

ॐ नमोनारायणाय
नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरच्छ्वैव नरोत्तमम्।
देवीं सरस्वतीं व्यासं ततो जयमुदीरयेत्॥

Reference of Gāyatrī in Mahābhārata; As a means of Salvation

'ध्येयः सदा सवितृमण्डलमध्यवर्ती नारायणः'

-P.S.WAIKER

Mahābhārata is really 'Maha'; meaning magnificent in every aspect. It is a great book of wisdom. Bhagavan Vedavyāsa composed it. It is believed that this great work was composed at the fag end of Dvāpara-Yuga; six hundred years before the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is called 'Itihāsa' (History). Also it has earned a place of high worthiness; recognised as fifth Veda. (भारतं चापि कृतवान् पञ्चमं वेदमुत्तमम्). This epic consists of eighteen Parvas and one lakh verses. (महत्वाद् भारवत्वाच्च महाभारतमुच्यते। निरुक्तमस्य यो वेद सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते। यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नोहास्ति न कुत्रचित्।). Even knowing the Nirukta of it, one would get rid of sins. It is an exclusive text. All worthy topics discussed elsewhere are found in Mahābhārata. The topics not mentioned in this work cannot be found elsewhere.

In Mahābhārata, Dharma (Virtues) and Adharma (Vices) have been personified and represented as Pāṇḍavās and their followers and Kauravās and their followers respectively. Lord Kṛṣṇa was incarnated to uphold Dharma and its followers and to put down Adharma and its followers. Finally, one can observe that Lord Kṛṣṇa vanquished the wicked and established the Dharma. Pāṇḍavās who were the followers of Dharma (righteousness) were given the opportunity to rule the kingdom.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is always in favour of people following the righteous path. The code of conduct of this path is well laid down in detail in Śruti, Smṛuti and Purāṇa. The golden path, based on these authorities, followed in India from time immemorial, is called Sanātana-Dharma.

For the followers of Sanātana-Dharma, Upanayana is one of the most important Sanskāra conducted for the boys of Dwija class at the age of eight years which makes them eligible to perform Sandhyāvandanam, learn the Vedas and follow other orders said therein. The Upanayana Sanskāra is not local arrangement by some people. It is a vedic instruction. Veda says, at the age of eight years for every boy in the Dwija class, Upanayanam has to be performed (अष्टवर्षे ब्राह्मणमुपनयीत, तमध्यापयीत). The Gāyatrī Mantra Japa is the core part of Sandhyāvandanam. The Vedas lay stress on performing the Sandhyāvandanam. It says 'Āharah Sandhyāmupāsīta. Prātarutthāya Sandhyāmupāsīta. Yah Sandhyāmupāsate Tasyaiva Samupāsate'. Perform Sandhyāvandanam regularly everyday morning (morn, noon, eve). It is said to be the Brahmopāsana.

One can see reference of Gāyatrī in a good number of philosophical works. It has relationship with Brahma Sutra, Bhāgavata, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Smṛuti-chandrika, Smṛuti Artha-Sāgara, Sandhya-Bhashya etc. It is referred to in these texts in different contexts. This wide reference shows the importance of Gāyatrī Mantra. It has earned its unique place due to its intrinsic virtue. Upanishad says 'गायति त्रयति च गायत्रि'. It is well known for its unique protective power. It was first demonstrated by sage Viśvāmitra. A boy by name Śunaśyepa was earmarked for offering in a Yajña. Viśvāmitra taught the boy the sacred Gāyatrī Mantra and asked him to keep repeating it. The human offering was meant for god Varuṇa. When the offering time approached, the boy was about to be consigned to the fire (Agni Deva), God

Varuṇa refused the offering and Agni too; since the boy was protected by the sacred Gāyatrī Mantra. That is the power of Gāyatrī Mantra.

Coming to the point of its reference in Mahābhārata, one could easily observe that Gāyatrī reference occurs at least five times, at different places and in different contexts.

First it appears in the beginning of Bhīṣma-Parva. Asked by Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Sanjaya narrates the importance of sacred mother earth. There he accounts for the broad category of living beings both static and dynamic, to be nineteen. He also accounts the five elements (Pancha-Bhūtā). All totals to twentyfour. Sanjaya said these twentyfour are the manifestations of twentyfour syllabled Gāyatrī. (तेषां विंशतिरेकोना महाभूतेषु पञ्चसु। चतुर्विंशति गायत्री लोकसम्मता। या एतां वेद गायत्री पुण्यां सर्वगुणान्विताम्। तत्त्वेन भरतश्रेष्ठ स लोके न प्रणश्यति॥).

After the completion of Bhagavadgītā in Bhīṣma-Parva, Sage Vaiśampāyana mentions in the next chapter that there are four precious things which Lord Kṛṣṇa has given to the humanity as a boon. They are Gītā, Gangā, Gāyatrī and Govinda-Nāmā. The Gītā is Śrī Kṛṣṇa's teachings to Arjuna. Ganga emerged from His foot. He spelt the Govinda-Nāmā (Viṣṇu-Sahasra Nāmā) through Bhīṣma. He taught Gāyatrī to Yudhiṣṭhira in Aśvamedha-parva. (गीता गङ्गा च गायत्री गोविन्देति हृदि स्थिते। चतुर्गकारसंयुक्ते पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते॥).

Next in Śāntiparva the importance of repeating Gāyatrī Mantra is highlighted. There is an interesting story of Kauśika Brāhmaṇa, performing the Gāyatrī Japa in an exemplary manner. He adhered to all the prescribed norms of a good Jāpaka. In appreciation of his performance of Japa with detachment, Goddess Sāvitrī appeared before him. She said that she was immensely pleased with his Gāyatrī Japa. He could ask for any boons. He bowed down his head at her feet and he refused to ask any boons from her. He prayed, Oh Goddess Let my japa incessantly continue with deeper meditation leading to Samādhi. (जप्यं प्रति ममेच्छेयं वर्धत्विति पुनः पुनः। मनसश्च समाधिर्मे वर्धताहरहः शुभे॥). That is enough' He said. She granted his wishes. (यास्यसि ब्रह्मणः स्थानमनिमित्तमनिन्दितम्). She also mentioned that Kāla, Yama, Dharma and King Ikṣhvāku will approach you shortly to discuss Dharma. They all came to him, first three came and then the king arrived. They were all amazed at his steadfastness and adherence to the principle of detachment (Nivṛttimārga). He refused to ask or accept anything from any body. The story is too long and interesting. The Kauśik Brāhmaṇa and Ikṣvāku attained Brahmaloḥka from two methods of Sadhana, viz. Japa and Yoga.

Further, there is a reference in Anuśāsika Parva. Yudhiṣṭhira asked Bhīṣma 'Which is the worthy Mantra to be repeated every day so that one would get the best reward of Dharma?' (किं जप्यं जपतो नित्यं भवेद्द्वर्मफलं महत्।). Bhīṣma replied that there is a Mantra mentioned by Vedavyāsa known as Sāvitrī or Gayatrī by chanting it every day, one would get rid of all the sins instantaneously. (व्यासप्रोक्तमिदं मन्त्रं शृणुष्वैकमना नृप। सावित्र्या विहितं दिव्यं सद्यः पापविमोचनम्॥). He further narrates the benefits of the Mantra as follows:

When travelling in air or land, when one is scheduled to meet a king or the like, chanting of Gāyatrī ensures success (यानपात्रे च याने च प्रवासे राजवेश्मनि। परां सिद्धिमवाप्नोति सावित्री ह्युत्तमां पठन्॥). A Dwija who practices Gāyatrī will not have any fear from king, devils, demons, fire, water, snakes etc. The Japa establishes peace in the society. Where Gāyatrī Japa is practiced, the surroundings will be safe from fire hazards, no untimely deaths, nor snakes live in the vicinity. (नान्निर्दहनि काष्ठानि सावित्री यत्रपठ्यते। न तत्र बालो म्रियते न च तिष्ठन्ति पन्नगाः॥). One who narrates or listens to the glory of Gāyatrī he will not be touched by sorrows. The sages perform

Japa and Homa and get rare rewards; they have guarded the secret of this Mantra. The rulers of Sūrya (Sun) and Chandra (Moon) dynasties adhered to the practice of Gāyatrī, fared well here and secured His grace too. All sages chant Gāyatrī Mantra regularly. Indra and Vasus got this Mantra re-initiated from Vasiṣṭa, with its power, they defeated the demons. The Jāpaka of Gāyatrī Mantra will be bestowed with the rewards equivalent to Godāna and Listening to Mahābhārata, (तुल्यं फलं भवति तस्य च तस्य चैव॥). Bhīṣma said I have narrated to you, Oh, Yudhiṣṭira the greatness of Sanātana Brahmarūpa Gāyatrī. (एषा कथिता राजन् सावित्री ब्रह्म शाश्वती॥).

At the end of Aśvamedha-Parva, before Śrī Kṛṣṇa's final departure to Dwārakā, Yudhiṣṭira requests Him to advise him on Vaiṣṇava Dharma. Out of the many topics discussed therein, Gāyatrī was one of the topics on which Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave an elaborate account. These are most valuable advices on Gāyatrī. An Upāsaka cannot find these elsewhere. Bhagavan has called Gāyatrī as 'VEDA MADHU'. In brief His advice is as follows:

In the opening stanza itself He highlights the importance of Sandhyāvandanam. One who performs Sandhya regularly every day three times, will make use of it (Gāyatrī) as a boat through which not only he crosses the ocean of Sansār, but also he would safely ferry others too. (सायं प्रातस्तु ये सन्ध्यां सम्यग्नित्यमुपासते। नावं वेदमयीं कृत्वा तरन्ते तारयन्ति च॥).

Gāyatrī Devi is popularly called Veda-Veda-Mātā. The Gāyatrī is a Veda-Mantra too. One who performs the Japa of Gāyatrī, even if he accepts whole of earth including the oceans as gift (Dāna), that will not be considered as serious lapse (प्रतिग्रहदोष). Acceptance of gifts of abnormal value is considered to be a serious lapse leading to sin. A Gāyatrī practitioner attains a high degree of purity and become eligible. He is unaffected by the acceptance of legitimate gifts of any value. (यो जपेत् पावनीं देवीं गायत्रीं वेदमातरम्। न सीदेत् प्रतिग्रहणानः पृथिवीं च स सागरम्॥).

At this juncture, we recall a related instance, regarding acceptance of gifts of high value from Brihadāranyaka-Upanishad. Once, Sage Budila visited king Janaka. The sage was received with respect. The king made up his mind to offer him one thousand cows and good amount of wealth as gift. The sage was reluctant to accept such great wealth in the form of gift. The sage felt accepting gifts beyond one's capacity would lead to sin. King Janaka understood the delicacy for his hesitation and reminded him of the governing deity of the first syllable of Gāyatrī. A Gāyatrī Upāsaka, with this knowledge can accept any amount of legitimate Dāna, he will not be a sinner. The above advice of Śrī Kṛṣṇa reveal the same contents.

Whenever an individual faces misfortune on account of unfavourable planetary configuration or planets being in debilitation or casting adverse effects, they will turn auspicious yielding favourable results by the performance of Gāyatrī Japa. (ये चास्य दुस्थिता केचित् ग्रहाः सूर्योदयो दिवि। ते चास्य सौम्य जायन्ते शिवाः शुभकरास्तथा॥).

Sometimes our residential places are infested with the presence of evil spirits. Those can do no harm to a person regularly adopting Gāyatrī Japa.

Gāyatrī appears in all four Vedas and it is most valuable part. Those who observe the Vedic instructions with steadfastness are capable of purifying others.

Prajāpati informed Manu that for a Brāhmin good conduct, Vedic studies, giving liberally, cleanliness, politeness, straightforwardness, are considered to be more than Vedas.

Those who perform Sandhya everyday regularly, Oh, Yudhiṣṭira, there is no doubt they will reach Brahmaloaka. (सन्ध्यामुपासते ये वै नित्यमेव द्विजोत्तमः। ते यान्ति नरशार्दूल ब्रह्मलोकं न संशयः॥).

A person who knows only Gāyatrī and observe that discipline according to vedic instructions is far better than a person who knows all the four Vedas and does not observe the discipline of Sandhya. (गायत्रीमात्रसारोपि वरो विप्रः सुयन्त्रितः। नायन्त्रितः चतुर्वेदी सर्वाशी सर्वविक्रयी॥).

In the past Devās and Rīśis weighed Gāyatrī and four Vedas in the presence of four headed Brahma. It was revealed that Gāyatrī weighed heavier than four Vedas.

Just like bees collect honey from various blossomed flowers, similarly, Oh Pāndava, Sāvitrī is collected from all Vedas. Hence Gāyatrī is popularly known as 'VEDA-MADHU' वेदमधु. (यथा विकसिते पुष्पे मधुगृह्णन्ति षट्पदाः। एवं गृहिता सावित्री सर्ववेदे च पाण्डव॥).

Therefore the Gāyatrī is considered to be the life essence of all Vedas. Without Sāvitrī, the Vedas are said to be lifeless. (तस्मात् सर्ववेदानां सावित्रीं प्राण उच्यते निर्बीजा हीतरे वेदा विना सावित्रिया नृप॥).

One thousand Japa (repetition) of Gāyatrī is said to be the best, hundred count is better and ten is good. Keeping this in mind Gāyatrī may be practised every day. Repetition of this Mantra, Oh Kaunteya, destroys all the sins and bestows rare benefits. (सहस्रपरमां देवीं शतमध्यां दशावराम्। सावित्रिं जप कौन्तेय सर्वपापप्रणाशिनीम्॥).

The words of praise about Gāyatrī, by Sanjaya, Vaiṣampāyana, Kauśika Brāhmana, Bhīṣma and the decisive advice from Śrī Kṛṣṇa would suffice to leave an unfading impression on the mind of Gāyatrī Upāsaka. For a Sādhaka what is always needed is the undiminished inspiration to continue the Japa till the end. Each syllable, each word and each pāda whole of Gāyatrī have enormous power in destroying sins and bestowing abundant benefits (virtues). This proves its innate value. It has been shining through ages. There are Gāyatrī realised souls both in the past and present days. Let there be a new awareness in the Dwija socety about this holy Gāyatrī Mantra and let all Upāsakas resolve to regularly and relentlessly practice it. The Gāyatrī has descended from eternity (Vedas) and is moving towards infinity.

ॐ तत्सत्
श्रीकृष्णार्पणमस्तु