

Principles of Formation of Patterns in Chanting of the Vedas

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Abstract

India has the honour of visualising the light of the vedas. Vedas are the collection of mantras; the literary compositions in the form of poetry, prose and singing, technically known as Rk, Yajush and Saman. All the vedic mantras are chanted with various melodic patterns.

The three types of mantras were revealed to the seers in their intuition in their state of penance and which were later collected in the form of four Samhitas viz. Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. It is pertinent to note that all the vedas are accented. This accent serves the purpose of understanding the meaning of the mantra as well as the modulation and patterns for chanting. Mantras are recited in three notes viz udatta, Anudatta and Swarita with attention to correct production of letters (words), correct intonation of swaras and correct duration of utterance of letters. At first stage mantras are memorized using simple methods in the form of Samhita, Pada and Krampath with various swar patterns. After this eight type of recitation are classified as complex recitation styles or vikritipathas. Samveda has a unique position as it is the veda of chanting. In the Samagana the words of the manta are changed suiting to the melody and seven musical notes are used. The oldest music which possessed a grammar and variety of patterns is vedic music. In this paper an attempt has been made to throw light on the music patterns used in recitation and chanting of the vedas.

In the history of Indian music, vedic chanting with melodic patterns was the oldest music.

Source – Vedic technical literature i.e. Shiksha, Pratishakhyas and Tantra Granta's.

Key words – Music patterns used in recitation and chanting of the vedas.

India has the honour of visualizing the light of the vedas, the most sacred knowledge which the humanity has ever produced. The literary compositions of the vedic seers in the form of rik, yajush and saman are traditionally known as mantras. The mantras were revealed to the seers in their intuition in their state of penance which were later collected and compiled in the form of four Samhitas viz Rigveda, yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Again these samhitas were handed down in several recensions (Shakhas). By the time of Patanjali there were at least twenty one recensions of Rigveda, one hundred and one recensions of Yajurveda, one thousand recensions of Samaveda and nine recensions of Atharvaveda. Vedic mantras, from the time of their composition, had come down through the oral tradition.

It is believed that the complete benefit of the veda-mantra could be achieved only when the following conditions are met.

- (i) correct production of letters (word) अक्षरशुद्धि
- (ii) correct duration of utterance of letters (मात्राशुद्धि)
- (iii) correct intonation of letters (स्वरशुद्धि)

So, in the vedic period correct pronunciation of the vedic mantras was meticulously observed at the time of their utterance in the performance of sacrifices (yajna) and studying the vedas. A mantra wrongly pronounced in the matter of accent or a syllable and wrongly used in sacrifice could bring disaster to the sacrificer and the officiating priests.¹ Our Rishis prescribed several fool-proof methods to correctly recite the veda mantras. Several works dealing with the phonetic peculiarities of respective sakhas were composed under the class of technical literature known as vedanga. Vedangas are six in number viz (1) Shiksha and Pratisakhya, (2) Vyakaran, (3) Nirukta, (4) Chhandas, (5) Kalpa and (6) Jyolish.

In oral tradition vedic seers devised many ways to prevent even a small error to creep to the recitation of the veda mantra for which various patterns and combinations were practiced. All the mantras are recited in three notes i.e. Udatta, Anudatta and Svarita is set principles.² There were eleven types of Pathas known as vakya, Pada, Krama, Jata, Mala, Shikha, Rekha, Dhvaja, Danda, Rath and Ghana.

Among these, vakya, pada, krama, jata and ghana methods of chanting are more popular and let us analyze those patterns.

1. Vakya or Samhita path- vakyapath is to recite a mantra in a sentence straight with appropriate intonations.
2. Padapath is word by word recitation in which compounds are dissolved.
3. Kramapath – In Kramapath words are arranged in the pattern of 12,23,34.

Here the first word of the sentence is added to the second and second to the third. The third to the fourth and so on, until the whole sentence is completed. The reciter, who knows this pattern is known as kramvit.

Jatapath – In the Jata method the first word and the second word are recited together and then the words are recited in the reverse order and then again in the original order. They are recited as 1-2-2-1-1-2; 2-3-3-2-2-3, 3-4-4-3-3-4 and so on. Scholarly priest capable of reciting in the Jatapath pattern are entitled 'Jataballabha'.

Ghanapath – The Ghana method is more difficult than the above where the combination of words will be 1-2-2-1-1-2-3-3-2-1-1-2-3; 2-3-3-2-2-3-4-4-3-2-3-4 and so on, the words are repeated back and forth in a bell shape.

¹ मन्त्रो हीनः स्वरतो वर्णतो वा मिथ्याप्रयुक्तो न तमर्थमाह ।

स वाग्वज्रो यजमानं हिनस्ति यथेन्द्रशत्रुः स्वरतोऽपराधात् पाणिनीय शिक्षा 52

² Vedic Svaro Bodh, Chaubey B.B. Vedic Sahitya Sadan, Hosharpur, 1972, p. 22 onwards.

This pattern is known as the Bell mode of chanting because in this pattern the words are repeated back and forth in a ball shape.

At first stage students are taught to memorize using simple patterns i.e. Prakriti path (Samhita, Pada and Krama) and then eight complex patterns i.e. vikriti paths.³ It is to be pointed out that reversing the word order or back word chanting does not alter the meaning of the vedic language.

Samaveda is veda of chanting. This chanting is done in seven svaras i.e. Kruṣṭa, Pratham, Dvitiya, Tritiya, Chaturth, Mandra and Atisvarya. For chanting of samagana definite techniques seem to have been introduced and developed by the samasingers. From the study of Brahmana and vedanga literature, we come across various techniques and patterns of saman chanting. When a saman is sung on a particular Rik mantra then it undergoes some modifications, alterations and additions to suit the chanting. This feature is technically known as vikriti. The samhitopanishad Brahmana gives the number of such vikritis as eighteen, the pushpasutra as twenty and the samtantra as thirty four.

These vikaras can be classified into two groups viz. internal and external. Internal vikaras are those which are based on the padas and the varnas of the rik on which the saman is chanted. Following are based on padas.

अंभाव, अतिहार भाव, अभ्यास, अवृद्ध, आइभाव, एभाव, ऐभाव, ओभाव, औभाव, यभाव, रेफत्वलोप, लोपभाव, वन्तविधि, विकर्ष, वृद्ध, ह्रस्वभाव।

These are the different patterns for changing the word for melody. For example in Am-bhava (अंभाव) a, i, u, r are changed into 'a' e.g. पावका to पवाका Following vikaras are based on melody or chanting. अतिक्रम, कर्षण, धार्य, नुभाव, प्रत्युत्क्रम, परिस्वार, प्रणीत, प्रेङ्ख etc.

अतिक्रम – When a svara cross the next and goes to the other svara. This skip is known as Atikrama. There are four types of Atikrama⁴ In first kind krushta omits the first in crossing to the second. In the second type first svara goes to the third by skipping second. Then third goes to the fifth note and in fourth type First crosses second, third and fourth and goes to fifth.

कर्षण (Karshan)-Karshan is lengthening. When a word is chanted by extending to its next note, it is known as Karshan. Karshan again is of five types.⁵

³ जटा, माला शिखा रेखा ध्वज दण्डो रथो घनः

इत्यष्ट विकृत्याह प्रयुक्तः क्रमपूर्वमहिर्षिभिः॥

⁴ चतुर्विधो अतिक्रमः । मात्रालक्षण 1.27

⁵ पञ्चविधं कर्षणम्। आद्वितीयकर्षणमातृतीयकर्षणमाचतुर्थ कर्षणम्।

मन्द्रश्चतिस्वार्यात् कृष्यते। मा० ल० 1.32

प्रत्युत्क्रम (Pratiyutkrama) – When a chanter while singing sings a note then goes to the higher note and then comes back to the same note. This process of ascending and descending back to the same note is known as प्रत्युत्क्रम. We find eight types of this pattern.⁶ These are some examples mentioned above.

Under the external vikaras, come the stobha (स्तोभ) which are also of various kinds and patterns. Sometimes a syllable, sometimes a pada (word) or a paada (sentence) are included at the time of chanting but these syllable, pada and paada have no relation with the Rik. These are called varna slobha (वर्णस्तोभ)] Pada stobha (पदस्तोभ) and Paada Stobha (पाद स्तोभ) respectively. Akshartantra and stobhausamhar illustrate all the stobhas.

There are many more patterns in chanting the saman. We have just given a glimps of this rich and highly technical tradition. These patterns have great impact on the later developed classical music of India.

In conclusion we can say that there are various pattern of reciting the Rk, yajush and Sama mantras. Pada, Rhythm and svara patterns in samagana chanting. But today in the absence of performance of rituals these techniques are gradually declining. Moreover in the absence of proper study and practice of samaveda and its literature the terms and patterns use therein are becoming obsolete. So efforts be made to study and preserve, because they are relevant in our modern classical music also.

⁶ प्रत्युत्क्रमोऽष्टविधः। मा० ल० 1.18