

Mohamudgaram: Adi Shankara's Hammer Against Delusion

 General Collection

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 **Description:** A comprehensive exploration of Bhaja Govindam's teachings on devotion, detachment, and the path to liberation through Maya and Bhakti

 **Tags:** bhaja-govindam, adi-shankara, advaita-vedanta, bhakti, ramayana, mohamudgaram, spiritual-philosophy

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Introduction - What is it Originally Called

The composition is originally called **Mohamudgaram**. The term *Mudgaram* in Sanskrit means "hammer". Therefore, Mohamudgaram translates to "The hammer that is struck on Kama desire or delusion".

It is popularly known today as **Bhaja Govindam**. The name Bhaja Govindam is derived from the first two words of the prabandham, following a traditional method of naming a work based on its opening words.



The Nine Characteristics of Bhakti (Nava Lakshas)

These nine essential characteristic features of devotion (Nava Lakshana) were taught by Prahlada to his father, Hiranyakashipu, as recorded in the seventh canto of the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana.

The nine characteristics are:

1. **Shravanam**: Listening.
2. **Kirtanam**: Speaking or repeating what has been heard. This is meant to follow listening, as repetition aids recollection.
3. **Vishnu Smaranam**: Remembering Vishnu.
4. **Pada Sevanam**: Seeking shelter under the feet of a very learned Bhagavatottama (a great devotee of Bhagavan).
5. **Archanam**: Worship, often performed using readymade stutis or Namavali.
6. **Vandanam**: Paying obeisances to the Ishta Devata, typically with palms folded together.
7. **Dasyam**: Realizing one must be subservient to Bhagavan and his devotees.
8. **Sakhyam**: Seeking and seeing friends in Bhagwan.
9. **Atma Nivedanam (Atma Samarpanam)**: Finally realizing that nobody but Bhagavan can grant moksham (liberation).

The first action one must take (*kriya padam*) from this list is **bhaja** (meditating/reciting).



Understanding "Bhaja Govindam" - The Story of Gautama Rishi and Ahalya

The story of Ahalya is used to illustrate the connection between Earth (Bhumi) and Cow (Go), which relates to the meanings of Govinda.

- Ahalya was considered a special, defectless, and blemishless (*Ahilya*) creation of Brahma.
- Indra fell in love with her. Brahma stated that whoever traveled around the world and returned first would marry Ahalya.
- While Indra was gone, Narada Maharishi arrived and informed Brahma that Gautama Maharishi had already completed his globetrotting.
- Gautama was summoned. Narada then explained a *shastra vakyam* (scriptural injunction): performing a *pradakshinam* (circumambulation) around a mother cow that is birthing her calf (specifically when both the mother's head and the calf's head are visible) is equivalent to visiting all the *tirthas* (sacred places) in the world.
- Gautama had incidentally performed this act in his backyard cowshed.

- Based on this equivalence between circumnavigating the Earth and circumnavigating the cow, Gautama was permitted to marry Ahalya.



GOVINDA Has Multiple Meanings

Govindam is the noun in the composition, and Bhaja is the verb, meaning "do bhajana of Govinda". There are four primary interpretations provided for the name Govinda:

1. **Bhumi Rakshaka (Protector of the Earth):** This refers to Varahamurthy. Varaha rescued Mother Earth (Bhumi) from the deluge waters when she was covered with moss, having been submerged by the tyrant Rakshasa Hiranyaksha. Varaha is known as Govinda and was the original Kshetrapalaka (guardian deity) of Tirumala Tirupati.
2. **The one who donated/protected the cow (Go):** Since going around the earth is equivalent to going around the cow, giving away a cow as Daanam also makes one Govinda. This refers to Rama, who gave away many cows to the brahmana Trijata before leaving Ayodhya for the forest.
3. **Gavam Indraka (Chief of the Bovine Race):** This refers to Krishna. He nurtured, nourished, and protected the cattle race (cows) with uninterrupted love. Since he lifted the Govardhanam hill to protect the Gokulam, he is considered the chief of the cows.
4. **The one who bestows eloquence:** This refers to Hayagriva Murthy.

Adi Shankara celebrated all these forms of Govinda (Varaha, Rama, Krishna, or Hayagriva). Furthermore, Govinda was the name of Adi Shankara's own guru, Govinda Pada, suggesting the name Bhaja Govindam may also be a tribute to his teacher.



The Origin Story

Bhaja Govindam, originally Moha Mudgaram, was composed by Adi Shankara while walking with his disciples (shishyas) in Varanasi (Kashi).

Adi Shankara observed local teachers teaching Vyakaranam (Paniniya Vyakaranam, Dhatu Patham) to students.

There are two major interpretations of the scene that inspired the composition:

1. **The Tumbling Jug:** An old teacher was seated reciting grammatical postulates. A jug of water, meant for the teacher, started rolling down the steps, making a noise. The devoted student was expected to retrieve it, but the students mechanically continued reciting, focused only on the knowledge, not the service to the guru. Shankara felt that knowledge not used to serve the Acharya (guru) is a useless tinsel.
2. **Dukrnkaranam and Shiva's Dance:** The teacher was reciting Dukrnkaranam, which refers to the crude sounds emanating from Shiva's Damaru during his cosmic dance. These sounds were refined by Rishis to form the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet, making Dukrnkaranam the basis for all scriptural knowledge. Acharya realized that this knowledge alone (dukkring karane) will not serve any purpose if it does not mature into devotion to the guru.

In response to this realization that mere intellectual knowledge is insufficient, Shankara composed the opening verse, admonishing the fool (*Moodhamate*) to focus on Govinda.

Adi Shankara originally composed 12 verses, known as Dwadasha Manjarika. His students, inspired by him, composed 14 more verses (Chaturdashi Manjarika). Five additional shlokas were added later, bringing the total to 31 verses today.



Advaita Philosophy on Maya

The fifth verse, *Ma Kuru Dhana Jana Yovana Garvam*, incorporates the Advaita philosophical concept of Maya:

- **Definition of Maya:** In Advaita philosophy (Adi Shankara's school), Maya is considered a positive entity that envelops the true nature of the Atma.
- **Classification:** Maya is described as *sadasat vilakshanam*, meaning it can neither be classified as existing (Sat) nor non-existing (Asat), nor both; it is different from existing and non-existing.
- **Effect:** This Maya envelops Atmajnana (self-knowledge).
- **Core Tenet:** The concept is encapsulated in the statement, *Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya*.

- **Analogy:** Maya is often likened to a mirage (Mrigatrishna). A mirage appears real to the eyes, but one can never attain the water, illustrating that the world appears true but cannot be permanently grasped.
- **Moksha:** Through guidance from the Acharya (guru) using Mahavakyas (like *Aham Brahmasmi*), the ignorance (agyana) caused by Maya goes away, leading to realization (Anubhuti) and the state of Jeevan Mukta (liberated while living). The goal is to attain Brahmapadam.



Explain Each Verse Elaborately (10 Selected Verses)

The following elaborations focus on the 10 selected verses discussed in the source material, drawing on the philosophical insights and Ramayana analogies provided:

1. The Contextual/First Verse

**Bhaja Govindam, Bhaja Govindam, Govindam bhaja, Moodhamate |
Samprapte Sannihite Kale, Nahi Nahi Rakshati Dukhrin Karane**

Meaning: Oh fool, meditate on Govinda. When the destined time (*Sannihite Kale*) for the Atma to leave the body arrives, that knowledge (*Dukhrin Karane*) will not protect you.

Elaboration: Adi Shankara establishes the urgency of devotion. When one faces the fear of death (Kala or Yama), all worldly knowledge—be it scientific, academic, or even complex philosophical knowledge (*Dukhrin Karane*, derived from the origins of the Sanskrit alphabet)—will fail to eradicate that fear. The only thing that comes to one's rescue is meditation on Govinda.

2. Verse on Wealth and Doubt 💰

**Artham Anartham Bhavaya Nityam, Nasti Tataha Sukha Leshaha Satyam |
Putrada Pi Dhana Bhajam Bhitih, Sarvatre Sha Vitariti**

Meaning: Wealth (*Artham*) is meaningless (*Anartham*). Know this always. There is not even an iota of happiness in it. Fear arises even from one's own children in the pursuit of wealth.

Elaboration: The Acharya instructs us to keep thinking daily that wealth, though practical for grihasthas (householders), is ultimately meaningless if pursued

madly. The pursuit of material power often leads to distrust, even towards one's own offspring (*Putrada Pi Dhana Bhajam Bhitih*), as seen when people write wills out of distrust.

Ramayana Example (Dasharatha): Dasharatha, despite being a great monarch, doubted his sincere son Bharata. He hurried Rama's coronation because he feared that Bharata, aided by Kaikeyi, might prevent Rama (the apple of his eye) from becoming the heir apparent. This love for his son acquiring the kingdom masked the mistake of doubting his own son.

3. Verse on Thirst and Knowledge 🌊

Moodha Jahi Dhana Agama Trishnam, Kuru Sadbuddhim Manasi Vitrishnam | Yalla Bhase Nija Karmopatam, Vittam Tena Vinodaya Chitam

Meaning: Oh fool, abandon the thirst (*Trishna*) to acquire wealth (*Dhana Agama*) and more wealth. Instead, cultivate the thirst for right knowledge (*Sadbuddhim*) in the mind. Whatever wealth you earn through your inevitable karma, use it to please your mind.

Elaboration: While it is difficult to escape one's karma, listening to spiritual truths allows Krishna or Rama to flash in our minds, momentarily removing the pain caused by distress (though the problem remains). The thirst for knowledge should be directed toward acquiring Krishna, who is knowledge itself.

Ramayana Example (Kaikeyi): Kaikeyi is the prime example of someone pursuing dhana agama trishnam (thirst for wealth). Independent of her son's thoughts, she was completely behind wealth and failed to acquire true knowledge. Had she truly understood the auspicious attributes of Bharata, she would never have asked for the boons.

4. Verse on Earning and Family 👨👩👧👦

Yavad Vitto Parjana Saktah, Tavan Nija Parivaro Raktah | Pashchad Jivati Jarajara Dehe, Vaartam Kopina Prichhati Gehe

Meaning: As long as a man has the ability to earn (*Vitto Parjana Saktah*), his family is attached to him. But when he shows signs of an aging body (*Jarajara Dehe*), no one in the house will even inquire about his welfare or include him in conversations.

Elaboration: This is a sharp social observation by the Acharya: respect is earned through functional capability and wealth generation. Once that ability is lost due to age, the family slowly shows signs of disrespect and abandonment.

Ramayana Example (Dasharatha): Dasharatha, who had once ruled for 60,000 years, began to age (evidenced by his silver hair). When his ability to enforce his will or be strong stopped after granting the boons, his wife Kaikeyi deserted him and did not discuss anything with him, illustrating the consequence of lost prowess.

5. Verse on Delusion (Maya) ✨

Ma Kuru Dhana Jana Yovana Garvam, Harati Nimesha Kala Sarvam | Maya Mayam Idam Akhilam Hitva, Brahma Padam Tvam Pravisha Veditva

Meaning: Do not flaunt the pride of wealth (*Dhana*), people/friends (*Jana*), or youth/beauty (*Yovana Garvam*). Time (*Kala*) will take all of this away in a minute. This entire world is Maya (*Maya Mayam*). Abandoning this delusion, realize the self and enter the state of Brahmapadam (Moksham).

Elaboration: All material possessions, connections, and physical appearance are perishable and will disappear quickly. This impermanence is due to the nature of the world being Maya Mayam—a grand delusion or a mirage. Recognizing this reality allows one to transcend the material world.

Ramayana Example (Kaikeyi): Kaikeyi placed her faith in her beauty (to lure Dasharatha), wealth (the kingdom), and her friend (Manthara). All these elements were stripped away almost instantly: Dasharatha died, she lost the kingdom, and Manthara left Ayodhya.

6. Verse on Scriptural Adherence

Bhagavad Gita Kinchit Adheeta, Ganga Jal Lava Kanika Peeta | Sakrid Api Yena Murari Samarcha, Kriyate Tasya Yamena Na Charcha

Meaning: Learn a little (*Kinchit*) of the Bhagavad Gita, drink a few drops (*lava kanika*) of Ganga water, and at least once (*Sakrid Api*) worship/think of Murari (Narayana). For the person who performs this, there will be no debate (*charcha*) with Yama (the god of death).

Elaboration: The Acharya simplifies the path to liberation by emphasizing minimal adherence: start with small acts of devotion. If these acts are performed, Vishnu Dutas (messengers) will come for the departing soul, and the fear-inducing Yamadutas, carrying their ropes (Pasham), will not be able to claim the soul.

Ramayana Example (Sumitra/Gita): Krishna, in the Gita, praises Janaka (Sita's father) for upholding Karma Yoga. Sumitra, by urging Lakshmana to follow Rama and serve him (thus adhering to his true self/swarupa as a servant of Paramatma), exemplified this concept of Karma Yoga, embodying the spirit of the Gita.

7. Verse on Detachment (Viraga) 🌳

**Sura Mandira Taru Moola Nivasaha, Shayya Bhutalam, Ajinambasaha |
Sarva Parigraha Bhoga Tyagaha, Kasya Sukham Na Karoti Viragah**

Meaning: Living under the roots of trees or in temples, having the Earth (*Bhutalam*) as a bed, and wearing animal skin or bark clothes. This is the abandonment (*Tyagaha*) of all possessions and pleasures (*Sarva Parigraha Bhoga*). How can detachment (*Viragah*) fail to bring happiness (*Sukham*)?

Elaboration: True happiness comes only through detachment (*Viragyam*); attachment leads only to sorrow (*Dukham*). The Acharya stresses giving up specific comforts and luxuries, such as sleeping on a soft bed or wearing fine clothes.

Ramayana Example (Lakshmana): Lakshmana readily volunteered to leave the luxurious Panchatoolika Shayanam and presidential suites of Ayodhya to sleep on the thorn-infested floor and wear valkalam (bark/antelope skin) for 14 years. This radical acceptance of discomfort demonstrates detachment (Viraga) driven by devotion (Rama Kaikariyam).

8. Verse on the Cycle of Samsara 🔄

**Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam, Punarapi Janani Jathare Shayanam
| Iha Samsare Bahu Dustare, Kripaya Pare Pahi Murare**

Meaning: Birth again, death again, sleeping again in the mother's womb. This cycle of Samsara is difficult to cross. Therefore, by your grace, Murari (Narayana), please carry me across.

Elaboration: The samsara (world) is a vicious cycle of repeated birth and death. Only a handful of people realize this truth and seek sharanagati (refuge) in Narayana (Murari) to be freed from this cycle.

Ramayana Examples: Characters like Maricha (who became a sanyasi), Kabandha, and Vali all attained dharmik gnana (wisdom) and sought refuge in Rama just as they were about to die, realizing the futility of the cycle.

9. Verse on Devotional Practice 🙏

Geyam Gita Nama Sahasram, Dhyeyam Shri Pati Roopam Ajasram | Neyam Sajjana Sange Chittam, Deyam Deena Janaya Cha Vittam

Meaning: Recite the Gita and the thousand names (Vishnu Sahasranama). Constantly meditate (*Dhyeyam*) on the form of Sripati (Narayana accompanied by Mahalakshmi). The mind should be led toward the company of good people (*Sajjana Sange*). Give wealth (*Vittam*) in charity to the needy (*Deena Janaya*).

Elaboration: Devotional practice involves combining scriptural study (Gita/ Sahasranama) with constant meditation on Bhagavan. Since Mahalakshmi is crucial for Narayana's value, one must meditate on Sripati (the consort of Shri). Furthermore, one must elevate conversations by seeking the company of the righteous (Sajjana) and performing acts of charity.

Ramayana Example (Lakshmana): Lakshmana lived the life prescribed here: he lived the essence of Gita (Sumitra's instruction), lived with Rama (the essence of Sahasranamam), served Rama with Sita (Sripati), associated with good devotees (Hanuman, Sugriva), and performed the greatest charity by coronating Vibhishana on Rama's behalf.

10. Verse on Guru Bhakti 🦶

Guru Charanam Bhuja Nirbhara Bhaktah, Samsara Tachirad Bhava Muktah | Sendriya Manasa Niyama Devam, Drakshasi Nija Hridayastham Devam

Meaning: The one who has deep devotion (*Nirbhara Bhaktah*) to the lotus feet of the Guru (*Guru Charanam Bhuja*) will quickly be released from the cycle of samsara. By restraining the senses and mind, you will see Bhagavan residing in your own heart.

Elaboration: The Guru's feet should be seated in the heart. The Guru is vital because he guides the devotee to God; as a saying goes, "The Guru is the one who tells me who Govinda is". Adi Shankara himself was deeply devoted to his guru, Govinda Pada. Devotion to the Guru, coupled with sensory restraint, leads to the realization of the Divine within.

Ramayana Example (Shabari): Rama accepted the fruits offered by Shabari, a woman from the hunter community (Shabarajatyam Shabari). He accepted her devotion not based on her caste, but because she had Acharya Sambandham (a connection to her guru, Matanga Rishi). Bhagavan accepts offerings only when there is devotion rooted in guidance from an Acharya.

✨ The Four 'Ga's to Adhere To

A subhashitam (good saying) states that rebirth (punarjanma) will not happen when four specific elements beginning with the letter 'Ga' are present in one's life:

1. **Gita:** The philosophical work, Bhagavad Gita.
2. **Ganga:** The river Ganga (Ganga water), which is traditionally stored in the house.
3. **Gayatri:** The Gayatri mantra, recited during Sandhyavandanam.
4. **Govinda:** The name Govinda, retained in the heart (*Hridistite*).



Sringeri Sannidhanam - Names and Their Meanings

The sources refer to the two current Acharyas, the Ubhaya Gurus, of the Sringeri Math.

Acharya Title	Name	Meaning/Context
Maha Sannidhanam	Bharati Tirtha	Bharati in Sanskrit means Bhasha (spoken language) or Saraswati (the repository of knowledge).
Sannidhanam	Vidushekhara Bharati	Vidhu means Moon (one of the 20 names for the moon). Shekhara means crown. Vidhushekhara (Moon on the crown) is a name for Shiva. This implies the Sannidhanam (Vidhu) is in the crown of the Mahasannidhanam (Bharati/Saraswati).



Krishna's Horses Names

The names of Krishna's horses are mentioned in the context of an anecdote concerning the trait of a good guru. The names are:

1. Shaibhya
2. Sugriva
3. Megha Pushpa
4. Balahaka



Reference

This blog post is based on notes taken from the following video : **Video Source:** [Watch on YouTube](#) For a more detailed explanation, I highly recommend watching the original video.



Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org> for more information. These notes are presented solely for educational purposes to help viewers download and benefit from these teachings. Any incorrect interpretations or inaccuracies are mine and unintentional—please forgive me. For any feedback, please send an [email](#).

