

CHAPTER - III

**SUN WORSHIP IN THE  
EPIC AND THE  
PURANIC LITERATURE**

## SUN WORSHIP IN THE EPIC AND THE PURĀNIC

## LITERATURE

## I

## EPICS

The post-Buddha epoch was characterized by the growth of sects and sectarian ideologies. The religious life of the Epics,<sup>1</sup> therefore, came to be dominated by sectarianism. In keeping with the changed ambiance, the Sun-cult also underwent very important changes in its concept of the divinity and its ritual. The Sun came to be one of the eight important deities of the Epics who had a sectarian following.<sup>2</sup>

**March towards Sectarianism:**

A Sun-sect known as *Sauras* finds specific reference for the first time in the *Mahābhārata*. It is said that in the camp of the Pāndus, there were a thousand and eight others who were Sun-worshippers.<sup>3</sup> In the said Epic, there is a hymn<sup>4</sup> in praise of the Sun god having 108 names, which was finally communicated to Yudhiṣṭhira by Dhaumya.<sup>5</sup> All the characteristic features of a sectarian divinity can be traced in this legend of Sun worship by Yudhiṣṭhira. He is the highest god, the lord of Manus and Manvantaras.<sup>6</sup> In the list of 108 names, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Skanda, Yama, Varuṇa, Indra, Soma etc. are just other names of the Sun god that demonstrates his supremacy. In the all the seven worlds, there is none who can surpass him.<sup>7</sup> His names such as Aja,

Kāla, Ādideva, Carācarātmā, Sukṣātmā and Viśvakarma are communicative of his superiority and recognition with the highest metaphysical principle of the cosmos. In this context, mention is also made of the grace of the god and submission to him. This shows that the Sun god was a deity of a sect and the flow of *bhakti* was flooding the naturalistic concept of the Vedic tradition of the Sun god. In the legend of Karṇa, there are references to the *bhaktas* of the Sun god.<sup>8</sup> In the same way, the legends of Samvarṇa<sup>9</sup> represents Vasistha as praying to the Sun god in a sectarian manner. He is the cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution. In the *Āditya-hridaya Mantra* of the *Rāmāyāṇa*,<sup>10</sup> the Sun god has been identified with all the great divinities in the typical sectarian way. He is the lord of even Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa.<sup>11</sup> He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all creatures.<sup>12</sup> The development of sectarian texts, which is a fundamental feature of a sect, is also traceable in the Epics. ‘A secret *Veda* of the Sun’ has been specially mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, which was taught to Arvāvasu. It is, therefore, evident that the *Sauras* developed a *Veda* of their own that was different from the traditional Vedas. The sectarian following of the Sun god may also be traced in some of the names of historical celebrities in the *Mahābhārata*. Such names are Sūryadhvaja, Rocamāna, Amsumāna<sup>13</sup> and Sūryadatta. In ancient India, many persons used to take the name of their god because of intense devotion to him. The data in the Epics thus demonstrate the march of Sun worship towards sectarianism from the non-exclusive and naturalistic tradition of the Vedic period.

Most probably, the solar sect originated as early as two-three centuries before the Christian era as the evidences of the Epic data, Pānini, Patañjali, early Buddhist and Jaina literatures combined with that of early images and coins disclose.<sup>14</sup> The distant past of

the Sun-sect may be pushed back to the 5th-4th cent. B.C. that is the upper limit of the *Mahābhārata* and that may be the era of Pānini as well.

The solar sect seems to have been ideologically connected with the Vedic thoughts. It is said that the Sun worshippers in the camp of the Pāndus were experts in the Vedic lore.<sup>15</sup> Names such as Sūrya, Savitā, Pūṣa, Bhaga, Aryamā, Tvaṣṭā, Vivasvān, etc. in the list of 108 names are Vedic survivals in the Epic pantheon. The method of Sun worship in the Epics is also in many ways a survival of the Vedic tradition. The *japa* and other constituents of the ritual such as the *ācamana*, the *prānāyāma*, the *upasthāna*, the *arghya*, etc. are mentioned in them.<sup>16</sup> In the *Rāmāyāṇa*, a class of worshippers is referred to as worshipping the Sun by means of the *upasthāna* with their arms upstretched.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Samvarṇa adored the Sun god by asceticism with face towards the Sun.<sup>18</sup> His descriptions as the soul of the universe,<sup>19</sup> the Time and the rain-giver are continuations of the Vedic tradition.

The solar sect seems to have been developed by the indigenous traditions of *bhakti*. It is said that various non-Āryan tribes such as Siddhas, the Cāraṇas, the Gandharvas, the Yaksas, the Guhyakas, the Nāgas, the Asuras and the Rāksasas adored the Sun.<sup>20</sup> *Bhakti* finds direct mention several times in the *Mahābhārata* in connection with the Sun worship. He is adored by means of *dhūpa*, *dīpa* and *naivedya*. The worship of the Sun god in the Epics integrated the indigenous traditions of *bhakti* and *pujā* along with the Vedic tradition.

The *Mahābhārata* appears to have been familiar with the fire-Sun-worshipping Maga priests from Śākadvīpa, the advent of whom marked the beginning of new traditions in solar cult.<sup>21</sup> They are mentioned for the first time in this work. Reference is

also made to the four castes of Śākadvīpa one of which is the Magas - the Fire-worshipping priests.<sup>22</sup> The Irānian tradition of Sun worship seems to have had its impact on the solar sect of the Epics. Mihira - the Magian Sun god has been explicitly referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as one of the names of the deity and distinguished from its Indian counterpart - Mitra in the same line.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the Magian tradition of providing boots etc. to the Sun-images seems to have been mentioned in the legend of Jamadagni referring to the offer of umbrella and boots to him by Sūrya.<sup>24</sup> It is evident that the *Mahābhārata* was familiar with the Magian tradition. However, there is no significant influence of it in the Sun worship in the *Mahābhārata* except in the adoption of the name of Mihira and a few legends like those of Jamadagni and Māṭhara. In the *Rāmāyāṇa*, there is no reference to Mihira or the Magas in the *Āditya-hridaya* hymn

The solar sect found in the Epics goes unnoticed by the Greek writers. Moreover, it is not specifically mentioned either in the works of Pāṇini or of Patañjali. In view of this, it is reasonable to suggest that in the Epic period, the sect of the Sun was not very popular. Most probably, it emerged under the impact of the indigenous tradition of *bhakti* and the Magian tradition of Sun worship. The patronage given by the alien rulers like Darius, Mihirakula, Kaniska, etc.<sup>25</sup> might have also been responsible for the growth of the solar sect.

### **Humanization of the Sun's personality:**

The personality of Sūrya has been fully humanized in the Epics.<sup>26</sup> However, he is still described as a disc, a bird, a horse, or a bull.<sup>27</sup> In the *Mahābhārata*, the Sun appears in human form in connection with the legends of Arvāvasu, Karṇa, Kuntī, Yudhiṣṭhira and Jamadagni.<sup>28</sup> The Sun was allegedly present in human form when Agastya instructed

Rāma to recite *Āditya-hridaya* hymn.<sup>29</sup> He possesses hands, hair etc., drinks, makes speeches, gives knowledge, acts as witness and goes home.<sup>30</sup>

In keeping with the humanization of the Sun's personality there also developed a family round him. Tvaṣṭrī, daughter of Tvaṣṭri and also known as Samjñā and Saraṇyū, is the wife of Vivasvat.<sup>31</sup> Suvarcalā is also mentioned as a devoted consort of him. Chāyā, the shadow of Saraṇyū, though not referred to in the Epic proper, finds specific mention in the *Harivamśa* as the wife of Sūrya. Aśvins are his sons by Tvaṣṭrī,<sup>32</sup> and Śaniscara by Chāyā. Karṇa, and Yama are also his children.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Sūrya had also a few other sons. Suprajā, Sraddhā Vaivasvatī and Sāvitrī are referred to as his daughters.<sup>34</sup> Most probably some of his family-members such as Aśvinī-kūmaras-Dasra Nāsatyas<sup>35</sup> also came to be invoked along with him. Aruṇa is the charioteer of Sūrya.<sup>36</sup> Aruṇa, Māṭhara and Daṇḍa are referred to as his attendants and worshipped along with the Sun.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Names and Traits of the Sun god:**

The Epics refer to several old Sun gods such as Sūrya, Savitrī, Mitra, Pūṣan, Aśvins, Vivasvat, Viṣṇu, Bhaga and Tvaṣṭā.<sup>38</sup> However, these once-separate gods are now considered just as different names and forms of the Sun. Vibhāvasu came to be common name in the Epics.<sup>39</sup> *Ādityas*, sons of Aditi, are also referred to in the *Mahābhārata*. According to the wise, they are twelve in number. In accordance with a list of the *Mahābhārata*, the twelve *Ādityas* are Dhātā, Mitra, Aryamā, Indra, Varuṇa, Amśa, Bhaga, Vivasvān, Pūṣā, Savitā, Tvaṣṭā, and Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu, though youngest, is said to be the greatest of the *Ādityas* because of his qualities.<sup>40</sup> The twelve *Ādityas* have been identified with the twelve months of the year in the Epics too.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that the Epics were following the tradition of the Brāhmaṇas in respect of the *Ādityas*. The only

difference is that Viṣṇu emerges here as the chief of the *Ādityas*. Under the name of Sūrya or *Āditya*, the once-separated solar deities were merged into one Sun god though his different aspects were represented by different old names and new synonyms and epithets. The coming out of the Sun in *Āditya* or Sūrya as the Supreme and original solar divinity marks an exit from the past and may be considered as the Epic innovation.

The primary function of the Sun god is to drive away darkness and demons.<sup>42</sup> More prominent than his day-maker aspect is his role as the rain-giver and the corn-producer. It is said that he draws up waters for eight months during his northern course and in the remaining four months, he pours them down in the form of rain during his southern course.<sup>43</sup> From the combination of heat and water, the plants and corns are produced. Thus, the Sun is ultimately responsible for the production of food on which men subsist.<sup>44</sup> That is why the food has been described as a form of Sūrya. Yudhiṣṭhira prayed to him specifically for food, which he gave to him for twelve years.<sup>45</sup> The rain-giving aspect of Sūrya is not fully developed in the Vedic tradition though it is known. However, in the Epics this aspect is quite frequently emphasized and was taken up later on by the Purāṇas.

He is identified with Time in an equal manner. This becomes evident from his names such as *Kāla*, *Samvatsarakara*, *Kālacakrapravartaka*, *Kālādhakṣya* and *Kṣaṇa*.<sup>46</sup> The twelve *Ādityas* who are regular Sun gods in the Epics are identified with the twelfth months of the year.<sup>47</sup> He is the lord of the planets<sup>48</sup> and also identical with all the planets.<sup>48</sup> Thus the tradition of worshipping Sūrya in association with Navagrahas was initiated in the Epics.

In the Epics, the benevolent qualities of the Sun god are expressed by such epithets as *Maitreya*, *Karunānvita*, *Dhanvantari*, *Jivana*, *Kāmada* and *Prāṇadhāraka*.<sup>49</sup> However, the role of the Sun as a malevolent deity is also emphasized in both the Epics. He is the destroyer of the universe<sup>50</sup> and an evil planet.<sup>51</sup> Probably, the oppressive heat of Northern India, where the Epics were composed, had contributed towards this feature. The Sun god is a great moral and ethical force in the Epics. He is the beholder of good and bad deeds of men.<sup>52</sup> The identity of the worshipper and the worshipped is repeated when it is said that the saint approaches to enter his disc at which Vivasvat welcomes him. The glory of the saint and the glory of the Sun becomes one.<sup>53</sup>

### **Method of Sun worship:**

The recitation of hymns sacred to the Sun god formed an essential feature of the Epic worship too. Yudhiṣṭhira worshipped the Sun by repeating hymns containing 108 names of the divinity as well as by hymns of praise and prayer.<sup>54</sup> Karṇa resorted to the method of *japa* of hymns propitiatory to the Sun god. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāma* invokes the Sun by the *japa* of the *Āditya-hṛidaya* hymn.<sup>55</sup> Besides the *japa*, others constituents of the ritual are the *ācamana*, the *prāṇāyama*, the *upasthāna* etc.<sup>56</sup> The concentration and purity of mind and observance of vows involving complete fasting also constituted the ritual of Sun worship as Yudhiṣṭhira lived on air only while adoring the Sun god with devoted mind.<sup>57</sup> There is a reference in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the *munis* who observe difficult vows such as worshipping the Sun god by means of the *upasthāna* with their arms up stretched.<sup>58</sup> Similarly in the *Mahābhārata*, Samvaraṇa worshipped the Sun god by asceticism with face towards the Sun. Kuntī invoked the Sun by the power of a magic

formula. The posture at the time of the worship used to be standing with face towards the Sun.<sup>59</sup> The salutation<sup>60</sup> to the Sun god is a frequent theme in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, the *japa* of the Epic tradition is slightly different from that of the Vedic ritual. In the *japa* of the Epics, exclusive emphasis was laid upon the names of the deity while in the Vedic school the repetition was of full hymn containing praise and prayer.

Departures that are more significant may be seen in the employment of flowers, incense, garlands, lamps etc. in Sun worship in the Epics.<sup>61</sup> It is already mentioned that Sun god was completely anthropomorphized and he used to appear in human form before the worshipper. However, there is no specific mention of any image of the Sun god in the Epics.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, usual images of the Sun dating as early as the 2nd century B.C.<sup>63</sup> are found. Further, terracotta-containing figures of the Sun of still earlier period i.e. Maurya-Sunga period are available.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the tradition of Sun worship by means of images was known the Epic society<sup>65</sup> but it was not a popular creed, as it is not directly mentioned. The worship of the Sun was done at two *samdhya*s and seventh and sixth days were especially auspicious for his worship.<sup>66</sup>

In reality, the Epics continue Sun worship of the Vedic tradition along with the adaptation of non-Āryan and popular trends of the solar cult. In the Epics, Sun worship assumed greater proportions and a sect came to be developed round him. The solar sect is purely indigenous in nature though the Epics are aware of the Magian tradition. Further, in the Epics, the Sun god witnessed a free and full humanization and there emerged a fully developed family round him. He has been associated with various legends in which may be traced the origin of the conception of halo and high boots, the latter under the

Irānian influence. In spite of various names of the Sun god, there is a tendency to regard these once-separate solar gods as different names and forms of one Sun god. There are many traits of Vedic origin in Sun's personality while others presage Purāṇic trends of solar worship. Sun worship appears to be popular among all sections of the Epic society. The worship centers round the concept of *bhakti* with its paraphernalia, which is a revolutionary change from the Vedic tradition.

## II

### PURĀṆIC WORLD

The Purāṇas present a composite religion in which are blended the Vedic tradition of sacrificial religion, the semi-Vedic stream of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and other unorthodox cults and the non-Vedic thought of Śāktism and Tāntricism.<sup>67</sup> Broadly speaking, there are two main stages in the development of the composite religion.<sup>68</sup> Firstly, in the early Purāṇic works the Vedic and the *Smārta* traditions have been given prominence though the semi-Vedic thought of *bhakti*, *pujā*, *vrata*, *tīrtha* etc. are also casually mentioned. Secondly, in the later Purāṇas, which originate from the 5th-6th centuries A.D. emphasis is laid upon the glorification of the semi-Vedic and even non-Vedic divinities in a sectarian fashion. The prevalence of *bhakti*, *pujā*, *vrata*, *tīrtha*, the worship of images in temples and the influence of Tāntricism are special characteristics of this stage.<sup>69</sup>

We know very well that there had been a vigorous tradition of solar worship in the Vedic period and an indigenous school of Sun worshipper existed from the pre-Aryan times. From the first century A.D. onwards (if not earlier),<sup>70</sup> a foreign tradition of Sun

worship appears to have been quite popular in the society. After the downfall of the Vedic system and the prevalence of a foreign tradition of Sun-cult, the indigenous thought of solar cult<sup>71</sup> really presented a sort of challenge to orthodox Sun worshippers. In response, they composed this system of composite Sun-cult, which are found in many early and late Purāṇas.

### (a) EARLY PURĀNIC WORLD

#### Impact of the Vedic and Epic Tradition:

The earlier Purāṇas carry on the Vedic and *Smārta* traditions of solar worship, though minor changes and additions are found in keeping with the changed conditions. The atmospheric aspect of the Sun as seen in the Vedic literature continues to be adhered to. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the Sun appears as the chief of the planetary system.<sup>72</sup> His descriptions as the arranger of the day, night, seasons etc. show his atmospheric aspect.<sup>73</sup> He is worshipped by the *Gāyatrī* and nobody should neglect the *Samdhyopāsanā*.<sup>74</sup> According to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, he abides in the *Veda* and his self is Vedic.<sup>75</sup> He dwells in the sky.<sup>76</sup> His first form is luminous and can hardly be gazed upon because of its circle of splendour.<sup>77</sup> The concept of the twelve *Ādityas* as the twelve months of the year is popular in the early Purāṇas,<sup>78</sup> which is also Vedic in origin. Constituents of the solar ritual such as the *arghya*, the *ācamana*, the *japa*, the *samhdhyopāsanā*<sup>79</sup> etc. are also Vedic survivals. References to sacrificial oblations to the Sun god are occasionally found in the early Purāṇas.<sup>80</sup> All these are indicative of the fact that in the Sun-cult of the early

Puranas, the Vedic tradition was given a prominent place, though non-Vedic elements such as sectarianism, *bhakti*, *pujā* etc. are also traceable therein.

Epic sectarianism had its impact upon the early Purāṇic world. The legends of Yājñavalkya,<sup>81</sup> Satrājī, <sup>82</sup> Brahmā,<sup>83</sup> Aditi<sup>84</sup> and Rājyavardhana<sup>85</sup> reveal the acquaintance of the early Purāṇas with the ideologies of a Sun-sect. Most probably, this trend was inspired and nourished by the non-Āryan tradition. Significantly, the picture of solar sectarianism drawn based on early Purāṇic accounts is corroborated by the Gupta inscriptions<sup>86</sup> and iconography. Many Sun-images of the Gupta period had been found from all over Northern India<sup>87</sup> that clearly demonstrate that Sun worship had developed itself into a cult-form.

### **Names and Forms of the Sun God:**

In the early Purāṇas, Āditya emerges as the most popular name of the Sun. In the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* Purāṇas this term is enumerated along with other names of Sūrya.<sup>88</sup> In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, prayer is given to the Sun god under the name of Āditya.<sup>89</sup> Yājñavalkya invoked the Sun god in the name of Āditya too. The emergence of Āditya as the popular name of the Sun is really an achievement of the Epic-Purāṇa tradition, because the etymological derivation of Āditya in the Purāṇas is based upon the semantic principles<sup>90</sup> while in the Vedas it was derived from the name of their mother – Aditi.<sup>91</sup> The Ādityas represent a group of Sun gods in the early Purāṇas. Generally, their number has come to be fixed as twelve. In many early Purāṇas<sup>92</sup> the list of the names of these twelve Ādityas is given. A comparative study of these lists<sup>93</sup> will reveal that Viṣṇu, Indra, Dhātā, Tvastā, Pūṣā, Vivasvān, Mitra, Varuṇa, Amśa (its variants are Amśu,

Amsumān) and Bhaga are common to all lists. The other two Ādityas are taken among from these Sun gods - Savitā, Aryamān, Parjanya, Yama, Viṣṇu and Indra. One significant omission in these lists is Mārttanda. However, he finds a definite mention as a Sun god in the *Matsya Purāṇa*.<sup>94</sup> The twelve Ādityas reside in the *Sūrya-maṇḍala*<sup>95</sup> and are identified with the twelve months of the year. The concept of the Ādityas as the Time is more prominent than their being simply the Sun gods.

Many Ādityas such as Viṣṇu, Pūṣan, Savitā, Aryamā, Vivasvān and Bhaga are invoked independently of this group. Savitri, Bhāskara, Sūrya, Vivasvat, Āditya are some of the names of the Sun god<sup>96</sup> under whom Yājñavalkya prayed him.<sup>97</sup> In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* the names of the Sun-deity are mentioned as Āditya, Bhāskara, Bhānu, Savitri, Divākara, Pūṣan, Aryamā and Svarabhānu. In all these references, we do not find the name of Mihira - the Iranian name of the Sun god - most probably due to the orthodoxy of the early puranic world.

It is mainly the benevolent aspect of the Sun god, which is worshipped in the early Purāṇic period.<sup>98</sup> He draws water for the eight months and pours them down during the next four months. Due to the rain and heat produced by the Sun, the corn grows and the world subsists. Therefore, he is called *Jivana* and *Brahmasatkrita*.<sup>99</sup> He is responsible for long life as is revealed by the legend of Rājyavardhana found in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. The role of the Sun god as the liberator from the sin, the giver of long life and prosperity and remover of diseases are described in connection with the *Sauravratas*.<sup>100</sup> The malevolent aspect of the Sun also finds mention in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. To avoid the creation-destroying fiery glory of the Sun, Brahmā prayed to him and persuaded him to contract his supreme glory.<sup>101</sup> Visvakarman's paring of the Sun's rays<sup>102</sup>

probably symbolizes the curtailment of the excessive heat and the destructive power of the Sun as well. The emphasis was laid upon the benevolent aspect of the Sun in the early Purāṇas because the Purāṇic religion centered round the concept of a loving god whose grace is sought for by the devotees.<sup>103</sup>

### **Humanization of the Sun and the Iconic Tradition:**

There is also a development in his personality towards humanization in the early Pūraṇas. The legends of Satrājī, <sup>104</sup> Aditi, <sup>105</sup> Yājñavalkya <sup>106</sup> and Rājyavardhana <sup>107</sup> are important in this regard. In all these legends, the Sun appeared at first in his natural form. However, he displayed his human form when the worshipper requested for the same. With humanization, there emerged a family round the Sun god. In the early Purāṇas, the story of *Samjñā* and her shadow *Chāyā* as wives of Sūrya is referred to.<sup>108</sup> Sūrya has many children - *Yama*, *Manu* and *Yamī* by *Samjñā*; two *Aśvins* - *Dasra* and *Nāsatya* and *Revanta* from *Samjñā* in mare's form ; *Manu*, *Śanaiścara* and *Tapatī* from *Chāyā*. In some late passages of the early Purāṇas,<sup>109</sup> the attendants of the Sun god - *Daṇḍa* and *Pingala* - also find mention.

From the references to human form of the Sun it appears that the early Purāṇas were aware of the iconic tradition of the Sun god that was in vogue in the contemporary society.<sup>110</sup> However, no direct reference occur to the image of the Sun in them. Some passages of the *Vāyu*, the *Matsya* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya* Purāṇas, which refer to the Sun-image, are regarded as later interpolations.

According to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, Yājñavalkya and his pupils, having been inflicted with the sin of *Brahmahatyā* and advised by Brahmā, worshipped the god *Vālukeśvara* of

twelve beams in the city of Vāyupur, took bath in the tanks including the *Sūryakuṇḍa* and merged them into the world of Sūrya (*Sūrya-maṇḍalam*). Ten *Rākṣasas* named *Yātudhānas* who were probably indigenous tribes of India are said to have been the followers of Sūrya and roamed with the deity.<sup>111</sup> The reference to *the Rākṣasas* wandering along with the god can refer only to the icon of the Sun. Similarly, the reference to the worship of the god *Vālukeśvara* of twelve beams in the city of Vāyupur may clearly mean to refer to the worship of a Sun-image in a temple. Further, the presence of a *Sūryakuṇḍa*, which became quite common in classical and mediaeval Hindu India<sup>112</sup> and was an integral part of the Sun-temple complex, presupposes the existence of the image and temple of the Sun at this place. The legend of Yājñavalkya occurs in many early Purāṇas, which do not mention the worship of *Vālukeśvara* or *Sūryakuṇḍa*. It may, therefore, be said that these additions were interpolated in the original story in the later period. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, they were added after the 5th cent. A.D.<sup>113</sup> to meet the popular demands for image and temple. These passages seem to have been influenced by the *Śāmba Purāṇa*,<sup>114</sup> which refers to the twelfth form of the Sun that is similar to *Vālukeśvara* of twelve beams. The god *Vālukeśvara* who was no other than the Sun god is specifically mentioned as of twelve beams - a fact, which is in conformity with the Magian tradition of worshipping the Sun in his twelfth form. All these indicate that there may have been some foreign elements in the Sun-cult as referred to in these passages of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*.

*The Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>115</sup> gives detailed instructions regarding the construction of Sun-images. It indicates that the practice of making Sun-images was already an established fact. There is no reference to Iranian features such as northerner's dress, high

boots etc., which came to be incorporated in the orthodox literature from the 6th-7th cent. A.D. as is evident from the *Śāmba Purāṇa*.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the Matsya Pūraṇa passages cannot be later than the sixth cent. A.D. Since there is no mention of Sun-images in earlier Purāṇas like the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* that were composed between the 3rd-5th cent. A.D.,<sup>117</sup> these passages may be placed between 500-600 A.D.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Sun-images are referred to in connection with several solar vows but these passages cannot be earlier than the sixth cent. A.D.<sup>119</sup> However, there prevailed the custom of making Sun-images in society from first cent. A.D. onwards as is evidenced by the iconography.<sup>120</sup> They ignored it out of their orthodoxy, as the tradition of Sun-images seems to have been alien to the Vedic tradition.<sup>121</sup>

### **Solar Vows in the Early Purāṇas:**

The development of vows on an organized scale as the part of a particular religious faith is essentially a Purāṇic concept.<sup>122</sup> In the *Viṣṇu*, the *Vāyu*, the *Brahmāṇḍa* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya* Purāṇas, there are no references to solar vows, though penances and austerities, fasting in honour of the Sun god etc. are referred<sup>123</sup> to several times. *Sauravratas* are mentioned for the first time in certain late chapters of the *Matsya Purāṇa*. The worship of the Sun god by means of lotus as displayed in these *vratas* definitely bespeaks of a period, which is earlier than the time of the adoption of the Magian forms of Sun worship by means of images with Iranian features. S.N. Roy<sup>124</sup> and Srivastava<sup>125</sup> have justifiably placed those chapters on the *Sauravratas* in between 500-550 A.D. Thus, the solar vows came to be developed and incorporated in the Sun-cult at the end (500-550 A.D.) of the early Purāṇic age. The main solar vows are the

*Kalyāṇasaptamī*, *Viśokasaptamī*, *Phalasaptamī*, *Śarkarāsaptamī*, *Kamalasaptamī*, *Mandārasaptamī*, *Śubhasaptamī*<sup>126</sup> and *Sūryasaṅkrānti*<sup>127</sup> in the early Purāṇas.

The *Kalyāṇasaptamī vrata* is a solar vow to be performed on Sunday of the 7th day of a bright fortnight. The vow centers round the worship of the Sun with flowers, sandals, white clothes, incense, eatables, raw sugar, salt and fruits. Eight pictures of the Sun god drawn on the eight petals of a lotus should be worshipped by the recitation of a *mantra* having eight names of the Sun deity. One who observes this *vrata* attains freedom from diseases, liberation from all sins, prosperity and long life.<sup>128</sup>

The *Viśokasaptamī vrata*<sup>129</sup> is to be kept on the sixth and the seventh days of the bright fortnight in the month of *Māgha*. On the sixth day, the observer of the *vrata* should take bath with black sesame and observe fast and celibacy. After taking bath and performing the *jape* in the morning, he should worship the golden lotus as *Ark*. On the seventh day, he should observe silence, eat food without oil and salt and give away the lotus, clothes etc. in charity. This makes the observer free from all sorrows and diseases for a period of ten *pumas*. He who observes it with no particular desire attains unification with Brahma.

The *Phalasaptamī*<sup>130</sup> is to be celebrated on the seventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Mārgaśīrṣa*. The vow requires the worship of the Sun with a golden image and golden lotus under various names. The rewards of this vow are the attainment of endless fruits, prosperity and the freedom from diseases and ultimately the attainment of the *Sūryaloka*. In this *vrata*, the Sun god has been identified with *Brahmā*, *Indra*, *Viṣṇu*, *Śiva* and *Varuṇa*, which shows that he was regarded as the highest. The *Śarkarāsaptamī*<sup>131</sup> to be observed on the seventh day of a bright fortnight in the month of

*Vaiśākha* enjoins the worship of the Sun by drawing a lotus on an altar, reciting hymn propitiatory for Savitri and employing incense etc. One who celebrates it attains sons, grandsons and final emancipation. The *Kamalasaptamī vrata*<sup>132</sup> is to be celebrated on the 7th day of bright fortnight in the spring. The vow centers round the worship of the Sun in the form of a golden lotus by means of flowers, incense etc. and recitation of *mantra* sacred to the Sun under various names - *Kamala, Prabhākara* etc. The observer should then give away gifts and food to the Brāhmaṇas. This is to be done for possession of inexhaustible wealth and going to the *Sūrya-maṇḍalam*.

The *Mandārasaptamī vrata*<sup>133</sup> is to be observed on the seventh day in the month of *Māgha*. Here the Sun is to be worshipped by means of a golden image along with a eight-petalled lotus under the names of *Bhāskara, Sūrya, Arka, Aryamā, Vedadharmā, Caṇḍabhānu, Pūṣan* and *Ānanda*. The employment of *mandāra* flowers in this vow forms a special feature of it.<sup>134</sup> The *Śubhasaptamī*<sup>135</sup> enjoins Sun worship by means of the golden ox and golden cow as born from him and also by flowers, incense etc. and the recitation of *mantra* to *Aryamā priyām*. The *Sūryasaṅkrānti vrata*<sup>136</sup> is to be observed on the day of equinoxes or solstices. The Sun should be worshipped by drawing an eight-petalled lotus under eight different names in the pericarp of the lotus. The *arghya* of water, sandal and flowers is to be given on the floor to the Sun. This entitles the observer to be honoured by the gods in the kingdom of Indra.

These *vratas* display a fixed procedure of the worship, the supremacy of the divinity and exclusive devotion to him. In view of the above facts, they appear to be connected with sectarian Sun worship but their nature is essentially domestic. There is no reference to any regular image or public worship. However, the references to the making

of golden man on the lotus as the solar symbol clearly show the foreshadowing of the iconic tradition.

Besides these occasions, Sun worship is prescribed in general on Sundays by drawing a twelve-petalled lotus with red sandal.<sup>137</sup> In the fore part of the lotus, the horses of the Sun should be inscribed. Here he has been described as the soul of the universe, the basis of the *Rik*, the *Yajus* and the *Sāma* Vedas. One who observes this ritual attains freedom from all sins and goes to the *Sūrya-maṇḍalam*. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,<sup>138</sup> it is prescribed for every householder to perform this form of Sun worship as one of the daily obligations. It involves the *ācamana*, *arghya* of water and recitation of a hymn invoking the Sun god under various names such as *Vivasvat*, *Bhāsvat*, *Savitri* and *Viṣṇu* etc. It is stated that the *Sūryavrata* is one of the sixty ordinances explained by *Śiva*.<sup>139</sup>

The existence of various types of Sun worshippers is well revealed by the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. The subjects of Rājyavardhana who worshipped the Sun god included variety of Sun worshippers.<sup>140</sup> Some of them paid adoration by presenting to him the *arghya*, presents and other oblations, the second class by maintaining silence, the third by repeating the Vedic hymns, the fourth by lying down on river sandbanks without taking food, the fifth by offering oblations to the fire and repeating solar hymns day and night, the sixth by casting their eyes on him and standing there and the seventh by presenting incense, flowers, oblations, unguent prayers, food, lamps and other offerings. The *pūjā* form of worship was getting popular though persons also resorted to older traditions.

### **Position of the Sun god:**

It is said in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>141</sup> and other early Purāṇas that the *cakra* of Viṣṇu, the trident of Śiva, *vimāṇa* of Kubera and *śakti* of Kārtikeya were made by Viśvakarmā out of the pared glory of the Sun. This is undoubtedly indicative of the superiority of the Sun over *Viṣṇu* and other gods. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Brahmā is referred to as having prayed to the Sun god for the continuance of his creation. Evidently, the power of Sūrya was greater than that of Brahmā.<sup>142</sup> The prominent place of the Sun god in the legends of Yājñavalkya, Rājyavardhana, Brahmā and Aditi and the reference to *Sauradarśana*<sup>142</sup> may tend to show that the Sun was occupying an important position. The equality of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya is indicated when these four gods are regarded as indistinguishable.<sup>143</sup> Further, the Vaiṣṇava, the Śaiva and the Saura vows are treated on equal terms in the early Purāṇas.<sup>143</sup> Sūrya and Śiva are identical in some early Purāṇas.<sup>144</sup>

### (b) LATE PURĀNIC HORIZON

The late Purāṇas and the Upa-purāṇas throw a flood of light on the Sun-cult as developed between the 6th century A.D. and the 12th-13th centuries A.D.

#### **Growth of Solar Literature and sect:**

A vast *Saura* literature came to be developed in this period. Unfortunately, most of these works such as the *Sūrya Purāṇa*, etc. have been lost except the *Sāmba Purāṇa*. Of all the extant Purāṇas, the *Sāmba Purāṇa* appears to be the earliest work of the *Sauras*. The verses in the *Skanda*, the *Brahma*, the *Varāha*, the *Agni* and the *Garuda* Purāṇas that shows sectarian form of Sun worship have certainly been borrowed from the *Sāmba Purāṇa*<sup>145</sup> The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* also appears to have been the borrower from the

Same *Purāṇa*.<sup>146</sup> The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* and the *Śāmba Purāṇa* are the most comprehensive and complete documents of the Sun-cult of the Magian tradition.

A full-fledged Sun-sect developed in the later Purāṇic times on an unprecedented scale along with all the paraphernalia. The indisputable supremacy of the god, the exclusive devotion, the fixed procedure of worship and other sectarian features are found in the *Sāmba*, the *Bhaviṣya*, the *Varāha*, the *Skanda* and other late Purāṇas. The *Sāmba Purāṇa* at its very outset describes the Sun god as the cause of creation, protection and destruction of the universe and also as the soul of *Brahmā*, *Nāraṇa* and *Samkara*.<sup>147</sup> He creates the universe and various kinds of creatures in the form and capacity of *Brahmā*<sup>148</sup> and pervades it as well. He is the only god to deserve devotion and worship.<sup>149</sup> He is attended by the gods, the *Yakṣas*, the *Gandharvas*, the *Apsarās*, the three Vedas incarnate, the three *Samhdyās* incarnate, the *Ādityas*, the *Vasus*, the *Maruts*, the *Āsvins*, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu*, *Rudra* and many other lesser gods. The making of Indra, Varuṇa, Rudra etc. as attendants of the solar divinity points to his supremacy. He is eulogized by *Brahmā*, *Rudra*<sup>150</sup> and other important gods. Thus, the concept of the Sun god as developed in the later Purāṇas is that of a sectarian deity.

The sectarian character of the solar cult is evidenced by the presence of a band of its followers known as the *Sūryabhaktas*,<sup>151</sup> by the emergence of a special class of priests known as the Magas and the Bhojkas or the Yājakas,<sup>152</sup> and by the development of a sectarian *Saura* literature. The reference to the *Sūrya-Siddhānta* as distinguished from the *Traividya-Siddhānta*<sup>153</sup> clearly demonstrates that the system of Sun worship had developed an exclusiveness that is quite befitting for a sect. Employment of flags and flag-staffs for the Sun god,<sup>154</sup> fixed methods and procedures for his worship,<sup>155</sup> evolution

of a code of conduct for his worshippers,<sup>156</sup> use of a sectarian *mantra*,<sup>157</sup> elaborate rules and regulations for making his images and temples and for other constituents of the solar ritual<sup>158</sup> were actually products of a sectarian Sun-cult. *Bhakti*, which is the basis of a sect, is referred to several times in the late Purāṇas.<sup>159</sup> The late Purāṇic records on Sun-  
sect are corroborated by the epigraphy<sup>160</sup> and secular Sanskrit literature<sup>161</sup> of the period.

### **Concept of the Sun god:**

In the *Sāmba* and other late Purāṇas, the concept of the Sun god is highly metaphysical. He is the highest deity and the supreme *Brahma*. He is both the individual and the supreme soul and is both one and many. The Supreme Being who is both personal and impersonal remains formless while residing as *Kṣetrajña* in the material body and is not contaminated by actions or influenced by the objects of senses. When transcending the three *guṇas* he is called *Puruṣa*. He pervades the universe, protects and regulates it and receives worship in different forms from gods and men in the different stages of life.<sup>162</sup>

The impact of the Vedic tradition is easily traceable in this concept. *Sāmba Purāṇa*'s description of Surya as the cause of creation, protection and destruction, whose manifestations are the three Vedas,<sup>163</sup> appears to have been inspired by the Vedic concept. The influence of Vedantic philosophy may be seen in the Vaśiṣṭha's praise of the Sun god as the highest. At several occasions, the Sun has been described simply as the luminary<sup>164</sup> that is in line with the Vedic tradition. *Savitri*, *Sūrya*, *Āditya*, *Mitra*, *Vivasvat* etc. are Vedic survivals in the later Purāṇic pantheon of the Sun god. The concept of the twelve Ādityas - Pūṣan, Mitra, Viṣṇu, Vivasvat, Dhātṛī, Bhaga, Indra,

Varuṇa, Aryamān, Amśumat, Tvaṣṭri, and Parjanya as identical with the twelve months<sup>165</sup> is also Vedic survival.

Mihira appears in the later Purāṇas<sup>166</sup> as one of the twelve common names of the Sun. The *Sāmba* and other late Purāṇas prescribe the worship of the Sun in his twelfth form, which is that of Mihira.<sup>167</sup> All these show that the Magian tradition was also accepted in these Purāṇas. Thus, the sectarian concept of the Sun god synthesized the Vedic and Magian concepts of the Sun god. In between these two, there had been the indigenous tradition of *bhakti*<sup>168</sup> centering round a human Sun god who had a large family also.<sup>169</sup>

### **The Magas and the solar cult:**

In the late Purāṇic period, Sun worship came to be formally associated with a foreign priesthood known as Maga. Many late Purāṇas refer to a legend about the coming of the Magas in India from Śākadvīpa and their association with the Sun-cult. The relevant part of the legend may briefly be summed up as follows: *Sāmba*, the son of Kriṣṇa by Jāmbavatī, was cursed by his father to suffer leprosy for his undesirable relations with the wives of Vāsudeva Kriṣṇa. To be cured of the disease *Sāmba*, on the advice of Nārada, constructed a Sun-temple at Candrabhāgā (modern Chenab in the Punjab) for the worship of the god. Unfortunately, no Brāhmaṇa was ready to accept the office of a regular priest of this temple. Therefore, he sought the help of *Gauramukha*, the priest of Ugrasena who advised him to get the Magas, the special Sun worshipping priests from Śākadvīpa. Accordingly, Samba went to Śākadvīpa, brought eighteen families of the Magas and installed them into the office of the priest of his temple.<sup>170</sup>

The late Purāṇic data on the Magas are corroborated by Varāhamihira<sup>171</sup> who clearly instructs that the installation and consecration of Sun-images should be caused to be made by the Magas. The legend finds confirmation in an inscription at Govindapur in Gayā district dated the Śaka year 1059 corresponding to 1137-38 A.D. In its opening stanza, the Magas are represented to have been brought into the country by Sāmba. Their existence in India is again indicated by many Iranian features such as *avyaṅga*, *udicyaveśa* and *upanātpinaddha*.<sup>172</sup> All this evidence conclusively proves that a certain class of priests known as the Magas with exclusive devotion to the Sun was brought into India from Śākadvīpa.

It has been held<sup>173</sup> that the Magas of the Purāṇas were no other than the Sun worshipping Magi priests of Iran. Originally, they were a priestly tribe of Medea,<sup>174</sup> a section of which worked their way into Zoroastrianism. Out of the compromise between the way of life of the Magi priests and that of the Persians<sup>175</sup> was born Mithraism not later than the 5th-4th cent B.C.<sup>176</sup> The chief features of the Magi-cult were the worship of the Sun god and Fire-god under the name of Mithra, the use of 'barsom' and a belief in the division of the world between good and evil powers represented by light and darkness<sup>177</sup> respectively. They were famous for magic and occult power. Śākadvīpa must have been situated in Iran, mostly probably in Eastern Iran<sup>178</sup> since the Śaka occupation of western India where the temple of Mūlasthāna is supposed to have been built by the Magas, was principally the work of the Śakas of Eastern Iran.

It has been suggested<sup>179</sup> that the Magas entered into India for the first time in the wake of the Achaemenid invasion of the 6th-5th cent. B.C. The first wave of the Magas appears to have been confined to the north-west borders of India where the Achaemenian

influence had been paramount. It was in this very region that the Magas started their activities.<sup>180</sup> They continued coming in waves in the trains of foreign invaders. The second significant wave of the Maga came in the wake of foreign invaders in the post-Maurya period. That the Magas came in waves is indicated by the *Sāmba Purāṇa*.<sup>181</sup> It appears that a third wave of the Magas who were the followers of Zoroaster must have left Iran for India because of the spread of Islam after the sixth cent. A.D. The Magas of this wave came to be known as the Yājakas.<sup>182</sup>

It is not known as to how far these Maga-priests could influence the indigenous tradition of Sun worship in ancient India. Many Purāṇas<sup>183</sup> do not mention the role of Magian priests at all and continue the indigenous and national tradition of Sun worship that is found in the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Ūpaniṣads*, the *Sūtras* and the *Epics*. Purāṇas like the *Kūrma* describe the Sun just as a heavenly body, which is in conformity with the Vedic account of the Sun god. The *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Matsya* Purāṇas reveal that the orthodox tradition of Sun worship actually developed on the lines of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*'s<sup>184</sup> prescription of a golden disc to represent the solar orb and the Upaniṣadic<sup>185</sup> doctrine of the golden *Puruṣa* in the Sun who was identified with the Ultimate Being. The prevalence of this tradition even after the spread of the Magian tradition is also attested by the *Kūrma Purāṇa*. Even in the *Sāmba Purāṇa*,<sup>186</sup> the Vedic tradition has not been forgotten. Moreover, the name of the sect of which the Magas became priests is *Saura* - a Sanskritised form. Further, the whole theology<sup>187</sup> of this system is a reflex of the teachings of the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Epics*.

The fundamentals of the Maga-cult could not make much headway in India probably because of the assimilative and absorbing capacity of the Indian culture.

Besides, there was hardly anything new for Maga-priests to propagate in India. India had already most of the features of the Maga-cult (especially its Irānianised form that reached India) such as the worship of the Sun under the name of Mithra in the *Rigveda*,<sup>188</sup> the *Atharvaveda*,<sup>189</sup> the *Upaniṣads*,<sup>189</sup> and the Epics,<sup>190</sup> close connection of the fire worship with the Sun right from the Rigvedic times and dualist view of the world in ancient Indian mythology.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the Maga-influence was negligible as far as the mythology, theology and philosophy of the Sun-cult were concerned.

The Magas, however, appear to have exerted powerful influence in iconography and temples. Most probably, the images and temples of the Sun-deity were either not known, or if known, were not popular in India before the advent of the Magas as is evidenced by the Purāṇas.<sup>192</sup> The solar orb was worshipped by the general masses.<sup>193</sup> It is also mentioned in the Purāṇas<sup>194</sup> that the masses worshipped the Sun god not in its anthropomorphic but in its symbolic forms of disc, wheel, lotus, *svastikā* etc.

On the other hand, features such as northern dress, girdle round the waist and high boots occur in solar iconography of the Kuṣāṇa, the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods, which are definitely Persian.<sup>195</sup> They are also referred to in the literary texts<sup>196</sup> of India. These features are confined to North Indian tradition while they are conspicuous by their absence in images of South Indian tradition. The existence of a large number of Sun-temples in Western India where the Magas first established a Sun-temple at Mūlasthāna (modern Multan),<sup>197</sup> also points out that the Maga-priests were responsible for starting this new tradition in the solar religion. The tradition of image making and temple building established by the Magas was materially instrumental in propagating and

diffusing the sectarian form of Sun worship. They gave concrete and lithic representation to the imaginary and atmospheric conception of the Sun as found in the Vedas, the Epics and the Purāṇas.

The Magas are passed in silence by the orthodox literature until the 5th-6th cent. A.D. This shows that for centuries they remained neglected by the orthodox Hindu society. However, Sun-images with Iranian features begin to occur from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards, which points to their popularity particularly among the foreigners and among unorthodox sections of Hindu society. It appears that the orthodox sections of Hindu society had to accept them by the 4th-5th cent. A.D. because of their immense popularity in the pre-Gupta society. The policy of religious toleration of the Guptas and their efforts to assimilate and synthesize divergent traditions - orthodox as well as unorthodox - had its impact upon the Maga-problem also. By the middle of the sixth cent. A.D., they were absorbed in the orthodox Hindu society as is evidenced by the prescription of Magianised Sun worship in the *Sāmba Purāṇa* whose lower limit goes back to 500 A.D.<sup>198</sup> In a manuscript, dated 550 A.D. found in Nepal the Brāhmaṇas and the Magas are given equal status.<sup>199</sup> The instruction of Varāhamihira (550 A.D.) for making Sun-images according to Iranian tradition also proves their absorption in Hindu society by the middle of the sixth century A.D.

It is an undeniable fact that the Magas commanded wide popularity in the later Purāṇic period. The factors, which contributed towards their temporary success, are the proselytizing spirit of theirs,<sup>200</sup> support of the Indo-Greek, the Scythian and the Kuṣāṇa rulers to them,<sup>201</sup> the propaganda of the benefits of Sun worship, especially its curative properties, their contribution towards image-making and temple-building of Sūrya and

their allowance to extend religious privileges to women and men of lower castes.<sup>202</sup> However, in due course they lost their individuality since there was nothing distinctive about them.

The Magas were divided in course of time into two groups: Magas and Bhojakas (later on degraded as the Yājakas).<sup>203</sup> The Magas used to meditate on the syllable 'M' while the Yājakas worshipped the Sun by burning incense, offering garlands and various other articles and muttering *mantras*. However, the aim of both was the same i.e. the attainment of final emancipation through *Karmayoga*. The Bhojakas or the Yājakas or the Sevakas chanted Vedic *mantras* etc.<sup>204</sup> Most probably, they were indigenous priests of the Sun-cult. Later on, they indulged into objectionable activities and practices and entered into matrimonial alliances with foreigners like the Magas. Then they came to be degraded as low or *apāñkteya*<sup>205</sup> or Devalaka-Brāhmaṇas<sup>206</sup> (temple-priests).

### **Development of a Family:**

The later Purāṇas elaborately describe the family and attendants the Sun god. His two wives are Rājñī and Nikṣubhā. Rājñī's another name was Samjñā or Sareṇu<sup>207</sup> and the Sun had two sons with her - Vaivasvata Manu and Yama Śrāddhadeya and a daughter named Yamī or Kālindī. The shadow of Samjñā was Chāyā who is said to be the same as Nikṣubhā and is identified with Prithvī. From Chāyā the Sun got Śrutaśravas, Śrutakarman, and a daughter known as Tapatī. The other sons of the Sun god were two Aśvins named Nāsatya and Dasra (from Samjñā in Kuru country) and Revanta with the body of a horse having bow and arrows.

There is a reference to the eighteen attendants of the Sun.<sup>208</sup> Agni known as Piṅgala<sup>209</sup> on the right side of the Sun was engaged in checking the good and bad deeds of all creatures. Indra under the name of Daṇḍanāyaka<sup>210</sup> on the left side of the Sun was engaged by the latter to rule over the world with his *daṇḍa* and *nīti*. Kārtikeya and Hara stood at the eastern gate under the name of Rājña and Stoṣa respectively. Yama (i.e. Kalmāṣa) and Garuda (i.e. Pakṣīn) stood with two asses at the gate. The two Aśvins stood on two sides of the god. On the south stood Citragupta and Kālā under the names of Jāṇḍakāra and Māṭhara, on the west stood Varuṇa and Sāgara under the names of Prāpnuyāna and Kṣtapā respectively, on the north stood Kubera and Vināyaka and on the east stood Revanta and Rudra, the latter under the name of Diṇḍī<sup>211</sup> and also Śrī, Mahāśvetā and Mātris. In addition to these chief eighteen attendants, Soma also figures as an attendant deity of the Sun at one place and there were fourteen other attendants. In the art of the period, these attendants of the Sun are illustrated.<sup>212</sup>

### **Method of Sun Worship:**

The later Purāṇas demonstrate many influences in the evolution of the methodology of Sun worship such as those of the Vedic tradition, indigenous system, Iranian stream, Tāntric practices and Śaiva theology. The first important feature in the worship of the Sun was the introduction of image and temple of the Sun god, which is expressly brought out in the later Purāṇas.<sup>213</sup> The rules for the construction of the Sun-temples and images are also given.<sup>214</sup> References are also made to six mediums of Sun worship viz. fire, water, air, holy place, image and pedestal for the image of a deity.

The later Purāṇas give prominence to the Vedic tradition in their earlier chapters though Iranian elements were already present in the Sun-cult of this period. The Vedic *homa* forms an important part of the worship and the *mantras* to be used are either Vedic or Purāṇic or both.<sup>215</sup> The hymns in praise of the Sun are called *Vedokta* or *Veda-Vedāṅga-sammita*. The *agnihotragriha* (the house for the oblations to the fire) is an integral part of the Sun-temples.<sup>216</sup> There is no reference to Tāntric symbols like *yantra* or *maṅḍala* in the earlier chapters.

The Tāntric cult was becoming quite popular particularly in Eastern India from 7th-8th centuries onward<sup>217</sup> from which the solar cult could not remain untouched. *Sāmba Purāṇa* refers to many Tantric elements in the Sun-cult. The method of initiation, which is full of Tāntric influence involves the selection and preparation of the ground, selection of spiritual preceptors and disciples, offer of *arghya* to the Sun with the *Mahāmantra*, drawing of a *maṅḍala* with the figure of a twelve-petalled lotus in it, performance of *homa* and of *tattvanyāsa* and *mantranyāsa*, worship of the quarter-guardians to whom fish, meat etc. are offered.<sup>218</sup> The *mantras* with Tāntric symbolism are employed at every step. The drawing of *maṅḍala* and the performance of various kinds of *mudrās* and *nyāsas* are in accordance with the Tāntric philosophy. The methods of performing *abhicāra* rites and *bījas* in *mantras* and practice of *yoga* have also been given and six acts viz. *vaśīkaraṇa*, *ākarṣaṇa*, *māraṇa*, *uccāṭana*, *vidveśana* and *stambhana* etc<sup>219</sup> are also mentioned.

Despite such influences, Sun worship remained free from some fundamental principles of Tāntricism. The concept of a female principle as the cause of the universe<sup>220</sup> is conspicuous by its absence in the later Purāṇas. No such concept as of *Prajñā* of

Tāntric Buddhism and Umā of Tāntric Hinduism could be developed round the name of Samjñā or Chāyā - wives of the Sun god - by the solar sectarians. No image of the Sun along with the female consort in Tāntric sense has also been found. Thus, the Sun-cult appears to have been influenced by Tāntricism outwardly because these practices were in keeping with the Yogic practices, which were prevalent in the Sun-cult as early as the Upaniṣads.<sup>221</sup>

The Sun was worshiped at sunrise, mid-day and sunset.<sup>222</sup> The later Purāṇas also describe the method of performing annual worship (*Samvatsarī pūjā*) and annual car-festival (*Rathayātrā*) of the Sun with the use of Vedic and Purāṇic mantras<sup>223</sup> as well as the methods of the use of incense and other materials in *pūjā*. They also describe elaborate methods and results of observing seven different *saptamī tithis* as well as twelve *śukla-saptamīs*.<sup>224</sup>

### Centres of Solar Cult:

The later Purāṇas inform us of three centers of Magian type of solar worship. The first place is Mūlsthāna or Maitravana<sup>225</sup> on the Candrabhāgā River, which is identified with Multan in Punjab. Hiuen -Tsang who visited this place in the seventh cent. A.D., testifies to its great popularity as a centre of the Sun-cult.<sup>226</sup> Alberuni, Al Edrisi, Abu Ishak al Ishtakhri etc. also give an account of this temple. The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* as well as the *Sāmba Purāṇa* refers to this place as *Ādyasthāna*.<sup>226</sup> According to the legend of *Sāmba*, it was here that a Sun-temple was established for the first time.<sup>227</sup> The fact that Western India where Multan is situated was a strong hold of the Sun-cult, is also attested by epigraphy.<sup>228</sup>

The second centre of solar worship is Kālapriya identified with modern Kālpī on the southern bank of Yamuna.<sup>229</sup> Some scholars identify the Kālapriya-temple of the Sun at Kālpī with Kālapriyanātha at whose fairs all the three plays of Bhavabhuti were staged while others identify Kālapriya with Mahākāla of Ujjayinī. The third place of Sun worship is mentioned as Sutīra, or Muṇḍīra or Udayācala also known as Sūryakānana, Ravikṣetra, Sūryakṣetra and Mitravana<sup>230</sup> while the *Brahma Purāṇa* expressly calls it Koṇāditya or Koṇārka in Utkala (Odradeśa)<sup>231</sup> It is generally identified with modern Koṇārka near Puri in Orissa.<sup>232</sup> Thus, it is evident that the Magian type of the solar cult was developing in the whole of Northern India. Further, it was gradually extending towards the Eastern India as is evidenced by the recasting of the *Sāmba Purāṇa* and addition of chapters in it.<sup>233</sup>

### Religious syncretism:

Religious syncretism reaches its climax in the later Purāṇas and finds an excellent illustration in the *Pañcāyatana Pūjā*<sup>234</sup> *Sāmba Purāṇa* speaks of the spirit of rapprochement among different sectarian deities. The Sun is said to have been worshipped as Viṣṇu in Śvetadvīpa, as Maheśvara in Kuśa-dvīpa, as Brahmā in Puṣkara-dvīpa and as Bhāskara in Śakadvīpa.<sup>235</sup> The compromising spirit between the sects of Sūrya and Brahmā<sup>236</sup> is revealed by the Ms. *Puṣkara-Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa*. The trend of rapprochement between different sects is best illustrated by the syncretic images of the Sun.<sup>237</sup> The cult-syncretism in the later Purāṇic world is attested by early mediaeval inscriptions of the Pratihāra, Pāla, Chauhān and many other Rājput kings who patronized more than one deity and the same at one time.<sup>238</sup>

It is clear that the Purāṇas - early and late - are full of valuable information for the study of the Sun and solar cult from the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier, to the end of the Hindu period of India.

The early Purāṇas continue the national tradition of simple, non-sectarian Sun worship by means of symbols though solar sectarianism may be seen in a veiled form. The old Vedic tradition of worshipping the atmospheric Sun under different names went on. Sun worship played a major role in various domestic rites and the twelve-petalled lotus was particularly associated with the Sun god. The early Purāṇic Sun worship mainly consisted of recitation of the *mantras* - Vedic and Purāṇic, in praise of the Sun god under the names of Bhāskara, Ravi, Sūrya, Savitri, Bhaga, Arka, etc, *arghya* consisting of water, sandal, flowers, especially red and salutation to the Sun god. The Sun was worshipped mainly in his benevolent form.

Sūrya, Savitri and Āditya were given human personalities as well. The family of the Sun god and his chariot were also described with elaborateness not seen before. Sun-images and temples are indirectly referred to. Mention is also made of the characteristics of the Sun-images, which are Indian. The early Purāṇas do not mention the Magas - the Iranian Sun-worshipping priests.

The Later Purāṇas characteristically mention the arrival of the Magas in India and the popularization of the Sun-images and temples at three places referred to above. The Sun-images were to be dressed according to the Iranian fashion. Nevertheless, there is an effort in these Purāṇas to nationalize the foreign aspects. The advent of the Magas gave an impetus to the cause of the Sun worshippers and it spread throughout Northern India. In due course, the national and Iranian traditions of Sun worship were mixed up and the

solar sectarians developed a philosophy, which was similar to the Sāmkhya system. In earlier chapters of the later Purāṇas, the Vedas and the Purāṇas are given prominence while in the later chapters of the later Purāṇas, Tāntric symbolism gains popularity.

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72. *Viṣṇu P.*, II.8.Iff.
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79. *Viṣṇu P.*, 111.11.39 refers to the *ācamana* and the *arghya* to Sūrya. *Mārkaṇḍeya P.*, CIX refers to the *japa* as one of the means of Sun worship. In the Smritis, the Vedic tradition of worshipping the Sun god by means of the *japa*, the *arghya*, the *upasthāna*, the *samhdyopāsana* etc. is continued which the early Purāṇas have tried to imbibe. Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 313ff.
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82. *Viṣṇu P.*, IV.13; *Vāyu P.*, IVC.22; *Brahmāṇḍa P.* III.71.23.
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133. *Ibid*, 79.
134. *Ibid*, 79.5.
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150. *Ibid*, 16.25-35; d. *Bhaviṣya P.*, 1.124.8.
151. *Ibid*, 38.10.
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153. *Ibid*, 28.15.
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155. *Ibid*, Chs. 47-83.
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157. *Ibid*, 44.
158. *Ibid*, Chs. 30-31. 36-37; cf. *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.13 I.132.
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161. *Sūrya Śatakam*, 22, 25, 29 88, 89, 90, 91, 92.

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163. *Śāmba P.*, 1.1-6.
164. *Ibid.*, 14.9.
165. *Sāmba P.*, 9.5ff; *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.65.26b-29; I. 78.58-60.
166. *Sāmba P.*, 9.2; *Brahma P.*, 31.15.
167. *Sāmba P.*, 1.13 says that this *Purāṇa* is concerned with the twelfth form of the Sun.
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174. Moulton, *The Treasure of Magi*, Oxford, 1917, p. 9. Moulton regards them neither Āryan nor non-Āryan but as belonging to a low graded indigenous tribe of Medea.
175. Herodotus was aware of these differences especially in matters connected with the disposal of the dead. They exposed the dead body while the Persians burnt it. cf. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, London, 1926, p.57; Ghirshman, R., *Iran*, Pelican Series, 1963, p.156.

176. Burns, E.M., *Western Civilizations*, London, 1957, p. 70.
177. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 182-253.
178. Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 465.
179. *SWAI-S*, pp. 244-254.
180. *Skanda P.*, VI.76; *Samba P.*, 26.14; *Bhavisya P.*, I.72.4-6 refer to Mūlasthāna (Multan, Punjab) as the original place of the Magianized Sun-cult).
181. Hazra, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.
182. Hazra, *op. cit.* p. 96. cf. *Sāmba P.*, 30.22b. The word *Yājaka* been substituted for the word *Bhojaka*.
183. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Classical Age*, Bombay, 1954, p. 438.
184. *SB*, VII.4.1.10.
185. *BAU*, II.5.5.
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187. Furquhar, J.N., *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, London, 1920, p. 153.
188. *RV*, III.59.
189. *AV*, XIII.3.13, IX.3.18, III.8.1 and V.12.1.
189. *Taittirīya U.*, I.1.1, I.12.1.
190. Hopkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-204.
191. Frazer, J.G., *Worship of Nature*, Vol. I, London, 1926, p. 596; *VM*, p.60; Ludwig, quoted by Pusalker, A.D., *Cultural History of India*, Vol. II, p. 65.
192. *Sāmba P.*, 29.2-6. It is interesting to note that here the Maga priests are not described as responsible for image making but Viśvakarman - the native architect

- was responsible. It is suggested that Bodh Gayā, Bhājā, Lālā Bhagat and Anantgumphā Sun-images represent the native tradition of solar iconography. cf. *DHI*, pp. 432-34.
193. *RV*, I.175.4; V.29.10; *SB*, VII. 4.1. 10; *DHI*, pp. 137-40, 198-99.
194. *Sāmba P.*, 29.2.6. *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (Brahma Parvan)* refers to *maṇḍala* form of Sun worship. In commenting upon *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra*, II.11.29.16 Haradatta says that the Dravidas used to worship *Āditya* by drawing *maṇḍalas*.
195. Banerjea, J.N., 'Myths Explaining Some Alien Traits of North Indian Sun icons', *I.H.Q.*, Vol. XXVIII, 1952; *DHI*, p. 437.
196. *Brihat Samhitā*, ch. 57 (45-8); *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III.67.1-5.
197. *Sāmba P.*, 29.2.6; *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, Ch. 139 too narrates the incident.
198. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
199. *I.A.*, 1911, Jan., p. 18.
200. Vasu, N.N., *Castes and sects of Bengal*, IV.55-57 suggests probable connection of the Sun worship with Śuṅga, Kaṇva and Hūṇa dynasties.
201. Bloch, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 1910, p. 723 believes that the theory of cure of leprosy by the Sun god came from Persia. However, as shown by the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda* there was native tradition also that the Sun god cures leprosy and other skin diseases. *Sāmba P.*, ch. 24; *Mayūra Śataka*.
202. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
203. *Ibid*, p. 97.
204. *Samba P.*, 27.

205. *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.140, 141, 146.
206. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
207. *Sāmba P.*, 10.17b; *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.79b; *Skanda P.*, VII.1.11.65b.
208. *Sāmba P.*, 16.1-22.
209. *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.76.23; *Sāmba P.*, 6.21; III.67.5-7; *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III.67.5-7.
210. *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III.67.5 refers him as Daṇḍin.
211. *Sāmba P.*, 16.1.24.
212. *IBBS*, p. 160.
213. *Sāmba P.*, 29.2-6.
214. *Ibid*, 29; *Brihat Samhitā*, 57. 46-48.
215. *Sāmba P.*, 30.18, 32.12.; 37.19.
216. *Sāmba P.*, 29.15.
217. Chakravarti, C., *The Tantras, Studies on Their Religion and Literature*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 80-89.
218. *Sāmba P.*, 39.41.
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221. *Maitrī U.*, I.2.
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223. *Ibid*, 34.14ff.
224. *Ibid*, 46.
225. *Sāmba P.*, I.38.
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226. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
227. *Sāmba P.*, ch. 24-26.
228. Sankalia, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 80, 137,212 ; Fleet, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 80, 162, 218.
229. Mirashi, V.V., 'Three Ancient Famous Temples of the Sun,' *Purāṇa*, Vol. VIII, No. I, p. 42.
230. *Sāmba P.*, 42.2.
231. *Brahma P.*, 28-32, Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
232. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Mirashi, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
233. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 62 suggest that the present *Sāmba Purāṇa* was composed in Orissa.
234. Banerjea, J.N., *Pañcopāsanā* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1950.
235. *Sāmba P.*, 26; 37; 38.
236. Chatterjee, A., *Padma Purāṇa - A Study*, pp. 193-94. The *Śāradātilakam*, XIVA.2, emphasizes the syncretic character of the worship of the Sun.
237. *DHI*, p. 551.
238. *SWAI-S*, pp. 366-391.