CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The Rgveda is undoubtedly the oldest book in the world literature. Its study is indispensable for the proper understanding of the Indian religion, philosophy, history and culture. However, it is very difficult to understand the Rgveda. Its language is not only archaic but is also different from the Classical Sanskrit language in vocabulary, conjugation, style and subject matter. Moreover, the style of the Rgveda is also allegorical and therefore cannot be understood with the knowledge of the meaning of simple words. Efforts have been made since time immemorial to explain the Rgveda.

One such attempt of the Rgvedic interpretation is related to the exposition of the deities praised in the Rgveda. The earliest specimen of such attempts are first met within the Brähmanas. However, a systematic approach in this respect is first found in the Nirukta of Yāska. Six chapters of the Nirukta i.e. VII - XII deal with the Rgvedic deities. In this portion of the Nirukta, Yāska discusses the following aspects of Vedic Deities:

- The Definition of a deity;
- The Number of deities;
- Etymologies of their names;

After this introductory portion, Yāska takes up the discussion of individual deities in the same order in which
they are enumerated in the Nighantu. First he discusses the etymologies of the name of a deity, then its form and the region to which it belongs. Then he cites verses from the Rgveda to illustrate his points.

Following in the footsteps of Yaska, Saunaka in his Brhaddevatā, first discusses general questions relating to definition, number and nature of the Vedic deities. Then he takes up the major task of his work to specify the deities of the individual hymns of the Rgveda. In the course of discussion he suggests the derivations of the names of some important deities. For most of these etymologies Saunaka is indebted to Yaska. Another important feature of the Brhaddevatā is that it narrates legends connected with the Vedic deities. The Brhaddevatā is the earliest available work to enumerate the deities of the entire Rgveda, but according to Macdonell, Saunaka's Devatānukramaṇi preceded this work.

The Brhaddevatā edited by Macdonell contains 1224 Ślokas, which are divided into eight adhyāyas and each adhyāya is further divided into vargas, all of these vargas generally contain five Ślokas each. This division of the Brhaddevatā into adhyāyas and vargas is quite mechanical because it is found that even in the middle of a discussion or of a legend the varga comes to an end. But its division into vargas is not taken into account in references. It's division into adhyāyas is also mechanical because the legends of Saranyū and
of Devapri remain incomplete at the end of VI* and VII chapter* respectively.

An outline of the contents of the BD is given below: the whole of the 1st chapter and 2nd chapter upto Śloka 126 are introductory in nature*. In the first six Ślokas of the Brhaddevatā, Saunaka outlines the scope and importance of this work. The scope of this work is the specification of the deities praised in all the sūktas, mantras and hemistiches of the Rgveda*. Then importance of the knowledge of deities is given in the following two verses. The knowledge of Vedic deities is important for understanding the meaning of the hymns and mantras of the Rgveda, as well as for attaining the fruit of Vedic sacrifices10. Then Saunaka defines a deity in the same manner as Yāska has defined in the Nirukta12. After this definition, he defines a Sūkta and says that a complete statement of a seer is called Sūkta13. Then sūktas are classified in to four categories on the basis of devata, rṣi and chanda.14

After this classification the BD proceeds with the description of various grounds of naming things.15 In this connection it cites three views of different authorities. According to the first view, which is supported by the Nairuktas, Purāṇah Kavayāh, Madhuka, Śvetaketu and Gālava, there are nine bases of naming things.16 Then the views of Yāska, Gārgya and Rāthitara are quoted, who say that all the names arise from four factors.17 The last view is ascribed to Saunaka and according to this view action is the only basis of naming things.18
Various grounds of naming things are discussed in Chapter XI below.

This discussion is followed by the classification of Rks. It has classified the Rks into the following thirty six categories:

(1) stuti, (2) prasāmsā, (3) nindā, (4) sāmsaya,
(5) paridevās, (6) sprha, (7) ājs, (8) katthās, (9) yācās,
(10) prāśa, (11) praiṣa, (12) pravahikā, (13) niyoga,
(14) amuyoga, (15) śāga, (16) vilapitā, (17) ācikhyāsā,
(18) satālāpa, (19) pavitrākhyāna, (20) ahasyā, (21) namsakāra,
(22) pratirādha, (23) sāṅkalpa, (24) pralāpa, (25) prativākya,
(26) pratīṣedha, (27) upadeśa, (28) pramāda, (29) apahna, (30) upapraśa, (31) sānjvara, (32) vismaya, (33) ākrosā,
(34) abhiśeṣa, (35) kēpa, (36) sāpa.

The author of the Brhaddevatā has also cited mantras from the Rgveda to illustrate these kinds of Rks. This portion has been studied in detail in Chapter IX.

In the Brhaddevatā various points regarding the number, sphere and classification of Vedic deities are found. It mentions three views regarding the number of these deities. The first view mentioned in the Brhaddevatā is that there is only one God. In support of this idea Saunaka cites the view of some unreferred authorities that Sūrya is the only cause of origin and dissolution of the world. Moreover, he is said to have three forms and three abodes. On the earth, he is known as Agni, in the atmosphere
as Indra and in the heaven as Sūrya. After this idea the BD states that there are three deities vis. Agni on the earth, Indra or Vāyu in the middle region and Sūrya in the heaven. This idea is borrowed from the Mirukta of Vāska. Then it enumerates so many deities in the three regions. In the legend of the Agni's flight from the gods, it states that thirty gods bestowed boons on Agni.

The discussion regarding the number of deities is followed by their classification. The BD classifies these deities into three categories:

The terrestrial deities,
The atmospheric deities,
The celestial deities.

All the following deities are connected with the terrestrial region:

After enumerating the deities of the terrestrial region the BD presents the list of the atmospheric deities:

Indra, Divya Vimana, the apsarasas, Parjanya, Sudra, Vayu, Brhaspati, Varuna, Ka, Mrtyu, Brahma-spati, Manyu, Visvakarman, Mitra, Kastraspati, Yama, Tarakya, Vastaspati, Sarasvan, Apam napat, Dadhikra, Suparna, Pururvasu, Rta, Asunti, Vena, Aditi, Tvastri, Savitri, Vata, Vacaspati, Dhatur, Prajapati, Atharvan, Syema, Agni, Ila, Vidhut, Indu, Ahirbudhnya, Soma, Ahi, Candrasas, Visvanara, Herd of the Rudras, The Maruts, Angirasas, Pitrs, Rahu, Sak, vak, Sarami, Antyas, Bhrgus, Agnyya Sarasvati, Yam, Urvashi, Sinivali, Pathya, Svasti, Usas, Ruhu, Prthivi, Anumat, Dhenu, Mitra, Laks, Cauri, Cau, Rodasi, Indrani, Trishtupmetre, Pankti metre, Lokanam madhyama, Grama, Hemanta, Brhat saman, Sakvara saman. This enumeration of deities is followed by the list of the deities belonging to the celestial region. This list is given below:

The Asvins, Surya, Vrasakapa, Usas, Saranyu, Bhara, Pusan, Vrasakapi, Yama, Vaisvanara, Vijnu, Varuna, Ekapadaja, Prthivi, Samudra, Santarshi, the Adityas, Kesin, The Sadhyas, Savitri, The Vasus, Manu, Dadhyaeno, Atharvan, Vajins, Devapatris, Trtya savana, Trtya loha, Sivata Saman, Valrana saman, Varsha, Siva, Trtyatriimsastoma, Santadasakipatyas, Jaspot metre, Atichanda. This classification of deities is followed by the description of various epithets of Agni, Indra and Surya. The Brhaddevata...
states that Agni, Indra and Sūrya have five, twenty-six and seven epithets respectively and these epithets are the names of all the important deities. In other words all the deities belonging to the terrestrial region are the epithets of Agni, all the deities belonging to the middle region are the various epithets of Indra and all those deities who belong to the celestial region are the different epithets of Sūrya.

First of all, the following epithets of Agni are given in the Brhaddevata: Dravinaôas, Tañunäpat, Varasamsa, Pavamana, Jatavedas.

Then the epithets of Indra are given in the BD as stated below: Vayu, Varuna, Rudra, Parjakha, Bhrajaspati, Brahmanspati, Ksetraspati, Vastaspati, Vacaspati, Mitra, Brahma, Vaca, Viscakarman, Sarasvat, Vena, Manyu, Asvini, Apamnapat, Dadhikra, Dhar, Taraksya, Pururava, Mrtyu, Indra.

Then the following seven names of Sūrya are given in the BD: Savítr, Bhaga, Púṣan, Vīśnu, Kesi, Visvānara, Vṛṣākapi.

From these epithets, it seems that the BD follows the idea that there are only three deities. But, one fails to understand why the author of the BD has not included the names of the Maruts, the Asvins, Soma and Usas among the epithets of the three principal deities. This omission on this part goes against his thesis that there are only three deities.
A similar attempt is also made by the author of the BD regarding the classification of the Vedic goddesses. It has enumerated all the names of the Vedic goddesses under the different epithets of Vāk (Speech). First of all the BD says that Vāk has three forms viz. Terrestrial, Atmospheric and Celestial.

Under the terrestrial form the BD enumerates all the following epithets of Vāk: Nādis, Āpah, Aṣadhis, Aranyāni, pātrī, Śraddhā, Usas, Agnayeśh.

In the list of the names of the terrestrial deities all these goddesses are enumerated as independent deities belonging to the terrestrial region.

Then the BD states the epithets of Vāk under her atmospheric form. These epithets are as follows: Aditi, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Yaśti, Indrāni, Saramā, Āni, Dhen, Devapatinis, Aghnyā, Romāsā, Urvasī, Sinivali, Rākā, Anumati, Kuhū, Pathya, Svasti and Rodasi.

Under the celestial form of Vāk, all the following epithets are attributed to her: Sūryā, Usas, Varṣakapāyi, Saranyū, Prthivi, Gaurī, Sarasvatī.

All the above mentioned names of Vāk are enumerated as independent deities belonging to the middle and the celestial regions. Therefore, the author of the BD seems to be of the view that there is only one goddess viz. Vāk.
Besides this the BD suggests the etymologies of the names of the Vedic deities and these etymologies are similar to those found in the Nirukta. All these points regarding deities are discussed in Chapter VI below. Some legends are also narrated by the BD relating to the Vedic deities. Some of these legends are also found in the Brāhmaṇas and some are also found in the Mahābhārata. All the legends narrated in the BD are as follows:

1. The legend of Dadhyānc and Madhu Vidyā.
2. The legend of the Rbhus and Tvāstr.
3. The legend of Trita.
4. The legend of Kaksīvat and Svanaya.
5. The legend of Romasā and Indra.
6. The legend of Dīrghatama.
7. The legend of Agastya, Indra and the Varuts.
8. The legend of Agastya and Lopamudra.
10. The legend of Indra as Kapinjala.
11. The legend of Visvāmitra.
12. The legend of Visvāmitra and the Rivers.
13. The legend of Visvāmitra and Śakti.
14. The legend of Indra's birth and fight with Vasudeva.
15. The legend of Tryaruna and Vṛṣajāna.
16. The legend of Sraṅcaya.
17. The legend of Śyāvasva.
18. The legend of Septavadhri.
19. The legend of the birth of Pṛṣgu, Anūṣas and Atri.
20. The legend of Abhyavartin and Prastoka Sāraṇjaya.
21. The legend of Mitra, Varuna and Urvashi.
22. The legend of the birth of Agastya and Vasistha.
23. The legend of Vasistha and the dog of Varuna.
24. The legend of Nāhusa and Sarasvati.
25. The legend of Vasistha and Sudās.
26. The legend of Kanva and Pragātha.
27. The legend of Trasadasyu.
28. The legend of Sobhara and Citra.
29. The legend of Vyamsa’s sister.
30. The legend of the Fish and the bamboo.
31. The legend of Apāla.
32. The legend of Soma’s flight from the gods.
33. The legend of Indra and Vīru.
34. The legend of Indra and the seers.
35. The legend of Triśirā.
36. The legend of the birth of Yama and Yami.
37. The legend of the birth of the Āśvins.
38. The legend of Ghosa.
39. The legend of Indra Vaikuntha.
40. The legend of Agni’s flight from the gods.
41. The legend of Subandhu.
42. The legend of Purūravas and Urvashi.
43. The legend of Devasī.
44. The legend of Bhūtānja Kaśyapa.
45. The legend of Saramā and the Panis.

See Chapter VII for a detailed study of these legends.

The legends narrated in the BD not only deal with the nature
and functions of Vedic deities but also serve as an important source for the mythological school of Vedic interpretation. The Brhaddevata also contains the following important information regarding the seers of the Rgveda:

I Short sketches of the biographies of some important Vedic seers such as Agastya, Atri, Bharadwaja, Vasistha and Visvamitra etc.

II Pedigrees of some important seers.

III An enumeration of the seers of Visvaveda hymns.

IV An account of the female seers of the Rgveda.

V Legends revealing the circumstances under which different seers of the Rgveda saw certain hymns.

All these points regarding seers are discussed in detail in Chapter X. Keeping in view the contents of the BD it is clear that this work occupies an important position in the Rgvedic literature. As far as the Vedic ancilliary works are concerned it comes after the Nirukta of Vāśka. For the Vedic interpretation, it serves as the most important source for the mythological school of Vedic interpretation. In this respect, it is the earliest available work which most systematically deals with this school of thoughts. Moreover, it is already pointed out that the BD is the earliest available work which enumerates all the deities of the entire Rgveda. Some of the later Vedic ancilliary works such as the Sarvāṅkramani of Kātyāyana and the Mitimañjari of Dyādviveda are indebted to it.
Both these works have borrowed so many passages from this work. The later commentators of the Rgveda have also borrowed numerous passages from this treatise in their commentaries on the Rgveda. Skandāswāmin, Vaiśnava Vādha, Sāyana, Udgītha and Mudgala, who are the prominent commentators of the Rgveda have cited almost all the legends narrated in the ED. Sādgrūṣān, the famous commentator of the Sarvānumkramaṇī, has cited about 92 passages from the ED.

Seeing the ED being widely borrowed by the later works Macdonell says, "I doubt whether, with the exception of the Vedic Samhitās, there is any other work in the Indian literature upon the text of which so much evidence outside its own MS material can be concentrated."\textsuperscript{135}

The importance of the knowledge of Vedic deities is emphasized in the concluding verses of this work. It is stated there that the only person who understands the deities, knows the rks; that he who understands Vajus formulars knows the sacrifice and; he who understands the sāmans, knows the real substance of the vedas.\textsuperscript{136} It is further said that the gods accept the sacrifice of that person who performs any sacrifice with the proper knowledge of the deities of the mantras, because when the sacrificer does not know to whom he is offering the oblations can not invoke the deities, properly, and without proper invocation of the deities do not desire the oblations.\textsuperscript{137} Moreover, the knowledge of deities is very important for them,
who want to devote themselves to the study of the Veda. The Brhaddevata says that he, who devotes himself to the study of the Vedas with proper knowledge of deities, is like one seated at a sacrificial session in heaven and such a man is also landed by those who are engaged in such sessions.\(^{138}\) Also the knowledge of deities is essential for the japa (muttering) and teaching of the Vedas and without a proper knowledge of the deities, the japa and teaching of Vedic mantras is a sin.\(^{139}\) So the knowledge of Vedic deities is very important in every field of life. In view of the importance of the BD for the knowledge of Vedic deities I have undertaken in this thesis a thorough study of this work.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

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