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Thirunāma-s of Svāmi Rāmānuja based on Bhagavad Gītā's Prathama Ṣaṭka in Śrī Rāmānuja Sahasranāma

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Abstract

Sahasranāma is a work comprised of 1000 *thirunāma* -s (divine names), praising the glories and attributes of *Bhagavān*. One can easily acquire knowledge by learning Sahasranāma, which is hard to attain by learning *śāstra*-s. Since *ācārya*-s are more revered than *Bhagavān*, disciples mostly engage in praising *ācārya*-s through various *thirunāma*-s. In this manner, Śrī. U.Ve. Addaṅki Veṅkaṭācārya Svāmi made an attempt and composed Sri Rāmānuja Sahasranāma, praising the glories, *guṇa*-s, *rūpa*, *śiṣyasāmbanda*, *divyadeśa yātra*-s, *kaiṅkarya*-s, *grantha*-s, etc., of Svāmi Rāmānuja. This is a very rare text and first of its kind. This article focuses on the *thirunāma*-s which portrays Svāmi Rāmānuja's contribution (Gītā Bhāshyam) to *prathama ṣaṭka* of Gītā.

Key words: Bhagavad Gītā, *prathama ṣaṭka*, Gītā Bhāshyam, *Śrīvaiṣṇava sampradāya*, *tattva yāthātmya jñāna*, *cit*, *acit*, *Īsvara*, *Karma yoga*, *Jñāna yoga*, *Bhakti yoga*, *ātmāsākṣātkāra*, *upāya*, *upeya*, Arjuna viṣāda yoga, *puruṣārta*, *karṭṛva tyāga*, *phala tyāga*

Introduction

Ācārya-s responsibility is to impart knowledge to his disciples in particular and to the world in general. Svāmi Rāmānuja carried out this task very efficiently by writing *grantha*-s. A disciple has to express the glories of his *ācārya/guru* in front of others. This is a duty/responsibility ordained by *śāstra*-s. There are many reasons for carrying out this responsibility. A disciple gains knowledge through the *upadeśa*-s of *guru* and hence he has to be thankful for his *guru*'s unequivocal help. There is no other way to show his gratitude as there is nothing equal to the knowledge obtained from his *guru*. Bearing this in mind, Śrī. U.Ve. Addaṅki Veṅkaṭācārya Svāmi, one in the clan of the 74 *siṃhāsānādhipati*-s, composed Sri Rāmānuja Sahasranāma. It is said that pleased with Svāmi Rāmānuja's various *kaiṅkarya*-s, Śrī Yoga Narasimha made this Svāmi write the text ^[1]. In that text, there are *thirunāma*-s based on Svāmi Rāmānuja's various *grantha*-s. This article describes the various *thirunāma* -s offered to Svāmi Rāmānuja based on his Bhāshyam to Gītā's *prathama ṣaṭka*; there are *thirunāma*-s based on each chapter, revealing the essence of that particular chapter.

Importance of Bhagavad Gītā

सर्वोपनिशदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः।

पार्थोवत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥

All the *Upaniṣad*-s are considered as cows; the cowherd's son Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the milker; Pārtha is the calf; Gītā is the nectar like milk obtained from the cows (*Upaniṣad*-s) for the enjoyment of *jñāni*-s. From this it is understood that Bhagavad Gītā is the quintessence of all the *Upaniṣad*-s. The knowledge one gains by learning *Upaniṣad*-s can be easily gained through Gītā. The former is difficult as *Upaniṣad*-s are vast. Gītā is a single text with 700 *śloka*-s and serve as a simple and quick means to gain real knowledge. This is the significance of Gītā.

Not alone this, Bhagavad Gītā gains more respect and importance than *Upaniṣad*-s. *Upaniṣad*-s are *nityam* (eternal). They are propagated by different *ṛṣi*-s in each *jagat śrṛṣṭi*. They praise the *Paramātmā* and explain His supremacy among all other things. On the other hand, Bhagavad Gītā is the teachings of *Paramātmā* Himself, who is the subject of the *Upaniṣad*-s.

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Hence Gītā attained the adjective ‘Bhagavad’, which signifies that this is a *śāstra* dictated by *Bhagavān* Himself.

Śrī Thirumazhisai Āzhvār states in Nānmugan Thiruvandhādhī as follows

‘மாயன் அன்றோதிய வாக்கத்தைக்கல்லார்
உலகத்தில் ஏதிலராம் மெய்ஞ்ஞானமில்’ (71)

Nammāzhvār states in his Thiruvāimozhi as follows

அறிவினால் குறைவில்லா
அகல்ஞாலத்தவரறிய நெறியெல்லாம்
எடுத்துறைத்த நிறைஞானத்தொருமூர்த்தி (4-8-6)

तत्त्वज्ञानान्मोक्षलाभः।अज्ञानात्संसारः।^[2]

This denotes that knowledge about real things gives *mukti* and knowledge about other things leads to *samsāra* (bondage). Knowledge about real things is gained by thoroughly learning *vedānta*-s, Brahmasūtra, Bhagavad Gītā, etc. It is difficult to ascertain the exact meanings of *vedānta*-s and Brahmasūtra. In order to understand the proper and overall meaning of *vedānta*-s, some logical methods such as *sarvaśākhā pratyaya nyāya*, *sakalavedānta pratyaya nyāya*, etc have to be involved. Brahmasūtra is a *grantha* which deals with the doubts which will arise while studying *vedānta*-s. But being in the form of *sūtra*-s, it becomes difficult for a new learner to interpret the meanings. Bhagavad Gītā, which is in the *śloka* format, serves as a better means for knowledge without the above said constraints.

Advent of Gītā Bhāṣyam

Due to the varied intelligence of various seekers of knowledge, the meanings of Bhagavad Gītā are interpreted in different ways. In order to provide the appropriate meanings of the Gītā, Svāmi Rāmānuja wrote a commentary named ‘Gītā Bhāṣyam’^[3].

In Rāmānusa Nūtrandādhī, Thiruvarangathamudanār mentions this as

மாயன் அன்று ஐவர்தெய்வத்தேரினில் செப்பிய
கீதையின் செம்மைப்பொருள் தெரியப்பாரினில்
சொன்ன இராமானுசனை (68)

A *śloka* in Guruparamparā prabhāvam^[4] describes the works of Svāmi Rāmānuja, where Gītā Bhāṣyam is mentioned first.

गीताभाष्यं भूष्य वेदान्तभाष्यं सारं दीपं किञ्च गद्यत्रयञ्च।

वेदार्थानां सङ्ग्रहं नित्ययागं प्राहैतान् यस्तं यतीन्द्रं भजेऽहम्॥

Hence there is a thirunāma for Svāmi Rāmānuja –
गीताभाष्यादिसद्ग्रन्थकारकः (368)

Śrī Ālavandār’s ‘Gītārta Saṅgraha’ served as a guide to Svāmi Rāmānuja to write Gītā Bhāṣyam. Śrī Ālavandar composed 32 *śloka*-s, bringing out the essence of Bhagavad Gītā. This is the first text explaining the Bhagavad Gītā, as per *Śrīvaiṣṇava sampradāya*.

Aim of Bhagavad Gītā

As previously said, Gītā is a *śāstra* rendered by Śrī Kṛṣṇa for the people of the world in the pretext of Arjuna’s delusion. Arjuna requested Śrī Kṛṣṇa to consider him as a disciple and

provide knowledge to enlighten him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa utilized this opportunity and provided Gītā *śāstra* to all those who have quest for knowledge. Śrī Ālavandar states this as follows.

पार्थ प्रपन्नमुद्दिष्य शास्त्रावतरणं कृतम्।

Svāmi Rāmānuja explains this in the introduction of Gītā Bhāṣyam as follows

पाण्डुतनययुध्दप्रोत्साहनव्याजेन... भक्तियोगम् अवतारयामास।

Hence the thirunāma – प्रपन्नपार्थव्याजेन गीताशास्त्रं विमर्शयते नमः (370)

Bhagavad Gītā’s primary aim is to provide *tattva yāthātmya jñāna*. *Tattva* here refers to the *paratattva* – *Paramātma*. The whole essence of Gītā is to establish *paratattva*; that is Śrīman Nārāyana is the supreme entity among the three *tattva*-s, which is *cit*, *acit*, *Īśvara*.

Yāthātmya means *svarūpa* (its own real nature). Knowledge about *Paramātma*’s *svarūpa*, *rūpa*, *guṇa*-s, etc is *tattva yāthātmya jñāna*.

Gītārta Saṅgraha states

नारायणः परं ब्रह्म गीताशास्त्रे समीरितः।

This means Bhagavad Gītā clearly declares that Lord Nārāyana is the only supreme *tattva*, possessing infinite auspicious *guṇa*-s. Svāmi Rāmānuja eulogized the *Paramātma*’s supremacy, His *svarūpa*, *rūpa*, *guṇa*-s, etc in Gītā Bhāṣyam’s introduction as

श्रियःपतिः निखिलहेयप्रत्यनीककल्याणैकतानः

स्वेतरसमस्तवस्तुविलक्षणानन्तज्ञानानन्दैक स्वरूपः.....

विविधविचित्रानन्तभोग्यभोक्तृवर्गपरिपूर्ण

निखिलजगदुदयविभवलयलीलः परंब्रह्म पुरुषोत्तमो नारायणः.....

परमपुरुषार्थलक्षणमोक्षसाधनतया वेदान्तोदितं स्वविषयं ज्ञान कर्मानुगृहीतं भक्तियोगम् अवतारयामास।

Also in all other appropriate places he describes *Paramātma* in a beautiful manner, capturing the minds of the reader, which is reflected in the following thirunāma –: गीताभाष्यमहाग्रन्थ तत्त्वयाथार्थ्यवेदकाय नमः (367), गीतासारार्थतात्पर्यभूमिं नारायणं वदते नमः (371)

Classification of Bhagavad Gītā (petikā vibhāgam)

Bhagavad Gītā establishes *Paratattva*, *paramaprāpya* and *upāya* in its 18 chapters. The 18 chapters are classified into three 3 *ṣaṭka*-s –

- 1 – 6 chapters: Prathama ṣaṭka / pūrva ṣaṭka
- 7 - 12 chapters: Dvītiya or madhyama ṣaṭka
- 13 – 18 chapters: Trītiya or carama ṣaṭka

Prathama ṣaṭka deals with *Karma yoga*, *Jñāna yoga* and the resultant *ātmasākṣātkāra*, which is considered as the eligibility for *Bhakti yoga*. Dvītiya ṣaṭka deals with *Bhakti yoga*, which leads to *Bhagavadsākṣātkāra*.

Trītiya ṣaṭkam explains about the three *tattva*-s (*cit*, *acit*, *Īśvara*) and again reiterates *Karma*, *Jñāna* and *Bhakti yoga* to emphasise the importance.

Upāya and upeya

Clear knowledge about the *Paramātma* makes it clear that He is the ultimate *puruṣārta*. Then the seeker will search for the

proper *upāya* (means) to attain this *puruṣārta* which will make him realise that the supreme entity Himself is the *upāya* as there is no other *upāya* worth to attain Him. In order to realise Him as the ultimate *puruṣārta* and *upāya*, *Bhakti yoga* or *prapatti* are the ways prescribed in *Vedānta-s*. Bhagavad Gītā preaches *bhakti* as the ultimate *upāya*. Realisation about *Bhagavān* is termed as *Bhagavadsākṣātkāra*; attaining Him is termed as *mukti*, *Bhagavadanubhava*, *Bhagavadprāpti*, etc.

So, *Bhakti* is the prescribed *upāya* for *Bhagavadsākṣātkāra*. Now, this *Bhakti* is to be achieved by following *Karma yoga* and *Jñāna yoga* which are its means.

Gītārtha Saṅgraha expresses this as

स्वधर्मज्ञानवैराग्यसाध्यभक्त्येकगोचरः नारायणः....

Svāmi Rāmānuja explains this at the 7th chapter *avatārikā* as follows

प्रथमेन अध्यायषट्केन परमप्राप्यभूतस्य श्रीमती नारायणस्य प्राप्त्युपायभूतं तदुपासनं वक्तुं तदङ्गभूतम् आत्मज्ञानपूर्वक कर्मानुष्ठानसाध्यं प्राप्तुः

Also, he states that

परब्रह्मभूत परम परुष स्वरूपं, तदुपासनं च भक्ति शब्द वाच्यम् उच्यते।

After this he establishes in detail that the ‘*upāsana*’ mentioned in the *vedānta-s* is *Bhakti* only. This gave him the thirunāma – उपायसाध्यं भक्तयेगम्यं तं परमंवदते नमः (372)

Arjuna viṣāda yogam

Every text has a chapter for introduction, followed by the subject matter. In Bhagavad Gītā, the 1st chapter is introduction and it goes till 11th śloka in the 2nd chapter. The first chapter is about Arjuna’s grief, delusion and perplexity as to what is *dharma* and *adharmā*. 47th śloka of 1st chapter says

एवमुक्त्वाऽर्जुनः शोकसम्बिग्न मानसः।

Śrī Alavandar explains the essence of each chapter of Gītā, in Gītārtha Saṅgraha from 5th to 22nd śloka. The Gītārtha Saṅgraha śloka of the first chapter states.

अस्थानस्नेहकारुण्य धर्माधर्मधियाकुलम्। पार्थम्

Svāmi Rāmānuja explained the grief of Arjuna in his Gītā Bhāṣyam as follows

बन्धुस्नेहेन परमया च कृपया धर्माधर्मभयेन च अतिमात्र स्विन्नसर्वगात्रः ‘सर्वथा अहं न योत्स्यामि’ इति उक्त्वा बन्धुविक्षेप जनित शोक सम्बिग्न मानसः।

So, he earned the thirunāma, गीतादिमाध्याय पार्थविषादं सुविमृश्यविदे नमः (373)

In Gītā Bhāṣyam commentary for 9th śloka of 2nd chapter [5], he quoted the Gītārtha Saṅgraha śloka of this chapter.

In order to relieve Arjuna’s delusion, Śrī Kṛṣṇa begins to preach the *śāstra* with a smile. Starting from 12th śloka of 2nd chapter till 66th śloka of 18th chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa preaches Arjuna about the real nature of *ātmā*, *Paramātmā*, and the *upāya* to reach *Paramātmā*, which is *Bhakti yoga*.

Sāmkhya yoga

The 2nd chapter of Gītā is called as *Sāmkhya yoga*. *Sāmkhya* means *buddhi* (intellect). *Ātmā* is the object that is known

through this intellect and hence it is termed as *sāmkhyam*. *Yoga* means *upāya*. The *upāya-s* to know and realise the *ātmā* are discussed in this chapter, which are *karma yoga* and *jñāna yoga*. It is explained in such a way that *karma yoga* leads to *jñāna yoga* and through that *ātmāsākṣātkāra*. Here *karma yoga* refers to the practice of prescribed activities and surrendering the results to *Bhagavān*. *Jñāna yoga* means steady and continuous meditation on *ātmā* with a firm control over senses and mind. The Gītārtha Saṅgraha śloka of Gītā’s second chapter is as follows:

नित्यात्मासङ्ग कर्महगोचरा सांख्य योगधीः।

द्वितीये स्थितधीलक्षा प्रोक्ता तन्मोहशान्तये॥

Svāmi Rāmānuja quotes the above śloka at the end of this chapter’s commentary [6].

In the commentary of 39th śloka, Svāmi Rāmānuja explains that till 38th śloka Śrī Kṛṣṇa imparted knowledge about *sāmkhyam* – *ātmā*, in order to realise its real nature. After that the *yoga*, i.e., *karma yoga* is explained, which if practiced with true knowledge about *ātmā*, leads to a state called *sthitadhī* (firm wisdom). This *sthitadhī* state is referred to as *jñāna yoga*. The four states in *jñāna yoga* and the ways through which it is accomplished are also explained. Finally, *ātmāsākṣātkāra* is expressed as the fruit of *jñāna yoga*.

गीताद्वितीयसांख्याह योगार्थ विशदीकराय नमः (374) – This thirunāma is based on the explanations which Svāmi Rāmānuja gave for the 2nd chapter.

Karma yoga

The third chapter of Gītā is named as *karma yoga* and this explains the importance and greatness of *karma yoga* as compared to *jñāna yoga*. In the previous chapter it is said that *jñāna yoga* has to be practiced after the *karma yoga*. One cannot practice *jñāna yoga* straight away. They may not possess the necessary skills due to lack of knowledge, power, etc. If such people indulge in *jñāna yoga*, they might get distressed due to their inability to accomplish *jñāna yoga*. Generally common people follow the ways of their elders and wise men or learned people. Hence to prevent laymen from indulging in *jñāna yoga* straightaway, it is suggested that everybody (even wise men who are capable of starting *jñāna yoga*) should first practice *karma yoga*. Svāmi Rāmānuja elucidated the importance of *karma yoga* in his Gītā Bhāṣyam of this chapter, for which he is known by the following thirunāma.

गीतातृतीयकर्माख्य योगार्थान् सुप्रपञ्चयते नमः (375)

In the fourth chapter’s *avatārikā* the essence of third chapter is mentioned by Svāmi Rāmānuja as follows

तृतीये अध्याये प्रकृतिसंसृष्टस्यमुमुक्षोः सहसा ज्ञानयोगे अनधिकारात् कर्मयोग एव कार्यः। ज्ञानयोगाधिकारिणः अपि अकर्तृत्वानुसन्धानपूर्वकं कर्मयोग एव श्रेयान् इति सहेतुकम् उक्तम्।

Jñāna yoga

The fourth chapter is called *jñāna yoga*. The term *jñāna yoga* here does not refer to the actual *jñāna yoga*. Here it refers only to *karma yoga*. *Karma yoga* is considered as *jñāna yoga*, because *karma yoga* includes the knowledge aspect which is very much important. The knowledge aspect mentioned here refers to the true knowledge about the *ātmā*, which is the

understanding that *ātmā* is not the real agent in doing *karma yoga*. The *karṣṭva* (agency) is first attributed to the *guṇa*-s of *prakṛti* (*satva, rajas, tamas*). Then this agency which is attributed to the *guṇa*-s ultimately goes to the *Bhagavān*, as the *guṇa*-s and *ātmā* both are subservient to *Bhagavān*, who is the *antaryāmi* to both *cit* and *acit*. Having gained this knowledge that is attributing the agency to *Bhagavān* (*karṣṭva tyāga*), the *karma* yogi surrenders the results of his actions also to *Bhagavān* (*phala tyāga*). If one practices *karma yoga* with *karṣṭva tyāga*, *phala tyāga* and contemplation of Supreme Brahman as *antaryāmi*, that will lead to *ātmāsākṣātkāra*. Svāmi Rāmānuja states in the commentary of 24th *śloka* of this chapter as follows.

मुमुक्षूणां क्रियमाणं कर्म परब्रह्मात्मकम् एव इत्यनुसन्धानयुक्ततया
ज्ञानाकारं साक्षादात्मावलोकनसाधनम्, न ज्ञाननिष्ठाव्यवधानेन
इत्यर्थः।

This knowledge aspect is necessary and *karma yoga* devoid of this will not be fruitful. The importance of this is described very clearly in last 10 *śloka*-s of this chapter. Because of this *karma yoga* in itself is qualified to be referred as *jñāna yoga*. Svāmi Rāmānuja established this well in *Gītā Bhāṣyam* and hence the *thirunāma* - गीताचतुर्थज्ञानाख्य योगार्थान् स्पष्टमुक्तयते नमः (376)

Karma sanyāsa yoga

The fifth chapter gets the name *karma sanyāsa yoga*. Svāmi Rāmānuja pronounced the sense of *karma sanyāsa* well in this chapter and is known by this *thirunāma*.

कर्मसन्न्यास योगार्थान् गीतापंचम ईरयते नमः (377)

It explains the renunciation of the agency of actions which is necessary while doing *karma yoga*. This sort of renunciation is a form of knowledge and it is *aṅga* (part) of *karma yoga*. In literal sense, *karma sanyāsa* may mean *jñāna yoga*, but here in accordance with the rest of this chapter, it means the *karma yoga* inclusive of this knowledge attribute. The ways of renunciation are elaborated from 8th *śloka* to 15th *śloka*, which are different from those explained in the previous chapters. Here the *karṣṭva* is attributed to the *indriya*-s, *prāṇa*-s, *deha* and *prakṛti vāsana*. The *karṣṭva* arises to *jīvātmā* because of the association of the *ātmā* with the *indriya*-s, etc which are deep rooted in *karma*. In the commentary of 2nd *śloka* of this chapter, Svāmi Rāmānuja states

कर्मसन्न्यासात् – ज्ञानयोगात् कर्मयोग एव विशिष्यते।

This means *karma yoga* is greater than *jñāna yoga*. The reason is practice of *karma yoga* inclusive of such renunciation is easy to follow, simpler and quicker than *jñāna yoga*. It directly leads to *ātmāsākṣātkāra* (independent of other means) without the help of *jñāna yoga*. Moreover, *karma yoga* is *apramāda sādhana* (free from liability to lapses).

Yogābhyāsa yoga

The sixth chapter is named as *yogābhyāsa yoga*. Here the first term *yoga* means *ātmāvalokana* (*ātmāsākṣātkāra*). This is a state of actual realisation of *ātmā* and it is a continuous process of thought or meditation upon *ātmā*. Practice of *karma yoga* or *jñāna yoga* helps one to attain this state. But having achieved that state, one has to remain in that state without distraction in order to widen the knowledge about the

ātmā by experiencing the same. In other words, *ātmā* recognises itself at the state of *ātmāsākṣātkāra*, which leads to pleasure/enjoyment of *ātmā* with the attributes of *jñāna* and *ānanda*. This is an unparalleled enjoyment when compared with the enjoyment of worldly objects. Hence, the entity who once enjoyed the pleasure from himself (*ātmā*) wishes to stay in the same state and continue to enjoy *ātmā*. For this, the effective means is practice – *abhyāsa*.

Yogābhyāsa means practice of the *ātmāvalokana* state. The ways and conditions of *yogābhyāsa* are explained from 10th to 28th *śloka* in this chapter. One of the ways is to fix the mind on *Brahmam*, the epitome of auspicious qualities. Even though there may be lapses in some of the ways and conditions during *yogābhyāsa*, Lord Kṛṣṇa preaches that making Him the object of meditation automatically resolves those lapses and leads to *ātmāsākṣātkāra*. Svāmi Rāmānuja expresses this at the introduction of 16th *śloka* as

आत्मयोगम् आरभमाणस्य मनोनेर्मल्यहेतुभूतां मनसो भगवति
शुभाश्रये स्थितिम् अभिधाय.....

His explanation to the 6th chapter resulted in the *thirunāma* - गीताषष्ठाध्याय योगाभ्यास योगविमर्शकाय नमः (378)

Conclusion

Bhagavad Gītā is preachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna and Svāmi Rāmānuja interpreted the meanings of Bhagavad Gītā following Śrī Alavandar's Gītārta Saṅgraha as a guide. His Gītā Bhāṣyam puts forth a step by step approach to attain *Bhagavadśākṣātkāra*. *Ātmajñāna* associated with *karma yoga* results in *ātmāsākṣātkāra* which is the eligibility to carry out *Bhakti yoga*; *Bhagavadśākṣātkāra* is gained through *Bhakti yoga*. In the *Sahasranāma* of Svāmi Rāmānuja, composed by Śrī. U.Ve. Addaṅki Veṅkaṭācārya Svāmi there are *thirunāma* -s describing Svāmi Rāmānuja's *guṇa*-s, various works, etc. In this article, *thirunāma* -s of Svāmi Rāmānuja which praises his work on Gītā Bhāṣyam's prathama ṣaṭka has been discussed.

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