CHAPTER - 3
MYTH AND POPULAR CULTURE
DURING VEDIC AGE
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The vedic mythology, in the initial phase of its development, appears to be considerably influenced by the Indo-European traditions. However, with the gradual progress of economy, the socio-cultural elements set a firm ground and the myth also underwent a change as reflected in the vedic literature. Thus, the vedic mythology did not remain static but dynamic and growing. A critical examination of the Vedas suggests that the vedic mythology is essentially evolutionary in nature. This implies that at different stages of its evolution, the vedic mythology saw advent of different gods who dominated mythology.

Evolutionary mythology of the Vedas presents a very complicated picture before us and it is suggested that this very mythological phenomenon created 'growing' personality of

With different vicissitudes in \textit{vedic} life and culture, different elements came to be introduced into the personality of \textit{Vedic} gods. Hence, it would be unwise to emphasise on a particular aspect of any god and try to define his personality and character one way or other way on a fixed line. In order to make a critical and an impartial study of \textit{vedic} myth it is necessary to determine, in the light of facts derived from the study of comparative philosophy, comparative mythology, anthropology and the cultural history of the Aryans, the priority of these varied elements and thereby present a complete history of the entire 'becoming' of a \textit{vedic} god.\textsuperscript{3}

The \textit{vedic} mythology has also seen the arrival of two schools of interpretations— the historical school and the naturalistic school. The former school has put forward the theory that the \textit{vedic} gods were historical personalities who having acquired heroic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 142.
\end{itemize}
qualities came to be venerated and thus, became mythological character due to their successful exploits. However, it would be unsound to regard certain vedic gods as historical without much literary or historical proof. In fact, the naturalistic interpretation certainly holds ground as it is based on much scientific lines. The etymologists, among whom Yaska was the foremost, and comparative mythologists have relied on the naturalistic interpretation which holds that the vedic gods represented various powers of nature and that the Vedic mythology consisted of symbolic description of various phenomena of nature.

Vedic myth and culture, although appearing coherent, is not really so. It represents dialectic currents of thought as gleaned through the vedic hymns. Although the vedic literature is full of hymns to a pantheon of gods, we find scepticism regarding beliefs and gods. In the Rigveda maximum number of

4. Ibid., pp. 141-198.
hymns have been addressed to Indra, albeit, at certain places, there is ambiguity regarding him. During the Rigvedic times, there were people who asked, 'who is Indra? Who ever saw him?' or asserted that he did not exist at all. Certain people did not believe in the gods of the brahmanas, nor did they give priests the fees for sacrifice. There were people not believing in Indra (anindra) and hence condemned by the pious poets of the Rigveda. We also find traces of conflict between Indra and probably Krishna. Despite substantial influence of the brahmanas in the social order, satirical language has been used against them in the frog Hymn of the Rigveda where they have been compared with the frogs who make loud voices whenever rainy season approaches i.e. sacrifice is performed by a yajamana.

In the vedic literature a large number of deities have been mentioned which

6. RV. II. 12.5; VIII. 103.3.
7. Indra is praised for his truthful deeds in RV. II. 15.1, 22.1-3; I. 84.17; VI. 87.1-2.
8. RV. VII. 103.
has led certain scholars to regard the vedic religion as polytheistic. Yet, there is also dissatisfaction with the gods of tradition as reflected in the assertion of the unity of gods and of the world. In a Rigvedic hymn, such an assertion is seen with an effort to grasp more concretely and definitely the unity which it asserts as a fact. This hymn, attributed to a mythical author, Dirghatamas, describes the riddle of the universe. We may also find some degree of cohesion and influence of the doctrine of the unity of the world. This idea is expressed as regards the gods in one of the fifty two versions - 'They call it Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Agni and the winged birds (Sun); the one they call by many names, Agni, Yama and Matarisvan'. The same idea appears more expressly in another verse, where the poet asks the wiser to tell him what supported the six regions of the universe, who was the first urban being.

Efforts towards unity of gods is

9. RV. I. 164.
more seen in creation hymn\textsuperscript{10} which has been regarded as the most important in the history of the philosophy of India.\textsuperscript{11} The poet says that in the beginning there was neither being nor not being but, at the end the poet suggests a supreme deity as distinct from the gods the seer poet still has doubt whether who were created. However such supreme deity has power of knowledge, that is, whether it has consciousness at all. Conception of unity of universe is also seen in the efforts of the Rigveda to setting up personal deities, who are credited with the creation and government of the whole of universe. Of these, the famous and enduring is Prajapati.\textsuperscript{12} This god, as we will see later, combined in himself, the duties of a creator, of ruler and preserver of the universe. The concept of Vishvakarman, synonymn for Prajapati, has two hymns\textsuperscript{13} of the Tenth Book of Rigveda devoted to his honour. We find here the tendency to insist that the creator,

\textsuperscript{10} RV. X. 129.
\textsuperscript{11} Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up., p. 435.
\textsuperscript{12} RV. X. 121.
\textsuperscript{13} RV. X. 81-82.
who is self-created, is not merely the material cause but also the efficient cause of the world.

Most of the western scholars have regarded vedic myth and culture as the priestly one. According to these historians, the vedic hymns were composed mostly by the brahmanas who largely depended on sacrifice for their livelihood. Hence, detached from the popular culture, they propounded their own views in the vedic literature which has little to do with the popular culture and beliefs. However, while making a critical analysis of the contents of the vedic literature, it is unfair to call the vedic culture as the priestly one. Mention of cults like the Rudra cult and Prajapati cult highlights the influence of popular culture in shaping the worldly life. In fact, it would be folly to depreciate the value of the knowledge of the priests by holding that the vedic religion represented only views of priests.\textsuperscript{14} It were the priests who kept

\textsuperscript{14} Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up. p. 55.
themselves busy with religion that changes in popular view. It is difficult to draw lines between priests and populace and holding that priests paid little regard for popular view converting popular rites to themselves and leaving others unnoticed or barely mentioned. Despite priestly elaboration, there were essentially popular rites in much of the vedic sacrifice-the rajasuya, vajapeya and mahavrata are no mystic rites but homely ceremonies.¹⁵

Sometimes, it is postulated that gods of domestic ritual were imposed by priests on popular usage. It is also held that the brahmanas had not the slightest popular hold. However, comparative religion suggests that they are far from priestly interventions and inventions. Moreover, we cannot say that fire as the means of sacrifice is a sign of priestly intervention because of ethnic fact of primitive fire worship. We cannot subscribe to the view that while priest insisted on aniconic worship,

¹⁵. Ibid., pp. 55-60.
the people made offerings to idols as we do not have the proof of idol-worship during this period. That the people rejoiced in bloody offerings while priests objected to them contradicts the whole ritual of animal offerings. The priests recognised importance of women only in certain rites, namely those affecting marriage and agriculture. But, there is no distinction here between the hieratic and popular views for primitive people recognised in these fields the special importance of women. In fact, priests and popular view were in full harmony with each other. However, certain differences persisted between priests and popular culture as the former did not like phallus worshippers. But, this is probably rather a distinction between hieratic and popular and while they recognised they seen unenthusiastic regarding the mad Muni who drinks poison from the same cup as Rudra. Thus, the priests did not stand apart from ordinary life and developed their own

16. RV. VII. 21.5; X. 99.3.
17. RV. X. 136.
views in difference to those of the people. On the other hand, with the passage of time, they absorbed en masse the popular rites and embellished them with their own poetry and their ritual elaboration.¹⁸ The truly popular nature of ritual is seen in the case of agricultural offerings and domestic sacrifices or marriages. The Shankhayana Grihyasutra provides as offering of the old bali type to sky and earth at the eastern boundary of the field when plough is being spanned. In the agricultural set-up of society, this divine pair had certainly a great role to play and hence, they did not require priests to teach peasants to what deities he should make offering. When there is a desire to change the current of a stream an offering is made to Varuna¹⁹ or when there is a need to protect from pests we find bali offerings made to Ashal, Ashapati, Kshetrapati and the Ashvins.²⁰ All such instances highlight the popular base of

¹⁸. Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up. p. 56.
vedic myth and culture. Even in the case where rites are evidently or probably performed to deities different from those who primarily received them, we must exercise caution in ascribing even the change of deity and still more the rite itself to priestly invention. The priests were not required always to intervene to induce the peasant to regard a great god such as Rudra-Shiva, Vishnu or even Brahman, as the recipient of an offering originally made to some minor and less personalized spirit.

The vedic mythology has been interpreted variously by scholars, who have interpreted it on the basis of their linguistic, etymological or comparative mythological approaches. It is said that an important aspect of the divinity represented in the vedic texts is the indefiniteness of outline and lack of individuality. This very approach has led to talk of vedic religion and culture in terms of polytheistic, monotheistic or henotheistic. In fact, it appears that the concern of the vedic

21. Ibid.
poet is not to highlight physical features. Hence, many of the Vedic gods share common features. Yaska, speaking of the nature of the gods, remarks that what is seen of them is not anthropomorphic at all. Regarding the Vedic gods, it is to be borne in mind that they are not totally 'moral' or 'true' as argued by some. They have all manly vices and thus possess good as well as bad aspects. However, they are ready to help human beings and bestow prosperity as well as material and spiritual benefits upon the people.

The Rigvedas as well as the AV gives the number of gods to thirty. However, the aggregate of thirty-three could not always have been regarded as exhaustive because in a few passage of the RV other gods are mentioned along with thirty-three. Hence, this number is only indicative as the Brahmanas sometime substitute one god for another. In the RV a

22. Nirukta. VII.
24. RV. III. 6.9.
25. AV. X. 7.13.
26. RV. I.34.11, 45.2; VIII. 35.3, 39.9.
good number of hymns have been addressed to Indra, Agni, Varuna and Soma who appear to have enjoyed considerable influence during the early phase of the Vedic period.

Indra was the most favourite god of the Rigvedic Aryans, to whom about 250 hymns have been addressed in the RV. This very large number of hymns is suggestive of his significance. If hymns in parts of which he is praised or in which he is associated with other gods are taken into account the aggregate is brought upto at least 300. J. Gonda has pointed to insufficient understanding of the myth of Indra by earlier western scholars when he argues that to say that it was nothing but a myth explaining the phenomenon of thunderstorm and describing the release of water, fails to account for many particulars in the texts.\(^{27}\) According to him, the central theme refers to a cosmic drama of paramount importance and probably was the product of a variety of influences and conceptions, the nucleus of which was the well-

known and ever-changing, growing, blending motive of the dragon-killer represented by or having fused with the divinity of victoriousness over obstruction, barring and impalements. In the Vedic Vritra combat the release of waters was considered the central feature and this occurrence meant the transformation of an inhabitable chaotic universe into a cosmos. According to some scholars, the word Indra was derived from 'Indha' meaning 'to kindle'. So, Indra is one who enkindles i.e. gives life and this function of Indra is conceived at microcosmic as well as macrocosmic level. It is interesting to note that name of Indra occurs twice in the Avesta. Being the dominant deity of the middle region, he pervades the air. In the RV Indra's personality and character consists of three strands - Indra is presented as a cosmic power; as a warlike leader of the Vedic Aryans; and as an ancient mythical dragon-

28. Ibid.
29. Usha Chaudhari, Indra and Varuna in Indian mythology, Delhi, 1981, p. 211.
Killing hero.\textsuperscript{31} Most of the descriptions of his personality are centred round his war with Vritra. However, to hold that Indra was a "historical personality" and a "national hero"\textsuperscript{32} would amount to serious misconception and hence difficult to accept. Indra is regarded as the personification of thunderstorm. He stands at the head of the gods of the antariksha and is verily the rain-god of the Vedic pantheon. The term Vritrahan is applied about seventy times to Indra in the RV. Though Indra is sometimes expressly stated to have slain Vritra by his own might alone,\textsuperscript{33} other deities are very often associated with him in the conflict. The Maruts are great helpers to him and they stood by him even when all other gods fled due to fear of Vritra.\textsuperscript{34} In the Brahmana version of Vritra story\textsuperscript{35} we find that Vritra was not slain but was cut in twains by Indra. Besides Vritra, Indra engages in conflict with many minor demons.

\begin{enumerate}
\item R. N. Dandekar, V.M.T., p. 142.
\item Ibid., pp. 141-198.
\item RV. I. 165.8; VII. 21.6; X. 138.
\item RV. VIII. 85.7; Ait. Br. III. 20.
\item Sh. Br. I. 6.3. 1ff.
\end{enumerate}
like Urana\textsuperscript{36} and Vishvarupa\textsuperscript{37}. With the liberation of waters is connected the winning of light, sun and dawn. Indra won light and divine water.\textsuperscript{38} He is also said to have generated the sun, the sky and the dawn after slewing the chief of dragons and released waters from the maintains.\textsuperscript{39} The dawn is sometimes said to be produced along with sun in the some passage in which the conquest of the waters is celebrated.\textsuperscript{40} An important myth which became very important during the post-Vedic period is Indra having settled quaking mountains and plains.\textsuperscript{41} He is also the protector of Aryan colour and subjects the black skin.\textsuperscript{42} His liberality is so famous that the very frequent attribute maghavan i.e. "bountiful" is almost entirely monopolised by him in the RV. Indra is also said to have captured the cows of the Panis.\textsuperscript{43} Fragmentary

\textsuperscript{36} RV. II. 14.4  
\textsuperscript{37} RV. X. 99.6.  
\textsuperscript{38} RV. III. 34.8.  
\textsuperscript{39} RV. I. 32.4; VI. 30.5  
\textsuperscript{40} RV. I.32-1, 2, 4; VI.30.5; X. 138.12.  
\textsuperscript{41} RV. II. 12.2; X. 44.8.  
\textsuperscript{42} RV. III. 34.9; I. 130.8.  
\textsuperscript{43} RV. X. 108.
references also occur regarding his victory over dasas and dasyus. Though mythological elements are largely mingled in the account of his victory over individual dasas, the foundation of these myths seems to be terrestrial and human. If we take into account all the attributes of Indra, they appear to eulogise his physical superiority and of dominion over the physical world. He is a universal monarch not as the applier of the eternal laws of the universe nor as a moral ruler but as an irresistible warrior whose mighty arm wins victory. To mark his anthropomorphism and nature certain sensual and immoral traits are also cited.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, stress is given on the identity of Purusha principle and Indra. Indra is also traced to 'Idampara' i.e. one who tears the horizon of the universe'. He is one who shatters the veils of darkness symbolising ignorance. The Brahma literature describes him as 'possessing

44. Macdonell, V. M., p. 64.
45. IV.2.2.
46. Usha Chaudhari, op. cit., p. 212.
powers and 'supremal witness of the whole world.' This is also supported by the Aupamanya school of the Nirukta. While emphasising these different aspects the Brahmanas also present symbolism of the poetic theme. Indra is pure consciousness and symbolizes supremal knowledge. He is supreme light. Indra in the Brahmanas is identified with speech (symbolic of knowledge or cognitive consciousness), vital energy (prana), mind (manas and hridaya) and strength (viryam and balam) and thus, Indra symbolises the all enveloping and omniscient conscious principle of the entire cosmic existence.

The god, who is by the side of Indra, is Varuna. The number of hymns dedicated to his praise is not a sufficient criterion of his exalted position. Hardly a dozen hymns celebrate him exclusively. Judged by the statistical standards, he would rank only as a third class

47. Tait. Br. II. 2.10.63; I. 7.6.6; Sh. Br. I. 8.1.42.
48. Tait Br. II. 2.10.63.
49. Nirukta X. 1.8.
51. Kaushitaki Br. XIV. 1.
52. Usha Chaudhari, op.cit., p. 212.
deity; and even if the two dozen hymns in which he is invoked along with his double Mitra are taken into account, he would come only fifth in order of priority. However, number of hymns notwithstanding, Varuna enjoys considerable hold in the Vedic mythology. He is preeminently called the asura\textsuperscript{53} and also the regulator of waters.\textsuperscript{54} In fact, all natural phenomena are controlled and directed by this god. The gods themselves follow Varuna's law\textsuperscript{55} and are incapable of obstructing in any way the proper functioning of that law. The divine dominion of Varuna is often referred to with the word maya i.e. magic power. On account of this maya, Varuna wields supreme sovereignty over the whole universe, which is said to have been originally created by him. He is the imperial ruler, (samraj) of all, both gods and men\textsuperscript{56} of the whole world\textsuperscript{57} and of all that exists. Not even the slightest activity in nature and in human and

\textsuperscript{53} RV. VII. 65.2; VIII. 42.1
\textsuperscript{54} RV. II. 28.4; V. 85.6; VII. 64.2.
\textsuperscript{55} RV. VIII. 41.7.
\textsuperscript{56} RV. X. 132.4.; II. 27.10.
\textsuperscript{57} RV. V. 85.3.
animal life passes unnoticed by him. The rising and the setting of the sun, the falling of rains, the growth of vegetation, the flowing of rivers, the flying of birds, even the working of the eye are governed by the subtly working law of Varuna.\textsuperscript{59} In his capacity of the world-sovereign, Varuna is said to be commanding a large band of spies,\textsuperscript{59} who being undeceived, undismayed and wise, observe all the happenings in the universe and report to their master, without delay, one case of lapse being the transgression of that law. The sun himself works as his eye\textsuperscript{60} so that he can supervise without any hindrance the happenings in the universe and activities of the human beings.

The abode of Varuna is in the highest heaven\textsuperscript{61} and it is the duty of all-seeing sun together with other spies to go to the dwellings of Varuna and report the deeds

\textsuperscript{58} R. N. Dandekar, \textit{V.M.T.}, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{RV.} I. 25.13; VI. 67.5; VII. 61.3, 87.3.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{RV.} I. 115.1; VI. 51.1; VII. 61.1.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{RV.} V. 67.2.
of men. Varuna is the unfailing witness of men's truth and falsehood. He perceives all that exists between the heaven and earth and all that is beyond; none can escape from Varuna fleeing even far beyond the sky.

An important feature of Vauna's personality is his special association with Mitra and the Adityas. Mitra and varuna are often inseparably bound to each other; and Varuna is represented, in the Veda, as the highest among the Adityas. Together with them, he forms an independent circle of Vedic divinities to whom is principally entrusted the guardianship of law, cosmic and moral. Their main characteristics is not the achievement of enormous exploits, as in the case of Indra; they govern the law which regulates the whole universe. A parallel of these Vedic gods can also be found in the Avesta where Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Amesa Spentas form a similar group. They too represent the supreme heavenly sovereignty.

62. RV. VII. 60.1
63. RV. VII. 49.3.
64. AV. IV. 16. 4-5.
According to Hillebrandt, the divine dominion of Varuna and Mitra is found in the word ‘Maya’ which, according to Macdonell, signifies occult powers\textsuperscript{66} applicable in a good sense to gods or in a bad sense to demons. It is Varuna who, through his pasha, brings order in the world. Varuna and Mitra are closely connected with the sun, but the former is a much more important deity. Mitra is so closely assimilated to the Varuna that he has hardly any important trait left.\textsuperscript{67} On the evidences drawn from the Avesta, Mitra has been almost unanimously acknowledged to be a solar deity.

The most important aspect of Varuna’s personality appears to be the regulation of world. This worldly and cosmic order known as the rit has been interpreted variously by different scholars. According to Winternitz\textsuperscript{68}, it represents the order of the universe. While Macdonell\textsuperscript{69} takes it to mean

\textsuperscript{66.} Macdonell, V. M., P. 24.
\textsuperscript{67.} Ibid., p. 27.
\textsuperscript{69.} Macdonell, History of Sanskrit Literature, London, 1905, p. 75.
the physical and moral order.' Keith\(^70\) thinks it to be a term for the cosmic as well as the moral order. According to Radhakrishnan, "Rita literally means the course of things. It stands for law in general and the immanence of justice. This conception must have originally been suggested by the regularity of the movement of the sun, moon and stars, the alternation of day and night, of the seasons. Rit denotes the order of the world. Everything that is ordered in the universe has rit the permanent reality which remains unchanged in all the welter of mutation".\(^71\) However, Bhattacharya\(^72\) takes it to a different connotation citing that it did not indicate merely physical and cosmic laws but also a 'means of substance'. He maintains that lament over the loss of rit in Vedic literature and strong urge for its revival certainly adds a different meaning to the concept of rit. It occurs only seven times in the principal Upanishads.\(^73\) However, to extend its

\(^{70}\) Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up, p. 248.


\(^{72}\) N. N. Bhattacharya, Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social contents, Delhi, 1975, p. 39.

\(^{73}\) Ibid.
meaning to the 'means of subsistence' appears to be a far-fetched view. In fact, Varuna being the upholder of the cosmic and moral order, is asked to restore the order as the Vedic authors appear to be concerned over the loss of moral order. This rit represents the holy bond - the unbreakable, invulnerable law - which is the foundation of all natural phenomena and which binds them down into a well-ordered whole. The Vedic references to 'ritasya tantu'74 would seem to support this explanation of the Vedic rit concept.

According to Dandekar, the eminence of Varuna as the creator of the universe, as the world-sovereign, as the protector of law and as the moral governor of mankind, had developed in the Veda, to such an enormous extent that there naturally arose a unique rivalry for supremacy between him and Indra.75 Several Vedic references are indicative of this rivalry which forms one of the most important

74. AV. IV. 16. 6-9.
75. R. N. Dandekar, V. M. T., p. 31.
features of Vedic mythology. It may be mentioned, in this context with Indra and many other vedic gods varuna no myth related to him; consequently, the anthropomorphism of his personality is more fully developed on the moral-spiritual rather than the physical side. However, it is not difficult to reconcile with the view that Indra and Varuna both represent the two harmonious powers of the Ultimate Truth (ekam sat).\textsuperscript{76}

Moreover, they represent the positive and negative aspects of the cosmic reality.\textsuperscript{77} At the same time, this is to note that the so-called rivalry need not be emphasised too much as we do not have any such reference in the Vedic literature directly referring to the conflict.

In the Brahmanas, there is certain difference in the treatment of Varuna. His personality had been eclipsed by Indra during the Rigvedic times but he regained the lost position during the period of the Brahmanas as gleaned from legends.\textsuperscript{78} In this case, he got support from

\textsuperscript{76} Usha Chaudhari, op. cit., p. 240.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Sh. Br. V. 4.5. 1f.
Vishnu as he was connected with Vishnu in sacrifice. As compared with the RV, the Brahmanas do show Varuna in a comparatively better position for he is there on par with Indra and Agni, and is along with them, a leader of the gods.\(^79\) Moreover, in the post-Vedic mythology he became an Indian Neptune, god of the sea.\(^80\)

After Indra, Agni was the second most important god in the Vedic literature. He is celebrated in at least 200 hymns of the RV and in many others, he is conjointly invoked with other deities. He differs from other Vedic gods as he possesses certain distinct features. For instance, he is regarded as being more 'earthly' than 'heavenly'.\(^81\) He is looked upon mainly as an envoy of gods rather than as a god. He is also the hotri or the purohita of the gods, their eye, their month, even their 'animal'. The gods are said to have employed

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81. R. N. Danekar, V. M. T., p. 278.
him for ritual service, and as a reward for such service, to have bestowed upon him eternal youth. It is also noteworthy that Agni is rarely represented as having a share in soma with the other gods. The peculiar position of Agni in the Vedic mythology seems to have been alluded to by a Vedic poet when he very significantly, says of Agni that he became the father of gods, despite being their son.\textsuperscript{82} Similar sentiment is echoed in the Sh. Br.\textsuperscript{83}

Dandekar says that a peculiar feature of Agni mythology is a dichotomy between the mythological Agni and the sacrificial fire.\textsuperscript{84} He opines that Agni as a vedic god is to be clearly distinguished from the sacrificial fires such as the ahavaniya, the garhapatya and the dakshina. These fires are never referred to as devatas.\textsuperscript{85} In the ritual sutras we find that oblations are prescribed to be offered to different Agnis such as Vrajapati Agni, Amhомуch

\textsuperscript{82} RV. I. 69.2
\textsuperscript{83} II. 3.3.5.
\textsuperscript{84} R. N. Dandekar, V. M. T., p. 279.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Agni, Agnikavat Agni, Tantumant Agni and Pathikrit Agni. It has been suggested by some scholars that the concept of three sacrificial fires has been derived from the triple character of the Vedic Agni, namely as Surya, Vayu or Indra and Agni. Agni is said to have various forms. Thus, Sh. Br. mentions four forms of Agni—the three Aptyas viz. Ekata, Dvita, Trita and Agni himself. At another place Agni, who is said to be born of Usas, is spoken of as having nine forms. When born Kumar i.e. Agni) represented Prajapati to give him a name and thus free him from evil. Prajapati, accordingly, gave him several names viz. Rudra, Sarva, Pasupati, Ugra, Asani, Bhava, Mahan Devah and Isana. These, the passage says further, are eight forms of Agni and Kumar is the ninth. Besides these, Agni has been given different names keeping in view its different aspects. Thus, he is called Havyavahana or Kavyavahana accordingly as he carries oblations to the

86. 1.2.3.1.
87. Sh. Br. VI. 1.3.
gods or the Pitris. Names like Pavamana, Pavaka, Shuchi or such names as Vratapati, Grihapati and Dharmanspati also occur.\textsuperscript{89} and are explanatory in nature. He is also called by two more names Anikavat and Indumat: by the former because before attacking Vritra the gods shaped him into a sharp point, and by the latter because Soma drops are offered into him.\textsuperscript{90} His other names viz. Pathikrit, Dhatri, Vivichi, Samvarga, Apsumat and Ayusmat\textsuperscript{91} too are important.

As the name of Agni is also the regular designation of fire, the anthropomorphism of his physical appearance is only rudimentary, his bodily parts having a clear reference to the phenomena of terrestrial fire mainly in its sacrificial aspect. He is butter-backed\textsuperscript{92} and butter-faced\textsuperscript{93} and beautiful-tongued.\textsuperscript{94} Like Indra, he has the epithet sahasra muska\textsuperscript{95}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 154.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{92} RV. V. 4.3.
\item \textsuperscript{93} RV. III. 1.18.
\item \textsuperscript{94} RV. I. 14.7.
\item \textsuperscript{95} RV. VIII. 19.32.
\end{itemize}
He is called an archer\textsuperscript{96} or is compared with an archer\textsuperscript{97} who sharpens his flame like a blade of iron. He is often likened with various animals, in most cases doubtless with a view to indicating his functions rather than representing his personal form.\textsuperscript{98}

\textit{Indra} is frequently compared with inanimate objects. Like the sun, he resembles gold.\textsuperscript{99} He resembles or is directly called a car.\textsuperscript{100} His brightness is much dwelt upon. He is of brilliant lustre, brilliant flamed and bright coloured.\textsuperscript{101} He encompasses heaven with his tongue\textsuperscript{102} and goes to the flood of heaven, to the waters, in the bright space above and below the sun. The \textit{Agni} of \textit{Divodasa} spread along mother towards the gods and stood on the ridge of the sky. Epithet 'dhumaketu' is frequently applied to him.

According to the ordinary view of the \textit{Vedic} poets, \textit{Agni}'s father is Dyaus, who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{96.} \textit{RV.} IV.4.1.
\item \textbf{97.} \textit{RV.} I.70.11.
\item \textbf{98.} Macdonell, \textit{V. M.}, p. 89.
\item \textbf{99.} \textit{RV.} II.2.2-4; VII.3.6.
\item \textbf{100.} \textit{RV.} I.141.8; III.11.5.
\item \textbf{101.} \textit{RV.} II.10.2; VI.10-3; VII.15.10; I.140.1; V.2.3.
\item \textbf{102.} Macdonell, \textit{V. M.}, p. 90.
\end{itemize}
generated him. He is the child (shishu) of Dyaus and is said to have been born from the belly of the Asura. Owing to his slightly developed anthropomorphism, the myths of the Agni have little to say about his deeds, being, outside his main activity as sacrificial fire, chiefly concerned with his various births, forms and abodes. According to a later text, the kindling of Agni by friction must not take before sunrise. Hence, being produced every morning for the sacrifice, Agni receives the very frequent epithet, exclusively connected with him, of youngest.

Agni represents lightning—for lighting is regarded as coming from heaven as well as from the waters and in the Brahmana passage it is spoken of as both celestial and aqueous. Owing to the diverse births, Agni is often regarded as having a triple character

103. RV. X. 45.8.
104. RV. III. 29.4.
107. AV. III. 21.1.7; VIII. 1.11.
108. Ait. Br. VII. 7.2
and this 'earliest Indian Trinity' is important for on it is based much of the mystical speculations of the Vedic age. Agni's three births were from heaven, earth and waters\textsuperscript{109} but the order of the source of birth varies. The third form of Agni i.e. heavenly Agni, is spoken of as the highest.\textsuperscript{110} Yaska\textsuperscript{111} mentions that his predecessor Shakapuni regarded the threefold existence of Agni referred to in the RV (X. 88.10) as being in earth, air and heaven. This threefold nature of Agni was probably the prototype not only of the posterior triad of sun, wind and fire\textsuperscript{112} but also of the triad of sun, Indra and fire which though not Rigvedic is still ancient. Hence, Vata or Vayu and Indra have taken the place of Agni Vaidyuta, the lightning Agni, as the Brahmanas and commentators call him.\textsuperscript{113} The triad of Agnis may have suggested and would explain the division of the sacrificial fire into the three sacrificial

\textsuperscript{109} RV. X. 45.1.
\textsuperscript{110} RV. X. 1.3.
\textsuperscript{111} Nirukta. VII. 28.
\textsuperscript{112} RV. VIII. 18.19.
\textsuperscript{113} Macdonell, V. M., p. 94.
fires which in the Vedic ritual are kept distinct from the domestic fire and which form an essential form of the cult in the Brahmanas. In the post-Vedic tradition, the three fires became representative of the three forms of Agni known to the RV.\textsuperscript{114}

Agni is more closely connected with human life than any other god. His association with the dwellings of man is peculiarly intimate. He is the only god to whom the frequent epithet \textquote{grihapati} is applied as he dwells in every abode.\textsuperscript{115} He is also more prominent as goblin-slayer than Indra both in the hymn and in the ritual. He also vanquishes the unbelieving Panis\textsuperscript{116} and in this regard he is associated with Indra. Occasionally Agni is also identified with other gods especially with Varuna and Mitra.\textsuperscript{117}

Agni is closely linked with the daily life of men in the sacrifice. He is,

\begin{itemize}
\item[114.] Hopkins, Religions of India, London, 1896, p. 106.
\item[115.] RV. VII. 15.2.
\item[116.] RV. VII. 6.3.
\item[117.] RV. II. 1.4; III. 5.4; VII. 12.3.
\end{itemize}
however, not merely a passive receiver of the offering, but is an intermediary between heaven and earth. In consequence of his main function the Veda of officiating at the sacrifice, Agni came to be celebrated as the divine counterpart of earthly priesthood. He is, therefore, often called the vipra or specifically the purohita, and constantly more frequently, in fact, than by any other name, the hotri or chief priest appointed by men.\textsuperscript{118} Agni is, in fact, a great priest. But, though this phase of Agni's character is so prominent from the beginning to the end of the RV, it is, of course, from a historical point of view, comparatively recent, due to those mystical sacerdotal speculations which ultimately led to the endless sacrificial symbolism of the later Vedic texts.\textsuperscript{119}

Regarding the Agni mythology, it is to be noted that no counterpart of Agni as such exists in any other Indo-European language.\textsuperscript{120}

In fact, we find two feminine divinities—the

\textsuperscript{118} RV. VIII. 49.1; X. 7.5
\textsuperscript{119} Macdonell, V. M., p. 97.
\textsuperscript{120} R. N. Dandekar, V. M. T., p. 309.
Greek Hestia and the Roman Vesta. But, they are not associated with the fire of any developed cult of sacrifice; they are associated only with the fire of the earth. In fact, the importance of Agni grew in the post-Rigvedic culture as Agni came to be recognized as the symbol of sacrifice. The legend Gotama Rahugana and Videgha Mathava, who became pioneers of Aryanisation of eastern India, evince the growing importance of Agni. In the Aranyakas, Agni is taken as a symbol of Ultimate Reality.

Soma was an important deity of the Rigvedic period as judged from the number of hymns dedicated to him. All the 114 hymns of the ninth mandala besides six in other mandalas, are dedicated to his praise. Identified with the Avestan Haoma, he was venerated in the Indo-Iranian period as well but came to hold a more prominent position in the Rigvedic period.

Derived from the root 'Su' ('hu') meaning 'to

121. Ibid.
123. Macdonell, V. M., p. 113.
press’ the word Soma means ‘pressed juice.’ Although there is considerable disagreement regarding his identification, Soma refers to a plant growing on the mountains of ‘Mujavant’. In both the Avesta and the RV, it is king of plants and refers to a medicine which gives health, long life and removes death.

Soma is much less anthropomorphic than Indra or Varuna, the constant presence of the plant its juice setting limits to the imagination of the poets who described its personification. Hence, little is said of his human form or action. The marvellous and heroic deeds attributed to him are either colourless, because common to almost all other gods, or else, only secondarily belong to him. Like other gods, he is, under the name of Indu as well as Soma, invoked to came to the sacrifice and receive the offerings on the strewn grass. The ninth mandala mainly consists of incantations sung over the tangible form of Soma, while it is pressed by the stones, flows

124. Ibid., p. 114.
through the woolen strainer into the wooden vats, in which it is finally offered on a litter of grass to the gods as a beverage sometimes in fire\textsuperscript{125} or drunk by the priests. The part of the same plant which is pressed is called amsu.\textsuperscript{126} The shoots swelling give milk like cows with their udders.\textsuperscript{127} The Soma juice is designated by Soma and generally by rasa; Soma is also associated with and occasionally referred to with anna.\textsuperscript{128} The priests who press Soma are adhvaryus\textsuperscript{129}. The pressing of Soma by means of stones was the usual method in the period of RV. But, the extraction of juice by mortar and pestle which is also sanctioned by the ritual texts was already known to the RV,\textsuperscript{130} the method known to the Parsis and going back to the era of Indo-Iranian age.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{Soma} is recognized in the RV as

\textsuperscript{125} RV. I. 94.14; V. 5.1; VIII. 43.11.
\textsuperscript{126} RV. IX. 67.28.
\textsuperscript{127} RV. VIII. 9.19.
\textsuperscript{128} RV. VII. 98.2; 8.4.12; Sh. Br. I. 6.4.5.
\textsuperscript{129} RV. VIII. 4.11.
\textsuperscript{130} RV. I. 28. 1-4.
\textsuperscript{131} Macdonell, V. M., p. 106.
having three kinds of admixture$^{132}$-gavashir, dadhyashir and yavashir. He also has three abodes which may designate the three tubs used at the Soma sacrifice of the later ritual.$^{133}$

Soma was brought from heaven.$^{134}$ The myth most commonly expressive of this belief is that of Soma and the eagle. The Soma is said to have been brought by eagle.$^{135}$ But, in the Brahmanas it is Gayatri a mystical sacerdotal name of Agni that carries off the Soma. Bloomfield, explaining a hymn$^{136}$, mentions the carrying off of Soma by the eagle as a mythological account of the simple phenomenon of the descent of lightning, darting from the cloud.$^{137}$ Being the most important of the herbs, Soma is said to have been born as the lord of plants.$^{138}$ He is, of course, often called a god; but, in one passage he is described as a god pressed for the gods.$^{139}$

132. RV. V. 27.5
133. Tait Samhita, III. 2.12; Katyayana Shrautasutra. IX. 5. 17, 7.4.
134. RV. IX. 63.27, 66.30.
135. RV. I. 80.2.
137. RV. I. 93.6.
138. RV. IX. 114.2.
139. RV. IX. 3. 6-7.
In the post-vedic literature, Soma is a regular name of the moon. In the Chhandogya Upanishad (V.10.1), the statement is found that moon is King Soma. Even the Brahmanas identify him as the moon. Thus, the remark has been given that the moon is the Soma of the gods: the Sh. Br. remarks that the king Soma, food of gods, is the moon. A large number of scholars agree that even in a few of the latest hymns of the RV Soma is already identified with the moon. Most of them, however, hold that Soma as a god is celebrated in the Vedic hymns only as a personification of the beverage, regarding his identification with the moon merely as a secondary mythological growth. In fact, whatever may be the later changes in the Soma mythology during the Rigvedic period, it was a personification of the terrestrial plant and juice and it was perhaps in the post-Rigvedic

141. Devasthali, op. cit., p. 165.
143. I. 6.4.5.
period that certain changes took place in his position as well as identification.

*Pushan*, whose name occurs about 120 times in the *RV* and also glorified in the *AV* was a minor deity of the *Rigvedic* times. Hymns in the praise of *Pushan* were mainly written by the *Bhardwaj* clan. According to Dandekar, the literary and religious activities of the clan of the *Bhardwajas*, mentioned in the sixth *mandala* of the *RV*, a suggests that *Pushan* cult was a special possession of the family of the *Bharadwajas*.\(^{144}\) It is equally important that the *Panis* are most prominently mentioned in the sixth *mandala*. Hence, it is argued that *Pushan* was the god of the *Panis*. He is coupled pre-eminently with the two gods—*Indra*\(^{145}\) and *Soma*.\(^{146}\) He is the only god who has been given the title. *'Pashupa' i.e. 'Protector of the cattle.'*\(^{147}\) He increases the cattle\(^{148}\) and brings back those

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145. *RV. VI*. 57.
146. *RV. II*. 40.
147. *RV. VI*. 58.2
148. *RV. VI*. 53.10; 54.5-6; 56.5.
that have strayed.\textsuperscript{149} Another important feature of his personality is his close association with 'paths'. He is the lord of paths and helps the nomadic tribes in other ways.\textsuperscript{150} Derived from the roots 'Push'\textsuperscript{151} the word means 'prosperer' and accordingly he holds such epithets as *vishvavedas, anashtavedas, Puruvasu* and 'Pushtimbhara. There are frequent invocations to him to bestow wealth and protection.\textsuperscript{152} Thus, the conception which seems to underlie the character of *Pushan* is the beneficent power of the sun manifested chiefly as a pastoral deity. However, in the later Vedic and post-Vedic periods, his name becoming rare suggests his dwindling position.

*Vishnu*, though a deity of much importance in the mythology of the *Brahmanas*, occupies a subordinate position in the *RV*. The only anthropomorphic traits of *Vishnu* are the frequently mentioned strides which he takes,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{149}] RV. VI. 54.7-10.
\item[\textsuperscript{150}] RV. X. 17.3-6.
\item[\textsuperscript{151}] Macdonell, *V. M.*, p. 37.
\item[\textsuperscript{152}] RV. VI. 48.15.
\end{itemize}
and his being a youth vast in body, who is no longer a child. The essential feature of his personality is that he takes (Vikram) three strides. According to the purely naturalistic interpretation given by most European scholars and by Yaska's predecessor, Aurnavabha, he takes the three steps to mean the rising, culminating and settling of the sun. The alternative view found in the later Vedas, the Brahmanas as well as the post-Vedic literature and favoured by Bergaigne and Macdonell interprets the three steps as the course of the solar deity through the three divisions of the universe. In fact, idea of motion is characteristics of Vishnu. In one passage he is described as setting in motion like a revolving wheel his ninety steeds with four names. If he was originally conceived as the sun that too implies the aspect of movement.

In the Brahmanas, Vishnu is

153. RV. I. 155.6.
155. RV. I. 155.6
conceived as taking his three steps in earth, air and heaven.\textsuperscript{157} These three strides are initiated by the sacrificer, who takes three Vishnu strides beginning with earth and ending with heaven for that is the goal, the safe refuge, which is the sun.\textsuperscript{156} The Brahmanas, which are the source of incarnation stories of Vishnu\textsuperscript{159}, also present two important myths relating to Vishnu. Vishnu, in alliance with Indra, is, in the RV, described as vanquishing demons. In the Brahmana, the gods and demons commonly appear as two hostile hosts, the former not, as in the RV, uniformly victorious but often worsted. They, therefore, have recourse to artifice, in order to recover the supremacy. In the Ait. Br.\textsuperscript{157} there is the story of Vishnu's three steps over the world, the Vedas and speech. The Sh. Br. also highlights three steps of Vishnu.\textsuperscript{161}

The god Rudra occupies a subordinate

\textsuperscript{157} Sh. Br. I. 9.3.9; Tait. Br. III. 1.2.7.
\textsuperscript{158} Sh. Br. I. 9.3.10, 13.
\textsuperscript{159} Devasthali, op.cit., p. 68.
\textsuperscript{160} VI. 15.
\textsuperscript{161} 1251939
position in the RV being celebrated in only three entire hymns, in part of another, and in one conjointly with Soma. The etymology of the word 'Rudra' is uncertain as regards the meaning. It is generally derived from the root 'rud' i.e. 'to cry'. Grassmann takes it as 'to shine' while Pischel takes it as 'to be ruddy'. Thus, the meaning somewhat remains uncertain. Although the evidence of the RV does not distinctly show with what physical basis Rudra is connected, he is generally regarded as a storm-god. His missile is maleficent, unlike that of Indra, which is directed only against the enemies of his worshippers. Rudra appears, therefore, to have originally represented not the storm, pure and simple, but rather its baleful side in the destructive agency of lightning. Being fierce and destructive like a terrible beast for the foes, he is easily invoked and regarded auspicious. His hosts, which attack men and

163. Ibid., p. 77.
164. RV. II. 33.9, 11; X. 12.65.
165. RV. II. 33.11.
166. RV. X. 92.9.
beast with disease and death, receive the bloody entrails of the victim\textsuperscript{167}, just as blood is poured out to demons as their peculiar share of the sacrifice\textsuperscript{168}. Dandekar sees two distinct Rudras – one in the RV and the other in the post-Vedic literature.\textsuperscript{169} However, this is merely the outcome of the growth of Rudra mythology.

An important aspect of the later Vedic mythology is the emergence of Prajapati as an important god. He perhaps evolved at the end of the Rigvedic period.\textsuperscript{170} However, he became more popular during the Brahmanas when the importance of sacrifice grew. Prajapati occurs in one passage of the RV\textsuperscript{171} as an epithet of Savitri, where he stands for supporting the world. He is invoked to bestow abundant offspring (prajam). He is younger among gods and has been regarded as lord of progeny and creatures.\textsuperscript{172}

Though only mentioned once in the RV in the

\textsuperscript{167} Shankhayan Shrautasutra. IV. 19.8.
\textsuperscript{168} Ait. Br. II. 7.1.
\textsuperscript{169} R. N. Dandekar, V. M. T., p. 199.
\textsuperscript{170} Macdonell, V. M., P. 118.
\textsuperscript{171} IV. 53.2.
\textsuperscript{172} J. Gonda, Change and Continuity in Indian Religions, The Hague, p. 45.
sense of god above the gods, he is common in the AV and Vajasaneyi Samhita and regular in the Brahmanas. He is the father of the gods.\textsuperscript{173} His most important activity was the creation of all things. Besides creation, he was also responsible for sustenance and destruction of the universe.\textsuperscript{174} He is also created to have discovered the sacrifice.\textsuperscript{175} Sometimes, he is said to have given all the sacrifices to the gods but reserved some sacrifice for himself.\textsuperscript{176} The importance of Prajapati in the Brahmanas becomes clear from bewildering number of his identifications. Thus, he is identified with Agni merely; or with Agni, the Purusha or with Agni and Savitri. Moreover, he is identified with Samvatsara, the year and his lights, Vayu, all metres, the moon, these three worlds, the quarters, antariksha and so on. Thus, he is given due importance and described in detail in the Brahman, literature. However, it must be noted that the concept of Prajapati is rather

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{173} \textit{Sh. Br.} II. 11.1.6; \textit{Tait. Br.} VIII. 1.3.4.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Devasthali, op.cit., p. 151.
\item \textsuperscript{175} G. U. Thite, \textit{Sacrifice in the Brahmanas Texts}. Poona, 1975, pp. 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
too vague for any definite personification unlike Vishnu or Rudra.\textsuperscript{177} This had its natural result. For, when sacrifice began to crumble under its own weight of details and idea of devotion began to take place, it was but natural that this concept, which was rather hard for and almost aloof from anthropomorphism, receded into background and gave place to the more anthropomorphic deities like Vishnu and Rudra.\textsuperscript{178}

Besides these major deities, we have several minor deities, which is difficult to mention here. We find a galaxy of deities in the Vedic literature—\textit{Marats} (identified with storm), \textit{Brihaspati} (identified as divine priest), \textit{Aditi} (female deity identified as mother of gods or Adityas) and \textit{Parjanya} (thundering rain-cloud). We have also lower deities like apsaras, \textit{gandharvas} and \textit{rbhus} and goddesses like \textit{Prithvi}, \textit{Vach} and \textit{Ratri}. In fact they represent the various idioms of Indian myth and culture and highlight how the process of

\textsuperscript{177} Devasthali, op. cit., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
absorption and intermingling of cultures and myth was going on. As seen above, different Vedic gods acquired significance in different periods under the influence of varied cults. Change in socio-cultural and economic sphere affected the current of mythology. In fact, presence of several deities is reflection of existence of varied cults.

An important aspect of the Vedic culture was the importance of sacrifice. Sacrifice, said to be created by Prajapati, was a means to propitiate gods to get desires fulfilled. However, in due course of time, there appeared several changes in performance of sacrifices.¹⁷⁹ In the Rigvedic period, sacrifices were simple rituals and magic element was more dominant. Winteternitz says, "the majority of the sacrificial ceremonies as also the Yajna formulate do not aim at worshipping the gods but at influencing them, at compelling them to fulfil the wishes of the sacrificer."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ N. N. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 10.
¹⁸⁰ History of Indian literature, vol. 1, p. 54.
Keith has also to admit in connection with the sacrifices as described in the Brahman literature that "in the vast majority of these cases, the nature of ritual can be solved at once by the application of the concept of sympathetic magic, and this is one of the most obvious and undeniable facts in the whole of the Vedic sacrifice; it is from beginning to end full of magic elements." Similar views are held by Bergaigne, Geldner, Weber and others. Macdonell says, "It is, thus, impossible to suggest that the sacrificial priests of the RV, the composers of the old hymns, should have occupied an isolated position untouched by magical practices derived from a much earlier age and afterwards continued throughout the priestly literature of later times.

In fact, a close examination of the hymns of the RV actually affords the evidence that even in them the belief in magical powers, independently of the gods, is to be found. Every page of the Brahmanas and the Sutras shows that

the whole sacrificial ceremony was overgrown with the notion that the sacrifice exercised power over gods, and going beyond them, could directly influence things and events without their intervention. An incipient form of this notion already appears in the RV, where exaggerated sacrificial powers are attributed to ancient priests.\textsuperscript{182} Bhattacharya says that original purpose of magic was economic\textsuperscript{183} and was directly connected with food-gathering or food-production. He cites the example of Sattra-Yaga and says that Mahavrata ritual, as explained by Keith\textsuperscript{184}, gives the same expression. Mahavrata in the Sh.Br. means anna or food which may lead us to the view that the purpose of the Sattrayaga was originally connected with food. Another Vedic sacrifice called Vajapaya\textsuperscript{185} which means ‘food and drink’ was also originally an agricultural ritual.\textsuperscript{186}

To some extent, sacrifice may be regarded as

\textsuperscript{182} Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. VIII, p. 312.
\textsuperscript{183} N. N. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{184} The Veda of the Black Yajus School, HOS, 1914, p. CXXX.
\textsuperscript{185} For details see SBE, XLI, pp. XXIII.
\textsuperscript{186} The Veda of the Black Yajus School, pp. CX-CXI.
productive technique\textsuperscript{187} as supported by the \textit{Vedic} literature. \textit{Prajapati} himself told the gods. "The sacrifice (shall be) your food, immorality your substance and the sun of our light."\textsuperscript{188} As cited earlier, the relation between the \textit{Vajapeya} and agriculture is clearly demonstrated in the \textit{Vajapeya} hymn offered to the \textit{Maruts} in which it is stated beyond all doubt that the \textit{Maruts} are peasants and the peasants are food.\textsuperscript{189} Equally significant is the ritual of the cooking of wild rice.\textsuperscript{190} Such references point at the role of \textit{yajna} in food-production but not all of them were related with food-production. In fact, many of the sacrifices had their socio-religious value.

Some scholars opine that element of sacrifice was introduced by the \textit{Brahmanas} to grab the surplus production and also to assert their authority over the \textit{vish}.\textsuperscript{191} Some

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{187} N. N. Bhattacharya, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{188} \textit{Sh. Br. II. 4.2.1}.
  \item \textsuperscript{189} Ibid., V. 1.3.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{190} Ibid. V. 1.4.12-14.
  \item \textsuperscript{191} R. Thapar, \textit{Lineage to State}, pp. 78-79.
\end{itemize}
others say that fear-psychosis, and symbolism had a definite role in the popularity of sacrifices.\textsuperscript{192} In fact, the emergence and popularity of sacrifice in the age of the Vedas, particularly during the period of the Brahmanas, was a complex process and there were various factors behind its growing importance, which, however, gradually lost strength due to changes in socio-economic milieu. However, some others hold that it was in their quest to overcome asuras that gods discovered sacrifice.\textsuperscript{193}

There is considerable divergence in rituals of the RV and Sutras, Samhitas of Yajurveda or Atharvaveda. It is also possible that the rituals may have considerably altered between the period of collection and still more composition of hymns and collection of Yajus formulae and the Samans. Hence, rituals in the Sutras show alterations as compared with texts on which it is based.\textsuperscript{194} Moreover, priests were not merely followers of traditional

\textsuperscript{192} Usha Grover, op. cit., p. 207.
\textsuperscript{193} G. U. Thite, op. cit., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{194} Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up, p. 252.
ritual. Hence, there is steady modification in detail of the rite during the whole Vedic period. The Rigvedic ritual varied in different families as seen in the different family hymns of the RV. Occurrence of different names for priests like Hotri, Adhvaryu, Avayas, Agnimindha, Gravagarbha etc. shows the complication of the Vedic rituals. However, some of the priests became less important in due course of time as referred to in the RV.\textsuperscript{195} Despite the mention of different priests the brahmana as the overseer of the whole sacrifice is not recognised in most of the RV.

Soma sacrifice was the most important of all the Vedic sacrifices. There are three pressings of the Soma; morning, noon and night, the first and the last possibly denoted by the later obsolete terminology Prapitva and Abhipitva.\textsuperscript{196} Besides Soma, Sura and honey were used in offerings in the later ritual; the former is used in the Sautramani

\textsuperscript{195} IX. 95.5.  
\textsuperscript{196} Keith, Religion and Philosophy of Veda and Up., pp. 254-55.
and Vajapeya rites, of which the former seems to be known of the RV while the latter appears only in the Vajapeya.\(^{197}\) Hymns of the RV are connected with sacrifice as well as other aspects as attested by the occurrence of a series of verses which are used later at the Prauga Shastra of the Agnishtoma and which must have from the beginning had their place there.\(^{198}\)

The Rajasuya sacrifice was important and consisted of a series of ekaahas (one day soma sacrifice) alternating with ishtis (offerings of cakes and porridge) and an occasional animal sacrifice.\(^{199}\) The king who is consecrated by this ritual is nothing more than a common sacrifice. Here the king is not important and even his position is at par with the common man in this regard.\(^{200}\) As per the sanctions of the dharmasutras, The sacrifices must be of three higher castes, exceptions being

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197. Ibid., p. 255.
198. RV. I. 2, 3, 23.
200. Ibid.
the rathakaras. Even nishadas were permitted a share in the sacrifice. Moreover, in the Apastamba, a form of words is prescribed at the new and full moon offering in the case of a Shudra but whether they are indicative of rathakara and nishad is difficult to say. A Shudra appears also at the Pitri medha in the Sh. Br., Maitrayani Samhita and Kathak Samhita and permitted to eat from a carpenter. Ashvalayana permits the carpenter to establish the sacred fire. The Baudhayana Dharmasutra makes the rathakara to be son of a Vaishya by a Shudra mother. But, Apastamba expressly contemplates any of the first three classes including in its ranks rathakaras.

The Vedic society suffered from certain taboos. While bath was essential before diksha by the sacrificer, by bridegroom and bride before marriage and by a woman after the

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203. XII. 8.3.11.
204. II. 4.1.
205. XII. 10.
206. II. 1.13.
207. V. 3.19.
spell to produce offspring has been performed for her\textsuperscript{208} it is necessary to avoid its use to prevent removal of the holy power. However, the use of bath was not normally in the slightest degree forbidden to the Vedic student.\textsuperscript{209} Cutting of hair was also closely connected with impurity. The sacrificer before the new and full moon offerings has his hair cut and beard shaven in the case of the diksha and the four monthly offerings and the motive expressed in these cases is removal of dead skin to make body pure.\textsuperscript{210} This shaving was also observed after the death of a member of a family.\textsuperscript{211} However, there are occasions like royal consecration\textsuperscript{212} and newly married bridal cases.\textsuperscript{213} and the studentship where the hair must not be cut at all. In a considerable number of cases we find that on some occasions the sacrificer must abstain from sexual intercourse, must fast

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208. Katayana Shrautasutra. V. 2.21.
209. Baudhayana Dharmasutra. I. 2.3.99; Gautam Dharmasutra. II.8.
210. Sh. Br. III. 1.2.1; Maitrayani Samhita. III. 6.2.
211. Ashvalayana Grihyasutra. IV. 6.4.
212. Latayana Grihyasutra. IX. 2.18, 21; Sh. Br. V. 5.3.1.
213. Gobhila Grihyasutra, II. 5.6.
\end{flushright}
or feed on certain specified foods alone. During the period of studentship, a student is forbidden intercourse and a high bed. The teacher himself is asked to maintain chastity and eat no flesh before imparting important teaching to the student.

The fear of spirits is one of the most important motives in the case of constant taboo of anything connected with death. A teacher who desires to instruct his pupil in the sacred texts must not see blood, a cemetery, nor certain beasts which are said to be shaped like a corpse. The pupil himself is to avoid the sight of a place of burning bodies; he should not look into a well, nor climb a tree.

The most important division of sacrifice is that between the Soma offerings and the offerings which are sometimes classed as haviryajnas and which differ essentially

215. Ibid., III. 2.37; Shankhayana Grihyasutra II. 11.6.
216. Ibid., III. 5. 32.
217. Ibid. II. 12.10; VI.1.4.5.
from the Soma sacrifices as they do not employ the Saman singers. With the latter may be classed the animal sacrifice but it also forms an integral and important part of Soma offering. Besides Soma sacrifice, other important sacrifices were Agnihotra, those related with new moon and full-moon and seasons, Jyotistoma, Sautramani, Ashvamedha, Vajapeya and Rajasuya.

There were also some domestic sacrifices to be performed normally by the householder who might be accompanied by his wife at the evening bali. A brahman was required for offerings Dhanvantari and spit-ox offerings. However, in paka offerings and one or two others, the householder was required to act himself. There is considerable disagreement regarding division of domestic offerings which need not be dealt with here.

Domestic rituals give precise rules for the performance of the legitimate and honourable

form of marriage. Regarding marriage, it is suggested that youth should obtain permission from his parents or his teacher to marry. In the Sutras, the number of brides is prescribed—three for the brahmanas, two for the kshatriyas and a one for the vaishya and one view a shudra for each. In consideration of marriage, family ranked above intelligence, beauty and wealth. Wedding hymns present a very sublime aspect of marriage. Thus, hymn which makes the wedding of the Surya, the sun maiden, and Soma the moon, is the prototype of human wedding. It is a late hymn and outcome of much priestly elaboration. Earlier, marriage was a primitive rite but it were the brahmanas who brought a lot of changes and exercised considerable influence. An important aspect of the Rigvedic marriage system


221. Paraskara Grihyasutra. I. 4-8-11.


223. RV. X. 85; 109.2; AV. V. 17.2.


225. Ibid.
was that widow was remarried to the younger brother of her departed husband\textsuperscript{226} which is indicative of flexibility in the social system.

There were rituals even for giving a name to the child as the name was considered very important and regarded as an integral part of an individual's personality. The connection between a name and its bearer was so intimate that, for all purposes, it was a question of identity, and also the notion of nature and essence of its bearer.\textsuperscript{227} In the Brahmanas, we find traces of animal sacrifice.\textsuperscript{228} However, there is also the tendency to avoid slaughtering of man.\textsuperscript{229} Warnings were given to the Purusha not to consummate victims otherwise man would eat man.\textsuperscript{135} This suggests that human sacrifice was a rare sacrificial practice and was on wane as the importance of sacrifice as a whole declined.

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\textsuperscript{226} RV. X. 18.7-8.
\textsuperscript{227} J. Gonda-Notes on Names and the Name of the God in Ancient India, Amesterdam, 1972, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{228} Sh. Br. I. 1.4.11ff.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., III.7.4-5.
\textsuperscript{230} G. U. Thite, op. cit., p. 9.