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## Āpaḥ in ṛgveda

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#### Abstract

The language of Veda is indirect, suggestive, symbolic, metaphorical and full of figures of speech. In Veda, so many words have been used for water, as - Arṇḥ, Kshodyaḥ, Kshadyaḥ, Salilam, extras. These names have been given on quality basis. As we know the physical form of water in our day to day life but water has a different form also which is philosophical and called Āpaḥ.

The common meaning of Āpaḥ is water but in Ṛgveda it is used in a symbolic form. As mentioned in the Ṛgveda, Aditi is the basic element and it is in trivargī form (Impact, Community and Collective form)1. From the trivargī form of Aditi, when three elements become active then Āpaḥ become the symbol of active state. So the meaning of Āpaḥ is the active state of basic element (mūltattava). On this place if we take the meaning of Āpaḥ as water then the motif will disappear.

The symbolic meaning of Āpaḥ derived from the root āplṛvyāptau (svādiganaparasmaipada)2 is fully appropriate for the universal principle. Āpaḥ is used in Veda in wide form. So let see its form in vedic sūktas.

**Keywords:** Āpaḥ, ṛgveda, Vedic, rishi, sūkta.

#### Introduction

##### 1.1 Viśvakarman Sūkta

(10.82.1/7)

We find one tendency which is common in Indian philosophy that the creator, who is self-created is not only the material cause but also the efficient cause of the universe.

The word Āpaḥ does not denote to ordinary meaning of water but it is a symbol for the pervasive force. Here Āpaḥ most probably understood in the sense which the Chāndogya Upaniṣad assigns to it. In Chāndogya Upaniṣad Āpaḥ, tejas and annam are said to be produced through the speculation of Sat. Here āpaḥ, tejas and annam are not said in ordinary form of water, fire and food respectively. They are the tripartite complexes (trivṛtkṛtarupa) of the aforesaid most subtle Āpaḥ, tejas and annam. So Āpaḥ here does not stand exactly for the ordinary water but it expresses here most probably the subtle form of water.

In first mantra of Vishwakarmā sūkta it has given that as a creator Vishwakarmā first creates water then Hiranyagarbh was created through water.

cakṣuṣaḥpitāmanasā hi dhīroghṛtameneajanannannamāne |  
yadedantādadṛhantapūrvaād id dyāvāpṛthivīaprathetām ||<sup>3</sup>

In Rigvedic mantra it is clear that Āpaḥ do not stand for water here. According to Vishwakarmā sūkta the first stage of original element is Aditi, second stage of tripartite complexes is active stage which is Āpaḥ, from which the universe has been produced-

“paro divā paraenāpṛthivyā paro devebhiraśurairyadasti |  
kaṃ svīdgarbhampṛathamam dadhra āpo yatradevāḥ samapaśyantaviśve ||”<sup>4</sup>

The second stage is the germ primeval (garbha) which is born by āpaḥ, which is said to be situated in the navel of the unborn. The third stage is constituted by gods and the universe themselves; as it is clear from the following mantra –

“tamid garbhampṛathamam dadhra āpoyatradevāḥ samagacchantaviśve |  
ajasyanābhāvadyekamarpitam zasminviśvānibhuvanānitasthuḥ ||”<sup>5</sup>

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## 1.2 Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta

In Hiraṇyagarbha sūkta, it has given the creation of the universe by an Omnipotent God.

“hiraṇyagarbhah samavartatāgre bhūtasyajātaḥ patirekaāsīt  
sadādhārapṛthivīdyām utemāṅkasmaidevāyahaviṣāvidhemal  
”6

In the beginning the first creation was the golden egg which was produced by *Apraket Salila* and from this the Hiraṇyagarbha was born. Then he became lord of all. He produced to the world and was the only swami of heaven and earth. But the question is who created to the primeval waters? According to *Smṛiti* and *Puranas* God desired to create the world, first he created the chaos and it was created by His will and by depositing the seed in it became a golden germ from which Hiraṇyagarbha was produced.

Later Vedic literature also indicates to golden egg. As *śatapathabrāhmaṇa* states.

“*Āpaḥ* were indeed *Salila* earlier. Desire arose in it. From that *Āpaḥ* heat arose. From that golden egg was born. Golden egg was swimming in that for a year.”7 From Golden egg every type of creatures were produced by Hiraṇyagarbha. Through his greatness the mountains, rivers, oceans were created. Due to Him the snow covered mountains are standing at their places firmly, the rivers and their swami oceans are also the creation of Hiraṇyagarbha. So he is superior to any other God. Let us offer worship with an oblation to Divine God.

Yasyemehimavantomahitvā yasyasamudramrasayāsahāhuḥ  
yasyemāḥ pradīsoyasyabhū kasmai devāya haviṣā  
vidhemal”8

Who has established dulok to up in sky and earth was fixed to down. The heaven, place of all comfort and bliss was established at its place and is the creator of lights in sky.

Yenadyaururā pṛthivīcadṛhā  
yenasvaḥstabhitaṃyenānākāḥ  
yoantariḥse rajasovimānaḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā  
vidhemal”9

He is the giver of Atman and strength also.

In Hiraṇyagarbha sūkta, the primeval stage of the ultimate reality is not described, but it outlines the second stage. The seer of this hymn designated the second stage as Hiraṇyagarbha Dakṣa and Prajāpati. The earlier stage, from where it evolves, is denoted by *Āpaḥ*, Perhaps the most original stage of all pervasive principle. The word *Āpaḥ* perhaps are used for it just to indicate the *āpti*, the *vyāpti*, the all pervasiveness as the essential character of the ultimate reality.

## 1.3 Nāsadiya Sūkta

Nāsadiya Sūkta expresses beautiful speculation about creation of the universe. The very first mantra starts with speculation regarding the origin of universe. It says,

nāsad āsīn no sadāsīt tadānīm nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat  
I  
kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmannambhaḥ kim āsīd  
gahanam gabhīram”10

“Then even nothingness was not, nor existence

There was neither air then nor the heaven beyond it  
What covered it? Where was it? In who’s keeping?

Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfaithomed?

In Indian philosophy Brahma has been represented as *satasata anirvachaneeya*-the one who cannot be described by the categories of *sat* and *asat*. However, *Bhagvad Geeta* and other texts think that the category *sat* is synonymous to Brahma. Vedic seers knew the limitation of language and for them the creator was beyond the categories of *sat* and *asat*. Vedic seers believed that initially the universe was pervaded with cosmic water. They speculated that water was the ultimate matter form which this universe was created. Though they do not give any final conclusion and the mystery of universe is open-ended in *Nāsadiya Sūkta*. Water represents the mystery and ambiguity of Vedic mind. Ambiguity is not always harmful; sometimes it opens up space for creativity and productivity. The Vedic mind speculated that initially there was darkness and there was unilluminated water and only through *tap* the Almighty God arose.

tama āsīt tamasā gūḍham agre 'praketaṃ salilaṃ sarvam ā  
idam I  
tucchyenābhvapihitaṃ yad āsīt tapasas tan  
mahinājāyataikam”11

At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.

All this was only unilluminated water.

That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,

Arose at last, born of the power of heat

One of the advanced theories of creation and dissolution has been symbolically presented through this sūkta. A modern writer says, “*Nāsadiya Sūkta* presupposes non- existence first, followed by the fact that in the beginning only ‘That One’ element existed in the state of perpetual motion (*śwadyatadekam*) which gave rise to the rest of creation. It represents us the most advanced theory of creation and the highest form of perpetual motion.”

Pt. Madhusudan Ojha has written *Dashwadrahasyam* on *Nāsadiya sūkta*’s first mantra. In that one vaad is “*Ambhovaad*.” It means world has created by ‘*Ambah*’. *Ambhovaad* is a important vaidic philosophy. It is supposed that the first element of the world was *Ambah* and the verse is...*ambahkimasitgahanamgambhiram*. The world was lying in it as *aavyakt* form.

## 1.4 Āpaḥ Sūkta

Vedic seers knew that water is an integral part of environment. It is *Āpaḥ* which makes weather pleasant and healthy. Water is not only capable to purify body. It has capacity to purify mind, body and soul. It can also purify external environment. Purity was synonymous to health and life. In the very first hymn of *Āpaḥ Sūkta* the Rishi offers his prayer to *Āpaḥ* for its capacity to purify *Bhuvah loka*.

“āpo hi ṣṭhā mayobhuvas tā na ūrje dadhātana I mahe raṇāya  
cākṣase”12

O Water! Because of your presence the atmosphere is so refreshing which gives us vigor and strength.

*Āpaḥ* is not an outer reality. Vedic seers had emotional connection with water. It was like their mother. It was filled with *Rasa*. Vedic philosophy was the least anthropocentric. For them nature was not inert and passive. In this philosophy, hierarchy between living and non-living being did not exist.

Modernity has created a hierarchy between nature and culture which is extremely violent. For long time Western philosophy regarded nature as wealth which was to be exploited to satisfy the greed of men and women. This western world-view has done much destruction to environment. This destruction of environment has led serious concern among environmentalists because the very existence of man depends on environment. Modern eco-anarchists who have criticized this worldview which creates a hierarchy between nature and culture can learn many things from Vedas. In Vedic literature at many places life and nature exist in harmony. In Vedic epistemology nature is not different from human life. There is a closed inter-relation between the two. Vedic seers were able to understand the harmony between nature and human being. The Vedic Rishi finds Āpaḥ (water) filled with rasa. The rasa has very diverse meaning and in the present context it is clear that it shows the symbiotic relation between water and human being. Rasa is not simple harmony; it shows affectionate relation between nature and man.

“yo vaḥ śivatamo rasas tasya bhājayateha naḥ | uśatīriva mātarāḥ ||”<sup>13</sup>

O Water! Please give this auspicious Rasa like a mother gives (her best possession to her children)

In Vedic age water was not a simple commodity. Due to commoditization of water Rasa disappeared from water. This can be seen as alienation from nature. Vedic seers knew that water is source of life and it could remove weaknesses. It is a common fact that due to dehydration body becomes weak. Vedic people knew by their experience that appropriate amount of water is necessary for smooth movement of body.

“tasmā araṃ gamāma vo yasya kṣayāya jinvalat āpo janayathā ca naḥ ||”<sup>14</sup>

Life cannot be imagined without water. Water is the ultimate source of life. It seems that water itself has life.

O Water! You give life to those who are affected by weaknesses. You are the source of our lives. We see that vedic philosophy is very closed to pantheism. Seeds of every philosophy are found in Vedas. When Vedic seers praise Agni the Agni becomes the most important god, when they praise Āpaḥ, Āpaḥ becomes the most prominent god. Maxmuller termed this kind of tendency as henotheism. The truth is that Vedic seers could see that world is inter-connected. They claimed that Agni was born out of Āpaḥ. In Jain philosophy we find the duality of Jiva and Ajiva. Though in praxis this kind of division can be helpful for a brief period, in long run such dualistic theories lose their relevance. Without matter we cannot imagine any kind of life on this earth. This dichotomy of Jiva and Ajiva is violent and it is the main source of violence towards nature. In Vedic ontology this dichotomy does not exist, Vedic seers easily transcended such a dualistic philosophy.

In Vedas Āpaḥ is always filled with divinity. The fourth hymn of Āpaḥ Sūkta says-

“śaṃ no devīrabhiṣṭaya āpo bhavantu pītaye | śaṃ yor abhi sravantu naḥ ||”<sup>15</sup>

(O water! You are filled with auspicious divinity May that auspiciousness flow to us.)

In Vedas divine is this-worldly, it is not outside this world. The divine is present everywhere, even in the ordinary material. By locating divinity in ordinary things and people, Vedic philosophy was able to turn ordinary into divine. In Abrahmic religion only God and prophets are divine. Ordinary men and women are treated as persons who have committed sin. In comparison to other world views Vedic philosophy does not see human life filled with sin. Human life is not worthless, it is regarded as precious. Later writer drew much on Vedic philosophy. Tulsidas claimed that human life is more worthy than life of gods and goddesses. Epics show that even gods and goddesses were willing to have a human life. In epics gods and goddesses interact with ordinary men and women. This intermingling of ordinary with divine makes this land special.

“āpaḥ pra vahata yat kiṃ ca duritaṃ mayi |  
yad vāham abhidudroha yad vā śepa utānṛtam ||”<sup>16</sup>

(O Water! Please wash away whatever wicked tendencies and falsehood are present in me.)

For Vedic seers cleanliness was not only the cleanliness of body, the cleanliness meant the cleanliness of mind and soul. Varuna is associated with Āpaḥ, and he is the god of rit. Rit is a cosmic rule as well as moral and ethical rule. Water does not only clean body it also purifies our heart and mind.

It would be interesting to deliberate on how ethics and morality were associated with cosmic rule and how water helped to shape this philosophy. It seems that after observing repetition of seasons Vedic seers thought that in this universe there is a cosmic rule. They thought that god Varuna is controller of this cosmic rule. As rules of morality and ethics were evolving during Vedic period, Rishis might have thought that Varuna was also controller of the moral laws. A modern philosophy believes that non-living objects also shape the life of man. Objects can function as non-human actor. It would be interesting to find how water, which was treated as a divine object, shaped the morality of ancient societies.

## Conclusion

At the end we can say āpaḥ in ṛgveda is not in ordinary form. It is in described in creative form which meaning is vast. It is a main nature element of creation.

## 2. Foot Note

1. sr̥ṣṭiutpattikīvaīdikaparikalpanā, bhāga- 1, pṛṣṭha – 80
2. amarakośa, pṛṣṭh – 135
3. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/82/1
4. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/82/5
5. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/82/6
6. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/121/1
7. śatapathabrāhmaṇa 11/1/6/1
8. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/121/4
9. ṛgvedasamhitā 10/121/5
10. ṛgveda, 10/129/1
11. ṛgveda, 10/129/3
12. ṛgveda, 10/9/1
13. ṛgveda, 10/9/2
14. ṛgveda, 10/9/3
15. ṛgveda, 10/9/4
16. ṛgveda, 10/9/8

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