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Jalapravāha – Rgveda to Purāṇa

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Introduction

An element which is most important for all mortal and immortal beings on earth, which is always available on earth and which distinguishes the earth from other planets of milky – ways is Water. The search of water on planets other than the earth has proved to be futile. From primitive age, man is curious about the water, the source of water, the structure of its molecules, the civilization flourished on the banks of rivers etc.

In India also, it seems that the study of the science of the water is made from the times of *Rgveda* (RV). One finds various references of water cycle in the RV. The ancient treatise namely *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (ChU)¹, *Kṛṣiparāśara* (KP), *Arthaśāstra* (AS)², *Bṛhadsamhitā* (BS)³ are also mentioned the various topics related to water. For e.g. KP attracts attention on the matters such as prediction of rain, measuring the rainfall etc.

Even today, the water is the topic of discussion on the global platforms. Many scholars have commented on this topic. I have taken the help of these comments for this paper. I know that there is a lot of scope to make a research on water from different sources. Due to prevent the extensiveness of the paper, I have limited myself Between Vedas to *Purāṇas*.

Water from Vedas to Purāṇas -

Vedic people were aware that the rain was the top-most source of the water on earth to provide clean and safe drinking water. They were also aware that water was the essential cause of food. In RV, there are rain related hymns such as *asmarutsūkta*, *parjanyaśūkta*, *māṇḍukyaśūkta*. It proves that Vedic people had given deep thought to this topic.

This topic is divided into four parts:-

- I. Scientific thought
- II. Divine thought
- III. Mythological thought

I. Scientific thought - Water cycle in RV–

The water cycle is an important concept in hydro science. The water cycle, also known as 'the hydrologic cycle' or 'H₂O cycle', describes the continuous movement of water on, above and below the surface of the Earth. Water can change states among liquid, vapor, and ice at different places in the water cycle.

Various sages expressed their thoughts on this water cycle in four Vedas. Just as an illustration one may refer to -

*ṛṣīdīrghatamāhaucathyaḥsamānametadudakamuccaityavacāhabhiḥ /
bhūmimparjanyaājīnivantidivamjīnvatyagnayaḥ* // (RV. I.164.51)⁴

One finds some other hymns in RV such as X.27.13 with some little differences in above thought⁵. Even though, there are some differences in these hymns, one can prove that Vedic people are possessed with the knowledge of the science of rain i.e. water cycle.

Atharvaveda (AV) says -

*udīrayatamarutaḥsamudratastveṣoarkonabhauptāyātha /
mahaṛṣabhasyanadatonaḥsatovāśrāāpaḥprthivīmṭarpayantu* // (AV. IV.15.5)⁶

According to RV there are two envelopments in the sky. The first one is known as *antarikṣa* and the name of another one is *dyu*. A continuous snowfall takes place from *dyu* to *antarikṣa*. To take away the famine it has been noted in devāpi⁷ story about this snowfall. The recent research of NASA endorses this notion of devavṛṣṭi⁸.

Like the Vedas, various *Purāṇas* such as *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Vāyupurāṇa*, *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, *Liṅgapurāṇa* have also mentioned the references of water cycle. Just as an illustration one may refer to –

*jalasyanāśovṛddhirvānātatyevāsyavicārataḥ /
dhravenāśriṣṭhatauvāyuvṛṣṭisamḥharatepunah* // (*Liṅgapurāṇa*, I.36.66)

These verses explain that water is not destroyed or lost at any time but it converted from one situation to another. *Liṅgapurāṇa*, hence states that water can never be created nor be destroyed.

Divine thought - Water Gods -

The vedic people assumed the miraculous things as a God. For e.g. Fire, Lightning, Rain etc. Under this topic, I elaborate the water gods like *Indra*, *Parjanya* and some other assistant gods like *Marut*.

Indra-

Indra is the most important deity of Vedic Aryans. Nearly 200 hymns/phrases the *Indra*. *Indra* is mainly regarded as the dean water god in RV. *Indra* and *Vrutram* metaphor is depend on this⁹. The name of *Indra* is *Purandara*. According to some scholars, *Pura* means *Megha*. For adequate and well rain the worship of *Indra* was there in Vedic period. They also celebrated *Indra-dhvaja-mahotsava*¹⁰ for the same reason. There are many hymns in RV which phrase *Indras* such as RV.VII.49.1-2, RV.II.17.5, RV.V.32.1.

Parjanya-

Rain water is the most purified and safe source of water. Due to this man can survive on earth. So since the Vedic period, man considered rain as a god and praised him in four hymns of RV. He is the son of *dyu*. Vedic sages praised the *Parjanya* through the verses like RV.V.83.1, RV.VII.101.2

Vedic sages also praised the *Parjanya* with the adjectives such as *Jagadutpādaka*, *Ādiśakti*, *Jagatādhāra* etc. Rain water is also regarded as a semen. Because, rain fertile the land with its semen i.e. water. It also places the fetus in herbs. C.F. *saretadhovṛṣabhaḥ* (RV.VII. 101. 6)¹¹.

The *Vṛṣṭikāma* mantra (RV.X.98) is specially chant for calling the rain. *Parjanya* is considered as a father by the Vedic seers. By the hymns, RV.V.83.2 and RV.V.84.4 it seems that Vedic seers believe that the thundering during showers is supposed to kill the evils and sins.

In *Purāṇas*, *Indra* is generally styled the king of Gods. The *Purāṇas* limited the power of *Indra* while *Parjanya* is spoken of as the ruler over and is dwelling in, the clouds.

Marut -

The position of *Marut* is higher in RV. From the period of RV it is known to man that wind directs the clouds which are full of water. And because of this wind, we enjoy the shower of water and survive whole year. Therefore, Vedic seers also praised *Marut* for rain from the hymns like RV.I.64.6, RV.I.38.9.

Beside these deities, in RV, there are many deities related with water such as *Aja Ekapāda*¹², *Aahi Budhnya*¹³.

*Apām Napāt*¹⁴, in Hinduism, is the god of the fresh water such as in rivers and lakes. In Zoroastrian texts, *Burz* i.e. *Apām Napāt* in Sanskrit, is also a divinity of water.

The regular Vedic deities like *Varuṇa*, *Bṛhaspati*, *Agni* are also linked with water.

III. Mythological thought –

In Vedas and in *Purāṇas*, one finds many stories to explain certain thing. Academicians term them as mythological stories. One may find such stories around the gods from Vedas and *Purāṇas*. Some of the stories from them, give the account of origination of rivers too. Because, Indian culture considers rivers as goddesses. Here, I am giving the stories related to *Brahmaputrā* and Ganga rivers.

Reddish *Brahmaputrā*

According to *Kalikāpurāṇa*, *Paraśurāma* destroyed *Kṣatriyas* and then he washed his *Paraśu* in the water of the river *Brahmaputrā*. Due to this incident the color of the *Brahmaputrā*'s water has changed in to reddish. Due to reddish color *Purāṇas* gave the another name to *Brahmaputrā* as *Lohitya*. The scientific reason behind this is the large amount of ferrous oxide which is present in the water of the *Brahmaputrā*. Because of this oxide, water color of this river is red.

Extinction of Ganga–

Many sins have been inflicted on *Kaliyuga*. According to *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* (SkM), because of these sins, after completion of 5000 years of *Kaliyuga*, Ganga will extinct like *Saraswatī* river. Even in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (VP) the same prophecy has been advocated. According to SkM, Ganga should have been extinct by this time but it has not taken place so far. The sin which has been referred in SkM and VP text must have been related to environment. In contemporary period man is destroying trees to erect concrete buildings. Due to reclaiming land from sea, increasing vehicular traffic, industrialization air pollution is rising day by day and thus, the layer of Ozone is diminishing. The effect is ultra violet rays of sun are directly reaching on the earth resulting in melting of snow from north pole. This is also true in the case of Himalayan snow. Due to such scenario in future, the level of Ganga will rise and there is a risk of flooding. Because of flood the entire water of river may drain away. An ice, the source of water may also perish. Because of such ultra violet rays snowfall in Himalayan ranges will cease and the perennial Ganga like other rivers will become a fluid river. This is what is connoted by the words sin and extinct.

Conclusion –

Through, this citations form Vedas and *Purāṇas*, we come to know that primitive man thought deeply about water. He considers this element of universe as God, not because of blind faith but because he knows that water cannot be created.

This essay will elucidate the suspense of blessings such as *asśivāḥsantuāpaḥ* / and sentences connoting the importance of water such as *askālevarṣatuparjanyaḥ*

Notes

1. ChU. described that rivers give up their water to the sea. This water is in dynamic condition. By the evaporation, water takes the form of clouds at a proper time. By the form of rainfall that water again comes on the earth. (Reference - Bharatiya Jalasanskriti, swaroopaanivyapti, Dr. R.S. Moravanchikar, Sumeruprakashan, Dombiwali, First edition, 11th July, 2006.
2. *Kautilya*, in his treatise by name AS, deals with many water related topic. For example, in the chapter 12th, he emphasizes on water management and the detailed instructions on how to do so contrasts with the grossly under tapped potential of this abundant natural resource. Millions trudge miles to obtain water in a country which has so much of it.
3. *Varahamihira*, in his BSdescribed the science of rain and farming in just a oneChapter. According to him, '*annaṃ jagataḥ prāṇāḥ* /' and this *annawe* can only get due to the rain. C.F.
'*prāvṛṣakālasya annamāyattamī yasmā dataḥ parīkṣya prāvṛṣakālaḥ prayatnena*' He also made a record about the predictions of rain.
4. Translation – Uniform, with the passing days, this water mounts and fails again. The tempest-clouds give life to earth, and fires re-animate the heaven. (RV. I.164.51)(reference - Rig Veda, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], at sacred-texts.com.)
5. (RV.X.27.13)-*patto jagārapratyañcamattisīrṣṇāsīraḥ pratidadhauvarūtham /āsīnauṛdhvāmupasikṣiṇātinyaḍuttānāmanvetibhūmim* //Translation:- His feet have grasped: he eats the man who meets him. Around his head he sets the head for shelter.
Sitting anear and right above he smites us, and follows earth that lies spread out beneath him.

6. Translation – Send up, O Maruts, from the ocean; brilliant (is) the song, you make the mist fly up, let the lowing cows of the resounding misty great bull, the water gratify the earth.
7. *Devāpi* was a Vedic sage. The RVX.98 is on the behalf of his name. He was born in *Kururace*. He was the younger brother of *Śantanu*. Due to leprosy he went away in a forest. So that, his elder brother *Śantanu* became the king. The younger brother was ruling the state in spite of the fact that the elder brother was alive and as a result there which God did not shower. So *Śantanu* requested *Devāpi* to take the charge of a kingdom. At that time *Devāpi* told *Śantanu* that, 'You perform a *Vṛṣṭikāmeṣṭi* sacrifice and I perform a role of *Purohita*.' *Śantanu* performed *Vṛṣṭikāmeṣṭi* sacrifice and God showered in his Kingdom.
8. Dr. R.S. Moravanchikar, *BharatiyaJalasanskriti-swaroopaanivvyapti*, Sumeruprakashan, Dombiwali, First edition, 11th July, 2006, Page no.- 137.
9. *Indra* and *Vrutra* metaphor:- *Vrutra* is the enemy of *Indra*. Once *Vrutra* coiled the rivers and detain the water of the rivers. To release the water *Indra* killed *Vrutra*. Many a times this reference occurs in RV. See RV. 2. 12.2.
10. The entire life on the earth solemnly depends on water. *Indra* is the water god. In order to please the *Indra* people worshiped *Indra*. This *Indra* worship is known as *Indra-dhvaja-mahotsava*. In BS, briefly explained this ceremony in *Indra-dhvaj-sampad-adhyaya* from verses 1 to 68. (Reference and for more details:- see *PrachinBharatatilIndra-dhvaja-mahotsava*, NeelaKorde, Loksatta – Lokamudra, Sunday, 13th November, 2005, page number 5.)
11. Translation - (RV. 7. 101. 6) - He is the Bull of all, and their impregner: he holds the life of all things fixed and moving. May this rite save me till my hundredth autumn. Preserve us evermore, ye Gods, with blessings. (reference - Rig Veda, tr. by Ralph T.H. Griffith, [1896], at sacred-texts.com.)
12. This being is closely connected with *AhiBudhnya*. *Durga* interprets him as the sun. *Yāskah* himself does not express an opinion as to what *Ajaekapad* represents, merely explaining *Aja* as *ajana*, driving, and *ekapad* as 'he who has one foot' or 'he who protects or drinks with one foot'. Roth, with whom Grassmann agrees, regards *Ajaekapad* as a genius of the storm, translating the name as the 'one – footed Driver or stormer'. Bloomfield and Victor Henry think he represents a solar deity.

Hardy believes that 'the goat who goes alone' in the moon. (See – Vedic Mythology, A.A. Macdonell, Motilal Banarasidas Delhi, Reprint 1995, Page no. 73-74.)

13. The serpent of the Deep, *AhiBudhnya*, whose name is mentioned solely in hymns to the *Viśvedevāḥ*, is spoken of only twelve times in the *Rigveda* and hardly ever alone. *AhiBudhnya* would seem to be an atmospheric deity. (See – Vedic Mythology, A.A. Macdonell, Motilal Banarasidas Delhi, Reprint 1995, Page no. 72-73.)

14. The deity called *apāmnāpātī* celebrated in one whole hymn (2.35), is invoked in two verses of a hymn to the waters and is mentioned by name nearly thirty times altogether in the *Rigveda*. Darmesteter considers him to be the fire god, as born from the cloud in lightning. Hillebrandt thinks *apāmnāpātī* is the moon. According to Max Muller, he is the sun or lightning. (See – Vedic Mythology, A.A. Macdonell, Motilal Banarasidas Delhi, Reprint 1995, Page no. 69-70.)

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