

ऋग्वेद

मण्डल १०-सूक्त १२९-ऋषि कुशिक-देवता रात्री

अथ रात्री सूक्तम्

ओम्

रात्री व्यस्यदायती पुरुत्रा देव्यक्षिभिः ।

विश्वा अधिश्रियोधित ॥ १ ॥

ओर्वप्रा अमर्त्या निवतो देव्युध्वतः ।

ज्योतिषा बाधते तमः ॥ २ ॥

निरुस्वसारमस्कृतोषसं देव्यायती ।

अपेदुहासते तमः ॥ ३ ॥

सा नो अद्य यस्या वयं निते यावन्नविक्ष्महि ।

वृक्षे न वसति वयः ॥ ४ ॥

नि ग्रामासो अविक्षितः नि पद्वन्तो नि पक्षिणः ।

नि श्येनासश्चिदर्थिनः ॥ ५ ॥

यावया वृक्यं वृकं यवयस्तेनमूर्म्ये ।

अथा न सुतरा भव ॥ ६ ॥

उप मा पेपिशत्तमः कृष्णं व्यक्तमस्थित ।

उष ऋणेव यातय ॥ ७ ॥

उप ते गा इवाकरं वृणीष्व दुहितर्दिवः ।

रात्री स्तोमं न जिग्युषे ॥ ८ ॥

ṛgvēda

maṇḍala 10-sūkta 129-ṛṣi kuśika-dēvatā rātrī
atha rātrī sūktam

ōm

rātrī vyakṣadāyatī purutrā dēvyakṣibhiḥ .

viśvā adhiśriyōdhita .. 1 ..

ōrvaprā amartyā nivatō dēvyudhvataḥ .

jyōtiṣā bādhatē tamaḥ .. 2 ..

nirusvasāramaskṛtōṣasaṃ dēvyāyatī .

apēduhāsatē tamaḥ .. 3 ..

sā nō adya yasyā vyaṃ nitē yāvannavikṣmahi .

vṛkṣē na vasatiṃ vayah .. 4 ..

ni grāmāsō avikṣitaḥ ni padvantō ni pakṣiṇaḥ .

ni śyēnāsaścidarthinaḥ .. 5 ..

yāvayā vṛkyam vṛkaṃ yavayastēnamūrmyē .

athā na sutarā bhava .. 6 ..

upa mā pēpiśattamaḥ kṛṣṇaṃ vyaktamasthita .

uṣa ṛṇēva yātaya .. 7 ..

upa tē gā ivākaraṃ vṛṇīṣva duhitardivaḥ .

rātrī stōmaṃ na jigyuṣē .. 8 ..

INTRODUCTION VEDIC THOUGHT

Vedic concept of the divine is very unique. The modern Bharatiya's concept of the Divine has its roots here. However we have modified and complicated it over the many centuries to match the modifications of our mind and our changing ways of living. A few pointers are given below that can help.

1. The Rgvedic concept of the Divine was spontaneous. This matched their language of communication which was also spontaneous. These concepts are not the result of deliberate planning as seen in the later works. This planning is seen however in the other three Vedas that are later in their construction.
2. The Riks or stanzas of praise are conceptualizations of what the rishis spontaneously felt. The experience of Man, Nature and the Divine has to be reasoned by us. For them it was a matter of instinctive and instantaneous experience. We are at a stage where we give hands, feet, body, jewellery, clothes, wife, births, events etc to appreciate and worship Vishnu. They did not need that. Vishnu the pervasiveness Divine was a matter of experience to them. There was no room for dichotomous thinking. It is simply for that reason that modern man finds it hard to understand the Riks as we are approaching it with the magnifying glasses of a mind that no longer is harmonious with its environment, in the form of nature. So many Western scholars and Indians inspired by the West have dubbed these Riks to just beautiful hymns or poetry. Sadly enough that is merely MERE-ing them!
3. Vedic Sanskrit and its manner of expression and usage of words is different from the Itihasic and Pauranic Sanskrit. Often a single word has different meanings that hold good together and separate, but the word always carries with it, its essence which remains the same no matter what is being said. Agni can be the Divinity that is First, it can be the sacrificial fire, it can be the first Eagerness within. Throughout all these meanings for the one word Agni, the essence of the word namely Agni the igniting factor remains the same. Go means cow, rays and light. Asva means horse, power and speed. Vaaja means food, nourishment and source. Ritam means water. It can also mean manifested Truth. It also stands for cosmic order and order in living style. Saagara means ocean, and the raw material for the building of creation. These are just a few of the many examples.
4. Gender and Number made no difference when words to suggest the Divine was used. Thus Sarasvati can be the single source or the many streams, the feminine mother, the masculine sarasvantah, or the neuter sarasvantam.
5. The Riks being rishi-conceptualisations their creators were not mere poets. Their understanding went beyond normal understanding. They are kraanta darses. Most important of all they are satya shrutah. They could hear the revealed truth. These truths are already there in the Vyoma (space or akasa) before and will continue to be after them. It is as if they went into the inner space or daharaakaasa and caught what is in outer space or mahaakaasa and expressed these truths in outpourings sublime and divine through the medium of speech. What resulted was these Riks that have an automatic parallel value. One that is an outer value baahya and one that is guhya or inner. That is why they became mantras. This double value is instantaneous. It can therefore be used to attain what we desire and ward off what we do not want. Its measurement in the outer life can be seen by ordinary man. Its measurement in inner life is known only to the rishi and falls within the dominion of the "Unmentionables". To translate these Riks word to word would be an act of inadequacy. Paraphrasing them would therefore allow better comprehension.

॥ ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॐ ॥

Ratri sukta is the 129th sukta found in the 10th mandala of the Rgveda. The conceiver of this sukta is Kushika rishi. The divinity illumined here is Raatri- the divinity of night.

rātrī vyakṣadāyatī purutrā dēvyakṣabhiḥ .viśvā adhiśriyōdhita .. 1 ..

rātrī-the divinity of night, ^{rnavatī}vyakṣadāyatī-visibly expansive has arrived purutrā-the protectress of the many, dēvī-the illumining one, akṣabhiḥ-with her many eyes, adhi viśva-reigns everywhere, adhita śriyah-reigns over everything

The divine night has arrived in a visibly expansive way. She is like a queen who surveys her domain and all that it contains. She sees everywhere with her many eyes. Nothing is spared. As darkness spreads, her sovereignty gets established. She, being the queen is also the protector of her subjects. The word rātrī is broken up in its roots as rā =to give and trī = protect. It means one who gives protection. It is much better to consider the word rātrī as the day-bringer of darkness, rather than simply as night. You will see the importance of it later when she will be referred to as sister of Ushaa ,the bringer of light .

Reflections

There is a natural flow to time from the light of the day to the dark of the night. Nature calms down and becomes quiet. The birds that chirp to glory in the evening begin to settle to their rest. As darkness approaches they disappear as it were. At twilight the inhabitants of villages wrap their activities. There is no major artificial illumination that blocks the darkness that spreads. A major shift takes place in nature and man then, which is fast disappearing in our industrialised technological cities. A lack of complying to this Nature-Clock has resulted in many a problem. It is a recorded fact for instance that women who work night-shifts at jobs find it harder to conceive. More and more children are needing glasses as they are being subjected to heavy artificial illumination throughout the day and night right from when they are newborn.

The night is a time meant for introspection. Pulling our energies and senses away from the distractions of the day would help the natural day to day healing processes. This is the time for those who bond to be together and spend meaningful simple time. This is also a very conducive time to engage in the quiet pursuit of knowledge.

The Vedic rishis recognised the coming of darkness as a divine power. They address this power in this suktam. They recognise her mastery, her strength, her omnipresence and resort to her for protection.

dēvī- the divinity (female) ōrvaprā- makes her presence everywhere amartyā- she is the one who cannot be killed, nivatō- she is below udvataḥ- she is above tamaḥ- the dense darkness bādatē-grips, obstructs jyōtiṣā -luminosity

Little by little all light disappears as the night- divine approaches. She takes over therefore she cannot be killed. She is an eternal happening. There is no more light above, below and all around. Those who live away from the glaring lights of the city in remote areas have experienced what pitch darkness means. It looks as if all light is gripped by the night and only when she releases will the light be free to manifest.

Reflections

Illuminative periods in our lives must be followed by periods of darkness. This is part of growth and part of spiritual evolution. The distractions of the day are no longer there at night. All problems, aches and troubles seem to take on gigantic proportions at night. We can no longer run away from them. We must deal with them head on. So too the nights of disillusionments that mark our growth as painful as they be, must be confronted. At this time there is a weakening of our confidence. Knowledge gained earlier and the confidence that ensued from that knowledge seem to mysteriously disappear. A shake up of the being is taking place. This shake up is referred to as pralaya. In simple physical terms it means flood or deluge. Symbolically knowing what a deluge can do to built up structures must be understood in the same way. Experiences, newly acquired knowledge can often destroy all previous notions, beliefs and assumptions that we have built over the years. It is said that everytime a notion or hard assumption is broken due to experience, man weeps internally. pralaya is also used to explain the end of the world. When the building blocks of creation are scrambled in a massive deluge prior to the next creation.

During autumn, around September or October, a particular new moon night, the darkest of all nights is designated as mahālaya amāvasya. Ancestors are honoured. Preparations begin for the annual nine nights of autumnal worship of the feminine divine principle. On this night the observer takes on a mode of behaviour that helps him turn inwards towards greater introspection.

Knowing fully well that this flooding is a necessary occurrence, we can prepare ourselves to use nighttime wisely. Instead of engaging in activities that are daylike in nature we can calm down the system by including prayers, chants, reflections and rituals that ease us.

nirusvasāramaskṛtōṣasam dēvyāyatī .apēduhāsātē tamaḥ .. 3 ..

ṛnavatī

niru-certainly dēvī-the divinity āyatī-has arrived svasāram uṣasam- her sister Usha akṛta- will be undone tamaḥ-the dense darkness apa hāsātē- will be distanced, will be laughed away ida u- certainly this too

There is a certainty that is being pointed out here. Night and day come one after the other. Ushaa, the bringer of light, who ushers in the day, is the sister of Raatri. When Raatri arrives it means that Ushaa's work is done. Raatri is on her shift now. Again when the night is over Ushaa will be back on her shift. Ushaa is the day- bringer and Raatri is the night-bringer. Their functions cannot be interchanged.

Reflections

Darkness and Light are both part of life. There cannot be one without the other. There is no Ushas without Raatri. We all love the illuminative periods in our pursuit of truth however we do not take notice of the fact that without the dark periods there can be no periods of light. The dismal association with dark will not be there if we learn to channel this time towards the main purpose in life and not slack off by giving up. We can even think of the fact that the light is on hold at night as you saw in the previous verse.

sā nō adya yasyā vyaṃ nitē yāvannavikṣmahi .vṛkṣē na vasatiṃ vayah .. 4

ṛnavatī

ni avikṣmahi- we begin towards the resting sā-She nō adya- for us now yasyā vyaṃ- in her time/period/agedness tē yāman- her night na-like vya- bird vasatiṃ- rests vṛkṣam- in the tree

The tree offers it expansiveness for the bird to rest. So too the night time gives us her time or period for us to rest.

Reflections

Once again we are drawn to nature where, as the sun sets and the darkness begins to spread, birds that are normally so active and noisy, calm down and begin their roost.

In Raatri's mature companionship we are to take shelter. She is like an unperturbed aged woman in whom we can confide, expose, correct our woes and concerns. We must learn to rest in her wisdom as easily as the birds go to the trees.

Going to rest can also be taken as going inwards, the direction taken for introspection.
