

CHAPTER - II

**SUN WORSHIP IN THE
VEDIC LITERATURE**

SUN WORSHIP IN THE VEDIC LITERATURE

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-Aryans. 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-Aryans and those of society and occupation³ among the Aryans and non-Aryans 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*, *Savitri*, *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 *Rigveda*⁵. In the *Atharvaveda*, *Sūrya* loses that intimacy with nature and becomes primarily a great force of magic and medicine⁶. However, in the Brāhmaṇas, Upanisads and Sūtras the orb of the Sun is regularly worshipped⁷. In the *Rigveda*,⁸ the

singer wishes the rising Sun to declare him sinless to Mitra and Varuṇa. Kauṣītākī 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 *Rigveda*, 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 *Rigveda*, 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 *Rigvedic* hymns,²² he is described as a celestial bird called '*Garutmān*' with beautiful wings (*divyah 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 *Rigveda* 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 *Rigveda* 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

Savitri:

Savitri 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 *Savitri*. He enlightens men and stimulates their thought.²⁹ In the *Taittirīya Samhitā*, he is often prayed for impulsion. *Atharvaveda*³⁰ describes him as the lord of stimulation. In the *Brāhmaṇas*, this quality of *Savitri* has been repeatedly and emphatically mentioned.³¹ In the *Śrauta* and the *Grihyasūtras*,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, *Savitri* is not a mere abstract deity.

Savitri is connected with wisdom and intelligence.³⁴ He is prayed in some domestic rites for instilling of intelligence. The famous *Gāyatri Mantra*,³⁵ known also as *Savitri Mantra*, which has been regarded as the valuable hymn to pay devotion to the Sun god and remained the sacred morning prayer of every devout Hindu for more than two thousand years, sheds much light on the nature and personality of *Savitri*. 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*, *Rigveda* associates *Savitri* with the highest metaphysical ideas elsewhere too. *Savitri* has been invoked as the supreme god, the creator and the preserver, and the regulator of all movable and immovable.⁴¹ In the *Cāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.12) he has been symbolically identified with the ultimate reality. These descriptions of *Savitri* later on contributed to the development of the Sun-sect by the sectarians.

In the Brāhmaṇas and the Sūtras, *Savitri* 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 Brahmanas, are frequently referred to as considering *Savitri*-worship by means of the *Gāyatrī* hymn as essential for spiritual upliftment. The oblations to *Savitri* are to be given at the house of a carver.⁴⁴

Pusan:

Pusan 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 *Rigveda*.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 and brings them home safely, when they have gone astray and in general, restores lost things. Pusan is intimately connected with paths in the *Rigveda*.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 *Panis*⁴⁹ who were traders and most probably non-Aryans.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 Upanisads. The Bharadvajas are special priests of Pusan in the *Rigveda*. The oblations to Pusan are to be given at the house of a divider.⁵⁴

Mitra:

Mitra (Iranian Mithra) is identical with Mithra of the Indo-Iranian Sun god.⁵⁵ In the *Rigveda*, he is so closely associated with Varuna 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. Rigvedic 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 *Rigveda* (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 Varuna (IX.3.18). The *Taittiriya Samhita* also directly refers to Mitra as the god of the day and Varuna as that of the night.⁵⁹ This view prevails in the Brahmanas too. Sayana⁶⁰ 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

Visnu:

Visnu is the most interesting of the different solar divinities, as he became one of the principal constituents of the composite god of the Vaisnava religion. The main characteristic of his nature is his three steps. Exclusive epithets like *Urugaya* (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. Visnu traverses three regions by his three strides.⁶³ This is a characteristic quality of him in the Vedic literature throughout.⁶⁴ Sakapuni, a predecessor of Yaska, regards these three strides as the course of the Sun through three divisions of the universe, earth, air and heaven.⁶⁵ Aurnavabha, another predecessor of Yaska (*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 Brahmanas, he is said to assume the dwarf form in order to help the god against the demons.⁶⁷

Visnu 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 Visnu has been compared with *Cakra*, the symbol of the Sun god, which became one of the prominent emblems of Visnu in the later mythology. The most outstanding heroic deeds performed by Visnu were two: firstly, he helped Indra with whom he is closely associated in the battle with Vritra, and secondly he took three strides in order to traverse the whole world.

Visnu, from the very beginning, was popular among the Aryan 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 Rigveda, 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 *Sipivista*.

Vivasvan:

Vivasvan 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 husband of Tvastri, the daughter of Tvastru, the architect of the gods. He is believed to protect one from Yama. The Vedic legend⁷⁴ about the marriage of Saranyu, the daughter of Tvasta, with Vivasvan was obviously the basis of the elaborate story current in the Epics, and the Puranic story about Surya marrying Samjna, the daughter of Visvakarma, her desertion of Surya after leaving with him her shadow (Chaya) due to her inability to bear her husband's excessive brilliance and Visvakarma's attempt to reduce it in order that his daughter might endure it.

The Adityas:

Most of the deities mentioned above along with a few others like Amsa, Daksa, Dhatri, Marttanda, etc. came to constitute, in different groupings and different contexts, a special class of gods collectively known as the Adityas, 'sons of Aditi', though Aditi was also looked upon as the mother of all the other Vedic divinities. Originally, six Adityas are mentioned in the *Rigveda*: Mitra, Aryama, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksa and Amsa.⁷⁵ However, the number increased from six to seven by the entry of Surya and to eight by the inclusion of Marttanda. Eight Adityas also occur in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Taittiriya Samhita*. In the *Taittiriya Brahmana*,⁷⁶ the names of eight Adityas are mentioned as Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, Amsa, Bhaga, Dhatri, Indra and Vivasvat. Owing to different traditions, there has been difference in the list of the Adityas. The *Satapatha Brahmana* at one place fixes their number at eight including Marttanda, 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, Puranas 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 Adityas 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 Adityas, has already been discussed in the foregoing pages.

Aryaman: Aryaman, also an Indo-Iranian deity, is a less defined aspect of Surya and so much destitute of individual traits that in the '*Naighantuka*' 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 *Rigveda*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 Aditya, Mitra. Aryaman, which means chivalry, is the chief of *Pitris*

Bhaga: According to Yaska,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

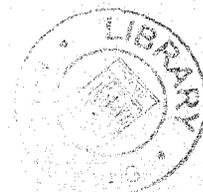
Amsa: Amsa has also no individual personality. He is almost synonymous with Bhaga, expressing both the concrete sense of 'share, portion' and that of 'apportioner'.

Daksa: Daksa was considered with Aditi as the universal parent representing the luminous sky.⁸⁵ It fits in with his description in the *Satapatha Brahmana*⁸⁶ as Prajapati.

Varuna: Varuna is described as a 'very wise son of Aditi'⁸⁷ and the chief of the Adityas in the Vedic literature. Mostly, he is described and invoked along with Mitra, and

22 NOV 2012

241020



only sometimes with other gods. He seems to represent the luminous encompassing sky.⁸⁸ Sayana,⁸⁹ the well-known commentator of the Vedas, however, remarks that the setting Sun alone is called Varuna. He causes the night by his departure.

Surya: Surya- the seventh Aditya has already been described.

Marttanda: Marttanda, the eighth Aditya 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

Asvins: The character of these two deities, always mentioned in one name *Ásvins*, is not well defined. The most marked feature is that the *Ásvins* are twins and inseparable generally.⁹² Yaska takes the *Ásvins* 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 *Usas* (*Dwan*), *Surya* and *Vivasvat*. *Usas* who is probably their sister comes in their wake. *Suryā*, daughter of *Surya*, is their wife and accompanies them on their car.⁹⁴ The car of the *Asvins* 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 *Usa* are also said to do. They are the sons of *Vivasvat* and *Saraṇyū*, daughter of *Tvaṣṭri*.⁹⁶

The attributes '*rudravartani*' (having a red path) and '*hiranyavartani*' (golden pathed) are peculiar to the *Asvins*. They reveal the light aspect of the *Asvins*' personality. The close connection of the *Asvins* 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 Asvins 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 Rigvedic 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 Upanisads, the Asvins are mentioned sparingly but wherever they find reference is in connection with the procreation.¹⁰³ The character of charioteers attributed to them in the *Rigveda* is maintained in the later Vedic literature. There is a reference in the *Taittiriya Samhita* to the effect that the oblations for the Asvins should be offered in the house of the charioteer.¹⁰⁴

In the later Vedic literature, it is found that the position of the Asvins came to be degraded and the orthodox circles looked down upon them. The *Taittiriya Samhita* mentions that at the beginning, the Asvins did not drink *Soma* and it was later that they acquired the habit of drinking *Soma*. A bad Brahmana who desires to drink *Soma* offers prayer to them. In a similar way, the *Brahmanas* inform that the deities did not invite them at the sacrifice as they mixed with the human beings too much. The position of the Asvins 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

Theriomorphic, Fetishistic and Symbolic Forms of the Sun Gods:

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 Asvins seem to have the horses, Pusan the goats and Visnu 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 fetishes, 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 *Rigveda*¹⁰⁶ and in the later Vedic literature.¹⁰⁷ It is said that the dawn leads a white steed.¹⁰⁸ The *Brahmanas* have directly identified the Sun with the horse.¹⁰⁹ In the *Asvamedha* 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. Surya has been called a bull in the *Rigveda*.¹¹¹ In the *Taittiriya Samhita*¹¹² and the *Satapatha Brahmana*,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, Pusan 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 Rigveda¹¹⁶ 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 'Suparna-Garutmat' (probably a mythical bird) or simply Suparna. 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 *Rigveda*.¹¹⁸ The wheel was also frequently used as a symbol representing the Sun in the Vedic rituals¹¹⁹ such as the *Vajapeya* 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 Rigvedic 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 or a white cow¹²⁸ or a white round skin¹²⁹ is used to represent the Sun.

Fetishes as Precursors of Icons:

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 coins¹³⁰ 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 *Rigveda* 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 pratikriti* 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 *Sutra* period the tradition of image making and worship was prevalent among a section of the people most probably outside the Vedic circle.

III

Social aspect of Sun Worship:

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. Pusan is prayed to lead the bride safely.¹³⁵ Mitra, Visnu and Surya 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 *Gayatri* hymn is the most important part of the ceremony.¹³⁸ Surya 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 *samskāras*. In the *Kesanta* and *Cudakarman* ceremonies, Savitri 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 *Grihyasutras*, 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 *Samdhyopasana*, a form of the Sun worship. The Morning Prayer along with the muttering of the *Gayatri 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 *Gayatri*

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 *Samdhya* was to be done according to the procedure laid down in the *Grihyasutras* and *Dharmasutras* 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 *Aditya-vrata* prescribed for a student is referred to in the *Gobhila Grihyasutra*.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 *Asvamedha* and the *Vajapeya* 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 Pusan, Savitri and Surya in the seasonal sacrifices.¹⁵⁹ It was beyond doubt that the Sun was not worshipped independently outside the institution of *Yajna*.

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 *Rigveda* and the later Vedic literature in favour of this. The recitation of hymns sacred to the Sun is also referred to in the *Brahmanas*, the *Srauta* and the *Grihya-sutras*.¹⁶¹ It is

said in the *Sutras* that the hymns were to be murmured and not recited. This practice was called *japa*. There are many references in the *Grihya-sutras* 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 *Samdhyopasana*, which is a type of Sun worship. Those constituents were *japa* (the muttering of the *Gayatri Mantra*), the *arghya*, the *acamana* (cleansing the mouth), the *pranayama* (the inhalation and exhalation of the air), the *marjana*, the *aghamarsana* and the *upasthana*.¹⁶² Emphasis is laid on the *japa* in the *Grihya-sutras* but in the *Dharma-sutras* elaborate rules have been evolved for other elements.¹⁶³ As the *Samdhyopasana* 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 *Surya*¹⁶⁵ and *Savitri*.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 *Chandogya Upanisad* (II.9). Beholding of the light of *Surya* is also prescribed. According to the *Maitri Upanisad* (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

DONATED IN THE
SACRED MEMORY
OF (MM) PT PRASANNA K^o TARKANIDHI
BY PROF P.K BHATTACHARYYA
N.B.U (RETD)

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.

Occasions of Sun- Worship:

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 *Rigveda*. According to *Aitareya Brahmana*, 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 *Kausitaki Brahmana*.¹⁶⁸ Three occasions of Sun worship is referred to in the Upanisads as well. Kausitaki 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 *Samdhyopasana* 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

Thus, Sun worship was in the nature of the *yajna*, which consisted of the recitation of the hymns of the praise or the prayer and the offerings of the oblation of clarified butter poured on fire and libation of Soma juice sprinkled either on the fire or sometimes on the ground or sometimes on the sacred grass strewed on the floor. There was no real development of the concept of the icon proper and the temple, though the tradition of the symbol-worship came to develop. The worship of the Sun god was exclusively domestic as the entire ceremony was performed in the house of the

worshipper. It was also of non-sectarian character because many gods were invoked simultaneously and many of them in turn were lauded as the highest. The same priest glorifies the Sun as the supreme god and the next moment, he eulogizes another divinity as the highest. From the beginning, it was enjoined to worship the Sun either once or twice or thrice. Salutation and meditation also formed the method of worship. Further, *Suryadarsana* is also prescribed. In the Sutras, we find the evolution of a distinct form of Sun worship involving the *japa*, the *arghya*, the *marjana*, the *acamana*, the *aghamarsana* and the *upasthana*. There was also a class of Sun-worshipping saints in the Vedic society.

Notes and References

1. *Nirukta*, II. 20.
2. Keith, *RPVU*, P. 92.
3. Renou, L., *Vedic India*, Calcutta, 1957, p.56; Griswold, H.D., *The Religion of the Rigveda*, Oxford, 1923, p. 51.
4. *VM*, p. 30.
5. I. 115. 5.
6. Shende, N.J., 'Foundations of Atharvavanic Religion', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Poona, Vol. 9, pp. 222-27.
7. *PB*, XVII.9.8; *BAU*, II.5.5; *SGS*, II.14.8.
8. VII, 60. 1; 62. 2.
9. *KU*, II.7.
10. *SGS*, VI.3.4-6.
11. I.50.12; X.37.7.

12. I.22; VII.107; IX. 8; IX.22.
13. *PB*, I.3.9; *SB*, XIII.3.8.4.
14. *RV*, X.37.7; *TS*, III.3.2; *AV*, II.29.1.
15. *RV*, V.44.4; I.164.52; *VM*, p. 321.
16. *RV*, I.115, 1.
17. *AV*, XIII.2.35; *VS*, VII.42; *SB*, 4.3.4.10; *TA*, 1.7.6, II.13.1; *Nirukta*, 12.16.
18. *KB*, XX.4; *SB*, XIV.3.2.9.
19. *BAU*, II.3.1; *MU*, VI.6.
20. *TS*, II.12.1; *TB*, III.5.7.2; *AV*, VII.1.2.
21. *RV*, I.164.48; *AV*, XIV.53; *BAU*, I.2.7; *KU*, XIX.3.
22. *RV*, I.164.46.
23. *Ibid*, VII. 77.3.
24. *Ibid*, I.115.3-4; VII.63.2.
25. *Ibid*, I.50.1, 8, 9; IV.13.3; V.45.9; X.37.3.
26. *SB*, I.7.2.11. II.6.3.8; *KB*, XVIII.9.
27. *PB*, IV.6.7.
28. *Sarvasya Prasavita – Nirukta*. X. 31.
29. *RV*, I.22.7; III.62.10.
30. V.24.1.
31. *AB*, I.8; *KB*, IV.14; *PB*, I.8.1; *SB*, III. 5.3.10.
32. *SSS*, I.4.4, 5; *SGS*, I.8.21.
33. *VM*, p.34; Hopkins, E. W., *The Religions of India*, Boston, 1895, p. 46; Keith, R.P.V.U, p.106; Barth, A., *The Religions of India*, London (Tr. J.A.R. Wood), 1882,

- p. 20; Renou, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
34. *RV*, III.62.12; V.81.1, 2; II.38.10.
35. *Ibid*, III.62.10.
36. Jones, W.. *Works*. No. 2, vol. XIII, p. 367.
37. *AB*, 4.32.2; *KB*, 23.3, 26.10; *SB.*, 2.3.4, 39.
38. *GB*, 1.1.34.
39. *TA*, 1.11.2; *BAU*, 6.3.11; *MU*, 6.7.34.
40. *SSS*, 2.10.2; *SGS*. 2.5.12; *SMB*, 1.6.29; *BDS*, 2.10.17.14.
41. *RV*, IV.53.2, 6.
42. MacDonnell. *VM*, pp. 32-34.
43. *SU*, IV.18.
44. *TS*, I.88.
45. *RV*, I.5.1. 2; VI.54.5; VI.53.9.
46. *MS*, 4.3.7; *TB*, I.7.24; *SGS*, 3.9.
47. *RV*, VI.49.8; 53.1.4, 54.9; X.59.7.
48. *RV*, VI.53.1; *TS*. I.1.14.1; *SSS*, 3.5.7; *AG*, 9.8.
49. *RV*, VI.53.3. 5, 6, 7.
50. *Vedic Index*. vol. I, p. 472.
51. *RV*, VI.55.3, 4; I.38.4.
52. *Ibid*, X.85; V.35.
53. *AGS*, 1.7.19; *SGS*, 1.11.4.
54. *TS*, I.88.
55. Hodivala, S.K., *Indo-Iranian Religion*, Bombay, 1925, pp. 47-52.

56. *RV*, III.59.
57. *VM*, p. 29.
58. *TS*, IV.1.7; *AB*, III.4.
59. II.1.7, 4; VI.4.8.3.
60. Sayana on *RV*, I.89.3.
61. *TS*, II.1.8.4.
62. *VM*, p. 39.
63. *RV*, I.22.17; *AV*, 7.26.4; *SV*, I.222; *VS*, 5.15; *TS*, I.2.13.1; *MS*; I.2.9; *AB*,
1.17.7; *PB*, 20.3.2; *SB*, 1.6.8; *TB*, 1.4.3.6.
64. Bloomfield, M., *A Vedic Concordance*, p. 198.
65. *Nirukta*. XII.1.
66. *RV*, I.155.5; 155.4.
67. *AB*, VI.15f; *SB*, I.9.39; *TS*, II.1.3.1. 67.
68. *RV*, 1.21.16.6.
69. *Ibid.*, I.156.1; VII.99.6.
70. *SB*, 7.5.1.21; *MU*, 6.13.
71. *RV*, VII.36.9. X.184.
72. *SB*, 1.2.5-10.
73. *AV*, V.25.5; *GGS*, II.5.9; *HGS*, 1.25.
74. *RV*, 1, 164.
75. II.27.1.
76. I.1.9.1.
77. IV. 1.2, 8; XI. 6.3, 8.

78. Wilson, H.H., *Notes on the Rigveda*, Vol. I, p. 241.
79. *RV*, I.20.3.3.
80. *Ibid*, V.85.7
81. *AV*, I.11.1; I.18.2; III.2.3.
82. *Nirukta*, XII.13.
83. *RV*, VII.3.8.3.
84. *Ibid*, VII.3.8.2.
85. *RV*, X.72.4.5; X.5.7.
86. 2.4.4.2.
87. *RV*, I.6.2.12.
88. Keith, *RPVU*, pp. 96-98.
89. Sayana on *RV*, VII.87.1.
90. Rai, S.N., *Pauranic Dharma Evam Samaja*, (in Hindi), Allahabad, 1968, p. 53.
91. *VM*, p. 44.
92. *RV*, III.39.3; X.17.2; II.39.2, 3, 4, 5.
93. *Nirukta*, XII.1.
94. *RV*, IV.43.6; VII.69.4.
95. *Ibid*, X.85.11, 12, 15.
96. *Ibid*, X.17.2.
97. *RV*, I.157.1; II.39.2; III.158.1, 4; V.76.1; VII.69.5.
98. *RV*, X.184.2.
99. *Ibid*.
100. *Ibid*, I.112.3.

101. *Ibid*, VI.62.2.
102. *AV*, VII.53.1; II.29.6; *SB*, XII.8.2. 16; 3.14; *PB*, 7.7.
103. *BAU*, VI.4.21, 22.
104. *TS*, I.8.9.
105. *SWAI-S*, p. 151.
106. I.163.2; VII.77.3; I.50.1, 8, 9; V.45.9.
107. *SB*, VI.3.1.29; VII.3.2.10; *AB*, VI.35; *TS*, VI.6.11.6.
108. *RV*, VII.77.3.
109. *SB*, VI.3.1.29; VII.3.2.10.
110. *AB*. VIII. 20.
111. *RV*, X.189.1.
112. I.5.3.
113. *SB*. II.1.4.29.
114. *AK*. IV.38; IV.2; V.7; VI.31.
115. Coomaraswami, A.K., 'The Sun-Kiss', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, vol. 60, pp. 47-67.
116. *RV*, V.47.3; VII.60.5; X.177.1.2.
117. *VM*, p.155.
118. *RV*, I.175.4; IV.30.4; V.29.10.
119. *RPVU*, I, p. 67, II. P. 340;
120. *VM*, p. 155.
121. *PB*, XVIII.9.9; *SB*, VII 4.1.10; *TS*, IV.2.8.
122. *SB*, III.9.2.9; XII.4.4.6; *AB*, VII.12.

123. *SB*, XII.4.6.
124. *PB*, XVIII.9.6-8; *AGS*, I.15.2; *ASS*, XVI.22.2.
125. *AV*, XIII.3.10.
126. *PB*, V.5.17.
127. *AB*, VI.35.
128. *TS*, V.6.11.
129. Keith, AB (Tr.), *TS*, I, Cambridge, Mass, 1914, p. CXXXI.
130. Allan, J., *Catalogue of Indian Coins in the British Museum, Coins of Ancient India*, Pt. I. class II, P.XX-1-3; pt. II, p. XXII.
131. Smith, V.A., *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta including the Cabinet of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. I., p. 132.
132. *DHI*, pp. 42, 58.
133. *JISOA.*, III, No. 2, p.125.
134. *DHI*, p. 432.
135. *AGS*, I.7.19; *SGS*, 1.11.4; *GGS*, II.2.7.
136. *PGS*, 1.4.16; *GGS*, 1.11.4; *HGS*, 1.6.21.
137. *HGS*, 1.7.24; *SGS*, 1.18.2; *PGS*, 1.11.2; *GGS*, II.2.7.
138. *SGS*, II.5; *AGS*, I.21, 4-6; *PGS*, II.3.4; *HGS*, I.6.6.
139. *AGS*, I.21.4.
140. *HGS*, 1.7.13.
141. *SGS*, II.2.12; *AGS*, I.20.4; *GGS*, II.10.26.
142. *PGS*, II.6.15.
143. *HGS*, II.1.6; *PGS*, II.1.9.

144. *GG*S, II.9.10; *SG*S, I.28.15; *PG*S, I.14.5.
145. *PG*S, I.17.6.
146. *AG*S, I.9.7; *SG*S, I.3.14; *GG*S, IV.6.12.14; IV.9.4.
147. *AG*S, III.6.5; *GG*S, III.3.22.
148. *AG*S, III.7.1, 2; *GG*S, I.7.6-9.
149. *AG*S, III.11.1.
150. *Āpastamba Grihyasūtra*, 3.9.9.
151. *AG*S, III.7.4-6; *SG*S, II.9.1.
152. *MGS*, I.2.1-2.
153. Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, Poona, pp. 315-321.
154. *SG*S, III.8.7.
155. *HGS*, I.8.27.1.
156. *AG*S, IV.8; *PG*S, III.8.
157. *SG*S, IV.1.8; *AG*S, IV.6.18; *HGS*, II.5.14.3.
158. III.1.28.
159. *SWAI-S*, pp. 165-66.
160. Wilson, H.H. (Tr.), *Rigveda*, vol. I, Intr. pp. XXI-XXIII.
161. *SG*S, II.5; III.8.7; V.5; VI.4.1.
162. *SWAI-S*, p.167.
163. *BDS*, II.4. 7ff.
164. *RV*, VI.51.1; *TS*, II. 6.8.
165. *Ibid*, X.177.1.
166. *Ibid*, II.38.9, 10.

167. *Ibid*, 1.115.3.

168. II.2, II.8.

169. *KU*, II.17.

170. *CU*, II.9.8.

171. *AGS*, IV.7.4-6; *SGS*, II.9; *GDS.*, I.11.17.

172. *GGs*, IV.6.2.