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Facets of the Vedic and Post Vedic hymns

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Abstract: Enumerations of numerous forms of hymns attributed to different divine entities have been found in the Vedic Saṁhitās. Hymns are simply the prayers or invocations consist of the glories and specified features of that particular deity to whom it is dedicated. Hymns are stated to be the initial form of literature by human being chanted towards God. Hymns have been seen from the aspect of experiences that is realized in the intellects of human being. These hymns are seen in particular form of using a metre or Chandaḥ to express its contextual purpose. In the Post Vedic era the interface between God and his devotees has been seen through the new dimensions of eulogy, recognized as 'Stotra' or 'Stava', which is evident in the Epics, Purāṇas, Āgamas or Tantras and other holy scriptures. In this concern to explore these hymns in the form of Vedic and Post Vedic scriptures about their approaches, scopes and forms are ventured to be made.

Key Words: *Hymns, Stotra, God, Deity, Devotion*

Method: The approach of the paper will be analytical and descriptive. The Vedic Saṁhitās and the Epics and Purāṇas are consulted to prepare this paper.

Introduction:

Hymns are the eulogies of divine entities. It is the inclusive package of prayers or invocations to particular deities for his gracious aspects towards the preservation and guidance of created beings. It also contains the glorified events of the concerned deity with the assimilation of his formal aspects of manifestation. Hymns have been seen from the perspective of earliest literary forms of systematic formal literature in the light of the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā. The Ṛgveda Saṁhitā is considered as the oldest form of scripture of the human civilization. The Ṛgveda Saṁhitā consists of numerous forms of eulogies or hymns attributed to the Vedic pantheon. The versions of hymns are stated to the Gods and framed in such type of metres or Chandaḥ which make the hymns complete in the sense of formation, lucidity, equality of letters and Chanting.

The scope of the hymns could be seen in two phases, one is the Vedic and another is the Post Vedic. The later phase of the hymns constitutes the eulogies of the era of Epics, Purāṇas and Āgamas or Tantras. The Vedic hymns are mainly found in three kinds as Ṛk, Yajuḥ and Sāman. Among these forms of hymns Ṛk-s are the earliest forms of hymn. The name of the Śaṁhitās also suggests their recognition based on the types of hymn. The hymns of the Vedas are seen in dealing with the objectives of cosmology, metaphysics,

philosophy, eulogy of the deities to make their features highlighted on behalf of the preservation of living beings. The unique feature of the Vedic hymns is stated to be arisen in the visions of the seers by the experience of spiritual realization. For the reason of realization of the hymns the seers are recognized as the 'Draṣṭārah'¹ or visualizer not as the creator of the hymns. The hymns are systematically arranged through the inclusion of the *Chandaḥ*² or metres whatever it is Vedic or Post Vedic hymn. It offers the lucidity and arrangement of the hymns in a suitable form which is found at the time of chanting.

The hymns of the Saṁhitās especially the Ṛgveda describe the civilizations, traditional atmosphere and communication skill of expressions through the expositions of the hymns. These hymns also urge the evolution of spiritual advancements by the traces of the hymn which could be seen in there. It proves the gradual development of spirituality in the form of religious ethnicity in the earliest phase of Indian people. The hymns of the Vedas have been seen in the state of making the path of later mythologies as they offered the evidences of personification of natural elements. The forms of natural consequences and functions are found in a way of glorifying manner which is found eulogized in a systematic way of prayer. Hence the phenomena of nature like sun, moon, thunder, rain, wind, fire and others to be framed under the persona of deific entities. Hence “the songs of the Ṛgveda prove indisputably the most excellent mythological figures have originated from personifications of the most conspicuous natural phenomena.”³

The types of the Ṛgvedic hymns are found as, the types of invocation and eulogy of divinities, types of philosophical contents and dialogue hymns. Western scholars considered them in two main categories, namely secular and sacred hymns of the Veda⁴.

Significant features of the eulogies of the theistic Indian genre have been found in its monolatrous aspect and from the view point of Maxmuller as henotheism or kenotheism. The exhaustive manner of adorations or liabilities is founded upon this area of the hymn. The literature of the hymn is centered upon Brahman or God initially. The theistic approach of Vedānta stresses upon the aspect of Brahman which influenced the post Vedic era in the realm of dedicated devotion towards the god as imposed to be the Brahman. Of course the hymns of the Vedic Saṁhitās somehow indicate it through the eulogized deity is ascribed as to be the supreme most of all. In the succession of this formation the literature of the Upaniṣad is dedicated to the glorification of Brahman through its very wisdom which the later period of scripture follow the tradition of to glorify the particular deity in the aspect of Brahman. Moreover the variation of this Brahman form in his different aspects is found to be eulogized. Of course the evidences of Post Vedic era also witness the eulogy of other deities or divine forms of human being can be cited in this context. The *Stotras* of Piṭṛ, Māṭṛ, Guru, regions, rivers are such type of instances which expose their divine features that to be glorified through this form of hymnology.

The literature of hymns also finds its attachment with the traditions of life of human being. It is distinct in the epics of eulogistic nature like the Rāmāyaṇa. This genre of 'Sarga-bandha-mahākāvya' has been seen blended with intellectual elegancy. In this sense the intension to ascribe such *Stotra* to the range of noble, typical and systematic to its structure is found. Of course the area of the classical poetry especially the *Stotras* are meant to be the best policy to appease and adore to the prosperous state of the religious antiquities and cultures. Of course their contents seldom seem to be highly refined and scholastic in skill and formation which emphasize its diverse state of nature.

¹ Ṛṣayo mantradraṣṭārah. Nirukta.

² Gāyatrī, Ūṣṇik, Anuṣṭup, Bṛhatī, Pañkti, Triṣṭup, Jagatī are Vedic metres. In the post Vedic era the inclusion of new metres found to be there of the kind of Vṛtta, Ardhavṛtta, Ardhasamāvṛtta etc.

³ Winternitz, M., *A History of Indian Literature*, translated by V. Srinivasa Sarma, Vol.I, MLBD, Delhi, 2003, P.68.

⁴ Winternitz, *op.cit.*, P.96.

In the Rāmāyaṇa the kind of *Stotra* or hymn has been found as ‘*Āditya-Hṛdaya*’ containing twenty three verses attributed to god Āditya. The significant fact of this form of hymn of the post Vedic age is the transition of traditions to glorify the individual deity through chanting his numerous names attributed to his glorified deeds in relation to the essence of invisible forms of worship to be mastered over. Appreciation of a pure and responsible identity, upholding the way of sacred lore and the ideology of universal ethnicity have been found acknowledged in the attires of the divine spirits. The observation has been made upon their motives and exhibitions of holy activities. In the divine expositions of worldly orders of functions are found in the three fold aspect of the gods and of course other two more gods are also seemed to be engaged namely, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti and Gaṇapati in accordance to their need of time and circumstances. In this same context other deities have also been engaged. The consequences of inclusions of deities the inferiority of the gods has not been found in their particular hymns rather supremacy has been evolved massively. It indicates that the concerned deities are not higher in position in respect to others eulogized deity.

The earlier hymns of the Vedas in their unique aspects and formations with the skills of invocations structured the systematic approach of spiritual adorations; this is to say the religious worships and sacrifices. The concept of grand succession of the initial deities to their elevated and newly developed transformation stimulated the very forms of this hymnology. This form of hymns are found in the Post Vedic scriptures like the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, Tantras and Āmnāyas in a generous state of poetic expressions, submitted as ‘*Stotra*’ for their aspects of their inducing character of appreciation for belief and emotional strength. Finest form of these *Stotras* and their utmost reputed adorations has been found in this genre of *Stotras*.

A unique extensive form of religious worship subjected under contemplation of that particular deity in appendage. It is a particular form of hymn occurs in the form of manifestation with his furnished appearance which is to be contemplated upon. It is ‘*Dhyāna*’ or the experience of his physical form. In this context the indulgence of anthropomorphic perception of the divine entity has been focused by the ancient thinkers which are evident from the description of the Vedic hymns featured with the reference of human limbs such as hands, feet, face, head, eyes and obviously the bodily shape. Though the descriptions of Rgveda suggest vague form of the divine deities yet the reference of the limbs of bodily aspect is also found. The enunciation of the *Stotras* exclusively or unitedly at the time of *pradakṣiṇā* of a pilgrimage is stated to be very pious that enhances a unique atmosphere of religious ethnicity to be made out.

Post Vedic hymns especially the non-Purāṇic hymns are found in the recitations of the sādḥaka or seeker in their daily rituals, many of which has anonymous authorship or sometimes even unknown authors of traditional genre. In this case the hymns of ‘*Śivamahimna Stotra, Saundaryalahari*’ can be taken. Of course some this genre of hymns is attributed to the authorship of scholarly saints like Śaṅkarācārya. Another type of hymn affiliated to such saints like collected hymns of Rūpa and Jīva Gosvāmin, Mukundamālā of Kulaśekhara of Kerala are some of the instances suggested the development of Bhakti cult which was transformed in the core of common populace and traditions of epic and Purāṇic India. Of course this genre of hymns can be seen apart from the finest exposition of the Post Vedic genre of *Stotra* literature with slightest essence of excellence furnished them in a new shade of dimension.

Purpose and nature of the hymns:

Utmost submission of spiritual affection is found with highly motivated aspiration through the pitches of recitations in these hymns or *Stotras*. This form of *Stotra* is considered as the perceptible form of worship. The concerned concept could be traced in the *Stotra* of the ‘*Śiva Mānasa Puja Stotra*’. The *Stotra* is found as influenced by the concept of Upaniṣads. The hymns are also found to be the outline of the legendary plots of divine entities that enhance the literary expositions of communicative skills. The purpose of the hymns is not only to describe the divine features of particular god but also enumerates the glories of extraordinary divine achievements and gracious events of the deities. Another facet of the hymns is said to have the descriptions of particular doctrines and ideas of the schools of different visions to the spirituality. In this context the invocation of the seers and Ācāryas can be cited in the forms of Hindu and Jaina scriptures of the age of

medieval era which include the events associated with them. Some of the *Stotras* are engaged with the elements of philosophical and religious aspects, like the *Pañcastavī Stotra*.

Another aspect of daily performed customs which refers to the term of '*Nityanaimittika-Karma*' contains the particular type of *Stotra* either of the Vedic or the Tantrik form is bounded to engage in their order of that particular custom. This custom of house holders engages the *Stotras* like '*Sandhya Vandana, Prataḥ vandanā, Guru Vandana*. This form of *Stotras* ventures the scope of individual efforts and their intellects logically and theologically that appreciates such pitches of sound arrangements, of course sometimes it is found with least improvement⁵. Moreover the sectarian groups of religious tradition are said to have such disciplines of hymns. The theistic successors of Vedāntic theologies like Advaita, Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaitādvaita have their certain code of hymns.

Literary merit of these hymns or *Stotras* is sometimes found with dual aspect of excellence and inadequacy of genuine formation of systematic approach, this is to say the least usage of grammatical principles. The use of the metres is also found to be improper and sometimes overflows. As a matter of fact it could be the reason for the tendency of the authors to make them the standard most. Some of the authors have been seen in the state of absence of individuality that led to restrict them in some particular phase of area. The incomparable rhythm of the *Stotras* makes them to feel the individuals' extraordinary experience of soothing feelings.

The commendable approach of the *Stotras* is the form of union of the devotee with his destined object. It is possible with the detachment of emotional attachments of the thought which the devotee is able to contemplate on the expression that harmonies the sequel in a balanced form.

The uses of metres of the kind of *mātrāvṛttas, akṣara vṛttas* are the defining elements to the furnishment of the *Stotras*. These metres beatify the essence of utterances and rhythm of the hymn. Moreover the unique sense of this literature is attributed to the sectarian traditions of India, especially the contributions of the Ālvārs and Nāyanārs. These are the distinct appraisal of utmost devotion and dedication towards their supreme most adorable deity. The poetic contributions of Caitanyadeva, Rāmprasāda, Vidyāpati, Tulsīdāsa, Sūrdāsa, Mīrābāi, Kabir, Nānaka, Jñāneśvara, Tukāram and many more preceptors and devotees of sacred sectarian cultures are the gems of literary treasure. In addition to this the need and scope of this very genre of poetic inception finds its space in the heart of the seekers and worshippers of religious movements in exclusive union of *Stotras*. This very form of religious integrity in poetic discipline flows from the earliest age human civilization as found to be witnessed in the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā.

Conclusion:

In this way the discussion comes to its expected part of conclusion. Through the discussion the traces of hymn have been detected from its earliest literature, the Ṛgveda. The streams of earliest form of hymns transformed with new aspects of dimensions, expressions, rhythm and popular form of chanting. Through the development of mythological factors to the union of tranquility for the ultimate destination to realize the supreme bliss, the form of hymns acquires a great place in the realm of religious perspective. As a part of poetic excellence these *Stotras* make an aspirant internally calm and blissful connecting the inner soul in search of the excellence. Hence this popular form of poetic structure maintains its victory over the time immemorial through its journey in the different streams of sectarian groups emphasizing the union of the seeker and his concerned objective.

⁵ '*Namaste sate sarvalokāśrayāya*' of Mahānirvāṇa Tantra is such type of *Stotra*.

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