CHAPTER VI

ASURA AND THEIR HOMA
The word 'Mâyā' has its various meanings like, art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power, illusion, unreality, deception, fraud, trick, sorcery, witchcraft, magic, an unreal or illusionary image, etc. In the Vedas, Mâyā is 'brajñā' according to the Nighanta, and at least sometimes according to Sāyana who explains it variously: 'Jñānāsya', 'Jayopāyajñā', etc., the knowledge of the means of victory, 'Karma viṣayābhijñā', the special knowledge of a particular branch of action and also writes 'Mâyati Karmano Jñānasya ca nāmadheyam', Mâyā is the name for the knowledge of action. Even while giving this explanation he cannot oppose the popular trend and adds an alternative meaning 'Yadva kṣapṭaiḥ' or by cunning means. No doubt, Mâyā is the power of knowledge that measures or fashions but it also corresponds to Asuravidyā, magic right from the Ṛgvedic period itself and, therefore, it is to be derived from 〈 ma as many Vedic passages

1. Vide MW. 8211.
2. Nigh. III. 8; Cf. V. VII. 27; XI. 17.
3. Vādeita Jñanāya. Sā. on RV. 1.51.5.
5. Vādeita: Vidyā prādayo | Ibid. on RV. III. 22.7.
6. Vādeita Karanā jñanasya ca nāmadheyu | Ibid. on RV. 1.86.1.
8. Vide RV. 1.11.7; 32.4; X. 53.9; RV. XI. 1.8; SB. II. 4.2.5; XIII. 4.3.11; etc.
actually connect the word māyā with the root. This root does not only mean 'to measure', but also 'to create', 'to arrange', etc. māyā thus, represents the capacity to plan or to organise, mainly in the spiritual sense rather than in the technical sense.

The term māyā also occurs in its derivative forms -māya, māyasat, māyasvin-meaning 'he who uses māyā' and corresponds to both the asura-māyā and the deva-māyā, but in the compound word vināya 'deprived of his māyā, whose māyas have become powerless', it expresses the māyās of Asuras only.

(ii) Asuras' association with Māyā

Asuras are chiefly associated with māyā. They inherited the māyā and darkness in inheritance from their father, Prajāpati. It is thus, called āsurī-māyā and they generally depend on māyā for their life. As such, most of the chief Asuras like Vṛtra, Nāmati, Śuka, Śambhu, Śrṣaya, Vāla, etc. are said to be expert in practising māyā and are called māyins. Vṛtra chiefly among the Asuras uses māyā and is called māyin. It is by this māyā

9. पायाविनो पथिने कथ पायान | RV.IX.93.3
10. पायाविनो पथिने कथ पायान | RV.IX.93.4
13. RV.I.30.7; V.48.3.
14. RV.II.11.5.
that he beset the waters. Also the epithet māyāvin is assigned to him and he is described as beleaguering the mighty river. But all of his māyā is overpowered by Indra. Śuṣṇa is also associated with māyā and is called māyin. He uses his māyā in the fight against Indra but his whole māyā is arrested by the latter. Śvarbhānu also uses māyā and by means of his māyā and darkness once he is said to have concealed the Sun. As such the darkness over-spread everywhere and the people were beheld like one bewildered, knowing not his place. Then all of his māyās were vanished by Indra, Atri or his family members. Nāuci is also described as māyin but the whole māyā of this war-loving Asura was robbed off for the sake of Rṣis. Arbudā, Fipra and Vṛṣṇāśpra are

15. RV. V.30.6.
16. RV.II.11.9.
17. RV. I.32.4.
18. RV. I.56.3.
19. RV. V.31.7.
20. RV. VI.20.7.
21. RV. V.40.6.
22. RV. V.40.5.
23. RV. V.40.5-9.
24. RV. I.53.7.
25. RV. I.73.7.
27. RV. L.138.3; Cf. VI. 20.7.
28. RV. VII.99.4.
also associated with māyā and Vrandin āsuras also use māyā in their struggle against Indra. Their priests - Kilāta and Ākuli are also associated with māyā.

Not only the āsuras, but their women are also described as using māyā. In the Ṛgveda, we come across Yātudhānas who use māyā. Here Indra is invoked to slay the female Yātudhāna along with male Yātudhāna who causes injury by means of their māyā. They are said to be well versed with this skill. They are very bold and full of strength and prowess because of the occult power acquired from this craft. Thus, various Vedic gods are constantly invoked to shatter their māyās. Indra is invoked chiefly to demolish Āsuri māyā. He destroys the whole māyā of the āsuras and of the enemies. Agni is also invoked to burn down the māyins Rakṣas with his flame. He conquers adevi and maligns māyās and sharpens both his horns to gore the Rakṣas. It is by Agni that the Rājas kept aloof the āsuras’ māyās. Varuṇa also seems to overthrow their māyās. In the connection of the Pāṇis, it is said, that this Soma foiled the māyā of malignant

30. JBr. III. 167.
31. RV. VII. 1 14. 24; Cf. AV. VIII. 4. 34; AV. XVI. 11. 4.
32. RV. XII. 118. 8; Cf. AV. XII. 8. 2; IV. 9. 9.
33. AV. XII. 14. 1.
34. RV. VI. 18. 9.
35. RV. VI. 22. 9.
36. RV. VI. 45. 9.
38. RV. V. 2. 9.
39. AV. IV. 23. 5; AV. IV. 33. 5.
40. RV. VIII. 418.
enemies. Even the Āsvins are also described as annihilating the māyā of the wicked Desya. Thus, the Rgveda speaks a lot of Āsuri-māyā which is practised by the Āsuras to have a sovereignty over the Devas, but these māyins could do nothing against the unshakeable laws of the Devas, as the Devas are also associated with māyā. They overcome the māyins by means of their māyās.

It is, at this point, worth mentioning to refer to the Deva-māyā to differentiate the Āsura-māyā. Most of the chief Devas are associated with māyā and are designated as 'māyī'; The epithet māyīn is assigned to heaven and earth. The māyās of the Āsvins are mentioned and they are called māyins or māyāvins and the epithet Purusāyā 'which has a good name māyā' is assigned to their chariot. Agni and Soma also use māyā. The numerous māyās of the māyīn have been combined in Agni. Soma is also called māyīn. The Maruts use māyās and are called māyins as well as

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41. RV. VI. 24. 22.
42. RV. I. 117. 3.
43. RV. VII. 1. 10, VII. 23. 15; etc.
44. RV. I. 169. 4; I. 5. 3.
45. RV. V. 78. 6; VI. 63. 5.
46. RV. X. 24. 4.
47. RV. I. 119. 1.
48. RV. III. 27. 7.
49. IX. 73. 8; 83. 3.
50. RV. VIII. 20. 3.
51. RV. VII. 82. 3.
52. RV. V. 63. 6.
53. RV. I. 164. 7.
*Samyā* Rodamī, the female companion of the Maruts, also enjoys the epithet māyīnī.

The māyas of the Mityas are also mentioned. The māyas, or the māya of Mitra and Varuṇa are mentioned and the epithet māyin frequently occurs for Varuṇa. Indra mostly uses the māya or the māyas and the epithet Daśmāyā 'having ten māyas' and 'Puruṣāyā' 'who has a good many māyas' are attributed to him frequently. He assumes many forms through his māyā. A large number of passages of this class can be quoted here which refer to Deva-māyā, but in this connection one thing is to be observed that Deva-māyā is beneficial to all the human beings and is to fight with the Asuras, the injurious forces, as can be seen more evidently from the passages quoted below: Indra triumphs over the māyins by means of māyā and shatters Daṇyas by means of māyā. It is true again that Indra triumphs over Viṣṇu, the māyin, by enveloping him and exterminates thousands of Dīnas by his māyā. It is...

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54. RV.1.88.1; 187.2.
55. RV.5.48.1.
56. RV.11.27.16.
57. RV.11.51.9; III.61.7; V.63.4.
58. RV.6.48.14; VII.28.4; X.99.10, 147.5.
59. RV.6.20.8.
60. RV.6.16.12; 21.2; 22.1; VII.68.10.
61. भ्रमण वायुमिनः: कुर्वम हिंको-— RV.6.47.18. 24 अङ्गों कला वैभवस्य पायत:।

62. RV.11.17; 51.5; 80.7; X.147.2.
63. RV.11.34.6.
64. RV.3.34.3.
65. RV.4.30.221.
by this māyā that Mitra and Varuṇa maintain law and order in the world, and by their māyās the Bhūṣus have raised themselves to divine dignity.

Thus, both the Devas and the Asuras are associated with māyā. But the Deva-māyā is to maintain law and order in the world, to fight with the enemies and to cause prosperity to the human beings, while the Asura-māyā is to cause injury and injustice in the world. Therefore the good sense of the term māyā, like that of 'Asura' is mainly connected with the Devas, while its bad sense is reserved only for the Asuras. And there seems to be a clear distinction made between these two kinds of māyā, viz. Devi and Adevī Divine and Undivine. In Purani's opinion, this distinction is developed into 'Vidyā-Prakṛti' and 'Avidyā-Prakṛti' in later Darānas and into karā-śakti and aparā-śakti in the Tantric literature.

(iii) Asuras skilled in sorcery and magic power

The Asuras are said to be skilled in sorcery and magic power. The witch-craft was very much in vogue among the Asuras. The Yaśodānās and Kusūḍānās were noted for their performance of black magic. In a hymn of the Atharvaveda, it is repeated

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66. RV.VIII.41.3.
67. RV.III.60.1.
70. AV.II.24.
everywhere 'Back fall your witchcraft'. And in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, we come across Yātuvīd who were skilled in sorcery. Even their women were equally skilled in sorcery. They knew the magical and medical plants and their cure also. They were such great magicians that one Āsura attracted even Indra by means of Śūrṣvala plant. They used to conceal their medicines underground, so that the Devas may not be benefited by it, but the Devas, however, uplifted it again. Here we are also told about the enchantment of the Āsuras which was warded off by the Devas by means of Varṣapāṇa plant. Even then once, they fascinated the Devas with their magic powers. The Bṛhad-Devātā says that Indra who had received sovereignty over the Āsuras was attracted by their māyā and he used to distress the Devas. They are described as roaming about with hooks and bonds of iron and trying to injure the Devas and other human beings. In the Yajurveda, we are told about the great thousand-fold wilde of the Āsuras. It is by the sorcery and magic power that they use mystic weapons in their...
conflicts against the Devas. The Taittiriya Samhita says that
the Asuras in retreat dug the spells against the vital airs of
the Devas but the latter found them at the distance of an arm's
depth. They resorted to Kṛtyā. The bones, nail, hair, foot-dust
or similar objects belonging to the Devas, were tied up in a piece
of cloth and were dug in the ground at an arm's length deep to
cause injury to the Devas. But, the Devas dug out these Kṛtyās
and made them ineffective. As, when a charm is dug, it becomes
inoperative and useless.

The Atharvaveda gives the detail of fifty three kinds
of sorceries which were practised or performed differently by the
experts belonging to hundred branches of this knowledge and of seven
delebitating charms. There were four main functions of the
procedure of performing a perfect magic. First is said to fashion
a spell, then to practise it, then to dig a root of a certain
plant and finally to send out curses. The spells, then were put
into an unburnt vessel, or into mixed grain, or into raw meat, or
into a cock, goat or an ass, or into gāṁapatiya fire, or into
housesfire to harm the object for which they prepared witchcraft.
Sometimes they buried that spell into the field or in the sacri-
ficial straws or in the burial ground for the slaughter of a man,

80. T. VI. 2. 11. 1.
81. sBr. III. 5. 4. 2.
82. sV. XI. 34. 2.
83. sV. XI. 34. 3.
84. sV. V. 31. 2.
85. sV. V. 31. 1-5.
Night is said to be the best time for them to perform black magic. They grow powerful in the darkness. The Rākṣasas and the Pīśācas took delight in roaming about at night. They are called the creature of darkness. And the gloomy night was the most suitable time to the Pīśācas and the Atriṇas for the performance of their witch-craft. The suitable places where the magic was practised were wells, burial ground, funeral pyre. Digging of the herbs or the roots of certain plants played an important part in their procedure of performing a spell. One thing is worth mentioning here that the witch-craft was practised not only by the Yātsdhānas or the Rākṣasas etc. but by the gods also. We are told about four main sources of sorceries - the sorceries that came from the Sīuras, from the Auras, that prepare themselves and those that are prepared by others. Here it seems that it was a common practice among the Auras and the Devas.

Still the Auras reigned supreme in this field. And in later...

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86. AV. I. 18 ff.
87. RV. I. 20.8; Cf. I. 87.6; AV. IV. 36.3.
88. तांत्रिक्: | RV. VII. 104.1.
89. RV. VII. 104.18.
90. RV. X. 73.5; Cf. XV. XXXIV. 25.
91. AV. I. 16.1, Cf. IV 36.3-4.
92. AV. VII. 31.8-9.
93. AV. IV. 28.6.
94. AV. X. 31; V. 14.17.
95. AV. VIII. 5.9.
96. RV. X. 124.5; Cf. AV. III. 9.4.
times, it is evidently seen that it came to be known only as """""" asrāi-nāyā.97

(iv) Asuras assuming different forms and making themselves invisii
ble:  
Mayā is the Veda, lore, of the Asuras. It is only by means of māyā that they were capable to change their appearances and assume different forms. The chief Asuras like Vṛtra, Śambhara, Śuṇa śhī, etc. are conceived as having associated with māyā or nāyās, as is stated above. To outwit the Devas or to be victorious over them, they were capable to assume even the form of a beast. Vṛtra and Arbuda are addressed by the epithet 'Hṛgaya'.98 By this epithet they appear to be assuming the form of a deer (Hṛgα). And here seems the germ of a story assuming the form of a wily golden deer by a Rākṣas named Kārica, who bequiled Rāma. Śambhara was too illusive to vindicate himself. He could preserve himself for thirty nine days continuously perhaps by changing his form. But unfortunately he was searched out by Indra on the fortieth day of Šarat. One of the defeated Asuras named Śuṇa, entered in the pupils of eyes of men looking like a young boy, perhaps by means of his sorcery. But in all these Asuras mentioned by name, Vṛtra seems to be more deceitful for a large majority

97. MBH. VI. 90. 36ff.
98. ĀBh. X.4.3.11.
99. RV. VII.3.19; L. D3.4.
100. RV. II.12.11.
101. ĀBh. III. 1.3.11.
of the hymns are addressed to Vṛtra’s being slain by Indra or by other Devas.

Having the desire of oblation, they could dissemble their real forms and assume the form of fathers (Pitṛas) to go to the sacrificial-places. In the Yajurveda, Agni is invoked to drive away those Asuras who are attracted by oblation and roam at will assumed varied figures and clothed themselves in large or little bodies. But generally they assumed different forms only to cause injury to the Devas. The Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa says that once in the conflict the Asuras assumed the form of the Devas and started distressing them (Devas) by their adopted forms. The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa also points out that while the Devas were consecrated, whichever of them fetched fire-wood or uttered his appointed texts, the Asura-Rakṣas endeavoured to strike the one by assuming the form of this one, and the other by that of another.

Their women were also equally skilled in assuming different forms and appearances. One Asura-woman (Āsuri) is mentioned as changing her form and assuming the form of plants. The Ātharvaveda says that the Āsuri, conquered in fight took the shape and form of plants.

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102. YV.II.30, YV.II.27.2.
103. Kāli. on YV.II.30.
104. JBr.III.31.
105. ŚBr.III.4.3.6-8.
106. AV.I.24.1; 31.
107. AV.I.24.1 AVF.I.36.1.
To conclude, it may be said that the Asuras were associated with māyā. They were expert in practising sorcery and magic power, and by means of this knowledge they could assume different will-forms and make themselves invisible to fulfill their desires.