



THE GLOBAL DRAGON MYTHS AND THEIR ROOTS IN THE RGVEDIC DRAGON MYTH OF INDRA KILLING VRTRA

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Abstract: Till the end of the hunter-gatherer stage and beginning of sedentary life style, the human society had no conception of super natural existences. During the age of sedentary life style, the dual existences of divine and demonic super beings beyond the physical human existences developed. At some point, animals were imposed with the divine and demonic qualities. One such entity was the demonic entity of dragon spread over many regions starting from India to the west and north up to Europe. In South Asia and in particular Indian subcontinent, Indra killing his archenemy, giant serpent Vṛtra, obstructing river waters is the most prominent dragon myth. It is attributed to physical reality of eruption of a long stretching brittle bunds formed due to tectonic upheavals. Over the millennia, Indra's archenemy was interpreted as a cloud demon. Vṛtra was described as a sleeping dragon. The narrations of demonological interpretations developed around the nature of Vṛtra over the millennia and Vṛtra was described in mystical terms in the post-Vedic Saṃhitā texts. Formation of long stretching bund resulted in flooding of the cities and town of the Indus Culture. This is attested by building of fortification embankments built in many Indus Culture settlements as anti-flooding measures. Multiple occurrences of bund formation and silting of the settlements ultimately led to their abandonment en mass. Indus Culture roots date back to 10,000 BCE and stages in the evolution of the Vedic sacrificial system – yajña coupled with fortnightly sacrifices - darśapūrṇamāseṣṭi and other constellation positions. The earliest phase of the yajña system dated back from 6000-4500 BCE. Further developments can be linked with the developmental phases of the Indus Culture. The roots of the dragon myths over the globe can be traced to the ancient most Indra-Vṛtra dragon myth in the R̥gveda.

Keywords: Dragon, Myths, Indra-Vṛtra, Sacrificial, Demonization.

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Ancient World of the Rock art

In the ancient times, the human society lived in the company of nascent state of nature in true sense. They were closely watching the animal world which surrounded their habitats. During the earliest stage of cave life comprising of the hunter-gatherer mode of living, they appear to have not developed a concept of super natural powers or super natural animals. It can be guessed from the variety cave/rock art works spread all over the world in mountain areas. The panorama of line drawings in the rock art comprises of the normal shaped animal world and the survival mode of human society i.e. community hunting scenes, fruit gathering, rats and rabbit hunting and occasionally of the copulation. Conspicuously absent are the godlike figures pointing to their superior status among the rest in the group, grotesque, hybrid, fabulous animals either deified or demonized, scenes of fire worship or even camp fire, though the burnt and half burnt pieces of coals were found in the caves. At the same time on a very rare occasion, serpent-like figures are found, but no special feature is projected. It is expected that in the ancient times there were ample locations around the habitats where serpents survived in large numbers; occasions to locate them in open were very frequent. They used to be fairly large in size; this the present author can state with confidence; because in the early 1990s he had occasion to stay in a remote village for long period in forest area. There the large reptiles of different types were sighted frequently, such as 1-1.5 Mt long cobra, almost 2 Mt long rat snake and small and long snakes. Vivid memories of those sighting still persist after almost three decades. In that case, it is expected that the ancient people were more prone to exposure to these reptiles and also suffering from the snake bites. The almost near absence of reptiles in the rock art can be understood from the fact that these reptiles were not the items of regular dietary consumption or the staple food. At the same time, it is worth noting

that the hunter-gatherer society usually established their habitat close to the perennial water source like rivers, large ponds, sea beaches etc. River born, sweet water fishes were easily accessible for consumption. Even then it is observed that fishes are almost absent in the rock art.

Concept of the Super Natural

It has been generally accepted that the human society developed sedentary living style only on developing techniques of cultivation on the moderate scale and adoption of mainly herbivorous animals which could be tamed for co-existence with the humans. Grains yield from cultivation could be a ready source of food with extended shelf life and the tamed animals could be easy source of protein food to be utilized at will. Stable life style considerably reduced the struggle for survival, gave scope for having leisure time. It provided few members with advanced sense of perception to develop ideas that transcended the day to day life reality. It can be envisaged that the concept of existence of the Super Natural being, the all-powerful godhood, the super natural animals with grotesque appearance and their esoteric appearances were developed by those gifted few. At some stage, the human society acquired logic of cause and effect over the sudden environmental changes and surroundings occurring in annual succession. They also envisioned that human life was controlled by those super natural entities and that they can be assuaged and gratified by praising and offering consumable items in the specially lit fire.

In due course it gave rise to a binary system of super natural existences, namely, the divine and the demonic. The developments in these two streams went almost parallel with each other with the premise of the divine existences being benevolent to the human society, to ultimately win over the demonic existences. The physical depictions were guided by the imagery of composite beings which comprised of both human and animal beings. Almost all the ancient cultures developed these

imageries in varied manner. There were hybrid beings, chimeras, dragons with both the divine and demonic qualities. In ancient Indian tradition there were incarnations of Viṣṇu who appeared in animal forms. The first four divine incarnations are *Matsya* (fish), *Kūrma* (tortoise), *Varāha* (boar) and *Narasimha* (Half human – half lion). Other two composite animals known world over are, unicorn - the decorated and deified horse of the horse sacrifice – *Aśvamedha* described in RV 1.163.9 and *Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa* – double headed human/bird with bird heads, rooted in ancient Indian ethos (Pathak:2022:38-57).

Worldwide presence of dragons

The dragon myths are the most popular myths in many countries and claim worldwide presence in the local ancient literature. Many different types of myths were developed on the different types of dragons; and were expressed in physical forms in the ancient texts of many cultures spread over many countries. They have been described as a composite hybrid creature with, mainly snakes and some as fearsome mammals in variety of ways. They acquired significance in the respective cultural ethos. Some of those depicted have sporting colossal wings, shown living in caves, sitting on treasure and breathed fire. They were perceived to be extraordinarily powerful, but even so, ultimately defeated in their battles with humans. In the Eastern countries, mainly in China, dragons were considered to be the divine beings heralding good omen. As against it, in India and further West, dragons were considered to be bad omen. There are many books dealing with dragons from multiple cultures and originating in different regions (Shuker: 2003:117-118). The latest addition to the literature on dragons worldwide is compilation by Danial Ogden (2021).

Roots of the dragon myths

Many researchers have attempted to correlate the dragon related myths with some types of reptiles

locally prevalent in the ancient times. Thus, a popular folk tale of dragon myth in UK known as The Lambton Worm was based on the story of a boy named Lambton who found an aquatic worm or a leech, which he nurtured rather than killing. Very soon it grew into an enormous and highly menacing dragon devouring livestock and even small children. After years, youthful Lambton killed him wearing spiked suit, slashed it into pieces by sword and let the body parts drown in river (Shuker: 2003:12-15). The story has parallel in Mahābhārata where the great serpent Takṣaka, in the form of a worm in fruit, got entry into guarded palace of Parikṣita, the cursed grandson of Arjuna. It grew into an enormous dragonic form and killed Parikṣita (MHB Ādiparva 43). German archeologist Robert Koldewey conducted excavations at the Babylonian site where he found mural of a huge dragon called Sīrūsh. He speculated that the dragon concept in the mural was based on the sitting of an Apatosaurus type dinosaur fossil of the ancient Babylonians. Fossils of these dinosaurs were sited in Africa (Shuker: 2003:72). Similarly, Behemoth mentioned in Bible (Job 40:15-23) is speculated to be “an undiscovered species of living long necked dinosaur, similar to Diplodocus and Apatosaurus. Such a beast would certainly resemble the biblical description of Behemoth (Shuker: 2003:37).

There is yet another twist to the dragon stories. Some stories narrate twist that the dragons encountered by the mortal human being in fact were the cursed human or divine beings. According to the European myths, the dragons inhabited the Central European region. Around 1335 CE, an odd shaped skull was discovered in Austria. It is speculated that the myth of Lindorms in Europe is rooted in that discovery. However, Lindorm's existence is traced to the myth from Sweden where a cursed queen gave birth to a hideous, snake like dragon and from whose body sprang a pair of powerful limbs with taloned feet. It turned into a most handsome youth when

embraced by a naked maiden. In fact, he was a prince born to the queen ((Shuker:2003:43).

Shuker's book has world map with the title of "World of Dragons" on the inner cover page showing the dragon pictures in different regions of the globe. Based on the appearance and qualities of dragons, Shuker has classified the dragon stories in five types:

- (a) Serpent dragons (pp. 11-38), akin to giant pythons and reptiles. It is noted here that typically the hood spreading cobras are missing.
- (b) Semi-dragons (pp. 39-56). These were the dragons with either two or four legs and giant wings with composite body of a reptile and bird.
- (c) Classical dragons (pp. 57-76). These are described in the classical literature with imagination running riot. They were monster in appearance and described as comprising of bodies of hybrid animals with scintillating scales covering their bodies, wings on either side, four powerful limbs with talon-tipped feet and fire emitting mouth. Their stories were narrated to highlight bravado and supernatural achievements of the heroes of the stories. These were woven around the petroglyphs on the banks of the River Mississippi in Illinois by the Jesuit priest Father Jacques Marquette who lived in 17th Century America.
- (d) Sky dragons (pp. 77-94) who could fly with the quality of aerial supremacy. They are the flying serpents from the Valley of Queens in Egypt, ancient Serpent God from Mexico, Dragon deities from China etc.
- (e) Neo-Dragons (pp. 95-115) described as the heterogeneous assemblage of monsters and may not be described in zoo-mythological sense as true dragons. The typical examples of these types are hydra with multiple heads encountered by Greek hero Hercules,

Salamander belonging to the middle Ages who could live in fire, long necked sea lizards which were cited by people during mediaeval times but were never attested by systematically carried out search operation.

It is noteworthy that in Shuker's map, there is no picture of a dragon from the South Asian region including India.

Shuker has discussed dragon stories in thirty sections, however, he has not covered dragon stories from the Indian subcontinent and from the Indo-Iranian culture spread up to Central Asian regions covering Armenia and Azerbaijan. So too is the case with Ogden's book. In fact, the dragon stories in India date back to the Ṛgvedic times. These were then followed by the stories of other celebrated kings, Nala and Nahuṣa mentioned in the famous epic of Mahābhārata (Vanaparva) who encountered dragons in their life.

Dragon myth in the Ṛgveda

There is frequent mention of a serpent-dragon *Ahi* – *Vṛtra* killed by Indra, the Supreme God amongst the Vedic pantheon of gods. Based on the descriptions occurring in the Ṛgveda (RV) text, the dragon who had encircled rivers was *Vṛtra*. It had obstructed streams of several rivers belonging to the *Saptasindhu* region i.e. Punjab and Sind in modern times. The nature of *Ahi-Vṛtra* is interpreted as an earthen bund formed due to tectonic upheavals, stretching over a long distance running in kilometers. It is referred as *adri* i.e. mountain. This nature of *Vṛtra* could be confirmed by a similar incident that occurred in Sind in 1819 when suddenly a long stretching ridge about 80 km long and about 5 mt in height erupted. It was named as Allah bund. It was breached at several locations during heavy rains in 1826.

The main feature of the *Vṛtra* myth was obstruction of the river streams in the Punjab and Sind region by *Vṛtra* and release of water accumulated upstream on killing *Vṛtra*. The

feat of killing Vṛtra is solely attributed to Indra. Traditionally, Vṛtra was considered as a cloud - *megha*. The Great commentator on the Rig Veda, Sāyaṇacārya in his commentary interpreted Vṛtra as a cloud, so too by many other translators and commentators.

Among many references to the Vṛtra myth in the Rig Veda, the dialogue hymn, *Viśvāmitra – Nadī sūkta*, RV 3.33 succinctly described the nature and act of killing of Vṛtra. Names of the two rivers, namely Śatudrī (modern River Sutlej) and Vipāśa (modern River Beas) are mentioned in the hymn. The hymn gives the background of an incident of tectonic upheaval and formation of loosely formed earthen bund. Viśvāmitra, the priest of the Bharata clan, while returning back from war with the war booty encountered two rivers Śatudrī and Vipāśa at their confluence (RV 3.33.2-4). Both the rivers were flooded, flowing unbound and difficult to cross over. The seer praised the rivers to reduce depth of their waters to flow below the axes of their carts and chariots – *namadhvam bhavatā supārā adhaḥ*—*akṣāḥ* – bend down you both below axes (of carts and wagons) to be fordable (RV 3.33.9). There is an undisputed reference to Vṛtra obstructing their flow and Indra killing it by digging and making way for rives to flow unobstructed. It occurs in the *ṛc* 3.33.6.

*Indro asmā aradadyjrabāhurapāhanvṛtram
paridhiṁ nadīnām|
devos nayatsavitā supāṇistasya vyaṁ prasave
yāma urvīḥ||*
(RV 3.33.6)

Tr. (by PVP): “Indra, wielding Vajra (His thunderbolt), dug paths for both of us; slaughtered Vṛtra who had encircled river waters. God Savitṛ carried us forward by his handsome hands. (Today) we are flowing unbound at his command.”

In the above *ṛc*, word *aradat* – dug, is worth noting. This description of the slaying of *Ahi-Vṛtra* confirms that Vṛtra was an earthen bund formed due to tectonic upheavals. It obstructed

the flow of the rivers and flooding occurred in the upstream regions. The rivers were not aerial or celestial but were terrestrial and flowing in the Punjab and Sind region. Digging path for release of water referred to digging operation on the earth. Other significant mention which extended Vṛtra’s ambit to other rivers is *nadīnām*. The word *nadīnām* occurs in RV 3.33.12; there also it points to multiple rivers. Thus, the sinister influence of Ahi-Vṛtra bund extended to other rivers too. This point is discussed later.

This description is like a factual account of breaching of an earthen bund obstructing two terrestrial rivers rather than clouds in the sky. As the science of tectonics has confirmed, this region was prone to tectonic activity. Digging paths for the rivers should refer to digging operation on the long stretching ridge formed in the path of those two rivers. It is confirmed by the description of earth after release of water and the physical description of Vṛtra as a mountain i.e. *Adri*.

*asyedeva śavasā śuśantam vi vṛścadvajreṇa
vṛtramindrah|
gā na vrāṇā avanīramuñcadabhi śravo
dāvane sacetāḥ ||*
(RV 1.61.10)

Tr. by PVP: “Indra, with his prowess, slaughtered water soaking Vṛtra with his Vajra (thunderbolt) piercing the earth and released (waters) like cows (recovered from thieves – Paṇis); (Indra) the knower of the wishes of (His) worshipper granted him food.”

In the above *ṛc*, release of water was compared with release of cows of gods referred in the *Saramā-Paṇi* dialogues hymn (RV 10.108). It is significant to note that slaughter of Vṛtra occurred on the earth after digging. It is indicated clearly by the description *vrāṇāḥ avanīḥ* - pierced earth (RV 1.61.10).

The compendium of the Rgvedic synonymous words, *nighaṇṭu* lists words for cloud in section 1.10. Both the words, Vṛtra and *adriḥ* i.e. a mountain or a ridge are listed there. There are

many *ṛcs* in the RV text which refer directly or indirectly to the cleaving of mountain/ridge - *adriḥ* with the release of river waters.

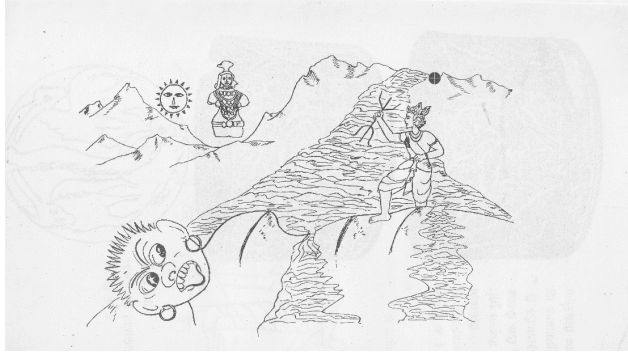


Fig. 1: Author's conception of the myth of Indra killing dragon Vṛtra

Nomenclature for dragon

There are two important texts from the ancient times that deal with nomenclature of different identities from the RV. These are Nighaṇṭu and Nirukta. These are dated earlier than 1000 BCE, but there is no clue as to whether these texts ever existed even before the dispersal of the population of the Indus Culture around 2000-1800 BCE. That may come to light when the Indus script will be deciphered unequivocally. The decipherment of the Indus script is still in a state of speculation. On unequivocal decipherment, it will be clear whether the Indus seals carry names of the Vedic entities, whether the names signifying Vṛtra, Ahi, etc. are relevant here.

It is apparent that Nighaṇṭu the glossary of the names from the RV was compiled first and then the etymological text of Nirukta was composed by Yāskacārya or Yaska in brief. Some scholars attribute the compilation of Nighaṇṭu also to Yaska. However, the present author opines that Nighaṇṭu was compiled much earlier. Because in Nirukta, Yaska has followed the sequence in Nighaṇṭu for etymological interpretation. At the same time, Yaska has referred his twenty-seven other predecessors in his text with their diverse etymologies. So, unless a glossary text like Nighaṇṭu was accessible to his predecessors, their

etymologies would not have come. Why at all so many of Yaska's predecessors felt need for giving diverse etymologies? Because they had noted incoherency in compilation of the Nighaṇṭu text which is apparent. After dispersal of the Indus people, the tradition of recitation of the Veda text and knowledge underlying meaning of words was disturbed. The time frame of 1800 – 1000 BCE reflects a chaotic period. The spread of people away for the mainland *saptasindhu* resulted in change of meanings of several hundred words. The scholars then felt the need to compile the words synonymous in meaning. That was the text of Nighaṇṭu. Many predecessors of Yaska gave diverse etymologies based on Nighaṇṭu with the intention to remove incoherencies in the glossary.

Archaeological considerations

For example, in Nighaṇṭu 1.2 out of fifteen names listed for gold, six are considered here for scrutiny. These are *hema*, *ayaḥ*, *hiranyaam*, *loham*, *kanakam*, *kāñcanam*. Among these, *loham*, *kanakam*, *kāñcanam* are not mentioned in the RV, *kanakam*, *kāñcanam* both means gold. The rest in the list as, *chandram*, *amṛtam*, *ṛśanam*, *Marutam* are incompatible in meaning. While words like *hema* (RV 9.97.1 etc.) and *hiranya* (RV 1.122.14 etc.) are mentioned in the text signifying existence and use of gold as precious metal and *ayaḥ* means copper; the word *loham* signifying iron is absent.

It was not long ago that the antiquity of iron in India was pushed back from 1000 to 1800 BCE following the excavations from 1996-2001 at Malhar, Raja Nala ka Tila, Dadupur and Lauhradewa in Uttar Pradesh. Its use enhanced the process of second urbanization that witnessed the growth of many *mahājanapadas* as recorded in the ancient texts (Tewari 2003).

These archaeological findings put the upper limit of antiquity of compilation of Nighaṇṭu to 1800 BCE contemporary with the advent of Iron processing technology. It was followed by Yaska's Nirukta. Since Pāṇini has referred Yaska as one

among his ten predecessors in ‘*Yaska-āḍibhyo gotre*’ (Aṣṭā. 2.4.63), the Nirukta text was well established as the etymological text. It is important to note that neither Yāska, nor Pāṇini mentioned Buddha, but he does quote Yāska. Based on this, Kapoor places him in the 9th century BCE, though he could have been much earlier. (Kapoor 2010). According to the present author, Yāska dates back earliest to 1300 BCE which is the earliest limit of availability of iron on appreciable scale to be listed in Nighaṇṭu under the category of metals.

Nomenclature of Vṛtra

Nighaṇṭu lists thirty words for cloud – *meghaḥ* (Nig.1.10). It includes Vṛtra. Though these convey diverse meaning and purport, these are classified as under:

1. Cloud: a) *abhram*, b) *valāhakaḥ*, c) *meghaḥ*, d) *uparaḥ*, e) *upalāḥ*, *purubhojāḥ*, g) *valisānaḥ*
2. Mountain: a) *adriḥ*, b) *aśmā*, c) *parvataḥ*, d) *giriḥ*, e) *grāvā*, f) *phaligaḥ*.
3. Serpent, reptile and animal: a) *valaḥ*, b) *ahih*, c) *varāhaḥ*.
4. Indra’s enemies: a) *Śambaraḥ*, b) *Rauhiṇaḥ*, d) *Asuraḥ*, e) *Raivataḥ*, f) *Vṛtraḥ*, g) *Vṛṣandhiḥ*.
5. Others: a) *gotraḥ*, b) *aśnaḥ*, c) *vrajaḥ*, d) *caruḥ*, e) *camasaḥ*, f) *dṛtiḥ*, g) *odanaḥ*, h) *kośaḥ*.

The diversity in meaning can be understood on the background of time gap between the composition of the RV text, time of dispersal of the Indus people and compilation of Nighaṇṭu. The post-Vedic scholars had lost touch with the environment prevailing in the *Saptasindhu* region during the later RV times. They were unfamiliar with the circumstances in which the R̥gvedic seers perceived the tectonically formed ridge/mountain. It is to be noted that killing of any of the entities listed in Nig. 1.10 above, was not associated with rains, it in particular dealt

with release of the accumulated river waters. *Nairuktāḥ* – etymological tradition in the later times interpreted *vṛtra* as a cloud Nir. 2.16 based on the following ṛc 1.32.10 quoted by Yaska:

*atiṣṭhantīnāmaniveśanānām kāṣṭhānām madhye
nīhitam śarīram|
vṛtrasya nīnyam vi carantyaṭpo dīrgham tama
āśyadindraśatruḥ||*

(1.32.10)

Tr. by HDV: “The waters variously pass over the (now) invisible body of Vṛtra, placed in the midst of their never resting, never-encamping streams. He whose slayer was Indra has lain in a long-lasting darkness.”

Real life description: The above ṛc is the real-life description of the situation after slaying Vṛtra. The long stretching bund was breached at several locations. As the waters accumulated upstream, it flowed downwards with speed and the bund was overflowed by water. The flowing water being full of silt, the remains of the bund were as if covered by darkness. The draining of water having taken long time, Vṛtra appeared to lay under darkness for long time.

In the above ṛc, interpreters have interpreted word *kāṣṭhā* differently. Yaska has given different meanings of the word based on its understanding, i.e. the one that encompasses. Thus, it means (four main) directions *diśāḥ*, four more secondary directions *upadiśāḥ*, the Sun, (travel) destination, the stagnant water – *sthāvarāṇām* because *itaretaram krāntvā sthitā bhavanti* (Nir. 2.15) - since they stay encompassing over a very long distance. Sāyaṇa has taken single meaning under waters *apām*. According K.F. Geldner – *eigentlich der rennbahnen* (German translation) – means the race track. HDV takes it as ‘F. limit, boundary’. The present author takes meaning of *kāṣṭhānām* – (many) as directions on the background of *dīrgham tama āśyadindraśatruḥ* - the enemy of Indra lay hidden below the long lasting darkness spread far and wide. The accumulated waters had covered the upstream land stretching in many directions.

Tr. by PVP: “(Vṛtra’s) body lay buried in the unending, unceasing directions (far and wide). Waters flowed over the body of the enemy of Indra who lay hidden in the darkness.”

The word *meghaḥ* for cloud occurs only once in the text in a *ṛc* RV 1.181.8 in praise of twin gods Aśvins, showering rains –*vṛṣā* on their devotees like milk outpouring. This description is not even distantly related to Indra and his cloud enemies are named variously. Over the centuries post Vedic etymologists quoted by Yaska and Yaska himself (Nir 2.16, 17) were far removed from the Vedic times and environment by distance. When they discussed Indra’s accomplishments, they perceived Vṛtra hidden in the dark clouds, and that’s how interpretation of Vṛtra as a cloud was initiated in the Indian tradition of interpreters of the RV; Sāyaṇa firmly established the trend. Other words signifying the tectonic occurrences i.e. a) *adriḥ*, b) *āsmā*, c) *parvataḥ*, d) *giriḥ*, e) *grāvā*, f) *phaligaḥ* went in background.

Other two most frequently occurring descriptions of the ridge are Ahi and Vṛtra. These are the most prevailing names of Indra’s enemy mentioned in the RV *ṛcs* and became firmly established in future. It was like a poetic freedom of expression. It would be just speculation that this name came into use long time after the tectonic upheavals because the hymn RV 1.32 described the saga of Vṛtra killing in depth narrating the factual account of how Indra breached the ridge at several locations (Pathak:2001:168-180 and 2024: 55-63). It can be construed as a general appearance of a ridge encircling, enveloping, and encompassing the river waters. Yaska gave three etymologies of Vṛtra in Nir. 2.17. It appears that till the time of Yāska, there prevailed notion that *vṛtra* was a terrestrial happening, because it had enveloped the terrestrial rivers in particular *Śutudrī* and *Vipat* (RV 3.33.6). Yāska while commenting and interpreting that *ṛc* referred to his predecessor Aurnavābha in connection with the derivation of

the word *urvīḥ*. It established direct connection with the terrestrial rivers.

*urvyah ūrṇoteḥ | vṛnoterityaurnavābhaḥ |
pratyākhyāyāntata āśuśruvuh ||* Nir. 2.26

Tr. by Sarup: “*urvyah* (expanded) is derived from the *√ūrṇu* (to cover). ‘It is derived (from the *√vr* (to cover)’ says Aurnavābha. Having thus (answered), the rivers consented in the end.”

Ahi – serpent is another word frequently representing *vṛtra* in the RV.

As Yāska elaborated

ahivattu khalu mantravarṇā brāhmaṇavādāśca
(Nir. 2.16)

Tr. by Sarup: “Indeed, the descriptions of Vedic stanzas and the narratives of the Brāhmaṇas (depict him) no doubt, as a serpent.”

It occurs many times together with *vṛtra* in the same hymn in RV 1.32. The hymn 1.32 is describing the saga of *vṛtra* slaying. It described *vṛtra* as *ahi* – a serpent, with no limbs – *apādahastah* (1.32.7).

Indra killed *Vṛtra*, sleeping on the ground *āśayānam*. It is mentioned in many *ṛcs* listed below:

vṛtram āśayānam (1.121.11) – sleeping Vṛtra
āśayānam māyāvinam Vṛtram (2.11.9) – sleeping
Vṛtra indulging in sorcery.

āśayānam ahim vajreṇa maghavanvi vṛśca
(4.17.7) – Maghavan (Indra) with his *vajra* rent into pieces the sleeping serpent.

āśayānam ahim vajreṇa vi riṇā aparvan
(4.19.3) – (Indra) with His *vajra* rent into pieces the sleeping *ahi*.

Serpent into dragon

Roots of the dragon myth can be traced to the description of Vṛtra as Ahi implying giant serpent – a dragon. It is reflected in the mode of attributing serpent like description *ahi* at the same time for Vṛtra in the RV text.

*ahanvṛtram vṛtrataram vyamsamindro vajreṇa
mahatā vadhena |
skandhāmsīva kuliśenā vivṛkṇāhiḥ śayata
upapṛkṛthivyāḥ ||* RV 1.32.5

Tr. by PVP: “Indra killed (His) greatest enemy Vṛtra with (His) *vajra* renting his shoulders: a great killing (achieved by Indra). The slain *ahi* lay stretched on ground like cut trunks of a tree lie on the earth.”

In the above ṛc word *ahi* is alternatively used for Vṛtra. In the same hymn *ahi* is mentioned in 1.32, 8 and 13 in the same context. In ṛc 13, the description assumes a mythical form.

*nāsmāi vidhunna tanyatuḥ siṣedha na yām
mihamakiraddhrādunim ca|
Indraśca yadyuyudhāte ahiścotāparibhyo
maghavā vi jigye|| RV 1.32.13*

Tr. by HDV: “Neither lightening nor thunder proved useful to him, nor (did) even the mist and the hail-storm which Ahi showered (on Indra). When Indra and Ahi fought, the bounteous god conquered (His foes then and) for all time to come.”

Epithet *ahi* for Vṛtra occurs in several other ṛcs confirming serpent like nature of the long stretching bund. Indra is described as slayer of *ahi* as *ahihā* (2.19.3), alternatively, several times as *vṛtra*□ *hā* (1.16.8 etc.), *vṛtra*□ *han* (1.84.3 etc.) and *vṛtra*□ *ghnaḥ* (8.66.10 and 78.7).

Sāyaṇa while considering Vṛtra as a cloud, gave etymology of Vṛtra as ‘*vṛṇoti ākāśam iti vṛtro meghaḥ*’ – it is (called) *vṛtra* as it envelops the sky i.e. cloud. This interpretation was well established in the tradition of Vedic interpretation in India and adopted by many other translators of the R̥gveda in centuries to follow.

At a certain stage Ahi was associated with word *dāsa* who were the enemies of Aryans and the river waters were described as seduced by *dāsa* and blocked by *ahi*-Vṛtra –*dāsapatniḥ ahiḥ gopā atiṣṭhan niruddhā āpaḥ* (1.32.11). In due course the ridge was alternatively called as *ahi dāsa*.

Over the centuries there developed what can be called a demonology around the story of Indra killing the personified and demonized Vṛtra. In due course new elements were incorporated in the

narration. The hymn RV 1.80.1-16 also deals with the saga of Vṛtra killing where Vṛtra killing was mystified:

1. While eulogizing feats of Indra, there is a refrain in every ṛc ending in *archannu svarājyām* – (O Indra, You) proclaim your own sovereignty.
2. Indra was accorded highest place and honor among the people lording over the creation –*rajā bhavo jagatścarṣaṇīnām* (RV6.30.5)
3. Offering soma juice to the Supreme God Indra had become inseparable part of the sacrifice and as a part of it one of the participants Brahmā used to sing in praise of Indra (1.80.1). The function of Brahmā priest was to supervise the entire *yajña* performance. The act accorded great importance to Indra.
4. Indra attacked the Vṛtra sleeping on the ground – *byūmyā adhi Vṛtram*, from the sky – *divaḥ* (1.80.4).
5. By killing Vṛtra, Indra bestowed food (prosperity) - *andhas* on his friends and devotees – *sakhibyaḥ*. As the productive lands occupied by upstream waters were emptied, they were rendered cultivable yielding food grains.
6. Indra surpassed sorcerer - *māyīnam* -Vṛtra, perceived as an animal *mṛgam* by overcoming its evil powers (1.80.7). Although in the ṛc Vṛtra is described as mountain like - *adrivaḥ*, there is twist in narration turning it into a myth.
7. Indra’s thunderbolts - *vajrasaḥ* were scattered over ninety -*navati* rivers (1.80.8). This description added element of exaggeration to the narration which is an integral part of the demonological mythology.
8. Twenty active participating members of the sacrifice, hundreds of seers and

thousands of people (commoners) showered praises on Indra. This can be understood as formal performance of a sacrifice and offering *soma* juice to Indra. It is sanctifying the myth by associating it with a sacred sacrifice.

9. Both, *ime* implying (*dyāvapṛthivī*) heaven and earth - trembled at the wrath of Indra. He was assisted by Maruts winds (1.80.11). This is a new mythical element of both heaven and earth trembling. Association of Maruts in *Vṛtra* slaying act is yet another element.
10. The limbless demon is stated to be hurling missile – *aśanim* at Indra which he countered with *vajra* (1.80.13). How can a sleeping dragon – *ahi* throw missile unless he has hands to hurl it at speed. Here it becomes a mythical narration.
11. Gods vested their powers, praise and wealth in Indra to invigorate to kill *Vṛtra* (1.80.15). In future, this type of vesting in powers to a new god and goddess became an established trend, especially in the *Purāṇa* literature.
12. Ancient seers Atharvan, Dadhyañc and progenitor of mankind Manu showered *ukhtha* chanting on Indra to invigorate Him (1.80.16). This *ṛc* traced the myth to ancient times. Both the seers Atharvan, Dadhyañc are referred in the RV text with great reverence, but there are no hymns attributed to them. It is a fair assumption that hymns attributed to them were lost. That gives credence to the above proposition of the *Vṛtra* killing incidents belonging to the remotest past

The description in the hymn in the course of time metamorphosed into the dragon myth far removed from the physical reality. It turned the natural phenomena into a mythical narration with many types of embellishments.

Fall out of *ahi-Vṛtra* phenomena

The tectonic upheavals were occurring frequently in the *saptasindhu* region. That frequency is indicated by the period of *ahi* dwelling in mountains for forty years - *catvāriṃśyām* (RV 2.12.11). This period is to be considered symbolic. The regions of Punjab and Sind are table lands with slope as small as 1 in 8000-10,000. So even the small elevation in ground level would lead to flooding of vast areas. That used to create havoc in the areas up stream of the blocked rivers. It is known that the rivers coming down the Himalayan slopes carry high quantities of silt. That resulted in deposition of stagnant silt which is distinguishable from the running flood waters.

Over the centuries, the Indus Civilization flourished. There were hundreds of settlements large and small and few city centers also developed. They had to face the problem of prolonged flooding and silting because of tectonic upheavals. They adopted preventive measures by building massive embankments and fortifications to prevent flood waters from entering in the residential areas. Earlier these fortifications were considered for defense purpose, but over the decades it was found that there were anti flooding measures adopted by the Indus people. S. R. Rao, in his book, “*Dawn and devolution of the Indus Civilization*” (1991) has extensively discussed devolution of the Indus Civilization (pp. 324-343). His conclusions are summarized below:

“The main cause of the decline is the standard of living and of construction which was noticed by Wheeler (widely acclaimed archaeologist of the Indus cities) as well as Dales (another archaeologist) is natural calamity. The peripheral walls and terraced platforms over which houses were built were anti-flood bolsters. Sometimes hurried repairs were carried out on the citadel walls of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro to prevent further damage by floods. The accumulation of flood debris in ‘HR mound’ is a clear proof of inundation of Mohenjo-daro.

Raikes added further to the evidence of extensive flooding which caused havoc to the Indus settlements. He suggested that coastal uplift was responsible for closing the mouth of the Indus flooding the estuary. The flood borne deposits capping Chanhu-daro (a prominent Indus Culture site) during the latest phase of Harappan occupation, is a convincing proof of the flooding being responsible for the decline of standards and gradual abandonment of the town by the inhabitants.” Finally, Rao concluded that the inhabitants of several other settlements were so tired of frequent floods that reconstruction of the towns became difficult (Rao:1991:325-326).

Elstov (2008) conducted systematic study of major Indus Culture sites from the flooding point of view and identifying the fortification walls constructed to prevent the flooding of settlements. Elstov has enumerated such anti-flooding embankments from the Indus Civilization cities. They are:

Banawali: a) The main wall was too insignificant to serve any military function, b) the earliest wall was built right on the top of the structures constructed during the period IA (Bisht:1987-1999: 15-16). Possibly in spite of reclaiming the silted part of the settlement, the city dwellers built platform to prevent flooding the rest of it.

Harappa: Kenoyer during excavations in 1997, found two mud-brick perimeter walls, the first one was built on a natural settlement and the second one was built on the top of the first one. “Meadow and Kenoyer suggested that these walls were constructed as a bund to protect the area of ‘granary’ from flooding.....During the season of excavation 1998-1999 more evidence was collected in support of the interpretation of the function of the wall as a bund against flooding” (Elstov:2008: 14-15).

Mohenjo-daro: The site to begin with was not systematically excavated. As such no fortification was identified. After decades,

systematic excavations were undertaken, when Jansen’s research confirmed that the structure of Stupa mound rest on the gigantic platform filled with alluvial sediments and encircled by a retaining wall. Jansen concluded that Mohejo-daro is built on a platform of bricks which provide protection against flooding in the valley of Indus whose yearly sediment deposits have raised the level of river plains. Jansen further suggested that the city could have been surrounded by a ditch resulting from digging required for construction of platform. Altogether these structures formed a complex fortification system that may have served at least three functions

1. It protected the city from floods;
2. It divided the city into distinct urban sectors; and
3. It symbolically elevated the stupa mound.

Judging from the recent photogrammetry and stratigraphic assessment studies by the German-Italian project team led by Michaël Jensen, (Jansen:1985: 161-169) it confirms that protection from floods must have been the key concern of the city administration at the initial stages of construction.

Lothal: The sea port of the Indus period, Lothal is located between two rivers, Sabarmati and Bhogavo. It was noted as a fortified site from the beginning (Rao:1979: 87). Rao conducted extensive excavations at the site. He stated that both, the system of platform and the wall were built to protect the site from floods, and not from military attacks or invasion.

The above-mentioned common feature of flood control measures, building of anti-flooding platforms, must have been adopted in many other small and big Indus settlements in the Indus Culture. It will need further investigations on the lines of what Elstov did to detect those.

A clear picture emerges from the above survey that the Indus valley faced the extensive flooding situations many times before 2000-1800 BCE on account of tectonically erupting long stretching

bunds. At times these bunds were breached either by human endeavor led by leader like Indra who was instrumental in breaching the bunds. It resulted in release of water accumulated upstream. It made the flooded area habitable after clearing water. It could have been breached at times by hydrostatic pressure of water upstream due to heavy rains. This type of breaching occurred in Allah Bund in the Sind province in 1826. Raikes pointed to the multiple silt layers, as many as seven at Mohenjodaro. Some of these were separated by layers of the flood silt. Consideration of the infrequency of the catastrophic floods that could bury a whole city under as much as six feet of silt. He further notes total of 30 feet of silt and seven times rebuilding of the city. He has estimated the duration of those silt deposits over the period of approximately 1000 years (Raikes:1979: 299-300). Those recurrent occurrences of floods and rebuilding ultimately resulted in fatigue of civilization as whole and they decided to abandon the region. As discussed, before they scattered in four directions.

On the nature of ahi-Vṛtra

Some salient points on the nature of Vṛtra emerge from the description of *ahi-Vṛtra* in the RV.

To begin with, Vṛtra in the RV was a tectonically formed long stretching bund in the table land of *saptasindhu* region.

Stream of many rivers accumulated behind the tectonically formed bund resulting in settlement of silt layers. Those were exposed during excavations of the Indus cities and settlements.

The bund was breached at several places along the length, either through the human effort or by hydrostatic pressure of the back water.

The act of breaching was attributed to god Indra who was accorded highest status among the pantheon of the Ṛgvedic gods, lording over the creation.

Initially the population had to abandon their settlements and when bund was breached, they came back and resettled.

The perception of tectonically formed bunds changed over the period of centuries and they were a) perceived as a ridge or mountain, b) as a giant serpent who lay on ground, c) the entity that lay stretched on ground encircling multiple river waters rendering them to go dry downstream.

Many alternative names were attributed to the ridge as *adri*, *aśma*, *parvataḥ*, *giriḥ*, Vṛtra, *ahi*, *dāsa*, *vala*, *megha*, etc. They reflected on the changing perception of the tectonic upheavals.

For accomplishing act of breaching, perceived as killing, Indra was called *Vṛtrahā*, *Vṛtrahan*, *Vṛtraghna*. He was accorded highest status of the sovereign lording over the creation.

The Ṛgveda also refers to Vṛtra in plural number – *Vṛtrāṇi* and as the human enemies of Indra. However, it is an entirely different diversion from the original perception of Vṛtra. This term is invariably associated with the war led by Indra for acquiring wealth for his devotees. This aspect of Vṛtra is dealt in depth earlier (Pathak:2024: 64 – 66). It is totally unconnected to the present discussion.

Antiquity of the Indus Culture and *yajña* system

It is clear now that the tectonic upheavals were occurring frequently during the mature Indus Culture period. However, they dated back even earlier. There are several references in the Brāhmaṇa texts which describe the upheavals in many different contexts. They are the reminiscences from the past. It is also now established that the Indus Culture was rooted in India, and it developed gradually over the period of thousands of years culminating into mature phase and then devolved towards 1800 BCE. The progress of the Indus Culture has been mapped by two archaeologists through different phases of settlement and urbanization. They are J. M. Kenoyer (2011) and R. S. Bisht (2013).

The roots of the Indus Civilization can be traced back to 10,000 BCE.

Emerging from the phase of Mesolithic and Microlithic stage, it entered into Early Food Producing Era as evidenced at Mehargarh (7500-5500 BCE) marked by Aceramic village economy.

The Early Farming phase II stretched over from 5500 -4500 BCE marked by Ceramic and village economy phase I.

Chalcolithic age commenced around 4500 – 3800 BCE marked by the village economy phase II.

The subsequent phases were marked by urbanization, growth of the city centered state administration, metal processing and alloying, manufacture of luxury goods, international commercial contacts during the Mature Indus Culture period till 2000 BCE. The authors have explored the developmental phases till 800 BCE when Iron Age commenced after the devolution period marked by the phase of Second Urbanization.

The development pattern from 10,000 onwards till 1300 BCE was reviewed in depth by the present author (Pathak:2024: 98-102) on the background of the development of the system of sacrifice - *yajña*. The fire worship altars were reported from many sites of the Indus Culture like Kalibangan, Lothal, Rakhigarhi, Banawali with triangular terracotta cakes, bones etc. as offering. B. K. Thapar reported series of fire altars at Kalibangan from the Indus Culture phase II (Thapar:1979: 200, Pl. No. XVII and XVIII). V. H. Sonavane reported a fire altar even from a small Indus Culture site at Wagad in Gujrat. (Sonawane and Mehta:1985: 38-44)

The system of fire worship accompanied with invocation of other gods of the Vedic pantheon evolved during these phases. Vestiges of this evolution can be observed in the procedures and changing pattern of the implements used in the Vedic sacrifices.

Aceramic phase (7500-5500 BCE), was marked by use of wooden glasses called *graha* and the wooden sword *sphya* in the sacrificial

performances. There is a story associated with *sphya* wherein it is related with use of Vajra by Indra to kill Vṛtra. It also points to initiation of the sacrificial system of *yajña* in the remote past. These wooden implements continue to be used even today. During these phases short aphorism like *Nivids*, the short prose formulas, distinct from the hymns in the metrical formats were chanted to invoke deities. The *Nivids* belonging to the earliest phase of sacrificial system development is asserted by two authors, namely, Martin Haug and Lokmanya B. G. Tilak. Haug has dealt in depth on the nature and use of *Nivids* (Haug:1977: 33-41) stating that, “I must lay particular stress on the *Nivids* which I believe to be more ancient than almost all the hymns contained in the R̥gveda”. “Another proof of the high antiquity of the *Nivids* is furnished by the Zend-Avesta. The many prayer formulas in the Yasna which commence with *nivaśahayemi*. i.e. I invite, are exactly of the same nature as the *Nivids*”. Lok. B.G. Tilak also expressed similar views. “The oldest period in Aryan Civilization may therefore be called the Aditi or the pre-Orion period, and we may roughly assign 6000-4000 BCE, as its limit. It was a period when the finished hymns do not seem to have been known and half-prose and half-poetical *Nivids* or sacrificial formulae ‘giving the principal names, epithets, and feats of the deity invoked’ were probably in use (Tilak:1955: 220). Concurrent reference to this phase is to be found in the Lopāmudrā-Agstya dialogue hymn which refers to the stage of hoe cultivation, *khanamānaḥ khanitraiḥ* (RV 1.179.6) as the initial farming phase of manual digging of land for cultivation.

Ceramic phase (5500 – 4500 BCE) was marked use of triangular terracotta plates, *kapāla*, used for putting *puroḍāṣa* on the altar wall. These were found in large numbers during the Indus Culture cultivation. There were found terracotta pots with two compartments. It is depicted on the Indus seal of an ornamented goat and seven human figures. It is known as *sakṣira-praṇitā-*

pranayana-pātra used in sacrifice and preparing solution of foul-smelling fruit called *Ajaśṛṅgi Arāṭaki* (Pathak: 2012:161)

Chalcolithic phase (4500-3800 BCE): It is reflected in description of the bastions of *Dāsas* as *āyasī purāḥ* (RV 1.58.8, 4.27.1, 7.14.5, etc.) These descriptions could be attributed to the hills from Sistan province in Afghanistan only after the copper ore processing techniques were developed and commencement of the Chalcolithic Age. This was the period when the Ṛgvedic people led expeditions to the regions occupied by *Dāsas*, *Dāhae* or *Dāhamarda* tribes in Sistan mentioned the Zend Avesta (Pathak:2022: 92-114). There are many references in the Ṛgveda to the foes of Indra and the Aryans in conflict with the *Dāsas* reflecting on this phase of civilizational development.

Urbanization phase (2600 – 1900 BCE): It is reflected in the majestic residential mansions in the Indus Culture cities and the Great Bath and granary at Mohenjo-daro. City centers such as Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi, Lothal etc. emerged as capital cities and centers of trade enclaves for the overseas trades. Two distinct features reflect this phase in the Ṛgveda text. These are, the thousand pillared mansion of Varuṇa - *sahasrasthūṇam* (RV 5.62.6), the second is references Varuṇa's spies *spaśo Varuṇasya* (RV 7.87.3) and spies of gods – *devānām spaśaḥ* (10.10.8). In the small sedentary village communities, everybody knows each other and activities go on. There is no need for people in authority to keep watch on any one. However, spies are needed for administration to keep watch on people in large populated cities. The Yama-Yami dialogue hymn (RV 10.10) mentioning spies keeping watch on people reflects on the urbanized set up.

Dating the Vṛtra episode

There is a school of Indus Culture archaeologists and scholars opposed to linking Indus Culture with the Vedic literature. They ignore the positive

evidences linking them both unequivocally. They also reject the astronomical observations mentioned in the Vedic and Brāhmaṇa text on account of the fact that these take back the period of the texts to the period contemporary with the Indus Culture and even earlier. These were discussed in depth earlier (Pathak:2024: 84-97). The present author agrees with the dating of the Vedic texts based on the astronomical observations. These were further augmented and revised confirmation of the seven astronomical eras in the recent years by the 21st century astronomer K. D. Abhyankar (2006: 35) are enumerated below:

1. Aśvinī – Puṣya era – around 7000 BCE,
2. Revatī- Punarvasu era (Also called Aditi era by Tilak) – around 6000 BCE,
3. Agastya era – around 5000 BCE,
4. Pūrvā Bhādrapadā – Mṛgaśīrṣa – ‘The Orion’ (Tilak) era- around 4000 BCE,
5. Mahāśivarātrī – Rohinī era – around 3000 BCE,
6. Maghā – Kṛttikā era (Tilak) – around 2300 BCE.
7. Vedāṅga Jyotiṣa era – around 1400 BCE.

(Abhyankar 2006: 22-29)

As regards the Vṛtra myth, it was coupled with system of sacrifice. Every fortnight, on full moon and no moon day, *darśapūrṇamāseṣṭi* sacrificial rites were performed. This tradition is continued even today by Agnihotris. Oblations were offered in the sacrificial fire invoking Indra to invigorate him to kill Vṛtra as given in Śatapatha Brā. 1.6.4.12-13 and 6.2.2.19. In the ancient times, year commenced with the vernal equinox. These fortnightly rites were coupled with commencement of the vernal equinox. Many short- and long-term sacrifices too commenced on these occasions. Many of these types of sacrifices and timings are mentioned in both the Vedic and Brāhmaṇa texts. There are two passages in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which link the slaying of Vṛtra with commencement of the year in ancient times:

*tadvai phālgunyāmeva| eṣā ha saṁvatsarasya
prathamā rātriryat phālgunī paurṇamāsī
yottaraīṣottamā yā pūrvā | mukhata eva tat
saṁvatsaramārabhate||* (ŚB 6.2.2.18)

Tr. by Eggling: “And furthermore, at the *Phālguna* (full moon), for that full moon of *Phālguna*, that is, the second (*Phālguna*), is the first night of the year; and that first (*Phālguna*) is the last (night of the year): he thus begins the year at the very mouth (beginning).

*sa vā iṣṭaiva paurṇamāsenā|atha
paśumalbhet paurṇamāsenā vā indro vṛtram
pāpmānam hatvāpahatapāpmāi tat karmārabhata
tathaivaitadyajamānaḥ paurṇamāsaivavṛtram
pāpmānam hatvāpahatapāpmāi tat karmārabhate||*
(ŚB 6.2.2.19)

Tr. by Eggling: “Now, as soon as he has performed the full moon offering, let him slaughter the victim. For Indra, having driven away *Vṛtra*, evil, by means of the full-moon offering, thus freed from evil entered upon this sacrifice performance; and in the like manner the Sacrificer, having driven away *Vṛtra*, evil, by means of the full-moon offering thus freed from evil now enters on this (sacred) performance.”

As Eggeling clarifies, “In the older division of the year the first spring season (*vasanta*) begins with the month of *Phālguna*, that is the month when the moon is in conjunction with the *nakṣatra* of the *Uttarā Phalgunī*, whence that full moon, in Kau. Br. 5.1 is called the mouth and that of the first *Phālgunī* the tail, of the year.” (Eggling:1963: 179).

There is another confirmation of the constellation position from *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*. corresponding to above passages.

*na pūrvayoh phalgunyoragnimādhātā| eṣā
vai jaghanyā rātriḥ saṁvatsarasya| yat pūrve
phalgunī| prṣṭita eva saṁvatsarasyāgnimādhāya|
pāpīyānbhavati|uttarayorādhātā|
eṣā vai prathamā rātriḥ saṁvatsarasya|
yaduttare phalgunī| mukhata eva
saṁvatsarasyāgnimādhāya| vasīyānbhavatī |*
(Tai. Br 1.1.2.8)

Tr.: “The fire is not to be established in the *Pūrva Phālgunī*s. This is the unworthy night, which has been known as *Pūrva Phālgunī*, so far as the year is concerned. He is a sinner who establishes the fire at the back of the year. The fire should be established in the *Uttara Phālgunī*. One who establishes the fire towards the face of the Sun is regarded as the worthy one.”

It is to be noted that the above passage does not mention the word “Full Moon”, but it is implied that when at a full moon day, the Moon is near the *Uttarā Phālgunī Nakṣatra*, then the year starts i.e. it is the first day of the year. The text advises against setting up the fire on the day of the full moon when it is under the *Pūrva Phālgunī nakṣatra* because the *Pūrva Phālgunī* corresponds to the last night of the year. Instead, the *Uttara Phālgunī nakṣatra* is recommended because the New Year commenced on that day and it was the first night of the year. It would bring prosperity (*vasīyān*) to the host - *yajamāna*. The above quoted passages from the *Brāhmaṇa* texts are often considered crucial to determine the antiquity of the Vedic texts. These are rejected outright by the school favoring Aryan invasion/migration.

In the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* i.e. *Taittirīya Samhitā*, *Uttara Phālgunī* is mentioned as the beginning of the year and the *Pūrva Phālgunī* is the tail end:

*Phalgunipūrṇamāse dīkṣeranmukham vā
etatsaṁvatsarasya yat phalgunīpūrṇamāso
mukhata eva saṁvatsaramārabhya
dīkṣante| tasaikaiva nirayayāt sāmmedhye
viśūvāntsāmpadyate citrāpūrṇamāse dīkṣeran|
mukhamvāetatsaṁvatsarasyayaccitrāpūrṇamāso
mukhata eva saṁvatsaramārabhya dīkṣante|* Tai. Sam. 7.4.8.1-2

Tr. by Keith: “They should consecrate themselves on the full moon. The full moon in *Phālgunī* is the beginning of the year; verily they consecrate themselves grasping the year at the beginning. To that there is one objection that the *Viśūvant* day falls in the cloudy season.

They should consecrate themselves on the full moon day in *Citrā*. The full moon in *Citrā* is the beginning of the year; verily they consecrate themselves grasping the year at the beginning.”

There is reference to *Citrā Nakṣtra* as head of the celestial representation of the Prajāpati – *yā vai nakṣatrīyaṃ prajāpatiṃ veda|.... Citrā śīraḥ niṣṭyā hṛdayam| ... eṣa vai nakṣatrīyaḥ prajāpatiḥ* in Tai. Br. 1.5.2.2. Lok. Tilak treated at the *Citrā* constellation at the beginning of the year i.e. Chitra full moon as the beginning of the year. It further pushes the commencement of the year by three more constellations, i.e. by 2400 -2700 years. These are reminiscences of the commencement of the year in the past adjusting the year with the winter equinoctial day as the seasons pushed forward. Tilak made an explanatory comment on this reference.

“With the Phalgunī full-moon, at the winter solstice the vernal equinox was in *Mṛgaśīras*; with *Citrā* full moon at the solstice the vernal equinox would be in *Punarvasū*. Let us, therefore, see if we have any evidence in the Vedic literature in support of such an interpretation. It may be we are here entering the remotest period of antiquity, when the year was first determined with some approach to accuracy; and even in the Vedas there is hardly anything beyond vague traditions about this period, while the Greeks and Parsees have not, it appears, preserved it.

There is no express passage which states *Punarvasū* was ever the first of the *Nakṣatras*, nor have we in this case a synonym like *Agrahāyana*, or Orion, wherein we might discover similar traditions. There are, however, some indications about the oldest position of *Punarvasū* preserved in the sacrificial literature. The presiding deity of *Punarvasū* is *Aditi*, and we are told in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.7, and the TS 6.1.5.1, that *Aditi* has been blessed with a boon that all sacrifices must commence and end with her”.

Tilak concludes, “This clearly means, if it can mean anything, that before this time,

sacrifices were performed at random, but it was at this time resolved and fixed to commence them from *Aditi*. *Aditi* was thus the oldest and the first commencement of the sacrifice or the year” (Tilak:1955: 214-15). Tilak takes back chronology of the visual astronomical markings to the period of *Citra* at the vernal equinox. This he called as *Aditi* period.

Demonization of Vṛtra

We find that during the Ṛgvedic period itself, perception of *Vṛtra* was undergoing changes. When migration in different directions occurred, there was further wider gap in time and location. The *Brāhmaṇa* text reflects this change. In the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, *Vṛtra* is treated both as a demon, antagonistic to gods and a son of a *Brāhmaṇa*. There entered another factor by this time. It was witchcraft of both the types, i.e. white or for wellbeing of people and black for destruction. What the priestly class performed, especially the sacrificial rites as part of *yajña* by invoking gods was a white witchcraft. These were aimed at bringing about good fortune for an individual host – *yajamāna* as well as for the society as a whole.

Vṛtra in story form continued to occur even in the post Vedic literature with even more twisted versions. In the *Mahābhārata*, he is almost deified. Since these altered narrations vary from the original reality of the Ṛgvedic times, discussion on these transformations become irrelevant. Here only few passages dealing with *Vṛtra* myth from the only two *Brāhmaṇa* texts, *Aitareya* (AB) and *Śatapatha* of *Madhyandina* School (ŚB) are dealt. The present author has dealt on these topics in depth earlier (Pathak: 2001:183-197). Only some selected references are described below.

There are four passages in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* which elaborate on the *Vṛtra* story.

AB 1.26 tr. by Martin Haug: “they (the divines) say: it is as were a cruel act, when they perform the ceremony of (touching) the melted butter (the *Tanunapatram*) near the King Soma,

the reason is that Indra using melted butter as his thunderbolt, killed Vṛtra.”

AB 7. 28: This passage in AB deals with the story of other entities, whom Indra killed along with Vṛtra; they were the son of semi god *Tvaṣṭr*, *Arurmaghas* and *Yatis*. There is a ghastly description that Indra threw *Yatis* before jackals to devour. Indra also rebuked Bṛhaspati, his teacher. For these unsavory acts, Indra was deprived of his share of Soma draught. Since Indra was a warrior god, in turn, the class of warriors, the *Kṣatriyas* were likewise excluded from the having Soma draught.

Martin Haug in a comment related to *Arurmaghas* gives further information, “The *Arurmaghas* were no doubt a kind of degraded Āryas, very likely a tribe of the ancient Iranian, in whose language (The Zend) the words *aurovo* and *magha* are frequently to be met with.

As discussed above, the passages from AB deal with sacrificial and liturgical procedures and are in no way even remotely connected with R̥gvedic situations.

These are as many as 15 passages in ŚB dealing with Vṛtra legend.

ŚB 1.2.4.1-3 Tr. by Egging: “When Indra hurled the thunderbolt – vajra at Vṛtra, that hurled one became fourfold, of (three parts of) it the wooden sword (*sphya*) represents one-third or thereabouts. That piece, moreover, with which He struck him, was broken off (*sri*) and on falling down it became an arrow (*śara*): hence the designation arrow, because it was broken off. And in this way the thunderbolt became fourfold”

Full Brāhmaṇa text ŚB 1.6.3 deals with the story of Viśvarūpa with three heads and six eyes, the son of Tvaṣṭā. Indra hated Viśvarūpa and he cut off his heads. As a result of which, Indra was denied His share of Soma juice. Uninvited Indra drank Soma juice forcefully. Indra drank too much of it and suffered from over consumption. In order to reduce its ill effects, a special performance, *Sautrāmaṇi iṣṭi* was initiated. There

is other famous story of Tvaṣṭā performing a sacrifice to beget enemy of Indra to kill him. The reciting seers pronounced it in such a way Tvaṣṭā begot a son who was killed by Indra. The killing of Viśvarūpa is echoed in RV 10.8.8-9 and RV 10.99.6. RV 10.8 is a mystical hymn by the seer *Triśirāstvāṣṭraḥ* himself. As Sayana explained, Triśiras had premonition and dreamt of being killed by Indra. It appears that the story of Triśiras was addition to the RV text centuries later and close to Brāhmaṇa period.

It can be observed from the above sample passages from the Brāhmaṇa texts that the scenario of Indra-Vṛtra war is totally independent of the R̥gvedic reality and intimately connected only with the sacrificial performances. The liturgical explanations in those texts are of no use to explain the ṛcs from the RV text. They also reflect a very different social ethos. Demonization of Vṛtra as a demonic entity was complete in those texts.

Conclusion

Roots of the ancient most Dragon Myth all over the globe can be traced to the Dragon Myth of Indra killing serpent - dragon Vṛtra as narrated in the RV text and rooted in physical reality. It dates back to 8000-6000 BCE in its original form. In the initial stages, it comprised of formation of a bunds/ridges/mountains suddenly erupting in the tectonically sensitive region of *Saptasindhu*. These were perceived as serpent – dragon. When these were breached by either human efforts or by building of hydrostatic pressure upstream, it was perceived as killing of dragon. There are physical evidences of the bund formations on the ground exposed at several Indus Culture sites where anti-flooding measures were adopted. More than 100 hymns in the RV text refer directly or indirectly to these incidents eulogizing great feats of Indra having killed Vṛtra. R̥gvedic ṛcs can be cogently interpreted with *ahi-Vṛtra* as a tectonically formed soft and fragile bund/ridge/mountain.

Over the centuries perception of the Dragon Myth underwent changes. This was due to the time gap and the Ṛgvedic people dispersing in four directions, that resulted in their movement from their original home. In course of time, the sacrificial rituals of *yajña* developed in order to invigorate Indra to kill. These sacrificial rituals went on becoming more and more complex.

The Brāhmaṇa texts elaborate on sacerdotal performances at the same time changing the tenor of the myth. The arch enemy of Indra came to be personified. He was perceived as the son of semi-god Tvaṣṭā, who begot Vṛtra performing sacrifice with the purpose of killing Indra. This story developed into a separate myth where Indra received divine punishment for killing Vṛtra. Simultaneously, parallel myth developed around breaking of *vajra* used by Indra in four parts, vestiges of which are to be seen in the use of sacrificial implements.

POSTSCRIPT: Author has quoted translations of the original Sanskrit passages by different authorities stating their names. In some cases where he differed with their translations, he has quoted his translations by stating his initials as PVP.

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