Chapter II

BIRTH OF AŚVINS AND THEIR FAMILY

In the tenth Maṇḍala of the Rgveda we find that Vivasvān and Saranyū (also called Savarṇā) are the parents of Aśvins.

From the later literature we come to know that Aśvins are the twin sons of the Sun, Vivasvān, by a nymph, who concealed herself in the form of a mare — "Tvāśtrītu Saviturbhāryā Vadvārupaladharinī. Aṣuyata mahābhaga sāntarikṣe aśvinavubhau". And as the mare is called Vadavā or Aśvinī, Aśvins are also called Vadavāsutau, and Aśvinīputrau.

In the eleventh chapter of the MatsyaPurāṇa (vv.2-36),

1 apāgūhamṛtāṁ martyrabhyaḥ kṛṭir savarṇāmadadurvivassvate utaśvināvabharadyat tadāsidajahādu dvā mithunā saranyuḥ

2 Please see Chapter I, p.11.

we get the detailed information about the birth of Aśvins.

The Sun had three wives namely, Samjñā, Rajñī and Prabhā, who gave birth to Vaivasvata Manu, Revata and Prabhāta respectively. Samjñā also gave birth to a twin named Yama and Yamunā. When she became unable to bear the brilliance of the Sun, she produced from her body a lady called Chāyā and directed her to take care of the Sun. The Sun mistook Chāyā for Samjñā and begot from her two sons Sāvarṇī Manu, Sani and two girls Tapatī and Viṣṭi. Yama, the son of Samjñā realizing that Chāyā was paying more attention to her own off-springs, raised his leg to kick her and she, in turn, cursed him that his leg would be eaten up by worms and puss, and blood would be coming out always. Yama told his father that she was not their mother. Later on, the Sun discovered that Samjñā had gone to live with her father. But, as her father rejected her, she, assuming the form of a mare, went to live in the Netherworld. Viśvakarma reduced the brilliance of the Sun, according to his will.

The Sun, after getting his power modified by Viśvakarma, went to the Netherworld, in the form of a horse and enjoyed the company of Samjñā. But Samjñā, not recognizing him and taking him for someone else became afraid but was helpless
and consequently ejected the semen through her nostrils, out of which Asvinikumāras were born.

Thus, from the story, narrated in the Purāṇa, we can say that Asvins are so-called because they were born of a horse and a mare and they are also called Nasatyau because they were born from the nostrils - (nāsa).

From the above story we can construct the family-tree of Asvins in this way -

\[\text{Kaśyapa} = \text{Aditi} \]
\[\text{Vivasvan} \]
\[\text{Samjña (W)} \]
\[\text{Rajni (W)} \]
\[\text{Prabhā (W)} \]
\[\text{Manu Yama Yamuna} \]
\[\text{Revata Prabhata} \]
\[\text{ASVINS} \]

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1 In the Rgveda Samjña is known as Saranyū. This table is according to Matsya Purāṇa.

* W = Wife
But the Padma Purāṇa lists the wives of the Sun as Samjña, Rajñī, Prabha, Tvāṣṭrī, whereas the Viṣṇu Dhamottara Purāṇa adds the names of Rkṣubhā or Nikṣubhā and Suvarcasa.¹

Similar references about the birth of Aśvins may be found in the Brhaddevatā² and Nirukta³ also. Again, in the Ṛgveda we find that Aśvins are the grand children of

2 srṣṭvā bhartuḥ parokṣam tu saranyuḥ sadrasēṁ striyam niksipyam mithunam tasyam āśvā bhūtvapacakrame avijñānadviśvanstu tasyājanayanmanum rajarṣirabhavatō api vivasvanivā tejasā sa viṣṇaya tvapakrantām sarasyumāsvarūpiṇīṁ tvāṣṭrīṁ prati jagāmāsu vājī bhūtvā salaksana saranyusca vivasvatam viditvā hayarupinam maithunayopacakrama tām ca tatrārūroha saḥ tatastayostu vegen śukram tadapatadbhuvi upājīghracca sa tvāśvā tacenthukram garbhakāmyayā āgrātamatracchukrattu kumārāu sambabhuvatuḥ nāsatyaścaiva dasrasca yau stutāśvinau 
One of them is once said to be a victorious prince, and the other, son of Heaven. Once they are said to have ocean as their mother. According to the MBh. I.2599, Āśvins are the offsprings of Tvaśṭrī and Saviṭrī and belong to Guhyakas, but in the MBh XIII.4126 they are said to have arisen from the tears of Agni and in the MBh XIII 7095 they are named as being sons of Mārtanda and said to have sprung from (his wife's) Samjñā's nose. In the Mahākavya "Saundarananda" written by Āsāvaghosa, we find that from the union of the Sun and Saranyū, in the form of a horse and mare respectively, the two Āśvins were born.

Dawn is the sister of Āśvins. Sūrya, the daughter of

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1 divo napāta
RV.I.182.1
See also: I.117.12; 184.1; X.61.4
2 jiṣṇurvamanyah sumakhasya sūrirdivo anyah
subhagah putra uhe.
RV.I.184.4
3 sindhumātara
RV.I.46.2.
4 V. Fausboll. Indian Mythology according to the MBh in outline, p.128.
5 śūryah saranyum prati jātaragastatprītaye tasta iti śrutam nah
tamasvabhūto aśvavadhum sametya yato aśvinau tau
janayambabhūvo.  
Canto VII. v.26.
6 avasā yaṁ vam visvagūrṛī bharāti vājāyeṭte madhupavīṣe ca.
RV.I.180.2.
the Sun, is their wife, whom she chose herself. She must be meant by the goddess Asvini and mentioned with others in the RV.V.46.8. Hillebrandt and some other scholars take Ugas, the dawn, and Surya as synonyms, but it is not possible because dawn is the sister of Asvins and Surya is their wife. Yaska opines that Asvini is the wife of Asvins. But in the dictionaries Asvini is said to be their mother. However, in the Rgveda she is Surya only who is said to be their wife.

According to the MBh V.18.16 Nakula and Sahadeva, the twins, are said to be the sons of Asvins. In the Matsya Purana, Chapter 46.v.10 we see that Nakula and Sahadeva were born of Asvins and Madravati. On the other hand, the

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1. tadugu vamajiram ceti yanam yena pati bhavathah suryayah
   RV.IV.43.4
2. yuvoh sriyam pari yosavrnita sure duhita paritakmyayam
   RV.VII.69.4
3. uta gna vyantu devapatrindranyah gnayyasvini rat
ta rodasi varunani shnotu . . .
4. Aśvinyaśvinoḥ patnī
   Nir.XII.46.
5. madravatyamtu janitāvasvibhyāmiti susrumah
   nakulah sahadevaśca rūpasilagunānvitau .
solar deity Pûśan claims Aśvins as his fathers.\(^1\)

In passing, we may note that Aśvins are the youngest and the most handsome of all the gods as we shall see later on. In the classical Sanskrit literature also they are well-known for their unparallel beauty. In the Mahākāvya, "Hīrasaubhāgya" written by Devavimalgaṇi in Canto. V.v.185. we find that Hīrasaubhāgya is one of the two Aśvins who descended on the earth.\(^2\)

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1. \textit{pitarāvaṃśita pūṣa}\cite{rv.x.85.14.}
2. \textit{dasrayoh kimayamanyatamo asminnāgatastridivataḥ ksitiplianthe.}