

A Short Analysis of Sree Narayana Guru's Hōmamantra

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ABSTRACT

Sree Narayana Guru, one of the greatest philosopher, poet, saints and social reformers of Kerala. He was a tireless crusader for social equality and fought against all sorts of discrimination prevalent against the down-trodden and oppressed, in his times. This paper attempts to find Guru's Advaita Philosophy based on his short work Hōmamantra.

Keywords: Sree Narayana Guru, Holy fire, Hōmamantra, Advaita Vedānta,

Introduction

Hōmamantra is a short work included in the philosophical works written by Sree Narayana Guru.

*Aum agne tava yat tejas brāhmaṇ
Atas tvaṁ pratyakṣaṁ brahmāsi |
Tvadiyā indriyāni mano-buddhir iti apta-jihvāḥ
Tvayi viṣayā iti samidho juhomi |
Aham ity ājyam juhomi |
tvaṁ naḥ prasīda prasīda
śreyas ca preyaś ca prayaccha svāhā ||
aum sāntiḥ sāntiḥ sāntiḥ ||*

On the occasion of the visit of some of the senior sanyāsīns of Arya Samaja at the Sivagiri Ashram, they chanced upon a conversation with Sree Narayana Guru about the greatness of the Vedic fire sacrifices. At Guru's request, they agreed to perform one at the ashram. As the ceremony was about to begin the next day, Guru approached and handed a piece of paper to them which contained the above mantra which was newly composed by Guru, but sounded like a Vedic mantra and asked them whether it too be included as a mantra for the ritual. Muni Narayana Prasad observes that Guru's mantra, though sounds like a Vedic mantra, actually corrects the Vedic worship practice with the philosophy of Non-Dualism or Advaita Vedānta.

The Dulcet of Mantra

The mantra means, 'O Fire, the splendour which you have is from the Supreme God, therefore you are the visible form of the Divine. You have the five sense organs, mind and intellect for your seven tongues. Into you I offer the objects of senses, mind and intellect as sacrificial fire wood. And into you I offer myself in the form of clarified butter. Deign to pacify upon us with prosperity and divine love. Svāhā. Aum, peace, peace, peace'.

The holy fire is believed to have seven tongues and is denoted in *Mundakopanishad* in the following names. "Kāḷī karālī manōjava ca/sulōhitā yāca sudūmṛavarṇā/sfulingini viśva ruci ca devī/lelāyamānā iti sapta jihvāḥ" (*Mundakopanishad.1.2.4*).

Śankarabāṣyam talks about the seven names of the tongues of holy Vedic fire, which moves to engulf the sacrifices, as "kālyādya viśva rucyantā lelāya mānaḥ aḥ neḥhavirāhūti grasanārtā etā kila sapta jihvāḥ".

In *Mundakopanishad* (5,6,7,) it is said that the priest of 'homa' or Vedic fire sacrificial ritual, who correctly practices the ritual on these seven tongues will be taken to 'devaloka' and welcomed cordially by Lord Indra once his sacrifices are accepted though the ray of Lord Surya or Sun.

Etacca njāna rahitam karmai tāvat falama vidyā kāma karṇakāryam atōḥ saram dukhamōlamiti niṅyate (the action without knowledge which arises from immature voluptuous actions lack meaningful matter and cause despair, and therefore aren't taken into serious account). The mantras 7,8,9 and 10 in *Mundakopanishad* rejects the 'yaga' or the Vedic fire sacrifice for attaining heaven. Upanishads portrays the return after the dissipation of good karma as 'jarā mṛityum te punarevāpiyanti' (M7), 'kṣīṇalōkāścyavante' (M9) and 'anubōtvemaṇ lōkam hīna taram vā viśvanti' (M10).

We also find the *Mundakopanishad* attacking on the one who leads the Vedic fire sacrifice. *avidyā yāmantare*

vartamānāḥ

Svayam dīrā paṇḍitam manyamānāḥ

Jamkhanyāmanāf pariyanti mōḍāf
Andenaiva nīyamānā yatandāf (8)

It means that the fools or the unwise who resides in ignorance consider them brave and wise and roams aimlessly like a group of blind led by a blind.

Sree Sankara introduces the twelfth mantra with an introductory note that says that the mantra intends to portray a person who is disinclined at the worldly glamour of existence alone can attain mastery in understanding 'Parabrahman' or the Supreme God.

“Parīkṣya lōkān karmaci tān brāhmanō
nīrveda māyānāstyakritaf kritena
tadvijnjānārtham saguru mevābigaccet
samit pānīfśrōtriyam brahmaniṣṭtam” (M 12.2)

A Brāhman, who once has attained worldly/physical experience through his actions realises that, that which lasts forever cannot be attained through stogy actions, and hence he shall follow a teacher who is well qualified to mentor and guide.

Homam: Difference in interpretation of Sacred Vedic Fire Sacrifice

svarggākāmō yajeta- we have already seen that the concept put forth by *Mandukopanishad* is seen not to comply with the philosophy of Pōṛvamīmāmsa. The mantras here denote a strong ideological conflict that had originated at a certain time among the people of Vedic period. The philosophies of Buddhism as well as Jainism which arose against the 'Yajña' or Fire sacrifice culture at the time posed powerful a threat which in turn increased the depth of ideological conflicts between the philosophies and practices, which even led to the formation of a group among the Vedic practitioners who rejected the traditional practices of the fire sacrifice and other related customs. The *Buddhanantha Upanishads* are filled with the philosophies of such out of the box spiritual thinkers who extensively talked about truth.

As Sree Narayana Guru later reaches the ideology of Sree Sankara, he is seemed attacking other philosophical doctrines, yet his approach towards the Pōṛvamīmāmsa philosophy was soft. Even when he openly showcased the meaninglessness of rituals and tradition in Pōṛvamīmāmsa, he asked the traditions to be observed as well. His approach, after learning, experiencing and practicing Pōṛvamīmāmsa, is of the one who is curious to know the Divine more. It is worthy to note that Sree Narayana Guru does not suggest such a transpose to any other philosophical school of thought. The relation between the ones who follow Pōṛvamīmāmsa and Uttaramīmāmsa is not philosophical, but political. This political cohort provided Pōṛvamīmāmsa with a land to stand, and enabled it to return with strength anytime into the philosophical ontology. The power this half-consent provides to the return of the Vedic fire sacrifice to the fold is not small.

Sree Narayana Guru's *Homa-Mantra* is a visible rejection of Pōṛvamīmāmsa. Muni Narayana Prasad's observation that the 'homa-mantra' which sounds like a Veda mantra in fact corrects Vedic rituals/tradition with the philosophy on non-dualism is valid a point. Guru incorporates a philosophical doctrine into ritualistic tradition that acts to attain heaven, thereby transposing philosophy of physical needs with that of Advaita Vedānta.

How can fire, which is only one among the five natural elements, be a representative of spiritual divine? If so, the representation shall be confined not with fire alone. Guru also agrees to this thought in his *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, where he says,

“nilamodu nīratu pole kātu tīyum
Veliyumaham kriti vidyayum manassum.
Alakaḷumāzhiyum ennu venda ellā
ulakavumuyarṇnarivāyi māridunnu” (Page.50)

which can roughly be translated as “like water to land, and air to fire/is knowledge and mind to one's self./Waves, Sea and the whole world/is transformed into knowledge in it/.

Sree Narayana Guru repeats this symbolic representation in his works through the symbol of lamp. As Guru accepts the Upanishad concept of fire to be one with seven tongues, he imagines the intellect and mind of a curious person to be the sacrifices for the fire, thereby symbolising the submission of senses, mind and intellect.

He puts forth the idea of desolation of senses through the lines, “*kuruvinu kannukal ancum ulladakki*” (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*, 1) and “*kilikle ancum arinju kīzhmarikkum velivuruventiyakam vilangidenam*” (*Ātmopadeśa Śatakam*,8). Guru imagines sacrificing senses, mind and intellect to fire next in his mantra. He reminds us of to desist, as “*priyya viṣayam prati vannidum bramam*”.

The next line in the mantra is “*aham ityājam ju hōmi*”, which is explained as
 “ahamaham ennarulunathokke yārā-
 Yukilakame palathallatekamākum.
 Akalumahantham anekamākayāli-
 Tukayilaham porulum tudarnirunnu”.

A rough translation of the same would mean, “if set out to find the ‘I’ all claim / is found within. / I that recede as ‘are’ more / is carried on in, within/.

‘*ahamityājam*’ denotes the state in which the ego or the ‘I’ complex diminishes and is cleared off completely. The next line in the mantra is the prayer for generosity and love. One of the key factors that increases the importance of Sree Narayana Guru’s philosophy is that he never rejected the material reality of physical world as unworthy, rather saw it as that which acts as a medium of communication with the common people. The last prayer in *Daivadaśakam*, which is based on the philosophy of non-dualism, is “*āzhanam vāzhanam nityam vāzhanam vāzhanam sukham*” which means, ‘live forever well in prosperity’.

Conclusion

The style of propagating non-dualism through symbols of dualism seems to be used by Sree Narayana Guru on many occasions.

“illate āyidum ullāsamonnunmari-
 villate illa anilanum
 Kallāzhiyum kanalumallāte śōnyamatum
 Ellāmorādiyiravām.
 Tallākhavam parakilillāranam kriyakal
 Mallāukilla matiyī
 Sallābhamonnu matiyellāvarum tirayum
 Ullākabōda janani” (*Janani 2*)

Here, Guru indulges in the process of redefining the faith system rooted in people by focusing within the belief system. The approach which attempts to slowly transpose a new idea over the old one is of diverse historical perceptions. At the same time, the chances of this to not succeed lie in the concept being misunderstood as an imitation of higher caste system by Guru’s own followers as well as his contenders. The deviations we find in the history of Sree Narayana Guru’s maxims are proof to such misapprehensions.

Notes and Bibliography

1. Prasad, Muni Narayana. “Homamantram”. *Complete Works of Sree Narayana Guru (Interpretation)*. National Book Trust India, 2005, pp. 372.
2. “A Brāhman, who once has attained worldly/physical experience through his actions realises that, that which lasts forever cannot be attained through stogy actions, and hence he shall follow a teacher who is well qualified to mentor and guide”. Here, the *Upanishad* doesn’t say that anyone who has knowledge of common and uncommon affairs of existence may, with his senses, mind and intellect, approach a teacher. The subjective focus in these lines is on ‘Brāhman’. The argument that the ‘brāhan’ there refers to is ‘brahmajnāni’ or one who has attained knowledge on ‘Brahman’ or the Supreme God acquired by karma and not by birth does not hold with *Sankarabāṣyam*. Sree Sankara has unmistakably stated, “*Brāhmanaf brāhmanasaiva viśeṣatōfdikāraf sarvatyāgena brahmavidyāmiti brāhmanagrahanam*”. He also says, “*tadvit jnānārtham viśeṣnādigamārtham sa niṣvīññō brāhmanaf guru meva ācāryam śamadamādi sampanam abigacet. Śāstra jnjōfpi svānthryena brahma jnānānveṣanam na kuryādityetad gurumevetyavadārana falam*”.