

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SATARUDRIYA

by

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We celebrate the day and the night in honour of the great God whose majesty and glory is described in ecstasy, especially in the Rudra Adhyaya, or the Satarudriya, of the Veda. Every Siva temple has this daily programme of worship and *abhisheka* to the great Lord Siva with the recitation of the famous mantras known as Satarudriya – also known as Rudra Adhyaya – which occur in the Yajur Veda. It may well be said that these wondrous Vedic hymns known as the Satarudriya are a sort of *magnum opus* of spiritual ecstasy, an insight into whose significance and meaning should make one's hair stand on end.

It is difficult to fathom the depth of the revelation and the feeling of the sage or the rishi to whom these visions were bequeathed by the Almighty. We have very few passages, prayers, hymns or *stotras* in religious literature comparable with this mighty Satarudriya, wherein everything that we can conceive of in respect of God humanly is portrayed in the language of spiritual intuition. Often it would appear that man is not supposed to understand its meaning, on account of the comprehensiveness of its approach and the profundity of the revelation that is contained therein.

No one can recite these Satarudriya mantras without having one's sins cleansed at once from their very roots, if only one would have the leisure and the patience to go into the internal connections and the suggestiveness that is

implied in these mantras. It will it is not a prayer to one God or to any particular God. Satarudriya, the name of the hymn, has several meanings: prayer to the hundred thousand Rudras – or to the Rudra appearing in a hundred thousand forms – who is Siva at the same time. *Rudra yatte dakshinam mukham tena mam pahi nityam* is an oft-quoted prayer. The power of God is also the terror of the human individual, while at the same time it is the most beneficent blessing that can ever be anywhere. Hence it is that the great Lord is often designated as Rudra-Siva, who has perpetually blended in His being the aspects of creation, sustenance and transformation of all things.

Those who recite these Satarudriya mantras in temples many a time chant them as a kind of routine, without bestowing sufficient thought on their implications. Most of our chanting becomes mechanical in the course of time, and we go on chanting mantras, repeating prayers and singing hymns automatically like the movement of the wheels of a vehicle, but the spirit behind the recitation can easily be lost when it becomes an everyday programme rather than a surge of the spirit or the call of the soul during moments of meditation and communion with the Almighty. A very beautiful English translation almost approaching the original in its meaning and suggestiveness has been published by the Sri Ramana Ashram; and there are very good Sanskrit commentaries, right from the one written by the great Sanyacharya, which gives us an insight into the extent to which some minds in ancient times could reach in their search for the reality of life.

One who recites these mantras of the Satarudriya is apt to feel that the person to whom these were revealed, who had this vision, was breaking up into pieces and his personality was scattered in various directions. He was dancing in madness of divine possession. And one who soulfully recites these mantras cannot afford to miss also being possessed by this power of ecstasy where the body, mind and the spirit are brought together in unison and forced to forge onward in the direction of the directionless Absolute.

Very mysteriously and curiously, the mantra *Namah Sivaya*, which devotees have been chanting today right from morning onwards, occurs in the middle of the *Satarudriya* mantras of the *Veda*. Very few of the normally accepted mantras occur in the *Veda Samhita*, but this occurs in the very middle of the *Samhita*. *Namah sankaraya ca mayaskaraya ca nama sivaya ca sivataraya ca* is the passage wherein the mantra *Namah Sivaya* occurs.

This morning someone asked me, "What is this mantra? What is the *rishi*? What is the *chhandas* and what is the *devata*?" I tried to explain that the mantra is a magazine of force. It is a hidden potency which is charged with a capacity which comes from various factors that go to constitute the importance of the mantra. The mantra does not necessarily mean merely the letters which are juxtaposed to constitute the formula, just as language does not mean merely the letters or the combination of the letters, but a hidden cementing power which gives the suggestion of meaning as latent inbetween the juxtaposition of the letters.

Therefore, the sound symbol which is the mantra is a compound of various elements that lose themselves in a fraternal embrace, as it were, to form a single indivisibility – just as, to give a very mundane example, when we sip a cup of tea, there is not merely the taste of milk, there is not merely the taste of sugar, there is not merely the taste of tea leaves, but there is a blend which is what is called the decoction. Or, to give another example, when we taste a delicious dish, we do not merely taste the salt and the other ingredients that constitute the dish. It is a new element altogether that crops up as a compound. The same is the case with a medical prescription; the components lose their individualities and enter into the formation of a new significance, which is the synthesis of the ingredients. Hence, the beauty of language, the style of expression and the significance of literature are elements that invisibly pervade the visible characters of the alphabet of any language.

Such is the meaning of what is known as the *chhandas*, or the metre of a mantra. The metre, or the *chhandas*, is the method of the bringing together of the letters of the mantra,

by which they form a totality of energy and no more exist merely as letters; they melt themselves in the menstruum of what is known as the mantra. In the Alankara Sastra, which is a treatise on the rhetoric of the Sanskrit language, descriptions are given of what are known as *ganas*. This science has been lost in modern times. *Gana* is the force that is behind every letter and the significance that it conveys when it is placed in a particular position. If a *sloka*, a verse, a formula or a hymn is to convey the required significance or meaning, a particular letter should come in the beginning, a particular letter should come in the middle, and so on. The mantras are not haphazard chanting; they are scientifically organised systems of sound formation. So much may be said about the meaning of *chhandas* that is behind the mantras, whether Vaidika or Tantrika.

There is also the *rishi*, or the author, we may say. We know what role the author's mind plays in the meaning that is conveyed by a textbook. The mind of the author pervades the entire book of which he is the writer or the formulator. The force of the author's thought is to be seen throughout the book which he has written, from the first page to the last. When we read a powerful text, we do not see merely the letters. We enter into an ocean of thought-force, which is conveyed through the symbols of the letters which are visible on the pages of the text. Likewise is the role that is played by the great master, or rishi, to whom the mantra is revealed in meditation. We do not say that the mantra is created or written down or invented by a rishi. According to accepted theories, the Vedas are not written-down texts. The author of the Veda is unknown. The belief is that these mantras are eternal sound symbols, perpetually existing in the ether of the cosmos, never getting destroyed even during the time of dissolution. Therefore, there is no such thing as destruction of the Vedas or destruction of the knowledge, as the Vedas are more than just books. The idea is that the subtle, etheric *tanmatric* symbols of force, which become grossly manifest in the sound symbols audible to the ears, are indestructible. They are ultimately certain patterns of thought which become patterns of external sound symbols, grossening

further into letters which are written on a palm leaf or paper, etc.

Finally, the vibration alone exists, and there is no substance. The Veda is not a solid book; it is not a visible substance; it is not a textbook. It is a symbol of the ethereal energy pervading in the form of the potency which can transform itself into certain patterns of expression at given moments of time. Modern science and modern thinkers on the basis of modern science have almost come to the borderland of accepting this great truth which is revealed in the original science of India known as *sphota vada*, the doctrine of sound. As I mentioned, all these sciences are becoming lost. Bhartrihari wrote a great book, called *Vakyapadiya*, on ancient Sanskrit grammar, which goes deep into the significance of *sphota*. Much of it has been mentioned by Acharya Sankara and others in their commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*. However, the point is that the mantra is a super-sensible potency and a latency of energy, which is brought into contact with the mind of the meditator.

We are also told that the mantra is revealed to the rishi. Remembering the rishi gives us a blessing from that person. When we recite the mantra, we are supposed to remember the great person to whom it was revealed. For instance, when we refer to *The Commentary of the Bhagavadgita* by Swami Sivananda, the very name Sivananda thrills us in a particular manner. The great work *The Life Divine* by Sri Aurobindo immediately rouses our feelings, which is in consonance with Sri Aurobindo. It is the same with Ramana Maharshi. The moment we hear the names of the authors or the persons to whom the mantras were revealed, we are suddenly stirred up into a spiritual mood. So there is a great point in our being asked to remember the rishi when we recite the mantra, chant the formula or the symbol.

I already mentioned the *chhandas*. The components of the mantra are very important. I mentioned what are known in Sanskrit rhetoric as *Gana Shastras*. It is very difficult to explain these things. According to the science of *Gana Shastra*, the letters of the mantra are arranged in a particular

manner by the very power of the intuition of the sage. They are not mathematically concocted or invented.

Then, above all these, there is the devata, or the deity of the mantra, who is embodied in the sound of the mantra. Just as the soul is embodied in this physical frame, just as the idea of the artist is embodied in the painted picture, just as the idea or the thought of the architect is seen in the building or the structure raised by him, the will of the deity – the force and the pattern of the form of the deity – is supposed to be visibly expressed in the vibrations that are produced while the mantra is being recited. Experiments have been conducted and it has been found that when a mantra is chanted very intensely and soulfully, it can produce electromagnetic waves in such velocity that they can scatter sand particles that are spread out in front of the chanter, and these sand particles form a pattern equivalent to or at least approximate to what is supposed to be the form of the *ishta devata*, or the deity, of that mantra.

Therefore, the great mantra Namah Sivaya that we are reciting today, right from morning until the end of the *puja* tonight, is not a chant in the ordinary sense. No mantra is to be regarded as commonplace; it is sacred. It is not supposed to be chanted with an unclean mouth – after eating something without washing the teeth, etc. We are supposed to recite it in a holy mood, in a spirit of dedication and sanctity of aspiration, as if we are seated in front of God Himself.

The Rudra Adhyaya, to which I referred earlier, will be recited several times during the course of the worship on this auspicious Sivaratri. But many of you will not know what they are chanting. You will hear only some sound, some chant – that is all. It may sound like noise; but it is not noise. It is the pouring forth of the soul as it was revealed to that mastermind, the rishi.

The Rudra Adhyaya is highly purifying. There are two or three occasions in the course of the hymns of the Veda Samhitas when superb ecstasies are recorded. The Purusha Sukta is one such occasion. It occurs almost in every one of the Samhitas – in the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda,

Atharvaveda – where the incomprehensibility, the all-comprehensiveness and the might of the Almighty is devastatingly described. And I may say that the Satarudriya is even more devastating. It will make us dance in the ecstasy of divine possession if we know what it tells us. Prostration to every blessed thing! Whatever we can see, whatever we can hear, whatever we can touch, and whatever we can think, feel and understand is divine manifestation. God has spread Himself in this variety of the unintelligible creation, which stuns even the highest rationality of the modern mind.

The recitation of a mantra, especially of the type of the Satarudriya, is not merely an ordinary japa in the common sense of the term. It is our moving into the depths of the ocean of that comprehensive outlook which the mantra portrays in front of us.

The Satarudriya consists of two sections, the Namaka and the Chamaka. In the Namaka, which is the preceding portion, *namah* occurs many times: Prostrations, Prostrations, Prostrations; Salutations, Salutations, Salutations; Surrender, Surrender, Surrender. This prostration is expressed in an infinite way. Then comes the Chamaka: *cha me, cha me, cha me*. “Everything is to me; everything is to me; everything is mine.” There is nothing which is not ours here. “Everything may come to me.” Everything has to come to us as it has to come to God Himself.

One of the verses of the Bhagavadgita says, *apuryamanam achalapratishtam samudram apah pravishanti yadvat tadvat kamayampravishanti sarve sa shantim apnoti na kama kami*: “As rivers enter into ocean, everything enters into you.” We should not cry that we are paupers, beggars in this world – as if we have nothing, no friends, and are forlorn and outcaste. Everything is in our possession. Everything has to come to us when our will is expressed. At the affirmation of a single thought it has to materialise itself, provided – a tremendous provision indeed, of course – provided that our thought is in unison with the Almighty’s will. So, everything shall come to us. If everything shall go to God, why should it not come to us? We are *amritasaya putrah*, children of the Immortal. We are heir-

apparent to the resources, the reservoir of the riches of the Almighty Himself.

Thus, the Chamaka portion invokes everything into ourselves in a divine insight into the all-comprehensiveness of God. We first of all surrender ourselves and become the very substance of God's Being Itself, and then everything enters into us as rivers rush into the ocean. Wondrous! Many a time I become indescribably thrilled even when thinking of these Satarudriya mantras.

And so, on this auspicious occasion, may I request you all to bestow some thought upon these great legacies left to us by our ancestors of yore, the treasures which we are likely to overlook in the humdrum activities of modern comforts and distractions. The Veda Samhitas are reservoirs of all-force, all-power and all-meaning.

As I mentioned, there are a few occasions when such ecstasies are revealed in the Veda Mantras. One is Purusha Sukta; and another is the Satarudriya, which occurs in the Taittiriya Samhita of the Yajurveda and also in the Sukla Yajurveda. Another place where such majestic expressions can be found in the Vedas is a *sukta* in the earlier portions of the Rig Veda, where the story of creation in terms of the glory of the Sun-god is described. Here occurs the oft-quoted famous verse, *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*, the one poets sing of in various ways. In the Atharva Veda there is the Skambha Sukta, which is not well known. It is something like the Purusha Sukta where the rishi to whom the mantra was revealed contemplates on the miracle of creation, putting the question to himself: "What is the substance out of which this great citadel of the cosmos has been created? What are the rafters? What is the wood that is used for building this cosmos? What are the building bricks?" etc. There are also other *suktas* in the Rigveda, such as the Hiranyagarbha Sukta and the Visvakarma Sukta.

How many of us have the time, the leisure, the mood, and the interest to go into these mysteries? We are too busy wasting our time on good-for-nothing things. It is very unfortunate. Our soul is not going to be satisfied by any modern gadget. We must have time in our lives to be a little

serious. We should not be like foolish children, running about as if everything is all right. Anything can happen in this world, at any moment, because we do not possess an insight into the purposes of the universe. The universe has been planned in a particular manner by the will of the Absolute, and everything moves according to that plan. Things do not happen because we will or wish them to happen in a particular manner. Hence, we must be prepared to adjust ourselves to any circumstance that may manifest in our experience in accordance with the plan of the universe.

Therefore, it is high time that we seriously contemplate what is worthwhile in our lives. We are souls – not bodies, not even minds and intellects. We are not merely social units, citizens, passport holders, etc. We are something more than that. We are not even this physical body constituted of the five elements. The requirements of the body are not our real requirements. They are only tentative demands felt under certain given conditions. For instance, medicine is required when we are ill, but we cannot say that medicine is our final requirement. We may require food when we are hungry, but that is not our final requirement. That is not the only thing that we are asking for in this world. We are not that which asks for food, we are not that which asks for physical comfort, we are not that which asks for social recognition, and we are not that which seeks authority and position in life. We are something transcendent to all these things. When the time of crisis comes, we throw off everything; and suddenly, to our consternation, we realise that we are the most valuable thing in the world. The most valuable and precious treasure in the world is ourselves, not what we possess – not our dollars and pounds and rupees, not our land and buildings, not even our friends. They can leave us in one second when the plan of the cosmos requires that to happen.

Yatha kashtham cha kashtham cha sameyatam mahodadhau, sametvicham yateyantam tatvad bhutasamagamah says the Mahabharata in a very famous passage: Just as logs of wood in the ocean come together as friends, as it were, but then separate, so also people come

together and separate. We know how logs of wood meet on the surface of the ocean. They come together due to the current; and when the current moves in a different direction, they are separated. Likewise is friendship and bereavement. Therefore, the idea that we have friends is a false notion. Our friendships in society and our relationships with anything in this world are like the relationships that one log of wood in the ocean has with other logs. Sometimes one log collides with another – embraces another, as it were, as a friend. And then it is suddenly cast off in a different direction by the current of the water and by the wind that blows. When the wind of the plan of the universe blows us in some other direction, we should not cry that we have lost everything. We do not lose anything, we are only participants in the great plan of God; and one who is ignorant of this will reap sorrow, just as one who is ignorant of any law reaps some grief as a consequence thereof.

May we have the blessedness and the blessing of the mighty Rudra Siva, the Great Lord whom we are worshipping today, that He may bless us with understanding – *dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*. We ask for nothing from God except enlightenment, understanding, insight and comprehension. We do not want material prosperity or material goods. There is no use in having anything. We have to 'be' something. What we 'have' is not important; what we 'are' is important. A great saying of Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj is, "Be satisfied with what you have, but be dissatisfied with what you are." But we are the other way around. We seem to be satisfied with what we are, but we are dissatisfied with what we have. We always complain about the goods that we possess and the commodities that we have, and we are always complacent about our own selves, our egoistic personalities.

The truth is, we have to be satisfied with every circumstance in which God has placed us, but we should always be dissatisfied with our own internal achievements. As the Upanishad puts it, *neti neti*: "This is not adequate; 'not this, not this', is the Truth." Any achievement of ours is inadequate for the purpose, ultimately. The soul is not going to be satisfied with anything that is offered to it. Our soul is

the infinite reservoir of forces. It is compatible with God-Being Itself. And so the infinite in us cannot be satisfied with any finite offering. Some little titbits and toys seem to satisfy us occasionally; a wristwatch, a transistor, some sound, colour and movement seem to be satisfying to us. We are ignorant children, moving and groping in the darkness of oblivion in this world. Thus, what we have to ask from the Mighty Lord is the blessing of enlightenment, knowledge and wisdom. And we ask nothing from God except God Himself.

May we all gather our powers, muster in our forces and bring ourselves together into a concentrated attention of devotion to the great Almighty, whose glories are sung in the great Veda mantras, so that we may be burnt and burnished in this austerity of spiritual attitude. May Lord Siva's grace be upon us all!