

Surya: The Vedic God

Dr. Sharma Bhanu Bhupendra
Associate Professor
Department of Philosophy
Hansraj College
University Of Delhi

Introduction

Since time immemorial Surya(Sun) has the major impact on the lives of man- kind, flora and fauna. It is the prime source of energy which helps in creation and nurturing things. It is the major reason that, in the Vedic culture one can see the daily rituals like Suryanamaskar, and Suryaupāsna. In the Vedas, Surya is considered as *pratyakṣa deva*, who is the prime source of all beings. In *pañca-* deva also Surya is among the five deva (Shiva, Ganesh, Viṣṇu, Amba and Surya). Being the core of the universe, all beings (be man or other beings) require its constant support for their sustenance. Vedic ṛṣi have given lots of significance and importance to Surya, the growth and prosperity of the whole world and universe depends on Surya, be it the vegetation, the water cycle everything is directly depending on Surya.¹ Rg Veda² describes Sun as the benefactor and the soul of all beings. Saur Pūraṇa describes the magnificent resources and powers of Sun. Sun has great curative powers, people who come in direct contact with sun rays are less likely to get sick, for example, people in rural areas be it farmers, masons, builders or so on; where as people living in urban areas, who do not come in direct contact with Sun but they prefer to stay in closed air - conditioned places are more likely to get sick, even if they eat nutritious food along with vitamin tablets. In my present paper I am analyzing the role of Sun in Vedic culture as well as its impact on the well-being.

Vedic concept of Surya

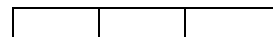
The Veda treat Surya as the basis of nitya and namitta karma as He is the witness of all our karma (good as well as bad) and yields the fruits of those karma accordingly. Time, directions and *pañca-mahā-bhūta* all are depending on Surya. According to the Vedic tradition without the worship of Surya one gains the right to perform any pious deed, people of all *varṇa- āśram* must perform the three *Samdhya*. *Samdhya* refers to the intermediate state of sleep, where one can know the other world³ but later it exclusively meant the union of morning, noon and dusk. According to the Mait.Up.⁴ *Samdhya* is the anthropo-comic twilight which fuses the three worlds (bhu, bhuvā, svah). Dawn shines forth at the kindling of the fire. When the Sun rises, light is spread. The inspirer God now sends us forth, both two- and four- legged, each to its own

task.... This daughter of Heaven has revealed herself in the eastern region, all clothed in light. Faithfully she follows the path of Cosmic Order; well understanding, she measures out the regions.⁵ Further, it states⁶ O immortal Goddess, beam forth your rays. Let your shining chariot, loaded with gifts, bring your hither in the company of your docile steeds, your powerful steeds, O golden Lady! According to the Rg Veda⁷ it is Surya which brings prosperity on earth and maintains the balance in space. It further adds⁸ that the sun is the lord of all the nine planets and by worshipping it, the aspirant can get rid off the malefic effects of other planets.

Rg Veda⁹ describes Surya as sitting on the chariot and directing and motivating the entire universe. In *Viṣṇu Pūraṇa*¹⁰ also describes in detail the chariot and the speed with which it runs. Surya along with Moon, creates *Kāla*. There are two *pakṣai*. i.e. *sukala* and *kr̥ṣṇapakṣa* which are created by moon, similarly the dates are sixteen (based on moon's sixteen phases) in number. The *ṛtu* (seasons) and the twelve months are created by sun, for each month Surya is described in a special way, for example, in *Caitra* Surya is *Dhātā* who is creator, preserver and supporter and soul of the universe, for *Jyeshtha* it is *Indra* and for *Asadha* it is *Ravi*.¹¹ In the *Gītā*,¹² *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* declares that "Of the *Ādityas* I am *Viṣṇu*; of the lights the radiant Sun; I am *Marici* of the *Maruts*; of the stars I am moon. In *Yoga sāstra*, beings are supposed to have *ida* and *pingla* from which the *pañca-mahā-bhūta* are supposed to flow; *ida* is associated to moon and *pingla* to Surya. *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*¹³ describes Surya as *Brahma*, who wished and converted itself to many, becoming the ultimate cause of everything. In the *Gītā*¹⁴ *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* declares that the power (*teja*) of moon, sun and fire is *Me*. *Surya Upaniṣad* of *Atharva Veda* also states that the aspirant who recites the *beejmantra* of Surya deva i.e.

“ॐ हां हीं हौंसः सूर्याय नमः” ।

regains the ability to possess all four *puruṣārtha*, i.e. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *kāma* and *Mokṣa*. In traditional Hindu families, even today one can observe members reciting this *mantra* and show reverence to the *Suryayantra*.



6	1	8
7	5	3
2	9	4

Surya Yantra

The twelve Āditya are the sons of Āditi¹⁵ among them Viṣṇu is the youngest and possess lots of qualities.¹⁶ Prabhais the power of Surya, she is his wife¹⁷. Savitri and Tapti are the daughters¹⁸, Sangya is his wife which bore twins the Ashvani Kumar, Yamuna (daughter) and Yama. Yama is equal in power and brilliance to Surya,¹⁹ Chaya bore him Shani who is the Lord of Justice and is one among the nine planets. In the *Mahābhārata* also Suryahas a son Karna from Kunti,²⁰ there are several instances where Suryais coming to protect Karna, for example, when he comes in Karna's dream and warns him about Indra who wants attain the Divine armour and earrings to save his son Arjun in the battle field.²¹

Suryais kind and is easily pleased, in the *Mahābhārata*, Yudishter prayed to Suryadeva and was gifted with the aksayapatra (inexhaustible vessel), which had the power to never depleting supply of food and it proved to be of great help to Pandavas in their period of exile, by using it the Pandavas were able to take care of their basic need of food and could also fulfill their duties towards their guest (as this duty is considered as a prime duty of a house holder).²²

In the Vedic Culture the saṁskārs played important role. Gṛhasūtradiscuss them in detailed. The number of saṁskārs varies in Gṛhasūtra, generally there are sixteen saṁskārs mainly agreed upon, which are performed for the spiritual growth. The saṁskārs like Garbhadhana, Pumsavana, Simantonayana are performed by the family members prior to one's birth and saṁskārs of antyesti is performed after agent's demise, rest of the saṁskārs are performed with in one's life time. Among these the upanayana saṁskārs which is also known as the second birth, in Satapatha Brahmana²³ Upanayana Saṁskārs assumed a ceremonious shape, where the agent takes a Gurū, who in turn gives direction to agent's life, every time when one takes a new Gurū one has to perform this saṁskārs again.²⁴ According to Rṣi Aruni, even an old person can become a disciple²⁵. The Gurū holds the high respect. In order to attain the highest knowledge devotion to Gurū is pre-requisite.²⁶ Upanayana Saṁskārs is also known as the teachings of Savitri, here, there is establishing the relation between disciple and Savitri which is performed by the Gurū. Savitri is considered as mother and Gurū as father. Suryais

considered as the ultimate Gurū, who enlightens his disciple and yields *Brahmajñāna*. The famous mantra of Brhadaranyaka Upanisad²⁷ which is used as a prayer in several school in India is '*Astoma sad gamaya, Tamsomajyotirgamaya, Mrutyorma Amritamgamaya*....' is recited by the aspirant who is seeking Grace from Suryasaying, kindly take me from darkness to light, here by darkness is meant from ignorance to knowledge. There are several hymns where²⁸ the aspirant begs for forgiveness from Suryadeva of the evil deeds performed due to ignorance and seeks salvation.

In Śrī Rāmāyaṇa,²⁹ ṛṣi Valmiki writes a potent stotra which yields fierce energy and power to the devotee who seeks Suryadeva blessings. It is known as Āditya- Hrdaya – Stotram. *The power and glory of Suryacan again be witnessed in this stotra, where sage Agastya comes to help Śrī Rāmā, who is in battle field tired and worried, there sage Agastya recites this Stotram, where Suryais said to be the embodiment of all gods, who is the ultimate creator, sustainer and destroyer. He is revered by both gods and demons. Suryais life breath of the universe, the progenitor who is courser in the heavens and nourisher of all. He posses a chariot which is pulled by seven green horses, destroyer of darkness. Suryais the source of happiness and bliss, the mitigatory of the suffering of his devotees, the infuser of life in the lifeless cosmic egg. He is the son of Aditi, who bears the fire of dissolution in him, who courses swiftly along his own orbit, carries in him the resolve to evolve the universe. He is omniscient, all – formed, endowed with extraordinary brilliance, coppery, the source of all evolutes. After this advise, Śrī Rāmā (who is himself the incarnation of Viṣṇu) concentrates and recites this prayer three times, feeling extremely exhilarated kills Ravana.*

Impact of Sun on the Well being

Suryais considered to possess great curative power. Yoga Sutra gives great importance to Surya. The Surya- Namaskaris considered as a complete exercise, by performing it one can take care of the physical body. Surya Namaskar is a process where there are various postures which an agent makes and while making these postures one recites the mantras of Surya, the twelve mantras are associated to twelve Ādityas (Surya) they are 1. Mitra, 2. Ravi, 3. Surya, 4. Bhanu, 5. Khaga, 6. Pusne, 7. Hiranya Barbhaya, 8. Maricaye, 9. Āditya, 10. Savitre, 11. Arkaya, 12. Bhaskaraya, by these not only physical but also spiritual power is developed. It brings the harmony in the aspirant on physical, psychological and spiritual spheres. According to Suryatreatment one's physical body consists of various colours, for example, skin

colour, hair colour, colour of the eyes so on and all these are different from each other and equally important in their own way. The colours are produced by the sun rays, thus if, there is imbalance in them then it signifies that an agent is sick and can be cured if he/ she comes in direct contact with sun. Atharva Veda³⁰ describes several remedies which can cure diseases like jaundice, leprosy, heart problems, problems related to blood and so on. It also suggests that if one comes in direct contact to morning sun- rays one gains longevity. In Mānasa,³¹ Tulsidas says, that all diseases related to eyes can be cured by worshipping Sun God. One is well aware that the food we intake, grows due to Sun light, there are germs as well as harmful fungus which is destroyed when it comes in contact with Sun rays, be it water or air, sunlight purifies it. There are several experiments conducted on the effect of GyatriMantra³² on the persons who are suffering from several mild as well as sever illnesses.

Conclusion

Man has been using and abusing the limited perishable resources like, petroleum, gas, coal, water etc. for their personal and other uses. To attain these resources man takes help of excessive mining which has harmful effect on nature. The excessive use of petroleum cause air pollution to such an extent that there is a threat from UV rays of sun. My inquiry holds that SuryaDeva is the elixir of life and in its mere absence no life form will be able to thrive. It is Surya which reveal the true nature of objects to the agent. The Vedic ṛṣi knew this and revered this power. It is important that man should use this inexhaustible energy, Chāndogya Upaniṣad³³ describes Suryaas effulgence of Brahm, it further states³⁴ the relation between sun and earth, and also declares that sun is the main benefactor to all it. Thus, for the ultimate purification on physical, moral and spiritual sphere one should beseech blessings of Suryadeva. Thus, it is important today, that man should understand his duty towards Mother Nature. In order to have holistic and harmonious existence and sustenance, it is the need of the hour that we should show our reverence to the sun and use its solar energy which is constant and inexhaustible in nature for the welfare of all. Though, baby steps have been initiated by the governments of various countries in this direction.

Notes and References

1. YV 7.42.
2. 10. 115.1-6
3. Brahd. Up.IV.3.9
4. 11.8
5. For full detail refer to Rg Veda 1.24.1-13

6. Rg Veda III.61
7. Rg Veda 10. 72. 8-9
8. 10.37.4-5
9. 1.35.2
10. 2.8.1-10; 2.8.24- 39); Mbh.(5.170)
11. for further detail see Viṣṇu Pu. 2.8-10
12. X. 21
13. 2.6
14. XV.12-13
15. Mbh. 1.68.14
16. Mbh. 1.65.15-16
17. Mbh. 5.117.8
18. Mbh. 1.170.7
19. Mbh. 1. 297.41
20. 1.110.8
21. Mbh. 1. 110. 117-118
22. Mbh. 3. 16.261
23. i.2. 1-8
24. Ch.Up.vi. 1.2
25. Br. U. vi.16
26. Svetasvatra Up. .vi. 23
27. 1.2.28
28. Rg Veda 4.54.3
29. Val. Ram. 6.105. 1-31
30. AV 1.22
31. 6.15.3
32. Rg Veda 3.62.10
33. Ch. Up.1.6.6
34. Ch. Up. II. 2.1

Abbreviations

1. Rg-Veda	RV
2. Atharva- Veda	AV
3. Yajurveda	YV
4. Bhagavad Gītā	BG, Gītā
5. Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad Brahd. Up	
6. Mahābhārat Mbh.	
7. Upaniṣad	Up
8. Chāndogya Upaniṣad CU	
9. Taittiriya Upaniṣad	Tait. Up.
10. Śrī Rāmachritamānasa Mānasa	
11. Maitrī Upaniṣad Mait. Up	
13. Taittiriya Upaniṣad	Tait. Up.
14. Pūraṇa	Pu

Bibliography

1. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad Text and tr. Swami Madhvananda, Advaita Ashrama, 1950.
2. ChandogyaUpanisad tr. Swahananda, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1980.
3. The Mahābhārata tr. and ed. V.S. Sukhthankar, et al., Bhandarikar, Oriental Research
4. Pannikar Raimundo, The Vedic Experience Manṭramanjari: An anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration, Motilal Banasidass Publishers pvt. Limited, Delhi, 2001
5. Radhakrishnan S. The BhagvadGītā, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2010.
6. Ṛg VedaSamhita ed. ed.and tr.in Hindi S.D. Satawalekar, SastaShahitya Mandal, Pardi. Vishwa Bandhu VVRI Institute, Hoshiarpur1964-65.
7. ŚrīRāmachritamānasa Swami Tulsidas, Gītā Press ,Gorakhpur.
8. Eight Upanishad Vol. I and II Text and tr. Gambhirananda, Advaita Ashram Calcutta 1973 and 1977.
9. ŚrīmadvalmikyaRāmāyaṇa, Gita Press, Gorahpur