

The Gist of Puruṣa Sāktam

The *Puruṣa Sāktam* is a popular Vedic hymn, being used often in rituals. This *sāktam* is found in all the four Vedas with minor variations. The presiding deity, the *prasīdhā-puruṣa* of this *mantra* is the *paramātman*. The *ṛṣi* is Nārāyaṇa. Both the *anuṣṭubh* and the *triṣṭubh* metres are used in this *sāktam*.

Description of the puruṣa

The following two *mantras* from the *Kāthopaniṣad*, talk about that which is the subtlest and the truth of everything:

इन्द्रियेषुः परा ह्यर्था अर्थेभ्यश्च परं मनः ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्ब्रह्मात्मा महान्परः ॥

*indriyebhyah parā bhārthā arthebhyaśca parāni
manah, manasastu parā buddhirbrahmerātmanā
mahānparah.*

महतः परमव्यक्तमव्यक्तानुरुधः परः ।

पुरुषान्न परं किञ्चित्सा काष्ठा सा परा गतिः ॥

*mahataḥ param avyaktam avyaktāni puruṣaḥ
parah,
puruṣānna parāni kiñchitśa kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ.*

Sense objects are superior to the sense organs. Mind is superior to the sense objects.

Intellect is superior to the mind. Hiraṇyagarbha is superior to the intellect. The unmanifest (*avyakta*) is superior to Hiraṇyagarbha. *Puruṣa* is superior to the unmanifest. Nothing is superior to the *puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* alone is the goal, the ultimate end (*Kāthopaniṣad* 1-3-10, 11).

We have the sense, the sense objects of our perceptions, the mind, the intellect (*buddhi*), *mahān ātmā* (Hiraṇyagarbha), the unmanifest (*avyakta*), and then the *puruṣa*. The *puruṣa* is consciousness, *caitanya*, the truth of the unmanifest. This *puruṣa* alone is the ultimate end, *sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ*.

This *puruṣa* is presented in a hymn of praise. The *Puruṣa Sāktam* is a *sāktam* for which the *puruṣa* is the object. *Uktam* is what is said. *Sāktam* or *sāktih* is that which is *su uktam*, well said. A *sāktam* is to be chanted daily, *pāṭhyāna-yogyā*, as a prayer. Any *sāktam* is a prayer in praise of the Lord. Some of the Vedic prayers ask the Lord to grant us something or the other. Some others are just a description of the Lord. The *Puruṣa Sāktam* is a description of the *puruṣa*. We repeat the glory of the Lord, *Paramēśvara*, every day by chanting this *sāktam*. In so doing, we also recognise that the *puruṣa* is the self, *ātman*. There is nothing higher than the *puruṣa*, *puruṣānna parāni kiñchit*. I am not separate from the *puruṣa*; I am not a separate entity. The entire knowledge of the *upaniṣads* is

contained in the *Puruṣa Sāktam*. Anything that describes the *puruṣa* properly becomes an *upadeśa*, teaching. Therefore this *sāktam* is the *upadeśa*. It is descriptive of the *puruṣa*. Naturally, the *puruṣa* has to be described as the Lord with form, *saguṇa-brahma*, as well as the Lord without form, *nirguṇa-brahma*. This is presented as the cause and the effect. The *puruṣa* cannot be described in the form of the cause, and since the effect is non-separate from the cause, the description of the effect becomes the description of the *puruṣa*.

All beings are the puruṣa

The *puruṣa* is thus described in the form of the creation, in the form of all the things that exist and in the form of the very society itself. All of humanity is nothing but the *puruṣa*. Your hands and legs are the *puruṣa*'s hands and legs. Your head is the *puruṣa*'s head; there is only the *puruṣa*'s head. If the *puruṣa* is understood properly your *ahānkāra* and *manakāra*—‘sense of I and mine’—will be only from a point of view.

Chanting Puruṣa Sāktam regularly neutralises the sense of ownership

If all that is here is *puruṣa*, the individual, then anyone who understands this even vaguely, has to say, “He includes me.” This approach creates a sense

of belonging with respect to *Īśvara*, the total. We seek a sense of belonging wherever we go. We feel a sense of non-belonging in certain places and tend to move away from those places, such as disco, a nightclub, or even Wall Street. One place where everyone can belong is with *Īśvara*. He is one person who claims you because the *brahman* is that your head is pervaded by his head. In that *brahman*, your sense of ownership, *manava*, diminishes, and the erroneous I-sense, *ahānkāra*, slowly goes away. This *sāktam* is a prayer repeated daily, towards that end. For a Vedantin, it is the confirmation of the *śāstra*. For the person who does not know, it is manner of praising *Īśvara*; the daily *pāṭyaṅgam* helps the person establish certain relationship with *Īśvara*. Therefore, it is a very popular *sāktam* like the *Rudram* or the *Śrī Sāktam*.

The *Camakam* can be viewed as a detailed account of *puruṣa*, the all. When you understand the *Puruṣa Sāktam* well, you can say that the *puruṣa* is the *ātmam*, the self. Then you can say, *manā idam sarvam*, “Everything belongs to me, as I am not separate from anything.” Instead, asking for different things, one knows that one is *puruṣa* that is everything.

In the beginning you say, *puruṣasya idam sarvam*, all this belongs to *puruṣa*. When you come to see the *puruṣa* as being the *ātmam*, the self, saying *manā idam sarvam*, all this belongs to me, is but a declaration that everything is I.

The word *puruṣa* has two meanings: one, the person who indwells the body-mind-sense complex—*puruṣa usati iti puruṣeḥ*. This body is likened to a city, *puri*. *Uṣati* means *reside*, indwells. Like the indivisible space is seemingly enclosed in a pot, this *ātman* is seemingly enclosed in a body-mind-sense complex. However, the enclosure is only from the standpoint of the mind and does not result in any kind of division to the *ātman*. Space is not divided even though the pot, which is an *upādhi*, encloses the space within it. Similarly, he who is the all-pervasive, *sarvagata*, and complete, *pūrṇa*, is manifest through a given body-mind-sense complex.

The other meaning of *puruṣa* is *pūrṇatati puruṣaḥ*, he is the *puruṣa* because he is complete, full. The *puruṣa* is the one who fills or permeates all this, *sarvāni pūrṇāni iti puruṣaḥ*, the one who abides in this entire creation. If we repeat *puruṣaḥ* twice, we mean that he is the one who abides in the entire creation and resides in the city that is our body. This *puruṣa*, even though remaining in this body, fills up everything that is here. Repeating the word *puruṣaḥ* twice as, '*puruṣaḥ puruṣaḥ*,' we have the entire teaching, *upadeśa*. The *upadeśa* is that this individual self, the *jīva*, is Lord, who is all. Just as we have the teaching, '*tat tvam asi*, that thou art,' we have *puruṣaḥ eva puruṣaḥ*.

In the *sūktā*, *puruṣa* who is a conscious being is not presented as someone who possesses one body.

We all know the person, 'I,' very well. The one who is in this body has one body, one mind, and one set of senses, one *kārya-karṇa-saṅghāta*, while that *puruṣa* in the hymn is all heads, all legs, all eyes. How both can be one? If the I-sense, *ahaṅkāra*, is taken as one body-mind-sense complex, we cannot understand this *vākya*, sentence. Then how is this *suktam* to be understood? We have to step out of this level of identification and go to the *ahankāra-aśiṣṭhāna*, the basis for the ego, the *sākṣī*, the witness. From there, look at the entire physical universe from the point of view of the consciousness which is the self, the *caitanya-ātman*. All of it, including space, *ākāśa*, air, *vāyu*, fire, *agni*, waters, *ap*, and earth, *pṛthivī*, is born of this *puruṣa* alone and is non-separate from this *puruṣa*.

Does this *puruṣa* have only one physical body-mind-sense complex? No. He is every body-mind-sense complex. Everything belongs to him alone. Then how many *śṛṅga*, heads has he? He has countless heads! The word *śatasra* does not mean a countable number; it means countless. Some, mistakenly, take this literally as meaning a thousand heads, thousand eyes and so on. It is a word that implies more than what is expressed, an *upadeśam*. This is the Lord as the whole cosmos, *virāṭ-sarāpa*. *Virāḥani rājate iti virāṭ*, the one who appears in this manifold form is the *virāṭ-puruṣa*. This *puruṣa* has countless heads;

he is *sahasrakṣa*, has countless eyes. He is *sahasrapañī*, all the feet are his feet.

Sa bhāminī viśvato vṛtā. *Bhāminī* is not only the earth, but the spherical form of the cosmos, *brahmanīda-golaka-trīpaṇ*. We have always looked upon the earth as being a sphere, *golaka*, and not as being flat. *Vṛtā* means *vijāpya*, pervading. The *puruṣa* encloses all of it, permeating, pervading everything, *viśvataḥ*, without exception, without omitting any place.

The Lord can be recognised in the heart

Alyatīṣṭhad daśāṅgulam is *daśāṅgulam alyatīṣṭhat*. You can ascribe two meanings to *daśāṅgulam*. One is that he is apart from you by ten inches, or stands ten inches away. The space of ten inches indicates that he stands unaffected. While pervading everything, he is yet far away from everything. He is both *saguṇam brahman* and *nirguṇam brahman*. Why the term *daśāṅgulam*? It is just a figurative expression, an *upalakṣaṇa*. It means he is miles away. Then why not say miles away? This is because he is so very close by! Ten inches is very close. He is very close to you and yet he is far away from you. He himself is everything, and still, he transcends everything.

Daśāṅgulam also symbolises the place in the heart, *hṛdaya-sthāna*. He is the one who stays close, pervading everything in your heart, the *daśāṅgula-hṛdaya*.

You could also understand it to mean that he pervades everything, as the *para-ātman*, even while abiding right in your heart. That is the place where he can be recognised, his *upalabdhī-sthānam*. The *hṛdaya* stands for the intellect, *buddhī*. He presides over the *buddhī* as the *jñātṛ*, knower, as *jñāna*, knowledge, and the *jñeya*, object to be known. This is the other meaning of *daśāṅgulam*.

The Lord is everything

Puruṣa evadaguṇī sarvaṃ—puruṣeḥ eva idāṅi sarvaṃ, *puruṣa* alone is all this. A lot of people commit mistakes in interpreting the *Puruṣa Saktam*. One problematic translation is that from the mouth of that *puruṣa* came the priestly class, the *brāhmaṇa*, from the hands came the warriors, the *ksatriya*, from the *aru*, the navel, came the traders, the *vaiśya*, and from the feet, the working class, *śūdra*. So in defense of the *śūdras*, they claim that they are in no way inferior in spite of having come from the feet of the *puruṣa*. "Without the feet and legs there is no *puruṣa*. There is no society without the *śūdras*, the working class. What would happen to the other classes if the working class were not there? Therefore, the working class is very important. The legs of Bhagavān are more important than the head of Bhagavān!"

What is the "idāṅi sarvaṃ—all this"? The section in question says, "The *brāhmaṇa* was his face," *brāhmanāḥ asya mukham aṣṭ*, and not "from his face was

the *brāhmanā*,” *asya mukhāt brāhmanāyāḥ asti*. All of humanity is his form. Why? As we saw, he has countless eyes, countless feet and pervades the entire cosmos without exception, *sahasraśśśah sahasrapāt sa bhānūnī viśvato vṛtaḥ*. In fact, the *Puruṣa Suktam* asks itself some questions—What are his hands, what are his legs, what is his face, and so on? Then it says that the face, *mukha*, is the *brāhmanā*, the feet are the *śāśra*, etc. In fact, he is everything, *idam sarvam*.

He is the lord of time and of all the worlds

Yadbhūtan yacca bhāyam. The entire cosmos, *brāhmanā*, including the 14 worlds, *lokas*, are this *puruṣa* alone, *idam sarvam puruṣaḥ eva*. He is there even in the worlds of the Gods, *devālokas*. Each *loka* has a presiding deity, an *adhishṭhāna-devatā*. Like Indra is the presiding *devatā* of heaven, *svarga*, and Brahmāji, of *brahmaloka*, he is the *svāmi* of all the *devāts* who preside over other *lokas*.

Yadannentirohati. *Yad* stands for the *puruṣa*. *Annena atirohati*, he is manifest in different forms of enjoyment, *bhoga*, for all the *jīvas*, giving up his earlier unmanifest state, but without ever giving up his true nature, *svarūpa*. This manifest form is an incidental *kārya* or effect, and therefore, not the *svarūpa*. An effect, *kārya*, is always *mithyā*. He has assumed this form and, therefore, remains in the heart.

Introduction to Viṣṇusahasranāma

Why so many names?

The *Viṣṇusahasranāma* is a compilation of the different names of the Lord. Why should I chant all these names? Can I not repeat any one name several times? If there are so many Viṣṇus, which one am I calling? The word Viṣṇu is applicable only to the Lord. It is derived from the root *viś*, *vyāptau*, meaning to pervade. So Viṣṇu means one who is all-pervasive. The all-pervasive is only one, not more than one. This name is appropriate only for the Lord, and nobody else. Therefore, when I call out to Viṣṇu, nobody else but the Lord can come. Being all-pervasive, he cannot be away from me; he is inside as well as outside. The moment I call for Viṣṇu, there is no question of him not hearing me. Why, then, are there so many names? If he does not respond to one name, will he respond to a different one? These verses are not even complete sentences that I can understand through syntax.

The names of the Lord in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* are so many words, one after another. The reason there are so many names is that if you do not understand one word, you can go on to the next. If you do not understand the second word, there is the third, and so on. The *Amarakośa*, authored by Amarasimha, is the classic Sanskrit thesaurus.