

REBIRTH (June 1983)

The Hindu philosophy is not concerned only with the present life of a person. It believes in series of lives for every 'atma' . Naturally therefore there is a belief in rebirth in that philosophy. Many things have been connected with the past and present lives of a person. It is believed that the status of our present life depends on the merits and demerits of our past life and that those who do good and meritorious things in their past life get happiness in their present life and vice versa.

As the Bhagawadgeeta is the essence of all the philosophy of the Upanishads, we find therein good many references to rebirth and the effect of merit and demerit of the past life on the present one. The mention of the cycle of birth and death is clearly stated thus in the Geeta

One who is born is sure to die & one who dies is bound to be reborn.

Adya Shankaracarya has also referred to this belief in his as follows :

(Birth comes again, death again follows and you again lie down in the womb of your mother).

Though this cycle of birth and death is referred to in the Hindu philosophy as above, we have also to note how the Hindu philosophers looked at death. The ancient philosophers considered the human body to comprise of five basic elements which pervade the whole universe. They are:- earth water, luster, wind and vacuum. Now the death .is described as : ***meaning that the body has disintegrated and that all the elements which had joined together to form the body have merged into the original elements and have become one with them.*** Death has been described as a so very simple happening In one shloka of the Bbagawadgeeta it has been described that death is a natural consequence and that it follows a series of events, which start from the birth as follows :-

(Just as there are different stages in the human life like the childhood, youth and old age, similarly the next one is death. A philosopher does not therefore worry about it).

The Hindu philosophy has a distinct conception of the 'atma*', who enters a body and leaves it when the body becomes useless for housing him. After describing the immortality of the soul at length therefore Lord Krishna describes death as follows :-

(Just as a man throws away his old and worn out garments and wears new ones, similarly the soul leaves the worn out bodies and enters into new ones.).

When death is considered so simple as the changing of old clothes and wearing new ones, then how will there be any sorrow for inevitable death or how will there be any fear for death ?

Life after death also has been described in the ninth canto of the Bhagawadgita. The traditional belief in this respect is of the heaven and hell. The persons who are wicked and do bad deeds during their present life are supposed to go to hell for undergoing punishment for their bad deeds, while the meritorious persons go to heaven for the good deeds done by them in this life. The future of the meritorious persons has been described as follows :-

(Those, who observe the functions described in the three vedas viz. Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda and who are free from sins, worship me by means of sacrifice; and expect to go to heaven by virtue of their merit. They go (after death) to the city of gods and enjoy many pleasures, which are commonly enjoyed only by the Gods). These pleasures are not enjoyed permanently by the meritorious persons referred to in the above shloka. In the very next shloka see what the Lord has to say:-

(After enjoying the pleasures of the wide heaven, those persons are reborn on the earth when their merit gets over. The people who thus observe the functions described in the three Vedas. go on travelling from heaven to earth)

Lord Shreekrishna has thus described the concepts of the Hindu people about merit, demerit and about the heaven and earth and the fruits that are obtained by the respective people after their death. It will be seen that the idea of rebirth has been clearly described in the different shlokas quoted above, which is the usual trend of the Hindu philosophy.

Having thus accepted the theory of rebirth, we become inquisitive to know whether we get some indication in the Bhagawadgita about the next birth. Can we say something about the next birth of a person after knowing his way of behaviour in this birth? Yes, we get some clue in this respect in the sixth canto of the Bhagawadgita where **Abhyasayoga** has been described by the Lord to his disciple Arjuna. In the beginning of this canto, the Lord has defined yoga and after that he has described how a person should sit and meditate so as to become a yogi. Though Lord Shreekrishna was a great scholar, his student Arjuna also was a perfect match. He was constantly expressing his doubts in many ways and the Lord was coolly replying to his doubts without getting vexed. These questions and answers are also much helpful to the readers of this philosophical book.

Thus after describing yoga and the way in which a yogi should meditate, the Lord has enumerated the different benefits that a yogi gets by means of meditation. Arjuna however noted in the speech of the Lord that the concentration of the mind was very essential for meditation. He however doubted how far concentration would be possible in view of the fickleness of the mind, which is its chief trend. He therefore raises the following doubt (**O Lord Krishna, the mind is ever changing, powerful, wayward and difficult to mould. I, therefore, feel that controlling it must be very difficult like having control over the wind**).

To this doubt of his disciple Lord Shreekrishna gave a reply that it is no doubt difficult to control the mind which is quite fickle; but He added that by practice you can get control over your mind and therefore practice is essential.

After getting the above reply from the Lord, Arjuna raised a further doubt in this respect as follows :-

(O Krishna, if after having full faith in Yoga a person is not able to achieve the Siddhi i. e. complete fruit of yoga due to lack of proper effort on his side, then what happens to such a person ? What end is met by such a person ?.)

As good deeds are never wasted, the Lord gives in the following shloka a straight reply to the above doubt that a person doing good deeds never comes to a bad state.

(Oh Arjuna, such a person, who has done good deeds will never perish neither in this world nor in the next. No one, who does good deeds, ever comes to a bad state).

Lord Krishna knew the way of thinking of his disciple Arjuna. He himself therefore thought that such a general reply will not satisfy his disciple. He therefore definitely tells in the very next shloka what happens to such people in their following birth.

(Such a person, who is distracted from yoga, gets for a long time all the pleasures which all meritorious people get and is reborn in a family which is pious and rich)

The above shloka though meant for clearing the doubts of Arjuna, does not only clear his doubts. It helps we common people also to solve so many riddles that we commonly meet in our life. Whenever we come across some prodigies, we often get baffled and we do not know how to account for the high degree of intelligence noticed in some people and also their wonderful achievements in their very early age. The reply of this doubt is given above by Lord Krishna that the achievements of these persons in their past life are carried by them in the next life and therefore they have not to start every thing from ABC. Their past achievements help them to come to a certain level from which they have to go ahead and make further progress, which other persons of the same age are not at all able to reach. In order to verify the truth of the above statement, we may

just cast a glance at the biographies of three prominent personalities *viz.* Adya Shankaracharya, Dnyaneshwar and Shri Sai Baba, At a very early age when others start learning, all the above three personalities appear to have made a very remarkable progress and achieved much knowledge by which they stood head and shoulders above their contemporaries. It is not necessary to refer to the incidents in the life of these persons as they are commonly known by the devotees in the spiritual line; but if we remember them mentally we shall find a solution for their high achievements in a very early age and also for their wonderful knowledge in different branches. It is because of their penance, which they have done in their past life. We Sai devotees should therefore know that the achievements of Shri Sai Baba in the practices of yoga were therefore not achieved by Him all at once after coming to Shirdi; but there was a good penance of the previous birth behind His achievements with which he was born. Let us therefore try to understand all the achievements of Shri Sai Baba and as true Sai devotees let us all try to master them as far as possible because they are bound to do our good not only in this life but also in the next as told by Shri Sai Baba Himself.