

CHAPTER - III

VEDIC RELIGION AND THE CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE

The religious heritage of India leaves an indelible impression on Hinduism. Vedic literature has described about it. The Vedic religious texts like hymn collections, manuals of rituals have been described as works on health and astrology. The present chapter examines some of Vedic rituals closely, discusses the nature of important Vedic deities and how these thoughts have been influenced by the poet in the classical Sanskrit literature. The Vedic critical concept is also introduced here, as it relates to the wider notion of sacrifice.

The literature of the Veda is divided into two parts i.e. *Karmakāṇḍa* and *Jñānakāṇḍa*. It is therefore necessary to trace the concept of religion from both the categories. The Sanskrit word for religion is *Dharma*. This word is originated from Sanskrit root ‘*Dhṛ-Dhārayati*’ with *man* suffix. *Dharma* is one of the key concepts in Indian thoughts. The word *Dharma* has been variously defined. In the Sanskrit literature, attempts have been made to define the term *Dharma* in different ways. According to the *Mīmāṃsā-śāstra*, the rule mentioned in the Vedas is *Dharma*.¹ *Dharma* has its legal, moral and social shades of meaning; which are developed during the course of tradition and historical development. Though *Dharma* is at the centre of Indian thoughts; it is misunderstood or has been misused to forestall social changes. Rādhākṛṣṇan gives his own particular definition and interpretation. He has defined *Dharma* :

“The whole duty of a man includes in four efforts i.e. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*. Four efforts are members of the four groups i.e. *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*.”²

The *Dharma* stands for comprehensive consideration of duties, righteousness, devotion, invocation, social welfare and welfare of the world. It

¹ चोदना लक्षणोऽर्थ धर्मः । MīS, I.1.2

यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः । VaiS., I.1.2

² Rādhākṛṣṇan, RS., P.107

is called '*lokasaṅgraha*'. *Dharma* in its comprehensive embraces ethical as well as religious pursuits, intrinsic as well as instrumental values. It has an impact on national character. There is a wealth of spiritual laws in the Vedic *Dharma*. The sages were discovered and realized it. This law was composed into the Vedas and Upaniṣads. In the later period, many additional books are received in the form of interpretations and stories. So the Vedic *Dharma* is not started by any one person. The Vedas were not originated or composed. The Vedas are a part of the spiritual knowledge of the *Śabda Brahman*. The sages were able to enter that spiritual dimension. They easily realized and assimilated that exists knowledge in that field. Then they compose them in book form for the benefit of all of humanity.

According to the *Dharmaśāstra*, *Dharma* is a social order. It is a mode of life or code of conduct for developing the men to reach his goal of existence, as says Yājñavalkya³. Veda describes *Dharma* as restraints, charity, compassion, and life as sacrifice. Veda describes enjoyment with relinquishment. Performing sacrifice is also *Dharma*. Mention may be made here that *Vyavahāra* as a category is distinct from *Dharma*. Medhātithi who stands at the threshold of the period brings out the distinction between *Dharma* and *Rājadharmā* of which *Vyavahāra* is a part. He says that while *Dharma* as such draws its validity exclusively from the Veda, *Rājadharmā* seeks validity from others sources as well as प्रमाणन्तरमूलाह्वत्र धर्मा उच्यते न सर्वे वेदमूलाः. In the *Manusmṛti*, Manu argues that in fact the rules of *Vyavahāra* are not derived from the Vedas because one is means of victory and defeat in *Vyavahāra* is accomplished facts and others are known through direct perception.⁴ Veda is the source of *Dharma* and also the conduct or behaviour of knower of the Veda. The *Ācāra* of good person or self satisfaction is also source of *Dharma*.

According to the *Īśopaniṣad*,⁵ the fundamental truth is the cosmic existence, pervades the entire creation and is also the basis the creation. The ancient seers those who realised that the eternal truth is referred by Yāska, as

³ इज्याचारदमाहिंसादानस्वाध्यायकर्मणाम् । अयं तु परमो धर्मो यद्योगेनात्मदर्शनम् ॥ YāS., I8.

⁴ न हि व्यवहारस्मृतिवेदमूला पराजयकरणान् । MS., VIII.3 (Medhātithi commentary)

⁵ हिरण्यमयेनपात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् । तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥ Ī., 15

साक्षात्कृतो धर्मणः, which the seers have realised. *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* equates the *Satya* ‘the eternal truth’ with *Dharma*, saying

“तत् श्रेयोरूपम् अत्यसृज्यो धर्मम् ।

यो वै स धर्मः सत्यं वै तत् ॥”

Thus the *Dharma* indeed is that eternal truth which is *Śreyorūpa*. Vedic religion includes views of rituals, philosophy and cultural of *Ṛṣis*. It can be studied through understanding the deep meaning of *mantras*.

3.1. Dharma as a Principle :

To understand the meaning of *Dharma*, one is known first the concept of *Ṛta* by the Vedic seers. B. Creel says in his text :

The Indo-European concept *Ṛta*, which expressed a view of an embracing cosmic order, both moral and physical, contributed significantly to the connotation of *Dharma*, with the understanding of *Ṛta* virtually absorbed into the meaning of *Dharma*.⁶

Benjamin Khan explains the principle of the *Ṛta* thus:

“The principle of *Ṛta* was the inner balance of the cosmic and the things thereof as well as beyond and above the cosmic and the things thereof. It is therefore, the transcendental and the immanent principle of the universe.”⁷

In the place of the *Ṛta*, the principle of *Dharma* became universal law of things and enjoyed the same status at the hands of the later witters. Thus it can be said that *Dharma* and *Ṛta* are synonyms, having two distinct senses. A when man tries to understand this principle, *Dharma* appears to him as a duty to be discharged and law to be followed in his life.

In short, the source of the universal *Dharma* is the Veda. The Vedas are the most original holy books in the world and the highest antiquity universally recognized. The Vedas are the source of all and have watered the whole world with religion. Āpastambha declares that the source of *Dharma* is the tradition or traditional usage and conviction of holy people.

⁶ Austin B Creel. *Dharma in Hindu Ethics*, p.3

⁷ Khan, Benjamin. *The concept of Dharma in Valmiki Rāmāyana*, p.25

3.2. The Religion in Vedic Saṁhitās :

The most highly regarded literary works of the Aryans contain praises to various deities. Many *Sūktā* were chanted on the ritual of preparing, offering and assimilating Soma, a sacred drink, during the New Year celebrations. Two *Saṁhitās* were produced in the upcoming centuries. The *Yajurveda Saṁhitā* and the *Sāmaveda Saṁhitā*, which together with the *Ṛgveda* formed early orthodox Aryan scripture. The *Yajurveda* contains versed prayers. Some prayers are also taken from the *Ṛgveda* which were learned by Adhvaryus. The priests who performed Vedic rituals like building fire-altars and so on. It also includes prose instructions on how to perform rituals such as horse-sacrifice. The *Yajurveda Saṁhitā* exists in two recessions. These are called the *Kṛṣṇayajurveda* and *Śuklayajurveda*. The black *Yajurveda* is challenging to understand because of its arrangement of content. The white *Yajurveda* or *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā* has essentially the same material content which is more accessible in its composition. The *Sāmaveda Saṁhitā* contains mostly of verses from the *Ṛgveda Saṁhitā*. During the sacrifice of Soma, rituals in the form of chant (*sāma*) is performed by Udgātās, a special class of priests.

A progressive development exposes by these three Vedic *Saṁhitās* in the Vedic ritual art. The *Saṁhitās* are composed in *mantras* in an ancient language known as Vedic Sanskrit. The fourth Vedic *Saṁhitā*, the *Atharvaveda*, was accepted several centuries later. The *Atharvaveda* later included as the fourth canonical *Saṁhitā*.

3.3. Religion in the Brāhmaṇa Texts :

The Brāhmaṇa texts are composed in the form of Vedic Sanskrit prose. The virtues sacrifice rituals are known as *Yajñas*. So according to the Brāhmaṇa literature, *Yajña* is the best act. It is considered as religion as per Vedic tradition.⁸ But Brāhmaṇas' contents came from the Vedic *Saṁhitās*. In these texts, various types of rituals have described in detail. It is also described a diversity of rituals in detail. This text also provides interpretations and explanations for the origin of aspects of ritual practices. The interpretations of Brāhmaṇas often attempt to show similarities between three

⁸ यज्ञ वै श्रेष्ठतमं कर्म । ŚB., I.7.1.5

Lokas and the macrocosm. In the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, the word *Brāhmaṇa* has been commonly used as detailing the to tualism related to the different sacrifices or *Yajñas*. It is expressed : “दूरोहणं रोहति तस्योक्तं ब्राह्मणम् ।” In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, as reference to the context. *Dūrohaṇa Brāhmaṇa* has been explained as दूरोहणं रोहति। सर्गो वै लोको दूरोहणं । स्वर्गमेव तं लोकं रोहति य एवं वेद ।⁹ It is evident the word *Dūrohaṇa* in the *Dūrohaṇa Brāhmaṇa* has been explained. Uvaṭa and other commentators, in the commentary of the *Yajurveda*, explains the word *Śruti* as *Brahmaṇa*. It is thus evident that the exponents of the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Ṛṣis* had always considered the word as explanation of the *Brahman* i.e. the *Veda* itself. *Veda* also says that the *Yajña* is the navel of the earth.¹⁰ According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*¹¹, *Yajña* is the real *Brahman* because *Prajāpati* first created sacrifice in the form of his image. Describing all the actions other than *Yajña* as the reason for the bondage of the people, the lord *Kṛṣṇa* has called *Yajña* as the main work of human being.¹² as explained by the Vedic seers

3.4. Religion as a Duty :

The *Śruti* ordains that man will not step away from *Dharma*.¹³ Man is asked to follow *Dharma* in order to enjoy life here and after. By properly following the way of *Dharma* as shown by the *Śruti* and *Smṛti*, man can attain *Svarga* and also get the liberation.¹⁴ The duties of man are laid down as rites to be performed rules to be followed, customs to be honoured and code of conduct at each stage of life, under the name *Svadharmā*. P. V. Kane explains that :

⁹ AaiB., VIII.36.2

¹⁰ यज्ञ विश्वस्य भुवनस्य नाभिः । AV., IX.10.14

यज्ञ भुवनस्य नाभिः । ŚuV., 23.11

¹¹ अथैनमात्मानः प्रतिमामसृजद् यद् यज्ञम् ,तस्मादाहुः प्रजापतिर्यज्ञ इत्यात्मनो ह्येनं प्रतिमामसृजत । ŚB., XI.1.8.3

¹² यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः । BhaG., III.9

¹³ TaiU., I.19

¹⁴ श्रुतिस्मृत्युदितं धर्ममनुतिष्ठन् हि मानवः । इह कीर्तिमवाप्नोति प्रेत्य चानुत्तमं सुखम् । MS., II.9

“The privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of one of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life.”¹⁵

One can understand that in this sense of following one's *Dharma*, *Dharma* is enumerated as one of the *Puruṣārthas*, bestowing prosperity and showing the way to liberation.

3.5. Religion as Rituals :

The word *Yajña* is used as sacrifices. *Yajamāna* is performed the sacrifices. Brāhmaṇa literature had begun to emphasize more sacrifices than the gods, for whom *Yajña* is performed. *Yajña* gives the power of gods. Therefore the deities have attained prestige through *Yajña*. Thus the powers of the Vedic deities are seen on the performance of *Yajña*. The priests who work on rituals are able to perform the rites. The Vedic deity Bṛhaspati is concedered as the supreme priest. He is known as preceptor of the gods. He worked as a divine model for the worldly members of the priestly class. Sacrifices were considered important to anyone who wanted a place in heaven. The *Yajña* provides nourishment for the deities. The gods received the essence of the offerings. The offerings are considered as sustenance of the deities. Although, the term sacrifice often refers to the offering of animals. Contemporary rites rarely involve flesh and blood as offerings. milk, clarified butter, rice or other grains and even parts of sacred plants like the *Dhatūrā* fruit, wood-apple leaves or *Bilvapatra* etc may also be offered. R.G. Collingwood examined :

“It is true that religion is discovered and established by ritualistic positive creed; and that apart from creed, ritual will always be meaningless and uninspiring.”¹⁶

Yajñas were performed as rituals for the benefit of the social. These are known as *Śrauta* rites. These rites involved with three sacred fires. Basically, in the Vedic era, the *Yajamānas* of these rites were kings, those who will get special benefit of the ritual. However, *Śrauta* rites were performed

¹⁵ Kane, P. V. HD., (Vol. I) p.2

¹⁶ Collingwood, R.G. RP., p.33

according to the rhythms of the natural world. For example, during the season change, the *Yajñas* was performed. The ruler displayed his generosity by appointing priests and conducting *Śrauta* rites. By the *Śrauta Yajñas* the king had secured the harmonious functioning of the universe, and obtained the beneficial fruits of the sacrifice. In these fruits the prosperity of the state, its lineage and the fertility of the land and its power are revived.

The performance of sacrifices was considered essential for the proper functioning of the universe. Thus it was believed that human beings have substantial control over their world through the inevitable intercession of *Brāhmin* priests. *Yajñas* were prescribed for individuals. The sacred fire is known as *Grhya* or domestic rites. It could be performed by the upper classes householders themselves. Over time, there has been an increased of prescribed rituals. As it was believed that erroneous performance could result in dangerous consequences for the *Yajamāna*. Therefore the responsibility for the proper performance of *Yajñas* flowed to the priestly classes. It was generally understood that all these results of the *Yajñas* would go to the priests who performed the rituals. *Dakṣiṇā* was considered to be the life of *Yajña*. It is indispensable payment for the transferring spiritual merit from the ritualist patron. It is a mandatory payment for the transferring spiritual merit from the ritualist patron.

3.6. Vedic Deities as Religion :

Among various deities addressed in the *Rgveda Samhitā*, these are 200 hymns of Agni and 250 hymns of Indra. These deities suggest their high status among the Aryan gods. There are hymns to Sūrya, Dyaus-pitṛ, Vāyu and Varuṇa, and even to Soma etc. The Vedic deities are mostly inhabited by male deities. But there are few hymns of those deities such as Uṣas, Rātrī, and Pṛthivī. Scholars estimate the prevalence of male deities. Some of which like Indra is a warrior of nature. The god reveals the patriarchal social structure among the Aryans. Hindu worship comes to gods and goddesses. Aryan literature has significantly included these female deities in non-Aryan worship traditions. Hence, it has influenced later Aryan culture.

Indian and Western scholars have explained about Vedic deities. In general, Hymns addressed to the gods affect the most impressive phenomena of nature and its aspects. The word *Devatā* means divine, bright, strong, powerful etc. We have found prayers for some natural elements like air, water, earth, sun, rain, dawn etc. in hymns. The attributes assigned to the deities are seen in their natural forms and activities. As Soma is green, Agni and Vāyu are bright and the Sun is the bearer of darkness. The activities of all the powers of nature are considered as deities. They are very helpful, beneficial and essential for human life. That is way, in Vedic mythology air, water, plants, trees, rivers, mountains, earth, forest, fire, rain, cloud, sun and moon etc. all are known as deities. The major deities are Agni, Indra, Vāyu, Pṛthvī, Soma, Varuṇa, Viṣṇu, Āditya, Uṣā, Aditi, Parjanya, etc. in the *Ṛgveda*.

3.7. Ṛta and Cosmic Order :

It is found in Vedic literature that the *Ṛta* is presented as a cosmic order. It shows that the Aryan civilization was aware of a comprehensive system for the functioning of the universe. It was evident in celestial bodies' movement, seasons change, and the course of human life. In general sense, *Ṛta* is the synonym of *Satya*. The eternal truth is called *Ṛta*. This eternal truth is the name of the imperishable original being of the world. Therefore *Ṛta* is completely different from the *Satya*. That is why, in the one *mantra* of the *Ṛgveda*, *Ṛta* and *Satya* have been expressed separately – “*Ṛta* and *Satya* first arose from the fierce penance of *Paramātmā*.”¹⁷ *Ṛta* controlled the way plants grew, the flow of rivers and the development of individual. Timely it becomes clear that this cosmic order is considered as beneficial. *Dharma* develops as a notion of individual human and social actions in relation to the wider cosmic order.

In the *Pṛthvī-sūkta* of *Atharvaveda*, *Satya* and *Ṛta* have mentioned separately making them necessary for the existence of the earth. And they have been accepted as different parts of religion. Apart from these *Satya*, *Ṛta* and *Yajña* of Vedic religion, *Vrata*, *Tapasyā* and *Brahma* have also been said to be

¹⁷ ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीद्धात् तपसोऽध्यजायत । ṚgV., X.190.1

part of religion by describing separately as the bearer of the earth.¹⁸ Religious authorities considered as the nature of the systematic course of things. It is now seen as a divine, moral order. It determines that how individuals should behave in their lives to follow the path of righteous righteousness.

3.8. Social Aspects of Dharma :

According to the Vedas, a human's life should be satisfied with happy and physically, mentally and spiritually. In Vedic *Mantras*¹⁹ we have found many prayers for long life, wealth, intelligence, family, children and food. All this is desired for a good and high quality of life. Vedic sages have underlined this fact. Karmic service as a path to *Mokṣa* has both an individual and a social dimension. The Upaniṣads have suggested that liberation as the highest goal of human life. According to Upaniṣads, it is a supreme goal for meet to *Brahman*. This union or ultimate liberation can be attained only by renouncing ignorance and achieving knowledge. Only he who has recognized the oneness of the soul with the *Brahman* will attain complete oneness with the *Brahman*. 'ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति'²⁰ This is the famous sentence from *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* means if one who knows *Brahman* then he becomes *Brahman*. According to Upaniṣads, it is necessary to renounce all good and bad actions to achieve this supreme goal. Sacrifices leads to heaven as virtues deeds. But it is not the highest goal, because after enjoying heaven the soul comes back to rebirth. *Brahman* leads to knowledge of self and oneness. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, Naciketā seeks to know *Brahman* alone in order to achieve the highest goal of ultimate immortality through his third boon. So it can be said that truly knowledge leads to salvation.

3.9. Belief in one Supreme Entity :

The Upaniṣad generally considered the two concepts like *Ātman* and *Brahman* as synonymous. Often they are intertwined with each other. *Brahman* represents as the supreme power. He pervades the world and soul

¹⁸ सत्यं बृहदृतमुग्रं दीक्षा तपो ब्रह्मयज्ञः पृथिवी धारयत् । AV., XII.1.1

¹⁹ MuU., III.2.9

²⁰ यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत्परम् । अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं नाचिकेतं शक्रेमहि ॥ KU., I.3.2

Ātman. The fundamental principle of the Upaniṣads is identification of the individual soul with the world-*Ātman*. It is strongly expressed in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* “This whole world is made by *Brahman*. That which is the soul is real *Brahman*. O Shvetaket! that is you.”²¹

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*²² expresses the same doctrine. One who knows ‘I am Brahma’, then he gets everything. No one can stop from the becoming the god, because he becomes his self. First *mantra* of *Īśavāsyopaniṣad* is cited, the supreme *Brahman* is pervaded everywhere. Everything that is changeable in this changing universe must be covered by god. Protect yourself from renunciation. Do not covet someone’s money.²³

Puruṣasūkta of the *Ṛgveda* gives to express that *Brahman* or *Puruṣa* is universal soul. The *Puruṣasūkta* establishes the same fact that the *Puruṣa* has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes and thousands of feet. By pervading the whole earth on all sides, he remains ten fingers in surplus.²⁴ The *Hiraṇyagarbha-sūkta* is considered important for the description of creation in the *Ṛgveda*. According to the Veda, *Hiraṇyagarbha* is the first aspect created from *Brahman*. Later it is the cause the creation of all beings. One *mantra* says that *Hiraṇyagarbha* was created at the beginning of creation. He was only lord from the birth of all being. He took care of the earth, the sky and all these. So which god should we worship with oblation?²⁵

3.10. Concept of Social Unity and Welfare :

For social unity we have found a unique prayer in the *Ṛgveda-saṃhitā*. It is known as *Samjñāna-sūkta*. The term *Samjñāna* gives a sense of unity in thoughts. Its aim is to bring people together and create harmony in them at the mental and intellectual level. The devotee invokes the lord of creation to inspire mankind with the feeling of love. It is command of god that all should be bound together with a common aims, thoughts and desires. The *Ṛgveda* is cited that human should move together and speak together as well as think

²¹ ChāU, VI.8-16

²² अहं ब्रह्म अस्मि । BrU, I.4.10

²³ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् । तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जिथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद् धनम् ॥ Ī., 1

²⁴ सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् । स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वाऽत्यतिष्ठद्दशाङ्गुलम् ॥ RgV., X.90.1

²⁵ हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् । स दाधार पृथिवी द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥ Ibid, X.121.1

together. Ancient gods accept their sacrifice with mind, so mind should be of one spirit.²⁶ Here *Deva* can also mean elders of divine qualities. Just as he played his part in life with full consciousness, so you should be followed him.

Prayer is remarkable here from the *Yajurveda*. The unity and well being are for the feeling of goodness among all beings. Here the term *Bhadra* is used for the welfare which means goodness. *Rgveda* states that o gods! may we hear with our ears what is good (*Bhadram*), may we see with our eyes what is good, o gods ! worthy of worship! may we enjoy the divinely determined period of life, with steadfast limbs and bodies, offering you songs of praise.²⁷ The full span of life is important, but more important is that it should be good and auspicious. Hence the life of human should be devoted to welfare and noble qualities. Therefore ,Vedic religion believes in welfare of all beings.

3.11. Vedic Morals :

Vedic religion is based on ethics and morality. What should be done and what should not be done. It is basis of moral instruction. Here cosmic order is called *Rtam*. It is controlled by the god of Varuṇa. Even it is follows by all gods. All universal activities follow some discipline, so why not men? The other moral value is *Satyam*. *Satyam* bears the weight of the earth.²⁸ *Dikṣā* or action and *Tapas* or austerity are other values. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says that it is truth and not falsehood.²⁹ So always truth is wins not untruth. Another famous proverb from Upanishad indicates study as a virtue. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* states that always speak truth do right deeds and don't leave study.³⁰ Indian moral values have their root in the Vedas. In fact they are the source of *Dharmaśāstras* and epics.

²⁶ सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्व सं वो मनांसि जानताम् । देव भागं यथा पूर्वे संजानाना उपासते ॥ *Ibid.*, X.191.2

²⁷ भद्रं कर्णेभिः शृणुयाम देवा भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्यजत्राः । स्थिरैरङ्गैस्तुष्टुवांसस्तनूभिर्व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥ *Ibid.*, I.89.8;

VāS, 25.21

²⁸ सत्येन अधृत पृथिवी ।

²⁹ सत्यमेव जयति नानृतम् । *MuU.*, III.1.6

³⁰ सत्यं वद धर्मं चर स्वध्यायत्मा प्रमदः । *TaiU.*, I.11.1

3.12. Purification of the Mind :

Vedic Religion has given special significance about purified mind. *Śivasamkalpa-sūkta* of the *Yajurveda* indicates the importance of good will as well as purification of mind for human beings. The *Mantra* tells that everything is the result of the mind in the universe. There is immense power in the mind. It is the real illuminator of perceptible human. If a person has good thoughts in his mind then everything will be good. Our senses are instruments of knowledge. They are like light or flame. Hence good motivation is most importance for mind. When the mind is evil then it can bring destruction, when it is noble pure at same time it can bring peace. A common phrase is given at the end of all the *mantras* of this *Sūkta* that may mind of mine be auspicious (Śiva) resolution or *Samkalpa*.³¹

3.13. Mode of Worship :

There are several distinct modes of worship like some meant for the Supreme Being, some for the *Devas* and some for the *Avatāras*. The Supreme Being is worshipped by *Dhyāna* or meditation, *Japa* or silent muttering of some prayer. Occurring in the *Ṛgveda*, the most famous prayer is the *Gāyatrī*. This prayer is always preceded by the utterance of the four words “ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः”. According to the Hindu scriptures, the correct way of worshiping the *Devas* is by *Yajña* or *Havana* which consists of casting of oblations with prayers in the sacred fire kindled in an altar.

The *Avatāra* Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are always worshiped through images installed in temples. This mode of worship is called *Pūjana* or *Arcana*. A word may be said about the images of these *Avatāras*. Another way by which Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are worshiped is *Kīrtana* or congregational chanting of same words of praise. Lastly a very popular way of worshiping god, the *Devas* and *Avatārai* is the singing and hearing of *Bhajan*s or devotional songs. Associated with the Hindu worship are the sacred emblem *Svastika* and the sacred syllable *Om*.

³¹ तन्मे मनः शिवसंल्पमस्तु।” YV., 34.1

3.14. The Influence of the Vedic Religion in Laghutrayī :

According to Kālidāsa, religion is one path followed since the times of Manu who is the first man of the world. Kālidāsa was very liberal in his religious views. He expressed respect for different faiths prevalent in his age.³² The ideas of the religion are mentioned in following way in his works. Kālidāsa praises Dilīpa as one under whose rule people would not step away from this well-trodden path, behaving like the rim of a wheel that whell that would not go out of the path out.

“रेखामत्रमपु क्षुण्णादा मनोर्वर्त्मनः परम् ।

न व्यतीयुः प्रजास्तस्य नियन्तुर्नेमिवृत्तयः ॥”³³

(i) Rājadharmā :

According to Manu, the king is endowed with divine power. The king has created by the parts of the seven gods i.e. Indra, Vāyu, Yama, Agni, Varuṇa, Candramā and Kuvera.³⁴ Manu establishes the king in the form of deity in the world.³⁵ Having followed the speech of Manu, Kālidāsa says that the king is made by Brahmā with heavenly qualities. That is way the king was dear to his enemies by his virtues.³⁶ It is because of this reason that he is called Īśvara, Īśa etc. which are the appellation of god.³⁷ A king is expected to be proficient in all sciences and arts.³⁸ He is required to be so powerful as to be able to protect his subject and keep them in order.³⁹ Kālidāsa has mentioned that the first duty of a king is pleased his subjects.⁴⁰ The whole subjects are like children for any king. The happiness and sorrow of the people are the happiness and sorrow of the king. For the sake of the national interest, the king has sacrificed his personal interests. The king performs the responsibility of

³² CSSK., p.114

³³ RV., I.17

³⁴ इन्द्रानिलयमार्कणामग्रेष्व वरुणस्य च । चन्द्रवित्तेशयोश्चैव मात्रा निर्हृत्य शाश्वतीः ॥ MS., VII.4

³⁵ MS., VII.7-8

³⁶ देव्योऽपि संमतः शिष्टस्तस्यार्त्तस्य यथौषधम् । त्याज्यो दुष्टः प्रियोऽप्यासीद्ङ्गुलीवोरगक्षता ॥ RV., I.28

³⁷ Ibid., III.5, IV.81, IV.83

³⁸ Ibid., I.8

³⁹ अनाकृष्टस्य विषयैर्विद्यानां पारदृश्वनः । तस्य धर्मरतेरासीद् वृद्धत्वं जरसा विना ॥ Ibid., I.23

⁴⁰ राजा प्रकृति रजजनात् । Ibid. IV.12

pleasing the subjects, that is, to please them, so he automatically gets all the merits.⁴¹

The king was considered a legitimate claimant to the sixth portion of one's gross income.⁴² The king used to take the taxes charged from his subjects for the welfare of the subjects as like the sun draws the waters from the earth for the rain.⁴³ These duties of a king are aptly described in several texts such as the *Manusmṛiti*⁴⁴, the *Arthaśāstra*⁴⁵, the *Gautama Dharmasūtra*⁴⁶. Kālidāsa seems to have taken the ideas regarding the duties of a king from the *Manusmṛiti*, which is an authentic text on the *Rājadhama*. In his *Raghuvamśam*, alluding to the duties of the king, Kālidāsa refers to the text of Manu.

(ii) Tirthas :

According to Kālidāsa, going to a place of pilgrimage was considered a great religious act. The sins of the sinner should have been washed away by the Gaṅgā and Yamunā.⁴⁷ Such sacred places were called *Tīrtha*. The confluences of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā,⁴⁸ the Gaṅgā and the Sarayu⁴⁹ were given higher importance. Some of the *Tīrthas* were quite famous. *Tīrtha* was considered sufficient to liberation the soul from the cycle of birth and rebirth.⁵⁰ By bathing in such places, one attained the same respect and status as the deities. Water from such *Tīrthas* was brought on auspicious occasions, especially on the occasion of the coronation of a king.⁵¹

⁴¹ Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva

⁴² तान्युच्छ्रष्टाङ्कितसैकतानि शिवानि वस्तीर्थजलानि कञ्चित् । RV. V.8 (cd)

⁴³ प्रजानामेव भूत्यर्थं स ताभ्यो बलिमग्रहीत् । सहस्रगुणमुत्सृष्टुमादत्ते हि रसं रविः ॥ *Ibid.*, I.18

⁴⁴ MS., VII.82,134,144, XI.294

⁴⁵ AS., V.1, p.257

⁴⁶ GauD., II.15,17,67,100, VI.17,18,63-85

⁴⁷ RV. V.8,

तीर्थं तोयव्यतिकरभवे जहन्तिकन्यासरय्वो*Ibid.* VIII.95,

KS., VI.56

⁴⁸ RV., XIII.54 & 57

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII.95

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII.58

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XIV.7

Thus, Kālidāsa is highly influenced by the Purāṇic *Mahātmyas* of the *Tīrthas*.⁵² This is why he lays much stress on the importance of these *Tīrthas* and expresses his faith in the outcome of the dips at such *Tīrthas*.

(iii) Hermitage :

Penance was practised in the solitude of forests. Kālidāsa gives a brief account of the Hermitage of Vālmīki, Vaśiṣṭha, Agastya, Satakarni and Śarbhaṅga.⁵³ On the ground of above account it may be said that, Kālidāsa was highly influenced by the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁵⁴, which gives a detailed account of such hermitages, Sages and anchorites.

(iv) Penance :

Emancipation has considered the summum bonum of life. Every Hindu felt relieved by the prospect of getting permanent bliss by releasing his soul from the circle of repeated birth. Severe penance was considered to be the main means for attaining salvation. And the RV⁵⁵ Kālidāsa mentioned penance and concentration of mind restrains sense organs from their involvement in their respective objects. The process of penance is described beautifully in *Raghuvamśa*. Raghu who is the father of Aja, after relinquishing the throne in favour of his son, took to the life of a forester and practised severe penance. In the other verse of the RV, Raghu abandoned the desire for pleasure, whether worldly or heavenly. He gave up royal dresses and put on bark garments.⁵⁶ He achieved control over the functions of his senses. He took to solitude, sat on holy *Kuśa* grass and practised introspection.⁵⁷ He gradually controlled his five dense organs and five breaths.⁵⁸

Several forms of penance are mentioned in the KS.⁵⁹ Sitting in the middle of four fires has considered a severe type of penance.⁶⁰ There were

⁵² PP., 63-62, 53-52

⁵³ RV XIV. 70-82, I.35, XIII.36, 45

⁵⁴ Rā., I.VII

⁵⁵ RV., VIII.10

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII.11

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.18

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII.19

⁵⁹ KS. V.20, RV.13.41

⁶⁰ RV XIII.39

such sages who lived on *Kuśa* grass and water along.⁶¹ Some of these sages kept their hands raised upward in order to attain salvation.⁶² Some of them consecrated their bodies by throwing themselves into fire while reciting Vedic *mantras*.⁶³

Thus, the works of Kālidāsa are replete with such references to penance. It seems that Kālidāsa was fully acquainted with the *Vibhūti pāda* of the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali, wherein such miracles of penance are described.⁶⁴ Most probably he had also paid a visit to those hermitages of his age where noted ascetics practised penance. Besides, some of his descriptions of penance are also quite in keeping with those of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁶⁵ Perhaps he has also consulted the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* for such delineations.

(v) Paraloka :

Deceased ancestors were supposed to dwell in the *Pitṛloka* and eat oblations, offered to them in the form of *Pinḍa* by their male off springs.⁶⁶ It is a popular belief among Hindus that every individual owes three kinds of debts viz. *Ṛṣi*, *Deva* and *Pitṛ*. He plays them by the studying the Vedas, performing sacrifices and begetting a male child.⁶⁷ In the work of Kālidāsa *Pitṛs* are described as *Pinḍabhajāḥ*⁶⁸, the poet has described in RV⁶⁹ that eater is oblations, offered to them in the *Śrāddhas*. It seems that these beliefs were deep-rooted in the minds of ancient Hindus. It is for this reason that kinds like Dilīpa show their anxiety when reminded of their having no male child.⁷⁰ They think very much about their own *Paralokas* are the *Paralokas* of their ancestors. The conception of *Paraloka* has seemed the pivot of Hindu religion.⁷¹ *Svarga* and *Naraka* were supposed to be attained on account of one's own good or bad deeds.⁷² A bath in the sacred river was considered a

⁶¹ KS. V.22

⁶² RV., XIII.43

⁶³ RV., XIII.45

⁶⁴ YoS, *Vibhūti pāda* 17-50

⁶⁵ Rā., Kāṇḍa 7

⁶⁶ BhaP., VIII.18.20-32 & 19-21, MP 245-246

⁶⁷ RV., VII.35

⁶⁸ MB., III.272.67-69

⁶⁹ RV., X.47

⁷⁰ Rā., VII.26.1

⁷¹ *Ibid*, VII.26.14-15

⁷² *Ibid*., VII.26.19

ladder to *Svarga*.⁷³ Thus the conception of *Paraloka* like *Svarga* and *Naraka* was a common belief of a Hindu in those days. Kālidāsa seems to be influenced by such beliefs current in the society in his age.

(vi) Varṇāśrama Dharma :

(A) Varṇa :

Kālidāsa is highly influence by Manu's rules on the caste system.⁷⁴ Manu's *Varṇāśrama* system is the main feature of Indian culture and society. It seems that in the days of Kālidāsa the social laws were strictly followed. None was allowed to deviate from his parental profession. There is another instance of Śambhuka who, violating the social laws, was practising penance and was, therefore, punished by king Rāma.⁷⁵ The king was considered wholly responsible for maintaining the caste system and punishing the person who violate it.⁷⁶

(a) Brāhmaṇa :

It appears that in the days of Kālidāsa, *Brahmaṇas* turned bigots. They contested regularly with *Kṣatriyas* for supremacy in society. In the *Raghuvamśam*, Paraśurāma, a *Brahmaṇa* warrior, challenges the supremacy of Rāma, a *Kṣatriya* warrior.⁷⁷ In the canto fifteen of *Raghuvamśam*, the disgraceful language used by a *Brāhmaṇa* against Rāma, is an expression of the feeling of superiority of a *Brāhmaṇa* felt in relation to a *Kṣatriya*.⁷⁸

Thus we see that though Kālidāsa was highly influenced by Manu in describing social and moral laws,⁷⁹ yet he was loyal to the current social and moral practices of his age.

(b) Kṣatriya :

In the days of Kālidāsa, *Kṣatriyas* were considered to be the sole protectors of living beings.⁸⁰ Dilīpa shows great respect to Vaśiṣṭha.⁸¹ With a

⁷³ *Ibid.*, VII.26.27

⁷⁴ RV., XIV.67

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XV.49-52

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* XV.53

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* XI.71

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* XV.43

⁷⁹ MS., I.88-91

view to fulfilling the wishes of a *Brāhmaṇa* boy, Raghu, being himself out of pocket, decides to invade Kubera.⁸² Rāma wishes to conquer the god of death to revive the *Brāhmaṇa*'s son who had met premature death.⁸³ He presents his whole kingdom to Vālmīki, sage.⁸⁴ Kuśa hands over the whole wealth of Kuśavatī to a 'Srotriya Brāhmaṇa'.⁸⁵ Here, Kālidāsa follows Manu in describing the virtues of *Kṣatriya* kings.⁸⁶

(c) Vaiśya :

Vaiśyas are mentioned only a few times in the works of Kālidāsa. As Manu had prescribed, their usual occupations were, Agriculture, trade and preservation of Cattle.⁸⁷

(d) Śūdra :

In the *Raghuvamśam*, we have a reference to a Śūdra ascetic named Śambuka who was punished by Rāma.⁸⁸ It seems that in this period Śūdras were reduced to the level of Slaves, being entitled only to serve the upper classes. In fact, Kālidāsa was highly influenced by the *Dharmasūtra*,⁸⁹ and the *Smṛtis*⁹⁰ in referring to the duties of *Śūdra*.

(vii) Āśrama Dharma :

(a) Brahmacarya :

Kālidāsa refers to four stages of Man's life *Brāmacarya*, *Gṛhastha*, *Vānaprashta* and *Sannyāsa*.⁹¹ In the stage of life, a *Brāhmaṇa* 'Brahmacārī' was expected to learn the Vedas,⁹² a *Kṣatriya* 'Acarya'⁹³ while a *Vaiśya* was

⁸⁰ RV., II.53

⁸¹ *Ibid*, I.60-64

⁸² *Ibid*, V.26

⁸³ *Ibid*, XV.45

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, XV.70

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, XVI.25

⁸⁶ MS., I.89

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, I.90

⁸⁸ RV., XIV.67

⁸⁹ ĀD., II.5.10.8; BauD., I.10.2-5; ViD., II.10-15; GauD., X.1.3

⁹⁰ MS., I.88-90, X.75,79

⁹¹ RV., I.8, V.19, VIII.14, XIV.67

⁹² *Ibid*, V.1,20,21

⁹³ *Ibid*, III.30

expected to learn business. A *Śūdra* was to learn the art of serving the upper class.

(b) Gr̥hastha :

After finishing study a *Brāhmaṇa* '*Brahmacāri*' was allowed to marry and lead the life of a house hold. It is to be noted here that a person belonging to a particular *Varṇa* has allowed marrying within his own caste. In special cases, the man of a higher class was allowed to marry the girl of a lower class. Paraśurāma also is said to be the son of a *Brāhmaṇa* father and *Kṣatriya* mother.⁹⁴ Thus in the age of Kālidāsa, *Anuloma* marriages were in vogue and were permitted by scriptures.⁹⁵

(viii) God Performs Sandhyā :

Kālidāsa has mentioned Sandhyā ceremony through the lord Śiva.⁹⁶ when god comes down from his plane of consciousness to grace the world, he must follow the duties of a man, like any other mortal being. This, Kālidāsa shows, when he makes Śiva perform the evening reties after his marriage with Pārvatī. The poet describes that while Śiva and Pārvatī are roaming on the Gandhamādana mountain⁹⁷ Śiva observes the coming of the twilight and performs his evening.

(ix) Duty of the King :

Kālidāsa has mention the duty of a king in the RV.⁹⁸ The king Dilīpa serves the cow. Nandinī is careless one day, thinking that the cow is unapproachable to any wild animal. Just then a lion attacks the cow. Then king's attempts to shoot at the lion fail. The lion then reveals that he is a servant of the lord Śiva. He says that he is made a lion and appointed as the guard to the Devadāru tree there. Further he says that the cow is made his food by the lord. He asks the king not to feel ashamed for his failure. Then Dilīpa says that the word of lord Śiva is to be respected and observes that the wealth

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, XI.90

⁹⁵ MS., III.43

⁹⁶ ईश्वरोऽपि दिवसात्ययोचितं मन्त्रपूर्वमनुपस्थितवान्विधिम् । KS., VIII.50

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.28

⁹⁸ RV., I.27-52

of his *guru* also must be protected. So the king Dilīpa offers himself as food to the lion in place of the cow. In the *Manusmṛti*, it is declared that who performed the religious duty whatever say in Veda and *Smṛti*, he will get the fame.⁹⁹ The king has protected the cow. Here Dilīpa is presented as a true *Kṣatriya*, as a dutiful disciple, as an obedient devotee and more than anything else as a compassionate human being. It is true that as a *Kṣatriya* he has protected the cow, as a disciple and guard to the cow. As a devotee he has honoured the word of the lord Śiva and see that the lion does not go without food. But even as a human being he has saved the distressed and provided food to the hungry.

3.14. The Influence of the Vedic Religion in the Bṛhatrayī :

(i) Religious Life of the People:

During Vedic period People were leading a fairly religious and pious life. They put on *Tilaka* marks after bath.¹⁰⁰ They did not tell a lie except for cutting jokes with their in *amrata*. *Sandhyāvandanā* or morning adorations were performed by twice-borns.¹⁰¹ A reference to *Trikāla Sandhyā* and *Aghamarṣaṇa* is found in NC XVII.191. *Sūryopasthāna*, *Baliyajña*, *Pitṛtarpaṇa* and *Devatārpaṇa* are referred by the poet Śrīharṣa in the NC. King Nala chanted the *Gāyatrī Mantra* on a *Sphaṭika-mālā*.¹⁰² The poet also mentioned about the *Sarvamedha Yajña*. In this sacrifice, one person from each caste is sacrificed like *Brāhmaṇa* killed *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya* killed *Kṣatriya* etc.¹⁰³ *Sarvamedha* sacrifice is a religious ritual performed in Hinduism. In this Sacrifice, all kinds of food grains and plants are burnt.¹⁰⁴ This sacrifice ends in thirty-four days. The use of rosaries for the recitation of different *Mantras* also formed a part of daily religious duty.¹⁰⁵

Different types of rosary beads were used for repeating the various formulas sacred to different gods. Thus the sandal-wood rosary-beads were

⁹⁹ श्रुतिस्मृत्युदितं धर्ममनुतिष्ठन् हि मानवः । इह कीर्तिमवाप्नोति प्रेत्य चानुत्तमं सुखम् ॥ MS. II.9

¹⁰⁰ NC., XVII.170

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, XVII.174

¹⁰² शुद्धबीजविशदस्फुटवर्णाः स्फाटिकाक्षवलयच्छलभाजः । NC., XXI.18 (cd)

¹⁰³ निर्वर्ण्य सर्वमेधस्य यज्वानं ज्वलति स्म सः । *Ibid.*, XVII.183 (cd)

¹⁰⁴ Sarvamedha Sacrifice

¹⁰⁵ NC., XVII.190, XXI.19

used for repeating formulas in honour of Sun.¹⁰⁶ Nala worshiped Puruṣottama Viṣṇu with the law of sixteen verses and worshiped the twelve Viṣṇu idols while reciting the *Dvadaśā mantra* “ॐ नम भगवते वासुदेवाय”. *Puruṣottam* is worshiped by the *mantras* of the *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Rgveda*.¹⁰⁷ While reciting these mantras, there is a law to offer water and flowers at the feet of the Lord. A rosary of *Rudrākṣa* beads was used for Śiva-formula e.g. *Śatarudriya*.¹⁰⁸ While a rosary of lotus-seed beads was used while repeating the Viṣṇu hymn.¹⁰⁹

Vedic recitation, preceded by *Om* along with accents, is referred to in NC.¹¹⁰ Recitation of Vedas with different types of modes viz. *Samhitā*, *Pada*, *Jaṭā*, *Mālā*, *Ghana* etc. was carried on in the morning.¹¹¹ (Put here reference) The body was anointed before the bath (NC. XXI.7-8). *Saṅkalpa* and *Ācamana* preceded the bath (XXI.8,10). During bath it was customary to hold blades of *Darbha* in the hand.¹¹² Applying earth to the body before bath is mentioned in NC (XXI.11). Water was sprinkled upon the bathing person with the blades of *Darbha* grass (NC, XXI.12). The poet has mention that putting on *Uttariya* (Upper garment) was compulsory during religious observances.¹¹³ After the bath the *Tīlaka* mark was put on the forehead.¹¹⁴ (Reference here)

(ii) Idol Worship :

We have the reference to the idols of Sun, Śiva and Viṣṇu. Thus we have a reference to the idol of Sun in NC. XXI.32. A crystal idol of Śiva finds a reference in NC XXI.34 & 36. A crystal phallus of Śiva called *Yāgeśvara* is mentioned in NC XII.38. An idol of Viṣṇu is mentioned in NC XXI.41. Viṣṇu's conch and lotus are mentioned again in NC XXI.98,10. A dual form of Viṣṇu and Śiva are called *Harihara*, it is referred by the poet in NC.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ NC. XXI.33

¹⁰⁷ सहस्रशीर्षाः पुरुषाःRgV. X. 70

¹⁰⁸ NC., XXI.40

¹⁰⁹ RgV., XI.2.24

¹¹⁰ NC., XIX.7

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, XVII.163-165

¹¹² *Ibid.* XXI.9

¹¹³ NC. XXI.15

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XXI.16

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI.102,104.

Daily worship of the idols of gods by offering different materials to them was customary in those days and it formed the part of religious life. Every family has its own family deity that was meditated upon by the devotees whenever opportunity demanded and the deity in turn helped the devotee by fulfilling his wish. A good picture of this is found in NC.¹¹⁶ The idols were kept in an adoration chamber where the religious celebrates were residing as attendants. The house holders entered the chamber only after washing their hands and feet.¹¹⁷ The different materials such as flowers etc. were kept in the chamber which was incensed with different kinds of materials (Nc. XXI.22). King and other rich people patronized songsters to sing songs in honour of gods (Nc.XXI.30)

Viṣṇu was worshipped with the rites connected with the *Puruṣasukta* hymn. The twelve lettered formula (ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय) was repeated twelve times during. His worship as the number of his idols is also twelve.¹¹⁸ A seat made by a coil of *Mallikā* flowers was offered to him.¹¹⁹

(iii) Materials Used in the Worship :

Following are some of the things offered to the deity at the time of worship: flowers, cake (Pupa) offered as *naivedya*, water, light (Dīpa), sandal-paste, Musk paste, ornaments, multi-coloured clothes, and different kind of incense such as pure.¹²⁰

(iv) Institution of Sacrifices :

The institution of Sacrifices was current in those days. The *Śrauta* sacrifices were in vogue not only in Śrīharṣa's period, but it has also been going in the post-Śrīharṣa period. Śrīharṣa mentions the following *Śrauta* sacrifices with their essential features: *Gomedha* in which a cow is offered to Soma,¹²¹ *Sautrāmaṇi*¹²² wherein wine is enjoined for the *Dvijās*,

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, XXI.21-118

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, XXI.20

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, XXI.40

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, XXI.42

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.61; XXI.22; VII.61

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, XVII.177

¹²² *Ibid.*, XVII.182

*Saivamedha*¹²³ wherein a brāhmin was also offered as an oblation along with other persons. The game of dice formed a part of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice.¹²⁴ *Darśa* and *Pūrṇamāsa* sacrifices are referred by the poet in the NC XVII.196. Brāhmins can touch one another while enjoying the remnant of the *Somayāga* sacrifice.¹²⁵ In the *Mahāvrata* sacrifice, a brahmacārin is allowed to enjoy a *hetaira*.¹²⁶ The wife of the sacrificer lies with the dead horse in the pose of union in the *Asvamedha* sacrifice.¹²⁷ Thus it is clear that the poet has been highly influenced by Vedic religion.

(v) Religious Practices :

Different methods of practising penance are referred to in several places. Some performed austerities by touching the ground with one foot only or even by standing on the smallest finger of the foot.¹²⁸ A religious observant usually observed fasts during his religious austerities which are mentioned in the NC III.101. A person gave up all his possessions and practised penance on a mountain in a cottage made of leaves etc.¹²⁹ A practice of earning one's livelihood by gleaning the grains left behind by the reapers is mentioned in NC. VIII.42.

(vi) Treatment of Guest :

The guest was given warm reception. On their arrival they were offered, water to wash their feet, a seat and a *Madhuparka* offering.¹³⁰ They were inquired of their health with sweet words.¹³¹ They were served with delicious dishes. A person, who did not have any guests to treat, was lamenting his misfortune and was considering him a cursed one.¹³²

¹²³ *Ibid.*, XVII.186

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, XVII.18

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, XVII.198

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, XVII.203

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, XVII.204

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.7

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, III.108

¹³⁰ It contains curds, honey and a piece of beef. NC., XVII.200

¹³¹ *Ibid.* V.7, VIII.20,25 XVII.167

¹³² *Ibid.*, V.16

(vii) Religious Customs :

It was customary to observe silence during religious observances in the NC III.30, XVII.178, 184. People used to sleep on the bare ground in the course of their religious austerities.¹³³ A ceremony called *Puṇyāhavidhi* was performed on an occasion like marriage or birth to counteract the evil influence of the planets.¹³⁴ A custom of applying earth to the body, while bathing is mentioned in NC XXI.11. The colour of the earth carried according to the caste, e.g. *Kṣatriyas* applied red earth.

(viii) Ordeals :

Practice of ordeals was common in India as in other countries. In the absence of definite evidence, a culprit was tried by different types of ordeals. If he comes out successfully through the ordeal, he was declared to be innocent and in the default of the successful emergence from the ordeal, he was considered to be guilty.

A reference to water ordeal is found in NC II.27. We gather from the *Mitākṣarā* on Yājñavalkya¹³⁵ that the practice is to shoot three arrows and send someone running to take up in the middle one. Another fast runner stands ready at the place from where the arrows are shot. The latter at the signal given runs to the place where the former waits with an arrow in his hand.

At the same time, the person passing through the water test dives into the pool of water. The man who was waiting with an arrow in his hand now comes running to the scene of the dice, finds the diver under water, the latter wins. But if he is found above the water level, he is declared to have lost the case. Thus this ordeal seems to be executed when a dispute between two persons is to be decided. One who comes out of the water first is defeated.

The poet has mentioned the fire ordeal in the NC¹³⁶ which this ordeal is traceable to the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad*. Here a practice of heating an axe for a culprit is mentioned. If he holds it in his hand without being hurt, he was declared innocent. If the result was otherwise, he was declared guilty. Women

¹³³ *Ibid.*, XVII.188

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI.13

¹³⁵ YāS., Vyavahar, 109

¹³⁶ NC.VI.16

also had to undergo this test to prove their purity. The case of Sītā is an exemplar in the point. The ordeal is referred by our poet in NC. IV.31 and IX.55.

We can say, Vedic religion is known as an eternal and universal religion. It has told about all beings' welfare. It has shown the path of knowledge and salvation. The classical poets like Kālidāsa, Māgha, Bhāravi and Śrīyharṣa show how religion governs the gods. Kālidāsa and other poets treat of the different laws such as personal law, social obligations and family responsibilities. The social laws are more important because they concern all the members of the society. In the family, human must think of himself and his comforts in the last only. He will realise that the physical body is given to him not for his pleasure but for the performance of *Dharma*. The poets believe in the structure of the *Varṇas* and *Āśramas*. They have described the ideal life of the all *Varṇas* whatever says in the Vedic literature. It is observed by us that the poets depict the carious duties of a man. They have presented man as a son, brother, husband, father etc and similarly woman as a wife, daughter etc in their poetries. The poets stresses the importance of cultivation if virtues such as learning speech etc. So the Vedic thoughts are applied very clearly by the great poets in their epic poems.
