Chapter Five

Rākṣasas in Vedas: Identity and Engagements
The engagements of Rakṣases\(^1\) (Rākṣasas) in *Rgveda* in general have close resemblance with that of the Asura of later period. In Vedas, Asuras and Rakṣases are described as distinct categories. Rakṣases are described both in the sense of protector and malignant beings in Vedas. In early as well as later portions of *Rgveda*, the concept of Rakṣas remains almost the same. The engagements of Rakṣases in Vedic hymns seem as of an inimical group which tries to prevent the sacrifices of the Vedic people. But there is no mention of a Rakṣas who has a proper name as in the case of Asura in Vedas. In the primary stage of the development of the concept, Rakṣas appears as a group of people that was against the Vedic religion and practices. In the secondary stage, the term Rakṣas is used also to denote certain power-substance which can cause destruction to the enemies. Rakṣas is seen throughout the early Vedic and later Vedic literature with no great change in the very concept. The description of Rakṣas in *Yajurveda* and *SāmAveda* is the same to that is found in *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda*. *Rgveda* bears more references regarding the concept of Rakṣas. There are both singular and plural occurrences with derivatives and compounds of the term Rakṣas in Vedas. The present

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\(^1\) The term found in Vedas is Rakṣas. It is only in later Vedic literature the term Rākṣasa became popular.
chapter is aimed to analyze the nature of the Rakṣas in Vedic literature in an anthropological point of view.

**Primary Concept of Rakṣas: Rgveda**

In the second chapter of the present study, a discussion on the origin and development of the term Rakṣas and a semantic analysis of it has already been done. The term Rakṣasa is derived from the Rgvedic term Rakṣas and it became popular in later Vedic period. The primary evidence with regard to the concept of Rakṣas can be found in the hymns of Rgveda. Most of the hymns which bear references to Rakṣas appear in connection with a deity who is desired to deal with them. Deities like Agni, Soma and Indra are asked to destroy the Rakṣases in Rgvedic hymns. In most of the hymns of Rgveda, Rakṣases presented as the antagonists of the sacrificial religion of Vedas. These references indicate that Rakṣases were not a mythical construction, whereas they were a particular sect of people.

**Rakṣas along with Other Rgvedic Deities**

The engagements of Rakṣases with the deities depicted in Rgveda gives some clues to their racial identity. The deities Agni, Soma, Indra etc. are asked to drive away the Rakṣases and to protect
the sacrifices. At one place Rakṣases are described to be ridiculous against Bṛhaspati;

रक्षसो तपस्य लक्षस्तय
दे त्या निन्दे देवरे वृष्णोहं।
आदिसत्कृष्ण वदसत उक्थय
वृहस्ताते वि परिरापो अर्दय।। Rgveda, II.23.14.

Here the Rakṣases are said to be a group of people who are speaking against Bṛhaspati. Bṛhaspati, the topmost representative of Vedic religion, is being praised to consume the Rakṣases with his brightest weapon. It is evident in this verse that Rakṣases hold different opinion from the people who are mentioned here as the worshippers of Bṛhaspati. This reference also indicates that Rakṣases are probably a separate ethnic group who were having different life style and religious practices. This may be supposed to be the reason for their description as a group of people speaking against Bṛhaspati.

The meaning of root, from which the word Rakṣas is derived, bears positive and negative ideas. A hymn says;

रक्षा णो अन्ये तव रक्षणोभि
राष्ट्राणि सुभाष प्रोणानि।
प्रति षुकुर वि रुन जीवलह्वो
जहि रक्षो महि विवाचव्यानम्।। Rgveda, IV.3.14.
The present hymn is addressed to Agni to overcome the exulting of victorious ('vāṃḍhānāṁ') Rakṣases. They here are described as great and engaged in celebrating victory. It may be noted that in the above hymn the derivatives of the root Rakṣa are occurring four times, and they are used in different senses. The occurrence of 'Rakṣas' in the last line indicates certain ethnic groups. The meaning of 'Rakṣā' in this hymn is conservator. 'Rakṣanā' conveys the meaning protector and 'Rakṣāna' is protection. These three ideas are derived from the positive root meaning of the root, i.e. 'to protect'.\(^2\) Thus, this hymn says that the people are seeking protection from the Rakṣases by Agni.

At another context in *Ṛgveda*, Rakṣases are described as the enemies of Vedic people. A hymn reads:

\[
उत्र रक्षायें दिविक हन्त्याने-
सिन्धुदुष्ट रक्षास हत्ता उ.
मदे विद्या प्रश्रुति भाषा
न चेतने परिलाभो अदेवि।
\]

*Rṛgveda*, V.2.10.

Here too, Agni is asked to exterminate the Rakṣases with his sharp weapon. Rakṣases are illustrated here as 'adevāḥ' i.e., un-divine. 'Adevāḥ' in this hymn may mean the person who is not included into

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\(^2\) Refer to the translation of *Ṛgveda* by H.H. Wilson, Vol. II, p.258 for more information.
the group of Devas. Thus Rakṣases here also are a separate group from the Rgvedic people.

Rakṣases in *Rgveda* are mentioned as the enemies of Vedic religion also. In III.30.17 Indra is asked to overcome the Rakṣas who is the enemy of Veda;

उष्ण रक्षा सहस्रमयमत्रा
वुशरम मथ्य् प्रत्यायूपणि।
आ कौलत: साल्नामृके चकर्य।
भवत्व तपुषि होतिमस्य॥ *Rgveda*, III.30.17.

This hymn addressed to Indra requests him to exterminate the Rakṣas who is the enemy of the Veda, from their root. This hymn also gives some inkling to the idea of the concept of Rakṣas. According to Śāyāna⁵ 'brahmadvīṣe' in this verse mean 'brāhmaṇadvēṣakārīne' i.e. 'one who entertains hatred against Brāhma'. 'Brahma' in fact means the prayer of the Vedas. Thus the word brahma is used not in the sense of a person belonging to any caste. Therefore, the meaning conveyed by it may be 'one who is against the religion of the Vedas. In this way the Rakṣas mentioned here possibly refer to the indigenous people who are the followers of a path distinct from the Vedic faith.

Rakṣas in another place is mentioned as the speaker of untruth;

न जा त सोमो तुलिन हिन्नेनि
न क्षत्रियं मित्रुना बारवन्तन्।
हरित रक्षो हरत्तास्त्रस्तात-
मुभविन्दरस्य प्रसिद्धं सवान।  Rgveda, VII.104.3.

This verse is addressed to Indra-Soma. Here Rakṣas is portrayed as 'asadvadantah'. Thus the meaning expressed here is, 'the speaker of untruth who remains in the bondage of Indra and destroyed by Soma'. This reference can also be connected to the concept of 'mṛdhravaḷc' of Rgveda where it refers to Dasyus.4

**Worship of Rakṣas**

Vedas never give a clear picture regarding the religious beliefs and practices of Rakṣa. But one of the Rgvedic verses, which is in the form of an abuse against Rakṣas, gives some indication about the nature of their worship;

परं शृण्णिि तपस्ता वातुधानमः
न्यर्गर्गे रक्षो हरसा शृण्णिि
परमिष्ठा सुरदेवाःशृण्णिि
परसुवृणा अभि माहुशुचन।  Rgveda, X.87.14.

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4 For a detailed discussion see the Second Chapter of the present study, p.45ff.
In this verse Agni is asked to annihilate both the Rakṣases and Yātudhānas with his heat. Here the term 'mūradevāḥ'6 conveys an important idea about the nature of worship of Rakṣases. Wilson6 translates the term as 'the believers in vain gods'. It should be taken here that Rakṣases are the group of believers whose concept of god does not conform with that of the Vedic religion. This may be supposed to be the reason for the Vedic people for asking their deities to devastate ate the Rakṣases.

**Rakṣases as the Enemies of Mankind**

Rakṣases are mentioned as the enemies of mankind in Rgvedic hymns. The Vedic deities frequently are asked to destroy them. Agni is asked to protect the people from the impious Rakṣases in one hymn;

पार्श्विविश्वसमाससो आराग्ये 
परं सम वालेचु नोऽव 
त्यागिन्य नंदिं देवतादय 
आदि नक्षामहे वृहे। Ṛgveda, VIII.60.10.

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5 A similar reference is seen in Ṛgveda, VII.104.24. In this hymn the Yātudhāna is said as 'mūradevā'. There Indra is asked to slay the Yātudhāna whether they are in the form of man or woman. The association of the term māyā found along with Yātudhāna reminds the usage of māyā, the power of Asura seen in Rgvedic hymns. 'Mūradevā' is explained here as the people who are doing mischief. According to Śāyana Yātudhāna here is a Rakṣasa. Thus this hymn is an indirect reference to the nature of worship of Rakṣas people.

6 Refer to Ṛgveda Samhitā, Vol. IV, p.412.
The Vedic poets praise Agni to protect their neighbour or kinsman who is coming for the sacrifice, from the impious (arāṇṇah) Rakṣases. According to Sāyana the term arāṇṇah literally means the people 'not giving (sacrificial) gifts'. It may be learnt from this interpretation that Rakṣases did not cooperate with the sacrifices of Vedic people.

Maruts are considered as the protectors of mankind in *Rgveda.* They are asked to overcome the Rakṣases in the following hymn;

\\begin{center}

\begin{tabular}{l}
वि तिष्ठतं महत्रो विशिष्टत्वान\\
\textbf{गृहावत रक्षसः से पिन्नतन।}\\
\textbf{यथो ये भूली पतयति नशिभ-}\\
\textbf{ये वा रिपो दृष्टिर देषे अक्षरे।}\\
\textit{Rgveda, VII.104.18.}\\
\end{tabular}

\end{center}

Here Maruts are asked to stay amongst the people to protect them from Rakṣases. Rakṣases are said to be the obstructers of sacrifices here. Thus the people to be protected here are the believers of Vedic religion. This shows that the Rakṣases are belonging to an entirely alien group that is against the Vedic religion.

**The Habitats of Rakṣases**

An Anthropological analysis of the features of the social and cultural life of Rakṣases depicted in various hymns of *Rgveda* testify the assumption that they were originally belonging to certain ethnic

\footnote{ibid., Vol. iii, p.548.}
group. One of the Rgvedic hymns contains reference to the habitats of Rakṣases;

रुना दूल्हा चिद्रकस्त्र सदासि
पुनान हि ब्रह्मणि वि बाजानि।
वृश्चिपरिधानमुनता यथेन
ये अनि दुराधुपनामे प्रायम्। ॥ Rgveda, IX.91.4.

This is a supplication to Soma for demolishing the strong abodes of Rakṣases along with their leader. Wilson\(^6\) considers this hymn as prayer to Soma to demolish the dwellings of Rakṣases alone. Though the name of the leader is not directly mentioned here, this verse supplies a strong proof in support of the ethnic identity of Rakṣases who were organized under the rulership of a powerful leader. The reference to the dwelling place of the Rakṣases is of help to have an idea about the state of the civilization they attained under the rulership of a leader\(^9\).

One more mention of the abodes of Rakṣases is available in Rgveda;

अनेन वाचस्य वि मूचो वि
दुराधुपनामे परस्विस सेव।
अस्मात्समुद्रश बुलती दिवो
नोष्पो भूमानपुप न नुजेह।। Rgveda, X.98.12.

\(^6\)Ibid. p.136.
Here Agni is invoked for the demolition of the strongholds of Rakṣases. He is also asked to drive away the disease along with the Rakṣases. The mention of Rakṣases in connection with disease leads one to the later concept regarding the Rakṣases in which anything that is unclean is associated with them.

**Rakṣas along with Asura**

Association of Rakṣas with Asura seen in certain places in *Ṛgveda* implies the attitude of the Vedic people as regard to the concept of Asura and Rākṣasa in early days. In the reference to the association of Rakṣas with Vṛtra cited below the seed of the later identical concept of Asuras and Rākṣasas is seen explicitly;

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वि रहो वि मृङ्गो जहि
वि वृक्ष्य हनु रुन।
वि मन्युमिन्द्र वृशः
सृशस्याभिभासत। *Ṛgveda*, X.152.3
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Indra, the slayer of Vṛtra is asked to destroy the Rakṣases in this hymn. He is also asked to shatter the jaws of Vṛtra. Vṛtra throughout *Ṛgveda* has been depicted as an Asura. Thus this context, which refers to an Asura in association with Rakṣas, also can be viewed as the point of germination of the later concept of Asura and Rākṣasa as identical beings.
Rakṣas and Asura mentioned together is found elsewhere also where the deity Savitṛ is asked to drive away the sorcerer and Rakṣas;

हिरण्यकश्पः असुरः सुनीतः
सुमुखः स्वच्छः चात्मवांसः।
अपरसंवक्ष्मो वातुत्याम्-
नस्वाहः प्रतिपतिः गृणातः। \textit{Rgveda}, 1.35.10.

Rakṣas and Yātudhāna are depicted here as enemies of the Vedic people and they are demanded to be driven away. The term Asura here bears its initial basic meaning i.e. 'life-bestowing'. The adjective 'hiranyahasta' in this verse is a praise to Asura, and it has been used to express his quality of bestowing life. In this positive sense of the term Asura, there is no room to link it with Rakṣas and to take both as identical beings. But the later descriptions of the engagements of Rākṣasa show very close affinity with that of the Asura and they came to be collectively known as the enemies of Devas. This is a matter of dispute which needs more evidence for solution.

\textbf{Association of Rakṣas with Sorcerer in Rgveda}

The association of Rakṣas with sorcerers gives some clues to reconstruct the concept regarding them. In some hymns Rakṣas is
referred to as a power-substance used by sorcerers against their enemies. An Rgvedic verse links Rakṣas with Yātū:\footnote{Sāyaṇa explains 'Yātū' as 'evil spirit' in his commentary to \textit{Rgveda}. See \textit{Rgveda Samhitā}, Vol. III, p.345. Hale opines that if Yātū and Rakṣas are same then the derivation of 'Yāudhāna' is 'the one who impels Yātus'. See W.E Hale, \textit{op.cit.}, p.142.}

\begin{quote}
उल्लुक्चारः शुशुरुक्कारः
जरः न्यातुमुन्त क्लोक्कानुन्।
सुपर्णवादुभीत गृहघारः
दृष्टवं प्र मृण रक्ष हृद। \textit{Rgveda}, VIII.104.22.
\end{quote}

This hymn is in the form of praise to Indra to grind the Rakṣases who are perceptible in various animal forms. Rakṣases are mentioned here as capable of taking various forms like owl, little owl, dog, cuckoo, eagle and vulture. As seen in other Rgvedic verses, Indra is mentioned here as the protector of mankind and the enemy of Rakṣases. How these creatures became fearful beings is doubtful. However, this concept has influenced the ancient Indian society in the formation of the later concept of Rakṣases as evil beings. A. B. Keith\footnote{Refer to A.B. Keith, \textit{The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads}, Part-I, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1998, p.237.} on the basis of a hymn, points out that Rakṣases assume the form of husband, brother or lover.\footnote{वल्लु प्राची परम्परा जाने भूषा निवर्तने।
प्राची दचन निपटने तत्रत् नवकर्मिति। \textit{Rgveda}, X.162.5. The word Rakṣas is not mentioned directly here. But Keith considers this hymn as speaking of Rakṣases.} This attitude also is reflected in the belief about Rakṣases as malignant beings.
Rgveda in another hymn again mentions Rakṣases along with sorcerer;

यो मात्रां वादुवानेन्वाह
यो वा रक्षा शुचिस्मीत्वाह।
इन्द्रसं हनु महता क्षेतन
विधुर्य जंतोत्तरमस्वदीष्ट। Rgveda, VII.104.16.

In this hymn Indra is asked to slay the enemies who call the sacrificer as both Rakṣas and Yātudhāna which he is not. The sacrificer says that Rakṣas and Yātudhāna believe themselves pure. But here they are said to be vilest of all beings, and hence Indra is asked to destroy them. This hymn obviously reflects the distinct identity of Rakṣases who believe themselves pure which the Vedic people do not agree. The rivalry between two sects of people having different life-style can also be read from this verse.

In the whole text of Rgveda, above 108 references to Rakṣas including its derivatives and compounds are seen. The references bear both the root meaning of the term 'protection' and 'defense'. Some verses describe Rakṣases as enemies of Vedic ritualism. Almost all references proclaim Rakṣas as antagonists of Vedic culture and find them to be wiped out from their premises. In this way the term attained the connotation of a distinct human folk. The following hymns also may be pointed out in this regard. Interestingly, the
chariot of Brhaspati also is described as the killer of Rakṣases in X.103.4.\textsuperscript{13} Agni is asked to burn the Rakṣases in X.118.7; X.87.19; X.43.26; X.87.14 etc. Again he is asked to kill the Rakṣases in X.187.3; VI.10.29; IV.3.14 etc. and he is acclaimed as the killer of Rakṣas in X.87.1 and X.162.1. Soma is asked to kill the Rakṣases in IX.86.48; IX.63.29; IX.104.6; IX.91.4 etc. and he is called as the killer of Rakṣases in IX.1.2; IX.37.3 and IX.67.20. Indra is asked to slay the Rakṣases in VII.104.19; VII.104.16; VII.10421; I.129.11 etc. Aśvins and Brhaspati are described as the killers of Rakṣases in VII.73.4 and II.23.3 respectively. All these contexts invariably and explicitly tell that Rakṣas is a distinct sect of people, probably an indigenous tribe, who did not succumb to the main stream society of Vedic people.

**Rakṣases in *Atharvaveda***

In *Atharvaveda*\textsuperscript{14} the term Rakṣas along with its derivatives and compounds is presented in a variety of meanings. As of *Rgveda*, the meanings include 'to protect', 'to defend', 'power-substance' and 'demon'. In the hymns of *Atharvaveda* there are a number of instances

\textsuperscript{13} This study examines those references only which are of importance in analysing the nature and change in the concept of Rakṣas.

\textsuperscript{14} For the translation of the hymns of *Atharvaveda*, this study follows the translation of M.A. Devíchand. In some places for more clarification and also for comparison the translation of Whitney is followed. It is mentioned clearly in notes as the case is
that mention Rakṣases as power substance used by sorcerers against their enemies. These references can be taken as the evidence of formation of the concept of Rakṣas as representing evil forces.

It would be interesting to note that Rakṣas, Yātu, Dasyu and Paṇi are mentioned together in one place;

आँध्रितकः रक्षसग्रामसेवतेः मा त्वा दमन्योषो यतुयाना इन्द्र इव दस्युन्व ज्ञृज्ञ प्रत्ययत स्वाछ्यन्ति न जे परिवास्तवस्वाभिः रक्षते। \textit{Atharvaveda, XIX.46.2.}

With the help of an amulet called 'astṛta' the sacrificer is wished to ward off the Paṇis and sorcerers as Indra damaged the Dasyus. Even though these names are mentioned together the meanings are different. The term Rakṣa is used here in the sense of 'to defend'.

Certain hymns of \textit{Atharvaveda} describe the association of Rakṣases with sorcerers and various kinds of amulets used for various purposes. The association of Rakṣas with Asuras, Gandharvas, Piśācas and Apsarases found in \textit{Atharvaveda} is an indication towards the possibility of their being belonged to the same category of beings in that time. In one of the hymns the term Rakṣa is used in its positive sense;

हिंदुं रक्ष जायमानं मा पुरांस्य स्विन्यं कर्न।
आण्डाद्वो परान्यं दशत् ब्रह्मक्षेत्रं किमिदिन। \textit{Atharvaveda, VIII.6.25.}
This hymn is addressed to a physician to protect the baby at birth. Here the word rakṣa is used in its positive meaning i.e. 'to protect'. The physician is also asked to protect the baby in womb from germs and hungry worms.\textsuperscript{15}

Mention of Rakṣas, Piśācas, Apsarases and Gandharvas together is seen in another hymn also;

\begin{verse}
दे गन्नव्यं अप्सरसों दे चाराया किन्नेिन।
विश्वजान्सवाणि रक्षाति तनस्माद भूमि वायवः।
\textit{Atharvaveda,} XII.1.50.
\end{verse}

This hymn is a prayer to Bhūmi. Here the meaning of the term Rakṣas is not clear. It seems to be used to get the meaning 'keep away'. Bhūmi is asked to protect them (the people of \textit{Atharvaveda}) from Piśācas, Apsarases and Gandharvas. It is clear here that these beings were considered as enemies of mankind in that time. Hence they also seem to have been included in the group of prototypes of demons.

**Key References to the Later Shift in the Meaning of Rakṣas**

In most of the Atharvavedic passages the meaning of Rakṣas is not clear. Frequent mention of Rakṣas with sorcerer upholds its later concept. In some of the verses, various kinds of amulets used to

\textsuperscript{15} The popularity as well as the belief in physicians in the time of \textit{Atharvaveda} is also can be read from this reference.
vanquish the Rakṣas can be seen. In XIX.37.1, 2, 4 & 5 an amulet śatavāra along with Rakṣas is found mentioned. The meaning of the word Rakṣas in the translation of Atharvaveda by Whitney\(^6\) is given as demon that has to be driven away with the help of śatavāra amulet, whereas M.A. Devichand in his translation accepts a different meaning. He does not agree with the translation of scholars who say śatavāra is an amulet. In his opinion śatavāra in the following verse of Atharvaveda is a medicinal root;

\[
\text{शतवारो अनीन्द्रियक्षमानु रक्षसि तेजसा}
\]

\[
\text{आरोहन्यर्थस सह मणिदुर्षमचातन्} \]

\*Atharvaveda*, XIX.37.1

This verse describes that the germs which cause disease can be destroyed by śatavāra with its heat and energy.\(^7\) The meaning of rakṣas is not clear in his translation also. But the contextual meaning seems to be the positive sense of the root i.e. protection. Thus the ability of the plant to protect from diseases seems to have been intended by the poet.


\(^{7}\) Devichand opines that śatavāra is also used as a powerful medicine which has the healing power to the dangerous skin diseases like ulcer, eczema etc. In XIX.37.2 he has explained that śatavāra herb can drive away the atmospheric germs by its thorns. See *The Atharvaveda* Translated by M.A. Devichand, p.756. In Ayurveda there is a medicinal plant named śatāvari, a thorny plant the root of which is used for the treatment of various women diseases.
In another verse reference to Rakṣas along with Piśāca is also available;

वनस्यति: सह देवेन्द्र आग्नं रक्षं पिशाचों अववध्यमानः।
स उच्चनाते प्र वदति वायु तेन लोको ओम सर्वायु:।

_Atharvaveda_, XII.3.15.

Here both Rakṣas and Piśāca are depicted as demons. There are a number of references in _Atharvaveda_ in relation with the demoniac Piśācas. In _Mahābhārata_ the Piśācas are included in the category of Asuras, Rakṣasas Yātudhanas etc.\(^{18}\)

By the time of _Atharvaveda_, unlike in _Rgveda_, the term Rakṣas has attained a broader mythical connotation. The references to the association of Rakṣases with sorcerers helped in the development of the later meaning of the term. _Atharvaveda_ contains fifty four references of Rakṣas including its derivatives and compounds. In III.12.8; IV.38.6; IV.38.7; X.6.18; XII.1.7; XII.1.18; XII.3.11; XII.3.14 etc. the term rakṣa is used in the sense of 'to defend'. This meaning leads to the positive sense of the root meaning 'to protect'. In VIII.2.12; XII.1.50; XII.1.49 etc. the term is interpreted as denoting demons.

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\(^{18}\) This topic has been analyzed in the Sixth chapter of the present study, p.170f.
Yajurveda

Yajurveda contains a few references to the concept of Rakṣas. Even though the references regarding Rakṣas are few in number, it gives valuable information about the later concept of Rakṣas. Rakṣas in Yajurveda is depicted as malignant being from whom protection is necessary. Vedic deities are praised to drive away them in this hymn;

देवाय त्वा सवितुः प्रसन्नोपति नाश्चात्मां पुण्या हसतलथ्यो आ ददे नार्यसी गीवा अगि व्रृत्ताय। वृहस्पति ज्वहर्दया वृहस्पतिनिन्त्रय चाच्च च। Yajurveda, V.22.

This hymn is apparently connected with Soma sacrifice. Here Rakṣases are picturised as enemies who obstruct the sacrifice. This verse also hints at the opposition of Rakṣas against the Vedic rituals. The reason behind this enmity is the difference between two groups of people in religious thoughts and practices. In Yajurveda also, Rakṣas is mentioned along with Asura;

अनन्ते कपिद्वाहनय स्वाहा सोमाय स्वाह।
अनुत्ता असुरा रक्षस्सि ब्रह्मसा। Yajurveda, II.29.

Both Asura and Rakṣas are referred to here as enemies of the people who address Agni and Soma and pray to overcome them. This hymn seems to be of later origin because the reference to Asura and Rakṣas as identical as well as enemies of Vedic cult is not much ancient. This
verse is in the context of the ritual of pindapitryajña which is a monthly ancestral sacrifice performed as part of the full moon sacrifice.15

The association of Rakṣas with sorcerers seems to be a common theme in early as well as later hymns of Rgveda which obviously is much older than that of Yajurveda. The association of Rakṣas with sorcerers can be seen in Yajurveda also;

अयं दक्षिणा विष्णुकर्मां तत्क्रियाकृति सेनानीप्रायमण्ये।
मनका च सहजन्य चायसरसी यातुष्ण हेतौ रक्षसोर्विन्दितसमीयो नमो असु ते नाद्वन्तु ते तो गृहितकृष्ण ते यथं हृद्धित्त स्वेषो जीवन्

dharm. || Yajurveda, XV.16.

Here Rakṣas and Yātudhāna are referred to as the missile weapon of Viśvakarman. Viśvakarman is said to be Vāyu here. Menakā and Sahajanyā are described as the celestial nymths representing the portions of the sky or heaven and earth. Yajurveda contains 15 references regarding the Rakṣas concept in its 11 verses. Interestingly, II.23 mentions the share of Rakṣases in sacrifices. The explanation of Griffith suggests that the context is a sacrificial ritual. In V.23 Viṣṇu is described as the killer of Rakṣases. There the term Rakṣas is translated as fiend, which clearly supports its later conceptual meaning.

15 cf. The Yajurvedasamhitā, Translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith, Nag Publishers, Delhi, p.25.
Rakṣas in Śāmaveda

Asuras are mentioned as the possessors of māyā in Rgveda. In Śāmaveda Rakṣases are portrayed as māyins, meaning enchanters.

One hymn reads;

शुष्कघने नक्षत्रो में स्नीकारय बीर विश्वाते।
बि मणिनस्तिपा रक्षसो दह। | Śāmaveda, I.2.1.1.10.

Here Agni is referred to as the lord of men. He is asked to burn down the Rakṣases with his flame. Rakṣases are described as enchanters by calling them 'māyinaḥ.' The adjective 'viśaspati' to Agni gives an important clue which reveals that he is also a man who is the leader of men. The enchanting Rakṣases may be suggested to have belonged to some native sects that have been following a different religious beliefs and customs from that of the Vedic way.

Rakṣas along with the sorcerer is mentioned in Śāmaveda also;

प्रभ्यान हरस हर: स्रणाह विश्वात्परि
बलुजनस्य रक्षसो बलं न्यूङसज्जवेष। | Śāmaveda, I.1.2.5.5.

In the above said verse Agni is asked to demolish the strength of Yatudhanas as well as the vigour of Rakṣases. From this reference it is clear that Rakṣases are powerful beings whom the Vedic people

26 The association of Rakṣas with māyā resembles with the association of Asuras along with māyā to certain extent.
feared. The description of the praise to Agni to demolish the enemies on every side apparently hints at a conflict that occurred in that time between two sects of people who were having different life and culture.

In Sāmaveda the direct references to Rakṣas occur only four times (l.1.2.13.8; l.1.2.5.5; l.2.1.1.10 & l.2.1.2.8) and three indirect mentions (l.6.1.1.5; l.6.2.1.1; l.6.1.3.6) are also available there. In the indirect mentions Rakṣases seem to be enemies of the people who chant the hymns. In another hymn Soma is mentioned as driving away the black skinned men:

pra yatra pra yatra antaśa antaśa 
ca kṛṣṇāmpīkṛṣṇāmpī kṛṣṇāmpī kṛṣṇāmpī
Sāmaveda, l.6.1.1.5.

This hymn is addressed to Soma Pavamāna. In the explanation of Medhātithi quoted by Griffith\(^{21}\) the term kṛṣṇatvac (black skin) is explicated variously. It means both the black pall and covering of night. Rakṣases or dark skinned Dasyus are again suggested to be the non-Aryan inhabitants of the country. This explanation implies some racial connotation also. Dasyus are said to be some sect of people in

\(^{21}\) See The Sāmavedasamhitā Translated by Ralph. T.H.Griffith, Nag publishers, Delhi. p.128f.
Rgveda. The mention of Dasyus along with Rakṣasas leads one to the assumption that both people had some commonness. It may be in religion, beliefs and practices rather than of the skin colour as argued by Medhātithi.

Rakṣas in Later Vedic Period

By the time of Brāhmaṇas, the concept of Rakṣas attained an anti-social connotation, eventhough some references in Brāhmaṇas show their positive relationship with the Aryans.²² For instance, Śatapathabrāhmaṇa²³ presents a reference to the share of Rakṣas in sacrifices;

>This passage tells that the blood of the sacrificial animals goes as the share of Rakṣas. It should be believed that Rakṣases had also taken part in sacrifices. Taking this reference into account, scholars like

²² The term Aryan is used in the sense of believers in Vedic faith here as it designates a cultural symbol rather than racial connotation. See the first chapter of the present study regarding Aryan issue.

²³ This is spoken in the context of the dispute of Devas and Asuras for gaining the share in the sacrifice.
Jyotish Nath\textsuperscript{24} think that there was an exchange of religious views between the Aryans and Rakṣases in the society.

Another interesting reference to the sacrificial share of Rakṣas is available in the same text;\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{quote}
ततो देव्या: असुकृ पशो रक्षसों भागिृसाङ्गिति अनानन्यन्यों तमस्सि प्रवेशितति।
तस्मात् पशोत्तोचिना न कुर्जः। रक्षसाः हि सः भागः।  Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, 1.9.3.35.
\end{quote}

This passage is uttered in the context of a sacrifice. This reference also shows the collaboration of two different cultured people in history.

It has been already discussed in the fourth chapter of this study that Rakṣases became identical with Asuras as the enemies of Devas in the period of Brāhmaṇas. Śatapathabrāhmaṇa mentions Kubera as the king of Rakṣases;

\begin{quote}
कुबेरः वैष्ठवणो राजेन्द्रः। तस्य रक्षसिसिद्:।
राजोमानायास्तः हृ́तः।
\end{quote}

Kubera, who appears as the supremo of Yakṣas later, has been characterised as the god of wealth in later mythology. He was popularly known as Vaiśravaṇa, the son of Viṣravas.

Śatapathabrāhmaṇa speaks of the Rakṣas in an interesting way;

\textsuperscript{24} Refer to Jyotish Nath, op.cit, p.90.
\textsuperscript{25} Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 1.9.3.33 also speaks of the sacrificial share of Rakṣases.
It is understood from this passage that it is the repelled who came to be known as Rakṣas. Jyotish Nath\textsuperscript{26} considers that the rubbish fell on sacrificial rite is described here as a Rakṣas. The rubbish may be the wastage of sacrificial objects like rice, flowers etc.

The references to Rakṣases as taking part in the sacrifices reveal the cultural contact between two groups of people. Jyotish Nath\textsuperscript{27} opines that the reference seen in \textit{Satapathabrāhmaṇa} is the result of the amalgamation between the Aryans and indigenous people and their cultures. Smṛti literature also preserves the memory of the contact of the Rakṣases with the Aryan people for it admits the offering of oblations to the Rakṣas and incorporates the Rakṣasa type of marriage to the realm of Brahmanic life. These developments undoubtedly are the results of social contacts between the above mentioned sects.

It has already been discussed that in early Vedic literature there is not a single reference to Rakṣas which supports the inclusion

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\textsuperscript{26} Jyotish Nath, \textit{op.cit.}, p.93.

\textsuperscript{27} There is a variation change in the number of \textit{Satapathabrāhmaṇa} passage in different editions. Jyotish Nath has given the number of the above said passage as 1.9.3.35. Refer to Jyotish Nath, \textit{op.cit.}, p.90.
of them into the group of Asuras. But the engagements of Rakṣases show their close affinity with the later concept of Asuras. References to Rakṣases in Rgveda vividly say that they belonged to certain ethnic groups. Most of the Vedic hymns containing reference to Rakṣases, reiterate them as the enemies of the sacrificial cult of Vedas. The description of Rakṣases as a sect of people to be driven away from the sacrificial places evidently tells that they were also human beings. The foregoing analysis of their engagements supports this assumption well.

[Image]