Introduction

Mythology in general

The culture of any society which has a long tradition and history is characterised by many facts including mythology. A myth is a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons etc. and embodying popular ideas on natural phenomena etc. Mythology is a body of such myths especially related to a particular person or subject. Attempts to build up the mythologies of different peoples have been made since old times. Towards the end of the eighteenth century when the Sanskrit language and literature and also the Iranian language and literature became known to the world, the mythologies of the various peoples began to be studied by scholars and as a result, a new science called the comparative mythology came into being. This new science coupled with the comparative philology shed new and important light on the manifold history of the various peoples, and thus considerably advanced the knowledge of the history of mankind.

The history of Sanskrit literature records attempts made to collect the myths and tales in Indian literature. The Sanskrit mythology took a new turn when the science of comparative mythology became
available for a scientific study of the mythology in Sanskrit literature. Consequently important contributions were made particularly by western scholars to the research in the mythology of Vedic and epic deities, demons and spirits. Numerous monographs embodying these researches have been compiled in the field of the Vedic and Epic mythology.

The method of interpreting mythology varies naturally from people to people, for the method depends upon the sources. "The sources from which myths are created are numerous. Whatever stirs the imagination, whatever induces fear or pleasure, or impresses the mind, dreaming or awake becomes or can become the starting point of divine being or of a demon. The myth-creating mind has always made use of all these sources; they converge in varying degrees of strength and create in confluence the mythology of a people ... All human experiences, those of external as well as those of inner life, can become myths when they are connected with a divine or a demonic being or when they are converted into such being in poetry. The character of a country, the psychological or cultural make up of its inhabitants, influences the strength of individual sources and determines the traits of character of its
pantheon". The power of phantasy is active in the creation of gods. It depends upon the environments on the phenomena of nature, on the climate, on the spiritual factors and on the individuality of a people. The living conditions, climate and vegetation differ from place to place.

The mythological details are determined by psychological factors and also by external conditions like the migration, contacts with other tribes, progress or decline in civilization, climate, creative power of individuals etc.²

**Vedic Mythology**

Leaving aside the religion and mythology in the Indus valley civilization which are not fully known to us so far, we have the Ṛgvedic hymns as the earliest source of Indian mythology. There are various deities in the Ṛgveda whose traits have been described in the Ṛgveda to a more or less extent. Yāska, a very old Indian writer, has in his Nirukta made a commendable attempt to interpret these deities. The new science of comparative mythology has rendered considerable assistance in ascertaining the original characters of these deities. Resorting to the sources from natural phenomena, the characters of many deities have been explained on the basis of the solar theory; some others are based on the
thunder-storm. The lunar theory has also been applied. Particularly in the later portions of the Rgveda, we come across certain abstract deities such as Manyu, Kāma etc.

Side by side, with the gods of light, there existed demons and spirits in the Rgveda. As said by Hillebrandt, the Rgveda is neither a book of folklore nor a primer giving us an idea of the whole range of beliefs of that period. In the Rgveda, however, we find that mythology was in the making. The Rgvedic mythology was further developed in the Yajurvedic Samhitās and Brāhmaṇa texts. This mythology was further developed in the Kalpasūtras and to some extent in the epic literature also.

In the development of Rgvedic mythology, the Śrauta sacrificial ritual as well as the domestic ritual played an important role. No other mythology has such an advantage. The ritual presupposed by the Rgvedic hymns may represent an earlier stage which is not fully known to us. The post-Rgvedic ritual-tradition renders considerable help in presuming the ritualistic rites which may have been associated with the Rgvedic hymns. The Vedic ritual thus gives an important aid in interpreting Vedic mythology. It is however surprising, that works on mythology, while
referring to tradition, look for it, first of all in
the later commentaries and not in the ritual-texts, or
overlook these completely. Indeed the ritual context
allows a deeper probing into Vedic mythology represent-
ed in the Rgvedic hymns as well as in the Yajurveda and
Brahmana literature.

Some other aspects need to be paid attention to
while defining the character of Rgvedic deities. The
Rgvedic hymns may be said to have been originated not
only in Panjab but also in the regions lying west of
the Panjab. The mythology may therefore be said as
reflecting the circumstances of both the Panjab and
the western regions. It may also be observed that in
the cultural history of India, the east played a
different role than the west. In their settlements
and during their further incursions into the land, the
Rgvedic tribes came into contact with an Aryan popula-
tion which had migrated earlier. Moreover the acti-
vity of composing hymns might have continued for a long
period to be counted by a few centuries. Vedic mytho-
logy was not a static phenomenon but a dynamic one.

Scope for investigation

With all these preconditions in view, modern
scholars made commendable attempts to define the
characters of Vedic deities and to expound the Vedic
mythology. Even though unanimity of opinion in all cases cannot be expected, it may be said that success has been attained in general in finding out the gross realities about the Vedic mythology.

The Visve Devas however do not appear to have received sufficient attention of Vedic scholars. Only a passing reference seems to have been made to this deity. A reference to the works composed by A. A. Macdonell, 5 Hillebrandt, 6 H. Oldenberg, 7 A. Bergaigne, 8 Griswold, 9 and others will bear testimony to this. The reason seems to be that, having dealt with individual Vedic gods, it was considered as superficial to pay any serious attention to the group of all these gods together. It may however be submitted that a closer attention towards the mythological details of this deity will not be fruitless.

There are two studies which need special mention. L. Renou 10 has critically studied the Rgvedic hymns addressed to the Visve Devas, and has shed welcome light on the character of the Visve Devas. H. W. Bodewitz 11 in his translation of the Jaininīya Brāhmaṇa I.1-35 has drawn pointed attention towards the niceties of the character of the Visve Devas in different Rgvedic hymns. The Visve Devas have been referred to in the Yajurveda and the Brāhmaṇa literature even to a larger extent where they are very closely associated with the
sacrificial ritual. It is further worthy of note that the Visve Devas appear in the post-Vedic literature also. E.W. Hopkins' Epic mythology\textsuperscript{12} has collected a few details about them from the Mahābhārata. There are moreover other types of literature namely the śutra-texts, Smṛtis, Purāṇas, Nibandhas and works on technical sciences where one comes across references to the Visve Devas. This entire field has not been traversed so far. The present thesis therefore aims at taking a fresh stock of the treatment of the Visve Devas in the Vedic as well as later literature.

\textbf{Plan of study}

The thesis is divided into nine chapters. The Ṛgvedic data has been collected in chapter I. There are about two scores of hymns which are ascribed to the Visve Devas. In each of these hymns several deities are praised in different verses and only one verse is addressed directly to the Visve Devas. Only such verses from these hymns have been quoted, translated and critically studied as are directly addressed to the Visve Devas. Geldner's translation and also H.D. Velankar's translation wherever it is available have been consulted. The work of Renou and Bodewitz has also been taken into consideration.
Chapter II is devoted to the study of the hymns to the Vis\'ve Devas in the Atharvaveda. Over a score of hymns are ascribed to the Vis\'ve Devas. Like the Rgvedic hymns, different deities including the Vis\'ve Devas themselves are addressed in different verses of each of these hymns. It often happens that in a single verse not only the Vis\'ve Devas, but also some other deities are praised together. All such verses have been quoted, translated and critically studied. Whitney's translation has been adopted and also Bloomfield's translation and notes are consulted wherever available. The ritual application prescribed in the Kaus\'ikas\'utra has been recorded. These verses, like most of the other hymns and groups of verses, have been employed as magic formulas in rites intended for fulfilling the worldly desires of the host by pacifying or warding off evil spirits or by gratifying gods of major or minor character.

Chapter III aims at the study of the mythology of the Vis\'ve Devas and also of the part played by the Vis\'ve Devas in the various rituals prescribed in the Yajurveda and the entire Brāhmaṇa literature. Each recension of the Yajurveda has been studied independently even though there is much correspondance among all of them. The close relation between mythology and ritual and even dependance of the former on the
latter will become particularly manifest in this chapter. The relevant mantras and brahmaṇa passages have been recorded in the notes. It may be submitted that the vast material shedding light on the mythology of the Viśve Devas in the Yajurveda and the Brāhmaṇa literature has been collected and exploited here for the first time. The Śrauta-sūtras closely follow their Brāhmaṇas. The additional information, if any, from these texts also has been collected in this chapter.

A study of the mythology of the Viśve Devas in the Śutra-literature is presented in chapter IV. The Grhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras have been taken into account for collecting the material for the mythology of the Viśve Devas in this chapter. The rites in which the Viśve Devas are particularly involved are the Vaisvadeva, Śrāddha and Brahmajñā-tarpaṇa.

The mythology of the Viśve Devas in the Epics has been presented in chapter V. In the voluminous Mahābhārata, references to the Viśve Devas seem to be confined only to the Vaisvadeva and Śrāddha rites. The Harivamsa has been taken up side by side with the Mahābhārata. In Vālmiki’s Rāmāyana, there is a reference to the Viśve Devas which pertains to the Vaisvadeva rite.
Chapter VI deals with the mythology of the Vis'Ve Devas in the Smrtis and Nibandhas (religious compendiaums). The Smrti period commences with the beginning of the Christian era while the Nibandhas pertain to the medieval period. Thus there is a great chronological difference between these two types of literature. It is however convenient and expedient to collect the mythology of the Vis'Ve Devas in these two types of literature in a single chapter because the topics discussed therein are identical, and the Nibandhas closely follow the Smrtis so far as the rites pertaining to the Vis'Ve Devas are concerned. Among the Nibandhas, the voluminous Caturvaryacintamanî stands prominent.

The mythology of the Vis'Ve Devas in the Purânas is the subject of chapter VII. Even though the number of the Purânas is a large one and even though the Purânas are extensive texts, the only occasion for them to refer to the Vis'Ve Devas is the rites for the Pitrs - a feature which is common to certain other types of literature already mentioned.

A section of the Sanskrit literature dealing with technical sciences such as astronomy, astrology, sculpture, Tantras etc. has certain occasions to refer to the Vis'Ve Devas. Such references have been collected in chapter VIII.
The last chapter namely IX records the conclusions which have been arrived at as a result of the study of the mythology of the Viséve Devas based on the literature from the Rgveda down to the Nibandhas and other literature composed in the medieval period.


2. cf. Hillebrandt, op. cit. p. 3


