

Paper on Expression of Advaita Vedanta through Classical Music

Advaitic kritis composed by Swami Dayānanda Saraswati (1930 - 2015) of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

-By Sonali Ambasankar

Rarely will there be any person who has not heard of the kriti Bho Śambho Śiva Śambho Svayambho. Composed and written by Pujya Swami Dayānanda Saraswati (1930 - 2015), who established the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, it is an immensely melodious and a much popular composition on Lord Śiva. So much is the popularity, that the song is sung by many a singer without even knowing the composer and the writer of these wonderful lyrics. It probably reflects the greatness of Swami Dayānanda ji as a teacher, where he wants the teaching to be remembered over the teacher, the song to be remembered over the composer.

Swamiji composed many such Sanskrit kritis, in praise of different devatas. 19 kritis to be precise to be sung upon Gaṇapati, Someśvara, Śāradādevi, Mīnākṣī, Ṣaṇmukham, Rāma, Govinda, Dakshināmurty, ĀdiŚankara and even on our dearest Bhāratavarsha. The last of his compositions was on Devi Jñāneśwari, in praise of the Veda, our Śruti māta. Across all his kritis, Swamiji has beautifully woven together Saguna and Nirguna Brahman. At first glance, these might appear as simple compositions like many others, sung as praises on different deities. But taking a closer look reveals a lot more.

In the Bhagavad Gitā, Chapter 7, verse 16, Bhagavān Kṛṣṇā talks about the 4 bhaktas - ārta, arthārthi, jijñāsu and the jñāni. Each type of bhakta is seeking or connecting with Bhagavān through his own understanding of Bhagavān. ĀdiŚankara in his bhāṣya on the Gitā says चतुर्विधाः चतुःप्रकाराः भजन्ते सेवन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनः पुण्यकर्माणः हे अर्जुन । आर्तः आर्तिपरिगृहीतः तस्करव्याघ्ररोगादिना अभिभूतः आपन्नः, जिज्ञासुः भगवत्तत्त्वं ज्ञातुमिच्छति यः, अर्थार्थी धनकामः, ज्ञानी विष्णोः तत्त्वविच्च हे भरतर्षभ ॥ ७.१६ ॥

Swami Dayānandaji's compositions connect with each of these 4 types of bhaktas to his personal understanding of Bhagavān. When any bhakta connects with Bhagavan, he as a devotee has no problems. He as a father, mother, son, friend, employee may have lots of problems, but as a devotee, how can he have problems, as now, all his problems are now Bhagavan's problems. Now, how do the kritis touch and have an impact on each devotee, each bhakta?

The ārta, arthārthi or jijñāsu can sing or listen to these kritis, connect fully with the words and thus ask Bhagavān for all that they are seeking. The jñāni sees himself as the meaning of the words

themselves. Śabda, being a means of knowledge, is capable of connecting the singer/listener to Isvarā/paramātma and finally make him see the truth of himself. What are kritis anyways? Śabda, words woven in musical phrases and rāgas. Thus, the lyrics of the kriti forms the basis for the kriti. The music, the singing, the rāga the bhāva and the swarās further add and aid an absorption and laya of the seeking mind. Thus, alongwith the music and the words of connection and jñānam, each kriti becomes a prayer towards the presiding devata. Each bhakta can potentially become a nāda upāsaka, i.e he can choose to do upāsana of the devata through śabda and nāda i.e music, relating to the lyrics and through their musical expression, finally leading him to understanding the meaning of the words and seeing himself as the very swarupa of the words, where in ultimately, the jñānam, the jneyam and the jñānagamyam are one and the same, thus making the singer, the song and the one to be sung upon as one and the same. On the other hand, the jñāni already sees himself as the basis of all the lyrics. In such a beautiful manner, the kritis connect with every bhakta, every seeker in his entire journey of seeking the sought, ie seeking moksha.

In the light of the above, we take a closer look at all the compositions and see their lyrics and the musical expressions to understand this better.

The journey of any seeker starts with the seeker recognising his helplessness in dealing with his life. He realises at some point in his life that he needs help from Bhagavān to manage his life. From here starts his journey as a bhakta. A bhajan is sung, it is a musical form of a prayer. Praying is the most intelligent and objective karma that a bhakta can do. Through the musical prayer, the bhakta surrenders his efforts, his ahamkara, his mind at the feet of Bhagavān. With this, without he realising, a change has happened. From the standpoint of karma, of course he has gained puṇya. But from the standpoint of his own mind, a huge shift has happened. He has dropped his notions of being self made, of being independent, being arrogant and intelligent to now being a person who needs help and seeing himself helpless in his own eyes. He has now, if I may say so, allowed Bhagavān into his life. Hence the bhajan i.e the musical prayer itself, has helped the person start his journey of a seeker. From here now, what the seeker prays for, that becomes an important question.

An āṛta, आर्तः आर्तिपरिगृहीतः तस्करव्याघ्ररोगादिना अभिभूतः आपन्नः, In his life and prayers, Bhagavān is just someone more powerful, whom he runs to when in trouble. And trouble is always around the corner for most people. Through Swamiji's 19 kritis on different devatas, the āṛta bhakta can connect with the devata from whom he seeks help or connect with his iṣṭadevata, showering love and praises on him/her. The pallavis of each composition are praises upon the respective devatas. The āṛta can connect with the names of Lord Gaṇesha in the kriti भजे विघ्नराजम् Bhaje Vighnarājam when he runs into obstacles. He can easily relate to the words "दीनम् अति दीनम् बल हीनम् उद्धर माम् (I am weak and helpless, raise me) through the kriti

"हे गोविन्द हे गोपाल". In fact the musical expression of the phrase *deenam ati deenam* is so appropriately denote the helpless āṛta bhakta himself. The āṛta has no clue about the Vedas, what the Vedas say, does not chant any mantras, does not offer any form of worship, but has only, thankfully, now, recognised his helplessness.

An arthārthi, अर्थार्थी धनकामः who has a give and take relationship with Bhagavān seeks comforts and profits and pleasures from Bhagavān, looks towards Bhagavān as a beneficiary who can grant boons and pleasant situations in life. He connects with the words of the kriti on Devi Mīnākṣī as "संताप हरिणी" (Remover of pain) and on Gaṇapati as "ताप त्रययुत भव रोग भेषजम्" (Remover of the ills of life fraught with 3 fold pain) and "शतकोटी विघ्न परिहार चरणम्" (Remover of countless obstacles) and on Kṛṣṇā as "कल्पद्रुम, as a wish fulfilling tree granting countless desires". He prays to Subramānyam as a bestower of "पशु पुत्र कलत्र स्वर्गादीष्ट कामतरो" i.e wealth, children marriage heaven. He recognises himself as "संचित सर्व कलुष कलापम् - a bundle of gathered impurities." He may also pray to Rāma as "नित्य धर्म चारिणम्, दण्डिनं कोदण्डिनं दुराचार खण्डनम्" so that dharma is at the centre of his being.

The āṛta and the arthārthi are seeking dharmārthakāma whereas a jijñāsu जिज्ञासुः भगवत्तत्त्वं ज्ञातुमिच्छति यः is basically a mokshārthi, he is seeking a way out of the samsāra, as he has seen the limitations of "जन्म मृत्यु जरा व्याधि दुःख दोष" (seen the limitations of birth, death, old age, disease, dukha) and he prays to Rama for their भव हरम् i.e freedom from them.

Generally, in the kritis, the jijñāsu, can connect with the words of the anupallavi or the first part of the charaṇam. In the kriti paripālaya karivarada, the jijñāsu has seen the limitations of actions, he seeks protection from the fire of samsāra in which he is afflicted with rāgas and dvesas अविद्यादि पञ्च क्लेशादि तप्तम्. He prays to Shambho as the भवसागर तारक one who helps to cross over the ocean of becoming.

The jijñāsu, who is seeking knowledge and hence adhikāritvam for the knowledge, asks for and prays to Lord Someśvara as "शमदामादि युक्तेन प्रतिपद्यमानं" (who is known for his mature mastered mind and senses) and prays to Śāradādevi for a शुद्ध सत्त्व *shuddha sattva*" (pure sattva) and "स्वच्छ हृदय" (pure heart) and to Ṣaṇmukham so as to take care of the shadripus as

"कामादि षड्रिपु निधनम् (destroyer of the six enemies) and to be centred on dharma prays to Lord Rāma.

A jijñāsu also prays for the teaching to Lord Rāma so that he can see truth of "वशीकृत माया कारित वेशम्", (lord of maya, the cause of all beings) and to Lord Dakshināmurti as "जिज्ञासु मनोगत हृणमुर्ते" who is residing in the jijñāsu's heart. Through doing seva to the people of Bhāratavarsha "कुरु सेवाम्" (reach out and join in seva), a jijñāsu is able to get a mature and fertile mind, for the knowledge to be seen clearly. In the kriti on Devi Jñāneśwari, the jijñāsu asks help from Śruti Māta to cross over the ocean of samsāra, "तारयमाम्".

The jijñāsu is reassured and ensured that no matter he the worst sinner, the jñānam will help him cross over the ocean of samsāra in the kriti *tyajare bhava bhaya tāpam*, अपि चेदसि पापकृतमह, सर्वम् वृजिनम् सन्तरिष्यसि त्वम्.

Swamiji also imparts the teaching to a jijñāsu in 2 of his kritis. In *tyajare bhava bhaya tāpam*, Swāmiji brings in the mahāvākya of the Bhagavad Gita ch13 verse 2. इदं शरीरं क्षेत्रं हि विद्धि क्षेत्रं यो वेत्ति सर्वेषु क्षेत्रेषु स हि परमात्मा अहमिति पश्य समाहितो भूत्वा i.e understand and know the body to be the kshetram within which the knower of the kshetra abides, know him to be the Paramātma, the limitless self, I aham, with a calm pure and composed mind. Thus right from the preparation of the mind upto the understanding, through shravanam and mananam, if the jijñāsu, understands these words from a śrotriyabrahmaniṣṭha guru, he will be able to see the truth of himself. In the kriti *bhāvaye paramātmānam*, the jijñāsu can even contemplate and do nidhidhyasana on the limitless self.

As we move from an ārta to an arthārthi to a jijñāsu bhakta, each can easily connect with eka rupa bhakti to anekarupa bhakti and move towards arupa bhakti, from Saguna to Nirguna.

For a jñāni, ज्ञानी विष्णोः तत्त्वविच्च he clearly sees arupa Gaṇapati as "नितान्त शुद्धान्त प्रशस्तम्, तटस्तम् समस्तम् तम्" (altar of praise, changeless, source of all beings, limitless, bestower of blessings, ultimate goal) and arupa Śambho as "स्वयंभो निर्गुण परब्रह्म स्वरूप, निजगुह निहित नितान्त अनन्ता अक्षय नित्य निरंजन" (self existent, free of all attributes, Brahman, residing in the heart, untouched, limitless, not declining, incomparable, eternal, pure). Nirguṇa Someśvara as "पूतम् पवित्रम् प्रणव स्वरूपम् नित्य निरीहम् निगमान्तगम् कालान्तकम्"

(pure, purifier, in the form of Om, known through Vedanta, lord of time) self illuminating Śāradādevi as "स्वप्रकाश रुपिणीम् शुभदाम् परापरविद्या" (self illuminating, confers ultimate freedom, para and apara knowledge) Mīnākṣī as परमगुह्य परब्रह्म सहाये (hidden in our hearts, creative power of limitless Brahman). Ṣaṅmukham as प्राज्ञं प्रणवार्थं देशिकम् (all knowledge, meaning of Om). Subramaṅya as विश्वाकार ओंकार तत्त्वार्थमूर्ते स्फूर्ते सुकीर्ते" (in the form of the universe, meaning of Om, manifest consciousness, lord of all glories) Kṛṣṇā as "भावाभावानिर्वचनीयमाया सच्चिद् घनरसमूर्तिम् पुण्यमनोरथपूर्तिम् हृत्स्फूर्तिम्" (in the form of maya, essence of existence consciousness, fruition of all punya, illumining all hearts) Dakshināmurti as "मूर्ते अमूर्ते आगमसार परिपूर्ण आत्मा प्रसीदहृदीश अधीहि ब्रह्म" (formless and with form, vision of the Vedas, atma, limitless, lord of my heart). In the kriti on Shankarācharya, the jnāni can relate to the words of विज्ञात परात्म निजस्वरूपम् ज्ञेयं ध्येयं गेयं ie he knows his atma as the paramātma, the one which is to be known, contemplated upon and attained. Thus a jnāni can completely see the truth of the words of the kritis as arupam, and ātma as paramātma, himself.

Although, a jnāni can connect and understand the truth of the entire kriti, the lyrics that the jnānis see themselves as, are usually in the second part of the charaṇam or in the 2nd charaṇams of the kritis.

In the Bho Śambho kriti, the ultimate culmination of the jeeva jagat isvara aikyam can be understood through its words, which are put together in such a way, that one cannot but look at the truth of the advaita statement depicting satyam and mithya and thus Oneness. "Where there is the clay satyam, there need not be the pot mithya, but where there is the pot mithya, there definitely is the clay satyam". Beautifully, Swamiji has added a final tarāṇa in the kriti as the 2nd charaṇam, which depicts the tāndava nritya of natesa, natarāja shambho, indicating the dance of Isvara in the form of the entire jagat. Dimita dimita... Thus for a jnāni, who sees that where there is mithya, definitely there is satyam; where there is prakriti, there is the purusha, he sees the only One, the Himself in everyone and everything, thus depicting the Oneness, advaita.

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇā in the Gita ch10, says, I am the Sāma Veda amongst all the Vedas. वेदानाम् सामवेदोऽस्मि। All music has its origin in the Sāma. In fact, all the 4 Vedas are chanted, not read. With music as a form of expression, through the rāga, bhāva, swarās, tune and phrases; the śabda pramāṇa, the words come alive and establish an immediate and direct connection with the mind of the bhakta. The āṛta, arthāṛti and jijñāsu can sing or listen to these kritis, connect fully with the words and thus ask Bhagavān for all that they are seeking. In addition, the music, the singing, the rāga and the swarās further aid an absorption and laya of the seeking mind. With the music and

the words of connection, each kriti becomes a prayer and each bhakta has the potential to become a nāda upāsaka. In this manner, the kritis connect with every bhakta, every seeker in his entire journey of seeking the sought, seeking moksha. The understanding of the jnāni resonates with all the words of the kriti as he sees himself as the very swarupa of all forms and has understood that he was always mukta.

Thus, no bhakta, no one, is denied Oneness. No one is rejected. No one left out. As Advaita, all is in Me and I am in all, I accept all as myself. मत्स्थानि सर्व भूतानि।

And Swami Dayānanda ji, through his melodious Advaitic kritis continues being true to the name conferred upon him of being Dayānanda, the one who is all compassionate, all inclusive, denying no one, accepting each and everyone, as all are in him, and he is in all.

Om Tat Sat.

Please note: Some of the above lyrics of the kritis were sung during the paper presentation to illustrate certain points.

References: Compositions of Swami Dayānanda Saraswati, published by Swami Dayānanda Satabhishekam Celebration Committee, Coimbatore.

Compositions of Swami Dayānanda Saraswati, from the Teachings of Swami Dayānanda app by Arsha Vidya Research and Publication Trust.