

# **Three Immortal Gitas**

## **Translated into Tamil**

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### **The Three Gitas**

Translation of immortal works from one language to another reflects the aspirations of the intellectuals of the Society and may be considered the great height to which both the language speakers rise. The late 18<sup>th</sup> cent and 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed translation of three immortal Sanskrit works, the “Bhagavad Gita”, the “Isvara Gita” and the “Brahma Gita”

All the three are in poetic Tamil, which speaks of the high standard in which Tamil was flourishing at that time. The tempo of translation seems to have been stirred up by the large scale introduction of printing which may be considered a revolution then as is the introduction of Computer in modern times. Interestingly computerization has further aided by the revolutionary work in the field of photography but whether this new revolution has brought in corresponding development in the field of literary creativity of classical Tamil can be gauged only in the coming years. But judging from the statements of responsible persons it seems the younger generation is not interested in studying classical Tamil.

### **19<sup>th</sup> cent Translations**

The translation of the “Three Gitas” in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent shows that they were critically studied, manuscripts examined, edited and published and this work was not confined to any one community, but all sections of the society have contributed both academically and inspirationally, as it is found by sanyasins of mutts, merchants like Chettiyars, and Pillaimars have participated and were responsible for their publication. The position then was beyond caste, Creed, or even religion. Of the three “Gitas” the Bhagavad gita the most popular and great work was translated by one Bhatta while the

other two were translated by Tattvaraya swamikal. Interestingly all the three Gita translations were published in the same year “Viya” in the month of April (1884) at Chennai Memorial press by A Ramaswamikal, a disciple of Chidambara swamikal of Koyilur mutt who was belonged to the Muthuramalinga swamikal Adheenam. This publication was made at the request of C.A.K Chellappa chettiyar, and C.Rama A Raman chettiyar of Kottamangalam. The “Bhagavad gita” was critically edited by one Ponnambala swamikal who was also a disciple of Chidambara swamikal of Koyilur. which was also called Sami vanam. Bhatta, who wrote the translation lived much earlier and it seems a number of manuscripts of this text was available for the editor provides variat textual readings in the foot notes.

### **Bhagavad Gita Translation into Tamil Poems**

The “Bhagavad gita” translated by Bhattar is in 18 chapters and is in vrittappa meter through out. The language of the translation is highly classical and delightful. At the beginning of the work there is a salutation to Ganesa, the son of Ardhanarisvara/In the second verse we are told that “Ayan Kirshna was born at Mathura as Bhatta to reach Ksheamanagar and gave this poem for the benefit of all men of purity. The next verse says Krishna taught this work as a reply to Vijaya and this was compiled into 18 chapters into a full text by the Ancient sage Vyasa, who compiled the Vedas.

We call this “Paramartha darsana” that resounded as thunderous clouds on the peak of Vedas. This was compiled in the divine language by Vyasa. I am translating into Tamil so that I can also enter into the subtleties of this work”.

In the last two verses of the “Payiram” (to be taken together) we are told that Veda Vyasa gave the very end of the Vedas (Vedanta). Sankara who adored the lotus feet of Govinda mahamuni (Govinda Bhagavadpada) and who subdued his senses and created an ocean of knowledge in the world after Vyasa and paved the way for realization. Evidently The Vedantic school was established by Vyasa and enlarged by Sankara. The author says he wrote this Dharma text in Tamil by the grace of Sankara, which means he followed the bhashya of Sankara in his rendering. So this is an Advaitic doctrine.

Interestingly Sankara in his “Gita bhashya”, mentions that this is “dharma text” taught by Narayana born as Vasudeva to Arjuna for the benefit of the world. He also says that Vyasa composed this text in 700 verses. Thus we are told that Krishna’s teaching was only verbal and it was Vyasa who reduced it into a text in 700 verses and Sankara elucidated it. Bhatta who translated this mention this tradition both at the beginning and end.

### **Chapter Headings**

Also interesting is a field of enquiry on the names of chapter headings of the Bhagavad Gita given by Vyasa and Sankara. It is seen that Sankara gives the same names to some of the chapters as given in the original text, while he gives different titles for some other chapters and in some instances he does not give any name at all. For example Sankara does not give any chapter headings to the first two chapters though vyasa gives the first chapter “Arjuna vishada yoga” and for the second he gives the title “Sankhya yoga. The 18<sup>th</sup> chapter is called “Moksha Sanyasa yoga” both by Vyasa and Sankara. But the translator calls the first chapter as Soka yoga, and the second adhyaya as Sankhya yoga. The 18<sup>th</sup> Adhyaya is called by him as “Samkshepa adhyaya”. Thus we find some variations in chapter headings. As this is a popular text spread both in time and space there are variations in chapter headings. For example Radhakrishnan’s translation into English shows some variations in titles. However it is not known whether the translator has changed the chapter headings or the manuscript he used had different headings. There is reason to believe that the translator has not changed the titles but probably the manuscript he used was southern recension.

As the chapter headings are the true reflections of the respective chapters I am giving the the three chapter headings, O) gives the title given in the Original text. S) The Chapter titles as they appear in Sankara’s version used in Anandasram edition. and C) the chapter heading as they appear in the Tamil Translation by Bhattar.

## Chapter headings in the Original, Sankara and Bhatta

1. O) Arjuna vishada yogah  
S) No title  
B) Soka adhyayam
2. O)Sankhya Yogah  
S) No title  
B) Sankhya yogah Adhyaya
3. O) Karma yogah  
S) Karma prasamsa yogah  
B) Deva Pujai adhyayam
4. O) Jnana Karma sanyasa yogah  
S) Brahama yajna prasamsa  
B) Sampradaya Adhyayam
5. O) Sanyasa yoga  
S) Prakriti Garbha  
B) Jnana kaema Adhyaya
6. O) Dhyana yogah  
S) Abhyasa yogah  
B) Yoga Adhyaya
7. O) Jnana vijnana yogah  
S) Jnana vijnana yogah  
B) Maya rupa Adhyaya
8. a) Taraka brahma yogah  
b) Brahmakshara nirdesa  
c) Elu vahai vinauraitta Adhyaya
9. O) Raja vidya rajaguhya yogah  
S) Raja vidya rajaguhya yogah  
B) Maya vikara Adhyaya
10. O) Vibhuti yogah  
S) Vibhuti yogah  
B) Vibhuti yogah
11. O) Visvarupa darsanam  
S) Visvarupa darsanam

- B) Visvarupa darsanam
12. O) Bhakti yogah  
S) Bhakti yogah  
B) Bhakti yogah
13. O) Prkriti Purusha viveka yogah  
S) Kshetra kshetrajnana yogah  
B) Kshetra Kshetrajna Adhyaya
14. O) Guna traya vibhaga yogah  
S) Gunatraya vibhaga yogah  
B) Gunatita yogah
15. O) Purushottama yogah  
S) Purushottama yogah  
B) Prapanca adhyaya
16. O) Deivasura sampat vibhaga yogah  
S) Sampat vibhaga yogah  
B) Devasura adhyaya
17. O) Sraddha traya vibhaga yogah  
S) Sraddha traya vibhaga yogah  
B) Guna vikara Adhyaya
18. O) Moksha sanyasa yogah  
S) Moksha sanyasa yogah  
B) Samkshepa Adhyaya

### **Bhagavad Gita translation in prose**

There is another publication of the Gita in Tamil but in prose form published by one Vira bhadra pillai of Tanjavur in Tanjavur National press in April, 1889. This publication was brought out at the request of J.Sabhapati pillai of Mathur matham. The title of the work says it was brought out with the help a manuscript obtained by the grace of God and that the author has made only spelling corrections retaining the original as found. The name of the translator is not given but says that it was done by an experienced sholar who followed Author who followed the Bhashya of Sankaracharya and the original text in Sanskrit.

But it seems that translation was based on the Translation of bhatta mentioned earlier for at the beginning is found a work called “Bhagavad Gita manmya sangraham” as found in Varaha purana and also another as found in “Padma puranam” which are also found in the publication of Bhattar mentioned earlier. Further the translation of Bhattar has been published in the year “Viya varsham” (1884 ) that is five years prior to the publication in prose./ further the salutation to Krishna occurring at the beginning of the prose version is exactly the same as found in the poetic Translation. This translator also says that he followed the bhashya of Sankaracharya and after reflecting he wrote this work to the best of his ability.

True to his claim the translator has given a true translation of Sankara’s introduction to the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit. “Sri Krishnamurti who remains presents in all living beings in this world taught the Supreme knowledge with compassion Arjuna who was in deluded with grief and attachments of worldly life and was ready throw away the Kshatriya dharma. The Bhagavan taught the “Paramartha jnana”. Sage Vyasa wrote this teaching in 700 verses under the name “Paramartha darsana”This text and its meaning were as told by Sanjaya to king Dhritarashtra is rendered by me un Tamil”. Neithjer in the original nor in the introduction of Sankara this name “Paramartha Darsana” is found. Sankara uses the word “Paramartha Tattva” on his introduction. But is found in the poetic translation of the Gita in Poetic form in Tamil by Bhatta. It would be interesting to check up whether any printed version or manuscript of Gita calls it “Paramartha Darsana”.

Further the prose translation follows the Chapter heading given by Bhatta in some instances. For example the first chapter is called “Soka Adhyaya” and the last chapter is called “Samkshepa adhyaya” as in Bhatta’s work. It is certain that the prose translation is aware of the poetic translation but it is not known whether the same Bhatta wrote the prose translation also?

The prose translation is found for all the 18 chapters. It would be interesting to make a comparative study of both these Tamil versions for further textual criticism.

I am giving the Poetic translation in full here. I will follow this up in later issues with a study of the translations of the “Isvara gita” and “Brahma gita” found in the edition mentioned at the beginning.