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Omkāra to Ek Onkāra

By

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1. Introduction:

I feel delighted to present this paper ‘Omkāra to Ek Onkāra’ on the august occasion of 550th birth anniversary (*Prakāśotsava*) of Guru Nanak Dev Ji before august assembly of scholars in the Department of Theology, Goethe University, Frankfurt (Germany). At the outset, it is necessary to say that the Om is eternal entity exists for ever even after universal devastation. Onkāra reveals formless (nirākāra) God. Nirākāra means not visible (śūnya) but present. *Vedas* (Vedic scriptures), *Āgamas* (Jain scriptures) and *Tripitakas* (Buddhist scriptures) have emphatically used Om as powerful *Mantra* that has power of origination, sustenance and annihilation. This is trinity of Vedic God. This Om presents ultimate reality of Buddhism because every entity goes through origination and annihilation every moment. Om reveals ultimate reality of Jainism because the definition of ultimate reality is everything undergoes origination, sustenance and annihilation.

Guru Nanak has preached us that Ek Onkāra is one supreme power. Ek reveals oneness. Thus, Ek Onkāra means Supreme power is one known by different names. Ek Onkāra is *Vismāda nāda*, known as Sabda-Brahma that is eternal like space and time are eternal. That is penetrated in creation as well as present beyond this creation. Each and every word pronounced by Guru Nanak makes us spiritually strong and morally high. The term Om is followed by term Kāra that is extension of Om in the form of creation. Thus, Onkāra means Akālapurakhu and His creation. Akāla means beyond the time or eternal. Akālapurakhu means eternal God in terms of Sikh religion. Guru Nanak enlightening us points out that there is plurality in unity and unity is in plurality. The unity is in God and plurality is in his creation. According to Guru Nanak that Akālapurakhu in other term is ultimate reality. Sikh religion emphatically asserts that our real father i.e. Akālapurakhu is one i.e. Almighty and we are family members like his son and daughters etc., thus we are sisters and brothers of each other. Therefore, Guru Nanak’s profound teaching is, we should not fight with each other on the name of caste, creed, region and religion. We must behave like family members.

2. Aim of Guru Nanak's Birth:

The aim of Guru Nanak's birth was to show real path of life to human kind and to develop common sense of universal fraternity among all. Guru Nanak is gracefully addressed by various names as Baba Nanak, Nanak Dev, Nanak Shah, Nanak Badshah, Nanak Sahib etc. by followers of different religions. He took birth as a savior of humanity. He devoted his entire life for promotion of true knowledge and to remove the barrier of false.

He emphatically stated that entire people on this earth are progeny of the same God. Our way of devotion to that power can be different, our language to recite His name can be different, our region wherefrom we devote Him can be different, our tradition can be different but we devote to the same God. Almost all religions explain the importance of Onkāra in different manner.

3. Ek Onkāra (Mūlamantra) in Guru Nanak's View:

Guru Grantha Sāhib starts with Guru Nanak's *Bānī Japu ji Sāhib* and *Japu ji Sāhib* starts with *Mūlamantra* and *Mūlamantra* starts with Ek Onkāra. Let us see *Mūlamantra*, as such, "*Ek Onkāra Satināmu Kartā purakhu Nirbhau Nirvairu Akāla mūrati Ajūnī Saibhaṅg Gurprasādi.*" After this *Mūlamantra Japu ji sahib* starts such as, "*Japu Ādi Sacu Jugādi Sacu Hai bhī Sacu Nanak hosī bhī Sacu.*"² The explanation of *Mūlamantra* in nut shell is as, 'God is one and equally present, true is his Name, He is creator and He expresses Himself through His creation, He is without fear and enmity. He is beyond the limit of time, he neither takes birth nor dies; He does not take birth coming into womb of mother. He created Himself. He is realized with the grace of Guru. Therefore, Guru Nanak further says in *Japuji Sāhib* that repeatedly recite His name. He is eternal reality. He was present even before he created the universe. He was present before the era started and is present even now. Firmly addressing Guru Nanak says that true is His name and He will remain present forever. Thus, in brief this can be stated that, Guru Grantha Sāhib is interpretation of Ek Onkāra. In *Mūlamantra* Guru Nanak has made us clear that Ek Onkāra is the ultimate reality, He is One. Guru Nanak has promoted fraternity by vividly clarifying Oneness of God. In spite of being formless He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

² *Guru Granth Sāhib, Mūlamantra*

Whatever we see in this universe that is created by the omniscient. And whatever is not visible to us is also created by the same. That almighty power takes care of all its creation. That is why that is omnipresent. Even every material particle is pervaded by that. And what is happening in this universe is happening through His permission. Whether it is thing or thought or imagination nothing is beyond His existence. How great and omnipresent is he that even mind cannot imagine about him. In Guru Ramdasa's words:

Jiu pasarī sūraja kiraṇi joti.

Tiu ghati ghati ramīyā oti poti.. GGS-1177

It means Ek Onkāra is pervaded everywhere as ray of sun pervades universe. Bhagat Namdev analyses the all pervasiveness of the Ek Onkāra in his words as:

Sabhu gobindu hai sabhu gobindu hai..

Gobindu binu nahīn koī..

Sūtu eku maṇi sata sahaṁsa jaise

Oti poti prabhu soī..rahāo.. GGS-485

Here Gobindu symbolizes Ek Onkāra. This rhyme says everything is Gobind, everything is Gobind, nothing is beyond Gobind. That is all pervasive as a thread pervades thousands of gems. I would like to quote here the *Bānī* of Guru Arjan Dev Ji such as-

Jali thali mahīyali pūriyā suāmī sirajanuhāru..

Anika bhāṁti hoi pasariyā nānaka ekaṁkāru.. GGS-296

Guru Nanak says, Ek Onkāra, owner and creator of all is observed to have fully penetrated in many forms and in many ways in water and in land and everywhere.

4. Om (ॐ) from Vedic Point of View:

Vedic philosophy ensures that Reality is one that is Brahma³. That is GOD known by different names in different religions.

bUnza fe=a o#.kefXuekgqjFkks fnO;% 1 lqi.kksZ xq#Reku~A

indram mitram varuṇamagnimāhuratho divyah sa suparṇo gurutmān.

,da ln~ foizk cgq/kk onUR;fXua ;ea ekrfj'okuekgq%AA⁴.

ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadantyagnim yamaṁ mātariśvānamāhuh..

³ *Yat Sat Tat Brahma*

⁴ *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā badanti. R̥gveda-1 mandal/164 sūkta/40 mantra*

The R̥gveda defines ultimate reality (sat) as one entity. The king of deities (Indra), the sun, the fire, the air all are part of single reality, the scholars call that by different names in different ways. Reality is Brahma. That is Almighty. Every moment we see operation in the nature that things are emerging and merging, evolving and dissolving the main cause behind these activities is Brahma. This is considered as power of God.

No one perceives God⁵ but everyone perceives his action in his creation. Om (Āḥ) is Akṣara (Śabda) symbolizes the intact Brahma⁶. That Brahma commands over all universe⁷. The grateful persons appreciate the bounteous giving of that Super-power and ungrateful always ignore that. This is the difference between wise and ignorant. Every religion believes on ultimate reality. That ultimate reality is Supreme power known as God. Guru Nanak tried to sow this seed of thought into minds of people who follow different religions. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upniṣada* there is quote worthy hymen

Āḥ iw.kZen% iw.kZfena iw.kkZRiw.kZeqnP;rsA
Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ pūrṇātpūrṇamudaccyate.
 iw.kZL; iw.kZeknk; iw.kZesokof'k";rsAA
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate.
 Āḥ 'kkfUr% 'kkfUr% 'kkfUr% A
Om Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upniṣada-mantra-1

The Omkāra (Parabrahma) is perfect and this world (Brahma) is also perfect. This perfect world has come into existence out of perfect Brahma. Perfect minus perfect becomes perfect. Everywhere there is Parabrahma there is perfection. When we recite Om, we realize perfection and lose three types of, physical, divine and material miseries. Om (Āḥ) Tat (rr~) Sat (lr~) these three words are known as synonymous of ultimate reality. As 'Tat' symbolizes 'Om' similarly 'Sat' also symbolizes 'Om'. In spite of being Nirguṇa and Nirākāra, the Brahma ever exists. Scriptures reveal that non-existent things never exist and existent things ever exist. The mystery of the existent and non-existent is known by the omniscient.

Ukklrks fo|rs Hkkoks uk Hkkoks fo|rs lr%A
nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhavo vidyate sataḥ
 mHk;ksjfi n`"Vks·UrLRou;ksLrRonf'kZfHk%AA Jhen~Hkxon~xhrc

2@16

ubhayorapi dṛṣṭo 'ntastvanayostatvadarṣibhiḥ. Bhagvadgītā-2/16

⁵ *Adriśyatvādiguṇako dharmokteh. vn`';Rokfnxq.kdks /keksZDRs% A Brahmasūtra 1/2/21*

⁶ *Aksharamambarāntadhṛte. v{kjeEckUr/k`rs A Brahmasūtra 1/3/10*

⁷ *Sā ca praśāsanāt. Lkk p iz'kklukr~ A Brahmasūtra 1/3/11*

Here worth mentioning *Mantra* of Īśāvāsyopaniṣada is-

Å; bZ'kkokL;fen ;wloZa ;fRd¥~p txR;ka txr~A

Om Īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyām jagat.

rsu R;Drso Hkq¥~thFkk ek x`/k% dL;fLo)ue~AA ea=-1

Tena tyaktena bhunjīthā māgr̥dhaḥ kasyasviddhanam..

Īśāvāsyopaniṣada 1/1

This Mantra starts with sound of Om. Ultimate reality is known by several names. Om and Īśā are synonyms. Sentient and insentient whatever is in this cosmos is pervaded by Īśā. Acknowledging Īśā everywhere as an evident; consume things in limit being detached from greed.

Let us compare here the *Mūlamantra* of Guru Granth Sahib that acknowledges the all-pervasive character of the Brahma. The meaning of the Japu is to recite the Name of Almighty. The omniscience of Om (Å;) and Ek Onkāra (bd vksadj) is unanimously accepted in Upniṣads and in *Śrī Guru Grantha Sāhib*.

Om (Å;) is a name means O Lord! I and my teacher both make us safe together, both of us have nourishment together, both of us gain power together, we should earn grace together and we should not have animosity among us⁸. This mantra leads us towards holistic approach of life that is similar to Guru Nanak's teaching.

I would like to share the remarkable Mantra of *Praśnopaniṣad* that the disciple Satyakāma asks to seer Pippalāda that what is the benefit of the devotion of the Omkāra? The Seer answers that the existence of Om is not different from the existence of Parameśwara means both are same. This is the wider form of the Aparabrahma i.e. originated out of Brahma. Om is the wider form of Brahma. Whatever we see, listen and understand this is mortal form of Brahma. Whosoever remembers His outer form, he doesn't attain Him but who understands His outer and inner forms both he obviously attains Him. See the Mantra-

frlzks ek=k e`R;qeR;% iz;qDrk% vU;ksU;lDrk vufoiz;qDrk%A

tisro mātrā mr̥tyumatyaḥ prayuktaḥ anyonyasaktā anaviprayuktāḥ-

fØ;klq ckákH;Urje;/eklq lE;Diz;qDrklq u dEirs K% AA iz'uksifu"kn~ 5@6

⁸ *Om saha nāvavatu, saha nau bhunaktu, saha vīryam karavāvahai
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai-kathopniṣad-Kaṭhupniṣad,mantra-1*

*kriāsu bāhyābhyantaramadhyamāsu samyakprayuktāsu na kampate jñāḥ*⁹
Praśnopaniṣad 5/6

The Upniṣada also states that when one recites one *Mātrā* means *Ṛgveda* only gets this mortal world, when one contemplates two *Mātrās* means *Yajur* gets place in cosmos and one who worships three *Mātrās* means *Sāma*, in other terms worships ‘Om’ gets emancipation becomes free from bondage of birth and death. There is a Mantra in Upniṣada-

riḡbhiretaṃ yajubhiraṅtarikṣaṃ sām̐bhiryat tatkavayo vedayante.
reks³~dkjs.kSok;rusukUosfr fo }ku ;RrRNkUretjee`reHk;a ija psfrAA
tamonkareṅaivātanenānveti vidvān yattatcchāntamajaramabhayaṃ paraṃ ceti..
Praśnopaniṣad 5/7

According to Guru Nanak the person who recites name, works hard and shares food with others crosses the ocean of life and finds salvation.

5. Reconciliation Between two Views:

In Indian philosophy there are two fundamentally opposed views of reality, namely the view that (i) only what is eternal and unchanging is real, and that (ii) only what is incessantly changing is the real. The former is called the philosophy of ‘Being’ and the latter is called the philosophy of ‘Becoming’. In the former the change is considered as absolutely unreal, while in the later change is the essence of things. The definition of ultimate reality in Jain Religion is things evolve, things dissolve and things have their own identity. This is the philosophy of becoming.

In the philosophy of Guru Nanak we see reconciliation between these two opposed views known as Vedic and Buddhist tradition in other terms known as philosophy of being and becoming. According to Guru Nanak’s view Ek Onkāra stands as being whereas his creation stands as becoming. Jain philosophers partially agree with Guru Nanak on the point that becoming cannot happen without being. Being is identity whereas becoming is origination and cessation.

⁹ *Praśnopaniṣad-5/6*

6. The Grace of Onkāra in Different Religions:

All religions explain the glory of all pervasiveness nature of Onkāra. Onkara is father and we are His progeny. Guru Nanak gives this message for the unity of human kind. The Vedic tradition says Brahma to that father. The Christian says Him God and Islam calls Him Allah. Sikh tradition says Ek Onkāra known as Akālapurukh or Vāheguru. This characteristic of Ek Onkāra motivates us to bow before all pervasiveness of the One God i.e. Supreme power. And Supreme power is called by different name but His work is the same. Reciting of His name 'Om' makes soul charged by His power.

Surtul fātihā of the Holy *Quran* starts with the holy name of Allah who is very kind and compassionate. Every praise is dedicated to the owner of all. We must obey Him and we must call Him for the help. We must walk on the way of Allah not on the path of misled.

The term GOD comprises three alphabets. Why only these three alphabets are used in? It means 'G' denotes generating power, 'O' denotes operating power and 'D' denotes destroying power. God inherits all these three components of power viz. generating, operating and destroying in Him.

Om, Allah and God are different representative words of the same Almighty.

The Jain Acharyas have accepted 'Om' as denotative of Arihanta, Siddha, Acharya, Upadhyaya and Muni¹⁰ Other interpretation of 'Om' is A+U+M. A+U=O and M=m, this Om comprises three words A, U and M. A denotes Right knowledge, U denotes right faith and M denotes right conduct. Combination of all these three leads to salvation¹¹. The ultimate reality combines origination, secession and sustenance.¹² Nothing is solid in this cosmos but everything is vibrating. The sound of this vibration is Om. No one has created this sound. This sound is eternal and all pervasive.

¹⁰ Arihanta-aśarīā-āyariya-uvajjhāya-muṇiṇo.

pancakkharanippano Onkāro pancaparmithī..

¹¹ samyagdarśanajñānacariṭrāṇi mokshamārgaḥ. Tattvārthasūtra-1/1

¹² utpādavyayadhrauvyayuktaṁ sat- Tattvārthasūtra-5/29

The use of ‘Om’ in Mahāyāna and Bajrayāna Buddhist tradition is found effectively with mantras. The Bajrayāna dignified the grace of ‘Om’ by Mantras like “*Om maṇi padme huṃ*”. Nearly every religious tradition in India is not only acquainted with the grace of ‘Om’ but also right practitioner of Om.

Thus, we find the all acceptance for dignified grace of Om — as a power of originator, sustainer and destroyer—in Semitic and Indian basically Vedic and Śramaṇa traditions. The recitation of the sound ‘Om’ not only motivates us to tread on the path of truth but it helps in attaining ultimate goal of life i.e. freedom from all kind of sorrows.

Guru Nanak has shown us path of truth by explaining to reverentially recite the sacred name, right action and eat after sharing. Only practicing on this path is the obeying of Hukum.

The Agama literature also directs that the “Guru’s command be followed without hesitation”¹³

7. Conclusion:

Guru Nanak disseminated the thought of one God i.e. Ek Onkāra among the followers of different religion. No one is animi in view of Guru Nanak. True knowledge Ek Onkāra is necessary for establishing fraternity among masses. He met the then saints of different traditions and tried to demolish the falsified ideas and thoughts of them to promote belief on true religion. Guru Nanak has emphatically said that Ek Onkāra is attained through the blessings of Guru.

The couplet of the Kabir Sāhib reveals the importance of Guru

xq# xksfoUn nksÅ [kMs+ dkds ykxksa ik;A
guru gobind dou khaḍe kāke lāgon pāya
 cfygkjh xq# vkius xksfoUn fn;ks crk;AA
balihārī guru āpane gobind diyo batāya

If we want to make our life meaningful, we will have to understand the meaning of *Mūlamantra* explained by Guru Nanak that is the great medicine to heal from worldly diseases.

¹³ *Guroḥ āgyā hi avicarṇīyā- Āgama*

His time was political upheavals and spiritual revolutions. People were confused and unable to understand difference between good and bad. At the time of Guru Nanak there was need to sow the seed of unity and fraternity in the minds of people. In such a crucial time it was also necessary to interpret the true meaning of ultimate reality that is same for all. How was it possible without the enlightened Guru like Nanak Dev Ji. The time inevitably needs to understand the importance of Ek Onkāra. Guru Nanak's this teaching leads us to understand One God.

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