

EARLY VEDIC PROSE—A STUDY OF SOME SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS

by

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Although the earliest extant specimens of Vedic prose are to be found in the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda*, it has been the opinion of some scholars that the *Rgveda* too contained prose portions which have faded away with the passage of time. Among these theorists the foremost is, perhaps, Oldenberg, who developed the thesis that the original form of literature in India was prose with verse interposed at those points where the primitive mind gave way to its feelings, particularly, in an invocation of a god, a pronouncement of a curse or an utterance of a benediction or prayer. He sees proof for the existence of this literary type not only in the *Rgveda*, but also in the Brāhmaṇas, the Epic and in the Pāli texts including the Jātakas.¹ In principle, the verses alone were preserved in fixed form as they could easily be committed to memory and the prose, serving as connecting links, was dropped, in Oldenberg's opinion, at the time of the compilation of the Saṃhitā.² The implication is that in such places, where a deeper feeling was expressed, prose was considered to be inadequate and verse was used instead. This characteristic, according to Oldenberg, is to be seen in the Dialogue Hymns of the *Rgveda*, which he calls Ākhyānas.³ The prose portions of these Ākhyānas, according to him, were no creation of the poet but were explanatory portions added by different narrators.⁴ If this theory is to be accepted, these hypothetical prose portions could be considered as representing the beginning of a continuous literary tradition the continuance of which is perhaps, to be seen in later works like the *Mahābhārata*, where, in dialogues, the speakers are introduced in prose.

It would appear that prose portions of the Ākhyānas of the *Rgveda* were never retained in fixed form. The position with regard to the Brāhmaṇas was, however, different because the latter contained more detailed accounts about the sacrificial ritual, and the prose portions of these texts were considered significant from this point of view. In the Ākhyānas, on the other hand, the verses formed the central part (as, for instance, in the story of Agastya and Lopamudrā) and were, therefore, more significant and descriptive. A similar phenomenon is seen in some of the Brāhmaṇas too, where the prose parts are less colourful than the verses (vide Sunahsepa Ākhyāna

1. Oldenberg, H. *Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen (GGA)* 1909. pp. 66 ff.

2. Oldenberg, H. *Das altindische Akhyāna und Akhyānahymnen im Rgveda ZDMG* 37. (1883) II. 54. p.

3. See also Levi S. *Le Theatre Indien (TI)* Paris, 1963. p. 301.

4. Oldenberg, H. *Zur Geschichte der altindischen Prosa (GAP)* Berlin 1917. pp. 91, 92, 93.

of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*). Therefore, even if Oldenberg's theory is accepted, it seems improbable that these prose passages were representative of the style and diction of the early Vedic period, particularly because, as Oldenberg himself maintains, these prose portions were added by different narrators from time to time.⁵ Apart from these hypothetical 'missing links' in prose, Oldenberg sees a semblance of prose in some of the Rgvedic hymns themselves. He calls these hymns either fragments of verse (RV. X. 20.1) or verse with a 'prose-like' freer rhythm (RV. I. 120, x. 105, I. 191, 10-13). He sees traces of prose in RV. VIII. 46, 14-16, which according to him are "exclamations surpassing the metre and are, therefore, nearer prose."⁶

On the whole, Oldenberg's theory can hardly be substantiated by Vedic evidence or adequately by evidence of comparative literature. From the extant data, the earliest form of prose with verse intermingled in Indian literature, appears to be that in which gnomic verse is cited to illustrate what is stated in prose. This, as Keith points out,⁷ is akin to the practice of the *Brāhmaṇas* to adduce occasionally 'Yājñagāthās' (verses on sacrificial points) in their respective discussions. It would seem clear, therefore, on the available evidence, that the earliest phase of the evolution of the Sanskrit prose tradition is to be sought in subsequent Vedic texts rather than in the *Rgveda* itself. We would, therefore, restrict the present study to an examination of some of the salient characteristics of these texts, namely the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.

It could generally be said that the prose style of the early Vedic texts contains certain specific characteristics which form the basis of the prose tradition which continued through the succeeding centuries. Perhaps, the most significant of these is the tendency to use verse and prose together, which constitutes one of the basic characteristics of the Sanskrit prose literature. In the *Yajurveda* are to be found some formulae which start with prose and end with verse and vice versa. In other words, there is a mixture of verse and prose in the same Yajus as e.g. in *deva tvastar bhūri te śam—etu visurūpā yat salaḥsmāno bhavatha*⁸. Sporadic instances in the fable literature and the *Mahābhārata*, of rhythmic portions in the midst of non-rhythmic prose clearly show that this tradition has been followed throughout. The prose of the drama and the Buddhist Sanskrit texts, in particular, abounds in instances where the sentence starts in prose and ends in verse—a clear continuation of the Yajurvedic tradition.

5. Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 93.

6. Ibid. p. 2. fn. (1).

7. Keith, A. B. *A History of Sanskrit Literature (HSL)*, Oxford University Press, London, 1948. p. 71.

8. *Taittirīya Saṁhita (TS) Anandāśrama Saṁskṛta Granthāvalī* No. 42. I. 3. 10.1. Vide Oldenberg, *GAP* p. 6.

The antiquity and the significance of the prose of the *Yajurveda* are well attested by the references made to it by Oldenberg in whose opinion it represents the oldest specimens of Indo-European prose.⁹ The literary type of the *Yajurveda*, no doubt, goes back at least to the Indo-Iranian period¹⁰ and some of the striking features that characterised the later prose tradition are already noticeable in such prose.

The earliest employment of prose in Indian literature was as a vehicle of expression with a religious or ritualistic import. It is in the *Yajurvedic* formulae and prayers that we see for the first time prose used for this purpose. Such prayers and sacrificial formulae consist partly of verses and partly of prose sentences. It is the latter that are called “yajus.” In these prayers one notices, for the first time, rhythmical prose which, as Winternitz remarks, occasionally, “rises to poetical flight.”¹¹ The use of rhythmic prose appears to be one of the devices employed to convey the ritualistic and religious import with greater effect. This tendency is also seen in the *Atharvaveda* and in some of the Brāhmaṇas. In fact, the origin of the later Brāhmaṇa style, as a whole, is to be sought in these ‘Brāhmaṇa’ or prose portions of the Black *Yajurveda*.

Attempts at rhyme, though not common, are a striking feature of Yajurvedic prose. Although in Vedic prose, this characteristic is seen for the first time in the *Yajurveda*, its origin is to be found in the *Rgveda* itself, where different types of its employment are in evidence. Diwekar, in his study on the *alamkāras* in the *Rgveda*, cites examples of rhyme in various positions in a stanza.¹² The type where rhyming words or pairs of such words are placed at regular intervals¹³ appears to be the most effective and the one that has exercised most influence on the style of the *Yajurveda*—cf. *śarma ca stho varma ca stho*.....¹⁴ As a literary device, rhyme is retained in the other Vedic texts too and, in the Brāhmaṇas and, particularly, in the Upanisads,¹⁵ it is used to much advantage. In later times, it developed into a significant characteristic of the metrical Kāvya and was also utilised by prose writers—particularly by the authors of the prose romance. The practical value of rhyme could be assessed from a different point of view as well. “It is true,” says Gonda, “that rhyme was not only not avoided but often deliberately

9. Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 2.

10. Ibid.

11. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature (HIL)* Vols. I and II, University of Calcutta, 1927. pp. 176-77.

12. Diwekar, H. R. *Les Fleurs de Rhétorique dans l'Inde*. Paris, 1930. pp. 12-14.

13. Cf. *RV*. 1.35. 3.

14. *Sukla Yajurveda (SYV) (Mādhyandina)* XI. 30.

15. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (AB)* Bombay, 1925. VI. 2.; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad (Ch. U)*, *Principal Upaniṣads*, Radhakrishnan, II. 1. 4.

retained and cultivated in magical texts. In later times, it even was one of the characteristics of the ancient, nay archaic and sacral style in which they were composed and in which they continued to be recited."¹⁶

Apart from the Rgvedic Ākhayānas, which formed the basis of Oldenberg's theory of the hypothetical prose-cum-verse literary type, the *Yajurveda* furnishes clear evidence of the relationship between verse and prose at a very early date. Thus in the *Yajurveda*, besides the formulae composed in a distinct prose style, there are also 'yajus' composed of lines of different metres—*ā pyāyadhvam aghniya devabhāgam/ūrjasvatīh payasvatīh/prajāvatīr anamīvā ayak-ṣmāh*.¹⁷ In some of the passages of the *Mahābhārata*, as also in the fable literature, are to be found metrical prose portions amidst the ones in ordinary prose. The presence of such metrical phrases is already reminiscent of this Yajurvedic tradition.

Oldenberg refers to a striking feature of the prose of the *Yajurveda* which could be considered as among the earliest attempts in Indian literature to create a rhythmic effect by the reciprocal repetition of words and phrases. The reference is to occasional 'parallelism of members,' within the structure of a sentence.¹⁸ In these constructions there is also double correspondence of two pairs of members conveying the sense of 'one for the other and the other for one' in a reciprocal manner—*prajāś tvam upāvaroha, prajāś tvām upāvarohantu*.¹⁹ Such instances in the *Yajurveda* are among the earliest forms of 'chiasmus' in Vedic prose.²⁰

The Yajurveda contains certain linguistic peculiarities which are significant from the point of view of the evolution of the prose style. "The language of the *Brāhmaṇa* portions," observes Keith, "differs in grammatical form very slightly from the classical language as fixed in the grammar of Pāṇini."²¹ In contrast to the language of the *mantras* it shows a lesser variety of forms and also lacks the ambiguities of forms which characterises the *mantras*. The tenses of the indicative display a precision of use which is alien to the *mantra* texts and the use of cases, in particular, loses the vagueness which is evident for the most part in the *Rgveda*. Thus, the use of forms like—*āsas* in the nominative plural of—*ā* ending masculine nouns,—*ā* in the nominative dual and the instrumental singular,—*ebhih* in the instrumental plural and—*ā* in the neuter nominative plural are steadily fading away from the

16. Gonda, J. *Stylistic Repetition in the Veda (SRV)*, Amsterdam, 1959. p. 220.

17. *TS. I. 1. 1. 1.*

18. Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 5.

19. *TS. I. 3. 13.1.* Quoted by Oldenberg, op. cit. pp. 5, 6.

20. For a discussion of the variant forms of 'chiasmus,' vide Gonda, *SRV*, pp. 109–127.

21. Keith, A. B. *H.O.S.* Vol. 18. p. cxliii.

mantra portions and completely disappear from the *Brāhmaṇa* parts of the *Taittirīya Samhitā*. On the other hand, certain forms like the locative singular form in-*an* of nouns in-*an* like *ātman*, *vyoman* are retained as in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Brahmanas*

In the *Yajurveda* (particularly in the *Taittirīya Samhitā*), the infinitive ceased to show its manifold forms as in the *Rgveda*, the uses which are common being the forms in-*ton* and the form in-*tum*, which remained as the normal form in the classical period.

The verb too shows a definite tendency to eliminate the *Rgvedic* forms and endings. At the same time, new forms or forms which were rare in the older language make their appearance. Thus, the use of the injunctive forms in any time-relation, and in any mood is steadily disappearing. The use is seen mostly with the particle *mā*. This may be considered as a clear transition to the use in the classical language where this remains as the only type of the injunctive.²² The subjunctive too which is common in the earlier language survives only in reported thoughts or speeches. On the other hand, the future which is quite rare in the *Rgveda* is fairly common in the *Yajurveda* and there is perhaps an instance of the periphrastic future in the *Taittirīya Samhitā*.²³ The rarity of narrative perfects in all the *Samhitās* of the *Black Yajurveda* not only proves their contemporaneity, but also assigns them chronologically to the earliest phase of Vedic prose. In fact, in this respect, the language of the *Black Yajurveda* appears to be more distinctly representative of the Indo-European basic idiom than the language of the *Rgveda* itself, for the narrative perfect is clearly not of Indo-European origin though it is in evidence in the *Rgveda*.²⁴ At the same time, the fact that the perfects do not seem to occur here in the narrative of personal experience, is in accordance with the practice in later literature where the perfect was restricted to narration of events outside one's personal experience.²⁵ This rule was scrupulously observed by writers of the prose *Kāvya*, like *Daṇḍin*.²⁶

Most of the syntactical peculiarities of the *Yajurveda* are shared by the *Atharvaveda* too. Particular mention should be made of some of the special uses of cases as the use of the nominative, and the locative (less frequently), with *kr*.²⁷ The use of the correlatives *yāvān ... tam* (or similar cases) too offers a sharp contrast to the later classical usage *yāvān ... tāvān*.²⁸

22. Burrow, T. *The Sanskrit Language*, Faber and Faber, London. p. 298.

23. Cf. *anvāgantā*, *TS*. V. 7. 7. 1.

24. See Wackernagel, *Altindische Grammatik*. Vol. I. p. xxxl.

25. See Speijer, J. S. *Sanskrit Syntax*. Leyden, 1886. p. 248.

26. See Keith's comments on the style of the *Dasakumāracarita* of *Daṇḍin*. Keith, *HSL*, p. 307.

27. *TS*. V. 2. 6. 5; VI. 3. 7. 5.

28. *TS*. V. 1. 3. 4.

Regarding the language of the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (particularly the *mantra* portions), Keith has shown that it represents a stage intermediate between the *Rgveda* language and the language of the Brāhmanas with a greater resemblance to the former.²⁹ The *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* too shares many linguistic characteristics with the Brāhmanas and is, on the whole, more close to the latter in language.³⁰

The prose of the *Yajurveda*, as a whole, is simple and, in the main, fairly clear. It is free from the use of long compounds which, as Keith says "in later Sanskrit prose deprives the language of most of its natural advantages and renounces all possibility of clearness and precision."³¹ As far as the use of compounds is concerned, there are very few innovations. Old *dvandvas* of the type found in the *Rgveda* and the Avesta are retained—ef. *angāparūṅsi*, *idhmābarhih*³² There are also to be found compounds formed by the combination of indeclinables like *adyāsvāt* and *yathāyatanāt*³³ There is also a group of forms as *tiṣyapūrnāmāsa*³⁴ which according to Wackernagel, are relics of the *dvandva* form.³⁵ Mention should also be made of another interesting group of compounds where the first member retains the case ending and conveys a peripharastic sense: *asithilambhavāya*.³⁶

According to Keith there is in the Yajurvedic style, "none of the quasi-profundity which is found in the Upanisads and in a small degree in the *āraṇyakas*. There is no trace of humour or pathos; even irony and sarcasm are practically unknown. The aridity of constant quibbles and meaningless explanations is relieved only by occasional and always brief references to real life."³⁷

The comparatively simple style of the *Yajurveda* sometimes tends to be boring, mostly due to the nature of its contents and the lack of its narrative value. Occasionally, however, one comes across similes³⁸ mostly drawn from everyday life, which are both vivid and expressive. The narrative element in the *Yajurveda* is negligible when compared to the later Vedic prose works and the diction itself is lacking both in force as well as in feeling. It could be said, therefore, that the prose of the *Yajurveda*, as a whole, contains very few

29. Keith, *H.O.S.* Vol. 18. p. cxl ff.

30. Vide Ghosh, B. K. *Vedic Age*, p. 405.

31. Keith, op. cit. p. clvii.

32. *TS.* II. 5. 6. 1.

33. *TS.* III. 1. 7. 2.

34. *TS.* II. 2. 10. 1.

35. Wackernagel, op. cit. Vol. II. 1. 155.

36. *TS.* VII. 2. 4. 2.

37. Keith, op. cit. p. clviii.

38. *TS.* V. 3. 10. 1.; V. 4. 10. 2.

literary devices that help sustain the interest of the readers unlike, for instance, the Brāhmaṇa narratives or the Upanisads. When we pass over to the *Atharvaveda*, however, a change occurs and for once we enter, as it were, the threshold of a new phase in the evolution of the Sanskrit prose style.

Bk. XV of the *Atharvaveda* is entirely composed in prose, and the greater part of Bk. XVI is in prose. Occasionally we also come across other prose pieces among the Atharva Veda verses.³⁹ These prose portions are similar in style and language to the Brāhmaṇas. Sometimes, the verse and prose are intermingled to such an extent that it is difficult, as Winternitz says, “to distinguish whether a piece is composed in lofty prose or in badly constructed verse.”⁴⁰ In fact, this mixture of prose and verse is seen in the *Atharvaveda*, “to an extent not quite reached in any other class of Vedic writings.”⁴¹

In some of the prose portions, particularly in Bk. XV, occasional sequences of words tend to be rhythmical.⁴² Whether these are “mere casual lapses into metre.” as Whitney believes⁴³ or conscious attempts at creating a rhythmic effect, they are of particular importance in determining the development of the stylistic peculiarities in Sanskrit. For, we see this same characteristic, employed with variations, in the prose portions of the *Mahābhārata*, the fable literature and more profusely in the prose Kāvya of the classical period.

The *Atharvaveda* shows a distinct advancement in style. Its prose portions, in particular, bear a marked resemblance to the Brāhmaṇas in language and style, and some of the literary devices of the Brāhmaṇa narratives are already foreshadowed in it. Apart from the rhythmic sequences, already noticed, there is a marked tendency in Atharvavedic prose, as also in the *Yajurveda*, to resort to repetitions. This repetition, which could be considered as a conscious attempt towards emphasis, appears in the *Atharvaveda* in a variety of forms. Very often the same verb is repeated in a sentence or in a series of sentences—*enam śraddhā gacchatyainam yajño gacchatyainam loko gacchati.....ya evam veda.*⁴⁴ This pattern, which is faithfully followed in the Brāhmaṇas and particularly in the Upanisads, is one of the predominant features in early Indian prose. Its influence is seen even in the prose of the early Pāli Suttas. At times, the same pronoun is repeated—*arvapuruṣah sarvātmā sarvatanūh.....*,⁴⁵ a characteristic which is in evidence in the early Upanisads—ef. *sarvakarmā sarvakāmah sarvagandhah sarvarasah.....*⁴⁶

39. Vide *H.O.S.* Vol. VIII. p. 1011.

40. Winternitz, op. cit, p. 122.

41. Bloomfield, M. *The Atharvaveda*, Strassburg, 1899. p. 5.

42. *Atharvaveda (AV) Saunakīya*, XV. 1st phrase of 17.8 and the relative clauses of 15, 16 and 17.

43. Whitney, W. D. *Atharvaveda (Trans) H.O.S.* Vol. VIII. p. 772.

44. *Av.* XV. 1. 7.

45. *Av.* V. 2. 1.

46. *Ch. U.* III. 14. 2.

The tendency towards the use of alliteration and assonance, by the repetition of words and syllables, which is common in the later prose Kāvya, is already common in the *Atharvaveda*, both in the prose as well as in the verse portions—*yā śasāpa śapanena yāgham mūram ā dadhe/śerabhaka śerabha punar vo yāntu.....*⁴⁷ This is a continuation of a striking phenomenon in the Vedic style where different forms derived from the same root are repeated consecutively or at close intervals in the same stanza or sentence. The roots of this phenomenon are to be found in the *Rgveda* itself where its employment is much more common: cf. *havimabhir havate.....; gāyanti tvā gāyatrino arcantyarkam arkinah*⁴⁸

Some of the stylistic peculiarities which originated in the *Yajurveda*, are to be found in a greater degree in the *Atharvaveda*, and one such characteristic is the tendency towards rhyming, which is clearly noticeable in the prose as well as the verse portions—*vi te madāvati saramiva pātayamasi/prā tvā carumiva yesantam vacasā sthapāyamāsi.*⁴⁹

A characteristic feature of early Vedic prose is the tendency to be more 'analytic' in structure, in contrast to the later classical prose which could be designated as more 'synthetic.' This analytic nature is evident from the tendency in these early Vedic texts to leave a series of words uncompounded in contexts where they are likely to be compounded in classical prose. This is clear in the prose portions of the *Atharvaveda*, where a series of words could appear uncompounded joined by the particle-*ca*.⁵⁰ The practice in such instances, in later prose, however, would be to join the words in a dvandva compound. This characteristic, which could be considered as a device for creating a greater effect, is retained in the style of the Brāhmaṇas and more so in that of the Upanishads.

In most of the magic formulae of the *Atharvaveda* we find the admixture of verse and prose. This is one of the most original and significant characteristics of the Sanskrit prose literature. In the *Atharvaveda*, in particular, this scheme is repeated with only slight variations.⁵¹ In some of these magic formulae, prose seems to have been preferred to verse, perhaps, because the former admitted of an easier and more forceful expression of ideas.

In the *Atharvaveda*, the prose diction is clearer and one notices a distinct tendency towards stylisation, which is, indeed of great significance, in the light of later developments. In fact, as observed by Oldenberg, it is in the

47. *Av.* 1. 5. 7.

48. *Rgveda* II. 35. 5; Vide Diwekar, op. cit. p. 9.

49. *Av.* IV. 2. 2.; see also Gonda op. cit. pp. 201 ff.

50. Cf. *Av.* XV. 1. 6.

51. Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 11.

Atharvaveda that we come across, for the first time, a conscious attempt at stylisation of prose.⁵² Some of the sentences are so constructed as to produce a certain beauty of style. Particular mention should be made, in this context, of constructions with *ca, ca*, commonly construed with dualities—*brahma ca kṣatram ca; barhiṣ ca vedīm ca*⁵³ and also rhythmic repetitions as *dhanyā dhanīṣṭhāh, śamyā śamiṣṭhāh, śacyā śaciṣṭhāh*.....⁵⁴

The *Atharvaveda* contains, in the manner of the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanisads, descriptive passages, which so to say, mark the beginning of a significant literary tradition. At times these descriptions are varied and somewhat colourful—*ghṛtahrādā madhukūlā surodakā kṣīreṇa pūrṇā udakena dadhnā*.....⁵⁵. The presence of such descriptive passages exercised considerable influence on the literary tradition of later times. Following the Atharvedic tradition, this tendency was continued through the Brāhmaṇas, the Upanisads and the Purāṇas until it reached the peak of its growth in the works of the classical period, particularly the prose Kāvya.

The literary tendencies of the Brāhmaṇas are already foreshadowed in the *Atharvaveda*, or, as Oldenberg points out,⁵⁶ in some of the prose portions of the *Atharvaveda*, particularly, the wedding formulae, one sees the diction of the Brāhmaṇas. The *Atharvaveda* shows a close affinity to the Brāhmaṇas not only in diction, but also in linguistic and syntactical peculiarities. The language of the *Atharvaveda* introduces, on the one hand, peculiar characteristics and new forms not found in the earlier language of the *Rgveda*, and displays, on the other, a tendency to retain some of the forms and characteristics of the older language. It forms, therefore, a transition between the language of the earlier Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas. In this respect, it is of great value for the study of the evolution of the language. Thus, for instance, the form *sarva*, which Burrow calls an “Indo-European development on the analogy of ‘*viśva*’⁵⁷ “is more common in the *Atharvaveda* than in the *Rgveda*. At the same time, older forms of words like *hiranyāya* are still preserved in the *Atharvaveda* in contrast to the classical Sanskrit *hiranmaya* : *hiranyayah panthāna āsan*.⁵⁸

A similar tendency is seen in the declension of nouns and the formation of participial and verbal forms. Thus, for instance, the vocative singular of *-vant* stems ends in—*van* in the *Atharvaveda* (as in the later language) as against

52. Ibid. p. 10.

53. Quoted by Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 10.

54. Ibid.

55. *Av.* IV. 7, 4.

56. Oldenberg, op. cit. p. 11.

57. Burrow, op. cit. p. 274.

58. *Av.* V. 1, 4.

-*vah* in the *Rgveda*⁵⁹ and the endings—*ebhik* and—*aih* or the instrumental plural are still used side by side: *viśvebhir devair dattam paridhīr*.....⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that these earlier endings have already gone into disuse in the Brāhmaṇa parts of the *Taittirīya Samhitā*—a fact which shows that some of the prose portions of the *Yajurveda* are later than the *Atharvaveda*.

Of the Mantra texts, it is only the *Atharvaveda* that contains gerundives in—*tavya* and—*anīya*: *na brāhmaṇo himsitavyo*.....⁶¹. Both these forms are of special significance for a study of the history of the language. As far as the absolutive is concerned, the later form in—*tvā* often replaces the *Rgvedic*—*tvāya* or—*tvī*. The extension of the past passive participle by the addition of the possessive suffix—*vant*, “is a creation of Indo-Aryan and the first purely participial formation of this character appears in the *Atharvaveda*—*āsītāvaty atithau*.”⁶² Among verbal formations too, new innovations are to be found in the *Atharvaveda*. Although, as Ghosh remarks, “the earliest occurrence of the periphrastic future, is to be found, perhaps, in the form *anvāgantā* in *Atharvaveda* vi. 123. 1-2,”⁶³ the real appearance of this type of future is to be seen in the Brāhmaṇa period.⁶⁴ Among the other verbal forms that are common in the classical language, the reduplicated aorist, the desiderative, the intensive and the denominative,⁶⁵ are of frequent occurrence in the *Atharvaveda*.

The *Atharvaveda*, while introducing new forms and characteristics into the language, makes an effort, as we have seen, to preserve some of the significant linguistic traits of the earlier period. Among these, one of the most important is, perhaps, the retention of the independent use of the prefixes—a characteristic feature of the earlier language.⁶⁶ The tendency to preserve the independence of prefixes, which was a characteristic of Indo-European, becomes less evident in the period of the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanisads and is lost completely in the classical period. In fact, its treatment forms one of the important morphological differences between the Vedic and classical languages.

Bloomfield makes a distinction between two styles of Atharvavedic hymns—popular or Atharvanic on the one hand and hieratic or ritualistic on

59. *Av.* III. 4, 1.

60. *Av.* IV. 2, 4.

61. *Av.* V. 4, 3.

62. Burrow, op. cit. p. 370.

63. Ghosh, op. cit. p. 407. The form *anvāgantā*, however, occurs in the *Taittirīya Samhitā* as well. See fn. 23.

64. Burrow, op. cit. p. 331.

65. *Av.* I. 5, 3; *Av.* V. 2, 3; *Av.* IV. 3, 1; *Av.* V. 5, 4.

66. Cf. *Rgveda*, X. 14, 8.

the other. "The language of the former class, according to him, "is related more closely to that dialect or dialects which are at the base of the language of the Brāhmaṇas, Sūtras and the later literary forms in general."⁶⁷ But, this "proximity of the language of the genuine Atharvanic hymns to that of the Brāhmaṇas and classical literature," he adds, "is no chronological criterion."⁶⁸

Gonda, in his analysis of the style of the *Atharvaveda*, prefers to call it 'carmen style', "characterised by a mode of literary expression which, whilst being neither exactly metrical nor prose, may be supposed to have been more original than both of these."⁶⁹ He had found it necessary to apply to this style the Latin word 'carmen' since, in his opinion, it is a style "to which the term prose and poetry are not yet relevant."⁷⁰

It would be seen, therefore, that Atharvavedic prose has a twofold significance. Firstly, its importance lies in the fact that it is in the *Atharvaveda* that we see a stylisation of prose for the first time in Indian literature, and secondly, it is the Atharvavedic style and language that paved the way to the style of the Brāhmaṇas, which introduced into the Sanskrit prose tradition a new and significant element—the narrative form.

67. Bloomfield, op. cit. p. 46.

68. Ibid. p. 47.

69. Gonda, op. cit. p. 24.

70. Ibid. p. 27.