

The Place of Sun in the Vedas and Ancient Iranian literature

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Abstract

Sun is very important in the Vedas Ancient Iranian literature. It is known by two names in the Vedic hymns namely Sūrya and Savitr. Sometimes one name occurs exclusively, sometimes they are used interchangeably and sometimes they are used as though they represent quite distinct object. It is supposed that Savitr is referred to the Sun when it is invisible; while Sūrya refers to him when he is visible to the worshippers. Sun is the name of an ancient Iranian god and it is the name of a “Yazata” in the Avesta book. The Avestan form of this word is “Hvarexšaeta” (Hvarekhshaeta) and it is said “Xvaršēt” in the Pahlavi texts, and “Xoršid” (Khoshid) in the Persian. The Sun from a long time ago was praised by Aryan people and ancient Iranian even before Zoroaster. Greek Historians have written something about Iranian who respected the Sun and Sun shine.

Key words: Sun, Sūrya, Savitr, Vedas, Avesta, Ancient Iranian.

Introduction

Sūrya and Savitr are two names by which the Sun is commonly addressed in the Vedic hymns. Sometimes one name occurs exclusively, sometimes they are used interchangeably and sometimes they are used as though they represent quite distinct object. It is supposed that Savitr is referred to the Sun when it is invisible; while Sūrya refers to him when he is visible to the worshippers. The Rigveda describes Savitr as possessing golden arms. He is broad handed and has beautiful hands. He wears tawny garment. His car is golden and it is driven by two radiant steeds. Savitr rises aloft his two strong arms in order to bless all beings and set them working. Savitr rises up his light continually from the east. Ten entire hymns of Rigveda are devoted to the celebration of Sūrya specifically. The adorable light of Sūrya in the sky is as if the face of great Agni. The path of Sūrya is prepared for him by Varuna or by Ādityas Mitra, Varuna and Aryaman. The eye of Sūrya is mentioned several times but he is himself equally often called the eye of Mitra and Varuna or the eye of the gods. There are some differences of Sūrya and Savitr in the Rigveda. Sūrya is the eye of Mitra-Varuna or the eye of the gods while Savitr is himself described as Sūrya- *raśmi* ‘Shining with the rays of the sun, yellow-haired’. Sūrya is the spy of the world; his chariot drawn by seven steeds as against the two radiant steeds of Savitr.

Sun is the name of an ancient Iranian god and it is the name of a “Yazata” in the Avesta book. The Avestan form of this word is “Hvarexšaeta” (Hvarekhshaeta) and it is said “Xvaršēt” in the Pahlavi texts, and “Xoršid” (Khoshid) in the Persian. The main quality which is mentioned for sun in the Avesta is the “swift horsed Sun”. This name in Gāthā Avesta (Oldest part of Avesta) in the form of “Havar” and in the other part of Avesta it is sometimes occurred as “Havar” and sometimes as “Hvarexšaeta”. One Yasht of Avesta book namely; “Khorshid Yasht” and one of the most important Nyāyishs (prayers), namely; “Khorshid Nyāyish” is consecrated to him. According to the ancient Iranian colander eleventh day of every solar month is called “Khorshid Ruz(The day of sun). The Sun from a long time ago was praised by Aryan people and ancient Iranian even before Zoroaster. Greek Historians have written something about Iranian who respected the Sun and Sun shine. The Sun in both sources namely, in the Vedas as well as Avesta is important, because in

the Rigveda ten entire hymns are devoted to the celebration of Sūrya and eleven hymns to Savitr. In the Avesta, one 'Yasht' namely; "Khorshid Yasht" and one prayer namely; "Khorshid Nyāyish" belong to him. The Greek historian also reports, sun was respected by ancient Iranian people.

The epithets and attributes of sun are very great in the Vedas and Avesta, so it is concluded that, the sun was respected by ancient Iranian and Indian people as well.

A. The Sun in the Vedas

Sūrya and Savitr are two names by which the Sun is commonly addressed in the Vedic hymns. Sometimes one name occurs exclusively, sometimes they are used interchangeably and sometimes they are used as though they represent quite distinct object. It is supposed that Savitr is referred to the Sun when it is invisible; while Sūrya refers to him when he is visible to the worshippers. (Wilkins. W. J, 1973, p. 30)

1. Savitr in the Rigveda

The Rigveda describes Savitr as possessing golden arms (I. 35.9-10; VI. 71. 1-5; VII. 45.2). He is broad handed (II. 38. 2); he has beautiful hands (III. 33.6); he wears tawny garment (IV. 35. 2); his car is golden (I.35. 2-3-5) and it is driven by two radiant steeds (I. 35. 2-5). Savitr rises aloft his two strong arms in order to bless all beings and set them working (Dandekar. R. N, 1940.p269) Savitr rises up his light continually from the east. He thrice surrounds the air, the three spaces, and the three bright realms of heaven. His ancient paths in the air are dustless and easy to traverse, on them he is besought to protect his worshippers. He is prayed to convey the departed spirit to where the righteous dwell. He bestows immortality on the gods as well as length of life on man. Like Sūrya, he is implored to remove evil dreams and to make men sinless. Like many other gods Savitr is called *asura*. He observes fixed laws. The waters and the wind are subject to his ordinance. He leads the waters and by his propulsion they flow broadly. The other gods follow his lead. No being, not even Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Rudra, can resist his will and independent dominion. He is lord of that which moves and stationary. He is the lord of all desirable things, and sends blessing from heaven, air earth. Like other gods he is a supporter of the sky. He supports the whole world. He fixed the earth with bonds and made firm the sky in the rafter less space. (MacDonnell. A. 2004, p. 48)

2. Sūrya in the Vedas

Ten entire hymns of Rigveda are devoted to the celebration of Sūrya specifically. The adorable light of Sūrya in the sky is as if the face of great Agni. The path of Sūrya is prepared for him by Varuna (I.24.8; VII.87.1) or by Ādityas Mitra, Varuna and Aryaman (VII. 60.4). The eye of Sūrya is mentioned several times but he is himself equally often called the eye of Mitra and Varuna (I. 115.1; VI. 51.1; VII.61.1) or the eye of the gods (VII.77.3). And once Dawn is said to bring the eye of the gods. The affinity of the eye and the sun is indicated in a passage where the eye of dead man is conceived as going to Sūrya. (MacDonell, 2004, p. 45) In the Atharvaveda, he is called the Lord of eyes (AV 5.24) and is said to be one of the created beings and to see beyond the sky, the earth, and the waters (AV 13, 1), (MacDonell, 2004, p. 45).

We read In AV (5, 24, 9-10) as follows:

"The Sūrya is overlord of sights; let him favor me, in this worship *brahman* in this rite *karman* , in this representation *purodhā*, in this firm-standing in this intent, in this design, in this benediction *āśis*, in this convocation of the gods". (Whitney. W. D. 1972, p. 439)

He is far-seeing; all-seeing, is the spy of the whole world (IV.13.3), and beholds all beings and the good and bad deeds of mortals. Aroused by Sūrya men pursue their objects and perform their work. Common to all men, he rises as their rouser. He is the soul or the guardian of all that moves of stationary. He has a car which is drawn by one steed or by an indefinite number of steed

or mares or by seven horses or mares called '*haritah*' or by seven swift mares or steed (RV. V.45 .9), (MacDonell. A. 2004, p. 45)

In the Rigveda,(I.50.1-9) Sūrya and His bright rays have been described as follows :

- "His bright rays bear him up aloft, the god who knows all that lives, Sūrya, that all may look on him.
- The constellations pass away, like thieves, together with their beams, before the all beholding sun.
- His heralds rays are seen afar refulgent over the world of men, like flames of fire that burn and blaze.
- Swift and beautiful are you, O Sūrya, maker of the light, illuming the entire radiant realm.
- You go to the hosts of gods; you come hither to mankind. Hither all light to be beheld.
- With that same eye of thin wherewith you look brilliant Varuna. upon the busy race of men.
- Traversing sky and wide mid-air, you met with your beams our days.

Sun seeing all things those have birth.

- Seven bay steeds harnessed to your car bear you, O you farseeing one. God Sūrya with radiant hair." (Griffith,T.H. 1976, P 32.)
- Pūshan is his messenger. The Dawn or Dawns reveal or produce Sūrya as well as Agni and Sacrifice. He shines forth from the lap of the dawns. But from another point of view Dawn is Sūrya's wife. We also bear and metronymic Āditya, son of Aditi or Āditya, but he is elsewhere distinguished from the Ādityas. His father is Dyaus. (X.37.1) and he is said to be god born (X.37.1). He is gold born. The gods raised him who had been hidden in the ocean. As a form of Agni he was placed by the gods in heaven. According to another order of ideas he is said to have arisen from the eye of the world-giant Purusha. In the Atharva Veda, the sun divākara is even described as having sprung from Vrtra. (MacDonell. A. 2004, p. 45)

Various individual gods are said to have produced the sun. Indra generated him caused him to shine or raised him to heaven. Indra-Vishnu generated him. Indra-Soma brought up Sūrya with light. Indra-Varuna raised him to heaven (VII. 82.3). Mitra-Varuna raised or place him in heaven (VI.13 .2; V.63.4), Soma placed light in the Sun, generated Sūrya caused him to shine or raised him in heaven. Agni establishes to brightness of Sun on high and caused him to ascend to heaven. Dhātr, the creator fashioned the Sun as well as the Moon (X.190.3). The Angirases (Angirases are the sons of heaven. They are seers who are sons of the gods).(Mc Donell, 2004, p.204) by their rites caused him to ascend the sky.(Ibid, p. 46) Oldenberg says about Sūrya as following:

"As far as Sūrya is concerned, he is a benevolent god, who drives away evil spirit with his light; the deadly power of sun's heat does not give here the decisive motif. But as against gods like Indra, Agni, or Varuna, Sūrya has a place well behind. The conception of his forms are full of variation; some time he is the eye of the gods , some time a shining horse , some time the seven golden mares on his chariot draw him like a homecoming hero ; or like a youth in love , he goes after his beloved , the goddess Dawn . Beside him, there is perhaps also a female personification of the sun, the goddess Sūryā, appearing in the myths which depict the sun as the divine bird." (Oldenberg, 2004, P 122)

In various passages Sūrya is conceived as a bird traversing space. He is a bird or a ruddy bird is represented as flying (X.177.1). It is compared with a flying eagle and seems to be directly called an eagle. He is once allowed to as white and brilliant steel brought by (Ushas, the goddess of dawn). Sūrya's horses are his rays (which are seven in numbers). (MacDonell. A,2004, P.46).

Elsewhere, Sūrya is occasionally spoken of as an inanimate object (VII. 63. 4 ; V.63.4 ; V.62.2). He is a gem of the sky and is allowed to as the variegated stone in the midst of heaven. He is a brilliant weapon which Mitra-Varuna conceals with cloud and rain; he is the felly *pavi* of Mitra-Varuna or brilliant car placed in heaven by Mitra-Varuna. The Sun is also called a wheel or the “Wheel of the Sun” is spoken of. (MacDonell. A, 2004, P.46)

3. *Differences of Sūrya and Savitr in the Rigveda*

Sūrya is the eye of Mitra-Varuna (I. 115.1; VI. 51.1; VII.61.1) or the eye of the gods (VII.77.3), while Savitr is himself described as *Sūrya- raśmi* ‘Shining with the rays of the sun, yellow -haired’.(MacDonell, 2004, p. 48). Sūrya is the spy of the world (IV.13.3) ; his chariot drawn by seven steeds (V.45.9) as against the two radiant steeds of Savitr (I.35.2).

The path of Sūrya is prepared for him by Varuna (I.24.8; VII.87.1) or by Ādityas , Mitra , Varuna and Aryaman (VII. 60.4) while Savitr himself makes path for all (II. 38. 7and 9). Sūrya’s father is *Dyauh* or *Dyaus* (X.37.1) and he is said to be god born (X.37.1) ; the mention is often made of Sūrya being produced and place in heaven by several gods – by Indra (II .12. 4) , by Indra -Vishnu) (VII.99.4) by Mitra- Varuna (VI.13 .2 ; V.63.4) , by Indra-Varuna (VII. 82.3) , and by *dhatr* (X.190.3) . This is a feature which clearly distinguishes Sūrya from Savitr , for it is Savitr, who is said to have produced and set in motion other natural powers (II.38.7 and 9) . Sūrya is further described as bird (X.177.1), or a bull (X.189.1) or a steed (VII.77.3), while in many other passages he is spoken of even as inanimate object (VII. 63. 4 ; V.63.4; V.62.2); this is again a feature , which can never be thought of with reference to Savitr , who is the stimulator of all objects , animate as well as inanimate . On the other hand, Savitr is described, unlike Sūrya, as vivifying Vāyu and Pūshan (X. 64.7; X 139.1), (Dandekar. R.N, 1940, p.302, 303).

4. *Savitr in the Avesta*

Can we find any traces of this important Vedic god, Savitr in the Avesta?

Dandekar says as follows:

“A hypothesis may be hazarded in this connection. Just as Indra and nāsatya are made demon by Zoroaster, so too is this god turned into a demon in Avesta. The Vedic Savitr does not only stimulate but also brings to rest all beings. This latter feature of Savitr was probably emphasized in Avesta, and there arose the divinity – demoniac and yawning – inciter Būshyāsta, usually feminine, but once in Yasht 18.2, also masculine. Būshyāsta puts people to sleep is *dardjogava* ‘long handed’, and *zairinā* ‘golden’. The magnificent and majestic personality of the great Vedic gods, Savitr, was thus grossly disfigured in Iran. The essential nature of that god, however, being retained in propound manner in the personality of Ahura Mazda”. (Dandekar . R.N, 1940, p. 316)

B. *The Sun in the Avesta*

Sun is the name of an ancient Iranian god and it is the name of a “Yazata” in the Avesta book. The Avestan form of this word is “Hvarexšaeta” (Hvarekhshaeta) and it is said “Xvaršēt” in the Pahlavi texts, and “Xoršid” (Khoshid) in the Persian. The main quality which is mentioned for sun in the Avesta is the “swift horsed Sun”. This name in Gāthā Avesta (Oldest part of Avesta) in the form of “Havar” and in the other part of Avesta it is sometimes occurred as “Havar” and sometimes as “Hvarexšaeta”.(Afifi, R, 1995, p.503.)

The Sun from a long time ago was praised by Aryan people and ancient Iranian even before Zoroaster. Greek Historians have written something about Iranian who respected the Sun and Sun shine.

Ktesias, the Greek historian writes: "Iranian Swear by sun"(Pour Davoud, E. 1928, p.309) and Curtius says: "The Sun is the sign of Iranian Kingdom and Power; and there was a shape of a shiny sun which had been made by crystal on the top of Iranian Kings tent". (Ibid)

One Yasht of Avesta book namely; "Khorshid Yasht" and one of the most important Nyāyishs (prayers), namely; "Khorshid Nyāyish" is consecrated to him. According to the ancient Iranian colander eleventh day of every solar month is called "Khorshid Ruz(The day of sun).(Afifi. R, 1995, p.503)

The treatment of Sun-Yazata like that of Sūrya, the sun in the Rigveda and the physical sun as a phenomenon of nature is so complicated that it is difficult in many instances to distinguish the one of the other.(Dhalla. M .N, 1994, p.212)

Hvarexšaeta, "the genus of the sun" is invoked by his name and his standing epithets are the imperishable, radiant and the swift horsed. The Amesha Spentas are all of one accord with the sun where the sun arms with its light, a hundred and a thousand spiritual Yazatas gather its glory and distribute it upon the earth for the furtherance of the world of righteousness. When the sun rises up, purification comes unto the earth and unto the standing and flowing waters and unto the waters of the wells and seas, and unto the righteous creation of the Holy Spirit. If indeed the sun were not to rise up, the demons would destroy all things that are in the seven regions. Not even the spiritual angles would find means to withstand and repel them. The offering of sacrifice unto the sun is in order to withstand darkness and demons, thieves and robbers, sorcerers and enchantresses. It is equivalent to sacrificing unto, Ahura Mazda, Amesha Spentas, the Yazatas, earthly and heavenly and one's own soul. The demons that, in the darkness of night, come out by the million from the bowels of the earth, glide away as soon as the sun mounts the sky and the world is ablaze with its light. Though they feast in the night time, as darkness is congenial to their nature, they fast during the day, for light is destructive to their being. When the light of Hvarekshaeta breaks through the darkness of night, it drives away, not only darkness, the defilement, disease and death like the moon and the stars it grieves the sun to shine upon a defiled person. Ahura Mazda has the sun for his eye. In the Litany to the sun, homage is paid to be two eyes of Ahura Mazda which are evidently the sun and the moon. The heavens bathed in the light of the sun from his garments. (Ibid, p. 212, 213)

In the Khorshid Yasht the Sun has been described as follows:

"We sacrifice unto the undying, shining, swift horsed sun. When the light of the sun waxen warmer, when the brightness of the sun waxen warmer, then up standing, the heavenly Yazatas by hundreds and thousands, they gather together its glory, they makes its glory pass down, they pour its glory upon the earth made by Ahura, for the increase of the world of holiness, for increase of the creatures of holiness for increase of the undying, shining, swift-horsed sun."(Muller.F.M, 1994, p.86)

"And when the sun rises up the earth made by Ahura becomes clean, the running waters become clean, the waters of wells become clean, the waters of the sea become clean, the standing waters become clean, all the holy creatures, the creatures of the good spirits, become clean." (Ibid)

"Should not the sun rise up, then the Daêvas would destroy all the things that are in the neither seven countries nor world the heavenly Yazatas find any way of withstanding or repelling them in the material world. He who offers up a sacrifice into the undying, shining, swift horsed sun to withstand darkness, to withstand the Daêvas (demon), born of darkness, to withstand the robbers and bandits, to withstand death that creeps in unseen offers it up to Ahura Mazda, offers it up to the Amesha-Spentas, offers it up to his own soul. He rejoices all heavenly and worldly Yazatas who offers up a sacrifice unto the undying, shining, swift-horsed sun." (Ibid)

Conclusion

No doubt the Sun in both sources namely, in the Vedas as well as Avesta is important, because in the Rigveda ten entire hymns are devoted to the celebration of Sūrya and eleven hymns to Savitr. In the Avesta, one 'Yasht' namely; "Khorshid Yasht" and one prayer namely; "Khorshid Nyāyish" belong to him. The Greek historian also reports, sun was respected by ancient Iranian people.

The epithets and attributes of sun are very great in the Vedas and Avesta, so it is concluded that, the sun was respected by ancient Iranian and Indian people as well. But there are some epithets and attributes for sun in Vedas and Avesta which are common or very near together, for example:

- In the Veda the Sun is the eye of Mitra-Varuna or of Agni, similarly in Avesta he is the eye of Ahura-Mazda.
- The sunlight is the cause of purification of earth and waters.
- According to the Vedas the sunlight drives away sickness diseases darkness and every evil dream similarly in the Avesta the sun light drives away darkness, defilement, diseases and death.

There are some very great epithets and attributes for sun in Vedas. Sūrya which one can't find out equal them for the sun in Avesta, like, "he is the soul or guardian of all beings" or "All creatures depend on him" and "The epithet all creating Viśvakarman is applied to him". And some great epithets for Savitr like; "No being, not even Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Rudra, can resist his will and independent dominion. He is lord of that which moves and stationary. He is the lord of all desirable things, and sends blessing from heaven, air earth. Like other gods he is a supporter of the sky". He supports the whole world. Such attributes may be found out for the maker, Ahura-Mazda in the Avesta.

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