CHAPTER II

THE ASURAS AND THE DEVAS
The Aniris and the Devas are described as forming two classes of beings. A large number of stories narrated in the Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas relating to their birth and creation bear this fact out. In the Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas, Prajāpati is said to have created or produced the Devas and the Asuras along with other beings and things. They are, therefore, designated as Prajāpatya after their father. Not only we know about their father but about their mother also. Aditi is called their mother. They have their parents and as such they are said to have inherited some of the qualities of their father, Prajāpati. The Jatapatha Brāhmaṇa points out that they inherited vaish in which was an admixture of both truth and untruth. The Devas relinquished untruth and held fast to truth, and the Asuras relinquished truth and held fast to untruth. This statement of the Jatapatha-Brāhmaṇa gives the reason why the Devas are associated with truth and Asuras with untruth.

In the Atharvaveda, Asuras and Devas are placed with other human beings like Ṛgīs and men of this earth. In the

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1. प्रजपतिविवाहकृतस्मिनुपि
   Ts.III.3.7.1; TBr.II.2.3.4; 2.7.2; etc.
2. ṢBr. 1.7.5.22.
3. विस्तितं नयनं गुणं: पिताः-पुत्रस्तरोऽवै जित्तानं नाति
4. ṢBr.IX.1.12-17.
5. Ṣ.VIII.9.24; Ṣ.D.26; ṢVP.VII.2.14 196.
Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa, they are mentioned along with the Gandharvas, men and Pitāras. In the Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa, both the Asuras and the Devas along with other living beings—Pitāras, men and beasts—are said to have approached Prajāpati to get an ordain in what manner they should live. In the same Brāhmaṇa, along with men they are depicted as getting the sacred knowledge from Prajāpati and interpreting the same syllable 'da' differently. Explaining the word Pāncājanā, Yāsaka holds that the Asuras and the Devas were two classes of the five beings, the other being Gandharvas, Pitāras and Rākṣasas.

Both the Devas and the Asuras were residing on this earth and like the other classes of beings they were the subject to death also. The former gained the immortality and heaven, i.e., Svarga, by their own efforts but the latter could not. At a number of places, we are told that the Devas attained the Svarga and defeated the Asuras by the successful performance of sacrifices.

6. Supra fn.3.
7. Br. II.4.2.3.
9. iii.11.8; also see Tā. on RV.X.53.4.
10. युद्धमधु तारवाला Tā. Br. VIII.9.2; अतरंतर के ता च विष्णुः Br. III.11.7; अतरंतर के द्वक्ष्य बांधिता | Br. III.2.9.6; also see Kṣ. XIII.4; XIV.2; XXXV.20; Kap. Kātha, XLVII.18;
Tā. Br. II.2.11; etc.
11. Br. II.2.2.14; II.5.1.8; XI.1.2.12; 2.3.6; etc.
12. Ts. I.6.10.2; VII.3.1.2; Br. I.1.4.3; 2.2.11, etc.
13. Ts. I.7.1.1.2; Tā. X.63.1; Mān. p. XXIII.1.
Thus, they had their parents and residence on this earth along with other beings and things of this world.

(ii) **Friendly relation of the Asuras with the Devas**

Both the Asuras and the Devas were the offsprings of Prajapati and being the progenies of the same father, there was a friendly relation between them. There are several stories and references in the Śāhītās and Brāhmaṇas which refer to the friendly relation of the two. In the Atharvaveda, Arundhati or Śilāci (some magical herb) is called the daughter of the Āsuras and sister of the Devas. The Taittirīya Śāhītā points out that Viśvarūpa, the Āsura, was the domestic priest of the Devas, and the sister's son of the Āsuras. The Jātāpatra Brāhmaṇa points out that Kīlāta and Ākuli, the priests of the Āsuras, performed sacrifices for Manu severally.

Their friendly relation can also be seen at the time of dividing their share. They divided their share without any mutual conflict. When the question of dividing the share arises, we most often find them (Asuras), saying to the Devas, 'you get according to your own will'. The Taittirīya Śāhītā says that the Āsuras owned the earth and the Devas had only so much as one seated could espay. The Devas asked for a share and in accordance with a

14. अष्टरात्यान् हृदिताः द्वां वेदानां भवति स्वस्तः

AV. VI. 120.3; AV. II. 13.6; etc.

15. विस्त्तरो वेष तानुः: पुराणिव वेदानांकोशः पञ्चमुः युग्मारः

Tos. II. 5. 1. 1, CR. TBR. VI. 14. 9.


17. Tvs. VI. 2. 4. 4.
contract made with the Asuras, they covered the whole earth by means of Indra as a Sālavṛti. The same type of stories are narrated many times in other texts also, where they are described as dividing their share in a friendly way. Here in all these stories Asuras are depicted as the first owner of this earth and other worlds, but the Devas, being the progenies of the same father, Prajāpati deprived them of their share also, by their own skill and wits.

They are depicted as living a peaceful life. In the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, both the Devas and the Asuras along with men are said to have lived the life of a sacred knowledge in a very peaceful manner. Prajāpati spoke to them only this syllable 'da' but the same letter is interpreted in three different ways by the three classes of beings evidently owing to their own intrinsic psychologically different levels. The same story is repeated in the Āradaṇa-yaṣya Upaniṣad.

In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Indra, the chief of the Devas, and Virocana, the chief of the Asuras, are depicted as a well-disciplined student of Prajāpati to know 'Ātmā' or Brahman. Virocana took the well adorned and nice body to be 'Ātmā' but Indra saw 'Ātmā' as unconnected with the perishable body. This was the difference between the two sections of the first people

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18. Ms.IV.1.1; Ks.XII.11, XXX.8; KaP.Katha,XXXI.1; Bṛ. III.2.9, 6-7; etc.
19. ŠBr.XV.2.1-4.
20. Br.UP.V.2.1.3.
created by the Almighty. It seems from these references that the distinction between the Asuras and the Devas was really one of outlook on life.

Thus, it is enough to show that the Asuras had friendly relation with the Devas in the beginning inspite of their different attitudes towards the life. The Asuras took a materialistic view of life, as opposed to the Devas whose outlook towards the life was predominately spiritual.

(iii) Enmity between the Asuras and the Devas

Though, the Devas and the Asuras were the progenies of the same father yet in due course they developed a pitched rivalry for each other. It was but natural, as it generally happens with the offsprings of the same father. Their enmity developed generally for the possession of inheritance or for the sake of superiority etc. A number of stories narrated in the Brāhmaṇas, begin with the statement, 'The Devas and the Asuras, sprung from Prajāpati, were contending', and refer to the contest held between them. In the Jātapatha Brāhmaṇa, it is said that when the Devas were about to set up their fire, the Asuras and the Rakṣas forbade them from setting up the fire. But the most bitter enmity was between Indra and Vṛtra, the heads of the Devas and the Asuras respectively. The Taittirīya Śaṁhitā points out that Vṛtra was

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22. ŚBr. I.7.2.22-24.
23. ŚBr. I.2.6.1-7, II.1.1.8-10.
24. ŚBr. I.6.1.8-9; IV.2.4.11-12.
25. ŚBr. I.1.4.15-16.
born by Tvastra from the Āsāniya fire only to be a foe of Indra. However, Indra and Vṛtra became bitter enemies. And the most bloody fight recorded was that between Indra and Vṛtra. Most of the Vedic hymns are in praise of Indra, the slayer of Vṛtra. The Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa says that when Vṛtra was killed by Indra, Namuci was born and a terrible duel ensued between the two as Namuci could not be slain in the night or in the day, by means of anything wet or dry. When Indra killed him with the force of waters, at the dawn, Namuci called Indra a 'Mitradrohi', an ungrateful friend. Thus, Indra and Tvastra and their family members were friends, and the enmity between the Devas and the Āsuras developed into a formidable rivalry later on.

(iv) Causes of enmity

Although the Devas and the Āsuras inherited certain things equally from their father, Prajāpati, but the difference arose by their choice itself. As the Āsuras chose exactly the opposite of what was chosen by the Devas. This was also one of the root causes of their vast difference that ultimately changed into a bloody fight.

Social Causes: There were also some social and economic causes of their enmity. According to the Taittiriya Šāhítā, the enmity took place between the two parties over the drinking of the soma-juice and the slain of Tvastra's son by Indra. Here the

27. TBr.1.7.1.6-7.
28. JBr.1.7.2.22-24.
29. Ts. VI.5.11.3.
30. Ts.11.4.12.1-4; 5.2.1-6.
story runs as follows: 'When Indra slew Tvāṣṭṛ's son, Viśvarūpa, the latter offered soma, excluding Indra, and prayed to the Śava-
nīya fire to give him a son who would be a foe of Indra, and thus, Vṛtra was born. Vṛtra enveloped the worlds and came into union with Agni and Soma. Then Viṣṇu came and deposited himself in the three worlds taking away the strength of Vṛtra. However, Indra and Vṛtra became bitter enemies. Indra made his Vajra from the bones of Dārśā, the son of Atharvan, and through it killed Vṛtra. Having killed Vṛtra, Indra was hailed, as Mahendra by the Devas. Indra, then became the chief of the Devas. Thus, the enmity between the 3 Devas and the Asuras developed into a formidable rivalry over the drinking of the Soma-juice and the Asa-juice of Tvāṣṭṛ's son. Here it seems that in the beginning the enmity was purely personal (only between the leaders of the two parties) but soon it pervaded in both the parties.

Economic Causes: Meanwhile, the Asuras were becoming rich and powerful. This was a matter of great concern to the Devas. Therefore, they appropriated the wealth of the Asuras. Indra and Viṣṇu overthrew the nine and ninety strong forts of Śambha. The boar (Varāha), stealer of the good, kept the wealth of the Asuras, beyond the seven hills and Indra pierced the seven hills and won the wealth for the Devas. Not only this, but the Devas wrested the

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31. TBr. 1.6.8.1.
32. Ts. VI.5.5.1.
33. Ts. VI.5.3.3.
34. Ts. III.2.11.3.
35. Ts. VI.2.4.3.
regions, quarters from the Asuras and drove them out of all these worlds. There are several stories indeed, in the Brāhmaṇas which refer to their struggle for superiority, for the possession of these worlds or cattle and the ultimate defeat of the Asuras in the battles. For instance, the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa points out that the Devas and the Asuras were contending for superiority. However, the Asuras defeated the Devas and thought that the whole world belongs to them. They started dividing it among themselves leaving nothing for the Devas. The Devas then, placing Viṣṇu, the sacrifice, at their head went to them and asked for their share. They agreed to give them as much as would be covered by Viṣṇu. Then the Devas, having enclosed Viṣṇu on all the three sides and having placed Agni on the east side, went on worshipping and toiling with him, and thus, obtained the entire earth. The said Brāhmaṇa further points out that Viṣṇu verily is the sacrifice. By striding, he obtained for the Devas that all-pervading power which now belongs to them. By his first step, he gained this same earth, by the second, this aerial expanse, and by his last step, the sky. Here we find Viṣṇu, Yajña, covering not only

36. ŚBr.lX.2.3.8.
37. Tā. Br. VIII.3.1, ŚBr.II.3.6.2.
38. ŚBr.1.2.4.8-12; 4.1.34-35; 5.4.6; II.1.18-19; I.2.13;
     2.2.8; 4.3.2.
39. ĀBr.1.14; V.11; VIII.13; ŚBr.1.2, JŚr.1.105; etc.
40. Tā. Br. XIII.6.7; JŚr.113, etc.
41. ŚBr.1.2.5.1-7.
42. ŚBr.1.9.3.9.
the earth as in the above passage but all the three worlds for
the Devas. Here seem the gems of Vīśnus incarnation, but for
the name of Bali in later Paurāṇika literature.

We have one another story from the same Brāhmaṇa, that
points out that they were contending for superiority. The Devas
vanquished the Asuras, but even then, they harassed the Devas
over again. Agni thereupon, went round to the northern side,
and whilst cutting them in, they put them down with these worlds
and from what forth world there is beyond these three worlds,
they did not rise again.

Possession of Divine cow seems to be another cause of
their enmity. The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa points out that Prajāpati
created Virāṭ as a cow and both the Devas and the Asuras quarreled
over its possession. The Atharvaveda says that 'the dappled
cow, well-milking, without calf was given by Varuṇa to Atharvan',
who calls himself the companion of Varuṇa, both having the same
connection, the same birth. The Taittirīya Āshīta says that
the cow, after bearing Indra, became barren. Indra thus, became
the leader of the Devas. The cow of Atharvan, which first be-
longed to Varuṇa, the Asura, born Indra, the leader of the
Devas.

43. śBr. I. 2. 10-12.
44. TBr. I. 10. 1.
45. AV. VII. 104.1.
46. AV. V. 11. 10-11.
47. Ts. II. 15. 4.
The Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa points out that they fought even for the possession of sea. But the Devas defeated the Asuras and sank them in the sea by means of Aśman. Possession of Āditya was also a cause of enmity between the two parties. The Tānḍya Mahā-Brāhmaṇa points out that the Devas and the Asuras were contending for the possession of Āditya, saying, 'Curs he shall be, ours he shall be!' The Devas got the victory and the Asuras could not.

Possession of day and night seems to be one another cause of their rivalry. The Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa says that the Devas defeated the Asuras in the day. Being defeated in the day they entered the night. But the Devas drove them away even from the night by means of night sacrifice, i.e., Ṛatra-satra. And thus, the Asuras were deprived of the day and night.

Possession of food in general, i.e., Ṛnādaya, was also a bone of contest between the two sections. The Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa points out that they were contesting for the food in general. But the Devas owned the whole wealth, cattle and food in general of the Asuras by means of Śman. The Tānḍya Mahā-Brāhmaṇa points out that they were struggling for their milking

48. देवाश्च च वृहत्तथा च पि चूस्तः जात्वक्तः ||

JBr.III.43.

49. देवाश्च च वृहत्तथा च पि चूस्तः जात्वक्तः ||

JBr.IV.5.15; also see K3.XXXIV.5; TBr.1.2.6.6.

50. JBr.1.196; also see I.211.

51. सन्तानाः वन्नाः च स्वमनिः ||

JBr.III.139; also see III.152,171.

52. Tā.Br.XI.5.9.
desires, i.e., Kānadugha. Here also, the Devas deprived the Asuras of their milking desires by means of Ākṣara Sāman.

Religious causes: Apart from social and economic causes, there seems to have been some religious causes for their rivalry. The Taittiriya Samhitā says that Viśvarūpa, the son of Tvasṭī, was the domestic priest of the Devas. He promised openly the share to the Devas and secretly to the Asuras. Indra being afraid of his sovereignty over the Devas, wrote off his three heads. The said Śaṁhitā further says that Brahaspati was the 'Purohita', the domestic priest, of the Devas and Śaṅga and Marka were the priests of the Asuras. Both the Devas and the Asuras had the holy power in them, and so they could not overcome one another. Then the Devas, won over Śaṅga and Marka with special boons and thus, overcame the Asuras. Hence in the ritual, cups came to be drawn for Śukra and Manthin. Śukra became the 'Purohita' of the Asuras. The Taittiriya Śaṁhitā further says that the Devas chose Agni as their messenger, and the Asuras Dauvyas or Uśanas Kāvyas, i.e., Śukra. Therefore, Agni is said to belong to both the Devas and the Asuras. But later on the Rākṣasas and Piśācas came to be treated as the enemies of Agni. So also Brahaspati is called the Deva-Guru. The said Śaṁhitā also refers to the enmity between the two sections of people - the Devas, men and Piśas on one side, and the Asuras, Rākṣasas and Piśācas, on the other.

63. Ts.11.5.1.1-2.
64. Ts.11.3.1.1-2.
65. Ts.11.3.1.5; 5.11.7.
66. Ts.11.4.1.1-3.
Devas then, made common cause with the Rākṣasas and conquered the Asuras. Then they, drove the Rākṣasas away. The Rākṣasas thereupon, surrounded the Devas. The Devas sought the protection of Agni and made offerings to him and with the aid of Agni, they overcame the Rākṣasas. Thus, it appears that the Devas gradually ousted the Asuras from the propitiation of Agni, although they were at first equally related to Agni.

The Taittirīya Śāhītā says that the high altar taking the form of a lioness went away and remained between the two parties. The Devas won the high altar. When the high altar went to the Devas, the Asuras thought of conquering it and with their bolts ready they advanced on the Devas. Then, the cry of Indra with the Vasus repelled them in front, the swift of mind with the Pitṛs on the right, the wise one with the Rudras behind, and Viśvakarma with the Ādityas on the left. There are several stories indeed, in the Śāhītās and Brāhmaṇas which refer to their enmity over the possession of sacrifice. Here we have a story from the Jātapatha Brāhmaṇa that tells us that both the

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57. Ts.11.4.1.1-3.

58. शेषस्वम वा स्र्दीत्स्वम को बनय्या वाल्मीकि् | । K3.XXV.2; also see Ts.1.6.6.6.7.1.1.3; VII.3.1.3; Kap. Kātha. XXXVIII.5; etc.

59. शेषावृत्तम् | । TBr.1.8.6.3-4; शेषावृत्तम् वा शेषावृत्तम् | JBr.1.153; शेषावृत्तम् वा सूतसूत्रम् प्राच्यापत्तियू

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60. JBr.11.8.9.3-4; etc.

61. TBr.11.2.4.11-12;
Devas and the Asuras were contending for the possession of this sacrifice, their father, Prajapati, the year, saying, 'Ours he shall be! Ours he shall be!' The Devas went on singing praises and toiling. They devised this Agniṣṭoma feast, and by means of this Agniṣṭoma feast, they appropriated the entire sacrifice and excluded the Asuras from the sacrifice. One another story from the same Brāhmaṇa tells us how the Devas obtained the possession of the whole of the sacrifice, and deprived those Asuras of it by giving them what was the worst part of the sacrifice. Thus, with the blood of the victim they dispossessed them of the animal sacrifice, and with the refuse of the rice, of the Haviryaṇa.

Possession of moon was also a cause of their enmity. In this connection, we have a story from the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa which brings out the importance of the moon to the Devas. Here the story runs as follows: 'The Devas, when they were preparing for the contest said to one another, 'Come, let us remove to the moon for safety what imperishable place of worship there is on this earth, so that if the Asuras on vanquishing us, drive us away from here, we may afterwards by praising and mortifying, prevail again.' They accordingly removed to the moon what imperishable place of worship there was on this earth. That now is the black spot in the moon, hence, they say, 'In the moon is the place of worship for this earth.'

Possession of immortal soul was also a bone of contest.
In this connection, the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa points out that among the Devas and the Asuras Agni alone was immortal. After going on praising and practising austerities, the Devas beheld this immortal Agnīyādheyā, and established it in their innermost soul to become immortal and unconquerable. The Asuras also tried to do so but all in vain and could not become immortal. The same type of story is found again in the same Brāhmaṇa, which makes it quite clear that how the Devas bestowed immortality and prevailed over the Asuras.

Now from the foregoing discussion, it is obvious that both the Devas and the Asuras were the descendants of the same father, Prajāpati and hence, were friends and propitiators of Agni, but in due course a pitched rivalry caused by social, economic and religious causes developed between them and thus, they became bitter enemies. The Brahmās never tire of recounting their struggle for the possession of supremacy or such other things. Their fights are recorded as battles between the two opposite groups headed by Indra and Vṛtra.

63. SBr.II.2.2.8-14.