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## REFLECTION OF SUN WORSHIP IN VEDIC LITERATURE

**Dr. Alphonsa Chacko**

Assistant Professor on Contract, Dept. of Sanskrit, Deva Matha College, Kuravilangad

### INTRODUCTION

Many important objects related to the Sun God can be found in Vedic Literature. The Vedas give instructions regarding the vehicle of the Sun. It is mentioned that the chariot of the Sun is drawn by horses. Sun symbols like wheels are also mentioned in Vedic Literature.<sup>3</sup> In Vedic Aryans, adoration of the Sun was a common practice. Various offerings were made to the Sun for removal of sins.<sup>4</sup> As per various Vedic verses, the Sun is considered to be the deity for entire human races and no discrimination for particular race or community.

The Sun, which awakens man from darkness and sleep, and which cannot be looked by anyone with the naked eyes and which enables as to maintain their existence. This has been adored by human beings as a god, as their life, their breath and their admired lord and protector. The Sun is also considered as the god who provides help to free people from a number of evil spirits. In Veda one can see four divisions such as *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. Following are short description about the Sun worship in four divisions of Veda

#### **RIGVEDA (R.V)**

The worship of the Sun god is in a well-developed form in *Rigveda*. Vedic Aryans are regarded as of Indian origin so the Vedic Sun god is original. If the Vedic Aryans came from outside, it could be regarded as originated from outside. One can see that the worship of the Sun god in various forms was existed on Indian soil even before the arrival of Aryans.<sup>5</sup> Various forms of the Sun god are projected under various names and are worshipped as different deities independent of the Sun god, but rest of the deities in Vedic pantheon are considered as single god. In *Rgveda*, the Sun is regarded as the god of gods (*R.V.*, 1.50.10).

The *Rigvedic* text states that ancient people were started adoring the Sun god because he was conceived to be removed darkness before the day when the humans first developed his sense of discrimination between evil and good.<sup>6</sup>

In the Vedic India, there existed an enthusiastic custom of Sun worship. Among Indo- Aryans, nature worship was well known. The Sun in various forms were worshipped in Vedic custom. Each form of the Sun god represents various aspects of the Sun. Sacrifice to the Sun were made to various names such as *Sūrya*, *Savita*, *Pūṣan*, *Bhaga*, *Vivasvat*, *Mitra* and *Viṣṇu*. The Sun is personified to a greater extent based on the dissimilar quality of the Sun.<sup>7</sup>

The *Rigveda* described about various solar gods such as *Surya*, *Savita*, the *Ashvins*, *Mitra*, *Vivasvan*, *Vishnu*, *Bhaga*, *Aryaman*, *Pushan*, *Aditya*, *Ushas* and *Surya*. All of them are not given any distinct individuality. Many of these deities have some similarity with their Iranian counter – parts and Indo-European models.<sup>8</sup> It is mentioned that *Sūrya* golden colour and his chariot is drawn by seven horses. Above mentioned deities along with others such as *Varuṇa*, *Amsha*, *Daksha*, *Dhatr*, *Martandaa* etc made another group of gods, which is collectively known as *Adityas*. They are considered as the sons of *Aditi*. *Aditi* was also described as the mother of all other Vedic deities. Six *Adityas* were mentioned in *Rigveda*, such as *Mitra*, *Aryaman*, *Bhaga*, *Varuna*, *Daksha* and *Amsha* (*R.V.*, 11.27).

The rays of the *Surya* are regarded as the hands of the Sun (*R.V.*, 1.115.5). He was also regarded as the son of sky and the dawn (*R.V.*, 10.37.1; 10.189.1; 7.63.3). *Sūrya* is connected with eye in *Rigveda*. It is mentioned that *Sūrya* is seeing everything and also mentioned about far-seeing ability of *Surya* (*R.V.*, 7.35.8; 1.50.2; 1.50.6; 7.60.2; 7.61.1). Also mentioned that *Sūrya*, is seeing all the activities of men including good and bad activities (*R.V.*, 7.51.2; 7.60.1; 7.63.1- 4). It is also regarded as *Sūrya* making sinners as sinless (*R.V.*, 10.37.4, 7). The healing power of *Surya* is also described in



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*Rigveda* (R.V., 10.37.4). It is mentioned that the Surya is having the power to cure jaundice (R.V.,1.50.12) and also said that he is worshipped for getting good eye sight (R.V.,10.37.7). A hymn in *Rigveda* described Surya as the soul of all movable and immovable things (R.V., 1.115.1). Surya is also called as a gem of the sky (R.V., 1.22.8.13). Surya is considered as the soul of moving world 'Surya atma jagatastasthushca' (R.V., 7.60.4). As the source of 'Madhuvidya'<sup>9</sup>, he is having the knowledge of honey therapy as a remedy of poison. (R.V., 1.191).

## YAJURVEDA

Second Veda is *Yajurveda*. This is used to perform Yaga and other rituals in right order that is the reason various Mantras related to various rituals and rites belongs to *Yajurveda*. The hymns of *Yajurveda* are said to be created from the hymns of the *Rgveda*. The hymns of the *Yajurveda* are in the form of prose and hymns in *Rgveda* are in the form of verses.<sup>10</sup> In *Yajurveda*, it is mentioned about the Sun God as a solar splendor and he is beyond the darkness and there is no other path except the Sun to reach the God. (*Yajurveda.*, 31.18).

Further it is mentioned that, to achieve success in different undertakings, one has to perform various sacrifices to the Sun and other Gods through fire sacrifice. If one done fire sacrifice it will reach directly to the Sun and other Gods (*Yajurveda.*, 2.5). In another verse it states that, one who made offerings through fire, the essence of this sacrifice will extract by the Sun with the help of Vāyu and take up it beyond the clouds and tears it on earth as rain (*Yajurveda.*, 2.8). In another place it was mentioned that, the Sun is not only the bringer of light but also the bringer of justice and knowledge (*Yajurveda.*, 10.4).

In *Rgveda*, the Sun is considered as a burning glob, but in *Yajurveda*, the Sun god is depicted as in human form as well. *Yajurveda* distinguishes the movement of the Sun with the Moon. The Sun is moving alone and the Moon is rising again. This means that the Moon decreases its visibility in dark fortnight and gradually increases its visibility during the bright fortnight (*Yajurveda.*, 23.10). One verse of *Yajurveda*, it is mentioned about the relation between Sūrya and Agni. Both of these are considered as the tejas of Brahman and that is the reason offerings are made to both of them during sacrifice (*Yajurveda.*, 3.8).

## SAMAVEDA

The *Samaveda* is called as the Veda of melodies. The seven basic notes of Indian music are originated from *Samaveda*. It contains 1549 verse in the form of songs and which are used by the Utgata priests for various ceremonies. Most of the verses are taken from *Rgveda* and are arranged in a particular order for easy use for various rituals.<sup>11</sup>

In *Samaveda*, the Sun is envisaged as the life giver of plants and vegetables (*Samaveda.*, 9.1.1783). The reddish rays of the Sun are helpful for crops, they have gratifying effect on these vigorous creatures. The sense activities notice their wishes and the capability of mind brings them in existence. Indra did not beat them down; they were acceptable and he won for them and entrust them. Savitr is called as a golden handed sage (*Samaveda.*, 1.464). In *Samaveda* also it is mentioned that Viṣṇu cross over three regions by his three steps (*Samaveda.*, 1.222).

## ATHARVAVEDA (A.V)

*Atharvaveda* is the fourth and last of the Vedas. Compared to other Vedas it shows some differences. First three Vedas generally deals with the gods and the future life of the man, but *Atharvaveda* dealing about present life of the man. The main concern of the *Atharvaveda* is to bring protection to man from his enemy and also bring day to day welfare to the mankind. *Atharvaveda* is known as the book of Atharvans or Angiras. Atharvans or Angiras are the highly intellectual class of priests who were first introduced the Fire Worship or Soma Sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> The main content of this Veda is prayers, rules and charms for protection against evil spirits, deceases, snakes and other dangerous creatures.



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In one verse of *Atharvaveda*, described the Sun as a heavenly object who attack the enemies and put them in to the dark world (*A.V.*, 13.1.32). In another verse the Sun is compared with Indra, Vāyu, Aryaman, Varuṇa, Rudra, Agni, Yama, Dhātā and Vidhata (*A.V.*, 13.4.1-5). In *A.V.*, it is mentioned that the Sun under the name Divakara have emerged from Vrutra. (*A.V.*, 4.10.5). Also, the Sun is called as the Lord of eyes. (*A.V.*, 5.24.9). Connection between Sūrya and heaven is referred in the *Atharvaveda* (*A.V.*, 4.39.5, 6). *A.V.*, it is mentioned that the chariot of the Surya is drawn by the steeds (*A.V.*, 13.1.124). Also mentioned that the Surya is the beholder of everything (*A.V.*, 13.1.45). There is also a mention about the healing power of the Sun. It is said that the Sūrya is solicited to cure jaundice (*A.V.*, 1.12).

Surya is regarded as the soul of all movable and immovable things in *Atharvaveda* (*A.V.*, 13.2.35). In *Atharvaveda* it is mentioned that Viṣṇu is travelling to three regions by his three stalks (*A.V.*, 7.26.4). In *Atharvaveda*, lotus is connected with the Sun god (*A.V.*, 13.3.10). Surya is also prayed to get cure from cough (*A.V.*, 6.100.1). Another place it is said that praying to Sūrya will bring relief from various kinds of pains especially pains related to the heart (*A.V.*, 9.8). Surya is invoked with other gods to get long life (*A.V.*, 2.29.1). In *Atharvaveda* Surya is regarded as the reason for Time (*A.V.*, 14.53). The Surya is also invoked along with Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman to turn away the evil spirits and to obtain riches (*A.V.*, 1.18.2, 1.26.2). The Sun god is identified with Viṣṇu in the *Atharvaveda* (*A.V.*, 17.1.8). There is a mention like, Viṣṇu is born of butter and it shows the fertility aspect of Viṣṇu (*A.V.*, 7.26.3). Another place it is mentioned that, Viṣṇu is blessed his worshippers with male children (*A.V.*, 5.25.5). The Sun god Rohita is narrated as bull in *Atharvaveda* (*A.V.*, 13.2.42).

## CONCLUSION

In Vedic society, the Sun god was worshipped in various forms and was an integral part of their social and religious ceremonies. The Sun god was thought to be gifted with divine value to solve the problems of human existence. The Sun played an important role in the daily life of Vedic period. Worship of the Sun in its spiritualized form played an important role in the social life of Vedic era. One can observe that, there is a mixing of various aspects and functions of the Sun gods in Vedic period, also there was a tendency to personify various natural phenomenon. It was found that the compassionate aspects of the Sun were worshipped during Vedic traditions and functions.

## Foot Notes

1. A. Saran and Gaya Pandey., *Sun Worship in India, A Study of Deo Sun-Shrine*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1992, p.4.
2. Devendrakumar Rajaram Patil., *Cultural History from the Vāyu Puranaa*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1973, p.191.
3. *ibid.*, p.19.
4. Shanti Lal Nagar., *Surya and Sun Cult (In Indian Art, Culture, Literature and Thought)*, Aryan Books International, Delhi, 1995, p.19.
5. Bijoy Kumar Sarkar., *Sun Cult in Prachyadesha History, Religion & Iconography*, Prathibha Prakashan, Delhi, 2010, p.5.
6. Goyal., *op.cit*, p.328.
7. The concept of Madhuvidya is like that, when we touch anything, we are touching everything. The word 'Madhu' in 'Madhuvidya' means honey. Honey draws the essence from the surrounding flowers and which express the organic relationship of everything in this universe.
8. Rekha Vyas., *Yajurveda*, Vishv Books Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, ..., p.3.
9. Goithyja., *Ayahuasca Glimpse 2012*, Xlibris Corporation, USA, 2012, p.69.
10. Rajbali Pandey., *Atharvaveda (Sukta-wise Translation)*, Diamond Books, New Delhi, 2006, p.5.



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- 7.Rekha Vyas., *Yajurveda*, Vishv Books Pvt.Ltd, Delhi, ...
- 8.Surendranath Dasgupta., *A History of Indian Philosophy (Vol- 1)*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1997.
- 9.Shanti Lal Nagar., *Surya and Sun Cult (In Indian Art, Culture, Literature and Thought)*, Aryan Books International, Delhi, 1995.

## Findings

- In Vedas one can find that the Sun god is regarded as the God of gods.
- Various names of the Sun such as Savita, Pushan, Aditya, Varuna, etc. brings an idea about the personification of the Sun god in Vedas.
- In Vedas one can find various sacrifices like Agnihotra, Agnishtoma, etc. are made to the Sun god.
- Vedas mentioned about the healing ability of the Sun, especially related to eyes and rheumatism. It also mentioned that the Sun is having the power to cure jaundice.
- All seeing capacity of the Sun is mentioned in Vedas. The Sun is watching all the activities including good and bad deeds of the human.
- Fertility aspect of the Sun is mentioned in Vedas. Through its heat and rain giving aspects, the Sun is helping to grow crops and vegetables.
- The importance of chanting Gayatri Manta is mentioned in Vedas, Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads.