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JEANINE G. MILLER

THE VISION OF RTA IN THE VEDAS

Thesis submitted  
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of Durham,  
for the degree of  
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J.G. MILLER

(Abstract of thesis  
submitted for the  
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October 1978)

## THE VISION OF ṚTA IN THE VEDAS

The ṛṣis developed their view of the nature of the world and man's role therein, from a visionary insight which they claimed not only as an heirloom from their ancestors but also as having themselves developed.

Their vision embraces the whole cosmic order and regards the process of manifestation as a continuous unfoldment in accordance with one basic law of harmony, ṛta: the world order exhibits a balance of all those factors that contribute to its making, a holding together in mutual tension of all opposites.

Ṛta is thus considered as both the mode and regulator whereby all things manifest, evolve, and adjust to changing conditions, as well as the overall order resulting from the harmonious working out of all according to the inherent law of existence. As manifestation means action, movement, the dynamic aspect of ṛta attracts more attention than its static counterpart, the stability of the fixed order which merely emphasises the constancy of change and succession - in paradoxical terms, the unchanging order of change.

Three fundamental aspects of ṛta are studied:

- 1) the natural: the one law that underlies the basic structure of the universe, in accordance with which all evolves and from which derive all other laws; hence the law of becoming, of transformation, of harmony.
- 2) the socio-ethical: the one truth which in the human context of socio-ethical norms can be translated as integrity-integration: man fulfils himself in as much as he lives truly and can therefore integrate himself in the cosmic order. Truth at the human level is equivalent to harmony at the universal level.
- 3) the religio-sacrificial: the one sacrifice with which the cosmic order is identified, a constant give and take of all its units, an eternal sharing and exchange which itself is rooted in the law of transformation.

To this order all beings contribute in greater or less measure, whatever friction occurring from non-cooperation or opposition, being finally offset by the greater pull towards harmony. Nothing can really over-ride the one law. Through the agency of gods and men ṛta as the "pattern in the heaven" is made manifest at the natural level and in the norms and ethics of human society. Man's sacrificial ritual is seen as his microscopic attempt at re-enacting the macroscopic drama of the dynamics of ṛta.

The Rgvedic vision of cosmic wholeness contains the seeds of many of the later speculative theories of Hindu philosophy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Vedic conception of *ṛta*, the *cosmic order*, the dynamics of manifestation, was developed, as can be reconstructed from the *Ṛgveda samhitā*, from a vision reaching out to vast dimensions and arrived at by generations of seers. Vedic tradition refers to the origin of the Veda as *apauruseya*, i.e. non-human. Its inspiration belongs to the eternal, it is a manifestation of the word, *vāc*. The Veda is in its essence a timeless revelation, the transcendent made manifest at the empirical level by means of visions couched into words through poetic inspiration. This implies certain issues which should be examined in order to understand the vision of *ṛta* itself:

- a) the means employed for achieving such vision and its description;
- b) the intuitive-visionary insight of the poets;
- c) the hereditary quality of the vision which, though new in so far as it is re-experienced and re-expressed, is yet ancestral, the heirloom of the ancient patriarchs who found the way and gave out the means so that their descendants could also follow the well-worn, because traditional, path as laid out by themselves;
- d) the vision's reliability, or otherwise;
- e) methods used for inducing visioning;
- f) the resulting religious philosophy as rooted in the personal experience of not just one seer but generations of seers through the discipline of contemplative meditation.

The vision itself embraces a wide domain of activities: cosmic, natural and human, showing insights into the inherent structure of the universe, the gods' and men's role therein; insights ranging from the *ṛsis'* speculation as to the origin of creation, the orderly unfoldment of the universe and its various kingdoms in accordance with strict laws, with particular stress upon the mutual interaction of the godly and human realms - the socio-ethical order worked out for humanity being a direct reflection of the universal law governed by the gods - to the sacrificial ritual as man's microscopic re-enactment of the cosmic order envisaged as a stupendous rite. The whole process of cosmic unfoldment that emerges from this Vedic vision appears as a universal offering of all the myriad lives to the One Life, the *Puruṣa*, that underlies and sustains them all.

The hymns that resulted from this vision, the songs which the *ṛsis* composed as expressions of it, were subsequently called *śruti*, that which has been heard: revelation. A.C. Bouquet, in his study of "Hinduism" voices a doubt, as

many a scholar or student of the Vedas has entertained, as to what exactly those hymns reveal:

"Since, however, most of them consist of lyrical addresses to the greater deities of the people concerned, it is difficult to see what, in a literal sense, they reveal."<sup>1</sup>

The revelation is certainly there, but couched in such a way that it is difficult to dig it out. Confronted with a multiplicity of appearances, of gods, of sacrifices, of praises and myths, of obscure allusions and riddles, western exegesis failed to see the vision of oneness, of divine solidarity which underlies this bewildering array of activities and names, of hints and invocations, the vision of cosmic integrity which is the Rgveda's peculiar contribution to religious speculation and which it is the purpose of this thesis to unravel. Furthermore, in the words of R. Panikkar:

"The Vedic Revelation ... conveys a transtemporal message, if we are permitted to use this word with reference to the present, in order to make us more aware of the mystery of existence and of life."<sup>2</sup>

To this vision may be traced most of the later speculations of Indian philosophy. It is also the root of the Indian conviction that any philosophical doctrine, to stand the test of truth, must be based upon experience. The transcendent must be brought into the field of the existent by direct intuition or visioning, in order to be established as truth and communicated to others, however inadequately.<sup>3</sup>

To express such supra-sensuous knowledge, such revelation, is a task that only a body of inspired seers can undertake, and this only in moments of high tension, of inflamed outbursts, of illumination. The vision, such as it has come down to us, is scattered through the Rgveda *saṃhitā* and has to be reconstructed piece by piece from the various hints, obscure references, myths and riddles. Many a conclusion one is led to draw is derived more from implied than explicit statements. The reconstruction of this vision, the examination of its insights, the conclusions that can be drawn in the field of philosophical thought and of socio-ethical and ritualistic practices, falls within the scope of this thesis.

We have concentrated mainly upon the text of the Rgveda as being the oldest and the basis of the Vedas. Quotations from the Atharvaveda have occasionally been examined to substantiate any particular point. Quotations from the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads have also sometimes been cited to show the similarity in or development of thought.\* As to the question of interpretation, the traditional idea that the Veda bears a threefold interpretation, *ādhyātmika* (spiritual) *ādhidāivika* (relating to the gods) and *ādhiyajñika* (ritual) has been favoured, the underlying aim being to examine the ṛṣis claim to divine revelation and their hymns the expression of their inspiration.

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\* The translation of the Rgvedic verses are our own except where otherwise stated. Any other text is given out in standard translation, except where otherwise stated.

## CHAPTER 1

HOW THE *ṚTA* WAS APPREHENDEDI. 1. The means to valid knowledge

The three means (*pramāṇas*) to valid knowledge (*pramā*) recognised by Indian philosophical schools are:

perception	( <i>pratyakṣa</i> )
Inference	( <i>anumāna</i> )
verbal testimony	( <i>śabda</i> ) or revelation ( <i>śruti</i> )

The testimony of the Vedas is concerned with the last of these, namely *śruti*. Some Indian logicians reject *śabda* (verbal testimony) as a means of knowledge. According to them verbal testimony can only be accepted if based upon the first two methods of apprehension - namely perception and inference which form the basis of daily experience. But knowledge, it was found, cannot be restricted merely to the senses, or direct perception and reason, as the only source we have at our disposal. For these do not exhaust the whole content of human experience. Therefore some schools of Indian philosophy recognised intuition or spiritual insight as a means of knowledge, a unique *pramāṇa* differing from the others, yet valid in itself. The Veda, based upon extra-ordinary means of knowledge, in fact, upon the intuitive vision of seers, was put forward as such an acceptable source of knowledge. In due course of time its systematic interpretation became the aim of the *Mīmāṃsā* system of philosophy.

Revelation, as expressed in the *R̥gveda saṃhitā*, is traceable to the insights of seers, that is to say, to their direct apprehension of certain realities that do not usually fall within the field of ordinary human experience. Intellectual inferences and logical deductions do play their parts, but only as a means of explaining and expanding upon what has been visioned.

The acceptance of *śruti* as an authority was considered to have its dangers. M. Hiriyanna points out that it was thought that it could

"lead to belief in anything under the plea that it has been revealed".<sup>4</sup>

To prevent this, certain conditions were laid down, such as that the revealed truths must refer to the extra-empirical, or what is new, in terms of what is known, otherwise they would be unintelligible:

"what is revealed should not be contradicted by any of the other *pramāṇas* ... The content of revelation must be internally coherent ... though it may be above reason, it cannot be against it ... revealed truth must appear probable".<sup>5</sup>

The danger of complete dependence upon the authority of individual insight which, however superficially interesting, is liable to illusion or may



be defective either through an unbalanced assessment of reality or in point of depth of insight, may be offset by the fact of plurality. On the other hand, the end-product may not be fully coherent, or may vary in the quality and depth of insight evidenced. The Veda's authority stems not just from the testimony of one *ṛṣi* but of generations of seers. Its testimony can be traced to a long line of sages.

## I.2 The validity of the Rgveda's claim to revelation

Hints scattered throughout the *samhitā* enable us to build up a substantial picture as to the seers' visionary insights and the conclusions they reached, though neither the one nor the other are fully described.

In the light of Professor Jan Gonda's examination of the Vedic word *dhīh* and its derivative *dhītih* in his study "The Vision of the Vedic poets"<sup>6</sup> it has become evident that *dhīh* is not just "thought" as it is usually translated, or "hymn" or "devotion", but "visionary insight", "thought-provoking-vision", a spiritual power which enabled the poets to see in depth and which they duly expressed as songs, hymns or prayer, so that the word has often the meaning of insight-leading-to-song, hymn or prayer. It could be likened to inspiration bursting forth into song.

J. Gonda's explanation of the meaning of *dhīh* and his reason for choosing the word "vision" to translate it is thus set forth:

"The Skt. noun *dhīh* is like vision closely associated with a verb expressing the idea of 'seeing'. By 'vision' is ... to be understood the exceptional and supranormal faculty, proper to 'seers', of 'seeing', in the mind, things, causes, connections as they really are, the faculty of acquiring a sudden knowledge of the truth of the functions and influence of the divine powers, of man's relation to them, etc. It is this vision which they attempt to give shape, to put into words."<sup>7</sup>

*Dhīh* allies both seeing and intuiting.

Thought on the other hand is generally based on data furnished by the senses and is an instrument of ordering what becomes accessible to the mind via the senses. It is used to put together a rational picture of that reality presented to the mind by sensory perception. But it may also be used to order that which has been received through intuition or spiritual insight, that which has been visioned at a level of experience quite divorced from the physical senses. In that case, the process of thought is first by-passed whilst a channel of vision is opened up and used to reach out beyond the senses and the mind, to those realms described in the Rgveda as "beyond" (*parā*).<sup>8</sup> Once the vision has been experienced the thought process takes up its task of expressing it in terms which are understandable and acceptable to the mind, in other words, to make some sense out of what has been received.

So the seers are said to

"harness (their) minds, harness (their) visions".<sup>9</sup>

The harnessing of the mind hints at a certain kind of mental training at least in so far as concentration and direction are concerned, and this is borne out in RgV, III.38.1 where the poet admits to

"straining after an intuition, bounding forward like a spirited well-yoked horse".<sup>10</sup>

So the "god Varuna" is asked to

"sharpen the resourcefulness and dexterity of him who is attempting (to express) this vision".<sup>11</sup>

There is here evidenced a definite attempt at an intellectual coming to grips with visionary insight. The mental qualities are sharpened in order to give shape to that which is seen internally at the level where words have no meaning, but must now be translated into words as a means of communicating with others. The words *kratu* and *dakṣa* have been translated as "resourcefulness" and "dexterity" in accordance with J. Gonda's remarks:

"*Kratu*, may for the sake of brevity be translated by 'resourcefulness' or 'inventiveness', *dakṣa* by 'ability, dexterity, expertness'. These two 'qualities' are needed to bring a 'poetical experiment' to a happy conclusion. They are the vessels that according to the second half of the stanza take the ṛṣi across."<sup>12</sup>

According to L. Renou

"they are clearly complementary: the two stages of the realisation and conception and execution."<sup>13</sup>

According to Śrī Aurobindo *kratu*

"... means also power or strength ... effective of action.

Psychologically this power effective of action is the will. The word may also mean mind or intellect".<sup>14</sup>

This kind of vision is described as being seven-headed (*sapta-śiṛṣṇīm*) i.e. as having seven aspects to it and as originating in *ṛta*, the realm of order, the cosmic order as the inherent structure and law of the universe. The seven aspects, however, are not explained. Two of these might pertain to the realms of light and sound, for the *ṛṣis* "saw" and "heard" the *veda*, and this will be considered in connection with Soma and the ritual:

"This vast seven-headed thought-provoking-vision (*dhīh*) born of *ṛta*, our ancestor discovered"<sup>15</sup>

Verse 2 elaborates:

"Praising *ṛta* and contemplating aright."<sup>16</sup>

The participle translated as "contemplating", namely *dīdhyaṇa* (*dhī*) bears the connotation of both visioning and meditating. What the right kind of contemplation could be is not stated but the same verse mentions that the patriarchs, who are qualified as "sons of heaven", were able to

"devise the first forms (or laws or norms) of worship".<sup>17</sup>

It is thus by such meditation that they were inspired to institute ways of paying homage. A further verse declares that by means of *dhīh* i.e.: vision-

inspired-song, these same ancestors gave shape to the light they had found:

"They found the light; they expressed it by means of *dhīh*".<sup>18</sup>  
This they did for the sake of mankind. In "breaking open" the "rock" (*adri*) as it is mythologically related (the very words *ruj* and *adri* evidence the great effort required).

"they made for us the way to vast heaven".<sup>19</sup>

Such verses hint at the patriarchs' achievement: they outlined the path whereby men might reach to where they themselves had gained access. That they gave shape to the *dhīh* could signify that they found the means of expressing that which they visioned, through songs, through ritual gestures, that they instituted certain rituals as a result of what they had received by way of enlightenment.

During the ritual, while the thread connecting man to the "splendour-region" is being spun by the worshipper, Agni is asked

"to protect the luminous paths made by visionary-insight"<sup>20</sup>  
These paths into the beyond are opened up by the seer's insight and allow him to penetrate right to what is called the "splendour region" (*rajaso bhānum*) which is the world of reality of which the world of the senses is but the reflection.

This *dhīh* is the possession par excellence of the wise (*dhīra*) hence the wiseman has depth of insight into the very heart of life. Such vision-inspired men are "artisans" (*kāru*) of illumination, for they not only strive after wisdom (*medhā*) but also give shape, i.e. expression to it. When the vision has been perceived in depth and brought to the foreground of consciousness it is then fashioned, "meted out", expressed into words, hence the song, praise or hymn:

"This new insight, worthy of attention and dear to many,  
I fashion in its own proper time".<sup>21</sup>

"For these artisans, these vision-inspired-men have aspired  
after the gaining of wisdom." <sup>22</sup>

The whole mind is directed towards wisdom, towards the understanding of the significance of that which is revealed and is to be moulded into a song. J. Gonda describes the word *medhā* as "supranormal insight and understanding".<sup>23</sup> The *dhīh* thus acts as an opening to deeper knowledge, bringing different aspects of reality into human consciousness. It is a means of illumination. As vision is translated into song, the seer exclaims that

"by the song born of *ṛta* the sun shone forth".<sup>24</sup>

Interpreted psychologically this would mean that as a result of the poet's song which was inspired to him in his contemplation of *ṛta*, light was made in his consciousness, hence the sun shone forth. In similar vein another bard declares:

"Having received from my father the wise insight of *ṛta*  
I was born even a sun."<sup>25</sup>

The insight that brings the illumination makes the poet a "sun". The hereditary transmission of this wisdom is also clearly implied. That the "sun" signifies illumination is equally hinted in an injunction to "make the sun manifest".

"Heed the *brahman*. Be invigorated by the songs.  
Make the sun manifest". 26

The gods are helpful factors in the furthering of the poets' visionary knowledge either fostering it or being themselves invigorated by it. Thus Agni is credited with "stimulating and rousing eager visionary-thoughts".<sup>27</sup> Soma, Pūṣan, Savitr, Indra, Mitra-Varuṇa, similarly foster the seers' vision.<sup>28</sup>

### I. 3. The *ṛsis*' vision as ancestral and continuous

The vision, qualified as "ancestral" and "luminous" is described as emerging in the poet's consciousness at dawn, and finding verbal expression so as to be sung at the ritual gathering:

"Emerging before daylight, watchful, recited at the sacred function, robed in auspicious raiments of light, this is our ancestral vision, born of old."<sup>29</sup>

Two outstanding points should be noted: the "god-given"<sup>30</sup> quality of the vision as it emerges to consciousness robed in light, and the fact that it is both new and old,<sup>31</sup> revealed anew, and hereditary, the divine heirloom of the *ṛsis*. These two apparent contradictions are explained by J. Gonda thus: the vision

"... is on the one hand said to be born in the early morning and on the other to be ancestral and to belong to the far past. Obviously the poet Viśvāmītra is of the opinion that the vision which comes to him at daybreak is identical with that which manifested itself to his father Gāthīn and his grandfather Kuśīka ... (in short) that all *dhiyaḥ* are reproductions of one and the same archetype."<sup>32</sup>

It is significant that the *dhiḥ* opens up insights into what otherwise remains a mystery, and that it is hereditary among the *ṛsis*: it is received from of old, newly grasped and framed into song.<sup>33</sup> Hence its value as revelation and as the secure ground of truth. Hence its reliability.

The Rgveda looks back to a golden age of seership whose continuity is not regarded as having been broken. Indeed the *ṛsis* refer again and again to the fact of their seership. A well-marked trend in the hymns not to break with tradition is reflected in the hints as to the handing down from generation to generation of certain secret knowledge through which the bards traced their line of descent to an actual figure or to several patriarchs, to those ancient

"followers of the law, steadfast in the law, who furthered the course of law, the Fathers, Yama, moved by *tapas*." 34

Thus the *ṛsis* call upon Agni "as did the Bhṛguṣ, Manus, Angīras" in days of old.<sup>35</sup> A poet claims<sup>36</sup> that he is following directly upon the path of *ṛta* those two divine sacrificers, the first *purohitas* whom Sāyana identified with Agni and Aditya. Another declares that "our forefathers" guided by Soma

"received as their share, among the gods, a jewel"<sup>37</sup> whereby they were made wise (*dhīrāḥ*).

Such continuity both at the physical (in e.g. the performance of specific rituals) and at the spiritual levels, in the receiving and handing down of visions, was a proof to the bards of the firm foundation of their science of seership:

"Not breaking the links, let us, seeking help follow after the powers of our forefathers".<sup>38</sup>

"We speak by-reason-of our descent (birth) from the ancient Sire".<sup>39</sup> This Sire being Soma, the giver of enlightenment and eloquence, the *ṛṣi* here makes plain his heritage.

So mythical events, such as the opening out of the mountain at the sounding of the sacred word<sup>40</sup> were re-enacted by the power of visioning. By such insight mankind's ancestor Manu<sup>41</sup> was able to "anoint" the "doors of vision"<sup>42</sup> giving access to the gods. J. Gonda makes a few illuminating remarks in this respect:

"The verb for 'anointing, (be) smearing' being not rarely used in connection with a transfer of power, the general meaning may be: 'Manu developed the *dhīyaḥ* - which are an entrée to the world of the gods - so as to compose hymns; he had received them from Indra who, being a seer, had enhanced his potency by assuming the inventiveness of the gods.'"<sup>43</sup>

From these few examples we may gather that it was through and because of their visionary powers, their "seership", that the poets of the Rgveda arrived at their particular view of life, devised their particular rituals and framed their particular insight into the laws of the universe, into songs, often through colourful myths, metaphors and similes, but also in straightforward, simple language, and that because of the hereditary quality of their vision they felt secure in the "truth" of their insights.

#### 1. 4. Method of arousing vision: meditation.

The method of inducing visualisation and of objectifying the vision into the clear light of the mind, if it was formulated, is hardly explained in the Rgveda. Hints are thrown out however, and from the images used one can somewhat reconstruct the process. Thus a striking comparison is made between the seer's activity and that of a builder, the metaphorical building of a chariot symbolising the focussing of consciousness

"as a skilful craftsman builds up a chariot"<sup>44</sup>

"As a carpenter have I been absorbed in meditation,  
proceeding like a spirited well-yoked steed.  
Brooding upon desirable and lofty matters I yearn  
to commune with inspired sages".<sup>45</sup>

Such absorption implies degrees of concentration.

Another very graphic image is used in RgV.1.88.4.<sup>46</sup> Here the Gotama seers compare themselves to vultures that for days circle round their prey; but the latter turns out to be *imām dhiyam*, that visionary insight which enables the *r̥sis* to push open the "well" or fountain and drink therefrom. The factors of time and the exertion are brought out by the simple words "for days"; the seekers, straining after their vision for days, finally "push upright" that which covers the fountain, i.e. use some kind of force, to exert themselves, to enter into that realm where nectar is found. The vulture intent upon its prey, serves as a pictograph to paint the intense action of those concentrating upon a particular vision which they pursue as relentlessly as vultures do their prey; the image then changes to a well, whose lid the seers push open by means of their "flashing songs" (*arkaiḥ*) and prayer (*brahma*). The well is described in another hymn;<sup>47</sup> its top is of stone and only the Lord of Prayer, Brahmaṇaspati, can push it open through his might. It is filled to the very brim with honey and thus is readily outpoured, if only the top can be opened, and

"all those who behold the light have drunk abundantly therefrom".<sup>48</sup>  
The well with its stone lid which only the might of the Lord of Prayer can push open recalls the rocky mountain of RgV.1.71.2. which the Aṅgirasas break open, thereby making a path to heaven.<sup>49</sup> The path to enlightenment is a strenuous one.

Certain steps in the process of contemplation are enumerated. A trusting approach to the god who is credited with certain powers that open up in the human being the required channels is evident. Thus Varuṇa is said to "make the *brahman*"<sup>50</sup> i.e. to cause the divine power locked in prayer to manifest:

"Varuṇa makes the brahman; to the path-knower we turn;  
in our heart he opens out thought;  
a new (manifestation of) *r̥ta* must become known."<sup>51</sup>

Varuṇa is the one who knows the way, the one to whom one may turn in full confidence. Thanks to him "thought" opens out in the "heart". The juxtaposition of *matiḥ* and *hr̥d* implies depth of insight rather than superficial, or just intellectual appraisal. By such means a new understanding of *r̥ta* becomes possible. Though the word *dhiḥ* is not mentioned here, the participle *vittam* implies a realising of the significance of *r̥ta*, hence an insight into the cosmic order which is new in so far as the insight is concerned. The result is *dhiḥ*. Reciprocally, meditation on *r̥ta*, or "seeking after" *r̥ta*, seems to be a way that opens a channel to vision, as one may gather from RgV.1.11.12b which, as rendered by J. Gonda runs thus:

"We should like to acquire a 'vision', cultivating (developing)  
it with *r̥ta*".<sup>52</sup>

Knowledge of certain laws basic to vision thus would enable the seer to cultivate the latter. Similarly the poet gives shape to his vision and perfects it by means of *ṛta*:

"Perfecting it in accordance with the norms of *ṛta*,  
I give form to vision".<sup>53</sup>

The poet of Rgv.VIII.59.6 grants us a deeper glimpse into the manifestation of vision. By means of *tapas* or contemplative exertion, that flame-power that awakens spiritual insight, he admits to perceiving the condition wherein visions were aroused. This all important hint points to the fact that the capacity for entering into such a supra-sensuous state of apprehension was furthered by *tapas*, a much misunderstood word implying a strict discipline of mind and body leading to a state of consciousness out of all relation to the normal daily state, a limitation in one sense for a further expansion in a deeper sense. The poet adds that Indra and Varuṇa originally gave to the seers "Inspired Insight" (*manīṣā*), the power to express thought (*vāco matim*)<sup>54</sup> verbally, and revealed knowledge:

"O Indra, Varuṇa, when in the beginning, you gave to the seers insight, thought (capable of) verbal expression and revelation, I perceived by means of the fervor of contemplation, in what conditions the wise ones who performed the worship projected them (the visions)."<sup>55</sup>

Inspiration and its expression are gifts of the gods.

Another bard claims that with "*manas* as an eye", i.e. with the clear light of the mind

"I believe that I see those who originally performed the sacrificial rite".<sup>56</sup>

By such knowledge men were raised to the status of *ṛsis*.

Visioning as evident in the seers does not mean that the *ṛsis* saw only what they wanted to see, what they a priori conceived in their minds. We have evidence that what was finally observed was not necessarily what was previously envisaged. Thus in Rgv.VII.88 Vasiṣṭha describes his ponderings upon the great Lord of Cosmic Order Varuṇa. Elsewhere (Rgv.I.25.16) the concentration of vision-inspired-thoughts upon Varuṇa is compared to cows moving unto their pastures; then there is a beholding the god,<sup>57</sup> though no description is given there of what is actually beheld. In Rgv.VII.88.2 however, Vasiṣṭha mentions that, as he comes into the presence of Varuṇa, it is the face of fire that he contemplates, the vision of Agni.

From the available evidence we may conclude that there are stages in the reaching of the goal which is illumination or visionary insight itself; that each step may have been marked out as a technique of concentration, meditation, vision, but little is given out in this respect in the Rgveda.

For a fuller elucidation of this aspect of the question one must turn to the Upaniṣads. It is however stated that in the fourth degree of prayer, or fourth *brahman*, the seer found the sun.<sup>58</sup> The culmination of the visioning seems to have been absorption into a transcendental reality which is described in various ways, such as the finding of the sun, or being "born a sun",<sup>59</sup> or as God possession.<sup>60</sup> In such a heightened state of vision, the *ṛṣi*s fathomed out and developed their conception of the cosmic order.

### I.5. Vision stated to be rooted in *ṛta*

Our major issue concerns the vision itself which in course of time was transcribed in various ways with different emphasis. We might call it the vision of *ṛta* as *ṛta*, the cosmic order, was found to be the fountain-spring of all visions, all inspiration, indeed the basic structure of all things. One particular verse leaves no doubt as to this fact:

"From the seat of *ṛta* glows forth the visionary insight"<sup>61</sup>.

A similar statement is made with regard to *brahman*:

"From the seat of *ṛta* issues forth the prayer"<sup>62</sup>

Vision and prayer are at times closely linked. Thus Soma is said to give voice to

"the vision of *ṛta* and to the inspiration of prayer"<sup>63</sup>

for Soma, the

"lord of all those who see by heaven's light roars forth the vision of *ṛta*"<sup>64</sup>

Such utterance is the poet's prayer and Soma is the lord of seer-poets, their great inspirer. But such inspired thought is to be carefully guarded:

"The seer-poets keep watch over their inspired thought (*manīṣā*) that shine with celestial-splendour, in the seat of *ṛta*"<sup>65</sup>

The visions are often referred to as glowing. Thus

"the concealed visions glow of their own accord"

and cause the seers themselves to glow "by the streams of *ṛta*"<sup>66</sup>. They suddenly appear in the seers' consciousness as glowing shafts of light and it is by means of this light that the patriarchs found the path to heaven. They are, moreover, in the previous verse, compared to the glittering flames of Agni. Agni himself is said to shine peerless, with bright (or beneficent) visions.<sup>67</sup> The poet clothes his god with the divine vision (*devīm dhiyam*).<sup>68</sup>

The special activity of the seer-poet is to express his vision by means of words into a song, a hymn or prayer. Such a song is thus also said to be born of *ṛta*,<sup>69</sup> the right use of all the means available, hence order.

We have in these Rgvedic examples three basic elements peculiar to



Vedic thought:

- 1) the visionary quality of the perception, embodied in the words *dhīh* or *dhītīh* used as a basis for the eulogy. The bard is a "seer" in the ancient sense of the term, he sees beyond the world of sensuous experience and is able to sing eloquently of his inner encounters. He thus combines insight and verbal ability as his special gift, that which makes him a *ṛṣi*.
- 2) The illuminating character of the vision; it shines; it is a glowing revelation of a luminous world hidden beyond the senses.
- 3) The fountain-spring of it all is *ṛta*, the cosmic order, reality. The *dhīh* or *dhītīh* emerges and shines from the seat of *ṛta*, its source is ultimately in that transcendental world in which all is rooted. Hence it gives insight into *ṛta*, both at the transcendental level, and its reflection, the phenomenal level.

The poet observes that, having "turned his attention"<sup>70</sup> to "the ancient vision abounding in *ṛta*"<sup>71</sup> he has generated a new pleasing song. The vision and the song composed as a result of this turning of awareness conform to the orderly structure of nature, hence abound in *ṛta*. Occasionally, it seems, there is a failure to conform to the *ṛta*.<sup>72</sup> The wish also expressed to Varuṇa -

"May we succeed (in finding) the opening of thy *ṛta*"<sup>73</sup> seems to signify: may our visions help us to gain access to thy *ṛta*, to an understanding of, and a living in accordance with, the law, as laid down by Varuṇa. This implies not only knowledge as to the laws of the universe, their understanding and application, but also knowledge as to how best to bring the visions forward to the consciousness and how to express them. It is an opening up to, and penetration into, the deepest structure of the macrocosm, and by repercussion, the microcosm, that the poet desires. Hence the *dhīh* grants insight into the *ṛta* which in turn fosters the means of developing that insight through the application of the law. This brings us to the fundamental issue of this thesis, namely the examination of the many faceted *ṛta*.

Chapter I.1,2,3,4,5.

1. op.cit.1966,p.28.
2. "The Vedic experience." 1977,p.162
3. cf. J. Gonda. "The Vision of the Vedic poets." 1963. "Man has, the Indians always believed, to acquire visionary knowledge of being, of the truth... of eternal values and not merely think with his brain." (p.19).
4. "Outlines of Indian philosophy." 1973.p.180.
5. op.cit.p.181.
6. op. cit. 1963. Henceforth to be referred to as "Vision". Concerning *dhītiḥ* J. Gonda writes: the "suffix (*ti*) helps to form words expressing that the idea conveyed by the root manifests itself and is realised as an actuality." p.171.
7. op.cit. p.68-9.
8. cf. Rgv.I.46.11 and III.54.5.
9. *yuñjate mana uta yuñjate dhiyo viprā.* (Rgv.V.81.1b) cf. Rgv.VIII.13.26b (*dhiyaṃ manoyujam*).
10. ... *dīdhayā manīṣām atyo na vājī sudhuro jihānaḥ.* (Rgv.III.38.1ab) J. Gonda ("Vision" p.52) explains *dīdhayā manīṣām* as "I look towards an inspiration".
11. *imāṃ dhiyaṃ śikṣamāṇasya deva kratuṃ dakṣaṃ varuṇā saṃ śisādhi.* (Rgv.VIII.42.3ab).
12. "Vision". 1963. p.111.
13. E.V.P. tome VII. fasc.12.1960.p.71.
14. "On the Veda". Pondicherry. 1964.p.67.
15. *imāṃ dhiyaṃ saptaśirṣṇīm pitā na rta prajātāṃ bṛhatīm avindat.* (Rgv.X.67.1ab) cf. Rgv.VIII.51.4.
16. *rtam śamsanta rju dīdhyānā.* (Rgv.X.67.2a)
17. *yajñasya dhāma prathamam mananta.* (Rgv.X.67.2d)
18. *vidanta jyotiḥ cakrpanta dhībhiḥ.* (Rgv.IV.1.14d)
19. *cakrur-divo bṛhatō gātum asme.* (Rgv.I.71.2c)
20. *jyotiṣmataḥ patho rakṣa dhiyā kṛtān.* (Rgv.X.53.6b)
21. *iyam ta rtvīyāvati dhītir-eti navīyasī saparyanti purupriyā mīmīta it.* (Rgv.VIII.12.10).
22. *ime hi te kāravo vāyaśur dhiyā viprāso medhasātaye.* (Rgv.VIII.3.1ab)
23. "Vision". 1963.p.127.
24. *śusoca sūrya rtajātayā girā.* (Rgv.X.138.2d). cf. Rgv.X.93.12.
25. *aham id hi pitus pari medhām rtasya jagrabha aham sūrya iva ajani.* (Rgv.VIII.6.10)
26. *śrudhi brahma vāvrdhasya uta gīrbhiḥ / āviḥ sūryam kṛṇuhi.* (Rgv.VI.17.3.5c)
27. *dhiyo hinvāna usatīr-ajigah.* (Rgv.VII.10.1cd). cf. Rgv.I.79.7; IV.11.2; VII.41.3; VIII.71.12; 21.12d; 3.1d; VI.52.16, etc.
28. cf. Rgv.II.40.5&6; I.159; VIII.42.3; IV.41.5; 5.2; and J. Gonda's discussion of Rgv.V.81.1 ("Vision" p.115,118-19.)
29. *divas cid ā pūrvyā jāyamānā vi jāgrvir-vidathe śasyamānā bhadra vastrāmy-arjunā vasānā seyam asme sanajā pitryā dhīḥ.* (Rgv.III.39.2)
30. cf. Rgv.VIII.59.6.
31. cf. Rgv.III.39.2.
32. op.cit. p.77.
33. also Rgv.VIII.95.5
34. *ye cit pūrva rtasāpa rtāvāna rtāvrdhaḥ pitṛn tapasvato yama.* (Rgv.X.154.4abc).
35. cf. *tān pūrvyayā nividā hūmahe vayam.* (Rgv.I.89.3) "We call them (the gods) with the ancient invocation". cf. Rgv.VIII.43.13; 102.4; I.87.5. Also cf. J. Gonda. "Vedic literature". p.74.
36. Rgv.X.66.13.
37. *tava prapīti pitaro na indo deveṣu ratnam abhajanta dhīrāḥ.* (Rgv.I.91.1cd)
38. *mā chedma rasminr-iti nādhamānāḥ pitṛnām śaktīr-anu yachamānāḥ.* (Rgv.I.109.3ab) cf. also Rgv.VIII.6.10.
39. *pituh pratnasya jamnā vadāmasi.* (Rgv.I.87.5a)

40. Rgv.V.45.3.
41. Manu is called that "ancient seer" (*sa pūrvyo venah*).
42. *dvārā ... deveṣu dhiya ānaje*. (Rgv.VIII.63.1d)
43. "Vision" p.72.
44. *ratham na dhīraḥ svapā atakṣisuh*. (Rgv.I.130.6b)
45. *abhi taṣṭā-iva dīdhayā manīṣām ātyo na vājī sudhuro jihānaḥ*  
*abhi priyāni marmṛṣat parāni kavīn-ichāmi sardṛṣe sumedhāḥ*. (Rgv.III.38.1)
46. *ahāni gr̥dhrāḥ pary-ā va ā āgur-imām dhiyaṃ vārkāryāṃ ca devīm*  
*brahma kṛṇvanto gotamāso arkair-ūrdhvaṃ nunudra utsadhiṃ pibadhyaḥ*.  
(Rgv.I.88.4).  
"For days circling round like vultures for this vision and the goddess Vārkāryā the Gotamas fashioned their prayer, by means of flashing-songs they pushed open the fountain-well to drink therefrom."
47. Rgv.II.24.4.
48. *tam eva viśva papire swardṛṣo bahu*. (Rgv.II.24.4c).
49. cf. O.T. Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11; Deut.8:15, where the similarity of thought lies in the fact that the rock contains the water that gives life - physical and/or spiritual.
50. According to L. Renou the correspondences drawn by the priest-poets between the sacred and the profane gave a magic power to their incantation. This was called *brahman*. ("Religions of ancient India." 1953.p.10.). According to Max Müller *brahman* means prayer ("The six systems of Indian philosophy." 1899.p.71). According to J. Gonda the words of the inspired sages (*vipra*) are "viewed as manifestations of the fundamental and universal supporting power called *brahman*." ("Vision" 1963 p.36.) cf. Zimmer H. "Philosophies of India." 1969.p.74-83. cf. J. Miller. "The Vedas." 1974 p.45. ff. Hence when the word *brahman* is used in this thesis it will not be capitalised.
51. *brāhma kṛnoti varuṇo gātuvidam tam imahe vyūrnoti hṛdā matim navyo jāyatām rtaṃ vittam*. (Rgv.I.105.15 abc).
52. op.cit.p.111. The Sanskrit runs thus: *dhiyaṃ vanema rtaḥ sapantaḥ*.
53. *sādhann rtena dhiyaṃ dadhāmi*. (Rgv.VII.34.8b).
54. That is what J. Gonda calls "thought as realised in speech", ("Vision" p.211), the conversion of vision into words, hence the *dhī* or vision-thought-word.
55. *indrāvaruṇā yad ṛṣibhyo manīṣām vāco matim śrutamadattam agre vāni sthānāny-asṛjanta dhīrā yajñam tanvānās tapasā abhy-apaśyam*. (Rgv.VIII.59.6) cf. Rgv.X.154.4.
56. *paśyan manye manasā cakṣasā tān ye imam yajñam ayajanta pūrve*. (Rgv.X.130.6cd). cf. Rgv.X.124.9.
57. *darṣam nu viśvadarśatam* (Rgv.I.25.18) "Him I now behold who is to be beheld by all."
58. cf. Rgv.V.40.6.
59. cf. Rgv.VIII.6.10; 1.33.5; 1.146.4.
60. cf. *ino viśvasya bhuvanasya gopāḥ sa mā dhīraḥ pākam atra viveśa*. (Rgv.I.164.21).  
"there is the herdsman of the whole universe, the illumined one, who has entered into me the simple."  
cf. also the Athv.XII.2.53: "the god Agni, O Fathers, who has entered into our hearts, I enclose in me."
61. *rtasya hi sadaso dhītir-adyaut* (Rgv.XIII.2a)
62. *pra brahma-etu sadanād-rtasya* (Rgv.VII.36.1a).
63. *rtasya dhītim brāhmaṇo manīṣām*. (Rgv.IX.97.34b).
64. *viśvasya rājā ... swardṛṣa rtasya dhītim ... avīvaśat*. (Rgv.IX.76.4,ab)
65. *tāṃ dyotamānāṃ svaryam manīṣām rtasya pade kavayo ni pānti*. (Rgv.X.177.2cd)

66. *guhā satīr-upa tmanā pra yac-śocanta dhītayah.* (Rgv.VIII.6.8a).  
 67. Rgv.III.13.5.  
 68. Rgv.VII.34.9.  
 69. *ṛtajātayā girā.* cf. (Rgv.X.138.2)  
 70. *cikitvin manasam.* (Rgv.VIII.95.5)  
 71. *dhiyaṃ pratnām ṛtasya pipyuṣim.* (Rgv.VIII.95.5d)  
 72. cf. Rgv.X.31.11.  
 73. *rdyāma te varuṇa khām ṛtasya.* (Rgv.II.28.5b).

## CHAPTER II

## RTA AS THE UNIVERSAL ORDER

II.1. Definition of rta

What is rta? This word has certain definite connotations such as reality, law, order, norm, basic structure of the universe, universal harmony, truth, depending on whether one examines the conception from the physical - including the luminaries in the sky and the biological regularity of terrestrial phenomena, the repetition of cycles, the balance of nature - or from the ethico-social, ritualistic, or religious point of view.

Basically, rta concerns the *dynamics of manifestation*, the process of world unfoldment at all levels. In the Vedic vision the universe manifests in accordance with an inherent law which is the very basis of its structure; it unfolds not in a haphazard way, but in a strict order, a progression, all other laws being but the development of, and therefore, subordinate to this one fundamental law. The concept of rta as the expression of law in activity which we would call the law of becoming, or transformation, is contained in the very root of the word itself;  $\sqrt{r}$  which means to move, to go. Hence *rta is the mode whereby the unmanifest becomes the manifest, the transcendent the actual, chaos cosmos.*

But the word rta, being a past participle, also contains, as V.M. Apte points out, the notion of

'''(something) gone over (correctly)' or better '(the settled or ordered) course of going''',<sup>1</sup>

hence the order of things, both in their becoming and in their settled configuration, both dynamic and apparently static. These two aspects should be kept in mind in any assessment of the meaning of rta: *the overall order results from the working out of all in accordance with the inherent law of being.*

It becomes apparent that this Order is not fully manifest in the phenomenal world and that creation is the process of actualising in this world that which exists at a transcendental level. The latter may be implied from certain hints thrown out in the Rgveda, e.g. that the gods' "father" is Dakṣa, that intelligence or ordering principle which, in nature as in man, creates a cosmos by producing order, and their mother Aditi, the infinite. This is not without significance, for the gods are the very embodiment of rta which is already expressed at that level where Dakṣa and Aditi manifest: rta and satya, being stated in Rgv.X.190.1

to be the first born of that "flame-power" that gave the original impetus to creation. Thus at the very outset the law of ordered activity came into being and caused the world to unfold in regular progression, the *sat* or manifest from the *asat* or unmanifest, Dakṣa and Aditi being born from each other, and from their interaction the world's divisions or levels of unfoldment, thence all things, coming into existence. *Rta*, in its transcendental sense, may thus be taken as a kind of blue-print according to which the gods will make all things manifest, the last level of creation being that where man appears and in his ignorance or ill-will impedes the working of the law which nevertheless finds its reflection in man's socio-ethical and ritualistic activity. Thus is *rta*, the one law, expressed, more or less successfully, at every level.

As explained by H. Lefever<sup>2</sup>, the term *rta* contains three basic elements in its connotation:

"activity, order and law ... They are not always equally stressed".

H. Lefever remarks that the

"... root *r* has two primary groups of meanings. It signifies 'to move' and (through movement) 'to fit or arrange'. Grassmann derives *rta* from the second group and defines it as primarily 'what is firmly fixed' - 'the unalterable Order' - coming later to mean 'what is fitting, proper, right'".<sup>3</sup>

The "activity" or "dynamic" aspect of *rta* is thus often lost sight of and a lopsided interpretation results. J.M. Koller<sup>4</sup> stresses this static aspect of *rta*:

"The concept of *rta* is most often used in the *Rgveda* to signify the unchanging order of the highest reality which is the source of all order in the universe."<sup>5</sup>

L. Renou's definition takes better account of both aspects:

"*Rta*, which for convenience sake can be translated by order (cosmic order and moral order) or by Law, is, more precisely, the result of correlations, the product of 'adaptation', of the 'fitting together' between the microcosm and the macrocosm."<sup>6</sup>

"Adaptation" and "fitting together" are aspects of the law of becoming or transformation which operates in full at the secondary level of manifestation, that level where the *devas* come into action and "measure out", "prop asunder" and "establish" heaven, earth and the mid- or inner region, all in accordance with the law inherent to their very being which is but a reflection of the law inherent to the very core of the universe. As the manifested world is a world of activity, as everything is on the move, as it were, this thesis will naturally examine *rta* in the light of this movement, *rta* in its dynamic aspect rather than static, the latter referring merely

to the unvarying constancy of the movement, the regularity and predictability of all change.

## II.2. Sphere of ṛta.

The sphere (*prasitih*) of ṛta is all inclusive; there is no activity whether metaphysical, natural, or human that is not covered by it. Thus:

"heaven, the wide expanse of earth (*vyacas*)  
 profound obeisance (*namas*)  
 and more wondrous adoration" (*aramatih*)<sup>7</sup>.

In this verse are succinctly brought together the three most important aspects of ṛta and its field of manifestation:

First, ṛta as it manifests in heaven which, at the physical level, may include the zodiac, as demonstrated by V.M. Apte<sup>8</sup>, but metaphysically does connote the domain of the gods, hence the transcendent ṛta.

Secondly, ṛta as it manifests on earth in the orderliness of the natural processes, the time sequences, the balance of nature, the vast sweep of evolving life. Both Heaven and Earth are said to

"dwell in close union in the womb of ṛta"<sup>9</sup>  
 They are fields of manifestation for life through which the one all-inclusive law of becoming expresses itself. Both realms, being described as united through the one law are by implication, shown to be working in harmony towards a common end.

Thirdly, ṛta as it manifests in human life both in so far as its socio-ethical norms and its religious life are concerned, the latter expressed by the words "obeisance" (*namas*) and "piety" or "adoration" (*aramatih*). This implies that homage and obeisance are brought together in the sacrificial ritual where man re-enacts the universal process of give and take, and adds his own contribution. In obeisance and worship he aligns himself to the universal order, pays his tribute to the one Law and becomes the living agent of the ṛta. He is true, hence ṛta as truth. But in thus analysing ṛta into its component aspects we lose sight of its "unity" which H. Lefever rightly stresses. One order rules the cosmos at all levels, the same order manifesting differently at different levels:

"Ṛta in nature, as in the sphere of sacrifice, refers not to any particular 'order', e.g., the order of the sun, but to the natural order 'in general'... In nature, as in the sphere of sacrifice, there is only one ṛta, which is manifested in the different natural 'orders'... In its application to human conduct, no less than to sacrifice or to natural phenomena, ṛta is a unity... Different obligations may apply to different men and circumstances, but it is the same moral order - ṛta - in every case. So those who cleave to ṛta are held righteous by all mankind (V.67.4).

"Not only is *ṛta* a unity in each of the three spheres mentioned, it is a unity throughout them all. Each of the three 'orders' - sacrificial, natural and moral - is a manifestation of the same universal *ṛta*."<sup>10</sup>

### 11. II.3. Origin of *ṛta*.

Tracing the origin of *ṛta* as conceived by the *ṛsis*, we have to go to a short, but revealing, three stanza hymn of creation:

"*Ṛta*, universal order, and *satya*, truth, were born of blazing *tapas*."<sup>11</sup>

The word *tapas* being here a keyword since both *ṛta* and *satya* are "born" of *tapas* should first be examined. In the *nāsadīya* hymn (Rgv.X.129) we find that all originally was in darkness and voidness and that only by the flame of *tapas* was life kindled to manifestation:

"Darkness there was; at first, hidden in darkness this all was undifferentiated depth. Enwrapped in voidness, that one emerged which flame-power kindled to existence."<sup>12</sup>

This could be compared to a verse from the Atharvaveda:

"Both *tapas* and action (*karman*) were within the mighty ocean. *Tapas* arose from action; that did they worship as highest."<sup>13</sup>

Here both *tapas* and *karman* are stated to be within the great sea. We might consider that *tapas*, contemplative exertion which leads to action, or potential within the great sea of cosmic life, i.e. and *karman* were latent in the unmanifest. But the next line says that *tapas* was born from action *karmanas*, the action being the arousal of the creative energy which itself leads to further action. The action is reciprocal.

The primary impulse is thus *tapas*<sup>14</sup> which, at the human level, has been translated as austerity, penance and heat - the root of the word being  $\sqrt{\text{tap}}$  to burn, consume, give out heat.<sup>15</sup> *Tapas* can be examined both ontologically and psychologically. Ontologically, it is that cosmic energy which keeps the universe moving from the beginning to the end of the cycle. The transition from the ABSOLUTE, the ONE - beyond being or *sat* - merely hinted at in the first and last stanza of the *nāsadīya* hymn to the manifested ONE described as "the overseer" (*adhyakṣa*) who, even as the Supreme One in the highest empyrean may not know the ultimate secret of Reality, occurs through the inherent creative drive of *tapas*. Through *tapas* the Unmanifest becomes manifest. Psychologically, *tapas* refers to a specific kind of inner exertion, an intense spiritual focussing which takes place in deep meditation, a contraction to an innermost point of contemplation, and a subsequent expansion whereby the creative flame is aroused at the highest possible level of awareness, the physiological effect of which only is heat. To emphasise the effect at the complete expense of the cause



is to evidence ignorance of the whole process.

The poets in these creation hymns are using the analogy of yogic meditation to describe the divine creative act. This contraction-expansion arouses the supreme energy locked within the ONE and personified in the R̥gveda as Agni. Not content with mere tapas the bard of R̥g.V.X.190.1 qualifies the word with the participial adjective of the verb  $\sqrt{\text{abhi-ldh}}$ , to "inflame", so that we have the picture of the divine contemplation blazing to incandescent manifestation.

The first stanza of R̥g.V.X.190.1 brings out a point of far reaching importance in the Vedic vision, namely that truth (satya) and order (rta) are inherent in the very structure and process of manifestation. Creation occurs in accordance with the inherent law of being. That is truth (satya). Hence the Vedic vision of the world is one of universal order. So Abinash Chandra Bose, in his "Hymns from the Vedas" wrote:

"R̥ta and satya as ends, and tapas as the means, form the foundation of Vedic culture and religion."<sup>16</sup>

#### II.4. Difference between rta and satya.

Rta and satya were evidently differentiated in the minds of the seers. Satya (from sat) refers to that which is, the being-ness so to speak of anything; rta (from  $\sqrt{\text{r}}$  to move, rise, go) refers to the "course of things";<sup>17</sup> it expresses being in manifestation, in activity, hence the visible order, the universal structure which is cosmic harmony. One may infer that satya is the passive or static expression, and rta the active or dynamic expression of Reality.

Scholars emphasise different points in their interpretation of rta and satya. For H. Oldenberg rta is "order" and satya is

"the agreement between what is said and what actually is".<sup>18</sup>

Rta operates in the field of "forward-tending-movement", hence the "course" of things, the dynamic aspect of rta.

W.N. Brown states that

"... rta refers to Cosmic Truth, the principles and rules by which our universe operates - or ought to operate. But satya in those contexts refers to individual Truth, the perfect fulfilment by an individual ... of his personal duty under the rta."<sup>19</sup>

According to H.D. Velankar

"Rta on the whole refers to what relates to existing facts, existing from beginningless times, while satya refers to something which is going to become ... When facts accord with what is desired in future, or intended or said, the desire, intention or speech is said to have

become *satya* ...

As against *satya*, which is mainly an adjective (mostly, as an independent word, but always, in compounds), *ṛta* is chiefly a noun (really a past passive participle of the root *ṛ* to go), meaning 'what has happened, what has traversed its course' from times immemorial, and rarely an adjective.<sup>20</sup>

This is taking *ṛta* as the static and *satya* as the active aspect of reality, an opposite view to the one we are taking. It seems rather that *satya* being related to *sat*, that which is, the state of being, refers to inherent truth, the very being of the universe or of anything, and *ṛta* its working out, and final layout, hence its dynamic aspect. J.M. Koller takes one step further along this line of interpretation when he declares:

"There is no difference between the being (*sat*) of reality and its function (*ṛta*) ... This identity of being and function (*sat* and *ṛta*) is one of the profoundest aspects of the Vedic vision ... *Satya* here (X.190.1) refers to the inner being or truth of reality, and *ṛta* to the functioning of that reality."<sup>21</sup>

But the equation can only be conceived as existing at the transcendental level. However, as H. Lefever points out:

"*Rta* includes *satya*, but its content is wider. Hence what is 'not *satya*' is also against *ṛta*, and so *anṛta* is regularly used as the opposite of *satya*."<sup>22</sup>

A.C. Bose sums up the argument thus:

"*Satya* (truth) has two aspects: first, it is integrity, and as such part of *Rta*; secondly, it is *Sat* or ultimate Reality to be realised through the inner vision."<sup>23</sup>

When what appears to be is proved to correspond to what is, then that is *satya*. This is what Grassmann means when he explains *satya* as 'what is as it appears to be or as it should be'. Perhaps we could sum up the main difference between both words as 'subjective truth' as against 'objective order', unmanifest being as against manifest law, veritas in essendo, essential truth as *satya* and veritas in rei, contingent truth as *ṛta*. This is somewhat brought out in an invocation to Heaven and Earth:

"O Heaven and Earth may your truth be effective!"<sup>24</sup>

In other words, may that for which you stand be made manifest.<sup>25</sup>

Soma is proclaimed as one

"speaking the *ṛta*, glorious through the *ṛta*;  
speaking the truth, acting the truth!"<sup>26</sup>

In acting in accordance with the divine order of things or the law, in manifesting it, Soma is effectually true. He is his own inherent being. Similarly Dawn is inherently "true" (*satya*) that is, reliable in her manifestation as dawn as she is born in *ṛta*,<sup>27</sup> manifesting in accordance with

the law. The Maruts, "followers of ṛta" (*ṛtasāpah*) "by means of ṛta have come to the truth".<sup>28</sup> As they are "versed in the ṛta" (*ṛtajñāh*) they heed the truth (*satyasrutah*). All the gods are "true" (*satyah*) as "they follow the ṛta".<sup>29</sup>

But as perceptively observed by H. Lefever

"... in spite of all these passages asserting or implying the reality of ṛta, there is a sense in which ṛta is regarded as ideal ... as far as the world of space, time and will is concerned, it is not always actual ... the chief task of Gods and men, as well as the chief motive of the sacrificial system generally, was to bring ṛta into actual existence in the space-time world.

'May your ṛta be actual (satya)' is a prayer to Heaven and Earth in [Rgv.] III.54.3".<sup>30</sup>

He then brings forward two rather unconvincing examples of the "interruption of ṛta's operation" in the sphere of natural phenomena: what he calls, by a great stretch of the imagination, an eclipse of the sun<sup>31</sup> or a drought<sup>32</sup> neither of which can be viewed as interruptions since they are both part of the vast movement and can be predicted. Ṛta is both "ideal" and "actual" in the phenomenal world to a far greater extent than at the human level where there is constant interruption of it, for man is faced with the choice of actualising ṛta in his life, or denying it and setting himself against it, in other words, integrating himself as a whole in harmony with the whole, or not. The most marked ~~obstruction~~ to the working of ṛta is therefore found in the sphere of human conduct which will be considered in due course.

Satya in its metaphysical, or absolute, meaning is described in the Rgveda as

"the unshakeable foundation of heaven"<sup>33</sup>

and as

"the base that bears the earth!"<sup>34</sup>

It is added that

"by ṛta stand the Adityas".<sup>35</sup>

Essential being, or being-ness, as the basis of the world, finds its manifested expression as order in ṛta whose root is thus ultimate being. So the ṛṣi states:

"Firmly (are fixed) the foundations of ṛta,  
shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms."<sup>36</sup>

These forms are the manifestations of the world order,<sup>37</sup> e.g. the perfect harmony existing between the essence of being, sat, and its activity or outer expression, ṛta: a thing will grow only in accordance with what is in its seed; so long as we ignite fire in the proper way that will produce the spark, it never fails to be kindled, for we have touched its inherent nature. This is the law, this is ṛta. Therefore fire is kindled

In accordance with ṛta, the tides ebb and flow. In accordance with ṛta, the sun rises, extends its light and sets in accordance with ṛta; the stars move along their ordered pathways, the seasons come in regular succession, the dawns, the days and nights, birth, growth and death all follow in ordered sequence and form part of the rhythmic pattern of life, the eternal rhythm of the universe, ordered activity, ṛta.<sup>38</sup>

"By ṛta (the law) have the herds (of the universe) entered the ṛta (cosmic order)."<sup>39</sup>

All the worlds move in accordance with the law, and all things in those worlds also proceed in accordance with the law:

"In accordance with the law is eternal nurture outpoured!"<sup>40</sup>

"Dawn the maiden infringes not upon the domain of Order and day after day proceeds to the appointed-place."<sup>41</sup>

Neither Sūrya nor any god can

"transgress the ordained directions!"<sup>42</sup>

or "infringe the common statute."<sup>43</sup>

All natural activities are effects of an inner harmony which is the touchstone of the Supreme Order.<sup>44</sup> These examples show both the static and dynamic aspects of ṛta: what is ordained and therefore fixed as the Law, is immutable; nought can over-ride it; that which brings about what is ordained, the dynamic activity expressed through those agents of the Law, the devas working in accordance with the law which is basic to their very nature, that is constantly in movement; hence the continuous actualisation of that law, the eternal transformation of all things in accordance with a specific pattern being inherently the settled order.

This orderly process that works according to the inherent law of being can be reduced to a fundamental rhythm: in-breathing and out-breathing, withdrawing and out-going, involution and evolution, action and reaction, contraction and expansion, diastolic and systolic, give and take, or in the quaint language of the hymns

"weaving forth and weaving back!"<sup>45</sup>

Hence the institution of rites to commemorate and translate into human terms the universal order; hence the bold imagery and equations in which the ṛsis seem to have delighted:

"To law (belong) the deep and wide (Heaven and) Earth,<sup>46</sup>  
Supreme milch-kine, to law these outpour their milk!"

"To law flow out the rivers<sup>47</sup>  
as truth spreads out the sun!"

This last verse may be interpreted as the sun shines out in accordance

with its inherent nature, law or truth, and thereby reveals its being. This is succinctly rendered as "the sun spreads", or "rays out" "truth" (satyam), it expresses nothing else but its very being. Likewise, the pithy statement already quoted, shows a remarkable compression of thought:

"The sun shone forth by the song born of ṛta"<sup>48</sup>

At the macrocosmic level the song born of ṛta is the harmonious working of all manifestation: this may be called the "song" of the devas, the sacred-song of ṛta, for the devas are said to

"rejoice in the sacred-song of ṛta"<sup>49</sup>

which is fashioned of their activity. At the microcosmic level, man's song is both his aspiration towards the highest that he can conceive, and his actual expression in daily life of that aspiration. The "song" is here the shorthand symbol of that inner drive which urges man to greater deeds in accordance with the "law" of which he is an inherent part. The intimate connection between the action of man and of ṛta proclaims the inter-linkedness of man and universe. Man's song, born of his understanding of and conforming to ṛta, filled with ṛta, is his own individual reflection of that cosmic order, hence his enlightenment: he shines his own truth as the sun does. R. Panikkar observes a peculiarly Vedic characteristic of the ṛsis' vision of truth hardly commented upon by scholars with the exception of J. Gonda, namely the "light" quality of reality:

"Reality is suffused with light; it is in fact light crystallised from the actual luminous source of light ... Reality is lightsome, that is, radiant and beautiful."<sup>50</sup>

A Rgvedic verse describes satya, truth, as

"luminous, lofty ... established on the unshakeable foundation of heaven."<sup>51</sup>

## II.5

### The physical image of ṛta: the zodiac

Although 19th century scholars tried to explain almost every Vedic conception as based on an observable natural phenomenon, or on a particular sensory object<sup>52</sup> there was little attempt, with regard to ṛta, to emphasise the physical basis of the conception to the exclusion of other aspects, beyond the recognition of ṛta as meaning the regularity of the movement of the celestial bodies, of time sequences, the succession of the seasons, and so on. This was itself an evaluation of the word at its most material level, i.e. as it manifests in the world of physical phenomena. It was thus

summarised by Max Müller:

"... this Rta ... meant originally the firmly established movement of the world, of the sun, of morning and evening, of day and night... the spring of that movement was localised in the far East ... its manifestation was perceived in the path of the heavenly bodies ... that right path on which the gods brought light out of darkness became afterwards the path to be followed by man, partly in his sacrifices, partly in his general moral conduct."<sup>53</sup>

The meaning of rta as moral order captured the attention of scholars and so they emphasised that aspect at the expense of the others.

However, an interesting development of the 19th century tendency to interpret Vedic conceptions as rooted in a physical or visible phenomenon is found in the 20th century scholar V.M. Apte who, in his article "The Zodiac - the physical basis of Rta (Cosmic order)"<sup>54</sup> brings forward arguments for the validity of such an interpretation. His thesis is that in addition to the number of passages where rta undoubtedly means law, order, right

"... there is an equally large number of passages there which betray (what we may call) the primary or the fundamental physical sense of the word which represents ... the natural or physical basis of the very abstract ... conception of rta as 'Cosmic- or World-Order'"<sup>55</sup>

Rta, according to Apte thus refers to

- (1) the path of the luminaries of the zodiac
- (2) the world order
- (3) right
- (4) rite

As we shall see in the course of this thesis, to the Vedic mind all things were interconnected and indeed interdependent; the physical world would thus have its counterpart in the non-physical and vice versa. Rta - if the idea of the zodiac<sup>56</sup> could have been part of its several meanings - could then have been considered the visible reflection of the invisible spiritual expression of the universe, but the point should not be stretched too far.<sup>57</sup> However, V.M. Apte's theory is worth examining both in terms of the words he lists as governing rta and the examples he brings forward as

"clear and unmistakable evidence of the original spatial character of rta, which, from all these indications appears to have described a well-defined figure in the geometry of the Rgvedic universe, holding within it heaven and earth and circumscribing the movements of the luminaries (devas)"<sup>58</sup>

The "original spatial character of rta" would, in 19th century scholarly opinion, be due to a simple or primitive notion which, however, stands in contradiction with what V.M. Apte terms the "geometry of the Rgvedic universe", the word "geometry" presupposing an already elaborate

conception of the universe which indeed the Rgveda evidences.

V.M. Apte continues

"If it is a recognised principle that in religious thought, generally, the process of development or evolution is from the external, the physical, the concrete, and the natural to the internal, moral and the abstract, if the Vedic gods are acknowledgedly nearer to the (or natural) phenomena from which they have developed, than the gods of any other European people, why should we suppose that the natural order of evolution is suspended in the case of ṛta ..."<sup>59</sup>

This "recognised principle" was a 19th century prejudice which is now open to grave doubts, the trend in modern scholarship being away from it. It is not at all recognised that religious thought shows a marked development from the external to the internal, from the concrete to the abstract. The divine and the natural order of things, in the ancient religions, seem rather indissolubly linked and the physical world is generally regarded as rooted in the divine action and therefore as its effect, brought about by those informing principles or entities which, to the ancient mind, always lay back of physical phenomena, and not vice versa. W.B. Kristensen recognises this different approach and points out that

"the Ancient's view of nature ... was directed especially towards the essence of phenomena, and the essence determined all the constituent elements. Thus the Ancients saw in the earth or in the fire in the first instance energies or living beings. The essence of phenomena was divine life. This is the religious view of nature".<sup>61</sup>

"That which is characteristic of the Ancient civilizations and religions is the vivid consciousness of the cooperation between, indeed a fusion of, the finite and infinite factors in all phenomena connected with the essentials of life".<sup>62</sup>

If vision or *dhī* is a mystical perception or, in the words of J. Gonda,

"the exceptional faculty ... proper to 'seers' of 'seeing', in the mind, things, causes, connections as they really are ... of acquiring a sudden knowledge of the truth",<sup>63</sup>

the origin of the apprehension of ṛta was a spiritual insight and certainly not derived exclusively from any physical observation. The observation of natural phenomena could and was used as an illustration best capable of describing the vision and bringing its significance closer to the understanding of simple folks. But it was not itself the source of the vision which, although being extra-sensory, was seen to be valid at all levels, as the interconnection and interdependence of all things was proved true.

This, however, does not alter the fact that ṛta may also have had a fourth meaning (besides that of law, truth or right and rite) namely the circle of the heaven or zodiacal belt. V.M. Apte brings forward

quotations which do lend themselves to such an interpretation. He lists certain words which are used governing ṛta and whose meanings apply to material things, but some of which such as "path", "womb", "seat" could also be used in a figurative sense:

*path* (path); *yoni* (womb); *sadana* (seat); *dhāman* (seat);  
*śrīṅga* (peak); *budhna* (bottom); *khā* (cavity); *sānu* (top, ridge);  
*cakra* (wheel).

The "path of ṛta" (*ṛtasya pantham*) may be taken in both a figurative and a literal sense - the path of righteousness as well as the path in the heavens along which the dawns, the sun and the luminaries travel. Some verses show this ambiguity and may be taken in both senses. Thus:

"For the broad (sun) a wider course was made manifest, the path of ṛta has been extended by means of rays"<sup>64</sup>

Slightly less obvious is the following:

"The path of ṛta is for crossing safely to the other shore, the channel of heaven has become visible."<sup>65</sup>

The channel of heaven which becomes visible is the path of ṛta which can be used to cross to the beyond. We have here a pointer to the visible track of the heavens as well as that invisible way which leads to the other shore. The paths of the planets in the heavens are expressive of that eternal recurrence, that peculiar rhythm, which is one aspect of the cosmic order.

This "path of ṛta" Dawn "follows correctly",<sup>66</sup> not missing the "directions" or cardinal points.<sup>67</sup> This evidently refers to the path that dawn follows in the heavens and that this is the path of ṛta is quite significant for it is the path laid out by the law and also laid out spatially in the heavens. Nor does she

"trespass on the *dhāman* of ṛta".<sup>68</sup>

V.M. Apte takes this *pāda* in a literal sense as meaning that dawn

"never misses the habitation (*dhāman*) of ṛta",<sup>69</sup>

i.e. she illuminates the zodiacal belt. It is, however, open to both literal and figurative interpretations. It can equally mean that Dawn never infringes the law, rule, or statute of ṛta in so far as it applies to her nature, eternally recurrent illumination which is part of the vast cosmic rhythm regulating all things in manifestation. J. Gonda translates, and comments upon the verse, thus:

"... the young woman strictly observes that particular 'modality' of universal order and truth which is 'located' in, i.e. which consists in, chronological order, *in casu*, the regular succession of days, coming, everyday, to the place of rendezvous (*niskṛta-*)".<sup>70</sup>



For the latter word he gives L. Renou's explanation:

"lieu fixé pour le retour périodique et ce retour même".<sup>71</sup>

The "appointed spot" is obviously a physical location, and in this case, the expanse of the heaven. Dawn illuminates that expanse, hence the path of *ṛta* which she follows is the canopy of heaven. In this example V.M. Apte's interpretation is as valid as J. Gonda's.

The same dual interpretation applies to *Rgv.* IV.7.7 where the gods are said to "rejoice" in the *dhāman* "institution", or "establishment" of *ṛta*.<sup>72</sup> The meaning of the word *dhāman* is still open to controversy. V.M. Apte translates it as "habitation" and lists *sadana*, *sadas* and *durona* as well as *dhāman* as words used in connection with *ṛta* and proving "its spatial character, nay, its exact location".<sup>73</sup> Bergaigne, on the other hand, argues that *dhāman* acquired the concrete sense of "habitation" in classical Sanskrit only:

"It appears to have, besides the sense of 'law', only that of 'essence' or 'inherent nature'... the nature of a thing is 'the way in which it has been instituted'. Both senses may be confused, the nature of a thing being at the same time its law."<sup>74</sup>

L. Renou translates the word as "institution" as well as "sojourn" or "form" as a "secondary" meaning. It specifically refers to the institution of *Varuṇa*:

"The obedience of the dawns consists in the uninterrupted periodicity of their manifestation".<sup>75</sup>

The gods themselves, those "heavenly denizens" (*divakṣasah*), "flame-tongued" (*agnijihvāḥ*), "ṛta fostering" (*ṛtāvṛdhah*), sit reflecting "in the womb of *ṛta*" (*ṛtasya yonim*).<sup>76</sup> Here the womb of *ṛta* may very well be the vault of the heaven whilst the first mentioned *ṛta* refers to the cosmic law which the gods foster. There could be a similar dual meaning in *Rgv.* VII.60.5:

"In the home of *ṛta* [the Adityas] have waxed great".<sup>77</sup>

Heaven and Earth, the parents of old, are described as "dwelling closely united" (*kṣayataḥ samokasā*) in the womb of *ṛta*;<sup>77a</sup> in that womb they rejoice (*mādataḥ*).<sup>77b</sup> The Dawns likewise "rejoice" or "disport themselves" in that "womb".<sup>78</sup> *Ṛta* in these examples evidently refers to the vault of the sky, this being the womb in which the dawns manifest. The sun is described as "the pure and beautiful face of *ṛta* that shines on its arising <sup>in heaven</sup> like gold".<sup>79</sup>

He "besprinkles with honey the womb of *ṛta*".<sup>80</sup>

This besprinkling points to the golden luminosity which extends over the sky at dawn so that the sun, as it appears, could be thought of as the

radiant face of ṛta as it illuminates the canopy of heaven. Sūrya also seems to be referred to

"glowing forth in the seat of ṛta",<sup>81</sup>

and "shining on the summit of ṛta".<sup>81a</sup>

For him the "Adityas have cut open a course."<sup>82</sup>

The word *adhvan* is used in the accusative plural and may mean either road, course or orbit, but it is also given out as "zodiac?" in Monier Williams's dictionary. The orbit of the planets is laid out by the gods, so their pathway in the heavens is both the law and the zodiac.

Varuna in Rgv.VII.87.1 is stated to cut a pathway for Sūrya.

This and similar ones seem to be those

"paths, ancient, dustless and well-laid out in the middle region".<sup>83</sup>

which Savitr is wont to traverse. He himself is said to

"toil in accordance with ṛta, to extend far out the peak of ṛta".<sup>84</sup>

an expression which V.M. Apte explains as meaning that

"Savitr's ever widening circle of light, simultaneously makes the extent of ṛta more and more manifest".<sup>85</sup>

We have again in this verse the use of the word ṛta in two different senses - literal as meaning sky and figurative as meaning law and order.

Again from

"the bottom of ṛta"<sup>85a</sup>

the sun is said to penetrate the two worlds. Such examples have certainly a spatial connotation.

Not only are such words as "womb" (*yoni*), "bottom" (*budhna*) and "summit" (*sānu*) used governing ṛta and expressive of the heavens, but also the word "seat" (*sadana* and *sadas*) often seems to refer to a particular location of ṛta. In Rgv.IV.21.3 ṛta is, according to V.M. Apte, specifically located "at a distance". Thus Indra is invited to come hither "from heaven or earth ... or from a distance (*parāvato vā*) from the seat of ṛta (*sadanād ṛtasya*)". From this "seat of ṛta the dawn goddesses awaken",<sup>86</sup> ṛta being seemingly here also a point in space from which the dawns start on their journey or speed onwards (*jarante*) unerringly traversing "the thirty *yojanas*".<sup>86a</sup> This localisation is confirmed in Rgv.IV.42.4 where Varuṇa is stated to have "fixed the heaven in the seat of ṛta".<sup>87</sup> Literally, this would mean that in ṛta, as the zodiacal belt, is established the expanse of sky; figuratively, the heavens in their everlasting and regular motion are expressive of the cosmic order.

The most convincing example brought forward by V.M. Apte to show

that one meaning of *ṛta* is the zodiacal circle is *Rgv.* I. 164.11:

"Around the heaven revolves the ever unaging twelve-spoked wheel of *ṛta*."<sup>88</sup>

This could be interpreted as the sun circling round the sky but in this case the twelve spokes would be difficult to explain; the verse however, does also lend itself to the idea of the heaven conceived as a wheel with its twelve spokes or divisions circling round forever through the twelve months of the year; "there" (*atra*) within that wheel, the verse goes on,

"seven hundred and twenty sons abide in pairs".<sup>89</sup>

The word "pairs" gives the clue to the meaning of seven hundred and twenty sons; we may presume that these refer to the three hundred and sixty days and three hundred and sixty nights.<sup>90</sup>

The "one-wheeled chariot" (*ratham ekacakram*) in *Rgv.* I. 164.2, "three-naved" (*trinābhi*) - interpreted as the three seasons<sup>91</sup> - "ageless" (*ajaram*) and "unobstructable" (*ānarvam*), "whom the seven yoke" is said to be "drawn by the one steed with seven names";<sup>92</sup> "there", i.e. within this wheel, "all the worlds take their stand". This cannot refer to the sun only as most scholars interpret "wheel", since all the worlds are not located in the sun, but rather to the zodiacal wheel which contains them all or possibly only to our solar system; the sun itself being the steed and the seven other steeds, occasionally mentioned the seven planets.<sup>93</sup>

In *Rgv.* I. 164.48 this "single wheel" - the emphasis on *cakram ekam* is quite significant - is described as having "twelve felines" (*dvādaśa pradhayaś*) and being "three-naved" (*trīṇi nabhyāni*);

"fixed together therein are three hundred and sixty spokes that (turn) undeviatingly."<sup>94</sup>

The eternal recurrence of day and night, of the seasons, the years, assures the irrevocable march of time and the ordered process of nature which nothing can disturb. This "selfsame wheel" (*samānam cakram*) is drawn by the "dappled" or "brilliant" courser, the sun itself, *etaśa*,

"intent on revolving it hither, yoked to the poles".<sup>95</sup>

This verse, as indeed *Rgv.* I. 164.2, previously quoted, is usually interpreted as referring to the sun being drawn by a horse and the wheel is taken to be the sun itself. But the interpretation of the sun being itself the courser that draws the wheel or circle of the heaven is equally valid.<sup>96</sup> *Sūrya* is at other times represented as the leader of the coursers, the latter possibly referring to the planets. A case in point is *Rgv.* V. 62.1 addressed to *Mitra-Varuna*:

"By your *ṛta* is eternal *ṛta* firmly established, there where they unyoke *Sūrya*'s steeds".<sup>97</sup>

All these verses seem to bear references to *ṛta* the cosmic order as mirrored in natural phenomena both in the heavens and on earth, the zodiac being but the image of the orderly motion of the universe, hence the image of *ṛta*. But this is only one of the many facets of *ṛta*.

Chapter II / Section 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

1. "The Zodiac - the physical basis of Rta (Cosmic Order)". (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute, vol.5,1943-44.)p.183.
2. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.2.
3. op.cit.p.1.
4. "Dharma: an expression of universal order." In Philosophy East and West. vol.22. April 1972. p.135.
5. cf. also A.A.Macdonell "Vedic mythology", 1897: "The Cosmic order or law prevailing in nature is recognised under the name of rta ... The same word also designates 'order' in the moral world as truth and right and in the religious world as sacrifice or 'rite'".(p.11).  
cf. Dumézil. "Ordre, fantaisie." 1935. "Rta ... est l'ordre du monde matériel, mythique, liturgique, moral, mais un ordre statique plutôt que dynamique, assuré par l'emboîtement correct et constant de ses composantes." (p.140)  
cf. R.N. Dandekar. "Some aspects of Hinduism."1967. "The word rta, which is connected with IE ar (= to bind), originally signified bondage. Later it came to denote the well-regulated order of the universe, the cosmic norm which ensured the exclusion of every kind of accidentality and unpredictability." (p.39)
6. "Un hymne à énigmes du Rgveda." In Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique. vol.42,1949.p.266. (trans.J.M.)  
cf. also A. Bergaigne "Religion védique", 1883. tome.III.p.211-212.  
cf. N. Venkataraman, "The conception of natural law in ancient Indian history". 5th Indian Phil. Cong. Lahore, 1929. Calcutta, 1936. p.374.  
Max Müller prefers the sense of rta as "of gone, the going, the path followed in going" rather than of "joined, fitted, fixed", and recognises "the same root in ... Nir-riti, literally going away, then decay, destruction, death, also the place of destruction, the abyss ..." (Lectures on the origin and growth of religion.1878. Hibbert Lectures) p.239.
7. *r̥tasya hi prasitir-dyaur-uru vyaco namo mahy-aramatih panīyasī.* (Rgv.X.92<sup>4</sup>/<sub>ab</sub>)
8. "The Zodiac - the physical basis of Rta (Cosmic Order)". (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol.5,1943-44.)p.180-191.
9. *r̥tasya yonā kṣayataḥ samokasā.* (Rgv.X.65.8b).
10. op.cit.p.5.
11. *r̥taṃ ca satyaṃ cābhīdhāt tapaso dhyajāyata.* (Rg.X.190.1ab).
12. *tama āsīt tamasā gūḥam agre 'praketaṃ salilaṃ sarvam ā idam tuchyena ābhv-āpihitaṃ yad āsīt tapasas tan mahinā ajāyata ekam.* (Rgv.X.129.3.)
13. *tapas ca eva āstām karma ca antar-mahaty-arnave tapo ha jñajñe karmaṇas tat te jyeṣṭham upāsata.* (Athv.XI.8.6.) The word *karman* translated here as "action", is really "what is to be done" or "what is ordained".
14. See also K. Werner. "Religious practice and yoga in the time of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and early Buddhism." p.184. (B.O.R. Institute. Poona. Annals. vol.56,1975.)
15. The usual translation of *tapas* as heat completely misses its inner significance. Cf. Keith "Indian mythology." 1917.p.17.
16. op.cit.1966.p.7.
17. cf. D.P. Joshi. "Rta." 15 AIOC.1949.p.7-8. cf. also J.M. Koller "Dharma: an expression of universal order." (Philosophy East and West. vol.22. Ap. 1972.) p.135.
18. "Zur Religion und Mythologie des Veda." (Nachrichten von der Königlischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Phil.-Hist.) 1915<sup>a</sup> ... "An ihnen allen (Stellen) tritt deutlichst hervor, wie das Schlagwort *satyam* die Übereinstimmung dessen, was gesagt wird, mit dem, was wirklich ist, bezeichnet." (p.169).
19. "Duty as truth in the Rig Veda." In India Major. 1972.p.60.
20. "Rta and satya in the Rgveda." A.I.O.C.20.1959. p.3-4.
21. "Dharma: an expression of universal order." (Philosophy East and West, 1972 no.2) p.136.

- 22 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935, p. 32
- 23 "Hymns from the Vedas." 1966, p. 8
- 24 *yuvor rtaṃ rodasī satyam astu.* (Rgv. III. 54. 3a)
- 25 cf. Rgv. III. 54. 4. where "faithful to rta" (*rtāvarī*) the ancient patriarchs declare the truth (*satyavācaḥ*).
- 26 *rtaṃ vadann-rta-dyumna satyam vadant-satya-karman.* (Rgv. IX. 113. 4 ab)
- 27 *rtājātasatyāḥ* (Rgv. IV. 51. 7)
- 28 *rtena satyam rtaṣapa āyan.* (Rgv. VII. 56. 12c)
- 29 *ya rtaṣapaḥ satyāḥ* (Rgv. VI. 50. 2c) cf. Rgv. V. 67. 4
- 30 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935, p. 6
- 31 *śuśoca sūrya rtajātayā girā* (Rgv. X. 138. 2d) "the sun shone forth by the song sprung of order." cf. The sun immersed in gloom. cf. Rgv. V. 40. 6 has been interpreted as an eclipse. There is no guarantee that either refers to an eclipse. The sun here may simply be a symbol of the inner light that may shine fully as a result of the all-inspiring song. Similarly the demon who strikes at rta by means of *anṛta* (Rgv. X. 87. 11) is no proof of the interruption of rta. Eclipses being predictable are part of the great movement of the heavens, hence of rta.
- 32 Rgv. I. 121. 4. Droughts and floods are two extremes of atmospheric pressure, hence part of the vast becoming and do not mean the interruption of rta. Phenomena appear disorderly to man when he suffers from them but a deeper study usually reveals that what appears as disorder is nature's restoration of balance, e.g. lightning releases the air from an overdose of ionisation.
- 33 *dharman divo dharuṇe satyam* (Rgv. X. 170. 2b).
- 34 *satyena attabhitā bhūmih.* (Rgv. X. 85. 1a)
- 35 *rtena adityās tisthanti.* (Rgv. X. 85. 1cd)
- 36 *rtasya drlhā dharuṇāni santi purūni candrā vapuṣe vapuṃsi.* (Rgv. IV. 23. 9ab)
- 37 cf. Rgv. V. 66. 2.
- 38 cf. Rgv. IV. 3. 9-12.
- 39 *rtena gāva rtaṃ ā viveśuh.* (Rgv. IV. 23. 9d) That the kine or herds (*gāvah*) refer to the rays of light or luminaries is confirmed in Rgv. VII. 36. 1. ("Let prayer issue forth from the seat of rta as Sūrya with his beams releases the herds.")
- 40 *rtena dīrgham iṣananta prksah.* (Rgv. IV. 23. 9c)
- 41 *rtasya yoṣā na mināti dhāmā ahar ahar niṣkṛtam ā caranti.* (Rgv. I. 123. 9cd)
- 42 *diśah ... na mināti pradīṣṭā.* (Rgv. III. 30. 12a)
- 43 *samānam na pramināti dhāma.* (Rgv. VII. 63. 3d)
- 44 cf. H. W. Wallis. "The cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887 ... the principle regulating the periodical recurrence of phenomena is constant; fresh phenomena are continually reproduced, but the principle of order remains the same." (p. 95).
- 45 *pra vaya apa vaya.* (Rgv. X. 130. 1d)
- 46 *rtāya pṛthvī bahule gabhīre rtāya dhenū parame duhāte.* (Rgv. IV. 23. 10cd)
- 47 *rtaṃ arṣanti sindhavaḥ satyam tatāna sūryo.* (Rgv. I. 105. 12ab)
- 48 *śuśoca sūrya rtajātayā girā.* (Rgv. X. 138. 2d)
- 49 *rtasya sāmān ranayanta devāḥ.* (Rgv. I. 147. 1d)
- 50 "The Vedic experience." 1977, p. 313.
- 51 *vibhrād brhat ... dhārman divo dharuṇe satyam arpitam.* (Rgv. X. 170. 2ab)
- 52 cf. Max Müller's attempt to prove the physical basis of the devas "that could be touched, like the rivers, that could be heard, like the thunder, that could be seen, like the sun." ("Lectures on the origin and growth of religion." London, 1878, p. 214.
- 53 op. cit. p. 245. cf. Wallis "Cosmology and the Rigveda." 1887, p. 93.
- 54 In "The Rgvedic antecedents of the Dharma-pāśa of Varuna in the Mahābhārata" (Deccan College Research Institute. Bull. vol. 5, 1943-44) pp. 167-196.
- 55 op. cit. p. 180

- 56 cf. Max Müller's "The nearest approach to rita is to be found in the Latin *rātus*, particularly when we consider that *rātus* was originally referred in Latin also to the constant movement of the stars ... I incline myself to the opinion that this *rātus* in Latin is identical in origin and also in intention with Sanskrit rita ..." op.cit.p.247.
- 57 cf. V.H. Vāder: "Rta, or the zodiacal belt." *Poona Orientalist*, vol. X, 1945 nos. 364. His conclusions are out of all proportion to any evidence he brings forward.
- 58 op.cit. 180.
- 59 op.cit. p. 181
- 60 "The Meaning of religion." Lectures in the phenomenology of religion. 1968.
- 61 op.cit. p. 36.
- 62 op.cit. p. 20
- 63 "Vision." p. 68
- 64 *adarsī gātur-urave variyāsī panthā rtasya samayamsta ras̄mibhih.* (Rgv. I. 136. 2ab)
- 65 *abhūd upāram etave panthā rtasya sādhuya adarsī vi srutir-divah.* (Rgv. I. 46. 11).
- 66 *rtasya panthām anv-eti sādhu.* Rgv. I. 124. 3c = V. 80. 4) Max Müller takes a completely different viewpoint from that of Apte: "the path of Rita occurs again and again, as followed by the dawn, or the sun, or day and night, and the only way in which we can generally translate it is the path of right, or the right path." ("Lectures on the origin and growth of religion." 1878). p. 242.
- 67 *naḥiso mināti.* (Rgv. I. 124. 3)
- 68 *rtasya ... na mināti dhāmā.* (Rgv. I. 123. 9c.)
- 69 op.cit. p. 185
- 70 "Dhāman." 1967. p. 30
- 71 E.V.P. III, p. 60
- 72 *rtasya dhāman ranayanta devāḥ.* (Rgv. IV. 7. 7b)
- 73 op.cit. p. 185
- 74 "La religion védique." 1878-83. III, p. 210. (Trans. J.M.) cf. *sva rtasya dhāman*, "in his own proper function of rta" (Rgv. VII. 36. 5) or as J. Gonda explains "in his own establishment of a manifestation of rta, i.e. in the established manifestation of rta which is proper to him" ("Vision" p. 175) cf. also *anu svam dhāma* (Rgv. III. 7. 6). The word *dhāman* is further discussed in ch. III. 3. 2. 9.
- 75 E.V.P. III, p. 59
- 76 Rgv. X. 65. 7
- 77 *ima rtasya vāvrdhur-durone.* (Rgv. VII. 60. 5d) cf. Rgv. II. 34. 13 (*rtasya sadanesu vavrdhḥ.*)
- 77a Rgv. X. 65. 8.
- 77b Rgv. III. 54. 6
- 78 *rtasya yonau tanvo juṣanta.* (Rgv. X. 8. 3d)
- 79 *rtasya śuci darsatam anīkaṃ rukmo na diva uditā vyadyaut.* (Rgv. VI. 51. 1cd)
- 80 *āpruṣāyan madhuna rtasya yonim.* (Rgv. X. 68. 4a)
- 81 *rtasya pade adhi dīdyanam* (Rgv. IV. 5. 9c)
- 81a *rtasya sānau* (Rgv. X. 123. 2)
- 82 *ādityā adhvano radanti.* (Rgv. VII. 60. 4c)
- 83 *ye te panthāḥ ... pūryāso arenavaḥ sukṛtā antarikṣe.* (Rgv. I. 35. 11. ab)
- 84 *ṛtena ... samāyat rtasya śṅgam urvīyā vipaprathe.* (Rgv. VIII. 86. 5. ab)
- 85 op.cit. p. 186-7
- 85a *rtasya budhna* (Rgv. III. 61. 7)
- 86 *rtasya devīḥ sadaso budhānā* (Rgv. IV. 51. 8c)
- 86a *trīṅsatam yojanāni* (Rgv. I. 123. 8) A *yojana* is a particular unit of distance.
- 87 *dhārayam divam sadana rtasya* (Rgv. IV. 42. 4b)
- 88 *divadasāram nahi taj-jarāya varvarti cakram pari dyām rtasya.* (Rgv. I. 164. 11. ab)

89. ā putrā ... mithunāso atra śapta śatāni viśatis ca tasthuh.  
(Rgv. I.164.11cd) cf. A Bergaigne. "La Religion védique." III.1883.  
p.215. Bergaigne mentions that universal order or rta is  
"symbolised by the figure of the wheel", but draws no conclusion.
90. See V.M. Apte. op.cit.p.187-8.
91. The seasons vary in number, either three, as the hot, rainy and cold,  
or five (Śat.Br.1.2.5.10) or even 6 (Ait.Br.III.1.6) - vasanta, grīśma,  
vatsa, śarad, hemanta, śisīra.
92. sapta yuñjanti ratham eka cakram eko āśvo vahati saptanāmā  
tripabhi cakram ajaram anarvam yatra imā viśvā bhuvanā adhi tasthuh.  
(Rgv. I.164.2).
93. In connection with this verse Keith simply mentions that "The year is  
the wheel of Rta with twelve spokes" in an enumeration of all the  
facets of Rta and gives no explanation. ("The Religion and Philosophy  
of the Veda." 1925.) p.83.
94. dvādaśa pradhayaś cakram ekam trīṇi nabhyāni ...  
tasmint sākam trisatā na śankavo arpitāḥ śastir-nā calācalāśah.  
(Rgv. I.164.48)
95. samanām cakram paryāvivṛtsan yad etaśo vahati dhūrṣu yuktaḥ.  
(Rgv. VII.63.2cd)
96. cf. Rgv. II.19.5c where Etaśa seems to be Sūrya himself.
97. rtena rtam aplhitam dhruvam vam sūryasya yatra vimucanty-āśvan.  
(Rgv. V.62.1ab)

## CHAPTER III

## VISION OF CREATION

## INTRODUCTION

Creation in accordance with ṛta

We may speak of the R̥gvedic vision of creation, using the word "creation" in a general sense, but we should bear in mind that in the context of the Vedic understanding of beginnings the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* as envisaged in Christianity does not apply. The ṛṣis thought of the origin of the universe in terms of a projection into manifestation of that which lies latent within the One, the word used being *visṛṣṭi* or *visarjana* from  $\sqrt{srj}$  to let go, to emit. It is rather like an unfoldment from within without in which process we notice three definite stages which imply three levels or world orders:

- 1) the primordial or transcendental level where  
 "that one which flame-power kindled to existence emerged"<sup>1</sup>  
 and ṛta manifested, born of *tapas*.<sup>2</sup> This is the transcendental ṛta, the blueprint of the cosmic order. Ultimate oneness is a characteristic of the R̥gvedic vision<sup>3</sup> to which Western scholars paid little attention. From this One differentiated the two poles of manifestation, poles which we would term positive-negative, spiritual-material, but which the Vedic seers first expressed as *asat* and *sat*, as Aditi and Dakṣa born from each other, and then as Dyaus-Pr̥thivī, Āpas-Tvaṣṭṛ.
- 2) The level intermediate between the spiritual and the physical, where the gods appear on the stage and through their interaction establish, give shape to and rule the manifested universe, or lower order, in accordance with the law implicit in their nature as at the heart of the universe, ṛta.
- 3) The concrete level, or space-time phenomenal world, where man rules and upsets the divine equilibrium. Here the tension between the opposite forces manifests as conflict, hence disharmony. It is the constant task of gods and men to restore the harmony and thus actualise at the earthly level that which is real at the ideal level.

Each of these orders will be examined in so far as it represents a field for the manifestation of the law, ṛta. It will become apparent that, although the law is one and the same at all levels, it finds a different expression according as the levels of life become more and more differentiated.



We have first the all-pervading law of becoming, of transformation or differentiation which could be simply called evolution, that which comes into play when *sat* emerges from *asat*, when

"desire, primordial seed of mind, in the beginning,  
arose in *That*".<sup>4</sup>

This law then manifests upon the different rungs of the ladder of the cosmos.

At the *primordial* level *ṛta* expresses itself as the differentiation of the one into the two poles of manifestation, then into the three, finally to become the many: an interaction of two complementary poles, a play of opposites wherein we glimpse the root of all the opposites such as light and darkness, positive and negative, good and evil and similar dichotomies without which a universe cannot be.

At the *secondary* level, *ṛta* manifests through the action of the *dévas* in so far as they are the law's agents in the further differentiation of the universe, acting in accordance with the law inherent to their being. The world is the expression of the *dévas*' activity. Here we find the field par excellence of the dynamics of *ṛta*.

At the *third* level, the effect of the action of *ṛta* becomes more complex; for opposition to its working is set up by human agency through ignorance, wrong choice or sheer ill-will; this creates an aspect of *ṛta* which is peculiar only to its relation to humanity: the law of righteousness as reflected in the socio-ethical-ritualistic side of religion. Religion is a purely human phenomenon, man's response to what he can grasp of the one universal law and its ramifications at all levels and his relation to it. We cannot regard this last aspect as the all important side of *ṛta*. It is but one of the facets of the many faceted law and one that manifests only in relation to humanity. Truth, righteousness, justice, are human value judgments which find their counterpart in the universe as harmony. What is constant as the characteristic of *ṛta* in the three fields of manifestation, is the law of transformation, ordering all things towards one harmonious whole, a cosmos; hence *ṛta* is essentially the law of harmony.

It will become apparent that, if we are to divide the cosmos into neat compartments, for the sake of analysis, a certain amount of overlapping is inevitable. Interdependence and interlinkedness are a marked feature of the universe which did not escape the perception of the *ṛsis*. Neat, separate compartments do not exist in nature. Thus for example, the question of the poles of manifestation examined in connection with the first differentiation, will have to be reconsidered in connection with the second level where the pairs of deities in their interaction further separate or delimit the world. Similarly, the question of the gods whose

activity is considered at the secondary level, will have to be taken up again in connection with humanity because of the close interaction, both at the ethical and ritualistic level, between both classes and their influence on each other. Some of the examples chosen from the Rgveda may also have to be taken up again in various sections to be examined from their various aspects as one and the same verse may bear several meanings.

## SECTION III.1. FIRST LEVEL

11.1.1. The primordial differentiation: the One differentiates into the two.

At the primordial level of manifestation, we find posited "that" which appears to be the Vedic conception of the Absolute. From the *nāsadīya* hymn (Rgv.X.129) we gather that this "that" is beyond human speculation, beyond attributes, although the human mind cannot help but qualify it in some way or other, such as

that "whose shadow is death whose shadow is immortality"<sup>5</sup> or as "undifferentiated depth"<sup>6</sup>, or "ocean profound, unfathomable".<sup>7</sup> Within "that" arose what could be described as the "creative power" (*uttānapad*) as a result of *tapas* and *kāma*.

"Earlier than the heaven, earlier than this earth,  
earlier than the gods and the asuras, That indeed is.  
What is that seed primeval which the billowy-deeps  
conceived wherein all the gods appeared together!"<sup>8</sup>

asks the poet. Through the power of *tapas*<sup>9</sup>, through the power of *kāma*<sup>10</sup>, of that primeval desire for existence which is the "primordial seed of mind"<sup>11</sup> and provides the bond between the unmanifest and the manifest, was the world brought into existence, was the world "projected". The *nāsadīya* hymn furthermore states expressly that "the gods came later by this world's projection".<sup>12</sup>

As we have seen when tracing the origin of *ṛta* in the Vedic vision (p.19) *ṛta* and *satya* were conceived as the first born of *tapas*, the primary impulse. The law came into action with the very first throeb of manifestation<sup>13</sup>. Thence was born time (*saṃvatsara* - the year) which rules all animate creatures with its orderly sequence of day and night<sup>14</sup>. The verb *√vi dhā*, "to impose order, distribute, ordain", is used to show time as regulating the sequences of manifestation, an orderly process, an expression of *ṛta*. Time is now the Ordainer (*dhātā*) that shapes or "images forth" (*akalpayat*) the stars and the heaven and the earth and the intermediate region and the empyrean.<sup>15</sup> The orderly unfoldment of the universe, the whole process of evolution is here clearly stated in a few masterly strokes.

The conception of the ultimate reality as an impersonal "that" on which there can be no speculation, is now stepped down so to speak to a supreme, masculine overseer (*adhyakṣa*) in the highest empyrean (*parama vyoman*), who himself may not know the ultimate secret of creation, for beyond him stands the Unmanifest, the Absolute Principle<sup>16</sup>, in which alone the secret may be locked. In

the *nāsadīya* hymn that overseer remains nameless. In other hymns Varuṇa stands as supreme and sovereign ruler<sup>17</sup> over all, master or overseer of the *ṛta*<sup>18</sup>, the "Omniscient" who is said to

"behold all things transcendent, past and future"<sup>19</sup>  
who is the "hidden depth",<sup>20</sup> "in whom rests all wisdom".<sup>21</sup>

Viśvakarman, the All-Creator is another presentation of this overseer, the "lord of vision"<sup>22</sup> who is "Our Father"<sup>13</sup> who is earlier than Heaven and Earth and the gods, who

"all-seeing, all-facing, all-embracing, all-pervading,  
with his arms, with his wings altogether whirled forth,  
generated heaven and earth, he the One God".<sup>24</sup>

The whirling forth of the Creator brings to mind an original vortex of energy circling round and round, aroused to activity as a result of *tapas* and bringing all things forth.

So the ṛṣis traced the origin of manifestation to the emanation or projection (*visṛṣṭi*) from the ONE, through *tapas*<sup>25</sup> or that flame-power aroused as a result of contemplative exertion<sup>26</sup>, or through *kāma*,<sup>27</sup> of a propelling force<sup>28</sup> which as Agni, is said to pervade all things and contain all powers<sup>29</sup>. They expressed this action in various philosophical and mythological ways. The conception of a creative power at the root of manifestation is described in Rg.X.72.3 as *uttānapad* - the upward shooting force that produces all things - this is really the power inherent in Agni<sup>30</sup> or again as

"that which arose from its own flame-power",<sup>31</sup>

from which all-kindling-*tapas* the right order of things, the process of transformation, *ṛta* was set in motion<sup>32</sup>, in other words, the course of manifestation started to roll onwards.

### III.1.2. Dualism inherent in manifestation

We might view this creative energy as a force of momentum becoming two by opposing force. The One thus differentiates into two polarities, the positive and the negative, the latent and active dynamism, or the spiritual and the substantial which two, in the Vedas are personified as Heaven and Earth, Father and Mother, bull and cow, whose interaction produces a third, namely the universe with all its creatures, including gods, which itself is the field of interplay for two currents of force, those of involution and evolution, expansion and contraction, construction and destruction, in human ethical terms, good and evil;<sup>33</sup> such interaction implying a definite rhythm, a majestic movement forming a pattern. That pattern is the ordered cosmos resulting from the weaving of the

Father and the Mother, the web<sup>34</sup> thus woven being the universe and the threads that form its woof the laws of nature.

"Between the Father and the Mother travels this whole moving world."<sup>35</sup>

As the forces of opposition form the very web of the universe and the law of change underlies their interaction, the latter should be examined in some detail in order to grasp the meaning of *rta* in its dynamic aspect. The differentiating process, or interaction of two poles, means association and dissociation, hence friction, attraction and repulsion, hence adaptation or adjustment, all exemplifying the law of transformation and balance, for balance is inherent in the adjustment of the vital tensions. The form in nature constantly adapts itself to the need. This adaptation-balance is one of the most important facets of *rta* and manifests at all levels. In this play of opposites or complementary forces, there may be resistance, hence pain. Hence the origin of pain, or as some would call it, evil is rooted in the very process of becoming.

### 1.3. The play of the opposites and its implications: the question of evil.

We do not think that the forces of opposition, whether they be described as being - non-being, true - false, chaos - cosmos, were in the Vedic view as sharply defined and opposed as W.N. Brown claims in his article "The Rgvedic equivalent for hell":

"There was the created, ordered, lighted world; there was the uncreated, unordered, unilluminated place of dissolution beneath it. The one was ruled by the gods; he (the Vedic sage) loved it. The other was the place of destruction and the demons; he dreaded it. Aditi, personification of Benevolent Boundlessness, symbolised one; Nirṛti, personification of Malevolence and Destruction, symbolised the other. The one he called Sat, the existent; the other he called Asat, the Non-existent."<sup>36</sup>

The Vedic ṛṣis were far too aware of the interconnection between all forces to place them into neat opposite camps. The one power *māyā* e.g. is used either for benevolent or malevolent purposes. The interplay of opposing forces may involve an intermingling of these as is exemplified in the personality of some gods. The ambivalence of these is a notorious factor to be taken into account in any assessment of e.g. Varuna, or Agni and Rudra who both deter and soothe, destroy and build up or heal.<sup>37</sup> On this subject L. Renou declares:

"These cosmic powers, precursors of the *śaktis*, do not constitute a system of clear-cut oppositions. In classical times Śiva, the terrible destroyer, could also be a kindly protector; similarly in the Vedic system, vast spheres of activity are controlled by ambivalent powers. A normally well-disposed divinity may take on a *ghorā tanū*, an awful aspect; Varuṇa

is alarmingly liable to assume the aspect of Vrtra... Sometimes the ambivalence is an integral feature of the divinity, as in the case of Rudra.<sup>38</sup>

This differentiating power may be said to be personified in some of the gods, notably in Indra who "repeatedly (*muhur*) makes the *asat* into the *sat*", or the potential into the actual<sup>37</sup> so that from the differentiation of the *asat* and the *sat* originally fused, chaos becomes cosmos<sup>40</sup>; or this same power assumes the grand figure of Puruṣa<sup>41</sup>, the divine prototype of man who, born in the beginning, was sacrificed that from his remains the universe might be; but only one-fourth of him pervades the world, three-quarters of him remain invisible in the inner levels. The word "repeatedly" *muhur* in the reference to Indra's action points to the process of transformation that is constantly going on in the world. The emergence of the *sat* from the *asat* is evidence of the starting point of the law of becoming, the ever changing process of universal life which we call evolution, from the indeterminate to the determinate, from the unconscious to the conscious.

The static force, as opposed to the dynamic, may be viewed in Vrtra,<sup>42</sup> elemental, primeval, undivided or "without joints" (*aparvan*), undifferentiated chaos; the "unawakened" (*abudhyam*) force of nature, "sunk in deepest sleep",<sup>43</sup> the static rock-like power of inertia and darkness as opposed to the dynamic force of Indra with his thunderbolt; Indra, the light-bringer whose action is necessary to cleave through the status-quo in order that an ordered cosmos may be brought about; Vrtra has to be mythologically "slain", dismembered or rent asunder, i.e. conquered so that what chaos contains in *potentia*<sup>44</sup> may be released, developed, evolved, expressed, that inertia may be surmounted, that the orderly universe, made up of more or less clear-cut, separate parts (or joints) or divisions, may come into existence.<sup>45</sup> This is creation, manifestation. The idea is similar to the immolation of *puruṣa*<sup>46</sup> only, in the one case it centres on the side of unawakened substance, inertia, constriction which is forcibly rent that its potential may become actual; in the other, on the divine, constructive power, or archetypal, all-pervading deity, willingly dividing or immolating its homogeneity. The mountain which contains all things also refers to this primeval chaos: it has to be opened up so that the waters of life can flow freely, or the cows or rays of light can be freed; the intimate connection between Vrtra and the mountain is brought out in the image of Vrtra "lying upon the mountain" as though covering it up<sup>47</sup>, the two bearing a similar significance.

The original sacrifice or primeval violence<sup>48</sup> set the pace for every subsequent unfoldment or differentiation so that manifestation in the Vedic view appears as dynamic interaction between opposing forces involving both destruction and construction, involution and evolution, light and darkness,

activity and inertia, expansion and contraction, good and evil, all being equal and opposite and no definite line of demarcation can be drawn between them.<sup>49</sup> The alternance between one polarity and the other, their interaction and oft time opposition, the succession of unmanifest and manifest, of birth and death, growth and decay, waxing and waning, the constant transformation of all things, implying the destruction of one form for the construction of another, point to a law of becoming, of change and adjustment, to which all creation is subject, a law which is one aspect of *ṛta*, the ordered course of things; all being subservient to that one law of transformation, *pariṇāma*, the equalisation of the opposing forces is part of the ordered course of the universal pattern, hence *ṛta* the law of harmony, the cosmic order.

The question of evil, considered in general, is contained both in the philosophical implications of *sat* and *asat*, which two polarities stand at the origin of all and the dualism that underlies manifestation, the opposition and therefore friction that is inherent in any existence. Creation, as we have seen, meant for the *ṛsis*, the projection of (*visṛṣṭi*) into limited or conditioned existence of that which contains<sup>all</sup> in *potentia*. This implies a reflection and at the same time a constriction or distortion of the unlimited or infinite source. In this mirror-like distortion the unconditioned finds itself imprisoned by the conditioned, such conditioning being essential to manifestation for without form or framework there can be no expression. The action of the creative gods is to separate (prop asunder etc.) in order to *define*, hence organise all in harmony with the one law.<sup>50</sup> Every projection must, by definition, be inferior to its source as it is a conditioned expression of it and may involve its very opposite, namely the negation, through limitation, of absolute being. The plenitude of manifestation can only be measured by the extremes of its contrasts, hence light and darkness, good and evil, life and death, growth and decay. Absolute being is "that whose shadow is death, whose shadow is immortality"<sup>51</sup> hence beyond manifestation, beyond the poles of existence. Whence metaphysically *sat* and *asat*, *ṛta* as manifested order and *anṛta* as disorder are the two sides of one Reality, of which the transcendent *ṛta* alone can be the mirror. The essence of being is unitary, that which is projected so to speak out of it will become a reflection and in its outermost projection its very opposite, real only in so far as it borrows its reality from its source, hence in a certain sense illusory. Opposition is an inherent law of the universe. So is attraction. There can be no manifestation without opposition, hence friction, separation, evil.

### III.1.4. The continuous process of creation

The process of creation is continuous. As R.N. Dandekar observes:

"Creation is not a single definite act - it is regarded as ever proceeding... creation usually implies transformation of the potential into the actual or the establishment of cosmos in place of chaos. It is indeed in this latter sense that the Rta is often characterised as the source of the phenomena." 52

The idea of becoming, of progressive emanation, is also succinctly referred to in the *pāda* previous to that which describes Indra as incessantly making the actual out of the potential:

"one action today, one action tomorrow." 53

Furthermore, in two hymns of the R̥gveda and three verses in three other hymns<sup>54</sup> the Vedic vision of successive emanations in time, or to use H.W. Wallis's phrase, "progressive stages in the growth of the world",<sup>55</sup> a progression which exemplifies the dynamics of r̥ta, is evidenced:

"the plants came into being three ages before the gods".<sup>56</sup>

This shows that to the ṛ̥sis' mind, the world unfolded in accordance with a certain rhythm, expressing certain stages of manifestation, that rhythm being a facet of the orderly process of the law of harmonious becoming, r̥ta.

Yet again we find:

"In the primeval age of the gods the manifest (*sat*) emerged from the unmanifest (*asat*). Thence did divisions follow into existence; thence this (all) from the creative power." 57

The emergence of *sat* from *asat* marks the process of unfoldment which also means demarcation, separation. Chaos is becoming cosmos, the world order has come into being, r̥ta is manifesting as a world organising power.

Such observations as are here brought together were formulated in various ways and scattered throughout the *samhitās*: not only in the philosophical conception of *asat*<sup>at</sup> and *sat*, the unmanifest and the manifest, or the field for the potential and the field for the actual, and the mythological stories of creation, but also in Aditi, the principle of freedom or expansion and Dānu that of bondage or oppression; in the personification of these principles in action, namely the Adityas, the source



of light, the givers of freedom, and the Dānavas, the source of darkness; in Indra and Vṛtra, the embodiment of these opposing forces, and their struggle;<sup>58</sup> in the dual meaning of *māyā*, and in the idea of *amhas*,<sup>59</sup> *amhu*, (distress, narrowness)<sup>60</sup> opposed to *uru* or *varivas* (space, freedom, relief); all of which will be considered in their broad lines.

### III.1.5. Examination of *asat* and *sat*

The meaning of *asat* and *sat*, translated by nineteenth century scholars as "entity" and "non-entity", or "being" and "non-being", has aroused a great deal of controversy. As *sat* and *asat* are both the first differentiation from the primeval oneness, the idea underlying these two terms should be examined in some detail.

Metaphysically *sat*, from which *satya* "truth" is derived, is the root of manifestation and its opposite *asat* is the not yet manifest; *sat* can also be envisaged as the actual expression of the potential (*asat*). It is the field of manifestation, of organisation, *asat* the field of the indeterminate yet potential, or chaos.

In this respect H.W. Wallis rightly points out that *asat* must have held within itself the potentiality of *sat*, otherwise it could not give rise to *sat*. He defines *asat* and *sat* thus:

"The word *asat* is used in the Rigveda in two senses, as an adjective with *vacas* 'speech' and as the converse of *sat* ... In the first case the meaning is clear: it is equivalent to *asatya*, the unreal or the false, the converse of that which is really the fact. When used with *sat* it occurs invariably in passages of a cosmogonic character; *sat* is said to be born from *asat*, that is translated into modern idiom, *asat* precedes *sat* or *asat* becomes *sat*."<sup>61</sup>

His commentary on both words is also very pertinent:

"Where the two words are coupled together by a conjunction, *asat* always precedes *sat*. The *asat* must therefore have had in itself the potentiality of existence; it is not merely the 'non-existent' but may almost be translated the 'not yet existing' as *bhavat* is elsewhere opposed to *sat*, *jāyamānam* to *jātam* and *bhavyam* to *bhūtam*. It is not colourless as our word 'nothing', it is the negation of *sat*."<sup>62</sup>

*Sat* and *āsāt* in the philosophical hymns refer to two poles of the one state of being or existence which itself is beyond all conception and is the substratum of all that is. The *nāsadiya* hymn (Rgv.X.129) points to a primeval state when neither the potential nor the actual,

neither chaos nor cosmos, asat nor sat, was.<sup>63</sup> There the poet attempts to express a state of perfect oneness, beyond time, beyond space, beyond the sway of the opposites. At one remove from such heights over which the human mind can hardly range are the asat and the sat.

J. Gonda considers these terms as corresponding

"to a certain extent ... to our 'chaos' and 'cosmos'".<sup>64</sup>

When merged they are placed in the highest heaven (*parame vyoman*) in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap<sup>65</sup> whence Agni, firstborn of *rta*, both male and female or bull and cow, emerges at the beginning of the aeons:

"(When both) the asat and the sat (were) in the highest heaven, in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap, Agni, both bull and cow, was our first born of *rta*, in the primeval aeon."<sup>66</sup>

A hint seems to be given here of the fusion of sat and asat producing a state of being which is equivalent<sup>to</sup> (= *is placed in*) the empyrean. This we are told furthermore, is Dakṣa's birthplace; this is also Aditi's lap; in that primeval fusion is nevertheless found the seed of the opposites which in manifestation will differentiate in accordance with the law of transformation. Agni, the first born of cosmic order, the dynamic power of creation, which here, being specifically described as both bull and cow, hence male and female, shows the original state of being as containing both poles of manifestation, positive and negative, active and passive, indeed shows Agni as the primary impulse that came into operation as the law of becoming manifested.

A further verse explains the differentiation of the original polarities as one emerging from the other:

"In that primeval age of the gods, from the unmanifest (asat) emerged the manifest (sat)."<sup>67</sup>

The sat, lying latent in the asat emerges out of it and <sup>becomes</sup> the field of the manifest. It is an expression of the asat which itself is already a step away from the original fountain-source.

But when the asat was predominant and the sat not yet apparent, the gods came into existence. They belong to the first age when the sat was not yet. The actualisation of the sat could be their work as we shall see later. The Atharvaveda makes a clear statement in this respect:

"Mighty in name are those devas who emerged from the asat; that asat is the one limb of the fulcrum, so have said the people."<sup>68</sup>

The asat in this verse seems to be the original home or cradle of the

*devas*, that realm which is not perceived by man and which the Rgveda refers to as "remoter, hidden dominions".<sup>69</sup>

R.N. Dandekar writes:

"In the only Rgvedic passage which seems to suggest that something was produced out of nothing, namely *devānām pūrvye yuge 'sataḥ sad ajāyata* (X.72.2) the word *asat* actually means 'primordial non-differentiation' or 'distinctionlessness' rather than nothing."<sup>73</sup>

*Asat* thus seems to be a primeval state of undifferentiation, an indeterminate container or receptacle that holds all seeds of existence, the cradle of the gods, the essence of the root of being - *sat*, which last is the field where manifests *ṛta*.

W.N. Brown in "The creation myth of the Rgveda"<sup>71</sup> equates *asat* with "non-existence" and in a previous article<sup>72</sup> with *nirṛti* or "destruction" which to him is the Rgvedic equivalent to hell. Certain verses, such as Rgv. VII.104.8 and 12 and 14.<sup>73</sup> may lend themselves to such an interpretation in the sense of *asat* meaning that which is not, or contrary to *sat*, hence unreal, untrue, but this does not equate *asat* with hell. As pointed out by H.W. Wallis, *asat* when used with *vacas* has a different meaning from *asat* when used in conjunction with *sat* in cosmogonic texts.<sup>74</sup> These Rgvedic words cannot be rigidly placed in neat pigeon-holes, but vary in meaning according to context.

The Atharvaveda also treats *asat* and *sat* as both being "there where" (*yatra*) the "fulcrum" (*skambha*) of the universe is, in other words when both are fused they lie at the root of the universe:

"Tell me which one among the many is that fulcrum (of the universe) in whom men find the worlds and their containments, the waters and *brahman* and within whom (lie) the *asat* and the *sat*."<sup>75</sup>

We may, on the other hand, view the whole question of *asat* and *sat* thus: out of a lump of marble a statue is fashioned. The divine sculptor or architect, in the Vedas this is *Ṛvāstr*, takes the lump and fashions a statue out of it. What is chipped off may be regarded as its non-being (*asat*) that part of the lump which is not the statue; yet the *asat* as the whole lump is its potentiality which is obviously there all the time as well as the statue. The sculptor takes one and separates it from the other; the chips are the non-being (as a statue) and the fashioned statue, the being.

The Atharvaveda gives further details:

"In the *asat* the *sat* is established; in the *sat* *bhūta* is established; in *bhūta* is *bhavya* established and *bhavya* in *bhūta*."<sup>76</sup>

The participle translated as "established" is *pratiṣṭhita* ( $\sqrt{\text{pratiṣṭha}}$ )

to stand firmly) which also means "resting upon" and "contained in". The *sat* is thus a manifestation of the *asat*, it is contained in it as the statue in the lump of marble; similarly *bhūta* which, if we can coin such a word, is "being" and in this context must be "existence", is established in the "manifest" and itself holds in essence "becoming", the two being interlocked as one constantly gives birth to the other. The future is contained in the present just as the present is an expression of the past.<sup>77</sup> We have in these ideas of *asat* and *sat*,<sup>78</sup> *bhūta* and *bhavya*, the seed from which all opposites have developed, but also the root of the law of eternal transformation. This may help us to understand why it is that *ṛta* is stated to be the "first born" in Rgv.X.190.1.

Furthermore it cannot be stated categorically, as W.N. Brown does, that "... in the Veda *anṛta* and *asat* are synonyms opposed to *sat*, *satya*, *ṛta*."<sup>79</sup> The usual antithesis of *satya* is *anṛta* and not *asat*. Thus Varuṇa regards the truth and falsehood of men as he moves in the midst of the waters of space, the words used for truth and falsehood being *satya anṛta*.<sup>80</sup>

It would be inconceivable that being (*sat*) or truth (*satya*) should emerge out of *asat* as "untruth", the unreal, the false. The *nāsadiya* hymn states that sages found

"the relation (*bandhum*) of the manifest (*sat*) in the unmanifest (*asati*)."<sup>81</sup>

This sets the seal on the correlation between the two. The differentiation process makes one emerge into the foreground as the field for the manifest, the other retreat into the background as the field of the unmanifest. At the human level *asat* would be equivalent to the unconscious, that which holds all latent possibilities;<sup>82</sup> *sat* to the conscious, that which acts, plans, thinks, in short, the active, that which nevertheless draws a great deal of its sustenance from the unconscious.<sup>83</sup> The two are two sides of an ultimate Reality that transcends human conception.

## NOTES

## Chapter III.

1. Rgv.X.129.3d
2. Rgv.X.190.1.
3. cf. Rgv.III.54.8cd, VIII.58.2, as well as all the creation hymns.
4. Rgv.X.129.3.ab.
5. *yasya chāyā amṛtaṃ yasya mṛtyuḥ.* (Rgv.X.121.2c).
6. Rgv.X.129.3.
7. Rgv.X.129.1.
8. *paro divā para enā pṛthivyā paro devebhir-asurair-yad asti kam. svid garbhaṃ prathamam dadhra āpo yatra devāḥ sam apaśyanta viśve.* (Rgv.X.82.5)
9. Rgv.X.190.1.
10. Rgv.X.129.3.
11. Rgv.X.129.3.
12. *arvāg devā asya visarjanena.* (Rgv.X.129.6c).
13. cf. H. Lefever's remark: *ṛta* is "conceived as actually prior in time to phenomena". ("The Vedic idea of *sin*." 1935.) p.6.
14. *samudrād arṇavād adhi saṃvatsaro ajāyata aho rātrāṇi vidadhad viśvasya mṛṣato vaśī.* (Rgv.X.190.2).  
"From the billowy ocean was born time ordaining days and nights, ruler of all appearances."
15. *sūryā candram asau dhātā yathā pūrvam akalpayat divaṃ ca pṛthiviṃ ca antarikṣaṃ atho svaḥ.* (Rgv.X.190.3).  
"As before, the creator fashioned that sun and moon, and heaven and earth and the mid-region and also the empyrean."
16. *iyam viśṛṣṭir-yata ābabhūva yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na yo āsya adhyakṣaḥ parame vyoman so aṅga veda yadi vā na veda.* (Rgv.X.129.7.)  
"Whence this creation originated, whether He caused it to be or not, He who in the highest empyrean surveys it, He alone knows, or else, even He knows not."
17. *samrāj brhat* (Rgv.VI.68.9.) cf. Rgv.II.27.10.
18. *netā rtasya* (Rgv.VII.40.4.)
19. *viśvāny-adbhutā cikitvān abhi paśyati kṛtāni yā ca kartvā* (Rgv.I.25.11)
20. *saḥ samudra apīcya.* (Rgv.VIII.41.8)
21. *yasmin viśvāni kāvyā ... śritā.* (Rgv.VIII.41.6a)
22. *caḥsusāḥ pitā* (Rgv.X.82.1&2) literally "father of the eye".
23. Rgv.X.82.3.
24. *viśvatas cakṣur-uta viśvato mukho viśvato bāhur-uta viśvataspāt saṃ bāhubhyāṃ dhamati saṃ patatir-dyāvābhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ.* (Rgv.X.81.3).
25. Not "self-torture". cf. A.D. Pusalker. "Purāṇic cosmogony" (*Bharatiya vidya.* vol.2. pt.II. May 1941.) p.180.
26. Rgv.X.190.1.
27. cf. Rgv.X.129.4.
28. *ajasya nābhāv-adhy-ekam arpitam.* (Rgv.X.82.6) "the One projected from the core of the Unborn". cf. Rgv.X.129.3d.
29. cf. Rgv.II.1; X.121.7; X.88.1; I.36.5; I.44.1; 143.3. cf. Rgv.II.35.2cd where Apām Napāt, the alter ego, of Agni is said to have generated all things (*viśvāni ... bhuvanā fajāna.*)
30. cf. Rgv.X.5.7.
31. *tapasas tan mahinā ajāyata ekam.* (Rgv.X.129.3d).
32. Rgv.X.190.1.

## III.1.2.

- 33 cf. *rta anṛta, varivas nirṛti*.  
 34 cf. *navyam navyam tantum ā tanvate divi samudre antaḥ kavayah suditayah*. (Rgv. I.159.4cd) "the radiant sages outspread the ever renewed warp within the sky, within the ocean". cf. Rgv. X.130.1&2 where the web woven by the fathers is their sacrificial offering, and Rgv. IX.73.9 where the web of *rta* is said to have been spun by the *māyā* of Varuṇa.  
 35 *idam viśvam ejat sam eti yad antara pitaram mātaram ca*. (Rgv. X.88.15cd).

## III.1.3.

36. J.A.O.S. vol.61, June 1941, p.79.  
 37 cf. the "healing hand" (*hasto beśajo*) (Rgv. II.33.7) of Rudra "the terrible" (*tveṣa*).  
 38 "Religions of ancient India." 1953, p.20. Renou goes on to demonstrate that terms like *manyu, māyā, yakṣa* "have two sets of meaning, according to whether they are used of good or evil beings."  
 39 *asac-ca san muhur-ācakṛir-indrah*. (Rgv. VI.24.5b).  
 40 cf. Zaehner. "Hinduism." 1966, p.28.  
 41 Rgv. X.90.  
 42 cf. E. Benveniste, and L. Renou. "Vṛtraḥ Vṛtragna. Étude de mythologie indo-iraniennne." (Cahier de la société Asiatique. no.3.1934), where *vṛtra* is shown to have originally meant "obstruction"; "resistance" as a neuter noun, the masculine personification being a later change. (p.95) cf. "Vṛtra est une force qui subit une action, mais qui ne la commande pas." (p.97): The principle of constriction, *vṛtra*, is already more than one remove from *asat* and therefore strictly speaking cannot be identified with *asat*. cf. A. De Nicolas "Four-dimensional man." 1971. p.115.  
 43 *abudhyamānam susupānam*. (Rgv. IV.19.3).  
 44 cf. Sat. Br.: "Of old everything here was within Vṛtra, to wit the Rk, the Yajus and the Sāman" (5.5.1-5), these three being considered the essence of all things.  
 45 cf. Rgv. I.26.8ab.  
 46 cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "Puruṣa is not only the cosmic Man; it is also the personal aspect of the whole of reality." (p.73).  
 47 *ahim parvate śisṛiyānam*. (Rgv. I.32.2a) cf. Rgv. IV.19.3&4 and I.54.10.  
 48 cf. Babylonian mythology, where Marduk fights with Tiamat, i.e. chaos. cf. Greek mythology, the Cyclopes and Titans, and Teutonic mythology.  
 49 cf. L. Renou. "Religions of ancient India." 1953. "The idea of evil is never clearly personified as a major demon, but is represented under the multiple forms of 'hostility', 'violence', 'resistance'. (p.19). cf. also R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "To ask ultimate questions about the why of evil implies two very grave assumptions: a) that there is something or somebody responsible for it, and b) that evil belongs to the realm of intelligibility. The Vedas do not make either of these assumptions." "... evil is taken to originate in a mal-functioning of the given structures of reality." (p.461,462).  
 50 cf. Rgv. VI.47.3.4; I.153.1; III.38.3; I.190.2.  
 51 cf. Rgv. X.121.2c.

## III.1.4

- 52 "Universe in Vedic thought." In India Major, 1972, p.93.
- 53 *anyad adya karvaram anyad unsvah.* (Rgv.VI.24.5a)
- 54 Rgv.X.129;190.1;72.3;149.2cd.
- 55 "The Cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887, p.96.
- 56 *yā osadhīh pūrvā jātā devebhyas trīṅgam purā.* (Rgv.X.97.1ab). The Atharvaveda refers to the "earth that was previous to this one" (*ya ita āsīd bhūmih pūrvā*) Athv.XI.8.7) and the verse adds that whoever knows this may deem himself wise in ancient lore.
- 57 *devānām yuge prathame 'satah sad ajāyata tad āsā anv ajāyanta - tad uttānapadas pari.* (Rgv.X.72.3).
- 58 cf. Rgv.I.63.3;130.8;X.49.9
- 59 This word, as pointed out by M. Winternitz "combines in itself the meanings 'distress, affliction' on one side, and 'guilt, sin' on the other. ('A history of Indian literature.' vol.1, p.137, 1927. Trans. by Mrs. S. Kētkar.)
- 60 See J. Gonda "The Vedic concept of *amhas*" (guilt) in Indo-Iranian Journal, vol.1, 1957, p.33-60. cf. Rgv.VIII.67.7.

## III.1.5

- 61 "The Cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887, p.61.
- 62 op. cit. p.62
- 63 cf. *Īsā Upaniṣad* 11&12. cf. also Wallis "Cosmology of the Rigveda" (1887): If we treat the (*nāsadiya*) hymn philosophically, we must assume a stage between those states described in verses 1&4 in which *asat* was present but there was as yet no *sat*. The context however shows that the poet was merely wishing to shadow forth a condition in which absolutely nothing existed; and the presence of *asat* was denied because it was inseparably associated with *sat*. p.62.
- 64 "The Dual deities in the religion of the Veda." 1974, p.32.
- 65 Rgv.X.5.7. cf. Chāndogya Up.1.9.1; VII.12.1 where space is considered the origin of all.
- 66 *asacca sac ca parame vyoman daksasya janmann aditer upasthe - agnir-ha naḥ prathamajā ṛtasya pūrva āyuna vṛṣabhas ca dhenuh.* (Rgv.X.5.7).
- 67 *devānām yuge prathame 'satah sad ajāyata.* (Rgv.X.72.3) (this verse is practically a repetition of verse 2).
- 68 *bṛhanto nāma te devāḥ ye 'satah pari jājñire - ekaṃ tad aṅgam skambhasya asad āhuḥ pari jānāh.* (Athv.X.7.25). (Trans. J.M.)
- 69 Rgv.III.54.5.
- 70 "Universe in Vedic thought." In India major 1972, p.93. cf. also p.96 of the same work and Dandekar's "Some aspects of the history of Hinduism", 1967, p.53.  
Such verses as Rgv.X.72.3. hint at the root idea of the Vedānta: *sat* being equivalent to *nāmarūpavyākṛtam vastu*, the essence of that which has name, form, separation, and *asat* to *avyaktavasthā*, the essence of that which is unmanifest.
- 71 J.A.O.S. vol.62, June 1942, p.88-9. cf. H.G. Nāhahari's answer to W.N. Brown: "... it is a fact worthy of note that neither orthodox tradition nor Western Interpretation has ever given the word hitherto the sense of hell." "Designation of hell in the Rgveda and the meaning of the word *asat*." In (Indian Historical Quarterly, vol.18, March 1942), p.158-66.)
- 72 "The Rgvedic equivalent for hell." J.A.O.S. vol.61, 1941, p.80.

- 73 In verse 8 of this hymn the poet casts imprecations against whoso assails him with "unrighteous spells" and declares "let him as he pronounces the *asat* be the *asat*. The wish may be that the antagonist should be plunged in that state which is the opposite of the manifest. If he pronounces words that are against what is established and thereby untrue. In other words, that he should cease to exist as a determinate being with name and form. cf. *Rgv.V.12.4cd*. The descriptions given in *Rgv.VII.10.4* do not necessarily refer to *asat*, nor is *asat* necessarily personified by *ahi* or *vṛata* as claimed by A. de Nicolas ("Four dimensional man." 1971).p.100.
- 74 cf. A. de Nicolas, op.cit. "The *asat* in the Rigveda functions as the original 'space' out of which all form and name derive". (p.106). cf. Hanns Oertel. "*Asat* - 'undifferentiated', 'formless', 'incapable of perception by the senses' in Vedic prose." (In the New Indian Antiquary. vol.1.Aug.1938.no.5.p.317-21). "It seems to me exceedingly unlikely that in the Brāhmaṇic cosmogony *asat* ever had the meaning of non-existence ... the verbs which are used to describe the act of creation appear to exclude such a notion; thus *taks*, and *taks + nis* presuppose some sort of material out of which an object is fashioned." (p.320).
- 75 *yatra lokāṃśca kośāṃśca apo brahmā jānā viduḥ*  
*asac-ca yatra sac-ca anta skambham taṃ brūhi katamaḥ svid eva saḥ.*  
(Athv.X.7.10). (Trans.J.M.)
- 76 *asati sat pratiṣṭhitam sati bhūtam pratiṣṭhitam*  
*bhūtam ha bhavya āhitam bhavyam bhūte pratiṣṭhitam.* (Athv.XVII.1.19)  
(Trans.J.M.)
- 77 The same trend of thought is perceptible in *Rgv.X.72.4, 90.5* and *1.185.1*.
- 78 In terms of human psychology we have the so-called unconscious or sub-conscious that cannot be disregarded in any assessment of human personality, as well as the conscious; the irrational as well as the rational. These two sides of the one human reality seem to be equivalent to the two sides of the cosmic reality, *asat* and *sat*.  
cf. A.T. de Nicolas. "Four-dimensional man." [97]: The *Asat* ... affirms that 'undifferentiated' perception that is obscure ... is a positive fact of human experience." (p.148).
- 79 "The Rigvedic equivalent for hell." J.A.O.S. vol.61. 1941.p.79.note 3.
- 80 *Rgv.VII.49.3*
- 81 *sato bandhum asati nir-avindan hr̥di pratiṣyā kavayo manīṣā.* (*Rgv.X.129.4cd*).  
"Seers searching in their heart's wisdom, discovered the kinship of the manifest in the unmanifest."
- 82 The waters of space of the origins (*Rgv.X.129.1*) are equivalent to the *asat*.
- 83 It may be that by the time of the Upaniṣads, the human mind viewed the world in more concrete terms and focussed more readily on the tangible, on *sat*, the manifest, as against *asat*, the intangible, unmanifest.  
cf. Taittirīya Upaniṣad II.7.1.



III.2.1. The godly level: the dynamics of ṛta.

At the secondary level of manifestation, or that level which stands between pure abstraction or the noumenal, and the purely phenomenal, or realm of sensuous experience, the *devas* come into being and action.

The divine, mysterious power that resides at the core of the universe as in all its creatures, now appears as a multiplicity of shining or radiating<sup>1</sup>, energising principles. Just as

"inspired poets shape with their words the One fair-winged Being in multivariied ways"<sup>2</sup>

so the One Power-Intelligence has split itself up into the many intelligent units, the noumena working behind the phenomenal expressions of nature, indeed of the whole universe. Neither wholly personal nor totally impersonal, and yet in some subtle way unique, these cosmic intelligences, the *devas* of the *Rgveda*, have individual characteristics that mark them each from the other, but their role and indeed whatever personality they evidence do at times merge or overlap, so that they may appear as separate entities and yet, not quite separate: thus *Brahmaṇaspati*, *Agni*, *Rudra*<sup>3</sup>; thus *Savitṛ*, *Sūrya*, *Pūṣan*, *Agni*. Thus *Agni*, the guest of men, the great mediator between gods and men, fire in the sun, fire in all things and fire in the heart of man, the same power that dries up and desiccates, that softens and melts, *Agni* is all the gods because his dynamic, creative-destructive flame is within them all.<sup>4</sup>

The interlinkedness of all the gods, their solidarity, their essential righteousness, their concerted activity, is their peculiar feature and one that eminently marks them as the agents of the law of harmony, *ṛta*, by which, through which and in which they live and perform their varied functions:

"One is the mighty godhood of the shining ones"<sup>5</sup>

is the refrain of a hymn that celebrates the *devas* and *Agni*, the "universal king" (*samano rājā*).

At this stage we are confronted with constant permutations which are stepping down various levels, or reflections, which superficially confuse the whole subject and have puzzled scholars and created no end of misunderstanding. This permutation reflects the process of objectifying powers at work in the universe at more and more concrete levels, all in accordance with the law of transformation. Hence this objectifying process whereby the abstract in due course becomes the concrete can be viewed as an aspect of the mighty dynamics of *ṛta*.

The first differentiation that heralds the unfoldment of the universe (*visṛṣṭi*) is, as we have seen, the *sat* from the *asat*.<sup>6</sup> Rgv.X.5.7. shows *sat* and *asat* latent

"in the highest heaven, in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap."<sup>7</sup> These last seem to be interlocked or fused until such time as they separate, i.e. come out of latency when the *sat* emerges from the *asat*, as though this primeval differentiation were made manifest in Dakṣa and Aditi.<sup>8</sup> These may thus be considered the first or primordial parents lying back of Heaven and Earth who are the more immediate, slightly more objectified parents.

### III.2.2. Dakṣa and Aditi: embodiment of the primeval differentiation.

An examination of these two words may reveal something of their significance. Both exemplify the characteristic Vedic conception of powers at the same time personal and impersonal. As noted by A.A. Macdonell, the word *dakṣa* occurs more often as an adjective meaning "dexterous, strong, clever, intelligent"<sup>9</sup> from which he concludes that

"the name of the personification therefore appears to mean the 'dexterous' or 'clever' god".<sup>10</sup>

Renou: qualified *dakṣa* as a

"complementary term of *kratu* indicating practical efficiency, the concrete realisation conferred by the possession of *kratu*".<sup>11</sup>

It is the effective power that can realise in the space time world that which has been thought out or ideated. Dakṣa can be considered as figuring in the cosmogonic hymns, as that primeval Force, that creative energy which, at the beginning of the aeons, brought about the first step in manifestation by differentiating from Aditi and impressing upon the waters of space (Aditi the great mother, or primordial substance) the pattern that in due course was to evolve into the universe. So he is "born of Aditi" and "Aditi is born of him". He is that intelligence that manifests through all creatures, of which all nature's activities are the expression. Each creature is born with a certain degree, great or small, of that power,<sup>11a</sup> the gods seemingly having the larger share. Hence Dakṣa is their father, the gods are qualified as "*daṣapitara*" (to whom Dakṣa is father). Agni is shown as receiving, in his quality of offspring of Dakṣa, the "fatherly seed of existences"<sup>12</sup>, and as Agni pervades all things<sup>12a</sup> it is pertinent to conclude that he gives all a measure of *dakṣa*. "To Agni the able one" (*agnaye ... dakṣase*) men's songs go forth<sup>12b</sup>. Dakṣa is described as that "mighty power" of which the most wise Mitra and Varuṇa are the sons.<sup>13</sup>

Dakṣa is an example of those cases

"... In which a definite 'power' is conceived as an 'impersonal potency', and sometimes as a 'divine person'... dakṣa... is 'personified' as 'the Clever or Dexterous. One' i.e. 'cleverness' or dexterity".<sup>14</sup>

Keith dismisses Dakṣa as

"The word means no more than 'clever' and there can be no doubt that he is the product of priestly ingenuity."<sup>15</sup>

For H. W. Wallis, Dakṣa is

"... an unimportant deity whose only characteristic in the Rgveda is his fatherhood of the gods",<sup>16</sup>

who derived his personality through the same process as that which created the goddess Śavastī out of such epithets as "son of strength" ascribed to Indra. Nineteenth century scholars all too superficially judged the importance of deities on the number of times they are invoked, but this is no criterion. Those deities mentioned most are those that stand in closer contact with men and whose immediate cooperation is needed for man's well-being, e.g. Agni, Indra, Soma, Savitr, the Aśvins, Varuṇa and Vāyu. Those who are more remote are less referred to, but are not thereby necessarily less important in the economy of the world. Their function in creation may be out of all relation to their specific assistance to man.

J. Gonda pertinently remarks that Indians do not draw any hard and fast line between both aspects - personal and impersonal - of the unseen. In some hymns Dakṣa is personified, in others the word is simply used as an adjective. So Agni and Indra are described as lords of *dakṣa*.<sup>17</sup> This might be a pointer to the antiquity of Dakṣa whose personification is very fluctuating in the Rgveda. In several instances<sup>17a</sup> he is numbered among the Adityas, although in Rgv.X.72.4 & 5 he seems to be prior to them. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (II.4.4.2) he is identified with the creator Prajāpati, thus keeping to his original role of primordial cause. This constant fluctuation between a creative, almost personal power in the universe and an impersonal attribute of the universe's creatures and its regents is well exemplified in Mitra Varuṇa, whose father is Dakṣa (*dakṣapitara*), who rule with the might of *dakṣa*,<sup>18</sup> who are most "dexterous"<sup>19</sup> and "vouchsafe efficient-working-power"<sup>20</sup> to their worshippers. They have

"separated... the chaos from the cosmos... through the zeal (*manyunā*) proper to your skill" (*dakṣasya*)"<sup>21</sup>

Here is evidenced intelligent discrimination, that principle which sifts, orders, arranges, creates. This is ascribed to Dakṣa. At the higher level it is divine ideation, at the lower level intelligence in practice, that creative intelligence that brings about in space time dimension what was thought out at the ideal level. By it the ideal is made manifest. The word

*manyu* governing *ḍakṣa* is described by Renou as "active or fertile thought".<sup>22</sup> *Kratu*, *manyu*, *ḍakṣa* all converge on the one factor of mental power that by its sole exertion can bring about manifestation. The discriminative, orderly faculty of intelligence is in this verse stated to be responsible for the due unfoldment of the universe.

Aditi, on the other hand, connotes the infinite depths of space,<sup>23</sup> the matrix, womb or lap,<sup>24</sup> the generative feminine power, the primeval mother substance wherein all things come into being through the impact of that power called *ḍakṣa*, as a result of the act of *tapas* that gave the original impetus to creation.<sup>25</sup> She is the mother who brings forth the gods<sup>25a</sup> and within whom is all that has been born and all that will be born; the repository of past, present and future, of manifest and unmanifest:

"Aditi is Heaven, Aditi is the midregion, Aditi is mother and father and child, Aditi is all the gods, Aditi is the five races, what was born and what shall be born."<sup>26</sup>

Hence she is the matrix wherein all move and have their being, the waters of space, the mother substance. *As noted by K. Werner*

"she stands for the divine source of the whole of manifested reality."<sup>27</sup>

In Rgv.X.72.5. Aditi is referred to as the daughter of *Dakṣa*, but the previous verse states that from Aditi *Dakṣa* was born and from *Dakṣa* Aditi. This reciprocal birth will be examined in due course, but is typical of that interaction and differentiating process between two original polarities whereby manifestation became possible: two principles are posited, the all encompassing mother substance being acted upon by the no less all penetrating, ordering principle, or divine intelligence, as a result of which the space-time world is projected. In the Atharva<sup>28</sup>, Aditi is designated as the spouse or queen of *ṛta* (*ṛtasya patnīm*). Such a figure of speech does indicate that all things are born from Aditi in accordance with the great law *ṛta* which manifests through the coming into action of the ordering principle.

Aditi is "not to be limited"<sup>29</sup>, "far-pervading"<sup>30</sup> "supporter of all creatures",<sup>31</sup> "celestial" (*svarvatīm*), "luminous"<sup>32</sup>. The ṛṣis's vision of the universe as infinite is reflected not only in their conception of Aditi as unlimited expanse and freedom, but also in such expressions as the "fathomless sphere" (*abudhne*) in which Varuṇa keeps erect the cosmic axis.<sup>33</sup>

Aditi has thus three definite attributes: her motherhood, her spaciousness and her luminosity. The basis of manifestation is light. Her qualities of light and space which may both be taken as expressions of freedom are mirrored in *Dyaus* and *Prthivī* respectively.

The wide expanse of earth, usually rendered by *urvīṣ*, is a direct reflection of Aditi, <sup>heaven's light a reflection of her luminosity.</sup> She seems to stand behind these two as the great enfolding mother, the still unmanifest bordering on the manifest reflecting herself in Heaven and Earth.<sup>34</sup> The word itself, *aditi*, like the word *dākṣa*, is also used as an adjective.<sup>35</sup>

### III.2.3. The threefold division of the world.

This original two fold division of the world is mirrored, at a lower level, so to speak, in Heaven and Earth, *Dyaus* and *Prthivī*, a twofold division which itself is further subdivided into a threefold order capable of further subdivisions:<sup>36</sup> *dyaus*, *antarikṣa* and *prthivī*.<sup>37</sup> Such conception of a tripartite world is found side by side with that of a twofold one and is only a more precise analysis of the component parts of the universe of which the twofold heaven and earth is a generalised view, neither excluding the other.<sup>38</sup>

Heaven, Earth, and the mid, or inner region, each is a *loka*, world or place of habitation for entities, whether celestial, human or subhuman.<sup>39</sup> This threefold universe, so commonly referred to in the *Rgveda*, is summed up in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* thus:

"Verily, in the beginning, Prajāpati alone was here. He desired 'may I exist, may I be generated'. He wearied himself and performed fervid devotions: from him, thus wearied and heated, the three worlds were created - the earth, the air, and the sky."<sup>40</sup>

But this threefold division of the world - "the simplest and earliest form ... of a threefold division ... earth, air and heaven"<sup>41</sup> is itself subdivided, each *loka* being a threefold one:

"There are three heavens; two are in the lap of Savitr, one is in the world of Yama".<sup>42</sup>

Heaven is described as "the threefold heavenly complex of heaven".<sup>43</sup> Savitr is said to

"impel the three heavens and the three earths"<sup>44</sup>

as well as to circumscribe the "three realms" (*tri rajāṃsi*) or threefold mid-region.

From the first quotation (*Rgv.* I.35.6) it seems evident that the three heavens refer to spheres of existence quite beyond physical

visibility, since one of these belongs to the king of the dead, Yama, and since these heavens are the *loka* of the gods and their birthplace.<sup>45</sup> Within the god *V*aruna himself

"are placed the three heavens and the lower three earths disposed in sixfold order".<sup>46</sup>

Heaven is referred to as either *dyaus* - the mighty father<sup>47</sup> --- or *swar*<sup>48</sup>, that celestial realm which Indra conquers, or *vyoman*,<sup>49</sup> the empyrean. As father and generator, it is personal, as that celestial realm of luminosity and bliss, it is impersonal.

*Antarikṣa*,<sup>50</sup> the mid-region, usually translated as firmament or atmosphere, is rendered as "the intermediate region" by J. Gonda.<sup>50a</sup> These various renderings take into account the visible expanse that stretches between earth and sky. But the significance of this secondary level - a *loka* in itself intermediate between the purely subjective or etherial heaven, the world of luminosity, the birthplace of the gods, and the purely objective or material earth, one of the domains whence the gods act and influence earthly phenomena, is usually altogether ignored. In Reinhold E.G. Muller's survey of scholars' contributions to the interpretation of *antarikṣa*<sup>51</sup> the notion of realm of air, aerial ocean, aerial sphere, atmosphere, space of air and the like alone is investigated. He shows that the original meaning of *ākāśa*<sup>52</sup> is very close to *antarikṣa*. In this respect it should be noted that *ākāśa* in the Upaniṣads, denotes the etherial space in the heart.<sup>53</sup> It is most probable that *antarikṣa* not only refers to the expanse of air or atmosphere stretching between the sky and the earth, but also to an intermediate realm, a mid-region, a *loka* between the intangible heaven and the tangible earth, that separates the spiritual from the material and at the same time acts as a bridge between them, the visible counterpart of which is the firmament.<sup>54</sup>

That the ṛṣis viewed the possibility of another dimension of being besides the merely physical and the purely spiritual, as part of their vision of the universe, may be gathered from the following stanza where by implication man appears as the offspring of Heaven and Earth.

"Heaven is my father, my begetter; here is affinity, my kinship; this mighty Earth is my mother. Here between the two wide-spreading receptacles is the womb (of birth); within it the father laid the daughter's germ."<sup>55</sup>

Man appears here as the child of Heaven and Earth, between whom is the *yonī*. If we take the clause "here between the two wide-spreading receptacles" literally, the word "between" (*antar*) and the subsequent words "womb" and "in it", should refer to the aerial space between Heaven

and Earth which, literally, is not the birthplace of man. The whole idea rather points to a different dimension, a *loka* that is neither wholly spiritual nor wholly material, of which man's psychomental nature may be the reflection. Such a *loka* may also be one of the meanings of *antariksa*.

*Prthivī* is the material abode of which our earth seems to be one among three.<sup>56</sup> J. Gonda wonders:

"Whereas we need not find any difficulty in understanding the existence of three celestial spheres that obviously belonged to the realms of religious theory and literary fiction the question is worth raising as to how these poets and priests could regard our visible earth and the atmosphere surrounding it tripartite".<sup>57</sup>

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, like the Ṛgveda, makes a clear statement:

"There are here three earths (*prthivī*) viz. this one, and two beyond it."<sup>58</sup>

They are evidently *loka*, spheres of life where beings evolve just as they do on earth, but which may not be visible to physical eyes.

Over this threefold univers - *dyaus*, *antariksa* and *prthivī* and their subdivisions - preside certain groups of gods. Yāska in his Nirukta (7.5) classifies, in accordance with the ancient Indian school of etymologists, the devas into the terrestrial (*prthivīsthāna*), the intermediate (*antarikṣasthāna* or *madhyamasthāna*) and the celestial (*dyusthāna*). This is based upon the clue given in the Ṛgveda itself (Ṛgv. I.139.11 and X.158.1).<sup>59a</sup> Some scholars such as A.B. Keith, A.A. Macdonell, P.S. Deshmukh,<sup>59</sup> followed in the wake of the Indian tradition and grouped the gods into three main categories, the "celestial" over which Sūrya is the overseer, the "aerial" or "atmospheric" whose jurisdiction falls to Vāyu or Indra, and the "terrestrial" over which Agni is the regent. This naturalist division is confirmed in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.<sup>60</sup> The ritualists inclined to view the gods according to their specific functions in the ritual<sup>61</sup> and G. Dumézil<sup>62</sup> worked out a theory that fits the gods into the three main human divisions of labour - the religious function (*brāhma*), the ruling (*ksatra*) and the productive (*viś*) of which, according to his estimation, the leading gods are Mitra-Varuṇa, Indra and the Aśvins respectively. However, such divisions, arbitrary and artificial though they <sup>may</sup> appear when applied to such a fluidic order as that of the Ṛgvedic pantheon, may help us to envisage the realm and functions of the devas in some kind of pattern. For the purpose of this thesis the point of importance is to examine the permutation of the gods and its significance as exemplifying the law of transformation in the wider context of the dynamics of *rta*.

### III.2.4. The origin of the gods.

As Dakṣa and Aditi represent the original differentiation of the two poles of manifestation<sup>63</sup> they are considered the primordial "parents" of the gods, these being they "whose father is Dakṣa"<sup>64</sup>, the "luminous sons" of Dakṣa.<sup>64a</sup> Such an appellative stresses their inborn intelligence, skill and mental power, their creative energy. They are indeed the "mind-born sons" of the primeval differentiation as the Taittirīya Saṃhita calls them<sup>65</sup>. To describe them as "sons" of that "intelligence"<sup>66</sup> which is basic to all creation, without which there could be no orderly, harmonious universe, is to suggest that they are the manifest expression of divine intelligence in action.

Since Aditi, the "all-bounteous" (*viśvārā*) is addressed as the "mother of the gods"<sup>67</sup>, one may surmise that the devas are born in the infinite depths of space (the great mother), of that intelligence that orders all things:

"In yon billowy-deeps ye gods stood closely-clasped"<sup>68</sup>  
They thus emerge to existence "born of the waters"<sup>69</sup> through the power of divine ideation (*dakṣa*) as a result of the dynamic energy aroused through contemplative exertion (*tapas*)<sup>70</sup>. The same verse continues:

"Then from ye, as though from dancers, hot dust was  
whirled away"<sup>71</sup>

We seem to have here the vision of luminaries whirling in a cosmic dance as they take shape in the depths of the heavens.

The idea of blowing or whirling is taken up in another creation hymn giving us the picture of the Lord of prayer, Brahmaṇaspati, blowing or welding the worlds into shape, as a blacksmith:

"Brahmaṇaspati welded these (*etā* = the two worlds)  
together like a blacksmith"<sup>72</sup>

This is not at variance with the hint given as to the divine creative flame aroused through contemplative exertion (*tapas*) which started the world's unfoldment. At the beginning of all was fire, whether as Agni, or *tapas* or *kāma*. And Brahmaṇaspati, in many instances, is another version of Agni.

In the above quoted verse, the verb *√dham* (to blow; exhale, kindle, melt, forge) and the word *kārmāra* (artisan, blacksmith) point to the action of fire as it fashions the worlds. The primordial creative urge from which proceeds "this whole" is called *uttānapad*,<sup>73</sup> is viewed now as Agni "first born of ṛta" at the beginning when Dakṣa and Aditi were still undifferentiated,<sup>74</sup> now as Brahmaṇaspati who forges the two worlds, the heavenly and the terrestrial,<sup>75</sup> now as Tvaṣṭṛ at a still more concrete level, who fashions all



forms, also "born at the beginning" (*agraja*)<sup>76</sup>. These three deities are more or less personified aspects of one and the same power at work as soon as the law of becoming is set going.<sup>77</sup>

Agni, Brahmanaspati, Tvaṣṭr are instances of that constant permutation so characteristic of the gods as well as of their actions at the various levels of manifestation. In Agni is well exemplified the birth, or appearance, of the same principle at different levels of manifestation.

"From heaven first came to birth Agni;  
secondly from us came the knower of births;  
thirdly the manly-souled (appeared) from within the waters".<sup>77a</sup>

Agni, first born of rta,<sup>77b</sup> that is, manifested in accordance with the law, exists at all levels, he is the basis of all, hence appears in the waters, in the stones, in the herbs;<sup>78</sup> he is "head of heaven, earth's centre;<sup>79</sup> engendered by the gods",<sup>80</sup> yet giver of immortality to the gods;<sup>81</sup> the immortal guest or herald amidst mortals;<sup>82</sup> is common to all men (*vaiśvānara*), their very "centre" (*nābhiḥ*), "like a pillar"<sup>83</sup> supporting them. Primordial spark, he is also the youngest of the gods and born of Tvaṣṭr.<sup>84</sup> Such a multiple birth is but a way of describing the one principle as it manifests on the various rungs of the ladder of creation.

Brahmanaspati whose role, in certain instances, is closely akin to Agni's,<sup>85</sup> forges the worlds, Heaven and Earth<sup>86</sup> but also waxes in grandeur through the very parents Heaven and Earth that he moulds.<sup>87</sup> Although these are the parents of the gods, he himself is called the father of the gods.<sup>88</sup> That kind of parenthood, being again and again ascribed to various other gods, should not be taken literally. Thus Soma is equally called father and generator of the gods.<sup>89</sup> Varuṇa and Indra fashion and prop asunder the "primordial parents", Heaven and Earth" born of old.<sup>90</sup> J. Gonda's remark with regard to Brahmanaspati puts the whole question into proper perspective:

"such statements as for instance that ... Bṛhaspati is said to be the father of the gods must be taken to mean that the lord of brahman is their source, that without him they would not exist ..."<sup>91</sup>

The divine artisan par excellence (*svapas sukṛt*) of creation, its universal stimulator (*savitṛ*)<sup>92</sup>, he who gives it its final shape, is Tvaṣṭr, the skilful-handed one (*supāni*), the omniform (*viśvarūpa*) the "faithful to the law" (*ṛtāvan*).<sup>92a</sup> In the Atharvaveda he is called the "counterpart of the waters"<sup>93</sup> but in general, he combines both the male and the female generative power. He shapes all "forms"<sup>94</sup>, gives Heaven and Earth their form<sup>95</sup>, forges the thunderbolt of Indra<sup>96</sup>, fashions the soma cup for the gods<sup>97</sup>; his own axe he sharpens for Brahmanaspati<sup>98</sup>; places the life seed in creatures and presides over birth.<sup>99</sup> The axe of time is ever at work in fashioning and refashioning nature's myriad forms, in accordance with the law (*ṛtāvan*).

In his capacity of generator and form builder, Tvastṛ personifies nature's moulding potencies<sup>100</sup>. This is summed up in two epithets:

"Tvastṛ the omniform, vivifying deity"<sup>101</sup>.

The whole of nature's creative and varied activity is compressed in these few words. But it is noteworthy to observe that these originally descriptive epithets of one and the same deity in due time were separated from their owner, and addressed as a personality in its own right. The stimulator (*śavitā*) side of Tvastṛ became related to the sun as the vivifying power whilst *viśvarūpa* became differentiated into a son of Tvastṛ.

### 111.2.5. Heaven and Earth

Most scholars see in the fact that the gods are said to generate<sup>102</sup>, prop asunder or spread out Heaven and Earth<sup>103</sup>, the ancient parents,

"a downright self-contradiction"<sup>104</sup>.

or else a hopeless muddle not worth the attempt to clarify. This rather seems to be evidence of the different levels of universal life, as viewed by the ṛṣis, to which levels these apparent contradictory statements apply, abstract or concrete, metaphysical or physical. Heaven and Earth are fields for development and so may be taken both as the parents and original ground as well as the ever unfolding and ever renewed playground of growth; their offspring manifest at various levels of the ladder of creation and grow in power through the interplay of Heaven and Earth which in their very growth they help to mould and transform. As principles, or as the spiritual and the material fields of life, the father and mother aspect, Heaven and Earth are the parents of all things including the devas.<sup>105</sup> As specific fields of manifestation - the two worlds *rodasī*, the two receptacles *camvā*, the two hemispheres, *rajasī*, the two bowls *dhiṣaṇā* - they are realms of transformation in which the devas contribute their share in the moulding, differentiating, transforming of these very fields that give them their habitation. The use of paradox does not imply confusion. Whatever can be explained in terms of the "below" or concrete expression applies also to the "above" or abstract, as the former is but a reflection of the latter. So Heaven and Earth give birth to the gods and reciprocally the gods shape and further separate them into two distinct realms, thus are said to give birth to them. This "giving birth" must be understood as a manifestation at different levels, hence a perpetual transformation, an aspect of the dynamics of ṛta. The interaction is constant, the interweaving of all forces at work within the universe being but another example of the law of transformation and balance.

As immediate parents of the gods, the *devaputre*,<sup>106</sup> Dyaus and Prthivī<sup>107</sup> represent metaphysically the spiritual, or "light" principle,<sup>108</sup> and the substantial, or "extension" which is matter<sup>109</sup>. So we find Dakṣa, the principle of ideation - intelligence - dexterity stepped down to that which illumines, or gives light, on the father's side, and Aditi, the infinite, the spatial deeps, stepped down to extension or matter on the mother's side. Strictly speaking, they represent the secondary differentiation from the primeval One<sup>110</sup> into two poles of manifestation<sup>111</sup> or, if we ignore Dakṣa and Aditi, they are the "ancient parents" "born of old"<sup>111a</sup>. They exemplify the unfoldment of the One into two poles of activity, the positive and the negative, the spiritual and the material, whose interaction (the relation between the subjective and the objective) brings about the projection of the universe<sup>112</sup>. As representing the spiritual and the material, they can be considered the origin of all things and are differentiated more and more as a result of the work of the law of transformation, that aspect of *ṛta* ruled by the offsprings of the positive - negative interaction, namely the devas<sup>113</sup>. We could thus conceive of them as permutations of Dakṣa and Aditi. Furthermore, although still perceptible as the vast expanse of sky and earth, they are no longer their primordial selves, but rather fields of action for the transforming lives, but certainly not "mythological fossils". They remain throughout the R̥gveda the primeval parents invoked for protection and for participation at the sacrifice<sup>114</sup>.

Dyaus and Prthivī are opposing, though not antagonistic, forces but rather complementary, Father and Mother, "first in accordance with the *ṛta*"<sup>115</sup>. As they set the course of the phenomenal world on its onward march, they are called "ancient mothers of *ṛta*"<sup>116</sup>. The orderly process and the fact that originally Heaven and Earth were considered as one, their separation - a reflection of the separation of Aditi and Dakṣa, *sat* and *asat* - also heralding the acceleration of unfoldment or evolution, through the gods' birth and action, may be gathered from various verses.

The orderly unfoldment in consonance with the law of harmony inherent to manifestation, is easily deducible from the following verse:

"Thence uprose the universe; thence the spheres;  
thence heaven and earth spread out."<sup>117</sup>

A highly ambiguous verse, on the other hand, shows the hierarchical structure of the kingdom of the gods, the time sequence in their appearance, but tells neither who are the first ones nor who are the later.

"In the gods' mansion stood the foremost, and from  
their separation came the later."<sup>118</sup>

The "foremost" could refer to Heaven and Earth as well as Dakṣa and Aditi,

since *prathamāḥ* is not dual but plural. The word *kr̥tatra* (*kr̥t*) shows "bisecting" hence division, separation in progress. A similar hint concerning the hierarchy of the gods is given, without any precision as to who are the older and the younger gods, thus:

"Homage to the mighty, homage to the smaller (gods);  
homage to the younger, homage to the elder (gods)"<sup>119</sup>

That the gods belong to different generations hence possibly to different ages may be gathered from quite a few references: thus Indra is one of the youngest gods and even to his "divine dominion, the earlier gods granted their powers".<sup>119a</sup>

As to

"Which one of these two is the earlier, which the later?  
How were they born, who knows it, O sages?"<sup>120</sup>

the question could be taken as an indication that these two have emerged together, as indeed we may gather from the whole trend of Vedic thought:

"Born of old, the parents spreading around, co-dwell  
in one mansion in the womb of *rta*".<sup>121</sup>

In a praise to Indra the poet states

"From thy body thou hast generated at the same time  
the mother and the father."<sup>122</sup>

Most references are to both of them as twins, from which it is easy to conclude that they differentiated together.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the *R̥gveda* seems rather to take it for granted that they were once one, and so does not make explicit references to this state.<sup>124</sup> As pointed out by A.A. Macdonell

"These two deities are quite coordinate while <sup>in</sup> most of the  
other pairs one of the two greatly predominates."<sup>125</sup>

Their coordination is in line with that of Dakṣa and Aditi who are born from each other. In all the world's cosmogonies Heaven and Earth are originally joined and then separated by the action of some god personifying the forces of evolution, transformation, time.<sup>126</sup>

Their appellation of Father and Mother, bull and cow, the "two mothers" would imply that their meaning extends quite beyond the literal sense.

Dandekar considers that

"... their mythological growth seems to have been arrested even  
in the *R̥gveda*".<sup>127</sup>

and Gr̥swold looks upon them as

"... little more than conventional figures, mythological  
fossils as it were".<sup>128</sup>

J. Gonda, on the other hand, realises their importance. In his opinion, as indeed is obvious from the *samhitā*, they

"... play an important part in Vedic thought; they are *inter alia*  
stated to protect all beings (RV.3.38.8) to bear all things (I.185.1),  
to expand themselves (10.82.1; 10.149.2), to be broad (I.160.2),  
well-founded (3.54.7; 3.57.4; 4.42.3 etc.) 'immortal' (I.185.6) and  
to safeguard against death (I.185.3)"<sup>(129)</sup>.

### 111.2.6. The process of permutation

The process of permutation, which is part of the law of transformation and such a vital aspect of the dynamics of ṛta and the Vedic vision, expressed as the offspring begetting or consuming its parent, has caused more puzzle than is warranted.<sup>130</sup> If we grasp that Heaven and Earth are both abstract and concrete expressions of the two poles of manifestation, between which stands man<sup>131</sup> we can better appreciate the following paradoxes:

"Being the son thou becamest the father of the gods"<sup>132</sup>

"This is the law (ṛta). Unto ye I declare it, O Heaven and Earth, the offspring on being born consumes his generators."<sup>132a</sup>

Here is admitted that ṛta is the great law of becoming, of change, of evolution. The parents, inherent in the embryo, disappear transformed in their offspring as the latter grows. So in the process of generation, evolution, in the vast course of ṛta, the new constantly destroys the old, taking from it what is necessary. This is the inexorable onward march of events, ṛta in its dynamic aspect.<sup>133</sup> A further illustration is found in the following:

"That which generated these things you will not find; something else has emerged to being from amongst you."<sup>134</sup>

That which generated these things has disappeared into those very things to which it gave birth. Yet in destroying the old the new once again begets the old, though in a new form; this is the meaning of the offspring begetting its parent. Two further famous examples of permutation could be examined:

"From him [Puruṣa] Virāḅ was born and from Virāḅ Puruṣa"<sup>135</sup>

"From Aditi Dakṣa was born and from Dakṣa Aditi."<sup>136</sup>

In the first example the question arises: is the puruṣa named at the end of the pāda the same as that implied at the beginning, or can the pāda be interpreted thus: from Puruṣa the Heavenly or archetypal Man, Virāḅ<sup>137</sup> was born, and from Virāḅ the earthly man? If Virāḅ be, as claimed by J. Gonda, a creative principle representing a hypostatization of the idea of the universe, then we read in this verse that from the noumenal essence came the seed that, through the law of change, was to become the universe, which in turn was to give birth to that microcosm of the macrocosm, man. Here is expressed in a very succinct way, the law of transformation, one aspect of the dynamics of ṛta.

This verse is explained in the Vājasaneyi Samhitā, where it also occurs, as expressed by J. Muir thus:

"... this reciprocal generation of Virāḅ from Puruṣa, and again of Puruṣa from Virāḅ ... (is) in conformity with Vedantic principles that Virāḅ in the form of the mundane egg, sprang from Adī-Puruṣa (Primeval Puruṣa), who then entered into this egg, which he animates as its vital soul or divine principle."<sup>138</sup>

The word *puruṣa* seems, even in Ṛgvedic times, to have borne several shades of meaning, e.g. Agni, called "puruṣa of plants" (*puruṣam auṣadhīnām*),<sup>139</sup> appears to be the "vital part" or soul of plants, just as he is the immortal guest in mortal bodies. This would point to a meaning of *puruṣa* which is not generally considered viz. the soul or divine essence as the life energy that courses through all things.

W.N. Brown sees in Virāj

"... the cosmic waters from which Puruṣa arises... That Puruṣa is both the son and the progenitor of Virāj is not... surprising as the essence and source of all, the underlying generality, Puruṣa must precede even that out of which he rises in concrete form."<sup>140</sup>

We catch in this example a glimpse into one meaning of the original sacrifice of *puruṣa* as described in Ṛgv.X.90 and to be examined in the section on ṛta as sacrifice. Suffice it to notice here that this transformation of the primeval *puruṣa*, this "birth" into more and more restricting conditions forming the various levels of the ladder of evolution is itself the perpetual sacrifice that keeps the universe going. It indirectly implies that the law of change, in the conception of the ṛsis, becomes equivalent to the eternal sacrificial offering of the *puruṣa* by means of which the universe evolves.

The second example given above follows Ṛgv.X.72.3 where the *sat* or the be, be-ness, is said to emerge from the *asat* or potential,<sup>141</sup> that which is not yet being, as though the latter engendered the former to realise itself in the concrete. Verse 4 goes one step further, Aditi gives birth to Dakṣa and Dakṣa to Aditi.<sup>142</sup> Aditi at one level, may represent the infinite in its transcendental aspect, the infinitude of possibilities through and in which plays creative ideation, *dakṣa* (as a result of *tapas*), which interaction in its turn gives rise, at another level, to the more readily conceivable Mother-space notion that contains and nourishes everything, hence through which and in which all are born, the infinite source of life. This reciprocal birth expresses the same idea as that of Puruṣa's birth from <sup>Virāj and</sup> Virāj's from Puruṣa - the eternal rhythm at the root of the manifested universe, one principle giving birth to another which is but a permutation of itself at another level; but both examples take the idea one step further than that expressed in the *sat* emerging from the *asat*; we have in them the Ṛgvedic formulation of the law of transformation, from the ideal to the concrete.<sup>143</sup>

### III.2.7. The gods, offsprings and servants of the cosmic order.

The gods' action is thus to separate or demarcate the various fields or levels of manifestation - the above and the below<sup>144</sup> or the inner and the outer; so that from one homogeneous but undifferentiated whole, when Heaven and Earth or the spiritual and the material lay as though fused - a state of being which the Greeks called "chaos" and which is described in Genesis as "the face of the deep" (1.2) - emerged a cosmos of heterogeneity, with each division or world sphere well marked out, all in accordance with the one law of harmony which the devas express in all their activities.

So Indra generates the Mother and the Father who are nevertheless the parents of all.<sup>145</sup> His cosmic actions whereby the quaking earth is made firm, the middle region more widely extended and the heaven propped up<sup>146</sup> might hint at the physical formation of our world, the original convulsions to which the earth was subject. But we also notice here the extension of the middle region, that is, from the psychological angle, the further separation of the spiritual and subjective from the phenomenal and objective, unfolding an inner world, a mid-region, which, at the human level, may be equivalent to the human mental world, the world of thought, ideas, imagination.

Varuna equally "measures out" the earth<sup>147</sup> and "props asunder" the "two wide worlds"<sup>148</sup>. The gods' cosmic action of building or fashioning the world is described in terms of "measuring" for which J. Gonda makes the following remark:

"In RV.VIII.42.1. the omniscient *asura*, i.e. Varuna ... is stated to have measured off the circumference or size of the earth: *amimīta varimāṇam pṛthivyāḥ* ... The hypothesis may be ventured that *mā-* expressed the sense of 'realizing in the phenomenal world' - and this implies: in three dimensional space - by applying a special technique such as 'measuring', what was mentally conceived; converting an idea into dimensional actuality."<sup>149</sup>

H. Lefever observes that the verb *√mā* "measure out" or "found" "used in connection with the creation of heaven and earth (I.159.4) the universe (VI.47.3) and the praisesong (I.164.24) ... is never found with *rta* as its object. The Gods 'found' or 'establish' the *dhāman*, as they establish the physical world ... Similar is the case with *vrata* and *dharmān*. The Gods do not create *rta*, however, they find *rta* - as something existing apart from and above them."<sup>150</sup>

The gods being vital expressions of the law, mark out its various domains (*dhāma*), found or measure out its spheres (*vrata*), in obedience to the one law. Here we have a vision of the dynamics of *rta* at work. The law itself acts as the very rhythm of becoming, the undercurrent of that transformation according to which the universe proceeds in its endless evolution. Hence the law, *rta*, is in one sense apart from and beyond the gods, and in another sense their very being. It exists at a transcendental level but

manifests through them on every rung of the ladder of existence. They are its intelligent, dynamic agents and guardians.

The gods thus stand on the constructive, evolving, expanding, forward directed, orderly side of the cosmic process. They are responsible for the *devahitim*, the divine impulse and order. They are thereby the custodians of creation, its regents, its builders, its "disposers" (*dhātṛ*). For this reason they are considered "offsprings of ṛta" (*ṛtajātāḥ*)<sup>151</sup> said to be the "first born of ṛta" (*prathamaja ṛtasya*)<sup>152</sup> "dwellers in the seat of ṛta" (*ṛtasya pastyasadah*)<sup>153</sup> in that realm where the law is perfectly manifested. They are born according to the ṛta and wax strong in accordance with it, i.e. as a result of observing and serving it. They thus increase in and foster the ṛta.<sup>154</sup>

Mitra and Varuṇa

"who by ṛta foster the ṛta, lords of the light of ṛta"<sup>155</sup> have "overcome all disorders" and "aligned themselves with ṛta".<sup>156</sup> There is here a hint as to a discriminative process at work. They have taken up their stand on the side of order and to this effect first conquered all kinds of disorder.<sup>157</sup> Therefore they

"rule over the whole world in accordance with the ṛta"<sup>158</sup>

"serving the ṛta, by means of ṛta they have attained to powerful might".<sup>159</sup>

"By ṛta they stand"<sup>159a</sup>, by ṛta they "wax strong" (*ṛtāvṛdh*)<sup>160</sup> in the house of ṛta.<sup>161</sup> They are sinless (*anāgas*) because they conform to the ṛta (*ṛtavari*) and thus are themselves considered the "great ṛta" (*ṛtam bṛhat*)<sup>161a</sup> i.e. the very embodiment of the law they serve. They are ṛta-minded, their vision is ṛta (*ṛtadhīṭayah*)<sup>161b</sup>, they are cherishers of ṛta (*ṛtasprsaḥ*)<sup>161c</sup> and therefore true (*satyāḥ*)<sup>161d</sup>. In that guise they shine forth and work their wonders.<sup>162</sup> So <sup>the</sup> Aditya (in this case Indra-Varuṇa as one god) "frustrates that which goes against the ṛta".<sup>163</sup>

Indra is said to grow mighty through the "directions" (*pradiśaḥ*) of ṛta.<sup>164</sup>

The devas' actions thereby form the statutes of the one law of which they are the upholders and agents. They follow the ordained courses of ṛta;<sup>165</sup> are "charioteers of ṛta"<sup>166</sup> whose "statutes are true" or effective.<sup>167</sup> They obey the ṛta since they cannot act against their own nature<sup>168</sup>, and at the same time being "pure-minded"<sup>169</sup> they are its knowers, its guardians (*ṛtasya gopāḥ*)<sup>170</sup> and its lords,<sup>170a</sup> the perfect expression of that which manifests through them, by them and with them;

"Law abiding, born in law, sublime fosterers of law, haters of falsehood" <sup>171</sup>

"herdsmen of the supreme-law, whose decrees are truth, ye mount your chariot in the highest heaven", <sup>172</sup>

Here we see the moral side of the gods which is implicit rather than explicit and summed up in the epithets *ṛtāvan*, *ṛtadyumna*, *ṛtaja*, *ṛta dhāman* and *ṛtasya gopāḥ*.



In this respect Balbir Singh Gauchwal<sup>173</sup> asks the question

"... whether the moral law in its metaphysical aspect can operate by itself, or requires some conscious personal agency to manifest and operate."

This idea is based upon the assumption that the Vedic thinkers unanimously formulated

"an objective moral law constituting the eternal moral order of the universe - called rta, dharma or apūrva".<sup>174</sup>

The objective moral order of the universe exists solely in man's mind. Its counterpart in the universe is harmony, equilibrium. The moral law, as formulated by the Vedic ṛṣis is only one aspect of the universal law as man envisages it, one aspect that in its specific relation to him he considers as moral, but not the whole of the law. That whole could be more appropriately summed up, not as "the objective law of goodness", but simply as the law of "harmony" of which the gods are the active, intelligent agents. That which is consonant with the over-all harmony will, in the human sphere of activity, be considered moral. Hence the norms of social as well as personal ethics that form the basis of all civilisations. In this respect there is no need of a supreme God or Arbiter of good and evil except in so far as a personalised representative of the one Law to whom the human being renders account of his deeds or misdeeds, seems to be more comprehensible to the average human mind than an impersonal law of which only one aspect touches man in his most vital activity, i.e. distinguishing between good and evil. This conception of an impersonal eternal law to which all, even the most highly evolved beings such as the Gods, are subservient, seems to have been the vision of the ṛṣis, for, as pointed out by H. Lefever, all the ordinances (*vrata*) or statutes (*dhārma*) of the gods

"... are the expressions of a transcendent, objective law which... the Gods 'find' rather than create"<sup>175</sup>

H. Lefever sums up the characteristics of *rta* in a few words: it is the

"cosmic and dynamic principle of Law and Order"<sup>176</sup>

"the transcendent objective Law of the Universe, applying not only to ritual and natural phenomena, but also to human conduct".<sup>177</sup>

The gods are only the "charioteers of *rta*", they guard the statutes of the one Law both as protectors (*ṛtasya gopāḥ*) and as punishers or 'debt-exactors' (*cayamānāḥ* *ṛṇāni*.) The mention of "ropeless bonds" (*setṛbhiḥ arajjubhiḥ*)<sup>178</sup> is significant enough as showing a universe governed by laws which bind its various parts together as one unity under the regency of Mitra-Varuṇa and the other Adityas. One Vedic god stands out prominently as the "guardian" par excellence of *rta*, the one to whom appeals can be made and whose forgiveness can be invoked, the one who is closest to the Christian and Jewish idea of a personal god. This is Varuṇa. This god's action will be examined in connection with *vrata* and <sup>in</sup> the section on ethics.<sup>179</sup>

### III.2.8. Asura and māyā, examples of ambivalence.

In their constructive work, however, the gods encounter opposition, this opposition being inevitable in a universe based upon the subtle balancing of opposite tensions, so that even at the godly level the two great forces which we call constructive and destructive, evolving and involving, expansive and restrictive, are present and indeed make the web of the universe. These two opposing factors were expressed by the ṛṣis in the enmity between certain categories of gods. The conflict between the asuras and the devas of later Hindu mythology is not so clearly defined in the R̥gveda. Furthermore, the title *asura*<sup>180</sup> given to several of the chief deities, namely Dyaus, Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni<sup>181</sup>, Savitr<sup>182</sup>, was in R̥gvedic times, applicable to high spiritual entities, both for their creative and ruling capacities and especially for the magic power which they could wield and not to demons only as in post-Vedic mythology. Varuṇa, Savitr, Indra are each described as "wise asura".<sup>182a</sup> Brhaspati himself is invoked as "the asurya" (R̥gv.11.23.2).

Asu<sup>183</sup> means breath or life-energy; coupled with *ra*<sup>184</sup> the word becomes *asura*, the possessor of the life-breath but also its bestower. We may surmise that what differentiates the *asuras* from the *devas* is precisely their capacity to create and in as much as a *deva* rises to that accomplishment he is also entitled to be addressed as *asura*.<sup>184a</sup> J. Gonda remarks that

"Creative power was indeed attributed to those vested with asuraship already in the R̥gveda: 2.35.2. "Apām Napāt created by the greatness of his asuraship all beings". Cf. also 6.30.2. The relation to skill is also expressed by the epithet given RV.7.66.2. to the great asuras Mitra and Varuṇa *dakṣapitarau* 'whose father is Dakṣa, i.e. Skill, Ability or Mental Power' ..."<sup>185</sup>

According to R.N. Dandekar

"The asura ... is the being who possesses the highest amount of *asu*, the occult power-substance and therefore commands the greatest occult power. Varuṇa is *asura* par excellence."<sup>186</sup>

W.N. Brown differentiates the classes of the *asuras* as the Adityas and the Dānavas<sup>187</sup> and oversimplifies and crystallises into rigid patterns of opposition the rather fluidic Vedic conception of the universal opposing forces of expansion and constriction, in fact, of involution and evolution. Certain *asuras* opposed to the Adityas are named in the R̥gveda: Pipru (R̥gv.X.138.3), Namuci (R̥gv.X.131.4), Asura Varcin (R̥gv.VII.99.5), Śambara and Śuṣṇa. In the Adityas, the sons of Aditi<sup>188</sup>, we can discern the principle of expansion, freedom, light, in other words the forces of evolution, in the Dānavas, or any opposing *asura*, the principle of constriction, bondage, Dānu<sup>189</sup> seemingly representing the force of involution. Reference to seven Dānus or Dānavas, is made in R̥gv.X.120.6, *seven such beings* though not named, being also found in R̥gv.VIII.96.16. Of these Dānavas Vṛtra, the

obstructor, the foe of Indra finally slain by the latter, is the best known. The gods' battling with the asuras is mentioned twice.<sup>189a</sup> Out of these few, vague and scattered remarks, there emerges an indefinite, yet sufficiently outlined picture of the forces of light, construction, evolution, personified in the Adityas and the forces of darkness, constriction and retrogression personified in the Dānavas and others, all originally belonging to the category of *asura* and wielding the same power, *māyā*. The question of *māyā* is thus intimately concerned with the problem of the *asuras*. In this connection C.W.J. van der Linden argues:

"Since there is presumably some relation to creative power, it (*asura*) surely indicates that the element of light belongs to *asuratya* (cf. V.85). It is quite important that Varuṇa is so often connected with creative power and creation *māyā* and that light is usually connected with Dyaus, Aditi, Agni, Savitr... and that creation and light seem again to be related to Dyauspitar who has the title of Asura as well."<sup>190</sup>

Asuraship seems thus to refer to a certain status, a status of attainment characterised by a power: the asura, on the constructive side of nature, creates orders, organises and his fundamental means of creation is described as *māyā* a word whose meaning is difficult to pinpoint exactly and which, for this reason, has aroused a great deal of controversy. *Māyā* as a power is not exclusively the asura's possession, as the devas as well as those who were in due course to be deified also possessed it, but it may be theirs in the highest degree. This skill is also the prerogative of demons, the asuras on the destructive side of nature. The *māyāvin* can be either godly or demonic.<sup>191</sup>

*Asuramāyā* as the Atharvaveda (III.9.4) terms it is thus used by gods and demons. For R.N.V. Dandekar the

"... power by means of which Varuṇa organises the cosmos is significantly enough denoted by the term *māyā* which is to be derived from *mimāti* or *mimīte*, meaning to 'lay down', to 'arrange', to 'organise'".<sup>192</sup>

J. Gonda argues that

"Although the correctness of the identification *māyā*: magic is ... questionable, *māyā* may in part of its application be described as a 'force mensuratrice' enabling its possessor to create dimensional reality. (It may be remembered that *māyā* is repeatedly associated with *rūpa* 'form', e.g. RV.3.38.7; 6.47.18.) As a universal definition this interpretation can however hardly be accepted. In connection with Agni (RV.1.144.1 *eti pra hotā vratam asya māyayā*; 3.27.7) and in cases such as RV.5.63.7 the sense is rather '(Unconceivable) wisdom, skill ability'".<sup>193</sup>

Rgv. IX.83.3 refers to the *māyāvin* or those possessing *māyā* as "measuring out" (*mamire*) by means of *māyā*, or as J. Gonda explains

"realising in the phenomenal world ... what was mentally conceived".<sup>194</sup>

"Dimensional reality" means physical manifestation brought about by the *māyā*

of the asuras as the examples to be examined will demonstrate. The sense of inconceivable wisdom which J. Gonda ascribes to the term is included in its fundamental meaning. This power of projection into manifestation which is inconceivable to the human being, is inherent in the skill and wisdom of the god.

K. S. Varma points out that *māyā* is used in three different senses in the Rgveda:

- 1) It means the supernatural power of gods - especially Indra, Mitra and Varuṇa - to transform themselves or assume strange forms; (cf. Rgv. VI.47.18: through his power of *māyā* Indra wanders in many forms; harnessed are his thousand horses.)
- 2) It is often used to indicate the world sustaining power. (cf. Rgv. III.38.7; IX.18.3, etc.).
- 3) *Māyā* means the deception or cunning exercised by the asuras (demons) in their fight against the devas (gods). Like gods, demons also have power of assuming any shape at will, but they excel the gods in the power of subtle trickery.<sup>195</sup>

This definition gives a broad outline from which one may proceed with further investigation. The question of *māyā* is of importance in any assessment of *ṛta* in so far as this power is used to fit in with *ṛta* or to obstruct the lay-out of the cosmos. It is one of those words which express the ambivalence which the ṛṣis saw in the universe. As one may gather from various verses, it is the special prerogative of the asuras and seems to be the meeting point of two currents of ideas,<sup>196</sup> referring to one and the same power which can be used for constructive or destructive aims, for beneficent or maleficent purposes, for forwarding the ends of evolution or impeding them, for working out "truth" or "deceit"; hence again the factor of opposition between order and anarchy, creation and dissolution exemplified in this word, each opposing force having its own part to play in accordance with the over-ruling course, *ṛta*: the difference between the two lying in their purpose or intent. But it should be noted at the outset, that even if the *ṛta* is opposed in some way, in the end all will be in accordance with the *ṛta*, for at the transcendental level *ṛta* can never be thwarted, though it can be so at the phenomenal or manifested level.

On the constructive side, we find *māyā* representing the creative power wielded by the asuras whereby the cosmic process is measured out or set in motion (*mā* to measure)<sup>197</sup> with its orderly course, the *vratas* thereby standing protected in accordance with the *dharman*:

"By means of your *dharman* and through the asura's power, ye wise ones, Mitra-Varuṇa, protect the ordinances."<sup>198</sup>

Mitra and Varuṇa create, transform and rule over all things by the power of their *māyā* and in accordance with the law of the universe. By their *māyā* they protect the *vratas*. Thus statutes are established which become the norms of right conduct in human society, indeed in the whole of nature as each kingdom has its own laws.<sup>199</sup> This is the path established by the gods' decrees.<sup>200</sup>

G. Dumézil observes how

"the words *ṛta* (or its equivalents) and *māyā* are several times brought together".<sup>201</sup>

Some may see here a contradiction in the thought of the *ṛṣis*, as *ṛta* stands for the world "order", and the gods' use of *māyā* denotes transformation of that order. This is not so as the world order is not static but is a constant "becoming" in accordance with strict rules such as the rhythm to which all things are subjected in their manifestation, birth, growth, death, decay, itself exemplifying transformation (*parināma*, development, evolution). The world order is both static and dynamic, static in the sense of established - nothing can alter the order of life, the motion of the planets, the recurrence of day and night, etc. - dynamic in the sense of that constant transformation in accordance with the law inherent in *being*.

Earth and Heaven are both *ṛtāyini*, following *ṛta*, and *māyini*, charmers, skilled in wondrous art,<sup>202</sup> that is, constantly producing their wonder in transforming forms. There is no fundamental contradiction.

Furthermore "by his *māyā*" Varuṇa lays down the law of cycles:

"he has encompassed the nights and established the norms".<sup>203</sup>

The sun which Mitra-Varuṇa

"set in heaven as a refulgent chariot"<sup>204</sup>

is compared to a

"flying bird anointed with the asura's *māyā*".<sup>205</sup>

By that *māyā* it has been given the power of circling round the heavens and thereby unerringly follows its course,

"not infringing the common law"<sup>206</sup>

"moving forth as light".<sup>207</sup>

By the asura's *māyā*, Mitra-Varuṇa pour forth the rain from heaven. These are all phenomena of nature attributed to what the *ṛṣis* considered the magic of Mitra-Varuṇa. None can hinder the mighty *māyā* (*māyāṃ mahīm*) of the most wise god by means of which the rivers flow without overflowing the oceans.<sup>208</sup>

That great power is qualified as splendid and compared to *candra*, which means either the moon or brilliant light:

"Mighty is the power of Mitra-Varuṇa, even like the moon it bestows its splendour far and wide".<sup>210</sup>

The beauty of the universe and its wondrous workings are magic to the eyes of the beholder.

The very spinning of the web of *ṛta*, reproduced in the Vedic ritual, is attributed to Varuṇa's *māyā*:

"By Varuṇa's *māyā* is the web of *ṛta* out-stretched".<sup>211</sup>

All thus works with the law which in man's eyes manifests<sup>as</sup> a wondrous piece of work. The power of *māyā* itself is the means whereby the world order is constantly expressed and its source is essentially divine:

"Your *māyā*, O Mitra-Varuṇa, is laid down in heaven".<sup>212</sup>

It seems clear that the whole of this aspect of *māyā* refers to the asura's creative, ordering power. Creation is a deed of mighty *māyā*.<sup>213</sup> The world order is in itself magic. The world can be regarded as the asura's magic for it cannot be explained in wholly rational terms. As one poet asks, where do the stars that are visible on high at night disappear by day? (Rgv. I.24.10). The answer that Varuṇa's decrees stand inviolable (*adabdhāni vratāni*) implies that all works in accordance with his ordinances.

But *māyā* is not only used to bring out the harmonious movement of natural phenomena. Nor was it only the possession of asuras, godly or demonic. The Aśvins are also called *māyāvin*. Their chariot is full of magic, or wonder-working *purumāyā*.<sup>214</sup> Their frequent assistance to mankind is a piece of magic.<sup>215</sup> The Ṛbhus and others also resort to this *māyā*. An interesting fact is that the Ṛbhus won their share of the sacrifice and rank among the gods through their skilful artistry and *māyā*. They are described as *māyināḥ*.<sup>216</sup> Certain mythical prowesses of theirs, miraculous deeds which they performed by means of 1) power of speech (*śacībhīḥ*), 2) vision (*dhiyā*), and 3) mental ability (*manasā* Rgv. III.60.2) - the power of sound, vision and thought capable of producing concrete phenomena - these are summed up in the word *māyā* in Rgv. III.60.1cd and show *māyā* as that mental power capable of producing or shaping things at the phenomenal level. Those who are thus gifted are also called *ahimāyāḥ* where the term *ahi*, serpent, may refer to both the wisdom and the wile which the ancients ascribed to the serpent. Thus the Maruts are *ahimāyāḥ* as they "robe themselves for our welfare in the height of heaven" as clouds that pour the beneficent rain. Through *māyā* they "invest themselves" with clouds,<sup>217</sup> i.e. assume the shape of clouds.

On the destructive side, we find *māyā*, the power of transformation, used for deceptive purposes, hence its evil side, though one should not attribute evil to a neutral power, but only to its wrong application, the truth as to good or evil being in the right or wrong motive in its usage. Demons can halt or alter the course of natural phenomena such as the holding back of the waters or of the sun<sup>219</sup> and can change their appearance at will,<sup>220</sup> a kind of glamour plus guile or craftiness and stratagem calculated to throw their adversaries into confusion but which the gods, with the same power at their disposal and by also donning various forms, can easily counteract.<sup>221</sup> This aspect of *māyā* inevitably led to the meaning of deceit, thence *illusion*, to the exclusion of all other meanings and is found far more developed in post-Vedic literature than in the Rgveda. In the final analysis, however great the power of the *māyināḥ* or of the *dhirāḥ*, that power cannot go against the statutes of the gods who are the embodiments of the *ṛta*:

"Neither those who possess *māyā* nor those who hold wisdom can impair the primeval, firmly-fixed statutes of the gods."<sup>222</sup>

So by means of *māyā* the world order seems capable of unsettlement and by means of that same *māyā* that order is re-established, for in its deepest aspect, or fundamentally, nothing can alter that which is to be established by *ṛta* and is already so established at the transcendental level.

As pointed out by L. Renou, whilst the negative and deceitful kind of *māyā* used by the opponents of the gods is

"... foreign to the lay-out of the cosmos, or *ṛta* ... whilst it is in some way a *nirṛti*, a dis-organising activity, the constructive *māyā* is placed in the field of *ṛta* ... is associated with the laws and statutes which are the foundation of the cosmic order, of those very *vṛata* and *dharman* which the other *māyā* strives ... to alter." 223

Renou further comments that it appears that both uses of the term

"cannot be simply interpreted by the ambivalence proper to so many Vedic notions, i.e. by a divine and demonic application" 224

but "there is something more", and he concludes that the original source of the word must be traced to two different words which eventually converged into one term "bearing a fundamental ambivalence".

We do not see the necessity of two different terms: the one power of creating, transforming and laying out can very well be used to forward the ends of the cosmos, or to impede them, hence the "constructive" or "destructive" *māyā* used in accordance with *ṛta* or against it.

According to G. Dumézil the "ambiguity" of the term is found in

"the definition of the concept and provokes the ambivalence in its applications and would provoke it if Vedic ideology was not predisposed to give two slants to its expressions" 225

In his opinion there is no need to seek the origin of *māyā* in two different terms:

"Good or bad, *māyā* takes its name from the one root  $\sqrt{māy}$ , everywhere and always it is the principle and the very act of a 'desired change' especially of a 'change of form'; its relations with 'the static lay-out' are simply numerous; the enemies of the *ṛta* make use of it to destroy it, the army of the *ṛta* to defend or reinstate it, the creators and administrators of the *ṛta* to maintain its working in its ever moving cogs ..." 226

Thus is the universe wrought and kept going, the root of this constant organising and disorganising being found in the original interplay of two opposing forces which are necessary to bring the universe into existence. That it is a cosmos, or field of ordered activity, is due to the law of its very being that acts as soon as the first impulse to manifestation has been given, and keeps all opposing forces in equilibrium. 227

III.2.9. The laws derived from the one fundamental law: dhāman, dharman, vrata.

Rta, in its various specialised applications, will now be examined.

The idea of law, as A. Bergaigne<sup>228</sup> points out, is expressed in the Rgvedic hymns by means of four principal words:

dhāman (√dhā to lay down, place, institute, found);

dharman (√dhr to support, sustain, hold together);

rta and vrata,

and he maintains that

"... foundation, support, adaptation, these are the original meanings; whence came the sense of law of the three words dhāman, dharman, rta."<sup>229</sup>

In the Vedic conception of cosmic order, as we have seen, the notion of ordering, of instituting, of establishing, is closely linked to that of creating. Creation which is first a projection (*visṛṣṭi*) through *tapas* of what we might call divine ideation impressing the mother substance (Dakṣa and Aditi born of each other) then becomes a process of organising, fashioning (√takṣ), a laying down in the right order according to certain norms, ways, rules, spheres and ordinances (*dhāman, dharman, vrata*) inherent in the rta, which regulate the unfoldment, motion, development of all things; hence creation, in its secondary sense, is an "establishing"; √dhā<sup>230</sup> represents the foundation in full accordance with "law"; it is the laying down of the cosmic order in the space time world in strict accordance with the rules which stem from, indeed are expressions of, the fundamental order, the inherent harmony at the core of the universe.<sup>231</sup>

The Adityas are those who

"vision the cosmic order and establish it, shining forth as perpetual wonder-workers".<sup>232</sup>

This verse seems to hint that the cosmic order which we might describe as "eternal in the heavens" is first visioned by the Adityas and then established at the phenomenal level, this being these gods' "wondrous achievement".

The year, the seasons and days, all divisions of time as a manifestation of rta, is thus described:

"Around the heaven revolves the ever unaging twelve-spoked wheel of rta. Here, O Agni, the seven-hundred and twenty sons take their stand."<sup>233</sup>

The work of establishing the seasons is ascribed to those gods intimately connected with the cosmic order, the Adityas. They

"have established (*vi dadhuh*) the seasons, months, days, nights, the worship and the holy-word".<sup>234</sup>

The sacrificial ritual is brought in line with time's sequence, and given the seal of godly statute. It is instituted as a microscopic reproduction of the cosmic order. The patriarchal ancestors, the Angirasas, are also said in Rgv.

I.71.3, to quote from J. Gonda:



"... to have established a special manifestation of *rta*, of the regular, normal, true, harmonious and fundamental structure and nature of the universe, underlying and determining the cosmic, mundane and ritual events, and to have started its *dhītiḥ* 'vision': *dadhann ṛtam dhanayann asya dhītim*." <sup>235</sup>

That which is thus established is a specific field or sphere of the *rta*, *ṛtasya dhāman*, of which *dhāman* there are many. The word *dhāman* <sup>236</sup> bears several connotations: domain, rule, institution, state, condition, nature, power; in general a specific area of divine influence connected with divine rule, a god's own proper sphere of influence marking out a particular manifestation of *rta*. <sup>237</sup> In the "*dhāman of rta*", i.e. the sphere of harmonious activity "the gods rejoice". <sup>238</sup>

J. Gonda attempts to elucidate further the concept of *dhāman*: it

"... may to some extent be defined as a 'place', sphere, phenomenon in which a divine power is located- a holder or container of a numinous potency, it is not surprising to find it associated with *nāman* 'name' ... because the experience 'here power manifests itself, here there is something numinous' induced man to assign a name to the powerful or incomprehensible ... Hence statements such as RV.10.45.2. 'We know thy ... *dhāmāni*, O Agni, which are distributed in many places ...; we know thy highest ... name, which is secret.'" <sup>239</sup>

A glimpse is given us into a primordial order, or *dhāman* which Varuṇa has measured out, hence established:

"He has established his *dhāman* of old." <sup>240</sup>

Since Varuṇa's sphere of influence extends over the whole phenomenal world, as one may gather from ṚgV.VII.87.2, VIII.42.1, the world is his *dhāman*.

*The dawns themselves*

"follow Varuṇa's long-standing *dhāman*." <sup>241</sup>

And Dawn herself, as the next verse (9) insists, never misses out the *dhāman* of *rta*, but day after day she appears at the appointed place in heaven. This conformity to the *rta* is an expression of her *dhāman*, <sup>242</sup> the very law of her being, hence her nature.

Agni, on the other hand, "marks out" or measures "the many spheres" or "manifestations of *rta*". <sup>243</sup> He "circumscribes seven *dhāma*". <sup>244</sup> These may be equivalent to the "seven seats" which "he establishes for the *rta*", which are expanded or perhaps just subdivided into "thirty spheres over which Vāc has dominion". <sup>245</sup> These most probably refer to the sacrificial seats wherein is enacted the drama of the cosmic order. Soma's offsprings (*prajāh*) - the daughters of immortality - are stated to be "in the highest sphere (*dhāman*) of the cosmic order". <sup>247</sup> This may give a clue as to what it is that the patriarchs discover "kept hidden as the supreme domain of the sacrificial worship". <sup>248</sup>

Hence each god seems to have his own specific domain over which he rules. <sup>249</sup> Each *dhāman* is a sphere of harmony established in and working with the overall harmony of the *rta* at the innermost core of which is found the secret of immortality.

Turning to *dharman*, we find the root  $\sqrt{dhr}$  implying support, maintenance:<sup>250</sup>  
the gods' buttress ( $\sqrt{dhr}$ ) the sky, earth, worlds and creatures, and the upkeep  
of the sacred fire is part of the upkeep of the world. So Agni

"has filled both worlds and mighty heaven when the well-versed  
ones upheld him at his birth".<sup>251</sup>

So Brhaspati is called the "upholder of mighty *rta*".<sup>252</sup>

The word *dharman* ( $\sqrt{dhr}$ ) which often governs *rta* seems to have meant in  
Vedic times that which sustains the foundations of law, that which holds together  
through the inherent law of harmony. *Dharman* is a more specialised aspect of  
*rta* and is used in the sense of specific statutes that sustain, regulate and<sup>253</sup>  
order the course of things; the term *rta* referring to the whole, i.e. the cosmic  
and social order, the truth, the sacrificial rite, the term *dharman* to specific  
regulations binding under that whole. Truth itself is said to be "established  
on the unshakable foundation" of heaven.<sup>254</sup> The fixed norms of cosmic order manifest  
themselves as the divine statutes which uphold the march of all things and  
maintain the universe in every aspect.

Four of the words we have been, or will be, considering - *dharman*, *vrata*,  
*māyā* and *rta* - are brought together in Rgv.V.63.7:

"By means of the *dharman*, with the magic power (*māyā*) of the asura,  
O wise Mitra-Varuṇa, ye protect the *vratas*;  
in accordance with *rta* ye rule over the whole world." <sup>255</sup>

The *māyā* of the gods is here practically an expression of the law as wielded  
by the gods through which further pathways (*vrata*) of the law are protected.  
The various ways (*vrata*) of upholding (*dharman*) the law (*rta*) are the various  
modes of that *rta* whose custodians the Adityas are. The maintenance of the *rta*  
(*rtasya dharman*) is the gods' proper function:

"For the sake of upholding and supporting the world  
through (Agni's) own power have the gods expanded." <sup>256</sup>

Hence their actions stand

"Firmly fixed by statute and ordinance".<sup>257</sup>

Through the same "ordinance", what is established as the norm,

"the refulgent sun journeys, a god amidst the goddesses",<sup>258</sup>

that is, travels between Heaven and Earth in accordance with the laws determined  
by the cosmic order, laws which he cannot help but follow.

Again, in accordance with the *dharman* Indra

"establishes the rivers in their course".<sup>259</sup>

Soma who, at the ritual, flows in accordance with the "true orderly process"  
(*satye vidharman*)<sup>260</sup> or the *dharman* of *rta*<sup>261</sup> is addressed as "lord of the *dharman*"  
whom all men uphold.<sup>262</sup>

Each god follows his own *dharman*,<sup>263</sup> i.e. his inherent nature and according  
to that nature or law proper to his being, sings his own song.<sup>264</sup> As *dharman* is  
used in the sense of that which sustains, food is glorified because it upholds  
strength.<sup>265</sup>

Several gods are intimately connected with the "foundation of truth" (*satyadharmān*): Agni, Mitra-Varuṇa, Savitr. Agni's truth is law, his truth being the good that he does to the worshipper. He is the "overseer of the *dharma*" in his quality of custodian of *ṛta* as the sacrificial rite, as commemorative of the universal rite of creation. Savitr, like Varuṇa, is he whose *dharma* is accomplished, or true (*satyadharmān*), he who maintains the statutes (*dhṛtavrata*). Varuṇa, whose insight detects all, the good and the evil, what has been and what will be, whose eye is the sun, is custodian of the *ṛta* as a whole. He is the very embodiment of truth.

He who "through his truth-accordant-decrees (*satyadharmān*) gave birth to heaven, who is earth's procreator, cannot harm us".

The law, that is the foundation of all, is truth and all-binding. Only in standing against it can one be harmed. Superficially the above verse may be thought to be in contradiction with certain prayers addressed in particular to Varuṇa and to be discussed in the next chapter. But the meaning is that man is harmed only in so far as he transgresses the law, thereby laying himself open to such specific harm as is brought about through sin; a man in harmony with the law which is truth, and with himself, his own deeper self, cannot be harmed, harm being contingent upon man's action and nothing else. Hence God cannot harm him.

As remarked by H. Lefever, of the three law terms, *dhāman*, *dharma* and *vrata*, *dharma*

"is that most often used in a sense approaching that of *ṛta*".

The accomplishment of the law as an expression of truth, *satyadharmān*, manifests in human society as social order. So the rules laid down for human behaviour are best calculated to promote social harmony and prevent society from breaking down. *Satya* truth as related to society becomes *dharma*. The subsequent development of *dharma* which, as *dharma*, came to be more and more used, made *ṛta* fall more and more into disuse. The connection between *dharma* and *ṛta* is well explained by J.M. Koller:

"The ordering or regulation of relations between events is accomplished by *dharma* ... *Dharma* is the expression of cosmic *ṛta* in human life, providing the identity of the individual reality with the higher reality ... all ordinary human *dharma* is only an aspect of the universal *dharma*, and is justified not in itself, but only in the function of the universal *dharma*, the *ṛta* of the *Rgveda*."

The word *vrata* has given occasion for controversy mainly because of the doubt as to its derivation. V.M. Apte derives it from  $\sqrt{vrt}$  "to proceed, turn, roll, move on", rather than from  $\sqrt{vr}$  "to enclose, cover or guard", or from  $\sqrt{vr}$  "to choose". In "All about 'vrata' in the *Rgveda*" the same author, whilst agreeing with W. Whitney's view, viz. the derivation of *vrata* from  $\sqrt{vrt}$  "to proceed", with the suffix *a*, surveys and criticises the various etymologies offered by

Western scholars and gives his reasons for choosing  $\sqrt{vrt}$ :

"The word *vrata* ... from *vrt* would mean something like a procedure, course, line of movement, course of action, then conduct or behaviour." 277

For E.W. Hopkins

"The word *vrata* means way, course, procedure, action and sphere of action, realm ... and, after the RigVeda period, obligation and vow. It derives from *vart* ... and is usually associated with a verb of motion in the sense 'follow the way', or rule set by the gods, while the other meaning of rule, in the sense of realm is preserved in the magnificent prophecy of the Rig Veda: '(the gods) spread abroad over the earth the Aryan realm' or rule (*āryā vrata*). Later this word becomes synonymous with moral order." 278

As will be seen in the examples chosen, *vrata* means the sphere of divine influence or, as W. Whitney explains, the right "course of action" 279

by means of which Varuṇa maintains order in the world in accordance with the *rta*. H.W. Wallis describes it as *ṛtasya panthah*, 280 the path of *rta*. So

"the gods follow the ordained-ways of *rta*" 281

in other words, they act in strict harmony with the established norms. This is their function. In this connection V.M. Apte argues:

"... the verbs which take *vrata* as object decidedly favour its interpretation as a 'word of motion'. We do not find them to mean 'obey, submit to, accept' and the like, but rather 'follow after, pursue, attach one's self to'." 282

The examples he brings forward, however, could be interpreted in terms of following the course of the law. In Rgv.I.183.3 the *Aśvins* are enjoined to come to the worshipper as he follows his function (*vrataṇi*), in other words, acts in harmony with the *rta*, performs his duty, which in this particular case, seems to be the ritual; in Rgv.III.61.1 Dawn is said to travel along her course, *vrata*, hence to follow the established path. 283 But in Rgv.VIII.43.16b and 44.21, the "bright *vrata*" (*śuci vrata*) of Agni, must be, as pointed out by V.M. Apte, his "blazing trail or path". The same applies to the following:

"All these Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman, omniscient, follow the *vratas* as though with feet, and safeguard mortal man from injury." 284

The description "as though with feet" is evidence, according to V.M. Apte that

"the devas follow the fixed luminous paths in the heavens, as surely and as regularly as if they were endowed with feet. No meaning other than 'courses, paths or ways' is suitable here." 285

Similarly:

"O Heaven and Earth blend for us heaven's balm, balm-yielding honey upon your balmy path". 286

*Vrata* may thus mean the particular way according to which a god performs his function, hence function, statute, norm. Each god in his own characteristic way, upholds his own mode of action, his own *vrata*, all of which *vratas* form the established norms, the divine "inroads". These may be considered as the

These may be considered as the paths, functions and thus ordinances of the great ṛta. Thus Sūrya<sup>15</sup> addressed:

"impelled-forward, thou safeguardest the universe's *vrata*"<sup>287</sup>

None, neither Varuṇa, nor Indra, nor Aryaman, nor Rudra infringes the *vratas* of Savitr.<sup>288</sup> The waters obey him, night comes at his bidding, he wakens all, stretching out his arms to protect all. Each kingdom of nature, each species, has its own domain,<sup>its own activity</sup> under his guardianship.<sup>289</sup> This is his "holy song" which "he fashions for the sake of his own *dharma*"<sup>290</sup>. Dawn is called the

"ancient, youthful, prolific goddess" who

"holds all good things and follows along the established-norm"<sup>291</sup>

As dawns ascend the sky and pervade the mid-region

"they generate the divine inroads"<sup>292</sup>

In obeying their own intrinsic law they show us the path we should follow, those intangible inroads whereby we learn to harmonise ourselves with the whole. Similarly in the divine sphere of Parjanya the earth bows down, hoofed beasts prance about, plants assume all kinds of forms.<sup>293</sup>

For those who follow Indra's *vrata* Heaven, Earth and the mountains stand firm.<sup>294</sup>

Varuṇa's *vratas* seem to yield in importance to none of all the other gods for the gods themselves are said to follow them:

"All the gods follow the *vrata* of Varuṇa"<sup>295</sup>

Varuṇa, the Asura,<sup>296</sup> the *ṛtayan*,<sup>297</sup> the lord of righteousness, the guardian of ṛta<sup>298</sup> whose statutes are *dhr̥tavrata*, firmly established,<sup>299</sup> seems to have been recognised, at least at one time, as the supreme lord of all,<sup>300</sup> "ruler of this world's-manifestation"<sup>301</sup>. He has ṛta as his form and figures as the god in whom ṛta is incarnate, ṛta is his dynamic expression. His

"statutes (*vrata*), unmovable, are firmly-fixed in thee as on a mountain"<sup>303</sup>

In some hymns he steps into the role of the all-creator<sup>304</sup> in whom all the worlds abide,<sup>305</sup> in others that of the all-dispenser of justice to whom the sinner turns in repentance.<sup>306</sup> He is *svaṛāj* and *saṃrāj*,<sup>307</sup> the mighty upholder of order, physical - as he controls natural phenomena - and moral as he

"perceives man's truth and untruth"<sup>308</sup>

"knows all things transcendental and beholds what has been and what will be"<sup>309</sup>

So the rivers run in accordance with Varuṇa's ṛta,<sup>310</sup> i.e. the sphere of ṛta over which Varuṇa has lordship, and in which the *vratas* are fixed as on a mountain.

All that Varuṇa represented in Vedic times is epitomised in a hymn of the Atharvaveda (Athv. IV. 16) of which Roth makes the following comment:

"There is no hymn in the whole Vedic literature which expresses the divine omniscience in such forceful terms as this." 3//

In spite of each god having his own *vrata* in which all creatures follow well laid out paths, under the overlordship of Varuna, there are, however, certain phenomena in nature which may be considered as going against the established norms. Thus, when during day time the sun is hidden in darkness through an eclipse, this is against the *vrata*, it is *apavrata*, as stated in Rgv.V.40.6. The verse is very ambiguous. It may refer to the actual sun in an eclipse, but it may as well refer to the inner sun of illumination which Atri discovers in the fourth degree of prayer (*brahman*):

"In the fourth degree of prayer, Atri discovered  
the sun strayed from his path, hidden in gloom." 312

If both interpretations are correct, this would be a perfect example of that duality, and often triplicity, of meaning of which Rgvedic verses are capable. It may also be noted in passing that since planetary movements can be calculated and eclipses predicted, the latter are in fact part of the cosmic order. They cannot really be against *ṛta*. Only we human beings can go against *ṛta*, only the sun in us, the dynamo of life-giving power can be obscured by too much physical or material covering, or transgressions, and may be recovered through prayer.

Thus the three law terms, *dhāman*, *dharman*, *vrata*, standing as they do for the decrees, ordinances, or rules, for the spheres and functions as laid out by the gods in accordance with the overall order, or *ṛta*, are expressive of the gods' function in the world of phenomena and their dynamic application of the *ṛta*. These very ordinances find their reflection at the human level where man is called upon to live in accordance with the *dharman* and *vrata* of the gods but reveals himself as the greatest disturber of the divine harmony. The question of the gods and human beings is so closely linked, their interaction so bound up together, that we shall consider the further action of the *devas*, especially as it influences humans, in connection with the socio-ethical and ritualistic aspects of *ṛta*.

No better summing up of the function of these words can be found than in H. Lefever's "The Vedic idea of sin":

"... the terms *vrata*, *dharma* and *dhāman* stand for the ordinances, formulated (generally by the gods) in accordance with *ṛta*, for the application or realisation of *ṛta* in the world. These ordinances can be said to 'belong' to the gods in a sense which is never true of *ṛta*... The Gods 'found' or 'establish' the *dhāman*, as they establish the physical world, or as a poet constructs his song. Similar is the case with *vrata* and *dharman*. The Gods do not create *ṛta*, however. It would be more correct to say that they find *ṛta*..." 313

In exercising their functions they create specific fields of *ṛta* which are all expressions of the cosmic order as reflected at the phenomenal level.

III.2.10. The Divine encounter.

The vision of the godly realm is one of splendour. Like

"Dawn, the shining daughter of Heaven... dispelling gloom of night... ushering in the light" 314

so the ṛsis in their contemplation lifted the veil upon a luminous world seldom envisaged by the human mind. Above all and in spite of certain disruptive forces, it is a vision of harmony,<sup>315</sup> of cosmic solidarity, the wonder of the working in unison of all the great energising powers of the universe as they shape the ideal thought of the Creator (*dhātā*), the Supreme Ordainer. Harmony is beauty, beauty is harmony. The infinite manifestations of nature all converge into one mighty paean of beauty:

"sinless in the sight of Aditi, stimulated by Savitr, let us contemplate all beautiful things". 316

In the poet's address to Indra

"Thou<sup>who</sup>... hast made<sup>the</sup> the earth the counterpart of thy creative-might" 317

we glimpse the ṛsis' idea that the richness of nature is but a reflection of the heavenly realms of the gods.

Free from all human failings, pure, infallible, undecivable,<sup>318</sup> the gods of the Ṛgveda represent truth (*satya*),<sup>319</sup> they are the "lords of truth" (*satyasyapatayah*) they are ṛta-visioned (*ṛtadhīṭayah*) and are therefore the worthy embodiments of the great law, ṛta, theirs being the dominion of light, wide space, freedom, of glory (*dhargas*) brilliance (*vārcas*), power (*ojas*), of benevolence (*śam*) and splendour (*amati*), all of which sum up the wonder and admiration in which human beings hold them.

"Denizens of heaven, flame-tongued, thriving through the law, they abide brooding in the womb of law." 320

The Adityas in particular are

"True observers of the law, faithful to the law, righteous leaders, bounteous to every man." 321

"Blessed is all that the devas regard with favour." 322

The Platonic dictum "Deity geometrises" is a reality in the Vedic conception in so far as the universe manifests according to certain patterns of progressive unfoldment and harmonious expression in which every realm of activity, supervised by a god, develops in perfect concordance with every other realm. Each god performs his task in accordance with the great law of harmony which he, by his very nature, follows and fosters in his multivariied functions. The universe, at the godly level, is the dynamic expression of ṛta, all the gods' actions moving concertedly towards the one end of creating a harmonious world, and this is reflected at the phenomenal level in the harmony of nature. The gods' action is constantly described as "of one accord" (*sajoṣasāḥ*) or harmonious: "Acting in harmony" (*sajoṣah*) and rejoicing (*mandamānāḥ*) the gods have awarded their dominion to Mitra-Varuna.<sup>323</sup> Accordant and of one mind (*samanasah*)<sup>324</sup> they all come to the worshipper to bless the sacrifice.<sup>325</sup>

"All gods, one-minded, one-intentioned, unerringly proceed to the one purposeful intelligence." 326

The essential oneness of manifestation as rooted in the divine harmony, rta, is expressed in far-sweeping imagery taking in the whole of nature, as the divine swan with its abode everywhere, the swan which <sup>is</sup> rta:

"Swan, dweller in the light, dweller in the inner space, beneficent priest present at the altar, guest in every dwelling, dweller amongst men, dweller in the wide-spaces, dweller in rta, dweller in heaven, born of waters, born of kine, born of rta, born of mountain, (such is) rta." 327

The universal harmony, the gods' handiwork, is their song in which they rejoice:

"The gods revel in the sacred-song (*sāman*) of rta." 328

The whole hymn to Earth in the Atharvaveda (XII.1) is a panegyric of harmony on earth.

The world,

"Heaven and Earth, the waters, the plants and the trees, did the godly ones engender according to the ordinances. As a favour they filled the mid-region with celestial light." 329

This mid-region that extends between heaven and earth and is the birthplace of man, <sup>330</sup> is, through the gods' graciousness, filled with not just light (*dyotis*) but heavenly light (*svar*). Agni's radiant energy (*varcah*) that dwells in Heaven and Earth is said to have "spread wide the mid-region" <sup>331</sup> whose dominion is *Indra's*. <sup>332</sup>

The gods are regarded as gracious towards humanity, for they are of one spirit (*samanyu*) <sup>333</sup> with man. Their further task is to train man to reflect this harmony, their own peculiar achievement, on earth. It is here that we meet man and his collaboration with or disruption of the divine solidarity, the "pattern in the heaven", rta.



## Section III.2.1-10.

1. *deva* from *div* to shine. cf. Yjv. 34.3 about the immortal light in all creatures.
2. *suparṇam viprāḥ kavayo vacobhir-ekam santam bahudhā kalpayanti* (Rgv.X.114.5ab)
3. cf. Rgv. I.72.4; IV.3.1; Athv.VII.87.1.
4. cf. Rgv. V.3.1-2; Rgv.II.1 and V.48.5 where Varuna seems to have taken on the attributes Agni. cf. X.16.13.
5. *mahad devānām asuratvam ekam.* (Rgv.III.55.1d) cf. Rgv.II.38.
6. *asataḥ sad ajāyata* (Rgv.X.72.3b)
7. *dakṣasya janmann aditer-upasthe.* (Rgv.X.5.7ab)
8. Many hymns also mention on the one hand the waters of space which could be considered as the primordial substance out of which all will be fashioned (cf. Rgv.X.121.7&8, X.129.1&3), and on the other hand, *Tvaṣṭṛ* who breathes life into all creatures. The Atharvaveda refers to *Tvaṣṭṛ* as "he who in the beginning became the counterpart of the waters" (IX.4.2). The idea is the same: the interaction of two poles of manifestation.
9. "Vedic mythology." 1897.p.46.
10. op.cit.p.46.
11. E.V.P.IV.1955.p.31.
- 11a. cf. Rgv.VIII.63.10. where the poet refers to humans as *Dakṣa*'s sons together with the gods.
12. *būtānām garbham ... pitaram.* (Rgv. III. 27.9)
- 12a. cf. Rgv. II.1; III.1.20.
- 12b. cf. Rgv.VI.48.1.
13. cf. *napātā śavaso mahāḥ sūnū dakṣasya sukratū.* (Rgv.VIII.25.5ab)  
"Sons of a mighty power, *Dakṣa*'s two most wise offspring."
14. J. Gonda. "Gods and Powers." 1957.p.5.
15. "Religion and philosophy of the Veda" 1925.p.100. cf. P.S.Deshmukh. "Religion in Vedic literature." 1933.p.232.
16. "The cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887.p.45.
17. *dakṣapatiḥ* (Rgv.I.95.6; I.56.2)
- 17a. Rgv. II.27.1; I.89.3; X.64.5.
18. *mahnā dakṣasya.* (Rgv. III.62.17) cf. Rgv. I.23.4; V.10.2.
19. *sudakṣa* (Rgv.VII.66.2.)
20. *dakṣam dadhāte apasām.* (Rgv. I.2.9).
21. J. Gonda's translation ("Vision." p.69) of Rgv. I.139.2ab:  
*rtād adhy-ādādāthe anṛtam svena manyunā dakṣasya.*
22. E.V.P.IV.p.31.
23. A.A. Macdonell traces the etymology of *Aditi* to  $3\sqrt{dā}$  to bind, in his "Vedic mythology" 1897,p.121, but to  $1\sqrt{dā}$  to give in his "Vedic grammar" (1910.p.122). In the latter case it would make her meaning equivalent to stringency, meanness or penury which certainly does not apply to her role of far pervading mother, or divine, prolific cow and celestial light. In Rgv.IV.2.11d (*ditim ca rāsva aditim uruṣya*) which Griffith translates as "keep penury afar and grant us plenty" we could have the meaning of "grant us the limited and preserve for us the unlimited", in other words the "manifest" and the "unmanifest". A similar sense could be read in Rgv.V.62.8d where *Mitra* and *Varuṇa arē* addressed and described as "viewing both the unlimited and the limited" (*cakṣāthe aditim ditim ca*) - the unmanifest and the manifest. cf. also V.M. Apte "Is Diti in the Rgveda a mere reflex of Aditi" in *Bharatiya Vidya* 9.1949.p.15-16.
24. *aditer-upasthe* (Rgv.X.5.7) cf. Athv.VII.6.1-4.
25. Rgv.X.129.3.

- 25a. cf. R. Roth "Die höchsten Götter der arischen Völker" (Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig 1852. Band 6, pp.67-77.)  
 "Die Aditi d.h. die Ewigkeit, oder das Ewige, ist das Element, welches sie trägt und von ihnen getragen wird." (p.68).  
 "Dieses Ewige und Unantastbare, in welchem die Aditjas ruhen und das ihr Wesen ausmacht, ist das himmlische Licht. ... Die Aditjas, die Götter dieses Lichtes, fallen darum keineswegs zusammen mit den Lichterscheinungen in der Welt, sie sind weder Sonne noch Mond, noch Sterne, noch Morgenroth, sondern gleichsam im Hintergrunde aller dieser Erscheinungen die ewigen Träger dieses Lichtlebens ..." (p.69.)
26. *aditir-dyaur-aditir-antarikṣam aditir-mātā sa pitā sa putrah viśve devā aditiḥ pañca janā aditir-jātam aditir-janitvam.* (Rgv. I.89.10).
27. "Symbolism in the Vedas and its conceptualisation." In *Numen* vol.24. fasc.3, 1977. p.225.
28. Athv. VII.6.2.
29. *anarva* (Rgv. II.40.6c)
30. *uruvyacāḥ* (Rgv. V.46.6d).
31. *dhārayat-ksitim* (Rgv. I.136.3b)
32. *vyotiṣmatim.* (Rgv. I.136.3a)
33. Rgv. I.24.7.
34. At times she seems almost to be identified with Earth, cf. Rgv. X.63.3; I.72.9; Athv. XIII.1.38. The identification becomes complete in the Tait. S., Śat. Br.
35. *mimātu dyaur-aditir-vītaye nah.* (Rgv. V.59.8a) land Naighantuka.  
 cf. Rgv. X.63.3. (Dyaus the infinite). ("May infinite Dyaus shout for our enjoyment.")
36. cf. Rgv. V.60.6 where heaven bears a threefold division - *uttama, madhyama, avama.* cf. Rgv. II.27.8 where the Adityas are described as staying three earths and three heavens and having three functions in the divine assembly. Also Rgv. I.102.8, V.69.1, VI.47.3, I.164.6 and Athv. VIII.9.16. cf. Rgv. VI.47.3; X.14.16; 128.5.
37. cf. Rgv. IV.14.2. *dyāvāpṛthivī antarikṣam;* III.8.8; V.85.3; VIII.12.24; cf. Śat. Br. 7.1.2.23. Among triads ... "none is so frequent as the three regions of the universe, nor so characteristic as the threefold Vedic lore, the triple sacred fire and the many ritual triads." (J. Gonda. "Triads." 1976. p.49).
38. cf. Rgv. I.154.4; VII.5.4; X.114.1. cf. Śat. Br. 11.2.3.3.5: "as far as there are form and name so far extends this universe- these indeed are the two great manifestations of brahman's power". These two become a triad of name, form and work (*karman*) Bṛhad. U. 1.6.1, this *karman* being the interaction of name and form. cf. Agni's threefold jurisdiction over Heaven and Earth (Rgv. VII.5.4. etc.)
39. cf. Rgv. X.114.1; VII.5.4; I.154.4. cf. Athv. XII.3.20 (*trayo lokah*); XVI.50.2.
40. op. cit. 11.5.8.1. (S.B.E. Trans. J. Eggeling. 1900). cf. Nirukta 7:5.
41. Hopkins, E.W. "Holy numbers of the Rig-Veda." ("Oriental studies, 1888-1894." Boston, 1894.) p.41 as quoted in J. Gonda "Triads" 1976. p.49.
42. *tisrodyāvāḥ savitur-dvā upasthām ekā yamasya bhuvane.* (Rgv. I.35.6ab)
43. *trināke tridive divaḥ lokā yatra jyotiṣmantak.* (Rgv. IX.113.9c) "In that threefold heavenly complex of heaven, in that luminous place." cf. Athv. X.9.5; X.10.32; XVII.1.10; XVIII.4.3; IX.5.10. cf. Rgv. VII.101.4b.
44. *tisro divaḥ pṛthivīs tisra invati.* (Rgv. IV.53.5c). cf. Rgv. II.27.8.9; I.102.8ab; 105.5ab.
45. Rgv. VIII.69.3cd. cf. Rgv. I.105.5ab.
46. *tisro dyāvo nihitā antar-asmin-tisro bhūmīr-uparāḥ ṣaḍ-vidhānāḥ.* (Rgv. VII.87.5ab) cf. Rgv. V.69.1ab; VI.47.3cd.
47. cf. Rgv. I.71.5; 90.7; 164.33; IV.1.10; VI.51.5.
48. cf. Rgv. X.167.1. cf. Rgv. X.36.3c and IX.21.1.
49. cf. Rgv. X.129.1.7.

50. Dandekar explains *antarikṣa* thus: "From *antari* and *kṣa* (from *kṣi* 'to reside')... also analysed as *antar* and *ikṣ* (for *īkṣ*) and explained as 'transparent' ..." ("Universe in Vedic thought." op cit.) p.101. Another word which denotes the mid-region is *rajas*.
- 50a. "Triads." 1976, p.49.
51. "Antarikṣa, ākāśa, kha" (*Rocznik orientalistyczny*, tome 24, pt.2, 1961, pp.53-8).
52. "Ungezwungen könnte doch ākāśa von ā = 'her, heran, hinzu' und kās = 'hell leuchten' abgeleitet werden, mit der Grundbedeutung '-schauen, -blicken oder -strahlen' (Grassmann), so dass die Übereinstimmung mit *antarikṣa* in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* nachgewiesen ist." op.cit.p.56.
53. Chānd. Up. III.12.8. (*Bibliotheca Indica*, vol.24).
54. cf. K. Werner "The Vedic concept of personality." (*Journal of Indian philosophy*, vol.5.1978, pp.275-289). p.277.
55. *dyaur-me pitā janitā nābhir-atra bandhur-me mātā pṛthivī mahīyam uttānayoś camvoryonir-antar atrā pitā duhitur-garbham ā adhāt*.
56. cf. Rgv. VIII.41.9; I.102.8ab; II.27.8a.
57. "Triads." 1976, p.53-4.
58. op. cit. 5.1.5.21. cf. Rgv. VII.104.11.
- 58a. cf. Rgv. VI.51.2 and Sāyana's comment that the earth belongs to the Vasus, the firmament to the Rudras, and heaven to the Adityas.
59. cf. A.B. Keith "Indian mythology." 1917, pp.15-72. A.A. Macdonell, "Vedic mythology." 1897, pp.21-115. P.S. Deshmukh, "Religion in Vedic literature." 1933, pp.213-296.
60. "He (Prajāpati) heated these three worlds, and from them, thus heated, three lights (*jyotis*) were produced - Agni (the fire), he who blows here (*vāyu*), and Sūrya (the sun)." Śat: Br. II.5.8.2.). cf. Ait. Br.5.32 and Rgv.X.158.1.
61. cf. Śat.Br.12.8.2.8 ff. See also J. Gonda "Triads." 1976, pp. 50-1 p.62 where he points out the relationship between the Vasus, the *gāyatrī* metre and the earth (Śat.Br.6.5.2.3), that between the Rudras, the *trīṣṭubh* and the air, and that between the Adityas, the *jagatī* and the sky. cf. "Triads in the Vedic ritual", by the same author. (*Ohio Journal of religious studies*, 2, 1974, p.5). cf. M. Bloomfield's classification of the gods as "prehistoric", "transparent" (half personified) "translucent" "opaque" (whose origin is not clear) and "abstract or symbolic gods". ("The religion of the Veda." 1908) p.96.
62. "Les Dieux des Indo-Européens". 1952. Also "L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens" (*Collection Latomus*, vol. 31, 1958, pp.5-122) and J. Brough's answer in his "The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an experiment in method". (*Bull. School of Oriental and African studies*, University of London, vol. 22, pt.1, 1959, pp.69-85). cf. J. Gonda "Triads" 1976 which discusses the whole implication of Dumézil's argument. Also the same author's "Some observations on Dumézil's views of Indo-European mythology" (*Mnemosyne* VI.13, Leiden 1960, p.1ff) and "Dumézil's tripartite ideology. Some critical observations" (*Journal of Asian studies*, 1974, p.139.)
63. Rgv.X.5.7; 72.3.4.
64. *dakṣapitarah*.
- 64a. *su-jyotiṣah ... dakṣapitrīm* (Rgv.VI.50.2a)
65. *ye devāḥ manojātāḥ manoyujāḥ sudakṣāḥ dakṣapitaras te naḥ pāntu*. (Tait.S.1.2.3.1.) "May those mind-born deities, mind-yoked, highly intelligent sons of Dakṣa, protect us." cf. Rgv.VII.66.2.
66. cf. *sūnū dakṣasya* said of Mitra, Varuṇa (Rgv.VIII.25.5). cf. J. Muir's doubt as to "the propriety of taking Dakṣa (in Rgv.VI.50.2 and VII.66.2) ... to represent a person, from the fact that in RV.VIII.25.5 Mitra Varuṇa are not only called the 'strong sons of Dakṣa' (*sūnū dakṣasya sukratū*) but also the 'grandsons of mighty strength' *napātā śavaso mahāḥ*". (O.S.T. 1870, vol.5.) p.52. He brings forward such well known epithets as "son of strength" (*sahasasputra*, *sahasah sūnu*), "son of might" (*savasah putra*) etc. applied to Agni and Indra. The personification of Dakṣa is only incipient in the Rgvēda and is developed and completed in the Pūrāṇas. cf. J. Gonda "Gods and Powers". 1957, p.5. cf. A.A. Macdonell's remark: "... the character of each Vedic god is made up of only a few essential traits combined with a number of other features common to all the gods, such as brilliance, power, beneficence and wisdom". (*Vedic mythology*" 1897) p15.

67. *mātā devānām*. (Rgv. I. 113. 19a)

67a. P.S. Deshmukh ("Religion in Vedic literature", 1933) considers that the birth of the gods is "lacking in consistency and definiteness". (p. 317).

68. *yad devā adaḥ salile susamrabdhā atīsthata*. (Rgv. X. 72. 6ab)

69. cf. Rgv. X. 63. 2cd where the devas are described as "born of the waters" and of Aditi and of the earth. These three aspects refer to the feminine or mother element of their origin. There is also contained in it the threefold division of the world, the higher abstract, the intermediate and the phenomenal.

cf. Rgv. I. 139. 11.

70. Cf. Rgv. X. 129. 3.

71. *atrā vo nrtyatām iva tīvro reṇur-apa āyata*. (Rgv. X. 72. 6cd).

cf. also Indra being called a "dancer" in his creative deeds (Rgv. II. 22. 4).

72. *brahmaṇaspatir-etā saṃ karmāra iva adhamat*. (Rgv. X. 72. 2ab)

J. Muir makes certain erroneous statements based on misunderstanding in connection with the gods' origin: "In another hymn (X. 72) the creation of the gods is ascribed to Brahmaṇaspati ... who blew them forth like a blacksmith". (O.S.T. 1870. vol. 5. p. 355.) The word *etā* being dual accusative can only refer to heaven and earth, and not to the "birth" (*janā*, sing) of the gods which is expressed in the previous verse. H.W. Wallis holds also to this latter interpretation: "Brahmaṇaspati welded these worlds together like a smith". (Cosmology of the Rgveda. 1887. p. 43.) His action as a smelter is brought out in Rgv. X. 68. 9cd.

73. Rgv. X. 72. 3.

74. Rgv. X. 5. 7

75. Rgv. X. 72. 2

76. cf. Rgv. IX. 5. 9; I. 13. 10.

77. J. Muir makes *uttānapad* into a "being" whereas it is simply a creative force: " ... the earth is said to have sprung from a being called *uttānapad*."

(O.S.T. 1870. vol. 5.) p. 355. This is not a being but that upward shooting force or creative energy through which all things take form, grow and finally decay. Nor is the *asat* called *uttānapad* as claimed by De Nicolas ("Four-dimensional man." 1971) p. 117.

77a. *divas pari prathamam jāne agnir-asmad dvitīyam pari jātavedān / tritīyam apsu nr-manā*. (Rgv. X. 45. 1abc) cf. Rgv. II. 9. 3., I. 128. 3; X. 2. 7.; 46. 9; VII. 43. 8; III. 22. 2 and Śat. Br. 2. 2. 1. 13 f.

77b. cf. Rgv. X. 5. 7.

78. Rgv. II. 1. 1.

79. *mūrdhā divo, nābhīr, pṛthivyā*. (Rgv. I. 59. 2a)

80. Rgv. I. 59. 2c; cf. Rgv. X. 46. 9; 88. 10.

81. cf. Rgv. VI. 7. 4

82. cf. Rgv. IV. 1. 20; I. 77. 1.

83. *sthūna iva* (Rgv. I. 59. 1d)

84. cf. Rgv. I. 36. 6; 69. 1; 95. 2; IV. 12. 4; X. 2. 7; 46. 9.

85. cf. Rgv. I. 38. 13 where Agni is referred to as the Lord of prayer and Rgv. VI. 16. 30 where Agni is called *brahmaṇas kavi*. cf. Rgv. II. 1. 3; III. 26. 2; V. 43. 12.

cf. *puro-dhā* "placed at the head" used of Brahmaṇaspati, (Rgv. IV. 50. 1) and *puro-hita* "placed foremost" = highpriest, the epithet of Agni. With regard to Indra and Bṛhaspati see Rgv. II. 24. 12; IV. 49. 1-6; VII. 97. 9.

86. cf. Rgv. X. 72. 2

87. cf. Rgv. VII. 97. 8.

88. *devānām pitaram* (Rgv. II. 26. 3)

89. cf. Rgv. IX. 87. 2; 96. 5.

90. *pra pūrvaje pitarā* (Rgv. VII. 53. 2) cf. Rgv. X. 65. 8a. This could be interpreted as a fashioning anew of Heaven and Earth who existed in a previous cycle. The Atharvaveda distinctly refers to "the earth that was before this one" (Athv. XI. 8. 7). cf. also Rgv. X. 190. 3 "As of old (*yathā pūrvam*) so now the creator fashioned forth" etc. The gods that fashion Heaven and Earth may belong to this cycle as such (i.e. they gained their immortality in a previous cycle and thus became gods in this cycle) whereas Heaven and Earth existed "of old" as such, i.e. in a previous cycle. The question of the "birth" and "immortality" of the gods can only be solved by accepting the still disputed fact that the ṛsis were acquainted with the doctrine of cycles. cf. P.S. Deshmukh ("Religion in Vedic literature" 1933) who dismisses the whole problem by categorically stating that "the early Rgvedic poets had no clear and definite notion on the matter". (p. 318).

91. "Gods and powers." 1957.p.8.
92. cf. Rgv. III.55.19; X.10.5; III.54.12; X.53.9.
- 92a. Rgv. III.54.12.
93. *āpām yo agre pratima babhuva* (Athv. IX.4.2)
94. *rupāni*. Rgv. I.188.9; IX.4.6; X.110.9.
95. cf. Rgv. X.110.9cd
96. Rgv. I.32.2; 52.7; 85.9; V.31.4.
97. Rgv. I.20.6
98. Rgv. X.53.9cd.
99. Rgv. III.4.9; X.10.5.
100. This creative activity is personalised in Viśvakarman who is called "our father" in Rgv. X.81.1&2 and may be an epithet for Tvaṣṭr. cf. Rgv. I.160.2 where the "father" who arrays Heaven and Earth in fair forms may be Viśvakarman or Tvaṣṭr. Both may be the same deity.
101. *devas tvaṣṭā savitā viśvarūpaḥ*. (Rgv. III.55.19). cf. Rgv. X.10.5.
102. cf. Rgv. I.160.4; VI.30.5; VIII.36.4.
103. cf. Rgv. VIII.41.7; III.6.5; X.31.7
104. cf. A.D. Pusalker "Pūrāṇic cosmogony" in *Bharatiya Vidyā* vol.2. pt.2. 1941.p.178. cf. R.N. Dandekar "Universe in Vedic thought" in *India Major*, 1972.p.98.
105. Rgv. I.159.1&2; 185.4; VI.17.7; VII.53.1; 97.8; X.2.7.
106. cf. Rgv. VII.53.1; I.159.1.
107. cf. the various appellations: *dyāvāprthivī*; *dyāvākṣamā*; *dyāvābhūmī*; *rodasī*. Dyaus and Prthivī seem to be the archetypes of the Sāṃkhyan *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and of the beginningless pair of the Bhagavad Gita (13.20-21).
108. *dyaus* √*div* to shine.
109. *prthivī* √*prth* and √*prath* to spread, stretch. According to Dandekar ("Universe in Vedic thought" p.100 -1) "the significance of many of these words such as *prthivī* (extended) ... *urvī* (wide) and *bhūmi* (T) - *bhūman* (that which has come into being, the place of becoming or prospering, amplitude) (all these denoting the earth) ... is self evident!"
110. cf. Rgv. I.164.6, X.149.2; I.185.5 where the twin sisters or Heaven and Earth are shown as lying "in their parents' bosom", which Ludwig interprets as Dakṣa and Aditi.
111. cf. "the two grand receptacles joined together" of. Rgv. III.55.20 (*mahī sam erac-camvā samīcī*) cf. also Rgv. X.44.8c and X.89.4; I.160.1c.
- 111a. *prapūṣvaje pitarā* (Rgv. VII.53.2)
112. cf. (Rgv. I.159.2cd) *suretasā pitarā bhūma cakratur-uru prajāyā amṛtaṃ varīmabhiḥ*. "prolific parents, they have made this wide world with its immensities and for their offsprings (bestowed) immortality." The very gift of immortality which is repeated in the legend of the churning of the ocean of matter can only be received by plunging into the depths of manifestation, hence of matter, the polar opposite of spirit. cf. also Rgv. I.185.6.
113. The differentiating process in manifestation which is a well marked feature of the Rgvedic vision, is expressed in Vedic terms as evolving (√*sam vṛt* Rgv. X.90.14), as fashioning (√*takṣ*), as establishing (√*vidhā*), also as making firm or supporting (√*āṛh*), as propping up (√*stabh* Rgv. VIII.52.1) or propping asunder (√*vistabh*) or spreading out (√*prath*) or pushing up (√*pranud*, propelling cf. Rgv. VII.86.1; VI.17.7. etc.) or stretching (√*tan* Rgv. III.6.5. spin or weave). This kind of action the gods perform.
114. cf. Rgv. VII.53.2ab; IV.56.7; V.43.2; X.64.14.
115. *dyāvā ha kṣamā prathame ṛtena*. (Rgv. X.12.1)
116. *pratne mātara ... ṛtasya*. (Rgv. VI.17.7)
117. *ato bhūr-ata ā utthitaṃ rajo ato dyāvāprthivī aprathetām* (Rgv. X.149.2cd) cf. Rgv. X.190; 72.3; 97.1.
118. *devānāṃ māne prathamā atiṣṭhan kṛntatrād eṣām uparā ud āyan*. (Rgv. X.27.23ab) cf. Rgv. III.38.3.
119. *namo mahadbhyo namo arbhakebhyo namo yuvabhyo nama āśinebhyah*. (Rgv. I.27.13ab)

119. *adevaś cit te asuryāya pūrve anu kṣatrāya mā mire/sahāṃsi.* (Rgv.VII.21.7ab)  
 120. *katarā pūrvā katarā aparā ayoh kathā jāte kavayaḥ ko vi veda* (Rgv.I.185.1ab)  
 121. *parikṣitā pitarā pūrvajāvarī ṛtasya yonā kṣayataḥ samokasā.* (Rgv.X.65.8ab)  
 cf. Rgv.I.159.4 ("They have measured the pair as of one common origin and one home").  
 cf. Rgv. IV. 56.3.
122. *yan mātaram ca pitaram ca sākam ajanayathās tanvaḥ svāyāḥ.* (Rgv.X.54.3cd)  
 123. cf. Rgv.IX.68.3; X.31.7; 54.3. Cf. Rgv.V.31.6.
124. In the Brāhmaṇas, as remarked by R.N. Dandekar, they are stated to have been originally joined together. In the Ait.Br.IV.27.5-6 their marriage is mentioned, the process of anthropomorphisation, hardly perceptible in the Rgveda, reached its peak then. ("Universe in Vedic thought." India Major, 1972.) p.103. cf. Rgv.III.54.7; 1.7; 7.1. cf. Rgv.I.185.1; III.38.3; IX.68.3; X.31.7; 54.3. cf. Tait.S. 5.2.3.3: "Heaven and Earth were together; going apart they said: let us share together what is worthy of sacrifice".
125. "Vedic Reader". 1960.p.37.
126. cf. Nut and Gob, Sky and Earth, separated by Shu in Egyptian cosmogony. cf. Rgv.VII.61.4 where the might of MitraVaruṇa is said to press apart the two worlds.
127. "Universe in Vedic thought" (India Major, 1972) p.103.
128. "The religion of the Rgveda". 1923.p.100.
129. "Loka. World and heaven in the Veda." 1966. p.61. cf. Rgv.VII.84.2a where Dyaus is said to invigorate or quicken the wide dominion of MitraVaruṇa. See also J. Gonda "The dual deities in the religion of the Veda". 1974.p.95.
130. cf. J. Muir. "Original Sanskrit texts". vol.5.1870. p.369. cf. P.S.Desmukh, A.A. Macdonell. A.B. Keith, etc. who give no explanation for this phenomenon.
131. cf. Rgv.I.164.33
- \* 132. *bhuvo devānām pitā putraḥ san.* (Rgv.I.69.1d)
133. This conception was to be personified in Śiva, the destroyer, the re-generator, the lord of the cosmic dance.
134. *na taṃ vidātha ya imā jajāna anyad yuṣmākam antaram babhūva.* (Rgv.X.82.7ab)
135. *tasmād virā ajāyata virājo adhi pūruṣaḥ.* (Rgv.X.90.5ab)
136. *aditer-dakṣo ajāyata daksadv-aditiḥ pari.* (Rgv.X.72.4cd)
137. cf. the meaning of Virāj in J. Gonda "Four studies in the language of the Veda", 1959.p.155. J. Gonda considers Virāj "a creative principle representing also the idea of ruling far and wide, being the sum of all existence, the hypostatization of the conception of the universe as a whole." cf. also the same author's "Dhāman". 1967.p.26. cf. Bhagavad Gīta 15:16 where the two puruṣas are referred to: the kṣara or perishable and the akṣara or imperishable.
138. "Original Sanskrit Texts." 1870.vol.5.p.369.note 549.
139. Rgv.X.51.8.
140. "The sources and nature of puruṣa in the Puruṣa sūkta." (Rgveda X.90) in J. A.O.S. vol.51.1931.p.108-18. cf. also his definition of puruṣa on p.114.
141. *devānām yuge prathame sataḥ sad ajāyata:* "in the primeval age of the gods from the unmanifest emerged the manifest". (Rgv. X.72.3)
- cf.
142. *dakṣasya vā adite janmani vrata rājānā mitrāvaruṇā ā vivāsasi.* (Rgv. X.64.5)  
 "Thou O Aditi, dost tend the two kings Mitra and Varuṇa after the production and by the will of Dakṣa." (Trans. J. Muir.O.S.T.V.p.51.)
143. Whether the notion of the sat re-emerging into the asat was present in the ṛṣis' mind to appear later as the cycles of *srṣṭi* and *pralaya*, cannot be surmised. No hint of it has been found except in Rgv.X.190.3 where the words *yathā pūrvam* (as before) can be interpreted as referring to a previous universe cf. also Rgv.X.72.9 and Athv.XI.8.7.
144. cf. *adhaḥ svid āsīd upari svid āsīt.* (Rgv.X.129.5). "There was indeed a below, there was indeed an above." cf. Genesis 1:7: "the waters... under the firmament" and those "above the firmament."
145. *janitā divo janitā pṛthivyāḥ.* (Rgv.X.54.3cd). cf. Rgv.VI.30.5d; III.34.8; 44.3; 32.8; VI.17.7; VII.1.36.4; X.29.6; 54.3; 55.1.
146. cf. Rgv. II.12.2; VI.17.7.

\*132a. taḥ vām rtaṃ rodasi pra bravimi jāvamānaḥ mātara garbho atti. (Rgv. 79.4ab)

147. Rgv. V. 85.5

148. Rgv. VII. 86.1b. cf. Rgv. IV. 42.4cd (*ṛtena putro aditer-ṛtavā uta tridhātu prathayadvi bhūma*. "In accordance with ṛta, the son of Aditi, the law observer, has spread the world in threefold measure".)

149. "Four studies in the language of the Veda." 1959. p.168.

150. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.12.

151. cf. Rgv. I. 156.3 Viṣṇu, the ancient seed of ṛta (*pūrvyam ... ṛtasya garbham*); and Soma deposited as seed of ṛta, *ṛtasya garbho nihitaḥ*. (Rgv. IX. 68.5)

152. Rgv. I. 144.7; I. 65.10; VI. 7.1.

153. cf. Rgv. VI. 51.9; IV. 21.3.

154. cf. Rgv. II. 41.4; III. 62.18; VII. 60.5.

155. *ṛtena yāv ṛtāvṛdhāv ṛtasya jyotiṣas patī*. (Rgv. I. 23.5)

156. *āvātīratam anṛtāni viśva ... ṛtena sacethe*. (Rgv. I. 152.1cd)

157. cf. Rgv. X. 124.5 where Indra seems to invite Varuṇa to come to his side because he has discerned the false from the true.

158. *ṛtena viśvaṃ bhuvanaṃ vi rājathaḥ*. (Rgv. V. 63.7c)

159. *ṛtam ṛtena sapantaṣīram dakṣam āśāte*. (Rgv. V. 68.4ab)

159a. Rgv. X. 85.1

160. cf. Rgv. I. 2.8a; II. 41.4b; III. 62.18d; VII. 66.13a, 19d.

161. cf. Rgv. VII. 60.5; I. 23.5.

161a. Rgv. V. 68.1.

161b. Rgv. VI. 51.10d.

161c. Rgv. V. 67.4a

161d. Rgv. V. 67.4a.

162. *ṛtadhītayo rurucanta dasmāḥ*. (Rgv. IV. 55.2d). "With ṛta as their vision they shine forth in wonder works."

163. *pra ya ādityo anṛtā mināty*. (Rgv. VII. 84.4c)

164. *ṛtasya mā pradiśo vardhayanti*. (Rgv. VIII. 100.4c). "The directions of ṛta strengthen me."

165. *ṛtasya devā anuvṛtata guḥ*. (cf. Rgv. I. 65.3). "The gods follow after the course of ṛta." cf. Rgv. IV. 13.2.

166. *ṛtasya rathyaḥ* (Rgv. VII. 66.12); cf. Rgv. VI. 51.9.

167. *satya dharmāṇaḥ* cf. Rgv. I. 12.7.

168. cf. Rgv. I. 123.9; III. 30.12; I. 160.1: *dyāvāpṛthivī viśvasambhuva ṛtāvārī*. "Heaven and Earth, beneficent to all, law-abiding."

169. *pūta dakṣāḥ* (Rgv. VI. 51.9)

170. cf. Rgv. I. 163.5; V. 63.1; IX. 73.8; also VII. 64.2; V. 63.1&7; III. 10.2; VII. 20.6; VI. 3.1.

170a. Rgv. I. 23.5.

\* 171. cf. *ṛtāvan* Rgv. VII. 62.3; I. 136.4d; 151.4b; *ṛtasap* Rgv. VI. 50.2.

172. *ṛtasya gopāv-adhi tiṣṭhatho ratham satyadharmāṇā parama vyomani*. (Rgv. V. 63.1ab)

173. "The Metaphysical foundations of Hindu ethics and religion." (*Philosophy East and West*, vol. 16 Jul. Oct. 1966) p. 144.

174. op. cit. p. 144.

175. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p. 19.

176. op. cit. p. 24.

177. op. cit. p. 14.

178. *yuvo rāstram brhad invāti dyaur-yau setrbhir-arajjabhiḥ sīnīthah* (Rgv. VII. 84.2ab) "Dyaus impels your lofty dominion O ye two who bind with ropeless cords."

179. See Section III. 3.8. *myth of the Rig Veda* (J. A. O. S. vol. 62. 1942);

180. cf. W. N. Brown, "Creation" "the term itself means 'powerful, a creature of power', especially one wielding the superhuman or 'magic' power of *māyā*." (p. 89)

181. Agni is called the asura of the "Inspired" *vipascit* Rgv. III. 3.4. cf. II. 35.2.

182. Rgv. IV. 53.1. cf. Dawn's action which in Rgv. X. 55.4 is ascribed to her asura nature.

182a. *asuraḥ pracetaḥ*. For Varuṇa cf. Rgv. I. 24.14, for Indra cf. Rgv. VIII. 90.6, for Savitr cf. Rgv. IV. 53.1, also I. 35.7&10.

\* 171. *ṛtāvāna ṛtajātā ṛtāvṛdho ghorāso anṛtadvīṣah*. (Rgv. VII. 66.13ab)

183. The Nirukta connects *asura* with *asu* from  $\sqrt{as}$  to breathe, be active (I.10). cf. also C.S. Venkatesvaran "Vedic conception of asura" (Poona Orientalist, vol.13, 1948) p.57-60. "Derivatives from 'asura' also embody the idea of being active, superhuman or divine." (p.58).
184. A primary suffix from  $\sqrt{ra}$  to possess and also to grant.
- 184a. It seems that the power of destruction, or conquest over opposition, is also rated as high, e.g. Indra was given the asura power after he had slain Vrtra (Rgv.VI.20.2. cf. Rgv.VII.21.7.)
185. "Four studies in the language of the Veda." 1959.p.157.
186. "Asura Varuna" (Annals of the Bhandakar Oriental Research Institute, vol.21, Ap.-Jy 1940) p.180. cf. also "Some aspects of the history of Hinduism", 1967, by the same author. p.39.
187. "The Creation myth of the Rig Veda." J.A.O.S.62.1942.p.88. cf. also A. de Nicolas. "Four dimensional man". 1971. p.111-114.
188. For the derivation of Aditi and Diti see V.M. Apte "Is Diti a mere reflex of Aditi". (Bharatya Vidya, vol.9.1949.) pp.14-22, and p.84 note 23 of this thesis.
189. W.N. Brown writes: "the name (*dānu*) seems easily derived from the same root *dā* 'bind' which appears in *aditi*. It is a primary derivative with the suffix *-nu* and similar to *bhānu* from the root *bhā* and *dhenu* from the root *dhā*. The meaning is 'bondage, restraint', and it fits precisely with the function of *Dānu* herself, or at least of her son *Vrtra* ..." ("The Creation myth of the Rig Veda." J.A.O.S. 62.1942. p.90). On p.88 he identifies the *Dānavas* with the *dāsas*. (cf. Rgv.I.32.11). *Dānu* is mentioned as the mother of *Vrtra* in Rgv.I.32.9.
- 189a. Rgv.X.53.4 & 157.4. cf. A.A. Macdonell ("Vedic mythology." 1897.) "The term *asura* occurs only a few times in the RV. with the later sense of demon. It is there found only four times in the plural with this meaning. Indra is invoked to scatter the godless *Asuras* (8.85.9). Otherwise they are only mentioned in the tenth book, always as opposed to the gods in general. The gods, it is said, smote the *Asuras* (10.157.4)." (p.156.)
190. "The Concept of deva in the Vedic Age." 1954. p.32.
191. A.A. Macdonell summed up the position thus:  
 "To the Vedic poets *asura* must ... have meant 'possessor of occult power' and as such would have been potentially applicable to hostile beings. In one hymn of the RV.(X.124) both senses seem to occur. Towards the end of the Rigvedic period the application of the word to the gods began to fall into disuse. This tendency was perhaps aided by the want of a general word to denote the higher hostile demoniac power and by an incipient popular etymology recognising a negative in the word and leading to the invention of *sura*, 'god' (first found in the Upaniṣads)." ("Vedic mythology." 1897) p.156-7. It may also be that the term *māyā* was used more and more in its negative sense of guile, deceit, falseness, hence the being who wielded it was immediately placed in the category of a demon. A.B. Keith acknowledges this fact in a note to the word *māyā* which he translates as "wile" or "occult power". He argues:  
 "The derivation from *mā* 'injure' (Geldner, Glossar zum RV., p.135) is clearly wrong; it is from *mā*, 'fashion' RV.V.85.5; I.159.4; III.38.7; IX.83.3." ("Religion and Philosophy of the Veda." 1925) p.231. Whoever has the power to fashion also has the power to change and in this changing of form we can see the development of the meaning of guile, deceit, ascribed to the demons, who alter their appearance to beguile their opponents.
192. "Some aspects of the history of Hinduism." 1967.p.39.
193. "Four studies in the language of the Veda." 1959.p.164.
194. op.cit.p.168.



195. "The doctrine of māyā." (Agra Univ. J. of Research. vol.1. Nov.1952). p.33. cf. V.K. Rajwade. "Asurasya māyā in Ṛgveda." (First Oriental Conference, Poona. Procs. and Trans. 1920. vol.1. pp.ix-xiii.); 1) māyā has the sense of *asuratva*. It means the creative power. 2) It means also 'thaumaturgy' or the power of working miracles. 3) In many instances it means the 'wiles, tricks, tactics which are employed both by Indra and his opponents. 4) In a few cases it means 'sorcery, witchcraft, magic'. cf. also the meaning ascribed to māyā by F. Nève ("Essai sur le mythe des Ribhavas", Paris 1847. pp.281-283.) Of the various meanings there attributed to māyā, the first is "l'intelligence qui mesure et construit ... l'intelligence envisagée non-seulement dans sa faculté de concevoir, mais encore dans sa puissance d'action." (p.289).
196. cf. J. Gonda's refutation of L. Renou's argument as to the 'gradual coalescence of two originally different words māyā.' In "Four studies in the language of the Veda." 1959. p.190.
197. cf. A.B. Keith. "Religion and philosophy of the Veda." 1925. p.231.. cf. also W. Neisser. Festschrift Hillebrandt. "Beiträge zur Sprach und Völkerkunde." 1913. p.144. cf. J. Gonda. "Four studies in the language of the Veda." 1959. p.168. cf. R.N. Dandekar. "Asura Varuṇa." (Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. 21. Ap. Jy. 1940. p.181.)
198. *dharmānā mitravaruṇā vipāścītā vratā rakṣethe asurasya māyayā.* (Ṛg. V. 63. 7ab)
199. cf. the animal kingdom with its specific code of behaviour.
200. This question will be taken up in the next section in connection with the word *vrata*.
201. "Ordre fantaisie, changement dans les pensées archaïques de l'Inde et de Rome." (Revue des études latines, tome 32. 1954. Paris, 1955.) p.147. (Trans. J.M.)
202. cf. Ṛg. X. 5. 3.
203. *saḥ kṣapah pari śasvaje ny-usro māyayā dadhe.* (Ṛg. VIII. 41. 3ab)
204. *sūryam ā dhattho divi citryam ratham* (Ṛg. V. 63. 7d)
205. *pātangam aktam asurasya māyayā.* (Ṛg. X. 177. 1b)
206. *yaḥ samānam na pramināti dhāma.* (Ṛg. VII. 63. 3d)
207. *sūryo jyotiś carati.* (Ṛg. V. 63. 4b)
208. Ṛg. V. 63. 3.
209. Ṛg. V. 85. 6.
210. *māhī mitrasya varuṇasya māyā candra iva bhānuṃ vi dadhe purutrā.* (Ṛg. III. 61. 7cd)
211. *ṛtaṣya tantur-ṛitataḥ ... varuṇasya māyayā.* (Ṛg. IX. 73. 9)
212. *māyā vām mitravaruṇā divi śritā.* (Ṛg. V. 6. 3. 4a)
213. cf. Ṛg. V. 85. 5; I. 159. 4. Indra has this power too. cf. Ṛg. I. 80. 7; II. 17. 5; III. 53. 8; IV. 30. 12, 21; VI. 22. 6; 47. 18; X. 54. 2. Agni bears many names and māyās: Ṛg. III. 20. 3; he sets out upon his work through māyā Ṛg. III. 27. 7. cf. Ṛg. I. 144. 1. He conquers malign māyās Ṛg. V. 2. 9. By Soma's māyā, the gods, the māyāvin, have 'meted out' (*mamire* Ṛg. IX. 83. 3c).
214. *purumāyā* (Ṛg. I. 119. 1.).
215. cf. Ṛg. V. 78. 6 & X. 24. 4.
216. Ṛg. I. 159. 4. cf. Heaven and Earth as māyini in Ṛg. X. 5. 3.
217. *āhimāyā ... divo varṣmāṇam vasate svastaye.* (Ṛg. X. 63. 4d).
218. Ṛg. V. 63. 6c. I. 51. 4;
219. cf. Ṛg. II. 11. 5 & 9; V. 30. 6; V. 40. 6 & 8. The demons, however, may simply be Vedic man's personification of those forces of nature that to him seemed to counteract established order.
220. māyā has been derived from *√mā* (*mināti*) to change, exchange. See P. Thieme, Z.D.M.G. 95 (1941) p. 82-116. cf. G. Dumézil. op cit. p. 142 ff.
221. cf. Ṛg. I. 51. 5; 11. 7; 32. 4; III. 34. 3; 53. 8; V. 30. 6; X. 73. 5; 147. 2.
222. *na tā minanti māyino na dhīrā vratā devānām prathamā dhruvāni.* (Ṛg. III. 56. 1ab)
223. "Les origines de la notion de 'māyā' dans la spéculation indienne." (Journal de psychologie, July-Sept. 1948.) p. 296. (trans. J.M.)
224. op. cit. p. 293.
225. "Ordre, fantaisie." p. 149. (Trans. J.M.)
226. op. cit. p. 150.
227. The contrast between *aṃhas* and *varivas* will be examined in the section on the ethical aspect of *ṛta*.

222. "La religion védique." Paris, 1878-83. tome III. p.20. (Trans. J.M.)  
 229. op.cit. p.215. 1963:  
 225 230. cf. J. Gonda. "Vision." "the verb *dhā* ... often conveys the idea of 'to establish, to institute, to create, lay down, dispose'". p.174.  
 cf. *nāsadiya sūkta*. Rgv.X.129.7. where *dadhe* applies to creation.  
 Hence *dhātṛ* the founder, Deity as creator, *vidhātṛ*, ordainer, establisher.  
 231. cf. Rgv.X.190.1.  
 232. *vidhātāro vi te dadhur-ajasrā ṛtadhītayo rurucanta dasmāḥ*. (Rgv.IV.55.2cd).  
 233. *dvādaśāraṃ nahi taj-jarāya varvarti cakraṃ pari dyām ṛtasya.*  
*ā putrā agne mithunāso atra sapta śatāni viśatis ca tasthuḥ*. (Rgv.I.164.11.)  
 See p.27 for an explanation of this verse.  
 234. *vi ye dadhuḥ śaradam māsam ād ahar-yajñam aktuṃ ca ād ṛcam*. (Rgv.VII.66.11ab)  
 235. "Vision" p.174. cf. also the same author's "The meaning of the Sanskrit term *dhāman*" 1967. p.33.  
 236. cf. L. Renou, E.V.P.: "dhāman- est voisin du sens de 'séjour', lieu où prend naissance une 'institution' divine, où se développe une 'fonction'." vol.V.p.73; also vol.VII.p.38: "structure en profondeur, position-clef" and vol.III.p.59. J. Gonda favours the connotation of "locations of modalities or manifestations of divine powers" (*Dhāman*. 1967.p.35.)  
 cf. Dumézil. "Ordre, fantaisie." 1955. "*Dhāman* ... paraît désigner proprement le domaine, ou une partie du domaine du *ṛta*; il est presque une indication topographique, 'un champ d'application' de la notion fondamentale à laquelle, des lors, il devient facilement équivalent." (p.140).  
 237. cf. Rgv.VII.36.5.  
 238. *ṛtasya dhāman raṇayanta devāḥ* (Rgv.IV.7.7b).  
 239. "*Dhāman*" 1967. p.20-1.  
*dhāma-pūrvyam-mame*. (Rgv.VIII.41.10c)  
 240. *sa dhāma pūrvyam mame*.  
 241. *dirgham sacantē varuṇasya dhāma*. (Rgv.I.123.8b)  
 242. J. Gonda explains that Dawn "strictly observes that particular 'modality' of universal order and truth which is 'located' in, i.e. which consists in, chronological order, in casu, the regular succession of days, coming every day, to the place of rendezvous". (*Dhāman*. 1967.p.30.)  
 243. *ṛtasya dhāma vi mime purūṇi*. (Rgv.X.124.3b) The many *dhāma* of Agni are listed in J. Gonda's "*Dhāman*." p.24.  
 244. *sapta dhāmāni pariyaṃ* (Rgv.X.122.3a). cf. Rgv.IV.7.5. and VIII.19.14. cf. the seven *dhāma* of the earth. (Rgv.I.22.16)  
 245. *ṛtāya sapta dadhiṣe padāni*. (Rgv.X.8.4c). The Śat. Br.10.3.1.1. considers these seven to be "the seven metres produced by Agni".  
 246. *triṃśad dhāma virājati vāk*. (Rgv.X.189.3).  
 247. *parasmin dhāman ṛtasya* (Rgv.I.43.9d)  
 248. *atihitam yad āsīd yajñasya dhāma paramaṃ guhā yat*. (Rgv.X.181.2ab)  
 249. cf. Rgv.X.124.3: "I have established many a *dhāman* of *ṛta*," says Indra. cf. Rgv.I.159.4.  
 250. cf. *dharman* "... le mot d'avenir ... introduit l'idée de 'soutien' ou de 'maintien' (*rac. dhar-*) et par conséquent, évoque un effort ou plutôt le résultat d'un effort pour la conservation, soulignant la grande vertu du *ṛta* ... la stabilité." Dumézil. ("Ordre, fantaisie." 1955) (p.141).  
 251. *ā rodasī aprnād ā svar mahaj-jātay yad enam apaso adhārayan* (Rgv.III.2.7ab)  
 252. *maha ṛtasya dhartari*. (Rgv.II.23.17d).  
 253. cf. Mahābhārata: "because it upholds, it is called *dharma*; *dharma* upholds the creation". Kāṇḍaparva 69:59.  
 254. *dharman divo dharuṇe satyam arpitam*. (Rgv.X.170.2b).  
 cf. Savitr qualified as *satyadharman*. Rgv.X.34.8, 139.3.  
 255 255. *dharmanā mitrāvaruṇa vipāścītā vratā rakṣethe asurasya māyayā ṛtena viśvaṃ bhuvanaṃ vi rājathaḥ*. (Rgv.VI.63.7)  
 256. *tasya bharmāṇe bhuvanānyā devā dharmāṇe kaṃ svadhayā paprathanta* (Rgv.X.88.1cd)  
 257. *vratena stho dhruvakṣemā dharmānā*. (Rgv.V.72.2a)  
 258. *antarīyate devo devī dharmānā sūryaḥ śucih*. (Rgv.I.160.1d)

259. *dharmāṇā ... vy-avanir-adhārayaḥ.* (Rgv. II.13.7a)  
 260. Rgv. IX.109.6.  
 261. *dharmān ṛtasya* (Rgv. IX.7.1)  
 262. *dharmānaspateḥ.* (Rgv. IX.35.6). cf. *dharmāṇā vāyū ā viśā* (Rgv. IX.25.2).  
 "He enters vāyū in accordance with the dharmān."  
 263. *svadharman.* cf. Rgv. III.12.7.  
 264. cf. Rgv. IV.53.3.  
 265. *dharmāṇam taviśim.* (Rgv. I.187.1)  
 266. *satyadharman.* (Rgv. I.12.7)  
 267. Rgv. I.1.6.  
 268. *ṛtasya gopaḥ.* (Rgv. VIII.43.24)  
 269. Rgv. X.34.8; 139.3.  
 270. Rgv. IV.53.4  
 271. *mā no himṣij-janitā yaḥ pṛthivyā yo vā divam satyadharmā jajāna.* (Rgv. X.121.9ab)  
 272. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.12.  
 273. cf. Rgv. IX.97.23c where the later sense of dharma is already perceptible:  
*dharmā bhuvad vṛjanyasya rāja.* "The king shall be the upholder of the community."  
 274. "Dharma: an expression of universal order." (Philosophy East and West. vol. 22. 1972) p.141.  
 275. "The Rgvedic antecedents of the dharma-pāśa of Varuna in the Mahābhārata." (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol. 5.. 1943-4) p.179.  
 Most scholars favour the derivation from  $\sqrt{vr}$  to choose.  
 276. Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol. 3. 1942.  
 277. op. cit. p.408  
 278. "Ethics of India." 1924. p.34-35.  
 279. See "On the etymology of the Sanskrit noun vrata". J.A.O.S. XI. 1884. p. ccxxix-ccxxxi, where he surveys the Western scholars' derivation of vrata from  $\sqrt{vr}$  but chooses to derive the word from  $\sqrt{vrt}$  so that the word would mean "procedure, course, line". cf. Bergaigne "La religion Védique." 1883. III. p. 212, 215 ff.  
 280. "Cosmology of the Rgveda." 1887. p.99.  
 281. *ṛtasya devā anu vratā guḥ.* (Rgv. I.65.3b).  
 282. "All about 'vrata' in the Rgveda." (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol. 3. 1942.) p.409.  
 283. cf. also Rgv. III.38.6. and VII.75.3. cf. J. Gonda's translation of Rgv. III.4.7. *anu vratam vratapā dīdhyanāḥ* "receiving whilst observing the religious ordinances, visions in accordance with the ordinance" ("Vision" p.206). cf. Bergaigne "La Religion védique". 1883. III. pp.210-221.  
 284. *viśve hi viśvavedaso varuno mitro aryamā vratā padeva sāścire pānti martyam riṣaḥ.* (Rgv. V.67.3)  
 285. op. cit. p.417.  
 286. *madhu no dyāvāpṛthivī mimikṣatām madhuścatā madhudughe madhuvrate* (Rgv. VI.70.5ab)  
 287. *viśvasya hi preṣito rakṣasi vratam.* (Rgv. X.37.5a)  
 288. Rgv. II.38.9.  
 289. Rgv. II.38 & IV.53.4.  
 290. *ślokaṃ devāḥ kṛnutē svāya dharmāne* (Rgv. IV.53.3b) ..... (1cd)  
 291. *purāṇī devī yuvātiḥ puramdhir-anu vratam carasi viśvavāre* (Rgv. III.61.1cd)  
 292. Rgv. V.83.5. cf. Rgv. VIII.94.2. "She (i.e. Prṣni) in whose lap all the gods maintain (*dhārayante*) their vratas".  
 294. *tava dyāvāpṛthivī parvatāso anu vratāya nimateva tasthuḥ* (Rgv. III.30.4cd)  
 "For those who follow thy vratas, Heaven, Earth and the mountains stand as though firmly fixed."  
 295. *varuṇasya ... viśve devāḥ anu vratam.* (Rgv. VI.11.41.7) cf. Rgv. V.67.3; VI.67.5.  
 296. cf. Rgv. I.24.14; 35.7; II.27.10; 28.7; VIII.42.1.  
 297. cf. Rgv. V.41.1; VII.87.1.  
 298. *ṛtasya gopaḥ.*  
 299. Rgv. I.25.10  
 300. Cf. Rgv. I.25.10 & 11 & 20; II.27.10.  
 301. *sato asya rājā.* (Rgv. VII.87.6d)  
 302. *ṛtapesāsa* (Rgv. V.66.1.)  
 303. *tve hi kaṃ parvate nā śritāni apracyutāni vratāni* (Rgv. II.28.8cd)  
 304. cf. Rgv. V.85.2; I.24.6, 7, 10; IV.42.1-4; VIII.41.7.  
 \* 292. *janayanti daivyaṇi vratāni.* (Rgv. VIII.75.3d)

305.cf. Rgv.VII.87.5

306.cf. Rgv.V.85.7; VII.86;87;89; I.24,9-15;25.20.

307.cf. Rgv.VII.82.2; IV.42.1&2. <sup>Rgv</sup>

308.satyānrte avapaśyan janānām (VII.49.3b). cf. Rgv.I.24.10; VIII.4.3-10; II.28.4; V.85.2-6.

309.ato viśvāny adbhutā cikitvān abhi paśyati kṛtāni yā ca kartvā. (Rgv.I.25.11)

310. Rgv.II.28.4.

311. As quoted in "Asura Varuṇa" by R.N. Dandekar (Annals Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, vol. 21, Ap.-July 1940, p.158, note 1) from R. Roth "Abhandlung über den AtharvaVeda" in Tübingen Universitäts-schriften.1856 p.30:

"Es gibt kein anderes Lied in der ganzen vedischen Literatur, welches die göttliche Allwissenheit in so nachdrücklichen Worten aussprache ..."

Varuna's overlordship in so far as man is concerned will be considered in the section on the ethical aspect of rta.

312.gūlham sūryam tamasā apavratena tūriyeṇa brahmaṇā avindad atriḥ. (Rgv.V.40.6) cf. Rgv.III.39.5. where Indra also "found the sun lying hidden in darkness".

313.op. cit. p.12.

314. Rgv.VII.81.1.

315. One discordant note to this otherwise wholly harmonious picture may be found in Rgv.I.30.3&5 which seems to recount a war in heaven with Indra fighting all the gods, not just the particular asuras that are his enemies. But no further reference is made anywhere else to this mythological episode which could portray certain astronomical phenomena. But cf. A.K. Coomaraswamy. "Angel and Titan." J.A.O.S. vol.55, 1935, p.384, note 14.

316.anāgaso aditaye devasya savituh save viśvā vāmāni dhīmahi. (Rgv.V.82.6.)

317.tvam ... cākṛṣe bhūmim pratimānam ojasah. (Rgv.I.52.12c) cf. Rgv.III.2.2. addressed to Agni.

318.cf. Rgv.X.66.13d; II.27.2.3&4.

319.cf. Rgv.VII.35.12a; V.51.2; II.27.4.

320.divakṣaso agnijihvā ṛtāvṛdha ṛtasya yonim vimṛsanta āsate. (Rgv.X.65.7ab)

321.tehi satyā ṛtasprāṣa ṛtāvāno jane jane sunīthāsah sudānavah. (Rgv.V.67.4abc)

322.viśvam tad bhadrām yad-avanti devāh. (Rgv.II.35.15c) Griffith's translation)

323. Rgv.VI.67.5ab.

324. Rgv.VIII.27.5ab

325. Rgv.III.8.8c.

326.viśve devāh samanasaḥ saketā ekam kratum abhiviyanti sādhu. (Rgv.VI.9.5.cd) cf. Rgv.X.101.1;126.1; VIII.27.5.

327.haṁsaḥ śuciśad vasur-antarikṣasad-hotā vediśad-atithir-duroṇaśat nṛśad varasad ṛtasad vyomasad abjā gojā ṛtajā adriḥjā ṛtam. (Rgv.IV.40.5)

328. ṛtasya sāman ranayanta devāh (Rgv.I.147.1d)

329. dyāvāpṛthivī janayann abhi vratā āpa ośadhīr-vanināni yajñiyā antarikṣam svar ā paprur-ūtaye (Rgv.X.66.9abc)

330.cf. Rgv.I.164.33

331. antarikṣam uru atatantha. (Rgv.III.22.2c)

332. cf. Rgv.I.51.2.

333. Rgv.VIII.27.14; 83.8.

Section III.3. Third level

III.3.1. The human level: the disruption of ṛta

At the third, or most concrete, level of manifestation, we encounter man. Just as ṛta, in its universal connotation, is the law that brings about order out of chaos and creates harmony, so in its ethical aspect it governs man in a similar way. To follow the norms of ṛta is to create order in human relationships. That order which mirrors the cosmic order is truth. Truth, integrity, righteousness, this is the human expression of universal harmony.

The idea of universal law becomes, at the human level, particularised into specific laws. Thus are developed those norms of social order which are meant to bring the best results for all concerned. Thus is born civilization. Thus one of the most important aspects of ṛta, in so far as man is concerned, is its ethico-social side. Here can be traced the root of the doctrine of *dharma* - duty or moral obligation, of one's function in life, and that of *karma*, or the doctrine of action and reaction as it affects man, the effect of causes brought about by human action. The conception of ṛta as the right course of things inevitably led to these two specifically Indian notions of *dharma* and *karma*.

Sin, which is a purely human characteristic, results from the violation of ṛta in the moral sphere. Through weakness or ignorance, through his human state<sup>1</sup> man violates the great law. Why is that? Man belongs both to the highest and the lowest, to the incorruptible and the corruptible, the divine and the animal. The one enables him to realise what is right, the other pushes him to commit the wrong, or ignore the right.

According to the Atharvaveda he is that creature where

"both immortality and death are set together"<sup>2</sup>

Hence his weakness and his potential spiritual strength. In Rgvedic terms, he is that mortal in whom dwells as "guest" (*atithi*) Agni who

"raises the mortal to highest immortality"<sup>3</sup>

by which means he links the spiritual to the terrestrial.

The moral significance of ṛta centres mainly around Varuṇa and man's relationship to the great god of cosmic order, but also around the other Adityas, and in addition Agni<sup>4</sup>, Soma<sup>5</sup>, Rudra<sup>6</sup>, Indra<sup>7</sup>, Heaven and Earth and Dawn<sup>8</sup>, the waters<sup>9</sup>, Aditi<sup>10</sup>, Savitr<sup>11</sup>, Sūrya<sup>12</sup>, Brhaspati<sup>13</sup>, the gods being the guardians of the law in one aspect or another and the great helpers of mankind:

"For of one spirit are the gods with mortal man,  
cosharers all of gracious gifts."<sup>14</sup>

### III.3.2 Rta in its application to man: the moral law

Viewing the subject of the moral aspect of rta in general, we find that for man, Rta, as

"... the cosmic and dynamic principle of Law and Order" to quote from H. Lefever<sup>15</sup>

"is the ultimate moral and religious Imperative, the source of the statutes of the Gods. This explanation receives striking confirmation from the fact that it is to just those Gods who are most intimately connected with rta that sin is ordinarily confessed and that a reference to rta is almost invariably found in the hymns containing such confessions."

Since Varuṇa placed in the human heart *kratu*<sup>16</sup>, that deeper understanding which characterises human intelligence, man has knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, even though at times he may be so deluded as not to be able to discriminate between them. Varuṇa, the path-finder, the opener of the way (*gātuvidam*) "makes the prayer" (*brahma kṛnoti*), or, as J. Gonda explains

"causes manifestations of brahma to appear in material form"<sup>17</sup>.

He "opens out in the heart the inspired-thought" and thereby

"brings about a new (vision of) rta"<sup>18</sup>.

So man knows, in his heart, the meaning of transgression which is essentially a disruption of the established harmony, and he implores the Adityas, the "mighty through rta"<sup>19</sup>, the "upholders of the law" (*dhṛtavratā*) par excellence, to remove his sin.<sup>20</sup> Since the Adityas are custodians of rta (*ṛtasya gopāḥ*), whatever moral transgressions men commit are considered sins against the gods, sins from which the bards ask to be released as from fetters. But as man partakes of the corruptible, he is weak and often fails to grasp or discern between right and wrong, or finds all sorts of excuses for his wrong doings, excuses which afford us glimpses into Vedic society and beliefs, such e.g. that one's sins are also the sins of ancestors<sup>22</sup> so that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children; the causes of, or excuses for, sin being delusion, wine, anger, dice or thoughtlessness<sup>23</sup>.

But mortals do recognise the eternal law of the gods and proclaim it<sup>24</sup>. Those who observe the rta follow the ordinances (*vratāni*) of the gods as established by their laws<sup>25</sup> and thereby enjoy the protection of these; and it is through the upholding of religious ordinances that the patriarchs became illumined and inspirers of their descendants<sup>26</sup>.

But life presents many facets and cosmic order, the transcendent ideal as prevalent in the heaven of the devas.

"whose lower habitations are perceived, but who abide in remoter, hidden dominions"<sup>27</sup>

is not mirrored here on earth among men in its purity, for men are false and obstacles beset the path even of the pure. Indeed life is thought of in terms of a journey fraught with dangers. The gods are implored to

"transport us to the farther-shore, away from distress to safety"<sup>28</sup>.

Trust in the gods and a willingness to abide by the path of ṛta as outlined by them for men is the best safeguard. The prayers, of which a few samples are given below, show man's trusting relationship with his god:

"By means of your path of ṛta, Mitra, Varuṇa, let us cross over the (ocean) of evils as a ship over the waters."<sup>29</sup>

Agni, the "knower of births" is entreated to

"lead us across the ocean of all difficulties, even as a ship across (all) perils"<sup>30</sup>.

A similar prayer goes to the Vasus:

"As a chariot (is brought) across a difficult passage, so do ye O bounteous Vasus, deliver us from all distress"<sup>31</sup>.

For

"the paths of ṛta are fair to tread"<sup>32</sup>

for those whom the gods protect, those who remain true to the gods; these guard from all kinds of evil<sup>33</sup>. For

"these sons of Aditi know how to ward off enmities; peerless, they grant freedom from distress."<sup>34</sup>

He who is under his god's protection need fear nothing whatever:

"Whoever is in thy grace is not slain, is not conquered, him distress does not reach, either from far or from near."<sup>35</sup>

"May I reach the path now, may I follow in the steps of Mitra (men) abide in the protection of this dear, harmless, one."<sup>36</sup>

### III.3.3. The meaning of anṛta

At times there seems to be confusion in the poet's mind as to what is the right and what is the wrong as established by the gods' ordinances, or where to draw the line between what belongs to the cosmic order, hence the truth, and what to the disorder brought about by human infringement of divine law, hence the false. He asks:

"Which is your ṛta, which your anṛta."<sup>37</sup>

The previous verse seems to hint at a time of change for the poet wonders:

"Where has the ancient law departed? Who now upholds it?"<sup>38</sup>

To what kind of ṛta is he referring? The social order, ethical norms, or ritualistic practices which may be disregarded? The separation between ṛta and anṛta is not always clear, both seem to be closely interwoven just as the sun, the cows and dawn are said to be hidden in the rocky cave. Moreover what is considered right for one social order loses its value in the next and this, in transition times, causes undue bewilderment.

Both words, ṛta and anṛta, are used in a verse where Mitra and Varuṇa are shown to have separated the one from the other, in this case - as rendered

by J. Gonda - the chaos from the cosmos, or possibly also one social or ethical order from the other:

"Since ye O Mitra Varuna separated, as it is known, the chaos from the cosmos, through your own zeal." 39

Anrta, used here in opposition to rta as cosmic, or any kind of, order must bear the sense of dis-order. Both may, as well, refer to the moral order of human society, right and wrong as established by the vratas, or ordinances of the gods, by implication truth as against un-truth, as e.g.

"All anrta ye overcome, O Mitra, Varuna, and line up with rta." 40

Rta, standing on the side of light, order, form, right, anrta would stand on that of darkness, disorder, formlessness, wrong. In Rgv.1.152.3 the "embryo" or sun is said to uphold rta 41 and dispel (or overpower) anrta. 42 With his appearance he puts an end to darkness which represents the formless and unorganised. Similarly, when spiritual light shines in human consciousness it puts an end to all sorts of wrong attitudes, in short, to human darkness. As pointed out by L. Renou, the sun is the skambha, or support of the world

"whose presence signifies precisely the ordered cosmos, heaven and earth duly separated, measured out." 43

Darkness again and again is said to contain light 44 and it is the task of the gods to separate their intermingling, to unravel them, thereby making cosmos out of chaos. They seem to be the two opposite poles, like spirit and matter, which when fused, constitute the unmanifest, or asat, which when duly separated make manifestation possible. This accounts for such enigmatic verses as the following:

"Bṛhaspati seeking light in the darkness, drove out the morning-beams 45 cows standing concealed in the bond of anrta." 45

The mountain cave Vala is cleft by means of prayer (brahmanā) and by this act the darkness is dispelled and heaven's light revealed 46. Vala is described as govapuṣah, 47 full of cows, a word which in Vedic mythological language means rays of light. Bṛhaspati

"mounts the refulgent chariot of rta" 48

chasing away the darkness, opening the cowpen and finding the light (svarvidam).

In similar manner, by means of the light of his thunderbolt, Indra milked the cows out of the darkness (Rgv.1.33.10) and, again,

"rolling down the darkness by means of his light, he drove forward the milky cows from within the cave." 49

He finds the sun lying hidden in obscurity, 50 he too, discerns the light from the darkness. 51

We have in these examples couched in mythological language, a tale of light taking birth from the womb of darkness, the cosmos arising from the chaos. 52 In this specific sense, there can be no evil ascribed to the darkness. But its meaning is narrowed down still further and given a specific slant especially when ascribed to the human order. The conflict between light and



darkness, so vividly portrayed in mythological stories, is thus a struggle for the manifestation of light out of the darkness which encompasses and holds it hidden, of the spiritual out of the material in which it is imprisoned. The forces of darkness are considered "obstructing" and those who embody these, such as the Vrtras, the Dānavas, the Dasyus, the Panis<sup>53</sup>, come to have an evil connotation, they are obstructors, but in the long run cannot win, for what has been decreed as the prevailing order must conquer. They cannot have meant sheer evil, for we find the curious, but quite revealing reference in the Atharva veda to the sun (divākara) as "born from the ocean, born from Vrtra"<sup>54</sup>. The waters of space, or ocean, are the subtle essence of matter out of which the universe is fashioned, they are the darkness, matter and womb of the universe. Here Vrtra is identified with these. A.B. Keith considers this verse "a late and absurd legend"<sup>55</sup>. It only serves to show Keith's lack of understanding that in what man considers darkness or chaos, because it is beyond his comprehension, lies hidden the principle of light, of order, of cosmos, of life-giving energy<sup>56</sup>.

The theme of a hidden treasure that grants life and light, is a recurring one in the Rgyeda. The "treasure of heaven" which Indra found is said to be

"fast hidden as the bird's young in the cave encompassed  
by never ending rock"<sup>57</sup>

That which is called the "highest treasure" (nidhim paramam) of the Panis is also described as fast hidden<sup>58</sup>; to find it the Angirases first detect the anṛta, and having recognised it for what it is, they once again ascend the high paths<sup>59</sup>. In this case, the anṛta is not the falsehood of men, but the fact that this world manifestation being only a mirror of the ultimate truth, is false in that particular sense. Once this kind of falsity is recognised, the sage, here the group of Angirases, can turn back to the contemplation of truth, to that which lies at the basis of it all.

Agni is said to be most wise who

"having cleared the doors of the Panis for us revealed the life-  
hourishing sun-light"<sup>60</sup>.

Agni and Soma in concerted action stole the treasured kine from those that withheld them and thereby

"found the one light for the many"<sup>61</sup>.

This part of the verse reveals the psychological intent of the thought behind the mythological story.

In all these myths the Panis seem to personify that - in nature or in humanity - which holds back a hidden treasure, a wealth that, once released or revealed, brings light and universal harmony. Louis Renou interprets such withholding in terms of engendering disorder:

"It is disorder which the Panis engender by keeping the cows (symbol of light II.24.6&7) prisoner. Such an act disrupts the regular march of the cosmos." 62

To "withhold" as against "sharing" and "giving" was considered a grievous sin. The universal order is bounteousness. Nature is constantly giving of her bounty to man. Thus generosity is one of the highest qualities and any behaviour that runs counter to it is "sinful".

Such mythological language, as bursting the mountain open, releasing the cows or the waters and setting the sun on high, seems to hide a psychological truth, namely the longing to cleave through the mental darkness or limitation which prevents the human being from seeing further, from seeing the light and penetrating into the beyond: man is himself the rock that contains the treasured light. This may be hinted at in the following verse:

"May we be sons of heaven, O Angirasas, and shining forth  
break open the treasure-possessing rock"<sup>63</sup>.

It is not enough that the Angirasas should have performed these prowesses, but their descendants evidence the desire to act in a similar way. Such a verse confirms the psychological significance of these legendary feats, since the wish is expressed that they should be re-enacted here and now, that we (the descendants) should be worthy of heaven.

Darkness, in its metaphysical sense, is not evil and could not have been considered as such in the early days of Rgvedic civilization; it is both the complement of light and that which contains the light which is the life of man. For this, Vedic man could think of no better symbol than the cowpen "in the bonds of anṛta"<sup>64</sup> waiting to be opened up, or, of the sun hidden in the rocky cave waiting to be released and set up in the sky. Anṛta, in such mythological verses, cannot be translated as wrong, false or untruth. It is probably far closer to "chaos" as noted by J. Gonda. But darkness's reflection, as known to human beings, becomes the symbol of evil, of constriction, hence Vṛtra, Vala, the Paṇis, those that hold back, constrict or obstruct, those that hide the treasure; hence the development of anṛta from disorder to wrong, to false, to untrue.

In this respect V.M. Apte<sup>65</sup> makes the pertinent remark that

"... the prasiti (the ensnaring net) of ṛta probably means this complicated and involved tangle or web of ṛta and anṛta and represents the ramifications of the nooses of Varuṇa, escape from which was, however, possible by strict adherence to the path of ṛta... Rta (or its custodians Mitra and Varuṇa) was itself the bond that bound (the snares of) anṛta... To separate the confused strand of ṛta and anṛta in this tangled skein was no easy task for god or mortal."

Hence the poet's predicament:

"Which is your ṛta, which your anṛta." <sup>66</sup>

We are faced once again with that ambivalence which, to the ṛsis, was characteristic of the universe.

*Anṛta* acquired the meaning of falsehood or untruth either early in Vedic times or as a secondary meaning to disorder - *anṛta* as opposed to *ṛta*, order. That which is not in accordance with the divine order of things, as seen by human eyes, is wrong, false, and conduces to suffering through the friction created thereby, hence to evil. Those who are *anṛtaḥ* and *asatyah* are *pāpāsaḥ* "sinful"<sup>67</sup>, whilst those who are "observant of the *ṛta* are truthful"<sup>68</sup>

since they are in harmony with that which is the expression of truth. But since what could have been the original meaning of *anṛta* as the opposite of *ṛta* in its cosmic sense, namely disorder as against order, is still evident in certain verses, the word itself may have borne that sense for a long time side by side with that of untruth. When coupled with *satya*, however, it means only falsehood and was to be kept as the opposite of *satya* even when *ṛta* fell out of use.

L. Renou sees the opposition between *ṛta* and *anṛta* on the ethical plane and between *ṛta* and *nirṛti* on the cosmological plane:

"There is an opposition between *ṛta* and *anṛta*, disorder or falsehood, on the ethical plane, and between *ṛta* and *nirṛti*, dissolution on the cosmological plane. The power of the gods is limited by the interplay of these forces, just as later it is limited by *karman* or *māyā*."<sup>69</sup>

These cosmic intelligences, being embodiments of those powers that conduce to order or dissolution, are therefore the dynamic expressions of two forces, of construction and destruction, cosmos and chaos. This is where lies the root of the problem of the asuras and their so-called beneficent or maleficent action, their unitive or separative influence on the cosmos.

In this respect the question whether the universal order can be injured by *anṛta* is relevant. It is implied in the following verse:

"Let thy noose, O Agni, thrice ensnare the evil-spirit that by *anṛta* strikes at *ṛta*."<sup>70</sup>

This invocation may simply refer to the sacrificial rite which is being thwarted by an evil spirit. *Anṛta* would therefore imply contempt of the ritual, a contempt which, in its wider connotation, would denote scorn for the values of orderliness, harmony, worship and respect for the divine laws. It may also imply that *ṛta*, in its particular applications, such as the norms of the social order or the ritual, may be attacked by those who refuse to follow these norms, by those separative, divisive forces that work against the universal order in contradistinction to the constructive, harmonious forces that work for it. But since *ṛta*, at the transcendental level, is itself the ultimate harmony behind both currents of forces, the unitive and the divisive, in the final analysis nothing can prevail against it, though at the phenomenal level conflict must go on from the very fact that the universe

is structured on the tension of two opposite polarities. In particular and practical applications, wherever disturbances do occur, these must be rectified in accordance with the law. The constant bringing back to equilibrium, to harmony, is part of the course of things, and in the moral sphere, where humanity is concerned, it heralds the doctrine of karma, as will be discussed in the next section.

The fundamental distinction between *ṛta* as the ultimate or ideal order and its immediate realisation in manifestation, is well brought out by H. Lefevér:

"*Ṛta* in the natural world is only a manifestation and never a complete manifestation of the transcendent reality (cf. I.139.2). *Ṛta*, as objective unity, is transcendent, not only in relation to the world but also in relation to the Gods. *Ṛta* as the actual order realised in the world, is a product of the activity of gods and men, an activity directed in accordance with the transcendent *ṛta*. This is the significance of such expressions as

"By *ṛta* upholding *ṛta*" (I.23.5. cf. V.15.2)."71

In this task of "actualisation" of *ṛta* in the phenomenal world the Adityas are intimately connected, as we have seen, and their domain includes not only the right working of all phenomena, but also the human moral sphere. Any infringement of the law is considered an infringement of the statutes of the Adityas. Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, because they have aligned themselves with *ṛta*<sup>72</sup> are the chastisers or haters of all falsehood<sup>73</sup>. So Varuna "discerns truth and falsehood prevalent among men"<sup>74</sup>,

and

"sifts the an*ṛta* by means of the *ṛta*".<sup>75</sup>

So man's transgression is a debt (*ṛṇa*)<sup>76</sup> which he contracts at the hands of the guardians of *ṛta*, a debt which he must pay in order to re-establish the balance he has upset. Indra is the *ṛṇayāh*, he who demands fulfilment of one's obligations. The Adityas, "true to *ṛta*" (*ṛtavānah*) are the "debt-exactors"<sup>77</sup>. Man pays his debt to the gods as agents of the great Law, should he infringe its decrees, by suffering the effects of causes set up through his wrong doing, whether this be committed in knowledge or in ignorance<sup>78</sup>. In the process he may accuse the gods, in his ignorance or anger, but he knows that fundamentally, those who infringe the statutes of Mitra, Varuna, e.g.

"injure as it were a friend"<sup>79</sup>.

For all works towards the greater harmony and therefore well-being of all. The ultimate criterion of *ṛta* whether at the natural, human, or godly, level, as ever, is harmony. The moral imperative is the expression, at the human level, of the supreme harmony: all human relationships that conduce to harmony, unity, are expressions of truth.

### III.3.4. Karma inherent in the conception of rta in the moral sphere.

H. Lefever, in his study of Vedic sin,<sup>80</sup> observes:

"... when rta is disturbed, the results affect not only the sinner himself, but all men, for the disturbance is a cosmic one. Hence the frequent prayers that the Gods may not punish the sinner for another man's trespass."

Pleas such as the following are very frequent:

"Let me not suffer, King, for what others have done."<sup>81</sup>

"Let us not suffer for another's sin, nor commit those deeds that ye, O Vasus, punish."<sup>82</sup>

The disruption in the all-harmony, whether at the natural, or human level, affects all parties. Hence the idea that the innocent suffer for the guilty.

R. Shamasastri<sup>83</sup> finds this a proof against the prevalence of a belief in the doctrine of karma in Rgvedic times. He takes a particular example:

"... instead of ascribing the untimely death of a man to the sin he committed in his previous birth, a Vedic poet is seen to attribute it to the sin committed by his father."

The example chosen by R. Shamasastri is from Rgveda VII.86.4&5. The statement made above is certainly an over simplification, or a narrowing down of the whole issue of karma which manifests in multivarious ways and the example given is no proof at all against its belief in Rgvedic times. In the passage quoted there is no untimely death at all, but simply a question as to what transgression could have been committed by the poet himself that Varuna would slay his friend (i.e. the poet himself, if indeed the ascribing of such a wish to Varuna is not an exaggeration on the poet's part due to his feeling of repentance, or distress, or surprise or awe). An imploration then follows:

"Release us from our fathers' offences, from those that we ourselves have committed."<sup>84</sup>

R. Shamasastri goes on:

"In the view of the Buddhists, the Jainas, and all the schools of Brahman philosophers each man is held responsible for his own Karma, and not for the Karma of his parents. Accordingly if a man is found to have committed no sin in the present birth to account for the calamity he is suffering from, the sinful act or acts committed by him in his previous birth are believed to be the cause of his present calamity. But the Vedic Indians seem to have believed in no such theory. In the view of the Vedic people, sons inherit diseases from their parents along with the sins, the causes of the diseases."<sup>85</sup>

Such a view as propounded by R. Shamasastri does not take into account group karma, whether national or racial; this is just where the Vedic standpoint falls. The realisation of the interdependence of all, hence that the sin of one is also the sin of all, whether ancestors or contemporaries, seems to have been far more widely spread in the Rgvedic age than in the later periods of the history of Indian religious thought. One could express the idea behind it all almost allegorically:

he who falls upon the road of life, falls as a warning to those coming

behind him and as a reproach to those who went before him but failed to remove the stumbling stone. H. Lefever<sup>86</sup> finds, on the contrary:

"Here the greatness and the weakness of the Rgvedic idea of sin become apparent. The conception of the universal world order checked an excessive individualism... It emphasised the responsibility of the whole human race for sin; and, furthermore, the part played by the 'unconscious'. These two important factors may tend to be overlooked in a religion based on the individual's relation to a personal God, who is Himself the ultimate source of the moral-religious Imperative."

This individualism has been pushed to such extremes in the West that hardly any Western scholar was able to appreciate the Vedic conception of interdependence, except H. Lefever. He, however, sees another side to it as well:

"On the other hand, just because of the lack of this ultimate individual relation to the ground of the Imperative<sup>87</sup>, there is the danger in the religion of the Rgveda that sin may be regarded in too external a fashion. Though not the normal view in the Rgveda, there is a tendency to regard sin as a substance, endowed with a kind of vertu propre (cf. Bergaigne, op. cit. p.163), which attacks and clings to a man like a disease and which can be removed by much the same method as in the case of a disease."

This H. Lefever considers a "material conception", whereas it could be merely a figure of speech. If sins were considered as the diseases of the mind or soul, the poets would easily choose their imagery from the material field, such as the waters that cleanse and thereby wash out the sins, or the medicinal herbs that purify. The conception of the remission of sin certainly degenerated into an external show of regular ablutions of the body taking precedence over the real inner cleansing of the heart. But such does not seem to have been prevalent in Rgvedic times.

The significance of sin and its consequence, distress in some form or other, of reward of good action and punishment of evil doing, must have led inevitably to the philosophy of karma<sup>88</sup> or action and reaction. It is true that we do not find any straight out injunction such as "as ye sow so shall ye reap, as ye have sown so are ye reaping"; or as the clearly defined statement in e.g. the Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad:

"As is his desire, such is his purpose; as is his purpose, such is the action he performs; what action (karma) he performs, that he procures for himself."<sup>89</sup>

But the root idea of karma, yathākratunyāya, which implies the setting right of any wrong action, the bringing back into harmony, is contained in the conception of ṛta, in as much as ṛta stands for harmony and orderly process, that right working of all things, the inherent law of the universe which is the basis of manifestation; and in as much as anṛta, its opposite, is said to be punished by the gods. The very mention that sin is punishable involves the notion of ill effects following wrong doing, of adverse reaction following

wrong action. This is part of the idea of karma.

We agree fully with E. Hopkins when he states that

"... though the Karma doctrine is not yet formulated, its ethical principles are already in evidence. Thus suffering is recognised as the fruit of previous sin and when a good man dies he goes to the next world carrying his merit with him." 90

V.A. Gadgil<sup>91</sup> identifies the law of karma with *ṛta*

"as represented by the institution of sacrifice in the Vedic days."

The reciprocal gift from man to god and from god to man through the ritual is bound up with cause and effect, or the law of action and reaction, hence karma considered as ritual sacrifice. That which is offered up is bound to have a reaction on the offerer. The appeal to the god was considered to evoke a response from the latter.

Paul Yevtie<sup>92</sup> is of the opinion that the later

"... Karma concept as a law of retribution was only a modification of the earliest thinking - a gradual transformation of the idea which existed since earliest times... There were many concepts underlying the conception of karma such as *yajña* (sacrifice), *dharma*, and especially *ṛta* - a universal world order in nature and ethical standards..."

R. Panikkar differentiates three trends of tradition:

"... *karman* as the saving sacrificial action, mainly stressed in the *Saṃhitās*; *karman* as the subtle structure of temporal reality, as that which all existing things have in common and in which they share, disclosed mainly in the *Upaniṣads* and developed in later times; *karman* as the path of action, of good works, and thus also as a way to salvation, emphasised in the *Bhagavad Gīta*." 93

He sums up the meaning of *karman* in a way which bridges what may appear as a gap between the Vedic and the post-Vedic conception of *karma*:

"We must stress ... the sacrificial element implied within the concept of *karman* and not load it with ideas of morality which it does not primarily contain. The tendency to equate religion and morality, to see in *karman* a simple chalking-up of merits and demerits according to good or evil conduct, is secondary to authentic religiousness. For the Vedic Experience, religion is essentially worship and worship means a dynamic ontological two-way relationship of Man with the divine. *Karman* implies action... it implies an act of worship that is identified with sacrifice and worship." 94

Whether life be interpreted as a sacrifice or not, its structure is based upon action and reaction, and this at all levels, physical, emotional, ethical, intellectual. Certain hints as to a current understanding of such a law, in the moral sphere, may be gathered from the word *ṛṇa* debt, also used in the sense of sin, in contexts which leave no doubt as to the meaning of moral debt incurred as an infringement against the divine law for which man has to pay the penalty.<sup>95</sup> Similar hints may also be seen in a few enigmatic verses. Thus in *Rgv.*X.14.8 the departed is enjoined to

"unite with the reward of sacrifices-and-good-works" 96

leaving his transgressions on the threshold of paradise (i.e. behind).<sup>97</sup>  
*Iṣṭāpūrta* is usually understood as the merits of sacred rites stored up in heaven, the rewards of the due performance of those rituals that the patriarchs instituted. It connotes the idea of duty carried out in the right, traditional manner. The effect of such duty will be rewarded in the next life. A.B. Keith qualifies this idea as

"a distant precursor of the later *Kārman*."<sup>98</sup>

The good that is done, or the "well-made" (*sukṛtam*)<sup>99</sup> usually refers to the right performance of the rite, hence the merit won through the sacrifice, but also to the acquitting oneself of all obligations, the fulfilling of one's duty. As expressed by J. Gonda, "one might be tempted to attribute some meaning like 'blessed' to this noun"<sup>100</sup> (*sukṛtam*).

A similar conception may be gathered from the Atharvaveda:

"Unite thyself with the fathers, with Yama, with thy sacred works in the highest firmament; abandoning what is reproachful, come again home; - let him unite with a body, very splendid."<sup>101</sup>

What has been sown by way of "good" is reaped as a reward in heaven to which the departed is said to come "again".<sup>102</sup> In *Rgv.*X.135.5-6 a curious question is asked about the newly dead boy:

"How was his equipment?" (verse 5)<sup>103</sup>

while the next stanza develops the thought further:

"According as the foundation was laid at the beginning of life so will the way out be contrived." (verse 6)<sup>104</sup>

This loose rendering of a rather enigmatic verse seems to mean that as it was at the beginning of life, so it is at the end: In other words, as we sow so we reap. The end of life and death will be the exact counterpart of how the life has been lived, a noble death is the expression of a noble life. This is one aspect of karma which tends to be overlooked but seems to be present in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.

That the Adityas, undeceivable<sup>105</sup> as they are, are credited with the ability to read the human heart, to look within, to perceive even when their eyelids are closed<sup>106</sup>, beholding the crooked (*vṛjina*) and the straight (*sādhu*)<sup>107</sup>, observing the *anṛta* of human beings<sup>108</sup>; that Varuṇa has many spies that move among men<sup>109</sup> and a thousand eyes<sup>110</sup>, that numbered of him are the winking of people<sup>111</sup>; that the sun beholds the straight (*rju*) and crooked deeds of men<sup>112</sup>; that Soma

"parts like a knotted tangle right and wrong conduct"<sup>113</sup>; all these examples could be interpreted as the highly coloured Vedic version of the law of karma, of what H. Lefever refers to as a

"... fact of experience, that every action of man, conscious or unconscious, produces its inevitable effect within the world order, *rta*."<sup>114</sup>



Such action is "known" to the gods and sweeps into its train a particular effect, be this termed the "noose" of Varuṇa, should the cause be transgression, or *madhu*, sweetness, should the cause be right living.<sup>115</sup> The verse

"Sinners are false and untruthful; they dig their own deep ditch" <sup>116</sup>

is an epitome of the doctrine of karma. In Bergaigne's interpretation of verse 16 of the hymn to the plants (Rgv.X.97) we see another example of the doctrine of karma, although Bergaigne himself does not draw this conclusion:

"The bond which holds back the sinner is expressly called the noose of Varuṇa ... 'let them (the plants) deliver me from the noose of malediction and from the noose of Varuṇa and from the fetter of Yama, from every transgression committed against the gods'".

The 'noose of malediction' appears to be the bond which holds back the man guilty of having pronounced a curse (cf. I.41.8) rather than that of which the victim of the curse would find himself imprisoned by ... the noose of Varuṇa is that wherein the sinner is caught ... and his transgressions expose him to death the idea of which is suggested by the 'fetter of Yama', the king of the dead." <sup>117</sup>

The Atharvaveda qualifies this law as "mighty", or "terrible" <sup>118</sup>

and brings together a number of epithets which purport to show what lies at the basis of the universal structure:

"Vast truth, mighty order, consecration, contemplative exertion, prayer (*brahma*), offering, uphold the earth." <sup>119</sup>

This implies that any trespassing of the Law, or right activity, means discord and ultimately pain and evil, since the tendency is constantly to bring back the disorder into line with the order, and the friction thus created causes pain. Therefore the closer human beings approach this fundamental equilibrium, the more does mankind become a dynamic expression <sup>of</sup> that truth which is the origin of all, the very pulse of being:

"Sweet blows the breeze for the righteous one,  
sweet flow the ocean-deeps." <sup>120</sup>

The Yajurveda adds:

"Where spiritual and ruling power move together in unity,  
that world will I know as holy, where dwell the shining ones  
together with the flame." <sup>121</sup>

On the other hand, those who do not live in accordance with *ṛta* will have to suffer the consequences of their having set up causes of disharmony, whether these effects be diseases which are the physical equivalent of moral wrong, or adverse circumstances, they bring about their downfall by their own action:

"Retribution dogs the wrongdoings of men".

"Evil-doers do not cross unto the pathway of the law". <sup>122</sup>

All these examples show the conception of the law of karma already well developed. *ṛta*, the law of harmony, is essentially the law of action and reaction which restores the balance, hence karma. It is not because a doctrine is called by a different name, and different aspects are emphasised in a different way that it was unknown before it assumed its later name. Nor was the

later belief in karma such "a moral advance on earlier ideas" as stated by J N Farquhar<sup>123</sup> since the moral meaning which belief in karma give to "all conduct" was already present and developed in *ṛta*, although this seems to have been unrecognised by 19th century scholars. On the other hand, to state as A.B. Keith does that

"... the idea of *Ṛta* is one which, like the moral elevation of *Vāruṇa* has no future history in India, pointing irresistibly to the view that it was not an Indian creation, but an inheritance which did not long survive its new milieu" <sup>124</sup>

is to fail completely to assess the law of *karma* and of *dharma* in their essential significance. There is no gulf stretching between the Vedic *ṛta* and the Hindu *dharma* and *karma*, as nineteenth century scholars understood and for this reason tried to find the date of the appearance of the doctrine of *karma*. Both *karma* and *dharma* are the Hindu equivalent of the Rgvedic *ṛta*. *Ṛta* is more universal in its application and contains all norms; *dharma* and *karma* in their later significance are more specialised and apply to humanity rather than to the cosmos. The vision of cosmic integrity, of which human integrity is the mirror, is peculiar to the Rgveda, and is more and more adumbrated in post-Vedic literature.

This brings us to the consideration of the conception of sin as such, as it was envisaged by the *ṛsis* and may be gathered from the text of the Rgveda.

### III.3.5 The conception of sin in the Rgveda

As remarked by J. Gonda it is difficult to assess what exactly Vedic man meant by *āgas*:

"the usual translations - 'Sünde, Unrecht' (Grassman); 'transgression, offence, injury, sin, fault' (Monier Williams), 'Vergehen' (Geldner) etc. - give no complete picture of the idea conveyed by this term." <sup>125</sup>

J. Gonda ascribes to *āgas* the sense of "pollution" in accordance with the later texts and explains e.g. a line from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (6.7.3.8) as

"may we be freed from pollution and restored to the ideal safe and sound condition, unhampered and secure from Varuṇa's wrath". <sup>126</sup>

H. Griswold however holds that

"the conception of sin as a defilement and of forgiveness as a cleansing from such defilement is not found explicitly stated in the RV. Sin itself is viewed as transgression and indebtedness." <sup>127</sup>

Several terms are used in the sense of transgression against what is right: *āgas*, *enās*, *agha*, *pāpa*, *śaraṇi*, *duṣkṛta*<sup>128</sup> and *ṛna* meaning having gone against or transgressed, hence what is morally owed, a debt. H. Lefever<sup>129</sup> ventures to describe *enas* as literally an "act of aggression"; *āgas* as signifying "sin in its deepest and most ethical sense". The variety of terms might be taken as an indication that the *ṛsis* may have given far more thought to man's conduct and transgressions than some scholars, e.g. J. McKenzie are prepared

to admit. J Mackenzie's statement that

"Any system of ethics that might be discovered in the Rig Veda is of a very rudimentary sort" <sup>130</sup>

is both peremptory and superficial. The hymns, it should be remembered, are primarily invocations and praises addressed to various deities, not philosophical treatises or moral precepts and therefore any reference to ethics would be purely incidental and linked to the poet's feelings or state of mind at the time of composition, his main preoccupation being to invoke the presence of the gods or to shine in excellence among other poets.

E W Hopkins on the contrary finds that

"... the kinds of sin recognized by the Rig Veda... comprise sins of faith as well as sins of omission (in the liturgy) and ethical faults... (religious) unbelief, liturgical errors or omissions, stinginess, lying, trickery, cheating at dice... unfilial behaviour, inhospitality, betrayal, robbery, theft, drunkenness, murder, incest, the use of harmful magic, including cursing, false swearing, and all forms of 'crookedness' whether directed against a member of the clan or against a stranger." <sup>131</sup>

J McKenzie maintains:

"It is clear enough that *rita* stands for moral order and is opposed to sin or unrighteousness, but we search in vain for clear indications as to forms that conduct in accordance with *rita* takes as against conduct that is sinful." <sup>132</sup>

Certain definite hints are given both in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* which he himself enumerates, such as: lying, cheating, harming, hating, greediness, miserliness which, in his own words,

"are sins against one's fellow-men that are held up to reprobation. The hatred even of foemen is more than once referred to as sinful. The adversary, thief, and robber, those who destroy the simple and harm the righteous, the malicious - upon these judgement is invoked. Notable also is the place that is given to friendship." <sup>133</sup>

The *Rgveda* is not a handbook of ethics. However, a fair idea of what was considered right and wrong can be had just by considering the hints scattered throughout the hymns. Thus Indra is said to slay the crooked (*vrjināyat*) and perverter of truth (*satya dhurtah*).<sup>134</sup> Incest is referred to as sinful (*pāpa*) in the famous dialogue between Yama and Yamī<sup>135</sup> and as against the *dharma* of Mitra and Varuṇa.<sup>136</sup> It is also *anṛta*, against the great law.<sup>137</sup> Loyalty to friend is highly prized; he who abandons his friend can no longer hear *vāk*, the divine voice, and knows naught of the path of the "well-accomplished" (*sukṛta*);<sup>138</sup> this may refer to the performance of the ritual but even if so, the keynote is that of harmonious relation, whether between men, or between men and devas, by means of the ritual; he who transgresses in any way the path of order ceases to be part of the harmony and fails to hear the divine voice. Sharing is an expression of friendship; offering the best to deity is man's way of sharing with his god. All men come together in the ritual to share in the offering. If they fail to do so in the proper way, they will fail to invoke the deity,

they will cease to hear the divine voice. As a corollary, sharing with the needy is a must.<sup>139</sup>

The removal of hatred is a constant theme in the various appeals to the gods,<sup>140</sup> not surprisingly, as hatred is divisive and thus works against harmony, *ṛta*. Deceit, lying are also strongly reprobated. They stand against truth (*satya*) which, with *ṛta*, forms the basis of the universe (Rgv.X.190.1). In the Atharvaveda is found a stern condemnation of falsehood and an entreaty for freedom from it:

"Man speaks much untruth, O King Varuna; free us from that distress."<sup>141</sup> Deceit brings in its train all sorts of other evils that psychologically constrict the human mind. Truth at all levels, speech, thought, action, human and godly, being the fundamental value, that which lies at the foundation of the world,<sup>142</sup> is conceived as sustaining all and through it alone all is secure, hence *ṛta*, the divine order. Since he who is true to his innermost self cannot be false to anyone, cannot harm anyone, can do no wrong, the Vedic stand for truth includes all ethical precepts. So the poet prays for Soma:

"This we desire, that we may travel on the path of *ṛta*."<sup>143</sup>

Here *ṛta* may be interpreted as not only the divine order in the sense of law, but also in that of truth, unswerving adherence to the law of righteousness which alone is truth. Soma flows

"declaring the law, splendid by law, declaring truth, truthful in action."<sup>144</sup>

Truth (*satya*) and law (*ṛta*) are in this stanza almost synonymous, each emphasising one facet of Reality as viewed by human perception. Man's stand on truth, his inborn sense of fairness, of justice, his acting and living in accordance with "his truth", is his human expression of the great law, cosmic order. So "speak the truth and act the truth" is the epitome of Rgvedic ethics, an injunction which did not vary since we find it expressed in the Upaniṣads: in the Taittirīya as

"speak the truth, act the truth, never swerve from the path of truth"<sup>145</sup>

in the Muṇḍaka as

"By truth is the divine path laid out by which sages, having obtained what they desire, ascend the supreme abode of truth."

and as

"Truth alone triumphs and not untruth!"<sup>146</sup>

which takes us back to the original Rgvedic conception

"By truth is the earth upheld."<sup>147</sup>

H. Lefever, in his summing up of the conception of sin in the Rgveda, gives incidentally an answer to J. McKenzie's complaint as to the want of a clear ethical code in the Rgveda:

"There are ... three pairs of contrary terms, by which the distinction between right and wrong is normally expressed. The distinction is viewed as one between 'straight' and 'crooked', 'single' and 'double',

and 'true' and 'false'. It is evident that these are simply three different modes of expressing the distinction between action which is in conformity with the 'straight path of rta' and that which is opposed to it."<sup>149</sup>

Viewing the subject as a whole, there seems to be two outstanding kinds of sin in the Vedic conception: to sin against generosity, and to sin against truth. Miserliness, withholding, keeping hidden, are regarded as abhorrent, as much as lying, cheating and deceiving. The Vedic ethical ideal seems to have been a combination of generosity and truthfulness. The man who gives everything, or his very best, cannot be deceitful, he is not prone to withhold, keep apart, but is open, truthful. Conversely, he who speaks the truth is not prone to hide or keep back. Generosity and truth, to the Vedic mind, go hand in hand. It could also be observed that the notion of generosity may have entailed its corollary, complete self-sacrifice even unto death. A gift that withholds nothing is in a certain sense a perfect sacrifice.<sup>150</sup> The great emphasis on sacrifice may also have stemmed from this code of ethics. That it applied most probably more to the *ksatriya* than to the *brahmana* class is another question.

The ideal of *ahimsā* does not appear in the *Rgveda*, violence being accepted as a part of life that cannot be dispensed with. Its first mention is found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which incidentally describes what the *dakṣiṇa* of the priest really means:

"Austerity, alms-giving, uprightness, harmlessness, truthfulness - these are one's gifts for the priests."<sup>151</sup>

The derivative word *ahimsāna* is used in *Rg.V.64.3* qualifying Mitra who does not harm his devotees, and *ahimsyamāna*, being unharmed, is found in *Rg.V.1.141.5*. The conception had evidently not yet developed into a cardinal doctrine.

Sin is viewed in some passages as a "pollution" as in this request in the *Atharvaveda*:

"What impurity (*ripram*), what pollution (*samalam*), and what wrong (*duṣkṛtam*) we have committed, let the waters purify me from that."<sup>152</sup>

Disease of the body is an effect of psychological illness. The non-recognition of this, in the nineteenth century, led scholars to assess the Vedic ethics as purely materialistic. In commenting upon *Rg.V.X.97* where the poet appeals to the plants to cure his disease caused through sin, Bergaigne sees

"a confusion between the remedies of the body and those of the soul",<sup>153</sup> failing to grasp that the interaction between mind, or soul and body is so close that one - physical ailment - may very well be the end result of the other.

But it is recognised in the *Rgveda* that physical ailment, such as hunger, even if considered the punishment for sin, is no excuse for the refusal of the better off to feed the hungry.<sup>154</sup> Retribution in the form of *agha* (impurity)

will indeed visit him who does not feed the hungry. E. W. Hopkins seems, however, to have understood the whole problem, as comes out in his explanation:

"... the sin causing divine anger has its outward manifestation in sickness or some other 'lack of freedom' called a bond."

"Sickness is punishment for sin and is even the objectified form of sin." 156

He interprets the "disease 'bound on the body'" of Rgv. VI. 74.3 as an identification

"with the offence committed against the gods". So he concludes:

"... the inherited sin is in the nature of inherited bodily evil and the prayer ... that one may not be punished for another's sin means that one should not suffer bodily through sin committed by another member of the family, either in the same generation or, more usually, by one's ancestor." 157

Scholars diverge widely in their assessment of Vedic attitude to sin, nineteenth century Orientalists emphasising the almost non-existent consciousness of sin which their Christian background would have them find, others, like R. Shamasastri, remarking that

"... the constant thought of sin and its consequences was a terror to the people of the Vedic times" 158

these being two extreme views. A more sober assessment was given by H. Lefever in his detailed study. According to him the Vedic bard

"... realises that the favour of the God is absolutely conditioned by his own righteousness. To regard adversity as the inevitable consequence of sin is to display, not a weak, but an exceedingly vivid consciousness of the gravity of sin." 159

Whether adversity is thought of as caused by sin, or not, it can also be regarded as a field of experience in which the human metal is forged. In whatever way it is looked upon, however, the consciousness of sin did not morbidly affect the usual optimistic Vedic attitude to life, its keynote remaining one of vigour of spirit and joie de vivre. Worldly prosperity seems to have been viewed as one of the signs of godly favour and adversity of godly displeasure. But as Lefever remarks

"In sending either prosperity or adversity, the Gods were acting ... in accordance with the rta." 160

Adversity is a result of the infringement of the law from which one may learn many a lesson. This statement by H. Lefever is an indirect recognition of the law of karma as understood in Vedic times.

R. Panikkar maintains that

"... the seers of the Vedic period possessed a peculiar awareness of sin and guilt." 161

He finds in the study of the terms used for sin and evil

"... three basic insights which, like three seeds, may later develop into three complete theories."

The first series of words (*enās, āgas, drugha, pīdā*) indicates an "external cause" for evils of all kinds. The second series (*amhas, tamas*) denotes an "internal source".

"These words speak of anxiety, narrowness, lack of expansion, a feeling of imprisonment within oneself. Here the cause is within and seems to be inherent in our own nature."

A third series of words, (*duḥkha, durita, anṛta, adharma*)

"seem to suggest that evil springs from maladjustment and malfunctioning of a system that otherwise is far from being bad. These words postulate a kind of factual ambivalence in almost any human value which can turn out to be either negative and mischievous or positive and beneficial." <sup>162</sup>

A more perfect answer to J. McKenzie's complaint could not have been found.

The whole Vedic attitude to life, to the gods and to sin, is widely different from that prevalent in the Old Testament. In the R̥gveda the gods differ ethically from man because they never infringe the one law which man, in his weakness or ignorance, does break and thereby has to suffer in consequence. Wrong committed against the gods is placed in the same category as that committed against a friend <sup>163</sup> for gods and men claim a common (*samānyā*) brotherhood (*bhrātṛtvam*) in the same mother's womb. <sup>164</sup> They are "related" (*āpayah*). <sup>165</sup> The immortal is the brother of the mortal, the latter seldom cringes before the former. The role of the gods, their mediating action in the ethical order of humanity, is well brought out by H. Lefevér:

"The Gods ... are 'charioteers of *ṛta*', guarding the transcendent cosmic Law by means of their statutes. These statutes have thus their origin, not so much in the pure will of the Gods, as in the transcendent *ṛta*. Therefore the breach of such statutes is not so much a personal offence against the Gods as a violation of the *ṛta* which the Gods protect." <sup>166</sup>

"All wrong-doing, whether against Gods or men, is a breach of this Law and herein, rather than in the character of the Gods, lies the special nature of the R̥gvedic idea of sin." <sup>167</sup>

"The sole duty of the Gods, as guardians of *ṛta*, is to punish the violation or to reward the keeping of *ṛta*." <sup>168</sup>

"Reward" and "punishment" are human value judgments applied to what essentially is action and reaction. These, when translated into terms of reward and punishment can only be "meted out" by more or less personal agents of the law.

J. McKenzie holds it as

"... very significant that at this early stage we should find such a unifying conception as that of Law or Order, pervading all things, expressing itself in the order of nature and in the

manifestations of man's religious life, and tending to be associated with one Supreme God." 167

The great unitary vision of Vedic man made him capable of conceiving a oneness to which all aspects converged: all things working towards a greater harmony of the whole so that whatever brought disharmony was "wrong" and in man's case "sin". R Panikkar expresses it thus:

"The dichotomy between an ethical and a cosmic order is foreign to Vedic thinking, not because the ethical order is ignored but because the really existential order is anthropocosmic and thus includes both the ethical and the cosmic in one." 170

### 111.3.6 Rta as Truth: the Vedic vision of holiness and the social order

We can hardly agree with A.C. Clayton's claim that

"... the supreme vision of holiness was simply not attained." 171

Such vision could be reconstructed if we realised that holiness means wholeness, completeness (*sarvatāti*) the very boon asked of the gods, and that *rta*, the transcendental law grants that vision of wholeness, a vision which, to the *ṛṣis*, was achieved by the gods, hence their ever concerted action. 172 The man at perfect peace with himself and the world is "true", "harmonious", "whole" and can commit no wrong. He is *ṛtāvan*, holy. All converges on the fundamental issue of the working in harmony with the great law or on its infringement. Material prosperity considered as a result or reward of right living also points to this conclusion as underlying the whole Vedic conception of *rta* in so far as it is related to man. Two hymns, one in the *Rgveda* (X.191.2-4), and one in the *Atharvaveda* (111.30.1-3) 173 express the vision of harmony as applied to humanity. Both emphasise concordance, togetherness, union. Justice among men can only be established when each man acts in harmony with his fellow-man and with the whole of which he is an integral part. The *Rgvedic* hymn, as rendered by R Panikkar, runs as follows:

"Gather together, converse together. Your minds be of one accord,  
Just as in harmony the gods of old took their ritual share of oblation.

United be your counsel, united your assembly, united your spirit and thoughts,  
A single plan do I lay before you; a single oblation do I offer!

United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be at one,  
that you may long together dwell in unity and concord!" 174

No more forceful call to peace among men, to togetherness, harmony, oneness, can be found among the world's religious literature.

Sinlessness is the pre-requisite to human harmony, integrity is the hallmark of truth. It is its guarantee. So man asks the sun to "declare us sinless", or without blemish, i.e. whole, in the presence of Mitra, Varuṇa and



other gods.<sup>175</sup> That Sūrya can do so is because the human heart is an open book to him and if he agrees to do so is a proof that the man is in harmony with himself and all and thus worthy of communing with the Adityas.

E.W. Hopkins summed up "the ethical content of the Rig Veda" thus:

"Morality is an expression of divine law; sin is opposition to that law. The sinner is one who is out of harmony with the higher spiritual environment, which encompasses and controls the world."<sup>176</sup>

A human being who is in harmony, performs his duty perfectly, fulfills his obligations under the *ṛta*, lives in accordance with the inherent law of his being, is then called *ṛtāvan*; he conserves the *ṛta* and is said to be "true", *satya*; hence the great power attributed to the declaration of truth.<sup>177</sup> *Ṛta*, when it applies to the human moral order, is truth. He who follows *ṛta*, the path of righteousness, is a man of truth and has at his command the power that only truth can wield:<sup>178</sup>

"Contemplation of *ṛta* annihilates transgressions."<sup>179</sup>

"Under the *ṛta*" as remarked by W.N. Brown

"every human being too has a duty, a specific function called his *vṛata*, a word which in the later language means 'vow'."<sup>180</sup>

Within the inclusive norms of *ṛta* there is much variety for human beings, the callings of men are numerous and some are somewhat humourously expressed in the following verse:

"Manifold are the visions (*dhiyah*) of men, manifold their functions:  
the carpenter seeks what's broken,  
the physician the diseased,  
the priest the soma-presser."<sup>181</sup>

Each calling is an integral part of the social order and when duly performed contributes to the overall social harmony. We glimpse here not only the beginnings of the idea of *dharma* which was to be so forcefully expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, but also the divisions of labour of Vedic society, divisions which imply professional groups which in due time gave rise to classes (*varṇa*) and castes (*jāti*). That there were originally, in addition to such basic divisions as family (*kula*), village community (*grāma*) and settlement (*vis*)<sup>182</sup> three broad groups in the Vedic community may be implied from certain hymns such as the following invocation to the Aśvins:

"Invigorate the *brahman* and the *dhīh*,  
invigorate the *ksātra* (ruling power) and the heroes,  
invigorate the kine, invigorate the people"<sup>183</sup>

We find here a threefold division of society expressed in the *brahman* - the pursuit of knowledge yielding spiritual leadership, power over thought, hence the priesthood -; the wielding of temporal power, hence the ruling class or government; the various trades of the common people symbolised in the cattle, hence the productive class. The divine prototypes of the *ksatriyas*, the gods

that enforce the keeping of the law and thereby protect the ordinances and the well-being of human society, are Mitra and Varuṇa: their mighty dominion is lofty rta.<sup>184</sup> Indra, the *ksātriya* par excellence whose task is to fight all opposition to Order is called *brāhman* in Rgv.VI.45.7,<sup>185</sup> both functions being shown as closely linked.

The rigidity with which in later times each of the *varṇas* was differentiated from the other, does not seem to have existed in the Rgvedic age. In a prayer to Indra, the bard expresses his wish to combine the three main social functions in himself and indeed to rise to that of a seer:

"Wilt thou not make me a herdsman of people,  
wilt thou not make me their ruler, O liberal Soma-drinker,  
a ṛṣi, drinker of Soma juice, a skilled-controller of  
immortal riches?"<sup>186</sup>

The *sūdras* or tillers of the soil, a word used but once in the Rgveda, are mentioned far more in the Atharvaveda. In the latter a comparison is made between the poets, *kavayah*,<sup>187</sup> the term with which the seers style themselves, and the tillers. A song of the Rgveda<sup>188</sup> dedicated to the lord of the field (*kṣetrapati*) shows an ideal world of simple happiness where labour becomes a constant communion with the divine powers that pervade all, as the worker dedicates in prayer every move he makes, every tool he uses, every spot he ploughs. The whole song is a consecration of the labourer and the soil.<sup>189</sup>

That the *varṇas* were accepted as a fact of nature may be gathered from the several prayers of the Atharvaveda and the Yajurveda, such as the following:

"Make me ... dear to brahman and ksatriya,  
both to śudra and to Aryan!"<sup>190</sup>

In the *puruṣa sūkta* (Rgv.X.90.12), considered one of the later compositions of the Rk *saṃhitā* the four classes which came to be distinctive of Hindu society are enumerated: the *brāhmaṇah*, *rājanyaḥ*, *vaiśyaḥ*, *sūdraḥ*. Being born from various parts of Puruṣa's body, these are the limbs of the divine being, different in their functions, yet each necessary for the welfare of the whole; one in their divine origin and one in their common purpose: manifested harmony. The ideal of harmony is found emphasised in the Rgveda, the Atharvaveda and the Yajurveda:

"Give brightness to our priestly folks  
make bright our ruling folks, bright our  
traders and tillers, and through that brightness  
give brightness to me."<sup>191</sup>

"Where the spiritual and the ruling power move together  
of one accord, that world where dwell devas with Agni,  
shall I know as holy."<sup>192</sup>

This is obviously the ideal social order envisaged by the ṛṣis,<sup>193</sup> an order that mirrors the godly order: holiness in man, harmony in his community. However far away from this set-up man strayed, he could not fall completely beyond the fold, for the law, as administered by the gods, encompasses all in its mighty sweep:

"Beyond the statutes of the devas no one,  
even if he had a hundred souls, can live."<sup>194</sup>

### III.3.7 Forgiveness and the meaning of freedom

That human nature is liable to transgress, to err widely, that at times man does not even realise that he has committed wrong<sup>195</sup> and therefore begs for the god's compassion and understanding of human weakness, these ideas are expressed again and again:

"If we have erred intentionally, unintentionally, and by way of imprecation, waking or sleeping, may Agni remove far away from us all evil and disgusting actions."<sup>196</sup>

The belief that retribution follows sin,<sup>197</sup> that wrong committed will have to be paid for in some unpleasant way or other, can (further) be inferred from the many entreaties for forgiveness addressed not only to Varuṇa but to other gods. Two trends of thought are clearly perceptible, that of retribution and that of forgiveness, for the conception of the remission of sin is also evident, the god, e.g. Varuṇa, may forgive out of his own graciousness, sin can be wiped out, or else, as said of Brahmaṇaspati, the god may remit human debts at his will. The power to bind and unbind sinners, that is, to punish or forgive, thus rests with the gods. They are, in human eyes, the agents of the law.<sup>198</sup> The many pleas to be "gracious" or show mercy as the verb *mṛ1* indicates, imply that the repentant sinner could expect forgiveness on the part of the god even though he had infringed the law and even though the Adityas are its custodians. The verb *√mṛ1* be gracious, and the substantive *mṛ1ika*, mercy, are very often used with reference to Rudra, Varuṇa, Soma, thus showing a belief in the possibility of sin's annulment or the wiping out of human "debt" (*r̥na*) through the deity's compassion or will.

The key to this apparent break of divine statute, or of the law of cause and effect, must be found in the attitude of repentance, or rather conscious and total change of mind and heart on the part of the sinner which would transform his whole being and give him a new lease of life, hence in his eyes "forgiveness" in the sight of the gods, since it is human to externalise or project objectively that which is basically subjective. The realisation in depth by a human being of what he has done, changes his ways, and thereby effects a transformation in his life which he ascribes to the god's forgiveness. The Rgveda abounds in such examples.

R. Panikkar explains this idea of mercy

"... as the fruit of a relationship, but the relationship is not exceptional nor does it militate against existing regulations; it is a part of the overall order of *r̥ta*. Neither *r̥ta* in the first period nor *karman* as it slowly begins to emerge in the pre-Upaniṣadic period is an automatic, merely mechanical force: both *r̥ta* and *karman* are always functional and they function according to a set of relational factors, one of which is the human will along with its sentiments and feelings."<sup>199</sup>

Such an idea seems to be touched upon in both Rgv. VII.1.67.17 and II.24.6.

The Sanskrit verb used in the first of these, *pratiyantam*,<sup>200</sup> bears the meaning of "turning back" upon oneself, transforming one's whole view, pointing to the Vedic seer's realisation of the necessity of a change of mind and heart in order to be "forgiven":

"To everyone turning back even from sin, O ye wise gods,  
vouchsafe that he may live"<sup>20</sup>

As a result of this re-direction of consciousness, the gods "make to live", or renew life in a deeper sense than the merely physical renewal. E.W. Hopkins explains this "going over" thus: taking a different example (Rgv.X.71.6) he writes:

"... one who betrays his friend loses his hold of the word ('because he has no understanding of the paths of well-doing'). This is the path to which one returns when one becomes 'sinless before Aditi' or in particular before Varuṇa, whose laws determine the straight course of the stars ... Only when one has 'returned' can one be forgiven: 'ye make to live, O ancient gods, every one who returns from his sin'. This return is implied in petitions where the suffering sinner begs for relief".<sup>202</sup>

It is also implied in the refrain of Rgv.VII.51.1:

"We choose freedom and wholeness."<sup>203</sup>

A somewhat similar turning back which, in the particular case to be considered, is a return to the source, may be glimpsed in the more enigmatic verse of Rgv.II.24.6 where the words *guhā hitam* and *tat* are of deep significance, the former always pointing to the seat of the heart where is hidden the greatest treasure (cf. Rgv.I.67.2) and the latter the essence of Deity which the Upaniṣads were to call the *ātman*:

"They drew near; they reached out towards that supreme treasure of the Paṇis secretly hidden away; those knowing ones, having viewed the falsehoods, turned back again whence (they had come) seeking to penetrate that."<sup>204</sup>

That which the sages wish to enter is the "supreme domain"<sup>205</sup>, the state of immortality<sup>206</sup> which is the highest treasure kept hidden away by those who are loath to reveal it.<sup>207</sup>

The same idea of observing the world of falsehood, seeing through it, rejecting it and turning back, is repeated in verse 7 and the sages are then declared to ascend the high paths:

"The law-abiding sages, having observed the world of falsehood thence (turned back) again and stepped unto the high paths."<sup>208</sup>

It seems that if there is no turning back, leading to a new start,

but only arrogance, then the god does not forgive:

Indra "forgives not the arrogant man his arrogance"<sup>209</sup>

Forgiveness is contingent upon a change of mind and heart ...

The forgiveness of sin is conceived in terms of a removing<sup>210</sup> of defilement, but especially as a release, an "untying" from "bond"; the many verbs used in connection with sin point this out very clearly:  $\sqrt{\text{ava-srj}}$ , "let loose, dismiss, pardon";  $\sqrt{\text{srath}}$ , "loosen, untie, remit, pardon";  $\sqrt{\text{vi-srath}}$ , "loosen, untie, remit, pardon";  $\sqrt{\text{pra-muc}}$ , "release from, loosen, untie".<sup>211</sup>

Rudra is asked to

"drive far away from us hatred, away distress, away diseases in all directions!"<sup>212</sup>

all of which - apart from hatred which can itself be a cause of sin - are the results of sin. The waters are implored for their cleansing effect, theirs being a purifying function:

"Whatever sin is found in me, whatever evil I have wrought if I have lied or falsely sworn, Waters, remove that from me!"<sup>213</sup>

Soma, it is claimed, when purified by harmonious thoughts, conquers all malignities.<sup>214</sup> Agni's flame can chase sin away.<sup>215</sup> To Agni the prayer goes:

"O youngest one, whatever sin we have committed, through our human condition, through want of sense, make us sinless in the sight of Aditi, pardon every offence whatsoever, O Agni!"<sup>216</sup>

That even great sin could be forgiven is indicated in the next verse:

"Even before great sin, O Agni, (free us) from prison of the gods and mortals!"<sup>217</sup>

and also in the following:

"I desire-to-overcome even committed sin by means of homage!"<sup>218</sup>

The particle *cid* used here and translated as "even" is noteworthy. Emphasising *kṛtam*, *cid* may infer that when sin has been committed it is worse than when it remains at the level of intention, but it can nevertheless be pardoned or wiped out.

The list of pleas for forgiveness is rather long, many of which are not addressed to Varuṇa only, but also to other gods, to Heaven and Earth, to Dawn, Rudra, Indra, Savitr. They certainly show the Vedic consciousness of the gravity of transgression against the law and the all too human fear of the consequences. <sup>219</sup>

"Not for one offence (*āgas*) O vallant one, not for two, nor for three, do thou strike us, nor yet for many." <sup>220</sup>

"Aditi, Mitra, Varuṇa, whatever sin we have committed that forgive us." <sup>221</sup>

The common plea is that whatever be the offence which we, human beings, in our wantonness (*acitti*) commit against the heavenly hosts, whether through lack of intelligence and understanding (*dīnair dakṣaiḥ*), or human weakness or sheer wickedness, "do not hurt us". <sup>222</sup>

The fact that sin is unacceptable in itself and not simply because it involves retribution is also evident:

"If we have ever committed sin against a loving one, a friendly one, companion or brother, the neighbour always with us or a stranger, do thou O Varuṇa loosen that from us." <sup>223</sup>

Many an imploration to Aditi is for forgiveness of sin, or, similar <sup>224</sup> entreaties are addressed to other gods that man be made "sinless in the sight of Aditi" <sup>225</sup> or "unto freedom", sinlessness being a condition of freedom and safety:

"Whatever sin we have committed, that forgive us, Aditi, Mitra, Varuṇa. May I obtain freedom and light free from fear, O Indra, may the spreading darkness not reach us." <sup>226</sup>

A similar request is formulated thus:

"May I attain the fearless light", <sup>227</sup>

obviously that light in whose radiance man can have no fear. As in the first example the desire evidenced for freedom and light follows upon the plea for forgiveness, we surmise that this freedom is the state of purity, a cleansing from trespasses which otherwise lead to distress, guilt, moral bondage and physical disease: complete harmony with *rta* meaning freedom, hence salvation.

Aditi the luminous one, the upholder of all creatures, <sup>228</sup> the holy, <sup>229</sup> and her sons protect or rescue human beings <sup>230</sup> from guilt, anguish (*ambhas*), <sup>231</sup> from every kind of evil or malignity, <sup>232</sup> these in human terms of reference, being connected with disease, <sup>233</sup> want, obstruction and thus destruction or disintegration (*nṛṣṭi*) and death:

"May Aditi protect us, may Aditi grant us shelter." <sup>234</sup>

The boons of the Adityas are the opposite of those evils that beset the unrighteous, they are beneficent (*avadha*), not hurting, two of their greatest gifts being "everlasting light" (*jyotir-ajasram*) <sup>235</sup> and "wide space" (*varivas*), free scope or freedom from anguish and all kinds of distress. Hence the oft mentioned opposition between *varivas*, wideness which implies freedom of range

and expansion, and *amhas* distress, anguish, which implies constriction, lack of scope. Expansion is inclusive, and therefore leads to wholeness; constriction is exclusive and therefore leads to separation, so that we have in these two ideas the fundamental dichotomies of love and hatred, harmony and conflict, light and darkness, right and wrong. So to the gods the poet confesses that away from constriction (*amhas*) there is spaciousness (*uzu*) hence freedom, the whole world belongs to the pure:

"O devas, from distress there is freedom, for the sinless a treasure." 236

Brahmanaspati also grants his worshipper relief from distress, literally grants him broadness out of narrowness:

"He safeguards him from distress, defends him from injury, granting him ample and marvellous protection against distress." 237

Similarly

"Neither distress nor woe, neither evil nor dishonest men from any side whatsoever overcome him. Thou drivest away all noxious powers from that man whom O Brahmanaspati thou protectest as a good herdsman." 238

"Now Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman vouchsafe us freedom (*varivas*) for us and for our offspring." 239

The "ever strengthening" (*sadāvṛdhā*) Aditi protects men from coming to grief, that is from *amhas*.<sup>240</sup> To find refuge in the Adityas means release from bondage, what in later times was to be called liberation (*mokṣa*):

"O bounteous Adityas vouchsafe us that refuge that releases even the sinner from his sin." 241

So Aditi, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, are begged for

"forgiveness for whatever sin we have committed.  
That I may obtain the broad, the fearless light.  
O Indra let not the long-enduring darkness overwhelm us." 242

Light cannot be qualified as "fearless". The poet is evidently transferring a certain psychological experience he may have had, an enlightenment marked by freedom, joy and fearlessness to the manifestation of light or illumination itself. This broad fearless light which is to be obtained after due forgiveness of one's transgressions is described as celestial (*svarvat*) and is the boon begged of Indra:

"Lead us to wide space, O thou who knowest, to celestial, fearless light, successfully." 243

The fearless light could also refer to freedom from the shackles of mortality, that wide place, *uzum lokam*, or state of being free from all bondage:

"May we attain that most spacious mansion, your own dominion." 244

The freedom from all limitations, from all that which hampers the free flow of life, is that freedom which removes all obstacles, physical or moral, all transgressions against the law, all diseases, poverty or oppression, etc:

"Verily O Adityas tear away every kind of hatred and anxiety combined to disease." 245

Freedom, ample room, often occurs in these prayers, as a *sine qua non* of purity, harmony and well-being. The sacrificial offering is to be placed in a state of sinlessness (*anāgāstve*) that is purity, wholeness, as well as freedom (*aditivve*).<sup>246</sup> In a *sūkta* addressed to Agni, the treasure-laden, divine flame is identified with Aditi:

"Thou grantest sinlessness, O Aditi, completely".<sup>247</sup>

The word translated as "completely" (*sarvatātā*) should be noted. Complete purity means wholeness. When all the body's functions work normally and therefore in harmony, the man enjoys good health; when his mental faculties also work well and in harmony, and his emotions are under full control, he is a harmonised man, he is whole. Only a fully harmonised man can be a mirror of *ṛta* and perform his proper function in accordance with the divine decrees. So again we find the prayer:

"May we be free, (may we be) sons of freedom, (may we be) a stronghold midst gods and mortals, O ye Vasus".<sup>248</sup>

In a *pāda* which recurs as a refrain throughout Rgv.X.100 the poet claims his choice for "freedom and wholeness". J. Gonda offers the following explanation:

"It seems possible to take this line (*ā sarvatātim aditim vṛṇīmahe*) as containing an explanation or qualification of *sarvatāti*: 'we entreat a safe and sound condition', *aditi-* (freedom, free scope ...) the wish: may we be, or remain, uninjured, is ... extended by the prayer for 'free scope ... unimpeded by distress, indigence' ..."<sup>249</sup>

*Sarvatāti* points to the total integration of the human being.

We may have in this contrast between *amhas*<sup>250</sup> anguish, constriction and *varivas*, space, free scope, bliss, or *aditi*, freedom, a glimpse into the Vedic conception of sin. The physical condition of anguish is used as a vivid, metaphoric image to describe the psychological state of sin: sin is constricting, in some subtle sense it means imprisonment, hence the "fettering" of the human being in so far as his choice of right action is concerned; by "fettering" himself he has forfeited his right to choose, to know the truth, to be free. Righteousness implies expansion to the light, hence space, broadness, freedom, hence the many aspirations to the light. It is an opening to a vaster dimension, a harmony of one's whole being with the cosmic *ṛta*, an integration in the universal harmony. It is truth. This alone can lead to wholeness. Truth, integrity, in the human being, are expressions of his wholeness. They are the moral equivalent of harmony. They are *ṛta* as it applies to human norms. Hence the prayers for freedom and light. Light means enlightenment. The latter grants supreme understanding. This conduces to right action, hence harmony, integration in the vast whole. This is truth.

The "incomparable share" which the poet claims from Aditi seems to be Aditi's light.<sup>251</sup> On this light the poet would meditate:

"Let us meditate on that beneficent light of Aditi and the praise of Savitr, the god who fosters the *ṛta*".<sup>252</sup>



This light cannot be obstructed (*anarva*), over it the evil-minded (*aghasamsa*) has no power:

"the enemy has no hold over those to whom Aditi's sons give their eternal light to live".<sup>254</sup>

It is evident that those who live in accordance with the light of the gods, who follow their ordinances (*vrata*) in the harmony of the *ṛta*, can fear no adverse consequences:

"For the righteous one sweet blows the breeze sweet flow the oceans".<sup>255</sup>

As pointed out by H. Lefever

"... prosperity is the reward but not the goal of right-doing".<sup>256</sup>

### III.3.8 Varuna and the fetters of sin

Varuna's role as that of the controller<sup>257</sup> and the binder (*paśin*) is of paramount importance in the examination of the Vedic conception of sin. Being the ruler of the cosmic waters<sup>258</sup> which seem to be the primordial substance out of which the universe is fashioned,<sup>259</sup> he is described as the "mysterious ocean",<sup>260</sup> the "support of the worlds"<sup>261</sup> "in whom is all wisdom".<sup>262</sup> As he encompasses all creation,<sup>263</sup> he has control over all, he "binds" all and thereby brings back the sinner unto the right path, or restrains those who would stray away.<sup>264</sup>

The word Varuna is taken by most scholars to be derived from the root  $\sqrt{vr}$  to cover, encompass. This root also yields *vrtra* who also encompasses. A.B. Keith draws attention to this fact. Referring to the word Varuna, he writes:

"It seems naturally to be derived from the root  $\sqrt{vr}$ , cover, so that the first meaning would be the coverer or encompasser ... If so, the parallel and contrast with *Vrtra* are interesting. It is possible that it originally was an epithet of the sky as the all-encompassing."<sup>265</sup>

With regard to *vrtra*, A A Macdonell makes the following point:

"There can be no doubt that the word *vr-tra* is derived from the root *vr* 'to cover or encompass'. Poets several times speak of *vrtra* as having encompassed the waters, *apo varivāmsam* (2.14.2 etc.) or *vrtvi* (1.52.6) or as being an encompasser of rivers, *nadī-vrt* (1.52.2; 8.12.26. cf. 6.30.4; 7.21.3). These are clearly allusions to the etymology of the name".<sup>266</sup>

A play upon the etymology of the word seems to be present in Rgv. III.34.3 where Indra is said to have "encompassed the encompasser" (*vrtram avṛnot*).

A Bergaigne,<sup>267</sup> E. Benveniste<sup>268</sup> and L. Renou<sup>268</sup> are also of the opinion that *vrtra* is derived from  $\sqrt{vr}$  and Bergaigne, in his exhaustive study of Rgvedic religion, comes to the conclusion that there has been at times a real "confusion" between this demon (*vrtra*) and certain gods such as *Tvaṣṭṛ* and Varuna

"whose names seem to have had, at least in the eyes of the Rishis, the same etymologic sense as that of *Vrtra*."<sup>267</sup>

We do not believe in a "confusion" between the two entities, Varuṇa and Vr̥tra, but an overlapping of functions and characteristics, an overlapping which somewhat tends to blur the outlines of each individuality; but the Vedic gods (and demons) are neither wholly personal nor wholly impersonal. Furthermore, Bergaigne sees in R̥gv. IV.42, a hymn where Varuṇa and Indra are made to expose their claim to superiority,

"... besides the idea of rivalry between Varuṇa and Indra ending in the latter's triumph, a more or less clear allusion to certain similar characteristics between the divine person of Varuṇa and the demonic person of Vr̥tra." <sup>270</sup>

Both Varuṇa and Vr̥tra encompass, restrain, check, though each in a different way, the one putting a check upon transgressions, thereby in due course restoring harmony or order through his very checking and encompassing, the other obstructing the free flow of the divine life or waters of existence <sup>271</sup> thereby causing friction and conflict. We are faced here with personifications of two relative forces of the universe that, in human eyes, work for the greater or lesser good. Yet it should be observed that restraint and expansion, friction and its surmounting, are needed in the universe and work in accordance with the law, so that the values of good and bad attributed to these forces are, in the last analysis, purely human and subjective.

In a rather enigmatic *pāda* Varuṇa claims:

"I rule over man's highest vesture" <sup>272</sup>

The keyword, *vavri*, given by O. Böhtlingk and R. Rudolf as "Versteck, Hütle, Gewand" <sup>273</sup>, refers to a highest place of concealment or covering of man over which Varuṇa is king, which may be not only "heaven" but what was later to be explained as a *kośa*, or "sheath", "covering", in the fourfold division of the human constitution of the Upaniṣads (cf. *ananda māyā kośa*). The very word "highest" in the R̥gvedic verse hints that there must be several such "coverings" <sup>274</sup>. The fact that Varuṇa rules over this highest vesture might mean that his is the last veil that conceals the innermost core of the human being. Varuṇa not only encompasses the universe, but also man whom he covers with his supreme veil, the purpose being to shelter man from the too great effulgence that lies in his very core <sup>\*</sup>. On the other hand, Vr̥tra holds back the waters of life or hides the sun and Vāta holds hidden the cows or rays of light which the warrior god Indra releases after much effort. In the one case we glimpse the protective end of covering, in the other the inertia (*tamas*) of nature - obstruction, friction, darkness - which, translated in mythological terms, becomes the selfishness of demons.

Mitra and Varuṇa <sup>275</sup> are described as peerless controllers, as "equipped with reins", with their own arms checking the people or pulling them in, as it were, with reins. <sup>276</sup> But they bind "with bonds not made of cords" <sup>277</sup>

a verse which gives away the figurative meaning of their action. They are the <sup>278</sup> binders of *anṛta*.  
<sup>\*</sup> cf. R̥gv. VIII. 6.10; I. 164.21. Yjv. 31.18.

Varuna's fetter or noose (*pāśa*), that power to fetter which is peculiarly his (*varuṇya*), is dreaded by the sinner who implores to be released from the *pāśa*.<sup>277</sup> The latter is really the symbolic expression of the effect of the disturbance of *ṛta*.<sup>280</sup> H. Lefever remarks:

"This fetter is not to be understood here as merely the punishment which Varuṇa inflicts on those who break his laws. It is the direct effect of the sinful action which disturbs the *ṛta*. In a sense it is a sin which enchains the sinner by the inevitable operation of cosmic Law. Since all wrong action, conscious or not, is a breach of this law, the reason for his bondage will not always be apparent to the sinner (cf. VII. 86.4-5). Therefore it seemed at times as though the Gods were actually deceiving men, tripping them up unawares."<sup>281</sup>

The human reaction is always to blame *the other*, in this case the gods, instead of oneself. So the Adityas are said to deceive the wicked and the unwary who are blind to their own misdeeds and weaknesses and, when punished and thereby brought to their senses, accuse the gods of having deceived them!

In human eyes, the great Aditya, Varuṇa, son of freedom (*aditi*), punishes by fettering (*pāśa*), i.e. the effect of going against the law which he embodies results in man's having to suffer the opposite of the god's essence which is freedom. In taking up his stand against established law, the cosmic order, man binds himself to disorder, chooses bondage as against freedom. In Varuṇa we see the expression of two possible ways which describe man's choice: freeing and fettering - hence his apparent "dark" as well as "light" side, only in regard to man's evaluation of light and dark, good and evil. Hence his "ambivalence", to use Renou's own expression.

The "bonds of *anṛta*" (*anṛtasya setū*) are "equipped with many nooses" (*bhūri pāśau*), "difficult to overcome" (*duratyetū*) for "the evil mortal".<sup>282</sup> Retribution comes in the shape of "nooses" or "avengers":

"At every step are bonds equipped with nooses".<sup>283</sup>

"Avengers follow the falsehoods of men".<sup>284</sup>

In two passages the *pāśa* itself is described as triple, though the meaning of this threefold bond is not explained anywhere:

"Untie the uppermost fetter from us O Varuṇa, the lowest, the midmost; may we then O Aditya, in accordance with thine ordinance belong, in all purity, to Aditi."<sup>285</sup>

"Release us from the upper noose, loosen us from the midmost and the lowest, that we may live."<sup>286</sup>

These two verses should be compared with the verse referring to Brhaspati seeking light amidst the darkness, driving the herds concealed in the "bond of *anṛta*" (*anṛtasya setau*), "above one, below two, opening up the three" [doors?] as he releases the rays of light<sup>287</sup> through the three levels of manifestation.

<sup>288</sup>

The legend of Sunahṣepa bound to three posts is also brought to mind.

(Rgv. I. 163)

In the highly allegorical hymn of the horse, the steed is described as being bound by three bonds (*bhandhanāni*) in heaven, three in the waters and three within the ocean. At the highest level, the sacrificial horse appears, to the bard, as Varuṇa. He is thus an image of the godhead pervading the threefold universe. Just as the cosmos, in Vedic conception, as well as man the microcosmos, are threefold - in the case of the cosmos, earth, the intermediate realm (*antarikṣa*) and heaven, in the case of man, the physical, the psycho-mental and spiritual - so the threefold bond might apply to an analogous division in each of which man may fetter himself through his own action, the fettering at one level reacting upon the other levels. But the fetters may also be an image of the "covering" which hides the next level of reality from human view. Only when these three coverings are lifted through righteous living, when these three fetters are untied, can human vision be pure, single, can "we, in all purity, belong to Aditi", i.e. be free.<sup>289</sup>

The fetters of Varuṇa, described as such because typical of the effect of transgressions against Varuṇa's statutes, are imposed upon humans as well as unclasped not only by Mitra and Varuṇa but also by other deities.<sup>(cf. Rv. X. 85. 24)</sup> Agni is asked to

"loose from us the bonds that bind us".<sup>290</sup>

Since he is the "knower of Varuṇa"<sup>291</sup> it is trusted that he will appease the latter's anger and

"release from us all hatred".<sup>292</sup>

R. T. H. Griffith translates this line as

"remove thou far from us all those who hate us",<sup>293</sup>

thus giving a somewhat different meaning. The freeing from all types of hatred credits Agni with the power to release the human being from impurities which arouse Varuṇa's anger, but can be removed either through Agni's intercession (by way of the sacrificial ritual)<sup>294</sup> or through Varuṇa's mercy, as the case might be. So Agni

"shall protect us from Varuṇa's chastisement, from the great god's chastisement".<sup>295</sup>

Similarly, Rudra and Soma are asked to

"... be merciful to us, release us from the noose of Varuṇa, in your graciousness protect us."<sup>296</sup>

Varuṇa's fetter seems to entail death or disease. Thus the poet entreats:

"Be thou not displeased O Varuṇa; attend thou here, O thou praised-by-many; do not steal away from us our span of life."<sup>297</sup>

"Whatever ordinance of thine, do we, as men, daily transgress, O God Varuṇa, deliver us not to the fatal slayer, to the fury of thine hostile wrath."<sup>298</sup>

The Atharvaveda goes so far as to say:

"There is no escape from King Varuṇa (even) for whosoever would creep further away from the sky." 299

Varuṇa stands undecelvable (*adabdhah*)<sup>300</sup> and is implored not to strike mortals with his dread weapons that wound the sinner.<sup>301</sup> Reading the human heart as he does he is asked to liberate man from the distress (*amhas*) of speaking untruth.<sup>302</sup> Falsehood constricts psychologically and thereby prevents man from expanding. He closes instead of opening himself to the divine influences. Falsehood brings in its train cheating, deception, fear, all of which darken human vision. The latter, when freed from these constricting ills, is pure and able to catch the subtler hues of truth.

Repentance and longing for wholeness which is the sign of mental health are also evidenced in the following verses:

"If in our wantonness we have violated whatever-you-have-laid-down-as-law (*dhārma*), for that offense, O God, do not harm us" 303

"O that we be found guiltless in the presence of Varuṇa who is merciful even to him who commits sin, as we accomplish Aditi's laws." 304

From the previous examples it is clear that Varuṇa is not merely the Lord who chastises but he who also shows mercy to the repentant sinner, the wise one who stands nearby in times of stress,<sup>305</sup> the friend to whom one may talk. To Varuṇa pardon is asked for trespasses<sup>306</sup> whether committed by one's self or by others,<sup>307</sup> his favour is entreated to loosen the sinner from his sin as from a rope<sup>308</sup> that men may succeed in finding the "aperture of ṛta",<sup>309</sup> hence open their consciousness to the significance and implications of the divine order and thereby live accordingly.

Varuṇa's "healing remedies are countless";<sup>310</sup> they are the gift of life. He is indeed asked to "prolong our lives for us".<sup>311</sup> There is always hope, through prayer and offering<sup>312</sup> that his wrath should subside, that his

"good disposition should spread far and penetrate deep".<sup>313</sup>

The words *sumati* (good disposition) and *mṛṭika* (favour) or mercy are distinctive epithets used in connection with Varuṇa.<sup>314</sup> He is the great Lord before whom the penitent is powerless, yet keeps hoping. This whole attitude is summed up thus:

"O Varuṇa keep dread far away from me; O Sovereign, holy Lord, be favourable to me. Like cords from a calf, release this distress from me. Without thee I am not even lord of my eye's winking." 315

This verse could be compared to Rgv.V.85.8 where there is no question of standing in awe of Varuṇa. He is simply asked to cast off those sins committed with intent or without knowing, like loosened fetters and "let us be dear to you" (*priyāsaḥ*).<sup>316</sup> Elsewhere the deliverance from *anṛta* or wrong-doing is ascribed to Varuṇa as though to his compassion:

"Our wrong-doing which faultless Varuṇa perceived, the wise one has certainly delivered us from it." 317

Forgiveness and retribution, opposites though they may appear, find their resolution in human change of heart.

### III.3.9 The rôle of *nirṛti* in the cosmic order

The question of the meaning of *nirṛti*,<sup>318</sup> dissolution, and its place in the R̥gvedic vision of cosmic order is still moot. In a prayer addressed to Varuna, the worshipper implores:

"Far from us, far away drive thou destruction".<sup>319</sup>

The word *nirṛti*<sup>320</sup> has been taken in opposition to *ṛta* but its connotation is different from that of *anṛta*, the latter meaning disorganisation in the sense of disorder, the former, i.e. *nirṛti*, meaning disorganisation in the sense of dissolution and therefore destruction. *Nirṛti* has its rôle to play in the vast scheme of becoming; within certain bounds it also forms part of the ordained course of existence since transformation involves both building and dissolving of outworn forms. But gods (and men) do not stand on this side of the cosmic process, although they may have to resort to destruction to serve the ends of construction. Thus Indra's slaying of Vṛtra results in the release of the waters of life, the generation of the dawns, the setting on high of the sun and, in so far as man is concerned, the granting of freedom.<sup>321</sup> The rendering powerless of the forces of inertia or obstruction served the higher purposes of the forces of evolution. J. Gonda observes that Agni, the *gopa ṛtasya* is asked to burn the *rakṣas*

"for maintenance of the fundamental order implies destruction of demoniac beings".<sup>322</sup>

Similarly Agni's fetters (*bandharāsaḥ*) await "those who drink from the cup of *anṛta*"

or, "those who protect the seat of *anṛta*" as the same verse could be translated.<sup>323</sup>

*Nirṛti* does not seem to be completely identified with death in the R̥gveda though in many passages it may be so taken, but it appears to be so in post-R̥gvedic literature. It is rather the process of disintegration that sets in after the severance of life and body has occurred. It seems therefore to signify and indeed personify the forces of disintegration that go against the ordered "lay out" or organisation (*ṛta*) of the universe, the process of decomposition that sets in when life is withdrawn from a body, the forces of putrefaction both physical and moral, those forces of disorder that are in constant conflict with those of construction and order, both in the universe and in the human constitution, forces which, in the latter case, take over completely and cause the annihilation of the physical frame as such after death.<sup>324</sup> *Nirṛti* thus represents the R̥gvedic conception of that tendency

prevalent in nature towards disorder and disintegration - a direct effect of the discontinuous structure of matter - which modern physics translates in terms of the laws of degradation and measures through what it calls entropy.<sup>325</sup> *Nirṛti* may then be a personification of what we would now call the law of degradation.

Such forces are also prevalent in the moral sphere. This state of decomposition can be viewed from both a physical and a moral point of view. The following verse could be read with this dual meaning in mind:

"Let not baneful *nirṛti* rule over us".<sup>326</sup>

Similarly, the verse already quoted, "far from us drive thou destruction"<sup>327</sup> could simply imply the fear of death, the wish for long life which is so typical of the *Ṛgveda*, but as it is followed by the plea

"free us from the sin we have committed"<sup>328</sup>

the moral overtone and the fear of retribution cannot be ignored. In this particular case *nirṛti* could personify the forces of moral disintegration that eventually destroy the human being, if allowed to run riot.<sup>329</sup>

*Nirṛti* appears in two enigmatic verses discussed by L. Renou in his "*Védique nirṛti*"<sup>330</sup> in an attempt to penetrate into the deeper meaning of this conception. In the first example, that which causes multiplicity is itself said to be subject to dissolution. This according to L. Renou seems to be the breath which ceaselessly gives birth to itself, through its own disappearance and reforming:

"Whoever has made it does not know it  
 whoever has seen it surely is hidden from it.  
 He encompassed, within his mother's womb, source  
 of much progeny, has entered into dissolution."<sup>331</sup>

According to L. Renou the problem

"... concerns an entity which 'hidden in the bosom of the mother, has penetrated into *nirṛti* whilst having numerous progeny'. This must be the breath which, having come back to its original point, abolishes itself whilst ceaselessly giving birth to other breaths. *Nirṛti* is here the apparent cessation of activity, a rupture of organic circuit (*rta*)."<sup>332</sup>

This stanza could have a cosmological as well as a human implication. The first *pāda* brings to mind the last verse of *Ṛg.X.129.7*:

"Whence this creation originated; whether He caused it to be or not,  
 He who in the highest empyrean surveys it He alone knows, or else  
 even He knows not".<sup>333</sup>

Even "He" who is ultimately responsible for the fashioning of this universe may not know the ultimate origin of this universe, and even if He surveys it, its essence may be hidden away from Him. The secret of secrets is locked up in the Absolute. In the case of *Ṛg.V.1.164.32*, at the cosmological level, the mother's womb may refer to Aditi in whose lap hides the seed of the universe, source of progeny,<sup>334</sup> this word signifying activity, and activity birth, growth and dissolution: to enter into activity is to enter into the realm of

dissolution, *nirṛti*, to create and to abolish. This is indeed part of the eternal rhythm, hence *ṛta*. At the human level, the one who is the cause of the birth of the child does not know the secret behind this birth, even the eternal signs cannot help unravel the ultimate secret of the *momentum* and the *modus operandi*. The seed is source of progeny but must itself die as such in order to become that which it contains in essence, hence enters the realm of dissolution in order to give birth to itself. As hinted in Rgv.X.114.2 these forces of destruction which are at the root of the universe can themselves teach the ṛṣis the secret of life and death.

The second enigmatic passage examined by L Renou may be translated thus:

"Those oblation-bearers who discern them, as they are heard from time immemorial, serve the three *nirṛtis* for instruction. The sages have perceived the connecting link (*nidāna*) of these within the secret and remote inroads (of the universe)."<sup>335</sup>

The forces of dissolution are here admitted to be inherent in the very structure of the

universe which is the field of compounded elements and therefore of construction as well as destruction, both being aspects of the course of things, or order, *ṛta*; though from man's point of view, construction and order stand for *ṛta*, the right, whereas destruction and disorder stand for *anṛta*, the wrong, it is obvious that metaphysically, the problem is far more complex. From a wider standpoint, the forces of organisation and of disorganisation equally express the established order as a balance between two opposite tendencies, the balance and its keeping being *ṛta*. Birth, growth, death, decay, the breaking up of forms into their component elements, the disintegration which affects every structure, all proceed in accordance with law; this is the vast becoming of the universe, the eternal transformation that characterises manifestation, or the universe to which the ṛṣis referred to as *viśvam bhuvanam, jagat* or *tat sarvam*.<sup>336</sup> The above quoted verse seems to imply that the sages hear the ever repeated sound emitted by those forces of destruction and discover their *raison d'être* in the very law of manifestation to which they are subservient. Hence the priests serve these *nirṛtis* for the sake of receiving enlightenment into the secrets of the universe, into the forces of involution and evolution. L Renou explains the meaning of the verse thus:

"These three *nirṛtis* are those factors of entropy ... the forces of rupture of the *ṛta* on the various levels where Vedic speculation moves; celestial, aerial, terrestrial space ... divine, ritual, human activity - a de-structuring power, the polar counterpart of the great positive entities of Vedic thought."<sup>337</sup>

A further example of this "destructuring power" that has its deep *raison d'être* in the universal economy may be seen in a description of the Maruts as

"pounding the two worlds with their mightiness as from the point of dissolution and the pillarless-region they reach out to the firmament!"<sup>338</sup>

<sup>339</sup>  
Nāka, the "painless world" is heaven. *Nirṛti* is taken by the commentators



as *bhūmi* the earth, the world of the transient; *avamsam*, that which has no beam or support is identified with *antarikṣa*, the "middle region" between heaven and earth. The Maruts take in their stride the realm of dissolution, the terrestrial, the firmament or the mid-region as well as heaven which in this case is *nāka*. But is there here another meaning to *nirrti*? Is the point of dissolution the *Jaya* centre, or critical stage of transformation from one state of being to another, from one *loka* to another? From that point of dissolution they reappear at another level, thereby contributing to the constant transformation of these three basic *lokas* which form the universe. We can only surmise.

From dissolution comes new life, through that power that is both dissolving and re-solving the world is constantly being transformed, born anew: the seed grows through the dark soil, the embryo in the dark womb. Likewise man grows, from darkness to more and more light, from ignorance to wider and deeper knowledge. Even sin is an experience out of the darkness of which he emerges to claim his birthright. The cosmic order is the dynamics of becoming and man its epitome.

### III.3.10: Man's confrontation with himself

This third level of the Vedic vision of *rta*, shows us puny man confronting himself: his possibilities and his limitations, his aspirations and hopes, his inadequacy and complacency; his humility and pride, his hopes and despair; fears and joys; suffering and exultation; self-betrayal and doubts; his revolt and his submission; his realisation of his inherent freedom and power to know, and his claim to his divine birthright, to choose freedom; in a word, his role in the vast scheme of the universe in which he finds himself seemingly caught up for better or worse as though in the cogs of an ever revolving wheel. And puny man, through this very facing, finding and accepting of himself, comes out magnified.

Rgvedic man probed the human condition, faced its dark and its light side, accepted it as part of the course of things, and firmly placed man as an inherent constituent of the cosmic order which he, as well as the gods, helps to further. The struggles, the pitfalls, the progress and the drawbacks, are all essential steps in the vast field of experience offered by the cosmic order, the means being conflict, the friction of opposite polarities, the end being complete harmony of all the integral parts. At this juncture <sup>man</sup> is the epitome of the darker side of the cosmic order for he stands at that stage where conflict prevails <sup>340</sup> prior to that further stage <sup>9</sup> which the *deva* commands, where harmony has been achieved and the tension between the polarities resolved; but man has

it in himself to become the epitome of the lighter side of the cosmic order, by integrating himself in the harmony, hence of uniting in himself the whole. The search for himself, both outward and inward, was obviously part of Vedic man's vision. The keynote of this search and its result, the bursting of man from his bonds and the call to freedom, is well expressed in a hymn from the Atharvaveda:

"Open yourself, create freespace (*lokam kṛnu*)  
release the bound one from his bonds!  
Like a new born child, freed from the womb,  
be free to move on every path." 34!

1. *puruṣatvatā* (Rgv. IV. 54. 3).
2. *yatra amṛtaṃ ca mṛtyuś ca puruṣo'dhi samāhite* (Athv X. 7. 15)
3. *amṛtatve uttame martam dadhasi* (Rgv I. 31. 7b)
4. cf. Rgv. IV. 12. 4d
5. cf. Rgv. VIII. 48. 4
6. cf. Rgv. VI. 74. 3
7. cf. Rgv. X. 89. 8&9; I. 104. 6; VIII. 45. 34
8. cf. Rgv. X. 35. 3
9. cf. Rgv. I. 23. 22. Athv. XII. 2. 40
10. cf. Rgv. I. 162. 22c; II. 27. 14
11. cf. Rgv. I. 123. 3d; IV. 54. 3; V. 82. 5-6
12. cf. Rgv. VI. 50. 2
13. cf. Rgv. II. 24. 13c
14. *devāso hi śmā manave samanyavo viśve sākam sarātayaḥ* (Rgv. VIII. 27. 4ab)  
Griffith's translation.
15. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p. 24
16. *hrtsu kratuṃ varuṇo ... adadhāt* (Rgv. V. 85. 2). "Varuṇa placed kratu in hearts."
17. "Vision" 1963. p. 277
18. *vyurnoti hrḍā matim navyo jāyatām ṛtam.* (Rgv. I. 105. 15cd)
19. *rtena mahi*
20. cf. Rgv. II. 29. 1
21. cf. the expression "we men" *viśaḥ* (Rgv. I. 25. 1), *puruṣatvatā* "In our human condition (Rgv. IV. 54. 3); cf. Rgv. X. 15. 6.
22. cf. Rgv. VII. 86. 5.
23. cf. Rgv. VII. 86. 6
24. cf. *pipartu mā tad ṛtasya pravācanaṃ devānām yan manuṣyā amanmahi* (Rgv. X. 35. 8)  
"promote this my proclaiming of the law of gods as we humans recognise it."
25. cf. Rgv. III. 59. 2b, 3c; 60. 6cd
26. cf. Rgv. I. 83. 5; IV. 1. 13ab
27. *dadrśra eṣām avamā sadāmsi pareṣu yā guhyeṣu vratesu* (Rgv. III. 54. 5cd)
28. *parṣi naḥ param aṃhasaḥ svasti.* (Rgv. II. 33. 3c).
29. *ṛtasya mitrāvaruṇā pathā vām apo na nāvā durita tarema.* (Rgv. VII. 65. 3cd)
30. *viśvāni no durgahā jātavedaḥ sindhum na nāvā duritāti parṣi.* (Rgv. V. 4. 9ab)
31. *rathaṃ na durgād vasavas sudānavo viśvasmān no aṃhaso niṣpipartana* (Rgv. I. 106. 1cd)  
cf. also Rgv. X. 133. 6 "Let us clasp Indra's friendship" (*sakhitvam ārabhāmahe*)  
"that by the path of ṛta it may guide us beyond all misfortunes (*ṛtasya naḥ pathā nayāti viśvāni duritā.*)"
32. *sugā ṛtasya panthāh.* (Rgv. VIII. 31. 13c)
33. cf. Rgv. X. 66. 5d: *sārma no yaṃsan trivarūtham aṃhasaḥ.* "Grant us a threefold protecting shelter from distress."
34. *te hi putrāso aditer vidur dveṣāmsi yotave aṃhoś cid urucakrayo anehasaḥ*  
(Rgv. VIII. 18. 5)
35. *na hanyate na jiyate tuoto naimam aṃho aśnoty-antito na dūrāt.* (Rgv. III. 59. 2cd)  
cf. Rgv. X. 133. 6.
36. *yan nūnam aśyāṃ gatim mitrasya yāyāṃ pathā asya priyasya sārmany-ahimsānasya saścire.* (Rgv. V. 64. 3). cf. Rgv. VIII. 47 which is a plea for the incomparable protection of the Adityas and a fine specimen of human trust in the gods' protection. cf. also Rgv. II. 23. 4&6 & II. 26. 4.
37. *kad va ṛtam kad anṛtam.* (Rgv. I. 105. 5cd)
38. *kva ṛtam pūrvyam gatam kas tad bibharti nūtanō.* (Rgv. I. 105. 4cd).
39. *yad-dha tyan-mitrāvaruṇāv-ṛtād-adhy-ādadhāthe anṛtam svena manyunā.* (Rgv. I. 139. 2ab)  
J. Gonda "Vision" 1963. p. 69. Some interpretations of this ambiguous verse are so ingenious that they should be mentioned: cf. Deo Prakash Patanjali Shastri's explanation: "In the present context of Mitra (Hydrogen) and Varuṇa (Oxygen), ṛta can mean nothing else but 'water'. Now, in view of the statement of the mantra, that Mitra and Varuṇa take or bring (*ādadhā*) 'an-ṛta' out of 'ṛta' by their own energy, we have to decide what form of water is 'ṛta' and what is 'anṛta'. We know that the elements are eternal and therefore, they are 'Satya'

(fr.  $\sqrt{\text{as}}$  to be, i.e. ever-existent, and their molecules which form different objects are non-eternal because they do not exist eternally. Hence the elemental stage of matter is called 'ṛta' and non-elemental 'anṛta' which denotes their creative function. The gods Mitra and Varuṇa convert the 'ṛta' elements into 'anṛta' i.e. water in its liquid form by their energy i.e. union."

(A critical study of R̥gveda (I.137.-163). 1963. p.84)

40. *ava atiratam anṛtāni viśva ṛtena mitrāvaruṇā ā sacethe* (R̥gv. I.152.1cd)

41. *ṛtam piparti.*

42. *anṛtam ni tārit.*

43. "Un hymne à énigmes du R̥gveda." (Journal de psychologie. 1949) p.270.

(Trans. J.M.). cf. also R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience". 1977. p.61-2

"The cosmic pillar".

44. cf. R̥gv. X.67.4; II.24.3; I.33.10.

45. *gā guhā tiṣṭhantīr-anṛtasya setau*

*brhaspatis tamasi jyotir-ichann ud usrā ākar ...* (R̥gv. X.67.4bcd). Only a portion of this stanza is examined here.

46. cf. R̥gv. II.24.3; X.68.8-11.

47. R̥gv. X.68.9.

48. *jyotiṣmantam ratham ṛtasya tiṣṭhasi.* (R̥gv. II.23.3b)

49. *prācodayat sudughā vavre antar-vi jyotiṣā sam vavṛtvat tamo avah.* (R̥gv. V.31.3cd)

50. R̥gv. III.39.5d.

51. R̥gv. III.39.7a.

52. cf. R̥gv. VI.21.3 and J. Gonda's comment: "Indra is stated to have given, by means of the sun, marks to the extensive darkness which is devoid of marks ... that is to say: he has modified the state of primeval darkness in which no distinctions ... could be perceived into the visible ... world, the components of which can be distinguished, and in which time can be measured." ("Epithets in the R̥gveda." 1959. p.137).

53. e.g. the Paṇis conceal their treasure, Vṛtra holds back the flow of the vital waters.

54. Athv. IV.10.5. A similar idea is expressed in R̥gv. I.23.19 where "immortality and healing balm" are said to be "present in the waters" of space. (*Apsu antar amṛtam apsu bheṣajam apām uta.*) The sun itself, which in many verses is described as hidden in mountain caverns, is said to be lying hidden in the billowy deeps (*samudra ā gūlham ā sūryam.* R̥gv. X.72.7). cf. Sat. Br. 5.5.5.1-5 quoted on p.49. note 44.

55. "The Religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads." vol. 31. 1925. p.104.

56. It is only when "marks", to use J. Gonda's expression have been given to darkness that it becomes apprehensible by the human mind. This is the task of the gods.

57. *avindat divo nihitam guhā nidhim verna garbham parivitam aśmani anante antar aśmani.* (R̥gv. I.130.3ab)

58. R̥gv. II.24.6. For trans. see p.119.

59. R̥gv. II.24.7.

60. *... vi durah pañinām punāno arkam purubhojasam nah.* (R̥gv. VII.9.2ab)

61. *avindatam jyotir-ekam bahubhyāḥ.* R̥gv. I.93.4d.

62. "Védique nirṛti." (*Indian Linguistics.* vol. 16. 1955) p.11. (Trans. J.M.)

When Indra is represented as having prospered and acquired much delight through human prayer he is asked not to be a paṇis (*mā pañir-bhūḥ*) R̥gv. II.33.3); not to withhold from man the treasure that has come to light from within him.

63. *divas putrā aṅgirasō bhavema adriṃ rujema dhaninam śucantaḥ.* (R̥gv. IV.2.15cd)

cf. O.T. Isaiah: "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places." (45:3). cf. also Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11 and Deut. 8:15.

64. R̥gv. X.67.4

65. "The R̥gvedic antecedents of the Dharma-pāśa of Varuṇa in the Mahābhārata" (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol. 5. 1943) p.194.

66. *kaḍ va ṛtam kaḍ anṛtam* (R̥gv. I.105.5cd.)

67. *pāpāsaḥ santo anṛtā asatyā.* (Rgv.IV.5.5c) "the sinful are false, untruthful".
68. *ya ṛtasāpaḥ satyāḥ* (Rgv.VI.50.2c)
69. "Religions of ancient India." 1953.p.19-20.
70. *trīr-yātudhānaḥ prasitiṃ ta etv-ṛtaṃ yo agne anṛtena hanti.* (Rgv.X.87.11ab)
71. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.9.
72. cf. Rgv.I.152.1
73. *anṛtasya bhūreḥ* (Rgv.VII.60.5)
74. *madhye satya anṛte avapacyaṣṭ janānām.* (Rgv.VII.60.5)
75. *ṛtena ... anṛtaṃ vivincan* (Rgv.X.124.5c)
76. cf. N.T. Math.VI.12: "forgive us our debts".
77. *ṛnāni cayamānāḥ* (Rgv.II.27.4d). cf. Rgv.IV.23.7; X.89.8.
78. Sin is stated to be committed in ignorance or in sleep as well as in knowledge. cf. Rgv.X.164.3; 12.5.
79. *na janā minanti mitram.* (Rgv.X.89.8c)
80. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.33.
81. *māhaṃ rājann anyākṛtena bhojam.* (Rgv.II.28.9b)
82. *mā vo bhujema anyātjātam eno mā tat karma vasavo yac cayadhve.* (Rgv.VII.52.2cd) cf. Rgv.VI.51.7a.
83. "The conception of sin in the Vedās." (Festschrift Moriz Winternitz, 1865-1933) p.141
84. *ava drugdhāni pitryā srjā no ava yā vyaṃ cakṛmā tanubhiḥ.* (Rgv.VII.86.5a) cf. O.T. Exodus 20:5: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."
86. op. cit. p.33-4. cf. p.14: "The conviction of a world order, to which all things and in particular all men had to submit, deprived an extreme individualism of the right to set itself against the whole. The moral imperative thus receives its sanction from the law and order of the entire universe."
85. op.cit. p.141-2
87. See Rgv.II.29.5 which shows a purely personal relationship between the sinner and the gods.
88. The question of karma is bound up with the problem of reincarnation into which we will not enter besides pointing out that this idea seems to be expressed in Rgv.IV.54.2. See K. Werner. "The Vedic concept of human personality and its destiny." (Journal of Indian philosophy. 5. 1978). p.286-7 and J. Miller. "The Vedās." 1974. p.184. ff.
89. *yathā kāmo bhavati tat kratuḥ-bhavati yat kratuḥ-bhavati tat karma kurute yat karma kurute tad abhisampadyate.* (Brh.Up.4.4.5) cf. Brh.Up. 3.2.13.
90. "Ethics of India." 1924.p.43-4.
91. "Ṛta and the law of karma." 10th Oriental Conference, Tirupati. 1940.p.26.
92. "Karma and reincarnation in Hindu religion and philosophy." 1927.p.6-7.
93. "The Vedic experience." London. 1977.p.540
94. op.cit.p.355
95. cf. e.g. IX.47.2b; II.24.13c; 28.9a
96. *saṃgacḥasva ... iṣṭāpūrtena.*
97. *hitvāya avadyam.*
98. "Religion and philosophy of the Veda." 1925.p.250.
99. cf. J. Gonda's discussion that *karma* in certain contexts does not express the idea of "good deed, benefaction", or "righteousness" but "that of the lasting merit ... of the correct performance of the ritual acts - of e.g. RV.29.8 ... This idea runs ... in the ritual sphere of Vedism parallel with ... what in later times ... is ... called a man's good karman which, being the fruit of his deeds, i.e. of the correct performance of his socio-religious obligations, determines his future situation viz. a sojourn in heaven and a rebirth in a good position." ("Loka." 1966. p.125-6.)
- 00 I 00. "Loka." 1966. p.123.
- 01 I 01. *saṃgacḥasva pitrbhiḥ saṃ Yamena iṣṭāpūrtena parame vyoman hitvāyāvadyam punar-astam ehi saṃgacḥasva tanvā suvarcāḥ.* (Athv.XVIII.3.58)

02102. punar Rgv.X.14.8 and Athv.XVIII.3.58
03103. anudeyī yatha abhavat.
04104. yathā abhavat anudeyī tato agram ajāyata.  
purustād budhna ātataḥ pāścān nirayaṇam kṛtam.  
the meaning of *purustāt* is given as: before, in front, in the beginning, or from the East, the East denoting entrance into life; in other words, as the seed was sown - the ground *budhna* of everyday experience - so will the way out be contrived, *pāścāt*: from behind, in the rear, in the West, the West meaning departure from this life.
105. adabdhāsaḥ (Rgv.VI.67.5)
106. Rgv.VIII.28.9
107. Rgv.II.27.3
108. Rgv.VII.61.5
109. Rgv.I.25.13
110. Rgv.VII.34.10
111. Rgv.VIII.41.7
112. Rgv.VI.51.2 cf. Rgv.IV.1.17d
113. granthim na vi śya grathitam ... rjūm ca gātum vrjinam ca soma (Rgv.IX.97.18ab)
114. op.cit.p.26.
115. cf. Rgv.I.90.6
116. pāpāsaḥ santo anṛtā asatyā idaṃ padam ajanatā gabhīram. (Rgv.IV.5.5cd)
117. "La religion védique." 1883. tome III.p.159. (Trans. J.M.)
118. ṛtam ugram.
119. satyaṃ brhad ṛtam ugram dikṣā tapo brahma yajñah pṛthivīm dhārayanti. (Athv.XII.1.1ab)
120. madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu āsaranti sindhavaḥ. (Rgv.I.90.6ab)
121. yatra brahma ca ksatram ca samyañcau carataḥ saha tal lokam punyaṃ prajñesaṃ yatra devāḥ saha agninā. (Yj. XX.25)
122. druhaḥ sacante anṛtā janānām (Rgv.VII.61.5cd) *ṛtasya panthām na taranti duskritah (Rgv. IX. 73. 6d)*
123. "An outline of the religious literature of India." 1967 (1st ed. 1920). p.35.
124. "Religion and philosophy of the Veda." 1925.p.35
125. "Gods and powers." 1957.p.85-6
126. op. cit. p.81
127. "The Religion of the Rigveda." 1923.p.125. cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.483.
128. cf. *abhidroha*, oppression, injury, *repas*, stain, wrong, fault, sin; *kilbiṣa*, offence, sin, guilt, *drugha*, injury, offence, *ripṛa*, impurity, *śamala*, also impurity, sin, blemish, *avadya*, blamable, imperfection.
129. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.26.
130. "Hindu ethics." 1922. p.7. cf. M. Bloomfield "Religion of the Veda" 1908. p.126.
131. "Ethics of India." 1924.p.30
132. "Hindu ethics." 1922.p.7
133. op.cit.p.10-11
134. Rgv.X.27.1
135. Rgv X.10.12
136. Rgv.X.10.6
137. Rgv.X.10.4. cf. Rgv.II.32.2; 42.3; 29.5; I.147.4; VI.12.5; X.34.13; 89.9.
138. sukṛtasya panthām (Rgv.X.71.6d)
139. Rgv.X.117.6
140. cf. Rgv.II.27.7; 33.2; IV.1.4; V.9.6.
141. Bahudam rājan varuṇa anṛtam āhu pūruṣaḥ tasmāt munā nāḥ paryamhasah. (Athv.XIX.44.8).
142. cf. also Rgv.I.147.5
143. cf. Rgv.X.190.1 and Athv.XII.1.1
144. panthām ṛtasya yātave tam imahe. (Rgv.VIII.12.3cd)
145. ṛtam vadann ṛtadyumna satyaṃ vadant satyakarman. (Rgv.IX.113.4ab)
146. satyaṃ vada dharmam cara/satyāt na pramaditavyam. (Tait.Up.I.113.)
147. Muṇḍ.Up.III.1.6
148. Rgv.X.85.1. cf. Athv.XIV.1.1.
149. a) straight (*rju* or *sādhu*), crooked (*vrjina*). cf. Rgv.VI.51.2; IV.1.17; IX.97.18; II.27.3. b) double (or guile, *dvaya*) is opposed to *ṛta*; the gods are guileless (*advayas* Rgv.VIII.18.6) and discriminate between *dvayu* and *advayu* (Rgv.VIII.18.14) c) what is in accordance with *ṛta* is true, *satya*, that which is opposed to it is false, *anṛta*.
149. op. cit. p.31

150. cf. Rgv. X.90  
 151. Chānd. Up. III.17.4  
 152. yad ripraṃ sāmalaṃ cakṛma yac ca duskṛtam  
 āpo mā tasmāc chumbhantu ... (Athv. XII.2.40).  
 153. "La religion védique." 1878-83. tome III. p.158.  
 154. Cf. Rgv. X.117.1-7  
 155. Rgv. X.117.6  
 156. "Ethics of India." 1924. p.25. cf. Rgv. V.82.5&11.28.9  
 157. op. cit. p.26. cf. O.T. exodus 20:5  
 158. "The conception of sin in the Vedas." (Festschrift Moriz Winternitz. 1865-1933.)  
 1933. p.141.  
 159. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.18  
 160. op. cit. 16.  
 161. "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.482-3  
 162. op. cit. 483  
 163. cf. Rgv. I.185.8  
 164. mātur-garbhe (Rgv. VIII.83.8) cf. Rgv. II.29.4a; I.164.30d&38ab.  
 165. cf. Rgv. II.29.4ab  
 166. op. cit. p.21  
 167. op. cit. p.23  
 168. op. cit. p.21  
 169. "Hindu ethics." 1922. p.7  
 170. "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.483  
 171. "The Rig-Veda and Vedic religion." (Christian Literature Society for India. 1913.)  
 p.162  
 172. cf. Rgv. VI.9.5cd  
 173. cf. also Athv. VII.52.1  
 174. "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.854  
 175. Rgv. VII.62.2  
 176. "Ethics of India." 1924. p.44  
 177. satyakti. cf. W.N. Brown. "Duty as truth in the Rgveda." (India Major. 1972) pp.57-67.  
 178.\* H Lüder's contention ("Varuṇa und das Rta." 1959) that rta means truth only is  
 too biased in one single direction. At the cosmological level, Rgv. X.90.1  
 distinguishes between rta and satya, so that one may rather say that rta is  
 the supreme law at the cosmological level, and truth when viewed at the human,  
 moral level.  
 179. rtasya dhitiṃ vrjināni hanti. (Rgv. IV.23.8b). cf. Rgv. I.24.5&25.1-3.  
 180. op. cit. p.61  
 181. Rgv. IX.112.1. cf. verses 2-4.  
 182. The word viś has given rise to controversy. Geographically it means settlement;  
 politically, the viśaḥ were the subjects of a rāṣṭra: socially they represent  
 the third class of Aryan society, the traders and agriculturists. cf. Macdonnell  
 & Keith. "Vedic Index." 1967 (1912) pp.305-7. cf. also J. Gonda. "Triads."  
 1976. p.138.  
 The Aryan varṇa was certainly recognised as such since Indra is mentioned as  
 protecting it against the Dasyus (Rgv. III.34.9)  
 183. brahma jinvatam uta jinvatam dhiyaḥ ksatram jinvatam uta jinvatam nṛn  
 dhenuṃ-jinvatam uta jinvatam viśaḥ. (Rgv. VIII.35.16.17.18) cf. Rgv. I.1136.  
 cf. Yjv. 26.2.  
 184. mahikṣatrāvṛtam brhat. (Rgv. V.68.1b). cf. Rgv. VII.64.2; VIII.67.1.  
 185. brahmāṇam brahmavāhasam gīrbhiḥ sakhāyam ṛgmiyam huve. (Rgv. VI.45.7) "With songs  
 I call on Indra, the brāhman, the forwarder of prayer".  
 186. kuvin mā gopāṃ karasē janasya kuvid rājāṇam maghavan ṛjīsin  
 kuvin mā ṛsim papivāmsam sutasya kuvit me vasō amṛtasya śikṣaḥ. (Rgv. III.43.5.)  
 cf. Athv. XI.32.8.  
 187. Athv. III.17.1. cf. Athv. IV.20.4; XIX.32.8; 62.1 where sūdras are contrasted with  
 āryas. cf. Athv. III.5.6; 15.  
 \*177. cf. Rgv. I.161.9; IV.33.5&6; X.34.12; III.26.9; VII.2.3; III.54.4; X.37.2

188. Rgv. IV.57  
 189. cf Athv. III.24.  
 190. Athv. XIX.32.8. cf. Yjv. 18.48; 26.2  
 191. *rucaṃ no dhehi brāhmaṇeṣu rucaṃ rājasu nas kṛdhi*  
*rucaṃ viśyeṣu śūdreṣu mayi dhehi rucā rucan* (Yjv. 18.48) cf. Yjv. 26.2.  
 192. *yatra brahma ca kṣatram ca samyāncāu carataḥ saha*  
*taṅ-lokaṃ puṇyam prajñeṣam yatra devāḥ saha agninā.* (Yjv. 20.25)  
 193. cf. Athv. III.30: a hymn to concord; VII.52 a hymn for harmony. Rgv. X.191; 101.  
 cf. Yjv. 22.22; 36.17 and Athv. 19.9.  
 194. *na devānām ati vratam sāta ātmā cana jīvati.* (Rgv. X.33.9ab)  
 195. cf. Rgv. X.164.3; 12.5 and 137  
 196. *yad āśasā niḥśasā abhiśasā upārīma jāgrato yat svapantaḥ*  
*agnir-viśvāny-apa duṣkṛtāny-ajustāny-āre asmad dadhātu.* (Rgv. X.164.3) cf. Rgv. VII.57.4.  
 cf. Rgv. X.89.8-9  
 197. *anū vaśa ṛnam ādadiḥ:* "remitting the debt according to his will." (Rgv. II.24.13c)  
 cf. Rgv. II.29.1.  
 199. "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.484  
 200. A parallel case is found in the Greek term *metanoia* (cf. N.T. Luke XIII.3,4,5 and II. Cor. VII.8,9) which means change of mind rather than repentance. Just as *metaphysics* means beyond purely physical science; or *metamorphosis*, a transformation of the structure of the grub into a (completely different) butterfly, so *metanoia* means beyond the present state of mind, a radical change of attitude. The Greek word does not involve pain or sorrow as the English word repentance does. Sorrow or repentance do not necessarily bring about a change of consciousness though they may lead towards it. But it is this change that is emphasised both in the Greek word and the Sanskrit, a radical turning over, bringing about a complete change of attitude. cf. R. Panikkar's view on *repentance* in "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.491.  
 201. *śāśvantaṃ hi pracetasah pratiyantaṃ cid enasah devāḥ kṛnuthā jīvase.* (Rgv. VIII.67.17)  
 202. op. cit. p.33  
 203. *ā sarvatātim aditiṃ vṛṇīmahe.*  
 204. *abhinakṣanto abhi ye tam ānaśur-nidhiṃ pañīnām paramaṃ guhā hitam*  
*te vidvāṃsah praticakṣya anṛtā punar yata u āyan tad ud īyur āviśam.*  
 (Rgv. II.24.6)  
 205. *dhāma paramam* (Rgv. X.181.2)  
 206. *amṛtasya dhāma* (Rgv. IX.97.32)  
 207. The word *Pañi* usually thought of as demons or "niggards" is derived from  $\sqrt{pā}$  which also means to honour, praise, as well as to barter. To the Vedic mind, the *Pañis* sin against generosity in withholding the cows. But it may also be pointed out that to the same Vedic mind those who praise are the wise ones. The ambivalence peculiar to so many Vedic ideas may here also apply though the word has never been so considered. Those who have knowledge of the highest treasure are not likely to part with its secret so lightly, except to those who make the effort (break through the rocky cave to release the cows or rays of light). The whole idea of the *Pañis* should be reconsidered.  
 208. *rtavānaḥ praticakṣya anṛtā punar ā ata ā tasthuḥ kavayo mahas pathaḥ.* Rgv. II.24.7ab)  
 209. *yaḥ śardhate na anudadāti śrdhyām.* (Rgv. II.12.10c)  
 210. cf. N.T. John 1.29; Rev. 1.5; O.T. Ps. ciii.12; 2 Sam. xii.13.  
 211. The conception of the untying of sin as of a fetter will be considered in connection with Varuṇa.  
 212. *vi asmad dveṣo vitaram vi amho vi amivās cātayasvā visūcīḥ.* (Rgv. II.33.2cd)  
 213. *idam āpaḥ pra vahata yat kiṃ ca duritam mayi yad vā aham*  
*abhidudroha yad vā śepa uta anṛtam.* (Rgv. I.23.22)  
 214. cf. Rgv. IX.96.15  
 215. *apaśuc to drive off by flame.* Rgv. I.97.1  
 216. *yac cid hi te puruṣatrā yaviṣṭhā acittibhiś cakṛma kac cid āgaḥ*  
*kṛdhī śva 'smān aditer-anāgān vy-enāmsi śisratho viśvag-agne.* Rgv. IV.12.4.  
 cf. also Rgv. I.31.16; VII.93.7  
 217. *mahaś cid agna enaso abhika ūrvād devānām uta martyānām.* (Rgv. IV.12.5ab)  
 cf. Rgv. III.7.10d.  
 218. *kṛtam cid eno namasā ā vivāse.* (Rgv. VI.51.8d)



219. cf. Rgv.VII.89.5; VIII.47.13; I.185.8; X.35.3; VI.74.3&4; II.33.7; IV.54.3.
220. mā na ekasmīn āgasi mā dvayor-uta triṣu vadhr-mā sūra bhūriṣu. (Rgv.VIII.45.34)
221. adite mitra varuṇa uta mṛṣa yad vo vayan cakrma kac cid āgaḥ. (Rgv.II.27.14)
222. mā nas ... rīriṣaḥ. cf. Rgv.VII.89.5&IV.54.3
223. aryamaṃ varuṇa mitryaṃ vā sakhāyaṃ vā sadam id bhrātaram vā veśaṃ vā nityaṃ varuṇa arāṇaṃ vā yat sīm āgas cakrma śīsrathas tat. (Rgv.V.85.7)
224. cf. Rgv.I.162.22c; II.27.14; VII.93.7.
225. anāgaso aditaye. Rgv.V.82.6
226. adite mitra varuṇa uta mṛṣa yad vo vayan cakrma kac cid āgaḥ uru aśyām abhayaṃ jyotir-indra mā no dīrghā abhi naśan tamisrāḥ. (Rgv.II.27.14)
227. abhayaṃ jyotir-aśyām. (Rgv.II.27.11d)
228. dhārayatksiti. (Rgv.I.136.3)
229. rtāvā. Rgv.VIII.25.3.
230. cf. Rgv.X.63.7&8; 66.5; VIII.47.1, 18.5; I.136.5; VI.62.8
231. Rgv.I.106.1, II.26.4
232. dṛuḥ cf. Rgv.X.25.8
233. rapas, kṣetriya.
234. aditir-na uruṣyatu aditiḥ śarma yacchatu. Rgv.VIII.47.9ab)
235. Rgv.X.185.3
236. asti devā amhor-uru asti ratnam ... (Rgv.VIII.67.7a) cf. Rgv.X.63.4&35.3
237. uruṣyati im amhaso rakṣati riṣo amhoś cid asmā urucakrir-adbhutaḥ. (Rgv.II.26.4cd)
238. na tam amho na duritaṃ kutaś cana na arātayas titirur-na dvayāvinah viśvā id asmād dhvaraso vi bādhasa yaṃ sugopā rakṣasi brahmaṇaspate. (Rgv.II.23.5)
239. nu mitro varuṇo aryama nas tmane tokaya varivo dadhantu. (Rgv.VII.63.6ab) cf. Rgv.II.23.6
240. aditiḥ pātu amhasaḥ sadāvṛdhā (Rgv.VIII.18.6d) "O ever fostering Aditi protect us from anguish".
241. tat su nah śarma yacchata ādityā yan mumocati enasvantaṃ cid enasaḥ sudānavah (Rgv.VIII.18.12)
242. ... mṛṣa yad vo vayan cakrma kac cid āgaḥ uru aśyām abhayaṃ jyotir-indra mā no dīrghā abhi naśan tamisrāḥ. (Rgv.II.27.14)
243. uruṃ no lokam anu neṣi vidvānt svarvaj-jyotir-abhayaṃ svasti (Rgv.VI.47.8ab)
244. vyaciṣṭhe bahupāyaye yatemahi svarājye. (Rgv.V.66.6) cf. Rgv.II.27.11d.
245. vi su dveṣo vjamaṭim ādityāso vi samhitaṃ viṣvag-vi vrhatā rapaḥ. (Rgv.VIII.67.21). cf. Rgv.VIII.18.5: te hi putraso aditer-vidur-dveśānsi yotave amhoś cid urucakrayo anehasaḥ. "For these sons of Aditi we know how to ward off hostilities; giving broad scope, incomparable, they protect from distress."
246. Rgv.VII.51.1. cf. J. Gonda: "An intimate connection between the state of being anāgas- and that of being identical or identified with Aditi is doubtless meant by the poet of RV.7.51.1, who calls upon the Adityas for protection asking them 'to put this sacrifice in freedom from bonds and freedom from āgas (anāgāstve adititve)'" ("Gods and Powers." 1957.p.91).
247. tvam ... dadāśo anāgāstvam adite sarvatātā. (Rgv.I.94.15ab)
248. ādityāso aditayas syāma pūr devatrā vasavo martyatrā. (Rgv.VII.52.1ab)
249. "Gods and Powers." 1957.p.78-9.
250. from  $\sqrt{amh}$  to press together, to strangle.
251. aneho dātram aditer-anarvam huve svarvad avadham namasvat. (Rgv.I.185.3) "I claim Aditi's incomparable share, irresistible, celestial, beneficent, venerable."
252. cf. Rgv.IV.25.3
253. avadhram jyotir-aditer-rtāvṛdho devasya ślokaṃ savitur-manāmahe. (Rgv.VII.82.10cd) cf. Rgv.II.23.15 where Bṛhaspati is asked to bestow a bright-hued treasure with power refulgent.
254. From J. Gonda's rendering of Rgv.X.185.2&3. ("Gods and Powers." 1957.p.78)
255. madhu vātā rtayate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ. (Rgv.I.90.6ab)
256. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.16.
257. praśiṣṭhāḥ (Rgv.X.66.2)
258. cf. Rgv.VIII.41.7-10; I.161.4.
259. cf. Rgv.X.129.1&3; X.190.2
260. apīcyah samudraḥ (Rgv.VIII.41.8)
261. dhartā bhuvanānām (Rgv.VIII.41.5)

262. *yasmin viśvāni kāvyā* (Rgv.VIII.41.6) The word *kāvyā* has been translated as "wisdom" in accordance with the ancient meaning of poetry, inspired utterance which is "wise".
263. cf. Rgv.VIII.41.9
264. Here is seen the restoration of a disrupted equilibrium, the bringing of that which has broken away back into the one harmony - the root idea of karma.
265. "The Religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads." 1925. p.100 For a contrary view see R. N. Dandekar's "Asura Varuṇa" in Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. vol. 21. Ap.-July 1940. p.163.
266. "Vedic mythology. Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde." Band III. Heft A. 1897. p.159.
267. "La religion védique." 1878-1883. tome II. p.200.
268. "Veda et Vreragna. Étude de mythologie indo-iranienne." (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique. Paris, 1934.) p.101
269. op.cit. tome II. p.202
270. op.cit. tome III. p.144
271. cf. Rgv.II.11.2&5 where Indra releases the streams pent up by the dragon. cf. also Rgv.VIII.78.4d "slay Vṛtra, win the light of heaven" (*hano vṛtram jayā svah*) and Rgv.IV.16.7, VI.20.2. Indra slays Vṛtra whilst Varuṇa guards the *vratas*. cf. Rgv.VII.83.9.
272. *ijāmi kṛṣṭer-upamasya vavreḥ* (Rgv.IV.42.1d)
273. Sanskrit-Wörterbuch. St Petersburg, 1855-75.
274. They are mentioned in Athv.X.2.31.32.
275. *smadabhīsu* (Rgv.VIII.25.24)
276. cf. Rgv.VI.67.1
277. *setrbhir-arajjubhiḥ sinīthaḥ* (Rgv.VII.84.2)
278. Rgv.VII.65.3
279. cf. Rgv.I.24.13&15. Rudra is also referred to as having a net (Rgv.VII.46.4b) wherein he can catch the sinner.
280. Sin is compared to a fetter which tightens around the transgressor. Words such as *raśanā* (Rgv.II.28.5) rope, *dāman* (Rgv.II.28.6&VII.86.5) halter, *bandhana*, *pāśa*, *setr* are in constant use. Hence the sinner asks Varuṇa to slacken or loosen *√viśrath* or *√ava srj*, cast off, *√vicrt*, untie the fettering cord, to release *√muc* him like a thief or a calf from the rope. Cf. Rgv.VII.86.5.
281. "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.35. cf. Rgv.II.27.2,3,16. cf. E. W. Hopkins's remark; "The view that the gods direct men's thought and action was not worked out into any system of determinism but rested on the oft-repeated thought 'may we not do what ye punish', which is scarcely more than a Vedic 'lead us not into temptation'." (Ethics of India. 1924. p.43).
282. *tā bhūri pāśau anṛtasya setū duratyetū ripave martyāya* (Rgv.VII.65.3ab). "The bonds of anṛta are equipped with many nooses difficult for the false mortal to overcome."
283. *pade pade pāśinaḥ santi setavaḥ*. (Rgv.IX.73.4d)
284. *druvaḥ sacante anṛtā janānām*. (Rgv.VII.61.5c)
285. *ud uttamaṃ varuṇa pāśam asmād avādhamam vi madhyamaṃ śrathāya athā vayam āditya vrata tavānāgasō aditaye syāma*. (Rgv.I.24.15)
286. *ud uttamaṃ mumugdhi no vi pāśam madhyamaṃ cṛta avādhamāni jīvāse*. (Rgv.I.25.21)
287. *avo dvābhyām para ekayā ... tisra āvaḥ*. (Rgv.X.67.4) J. Gonda ("Triads." 1976 p.16) gives no explanation as to the meaning of these three.
288. Rgv.I.24.13.
289. The Lord of prayer would in this case drive forth the imprisoned rays of light through the three openings of perception - physical, mental, spiritual.
290. *eva asmād agne vi mumugdhi pāśān*. (Rgv.V.2.7.cd).
291. *varuṇasya vidvān*. (Rgv.IV.1.4a)
292. *viśvā dveṣāmsi pra mumugdhy-asmāt*. (Rgv.IV.1.4d) cf. Rgv.V.85.8&I.128.7).
293. "The Hymns of the Rgveda." Varanasi. 1963. vol. I. p.391.
294. cf. Rgv.V.2.7ab
295. *sa nas trāsate varuṇasya dhūrter-maho devasya dhūrteḥ*. (Rgv.I.128.7d)

296. ... somārudrāvīha su mṛlatam naḥ  
pra no muñcatam varuṇasya pāsād gopāyatam naḥ sumanasyamana. (Rgv.VI.74.4bcd)
297. ahelamāno varuṇa iha bodhy-urusamsa mā na āyuh pra moṣiḥ. (Rgv.I.24.11cd)
298. yac-cid hi te viśo yathā pra deva varuṇa vratam minimasi dyavidyavi  
mā no vadhāya hatnave jihilānasya rīradhaḥ mā hrñānasya manyave. (Rgv.I.25.1&2)  
cf. Rgv.VII.89 and X.137.1 addressed to the gods.
299. uta yo dyām atī sarpāt parastānna sa mucyātai varuṇasya rājñāḥ. (Athv.IV.16.4)
300. Rgv.I.24.13. cf. Rgv.II.28.8 dūlabha.
301. cf. Rgv.II.28.5,7,9
302. Athv.XIX.44.8
303. acittī yat tava dharmā yuyopima mā nas tasmād enaso deva rīriṣaḥ. (Rgv.VII.89.5cd)
304. yo mṛlayāti cakruṣe cid āgo vayan syāma varuṇe anāgāḥ  
anu vratāny aditer-rdhantaḥ ... (Rgv.VII.87.7abc)
305. siṣakty-anyo vṛjaneṣu viprah. (Rgv.VI.68.3d) "the other, the wise one, stands  
by in deceitful times".
306. cf. Rgv.V.85.7.
307. cf. Rgv.II.28.9.
308. cf. Rgv.II.28.5 & VII.87.7;88.7.
309. translated in accordance with J. Gonda's own rendering ("Vision." 1963.  
p.114) Rgv.II.28.5.
310. śatam te rājan bhiṣajaḥ sahasram. (Rgv.I.24.9)
311. pra na āyūṃsi tāriṣat (Rgv.I.25.12c) cf. Rgv.I.25.3&21.
312. cf. Rgv.I.24.11; I.25.3
313. urvī gabhīrā sumatis te astu. (Rgv.I.24.9b) cf. Rgv.I.25.3.
314. the use of the words sumati and mṛlika is frequent: cf. Rgv.VII.86.2.7;87.7;88.1;  
89.1; I.24.9;25.3,5,19 etc.
315. apo su myakṣa varuṇa bhiyasam mat samrāḥ rtāvo anu mā grbhāya  
dāma iva vatsād vi mumughi anho nahi tvaḥ āre nimīṣas-cana īse. (Rgv.II.28.6)
316. prāti yac-caṣṭe anṛtam ānenā ava dvitā varuṇo māyī naḥ sāt. (Rgv.VII.28.4cd)
317. Although dialogues between the god and the human are often couched as though  
man were on the same level as Varuṇa, compare Rgv.II.28 which shows the  
great respect for and submission to Varuṇa felt by the bard.
318. L. Renou explains *nirṛti* as "a derivative in *ti* (thus bearing a priori some  
dynamic value which makes it appropriate for personification) from the  
root  $\sqrt{r}$  (*ar*) pointing to a certain fixed order, a foreseen arrangement of  
time, cosmos, human or ritual activity ... With the prefix *nis*, *nirṛti*  
will inversely signify disorder - the term denoting a factor of entropy."  
"Védique *nirṛti*." (*Indian Linguistics* vol.16. 1955) p.11. (Trans. J.M.)  
*Nirṛti* assumes prominence in post-Rgvedic literature.
319. bādhasva dūre *nirṛtiṃ parācaih*. (Rgv.I.24.9c) Griffith's translation.
320. cf. Rgv.VI.74.2 where Soma and Rudra are also asked to drive *nirṛti* far away  
and Rgv.X.59.1-4, X.76.4.
321. samrād dhantā vṛtram varivaḥ pūrave kaḥ (Rgv.IV.21.10) "the mighty king,  
slayer of Vṛtra (granted) man free scope".
322. Rgv.X.118.7. "Gods and Powers". 1957.p.75. cf. Rgv.X.87.19
323. ke dhāsim agne anṛtasya pānti (Rgv.V.12.4c)
324. cf. Rgv.X.18.10 where the dead person is entreated to betake himself to  
the lap of mother Earth and that the latter may preserve him from *nirṛti*!  
This shows that Earth and *Nirṛti* were not yet identified in the Rgveda.  
cf. Rgv.V.41.17, where *Nirṛti* is asked to consume the poet's old age  
(presumably not himself but that his aged state should disappear).  
cf. Rgv.VI.74.2c; VIII.24.24b and X.59.1.4; 76.4b. In Rgv.VII.104.9 those  
who harm the righteous are wished away in the lap of *Nirṛti*. cf. S.  
Bhattacharji ("The Indian Theogony." 1970) p.82 and L. Renou. "Védique  
*nirṛti*." (*Indian Linguistics*. vol.16.1955.p.13.

325. cf. L. Renou. op.cit.p.14.
326. *mā durvidatrā nirrtir-na Isata* (Rgv.X.36.2c)
327. Rgv.I.24.9
328. *kṛtaṃ cid enaḥ prā mumugdhi asmat* (Rgv.I.24.9d)
329. R. Panikkar considers *nirrti* as "the personification of dissolution, destruction, <sup>Calamity, corruption</sup> death, and also the abysmal abode of dissolution". ("The Vedic experience." 1977) p.456-7. This is more strongly evident in post-Rgvdic literature. cf. Sat. Br.5.2.33; 7.2.1.3  
op.cit.pp.13-14.
330. *ya Im cakāra na so asya veda ya Im dadarśa hirug-in nu tasmāt sa mātur-yonā parivāto antar-bahuprajā nirrtim ā viveśa.* (Rgv.I.164.32.)
331. op.cit. p.14. (Trans.J.M.)
332. cf. also Rgv.X.82.7ab
333. cf. Rgv.X.5.7 where Agni, first born of ṛta, both bull and cow, lies in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap.
334. *tisro deṣṭrāya nirrtir-upāsate dīrghaśruto vi hi jānanti-vaḥ nayaḥ tāsām ni cikyuḥ kavayo nidānaṃ pareṣu yā guhyeṣu vrateṣu.* (Rgv.X.114.2)
335. cf. also *iha* and *ayam*, this here as against *asau* and *amutra*, that there.
336. op.cit. p.14. (Trans.J.M.)
337. *uta kṣodanti rodasī mahitvā nakṣante nākaṃ nirrtir-avamsat.* (Rgv.VII.58.1cd)
338. According to the Nirukta this word is made up of two words meaning *na aka*, where there is no pain, heaven being the place of bliss.
339. In this respect it is interesting to note that Indra found for man the way to "fulfilment" (*iṣṭaye*) through conflict (*yudhā*) (Rgv.X.49.9).
340. Athv.VI.121.4 as rendered by R.Panikkar ("The Vedic experience." 1977.p.489)

## CHAPTER IV

## RTA AS THE SACRIFICE

Section IV.1. Introduction. The ritualistic aspect and purpose

As ṛta designates the cosmic order in its metaphysical and physical sense, and that order as reflected in human society in the accepted ethical norms of human behaviour, so also in religious practices, it refers not only to the harmonious sequence of ritualistic function<sup>1</sup>, but to their inner meaning: a dramatic, miniature and symbolic representation of the cosmic process - that process according to which all parts work in harmony with the whole towards a common end; that process which may be summed up in the law of give and take which represents life and which is epitomised in the circuit of birth, growth, decay: the child takes in order to grow; the adult gives or returns in his own individual way what he has taken and assimilated. That which is <sup>given is</sup> in one sense a deprivation, a sacrifice, yet it is a restoration creating a balance, for there can be no giving without a previous receiving or taking: the rite of sacrifice in its inner structure is ṛta, the eternal balance, the universal order.

The world order, its regular movement, its activities converging on the one aim of fostering life, all this seems to have been considered from the very beginnings of manifestation:

"By that sacrifice the gods paid homage to the sacrificial-host. Such were the first ordinances."<sup>2</sup>

"All the gods worshipped in sacrifice the divine-life."<sup>3</sup>

Of this mighty oblation the human ritual is the microcosmic reflection. The underlying factor of the interlinkedness of all participants, their joining forces in a common re-enactment of the universal process of creation - the sacred "work" (*apas*) par excellence - is a peculiar characteristic of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice, a characteristic which explains its intimate link with ṛta, but one completely missed by nineteenth and early twentieth century Western exegesis. The human rite is a tribute paid to the gods and through them to the divine life of which these are the ministers - that life, the Puruṣa,<sup>4</sup> through and by means of which all creatures live.

Sacrifice, like ṛta, is intimately connected with the beginnings. In this respect R. Panikkar's<sup>5</sup> dichotomy of the trend in human intuition concerning the origin of all into two possibilities explains the process of manifestation, as viewed by the ṛṣis, along two lines:

The first concerns

- 1) *Be* as the "infinite reservoir of possibilities", Infinite Being, the *Be* from which all *becomes*, unfolds, develops from what is already there.

The second posits

- 2) *Sacrifice* as "*Becoming* is a coming into *Be*, into being".  
 "In the beginning 'was' neither Being nor Non-being, neither Fullness nor Void."  
 "In the beginning 'was' Sacrifice."  
 It is the Prajāpati-sacrifice, in mythical terms, which gives birth to Being."

This dichotomy in the viewing of the origin, however seemingly contradictory, does not appear to have been held so separate in the vision of the Vedic seers. Thus the Absolute of the *nāsadiya* hymn is beyond Being and Non-being, yet out of IT arises some power which, through the very action of *tapas* which itself is a sacrificial, self-limiting, contemplative act, generates Being. Both *Be* and *Becoming* are two aspects of the one reality related through *tapas*. In the *puruṣa sūkta* the divine essence is sacrificed that the many may be. Thus

"the texture of the universe is sacrifice, which is the act par excellence which produces all that is."<sup>6</sup>

So the meaning of sacrifice, its vital importance in the Rgvedic religious cult, and its identification with the cosmic order will now be examined.

#### IV.2. The meaning of *yajña* the sacrifice

The current meaning of sacrifice as self-deprivation, or animal immolation, or vicarious atonement, has militated against the understanding of the essence of the Vedic sacrifice. The key to its basic significance may be found in the words *tapas*, *apas*, *karman* and *yajña*. The Vedic sacrifice is a work (*apas*), an action (*karman*), a participation, communication-in-worship, communion (*yajña*). These three basic concepts can be examined in relation to *tapas*.

We have seen how, in the Vedic vision, *tapas* was the supreme means to the supreme end of creation, as a result of which truth (*satya*) and order (*ṛta*) manifested. The divine creative act was performed as a result of the arousal of that flame-power or all burning energy, *tapas* which caused desire to develop the seed of mind, hence intelligence, hence the cosmic order.

"That One emerged through the power of *tapas*".<sup>7</sup>

This original divine act set the seal upon every subsequent act of creation and endowed each with some kind of sacredness which no amount of repetition could remove. All things are achieved through *tapas*, says the Atharvaveda:

Through the *tapas* of *brahmacharya* the king protects his kingdom  
 Through the *tapas* of *brahmacharya* the teacher attracts his pupils  
 Through the *tapas* of *brahmacharya* the devas drove away death  
 from themselves".<sup>8</sup>

The very basis of creation is thus sacrifice, i.e. self-imposed limitation, ordered activity, not only at the primary stage, but also at the secondary or godly and at the third or human stage.

In the famous *Puruṣa sūkta* (Rgv.X.90) the gods are shown as performing a sacrificial rite by immolating *Puruṣa*, the Divine Man, or spiritual essence,<sup>9</sup> as a result of which the world as we know it comes into being. Accordingly, the primeval spirit, instead of remaining one homogeneous whole was fragmented so as to pervade all things. It became embodied in many forms. In the mythological language of the Rgveda:

"Three-fourths of the heavenly man ascended on high  
 one-fourth remained here below.  
 Thence he pervaded all things; animate and inanimate."<sup>10</sup>

"The spring was the melted butter,  
 the summer the fuel, the autumn the oblation".<sup>11</sup>

The various castes and the various planetary bodies are born from the various parts of *Puruṣa*'s body.

Eggeling in his introduction to vol.43 of the Sacred Books of the East states:

"In this primeval - rather timeless, because ever proceeding - sacrifice, Time itself, in the shape of its unit, the Year, is made to take its part, inasmuch as the three seasons, spring, summer and autumn, of which it consists constitute the ghee, the offering-fuel and the oblation respectively ... Prajāpati who ... (in the Brāhmaṇas) takes the place of the Puruṣa; the world-man or all-embracing Personality, is offered up anew in every sacrifice; and inasmuch as the very dismemberment of the Lord of creatures, which took place at that archetypal sacrifice, was in itself the creation of the universe, so every sacrifice is also a repetition of that first creative act. Thus the periodical sacrifice is nothing else than a microcosmic representation of the ever-proceeding destruction and renewal of all cosmic life and matter."<sup>12</sup>

The Rgveda sums up this whole conception thus:

"All the gods worshipped in sacrifice the divine-life".<sup>13</sup>

M. Winternitz evidences an incapacity to understand this original sacrifice in his comments on the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa concerning Prajāpati<sup>14</sup>. He observes in

a note:

"As the magician must prepare himself for his magic and the priest must prepare himself for the sacrifice, by means of self-torture and mortification so Prajāpati too, has to prepare himself in the same way for the great work of creation.<sup>15</sup>

As earlier noted, *tapas* refers to the highest contemplative exertion at the creative, godly level; the thought of expiation, mortification, self-torture, does not enter into its conception. Only at the human level is there a need for that kind of purification which may be thought of in terms of mortification, for the human, having both the corrupt and the incorrupt has to purify himself of the former if he would know the latter fully.

*Tapas*, at the human level, as contemplative exertion, that intense spiritual focussing which occurs in deep meditation, involves self-imposed purification which itself implies limitation in one way or another for further expansion. This is sacrifice in its deepest sense of making sacred, an action that is both self limiting and self expanding, an offering of self to receive or contact a greater self. Similarly, the sacrificial rite involved a making sacred through purification,<sup>16</sup> an offering of the essence through burning off the dross; both at the personal and ritual level it implies a self-discipline through applied orderliness, the making of a cosmos out of a chaos. This making sacred, this sacrifice, to the Vedic mind, was essentially "creation": it was *action*, as the word *karman* used originally for ritual connotes, it was *apas*, the sacred work.

The word *yajña* is derived from  $\sqrt{yaj}$  which means to "worship", "pay honour to"<sup>17</sup>. It is an act of relatedness linking one level to another, making use of the concentration of mental power which "yokes"<sup>18</sup> the mind to the object of worship<sup>19</sup>. In the *yajña* the mind yokes itself to a vision of the beyond, or to one god or another, the rite being a framework, the means whereby the mind is directed towards and possibly penetrates into the transcendent. As expressed by R. Panikkar:

"Worship does not consist solely in prayer... it is *action*, an action by which duality is transcended and dissimilarity banished. This act contains within itself, essentially, a sacrificial aspect, a death and a becoming, a doing, *karman*."<sup>20</sup>

It is a sacred work performed according to certain well-attested rules, hence its identification with *rta*. It should therefore not be taken in the sense of the shedding of an innocent victim's blood to propitiate a deity.

The Rgvedic seers conceived the sacrifice as a universal process to which all things are subservient, an eternal give and take. This, at the lowest level, manifests as what may be considered a constant "preying"; at the highest as a constant "self-gift". Hence the universal application of the Rgvedic riddles:



"this *yajña*, the hub of the universe"<sup>21</sup>.

"O Agni, sacrifice with thy mouth to thine own self"<sup>22</sup>

i.e. offer up through thy mouth (through the action of burning) that which will come back to thy self, for all is one. Here the circuit of giving, taking and returning the gift, has gone full round and recalls the idea of the descent of the spiritual life into the limitation of the material and its reascent enriched by experience.<sup>23</sup> Of this grand cosmic conception Agni is the divine ministrant and through Agni, the "immortal guest in mortal houses", man partakes in the eternal sacrifice. In this dramatic enactment there is built up a relationship between terrestrial man and those divine powers he invokes and seeks to serve, there is started an interaction that mirrors the interplay between the two main poles of manifestation, spirit-matter, earth-heaven, positive-negative, father-mother, the eternal rhythm of the universal order.<sup>24</sup>

A.B. Keith's speculative chapter on "The nature of the Vedic sacrifice",<sup>25</sup> reviewing previous scholars' attempts at explaining the meaning and various aspects of the Vedic *yajña*, especially in the light of the later Brāhmaṇas, misses one particular significance which seems to be of paramount importance in the R̥gveda, namely the ritual as a mirror of the cosmic process,<sup>26</sup> hence the sacrifice as itself man's expression of law and order. Keith admits that the ritual as presented in the Sūtras accords

"with the texts of the *saṃhitās* of the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda"

but

"is not precisely that which is contemplated by the hymns of the R̥gveda"<sup>27</sup>. The period that intervened between the sacrificial conception that one may gather from the R̥gveda and that of the collection of the Yajus and Sāmans may have been a long one. During that time both conception and actual practice may have been considerably altered, though modifications in the ritual may have applied only to details; but the outlook and the very meaning of the sacrifice could have changed to a great extent.<sup>28</sup> To assess the significance of the R̥gvedic sacrifice on the basis of the later Brāhmaṇa speculation and to try to bring it into line with other sacrificial practices, such as those of the Semites and the Greeks, as nineteenth century Western exegesis attempted to do, and in the attempt missed the real core of R̥gvedic sacrifice, is certainly conducive to a wrong evaluation and to erroneous conclusions.

The R̥gveda itself gives sufficient hints to afford us a glimpse into the essence of the R̥gvedic sacrifice, especially in its relation to *ṛta*.

Keith claims that

"... the theory of the sacrifice as a communion with the deity, whether by direct rite of eating with him, or as a sacrament through eating a victim... is not recognised as such in the formulae of the ritual; we simply find nothing of the view that the worshippers are eating together with the god in order to renew their relationship."<sup>29</sup>

This shows a judgment so partial to other kinds of sacrifices that it is unable to perceive the characteristic of the sacrifice under consideration. If eating for renewal be a primitive idea, the Rgveda goes far beyond and indeed much deeper in its conception, and this remained unnoticed until the mid-twentieth century. There is no emphasis on the "eating together" but rather on the "offering" through "mind and heart" by way of the soma outpouring, the oblation, chanting and visioning<sup>30</sup> thereby pointing to a communion at the level of the heart and mind rather than the mere physical body. We find this in countless verses addressed to Agni, the oblation bearer to the gods, "served with homage and oblation",<sup>31</sup> the ministering priest par excellence:

"With our homage rich in oblation, let us arouse that performer of the sacrifice by the path of rta."<sup>32</sup>

"Reverencing with oblation in our spirit Agni Vaisvānara, the truth-bearer, the light-finder."<sup>33</sup>

The mythical Rbhus are said to have

"fashioned prayer for the sake of Agni"<sup>34</sup>

that is, made the invocative word, *brahma*, their prayer, worthy of Agni. And so, the poet goes on,

"let us also proclaim for Agni the great and glorious-praise."<sup>35</sup>

"All indeed partake of thy divinity as they keep, each in his own proper way, the eternal law."<sup>36</sup>

This partaking of the god's divinity occurs only in as much as the divine law is kept. The stress is on the sharing of divinity by "all" in the very keeping of the rta both as the eternal order and the eternal rite, for rta here bears both meanings.<sup>37</sup>

To Agni's ministry is ascribed a very subtle role, that of inner illumination, and this quite apart from any purifying and ritualistic part that he assumes. Thus as he

"purifies with three filters in the flashing-song"<sup>38</sup>

which the poet has conceived and offers

"he brings to birth an inspired-thought within the heart as light".<sup>39</sup>

So the poet clothes him with his thought (*manmanā*) as it were with a robe.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, to the partaking of Soma in the sacrifice, is attributed the

stimulation of spiritual insight (*svadhī*):

"Wisely have I taken my share of that honeyed oblation  
generous in spiritual insight".<sup>41</sup>

Partaking of divinity, receiving of spiritual insights, illumination, are effects of the coming together in the sacred function of the ritual.

The very mention by the poet to his god of his own action of purifying his intuition:

"For you, Indra-Varuṇa, I purify a flawless  
intuition whilst outpouring the Soma"<sup>42</sup>

proves that the *manīṣā* is offered during the sacrifice and incidentally epitomises the ritual as an expression of man's spiritual effort and surrender.

Intimate, devotional relationship between god and worshipper such as borders on *bhakti*, may be seen in Vasiṣṭha's hymns to Varuṇa.<sup>43</sup>

"And now what has become of our friendship of old  
when we two kept unhindered company? O law-abiding  
Varuṇa, I went into thy mighty mansion, thy thousand-  
gated home."<sup>44</sup>

The ritual establishes such a close relationship between man and god as brings the human into direct contact with his god. The former claims his entrance into the divine domains and when that is refused he demands the reason for such estrangement? The rite is often considered a "ship" or a "chariot", it is a means of communication, of bridging the two shores, that of the hither or terrestrial land, and that of the beyond, or godly realm.<sup>45</sup>

The worshippers' songs and homage, their visionary thoughts translated into hymns (*dhībhiḥ*),<sup>46</sup> their praise and prayer (*brahma*) frame as it were a receptacle that can be filled by the divine influences:

"Through these our flashing-songs, do thou turn  
towards us like heaven's radiance".<sup>47</sup>

With Indra they bring about "visionary contact"<sup>48</sup> by means of their inspired thought (*manīṣā*),<sup>49</sup> to Agni they present

"a new and mightier vision; I bear my words and thought to  
the son of strength."<sup>50</sup>

The emphasis lies on blessings poured out through the power of visions and offerings sent to the gods through that same power:

"vision was established as a help towards the seeking of riches."<sup>51</sup>

Agni is enjoined to

"shine riches on us through our fine praise-songs".<sup>52</sup>

The action is reciprocal and is summed up in the sacrificial chariot travelling hither and thither like

<sup>ever</sup> "conquering chariots gaining wealth, giving aid".<sup>53</sup> *unfailing*

Hymns, visions and aspirations, rise upwards to the gods upon the flames of Agni,<sup>54</sup> offered up as the wealth desired of the god and sent back to men enriched. These seem to be the riches for which the poet yearns that he may enter the gods' assembly.<sup>55</sup> When Agni, "the wise son of heaven", the "redeemer" (*kilbisāprt*) is specifically asked to

"bring the gods hither one by one (*rdhak*) for worship"<sup>56</sup>

the implication is that communion between humans and deities is to be brought about through Agni, hence through the ritual, so that Keith's opinion that the

"... conception of the sacrifice as a communion of men both inter se and with the god and as a sacrament through the feeding on a victim which is really an embodiment of the god, were present only in germ, and they do not seem to have generated the consciousness of the sacramental nature of the offering..."<sup>57</sup>

needs a good deal of qualifying. It evidences a complete failure to grasp the sacredness of the Vedic sacrifice which such verse as the following makes very plain:

"Upon our knees let us approach thee with adoration as thou shinest forth in thine own domain,"<sup>58</sup>

Agni's own domain being the altar where the ritual is performed.

The consciousness of a coming together in holy worship is well attested in Rgv.X.71.8 where "companion brahmins"

"coming together to worship by means of mental impulses fashioned in the heart"<sup>59</sup>

track down the path of the divine voice (*vāk*), the *sacred-word*, and leave far behind themselves those that speak without real knowledge. The important point is the "worshipping together" and in the "heart" where the divine voice is heard. So are the aspirations towards general harmony and the knowledge of the strength bestowed by communal assembling in a pure and sacred function present in the Vedic thought as the last hymn of the Rgveda testifies<sup>60</sup>.

The whole sacrificial ritual was conceived as a bringing together of gods and men<sup>61</sup> so as to enact dramatically the cosmic order. The Vedic ritual was a communion with the higher powers through Agni as the highpriest or oblation bearer. One whole hymn (Rgv.III.27) bears witness to this. Verse 6 states that the officiants

"worshipping with true vision have prepared Agni for our aid"<sup>62</sup>

i.e. have kindled the sacrificial fire to perform the ritual for human help.

Furthermore, three of the main elements of the rite, the *word*, or holy syllable, the fire which burns up the dross, and the purified oblation borne by the fire to the gods, are said to be "god-given" and thereby stamped as sacred:

"First begotten of the gods was the invocation, thence the flame, then the oblation."<sup>63</sup>

Of particular interest is the order of precedence:<sup>64</sup> the recitation of the hymn (*sūktavākam*) i.e. the poetic utterance which springs from the depths and is directly inspired by the gods; the fire both purifying and energising, destroying and creating out of the ashes of what is eliminated; here it may also refer specifically to the inner fire kindled by inspiration - poets are fired on to greater and greater eloquence; finally the offering which consists of that very inspiration purified by fire given as an oblation, together with materials such as ghee, milk, soma, to those same gods that caused the original inspiration. The best offer seems to be a song, a hymn, a prayer, from the worshipper's heart, but all are expressions of a god-given<sup>65</sup> vision now returned to the god fashioned by the poet, made the poet's own and fire-proved. A verse from an eulogy to the gods makes this quite clear. The intuitive thought (*matī*) "within" (i.e. in the heart) follows, or "joins", the "gift of the cow", or ghee or milk-oblation<sup>66</sup>. The poet's thought and his offering blend together in the ritual.

All this certainly leaves far behind all kinds of "primitive" sacrifices into which nineteenth century Western exegis tried to fit the R̥gveda.<sup>67</sup>

The few passing references to animal immolation, specifically to Indra, may be indicative of certain animal sacrifices<sup>68</sup> as also the two hymns relative to the horse sacrifice, but are rather exceptional. The simple daily worship of the householders should be sharply differentiated from these so-called great sacrifices which are not typical R̥gvedic sacrifices. This is borne out in every hymn addressed to Agni and Soma<sup>69</sup> who are indeed the archetypal highpriests. The sacrificial action which consists in the lighting of the fire, the pouring of the *ghṛta* or ghee, the pressing of the Soma and its preparation with milk by means of which songs of praise<sup>70</sup> and *visṭons*-translated-into-hymns are offered up to the gods<sup>71</sup> is the Vedic ritual par excellence.<sup>72</sup>

The original idea, as implied in the *Puruṣa sūkta*, simply expressed the offering, by the gods, of the divine life, the *puruṣa* as essence of all, the life-blood of the many; i.e. that divine life which courses through all and animates all. It is split up in many forms but one in essence.<sup>73</sup> The giving and the taking, that universal rhythm which is part of the vast becoming, *ṛta*, is present in this primeval *yajña*, whence derive all the others. It is the supreme offering of self which is itself an act of creation.

M. Bloomfield rightly affirms that

"The sacrifice is the dominant note of Vedic life, as far as it is revealed in these ancient documents."<sup>74</sup>

But of its intrinsic meaning he shows not the slightest inkling and refers to it as "the foolish sacrifice".<sup>75</sup> In his attempt to trace the "environment"

in which developed the philosophy of what he calls the "higher religion of the Veda" which to him is represented in the older Upaniṣads, he finds that

"... that, curiously enough, was the great Vedic sacrifice with its mock business and endless technicalities, calculated to deaden the soul, and apparently the very thing to put the lid tight on higher religious inspiration and aspiration."<sup>76</sup>

That which the Western scholar considers a mock business was deemed by the ancient ṛṣi the greatest attempt by man to mirror the cosmic process and express the universal harmony in his own dramatic way. That it did not put the lid tight on higher religious inspiration is proved by the development of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads. The very underlying meaning of the sacrifice, the interlinkedness, the constant sharing of all things, in one way or another, heralds the speculation of the Upaniṣads as to the common basis in which such interlinkedness is rooted, the one all pervading, universal Principle as the foundation of all. When commenting upon Dawn's brilliance being likened, by the poet, to the painted sacrificial post, he dismisses the simile as worthy of the "mockeries of the sacrifice".

"... never has poetic endowment strayed so far from wholesome theme as to fritter itself away upon the ancient hocus-pocus of the fire-priest and medicine-man."<sup>77</sup>

That "ancient hocus-pocus" nevertheless does afford us an insight into a grand conception of the universe where the interdependence of all things is recognised and man viewed as an active participator, a truth left completely unobserved by nineteenth century exegesis. This lack of understanding led to the erroneous assertion, in so far as the R̥gveda is concerned, that, in the words of E.W. Hopkins

"the same presumptuous assumption that the gods depend on earthly sacrifice is often made."<sup>78</sup>

as in the period of the Brāhmaṇas. The "dependence" was rather the "interdependence" of all forces, an interaction of all those factors that play a vital role in the order of the universe. If later on the conception of "interaction" was changed to mere "dependence" of the gods on human sacrifice and the sacrifice degenerated into an exchange of gifts, in an attempt to make the priesthood all powerful, such is not the original idea as reflected in the R̥gveda.<sup>79</sup>

Nor can E.W. Hopkins's view be accepted:

"Desire and hope and shrewd hospitality, to make the gods grant these hopeful desires are the foundation of the Vedic sacrifice."<sup>80</sup>

The very fact that ṛta the cosmic order and yajña the sacrifice came to be equated in many passages of the R̥gveda<sup>81</sup> which we shall examine in section 4 of this chapter, should have pointed in a direction out of all relation

to that emphasised by Hopkins and other scholars. Both *ṛta* and *yajña* signify a process going on according to an inherent law of harmony. The sacrificial ritual became established as a religious institution expressive of the cosmic order and man's active participation in it: it is *ṛta*. Its performance in all its details was worked out so as to be in harmony with the seasons and the planetary movements.<sup>82</sup>

"They established the *ṛta*; they maintained its vision",<sup>83</sup> literally "they set in motion the vision, or thought, of it"; the establishment of the *ṛta* as the norm of cosmic order includes social, ethical and ritual order.

"By means of *ṛta*, with the power of sacrifice, they (the patriarchs) upheld the all-supporting *ṛta* in the highest heaven."<sup>84</sup>

But it is not only the patriarchs who are given credit for the establishment of the ritual. The gods themselves, the primeval sacrificers

"have established the year, month, the day and night, the sacrifice and holy-word".<sup>85</sup>

Thus was sacrifice given the seal of godly statute.

"The gods, denizens of heaven, flame-tongued, promote the *ṛta* as they sit brooding in the source of *ṛta*".<sup>86</sup>

*could be interpreted as the gods foster the law and its expression in the ritual.*

We have to come to mid-twentieth century to find a far better understanding and assessment of the meaning of the Vedic sacrifice. L. Renou, J.M. Koller, M. Biardeau and C. Malamoud make a substantial contribution. According to L. Renou, Abel Bergaigne has shown us the right method, that

"... of seeking correspondence between the world of men ... the microcosm on the one hand, and the 'aerial' world of the gods, the macrocosm, on the other. The duty of the *ṛsis* was to ensure the ordered functioning of the world and of religious ceremonial by reproducing the succession of cosmic events, the *ordo rerum*, in their acts and in the imagery they conceived. The term *ṛta* is a designation of the cosmic order on which human order, ethics and social behaviour depend ... Seen in this light, the Veda is a vast magical synthesis expressed in symbolic terms."<sup>87</sup>

In contrast to nineteenth century contemptuous dismissal of the Brāhmaṇas' conception of the sacrifice, J. Gonda considers that they evidence

"... one grandiose theory of human welfare and salvation advanced in order to teach man how to bring, by ritual means, the microcosm of human existence into harmony with the powers governing the universe ... so as to gain welfare, health, a full term of life."<sup>88</sup>

This applies perfectly to the Rgvedic conception.

M. Biardeau and Charles Malamoud bring out one of the most important aspects of the ancient sacrificial theory:

"... the sacrificial system bears a far vaster extension (than the mere wish of the worshipper to commune with the gods) ... the sacrifice is in a general way what weaves sacred links between creatures and especially between those who are not or no longer

united by visible links. It is the recognition of the interdependence of all categories of beings and of all the parts of the universe."<sup>89</sup>

We are at last coming closer to the realisation that the ṛsis had recognised through their vision, the interconnectedness of all things and had summed this up in the vision of the cosmic order, *ṛta*, expressed in their ritual.

J.M. Koller clarifies the relation between *yajña* and *ṛtathūs*:

"The great emphasis on *yajña* in these Vedic accounts of world making and manifestation should be seen as a recognition by the seers... of the applicability of order or law in the universe, for *yajña* represents the functioning of the inner structure or order of the universe, something called *ṛta*. The *yajña* of world-making *devas* are the analogues of human *yajña*. Human *yajña* effects *devayajña*, and since the *yajña* of the *devas* reflects the orderly rhythm and power of the cosmos, it turns out that human *yajña* is the means par excellence for connecting the functions of individual life with the orderly functions and power of the universe..."<sup>90</sup>

"Since the effect of *yajña* is maintenance of order, and *ṛta* is the highest order of reality, these concepts are closely related and are clearly normative."<sup>91</sup>

H. Lefever sums up the position thus:

"In the hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, the term *ṛta* is most frequently used in connection with the sacrifice. It denotes the 'law of worship' in accordance with which the sacrifice reaches the Gods and elicits their aid. It is thus not the actual ceremony itself, nor the 'institution' of the sacrifice... (but) the 'ordered course' of the sacrifice both of the ritual and of the divine power by which the sacrifice achieves its end."<sup>92</sup>

R.N. Dandekar clarifies the Vedic idea of sacrifice-cosmic order:

"A sacrifice, it was believed, was not a mere propitiatory rite but it possessed a profound cosmic significance. A cultic act established a magical rapport with the entire cosmos. A sacrifice was not merely a representation in miniature of the cosmic order *ṛta*, but it was also a necessary condition for the proper working of the cosmic order. The performance of specific cultic rites was made to correspond with the rhythmic course of nature."<sup>93</sup>

The *yajña* is compared to a web (*tantu*) woven by a hundred and one ministers.<sup>94</sup> The ritual is a spinning, the web the fabric of the universe which man also spins,<sup>95</sup> this being his contribution to the world process, from the sacrificial enclosure right to the vault of heaven.<sup>96</sup> It is an "ancient" participation. Thus Agni is asked to spin out the "ancient thread" (*tantum pūrvyam*)<sup>97</sup> connecting heaven and earth. This is the bond that binds man, the earthly being, to heaven.

At the level of ritualistic religion man shares in the universal work in so far as he re-enacts the primordial sacrifice sacramentally as symbolic of the cosmic life. A colourful summary of the whole idea - as translated by



(*"Vision"* p. 212)

J. Gonda - is given in the following stanza:

"The warp of ṛta has been extended in the sieve on the tip of the tongue by Varuṇa's māyā. Only the 'wise ones' who desired to attain that have reached it".<sup>98</sup>

The cosmic order is spun in the very sieve where the preparations are made for the ritual, as well as on the tongue where the words are pronounced, all due to Varuṇa's magic.<sup>99</sup> J. Gonda offers this explanation: only those

"... hymns (which) have successfully passed through the sieve because they are in harmony with the reality underlying the phenomena do not infringe the laws and rules obtaining in the universe".<sup>100</sup>

This could imply that a communion has been established and therefore that a penetration of human consciousness into another dimension of being has become possible. Only the wise ones have managed to do so.

Certain mythical events, such as the "opening of the mountain" at the sound of the "recitation"<sup>101</sup> resulting in the generation of the "great ones", are evoked.<sup>102</sup> An invitation is then extended to the bards to commemorate and re-enact this ancient feat through the power of visioning.<sup>103</sup> Through thus "setting their mind to contemplation"<sup>104</sup> the seers "discovered"

"the primeval sacrificial formula that trickled down as a pathway-to-the gods".<sup>105</sup>

This was to form part of rituals sanctified as rooted in truth. Each vision had to be so filled up with truth as to mirror the cosmic order, ṛta, before it could be accounted true. So the Vedic patriarchs

"established the ṛta; they maintained its vision"<sup>106</sup>

that is, they actualised the ṛta on earth both through socio-ethical norms and ritual practices and thereby made its realisation possible for man.

#### IV.3. The purifying function of the sacrifice

In addition to serving as a spiritual experience and a social participation the ritual had an expiatory function: it is a means of purification.<sup>107</sup>

The verb √pū "purify" is used with both the word *yajña* and *ṛta* as reflected in the sacrifice. Thus:

"By ṛta I purify heaven and earth"<sup>108</sup>

i.e. by means of the harmony, of that orderly process which I re-create in the ritual as a mirror of the cosmic order, I bring about a purifying effect in the two worlds of spirit and matter. The re-enactment of the cosmic process was thus considered a purifying action. For it is a conscious return to an original harmony, a going back to the root, the ground of all being, truth, *satya*.

Performing the ritual the poet proclaims:

"This by the holy syllable do I imitate.  
I purify in the centre of *rta*."<sup>109</sup>

And from that centre originates the *amṛta*.<sup>110</sup> This links the sacred function to the essence of *rta*. Reality, in its aspect of ordered activity, *rta* is an expression of fundamental harmony. This is the *satya*<sup>111</sup> on which all things are based: in this central point of truth is found that which has neither beginning nor end, that which *is*.

In Rgv.VI.51 the poet praises the power (*ugra*) of homage (*namas*) that holds Heaven and Earth fixed together (verse 8), homage that rules the gods, overcomes even committed sin; in homage all the powers of the human being are unified in one concentrated act of worship. Homage is in a peculiar sense an act of obeisance to nature. Only in obeying nature's laws can man learn to control them and himself and finally transcend himself. This is the purpose of the *yajña*, a homage paid by man to deity which not only purifies but establishes a specific relationship between earth<sup>th</sup> and divine powers. The gods show men the way. To the Maruts

"... to you, the pure, I send forth a pure sacrificial-offering.  
By *rta*, they observing the *rta*, came to truth..."<sup>112</sup>

Prayers addressed to Agni show him as the purifying agent par excellence:

"Burn up our sin away."<sup>113</sup>

"O Agni, with thy flame outspread as a filter, purify this our prayer"<sup>114</sup>.

Even prayer has to pass through the sieve of the flame so that no dross may remain ere it reaches the gods. Can such a purified prayer be solely a demand for worldly goods? Borne by Agni it must "shine in heaven"<sup>115</sup> The kine frequently asked for seem to have a double meaning; they often refer to those herds of the heavens, those rays of light that illuminate both the universe and human consciousness.<sup>116</sup>

Soma the "father" is asked to

"purify us with (his) filter".<sup>117</sup>

Three filters are said to be set within his heart<sup>118</sup>. Each of these may apply to one of the three levels of human experience: physical, emotional, psycho-mental.<sup>119</sup> Whatever is received from the innermost depth is filtered before it reaches any of the levels, physical, emotional, mental. But since Soma is begged to "purify us with (his) filter" the purpose of the filter is self-evident. That the various references to it go far beyond the mere physical instrument used in the ritual is even borne out by the mention that Soma is distilled with the "efficiency of true speech" (*ṛtavākena satyena*)

"with *tapas*, with faith (*śraddhayā*)"<sup>120</sup>

in other words, the true offering from which results the true Soma, or enlightenment, can be effected only through pure contemplation, spiritual

exertion, that state in which the divine creative fire is aroused, (*tapas*). But this, we are reminded, can only be achieved through faith and the true invocation, i.e. in all sincerity. For the invocation can only be true if it springs from deep within the heart. This verse reveals the Vedic understanding of sacrifice as not only an orderly rite, a mechanical rendering in miniature of certain cosmic processes, but a heartfelt offering of what is best in man, dependent upon the values of the "heart"<sup>121</sup> and resulting in deeper understanding which itself is bound up with the "visioning" that plays a most important part in the sacrifice.

That Soma is credited with the discriminating action of separating the true from the false may be seen from the following:

"Part, like a knotted tangle, while they cleanse thee,  
O Soma, righteous and unrighteous conduct."<sup>122</sup>

In an invocation addressed to Vāyu Soma is stated to be pressed by men who have cleansed themselves from sin.<sup>123</sup> This could be a hint that the ritual preparation of the Soma would require a prior purification. How that prior cleansing has been effected is not told. But in verse 27 the Vasus are asked:

"Make me clean by means of the vision" (*dhiyā*)<sup>124</sup>

or vision-converted-into-song. The function of the latter is thus not only a means for the poet of entering into contact with other realms, fathoming their essence and expressing it by means of words, but this penetration, this contact with unseen powers through supranormal insight, is thought to have a wholesome effect upon him, to be purifying.<sup>125</sup> The *dhih* is also shown in a prayer addressed to Heaven and Earth as capable of removing sin:

"Whatever transgression we have ever committed against the gods, against a friend, or against the family head, may this our *dhih* act as (be) expiation".<sup>126</sup>

Visions-translated-into-songs thus do have a ritual function:

"Along the path of *rta*, from the sacred-work, speed forth  
the hymns to Indra-Agni."<sup>127</sup>

According to the traditional order which has become the path of *rta*, these visionary-hymns are offered up to the god. By their means the *rṣi* will be able to enter into communication with the devas. This is the sacred work (*apas*). Such a visionary-hymn qualified as "new and worthy of attention and dear to many"<sup>128</sup> is, in the next verse, proclaimed as "the divine embryo of the sacrifice that purifies resourcefulness".<sup>129</sup>

The action is thus reciprocal. The sacrifice helps the intuiting of the vision and the latter helps the right process of the ritual and its furtherance. It enables man to grasp in its essence the *rta* or reality in its ordered activity. Indeed Agni is asked to

"follow the light of space whilst stretching the warp  
and to guard the paths of light which have been made by vision." 130

We shall see that by such paths the sages found

"that which had been hidden away as the supreme domain  
of the sacrificial rite". 131

#### IV.4 Examination of *yajña* = *ṛta*

Examining *ṛta* in its connotation of ritual offering or sacrificial rite, 132  
we could turn first to J. Gonda's remarks in his study on *dhāman*:

"Another 'seat' or 'manifestation' of *ṛta* is the recurrent ritual,  
for without contending that '*ṛta*' and 'sacrifice' are  
completely synonymous, which is denied by Lüders-Alsdorf  
(Varuṇa 1951-59 p.478), who however were too much fascinated by  
the belief that *ṛta* only means 'verbal truth' - the regular rites  
were intelligibly enough regarded as representing the fundamental  
principle of *ṛta*." 133

V.A Gadgil in his article "Ṛta and the law of karma" holds that there  
can be no difficulty in interpreting *ṛta* as sacrifice or sacrificial act when  
it is used in the plural for one cannot "talk of many universal or cosmic  
orders".

"It is only when *ṛta* occurs in the singular that European scholars  
... interpret it generally as the universal law or order and very  
rarely as a sacrificial act." 134

L. Renou agrees that

"... in book IX ... *ṛta* does not signify anything more than rite,  
function or manifestation of the sacred understood in a general way". 135

H. Lefever fathoms the Vedic standpoint:

"If *ṛta* is sometimes used apparently signifying the actual ceremony  
which the hymn accompanies, or the institution in general, such uses  
are merely abbreviated expressions for ceremony or institution in  
accordance with *ṛta*". 136

The word, however, is also used in other books of the R̥gveda in the  
singular with the significance of rite, or even with both meanings of law and  
rite. In the following examples the sense of ritual is possible, together  
with that of harmony or order:

"Let not the lustful enter our *ṛta*". 137

"By *ṛta* I purify both heaven and earth". 138

"May this *ṛta* protect me for a hundred springs". 139

"I sing to Heaven and Earth and offer (this) *ṛta*". 140

"Come forth O golden-handed Savitr and pay heed to him in  
the offering of the *ṛta*". 141

Agni, "eye and guardian of mighty rta" (order) is identified with Varuna

"when thou approachest the rta" (ritual)<sup>142</sup>

Some of these verses seem to telescope into the succinct expression of rta a vast process of thought:

"Full of understanding, I have first uttered this rta to Heaven and Earth (for all) to hear".<sup>143</sup>

The sacrificial rite, in the poets' view, performed by man in commemoration of the primordial divine sacrifice, becomes equivalent to the cosmic order which is based on sacrifice. The ever "renewed" song<sup>144</sup> of the ancient vision<sup>145</sup> abounds in the (norms of) the cosmic order.<sup>146</sup> It therefore proclaims the truth. If the song (which incidentally may be a symbol of the whole ritualistic order) did not conform to the inherent structure of things, if it was not an epitome of it, it would fail of its purpose.<sup>147</sup> So the poet, understanding these things full well, can claim "I offer this rta", the rta includes and epitomises everything. So

"the visionary-insight has shone from the seat of rta"<sup>148</sup>

and

"the sun illuminates by means of the song born of rta".<sup>149</sup>

The ancient fathers thus "fostered the rta" as they

"gained their bright inspiration whilst singing their praises".<sup>150</sup>

In a panegyric of the Angirasas, the famed patriarchs who instituted the vision of rta are said to have been

"anointed with the sacrifice and the gift"<sup>151</sup>

and thereby to have won immortality. "In accordance with the rta" they rent open the cave Vala rich in kine and again

"in accordance with the rta they raised the sun to heaven".<sup>152</sup>

The bond established by the worshipper through the sacrifice brings its reward: in obeying the norms of order, man is able to pierce through the cave of darkness and to wrench from it its hidden treasure, light, the sun, immortality.

Such colourful, mythological language is of deep psychological import. In these myths the emphasis is constantly centred upon the rending of mountainrock or cave,<sup>153</sup> the freeing of cattle from within the darkness by means of celestial speech<sup>154</sup> whilst striving after the rta,<sup>155</sup> the finding of the light<sup>156</sup> and the pathway of rta<sup>157</sup> and immortality<sup>158</sup>.

A request of a similar nature is addressed to the Angirasas by their descendants:

"May we be sons of heaven and beaming bright  
rend open the treasure rock".<sup>159</sup>

The meaning of the darkness to be overcome and the treasure awaiting discovery is indicated by the words "light"<sup>160</sup>, "immortality"<sup>161</sup> and "heaven"<sup>162</sup>:

"They made for us a way to lofty heaven".<sup>163</sup>

This way is the institution of the "rites of sacrificial worship"<sup>164</sup> whereby all come together to pay homage to the gods and commune with them:

"Stating the ṛta, visioning aright ... they first thought out the forms of the sacrificial rite".<sup>165</sup>

This is the human response to the vision of the cosmic order and its attempt at re-enacting it in its own microscopic and symbolic version. The Angirasas "instituted the ṛta" (*dadhann ṛtam*), they "stimulated its visioning"<sup>166</sup>, they "marked out the ancient unmeasured spheres"<sup>167</sup>

"By means of ṛta, with the power of sacrifice, they upheld the all-supporting ṛta in the highest heaven".<sup>168</sup>

By means of the ordered, ritualistic expression of the universal oblation established on earth as a token of the heavenly ṛta they helped men to reach out to a loftier vision and code of life. By such paths of vision they found

"What had been kept secretly hidden as the supreme domain of the sacrifice".<sup>169</sup>

The whole process of the institution of the sacrificial rite, its intimate connection with the visionary insight of the cosmic order, its "thinking out" and establishment, its ultimate prize, immortality,<sup>170</sup> is outlined in these allusions to the patriarchs' feats. The *yajña* was considered the most effective means of conveying to man the meaning of the cosmic order and of representing it in a concrete and dramatic form in which man could himself play a vital role. Hence ṛta, in one of its connotations, came to mean the ordered expression in rite of the universal oblation, the give and take, the receiving and the returning, the eternal rhythm of the orderly movement of the universe. So the wish expressed in an invocation to Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman

"May we be champions of your ṛta"<sup>171</sup>

evidences the ṛṣi's aspiration towards the full accomplishment of the ṛta and his full participation in it.

The idea that all things run their course in accordance with law is emphasised in Rgv. IV.3.9-12, but ṛta is in verse 9 used in its dual meaning of law and sacrifice. The poet claims that he is

"soliciting the ṛta regulated by the ṛta"

i.e. invoking the cosmic order as it is reflected in the ritual, man's symbol of it, and through the latter he transforms his invocation into a sacred action, a symbolic return to the universe of what the universe has given him. The verse consists of two parts which to all appearances seem unrelated.

It may be rendered (slightly differently) thus:

"I solicit the truth established by the sacrificial rite; even so O Agni, just as the raw cow gives of her sweet, ripe milk (do thou perform thy task of transmuter)." <sup>172</sup>

The image in the second *pāda* - pointing to the natural yet incomprehensible process whereby the cow, though raw, is yet able to give sweet ripe milk, a 'mature' offering, the *how* of the transformation effected, incomprehensible to man, being inherent in nature and an expression of the law of harmonious becoming, *ṛta* - surely has a bearing upon the first *pāda*: just as the milk is the end product of the harmonious working together of natural processes - the cow gives that which has been transformed through her - so *ṛta* as the rite is the mature human expression and symbol of the harmonious working of laws as summed up in the cosmic order, and man's response to it in his moral life and <sup>the</sup> ethics of society. The cow could here personify the *ṛta* in both its meanings.

A similar thought touching upon the interlinkedness of all things as they proceed in accordance with the inherent law of their being is expressed as "butter and milk" "drawn from the essence of the cloud" whence *amṛta*, the nectar of immortality, is "produced as the centre of *ṛta*". <sup>173</sup> Through the bond of the sacrifice performed in accordance with the norms of Order, Soma (he who grants *amṛta*) is pleased and causes rain to fall from the sky; <sup>174</sup> nature thereby fructifies; so butter and milk, the essence of nature's gifts, are extracted from heaven. The "soul-infused cloud" (*ātman nabhas*), however, may be considered the effect of man's offering. For just as the bee *collects* the pollen of the flower to transform it into honey, just as the cow gives its essence - milk - to feed its young, so man offers in the sacrifice that which he has assimilated through the process of purification. The very core of *ṛta* wherefrom emerges the nectar is this sacrificial ritual, symbol of universal and continuous exchange: the transformation process wherein man gives up those desires which constitute his earthly self for those which link him to the gods or his godly self, thereby strengthening his bond with heaven and contributing to the higher aspect of the law of give and take. Hence the Vedic poet summed up this mighty interconnection in one of those bold and far reaching statements which to the superficial understanding may appear unintelligible:

"To law, (Heaven and Earth) supreme milch kine, yield back their milk!" <sup>175</sup>

Heaven and Earth themselves are asked to accomplish their task ( $\sqrt{\text{prākṛ}}$ ) through the poet's new songs, in the matrix of ṛta<sup>176</sup>. At the cosmic level, as previously shown, the parents are thought of in terms of first engendering the gods and then as keeping within their norms all creatures as these travel between the Father and Mother<sup>177</sup>. Between these two also journeys the sun in accordance with the rhythm of the cosmos, i.e. established law<sup>178</sup>. At the ritual level - the dramatised expression of the ṛta - they are asked to perform their task, to help in the gathering together of both gods and humans, hence forward a harmonious togetherness. They

"sit around the sacrifice and promote the ṛta of Mitra"<sup>179</sup>.

We glimpse in this togetherness of gods and men a social and spiritual purpose furthered by the rite, both in the assembling of men to uplift their heart and mind in a joint effort, aspiration and communication, and in the calling upon the gods to participate in, promote and protect men's endeavours.<sup>180</sup> Thus is the great ṛta kept going.

"Serving the ṛta with the ṛta"<sup>181</sup>

also alludes to the means whereby the ṛta in its cosmic sense is best expressed by the ṛta not only in its human ethical sense but also in its ritualistic bearing, the means whereby Mitra and Varuna have attained their might being their conforming to the laws of the universal order as a whole and to those laws as particularised in their symbol, in the gods' case, the cosmic sacrifice. Thereby these gods

"have attained the lofty throne"<sup>182</sup>

A similar complex thought is voiced in the following:

"By ṛta is ṛta firmly fixed there where they unyoke Sūrya's horses."<sup>183</sup>

Thus by ṛta the law of harmony, as it is in heaven at the transcendental level, is ṛta its reflection both in the ethical and ritualistic domain of men's endeavours, firmly established.



N O T E S

Chapter IV : Section IV, 1. 2. 3. 4.

- 1 cf. A.C. Bose. "The call of the Vedas". 1970.p.49. "... Rita is *rite* as well as *right*. As a ritual Rita signifies the orderly performance of the ceremonial part of the worship which is a complicated form of action, and therefore possesses the attributes of art. So like the aesthetic form, the form of the Yajña also conforms to laws of order. And the order observed at the ritual is a symbol of Eternal Order, including the eternal statutes of moral life."
- 2 *yajñena yajñam ayajanta devās tāni dharmāṇi prathamāny āsan.* (Rgv.X.90.16ab)
- 3 *devā devam ayajanta visve.* (Rgv.X.130.3d) cf. Rgv.X.81.5&6.
- 4 Rgv.X.90.8-14.
- 5 "The Vedic experience". 1977.p.348
- 6 op.cit.p.348
- 7 *tapasas tan mahinā ajāyata ekam.* (Rgv.X.129.3d)
- 8 Athv.XI.5.17&19.  
cf. Ait.Br.II.13. where the gods are said to have conquered heaven by means of the sacrifice, austerities, penance and oblations. Also Mbh.XII.221.4-5: "renunciation (*tyāga*) and humility are to be taught as the highest *tapas*: he who has got these two virtues, has also the continued fasting and persisting chastity."  
John McKenzie ("Hindu Ethics" 1922) dismisses *tapas* in the Brāhmaṇas as calling "for little special attention though it occupies a place of high importance". (p.32), which dismissal reveals a complete lack of understanding. The very meaning of *tapas*, which, in man, results in harmonising him with the cosmic order and thereby makes him "holy" belies his main contention that the ethics of Vedic literature are very meagre.
- 9 See p.65 for this meaning and cf. Rgv.X.51.8
- 10 Rgv.X.90.4
- 11 Rgv.X.90.6
- 12 op.cit.p.xv. cf. N.T.1 Cor.XV.36: "the seed is not quickened except it die."
- 13 *devā devam ayajanta visve.* (Rgv.X.130.3d)
- 14 "In the beginning only Prajāpati was here alone. He thought to himself: 'How can I obtain descendants?' He tortured himself and mortified himself". (Sat.Br.2.2.4). The translation "tortured" is completely out of place.
- 15 "History of Indian literature." vol.1. 1927.p.220. note 2. Translated from the original German by Mrs S. Ketkar and revised by the author.
- 16 cf. Rgv.IX.67.22. where Soma is pressed for the ritual and is asked to "purify us with his filter" (*pavitrena ... punātu nah*). cf. Rgv.I.133.1a ("with ṛta I purify both Heaven and Earth"). In Rgv.IV.12.4 Agni the priest of the sacrifice is invoked and asked to "make us sinless in the sight of Aditi".
- 17 cf. Rgv.VI.11.4b where Agni is invoked to "pay honour to both wide worlds" (*agne yajasva rodasī urūcī*), he whom as "the divine-priest, oblation-receiver ... the five races anoint with their homage" (*āyuj na yam namasā rātahavyā ānjanti ... pañcajanāḥ*) Rgv.VI.11.4cd. The terms commonly used for the sacrifice are *yajña* ( $\sqrt{yaj}$  to worship) *havis* ( $\sqrt{hu}$  to pour out) *adhvara* (*adhvan* the way).
- 18  $\sqrt{yuj}$  yielding *yoga*.

- 19 *ayun̄jate mana uta yun̄jate dhiyo viprā.* (Rgv.V.81.1ab). "The Inspired ones harness their mind, harness their vision." cf. Rgv.I.18.7
- 20 "The Vedic experience." 1977.p.354
- 21 *ayam yajñam bhuvanasya nābhīh.* (Rgv.I.164.35b)
- 22 *āsā agne yajasva tanvam tava svām.* (Rgv.VI.11.2d)
- 23 cf. Rgv.I.164.47.
- 24 cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "The proper sphere of sacrifice is the sphere of communication, and communication constitutes the very structure of the universe." (p.347). "The sacrifice of the Cosmic Man signifies divine transcendence investing humanity. This universal sacrifice possesses a twofold dynamism, for it includes a sacramental downward movement of the All toward the earth and a sacrificial upward movement of the world toward the all; these two aspects are inseparable one from the other precisely because of the unity of the integral sacrifice." (p.75).
- 25 "The religion and philosophy of the Veda." 1925.p.252ff.
- 26 See in this connection Deo Prakash Patanjali Shastri "A critical study of Rigveda (I.137-163)." 1963. He argues that the Vedic rituals "describe the great sacrifice going on in the process of creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe by the Primordial being." (p.41).
- 27 op.cit.p.252. cf. K.R. Potdar. "Sacrifice in the Rgveda." 1953. "... the Brāhmaṇas cannot become adequate guides for the Rgvedic ritual viz. the chronological gap that separates the two and the possibility of the consequent changes in the ritual performances." (p.7). Nevertheless the Śat.Br. and the Ait. Br. seem to express the spirit of Vedic sacrifice in some of their statements e.g.: "the Lord of creatures created sacrifice as a symbol of self" (*prajāpatir-ātmanah pratimam asṛjata yad yajñam*) (Śat.Br.II.1.8.3) "The sacrificer is indeed the sacrifice" (*yajamano vai yajñah*) (Ait.Br.I.28) cf. Rgv.X.81.6 "O all-creator, exalted by the sacrifice offer up for thyself both Heaven and Earth."
- 28 cf. Deo Prakash Patanjali Shastri. op.cit.p.42-3. cf. K.R. Potdar. op.cit. p.2-17,270.
- 29 op.cit.p.273. cf. Buddha Prakash's views on "The meaning of yajña" in S.P.17th AIOC, Ahmedabad. 1953.p.114. On the ground of comparison he maintains that yajña means "eating" or "feast". M. Yamunacharya on the other hand maintains that yajña is worship in its best form ("The deeper meaning of yajña in Indian religious thought". Quarterly Journal of the Myth. Soc. Bangalore. 39.1948.p.87-92)
- 30 cf. Rgv.X.80.7
- 31 *namasā rātahavya* (Rgv.IV.7.7c)
- 32 *taṃ yajñasādham api vātayāmasi ṛtasya pathā namasā havismatā.* (Rgv.I.128.2ab). cf. Rgv.VII.51.1 where the sacrifice is stated to be a means to freedom and sinlessness.
- 33 *vaiśvānaram manasā agniṃ nicāyā havismanto anuṣatyam svarvidam.* (Rgv.III.26.1ab) cf. Rgv.II.35.12ab; I.93.8.
- 34 *agnaye brahma ṛbhavas tataksuh.* (Rgv.X.80.7a)
- 35 *agniṃ mahām avocāmā suvṛktim.* (Rgv.X.80.7b)
- 36 *bhājanta viśve devatvam nāma ṛtaṃ sapanto amṛtam evaiḥ.* (Rgv.I.68.2cd) cf. also the use of the word *cetana* in connection with Agni and the sacrifice (Rgv.III.3.8; II.5.1; I.170.4; VIII.13.18.
- 37 cf. A.T. de Nicolas. "Four-dimensional man." 1971: "It is as a result of this transcendence (sacrifice) that Vedic man achieves in one auspicious intuitive moment that vision-identity of the Real which could make 'his' action cosmically efficient." (p.3)

- 38 *bibhiḥ pavitrair-apupod hi arkam.* (Rgv. III.26.8b)
- 39 *hrdā matiḥ jyotir-anu prajānan.* (Rgv. III.26.8a)
- 40 cf. Rgv. I.140.1c.
- 41 *svador-abhaksi vayasah sumedhāḥ svādhyo varivovittarasya.* (Rgv. VIII.48.1ab)
- 42 *puniṣe vām arakṣasam manīṣām somam indrāya varuṇāya juhvāt.*  
(Rgv. VII.85.1ab)
- 43 cf. Rgv. VII.86, 87, 88
- 44 *kva tyāni nau sakhyā babhūyuh sacāvahe yad avrkam purā cit  
bhantaṃ mānaṃ Varuṇa svadhāvaḥ sahasradvāraṃ jagamā gṛhaṃ te.*  
(Rgv. VII.88.5)
- 45 cf. X.101.2
- 46 cf. Rgv. V.25.4; VIII.96.5d.
- 47 *ebhir-no arkair-bhavā no arvānc svarṇa jyotiḥ.* (Rgv. IV.10.3b) The song  
of praise is like a milk cow that never fails. It draws the milk  
of heaven. (cf. Rgv. VIII.27.11).
- 48 J. Gonda's expression. "Vision." p.203
- 49 *didhyato manīṣā.* (Rgv. II.20.1c)
- 50 *pra tavyasīm navyasīm dhītim agne vāco matiḥ sahasaḥ sūnave bhare.*  
(Rgv. I.143.1ab)
- 51 *rāya ese vase dadhīta dhīḥ.* (Rgv. V.41.5b)
- 52 *rāyo didhi nah suvṛktibhiḥ.* (Rgv. V.25.3d)
- 53 *satrājīto dhanṣā aksītotayavājayanto rathā iva.* (Rgv. VIII.3.15bd)
- 54 cf. Rgv. I.123.6; I.143.4.
- 55 cf. Rgv. III.38.1cd; VI.1.84.5 & 85.5.
- 56 *ṛdhag devān iha yajā.* (Rgv. III.25.1d)
57. op. cit. p.274.
- 58 *taṃ tvā vyaṃ dama ā didivānsam upa jñubādho namasā sadema.* (Rgv. VI.1.6d)  
cf. also Rgv. I.110.6.
- 59 *hrdā taṣṭesu manaso javeṣu yad brāhmaṇāḥ samyajante sakhyāḥ.*  
(Rgv. X.71.8ab). The question of the heart will be taken up again at  
the end of this chapter. cf. Rgv. I.93.8
- 60 cf. Rgv. X.191.
- 61 cf. Rgv. IX.73; VIII.27.10-22; 32.16 where the brahman priest is reported  
as not incurring any debt through his sacrificial office, which would  
imply that sacrifice is a social duty binding on men.
- 62 *itthā dhiyā yajñavantah ā cakrur-agnim ūtaye.* (Rgv. III.27.6) cf. Rgv. V.1.7
- 63 *sūktavākam prathamam ād id agnim ād id havir-ajanayanta devāḥ.*  
(Rgv. X.88.8ab)
- 64 This in K.R. Potdar's estimation might be a hint "that the hymns came  
to be written first and then the sacrifice came into existence".  
("Sacrifice in the Rgveda". 1953. p.20). By "written" he must mean  
"composed" as the hymns were not written down until much later.
- 65 cf. *devattam brāhma gāyata.* (Rgv. VIII.32.27). "Sing forth the god-  
given prayer".
- 66 *antar-matis-carati niṣṣidham goḥ.* (Rgv. III.55.8c)
- 67 For a complete study of Rgvedic sacrifice and a survey of scholars'  
contribution to the subject see K.R. Potdar. "Sacrifice in the Rgveda".  
1953.
- 68 H. Oldenberg's survey of animal sacrifices in the Rgveda is rather  
vague. ("Die Religion des Veda." 1970, 1st printed 1894) pp.354-366.  
Mention of animal sacrifices are found in Rgv. X.28.3; 27.2; 86.14; V.27.7;  
VI.17.11; the horse sacrifice in I.162 and 163. cf. L. Renou.  
"Religions of ancient India". 1953. "We cannot ... reconstruct this  
early cult. Our sole data would be the soma ceremonies which are the  
only rituals that the hymns treat in detail ... But the Rgveda,  
although it describes the preparation of the soma at great length  
hardly mentions the other operations ... Animal sacrifices for example,  
are barely touched upon." (cf. Deo Prakash Patanjali Shastri "A  
critical study of Rigveda (I.137-163). 1963. pp.34-36 and 386-423 where  
he examines Rgv. I.162 and 163 and argues in favour of a completely  
allegorical interpretation of these hymns and therefore of the horse  
sacrifice.

- 69 cf. Rgv. III.28; II.2.1. etc.
- 70 cf. Rgv. VI.16.26.
- 71 cf. Rgv. I.36.11; II.2.1; X.6.4
- 72 cf. K.R. Potdar. "Sacrifice in the Rgveda." 1953. pp.96-122. where the offerings are systematically reviewed, also p.5.-8; 135-37  
 cf. "In the hymns composed for the propitiation of the divinity, the offerings of ghr̥ta and soma are very conspicuously referred to as brought or offered by the sacrificers. We do not however come across any such reference to the 'paśu' or the beast of the sacrifice, which should have occurred if the beast were so commonly offered in the sacrifice." (p.136)
- 73 Rgv. X.90.1-4. We do not believe in human sacrifices being performed either in the time of the Rgveda or in that of the Brāhmaṇas. F. Kittel ("A tract on sacrifice." Mangalore, 1872) quotes from the Śat.Br. to prove his point that human sacrifices were current: "man is indeed the first of the sacrificial victims" (Śat.Br. 16.2.118) as well as from the Atharvaveda: "Thine (Oh Bhava) are these five victims, divided as cows, horses, men, goats and sheep." (Athv. XI.2.9). Understood figuratively it is the divine life in man (as well as animals) that is being sacrificed by being incarnated in matter. This interpretation tallies with another quotation from the Śat.Br.: "This which is sacrificed is the soul of all beings and of all gods." (Śat.Br. 14.3.2.1.) a quotation which confirms our main contention that the puruṣa or divine life through being imprisoned in the shackles of mortality or matter is the sacrificial victim par excellence. This sacrifice is necessary that the world might be a "living" cosmos; man being, on earth, the "king" of creation, whose divine nature is far more developed than the animals is necessarily the "first" among all the sacrificial victims. So the animal is used as a substitute for the human, "the animal is man by reflection" or allegory (*pratimā*) (*Sankhayana Śrauta Sūtra* X.3; XI.8), and "the animal is ultimately the sacrificer himself" (Ait.Br. II.11) cf. Tait.S. VI.1.11.6. Śat.Br. 13.3.4.21.  
 "The religion of the Veda." 1908. p.65.
- 74 op.cit. p.76.
- 75 op.cit. p.213.
- 76 op.cit. p.75. cf. also p.66-7.
- 77 "The religions of India." 1895. p.149.
- 78 H. Lefever rightly condemns Bergaigne's view that the *do ut des* "is the fundamental fact of the whole Vedic religion". ("The Vedic Idea of sin". 1935. p.16). This view applies to the Brāhmaṇa period, but not to the Rgveda.  
 cf. K.R. Potdar. "Sacrifice in the Rgveda." 1953. pp.40-62. cf. Rgv. VIII.10.4; 6.22; 12.19; VI.10.1, VII.17. 3&4; I.111.2 where the gods are clearly stated to be instrumental in the success of the sacrifice. The sacrifice is said in Rgv. VIII.18.19. to be the Adityas' "inner monitor": *yajño hīlo vo antara*, for men are of the same race as the gods (*sajātya*).
- 80 "Theories of sacrifice as applied to the Rgveda." (*AOSJ*). vol.16, 1896. p.cxxxix.
- 81 cf. Rgv. I.133.1ab. "With ṛta I purify both earth and heaven" (*ubhe punāmi rodasi ṛtena*) where ṛta is the sacrificial rite as well as the harmony mirrored therein. The same meaning applies to Rgv. V.59.1: "I offer the ṛta to Heaven and Earth" (*dive pra pṛthivyā ṛtam bhare*). cf. Rgv. VII.21.5d: "Let not the phallus worshippers enter our ṛta" (*mā śiśnadevā api gur-ṛtam nah*) where ṛta is the sacrificial enclosure. cf. Rgv. VII.38.2b and 59.1b where the ṛta is "offered" (*rabhṛtāvṛtasya ṛtam bhare*). cf. Rgv. VII.101.6c. "may this ṛta protect me".  
 cf. Rgv. X.67.2. "praising ṛta; thinking aright ... the Angirases ... first thought out the institution of the sacrifice" (*ṛtam śamsanta rju dīdhyānā ... yajñasya dhāma prathamam mananta.*)

- 82 This is more explicit in the later literature. cf. J. Gonda. "Triads". 1976. "The co-ordination of a ritual act and the cosmic fact of the threefold universe is at S. B. 6.5.2.22 explicitly based on an identity." p.57)
- 83 *dadhann ṛtaṃ dhanayann asya dhītim* (Rgv. I.71.3a)
- 84 *ṛtena ṛtaṃ dharuṇaṃ dhārayanta yajñasya śāke parame vyoman.* (Rgv. V.15.2ab)
- 85 *vi ye dadhuḥ śaradaṃ māsam ād-ahar-yajñam aktuḥ ca ād-ṛcam.* (Rgv. VII.66.11ab)
- 86 *divakṣaso agni-jihvā ṛtāvṛdha ṛtasya yonim vimṛśanta āsate.* (Rgv. X.65.7ab)
- 87 "Religions of ancient India." 1953. p.17-18.
- 88 "Triads." 1976. p.49.
- 89 "Le sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne." (École des Hautes Études. vol.79. 1976. p.20. (Trans. J.M.)
- 90 "Dharma: an expression of universal order." (Philosophy East and West. vol.22. 1972. p.140).
- 91 op.cit. p.135
- 92 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.2-3
- 93 "Some aspects of the history of Hinduism." 1967. p.70.
- 94 Rgv. X.130.1.
- 95 *pumān enam tanute.* (Rgv. X.130.2a) "the man extends it".
- 96 *vi tatne adhi nāke asmin.* (Rgv. X.130.2b) "even to yonder vault has he outstretched it."
- 97 Rgv. I.142.1.
- 98 *ṛtasya tantur-vitataḥ pavitra ā jihvāyā agne varuṇasya māyayā dhīras cit tat sam inakṣanta āsata atra kartam ava padāty-aprabhuḥ.* (Rgv. IX.73.9ab)
- 99 cf. the Christian transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord.
- 100 "Vision." 1963. p.212.
- 101 *asmā ukthāya.*
- 102 cf. Rgv. V.45.3.
- 103 *etā dhiyaṃ kṛnavāmā.* (Rgv. V.45.6ab) "Let us perform the dhīh'.
- 104 *manasā dīdhyānā.*
- 105 *te avindan manasā dīdhyānā yajuḥ skannaṃ prathamam devayānam.* (Rgv. X.181.3ab)
- 106 *dadhann ṛtaṃ dhanayann asya dhītim.* (Rgv. I.71.3a)
- 107 cf. J. McKenzie's contention that the sacrifice as understood and practised in Vedic times "has no ethical significance." ("Hindu ethics". 1922. p.31). For an opposite view cf. A.C. Bose "Hymns from the Vedas." 1966. p.42.
- 108 *ubhe punāmi rodasī ṛtena.* (Rgv. I.133.1a)
- 109 *akṣareṇa prati mima etām ṛtasya nābhau adhi sam punāmi.* (Rgv. X.13.3cd) For *√prati mā* cf. J. Gonda "Four studies in the language of the Rgveda." 1959. p.177-8.
- 110 Rgv. IX.74.4b.
- 111 cf. Rgv. X.170.2; 85.1
- 112 ... *śucim hinomy-adhvaram śucibhyaḥ / ṛtena satyam ṛtasāpa āyan ...* (Rgv. VII.56.12)
- 113 *apa naḥ sośucad agham.* (Rgv. I.97.1a).
- 114 *yat te pavitram arcisy-agne vitatam antar ā brahma tena punīhi naḥ.* (Rgv. IX.67.23abc) cf. Rgv. VI.11.2.
- 115 *yad dīdayad divi.* (Rgv. VI.16.36c)
- 116 cf. also Rgv. I.44.10; 68.10; 72.1; VI.22.3; VIII.43.32; 46.8; IX.106.4; 107.21.

- 117 pavitreṇa ... sa punātu naḥ. (Rgv. IX.67.22a,b)  
 118 trī sa pavitrā hṛdi antar ā dadhe. (Rgv. IX.73.8b) "Three filters  
 are set within his heart".  
 119 cf. Rgv. IX.97.34 and IX.111.2. Agni is also credited with three  
 filters. cf. Rgv. III.26.8.  
 120 rtavākena satyena śraddhayā tapasā suta. (Rgv. IX.113.2c) see also p.173-4.  
 121 cf. Rgv. I.67.2. This aspect will be taken up in the last section  
 of this chapter.  
 122 granthim na vi śya grathitaṃ punāna rjum ca gātum vṛjinam ca soma.  
 Rgv. IX.97.18. ab.) (Griffith's trans.)  
 cf. ṛtasya panthāṃ na taranti duṣkṛtaḥ. (Rgv. IX.73.6d. "The wicked  
 do not travel on the pathway of ṛtā".  
 Rgv. I.134.6.  
 123 punantu mān ... dhiyā. (Rgv. IX.67.27)  
 124 cf. Rgv. IX.111.2 where Soma is said to be adored by the "mothers" who  
 seem to be the dhiyaḥ.  
 126 devān vā yaç-cakṛmā kaç-cid āgaḥ sakhāyaṃ vā sadam ij-jās patiṃ vā  
 iyaṃ dhīr-bhūyā avayānam eṣām. (Rgv. I.185.8abc).  
 127 indrāgni apasas pary-upa pra yanti dhītayaḥ ṛtasya pathyā anu.  
 (Rgv. III.12.7) cf. ṛtād iyarmi te dhiyaṃ manoyujam. (Rgv. VIII.3.26b)  
 "From [the seat of] rta I send thee a mind-yoked dhīḥ."  
 128 iyaṃ ta ṛtviyāvati dhītir-eti navīyasi saparyamti purūpriyā mimita it.  
 (Rgv. VIII.12.10) "This new visionary-hymn, worthy of attention and  
 dear to many I measure out in its own proper time."  
 129 garbho yajñasya devayuh kratuṃ punīta. (Rgv. VIII.12.11)  
 130 tantuṃ tanvan rajaso bhānum anu ihi jyotiṣmataḥ patho rakṣa dhiyā kṛtān.  
 (Rgv. X.53.6ab)  
 131 atihitaṃ yaç āsīd yajñasya dhāma paramam guhā yat. (Rgv. X.181.2ab)  
 132 We propose to examine ṛta in that sense only as used in the singular.  
 133 "Dhāman." 1967.p.31  
 134 10th Oriental Conference. Tirupati, 1940.p.18.  
 135 E.V.P. vol.VIII.p.61  
 136 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935.p.3  
 137 mā śisnadevā api gur-ṛtaṃ naḥ. (Rgv. VII.21.5d)  
 138 ubhe punāmi rodasī ṛtena. (Rgv. I.133.1a)  
 139 tan ma ṛtaṃ pātu śata śāradaḥ. (Rgv. VII.101.6c)  
 140 arcā dive pra pṛthivyā ṛtaṃ bhare. (Rgv. V.59.1b) cf. also Rgv. VII.38.2;  
 V.21.4; III.12.7.  
 141 ud u tiṣṭha savitaḥ śrudhyasya hiraṇyapāṇe prabhṛtāu ṛtasya .  
 (Rgv. VII.38.2ab)  
 142 yaç ṛtasya veṣi. (Rgv. X.8.5ab)  
 143 ṛtaṃ dive tad avocaṃ pṛthivyā abhiśrāvāya prathamam sumedhāḥ.  
 (Rgv. I.185.10ab)  
 144 navīyasiṃ gīram.  
 145 dhiyaṃ pratnām .  
 146 ṛtasya pipyusīm. This is the vision, abounding in ṛta, which the  
 worshipper offers to Indra. (Rgv. VIII.95.5)  
 147 cf. Rgv. X.31.11.  
 148 ṛtasya hi sadaso dhītir-adyaut. (Rgv. X.111.2a)  
 149 śusoca sūrya ṛtajātayaḥ girā. (Rgv. X.138.2d)  
 150 ṛtam āsusāṇāḥ / śuci id-ayan dīdhitim ukthaśāsaḥ. (Rgv. IV.2.16bc)  
 151 yajñena dakṣiṇayā samaktā. (Rgv. X.62.1ā). J. Gonda defines dakṣiṇā  
 thus: "A dakṣiṇā which is often incorrectly translated by 'fee' or  
 'salary' is a gift which being presented to the officiating priests  
 and other brahmins, establishes ... a bond between giver and recipient;  
 which produces rich returns for the giver and establishes a  
 generative alliance between both parties concerned." "Vision."  
 1963.p.239).  
 152 ye rtena sūryam ā arohayan divi. (Rgv. X.62.3a)

- 153 cf. *dadr̥vāṅso adrim*. (Rgv.IV.1.13)
- 154 cf. Rgv.IV.1.13-18; III.31.5&9
- 155 cf. *ṛtam āsuṣāṅāḥ*. (Rgv.IV.1.13)
- 156 cf. *vidantā jyotiḥ*. (Rgv.IV.1.14)
- 157 *viśvām avindan pathyām ṛtasya*. (Rgv.III.31.5) "they found the whole pathway of ṛtā". cf. Rgv.IV.3.11.
- 158 *arkaiḥ kṛṇvānāso amṛtatvāya gātum*. (Rgv.III.31.9) "Fashioning with their flashing songs a path to immortality."
- 159 *divas putrā ... bhavema adrim rujema dhaninam śucantah*. (Rgv.IV.2.15cd). cf. Rgv.I.109.3.
- 160 *jyotis* (Rgv.IV.1.4)
- 161 Rgv.III.31.9
- 162 Rgv.IV.2.15cd. cf. O.T. Isaiah 45.3: "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places".
- 163 *cakrur-divobṛhato gātum asme*. (Rgv.I.71.2c)
- 164 *yajñasya dhāma*.
- 165 *ṛtam śamsanta ṛju dīdhyānā ... yajñasya dhāma prathamam mananta*. (Rgv.X.67.2a,d)
- 166 *dādhan ṛtam dhanayann asya dhītim*. (Rgv.I.71.3). J. Gonda ("Vision") explains this verse thus: They established a special manifestation of ṛta and made ... the intuitive and visionary 'sight' of it an institution". (p.174).
- 167 *pūrvā dhāmāny-amitā mimānāḥ*. (Rgv.X.56.5b) *dhāma* would here be the institution of the rite.
- 168 *ṛtena ṛtam dharuṇam dhārayanta yajñasya śāke parame vyoman*. (Rgv.V.15.2ab). cf. the prayer to the Ṛbhus, Rgv.IV.37.7.
- 169 *avindan te atihitam yad āsīd yajñasya dhāma paramam guha*. (Rgv.X.181.2ab)
- 170 This will be explained in the section on Soma.
- 171 *syāma id ṛtasya rathyaḥ*. (Rgv.VIII.19.35cd)
- 172 *ṛtena ṛtam niyatam ile ā gor-āmā sacā madhumat pakvam agne*. (Rgv.IV.3.9ab).
- 173 *ātmanvan nabho duhyate ghṛtam paya ṛtasya nābhir-amṛtam vi jāyate*. (Rgv.IX.74.4ab)
- 174 cf. Rgv.IX.86.14c
- 175 *ṛtāya dhenū parame duhāte*. (Rgv.IV.23.10d)
- 176 *pra pūrvaje pitarā navyasībhir-gīrbhiḥ kṛṇudhvaṃ sadane ṛtasya*. (Rgv.VII.53.2ab)
- 177 *dve srutī aśṛṇavaṃ pitṛnām aham devānām uta martyānām tābhyām idam viśvam ejaṭ sam eti yad antarā pitaram mātaram ca*. (Rgv.X.88.15)
- 178 *antariyate devo devī dharmanā sūryaḥ śuciḥ*. (Rgv.I.160.1d) "Between these goddesses the godly, effulgent Sūrya travels in accordance with the statute."
- 179 *mitrasya sādhatas ... ṛtam pari yajñam ni sedathuḥ*. (Rgv.IV.56.7)
- 180 cf. Rgv.I.139.1; VI.II.32.16.
- 181 *ṛtam ṛtena sapantā*. (Rgv.V.68.4a)
- 182 *brhantam gartam āsate* (Rgv.V.68.5c)
- 183 *ṛtena ṛtam apihitam dhruvam vām sūryasya yatra vimucanty-aśvān*. (Rgv.V.62.1ab).

#### IV.5 Soma's role in the ritual

Two gods are intimately connected with the ritual and the purificatory process of the sacrifice: Soma and Agni. Each one plays as great a role as the other. Both purify, inspire and exalt.

Both take the worshipper to that innermost centre whence the state of immortality is experienced. Agni, the highpriest, offers up the oblation transmuted through his ministry; the response is the exalted vision of godhood granted by Soma, the king. An analysis of the function and meaning of these two deities in the ritual may serve to pinpoint further the Vedic significance of the ritual and its part in the vast *ṛta*.

In respect to Soma two points of importance will be examined:

Soma as the knower and the inspired-and-inspirer (*kaviḥ*)<sup>1</sup>  
and Soma as the essence of the *ṛta*.

Born in the womb of *ṛta* Soma embodies the norms of cosmic order, and being the exhilarating drink that bestows enlightenment and immortality he inspires the sacrificer; uplifts him to the domain of the gods and grants him that insight which pierces to the very core of the universe, hence of the cosmic order. He is the illuminator par excellence, the one whose action expresses the *ṛta* in its deepest sense.

Soma is asked, as "king and as god"

"to accomplish the lofty *ṛta*".<sup>2</sup>

In this request his role in the ritual is declared essential. As he "flows forth purified", he, like Agni, brings to the altar

"the gods, the fosterers of *ṛta*".<sup>3</sup>

He flows in accordance with that circuit of "true orderly process"<sup>4</sup> in which is mirrored the great *ṛta*. Compared to a "stallion" (*vṛṣan*)

"following the *vrata* of the stallion, thou, O stallion, hast established the statutes"<sup>5</sup>

and as "lord of the *dharman*"<sup>6</sup> i.e. of the maintenance of the *ṛta* in all its senses<sup>7</sup>

"he journeys along the paths of *ṛta*"<sup>8</sup>

"knowing the course of the sacrifice".<sup>9</sup>

The expression "womb of *ṛta*" (*ṛtasya yoni*), "seat of *ṛta*" (*ṛtasya pāda*) - elsewhere *sadas* and *śadana*<sup>10</sup> - whenever used in connection with Soma (or Agni), is evidently the enclosure where the seers congregate to perform the rite and await the manifestation of the visions which, with the help of Soma, enable them to pass beyond the normal range of perception, to expand their insight quite beyond the power of the intellect:

"In the seat of *ṛta* the seers keep watch over their intuitive insights, luminous-as-heaven and bright-like-lightning".<sup>11</sup>

"Inspirations hasten towards the Soma ...  
even like billowy waters!"<sup>12</sup>



"Men urge Soma forth to the sacrifice with all-expressive vision".<sup>13</sup>

No better description of the purpose of the sacrifice can be found than such coming together of the worshippers for purposes of communion through spiritual insight.

"United together in one common aim, they sit, the highpriests, the seven brothers, and fill the seat of the One".<sup>14</sup>  
Soma's drops, described as "causing inspiration" (*vipāścītaḥ*)

"through inspiration have attained to visions".<sup>15</sup>

The maintenance of the law and the illuminating action of Soma are both functions of the god activated by means of the ritual. His juice flows into the sieve "a god for the gods"<sup>16</sup> according to "primeval plan" as R.T.H. Griffith translates *pratnena manmanā*, or as one might render it "according to traditional wisdom", i.e. to those immemorial practices of the sacrificial ritual as they had been handed down by the wise. Called the "embryo of the ṛta" (*garbho ṛtasya*) born in the ṛta, i.e. in accordance with the course of Imperial practices,<sup>em</sup> he engenders the ṛta<sup>17</sup> and "grows mighty by ṛta" and is identified with the "mighty ṛta" in both its ritual and cosmic sense:

"He, born in ṛta, waxing strong by ṛta, king, god and mighty ṛta."<sup>18</sup>

"Swiftly he flows as the vast law to the purifying sieve."<sup>19</sup>

That Soma the "inspirer", or divine-poet (*kaviḥ*) is said to be generated by means of purposeful intellectual activity (*dakṣena manasā*) presupposes a thinker, whether human or godly:

"Through will and mental activity is generated the inspirer placed as embryo of the ṛta beyond the twins"<sup>20</sup>

Is Soma generated by thought? Elsewhere (Rgv. I.46.8) the Soma drops are said to be prepared by means of *dhiyā*, the visionary insight of the poet. Are these "drops" a technical term referring to the culminating point of an experience precluded by the *dhiḥ*, in fact a deepening of that vision which takes the seer into a state of ecstasy such as Soma produces? Is there a hint in Rgv. IX.68.5 (above quoted) as to the inherent meaning of Soma, namely an illumination which flashes forth or is "generated" in the worshipper when he has duly performed all his duties and concentrated his mind on higher purposes, visioned aright and invoked the presence of the gods in the right way. The mention that Soma is placed "beyond the twins" is also worthy of observation. The word "twins" refers to Heaven and Earth, or to any dualities of the manifested worlds, or of man. His origin is beyond the worlds of complements or of opposites. In the case of a man, illuminated by Soma, this would refer to his ability to enter a world beyond the opposites, hence the world of noumenon as against that of phenomenon.

Soma's action upon the seer is dual; it opens his eyes and loosens his tongue, i.e. grants him eloquence:

"This here when drunk arouses my voice, this has awakened the eager intuition!"<sup>21</sup>

When "purified" (*puṇāna*) Soma, the "arouser" (*upavaktā*)  
 "unseals the intuitive-perception of the priest".<sup>22</sup>

The mental activity which generates him seems linked to *dhītiḥ* or  
 visioning, since the visions of *ṛta* are seemingly considered his "mothers":

"Thou, together with thy mothers adornest thyself in  
 thy home, with visions of *ṛta*, in thy home."<sup>23</sup>

He is thus son of visionary insights who himself grants insight or illumination.  
 Invoked as the inspirer, he reveals the part he plays in, and the purpose of  
 the sacrificial rite: in enlightening man he enables him to penetrate into the  
 very fabric of the cosmic order, he grants him the vision of *ṛta*. The eyes  
 that can visualise this order, the mind that can comprehend its full meaning,  
 can only be those enlightened by Soma. They are his gifts to the *ṛṣi*. Hence  
 he is the "treasure-granter" (*ratnadhā*), seated "in the womb of *ṛta*"<sup>24</sup> very  
 "soul of the sacrifice"<sup>25</sup>, very core of the worship.

For such reason Soma is proclaimed the "lord" of the poet's "vision"<sup>26</sup>,  
 the "lord of unalloyed speech"<sup>27</sup>, the "truly inspired one"<sup>28</sup>. Since he makes  
 the vision of *ṛta* perceptible he is *ṛṣisād*:

"He flows, king of all celestial seers, roaring forth  
 the vision of *ṛta*, surpassing the *ṛṣi*."<sup>29</sup>

This supreme "vision of cosmic order" coming to the *ṛṣi* through Soma in  
 the ritual is a transcendental experience that surpasses the ordinary mental faculties.  
 Visioning and singing are the essential qualifications of the *ṛṣi*; these are  
 enhanced by Soma, the ecstasy-granter, who

"releases the mind-yoked vision even as the  
 thunder releases the rain."<sup>30</sup>

The whole ritual is implied as helping to bring to consciousness that which is  
 deeply buried in the *ṛṣi*. This is the

"glory for which Soma is born"<sup>31</sup>

that he should

"give glory and vigour to the singers (who)  
 donning (his) glory have reached immortality."<sup>32</sup>

The seer when exalted enters into a state of ecstasy which is Soma's, hence he  
 dons Soma's glory, sees and knows through Soma's eyes.<sup>33</sup>

Since Soma gives eloquence to the poet, he is the "tongue of the *ṛta*"<sup>34</sup>  
 as that eloquence expresses itself through man:

"As the tongue of the *ṛta*, the speaker, undeceivable lord  
 of this vision, purifies the cherished meath."<sup>35</sup>

He is chosen to proclaim the *ṛta*:

"Knowing the *ṛta*, he foremost, wisest, celestial lord,  
 was indeed chosen to proclaim it."<sup>36</sup>

"Declaring the *ṛta*, exalted by the *ṛta*, speaking the truth,  
 acting the truth, declaring faith!"<sup>37</sup>

Through the impact of inspiration and visioning the seer bursts into eloquence. And this eloquence serves to exalt the *ṛta*: the inherent harmony in accordance with which all things move is visioned as *satya*, truth. To proclaim this truth (*satya*) is Soma's glory. To proclaim this truth is his act of faith (*śraddhā*). Such words as *ṛta*, *satya* and *śraddhā* brought together in a verse that describes Soma, the exalter of the sacrifice, are indicative of the essential meaning of the ritual. This is further emphasised in the second verse of the same hymn where *śraddhā* is placed next to *tapas*:

"With right enunciation (*ṛtavākēna*), with truth (*satyena*)  
with faith and contemplative exertion (*tapas*)  
is (Soma) pressed".<sup>38</sup>

It may be that the true Soma, that which grants illumination, that which only the Brahmins know<sup>39</sup> cannot be pressed, i.e. his essence cannot be known unless the seer reaches a state of purity pregnant with faith, with fervor of heart, with sincerity. These verses lift the veil that hides that side of the sacrifice left impenetrable to Western scholars: the pressing-and-pouring of the Soma is an act of faith and meditation expressing true prayer, reaching out far beyond the mere physical action, and Soma, its mouthpiece is man's eloquent praise and homage to the divine powers. This inner meaning was completely overlooked and as a result the Vedic sacrifice was dismissed as well nigh meaningless.

Soma is furthermore addressed as Brahmanaspati, the Lord of prayer (*brahman*), of that power of the utterance and invocation which blends appeal and command:

"Outspread is thy purifying filter, O Brahmanaspati!"<sup>40</sup>

The purification opens the way for prayer, or direct communication. So the priests

"have assigned him as messenger for the sake of  
probing the divine-insights".<sup>41</sup>

This verse, translated in accordance with L. Renou's comments<sup>42</sup> indirectly reveals Soma's inspiring role in opening the seers' eyes to the meaning inherent in their intuitive insights. Through Soma, the illuminator, the seers have been able to penetrate into the significance of the *ṛta*.

Further hints as to Soma's role are given in a curious verse:

"Three are the utterances to which he gives voice, he the  
conveyor of the vision of *ṛta*, the intuitive perception  
[manifesting] *brahma*."<sup>43</sup>

The "conveyor of the vision of *ṛta*" declares the function of Soma, the opener of the inner eye to the perception of the cosmic order. The fact that *brahmano manīṣām* is juxtaposed to the "vision of *ṛta*" points to the sacredness of the whole procedure and to one of the several meanings of the sacrifice, viz. a means of coming into communion with extra sensory powers and addressing to them man's higher aspirations. This is thus confirmed:

"Whilst being cleansed Soma finds a pathway for prayer".<sup>44</sup>

The very purifying and enlightening role of Soma blazes the track for that prayer which will, by its power of invocation, bring gods and men together in communion. In this essential aim of the sacrifice is again glimpsed the reflection of *rta* which, meaning harmony, implies the bringing, the working together in orderly sequence, of the various forces of the world, for holy creative purposes; the "renewal" of those who participate in the drama, hence the renewal of the whole creation.

Returning to Rgv. IX.97.34 a glance at J. Gonda's Interpretation may help to clarify the verse:

"... Soma is said to initiate the process of coming, by way of a visionary intuition, in touch with the norms, 'laws' and structure which underly the phenomenal world and make it an organic whole and to set also an analogous mental process with regard to brahman in motion"<sup>45</sup>

The whole purpose of the sacrificial ritual is here set forth; hence the identification of *rta* with *yajña*. As <sup>to</sup> the puzzle of the three voices or utterances, J. Gonda offers the suggestion that these are

"... the recitations of the priests, the lowing of the cows and the sound of the soma itself."<sup>46</sup>

This is taking the "three voices" at a rather superficial level. These may be the three ways Soma expresses himself, or utters his message in his three habitations, *dhāma*: sound, light and supreme illumination pertaining to the domain of Soma's action. Eloquence or the power of the word - the realm of sound - enlightenment or light - the vision of truth - and immortality or full illumination - i.e. pure *vidyā* or wisdom - are his gifts to the *ṛṣis*, hence his *dhāma*, his sphere or domain of action. For his threefold<sup>47</sup> estate and even a fourth one<sup>48</sup> are referred to in various verses:

"Far-seeing mind, enlightening, light bestower, skilled in a thousand ways, leader of the inspired-poets, the mighty one (*mahiṣah*) strives after his third estate"<sup>49</sup>

"the mighty one declares his fourth estate".<sup>50</sup>

The desiderative form of  $\sqrt{\text{san}}$  (*siṣānt*) wish to gain, might imply that his third sphere <sup>(or "highest estate" 51)</sup> is to be reached during the process of the sacrifice, and that man with the help of Soma can attain to it, the ritual being the very means for such attainment.

Soma's first domain, that of *sound*, is brought to our notice through the *ṛṣis*' search for the divine word during their act of worship:

"They tracked down the path of *vāc* by means of the sacrificial rite."<sup>52</sup>

The act of worship, *yajña*, opens up the realm of sound, *vāc*, the *ṛṣis* following the path to *vāc*.<sup>53</sup> The verse adds that they discovered her "abiding" (*praviṣṭām*) among the *ṛṣis* (*ṛṣiṣu*); *vāc* is then the power hidden in the seer and aroused through the rite, by means of Soma, the ultimate expression, in

sound, of the concealed knowledge. Then,

"Having given shape to her they produce her variously".<sup>54</sup>

This would indicate a knowledge of the potencies and qualities of sound, and its impact; it also grants another glimpse into the purpose of the sacrifice which seems to further the same ends as meditation, namely to investigate the realms beyond the physical senses, and enter into communion with higher powers. The ṛṣi Dīrghatamas mentions that only when visited by the "first-born of order"<sup>55</sup> does man gain insight into *vāc*, and obtain a share of her. Thus only through the divine influx, whether caused by Agni or Soma as the "first-born of *rta*", does man become conscious of the potency of the creative word and can use it to fruitful purposes.<sup>56</sup>

The ṛṣis conceived light and sound, shining and singing, as interchangeable. To the Vedic mind to praise is to sound the right word that will illuminate in the proper way that will attract the notice of the gods. The whole process of worshipping meant to set up an inner light. The *arka* is a ray, flash of lightning as well as a hymn and praise. "Sing forth a prayer"<sup>57</sup> may as well be rendered by "shine forth a prayer". Songs "glow with the force of fire".<sup>58</sup> "By the currents of *rta*"<sup>59</sup>, the bards and their concealed visions proceed to glow (*śocanta*)<sup>60</sup>. "Light-winning", or "heaven-possessing" (*svarṣa*) is a characteristic of the thought or song or eulogy. Agni is invoked for *brahma*<sup>61</sup> that the latter "may shine in heaven".<sup>62</sup> Remembering that *brahma*, in the Rgveda, is the evocative power of the word, we glimpse the two aspects of light and sound brought together as one in this verse.

The second domain, so intimately connected with the first, the realm of light to which Soma led the ṛṣi, was described as sunlight or celestial light.

"Visions vie for the sunlight as people".<sup>63</sup>

The ṛṣis' visions are steps towards that enlightenment which is Soma's great gift. Soma's potent action upon the mind, shown as "stimulating" in the bard "the vision of *rta* for the sake of the sacrifice"<sup>64</sup> wins him the title of "lord of mind"<sup>65</sup> and "all-knower"<sup>66</sup>, the far-seeing, wise one,<sup>67</sup> i.e. he fosters that insight that permits the bard to penetrate into and understand the laws of the universe; through his intelligent perception (*kratvā*) and "bright eyes" he opens out "the stall of heaven", thus "releasing the vision of *rta*".<sup>68</sup> The reference to "bright eyes"<sup>69</sup> is characteristic of Soma whose drops arouse, or bestow, an intuitive perception (*manīṣā*)<sup>70</sup> which as *dhītiḥ* or visionary insight is said to "shine from the seat of *rta*".<sup>71</sup> Soma's drops are *manīṣinah*, i.e. they incite to wise perception, they find celestial light (*svarvidah*)<sup>72</sup> for the seer.

"Seated in the womb of *rta* he perceives by means of heaven's light",<sup>73</sup> and as the "inspirer, he illumines the bright sphere of heaven".<sup>74</sup>

Through the effect of Soma the ṛṣi is enabled to penetrate or see "heaven"

which otherwise remains obscure to his ordinary perception.

"Far-sighted, brightly-he-shines"<sup>75</sup>

"thousand-eyed"<sup>76</sup> hence his eyes, by implication, grant illumination in the seer, make him "sun-eyed".<sup>77</sup> In a state of heightened awareness the Vedic bards admitted to beholding the "golden one"<sup>78</sup> not with visionary thoughts or mental insight,<sup>79</sup> but with the "very eyes of Soma (our) very eyes".<sup>80</sup>

The close link between Soma and the all-seeing sun, the "overlord of sights"<sup>81</sup> as the Atharvaveda qualifies Sūrya who, in the Rgveda, is called the "wide-visioned one" (*urucakṣas*),<sup>82</sup> is a pointer to Soma's illuminating action in man. He is said to "generate the sun"<sup>83</sup>, to "place the eye with the sun"<sup>84</sup>, that is, to illumine human consciousness, to "produce" Sūrya

"midst mortals for maintenance of the law and for prized immortality."<sup>85</sup>

This, together with such statements as

"Having received from my father the vision of ṛta,  
I was born even a sun"<sup>86</sup>

is one of the most important verses relating to the sun in so far as it shows that Sūrya was not merely the sun out in the sky, but also that the name was used as a term of reference symbolic of the illuminating principle that was aroused through the medium of Soma's action. The end of illumination is the constant maintenance of the law in all its aspects and the entering in that state beyond the opposites, or immortality.

Mythological expressions such as Soma mounting on Sūrya's chariot,<sup>87</sup> Soma mounting up with Sūrya to the sky,<sup>88</sup> Soma making Sūrya ascend the heavens,<sup>89</sup> Soma shining by means of the sun,<sup>90</sup> Soma "donning the rays of Sūrya",<sup>91</sup> all tend to indicate one overwhelming state of exaltation culminating in illumination that is akin to the solar splendour to which Soma gives birth. The bond between Soma and Sūrya in the sacrificial ritual hints at a close connection between the sacrifice and the illumination. Having

"wrapped himself up with Sūrya's rays, he (Soma) spins the triply  
twisted thread, as he knows, conducting the new operations of ṛta".<sup>92</sup>

In a pithy summing up of the ritual, this verse indicates Soma's action which, in conjunction with that illumination described as solar, spins the thread of the sacrifice, that is, relates the two worlds of the manifest and the unmanifest, thereby working in accordance with, indeed "conducting", the norms of the cosmic order.

Soma's drops are said to reach to the "heights", to the "highest thread", thus spanning the loftiest and the lowest, heaven and earth. Since they are in question, the verse may refer to their illuminating quality which gives insight into the highest realm (*uttamam*):

"Right to the heights have they reached out, to the ultimate  
spun-out warp".<sup>93</sup>

The action of the ritual is often compared to a thread spinning out a web,<sup>94</sup>

the image reminding us that the sacrifice was viewed as a mode of action whereby man himself, so to speak, "wove" the pattern or web of the cosmic order, the warp of *rta*<sup>95</sup> being spun in the "sieve", this being made possible through the magic power of Varuna.<sup>96</sup> Thus the action of men and gods is closely interlinked; man sets the warp<sup>97</sup> through the grace of the deity and in his spinning makes his contribution to the cosmic order. This is a very ancient action that dates back to the origin of the world and is "well known". Indra is thus invited to

"spin out the thread of ancient time, as is well known".<sup>98</sup>

To this verse R.T.H. Griffith adds the apposite note that

"... the due performance of sacrifice is regarded as an unbroken thread reaching through a succession of Rishis from ancient to modern times".<sup>99</sup>

This is quite in keeping with the *ṛsis*<sup>1</sup> looking back to a golden age of seership whose continuity does not seem to have been broken.<sup>100</sup>

It thus becomes apparent that the ritual is also the human dramatic attempt at reflecting man's endeavour to control the three spheres over which his consciousness can range prior to achieving complete integration and its outcome, full illumination: control over manifestation as sound and as light as a prerequisite towards the understanding of the hidden forces of nature, their manipulation, mastery and transcendence.

As already seen in several instances,<sup>101</sup> Soma holds in himself the extremes of manifestation and in this respect is a worthy embodiment of *rta* which holds all opposite tensions in equilibrium:

"Shining over both worlds, like a darting deer, thou rushest forward, seated in the womb of *rta*".<sup>102</sup>

Here the dynamic and static aspects of Soma ("thou rushest, seated") are brought together in one of those daring juxtapositions typical of the *Rgveda*. The two opposites, speed and rest, as demonstrated by Soma, hint at a state of omnipresence. Both at the "centre" or "navel" of *rta* and in all manifested spheres - "the two worlds" - shines Soma, omnipresent and omniscient, "guardian of *rta*" (*gopam ṛtasya*), like Agni, "cleaver of the heaven" (*rajasturam*), true "centre of earth"<sup>103</sup> and "support of mighty heaven".<sup>104</sup> In connecting both, Soma is equivalent to Agni who, too, is both head of heaven and centre of earth.

From the "central point" (*nābhā*) of the ritual, works Soma

"receiving us in the centre".<sup>105</sup>

The word *nābhi* elsewhere qualified by *prthivi*<sup>106</sup> refers literally to the sacrificial enclosure as microcosmic centre but also figuratively, to Soma's anchor which is the very central point of human consciousness, the point of dissolution and re-resolution. Soma's capacity to span heights and plumb depths is well attested:

"In earth's centre and on the mountains has he taken up his abode".<sup>107</sup>

He is present both in the terrestrial and in the spiritual (mountain or height), uniting them, enlightening the earthly. This central point <sup>108</sup> of earth which is also Agni's own home, the navel of the world, is the sacrificial enclosure wherein the *rta* is re-enacted:

"This altar" says the ṛṣi Dīrghatamas  
 "is the earth's furthest limit;  
 this sacrificial offering the hub of the universe,  
 this Soma, the stallion's powerful seed,  
 this prayer, the speech of highest heaven". <sup>109</sup>

The whole of existence is epitomised in the altar, the meeting-point between the manifest and the unmanifest, the "navel" of the world: the final syllable (*anta*) of that ultimate (*para*) which it represents. From the extreme limits of manifestation to the core of creation, is sacrifice, a constant self-gift for self-perpetuation; the eternally revolving wheel of give and take, of receiving and returning; the sacrificial imprisonment of the spiritual essence in the many forms of material existence and the redeeming of this multi-formed matter through fiery purification and sacrificial offering; the eternal balancing, the dynamics of *rta*. Everything revolves around the sacrifice which, as the ritual, is the human symbol, the concrete token, of the universal law of give and take, the altar being the miniature representation, the matrix <sup>110</sup> of the all-circumscribing *rta* to which all the gods are invited to come.

Soma, giver of illumination, offspring of that supreme consciousness, the transcendent, of that total enlightenment which can only be known partially by the human mind, Soma, the stallion's seed is heaven's revelation in men and gods. Very seed of the transcendent, of life in its spiritual sense, he is that divine urge that compels men to further realisation, to deeper understanding, to fuller bliss, to life more abundant. He, it is, who calls

"the divine races to immortality". <sup>111</sup>

Through him man enters into a dimension out of all relation to our space-time world, a state of illumination which the ṛṣis called immortality, the converging point to which finally lead all activities in the *rta*.

Soma not only opens the inner eyes, but also grants eloquence, as we have seen. Prayer, in the priest exalted by Soma, is the very speech of deity, the power of the word, *vāc* manifested in man; through him heaven is made speech in man. The invocation, the word, *brahman*, in such a state of ecstasy, becomes the key that unlocks the gateway to heaven, the catalyst that galvanises, the dynamo that removes all barriers and reveals the higher states of illumination, the "secret of the cows' name".

In Soma (*tve* "in thee") the celestial catalyst, the "primeval sacrificers" <sup>112</sup> "placed their vision", <sup>113</sup> as we have seen, "effecting union and release for our



help".<sup>114</sup> Thereby

"they milked forth from out the mighty depth of  
heaven, heaven's ancient, praiseworthy ambrosia".<sup>115</sup>

The juxtaposition of the two actions which one may consider as opposite, union and release, is also worthy of special notice.<sup>116</sup> Union with what? Release from what? As usual in the Rgveda the verse does not give any positive answer. But since this is Soma's action, one may surmise that the 'union' refers to the ṛṣi's entering into, or merging with that loftier state of illumined consciousness that enabled him to "see the gods"<sup>117</sup> and which he called immortality. To the second question the answer could be that the release effected is one from the thrall of the senses which permits the penetration into a different state of being, Soma's third estate.

This same Soma

"rent open, as it were, an unfailling fountain-spring  
as beverage for man"<sup>118</sup>.

This unfailling fountain-spring indicates a sphere beyond that of light and sound, beyond the manifest, wherein the opposites have blended and created that third state of Soma, one characteristic of which is an everlasting renewal from the innermost, hence an unfailling fountain, itself the elixir of *amṛta*. Such a state is described in the Atharvaveda:

"Desireless, wise, immortal, self-existent,  
contented with the essence, lacking nothing  
is he. One fears not death who has known him,  
the ātman, serene, ageless, youthful."<sup>119</sup>

It is this drink that exalts the priests and opens their eyes to another world where time and space are transcended.

"Brightly he shines, *dhāma* of *amṛta*."<sup>120</sup>

Soma is not only the "mighty ṛta,"<sup>121</sup> but the very "embodiment of immortality". The juxtaposition of these two, the cosmic order and the state of immortality, as embodied in the one deity, Soma, brings home to us a certain hidden significance of ṛta that would otherwise be lost to us: the *amṛta*

"secretly hidden away as the supreme domain of  
the sacrificial rite"<sup>122</sup>.

"originates from the navel of ṛta".<sup>123</sup>

Sacrifice is ṛta as it establishes the balance between the great inflow and outflow of life, the ingoing and outgoing pulsation of all. The very centre of ṛta is the essence of harmony and that is immortality. Immortality is a state of being: not the perpetuation of that which by its very nature is limited and conditioned by space and time, but that which lies at the back of or causes the manifestation and harmonious movement of all things; that which underlies the adjustment of all forces, the eternal rhythm of life. The experience of such a state presupposes in the human being a consciousness developed and deepened in its insights, a possibility to range freely over an all-encompassing,

because dimensionless reality, an integrity, an integration. Immortality is a state of wholeness in which all parts are seen as best fitted to subserve the one end of cosmic order. Wholeness, harmony, that is the hallmark of *rta*, the essence of manifestation, the expression of the transcendent. In man's case, only in harmonising himself with the whole, in opening his consciousness to a deeper dimension, in integrating himself, can he realise his essential being and thereby find immortality. The core of *rta* is essential being (*sat*).<sup>124</sup>

A hidden side to the purpose of the sacrifice can here be glimpsed: a ritual which, in its fullest understanding, would help man to realise the significance of and the reason for integration and the means thereto. In awakening man's inner perception Soma "stimulates" the visionary insight into the *rta*, such action being couched again and again in mythological language.<sup>125</sup> He makes human insight equivalent to Sūrya's gaze, he makes man "sun-eyed", illumined. So the poets could sing:

"We have drunk Soma; we have become immortal.  
We have gone to the light; we have found the gods".<sup>126</sup>

"The vision has been realised into a song... Unto the transcendent one  
(companions come as to a ford. We have succeeded in our song in the praise  
of prosperity. We have made acquaintance with the immortals".<sup>127</sup>

The examination of the Vedic idea of sound and light as well as immortality is a study in itself and outlined here only to point out the vast domain of the speculation contained in at least two spheres of Soma's action - let alone the third and fourth - of which the *ṛṣis* may have known far more than their hints give us to understand, and to reiterate that this action is visualised by the *ṛṣis* through the sacrifice. Soma is the embodiment of their insights into the potencies of sound and light, into the realities of a realm beyond the physical sphere, a realm marked by luminosity, by freedom of movement, by ecstasy, a realm they called *svaz*, a state of being they called immortality, a condition peculiar to the gods, but of which man could partake if he was so inclined, and performed his duties, and made the effort. Soma is the illuminator through whose means they could envisage the workings of the divine law and indeed were granted the vision of *rta*, of cosmic harmony, of truth, of immortality. Only a study in depth of Soma's role in the sacrifice can reveal the full significance which the *ṛṣis* attached to their ritual.

- 1 A *kaviḥ* is a poet in the ancient sense, i.e. a visionary sage who is inspired and inspires. cf. L. Renou. "Religions of ancient India." 1953.p.10
- 2 *tarat samudraṃ pavamāna ūrmiṇā rājā deva ṛtaṃ bṛhat arṣan mitrasya varuṇasya dharmāṇā pra hinvāna ṛtaṃ bṛhat.* (Rgv.IX.107.15)  
"May Pavamāna, king and god, cross through the ocean, with his wave perform the mighty rite. As he flows in accordance with Mitra-Varuṇa's decree may he foster the mighty ṛta."
- 3 *devān ṛtāvṛdhaḥ.* (Rgv.IX.42.5)
- 4 *satye vidharman.* (Rgv.IX.109.6)
- 5 *vr̥ṣa-vrataḥ vr̥ṣā dharmāṇi dadhiṣe.* (Rgv.IX.64.1bc)
- 6 *dharmāṇas patiḥ.* (Rgv.IX.35.6)
- 7 cf. "for maintenance of the law" (*dharmann ṛtasya*)
- 8 *ṛtasya yati pathibhiḥ.* (Rgv.IX.86.33). cf. Rgv.IX.97.32;22.4
- 9 *vidānā asya yojanam.* (Rgv.IX.7.1c)
- 10 With reference to *sadas*, J. Gonda writes: "These words in most cases express the idea of a temporary though regularly occupied place ... where a power ... is believed to let down himself and to operate." ("Vision." 1963.p.179)
- 11 *tām dyotamānām svaryaṃ maṇiṣām ṛtasya pade kavayo ni-pānti.* (Rgv.X.177.2cd)
- 12 *apām iva id ūrmayas ... pra maṇiṣā irate somam accha.* (Rgv.IX.95.3ab)
- 13 *abhī naraḥ somam viśvācyā dhiyā yajñam hinvanti* (Rgv.IX.112.7)
- 14 *samīcīnāsa āsate hotāraḥ sapta jāmaḥ padam ekasya piprataḥ.* (Rgv.IX.10.7)
- 15 *vipā vyānaśur dhiyaḥ.* (Rgv.IX.22.3c)
- 16 *devo devebhyas.* (Rgv.IX.42.2)
- 17 Rgv.IX.66.24.
- 18 *ṛtena ya ṛtajāto vivāvṛdhe rājā deva ṛtaṃ bṛhat.* (Rgv.IX.108.8cd)  
cf. Rgv.IX.107.15 where Soma is also identified with ṛta.
- 19 *pari soma ṛtaṃ bṛhad āsuḥ pavitre arṣati.* (Rgv.IX.56.1ab)
- 20 *saṃ dakṣena manasā jāyate kavir-ṛtasya garbho nihito yamā paraḥ.* (Rgv.IX.68.35)
- 21 *ayaṃ me pīta ud iyarti vācam ayaṃ maṇiṣām usatīm ajigaḥ.* (Rgv.VI.47.3.ab)
- 22 *hotuḥ punāna indo viṣyā maṇiṣām.* (Rgv.IX.95.5b) cf. J. Gonda's comment on *maṇiṣā*: "... like *dhiḥ maṇiṣā* is also the thought converted into a hymn or eulogy addressed or offered to a god." ("Vision." p.52).
- 23 *... saṃ matr̥bhir-marjayasi sva ā dama ṛtasya dhītibhir-dame.* (Rgv.IX.111.2b)  
cf. Rgv.I.46.8&I.91.21c *bhāreṣujam* "born amidst cries of joy".  
cf. Rgv.IX.19.4.
- 24 *ā rātnadhā yonim ṛtasya sīdasi.* (Rgv.IX.107.4c)
- 25 *ātmā yajñasya.* (Rgv.IX.6.8a)
- 26 *patir-dhiyaḥ.* (Rgv.IX.75.2) cf. Rgv.IX.99.6
- 27 *patiṃ vāco adābhyam.* (Rgv.IX.26.4c)
- 28 *ṛtaḥ kaviḥ.* (Rgv.IX.62.3)
- 29 *viśvasya rājā pavate svardr̥śa ṛtasya dhītim ṛṣiṣāḥ avīvaśat.* (Rgv.IX.76.4ab)
- 30 *tvam dhiyaṃ manoyujam sṛjā vr̥ṣtim na tanyatuḥ.* (Rgv.IX.100.3ab)
- 31 *śriye jātaḥ.* (Rgv.IX.94.4a)
- 32 *... śriyaṃ vayo jaritṛbhyo dadhāti śriyaṃ vasānā amṛtatvam āyan.* (Rgv.IX.94.4bc)
- 33 cf. Rgv.I.139.2
- 34 Rgv.IX.75.2; as well as of the gods cf. Rgv.IV.58.1 (*jihvā devānām*).
- 35 *ṛtasya jihvā pavate madhu priyaṃ vaktā patir-dhiyo asyā adābhyah.* (Rgv.IX.75.2)  
cf. J. Gonda: "In 9.75.2 ... Soma ... the speaker and lord of this 'vision' ... is therefore considered to be the god who as the instrument (tongue) of the universal and fundamental order ... of the ultimate 'truth' on which the world and the ritual is founded, imparts the vision to the ṛṣi's mind ... the ultimate source of the visions is the ṛta, the god Soma transmitting them to the ṛṣis by the instrumentality of his tongue." ("Vision." p.74).

- 36 *jānann ṛtaṃ prathamam yat svarṇaram prasāstaye kaṃ vṛṇīta sukratuḥ.* (Rgv. IX.70.6.)
- 37 *ṛtaṃ vadann ṛtadyumna satyaṃ vadant satyakarman śraddhām vadant.* (Rgv. IX.113.4)
- 38 *ṛtavākena satyena śraddhayā tapasā suta.* (Rgv. IX.113.2)
- 39 Rgv. X.85.3-4 shows distinctly that the Soma plant is not the real Soma, the power of ecstasy and illumination:  
"Soma is thought to have been drunk when they press the plant.  
The Soma whom the brāhmaṇas know, of that no one tastes." (3)
- "No earthly born can taste of thee." (4)
- 40 *pavitram te vitataṃ brahmaṇaspate.* (Rgv. IX.83.1a)
- 41 *dūtaṃ na pūrvacittaye ā śasate maṇiṣiṇaḥ.* (Rgv. IX.99.5cd)
- 42 E.V.P. IX.P.53:VII.p.18.
- 43 *tisro vācā īrayati pra vahnir-ṛtasya dhītiṃ brahmaṇo maṇiṣām.* (Rgv. IX.97.34ab). Translated in accordance with J. Gonda's comments ("Vision." p.52).
- 44 *vidad gātum brahmaṇe pūyamānaḥ.* (Rgv. IX.96.10d) cf. Agni Rgv. VII.13.3c.
- 45 "Vision." p.178. cf. also p.74 of the same work: "It may ... be contended that the qualification 'lord of dhīḥ' was given to Soma to characterise this divine power as being able or willing to dispense visions."
- 46 op. cit. p.178
- 47 cf. Rgv. IX.111.2
- 48 Here could be compared Rgv. I.164.45 where speech is said to be measured out in four pādas of which three are kept concealed and only the fourth is known to men. Of these three, the first counting downwards would be equivalent to the fourth estate of Soma (counting upwards). cf. the third and fourth state of consciousness of the Maṇḍukya Upaniṣad.
- 49 *ṛṣimanā ya ṛṣikṛt svarṣaḥ sahasraṇīthaḥ padāvīḥ kavīnām*  
*trīyaṃ dhāma mahiṣaḥ siṣāsant ... Rgv. IX.96.18. cf. Rgv. IX.73.8b the*  
*three purifiers set in Soma's heart: trī ṣa pavitrā hṛdi antar ā dadhe*
- 50 *turīyaṃ dhāma mahiṣo vivakti.* (Rgv. IX.96.19.d) (and Rgv. IX.75.3.
- 51 cf. *yajñasya dhāma paramam.* (Rgv. X.181.2b). The words *dhāma paramam* could also be translated as "highest attainment".
- 52 *yajñena vācaḥ padaviyam āyan.* (Rgv. X.71.3ab)
- 53 cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "The word is not only speech, though constitutively connected with it; it is also intelligibility, the principle of reason, the power of the intellect, the rational structure of reality." (p.98). "The word is not only sound, not only idea and intelligibility; it is also action, spirit, the unique Word permeating everything." (p.99).
- 54 *tām ābhṛtyā vyadadhuh purutrā.* (Rgv. X.71.3c)
- 55 *prathamajā ṛtasya.* (Rgv. I.164.37c)
- 56 A hint as to the four dimensions of the word is given in Rgv. I.164.45. Of these only one fourth is understood by man. cf. Śat. Br. I.1.3.16. Taittirīya Up. I.5.1-5 and Maitrī Up. VI.6.
- 57 *arca brahma.* (Rgv. V.85.1)
- 58 *agnitapobhir-arkaiḥ.* (Rgv. X.68.6.)
- 59 *ṛtasya dhārayā.* (Rgv. VIII.6.8)
- 60 Rgv. VIII.6.8.
- 61 *brahma* in the Rgveda is not the Universal Source and Principle of all as in the Upaniṣads. It signifies, as Śrī Aurobindo reminds us: "... the Vedic Word or Mantra in its profoundest aspect as the expression of the intuition arising out of the depths of the soul or being." (On the Veda. Pondicherry. 1964.p.331.)
- 62 cf. "Bring fruitful prayer ... O Agni, that it may shine in heaven"  
*brahma prajāvad bhara ... agne yad dīdayad divi.* (Rgv. VI.16.36).
- 63 *spardhante dhiyaḥ sūrye na viśaḥ.* (Rgv. IX.94.1b)
- 64 *hinvaṇ ṛtasya dīdhitiṃ pra advhare.* (Rgv. IX.102.1b&8c)
- 65 *manasas patīḥ.* (Rgv. IX.11.8&28)
- 66 *viśvavid* (Rgv. IX.28.1)
- 67 *kratur-indur-vicaksana.* (Rgv. IX.107.3b)

- 68 *kratvā sukrebhir-akṣabhir-ṛnor-apa vrajaṃ divaḥ hinvaṇṇ ṛtasya dīdhitim pra adhvaṇe. (Rgv.IX.102.8)* "Through thine understanding, with thy bright eyes, thou hast opened out heaven's stall, fostering the vision of ṛta for the ritual."
- 69 *śukrebhir-akṣabhiḥ.*
- 70 *mañiṣām uśatim ajigaḥ. (Rgv.VI.47.3)*
- 71 *ṛtasya hi sadaso dhītir-adyaut. (Rgv.X.111.2a)*
- 72 *cf. Rgv.IX.107.14; IX.21.1.*
- 73 *svarāṛśaḥ yonāv-ṛtasya sīdata. (Rgv.IX.13.9b)*
- 74 *arūṇād vidivo rocanā kavīḥ. (Rgv.IX.85.9b)*
- 75 *vicākṣāno virocayan. (Rgv.IX.39.3)*
- 76 *sahasra cakṣa. (Rgv.IX.60.1)*
- 77 *suracakṣaḥ. cf. Rgv.I.139.2 and VIII.48.3.*
- 78 *apaśyāma hiraṇyayam. (Rgv.I.139.2)*
- 79 *dībhiś cana manasā. (Rgv.I.139.2)*
- 80 *svebhir-akṣabhiḥ somasya svebhir-akṣabhiḥ. (Rgv.I.139.2)*  
This verse could also be translated: "with the very eyes of Soma, indeed its very eyes", the meaning being the same, as "its very eyes" become the eyes of the seers.
- 81 *sūryas cakṣusām adhi patiḥ sa. (Athv.V.24.9).*
- 82 *Rgv.VI.35.8&63.4*
- 83 *ajījano hi pavamāna sūryam. (Rgv.IX.110.3a)*
- 84 *cakṣuścit sūrye sacā. (Rgv.IX.10.8b)*
- 85 *ajījano ... martyeṣu ā ṛtasya dharmann amrtasyā cāruṇaḥ. (Rgv.IX.110.4ab)*
- 86 *aham id hi pitus pari medhām ṛtasya jagrabha aham sūrya ivā ajani. (Rgv.VIII.6.10)*
- 87 *cf. Rgv.IX.75.1*
- 88 *Cf. Rgv.IX.28.5; 85.9*
- 89 *cf. Rgv.IX.107.7*
- 90 *cf. Rgv.IX.2.6*
- 91 *sa sūryasya raśmibhiḥ pari vyata. (Rgv.IX.86.32a) cf. Rgv.IX.76.4c.*  
*cf. Rgv.IX.86.29*
- 92 *sa sūryasya raśmibhiḥ pari vyata tantum tanvānas tri vṛtam yathā vide nayann ṛtasya praśiṣo navīyasīḥ ... (Rgv.IX.86.32abc)*
- 93 *tantum tanvānam uttamam anu pravata āsata. (Rgv.IX.22.6ab)*
- 94 *yo yajño viśvataḥ tantubhiḥ tataḥ. (Rgv.X.130.1a)* "the sacrifice drawn out with threads on every side". Cf. Rgv.IX.22.7d.
- 95 *ṛtasya tantuḥ.*
- 96 *cf. Rgv.IX.73.9*
- 97 *cf. pitubhr̥to na tantum it sudānavāḥ prati dadhmo yajāmasi. (Rgv.X.172.3)* "as food offerers we set the warp, liberally we offer up the sacrifice".
- 98 *tantum tanuṣva pūrvyaṃ yathā vide. (Rgv.VIII.13.14cd)*
- 99 "The hymns of the Rgveda. Translated with a popular commentary by R.T.H. Griffiths." 4th ed. 1963. vol. II. p. 136.
- 100 *cf. Rgv.I.109.3 and p. 8 of this thesis.*
- 102 \* *ubhe soma avacākaśan mṛgo na takto arṣasi sīdann ṛtasya yonim ā. (Rgv.IX.32.4)*
- 103 *nābhā pṛthivyā.*
- 104 *dharuṇo maho divoḥ (Rgv.IX.72.7) cf. Rgv.IX.86.8 and Rgv.IX.48.4: viśvaśmā it svarāṛśe sādharāṇaṃ rajasturam gopām ṛtasya vir-bharat: "for all to see the universal light the bird brought us the guardian of ṛta, the cleaver of the heaven."*
- 105 *nābhā nābhīm na ā dade. (Rgv.IX.10.8)*
- 106 *Rgv.IX.82.3*
- 107 *nābhā pṛthivyā giriṣu kṣayam dadhe. (Rgv.IX.82.3b)*
- 108 *Cf. Rgv.IX.72.7; 86.8*
- 109 *iyam vedīḥ paro antaḥ pṛthivyā ayam yajño bhuvasya nābhiḥ-  
ayam somo vṛṣṇo aśvasya reto brahmā ayam vācaḥ paramaṃ vyoma. (Rgv.I.164.35)*  
Although *brahmā* is in the masculine form and thus means the priest, the latter may be thought of in terms of prayer, he who wields the divine word, *brahma* (neuter), hence our translation emphasising the word rather than the wielder of the word.
- \* 101. *cf. Rgv. IX.22.6; 82.3; 86.29.*

- 110 cf. Rgv. VI.11.53.2; X.65.8; III.62.3&8.
- 111 *daivya* ... *janimāni* ... *amṛtatvāya*. (Rgv. IX.108.3)
- 112 *prathamā vrkta barhiṣaḥ*. (Rgv. IX.110.7a) "those whose grass was twisted".
- 113 *dhiyam dadhuḥ*. (Rgv. IX.110.7b)
- 114 *kr̥ṇvant samcṛtam vicṛtam abhiṣṭaya* (Rgv. IX.84.2c)
- 115 *divaḥ p̥iyuṣam p̥urvyam yad ukthyam maho gāhād diva ā nir-adhukṣata*. (Rgv. IX.110.8ab)
- 116 cf. Nicholas of Cusa: "Thus 'tis beyond the coincidence of contradictories that Thou mayest be seen, and nowhere this side thereof." The Vision of God, ch. IX. cf. A. Coomaraswamy "The Vedas. Essays in Translation and Exegesis" 1976. Introduction p. XI - XII.
- 117 Rgv. VIII.48.3
- 118 *tatarditha utsam na kam̐ cij-janapānam akṣitam*. (Rgv. IX.110.5)
- 119 Athv. X.8.44
- 120 *śukrovibhāsya-amṛtasya dhāma*. (Rgv. IX.97.32b)
- 121 Rgv. IX.108.8.
- 122 *avindan te atihitam yad āsīd yajñasya dhāma paramam̐ guhā yat*. (Rgv. X.181.2ab) "they found what had been kept secretly hidden away, the supreme domain of the sacrifice." The word *dhāma* as seen in Section III.2.9 is susceptible of various interpretations and renderings. cf. Rgv. X.67.2 *yajñasya dhāma* - rites of worship; Rgv. VII.36.5 *ṛtasya dhāma* - particular modality of ṛta, or "foundation of order" as L. Renou translates this in E.V.P. VII. p.38. cf. Rgv. IX.97.32 *amṛtasya dhāma*.
- 123 *ṛtasya nābhir-amṛtam vi jāyate*. (Rgv. IX.74.4b)
- 124 cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience". 1977. "In the performance of worship man always endeavors to transcend time ... By this liberation he enters into the sphere of ultimate Reality. Liberation, mokṣa, is absolute freedom." (p.354).
- 125 cf. Rgv. IX.102.8
- 126 *apāma somam amṛtā abhūma aganmā jyotir-avidāma devān*. (Rgv. VI.11.48.3)
- 127 *adhāyi dhītiḥ* ... *tīrthe na dasmam̐ upa yanty-umāḥ* *abhi ānaśma suvitasya śuṣam̐ navedaso amṛtānām abhūma*. (Rgv. X.31.3)

IV.6. Agni's rôle in the ritual.

Passing on to a consideration of Agni, the highpriest of the ritual, we notice that both Soma and Agni are inspirers as well as purifying, dynamic oblation-bearers. The one purifies by means of the filter set in his heart, and grants ecstasy, the other's filter is his all devouring flame. Both stimulate mental activity and spur on to exaltation. Indeed their functions overlap considerably. Soma's seems to be an introvert, Agni's an extrovert action within the rta. Both can be thought of in terms of the consumer and the consumed, the offerer and the offered, the devourer and the devoured. Their functions meet in their effect: purifying, exalting, illuminating, the two become one in the transmutation.

Agni is not only

"the arouser of intuitive insights" as is Soma, but he himself is the "protector of the soma."<sup>1</sup>

With Soma's "heavenly milk" he has been "anointed by rta"<sup>2</sup>, he the "sourceful inspirer"<sup>3</sup> of men. The very "weal" he "bestows on (his) worshipper" is his "truth".<sup>4</sup> Both Soma and Agni are said to grant immortality, Agni through his intelligence (*kratu*)<sup>5</sup>, Soma through his exhilaration<sup>6</sup>. Their action precipitates inspiration-exaltation-ecstasy.

But Agni alone is called the highpriest (*purohita*)<sup>7</sup> "placed foremost", the "highpriest of order" who "celebrates the rta"<sup>8</sup>, the "cherished one in the rite"<sup>9</sup>, the "god among men in our assembly"<sup>10</sup>:

"Highpriest, bright chariot of the ritual, of every act of worship the resplendent token, thou sharest with every god in might and glory, thou Agni, guest of men."<sup>11</sup>

As H.D. Griswold explains:

"Over against the many priesthoods of men there is the one divine priesthood of Fire, for through Agni alone men worship the gods."<sup>12</sup>

"Agni as the sacrificial element par excellence and the archetype of every human priesthood is the very embodiment of ritualistic order."<sup>13</sup>

"Of the three strands of meaning in the rita 'order', namely cosmic, ethical and ritualist, the meaning ritualistic order is naturally prominent in connection with Agni."<sup>14</sup>

For this reason he is

"the lord of mighty sacrifice, Agni, of all oblations."<sup>15</sup>

In his function of "guardian of the rta"<sup>16</sup>, "friend, as it were, of mighty order"<sup>17</sup>, its "inspirer"<sup>18</sup>, its "charioteer"<sup>19</sup> he is shown as protector of a rite which in its reflection of the cosmic order makes of him the very guardian of that cosmic order. This very point is missed by V.A. Gadgil when he asks the question:

"How can Agni the most visible of all the Vedic gods be called a guardian of the Rta, the invisible eternal law?"

"At the most he can guard Ṛta in some concrete form."<sup>20</sup>

That concrete form being the expression, at the phenomenal level, of the universal law at the metaphysical level, there can be no difficulty in regarding Agni as the guardian of ṛta in its deepest sense. This is his very function, his priesthood. In him the manifest and the unmanifest meet and join in a meaningful fusion. Agni, in fact, watches over ṛta in all its aspects and the sacrificial rite is but the symbolic epitome of all these. So he is enjoined to sit

"In the chamber of ṛta, the chamber of grass",<sup>21</sup>

i.e. the enclosure where the rite is performed to

"celebrate the lofty ṛta in (his) own domain"<sup>22</sup>

to "shine forth in thine own home, as guardian of the ṛta"<sup>23</sup>

cosmic, social, ethical, ritualistic. He is asked, as performer of the *yajña*, to come by the path of ṛta, the path mapped out from immemorial times by law:

"With homage and oblation we invoke that performer of the sacrifice by the path of order."<sup>24</sup>

For he, as he takes up "the reins of ṛta when sacrificial food is offered"<sup>25</sup> is the one "most godlike" and thus capable of

"guiding aright our homage and offering it unto the gods along the path of order".<sup>26</sup>

Agni is thus the conveyor of man's aspirations and the giver to man of the gods' grace: "eye and guardian of mighty ṛta (order)

thou art Varuṇa when to the ṛta (ritual) thou comest".<sup>27</sup>

To apply the term Agni to the visible fire only is a limitation imposed by our limited human mind. To consider Agni as the epitome of all energies pushes the frontiers of definition to the realms of the cosmic order.

Agni's sacrificial action, like Soma's, but perhaps in a still more dynamic way, marks him out as the great uniter, he who links the manifest and the unmanifest, heaven and earth, gods and men. Born in ṛta,<sup>28</sup> he is not exactly said to be the ṛta, yet he embodies the vast law in his very function. To understand his essential action in the sacrificial rite of linking, purifying and offering, is to catch a glimpse of the Vedic meaning of the sacrifice, that which links heaven and earth in one sacred act performed by man, and epitomises the whole cosmic process. In such an act all forces work together towards a harmonious end, hence ṛta.

Working "in accordance with the law" (*ṛtena*) Agni

"reaches out over both worlds".<sup>29</sup>

He is "head of heaven", "fleet-messenger of earth";<sup>30</sup> the "deathless oblation-bearer"<sup>31</sup> who, by means of "vision (*dhiyā*)" "brings together" (*samṛnvati*)<sup>32</sup>,

i.e. he joins vision and offering, man and gods, heaven and earth, ritual and order. He "holds up" or "offers our visionary thought".<sup>33</sup> This function of his to "worship (with oblation) both wide worlds"<sup>34</sup>, or in his ascending and descending: "he mounts and he descends",<sup>35</sup> he, "vehicle of the transcendent"<sup>36</sup>



The last is a most important revelation of Agni's function for as vehicle he steps down the power of the transcendent to within the reach of the worshipper. As vehicle he transmutes man's offering that it may be purified and acceptable to the gods. In encompassing all worlds he is the dynamic charioteer<sup>37</sup> of that which lies beyond these worlds, i.e. the transcendent. As the intermediary between heaven and earth<sup>38</sup>, as "conveyor of oblations"<sup>39</sup>, as "ensign of sacrifice"<sup>40</sup>, as "highpriest of the gods", the "inspired highpriest, unerring in sacrifices"<sup>41</sup> he enters into the houses of men<sup>42</sup>, he is the "guest of men"<sup>43</sup>, so men themselves have

"established Agni as their priest".<sup>44</sup>

"In the abode of mortals, the immortal, the king has sat down, furthering the religious rites,"<sup>45</sup>

bringing about the means of communication between two world.

Agni's function as officiating highpriest and mediator between gods and men is constantly brought out by such words as *vahni*, conveyor, *rathi*, charioteer, and the imperative, injunctive or subjunctive forms of the verb *yaj*. This verb is used to ask Agni to gain for the worshipper the "favour" or "protection" (*sumnam*) of the gods Mitra and Varuṇa and the Waters "in heaven" (*divi*)<sup>46</sup>. The word *yoga* which implies the act of joining or harnessing is occasionally used governing *ṛta*: thus "in the performance of the *ṛta*" (*ṛtasya yoge*)<sup>47</sup>, in the "yoking" of the rite as a reflection of the universal process<sup>48</sup> the ends of the cosmic order are subserved, both the performance and the law of which it purports to be the dramatic expression being here brought together in one sacred act, that of the sacrificial ritual. Such meaning is ascribed by J. Gonda to Rgv.VIII.27.19:

"The *ṛta* established by the gods three times a day obviously consists in the regular, normal and solemn ritual contact of man with the divine powers who are to protect and favour him (cf. st. 20ff). This again is an aspect or manifestation of the universal order."<sup>49</sup>

The stress is constantly made that Agni accomplishes his task among humans according to the dictates of the universal law:

"Established amongst human habitations, Agni, embryo of the waters, achieves (performs his task) in accordance with the *ṛta*."<sup>50</sup>

"Convey our oblation in accordance with the *ṛta*."<sup>51</sup>

True to his inherent being (as indeed are all the gods) he performs that immemorial task of burning, transmuting and offering, of destroying and creating, linking the poles of manifestation through his very being and sacred activity. His very function of offering to the gods man's sacrificial food<sup>52</sup> embodies in itself the law of give and take. In thus consuming man's fuel so that only the essence can reach the gods he proves himself the

"true sacrificer" (*satyayajam*), "highpriest of heaven and earth"<sup>53</sup>, the one archetypal priest on whom all priesthood is modelled.

"Whatever worship we thus perpetually offer to every god, in thee is that oblation presented."<sup>54</sup>

Every oblation passes through the flame that burns the dross and keeps but the essence. This creative work of Agni is described in terms of "human offering" (*mānuṣīr iṣaḥ*) "making him an axe (*svadhitiṃ*) for the sake of *tejas*, radiance."<sup>55</sup> This axe-like sharpening of what is offered may be interpreted as the burning up of the unwanted part of the offering which is mixed up with the essence, leaving the latter only intact, that which is worthy to be received by the gods. This is surely symbolic of the change and transmutation that should take place within man before he can hope to "enter the *ṛta*" to integrate himself.

*Tejas* means both sharpness and brilliance but when applied to human beings (or gods) it refers to that radiance of countenance that manifests as a result of spiritual practices ending in exaltation, so that *tapas* and *tejas* are in a certain sense related, one emphasising the process, the other the manifestation of that which *tapas* has aroused: spiritual perception results in an illumination which, at the physical level, is seen as radiance, a shining from within without. Those who are "sun-eyed" (*sūracakṣasaḥ*) i.e. radiant and are therefore wise, with Agni as their tongue, "flame-tongued (*agnijihvaḥ*)"<sup>56</sup> "foster the *ṛta*" and are fostered by it.<sup>57</sup> They grow in understanding of, and through adherence to, the *ṛta*.<sup>58</sup> These are the gods.

This should throw some light on the meaning of that oft mentioned radiance or splendour which characterises Agni as not merely the shining flame, but the illumination by means of which the deity is credited with an understanding of the cosmic order and which grants that very understanding to those who have kindled the flame within themselves; the flame is but the outer token of the inner state. Agni is not only the flame that burns the offering, but the *kavikratuḥ*, he who inspires or kindles man's intelligence, the "enlightened knower", one of whose functions in the ritual is to bring about this spiritual exaltation in man<sup>59</sup> which itself is personified in Soma. Aroused through the flame and exalted by the Soma, man through the action of both deities enters into the divine realm.<sup>60</sup>

"Through the power of his splendour he clasps the rein of *ṛta*."<sup>61</sup>

This clasping symbolises man's harnessing of the ritual for purposes of reflecting the cosmic order<sup>62</sup> and coming to terms with both the vision of it and the living in accordance with it. This is Agni's task, and by reflection, the priest's. Noteworthy is the specific mention that this clasping is accomplished through the "power of splendour", that illuminating knowledge which allows the god to perform his function, and the worshipper to enter into the

spirit of it and understand what lies at the back of it.

Such an idea may also be inferred from a verse addressed to Dawn:

"Holding on to the rein of *rta* (as you do) grant us that perspicacity (that shall be) more and more auspicious to us."<sup>63</sup>

*Kratu*, a blend of purposeful will and Intelligence, translated here as perspicacity which J. Gonda defines as

"A kind of effective mental power or Intelligence, mental energy and determination, which enables its possessor to have solutions for preponderantly practical difficulties"<sup>64</sup>

implies that Dawn in her perfect fulfilment of her recurring task, her complete conforming to the *rta*, is the living, everpresent example to man of what working in harmony with the cosmic law does mean. Such understanding will enable man himself to come to terms with the *rta* in its social and ethical aspect in his own individual life.

It may be for this reason that Agni's intelligence and wisdom as well as his function of charioteer of man's worship are reiterated. The insistence upon the understanding, insight and wisdom which Agni incarnates and which he imparts to man is an indication of the *ṛsis*' own stand for knowledge; the sacrificial ritual is not a mere mechanical procedure, but it is fraught with meaning, and in its course the great highpriest himself bestows upon the performer his own wisdom:

"For thou of gracious Intelligence and unerring insight hast been the charioteer of lofty *rta*."<sup>65</sup>

*Sukratu* and *cakivān* are epithets specifically applied to Agni.<sup>66</sup> His *kratu* is described as "most inspired"<sup>67</sup>. As "wisest of priests" (*sukratuḥ purohitah*) he, with "wise insight" (*kratvā*)

"attends in every house to the sacrificial rite"<sup>68</sup>

and "reveals all generations to him-who-endeavours"<sup>69</sup>

to obtain knowledge. So on him "the very wise" men are enjoined to "meditate"<sup>70</sup>, for he is the "knower"<sup>71</sup>, the "knower of all wisdom"<sup>72</sup>, the "knower of generations" (*jātavedas*) the "all-knowing"<sup>one</sup><sup>73</sup>. No wonder that to him goes that most ancient of human cries:

"Shine forth auspiciously upon us that we may reach wise understanding"<sup>74</sup>

Agni's action on man, as "the finder of light" (*svarvid*)<sup>75</sup> is similar to Soma's:

"thou prevailed over every thought; thou promotest the intuition of the wise."<sup>76</sup>

"May he stimulate us to vigour and vision."<sup>77</sup>

"From thee O Agni inspired-wisdom, from thee intuitions, from thee accomplished utterances are generated."<sup>78</sup>

His is the quality of the sage (*kāvya*): intuitive insight (*manisā*), that wisdom imparted by inspiration which is the poet's gift, and inspired

utterances (*ukthā*). Like Soma, he is a ṛṣi.<sup>79</sup> To him goes the same plea as to Soma<sup>80</sup> to "open out" (*viṣyā*) the *manīṣā*,<sup>81</sup> hence to release the inner vision and to offer it on high in his function of highpriest (*prahotā vratam*) by the power of *māyā*.<sup>82</sup>

Agni's action as

"bringing to birth within the heart a thought as light",<sup>83a</sup>  
shows him working within the human being, causing the inspired thought to come to consciousness which is then shaped into a song which he purifies:

"he purified the flashing song with threefold filter".<sup>83b</sup>

The thought becomes a colourful song since *arka* means both a ray, flash of lightning and a hymn or praise. Born in the heart, seen as light, expressed as song, with Agni as both its arouser and its purifier, it is then offered to the devotee's god, whoever this might be:

"thought (*matī*) moving forth from the heart fashioned in praise goes to Indra, the Lord."<sup>84</sup>

"With pleasing hearts let us approach-with-veneration, Agni the pleasing, beloved of many, the sharp-rayed purifying flame."<sup>85</sup>

The kindling of Agni is thus not simply the physical action but as well the mental act (of which the physical is an extension), the inner process of awakening the flame of aspiration-inspiration-ecstasy, the result of which seems to have been that vision (*dhīh*)<sup>86</sup> which translated itself into a hymn, which granted the ṛṣi a penetrative insight into the laws of the universe, an intuitive perception which is itself offered up to the gods in the sacrifice<sup>87</sup> to be renewed and received again.

For Agni is not merely the fire on the altar or in the wood, but

"the one ocean, the foundation of riches, of many births  
(that) shines forth from our heart".<sup>88</sup>

Here is set forth unequivocally the intimate connection between Agni and man so that when the bard claims that

"his are the fires, with shining smoke, eternal,  
purifying propellers of houses"<sup>89</sup>

the word "house" which puzzled R.T.H. Griffiths, may refer simply to the human tabernacle, in other words, the human body, where Agni is concealed, as is made evident in the following:

"... Seated in secret place ...  
men find him there whilst meditating and reciting  
their mantras which they fashion in their heart."<sup>90</sup>

The "guest" in "every house"<sup>91</sup> is not only the fire on every altar but the flame in every heart. These verses point to the necessity of an interpretation beyond the mere literal one.

As in the case of Soma we should also observe that the *yajña* was not conceived merely as a ritualistic process to be meticulously performed, but, in a deeper sense, it was considered in terms of an offering of self-welling

forth from the "heart". This is clear from the following verse where the *havis* is specifically mentioned as shaped in the heart:

"Agni, to thee we bring with our song this offering  
shaped in our heart"<sup>92a</sup>

The second part of the verse is even more revealing:

"Let these be oxen, bulls, cattle to thee."<sup>92b</sup>

Here is openly claimed that the true offering fashioned in the heart is worth all the cattle and is evidently to Agni what wealth in kine is to man. In Rgv.X.91.14 a similar thought seems to be voiced for there also horses, bulls, cattle, all the valuables of the Vedic people, are mentioned as offered up in Agni as the sacrificer brings forth:

"the cherished intuitive perception from his heart."<sup>93</sup>

The keyword in these verses is surely the "heart". Whatever is most treasured springs from the heart to be offered up in the fire and that is likened to whatever is most prized in everyday life, the essential thought being the oblation as a heartfelt offering.<sup>94</sup>

The action of both Soma and Agni upon the worshippers in the performance of their function is thus revealing of the fundamental meaning of the rite: man's epitomising of, and participating in, the cosmic "sacred work". One may draw the conclusion that just as *rta*, in its ideal sense, has to be dynamically actualised on earth by godly as well as human agency, both social and ritual, so the enlightened seer, striving after full illumination, has to reconcile the inner vision he perceives in his highest state of consciousness with the outer, everyday reality, i.e. fully to integrate himself and live at all levels in that state of enlightenment which is pure harmony and transcendence of the lower self, a state which the *ṛsis* qualified as immortality.

The intimate connection between Soma and Agni's action can be perceived in the state of consciousness which Agni grants through his wise insight, a state which is akin to Soma's enlightenment and by means of which the gods reached immortality.<sup>95</sup> Agni, "lord of abundant *amṛta*"<sup>96</sup> himself is made "centre of immortality" by the gods<sup>97</sup> as he is both their flame of aspiration and their very achievement. They protect the "boon-bestowing" (*draviṇodām*) Agni as their own immortal state.<sup>98</sup>

Two stanzas, each concerning Agni's and Soma's strengthening influence, when juxtaposed, reveal the effort needed to attain the state of immortality:

"Agni, the knower,  
procures heroic-might, procures vigour, enhancing it for immortality"<sup>99</sup>

"Far-seeing mind, enlightening, light-bestower... the  
mighty one (Soma) strives after his third estate"<sup>100</sup>

that third estate which seems to be the "supreme domain of the sacrifice",<sup>101</sup> its

innermost secret, immortality. In the one case, the heroic power is enhanced (*bhūs*)<sup>102</sup> through Agni's action, in the other, the desiderative form of *√san* to wish to gain shows a striving after. This striving might be indicative of a transmutation process that operates in man at a certain stage of enlightenment, a transmutation that permits him to force entrance into another level of awareness. In both cases effort is implied and in both the deities seem to become the very embodiment of human aspiration, enlightenment and exaltation.

In the same order of thought, Soma "lord of valour"<sup>103</sup>, giver of "vigour" (*vayodhāh*) is asked for a share of his riches,<sup>104</sup> those riches that are mental ability and insight.<sup>105</sup>

"Bring us that resplendent courage that will find heaven"<sup>106</sup> is a plea addressed to Soma, but could equally be addressed to Agni.<sup>107</sup> Only those men who are purified and brave, only those fire-proved, heroic souls can gain the boon of immortality. The power envisaged seems to be rather that which storms the kingdom of heaven than that which destroys man-made forts. *Ṛta* can only be apprehended, and its very core, immortality, can only be attained, by the pure, by the tried, by heroes.

#### IV.7. The heart, crux of the sacrifice

The question of the heart is really the pivot on which centres the depth of the significance of Vedic sacrifice, a significance so totally missed by early Western exegesis. The values of the heart are stressed either directly or indirectly as when the poet makes his offering from the heart or hopes it will touch his god's heart. Its role in the fostering of vision and the fashioning of songs has just been considered with regard to Agni, the kindler of inspiration.

Of the several examples given of Agni's great role in human life, the point to be emphasised here is his being considered:

"the one ocean, the foundation of riches ...  
(that) shines forth from our heart"<sup>108</sup>

He sits "in secret place" (*guhā nisīdan*), i.e. in the human heart

"where men find him whilst meditating and reciting,  
their mantras which they fashion in their heart"<sup>109</sup>

The flame in the human heart is thus the sacrificer, the outer fire being but the physical token of an inner dynamic, all kindling energy that sets all things on their onward course, and in man directs him onto the path of immortality.<sup>110</sup> This has been disregarded in the evaluation of the R̥gvedic sacrifice. The human heart is the seat of the offering, the enclosure wherein

is enacted the drama of give and take, the eternal exchange, the divine transmutation whereby the lower is uplifted and in the process may suffer by losing itself, and the higher is exalted and in the process there is effected a union whereby the joy of oneness is fully experienced.

Further examples should clarify the question of the heart's role. The offering of the praise, song or hymn, the end-product of the vision is, as we have seen, part of the sacrificial oblation, and perhaps dearest to the heart of the worshipper because it was his own effort, expression, creation. In this respect the following verses reveal a great deal as to his beliefs, hopes and feelings:

"On whose heart shall we clasp this divine paean rich in oblation, most beloved among the immortals?"<sup>111</sup>

"My songs-of-praise, high-aspiring, speed-forth as messengers to Indra ... uttered by my spirit to touch his heart ..."<sup>112</sup>

"May this song-of-praise be foremost in touching thy heart, in blessedness!"<sup>113</sup>

"O Maruts, ye gods, to you with homage is offered this song-of-praise shaped with heart and mind."<sup>114</sup>

Soma's boons of insight and intelligence touch the heart (*hrdispr̥sas*)<sup>115</sup>. To touch Varuṇa's spirit and win his mercy the poet attempts to "bind" him with his songs.<sup>116</sup>

Brahman companions, as already mentioned, come together for worship "with mental impulses fashioned by the heart"<sup>117</sup> whilst others who pose as Brahmans wander elsewhere. By means of insights gained within the heart the Vasiṣṭhas "secretly" approached "the thousand branched (tree of knowledge?)"<sup>118</sup> and penetrated to the realm of Yama, the king of the kingdom of death. Pondering in their heart the sages discovered the connection between the *sat* and the *asat*.<sup>119</sup>

All these examples point to the heart as being the recognised centre of both receiving and giving, of inner perception and understanding, in other words, of a spiritual insight far removed from the rational faculty. This is further enhanced in a hymn to the Viśvedevas where Varuṇa "reveals" or

"opens out his thought by means of the heart"<sup>120</sup>

as a result of which a new manifestation of *ṛta* is made apparent. The word "heart" must therefore have been some kind of technical term that comprised the meaning of understanding-intuition-wisdom or spiritual insight. Revelation comes through the heart as the seat of synthesis. It is in the heart that Varuṇa placed *kratu*<sup>121</sup> which therefore combines intelligent awareness and intuitive perception and yields the higher wisdom. This is the meaning of the later word, *buddhi*.

The heart<sup>122</sup> is thus the secret or hidden place (*guhā*) wherein knowledge,

the divine treasure, is stored. Several verses refer to that knowledge received in secret (*ninyam*).<sup>123</sup> The language of some of these, e.g. Rgv.V.3.3 and IV.5.3 is somewhat recondite: the Vedic poets had evidently their own technical terms to refer to certain states of consciousness and perception beyond the normal, mundane knowledge and awareness:

"Agni the knower has revealed this inspiration to me as the hidden footprint of the cow."<sup>124</sup>

"That which was established as Visnu's supreme seat, therewith thou guardest the cows' secret name."<sup>125</sup>

The name being the essence of a thing, the cows' secret name would refer to the deepest mystery which can only be apprehended in "heaven" or in the state of ecstasy granted by Soma. The word cow is evidently another of those technical terms for some kind of divine knowledge of which Agni is the keeper and the revealer.

That these revelations are brought about by Agni or Soma, the ministers of the ritual, is another pointer to the specific function of these rites. The sacrifice is a prayer and prayer an action, a communication, hence sacrifice is sacred work (*apas*). The shaping of prayer and the offering of the oblation, or of the vision-inspired-thought, or of the recitation, all have their roots in the heart. The Lord of prayer, Brhaspati, is worshipped

"with this new and mighty song".<sup>126</sup>

"I bring to thee O Agni the offering with the sacred utterance (*rk*) fashioned in the heart."<sup>127</sup>

To the Maruts is offered the praise "shaped in the heart and mind"<sup>128</sup> and to Indra, the soma drops are "offered from the heart".<sup>129</sup> The original oblation offered by man was Manu's, the first human, by means of his spirit, with kindled fire.<sup>130</sup> That Agni

"found the path to prayer"<sup>131</sup>

would imply that sacrificial offering is the means of communication with the gods, hence the path of invocation which is prayer. Such heartfelt offering is what brings reward whether as protection or as boon, or as the mere presence of the deity which itself is a blessing:

"Whoso with oblation, with god-directed spirit and with chrism, pays homage to ye, O Agni-Soma, protect his way, guard him from distress."<sup>132</sup>

"Strengthened by prayer"<sup>133</sup> both Agni and Soma grant the worshipper ample room (*urum lokam*) or free scope for his sacrifice.<sup>134</sup> The response of the god seems to depend upon the efficacy or the power of the invocation (*brahman*). This is an important factor in the bringing together of gods and men. When there is no heartfelt longing or call for communion, there is no power, hence no response, no revelation, no nearness or divine presence.

The sacrifice (*yajña*) that is performed "cut off from prayer"<sup>135</sup>



does not please Indra. Likewise the Soma juice pressed without prayer (*abrahmaṇo*) finds no favour in his eyes.<sup>136</sup> For Indra thrives (*vardhanam*) not only on Soma but on prayer as well as the sacrificial oblation.<sup>137</sup>

The source of the inspiration is thus rooted deep in the human being, in that central focus whence inspirations well forth and insights into the world processes emerge. The poets describe themselves as devout and god-serving (*sumnāyayaḥ* and *devayantaḥ*), whilst seeking Agni, their "protector" (*trātā*), father and mother.<sup>138</sup> The state of grace and piety is thus a prerequisite to their finding the god and actively participating in the oblation.

All this shows prayer not only in its sense of power<sup>ful</sup> invocation but also of heartfelt longing, as an essential element of the sacrificial offering. When we realise that *brahman* is not prayer in our ordinary sense of the term - a mere asking or even simple attuning to a higher power - but a dynamic, god-given (*devattam*)<sup>power</sup> that man can use to invoke the noumenal or come into the gods' presence, then the sacrifice, such as it was conceived in Rgvedic times, can no longer be regarded as a mere bargain or a "hocus-pocus", but a ritual dramatising man's inner transformation - his appeal, his commitment and participation - an action that brings him in harmony with the universal order, a ritual integration.

To quote from R. Panikkar:

"... the common underlying assumption or implicit belief - is that in the act of prayer Man is sharing in the central dynamism of reality and penetrating into the heart of the world. Prayer is truly Brahman."<sup>139</sup>

Prayer, offering, sacrifice, are essentially sacred acts of the human heart. They are steps indicative of man's integration into the cosmic harmony.

The detailed examination of all the verses surveyed in this chapter should serve to show the vastness as well as the subtlety of the conception that lay behind the Vedic ritual and the superfluity of those Western critics who dismissed it as meaningless twaddle. Very subtle are many of the hints whose depth of thought hinges upon the understanding of a few key-words which have all too often been by-passed. As A. Danielou well understood:

"The fire sacrifice became the essential instrument of man's participation in the cosmic sacrifice ... The Vedic ritual aimed at resembling more and more perfectly the very ritual through which the universe exists."<sup>140</sup>

Purification, aspiration, recitation, visioning, communion, togetherness, are expressions of the stirrings of the soul, its strivings, its faith, hope and trust; all these are fostered by the Vedic sacrificial ritual. They are further pointers to man's attempt at integrating himself in the vast order, of being himself the living embodiment of that harmony which means true life. The yajña epitomises the action of give and take, which itself is a shorthand symbol

of the law of transformation and of the vast rhythm of the universe. In participating ritualistically in this constant exchange, man learnt to integrate himself in the cosmic order. This could only be done through the inner purifying of himself and the coming to terms with society of which the purificatory rites and the assembling together were the outer mark. The ritual forms a complement to the norms of social life as established by Vedic ethics. It galvanises these norms into a purposeful reflection of the cosmic process and gives man a condensed view of the meaning of it all.

The Vedic point of view, such as it may be constructed from the Rgveda *saṃhitā*, is best summarised by R. Panikkar:

"Vedic Man is fundamentally a celebrating Man, but he does not celebrate his own victories or even a nature festival in company with his fellowmen; rather, he celebrates with the whole universe, taking his place in the cosmic sacrifice in which all the Gods are engaged together."

"Ṛta is ... the actual functioning or rather the proper rhythm of the sacrifice; while sacrifice is that which causes things to be what they are. By sacrifice Gods and Men collaborate, not only among themselves but also for the maintenance and very existence of the universe. Reality subsists, thanks to sacrifice. But this truly primordial sacrifice is not left to the whim of either Men or Gods; it has an internal structure and mode of operation, namely, *ṛta*."<sup>141</sup>

So long as the ṛṣis were inspired to compose their hymns, so long did the ritual remain a live, meaningful symbol and vital action, the outer token of their understanding, their vision, their livingness. But when the "spirit" of the sacrificial ritual was almost forgotten and priests only clung to the "letter", these rites still served, for many centuries, the purpose of bringing people together in worship, hence in some kind of harmony and in the remembrance of an originally sacred action. *Ṛta* was still somehow mirrored in *yajña*.

N O T E S

IV. 6. 7.

- 1 *manīṣīṅnām prāpanaḥ somagopāḥ*, (Rgv.X.45.5). cf. Rgv.IV.10.2; X.46.5  
cf. Rgv.II.9.4d, Agni as the "deviser of pure speech" (*śukrasya vacaso manotā*) and Soma as *manasaspatiḥ* (Rgv.IX.11.8; 28.1) and as *viśvavid* (Rgv.IX.28.1).
- 2 *ṛtena ... aktaḥ ... agniḥ payasā prṣṭhyena*. (Rgv.IV.3.10). cf. Rgv.I.79.3.
- 3 *kavikratuḥ*.
- 4 *yad aṅga dāsūṣe tvam agne bhadraṃ kariṣyasi tavet tat satyam*. (Rgv.I.1.6)  
"just what good thou doest to the worshipper that is thy truth."
- 5 cf. Rgv.VI.7.4c; V.34; III.17.4
- 6 cf. Rgv.IX.106.8; VIII.48.3.
- 7 cf. *sukratuḥ purohitaḥ* "most wise high-priest" (Rgv.I.128.4); *hotar-ṛtasya hotādhruk* "highpriest of order, undeceivable highpriest" (Rgv.X.61.14). cf. Rgv.VI.1.1ab.
- 8 *ṛtaṃ hotā ... yajāti* (Rgv.VII.39.1) cf. Rgv.VI.15.14
- 9 *cārur-adhvare*. (Rgv.I.94.13)
- 10 *antar-devo vidathā martyeṣu* (Rgv.VI.11.2b)
- 11 *hotāraṃ citraratham adhvaryasya yajñasya yajñasya ketuṃ rusantam prati ardhim devasya devasya mahnā śriyā tu agnim atithim janānām*. (Rgv.X.1.5)  
"The religion of the Rigveda." 1923.p.164
- 12 op.cit.p.166
- 13 op.cit.p.166
- 14 *agnir-īṣe brhato adhvaryasya agniḥ-viśvasya haviṣaḥ kṛtasya*. (Rgv.VII.11.4)
- 15 *ṛtasya gopāḥ* (Rgv.III.10.2) or *ṛtapaḥ* (Rgv.VI.3.1)
- 16 *agne mitro na brhata ṛtasya asi*. (Rgv.VI.13.2)
- 17 *ṛtaskaviḥ* (Rgv.VIII.60.5). cf. Rgv.III.2.10 "the people's inspirer" (*viśām kavim*). We prefer to translate *kavi* as "inspirer" rather than "poet" for the ancient meaning of poet is he who is inspired and capable of inspiring by his words, the modern meaning stressing too much the technicalities at the expense of inspiration.
- 18 *rathir-ṛtasya brhato*. (Rgv.IV.10.2)
- 19 "Rta and the law of Karma." 10th Oriental Conference, Tirupati. 1940.p.19.
- 20 *ṛtasya yonim ā asadaḥ sasasya yonim ā asadaḥ*. (Rgv.V.21.4d)
- 21 *ṛtaṃ brhad agne yakṣi svam damam*. (Rgv.I.75.5bc)
- 22 *gopā ṛtasya dīdhi sve dame*. (Rgv.III.10.2). cf. Rgv.I.1.8.
- 23 *taṃ yajñasādham api vātayāmasi ṛtasya pathā namasā haviṣmatā*. (Rgv.I.128.2ab)
- 24 *saṃ yad iṣo vanāmahe saṃ havya mānuṣānām ... ṛtasya raśmini ā dade* (Rgv.V.7.3). "When together with the libation and oblation of men we conquer him; he ... grasps the rein of rta".
- 25 *ṛtasya pathā namasā miyedho devebhyo devatamaḥ suśūdat*. (Rgv.X.70.2cd)
- 26 *bhuvaś cakṣur-maha ṛtasya gopā bhuvo varuṇo yad ṛtasya vesi*. (Rgv.X.8.5ab)
- 27 *ṛte ā jātam*. (Rgv.VI.7.1)
- 28 *ā yas tatāna rodasī ṛtena*. (Rgv.V.1.7c)
- 29 *mūrdhānaṃ divo; aratiṃ pṛthivyā*. (Rgv.VI.7.1). cf. Rgv.I.44.12; 59.2; VIII.44.16; V.1.7c.
- 30 *havyavāḷ amartya*. (Rgv.III.11.2a)
- 31 *agnir-dhiyā samṛvati*. (Rgv.III.11.2b)
- 32 *ud u no yaṃsate dhiyam*. (Rgv.I.143.7d) cf. Rgv.I.144.1b.
- 33 *agne yajasva rodasī uruci*. (Rgv.VI.11.4b)
- 34 *sa udvato nivato yāti*. (Rgv.III.2.10c)
- 35 *adbhutasya rathīḥ*. (Rgv.I.77.3)
- 36 cf. *vicarṣamir-agnir-devānām ... purohitaḥ*. (Rgv.III.2.8) "Most active Agni, highpriest of the gods".
- 37

- 38 cf. *agne divaḥ sūnur-asi pracetās tanā pṛthivyā uta viśvavedaḥ.* (Rgv. III.25.1ab). "O Agni, thou art the wise offspring of heaven born constantly of earth and knower of all."
- 39 *rathyam adhvarānām*
- 40 *yajñasya ketum*
- 41 *vipram adhvarēṣu sādhum agnim hotāram.* (Rgv.V.1.7ab)
- 42 Rgv.VI.2.10.
- 43 *ātithim janānām.* (Rgv.VI.7.1)
- 44 *hotaram agnim manuṣo ni sedur.* (Rgv.V.3.4c) cf. Rgv.VI.1.1ab)
- 45 *ni durone amṛto martyānām rājā sasāda vidathāni sādhan.* (Rgv. III.1.18ab)
- 46 *sa no mitrasya varuṇasya so apām a sunnam yakṣate divi.* (Rgv.VIII.19.4cd)  
"May he secure for us in heaven through the sacrifice the grace of Mitra, Varuṇa, and the Waters."
- 47 Rgv. III.27.11
- 48 cf. *ṛtasya yoge viśyadhvam ūdhaḥ* (Rgv.X.30.11c). "In the performance of the rite let the udder flow."
- 49 "Dhāman." 1967.p.33-4
- 50 *adhāyi agnir-mānuṣīṣu vikṣu apām garbho mitra ṛtena sādhan.* (Rgv. III.5.3ab)  
cf. Rgv. III.29.7&8.
- 51 *ṛtena vahā no havyam.* (Rgv.X.12.2b)
- 52 cf. Rgv.V.7.3; III.27.11.
- 53 *hotarām rodasyoḥ.* (Rgv.VI.16.46)
- 54 *yac cid hi śaśvatā tanā devaṃ devaṃ yajāmahe tve id hūyate haviḥ.* (Rgv. II.26.6)
- 55 *viśam kaviṃ viśpatiṃ mānuṣīr-iṣaḥ sam sīm akṛṇvant svadhitiṃ na tejase.* (Rgv. III.2.) "Human sacrificial offerings have made him, the people's inspirer, the lord of the people, into an axe, for the sake of radiant energy." J. Gonda describes *tejas* as "fiery energy, splendour, efficiency, majesty, supernormal potency, keenness". ("Gods and Powers." 1957.p.58.)
- 56 cf. Rgv.V.51.2
- 57 *ṛtāvṛdhaḥ* (Rgv.VII.66.10)
- 58 cf. Rgv. I.89.7
- 59 cf. "for the sake of *tejas*" *tejase.*
- 60 Rgv.VIII.48.3
- 61 *dyumnasya śavasa ṛtasya raśmim ā dade.* (Rgv.V.7.3)
- 62 cf. also Rgv. III.6.6 where Agni is enjoined to "fix to the pole by means of the reins of *ṛta*" both his "gleaming ruby-maned stallions" (*ṛtasya vā keśinā योग्याभिर-ghṛtas stuvā rohitā dhuri dhiṣva.*)
- 63 *ṛtasya raśmim anu yacchamānā bhadrām bhadrām kratum asmāsu dhehi.* (Rgv. I.123.13ab)
- 64 "Vision." p.183. cf. J. Gonda "Epithets in the Rgveda". 1959.p.37. cf. L. Renou E.V.P. VII.p.18 where commenting upon *kratu* in Rgv.V.85.2 he writes that it "seems to mean 'manas' but the heart being conceived as the seat of sacred inspiration the sense of 'power of inspiration' can be maintained." (Trans. J.M.)
- 65 *adhā hy-agne krator-bhadrasya dakṣasya sādhoḥ rathīr-ṛtasya brhato babhūtha.* (Rgv. IV.10.2) cf. Rgv. I.128.4; III.27.12.
- 66 cf. Rgv. IV.3.4b: *ṛtasya bodhy ṛtacit svādhīḥ.* "Pious knower of the law be attentive (to us).
- 67 *dyumnintama uta kratuḥ.* (Rgv. I.127.9)
- 68 *dame dame agnir-yajñasya adhvarasyā cetati kratvā.* (Rgv. I.128.4ab)
- 69 *iṣūyate viśvā jātāni paspase.* (Rgv. I.128.4d)
- 70 *dhīmahi pracetasam.* (Rgv. I.44.11)
- 71 *cikitvān.* (Rgv. X.12.2)
- 72 *viśvāni kāvyāni vidvān.* (Rgv. III.1.17b & 18d). cf. Rgv. X.21.5; I.5.3cd; IV.11.3ab.
- 73 *viśvavid.* cf. *viśvavedas.*
- 74 *etā no agne saubhagā dīdīhi api kratum sucetasam vatema.* (Rgv. VII.3.10)

- 75 Rgv.III.26.1. This word can also be interpreted as "knower of sound" and shows the close connection between Agni and Soma in their linking of sound and sight.
- 76 *tvam hi visvam abhy-asi manma pra vedhasas cit tirasi manisam.* (Rgv.IV.6.1) cf. Rgv.I.140.1; VI.1.1
- 77 *dhiye vajaya hinvalu.* (Rgv.I.27.11) If *vaja* be a generative power as J. Gonda explains it ("Vision".p.141) then this verse would mean that Agni helps to generate vision.
- 78 *tvad agne kavya tvan manisas tvad uktha jayante radhyani.* (Rgv.IV.11.3ab)
- 79 cf. Rgv.VI.14.2; III.21.3; I.31.1; IX.66.20a where he is identified with Soma.
- 80 cf. Rgv.IX.95.5
- 81 Rgv.IV.11.2
- 82 Rgv.I.144.1ab
- 83 ab *tribhih pavitrair-apunod hi arkam hrda matim jyotir-anu prajanan.* (Rgv.III.26.8ab)
- 84 *indram matir-hrda a vacyamana accha patim stomatasta jigati.* (Rgv.III.39.1)
- 85 *agnim mandram purupriyam siram pavakasocisam hrdbhir-mandrebhir-imahe.* (Rgv.VIII.43.31)
- 86 cf. *pratara-maksu dhiya vasur-jagamyat.* (Rgv.I.62.13) "May he (Indra) enriched with vision quickly come at daybreak."
- 87 cf. *eti prahota vratam asya mayaya urdhvam dadhana sicipesasa dhiyam.* (Rgv.I.144.1). "The highpriest performs his function, with his *mayaya* he sends aloft his resplendent vision" cf. also Rgv.I.143.7 and Rgv.X.91.12 where *vac*, *rc* and *gir* are offered up.
- 88 *ekah samudro dharuno rayinam asmad hrdo bhuri janma vi caste.* (Rgv.X.5.1)
- 89 *asya ajaraso damam aritra arcaddhumaso agnayah pavakah.* (Rgv.X.46.7ab)
- 90 ... *guhā nisṭhan ...*  
*vidanti im atra nara dhiyamdhah hrda yat tastaṅ mantran asamsan.* (Rgv.I.67.2)
- 91 *atithir-grhe grhe.* (Rgv.X.91.2)
- 92ab *a te agna rca havir-hrda tastaṅ bharāmasi*  
*te te bhavantu ukšana rshabhāso visa uta.* (Rgv.VI.16.47).
- 93 *hrda matim janaye carum.* (Rgv.X.91.14d) cf. Rgv.VIII.43.11.
- 94 cf. Compare the Christian "this is my body, this is my blood of the new covenant" (N.T.Math.26:26-28). There is here no shedding of blood, yet a direct assimilation with flesh and blood in a commemorative communion. cf. Rgv.X.86.13&14; 27.2; 28.3; VI.17.11; V.29.7. One may wonder whether the references to Indra's devouring sacrificed animals may not also be figures of speech in like manner.
- 95 cf. Rgv.VI.7.4&V.3.4.
- 96 *amrtasya bhurer-ise.* (Rgv.VII.4.6)
- 97 *akṛṇvan amrtasya nabhim.* (Rgv.III.17.4d) cf. Rgv.IX.106.8 where the gods drink Soma for immortality.
- 98 cf. Rgv.I.96.6
- 99 *agnih sanoti viryani vidvant sanoti vajam amrtaya bhusan.* (Rgv.III.25.2ab)
- 100 *rshimāna ya rshikrt svarshah ... trtiyam dhama mahisah sisasant.* (Rgv.IX.96.18)
- 101 *yajnasya dhama paraman.* (Rgv.X.181.2b)
- 102 cf. J. Gonda's discussion of *√bhūṣ* in "Four studies in the language of the Veda". 1959.p.75,76,92.
- 103 *isise viryasya.* (Rgv.I.91.23)
- 104 *rayo bhagam* (Rgv.I.91.23)
- 105 cf. Rgv.X.25.1ab (*bhadram ... mano daksam uta kratum*)
- 106 *dyumantam susmam a bhara svarvidam.* (Rgv.IX.106.4)
- 107 cf. Rgv.III.15.4&5.
- 108 Rgv.X.5.1 Sanskrit: see note 88.
- 109 Rgv.I.67.2. Sanskrit: see note 90.
- 110 cf. *tvam tam agne amrtatve uttame martam dadhasi ...* (Rgv.I.31.7ab)  
"thou raisest the mortal O Agni, to highest immortality."
- 111 *kasya imam devam amrtesu prestham hradi sreshama sustutim suhavyam.* (Rgv.IV.43.1cd)

- 112 vanivāno mama dūtāsa indraṃ stomāś caranti ...  
 hr̥dispr̥śo manasā vacyamānā asmabhyūm ... (R̥gv.X.47.7abc)
- 113 ayaṃ te stomo agriyo hr̥dispr̥g astu saṃtamah ... (R̥gv.I.16.7ab)
- 114 eṣa vaḥ stomo maruto namasvān hr̥dā taṣṭo manasā dhāyi devāḥ. (R̥gv.I.171.2ab)
- 115 R̥gv.X.25.2ā
- 116 R̥gv.I.25.3
- 117 (R̥gv.X.71.8) Trans. on p.166 note 57.
- 118 te in ninyam hr̥dayasya praketaiḥ sahasra valśam abhi saṃ caranti.  
 (R̥gv.VII.33.9ab): "they, with the insights of the heart, move  
 together in secret towards the thousand-branched" tree.
- 119 R̥gv.X.129.4
- 120 vi ūrnoti hr̥dā matim. (R̥gv.I.105.15c)
- 121 R̥gv.V.85.2. cf. J. Gonda "Epithets in the R̥gveda".1959.p.137.
- 122 The important part the heart plays in the Upaniṣads as the hidden cave  
 wherein abides the ātmā, the unborn, that which is the essence of the  
 whole universe, can be traced back to this R̥gvedic doctrine, a doctrine  
 which stems from a vision.
- 123 cf. R̥gv.I.67.2; VII.33.9ab; V.3.3; IV.5.3.
- 124 paḍam na gor-apagūlham vividvān agnir-mahyam pra id uḍ vocat manīṣām.  
 (R̥gv.IV.5.3ēd)
- 125 paḍam yad viṣnor-upamaṃ nidhāyi tena pāsi guhyam nāma gonām. (R̥gv.V.3.3cd)
- 126 vidhema navayā mahā girā. (R̥gv.II.24.1b)
- 127 ā te agna p̄cā havir-hr̥dā taṣṭam bharāmasi. (R̥gv.VI.16.47ab).  
 cf. R̥gv.VIII.76.8; X.91.14; I.60.3; III.26.1; 39.1; II.35.2
- 128 hr̥dā taṣṭo manasā. (R̥gv.I.171.2ā)
- 129 sūtāḥ somāso ... hr̥dā hūyanta ... (R̥gv.VIII.76.8)
- 130 cf. R̥gv.X.63.7b
- 131 brāhmaṇe vinda gātum. (R̥gv.VII.13.3c)
- 132 agnīsomā havisā saparyād devadrīcā manasā yo ghr̥tena tasya vratam rakṣatam  
 pātam amhaso ... (R̥gv.I.93.8abc)
- 133 brahmaṇā vāvṛdhānā. (R̥gv.I.93.6c)
- 134 R̥gv.I.93.6cd
- 135 ābrahmā ya-jña r̄dhag. (R̥gv.X.105.8d). cf. R̥gv.VII.26.1; II.12.14.
- 136 cf. R̥gv.VII.26.1b.
- 137 cf. R̥gv.II.12.14; VI.38.4.
- 138 R̥gv.VI.1.5; 7ab.
- 139 "The Vedic experience." 1977.p.782
- 140 "Hindu polytheism." 1964.p.68.
- 141 op.cit.p.28;351.

## CHAPTER V

## ṚTA AS DEITY

Section V.1 Ṛta, world-embracing power

The question whether ṛta held, as H. Lefever<sup>1</sup> claims for it, the status of a 'world-embracing power' in the sense of being considered a deity in its own right, cannot be entirely satisfactorily solved. The pros and cons seem to weigh about equally in the balance.

As a unity and the one universal order, ṛta does encompass, as we have seen, each of the three norms of established order, the natural, the ethico-social and the religio-sacrificial. By its power Varuṇa and Mitra govern all the world.<sup>2</sup>

H.W. Wallis claims that

"The ṛta was ... in itself too stationary, too conservative, and purely regulative to be endowed with the individual life necessary to a god; it remained an abstract idea and was not an object of direct adoration."<sup>3</sup>

A similar opinion is voiced by A.B. Keith:

"As a deity ... the Ṛta does not obtain an established rank. The occurrence of such phrases as the idea of the Dawns coming forth from the place of the Ṛta, or of the place of sacrifice as the seat of the Ṛta, or of the charioteer or the wheel or the steeds or the vehicle or the ship of the Ṛta, shows nothing more than the natural concreteness of expression of the Vedic age; there is no prayer to it, and in all the mass of deities invoked in the cult the Ṛta is not included."<sup>4</sup>

This is very far from accurate. Injunctions to meditate on ṛta<sup>5</sup> can be found as well as invitations to pay homage to ṛta<sup>6</sup> and straightforward invocations.<sup>7</sup>

Direct worship may not have been as freely lavished upon it, as being the universal law, hence impersonal, as it was accorded to the more personal gods that both serve it and rule by its means and whom the worshippers could feel as being closer to themselves. Nevertheless certain verses seem to indicate that it could have been invoked as a deity and if so, other passages where it is mentioned together with some of the devas may also imply an invocation which so far has escaped notice.

Wallis's definition of what is necessary for a god to qualify as such, namely "individual life" shows the relativity and limitation of godhood, since individuality is a limitation. The Vedic gods, just as the God of any monotheistic faith, are bound by the very "individuality" with which they are endowed by their devotees. Only, the Vedic mind went further and conceived of the one transcendental law as the only fit expression of the Absolute which itself stood beyond human speculation.<sup>8</sup>

## Section V.2 The Vedic conception of divine power

The whole issue centres around the Vedic conception of divine power. Certain categories of powers are evident - if we may thus subdivide these - in the Vedas: 1) those great cosmic powers or devas, who are both impersonal and personal - some of whom appear both as powers and as persons (Dakṣa, Aditi, Agni, Brhaspati, Soma), and others with a very marked personal character (Varuṇa, Indra, the Aśvins) - ; 2) such seemingly impersonal powers as *ṛta*, *uttānapad*, *ilā*, *tapas*, *tejas*, *sahas*; 3) and personifications of abstract nouns, such as *śraddhā*, faith, *manyu*, zeal, mettle, *takman*, fever. Three hymns e.g., one to *manyu* (Rgv.X.84.4), one to *ṛtu* (season) (Rgv.I.15), one to *śraddhā* faith (Rgv.X.151) show that abstract conceptions or qualities such as faith personalised into an independent power capable of being invoked, could be addressed with a view to filling the worshippers with their essence:

"We call upon Faith at dawn; we call upon Faith at midday;  
we call upon Faith at the setting of the sun;<sup>9</sup>  
O Faith inspire us herewith with confidence."

This is what Keith describes as "deifying"<sup>10</sup> which seems rather to be an exaggerated claim.

Power in the Vedas always has an element of intelligence which, in human thinking, endows it with a certain amount of personality. As the supreme law, *ṛta* is an impersonal power, the underlying regulator of all phenomena, whether at the natural level or at the level of its reflection, the human. At the same time it has a certain quality which the human mind apprehends in terms of the personal. The very fact that the Vedic poet could address *ṛta* thus:

"I solicit the *ṛta* controlled by the *ṛta*"<sup>11</sup>

shows man invoking the vast cosmic order itself by means of the rite. He may have represented it to himself as an almost personal entity whose attention he is requesting. To "solicit, entreat, request, glorify" *ṛta* can only be used of intelligences whose attention is believed capable of being turned to one's self. On the other hand, he may have also just expressed his admiration ("I glorify" can also be a translation) in a superb gesture of both praise and entreaty. *Ṛta* is both impersonal and personal, like all other powers in the Vedas. Personification in the Rgveda is never clearcut. The great cosmic powers themselves, the *devas*, are beyond personification, and yet not completely impersonal. To the Western mind they have not yet "acquired" a full personality as they do in post-Vedic mythology and in such late mythologies as the Greek and the Roman. The human trend has been towards anthropomorphising the nouminous and thus making it more accessible to average



human intelligence. It is no sign of advance in or development of understanding. The Vedic cosmos is ruled by Intelligent Law which manifests through the action of intelligent units, its dynamic agents, who all

"one-minded, one-intentioned, unerringly proceed to the one intelligent-awareness".<sup>12</sup>

### V.3 Rta, universal law

Rta is, as we have seen, the supreme law from which all other laws are derived, the order of the universe, the blueprint of what, by means of its actualisation in the phenomenal world, will bring about the manifestation of the transcendental through the cooperation of men and *devas* and therefore the first to be conceived at the origin of the universe.<sup>13</sup> The gods follow its *vrata*, hence are its charioteers (*rathī*), Soma flows under its *dharma*, its commandments (*pradiśah*) make Indra mighty.<sup>14</sup> To it the gods are faithful (*ṛtavari*), in it they are born *ṛtajāta*). Scholars (e.g. A. Bergaigne, H. Lefever) point out that *dharma*, *dhāman* and *vrata*, which are the three main law terms apart from *rta*, govern the latter in the genitive, but *rta* never governs any one of them: e.g. *dhāman ṛtasya*,<sup>15</sup> *dharmān ṛtasya*.<sup>16</sup> Many other expressions such as *sadas*,<sup>17</sup> *raśmi*,<sup>18</sup> *cakram*<sup>19</sup> are used as qualifying *rta* in a way in which *satya* or *yajña* are not used in the Rgveda. *Rta* in such cases could be considered as taking on the attributes of a deity. On the other hand it is observed that *rta* is also used in subordination to some of the gods, e.g. Varuṇa and Mitra.<sup>20</sup> This apparent paradox is discussed by H. Lefever who explains that the gods act by the "power" of *rta* and only in this sense does it seem to be subordinate to them. He points out that

"Rta as the actual order realised in the world, is a product of the activity of Gods and men, an activity directed in accordance with the transcendent *rta*. This is the significance of such expressions as 'By *rta* upholding *rta*' (I.23.5 - cf. V.15.2)"

"Rta ... is transcendent as the governing principle of all life and activity in the sphere of space, time and will. To this sphere belong both gods and men. ... Rta is, on the one hand, the law of their own nature and so is immanent, while, on the other hand, it is the law which they must obey and yet are free to disobey, and so is transcendent."<sup>21</sup>

The harmonious movement of all things shows the ordered course, the transcendent *rta* as it is reflected at the phenomenal level. But the actual operation of this harmonious movement in the space-time world is the task of the gods who "harness" the power of *rta*. This power is described as *dakṣam* "efficient", and coming "from lofty heaven" (*divo brhato*).<sup>22</sup> This is *rta* which the gods (Mitra-Varuṇa) yoke (*yuñjāthe*) to the work (*apaś*) as to the pole is bound the ox. Hence the gods are both its charioteers (*rathī*) and its

guardians (*gopāh*) or superintendents. They "proclaim ṛta"<sup>23</sup> i.e. their every action is a manifestation of ṛta because they only work in accordance with it. So Indra "harnesses" or "steers" the ṛta<sup>24</sup>, Viṣṇu gives the worshipper his "share of ṛta"<sup>25</sup> i.e. maps out for man what befits him. Of all the gods the Adityas are the most closely connected with the supervision of the working of ṛta both in the phenomenal and in the human fields. Hence the "ṛta of Varuṇa", the "ṛta of Mitra", refer to that sphere of ṛta which is under the superintendence of these gods and do not necessarily mean subordination of the ṛta to these gods.<sup>26</sup> Hence, by Mitra-Varuṇa's "ṛta is ṛta firmly established!"<sup>27</sup>

However much the gods may use the power of ṛta, i.e. act in accordance with the law, they ever remain its custodians (*gopāh*). To be "born of ṛta" may have been considered the highest praise. Occasionally we find the culmination of praise extending as far as identification with ṛta, but this may be the highest blessing that the poet may imagine for his deity. Thus Soma is "the vast ṛta"<sup>28</sup>. Thus Mitra Varuṇa, mighty lords "are the great ṛta".<sup>29</sup>

These few examples serve to show the extreme reverence in which the ṛta was held by the ṛṣis. This could be a pointer to their having considered it as an impersonal deity much in the same way that *Brahman* was held in the time of the Upaniṣads. Only, ṛta is the way to the source, *Brahman* is the source.

In K.R. Potdār's opinion

"From the variety of epithets, derived from 'Ṛta', applied to the gods as 'ṛtaprajāta', 'ṛtajñā', 'ṛtadyumnā', 'ṛtapesāh', 'ṛtāvānaḥ', 'ṛtāvṛdhaḥ', etc., it is obvious that at one stage it was being considered as the all-pervading and the all-supporting principle. In the later days however, only the sacrificial aspect of the Ṛta seems to have survived ..."<sup>30</sup>

The Dawn described as coming from the place of ṛta is in Keith's eyes only proof of the Vedic "concreteness of expression". For V.M. Apte, this shows that ṛta is a concrete entity with a specific location in the heavens.<sup>31</sup> For H. Lefever this is one among other "mythological references" which, not being found in connection with *yajña*, the sacrifice, and other law terms, such as *dharma*, *dhāman*, *vrata*, indicate

"that ṛta was different in kind from the conception of law expressed by the other terms."<sup>32</sup>

#### V.4. Rta as deity

V.M. Apte brings forward some quotations which, in his opinion, show that *rta* ranked as a deity in the Vedic mind. He writes:

"The mighty (*mahad*) *rta* figures as an independent deity among deities like Aditi, Dyāvapṛthivī, Indra, Viṣṇu and Savitr invoked for protection in X.66.4."<sup>33</sup>

This verse, literally translated, runs thus:

"Aditi, Heaven and Earth, Rta the mighty, Indra, Viṣṇu, the Maruts, the lofty empyrean we call upon the gods, the Adityās for help, the Vasus, the Rudras, Savitr of mighty accomplishment"<sup>34</sup>

Here *rta* is certainly on a par with the other gods and one could affirm that if Aditi is considered a goddess in her own right so in this passage *rta* could also have been called upon as a deity in its own right. But the term *svar bṛhat* should also be noticed. Is this different from *dyaus*, and if so is it considered a deity? Not necessarily, in which case *rtam mahad* may not be a deity in the accepted sense of the term. This does not prevent it from being called upon together with the recognised deities.

V.M. Apte then quotes a somewhat controversial verse:

"The soma juice is pressed for Mitra and Varuṇa to drink, the pleasant juice for Rta to drink"<sup>35</sup>

The word *rta* here again seems to rank as equal in status with the gods quoted alongside with it. The whole argument of the status of *rta* hinges around the idea that personal gods are considered (by Western scholars) higher than an impersonal power. That may not have been so in Vedic times and there is no reason why the "personal" should rank higher than the "impersonal". The only difference, to man, between personal and impersonal powers being that man, because of his nature, will seek protection, refuge, comfort, etc. from a personal rather than an impersonal power, endowing the former with what he considers his own higher attributes whilst the latter remains more or less abstruse. It may be noted that in the Upaniṣads the impersonal *Brahman* assumes precedence over every personal deity. E.W. Hopkins considers that *rta* was personified "as a divine personal Power" towards the very end of the Rgveda but that

"... in no passage is Varuṇa subject to Rta as a superior power, but rather Rta (Right Order) has its very source in the wise spirit (Varuṇa) and all the laws of Varuṇa and of the lesser gods are expressions in concrete detail of the divine Order which emanates from heaven, born ... of the religious fervor of the Creator."<sup>36</sup>

There is however no extant verse stating that *rta* has its source in the wise spirit, Varuṇa,<sup>37</sup> unless Varuṇa be equated with the Ordainer (*dhatṛ*) of Rgv.X.190.3, and even here *rta* seems to antedate the creator, or Time the great fashioner. It is evident that Western scholars find it difficult to

conceive of an impersonal power as a fit object of worship.

Rta in the above quoted verse (Rgv.1.137.2) is used in the same dative case as Mitra, Varuna. The construction of the sentence also shows this kind of equality: *pītaye* applies to Mitra Varuna and the second *pītaye* applies to *ṛtāya* in strict parallel to the first part of the sentence.

R.T.H. Griffith translates the phrase thus:

"Juice waits for Mitra and for Varuna to drink, fair juice for drink, for sacrifice",<sup>38</sup>

thus giving a different twist to the meaning, and avoiding what to the Western mind seems inconceivable, namely that an impersonal power be raised to godly status. The verse may, on the other hand, simply mean that the offering of the Soma to *ṛta* is an act of obeisance to the cosmic order, a symbol of man's participation in its process.

Another Rgvedic verse states:

"Pay homage for us to Mitra Varuna, pay homage to the gods,  
O Agni, pay homage to the mighty *ṛta*, thine own domain".<sup>39</sup>

According to A. Bergaigne<sup>40</sup> the mighty *ṛta* is here the sacrifice that is offered to the gods, which would make the verse read "sacrifice for us a mighty sacrifice" or "offer up the mighty order". V.M. Apte criticises Oldenberg for his translation:

"Sacrifice to the gods (a sacrifice conforming to) the great *ṛta*"  
and Geldner's

"Adore the lofty law (Gesetz) of the gods"

as due

"to the non-recognition of the divine status - the godly rank - of *ṛta* which entitled it to the offering of Soma and sacrificial worship generally."<sup>41</sup>

This verse was translated by R.T.H. Griffith thus:

"Bring to us Mitra Varuna, bring the gods to mighty sacrifice,  
bring them Agni to thine own home".<sup>42</sup>

*Yaj* means to "worship" with sacrificial offering rather than "bring" the gods, although the very act of worshipping effects a bringing together of heavenly and earthly powers. Nevertheless, here again we have another example of a strict parallel case, where *devān* is the object of *yajā* and *ṛtaṃ bṛhat* is also the object of *yajā*. H. Lefever sees in the epithet *bṛhat*, so often used with *ṛta*, an example of an incipient personification.<sup>43</sup>

This "worship with sacrifice" is thus, strictly speaking, addressed to Mitra, Varuna, to the gods, to the cosmic order.

The status of *ṛta* as a personified deity as made out in the other examples mentioned by V.M. Apte - Rgv.V.66.5a, V.68.1c; VII.39.1d - seems, however, rather dubious. Rgv.VII.39.1 could for example be translated thus:

"May our quickening-priest celebrate the ṛta"  
 or, "may our quickening-priest pay homage to the ṛta".<sup>44</sup>

In the first case the ṛta would simply refer to the sacrificial ritual as a mirror of the universal order so that the celebration is a holy act wherein man pays homage to the cosmos. In the second case it could be a personified deity.

However, whether personified or not, ṛta remains that transcendental harmony, that cosmic order to which man aspires and in so doing endeavours to regulate his life in accordance with principles which he reads in it, establishing the norms of social and ethical harmony which the ritual is meant to mirror. In the words of A.C. Bose

"... the order observed at the ritual is a symbol of Eternal Order, including the eternal statutes of moral life."<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps ṛta was the best expression of Deity in manifestation that the ṛṣis could conceive - the vast course of life that flows through the multitudinous, separate existences and phenomena, the variegated beauties of the universe. Homage could be paid to it, during the sacrificial rite, as the very reflection in the cosmos of the impersonal Absolute, tat. Hence the praise:

"Firmly based are the foundations of ṛta, shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms".<sup>46</sup>

That, in the final analysis, all creation pays homage to the ṛta is stated in bold imagery:

"To Law wide Earth and deep (Heaven)  
 supreme milch kine, render their milk".<sup>47</sup>

Every act performed in conformity with one's nature is a homage paid to that supreme law from which springs the very law of our being. In this sense also can be understood the universal homage (or sacrifice) paid by the gods and all creation to the one law which is the very essence of the divine life - the Puruṣa sacrificed at the origin of all.

#### V.5 Rta, subject for meditation.

If the world order is fit for admiration, it is also fit for meditation. With this thought in mind we could glance at certain hints given out in Rgv. IV.23.8-10. Verse 8 begins with the realisation that

"Ancient are the invigorating-draughts of ṛta  
 Contemplation of ṛta removes transgressions."<sup>48</sup>

The word *śurudhaḥ* meaning riches, comforts or invigorating-draughts, shows ṛta as pouring out blessings that have been of old, therefore that are ever present, that bring one to a state of holiness, since an end is put to sin. The counsel given here is similar to all mystical teachings which advise

concentration upon a chosen deity by which means the devotee will acquire the attributes of that divinity. The stanza ends with the comment that the song-of-praise (*śloka*) of *ṛta* opens the deaf ears of the priest; therefore to praise the *ṛta* is to effect some transformation in the human being. Verse 10 emphasises a similar thought:

"Whoso harnesses the *ṛta* wins the *ṛta*",<sup>49</sup>

in other words, who obeys nature masters nature because he has learned to use her laws in her own proper way. Nature here can also be considered as epitomised in the ritual. Thence does

"the might of *ṛta* fervently speed onwards".<sup>50</sup>

In this way is all accomplished in accordance with the *ṛta*.

These verses provide an example of the possibility of a personal kind of relationship between man and that impersonal power behind and within the universe, and the potent effect the latter can have on the former. The same type of prayer is observed in the following:

"Pay attention to the *ṛta*, O attentive one, to the *ṛta*,  
split open the many streams of *ṛta*."<sup>51</sup>

In other words, open the sources of *ṛta*. The Vedic seers were on the alert to catch glimpses of the Cosmic Order in their vision and performed all works in accordance with the "summons of *ṛta*" (*ṛtasya preṣā*), with the "visionary insights of *ṛta*".<sup>52</sup> This concentration on the *ṛta* is like an opening of one's mind to the divine inflow. The direct action of the *ṛta* on the human being is implied as well as its beneficent effects. It was thus considered a universal, beneficent power to which man could turn. *Rta* is the way to the Transcendent. It is the only fit expression of the nature of the Transcendent, as mirrored at the manifested level, of that which the Upaniṣads called *Brahman*. Cosmic harmony images the Unmanifest and is therefore a worthy object of meditation. It is the language of the Unmanifest.

*Rta* is both a differentiated and an integrated Power that yet stands beyond differentiation and integration because it makes both actions possible. Sanctity conferred upon *ṛta*, or making it a deity, is man's ultimate expression of acknowledgement and reverence offered to something that he senses as far beyond himself and too superior to be reached even by imagination. His worship of *ṛta* is indirectly manifested when he lives in accordance with the highest norms that he is capable of conceiving and when he pays homage through thought, word and deed, to the gods who are the custodians of *ṛta*. To attune oneself to *ṛta* is to take the right direction to the right goal. It is the return to the source. It is integration. Hence "from the navel of *ṛta* is born immortality".<sup>53</sup> This is the essence of the Rgvedic vision and its message. This is the Vedic revelation (*śruti*).

## N O T E S

Chapter V, Section  
h, 2, 3, 4, 5.

- 1 "The Vedic idea of sin". 1935.p.6.  
 2 Rgv.V.63.7  
 3 "Cosmology of the Rigveda". 1887.p.93  
 4 "Religion and philosophy of the Veda". p.84  
 5 cf. Rgv. IV.23.10; V.12.2  
 6 cf. Rgv. I.75.5  
 7 Rgv. IV.3.9  
 8 cf. Rgv. X.129.1&7. cf. A. Daniélou's discussion of "The representation of the Transcendent" in "Hindu polytheism". 1964.p.4-5  
 9 *śraddhām prātar havamahe śraddhām madhyamdinam pari śraddhām sūryasya nimruçi śraddhe śraddhāpaya iha naḥ.* (Rgv. X.151.5)  
 cf. Rgv. IV.57 addressed to the lord of the field, to the plough and the furrow.  
 cf. Rgv. I.188.8; 31.11; VII.44.2 addressed to Iṅā first personified, then deified.  
 10 op.cit.p.210. cf. J. Gonda. "Gods and powers". 1957.p.19&36. In the Atharvaveda VI.41 "worship is paid with oblation to *manas* 'mind', *cetas* 'thought', *cakṣas* 'visual faculty' and other powers." (p.36)  
 11 *rtena ṛtam niyatam iṅe.* (Rgv. IV.3.9)  
 12 Rgv. VI.9.5. The Sanskrit of this verse appears on p.95.  
 13 cf. Rgv. X.190.1  
 14 cf. Rgv. VIII.89.4  
 15 cf. Rgv. I.43.9; IV.7.7  
 16 cf. Rgv. IX.7.1  
 17 cf. Rgv. X.111.2; III.7.2  
 18 cf. Rgv. V.7.3; I.123.13  
 19 cf. Rgv. I.164.11 cf. *ṛtasya dhīti* (Rgv. I.68.5; IX.111.2), *ṛtasya garbham* (Rgv. I.156.3; IX.68.5); *ṛtasya jihvā* (Rgv. IX.75.2) *ṛtasya pada* (Rgv. X.177.2; IV.5.9; X.5.2); *ṛtasya yōni* (Rgv. X.68.4; 65.7; III.54.6) *ṛtasya pantha* (Rgv. V.80.4; X.31.2; 133.6; I.136.2; 46.11; IX.76.4, etc. All these may indicate something more than "the natural concreteness of expression of the Vedic age" (Keith. op.cit. p.84).  
 20 cf. Rgv. II.28.4; IV.56.7; V.62.1. cf. Rgv. IX.66.24 where Soma engenders *rta*.  
 21 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p.9&13.  
 22 Rgv. I.151.4cd. \*23. Rgv. I.151.4b.  
 24\* *ṛtam yemānaḥ* (Rgv. IV.23.10)  
 25 *ṛtasya bhago* (Rgv. I.156.5)  
 26 cf. Rgv. II.28.4; IV.56.6&7  
 27 Rgv. V.62.1  
 28 *ṛtam bṛhat.* (Rgv. IX.108.8)  
 29 *pra vo mitrāya gāyata varuṇāya vipā girā mahikṣatrāv ṛtam bṛhat.* (Rgv. V.68.1)  
 "Sing forth for your Mitra-Varuṇa an inspired song; mighty lords they (are) the great *rta*".  
 30 "Sacrificial setting of the philosophical hymns in the Rgveda".  
 (*Bharatiya Vidya.* 12.1951)p.171  
 31 See "The Rgvedic antecedents of the dharma-pāśa of Varuṇa in the Mahābhārata." Bull. Deccan College Research Institute. vol. 5.1943.44. p.185-88.  
 32 op.cit.p.6  
 33 op.cit.p.181  
 34 *aditir-dyāvāpṛthivī ṛtam mahad indraviṣṇū marutaḥ svar-bṛhat devān ādityān avase havāmahe vasūn rudrān savitarām sudamśasam.*  
 35 *suto mitrāya varuṇāya pītaye cārur-ṛtāya pītaye.* (Rgv. I.137.2)  
 cf. Rgv. IV.23.8-10  
 36 "Ethics of India". 1924.p.40-1

- 37 The ṛta of Varuṇa as explained above, does not necessarily refer to the source of ṛta. That source is in the original act of creation, *tapas* from the impersonal that or *tat* (Rgv.X.190.1 & X.129.3). All the devas are offsprings of ṛta (*ṛtajātāḥ*) and the first born of ṛta (*prathamajā ṛtasya*). This cannot be otherwise as ṛta is the first to manifest (Rgv.X.190.1).
- 38 "The hymns of the Rgveda." 1963.vol.1.p.190.
- 39 *yajā no mitrā varuṇā yajā devān ṛtam bṛhat agne yakṣi svap damam.* (Rgv.I.75.5)
- 40 *La religion védique. 1883. p.231.*
- 41 op.cit.p.182.
- 42 op.cit.p.99.
- 43 "The Vedic idea of sin". 1935.p.8. cf.also the suffixes *jña*, knowing, *yan* faithful to, *jāta*, born in, applied to ṛta and not to *dharma*, *dhāman* and *vrata*. That the gods are said to be born in ṛta may simply be a figure of speech such as the poets often indulge in; thus the gods are sons of immortality, of skill, Agni is the son of strength, etc. But it may also mean that they are the embodiments of ṛta, the embodiments of immortality, etc.
- 44 *ṛtam hotā na iṣīto yajāti.* Similarly in the case of Rgv.V.68.1c translated on p 210, the verse could mean "sing a song for Mitra \*note 29 Varuṇa, for the great ṛta."
- 45 "The call of the Vedas." 1970. p.49.
- 46 *ṛtasya dr̥hā dharuṇāni santi purūṇi candrā vapuse vapūmsi.* (Rgv.IV.23.9ab)
- 47 *ṛtāya pṛthivī bahule gabhīre ṛtāya dhenū paramē duhāte.* (Rgv.IV.23.10cd)
- 48 *ṛtasya hi śurudhaḥ santi pūrvīr ṛtasya dhītīr-vṛjināni hanti.* (Rgv.IV.23.8)
- 49 *ṛtam yemāna ṛtam id vanoti.* (Rgv.IV.23.10a)
- 50 *ṛtasya śuṣmas turayā u gavyuh.* (Rgv.IV.23.10b)
- 51 *ṛtam cikītvā ṛtam ic-cikīddhy-ṛtasya dhārā anu trndhi pūrvīh.* (Rgv.V.12.2)
- 52 J. Gonda's translation. ("Vision." 1963) p.173.
- 53 *ṛtasya dhītīh.* (Rgv.I.68.5)
- 53 *Rgv.IX.74.4*



## CONCLUSION:

## RTA, COSMIC HARMONY

The whole trend of this investigation into the significance of *ṛta* has been an endeavour to examine the many facets of the *R̥gvedic* vision of *ṛta*, of a cosmic order in which all parts throb with dynamic life and play an effective role subservient to the whole. One cannot assert that *ṛta* is just the fixed order of things, or just truth, or just law, but its meaning includes all these and goes far beyond, for *ṛta* is transcendental; it stands for universal truth, universal harmony, universal law, universal order, universal life; in standing for all these conceptions which can only be envisaged in man's loftiest flights, it points to the richness of its underlying meaning; it is the manifested expression of the Transcendent.

The school of thought based upon nineteenth and early twentieth century conclusions which still influences scholars nowadays<sup>1</sup> as well as the more popular types of expositions on India's earlier forms of religion, which considers the *R̥gveda* as a collection of more or less primitive songs, of nature worship, the tribal cult of simple minds, a "naïve religion", needs complete reviewing. S. Radhakrishnan summed up the general position in the following words:

"A study of the hymns of the *R̥gVeda* is indispensable for any adequate account of Indian thought. Whatever we may think of them, half-formed myths or crude allegories, obscure gropings or immature compositions, still they are the source of the later practices and philosophies of the Indo Aryans, and a study of them is necessary for a proper understanding of subsequent thought."<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately the latest trend is against such an ill-considered, somewhat superficial and biased approach. With the work of J. Gonda, L. Renou, R. Panikkar, K. Werner, and others the *R̥gveda* is being studied in depth with an open mind and the claim of the *ṛsis* to spiritual insights is being investigated and more and more vindicated.

That the Vedic hymns show a religion deeply imbued with the poetry of and the feeling for nature, and man as essentially part of nature, is all too evident. Vedic man lived in such proximity to nature that there could be no divorce in his thought between the latter and himself. For him natural phenomena were as divine as his own divinely inspired and most treasured songs and visions. Both the animate and the inanimate were, in his eyes, imbued with one and the same divine life. But this aspect of his outlook is only the outer garment, so to speak, of that which is first apprehended at the superficial level. Behind the multiplicity of gods and activities, behind the mythological terminology often difficult to grasp in the examination of

which too many of the early scholars foundered, is perceptible a remarkable insight not only into the laws of the universe, both heavenly and terrestrial, but also into the depths of human nature, as well as an extraordinary vision of the oneness, the intrinsic interlinkedness of all, a vision the mightiness of which escaped the notice of nineteenth and early twentieth century Western exegesis. The *tadekam*,<sup>3</sup> or the *aja*, the unborn one<sup>4</sup> of the origins, the *rta* as the foundation and mover of the continuous development, the *asuratvam ekam*,<sup>5</sup> or one godhood of the *devas*, the furtherers of this *rta*, that "one-intentioned move together to the one purposeful intelligence"<sup>6</sup> the *visvam ekam*<sup>7</sup> of this incessant activity which A.T.de Nicolas aptly translates as "integral multiplicity",<sup>8</sup> underly, emphasise and glorify oneness:

"That which is one has developed into the all!"<sup>9</sup>

"One whole governs the moving and the stable, that which walks and flies, this variegated creation".<sup>10</sup>

All issue from the One and develop in accordance with the "one law which itself is rooted in the One. This is the guarantee of the one origin and the one end.

Vedic man conceived his life as a centre of energies in a whirlpool of energies, every surrounding object radiating, in varying degrees, the same divine life as he himself, all governed by the law of equilibrium; hence, that every deed of his had repercussions extending far beyond his present awareness. At the cosmic level *rta* is the law of harmony; at the human level, the law of truth, righteousness, justice; at the personal level, integrity, the manifestation of the human conscience, the silent voice that guides conduct and points to the right.

The sections on the godly and the human level, and that on the ritual were intended to demonstrate these vistas of vast dimension that yet stand as one whole. What is merely hinted at as a passing allusion in the *Rgveda*, or expressed as a question, or as a riddle or a myth, if pieced together, is discovered to form the material for at least the broad outlines of a system of thought which found its development in the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Epics* and the *Purāṇas*.

Some scholars, like R.N. Dandekar<sup>11</sup> contest the common notion that the Veda is the fountain-head of all Indian philosophy. For him

"... historical Hinduism was affiliated to the Veda only in a formal and fortuitous manner".<sup>12</sup>

This is a moot point. Both the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* are expositions of, or speculations directly based upon, a number of *Rgvedic* verses - hence *Rgvedic* ideas - which nowadays are quoted as though originating from the *Upaniṣads* whereas they can be traced back to the *Rgveda*.<sup>13</sup> This shows that the *Rgveda* is the fountain-spring of much of the later philosophical speculation.

Three great conceptions underlie the many-faceted presentation of Rgvedic religious life: the one law, the one truth which in the human context is integrity-integration, and the one sacrifice. These are the three fundamental aspects of the vision of *ṛta*. We have called *ṛta* the cosmic order, the universal harmony because on viewing these three main facets of *ṛta*, the keynote has ever been harmony, harmony as the expression in the manifest of the unmanifest, transcendent. In this respect H. Panikkar's profound statement is revealing of the inner significance of *ṛta*:

"Immanence and transcendence are intrinsically correlated and are possible only when held together in mutual tension."<sup>14</sup>

This holding together in mutual tension is the essence of *ṛta*: the correlation of immanence and transcendence spells the correlation of all opposites and their being held in mutual tension, in equilibrium. This is the cosmic order.

The Rgvedic vision of *ṛta* is one of cosmic integrity: all the various kingdoms of nature, visible and invisible and their denizens work together in concerted action, whether consciously or unconsciously, towards a common purpose, towards establishing in all the spheres of manifested existence a perfect wholeness, ordered activity, oneness, the reflection of the transcendent. Underlying the multiplicity of the gods is the oneness of their godhood and their action.<sup>15</sup> Underlying the many appearances and disappearances of things and creatures from the humblest mineral and blade of grass to the proudest human and the most glorious god, is the one law of transformation which activates, organises, changes and keeps in balance the opposing forces and various tensions that work in and contribute to the unfoldment of the universe. Everything is in constant motion, on the wing as it were, but this very constancy of movement is itself the stability, the fixity of *ṛta*. Motion and stability are united in *ṛta*. Underlying the apparent disorder of certain phenomena the one law maintains an order which, at the higher level (the godly) is perfect harmony, which at the lower (the terrestrial) is a conflict whose resolution demands the cooperation of those intelligent units of the One Intelligence, gods and men, a cooperation which is movement in togetherness; a working with law and therefore on the side of power, the two forces of conflict or resistance, and of cooperation or unfoldment finding their ultimate resolution at the level of the gods where harmony is achieved and concerted action a fact, hence oneness of purpose, the pattern in the heaven. As the lower is but a blurred reflection of the higher order, the dynamics of *ṛta*, in our space-time dimension, nevertheless reveal a cosmos (in the heavens as in nature) which is the phenomenal expression of the transcendent *ṛta*. The cosmic order is constantly being mirrored on earth in spite of all.

At the human level the establishment of harmonious relationships in society is man's answer to the cosmic order: it is the expression of his understanding of it. Such relationships, imply a common code of ethics, justice and honour, acceptable to all. Moral codes and sacrificial rites are reflections of man's response to the law inherent in his deepest nature, his conduct and his participation and commitment being indicative of his understanding of the cosmic order, modes of enabling him to realise the inner significance of cosmic life and his role therein. Man first submits to the Law as reflected in the social and moral order established by the wise ones who have received the vision and understood its meaning, and then re-enacts it in his ritual worship. The power of the latter lies in its calling men together for a holy purpose and in this togetherness of making it easier for men to enter into a higher state of awareness, of communion with the loftier powers, a state of illumination. The drawing more closely of men and gods is thereby furthered and the law of harmony deliberately actuated by man in this sacred work. In conforming to this universal harmony man finds his true self, meaning and purpose. His achievement of integrity heralds his integration in the cosmic order. In this attainment lies hidden the elixir of life, *amṛta*, which is the very core of *ṛta*, immortality, the essence of that which underlies the harmonious working of all things: hence *ṛta* viewed as the inherent rhythm in the law of transformation whereby all is organised into a harmonious whole, the supreme order, law, truth. All this is hinted at in many verses scattered about in the *Rgveda* and quoted throughout this thesis. These when pieced together, build up a vision of the universe that reveals such insight as has been here summarised.

The dynamic order of reality as the eternal transformation of the divine life, exemplified not only in the *puruṣa sūkta*, but also in the Agni hymns, implies the entering of this divine life into more and more restricting conditions of existence where it is buried - the stranglehold, so to speak, that material forms have over the spiritual essence that seems to die or disappear within them -; this is the perpetual sacrifice whereby the universe is kept in existence, on the move, as it were. There can be no manifestation without change, without movement, the ceaseless swinging between separation and union. The *love* and *strife* of Empedocles find here their ancient Indian observation and formulation. This is the law of becoming, of life, *ṛta*, and hidden within that law is the eternal sacrifice, the immanent and transcendent *puruṣa* immolated; the fire, life-sap of all things, hidden in the waters, in the rock, in the trees, in humans, can

only be brought to birth through friction, which in human terms is conflict. The law of transformation is thus revealed as equivalent to the perpetual sacrificial self-offering of the *puruṣa*.<sup>16</sup> This equivalence which is not explicit but fully implicit in the Ṛgveda, is one of the most arresting conceptions in the Vedic vision of *ṛta* as sacrifice, *yajña*, one of its far-reaching conclusions. A human life that is a perpetual self-offering to the divine life that courses within itself as within all things, is a harmonised life, for it has integrated itself in the vaster life of the universe which itself is an eternal self-offering; where there is no integration, separation, enmity, strife and unhappiness prevail. Harmony in a human being is a reflection of the cosmic order. All this is summed up, in typical Ṛgvedic fashion, in the cryptic formula addressed to the All-Creator:

"Sacrifice thyself for thine own exaltation."<sup>17</sup>

From such beginnings the doctrine of sacrifice found its full development in the period of the Brāhmaṇas.

The vision of *ṛta* which in the light of the above interpretation may be called the vision of cosmic wholeness, was to split up into three main avenues of speculative thought: *dhārma-kārma*, *kalpa-yuga* and *brahman-ātman*. From this standpoint we can maintain that that which was peculiarly Ṛgvedic, namely the vision of cosmic order, of wholeness, of harmony, of integration, becomes the fountainhead of the subsequent peculiarly Hindu doctrines of *dhārma* and *kārma*, of the law of cycles and of the essential oneness of all creatures with their Ultimate Source.<sup>18</sup>

The roots of the doctrine of *kārma* and *dhārma* are embodied in the two aspects of *ṛta*: *ṛta* as 1) the sacrifice representing both the work (*apas* or *kārman*) of the universe's intelligent units, gods and humans, and as 2) what "supports" that same universe, the basic law according to which all things move. Furthermore, the action of receiving and returning inherent in the sacrifice proclaims the law of equilibrium which sustains the universe. The doctrine of *order based on equilibrium* thus developed, in the moral sphere, in the doctrine of *kārma*, the interconnectedness of all actions and their counterbalancing of one another, - as ye have sown so are ye reaping, as ye are sowing so will ye reap, - and that of *dhārma*, of one's duty-vocation-function-stand in life, the regulations of conduct, codes of ethics, each appropriate to, or in strict accordance with, one's inherent truth, the innermost law of one's being, *svadhārma*;<sup>19</sup> a doctrine which was to be further amplified in the theory of the *varṇas* and *āśramas*. *Ṛta* in its cosmic sense becomes specialised as *dhārma* in a social or human sense, but a

*dhārma* not imposed by any one from outside, a *dhārma* seen as the inner law which governs all and which, if carried out by man in his life, results in harmony, in establishing on earth the divine harmony. In the words of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad *dhārma* "embraces the whole world"<sup>20</sup>, it is the world's foundation. Nevertheless it may be said that the great vision of cosmos as peculiar to the ṛṣis of the Ṛgveda becomes more and more dimmed and compartmentalised until the whole focus of attention is concentrated on the individual and society. Man emerges as his own most proper study and the vision of cosmic integrity disappears into the vision of Man.

It was inevitable that the conception of ṛta as that law which underlies the cyclic recurrence of all natural phenomena should develop further into the doctrine of the cyclic manifestation of the universe and of man, of projection and absorption, of birth, death and rebirth: in the macrocosm *śṛṣṭi* and *pralaya*, the great *kalpas* and *mahā yugas* as propounded in the Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata,<sup>21</sup> in the microcosm, *punarjanman*, rebirth first clearly explained in the Upaniṣads. Of these two doctrines only a few references can be found in the Ṛgveda,<sup>22</sup> but they are sufficient pointers both to the future of the teachings and to the fact that such ideas were already prevalent in Ṛgvedic times. Thus "the plants that were born of old three ages before the gods"<sup>23</sup> and the prayer of obeisance to the gods, the "mighty and the lesser" the "elder and the younger"<sup>24</sup> implies a progressive formation of the earth according to cycles and a progressive development or coming into action of its denizens. Thus also the "successive existences" (*anūcīnā jīvitā*) which Savitr grants man (Ṛgv.IV.54.2) which, contrary to prevalent scholarly opinion,<sup>25</sup> shows far more than a "trace" of the doctrine of rebirth.<sup>26</sup> That this doctrine of *karma* and *punarjanman* was regarded as a secret one may be gathered from the Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad.<sup>27</sup> This would account for the scarce references to it in the Ṛgveda.

The vision of ṛta as cosmic integrity was eclipsed during the period of the Brāhmaṇas but only to re-emerge via its cognate term, *satya* which thereafter assumed precedence over ṛta. The Ṛgvedic distinction between ṛta and *satya* was lost sight of, the two ideas coalescing, *satya*<sup>28</sup> being kept as the term for reality, truth and ṛta being dropped: so that <sup>from</sup> the notion of ṛta as cosmic order, the one law, basis of all structures, to *satya* the truth, the one reality, to the identification of the latter with the power inherent in the invocative word, *brahman*, the creative force, to the exaltation of that power as what lies at the root of all, hence the source of all things, the truth, the steps are foreseeable and evidence a consistent line of thought and

and enquiry, all heading towards finding the ultimate principle.

"Satya, the luminous, lofty, cherished, all-conquering truth established on the unshakable foundations of heaven"<sup>29</sup>

becomes the one reality of the Brāhmaṇas. The knowledge of the truth of the threefold *gnosis*, the *ṛk*, the *yajuh* and the *sāman*, gave the *devas* the power to conquer the *asuras*.<sup>30</sup> Knowledge of the truth is power. *Satya* is *brahman* which the sacrifice expresses. If *satya* is the foundation of the universe,<sup>31</sup> *satya* is itself founded on *brahman* which in turn is based on *tapas*.<sup>32</sup> Such statement is of paramount importance for it proclaims *satya* as based upon the ultimate power, the invocative hence creative power, *brahman*, which itself can only be evoked and realised through *tapas*.

The identification of *satya* and *brahman* is found in two passages of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, one implicitly via worship - *yajña* being essentially the expression of *brahman* as indeed is stated in Śat.Br.2.1.4.10, then by implication *brahman* = *satya*:

"Worship above all is truthfulness"<sup>33</sup>

and one explicitly:

"Verily that (fire) is of the brahman. With the brahman it is set up.

The brahman is speech ... the brahman is the truth and the truth consists in those same (three) mystic utterances: hence his (fire) is established by means of the truth."<sup>34</sup>

Fire is that burning energy which ever spurs onward and uplifts thought and feeling, blends them into aspiration and relentlessly pursues its quest: contact with the transcendent. This is the power of *brahman*. *Brahman* is the irresistible invocation: it takes form as the word that bears fruit; it becomes the word made flesh. That which is achieved thereby is the expression of that which is, hence *satya*: *brahman* is *satya*.

This identification was to be taken up and amplified in the Upaniṣads:

"*Satya* is the name of *brahman*"<sup>35</sup>

"*Brahman* is *satya*"<sup>36</sup>

"The wise invoke him as *ṛta*, as *satya* as highest *brahman*".<sup>37</sup>

Cosmic order, truth, ultimate principle, these are three stages in Vedic man's search for truth, three stages during which he searched along slightly different paths and used different terminology, but which all had the same end in view.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad's summary could be considered an amplification of and commentary on Ṛgveda 1.67.2:<sup>38</sup>

"He who knows *brahman* as the real (*satya*) as knowledge (*jñāna*) as the infinite (*ananta*) laid in the secret place (of the heart) in the highest heaven, that one obtains all desires together with the all knowing Brahman." 39

The religious experience of the ancient seers of India, such as it may be reconstructed from their visionary hymns, thus became the basis of doctrines whose origin can be traced to the hints scattered in the *R̥gveda* and whose testimony is the fountainspring of later religious speculation. The fundamental idea of the one law that constitutes the foundation of life, the very structure of the universe and pulsation of the One Absolute Principle from whom proceed the many, first as a duality, then as a plurality, in ordered sequence; and the possibility for man of realising, through supra-normal insight or vision and through righteous living, through the integration of his whole being, and through the ritualistic ordering in symbolic gestures, certain truths that lie beyond the scope of ordinary, mundane experience and perception; all this forms the background of the hymns of the *R̥gveda* and was to be taken up, developed and expounded in a different language in the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Vedānta Sūtras*, the *Epics* and the *Purāṇas*.



NOTES

Conclusion.

- 1 cf. M. Winternitz. "A history of Indian literature". 1927. vol. I. A.L. Basham. "The wonder that was India." 1954 (reprinted 1974) p.234-243. A.C. Bouquet. "Hinduism." 1966. p.44. R.C. Zaehner. "Hinduism." 1966. chapter I. S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore. "A source book in Indian philosophy." 1967. p.3.
- 2 op.cit. p.3.
- 3 Rgv. X.129.3
- 4 Rgv. I.164.6
- 5 Rgv. III.55.1
- 6 Rgv. VI.9.5
- 7 Rgv. III.54.8
- 8 "Four-dimensional man." 1971. p.151.
- 9 *ekam vā idam vi babhūva sarvam.* (Rgv. VIII.58.2d) cf. also Rgv. III.54.8cd; X.114.5; I.164.46.
- 10 *ejad dhruvam patyate viśvam ekam carat patatri viṣṇuṇam vijātam.* (Rgv. III.54.8cd)
- 11 "Some aspects of Hinduism." 1967.
- 12 op.cit. p.32.
- 13 cf. Rgv. VIII.70.3 with Katha Up. I.2.23 and Muṇḍ. Up. III.2.3. Rgv. I.164.20 with Muṇḍ. Up. III.1.1. and Bh. Gita 15.16. Rgv. I.24.7 with Katha Up. II.3.1 and Bhagavad Gita 15.1. Rgv. IV.40.5 with Katha Up. II.2.2, Rgv. I.89.8 with Muṇḍ. and Praśna Up. (opening lines.) cf. also Rgv. X.90.1-4 with Svet. Up. III.3 and Mahān<sup>Up</sup>. I-14.
- 14 "The Vedic experience." 1977. p.315-16.
- 15 cf. Rgv. III.55.1 & VI.9.5
- 16 cf. Śat. Br. (14.3.21) "That which is sacrificed is the soul of all beings and all gods." cf. also Rgv. X.81.5 & 6.
- 17 *svayaṃ yajasva tanvaṃ vṛdhānaḥ.* (Rgv. X.81.5d)
- 18 cf. L. Renou. "Religion of ancient India." 1953. "The Vedic and the Upaniṣadic texts both seek the same end but they use different means." (p.18). cf. M. Winternitz. "History of Sanskrit literature." 1927. vol. I. p.225.
- 19 cf. Bhagavad Gita: "Better one's own duty though destitute of merit, than the duty of another, however well discharged". (III.35. cf. XVIII.48).
- 20 op.cit. 62.6; 63.7.
21. References to the four yugas or ages of the world and to a "day" of Brahma, however, are found in the Devatādhyāya Brāhmaṇa, chapter 3. cf. also Rgv. X.97.1; 72.2 as against J. Muir's statement that "Of this elaborate system of Yugas, Manvantaras, and Kalpas, of enormous duration, no traces are found in the hymns of the Rig-veda". (O.S.T. IV. p.45). He then proceeds to examine all the Rgvedic verses where the word *yuga* appears, an examination which only helps to convince one that the doctrine of *yugas* must have been known, the details of which may have been kept secret.
- 22 cf. Rgv. X.190.3; 97.1; IV.54.2.
- 23 *yā ośadhīḥ pūrvā jātā devebhyas triyugaṃ purā.* (Rgv. X.97.1) cf. Śat. Br. 7.2.4.26 "The herbs first grown three ages before the gods". Rgv. I.27.13.
- 24 Rgv. I.27.13.
- 25 cf. J.M. Farquhar. "An outline of the religious literature of India". 1920 (reprinted 1967): "There is no trace of transmigration in the hymns of the Vedas" (p.33). cf. A.B. Keith "Pythagoras and the doctrine of transmigration" (J.R.A.S. 1909) where on p.574-5 he discusses the Hindu doctrine and states that "most authorities are agreed that it can be found only in the Upaniṣads". Hopkins, "Religions of India" ascribes it first to the Śat. Br. with a possibility in Rgv. I.164.30, 38. cf. A.A. Macdonell "History of Sanskrit literature" p.115. Geldner "Vedische Studien" ii.288; iii.3. The discussion centres mainly around Rgv. I.164.30, 38 which verses are most ambiguous and no account is taken of Rgv. IV.54.2 which is the

- only clear statement in the R̥gveda, but which A.A. Macdonell renders as "length of life on man" ("Vedic mythology."1897.p.32)  
 cf. K.Werner "The Vedic concept of human personality and its destiny" (J. of Indian Philosophy 5.1978.p.287) for a counter argument.  
 cf. R.C. Zaehner "Hinduism" p.57: "Of this (the doctrine of rebirth, reincarnation, of the transmigration of souls) there is no trace in the Samhitās or the Brāhmaṇas."
- 26 cf. Sat.Br.3.1.2.21. cf. also the beginnings of the idea of *devayāna* and *pitryāna* in the R̥gveda I.162.4; IV.37.1; X.2.7; 88.15; 181.3.
- 27 op.cit. III.2.13.
- 28 *satya* from *sat*, what is, what essentially is, in strict accordance with its own essence. cf. H. Lefever. ("The Vedic idea of sin"): "This term (*satya*) ... was admirably suited to express the conception of 'right', 'truth', or 'law' in a system where Reality was equated with something spoken, i.e. *brahman*, the prayer, or with the power which was inherent in the prayer. (cf. Sat.Br.2.1.4.10)". (p.57).
- 29 *vibhrād bṛhat subhrtam vājasātamaṃ dhārman divo dharuṇe satyam arpitam.* (R̥g.V. X.170.2ab).
- 30 Sat.Br.9.5.1.18.
- 31 cf. Sat.Br.7.4.1.8. "This earth is established on the truth; hence the truth is this earth" with R̥g.V. X.85.1 & I.105.12b.
- 32 cf. Aitā. Br.3.1.6.(3): "The sky rests on the air; the air on the earth; the earth on the waters; the waters on the reality (*satya*); the reality on the brahma; the brahma on the concentrated heat of meditation (*tapas*). cf. Chānd.Up. VIII.4.3.: "And that world of *brahman* belongs to those only who find it by abstinence."
- 33 Sat.Br.2.2.2.20. cf. also Sat.Br.9.5.1.18: "Having made up the *yajña* let us spread out this *satya*."
- 34 Sat.Br.2.1.4.10. (not *śalva*)
- 35 Chānd.Up. VIII.3.4.
- 36 Bṛhad.Up. V.5.1. cf. V.4.1.
- 37 Mahānā. Up. I.6; cf. XII.1.
- 38 See p.191 and 193.
- 39 Tait.Up. II.1.

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I N D E X

(Selective. The alphabetisation according to  
the English order.)

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