

CHAPTER - II

**SUN WORSHIP IN THE
VEDIC LITERATURE**

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The worship of the Sun as a prominent deity was prevalent among almost all the ancient nations of the world, for the celestial luminary appealed greatly to their religious instincts. Sūrya was being worshipped in India from very early times. Vedic India had a vigorous tradition of Sun worship, which forms an integral part of Nature worship so prominently practiced by the Indo-Āryans. The Sun was worshipped under multiple names and forms in the Vedic tradition. Different Vedic Sun gods represent a special aspect of the Sun. Differences in functions, positions¹, aspects and times of daily worship of the Sun god as well as differences of tribes and families² among the Indo-Āryans and those of society and occupation³ among the Āryans and non-Āryans appear to have contributed to the multiplication of names and forms of the Sun god. Sacrifices were offered to the Sun god in his various aspects under different names such as Sūrya, Savitṛ, Pūṣan, Bhaga, Vivasvat, Mitra and Viṣṇu, each personifying to a greater or lesser extent the different attributes of the Sun.

I

Sūrya:

Sūrya represents primarily the round red orb of the Sun and hence is “the most concrete of the solar deities”⁴. His connection with the visible luminary orb is very intimate in the *Ṛgveda*⁵. In the *Atharvaveda*, Sūrya loses that intimacy with nature and becomes primarily a great force of magic and medicine⁶. However, in the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Upaniṣads* and *Sūtras* the orb of the Sun is regularly worshipped⁷. In the *Ṛgveda*,⁸ the

singer wishes the rising Sun to declare him sinless to Mitra and Varuṇa. Kauṣītakī used to adore the Sun god for the removal of his sin⁹. In the *Sūtra* literature also, he is prayed particularly to deliver from sin¹⁰. Sūrya is also a great healing power, obviously because of the healing qualities of his rays. In the *Ṛgveda*, he is worshipped for the removal of jaundice as well as for the eyesight¹¹. The healing aspect of Sūrya's personality was developed in fuller terms in the *Atharvaveda*. There he is prayed for a cure of yellowness of eyes, skin, teeth and nails as well as for a cure of the cough and pains of different kinds including that of heart and for the protection of the eyes¹². In the *Brāhmaṇas*, he is intimately connected with the diseases of the eyes¹³. He is also invoked for granting long life¹⁴. The Sun is the giver of rain and heat.¹⁵

The Vedic seers also ascribed to Sūrya ideas higher than those of its material form did. In the *Ṛgveda*, the Sun is described as the soul of all movable and immovable things.¹⁶ This tradition is repeated in the Vedic literature throughout.¹⁷ In the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āditya* is said to be the supreme essence of the deities and the soul of all the gods.¹⁸ In the *Upaniṣads*, developed the concept of *Puruṣa* in the Sun, which is nothing but the formless ultimate reality while the Sun is the essence of the formed and actual reality.¹⁹ Sūrya has been repeatedly identified with the universe in the later Vedic literature.²⁰

He has also been conceived as the time.²¹ In some *Ṛgvedic* hymns,²² he is described as a celestial bird called 'Garutmān' with beautiful wings (*divyaḥ suparṇa Garutmān*) while in one verse²³ he is described as a white and brilliant horse brought by *Ūṣā*. He is more often described in the *Ṛgveda* as moving in a car "sometimes drawn by one, and at other times by several, four or seven, swift and ruddy horses or mares".²⁴ His

rays were sometimes conceived as the seven horses of his chariot.²⁵ The benevolent nature of Sūrya is very much prominent in the *Ṛgveda* but the later Vedic period witnessed the development of his malevolent aspect too. *Sūrya* is the scorching Sun and is no other than the death.²⁶ If there occurs any default, Sūrya would burn down the sacrificers.²⁷

Savitṛ:

Savitṛ is “the stimulator of everything”.²⁸ He is the spiritual power of the Sun and denotes his abstract qualities. The works of impulsion, vivification, instigation and stimulation are characteristically attributed to Savitṛ. He enlightens men and stimulates their thought.²⁹ In the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, he is often prayed for impulsion. *Atharvaveda*³⁰ describes him as the lord of stimulation. In the *Brāhmaṇas*, this quality of Savitṛ has been repeatedly and emphatically mentioned.³¹ In the *Śrauta-* and the *Gṛhyasūtras*,³² the impulse of the god finds very frequent mention. Other works such as bestowing of riches, purification of sin and protection from the evil are also attributed to him. Of course, these activities remain subservient to his main work of stimulation. He is intimately connected with the sacrifices in the Vedic tradition.³³ Like Sūrya, he is pre-eminently a golden deity. His eyes, arms, hands, tongue and hair are of gold; so are his armour, chariot and its pole. Therefore, Savitṛ is not a mere abstract deity.

Savitṛ is connected with wisdom and intelligence.³⁴ He is prayed in some domestic rites for instilling of intelligence. The famous *Gāyatrī Mantra*.³⁵ known also as *Savitṛ Mantra*, which has been regarded as the valuable hymn to pay devotion to the Sun god and remained the sacred prayer of every devout Hindu for more than two thousand years, sheds much light on the nature and personality of Savitṛ. W. Jones renders it, “Let us adore the supremacy of that divine Sun, the godhead, who illuminates all, who recreates

all, from who all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress towards his holy seat".³⁶ According to Sāyaṇa, the hymn means: 'We mediate on the light which is one with Brahma; his own light which, from its consuming influence on ignorance and its consequences, is termed *bhargas* and is that which is desirable, from its being to be known or worshipped by all (the property of the supreme being, the creator of the world and the animator through the abiding spirit of all creatures). Thus, the *Mantra* contains the belief that the solar light is the symbol of ultimate reality. It is enjoined in the *Brāhmaṇas* to employ this hymn in many rituals.³⁷ It is also utilized in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* of the Atharvavedic tradition.³⁸ The *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* have interpreted it in the highest metaphysical sense.³⁹ It finds mention in the *Sūtra* literature too.⁴⁰ In addition to the *Gāyatrī Mantra*, *Ṛgveda* associates *Savitṛ* with the highest metaphysical ideas elsewhere too. *Savitṛ* has been invoked as the supreme god, the creator and the preserver, and the regulator of all movable and immovable.⁴¹ In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.12), he has been symbolically identified with the ultimate reality. These descriptions of *Savitṛ* later on contributed to the development of the Sun-sect by the sectarians.

In the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Sūtras*, *Savitṛ* is the chief deity in the initiation ceremony. Owing to his connection with stimulation, sacrifices and wisdom, the intelligentsia of the Vedic society⁴² seemingly favoured him. In the later Vedic literature,⁴³ the intellectual classes, particularly the *Brāhmaṇas*, are frequently referred to as considering *Savitṛ*-worship by means of the *Gāyatrī* hymn as essential for spiritual upliftment. The oblations to *Savitṛ* are to be given at the house of a carver.⁴⁴

Pūṣan:

Pūṣan signifies the benevolent power of the Sun, manifested chiefly as a pastoral deity. He has been intimately connected with cattle and pastoral life in the *Ṛgveda*.⁴⁵ He is connected with the prosperity of cattle in the later Vedic literature too.⁴⁶ He takes care of cattle so that they may not be dashed to pieces in the ravine, brings them home safely, when they have gone astray, and in general, restores lost things. Pūṣan is intimately connected with paths in the *Ṛgveda*.⁴⁷ He is a guardian of the roads, which is a characteristic feature.⁴⁸ He knows the roadways and protects his devotees from dangers such as wolves and robbers. He is intimately connected with a particular class of people known as *Paṇis*⁴⁹ who were traders and most probably non-Āryans.⁵⁰ He has been asked to generate generosity in their hearts so that they become complacent towards the priests. He has a beard and braided hair. He travels in a chariot drawn by a goat⁵¹ and he carries a golden spear, an awl, and a goad. His favourite food is *karambha* ("gruel"). He is connected with marriage in the wedding hymn.⁵² He is invoked to lead the bride safely.⁵³ There is no growth of his personality in the later Vedic literature except his spiritualization in the *Upaniṣads*. The Bharadvājas are special priests of Pūṣan in the *Ṛgveda*. The oblations to Pūṣan are to be given at the house of a divider.⁵⁴

Mitra:

Mitra (Irānian Mithra) is identical with Mithra of the Indo-Irānian Sun god.⁵⁵ In the *Ṛgveda*, he is so closely associated with Varuṇa that he has virtually lost his independent stature. Only one hymn⁵⁶ is exclusively devoted to him, where it is stated that 'he brings men together by the utterance of his voice, and watches the tillers with unwinking eye'. According to MacDonnell,⁵⁷ the bringing of men together is a distinctive

feature of Mitra in the Vedic literature. Ṛgvedic evidence points to Mitra as the representative of the beneficent aspect of the Sun as suggested by the name Mitra which originally meant “an ally”. In the *Ṛgveda* (VII.62.4), he is mentioned as the dearest friend of the people. The later Vedic literature also refers to his friendly nature.⁵⁸

He attains independence in the later Vedic literature. In the *Atharvaveda*, Mitra is represented as uncovering in the morning what has been covered by Varuṇa (IX.3.18). The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* also directly refers to Mitra as the god of the day and Varuṇa as that of the night.⁵⁹ This view prevails in the *Brāhmaṇas* too. Sāyaṇa⁶⁰ and other commentators regarded Mitra as the presiding deity of the day as well. It is only in the later Vedic literature that Mitra appears as a god of concord and agreement.⁶¹

Viṣṇu:

Viṣṇu is the most interesting of the different solar divinities, as he became one of the principal constituents of the composite god of the Vaiṣṇava religion. The main characteristic of his nature is his three steps. Exclusive epithets like *Urugāya* (wide going), *Urukrama* (wide going) and *Vikrama* meaning swift motion are applied to him several times in the Vedic literature. He is the personification of the swift-moving Sun.⁶² Two of his steps are visible. However, the third or highest is invisible, far beyond the flight of birds, and is as an eye fixed in heaven, shining brightly down. It is the supreme power in the universe and three worlds are engulfed in it. Viṣṇu traverses three regions by his three strides.⁶³ This is a characteristic quality of him in the Vedic literature throughout.⁶⁴ Śākapūṇī, a predecessor of Yāska, regards these three strides as the course of the Sun through three divisions of the universe, earth, air and heaven.⁶⁵ Aurṇāvābha, another predecessor of Yāska (*Nirukta*, 12.19) takes them to mean the rising, the culminating and

the setting of the Sun. Modern scholars like Max Muller, Keith, Wilson, Roth, MacDonnell and Kaegi favour the latter view. He took his three steps to protect the man in distress, to provide him a dwelling.⁶⁶ In the *Brāhmaṇas*, he is said to assume the dwarf form in order to help the god against the demons.⁶⁷

Viṣṇu sets in motion, like a revolving wheel, his ninety steeds (days)⁶⁸ with their four names, 'an allusion probably to the three hundred and sixty days of the year divided into four seasons. It is significant to note that here Viṣṇu has been compared with *cakra*, the symbol of the Sun god, which became one of the prominent emblems of Viṣṇu in the later mythology. The most outstanding heroic deeds performed by Viṣṇu were two: firstly, he helped Indra with whom he is closely associated in the battle with Vṛtra, and secondly he took three strides in order to traverse the whole world.

Viṣṇu, from the very beginning, was popular among the Āryan masses as the god of productivity. So prominent is his quality as the great source of fertility, procreation and vegetation in the Vedic and the post-Vedic literature that many consider him primarily as the god of fertility. In the *Ṛgveda*, he is frequently invoked for bestowal of food.⁶⁹ The later Vedic literature also associate him with the food as well as plants.⁷⁰ In his invocation with other deities, he is invoked to promote conception.⁷¹ He is invoked in the conception rite for laying the womb.⁷² He is a protector of embryos. It is said in the later Vedic literature that he blesses his worshippers with children.⁷³ Thus, he is also a god of fertility and productivity and this, perhaps, accounts for his being called *Śipivīṣṭa*.

Vivasvān:

Vivasvān appears to have originally represented the rising Sun. He was also looked upon by the hymnists as the first sacrificer and the ancestor of the human race. He is the

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husband of Tvaṣṭrī, the daughter of Tvaṣṭru, the architect of the gods. He is believed to protect one from Yama. The Vedic legend⁷⁴ about the marriage of Saraṇyu, the daughter of Tvaṣṭā, with Vivasvān was obviously the basis of the elaborate story current in the Epics, and the Purāṇic story about Sūrya marrying Saṁjñā, the daughter of Viśvakarmā, her desertion of Sūrya after leaving with him her shadow (Chāyā) due to her inability to bear her husband's excessive brilliance and Viśvakarmā's attempt to reduce it in order that his daughter might endure it.

The Ādityas:

Most of the deities mentioned above along with a few others like Amśa, Dakṣa, Dhātṛī, Mārtaṇḍa, etc. came to constitute, in different groupings and different contexts, a special class of gods collectively known as the Ādityas, 'sons of Aditi', though Aditi was also looked upon as the mother of all the other Vedic divinities. Originally, six Ādityas are mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*: Mitra, Aryamā, Bhaga, Varuṇa, Dakṣa and Amśa.⁷⁵ However, the number increased from six to seven by the entry of Sūrya and to eight by the inclusion of Mārtaṇḍa. Eight Ādityas also occur in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*. In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*,⁷⁶ the names of eight Ādityas are mentioned as Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Amśa, Bhaga, Dhātṛī, Indra and Vivasvat. Owing to different traditions, there has been difference in the list of the Ādityas. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* at one place fixes their number at eight including Mārtaṇḍa, while in two other passages,⁷⁷ it raises the number to twelve and identifies them in this context with the 12 months. However, their names have not been enumerated. The identification of the Sun god with the Time is a marked feature of Sun worship of the later Vedic era. The Epics, Purāṇas and other later texts accept the number twelve. Many of the solar deities of the



Vedic period are found here. Later, the worship of the twelve Ādityas along with that of the Navagrahas (the nine planets) came to occupy an important place in the religious life of the Hindus.

Mitra: Mitra, one of the Ādityas, has already been discussed.

Aryaman: Aryaman, also an Indo-Irānian deity, is a less defined aspect of Sūrya and so much destitute of individual traits that in the '*Naighaṇṭuka*' he is not included in the list of the gods. According to Wilson, Aryaman presides over twilight.⁷⁸ He is described as the animator of humankind.⁷⁹ His friendly nature is referred to in the *Ṛgveda*⁸⁰ and finds mention in the *Atharvaveda* too.⁸¹ Thus, the conception of Aryaman seems to have differed but little from that of the greater Āditya, Mitra. Aryaman, which means chivalry, is the chief of *Pitṛs*

Bhaga: According to Yāska,⁸² Bhaga is the presiding deity of the forenoon. However, its association with the Sun is not very clear. The name means 'dispenser' or 'giver' and is of Indo-European origin. He is also regularly conceived in the Vedic hymns as 'a distributor of wealth' usually the gift of Indra and Agni, the chief leader of rites⁸³ and the sustainer of the world.⁸⁴

Aṁśa: Aṁśa has also no individual personality. He is almost synonymous with Bhaga, expressing both the concrete sense of 'share, portion' and that of 'apportioner'.

Dakṣa: Dakṣa was considered with Aditi as the universal parent representing the luminous sky.⁸⁵ It fits in with his description in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁸⁶ as Prajāpati.

Varuṇa: Varuṇa is described as a 'very wise son of Aditi'⁸⁷ and the chief of the Ādityas in the Vedic literature. Mostly, he is described and invoked along with Mitra, and only sometimes with other gods. He seems to represent the luminous encompassing sky.⁸⁸

Sāyana,⁸⁹ the well-known commentator of the Vedas, however, remarks that the setting Sun alone is called Varuṇa. He causes the night by his departure.

Sūrya: Sūrya - the seventh Āditya has already been described.

Mārtaṇḍa: Mārtaṇḍa, the eighth Āditya has almost no individual feature. It is only said of him that he was born from a dead egg and was thrown away by Aditi. He is mentioned just as a name of the Sun god in the later Vedic literature.⁹⁰ It is suggested by MacDonnell that he is a representative of the setting Sun.⁹¹

Aśvins: The character of these two deities, always mentioned in one name Aśvins, is not well defined. The most marked feature is that the Aśvins are twins and inseparable generally.⁹² Yāska takes the Aśvins to be the twilight before dawn: half-dark, half-light. However, he has also quoted alternative views of his predecessors.⁹³ Some considered them as the heaven and earth, others as the day and night and some others as the Sun and the moon while the legendary writers or writers of history regarded them as two kings, performers of holy acts. However, their solar character is affirmed by their connection with Ūṣā (Dwan), Sūrya and Vivasvat. Ūṣā who is probably their sister comes in their wake. Suryā, daughter of Sūrya, is their wife and accompanies them on their car.⁹⁴ The car of the Aśvins is golden or Sun-like⁹⁵ in all its various parts and traverses heaven and earth in a single day as the cars of the Sun and Ūṣā are also said to do. They are the sons of Vivasvat and Saraṇyū, daughter of Tvaṣṭṛ.⁹⁶

The attributes 'rudravartanī' (having a red path) and 'hiraṇyavartanī' (golden pathed) are peculiar to the Aśvins. They reveal the light aspect of the Aśvins' personality. The close connection of the Aśvins with horses as their name as well as other connections is again a pointer in the same direction. They appear in the early dawn⁹⁷ when they yoke

their horses to their car and descend to earth to receive the adorations and offerings of their votaries.

The Aśvins are connected with marriage, production and love.⁹⁸ They are invoked along with several other gods to bestow fertility on the bride.⁹⁹ They gave the wife of a eunuch a child and made the barren cow yield milk.¹⁰⁰ They are responsible for the rain so essential for the fertility of the vegetative world.¹⁰¹ They are divine physicians with several Ṛgvedic legends of miraculous cures to their credit. These legends illustrate their role as the physicians for diseases such as blindness in the main or restoring youthful vigour, helping young maiden in production and works connected with procreative potency. In the later Vedic literature also, they are the physicians restoring the eyesight and other diseases.¹⁰² In the *Upaniṣad*, the Aśvins are mentioned sparingly but wherever they find reference is in connection with the procreation.¹⁰³ The character of charioteers attributed to them in the *Ṛgveda* is maintained in the later Vedic literature. There is a reference in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* to the effect that the oblations for the Aśvins should be offered in the house of the charioteer.¹⁰⁴

In the later Vedic literature, it is found that the position of the Aśvins came to be degraded and the orthodox circles looked down upon them. The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* mentions that at the beginning, the Aśvins did not drink *Soma* and it was later that they acquired the habit of drinking *Soma*. A bad Brāhmaṇa who desires to drink *Soma* offers prayer to them. In a similar way, the *Brāhmaṇas* inform that the deities did not invite them at the sacrifice as they mixed with the human beings too much. The position of the Aśvins declined in the later Vedic age probably because of too much emphasis on their fertility aspect. The orthodox circles regarded this field as a private and closed book and

therefore, did not like this aspect of them, which came to be more prominent in the post-Vedic era.

II

The Sun was also adored in theriomorphic, fetishistic and symbolic forms in the Vedic period. These aspects were, however, not very important.

Behind the anthropomorphic forms of some solar gods, probably there may have been some animals. The Aśvins seem to have the horses, Pūṣan the goats and Viṣṇu the bird in the background of their personalities.¹⁰⁵ In addition to these identifications of the Sun gods with the animals, there were a variety of animal-fetishes of the solar deities in the Vedic worship. These fētishes, no doubt, played a minor role.

The horse in general is a symbol of the Sun god. This becomes evident from his several descriptions in the *Ṛgveda*¹⁰⁶ and in the later Vedic literature.¹⁰⁷ It is said that the dawn leads a white steed.¹⁰⁸ The *Brāhmaṇas* have directly identified the Sun with the horse.¹⁰⁹ In the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, horse was employed as the symbol of the Sun as the lord of the heaven.¹¹⁰ The bull is another symbol of the Sun god in the Vedic literature. Sūrya has been called a bull in the *Ṛgveda*.¹¹¹ In the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*¹¹² and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*,¹¹³ the Sun has again been described as the bull. In many Atharvavedic rites, the bull used to be employed as the symbol of the Sun-god.¹¹⁴ The bull represents the procreative potency of the Sun.¹¹⁵ The goat appears to have been another animal-fetish of the Sun god. According to MacDonnell, Pūṣan was specially associated with the goat. The bird in general was also symbolic of the Sun god due to its fast speed. Frequent comparison is found in the *Ṛgveda*¹¹⁶ between the Sun and a few birds such as an eagle, a swan, a falcon etc. The Sun has been referred to a number of

times as a particular bird '*Suparṇa-Garutmat*' (probably a mythical bird) or simply *Suparṇa*. In the later Vedic literature also, such descriptions occur.

Besides animals, various material objects were also employed in the Vedic times to symbolize the Sun god. The wheel served as a well-liked symbol of the Sun god. It represented both the shape and motion of the Sun.¹¹⁷ The wheels of the Sun's car are too often referred to in the *Ṛgveda*.¹¹⁸ The wheel was also frequently used as a symbol representing the Sun in the Vedic rituals¹¹⁹ such as the *Vājapeya* sacrifice or the ritual of laying the sacrificial fire or the solstice-festival. A golden disc as well as simple gold was also employed to symbolize the Sun god in the Vedic ritual.¹²⁰ The practice might have originated in the Ṛgvedic age. In the Vedic rituals, a gold plate served as the symbol of the Sun.¹²¹ In various rituals, simply the gold was employed to represent the Sun god.¹²² A firebrand was also utilized as a symbol of the Sun.¹²³

The lotus also served in the Vedic rituals¹²⁴ as a symbol of the Sun probably in his fertility aspect. Lotus appears to be connected with the Sun in the *Atharvaveda*.¹²⁵ A circular white hide also symbolizes of the Sun god.¹²⁶ The white colour, sacred to the Sun god, also served as his symbol. Generally, a white horse¹²⁷, a white cow¹²⁸, or a white round skin¹²⁹ is used to represent the Sun.

Material objects like the wheel, the disc, the lotus etc. that served as symbols of the Sun god in the Vedic rituals are found on numerous early coins,¹³⁰ some of which may be dated in the later Vedic age.¹³¹ These representations might have been encouraged by the Vedic tradition. These material objects symbolized the Sun god only during their employment in the rituals and therefore, they tend to command importance as ritual components than as icons. However, they may be taken to be the precursor of later

images. The general trend of the Vedic society as indicated in the Vedic literature seems to be aniconic.¹³² The aniconic tradition of the *Ṛgveda* goes on in the later Vedic period too. However, it is evident from the use of symbols as Sun-fetishes in the Vedic rituals that the tradition of the worship of the Sun has moved forward from the purely aniconic tradition to the semi-iconic phase as these *vimbas* or *Sandris pratikṛti* served as temporary icons of the Sun in unconventional sense. Not only iconic tradition but also public worship by means of temples could not be developed. One thing should, however, be mentioned here. Sun in human form has been found represented on the Mauryan pottery¹³³ and actual specimen of the Sun-images of the first or 2nd Century B.C.¹³⁴ has been discovered as well. Therefore, it is not unnatural to suggest that by the last part of the *Sūtra* period the tradition of image making and worship was prevalent among a section of the people most probably outside the Vedic circle.

III

The adoration of the Sun under one name or other is important and essential in all the social and religious rites and ceremonies of the Vedic society. It shows that Sun worship was popular among the people in Vedic India. The ceremonies where the worship of the Sun was integral are the following:

The Sun is worshipped at different occasions in the marriage ceremony. Pūṣan is prayed to lead the bride safely.¹³⁵ Mitra, Viṣṇu and Sūrya along with other gods are invoked to protect the couple.¹³⁶ After marriage, on the fourth night towards the morning the husband offers oblations with prayers to the Sun for expiation.¹³⁷

In the initiation ceremony, Sun god plays a far more important role. The recitation of the *Gāyatrī* hymn is the most important part of the ceremony¹³⁸ Sūrya is prayed for bestowal of insight and radiance on the student.¹³⁹ When the charge of the student is given to the Sun, he is to be worshipped.¹⁴⁰ When the teacher takes charge of the student, many solar deities are invoked.¹⁴¹ The worship of the Sun is to be done when the studentship ends.¹⁴²

The worship of the Sun is prescribed in all the *saṁskāras*. In the *Keśānta* and *Cūḍākarman* ceremonies, Savitṛ is invoked.¹⁴³ The recitation of the hymn sacred to the Sun is prescribed for a valiant male child.¹⁴⁴ The child in his fourth month is made to look to the Sun while the adoration to the Sun continues by means of the muttering of the hymn.¹⁴⁵

The role of the Sun god is important in the daily life too. In a few *Gṛhyasūtras*, every householder is enjoined to offer oblations to the Sun god daily in the morning.¹⁴⁶ In case someone sees a bad dream,¹⁴⁷ rises after the sun-rise,¹⁴⁸ falls in some danger¹⁴⁹ or desires to win co-wives,¹⁵⁰ the worship of the Sun is to be done. Every twice-born householder is to perform the *Sandhyopāsanā*, a form of the Sun worship. The Morning Prayer along with the muttering of the *Gāyatrī Mantra* and facing towards the east should begin before the Sunrise and goes on until the disc of the Sun is on the horizon. The evening prayer commences by facing the north-east along with muttering of the *Gāyatrī* when the solar disc is about to set and it continues till the stars appear in the sky.¹⁵¹ Offer of an *arghya* to the Sun is also prescribed.¹⁵² As the *Sandhyā* was to be done according to the procedure laid down in the *Gṛhyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras* daily by every twice-

born Hindu,¹⁵³ it may be said that Sun-worship in its spiritualized form was a very important feature of social life.

In various seasonal ceremonies and festivals, Sun god figures prominently. At the partaking of the first fruits of the harvest¹⁵⁴ as well as in the house-building ceremony,¹⁵⁵ the Sun is worshipped. In many agricultural festivals¹⁵⁶ and in the funeral ceremony, the Sun is also worshipped by means of reciting the hymn propitiatory to the him.¹⁵⁷ An *Āditya-vrata* prescribed for a student is referred to in the *Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra*.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the common people, the aristocratic circles of the Vedic society also worshipped the solar deities. This is evident from the worship of the Sun in the *Agnicayana* and *Agnihotra*, employment of the solar symbolism in the *Aśvamedha* and the *Vājapeya* sacrifices as well as in the ceremony for the setting up of the sacred fires, places of the Sun gods given in the *Soma* sacrifices and offering of libations to Pūṣan, Savitṛ and Sūrya in the seasonal sacrifices.¹⁵⁹ It was beyond doubt that the Sun was not worshipped independently outside the institution of *Yajña*.

Method of Worship:

The Sun, like other deities, was worshipped through the recitation of the hymns and the offerings.¹⁶⁰ The recitation of hymns was essential in the Vedic worship. The hymns were of two types: the prayer and the praise. There are internal evidences in the *Ṛgveda* and the later Vedic literature in favour of this. The recitation of hymns sacred to the Sun is also referred to in the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Śrauta-* and the *Gṛhyasūtras*.¹⁶¹ It is said in the *Sūtras* that the hymns were to be murmured and not recited. This practice was called *japa*. There are many references in the *Gṛhyasūtras* to the *japa* of hymns for the

Sun worship. The procedures of Sun worship may be known from the study of the constituents of the *Sandhyopāsanā*, which is a type of Sun worship. Those constituents were *japa* (the muttering of the *Gāyatrī Mantra*), the *arghya*, the *ācamana* (cleansing the mouth), the *prāṇāyama* (the inhalation and exhalation of the air), the *mārjana*, the *aghamarṣana* and the *upasthāna*.¹⁶² Emphasis is laid on the *japa* in the *Gr̥hyasūtras* but in the *Dharmasūtras* elaborate rules have been evolved for other elements.¹⁶³ As the *Sandhyopāsanā* was the ideal worship for every twice born householder, it may be suggested that the general worship of the Sun god necessitated these procedures as well.

The offerings consisted either of the oblations or of the libations. The oblations consisted of clarified butter poured on fire while the libation was that of the *Soma* juice in the fire, on the ground or on the sacred grass strewn on the floor. The libation of *Soma* juice was an essential part of the Vedic ritual and all the solar deities were connected with it. References are found in the Vedic literature of the oblations of clarified butter to the Sun gods.¹⁶⁴ Salutations are offered and meditations are addressed to *Sūrya*¹⁶⁵ and *Savitṛ*.¹⁶⁶ It is enjoined that the horses of the Sun are also to be saluted.¹⁶⁷ Meditation devoted to the Sun also finds frequent mention in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (II.9). Beholding of the light of *Sūrya* is also prescribed. According to the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* (I.2), the worshippers are supposed to gaze on the solar orb. The worship of the Sun was essentially domestic, as the entire ceremony was performed in the house of the worshippers. It was non-sectarian too, as various deities were simultaneously invoked and many of them in turn were praised as the supreme deities. No reference is made to any temple or any place of community-worship in the early Vedic literature.

Worship of the Sun is prescribed for once (in the morning), twice (in the morning and the evening) or thrice (at the dawn, the noon and the evening) in a day. Three occasions of Sun worship are indicated even in the *Ṛgveda*. According to *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the hymns sacred to the Sun god should be recited in keeping with his movement. Sun worship for twice a day (in the morning and in the evening) is mentioned in *Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa*.¹⁶⁸ Three occasions of Sun worship is referred to in the *Upaniṣads* as well. Kauśītaki used to adore the Sun in the morning, at midday and in the evening.¹⁶⁹ Worship of the Sun as the symbol of *Brahman* is also prescribed at seven different times of the day.¹⁷⁰ These seven times are as follows: the pre-rise, the post-rise, the cow-gathering, the mid-day, the past mid-day, past afternoon and the post-sunset. It seems that in the beginning, the *Sandhyopāsanā* used to be performed twice - in the morning and in the evening,¹⁷¹ but later, it was to be done for three times - the morning, the noon and the evening.¹⁷²

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