

Sandhyaa Vandanam, through the Modern Eye

Significance of Twilight Worship at the Twilight of Western and Eastern Spirituality

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Abstract:

A paradigm shift towards Eastern Spirituality and Philosophy in aspects of science, management, arts and medicine is more than evident. Taking cue from this, the present article looks at various key components of SandhyaVandanam from the perspective of the “modern eye”, by understanding the meaning and significance of each term used, both on lexical and deeper philosophical levels, aided by the concepts of the 51 Aksharas. From the explorations, the observation of the universality and magnificence of the practice along with its relevance even in the present day is easily observed.

Introduction:

The latter half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first, until the present, has undoubtedly seen an increasing awareness about the Oriental Philosophy among the West, with a steady shift of paradigm among medicine, management, arts, science and philosophy towards South and East Asian ideologies, which themselves are centered around the Spirituality of India, China, Japan and Korea, that have been time-tested for thousands of years.

Arguably, of the above mentioned four regions, Indian Spirituality, being the oldest of the lot has had a significant influence on the other three systems as well, with terms such as Karma, Yoga, Tantra, Nirvana, Mantra becoming household terms around the world. Books such as “The Tao of Physics” by Capra and the celebration of the First International Yoga Day on June 21, 2015 only reinforce this observation. Rather than the exploitation of nature for easier living, the driving concept of all eastern philosophies is the maximization of the harmony between man and nature, recognizing the two as complementary and protective of each other.

In order to understand and grasp the essence of the depth of Indian Spirituality, one needs to inevitably look at the practice of Sandhyavandanam, literally “twilight worship” and described as the oldest extant liturgy in the world. The practice is essentially a compendium of excerpts from the Vedas to be performed thrice a day at the strategic twilight junctures of dawn, noon and dusk. While symbolically these junctures are the meeting points of day and night, symbolizing the merging of the fundamental dualities of Yin-Yang, Shiva-Shakti, Life-Death, Order-Chaos and Good-Bad, the science of circadian rhythms says that in the 24-hour biological rhythm cycle, the time of dawn or sunrise (approximately 6AM) is when the body temperature rises from its lowest value, accompanied by the sharpest rise in blood pressure, testosterone secretion, increase in alertness and drop in melatonin secretion. Similarly, the noon or midday is characterized by improvement in coordination and reaction times and increases in cardiovascular efficiency and muscular strength. The time of dusk, or sunset (typically at 6PM) is

characterized by increase in blood pressure, body temperature and start of melatonin secretion. Thus, there is a clear physiological, psychological and spiritual significance to the timings of Sandhyavandanam, only accentuated by the practice of facing the sun (east during morning, north during noon and west during evening), enabling the practitioner to absorb the life-energy filled radiation from the sole source of all life on earth.

Thus, the practice of Sandhyavandanam is clearly the pinnacle of the nature-man harmonization that forms the core tenet of Oriental Philosophy, and its universality is seen from the practice recommended for all twice-born people irrespective of caste, region or worship sects, such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. The same is also seen in the relatively modern observations of Travis, where it is seen that mere recitation of Sanskrit Mantras and sounds, even without understanding the meaning, result in lowering of heart and respiratory rates, and changes in skin conductance and brain states, similar to those observed in deep meditation or Yoga.

With this motivation, the present article looks at various key components of SandhyaVandanam from the perspective of the “modern eye”, as the world steadily moves eastward spiritually, by understanding the meaning and significance of each term used, both on lexical and deeper philosophical levels, aided by the concepts of the 51 Aksharas. Of the four Vedic traditions, the Yajur tradition, which is still practiced with fervor in few South Indian households is chosen.

Achamanam

The first step in Sandhyavandanam, as is the case in almost all Vedic rituals, is Achamanam, which essentially is a purification ritual using the most ubiquitous resource – water. It is also the most frequently occurring component of Sandhyavandanam

First, three sips of the water are taken in uttering prostrations to Achyuta, Ananta and Govinda. These three are described as names of Vishnu in the Vishnu Sahasranamam, with Achyuta meaning immovable or unchangeable, Ananta being the endless or infinite and Govinda being the pervader of all the worlds just as a cowherd tends his cattle and accessible through Vedic words. Thus, we see that Achyuta refers to the transcendence of the concept of time, since time itself is characterized only by events and change. Similarly Ananta signifies transcendence of space, and Govinda signifies the one who has transcended both time and space, as well as existence. These binding factors of time, space and existence are also the same as mentioned in the Lalitha Sahasranamam as the Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra Granthis respectively, with the breaking of all the three bondages a necessity for final self-realization, eventually merging with the timeless, spaceless, formless, neither-existent nor non-existent absolute consciousness.

Following this, twelve names of the Almighty are uttered while touching the twelve parts of the body using the now purified right hand as enumerated below. With the hands now purified with the water energized by the aspects of the Absolute as mentioned earlier, twelve key parts of the body are touched, most of them sense organs and each of them an Akshara Peetha or centre of an Akshara concept by itself, and with each touch, one of the twelve names energizes the corresponding body part as well as the concept.

1. Keshava – Right Cheek with the Thumb – the right cheek is the Akshara centre of L, or Charm and Love. Keshava, literally translated, is the one with the long, uncut hair. However, in modern

physics, especially in black hole theory, the hair, as in the “no hair theorem”, hair is seen as a metaphor for information, such as mass, charge and spin, emerging from a black hole. With Lloyd’s Information-Energy Equivalence, it is only relevant that Keshava is that aspect of the Absolute that radiates everywhere, the universal consciousness, encompassing the single state (Sadaa Akhanda Eka Rasa) of Bliss. Thus, by touching the right cheek with Keshava, we intend to kindle the feeling of universal love and brotherhood through the very fundamental bliss of the Absolute.

2. Naaraayana – Left Cheek with the Thumb – the left cheek is the Akshara centre for LI, or awe. Naaraayana is the final resting place (Aayana) of all the living entities (Nara), and thus represents the aspect of unconditional devotion through love and respect for the Almighty, which translates in the physical world to the feeling of respectful awe, especially towards one’s Guru or preceptor. This aspect, as well as the previous aspect are related to dynamic energy (love and awe) radiating from within, and for this reason, the thumb, representing fire among the five elements (Pancha Maha Bhootas) is used.
3. Maadhava – Right Eye with the Ring Finger – the right eye is the Akshara centre of I, or Desire (Iccha Shakti). Translated as the consort and dwelling place (Dhava) of the Divine Mother Mahalakshmi (Ma), or enlightening knowledge depicted by the Akshara Ma, using Maadhava for the right eye signifies that our desires ought to be directed towards enlightenment and in the case of the enlightened, towards spiritual upliftment of the society, caring for the world as a Mother would.
4. Govinda – Left Eye with the Ring Finger – the left eye is the centre of Ee, or Perfection, represented as the Goddess Eeshwari. Govinda, as mentioned earlier, denotes the all-pervading aspect of the divine. Thus the intent here is to stimulate the cutting of the Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra Granthis, through careful balance of the four Purusharthas of Dharma (righteousness), Artha (strategy), Kama (desire) and Moksha (self-realization). Since this and the previous aspect deal with strengthening our own “roots” (enlightenment and Prusharthas), the ring finger, representing the earth element is used.
5. Vishnu – Right Nose with the Index Finger – the right nose is the Akshara R, signifying order and season, as depicted by the term Rta. Vishnu, one of the foremost names of the Almighty is translated as the omnipresent, pervading everywhere without borders and bondages. The right nostril is part of the Surya Nadi or Pingala Nadi, which is connected with the physical self. The intent here is to energize this physical Nadi with the all-pervading Vishnu, while acknowledging the fact that the physical body is born out of nature and is subject to the timely seasonal variations pertaining to temperature, moisture, brightness and so on.
6. Madhusoodana – Left Nose with the Index Finger – the left nose is the Akshara Rr, signifying intensity. Madhusoodana refers to the slaying of the demon Madhu, which itself is a metaphor for the honey-like pleasures of the mind. With the left nostril part of the Chandra Nadi or Ida Nadi, which is connected with the mind, the intent of stimulating the mind energies using Madhisoodana is to elevate the mind, thoughts, instincts and motives beyond the pleasure-pain dualities and focus them towards spiritual progress. This aspect and the previous aspect energize the respiratory organs (nose), and hence the index finger, representing the air element, is used.
7. Trivikrama – Right Ear with the Little Finger – the right ear, as the Akshara U, represents cautiousness and care. Trivikrama is the One who strided over the three worlds, with the three worlds metaphorically referring to the stages of wakefulness, dream and deep sleep, as also seen

in the “Tripura” of Tripura Samhaara Moorthy and Goddess Tripura Sundari. Thus, Trivikrama on the right ear signifies the warm embrace of the Guru, that slowly and cautiously guides one through the various stages of consciousness towards self-realization.

8. Vaamana – Left Ear with the Little Finger – the left ear is the seat of the Akshara Oo, representing excellence. Vaamana translates to dwarf, signifying the incarnation of Almighty, that taught King Mahabali, both literally and figuratively, that pride should be abandoned if one is to advance in life and spirituality and achieve excellence. This is the same teaching that is stimulated by touching the left ear with Vaamana. This aspect and the previous aspect represent streamlining of our thoughts, words and deeds (Kaayaka-Maanasa-Vaachana), and for this reason, the finger representing water element (the little finger) is used.
9. Sridhara – Right Shoulder with Middle Finger – the right shoulder is the Akshara Ra, signifying negation and reduction. Sridhara is that aspect of the almighty connected with Auspiciousness “Sri”. While Sri is translated to Lakshmi, on a deeper level, Sri, as the bright full moon of Purnami and seen as the core of esoteric Sri Vidhya tradition, refers to the central philosophy of completeness (Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaat Poornamudachyate – That is complete, this is complete, from completeness comes completeness), as contrary to the Kali Vidhya, representing the darkness of new moon Amavasya and centered around emptiness or “Shoonyam”. Thus, touching the right shoulder, representing negation or emptiness, with Sridhara, representing completeness, merges the two philosophies and stimulates the awareness that the Absolute Brahman is neither Existent non Non-Existent.
10. Hrushiksha – Left Shoulder with Middle Finger – left shoulder is the center of Akshara Va, representing charity. Hrushiksha refers to the God, the controller of the senses. The intent behind this connection is the stimulation of the awareness that it is the duty of every person to ensure both his enlightenment as well as the spiritual upliftment of others near him. While controlling the senses ensures the former, charity is the first step toward achieving the latter. This and the previous aspect denote the fundamental quality (completeness) and fundamental action (transformation), and for this reason, the middle finger, representative of the fundamental element (space) is used.
11. Padmanaabha – Navel with all Fingers – the navel is the centre of the Akshara Bha, signifying life force. Padmanaabha literally translates to the lotus-navelled. However, the lotus metaphorically represents the emergence of life with the sole connection for nutrients being the umbilical cord connecting from the navel. This is precisely the awareness stimulated by touching the navel with Padmanaabha.
12. Daamodara – Crown of the head with all Fingers – the crown of the head is the centre of the Sahasrara Chakra, the final union of Shiva Shakti and attainment of self-realization. With Daamodara referring to the One attainable through a purified mind (Udara) by means of self-control (Dama), touching the crown uttering Daamodara is to bring this awareness of the ultimate goal of human life and the means to attain it.

Thus, by first purifying the hand with water, and energizing it with the three bondage-breaking aspects of the Absolute, one touches and purifies the various organs by the Kaayaka-hand carrying the energy of the Pancha Maha Bhootas, Vaachaka-Words carrying the corresponding aspect of the Absolute and Maanasa-Minds carrying the intents and awareness to be stimulated at each stage, making Aachaman the most comprehensive purification ritual.

Ganapathi Dhyaanam

The most ubiquitous deity in India, Ganapathi is seen as the remover of obstacles. However on a deeper note, He is referred to as the Pranava Swarooma, or the very form of Om. “Gana” refers to groups and classifications, as seen in Sankhya Philosophy, and as Ganapathi, He transcends all such groupings and classifications, and is the supreme primordial sound of “Aum”.

Ganapathi Dhyaanam is then the ritual focusing our thoughts, feeling and energies towards this aspect of the Absolute, and addresses Ganapathi with the following epithets:

1. Shuklaambaradharam – The One who is dressed in white. White is the merger of the seven colors of the rainbow which symbolically denote the seven energy centres (Chakras) traversed by the Life Energy (Kundalini) finally attaining the Shiva-Shakti union in the Sahasrara. Those seven Chakras are Moolaadhaara-Sacral-Red, Svaadishtaana-Pelvic-Orange, Manipoora-Solar Plexus-Yellow, Anaahata-Heart-Green, Vishuddhi-Throat-Blue, Aajna-Third Eye-Indigo and Sahasraara-Crown-Violet.
2. Vishnum – As mentioned above, this refers to the omnipresent, all-pervading aspect.
3. Shashivarnam – Of White Hue as the moon, similar to Shuklaambaradharam, but also denoting the reflecting capacity of the moon, i.e. The Divine is viewed as both the Brahma-Rooma-Prakaasha (Shiva, resplendent with the formless form of Brahman) as well as Naama-Rooma-Vimarsha (Shakti, which gives Brahman form and attributes).
4. Chaturbhujam – The four armed, representing the four Purushaartaas, as well as the four Vedic Traditions (Rg, Yajur, Saama and Atharvana).
5. Prasannavadanam – Pleasant faced, with the sweet smile (Manda Smitha) reflective of the peaceful ocean of Bliss in which the Self is drenched.
6. Sarva Vighna Upa Shaanthaye – The One who removes all obstacles, yielding everlasting peace. The deeper meaning is that obstacles are by and large formed in our minds, almost always due to discrimination, which arises because of grouping and classifying things. By contemplating on Ganapathi, the One who transcends all classifications, this discrimination and bias, and hence the obstacles are removed.

After each of the first five epithets mentioned above, it is necessary to gently hit the temples of the head with the knuckles, since this is a well-known practice to stimulate focus in the brain.

Praanaayaama

One of the eight limbs (Ashtaanga) of Yoga, Praanaayaama pertains to regulating, streamlining and organizing our energy flow using simple breath control techniques. Specifically, by inhaling or exhaling through one of the two nostrils, representing Surya or Chandra Nadi, it is possible to stimulate and organize the flow of the Kundalini energy. The prescribed procedure is as follows:

1. Cover the right nostril with the right thumb, reciting “Om Bhoo Om Bhuvah Om Suvah Om Mahah Om Janah Om Tapah Om Satyam”. Here, the names of the Seven levels of Consciousness (Saptha Loka), associated with the seven Chakras listed above are recited. Bhoo is the materialistic, physical world, bound by the force of gravity. Bhuvah is the world-view characterized by mechanical and non-mechanical fields and polarities, which though spread everywhere, indeed decay with spatial distance. Suvah is the world-view of sub-atomic particles,

of a wide variety annihilating, creating and interacting, giving rise to the four fundamental forces of Gravity, Electromagnetism, Weak and Strong Nuclear Force. Mahah is the world-view characterized by Praana, known to modern physics as strings, whose varied modes of oscillations and vibrations give rise to the particles seen in Suvah. Janah is the world-view encompassing the fundamental information field of existence, represented as Om, and as the quantum universal wave function, transcending time and space. Tapah is the world-view of Shiva-Shakti, of the Prakaasha-Vimarsha duality as mentioned earlier. Finally Satyam is the ultimate Absolute, which is incomprehensible to the human mind, that which is neither existent nor non-existent.

2. Close both nostrils, holding the breath and reciting “Om Tat Savitur Varenyam Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi Dhyoyonah Prachodayaath”. This recitation is the core of the Gaayathri Mantra, and the lexical and spiritual meaning of this will be discussed later.
3. Release the right thumb, still closing the left nostril with the right index finger, and exhale, reciting “Om Aapah Jyothee Rasah Amrutham Brahma Bhoo Bhuvah Suvah Om”. This recitation refers to the elements of water (Aapah), which comprises nearly 70% of the human body, as the essence (Rasa) of the Inner Life Energy (Jyothee), and as the Eternal Nectar (Amrutham) guiding us towards the Absolute Consciousness (Brahman).

Medically, Praanaayama has been shown to treat a range of stress-related disorders, improving autonomic functions.

Sankalpa and Abhivaadanam

Sankalpa, or Declaration, is the component of many Vedic Rituals and Ceremonies, stating the Location and Time of the ritual, as well as the form of Absolute meditated upon and the expected benefits, both materialistic and spiritual. While some rituals encompass a detailed Sankalpa covering among other attributes, the current era (Adya Brahmana, Dvitiya Paraardhe, Shveta Varaaha Kalpe, Vaivasvata Manvantare, Ashtaa Vimshatitame, Kali Yuge, Prathame Paade), the geographical location (Jamboo Dveepe, Bhaaraatha Varshe, Bharatha Khande, Meroh, Uttare/Dakshine Paarshve), date (Samvatsare-year, Aayane-movement of Sun, Ritau-Season, Maase-Month, Pakshhe-Phase of the moon, Thithou-Date, Nakshatra Yukthaayaam-Star at Zenith) and benefits (Kshema, Dhairya, Veerya, Vijaya, Ayur, Arogya, Aiswarya, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha), the Sandhyavandanam, being universal in nature prescribes a much simpler Sankalpam consisting of the following:

1. Mamopartha Samastha Duritha Kshayaadvaaraa – Removing all problems, pain and sufferings.
2. Shree Parameshwara Preetyartham – With the intent of achieving the Eternal Bliss of the Almighty filled with Completeness
3. Praatah Sandhyaam Upaasishye/ Maadhyaahnikam Karishye/ Saayam Sandhyaam Upashisyeh, for the first part as appropriate for the twilight.
4. Praatah Sandhyaam/ Maadhyaahnikam/ Saayam Sandhyaam Gaayathri Mahaa Mantra Japam Karishye, for the Gaayathri Japam as appropriate for the twilight.

The concept of Sankalpa serves two important purposes. Firstly, it maintains a nearly unbroken record of the lineage and tradition, with accurate references to the location and timing, thus serving as an authoritative reference amidst all the obscurities of history. Secondly, it forms an auto-suggestive system, focusing the mind on the present and on the aspect of Brahman meditated upon.

Another concept of time localization and identity is seen in the practice of Abhivaadanam or Salutation, where the practitioner traces his lineage, back to one of the seven principal seers (Rishis) through the Gothra, which is a paternal transmission of identity, coinciding with the biological Y-Chromosomal transfer. Apart from the lineage, the Shaakha (Vedic school, such as Yajur) being followed is also declared, culminating in the utterance of the individual's appellation (Sharma) given during initiation.

Thilakam and Maarjanam

These are purification and energization processes, again using the ubiquitous element of water.

Thilakam consists of energizing the water, and the ring finger, representing the earth, using the universal consciousness aspect of Keshava, as mentioned earlier, and stimulating the Aajna Chakra, the third eye in between the eyebrows, with this aspect.

The cleansing ritual of Maarjanam entails ten utterances, the first seven and ninth of them accompanied with the sprinkling of water on the head, the eighth with sprinkling water on the legs and the tenth with sprinkling water around the practitioner, enumerated as follows:

1. Aapo Hi Stha Mayo Bhuvah – Water is verily the Cosmic Water (Information Field) that fills the Universe.
2. Taana Oorje Dadhaa Tanaa – The intense focus of which yields Fruition of Various kinds.
3. Mahe Ranaaya Chakshase – Causing the great motion of the sun and the planets.
4. Yo Va Shiva Tamo Rasah – The One that is honored as Shiva (the Auspiciousness) and as the Tamo Rasah (of a cool and accumulating nature).
5. Tasya Bhaajaya Te Ha Naa – The One whose contemplation turns the worshipper into Itself.
6. Usha Theeriva Maatarah – The One upon infinite Division due to Maaya yields the Universe from the Mother.
7. Tasma Aranga Maamava – Let the fabric of this Universal Consciousness protect me.
8. Yasya Kshayaaya Jinvatha – On which resides the very Force of Life
9. Aapo Janayathaa Cha Nah – Water is verily the medium of Life from birth to death.
10. Om Bhooh Bhuvah Suvah.

In essence, these ten utterances view the flowing, ubiquitous nature of water as a representation of the cosmic information field, energizing the water with that universal consciousness and using it to cleanse and purify the body, mind and soul.

During second occurrence of Maarjanam (Punar Maarjanam), an additional line is added in the beginning as follows: “Dadhikraavanno Akaarisham Jishnorashvasya Vaajinah – Surabhi no Mukhaa Karat Prana Aayumshi Taarishat”. This recitation pays obeisance to the Absolute, contemplated as the sustainer of all worlds, ever victorious and repository of wisdom, enthusing the face, senses and other organs through the fundamental life-force of Praana. The importance of using this only in the second occurrence is that this follows the Praashanam ritual which involves the cleansing of the inner organs, thus purifying the Praana that flows in and out of them.

Arghyam, Tharpanam and Aatmapradakshinam

Arghyam, or offering of water, is one of the key elements in Sandhyavandanam. Among other purposes, Arghyam is also offered as an atonement (Praayaschitta). The principle behind Arghyam is that with the now purified self, an offering of water by the Jeevaathma to the Paramaathma, is in essence, an offering of Brahman to Brahman itself. This is aptly represented by the following – the last and 100th Shloka of Saundaryalahari:

Pradhira-jvalabhir dhivasakara-neerajanavidhih| Sudha-suthe chandropala-jala-lavair arghya-rachana||
Svakiyairambhobhih salila-nidhi-sauhitya karanam| Tvadiyabhir vagbhi thava janani vacham stuti iyam||

Oh Goddess who is the source of all words, this poem which is made of words,
That you only made, Is like showing the camphor lamp to the Sun,
Is like offering as ablation to the moon, the water got from the moon stone,
And is like offering water worship, To the sea.

The Arghyam is performed three times while chanting the Gaayathri Mantra.

While Arghyam is the unconditional offering of the Self to the Formless Absolute, Tharpanam is the offering given to specific Attributes of the Absolute.

This is done specifically for the nine planets, acknowledging the fact that they are, owing to their movements, reflectors of various aspects of the primordial energy or information field, the combination of which affect the individual in many ways. Following this, Tharpanam is performed for the twelve forms of the Absolute listed above in Aachamanam.

Aatmapradakshinam, or circumambulation of the Self, is the pinnacle of Advaita philosophy, wherein one circumambulates one's own self, with the offering of water, and by virtue of meditation, contemplates on the underlying oneness of the Jeevathma and Paramaathma, as in the following Dhyaanam – “Asaavaadityo Brahma Brahmaiva Ahamasmi”. Thus, by this practice, the worshipper, worship and the worshipped all become one.

Gaayathri Aavaahanam and Dhyaanam

The term Gaayathri is interpreted in multiple ways: as the Vedic meter consisting of three paadas each or as the One who is Extolled Thrice (during the three twilights).

The Formless Brahman, seen as the focus of the entire Sandhyavandanam ritual is viewed as Gaayathri – She is of the form of the Sun – bright, radiant and resplendent.

Thus, the Gaayathri Japam starts with declaration of the Seer, Metre (Chandas) and Deity.

For the Pranava Om, The Rishi (Seer) is Brahma, the metre is Gaayathri, and the Deity is the Absolute Paramaatma.

For the seven Vyaahrtis, (Saptha Lokas), the seven Rishis (Sapta Rishi) namely Atri, Bhrigu, Kutsa, Vasishta, Gautama, Kaashyapa and Angirasa are the Rishis, the seven of Gayatri, Ushnik, Anushtup, Bruhati, Pankti Trishtup and Jagathi are the Meters, and the Seven Devas of Agni, Vaayu, Arka, Vaageesha, Varuna, Indra and Vishvadevah are the deities.

Thus, while the earlier declaration attributed to Pranava Om the Formless Brahma, corresponding to Nirguna, the latter corresponds to Saguna, and using the Seven World-views corresponding to the Seven Chakras as explained earlier, attributes the seven Vyaahritis starting from Bhooḥ to the seven Deities, each of which are an aspect of the Absolute.

Aavaahanam, or invoking Gaayathri, starts with declaring Vaamadeva (One of the five forms of Shiva) as the Rishi, Anushtup as the Metre and Gaayathri as the Deity.

Following this the Dhyaanam of Gaayathri extolls Her using the following epithets, directing all thoughts, feelings and energies towards the Savitr aspect of the Absolute.

1. Aayaa Tu Varadaa Devi – Granter of Boons to Everyone that reaches you
2. Aksharam Brahma Sammitam – The Unchanging Eternal form of Brahman
3. Gaayathreem Chandasaam Maatha – The One manifesting as the Mother of the Meter
4. Idam Brahma Jushasva Nah – This Brahma within me is devoted to you
5. Ojosi Sahosi Balamosi Bhraajosi – As energy, endurance, strength and illuminance
6. Devaanaam Dhaama naamaasi – As the Divine Force and the Vimarsha
7. Vishvamasi Vishvayuh Sarvamasi Sarvayuh – That which is the Universe and Everything in it
8. Abhi Bhooḥ Om – That who pervades from the Bhooḥ Loka to the Sathya Loka (Om).

Following this, Aavaahanam is done for the three forms of Gaayathri, Saavithri and Saraswathi representing the three twilights of dawn, noon and dusk.

Gaayathri Mantram

This is the most important and central component of Sandhyavandanam. The Gaayathri Mantram is a chanting consisting of 24 syllables, whose text is as follows:

“Om bhūr bhuvah svaḥ - tát savitúr váreṇ(i)yaṃ - bhárgo devásya dhīmahi - dhíyo yó naḥ pracodáyāt”

The direct lexical meaning of this Mantra runs as follows:

‘We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds.’

Thus, it is seen that the Mantra focuses an impersonal, non-specific Nirguna aspect of the Absolute, which is also sometimes seen as a reference to the Sun – the direct aspect of the Absolute that is the source of all life on earth.

Some advanced initiates utter a 32 syllabled Gaayathri Mantra, by adding “Paro Raajasi Saavad Om” to the 24 syllables given earlier. On a deeper spiritual level, it is seen that these 32 syllables correspond to various forces (Shaktis), which are aspects of the Absolute responsible for various actions and concepts in the universe, with each of them responsible for activation of a concentrate of energy (Granthi) pertaining to a specific objective. These Shaktis and their Granthis, in association with the 32 syllables and Deities are listed below:

Gaayathri Mantra	Granthi (Objective)	Shakti (Force)	Deity
Tat	Taapini (Energy)	Saphalata (Fruition)	Ganapathi
Sa	Saphalata (Fruition)	Paraakrama (Conquest)	Narasimha
Vi	Vishva (Universality)	Paalana (Preservation)	Vishnu
Tur	Tushti (Bliss)	Kalyaana (Auspiciousness)	Shiva
Va	Varada (Boon)	Yoga (Union)	Krishna
Re	Revati (Abundance)	Prema (Love)	Bhuvaneshwari
Ni	Sookshma (Subtlety)	Vaibhava (Glory)	Lakshmi
Yam	Jnana (Knowledge)	Teja (Radiance)	Agni
Bhar	Bharga (Splendour)	Raksha (Protection)	Indra
Go	Gomathi (Wisdom)	Buddhi (Enlightenment)	Saraswathi
De	Devika (Divinity)	Daama (Self-Restraint)	Durga
Vas	Vaaraahi (Result)	Nishtha (Excellence)	Hanuman
Ya	Simhini (Awe)	Dhaarana (Productivity)	Prithvi
Dhee	Dhyaana (Focus)	Chetana (Consciousness)	Soorya
Ma	Maryaada (Respect)	Samyamana (Equanimity)	Raama
Hee	Sphuta (Heat)	Tapa (Heat)	Seetha
Dhi	Medha (Intellect)	Darshitva (Vision)	Soma
Yo	Yogamaya (Delusion)	Jaagriti (Alertness)	Yama
Yo	Yogini (Union)	Utpaadana (Creativity)	Brahma
Nah	Dhaarana (Productivity)	Namrata (Humility)	Varuna
Pra	Prabhaava (Splendour)	Aadarsha (Awe)	Sadashiva
Cho	Ushma (Warmth)	Saahasa (Achievement)	Guru
Da	Drishya (Clarity)	Vivekata (Distinction)	Hamsa
Yaat	Niranjana (Purity)	Seva (Service)	Eeshwari
Pa	Daana (Charity)	Paraa (Transcendence)	Kamadhenu
Ro	Prema (Love)	Praana (Vitality)	Vaayu
Ra	Raksha (Protection)	Mana (Mind)	Ayyappa
Ja	Vijaya (Victory)	Nyaaya (Justice)	Navagraha
Si	Chit (Consciousness)	Aananda (Bliss)	Subrahmanya
Saa	Sampatti (Abundance)	Dhana (Wealth)	Kubera
Vad	Vaak (Speech)	Rahasya (Esoteric)	Baalaa
Om	Paraatpara (Supreme)	Paramaananda (Bliss)	Parabrahman

Thus, it is seen that the Gaayathri Mantra enables one to spiritually access the fundamental forces and energies behind the operation of the universe sing the power of Sanskrit Aksharas.

Conclusion:

Taking cue from the recently observed paradigm shift towards eastern philosophy and spirituality, the present article explores various concepts of the Sandhyavandanam, the oldest extant liturgical practice, using concepts from modern science and the power of Sanskrit Aksharas as a guiding beacon. From the explorations, the observation of the universality and magnificence of the practice along with its relevance even in the present day is easily observed.

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