

## **'KASHI': AN ABODE OF 'GHOR' AND 'AGHOR'**

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### **Abstract**

Shri Bhagwaan uwachyaa:

“Asocyan anvasoocas tavam, Parina- vadaamas ca bhasase

Gataasun agyatasumss ca, Naanusocaanti panditah”

-Shrimad Bhagwat Geeta (2:1)

In the words of the divine lord: “When you speak the mourning words, you are crying and lamenting for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are endowed with knowledge and wisdom, lament neither living nor the dead”

These lines indicate the “optimistic approach in pessimism” of the “Santana Dharma”. The Hinduism which is said to be the oldest prevalent religion in the world stands witness of times and has eventually evolved from Sanatanism. The innumerable Gods and Goddesses, have immensely rich legends and folklores in their association, and give out an abstract meaning of both life, and death.

“Rudra” and “Kali” the two prominent “deities” we associate with death have an iconography of immense interest, and the way they are worshipped is completely different from the traditional “Vaishnava sect”. The “ghats” or “Place of burning the dead” and “Aghoris” saints who worship

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the dead (Shav) and its lord (Shiva), are considered sacred and have a religious belief attached to them, focusing on the single fact, that “happiness can be found in the darkest of times, if only we keep the hope alive.”

**Key words** Sanatan Dharma, Shav, Shiva, Rudra, Death, Aghoris, Manikarnika ghat, Benaras

We in general, tend to confuse Hinduism and Sanatan Dharma; Hinduism of modern times is immensely corrupted and has a distinctive “class” and “caste” hierarchy, whereas earlier, all we believed was on God residing in every human, “Aham Bramhasmi”. The belief has been segregated into sub-divisions of deities or “Isht-devta” in Hinduism, on basis of the same, the two prominent sects which came forward was of “Vaishnavism” and “Shaivism”. “Vaishnavs”, being the followers of “Vishnu”, the creator; and “Shavites”, the followers of “Shiva”, the destroyer.

The Hinduism which we so profoundly follow today dates back its roots to the “Sanatan Dharma”, which means “the right way of life”. It confines a number of aspects in itself, from life to death. It speaks about anything and everything one can name. The most important and beautiful fact being, that it gives the liberty to follow and see God, just the way a person wants to. He comes when ‘Meera’ calls Him, He comes when ‘Shabri’ feeds Him, He comes when ‘Yashoda’ scolds Him, and even comes when ‘Aghoris’ dance to His tunes in trance.

The way of worship is different in the sects as well. The “Vaishnava sect” worships “Vishnu” with profound flowers and sweets, while the “Shaivites” are completely opposite in their approach of performing the rituals. They drink, the smoke, and majorly stay in trance with ashes smeared on their face and bodies with a belief that “God resides in everything, and can be found in both purity and filth.”

Even if we trace history of Hindu Gods, we see a similar and unbelievable pattern in the “Bhakti ras” of the “Bhaktas”. How interesting it is to notice that very fact of seeing “God” depends on the individual, on basis of the same, it is even bifurcated into various “rasas” or “types”; and

there have been outstanding examples, where He, himself comes to the rescue of his “Bhakta”, in the form they want to see Him.

The “Sakhya Rasa” or the “Friendship with the Divine”, been beautifully exemplified by the relationship of “Krishna and Draupadi”, “Sudama and Krishna”, “Arjuna and Krishna”, “Rama and Sugreeva” and “Rama and Vibhishana.”. God comes as a friend to those who see Him as a friend, and there has been no true friend than Him.

The “Bhakti Rasa” or the “Devotion to the Divine”, has innumerable stories and examples, the prominent being “Krishna and Meera”. “Rama and Hanumana” and “Shiva and Ravana”. The divine loves his “Bhakta” the way they love Him. What else can exceptionally signify the beauty of Sanatan Dharma?

The “Vastsaya Rasa” or “Divine as our own child”, has been prominently linked with “Yashoda and Krishna”. But the example of “Sati Anusuiya”, who loved “Shiva”, “Vishnu” and “Bramaha” as her own child can’t be ignored due to the immense legend and love attached to it. Thus, we see how liberal the Sanatan Dharma is, giving every individual the right to see God the way they want to. The same can be linked to the sect of “Aghoris”. Though their ways and rituals may seem unfamiliar and strange to us, but it is as natural and as divine as any other rasa. We forbid talking about Death, and fear going to the “ghats”, but this thanatophobia has no meaning for them, as they see Death as a new beginning and the ultimate truth of life.

Benares, the oldest city of the world is said to rest on the “Trishula” of “Shiva” and has immense of culture and religious value. The presence of “Kashi Vishwanath” is the centre for tourists as well as sages, and hence it homes a number of people moving up and down the lanes of this city. Giving out the true essence of “living and letting others live” and letting them follow their personal religion or praying to their “Inner Rama”, as Kabirdas quotes.

While taking a look at the religion, superficially, we tend to come to a conclusion that “Hinduism” is a “rigid” and “strict” religion, whereas when we unfold the realms of the same, we come to know that it is not even a religion, but a way of life, which just guides the men at

large and enable them to do what they wish to do and see the divine in everything and any form they wish to witness.

Benares is undoubtedly the oldest city of the world, known prominently for its religious value and the attainment of “Moksha” and is said to rest on the “trishula of Shiva”. Benares, earlier known as “Kashi”, gets its name from the most significant “jyotirlinga” of “Shiva”, the “Kashi Vishwanaath Temple.” It is a symbol of not only Shiva but also Shakti, the cosmic energy of the world.

The unification of Shiva and Shakti, can be experienced in the very aura of the city, where on one hand the Shaivites are dancing in trance, while the followers of Shakti are busy in the praise of their deity. The symbolic interpretations of the same can be understood by the significance of life and death. Shakti is said to be the creator, the word literally means “energy” and is the personification of the abstract energy, and from where the world came into existence. The contrary of the same, is beautifully shown in the Hinduism, where the symbol of Birth is married to the lord of Death, Shiva.

Shiva, or Rudra, as he is prominently known as the destructor in the Hindu mythology, is the symbol of life after death, and is said to have a “yogi” way of life. His unison with Shakti is a well-known fable and the world is well-acquainted with his rage. The beauty and pacification of Shakti calms down Shiva, and the rage of Shakti can be controlled by none by Shiva himself.

The love between the mythical Gods is unquestionable, and we have innumerable tales to prove how Shiva and Shakti, in their conjugal bliss are the “supreme couple” and “ideal” Sanatan followers.

Shakti, as mentioned in the puranas, is said to be the born in humane form to “Prajapati Daksha” and “Prasuta” as their beloved daughter “Sati”. Dhaksha, being the son of Brahama, was a hater of Shiva, due to the “yogi” way of life which Shiva led. He barely considered him as God, and claimed that a person residing with the dead and dancing in trance is in no way a God. His criticism had negligible effects on Shiva, and he was as happy as always, despite all the hatred. Tables turned when Sati, the daughter of Daksha, fell in love with Shiva, and expressed a wish to

marry him. Daksha was extremely annoyed on the same, and therefore expressed his dissatisfaction against the marriage. Sati, went against the will of her father, and married Shiva, and in doing so, she had to end her relationship with her father, which pained her to extremities. Daksha, in order to humiliate Shiva and Sati, organized a religious yajana, and did not invite the couple. Sati, with a belief that her father's house was still her own, went to attend the ceremony and was deeply hurt to face humiliation from her own father, as a result of the same, she jumped into the fire of yajana and ended her life. The rage of Shiva knew no bounds, and he danced the famous "Tandava" taking the dead body of Sati in his arms. His grief was unending, and therefore lord Vishnu bifurcated the body of Sati into 52 parts, each of which fell in different places, where temples were build later on. These pure temples came to be known as the "Shaktipeetha". Shiva took the form of "Bhairava" to guard the "Shaktipeetha", and Bhairava is said to reside in Kashi till date, known as "Kotwala of Kashi", and visiting his sanctum completes the visit of a person to the pure city of Kashi.

The significance of "Ganga", on the banks of Kashi, speaks in great measures of the diverse Hindu mythology. It is a fact universally known that goddess Ganga resides on the head of Shiva, and had come down to cure the ancestors to Bhagirathi of their sin. Ganga, however, consistently strives to reach Shiva, and finds fulfillment in the same, therefore, the presence of Ganga further verifies the fact, that Shiva and Shakti still reside in Kashi, as they had promised Lord Vishnu.

The modern day Benares, is seen as an amalgamation of cultures and traditions, with subtle modernity springing up with time. The very famous "Banaras Hindu University", still stands as a trademark of the city, and encourages imparting quality education along with the remembrance of roots, which make us a better person. The liberal city, homes not only Sadhus and Pundits, but also a major sect of the place is acquired by Muslims and Christians who live in peace and harmony, and are equally proud of the cultural heritage of the city as any other Hindu. It can hence be conferred that Benares, is a beautiful drop from the ocean of India, and is always ready to accept the guests and new with open arms, following the concepts of "Vasudhev Kudumbakam", meaning, "the entire world is one home, and all its occupants are our brothers."

- **“Purity in Filth”**- The Aghoris live by the sole concept of finding purity in filth. They believe that Shiva resides equally in both joy and sorrow. He is the lord of Death, and by trying to find him in the most outrageous sorry of life, that is, its end, we can reach Shiva and be in unison with Him.
- **“Meditation on Mortal Remains”**- In order to overcome their sense of grief, the Aghoris tend to meditate on the funeral pyre. If we see this act superficially, it might sound scary, but when we try to unravel its true meaning and reason, we find that they do so in order to master their senses completely. It is indeed extremely easy to sit in a lonely room with God’s idol and try to find Him inside our soul. But it is only when we find Him inside us, when there are thousands of distractions of fear, grief and pain, we have truly meditated and acquired our senses.
- **“Guruve Devo Bhava** - The Aghoris are extremely devoted to their gurus, and have a sense of sacrifice at the very command of their Guru. In order to acquire the real essence of a “Aghori”, they are required to first find a Guru, who trains them the basic meditations and futility of worldly life.
- **“Losing social identity to find Shiva”**- The things which are considered unacceptable for any society, such as liquor, and weed are a common and day to day practice for the Aghoris. They believe in losing their senses, and finding Shiva next to themselves. In this state of trance, they are extremely detached with the worldly life, and completely connected to ‘Ghor’, Shiva residing in them.
- **Conquering the fear of Death**- The Aghoris are seen, carrying a “Kalpa” or the “Human Skull” along with them, and are smeared with the ashes of the dead. This symbolize that in order to overcome the fear of Dead, they wear it on themselves.

Therefore, it is noticed how the Aghoris are not different people. They pray to the same Shiva, and are not to be feared, but respected for their ultimate meditation and power to overcome the fear we all are so deeply enrooted with.

## Conclusion

In the words of the divine lord: “When you speak the mourning words, you are crying and lamenting for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are endowed with knowledge and wisdom, lament neither living nor the dead”

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If we carefully look at a coin, it has two faces; a head and a tail. In the same way the head of the coin is life while its tail is death. There is no way in which they can exist independently. The two are as closely related as day and night and are the ultimate meaning of existence.

The very fact about a person when they are born is that they will die. This departure indeed tend to dishearten the fellows, and even the soul himself, but it is the ultimate truth and important for the circle of life and death. It is only when a life ends, that a new life can begin. The new beginning has immense meaning and the belief of Hindu on the positivity of death and rebirth gives out immense optimism to the religion.

Shiva or Rudra, therefore, is rightly called “Devon ke dev Mahadev” meaning “God of Gods”, for he is the ultimate power and presides over everything. His majesty must therefore be experienced, and where else can we find him except Benares?

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