

## Gita Jayanti

- Prof. D. V. Potdar

Gita Jayanti is being celebrated today.

Indian religious classics contain ideas and thoughts which have an all-time relevance.

I have read and reread the Gita, and in the light of the above statement, wish to examine some aspects of it.

On the Kurukshetra, the battle is about to begin, but Arjuna has cold feet suddenly and refuses to fight. Krishna has to argue, convince and spur Arjuna to action. So he says, "All souls are immortal, there is no fear of anybody killing or being killed. Human life has certain goals the highest being salvation. Three paths lead to it - the path of knowledge, the path of devotion and the path of action. You have to choose the one suitable for you and pursue it with a steadfast mind and firm faith. All the while you have to do the duty laid down by the Supreme being - He orders because he is the creator, preserver and destroyer. We have to obey Him. This course chosen by you has to be followed for a long long time (many lives) because spiritual evolution is a slow process like the biological. At the end, the Lord willing, you will have a glimpse of Him - that is tantamount to salvation".

This advice given by Krishna will be readily followed by people who believe in spiritual values and achievement - shreyas. But what about those who have no such faith, but care for material values and success - preyas - like a lot of people in our times? I think for them also directly or indirectly it could be a guide, especially the paths pointed out by Krishna leading to the goal.

Achievement and success in our world depend upon a person's mental and physical reactions to his surroundings - social and physical - in other words his behavior. This behavior is, we find controlled by the three H's - the head, the heart and the hands.

In all fields of life, we see intelligent persons invent, discover, plan and organize for the welfare of the people (Lokasangraha). They are the leaders, (not necessarily political) who bring prosperity and a good name not only to themselves, but to their nation when they succeed. These

are the intellectuals who follow the path of knowledge to achieve their ends and are the elite in any society.

Now there is another class of individuals who look around and are moved by the sufferings of the masses. Their hearts go out to them and they devise plans and means to serve them believing that such service is of the highest kind. As Shri Sathya Sai Baba says, "No divinity greater than humanity and no religion greater than service". These people are doing God's work and the amount of good that they do to humanity is great. Being led by their hearts, they may be said to follow the path of devotion. In this connection, the names that readily come to our mind are those of Florence Nightingale and Mother Theresa, shining like stars in the firmament.

If the people mentioned above have schemes and plans, who is to carry them out? What is the use if they simply remain on paper as blue prints? So we require an army of selfless workers who realize the dreams of these people. They are the Karma Yogins that follow the path of action for the betterment of their fellow beings. They are the real benefactors of the world in a sense. Their importance can be realized, if we take a concrete example. Imagine what would have happened if the people of India had not backed up Gandhiji en masse, when he told the British, "Quit India".

So we see Krishna's advice holds good for our age also in a new light - for achieving preyas. And preyas is not to be looked down upon says the Gita since those who are after it are temporarily derailed but are sure to come back on the line after some time and reach their goals safely (Chapter VI, verse 41). Because shreyas is constant and preyas is variable!

Wealth may be also ill-gotten by persons and for such the punishment is hell says Krishna. It resembles the fate of our crime lords, who have to face bullets of their rivals or long term imprisonments.

Another statement I wish to examine is Krishna's announcement regarding the creation of the four varnas (Chapter IV, verse 13). He is very cautious while doing so - the classification is strictly based on the mental-physical make-up of a person and the type of work he can do. But much controversy has followed the declaration

because of the divides it has created in society - the privileged classes and the downtrodden. The former wield power and are prosperous whereas the latter are poor and helpless. This of course is the picture we get in India, but we have to see the reasons behind the situation and ask whether there are any such parallels in other societies. Let us look at Europe, which has been in the center of the stage since the renaissance. There also we find big gaps in society because of monarchy (ruler-ruled), aristocracy (rich-poor), feudalism (lords-peasants), race (superior-inferior) and the privileged lording it over the masses under some pretext or other. When the conditions became intolerable, there were bloody revolutions, but the new "cracies" and "isms" that came into force also failed to deliver the goods in the long run.

In India, half a century after Independence, things are no better. The common man there, with his cynical exclamation - whether it's Rama's rule or Ravana's we have to go on grinding corn - may very well be the spokesman for all the disillusioned masses of the world.

So what we see is a worldwide phenomenon, (exploitation under some pretext or other) and a cool and logical analysis of the problem is necessary. The facts are: the quality of the human institutions (in a broad sense) depends upon the human beings that run them. If their character deteriorates, the institutions they manage are bound to suffer. A close observation reveals that human cussedness is at the root, the core of which are selfishness and egoism.

Has the Gita any remedy for these ills? I think it has - it advocates nishkama karma, that is action without expecting returns. In modern parlance, trade but do not grab all the profits yourself. Advice which appears to be impractical as the world goes! But just look around and you will not find it so. Many millionaires in India - honoring Gandhiji's trusteeship theory - and in the USA - inspired by benevolence - set up foundations. The funds released by them are utilized for the welfare of the people all over the world. What a noble idea! If all of us were to tread this path just a little, I think the world would definitely be a better place.

Dark clouds are gathering over our heads but wait, there is a bright ray of light flashing from somewhere. Oh! it is

from the Bhagavad Gita and there is a message. It reads - this world is a boxing ring. Three contestants - Satwa, Rajas and Tamas - are in it (unlike the usual two!). And each one by turn knocks down the others (Chapter XIV, verse 10). Now perhaps Satwa has been floored. Let us hope, the time-out will soon be over, and Satwa will stand up and knock down the other two!

Aum Tat Sat.

*Note: This write-up was published on 12/11/2005 on the occasion of Gita Jayanti.*