CHAPTER-V

SOURCES OF MYTHS IN THE SATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA

In the history of world religion, the Hindu religion stands unparalleled. India's cultural heritage lies in its religion and philosophy. In India religion and philosophy are inseparable. Religion is a matter of experience. It is an insight into reality, a direct awareness of the work of values. Vedic mythology also occupies an important place in the history of religion. Religion includes the conception which man entertains of the supernatural powers. Myths have their sources in the attempt of human mind to explain the various forces of phenomena of nature to which man is confronted in every walk of life. The purpose of religion besides refining man's emotions is to sublimate them and transform his entire life. It helps to induce devotion in one's heart for the deity. Practically, every sphere of ancient Indian life was dominated by religion. Religion regulated the economic and other pursuits of life of the ancient Indian. Again a myth is one which is to be believed. Myths are called sacred tales and their validity is not questioned. It is seen that religion and mythology always go hand in hand and in many points these two are quite inseparable. Hindu mythology is very extensive. The conception of divine or supernatural power by which man can entertain is known as religion and we see that the source of myth is always in human mind. So the basis of myth is the primitive attitude of mind which regards all nature as an aggregate of of human entities. "The word 'religion' may be derived either from Latin 'religore' to bind together or from 'religere' to rehearse, to execute, there by suggesting group activity or unity."¹ According to Galloway, "religion is man's faith in a power beyond himself

where by he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability of life and which expresses in acts of worship and service.\(^2\) In reality religion, that is Dharma, manifests itself in the form of love and compassion from which emerge code of moral conduct as defined by sage Patañjali in the Yoga Darsana. Manifestations of religion are of two kinds. One is concerned with man's social conduct which guides him to the proper way of life so as to attain purity of mind and body free from disease. The other manifestation is in the form of bringing rational intelligence while fighting against man's own mental character or pollution and helps him to attain spirituality. The fundamental percept of religion is that contentment which is the highest form of wealth and the key to happiness. In reality, one experiences true happiness when he is endowed with perfect body and mind free from jealousy, anger, passion that lead to mortal tension which reflects one weakness and leads to failure and frustration. Man has to turn towards spirituality if he wants to save himself from many natural calamities which are the result of his own misdeeds. Yinger defines religion as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggle with this ultimate problems of life. It is the refusal to capitulate to death that give up in the face of frustration.\(^3\) The Sanskrit word for religion viz. Dharma which is derived from \(^\text{\textit{dhr}}, 'to carry' or to hold. But in Veda the word is used to mean the power of nature which sustains.

Sacrifice was one of the main part of Vedic religious system. Sacrificial ceremonials are an integral part of the Vedic way of life. Religious speculation evolved from an animistic conception of inanimate objects or power of nature and Vedic religion was of no exception to this. Vedic religion consists of unified and well defined system of

\(^3\) Yinger, J.M., ibid., pg. 9.
rituals based on particular beliefs and attitudes of the Vedic people towards sacred. The sources of all religious ideas and beliefs in India, lie in the Vedas and Upanisads. The basis of the Vedic religion is the naturalism. Vedic religion is the best example of physical religion which is the first phase of development of natural religion. Religion born as a result of naturalism is called 'Natural religion'. Max Muller holds: "In course of time with the evaluation of human mind the idea of Supreme being was born out of these nature gods. This type of natural religion is called Physical religion."

According to Winternitz, "Whatever may be the poetic content of the songs of the Rgveda, there is no more important source for investigating into the earliest stages of the development of the Indian religion, no more important literary source for investigating into the mythology of the Indo-Germanic peoples indeed of the people themselves, than these songs of the Rgveda." Yaska while dealing with the gods of Veda, in his Nirukta says that "there is only one God, other gods are only different manifestations of that one God."

The Rgveda is the oldest and at the same time the most important repository of religion, philosophy and culture of Aryans. The four aims of lives of Indian were Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa that have their root in the Rgveda. In fact the religion of the Rgveda changed itself into the theosophy of the Brâhmanas. In several places the Rgveda declares that the great divinity of gods is one. In the case of Rgveda also we find that religion is bound up with myths and the separation of the two is almost impossible. The Rgveda is important not only as a document for the history of language, but also as a monument of the Indo-Germanic mythology. The Rgveda forms a link

between Indo-Iranian religious beliefs and the later Indian phases of religious form. According to Macdonell, "mythology deals with a number of co-ordinate nature-gods of varying importance. This polytheism under the influence of an increasing tendency to abstraction at the end of Rgvedic period, exhibits in its latest book the beginnings of a kind of monotheism and even signs of pantheism."\(^7\)

The Rgvedic poets were inspired by mysterious working of nature and their primitive attitude of mind looked upon all nature as a living entity. Animals play not less an important part in the mythological and religious conceptions of the Veda. In the Rgveda, horse, cow, snake, etc. occupy prominent places. Horse was regarded as the symbol of the sun and the fire. The adoration of trees, plants also are found to reflect the simple primitive side of nature worship. Besides, animals too metaphorically contributed to the development of myths in Vedas. The main sources of myths, legends thus are found in Veda. The Rgveda the oldest literary monument of India may be said as the main source of Vedic myths. "The mythology of the Rgveda is not directly ancestral but collateral. Everything is subordinated to a consciously elaborated system of classificatory symbolism. Such work necessarily required long elaboration."\(^8\)

The Samaveda may be said as of little importance in the study of Vedic mythology. The Atharvaveda deals mainly with domestic and magical rites. It can hardly be said to supply any important mythological account.

The Yajurveda introduces us both social and religious lives in India. The most important characteristics feature of the mythology of the Yajurveda is the existence of the

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8. Renou, I... Vedic India, pg. 57.
chief god Prajapati, who is called mostly as Viṣṇu and the appearance of an old god Siva whose name was Rudra in the Rgvedic period. According to Macdonell, "on its mythological side, the religion of the Yajurveda does not differ essentially from that of the older Veda, for the pantheon is still the same. Some important modifications in detail are however apparent. The figure of Prajāpati, only forshadowed in the latest hymns of the Rgveda comes more and more into the foreground as the chief of the Gods."

The Brāhmaṇas relate numerous myths. The most important Brāhmaṇas which deal with the myths are mainly the Aitareya and the Sat. Br. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa belongs to the Rgveda.

The Brāhmaṇas in particular emphasize the importance of sacrifices. The atmosphere here is pervaded by the smoke of sacrifice and the incense of ritual. But one of the component parts of Ilihāsas Akhyānas and Purāṇas i.e. narratives, myths and legends are of human interest and are narrated in order to explain the reason for some ritual acts. Though the Brāhmaṇas are compared with a desert of theological speculation, these myths and legends are oasis in such a desert. In the Sat Br. Prajāpati is said to be the All (Sat Br. 1-3-5) and everything (Sat Br. 1-6-4, 1V-5-7). The myths in this Brāhmaṇa are found only with some variations in the Rgveda. Macdonell viewed that "where they do occur in the earlier literature they appear in the Brāhmaṇas only as development of their older forms and cannot be said to shed light on their original forms, but only serve as a link between the mythological creations of the oldest Vedic and post Vedic periods."  

10 Macdonell, A.A., Vedic Mythology, pg. 5.
We come across many myths and legends in the *Sat. Br.* These myths are narrated in connection with some of the Vedic rituals. These are discussed elaborately in the fourth and seventh chapters of this work. It is observed here that *Rgveda*, the oldest and the most important of all the works of Vedic literature is the source of myths and legends of *Brāhmaṇa* literature with special reference to the *Sat. Br.* Because *Rgveda* is said as a text of morals. Here we mention certain leading myths common to both *Rgveda* and *Sat. Br.*.

The Indra-Vṛtra myth is described in the *Sat. Br.* more than one times (I-1-3-4; I-2-4; 1-6-2-3). This was a famous myth during the Vedic time. Almost all the Vedic texts record this myth. But it can said boldly that the sources of this myth in the *Sat. Br.* undoubtedly goes to the *Rgveda*. In the *Rgveda* the myth occurs in the hymns addressed to the most popular Rgvedic god *Indra*. Indra's encounter with Vṛtra and the slaying of the later is a well known story of the *Sat. Br.* *Yāska*, the author of *Nirukta* stated that Vṛtra is none other than the cloud. The myth of Indra's fight against Vṛtra is a depiction of natural phenomena. According to mythologists Vṛtra was a demon born of Tvastr.

The story of Syena and Soma is described in the *Sat. Br.* I-7-1-1; III-2-4-1; III-3-4-10; IV-3-2-7; VI-2-2-8. The story of Syena and Soma found scattered in a large number of verses in the *Rgveda* (X-28-10; IX-86-1; IX-85-11). So the source of the story of the *Sat. Br.* is found in the *Rgveda*. In the *Rgveda* we read that Soma was brought by a famous bird Syena for Indra's sake from the Heaven by crossing one hundred most difficult path with the speed of mind. But the guardian of the Soma pierced one of his

11. *Nirukta*, II-13; X-8; X-34.

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apānca jyotiṣaśca misriḥvākarmāno varṣakarma jāyate atropamārtheṇa vuddhavārṇaḥ bhavanti
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feather with his arrow. It is mentioned in the *Aitareya Brahmana* also. In the *Sat. Br.* it is clearly mentioned that *Gayatri* being a bird has brought down *Soma* from Heaven. The story is known as *Suparnī-Kādrava*. The *Sat. Br.* I-7-1-1 described the guardian of *Soma* who shot an arrow at *Gayatri* as a footless archer. The feather which was shot became a *parṇa* (*paḷāśa*) tree. The description of *Gayatri's* journey is also not found in the *Sat. Br.*

In the *Rgveda* (X-95-1-18) a beautiful dialogue is described between *Purūravas* and *Urvasī*. Purūravas was the king of earth and *Urvasī* an *Apsara* of Heaven. The dialogue contains the germs of the myth in the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* and forms the plot of the well known drama *Vikramorvasiyam* of *Kalidāsa*. This story is found in the *Sat. Br.* XI-5-1-1; XI1-4-1-22. So the main source of the story is found in the *Rgveda*. According to this myth *Urvasī*, an *Apsara* of Heaven has been banished to earth where she agrees to live with king *Purūravas* on condition and also describes how the *Gandharvas* caused him to break one of these conditions. Then separation comes between these two.

Besides, the stories mentioned above we see that the *Rgveda* is the main source of the following myths also.

From the above examples it is very clear that Rgveda, the oldest literary monument of Vedic literature is the source book of different myths and legends of this Sat. Br. These myths serve as a link between the mythological creations of the oldest Vedic and of the post Vedic periods.