

SUMMARY OF GITA BHASYAM

- **N. Avinashilingam**

Bhasyam is a commentary in prose form, where the meaning of a sutra is explained. By extension, similar commentary on Bhagavad Gita and Upanisads are also called bhasyam. In the bhasyam, first a brief explanation is given. Later it explains these words and describes further in detail.

The benefit of this study is that one gets the in depth meaning of the sutras/ mantras/ slokas. How the meaning is extracted is given in the bhasyam. The Vedanta teacher will have the tools of pada sastra (grammar) , vakya sastra (analysis of a sentence) and nyaya sastra (logic) in analyzing the subject. With this methodology any other text on Vedanta can be analysed.

Vedanta is not logical as the teaching is not established just by logic, but Vedanta cannot be dismissed as illogical either.

PRAYER: The dhyana sloka for Gita bhasyam is taken from Brahmanda Purana. It says Lord Narayana is beyond the cause of the universe and beyond the effect in the form of gross and subtle universe including this world with seven continents.

UPODGHATA BHASYAM: Sri Sankara's introduction bhasyam on Bhagavad Gita called upodghata bhasyam, on Brahadaranyaka Upanisad called sambanda bhasyam and on Brahma Sutra called adhyasa bhasyam are all very popular and profound.

Upodghata bhasyam or introductory analysis of Gita, describes the essence and back ground of the Sastra. It explains the place, basis, purpose, speaker, listener, situation and benefit for the listener.

The introductory bhasyam can be seen as containing four parts; vedaarthasara, gita background explaining the purpose of avatara and the

situation that called for the upadesha, the necessity for writing a commentary and finally to present the anubandachatustayam.

VEDA ARTHA SARA: Isvara after creating the world, for its sustenance created Mariichi and other Prajaapatis, who were the progenitors of subsequent lineage of householders, and taught them Vedas. They were taught pravrtti marga so that they can pursue artha and kama in a dharmic way.

Isvara later created Sanaka and other ascetics. They were taught nivrtti marga so that they can pursue moksha, withdrawing from activities of artha and kama.

One sincerely pursuing pravrtti marga will primarily have pleasure and will also get qualification to pursue nivrtti marga. Varna asrama dharma were prescribed to achieve the four purusharthas. If human beings follow dharma as prescribed in the Vedas, all living beings will be cared for.

BACK GROUND OF GITA: When there is a decline in dharma initially, the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas can help restore dharma. But when dharma falls more, even the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas do not follow dharma. Then Isvara incarnates for sustenance of the jagat and for re-establishment of dharma.

PURPOSE OF AVATARA: Isvara assuming the body is called avatara. Lord Vishnu assumed the avatara of Lord Krishna through Devaki and Vasudeva. His avatara was for protection of Brahmin-ness of Brahmins. Keeping maya under control, He appears to be born. He has covering power (avarana) and projecting power (vikshepa) under his control. His nature is timelessness (nithya), pure (suddha), consciousness (buddha) and is free (muktha).

CONTEXT FOR GITA: Lord Krishna taught Arjuna two fold life style of house holder and sannyasi. Arjuna was immersed in sorrow and delusion. He asked for the jnana. Considering that dharma received and practiced by a famous person with noble qualities will attain popularity, the Lord

taught him. Veda Vyasa compiled the teaching. The teaching is in the form of dialogue between Lord as the Teacher and Arjuna as a disciple.

PURPOSE OF BHASYAM: Gita is the essence of all Vedas. Its central theme is difficult to comprehend. Existing commentaries at that time contained contradictory ideas. Hence Sri Adi Sankara wrote the brief commentary to ascertain the import of Gita distinctly.

ANUBANDHA CHATUSTAYAM: The purpose of Gita is to give moksha or the highest happiness with complete cessation of samsara or the life of becoming. The purpose is achieved by a life style committed to self knowledge. Sannyasa life style is more conducive to pursue moksha. Sannyasi has already weakened his ego, has more time available and has undistracted mind. Hence he is in a better position to assimilate Brahman.

During Sri Adi Sankara's time, there was a popular 'jnana karma samuchchaya vada' that action and knowledge should be combined to gain moksha. He dismissed this view. He quotes four verses from Anu Gita (Mahabharata Aswamedika parva) where Lord Krishna says: "Nivrti dharma alone is enough for attainment of Brahman", "A wise person not doing any vedic karma becomes free by his wisdom", "One absorbed in non-dual Brahman becomes free", "Characteristic of jnanam is sannyasa". All these verses confirm that without karma and by jnana alone moksha is gained.

He also quotes the last verse of Bhagawad Gita teaching where Lord Krishna says "Give up identification with all your activities; surrender your individuality by understanding of non-dual Brahman; there will be no sorrow after oneness with Brahman".

Visaya is pravirti lakshana dharma (karma yoga), nivirti lakshana dharma (jnana yoga) and param Brahma. Adikari is a person having a mind purified by karma yoga. Sannyasa life style with commitment to self knowledge is preferable. Sambandha is pradipadya (revealed) and pradipadaka (revealer) sambandha.

ESSENCE OF THE FIRST 57 SLOKAS: Atma is asanga. Due to ignorance of this, one suffers from sambandha bhranthi. One thinks that I belong to them and they belong to me. This causes sneha or attachment. Actual or imaginary separation from them causes sorrow and delusion. Discriminative knowledge is totally over powered. This will make one do what is inappropriate or make one not do what is appropriate leading to punya/papa. This leads to rebirth. There is perpetuation of samsara.

Arjuna although came for fighting a war for protection of dharma, on seeing his dear and near people on the other side decided not to fight. He preferred to live on alms. His discriminative knowledge was over powered by grief and delusion. Arjuna entered the battlefield for protection of dharma, but when he saw his Gurus and relatives on the opposite camp, he was overpowered by sorrow and delusion. He realized that the confusion was born of a deeper problem that he could not solve himself and sought a permanent solution from Lord Krishna to end that sorrow.

ESSENCE OF THE TEACHING: Sri Adi Sankara, begins his commentary by presenting the summary of the ideas presented in the verses in Chapter-1 till the 10th verse of Chapter-2.

The preceding verses till verse 11 of Chapter 2 are meant to demonstrate the perpetuation of defects like **grief and delusion forming the seeds of samsara**. It is **caused due to ignorance**. Ignorance further causes delusion characterized by the notion of **“I belong to them and they belong to me”**. This leads to **intense attachment** causing grief and delusion. This further leads one to engage in actions that are **prohibited karma or karma to safeguard one’s possessions**. These actions result in **punya-papa** which further cause **re-birth**, thereby **perpetuating samara**. Arjuna seeing his relatives in the opponent camp of the battle field was overcome with delusion and sorrow and in order to retain their lives, preferred to live as a mendicant, which was paradharma (Gita 2.4). Similarly **everyone under the spell of grief and delusion abandon their svadharma** and take up prohibited action. **Only atma jnana can**

remove grief and delusion. The Lord desirous of blessing all the people by teaching atma jnana starts his message by telling Arjuna **“you grieve for those who are not to be grieved for”** (Gita 2.11).

Bhasyakara presents possible opposing ideas and resolves them in the form of objections raised by the Purvapakshi (opponent) and establishing the right idea in the form of Siddanti's answer to the objections.

PURVAPAKSHI'S VIEW: Moksha can be gained by combination of knowledge and actions. The Vedaas seen as pramana with reference to both karma kanda and jnana kanda indicates that both karma and jnana have to be pursued to gain moksha. The following verses also support this view: “This righteous battle if you do not fight” (Gita 2.33), “your choice is for action alone” (Gita 2.47) and “therefore do action alone” (Gita 4.15). Even if some karma involves himsa, that which are ordained by the Veda do not result in papa. Sruti mandates that one shall perform sruti ordained karma as long as one lives.

SIDDHANTIN'S VIEW: Moksha can be gained by knowledge alone without combining with karma (as prescribed by the Sruti and Smruti). The verses starting with “those who should not be grieved for” (Gita 2.11) and ending with “even considering your duty” (Gita 2.31), the Lord explains that Samkhya is the nature of the self. Later he says that he will tell about (karma) yoga (Gita 2.39).

There is impossibility of commitment to knowledge and action by the same person at the same time as the two lifestyles have their basis in two different understandings and the candidates are different. **A life committed to jnana** is characterized by an understanding that “I'm not the doer” as Atma is not subject to changes. **A life committed to karma** is characterized by pursuit of means that lead to moksha with the understanding that “I'm the doer” and “I am other than the body”.

Brahadaranyaka Upanisad 4.4.22 and 1.4.17 also tell that when one is exclusively interested in atma loka and not interested in son, wealth or svarga, he becomes a sannyasi.

This idea is further substantiated by citing Arjuna's questions which would otherwise be untenable. Arjuna asks the Lord in Gita 3.1, "When you say knowledge is superior, why do you ask me to do action?" This implies that the Lord did not teach that knowledge and action can be combined but taught that knowledge is superior to action.

Further, in Gita 5.1, Arjuna asks the Lord to advise which among the two, knowledge or action is best for him. If knowledge and action were to be combined, the Lord would have told him that I already asked you to combine both.

The Lord clearly says in Gita 3.3, that there are two distinct life styles; for people committed to knowledge and for people committed to action.

These arguments will apply equally with reference to the purvapakshi's contention of combining just Smruti based karma with the pursuit of knowledge.

Therefore, in the Gita, none can show that there is the slightest proposal to combine pursuit of knowledge along with actions prescribed by Sruti or Smruti, for attaining moksha.

Gita says in 4.15, Janaka and others performed action and attained success. If for argument sake, we say Janaka is an ajnani, we can say that he did action and attained mental purity and later got jnana. If we say Janaka is a Jnani, we can say that he did action for protection of the world.

We may conclude that Lord Krishna and Jnanis like Raja Janaka performed action with the understanding of non-doer ship. They did not perform action for getting purity of mind or for gaining

punya. But they performed action for the welfare of the world and for setting an example for others to emulate.

CHAPTER 2: *Bhagavan* Sankaracharya begins his commentary on the verses starting from Verse 11 of Chapter 2, because the teaching begins from that verse. Arjuna surrendered to the Lord Krishna and requested him to teach him what is *Sreyas- moksha*.

The Lord tells Arjuna that Wise people grieve neither for the departed nor the un-departed. Whereas, he was grieving after those who are not to be grieved after, like a confused person even while speaking words of wisdom. (BG 2-11)

Bhasyakara explains further that: From the body standpoint, once born, its death is imperative. From the stand point of Bhishma and others being *jivas*, they are of noble conduct and hence will go only to higher *lokas*. **From the absolute level of *atma*, they are timeless and exist in all the three periods of time. (BG 2-12).** Therefore, from all standpoints, Bhishma and others need not be grieved after.

Atma does not undergo any change when the body undergoes change from child hood to youth to old age. Similarly **there is no change for the *atma* even during the attainment of another body. (BG 2-13)**

Contact of the sense organs with sense objects produce experience of cold and heat, **pleasure and pain which are all temporary. One should understand and accept them as *Isvara's* order. (BG 2-14).**

One who is not agitated by pain or disturbed by pleasure is fit for gaining *moksha*. (BG 2-15).

Pairs of opposites like cold and heat together with their cause do not have real existence. Only *atma* has real existence. This truth is understood by wise people.

There is no being for *asat (mithya)* and there is no non-being for *sat*. (BG 2-16)

That which has independent existence is *sat* and that which has dependent existence is *asat*.

This is established by *Bhasyakara* by taking the example of a clay pot. **A pot does not exist apart from its cause, clay.** Pot does not exist before its origin and also does not exist after it is destroyed. Even clay does not have existence apart from its cause.

By extension, on account of every object being non-separate from its cause and the cause itself being an effect of its cause, **the whole world of cause-effects is *asat*.**

Objection: If all effects are negated, it will lead to *sunyavada* or absence of everything i.e. Nihilism.

Reply: In every existent object cognition, there are two cognitions: Pot cognition and existence ('is') cognition. When we say "pot is", we cognize *asat* which is the object called 'pot' and we also cognize *sat* by the word 'is'. The cognition of pot, which is *asat* is subject to change whereas **the cognition of 'is', which is *sat* remain changeless even when the pot is destroyed.**

Objection: When pot is destroyed, along with pot cognition, **existence cognition also goes.**

Reply: No. Even if a given pot cognition goes, **there is "Is-cognition" with reference to other things like cloth and surviving pots.**

Objection: Real and unreal things cannot exist in a common ground.

Reply: No. Unreal water and the real sand which appears as '*idam*' are in a common ground.

***Brahman* is the only existing reality. Pairs of opposites like cold and heat are *mithya*. Hence the seeker should endure the pairs of opposites.**

May you know this indestructible reality by which everything is pervaded. No one is capable of bringing about the destruction of this indestructible reality. (BG 2-17)

Brahman pervades everything like space pervading pot. It cannot disintegrate because it is partless . It cannot be destroyed by external factors as nothing is connected to it. Even the Lord cannot destroy Brahman, as the same entity cannot be the subject and object.

These bodies belonging to everlasting, indestructible, unobjectifiable, embodied self are said to be subject to end. Therefore Arjuna, fight. (BG 2-18)

Bodies in dream and magic have their end. There are two types of destruction like the body reduced to ashes and the body transformed due to disease. Brahman is not having these two types of destruction. Self is not unknown to anyone. But the qualities that do not belong to the self, super imposed on the self are removed by the Scriptures. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 3.4.1 declare that *Brahman* is that which is direct and immediate, which is the innermost self. As the self is timeless and changeless, **Arjuna was advised not to withdraw from the battle, which was his duty.**

Gita teaching is for removing grief and delusion which are the cause of samsara. It is not to induce action.

The one who thinks that the self is the killer or the one who thinks that the self is killed, both of them do not know the true nature of the self. The self does not kill nor is it killed, because the self is changeless. (BG 2-19).

The self is never born, nor dies. The self having been existent, does not become non-existent. Unlike the body, the self is ever new, birth-less, decay-less and deathless. Even when the body is destroyed, the self is not destroyed. (BG 2-20).

The above two verses are based on Kathopanisd mantras.

The one who knows the self to be indestructible, not transformable, unborn and decay less, how and whom does that person kill or instigate to kill? (BG 2-21)

This verse is not in interrogative sense but in the sense to convey the idea of negation of all actions by a knower of the self. Negation of killing is mentioned for the purpose of illustration.

Objection: Due to what specific reason actions are ruled out by the knower of the self ?

Reply: Changelessness of the self is the reason for impossibility of action by the knower of the self.

Objection: We cannot say that action is not possible by the one who knows the post to be changeless.

Reply: The knower of the post is not the post. But the knower of the self is the self. Action is prescribed in the Sastra only for an ignorant person.

Objection: Knowledge is also prescribed for an ignorant person. Knowledge is useless for a wise person like grinding of corn that is already ground. Hence action is prescribed only for an ignorant person is not reasonable.

Reply: An ignorant person thinks that he should perform actions like fire rituals. He is eligible for doing action. A wise person and a seeker of freedom are eligible for renunciation of all actions. Two distinctive life styles, one committed to jnana yoga and another to karma yoga are prescribed by Gita 3.3 and Mahabharata 241.6. The Lord shows these two different life styles again in the Gita verses 3.27, 3.28 and 5.13.

Objection: Self being inaccessible to the sense organs, self-knowledge is not possible

Reply: Brhadaranyaka Upanisad 4.4.19 declares that the self is to appreciated through the mind alone. The mind which is purified by the

teachings of teacher and scriptures and by discipline of mind and sense organs, is fit for self-knowledge. The Lord will say in Gita 5.13 that a wise person renouncing actions in the mind sits in this body.

Objection: Only mental actions should be renounced. Not physical and oral actions.

Reply: No renunciation of all actions prescribed

Objection: Only all actions of the mind prescribed

Reply: Physical and oral actions have to be preceded by mental action

Objection: Renunciation of all actions prescribed for a dying person

Reply: Self is said to comfortably sit in the body of nine gates which is not possible for a dead person.

Therefore according to Gita sastra, the one having self knowledge has fitness for renunciation alone and not for action. This idea we will show in all such relevant places later on in the context/ topic of self-knowledge.

Just as a person remaining changeless, discards old clothes and puts on new clothes, the embodied self remaining changeless discards old bodies and takes up new bodies. (BG 2-22)

Self is partless. Weapons do not cut this self. Fire does not burn it. Water does not wet it. And wind does not dry it. (BG 2-23)

The Self cannot be cut, burnt, drowned or dried. Self is changeless, all-pervasive, stable, motionless and everlasting. (BG 2-24).

The Self is said to be un-manifest, inconceivable and unchangeable. Knowing this one need not grieve. (BG 2-25).

Even if one takes the atma to have constant birth and death, even then one need not grieve. (BG 2-26)

For that which is born, death is certain. For that which is dead, birth is certain. Therefore one should not grieve for what is inevitable. (BG 2-27)

All beings are unmanifest in the beginning, manifest in the middle and again unmanifest at the end. Hence there is no reason for grief. (BG 2-28)

One sees the self as a wonder. Another speaks of it as a wonder. Another hears it as a wonder. Still another even after hearing about it, does not understand it. (BG 2-29)

The embodied self present in all bodies is ever indestructible. One ought not to grieve regarding all living beings. (BG 2-30)

Lord Krishna explains why there is no reason for sorrow for Arjuna from the absolute level.

Arjuna's duty as a *ksatriya* is to fight a righteous war. There is nothing greater for a *ksatriya* than a righteous war. (BG 2-31)

Only fortunate warriors get a chance to fight a righteous war. It comes by chance and is an open gate to *svarga*. (BG 2-32)

If Arjuna does not fight this righteous war, having forsaken his duty and honour, he will incur unfavorable invisible result. (BG 2-33)

People will speak of unendingly of Arjuna's dishonour. For the honoured, dishonour is worse than death. (BG 2-34)

The great warriors will think that Arjuna withdrew from the war out of fear. Arjuna will fall in their esteem. (BG 2-35)

The enemies, looking down upon Arjuna's ability, will say many unutterable words about him. It will be very painful. (BG 2-36)

If dead in the war, Arjuna will go to heaven. If victorious, he will enjoy this world. (BG 2-37)

Arjuna should take pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat as the same and fight the war. (BG 2-38)

After that the Lord explains why there is no reason for sorrow for Arjuna as a *karma yogi*.

After talking about self knowledge, Lord Krishna talked about *karma yoga*, endowed with which attitude Arjuna can get rid of bondage of action. (BG 2-39)

In *karma yoga* there is no waste of effort and there is no adverse result. Even a little practice of this discipline of *karma yoga* protects one from great fear. (BG 2-40)

In the pursuit of *moksa*, there is a single well ascertained understanding. The notions of the people who lack discrimination are many branched and countless. (BG 2-41)

People who lack discrimination, remain engrossed in the Vedas. They speak flowery words about *kamyā karma* and its results. (BG 2-42)

They are full of desires and have *svarga* as their highest goal. They talk of special rituals leading to better births or for attainment of pleasure and power. (BG 2-43)

Well ascertained understanding does not take place in the mind of those who are carried away by that flowery words and are attached to pleasure and power. (BG 2-44)

The subject matter of the Vedas is the product of three qualities. One should become free from desire for the product of three qualities. One should remain in the quality of *sattva*, free from the

pairs of opposites, free from concern for acquisition and protection and be mindful. (BG 2-45)

The benefit available in a well is available in a huge water body. Similarly all the benefits available to one performing Vedic rituals are available to a knower of *Brahman*. (BG 2-46)

The Lord told that Arjuna had qualification for being a *karma yogi* and not for being a *jnana yogi*. He had no say over and the results of action, as they happen as per karma phala. He should not have attachment to inaction. (BG 2-47)

There is an alternate way of explanation. One has choice over action. But one has no choice over the result of the action. Let one have *prasada buddhi* while accepting the results of action as they come from *Isvara*. Let there not be attachment towards inaction.

The Lord advised that Arjuna may remain in yoga, giving up attachment, remaining same to success and failure. The sameness of the mind is called *yoga*. (BG 2-48)

Desire prompted actions are inferior to that of actions performed with the attitude of *karma yoga*. Those who perform action only for results are unfortunate ones. (BG 2-49)

One who has sameness of the mind, gives up both *punya* and *papa*. Skill in action is converting the binding actions into liberating actions by the attitude of *karma yoga*. (BG 2-50)

The seeker endowed with the attitude of *karma yoga*, gives up the result of action, becomes free from the bondage of birth and accomplish the end that is free from all afflictions. (BG 2-51)

The Lord explains why there is no reason for sorrow for Arjuna as a *karma yogi*.

When one's intellect crosses over delusion, then he shall gain dispassion for the objects that has been heard about and for objects that is to be heard about. (BG 2-52)

When one's mind is no longer distracted by the Vedas which present various means and ends to be gained, it will remain steadily in the self. Then he can gain self-knowledge. (BG 2-53)

The Teaching is over in verse 53 of chapter 2. Because of Arjuna's question Bhagavad Gita continues.

Arjuna asked: **What is the description of the person of firm wisdom, who abides in the self? How does he speak, sit and walk? (BG 2-54)**

The qualities that are spontaneous for a wise person are to be deliberately pursued by a spiritual seeker.

Lord Krishna replied: **When one gives up all binding desires, remain satisfied by the self-knowledge, then he is called a person of steady wisdom. (BG 2-55)**

The one who remains unaffected in sorrow, who does not yearn for pleasures and is free from binding desires, fear and anger is a wise person with determined wisdom. (BG 2-56)

The one who has no attachment to any object anywhere and maintain equanimity regarding pleasant and unpleasant situations has well established knowledge. (BG 2-57)

The quality of *dama* required by the seeker is highlighted in the following verses:

The one has who completely withdrawn the sense organs from the sense objects, like a tortoise withdrawing its limbs, has steady knowledge. (BG 2-58)

For a person not engaging in sense pleasures, the sense objects drop off but leaving behind the taste for them. That taste also goes away on gaining the knowledge of the highest reality. (BG 2-59)

The powerful sense organs forcefully take away the mind of even an intelligent person who is striving. (BG 2-60)

After restraining the sense organs one should fix his concentration on Vasudeva, who is the self of all. Only the seeker who has mastery of sense organs can have well established knowledge. (BG 2-61)

The quality of *sama* required by the seeker is highlighted in the following verses:

The one who dwells on sense objects develops attachment towards them. From attachment, desire is born. When fulfillment of desire is obstructed, anger is born. (BG 2-62)

From anger arises delusion. From delusion arises loss of memory of the teaching of Scriptures and Teachers. Because of loss of memory, the mind becomes incapacitated. When the mind is incapacitated, the person is spiritually destroyed. (BG 2-63)

The circumstances in which the intellect is well established in atma is described.

Perceiving the objects with sense organs which are free from likes and dislikes, having mastery over the mind, one attains tranquility. (BG 2-64)

For one with a tranquil mind, all sorrows are removed. His intellect gets well established in atma jnana. (BG 2-65)

The problems faced in the absence of tranquility are explained.

For the one with a wavering mind, there is neither knowledge nor contemplation. For the one who is non contemplative, there is no peace. For the one who has no peace, there is no happiness. (BG 2-66)

The mind that follows the sense organs, robs the person of his knowledge like the wind carrying away a boat in water. (BG 2-67)

The topic on the person with steady wisdom is concluded.

For the one who has mastered his sense organs, the wisdom becomes well established. (BG 2-68)