



PRSS-6

A STUDY ON THE CULT OF BRAHMÂ

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There was a well-known cult in ancient India, perhaps a pre-Vedic one, known as the cult of Brahman. It was mainly and originally associated with a creator God. The name "BRAHMÂ" appears to have been the popular name of the creator god in the Âryāvarta region. He assumed various forms and names in different parts of India in different ages. This is the wrong opinion that Brahman was a post-vedic or Paurânic god and hence his cult cannot be said to have existed before the Vedic period. In fact, Brahman was a most popular god of Vedic age. All Vedic text call Brahman Svayambhû i.e. self-born, and thus the first and oldest of the gods. The antiquity of Brahman cult, Brahman's symbols in veda, the method of worship, and whether there was really a sect of Brahman will therefore be discussed in this study. The causes of fall of Brahman cult are also included.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Brahman was the earliest creator god of India. He was a pre-Vedic god. The name "BRAHMÂ" appears to have been the popular name of the creator god in the Âryāvarta region. He assumed various forms and names in different parts of India in different ages. All religions and sects, however, have to acknowledge their debts to and accept the authority of god Brahman. Even the Vedas are said to have been creation of Brahman. This is the wrong opinion that Brahman was a post-vedic or Paurânic god and hence his cult cannot be said to have existed before the Vedic period. In fact, Brahman was a most popular god of Vedic age. All Vedic text call Brahman Svayambhû i.e. self-born, and thus the first and oldest of the gods. Jainism and Buddhism arose out of the cult of Brahman. The Brahman cult as known in the pre-Vedic days included the worship of Various gods of elements such as Water, Earth, Fire, Wind and ether, which in the Vedas were defiend and in the Samkhya Philosiphy, considered as some of the Tattvas out of which creation arose. The absence of reference to Brahman in the Veda need not therefore be taken as a proof of non-existence of his worship in the Vedic period, because Vedas do not really give us a full picture of the condition of India of that period. The review of Vedic literature clearly indicates that even in the early Vedic period, there was prevalent the worship of a god named Brahman.

All the Hindus believe that the three gods, viz. Brahman, Visnu and Siva are the principal gods to be worshipped. In spite of this belief, no sect is known to have existed in India worshipped Brahman as its principal god. The Brahman cult in a very early age had assimilated various other forms of worship and gods. Siva, Mother Goddess of Tantric nature, God Dharma, Yama and Kâla were all associated with the cult of Brahman. The five primary elements (Panchmahâbhutas), the subtle elements (tanmâtra),

Ahmkar, Buddhi (mind) and Avyakta (the unmanifest)- these five things are the Râtra (the body) of Purusa and are describe as Pancharâtra. Râtra were the body of Brahman. The Pancharâtra cult was originally the worship of five elements (Panchmahâbhutas, Water, Earth, Fire, Wind and ether). These in a later age were worshipped as five forms of a creator God Brahman. This religion may be said to be crude form of worship of Natural phenomena as manifestations of a creative spirit or force. With the advance of time and civilization, the idea of the divinity of those natural phenomena arose and this Vedic religion created the Devas (Gods) by anthropomorphising them.

The knowledge of the existance of a cult of Brahman in ancient India will thus throw new light on various problems of Indian religions and traditions.

2. ANTIQUITY OF BRAHMÂ CULT:

Brahman is the chief creator god of Vedic culture. In Vedas, He is known by various names -Hiranyagarbha, Aj, Purusa, Nârâyana, Ka, Vishvakarmâ, Brahmanapati and Brahmanaspati etc. The most famous of them was "Prajâpati". Accordoing to Satapath Brâhmana there are many passages where Prajâpati recognised as the chief god. (Sat. Brâ. 11/1/6/14,2/2/4,2/4/4/1). In Asvalâyan Grhya sutra (3/4) and Chândogya Upanisad (1/7/5), he is identified with Brahman. Sâyanâchârya (Atharva. 3/20/4, Sâyana Bhâsya) also says - "Brahmanam esham devanam Prajâpatim". Prajâpati is the chief of the gods, and in special the father god who produces every thing, who is the father of the gods and also of the Asuras. Prajâpati is the hero of the cosmogonic mythes of the whole of the Brahmana period; he creates the worlds, the vedas and the castes. Prajâpati also occures in the Rgveda (3/53/2) as an epithet of Savitr and as also of soma (9/59). In (10/121/1), he bears the title "Hiranyagarbha", the golden germ.

In the Rgveda (2/1/3) Brahmanaspati is invoked as 'Brahmâ'. In the hymns 8/16,10/112/8,10/141/3,2/3/1,2/3/2,10/72 Brahman may be taken as a god. The above hymn indicates that Brahmanaspati, Brahmanapati or Prajâpati are really the Rgvedic equivalent of god 'Brahmâ'. The Atharvaveda (4/2,5/1,19/43,7/3/1 etc.) contains references to a god Brahman. In the Atharvaveda (4/2/8)he appears as the embryo, which is, produces in the waters on the process of creation. This hymn (Atharva. 19/21) shows the supreme position of Brahman -

*Brahma jyestha sambhritah veeryani
Brahmâgre jyestham divama tatân A
Bhutânâ Brahman prithamote jagye tenarhita
Brahmanâ spardhitum kah AA*

The Prasna Upanisad refers to the preparing of a sacrifice by Prajâpati for the purpose of creation. The Mundak Upanisad refers to Brahman's eldest son named Athervan who learned the Brahman -Vidya from his father. The Aitareya, Taittiriya, Kausitaki Upanisad also refer to Brahman. In Sâmkhayana Aranyaka Soma is addressed as, "Five mouthed Prajâpati". Thus there is no doubt that in certain stage of his-



tory, especially in the Upanisadas, Indians are familiar with Brahmā. Therefore we may conclude that Brahmā was a very ancient god and he assumed various forms and names in different parts of India. Regarding 'Purusa' it may be said that he is the production of the philosophical tendency of the Rgvedic India. His name occurring in the Rgveda indicates his existence in the Rgvedic period.

The review of the Vedic period thus shows that even in the Rgvedic period god Brahmā might have existed in India. Brahmā was the main god not only of the Brahman period but also of the Upanisadic age.

3. BRAHMĀ 's SYMBOL:

Brahmā was worshipped through symbols. The idea of his fourfaced image is to be found for the first time in an interpolated verse in the Maitrāyani Samhitā. The Vedic Indians who had taken up the worship of Brahmā in a modified form worshipped him in the form of the sacrificial 'citi' (altar). Swan was a favourite symbol of Brahmā. Several animals like bull, lion etc. were also used to represent his symbols. A chariot or a pillar (Skambha) was also used as his symbol. One of the earliest symbol for Brahmā was Asvattha tree (Kath. Upa. 2/5/8 & Rg. 10/97/5). In the Rgveda (10/81-82) it is said, "What was the tree out of which they fashioned heaven and earth?" The Taittiriya Brahmana (2/8/9/6) answers this query as, "Brahmā was the forest, Brahmā was that tree out of which they fashioned heaven and earth." The Atharvaveda (10/7/38) relates, "Gods form part of the Skambha- Brahmā, branches of a tree," The Skambha Brahmā was thus represented as the Asvattha tree. The Brahदारanyaka Up. (3/28) also clearly says that "Tree is Purusa". In the Svetāsvatara Upnishad, a tree is said to have the form of Kāla, a god relates to Brahmā (Svet. Up. 3/9 and Katha Up. 2/3/1).

4. METHOD OF WORSHIP:

The Brahmā cult was primarily a cult of Sanyasin and also of the original Brahmins. The philosophical minded people worshipped Brahmā. The teachings of this cult were Samyama (self-control), Satya (truth), Sreyas (real good), Brahma, hita (welfare), dharma, artha and moksha. This cult gave much importance to pure life and good conduct. The Brahmā cult has existed in the earliest known periods of Indian history is curiously not directly mentioned in the Vedas. The reason was not that it did not exist, but that the Vedas purposely suppressed it. The cult of Brahmā after its suppression by the Vedic religion was considered as a religion of the Asuras. But the worship of Brahmā continued in society in various forms, some incorporated into the orthodox religion and others limited to low class people. The saptarātra cult of Brahmā appears to have been popular in several religions such as Kuruksetra, Panchal, Banaras and eastern parts of India. In certain parts of Bengal (nabadvipa etc.) Brahmā is still worshipped for seven days in the month of Bhadra, as a protection against fire. Very few temples were erected for this god. Hindus worship the god in the sandhyā rits, in marriage ceremonies, on the eve of Hindu new year (chaitra shukla pratipadā) etc.

Non – sectarian work of later periods indicate the popularity or continuity of Brahmā's worship. Brahmā was the chief god worshipped during religious ceremonies performed at the time of building a house. In the Vāstumandala Brahmā occupies the central place according to all the Vastu texts. The non-sectarian Vāstushāstra proves the antiquity of the worship of Brahmā, and its popularity even in the historical period.

5. SECT OF BRAHMĀ:

Brahmā was accepted as one of the Trinity, but his worshippers now formed no sect. Brahmā continued to be worshipped by all Hindus on certain occasions only and as a minor god in all Puja ceremonies. The Varna system was at first based on the religion or the gods worshipped by various groups (or sects) of people of different locations of India and the Brahmana cast must have a close relation with Brahmā. Brahmins might originally have been worshippers of the pre-Vedic Brahmā. The evidences of the existence of a real cult of Brahmā in a very early period make it clear that absence of references in the Vedas to this god was not due to its non-existence but perhaps due to its pre-Vedic character. It was Brahmā who, as gradually there was intermingling of the vedic and non vedic people in various parts of India, was also worshipped by the Vedic people of a later period (i.e. Brahmana period) as Prajāpati (adherents of Vedic faith) first and then also accepted Brahmā worship.

All religious sects of India ascribe creation of Brahmā and even sectarian works refer to the creation legends being associated with Brahmā. Infact, all known religious sects attempted to give authority to their religion and religious books by referring their origin to Brahmā the earliest god of India. It is also likely that the Vratyas, Yatis and Munis of the Vedic period, known to be following a non-Vedic cult were really following a cult allied to that of Brahmā.

6. CAUSES OF FALL OF BRAHMĀ CULT:

The Brāhmana and Pauranic tradition to the effect that Brahmā died after creation indicates that with the rise of the Vedic religion Brahmā's direct worship had ceased among the people at least of the western parts of India. The rise of the Vaishnavism and Buddhism totally destroyed the older cults. The Brahmā cult again made some progress after the fall of the heyday of Buddhism. But with the rise of Vashnavism, Brahmā cult was relegated to the position of a religion of the low class people. The Brahmā cult was mainly considered, as a cult of Asuras is evident from the fact that in the Puranas most of the Daityas or Asuras are said to have achieved supernatural power by a boon from god Brahmā. The reason for the disappearance of the cult was undoubtedly the rivalry of the cult with the Vedic religion.

7. CONCLUSIONS:

The Brahmā cult was the cradle of all religions, and the Vedic culture was a development of the old Brahmā cult of India. The Brahmā cult were for a long time regarded as a Asuras or non – orthodox in character chiefly followed by the lower class people in some parts of India. But even then the



old religions gradually changed the character of the vedic religion. In eastern part of India, where the Vedic cult spread gradually and slowly, the majority of the people followed the Brahmā cult. In the north west, Krishna gave rise to the Vaisnava cult. In Eastern India arose Jainism and Buddhism which gave a death blow to both the Vedic and the non Vedic cults, including that of Brahmā. But Buddhism fell a prey to the old religions and Vaisnavism became the predominant religion. Along with that arose the worship of Siva, Sakti, Sun and other gods, which gave rise to the modern form of Hinduism. The Brahmā cult however, had mixed up thoroughly with all Indian religions and gave rise to the present day religion viz. Hinduism. The Samkhya philosophy was a philosophy of Brahmā's Ratra cult and the Yoga was associated with Brahmā's son Rudra-Shiva. Hence it is that these two systems were more or less adopted and accepted by all the religious sects and texts. Just as Buddhism was assimilated by Hinduism and disappeared from India, so was the Brahmā cult assimilated by the Vedic cult and the later religious systems of India and has altogether been forgotten by the Indians.

Many problems of Indian philosophy and religions may thus be solved if further investigation is carried out about the Brahmā cult.

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