

Rudra Deva in the Rig Veda & Forms of Rudra Shiva in Hinduism

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Abstract

This paper explores the Rig Veda and other religious texts in identifying the deity Rudra Deva and his importance in the sacred text. It is seen that Lord Shiva was unknown during those days. The Rig Vedic texts reveal that there are many shuktas or verses in devotion to Lord Rudra. The society of those days was in awe of the deity and gave great importance to Rudra Deva. The study of the shuktas or verses brings to light that Rudra Deva has been highly praised and prayed for protection and prosperity. Rudra Deva has been praised for his herbal knowledge. They also prayed to the deity with the view that his anger may not befall them. This paper also describes the forms of Rudra Shiva in Hinduism. This research is based on content analysis of the Rig Veda and other religious texts. Very few priests were interviewed to acquire their views related to Lord Rudra Deva. This deity was feared by all, hence people of those days socio-culturally adapted themselves to the deity and its associated beliefs with great devotion and dedication

Keywords: Rudra Deva, Rig Veda, Hinduism, Forms.



Introduction

During the Vedic age, the name Shiva was unknown. In the ancient world the Vedic Aryans gave great importance to Rudra, who could be equated with Dravidian Shiva and the Greek Dtonyosos, or Egyptian Osiris. (Danielo, 1964, p.12). Rudra originated from the word 'Rud' which means to cry or howl. (Mahadev, 1994, p.4). Rudra has also been described as the 'roarer'. Prof. Pischel describes Rudra as "the brilliant one" from the root word 'rud, which means red or "to be ruddy". According to Grassman, it means "to shine". Rudra is regarded as the eliminator of evil and he ushered peace. Stella Kramisch shows a different etymology connected with the form Rudra. Rudra is named as the 'wild one' or the 'fierce god' (Mayrhofer, 1960, pp.360-368) Rudra is also known as the 'archer' in Sanskrit 'Sarva' (Shivram, 1965, p.210)

The Gods of the Vedas are classified into three categories. The dwellers of the Sky (Dayusthania) , Space (Antarikshya) and Earth (Prithivi).

SKY Dayusthaniya	SPACE/ Antarikshya	EARTH /Prithivi
Disha	Indra	Saraswati
Varuna	Rudra	Prithivi
Mitra	Apamanapana	Agni
Surya	Trita Aptya	Soma
Sabitri	Ahibudhaynaya	Brihaspati
Paparna	Ajaekapata	Wapta
Vishnu	Maruta	Bishwakrama/Prajapati
Vivasvan	Vayuwan	Shradha
Aditya	Parjanya	Aditi
Usha	Manariswan	Dini
Ashwin	Aapa	Basnospati (Varaha Purana, 1893)

The Vedic Aryans have regarded Rudra as the dweller of the Antarikshya or the Sky. As already mentioned Rudra is the earlier Roopa or form of Lord Shiva. Rudra is said to have dual aspects, one the fearful and the other benevolent Roopa or form.

In the Rig Veda great importance has been given to Rudra. There are many *slokas* or *shuktas* dedicated to Lord Rudra. During the Vedic era Rudra, Indra, Agni, and Soma were regarded as the most powerful of its period. Unlike the Upanishad period where the Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwar gained importance and the Vedic deities like Indra, Soma, Rudra Varuna seem to have lost their importance.

RV (1/114/1 – 11) All these *shuktas* are dedicated to Lord Rudra.

R V (1/114/1) “Let us pray to the matted-haired one who is the destroyer of evil and who is an inspiration of power Rudra Deva prayed for the welfare of the subjects and cows. May all the people of this village be healthy?” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S, R V 1/114/1)

RV (1/114/2) “Oh Rudra Deva! May you provide us with happiness and good health. You are one who provides help to those who are brave, therefore we bow to you. You help us to fight against all diseases. You are our saviour. Oh Rudra Deva, we all imitate your excellent polity.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S., p.119)

RV (1/114/3) “Oh doer of all good Rudra Deva! You provide us with right thinking. May you look after our children and may you provide us with power and strength. We will perform ‘*hawana*’ in your name.”(Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S., p.120)

RV (1/114/4) “Bright doer of good, swift and knowledgeable oh Rudra deva!, we pray to you. May you keep us under your protection and guidance? Instead of your anger, may you shower your graciousness on us all?” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S., p.121)

RV (1/114/5) “One who eats only fruits, handsome, shining face, with matted hair, brave Rudra Deva we always bow to you. All the holy vanaspati (Herbal medicine) you hold, may you bring forth from the ‘*Antarikshya*’ or the space to the *Prithivi* or the earth. May you provide us with the inner strength, to acquire peace and power to fight against outer epidemics? May you take out all evil poisons that are inside us? Oh! Rudra Deva.(Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S., p.120)”

RV. (1/114/6) “We sing hymns in praise of the father of *Maruta Ganas*. Oh! Immortal Rudra Deva, do provide us with things that are necessary for our survival. May you bless us and our children with happiness and prosperity?” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V.S., pp.120-121)

RV. (1/114/7) “Rudra Deva may you not trouble our mind. May you not kill our children and youths. May you not harm our parents nor will you trouble

our relatives. Oh Rudra Deva do hear our prayers.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V, S., pp.120-122) (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.120-121)

RV. (1/ 114/ 8) “Oh Rudra Deva May you not befall evil on our sons and grandsons, our life, cows, and *aswas* (horses). May you not anger our brave youths. We whole-heartedly pray that you come to our holy *yajna*. ”(Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., pp. 119-120)

RV. (1/114/9) “Oh father of the *Maruta Ganas* Rudra Deva. Just as at early dawn the cow-herder takes the cows from its owners and brings them safely back to them at dusk, likewise all these mantras, stutis or prayers that we received from you; we offer it back to you oh Rudra Deva. May you provide us with happiness? We all expect your protection and guidance.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.120)

RV. (1/114/10) “Oh the protector of the brave Rudra Deva, Your powerful weapon slays humans and animals. May it not harm us. May you always protect us and provide us with happiness. May you guide us and provide us with peace.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., pp.119 – 120)

RV (1/114/ 11) “We wish for your protection and security we bow to you Oh Rudra Deva!. May all the *Maruta Ganas* and Rudra Deva himself hear our prayers. May you hear our prayers oh! Mitra, Varuna, Aditi , Samundra, Prithivi and deities of Dayusthanieloka (sky)” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.120)

RV. (7/46/ 1) “Oh dedicated one who carries bow & arrow, sharp weapon, immortal Rudra deva, may you hear our *stutis* or prayers.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.572)

RV. (7/46/2) “Oh Rudra Deva you are known as the holy ashes. May you provide us with joy and prosperity and good health, and may you reside in our home”. (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., pp.572-573)

RV (7/46/ 3) “One who is swift as the wind, Oh Rudra Deva! May the lightening from the space (*Antarikshya*) not harm us. May all your medicine works and make our children healthy.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.572)

RV (7/46/ 4) “Oh Rudra Deva, may you not kill us or leave us. May your anger not befall on us. May you always guide and protect us.” (Luintel, Rig Veda, 2063 V,S., p.573)

When all these ‘*Shuktas*’ from *Mandala* 1 & 7 are analysed it brings to the limelight that Vedic Aryans feared and had great respect for Rudra Deva.

He has been described as a Deva with a shining bright face, a sturdy well-built body, handsome with matted hair, decorated with ashes carrying a bow & arrow and other sharp weapons.

R.G. Bhandarkar also has mentioned Rudra Deva being worshipped as a bright shining deity. (Bhandarkar, 1965, pp.97- 110)

In the Rig Veda, the Vedic Aryans have requested Rudra Deva to provide them with happiness, prosperity, and good health, save them from enemies and protect their children and cows. They further pray that his anger may not befall them and their family. Hence they prayed to please Rudra Deva so that he may provide them with peace, prosperity and protection. This shows that the Vedic Aryans not only feared Rudra Deva but actually showed great devotion and dedication when they offered their prayers to the deity.

This shows that Rudra Deva played an important role in the life of Vedic Aryans. During the Rig Vedic age Agni, Indra, Rudra, Soma and Varuna were the most important deities to whom the majority of the verses are dedicated.

An interview was conducted with Guru Narayan Acharya who is involved in Bhagawat preaching and other ritualistic worship. He viewed that in the Vedic age trinity (creator Brahma, Saviour Vishnu and, destroyer Shiva) was unknown. It was an agrarian society and people gave great importance to Lord Indra the rain god, and Rudra was feared by all and in every ritualistic worship in those days he was given an 'asana'. Even the Kings feared him, during the war he was worshipped so as to gain victory over the enemies. Thus Rudra played an important role for the people in the Vedic age. (Acharya, interview 2022, Nov 22)

The Forms of Rudra Shiva

Lord Rudra is associated with destruction. Rudra is the fire that kills, the wind that destroys, the water that causes destruction and the man that murders. As the power behind the elements, Rudra is depicted under eight forms. There are both fearful and benevolent forms of Rudra.

Danielou in his book, Hindu Polytheism has mentioned the eight forms of Rudra. Though there are other religious texts who mention 10 forms or 12 forms of Rudra Deva, names vary. However, the researcher has reviewed Danielou's book and the forms mentioned by him.

The different forms are:

Sarva (The Archer)

Bhava (Existence)

Ugra/Asani (Fearful)
Mahan (Great)
Isana (The Ruler)
Bhima (The tremendous)
Pasupati (Herdsman)
Rudra (Lord of tears)

Sarva (The Archer)

The deity whose substance is earth is known as Sarva. In English, he is termed the Archer. Sarva is regarded as the supporter of both animate and inanimate. Sarva, therefore, represents earth, which nourishes all and thus supports life on earth. Sarva is the archer and the hunter who brings food. He is regarded as equivalent of god of love, whose arrows are the five senses. (Danielou, 1964, p.204) .

Bhava (Existence)

Bhava is the element water and it is associated with Sarva. Bhava is the one who knows the Veda is regarded as a powerful deity. He nurtures life on this earth. His Shakti is Uma (Peace of the night). Planet Venus is his son. He is considered as the protector of the seven worlds. Bhava is also depicted as the attendant of Lord Shiva. He has been equated with Lord Parjanya the god of rain. (Danielou, 1964, p.205)

Ugra/Asani (Fearful / Thunderbolt)

Ugra refers to the fearful form of Rudra. It denotes thunderbolt also termed as *Asani*. It is a spark of the fire of destruction. There are verses in the Rig Veda where the Vedic Arayans join hands and prayer to Rudra Deva to save them and their children from the destruction of the Thunderbolt. It has also been noted that the name ‘thunderbolt’ has been given to the sacrifice or the ‘*yajamana*’ who kills his victim. In the Linga Purana, it has been said that the fearful god ‘Ugra’ is very wise, there are others who call him Ishana or Ruler. Ugra’s shakti is *Diksha* or (Initiation), and his son is *Santana* or (liberation). (Danielou, 1964, p.206-211)

Mahan (The great God)

Mahan means supreme or great. Mahan is the name for Maha-deva. Later he came to be known as Shiva. He is symbolized by phallus or the ‘*Linga*’ that sows the seed of creation. He is the supreme god who destroys and creates. The Shakti of this great god Rudra is *Rohini* (the red-one). His son is *Budha* or the planet Mercury.

Ishana (The ruler)

Ishana is another elemental form of Rudra- Shiva. It is regarded as the embodiment of air, which is considered to be the purifier. Ishana is regarded as the ruler of the North

Eastern direction. Ishana is the master of all knowledge. He is the spirit of the air. The Linga Purana calls him the creator of the world whose nature is the wind. He is shown as a copper-coloured deity. When depicted alone, Ishana is shown with five faces. When the Siva-linga is depicted with five faces, the face of Shiva that looks upward is the Ishana. His Shakti is the auspicious Goddess 'Siva'. His son is 'Manojava' (the swiftness of mind). (Danielou, 1964, p.204)

Bhima (The Tremendous)

Bhima is the embodiment of ether, the source that is able to fulfil desires of all living and the nonliving. He is known as the tremendous or Bhima. He has the power to fulfil all desires. His shakti are the ten *Disa* or the direction of space. His son is *Sarga* or creation. Bhima is known for his power and strength and is said to provide great fame, if pleased.

Pasupati (Herdsman)

Vedic Granthas term Rudra as the 'Herdsman'. The Lord-Herdsman (Pasupati) represents the element of 'fire'. It is through the sacrificial fire that an individual enters the divine domain. Herdsman is equated with Prajapati. The beloved wife of herdsman is *Svaha* (Invocation-at-Offering) His son is said to be *Skanda*, (Six Faced Lord of War). There is a story associated with Rudra as Herdsman. In the Sadpatha Brahmana mentions that once Lord Rudra agreed to be born in-order to punish Prajapati (lord-of progeny), who is said to have casted lustful look on his own daughter. Rudra accepted the lordship of animal and took the form of animal and attacked Prajapati. It is said that even today one can meet him in form of animal or of a hunter or herdsman or as the star Rohini. (Danielou, 1964, pp.205-208)

Rudra (The lord of Tears) Rudra is the embodiment of the sun, it is regarded as the celestial form of 'Holy Fire'. This solar deity is the source of all splendour, one that gives liberation and Enjoyment is lord Rudra. In the Linga purana, it has been said that he is the Lord of Tears. His shakti is supposed to be the Shining Goddess *Suvarcala*. His son Saturn or *Sani*.(Danielou, 1964, p.206) The Rig Vedic granthas have dedicated numerous *shuktas* or verses in prayer or *stuti* to Rudra where they request him to protect, guide, and bring good health, happiness and prosperity to their children and grandchildren and their cows and villages.

Thus, it can be concluded that through the study of the Vedic texts, in the Vedic Period, the Aryans gave great importance to Rudra. The name Shiva is unknown. In the Rig Vedic text, there are numerous verses dedicated to Rudra. It seem that the people feared him, and looked upon him with great awe. They performed Bajana, where great importance was given to Rudra Deva. Each and every verse is full of praise of Rudra Deva. They pray to him for protection and peace, and prosperity. It seems that he was also regarded as the deity

who had great knowledge related to herbal medicine. In one of the verses, they request him to come to the Prithivi or earth from Antarikshya or space with these medicines so that their children may be healthy and the youth strong. They also pray that May Lord Rudra's anger may not befall on them, may he guide them, protect them and destroy their enemies.

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