CHAPTER V

Visve Devas in the Epics

In the last chapter, we studied the position of the VD etc. in the domestic rites prescribed in the Gṛhyaśūtras. That chapter has brought us to the end of the Vedic literature. Coming to the classical literature, we may first turn our attention towards the archaic Epics: Mahābhārata (MBh.) and Rāmāyaṇa (Rāmā.)

(a) Data from the Mahābhārata

The Mahābhārata (MBh.) is a magnificent work both in quantity and in quality. Its main theme is the great Mahābhārata war—an event of national importance.

It also records numerous anecdotes (Itihāsa and Ākhyāna) which have enlarged the basic form. The MBh. presents a complete picture of the historical, geographical, religious and cultural conditions prevailing in India so far as it was then intimately known by that time. As regards the chronology of that work, it is a fact that in consideration of the additions made to the original text from time to time, a fixed date of its composition cannot be thought of. The literary activity of its compilation may be counted by centuries. The work is of course a post-Buddhistic composition and is generally considered as compiled during the period ranging from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D. The period follows that of the Kalpasūtra literature. It is therefore proper to take stock of the position of the visve Devas in the MBh. Even though the MBh. is a voluminous text, the references to the VD therein are only a few.
The creation of gods:

In the very first chapter of the Ādiparvan of the Mahā-bhārata, we come across some cosmogonical details. Sthānu, Manu, Ka, Paramēṣṭhi, Prācetasa and Dakṣa were created from Svayambhu. There were twenty-one Prajāpatis. The VD, Ādityas, Vasus, Aśvinau, Yakṣa, Sādhyas, Piśācas, Guhyakas, Pitṛs etc. were created. The list is further continued.\(^{(1)}\) The VD are mentioned together with Ādityas, Vasus, Maruts, Rudras. Moreover Sādhyas and Pitṛs are added to these groups of gods. The VD are mentioned together with these groups of gods in the Ādivāṁśavataraṇaparvan.\(^{(2)}\)

In Harivamsa, the origin of the VD is given. Dakṣa had sixty daughters. Out of them, he gave ten daughters to Dharma in marriage. Viśvā was one of them. From Viśvā and Dharma VD were born.\(^{(3)}\) At another place, Ādityas, Vasus, Rudras, VD, Maruts, Nāgas, Sādhyas and Pannagas are said to be the progeny of Dakṣa's daughters.\(^{(4)}\)

Janamejaya wanted to know the incarnations of gods, demons etc. in mankind. Vaiśampāyana said the five sons of Draupadī were the incarnations of the VD.\(^{(5)}\) When Arjuna was born, gods gathered in the heaven to see the child of Indra. Aśvinau, Vasus, Maruts, VD, Sādhyas were among those gods.\(^{(6)}\)

In Tīrthayātrāparvan, gods came bringing consecrating water. There were VD, Rudras, Vasus, Ādityas, Aśvinau, Maruts, Sādhyas and Pitṛs.\(^{(7)}\)

Vaiśampāyana, while speaking about the importance of Daṇḍa, says, one who has power, becomes a master. Indra killed
Vṛtra, therefore people admire him. Vāyu, Mṛtyu, Vaiśravana, Ravi, Vasus, Maruts, Sādhyas and the VD have power, so that people pay obeisance to them. (3) At another place, the VD are mentioned along with Brahmana, Satakratu, Viṣṇu and Mahārṣis. (9)

During the Mahābhārata war, Droṇācārya, the head of the Kaurava army, one day organised his army in Cakravāha - a mode which was difficult to break through. It was Arjuna alone who knew the way of entering that array and of coming out safely. It so happened that Arjuna was engaged in fight by the Samsaptakas on that day, hence there was nobody on the Pāṇḍavaś side who could face the challenge. The Pāṇḍavas were thus in a fix. Śrīkṛṣṇa said that Abhimanyu had the knowledge of breaking through the Cakravāha, since while being in embryonic stage in the abdomen of Subhadrā, he had listened to the way of breaking through the Cakravāha being taught to Arjuna. Abhimanyu, even though a boy, undertook to lead the army in spite of the protest by Subhadrā and others. He entered the Cakravāha, but could not come out safely. He was surrounded by the Kaurava warriors and was slain by Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu. "Arjuna was shocked at this incident and determined to kill Jayadratha. He said to Śrīkṛṣṇa, "if VD, Ādityas, Vasus, Maruts, Rudras and other groups of gods come forward to protect the Sindhurāja, still you will see that Sindhurāja is killed in the battlefield tomorrow." (10)

Thus in the Mahābhārata, the VD seem to have assumed the character of an independent group of gods, side by side with Ādityas, Vasus, Rudras, Maruts, Sādhyas Pitṛs, etc. They are not gods in general; nor are they deemed, following the Vedic
concept, as a group of gods added for completion. They do not form a combination of Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas. They form a concrete group to be mentioned side by side with Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas etc.

The Vaiśvādeva rite:

The many references in the Mahābhārata and a single one in the Rāmāyaṇa to the Vaiśvādeva rite indicate the continuity of an old Vedic domestic rite which is recorded in the Gṛhya-
sūtras. The character of the VD which prevailed in the Gṛhya-
sūtras and even in earlier literature is retained in the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa also. In the Vaiśvādeva rite, the VD form a groups of gods which is mentioned along with other Vedic gods for the sake of completeness. In the long Indian tradition certain domestic rites have naturally enjoyed a continuity. The daily Vaiśvādeva rite is one among them. Consequently the old concept of the VD continued even in the period of Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa.

It is said that after the Vaiśvādeva offering, one should entertain a guest; one should not forget to give food also to one's servants. One who gives a fat cow with white neck together with her calf to a brahman attains the world of the VD.\(^{(11)}\) Those who do not perform Vaiśvādeva nor bestow gifts on a brahman or a Brahmačārin, attain evil worlds. At one place,\(^{(12)}\) One comes across the religious practices which a householder is required to perform. Prthivī asks Vāsudeva about the daily procedure of a householder. She relates that a householder establishes Gṛhyaōgni at his home; everyday he offers Śrāddha
to Fathers, and performs Vaisvadeva as prescribed in the Gṛhyasūtra. He gives food to domestic animals, birds and low class people. After the Viśvadeva, one should enquire about a brahman and then should give food to guests.

Śrāddha:

In the Anuśāsanapurvan, there are seven chapters (Xiii. 87-93) which are known as Śrāddhakalpa. In the great Mahābhārata war, numerous relatives of Yudhiṣṭhira on both sides of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas were killed. The problem of the funeral and Śrāddha - rites in respect of them had of course assumed a wide dimension. Yudhiṣṭhira therefore asked Bhīṣma about the social and religious conduct of man, when Bhīṣma was on arrow-bed and waiting for the uttarāyaṇa to be started. In that course of conversation, Yudhiṣṭhira discusses the Śrāddha-rite. Bhīṣma informed him that Nimi had introduced the Śrāddha rite. Nimi had a son named Śrīmān who was brilliant and virtuous. Unfortunately he died. Nimi was very much grieved. He thought of offering a Śrāddha for him. He performed all rites so as to be directed towards the south because Pitṛloka was situated towards the south. Vīd are said to be living there together with Pitṛs. (13) Nimi offered a ball of rice to Śrīmān. Atri, the ancestor of Nimi came and he conducted the Śrāddha - rite properly. Here Bhīṣma mentions the names of the Vīd as follows: 1) Saha 2) Kṛti 3) Vipāpman 4) Puṇyakṛt 5) Pāvana 6) Grāmni 7) Kṣema 8) Samūha 9) Divyasānu 10) Vivasvat 11) Vīryavat 12) Hṛimat 13) Kīrtimat 14) Kṛta 15) Vipūrva 16) Somapurva 17) Sūryasṛī 18) Somapā 19) Sūryasāvitra 20) DaHātman 21) Puṣkarīyaka 22) Uṣṇīnābha 23) Nabhoda
The śrāddha rite which is recorded in the Mahābhārata supplies some information which is important for defining the character of the VD vis-à-vis the śrāddha-rite: The Pitṛs are said to be living in the southern direction (dakṣiṇā). According to the Mahābhārata, the dakṣiṇā direction is so called because long long ago Vivasvat who performed a Vedic sacrifice, gave away to his preceptor the southern direction as sacrificial fee (Dakṣiṇā). Since then that direction is known as Dakṣiṇā. In the Vedic literature, we often come across the word dakṣiṇā meaning "sacrificial fee." There also the word is related to the southern direction. The ritual injunction is that when, in a Soma-sacrifice, cows are given away as sacrificial fee to the various officiating priests in the Midday - pressing, the cows are driven into the sacrificial place along the path between the Prāgyāmsa and the Sadas Pandal from the south and are made to pass through the sacrificial place towards the north. Because the cows enter from the south,
the sacrificial fees are known as Dākṣīṇā. Anyway there is a relation between the southern direction and the sacrificial fees. The Mahābhārata further says that the place of the Pitṛs belonging to the three regions Earth, midregion, and heaven is located in the southern direction. In this direction reside the gods who enjoy the steam (issuing out of the rice-balls). The VD also live here along with the Pitṛs. Offerings are made to them on the earth and they enjoy equal share (with Pitṛs.) Thus the Mahābhārata for the first time, assigns the southern direction to the VD and describes them as staying with Pitṛs.

(b) Rāmāyana

In Rāmāyana (II. * 1110), Rāma is said to have performed the Vaiśvādeva-rite when he built his hut in Pañcavaṭi. After having performed the Vaiśvādeva rite he performed the Vāstusānti in connection with the construction of his new hut.

(c) Conclusion

The epics may be said to be continuing the religious and cultural tradition come down from the Veda. In consideration of its main theme and voluminous character, the Mahābhārata presents much information reflecting its novelty. So far as the problem of the VD is concerned, it however does not go much beyond the trend in the Vedic literature.

The age-old Vaiśvādeva rite finds a place in the Mahābhārata. It is a rite which is intended for all gods; at the same time, it has assigned the VD, the character of a
group of gods bearing the same designation. The Ādiparvan begins with the cosmogony in which Svayambhu is credited with creating Ṣṭhāṇu, Manu and other supreme beings. Next are mentioned the various groups of gods etc. like VD, Ādityas, Vasus, Maruts, Rudras, Sādhyas, Piśācas, Guhyakas Pitṛs etc.

In connection with the deaths of hundreds and thousands of relatives and other persons on both the sides of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, Mahārṣi Vyāsa had to deal with the Śrāddha rite to be performed in honour of the departed souls. In that regard, Bhīṣma has mentioned the names of sixty two Viśve Devas which are mentioned here for the first time. The Hari-vamsa also gives the names of twelve viśve Devas which donot agree with the above-mentioned list. Draupadi's five sons are said to have been the incarnations of the VD. The most important point to be noted in regard to the VD in the Mahābhārata is that they are said to be living in the southern direction together with the Pitṛs.

In Rāmāyaṇa, it is said that the Vaisvadevarite was performed by Rāma prior to the Vāstuśanti rite of his newly constructed hut in Pañcavaṭī. Thus it is clear that in the Rāmāyaṇa period the Vaisvadeva-rite was an established rite to be performed daily.
Notes

1) यस्मापिनामही अज्य प्रसुकः प्रजापातिः।
   पुरुषब्रह्मसम्युक्तमा संवंशिष्यो विदुः।
   बिष्णुदेवसत्यादित्या कस्योक्ताचिनावि।
   ... ततः प्रसुता विधानं किष्णा वर्धन्योऽक्षमतः। MBh. i. 32, 33

2) अन्यं संभ्रवक्यामि पश्चात् कुल्लिति गणान।
   सुभ्राणापि: पठस्य साध्यानां सरस्तां तथा।
   कस्मूनं भगवं बिष्णुदेवसत्यादित्या MBh. i. 60, 37

3) अशुभ्यतीत्वा कर्मणीमि लाभा भावुमहीनस्य।
   संस्कारसं नुसूरत्वं न साध्यां विचा न भवत।
   धर्मशाल्यो इश्वरि तेवामुनिसत्यापत्याने में कुँशु।
   'बिष्णुदेवसत्या विचाया: साध्या साध्यांनाय जायत HariVam. 3, 26-27

4) एताधिता प्रजाः संवेद वसकण्यासु जातिर|。
   आदित्य हस्तनी रत्रि विचि न समस्मिना।
   नागाधिनेत्रसिंधसः साध्या वै पल्लगारस्या HariVam. (Cal. Ed.) 11844

5) ब्रह्मदेवस्य च पति अभूवमुर्तिवर्तितोऽ|।
   बिष्णुदेववार्जनानन्दतिविविधेय मक्षणम् MBh. i. 61, 88

6) अधिनी वसवशाशो सरस्तव पत्राबत:।
   बिष्णुदेववार्जनानन्दतिविविधेय मक्षणम् MBh. i. 114, 59

7) स्त्रीवसुविभार्तिविविहितोऽसु ब्रज: प्रसु।
   विष्णुदेववार्जनानन्दतिविविधेय पिलीमि: मह MBh. ix. 44, 6

8) इति: वृजवर्षीनां च मेहन्द्रः समपयने।
   य एव देवा हन्तरस्तातृतोऽकुर्चयिते भूसम्।।।
   हन्त्या कालसमया वायुहितुयं अन्नवी वकैः।
वसवि भसतः साध्या विन्दुवेवाय्य भसतः
एकादशीतमस्मयः प्रसतप्रवणता जनः MBh.xii.15.16-18

9) ब्रह्मा शाक्ति विलियुविलियं वेदेवा महानाति:
न विदुः सु तन्वेन कुतो वेदयामहे स्वयम् MBh.xiii.16.16

10) यदि साध्यात रुपा रुपायु वसवद्य सताद्यानि:
सताद्य सहेन्द्रण विन्दुदेवास्यास्त्राः
...
तथातः सिन्धुराणक्य भवानि मथुराधिनः
तन्याधिकृतः कालोष्टिवे शो दृढः सि रघु मथुराधिनः MBh.vii.53.34

11) सवल्लो निर्सवल्लो निर्माणा धिनितकण्ठार्तकृताम्
वेदेन्द्रमस्यार्थं स्वानं तेन वधायः MBh.xiii.74.18

12) पितृवन्दत्रपियोऽवला दु वाते कुलकं प्रहानतः
वेदेन्द्रेण ततः कुर्नाराधे ब्राह्मणार्चनम् MBh.xvi.1611
तनीतः वेदेन्द्राक्षेण भौज्येदतियोऽपि
अर्थार्थं महाराजः ततः प्रोणाति माधुराणः MBh.xvii.1711
अनेनकृतं हि स्वेतो नमस्तासमासीयाञ्च ये MBh.xviii.1811
अन्नास्यम् पितृवन्दत्रपियोऽवला च चिन्त्याः
इदमाति शुरू महामाति निष्कन्तं निवेष्येन् MBh.xviii.1911
ते यहायुस्तं कुर्नाराधे प्रहान्तेन धर्मां विनायिते
श्रव्यं: कुश्य: कृष्ण: शिष्याः स्वतं सदा मेवलं MBh.xviii.2011
राजविलियां स्वातंकं च नु चुं धर्मस्मृतं च
अर्चिभैर्महादुर्ष्यां परिष्कर्षण सरोपिनात् MBh.xviii.2111
-कुप्पर्यायं क्षणोपप्पत्यं कृष्ण्यायांतिक्षु, वेदेन्द्राय ते हि नरमात्मायु प्राणार्धीमिते MBh.xiii.100.16-22
13) इसमें विवचनतः... गुणि दक्षिणा दत्ता वाक्षीर्द्वृत्ति निविद्।

अनि विचे सदा देवा पिलामुः। सार्थमस्तति: मः Bh. vi. 167.3

14) सहः कृतेतिपिन्दाः न वृष्णकृप्ताविन्यया।

ग्रामलि: कृत्यं समुद्रस्य दिव्यमनुस्त्रवेदी य।

विज्ञानीयानकलोमनीविन्यासरकृम्यात् एव।

विषुवः मूर्द्धः सुर्यसातिष्ठति नाममाः।

भौमद: सूर्यसातिष्ठति वनामाः पुष्करिकाः।

उष्णिनामाः नमोद्यं विद्वायुरीकरिते य।

पासुरः सूर्यमेव व्योमारि: भोकरी भवः।

ईश्वरः करतां कृतिर्दितः शुक्लो दिव्यकथितः।

गाणित: प्रस्तवक्रिया आदिन्यो रघुमांसयः।

सत्यकृत्सीमवायुः विद्वायुनिकितवस्य।

अनुगोपस्य सुगोपस्य न नमस्ते वैधर्यात् एव।

विज्ञानाम् सुनिवियेदेवी विपलसे समेतः।

अनुक्रियाः प्रतीतश्च प्रवाहाः सूधुरांसस्याः।

कृत्याः: परस्मािक्षण्यो धीरोमां भूपितस्याः।

सणिव वलो करी नैव विचेदेवा सानानः।

कृतिनामाः महामयं: कालस्य गतिगिरि: मः Bh. xiii. 91. 30-37

15) विद्विषेद्वायाः विद्वायाः धर्महीना इति शुचि:।

सुधर्माः न महाराजः सानुपात्य पार्वत।

उक्ष्यात्मक महाबारुपुरुपात्य तथैव य।

पार्वशुक्स्मः मनोरीति तस्यानन्दमहोरिणः।

विद्वायुवसूधुरान्यो विद्वायुनिकित्वत् महायशः।

सुदार्शनाम्बाजः कै श्रास्त्रंत्रत्र नितिः: Hari Varn. (Cal.:Ed.)

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