

The concept of the Fire God and God Rudra in Ṛg Veda: A study

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The Śruti and the Smṛti have been recognized as the basis of Indian literature, culture and civilization. The Puraṇas and other ancient literature are also most popular and important literature; these are based on the Śrutis or Vedas. So the Vedas have been recognized as the sole foundation of Indian culture, literature, tradition and society. The Vedas are believed to be the eternal voice of the Supreme soul, transmitted as a vibration language. The ṛṣis (seers) heard the eternal voice during their Samādhi (meditation) state, and the Vedas come to us through the tradition of learning and listening. Therefore the Vedas are also known as Śruti (Śruti means what is heard). The Smṛti generally means that scripture which records the codes of conduct for the society. The Smṛti has been placed in Indian tradition just after the Veda.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE VEDAS:

The term 'Veda' is derived from the root 'vid' with the suffix 'ach'. That means spiritual knowledge, subject of knowledge. The Vedas are four in number, viz; Ṛg Veda, Yaju Veda, Sāma Veda and Atharva Veda. The word 'Veda' also includes Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣds and Vedāngas.

Samhītā indicates the Mantra part of the four Vedas (R̥g, Yaju, Sāma and Atharva). The Sanskrit word Mantra is derived from the root 'man'. It generally means to think from the mind. Again the Mantras of the Vedas are divided as Maṇḍala, Anuvāka and Sūkta. The Mantras of every Sūktas have their ṛṣi (seer), chanda (metre), devtā (deity) and Viniyoga (the use of the Mantras as the sacrificial way).

There are two Brāhmaṇas (the prose texts and rituals) and two Āranyakas (that texts which knowledge is earned in wild place) of the R̥g Veda, viz; Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and Kauṣītiki Brāhmaṇa; and Aitareya Āranyaka and Kauṣītiki Āranyaka. Again the same Veda has two Upaniṣads – Aitareya Upaniṣad and Kauṣītiki Upaniṣad. The Kauṣītiki is also known as Śamkhyāyana. The critics say that the R̥g Veda had many Brāhmaṇas in the ancient India, but only these two are available at the present time.

The fifth part of the Veda is the Vedanga. 'Vedanga' means the part or limbs of the Veda. There are six Vedangas, viz; Śikṣā (that scripture where the rules of phonological use of the Mantras of the Vedas are quoted.), Kalpa (the rituals), Nirukta (that scripture where the etymological history of the Vedic terms is quoted), Vyākaraṇa (the Vedic grammar), Chanda (the Vedic meter) and Jyotiṣa (the Vedic astronomy). The Vedangas help to recite, to know the meaning and the use of the Mantras.

The description of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in the Vedas are very interesting and meaningful. There are many kinds of deities in Hinduism. These are as follows-

- (i) Vedic Deities- these are defined or discussed by Vedas.
- (ii) Epic Deities- these are mentioned (mainly) by the two great epics of Indian literature, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. In these epics the relationship between gods and men are much closed.
- (iii) Puranic Deities- Puraṇas are the representative of the Vedas. Puraṇas help the common people to

understanding the Vedas. Puraṇas make the Vedic deities more popular (including female deities), like the Vedic deity Viṣṇu has been identified with Vāsudeva and another epic hero Kṛṣṇa, and again Puraṇas discusses the ten incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu in a different way.

There are many definitions of Vedic deities in Vedas. Mainly Ṛg Veda discusses some interesting characteristics of the Vedic deities. The Vedic hymns include many Vedic deities, i.e. Indra, Agni, Māruta, Vāk, Rudra etc. Many hymns are also noted as dialogue hymns in the Veda.

According to Veda Indra – the king of Gods, Vāyu – the God of air, Kubera - the God of wealth, Kāma Deva – the God of love, Soma Deva – the moon God, Varuṇa – the God of oceans, Viśvakarmā – the God of architect, Yamunā – river Goddess, Yama – the God of death, Rudra – the God of thunder and thunderbolt.

THE FIRE GOD AGNI:

Like above mentioned deities, the God of fire, Agni is one of the most important of the Vedic Deity. The worshippers pray him as the illuminator of the sacrifice and the messenger of gods¹. He is a close companion of Indra, and sometimes said to be his twin brother. Agni is worshipped in Ṛg Veda just after Indra (the King of deities). 200 hymns are dedicated to him. The word 'Agni' derives from 'Ag' root of Sanskrit.

Sometimes it is observed Kāśyapa and Aditi are his parents; again some where he is mentioned as the son of a queen who keeps his birth secret from her king. Another story tells that Indra and Pṛthivī are his parents. He is also said to be the son of ten mothers who are all sisters.

¹ Agnirhotā kavikratuh satyaścitraśravastamah /Devo devebhirā gamat //Ṛg Veda -1.1.5

Agni is the integral part of all sacrifices. Without Agni a priest cannot perform any sacrifice. He is called as 'Rtvik'. He is the first god, known as 'Purohita'. He is also called as 'Hota'. The fire god carries the sacrifices to the other deities and the excellent bestower of wealth.²

Agni is the well-bread for earthly beings as the illuminator. He has the capacity to brightening any dark place very smoothly. He is the protector of sacrifice and is the shining one, growing in the sacrificial altar.³

Agni is the well wisher to his worshipers as their father. He is easy for them as father. So, the worshipers pray him as their well bread⁴.

Agni, the God of Fire, carries the offering to other deities. The sacrifices made to Agni go to the deities, so he is the 'Purohita' (priest) of the gods and works as the mediator between worshiper and deities. The god of fire occupies an important and great place in the Indian hierarchy of gods, from the ancient age to today. He has been dominating all the ceremonies of a person from birth till the end of his life.

The one or two headed fire deity is represented as a red man having three legs, seven arms, six gloomy red eyes, big tummy. In his seven hands carries a spear, a fan, a cap, and many other tools used for sacrifice. Flames issues from his seven tongues with which he licks up the butter which worshiper offers to the sacrificial fire. The priest or worshiper while pouring butter in the sacrificial fire has to pronounce 'Svāhā'. Svāhā and svadhā are the consorts of Agni.

From the above discussion it can be said that Agni, the god of fire is a well-bread for human being. Without Agni performing the daily rituals and sacrifices are impossible. He is the fire, which consumes food for human beings.

² Rg Veda -1.1.1

³Rājantamadhvarāṇam gopāmṛtasya dīdivim /
Vardhamānam sve dame // Rg Veda -1.1.8

⁴ Rg Veda -1.1.9

GOD RUDRA (GOD OF THUNDERBOLT):

Rudra is a very important one among the Vedic deity. R̥g Veda mentions his as 'Vajrabāho'⁵ (wielder of the thunderbolt). But Indra is also mentioned as the god of thunderbolt many times. Rudra is the father of Marutas⁶, they are the deities of rain. There are many descriptions about the personality of Rudra R̥g Veda, which is very different to other deities. He has very powerful arms⁷, well shaped fair two lips⁸, the glom of body is like the Sun. the vehicle of Rudra is a chariot. It is mentionable that the Vedic deities have so many arms; each hand would hold some objects which would symbolize represent the various qualities and capacities of that particular deity. Some time or some h and would be empty which indicates a deferent style or character of the deity. Rudra is filled up by 'dhanur-vāna' (bow and arrow) and thunderbolt. Much time the devotees address him as the best physician who cures his devotees by bestowing the bheṣaja (medicines)⁹. But some time his appearance is very angry, cruel and destroyer and again sometime he is well-bread to his worshippers¹⁰.

The Sanskrit word 'Rudra' is derived from the root 'rud', that means 'to cry, or 'to utter loudly'. Some time Lord Śīva is also known as Rudra. But R̥g Veda discusses Rudra as a destroyer, not as Lord Śīva. The human and other living beings are very poor for his cruelty. He is the destroyer. They pray him as the chief of beings, the wielder of thunderbolt; pass the worshippers from the sin and he is the defender.¹¹ He is very dangerous, when he is filled up by thunderbolt and anger. He is

⁵ R̥g Veda -2.33.3

⁶ R̥g Veda -2.33.1

⁷ R̥g Veda -2.33.3

⁸ R̥g Veda -2.33.5

⁹ R̥g Veda -2.33.2, 2.33.4,2.33.7

¹⁰ R̥g Veda -2.33.5

¹¹ Śreṣṭho jātasya rudra śriyāsi tavastamastavasām vajrabāho /
Paṣir nah pāramamhasah svasti viśvā abhītī rapaso yuyodhi//R̥g Veda -2.33.3

very powerful, unbeatable, quick invisible, ever young and very cruel. But according to the Veda he is the well-bred for earthly living.

From the discussion it can be said that Rudra, the god of thunder and thunderbolt who has well capacity of thunder and thunderbolt. His character is very cruel, angry but he is the well-bred of earthly beings. Therefore the worshippers pray him as their defender.

The descriptions of god and goddesses in the R̥g Veda are very engrossing. The concept and the characteristics of other many deities are also discussed by the four Vedas. These Vedic deities have been recognized as the lord of the Indian people from ancient time to till date. And they believe that deities are the protector of the earthly beings.

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