CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, we studied the mythology and ritual of the Viśve Devas as occurring in the Rgveda, Atharvaveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda together with Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas, the Sūtra-literature, Mahābhārata, Smṛtis and Nibandhas, Purāṇas and the other literature. While doing so, we made an attempt to trace the development of the character of the Viśve Devas. In this last chapter we shall take a stock of the summaries of the various chapters and try to arrive at conclusion.

There are about two scores of hymns in the Rgveda which have Viśve Devas for their deity. When a hymn consist of verses addressed to a number of deities, the tradition deems it as addressed to the Viśve Devas. In such a hymn there are one or two verses at the end or at the beginning or in between which are addressed to Viśve Devāḥ "all gods." Now what does this "all gods" mean? A study of only such verses as contain the word 'viśve Devāḥ' in some case-form would enable us to arrive at the scientific meaning of the term. A study of other verses in such a hymn which are obviously addressed to definite deities would not be of any use for our purpose. We reproduced and translated with critical notes wherever necessary the relevant verses from each of the hymns of viśve Devas, and found that the term Viśve Devas has not a uniform meaning in those verses. We found that

(a) In some verses, Viśve Devāḥ mean "all (many) gods."
(b) In a large number of verses the word denotes a separate group of gods including the other gods as an element added to a whole. Here they are sometimes mentioned as three times eleven or comprising the Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas.

(c) In a few instances the group of gods is mentioned for completeness with a sense of fear of omission.

(d) The Viśve Devas began to appear as an entirely separate group of gods.

The important point to be noted is that even though an entire hymn is considered as addressed to the Viśve Devas, the term Viśve Devas denotes a separate group of gods.

In the Atharvaveda over a score of hymns are addressed to Viśve Devas. What applies to a hymn of Viśve Devas in the Rgveda, applies also to that in the Atharvaveda. Like the Rgvedic hymns, many deities including the Viśve Devas are addressed in each of these hymns. Not only that, in a single verse several deities together with Viśve Devas are often addressed. In the Atharvaveda hymns or verses or group of verses are mostly employed as magic formulas in rites intended for the fulfilment of worldly desires by pacifying or warding off evil spirits or by gratifying gods of a major or minor character. Like the Rgveda, in the Atharvaveda also the Viśve Devas denote all gods in a few cases following the Rgvedic tradition. In most of the other references they were considered as a group of gods including other deities added as an element to make a whole or for completeness for the fear lest some god might be omitted. The fact that the verses addressed to the Viśve Devas were
employed as magic formulas, indicates that the status of the Viśve Devas as a group of gods was comparatively lowered down. Because the desires for the fulfilment of which the verses addressed to the Viśve Devas were employed were of a different nature, the mythology of the Viśve Devas might not have assumed a definite shape. There is no Brāhmaṇa of the Atharvaveda which might expound the mythology of the major portion of the Atharvaveda. The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa which is related to only the twentieth Kāṇḍa is not helpful for understanding the mythology of the main portion of the Atharvaveda.

The Yajurveda consists of two main divisions-Kṛṣṇa and Śukla. The Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda consists of mantra and brāhmaṇa-portions. The Sāmaveda is a collection of Ṛgveda mantras put together for the purpose of chanting at a sacrifice. It has however a number of Brāhmaṇas. The Āranyakas form the ending portions of the Brāhmaṇas. Therefore this entire literature, being of a similar nature, needs to be taken in to account as a whole. Most of these texts have been summarised separately. This literature has a clear ritualistic character, hence it is different from the Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda. Even then some of the Viśve Deva verses in the ritualistic literature have been borrowed from the Ṛgveda. In these verses and some Yajus-formulas one has to understand "all gods" by the word 'Viśve Devas. But in most of the other cases they are a specific group of gods. In most of the Yajus-formulas and verses, and consequently in the Brāhmaṇa passages, they are addressed alone. Even then, as a group of gods, they are sometimes said to be thirty-three, sometimes consisting of eight Vasus, eleven Rudras and twelve Ādityas. Their multiplicity finds correspondance in many ways,
sometimes in the number of the colours of the animals to be offered, sometimes in the form of other oblations. The main characteristics of the Viśve Devas is their association with Viś- the common people and their life in all aspects - rural, agricultural and economic. The off - repeated passage in this literature is vaisvadevyo vai prajāh - "The progeny belongs to the Viśve Devas.

In the Rgveda, the Viśve Devas were a group of gods, whom prayers were offered for long life, sons and general prosperity. In the Atharvaveda, they were of a lowered down status, but without specific function ready to grant under magic power whatever the host demanded. In the Yajurveda and Brāhmaṇas, they were indeed honoured as gods. Soma - cups and oblations were offered to them in accordance with the injunctions in the scriptures. In a way, however, they seem not to have been granted the same dignity as other deities. In correspondence with the classes in the society, deities also came to be regarded as belonging to different classes. The Viśve Devas were Viś, among the deities. Brahma, Kṣakra and Viś were three classes in the society, and in consideration of the function being carried out by each of the classes, the Viś could not be said as enjoying the same status as the other two. Similar was the position of the Viśve Devas, the Viś among the deities.

What were the circumstances that led the Viśve Devas to this position. The reply to this question may be sought in the conncomittant relation between ritual and mythology. Of the three Vedas, the Yajurveda is most intimately related to the ritual. As Sāyana has said in the introduction to
provides the canvas and the Rgveda and Sāmaveda represent the painting made on it. (bhittisthānīyo yajurvedā citrasthānīyāv itarau). The Brāhmaṇas belonging to the Rgveda and Sāmaveda lay down the prescriptions pertaining to the ritual in relation to their Veda. Thus the ritual wound round the Viśve Devas was the principal thing and mythology followed the track. Let us take a few examples:

There is the Āgrayaṇaṇī prescribed in the Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā (iv.3.2) as a part of the Rājasūya sacrifice. When the crop became ripe, the gods ran a race. Agni and Indra won the race, therefore a cake on twelve potsherds is offered to them. When the corns grew up, there was only a handful of barley, a handful of paddy, a handful of beans and a handful of sesame. The Viśve Devas said to gods, "if you agree to give us a share, we shall increase the quantity." Gods agreed and consequently the Viśve Devas increased the crops and gave a share of cooked rice. Thus an oblation offered to the Viśve Devas resulted in the abundance of food. The rice is cooked in milk, so the milk belongs to the Viśve Devas. Thus the provision of the oblation of cooked rice to the Viśve Devas made in ritual led to the association of the Viśve Devas with paddy and milk, and gave birth to a myth which identified the Viśve Devas with the Viś and rural economy.

In the Ekadaśini rite, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa lays down the order of the sacrificial animals to be tied to the eleven sacrificial posts. The eighth animal to be tied is dedicated to the Viśve Devas. "The Viśve Devas are indeed everything. Prajāpati swole himself with all. Everything
reached him. He made everything dependent on himself. This animal for Viśve Devas follows the one to Bṛhaspati. Bṛhaspati is Brahman and the Viśve Devas are all this. This Brahman belongs to all this ... The animal for Indra comes after that for the Viśve Devas. Kṣatra indeed it Indra. The Viśve Devas are Viś. One thereby provides food for him (Indra) beforehand.

"The meaning "all" of Viśva is employed here for the purpose of the Arthavāda even though the Viśve Devas are here a specific group of gods. The order of the three deities is Bṛhaspati, Viśve Devas and Indra. Bṛhaspati stands for Brahman. The animal for the Viśve Devas (=Viś) precedes the one for Indra (=Kṣatra). Thus the food for the consumer is provided before hand. The equivalence of the Viśve Devas with Viś which is often mentioned is supported here by the precedence of Viśve Devas to Indra in the ritual.

In the introductory part of the Agniṣṭoma, the Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa (vi.1) has related the myth of the creation of sacrifice. Prajāpati created from the mouth the Trivṛt stoma, Gāyatrīmetre, the deity Agni and other associates. From the bōsōm, the Pañcadaśa stoma, the metre Triṣṭubh, the deity Indra and other associates. From the middle portion he created the Saptadaśa Stoma, the metre Jagatī, Viśve Devas, the Vaiśya and the raining season. Therefore, the Vaiśya being consumed by Brahma and Kṣatra does not perish. He has plenty of cattle because he is associated with the Viśve Devas and the Jagatī metre. The raining season is his season. Here the brāhmaṇaṅkāra has laid down the theme of a Soma-sacrifice. The three pressings are respectively assigned to Agni, Indra and Viśve Devas. The three metres related to the three pressings
are Gāyatrī, Triṣṭubh and Jaṅgātī. The three classes of the society are Brahma, Kṣatra, and Viś. Thus the Viśve Devas correspond to Viś and are consequently associated with the raining season. The position of the Viśve Devas in the ritual order led to their character as Viś and association with agriculture.

There is a Soma Sacrifice called Vaiśvadeva to be performed by one desirous of progeny and cattle. (JaimBr.2.146). Prajāpati is said to have performed this Sacrifice for the same purpose. The desire for progeny is expressed with the words Vaiśvadevīṁ praśāṁ sṛjeyeti: So that I may procreate progeny associated with the Viśvedevas. "This association of the Viśve Devas with progeny points to the character of the Viśve Devas as a group of gods connected with social welfare in the ritualistic literature. The ritualistic injunction concerning the Vaiśvadeva sacrifice lend the typical character to the myth.

There is an interesting myth in the Jaiminiḥ, a Upaniṣad Brāhmana (1.50-52) which speaks about the origin of the Vaiśvadeva Sāman. Desiring to conquer the Asuras, the gods said, "let us create the second."— They said, "let us create Sāman as the second." They said to Dvāparaḥvī, "Do you be united and create Sāman." Dyaus said to gods, "do you purify her (the earth). She is indeed impure." She became pure. She then said to Dyaus. "A man moves here and there at random. Do thou purify thyself."... They became united and created Sāman. ...Gods then said, "let us distribute this (Sāman)." ...Prajāpati said to them, "wait. This is mine. I shall distribute it among yourselves." He said to Agni, "you are my eldest son, you choose your part first." He then said to the Viśve Devas, "now you
choose your portion." They said, "We choose the Vaiśvadeva among the Sāmans because it procreates. One who chants it, would obtain progeny and would reach us among the gods."

The above-mentioned illustrations amply show that in the Yajurveda and other ritualistic literature. The ritual injunctions imparted the character of Viś-common folk engaged in rural economy and agriculture to the Viśve Devas - a group of gods which did not hold a specific character in the Rgveda and held in the Atharvaveda, a subordinate position under the predominance of magic formulas.

Coming to the Sūtra-literature, particularly the Gṛhya-sūtras, we find that the Viśve Devas have maintained the two connotations existing in the earlier literature, namely, "all gods" and a group of gods. " The literature deals with domestic rites, not sacrificial rituals, which fact is responsible for assigning to the Viśve Devas a different character. The rites with which the Viśve Devas are concerned are only three - the Vaiśvadeva, water-libations (tarpāṇa) as a part of the Brahmayajña included among the five Mahāyajñas and the Śrāddha of different types. Oblations of cooked rice are offered on the domestic fire to the Viśve Devas among the other deities. According to certain Sūtras the Viśve Devas are also included among those deities and spirits whom Bali are offered on the ground. Water-libations are offered (tarpāṇa) to gods, Rāis and Pitrīs. Among the gods the Viśve Devas receive water as a separate group of gods and also as all gods. Excepting the Ekodīṣṭa and Āhyuḍayika. The Viśve Devas worship at Śrāddhas together with the pitṛs. Two brahmans represent the Viśve Devas and three (or five or seven etc.) represent the Pitrīs (and Mātrīs).
The sacrificial ritual identified the Viśve Devas with Viś. The domestic ritual associated them with the Pitṛs. The plural number was also ignored. In the later grh yasūtras, the word Viśvedeva began sometimes to be used as a single word with ā-ending.

In the voluminous Mahābhārata, there are only two rites — Vaiśvadeva and Śrāddha which refer to the Viśve Devas. The Vaiśvadeva rite which is prescribed in the Gṛhyaśūtras finds reference in the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. The occasion for a rather detailed reference to the Śrāddho has been provided in the Mahābhārata by the necessity to offer libations to the numberless heroes on both the sides of Pāṇḍavas and kauravas who laid their lives in the great Mahābhārata war. The mythology of the Viśve Devas took a particular turn in connection with the Viśve Devas who enjoy the Śrāddha in company with the Pitṛs. The Viśve Devas are said to be living towards the south together with the Pitṛs belonging to the three region. The brahmans who represent the Viśve Devas in the Śrāddha receive honour in their behalf. Sixty two names of the Viśve Devas have been recorded in the Mahābhārata. The Harivaṃśa which is a supplement to the Mahābhārata mentions twelve names. They were the sons of Dharma born from his wife Viśvā. The Mahābhārata has thus given a Purānic turn to the mythology of the Viśve Devas.

The Smṛtis generally deal with three topics: Ācāra, Vyavahāra and Prāyaścitta. It is the Ācāra alone which has occasions to refer to the Viśve Devas. The rites concerned as usual are the Vaiśvadeva, Tarpāṇa at the Brahmayajñā and the Śrāddha. Nothing new is said about the first two rites. About the third rite, the Manusmr̥ti informs us for the first time that the Viśve Devas protect the Śrāddha-libations offered to the
Pitṛs from both the ends of the rite. Offerings to the Viśve Devas are made at the beginning and also at the end of the rite so that they may guard the śrāddha against the attacks of the evil spirits and demons. Tradition has assigned names to the two Viśve Devas who are represented by the brahmans. The names are different in different types of śrāddhas. The number two seems to have been assigned to the Viśve Devas for the reason that each of them should guard the śrāddha from each end. Consequently each of them was regarded as the Viśve Devas.

The Pitṛs whom śrāddha is offered bear a spiritual character. In the three consecutive Pitṛs from the father (or mother) backwards respectively reside the three deities Vasu, Rudra and Āditya. The householder offers śrāddha to the relevant Pitṛ and also the deity residing in him. The three generations of Pitṛs correspond to the Vasus residing on the earth, Rudras residing in the atmosphere and Ādityas residing in the heaven. It may be recalled that in the Rgveda the Viśve Devas have sometimes been said to be comprising the Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas. It is remarkable that the Vasu, Rudras and Ādityas residing in the Pitṛs should comprise the Viśve Devas in the Rgveda.

It is worth noting that the śrāddha rite in the Mahābhārata has been quoted with authority in the religious compendiums of the medieval period. The Caturvargacintāmaṇi of Hemādri (14th C.A.D) has reproduced the names of the Viśve Devas recorded in Mahābhārata and says that in a śrāddha all these names should be mentioned in the relevant case-forms whenever an occasion arose.
The Purānic cosmogony begins with the creation of gods which include the Viśve Devas. The various groups of gods like the Vasus, Rudras, Ādityas, Maruts, Śādhyas and even Pitṛs are often mentioned together in the Purāṇas. The single word Viśve deva with ṛ-ending is often used in the Purāṇas. All this indicates a definite character of the Viśve Devas. Following the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas have given another turn to the mythology of the Viśve Devas. Agreeing with the Harivamśa, the Purāṇas have also said that Dharma's tenth wife Viśvā gave birth to the Viśve Devas. The number of the Viśve Devas is said to be ten. They have rather different names in different Purāṇas. The names however generally agree with the names mentioned by pairs in the various types of śrāddhas. With reference to the śrāddha to be performed at Gayā, the Skandapurāṇa has related story which sheds some light on the function of the Viśve Devas as the guardians of the śrāddha against the demons.

The position of the Viśve Devas as formed in the texts dealing with astronomy, astrology, Tantra and sculpture is in consonance with the character of the Viśve Devas as an entirely separate group of gods following the Smṛtis and Purāṇas. The relevant data collected here cannot be claimed to be exhaustive. Any attempt at exhaustiveness is, however, not likely to lead to any different conclusion.

The conclusion may be summed up as follows:

(i) In the Rgveda, the Viśve Devas denoted all gods and also "a group of gods."
(ii) In the Atharvaveda, the concept of a group of gods persisted. The group had a subordinate status under the influence of magic formulas employed for the fulfilment of worldly desires.

(iii) In the Yajurveda and other ritualistic literature the group of gods was identified with Viś - common people and was associated with rural economy under the influence of sacrificial ritual. The mythology went hand in hand with the ritual. (1)

(iv) In the kalpasūtra period when domestic rites, particularly the Śrāddha came into prominence, the Viśve Devas were associated with the Pitṛs.

(v) The sacrificial rituals receded in to the background and the domestic rituals continued to be practiced. The character of the Viśve Devas as reflected in the Vaiśvadeva and Tarpana at the Brahmayajña remained the same, but the position of the Viśve Devas in the Śrāddha rite gave a new turn to the mythology of the Viśve Devas in the Mahābhārata which records sixty two names of the Viśve Devas. The Harivamsa mentioned twelve names. The Viśve Devas lived towards the south together with the Pitṛs.

(vi) The association of the Viśve Devas with the Pitṛs was confirmed in the Śmṛti period, and the former came to be regarded as guarding the Śrāddha-libations against the evil spirits. Different names were assigned to the Viśve Devas functioning in different types of Śrāddhas.
(vii) In the other types of literature the Viśve Devas were regarded as an entirely separate group of gods without any distinctive character.

(viii) The changes in the rituals connected with the Viśve Devas gave new turns to their mythology.

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1. The relation between mythology and ritual has been a topic of discussion for the last so many years. It has generally been accepted that both are inter dependent and that the ritual is mainly responsible for creating myths. For the various views on relation between mythology and ritual and for the theory of sacrifice, see G.U. Thite, Sacrifice in the Brāhmapas, Pune, 1975.