

The Poet and the Poetry in the R̥gveda

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गयाचरणत्रिपाठीमहाभागः ऋग्वेदसंहितामवलम्ब्य वेदकवीनां, तेषां मन्त्ररूपकवितायां विद्यमानानां काव्यधर्माणां विशदं व्याख्यानं सोदाहरणं प्रस्तौति। आदौ कविस्वरूपं स्त्रष्टृ-द्रष्टृ-मन्तृ-विज्ञातृ-रूपं ऋग्वेदे तत्र प्रोक्तं संगृह्य, काव्यस्वरूपञ्च कान्त्यात्मकं, प्रेरयितृ-बुद्ध्यात्मकं, कलात्मकं च विशदय्य, आन्तरं साक्षात्कारं, देवतानुग्रहरूपां शक्तिं च काव्यकारणत्वेन प्रदर्श्य, ऋग्वेदकवितायां गुणालङ्काररसभावादीनां निरूपणं कृत्वा यशआदीनां काव्यप्रयोजनानां प्रदर्शनं विधाय, तस्याः उपदेशरूपतां व्यवस्थापयति। निबन्धेनानेन अलङ्कारशास्त्रस्य स्रोतो विकासक्रमश्च विज्ञातुं शक्यते।

Among the ancient-most religious texts of literary character, the R̥gveda occupies the topmost place of pride, not only because of its spiritually inspired religious fevour and its sublime philosophy, but also for an unexcelled beauty of its poetry couched in a wonderfully well structured language with highly artistic literary expressions. The R̥ṣi-poet of the R̥gveda is an arrived sage and an accomplished poet rolled into one.

The Poet

Interrelationship between the poet and the gods

The spiritual preceptors of India have always underlined the importance of a direct experience of transcendental reality and have accepted it not only as the basic source but also the very substratum of all mundane reality. The Vedic poet is a R̥ṣi who perceives and directly experiences such a transcendental reality through his inner vision, a vision that transcends both time and space, with the result that he is capable of visualizing the mysteries of the gods and the universe and reveals them to us. His speech is revelation, revelation of the highest spiritual truth. For this unique capability, he is often equated with gods and so the gods with poets. “Our umbilical cord is with gods” (*asmākaṃ teṣu [deveṣu] nābhayḥ*) says the poet of RV 1.39.9. In RV

7.52.13 the poet exhorts the people to glorify and make obeisance to the brilliant group of Maruts who are ‘kavi” and ‘vedhasaḥ’ (creators) in their own right:

ये ऋष्या ऋष्टिविद्युतः कवयः सन्ति वेधसः।

तमृषे मारुतं गणं नमस्या रमया गिरा॥

God Agni has also been addressed as *kavi* (*kaviṃ samrājamatithiṃ janānām....*) because he is *jātavedas*, i.e. knows everyone who is born in the world, being present in their bodies.

The occasional use of the expression *kavi* (‘visionary’) for a poet in the Vedic hymns, a word which denotes the sense of a person capable of looking beyond time and space (*krāntadarśin*) and which is meant to be applied primarily and mainly for the Supreme Creator, underlines the importance of the creative activity of a poet in the minds of Vedic literati which was not considered to be lesser or lower in any respect than that of the creator.

Kavi: the creator

The following, relatively well known, sentence from the *Īśāvāsya-Upaniṣad* (=YV 40.8) stating that ‘the self-born, all-surrounding, wise and visionary [Creator] goes on creating perpetually the worldly objects in their proper form – as they ought to be’, has justifiably been understood as applicable to the literary activities of a poet as well:

कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयंभूः

याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान् व्यदधात् शाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः।

The expression ‘*vyadadhāt*’ (created) needs attention here. This is an activity which is connected with its agent *Vedhas*, the Creator, but which is also a homonym for poet. *Vedhas* is someone who combines in himself the elements of both knowledge and action. The poet also has both. He has thoughts, emotions, feelings and visions combined with the creative capability of expressing them in a nicely structured verbal form – form which conjures up and recreates the vision of the poet in the mind of the reader/listener. This capability to ‘create’ poetry, not common to all, is the quality which is termed as *Śakti* by Mammaṭa in his *Kāvya prakāśa* (I.3) and is considered to be a divine gift.

The idea of according an exalted status similar to that of the creator god comes down to the classical period where we meet with the following famous statement:

अपारे काव्यसंसारे कविरेकः प्रजापतिः।
यथास्मै रोचते विश्वं तथेदं परिकल्पते॥

Kavi and *Vedhas* are not the only expressions used for the Vedic poets. There are at least four more terms used for a Vedic poet which are Ṛṣi, Vipra, Sūri and Kāru.

Kavi: the divine visionary

Ṛṣi is a sage, a person endowed with Intuitive knowledge (prātibha-jñānavān); nothing is hidden from him. He is the one who is in direct touch with the supreme powers and receives inspirations from them.

Gods are the protectors of Ṛta (Cosmic order) which is the source of those laws (*dharmāṇi*) which govern and hold this universe. A Ṛṣi has intimate knowledge of these *dharmāṇi* which he propagates through his sayings. His words and spells have magical effect. Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra is capable of checking the flow of the rivers Vipāś and Śutudrī at their confluence so that the clan of Bharatas could wade through their beds and cross over to the other side (RV III.33).

Kavi: the inspired one

The word Vipra is derived from the root 'vepr-kampane', He is the one who gets emotionally charged, stirred up, moved. He is distinguished from others because of for his fervency and enthusiasm, has had experience of spiritual rapture, and enlightenment and is inspired to put his experience in words. A Ṛṣi could be a vipra, but a vipra is not necessarily a Ṛṣi (cf. *rṣiḥ ko vipra oḥate....*, RV 8.3.14).

Kavi: the enlightened one

Sūri is a knowledgeable and wise person, an enlightened one. The word is connected with the term 'svar' which means light - also the lighted space, the heaven (cf. the word Sūrya). He is mostly given to contemplation and meditation in his quest to discover the mysteries of the Universe (cf. *tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam, sadā paśyanti sūrayaḥ....* RV 1.22.16).

Kavi: the technician

Kāru (=the ‘maker’ from the root kṛ) is simply a ‘composer’, a skillful professional poet who can create poetry on any subject at the behest of his benefactor. The composer RV 9.121.3, declares himself as such (*kārur ahaṃ pitā bhiṣak...*). Sometimes the activity of such a poet is compared to the work of a craftsman or carpenter (*taṣṭā, tvaṣṭā*) who fashions a chariot out of wooden material, and as such these two words *taṣṭa* and *tvaṣṭā* also occur in the Ṛgveda in the sense of poet and the expression *sutaṣṭam* (well crafted) is often used as an adjective to a prayer or hymn in the sense of ‘well composed’.

The Composition (Poetry)

Synonyms of Poetry

A number of words and expressions occur in the Ṛgveda to denote poetic compositions, some of them are nouns, but many of them are adjectives used independently as nouns. I have spotted around 27 of the most commonly occurring expressions on a random checking of the text of the Ṛgveda which are listed below:

Sūktam, kāvyam, ṛk, arkaḥ, goḥ, Brahman, gīr (gīrah), dhīḥ (dhiyah), dhenā, suṣṭuti, stotram, stoma, mantrah, matiḥ (matayah), manman, manīṣā, sumnam, dyumnam, suṣasti, praṣasti, suvrkti, uktham, vaktvam, sukīrti, apas and dhenuḥ.

One may also add *vāc* to the list.

If one were to classify these terms into certain groups according to various aspects stressed in them, there would emerge roughly the following picture: Terms denoting activities or associated with aspects related to the under mentioned categories are listed in front of them:

Mystic, spiritual knowledge	: ब्रह्मन्, काव्यम् ।
Light, brilliance, consciousness	: ऋक्, अर्कः, गोः, द्युम्नम् ।
Intellect	: धीः, धेना, धेनुः ।
Mind	: मन्त्रः, [सु]मतिः, मनीषा, सुम्नम्, मन्मन् ।
Speech	: गीः, उक्थ, वक्त्वम्, सूक्तम् ।

Labor-intensive activity	: अपस् ।
Craftsmanship, form	: सुवृक्तिः, सुतष्टम्, अरंकृतम् ।

A short note on some of these terms may not be out of place here:

Poetry as supporting principle :

Brahman, derived from the root *br̥mh*, is 'inherently firm and supporting principle which sustains the world. It is also the fundamental power inherent in the holy word and the ritual'. In the latter sense it denotes the Vedic verses and the prayer in general (cf. *tat tvā yāmi brahmaṇā vandamānaḥ.... 1.24.11, yasyedaṃ brahma vardhanaṃ yasya somaḥ.... 2.12.14, etc.*)

As light :

The most commonly used word for Vedic verses is *Ṛk/Ṛcā* which originally means a 'streak or flash of light', 'a ray'. Very often is said to emanate in the highest heaven (cf. *ṛco akṣare parame vyoman...1.164.39*). A cognate word derived from the same root (*ṛc*) is *arkaḥ* which also means 'a small poetic composition,' 'a couplet' or so and later in the classical Sanskrit, it is used to denote the Sun. *Goḥ* has a twin meaning of 'cow' and 'ray', both – sometimes both meanings are intended (cf. *tā vāṃ vāstūni uśmasi gamadhyai, yatra gāvo bhūriśrīgā ayāsaḥ. RV. 1.154.6*). The word is preserved in the classical Sanskrit as well in such words as *Śītaguḥ* (=moon). *Dyumnā* is derived from the root *dyu* which means 'brilliance'. *Pradyumna* in the sense of 'dazzling' is quite a common word in Sanskrit.

As inspired thought :

The words which appear to be related to intellect like *dhīh*, *dhenā*, *dhenuḥ* etc. are to be understood in the sense of 'inspired vision' which is 'inspired thoughts' or 'thoughts full of reverence for the divinity'. Reverence and faith are the main contents of this group of words. The Avesto-Persian version of the Vedic *dhenā* (i.e. *dīn*) has acquired the meaning of 'religion' in general and is quite well known in colloquial language and Muslim names in India. The words coined from the root '*man*' to ponder, 'to think' like *mantra*, *manman* etc. denote the products of a mental set-up full of reverence for the deity. It may also mean that the

poem is a well thought out composition created after a long mental exercise. However the term *manīṣā* is perhaps separated from this group so far as it is not purely a mental exercise, but contains element of emotion and also inspiration (cf. *sato bandhum asati nir avindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā*, RV. 10.129.4).

As a craft :

The word *apas* meaning 'work' 'task' 'product' etc. is of Indo-European origin and is found in Latin as well in the form of *opus* (pl. *operā*, cf. *magnum opus* = great work). A Vedic poet often calls his poetry an *apas*, 'a creation' with which he implies that he has worked hard on its composition and form, even though the inspiration might have come from above. The one desirous of producing *apas* is *apasyu* in the Ṛgveda and the one performing mighty and heroic deeds is *svapas/svaphāḥ* (cf. RV 1.85.9). Careful and attractive handling of a poetic composition is expressed in the terms like *Suvṛkti* (Well pruned, trimmed, neat) and *sutaṣṭa* (Well fashioned, well chiseled out) etc.

As well-uttered word in praise of gods :

The element of speech is expressed most commonly in the terms like *sūktam* ('well uttered'), *uktham* and *vaktavam*, all derived from the root *vac* = to speak, whereas the idea of the poem being primarily a 'praise', a glorification of god, is expressed in a number of terms mostly derived from the root *stu*. Glorification of divinities in order to placate them or to make them grant favours is a common phenomenon in all religions. The nature of a *stotra* is also best suited to communicate the devotional and emotional outpourings of a worshiper to his deity.

Nature of Poetry

Righteous and truthful

According to the poets of the Ṛgveda, the first and the foremost characteristic of a good poetry is its being righteous and in accordance with the cosmic law or *Ṛta* and it should contain and propagate the truth (*satyam*). Sage Dīrghatamāḥ directs his nicely flowing outpourings born of *Ṛta* towards god Agni (RV 1.141.1):

यदीम् उपह्वरते साधते मतिर्ऋतस्य धेना अनयन्त सस्रुतः।

Only the poetry which contains Ṛta lights up the Universe and the poets who compose it, shine in the world (7.7.6) :

एते द्युम्नेभिर्विश्वमातिरन्त [मन्त्रं ये वारं नर्या अतक्षन् ।
प्र ये विशस्तिरन्त श्रोषमाणाः] आ ये मे दीधयन्तस्य ॥

The hundredfold inexhaustible treasure of truth is the primeval source, the father, of poetry (RV 3.26.9):

शतधारमुत्समक्षीयमाणं विपश्चितं पितरं वक्त्वानाम्।
... तं रोदसी पिपृतं सत्यवाचम्॥

Even the sun shines more brilliantly, if words full of Ṛta are addressed to it (10 .138.2):

अवर्धयो वनिनो अस्य दंससा शुशोच सूर्य ऋतजातया गिरा।

The word *sūnṛtam/sūnṛtā vāk* also occurs in the Ṛgveda (and Atharvaveda) and is usually understood to be an antonym of *anṛtam*. As such it yields the meanings of ‘that which corresponds to Ṛta, as well as of ‘nice’ and ‘pleasing’. In RV 3.31.2 Indra is said to dispel adversities through *sūnṛtā (vāk)* combined with *ṛta*:

प्र सूनृता दिशमानः ऋतेन दुरश्च विश्वा अवृणोद् अप स्वाः।

The shining goddess Uṣas is praised for attaining pleasing and beneficial speech (RV 1.92.7)

भास्वती नेत्री सूनृतानां दिवः स्तवे दुहिता गोतमेभिः।

One of the frequent requests of a poet unto his deity is to bless him with *sūnṛtā* speech: *so asmai sūnṛtām duhe* (AV 10.6.13)-

Taking cue from such Vedic references, poet Bhavabhūti in his *Uttararāmacaritam* (5.31) remarks that a *sūnṛtā Vāk* is known to fulfill all desires of a human being:

..... धेनुं धीरां सूनृतां वाचमाहुः ।

Needs inspiration from above :

The Ṛgvedic poet knows well that unless there is inspiration from above, poetry cannot take shape. No amount of mechanical effort would bring about good poetry. Therefore he prays gods, especially Brahmanaspati or Bṛhaspati (cf. RV. I. 18, the whole poem) to inspire him. Bṛhaspati not only inspires him but also reveals the first form of Vāc (perhaps *paśyantī* is meant, not *parā*) to him (RV 10.71.1):

बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं यत् प्रैरत नामधेयं दधानाः।

Only then the best of the thoughts of the Ṛṣi, which is also beneficial to the world, comes out of the cave of his heart (10.71.1cd):

यदेषां श्रेष्ठ यदरिप्रमासीत् प्रेणा तदेषां निहितं गुहाविः।

In another hymn (2.33.6) the poet declares that god Rudra has inspired him (*unmā mamand vriṣbho marutvān*) after he requested him to do so with an emotionally charged conscience (*tvakṣīyasā vayasā nādhamānam*). In fact, the poet asks for the favour of god himself, whom he is going to praise, to inspire him. Sage Agastya prays Aśvins to gift him with honeyed speech in order to be able to compose a nice hymn in their praise (RV I. 184.4)

अस्मे सा वां माध्वी रतिरस्तु स्तोमं हिनोतं मान्यस्य कारोः।

Poetry and visionary insight :

The Sūkta X.177 of the Ṛgveda deserves a special mention in this regards where this inner light of visionary insight is symbolically represented as *Pataṅga* which has the core meaning of “a flying object” and as such has later been used for a ‘bird’, ‘the sun’ or a ‘moth’. However in the present hymn it refers to the flight of poetic imagination. This ‘deity’ *Pataṅga* contains in himself the divinely inspired, shining speech which has its source in heaven where it is firmly established and well protected within the sphere of Ṛta (RV 10.177.2) :

पतंगो वाचं मनसा बिभर्ति तां गन्धर्वो अवदद् गर्भे अन्तः।

तां द्योतमानां स्वर्यं मनीषाम् ऋतस्य पदे कवयो नि पान्ति॥

“As soon as the *vipaścits* achieve this intuitive insight, the mysteries of the Supreme power start unfolding themselves to their hearts and their minds, the *kavis* start descending right up to the depth of the ocean and the *vedhasas* desire to reach the pinnacle of light” (X.177.1) :

पतङ्गमक्तमसुरस्य मायया हृदा पश्यन्ति मनसा विपश्चितः।
समुद्रे अन्तः कवयो विचक्षते मरीचीनां पदमिच्छन्ति वेधसः॥

That such an inner light emerging in the heart of a poet enables him to see and visualize everything in the heaven and earth is corroborated by Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra in the following verse (RV 3.26.8):

...हृदा मतिं ज्योतिरनुप्रजानन् ।
वर्षिष्ठं रत्नमकृत स्वधाभिरदिद् द्यावापृथिवी पर्यपश्यत् ॥

Dhīḥ : the inner light as source of poetry :

On closely looking at the meaning of the word *Dhīḥ*, it appears that it is the exceptional faculty of acquiring knowledge of transcendent truth or reality; the inner light. This is the reason why Uṣas, the goddess of light, is frequently requested to grant *Dhīḥ* to the poets (cf 7.79.5) and Savitṛ, another god connected with light, has been requested to channelize those *dhiyas* in the right direction (cf. the famous *Gāyatrīmantra* 3.62.10). Ṛṣi Nābhāka requests god Varuṇa to grant *dhīḥ*, wonderful ideas (*kratu*) and efficiency (*dakṣam*) to a budding poet, *śikṣamāṇasya*—one who has just started composing poetry, with which he perhaps means his own self (RV 8.42.3):

इमां धियं शिक्षमाणस्य देव क्रतुं दक्षं वरुण सं शिशाधि ।

The word *śikṣamāṇa* (=still learning) reminds us here of the ‘*kāvyañāśikṣayā abhyāsaḥ*’ of Mammaṭa (cf. *Kāvyaaprakāśa*, I.3) as well as the expression ‘*amandaścābhiyogaḥ*’ along with ‘*naisargikī pratibhā*’ and ‘*nirmalaṃ śrutam*’ (*naisargikī ca pratibhā śrutam ca bahu nirmalaṃ. amandaścābhiyogaḥ...*) as sources of poetry, where *pratibhā* or *śakti* can be equated with *dhiyaḥ*.

Not every attempt at writing a poetry or not every literary composition of even a *vipaścit* meets with the expected success. There is a complete hymn in the RV (I.18) starting with ‘*somānaṃ*

svaraṇaṃ kṛṇuhi brahmaṇaspate....’ in which poet Medhātithi prays to god Brahmaṇaspati to crown his poetic utterings with success:

यस्माद् ऋते न सिध्यति यज्ञो विपश्चितश्चन।
स धीनां योगमिन्वति॥ (RV 1.18.6)

Unbroken tradition of poetry

A Ṛgvedic poet is not only well aware of the long and unbroken tradition of the composition of poetry in his community, he is also proud of it. In the very first hymn of the Ṛgveda we hear the words:

अग्निः पूर्वोभिर्ऋषिभिरीड्यो नूतनैरुत...।

These are the words of Madhucchandasa who belongs to the lineage of Viśvāmitra. He is well aware of the contribution of his great ancestors, the chief priests of the Bharatas, whose poems are mostly collected in the third book of the Ṛgveda. He has perhaps done “Kāvya-jñā-sikṣayābhyāḥ” under the guidance of his parents. Poet Śaṃyu of Bṛhaspati gotra addressing Indra remarks (RV 6.44.13):

य पूर्व्याभिरुत नूतनाभिः गीर्भिर्वावृधे गृणतामृषीणाम्।

Although some poets like Agastya are modest to state that they are repeating what the veterans have also uttered (*asarji vāṃ sthvirā vedhasā gīḥ* RV 1.181.7), the others like Paruccheṣa entreat Indra that he ought to listen to a new composition by a new poet rather than to remain content with the poems of the old generation (RV I.131.6):

आ मे अस्य वेधसो नवीयसो मन्म श्रुधि नवीयसः।

Mark here the word *vedhas* which the ‘new’ (=young) poet uses for himself. It is this very word which is used later for the creator God Prajapati and justifies a close similarity between the two.

Language of poetry : Choice of words

We know that the language of poetry can neither be the colloquial dialect nor the language of prose. The Ṛgvedic poet is very fastidious and choosy about the words and expression that he uses in his poetry. As soon as he visualizes a truth, god

Bṛhaspati kindles up his linguistic faculty and suggest him an array of words out of what he makes a careful selection of most appropriate words and expressions leaving aside the rest, with the sieve of his mind as one does in the case of saktu (flour of parched gram and barely) which is cleaned by passing through a sieve (RV 10.71.1,2):

बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं यत् प्रैरत नामधेयं दधाना.....(1 ab)

सक्तुमिव तितउना पुनन्तो यत्र धीरा मनसा वाचमक्रत.....(2 ab)

A poem is to be 'gīrbhiḥ pariṣkṛtaḥ' as the poet of RV 10.135.7 says, the sage-like poets purify the sacrificial ingredients through their purified speech (RV 9, 86.4,20):

....ये त्वा मृजन्ति ऋषिषाण वेधसः (4 cd)

मनीषिभिः पवते पूव्यः कविः....(20 ab)

The inspired poems when cleaned and purified through [the sieve of] mind, flow out of the hearts of the Ṛṣi in the manner the streams of water gush forth or like the antelopes running madly when chased by a hunter (RV 4.58.6):

सम्यक् स्रवन्ति सरितो न धेना अन्तर्हृदा मनसा पूयमानाः।

एते अर्षन्त्यूर्मयो घृतस्य मृगा इव क्षिपणोरीषमाणाः॥

Attention is drawn here towards the beautiful expression 'waves of clarified butter' (*ūrmayo ghṛtasya*) used for poetry. According to the view of Vedic poets, the poetry should not only be refined, sophisticated and pure, but also butter-like smooth and soft. It is not the only place where the Vedic Ṛṣi uses the simile of butter to his poetic words. The '*ghṛtasnū girāḥ*' appears elsewhere too, e.g. in the following verse addressed to Ādityāḥ (RV 2.27.1):

इमा गिर आदित्येभ्यो घृतस्नूः सनाद् राजभ्यो जुह्वा जुहोमि।

The Kāvyaḡunas (merits of poetry)

The verse 3.1.8 makes mention of not only butter but also of honey in the context of a poetic composition. Poet Viśvāmitra remarks that when poets start glorifying Indra with their poetry, streams of honey and clarified butter start flowing:

श्चोतन्ति धारा मधुनो घृतस्य वृषा यत्र वावृधे काव्येन।

The verse 4.58.1 makes mention of not only butter but also of honey in the context of poetic composition:

समुद्रादूर्मिर्मधुमाँ उदारद् उपांशुना समममृतत्वामानट्।
घृतस्य नाम गुह्यं यदस्ति जिह्वा देवानाममृतस्य नाभिः॥

Butter and honey again feature in verse 43 of the 6th Sūkta of the 8th Maṇḍala, ascribed to poet Vatsa of Kaṇva's lineage who reminds Indra that in the past his forefather have composed poetry 'dripping with ghee and honey' in his praise:

इमां सुपूर्व्यां धियं मधोर्घृतस्य पिप्युषीम्।
कण्वा उक्थेन वावृधुः॥

In the above quoted verses likening the poetry with ghr̥ta and madhu, one may find the foreshadows of the poetic qualities (kāvyaguṇas) *saukumārya* and *mādhurya*, discovered later by Bhāmaha and dealt with him in detail.

Even the traces of the concept of *Ojas* in the sense of a 'vigorous and powerful construction of right words' (cf. 'tour de force' = 'feat of strength', forceful piece of art) – which is considered to be the 'life substance' (*jīvitam*) of the poetry by Daṇḍin (cf. *Kāvyādarśa* 1.8 : *ojaḥ samāsabhūyastvametat kāvyasya jīvitam*) is found to be mentioned as a desirable quality of poetry in the Ṛgveda, as, for example, in RV 8.12.4:

इमं स्तोममभिष्टये घृतं न पूतमद्रिवः।
येना नु सद्य ओजसा ववक्षिथ।

'Words purified as ghee passed through a strainer, spoken with vigour and vitality....'.

Also the *guṇa prasāda* (clarity, simplicity) of the later theoreticians of poetics is hinted at in such adjectives as *sumṛṣṭam* (well cleaned, smooth), *śukram* (brilliant) and *śvetam* (whit, clear, clean, unmuddled) used for poetry:

शुक्रवर्णाम् उदु नो यंसते धियम् (1.143.7)
प्रेमं वर्णम् अतिरच्छुक्रम् आसाम् (3.34.5)

स्मदेतया सुकीर्त्या अश्विना श्वेतया धिया,
वहेथे शुभ्र यावाना। (8.26.19)

Thus all three main qualities of good poetry (*mādhurya*, *ojas* and *prasāda*) highlighted by Mammaṭa (Kāvya prakāśa VIII.67) seem to have not only been known but also greatly valued by Vedic poets.

The Embellishments (Alaṅkāras) :

That the poetry, especially that which is to be directed towards gods, should be well-adorned, embellished (*supesalam*), not deficient or wanting (*akharvam*) in any respect and well composed (*sudhitam*) is also mentioned in the RV 7.32.13:

मन्त्रमखर्व सुधितं सुपेशलं दधात यज्ञियेषु आ।

The expression ‘*aram kṛtaḥ*’ (alaṅkṛtaḥ of later period) in the sense of ‘well arranged’ ‘proper’ ‘appropriate’ is met with often in the Ṛgveda, especially in the context of sacrifice, e.g. ‘*yamaḥ ha yajño gachatyagnidūto amkṛtaḥ*’ (10.14.13). The sense of properly arranged or ‘embellished’ is obviously also intended in RV 10.51.5.:

एहि मनुदेवयुर्यज्ञकामो अरंकृत्या तमसि क्षेप्यग्ने...।

The idea that a poem should be ‘well fashioned’ (*sutaṣṭa*), well formed and well arranged without any loose ends is quite common in the Ṛgveda as the following illustrations shall show:

इमा हि त्वा मतयः स्तोमतष्टा इन्द्र हवन्ते सख्यं जुषाणाः। (3.43.2)

इमं स्वस्मै हृद आ सुतष्टं मन्त्रं वोचेम कुविदस्य वेदत्। (2.35.2)

Should be free of blemishes (adoṣa) :

The desirability of poetry being flawless, without any blemishes (adoṣam) which is highly stressed upon by Mammaṭa and Bhojarāja in their respective works is also frequently found to be mentioned in the Ṛgveda, e.g. in the passage like ‘*anehasaḥ stubha indro duvasyati*’ (3.51.3) or in the statements like ‘one does not achieve any gains by bad poem/ bad praise : ‘*na duṣṭutī martyo vindate vasu*’ (7.32.2) or ‘it not considered good to utter a

blemished poem unto those who are munificent' (Indra is meant :
na duṣṭutirdraviṇodeṣu śasyate.)

Gains from poetry : fame and prosperity

The main worldly achievements of a literary composition for a poet, according to Mammaṭa, are fame and money: *kāvyaṃ yaśase arthakṛte* (*Kāvyaṃprakāśa* I.2). It looks like as if Mammaṭa has been inspired in his statement by the following words of the RV (I.31.8 ab) in which the poet Hiraṇyastūpa expresses the same desire unto god Agni:

त्वं नो अग्ने सनये धनानां यशसं कारुं कृणुहि स्तवानः ।

In RV I.9.7 Ṛṣi Madhucchandasa expresses a similar wish while addressing his prayer to Indra:

सं गोमद् इन्द्र वाजवद् अस्मे पृथुश्रवो बृहत्।
विश्वा युधेहि अक्षितम्॥

Bharadvāja also has the same desire which he wants to be fulfilled by Indra:

स नो वाजाय श्रवसे इषे च राये धेहि द्युमतः इन्द्र विप्रान्।

Another Kavi named Suparṇa wants Indra and Varuṇa to grant friendly nature without pride (*saumanasam adṛptam*) and prosperity (*rāyaspoṣa*) short of arrogance to his *yajamāna* but wishes progeny, prosperity and long life for himself (RV 8.59.7)

Advisory faculty of the poetry

The *prayojana* 'upadeśayuje' was also not lost sight of the Vedic poets. A number of verses of the RV contain directives and even injunctions about moral and social conduct. One of the beautiful verses of this kind is RV 5.47.1 by poet Pratiratha of Atri's clan addressed to Viśvedevāḥ. He compares his poetry (*manīṣā*) with the pleasing words of an old mother resounding in the ears of the daughter much later as if descending from heavens above or like the soft words of a beautiful young daughter calling out to her father at home:

प्रयुञ्जती दिव एति ब्रुवाणा मही माता दुहितुर्बोधयन्ती।
आ विवासन्ती युवतिर्मनीषा पितृभ्य आ सद्ने जोहुवाना॥

Among the instructions given directly to human beings, the best known example is perhaps the advice given to a gambler, and through him to all human beings (RV 10.34.13). Such instructions occurring in the Veda are considered as 'ādeśa' (command) in our Smṛti literature and are meant to be followed assiduously :

अक्षैर्मा दीव्यः कृषिमित् कृषस्व वित्ते रमस्व बहु मन्यमानः।

तत्र गावः कितव तत्र जाया..... ॥

“Don't indulge in gambling, till the land, be satisfied with you earn or get, considering it much. This will bring you wealth (lit. cows) and keep your wife satisfied.....”

Poetry : an emotive eloquence

The emotional aspect (bhāva-pakṣa) of the poetry has been highlighted in the poems of the Ṛgveda quite frequently and strongly. According to Vedic poets the poetry should come directly from the heart (*hr̥dā-taṣṭam*, composed from heart). This is a considered opinion of many a poet of the Ṛgveda. The element of emotional exuberance is important for good poetry. The poet of RV 6.16.47 (Bharadvāja) offers an oblation to god Agni in the form of a poem composed through his heart : *ā te agna ṛcā havir hr̥dā taṣṭam bharāmasi*.

The light of the excellent gem of the real poetry originates in heart (3.26.8):

हृदा मतिं ज्योतिरनु प्रजानन् वर्षिष्ठं रत्नमकृत स्वधाभिः।

Only when the poetry emanates from the heart of the poet, it is beautiful enough to touch the heart of listener and embrace him like a beloved embraces her lover:

परिष्वजन्ते जनयो यथा पतिं मर्यं न शुन्ध्युं मघवानमूतये।

This is one of the most beautiful depictions of the characteristics of good poetry that one can think of. Unless the poetry touches ones heart, it is not equisit and unless it comes from the heart of the poet, it cannot do so.

But it is not so easy to compose such a poetry, admits, at the same time, another poet (4.5.6) : *guruṃ bhāraṃ na manma....* ('It is a kind of great burden to create good poetry'). A literary critic of

classical period agrees with him fully and corroborates it using almost the same words : *aho bhāro mahān kaveḥ*.

Let me conclude with pointing out a fundamental difference between the views of Vedic poets and the literary critics regarding the nature and purpose of the poetry.

The highest aim of poetry, according to classical aestheticians is to immerse the reader/listener in the ocean of absolute bliss comparable to *brahmānanda*, the rapture which one experiences when one realizes the identity of his self with the supreme consciousness. For a Vedic poet *ānanda* or bliss is not a product or effect of poetry, but it's its very cause. Instead of *leading to ānanda*, the vedic poetry rather ensues or *originates from* the ecstasy of spiritual experience. A Vedic poet becomes eloquent and starts pouring out when he has visualized the supreme truth, seen that brilliant light (...*aganma jyotir uttamam*, 1.50.10) and has understood the mysteries of gods (...*aganma jyotir avidāma devān*, 8.43.3). The poetry of a Vedic seer is, therefore, the vocal expression of his spiritual experience under the inspiration of divinities who impel his *dhiyaḥ* (imaginative and creative faculty) and with whom he identifies himself in the state of divine elevation, so beautifully expressed by the sage Viśvāmitra in the famous Gāyatrī (3.62.10):

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥