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# Concept of Puruṣa (Akāl Purukh) as God
## in the Vedas and the Śri Guru Granth Sāhib


By

Roop Kishor Shastri•


Paramātman is referred to by different names like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahman, Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Bṛhaspati, Savitā, Agni and so on in the Vedic literature, particularly in the Vedic Samhitās. The wise speaks of the One by different names.[1] Over a hundred words have been used in the Vedas for Him of which Puruṣa is of the most frequent occurrence found in about eighty hymns. The Suktas too refer to Him by this name. With the exception of a few uses where consideration of context would make it a synonym of man, everywhere else it signifies the Great Entity. Of those hymns where that Entity referred to the Puruṣa Sukta[2] is the most well-known, being met with in all the Vedas with the exception of the *Sāmaveda.*


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[1] *Indram mitram varuṇamagnimāhuratho divyah sa suparṇo garutmān.*
*ekam sadvipra bahudhā vadantiyagnim yamam mātariśvānamāhuh.* Ṛgveda 1.164.46

[2] *Sahasraśirṣā puruṣah sahasrākṣṣah sahasrapād.*
*Sa bhūmim sarvatah sp,tvātyati ṣṭatdaśāngulam.* Yajurveda 31.1

The post-Vedic literature as also all religions together with the sages, seers, preceptors, saints and great men owing allegiance to the Vedas have been theistic, the believers in God. Sikhism originated in the 16th century A.D. All the Gurus who founded it have been believers in God. The difference among them is not noticeable in the different names for God in their Bāṇis. They believe in what the Vedas propound. Taking them to be the true and authoritative texts they speak of their glory in great devotion.

*Kālā ganthu nadi ā moh jhola ganthu pariti bola*
*Vedā ganthu bole sachu koi muiā ganthu ne ki satu koi*.
Śri Guru Grantha Sāhib (= S.G.G.S.), p. 116
*Veda sāstran jana pukārhin sunai nāhi dorā.*
*Nepati bāji hāri mukā pachatāio mani morā.*
S.G.G.S., p. 408
*Veda kate va kahahu mata jhūthe, jhūthā jo na bichāre.*
S.G.G.S., p. 1340
*Chāron veda hoe sachiaar pathahi guṇahi tinu chār vichāra.*
S.G.G.S, p. 470
*Satta sadaiva sarūpa veda kateb tu hi upajāyo.*
S. Pāt. 10 GuruGobindji.

In the Bāṇis of Guru Grantha Sāhib there are words like Rāma, Rahima, Govinda, Hari, Allāh, Kartār for God not found in the Vedas. In the Ādi Guru Granth Sāhib every musical composition is preceded by the recitation of the Guru–mantra as introduction of auspiciousness and through this is remembered the Supreme Reality, the Brahman.[3] Where necessary, its brief form *Om Sata Guru Prasādi* is also recited here and there. The Guru-mantra tells that it is God, the Supreme Being, referred to by His more prominent name Omkāra, is of the form of truth. He is the originator of the creation, is self-born and is realizable through the grace of God. Guru Nānaka takes God to be formless and beyond the three guṇas Sattva, Rajas and Tamas:

*rūpa na ranga na rekha kucha, trihu guna te prabhu bhinna.*
S.G.G.S., p. 283

This Akāl Purukha, the Timeless Entity, according to him, has no form whatsoever. His belief he expresses in the following words:

*Eko simaro Nānakā jala thala rahia samāi/*
*duja kāhe simario janmai te mari jai//*
*prāṇa adhāra mita sājana prabhu ekai Omkārai/*
*sab te unćā thākur Nānak bāra-bāra namaskārai//.*
S.G.G.S., p. 716

His idea is quite clear. He who is all-pervasive, unborn, equable, that Brahman is Akāl Purukha. Omkāra referred to above has its source in the Vedic hymns. In Guru Granth

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*Vedāhametam puruṣam mahāntamāditya var ṇam tamasah parastāt.*
Tameva viditvātim,tumeti nānyah panthā vidyateayanāya. Yajurveda 31.18

[3] *Om satināmu kartā purakhu nirbhau nirvairu akāla murati ajūni saibham guru prasādi.* S.G.G.S., 1

Sāhib, in the Bāṇis of the Gurus, and wherever there is reference to Akāl Purukh, He is said to be of the form of truth, consciousness and bliss with no fear, all-powerful, just, unborn, boundless, changeless, formless, beginningless, incomparable, all-supporting, the lord of all, knowing the inner feelings of every one, ageless, immortal, fearless, eternal, the purest of the pure and the originator of the creation. In Guru Granth Sāhib, Guru Arjun Dev has described Him in his form of time as the creator of day and night.[4] The Veda speaks of him as the creator of time even and such other entities. None can perceive His other side. He is all-pervading and beyond the three-fold time. Since he is not bound by time, He is timeless or Akāl.[5] Guru Nānak Dev has dedicated all his devotion to the syllabic essence Om and has spoken of him as the creator of the universe.[6] His fame has no limit, He has no icon, no form.[7] He permeates everything.[8] He is formless, self-born with no physical existence and is removed from sin and such other vices.[9] The Vedas speak of Him as unborn with no birth and death.[10] He is boundless, all-pervading, knower of beings, the universe, the nature, the past, the future and the present and moving alone in the universe bestowing happiness.[11] He has no worldly desires, is ageless, immortal and self-born.[12] The Supreme Being, the Parama Puruṣa, the creator of the universe is described as the knower of inside out[13] with no fear.[14] The entire Puruṣa Sukta in the Ṛgveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda lays bare the essence of the mystery of this Supreme Being, the Akāl Puruṣa. According to Guru Granth Sāhib God is all excellence and all-illumination. This is what Guru Amar Dās has said in his Bāṇi.[15] For realizing Him it is futile to roam about in the forests or the mountains or meditate in the caves or proceed on pilgrimages. He is present in all. He can be realized only through devotion and His grace.

Even the etymology of the word (Akāl) Puruṣa occurring in the Vedas and Guru Granth Sāhib, which could well be taken as its minute meaningful explanation, throws light on his nature. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,* which is the explanatory treatise on the *Yajurveda* speaks of *pu* which could designate all the worlds. One who purifies or permeates this *pu* is Puruṣa, according to it.[16] Yāska also has a similar etymology for it (Puruṣa).[17] He ex-

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[4] *Omkāra utpatti kiyā divasa sava rāta.* S.G.G.S., p. 1003

[5] *Sarve nimeṣā jajñire vidyutah puraṣādadhi.*
*Nainamūrdhvama na tiryañćam na madhye parijagrabhat.* Yajurveda 32/2

[6] *Omkāra brahmā utpati Omkāra kiyā jina chita.*
*Unana akhar suna bićāra uttama akhar tribhuvanan sāra.* S.G.G.S., p. 929-30
*Agama agoćaru anāthu ajoni guramati ekai jāniā.* S.G.G.S., p. 682

[7] *Na tasya pratimā asti yasya nāma mahadyaśah.* Yajurveda 32/2

[8] *Sa otah protaśća vibhu prajāsu.*Yajurveda 32.8

[9] *Sa paryagāchhukramakāyamavraṇamasnāviram śuddhamapāpaviddham.*
*Kavirmaniṣi paribhuh svayambhu yāthātathyatorthānvyadadhāth śāśvatibhyah samābhyah*.
Yajurveda 40.8

[10] *śanno aja ekapāddevo astu.* Ṛgveda 7.35.13

[11] *Anantam vitatam purutrānantamantavaććā samante.*
*Te nākapālśćarati vićinvan vidvān bhutamuta bhavyamasya.* Atharvaveda 10.8.12

[12] *Akāmo dhiro am,tah svayambhu rasena tpto na kutaścanonah.*
*tameva vidvāna na vibhāya mritorātmānam dhiramajaram yuyānam.* Atharvaveda 10.8.44

[13] *ya imā jajānānyadyuṣamākamantram babhuva.* Ṛgveda 10.82.7.

[14] *Urvaśyāmabhayam jyotirindrah.* Ṛgveda 2.27.14.

[15] *Vedā mahi nāmu uttamu so suṇahi nāhi phirahi jiu betāliā.* S.G.G.S., p.199

[16] *Ime vai lokāh puh. Ayameva puruṣah. yoayam pavate soasyām puri śete tasmāt puruṣah.*
Śapatha Brāhmaṇa 13.6.2.1

plains the word to mean 'one who knows the inside out of this universe and is its support.' As proof of it he reproduces the words of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* where it is said that there is nothing beyond Paramātman, nothing is bigger or smaller than Him. He alone is permeating the universe.[18] Maharṣi Dayānand, the exponent of the Vedas, has said that He through His all-pervasiveness sustains this world, all that moves in it or is stationary and continues to impart fullness to it. Supreme Paramātman is the meaning of the word Puruṣa.[19]

That all-pervasive Paramātman is referred by His prominent name Om or Omkār.[20] Om or Pranava is also considered as the bridge for the *mantras*: *mantrāṇam praṇavah setuh*. Without the pre-fixture of Om the singing aloud or recitation of any *mantra* is considered incomplete. In a similar vein Guru Granth Sāhib also begins with Om: *Ek Omkāra, satnam karta purukh* etc. Elsewhere too in the words of Guru Granth Sāhib the utterance of Om is emphasized.[21] In Guru Granth Sāhib the syllable Om is said to be the revealer of the Vedas and the creator of the world and is eulogized as such in great devotion. The sage Patañjali in *Yoga Darśan*[22] has clearly described it as the word for Paramātman while the commentator of his work, the sage Vyasa, has interpreted it as Iśvara.[23] The Veda has accepted it as the principal means for meditating on One God.[24] Guru Nānak Dev has described it (Om) as remaining constant under all circumstances, indestructible, beginningless, all-pervasive and of the form of truth.[25] According to the *Māṇdūkya Upaniṣad* the syllable Om is eternal Brahman who is past, future and present in a miniscule form.[26] Aksara, in Sanskrit is from the root √ *kṣar*, 'to move' with the prefix (A) *na-* (*nañ*) in the sense of negation. Another of its etymology traces it to root *as* (*asun*), 'to pervade, to permeate' with the addition of the desiderative suffix *saran*, meaning 'one who is present everywhere'. The sage Dayānand[27] taking both the above etymologies into consideration has explained it as 'the one that covers everything, yah *sarvam aśnute* and

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[17] *Pūrayatyantarityāntarapuruṣamabhipretya.* Nirukta 2.3

[18] *Yasmāt param nāparamasti kinćit.*
*Yasmānnāṇiyo na jyāyoasti kaśćit.*
*Vrikśa iva stabdho divi tiṣthatyekah*
*Tenedam purṇam puruṣeṇa sarvam.* Śveta Upaniṣad 3.9.

[19] *Yah svavyāptyā ćarāćaram jagat p,ṇāti pūrayati vā sah puruṣah.* Satyartha Prakasha.(Prathama Samullāsa)

[20] *Om kham brahmā.* Yajurveda 40.50.

[21] *Hari jū sadā dhyāya tū gurumukha ek omkāra.*
*Omkāra brahmā utpata omkāra ved nirmāye.*
*Jala thala mahithala puriā swāmi sirajanhāra.*
*Aneka bhānti hoi pasariā nānak ek omkāra.*
*Om akkhara sunahu vićāra, om akkhara tribhuvana sāra.*
*Praṇvo ādi ek omkārā jala thala mahiyala kiyo prasār.* S.G.G.S., p. 929-30

[22] *Tasya vāćakah praṇvah.* Yoga Darśan 1.27.

[23] *Vāćya iṣwarah praṇavasya.* Yoga Darśan 1.27.

[24] *Om krato smara.* Yajurveda 40.15

[25] *Ādi anilu anādi anāhati jugu jugu eko vesu.*
*Ādi saću jugādi saću hai bhi nānak hosi bhi saću.* S.G.G.S., p.18

[26] *Omitiyetadakṣaram, idam sarvam tasyopakhyānam bhūtam bhavat bhaviṣyaditi sarvamomkārameva.* Māṇdukya Upaniṣad 1

[27] Satyartha Prakasha (Prathama Samullāsa)

as 'one that does not vanish', *na kṣarati*.[28] As per the commentator of the *Ćāndogya Upaniṣad* it is the most appealing means for meditating on Brahman and its symbol.[29] The *Yajurveda* says that a person climbing on the chariot of Om realizes the immortal Āditya-Puruṣa, i.e. Akāl Puruṣa, and releases from death as also from sins. There are no means other than that.[30]

[28] Uṇādi. Koṣha. 3.70.

[29] *Omitiyetadakṣaram parmātamanobhidhānam nedhiṣṭam. Tasmin hi prayujyamāne. Sa prasidati priyanāma.* Chāndogya Upaniṣad Sānkar Bhāṣya 1.1.1.1

[30] *Vedāhametam puruṣam mahāntamādityavarṇam tamasah parastāt. tameva viditvātim, tumeti nānya panthā vidhyateaynāya.* Yajurveda 31.18