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STOTRAS IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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Abstract –

Sanskrit literature is rich with many genres like the vedas, upaniṣad-s, Sūtras of different branches, philosophical discussions, mahākāvya-s, khaṇḍakāvya-s, gadyakāvya-s etc. But in all these texts stotra or stuti finds its place either in maṅgalācaraṇa form or in the sahasranāma form. Apart from these there are different stutis and stotra, which have been composed in that purpose only. This article highlights the stotra literature and its different aspects.

Keywords – stuti, prārthanā, sahasranāma, phalashruti, pratibhā.

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Sanskrit Literature is full of devotional Literature. The devotional literature is nothing but the presentation of hymns. This hymn had a start with the hymn of *R̥gveda* and then turned into a discipline like Hymnology. As a separate genre, this literature, may be taken as *Laghukāvya* or *Gītikāvya*, not only covers the hymns presented in all the four Vedas, but also in the form of *Śatakas*, *Aṣṭakas*, *Laharīs*, *Nāmāvalīs* etc. The devotional literature, which is commonly for named as stotra, has continuous history from the Vedas to modern times, rather till date.

All the four Vedas or the compilation of hymns (संहिता), have been the source books of the intellectual, religious, social or ceremonial activities of Indians. They have become the part and parcel of the lives of Indians through commentaries, super commentaries, through their branches (*Vedāṅgas*) and the further offshoot literatures. The *Vedāṅgas* and the *Purāṇas* have explained the vedic thoughts elaborately. But either Vedas or *Vedāṅgas* or *Itihāsas* or *Purāṇas* (either Vyāsa or Vālmīki or any other sheer) have not spared any place or any situation, where they could not add a stotra, either in a mantra form or in a metrical form. The (R̥g. 10.125.) shows it all that it says.¹ The *Puruṣasūkta* (R̥g. 10.90), which is also found in other Vedas with some variations, also exhibits the stuti. *Stutis* in all its forms are found in the Vedas². There are *stutis* by the Ṛṣis and for the Ṛṣis, which reflect the necessity of Universe and inspiration for the humanity. The *Śatarudrīya* of *Yajurveda* "नमः सोमाय च रुद्राय च" is also a life example of stotra in Vedas, where 265 epithets of Lord Śiva is found. But whatever the text may be, the scholarship behind the devotion or bhakti, which forms into stuti or stotra. The *pratibhā* is the main cause that a particular text could be composed. May be the purpose behind the composition is spiritual, but without the scholarly approach, the devotional composition could not be so popular and would not capture the mind of the mass so intensely. Stotra as derived from the root स्तुञ् स्तुतौ, which means to praise and स्तूयते अनेन इति स्तोत्रम् by which the almighty is praised. To define the stotra elaborately it said:

नमस्कारस्तथाशीश्च सिद्धान्तोक्तिः पराक्रमः ।

विभूतिः प्रार्थना चेति षड्विधं स्तोत्रलक्षणम् ॥

The *bhakti* in its nine forms is behind any spiritual attainment. They are श्रवण (listening to the narratives of the actions and the excellence of Gods as Parīkṣita), कीर्तन (chanting the names of hymns, as Caitanya), स्मरण (remembering him always, like Prahlāda), पादसेवन (serving at the feet of diety), अर्चन (worshipping), वन्दन (praising his deeds like Akṛūra), दास्य (serving to him as a servant as Hanumān, सख्य (befriending him like Arjuna) and आत्मनिवेदनम् (making total surrender to him)³ | From the characters described in *Bhāgavata*, and the other texts the examples can be considered. Even though here the word विष्णोः is found here, it is applicable to all sects. All these feelings are exhibited only through Stotra and the devotee tries to

¹ अहमेव स्वयमिदं वदामि । जुष्टं देवेभिरुत मानुषेभिः (10.125.5)

² स्तवः स्तोत्रं नृतिः स्तुतिः । Amarakośa 1.6.11.

³ श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् । अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥ (Bhāgavata V.7.23)

communicate with his God. Stutis are scattered in many forms. An overall classification is presented here -

1. *Viruda* - Where the devotee expresses all his agony by praising his God.
2. *Gīta*-To describe all the activities of the God
3. *Pañcaratna*- Five verses
4. *Aṣṭaka*-eight verses
5. *Tārāvalī* or *Nakṣatrāvalī* (in 27 verses attr. to the number of stars)
6. *Śataka*- hundred verses or hundred names attr. to
7. *Pañcāśat*- fifty verses
8. *Pañcadaśī*- fifteen verses
9. *Aṣṭottaraśatanāma* - 108 names
10. *Sahasranāma*- 1000 names
11. *Aṣṭottarasahasranāma*-1008 names
12. *Nāmāvalī*- strings of divine names (with *caturthyanta*)
13. *Navaratnamālā*
14. *Akṣaramālikā* - the verses have the beginning letters as the order of letters i.e. if first verses start with क the second one is with ख and goes on.
15. *Vṛttamaṇimālikā* - Gods projected through the employment of different metres.
16. *Maṅgalas*- invoking the auspiciousness
17. *Kavaca*-praying for protection
18. *Citrabandha* - illustrating different *citras* as *padma*, *hala* etc.
19. *Daṇḍaka* - the prosaic form of the metre and presentation of God
20. *Śaraṇāgati* - complete surrender to God
21. *Kṣamāpana* - beg for excuse for any bad deeds and request to show the way to lead a good life.
22. *Mānasapūjās* - Do pūjās in the mind

The tranquillity, the attachment to the God takes a form of a stotra. Stotra is nothing but sitting near to God. Hence it is named as उपासना (उप + आसना) sitting near to deity, then a final surrender (आत्मसमर्पण). Whether out of love or devotion or fear, the devotee takes shelter with the deity. When the state of mind is conditioned by devotion, it is reflected through a stotra. For a *pūjā* or stotra the self-satisfaction is the greatest cause. The *Āpastambadharmasūtra* (1.22.2) says :

आत्मलाभात् परो लाभो नास्तीति मुनयो विदुः ।
तल्लाभार्थं कविः स्तौति स्वात्मानं परमेश्वरम् ॥

Deity in return showers love and blessings on the devotee. All the above mentioned types of stotras can be categorized in 5 groups based on the nature of their composition. They are:

- i. संख्याश्रित - All the stotras, which are bound with either with the numbers of the names of God or the number of the verses.

- ii. फलाश्रित - This group covers *anugraha*, *upālabha*, *pīḍāharaṇa* - *Āḍityahrdaya stotra* (*Rāmāyaṇa*).
- iii. ध्यानपूजाश्रित - *nyāsa*, *dhyāna*, *aparādhakṣamāpaṇa*, *mānasapūjā*, *ātmabodha*, *kaivalya* etc.
- iv. मन्त्रपदाश्रित – the stotra like ॐ । श्री । क्ली etc and with limited alphabets.
- v. शास्त्राश्रित -based on some particular *sampradāya*, *siddhānta* etc.
- vi. काव्यफलाश्रित - and this variety has covered *kośa*, *bhāṣā*, *chandas*, *alaṅkāra*, *kathātmaka*, *upadeśātmaka* etc. In this genre the poet or the devotee gets more scope to exhibit his talent along with his devotion.

There are two ways of understanding the stotras. One way may be the devotional way and the other is the psychological way. Now to study, whether the former is the cause for the latter or the latter is the cause for the former. But whatever the cause may be, if there would not be poetic caliber, the stotras would not be so charming and would not have the permanent clutch over the common man. If we study the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata*, one can feel that the either Vālmīki or Vyāsadeva, just wait for a chance to incorporate a stotra to the topic. All other purāṇas also same way present the stotras. *Lalitāsahasranāma* is one of the most accepted stotra on Devī found in *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. Except the four from the above group, all other stotras are full of talents, emotional feelings and metrical harmony. The extra ordinary employment of metres, suitable to the context, always attracts a common man to recite without a break. The similes, the metaphors, different *Śabdālaṅkāras* exhibit the talent of the composer, who wants to swim in the ocean of knowledge making *bhakti* as his boat (त्ती). Some stotras in the form of songs or prayers are blend with music again. These prayers reflect the continuous effort of the saints as achieving their spiritual destination. Most of the stotras are pregnant with mythological stories, which exhibit the deep knowledge of the composer also. In such an artistic way the composer composes the stotras that it soothes the mind devotionally and also psychologically. To find the achievements by *stuti*, *Br̥hddevatā*, 1.7 which is an elaboration of R̥gveda where Śaunaka says:

स्तुतिस्तु नाम्ना रूपेण कर्मणा बान्धवेन च ।
स्वर्गायुर्धनपुत्राद्यैरर्थैराशीस्तु कथ्यते ॥

Praise is expressed by name, form, deed and relationship and the blessings can be asked in the form of heaven, long life, wealth, and offsprings."

It again says:

स्तुत्या चैव विभूत्या च वाक्प्रभावेण चात्मनः ।
स्तुतिः प्रशंसा निन्दा च संशयः परिवेदना ॥ (1.34-35)

(cr. Ed. By Macdonell, in 2 pts, 1904).

To say the power of *stuti*, it again says: स्तुतेः प्रभुत्वं सर्वस्य बलस्य (2.6) which is the reflection of the Rigveda mantra 1.37.12

The first chapter of this text elaborately discusses about stuti, types of *stuti*, the purpose behind composing a *stuti* etc.

Jagaddhara Bhaṭṭa in his *Stutikusumāñjali*, 36th chapter has been devoted to *Stutiphalaprāpti*, where in 41 verses he boasts of a poet, who composes a stotra.⁴

Ultimately, he praises the stotra and the composer of a stotra and the influence of it on the devotee, who chants it⁵. Here Jagaddhara even gives hints for the devotees of Lord Śiva, but in many verses, he specifies the influence of the stotra on a devotee, irrespective of the sect., without specifying the God. He says the stotras should be studied after the Vedas. Śaṅkarācārya, is in forefront in composing the stotras and the world of devotees are benefitted out of it.

Apart from *Bhakti*, which is the core point of a stotra, some psychological points are the source of attraction and for that reason alone a stotra is so popular and have reached us without a break.

In षट् पदी stotra there is symbolical use of सामुद्रो हि तरङ्गः क्वचन समुद्रो न तारङ्गः (verse 3). Though Śaṅkarācārya has completely surrendered to Nārāyaṇa and says, he belongs to the universe, universe does not belong to him, as the waves belong to the ocean, ocean does not belong to the waves. With a very common example the sentence turn in to a metaphor and the core point he reaches a common man.

1 In *Śivamānasapūjā*, giving the title as *mānasapūjā* he exhibits the aspiration of a common man, his needs. Whatever a man desires, he desires only for his deity. A common man is not able to obtain all the things (for pūjā the *jāti*, *campaka*, *bilva*, *candana* etc)⁶, but I can imagine of getting all the things in my heart and oh God, please accept it. A devotee can imagine of accumulating anything, not for himself but for his God and offer. He may wish to offer different types of delicious foods to God in a golden pot, and it is possible also, as he wishes from his heart.⁷ It is again symbolical that, a common man can dream of anything. No limitation of desire, and that too when his deity is there in front.

4 ते तक्षाणं तरुमिव गुरुं त्वामघं तक्षयन्ति
प्राप्तुं तृप्तिं शुभफलभरं निर्भरं भक्षयन्ति ।
प्रत्यासन्नां श्रियमपि धिया तीक्ष्णया लक्षयन्ति
त्वद्भक्तान्ये श्रुतिमिव नृतिं तावकीं शिक्षयन्ति ॥ 36.41

5 ते रागादीन्मनसि मिलितानाशु विश्लेषयन्ति
क्रोधान्द्यानप्यतनुविनया न कचिद् द्वेषयन्ति ।
मोहध्वान्तं धनमधिमतिव्योम निःशेषयन्ति
त्वत्पार्थ ये गिरमभिमतप्रासये प्रेषयन्ति ॥ 36.37

6 जातीचम्पकविल्वपत्ररचितं पुष्पं च धूपं तथा । दीपं देव दयानिधे पशुपते हृत्कल्पितं गृह्यताम् ।

7 सौवर्णे नवरत्नखण्डरचिते पात्रे घृतं पायसम् । भक्ष्यं पञ्चविधं पयोदधियुतं रम्भाफलं पानकम् ॥

In the *Śivāparādhakṣamāpana* stotra, he describes, each and every activity of a common man right from his birth. The activities discussed in this stotra are eternal. From birth to be fed on mother's milk, at young age afflicted by the material desire, to suffer from the diseases, and finally in old age to become friendless. He describes each stage of human being, what is common to everybody, rich or poor. Finally he says son, wife, wealth, property, pets are all temporary⁸.

In भवान्यष्टक he describes all the stots of a human being that he can become — कुसङ्गी, कुबुद्धि, कुदास etc. due to his own negligence, or he can become अनाथ, दरिद्र, जरारोगयुक्त etc. affected by the unseen hands. And again he says one can face the problems like dull. He spoils his own life some way or the other. Hence he needs the guidance in every stage of his life that is विवाद, विषाद, प्रमाद, प्रवास. Here he cautions a common man that, in any situation one might be, but all these problems are natural to come and one need a friend and friendly guidance.

In देवीभुजङ्ग, he points at the cause of fear⁹ of life. In सौन्दर्यलहरी, it goes with more philosophical.

In वेदसारस्तव Śaṅkarācārya points at the causes of the creation of Universe, where God is above all.

The शिवाष्टक and शिवपञ्चाक्षरस्तोत्र type of stotras are totally based on Puranic lores and the iconic beauty of Lord Śiva is being described in different tones. The use of proper synonym, grammatical peculiarity makes the stotras readable and the common reader gets immense pleasure in his heart through the devotion. In *Saundaryalaharī*, Śaṅkarācārya deals with the philosophy, science of human body, the seasons etc. even though this text is mostly accepted as a Tantra text.

The हरिशरणाष्टक of Brahmānanda with the refrain तस्मात् त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो ! is the beautiful example of the naked truth of the society, the relationship etc. He says, when problem arises, nobody comes forward to help or support you. Neither brother, nor father, nor mother, nor family, nor wife, nor children, nor the power is of any help. Hence Oh Dīnabandhu! you are the only resort, where I can take shelter¹⁰.

Some compositions like *Caitanyacaritāmṛta*¹¹ of Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma are not bound with any rule or regulation of meters, but there is a natural flow, where bhakti alone is exhibited.

⁸ किं वा पुत्रकलत्रमित्र पशुभिर्देहेन गेहेन किम्

⁹ शरीरेऽतिकटे रिपौ पुत्रवर्गे सदाभीतिमूले कलत्रे धने वा ।

¹⁰ नो सोदरो न जनको जननी न जाया
नैवात्मजो न च कुलं विपुलं बलं वा ।
सन्दृश्यते न किल कोऽपि सहायको मे
तस्मात् त्वमेव शरणं मम दीनबन्धो !

¹¹ यदद्वैतं ब्रह्मोपनिषदि तदप्यस्य तनु-भा
य आत्मान्तर्यामी पुरुष इति सोऽस्यांश-विभवः ।

A devotee can scold his God (in *Caurāṣṭaka*)¹², another devotee can demand from his God (*Patitapāvanāṣṭaka* of Sālabega)¹³. Even the mischieves or the misdeeds are of praise worthy of the God (in *Madhurāṣṭaka*).¹⁴

But all these are the ways to reach the God. The devotee, while composing a stotra just dwells in an ocean of devotion and through the songs of waves, it wants to cross the eternal world. Jagaddhara Bhaṭṭa (C.1350 c.e.) in his *Stutikusumāñjali*, who has composed 38 stutis on different topics and the 39th one on *Vaṃśavarṇana* (total 1409 vv). Pointing at the importance of the complete surrender to god, he says in his *Stutiphalaprāptistotra* –

देवालये वसतिमर्थयते कपोतः
सिन्धौ वणिग् भजति वृत्तिमशङ्कपोतः ।
पृष्ठे श्रियं वहति नित्यमनेकपोतः
त्वद्भक्तिमेति सरसीमिव भेकपोतः ॥ (9/42)

(Master Khelari Lal & Sons, Sanskrit Book Depot, Kachaurigali, Benares City, 1938)

With the *anuprāsa* (कपोतः अशङ्कपोतः अनेकपः भेकपोतः) and *upamā*, Jagaddhara Bhaṭṭa prays Goddess Sarasvatī saying that "As the dove not being afraid of any danger to his life in the temple moves on, the sailor to get his livelihood moves in the ocean with his boat, the elephant (अनेकपः) moves happily keeping the Goddess Lakṣmī on his back, the baby frog moves in the clear water body freely, I take shelter on you Oh Goddess Sarasvatī !

In his text *Stutikusumāñjali*, Jagaddhara scolds the God (त्रीडापि नास्ति शरणागतमुज्झतस्ते, 11.102, अज्ञोऽसि किं, किमबलोऽसि, किमाकुलोऽसि 11.103).

षडैश्वर्यैः पूर्णो य इह भगवान्स स्वयमयं
न चैतन्यात्कृष्णाजगति पर-तत्त्वं परमिह ॥

¹² अकञ्चनीकृत्य पदाश्रितं यः

करोति भिक्षुं पथि गेहहीनम्
केनाप्यहो भीषणचौर ईदृग्
दृष्टः श्रुतो वा न जगत् त्रयेऽपि

¹³ सचिन्त इव लक्ष्यसे सपदि मे चरित्रं स्मरन्

परं कलितसाहसः पतितपावनत्वव्रतात् ।
न मामगणयः पुरा न हि विचारकालोऽधुना
व्रतं विसृज वाथवा वरद पावयैनं जनम्

¹⁴ करणं मधुरं तरणं मधुरं हरणं मधुरं रमणं मधुरम् ।

वमितं मधुरं शमितं मधुरं मधुराधिपतेरखिलं मधुरम् ॥

Highlighting the influence of stuti, he again says "Oh God! They are great, those who place your pray in their heart, they uproot the trees of sorrow. Those, who dance making the prayer as a song, they dwell with your thought and dance like a child¹⁵.

There are stotras which are full of science also. The gods are visualized as God of Knowledge, God of lamp, God of life, God of medicine, God of love, God of inner soul. He is also presented as Lord of Love, protector from all the obstacles, irrespective of religion or sect and the objective of any stotra is common i.e. to reach the almighty.

But if some stotras are studied deeply or understood, one can feel that sometimes they are more purpose oriented than the objective of surrender.¹⁶

Based on numerous stotras, it is found that seven things are essential to chant a stotra or a mantra. So subject wise they can be grouped in 5 categories:

i. **The Guru:** Irrespective of all sects, the Hindus have faith on living teacher. They give the highest regard to a Guru."¹⁷

ii. **Purity:** To have the stotra to surrender oneself, the religious injunctions are first observed, say to take bath, to clean the environment. Then only the prayer can be offered. As physical purity is made before chanting a stotra, after chanting a stotra the inner impurity goes away.

iii. **Auspiciousness:** Auspicious times, the calculations of *tithi*, *māsa*, *muhūrtas* are taken into consideration. In fact considering all these things, when an observer surrenders to God, his inner soul get also auspicious also.

iv. **Many sects but one truth:** Whether absolute for Vedāntins, or Śiva for Saivaites or Nārāyaṇa for Vaiṣṇavas, Tathāgata for Buddhists or Arhata for Jainas, the central point of any sect is to be with the God, the almighty.

v. **Service :** Service to the suffering: desire to get relieve from all sufferings of world.¹⁸

vi. **Dedication:** the body, the mind, the sense organs, the wordings every other aspect is dedicated to Lord.

vii. **The universal benediction:** There are performances, which are done to bring benefit to mass, though in Vedic Literature it is seen more.

From we or us to I or me-

¹⁵ ते त्वत् स्तुतिं हृदयधाम्नि कवाटयन्ति
दुःखद्रुमं च दृढमापदि पाटयन्ति ।
भावं तवैव भुवि बालमिवाटयन्ति
ये वाङ्मटीमभिमुखं तव नाटयन्ति ॥ 36.5

¹⁶ धनधान्यकरं नित्यं गुरुदेवद्विजार्चनम् - Rājvallabha

¹⁷ गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः
गुरुस्साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

¹⁸ It is also very common in Indian society to feed the poor on some special occasions.

From the Vedic period till now the stotras have travelled and have become a part and parcel of the human life. While in Vedic period or Vedic literature, the stotras were meant for all, for a mass (वयं, नः, यूयं) in the later period the idea turned into personal (मे, मम, अहं). The prayers in the Vedic literature were made for protection, prosperity, salvation. In due course it turned into rejuvenation, for destroying distress, fulfilment of desires, to get rid of helplessness etc.

The sānti mantra भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयामः (Rv. 1.89.8) is for all or मधु द्यौरस्तु नः पिता, माध्वीर्गावो भवन्तु नः (Rv. 1.90.6) is the desire of all, वयं जयेम त्वया युजा (Rv. 1.102.4) is an expectation for all. Even in other Vedas the prayers are for mass. And the examples are numerous. Even in *Stutikusumañjali*, Jagaddhara Bhaṭṭa says :

सरस्वतीवेन्दुकलोद्गता करैः
सरास्वतीव श्रवणामृतस्वरैः ।
सरस्वतीवोर्मिभिरीश्वरस्तवैः
सरस्वती वर्षतु वः सुधामियम् ॥ (38. 2)

As coming out of the ocean, the moon rays (compared to Sarasvatī) cool every one, the musical sounds of a flute (compared to Sarasvatī) give pleasure to all, whoever listens to it, as the waves of river Sarasvatī purify all the beings, my *vānī* compared to Sarasvatī will produce nectar for all. Here also Jagaddhara prays for all.

But in the classical literature it turns into क्षन्तव्यो मेऽपराधः or निर्विघ्नं कुरु मे देव. In

Vedas or the Vedic literature, each and every object of this Universe are praised, the mountain, the river, the trees, the air, the water etc. But in later period these objects have become the medium for worship of a particular God.

Actually the flowers, fruits, incense etc. are used not to please the Gods, but to please the self.

In due course the फलश्रुति has become a part of the stotras. Though Jagaddhara Bhaṭṭa makes one chapter named as स्तुतिफलप्रशंसा where in he does not have the agreement with God, but he describes the impact of listening the stotras. In some stotras the फलश्रुति has become a part of the stotras. The famous हनूमान् चालिसा (though not in Sanskrit) has at least 2 verses on फलश्रुति and last one mentions the name of composer. So this stuti actually contains 37 dohās, where the greatness of Hanumān is described. In the *Ādityahṛdaya stotra*¹⁹ also the फलश्रुति is also a part of the text.

But in some of the stotras the फलश्रुति has been added. And by this way the पञ्चक-s, the अष्टक-s have wrong numbers instead of 5 or 8 or so on. These verses have been added in such a way that, this has been taken as the main chanting by a common man. And it just shows the agreement between the God and the devotee.

¹⁹ *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*

Sanskrit Hymnology has a long history from Vedic period till date. Even in modern times, considerable volumes of works are composed with devotional fervour and stutis are composed in all forms. It is a continuous process as it represents the human feelings.

In India, the practice of chanting a stotra, is very common. A child is introduced to any form of a stotra. And it is believed that, it is the only way to be close to the divine. Through the stotra, the devotee tries to make a direct relationship with God, by addressing him. It is not only for the liberation, but also to get his love through the blessings.

The society is bound to be grateful to the musicians and the womenfolk, who have preserved the stotra through the songs and everyday activities. And they are the instrumental to pass on these stotras to their successors.

Numerous stotras are still there to see the light of the day. While many stotras are still hidden in the manuscripts, some stotras have reached us without the name of the composer. For these type of composers, their कृति was to be immortal, not their name. Some of the stotras have been ascribed to Śaṅkarācārya, may be with the same purpose that their creation was to reach the mass. Giving the proper definition Mahākavi Kālidāsa says स्तुतिभ्यो व्यतिरिच्यन्ते दूराणि चरितानि (Raghuvaṃśa 10.30).

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