



ATTRIBUTES OF THE SUN

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Sun is the symbol of the Supreme and is the manifestation of the Brahman. In the Vedic period, the Sun-god has been adored by the Vedic seers. This God saves the individual from sin, shame, dishonour and disease, offers blessings, gives wealth, health, fame and food. Among the natural phenomena, the Sun is the most dominant expression of grandeur. With the rising of the sun the living beings of the whole world is made to awaken and when the sun sets, there is the inactivity of sleep, the seeming death. He is the preserver of all the things that are stationary and all that is moving, far-seeing and is the gem of the sky. As a spy he sees all the good and bad things of all beings, dispels darkness, drives diseases and evil-dreams.

ORIGIN

The word Sun in English is a proper noun and developed from Old English ‘sunne’ and may be related to the south. It cognates to other Germanic Languages, including Old Frisian – sunne, sonne, Old Saxon – sunna, Middle Dutch – sonne, modern Dutch – zon, Old High German – sunna, modern German – Sonne, Old Norse – sunna, and Gothic – Sunnō. All Germanic terms for the Sun stem from Proto-Germanic Sunnōn.¹ In Japan, the Sun-God is worshipped in the name of *Nitten*. In Ancient Greece, *Apollo* has been described as the Sun-God. Sūrya is a god of Indo-European origin. The name of Sūrya cognates to that of Greek Helios.

The English weekday named Sunday stems from Old English (Sunnandæg; “Sun’s day”, from before 700 AD) and is ultimately a result of a Germanic interpretation of Latin dies solis, which is a translation of the Greek – Hēméra hēlíou. The Latin name for the Sun, Sol, is not common in general English language, the adjectival form is the related word ‘solar’. The term ‘sol’ is also used by planetary astronomers to refer to the duration of a solar day on another planet, such as Mars. A mean Earth solar day is approximately 24 hours, whereas a mean Martian ‘sol’ is 24 hours, 39 minutes, and 35.244 seconds.

NAMES OF THE SUN

The Sun is referred by various names such as, Āditya, Sūrya, Svar, Pṛṣni, Nāka, Gauḥ, Viṣṭap, Nabhas in Yāska's Nitukta.² In Amarakośa Sun is referred to as follows -Sūra, Aryamā, Dvadaśātmā, Divākara, Bhāskara, Ahaskara, Bradhna, Prabhākara, Vibhākara, Bhāsvān, Vivasvān, Saptāśva, Haridaśva, Uṣnaraśmi, Vikartana, Arka, Mārtanda, Mihira, Aruna, Pūṣā, Dyumaṇi, Taraṇi, Mitra, Citrabhānu, Virocana, Viśvāvasu, Grahapati, Tviṣāmpati, Aharpati, Bhānu, Hamsa, Sahasrāmśu, Savitā, Tapana, Ravi, Padmākṣā, Tejasāmṛāśi, Chāyānātha, Tamistahā, Karmasākṣi, Jagaccakṣus, Lokabandhu, Trayitanu, Pradyotana, Dinamani, Khadyota, Lokabāndhava, Ina, BhaṚga, Dhāmanidhi, Amśumāli and Abjinīpati.³

BIRTH OF THE SUN

Sun is said to be born to Kaśyapa and his wife Aditi, hence the name Āditya. It is also believed that, he is born from the eyes of the Virāṭ, and he is described as the son of Dyauḥ and Aditi. He is described with high attributes, and he is the one who gives light to the worlds and hence is said to be the lord of the day. He is praised in the Vedas, Epics, Puranas, Kāvya, Stotras, etc, and it is hard to find any scripture, without his descriptions.

There is a reference in the Vana Parva of Mahābhārata, which states the Sun to be the father of all creatures. Yudhiṣṭhira has been described to have propitiated the Sun-god by chanting the 108 names of Sun (as recited by the hermit Dhaumya to Dharmaputra), for the purpose of feeding thousands of Brahmanas who followed him to the forest.

एवं भानुमयं ह्यन्नं भूतानां प्राणधारणम् । पितृषु सर्वभूतानां तस्मात् तं शरणं ब्रज ॥⁴

THE SUN IN THE VEDAS

The complete power of Viṣṇu is the three Vedas (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma) and in turn the power of those Vedas blazes in the form of the Sun. That power destroys all the sins in the world. Viṣṇu stays inside the Sun in the form of Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma for the sustenance and protection of the world. Vedas are said to be Parāśakti and she stays inside the particular Āditya of the month. The Sun is praised in the morning in Ṛg Veda, at the noon in Yajur Veda and in the evening in the Sāma Veda.

The Ṛg Vedic poets were deeply moved by the mysterious working of the awe-inspiring forces of nature, since Vedic times and the ancestors have recognized the divine power of the Sun. The sun is the greatest source of light and is the symbol of knowledge. The Ṛg Veda speaks of five Solar deities - Savitṛdeva, Sūrya, Mitra, Pūṣan and Viṣṇu.

SAVITṚ DEVA

Savitṛ is the Stimulator God, who stands for the enlivening or quickening aspect of the Sun and is celebrated in eleven hymns in the Ṛg Veda. The word ‘Savitṛ’ is derived from the root Sū—to stimulate, and literally means the impeller or enlivener. According to Sāyanācārya, the Sun is called Savitṛ before rising and from sunrise to sunset he is called Sūrya.

Savitṛ is connected with the evening as well as the morning, as at his command the night comes and he brings all beings to rest. हवयामि रात्रीं जगतो निवेशनीं । हवयामि देवं सवितारमृतये ॥⁵

He is good complexioned, a golden deity with golden eye, golden tongue, golden hands and golden arms beholding all creatures. He ascends a golden car drawn by two or more brown, white-footed horses. The other Gods follow Savitṛ’s lead, and no being can resist his will. He is described as shining with the rays of the Sun, yellow-haired, raises up his light continually from the east and conveys the departed spirit to where the righteous dwell.

SŪRYA

Sūrya is the god of *dyuloka*, the celestial world and is a concrete solar deity. The name Sūrya is a derivative of Svár *light*, and cognates with the Avestian *hvarē Sun*, which has swift horses called *hárít bays*. Sūrya is drawn by seven Horses and is addressed in 10 hymns. He is the gem of the sky, or a variegated stone set in the midst of the heaven. He is also called a mottled bull, or a white and brilliant steed brought by dawn. The name Surya designates the orb of the Sun as well as the God. He is the most concrete of the solar deities. He arouses people to activities. His car is drawn with one steed called *etaśá*, with the great waving banner of the Sūrya desiring to revolve hither.

उद्वेति प्रसवीता जनानाम् ।⁶

He is the soul or guardian of all that moves or stationary. He drives away sickness, disease and evil dreams in all creatures, Sūrya is conceived as a bird, traversing space, he is a ruddy bird that flies or he is a flying eagle.

श्येनो न दीयन्नन्वेति पाथः ।⁷

Sūrya is a brilliant weapon which Mitra and Varuṇa conceal with cloud and rain. He shines for the world, for men and gods. He dispels the darkness, which he rolls up like a skin, which his rays throw of like a skin into the waters. He measures the days and prolongs life. He is the golden gem of the sky, far seeing rises, whose goal is distant, speeding onward, and shining.

दूरे अर्थस्तरणिर्भाजमानः ।⁸

SUN AND MITRA

Mitra mainly stimulates people to activity, and is praised in nine hymns in Ṛg Veda. He holds fast the Earth and the Heaven, Heaven by his greatness and Earth by his glories. Primarily he watches the people ceaselessly. Mitra is generally invoked along with Varuṇa. *Śam no mitraḥ Śam varuṇaḥ*. This Mitra is adorable, most propitious, he is a king wielding fair sway, has been a disposer.

अयं मित्रो नमस्य सुशेवो राजा सुक्षत्रो अजनिष्ट वेधाः।⁹

Gods and men depend on Mitra. He, among gods and mortals, has provided food, according to the ordinances he desires, for the man whose sacrificial grass is spread.

मित्रो देवेष्वायुषु जनाय वृक्तर्बाहृषे । इष इष्टव्रता अकः ॥¹⁰

SUN AND PŪṢAN

Pūṣan has been invoked in eight hymns of the Ṛgveda. He is the prosperer God. It is the beneficent power of the great god Sun. He is manifested mainly as a pastoral deity. His car is drawn by goats, carries a goad and thus he is a shepherd God. He has a vague personality, possessing a beard and braided hair, carries a golden spear, an awl and a goad. *Karambha* ‘gruel’ is his favourite food. He is specially connected with marriage in the wedding hymn.¹¹ This God, is the beneficent power of the Sun manifested mainly for its pastoral aspect. With his golden aerial ships, *Pūṣan* acts as the messenger of *Sūrya* and in the Upaniṣads, *Pūṣan* stands for the Sun.

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।

तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥

पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्राजापत्य व्यूह रश्मीन् समूह तेजः ।¹²

In these verses, *Pūṣan* refers to the Sun, and one who prays to *Pūṣan* will be the first to receive the blessings of wealth.

यो अस्मै हविषाविधन् न तं पूषापि मृष्यते । प्रथमो विन्दते वसु ॥¹³

SUN & VIṢṆU

In Ṛgveda, *Viṣṇu* is less frequently invoked. The name is derived from *viṣ-* be active and hence the meaning ‘the active one’. He takes three strides covering the three worlds. The commentators signify the three steps with the rising, culminating and setting of the sun. It also refers to the three divisions of the world: earth, air and heaven. The two steps are visible to men whereas the third step is like a eye in the heaven, shining brightly. Six hymns in the Ṛg Veda are addressed to *Viṣṇu*. He sets in motion like a revolving wheel his ninety steeds (days) with their four names (seasons), an allusion to the three hundred

and sixty days of the solar year. He seems to be a personification of the activity of the Sun, moving swiftly with his strides passing through the whole universe and in his abode, the pious men and the Gods rejoice.

तदस्य प्रियमभि पाथो अश्यां नरो यच देवयवो मदन्ति ॥¹⁴

In the Ramayana, Agastya praises the valour of Sun to Rāma in the Yuddha-Kānda when Rāma has not achieved victory over Rāvana in the battle. When Śrī Rāma was fighting with Rāvana in Lañkā, dejection befell him, his heart being weighed down with faintness, for a little while. Rāvana made the best use of this opportunity and began to advance even when the gods had gathered in the sky above to witness the fight. Agastya, at that particular moment, taught Śrī Rāma the Āditya-hṛdaya mantra, a hymn in praise of the Sun-god. The stotra consists of the various names of the Sun in praise and Sage Agastya admits that, the utterance of the names of the Sun brings victory. When Śrī Rāma chanted that mantra, he resumed the fight with vigour and Rāvana was defeated and slain.

आदित्यहृदयं पुण्यं सर्वशत्रुविनाशनम् । जयावहं जपं नित्यमक्षयं परमं शिवम् ॥¹⁵

THE CHARIOT OF THE SUN

The chariot of the Sun is nine yojanas long. The wheel attached to it is the great wheel of time with three centres, five tyres and six spokes. Seven horses tied to the Chariot are the Seven Vedic Metres namely Gāyatri, Brhatī, Uṣṇik, Jagatī, Triṣṭup, Anuṣṭup and Pankti. The axle used for the chariot of the Sun is forty five thousand five hundred yojanas long. The length of each half of the yoke is proportionate to the length of the axle. The names of the Sun's horses are

जयोऽजयश्च विजयो जितप्राणो जितक्षमः । मनोजवो जितक्रोधो वाजिनः सप्तकीर्तिताः ॥

CHARIOTEER ARUṆA

The Charioteer of the Sun is named Aruṇa. He is said to be the son of Kāśyapa by Vinatā. He is said to be the brother of Garuda and father of Sampāti and Jaṭāyu. Aruṇa is said to be lame and there is a Puranic story behind it. Vinatā out of haste opened one of the pots, in which she preserved her egg and from the half-developed egg a child emerged and he was Aruṇa.

When the Sun was frequently attacked by Rāhu, the Sun started burning virulently. The Devas were frightened by this and took refuge in Brahma. Brahma, called his grand-son Aruṇa and asked him to stand as charioteer in front of the Sun God everyday so that the Sun's intensity might be reduced. From that day onwards Aruṇa has been functioning as the charioteer of the Sun.

There is a hymn in praise of Aruṇa in the 'prathama praśna' of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* which has 130 passages written in Prose, the Ṛṣi is Aruṇa and the devatā is Āditya.

SEASONS AND SUN

There are 12 Months and 6 seasons in a year. The seasons are Summer, Winter, Rainy, Autumn, Spring and Due. In every season the chariot of the sun is occupied by seven persons and they are Separate Ādityas, Hermits, Gandharvas, Celestial Maids, Yaksas, Serpents and Giants. These group of seven in each month are responsible for heat, coldness, rain etc., in the nature.

The following table gives an account of the seven persons sitting in the chariot of the Sun every month.

These seven persons live in the region of the Sun in their time, the hermits Praise the Sun; the Gandharvas sing; the Celestial maids dance; the Giants walk behind as guards; the Serpents prepare the horses to be yoked; the Yaksas hold the bridle & the Bālakhilyas stand round the Sun.

S. No.	Month	Āditya	Hermit	Gandharva	Celestial Maid	Yaksa	Serpent	Gaint
1.	Caitra (or) Madhumāsa	Dhātā	Pulatsya	Tumburu	Kratusthalā	Rathabhrt	Vasuki	Heti
2.	Vaiśākha (or) Madhava	Aryaman	Pulaha	Narada	Punjikasthalā	Rathaujas	Kacavina	Praheti
3.	Jyestha	Mitra	Atri	Hāhā	Menaka	Rathasvana	Taksaka	Pauruseya
4.	Āsādhā	Varuna	Vasistha	Hūhū	Sahajanyā	Citraratha	Nāga	Ratha
5.	Srāvāna	Indra	Angiras	Viśvāvasu	Pramlocā	Srotas	Elāputra	Sarpi
6.	Bhādrapada	Vivasvan	BhṚṅgu	Ugrasena	Anumlocā	Apurana	Śankapala	Vyāghra
7.	Aśvanī	Pūsā	Gautama	Vasuruci	Ghrtāci	Susena	Dhananjaya	Vāta
8.	Karttika	Parjanya	Bharodvāja	Another Viśvāvasu	Viśvāci	Senajit	Airavata	Āpa
9.	Mārgaśirsa	Amśa	Kaśyapa	Citrasena	Urvaśī	Tārksya	Mahāpadma	Vidyut
10.	Pausa	Bhaga	Kratu	Ūr nāyu	Pūrvacitti	Aristanemi	Karkotaka	Sphurja
11.	Māgha	Tvastā	Jamadagni	Dhṛtarāṣṭra	Tilottamā	Rtajit	Kambala	Brahmopeta
12.	Phālguna	Visnu	Visvāmitra	Suvarcas	Rambhā	Satyajit	Aśvatara	Yajñopeta

OTHER ATTRIBUTES

There are many other forms in which we could see the Sun God. A Puranic Story reveals that the disc of Viṣṇu (Cakra), Śiva's triśūla (trident), Kubera's Puṣpakavimāna and Subrahmanya's weapon Śakti were made of the fraction of heat (i.e., 1/8th of effulgence of heat) of Sun.

In therapeutic treatment there is a Mudra called, Sūrya Mudra, which increases the Eye Power. Sun has been the protector of Devas, killing all the asuras. There are many old stories praising his valour and greatness. Sun has benefited Pāñcālī with an unseen giant for her protection and she procured the 'Akṣayapātra' (the pot that never became empty) from him.

SACRIFICE TO THE SUN

The *Aśvamedha* sacrifice gained importance in ancient India. The sole aim of this sacrifice was to gain victory over the foes and get progeny and prosperity on the other. In this sacrifice the presiding deity is Sūryadeva, the Sun God. The horse which is sacrificed in this holy performance is the symbol of the Sun-God. He is the Lord of the farmers and in the festival of Pongal the main offering is offered to the Sun.

WORSHIP OF SUN GOD

The Sun-God is an Āditya. The Ādityas are a group of gods. Six entire hymns and parts of two hymns are there in the Ṛgveda to praise the Ādityas. The Sun is the only source of life and energy. The worship of the Sun was a natural phenomenon since antiquity. Thus in the Vedic age the Sun-God of the primitive mind got transformed and sublimated and became the Lord of this Universe. He supports the Cosmic manifestation in space and time. There is clear evidence that the people of Indus valley civilization worshipped the Sun-God. According to Marshall, the wheel, circle with radiant rays, bird and the bull and the *swastika* mark were the symbols of the Sun.

SUN THE HEALER

In ancient times the science of Āyurveda in India believed that Sun is a natural element to cure leprosy. In Ṛg Veda, Sūrya has been invoked as a great healer. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa narrates the story of *Kauśika* Brahmin of Pratiṣṭhāna who was suffering from leprosy and cured due to the grace of the Sun God.

नेत्रोपनिषत् is a स्तोत्र recited for the treatment of eyes. The praise of the Sun forms the basis of the stotra. ॐ नमश्चक्षुस्तेजोदात्रे दिव्यभास्कराय । ॐ नमो भगवते सूर्याय । असतो मां सद्गमय । तमसो मां ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्मांममृतं गमय । पुरुष प्रजानामुदयत्येष सूर्यः ॐ नमो भगवते आदित्याय अवाग्वादिने स्वाहा ॥¹⁶

Here is a list of Sun- Worship in earlier Centuries –

S.No.	Period	Name of the King	Situated at	Description
1.	2 nd Cen. A.D		North-west India (Multan)	First temple of Sun-God
2.	699-736	King Lalitāditya	Kashmir	Built on the ruins of the temple already built by Rāmāditya
3.	11 th Cen. AD.		Modhera (Western India)	The Sun rays falls on the Sun-God.Now Considered as a Monument.
4.			Konark (Orissa)	Last Monument. Temple in the form of celestial car with 24 wheels and 7 steeds.
5.	7 th -8 th Cen.A.D.		Hatodi (Nagpur District)	Red Stone. One foot height.Facing upward in standing position with lotus stalks in both the hands.

CONCLUSION

There are many temples in and around India for Sun God, who is considered to be nature himself. In the Central Museum of Nagpur there are two Standing Sūrya figures belonging to 8th – 9th Cen A.D., along with the Sun-God with a horse-chariot of 17th Cen.A.D. from Ramtek . In many Sūrya images found in north-India, the common feature is that their hands hold full-blown lotuses and they were boots.

Sun is the lord of lords and paves way for the human beings to attain the bliss. It as only by the presence of the Sun; Lord Hanuman was raised to a higher status. Thus the Lord of the day, the Sun, Showers his blessings on those who prays him. One should desire to be cured by the blessings of the Sun-God, for the physical and mental health.

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