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The creative form of Vaidic Water and Its Importance

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Abstract

The Vedas are considered to be the world's oldest knowledge treasure and this undeniable truth has been accepted by all.

In Indian intellectual tradition vedas are considered as the primary source of all knowledge and sciences of the world. Vedas are even required today for the progress of Ādhibhautika, Ādhidaivika and Ādhy ātmika values. In Nirukta acharya Yāska states that – the work becomes successful when it is perform with vedic mantras –

“पुरुषविद्यानित्यत्वात् कर्मसम्पत्तिर्मन्त्रो वेदे ।”¹

The vedas from its origin are so much important that all knowledge and science related references and proofs are taken from vedas. As Bhartṛhari says –

“स्मृतयो बहुरूपाश्च दृष्टादृष्टप्रयोजनाः।

तमेवाश्रित्य लिङ्गेभ्यो वेदविद्धिः प्रकल्पिताः।”²

According to Bhartṛhari, the evidence of visible and invisible śruties are based on vedas. Not only śruties but philosophical proofs are also related to vedas, as Bhartṛhari says –

“तस्यार्थवादरूपाणि निश्चिताः स्वविकल्पजाः ।

एकत्विनां द्वैतिनां च प्रवादा बहुधा मताः ॥”³

The language of veda is indirect, suggestive, symbolic and metaphorical and full of figures of speech. So in veda, so many words have been used for water, as- Arṇḥ, Kshodyaḥ, Kshadyaḥ, Salilam, extras. On quality basis these names have been given. As we know the physical form of water in our day to day life but water has a different form also which is philosophical and called Āpaḥ.

Key words - Veda, āpaḥ, hymn, salila, vaidic seers.

Introduction

The common meaning of Āpaḥ is water but in Ṛigveda it is used in a symbolic form. As mentioned in the Rgveda, Aditi is the basic element and it is in trivargī form (Impact, Community and Collective form)⁴. From the trivargī form of Aditi, when three elements become active then Āpaḥ become the symbol of active state. So the meaning of Āpaḥ is the active state of basic element (mūltattava). On this place if we take the meaning of Āpaḥ as water then the motif will disappear.

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The symbolic meaning of Āpaḥ derived from the root आप्न् व्याप्तौ⁵ (स्वादिगण परस्मैपद) is fully appropriate for the universal principle.

According to R̥gveda, the basic physical element is Aditi or Mother. Nature becomes active as soon as the creation starts. The active second stage of the nature is Āpaḥ or Māyā.

Ancient Indian Scholars knew the indispensability of water for life on the earth. According to ancient beliefs, the universe is comprised of five basic elements: Vyoma (eather/space), Marut (air), Teja (light/heat), Āpaḥ (water), Kṣiti (earth). According to R̥gveda all life evolved from water (Āpaḥ). Pure water is called Divyajala due to its properties of - Śētam (cold), Śuciḥ (clean), Śivam (blessful), Īṣtam (desired by all), Vimalam (transperant). In spite of this there are many medicinal properties also present in water.

Two third of the earth's surface is covered with water and the human body is consisting of 70% of it. It is evidently clear that water is one of the prime elements responsible for life on the earth.

Like the 70% of the body part is water, same as at least 40% of the Vedic literature mentions about water. Vedic literature revolves around the water element.

In Aitareya Brahmana the word Āpaḥ have been taken in a wider sense. According to a fable –

In a sacrifice, it is thought by creator, if I shall initially target the sacrifice to a deity other God will be angry. Taking into account the receipt of all the Gods he saw the hymn –

“आपो रेवतीः ।”⁶

Acharya Sāyana states in his commentary that –

तत्राप्शब्देन सर्वा देवता उक्ता भवन्ति । आप्नुवन्तीत्यापः ।⁷

All gods are denoted from the word Āpaḥ. The word Āpaḥ represent the realization of all gods. Sāyana also says –

“सर्वा देवताः अप्युपाप्ता उपक्रमे प्राप्ता भविष्यन्ति ।”⁸

Beginning of all deities is done according to the planning of God. In the beginning all the deities are established. Measures are derived from the divine plan. Here the word Āpaḥ is integrated with all the deities. So it is clear that from the word Āpaḥ only water element is not taken because all deities are not integrated in water element. All gods are in inclusion of the original power, the same power that all the deities are achievable. So in this sense the word Āpaḥ is the sign of original power.

In Samhitās, vedic seers have used the word Āpaḥ to convey the primeval matter at the original source of the whole universe which is said to have evolved with its various manifestations and categories. In the Viśvakarman hymn, an attempt is made to identify the first principal of the universe. Here Viśvakarman is worshiped as the ultimate source from which everything is created. We find one tendency which is common in Indian concept that the creator, who is self-created, is not only the material cause but also the efficient cause of the universe also.

The word Āpaḥ does not denote to ordinary meaning of water but it is a symbol for the pervasive force. Here Āpaḥ most probably understood in the sense which the Chāndogya Upaniṣad assigns to it. In Chāndogya Upaniṣad Āpaḥ, tejas and annam are said to be produced through the speculation of Sat. Here āpaḥ, tejas and annam are not said in ordinary form of water, fire and food respectively. They are the tripartite complexes (trivṛtkṛtarupa)⁹ of the aforesaid most subtle Āpaḥ, tejas and annam. So Āpaḥ here does not stand exactly for the ordinary water but it express here most probably the subtle form of water. In R̥gvedic mantra it is clear that Āpaḥ

do not stand for water here. According to mantra the first stage of original element is Aditi, second stage of tripartite complexes is active stage which is Āpaḥ, from which the universe has been produced-

“ परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्या परो देवेभिरसुरैर्यदस्ति ।

कं स्विद् गर्भं प्रथमं दध आपो यत्र देवाः समपश्यन्त विश्वे ॥”¹⁰

The second stage is the germ primeval (garbha) which is born by āpaḥ, which is said to be situated in the navel of the unborn. The third stage is constituted by gods and the universe themselves; as it is clear from the following mantra –

“तमिद् गर्भम् प्रथमं दध आपो यत्र देवाः समगच्छन्त विश्वे । अजस्य नाभावध्येकमर्पितं यस्मिन् विश्वानि भुवनानि तस्थुः ॥”¹¹

In Hiranyagarbha hymn, the primeval stage of the ultimate reality is not described, but it outlines the second stage. The seer of this hymn designated the second stage as Hiranyagarbha Dakṣa and Prajāpati. The earlier stage, from where it evolves, is denoted by Āpaḥ, Perhaps the most original stage of all pervasive principle. The word Āpaḥ. Perhaps are used for it just to indicate the āpti, the vyāpti, the all pervasiveness as the essential character of the ultimate reality.

Thus Hiranyagarbha is a stage which evolves from the Āpaḥ, the ultimate principle and is credited with creation and the governance of the universe. It has been explained in following mantras –

“आपो ह यद् बृहतीर् विश्वम् आयन् गर्भं दधाना जनयन्तीर् अग्निम् ।

ततो देवानां सम् अवर्ततासुर् एकः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥”¹²

But in further mantra it has mentioned in different form –

“मा नो हिंसीज् जनिता यः पृथिव्या यो वा दिवं सत्यधर्मा जजान ।

यश् चापश् चन्द्रा बृहतीर् जजान् कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥”¹³

In the above first mantra, it is said that the gods' one spirit, springs out of Āpaḥ while in the second He is said to have produced Āpaḥ. How is it possible? It is perhaps employed by the seer to indicate the identity of both the begetter and the begotten. The seer, perhaps, wants to say that the universe is not originated out of something different from Āpaḥ. But the very Āpaḥ are being produced in the form of Hiranyagarbh and reproduced as the universe.

The seer, perhaps, wants to imply through such expression the material and efficient causality is one. Hiranyagarbha, on account of being the material and efficient cause, the Prajāpati of all the things, is stated to be beyond all the things of the universe. And He having evolved from Āpaḥ, causes in his turn the heaven, the earth, the creatures, the mountains and so on.

The Nāsadiya hymn also gives us the R̥gveda notion about the ultimate cause of the universe. According to hymn –

“न मृत्युरासीत् अमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अहन आसीत् प्रकेतः । आनीद् अवातं स्वधया तद् एकं तस्माद् धान्यन् न परः किं चनास ॥”¹⁴

In the starting of this universe there was nothing except Prajāpati. Then the first creation of the Prajāpati was Salila –
 “तम आसीत् तमसा गूढमग्रे ऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वम् आ इदम् ।
 तुच्छयेनाभवपिहितं यद् आसीत् तपसस् तन् महिनाजायतैकम्
 ॥”¹⁵

It means that at beginning everything was concealed in darkness and then the indiscriminated salila was originated. The word salila is very important from philosophical point of view. It does not give here the ordinary meaning of water. In this mantra it is clearly implies that in starting the water was not there then.

Acharya Sāyaṇa interprets it in two ways

1. The Water is the highest cause in which the whole universe rests without categorical distinctions.
2. Comparing the reality with water, interprets that as water mixed with milk is indistinguishable, similarly, the universe originally on account of being covered with darkness, was ungraspable.

The first interpretation is somewhat plausible but not the second. The seer here is describing the ultimate one and not the universe as interpreted it by Sāyaṇa.

On the basis of above descriptions we can say that in Rgveda and in Atharvaveda, Āpaḥ have used in a symbolic form. There is a lot of hymn which is related to metaphysics, science and symbol. The another name of water is salila. Meaning of salila is – sat + līna,

“सलिलं सद्भावे लीनम्। सर्वमिदं भावस्योपरि लीनमासीत्”¹⁶

In the pre-existing stage of world, everything is absorbed in the existence. So the meaning of salila is “astittva līnata.” Taitiriyasamhitā clearly declares that before the creation of the world, Āpaḥ was in salila form. Thus we can say that creation begins with a combination of water element, which is wide and non-existing.

The significance of water is also given in Atharvaveda, where the first mantra of the Rgveda is about agnisukta, while the first kāṇḍa of Atharvaveda is describing about Āpaḥ. In first kāṇḍa water is called as “Goddess”. In first kāṇḍa’s sixth suktas the usefulness of water has given –

शं नो देवीरभिष्टय आपो भवन्तु पीतये ।

शं योरभि स्त्रवन्तु नः ॥¹⁷

Be the divine waters weal for us in order to assistance, to drink; weal [and] health flow they unto us. In next mantra, the all remedies qualities live in Āpaḥ –

अप्सु मे सोमो अब्रवीदन्तर्विश्वानि भेषजा ।¹⁸

Seer says, o waters, bestow a remedy, protection (varutha) for my body, and long to see the sun.

आपः पृणीत भेषजं वरुथं तन्वेऽ मम। ज्योक् च सूर्यं दशे ॥¹⁹

In next mantra, it is a description of the different form of water. As-

The waters of the plain (dhanayanya)

The water of marshes (anupya)

The waters won by digging (khanitrima)

The water brought in a vessel (kumbhadi)

The rain water (varsa). So these are the lots of form of physical water.

Conclusion

After the above description of physical and metaphysical form of water we can say that the importance of water is not only in

our day to day life but also it is an important element which is responsible for the life of creatures and plants on earth. Manusmriti also states –

अप एवससर्जादौ ।

Vaidic seers knew the importance of water, that is why in our culture water is recognized as “Goddess”. The reason behind it may that people will take care of its maintenance and protection.

As we know, for the life on earth, air and water these two elements are major elements. If they become contaminated then the crisis will come upon life. When the question comes to the origin of human life and other life, water plays an important role in it. The baby is in the womb of mother, it remains in the water. So water is important. Science has also proved that the first organism that comes from Amoeba and Paramecium on the earth is also produced by water. Therefore the origin of earth becomes clear through water.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that my work is original and I have written this. No other same work I have found any other places. If any work found then I will be guilty for it. Astha

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