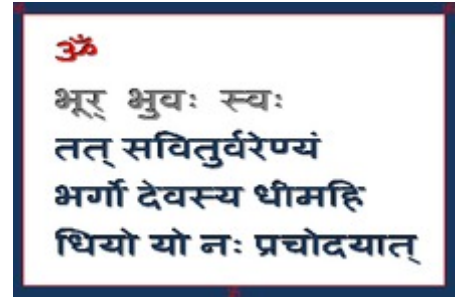


Gayatri Mantra

The **Gāyatrī Mantra**, also known as the **Sāvitrī mantra**, is a highly revered *mantra* from the *Rig Veda* (Mandala 3.62.10), dedicated to Savitr, a form of the sun. *Gāyatrī* is the name of the *Vedic meter* in which the verse is composed.^[1] Its recitation is traditionally preceded by *om̐* and the formula *bhūr bhuvah svaḥ*, known as the *mahāvyaḥṛti*, or "great (mystical) utterance". *Vishvamitra* is said to have created Gayatri Mantra.

The Gayatri mantra is cited widely in Vedic and post-Vedic texts, such as the mantra listings of the Śrauta liturgy, and classical Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*,^{[2][3]} *Harivamsa*,^[4] and *Manusmṛti*.^[5] It is also praised by the Buddha in the Pali Canon.^[6] The mantra is an important part of the *upanayana* ceremony for young males in *Hinduism*, and has long been recited by *dvija* men as part of their daily rituals. Modern *Hindu reform movements* spread the practice of the mantra to include women and all castes and its use is now very widespread.^{[7][8]}



Gayatri Mantra

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Text

The main mantra appears in the hymn *RV* 3.62.10. During its recitation, the hymn is preceded by *om̐* (ॐ) and the formula *bhūr bhuvah svaḥ* (भूर् भुवः स्वः). This prefixing of the mantra proper is described in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (2.11.1-8), which states that it should be chanted with the syllable *om̐*, followed by the three *Vyahrtis* and the Gayatri verse.^[9] Whereas in principle the *gāyatrī* mantra specifies three *pādas* of eight syllables each, the text of the verse as preserved in the *Samhita* is one short, seven instead of eight. Metrical restoration would emend the attested tri-syllabic *vareṇyaṃ* with a tetra-syllabic *vareṇiyaṃ*.^[10]

The Gayatri mantra is,^[9] in *Devanagari*:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः ।
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

In IAST:

*om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ
tatsaviturvareṇyaṃ
bhargo devasyadhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ prachodayāt*
– Rigveda 3.62.10^[11]

Dedication

The *Gāyatrī Mantra* is dedicated to Savitr, a Vedic Sun deity.^{[12][13]}

Translations

The Gayatri Mantra has been translated in many ways.^[note 1] Quite literal translations include:

- Monier Monier-Williams(1882): "Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun, May he enlighten our understandings."^{[14][15]}
- Ralph T.H. Griffith (1896): "May we attain that excellent glory of Savitar the god: So may he stimulate our prayers."^[16]

More interpretative translations include:

- Sir William Jones(1807): "Let us adore the supremacy of that divine sun, the god-head who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress toward his holy seat."^[17]
- William Quan Judge(1893): "Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, that face of the True Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light, that we may see the truth and do our whole duty on our journey to thy sacred seat."^[18]
- Sivanath Sastri (Brahmo Samaj) (1911): "We meditate on the worshipable power and glory of Him who has created the earth, the nether world and the heavens (i.e. the universe), and who directs our understanding."^{[19][note 2]}
- Swami Vivekananda: "We meditate on the glory of that Being whchas produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds."^[20]
- S. Radhakrishnan
 - (1947): "We meditate on the efulgent glory of the divine Light; may he inspire our understanding."^[21]
 - (1953): "We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may he inspire our intelligence."^[22]

Textual appearances

Vedic and Vedantic literature

The Gayatri mantra is cited widely in Vedic and post-Vedic texts, such as the mantra listings of the Śrauta liturgy,^{[note 3][note 4]} and cited several times in the Brahmanas and the Srauta-sutras.^{[note 5][note 6]} It is also cited in a number of grhyasutras, mostly in connection with the upanayana ceremony^[25] in which it has a significant role.



Gayatri mantra personified as a goddess.

The Gayatri mantra is the subject of esoteric treatment and explanation in some major Upanishads, including Mukhya Upanishads such as the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad^[note 7] the Shvetashvatara Upanishad^[note 8] and the Maitrayaniya Upanishad^[note 9] as well as other well-known works such as the Jaiminiya Upanishad Brahmana^[note 10] The text also appears in minor Upanishads, such as the Surya Upanishad

The Gayatri mantra is the apparent inspiration for derivative "gāyatrī" stanzas dedicated to other deities. Those derivations are patterned on the formula *vidmahe - dhīmahi - pracodayāt*,^[26] and have been interpolated^[27] into some recensions of the Shatarudriya litany.^[note 11] Gāyatrīs of this form are also found in the Mahanarayana Upanishad.^[note 12]

The Gayatri mantra is also repeated and cited widely in classical Hindu texts such as the Bhagavad Gita,^{[2][3]} Harivamsa,^[4] and Manusmṛti.^[5]

Buddhist corpus

In Samyutta Nikaya 111, Majjhima Nikaya 92 and Vinaya i 246 of the Pali Canon, the Buddha refers to the Agnihotra as the foremost sacrifice and the Gayatri mantra as the foremost meter:

aggihuttamukhā yaññā sāvittī chandaso mukham.

Sacrifices have the agnihotra as foremost; of meter the foremost is the Sāvitrī.^[6]

Usage

Upanayana ceremony

Imparting the Gayatri mantra to young Sanatan men is an important part of the traditional upanayana ceremony, which marks the beginning of study of the Vedas. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan described this as the essence of the ceremony,^[21] which is sometimes called "*Gayatri diksha*", i.e. initiation into the Gayatri mantra.^[28] However, traditionally, the stanza RV.3.62.10 is imparted only to Brahmin boys. Other Gayatri verses are used in the upanayana ceremony for non-Brahmins: RV.1.35.2, in the tristubh meter, for a kshatriya and either RV.1.35.9 or RV.4.40.5 in the jagati meter for a Vaishya.^[29]

Mantra-recitation

Gayatri japa is used as a method of prāyaścitta, instrument of Tantric practice. It is believed by practitioners that reciting the mantra bestows wisdom and enlightenment, through the vehicle of the Sun (Savitṛ), who represents the source and inspiration of the universe.^[21]

Brahmo Samaj

In 1827 Ram Mohan Roy published a dissertation on the Gayatri mantra^[30] that analysed it in the context of various Upanishads. Roy prescribed a Brahmin to always pronounce *om* at the beginning and end of the Gayatri mantra.^[31] From 1830, the Gayatri mantra was used for private devotion of Brahmos. In 1843, the First Covenant of Brahmo Samaj required Gayatri mantra for Divine Worship. From 1848-1850 with the rejection of Vedas, the Adi Dharm Brahmins use the Gayatri mantra in their private devotions.^[32]

Hindu revivalism

In the later 19th century, Hindu reform movements spread the chanting of the Gayatri mantra. In 1898 for example, Swami Vivekananda claimed that, according to the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, a person became Brahmin through learning from his Guru, and not because of birth. He administered the sacred thread ceremony and the Gayatri mantra to non-Brahmins in Ramakrishna

Mission.^[33] This Hindu mantra has been popularized to the masses, outside of Brahminic culture through pendants, audio recordings and mock scrolls.^[34] Various Gayatri yajñas organised by All World Gayatri Pariwar at small and large scales in late twentieth century also helped spread Gayatri mantra to the masses.^[35]

Popular culture

A version of the Gayatri mantra is featured in the opening theme song of the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004).^[36] A variation on the William Quan Judge translation is also used as the introduction to Kate Bush's song "Lily" on her 1993 album, *The Red Shoes*. In her *Living Proof: The Farewell Tour* the singer/actress Cher sang Gayatri mantra while riding a mechanical elephant. She later reprised the performance during her *Classic Cher* tour. The Swiss *avantgarde* black metal band Schammasch adapted the mantra as the outro in their song "The Empyrean" on their last album "Ætangle" as a Gregorian chant

Notes

1. A literal translation of

*tāt savitūr vāreṇ(i)yaṃ
bhārgo devāsya dhīmahi
dhīyo yō naḥ prachodayāt*

is as follows:

- tat - that
 - savitur - from *savitṛ*, 'that which gives birth', 'the power inside the Sun' or the Sun itself
 - vareṇiyam - to choose, to select; the most choosable, the best

 - bhargoh- to be luminous, the self-luminous one
 - devasya - luminous/ radiant, the divine.
 - *tatsavitur devasya* - "of that divine entity called *Savitṛ*"

 - dhīmahi - who's wisdom and knowledge flow like waters

 - dhiyoh - intellect, a faculty of the spirit inside the body/life activity
 - yoh - which
 - naḥ - our, of us
 - prachodayāt - to move in a specific direction.
 - cod - to move (something/somebody) in a specific direction.
 - pra - the prefix "forth, forward."
 - pracud - "to move (something/somebody) forward"
 - pracodayāt - "may it move (something/somebody) forward"; inspires
2. The word Savitr in the original Sanskrit may be interpreted in two ways, first as the sun, secondly as the "originator or creator". Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Maharshi Debendranath Tagore used that word in the second sense. Interpreted in their way the whole formula may be thus rendered.
3. Sama Veda: 2.812; Vajrasenayi Samhita (M): 3.35, 22.9, 30.2, 36.3; Āittiriya Samhita: 1.5.6.4, 1.5.8.4, 4.1.11.1; Maitrayani Samhita: 4.10.3; Āittiriya Aranyaka: 1.11.2
4. Where it is used without any special distinction, typically as one among several stanzas dedicated to Savitar at appropriate points in the various rituals.

5. Aitareya Brahmana: 4.32.2, 5.5.6, 5.13.8, 5.19.8; Kausitaki Brahmana: 23.3, 26.10; Asvalayana Srautasutra: 7.6.6, 8.1.18; Shankhayana Srautasutra: 2.10.2, 2.12.7, 5.5.2, 10.6.17, 10.9.16; Apastambha Srautasutra: 6.18.1
6. In this corpus, there is only one instance of the stanza being prefixed with the three mahavyahrtis.^[23] This is in a late supplementary chapter of the Shukla Yajurveda samhita, listing the mantras used in the preliminaries to the pravargya ceremony. However, none of the parallel texts of the pravargya rite in other samhitas have the stanza at all. A form of the mantra with all seven vyahrtis prefixed is found in the last book of the Taittiriya Aranyaka better known as the Mahanarayana Upanishad^[24] It is as follows:
 ओम् भूः ओम् भुवः ओम् सुवः ओम् महः ओम् जन् ओम् तपः ओम् सत्यम्। ओम् तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यम् भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।
 धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्।
 ओमापो ज्योती रसोऽमृतं ब्रह्म भूर्भुवस्सुवरोम्।
7. 6.3.6 in the well-known Kanva recension, numbered 6.3.11-13 in the Madhyamdina recension.
8. 4.18
9. 6.7, 6.34, albeit in a section known to be of late origin.
10. 4.28.1
11. Maitrayani Samhita: 2.9.1; Kathaka Samhita: 17.11
12. Taittiriya Aranyaka: 10.1.5-7

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2. Rahman 2005, p. 300.
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