

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 14: Guṇatraya-Vibhāga-Yoga

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Understanding the Three Guṇas of Prakṛti and How They Bind the Imperishable Self

The **14th chapter** of the Bhagavad Gītā is known as **Guṇa-Traya-Vibhāga Yoga, the Yoga of the Division of the Three Guṇas.**

In keeping with the beautiful traditions of the Geeta Pariwar, the session opened with the lighting of the sacred dīpam at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān. The soft glow of the flame, rising upward, seemed to mirror the devotion of every heart present, quietly dispelling darkness and filling the atmosphere with a divine radiance.

Before entering the study of this profound chapter, the gathering humbly bowed to the lineage of teachers with the timeless prayer:

सदाशिव समारम्भाम् शंकराचार्य मध्यमाम्।
अस्मदाचार्य पर्यन्ताम् वन्दे गुरु परम्पराम्॥

Beginning with Lord Sadāśiva, carried forward through Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, and continuing through our own revered teachers, I bow in gratitude to the entire Guru-paramparā.

With this spirit of reverence, the discourse unfolded, inviting each listener not just to understand, but to experience the living message of the Gītā.

By the grace of Bhagavān, through the blessings of so many saints, and by the accumulated puṇya-karma performed in this life and in previous lives, this rare opportunity has been received to learn the Bhagavad Gītā, to teach the Bhagavad Gītā, and to spread its divine knowledge. Having been given this sacred opportunity, one should never abandon this path at any cost.

On the spiritual journey, there often arise situations that test one's resolve. At times, the mind says, "I cannot continue. I am too occupied." Sometimes one even thinks, "This is not the right age to study the Gītā." But there is no age for learning the Bhagavad Gītā; whenever one begins, that is the right time.

In the Upaniṣads and in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, Bhagavatpāda Śaṅkarācārya has declared,

यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥

Bhagavān Himself chooses whom to bring on this path. Thus, it is not that one has chosen the path, but rather Bhagavān has chosen that person for the path.

When Bhagavān guides a seeker, it may seem at some point as if He says, “*Now you are mature enough to walk on your own.*” But the truth is, the devotee can never walk alone. The devotee prays, “*Bhagavān, even if You release Your hand, I will still hold on to it. I wish to walk this path only with Your guidance.*” And when such a prayer is offered daily, Bhagavān listens, because it is born of love, for the Gītā and for Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.

In the Gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has said, Gītā me hṛdayam Pārtha “O Arjuna, the Gītā is My very heart.” Therefore, love for the Bhagavad Gītā is direct love for Bhagavān. He recognises such a devotee as His own. Just as in a class of many students, when the teacher’s favourite pupil speaks, the teacher first listens attentively, so too, amidst the prayers of countless beings, Bhagavān gives special attention to the prayers of His dear devotees, those who love His Gītā and walk on this path.

If one wishes to be in that “favoured list” of Bhagavān, one must continue to study the Gītā, live by its teachings, and share its wisdom with others. Having stepped onto this sacred path, the resolve should be: “I will never leave it.”

At the beginning, no one knows how far they will go or how much they will be able to study. Perhaps one began with the 12th chapter, then completed the 15th, then the 16th, and now is on the 14th. Step by step, the journey continues, Level One, Level Two, Level Three, and Level Four, like a catur-dhāma yātrā, until all 18 chapters are complete.

When one reaches the stage of reciting the entire Bhagavad Gītā fluently and flawlessly, there will arise a firm confidence: “*Yes, I have learnt the Bhagavad Gītā.*” And then begins the deeper journey of understanding, contemplation, and living its eternal message.

The 14th chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā is called ***Guṇatraya Vibhāga Yoga, the Yoga of the Division of the Three Guṇas.***

The Bhagavad Gītā consists of 18 chapters, and these are often grouped into three ṣaṭkas. The word ṣaṭka means “a group of six.” Thus, the 18 chapters can be understood as three groups of six each. ***The first ṣaṭka (Chapters 1-6) primarily emphasises Karma, the second ṣaṭka (Chapters 7-12) emphasises Jñāna, and the third ṣaṭka (Chapters 13-18) emphasises Bhakti.***

From the 13th chapter, the Bhakti-ṣaṭka begins. At the end of the 13th chapter, certain important questions naturally arise: “*What truly is Jñāna? What is knowledge?*” Since the section dealing with Jñāna (Jñāna-kāṇḍa) has begun, it is necessary to define what Jñāna itself is. Just as, before beginning the study of Chemistry, one must know what Chemistry means, or before beginning Physics, one must know what Physics is, in the same way, before delving into Jñāna-kāṇḍa, the nature of Jñāna must be clarified.

To answer this question, Bhagavān begins the 14th chapter and introduces ***Guṇatraya Vibhāga Yoga.***

The term guṇa has already appeared earlier in the Gītā. For instance, in Chapter 15, we hear ***guṇa-***

pravṛddhā viśaya-pravālāḥ, indicating that all the branches of worldly engagement are nourished by the three guṇas. Whatever action takes place in this world is always influenced by one or more of the guṇas: sattva-guṇa, rajo-guṇa, or tamo-guṇa.

In another verse, it is said: **guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate**, the wise recognise that “the guṇas are simply interacting with the guṇas” and do not get attached. This vision changes one’s perspective on life. For example, when someone is angry or shouting, it can be seen as the play of rajo-guṇa. When someone is worshipping sincerely, that is the expression of sattva-guṇa. When someone is lazy or sleeping excessively, that is the influence of tamo-guṇa. Thus, whatever is happening in this world is the result of the guṇas at work.

A person established in this understanding develops **sākṣī-bhāva**, the attitude of the witness. The individual self, the jīva, is by nature a witness. Actions take place according to the guṇas, but the self merely observes.

Why does one have certain guṇas dominating at a given time? This is because of past karma. The karmas performed in previous lives form an account, and from that account arises the predominance of certain guṇas in the present life. These guṇas in turn influence one’s actions and experiences. Thus, recognising this truth, one can see the world more clearly, without unnecessary entanglement.

It is for this reason that Bhagavān considered it necessary to explain the nature of the three guṇas in detail. By understanding **sattva, rajas, and tamas**, their characteristics and how they operate, life becomes clearer, like a crystal. Though this may first appear as theory, gradually it becomes practical: one begins to observe, in daily life, how sattva, rajas, and tamas express themselves in oneself and in others.

Therefore, Chapter 14, Guṇatrāya Vibhāga Yoga, is devoted to describing the three guṇas, distinguishing their qualities, and showing how they influence life and spiritual progress.

Let us now enter into this profound teaching: **Guṇatrāya Vibhāga Yoga, the division and explanation of the three guṇas.**

14.1

śrībhagavān uvāca param(m) bhūyaḥ(ph) praVākṣyāmi, jñānānāṃ(ñ) jñānamuttamam, yajñātvā munayaḥ(s) sarve, parāṃ(m) siddhimito gatāḥ. 14.1

Śrī Bhagavān said :I shall expound once more the supreme knowledge, the best of all knowledge, acquiring which all sages have attained highest perfection, being liberated from this mundane existence.

Bhagavān said, “*Again, I shall declare to you the supreme knowledge, the highest of all knowledges, knowing which, all the sages attained the supreme perfection.*”

Here, Bhagavān is setting the stage for the next teaching. He says **param bhūyaḥ pravakṣyāmi**, “again I will speak to you the supreme knowledge.” The word **bhūyaḥ** means “again.” This indicates that although Bhagavān has already explained many forms of knowledge, He is now about to speak once more, but this time of something param, supreme, ultimate, the highest among all. He emphasises that this is jñānam uttamam, the supreme wisdom. Thus, Bhagavān is making a clear prelude: “*Among all knowledges, I am going to tell you the highest. And by knowing this knowledge,*

all the sages, the great munis, attained perfection.”

The phrase yat **jñātvā munayaḥ sarve param siddhim itāḥ** means that all the sages who attained perfection did so only through this very knowledge. It is not that they began elsewhere or followed another path separately; rather, they started from this knowledge itself and by it reached supreme perfection. Bhagavān is stressing that this knowledge is the direct gateway to param siddhi, the highest state of realisation.

“उपक्रमोपसंहारौ अभ्यासोऽपूर्वता फलम् ।
अर्थवादोपपत्ती च लिङ्गं तात्पर्यनिर्णये ॥”

In śāstra, whenever one wants to understand the essence (tātparya) of a text, there are certain guiding principles called the **ṣaṭ tātparya liṅgāni**, the six indicators of the central intent of a scripture. These are:

- **Upakrama** - how the teaching begins.
- **Upasaṃhāra** - how the teaching concludes.
- **Abhyāsa** - repetition of ideas again and again.
- **Apūrvatā** - what is unique in this scripture that is not found elsewhere.
- **Phalam** - the result or fruit promised by following it.
- **Arthavāda and Upapatti** - explanatory praise or reasoning used to establish the point.

Through these six, one discerns the **tātparya**, the essential purport of the scripture.

For the Bhagavad Gītā, the upakrama is the first verse: **dharma-kṣetre kuru-kṣetre**... It begins with a question asked by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, setting the stage in the field of dharma. The upasaṃhāra, the conclusion, is in 18.78: yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanur-dharaḥ tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama, “Where there is Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa, the master of yoga, and where there is Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, there are certainly fortune, victory, prosperity, and righteousness.” Thus, the Gītā begins and ends with dharma, framed by these two verses.

The second indicator, **abhyāsa**, repetition, appears throughout. The Gītā constantly revisits its central themes: devotion, surrender, detachment, and the unity of knowledge and action.

The third, **apūrvatā**, uniqueness, is also found here. The Gītā stands apart from other śāstras because it unites Vedānta, Yoga, and Dharma-śāstra in one dialogue.

The fourth, **phalam**, fruit, is clearly stated: by following the teachings of the Gītā, one attains Bhagavān, liberation, and the highest perfection.

The fifth, **arthavāda**, praise, is an important tool. Without it, a text might appear dry, monotonous, and uninspiring. **Arthavāda** gives encouragement. It praises the knowledge or practice that the scripture wishes to emphasise, and sometimes it also includes **nindā**, criticism or warning, against what should be avoided. In the opening verse of the 14th chapter itself, Bhagavān employs arthavāda. He praises this supreme knowledge by declaring that all sages attained perfection through it, thus inspiring the listener to pay full attention.

This is why Bhagavan says: Do not listen to this casually, as if while eating or while half-asleep. This knowledge is supreme, and it requires careful, devoted listening. It is by this knowledge alone that all great sages have reached the highest state.

Thus, the first verse of the 14th chapter is both an upakrama (an opening) and an arthavāda (a

praise), serving as the introduction to the supreme teaching that Bhagavan is about to give.

14.2

idaṃ(ñ) jñānamupāśritya, mama sādharmaṃyāgātāḥ, sarge'pi nopajāyante, pralaye na vyathanti ca. 14.2

Those who, by practising this knowledge have entered into My being, are not born again at the cosmic dawn, nor feel disturbed even during the cosmic dissolution (Pralaya).

In this verse, Bhagavān continues the thought introduced in the first śloka. He now uses the expression **idaṃ jñānam**, “this knowledge.” The demonstrative idam refers back to the very knowledge that He had just spoken about in the opening verse: the supreme knowledge (**jñānam uttamam**) by which all sages attained perfection. Thus, Bhagavān is not shifting the subject but reinforcing continuity, “*this same knowledge, if one takes refuge in it...*”

The phrase idam **jñānam upāśritya** means “taking refuge in this knowledge,” or more literally, “resorting to, relying upon this wisdom.” To take āśraya (support or refuge) in this knowledge means to let it become the very foundation of one’s life and practice. Such a person does not treat the Gītā’s teaching as abstract philosophy but embraces it as the guiding principle for thought, word, and deed.

Bhagavān then says **mama sādharmaṃyāgātāḥ**, “they attain My state, My likeness.” Here, sādharmaṃya does not mean that the jīva becomes identical in essence to Bhagavān, but rather that the jīva partakes in a likeness, a harmony with Bhagavān’s state. This means freedom from bondage, freedom from repeated birth and death, and a state of being ever-conscious of Him.

In devotional terms, this is experienced as living with a continuous awareness of Bhagavān, thinking of Him in all activities: “*wherever I go, that becomes His parikramā; whatever I do, that becomes His worship; even when I rest, it is in His remembrance.*” This is the bhāva of surrender, where the devotee feels that every action, small or great, is offered unto Bhagavān. Hence, after completing any act, one naturally concludes with a sentiment such as “**om śrī-kṛṣṇārpaṇam astu**”, “let this be dedicated unto Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

Such persons, says Bhagavān, become united with Him in sādharmaṃya. Their minds are absorbed in Him, their lives are centered on Him, and they feel His presence constantly.

The result is described in the second half of the verse: **sarge 'pi nopajāyante pralaye na vyathanti ca**. “At the time of creation, they are not born; at the time of dissolution, they do not perish.”

Here, sarga refers to cosmic creation, when beings take form again and again. Those who have taken refuge in this supreme knowledge do not re-enter the cycle of birth. Likewise, pralaya refers to the cosmic dissolution when the universe is withdrawn. Ordinary beings suffer the destruction of their gross forms, and their subtle forms remain in suspension until the next creation. But those who have attained sādharmaṃya with Bhagavān are not disturbed by pralaya.

This means that such realised beings transcend both ends of **saṃsāra**; neither are they generated at the beginning of creation, nor are they destroyed at the end. Having realised the eternal nature of the ātman and its harmony with Bhagavān, they are beyond creation and dissolution. They have awakened to their true svarūpa, which is eternal, uncreated, and indestructible.

Thus, verse 2 emphasises the fruit of taking refuge in this knowledge: freedom from saṁsāra and sharing in the eternal state of Bhagavān.

14.3

mama yonirmahadbrahma, tasmingarbhamaṁ(n) dadhāmyaham, sambhavaḥ(s) sarvabhūtānāṁ(n), tato bhavati bhārata. 14.3

My primordial Nature, known as the great Brahma, is the womb of all creatures; in that womb I place the seed of all life. The creation of all beings follows from that union of Matter and Spirit, O Arjuna.

Here Bhagavān begins to describe the mystery of creation. He uses the expression mama yoniḥ, “My womb”, which refers to mahad brahma, the great principle, Prakṛti or primordial nature. This Prakṛti, made of the three guṇas, is the material womb of the universe. Bhagavān says: tasmin garbhamaṁ dadhāmy aham, “Into that womb, I deposit the seed.” The seed here represents the conscious principle, the divine potency of the Puruṣa, the supreme Self.

Thus, Prakṛti is the mother, and Bhagavān, as the supreme Puruṣa, is the father. From their union, all beings come forth: **sambhavaḥ sarva-bhūtānām**, “from that union arises the birth of all creatures.” This metaphor of seed and womb conveys that the inert Prakṛti alone cannot give rise to creation; it requires the enlivening presence of the conscious Self. The seed is not a physical substance, but the divine impulse of Bhagavān that activates Prakṛti’s potentiality.

Therefore, Bhagavān clarifies that it is by His will and presence that the universe takes shape. The beings of all kinds, humans, animals, plants, and even the cosmic deities, arise through this interplay of Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

The Upaniṣadic Context

Bhagavān here states the principle briefly, in sūtra-like fashion. The Upaniṣads and Vedas elaborate the sequence of sṛṣṭi-kramathe order of cosmic creation. For example:

तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति तत्तेजोऽसृजत तत्तेज ऐक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति तदपोऽसृजत ।
तस्माद्यत्र क्वच शोचति स्वेदते वा पुरुषस्तेजस एव तदध्यापो जायन्ते ॥ ६.२.३ ॥

- **tad aikṣata bahu syām prajāyeya** — “That One thought, ‘May I become many, may I be born.’” (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.3)
- **ekāki na ramate dvitīyaṁ icchat** — “Being alone, He did not delight; He desired a second.”

The beginning of creation was thus a movement from unity into multiplicity, born out of the will of the One to manifest as many, to enter into relationship, and to play as the universe.

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः । आकाशाद्वायुः ।
वायोरग्निः । अग्नेरापः । अद्भ्यः पृथिवी ।
पृथिव्या ओषधयः । ओषधीभ्योन्नम् । अन्नात्पुरुषः ।
स वा एष पुरुषोऽन्नरसमयः । तस्येदमेव शिरः ।
अयं दक्षिणः पक्षः । अयमुत्तरः पक्षः ।
अयमात्मा । इदं पुच्छं प्रतिष्ठा ।
तदप्येष श्लोको भवति ॥ १ ॥

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.1) explains the sequence:

- **ātmanah ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ** — from the Self, space (ākāśa) came forth.

- **ākāśāt vāyuh** — from space, air.
- **vayor agniḥ** — from air, fire.
- **agner āpaḥ** — from fire, water.
- **adbhyah pṛthivī** — from water, earth.

Thus, the five great elements (pañca-mahābhūta) arise.

The Gradation of the Elements

- **Ākāśa (space, ether):** The first and subtlest, closest to the ātman. It is not seen or touched, yet all-pervading. For this reason, the Upaniṣads often use ākāśa as a metaphor for the Self. Even where there is “nothing”, no air, no form, still the Self is present.
- **Vāyu (air):** From ākāśa arises vāyu. Unlike space, vāyu can be felt, like the pressure against our skin or the movement of a fan.
- **Agni (fire):** From vāyu comes fire. Fire is more tangible; it burns, it gives pain or warmth. It is perceived directly.
- **Āpaḥ (water):** From fire arises water, which is grosser still, fluid, visible, and life-sustaining.
- **Pṛthivī (earth):** Finally, from water arises earth, the grossest, most solid element, the ground of our tangible existence.

Thus, the order of creation is a movement from subtle to gross, from the unmanifest to the manifest.

Bhagavān’s Role as Father, Prakṛti as Mother

By saying *mama yoniḥ mahad brahma*, Bhagavān establishes that Prakṛti is His womb. It is vast, subtle, and beyond measure, the storehouse of all latent potential. Yet without His seed, *garbhaṁ dadhāmi aham*, there can be no manifestation. The seed is the spark of consciousness, the enlivening principle of Paramātman.

From this divine union, ***sarva-bhūtānām sambhavaḥ***, the birth of all beings, takes place. Thus, O Bhārata (Arjuna), all creatures, all bhūtas, arise from this same source.

In the next verses, Bhagavān will describe how every individual being is born, sustained, and shaped by this interplay of Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

14.4

**sarvayoniṣu kaunteya, mūrtayaḥ(s) sambhavanti yāḥ,
tāsām(m) brahma mahadyoniḥ(r), ahaṁ(m) bijapradāḥ(ph) pitā. 14.4**

Of all embodied beings that appear in all the species of various kinds, Arjuna, Prakṛti or Nature is the conceiving Mother, while I am the seed giving Father.

Here, Bhagavān expands the principle of creation further. He addresses Arjuna as Kaunteya, “*O son of Kuntī.*” This reminds us of Arjuna’s maternal lineage, just as another of his names, Pārtha, means “*son of Pṛthā,*” another name of Kuntī.

Bhagavān declares: ***sarva-yoniṣu mūrtayaḥ sambhavanti yāḥ***, “In all wombs, whatever embodied forms come into being.” The word *mūrti* means a concrete form, a manifestation with a name and shape. *Sambhavanti* means “are produced, come forth.” Thus, all varieties of beings, humans, animals, birds, insects, celestial beings, and even subtle life forms, arise in different wombs.

He then clarifies: *tāsām brahma mahad yonir*, “For all of them, the great Brahmān (Prakṛti) is the womb.” The *mahad brahma*, primordial nature, constituted of the three guṇas, is the universal mother

in which all seeds are sown. Ahaṁ bīja-pradaḥ pitā, “I am the seed-giving father.” Bhagavān places the seed of life, the principle of consciousness, into that womb.

The imagery is clear: just as in human birth, the mother provides the womb and the father contributes the seed, so too in the cosmic sense, Prakṛti is the mother and Bhagavān is the father.

Role of Bhagavān as the Father

Bhagavān emphasises His role as **bīja-pradaḥ pitā**, the seed-giving father. He is not just one among many fathers but the universal Father, the source of all life. The actual formation of bodies, senses, and qualities is carried out by Prakṛti, the mother. Yet without the conscious spark of Bhagavān, there would be no life, no experience, no individuality.

This is not a one-time act but a continuous process. At every moment, all wombs, whether human, animal, or celestial, are sustained by the same principle: Prakṛti as womb, and Bhagavān as seed-giver.

This idea appears again in Chapter 9 (9.17):

pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ

“I am the father of this world, the mother, the sustainer, and the grandsire.”

Thus, Bhagavān is not limited to one role. Depending on the context, He is the father, mother, sustainer, origin, and end of all beings. Here, however, He highlights His role as Father to establish the principle of creation in the clearest terms.

Knowledge of Creation as Vidyā

In verses 14.1-4, Bhagavān has praised jñāna (knowledge) as the highest purifier, the supreme wisdom. He then explains what kind of knowledge this is: the knowledge of creation (sṛṣṭi-vidyā), of how beings come into this world. By understanding that all forms are born of Prakṛti as mother and of Bhagavān as father, one gains detachment.

Why? Because one realises:

- “I, as the ātman, am not truly produced or destroyed.”
- “This body, mind, and guṇa-structure arise from Prakṛti.”
- “Life itself flows from Bhagavān, the supreme source.”

Such insight loosens attachment to worldly identity and possessions. One begins to see the world as a play of Prakṛti and the will of Bhagavān, not as one’s own absolute possession or achievement.

Transition Toward the Guṇas

Having explained the origin of beings through the five great elements (pañca-mahābhūta) and the principle of **Puruṣa-Prakṛti**, Bhagavān now turns to explain the three guṇas, sattva, rajas, and tamas.

If the five elements describe the material building blocks of creation, the three guṇas describe the energies that sustain and nourish it. The elements are like the plant; the guṇas are like the nourishment (sunlight, water, soil quality) that determine how that plant will grow.

Therefore, in the next verses, beginning from 14.5, Bhagavān will introduce the guṇas and their binding power, showing how they influence the jīva’s experience and destiny.

sattvaṃ(m) rajastama iti, guṇāḥ(ph) prakṛtisambhavāḥ, nibadhnanti mahābāho, dehe dehinamavyayam. 14.5

Sattva, Rajas and Tamas-these three Guṇas born of Nature tie down the imperishable soul to the body, Arjuna.

Here, Bhagavān begins to describe the nature of the three guṇas.

He says: **sattvaṃ rajas tama iti**, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, **guṇāḥ prakṛti-sambhavāḥ**; these qualities arise from Prakṛti itself. Just as the five great elements (**pañca-mahābhūta**) form the material basis of creation, the three guṇas form its dynamical qualities, the modes of energy through which Prakṛti operates.

Bhagavān addresses Arjuna as **mahā-bāho**, “O mighty-armed one.” This epithet highlights Arjuna’s strength and valour, reminding him that just as he is mighty in physical battle, so too must he become mighty in the inner battle against the binding power of the guṇas.

Bhagavān then explains their function: **nibadhnanti dehe dehinam avyayam**, “They bind the imperishable self (ātman), dwelling in the body, to that very body.”

- **Deha** means “body,” the perishable material form.
- **Dehin** means “the embodied one,” the self which resides in the body.
- **Avyayam** means “imperishable,” reminding us that the ātman cannot be destroyed, **na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre (2.20)**.

The apparent contradiction is profound: how can the imperishable ātman, which is beyond decay, be bound to a perishable body? Bhagavān answers: it is through the three guṇas of Prakṛti.

How the Guṇas Bind

The ātman by itself is untouched, eternal, beyond guṇas. Yet when it comes into contact with Prakṛti, through beginningless association, the guṇas function as the ropes of attachment. **Nibadhnanti**, they tie, fetter, or bind the pure self to the material body and its experiences.

This bondage is not physical but psychological and karmic:

- **Through Sattva**, the self becomes attached to knowledge, clarity, and even subtle happiness.
- **Through Rajas**, it becomes bound to action, restlessness, and desire.
- **Through Tamas**, it is bound to inertia, ignorance, and delusion.

Thus, the guṇas create the illusion that the ātman is the doer and enjoyer, even though in truth it is beyond all action.

The Beauty of Expression

Bhagavān’s use of terms is noteworthy: **dehe dehinam avyayam**. The deha (body) is destructible, yet the dehin (soul) is avyaya (indestructible). The soul is like a king imprisoned within the fortress of the body. The guṇas act as the jailors, ropes that tie the king inside.

This imagery beautifully explains why knowledge of the guṇas is essential. Without recognising how Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas operate, one remains helplessly bound to the cycle of birth and death. By gaining this knowledge, one can rise above the guṇas and attain liberation.

With this verse, Bhagavān has introduced the principle: the guṇas of Prakṛti bind the imperishable self to the perishable body. In the next verses, He will explain the specific character of each guṇa, first

Sattva, then Rajas, and then Tamas, showing both their qualities and their modes of binding.

14.6

tatra sattvaṃ(n) nirmalatvāt, prakāśakamanāmayam, sukhasaṅgena badhnāti, jñānasaṅgena cānagha. 14.6

Of these, Sattva being immaculate, is illuminating and flawless, Arjuna; it binds through attachment to happiness and knowledge.

Here, Bhagavān explains the nature of sattva-guṇa.

Sattva is described as **nirmala**, pure and stainless. Because of its purity, it has the quality of **prakāśakatva**, luminosity or the ability to illuminate. Just as a lamp or a bulb covered with dust cannot spread its light effectively, the inner light of a person covered with impurities (like desire, anger, or ignorance) remains obscured. When that dust of impurity is removed, the lamp shines fully and illuminates the entire room. In the same way, sattva-guṇa is naturally pure, dust-free, and stainless. Because of this nirmalatva, it reveals, illuminates, and brings clarity.

It is also called **anāmaya**, free from disease, harmless, and wholesome. Unlike the other two guṇas, sattva does not cause harm or disturbance to oneself or to others. It is completely healthy and beneficial in its influence.

However, Bhagavān also points out that even sattva-guṇa has a binding nature. How does it bind the soul (dehī) to the body (deha)? Bhagavān says, **sukha-saṅgena badhnāti jñāna-saṅgena ca.**

- **Sukha-saṅga (attachment to happiness):** When a person engages in noble activities like nāma-japa, satsaṅga, kīrtana, listening to scriptural discourses, or studying the Bhagavad Gītā, he experiences inner joy and peace. That happiness itself creates an attachment. The soul begins to cling to that sense of peace, comfort, and joy. Though refined and uplifting, this attachment still binds one to the body and the cycle of birth and death.
- **Jñāna-saṅga (attachment to knowledge):** Some seekers are deeply inclined toward wisdom. They love to read, contemplate, and discuss the scriptures, philosophy, and spiritual truths. This thirst for knowledge and intellectual clarity, though sattvic in nature, also becomes a form of attachment.

Thus, sattva-guṇa binds the jīva in two subtle ways, through the attachment to happiness and through the attachment to knowledge.

Bhagavān, addressing Arjuna with the affectionate name Anagha, the sinless one, highlights this binding nature. Throughout the Gītā, Bhagavān uses different names for Arjuna depending on the context, and here Anagha signifies Arjuna's purity and suitability to receive this knowledge.

It is important to note that this bondage is very different from that caused by rajas or tamas. The binding through sattva does not harm; it uplifts, illumines, and purifies. Saints provide examples of this:

- Some, like Bhagavān Rāmaṇa Maharṣi, naturally radiated bliss and were immersed in the joy of pure existence (sukha-saṅga).
- Others, like scholars and sages who thirsted for wisdom, embodied jñāna-saṅga.

Both are sattvic forms of attachment, noble, elevating, and harmless, yet still binding. Ultimately, one must transcend even sattva to go beyond the guṇas and attain liberation.

rajo rāgātmakaṃ(m) viddhi, tṛṣṇāsaṅgasamudbhavam, tannibadhnāti kaunteya, karmasaṅgena dehinam. 14.7

Arjuna, know the quality of Rajas, which is of the nature of passion, as born of desire and attachment. It binds the soul through attachment to actions and their fruit.

Bhagavān here explains the nature of rajo-guṇa.

Whereas sattva is nirmala (pure) and prakāśaka (illuminating), rajas is described as **rāgātmaka**, of the nature of passion and attachment.

1. Rāgātmaka, the nature of passion

A rājasic person is not content with simply being still or quiet. If one were asked to just sit in meditation or perform nāma-japa peacefully, the rājasic temperament would resist. Instead, the person would say, “Give me something to do. Let me act, let me move, let me create.” The nature of rajas is restless activity born out of passion. It is driven by enthusiasm, energy, and a constant urge for engagement. This is what rāgātmaka means: the inner nature characterised by passion.

2. Tṛṣṇā-saṅga-samudbhavam, arising from thirst and attachment

Rajo-guṇa arises from tṛṣṇā (thirst, craving, desire) and saṅga (attachment). It is the force that makes the individual say: “I want this, I must achieve this, I cannot sit idle.” The soul (dehī) gets bound to the body (deha) through this very restlessness of craving and attachment. Thus, unlike sattva, which binds through joy (*sukha-saṅga*) and knowledge (*jñāna-saṅga*), rajas binds through **karma-saṅga**, attachment to action.

3. The binding power of rajas

Bhagavān tells Arjuna (here addressed as Kaunteya, son of Kuntī) that rajo-guṇa binds the soul through constant involvement in action. This is not simply action itself, but attachment to action, the inability to step back, to detach, or to act without personal craving.

Thus, rajas never allows stillness. It is characterised by perpetual motion, a constant striving, and the restlessness of desire. When one sees ceaseless activity in society, ambition, competition, enterprise, creation, and destruction, this is the manifestation of rajo-guṇa.

4. Comparison with sattva and tamas

- In sattva, the binding force is gentle and elevating: attachment to happiness and knowledge.
- In rajas, the binding force is restless: attachment to action itself.
- In tamas, the binding force is heavy, obscuring, and harmful: attachment to delusion, inertia, and negligence.

It is interesting to note that both sattva and tamas have aspects of “stillness”: sattva is peaceful, clear, and luminous, while tamas is stagnant, lethargic, and dark. The difference is that sattva uplifts and purifies, while tamas harms and degrades. Rajas, on the other hand, never rests. Its essential quality is constant movement, driven by passion, thirst, and attachment.

5. Practical understanding

- **A sāttvika person** delights in contemplation, peace, and knowledge.
- **A rājasic person** delights in activity, achievement, and productivity, often fueled by desire.
- **A tāmasic person** falls into negligence, delusion, and harmful stagnation.

Thus, in this verse Bhagavān highlights the defining qualities of **rajo-guṇa: passion (rāgātmaka), desire (tr̥ṣṇā), attachment (saṅga), and restless activity (karma-saṅga).**

14.8

**tamastvajñānajaṃ(m) viddhi, mohanaṃ(m) sarvadehinām,
pramādālasyanidrābhiḥ(s), tannibadhnāti bhārata. 14.8**

And know Tamas, the deluder of all those who look upon the body as their own self, as born of ignorance. It binds the soul through error, sleep and sloth, Arjuna.

The Source of Tamoguṇa

Tamoguṇa is called **ajñānajaṃ**, “born of ignorance.”

- **Ajñāna** means the absence of knowledge, not knowing the truth.
- Jā or jaṃ means “born of” or “arising from.”

So, tamas is not self-standing. Its very source is ajñāna, ignorance of the Self.

From Ajñāna to Moha

Bhagavān further says tamas is mohanaṃ; it causes delusion.

Now, what is moha? It is important to understand the difference:

- Ajñāna means: “I do not know.” Example: I do not know that waking up at brahma-muhūrta (around 4 a.m.) is beneficial. That is ignorance.
- **Moha** means: “I know, but I do not do.” Example: I know waking up early is good, but I still sleep late. That is delusion.

So ajñāna is a lack of knowledge, while moha is going against knowledge.

We see this everywhere: On packets of tobacco or gutkha it is written in bold letters, “*This is harmful, this causes cancer.*” Everyone reads it, everyone knows it, yet people still consume it. This is Moha. Knowing what is right but still not doing it.

Thus tamoguṇa, being ajñānajaṃ, produces moha. It is the very cause of delusion in this world.

The Role of Avidyā - Two Powers of Ignorance

Vedānta explains that ignorance (avidyā or ajñāna) has two powers:

- **Āvaraṇa-śakti** – the power to cover knowledge. It hides the truth of the Self, like a cloud covering the sun.
- **Vikṣepa-śakti** – the power to project something else in place of truth. For example, when the rope is unseen in darkness, one projects the image of a snake.

Thus:

- The reality, Brahman (paramātman), is hidden.
- The world (jagat) is projected as real.

This is the famous Advaitic teaching:

“Brahma satyam jagat mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ.”

Brahman alone is real; the world is mithyā; the individual soul is none other than Brahman.

The Three Levels of Reality (Sattā-traya)

Vedānta further explains three orders of reality:

- Pāramārthika-sattā – absolute reality, the Self, Brahman.
- **Vyāvahārika-sattā** – transactional reality, the practical world.
- **Prātibhāsika-sattā** – illusory reality, like dreams or hallucinations.

Examples:

- **Prātibhāsika:** Dreaming of a snake, mistaking mother-of-pearl (śukti) for silver, or seeing water in a mirage (mṛg-māricikā).
- **Vyāvahārika:** The waking world where we eat, work, and interact. Real until higher truth is known.
- **Pāramārthika:** The supreme truth, Brahman, the pure Self.

When we mistake a rope for a snake, fear arises. But once someone shows it is only a rope, the fear vanishes. Similarly, once Brahman is realised, the world is known as mithyā.

A Modern Analogy - Artificial Intelligence and Illusion

Just as Vedānta speaks of prātibhāsika-sattā (illusory reality), we can see parallels today. With artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital worlds, humans create artificial experiences that feel real for a time. For example, through VR headsets, one may feel transported into another world, fighting battles, building homes, or meeting people. For that duration, the illusion feels real. But when one removes the headset, one returns to waking life (vyāvahārika-sattā) and knows the virtual experience was not ultimately real.

Similarly, once one realises pāramārthika-sattā, Brahman, one knows even this waking world is not the ultimate truth.

The Practical Expressions of Tamoguṇa

Bhagavān explains that tamas binds beings through three forces:

- **Pramāda** – negligence, carelessness, procrastination.
Example: Having important work to do now, but endlessly delaying it. Sitting idle, wasting time, not moving forward.
- **Ālasya** – laziness, disinclination to put effort.
Example: Not wanting to go to college or work, simply lying down, finding excuses to avoid action.
- **Nidrā** – sleep, both literal oversleeping and symbolic sleep of awareness.
Sleeping excessively, 10-12 hours, or living life in unawareness of one's true Self.

Together, these keep the jīva bound to the body, preventing higher effort.

Indeed, if we look at society today, more than half of people live in this way: a cycle of eating, sleeping, doing minimal work, and again sleeping. They neither rise to sattva nor aspire for higher realisation. This is the grip of tamas.

The Subtle Difference from Sattva

It may appear that both sattva and tamas involve a kind of stillness, but there is a profound difference:

Sattva: A peaceful stillness that is pure, uplifting, and connected with knowledge and devotion.
Example: sitting quietly in japa or meditation.

Tamas: A dull stillness that is heavy, unproductive, and harmful. Example: sitting idle in lethargy without doing anything beneficial.

Thus, Sattva produces puṇya and moves one toward liberation, while tamas binds deeper into darkness.

On Sleep and Balance

It must be noted that tamas is not entirely useless. The body requires some amount of tamas for rest and repair. Sleep of 6–8 hours is healthy and necessary to recharge the mind and body. But beyond that, excessive sleep increases tamas and dullness, while reducing sattva.

Thus, the balance of guṇas in life depends on our choices, what we eat, how much we sleep, what we think, and what actions we take.

14.9

sattvaṃ(m) sukhe sañjayati, rajaḥ(kh) karmaṇi bhārata, jñānamāvṛtya tu tamaḥ(ph), pramāde sañjayatyuta. 14.9

Sattva draws one to joy and Rajas to action; while Tamas, clouding wisdom, impels one to error, sleep and sloth Arjuna.

In this verse, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains how each of the three guṇas, sattva, rajas, and tamas, binds the embodied self (jīva) in different ways:

Sattvaṃ sukhe sañjayati - Sattva-guṇa binds one to sukha (happiness).

- The nature of sattva is clarity, light, and purity.
- Because of this purity, the mind becomes calm, clear, and inclined towards joy.
- However, even this attachment to happiness becomes a subtle bondage. The person feels peaceful, serene, and elevated, but may remain content with that happiness itself rather than moving towards the higher goal of liberation.
- Thus, sattva, though pure, still binds by creating attachment to happiness.

Rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata - Rajo-guṇa binds one to karma (action).

- The nature of rajas is passion, restlessness, and movement.
- A person dominated by rajas cannot remain still; they constantly feel the urge to act, to achieve, to acquire, to build, to struggle.
- This is driven by tṛṣṇā (thirst, craving) and saṅga (attachment).

For example, if one is told to quietly sit and chant nāma-japa, they may find it difficult, but if told to run a kilometre, they may readily agree, because they love action. This is Rajas.

Such action may not always be directed towards ultimate welfare; it is often motivated by desire, competition, or ambition.

Jñānam āvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde sañjayaty uta - Tamo-guṇa, by covering knowledge, binds one to pramāda (negligence, heedlessness).

- Tamas is born of ajñāna (ignorance).
- Its power lies in veiling knowledge. One may know what is right, yet tamas covers that knowledge, and the person ends up following the wrong path.

- For example, everyone knows tobacco or alcohol is harmful, the warning is even printed on the packet in bold letters, yet many continue consuming it. This is moha (delusion) born of tamas.
- Similarly, one may know that rising in brahma-muhūrta is auspicious, yet out of laziness (ālasyam) and indulgence in sleep (nidrā), one postpones and fails to act.
- Thus, tamas operates in two steps:
 - **Jñānam āvṛtya** – It first covers the knowledge.
 - **Pramāde sañjayati** – It then binds the person to heedlessness, negligence, laziness, and sleep.

The Subtle Contrast

- Sattva also seems inactive at times, but it is inactivity in the form of calmness, contemplation, and worship. It produces puṇya-karma (meritorious action) and purifies the heart.
- Tamas, on the other hand, is inactive in the form of stagnation, indolence, and useless idleness. It produces ignorance and decline.
- Rajas never remains still; it is always in movement, creating endless activity, sometimes constructive, sometimes destructive.

Thus, each guṇa binds the jīva in its own way, sattva through attachment to happiness, rajas through attachment to action, and tamas through ignorance and negligence.

The session concluded with **Harinām Sankīrtan**, a heartfelt prayer and the recitation of the **Hanumān Chālīsā**, marking the end of a spiritually enriching discourse



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Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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