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Kaustav Sanyal
Computer Science &
Engineering, M.Tech Bankura
Unnayani Institute of
Engineering Bankura,
West Bengal, India

Shiva mahimna and vishwanath: Abhivandanam

Kaustav Sanyal

Abstract

The abstract of this paper is to present two remarkable creations in Sanskrit literature one being widely known and less explored, namely the Shiva Mahimna Stotra (abbrv. ShMaSt) while another is almost unknown and hardly explored, namely Viswanath Abhivandanam (abbrv. ViAb) and to analyze some of the aspects of both the works and establish the equal brilliance of the lesser known one i.e. the ViAb in comparison to the widely known one i.e. ShMaSt. Our study is not only to establish the importance of the works in Sanskrit literature but in the vast ocean of world-literature as well. This paper also analyses hymn-based literatures as some brilliant poetic creations.

Keywords: Sanskrit-literature, world-literature, poetry, hymn-based-literature

Introduction

Religion acted as the mother of human creations from the very ancient times. Most of the greatest and finest creations of man in the world are created and recreated holding this mighty guiding hands of religion. Bharat-varsha, popularly known as India to the world is enriched with varied creativity of this genre of religion. In these unfathomable creations of beatific religion has been endowed with the ‘Hymn-literature’ or the “Stotra Sahitya” of Sanskrit. Most of those Sanskrit hymns are one of the finest poetic creations indeed in gamut of vast literary world. Be it the Vedic hymns that describes terse as well as the most subtle aspects of the universe or the Stotras (poems/hymns to praise the Supreme from several dimensions) from the Pauranic texts (texts from Puran literature from post-Vedic era), these works contain incomparable poetic brilliance. It is a wonder that how the people from so remote age managed to produce such literary works that can be directed as the gist of the complete history of world literature. Though it is so hard to resist dive into the ocean of Sanskrit literature to explore, we are moving forward towards our proposed discussion now. Here today our dissertation is centered round two of such resplendent works, one of which being widely known whilst the other one is hardly known to the modern world viz. Pushpadanta propounded “Shiva Mahimna Stotra (ShMaSt)” and “Vishwanathabhvandanam (ViAb)” procreated by Srimat Swami Tryaksharananda (Tryaksha). In between these two one has become a legend but the other one is completely historic.

The Authors

Amongst all the non-Vedic hymns that describes the glory of Lord Shiva, ShMaSt is considered to be the best work till date. In this work itself, the poet has described it to be the best non-Vedic hymn of all. The very background of this hymn epitomize the legend of a Gandharva (musician of heaven) named Pushpadanta. The story goes like Pushpadanta (literally, Flower-Teethed) was a divine musician of such standing, in the court of Lord Indra (King of the Gods). Pushpadanta was also a devotee of Lord Shiva and a lover of flowers. Once he happened to see a beautiful garden adorned with charming flowers. It was King Chitraratha's royal garden, who was also a devotee of Lord Shiva. The King used to offer flowers from his palatial garden as a symbol of his devotion to Lord Shiva. Pushpadanta was so awestruck by the beauty of the garden, that he could not control his emotions and picked up the flowers from the garden. Every day he tried to stop himself, but failed and picked up the flowers. As a result, King Chitraratha was left with no flowers to complete his prayers to Lord Shiva. The King did all he could to address the issue. But Pushpadanta had divine powers to be invisible and hence, the king could not find the culprit.

Correspondence
Kaustav Sanyal
Computer Science &
Engineering, M.Tech Bankura
Unnayani Institute of
Engineering Bankura,
West Bengal, India

Left with no ideas to solve this problem, the king spread bilva leaves or bilipatra (AEGLE MARMELOS tree leaves, which are considered to be sacred offerings to Lord Shiva) in his garden. Pushpadanta was unaware of this and unknowingly stepped on the bilva leaves. This infuriated Lord Shiva and he punished Pushpadanta by taking away his divine powers. He was shocked, but being a blessed devotee, he realized why that happened. In order to seek forgiveness and please Lord Shiva, Pushpadanta composed a stotra (song of praise) in which he elaborated at length upon Shiva's greatness as a prayer. Lord Shiva, was pleased with his prayers, absolved him and returned his divine powers. This very prayer became well known as the 'Shiva Mahimna Stotra'.

In other hand the author of the ViAb is a sage from Bengal who remaining in the recluse of the Himalayas could succeed in unifying himself with his worshipped deity keeping this poetic hymn in complete concealment till date. During his stay at Uttarkashi of the state of Uttarakhand, India he created this great stotra in an extempore manner. On the night of Mahashivaratri^[1] 1954 during his meditation at Uttarkashi Viswanath Temple he somehow managed to create such a jewel of Sanskrit literature with an ease. Just as Pushpadanta instantly composed ShMaSt at that garden of king Chitraratha, Srimat Swami Tryaksharananda (Tryaksha) composed ViAb. It is impossible to gauge his mental state that used to goad him to compose such gem of creation as he rather preferred to veil himself always during his long hermitage at Uttarkashi on the bank of Alakananda river. In later parts of our discussion we shall analyze both the incidents and present our comment on both backgrounds.

Comments on their Identity

Pushpadanta was a Gandharva, a celestial musician. We are still baffled in the existence of such celestial stuff which ever eludes our ken of knowledge and as such we are really doubtful about their presence too. Possibly some great Sanskrit poet of ancient times who had had great mastery on music could have composed ShMaSt in the wick name of Pushpadanta. The very name Pushpadanta is fictitious itself as the etymological meaning of the name is one whose tooth even is as tender as flower petals. In verse no. 38 he himself stated his name as Kusuma-dashan which is not exactly Pushpadanta but the meaning remains exactly the same. In this shloka he says, "the king of Gandharvas, coming down to this terse earth accepting the serfdom of Lord Shiva composed this great Shiva Mahimna Stotra."

On the other hand Tryaksha has also concealed his identity during the creation of Vishwanathabhivandanam in the suave submission. Before the beginning of the Stotra we can see a part named "Arpanam", which means offering, that the author is offering his creation to his master. In this part we can see the poet referring himself as just a disciple of his master. If we ignore what we know about Tryaksha historically and only take ViAb in consideration to know the identity of the author, we get a sage who is just a disciple of his master, offering his life's one of the greatest creations to him.

Pushpadanta has concealed his identity by the glory of his rank whilst Tryaksha has veiled his insignificant fugitive existence. For example in the 17th verse he has alluded his birth to Brahmin caste as an accident, he did not deserve it; no doubt an example of exquisite humbleness. Thus knowing his biography historically we are misguided by his self imposed bindings on himself.

A Brief Study

Both of the works require some prerequisite studies of the texts. In the oldest available scriptures like Vedas, Lord Shiva is depicted as 'Rudra'. The new age researchers of the day think him to be a human with highest spiritual element in a great self. A human being by his sheer penance has had become undoubtedly laudable and respectable to all gods of heaven. The moment we the men on earth have become doubtful about the agility of those gods due to their relentless reluctance and inertness for time long drawn, this 'Adiyogi' (the very first Yogi) by his sheer dedication and meditation has become the perennial source of inspiration for these hopeless human beings.

On the other hand the old schools without assessing or knowing slightest hint of godliness of Lord Shiva have already made his worshipping techniques more and more vulnerable. These medieval thoughts are assiduously followed even today have made it just a ritual only without any intrinsic value of its own.

Moreover in the Vedas especially in the RgVeda and Yajurveda our sustained Lord has become both our savior and ultimate punisher. In the Vedic saints' estimate this is the only way for common people to concentrate upon Him. Through these angels of vision the great gems like 'Rudra Ashtadhyayi' (8 Chapters of Rudra) emerged from Vedas and still glowing with brilliance amidst ancient literature.

The Shiva Mahimna Stotra

The caption of this composition is itself self-explanatory, which defines the eulogy of the exquisite fame of Lord Shiva. ShMaSt as propounded by Pushpadanta can be termed as the fittest reply to the so called contradictions as mentioned above. By dipping delve into the SMS we can easily arrive at the conclusion that it is not just merely a glorification of Lord Shiva rather it is answer to all the old and cumbrous questions and enigmas. All the culpable questions could be framed are very subtly answered by Pushpadanta. This stotra has never tried to crisscross other notions at all rather the author of the scripture through the verse no.4 up to verse no.7 with wise devotion and realization conjoined by the synthesis of Vedic truth has epitomized the multifarious aspects of the varied genres of the sacred cultures. In fine all the multifarious streams of thoughts must dissolve into one unique ocean of infinite possibilities. Thus Pushpadanta has established the Vedantic^[2] monotheism along with worldwide practiced and preached streams of monotheism. Similarly stories of some epic sagas, like Puranas and Ramayana also emerged from SMS. It also enshrines a bridge between ShMaSt and Saudarya Lahari, which is accepted and believed to be composed by Lord Shiva Himself (the first 41 verses). Nay not know the 23rd verse of both the scriptures have exactly the same topic described.

Thus and many other ways this ShMaSt has become more than just a hymn rather a valued scripture. So the complete detailed analysis of this Stotra is not possible here or in broader aspect anywhere else. But so much analyzed so far can fulfill our desire of this treatise.

Viswanath Abhivandanam

From invocation to conclusion the moot point of this composition is self-surrender. Tryaksha composed this Stotra in the year 1954 on the night of Mahashivaratri at Uttarkashi

¹ Mahashivaratri is a festive-night dedicated to Lord Shiva

² Related to Vedanta philosophy.

Viswanath Temple. This stotra is purely composed in honor of Lord Viswanath of Uttarkashi as it behooves from the verse no.6 and 7. This conviction remains firm till we reach at the verses Prasthana scriptures from 15th verse to 25th verse, where we find the poet has ventured to unify the monism and his propounded Lord's oneness. The readers become curious to know why the great theory has had been concentrated to Uttarkashi only. By synthesizing it we can arrive at the safe conclusion that the Uttarkashi as mentioned in the composition is not the same Geographical Uttarkashi of Uttarakhand. The poet has established a bond between human body and the universe. The scriptures preach all living in the universe resides in the pitcher like human body. In the 6th verse the mentioned 5crosha (10 miles) diameter of Uttarkashi represents the human body itself which is bound by the five main organs known as 5Indriyas(be it karmendriya or gyanendriya). Now it makes sense. Otherwise a person who has attained the state of Avadhutatwa^[3] can never concentrate his mind over one geographical point as his mind becomes so open that he experiences the complete universe within him and himself spread throughout the cosmos. The complete Stotra is thus encoded by several means and protected by riddles. Neither a wise one nor a devout one can decode its complete meaning, but both combined.

Comparative Study

Amongst 12 Suns^[4] in the cosmos, two can never be compared no doubt. Similarly these two remain ever incomparable. So a general question arises, what on earth is the purpose of this paper then? In answer to that we say our effort is to bring a widely known gem and an unexplored gem together as both of them have so many resemblances in them that is hard to ignore. The word comparison is a very strong one to use. Use of the word denotes supremacy of one over another. Here we shall not dare to do that as both of them are brilliant irrespective of time and space. Primarily it seems like it is enough to study any one of them as both of them requires utmost knowledge in Sanskrit scriptures and mastery over Vedanta philosophy. But after studying them both one can find that it is ever incomplete to study one solely without studying the other. We agree that it is not a matter to complete in a short period of time, but it is worth the dedication. After studying both of them together for quite a long time we are now able to draw a comparative study on both the masterpieces, where we can only highlight some facets of these two. These facets hardly require any penance whatsoever. The apt saying of the ancient scriptures that, "study the scripture for hundred times and it will convey its meaning to you" is equally applicable for these two scriptures. The just and out analysis of these two from any specific aspect is never possible as they don't have only one. A specific verse and its interpretation vary according to the varied depth of knowledge and realization of the reader. Despite we venture to usher height to some of the facets of penance of the great saints by our attempt of dissertation.

1. ShMaSt's date of composition is nowhere mentioned and hence its year of composition is based on our indirect evidences and assumptions only. But on the other hand at the very outset of ViAb the saint poet has had encoded the year of composition which decoded becomes 1954 AD.
2. ShMaSt composer has allowed himself as 'Gandharva raaJ', the king of heavenly musicians whilst the composer

³ The one who has alleviated the Varna system(caste) and Asram system(stages of life) is an Avadhut.

⁴ According to Vedas there are 12 forms of the Sun known as 12 Adityas.

of ViAb has mentioned himself as one of the slaves of his master who suddenly attained the Avadhutatwam.

3. ShMaSt and its enunciator has had tried from the very outset of the Stotra to glorify it. In the very first verse he has attempted to eulogize it but in the ending verses even termed as the best even. ViAb on the other hand never tried such rather he humbly submitted that his attempt is just an effort to purify his inner self only and in no way out of great vanity of poetic fervor.
4. ShMaSt had been written in 'Atyashti' rhythm pattern, which contains sixty-eight syllables and considered to be one of the 'Ati' meters after 'Jagati' meter. ViAb followed the 'Mandakranta' meter which contains seventeen syllables.
5. ShMaSt has been composed on the existing concept of Lord Shiva as widely acknowledged. But ViAb only narrates the glory of Viswanath, the lord of Uttarkashi—beyond doubt it is also encoded which being decoded confers the worshipped lord here too is one and akin to the Lord of ShMaSt.

The literary creation is enriched by the variety of subjects' assimilation in it. But it is equally true that in a limited span the depth of a topic can enrich more bountifully the literature itself. Srimat Swami Viswatmananda ji Maharaj termed, analysis can be made two folds—quantitive and qualitive. ShMaSt has alluded varied references of different scriptures and thereby quantitively enriched whilst ViAb using three 'Prasthana'^[5] scriptures and their teachings only has categorically unified in on Stotra by which it has qualitatively enriched.

Conclusion

Be it Pushpadanta or Tryaksha or any other saint who composed hymns to please their worshipped and beloved God, we are heartily grateful to them as their composition apart from being a religious text shine with brilliance in the galaxy of world literature. This comparative study on both the text can be modified more and more in so many aspects. But our try to begin the study of them together was really a challenging one because as it is said earlier one can never hope to completely understand either one of them. The study is still being continued and we hope to present more based on these two texts. It is sad for us that texts like ViAb are mostly kept hidden and not available for people to study. We hope our effort will make change in this effect and texts like ViAb will be of more interest to the ones who seek.

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⁵ The core scriptures of Vedic philosophy, composed of the Upanishadas, the Gita and Brahma-sutra