

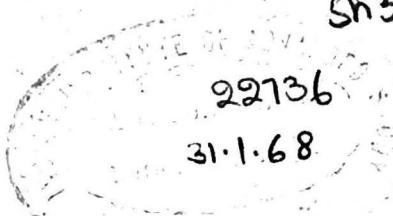


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# The Puruṣa-Sūkta (RV 10.90) in the Vedic Literature

by  
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## 1 Introduction :

The Puruṣa-Sūkta (RV 10.90) is one of the late hymns in the *Reveda-Samhitā*. It has attracted the attention of many scholars owing to its philosophical, sacrificial, religious, linguistic and sociological importance. The object of this paper is to trace this familiar hymn in the Vedic Literature.

## 2 Occurrence of the hymn :

With some changes, fully or partially the hymn is found in the following places in the Vedic and post-Vedic Literature :

- (1) RV 10.90; (2) AV 19.6; (3) VS 31. 1-16; (4) KS (Kāṇva) 35. 1-16; (5) SV 617-621; (6.4.3-7); (6) TA 3.12. It is referred to at
  - (i) SB 13.6.2.12 in *Puruṣamedha*
  - (ii) *Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra* 16,28.3; 20.20.2; 24.10.
  - (iii) *Vaitāna* 37.19 in the *Puruṣamedha* to accompany the release of human victim.
  - (iv) *Rgvidhāna* in *kāmya* rite by one disiring progeny (13.34-148); in Viṣṇu worship (3. 149-173); in a rite for obtaining the highest bliss and all benefits (3.186-223).
  - (v) *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 2.5.34-37; 3.22.2-3; 3.6.30-34. The account of this *Purāṇa* is identical with that in RV 10.90.

## 3 Variations in the Text :

- (a) RV 10.90. 1 = AV 19.6.1 reads *sahasrabāhuḥ* for *sahasraśīrṣā*. *Sahasra* does not mean exact thousand, but innumerable. Hence 1000 heads or 1000 arms need not present difficulty. SV 617 has *sahasraśīrṣāḥ*. RV *viśvataḥ* reads as *sarvataḥ* in VS and KS. In addition, they read *prtvā* for *vṛtvā*. All others read *vṛtvā*.
- RV 10.90. 2 = AV 19.6.4, for *bhavyam* in 2 b of RV and TA all others read *bhāvyaṃ*, 'What is caused to be.' 2cd = AV 19.6.4 cd = SV 620 cd. AV alone reads *īśvara* for *īśāna*; and *yadanyenābhavat saha* for *yadan-nenātirohati* in all others, meaning 'which had grown

with some one else' for 'that which grows with food.'  
The reading of AV is obscure.

RV 10.90. 3 = AV 19.6.3 = SV 620 ab and 619 cd. AV reads *tāvantaḥ asya mahimānaḥ tataḥ* etc. for *etāvān asya mahimā ataḥ* etc. in all others. "So many are his greatnesses and Puruṣa is greater than those," in AV. SV alone reads *tāvān* for *etāvān* and *sarvā* for *viśvā* in all others.

RV 10.90. 4 = AV 19.6.2; in ab AV reads त्रिभिः पश्चिद्दामिरोह-  
त्पादस्येहाभवत् पुनः । for त्रिपादूर्ध्वं उदैत्पुरुषः पादो ऽस्येहाभवत्  
पुनः । in all others, except TA which differs from RV  
in reading in d *abhavāt*. The commentator explains it  
as if the reading is *ābhavat*.

= SV 618; reads in cd *tathā* for *tataḥ*, also SV 618;  
and whole cd in AV reads as तथा व्यक्रामद्विष्वङ्गशानानशने  
अनु । SV 618 cd follows AV, except *abhi* for *anu* at  
the end. RV and others read, ततो विष्वङ्गव्यक्रामत्साशानान-  
शने अभि । Accent is the same in all readings.

RV 10.90. 5 = AV 19.6.9, reads in a *virāḍagre samabhavat* for  
*tasmadvirāḷajāyata* in all others, which except RV read  
*tataḥ* for *tasmat*.

RV 10.90. 6 = AV 19.6.10; = VS 31.14; = KS 35.14; = TA 3.

RV 10.90. 7 = VS 31.9; = KS 35.9; = AV 19.6.11.

AV reads *prāvṛṣā* for *barhiṣi* in all others; and *agraṣaḥ*  
for *agrataḥ* in all others, and *vasavaḥ* for *sādhyāḥ* in all  
others. AV reading is better as it goes well with  
*praukṣan*. PPP reads *sādhyāḥ* like RV.

RV 10.90. 9 = VS 31.7; = KS 35.7; = TA 4; = AV 19.6.13. AV  
reads quite ungrammatically *chando ha* (which must  
be corrupt) for *chandāmsi* in all others.

RV 10.90. 8 = VS 31.6; = KS 35.6; = TA 4; = AV 19.6.14.

RV 10.90. 10 = VS 31.8; = KS 35.8; = TA 5; = AV 19.6.12.  
AV alone in b adds one more *ca* after *ye*.

RV 10.90. 11 = VS 31.10; = KS 35.10; = TA 5; = AV 19.6.5.  
RV and TA alone agree in all respects. AV, VS, KS  
read in cd मुखं किमस्य किं बाहू किमूरू पादा उच्येते for .. को  
बाहू का ऊरू etc.

RV 10.90. 12 = VS 31.11; = KS 35.11; = TA 6; = AV 19.6.6.  
AV alone reads *abhavat* for *kṛtaḥ* in b; and *madhyam*  
for *ūrū* in e in all others.

RV 10.90. 13 = VS 31.12; = KS 35.12; = TA 6; = AV 19.6.7.  
VS and KS read श्रोत्राद्वायुश्च प्राणश्च मुखादग्निरजायत for  
मुखादिन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत । in all others,

RV 10.90. 14=VS 31.13; = KS 35.13; = TA 6; = AV 19.6.8.

RV 10.90. 15=VS 31.15; = KS 35.15; = TA 6; = AV 19.6.15.

No change.

RV 10.90. 16=VS 31.16; = KS 35.16; = TA 7.

The last *rc* in AV 19.6 is, "Seven times seventy rays were born from the head of the great god, king Soma, when born out of Puruṣa." Soma is a plant and moon and has 490 rays as distinguished from 1000 rays of the sun. This *rc* in AV 19.6.16 is not found any where else.

RV 10.90.16 is an appendage to the hymn in a different metre. It is found at RV 1.164.50 and AV 7.5.1.

- (b) SV 6.4.3-7 are found in RV 10.90. SV 6.4 has 12 verses of which five are found in the RV and remaining seven verses are not found in the RV.
- (c) VS 31 contains 22 verses of which 1-16 are common with RV 10.90.1-16. Verses 17-22 describe the further creation from the Puruṣa. VS 31.18 describes the Puruṣa as the great one, possessed of the complexion of the sun and as beyond darkness. Knowing him one goes beyond death; there is no other path. This Puruṣa has two wives Śrī and Lakṣmī (VS 31.22).
- (d) KS 35.1-16 forms one unit, although in KS 35 there are other three more hymns, making 55 verses in KS 35.
- (e) TA 3.12 has seven subsections and consists of 1-18 verses, of which 1-16 are RV 10.90.1-16. TA 3.12.16 and 17 describe the Puruṣa as lustrous like the sun and as beyond darkness. He creates all forms of beings and gives them different names. By knowing him one becomes immortal and there is no other way.
- (f) SB 13.6.2.12 refers RV 10.90, calls it Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa hymn of sixteen *rcs* and gives its *pratīka* as सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।

SB 13.6.2.20 refers to the Uttara Nārāyaṇa hymn with its equivalence as, VS 31. 17-22.

#### 4 Interpretation :

##### (i) RV 10.90.

The hymn refers to Puruṣa as the lord and creator with anthropomorphic features. The Puruṣa has a human form, he is the lord (Īśāna or Īśvara of the AV), timeless and immortal; he is over and above the earth and is possessed of *māhiman*. The Puruṣa is the creator. He created Virāj (the shining one) and as the first product of Virāj, Puruṣa was born. This second Puruṣa has the same all-pervading nature as the first one. Virāj is like Hiranyagarbha. This second Puruṣa was offered in the sacrifice by the *devas*, *sādhyas* and *ṛṣis*. This Puruṣa was bound at the stake and was

sprinkled over on the *barhis*. Along with him, the three seasons were offered as *ājya*, *idhma* and *haviṣ*. So the timeless Puruṣa assumed the form of a person limited in time. This was a complete sacrifice. From him came out all animals, the Vedas, four castes, Sūrya, Candramas, Indra, Agni and Vāyu.

The second Puruṣa has mouth, arms, thighs (or waist according to AV), feet, eyes, navel, head, ears and mind. His body constitutes the creation.

This Puruṣa has a very great similarity with Lord Vāsudeva in the Gītā in his being Īśvara and creator, being possessed of greatness, distributed among the beings and yet being one and above them.

(ii) AV 19.6. The distribution of the *ṛcs* in the hymn changes the order of the creation, although their import remains the same. The AV makes the Puruṣa Īśvara, the lord of the immortality. The Puruṣa is bound and is sprinkled over with *prāvṛṣ* (rain). The AV considers that Puruṣa is the same as Virāj, from whom Puruṣa is born. This second Puruṣa is bound and offered in the total sacrifice. From him were produced horses, goats, sheep, three Vedas, metres and all animals.

(iii) VS 31.1-22. In the second part of this hymn in the VS 31.17-22, Puruṣa is brought forth from the waters and sap of the earth. His personal form is stressed in the VS. His wives are Śrī and Lakṣmī; his sides are day and night, his form is the *nakṣatras*. His open mouth is the Aśvins.

(iv) SB 13.6.2.12. By means of the Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa hymn the Brahman priest seated to the right praises the men bound to the stake in the *Puruṣamedha* for obtaining and securing every thing. The victims round which fire is carried are not yet slaughtered. A voice said to him (Brahman), 'Do not kill these human victims; for otherwise man would eat man.' Accordingly the sacrificer sets the victims free. According to SB 13.6.2.20 after the *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice, the sacrificer having taken up the two fires within himself and worshipped the sun with the Uttara Nārāyaṇa hymn (VS 31.17-22) goes to a forest without looking round. That place is away from men. If, however, he wishes to live in the village he should worship the sun with the Uttara Nārāyaṇa hymn. Let him live at his home and offer sacrifices.

Thus according to SB, VS 31.1-22 is the Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa hymn, and the one part of it (VS 31.1-16) is to be used for the *Puruṣamedha* and the other (VS 31.17-22) is to be used for taking recourse to a forest or remaining at home. It is to be noted that SB records that the first Puruṣa hymn has sixteen and the second six verses and that the Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa is the deity of the hymn.

### 5 Commentators' interpretation and employment :

#### (a) Sāyaṇa

Sāyaṇa has commented on the hymn occurring in the RV, AV and TA. It is useful to record his views on the meaning and use of the hymn.

( i ) RV 10.90. The seer of this hymn is Nārāyaṇa. The deity of this hymn is Puruṣa, who is referred to as the sentient one, different in nature from Prakṛti as mentioned in Vedānta Sūtra 1.4.1, and who is well known in the Vedānta as, 'There is nothing higher than Puruṣa' ( *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and others ). So Puruṣa is the Highest Reality, the Brahman.

This Puruṣa is the same as Virāj. He is all-pervading ( RV 10.90.1 ). He is the lord of the divinity. He assumes the role of the creator, but it is not his original nature ( RV 10.90.2 ). All this world is his miraculous form. It is not his real nature ( RV 10.90.3 ). He is not affected by the qualities of the world. With his one-fourth part he creates, sustains and destroys the world ( RV 10.90.5 ). Puruṣa born as Virāj is *jīva*, who is the same as the Puruṣa, the Paramātman ( RV 10.90.5 ). Having created the bodies of beings, the Devas performed a mental sacrifice ( *mānasa yajña* ) and offered Puruṣa as a victim ( RV 10.90.6 ). The last *ṛc* summarizes the topic of the hymn. The Devas are the *prāṇas* of Prajāpati, who with the mental sacrifice ( *yajña* ) worshipped Prajāpati ( *yajña* ). In this sacrifice the effects in the form of the world were the principal supporters ( *dharmāṇi*, RV 10.90.16 ).

Thus according to Sāyaṇa this is a creation hymn, in which Puruṣa is the Highest Reality and he with his *māyā* creates the Universe through the Devas who resort to mental sacrifice for that purpose and offer Puruṣa in the sacrifice.

( ii ) AV 19.6. Sāyaṇa while commenting on this hymn considers AV 19.6.1-5 as one hymn and *ṛcs* 6-16 as forming another hymn ( AV 19.7 ). He refers to these two hymns ( AV 19.6-7 ) as used in Puruṣamedha sacrifice to be recited over the human victims. He also refers to their use in pacificatory sacrifice to the Planet Saturn ( *śaniścara* ). He further points out that this hymn is called Puruṣasūkta, because in this hymn Puruṣa called Nārāyaṇa, who is the Universal Self, is said to have offered the *Puruṣamedha*; or it is so called because it deals with the first Puruṣa called Nārāyaṇa as the cause of the Universe. Thus the hymn has a twofold import: one sacrificial and the other philosophical. Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa's *Puruṣamedha* is referred to in SB: Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa desired, May I surpass all beings ! May I be all this ! He saw this *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice of five nights ( *pañcarātra* ). He performed it and became all this ( SB 13.6.1-1 ). So the *Puruṣamedha* is performed by Nārāyaṇa for surpassing all and becoming all.

Accordingly Sāyaṇa gives two interpretations, one sacrificial and the other philosophical. The latter agrees with his commentary on RV 10.90.

He employs the *ṛcs* of AV 19.6.6-16 ( RV 10.90.6-16, AV 19.7 ) as quite another hymn beginning with *brāhmaṇo'sya mukham āsīt* for the same purpose. Sāyaṇa considers Virāj as the mind of Puruṣa and describes the further creation from mind. He refers to the *yajña* as a mental sacrifice for creation.

At no stage in his commentary on the AV 19.6 does he refer to RV 10.90.

(iii) TA 3.12. Sāyaṇa comments on this hymn and gives its employment according to Āpastamba in piling up a figure of a man and praising it with the hymn. Bhāradvāja uses it in the *Brahmamedha* for praying at the time of the cremation of a dead body.

There are two hymns of this name. The first consists of 1-18 and the second of 1-5 verses.

Both are called Nārāyaṇa hymns, because they are seen by sage Nārāyaṇa and also because Puruṣa, called Nārāyaṇa, is mentioned to be the cause of the universe.

The commentary of Sāyaṇa, although worded differently, has the same import.

TA 10 is the *Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad*. Sāyaṇa refers to it as *yājñikī upaniṣad*. It identifies Puruṣa with Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva; he is also said to be the same as Āditya. It refers to the thousand heads and eyes of Nārāyaṇa, who is the same as Puruṣa. Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa is the Universal Self and the lord of all. He is all-pervading and resides in the heart of beings. He is the highest Brahman. Thus the identification of Puruṣa with Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and Vāsudeva becomes complete in TA.

#### (b) Mahīdhara

Mahīdhara, in his introduction to the commentary on VS 31.12, says that in the previous section (VS 31.11) all limbs of the *Puruṣamedha* (by which he understands Puruṣa) are mentioned, and now in this section (VS 31.12), in sixteen *ṛcs*, Puruṣa, whose limbs these are, is praised. Their deity is Puruṣa who is the very seed of the Universe.

Mahīdhara considers all victims of the *Puruṣamedha* to be the limbs of Puruṣa. Puruṣa's sacrifice is a mental sacrifice of the Devas.

#### (c) Ṛgvidhāna

Śaunaka, in his *Ṛgvidhāna*, gives the traditional employment of RV 10.90. It is used in a *kāmya* rite for one desiring progeny (3. 134-148). A couple desiring a son is to offer *caru* to Viṣṇu, with his twelve names, that is to say, Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Damodara, in twelve months beginning with Mārgaśīrṣa. Then again the couple is to offer *samidhs* of Aśvattha tree in the fire with the recitation of each *ṛc*. Viṣṇu is to be worshipped in water, fire, heart, sun, altar, and image. Viṣṇu is Nārāyaṇa because his former abode was water. The hymn is also to be muttered (*japa*). In the worship of Viṣṇu, first there are sixteen *nyāsas* (touching of one's limbs) with the sixteen *ṛcs*. The proper worship of Viṣṇu then begins (*śoḍaśopacārāpūjā*): invocation, giving seat, offering water, respectful offer (*arghya*), sipping of water, bathing, offering garment, *yajñopavīta*, and unguents, offering flowers and incense, lighting lamp, offering eatables, salutation, going round the deity, and offering of *dakṣiṇā*, with the recitation of the sixteen *ṛcs*. These are the sixteen modes of worship. Then a sacrifice is to be offered to Viṣṇu with the recitation of the hymn.

Its *japa* leads one to the heaven; it brings success and fame and imparts the knowledge of the Ātman and Yoga. Meditation of Viṣṇu with this hymn brings to the Yogin the identification with the Lord ( 3. 149-231 ). Thus Puruṣa in the hymn is Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, who is the same as Vāsudeva.

6 The following points emerge from the occurrence of RV 10.90 in the Vedic Literature:

- ( i ) The creator is Puruṣa ( endowed with a human form ).
- ( ii ) Puruṣa is Īśāna or Īśvara. He is the lord of gods and of the whole Universe. He is all-pervading.
- ( iii ) He creates Virāj ( mind, metre, Hiranyagarbha ), who in turn creates Puruṣa, who is equal to the first Puruṣa.
- ( iv ) Puruṣa's creation is an act of sacrifice in which his whole body is transformed into ( becomes ) the world.
- ( v ) This sacrifice is a mental or a symbolical one.
- ( vi ) The hymn is found in all the *Samhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇa* of the White *Yajurveda* ( SB ), TA, and the *Rgvidhāna*.
- ( vii ) It is not completely found at all places. There seem to be the following parts of the hymn : *ṛcs* 1-5; *ṛcs* 6-15; *ṛc* 16; *ṛcs* 17-22. The hymn of sixteen *ṛcs* is however the standard one as it is referred to in SB.
- ( viii ) Puruṣa is the deity and Nārāyaṇa is the seer.
- ( ix ) In SB and TA, Nārāyaṇa and Puruṣa are identified.
- ( x ) TA has the *Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad* which identifies Nārāyaṇa, Puruṣa, and Viṣṇu with Vāsudeva. He is said to be the same as the Highest Brahman. In the *Nārāyaṇīyadharmā-Parvan* of the Mbh., this *Āraṇyaka* seems to be referred to ( 12.323.10, 326.8, 330.34 ).
- ( xi ) Sāyaṇa gives a twofold interpretation of this hymn : sacrificial and philosophical. In sacrifice, the hymn is used in the *Puruṣamedha* which is the *pañcarātra* sacrifice performed by Puruṣa for securing every thing. The human victims are not killed. It is suprising that the human sacrifice, which is the first in the evolution of the idea of sacrifice, should be connected with the Puruṣa-Sūkta, which is one of the late hymns in the *Rgveda Samhitā*. In the philosophical explanation, two trends are noticeable: One according to which Puruṣa is described as the Brahman, and the other according to which Puruṣa is described as the highest lord ( Īśvara ) and the creator; The former is the Advaita Vedāntic and the latter is the Bhakti view. This Bhakti view is preserved in the traditional employment of RV 10.90 in the *Rgvidhāna*, which refers to Puruṣa as being the same as Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva.

