattvica** failure to act may be the avoidance of a necessary action because one does not wish to offend the other (such as scolding an errant child). The **Rajasica** avoidance of action would be to not do something because one feels the reward is not great enough, or out of fear. **Tamasica** avoidance of action would be that due to sheer laziness, dullness or stubborn ignorant refusal to do what should be done.

Swadhyaya, the fourth **Niyama** of **Adhikara Yoga** (the tenfold moral and ethical path of the **Yama- Niyama**), is the key that opens up our understanding of the **Trigunic** nature of our day-to-day actions. It is only when we start to look inward that we can begin to understand the nature of our external actions. With clear-cut intellectual discrimination (**viveka**) between the false (**asat**) and the true (**sat**) we start to understand our actions and their repercussion better. As we begin to cultivate dispassionate detachment (**vairagya**) in the performance of our day-to-day actions, the larger picture begins to appear in our mind's eye and our actions start to take on a more **Sattvica** nature. This signifies yet another major step on the accelerated path of evolution facilitated by the art and science of Yoga.