CHAPTER : I
INTRODUCTION

A

Vedic literature which in its present form covers a vast, varied and a voluminous text which awaits a sustained effort to go deep into it. It recorded the activities and achievements of a culture spreading over thousands of year. The Vedic seers have expressed their feelings in the different suktas of the Rig Veda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda. It is a long journey from the Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas to the Upaniṣads or it can be said that it is a long journey from polytheism to monotheism. The Samhitās of the Vedic texts revealed the features of numerous gods ultimately rising to the transcendental reality beyond all limitations and perceived the dawn of Indian philosophy. The interpretations of the Vedic Gods have, therefore, undergone through two different lines-Naturalistic and Spiritual.

Naturalistic interpretations mean our visual observations of the Vedic Gods as conceived by mainly the western scholars and spiritual interpretations are, the revival of spirit and recreating the inner experience in which the mantras took shape. The western Indologists approached the subjects in a rational and scientific spirit. There is a striking difference of initial objectivism and subjectivism. The naturalistic interpretations are subjective in nature while spiritual interpretations aim at objectivity. The new impetuous again has taken two courses, one conservative and the other critical. The critical interpretation is represented by two important schools – the schools of Āryasamāj and of Pandicherī. The aim of both the schools is to attain the spiritual depth of the Vedic gods. The present dissertation prepares
an account of the Vedic gods in the perspective of naturalistic and spiritual interpretations individually resuming to its findings.

B

The word ‘Veda’ is evolved from the root ‘vid’ which means ‘to know’. So the term ‘Veda’ means knowledge. Vedas are also known as ‘Shruti’ which means the sages or seers first dictated the Vedas and the next generation sages heard them and memorised them. There are four Vedas, namely Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda.

Vedic literature consists of four sections- Samhitā, Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣad and the six Vedāṅgas are also included therein. The Samhitā section is the centre from where the others have developed. The Samhitās consist of mantras which are known as ‘Richas’. The Richas of the Rigveda are eulogies and prayers through which deities have been invoked. The Yajurveda speaks of the different types of Yajñā or religious sacrifices. The Sāmaveda consists of many Richas or Mantras which also finds mention in Rigveda. These Sāmavedic richas are famous for their lyric and music. Atharvaveda contains lots of information on both material-world as well as spiritual world.

Rigveda is the oldest Veda. It comprises of 10 Maṇḍalas, 1028 Sukta-s and contains 10,552 mantras. Maṇḍalas are comprised of Sukta-s, while Sukta-s are comprised of Richa-s. All together there are 1028 Sukta-s in all the 10 mandalas.

The ‘Richa-s’ of Rigveda are called Sukta-s which mean ‘beautiful statement’. In other words, a very beautifully composed incantations is a Sukta. The Richa-s of Rigveda are in fact eulogies through which deities have been invoked. Apart from these Richa-s incantations containing ‘brilliant-
thoughts’ which our ancient sages arrived at after their minute observations, contemplation and analysis of the natural phenomenon they came across. Each and every phenomenon of nature was a matter to contemplate upon for the sages. They marveled at the order which Mother Nature functions. The Rigvedic richas are beautiful expressions to their feelings.

So the interpretations of the Vedic Gods have undergone in two major lines—naturalistic interpretation and spiritualistic interpretation. With the theory of natural evolution the naturalistic interpretation of the Vedic Gods took place. The chief advocates of this theory were the western scholars. Western scholars have taken the Vedic Gods as the deification of the nature. This naturalism is stressed by Winternitz who comments “Mythology in the making”. The naturalistic interpretation is mentioned by Yāska also. Western Scholars starts showing interest in the Indian cultural heritage in the early part of the seventeenth century when the Dutch missionary, Abraham Roger, who writes his “Open door to the Hidden heathemdom” in 1561. William Jones, Henry Thomas, Colebrooke, Rudolph Ro:th, Hillebrandt, Macdonell all are advocates of this natural interpretations. The naturalistic interpretations of western scholars take up the Vedic Gods as a natural phenomenon and they say that through personification of different natural phenomenon say Agni, the natural fire element first has been personified and a step further deified. So the Vedic God ‘Agni’ is in essence the fire element.

But the Naturalistic interpretations are not sufficient to express the ‘Bibhuti’ of the Vedic Gods. However, the Indian thinking about the conception of the Vedic Gods remains incomplete if the spiritual interpretations are not taken into account. The concept of the Vedic Gods awaits its spiritual interpretations which starts with the commentators like Skandasvāmin, Nārayana, Udgītha, Hastamālaka, Uvata, Venkatamādhava, Ānan

About naturalistic interpretation it is known that some glorious aspects of nature caught the imagination of the Rigvedic Seers and they came to be identified with divine identities at a subsequent stage. In the beginning the hymns are not addressed to a sun-god, nor to a moon-god, nor to a fire-god, nor to a god of the heavens, nor to storm-god and water deities, nor to a goddess of the dawn and an earth-goddess, but the shining sun itself, the gleaming moon in the nocturnal sky, the fire blazing on the hearth or on the altar or even the lightning shooting forth from the cloud, the bright sky of the day or the starry sky of the night, the roaring storms, the flowing waters of clouds and of rivers, the glowing dawn and the spread out fruitful earth. The seers of Vedic hymns were delighted seeing nature in their own unostentatious way, but being of a poetic temperament they saw these things of nature with such intensity of feeling and force of imagination that the things became suffused with souls with the result that the moon and the stars, the sea and the sky, the dawn and the night-fall were regarded as divine. This is the very beginning of Vedic religion. This stage was quickly followed by
another when the Vedic seers became busy in waking Gods in their own image, which may be described as a kind of anthromorphism.

The polytheistic anthromorphism in course of time was replaced by a spiritual monotheism when Vedic seers tried to find out a single creative cause of the universe which was itself uncreated and imperishable. The result was that they tried to subordinate the Gods under one higher being who was competent to control other Gods and their activities. Thus, the many Gods came to be gradually looked upon as the embodiments or expressions of one universal identity. But, in this process what happened in the earlier stages was that the Vedic seers worshipped each God in turn as if it were the greatest and even the only God. This practice of invoking different Gods as if each of them were paramount in what Prof. Max Muller calls 'Henotheism' or 'Kathenotheism' according to which the individual Gods are alternately believed to be the highest, absolutely independent of the Supreme deity. As the whole position is hardly consistent and we cannot have a plurality of Gods henotheism may be described as an unconscious groping towards monotheism. Ultimately monotheism was displaced by monism which found its most comprehensive expression in the literature of the Upanisads. The Rigvedic seer could understand that there was something which was many, that something, one and impersonal, ruling over all that is unmoving and moving, that walks or flies being differently born. The real is one, colourless and sexless whom the wise call by various names Agni, Yāma and Mātarishvān. We may have naturalistic Gods, anthromorphic Gods but none of them answered the highest conception however much one might try to justify them to the mind of man by saying that they were the varying expressions of the one Supreme. It is true that innumerable Gods and
Goddesses are found in the poetry of Rig Veda, but, this polytheism does not contradict the monism which the Vedic seers sought to establish.

C

Yāska, the author of Nirukta has divided all Gods into three regions, namely prithivīsthānadevatā i.e. terrestrial Gods, antarikṣasthānadevatā i.e. atmospheric Gods and dyusthānadevatā i.e. celestial Gods. Agni, Ap, Prithivī, and Soma belong to the terrestrial region. The Gods belonging to atmospheric region are Indra, Vāyu, Rudra, Marut, Parjanya. The Gods of celestial region are Śūrya, Mitra, Varuṇa, Dyuḥ, Pūṣan, Savitā, Āditya, Ashvins, Uṣas and Rātri. Only one God is predominant among all Gods of each and every region and other Gods are personifications of that God. Each God has a number of activities and each name has a reference to one such activity. The different names indicate their greatness. Śaunaka informs us that Agni has three names, Vāyu or Indra has twenty six while Śūrya has seven. Agni is the predominant God of Prithivīsthāna devatā, Indra or Vāyu is the predominant God of Antarikṣasthānadevatā and Śūrya is the main God among the Gods of Dyusthānadevatā. Yāska states – “tisra eva devatā iti nairuktā agniḥ prthivīsthāno vāyuvendro vā’antarikṣasthānāḥ śūryo dyusthānāḥ”

In the RK “Śūryo no divaspātu vāto’antarikṣadagnirṇaḥ pārthivebhyaḥ” (RV.X.151.1) it is stated that the celestial God Śūrya saves or protects us from the hindrances of Dyusthāna, the atmospheric God Vāyu protects us from the hindrances of antarikṣasthāna and Agni the prithivīsthāna devatā saves us from the obstacles of terrestrial region. From this richa of the Rig Veda it is clear that all deities of three regions are not so prominent, but only Śūrya, Vāyu or Indra and Agni are prominent Gods of three regions because they are representatives of the Gods of their respective regions.
Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya, among these three prominent Gods, Agni is nearest to us, “Agnirvaidevanāmavamaḥ” and Sūrya is farthest “Sūryo devānām paramaḥ” and all other deities exist between these two Gods. These three prominent Gods are the personifications of the all pervading, almighty and one supreme soul. Other gods are various forms of that supreme soul. So Yāska states in his Nirukta – “devatāyā eka atmā vaḥudhā stūyate” (Nirukta 7.4). Parambrahma is the supreme soul here and other deities are his different limbs “ekasyātmanto’nye devāḥ pratyangāni bhavanti”

The same idea is also found in the richa of the Rig Veda “ekāṁ sad viprā vaḥudhā vakdanti aṅgīṁ yamāṁ mātariśvānāmāhūḥ” (RV.I.164.46) i.e. that one eternal soul is designated as Agni, Yama, Matarisvā by the sages. “ekāṁ santāṁ vaḥudhā kalpayanti” (RV.X.114.5). It is vividly stated in the Śukla-yajurveda that Gods are originated from that eternal-truthful supreme soul – “etasyaiva sa visṛṣṭireṣa u hyeva sarve devāḥ”(Śukla-yajurveda)

That one supreme-soul has created all material of this universe and has taken the forms of all deities.

All the deities described in the Veda are symbols of earthly natural phenomenon. One God is the conscious existent of one earthly matter. So God Agni is the deity of earthly fire, Sūrya is the deity of ever-seen Sun and Vāyu is of earthly-air etc.

The Nirukta says: “Devo dānād vā, dīpanād vā, dyotanād vā, dyusthāno vā bhavati”. The Sanskrit expression for ‘god’ is ‘deva’ which is derived from the vīdiv. The nominal base is found in the Veda but the root has not been used in any one of its conjugated forms. God is ‘deva’ because he gives his blessings to those who worship him. The sun, the moon and the sky are all devas because they give light to all creation. One synonym of ‘deva’ is ‘vasū’
derived from the śvas, ‘to throw light’, ‘to shine’. All the Vedic Gods Agni, Indra, Soma, Rudra, Maruts, Uṣas, Sūrya, Pūṣan and Ādityas are described as vasu, the shining one. The number of Gods mentioned in RV is thirty three. The name of the major Gods belonging to the three different regions have been discussed, however the name of the minor Gods may be discussed as hereunder:

In the Prithivīsthāna the minor Gods are Maṇḍuka, Gravana, Nadi, Brṣabha, Śraddhā, Oṣadhi, Rātri, Dice. In the Antarikṣasthāna the minor Gods are Brahmanspaṭi, Yama, Viśvakarman, Tārṣya, Dadhikrā, Mṛtyu, Angirasa, Aditi, Sarasvatī, Urvaśī. In the Dyusthana the minor Gods are Bhaga, Ajapeśapāḍ, Samudra, Kesī, Vishnu and Vāta.

A brief introduction of the major gods of the three different regions discussed in this dissertation are being presented here.

AGNI

The most important of the terrestrial Gods is Agni, the fire God. He is second only to Indra. Celebrated in more than two hundred hymns he engrosses the attention of Vedic seers. His physical aspects are manifested from the descriptions that he possesses a tawny beard, sharp jaws and burning teeth. His food is ghee and wood, melted butter is his beverage and he is nourished three times a day. He is the mouth by which the Gods eat the sacrifice and his flames are spoons with which he besprinkles the Gods, but he is also asked to consume the offerings himself.

His brightness is much dwelt upon, he shines like the sun, his luster is like the rays of the dawn and the sun and like the lightning of the rain-cloud.
He shines even at night and dispels the darkness with his beams. His red smoke rises up to the firmament, like the erector of a post he supports the sky with his smoke. ‘Smoke-bannered’ (dhuma-ketu) is his frequent and exclusive epithet.

Agni is the child of Heaven (Dyaus) and is often called the son of Heaven and Earth (RV.I.160). He is also the offspring of the waters. Mention is often made of his daily production from the two kindling sticks (aranis), which are his parents or his mothers. From the dry wood Agni is born living; as soon as born the child devours his parents. Owing to the force required to kindle Agni he is often called ‘son of strength’ (sahasāḥ sunuh). Agni is sometimes said to have two origins and indeed exclusively bears the epithet dvi-janman having two births. As being kindled in numerous dwellings Agni is also said to have many births.

Agni is more closely associated with human life than any other deity. He is the only God called grha-pati lord of the house and is constantly spoken of as a guest (atithi) in human dwellings. He both takes the offerings of men to the Gods and brings the Gods to the sacrifice. He is thus characteristically a messenger (duta) appointed by Gods and by men to be an ‘oblation-bearer’. His priesthood is the most salient feature of his character; he is in fact the great priest, as Indra is the great warrior.

Agni’s wisdom is often dwelt upon. As knowing all the details of sacrifice he is wise and all-knowing and is exclusively called jāta-vedas he who knows all created beings. He is a great benefactor of his worshippers, protecting and delivering them and bestowing on them all kinds of boons, but pre-eminently domestic welfare, offspring and prosperity.
From the ordinary sacrificial Agni who conveys the offering (havyavahana) is distinguished his corpse-devouring (kravyad) form that burns the body on the funeral pyre (RV.X.14).

Another function of Agni is to burn and dispel evil spirits and hostile magic.

SOMA

As the sacrifice plays a very important role in RV it is only natural that Soma, the plant, the juice of which is so much used in the ritual is deified. The God Soma is one of the most prominent deities. With rather more than 120 hymns addressed to him, becomes next to Agni in importance. The entire ninth book of RV is in praise of Soma which is pressed by stones and flows through the woolen strainer into the wooden vats. The sound of Soma juice flowing into the bowls is poetically described as the din of the combatants. The physical quality of Soma is its brilliance. The invigorating action of Soma, as a divine drink is very much mentioned.

The Soma juice, which is intoxicating, is frequently termed madhu or sweet drought, but oftenest called indu, the bright drop. The colour of Soma is brown (babhru), ruddy (aruna) or more usually tawny (hari).

The exhilarating power of Soma led to its being regarded as a divine drink bestowing immortal life. Hence it is called amrta draught of immortality. All the Gods drink Soma, they drank it to gain immortality; it confers immortality not only on Gods, but on men. It has, moreover, medicinal powers. Soma heals whatever is sick, making the blind to see and the lame to walk. Soma also stimulates the voice and is called 'lord of speech'.

The intoxicating effect of Soma most emphasized by the poets is the stimulus it imparts to Indra in his conflict with hostile powers.
Though Soma is several times regarded as dwelling or growing on the montains, his true origin and abode are regarded as in heaven. He is the lord of heaven, he occupies heaven and his place is the highest heaven. Thence he was brought to earth. Being the most important of herbs, Soma is said to have been born as the lord (pati) of plants, which also have him as their king, he is a lord of the wood (vanaspati) and has generated all plants. But quite apart from his connection with herbs Soma is, like other leading Gods called a king, a king of Gods and mortals.

In a few of the latest hymns of the RV, Soma begins to be mystically identified with the moon; in the AV, Soma several times means the moon and in the Brāhmanas this identification has already become a common place.

**APAH**

Apah which is known as water has retained in the Veda its divineness originating from the times of the most primitive notions. Because of its influence on the growth and prosperity, its beneficent, creative and curative powers, because it washes off the taint of sin, fraud and perjury as well as the impurity of the body and because it removes the harmful effects of evil spirits of all sorts, Indians like other peoples have placed water among the benevolent Gods and worshipped it from the remotest period until the present day. The RV differentiates between waters of various kinds; it mentions the waters of the sky, those which flow, those which emanate from wells or springs or those which strive towards the ocean. Distinction is made not only between the waters in the heavens and those in the atmosphere or on the earth but also between those which are beyond and which are beneath the sun. In
manifold turns of expressions the mārtamāḥ or amṛtasya patnīḥ are described; even during the ceremonial shaving for the Dīksā, waters are invoked for life, longevity and fame.

The waters are praised in four entire hymns. Their personification is very slight. It is the heavenly waters that are celebrated in the hymn (RV.VII.49). Their place is beside the sun. The waters are naturally conceived as feminine. They have most auspicious fluid, which they are besought as loving mothers to give. They are wealthy, that is, wealth-giving. The waters may be called wealth-giving either as fertilizing as a constituent of the Soma drink, delighting Indra and the other Gods and so inciting them to give boons. It is not the waters as such, but the waters as mixed with Soma that are praised in RV.VII.49.4 and RV.X.30.

The waters are nourishing, strengthening, life-giving. There is the ‘wave of nourishment’ (RV.VII.47.1). They furnish drink to men and are a constituent of the drink of Indra (RV.X.9.4; RV.VII.47.1). It is only an extension of the same idea, when the waters are called medicinal and are conceived as the source of healing and immortality.

PRITHIVĪ

Prithivi is considered in the Vedas as a terrestrial God or ‘Prithiviśṭhānadevatā’ which emerges from its name. In the Rig Veda only one hymn (RV.V.84) of three verses is found where Prithivi is worshipped.
INDRA

Indra is unquestionably the most dominant and popular deity of the atmospheric region. Indra is invoked alone in about one-fourth of the hymns of the RV, far more than are addressed to any other deity; for he is the favourite national God of the Vedic people. He is primarily a God of the thunderstorm who vanquishes the demons of draught or darkness and sets free the waters or wing the light. He is secondarily the God of battle who aids the victorious Aryan in overcoming his aboriginal foes. He wields a thunderbolt. Sometimes he is described as armed with bow and arrows; he also carries a hook (ankuśa).

As Indra is more addicted to Soma than any of the other Gods, the common epithet ‘Soma drinker’ (Somapā) is characteristic of him. This beverage stimulates him to carry out his warlike deeds. One whole hymn (RV.X.119) is a monologue in which Indra, intoxicated with Soma, boasts of his greatness and his might.

Indra is often spoken of as having been born and two whole hymns deal with the subject of his birth. His father, the same as Agni’s, appears to be Dyaus. Indra is associated with other deities. The Maruts (RV.I.85) are his chief allies, who constantly help him in his conflicts. Hence the epithet Marutvant, accompanied by the Maruts is characteristic of him. Agni is the God most often conjoined with him as a dual divinity. Indra is also often coupled with Varuṇa (RV.VII.86) and Vāyu, God of wind, less often with Soma (RV.VIII.48), Brhaspati (RV.IV.50), Pūšan and Viṣṇu.

His greatness and power are constantly dwelt on. Thus various epithets such as Saṅkra and Saṅcivant ‘mightily’, Saṁcipati ‘lord of might’, sátakrätu ‘having a hundred powers’ are characteristic of him. With his thunderbolt he shatters Vṛtra who encompasses the waters, hence receives the exclusive
epithet apsu-jit ‘conquering in the waters’. The clouds appear as the fortresses (puras) of the aerial demons being described as moving, made of iron or stone. Indra shatters them and is characteristically called the ‘fort-destroyer’ (parbhid). But the chief and specific epithet of Indra is ‘Vṛtra-slayer’ (Vṛtra-han).

More generally Indra is praised as the protector, helper and friend of his worshippers. He is described as bestowing on them wealth, which is considered the result of victories. His liberty is so characteristic that the frequent attribute maghavan ‘bountiful’ is almost exclusively his.

RUDRA

Rudra, an atmospheric God occupies a subordinate position in the RV, being celebrated in only three entire hymns, in part of another and in one conjointly with Soma. The Maruts are described as his sons. He is armed with a bow and arrow. He is fierce and destructive. But, his blessings are sought for the welfare of human beings as well as the animal world. His healing power is mentioned at times. He is the strongest of the strong and unassailable, unsurpassed in might.

MARUTS

This group of deities is prominent in the RV, thirty-three hymns being addressed to them alone, seven to them with Indra, and one each to them with Agni and Pūśan. Their number is thrice sixty or thrice seven. They are the sons of Rudra and of Prśni, who is a cow. The goddess Rodasi is always mentioned in connection with them and thus seems to have been regarded as their bride.
They are described as youthful warriors armed with golden spears and decorated with golden helmets and gold ornaments and driving golden chariots. They are associates of Indra in his fight with Vṛtra. They shed rain, they are supplicated to bring healing remedies. These remedies appear to be the waters, for the Maruts bestow medicine by raining.

**VĀYU**

Invoked in only three entire hymns Vāyu, the wind-god is often described as associated with Indra in his exploits while the latter moves in the company of Parjanya, the Rain god. Vāyu is as fast as thought. He possesses the power of healing.

**PARJANYA**

This deity occupies quite a subordinate position, being celebrated in only three hymns. His name often means ‘rain-cloud’ in the literal sense. The shedding of rain is his most prominent characteristic. In this activity he is associated with thunder and lightning. He is in a special degree the producer and nourisher of vegetation.

**SŪRYA**

Sūrya is the prominent God of celestial region. Ten hymns are addressed to Sūrya. Since the name designates the orb of the sun as well as the God, Sūrya is the most concrete of the solar deities, his connection with the luminary always being present to the mind of the seers. The eye of Sūrya is several times mentioned, but Sūrya, himself is also often called the eye of Mitra and Varuṇa, as well as of Agni and of the Gods. He is far-seeing, all-
seeing, the spy of the whole world, he beholds all beings and the good and bad deeds of mortals. He arouses men to perform their activities. He is the soul or guardian of all that moves or is stationary. His car is drawn by one steed called etasa or by seven swift mares called ‘harit bays’. Surya’s car and steeds seem to represent his rays of light, for both his steeds and his rays are said to carry him.

Sūrya as the heavenly form of Agni dispels darkness (RV.VII.63.1) and shines for all the world (RV.VII.63.1). Sūrya measures the days (RV.I.50.7) and prolongs them (RV.VIII.48.7). He is once called “the divine priest of the Gods” and the epithet viśvakārman ‘all-creating’ is once applied (RV.X.170.4) to him.

MITRA

Mitra is spoken of as an associate of Varuṇa. He represents prominently the beneficent side of the sun’s power. He stimulates people to activity, holds fast heaven and earth and watches people ceaselessly. Only hymn addressed to Mitra is RV.III.59; otherwise he is invoked along with Varuna. Though an oldest deity, owing to his identification with the Iranian Mithra, he has lost independent individuality in Rig Veda. In the Atharvaveda, Mitra at sun rise is contrasted with Varuṇa in the evening and in the Brāhmaṇas Mitra is connected with day, Varuṇa with night. The conclusion from the Vedic evidence is that Mitra was a solar deity. At times he represents the sun and on other occasions, the light.
**Pūṣan**

Pūṣan is invoked in only eight hymns. He represents the beneficent power of the sun. He is a pastoral god and guardian of cattle. He is friendly with the mankind. He is the god of wayfarers and husbandmen. With his golden aerial ships Pūṣan acts as the messenger of Sūrya. He moves onward observing the universe and makes his abode in heaven. He is a guardian of roads, removing dangers out of the way and is called ‘son of deliverance’ (vimuco napat). ‘glowing’ (aghri) is one of his exclusive epithets. The name means ‘prosperer’, as derived from pus, cause to thrive. He knows the way to the heaven and conducts the dead on the path to the departed souls. His car is drawn by goats and he carries a goad.

**Savitṛ**

This God is celebrated in eleven entire hymns and in many detached stanzas as well. He is pre-eminently a golden deity. The word savitṛ is derived from the root ‘su’ to stimulate, which is constantly and almost exclusively used with it in such a way as to form a perpetual play on the name of the God. In nearly half its occurrences the name is accompanied by deva ‘god’, when it means the ‘Stimulator god’. He is thus originally a solar deity in the capacity of the great stimulator of life and motion in the world.

Shining with the rays of the sun, Savitṛ raises up his light continually from the east. He observes fixed laws, the waters and the wind are subject to him. In one richa of Rig Veda (III.62.10) he is besought to stimulate the thoughts of worshippers who desire to think of the glory of god Savitṛ. This is the celebrated Savitṛ stanza which has been a morning prayer in India for more than three thousand years. Savitṛ is often distinguished from Sūrya
(RV.VII.63), as when he is said to shine with the rays of the Sun, to impel the
sun or to declare men sinless to the sun. But in other passages it is hardly
possible to keep the two deities apart. Savitr is connected with the evening as
well as the morning, for at his command night comes and he brings all beings
to rest. He destroys bad dreams and drives away evil spirits. Gods have
become immortal and men enjoy long life because of his grace.

AŚVINS

These two deities are the most prominent gods after Indra, Agni and
Soma, being invoked in more than fifty entire hymns and in parts of several
others, they belong to the group of the deities of light. They are twins and
inseparable. They are young and yet ancient. They are bright, lords of luster,
of golden brilliancy, beautiful and adorned with lotus-garlands. They are the
only gods called golden-pathed (hiranya-vartani). They possess profound
wisdom and occult power. Their two most distinctive and frequent epithets
are ‘dasra’ ‘wondrous’ and ‘nasatya’ ‘true’. They are more closely associated
with honey (madhu) than any of the other gods. They desire honey and are
drinkers of it. They are, however, also fond of Soma, being invited to drink it
with Uśas and Sūrya. They come driving a car made of gold in the company
of the sun-maiden, Sūryā. The phenomenon of twilight seems to be the
material basis. They are described as the physicians of gods and men,
 wonder-workers and saviours of the oppressed from their suffering. The
Aśvins are children of Heaven.
VARUṆA

Beside Indra Varuṇa is the greatest of the gods of the RV, though the number of the hymns in which he is celebrated alone (apart from Mitra) is small, numbering hardly a dozen. Varuṇa is mainly lauded as upholder of physical and moral order. He is a great lord of the laws of nature. He established heaven and earth and by his law heaven and earth are held apart. He made the golden swing (the sun) to shine in heaven; he has made a wide path for the sun. The one most important trait in his character is that he is described as the custodian of law and order (ṛta), of physical and moral order. Varuṇa's ordinances are so very rigid that even gods dare not to disobey them. He covers the whole starry heaven from one end to the other and watches the activities of all creatures down below and whenever he notices any instance of violation of his laws or addiction to sinful acts, he binds down the offender with his noose (pāśa), but when he finds him penitent, he becomes gracious and blesses him. There is not a single hymn addressed to him in which a prayer for forgiveness of the guilt is absent. Varuṇa's omniscience is often highly praised, he knows the flight of birds in the sky as also the paths of ships in the sea. He knows the course of the mind. No creature can wink without his knowledge.

Varuṇa is often associated with Mitra. Jointly they represent the two aspects of the solar deity, the sun before sunrise and after sunset is Varuṇa while Mitra is the sun after sunrise and before sunset.
DYAUS

The oldest among the gods of heaven is Dyaus, the sky or the firmament. The boundless and illuminating firmament shining with the bright rays of the sun by day and with the mellow light of the moon and stars by night answered to the feelings for the Infinite and it was because of this that the sky was deified. Clouds may veil, storms may break and the sun may disappear but the sky continues to be there for all times and under all conditions. Dyaus is often associated with Prithivi, forming a most happy couple. They are celebrated in six hymns as Universal Parents.

USAS

Celebrated in some twenty hymns, the boundless dawn from which flash forth light and life every morning is the goddess Usas, the resplendent and charming maid loved by the sun as well as by the Ashvins but fleeting fast as the former is intent on embracing her. She is the daughter of Dyaus and born in the sky. She is young, being born again and again, though ancient. She illumines the ends of the sky when she awakes. She drives away evil dreams, evil spirit and the hated darkness. She discloses the treasures concealed by darkness and distributes them beautifully, she awakens every living being to motion. When Usas shines forth, the birds fly up from their nests and men seek nourishment. Day by day appearing at the appointed place, she never infringes the ordinance of nature and of the gods. She renders good service to the gods by awakening all worshippers and causing the sacrificial fires to be kindled. She brings the gods to drink the Soma draught. She is borne on a shining car, drawn by ruddy steeds or kine, which probably represents the red rays of morning.
Uṣas is closely associated with the sun. She has opened paths for Sūrya to travel, she brings the eye of the gods. She shines with the light of the Sun, with the light of her lover. Sūrya follows her as a young man a maiden; she meets the god who desires her. She thus comes to be spoken of as the wife of Sūrya. But as predeeding the Sun, she is occasionally regarded as his mother, thus she is said to arrive with a bright child. She is also called the sister of Night (RV.X.127) and their names are often conjoined as a dwell compound (uṣasa-nakta and naktosasa).

Uṣas brings the worshipper wealth and children, bestowing protection and long life. She confers renown and glory on all liberal benefactors of the poet. She is characteristically bountiful (Maghoni).

The name of Uṣas is derived from the root ‘vas’, ‘to shine’, forms of which are often used with reference to her in the hymns in which she is invoked.

RĀTRI

The Goddess of night, under the name of Rātri is invoked in only one hymn (RV.X.127). She is the sister of Uṣas and like her is called a daughter of heaven. She is not conceived as the dark, but as the bright starlit night. Decked with all splendour she drives away the darkness. At her approach men, beasts and birds go to rest. She protects her worshipers from the wolf and the thief, guiding them to safety. Under the name of naktan, combined with Usas, Night appears as a dual divinity with Dawn in the form of Uṣasa-nakta and Naktosasa, occurring in some twenty scattered stanzas of the Rig Veda.
ADITYAS

A śitya is sometimes used in the singular number indicating the Sun. Thus A śitya is addressed as having got into his hundred-oared boat (AV. XVIII:1:25). In the heart of A śitya dwells this golden man. A śityas are Mitra, Varuna, Āryaman, Bhaga, Dakṣa and Arńsa etc. Analysing the specific characteristics of the solar Gods certain features are found as significant for an exposition of their essence. The individual Gods present different aspects of the Sun God, but most of these Solar Gods become extinct with time.

E

The naturalistic and spiritual interpretations of the Vedic Gods have been in some places intervened a metaphysical step. While finding out the integrity of both the interpretations the metaphysical stepping accounted for a good help-bridge both the schools of interpretations.

F

The spiritual interpretations are mainly advocated by Dayānanda, Aurobindo and Anirvāṇ. Going beyond the limit of the naturalistic periphery they ventured to dive deep into the inner spirit of the Vedic Gods.

Dayānanda accepted the Vedas as his rock of firm foundation and regarded the word of eternal truth of which man’s knowledge of God and his relations with the divine being. While western scholarship extending the hints of the Vedic texts seemed to have classed it for ever as a ritual liturgy to nature gods. The genius of the race looking through the eyes of Dayānanda
received the intuition of a timeless revelation and a divine truth given to humanity. Although there is a harsh criticism of Dayānanda which says ‘Dayānanda gave to the Vedas that it is no true sense but an arbitrary fabrication of imaginative learning to his method backed it is fantastic and unacceptable to the critical reason’. But our submission is an interpretation of Veda must stand or fall by its central conception of the Vedic religion and the amount of support given to it by the intrinsic evidence of the Veda itself. Here Dayānanda’s view is quite clear, its foundation inexpugnable. The Vedic hymns are chanted to the one Deity under many names, names which are used and even designed to express His qualities and powers. It is not the conception of Dayānanda, it itself is in the Vedas. In the interpretations of Dayananda there are three fundamental entities god, nature and the soul.

Sri Aurovindo is a renowned interpretator of the Vedas in modern time. The interpretation of Sri Aurovindo is the discovery of the esoteric meaning of the Vedas. Rig Veda is considered by some to be a book written by barbaric culture worshipping violent Gods.

Aurobindo realised that this was due to the biased view of Westerners who had some preconceived views on Hindu culture. So Aurobindo decided to look for hidden meanings in the Vedas. He looked at the Rig Veda as a psychological book, inspiring the people to move towards God, but in hidden language.

So Indra is the God of Indriya, or the senses (Look, touch, hear, taste etc). Vāyu means air, but in esoteric terms means Prān, or the Life force. So when the Rig Vedas says “Call Indra and Vāyu to drink Soma Rasa” they mean use the Senses and Prān to receive divine bliss (Soma means wine of Gods, but in several texts also means Divine Bliss, as in Right handed Tantra).
Agni, or God of Fire, is the hidden Divine Spark in us, which we have to fan, so it grows and engulfs our whole body. So the sacrifice of the Vedas could mean sacrificing one's ego to the internal Agni, or Divine spark.

These essays originally appeared in the Arya, but have been condensed as a book form as "The Secret of the Vedas" by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Anirvan covers a wide area and touches upon most of the salient points of Hindu spirituality directly and indirectly. He roams through the vast territory of Hindu Philosophical thought with ease and familiarity. He combines Scholarship and Sadhana supported by an intellect which is analytic as well as synthetic.

Vedic literature has come down to us as an oral tradition and vedic verses form part of mantras which roll within the ether of the body and come out as sound with varying frequencies. This sacred sound is the omnipotent name and rupa (name and form). The earliest reference about the interpretation and value of mantra is found in Brāhmaṇas. Veda mīmāṃsā is an introduction of the Mantras of the Rksaṁhitā. In the first part of the Vol.1 of the Veda Mimamsa, Anirvān has dealt with the modes of interpretation in general. In the second part of the same book he has reflected on the Vedic literature in brief. Anirvan's interpretation of the philosophy of the Vedic gods is, as he himself has named is 'chinmaya Pratyakshavada' (luminous direct perception). This self illuminating work of Anirvan sheds a new light to the interpretation of the Vedas.

Śāyaṅchārya is the famous commentator of Vedic literature. He was the Brahmin of Black-yajurveda, has written commentaries on Black-yajurveda Saṁhitā, Brāhmaṇa and Āranyaka, and the commentary on Ṛgveda. In his commentary on Ṛgveda he has established the supremacy of Black-yajurveda regarding sacrifice than any other Vedas. The explanations
of Vedas and Vedic mantras of Śaṅkara are in accordance with Sacrifices. According to him the applications of Vedic mantras in sacrifices are the main significance of Vedas. He has left the explanations of Yāska, the author of Nirukta in some places regarding the explanations of Vedic mantras in sacrifices. The influence of the writings of his predecessors like preeminent Skandasvāmī, Nārāyaṇa and Udgītha have been seen in the writings of Śaṅkara of Vedic-bhashya, because these three predecessors are also the advocates of the explanations of Vedic mantras regarding sacrifices or yajnas.

Achārya Satyavrata sāmāstamī has earned international reputation as a Vedic-scholar. As translator, publisher and expositor of Vedic literature in different Indian languages he is assumed to be the greatest among the Vedic scholars.

Durgādās Lahiri is a reputed scholar, reporter and literate. He has published Rg, Sama, Yajuh and Atharva with the commentary of Sayana in Bengali-letter and translated the Vedic mantras in Bengali language. He is known as ‘Vedacharya’, ‘Vedavisarad’ and ‘Vedavyasa’ of modern-age. While explaining the Rgveda in many places he does not follow Nirukta or the commentary of Śaṅkara, but he has initiated his own interpretations and given spiritual interpretations of the mantras along with his own imaginations.

Rameshchandra is the first bengalee personality who has translated and published the whole Rgveda in Bengali language. While writing translation of Rgveda in Bengali he has taken the help of the commentary of Śaṅkara but he has inserted many of his own imagining meaning of Rgveda therein.

On the basis of the interpretations of the above mentioned renowned scholars this dissertation entitled ‘A Study of the Vedic Gods: Naturalistic and Spiritual Interpretations’ has been prepared.