



Purusha Suktam: PART 1



Vedas Collection



Date: 2025-11-28



Description: Exploring the profound philosophical foundations of the Purusha Suktam through the five principal Acharyas and their interpretations



Tags: purusha-suktam, vedic-commentators, acharyas, sanskrit-scholars, vedic-studies, pranava, omkara, tattvas, purushottaman



What is Purusha - Different Meanings

The term Purusha is interpreted through various etymological and philosophical lenses by commentators (Vyakhyatas):

Meaning/ Derivation

Explanation

Akragaami Purushaha

One who walks ahead or leads the way

Puru Bagu Sanothi Iti Purushaha

One whose hands are reddened (or swollen) from constantly giving or granting boons to devotees

Purishathe Iti Purushaha

One who resides inside the body (puri). This addresses both the Jeevatma (individual soul) and the Paramatma (Supreme Soul) as the indweller




Interpretations by Major Commentators

Pattabhaaskarar & Saayanaachaarya: - Both scholars assert that the term Purusha primarily refers to **Narayana** - Saayanaachaarya suggests that the Purusha Suktam can also be called the **Narayana Anuvaakam**



Adi Shankarar (on Vishnu Sahasranamam): 1. *Purum Sareeram Thasmin Shethe Iti Purushaha:* One who sleeps (resides) in the body (pur) 2. *Purushu Utkarsha Saalisthu Seedhathi:* One who is exalted or highest among all

 **Paraasara Bhattar (on Vishnu Sahasranamam):** 1. *Parama Paavanatvaadhu Purushaha*: One who confers purity or sanctity 2. *Sarva Paapasya Saadhanaath*: One who is capable of burning the sins committed by devotees

Scriptural support from the **Skanda Purana** also affirms that the word Purusha refers to Vasudeva Sanathana (Narayana).

The Chith, Achith, and Ishwara Tattvam

The entirety of existence is categorized into three Tattvas (Tattvath Thrayam):

The Three Primary Tattvas

1. **Achith (Achetanam)** - The non-sentient or inanimate category
2. Technically defined as that which is not the substratum of knowledge (Gnanam illathathu)
3. Example: The physical body (sareeram)
4. **Chith (Chetanam)** - The sentient category
5. Defined as that which is the substratum of knowledge
6. Refers to the individual soul (Jeevatma)
7. **Ishvara Tattvam** - The Supreme Lord
8. Distinct from both Chith and Achith

Division into Five Categories

The three Tattvas are expanded into five distinct categories by classifying the Chith (Jeevatma) Tattva:

# Category	Description
1 Achith	Non-sentient matter
2 Baddha (Bound Jeevatma)	Souls bound by karma who are currently encased in a body
3 Mukta (Liberated Jeevatma)	Souls who have attained liberation (Moksha) and whose status has changed from bound to liberated (Muktaatma)
4	

# Category	Description
Nitya (Eternal Jeevatma)	Eternal souls (Nityasuris) who have never been bound by karma (e.g., Anantan, Garudan, Visvaksenar)
5 Ishvaran	The Supreme Lord

What is Purushottaman?

Purushottaman is the title given to Ishvara (Paramatma) to distinguish Him from the other four categories of existence. The derivation uses three degrees of superiority (tama denoting the superlative degree):

1. **Purusha**: The Lord is superior to Achith (non-sentient matter)
2. **Uthpurusha**: The Lord is superior to the Baddhaatma (bound soul)
3. **Uthara Purusha**: The Lord is superior to the Muktaatma (liberated soul)
4. **Uthama Purusha**: The Lord is superior to the Nityaatma (eternal soul)

The compound word **Purushottaman** is derived from Purusha plus Uthama (Uthama Purusha), signifying the **Supreme Person** who is superior to all other categories of existence.

Pranava: The Essence of the Vedas

The Pranava (Omkaara) is considered the essence of the Vedas because its components are derived directly from the structure and content of the three principal Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda). This foundational concept is based on the analysis of the starting and ending sounds or syllables of these three Vedas, demonstrating that the Pranava encapsulates their entire scope.

The Components of Pranava

The Pranava (Omkaara) is composed of three primary sounds: - **A** (Akkara) - **U** (Ukkara) - **M** (Makara)

Derivation from the Three Principal Vedas

Ancient texts often refer only to three Vedas (Trai): Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda. The core essence of these three Vedas collectively forms the Pranava.

Veda	Starting Syllable	Ending Syllable	Contribution to Pranava
Rigveda	A (Agnimīle purohitam)	I (Sukah Sati)	Beginning of A
Yajurveda	I (Iṣe tva urje tva)	U (Samudro bandhuhu)	Ending of U
Samaveda	Musical chanting (Gana Shastra)	Madhyamam (M1/ M2)	The M sound

Akkara (A) and Ukkara (U) from Rigveda and Yajurveda:

The sounds A and U are derived by analyzing the start and end of the Rigveda and Yajurveda. By connecting the common ending sound of the Rigveda (I) with the starting sound of the Yajurveda (I), the combination of the two Vedas starts with **A** and ends with **U**. The initial sound of the collective Rig-Yajur knowledge is Akkara (A), and the final sound is Ukkara (U).

Makara (M) from Samaveda:

The Makara (M) is derived primarily from the nature and content of the Samaveda, which is rooted in musical and melodic chanting (Gana Shastra). Within musical theory, particularly the 72 Mela Karta ragas, the primary difference between certain types of ragas comes down to the use of Madhyamam (the fourth note), often designated as M1 or M2. Since the Samaveda embodies the principle of musical chanting (Gana), the Makara component completes the three sounds of the Pranava (A U M).

The Pranava as the Source of Vedic Knowledge

The sources emphasize that the connection between A U M and the Rig, Yajur, and Sama Vedas is precise and demonstrates that the Pranava is the underlying unity of all Vedic hymns. Because these three sounds (A U M) represent the collective beginning and end points of the content of the major Vedas, the Omkara (Pranava) is established as the essence (Saram) of the Veda.

Relationship to the Gayatri Mantra and Epics

The concept is further extended by noting the relationship between the Pranava and other fundamental texts:

- **Gayatri Mantra:** Considered an expanded or extensive form of the Pranava

- **Ramayana (Gayatri Ramayanam):** The first letter of every set of 1,000 verses aligns sequentially with the 24 syllables of the Gayatri Mantra
- **Symbolic Trinity:** The three components of Pranava (A U M) are represented in the walking order of Rama (A), Sita (U), and Lakshmana (M)

The Pranava is the essence of the Vedas because its three phonemes (A, U, M) are derived systematically from the beginning and ending points of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda, thereby encapsulating the entire scope of the Vedic teachings.



Five Commentators of the Purusha Suktam

The author emphasizes the importance of remembering the names of the five Acharyas (commentators or Vyakhyatas) whose interpretations are being used to understand the Purusha Suktam. The speaker stresses that these names should be remembered, contrasting them with widely known figures like Kalidasa, Shankara, or Ramanuja, whom the speaker refers to as "superstars."



The Five Principal Commentators

The five principal commentators (Acharya Purushas) whose Vyakhyanas (commentaries) the discourse is following are:

# Commentator	Period	Notable Information
1 Uvattaachaaryar	11th century	Lived during the time of Bhojaraja
2 Pattabhaaskarar	12th century	The speaker specifically hoped his name would spread widely
3 Saayanaachaaryar	Vijayanagara Empire period	Highly influential scholar who commented on nearly all parts of the Veda
4 Mahidaraachaaryar	Unknown	Not much detailed history is known
5 Rangaramanuja Muni	16th-17th centuries	Sri Vaishnava Acharya who commented on many significant Vedic sections

Other Notable Commentators

While the above five are the primary sources for the Purusha Suktam explanation, the speaker also references interpretations by other great scholars:

- 🙏 **Adi Shankarar (Shankara):** His Vyakhyanam on the Vishnu Sahasranamam interprets Purusha as "one who resides inside the body" or "one who is exalted or highest among all"
 - 🗨️ **Paraasara Bhattar:** His commentary, Bhagavad Guna Darpanam, defines Purusha as "one who confers purity or sanctity" and "one who is capable of burning the sins"
 - 🖋️ **Appayya Dikshitar:** Cited for his beautiful commentary on the concept of Varada Hastam (boon-giving hand)
 - 📖 **Mallinatha Suri:** Essential for interpreting the works of Kalidasa
 - 📜 **Govindaraja and Tilaka:** Necessary commentators for understanding the Ramayana
-

Foundational Context of the Purusha Suktam

This section summarizes the salient facts mentioned in the introduction and foundational discussion surrounding the Purusha Suktam before the lecturer commenced the analysis of the first mantra. The introductory material covered the structure of Vedic knowledge, the necessity of correct recitation, the standing of the Purusha Suktam among other texts, its authorship, its central deity, its associated benefits, and its relevance in Puranic context.

Structure and Philosophy of the Vedas

The Four (or Three) Vedas: - While four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva) are generally cited, ancient texts often refer only to three Vedas (Trai) - The Atharva Veda is sometimes omitted because it contains themes and concepts already present in the first three - The epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are considered the essence or substance of the Vedas, sometimes referred to as the fifth and sixth Vedas

The Essence of Veda: - The essence of the Vedas is the Pranava (Omkaara) - The three sounds of the Pranava—A, U, and M (Akkara, Ukkara, Makaranga)—are

derived from the starting and ending letters of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda - The Gayatri Mantra is an expansive form of the Pranava - The Ramayana is considered the Gayatri Ramayanam because the initial letter of every set of 1,000 verses corresponds to the 24 syllables of the Gayatri Mantra

Importance of Proper Recitation (Svara):

The Vedas must be chanted with the exact tune (Svara) prescribed by the Rishis. Unlike philosophical texts or epics like the Ramayana, where tunes can be varied, deviating from the prescribed Svara in Vedic recitation renders the mantra ineffective or even harmful, as exemplified by the story of Indra Shatru. The seven musical notes (Sapta Svaras) of classical music are derived from the Vedic intonations (Udatta, Svarita, Anudatta).

Status and Universality of the Purusha Suktam

Nature of the Text: - Suktam refers to a hymn or prayer praising a specific deity
- The Purusha Suktam is considered one of the most prominent (Pancha Suktam)

Unique Presence Across Vedas: - The Purusha Suktam holds a unique distinction as it is found and recited in **all five Vedas:** - Rigveda - Krishna Yajurveda - Shukla Yajurveda - Samaveda - Atharva Veda - Though the exact number of mantras may vary across recensions, the most famous version contains **18 mantras** and belongs to the Krishna Yajurveda

Supreme Authority: - The Padma Purana ranks the Purusha Suktam as supreme among Vedic texts, similar to how: - The Bhagavad Gita is supreme in the Mahabharata - The Manu Dharma Shastra is supreme among Dharma Shastras - Maharishis like Apastamba and texts like the Vatula Sutra explicitly associate the "Purusha" mentioned in the Suktam with **Narayana**

Puranic Context and Commentators

Bhagavata Purana Reference:

In the Bhagavata Purana (Dasama Skanda), when the Earth Goddess (Bhoomi Devi) appears in the form of a cow (Gaur Bhutva) and seeks refuge from the burden of evil kings, she and the Devas collectively praise the ultimate deity, Jagannatha (Narayana), using the Purusha Suktam.

Importance of Commentary:

Understanding complex texts like the Vedas requires the interpretations of great commentators (Vyakhyatas), just as: - Interpreting Kalidasa requires Mallinatha Suri - The Ramayana requires Govindaraja or Tilaka

The interpretation provided in the lecture draws upon the works of five main Acharyas who have written commentaries on the Purusha Suktam: Uvatacharya, Mahidharacharya, Sayanacharya, Pattabhaskara, and Rangaramanuja Muni.

Benefits of Reciting the Purusha Suktam (Phala Shruti)

Based on the dialogue between Sanatkumara and Vishnu cited in the Padma Purana, hearing or reciting the Purusha Suktam yields several benefits, demonstrating that the Vedas are highly efficacious:

Benefit	Sanskrit Term	Description
 Sons/ Daughters	Putra Pradam Putranam	Blessings of progeny
 Victory	Jayadam Jayakaminam	Success in battles or endeavors
 Prosperity/ Wealth	Shriyam Shri Kaminam	Material abundance
 Rulership/ Leadership	Rajyadam Rajyakaminam	Authority and governance
 Abundance of Grains	Dhanyadam Dhanya Kamanam	Sustenance that never diminishes (like Akshaya Patra)
 Fame	Kirtidam Kirti Kaminam	Recognition and glory
 Liberation	Muktidam Muktikaminam	Spiritual freedom (Moksha)
 General Welfare	Sarva Siddhi Pradam Nrunam	Welfare for all people, regardless of background or philosophy



Reference

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzCWeIKtGHU&list=PLUCe17-wlYr-zIRfRt1m6fyPy2r-wjcXl>



Acknowledgment & Disclaimer

These articles are based on discourses by **Sri Dushyanth Sridhar**, who renders discourses in English & Tamil on Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Vishnu Purāna, Bhagavad Gitā, Vishnu Sahasranāma, and Divya Prabanda in the upanyāsam, pravachanam, or kālakshepam style. Visit <https://desikadaya.org> for more information. These notes are presented solely for educational purposes to help viewers download and benefit from these teachings. Any incorrect interpretations or inaccuracies are mine and unintentional—please forgive me. For any feedback, please send an [email](#).



Generated from UpanyasamNotes

Sacred Wisdom Preserved • January 31, 2026