

Religious beliefs among Hindus with special reference to Al-beruni.

Sonia Jamwal.

Research Scholar

Department OF History.

University of Jammu.

Abstract; This paper high –lights about the belief system of Hindus with special reference to Alberuni and also through the Puranic and Vedic texts and effort has been made to through light on the fact that what these texts talk about the beliefs.

Keywords; Puranas, Vedas, Epics, Rig-Veda, Yajurveda, Samveda, Atharvaveda.

Introduction; “The Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana ,the Mahabharata and the eighteen Puranas form the massive basement on which stands the magnificent edifice of Indian religion ,thought ,culture and literature .It’s the two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata which serve as the strongest factor that hold together the Indian life in all its growth through centuries and has sustained.”ⁱ Talking about the Vedic literature, it has always confined mainly to the “priest and aristocratic classes, the Upanishads were confined to the intellectuals and philosophers.”ⁱⁱ But the epics served as the real Vedas for the common masses. “These have always moulded the life and character of the people.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Vedic literature is divided into four books which *are* Rig-Veda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and in the last is the number of Atharaveda. “The literal meaning of the term *Veda* is to know”^{iv} which signifies knowledge. “The Vedic literature according to Alberuni comprises of the commandments and prohibitions detailed statements about rewards and punishments intended to encourage and to deter but it contains hymns of praise and treats of various kinds of sacrifices to the fire, which are so numerous in number.”^v Each of the Veda comprises of two main parts a Samhita or collection of mantras or hymns and the second part is Brahmanas or ritualistic illustrations. According to the religious beliefs of the Hindu, “Vedic literature is a religious system which has come from god and it came to Hindus through Brahmanas.”^{vi} To each *Paraná* is attached an Upanishad which contains mystical doctrine. “Where the Samhita and the Brahmanic literature is meant for common masses, the Upanishad are for philosophical inquirers.”^{vii} Among all the Vedic literature Rig-Veda is the oldest one and it has the total number of “one thousand and seventeen hymns which are in the praise of a deity.”^{viii} Then comes the YajurVeda and it is in prose style. The hymns contained in it are meant for sacrificial purpose.”^{ix} Samaveda, “it contains hymns related with chanting of mantra.”^x Atharva Veda according to Alberuni, it’s recited according to a melody with a nasal tone, this *Veda* is less in favour among the Hindus. “It attracts sacrifices to fire and contains injunctions’ regarding the dead and what is to be done with them”.^{xi} According to the most famous religious beliefs of *Hindus* and “the Vedic literature is *apaurushya* [not made by man] are therefore self authoritative.”^{xii} So, “the Vedas contain the rites of the Hindu religion and are recited according to certain modulations and had been obliterated in the last *Dvapara* Yuga.”^{xiii} There is a practise prevalent among Hindus of not reciting the Vedas in the dwellings because according to their belief system, “reciting Veda within the dwelling could cause abortion to women and cattle.”^{xiv} Therefore they step out in open to recite them there. The division of Vedic literature into four prominent Vedas one by *rishi* Vyas and according to, “Alberuni who had four *shishyas*(students)and he made them carry Vedic literature in their memory and the four shishyas were Paila, Vaisham Payana, Jaimini, and Sumantu.”^{xv} According to the religious beliefs of *Hindus*, “a student who has performed the upkarma ceremony in the month of Shravana(july –august), shall not study Veda for one month at the time of evening in the month of December to January , moreover the study of Vedas was to be avoided on a market road but after having smeared the space with cow dung one could study the Veda.”^{xvi} If any

habitation started on a burial ground then also the recitation of was prohibited by religious scriptures but if “cultivation was practised there then the recitation was not prohibited.”^{xxvii} According to beliefs of Hindus where there lied a corpse there also recitation was not allowed there and also in “the presence of shudras recitation of religious scriptures was prohibited.”^{xxviii} In fact at the time of lightening and thundering also the Vedic recitation was not conducted. Nor could, “the recitation could be conducted when the cows were prevented from leaving the village on account of thieves.”^{xxix} In fact if any criminal activity was executed or while riding on any animal, “the study of Vedas was not supposed to be performed.”^{xxx} In fact at the time of barking of dogs, braying of ass, cry of jackals, wolf or owl and all rounds of musical instruments “the study of Vedas was prohibited.”^{xxxi} In fact if in the neighbourhood the recitation of Vedas was being carried then the recitation of Vedas in the same manner was to be avoided. Moreover at “the instance of foul smell the recitation of Vedic literature was to be discontinued and if the hands of a person were dirty then also the recitation was to be discontinued and after and if food was prepared in honour of a dead person then also the recitation of Vedas was to be stopped for a day and in the evening.”^{xxxi} At the time of the roar of the wind or at the time of storm the recitation had to be discontinued while sitting or immersed in water ,or at night with doors open the recitation had to be discontinued also, “nor at night with door closed the recitation had to be performed.”^{xxxii} According to the religious beliefs of Hindus the one who studied, ‘he was supposed to begin with ‘OM’ at the times of performance of ceremonies “the whole *Veda* is to be studied under a vow of obedience until there is no doubt among the pupil regarding it. ’’^{xxxiv} After the *Vedic* literature comes the Puranic literature which serves as the guiding force of the religious beliefs among Hindus. As far as the origin of Puranas is concerned it’s mention is made in connection with “*Itihas* in the Atharva-Veda ,Shatapatha Brahmana , Gopatha Brahmana , Brihad Aryanka Upanishad and other works of Vedic literature and Atharva Veda contains the earliest mention of the word Purana.”^{xxxv}

The Puranic literature comprises of majorly themes and these themes are divided into five categories

1. *Sarga* (creation or evolution of the universe from its natural cause).
2. *Prati-sarga* (creation of the world from its constituent elements).
3. *Vansha*(genealogies of gods, demons, patriarchs, sages and kings) .
4. *Manvatara* (cosmic cycles each of which is ruled over by a Manu, the first father of mankind).
5. ‘*Vanshanucarita* which accounts of royal dynasties.’^{xxxvi}

According to religious beliefs of the Hindus it was the sage, “Vyasa who utilized the *aharyanas* [tales]. “*Upakhyanas*(anecdotes),*gathas*(metrical songs) or proverbial sayings current in ancient society and Kalpakotis saying which have come down through long time back and compiled these into original *Puranic Samhita* or Puranic texts.”^{xxxvii} One important fact related to the performance of a Vedic sacrifice, *akhyanas* was always

performed by Brahmans. “This act included narration and recitation of Puranas.”^{xxxviii} What all Puranic literature incorporated was “the glorification and praise of different deities and these deities included deities like Brahma ,Vishnu and Shiva.”^{xxxix} Things like customs, rites, penances, mention about different castes along with caste duties ,orders of life ,customs ,penances ,sins also form the material of incorporation in Puranas. Most interesting things like “the description about hells, Karma –vipaka(result of good and bad –deeds),devotional vows ,places of pilgrimage ,conservation of temples and images of gods ,mystics rites and practices are also there in Puranic texts”^{xxx}. Puranic literature is regarded as, “the soul of Vedas. This literature is considered as the deal for the common life among Hindus.”^{xxxi} Puranas serve as the mine of information and they fetch information on astronomy, astrology, customs,superstitions ,medical science ,knowledge of precious stones, rules regarding construction of image of deities ,architecture, about art ,about politics and constitutes a very important branch of the sacred literature of Hindus. Puranas are seen from two main stand points, “the first is when they manifest and demonstrate the Vedic truths and secondly, they deal with the five well known stages in the Hindu cosmology that is the creation of the universe.”^{xxxii} “It’s the creation of universe after destruction .Genealogy of great periods of time with Manu as the primal ancestor, the history of dynasties of both solar and lunar bodies.”^{xxxiii}

As far as Puranas are concerned they are eighteen in number, they can be classified into three categories.

1. Those which talk about Brahmada, the Bramavaivarthmada, the Markendeya, the Bhavishya and the Vaman and hence they are devoted to Brahma.
2. Those which talk about the Bhagwata, the Naradiya, the Garuda, the Padma and the Varaha and hence they are devoted to Vishnu.

3. In the last, “which talk about Shiva, the linga, the Skanda, the Agni, the Mastya, the kurma and is dedicated to Shiva.”^{xxxiv}

Puranas are eighteen in number and they are as follows

1. The Aditya Purana.
2. Matsya Purana .
3. Kurma Purana.
4. Narasimha Purana .
5. Vamana Purana.
6. Vayu Purana.
7. Nanda Purana.
8. Skanda Purana.
9. Aditya Purana .
10. Soma Purana .
11. Samba Purana.
12. Brahmanda Purana.
13. Markendeya Purana .
14. Vishnu Purana.
15. Tarkshya Purana .
16. Brahma Purana.
17. Bhavishya Purana .
18. Shiva Purana.

According to Alberuni there are eighteen Puranas which are;

1. Brahmanda Purana.
2. Padma Purana.
3. Vishnu Purana.
4. Shiva Purana.
5. Bhagavata Purana.
6. Narada Purana.
7. Naradeya Purana .
8. Agni Purana.
9. Agni Purana.
9. Bhavishya Purana.
10. Brahmavaivarta Purana.
11. Linga Purana.
12. Varaha Purana.
13. Skanda Purana.
14. Vamana Purana.
15. Kurma Purana.
16. Matsya purana.

17. Garuda Purana.
18. Brahmanda Purana.

But according to Alberuni, There is one more list of Puranas given by Vishnu Purana and Thus being eighteen in number most of them are called by the names of animals, human or angelic being because they contain stories about them or because, “the books consists of answers which the creature whose name forms the title of the books has been given to certain questions.”^{xxxv} About the concept of god which are prevalent among Hindus ,Alberuni regards that “they think god is one eternal without beginning and end god is almighty all wise life giving life ruling preserving and his sovereignty is unique beyond all likeness and unlikeness and he does not resemble anything nor does anything resembles him.”^{xxxvi} Alberuni regards that the people of India use the term *ishvara* for god, who is self-sufficing gives without receiving and for them it’s not impossible to think that “the existing beings are not and that he is but it is impossible to think that he is not and that they are.”^{xxxvii} Thus we can say that Hindu religion belief system comprises everything what is there is Vedas, Puranas, epics and therefore the whole belief system comprises within itself majority the rites, rituals, myths, superstitions etc. The most interesting element of Hinduism is mythology. “Therefore the religious belief system in Hinduism can be traced back to 1200 b.c and 1000 B.C. Due to the reason that this was the time when scriptures were framed by Aryans who began to settle in North West India about 1500 b.c.”^{xxxviii} Talking about Vedas, it is Yaksa coolest commentator on the Veda who gives details about Vedas which contain the beginning element of Hinduism and all this is interconnected writer each other which comes from Vedic mythology. Yaksa gives classification of the Vedic gods who are Agni, vayu or Indra and surya. According to Yaksa these there were main deities in the early Vedic period. “Again whose place is on earth, vayu or Indra whose place is in the air and Surya whose place is in the sky.”^{xxxix} These deities are regarded as immortal in the Indian mythology but not claimed not to be claimed to be self –existing beings. These deities are addressed by different names and are associated with certain important tasks and super natural powers. In fact there are certain hymns associated with these deities also among with these three main deities there were other deities also who are Aditi, Ashvins, Usha,Indrani, Prajanya, Varun ,Maruts, Soma, Tvastri or Visvakara ,Yama and Indra. All the deities are addressed by different names.

These deities like the sun or surya ,pushan,varun ,ashvins, ushas were called as solar deities like indra ,indrani,prajanya,vayu,the maruts,soma,tvastri,yama,were called as the storm deities. In the Vedic literature there are semi-divine beings like Gndharavas and apsaras and many mythical sages also find their memories mentions like Manu,Angiras,bhrgu,vashishtha etc. “The practise of sacrifices forms the important but the most ancient deities in the general option to be Dyaus(heaven) and prithvi (earth).”^{xl} Aspects of Vedic pantheon serving as the motivating factor for performing many rituals .It was the “Brahmanas which made mythology subservient to the concept of sacrificing.”^{xli} Moreover epic literature presents “three sectarian gods Vishnu-Krishna, Brahmaand rudra.”^{xlii} Talking about the most important Vedic deity who dominates the Vedic pantheon and enjoys the most important Vedic deity who dominates the Vedic deity who dominates the Vedic pantheon and enjoys much importance is the rain god Indra. There are things of importance which are associated with him and they are Maruts and Soma, Soma is a plant of importance in “religious ceremonies of the Aryans in their common abode in the Balkh region adjoining the Muja vat mountains.”^{xliii} Maruts are regarded as the messengers of death and the name comes from the term Marut(being taken from mar that is to die). “The Vedic poets associate Maruts with the war god.”^{xliv} There are other Vedic deities too like Vayu, Tvastri, and Yama.

Vayu; he is the god of storms and it often regarded being associated with Indra.He is also regarded as ruling the atmosphere and is said to “have connection with *maruts* the storm deities.”^{xlv}

Tvastri; He is also called as Vishvakarma (the architecture of gods).He is associated with many important tasks like forming the heavenly places, making weapons for war like gods, “he also forges the thunderbolts for Indra and also sharpens the iron axe of the deity Agni.”^{xlvi} He is also called mechanist, the ornament fabricator, the constructor of the chariots of the deities .Thus, “he is called the chief of artists.”^{xlvii}

Yama; In the Puranic literature he is regarded as to rule the wicked in Narka where death takes a person according to Hindu mythology, “Vishnu Parana regards that all men become slaves to the power of Yama, by whom they are sentenced to painful punishments.”^{xlviii} According to the religious beliefs prevalent among Hindus ‘the soul is believed to reach yam’s abode in four hours forty five minutes.’^{xlix}

Solar deities

1. **Sun;** He is the important solar deity and is addressed by the name Surya and according to Hindu mythology he is called Savitri when he is invisible and is addressed as Surya when he is visible to people. He is regarded as a son of Aditi and at times he is regarded as son of Dayus from the character ascribed to him thus it is natural to regard him as, “the sun shining in his strength and Surya as the sun when rising and setting”¹. In Puranic texts he is regarded to be worshipped by offering him Gayatri Mantra by Brahmins. An interesting fact about sun god is that he is worshipped every year on Sunday in the month of Magh, in fact to recover from prolonged illness, it's regarded important to hire a Brahman for recitation of mantras in praise of sun to ward off illness.^{li}
2. **Pushan;** Usually hymns are addressed to him and his praise is done in connection with Indra. Though his character is not clear but he is said to behold the entire universe and is addressed as the guide of travellers and the protector of cattle. Moreover according to Indian mythology, “he is invoked in the marriage ceremonials and is asked to take the bride's hand.”^{lii}
3. **Mitra and Varun;** These two deities are usually referred in hymns named together. Though Varuna is often addressed alone Mitra is not addressed very often. “The commentators give the idea that Mitra represented and ruled over day.”^{liii} He is called as the king of gods and men is mighty and terrible and no one can resist his authority. “He is sovereign ruler of universe.”^{liv} According to the belief system of Hindus, “it is he who makes the sun to shine in heaven, the wind that blow at his command and he is the one who has made the depths of the sea.”^{lv} He knows the flight of the birds, the sky, “the course of the far travelling wind, the paths of ships on the ocean and he holds all the secret things that have been or shall be done. He witnesses men's truth and falsehood.”^{lvi}
4. **The Ashvins;** They are regarded as, “the physicians of the gods and are declared to be able to restore to health, the blind, the sick, the lame and the emaciated amongst mortals. “They are the special guardians of the slow and backward.”^{lvii} They are also regarded as, “the presiding force over, love and marriage.”^{lviii} In the Vedic texts “they are called as restorer of the youth.”^{lix}
5. **Ushas;** This goddess is representative of the dawn. “The Vedic hymns address her among the most beautiful.” She is described as the daughter of the sky and the night and is related to Varuna. She is also regarded as “the wife of the sun and at times Agni is given as her lover in the mythology.”^{lx} She is regarded as dispelling the darkness, disclosing the treasure it concealed. She illuminates the world revealing its most distant extremities. “She is also the life and health of all things, causes birds to fly from their nests.”^{lxi} There were other attributes related with her for example she regarded as “the provider of good service to the gods, by causing the worshippers towards, and the sacrificial fires are regarded to be lighted by her.”^{lxii}

Puranic deities;

1. **Brahma;** He is regarded as being charged with the creation of the world. “Vedic literature, epics and smritis assign him the duty of creation.”^{lxiii} He is described as the first god who is creator and preserver of the universe. He is called god of gods. “He enjoyed the three duties creation, sustaining and dissolving the world.”^{lxiv} Though at the later stage, “the task of preservation and dissolution was taken away from.”^{lxv}
2. **Saraswati;** She is regarded as the wife of Brahma and most importantly called the goddess of science of wisdom and learning. “According to Matsya Purana she is regarded both as a river and a goddess.”^{lxvi}
3. **Vishnu;** The work of preservation is assigned to Vishnu. “He is called as *Ishwara* and *Narayana*.”^{lxvii}
4. **Lakshmi;** She is regarded as the goddess of love, beauty and prosperity. She is known as, “the wife of Vishnu and in Indian mythology she is famously known as Sri.”^{lxviii}
5. **Shiva;** His abode is regarded to be Mount Kailash in the Himalayas and he is known by different names “like *bhairava*, *gangadhara*, *Chandra shekhara* etc.”^{lxix}

Conclusion; Thus there is a long list of both Vedic and Puranic deities along with many more but these are the main and each deity is assigned with special duty, power, hymns and a female deity. The Vedic and Puranic text also thus serve as an important source of knowledge about both Vedic and Puranic deities, hymns and all the belief-system among Hindus is derived from these text, thus these texts serve an important purpose of belief system from ages at least from the time period Vedic Aryans and mythology also derives its origin from these texts only.

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