

## Chapter 2

## The Vedic Gods

All religions in India are rooted in the Vedic lore. They are either allied or opposed to the Vedic heritage. For instance, in evaluating any religious tenet, the Brahmasutra (III,2,38) give the directive that its authority lies in the Sruti; on the other hand, this authority is a bit belittled by the Gita (II,53) as when it refers to such believers as are confounded by the Sruti (Srutibipratipanna).

Generally speaking all Indian religions, one way or another, have a Vedic reference, often origin. It is peculiar that Buddha, who in many ways felt akin to the Upanisad, was averse to the Veda. Medieval and modern masters – Kabir, Nanak, Raja Rammohan, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda – all have their new faiths either founded on or estranged from the Sruti. Even Saiva and Sakta ways of worship are remotely related to the Veda, though they strike out strange paths more or less.

So then, a proper study of the Dada movement has to have some link, however remote, with the Vedic structure. It is with this recognition of heritage that we begin here with an outline of the Vedic scripture – the origin as a rule of all religious prescriptions and speculations in India.

The first troop of Aryan exodus\* (in 2000 B.C. or thereabout) was captained by Manu. He was the grand patriarch of Vedic polity. It was from his name that the word manava was derived; then meaning children of Manu, not mankind.

Faithful to the founding father, his retinue resolved to remain ever true to his principle: Ye Gods, may we not go astray from the path laid out by father Manu – RV.VIII, 30, 3.

This path comprised of the twin rule of life: sam (santi) and yo (yoga) – peace and union. The newcomers not only found a new homeland in a kindly climate: they as well founded a sound law of life.

Be it noted here that the lawgiver Manu was quite another person who belonged to the late epic age, around 600 B.C. He compiled what is known as the Code of Manu, which held authority in the upper India of his time, which he ad named Aryavarta.

In contrast to manava, another category was named deva. Both belonged to the human species. At that remote age a deva was no unbodied being. He was as good a flesh and blood being as was manava. The only difference was that manava represented a division of humanity that left West Asian home and became domiciled in India, while deva was one who retained that trans-Indian home and only paid flying visits to India to look after the adventurous colonizers out of fatherly or friendly feeling. The native or original homeland west of India was called div, the dweller of which was called deva.

In the course of centuries the primitive home and the old connections were not exactly remembered by the migrators. As the tradition grew dim and recollections faded away and as physical contact was long lost and the remote generations remembered relationships only very vaguely, deva was supposed to be an airy being. But as always, for fatherland and attachment, however vague, remains. So it continued to be remembered with poetic fancy. Thus the transmontane fatherland was fondly fancied to be transmundane; and, in vested with mystery, it was called heaven, located above the skies. To put it in poet's words: The sky remains infinitely vacant for earth there to build its heaven with dreams – Tagore, *Fireflies*.

In the early Vedic literature, devas were no figures of fiction, no figments of imagination. They were the leaders and patrons of the immigrants, who held sacrificial festivities in honor of the benevolent guardians, much as nowadays huge parties are thrown to welcome eminent guests and superiors and regents. The Rgveda (1, 22, 23) speaks of mahi dyauh, earth and heaven, as spacious tracts. The Atharva-veda recalls the birthplace of our fathers: dyau is the birth place where our fathers were born – dyaurnah pita janita nabhiratra. The Rgveda (III, 54, 9), pointedly informs: sarvam ekasmat jatam – all (Manava and deva) were born of one and the same stock. Viswamitra (RV. III, 39, 2) refers to the heritage of thought: This in us is the ancient

\* All previous estimates of the antiquity of the Vedic period have been outdone by the present theory of Professor Jacobi of Bonn, who supposes that period goes back to at least 4000 B.C. The Vedic literature in any case is of considerably higher antiquity than that of Greece. - Macdonnell

thought of the fathers – sayam sanaja pitrya dhii. The Rgveda states: They established friendship with the gods – tatpratnam sakhyam (VI, 18, 5). And it is clearly stated: our fathers were humans: pitaro manusyah. (RV. IV, 1, 13; VIII, 38, 3; VIII, 72, 8 & II; VIII, 10, 27; VIII, 7, 72)

It may be relevant to note that the Chinese had similar beliefs in regard to their religious life.

Yet in spite of this wealth of material the exact form of their religious rites is not known, nor can the Shang pantheon be enumerated. However, the deities seem to have been somewhat intimate ones, chiefly ancestors who lived in “heaven” but who would participate in human actions, helping or hindering according to whether they received the proper sacrifices. A god who is familiarly termed “Emperor” and seems to be a sort of First Ancestor of the race is frequently mentioned on the shell and bone inscriptions: every kind of trouble, great or small, private disasters and fortunes of war, are all brought before him. In addition there are gods of agriculture, mountains, and rivers, and natural elements, though it is likely that these too were identified with ancestors, for we read one interesting record which says, “Pray for rain from Grandmother Yi.” – Tsui Chi, *A short History of the Chinese Civilization*, p. 29.

Vedic people and god were near relations; fathers, sons, ancestors, issues. The Rgveda (I, 2, 11) alludes to a goddess wife of a nara (man) devanrpatni. It comes out even clearer when a sage says: we know the age of our gods – devanam nu vayam jana (RV 1, 71). One who has a certain age must have been born and he who is born as well dies. The idea of immortal gods came along the trend of theological tenets of later times, when fathers, having been forgotten, were deified.

A Brahman and a deva were relations. The psalmists of the Veda generally addressed a god as father. The Yajurveda (XXXII, 14) puts gods and fathers together: devaganah pitarsca. They are recognized as kith and kin: svajati (RV, VII, 8-10; X, 27, 8); as well-willers (RV. I, 11, 8), as brothers (RV. VIII, 72, 8); as friends, sakha (RV. VIII, 100; X, 31, 1). In a hymn to Vishnu, the rsi (seer, singer) enquires:

What hath become of those our ancient friendships, when, without enmity we walked together? – RV. VII, 88, 5.

A prayer to Vishnu remembers the old attachment: Such is our kinship (RV 1, 154, 5).

The language of the deva and manava was the same deva bhasa: devim vacam ajanaynta devah (RV; VIII, 89, 11) – the devas brought with them the divine language, their language in the home before migration. It was called, later, Sanskrit ie reformed and refined as the language – for the matter of that, any language – underwent continual revision, reconstruction, refinement, all throughout the Vedic and the classical period from the Veda to the Gita. The first script was Brahmi, derived from Brahma, which at the time meant the Veda.

Brahmans (Brahmins) were the bards of the Vedic psalms. A great deal of scholarship has been spent on the word Brahman:

The word Brahmin which is considered by Scradler to have originally meant a magician in the Rigveda denotes at first poet, sage, and then officiating priest; or still later a special class of priests, and this is not questioned by Sanskrit scholars. The authors of the *Vedic Index* think that the word does not mean merely poet or sage, but can in the Rigveda almost always be translated by the word priest, since the priest was of course the singer; but they do not say that the original meaning was a priest, and that it came to mean a poet or sage later on.

– Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 58.

The core of the Veda is neither magic nor ritualism. It is as many surprising flights of high philosophy, underneath and over above the liturgical exercises. Nor even is it a string of pastoral lyrics as these have many subtle turns that soar into the sublime.



Dadaji

instructions regarding death and the hereafter. Yama applauds Naciketas: May we have always an inquirer like thee. And then he informs him:

The knowing (self) is not born, it dies not; it sprang from nothing, nothing sprang from it. The Ancient is unborn, eternal, and everlasting; he is not killed, though the body is killed. If the killer thinks that he kills, if the killed thinks that he is killed, they do not understand; for this one does not kill, nor is that one killed. The self, smaller than the small, greater than the great, is hidden in the heart of that creature. A man who is free from desires and free from grief sees the majesty of the self by the grace of the Creator. Though sitting still he walks far; though lying down, he goes everywhere. Who, save myself, is able to know that God who rejoices and rejoices not.

The Mahabharata narrates that the King Yudhisthira, with his wife and brothers, started for heaven on foot, not by any medium of yoga; and he at last reached heaven in his physical form. At least till that time heaven was not an airy or fairy land. Arjuna went to Indra's capital in heaven as well as to Siva's heavenly seat at Kailas for winning and learning divine weapons. The guardian gods of the Vedic Arayan: Indra, Agni, Soma, Vishnu and Varuna from time to time loved to come to India to attend sacrificial ceremonies or parties, performed by their Indian protégé. Goddess Saraswati was requested in a hymn to hasten to the sacrificial alter on horseback.

These personal contacts gradually lessened and were finally lost as centuries rolled away, though meanwhile new Indras and other gods for some time appeared. Meanwhile successive offspring and offshoots of clans entered the changing scene. Thus, with the passage of time, the father figures grew unfamiliar and faded away from memory. More than a thousand hymns had been composed and the composition went through a thousand years. Meanwhile, characteristics of ancient patron deities, across the centuries, changed; equally changed the devotees through numerous generations; forms of worship too responded to shifting scenes and altering traditions. In the confounding environment a sage of a later generation simply wondered: What God with our oblations shall we worship? – RV; X, 121.

Such confusion is in great contrast to the previous generations whose relation was fresh and familiar. These earlier hymns to Agni and Indra rang with fresh vision and vigor. The ideal god was Indra: The strong who listens, who gives aid in battles, who slays the Vritra, wins and

The Aryan migrators came in successively batches to meet their increasing need of new abode: nutanena---sarmana (RV. VII, 51, 1). While on the move, immigrants possibly carried with them some bits of rudimentary songs. Immense impetus to their talent and taste was given by the encouraging environment of their splendid settlements in India. For quite a long the live as well as the imaginative contact with their former habitat and habit seems to have been maintained. "A longing lingering look behind" must have been going on for a good while. Memory of the older home used to emit sparks of thought, as when a sage called out: Harken ye, sons of the immortals who in the earlier time used to stay in divine dwellings. – Svetasvatara Upanisad

Thus the sages in India reminded their folk of their forsaken residence, which by that time was shrouded in mystery and conceived in a mythical glare, in the metaphor of the heaven.

And the early sages from India undertook physical journey to heaven. So the, heaven had a geographical location. The young sage Naciketas traveled on foot to the land ruled by Yama, the King of Death, and he returned home having acquired

gathers riches. – RV: X, 89, 18. His prowess is immeasurable: Vaster than days and nights, giver of increase, vaster than firmament and flood of ocean; vaster than bounds of earth and wind's extension, vaster than rivers and our lands is Indra. – RV: X, 89, 11. Quite as great and gracious is Agni: His flames are fierce, never aging are the flames of him who is beautiful to behold, whose face is beautiful, whose splendor is beautiful. – RV: I, 143, 3.

But to newer generations of sages the gods of old were not as much manifest and familiar. A new worshipper, stricken with doubt, fashioned his hymn in uncertain submission: Striving for strength bring forth a laud to Indra, a truthful hymn if he in truth existeth. One and another say, there is no Indra. Who hath beheld him? Whom then shall we honor? – RV: VIII, 89 (Griffith) Another, failing to identify Indra, prays: Ye who desire for war, if it be true, Indra exists there, in his name offer hymn. The sage Nema says that there is no one named Indra. Who has seen him? Whom shall we worship? – RV: VIII, 100, 3.

Doubts had been growing about the power of gods: Where, Indra-Varuna, is now that glory wherewith ye brought us support to those who loved you? – RV. III, 62, 1. Meanwhile many generations of sages had come and gone: Rishis of old, in numerous troops, as singers, who in the distant, near, and lower region... - RV. X, 82, 4.

In the fleeting current of times, very long indeed, the gods of the early Vedic era lost ground, as they became unremembered. Feeling for the past were roused and attempts were made to keep tradition going, so that good old faith might revive and remain fresh: Let us with tuneful skill proclaim, these generations of the gods, that one may see them when these hymns are chanted in a future age. – RV. X, 72.

As the father figures grew shadowy, myths were spun to cover the vacuum with fineries of fancy. Thus came in heaven and heavenly beings, when live ones had long taken leave. This is done now as well: We send the dear dead to heaven and foul ones to hell.