CHAPTER IV
THE VEDIC CONCEPTION OF GOD

In this chapter, we propose to throw some light on the Vedic conception of God. The Vedas teach the worship of One God who is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent Lord of the universe. The Vedic conception of God put in a nutshell is expressed clearly in the following well-known verse of the Yajur Veda 40-8.

स पर्य्याच्छुक्मकायम्यमानार्नावः | कविर्मनीर्पणि परिभः
स्वयम्भूयांशिखात्यावतो | स्थानः व्यद्याच्छाशतीष्ठः || समाभ्यः || यजूः ४०.८\

It means........

God is All-pervading, Radiant and formless, free from physical wound as He is without sinews, most Holy, Unpierced by any sin. Omniscient, Knower of the mind of all, All conquering and Self-existent. He has created the objects of the world for His eternal subjects (immortal souls).

According to the Vedas, such an Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient God is One and He alone is to be worshipped by all with pure heart and noble deeds.

The Vedas declare......

य एक इत्तमु परुहि कृप्तोनां विचरणोः ||
पत्तिज्ञे वृपकन्तुः || ओऽ ६.४८.१६\

O man ! Praise God who is One and One only and who is the Omniscient and Omnipotent Lord of all beings.

एक एव नमस्यो विश्रब्धः || अथवा २.२.९\

One God alone is to be worshipped by all people. He is Adorable.
One God alone who is the Giver of true happiness and bliss is to be worshipped by all.

It is true that some scholars maintain that the Vedas enjoin upon us the worship of many Gods such as Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuna etc. But their idea is entirely wrong. In the Vedas, Agni, Mitra, Varuna, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and other words of this type are principally used for God. For instance, we are expressly told in the Rigveda—

इन्द्र निर्मन वरुणमयिनिमहर्षो दिव्यः स सुपृणो गरुऩान्।
एकं सहित्रा वहुधा वदन्यानिं यम मातरिष्वनामाहु:॥ ऋ० ९.९६॥

i.e. That Supreme Spirit is the Protector of all and He pervades and gives light to all bright things. He is called Indra or the Glorious, Mitra or the Friendly, Varuna or the Greatest and the best, Agni or Adorable. Though One, He is called by the wise, by many names such as Agni (The Adorable) Yama (The Ruler or Controller) Matarishva or the Mighty.

The learned and the wise describe the One existing God in many forms of expressions.

In the Rig Veda 10.82.3 the idea of one God is put in the following manner:—

यो न पिता जनिता यो विधाता, धामानि वेद भूवनानि विश्वा।
यो देवानाम नामदाह एक एव तं संप्रशं भूवना वन्यन्या॥ ऋ० १०.८२॥

Our Father who is the All-creating God and Who is (he disposer, knoweth all the worlds and all things existing; He is the only One Reality, the
name giver of all the devas - shining objects. Him alone all other beings attain (for) He is the only one solution of all our interrogations. Rig 10.82.3

The Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God has been described poetically in the Vedas as follows —

विश्वतःशकुन्रत विश्वतोमुखं विश्वतो बाहुरुर्त विश्वतस्मात्।
सं बाहुभ्यां धर्मितं सं पतन्त्रैर्वाभूमि जनयन्देव एकः॥ ६००९.५॥

“He whose eyes are everywhere, Whose mouth is in all sides. Whose arms are all around and Whose feet are in all directions is the only One Divine Being who has created the heaven and the earth and by means of His all-spreading arms, He infuses life into all beings.

The Oneness of God is explicitly described in the following, besides thousands of Mantras of the same kind.

य एक इदिदयते वसु मूर्ताय दाशुपे।
ईशानो अप्रतिष्कृतं इन्द्रो अङ्गं॥ ८००७.१॥ साम० ३७६।

O. friend ! Indra (God of Supreme Power) is the only Ruler of resistless authority Who bestoweth wealth on the gift - offering liberal mortal.

प्रजापते न व्यदेतान्यन्यो विश्वा जातानि परि ता वभूव।
यक्षामास्ते जुमस्तान्मो अस्तु वचं स्याम पत्यो र्योणाम॥

६००२९.५॥

O Lord of all creatures, no other than Thou can control and govern all these created things. May the things desiring which we pray to Thee, be ours. May we be lords of all good wealth (material as well spiritual).

न नूर्त्यो न तृतीयत्वतुर्भृ नापुच्यते॥ ९६॥

न पंचमो न पटः सत्तमो नापुच्यते॥ ९७॥
He (God) is called neither the second, nor the third nor yet the fourth. He is called neither the fifth, nor the sixth, nor yet the seventh.

He is called neither the eighth, not the ninth nor yet the tenth.

He takes care of all that breathes and of all that does not breathe. He has got all this conquering power. He is the One, One alone and only One.

All these luminous forces of nature become one in Him. Atharva XII 4. 19-21.

How emphatically the Unity of God is asserted in such passages and how absurd and false is the view advocated by some prejudiced Western Scholars that Vedas teach polytheism. Besides prejudice, it is also due to ignorance of the real meaning of the word “Devā” that this misconception about the Vedic idea of God has sprung up. It is generally translated by the Western scholars as God and as 33 devas are mentioned in some Vedic hymns. It is supposed that the Vedas teach the worship of these 33 Devas or Gods. As a matter of fact, the word देव (Deva) is derived from the root Divu दिव which has got ten meanings.

It means Deva is used in the sense of sporting, desire to conquer, pursuit, brilliancy, praise, pleasure, exhilaration, sleep, knowledge, motion and acquisition.

As such, it is an epithet applied to the sun, the moon and other forces of nature life fire, wind etc.
Yaskacharya, the celebrated author of the Vedic Philology (Nirukta) interprets the word “Deva” as follows —

देवो दानाद्व दीपनाद्व दौतनाद्व दृष्टानो भवतीति वा। निरूक्ते ७.७६॥

That which confers some advantages upon us, can illuminate things i.e. explain or throw light upon them and that which is the source of light is “Deva.”

It is therefore entirely wrong to translate the word “deva” everywhere as God. It may be used for all brilliant and useful objects as well as learned man of truthful nature.

सत्यंभिता वै देवा:॥ ऐतरेय ब्राह्मण ९.६॥

विद्यंसो हि देवा:॥ शतपथ ३.९.३.९०॥

By 33 devas mentioned in the Vedas are not meant 33 Gods as misinterpreted by some eastern and western scholars, but the following objects according to the Shatapath Brahman which contains exposition of the Yajurveda mantras —

कतमे ते त्रयस्त्रिंशतू इति अष्टी वसव:। एकादश रुद्रा द्रादशादित्या: त
एकादश इति। इद्रयश्च द्रादशादित्या प्रजापतियाः त्रयस्त्रिंशश्चाः। कतमे वसव इति। अग्निश्च पृथिवी च वायुश्च चारित्यश्च द्रादशादित्याः नक्षत्राणि चैते वसव एतेषु हीद सर्वेः वसव इति। कतमे रुद्रा इति। दशोस्म प्राणा आलंकादेशः ते यद्यास्मात् मयाच्छिरिरुत्क्रामन्ति अथ रूद्रयन्ति तद् यद् रूद्रयन्ति तस्माद् रुद्रा इति। कतम आदित्या: इति।

इद्रयश्च चारित्या: समस्तस्य एत आदित्या: एते हीद सर्वमादादायन्ति तद्विदिदं सर्वमादादाना यन्ति तस्मादादित्या इति। कतम इद्र: कतम: प्रजापतिरिती।

शतपथ ९४.८६॥
The meaning of the above is......

There are 33 devas which manifest the glory of God, 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras, 12 Adityas, Indra and Prajapati, 33 on the whole. The eight Vasus (I) Heated consmic bodies, (2) Planets (3) Atmospheres (4) Supertcherstial space (5) Suns (6) Rays of ethcral space (7) Satellites (8) Stars.

These are called Vasus (abodes) for the whole group of existences resides in them, for they are abodes of all that lives, moves or exists.

The eleven Rudras are the ten pranas (nervauric forces or vital airs) enlivening the human frame and the eleventh is Aatma (the human spirit).

These are called the Rudras (from root rud to weep) because when they desert the body, it becomes dead and the relations of the dead begin to weep.

The 12 Adityas are the twelve solar months, marking the course of time. They are called Adityas as by their cyclic motion, they produce changes in all objects and hence lapse of the term of existence for each object.

Indra is the all-pervading electricity or force. Prajapati is Yajna (or an active voluntary association of objects on the part of man for the purpose of art or association with other men for purpose of teaching or learning) God is the One Deva Who is Adorable. According to the Vedas, God is the Supreme Lord of all the devas. The Vedas tell us expressly.

आपो ह यद्वृहत्तीर्थकमायनां दद्धना जनयतीर्थनिमोऽ।
ततो देवां समवत्तातुरेकः कर्मे देवय हविपा विधेम॥

्रो १०.२९.१॥

यशिचदापो महिना पर्यपपश्यवटक्षं दद्धना जनयतीर्थज्ञम्॥

्रो १०.२९.२॥
When this vast diffused matter producing an igneous condition and holding in its womb this universe, manifested itself, then He was the One life of all shining beings; He it is to Whom we shall offer our prayers. (Rig. 10.121.7)

He who with His greatness looked on that diffused Matter possessed of heat and energy and producing the cosmos, Who is the One Supreme Lord (Adhi Deva) of bright things (devas). He it in to Whom we shall offer our prayers.

In the Rigveda 8.1.1 and Sama Veda 342. we find the Vedic injunction:—

मा चिदन्यव शंसत सृष्ट्या सृष्ट्या रिख्यात् ।
इन्द्र मित्सलोता त्रृष्णण सचा युंगे मुद्रुक्तं च शंसत॥ ऋ० ८.१.१॥

O ye friends: do not glorify any other being than God so that sorrows and sufferings may not trouble you. Eulogies Indra-God of Supreme Power alone Who is the showerer of all blessings and repeatedly pronounce the saiced hymns together in all your congregations. (Rig. VIII 1-1)

In the Rigveda I 164.20 the relation between God and Soul and their separate existence is expressed in the following poetical words—

द्वा सुर्णां सुरुजा सुख्या समानं वृक्ष परि पस्वजनाते ।
तयोरन्यः पिपलं स्वाह्यत्वनशशन्यो अभि चाकर्षीति॥ ऋ० ९.१६०.२०॥

Two co-eternal spirits reside in the equally eternal matter, like two coeval and friendly birds perching on the same tree. One of these two (viz. the finite soul) tastes of the fruit of this tree (i.e. feels pleasure and pain which are incidental to the soul’s union with matter or its circumscription with a body) while the other (viz. Infinite Soul or God)
watches or supervises without being subject to its joys and sorrows. It is thus clear that the Vedas advocate neither polytheism nor henotheism or pantheism. It is Monotheism of the purest type that is taught by the Vedas. The Vedic conception of God has been clearly expressed by Maharshi Dayananda Sarasvati - the greatest sage and Vedic scholar of the age as follows—

God is Truth and Happiness itself. Formless, Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unbegotten, Infinite, Immutable, without beginning, Incomparable, All-supporting, the Lord of All, All pervading, Omniscient, Imperishable, Immortal, Fearless, Eternal, Holy and the efficient cause of the universe. To him alone worship is due: This is quite in keeping with the scientific conception of God as expressed by Sir Issac Newton, the father of Modern science in the following terms—

“These things being rightly despatched does it not appear from phenomena that there is a Supreme Being in-corporeal, living, Intelligent, Omnipresent, who in infinite space sees the things themselves intimately and thoroughly, perceives them and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to Himself.” (Opticks by Sir Newton P. 344)

**Impartial Great Scholars on the Vedic Conception of God**

Many impartial great scholars of all countries and nations have clearly admitted that the Vedas teach pure Monotheism. The following are some extracts from their writings:—

(1) Shri F. Dadachanji B. A., LL. B., The renowned Parsi
Scholar in his well known book entitled ‘Philosophy of Zoroastrianism and Comparative Study of Religions” has clearly and most un-ambiguously stated—

“The Vedas teach nothing but monotheism of the purest kind.” P’ 100

A Muslim Scholar’s Views—

Sir Yamin Khan Ki. C. I. E. Ex. Member - of the Central Assembly in the Pre-independence days writes in his known work named “God, Soul and Universe in Science and Islam.”

“Originally the conception of God among the Hindus was right, when they believed Him to be Unit and Omnipresent, but when they started dividing Him into different shapes according to different functions which they considered He performed, they strayed far from their original conception. The result was that many who were heroes in their life time, were gradually turned into incarnations of God and idolatry increased.” Chap. 1 P. 3)

“Many Hindus believe that all their sins are washed away by having a dip in the holy water of the Ganges. Thus it is seen that the great philosophical religion which conceived Unity of God in the beginning, brought up corruption and degradation of high ideas, when His attributes as the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer were divided and allotted to different deities possessing separate entities in different forms.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati a man of great learning started preaching the old Religion of the Vedas which conceived Unity of God.

(“God, Soul and Universe in Science and Islam by Sir Mohammed Yamin Khan, P. 3).
Some Western Scholars on the subject—

Mr. Schlegel - a famous German philosopher writes thus in the “Wisdom of the Ancient Hindus.”

“It cannot be denied that the early Indians possessed a knowledge of the true God. All their writings are replete with sentiments and expressions noble, clear, lovely, grand, as deeply conceived as in any human language in which men have spoken of their God.” (Wisdom of the Ancient Indians by Schlegel).

Mr. Charles Coleman—

Mr. Charles Coleman an English Scholar has written as follows regarding the Vedic Conception of God — “The Al-mighty, Infinite, Eternal, Incomprehensible, Self-existent Being, He who sees everything through never seen is Brahma, One un-known True Being, the Creator, the Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe.”

Count Bjarnstjerne’s Views —

Coiirit Bjarhstjerne - a Russian Scholar Wrote thus in this illustrious work named “Theogohy of the Hindus” P. 53 after giving a few quotations from the Vedas—

“These sublime ideas cannot fail to convince us that the Vedas recognise only One God who is Almighty, Infinite, Eternal, Self existent, the Light and Lord of the Universe.”

Mr. Ernest Wood’s views—

Mr. Ernest Wood an English Scholar in his famous book entitled “An English Man defends Mother India.” has stated as follows on the subject we are dealing with ‘In the eyes of Hindus, there is but One God. This was stated long ago in the Rigveda in the following Words—
Which may be translated as “The sages name the One Being variously.”

Prof. Maxmuller’s Views—

Prof. Maxmullar admitted in his last work (though he did not admit that before) “That the conception had been formed (in the Vedic period) that there is but One, One Being neither male nor female, a being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature and nevertheless the Being that was really meant by all such names as Indra, Agni, Matarishvan and by the name Prajapati - Lord of creatures.”

Referring to several hymns of the Vedas, Prof. Maxmuller remarked in his “History of Sanskrit Literature” “I add only one more hymn, (Rig. 10.121) in which the Idea of One God is expressed with such power and decision, that it will make us hesitate before we deny to the Aryan nation an instinctive monotheism.”

Thus it is clear that the Vedas teach the worship of One God and their conception of God is most rational and scientific.