

Worship of Sun in ṚGVEDA

Alphonsa Chacko

Research Scholar, Dept.of Sanskrit Sahitya, SSUS, Kalady, Kerala

Abstract: The celestial luminary called sun shedding its perpetual flow of light and energy from the heavens on every being in the universe has always been a source of wonder and curiosity since the pre- historic days to the present. It has kindled the imagination of several writers including the Ṛgvedic poets who praised the grace and lustre of the Sun god endowed with many a characteristic feature. In the Hindu pantheon of Gods, the Sun and the Moon are the only pratyakṣa devatas, able to be seen to the naked eye. The worshipping Sun is also worshipping Goddess Gāyatri. According to the Ṛgveda, the Sun is the divine healer. The present paper intends to analyse the features of the cult of Sun in the Ṛgvedic times.

Index Terms- Ṛgveda-Sun-Gāyatrī-Savitṛ

I. INTRODUCTION

The cult of sun worship has been prevalent throughout the world for centuries. Ancient Tribes in various parts of the world worshipped the Sun as a universal force. They worshipped Thunder, Wind, Sun, etc. which are natural phenomena. In Ṛgveda these natural phenomena were worshipped as deities. They were personified forms of natural forces.¹ Which clear from the Vedic names like Savitā, Pūṣan, Āditya, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Araṇya and the like. Some of these deities were conceived as the controllers of the Ṛtam of this spontaneous Ṛtam of the universe.² The Vedic concept of Ṛta is very significant and Varuṇa who is the Pāśabhṛt. The wealer of noose is the protector and controller of Ṛta. The rising and setting of Sun and Moon the nature of the ocean in not transgressing its limits comes under the concept of Ṛta.

The Yoga philosophy as propounded by sage patanjali attaches great prominence to Sūryanamaskāra. It is an ancient exercise aimed at physical and mental equilibrium of human beings.³ Sūryanamaskāra is performed the before sunrise and after sunset. Its process consist of ten steps or stages.⁴

The Purāṇas describe the god as one who provides light of the universe.⁵ In Purāṇic literature sun is the son of Kaśyapaprajāpati and Aditi. Poetic imagination conceives sun as travelling in chariot borne by seven horses whose charioteer is Aruṇa. The sun and moon were believed to rotate around mount Mahāmeru.⁶ AtharvaVeda consist of a passage with this concept:

{ÉÚ'ÉÉÇ(É*úÉè SÉ*úíÉÉä "ÉÉ*É*ÉÉè iÉÉè ÉgÉgÉÚ

GòOb+xiÉÉè {ÉÉ*ú *ÉÉiÉÉä%hÉÇ'É'ÉÁ *

É'É'ÉÉxÉÁ *ÉÉä !ÉÓ'ÉxÉÉ É'ÉÉÉ']ò @ñiÉÚÄ-

*úx*ÉÉä É'ÉñìvÉVVEÉ*É'Éä xÉ'É&**⁷

In Āraṇyaka literature there is the concept of Dvādaśa Ādityas. J.E Swain, in his book *A History of world civilization*, who thinks that the Ṛgvedic hymns is earlier than B.C 2000. He quotes in this work a song devoted to the sun found in early Egyptian culture.⁸

II. SUN

Sun was possibly the most obvious personified form of the natural incidence for the Vedic peoples and solar worship may be the real religion of India. As Hastings examine, “nor is it difficult to identify with how in a land flooded with sunlight, where every phase and function of life is dependent upon the kindly tenderness of the Sun and his vicious power and force are felt in the extreme boundaries of heat, it should have been man’s primary business to win his favour and placate his rage⁹. The minds of the Vedic peoples and thus develop the different solar deities. Thus we have Mitra, Varuṇa, Savitr, Sūrya, Pūṣan, aryaman in the Vedic and the twelve Ādityas in the Purāṇic times. Though there do not exist many Sun- Temples in India, solar worship is accepted and practiced even today. The importance attached to the 7th day of the month for worshipping sun tell the fact that like other divine being, sun too has some ritualistic tradition.¹⁰

SUN AS A SOLAR GOD

Surya is one of the outward appearances of fire god placed in paradise by other gods. He is the brightest leading light, the glowing ball of light that Uṣas brings to the humanity. He is portraying as the eye of gods that beholds the actions of all worldly. He travels on a resplendent car driven by seven steeds that he unyokes at sunset. As he comes up in the horizon in the morning, the darkness of the night takes to its heels and the whole world is aroused to activities. As he rolls up darkness like a skin and the stars make good quality their run away like thieves the shines magnificently on the lap of dawn. It is with his light that he sustains the whole creation and energies it. All living being depend on surya who is their lead. He is poetically described as a bird flying through the unlimited spread of the blue firmament.¹¹

NATURAL INDIVIDUALITY OF THE SUN

Sun is the celestial deity. He is created by Brahman and placed in the in the sky just as vāyu was placed in the atmosphere. The burning planet shining amazingly in the sky is like an eye. He is the Sould of he is the eye of Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, etc; He is the Soul of the heaven earth and sky. In the first maṇḍala of R̥gveda that sun is the soul of the universe, its support and stay ‘Sūrya ātma jagatastuśca’.¹² Sun, as the common observable fact was glorified and worshipped through their hymns by the Vedic peoples. In the Vedic times, people attempt to detain his magnificence and dignity in the icon and worshipped him either in the form of a divine being or some symbolical design which signify him.

THE SOLAR SYMBOLS

The sun-god is symbolized by a choice of symbols and the wheel is one of them. A gold plate also is a sign of the sun Śatapata Brāhmaṇa VII.4.1.10. A gold dies was laid at the time of piling of the fire alter to represent the sun Śatapata Brāhmaṇa VII.4.1.1.10.¹³ The lotus is also originate in the hands of the sun- image, and it was presently taken over by Viṣṇu and his wife Lakṣmi. The lotus is inseparably related with the sun almost certainly because it blooms only while the sun burnish. Garuḍa, the bird mount of the sun, is absent in the Vedic literature though in a R̥gvedic passage Garutmān it appears that stands for the sun. According to another observation the sun is a horse brought by Uṣa-

nāu'ÉÉÉÉÉ SÉÉÓ& *ÉÓ:ÉMÉE'É/ápxiÉÓ ÉáíÉÉ xÉ*ÉxiÉÓ *ÉÓóùgÉÓÉÉ'É-É'ÉÁ *

=TÉE =nù]gÉ *Ég'ÉÉ:É*ÉÇHóÉ ÉSÉjÉE ÉvÉE É'Ég'É'ÉxÉÓ |É:ÉÚiÉÉ**¹⁴

He is also quite often described as riding a car sometimes drawn by one, and at other times by more than a few, four or seven, swift and glowing horses or mares. In the shodaśin give up a horse was placed in the hands of the priest and it signifies the sun. The horse was a strong and probably the fastest animal known to the Āryans and they recognized its speed and strength to its solar origin. The affiliation between the sun –god and the serpent, however, is one of hostility for the serpent symbolizes evil, and the sun goodness.¹⁵

SUN WORSHIP IN THE VEDIC AGE

As noted earlier, in the R̥gveda solar gods are the most numerous. We have Surya, Savitṛ, the Aśvins, Mitra, Vivasvān, Viṣṇu, Bhāga, Aryaman, Pūṣan, Āditya and the goddesses Uṣas, and Sūrya. Not all of them are given different personality, but glimpses are provided in to the natural occurrence or idea behind their apotheosis. Many of them have obvious resemblance with their Iranian counter parts and Indo- European prototypes. Surya as a sun god is thought of first and foremost as the visible orb light. He is golden; his chariot is drawn by seven horses. He is a healer, apparently because of the healing qualities of the sun rays Savitā, the stimulator of everything denotes his abstract individuality.¹⁶ Pūṣan indicate his compassionate power, visible chiefly as a idyllic deity. Bhaga, according to yāska presides over the forenoon. Vivasvān almost certainly in the establishment represented the rising sun but was also looked upon as the first sacrificer, the ancestor of the human race. The Aśvins are the most existing of solar gods. Their solar character is confirmed by their relationship with Uṣas (Dawn) that comes in their wake, and with Sūrya (daughter of Surya) and Savitṛ.

Most of the divine being point out above along with a few others like Varuṇa, Amśa, Dakṣa, Dhātṛ, Mārtaṇḍa etc. come to represent a special class of gods together known as the Ādityas, or sons of Aditi. Aditi was also looked upon as the mother of all the other Vedic divinities. Six Ādityas are mentioned in the Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuṇa, Dakṣa and Amśa.¹⁷

SURYA- THE VEDIC GOD

Surya, the sun god, worshipped by the Greeks as Helios, is in one hymn approach the son of Dayus in another he is called the son of Aditi. Uṣas, the dawn is in one place said to be his wife, while in another she is illustrate as his mother. He travels about in a car which is sometimes said to be drawn by seven fleet and glowing mares. He rolls up darkness like a put out of sight. Pūṣan goes as his envoy with his golden ships, which sail in the mid-air ocean. Surya is the preserver and soul of all things stationary and moving and is therefore, called the creator of everything, enlivened by him men perform their work, he is far- seeing, all seeing, beholds all living thing, and the good and bad deeds of moral values. By his prominence he is the divine chief of the gods.

In numerous passages however, the position of surya is emphasize. He said to have been caused to stand out by Indra, who also once approved off one of the wheels of his chariot. Mitra and Varuṇa sometimes obscure him by clouds and rain.¹⁸

SŪRYASTUTI

In R̥gveda, there are eleven sūktas devoted to sun. Some of these mantras describe the greatness and supernatural power of surya. Sun rays are having a power to destroy skin diseases like ‘Harima’ the greenish colour of the body an effect of the skin diseases like leprosy. Sunrays cure these types of diseases.¹⁹ R̥gveda consists of mantras invoking sun god to cure diseases.

=tzÉt Ê ÉjÉ É½p +É*úÉá½pzÉÖkÉ*ÉÉ ÊnúÉ ÉÁ*

¼ppúÉáMÉÉ É É Ú*ÉÇ ½É*ÉÉhÉÉ SE xÉÉÉÉ*É**²⁰

ईदृश- identity- effulgence, radiance, spiritual light and that bestows wisdom. नानु ईदृश - The word indicate divine authenticity, of glorious supreme. - ईदृशः we meditate upon.

ईदृशः ईदृशः x&p | ईदृशः ईदृशः

ईदृशः - mental power, sympathetic, cultivated supremacy. ईदृशः - Which. x&p Our. | ईदृशः ईदृशः - make clear to, motivate, direct.²⁵

SŪRYA AND SAVITA IN ṚGVEDA

Savita, in Ṛgveda with 11 hymns is also a sun deity. He is with golden eyes, hands and tongue. Sometimes he is differentiated from sun. Savita is related with ṛta.²⁶ He is the invisible sun of the night. He is mainly worshipped for the excusal from the sins, 'oh Savita, please make us free from the sins against devas, which have been occurred because of the lack of wisdom, power etc.'²⁷ Gāyatri mantra addresses the sun in the form of Savita. Yajurveda consist of the mantras which address the sun who is the supreme power and Savita, who is the base of Ṛk, Yajus by Sāmaveda.²⁸

III. CONCLUSION

The celestial orb of lusture namely sun has been a source of amazement for humans, since the early times. A Ṛgvedic poet wonders where sun has disappeared during night time. Since sun is the inexhaustible source of light and energy that keeps burning in the skies from time immemorial, it has been because an object of worship. Sun god was thought to be endowed with divine efficacy to solve the problems of human existence. It was natural that if sun god is propitiated it would bring fortune, prosperity, luminosity, children, cattle and longevity to them. It was such a belief that was the first source of the cult of sun worship and Ṛgveda is our most ancient monument of sun worship which is couched in poetic, as well as metaphoric expressions.

NOTES

1. *Samskr̥ta Sāhitya Caritram* Vol.I&II, K.kunjunni Raja & M.S Menon, P. 2.

2. Quoted by *Vedadīpika*, P.V Ramankutty, p.76.

3. *Hindu Encyclopaedia*, C Prasad (Ed.), P.898.

4. *ibid.*, C Prasad (Ed.), P.856.

5. *ibid.*, C Prasad (Ed.), P.856.

6. *Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Vilāsakāvya* with Sanskrit commentary Vilasini of Rāmapāṇivāda and Malayalam Commentary Prasadam, Canto One, P.N Prasad (Ed.), P.14.

7. *ibid.*, P.N Prasad (Ed.), P.15.

8. *Vedadīpika*, P.V Ramankutty, P.16-17.

9. *Vedic Elements in Purāṇic mantras and Rituals*, Gauri Mahulikar, P.190-191.

10. *ibid.*, P.191.

11. *The Ṛgveda and Vedic Religion with readings from the Vedas*, A.C Clayton, P.65-66.

12. *Gāyatri in Ṛgveda*, Mahadeva Narayanrao Joshi, P.31.

13. *A Religious History of Ancient India* Vol.II, S.R Goyal, P.329.

14. *ibid.*, P.328.

15. *Ṛgveda.*, VII.63.4.
16. *A Religious History of Ancient India* Vol.II, S.R Goyal , P.328.
17. *Ṛgveda.*, II.27.
18. *ibid.*, P.329.
19. *Śruthisaurabham*, C.M Neelakandhan, P.67.
20. *Ṛgveda.*, I.50.11.
21. *Ṛgveda.*, I.50.12.
22. *Ṛgveda*.III.62.10.
23. *Gāyatri in Ṛgveda*, Mahadeva Narayanarao Joshi, P.98.
24. *ibid.*, P.99.
25. *Vedic Mind*, Ram K Pipariya,(Ed.), P.I.
26. *Samskr̥ta Sāhitya Charitram*, K.kunjunni Raja & M.S Menon, P.62.
27. *Bhāratīyadarśanam*,T. Narayanan Nambissan (Tr.), P.60.
28. *Yajurvedasamīkṣa*, P.V Ramankutty, P.20.

References

1. Clayton A.C, *The Ṛgveda and Vedic Religion with readings from the Vedas*, Banarasi Dass & CO Publishers, Delhi, 1981, (1913).
2. Goyal S.R, *A Religious History of Ancient India* Vol.II, Kusumanjali Publishers, Delhi, 1995.
3. Joshi Mahadeva Narayanrao, *Gāyatri in Ṛgveda*, Roopa Publications, Dharward, 2001.
4. Kunjunni Raja K. & Menon M.S, *Samskr̥ta Sāhitya Caritram* Vol.I&II, Kerala Sahitya Academi, Thrissur, 2002, (1990).
5. Macdonell A.A, *Vedic Mythology*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1995, (1898).
6. Mahulikar Gauri, *Vedic Elements in Purāṇic Mantras and Rituals*, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 2000.
7. Neelakandhan C.M, *Śruthisaurabham*, Panchangam pustakashala, Kunnamkulam, 2005.
8. Nambissan T. Narayanan (Tr.), *Bhāratīyadarśanam*, The Mathrubhumi Printing & Publishing, Calicut, 1996.
9. Prasad C (Ed.), *Hindu Encyclopaedia*, Rainbow Book publishers, Trivandrum, 2004.
10. Pipariya Ram K, *Vedic Mind*, indusvista Editions, Mumbai, 2004.
11. Prasad P.N (Ed.), *Śrīkr̥ṣṇa Vilāsakāvya* with Sanskrit commentary Vilasini of Rāmapāṇivāda and Malayalam Commentary Prasadam, Canto One, Pranav & Pranam Publishers, Anchal, 1996.
12. Ramankutty P.V, *Vedadīpika*, Panchangam pustakashala, Kunnamkulam, 2008.
13. Ramankutty P.V, *Yajurvedasamīkṣa*, Panchangam pustakashala, Kunnamkulam, 2008.
14. Wilson H.H, (Tr.), *Ṛgveda Samhita*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 1997.