CHAPTER - I

A BRIEF SURVEY OF STOTRA SĀHITYA

Stotra literature occupies an unique place in Sanskrit literature. The term Stotra may appear very simple but, a comprehensive study of the same reveals the unfathomable depth of knowledge and vision hidden in it. Stotras are not mere theological collections of epithets, but are also the sincere utterances of devotees and real pathway to the Supreme God. Stotra is found to be the earliest and the simplest pathway to God and its life is devotion. Thus Stotra is found to be an expression of deep devotion unto God.

Sanskrit literature has rather a big portion for Stotra literature, the quantity and quality of Stotras reveals its importance, thus stotras have been warp and woof in Sanskrit literature.

The word Stotra is derived from the root स्‍रु-स्तीति "to praise" with द्रव suffix in the sense of instrument.1

Stotras are described as emotional lyrics and Hindu poems by the noted authors like S.K.De and S.N.Dasgupta. V.S.Apte has given the meaning of the word Stotra to praise, eulogize, glorify, extol, (praise in song) or worship by hymns.2

The innermost sincere and God centred feelings of the devotee who stands dumbfounded before the God, are later on recollected in tranquility, and thus emerges a new wave of poetry known as Stotra. It generally includes six characteristics, salutation, blessing, authoritative statement, valour, splendour and prayer. It means that a sentence or a verse is called Stotra when its subject
matter has a reference either to salutation or to blessing or to authoritative statement or to valour of any popular personality or to splendour or to prayer. This is reflected in the following statement.

नमस्कारास्थापिश्च
सिद्धान्तोबितः पराक्रमः ।
विभूतिः प्रार्थनाः चैति
यद्विधं स्तोत्रलक्षणं ॥ ३

In all these characteristics an element of devotion is present which is one of the most easiest means to liberation. Madhvacarya defines *Bhakti* or devotion as "Devotion is the intense affection towards the Lord surpassing everything else, with the knowledge of His greatness; liberation is obtained only through such devotion and not otherwise".⁴

This *Bhakti* is described as ninefold in the *Bhāgavata purāṇa*, by Prahlada, one of the famous devotees of the Lord Viṣṇu, thus "To hear the names, praises and stories of Lord Viṣṇu and chant them, to remember Him, as well as His names and stories, to wait upon Him, to offer worship and salutations to Him, to dedicate one's action to Him, to cultivate friendship with Him and to offer one's own body as well as one's dependents and belongings to Him, if devotion marked by these nine features practised by a man can direct to Lord Viṣṇu".⁵

*Karma* (action), *Jñāna* (knowledge), and *Bhakti* (devotion), are the three paths ascribed to God-realisation, among which *Bhakti* is superior because of its generosity; the importance of this brought to light by innumerable Ākhyāyikās, stories in epics and *Vedic purāṇas*. There are so many instances showing that many ardent devotees have got relieved from worldly entanglements and attained liberation by their ardent devotion unto God. To mention some of them, Dhruva,
son of the king Uttānapāda, attained the foremost position in the form of north-star i.e. Dhruva-Nakṣatra, by his deep and sincere devotion to the Lord Viṣṇu.

Gajeṇdra, King of elephants and Draupadi, wife of the Pāṇḍavas etc., passed through great ordeals by praying to the supreme God. It is said that Māyūrabhaṭṭa a famous poet, got his leprosy disease cured by praying to the 'Sun God' with hundred verses which then was entitled as Sūryāśātaka.6

Such instances show that each and everyman can overcome all obstacles and obtain salvation by deep devotion unto supreme, which in fact is a key-element in stotra.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF STOTRAS IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE:

Stotra generally means, 'praise' or 'eulogy' of a deity and involving the expression of emotions in their natural form. Going a step ahead stotra is of the nature of spontaneous overflow of devotion, and it is the motive force to it. To the devotee worship is mandatory, but there are various modes of worship, viz. Material worship, Verbal worship and Mental worship. Of these three first two, Material worship and Verbal worship are expensive and they need man and money power; but, in the last i.e. Mental worship, a devotee ascends higher level and merges himself in the contemplation of God. In this sense, it is said that "among all the yajñās, the Japayajñā is the most simple and potent".7

It has been a general opinion that stotra literature has a limited scope. But this opinion loses its existence by a close perusal of the Sanskrit literature right from the Vedic age. The genius and genesis of stotra could be traced to the Rgveda, the earliest of the four Vedas and which is replete with devotional hymns.
The quantity of the stotras has been a living proof for their wider scope, if the scope is limited then it is hard to name it as a form of literature.

The Brāhmaṇas, the Āranyakas, the Upaniṣads contain number of stotras; this tradition then continued to Purāṇic literature and classical literature of Sanskrit. Even saint philosophers like Śankarācārya, Rāmānujaśārya and Madhvācārya etc., have written independent works in the field, making the form extensive as well as ramified.

So far as the nature of stotras is concerned it is observed that the stotras have developed into many varieties of Astaka, Śataka and Sahasranāma-vals. In stotras, the glorification of the qualities of the supreme God and of His deeds can be seen. By a close study of the stotras, we find that there are two main streams of the stotras, i.e. stotras of descriptive style and stotras of philosophical idea. Though stotra, the language of the heart has ample scope for description but at the end it culminates in philosophy.

Since stotra or prayer is the means to approach God, man began to recite the names of the God in the form of prayer. Stotra is the best means of spiritual evolution and the same aspect is accepted by noted modern philosophical thinkers. Dr. V. Raghavan says "The recitation of Divine names is the means of salvation, it being the earliest and the best suited for the present age, when higher spiritual qualifications are difficult of attainment owing to the greater pre-occupation of people with worldly activities".

According to Hegel "there are three paths for the common man to approach the supreme being namely, Art, Religion and Philosophy. Of these considering Religion, it is observed that, the philosophy of Religion is to infuse ethical excellences and to awaken the divine in the human beings. In this Godward
path, prayers and meditations have been the great instruments. For among the varied kinds of religious practices none is apparently so easy of performances and supposed to be sure in the yeilding of desired fruits, as the recital of religious hymns or hallowed names of Gods or Goddesses of religion. This no doubt accounts for the great hold that such recitals have on the temparament of theistic people and naturally therefore one of the most widely practised of religious acts. Probably coeval with the beginnings of religion is the recital of certain stotras composed by eminent seers of the old.\textsuperscript{9}

The whole Indian literature is replete with prayers, praises and psalms. It is also true that right from the vedic times stotra has continued to be a rich heritage to the present time in India. There is no exaggeration if it is said that India is called *Cradle of stotras*, or *Land of stotras*.

THE ORIGIN OF STOTRA SĀHITYA:

The idea of the supreme is the crowning feature of all human activities. This being the fact, man has been praising and eulogising the Higher power, with the idea of the supernatural in his mind. In this regard Bhattacharya opines, "man's entry into the world, launched him at once into a state of submission and surrender to the cosmic forces."\textsuperscript{10}

The Vedas have proclaimed the greatness of the supreme being, the entire Rgvedic literature is considered as stotra to some extent, as the hymns therein are nothing but eulogy of one or the other gods. So the *Stotra* literature is as old as Vedic literature.
To quote an authority from the *Rgveda*

अन्नमीठे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य वैवृत्तिकम् ।
होतानं रश्द्यात्मसः त ॥ (1-1-1)

"I magnify Agni the domestic priest, the divine ministrant of the sacrifice, the invoker, best bestower of treasure".

The words of K. Parameshwar Aithal support the above view "The Stotra has had a continuous history from the Vedas to modern times. The Stotra being the most prolific and popular among the branches of Sanskrit literature."\(^{11}\)

Most of the noted scholars rightly opine that the subject matter of *Rgveda* is the eulogy of different deities. On this point Dr. Ramakrishna Acharya writes;

ऋग्वेदस्य प्रमुखः विषयं विभिन्नवैवाणाम् स्तवनम् अस्ति ।
अवः वेदः देवसुतीत्ताम् एकं विशालं संग्रहं अस्ति ।
आभिः सुतित्तिः सूर्यमण्डलः प्रमुखः देवः अभिः इदः
वाचुः वथः महतः विद्यावस्तः सन्ति ॥

The whole *Rgveda* is an example of excellent devotional poetry, the body or subject of which is prayer of different innumerable deities.\(^{12}\)

Winternitz explaining the Vedic *saṁhitas*, describes *Saṁhitas* as a collection of hymns, prayers, incantations, benedictions, sacrificial formulas and litanies.\(^{13}\)

This point has also been dealt with by S.N. Dasgupta "The hymns of the *Rgveda* were almost all composed in praise of the Gods. The social and other materials are of secondary importance as these references had only to be mentioned incidentally in giving vent to their feelings and devotion to the God".\(^{14}\)

So, by considering all these opinions, it can be said that the Vedas are the prime sources and origin of *Stotra* literature. In the *Rgveda* among the
collections of prayers Agni, Vayu, Varuna, Indra, Marut and Rudra occupy predominant place, yet Agni has widest scope of all in the Rgveda.

There are some mantras of the Rgveda describing the glorified deeds of the particular deity; if so, how is it that they can be the stotras, usually a devotee invokes his istadevata by the way of glorifying the deeds thereof. Thus, the description of the deeds of any deity is nothing but stotra itself.

For instance-

इन्द्रसय नु वीयाणि प्रवोचं वानि प्रयमाणि वज्री |  
अह्नश्रिवन्धकपतर्क प्रवक्षणा अगीनतु पर्यतानाः || (1-7-32)

" I will now enumerate the valorous deeds of Indra, the wielder of the thunder bolt has achieved; he clove the cloud, he sent down the waters, he broke open away for the torrents of the mountain ".

Here, the seer explains Indra's heroic deeds yet this mantra is seen as a stotra. So Stotra literature owes its origin to the Vedas.

Further Vedic seers, saint poets, poet-philosophers etc., widened the field of Stotra literature by composing stotras containing rich poetic elements. From the foregoing discussions it can be declared that the Vedas are the fountain beads, the origin of Stotra literature.

CLASSIFICATION OF STOTRAS :

It may be said that on the basis of entire Stotra collection of the Rgveda various types of stotras like Aṣṭakas, Šatakās, Saptaśatīs, Pañcaśatīs, Sahasranāmās, Aṣṭottarasatanāmās, Laharīs, Tarāṅgās, Daṇḍakās, Nāmāvalīs, Gāthas, Suprabhātās, and Kavacavarmās etc., have come to light due to many poets, saints and philosophers. This part occupied a wider section in the
classical period. The word *Stotra*, meaning eulogy or praise of deity, has many synonyms like *Stoma, Stavana, Stava, Stuti, Nuti, Brahma, Udgita, Uktha, Śamsa, Savana, Mantra, Prārthanā, and Vandanā*. It is very hard to categorise the stotras of different elements, yet scholars have tried to classify them as under.

The entire *Stotra* literature can be broadly classified into *Kāmya* and *Akāmya*. In the *Kāmya* type of *stotra*, a devotee invokes the deity with desire or to have something from God. In the second type, devotee praises God to obtain His grace and nothing else. Mayurabhatṭa’s *Suryaśatakā* met with former one, where he has eulogized the Sun God to get rid of the disease.¹⁶

The *Durgāstuti*, occurring in the *Mahābhārata* is of *Akāmya* type because Arjuna asks earnestly for Her divine grace only.

The *Matsyapurāṇa* mentions, four types of *Stotras* namely *Dravya stotra, Vidhi stotra, Karma stotra* and *Abhijan stotra*.¹⁷

In this regard classification of *stotras* according to modern scholars too deserves mention. They also divide into four categories such as Ritualistic Prayer, Prayer on account of faith, prayer on account of needs and prayer for communion”.¹⁸

**THE PURPOSE OF STOTRAS:**

There is a well-known saying—

प्रयोजनं अनुदिश्य न मंदोःपि प्रवर्तति ।

when a man performs certain work he looks for its fruit. But really speaking, as Lord Kṛṣṇa declares an individual soul has the right to perform his duties but never to the acquisition of the fruits.
In the world of phenomena, the purpose of stotra is to obtain the things leading to happiness; in ultimate sense, stotra has its purpose in the attainment of salvation.

Though stotra comes under Kāvyā, the purpose of Kāvyā is different from that of the former.

As conceived by rhetoricians, Kāvyā or poetry is for name, fame, money, general awareness, removing inauspiciousness and pleasure of poetry, on the other hand stotra, having all above gains, in addition, it has two prime purposes i.e. grace of God and salvation i.e. final bliss, so purpose of stotra is not only different from but also quite higher than that of Kāvyā.

There are four types of worshippers as declared by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgīṭa:

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनां सुनुन्दा।
आतो सृष्टिपुरुषायं ज्ञानी च परतर्पर्यं। (VII-16)

"Four kinds of meritorious persons worship Me, O Arjuna. They are i) those who are in distress ii) those who are inquisitive to know Brahman iii) those who desire wealth and other objects and iv) those who are endowed with the knowledge of Brahman".

Of these four, the last one i.e. man of wisdom is regarded as the best. Because his mind is always concentrated on Brahman and his devotion is always unstinted. Therefore such devotee becomes exceedingly dearer to Me as he is nearer to Brahman.
In this connection it is observed that "For, the grace of God alone will create in man real aversion for the pleasure of this world and of the swarga, and will teach him, as Madhva-ārya and his commentator Jayatīrtha would put it, that an irresistible loving adoration of God is immeasurably superior to the position of miraculous powers which are capable of yeilding all desires".20

Thus it is evident from Lord Kṛṣṇa's declaration that a man or worshipper who has begun to know Brahman will definitely reach Him even after several births.

There are also some stotras pointing to the selflessness of worshipper. To quote the Bhāgavata purāṇa.

"May the universe be prosperous, may the wicked become gentle, may the creatures think of mutual welfare, may their minds ever cherish what is auspicious. May our hearts be ever immersed in selfless love for the Lord".21

THE STOTRA AND THE KĀVYA:

A comparative study of Stotra and of Kāvya is found essential in this connection. A cursery glance at the two forms of literatures enables one to make out that, Kāvya, is sophisticated and studded with theoretical principles. In the words of Winternitz- "Kāvya is perfectly polished poetical art".22 In contrast with this, stotra is generally known as an expression of worshippers devotion unto God, and it is not bound by rules or principles in connection with its form as in the case of Kāvya.

Stotra is pregnant with emotions in its natural form, sometimes poetical, but mostly mythological and philosophical; while Kāvya is subject to poetic principles and its verses are purely poetic in nature. Kāvya is artistic but stotra
Rhetoricians mention the characteristic features of Kāvya viz:

'Kāvya is the harmonious blend of sound and sense'. (Bhāmaha). I, 4

'Poetry consists of word and sense, both combined, free from faults, full of excellences and sometimes even without figures of speech. (Mammata) I. 5

'Poetry is the constitution of words which lead to effective sense: (Jagannātha.)

A sentence full of sentiment is poetry'. (Viswanāth) I. 3

A word and its meaning, devoid of dosas, full of gunas, and alaṅkāras are poetry. (Hemachandra) I. 11

Though these definitions differ on some minute details, they aim at formulating certain general characteristics feature of Kāvya.

Kāvya contains appreciation and criticism. It is usually based on Itihāsa, Purāṇa or some time on poetic imaginations: whereas Stotra, is based on the scriptural texts, epics and mythological works.

The subject of Kāvya may be the description of characters, Sunrise, Sunset, Rivers, the Sea of nature and of its phenomena and love or separation. As for the subject matter of Stotra there is a glorification of deities and seeking some kind of prosperity from them.

Some similarities are found in Kāvya and Stotra, But Kāvya is classified
as prose, poetry and śāmpu. *Stotra* also appears both in the form of prose and poetry and also in the form of śāmpu, as found for instance in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.*

Then as regards importance of these two forms, *Kāvya* is literary and it appeals to learned men, since it is embellished with Alāṅkāras, Gunās and Rasās. It provides delight to *Sahṛḍaḍaya*, a sensitive heart. *Stotra* has appealing quality to both *Sahṛḍaḍaya* and worshipper. It possesses a religious instinct of man as well.

*Stotra* is often music-oriented literature whereas *Kāvya* may or may not be so. From the above observation, it can be said that there are similar and dissimilar qualities in these two forms *Kāvya* and *Stotra*. However, an instance may be given here to witness, the similar qualities thereof.

असितशिरिसंभ स्वातकजाल सिद्धुपात्रे
मुस्तकवर्षाखा लेखनी पत्रमूर्ठि ।
लिखति यदि गृहीत्वा शारदा सर्वकालं
तदपि तव गुणानापीश पारं न याति ॥

"If the Goddess of learning were to write eternally, having the biggest branch of the celestial tree for her pen, the whole earth for paper, the blue mountain for ink, and the ocean for the vessel thereof, even then, O lord Thy attributes cannot be fully described." 24

This devotional song is in artistic way as it uses *Atiśayokti* figure and emphasizes the greatness of God.

In each and every *Kāvya*, there must be benedictory verse where it is the very basic element of *stotra*. The famous *Kāvyas* like *Raghuvaṃśam*, *Kumārasambhavam*, *Kīrātārjunīyam* and *Śisupālavadham* begin with an eulogy of Viṣṇu, Brahma, Śiva and of Krṣṇa respectively.
VEDIC PRAYERS:

As it is seen earlier, the Vedas are the sources for the stotras since those sacred texts are the first and oldest literature of the universe. Bhattacharya opines "the first literature of man is to be found in the hymns he sang spontaneously to his God".  

The origination of Stotra can be traced to the Rgveda, the earliest of the four vedas, as the very term शब्द denotes adoration or eulogy. The seers in the upper stage of devotion have brought to light the divine radiance in poetry. There are many in number which support its origin of Stotras. The very first hymn of Rgveda deals with an adoration to Agni.

अग्निमीले पुजोहिति यज्ञस्य देवमूर्तिविजं ।
होतारं रत्नाधातमयम् ।

"I praise Agni, the chief priest of the sacrifice, the bright one, the invoking priest, the greatest giver of rewards".

A study of these Vedic prayers reveals that they are not ornamented as in later texts. Another instance that follows is also in a similar type where Agni is invoked;

अग्ने नय सुपत्ता राये अमानू
विश्वानि देव चयुनानि विद्वान् ।
युयोध्यमानसुहुराणपेनो
पूविषां ते नमुक्षिं विधेयम् ।

"O Agni, lead us on to beatitude by an auspicious path; O God who know all things, keep far from us the evil, we shall offer you the fullest praise". (Rgveda I 189.1)

But, there are also some mantras showing poetic excellences. A few hymns
can be quoted to witness the poetic features of stotras.

\[ \text{इगा जुझाना युभचा नमोभिः}
\text{प्रतिस्थों च सरस्वति जुषभव ।}
\text{तद्र शर्षवृं प्रियतमे दधाना}
\text{उप स्थे भाव्य शरणं न बर्सम् ।। (RV VII 95.5)}\]

"Those offerings have ye made with adoration say this Saraswati and accept our praises placing it under your dear protection, may we approach you as a tree for shelter".

Here, Goddess Saraswati is invoked for protection, suggestively through the simile of a tree.

\[ \text{आ पुत्रास्ता न मातरं विप्रृत्ताः}
\text{सानी देवास्तों बहुविश्वत सवन्तु ।}
\text{आ विन्यानि विद्यामत्तव्ये मा}
\text{नो देवताता मृदक्षं ।।} \]

"Like babes in arms reposing on their mother, let us, Gods, sit upon the grass summit".\(^{28}\)

The above hymn, unto Viṣvedevās reveals how the seers invoke the deity, like a child held in the mother’s arms.

\[ \text{स नं विशैव सूनवस्ते सूपस्मो भव ।}
\text{स च स्वा नं स्वस्त्ये ।।} \]

"Be to us of easy approach, even as a father to his son, Agni, be with us for our weat". \(^{29}\)

Here one can say that upama being the basis of all alaṅkāras has been copiously made use of in the Rgveda. In the above hymn, the deity, Agni is compared to father, who always thinks of the well being of his son.
"Agni, I deem my father and my kinsmen, count Him my brother and my friend forever, I honour as the face of lofty Agni in heaven the bright and holy light of Surya. This *Rgvedic* hymn illustrates that how God is made nearer to the devotee by showing phenomenal relation with the God, with the words like *Pitṛ, Bhrātr* etc., such that there is no doubt of acquiring God's favour. The deity Agni, here is termed as father, mother, friend, brother etc., and is invoked as the nearest and dearest. This is one of the characteristic features of *Vedic Stotra*.

The purpose of Vedic seers is to acquire universal prosperity and well-being of all. This is evidenced in the following hymn.

"O Gods, may we hear with our ears, what is auspicious. O ye adorable ones, may we see with our eyes, what is auspicious. May we sing praises to ye and enjoy with strong limbs and body the life allotted to us by the Gods." So Vedic prayers are not only meant for asking worldly pleasures but also for universal peace and prosperity of the entire cosmos. This points to their sense of patriotism.

In a similar way, the *Yajurveda* is also a very important text from the point
of covering the basic literature of stotras. There are many hymns extolling the deities like Śri, Durga, Sūrya and Nārāyaṇa. These Yajurvedic stotras are famous for their simple prose style. Here is a Durga hymn:

जातवेदसे सुनवाम सोम
मारातीलो निधाति वेदश ।
सन्धि पर्षदिति दुर्गाणि विश्वा
नावेच सिन्हुं दुरितालयनिः।।

The seer praises mother Goddess Durga for solace and protection. In the Nārāyaṇa hymn, Nārāyaṇa is eulogized in glowing but simple terms and in rhythmic way;

सहस्रशीर्ष देवं विश्वाशं विश्ववश्मयुवम् ।
विश्वं नारायणं देवमध्यं पर्यं पदम् ।। (Nārāyaṇa Sūkta)

"We contemplate on that cosmic form with infinite heads, infinite eyes the effulgent, the substratum of universal well-being, Lord Nārāyaṇa, the imperishable, supreme being the highest abode of knowers".

Mention may be made of the Śrisūkta which is in extolment of the Goddess of wealth as the supreme mother in a series of epithets.

हिरण्यवर्णा हरिणाः युवर्णजललक्षाम् ।
चन्द्रः हिरण्याः लक्षीं जातवेदो न आवह ।।
अश्वपुर्णा रथमध्या हस्तिनावप्रबोधिनीम्
श्रीयं देविपुष्पक्षे श्रीमिद्विष जुष्पताम् ।। (Śri Sūkta)

"O Lord Agni, of the Vedic origin grace me with the manifestation of the all graceful Goddess of wealth with golden effulgence, wearing gold and silver garlands causing bliss for the whole world like the Moon and who is the very personification of prosperity".
Here, Goddess Śri is eulogized as the supreme. The devotee seeks refuge at the lotus feet of Goddess Śri as she is the embodiment of saving grace. Hence she has been extolled Īśvarī, the main principle behind cosmic energy.

The next *mantra* is the collection of hundred Udgīthās in prose taken from the *Krṣṇayajurveda* namely *Śatarūḍriya*. A single instance will bring epithets couched in rhythmic prose and spirit of devotion-

\[
\text{नमः शम्पवे च मयोभवे च}
\]
\[
\text{नमः शंकरायच नमस्करायच ।}
\]
\[
\text{नमः शिवाय च शिवतराय च}
\]
\[
\text{नमः पार्याय च चावर्याय च ।।}
\]

(वाजसनेि, माध्यमिन, शुल्कयजुर्वेदः 16-41,42)

"Salutations to the bestower of happiness and well-being; salutations to the promoter of the good and auspiciousness; salutations to the bestower of bliss and still greater bliss, salutations to thee O Lord, who art beyond the sea of relative existence and also in the midst of it".

A group of epithets have been arranged in two sections namely *Namaka* and *Camaka* the frequent repetition of the word ‘*Namah*’ is the charm of the typical *stotra* style and it reveals the intensity of sincere deep devotion therein.

The example of *Camaka* is as follows-

\[
\text{शंघमे मयशचमे प्रियं चमेृनुकामशचमे कामशचमे}
\]
\[
\text{शीमनसचमे प्रदृश्च चमे श्रेिशचमे ।। (शुक्ल यजुर्वेदः 18-8)}
\]

Here, one can note the devotee’s desire to imbibe all divine qualities within himself. It is note worthy that *Śatarūḍriya* serves the model for the composition of *Sahasranāmāvalis*, in the later period. Since the Yajurveda is the Veda dealing with *Yajñas*, *stotras* gained new colour under ritualistic setting.
A.C. Bose opines "Being the great public institution, the yajña developed complicated rituals that added to the attractiveness of the ceremonial side of prayer".\(^\text{32}\)

The next Veda in order is the Sāmaveda, where in the Rgvedic hymns have been set to melody of music. Vedic seers desire to eulogize the supreme being through music, as it adds charm and foundation to devotion. When stotras are set to melody and music, they can reach larger sections of the mankind, since music holds a powerful sway over human minds.

Here is a hymn from the Sāmaveda where the poet-seer sings out of fullness of heart as-

\[
\text{sambha vishva ojasam pahl}
\text{nibyo y akh jurvi dhirjanaanam} \ 1
\text{s puvrno nute jignaib}
\text{tan varjinaru vaahut ekdhu} \ 1
\]

"Come together, you all with power of spirit, to the Lord of heaven, who is the only one, the quest of the people. He the ancient desires come to the new, to Him all the pathways turn, really, He is one".\(^\text{33}\)

The above mantra indicated the collective worship which is the real and universal spirit of the Vedic prayers.

Further, in the Atharvaveda, there is a rich variety of stotras but the nature of stotra in the Atharvaveda is not in that appreciable degree as in that of Rgveda and Yajurveda. However, there are also references to genuine stotras like the Pavamānasūkta\(^\text{34}\), Prthivi Sūkta\(^\text{35}\), and Parabrahman Stūṭi\(^\text{36}\).

The Pavamānasūkta is a kind of mystic hymn with the refrain लैं सहस्रधारण पुनातुमां \ The Pavamānasūkta is the only sūkta which contains more number of
hymns in adoration to the deity Pavamāna.

*Prthivi sūkta* is significant for tender sentiment and it tells us that the earth is the mother goddess. To quote;

\begin{vsc}
ततं मध्यं पृथिवी यशं नम्यं
यात्र ऊर्जस्वतं संबभुवः।
ता सुनो श्रेहनामिः नां पावस्व माता पुष्पिः पुष्पोऽहि पृथिव्याः
पर्ज्यां पिता स उत्त पिपुः।
\end{vsc}

"That middle region, naval where upon beings are nourished, O mother earth protect us and give us happiness, purify your children we are sons to you, and you are mother to all, let father Varuṇa protect us".

This *mantra* reveals the physical as well as metaphysical element of the hymn. According to Sāyaṇācārya this sūkta has various applications viz: *Puṣṭi Karma, Kṛṣi karma* for the attainment of food, wealth and protection. Hence vedic poets pray ardently for her grace. Thus the Vedic prayers present a variety of metaphysical, religious and ritualistic aspects of life. In his *Nirukta*, Yāska deals with the above subject. The survey of Vedic prayers presented earlier shows how Vedic prayers radiate universal knowledge and at the same time universal love.

Next to four Vedas, *Brāhmanās* and *Āranyakās* have mainly deal with rituals.

**UPANIṢADIC PRAYERS:**

It is very much interesting to note that, the upaniṣads though profound philosophical treatises contain *stotras* with blooming devotion. The nature of God described in the Vedas is understood by the terms like सदृ, धितु, आनन्द in
the upaniṣads. The supreme being according to upaniṣads is Ananta, Aksara, Antaryāmin, Madhu, Ānand, Rasa, Īśa, Jyoti, Ātman, Brahman, Amṛta, Paramapūrūṣa, Parabrahma, Ajasrajyoti, Tat and so on. 39

There is a reference to what may be called stotras addressed to the supreme cosmic self under different names as mentioned above. Here is a mantra in which upaniṣadic prayer can be discerned:

अणोरणियान् महतोमहीयान्
आत्मास्यजन्तो मनिहितं गुहायां ।
तमक्रुष्ण पश्यति चौत्सोको
धातुं प्रसादान्चहिन्मात्मानं । ।

"Desirous of emancipation, I seek refuge in that effulgent being whose light reveals the knowledge of Ātman, who first creates the cosmic soul and delivers him to the supreme knowledge." 40

In the above mantra, there is the culmination of devotion and wisdom on a metaphysical basis. Since upaniṣadic prayers are mystic poems of the Absolute. The following specimen shows exoteric beauty of the upaniṣadic prayer.

"The self, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the heart of this creature. A man who is free from desires and free from grief sees the majesty of the self by the grace of the creator." 41

Here the seer prays to the supreme with the terms Anōraniyān and quite opposite Mahatōmahīyan. This mantra represents the typical stotra style.

The shortest of the upaniṣads, Īśāvāsyam āpyanṣad contains eighteen
mantras; among those mantras seventeenth and eighteenth are identified as prayers or stotras.

Commenting on the above mantra Madhvācārya tells that the devotee is praying to Lord Viṣṇu symbolised as Om, Praṇava mantra. The concluding mantra of the Īsāvāsa upaniṣad, runs thus;

अग्ने नयं सुपुषा राये अस्वानुः
विश्वासि देव बघुनामि विद्यानुः
युयोध्यस्मजुदूराणमेनो
भूपितां ते नम उक्ति विशेष

"O Agni, direct us on a good path or devayāna for the attainment of salvation, O God, you know our knowledge, take away from us the degrading sin. In a bid to offer thee best salutations, we utter the word Namah.

So, in the above mantra a devotee salutes the supreme for the utmost goal of life, salvation, because knowledge without Bhakti is nothing more than the knowledge of God but liberation is only through His grace, that is attained by pure, sincere and deep devotion unto Him. Dr. K.B. Archak opines " For knowledge alone is not a guarantee for liberation. It leads to divine vision and God grants His grace for the attainment of salvation. The present mantra shows how an enlightened one should pray to God for His grace after Sākṣātkaṇa.

There are other instances also from the Brhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya upaniṣads which reflect stotra elements. It is worth while to note that the later upaniṣads contain adoration to divinities like Nṛṣimha in Nṛsimhatāpanypaniṣad, Rāma in Rāmatapanyupaniṣad, Viṣṇu in Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad. Thus the theistic upaniṣads like Śvetāsvatara, katha, Muṇḍaka, Brhadāraṇyaka, Kauśitaki,
Chāndogya, Nārāyaṇa etc., contain many genuine Stotras, so it is said that "the upaniṣadic doctrine of an impersonal God was fused with the devotional worship of the personal-God, which almost led to revolutionary changes".  

**EPIC PERIOD:**

Coming to epics, the Indian cultural heritage can be understood by two great epics of India viz, The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, two noteworthy instances of stotras are found namely Ādityahṛdayam and Rāmastuti.46

Those stotras are composed in the Anuśṭubh metre. The Ādityahṛdaya containing glorious epithets of the Surya God can be understood as a descriptive stotra. One of the examples from the same runs as follows:

```
नमस् पूजाय गिरये पश्चिमाने नमस् 

नमस् प्रसिद्धार्थे विनिधिष्ठते नमस् 

नमस् सहस्राणि आविष्कार नमस् नमस् 
```

"Salutations to the lord of the eastern as well as of the western mounts, salutations to the lord of the luminaries and the lord of the day; salutations to thee, bestower of victory and beautitude. Salutations to thee, possessor of seven steeds; salutations to the thousand rayed Sun, salutations. (Rāmāyaṇa VI 105,16,17)

The above quoted verses remind of Namaka style in the Rudra hymn occurring in the Kṛṣṇayajurveda. The repetition of the term Namah exhibits the typical style of stotra.

It is not superfluous to say that some portions of the Rāmāyaṇa possess
the features of stotra as they deal with eulogy of Lord Rāma. For instance, the stuti of Rāma in the Yuddhkāṇḍa where Rāma is glorified as an incarnation of Lord-Visṇu. 47

This is also purely descriptive in nature. The below quoted example shows peculiar features of stotra related to Vedic stotras.

"Thou art the great bull with thousand horns, the very essence of the Vedas, with thousand faces, thou art the maker of the three worlds, the self existant one, Thou art manifest in all directions, in the sky as well as in rivers and mountains. Thou art the most glorious cosmic being with innumerable feet, heads, and eyes. 48

In last two lines of the above stotra Rāma is described as the All-pervading supreme-being. This resemblance the Puruṣaśūktā occurring in the Ṛgveda. All the deities beseech Rāma for His protection from demons. 49 Rāvaṇa's praying Lord Śiva may also be considered as stotra where he offers flowers and holy sandal paste to Śiva. 50

The Mahābhārata, next epic in order, supplies good many specimens of stotras of the highest enlightenment such as Durgāstotra 51, Nārāyaṇa stotra, 52 Jitānte stotra, 53 Viṣṇuṣahasranāma 54, and Viṣvarūpadarśana 55.

Among these Viṣṇuṣahasranāma, suggests prayer of Lord Viṣṇu with thousand epithets. Each word representing His epithet in this stotra, is very significant so that it can be interpreted in different ways. It is said Madhvācārya the foremost propounder of Dvaita school of vedanta has explained hundred
heating the whole universe with Thy radiance".

And similarly,

\[ \text{Bhagavadgita 11.43-44} \]

"Thou art the father of all things, animate and inanimate, Thou art the great sage and teacher of the universe and worthy to be adored by all. There is none like unto thee, who then can there be in this world superior to thee, O Being of unequalled glory".

Here, the devotee, addresses God as his father, friend, and beloved. And thus the intimacy between the deity and the devotee is indicated as the real spirit of the Stotras.

The following portions of Jitānte stotra and of Durgā stotra reveal devotional content in a beautiful language;

\[ \text{Jitānte stotra} \]

\[ \text{Durgā stotra} \]

"Nothing is beyond Thy ken, Thou art not directly perceived by any. To thee nothing is impossible of realisation and none has realised Thee".\[58\]

In the above instance, there is glorification of the supreme being as Omnipotent and Omniscient in a beautiful rhythmic language. The following extract from Durgā stotra contains the spirit of devotion;

\[ \text{Durgā stotra} \]

\[ \text{Jitānte stotra} \]
As has been observed, the Stotra portion in the Mahābhārata takes new dimension and is developed as sahasraṇāmā, covering various aspects of Bhakti. So the Mahābhārata marks the advancement in the thought of the Stotra literature.

STOTRAS IN THE PURĀNIC LITERATURE:

The vast purānic literature has a predominant role to play in the development of stotras. Purāṇas are the rich mines of stotras, being solely theological collections of sacred epithets. The nature and content of stotras in the purāṇas do not differ much from each other, as their motive is faith in devotion. Some of the purāṇas containing stotras are Bhagavatapurāṇa,60 Mārkandeyapurāṇa,61 Viṣṇupurāṇa,62 Skandapurāṇa,63 Padmapurāṇa,64 Brahmapurāṇa,65 Brahmvāivartapurāṇa,66 Bhaviṣyottarapurāṇa,67 Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa,68 and Agnipurāṇa.69

In the whole of purānic literature the Bhagavata purāṇa, has been the most popular for its high poetic excellence and sublime devotion.

विषयलाभयात् व्यालरायात् ्वर्षमार्गतात् वैमहुतानलात्।
वृषभप्राप्यादि विश्वतोमुखादि क्रष्णेः ते वर्ष रक्षितामुः।।

Here, Gopikās asking for grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa pray thus; "O lord, we have been saved again and again from the poisonous water, from demon-serpent, from fire, from the demon-bull from fears of worldly existence".70

This verse is a beautiful example of rhythmic sound with a current of deep devotion. It is an instance of Cchekāṇuprāsa. Another extract of Prahlada's prayer deserves mention here.
O lord, who art kind to the helpless, terribly afraid am I of the unbearable and dreadful woe that over takes those who turn round and round in the wheel of existence. Bound though I be by the consequences of my actions, O most glorious one, when shalt thou, being propitious, recall me unto thy blessed feet that bestow salvation and protection?  

This verse speaks of request for emancipation of the devotee from the worldly existence. Further, some more examples of stotras are quoted to clarify the point that, purānas are the mines of stotras.

This hymn giving happiness and salvation should always be muttered. There is no doubt that due to the grace of Viṣṇu a man would be equipped with every thing.

The above quoted two examples from the biggest among purānas i.e. the Padmapurāṇa, informs that, Lord Nārāyaṇa is the supreme and by Him only one can obtain happiness and the highest goal, final bliss, salvation.

In the Vāmana purāṇa, there are as many as twentyfive stotras about which
Krishnamani Tripathi opines,

"बामने विविधानि पञ्चविषिणि स्तोत्राणि सन्ति। तत्र द्वादश स्तोत्राणि
विष्णुसबन्धीनि सन्ति। यानि भगवतो विष्णूः विभिन्न वैशिश्च्यं बोधयति।
अठं स्तोत्राणि सन्ति आशुतोषस्य भगवतः शिवस्य स्वरूप्यम्यज्ञकानि।
चतुर्थी देवी पार्वती - सरस्वती - कालाद्यिनीं चत्वारि स्तोत्राणि सन्ति।
यानि तासं उक्तुं प्रभावं प्रकट्यति। एकं स्थेभं च युद्धयस्य वैभवं सूचयति।"

The *Skandapurāṇa* has a stock instance of selfless prayer;

न त्यं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं नापुनर्ध्वंतमु ।
कामये दुष्कर्तसानं प्राणिनामार्पितसं।।

"O lord, I do not wish for any kingdom nor heaven or even escape from
re-birth. But I do want that the affliction of all beings tormented by the miseries
of life, may cease".  

It is worthwhile making a reference to the *Devimāhātmya* in the
*Markandeyapurāṇa*, which is an adoration of Goddess Durgā in a high flown but
simple style.

The concept of mother Goddess has been developed right from the *Vedic
stotras* celebrating Goddesses like Lakṣmi, Durgā, Śrī, Rātri, Uṣā, Vāgāmbhṛṇi,
and Bhū. In these stotras same ideas have been expressed in a beautiful
language.

या देवी सर्वभूतेऽहु दयायुक्तेऽसंस्थिता।
नमस्तत्थे नमस्तत्थे नमस्तत्थे नमो नम।।
या देवी सर्वभूतेऽहु मातृभूतेऽसंस्थिता।
नमस्तत्थे नमस्तत्थे नमस्तत्थे नमो नम।।

"Salutations to the divine mother, who exists in all beings in the form of
mercy. Salutations to Her, salutations. Salutations to the divine mother, who
exists in beings in the form of mother”. 75

Here one can point out one word difference in the former and latter verses. i.e. दयालुप्तेन in former and मातृपृण in latter, leaving this, both verses are same and equal in construction of wordings. Durga is eulogised in the most affectionate manner and in rhythmic language as the supreme mother-power, mother of the whole universe.

Some of the purānic stotras have dominating poetic excellence. Here is an example;

ब्रह्मस्वरूप ब्रह्म हृदयस्तोतरा हि तस्मि ।
ब्रह्मवीजस्वरूपे जगद्धीर्नयो विस्तुते ॥

"Thou verily art Brahman, the knower of Brahman, the constant possessor of consciousness of Brahman, Thou art Brahman the ultimate cause, salutations to Thee from whom the universe has sprung". 76

Here, there is a repetition of the word Brahma indicating different functions. In the first the deity is described as Brahman. Secondly, the same God is described as the knower of Brahman. The term Brahmagha refers to the state of Brahman as karttpara, Brahmbija refers to Brahman as the ultimate cause.

Thus, the purānic literature exemplifies many types of stotras as Mahimna stotra, Sthalamahātmyas, Kavaca, Varma, in glorification of the greatness of a place or of the God. The Vedic prayers are simplified in Purānic literature, and this period marks a period of transition in nature and content of Stotras.

STOTRAS IN THE CLASSICAL AGE:

In the next stage, i.e. the classical period (200 B.C- 1100 A.C) Stotra assumed a full-fledged form incorporating religious and poetic elements. The early stotras in the classical age can be traced to the works of Kālidāsa 77,
Bhāravi⁷⁸, Māgha⁷⁹ etc., who have composed some stotras in their works which are best literary compositions of highly eulogistic stanzas in a variety of metres.

In the classical age, various types of stotras have been composed like Aṣṭaka, Pañcaśati, Aṣṭottara, Aṣṭapadi, Lahari, Taranga, Daṇḍaka, Gātha, Suprabhāta stotra, Varṇamālā stotra and Śataka etc.,

Among these types of stotras, stand out, the Śūryaśataka by Mayurabhaṭṭa, the Mūkapañcaśati of Mūkakavi, Pañcalaharis of Jagannātha paṇḍita, Vakrokti pāncāśika of Ratnākara, Devisataka of Ānandavardhana, Čandiśataka of Bānabhaṭṭa, Lakṣmisahasra of Venkatādhvarin, Śivamahimnastotra of Puspadanta, Gitagovinda of Jayadeva etc.,

The following verse from the Śūryaśataka illustrates the grandeur of the classical stotra style.

एकं ज्योतिर्दृशो द्रे त्रि जगति गादितान्यक्षशायिशचतुःभिः
भूतानं पञ्चं यान्यलमूलुः तथा चतुर्दशत सन्नविधानि ।
युधिकं तानि सस्त्रिदशपुनिनुता व्यधिविधाजिव्व भानो
व्यति प्राणं नवें दश वधातुर्शिवं दीपधितिनां शतानि ।

"May the thousand rays of the Lord Sun bestow good upon all; the rays which though one light become double fold when beheld by the eyes of all; become three fold as they pervade the three worlds, become four-fold when glorified by the four-faced Brahma, become five-fold due to five primordial elements, six -fold in the cycle of six seasons, sevenfold in the seven divine luminaries called as Saptārṣis, eight fold in pervading the eight quarters, lastly nine fold at the time of dawn every day".⁸⁰

In the above verse, couched in the Sṛgḍhara metre, poet Mayurabhaṭṭa eulogizes the rays of the divine Sun and describes nine-fold perspectives in a
skilful and beautiful language. This kind of figures of speech is called paryāyalaṅkāra which is defined as,

एकं क्रेण अनेकसिन पर्यायः । (काव्यप्रकाश ३१)

The dantya syllables Ta, La, Dha, Na, of the same origin are used; hence it is an instance of the Śrutyanuprāsa.

Further, the nature of classic stotras may be understood in the following example from the Gangālahari of Jagannātha paṇḍita;

समृद्ध वाक्यम् सकलं वसुधायं क्रिमपि
तन्महेश्वरं लीलाजितं जगतं खण्डपरशोऽः
श्रुतीनां सर्ववस्तुं सुकृतस्वं मूर्तं सुननसां
सुधासाग्राज्यं ते सतिलमशिवं नं शमयतुः ।

"O Goddess Ganga, let your holy water which is the inexplicable ample fortune of the entire earth, which is the supreme glory of Lord Śiva, the creator of the world, which is the essence of the Vedas, the merit of Gods incarnate and which is the supreme realm of ambrosia, remove our evils" ।

In the above extract from Gangālahari the poet extols the divine river Ganga with the most glorious terms like वाक्यम्, वसुधायं, लीलाजितं and सुधासाग्राज्यं. Here beauty of expression and attractive description are appreciable.

STOTRAS OF SAINT POETS AND RELIGIOUS TEACHERS:

In the classical age, saint poets and religious teachers have chosen the Stotra media to propogate their phiolsophical doctrines. During this period the Bhakti movement started spreading at large, particularly the Bhāgavata cult, and the Jaina religion added much material to the Stotra literature. At this juncture many schools of philosophy have been established. In order to make
the philosophy and religion much popular, saint philosophers who founded different schools of thoughts, composed significant stotras and made them accessible to the laymen. Thus the Stotras composed by them are rather philosophical in content.

Among those philosophical Stotras, the Annapūrṇāśataka, Gajeñdrabhujaṅgaśatpadī, Saundaryalahari, Śivamānasapūja, Ardhanārīśvarastotra, Dakṣināmūrtystotra are from the pen of Śankarācārya. Gadyatraya of Rāmānujācārya, Stotraratna of Yamunācārya, Nārāyaṇiyam of Saint Nārāyanabhaṭṭādri, Mukundamāla of Saint Kulaśekhara and Dvādasā Stotra of Madhvaścārya can be classed as Storas par excellence with a philosophic approach. A few examples are enough to witness the nature of philosophical Stotras,

अला तें गरिमा मति दहचरा प्राणां शरीरं गृहम् ।
पूजा ते विषयोप्रमोगरचना निद्रासमाधिस्थिति ।
सन्धारं पदयो द्रवक्ष्यायनविधिं स्तोत्राणि सम्प्र मिरह
यथार्थमं करोमि ततदपिं शम्भो तत्वाराधनम् ॥

"O Blissful Lord, my self thou art, my mind, I liken to the divine mother, my vital airs to thy followers, my body to thy temple, my enjoyment, I regard as offerings made unto thee, my sleep the contemplation on you, my wanderings are the circumambulation while my words are prayers offered unto thee; whatsoever, I do, may it all be your worship ".

In the above example, the words like आला and प्राणां contain philosophical fervour hence the message thereof is philosophical. Here we see the poets sublime thought of Bhakti unto his beloved deity.
An instance from the *Kamākṣīṣātaka* is as under:

TStfcT *§f%8
ifrT
^ ^TTcrf% ^T?nt I 1

"Lord Nṛsimha, what is the use of other protectors if you are protecting, what is the use of other protectors if you do not protect, with this firmness of mind, I seek refuge in you, O lord having abode on the banks of Vegavati" 83

Namo namo vaḥnāsārātīmārūmīyē
Namo namo vaḥnārābakāmārūmīyē 1
Namo namo brahmanīmārūmīyē
Namo namo brahmanīnasmārūmīyē 1

"Salutations unto thee O Lord thou art the origin of mind and speech, but thee neither mind or speech, can comprehend, O Lord of eternal infinite glory, O thou Boundless ocean of mercy, salutations unto thee “ 84

In the above example there is rhythm and melody in the expression, at the same time it unfolds the devotional content with utter surrender.

Śankarācārya, the founder of Advaita school of Vedanta has composed many *Stotras* to present Bhakti as one of the means to gain self-realisation. Thus his contribution to *Stotras* is considerable. Sankarācārya's *Stotras* may be divided into five categories:

i. Devotional *Stotras*.

ii. Ascetic *Stotras*.

iii. Moral *Stotras*.

iv. Philosophical *Stotras*. 
Mystical Stotras.  

The devotee prays to God with deep and sincere devotion in devotional Stotras. The *Pāṇcaratnaśastotra* and the *Śivapancākṣaraśastotra* comes under this category.

In ascetic Stotras, devotee prays for liberation from bondage of birth, death and rebirth, Stotras under this head are *Carpatapañjarikāśṭotra*, *Dvādaśapañjarikāśṭotra* and *Gūrvaṭaka*. The moral Stotras are aimed at enshrining moral values, the *Ūpadeśapañcaka* is the only work on moral values.

The philosophical Stotras of Śankarācārya are *Vedasāraśivaśuti*, *Māyāpancaka*, *Ātmaśatakam*, *Saundaryalahari* and *Dakṣināmurthystotra*. Śankarācārya exemplifies the fact that even philosophical ideas can be cast into beautiful Stotra works.

*Daśaslokisāmbastuti, Śivāparādhānanāmsāpanastuti, Śivānandalahari* are the mystical Stotras.

*Saranāgati gadyam* of Rāmānujācārya highlights the intensity of devotion. 

"I who have taken refuge in Her ,who possesses a multitude of unlimited surpassingly great and innumerable auspicious qualities such as the nature, form, glory (splendour), divine supremacy, virtues etc., allworthy and approved by the adorable God Nārāyaṇa in whose dwelling is the forest of lotuses, who is the
adorable Goddess Śri, ever unharmed and faultless and who is the divine consort of the God of gods, the mother of the whole universe, our mother, and the sole refuge of all those who have not found there refuge anywhere else."

"May I obtain the really appropriate and ever lasting refuge in the lotus feet of the Lord for the sake of the attainment of eternal divine service which is of the nature of taking sole delight in all things sub-servient to His purpose and which is suited to all His conditions and is the result of the unbounded and excessive love out of the sincere, unswearing, everactive high devotion, supreme knowledge and the supreme love directed to the lotus feet of the Lord and which is full, incessant, most vivid, eternal and an end in itself, and is infinitely and exceedingly pleasing".

In the above Stotras of the Rāmānujaśārya it is seen that he has given a poetic articulation to the thesis of śaraṇāgati.

STOTRAS IN TANTRAS:

It is worthy to note that, the tantras also contain glimpses of the Stotras marked with deep devotion. To quote, the Brahmustuti in the Mahānirvāṇatantra, the Durgā Stotra and the Guru-Stotra in the Viśvasāratantra and Stotras on Saraswati, Durgā and Śiva in the Prapañcasāra are the best instances. In many of the tantric Stotras the idea of complete surrender and divine grace is sung with devotional power. To quote.

भयाणं भयं भीषणं भीषणानं
गलिः प्राणिनां पावनं पावनानाम् ।
महोधिः पदानां नियत्वत्वेकं
परेषां परं रक्षणं रक्षणानाम् । (Mahānirvāṇatantra 3.61)
O Lord thou art the dread of even the dreadful, the terror of the terrible, the refuge of all beings, the purifier of all purifiers. Thou alone art the ruler of even the high placed ones. Thou art the supreme over the supreme, the protector of the protectors". And

तदेवं स्मरामस्तदेवं भजाम
स्तदेवं जगामाकिर्मं नमाम।
तदेवं निधानं निशालमवधीशं
भवामोहिपोतं शरणं ब्रजाम॥

"O thee the, one alone, we meditate to thee, the one, alone, we offer our worship to thee, the one, alone, who art the witness of the universe, do we tender our salutations. In thee, the one, alone, who art our sole support and self existent Lord, the vessel of safety in the ocean of existence, do we seek refuge.⁸⁷

In the above two instances, there is a glorification of the one supreme being in a most rythmic language. The devotee is invoking the supreme with a single minded devotion seeking His refuge.

अनायस्य दीनस्य तृणायुरस्य
भयात्स्य भीतस्य ब्रह्मस्य जन्तो॥

ल्येका गक्तिष्ठितं निस्तारादापि
नमस्ते जगतारिणि त्राहि दुरं॥

O mother Durgā, the remover of miseries of devotees, thou art the saviour of the poor and the helpless. Thou art the protector of those oppressed by desire and sticken with fear. Thou art the refuge of the afflicted. Thou art, O mother the goal and the giver of emancipation. Thou art the saviour of universe, do Thou protect us, to Thee I bow."⁸⁸
Here, the Goddess Durgā is extolled as supreme mother who removes all miseries and therefore the devotee ardently prays for protection.

From the above examples, it is clear that the *tantric* works are not only manuals of magic and *upāsanā* but are also collections of best *stotras*. Thus Stotra literature is enriched by *Tantric Stotras*.

**STOTRAS IN INSCRIPTIONS:**

Mention must be made of the inscriptions which also contain *Stotras*. Probably, the purpose of inserting *stotras* in inscriptions is to retain the religious ideas and thereby cultivate devotion among the people at large for longer period.

There are ample references to the insessional *Stotras*, i.e. the *Rāṇāsamārasimhapraśasti*, *Kulottungacholā's dānapatra*, Nepal kings *Siddhanṭsimha mallapraśasti*, King Jayadevas *praśasti*, Vijayanagara King Prataparaja Wodeyars *Mallāvaram Śivātemple*, *Kurukṣetra* etc. An instance from inscription of *Mallāvaram Śiva temple* can bring out the characteristic features of *Stotras* in inscriptions.

> सम्प्रदासितिसंसारकारणं धीतकारणम्<br> भूयाद्वयन्तकामाय जगतं काममर्दिनः।<br> अभायाशिव्रितमायो साबुणो गुणभाजनः।<br> स्वस्तो निरूत्तो जीयादवीशाः परमेश्वरः।।

"Glory to the supreme being Śiva, who is without cause, though He is the cause for creation, sustenance and destruction. May He be the object of our desire who himself is the destroyer of cupid. He who is the abode of virtues, remover of illusion, creator of wonderful things, perfect, unique, may that
supreme god be victorious" 90

In the above verse Lord Śiva is eulogized in a beautiful language through opposite rhymes, in the expression as कारणं, वीतकारणं, कामाय and कामपदनं। This may be an instance of Virodhālaṅkāra. One more instance from Malava king Adityadevaśa Prāśasti may be presented:

सान्नद्यनिधिकरुणदसान्ना
नामिनिनेन तुम्हें रघुरमणरमणमानेः।
नृत्यनवेरवननिष्ठं सुधासदनेश्वरा
यस्याप्रति भवन्ते वं स शिवं शिवाय।।

"May Lord Śiva in the presence of whom the heavenly nymphs are constantly engaged in dancing to the accompaniment of the delightful sound of tabor played by Nandi's hand and to the charming songs of the divine singer Tumburu bring good to you all."91

One more beautiful example may be given to bring forth the poetic value of the inscriptional Stotras:

जयति शीकरिष्ठं (म्यानति)च्युतः।
दानवशी युगान्तान्तिन्ति (शिष्ठनन्तु) सुदर्शनः।।

Lord Viṣṇu who is inseparably associated with Goddess Śrī, is victorious who is the fire of the annihilation to the eyes of demons and sudarśana (charming or holding sudarśana cakra) to the eyes of the virtuous."92

The poetic value of this verse is heightened by bringing the Ullēkhālaṅkāra in the above verse.
IMPORTANCE OF STOTRAS:

As it is since time immemorial the Vedas, the Purāṇas, philosophers and religious teachers have laid emphasis on the importance of stotras promoting inherent bliss in man's life. The seer of the Vedas knew stotra as the best approach to God and best offering to God.

A well-known note from the Viṣṇusahasraṇāma declares stotras are the best approach to almighty God;

अनाविनिधं विष्णु सर्वलोकमहेश्वरपु ।
लोकायथां सुब्रह्मिण्य सर्वं भक्तानि भवेत् ।।

"By praising and praying the only God of universe, Viṣṇu, one surmounts all miseries".93

T.V.Viswanath Aiyar in his article rightly says "God is our source and sanctuary. The need for God expresses itself in prayer. True prayer is not a petition for benefits asking this or that. It does not consist in dry and dreary and mechanical recitation of words whose purport we do not understand.

The purpose of prayer is to find relief from the heart-aches of life by the pouring of our troubles and tribulations to one who can give ear to them and who alone, we believe can heal them.

As the noble Laureate Alexis carrel says ; "prayer gives us strength to bear cares and anxieties, to hope when there is no logical motive for hope, to remain steadfast in the midst of catastrophies.".

If anything man's prayer must really be he should be helped to shake of his pride control his mind, restrain his senses and enable to have an expansive feeling of love and concern for all beings, so as automatically to attain peace or mental peace and freedom from destruction."94
The above noticed value of stotra is heightened by Śankarācārya in his commentary on Viṣṇusahasranāma;

अस्य सूतिलक्षणय अर्नस्य आधिकवे कि कारणम्?
हिंसादिपुरुषान्तर इव्यान्तर देश कालानियमन्मेतमाधिकवे कारणम्।

"What is the ground of superiority of this adoration in the form of the hymn? Its superiority over the other kinds of yajñas consists in the following points in its favour. It does not involve injury to a being in the form of sacrifice, it is an Ahiṃsāyāga, for doing it you need no collection of men, money or observe any particular time, place or procedure".95

Whoever composes Stotra texts may be regarded as religious reformer of society. Since his mind works at the betterment of the society. Hence, they may be called psychologists too! Dr.Plott opines "the greatest guides in the field of religion have always been the best psychologists."96

The value of Stotra or prayer may be summed up as below;

"This approach of soul towards the divine with its definite, conscious experience of the divine presence, is seen in the distinctive exercises and practices of devotion. These are infinite in variety but primacy must be given to prayer".97

So, from this brief survey of stotras it is evident that the stotras in early ages viz., Vedic stotras are simple sublime and pure in form. Stotras show the development in the Upaniṣadic period with philosophical significance and poetic excellence. During the epic and purānic age, stotras attained full-fledged form and there is all-round development. More precisely "the cult of Bhakti is adumbrated in the Vedic hymns and partly developed in the Upaniṣads. It blossoms forth in epics and later devotional literature".98

Thus stotras which have been developed right from Vedic times have formed glorious literature enriched and enlivened by the great personages.
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   (सिद्धांत कौणिक 3-2-182)

   The affix द्वार with a sense of instrument comes after the verbs, द्वार
to cut, नि- to lead, शां-to hurt, यु-to join, युज्ञ- to join, खु -to praise, तुद- to
inflict pain, सिं-to bind, सिच- -to sprinkle, निज -to urine, दश- to bite, and नह- to
bind.

   Vasu S.C.
   The Astadhyayi of Panini Vol.1 p.480

   b) स्वतिसाधने वाघे स्वतिरस् मुणिनुमुनसर्वसीनि कृतय तत्त्रिकानां गुणानां प्राप्तायेन
कथनाभ्य ऋणवेदमाणे लक्षिता, सतने गुणकथने च प्रगीतं ऋणातं च ।

   वाचस्पत्यं
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and read, There is a little difference between the recitation of the mantra in japa and the offering of prayer. While japa is always a fixed form of utterance of words or formulae, as in mantra, prayer can be an expression of one's feelings in any language and in any manner one would like. Prayer is primarily a supplication to God for His grace. In ordinary forms of prayer, it can be directed to an ulterior end, such as acquisition of material objects, recovery from health and the like, but the truly spiritual form of prayer asks for nothing from God, it asks for God alone. Though prayer may be expressed in words, phrases or sentences, it need not always be so, for prayer can also be mental and the devotee can inwardly solicit the grace of God by an act of deep concentration of mind and a feeling of union with Him in love and adoration. The scriptures abound in prayers of various kinds addressed to the various God's of the pantheon but often directly to the Supreme Being. Usually it is the practice to regard once
choosen deity as the highest divinity and exalt it to the state of the Absolute. So that the devotee has no idea in his mind other than that of his deity. *Japa* and prayer, are regarded as the best forms of worship as they do not involve dependence on external objects or circumstances.

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Swami Krishnananda


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