



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

ॐ

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2020; 6(6): 126-129

© 2020 IJSR

www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 14-08-2020

Accepted: 21-09-2020

Sri Satyanarayan Rath

Ph.D., Scholar, Sambalpur
University, Odisha, India

Agni vaiśvānara in ṛgveda: A study

Sri Satyanarayan Rath

Abstract

Agni occupies an important place among the deities of the Vedas. He has been praised nearly in 200 hymns next to Indra. He is seen with some epithets. The epithet Vaisvānara in RgVeda exhibits some important aspects of Agni. The idea of assigning any particular region to Agni no more appears right after a detail analysis of this epithet.

Keywords: Agni, vaisvanara, rgveda, epithets

1. Introduction

The deity concept in the Vedas is very much important and interesting to a modern mind. The word for deity is *deva* in Sanskrit which comes from the root *div*-to shine, to give away etc. The Indo-European counterpart is *daiv* meaning celestial as taken mostly. Yāska tries to derive the word from the root *div* with the meaning spark, shine etc. So a common meaning may come from this word like radiant or something glowing. Regarding the number of gods in the Vedas, nothing can be said concretely as the number varies according to interpretation. But somehow the number is fixed mostly as 33 (8 vasus, 11 Rudras, 12 Ādityas and the Creator (Prajāpati). Major gods are Indra, Agni, Sūrya, Uṣas, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Mitra, Aditi, Soma, Prithivi, Yama Viṣṇu and Rudra. The gods belong to three regions like sky, firmament and earth. However in the pantheon of Vedic gods, Agni occupies an important place as he has been praised nearly in 200 hymns next to Indra. Again he has been praised conjointly with other gods most frequently. Agni appears to be more an interesting deity, since some peculiar features are found with him like, he is more earthly than heavenly, closely associated with the worshiper, regarded as the guest of house-hold, an envoy of gods rather than a god, invoker (*hotā*) and many more. This may be because of the early association of humans with fire and the utility derived from it. To get a clear picture of the god Agni, various epithets found in the Vedas should be analysed.

2. Vedic epithets

Epithets play an important role in obtaining an idea or concept of Vedic gods. Oxford dictionary gives the definition of epithet as 'An adjective or adjectival phrase used to define a characteristic, quality or attribute of some person or things'. A more clear concept of epithet is found in the words of J. Gonda. "Of the stylistic devices, the epithet is perhaps, the one which has been most abused in certain genres of poetry and prose compositions. But in its proper and moderate use, it may have the effect of increasing the author's vocabulary and enriching his power of expression. A well-chosen epithet often constitutes a picture by itself, adding an element of vividness to the context, rubbing of a vague and worn noun and throwing light upon those of its connotations which should attract the attention of audience. An epithet may typify and express an opinion, beautify and add to the intelligibility of a passage, without interrupting the course of narrative or by movement of the poem by a long parenthesis or burdening them by a cumbersome description. It often is the best way to secure brightness, beauty, distinction and sublimity of the style [1] After going through this brilliant disposition regarding epithets by Gonda, there is no further doubt about its importance in literary works. However to a common mind it appears that a well chosen epithet definitely throws a new light on the original source so called.

Corresponding Author:

Sri Satyanarayan Rath

Ph.D., Scholar, Sambalpur
University, Odisha, India

3. Some epithets of Agni

i) Narāsamsa

The epithet Narāsamsa occurs many a times in ṚgVeda. But it has been given an independent appellation in Nighantu (5.3). It is unaccompanied by the name Agni^[2]. The name has been found in the third verse as a fixed place in Āpri hymns and the second in those which are technically called Āpra. The primary sense of the word is the form of Agni which is praised by humans (*nareih stuyate sasyate*). Of course this epithet has been used for Pusan twice apart from Agni. Again in ṚgVeda, Agni has been called Narāsamsa differentiating him from Tanunapāt^[4] He performs sacrifice with honey on his tongue, *madhūjihvam* (R.V,I.13.3;V.5.2). In Āpri hymns also he has been mentioned as sacred grass (*barhis*) etc. Again his association with Bṛhaspati is well known (R.V,X.182.2). In ṚgVeda I.18.9, he has been mentioned as the performer of sacrifice in heaven. Prof. R.N. Dandekar is of the opinion that Narāsamsa is the ṚgVedic name of dakṣiṇā fire and to prove the point he quotes Hillebrandt (Vedic Mythology)^[5]. The same opinion he gives in his article published in the journal from Baroda^[6]. According to this article although ṚgVeda is prepared for the praise of gods, there are indications of the cult of *pitars* or manes and Narāsamsa is the name for the *dakṣiṇā* fire i.e the fire of *pitars*.

ii) Tanunapāt

This epithet, unaccompanied by the name Agni, occurs eight times in the ṚgVeda and six of these are always just after the first verse of the Āpri hymns. This is treated as an independent name in Nighantu (5.2). He is beautiful tongued (R.V,X.110.2). He is honoured by the gods three times a day and Varuṇa, Mitra and Agni, everyday. The word would mean “son of himself” since he is generated spontaneously in wood and cloud. He is prayed to take the sacrifice to gods (I.13.2). According to Dandekar, later vedic ritual has a rite called *Tanunapatra* where the sacrificer and the priests take oath for mutual help. But again citing *Taittiriya samhita* (I.2.10) he describes it as the fire of digestion. Again as per Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. (III.4.2.5) states that Tanunapāt became a witness when gods took oath of alliance before Prajāpati. As per this Brāhmaṇa ‘he who blows is Tanunapāt, the strong one, was witness’^[7] In this way Tanunapāt is regarded as the wind god. But according to Fay the double accent illustrates *dwanda* compound denoting thunder^[8]. Again Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa also thinks him as Summer season (*grīṣmo vai tanunapāt*. (I.5.3.10). On the whole it can be said that Tanunapāt is in some way connected to fire (Agni).

iii) Jātavedas

This is a very important epithet of Agni and occurs more than 270 times in all the Vedas. But more interesting is that only Agni bears this epithet and none. The derivation is like *jan+kta+vid* (to know)+*asun* and the meaning would be, i) the knower of creatures, ii) having innate wisdom. The meaning may come like ‘all creatures know him or he knows all creatures’. In ṚgVeda, (VI.15.13b) he is described as the knower of all generations. He knows heavenly ordinances, knows all living beings and their invocations. He is also the generator of wisdom (R.V,IV.2.3). He has been assigned with the attributes like Viśvadevas, Viśvavid, kavi, Kavikratu (the possessor of knowledge) etc. Yāska treated him as having innate wisdom. Again he produces wisdom and having eloquence and also the cause of eloquence in

others. Since he is the knower of all and sustains everybody, in one way he is regarded as the Supreme Being. He is present within everybody and knows their activities. So omnipresence is the remarkable quality with him. But it is worth to be seen that though it is an epithet of Agni still in some places he is an independent deity. In this regard two hymns of ṚgVeda may be seen. (R.V,I.99 & R.V,X.188). In I.99 of ṚgVeda, the sacrificers try to extract *Soma* juices which is to be offered to Jātavedas. He is prayed to consume all the wealth of the enemies.” Agni. “For Jātavedas let us press the Soma: may he consume the wealth of the malignant. May Agni carry us through all our troubles, through grief as in a boat across the river.” Also in ṚgVeda, I.88.1, he has been invited to sit on the sacred grass and so called *Vajinam or the giver of food*. Again in this hymn he has been addressed as *Midhusa or the showerer of benefits*, *Vipravira* or the father whose sons are intelligent. In this way it is seen that this epithet occupies very much importance since it exhibits some important aspect of Agni who is according to Dayānanda and Aurovinda is the Supreme Self and present in everything.

iv) Vaiśvānara

This form of Agni attracts our attention very much since much discussions have been seen in Upaniṣadas, Brahmaṣūtras and in other allied literature stating Vaiśvānara as Supreme Soul. Yāska has pointed out in the Nirukta that Agni is the only god, prayed in various names.⁹ There are twelve hymns in ṚgVeda where Vaiśvānara is invoked and praised (I.59, I.98, III.2, III.3, IV.5, VI.7, VI.8, VI.9 and X.88). Regarding the derivation of the word Vaiśvānara it may be seen that this can be done in two ways as proposed by Yāska (Nirukta (7.6.1).

1. *Viśvan narān nayanti iti Vaiśvānarah.* (He leads all men)
2. *Viśva enam narā nayanti iti Vaiśvānarah.* (All men lead him) So it may be presumed that Vaiśvānara is a deity concept of Agni which postulates him as an active agent. Again Yāska gives another definition:-
3. *iii) api va Viśvānara eva syat sarvāṇi bhūtāni tasya Vaiśvānarah.*

Viśvan+√r+ka

Viśvan+ar+a=Viśvanara and tasyāpatyam Vaiśvānara.

Durgāchārya commenting on this alternate definition opines that it may be a deity named Viśvanara and his son is Vaiśvānara.

In ṚgVeda the word Viśvānara occurs for four times. In I.186.1 it qualifies terrestrial fire, in VII.76.1 it qualifies Savitṛ, in X.5.1, it qualifies Indra and in VIII.68.4, it qualifies *Savas*. But Vaiśvānara only qualifies Agni as manifested in three regions. Agni has been described as having three abodes (*trisadhastha*), son of three mothers (*tryambaka*, R.V,VI.59.12) or something connected to three. But this triple character of Agni rightly justified in the form of Vaiśvānara as he has been thought of as pervaded the three regions. Vaiśvānara has been invoked in twelve hymns in ṚgVeda. Regarding his birth, it is said that the gods generated him in a ritual, for the benefit of everybody^[10] In ṚgVeda, X.88.7 he has been called the source of the celestial world (*diviyoni*) and in X.88.7 of the same Veda he is said to have been generated by the eulogy of gods. In this way the importance of Vaiśvānara has been described. But interestingly it is also seen that the concept of Vaiśvānara has been interpreted variously with natural, ritual, spiritual and secular meanings by different Vedic commentators.

4. Concept of Vaiśvānara

A) Naturalistic concept of Vaiśvānara

The interpretation which is made with the objective, scheme of reality of nature is natural interpretation. Vedic poets saw the nature as the manifestation of Supreme in the form of mountain, river, sun, lightning, rain, thunder etc and Vaiśvānara is ascribed to such natural phenomena.

i). Vaiśvānara as Sun

In view of the ancient Mināṅsakas, Vaiśvānara is Sun itself. In Bṛhaddevatā, (2.18) Vaiśvānara is included in the group of gods headed by Surya. In sacrifice when libations are offered, it is given in an ascending order, like morning, mid-day and evening. In Agni-Marut book, it is mentioned that the evening offering should be made by chanting of verses meant for Vaiśvānara. Again the third offering is meant for the deity of heaven i.e Sun or Sūrya. Ritualists say that Surya is meant by the name Vaiśvānara here. Again the oblation of Sun is in twelve pot shurds (*kapāla*) which coincides with the offerings to Vaiśvānara and this equality of offerings points to same deity. Again, twelve months are the twelve types of functions of Aditya. To make the point more clear, it is seen that in ṚgVeda, X.88.12, Vaiśvānara is thought of as Surya. "The gods make Agni Vaiśvānara, the indicator of days, for the sake of the whole world, who stretched out the radiant dawns, and he moves along, scatters the darkness with his light." The words like 'indicator of days', 'scattering of light' etc. point to the fact that Vaiśvānara is meant as Sūrya here. Again ṚgVeda, VI.8.2 speaks of the birth of Vaiśvānara in the highest world (*paramē vyomani*) which means the birth place of sun.

ii). Vaiśvānara as lightning (*Vidyut*)

In one of the verses of ṚgVeda (I.59.6) Vaiśvānara is thought of as lightning. Here he has been described as the destroyer of Vṛtra (Vṛtrahaṇam). Many a times Indra is described to have killed the stealer of water (Vṛtra). So Indra is no other than lightning and rightly Yāska has quoted the verse to prove him as lightning. Again in another verse of ṚgVeda (VI.7.5) Vaiśvānara has been described as born on the lap of his parents, i.e firmament (*pitrorupasthe*). Here it is mentioned that the heaven and the earth have stationed the banner of the days (sun) on the paths of firmament. Sāyaṇa makes the point more clear stating that the 'lap of sky and earth' is firmament.¹¹ There are many other places where a clear indication is seen of Vaiśvānara as Aditya or sun but due to the restriction of space the same could not be given.

iii). Vaiśvānara as terrestrial fire

In ṚgVeda at many places Vaiśvānara is treated as terrestrial fire. In Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad, Vaiśvānara is described as consumer of gross objects (*sthulabhuk Vaiśvānarah*, 1.3). To begin with, in ṚgVeda, VI.8.4, he is thought of as have been brought of by Mātariśvān, from far of places or distant sphere of sun. In explaining the verse Sāyaṇa treats him as the fire of the earth.¹² Again he has been lauded by the attribute like *pitā, nābhi, ketu* etc. which exhibits his earthly form. In ṚgVeda, (III.2.4) he has been designated as *Kavikratu* as *Purohita*, III.2.8; *Hota*, III.2.1 & 13; as *Dūta*, III.3.2 and so on. On the whole it can be said that there are ample of examples in ṚgVeda, where he is described with his terrestrial form.

B) Ritualistic Concept of Vaiśvānara

It is a well known fact that the Vedic life was closely

connected with rituals. Yajña was performed for individual and for collective benefit. It is very interesting to see that Vaiśvānara is invoked in rituals for various purposes. In ṚgVeda (VI.7.2) he has been mentioned as the naval of sacrifice. "The worshipers glorify together, (Agni), the bond of sacrifice, the abode of riches, the great receptacle of burnt offerings: the gods generate Vaiśvānara, the conveyer of oblations, the emblem of sacrifice."¹³ In this verse, when he is said to be the naval of sacrifice, the importance attached to him in the sacrifice, is clearly marked. Similarly, the word, banner of sacrifice (*Yajñasya ketum*) speaks of his importance. Again, in another verse it is said that Vaiśvānara is the possessor of riches and these are deposited within him, like rays in the sun. He is the sovereign of all the valuables that exist in mountains, in waters and among the people. When it is said that 'the treasures deposited in mountains' it may mean the volcanic eruptions at the beginning of the earth and later on the formation of mountains completed. So in that way it can be said that at the beginning it was only fire.

C. Spiritual Concept of Vaiśvānara

It is very interesting to see that Vaiśvānara has been thought of as the Supreme Being or Paramātman in many verses of ṚgVeda. There are descriptions in the Vedas and Upaniṣads where the concept of one god is seen. The famous saying as 'it is only one god prayed in different names' (*ekam sadviprah vahudhā vadanti*) is the best example of the same. Everything with name and form in the universe, is nothing but His manifestations. There are many absurd remarks by some western scholars regarding the exact meaning of Vedic verses but the Indian scholars like Dayānanda and Aurovinda have tried to eradicate the absurdities put forth by the so called Vedic scholars. So let us find the interpretation of these scholars regarding Vaiśvānara, which is, an important epithet of Agni. First of all in Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa very explicitly describes Vaiśvānara in a spiritual way stating hi as *Prāṇa* in first place and *Apāna* in the second¹⁴. The same description is found in Śrīmad Bhagavat Gītā where Sri Kṛṣṇa describes himself as Vaiśvānara and does the work of digestion with *Prāṇa* and *Apāna* in living beings (*prāṇāpānasamāyuktaḥ paçāmyanna çaturvidham*). Chāndogya Upaniṣad very clearly admits Vaiśvānara as the soul (5.11.2; 5.11.6; 5.12.1). At one place in this Upaniṣad it is said that Vaiśvānara is the soul of living beings¹⁵. In Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad also the same thing has been said (*viśvo Vaiśvānarah*, 1.1.1). Then coming to ṚgVeda, in verse I.59.5, Vaiśvānara has been described as the knower of everything. "Vaiśvānara who knowest all that are born, thy magnitude has exceeded that of the spacious: heaven, thou art the monarch of Manu-descended men: thou has regained for the gods in battle the wealth (carried away by *asuras*)"¹⁶ Here he has been described as exceeded everything in magnitude and the knower of everything. This is a clear indication of the spiritual aspect of Vaiśvānara. Dayānanda has rightly explained Vaiśvānara in this verse that 'the element present in everything' (*jāteṣu padārtheṣu vidyate*) and he is no other than the Supreme Being.

IV) Secular Concept of Vaiśvānara

The secular concept is the unique one among all the concepts of Vaiśvānara. In spite of other meanings of the verses of Vedas Dayānanda finds a secular meaning that concerns man during his daily activities. The idea of Dayānanda is that, through the figures of speech like *sleṣa, upamā* etc in the verses of the Vedas, a beautiful meaning can be thought of.

Vedic words are derivatives(*yaugika*)but not *ruḍha*.So if analysed in that way, more than one meaning can be seen from the verses.Dayānanda is of the opinion that the Vedas not at all concerned only with some rituals but connected with the lives of common man.For instance Vaiśvānara in RgVeda may be seen like a brilliant scholar,good husband,ideal teacher etc.The idea of universal leader is found in RgVeda,VI.7.5 ^[17]. The word Vaiśvānara in this verse is explained by Dayānanda as *viśvesmin vidyādharmaprakāśanena nāyako yaḥ* or Vaiśvānara is a universal leader who is brilliant by the acquisition of knowledge and righteousness. Again the word *vrātāni* is explained as *brahmacharyavidyāgrahanasatyabhāsanādīni* or vows are like continence, acquisition of knowledge, speaking truth etc. So the purport of the verse is, all should know that if they take a second birth through initiation, all their actions will be successful.Similliarly, in VI.7.3, the idea of ‘brilliant scholar’ is found as per this interpretation.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of above discussion it may be seen that the concept of Vaiśvānara is very wide. What has been said by the authorities like Saunaka etc, to place him in heaven or Yāska etc. as to place him in earthly or in firmament region, needs a second thought .Many a times it is mentioned that Vaiśvānara is present in three regions which justifies his triple character. Various Agnis are found in Vedic literature like fire of Divodāsa, Bharatas, Kuśikas etc.So Vaiśvānara Agni may be one of from that group who is meant for every human being.In a spiritual way he is the Supreme Soul and present everywhere.

6. References

1. Gonda J. ‘Epithets in RigVeda’ p.7
2. Macdonel A.A: Vedic Mytology,p.100
3. Nirukta,7.1
4. tanūnapāducyate garbha āsuro narāśamso bhavati yadvijāyate | mātariśvā yadamimīta mātari vātasya sargo abhavatsarīmaṇi ||R.V,III.29.11
5. Dandekar R.N, ‘Vedic Mythological Tracts’,pp.279-290.
6. ‘Some aspects of Agni Mythology in the Veda’,Vol.XI,1962, 346
7. op cit,p.357
8. Fay EW. The Aryan God of Lightning’AJPH 65,cited by Dandekar in Vedic Mythological Tracts,p.292
9. *imāmagnim mahāntamatmānam bahudhā vadantī*, Nirukta,7.18
10. kratvā dakṣasya taruṣo vidharmaṇi devāso agnim janayanta cittibhiḥ /rurucānam bhānunā jyotiṣā mahāmatyam na vājam saniṣyannupa bruve//R.V,III.2.3
11. R.V,VI.7.5 C f.Sā.Bhā. ‘*dyavā pṛthivyoh upasthāne’ntarikṣe*’
12. *Ibid*,VI.8.4 Cf Sā.Bhā. ‘*matariśvā vāyuḥ parāvataḥ dūradeśāt vivasvataḥ ādityāt ā abharat imāṃ lokam pratyajahāra*’
13. *nābhi yajñam sadanam rayīnām mahāmahanābhim sam navanta | vaiśvānaram rathyamadhvarāṇām yajñasya ketum janayanta devāḥ* ||R.V., 6.007.02
14. praṇo vaipurvo vaiśvānaro’ pāno’ uttarah,Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa,3.8
15. sampratmanam Vaiśvānaramadhyeti,Chā.Up.,5.11.2
16. divāscitte bhṛhato jātavedo vaiśvānara pra ririce mahitvam | rājā kṛṣṭināmasi mānuṣiṇām yudhā devebhyo varivaścakartha ||R.V.,I.59.5

17. vaiśvānara tava tāni vrātāni mahānyagne nakirā dadharṣa | yajjāyamānaḥ pitrorupasthe’vindaḥ ketum vayneṣvahnām || R.V,VI.7.05