

Vedic legends related to Rudra in the Brāhmaṇa-s and the Āraṇyaka-s: A Brief Study

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The Vedic people observed the destructive phenomena of storms uprooting tree and demolishing houses, the striking of thunderbolt which causes men and beasts to drop dead instantly, the outbreak of epidemics which harms the very existence of human beings etc. They observe cure, help, compassion, strength and care. In these phenomena, the Vedic people saw Rudra i.e. the howling storm god and his sons, the storm deities Marūts also known as Rudrīyas. They observed cure, compassion, might and knowledge.

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The Vedic people observed the destructive phenomena of storms uprooting tree and demolishing houses, the striking of thunderbolt which causes men and beasts to drop dead instantly, the outbreak of epidemics which harms the very existence of human beings etc. They observe cure, help, compassion, strength and care. In these phenomena, the Vedic people saw Rudra i.e. the howling storm god and his sons, the storm deities Marūts also known as Rudrīyas. They observed cure, compassion, might and knowledge. In the words of Bhandarkar, the dreadful phenomena are attributed to the wrath of a god, which, however, can be appeased by prayer, praise and offerings¹. Then the god became Śiva or the benignant. He is a god who displays kindness and healing and cooling powers. (RV. II.33.12, II.13.2,4,7, I.114)².

Nature of Rudra in Vedic literature indicates that he is a differentiated god compared to other gods of the pantheon. Vedic Rudra constitutes two distinct personalities viz, he is a fierce god (*R̥gveda* II. 33. 9.) and he might is unsurpassed (*R̥gveda*. I. 114.)³. Rudra is represented as discharging brilliant shafts (RV. VII. 46. 3.) which run about the heaven and earth and as possessing weapons which slay cows and men (RV. I.

114. 10). In the same hymn Rudra is praised to be Paṣupa, the protector of cattle⁴. (RV VII.46.2) speaks of Rudra as one who causes diseases and (RV. I. 43. 4) mentions him as possessing healing remedies⁵. The later Samhitās distinguish his benignant form from its opposite. Rudra thus represents the darker powers of nature, he may be expected to dwell away from the habitations of men and therefore he is called the lord of paths, of the forests, and of those who roam in them, of thieves and highway robbers who frequent and move about in lonely places to prevent being detected and also outcastes who live away from the usual dwellings of men. The Atharvaveda elevates the god further more⁶. Obeisance is offered to Rudra who is in Agni, who is in the waters, who has entered into the herbs and plants and who has formed all these beings. Thus, he appears as an all pervading god. Bhava, Sarva and Mahādeva are other epithets attributed to him. In this paper I will discuss three legends of Rudra. Aranyakas do not cast much light on Rudra. I will just mention about how Rudra is dissented in it.

This peculiar nature of Rudra is depicted in various legends mentioned in the later Vedic literature like the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Āraṇyakas*. The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*

(X. 14.) mentions of Rudra as the Lord of living beings and also the father of Maruts^{7a}. Therefore, one comes across reference to Rudras (ito Rudrah paraam gataah). The first prapathaka seventeenth anuvaka of the text mentions of Maruts 'prabhrajamanaanaam rudraanaam sthane svatejasaa bhaani. Bhatta Bhaskar comments as atraisaam, marutanaam rudratanutvat rudrataadaatmyapratipadanaartham rudraanaam ityutam. In the cosmic Caturhotra ritual Rudra is Agnidhr. The chandas dedicated to Rudra is Tristubh. At another place cows belong to Rudra is mentioned (II. 12).

Tatpuruṣāya Vidmahe Mahādevāya Dhīmahi Tanno Rudrah Pracodyāt^{7b}.

- Rudra Gāyatri-3.2- *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*.

But the detailing of legends occurs in the Brāhmaṇa literature. I have covered up Aranyaka, as the topic is dealt in brief.

1. Origin of Rudra as referred by *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (III. 33-38)⁸, *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (VI.1-9)⁹ and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (VI. 1. 3. 10)¹⁰: The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* mentions of Prajāpati being passionate about his daughter and Rudra confronting him. The story goes as follows: Prajāpati thought of cohabiting with his daughter, whom some call as heaven and some as Uṣas. He transformed himself into a buck, while the daughter assumed the shape of a doe. Gods felt that this act is a sin and has never been done before by Prajāpati. They did not find anyone amongst themselves to be capable of thwarting this act. They put their most terrible bodies together and from them sprang one god named Bhutavan. He pierced Prajāpati and stopped him from doing incest. Prajāpati is called Mrga,

daughter is Rohini and Rudra Mrgavyādha. The outpoured semen became a lake mystically called Manusa from Ma-dusa which means pure. The pond was surrounded by Agni Vaiśvānara. It was blown up by Maruts. When kindled up, the first part of the seed became Āditya, the second Bṛghu, the third Ādityas, coal became the Angirasas, which cooled down and gave rise to Bṛhaspati. The extinguished black coals became black cattle and the reddened earth became the ruddy cattle. From the ashes emerged the buffalo, gayal, antelope, camel, ass and other animals. Then he chose a boon of being the lord of animals. The sperm of Prajāpati which fell on the ground became a lake. This sperm was agitated by gods and creation took place. The animals which were born were claimed by Rudra. The gods prayed to spare those animals which belonged to them. He became Rudra, the terrible one.

The same legend is reiterated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* with slight variation. Prajāpati conceived passion for his daughter either the sky or dawn. This assuredly was a sin in the eyes of the gods. The gods asked Rudra, the Lord of beasts to pierce him. When the anger of the gods subsided they cured Prajāpati and cut of the dart. As Prajāpati was identified with sacrifice, he was torn by the dart.

Thus the myth indicates that a) Other gods existed, Rudra was born later than gods, which seems to be a later addition in the Vedic theological pantheon. b) He was born out of the fierce energies of gods, which underline his terrible and fearful nature. c) He is the Lord of the animal world, the Paśupati.

Stella Kramrisch regards Rudra as the fire¹¹. 'Rudra, the fire prepares the seed

for the Prajāpati; Rudra the Archer aims at Prajāpati, hot with passion, who lets fall the seed on the earth'. Unlike Chattopadhyaya, Kramrisch says that Rudra is not a person, not a power confined in one single shape. He initiates but later on destroys¹². This is his conflicting nature which is worshipped by Vedic people as the savior and destroyer. He is fiery in nature but applauded for healing and cooling powers. This is the very nature of Rudra, who creates in order to destroy, for he will create again in an inexhaustible renewal of life on earth. These polarities are harped a lot in the Vedic texts.

Following points are highlighted in this legend. Other gods existed, Rudra was born later from gods. Firstly, Rudra is an agent here in the process of creation of this world from Prajāpati. Rudra plays a pivotal part in it. He is the creation of the ghora aspect of gods and therefore has the power and courage to punish immorality, be it done by Prajāpati. No creature can be excused from the wrath of Rudra.

Secondly, the entire process of creation revolves around the institution of sacrifice and Rudra claims the residue of the sacrifice which are the ashes, which transformed into animals. The five types of animals are also associated with Rudra in other Vedic texts as in the AV¹³.

According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Rudra is born from Prajāpati and Uṣas, he cried, therefore he was named as 'Rudra' (VI. 1. 3. 7ff)¹⁴. When Prajāpati was alone he began to think of reproducing. He created water, foam, clay, pebble, stone, metal etc. The creation flowed (aksarat) eight times. Thus, Gāyatri was born. Then he created the earth, which became the abode of Prajāpati with Uṣas as the mistress. A boy was born i.e. kumara. He cried because he was not freed from evil as he did not have any name. The name given was Rudra. The boy was Agni, he became Rudra because he cried. Along with Rudra, the names Sarva, Paśupati, Ugra, Asani, Bhava, Mahādeva, Ísana are given to him¹⁵.

Eight names of Agni-Rudra given to him by Prajāpati		
S. No.	Name	Reason
1	Rudra	Agni cried
2	Sarva	Equivalent to waters
3	Paśupati	Cattle consume plants
4	Ugra	Equivalent to Vayu
5	Asani	Equivalent to lightning
6	Bhava	Equivalent to Parjanya
7	Mahān Deva	Equivalent to Moon
8	Ísana	Equivalent to Sun

Interestingly all these names and aspects are regarded as different forms of Agni. In giving the names, the Brahmana has related them with different manifestations of nature. They have applied the principle

of Bandhus, but the logic does not appeal a rational mind.

This story seems to imbibe the ideas of both the legends. Here neither Prajāpati nor the beings created from him are

singularly responsible, but Prajāpati and other gods shoulder the responsibility together. Secondly, each of these names successively possess higher power, for the boy each time becomes dissatisfied by declaring surely I am mightier than the earlier name. Prativa Manjari Rath feels that Rudra is pining for supremacy¹⁶. I feel that every name has got a mystic effect of the divine sound and on inculcating that effect, Rudra demands more. These names indicate the journey of Rudra from terrestrial Agni to the Sun in the heavens, in the course he touches different aspects of creation. The allusion to the work 'kumara' indicates his future relationship with Kārtikeya also known as Kumāra. Stella Kramrish explains this as the enormity of the primordial evil is greater than the power inherent in any one of the eight names. Only in their eightfold totality are they commensurate with the

primordial evil. Only after receiving all eight does the new born god ask his father for no other name. The same legend is reiterated in the *Vayu Purāna* 27. 15. 6¹⁷.

The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* describes the birth of Rudra from the seed of gods (VI 1-9)¹⁸. The legend is very much similar to that of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Five gods namely Agni, Vāyu, Indra, Āditya and Candramas emerged from the penance underwent by Prajāpati. These five gods were instructed by Prajāpati to practice fervor. Then Uṣas appears before them in the form of Apsarās by which they became inclined towards her. Subsequently, they poured out seed, which was collected in a golden bowl made by Prajāpati having the breadth and height of an arrow. From this emerged the deity of thousand eyes, of a thousand feet and thousand arrows. He grasped his father, Prajāpati, to give him a name.

S. No.	Names	Represents
1.	Bhava	waters
2.	Sarva	food
3.	Paśupati	air
4.	Ugra	herbs
5.	Mahān deva	Aditya
6.	Rudra	Candramas
7.	Ísana	food
8.	Asani	Indra

Bhandarkar says, as in the case of the sun-god the several ways of looking at him gave rise to the conception of several sun-deities such as Savitr, Surya, Mitra, Pusan etc, so the same terrible and destructive agency in nature, with its benignant and gracious counterpart, looked at from different points of view, gave rise to the belief of seven different gods mentioned in the AV¹⁹. They are all regarded as the names of one god in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* and

an eighth name introduced. Of these eight names, four Rudra, Sarva, Ugra and Asani are indicative of the destructive energy and the other four Bhava, Mahādeva Paśupati and Ísana of its benignant counterpart. Unlike the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, Rudra is created out of five deities and not out of the wrath of gods. Different names ascribed to Rudra, represent different aspects of cosmic world in both the stories. From this it appears that Rudra's overlordship pervaded every aspect of the

universe, which ultimately led to the monotheistic belief of Rudra as identified with the supreme creator in *Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣads*²⁰. Though the process of identification differs in the stories, these names are suggestive of the gradual development of Rudra's elevation towards supreme Lord. This attribution involves as special prominence in the personality of this deity. The account of Rudra darting an arrow at Prajāpati and his exclusion in the sacrifice is an archetype of the famous legend of Śiva being excluded from the sacrifice of Dakṣa and the holocaust which followed it. The Purāṇic legend of the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa appears to be embroidered around this Vedic legend. A) Rudra being excluded from getting any share in the sacrifices performed by gods. B) His anger for Prajāpati for inculcating passion for his daughter. In the Purāṇic myths, Prajāpati became Dakṣa Prajāpati.

2. The Nābhānediṣṭha legend occurring in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*²¹ (VI.30.31) : Another legend which has a different role of Rudra is that of Nābhānediṣṭha. He was the youngest son of Manu, who had left nothing of his property for him. He advised Nābhānediṣṭha to proceed to the sacrifice of Angirases. Nābhānediṣṭha should give the knowledge of Brahman and help the Angirases attain heaven. He did as told and Angirases gave him 1000 cattle. When he was collecting the cattle together a huge figure from the north, clothed in black stopped him, saying, "this is mine; mine is what is left at the site". The Angirases did not have the power to dispose of the cattle. Nābhānediṣṭha acknowledged the man's claim, but told him how he had come to own the cattle. He questioned his father on the stranger's claim, and was told by

him that the claim was true. Nābhānediṣṭha returned and told the stranger so. On ascertaining that Nābhānediṣṭha had spoken the truth, the stranger relinquished his claim and gave the cattle to him. Manu gave his son a very special gift of communicating his knowledge in the form of certain mantra, and receiving in return a thousand cattle from the fire priests, whom he had enabled to go to heaven. His right to cattle was disputed by the stranger who later on accepted his claim.

The dark clad stranger identified himself by defining his possessions. They comprise "what remains on the site of the sacrifice". He introduced himself as the Lord of animals. He knew that Nābhānediṣṭha had given the true Brahman to the fire priests or else they could not have gone to heaven. Rudra moreover recognized himself in that brahma; for the potent Brahman that Nābhānediṣṭha had given to the fire priests was the raudra Brahman itself.

As Paśupati, the Lord of Animals, Rudra showed them his grace. In his guise as a man in dark attire from the north, he recognized himself in the Raudra Brahman. He made doubly sure that Nābhānediṣṭha was a speaker of truth. The background of this legend can be traced up to the RV. X. 61, 62 wherein he is the seer²². The name suggests 'nearest relative'. The fact that he received the gift of a thousand cows is the gift of Manu, the gift of Angirases and the gift of Rudra himself to the singer. It was the gift by the god himself to the seer who had seen him. Stella Kramrish calls this gift as dakṣiṇā and states that in his images as Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Śiva imparts to the sages

the gnosis that was his gift to Nābhānediṣṭha²³.

Another account in the fifth book of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (V. 9. 22) says that Rudra claims his Lordship over cattle and therefore the father Manu declares that whatever remains belongs to Nābhānediṣṭha. Sukumari Bhattacharjee makes an interesting observation that the cult of Rudra seems to have been established when the legend found place in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*²⁴.

Another account of Nābhānediṣṭha and Rudra occurs in the *Taittirīya Samhita*. (III. 1. 9. 4-6), which speaks of the remnant of the sacrifice²⁵. Here Rudra was not the munificent giver of all that has remained on the site (vastu). On the contrary, he becomes the recipient of the remnant (vastu) of the milk and barley offered at the sacrifice of the Angirases, in exchange for relinquishing his claim to the cattle left on the site. Rudra having challenged the right to the Angirases to leave their cattle to Nābhānediṣṭha, made a counterproposal that he would desist claiming the cattle if he were to receive as libation what was left over from the sacrifice. The exchange was all important to Rudra for he has been excluded from the sacrifice after his arrow had pierced Prajāpati. Gods did not want Rudra to have any part in the sacrifice. They abhorred Rudra for he had pierced Prajāpati, his arrows threatened man and beast, the power over life and death was in his hands. The Rudra mantra invokes Rudra Tryambaka that he may not cut off the life of man like a gourd from its stalk that he may liberate from death and give a full life span to human beings.

Nābhānediṣṭha also occurs in Avestā as Nabaanajdistha²⁶. He is just referred to in the *Tandya Mahabrāhmaṇā* as the seer of the hymn Nabhanedisthiyam²⁷. He is

mentioned in the *Purāṇas* as Nabhaga, a righteous king, who won over the other and gave it to the Brāhmaṇās in charity, as per *Mbh. Śānti Parvan* 97. 21 which was returned back (*Śānti* 24. 16-17)²⁸. The *Padma Purāṇa* mentions about this him as the son of Manu who was not given his share of the kingdom from his nine brothers²⁹. Ridiculing him, the brothers handed over Manu to him, who advised him to go the sacrifice of Angiras to gain wealth. Angiras had forgotten certain rituals. After chanting Vaiśvadeva sukta the ritual was completed and Nabhaga got wealth from it. When he was about to take wealth, a dark person i.e. Rudra-Śiva claimed it as he is the lord of the remnant of the sacrifice. Nabhaga gave it to him, being pleased Śiva gave him wealth and taught him Brahma Vidya.

In this paper, we have discussed three sets of myths regarding Rudra, through which his bipolar nature has become very evident. His birth, friction with gods, exclusion from the sacrifice, lordship over cattle, recipient of the remnant offerings, demand for identity indicate this later inclusion, ambiguous and conflicting nature indicate his later inclusion in the Vedic pantheon. Satarudriya and Vratyakanda have not been dealt with to avoid ativyapti, but they indicate all-encompassing nature of this deity and his assimilation in the Vedic fold.

Myths and legends echo a collective subconscious of the society. To conclude, in spite of assimilatory passages like the Satarudriya and Vratyakanda, the element of discomfort with this deity has been retained in the subconscious, which found an outlet through these legends. The legend of the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa, which has found place in almost all *Purāṇas* is a resonance of this fact.

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