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SOMA AND RUDRA IN VEDIC MYTHOLOGY

BY

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India can boast of *twelve* great *linga* temples¹ which have, for centuries, commanded an especial veneration from the devotees of Śiva. Perhaps the most famous of these is the shrine of Somanātha, situated in Prabhāsa Pāṭan on the southern coast of Saurashtra, whose wealth and splendour attracted the avaricious eyes of Suṭtan Mahmūd of Ghazni who on January 8, 1026, destroyed the idols of the temple and looted its rarest treasures.² The shrine is named after the moon-god Soma who, under a curse, is believed to have set up the *linga* and worshipped it with devotion. The story goes that, though the moon-god had married all the twenty-seven daughters of Dakṣa, he had a special fascination for Rohiṇī to the great chagrin of her sisters. Dakṣa advised his son-in-law to treat all the wives equally; but, advice proving of no avail, the son-in-law was cursed whereby he contracted phthisis. In vain the moon-god appears to have made manifold attempts to get over the effects of the curse. As he, defeated in his attempts, continue to wane, herbs became either tasteless or failed to grow altogether. The high gods had to intervene in the matter, and a compromise was arranged between the disputants. Soma had to promise equal devotion towards all his wives and regard for womankind in general and brahmīns. He could get rid of the disease already on him if he bathed in the *Prabhāsatīrtha*, the spot at which the Sarasvatī mingles with the ocean, and worshipped Lord Mahādeva there. The moon-god obeyed and regained his form and beauty.³

This is the story in the Epics. My attempt now is to discuss what sort of relationship existed already between the gods Soma and Śiva in the Vedic period. It may be noted at the very outset that Soma is one of the most important deities in the Ṛgveda. The name occurs hundreds of times and at least 120 whole hymns are devoted to the praise of this divinity. It is indeed true that the allusion in most of these occurrences is either to the concrete plant of

1. For a list see Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, p. 322 n.

2. K. M. Munshi, *Somnath the Shrine Eternal*, Bombay, 1951, p. 26.

3. *Mahābhārata* (Nirayasaagara Press Edition), IX. 36.

Ample recompense (*brhat*)¹² awaits those who worship these two gods together. Their horses become strong and cows become fat. Themselves they become healthy and rich:¹³

अग्नीषोमा हविषः प्रस्थितस्य वीतं हर्यतं वृषणा जुषेथाम् ।

(Vide p. 3 of original)

मुशर्मणा स्ववसा हि भूतमथा धत्तं यजमानाय शं योः ॥

अग्नीषोमा पिपृतमर्वतो न

आप्यायन्तामुस्त्रियां हव्यसूदः ।

When Soma and Rudra go together, they are both armed with sharp weapons and shafts (*tigmāyudhau tigmahetī*),¹⁴ and are supplicated by devotees for blessings to man and beast, for healing medicines and for deliverance from sin:¹⁵

शं नो भूतं द्विपदे शं चतुष्पदे ।

सोमा रुद्रा युवमेतान्यस्मे विश्वातनूषु भेषजानि धत्तम् ।

अवस्यतं मुञ्चतं यन्नो अस्तितनूषु बद्धं कृतमेनो अस्मत् ॥

If, therefore, we read in the Epics that the *Prabhāsatīrtha*, where Soma bathes on every New-Moon day,¹⁶ has the power to make every devout pilgrim who bathes there radiant even like the full Moon (*prabhāsate yathā Somah*) or as lustrous as the glorious Sun (*vimalārkasamadyutiḥ*),¹⁷ we are treated to no empty hyperbole. The verdict of the Epic has its firm roots in the beliefs of the oldest known period of our history.

12. RV. I. 93. 10 c.

13. RV. I. 93. 7 & 12.

14. RV. VI. 74. 4 a.

15. RV. VI. 74. 1 and 3.

16. *Mahābhārata*, IX. 36. 41.

17. *Ibid.*, III. 80. 64.