VI. Indra and other gods (Varuṇa and Kubera)

The gods, viz., Indra, Varuṇa and Kubera, perhaps, have no common characteristics, at least outwardly, to justify putting them into one group. Not all of them are purely naturalistic or abstracted, or euhemeristic deities. Indra and Varuṇa were two supreme gods of the Vedas, whereas Kubera was not even mentioned in the RV. He was referred to only in the AV., and there too he was not even called a deity. However, with the passage of time their status has enormously changed. Indra’s dramatic rise and fall and his changing disposition; Varuṇa’s supreme authority in the Vedas and his rapid lose of power; and Kubera’s late emerging but gaining a considerably firm status, though he may be said to be ‘minor’ among the gods, are all stimulating episodes in the history of Indian mythology. These three gods may be, grouped together, according to our own categorization, under ‘rulership’ of a certain kind. Varuṇa, in the Vedas, was the ‘ruler of the universe and morality’, Indra was called ‘the king of the devas’ throughout the ages, and Kubera is known as ‘the lord of the yaksas and wealth’ both in Pāli literature and in the Epics. While Varuṇa enjoyed rulership only for a limited period, Indra and Kubera, from their emergence, always remained as ‘the ruler of the gods’ and as ‘the king of the yaksas and wealth’, though sometimes their power was much lessened. The three gods, being the rulers of certain group, may also be clubbed together regarding the matter of ‘faith’ of a certain kind. Therefore, this chapter is focused mainly on the ‘rulership’ and the ‘faith’ regarding these three gods.
1. Kubera

(i) General remarks

Kubera is generally celebrated, in the post-Vedic and classical mythologies, as the god of prosperity and also as the king of a prosperous city called Alaka where the semi-divine beings, i.e., the yakṣas, dwell. He is also known as a close friend (or servant) of Śiva\(^1\). However, the name Kubera is not mentioned in the ṚV., even though there is a reference to the yakṣa people (ṚV. VII. 8. 19). Joshi\(^2\) points out the reason for this lack of mention of Kubera in the ṚV. as; “the tribe of Kubera remained away from the higher class in society in which warriors were in majority”. He further remarks that “Kubera originally was the leader of a tribe, which used to snatch away the wealth of Aryans. He was called ‘ku-bera’ ‘the ill-shaped one’, presumably because of the dislike or hatred, which the Aryans must have entertained towards him”. Satapathy\(^3\), following Joshi’s view, remarks that “Kubera seems originally to be the leader of an indigenous pre-aryan tribe, who probably remained in the dense forest and when the Aryans came in their contact they concealed themselves in the forests”. Derivation may be different according to the scholars. Interestingly, however, the different derivations of Kubera also lead to the same result, i.e., Kubera as a lord of prosperity who might be an ‘ill-

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\(^1\) eg., in the Meghadūta, 1-7.

\(^2\) Joshi, ‘Minor Vedic Divinities’, pp. 100-1.

shaped’ deity. Mayerhofer¹ and Kolhatkar² derive the word Kubera from the Vedic word ‘kubhra’ which means ‘a humped animal’ which is considered to be a good attribute. Kolhatkar points out that this kind of animal represents thousandfold cattle, therefore, it is possession and property itself. Later on, the word, in a good sense, changed to Kubera – the god connected with treasure and also Laxmi in Puranas. In a bad sense, it became kubja, and kubda in Marathi which means a man who has hump on his back, i.e., a hunched-back man. Suryakant³ derives the word Kubera from kubh (‘be high or extensive’, met with in Kakubh), hence the original meaning of Kubera (Kubhera) is ‘living on mountain’. Hopkins too regards Kubera as a mountain spirit with propensities to hide. He compares Kubera to the Greek god of prosperity Kabeiros (Cabiros or Cabiri) also⁴. Hopkins mentions Kubera as Hindu Plutus (Plutos), the protector of prosperity⁵. Zimmer opines that Kubera and his followers are genii of fertility, riches and prosperity and are principally associated with the earth, the mountains, and treasures of precious stones and metals underground⁶.

² Bhan Maharashtra Pracividya Parishad (Bopal, 9. 10. 11-Dec, 2005), Presidensial talk (Marathi) in Vedic section, unpublished
³ Suryakant, BDGRI, XXXIV. 54fn. 3.
⁴ ‘Sanskrit Kabairos or Kuaiiras and Greek Kabeiros’, JAOS (1913) Vol. XXXIII, pp. 55-70.
⁵ ‘Religion of India’, p. 353
⁶ Zimmer, ‘Earth and symbols in Indian art and civilization’, p. 70. This view, ‘Kubera had some connection with mountain’ and the view of Suryakant and Hopkins that ‘Kubera was originally the mountain spirit’, and also the connection between Siva and Kubera in the Epic
Thus, regarding Kubera, observations and views differ from one scholar to another\(^1\). Now, it may be better to go back to the original texts in which Kubera is mentioned.

(ii) Kubera in the Atharvaveda

Not being mentioned in the Rgveda, the first reference of Kubera is in the hymn of the Atharvaveda VIII. 10. 28, the hymn for Virāj. In the hymn Kubera appears as the name Vaiśravaṇa, the son of Viśravaṇa, and as the dear calf of Virāj who is represented as the divine cow. It is said in the hymn that Virāj, after traveling through the regions of pitṛs, gods, men, asuras, sages, gandharvas, apsarasas, and reaches to the itarajanās, the other folks where Kubera dwells\(^2\). In the next verse it is also said that Kubera’s son who is called Rajatanābhi milked concealment (or darkness, tiroḍha) from Virāj, and upon that concealment the other-folk (itarajana) subsist and, conceal all evil\(^3\). Here, a question arises: Who are these itarajanās over whom Kubera’s chieftainship is apparently suggested?

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and in the later period may be interesting from the point of view of our observation, ‘Rudra as mountain deity’, and identification of Rudra and Śiva in the later period.

\(^1\) For further detailed information and analysis of the various scholars, read Joshi’s ‘Minor Vedic Divinities’, pp. 102-108, and also Satapathy’s ‘Kubera’.

\(^2\) sodakrämat setarajanānāgacchat tāmitarajana upāhvayanta tiroḍhā eḥiti, tasyāḥ kubero vaiśravano vatsa āśīḍāmapātram pātram /

\(^3\) tāṁ rajatanābhīḥ käberakodhok tāṁ tiroḍhāmevādhok, tāṁ tiroḍhāmitarajana upa jīvanti tiro dhatte sarvam pāpmānamapā jīvanīyobhavati ya evam veda /
Hopkins\textsuperscript{1} suggests that they are the people other than the Aryans, i.e., the indigenous pre-Aryans. Joshi\textsuperscript{2} thinks the word \textit{itarajana} may indicate ‘foreigner’. He also points out that the terms like \textit{āmapātra} (un-annealed vessel), \textit{Rajatanābhi} (Kubera’s son), and \textit{tirodhā} (concealment), which are used in the hymn, may be some special characteristics of different ‘communities’ as the word ‘sweet odour’ is used in the proceeding passage relating to the \textit{gandharvas} and the \textit{apsarasas}, ‘concealment is mentioned as a special characteristic of the ‘other folks’. In connection with these characteristics ‘other folks’ will be discussed in the following pages.

Now, with this hymn of the Atharvaveda and the term ‘\textit{itarajana}’, and also remembering the references of the scholars we may proceed to Pāli literature where the picture of Kubera and his chieftainship to the certain beings, and their characteristics are described in detail.

\textbf{(iii) Kubera (or Kuvera) in Pāli literature}

Kuvera (Vessavaṇa), without exception, appears as a faithful follower of the Buddha in Pāli literature. He is described as a deity who asks the question about the doctrine of the Buddha and attentively listens to the latter’s reply\textsuperscript{3}. Kuvera is called great king (\textit{mahārājā}) of the \textit{yakkhas}\textsuperscript{4}, and is said to be one of the four

\begin{footnotes}
\item[4] Janavasabha sutta, Dig. II. 5.
\end{footnotes}
regent gods who rule the North (Uttarakuru) where there is all kind of prosperity. He is called Vessavana because he rules the kingdom called Visana¹.

Now, as observed earlier that the figure of Kubera, in the AV., is the chief of a certain group of people (itarajana) who are supposedly from a foreign land, whose characteristics are not bright but dark and concealed (tirodha). This Atharvavedic figure of Kubera and his people seem to be continued till the time of the Buddha, but in addition to this feature, the Buddhist mythology introduces the prosperity of Kubera and his city. In order to compare this figure we may refer to a very interesting sutta called Atanatiya. According to the sutta, ‘atānatiya’ is the ancient rune, which can protect people from bad happenings, and which can turn the hearts of other deities (or more possibly other people) who are unfriendly to the new doctrine.

It appears that, according to the sutta, the majority of the tribes of Kubera, the yakkhas in the text, habitually robbed wealth and harassed people, and due to this reason Kubera (Vessavana) offered the Atanatiya rune to the Buddha and the Buddhist monks and nuns and the lay followers so as not to be harmed from his own tribes. The words of Kubera said to the Buddha in this connection are very significant. He said: 'the majority of yakkhas do not believe in the Buddha, because the Buddha teaches a code which asks to refrain from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from lying speech, and from

¹ Atanatiya sutta, Dīg, III, 9; The other three regent gods are: Dhatarattha (East), the lord of the gandhabbas, Virūpakkha (West), the lord of the nāgas, and Virulhaka (South), the lord of the kumbhandas.
strong drink and sloth-producing drugs. But the majority of the yakkhas do not refrain from these things, and to do so is distasteful and unpleasant to them. Many of the monks stay in remote forests, and so the prominent yakkhas who do not have faith in the Buddha’s word. Therefore, the Buddha should learn this ātānaṭiya protective verses by means of which the Buddha and the Buddhists may dwell guarded, protected. The Buddha consented and learnt the verses from Vessavanā.

Now, this ātānaṭiya rune interestingly surveys various beings and the places while praising them just like the goddess Virāj in the hymn of Atharvaveda who visits many places and beings while giving them benefit. As Virāj traveled through the land of gods, pīṭras, sages, gandharvas and apsarasas, nāgas and itarajanās, i.e.,

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the Kubera’s tribe, this āṭāṇatiya rune praises the previous Buddhas, the ancient sages, the gods, the petas (pitrs), nāgas, and finally the yakkhas, i.e., the tribe of Kubera. However, this place of Kuvera is described not at all as dark and hidden as it is in the AV., though its people might be hostile. The land and the people of Uttara Kuru where Kuvera is the lord enjoy all kinds of prosperity and beauty of nature. An interesting epithet purisavāhana is used in the verses of the Āṭāṇatiya sutta. One may consider this in connection with one of his common epithets in the Epics, i.e., naravāhana (one whose mount or vehicle is a man). It is also significant that not only Kubera but also all his people are described, in the Āṭāṇatiya sutta, as itthivāhana, purisavāhana, kumārīvāhana and kumāravāhana.

The verses of the sutta runs as:

\[ \text{itthim vā vāhanaṃ katvā anuyanti disodisaṇ, purisaṇ vāhanaṃ katvā anuyanti disodisaṇ, kumārim vāhanaṃ katvā anuyanti disodisaṇ, kumāram vāhanaṃ katvā anuyanti disodisaṇ}^1. \]

*Using women as a mount, thus they ride about the land; using men to serve as a mount, thus they ride about the land; using maidens as mount, thus they ride about the land; using boys to serve, thus they ride about the land.* (Walshe’s translation)

In fact, the exact meaning of the verse and the epithets are obscure, and Dig.A. remains an unexplained riddle. “DA’s only relevant comment is that right-

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^1 Dig. III. 9., pp. 160-161.
thinking people cannot do this\textsuperscript{1}. These epithets with the help of the same \textit{sutta}, may be interpreted in two ways. First, in the later part of the \textit{sutta}, though the \textit{ātānatiya} rune is in praise of Kuvera\textquotesingle s prosperous city, certain cruelty, brutality and wildness are being narrated. Hence, as Dīg.A. points out that the \textit{yakkhas} may not be ‘right-thinking’ beings, therefore they do use women etc. as their vehicles. However, contextually, this interpretation is hard to accept. For, the prior part of the verse narrates the characteristics of \textit{yakkhas} as: beautiful (\textit{suddassana}), unselfish (\textit{amama}), and possessionless (or, not owning wife, or not married, \textit{apariggaṇa}). Their land is so fertile that they do not need to scatter seed (\textit{na bijām pavapanti}) nor to draw the plough (\textit{na niyanti naṅgalā}), crops ripen by themselves (\textit{akaṭṭhapākimaṇ sālim}), hence they do not need to shackle the hooves for the cows (\textit{gāvi}) or the cattle (\textit{pasu}) to work. They shackle only a single hoof (\textit{ekakhura}), perhaps, to indicate that they are domestic ones. The later part of the verse mentions that the \textit{yakkhas} own the vehicles of elephant (\textit{hatthiyāṇa}), and horse (\textit{assayāṇa}), and also the cars fit for gods (\textit{dibbayāṇa}) and splendid palanquins (\textit{pāsādā sivikā}). Thus, the poem clearly uses the word \textit{yāna} not \textit{vāhana} for regular vehicle. It implies that the \textit{vāhana} may be used for different meaning. The verse also informs that Kuvera enjoys the dances and songs (\textit{naccagīta}) of the \textit{yakkhas}, and he has ‘eighty, ten and one (\textit{asīti dasa eko})’ mighty sons. With the help of the above information, one may arrive at the second interpretation. Such epithets, \textit{itthivāhana}, \textit{purisavāhana}, \textit{kumārīvāhana} and \textit{kumāravāhana} etc., may indicate that the \textit{yakkhas} used to enjoy a kind of game or play ‘riding (\textit{vāhana}) on the back of women, men, girls and boys’. Or further, and may also be far-fetched, not owning wife (or not married, \textit{apariggaṇa}), but still

\footnote{Walshe, ‘Thus Have I heard’, p. 615, note 1004.}
possessing a number of sons, the *yakkhas* may be considered by the people as the tribes of fertility who enjoy free-sexual relations. This idea is indicatively conveyed by the word *vāhana* added to the words like *ithi*, *purisa*, *kumārī* and *kumāra*. And this concept is connected with *naravāhna* which is commonly used for the epithet of the king of the *yakṣas*, i.e., Kubera in the later literature\(^1\). The scholars too regard Kubera and the *yakkhas* (*yakṣas*) as the genii of fertility and prosperity\(^2\). Zimmer further remarks that man vehicle beneath his feet distinguishes Kubera from all other superhuman kings and princes, just as the cobra hoods mark for us the superhuman *nāga*\(^3\).

(iv) *Faith and rulership seen in Pāli literature*

Kuvera’s lordship over the inhabitants of the entire Cātumahārājika world is apparently mentioned in the later part of the *sutta*. He seems to wield almost absolute power in his kingdom. The *yakkhas* honour and fear him greatly. They are always in the service of their king Vessavaṇa, thus, they traverse all the regions riding on the elephant, the horses, and the car that is fit for the gods. It is said in the same *sutta* that if any non-human beings, the *yakkhas* or the *gandhabbas* or the *kumbhāṇḍas*, the *nāgas*, i.e., four kinds of beings who live in the Cātumahārājika world, should approach that person with hostile intent he would not gain any honour or respect in the village or town. Such a being would not gain a footing or a lodging in the royal city of Ālakamandā, he would not be

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1 Mbh. III. 87. 3; III. 156. 25 (surrounded by the *apsarasas*); III. 164. 13; V. 193. 30 etc.

2 e.g., Zimmer, *Myths and Symbol in Idian Art and Civilization*, p, 70.

3 Zimmer, *Myths and Symbol in Indian Art and Civilization*, p, 70.
admitted to the yakkhas’ assembly, nor would he be acceptable for taking or giving in marriage¹. In Jātakas², his power of lordship is seen to have increased still more. It is said that Kuvera has the right of devouring anyone entering a pond, and his angry look can break and scatter one thousand yakkhas.

(v) Kubera’s rulership in the Mahābhārata

The kind of scrupulous attribute, namely, the ‘lordship’ of Kubera over the particular beings, i.e., yakṣas (or yakkhas) and wealth is not changed even in the Epics. He is called the lord of rakṣasas and apsarasas also (Mbh. III. 140f). In the Mbh. Kubera is worshipped not only by yakṣas but also by the kings and the common people who are in search of material wealth. As a natural result special

¹ yassa kassaci, mārīṣa, bhikkhusa vā bhikkhuniyā vā upāsakassa vā upāsikāya vā ayam ātāṇātiyā rakkhā suggaḥitā bhavissati samattā pariyāputā, taṃ ce amanusso yakkho vā yakkhiṇī vā yakkhapotako vā yakkhapotikā vā yakkhamahāmatto vā yakkhapārisajjo vā yakkhapacāro vā, gandhabbo vā gandhabbi ..., kumbhando vā kumbhando vā ..., nāgo vā nāgi vā ..., padutṭhacitto bhikkhum vā bhikkhunīm vā ... gacchantam vā anugacheyya, ñhitam vā upatīṭheyya, nissīnam vā upanisīdeyya, nipannam vā upanipajjeyya. na me so, mārīsa, amanusso labheyya gāmesu vā nīgasesu vā sakkāraṃ vā garukāraṃ vā. na me so, mārīsa, amanusso labheyya ārakamandāya nāma rājadhāniyā vatthum vā vasaṃ vā. na me so, mārīsa, amanusso labheyya, mārīsa, amanusso labheyya, amanusso labheyya yakkhaṇaṃ samitīṃ gantum. apissu nam, mārīsa, amanusso anāvayhampi nam kareyyum avivayham. apissu nam, mārīsa, amanusso attāhipi paripāsāhī paribbāsāhi paribbāseyum. apissu nam, mārīsa, amanusso rittampissa pattam sīse nikkujjeyyum. apissu nam, mārīsa, amanusso sattadhāpissa muddham phāleyyum.

² e.g, Vol. I. P, 128, 328 and Vol. III. p, 325.
security for the city of Kubera is also tightened, in the Epics. He dwells on Mt. Kāilāsa (III. 140. 10, or also, Mt. Mandara, Mbh. 169. 4) along with his friend Maṇīcara. The denizens of Mt. Mandara are, several thousands of swift-traveling gandharvas and four times as many kimpuruṣas and yaksas. They are described as having various forms and guises and holding manifold weapons and attending on Kubera, their king. Their wealth is tremendous. Their speed is like wind, and even Indra cannot overcome their power. Due to its guard, the Mt. Mandara has almost impossible to access. Rākṣasas and Kubera’s dreadful ministers are also hidden to protect the mountain as well as Kubera’s wealth. Kubera’s unbelievably beautiful lake is guarded by the hundreds and thousands of rākṣasas by the name Krodhavaśas who have dreadful weapons and operate at the command of Kubera (Mbh. III. 151f).

There is another story in the Mbh. (III. 159) relating to Kubera and his followers. In this story Kubera gives assured protection to the Pāṇḍava brothers who came to his forest where various dangerous beings dwelt. Not by a verse or rune, as it was in Pāli literature, but by his direct order Kubera commands his followers not to harm the Pāṇḍava brothers who had to trespass into the forest, but to protect them.

Thus, Kuvera’s rulership over his followers is practical, material, concrete, and tangible. In his case, instead of the word ‘devotee’ the word ‘follower’ or ‘subject’ should be applied. For, his rulership is not ‘sovereignty’, but limited to the ‘kingship’ over certain beings, i.e., yaksas who specially belong to him just as the subjects of a king of a particular kingdom. In the case of his followers too

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1 Mbh. III. 140f.
because of the unfailing punishment meted out to them for any transgression they
dare not break the rules and orders of their ruler. On the other hand, they were
rewarded for reward for good act\textsuperscript{1}.

\textsuperscript{1} e.g., in Meghadūta,\textit{a yakṣa}, who carried out his duty negligently was cursed to be separate
from his newly married wife for a year.
2. Varuṇa

(i) General remarks

In the Vedas, Varuṇa is the wise, omniscient, functional god of eternal order, particularly of legal order\(^1\), and he is commonly regarded as the greatest god among the Vedic pantheon. The importance of Varuṇa, in the Vedas, cannot be compared with that of Kubera mentioned above. If Kubera who appears only from the AV. is merely the ruler of an unidentified tribe, i.e., itarajana, Varuṇa is the ruler of the entire universe. Vedic Varuṇa’s power can be comparable, perhaps, only with Indra. However, by the time of the Buddha, the power of Varuṇa was already much dwindled. In Buddhist mythology, Kubera is mentioned more frequently than Varuṇa, and is regarded as the faithful follower of the Buddha, and often protects him from the danger from hostile beings. While Kubera, as the lord of yakshas and wealth, was apparently worshipped in the Buddha’s time by many, Varuṇa, who lost all his greatness, stays as one of the uncountable deities whose names are merely referred to, though sometimes he is mentioned as a god who is said to be the king of the gods.

Varuṇa’s greatness and importance are brought together in the old portions of the Vedas. Though not many hymns are dedicated to his praise, perceiving Varuṇa’s greatness through these hymns is not difficult. The main traits of the personality of Varuṇa in the RV can be summed up under the following categories: Varuṇa in

\(^{1}\) Weber, ‘The religion of India’, p. 27.
connection with water(s); Varuṇa with relation to the sun or the moon; Varuṇa as the sky god; Varuṇa, the holder of rta or the cosmic order and; Varuṇa, the monarch, the universal ruler.

(ii) Varuṇa’s connection with water(s)

Varuṇa’s close relation with waters and rain is often mentioned in the Vedas. One entire hymn of the RV (V. 63) is dedicated to Mitra-Varuṇa’s powers of bestowing rain. Varuṇa wraps rivers around himself as robe (IX. 90. 2). He causes the rivers to flow (RV. II. 28.4). The rivers flow in Varuṇa’s throat as if it were a hollow pipe (VIII. 69. 11,12). Varuṇa and Mitra have rainy skies and streaming waters (V. 68.5). Varuṇa moves on the waters (I. 161. 14). Due to this close connection with water Oldenberg\(^1\) regards him as Indian Poseidon. Varuṇa’s connection with water continues in the AV.\(^2\) and the Mbh. even after losing position as the ruler of the universe.

(iii) Varuṇa’s relation with the sun or the moon, and the sky

Being one of the Ādityas, and also due to his association with Mitra who is often compared with Mithra, the sun god of the Avesta, Varuṇa is often considered as the sun deity. And according to some\(^3\), he is regarded as the moon deity. Together with Mitra, Varuṇa is called sun-eyed (RV. VII. 66. 10; I. 115. 1; X. 37. 1), far-

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1 ‘Religion of the Veda’, p. 104.
2 e.g., AV. III. 3. 3; VII. 83. 1; VI. 24. 4 etc.
sighted (RV. I. 25. 5, 16). Varuṇa is also commonly regarded as the sky god\(^1\). When Varuṇa is regarded as the sky god, he is generally called the Indian analogue of either the Greek Ouranos or of the Avestan Ahura Mazda. It may be pointless to discuss about the identification of Varuṇa any further, for it has been discussed already by a number of scholars, and moreover, as it is mentioned before, the present work is mainly concerned with the matter of ‘rulership’ and ‘faith’.

(iv) Varuṇa as the holder of ṛta and as the universal ruler

Concerning the matter of ‘rulership’ and ‘faith’, two things may be important, i.e., Varuṇa as the holder of ṛta, and Varuṇa as the monarch. This ṛta holder and monarch Varuṇa very much resemble the Hebrew God\(^2\), especially in the penitential prayers of the devotees, such as, the Rgveda hymn VII. 86. In this hymn the Vedic singer is anguished by Varuṇa’s anger due to his unknown transgression (vs. 3-4), and asks Varuṇa’s forgiveness for that unrecognized sin (vs. 5-8). Varuṇa and Mitrā-varuṇa are often called asura\(^3\), which means, in the Vedic texts, some sort of leader who is respected and has at his command some

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\(^2\) There are also views that Varuṇa, who is one of the Ādityas, is more or less foreign to the pantheon of the Vedic gods, which is presided over by the Aryan national war-god Indra, and Varuṇa-Mitra mythology has been implanted in the Vedic religion from outside, perhaps from the Semitic people (or the Akkadians). Cf. Danekar, ‘Vedic Mythological Tracks’, p. 42.

\(^3\) RV. II. 27. 10; II. 28. 7 and VII. 36. 2; VII. 65. 2.
fighting force, and who may wield a sort of magical power called māyā\(^1\). All natural phenomena are controlled and directed by Varuṇa with this power māyā. Along with āta the term māyā is most importantly and most frequently used in Varuṇa hymn.

\((v)\) Faith and rulership

The relation between Varuṇa and man and nature are clearly that of the omniscient ruler and the faithful devotee. Varuṇa’s rulership over the universe, including over man and nature, is depicted throughout the Vedic texts. Varuṇa, who has the cosmic responsibility on his shoulder as the one who fixed heaven, measured the earth, presided as the supreme monarch over all the worlds (RV. VIII. 42. 1). The moon shines and the stars are placed high up due to Varuṇa’s ordinance (RV. I. 24. 10). Varuṇa knows every movement of the natural element. It is not possible for any creature even to wink without his knowledge (RV. II. 8. 6). The thousand-eyed spies of Varuṇa, who are undeceived and wise (RV. VI. 67. 5), are everywhere to watch men. Thus Varuṇa knows men’s truth and falsehood (RV. VII. 49. 3), and accordingely he punishes them. Varuṇa usually inflicts disease and even death upon the sinners as a punishment (RV. VII. 9. 2). The laws of Varuṇa, like the laws of the Medes and the Persians, change not. His is the characteristic epithet dhrtavrata ‘whose ordinances are fixed’\(^2\).

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It sounds strange that Varuṇa who wields the sovereignty over the whole universe and who was regarded as one of the greatest among the Vedic pantheon by the side of Indra, does not seem to have the anti-cult, i.e., a-varuṇa cult, while Indra and Agni clearly have it, i.e., anindra and anagni cult, even though there exists clearly the rivalry between Indra and Varuṇa¹. Again, Varuṇa is not frequently invoked to destroy the demons as Indra is. Only in one hymn, along with Indra, the word adeva is used, and that too is used in the sense of the demons, but not as a-varuṇa. This kind of phenomena is perhaps, as Dandekar remarks, because of the absolute and unmovable faith shown in him by the devotees mainly out of fear for that god. Varuṇa is called a universal sovereign and Indra an earthly monarch (RV. VII. 82. 2). Therefore, all traces of human weakness that are clearly perceptible in the character of Indra and Agni are conspicuously absent in Varuṇa’s character². Or, as Macdonell³ points out, “the anthropomorphism of Varuṇa’s personality is more fully developed on the moral than the physical side”. Much more than the hymns dedicated to him alone, in the joint hymns Varuṇa is invoked to destroy or is praised for crushing the demons⁴. And when Varuṇa is praised alone the singers begged him to forgive them of their various sins rather than destroying the demons. The Vedic singers confess their sins and express their

¹ Dandekar (Vedic Mythological Tracks, p. 66) says that the deterioration in Varuṇa’s religions supremacy began with the ascendancy of Indra.

² Dandekar, loc.cit, p. 32


⁴ e.g., RV I. 41. 1; 1; V. 41. 2; 67. 3; 71. 1; VII. 83 entire hymn; VIII. 82. 1; X. 132. 2 etc. He alone is invoked to destroy the demons in the RV. II. 28 7.
wish to Varuṇa that the sins should not contaminate him nor distress him. The devotees of Varuṇa are scared that their sins may incur Varuṇa's wrath (RV. VIII. 86. 4). The singers want themselves to be excused from Varuṇa's wrath on the basis that they have sinned only as much as other people (RV. VIII. 86. 2).

Weber remarks that 'in popular thinking sin was a kind of magical demonic affair as was tapas. In the RV., sin was trespass only of commandments of Varuṇa'. It seems that two kinds of sins, viz., transgression of Varuṇa's commandments, and undesirable inner feeling of humans, were recognized by the Vedic people. In some hymns of Varuṇa it is quite clear that sin is indicated 'the transgression of the law of Varuṇa, such as, killing (RV. I. 41. 8), deceiving (RV. II. 27. 1), gambling (RV. II. 29. 5) etc. On the other hand, the Vedic people recognized that if they feel emotional aberrations, such as, hatred, wrath etc., in their minds they are mentally sinned, and they confess it to Varuṇa (RV. VII. 86. 4). However, this kind of problem cannot be called sin. And also this can hardly be considered as a transgression of Varuṇa's order. Then, the Vedic meaning of sin was not only a trespass of Varṇa's law, but also undesirable inner feeling of humans. Therefore, Weber's remark, i.e., 'in the Vedic period, sin was trespass only of commandments of Varuṇa', can be accepted only limitedly. We may agree this statement only when we accept that Varuṇa governed even mind and feeling of humans. Then, the feature of a Vedic deity, who generally was more or less unsophisticated, looks too advanced though Varuṇa seems to be

1 RV. VII. 82. 7; na tamaśīho na duritāṇi martymindrāvarunā na tapah kutaścana.

quite away from the general traits of the Vedic deities. In fact in the Vedas, both faith in Varuṇa on the part of the devotees, and Varuṇa’s rulership over men were almost absolute. Sometimes when we observe the Vedic singer who confesses to Varuṇa not only outer sin but also his undesirable emotion we are tempted to compare Varuṇa with a Catholic priest who sits unseen, and listen to the layman’s confession only by which the sin can be forgiven. However, this absolute rulership and dedication was stopped soon after Indra’s ascendancy, perhaps, as it is earlier mentioned in the note (p. 262. 1, to be checked), because this kind of feeling is not in keeping with the Indian flavour but might be a ‘foreign one’.
3. **Indra**

*(i) General remarks*

Indra, who once dominated the entire mythological event while whirling his unmatched power, and who as a god once served the great human beings, and who also experienced the downfall to a ridiculous state, and who finally was worshipped by no one, is the god whose characteristics and status have been most dramatically changed through the ages. He was the most important idol of the Vedas, the most faithful divine being in Pāli literature, and the most mischievous divinity of the Epics. Winternitz¹ expresses his wonder as: “How great the gap between the Veda and the Tipiṭaka must be assumed to be is shown by a comparison of the wild and furious Vṛtra-killer of the Vedic hymns with the mild Sakka of the Sakkasamīyutta who professes that he can never become angry and who scares away the demon who seized his throne only with the polite words, ‘I am Indra the ruler of the gods, my dear friend’.” Therefore, to study Indian mythology excluding Indra is like tasting various condiments and side dishes keeping aside the main foodstuff whose flavor had already infiltrated to the every substance.

Indra, being the favourite national god of the Vedic Indians², occupies nearly one fourth of the Ṛgveda hymns and almost all the important gods are related to him.

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¹ *History of Indian literature* Vol. II. p. 53.
² cf, Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 54.
Dandekar\(^1\) remarks that Indra had become the very symbol of hieratic Vedic religion, and association with him served as a veritable 'open sesame' for the divinities of the popular cults in the matter of their hieratic upgrading. Thus, the most common procedure adopted by the Vedic poet-priests for admitting a popular divinity into the pantheon of hieratic gods was to bring that divinity into contact with Indra — maybe in a forced and artificial manner. As a natural result, so many traits of Indra are already discussed in the books and articles by scholars. Some scholars understand Indra primarily as the naturalistic, atmospheric god, either a rain or a thunder god who possesses thunderbolt in his hand as his great weapon by which he conquers the demons of draught or darkness and consequent liberation of the waters or the winning of light forming his mythological essence\(^2\). Some believe Indra to be a sun god or a moon god\(^3\). However, as Hopkins points out it may be that Indra is too stormy to be the sun; too luminous to be the storm; too near to the phenomena of the monsoon to be the year of the sky; too rainy to be fire; too alien from any one thing to be any one thing. Again many scholars understand Indra as euhemeristic god, i.e., the mythologization of human heroes. Thus, Hopkins suggests that Indra was a warrior’s god exploited by priests; a

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\(^2\) cf, Macdonell, 'Vedic Mythology', p. 54. Thus, Indra is understood as a thunderstorm god by Oldenberg (The Religion of the Veda, p, 29), Perry (JAOS 11, pp, 117-205), Bloomfield (JAOS 15, p, 143),

\(^3\) Siecke, quote from Chakravarty, 'Indra and others', p. 156.
sensual giant, friend, brother, helper of man\(^1\). Muir\(^2\) suggests that Indra is to be identified with Jupiter Pluvius. Kuiper\(^3\) understood Indra as the Vedic creator of the second stage. Besides these opinions there is also a view that Indra is a fertility deity as it is seen in the RV. X. 134. 6 etc. One can notice that Indra is said to have a long hook (dirgha aṅkuśa). This aṅkuśa is mainly used to train and control the elephants. It often implies the male sexual implement. RV. X. 134. 6 says that Indra uses his aṅkuśa just like a goat who draw down the branches with its front feet (pīrvena padā ajāḥ vayāṁ). RV. III. 53. 6 also gives impression that Indra is a fertility deity. It says that Indra has drunk soma and now the poet is urging him to go home where he has a beautiful consort\(^4\).

\(^1\) Hopkins, ‘The Religion of India’, p. 39, and 96. Besides him, Dandekar, Uma Chakravarti, S. Bhattacharji, Bergaigne, Adolf Kaegi, Renou too understood Indra as a war hero, a protector of the fighting Āryans.

\(^2\) Muir, ‘Original Sanskrit Texts’. V. P. 77ff, see also all other scholars’ view introduced in this article, also see Dandekar, ‘Vedic Mythological Tracks’ another views of the scholars.

\(^3\) Kuiper, ‘basic concept of Vedic Religion’, ‘History of Religion’ 15. 110; He remarks that at first the world was an undifferentiated mass of water with a clod of earth floating on it, and the asuras were its gods. Indra entered into the second stage of creation. His creative activity was twofold. He riveted in place the primeval hill which floats on these waters and split it open by killing Vṛtra, who was a personification of the resistance he encounters. Secondly, he functioned as pillar in propping up the sky, which until then had been lying upon the earth. In doing so he created the duality of heaven and earth.

\(^4\) The theory of Indra as fertility deity is also backed by AV. VII. 38. 2 in which Indra is said to have been drawn down from among the gods by an asura female (āsuri). Hopkins (JAOS XXXVI, 1917) and Gonda (aspect of Viṣṇuism, p. 284) too understand Indra as a fertility
Thus, it seems, indeed, that Indra possesses almost all the aspects of the Vedic pantheon, and they are also well researched, and almost nothing is left for any more study. Therefore, in this chapter, leaving all the general aspects and well known points which has been discussed extensively by scholars, I would like to focus only on the undealt, or less focused traits of the personality of Indra centering around the term ‘faith’ or ‘devotion’ and ‘un-faith’ or ‘un-devotion’, and the word adeva or adevayu, which is used in connection with Indra in the Vedas. Again, a study will also be made regarding the ‘rulership’, and the faithful nature of Indra as a Buddhist as depicted in Pāli literature, and side by side his dramatic rise and downfall from the angle of Pāli literature will be look into.

Indra, in the Vedas, was the object of faith, but in the Pāli literature he appears to be the subject of faith and works as the protector god of the Buddhist faith, and in the Epics he does not bother about faith seriously, or many times even disturbs the faith of others. Therefore, it may be said that Indra in the Vedas, was considered as the ‘receiver of faith’, in Buddhist literature he is the ‘server of faith’, and in the Epics he is regarded as the ‘disturber of faith’. Indra lost faith in the Epics. He was neither the subject nor the object of faith. He doubts and disturbs the sages and, is anxious for keeping his post as the ruler of heaven.

deity. For various opinions of the scholars, see Chakravarti’s ‘Indra and other Vedic deities’, pp, 152- 160. She introduces the opinions of the scholars exhaustively.
(ii) The non-believers of the Rgveda

This has been discussed, the section on ‘Non-believers’ in the chapter ‘Agni’. Out of such terms discussed, namely, pīyati, andhā, adeva etc., only adeva or adevayu, which is used in the hymns for Indra, will be discussed in this chapter.

It is noteworthy that the term adeva or adevayu is used extensively in the hymns for Indra and Agni in the RV. It is, in fact, by far the most frequently used for Indra. Out of approximately forty such verses, nine have occurred in Agni hymns and twenty-two are in Indra’s. The rest of them are scattered in various hymns, such as, Indra-Agni, Brahmaṇaspati (II. 23. 12; 26. 1), Viśvedevas (VI. 49. 15), Indra-Varuṇa (VIII. 59. 2), Sūrya (X. 37. 3) and Soma (IX. 63. 24; 104. 6; 105. 6).

The word adeva or adevayu which is mostly rendered in translation as ‘the godless’, sometimes used as an adjective of some beings but many times it indicates different being(s). The word is used broadly in three senses: First, in the sense of a supernatural being who is not a god—a-deva, and therefore who opposes a god and who can stand or fight with a god, such as, rākṣasas, pīṣacas etc. Second, in the sense of a mortal or a human being who does not have faith in gods, or perhaps, a being who has faith in god but other than the mentioned god. Third, in the sense of a group of mighty tribes, who stood against the power of Indra, therefore, who were considered as demonic beings, or who were unspecifically called the asuras, such as, dāsa, dasyu, arya, and also the leader of a tribe like Kṛṣṇa etc.
'Adeva' in the sense of 'a supernatural being who is not a god': The supernatural being who is not a god—a-deva, is said to be a-deva. This sense of adeva can be interpreted as 'a being who opposes and stands strongly against a god'. They are unholy beings who generally seem to be rich and strong but their power and wealth do not reach those of Indra. For, Indra is so great no one could withstand him. Thus, it is neither adeva nor deva who hinders Indra (na adeva varate na deva, RV. VI. 18. 11). This sense of adeva is said to use magic (RV. VII. 98. 5), their bodies are resplendent (RV. X. 27. 2, adevayān tanvān śūṣujānān) and the term adeva, in this sense, is similar to the term asura, a-sura, which means, 'not a god' or 'one who opposes a god'.1 In this way Indra is called a slayer of asura (asuraghna, RV. VI. 22. 4). Thus, Vṛtra, the most powerful enemy of Indra, and from whom Indra releases the Heavenly Water (RV. III. 32. 6; X. 111. 6), is called adeva. All the gods placed Indra as their mighty chief (ekam tavasam) in the front for battle (pura dadhira) when the adeva assailed the gods (RV. VI. 17. 8). Sāyana explains the term adeva in the verse as vrtraḥ asuraḥ. The verse below RV. II. 22. 4, is also used in this sense.

tava tyannaryan nṛto'pa indra prathamam pūrvyan divi pravācyān kṛtam /
yaddevasya śavasā prāriṇā asum riṇannapah //
bhuvadviśvamabhya devamojasā vidādurjaṃ satakraturvidād iṣam //

1 Dandekar (Vedic Mythological Tracks, p. 54) explains asura and sura differently. He explains that the word asura whose meaning is demon belongs semasiologically to a later date, then the word sura was artificially coined through a misunderstanding of the a in asura as a prefix of negation. And philologically the word asura is derived from asu by the addition of the possessive termination ra.
Sāyaṇa interprets the term *adeva* in this verse as *tamorūpamasuram* *asura* who is wrapped with ignorance.

Griffith translates it as:

_This, Indra, was thy hero deed, Dancer, thy first and ancient work, worthy to be
told forth in heaven, What time thou sentest down life with a God’s own power,
freeing the floods.

All that is godless may he conquer with his might, and, Lord of Hundred Powers,
find for us strength and food._

Often Indra declares himself to be a slayer of *adeva* or *adevayus* (RV. X. 27. 3). In that case also the meaning of *a-deva* appears to be the supernatural beings who are not gods. When *adeva* is used in the verse like ‘no *adeva* is worthy to be called Indra’s foe (*satrunakirādeva ohate*, RV. VIII. 59. 2)’, it may also mean ‘supernatural being’.

*Adeva* in the sense of ‘a mortal or a human being who does not have faith in
gods, or, of ‘a being who has faith in god but other than the mentioned god’:
The most significant sense of the term *adeva* is, perhaps, in the sense of ‘the
mortals or human beings who do not have faith in god’. It also, quite appropriately, means ‘a person whose faith is in other gods’ from the point of view of his own cult, and most likely in this case, in the Indra cult. Therefore, as it is discussed in the chapter for Agni, such people are, so to say, the heretics. *Adevas* in this sense seem to fight often with the Indra cult, and they seem to be strong and rich. Therefore, Indra is asked to stand beside the *devayu* who presents
libations and smites the *adēvayu* when the two parties fight vigoursly
(RV. VII. 93. 5). Indra is also invoked to chastise *adevas*, who are careless with
respect to the gods, and who, offer no sacrifices and stow away, lose their
precious wealth in some hidden place but ultimately they lose this wealth by their
own evil courses (RV. VIII. 97. 3). The verse below, RV. VIII. 70. 7, is very
significant from the point of view of the believers and non-believers.

\[
na \text{ simadeva āpat iṣan dīrghāyo martyāḥ} / \\
etagvā cidya etaśā yuyojate harī indraō yuyojate //
\]

Griffith translates it as:

*Let not a godless mortal gain this food, O thou whose life is long! But one who
yokes the bright-hued steeds, the Etaśas, even Indra yoker of the Bays.*

Wilson, more significantly, translates this verse as;

*O long lived Indra, the mortal who has not you as his deity obtains no food; (he
who praises not) that steed-borne Indra, who yokes to his car the two variegated,
who yokes the two bay steeds.*

Sāyaṇa too interprets the word *adeva* here as *indrākhyadevarehitaḥ*, the non-
believer who does not accept Indra as his deity.

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1 RV. VII. 93. 5: *saṁ yannahī mithā śpardhamāne tanūr ucā śūrasātā yataite /

   *adēvayum vidathe devayubhiḥ satrā hatam somasūtā janena //*

2 RV. VIII. 97. 3: *ya indra sastya vrato 'nusvāpamadevayuḥ /

   *svaiḥ śa evairmumuratposyaṁ rayiṁ sanuta dhehi tāṁ tataḥ //*

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Monier Williams\(^1\) significantly points out that even in the Vedic age some denied the existence of the God Indra. And certain passages of the Rgveda clearly show this doubt. RV. II. 12. 5\(^2\) reads as;

\begin{align*}
\text{yam smā precchanti kuha seti ghoramutemāhurnaiṣo astīyenam} / \\
\text{so aryaḥ puṣṭirvijaiva ā mināti śradasmai dhatta sa janāsa indraḥ} //
\end{align*}

Griffith translates as;

*Of whom, the Terrible, they ask, where is he or verily they say of him, He is not. He sweeps away, like birds, the foe’s possessions. Have faith in him, for He, O men, is Indra.*

Thus, on the one hand there existed a doubt about Indra and on the other hand the devotion towards him seems to be quite firm, and no non-believers could separate Indra from them. Thus they expressed their devotion in the verses as ‘adevas have no power to keep Indra distant’.

*‘Adeva’ in the sense of a group of mighty tribes A group of mighty tribes:* In the Vedas, demonic beings are regarded also as adeva. Their names are various and they stood fiercely against, the Vedic tribes, especially against Indra. Thus, the Vedic Kṛṣṇa who is said to fight with Indra on the bank of Arśumati is called

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\(^1\) Monier Williams ‘Buddhism’, p. 8.

\(^2\) Read also RV. VIII. 100. 3;4.
adevi (RV. VIII. 96. 15). Indra is invoked to hurl down the faithless dāsa and ārya in the battle with the help of Indra (RV. X. 38. 3)\(^1\).

yo no dāsa ārya vā puruśutādeva indra yudhaye ciketati /
asmābhiśte susahāḥ santu satravastvayā vayan tānvanuyāma saṅgame //

These, so called, heretical tribes must have been equipped with strong weapons which were destroyed by Indra with the help of his powerful weapon vajra. He is said to make adevas and asuras, or asuras who are adevas, weaponless (RV. VIII. 96. 9). Indra crushed the adeva races just like castles, and bowed the adeva scorners deadly weapon (RV. I. 174. 8)\(^2\)

sanā tā ta indra navyā āguḥ saho nabho 'viraṇāya pūrvīḥ /
bhinatpuro na bhido adevin analamo vadharadevasya piyoḥ //

The adevas of the non-Vedic tribe might be quite rich whose property has been snatched or destroyed by the Vedic people with the help of Indra. Indra is said to destroy the adeva's treasure-stores (RV. X. 138. 4). There are also some stanzas which depict the efforts of the singer to embrace even the adevas. The seers call adeva to receive a great gift but the reason is obscure (ā sa etu ya īvadām adevaḥ pūrtamādahe, RV. VIII. 46. 21).

\(^1\) Similar expressions are found in the verses, RV. VIII. 70. 11; V. 25. 9; VII. 98. 5.

\(^2\) Similar expressions are found in RV. II. 19. 7 and VIII. 61. 16.
Thus, the _adevas_ or _adeyayus_ are such as super demon or _not-god_ or more correctly Vṛtra, and the group of powerful _adeva_ tribes, and also the faithless individuals or those who may have faith in god but not in Indra. This Vedic Indra destroyed and crushed them all and because he is the ruler of the gods, therefore, he could become an object of faith, and receive firm devotion. He wins the unshakable faith of, so called, _devayus_ and obtains consequent glory and oblation as well.

(iii) _Indra (Sakka) in Pāli literature_

In Buddhist literature this great Vedic Indra’s role is entirely changed from the ‘receiver of faith’ to the ‘server or offerer of faith’. And this change has been so smoothly made that no trace is found to show that he was once the greatest and the fiercest god. Though he lost his earlier position of honour he is still called ‘the ruler of the _devas_ (devānam indo)’ and his rulership over the _devas_ is unchanged and he still receives the honour of the common people. He touches the earth with his hand to pay homage to the Buddha, the fully Enlightened one\(^1\). As a faithful devotee, Indra ranked the Buddha at the highest state because the Buddha uprooted Indra’s doubts fully when Indra asked him about Dhamma. So Indra then ranked the other sages and himself below the Buddha. For, when Indra asked other sages, who he met in the forest about Dhamma, the sages argued among themselves and could give no satisfactory answer. Then, Indra, himself, taught them about Dhamma\(^2\).

\(^1\) Sakkapañhasutta Dīg. II. 8, p. 213.

He is generally called Sakka. He is a humble, mild and kind king of the devas. Hence the devas called him always ‘bhaddantavā’ the ‘gentle and righteous one’. His rulership is continued not by the physical strength but by the kind and patient nature. He endures the harsh words of the asuras since he is wise (vīññā)¹. He took a detour round the nest so as not to hurt the birds even when he was defeated by asuras and was being chased by them. He tells the devas that it is better to surrender their lives to the asuras rather than make the birds nestless². He knows that his puññākaphala is instant and will disappear soon³. Sometimes he does not even care about keeping his position as the ruler of the gods, i.e., Indra post. Thus, in Buddhist literature, Indra won the mind of the people with true Dhamma which is taught by the Buddha.

Sakka, the ruler of heaven, is inferior to the arahants, who are free from the defects of ordinary beings, because unlike them he is not free from the rāga, doṣa and moha⁴. He does not understand fully Buddha’s level of meditation while

¹ ibid. pp. 255-256
² ibid. I. 11. pp. 250-251
³ ibid. p. 251.
⁴ Aṅg. Vol. I. pp. 144-45. Samyuttanikāya sats that when Indra was visited by Mahā Moggallāna, he paid homage to him, sat down at one side, and took a lower seat than Moggallāna. When he seemed to be living idly, proud of himself, Moggallāna, stirred to a sense of urgency, performed a feat of supernormal power by which with a point of his toe he made the Vejayanta Palace shake and tremble, and Indra’s pride was humbled (in Cūlatanāhāsāṅkhaya sutta, Maj. I).
Sariputta and the other disciples of the Buddha understand\(^1\). Therefore Sakka is eager to listen to the Buddha’s Dhamma and he is very careful not to disturb the Buddha when he visits Him\(^2\). When the Buddha is in deep meditation even Indra is not allowed to meet him\(^3\). Indra’s devotion to and firm faith in the Buddha is expressed throughout the texts. He always gives priority to the Buddha’s Dhamma than to anything else because Indra has overcome his doubt (\textit{kāśkhā vigatā}) on realities and he was able to get rid of uncertainty after having been preached by the Buddha\(^4\). He realized that the happiness which was gained by blows (\textit{sadaṇḍā}) and wounds (\textit{sattha}) is not conducive to dispassion, detachment and the higher knowledge. But happiness that is obtained by hearing about the Dhamma from the Buddha and this is conducive to dispassion and enlightenment, \textit{nibbāna} (\textit{adaṇḍāvācaro asatthāvācaro ekantānibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati}). Therefore, Sakka wanted to leave.

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\(^1\) Due to this reason Indra just mentioned the Buddha’s level of meditation as \textit{bhagava aṇḍhareṇe samādhinā nisīṇo hoti} (Sakkapāṇhasutta, Dīg. II. 8, p. 198)

\(^2\) In Sakkapāṇhasutta, Indra sends a \textit{gandhabha} named Pañcasikha to draw the Buddha’s attention in a manner which is easy and does not disturb him so that Indra may approach him.

\(^3\) Once, Kubera’s consort Bhūṣjāñī was waiting on the Buddha, Indra came there and asked her if he could pay homage to the Buddha. She did not allow the king of the \textit{devas} by saying ‘it is not the right time (\textit{akāla})’. Indra requested her to salute the Buddha on his behalf, when the Buddha rises from his meditation (\textit{yadā bhagavā tamhā samādhiphā vuttho hoti}). Sakkapāṇhasutta, Dīg. I. 11. p. 198-199.

\(^4\) Ibid. pp. 208.
the non-human realm and to be reborn in the human state for gaining perfect enlightenment\(^1\).

Notwithstanding the fact that Indra is thus a humble and gentle deity, he plays a very great role in Buddhist literature. Along with Brahmā, the god of the thinkers, Indra, the god of physical power, remained at a higher state among the gods but yielded to a still higher power, i.e., the Buddha. As Hopkins\(^2\) points out that the reason of Indra’s great role in Buddhism may be due to “a warrior class rapidly becoming a caste, and politically the most important caste, took the god of thunder and lightening for their god of battle. The fighting race naturally exalted to the highest the fighting god.” And this fighting god serves the Buddha\(^3\). Indra helps the Buddha and the monks invisibly, and draws the other ordinary warrior class to Buddhism. While the god Brahmā protects the doctrine of the Buddha and

\(^1\) Sakkapabhasutta Dīg. II. 11. pp. 291-291. Sakka wants to be reborn as a highest god in heaven after the leaving human world as a Peerless Gods (\(akani\-\text{ṭṭhā}\)), he wants to dwell there as his final home. The idea of enlightenment in Pāli literature is not only applied to human being but it include the gods and their ruler who are not free from bonds. Passion, jealousy, which the gods are bound by, and are also to be destroyed by true knowledge. So the passion, pride, and jealousy of the gods are criticized in the Sanskrit literature. However, in Pāli literature they are merely the fetters on the way to freedom. When beings are freed from them they are ready for liberation. Then gods have to be reborn in the human world to obtain final bliss.

\(^2\) Hopkins, ‘Religion of India’, p, 40.

\(^3\) In the Buddha’s time Indra is the great supporter of the \(\text{ksatriya}\) clan, he supported not only The Buddha but also Mahāvīra, the leader of the Jains.
converts the *brāhmaṇas* to Buddhism, Indra protects the Buddha and his chief disciples in person from the dangers and leads the other *kṣatriyas* to Buddhism. In order to protect the Buddha Indra does not hesitate to physically attack the opponent or those who oppose the Buddha’s doctrine. He is always ready in action for the sake of the Buddha. Dīghanikāya¹ describes the figure of Indra. He stood holding a huge iron club, flaming, and ablaze up in the sky...to spilt the head into seven pieces, of the one who does not answer to the Buddha. Thus, Indra’s weapon *vajra* too which was the emblem of his power in the Vedas, now, became an instrument for the protection of the Buddha and Buddhism in Pāli literature. Indra uses it to put the enemies of Buddhism to death, hence vajra also symbolized the victory of the Law².

Indra, as a kind ruler of the gods, was humbled by the disciples and willingly humbled himself down to the Buddha and his willing service is always ready for them because of his faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. In this way Indra was the ‘server of the faith’ in Buddhism.

(iv) *Indra in the Mahābhārata*

In the Mbh., Indra’s nature is exactly the opposite to his personality in Pāli literature. Indra’s power becomes much diminished though he is still called ‘the king of the gods.’ Many times he is described as the deity who is scared of the

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¹ Ambarīṭha sutta, Dīg. l. 3.

beings who have strong faith, and therefore disturbs the faith of the great beings due to his selfish purpose\(^1\). And due to this arrogance for power he also was threatened by the sages\(^2\).

He is the ruler of the gods, but is not virtuous and kind as he is in Pāli literature. He is not a confident king\(^3\). He was anxious about his post and was jealous of the stronger beings\(^4\). His energy too is not enough to subdue the enemies and the

\(^1\) In the Mbh. XII. 116. Indra asks Brahmā how to kill virtuous Bali who has no fault, even though Brahmā tells him not to ask anything which is not virtuous but only to ask about what is worthy of him.

\(^2\) The Mbh. I. 27 tells the story that the group of sage Valakīlyas cursed him that he would be overpowered by some other powerful creature. And due to his conceit he was reduced to the size of an atom.

\(^3\) Mbh. V. 11, the story is as follows; Once Indra was afflicted with the sin of murdering a brāhmaṇa Trīṣiras (brahmahatyā), and with falsehood (anṛta) related to Vṛtra. Indra went to the end of the world where no one knew him and there, bereft of consciousness, he was pressed down by his guilt. He then dwelt concealed in the Waters, writhing like a snake. The kingless heaven and the world were beset by disasters. The gods and the sages in the heaven were afraid of the kingless state. However, no god wanted kingship. Thereupon all the sages and the thirty gods decided to ask Nahuṣa, the earthly virtuous king, to be the king of heaven. Only due to Nahuṣa’s fault Indra got back his post.

\(^4\) The story in the Mbh. III. 215-216 is as follows; Indra was in need of a new strong god to fight with the strong asuras. But when Skanda came into being he was scared by his might, and feared he might lose his Indra post. He, with the help of the other gods tried to kill Skanda but all the gods were overpowered by Skanda, and left Indra. Indra too took refuge in Skanda,
demons. Therefore, Indra, in fear, hastens to Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu bestows upon him his power (Mbh. III. 98). Indra rarely shows the moral sense either. Indra made an effort to convert the mind of Yavakrā(ī) who tried to obtain the knowledge of the Vedas in an improper way, i.e., not through the teacher’s mouth but through austerities (Mbh. III. 135f). Indra’s effort resembled that of the Buddha who admonishes the people who are away from the righteous way. To teach him, Indra appeared as an old ascetic brāhmaṇa, many hundred years old, feeble, and sick with consumption. At the ford where Yavakrāta wanted to go for his morning ablutions in the river Bhāgīrathā, he began making a dam with scoops of river sand, and fistful after fistful of sand he let drift off in the river, as he started building his dam, to teach Yavakrāta a lesson. However, his effort was not very consistent. At the end, he granted the boon to that sage and let the Vedas manifest in front of him. Indra purposely steals other’s property.\(^1\)

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and by latter’s grace he could continue in his post. It is very interesting to compare this story with Angi-Aṅgiras. When Agni knew the brightness of Aṅgiras he too wanted to give up his Agnitvam. Both Indra and Agni feared censure of the world. They admitted that they were of lesser strength, tried to give up their own post. Agni restrained them and they continued to hold their post. These two stories tell us that in the world of gods too, it is not only their physical power or mental strength which are needed to rule over people but also the first mission, i.e., the given function is very important.

\(^1\) Indra’s theft of lotus stalk in the Mbh. 13. 96.16 is as follows; Once the rṣis resolved to visit all the sacred Tirthas on the earth together with Indra. These rṣis placing Indra at their head, visited all the Tirthas one after another and reached the sacred Tirtha Kauśiki. After their bath and performance of religious rites, they started towards Brahmasara. All took their ablution in that lake. Some of them extracted the stalks of the lotus only, others collected the stalks and
Thus, Indra in the Mbh was a ruler of the gods, however, he did not obtain much
devotion from the devotee and he himself did not pay any faith in other gods. He
also lost his confidence about keeping his post. He seems to be the king of the
gods only in name.

counted them. But Agastya extracted them and kept them on the shore. When Agstya
completed his bathing rites and returned to the shore, he found those stalks missing. He
naturally suspected that some one among his companions must have stolen the stalks. This
unseemly behaviour of the rsis was simply revolting for Agastya. Bhrigu took the lead among
the sages and tried to impress upon others the virtue of an ideal brähmana. In a similar tone,
all the sages swore their innocence. When Indra's turn came, he said that let the man who had
stolen the stalks be endowed with all sorts of virtues. Agastya thought Indra to be the real
offender and asked him to return the stalks. Indra immediately complied with Agastya's
demand and said that he had done this mischief on purpose, because he thought that such an
act would generate a learned discourse among the sages and he would enjoy it.