

# ŚRĪ RUDRAM

A Vedic invocation addressed

to

**LORD RUDRA**

(the dispeller of depression and Bestower of Bliss)

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The two texts 'NĪLAKAṆṬHASTAVA' (glorification of lord Nīlakantha, the 'Blue-necked') and 'LĪNGODBHAVA STAVA' (the manifestation of Śiva in the form of a *liṅga*) inspired me lead and to the abode of Rudra through the enlightening routes amidst the encircling gloom. The chapters on JYOTI (the divine light) also threw enormous light on the excellence and exuberance of Lord Rudra as depicted and glorified in the sacred hymn 'Śrī Rudram'.

A few lines from these two texts will suffice to pave the way for the main theme of Śrī Rudram.

To start with, the illustrious narrator ' Sūta starts with the words:

यथा श्रुतं मया पूर्वं वायुना जगदायुना । कथ्यमानं द्विजश्रेष्ठाः सत्रे वर्ष सहस्रके ॥

नीलता येन कण्ठस्य देवदेवस्य शूलिनः । तदहं कीर्तयिष्यामि शृणुध्वं शंसितव्रताः ॥ वा. पु. 1. 54. 2-3

(As I heard from , the wind-god direct in an assemblage of the sages thousands of years ago, I shall tell you why and how Lord Śiva has come to be known as Nīlakaṇṭha).

Depicting as *Jagadāyu*, the life-spring of the whole material world, is of great significance. The word 'Vāyu' is depicted here almost as synonymous with 'Āyu'. One can easily interpret the title 'Vāyupurana' as 'Āyupurāṇa' on the basis of this observation made by the narrator of the Purāṇa. In fact the grammatical aphorism 'भूवाद्यो धात्वः' of Pāṇini highlights two roots (dhātus) 'भू' (to be) and 'वा' (to flow) representing the two principal states of the universe- 'Being and moving'- the static and the dynamic forms of existence.

It is worth reconnecting in the context when Rama says addressing Vāyu in his eagerness to feel the presence of Śītā as soon as he reaches the seashore-visualising Śītā mentally across the ocean:

वाहि वात यतः कांता तांस्पृष्ट्वा मामपि स्पृश । त्वयि मे गात्रसंस्पर्शः चंद्रे दृष्टि समागमः ॥ वा. रा. VI.5.6

(Oh, my dear Vāyu ! please proceed towards the place where my beloved lady is stationed. You just touch her and comeback and touch me too. This will be a great favour to me as I can feel the touch of my beloved through you and have a glimpse of her through the Moon.)

It is at this cosmic level that Vāyu-purāṇa depicts Nīlakaṇṭha as the Lord of the Universe encompassing all forms and norms of divinity. A few lines from Brahmā's

invocation to the Lord Nīlakaṅṭha illustrate the multiplicity of the Lord's manifestation (Vāyupurāṇa I. 54.65-66,71-74).

नमस्तुभ्यं विरूपाक्ष नमस्तेऽनेक चक्षुषे । नमः पिनाकहस्ताय वज्रहस्ताय वै नमः ॥  
 नमस्त्रैलोक्यनाथाय भूतानां पतये नमः । नमः सुरारि संहर्त्रे तापसाय त्रिचक्षुषे ॥  
 नमः कमलहस्ताय दिग्वासाय शिखण्डिने । लोकत्रय विधात्रे च रुद्राय वरुणाय च ॥  
 अग्राय चैव चोग्राय विप्रायानेक चक्षुषे । रजसे चैव सत्त्वाय तमसेऽव्यक्तयो नये ॥  
 नित्यायानित्य रूपाय नित्यानित्याय वै नमः । व्यक्ताय चैवाव्यक्ताय व्यक्ताव्यक्ताय च वै नमः ॥  
 चिन्त्याय चैवाचिन्त्याय चिन्त्याचिन्त्याय वै नमः । भक्तानामार्तिनाशाय नरनारायणाय च ॥

These are the words of Brahmā glorifying the multiplicity of manifestation of Lord Rudra whose Nīlakaṅṭha is capable of absorbing the entire poison encircling the universe in a single sip. In fact Mahādeva Śaṅkara narrated this to Mahādevī in response to her desire to know how He became Blue-necked (Nīlakaṅṭha). Incidentally this testifies the authenticity of the identity of Śiva, Śaṅkara or Rudra with Nara and Nārāyaṇa. It is therefore but natural that my heart beats echoed with vibrations of Śrī Rudram when going through the above lines from the Vāyupurāṇa .

Śrī Rudram, acclaimed, admired and adopted by Vedic scholars as an intergral part of their daily prayers invoking the blessings of the most merciful Lord Rudra, the dispeller of depression and bestower of bliss in day to day life. The mere chanting of this holy text, a part of the Taittirīya Saṁhitā of Kṛṣṇa Yajur veda, produces vibrations not only in the heart and brain of the devotee but in the whole environment around the saered place where recitation is rendered in accordance with the well-designed intonations of various sounds making a marvellous sense to the ears and hearts of those who recite and also who hear. The in built rhythm and symmetry in thought add to the sanctity of the prayer which takes hardly 20 to 30 minutes to recite with ease and without any haste. In popularity, this closely resembles Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasrānāma a sacred hymn preached by Ācārya Bhīṣma to King Yudhiṣṭhira in the Anusasanika parva of the celebrated epic Mahābhārata.

Even though Sri Mahā Viṣṇu is the presiding deity in the Sahasranāma and Lord Rudra or Śiva in Śrī Rudram, there are references in both the texts to the other deities as manifestations of the same divinity name them as you like.

For instance, the lines :

सर्वः शर्वः शिवः स्थाणुर्भूतादि निधिरव्ययः । सम्भनवो भावनो प्रभवः प्रभुरीश्वरः ॥  
 स्वयंभूः शम्भुरादित्यः पुष्कराक्षो महास्वनः । अनादिनिधनो धाता विधाता धातुरुत्तमः ॥ 17-18

Testify a balanced approach to both Śiva and Visnu in Śrī Viṣṇu sahasranāma. Similarly, the *camakam* (second) part of ŚRĪ RUDRAM starts with an invocation :(May our faculty of speech flourish with the nourishment of equally cherished grace of both Agni and Viṣṇu).

Obviously, the word 'agni' here stands for the glorification of the three-eyed Lord whose third eye above the two eye-brows is the reservoir of celestial fire (*trikāgni or kālāgni*) as addressed by the Vedic seer as '*trikāgni kālāya kālāgni Rudrāya, Nīlakaṇṭhāya*' etc. in the very first anuvākam of *namakam*.

It is significant to note that the concluding sentence in the *namakam*-recitation pays homage to both Rudra and Viṣṇu in the same breath “नमो रुद्राय विष्णवे मृत्युर्मे पाहि” . This identity between the two facets of divinity-Viṣṇu and Rudra finds a fascinating echo in the '*Nīlakaṇṭha stavam*' of the as stated earlier.

Śrī Rudram, in its popular form of worship (recitation, chanting, havan etc.) consists of two parts- '*namakam*' and '*camakam*'. The nomenclature is also very interesting, simple and catching. The first part '*namakam*' is so named because the phrases '*namo*', '*namaḥ*', '*namostu*', '*namaste*' and the like are added to almost each and every word glorifying the Lord Viṣṇu as a prefix or a suffix. For example:

नमो ज्येष्ठाय च कनिष्ठाय च । नमः पूर्वजाय चापरजाय च ।  
 नमो मध्यमाय चापगल्भाय च । नमो जघन्याय च बुध्न्याय च ।  
 नमः सौभ्याय च प्रतिसर्याय च ॥ वा.सं. XVI. 32-33

obeisance to the eldest as well as the youngest  
 obeisance to the primordial as well as the ultimate  
 obeisance to the middle one and the origin of all  
 obeisance to the inferior and superior  
 obeisance to the double sided and the subsided.

Similarly, *camakam*, the second part of the text, uses the phrase '*p es*' (also mine or grant that too forme) wish almost all the words or confess occurring in the text. That is why it is called '*camakam*'. The text starts as follows:

“वाजश्च मे प्रसवश्च मे प्रयतिश्च मे प्रसितिश्च मे धीतिश्च मे क्रतुश्च मे स्वरश्च मे श्लोकश्च मे  
 श्रावश्च मे श्रुतिश्च मे ज्योतिश्च मे स्वश्च मे प्राणश्च मेऽपानश्च मे व्यानश्च मे ॥ वा.सं. XVIII. 1-2

(Grant me the food and allied material, grant me the sacred fire and its worship, grant me the ability to recite the hymns, listen to prayers, perform the sacrifices, effective articulation, comprehension of the scriptural material, the ability to offer prayers and understand the content, the enlightenment both outward and inward. Grant us the control over the finer life-breaths).

Each and every word or phrase used in the text-whether it is *namakam* or *camakam*- is so powerful that it conveys variety of meaning depending upon our ability to grasp and interpret it. Even if we do not have that ability, we can enjoy the sound and feel elevated merely by using them.

*Namkam* and *camakam* are in a way, complementary. A contemplative intellect can grasp the inner meaning even from the sound though at times the ideas become so abstract that even the higher class of comprehension fails to understand the whole meaning.

For example the last and also the concluding passage in '*camakam*' simply goes on counting the numerals in a peculiar pattern. The Vedic seer simply goes on enumerating the figures: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 and then stops at 33 in this series. Then immediately he starts with 4, goes on reckoning 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40, 44 and 48. What these figures indicate is conveyed through a code language which only a matured mind can grasp after hours and years of meditation.

The commentators have, however, achieved it with divine grace. In brief, what is covered in the odd figures 1 to 33 in the first series relates to the entire cosmos comprising 289 units in all. Similarly, the even numbers cover the entire knowledge and skills that one can acquire to qualify for the divine grace.

But the miracle is that even instant sowing into the numerical and metaphysical intricacies. One can enjoy the script first by articulating it on the lines indicated by the Vedic seers of these *mantras* and feel that they are elevated without their being aware of it.

This concluding section of '*camakam*' is worth going through just for a glance and the instant appraisal of the august mind behind these sounds.

Having completed all the numerals contemplated to cover all the landmarks of the cosmos. The scriptive summarises all that is covered in these numerals (highly suggestive and hence abstract for the common mind) in the following lines:

“वाजश्च प्रसवश्च पिजश्च क्रतुश्च सुवश्च ॥ तै.सं. 1.7.9.1

It can be seen that these concluding lines are almost identical with the opening lines in the beginning of this '*camakam*'. Thus there is a harmony in sound and a pleasant symmetry in the sometimes of the whole text. These concluding lines in particular, have a tonic effect on the tone of the aspirant who recites this and chant these charming of this sacred hymn.

Before I conclude, I would like to mention to you that whenever I glance through this passage of numbers- both odd and even- I am reminded of what my father used to say when I was young that the best way to control anger is to count the numbers from 1 to 33 and 4 to 48. May be, he got this clue from Śrī Rudram. He was always fond of reciting Śrī Viṣṇu sahasranama in the morning and Śrī Rudram at noon or night. The Sahasranāma starts with 'OM' and ends with 'OM' *nama-iti*, while Śrī Rudram starts with the line '*namaste Rudra manyava*' (Prostrations to you, O Rudra and particular to your anger as you are the dispeller of all depression and bestower of bliss).

*Namakam*, in Śrī Rudram teaches how to win over the Lord by just offering a

sincere *praṇāma* as the Chāndogya says '*Oṃ nama ityupāsīta, 'namyante asmai kāmah'*' (Cultivate yourself to pay obeisance to all that is to the revered, all your desires will come to you and prostrate before you.)

Infact *namakam* and *camakam* are the two facets of the Lord Rudra. He grants everything to a devotee if there is sincerity in his humility integrity and devotion and he showers miraculous mercy over the devoted articulator of Śrī Rudram '*camākam*' in particular. *Namakam* (नमकं) teaches *namaskāra* (नमस्कार) while *camakam* works our wonders-*camatkāra* (चमत्कार).