

Vedic *Adhidaivata* Roots of Purāṇic and Hindu Astronomy

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The Vedas, the most ancient known literature of India carry a variety of natural and physical information of great importance, appreciation of which facilitates understanding the common threads passing through the cultural history of the people of India. However, study of Vedic texts is far from being a straightforward exercise of literal dictionary based translation from Sanskrit into another language to look for the original Indian approaches to astronomy, mathematics, cosmology, music, medicine and other subjects of current interest. *Nirukta* of Yāska is the earliest available text that explains some RV hymns, providing possible multiple meanings for a few RV verses. Yāska was recording the Vedic tradition as it existed in his time, adding his own explanations to be passed on further. One of the definitive clarifications offered by Yāska is about *Soma* as a nameable entity and about *Somapāna* or drinking of *Soma* by Indra. *Soma* is a creeper of the same name, from which the *soma* juice is extracted ritualistically and consumed by the officiating priests as consecrated offering in the *somayāga*. This is the *adhiyajña* explanation. But when *Soma* is said to be the food for gods (*deva*) approaching him on Pūrṇimā (full moon), the visible moon in the sky is meant by the word *Soma*. In the Upaniṣads *Soma* means *mind* in the *adhyātma* (spiritual) sense. From the time of Yāska onwards, we can infer that generations of followers of Veda inherited and practiced a blend of *adhiyajña*, *adhidaivata*, *adhyātma* as their *dharma* or way of life. This ethos of non-determinism and acceptance of balanced diversity as the implied Vedic perception is seen in several Purāṇa texts also. The concept of *devatā* (deity) from which the *adhidaivata-pakṣa* originates, has *number count* as its basis, and the action of the deities are of cosmic nature, most likely in the visible sky, in some cases reflecting axial precession of earth. In this talk I like to briefly discuss the astral/cosmological background behind

- i) Indra consuming 30 lakes of Soma (Ṛgveda 8.77.4)
- ii) Viśvedeva deities counted as 3339 drinking Soma (RV 10.52-53; Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa)
- iii) Chandas (Meters) helping Indra to cross over the night (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 4.5)
- iv) Meru-Dhruva centric astronomy & Śiśumāra constellation (Taittirīya Āraṇyaka II.19)
