CHAPTER II

VEDIC MYTHS WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ŚATAPATHA BRAHMAṆA

Mythology has been an integral part of Vedic religion. The Vedic religion centres round the worship of elements in nature. Thus the myths in the Vedic religion is closely connected to the worship of phenomena in nature. It is believed that all the objects and phenomena of nature with which man is surrounded are animate and divine. Everything that impressed the soul with awe was regarded as capable of exercising a good or evil influence on man. Thus these become object of adoration and prayer in the Vedic age.

Although the oldest source of Vedic myths centres round the worship of various phenomena of nature but later on it is extended to the worship of cows, horses, ploughs, pressing stones, sacrificial posts etc. "The true gods of the veda are glorified human beings, inspired with human motives and passions born like men but immortal. They are almost without exception the deified representatives to the phenomena or agencies of nature," thus remarked A. A. Macdonell. It is viewed that Vedic mythology was essentially an evolutionary mythology. It has reacted to the many vicissitudes in the life of the Vedic Indians, and with each change, new elements have been introduced into the personality of a Vedic god. A.A. Macdonell stated that "various traits are now added according to the individual fancy of the narrator, as the story passes from mouth to mouth. The natural phenomenon narrated in the Rgveda begins to fade out of the picture as its place is taken by a detailed representation of human passions when the natural basis of the later is forgotten, new touches totally unconnected with its original

significance may be added or even transferred from other myths. The mythology thus, appears to be dominated by the individual personalities of different gods. The Vedic myths have been originated in the nature worships of the Rgveda. The other three Vedas specially the Sāmaveda is of no importance to the study of the mythology in the Vedas. The Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda together are enjoined with a little mythologies. But the Brāhmaṇas contain a great number of myths which are elaborately dealt with in the later Indian literature. Leaving aside the myths related in the Brāhmaṇas, a short view on the leading myths in the Rgveda will be given in the following pages.

The great divinities of the Rgveda as well as small divinities arrested the attention of the Vedic people and the world scholars because they were narrated almost as personified human beings. Most of these divinities were seen invoked in the rituals in Vedas and these were offered oblations by sacrificers. The myths described in Vedas may be classified into three viz., the myths related to the deities of terrestrial region, myths related to the deities of atmospheric region and myths related to the deities of heavenly region.

Among the terrestrial deities in the Veda, Agni, the fire god is foremost. The prominence of Agni is realised through the innumerable worships of this deity. The Vedic seers described this god as the closest one. He was given the status of a father in Aryan society. Both anthropomorphic and unanthropomorphic forms of Agni are found in Vedas. Three fold birth of Agni seems to be an accepted fact during the Vedic period. Owing to his three fold births he is regarded as having a triple character. The earliest Indian trinity is important for it is based on much of the mystical speculation of the Vedic age. That Agni's births are three or three fold is expressed beautifully in the

The gods made him three fold (R. V. X-88-10). He is threefold light and has three heads (R. V. I-146-1). Another important attribute of Agni is Purohita or priest. Among the Vedic divinities he is honoured as a priest (R. V. I-1-1). He is further regularly designated as guest in human abodes. He is a guest in every house. He is called often as Lord of houses. He dwells in every abode. (R. V., VII-15-2). As because he is said as grhapati by the Aryans, so one of the three great sacrificial fires is named as Gārhapatya fire. The other two are Ṭhavaniya and Dakṣināgni. Not only he is called in many places as father but also named as kinsman of man, (VII-15-1) a friend (I-75-1), a brother (VIII-43-16) and a son (II-1-9) in the Rgveda. As Agni remains present in houses of Aryans invariably, therefore the ancestral friendship of him with his worshipper is probably more typical of him than of any other god. Thus Agni is mentioned as being kindled specially by Bharatas (II-7-1) Vadhrasya (X-69-2), by Devavāta (III-23-3), Divodaśa (VIII-92-2) and Trasadasyu (VIII-19-32). The family of Vasistha is found to be most familiar with this god. Sāyana, quoting the view of Yāska in fact points out the salient features of Agni show how the kindling fire or fire produced out of friction of two woods or more becomes the object of worship and deified by the Aryans. He said Agni is so addressed because he leads all other gods. He is the mouth of gods. He takes with him the sacrificial oblation for the gods in the other two worlds i.e. the atmosphere and heaven. He too is first kindled in sacrificial altars and is taken by priests from the western fire place to the eastern one. Agni is a god who never loves himself. When necessity arises it burns everything on this earth. He is reduced to ashes. He is ready to sacrifice himself. For these activities the fire kindled on the hearth of Aryans becomes an
object of worship. Macdonell remarked, "Though agni is an Indo-European word Lat. igni-s, slavonic ogri, the worship of fire under this name is purely Indian. He speaks of the Indo-Iranian period when the sacrificial fire found as the centre of a developed ritual at that time. It was reared by a priestly class, that may be called Atharván. The sacrificial fire seems to have been an Indo-European institution too. Thus Agni is narrated as being associated with several Vedic gods. Among these Varuna is said as the foremost one.

Among the leading Agni myths in the Sarhitas the threefold characters of him are famous. The Vajasaneyi Saṁhitā distinguishes three forms, as the Agni who devours rawflesh (āmad) the corpse devouring or funeral, and the sacrificial Agni (V.S. I. 17, 1.8.51.). The Taittiriya Saṁhitā also distinguishes three, Agnis i.e. the Agni that bears the oblation (havyavāhana), as belonging to the gods, the Agni that bears the funeral offering (kavyavāhāna) as belonging to the fathers and the Agni associated with goblins (saharaksas) as belonging to the Asuras. Agni was known by the name Rudra. The Taittiriya Saṁhitā relates a beautiful story in this regard. It is stated here that once the gods were in hurry to fight with the demons and they kept all their belonging in the possession of Agni and went away. By the time Agni being greedy of these belongings of gods fled away from heaven and hid himself in unknown place. The gods after returning from battles discovered that Agni had already left heaven. At last they found him and asked him to return their belongings. Agni when charged with the act of thief was ashamed of and angry and he began to cry out. From that very moment he became famous as Rudra. Besides, there are also other myths related to Agni in the Sarhitas. That the fire is produced in water is described well in the Sarhitas. Besides in a hymn

Agni spoke to Varuna that being afraid of the office of Hotamhe, he fled away so that the gods would not place him there again. He hid himself in many places (R.V. 1-51,53). At last the gods placed him as the chief priest of sacrifice.

It is curious to know that among the Vedic divinities Varuna's personality is fully developed on the moral than the physical side. He is more close to Indra, the rain god and stands very often with Mitra. He was actually a sky god and was very much similar to Dyaus, another sky-god invoked in Vedas. He is described several times as dhrtavratah the holder of duties or laws. His face was like that of Agni. His eyes were the sun. Varuna was far-sighted and thousand eyed. (R.V. VII-34-10). He wears a golden mantle (dräpi) and puts on a shining robe (R.V. 1-25-13). In the Sat Br, he is represented as a fair yellow eyed old man. Mitra and Varuna mount their car in the highest heaven (V-63-1). In the same Brähmana i.e. (Sat. Br, II-6-1) Varuna conceived as the Lord of universe was seated in the midst of heaven, from which he surveyed. The places of punishment were situated all around him. Varuna's spies were very active. They always sat down around him. In the A.V. IV-16-4 it is said that Varuna's messengers were descending from heaven, traverse the world; thousand eyed they look across the whole world. The natural basis of these spies is usually assumed to be the stars; but the Rgveda yields no evidence in support of this view—thus holds Macdonell. He further states that the stars are there never said to watch, nor are the spies connected with night. In the Rgveda 1-24-7, Varuna is described as shining (rājā), and mighty. He is responsible for holding the lustre of the sun in the atmosphere and through him this lustre enters this earth, abudhne rāiś varuṇa vanasyordhvaṁ stupaṁ dadate pūtaddkaśa / nīcināḥ sthurupari budhna eṣāmasme antarnihitāh ke tavāḥ syuḥ / Besides, he made path of sun precise so that the sun can

5. Macdonell. A.A. ibid, pg. 23
move spontaneously, uru hi rāiā varuṇaścakāra sūryāya panthāmanvetavā u apade pādā pratidhātave karutāpavaktā hṛdayāvidhāścit / The stars that shine at night are all seen during the night but are not seen in the daytime. Even the shining moon is seen clearly during night. By the grace of Varuṇa only the moon shines at night. These achievements of Varuṇa can never be challenged. It is seen that Varuṇa is personified as starry night sky. He has been popularly known as Asura (R. V.1-24-15). Śāyana gives the meaning of the word Asura as dispeller of harmful things or activities. In another context he along with Mitra is described as Asura, viz, tā hi devānāmasura (R. V. VII-65-2). Here Asura means energetic or powerful. Varuṇa and Mitra are always described as the possessor of māyā. This term signifies occult power, applicable in a good sense to gods or in a bad sense to demons. It has an exact parallel in the English word craft. By this power Varuṇa standing in the atmosphere measures out the earth with the sun as with a measure.

Varuṇa's māyā or power can never be destroyed. It is a great power. The great deed of Varuṇa is that he not only fills up the great atmospheric region with water but also all the rivers and oceans of the three worlds. (R. V. V-85-6), ekam yadudga na prṇāntyenaśrī śīncantīra vanayāḥ samudrām. Yāska places Varuṇa as a deity of atmospheric region.

In later Indian literature Varuṇa is identified with the Ocean God. In the Mahābhārata Sālīya parva, chapter, 47, it is said, " In kṛtayuga the devas approached Varuṇa and said to him, You must be the Lord of all the waters as Indra is our protector. You can live in the heart of the ocean. All the rivers in the world, and the ocean which is their husband

6. R.V. 1-24-10, ami yā rksā nihitāsa ucca naktān dadrāe kuha ciddīveuh/ adabdhanī varuṇasya vratāni vicakāsaccandramā naktameti /
7. Śāyana on R.V. 1-24-15
8. R.V. V-85 -5, māneneva tathīvām / antarikse vi yo mame prithivīṁ sūryeṇa
9. Nirukta X-3
will obey you. You will wax and wane along with Candra. Varuṇa agreed to comply with their request. All of them anointed Varuṇa as the king of waters."

Indra was the prominent deity during the Vedic age. His importance is realised from his worships found in the Rgveda. At least 250 hymns are addressed to this deity. Yāska viewed that Indra was famous for two main acts viz. giving rains and killing the demon Vṛtra. Even this deity is variously described in the Veda. Accordingly, the Indra myths centre round these two activities.

That Indra was the personification of the atmospheric light is beautifully stated in the Nirukta. According to Yāska rain is the outcome of the mixture of water and atmospheric light. This rain giving scene was conceived of as a fierce battle between Indra the mighty Vedic god and the ferocious demon Vṛtra, son of Tvāsṛ. Rgveda holds him to be a powerful deity. He is powerful enough to kill the demons. Besides he had a beautiful wife. Her name was Indrāṇī. The Sat. Br. clearly states Indrāṇī as wife of Indra. The A.B. however mentions Prāśahā and Senā as Indra's wives. These two are identified with Indrāṇī. The Vedic seers invariably refer to his addiction to the drink of soma. Indra is described as addicted to it. He even stole it once. He is famous for his drinking of soma. He is often called as Somapā. It stimulated him more so to perform great cosmic actions. He is the supreme who can take any form at his will.

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10. Nirukta, VII-3-10.
12. R.V, II-12-1.
13. R.V, II-12-3.
15. R.V, II-82-5,6.
18. T.B., II -4-2. 7,8.
slaughter of Vṛtra he drank three lakes of Soma. Once he was attacked by heart disease due to excessive soma drinking. However the gods rescued him from this disease. The Vedas refer to his birth. Two whole hymns deal with his birth. On being born he illumines he sky. He holds a yellow coloured weapon, haryāśvo haritām dhatta / (R.V. III-44-4). Also he takes in his hand mostly the thunderbolt which kills foes, āyudhamā vajram bāhvorharim.

Among the leading events of this god, the killing of Vṛtra stands foremost. Besides, he rescued and caused the stolen cows release. The killing of Asura Vala, his showing favour to Rbhus, favour shown to Apāla, also to Vṛśākapi a monkey, etc. are noteworthy. An account of Namuci and other Dāsas vanquished by Indra also arrests attentions of Vedic readers. Indra is connected with the activities of a great number of Vedic divinities such as Agni, Varuṇa, Mitra, Maruts etc. His special connections to Maruts are referred to several times in Vedas. Almost all the descriptions of Indra reflected his varied personality. In Vedas Indra is presented as a cosmic power, he is a war-like leader of Vedic Aryans and he is an ancient mythical dragon, killing heroes. From Yāska's impressions of this god it may safely be said that he is nothing but the personification of thunderstorm. He stands at the head of the atmosphere and is chiefly a rain god of vedic pantheon. It is very curious to know that from a mere god of thunderstorm he was elevated to the position of an all god. Despite his miraculous powers, he was brought down to a human hero and war lord. Indra's name itself verily comprises all notions relating to virile power. Although various derivations


jajnāno harito vṛśā viśsamā bhāti rocanam.
have been shown by scholars on Indology yet all are not sound. Jacobi connects the word, *Indra* philologically with *nro* (Sanskrit 'nar') and thus emphasizes the essentially, manly, virile character of *Indra*.

Sūrya appears to hold an equal status with *Indra* in the Vedic pantheon. The entire hymns of *Ṛgveda* are nothing but the worship of this deity. At least ten hymns are dedicated to the worship of this Vedic divinity in particular. Besides, he is worshipped with other gods in Vedic pantheon such as *Agni*, *Vāyu*, *Parjanya*, *Uṣas* and so on so forth. In Vedas this deity is found with a very little myths. Yet, in the *Ṛgvedic* period he was worshipped in great solemnity. The eye of Sūrya is mentioned several times, *atrih sūryasya divi cakṣurādhatu* (*R.V. V-40-8*). Sometimes he is called the eye of *Mitra* and *Varuṇa* or of *Agni* as well, *cakṣurmitrasya varuṇasyāgneh* (*R.V. I-115-1*). Sāyāṇa explains *cakṣuh* of *suryah* as the lighting everything by the rays of the sun is symbolical representation of the eyes of the men, *upalakṣaṇametat / tadupalakṣitānām jagatām cakṣuḥ prakāśakām cakṣurindriyasthaniyam vā / The affinity of the eye and the sun is indicated in a passage where the eye of the dead man is conceived as going to Sūrya (*X-163-3*), *suryam cakṣurgacchatu* i.e., the eyes of a dead man shall go to sūrya. In the *A.V.* he is called the Lord of eyes. (*A.V. V-24-9*). Sūrya is the eye of the whole world, *tām sūryam haritāḥ sapta yahīḥ spadāṁ viśvasya Jagato vahanti* (*R.V. IV-13-3*). He remains ever vigilant upon creatures of the universe, *paśyām janmāni sūryāḥ* (*R.V. I-50-7*). He is *sociṣṭesāḥ* i.e. his lustures appear to be his hair. He is used to ride in his chariot driven

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25. *R.V. I-50; I-115; I-164-46,47; V-40-5; VII-60-1; VII-62-1,3; VII-63-1,5; VII-66-14,15, 16; VIII-10-11,12; X-10-37; X-139-1,2,3; X-158; X-170."
by seven horses. The seven horses are the seven rays of the sun (R.V. I-50-8). He is guardian of all movable and immovable on this earth, sūrya ātmā jagat-stāsthunāśca (R.V. I-115-1). Sometimes he travels by his chariot drawn by etāśa, samānānī cakram paryāvivṛtsan yadetaśo vahati dhūrṣu yuktah (R.V. VII-63-2). Sūrya shines forth from the laps of dawns (R.V. VII-63-3). He is famous as Āditya, son of Aditi (R.V. I-50-12). His father is Dyaus. (X-37-1). In the A.V. (IV-10-5) he is described as having sprung from Vṛtra. Besides, various other divinities are narrated as creatures of the sun. Sūrya is often conceived as a bird traversing space. He is a bird or a ruddy bird. He is compared with an eagle, yatra cakraramṛtatūtumasmai sīyeno na diyannanveti paṭah (VII-63-5). Over and above his connection with inanimate objects are also found in the Rgveda. He is a gem of the sky (VIII-63-4). He is a brilliant weapon which Mitra-Varuna conceal with cloud and rain (V-63-4). He is called as a wheel here in this Veda. That Sūrya shines this universe is expressed in many places of the Rgveda. He dispels the darkness with his light, yena sūrya jyotiśa bādhase tamo jagacca visvamudiyarṣi bhūmnā (X-37-4). Days and nights are measured by Sūrya, soma rājanpra na āyūnṣi tārīrahāniva sūryo vāsārāh (VIII-48-7). In one verse he is said to ward off darkness as a skin into the waters, davidhvato raśmayaḥ sūryasya carmevādhistamo apsvantaḥ/ (IV-13-4). All creatures depend on Sūrya, tasminnarpita bhuvanāni visvā (I-164-14). The wheel of the year revolves. It is drawn by ten. They yoke it to the far reaching pole. Thus the sun rules the entire world. Time is maintained by the sun. Besides, the eye of the sun, i.e. the orb of the sun, collecting the waters moves here and there. All creatures are dependent on him. Macdonell, in his discourse on the sun, pointed out that there is only one myth related to this god. Here it is stated there once Indra vanquished him (X-43-5).
and stole his wheel. (I-175-4; IV-30-4). He thinks that it may allude to the obscuration of
the sun by a thunderstorm. That savîr is a synonym to Sûrya is stated in the Brhaddevatā
of Saunâka. Saunâka refers to seven names of the sun, viz, Savîr, Bhaga, Pûsan, Viṣṇu, Kesîn, Visvanara and Vṛṣakapi. Saunâka shows the etymology of the word Sûrya
and thereby laid down the essence of this god as follows: su[rātī] bhūtesu su
vīrayati tāni vā / su irayitvāya yāt yesu sarvakāryāni samadhati / i.e., Sûrya
(sarāti) among beings or he instigates them well, taking into account all their well, taking
into account all their functions he goes among them in order to instigate them well.

Asvins are other two gods in Vedic pantheon that add some specialties to its
myths. While they are celebrated in more than fifty entire hymns, yet their name occurs
more than 400 times in the Rgveda. They are twins and inseparable (R.V. III-39-3;
X-17-2). They are young (VII-67-10). They are bright (VII-68-1), Lords of lustre
(VIII-22-14) of golden brilliancy and honey-hued, dhiyamjina madhuvacta subhaspati
(VIII-26-6). They are nāsātyā not untrue. It is an epithet specially of Asvins. Asvins are
described as being connected to honey. They have a skin filled with honey and the birds
which draw them abound in it. They poured out 100 jars of honey, karotara
acchaphadasvasya vrsnaḥ sātāṁ kumbhān asincataṁ suryāḥ (R.V. I-117-6). The car of
Asvins is often referred to. It is sun-like. It is peculiar in construction, being threefold,
having three wheels and some other parts of triple character (I-118-1,2). It moves lightly.
It is swifter than thought. It was once fashioned by Rbhus. Macdonell thinks that these
two divinities are so named because they are the possessor of horses. It traverses
heaven and earth in a single day (III-58-8). The time of their appearance is often said to

27. Brhaddevata, VII-128.
be the early dawn, when darkness still stands among the ruddy cows. They follow the *Usas* in car. They are children of heaven. They are sometimes said to be the sons of *Vivasvat* and *Saranyu*, *Tvastri*’s daughter. They had a relation to *Surya*. *Asvins* were the brides of *Surya*, *suryāya asvīnā varāgnirāsit purogavah* (*R.V. X-85-8*). They are sons of heaven, *dīvo napātāh*// They hold a distinct position among the deities of light (*1-18-3, 10*). Some say that they are the heaven and earth others day and night, others again the sun and the moon, and traditionalists say that they are two princes (*Nirukta XII-1*). *Macdonell* remarked that these two gods may originally have been conceived as finding and restoring or rescuing the vanished light of the sun. In the *Rgveda* they are stated to be typically succouring divinities. They are the speediest helpers and deliverers from distress in general (*I-112-2*). They are the divine physicians and guardians of immortality (*A.V. VII-53-1*). They bring their worshipper to old age. There are a few myths related to these gods are met with in the *Rgveda*. Among these the myth of *Cyavana Bhārgava* is a noted one. It finds place in the *Sat. Br.* too (*IV-1-5*). Regarding the personification of these two deities the scholars are not sure. But it may be said safely that these two divinities were close to the sun. *Yaska* traced this word to *vās*, to reach. He says, of these two gods one reaches everything by water and the other by light. Moreover they were said as twin sons of *Vivasvat* and *Saranyu*. Vivasvat is one of twelve *Ādityas*. He is the himself. The rescue of *Bhujyata* from ocean by *Asvins* is said to be a leading myth related to *Asvins*. In the *T. S.* men are spoken of as progeny of *Vivasvan Ādityah.*

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29. *T.S. VI-5-6-2; Sat. Br.*, III-1-3-4.
These are the divinities in Vedas specially in the *Rgveda* around whom Vedic myth arouse developed and still continued. In India, it is very hard to separate the religion from its myths. Besides, the major divinities around whom Vedic myths are cropped up and developed, there are certain other minor divinities who helped a lot in the growth of Vedic myths. While myths in *Sat. Br.* will be taken into account, such as, that of *Rbhus* etc. then these myths centring round the minor divinities will be explained.

In the *Sat. Br.* we come across numerous myths which facilitate the growth and development of Vedic sacrificial paraphernalia. Here each and every myth centres round the sacrifices. Sacrifices have been identified mostly with *Prajāpati*. So *Prajāpati* myths are found at length in this *Brahmāṇa*. The leading Vedic sacrifices such as the New moon and Full moon sacrifices, *Agnihotra*, Soma sacrifices are narrated elaborately in this *Brahmāṇa*. The creator *Prajāpati* identified as *Brahma* is narrated as the father of all creatures. He is stated all in all in this world. *Prajāpati* here is spoken of as the embodiment of desire or anthropomorphic representation of desire which is the first seed delivered in *Rgveda* X-129.