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The family books of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*: A general study

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Abstract

The *R̥gvedasamhitā* is the earliest scripture of the Vedic literature. *Maṇḍala* and *Aṣṭaka* are the two arrangements of the *R̥gvedic* contents. According to the *Maṇḍala* division, among the ten *maṇḍalas*, the *maṇḍalas* from second to seventh are the most ancient *ṛkmantras*, which are homogeneous in character. The *mantras* of these six *maṇḍalas*, the second to seventh *maṇḍalas* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* are called to be seen or revealed by the *mantradrāṣṭās* or seers of the same family. So, this portion of the whole *R̥gvedasamhitā* is known as the Family Books or *Vamśamaṇḍalas* or *Kulamaṇḍalas*. These *Vamśamaṇḍalas* have some interesting and unique characteristics which give us the information about the ancient hymns and *ṛṣis* of the Vedic literature. This research paper is a general study on the uniformity and significance of the hymns of these Family Books or *Vamśamaṇḍalas* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*.

Key words: homogeneous, *ṛgvedasamhitā*, uniformity, *vamśamaṇḍalas*

Introduction

The *R̥gvedasamhitā* is the earliest and most important compilation of the Vedic literature which is usually called the *R̥gveda*.¹ Basically, it is the collections of *Ṛks*, i.e. eulogical verses for praising the god revealed by the ancient *ṛṣis*. According to the *Caranavyūha* of *Śaunakācārya*, *R̥gveda* has eight divisions,² viz. i) *Śākala*, ii) *Bāṣkala*, iii) *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*, iv) *Aitareyāranyaka*, v) *Śāṅkhāyana*, vi) *Māṇḍūkā* vii) *Kauṣītakīyabrāhmaṇa* and viii) *Kauṣītakīyāranyaka*. On the other hand, different views are noticed about the recensions of *R̥gvedasamhitā*. Among these *Ācārya* *Śaunaka* has mentioned five *śākhās*, i.e. recensions of *R̥gvedasamhitā*, regarding the *Vedapārāyaṇa*, viz. *Śākala*, *Bāṣkala*, *Āśvalāyana*, *Śāṅkhyāyana* and *Māṇḍūkāyana*.³ At present, the *R̥gvedic* text of *Śākala-śākhā* only is read althroughout. There are 1028 hymns (including the eleven *Khilasūktas*) in the *R̥gvedasamhitā*. The contents of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* are divided into two, viz. *Aṣṭaka* and *Maṇḍala*. While the former one consists of *Aṣṭaka—Adhyāya—Varga* and the other is consisted of *Maṇḍala—Anuvāka—Sūkta*. Of these two divisions, the former is considered as mechanical and the latter is regarded as most popular in sacrificial purposes. According to the *Aṣṭaka* division, *R̥gvedasamhitā* consists of eight *Aṣṭakas*, sixty four *Adhyāyas* and two thousand six *Vargas*. Again, according to the *Maṇḍala*, it consists of ten *maṇḍalas*, eighty five *Anuvākas* and one thousand seventeen *Sūktas*. The *Maṇḍala* division is very popular as because the verses of this division are being seen applied in the Vedic sacrifices. Each *maṇḍala* contains *mantras* which are devoted to a particular hymn (*sūkta*) in praise of the ritual deities like *Agni*, *Indra*, *Varuṇa*, *Uṣas* etc. Because of this division into *maṇḍalas* etc., this earliest *Veda* is known as *Daśatayī* and also known as *Bahvr̥c* as containing many *ṛcas*.

The composition of the various hymns is attributed to the great seers or *ṛṣis* like *Madhucchandā*, *Gr̥tsamada*, *Viśvāmitra*, *Vāmadeva*, *Atri*, *Bharadvāja*, *Vasiṣṭha* etc. After an analysis of the *maṇḍalas* and the hymns of *R̥gvedasamhitā*, it is found that of these ten *maṇḍalas*, 2nd to 7th *maṇḍalas* are of one family of seers and have homogeneous character; these are called *Vamśa-Maṇḍalas* or *Kulamaṇḍalas*, i.e. Family Books. The eighth *maṇḍala* contains hymns which have been composed by two different families, i.e. *Kāṇva* and *Āṅgirasas*. The 9th *maṇḍala* consists of hymns in praise of one god, i.e. *Soma-Pavamāna*. These have been revealed by various seers. The hymns of *Maṇḍalas* first and tenth having

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equal number of hymns 191, i.e. which, contain miscellaneous contents composed by seers belonging to different families. Like the seers of the ninth *maṇḍala*, the first and tenth *maṇḍalas* have been revealed by different seers differently.

It is notable that, the subject-matter of the *Rgvedasamhitā* may be chiefly divided into three classes, viz. Religious hymns, Philosophical hymns and Secular hymns. The major portion of the *Rgvedasamhitā* is covered with the Religious hymns, where many hymns are dedicated to the deities, e.g. Indra, Agni, Soma etc. prominently. Again, the mysterious creation theory of the universe is depicted in the Philosophical hymns. Under these hymns the *Puruṣa-sūkta* (X.90), *Hiraṇyagarbha-sūkta* (X.121), *Nāsadīya-sūkta* (X.129) etc., are famous. In case of the Secular hymns, the divinities are seen to be the subjects of the hymns, such as, the Dialogue hymns, *Dānastuti*, the marriage hymn of Soma and *Sūryā* (X.85), the Frog-songs (VII.103), funeral-songs, riddles etc. The deities or subjects vary from one another.

About the family-books or *vaṁśamaṇḍalas*

As par the *maṇḍala* division of the *Daśatayī*, i.e. *Rgvedasamhitā* have some special arrangement in respect to the hymns or the *maṇḍalas*. The ṛkmantras from second to seventh *maṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā* are homogeneous in character and generally based on an ascending order in the number of hymns. It means that the *maṇḍalas* from 2nd to 7th of the *Rgvedasamhitā* are each ascribed to one *ṛṣi* or one family of ṛṣis. So, this portion of the whole *Rgvedasamhitā* is known as the *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* or *Kulamaṇḍalas* or Family Books. Again, these six books, i.e. *maṇḍalas* from 2nd to 7th are considered as the nucleus or central part of the *Rgvedasamhitā*, while the *maṇḍalas* 1st, 8th, 9th and 10th have some different principles. It is noteworthy that, each of *Vaṁśamaṇḍala* has the relation with a *ṛṣi* or common family members of the *ṛṣi*. Thus, the ṛṣis of these Family Books, i.e. second to seventh *maṇḍalas* of *Rgvedasamhitā* are viz., *Gr̥tsamada*, *Viśvāmitra*, *Vāmadeva*, *Atri*, *Bharadvāja* and *Vasiṣṭha* respectively and their descendants. The eighth *maṇḍala* is attributed to the ṛṣis *Kāṇva* and *Aṅgīrasa* family. Again, the whole ninth *maṇḍala* is made up of hymns addressed to Soma *Pavamāna* and its seers belong to different families. On the other hand, the first and tenth *maṇḍalas* each has 191 hymns, which are revealed by many seers of different families and they are placed in the beginning and end of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. Therefore, the general arrangements of the *maṇḍalas* from 2nd to 7th are placed as the Family Books or *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* in the middle part of the *Rgvedasamhitā*.

According to the Vedic tradition, the *mantradraṣṭā* ṛṣis of the ten *maṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā* are broadly classified into three groups, e.g. *Śatarcin*, *Kṣudrasūktam* or *Mahāsūktam* and *Madhyamā*.⁴ It implies that, the entire first *maṇḍala* of *Rgvedasamhitā* is known as *Śatarcina*. The first *ṛṣi* of this *maṇḍala* is *Madhucchandā*, the son of *ṛṣi* *Viśvāmitra*. The ṛṣis of tenth *maṇḍala* are called the *Kṣudrasūktam* or *Mahāsūktam* of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. Then the ṛṣis from 2nd to 9th *maṇḍalas* are regarded as the *Madhyamā* as placed in the middle part of *Rgvedasamhitā*. The ṛṣis of the six *Kulamaṇḍalas* (II-VII), viz. *Gr̥tsamada*, *Viśvāmitra*, *Vāmadeva*, *Atri*, *Bharadvāja* and *Vasiṣṭha* become first among the *Madhyamā* ṛṣis. Again, the eighth *maṇḍala* is considered as *Pragātha*. The ninth *maṇḍala* is also known as the *Soma-Pāvamānya*.

Although the main principle of the Family Books of the *Rgvedasamhitā* is the existence of a common *ṛṣi* family in each *maṇḍala*; yet there is a definite sequence of the hymns in each the *maṇḍala* itself. Thus, as a rule, the first group of

hymns in each *maṇḍala* is addressed to god *Agni*; the second to *Indra* and the rest to miscellaneous deities. Indeed, the *Āprī* hymns are also noticed in the *Agni-sūktas* of these *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas*. There are four *Āprī* sūktas⁵ in the *Kulamaṇḍalas*, i.e. 2nd to 7th *maṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. Besides the gods *Agni* and *Indra*, a few other common deities are also eulogized in the Family-Books, e.g. *Viśvadevas*, *Aśvins*, and *Savitṛ* etc. Again, the numbers of hymns of these *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* are seen to be increased, but it is not applicable in the case of the fourth and the sixth *maṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. The second *maṇḍala* has the smallest and the seventh has the greatest number of the *Rgvedic* hymns or sūktas. The Family Books of the *Rgvedasamhitā* have some interesting and special characteristics which give us the information about the ancient hymns and ṛṣis of the Vedic literature. To get the proper meaning of the mantras it is important to observe the uniform arrangements and salient features of *Rgvedic* text. As the major compilations of the *Rgvedasamhitā*, the Family Books provide some unique arrangement order among these six *maṇḍalas* (2nd to 7th *maṇḍalas*) of the *ṛṣi* families. Again some other special characteristics of the *Rgvedic* *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* also find expression in the revelations of the deities of the hymns. Along with the other hymns some remarkable mantras and sūktas are observed in these *Kulamaṇḍalas*, viz. *Gāyatrī mantra* (III.62.10), *Sajanīya-sūkta* (II.2), Dialogue-hymns (III.33), Frog-hymn or *Maṇḍūka-sūkta* (VII.103), *Mahāmṛtyuñjaya-mantra* (VII.59.12), *Dānastuti* (VI.27.8, VII.18.22-25) etc.

Significance of the family books

The Family Books have a great importance in the Vedic literature and tradition. Among the ten *maṇḍalas* of the *Daśatayī*, i.e. *Rgvedasamhitā*, the *maṇḍalas* from second to seventh are considered as the earliest portion from the chronological point of view. In general word, Family Books mean the hymns revealed by the particular group of families. Here, in this context of *Rgvedasamhitā*, the word *Kulamaṇḍala* or *Vaṁśamaṇḍala* denotes that families of ṛṣis who have revealed the hymns from second to seventh *maṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. These groups of *maṇḍalas* or Books are called the Family Books, i.e. the *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* of the *Rgvedasamhitā*, which have some uniform characteristics. The ṛṣis or seers of these *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* have maintained some special homogeneity in the compilation of their sūktas. Through the deep meditation and their visual-eye-view the ṛṣis of the *Rgvedasamhitā* have revealed the mantras and sūktas which carried the Vedic intellectual thoughts and knowledge. The six *Kulamaṇḍalas* (II-VII) of the *Rgvedasamhitā* are well known as, viz. *Gārtsamada Maṇḍala*, *Vaiśvāmitra Maṇḍala*, *Vāmadevya Maṇḍala*, *Ātreya Maṇḍala*, *Bhāradvāja Maṇḍala* and *Vasiṣṭha Maṇḍala* respectively. These Family Books or *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas* are named in respect of the prominent *ṛṣi* of that particular *maṇḍala* and the other ṛṣis are belonged to the families of them.

The term *Kulamaṇḍala* or *Vaṁśamaṇḍala* indicates the basic idea and significance of the Family Books of the *Rgvedasamhitā*. In Sanskrit, *Kula* or *Vaṁśa* means the family or the same clan. So, as the seers of the each *maṇḍala* from 2nd to 7th of the *Rgvedasamhitā* are belonged to same family; this group is classified into one entitled, i.e. Family Books or *Kulamaṇḍalas* or *Vaṁśamaṇḍalas*. It is also remarkable that, the arrangement of these *Kulamaṇḍalas* is based on an ascending order in the number of hymns. Though some

special gods are eulogized by the seers of each *maṇḍala* of the Family Books, but, in the beginning of the every Kulamaṇḍalas, the hymns of gods Agni and Indra must be represented. And thus, these special maṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* have been included under one class of R̥gvedic maṇḍalas. This group of maṇḍalas has covered a wide range of the entire *R̥gvedasamhitā*. It means, among the ten maṇḍalas, the six maṇḍalas are of same classification. It is also interestingly noticeable that, the six Vamśamaṇḍalas are observed according to a systematic order in the *R̥gvedasamhitā*. That is why this group of hymns has carried the significance of the oldest literary monument, *R̥gvedasamhitā*. Apart from the individual features of the Kulamaṇḍalas (II-VII), some unique characteristics are also seen. Some of the unique features are as follows-

A. Ṛṣis are from Homogeneous family-

The second *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* is included into the Family Books, which is prominently attributed to *ṛṣi* Gr̥tsamada. According to Vedic tradition, *ṛṣi* Gr̥tsamada and the ṛṣis belong to his family have revealed the hymns of the entire second *maṇḍala*. That is why; this *maṇḍala* is known as the Gārtsamada *maṇḍala* of the Family Books. The third *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gveda* is revealed by *ṛṣi* Viśvāmītra and the ṛṣis belong to his family. There are total ten ṛṣis in this *maṇḍala* have seen the different hymns. Among them, Viśvāmītra Gāthī, R̥sabha, Utkīla, Kata, Devarāta, Gāthī Kauśika and Prajāpati are directly belonged to the Vaiśvāmītra family and Kuśika Aiśīrathi is the predecessor of *ṛṣi* Viśvāmītra. Thus, the ṛṣis of this third *maṇḍala* are allied to one family and the entire Family Book is called the Vaiśvāmītra *maṇḍala*. Again, the fourth *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* is shown by the ṛṣis of Vāmadevya family. *Ṛṣi* Vāmadeva is the prominent one among them. The other ṛṣis of this Family-Book are Trasadasyu Paurukutsya and Purumilhājamīlha Sauhotra who have revealed only one and two hymns of this *maṇḍala* respectively. Here, *ṛṣi* Vāmadeva is the son of Gautama; and the other ṛṣis are belonged to the family of *ṛṣi* Vāmadeva. So, this *maṇḍala* is named as Vāmadevya *maṇḍala*. The fifth *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* is also included into the Kulamaṇḍalas. The hymns of this Family Book are revealed by *ṛṣi* Atri and the ṛṣis belong to his Vamśa, i.e. family. According to the Vedic tradition, there are 44 ṛṣis of this fifth *maṇḍala*. Among them, *ṛṣi* Atri is notable, who have revealed 13 hymns out of 85 hymns of this *maṇḍala*. And the other ṛṣis, viz. Budhagavṣṭhira, Kumāra, Vasuśruta, Gaya, Sutambhara, Sasa, Viśvavārā, Babhru, Śvāvāśva, Sadāpṛṇa, Viśvasāmā etc. belong to Ātreya family. As the entire ṛṣis belong to the family of *ṛṣi* Atri, so this Family Book is called the Ātreya *maṇḍala*. It is notable that among these 44 mantradraṣṭās of this *maṇḍala* Viśvavārā is the female *ṛṣi* called *ṛṣikā*. Among the ten maṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, the sixth *maṇḍala* is also considered as one of the Kulamaṇḍalas. *Ṛṣi* Bharadvāja is the prominent one and he was the son of Bṛhaspati. Among the 8 ṛṣis of these *maṇḍala*, Suhotra, Śunahotra, Nara, Garga, R̥jīśvā and Pāyu are belonged to the family of *ṛṣi* Bharadvāja while, Śamyā is also the son of Bṛhaspati. So, it can be said that the all ṛṣis of this sixth *maṇḍala* are related to the family of *ṛṣi* Bharadvāja. And, for this reason this Family Book of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* is termed as the Bhāradvāja *maṇḍala*. The ṛṣis of the seventh *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* are also closely connected with one family. They have expressed so many Vedic hymns and this Family-Book is regarded as the most remarkable one. The hymns of this *maṇḍala* are certified

to *ṛṣi* Vasiṣṭha and the ṛṣis belong to his family. Among the 104 hymns this *maṇḍala*, *ṛṣi* Vasiṣṭha has seen a major number of verses. Only four hymns of this Family Book are revealed by the two ṛṣis, viz. Śakti and Vasiṣṭhaputras. These two ṛṣis are the sons of *ṛṣi* Vasiṣṭha, the great seer of the ancient Vedic age.

From the above discussion of each Family Book or Vamśamaṇḍala of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, it is clearly understood that the ṛṣis of the six Family Books are homogeneous in character. These ṛṣis of each Family Book are related to each other. The homogeneous character of the R̥gvedic Ṛṣis signifies the importance of the Vamśamaṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*.

B. Arrangement of the Hymns

In the six Kulamaṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, a special feature on the arrangement of the R̥gvedic hymns can be noticed. In every Family Books we have observed that, the hymns of the god Agni comes first. After a few Agni sūktas, ṛṣis have compiled the hymns of god Indra. And then they praise the special gods in their particular *maṇḍala*. The god Agni is lauded at the very beginning of the sūktas of the each *maṇḍala* of the Family Books in the *R̥gvedasamhitā*.⁶ The god Agni is called the *Purohita* as stated in the first *mantra* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*. It means, god Agni has come first among all Vedic gods and so, Agni should be eulogized by the devotee at the very beginning of the starting work. Again, there may find the *Āprī* hymn in between the Agni sūktas of the four Kulamaṇḍalas, viz. 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th maṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*. The *Āprī* hymns are absent in the 4th and 6th maṇḍalas of the Vamśamaṇḍalas.

Thus, it is seen that, in each *maṇḍala* of the Vamśamaṇḍalas, the ṛṣis have used same arrangement to introduce the god Agni and Indra at the very beginning of each Kulamaṇḍalas. After that the ṛṣis have recited their special gods and invoke their praise. In addition, a few common gods, e.g. Viśvedevās, Savitā and Aśvinau etc., are interestingly praised by the ṛṣis of the Family Books in each of the six maṇḍalas.

C. Numbers of Hymns and Mantras

According to the Vedic tradition, the Kulamaṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā* are organized as per the number of hymns. As the core portion of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, the arrangement of the Vamśamaṇḍalas has been observed as it is based on an ascending order in the number of hymns of each *maṇḍala*. In every *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*, the ṛṣis belonging to that particular family have revealed. It is remarkable that, the arrangement of the each *maṇḍala* of the Vamśamaṇḍalas is based on the total numbers of the sūktas. So, the six Kulamaṇḍalas are placed according to their increasing *sūkta* numbers. The total numbers of hymns and mantras of the six Family Books of *R̥gvedasamhitā* are listed as follows-

Maṇḍalas	No. of Sūktas	No. of R̥ks
2 nd maṇḍala	43	429
3 rd maṇḍala	62	617
4 th maṇḍala	58	589
5 th maṇḍala	87	727
6 th maṇḍala	75	765
7 th maṇḍala	104	841

Regarding the arrangement of these Family Books it may be stated that, every following maṇḍalas have the lower hymns than the preceding maṇḍalas of the *R̥gvedasamhitā*. However, in a few cases, this arrangement of the hymns in the Family Books is seemed to be exceptional. It is found that the third

maṇḍala of ṛṣi Viśvāmītra have a large number of hymns than the fourth *maṇḍala* of ṛṣi Vāmadeva although the numbers of hymns of the third and fourth *maṇḍalas* are not following the rule of the accumulative, but according to the Vedic tradition this uniform significance of the Family-Books has been accepted. In simple word, the ṛṣis of the Kulamaṇḍalas have revealed the Vedic hymns in their Kulamaṇḍalas and followed the ascending order of the hymns.

Conclusion

According to the *maṇḍala* division of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, among the ten the six *maṇḍalas* are recognized as the Family Books or Vamśamaṇḍalas (*Ṛgvedasamhitā*, II-VII). These particular six Kulamaṇḍalas have some special characteristics in their arrangement and common salient feature. And as the core portion of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, the six Vamśamaṇḍalas have given information about the Vedic socio-cultural performances and the religious and philosophical thoughts of the *mantradrāṣṭā* ṛṣis. The ṛṣis of these six *maṇḍalas* are identical in character; it means that, the ṛṣis of each *maṇḍala* are belonged to same family and the hymns have also some uniformity. That is why these six *maṇḍalas* are called together Vamśamaṇḍalas, i.e. Family Books or Kulamaṇḍalas of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā*. Indeed, the family background of the *mantradrāṣṭā* ṛṣis of the Ṛgvedic hymns are also noticed in the six Family Books. The hymns of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* are revealed by several ṛṣis and ṛṣikās who have showed the eternal truth of Vedic thoughts and concepts. As the earliest Vedic tradition, the six Family Books of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* are the source of entire Vedic literature and culture.

To conclude, it can be said that, these six Kulamaṇḍalas or Ārṣamaṇḍalas of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* throws immense light on the personal history of the Vedic seers, which are of great value to the researchers in the field of Vedic studies.

End Notes

1. ṛcyate stūyate yayā sā ṛk/ tāḍṛśīnāmṛcām samūha eva ṛgvedah// cf., Tripathi, Brahmananda, *Vaidikavānmayasyetiḥāsa*, p., 85
2. tatra ṛgvedasyāṣṭau sthānāni bhavanti/ *Caranavyūha*, 1.4
3. a) eteṣām śākhāḥ pañca vidhā bhavanti/ Ibid., 1.7
b) ṛcām samūha ṛgvedastamabhyasya prayatnataḥ/ paṭhitaḥ śākalenāḍau caturbhistadantaram// sānkhyāśvalāyanau caiva māṇḍukā-bāṣkalāstathā/ bahvṛcā ṛṣayah sarve pañcaite hyekavedinaḥ// *Mahīdāsabhāṣya* on *Caranavyūha*
4. śatarcina ādye maṇḍale'ntye kṣhudrasūkta mahāsūktā mādhyaṃṣu madhyamā// cf., Mishra, Jagadish Chandra, *Vaidikavānmayasyetiḥāsa*, p., 87
5. RV., II.3, III.4, V.5 and VII.2.
6. agnimīle purohitam yajñasya devamṛtvijam/ hotāram ratnadhātamaḥ// *Ṛgvedasamhitā*, I.1.1

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