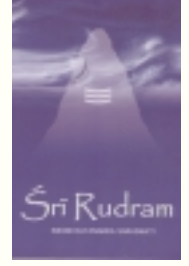


Śrī Rudram*

by Swami Dayananda Saraswati'



Introduction:

Among the various vedik hymns recited daily by a vaidika, the Śata Rudriya occupies a prime place. Popularly known as Śrī Rudram it is in praise of and prayer to the Lord. A part of both Śukla and Kṛṣṇa Yajur Vedas, the hymn is a source of inspiration for the nāmāvalis consisting of one thousand and eight names that reveal and praise the Lord invoked in a particular form. In the epic Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma gives thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu, known as Viṣṇu-sahasranāma. Many such nāmāvalis are mentioned in various purāṇās. Both in form and content these nāmāvalis are not different from the vedik Rudram. Even in the Vedas, one does not see a section like Śrī Rudram consisting of many names of the Lord along with the word, nāmaḥ, salutation. The famous five-syllabled mantra, nāmaśśivāya, is from this great hymn.

Nāma japa is perhaps one invariable element in the religious life of a vaidika. Even now one can see religious people from different parts of India doing mental or oral japa daily. The kīrtan groups that sing 'Hare Rāma — Hare Kṛṣṇā' are in fact doing japa. The mode of repeating different names of the Lord has crossed geographical and cultural borders. A devout Muslim repeats the ninety-nine names of Allah. This repetition is japa. A faithful Christian tells the rosary beads repeating a sentence seeking mercy from the Lord. This too is japa. The most ancient source of this mode of prayer is śata Rudriya.

The hymn is also called nāmaka because the word nāmaḥ is added to a word or words in the dative case depicting the Lord. The words in the verses of Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma are only in the nominative case and therefore nāmaḥ has no place. But in a ritual of offering flowers unto the altar of Viṣṇu, nāmaḥ is added to every name appropriately modified to dative case, giving the sense, 'unto'.

There are three types of prayer based upon the predominant means of accomplishing an act of prayer: kāyika¹, vācika and mānasa.

kāyika: A vedik fire ritual is kāyika because the physical limbs and materials are involved in the ritualistic prayer. The vedik ritual is substituted by a more popular form of worship,

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that of the Lord at an altar, as is done in a temple. Worship of the Lord either at home or in a public place of worship is also kāyika. Though the form of prayer is kāyika², it implies the use of speech and the mind.

Vācika is oral prayer. It is popular in all religious traditions. In this form, the organ of speech, vāk, as well as the mind are involved. Any form of recitation, including that of a choir in the church, comes under this category.

mānasa is an act of prayer done purely by the mind, manah, which is why it is called mānasa, meaning mental. It is also called dhyāna, meditation. When the physical act of worship, kāyika, is mentally done, it is meditation. Only the mind is involved here. The Sata Rudrīya is used in all three forms of prayer. The whole hymn is used in a kāyika ritual, implying either an altar of śiva or of fire. It is also used for oral japa which is b vācika. When a part of the whole of the hymn is repeated mentally, it is mānasa.

Besides being a hymn of prayer, Sata Rudrīya is like an upanishad revealing the truth of jiva, the individual, jagat, the world and īsvara, the Lord. It also provides the means for gaining eligibility for the knowledge unfolded by the upanishad. The different names of the Lord changed in one's prayer also reveal the truth of the Lord as one and non-dual, the vision of the upanishad. The hymn, therefore, is rightly called Rudropanishad. The implied meaning of the words of the Lord serve as upanishad and the words in the hymn with their simple meaning become a means for gaining the eligibility for knowledge. This hymn is also considered very efficacious in neutralising the result of wrong actions. A human being is subject to punya and pāpa. The difficulties people go through in their lives are often the pāpas of previous actions actualised in the form of obstructions for a person in pursuit of spiritual knowledge. Sata Rudrīya is one of the efficacious means to neutralise them. Even for citta naischalya, freedom from emotional upheavals in one's life, Sata Rudrīya is highly recommended by people who know the vedik tradition very well. In one of the upanishads³ it is said "The one who repeats Sata Rudrīya is freed from the pāpa incurred by hurting a brahmana, robbing somebody's wealth and so on.."

The vedik japa is reverentially talked about even in the puranas. In the Kurma purana, there is a story of a king called Vasumanas, who did gayatri-upasana for many years. As a result of his prayer, the Lord appeared to the king in the very form he was praying to. Requested by the king for the means to moksha from samsāra, the Lord told him, "Listen to these secret names of mine given in one place, even though they are mentioned individually in different parts of the Vedas. Add nāmaḥ to each word and do nāmaskara, living a life of dharma. You will free yourself from samsāra." What is the logic here? It needs to be discussed.

There are devotees who believe that the name, nāma, of the Lord is greater than the person, the nāmi. For instance, the name Rāmā is greater than Lord Rāmā.

There is certain truth in this vidw. There is no name without a nāmi. The name Gandhi stands for the person, the nāmi, who gave a distinct content to name. The name Vivekananda has gained a sacred status only because of the nāmi, the person. It is clear that nāma had no meaning without the nāmi. That Rāmā was in Ayodhya, in Kishkindha, in Citrakuta, that he vanquished Rāvaṇā and brought back Sita wore the crown and so on, was the story of Rāmā. He gave content to the word. But then we hear that Hanumanji was given to do japa of Rāmā nāma even when Rāmā, the nāmi, was around/ Why? Because Rāmā the person cannot be put in the mind and repeated in japa! Japa being an act of repetition, the nāmi has no place there. Therefore, there is a basis for saying that nāma is more important than the nāmi. When the nāmi is no more, the nāma with its content would last forever.

Further, all that is here is only Brahman. What does this word, 'all' mean? Like even the world of earthenware is nothing but clay, this entire world of forms, rūpa, is Brahman. It is unfolded in Vedānta Śāstra by sentence like, sarvam khalvidam brahma.' The world of earthenware such as pot, jar, cup and saucer are not separate from clay. Therefore, the words pot, cup and so on are only symbols that refer to various forms. So too, every object such as sun, moon, earth, space and time, is not separate from Brahman, even though each object has its own particular content and is referred to by the words (sun, moon, earth, space and time). Therefore, any form, rūpa, is the meaning of the word, nāma.

Can you think of a nāma without the rūpa? Can you repeat a known word like apple without seeing its meaning, the object, fruit? Between a word, vacaka and its meaning, vachya, there is an invariable relationship. Even if you do not have a name for a form of clay, you cannot even imagine the form without imagining the substance. There is a non-separate relationship between name and form. If all forms are Brahman, īsvara, then all names are those of īsvara. Therefore, in one name, which includes all names, you can see the entire jagat being non-separate from īsvara. When Rāmā is the Lord, Rāmā the name includes every other word. You can repeat the word as a prayer.

The hymn under discussion, Sata Rudrīya, consists of eleven sections, anu vākas; each of them has a number of hymns in different vedik metres. Every hymn has a seer, ṛṣi and a devatā. Often we see more than one hymn being attributed to a given ṛṣi. The first anuvāka is prayer to Lord Rudra asking him to be kind and giving. From the second to ninth anu vāka, the Lord is saluted as sarvatma, all forms constituting the world, as sarvantaryami, the inner order sustaining everything and also as sarvesvara, the Lord of everything. The tenth anu vāka consists of prayers to the Lord and in the eleventh, the Lord is prayed to be in the forms of many devatās sustaining different spheres of experience. In the first nine sections of the Rudram, the word nāmaḥ occurs three hundred times which is why the Sata Rudrīya is popular as nāmaka in the south of India.

This hymn is invariably followed by another hymn where the syllables 'ca' and 'me' occur in every sentence and so the hymn is called Camaka. Recitation of Rudram is a part of the daily prayer for many vaidikās in this country. Even a renunciate, sannyāsi, is advised to recite this hymn daily⁴ with understanding of the words and their implications to live a contemplative life.

The vedik mantra invoking the grace of the Lord Gaṇapati is first chanted before the chanting of Rudram.

गणानां॑ त्वा॑ गणपतिं॑ हवामहे
 कविं॑ कवीनामुपमश्रवस्तमम् ।
 ज्येष्ठराजं॑ ब्रह्मणां॑ ब्रह्मणास्पत
 आनश्शृण्वन्नूतिभिस्सीद॑ सादनम् ॥

gaṇānām॑ tvā॑ gaṇapatiṃ॑ havāmahe
 kavim॑ kavīnāmupamaśravastamam ।
 jyeṣṭharājam॑ brahmaṇām॑ brahmaṇāspata
 ānaśśṛṇvannūtibhissīda॑ sādanam ॥

gaṇānām॑ - of all groups of devas; tvā - you; gaṇapatiṃ॑ - their leader; havāmahe - we worship; kavim॑ - the visionary; kavīnām - of all visionaries; upamaśravastamam - who has attained great fame through various similies; jyeṣṭharājam॑ - the most exalted and who shines in the hearts of devotees; brahmaṇām॑ - of the knowers of Brahman; brahmaṇāspate - O Lord of Vedas; naḥ - our; śṛṇvan - - listening; ūtibhiḥ - with all protective means; asīda - please sit; sādanam - at the altar of our heart

Here, Lord Gaṇapati is looked upon as Parameśvarā and not as a given devatā. It is so because he is addressed by the word brahmaṇāspate, meaning "O Lord of Brahma, the veda-śāstra." The word 'brahma' here means the body of knowledge known as Veda. Pati means the Lord. Brahmaṇāspate - O Lord of the Veda, Parameśvarā! The subject matter of the Vedas, like the devatās, rituals, heaven and so on, is not within the range of human perception and inference. It has to be revealed by the source of all knowledge, the Lord. The ṛṣis⁵ are the recipients of this sacred knowledge.

We can also interpret the word Brahma as Hiranyagarbha, the creator of Brahma. So Gaṇapati here is Parameśvarā.

gaṇānām॑ tvā havāmahe - We worship you, Parameśvarā, the Lord, the creator and protector of ganas, all living beings including the devgas. A deva, dxeity, is also one of the manifestations of īsvara.

“You being the Lord, havāmahe, we worship you for a pure mind.”. It is a mumukshu’s prayer. You seek the Lord’s grace to accomplish various goals in life. A human being though intelligent, many a time becomes helpless. Intelligent living is seeking help when you need it, and here you offer a prayer to ask for help.

Gaṇapati is kavīnām kavīḥ. Kavīḥ. Means the one who knows the past, present and future. A good astrologer is also called kavi as even a poet. Gaṇapati is the kavi of all kavis. All the kavis need the grace of this kavi even to be a relative kavi. He is all-knowledge.

Gaṇapati being Parameśvarā, there is no similitude for him. In other words, Parameśvarā is like Parameśvarā. Valmiki said, rāma rāvaṇayoryuddham rāma rāvaṇayoriva—the battle between Rāmā and Rāvaṇā was like the battle between Rāmā and Rāvaṇā. So the mantra says upamaśravastamam.

What is upama? upamiyate anayā iti upamā—that by which something is approximated. Many upamas are given in the sruti, such as space to point out the all pervasiveness of the Lord and sun to point out the effulgence of the Lord. The sun example is also for one being many; there is one sun but reflections are many. One comes to know that in spite of all the varieties of upamas that the sruti gives, the Lord stands far beyond them, his glory being infinite. He is upamaśravastavam⁶—the one who is praised in various upamas and yet there is no one equal to him. He stands apart and cannot be compared with anything, which is why the Lord cannot be flattered. Anything one says will fall short of his glory. For the same reason, the Lord can be understood in his transcendental nature as one who is free from all attributes. And everything else is only his manifestation. Thus appreciating Parameśvarā, havāmahe, we worship.

jyeṣṭharājam – The one who always shines in the hearts of the devotees is raja. He also shines in the hearts of even those who are not devotees, but is not recognised by them. One who is to be counted and reckoned in society is jyeṣṭha.

Naḥ śṛṇvan ūtibhiḥ sādhanam āsīda – Listening to our praises, with all protective means, please sit at the altar of fire ritual, sadhanam, (in our heart). We, your devotees, are praising you, revealing who you are and these words of prayer merely state your virtues. The more words of prayer merely state your virtues. The more words you have of Bhagavan, fewer are the things which are outside Bhagavan. You see ananta, limitless, totally as well as severally. All individual objects are also Parameśvarā and you can see this up to the quantum level. Any ray of glory is īśvara. The less of you, the more you get in life. By our own individual presence, we deny the whole. Listening to all these prayers, may you abide in our heart and protect us.