The vision of RTA in the Vedas

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THE VISION OF RTA IN THE VEDAS

Thesis submitted
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THE VISION OF RTA IN THE VEDAS

The rṣis 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, rta: the world order exhibits a balance of all those factors that contribute to its making, a holding together in mutual tension of all opposites.

Rta 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 rta 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 rta 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 fulfills 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 rta 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 rta.

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

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

Section I.1
The means to valid knowledge.

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

I.3
The risis' vision as ancestral and continuous.

I.4
Method of arousing vision; meditation.

I.5
Vision stated to be rooted in rta.

CHAPTER II

Section II.1
Definition of rta: eternal order, law underlying the structure of the universe, the process of transformation, or law of becoming.

II.2
Sphere of rta: cosmic, natural, human, hence various manifestations.

II.3
Origin of rta; ontological, psychological explanation.

II.4
Difference between rta and satya.

II.5
The physical image of rta: the zodiac.

CHAPTER III

VISION OF CREATION

Introduction: creation according to rta.

Section III.1

III.1.1
The primordial differentiation: the One differentiates into the two.

III.1.2
Dualism inherent in manifestation.

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

III.1.4
The continuous process of creation.

III.1.5
Examination of asat and sat.

p. 1 - 2

3 - 4

4 - 7

7 - 8

8 - 11

11 - 12

13 - 15

16 - 18

18 - 19

19 - 20

20 - 24

24 - 30

31 - 34

35 - 37

38 - 39

39 - 40

40 - 42

43 - 44

44 - 47

Notes 48 - 51
CHAPTER III (contd)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section III.2</th>
<th>Second level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III.2.1</td>
<td>The godly level: the dynamics of rta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.2</td>
<td>Dakśa and Aditi, embodiment of the primeval differentiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.3</td>
<td>The threefold division of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.4</td>
<td>The origin of the gods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.5</td>
<td>Heaven and Earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.6</td>
<td>The process of permutation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.7</td>
<td>The gods, offspring and servants of the cosmic order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.8</td>
<td>Asura and māyā, examples of ambivalence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.9</td>
<td>The laws derived from the one Law: dhāman, dharman, vrata.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.2.10</td>
<td>The divine encounter. Notes 82 - 83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III.3 Third level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section III.3</th>
<th>Third level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III.3.1</td>
<td>The human level: the disruption of rta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.2</td>
<td>Rta in its application to man: the moral law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.3</td>
<td>The meaning of anṛta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.4</td>
<td>Karma inherent in the conception of rta in the moral sphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.5</td>
<td>The conception of sin in the Rgveda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.6</td>
<td>Rta as truth: the vision of holiness and the social order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.7</td>
<td>Forgiveness and the meaning of freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.8</td>
<td>Varuṇa and the fetters of sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.9</td>
<td>The role of nirṛti in the cosmic order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.3.10</td>
<td>Man's confrontation. Notes 132 - 133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER IV

RTA AS THE SACRIFICE.

Section IV.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section IV.1</th>
<th>The ritualistic aspect and purpose: symbol of the cosmic process; a bringing together of gods and men for mutual benefit.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV.2</td>
<td>The meaning of yajñā the sacrifice. Notes 145 - 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.3</td>
<td>The purifying function of the sacrifice. Notes 156 - 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.4</td>
<td>Examination of yajñā = rta. Notes 159 - 163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.5</td>
<td>Soma's role in the ritual: Soma the essence of the rta - illuminator and granter of the vision of rta. Notes 164 - 170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.6</td>
<td>Agni's role in the ritual: Agni, the highpriest of the rta, dynamic charioteer of man's offering and link between heaven and earth, man and god. Notes 182 - 185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.7</td>
<td>The heart, crux of the sacrifice. Notes 193 - 197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER V

RTA AS DEITY

Section V.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section V.1</th>
<th>Rta, world embracing power.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V.2</td>
<td>The Vedic conception of divine power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.3</td>
<td>Rta, universal law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.4</td>
<td>Rta as deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.5</td>
<td>Rta, subject for meditation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX

Notes 210 - 211

Notes 220 - 221
The Vedic conception of rta, the cosmic order, the dynamics of manifestation, was developed, as can be reconstructed from the Rgveda 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 rta 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 man's role therein; insights ranging from the rṣis' speculation as to the origin of creation, the orderly unfolding 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 rṣis composed as expressions of it, were subsequently called śruti, that which has been heard: revelation. A.C. Bouquet, in his study of 'Hindulism' 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."  

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."

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.

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 samhita and has to be re-constructed 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 ādhyājñitika (ritual) has been favoured, the underlying aim being to examine the rṣi's claim to divine revelation and their hymns the expression of their inspiration.

* The translation of the Ṛgvedic 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 RTA WAS APPREHENDED

I.1. The means to valid knowledge

The three means (pramāṇās) to valid knowledge (pramāṇa) recognised by Indian philosophical schools are:

- perception (pratyakṣa)
- inference (anumāṇa)
- verbal testimony (śabda) or revelation (śruti)

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 Rgveda samhitā, 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". 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".

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 rsi but of generations of seers. Its testimony can be traced to a long line of sages.

The validity of the Rgveda's claim to revelation

Hints scattered throughout the *samhitās* 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 *dhiḥ* and its derivative *dhiḥtiḥ* in his study "The Vision of the Vedic poets", it has become evident that *dhiḥ* 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 *dhiḥ* and his reason for choosing the word "vision" to translate it is thus set forth:

"The Skt. noun *dhiḥ* 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."

*dhiḥ* 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" (*pasyān*). 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".
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".10

So the "god Varuna" is asked to

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

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 rsı across."12

According to L. Renou

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

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".14

This kind of vision is described as being seven-headed (sapta-śirṣānīm) i.e., as having seven aspects to it and as originating in ṛṣṭa, 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 (dhīḥ)
born of ṛṣṭa, our ancestor discovered"15

Verse 2 elaborates:

"Praising ṛṣṭa and contemplating aright,"16
The participle translated as 'contemplating', namely 嗲dhyāna (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".17

It is thus by such meditation that they were inspired to institute ways of paying homage. A further verse declares that by means of dhīḥ 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 dhih". This they did for the sake of mankind. In "breaking open" the "rock" (adri) as it is mythologically related (the very words xu and adri evidence the great effort required).

"they made for us the way to vast heaven". 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 dhih 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". 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 bhānam) which is the world of reality of which the world of the senses is but the reflection.

This dhih is the possession par excellence of the wise (dhiRa) hence the wise man 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".

"For these artisans, these vision-inspired-men have aspired after the gaining of wisdom."  

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". The dhih 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 rta the sun shone forth". Interpreted psychologically this would mean that as a result of the poet's song which was inspired to him in his contemplation of rta, 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 rta I was born even a sun."
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". 27 Soma, Pūsan, Savitr, Indra, Mitra-Varuna, similarly foster the seers' vision. 28

I. 3. The rṣis' 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." 29

Two outstanding points should be noted: the "god-given" quality of the vision as it emerges to consciousness robed in light, and the fact that it is both new and old, 30 revealed anew, and hereditary, the divine heirloom of the rṣis. 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 Viśvāmitra is of the opinion that the vision which comes to him at daybreak is identical with that which manifested itself to his father Gāthin and his grandfather Kuśāka ... (In short) that all dhiyāh are reproductions of one and the same archetype." 32

It is significant that the dhiyā opens up insights into what otherwise remains a mystery, and that it is hereditary among the rṣis: It is received from of old, newly grasped and framed into song. 33 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 rṣis 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 rsis call upon Agni "as did the Bhrgus, Manus, Angiras" in days of old. A poet claims that he is following directly upon the path of rta 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" 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".

"We speak by-reason-of our descent (birth) from the ancient Sire".

This Sire being Soma, the giver of enlightenment and eloquence, the rsi here makes plain his heritage.

So mythical events, such as the opening out of the mountain at the sounding of the sacred word were re-enacted by the power of visioning. By such insight mankind's ancestor Manu was able to "anoint" the "doors of vision" 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 dhīyāḥ 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'"

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. 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"
"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," 45

Such absorption implies degrees of concentration.

Another very graphic image is used in Rg.1.88.4. Here the Gotama seers compare themselves to vultures that for days circle round their prey; but the latter turns out to be *imāma dhiyam*, that visionary insight which enables the *ṛṣis* 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" (*arkāh*) and prayer (*brahma*). The well is described in another hymn; its top is of stone and only the Lord of Prayer, Brahmapātā, 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". 48

The well with its stone lid which only the might of the Lord of Prayer can push open recalls the rocky mountain of Rg.1.71.2, which the Ṛg-Īrasas break open, thereby making a path to heaven. 49 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" 50 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) rta must become known." 51

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 *matis* and *hrd* implies depth of insight rather than superficial, or just intellectual appraisal. By such means a new understanding of rta becomes possible. Though the word *dhih* is not mentioned here, the participle *vittam* implies a realising of the significance of rta, hence an insight into the cosmic order which is new in so far as the insight is concerned. The result is *dhih*. Reciprocally, meditation on rta, or "seeking after" rta, seems to be a way that opens a channel to vision, as one may gather from Rg.11.12b which, as rendered by J. Gonda runs thus:

"We should like to acquire a 'vision', cultivating (developing) it with rta". 52
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 rta:

"Perfecting it in-accordance-with-the-norms-of rta,
I give form to vision".53

The poet of Rgv.VII.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 Varuna originally gave to the seers "Inspired insight" (manIŠa), the power to express thought (vAco ma[/im]) verbally, and revealed knowledge:

"O Indra, Varuna, 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).55

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".56

By such knowledge men were raised to the status of Ṛṣis.

Visioning as evident in the seers does not mean that the Ṛṣis 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 Vasilśtha describes his ponderings upon the great Lord of Cosmic Order Varuna. Elsewhere (Rgv.I.25.16) the concentration of vision-inspired-thoughts upon Varuna is compared to cows moving unto their pastures; then there is a beholding the god57 though no description is given there of what is actually beheld. In Rgv.VII.88.2 however, Vasilśtha mentions that, as he comes into the presence of Varuna, 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 Upanishads. It is however stated that in the fourth degree of prayer, or fourth brahman, the seer found the sun. 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" or as God possession. In such a heightened state of vision, the seers fathomed out and developed their conception of the cosmic order.

1.5 Vision stated to be rooted in rta

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 rta as rta, 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 rta glows forth the visionary insight." A similar statement is made with regard to brahman:

"From the seat of rta issues forth the prayer." Vision and prayer are at times closely linked. Thus Soma is said to give voice to

"the vision of rta and to the inspiration of prayer." for Soma, the

"lord of all those who see by heaven's light roars forth the vision of rta." 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 (mantra) that shine with celestial-splendour, in the seat of rta." 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 rta." 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. The poet clothes his god with the divine vision (devim dhiyam).

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 rta, 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 *dlh* or *dhltih* 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 *rsi*.

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 *rta*, the cosmic order, reality. The *dlh* or *dhltih* emerges and shines from the seat of *rta*, its source is ultimately in that transcendental world in which all is rooted. Hence it gives insight into *rta*, both at the transcendental level, and its reflection, the phenomenal level.

The poet observes that, having "turned his attention" to "the ancient vision abounding in *rta*" 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 *rta*. Occasionally, it seems, there is a failure to conform to the *rta*. The wish also expressed to Varuna -

"May we succeed (in finding) the opening of thy *rta*" seems to signify: may our visions help us to gain access to thy *rta*, to an understanding of, and a living in accordance with, the law, as laid down by Varuna. 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 *dlh* grants insight into the *rta* 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 *rta*.
NOTES

Chapter 1.1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
1. op.cit. 1966, p. 28.
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).
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.
8. cf. Rg. V.66.11 and 111.54.5.
9. yunjate mana uta yunjate dhiyo viprā. (Rg. V.81.1b) cf. Rg. VIII.13.26b (dhiyam manouyam).
10. ... dīdhayā maṇiṣāṁ atyo na vāṣti sudhuro jīhānaḥ. (Rg. 111.38.1ab)
   J. Gonda ("Vision" p. 52) explains dīdhayā maṇiṣāṁ as "I look towards an inspiration".
11. imām dhiyam śīkṣāmānasya deva kratum daksam varuṇā sam ādiṣādi.
   (Rg. VIII.42.3ab).
15. imām dhiyam saptāṣāṇāmīṁ pitā na ṛta pragāteṁ bhāṭīṁ avindat. (Rg. X.67.1ab).
   cf. Rg. VIII.51.4.
16. ṛtaṁ śāmantana jīu dīdhayānaḥ. (Rg. X.67.2a).
17. yajñasya dhāma prathamam mananta. (Rg. X.67.2d).
18. vidanta jyōtiḥ cakrṇata dhīhiḥ. (Rg. VII.1.14d).
19. cakrur-dīvo bhūta gātum asme. (Rg. VII.1.12c).
20. jyōtiṣmaṭaḥ patho rakṣa dhiyā kṛtān. (Rg. X.53.6b).
21. iyaṁ te rtiṣṭhavatiḥ dhītir-eti navīgyasi saparyanti puruṣopiyā mimēta it. (Rg. VII.12, 10).
22. ime hi te kārava vāyāsur dhiyā viprāso medhasātaye. (Rg. VII.13.1bb).
25. aham id hi pitaru pari medhaṁ ṛtasya jāgrābhā aham sūrya īva ajātī. (Rg. VIII.61.10).
26. śrudhi brahma vāyudhasya uta gībhīḥ / āviṣṭu sūryaṁ kṛṣṇuḥ. (Rg. VI.17.3.6c).
27. dhīyo hināvāṁ uṇāṭir-arjagāḥ. (Rg. VII.10.1cd). cf. Rg. I.79.7; IV.11.2; VII.41.3; VII.71.12; 21.12d; 3.1d; VI.52.16, etc.
28. cf. Rg. VI.11.40.566; 1.159; VII.42.3; IV.41.5; 5.2; and J. Gonda's discussion of Rg. VIII.1.1 ("Vision" p. 115, 118-19.)
29. divāś ca ṗūrvyā jāyāmāṇā vi jāgṛtr-viṣṭaṁ śāyamānā
dhārā vastraṁ-arjunā vasānā seyam asme sanajā ṗīṭrāyā dhīḥ. (Rg. VII.11.39.2).
30. cf. Rg. VIII.59.6.
31. cf. Rg. VIII.39.2.
32. op.cit. p. 77.
33. also Rg. VIII.95.5
34. ye cit ṗūrva ṛtaśca ṛṇāvā ṛṇāvṛddhaḥ pitāṁ tapasvato yama. (Rg. X.154.4abc).
35. cf. tāṁ ṗūrvaṁyāṁ nīvīdaḥ hūmaḥ vāyam. (Rg. I.89.3) "We call them (the gods) with the ancient invocation". cf. Rg. VIII.43.13; 102.4; I.87.5. Also cf. J. Gonda. "Vedic literature" p. 74.
36. Rg. X.66.13.
37. tava praṇītīḥ pitaro na indo deveṣu ratnam abhajanā dhīṛpan. (Rg. I.91.1cd).
38. mā chedma rasamitr-iti nādhāmānāḥ pitṛnām sakṣṭer-anu yachamānāḥ. (Rg. I.109.3ab) cf. also Rg. VII.6.10.
39. pitṛḥ praṇāṣṭaḥ jammanā vādāmasi. (Rg. I.87.5a).
40. RgV.45.I.
41. Manu is called that "ancient seer" (sa pūrvyo venaḥ).
42. dvārā ... devegu dhiya ānaye. (RgV.111.63.1d)
44. ratham na dhrīraḥ svapā atakṣātya. (RgV.1.130.6b)
45. abhi taṣṭā-iva dīdhyāya manīsām ātya na vājī sudhuro jīhānaḥ abhi priyāpi mārmrāt paraṁ kaviṁr-ichāmi saprāye sumedhāḥ. (RgV.111.38.1)
46. abhīna gṛdhṛṇaḥ paryāva va śūrur-īmāṃ dhiyām vār kýrṇvyaḥ ca devīm brahma kṛpyanto gotamāṣo arkaīr-ūrdhvam nunudra utsadhim pibadhyaḥ. (RgV.1.88.4).
47. "For days circling round like vultures for this vision and the goddess Vārkeyā the Gotamas fashioned their prayer, by means of flashing-songs they pushed open the fountain-well to drink therefrom."
48. RgV.11.24.4.
49. ābha eva viśva papiśre svardṛṣṇa dahuḥ. (RgV.11.24.4c).
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).
52. That is what J. Gonda calls "thought as realised in speech", ("Vision" 1963: p.36).
53. indra vaṇḍhaḥ paṇḍhaḥ manīsām vṛcchati. (RgV.1.105.15 abc).
55. saśdham śṛṇaḥ dhiyām sadāh. (RgV.11.34.8).
56. That is what J. Gonda calls "thought as realised in speech", ("Vision" p.211), the conversion of vision into words, hence the dhiyām vision—thought—word.
57. indraśaḥ yad pāśyante manīsām vṛcchati. (RgV.1.59.4a). cf. RgV.X.154.4.
58. paśyaḥ manye manasā cakṣaṣe tāṁ ye imām yajñam ayajanta purve. (RgV.X.130.6cd). cf. RgV.X.124.9.
59. darśaṁ na viśvatardātaram (RgV.1.25.18) "Him I now behold who is to be beheld by all."
60. cf. RgV.40.6.
61. cf. RgV.111.6.10; 1.33.5; 1.146.4.
62. cf. ino viśvasya bhuvanasya gopāḥ sa mā dhrīraḥ pākam atra viveśa. (RgV.1.164.21).
63. "there is the herdsman of the whole universe, the illumined one, who has entered into me the simple,"
64. cf. also the Athv.XII.2.53: "the god Agni, O Fathers, who has entered into our hearts, I enclose in me."
65. ṛtasya hi sadaso dhītir-adyaut (RgV.111.2a)
66. pra brahma-etu sadanāṁ-ṛtasya (RgV.111.36.1a).
67. ṛtasya dhītir brahmaṇaḥ manīsām. (RgV.X.97.34b).
68. Viśvasya rājā ... svardṛṣṇa ṛtasyā dhītir ... avivāṣat. (RgV.X.76.4, ab)
69. tāṁ dyotamāṇam svarāya manīsām ṛtasya pada kavyo ni pānti. (RgV.X.177.2cd).
66. guhā satīr-ūpa tmanā pra yac-śocanta dhītayāḥ. *RgV.VII.6.8a*

67. *RgV.III.13.5*

68. *RgV.VII.34.9*

69. ātajātayā girā. *cf.* (*RgV.X.138.2*)

70. cikitvīn manāsam. *RgV.VII.95.5*

71. dhiyam pratnām ātasya pipyuṣīm. *RgV.VII.95.5d*

72. *cf.* *RgV.X.31.11*

73. rdyāma te varuṇa khām ātasya. *RgV.II.28.5b*
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; ō 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", 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 Rigveda, e.g. that the gods' "father" is Daksa, 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 Daksa 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 *sa* or manifest from the *asat* or unmanifest, Dakṣa and Adiś by being born from each other, and from their interaction the world's divisions or levels of unfoldment, thence all things, coming into existence. *ṛta*, 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 *ṛta*, the one law, expressed, more or less successfully, at every level.

As explained by H. Lefever, the term *ṛta* contains three basic elements in its connotation:

"activity, order and law ... They are not always equally stressed". H. Lefever remarks that the "... root ṛ has two primary groups of meanings. It signifies 'to move' and (through movement) 'to fit or arrange'. Grassmann derives *ṛta* 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'."

The "activity" or "dynamic" aspect of *ṛta* is thus often lost sight of and a lopsided interpretation results. J. M. Koller stresses this static aspect of *ṛta*:

"The concept of *ṛta* 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." L. Renou's definition takes better account of both aspects:

"*ṛta*, 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."

"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 *ṛta* in the light of this movement, *ṛta* 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. Sphere of rta.

The sphere (prasiti) of rta 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 (vyacās)
profound obeisance (namas)
and more wondrous adoration" (aramatiḥ).

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

First, rta as it manifests in heaven which, at the physical level, may include the zodiac, as demonstrated by V. N. Apte, but metaphysically does connote the domain of the gods, hence the transcendent rta.

Secondly, rta 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 rta". 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, rta 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" (aramatiḥ).

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 rta. He is true, hence rta as truth. But in thus analysing rta into its component aspects we lose sight of its "unity" which H. Lefevers rightly stresses. One order rules the cosmos at all levels, the same order manifesting differently at different levels:

"Rta 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 rta, which is manifested in the different natural "orders". In its application to human conduct, no less than to sacrifice or to natural phenomena, rta is a unity. Different obligations may apply to different men and circumstances, but it is the same moral order - rta - in every case. So those who cleave to rta are held righteous by all mankind (V.67.4)."
"Not only is rta 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 rta." 10


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

"Rta, universal order, and satya, truth, were born of blazing tapas." 11

The word tapas being here a keyword since both rta and satya are "born" of tapas should first be examined. In the násadicya 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."

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." 13

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 which, at the human level, has been translated as austerity, penance and heat - the root of the word being tap to burn, consume, give out heat. 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 násadicya hymn to the manifested ONE described as "the overseer" (adyakta) 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 Rgveda as Agni. Not content with mere tapas the bard of Rgv.X.190.1 qualifies the word with the participial adjective of the verb abhi-idh, to "inflame", so that we have the picture of the divine contemplation blazing to incandescent manifestation.

The first stanza of Rgv.X.190.1 brings out a point of far reaching importance in the Vedie 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:

"rta and satya as ends, and tapas as the means,
form the foundation of Vedic culture and religion."

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) to move, rise, go) refers to the "course of things"; rta 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". 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."

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), rta is chiefly a noun (really a past passive participle of the root r to go), meaning 'what has happened, what has traversed its course' from times immemorial, and rarely an adjective. This is taking rta 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 rta its working out, and final layout, hence its dynamic aspect. J.H. 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 (rta) ... This identity of being and function (sat and rta) 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 rta to the functioning of that reality."

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 rta, and so anrta is regularly used as the opposite of satya."

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.

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 re, contingent truth as rta. This is somewhat brought out in an Invocation to Heaven and Earth:

"0 Heaven and Earth may your truth be effective!"

In other words, may that for which you stand be made manifest.

Soma is proclaimed as one

"speaking the rta, glorious through the rta; speaking the truth, acting the truth."

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 rta, manifesting in accordance with
the law. The Maruts, "followers of rta" (ṛtāśāpah) "by means of rta have come to the truth". As they are "versed in the rta" (ṛtaśāpah) they heed the truth (satyaśrutah). All the gods are "true" (satyaḥ) as "they follow the rta".29

But as perceptively observed by H. Lefever

"... In spite of all these passages asserting or implying the reality of rta, there is a sense in which rta 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 rta into actual existence in the space-time world. 'May your rta be actual (satva)!' is a prayer to Heaven and Earth in [RgV] 11.54.3." 30

He then brings forward two rather unconvincing examples of the "inter­ruption of rta's operation" in the sphere of natural phenomena: what he calls, by a great stretch of the imagination, an eclipse of the sun31 or a drought32 neither of which can be viewed as interruptions since they are both part of the vast movement and can be predicted. Rta 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 rta 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 rta 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", and as

"the base that bears the earth". It is added that

"by rta stand the Adityas". Essential being, or being-ness, as the basis of the world, finds its manifested expression as order in rta whose root is thus ultimate being. So the rśi states:

"Firmly fixed are the foundations of rta, shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms." These forms are the manifestations of the world order, e.g. the perfect harmony existing between the essence of being, sat, and its activity or outer expression, rta: 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 rta. Therefore fire is kindled
in accordance with rta, the tides ebb and flow in accordance with rta, the sun rises, extends its light and sets in accordance with rta; 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, rta.

"By rta (the law) have the herds (of the universe) entered the rta (cosmic order)." 39

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." 40

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

Neither Sūrya nor any god can "transgress the ordained directions" 42 or: "infringe the common statute." 43

All natural activities are effects of an inner harmony which is the touchstone of the Supreme Order. These examples show both the static and dynamic aspects of rta: 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." 45

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

"To law (belong) the deep and wide. (Heaven and) Earth, Supreme milch-kine, to law these outpour their milk." 46

"To law flow out the rivers as truth spreads out the sun." 47

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" (sabhya), 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 rta."

At the macrocosmic level the song born of rta is the harmonious working of all manifestation: this may be called the "song" of the devas, the sacred-song of rta, for the devas are said to "rejoice in the sacred-song of rta" 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 rta proclaims the inter-linkedness of man and universe. Man's song, born of his understanding of and conforming to rta, filled with rta, 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 this 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."

A Rgvedic verse describes satva, truth, as

"luminous, lofty... established on the unshakeable foundation of heaven."

Il.5 The physical image of rta: 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 there was little attempt, with regard to rta, to emphasise the physical basis of the conception to the exclusion of other aspects, beyond the recognition of rta 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
"... 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."

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)" 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'."

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 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. 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 Rigvedic universe, holding within it heaven and earth and circumscribing the movements of the luminaries (devas).

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 Rigvedic 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 rta..."

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".

"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".

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"

the origin of the apprehension of rta 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 rta 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);
- śrīnga (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".

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."

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", not missing the "directions" or cardinal points. 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 dhaman of ṛta".

V.M. Apte takes this pada in a literal sense as meaning that dawn "never misses the habitation (dhaman) of ṛta".

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

"lieu fixé pour le retour périodique et ce retour même".

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 rta 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.V.7.7 where the gods are said to "rejoice" in the dhaman "institution", or "establishment" of rta. The meaning of the word dhaman is still open to controversy. V. M. Apte translates it as "habitation" and lists sadana, sadas and durona as well as dhaman as words used in connection with rta and proving "its spatial character, nay, its exact location". Bergaigne, on the other hand, argues that dhaman 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." 74

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

"The obedience of the dawns consists in the uninterrupted periodicity of their manifestation". 75

The gods themselves, those "heavenly denizens" (divaksasah), "flame-tongued" (agnijihvah), "rta fostering" (rtavrdhah), sit reflecting "in the womb of rta" (rtasya yonim). 76 Here the womb of rta may very well be the vault of the heaven whilst the first mentioned rta 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 rta [the Adityas] have waxed great". 77

Heaven and Earth, the parents of old, are described as "dwelling closely united" (ksayatah samokasa) in the womb of rta; 77as in that womb they rejoice (madantah). 77b The Dawns likewise "rejoice" or "disport themselves" in that "womb". 78 Rta 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 rta that on its arising/shines like gold". 79

He "besprinkles with honey the womb of rta". 80 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 \( \text{rta} \) as it illuminates the canopy of heaven. Sūrya also seems to be referred to

"glowing forth in the seat of \( \text{rta} \)",

and "shining on the summit of \( \text{rta} \)".

For him the "Adityas have cut open a course." The word \( \text{adhvan} \) 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", which Savitr is wont to traverse. He himself is said to "toil in accordance with \( \text{rta} \), to extend far out the peak of \( \text{rta} \)".

an expression which V.M. Apte explains as meaning that "Savitr's ever widening circle of light, simultaneously makes the extent of \( \text{rta} \) more and more manifest".

We have again in this verse the use of the word \( \text{rta} \) in two different senses - literal as meaning sky and figurative as meaning law and order.

Again from "the bottom of \( \text{rta} \)" 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" (\( \text{sānu} \)) used governing \( \text{rta} \) and expressive of the heavens, but also the word "seat" (\( \text{sadana} \) and \( \text{sadas} \)) often seems to refer to a particular location of \( \text{rta} \). In Rgv.IV.21.3 \( \text{rta} \) 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 (\( \text{parāvato vā} \)) from the seat of \( \text{rta} \) (\( \text{sadanād \text{rtasya}} \))". From this "seat of \( \text{rta} \) the dawn goddesses awaken"; \( \text{rta} \) being seemingly here also a point in space from which the dawns start on their journey or speed onwards (\( \text{jaranta} \)) unerringly traversing "the thirty \( \text{yojanas} \)". This localisation is confirmed in Rgv.IV.42.4 where Varuna is stated to have "fixed the heaven in the seat of \( \text{rta} \)". Literally, this would mean that in \( \text{rta} \), 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 rta is the zodiacal circle is Rgv.1.164.11:

"Around the heaven revolves the ever unaging twelve-spoked wheel of rta."

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". 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.

The "one-wheeled chariot" (ratham ekaaakram) in Rgv.1.164.2, "three-naved" (trinabhi) - interpreted as the three seasons, "ageless" (ajaram) and "unobstructable" (anarvam), "whom the seven yoke" is said to be "drawn by the one steed with seven names"; "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.

In Rgv.1.164.48 this "single wheel" - the emphasis on cakram ekam is quite significant - is described as having "twelve fellies" (dvadasa pradhayas) and being "three-naved" (trini nabhyani); "fixed together therein are three hundred and sixty spokes that (turn) undeviatingly."

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" (samamam cakram) is drawn by the "dappled" or "brilliant" courser, the sun itself, etasa, "intent on revolving it hither, yoked to the poles".

This verse, as indeed Rgv.1.164.2, 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. 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.5.62.1 addressed to Mtra-Varuṇa:

"By your rta is eternal rta firmly established, there where they unyoke Sūrya's steeds".

All these verses seem to bear references to rta 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 rta. But this is only one of the many facets of rta.
1. "The Zodiac - the physical basis of Rta (Cosmic Order)." (Bull. Deccan College Research Institute, vol. 5, 1943-44.) p. 183.
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. 111)
7. 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)
9. "Rtasya hi prasitir-dyaur-uru vyaco namo mahy-aramatih panâyast. (Rg.v.X.93.6)
10. op. cit. p. 5.
11. "Rtam ca satyam cābhidhāt tapaso dhyaajāyata. (Rg.v.X.90.1ab).
12. "Tama āśīt tamasā gūdham agrē 'praketām saīlām sarvam ē idam tuchyena ābhuv-apīhitam yad āśīt tapasas tan maṁhīā ajayata ekam. (Rg.v.X.129.3.)
13. "Tapaṃ ca āstām karma ca antar-mahaty-arṇave tapo ha jñayā karmapās tat te jayṣṭam upāsata. (Athv.X.8.6.) The word karman translated here as "action", is really 'what is to be done' or 'what is ordained'.
18. "Zur Religionsund Mythologie des Veda." (Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen: Phil.-Hist.) 1915 "...An ihnen allen (Stellen) tritt deutlichst hervor, wie das Schlagwort satyam di Übereinstimmung dessen, was gesagt wird, mit dem, was wirklich ist, bezeichnet." (p. 169).
"The Vedic idea of sin." 1935, p. 32

"Hymns from the Vedas." 1966, p. 8

The Vedic idea of sin. 1935, p. 32

"Hymns from the Vedas." 1966, p. 8

yuvor tota rodasti satyam astu. (Rg.v.111.54.3a)

cf. Rg.v.111.54.4, where "faithful to rta" (rtavāry) the ancient patriarchs declare the truth (satyavāpyah).

yataśa satyam rta-dyumna satyam vadant-satyaka-karman. (Rg.v.111.113.4 ab)

"The Vedic idea of sin." 1935, p. 6

susoca suṛya rta-jatayā gīrā (Rg.v.113.2d) "the sun shone forth by the song sprung of order." cf. The sun immersed in gloom, cf. Rg.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 (Rg.v.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.

Rg.v.1.121.4. 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.

"Let prayer issue forth from the seat of rta as Surya with his beams releases the herds." cf. H.W. Wallis, "The cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887, p. 95. 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).


vibhrād bhrata ... dharmān divo dharunye satyam. (Rg.v.170.2b)

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vibhrād bhrata ... dharmān divo dharunye satyam. (Rg.v.170.2b)

sūancia attabhita bhūmiḥ. (Rg.v.85.1a)
33


61 "Vision,"p.68


63 "In his own proper function of rta" (Rgv.VII.36.5) or as J. Gonda explains

64 "In his established manifestation of rta which is proper to him" ("Vision" p.175)

65 cf. also anu svam dhāma (Rgv.III.7.6). The word dhāman is further discussed

66 in ch.III.3.2.9.


69 "Vision,"p.68


71 "In his own proper function of rta" (Rgv.VII.36.5) or as J. Gonda explains

72 "In his established manifestation of rta which is proper to him" ("Vision" p.175)

73 cf. also anu svam dhāma (Rgv.III.7.6). The word dhāman is further discussed

74 in ch.III.3.2.9.

75 "Visi6n."p.68

76 rtasya dhāman rapayanta devāḥ. (Rgv.IV.7.7b)

77 ima rtasya vāvrdhur-duropena. (Rgv.VII.60.5d) cf.Rgv.II.34.13

78 (rtasya sadānēsu vāvṛdhāṃ)

79 "Visi6n."p.68


82 "In his own proper function of rta" (Rgv.VII.36.5) or as J. Gonda explains

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94 "In his own proper function of rta" (Rgv.VII.36.5) or as J. Gonda explains

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96 cf. also anu svam dhāma (Rgv.III.7.6). The word dhāman is further discussed

97 in ch.III.3.2.9.
89 a putra ... mithunāso atra ṣapta satāni viṇātiṣ ca tasthuh.
p.215. Bergaigne mentions that universal order or rta is "symbolised by the figure of the wheel", but draws no conclusion.


91 The seasons vary in number, either three, as the hot, rainy and cold, or five (Sat. Br.1,2,5,10) or even 6 (Ait. Br. Ill,1,6) - vasanta, grīma, vatsa, śarad, hemanta, sisira.

92 sapta yuñjanti ratham eka cakram eko aśvo vahati saptaṁāṁ triṇabhī cakram ājaram anarvam yatra imā viśvā bhuvanā adhi tasthuh.
(Bṛg.1.164.2).

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 pradhayaḥ cakram ekaṃ triṇi nabhyāni ...
tasmint sakam triśatā na sankavo arpitāḥ saṁśihr na ca lācalāsah.
(Bṛg.1.164.48)

95 saṁnaṁ cakram paryāvrtsan yaḥ ētaśo vahati dhūṛṣu yuktah.
(Bṛg.VII.63,2cd)

96 cf. Bṛg.1,19.5c where Etaśa seems to be Śūrya himself.

97 rtena rūtam apihitam dhruvam vam śūryasya yatra vimucantya-asvan.
(Bṛg.V.62.1ab)
CHAPTER III
VISION OF CREATION
INTRODUCTION

Creation in accordance with rta.

We may speak of the Rgvedic 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 rṣis 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 sṛj 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" and rta manifested, born of tapas. This is the transcendental rta, the blueprint of the cosmic order. Ultimate oneness is a characteristic of the Rgvedic vision 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 Dakśa born from each other, and then as Dyaus-Pṛthivī, Āpas-Tvastr.

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, rta.

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, rta. 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".

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

At the primordial level rta 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, rta manifests through the action of the devas 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 devas' activity. Here we find the field par excellence of the dynamics of rta.

At the third level, the effect of the action of rta 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 rta 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 rta. 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 rta in the three fields of manifestation, is the law of transformation, ordering all things towards one harmonious whole, a cosmos; hence rta 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 rṣis. 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.
At the primordial level of manifestation, we find posited "that" which appears to be the Vedic conception of the Absolute. From the nsadīya hymn (Rg. 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" or as "undifferentiated depth", or "ocean profound, unfathomable". 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" asks the poet. Through the power of tapas, through the power of kāma, of that primeval desire for existence which is the "primordial seed of mind" and provides the bond between the unmanifest and the manifest, was the world brought into existence, was the world "projected". The nsadīya hymn furthermore states expressly that "the gods came later by this world's projection".

As we have seen when tracing the origin of rta in the Vedic vision (p.7) rta and satya were conceived as the first born of tapas, the primary impulse. The law came into action with the very first throb of manifestation. Thence was born time (samsāra - the year) which rules all animate creatures with its orderly sequence of day and night. 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 rta. 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. 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, in which alone the secret may be locked.
the nāsadīya hymn that overseer remains nameless. In other hymns, Varuna stands as supreme and sovereign ruler over all, master or overseer of the rta, the "Omniscient" who is said to "behold all things transcendent, past and future" who is the "hidden depth", "in whom rests all wisdom". Visvakarman, the All-Creator is another presentation of this overseer, the "lord of vision" who is "Our Father" 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 whirlèd forth, generated heaven and earth, he the One God". The whirlèrng 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 rśis traced the origin of manifestation to the emanation or projection (visrsti) from the ONE, through tapas or that flame-power aroused as a result of contemplative exertion, or through kāma, of a propelling force which as Agni, is said to pervade all things and contain all powers. 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.ks.72,3 as uttanapad - the upward shooting force that produces all things - this is really the power inherent in Agni or again as "that which arose from its own flame-power", from which all-kindling-tapas the right order of things, the process of transformation, rta was set in motion, 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; 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 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." 35

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 of 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, unillumined 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; Nirgātī, personification of Malevolence and Destruction, symbolised the other. The one he called Sat, the existent; the other he called Asat, the Non-existent." 36

The Vedic rṣis 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. 39 On this subject L. Renou declares:

"These cosmic powers, precursors of the saktis 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 ghōzā tanū, an awful aspect; Varuṇa
is alarmingly liable to assume the aspect of Vṛtra... Sometimes the ambivalence is an integral feature of the divinity, as in the case of Rudra.38

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 so that from the differentiation of the asat and the sat originally fused, chaos becomes cosmos; or this same power assumes the grand figure of Purusa43, 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 Vṛtra,42 elemental, primeval, undivided or "without joints" (aparvan), undifferentiated chaos; the "unawakened" (abudhyam) force of nature, "sunk in deepest sleep",43 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; Vṛtra has to be mythologically "slain", dismembered or rent asunder, i.e. conquered so that what chaos contains in potentia44 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.45 This is creation, manifestation. The idea is similar to the immolation of purusa46 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 Vṛtra and the mountain is brought out in the image of Vṛtra "lying upon the mountain" as though covering it up47, the two bearing a similar significance.

The original sacrifice or primeval violence48 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. 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 rta, the ordered course of things; all being subservient to that one law of transformation, paripāma, the equalisation of the opposing forces is part of the ordered course of the universal pattern, hence rta 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 rṣis, the projection of (Vṛṣṭi) into limited or conditioned existence of that which contains 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 organizing all in harmony with the one law. 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" hence beyond manifestation, beyond the poles of existence. Whence metaphysically sat and asat, rta as manifested order and anṛta as disorder are the two sides of one Reality, of which the transcendent rta 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.
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 pada 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 Rgveda and three verses in three other hymns 54 the Vedic vision of successive emanations in time, or to use H.W. Wallis's phrase, "progressive stages in the growth of the world", 55 a progression which exemplifies the dynamics of rta, is evidenced:

"the plants came into being three ages before the gods". 56

This shows that to the rasis' 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, rta.

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, rta is manifesting as a world organising power.

Such observations as are here brought together were formulated in various ways and scattered throughout the samhitäs: not only in the philosophical conception of asat 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 Devanas, the source of
darkness; in Indra and Vritra, the embodiment of these opposing forces,
and their struggle; 58 in the dual meaning of māyā and in the idea of
ambas, 59 ambu, (distress, narrowness) 60 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."

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, jayamānam
to jītām and bhavyam to bhūtām. It is not colourless as our
word 'nothing', it is the negation of sat."

Sat and asat 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 nasadiya hymn (Rg.v.X,129)
points to a primeval state when neither the potential nor the actual,
neither chaos nor cosmos, asat nor sat was. 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'.

When merged they are placed in the highest heaven (parama vyoman) in Daksa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap, 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 Daksa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap, Agni, both bull and cow, was our first born of rta, in the primeval aeon."  

A hint seems to be given here of the fusion of sat and asat producing a state of being which is equivalent (= is placed in) the empyrean. This we are told furthermore, is Daksa'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)."

The sat, lying latent in the asat emerges out of it and 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."

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". 

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." 

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 rta.

W.N. Brown in "The creation myth of the Rgveda" equates asat with "non-existence" and in a previous article 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 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. 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" (yatram) 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 (i.e) the asat and the sat."75

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 Tvāstra, 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."76

The participle translated as "established" is pratisthita (√pratistha
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 "beness" 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. We have in these ideas of asat and sat, 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 rta 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, rta." 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.80

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 (bandhun) of the manifest (sat) in the unmanifest (asati)."81

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; 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.83 The two are two sides of an ultimate Reality that transcends human conception.
Chapter III.

1. Rgv.X.129.3d
2. Rgv.X.190.1.
3. cf. Rgv.XI.54.4cd, VIII.58.2, as well as all the creation hymns.
4. Rgv.X.129.3. ab.

129. 1. rṣya chaṣya amṛṣṭam rṣya mṛtyuḥ. (Rgv.X.121.2c).
6. Rgv.X.129.3.
7. Rgv.X.129.1.
8. para divā para ēka prthivyā para devebhī-āsurasī-yaḥ astī kam, svid garbhaḥ prathamam dadhra ēpo yatra devāḥ sam apāṣyaṃta viśye. (Rgv.X.82.5)
10. Rgv.X.129.3.
11. Rgv.X.129.3.
12. aravga deva āsyā visarjanana. (Rgv.X.129.6c).
14. samātrey aśravād ādhi saṁvatsara ajāyata aha rātrāpi vidadhad viśvasya maṣgato vasi. (Rgv.X.190.2).

15. sīya candram asau dhāta yathā pūrvam akṣaraṃyat dīvāṃ ca prthivyāṃ ca antarikṣam atho svāp. (Rgv.X.190.3).

16. yām visvānīr-yata saṁbhūva yadi vā dāde yadi vā na yo āsyā adhyakṣāḥ paraṃ vyanman so asa veda yadi vā na veda, (Rgv.X.129.7.)

17. samrāja dhāt (Rgv.VI.68.9.) cf. Rgv.II.27.10.
18. netā rtasya (Rgv.VII.40.4).
19. visvānī-adbhutā cikitsaṃ abhi pāṣyaṃ kṛtāni yā ca kartvā (Rgv.I.25.11).
20. sah samudra apiṣya. (Rgv.VII.41.8).
21. yasmin viśvānī kāvyā ... śrīta. (Rgv.VII.41.6a).
22. caksuṣaḥ pīṭaḥ (Rgv.X.82.162) literally “father of the eye”.
23. Rgv.X.82.3.

24. visvataḥ caṣkṣura-uta visvato mukho visvato bāhur-uta visvataśpāt sam bāhubhyām dhāmati sam patastrī-dyāvabhūmi janaṇya deva ekaḥ. (Rgv.X.81.3).
27. cf. Rgv.X.129.4.
28. ajāyata mābhāv-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.1.1; X.121.7; X.88.1; 1.36.5; 144.1; 143.3. cf. Rgv.II.35.2cd where Apāṃ Nāpāt, the alter ego, of Agni is said to have generated all things (viśvānī ... bhuvanā jajāna.)
30. cf. Rgv.X.5.7.
31. tapasas tan mahinā ajāyata ekam. (Rgv.X.129.3d).
32. Rgv.X.190.1.
33 cf. rta anṛta, varivas nirṛti.
34 cf. havyam havyam tantum a tanvate divi samudre antah kavayah sudītyayah.
  (Rgv.1.159.4cd) "the radiant sages outspread the ever renewed warp within the sky, within the ocean".
35 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 maya of Varuna.

36 J.A.O.S. vol.61 June 1941.p.79.
37 cf. the "healing hand" (hasto bāṣaja) (Rgv.11.33.7) of Rudra "the terrible" (tvesa).
38 "Religions of ancient India." 1953.p.20. Renou goes on to demonstrate that
terms like manyu, māyah, yaksā "have two sets of meaning, according to
whether they are used of good or evil beings."
39 asṛca ca sah māhur-ācakrir-indraḥ. (Rgv. VI.24.5b).
41 Rgv. X.90.
42 cf. E. Benveniste, and L. Renou. "Vṛtra est Vrērgna. Étude de mythologie
indo-iranienne." (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)
43 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
p.115.
44 abudpyamanam susupānam. (Rgv. IV.19.3).
45 cf. Sat.Br.: "Of old everything here was within Vṛtra, to wit the Rk, the
Yajus and the Sāman" (5.571-5), these three being considered the essence
of all things.
46 cf. Rgv. 1.26.8ab.
47 cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "Purusa is not only the
cosmic Man; it is also the personal aspect of the whole of reality."
(p.73).
48 ahim parvate śīṣiyānam. (Rgv.1.32.2a) cf. Rgv. IV.19.364 and 1.54.10.
49 cf. Babylonian mythology, where Marduk fights with Tiamat, i.e. chaos.
cf. Greek mythology, the Cyclopes and Titans, and Teutonic mythology.
50 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).
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).
52 cf. Rgv. VI.147.3,4;1.153.1;111.38.3;1.190.2.
53 cf. Rgv. X.121.2c.
"Universe in Vedic thought." In India Maior, 1972, p. 93.

anyad-adya karvaram anyad atmâvah. (Rgv. VI. 24.5a)


ya osadhih purvâ jatâ devebhagas trâgâm purâ. (Rgv. X. 97.1ab). The Atharvaveda refers to the "earth that was previous to this one" (ya ita asid bhûmi bhûvam) Athv. X. 8.7) and the verse adds that whoever knows this may deem himself wise in ancient lore.

devañâm yuge prathame 'satah sad ajâyata tad åså anv ajâyanta-tad uttamapadas pâri. (Rgv. X. 72.3).

cf. Rgv. I. 63.3; 130.8: X. 49.9

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. Ketkar.)


op. cit. p. 62

cf. I. 15 Apanishad. 11612. cf. also Wallis "Cosmology of the Rigveda" (1887): If we treat the (nâsadhyâ) hymn philosophically, we must assume a stage between those states described in verses 164 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.


Rgv. X. 5.7. cf. Chândogya Up. I. 9.1; VII. 12.1 where space is considered the origin of all.

asacca sac ca param vyaman daksasya jaimah aditor upaste.
agnir-ha nàp prathamâjâ tpasya purvâ ayuna vpsabhas ca dhenu. (Rgv. X. 5.7).

devañâm yuge prathame 'satah sad ajâyata. (Rgv. X. 72.3) (this verse is practically a repetition of verse 2).

bhánta nama te devâh ye 'satah parîjânicre
ekam tad ânigam skambhasya asad âhu parijanâh. (Athv. X. 7.25). (Trans. 5. 17.)

Rgv. I. 111.54.5.


Such verses as Rgv. X. 72.3, hint at the root idea of the Vedanta: sat being equivalent to nàmarâjyâvâkâtam vâstu, the essence of that which has name, form, separation, and asat tâjyaktavasthâ, the essence of that which is unmanifest.

J. A. O. S. Vol. 62, June 1942, p. 88-9. cf. H. G. Nahahari'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 Rigveda and the meaning of the word asat." In (Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. 18, March 1942, p. 158-66.)

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.12.4cd. The descriptions given in RgV.11.10.4 do not necessarily refer to asat; nor is asat necessarily personified by ahi or vrata as claimed by A. de Nicolas ("Four dimensional man." 1971), p.100.

df. 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).

df. 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 Brahmagic 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).

yatra lokamica kosamica apo brahma jana viduh
asac-ca yatra sac-ca anta skambham tany brhi katamah svid eva sah.
(Athv.X.7.10). (Trans.J.M.)

asati sat pratisthitam sati bhutam pratisthitam
bhutam ha bhavya ahitam bhavyam bhute pratisthitam. (Athv.XVII.1.19)
(Trans.J.M.)

The same trend of thought is perceptible in RgV.X.72.4,90.5 and 1.185.1.

In terms of human psychology we have the so-called unconscious or subconscious 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." 1971. The Asat ... affirms that 'undifferentiated' perception that is obscure ... is a positive fact of human experience." (p.148).

"The Rigvedic equivalent for hell." J.A.O.S. vol.61, 1941, p.79, note 3.

RgV.VII.49.3

sato bandhum asati nir-avindan hrdi pratigya kavayo manisā. (RgV.X.129.4cd).
"Seers searching in their heart's wisdom, discovered the kinship of the manifest in the unmanifest."

The waters of space of the origins (RgV.X.129.1) are equivalent to the asat.

It may be that by the time of the Upanisads, 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. Taittiriya Upaniṣad 11.7.1.
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, energising principles. Just as "inspired poets shape with their words the One fair-winged Being in multivaried ways\(^2\)

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\(^3\); 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.\(^4\)

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, rta, by which, through which and in which they live and perform their varied functions:

"One is the mighty godhood of the shining ones\(^5\)

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

At this stage we are confronted with constant permutations which are steppings 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 rta.
The first differentiation that heralds the unfoldment of the universe (vistarati) is, as we have seen, the sat from the asat. Rg. V. 5. 7. shows sat and asat latent

"In the highest heaven, in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap." 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. 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" from which he concludes that "the name of the personification therefore appears to mean the 'dexterous' or 'clever' god".

Renou qualified dakṣa as a "complementary term of kṣatru indicating practical efficiency, the concrete realisation conferred by the possession of kṣatru". 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, the gods seemingly having the larger share. Hence Dakṣa is their father, the gods are qualified as "dakṣapitara" (to whom Dakṣa is father). Agni is shown as receiving, in his quality of offspring of Dakṣa, the "fatherly seed of existences", and as Agni pervades all things it is pertinent to conclude that he gives all a measure of dakṣa. "To Agni the able one" (agnaye .. daksase) men's songs go forth. Dakṣa is described as that "mighty power" of which the most wise Mitra and Varuna are the sons.
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.'

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." For H. W. Wallis, Dakṣa is "... an unimportant deity whose only characteristic in the Rgveda is his fatherhood of the gods", who derived his personality through the same process as that which created the goddess Śāvasī 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, Savitṛ, the Āśvins, 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. This might be a pointer to the antiquity of Dakṣa whose personification is very fluctuating in the Rgveda. In several instances he is numbered among the Adityas, although in Rg.v.X.72.4 & 5 he seems to be prior to them. In the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa (11.4.4.2) 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 (daksapitara), who rule with the might of dakṣa, who are most 'dexterous' and 'vouchsafe efficient-working-power to their worshippers.' They have separated ... the chaos from the cosmos ... through the zeal (mānyunā) proper to your skill" (daksasya)"

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 dakṣa is described by Renou as "active or fertile thought". Kratu, manyu, dakṣa 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, the matrix, womb or lap, the generative feminine power, the primeval mother substance wherein all things come into being through the impact of that power called dakṣa, as a result of the act of tapas that gave the original impetus to creation. She is the mother who brings forth the gods 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 the mother and father and child, Aditi is the five races, what was born and what shall be born." 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."

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 Atharvaveda, Aditi is designated as the spouse or queen of rta (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", "far-pervading", "supporter of all creatures", "celestial" (svārvaṁ), "luminous". The āryas'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" (ābudhane) in which Varuṇa keeps erect the cosmic axis.

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 Prthivi respectively.
The wide expanse of earth, usually rendered by urvīs, is a direct reflection of Aditi. 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. The word itself, aditi, like the word daksā, is also used as an adjective.

III.2.3. The threefold division of the world

This original twofold 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: dyaus, antariksa and prthivī. 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.

Heaven, Earth, and the mid, or inner region, each is a loka, world or place of habitation for entities, whether celestial, human or subhuman. This threefold universe, so commonly referred to in the Rgveda, is summed up in the Satapatha 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."

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

"There are three heavens; two are in the lap of Savitṛ, one is in the world of Yama".

Heaven is described as "the threefold heavenly complex of heaven". Savitṛ is said to "impel the three heavens and the three earths" as well as to circumscribe the "three realms" (trī rajāmsi) or threefold mid-region.

From the first quotation (Rg 1.35.6) 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. Within the god Varuna himself:

"are placed the three heavens and the lower three earths disposed in sixfold order".

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

Antariksa, the mid-region, usually translated as firmament or atmosphere, is rendered as "the intermediate region" by J. Gonda. 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. Muir's survey of scholars' contributions to the interpretation of antariksa 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 ākāsa is very close to antariksa. In this respect it should be noted that ākāsa in the Upaniṣads, denotes the ethereal space in the heart. It is most probable that antariksa 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.

That the rṣis 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."

Man appears here as the child of Heaven and Earth, between whom is the yoni. 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. 56 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". 57

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

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

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 universe - *dyaus*, antarikṣa and *prthivī* and their subdivisions - preside certain groups of gods. Yāṣka in his Nirukta (7.5) classifies, in accordance with the ancient Indian school of etymologists, the devas into the terrestrial (*prthivīsthaṇa*), the intermediate (*antarikṣasthaṇa* or *madhyamasthaṇa*) and the celestial (*dyusthaṇa*). This is based upon the clue given in the Rgveda itself (Rg.v.139.11 and X.158.1). Some scholars such as A. K. Keith, A. A. Macdonell, P. S. Deshmukh, 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. 60 The ritualists inclined to view the gods according to their specific functions in the ritual and G. Dumézil worked out a theory that fits the gods into the three main human divisions of labour - the religious function (*brahman*), the ruling (*kṣattra*) and the productive (*vīś*), of which, according to his estimation, the leading gods are Mitra-Varuṇa, Indra and the Āśvins respectively. However, such divisions, arbitrary and artificial though they appear when applied to such a fluidic order as that of the Rgvedic 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.
The origin of the gods.

As Dakṣa and Aditi represent the original differentiation of the two poles of manifestation they are considered the primordial "parents" of the gods, these being they "whose father is Dakṣa", the "luminous sons" of Dakṣa. 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 Samhitā calls them. To describe them as "sons" of that "intelligence" 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", 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."

They thus emerge to existence "born of the waters" through the power of divine ideation (dakṣa) as a result of the dynamic energy aroused through contemplative exertion (tapas). The same verse continues:

"Then from ye, as though from dancers, hot dust was whirled away."

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, Brahmanaspati, blowing or welding the worlds into shape, as a blacksmith:

"Brahmagaspati welded these (etā = the two worlds) together like a blacksmith."

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 Brahmanaspati, in many instances, is another version of Agni.

In the above quoted verse, the verb ṛddham (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 uttānapaḥ, is viewed now as Agni "first born of rta" at the beginning when Dakṣa and Aditi were still undifferentiated, now as Brahmaṇaspati who forges the two worlds, the heavenly and the terrestrial, now as Tvaṣṭṛ at a still more concrete level, who fashions all
forms, also "born at the beginning" (agṛaja). 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.

Agni, Brahmanaspati, Tvastr 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." Agni, first born of rta, 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; he is "head of heaven, earth's centre," engendered by the gods, yet giver of immortality to the gods; the immortal guest or herald amidst mortals; is common to all men (vaśvānara), their very "centre" (nabhī), "like a pillar," supporting them. Primordial spark, he is also the youngest of the gods and born of Tvastr. 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, forges the worlds, Heaven and Earth but also waxes in grandeur through the very parents Heaven and Earth that he moulds. Although these are the parents of the gods, he himself is called the father of the gods. 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. Varuṇa and Indra fashion and prop asunder the "primordial parents", Heaven and Earth born of old. J. Gonda's remark with regard to Brahmanaspati puts the whole question into proper perspective:

"Such statements as for instance that ... Brhas.pati is said to be the father of the gods must be taken to mean that the lord of brahmān is their source, that without him they would not exist ..." The divine artisan par excellence (svapas sukṛt) of creation, its universal stimulator (svātṛ), who gives it its final shape, is Tvastr, the skillful-handed one (supāni), the omniform (viśvarūpa, the "faithful to the law" (ṛtāvan). In the Atharvaveda he is called the "counterpart of the waters" but in general, he combines both the male and the female generative power. He shapes all "forms", gives Heaven and Earth their form, forges the thunderbolt of Indra, fashions the soma cup for the gods; his own axe he sharpens for Brahmanaspati; places the life seed in creatures and presides over birth. The axe of time is ever at work in fashioned and refashioned nature's myriad forms, in accordance with the law (ṛtāvan).
In his capacity of generator and form builder, Tvaṣṭṛ personifies nature's moulding potencies. This is summed up in two epithets: "Tvaṣṭṛ the omniform, vivifying deity". 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 personality in its own right. The stimulator (savitṛ) side of Tvaṣṭṛ became related to the sun as the vivifying power whilst viśvaruṇa became differentiated into a son of Tvaṣṭṛ.

### 111.2.5. Heaven and Earth

Most scholars see in the fact that the gods are said to generate, prop asunder or spread-out Heaven and Earth, the ancient parents, "a downright self-contradiction". 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 rṣis, 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. As specific fields of manifestation - the two worlds rōdasī, the two receptacles caṇṇva, the two hemispheres, rajasī, the two bowls dhīgapā - 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 devaputra, Dyaus and Prthivi represent metaphysically the spiritual, or "light" principle, and the substantial, or "extension" which is matter. So we find Dakṣa, the principle of ideation - intelligence - dexterity stepped down to that which illuminates, 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 into two poles of manifestation or, if we ignore Dakṣa and Aditi, they are the "ancient parents" "born of old". 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. 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 rta ruled by the offsprings of the positive - negative interaction, namely the devas. 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 Rgveda the primeval parents invoked for protection and for participation at the sacrifice.

Dyaus and Prthivi are opposing, though not antagonistic, forces but rather complementary, Father and Mother, "first in accordance with the rta". As they set the course of the phenomenal world on its onward march, they are called "ancient mothers of rta". 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." 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." The "foremost" could refer to Heaven and Earth as well as Dakṣa and Aditi,
since prathamah is not dual but plural. The word kṣetra (kṛt) 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)"

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". 119a

As to

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

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". 121

In a praise to Indra the poet states

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

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

"These two deities are quite coordinate while most of the other pairs one of the two greatly predominates." 125

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. 126

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 Rgveda". 127

and Griswold looks upon them as

"... little more than conventional figures, mythological fossils as it were". 128

J. Gonda, on the other hand, realises their importance. In his opinion, as indeed is obvious from the sāmphita, 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 (1.185.1), to expand themselves (10.82.1; 10.149.2), to be broad (1.160.2), well-founded (3.54.7; 3.57.4; 4.42.3 etc.) immortal (1.185.6) and to safeguard against death (1.185.3)". 129
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 rta and the Vedic vision, expressed as the offspring begetting or consuming its parent, has caused more puzzle than is warranted. If we grasp that Heaven and Earth are both abstract and concrete expressions of the two poles of manifestation, between which stands man, we can better appreciate the following paradoxes:

"Being the son thou becamest the father of the gods"

"This is the law (rta). Unto ye I declare it, O Heaven and Earth, the offspring on being born consumes his generators."

Here is admitted that rta 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 rta, the new constantly destroys the old, taking from it what is necessary. This is the inexorable onward march of events, rta in its dynamic aspect. 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."

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) Virāj was born and from Virāj Purusa."

"From Aditi Dakṣa was born and from Dakṣa Aditi."

In the first example the question arises: is the purusa named at the end of the pada the same as that implied at the beginning, or can the pada be interpreted thus: from Purusa the Heavenly or archetypal Man, Virāj was born, and from Virāj the earthly man? If Virāj 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 rta.

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

"... this reciprocal generation of Virāj from Purusā, and again of Purusā from Virāj ... (is) in conformity with Vedantic principles that Virāj in the form of the mundane egg, sprang from Adi-Purusā (Primeval Purusha), who then entered into this egg, which he animates as its vital soul or divine principle."
The word *purusa* seems, even in Rgvedic times, to have borne several shades of meaning, e.g., Agni, called "purusa of plants" (*purusam aśadhīnam*), 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 *purusa* 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." We catch in this example a glimpse into one meaning of the original sacrifice of *purusa* as described in Rg.Ⅹ.90 and to be examined in the section on *ṛta* as sacrifice. Suffice it to notice here that this transformation of the primeval *purusa*, 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 rṣis, becomes equivalent to the eternal sacrificial offering of the *purusa* by means of which the universe evolves.

The second example given above follows Rg.Ⅹ.72.3 where the *sat* or the *be*, *be-ness* is said to emerge from the *asat* or potential, 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. 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 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 Rgvedic formulation of the law of transformation, from the ideal to the concrete.
The gods' action is thus to separate or demarcate the various fields or levels of manifestation - the above and the below 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. His cosmic actions whereby the quaking earth is made firm, the middle region more widely extended and the heaven propped up 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 and "props asunder" the "two wide worlds". 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: amimita varimāgam pṛthivyāḥ... The hypothesis may be ventured that ma- 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." 

H. Lefever observes that the verb ma- "measure out" or "found" used in connection with the creation of heaven and earth (1.159.4) the universe (VI.47.3) and the praisesong (J.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 dharman. The Gods do not create rta, however, they 'find' rta - as something existing apart from and above them.

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 rta" (ṛtajātā)151 said to be the "first born of rta" (prathamajajṛtasya)152 "dwellers in the seat of rta" (ṛtasyapastyasadāh)153 in that realm where the law is perfectly manifested. They are born according to the rta and wax strong in accordance with it, i.e. as a result of observing and serving it. They thus increase in and foster the rta,154 Mitra and Varuna "who by rta foster the rta, lords of the light of rta"155 have "overcome all disorders" and "aligned themselves with rta".156 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.157 Therefore they "rule over the whole world in accordance with the rta"158 "serving the rta, by means of rta they have attained to powerful might".159 "By rta they stand"159a, by rta they "wax strong" (ṛtvṛdh)160 in the house of rta.161 They are sinless (anāga) because they conform to the rta (ṛtavṛt) and thus are themselves considered the "great rta" (ṛtaka)161a, i.e. the very embodiment of the law they serve. They are rta-minded, their vision is rta (ṛtadhiyatah)161b, they are cherishers of rta (ṛtasprasah)161c and therefore true (satyah)161d. In that guise they shine forth and work their wonders.162 So Aditya (in this case Indra-Varuna as one god) "frustrates that which goes against the rta".163 Indra is said to grow mighty through the "directions" (pradīśap) of rta.164

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 rta;165 are "charioteers of rta"166 whose "statutes are true" or effective.167 They obey the rta since they cannot act against their own nature168, and at the same time being "pure-minded"169 they are its knowers, its guardians (ṛtasyagopah)170 and its lords170a, 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"171

"Herdsmen of the supreme-law, whose decrees are truth, ye mount your chariot in the highest heaven"172

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 gopah.
In this respect Balbir Singh Gauchwal 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 apurva."

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 rsis 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 civilizations. 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 rsis, for, as pointed out by H. Lefever, all the ordinances (vrata) or statutes (dharma) of the gods "... are the expressions of a transcendent, objective law which the Gods 'find' rather than create."

H. Lefever sums up the characteristics of rta in a few words: it is the "cosmic and dynamic principle of Law and Order.

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

The gods are only the "charioteers of rta", they guard the statues of the one Law both as protectors (ṛṣasya gopāḥ) and as punishers or 'debt-exactors' (cayamānāḥ prāṇi.). The mention of "ropeless bonds" (setrbhīḥ arajjubhīḥ) is significant enough as showing a universe governed by laws which bind its various parts together as one unity under the regency of Mitra-Varuna 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 Varuna. This god's action will be examined in connection with vrata in the section on ethics.
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 rṣis 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 Rgveda. Furthermore, the title asura given to several of the chief deities, namely Dyauṣ, Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni, Savitṛ, was in Rgvedic 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, Savitṛ, Indra are each described as "wise asura". Brhaspati himself is invoked as "the asurya" (Rg.v.11.23.2).

Asu means breath or life-energy; coupled with ra 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.

"Creative power was indeed attributed to those vested with asuraship already in the Rgveda: 2.35.2. "Apām Nāpāt 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"." 185

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." 186

W.N. Brown differentiates the classes of the asuras as the Adityas and the Daṇnavas and oversimplifies and crystallises into rigid patterns of opposition the rather fluid 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 Rgveda: Pipru (Rg.v.X.138.3), Namuci (Rg.v.X.131.4), Asura Varcin (Rg.v.VII.99.5), Śambara and Śugna. In the Adityas, the sons of Aditi, we can discern the principle of expansion, freedom, light, in other words the forces of evolution, in the Daṇnavas, or any opposing asura, the principle of constriction, bondage, Daṇu seemingly representing the force of involution. Reference to seven Daṇus or Daṇnavas, is made in Rg.v.X.120.6, though not named, being also found in Rg.v.VII.96.16. Of these Daṇnavas Vṛtra, the
obstructor, the foe of Indra finally slain by the latter, is the best known. The god's battling with the asuras is mentioned twice. 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 Dyauspiṭār who has the title of Asura as well." 190

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. 191

Asuramāyā as the Atharvaveda (111.9.4) terms it is thus used by gods and demons. For R.N.V. Dandekar the

"... power by means of which Varuga 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'". 192

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 māyāyā; 3.27.7) and in cases such as RV.5.63.7 the sense is rather 'unconceivable) wisdom, skill ability". 193

Rg.1X.83.3 refers to the māyāvin or those possessing māyā as "measuring out" (mamite) by means of māyā, or as J. Gonda explains

"realising in the phenomenal world ... what was mentally conceived". 194

"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. G. Varma points out that \textit{māyā} is used in three different senses in the Rgveda:

1) \textit{māyā} 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 \textit{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) \textit{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.\textsuperscript{195}

This definition gives a broad outline from which one may proceed with further investigation. The question of \textit{māyā} is of importance in any assessment of \textit{ṛta} in so far as this power is used to fit in with \textit{ṛta} or to obstruct the lay-out of the cosmos. It is one of those words which express the ambivalence which the \textit{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,\textsuperscript{196} referring to one and the same power which can be used for constructive or destructive aims, for beneficent or maleficient 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, \textit{ṛta}: the difference between the two lying in their purpose or intent. But it should be noted at the outset, that even if the \textit{ṛta} is opposed in some way, in the end all will be in accordance with the \textit{ṛta}, for at the transcendental level \textit{ṛta} can never be thwarted, though it can be so at the phenomenal or manifested level.

On the constructive side, we find \textit{māyā} representing the creative power wielded by the asuras whereby the cosmic process is measured out or set in motion (\textit{ma} to measure)\textsuperscript{197} with its orderly course, the \textit{vratas} thereby standing protected in accordance with the \textit{dharma}:

\texttt{"By means of your \textit{dharma} and through the asura's power ye wise ones, Mitra-Varuṇa, protect: the ordinances."}\textsuperscript{198}

Mitra and Varuṇa create, transform and rule over all things by the power of their \textit{māyā} and in accordance with the law of the universe. By their \textit{māyā} they protect the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{199}

This is the path established by the gods' decrees.\textsuperscript{200}
G. Dumézil observes how

"the words r̥ta (or its equivalents) and māyā are several times brought together". 201

Some may see here a contradiction in the thought of the ṛṣis, as r̥ta 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 r̥tāyinī, following r̥ta, and māyinī, charmers, skilled in wondrous art, 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 morns". 203

The sun which Mitra-Varuṇa "set in heaven as a refülıgent chariot" 204 is compared to a "flying bird anointed with the asura's māyā". 205

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" 206

"moving forth as light". 207

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 overflooding the oceans. 209

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". 210

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

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

"By Varuṇa's māyā is the web of r̥ta out-stretched". 211

All thus works with the law which in man's eyes manifests 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". 212
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. 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.1,24,10). The answer that Varuṇa's decrees stand inviolable (adabdhāni vrataṇi) 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 demoniac. The Aśvins are also called māyāvin. Their chariot is full of magic, or wonder-working purumāyā. Their frequent assistance to mankind is a piece of magic. The Rbhus and others also resort to this māyā. An interesting fact is that the Rbhus won their share of the sacrifice and rank among the gods through their skilful artistry and māyā. They are described as māyināḥ. Certain mythical prowess of theirs, miraculous deeds which they performed by means of power of speech (śacībhū), 2) vision (dhiya), and 3) mental ability (manasa 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, 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 and can change their appearance at will, 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. This aspect of māyā inevitably led to the meaning of deceit, hence illusion, to the exclusion of all other meanings and is found far more developed in post-Vedic literature than in the Rāveda. 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."
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 rta 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 rta ... whilst it is in some way a nīrūti, a dis-organising activity, the constructive māyā is placed in the field of rta ... is associated with the laws, and statutes which are the foundation of the cosmic order, of those very vrata and dharma which the other māyā strives ... to alter."225

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"226 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 rta 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."227

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, 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 rta make use of it to destroy it, the army of the rta to defend or re-establish it, the creators and administrators of the rta 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
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 points out, is expressed in the Rgvedic hymns by means of four principal words:

dhāman (dha to lay down, place, institute, found);
dharman (dhā 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." 229

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 (take), 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 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. 231

The Adityas are those who

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

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." 233

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

"have established (vi dadhaḥ) the seasons, months, days, nights, the worship and the holy-word". 234

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. 1.71.3, 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 dhītim (vision); dadhann rtaṃ dhanayann asya dhītim."

That which is thus established is a specific field or sphere of the rta, rtaśya dhāman, of which dhāman there are many. The word dhāman 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. In the "dhāman of rta", i.e., the sphere of harmonious activity "the gods rejoice".

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 'there power manifests itself' here there is something numinous'. Induced man to assign a name to the powerful or incomprehensible... Hence statements such as RV.10,145,2. 'We know thy dhāmāni. O Agni, which are distributed in many places... we know thy highest... name, which is secret.'

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

The dawns themselves "follow Varuna's long-standing dhāman." 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, 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". He "circumscribes seven dhāman". 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". 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". This may give a clue as to what it is that the patriarchs discover "kept hidden as the supreme domain of the sacrificial worship".

Hence each god seems to have his own specific domain over which he rules. 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 *dharma*, we find the root \( \sqrt{\text{dhar}} \) implying support, maintenance: the gods buttress \( \sqrt{\text{dhar}} \), 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.\(^{251}\)

So Brhaspati is called the "upholder of mighty rta".\(^{252}\)

The word *dharma* \( \sqrt{\text{dhar}} \) 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. *Dharma* is a more specialised aspect of rta and is used in the sense of specific statutes that sustain, regulate and 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 *dharma* to specific regulations binding under that whole. Truth itself is said to be "established on the unshakable foundation" of heaven. 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 - *dharma*, *vrata*, *maya* and rta - are brought together in Rg.v.63.7:

"By means of the *dharma*, with the magic power (*maya*) of the asura, O wise Mitra-Varuna, ye protect the *vratas*; in accordance with rta ye rule over the whole world."\(^{255}\)

The *maya* 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 (*dharma*) the law (rta) are the various modes of that rta whose custodians the Adityas are. The maintenance of the rta (rta*ya dharma*) is the gods' proper function:

"For the sake of upholding and supporting the world through Agni's own power have the gods expanded."\(^{256}\)

Hence their actions stand

"Firmly fixed by statute and ordinance".\(^{257}\)

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

"the refulgent sun journeys, a god amidst the goddesses",\(^{258}\)

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 dharma Indra

"estabhishes the rivers in their course."\(^{259}\)

Soma who, at the ritual, flows in accordance with the "true orderly process" (satye vidharm) or the dharma of rta is addressed as "lord of the dharma" whom all men uphold.\(^{260}\)

Each god follows his own dharma, i.e. his inherent nature and according to that nature or law proper to his being, sings his own song.\(^{261}\) As dharma is used in the sense of that which sustains, food is glorified because it upholds strength.\(^{262}\)
Several gods are intimately connected with the "foundation of truth" (sa\textsuperscript{2}dharman): Agni, Mitra-Varuna, Savitr. Agni's truth is law his truth being the good that he does to the worshipper. He is the "overseer of the dharman" in his quality of custodian of rta as the sacrificial rite, as commemorative of the universal rite of creation. Savitr, like Varuna, is he whose dharman is accomplished, or true (sa\textsuperscript{2}tyadharman); he who maintains the statutes (dhrtavrata). Varuna, 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 rta as a whole. He is the very embodiment of truth.

He who "through his truth-accordant-decrees (sa\textsuperscript{2}tyadharma) 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 Varuna 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, dhaman, dharman and vrata, dharman "is that most often used in a sense approaching that of rta".

The accomplishment of the law as an expression of truth, sa\textsuperscript{2}tyadharman, 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 dharman which, as dharma, came to be more and more used, made rta fall more and more into disuse. The connection between dharma and rta 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 rta 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 rta 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 \textit{vṛt} "to proceed, turn, roll, move on", rather than from \textit{vṛ} "to enclose, cover or guard", or from \textit{vṛ} "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 \textit{vṛt} "to proceed", with the suffix a, surveys and criticises the various etymologies offered by
Western scholars and gives his reasons for choosing \( \sqrt{vṛt} \):

"The word \( vṛt \) ... from \( vṛt \) would mean something like a procedure, course, line of movement: 'course of action, then conduct or behaviour.'"  

For E.W. Hopkins

"The word \( vṛat \) means way, course, procedure, action and sphere of action, realm ... and, after the Rigveda period, obligation and vow. It derives from \( vṛt \) ... 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 (\( ārya vṛata \)). Later this word becomes synonymous with moral order."  

As will be seen in the examples chosen, \( vṛat \) means the sphere of divine influence or, as W. Whitney explains, the right 'course of action', by means of which Varuna maintains order in the world in accordance with the \( rta \). H.W. Wallis describes it as \( rta \) as panthah, the path of \( rta \). So "the gods follow the ordained-ways of \( rta \)" 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 \( vṛat \) 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 oneself to'."

The examples he brings forward, however, could be interpreted in terms of following the course of the law. In Rgv.I.183.3 the Āśvinis are enjoined to come to the worshipper as he follows his function (\( vratān \)), 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, \( vṛat \), hence to follow the established path. But in Rgv.VIII.43.16b and 44.21, the "bright \( vrata \)" (\( suci \)) 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 \( vrata \) as though with feet, and safeguard mortal man from injury."  

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."  

Similarly:

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

\( vṛat \) 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 \( vṛat \), all of which \( vrata \)s 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 rta. Thus Sûrya addressed:

"impelled forward, thou safeguardest the universe's vrata" 287

None, neither Varûna, nor Indra, nor Aryaman, nor Rudra infringes the vratas of Sâvitr. 292 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 under his guardianship. This is his "holy song" which he fashions for the sake of his own dharma 299. Dawn is called the

"ancient, youthful, prolific goddess" who holds all good things and follows along the established-norm. 291

As dawns ascend the sky and pervade the mid-region

"they generate the divine inroads" 292

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. 293

For those who follow Indra's vrata Heaven, Earth and the mountains stand firm. 294

Varuna'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 Varûna." 295

Varûna, the Asura, the rtayan, the lord of righteousness, the guardian of rta whose statutes are dhrtavrata, firmly established seems to have been recognised, at least at one time, as the supreme lord of all, "ruler of this world's-manifestation". He has rta as his form and figures as the god in whom rta is incarnate, rta is his dynamic expression. His

"statutes (vrata), unmovable, are firmly-fixed in thee as on a mountain." 293

In some hymns he steps into the role of the all-creator in whom all the worlds abide, in others that of the all-dispenser of Justice to whom the sinner turns in repentance. He is svaraj and samrâj, the mighty upholder of order, physical - as he controls natural phenomena - and moral as he perceives man's truth and untruth. 302

"knows all things transcendental and beholds what has been and what will be". 307

So the rivers run in accordance with Varûna's rta, i.e., the sphere of rta over which Varuna has lordship, and in which the vratas are fixed as on a mountain.

All that Varûna 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." 311
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 apravrata, as stated in Rgy. 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." 342

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 rta. Only we human beings can go against rta, only the sun in us, the dynamo of life-giving power can be obscured by too much physical or material covering 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 rta, are expressive of the gods' function in the world of phenomena and their dynamic application of the rta. 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 rta.

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 rta, for the application or realisation of rta in the world. These ordinances can be said to 'belong' to the gods in a sense which is never true of rta... 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 rta, however. It would be more correct to say that they find rta..." 345

In exercising their functions they create specific fields of rta which are all expressions of the cosmic order as reflected at the phenomenal level.
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 rṣis 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, 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 (dhāta), 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... hast made the earth the counterpart of thy creative-might" 317
we glimpse the rṣis' idea that the richness of nature is but a reflection
of the heavenly realms of the gods.
Free from all human fallings, pure, infallible, indeceivable, the
gods of the hymeda represent truth (satya), they are the "lords of truth" (satyaṣyapatayah) they are rta-visioned (rtaṃḥitayāḥ) and are therefore the
worthy embodiments of the great law, rta, theirs being the dominion of light,
wide space, freedom, of glory (bhargas) brilliance (vārcaḥ), power (ojas),
of benevolence (ṣam) 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 deyas 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 multivaried
functions. The universe, at the godly level, is the dynamic expression of
rta, 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" (sajoṣaṣaḥ) or harmonious: "Acting in harmony" (sajoṣaḥ) and rejoicing
(mandamāṇāḥ) the gods have awarded their dominion to Mitra-Varuna. Accordant
and of one mind (samanasah) they all come to the worshipper to bless the
sacrifice.
"All gods, one-minded, one-intentioned, unerringly proceed to the one purposeful Intelligence."

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

"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."

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

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

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."

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

The gods are regarded as gracious towards humanity, for they are of one spirit (samanyu) 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. suparnam vipraḥ kavyoya vacobhir-ekam santam bahudhā kalpayanti (Rgv.X.114.5ab)
3. cf. Rgv. X.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. daksasya janamann 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.129.163), and on the other hand, Tvāstr who breathes life into all creatures. The Atharvaveda refers to Tvāstr 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.
10. op.cit.p.46.
12. cf. Rgv.VII.63.10, where the poet refers to humans as Dakṣa's sons together with the gods.
13. hūtānām garbham ... pitarām. (Rgr. III.27.9)
14. cf. Rgv. II.1; III.1.20.
16. cf. napātā śavaso mahāḥ sūnī daksasya sukṛatū. (Rgv.VIII.25.5ab)
17. "Sons of a mighty power, Dakṣa's two most wise offspring."
21. daksapatih (Rgv. I.35.6; I.56.2)
22. Rgv. II.27.1; "1.89; X.65.5.
23. māṁ daksasya... (Rgv. III.62.17) cf. Rgv. I.23.4; V.10.2.
24. sudakṣa (Rgv. VII.66.2).
25. daksam dadhāte apaṃstām. (Rgv. I.2.9).
27. itād adhyādāthe anṛṭam svena manuṇā daksasya.
28. E.V.P. IV. p.31.
29. A.A. Macdonell traces the etymology of Aditi to 3√dā to bind, in his "Vedic mythology" 1897, p.121, but to 1√dā to give in his "Vedic grammar" (1910, p.122).
30. In the latter case it would make her meaning equivalent to stringency, manness or penury which does not apply to her role of far pervading mother, or d'ylne, prolific cow and celestial light. In Rgv. IV.2.11d (ditim ca rāṣva adītim uṛṣugya) 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 are addressed and described as "viewing both the unlimited and the limited" (daksatē adītim ditim ca) - the unmanifest and the manifest. cf. also V.M. Apte "Is Diti in the Rigveda a mere reflex of Aditi?" in Bharatiya Vidya 9, 1949, p.15-16.

"Dieses Ewige und Unantastbare, in welchem die Aditjas ruhen und das Ihr Wesen ausmacht, ist das himmlische Licht... Die Aditjas, die Göter dieses Lichtes, fallen darum keineswegs zusammen mit den Lichterschöpfungen 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.

16. aditir- dyaur-aditir-antariksam aditir-mātā sa pitā sa putraḥ
viśve deva aditīṁ paśca jaanād aditīṁ-jātāṁ aditīṁ-janitvam. (Rgy. 1.89.10.)


29. anarva (Rgy. 11. 40. 6c)
30. uruvyaacāh (Rgy. V. 46. 6d)
31. dhārayat-ksitaṁ (Rgy. 1. 136. 3b)
32. jyotismatīm (Rgy. 1. 136. 3a)

At times she seems almost to be identified with Earth. cf. Rgy. X. 63. 3. 1. 72. 9; Athv. X. 11. 1. 38. The identification becomes complete in the Tait. S. Br. Br.

35. mimāma adiitir- vītaye naḥ. (Rgy. V. 59. 8a)

 Macedonia and Naighantuţa, cf. Rgy. X. 63. 3. (Dyaus the Infinite). ("May Infinite Dyaus shout for our enjoyment.")

36. cf. Rgy. V. 60. 6 where heaven bears a threefold division - ०त्तम, madhyama, avama. cf. Rgy. 11. 27. 8 where the Adityas are described as staying three earths and three heavens and having three functions in the divine assembly. Also Rgy. 1. 102. 8, V. 69. 1, VI. 47. 3, 1. 164. 6 and Athv. VII. 9. 16. cf. Rgy. VI. 47. 3; X. 14. 6; 128. 5.

37. cf. Rgy. IV. 14. 2. dyāvaprthivi antariksam; III. 8. 8; V. 85. 3; VII. 12. 24; cf. Sat. Br. 7. 1. 2. 23. Among triads... "none is so frequent as the three regions of the universe, no... characteristic as the threefold Vedic lore, the triple sacred fire and the many ritual triads." (J. Gonda. "Triads." 1976. p. 49.)

38. cf. Rgy. 1. 154. 4; VII. 5. 4; X. 114. 1. cf. Sat. 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) Brhad. U. 1. 6. 1, this karman being the interaction of name and form, cf. Agni's threefold jurisdiction over Heaven and Earth (Rgy. VII. 5. 4, etc.)

39. cf. Rgy. X. 114.1; VII. 5. 4; 1. 154. 4. cf. Athv. XII. 3. 20 (trayo lekāh); XVI. 50. 2.
42. tisrodyāvah savitur-dvā upastham ekā yamasya bhuvane. (Bgv. 1. 35. 6ab)
43. tisro dyāvaprthivi divaḥ lokā yatra jyotismatāḥ. (Rgy. X. 113. 9c) "In that threefold heavenly complex of heaven, in that luminous place." cf. Athv. X. 95; X. 10. 32; XVI. 1. 10; XVII. 4. 3; IX. 5. 10. cf. Rgy. VII. 101. 4b.
44. tisro prthivis tisra invati. (Rgy. IV. 53. 5c). cf. Rgy. X. 117. 8. 9; 1. 102. 8ab; 105. 5ab.
45. Rgy. VII. 69. 3cd. cf. Rgy. 1. 105. 5ab.
46. tisro dyāvo niḥtā āntar-asmin-tisro bhūmīr-uparaṁ caṣ-vidhānāh. (Rgy. VII. 87. 5ab) cf. Bhg. V. 69. 1ab; VI. 47. 3cd.
47. cf. Bhg. 1. 71. 5; 90. 7; 164. 33; IV. 1. 10; VI. 51. 5.
49. cf. Rgy. X. 129. 1. 7.
50. Dandekar explains antariksa as: "From antari and ksa (from kṣī 'to reside')... also analyzed as antar and kṣa (for kṣa) and explained as 'transparent'..."("Universe in Vedic thought," op cit.) p.101. Another word which denotes the mid-region is ākṣa.


52. "ANTARIKSA, ĀKĀŚA, KHA" (Rocznik orientalystyczny, tom 24, pt.2, 1961, pp.53-8).

53. "Ungezungen könnte doch ākāśa von ā = 'her, heran, hinzu' und kāś = 'hell leuchten' abgeleitet werden, mit der Grundsatz 'schauen, blicken oder strahlen' (Grassmann), so dass die Übereinstimmung mit antariksa in Satapatha Brāhmaṇa nachgewiesen ist," op. cit. p.56.


57. op. cit. 5.1.5.21. cf. Rg. VII.104.11.

58. cf. Rg. VII.51.2 and Sāyana's comment that the earth belongs to the Vasus, the firmament to the Rudras, and heaven to the Adityas.


60. "He (Prajāpati) heated these three worlds, and from them, thus heated, three lights (jyotis) were produced - Agni (the fire), who blows here (vāyu), and Śūrya (the sun)." Śat. Br. II.5.8.2. cf. Alt. Br.5.32 and Rg.V.158.1.

61. cf. Sat. Br.12.8.2.8 ff. See also J. Gonda "Triads," 1976, pp.50-1, cf. 62 where he points out the relationship between the Rudras, the gṛhyaṛī metre and the earth (Sat. Br.6.5.2.3), that between the Rudras, the tristubh and the air, and that between the Adityas, the jagati 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.36.


63. Rg. V.5.7; 72.3.4.

64. daksapitarah.

65. daksapitṛ (Rg. VI.50.2a)

66. ye devāh manojatāh manojuhāh sudakaśāh daksapitaras te na pāntu. (Tait. S.5.1.2.3.1.) "May those mind-born deltels, mind-yoked, highly intelligent sons of Dākṣa, protect us," cf. Rg. VII.66.2.

66. cf. sūṁi daksasya said of Mitra, Varuṇa (Rg. VII.25.5).

67. cf. J. Muir's doubt as to "the propriety of taking Dakṣa (in Rg. 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' (सूनि daksasya sukṛatā) but also the 'grandsons of mighty strength' (नपातक सवास महाहि)." (O.S.T. 1870, vol.5.) p.52. He brings forward such well known epithets as "son of strength" (sahasaputra, sahasah śīnu), "son of might" (savasah putra) etc., applied to Agni and Indra. The personification of Dakṣa is only incident in the Ṛgveda and is developed and completed in the Pūrāṇas.

68. 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) p.15.
67. mātā devaṇāṃ. (Rgv.1.113.19a)

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

69. yad deva adah salile susamrabdhā atisthata. (Rgv. X.72.6ab)

70. 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.1.139.11.

71. cf. Rgv. X.129.3.

72. atro vā nṛtātām īva tīvra repur-apa āyata. (Rgv. X.72.6cd).

73. 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 Brahmanaspati ... who blew them forth like a blacksmith". (O.S.T. 1870. vol. 5. p.355.) The word ēṭa being dual accusative can only refer to heaven and earth, and not to the "birth" (jana, sing) of the gods which is expressed in the previous vers. H.W. Wallis holds also to this latter interpretation: "Brahmanaspati welded these worlds together like a smith". (Cosmology of the Rigveda." 1887. p.43.) His action as a smelter is brought out in Rgv.X.68.9cd.

74. Rgv. X.72.3.

75. Rgv. X.57.

76. cf. Rgv.IX.5.9; 1.13.10.

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.

78. Rg. X.45.1abc) cf. Rgv.II.9.3;I.128.3;X.27;46.9;VIII.43.8;III.22.2.

79. cf. Rgy.X.72.2.

80. cf. Rgv. IX.5.7.

81. cf. Rgv.X.5.7.

82. Rgv.I.1.1.

83. mūdhā divo,ānāhin,prthivyā. (Rgv.1.59.2a)

84. Rgv.1.59.2c; cf.Rgv.X.46.9;88.10.

85. cf. Rgv.VI.7.4.

86. cf. Rgv.IV.1.20;1.77.1.

87. sthāna iva (Rgv.1.59.1d)

88. 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.

89. cf. puro-dhā "placed at the head" used of Brahmanaspati, (Rgv.IV.50.1) and puro-hita "placed foremost" = highpriest, the epithet of Agni. With regard to Indra and Brhaspati see Rgv.II.24.12;IV.49.1-6;VII.97.9.

90. cf. Rgv.X.72.2

91. cf. Rgv.VII.97.8.

92. devaṇāṃ pitaram (Rgv.1.126.3)

93. cf. Rgv.1.X.87.2;96.5.

94. pra pūrvajē pitaram (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 (gathā 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 rṣis 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 Ṛgvedic poets had no clear and definite notion on the matter". (p.318).
This creative activity is personalised in Visvakarman who is called "our father" in Rigveda. This may be an epithet for Tvastr. Both may be the same deity.

Dyaus and PrthivT seem to be the archetypes of the Samkhyan purusa and prakrti and of the beginningless pair of the Bhagavad Gita (13.20-21).

The differentiating process in manifestation which is a well marked feature of the Vedic vision, is expressed in Vedic terms as evolving (sam vrth), as fashioning (vidhā), as establishing (viśtabh), as making firm or supporting (vādh), as propping up (vāstabh), or spreading out (prath) or pushing up (.jarat), or stretching (yean) or weaving (tīkan).

This kind of action the gods perform.
devaḥ cit te asuryaḥ pūrve anu kṣatrāya maṃre/sahāṃstī, (RgV.1.21.7ab)

26. katurā pūrṇā katāra aparā ayoḥ katāḥ jāte kavayaḥ ko vi veda (RgV.1.185.1ab).

26. parītā pitarā pūrvajāvāri ṣasya yona kṣayaḥ samokasaḥ. (RgV.X.65.8ab).

cf. (RgV.1.159.4, "They have measured the pair as of one common origin and one home"). cf. RgV. IV. 57.3.

27. yam mātaram ca pitarām ca sākam ajanayāthās tanvaḥ svāyāna. (RgV.X.54.3cd)

28. In the Brāhmaṇas, as remarked by N. N. Dandekar, they are stated to have been originally joined together. In the Alt. 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.1.54.7; 1.7; 7.1; cf. RgV.1.185.1; RgV.583; 1.X.68.3; 3.X.31.7; 54.3. cf. TaI.5.5.2.3; 3. "Heaven and Earth were together; going apart they said: 'let us share together what is worthy of sacrifice'."


cf. Nut and Geb, Sky and Earth, separated by Shu in Egyptian cosmology. cf. RgV.II.61.4 where the might of MītrāVarūṇa is said to press apart the two worlds.


32. "Loka. World and heaven in the Veda", 1966, p.61. cf. RgV.III.84.2a where Dyaus is said to invigorate or quicken the wide dominion of MītrāVarūṇa. See also J. Gonda "The dual deities in the religion of the Veda", 1974, p.95.

33. cf. J. Muir.' "Original Sanskrit texts", vol.5, 1870, p.369.; cf. P.S. Deshmukh, A.A. Macdonell, A.B. Keith, etc. who give no explanation for this phenomenon.

34. cf. RgV.1.164.33

35. bhuvō devāmar pitā putraḥ san. (RgV.1.69.1d)

36. This conception was to be personified in Śiva, the destroyer, the regenerator, the lord of the cosmic dance.

37. na tam vidāthā ya ima jajāna anyad yuṣmākam antaram babhūva. (RgV.X.82.7ab)

38. tasmād virajā ajañata virājo adhi pūrṣaḥ. (RgV.X.90.5ab)

39. aditer-dakṣo ajañata dakṣadv-aditiḥ pari. (RgV.X.72.4cd)

40. 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 "Dhamma". 1967, p.26. cf. Bhagavad Gītā 15:16 where the two purusas are referred to: the kṣara or perishable and the aksara or imperishable.


42. RgV.X.51.8.


44. devānām yuge prathame 'sataḥ sad' ajañata: "in the primeval age of the gods from the unmanifest emerged the manifest!" (RgV. VII.72.3)

45. daksasya vā adite jannani vrata rājāna mitrāvarūpa a vivāsasi. (RgV. X.64.5)

46. Thou o Aditi, dost tend the two kings Mitra and Varuṇa after the production and by the will of Dakṣa." (Trans. J. Muir, O.51.T,Vp.51.)

47. Whether the notion of the sat re-emerging into the asat: was present in the rgsim mind to appear later as the cycles of srstī and pralaya, cannot be surmised. No hint of it has been found except in RgV. X.190.3 where the words yathā pūrvaṃ (as before) can be interpreted as referring to a previous universe cf. also RgV.X.72.9 and Athv.XI.8.7.

48. cf. adhaḥ svād asid upari svād asitā. (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".

49. janitā dīvo jantiḥ prthivyāḥ. (RgV.X.54.3cd). cf.RgV.VII.30.5;114.34.8; 44.3;32.8;VI.17.7;VII.13.36.4;X.29.6;54.3;55.1.

50. cf. RgV.11.12.2;VI.17.7.
The law observer, has spread the world in threefold measure.

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


The Nirukta connects asura with asu from *vas to breathe, be active (1.10).

cf. also C.S. Venkateshvaran "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).

A primary suffix from *frs to possess and also to grant.

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 Vatra (Rgv.V.120.2: cf. Rgv.VII.21.7.)


1967, by the same author. p.39.


For the derivation of Aditi and Diti see V.M. Apte "Is Diti a mere reflex of Aditi". (Bharatya Vidya. vol 9.1969) pp.14-22, and p.84 note 23 of this thesis.

N. Brown writes: "the name (Dhanu) 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 Vṛtra..." ("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). Dānus is mentioned as the mother of Vṛtra in Rgv.I.32.9.

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)

The Concept of deva in the Vedic Age." 1954. p.32.

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 asura, 'god' (first found in the Upanishads)." ("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, Glassarzum RV., p.135) is clearly wrong; it is from mā, 'fashion' RV, V.85.5; l.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.


op.cit.p.168.
The doctrine of maya. (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 asurasatva. 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. 283).

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.


202. cf. RgV. 3. 5. 3.

205. sah kṣapah pari gavajye ny-ūṣro māyāyad dadhe. (RgV. 11. 41. 3ab)

206. sūryaṃ a dhatho dīvi citryam ratham (RgV. 63. 7d)

207. patangam aktaṃ asurasya māyāyā. (RgV. X. 177. 1b)

208. yah samānaṃ na praṃnāti dhāma (RgV. 63. 3d).

209. sūryo jyoṭiṣ carati. (RgV. 63. 4b)

210. RgV. 63. 3.

211. RgV. 85. 6.

212. mahī mitrasya varupasya māyā candra iva dhānun vi dadhe purutra. (RgV. 111. 61. 7cd)

213. Itasya tantur-vitatah ... varūṣasya māyāyā. (RgV. IX. 73. 9)

214. vām vam mitrāvaruṇaṃ dīvi sṛtā. (RgV. 63. 4a)

215. Indra has this power too. cf. RgV. 1. 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. RgV. 111. 20. 3; he sets out upon his work through māyā RgV. 111. 27. 7. cf. RgV. 1. 144. 1. He conquers malign māyās RgV. 2. 9. By Soma's māyā, the gods, the māyāvin, have "mated out" (mamire RgV. IX. 83. 3c).

216. purūmāyā (RgV. 1. 119. 1).

217. RgV. 78. 6. E. X. 24. 4.

218. RgV. 1. 159. 4. cf. Heaven and Earth as māyini in RgV. 5. 3.

219. ahaṃ māyā ... divī varṇāṇam vasate svastaye. (RgV. 63. 4d).

220. RgV. 63. 6c. Īś. 54; 221. RgV. 11. 11. 569; V. 30. 6; V. 40. 6. E. 8. The demons, however, may simply be Vedic man's personification of those forces of nature that to him seemed to counteract established order.

222. māyā has been derived from मा (mināti) to change, exchange. See P. Thieme, Z. d. M. G. 95. (1941) p. 82-116. cf. G. Dumézil, op cit., p. 142 ff.

223. cf. RgV. 1. 151. 5; II. 11. 7; II. 34. 3; III. 34. 3; 53. 8; V. 30. 6; X. 73. 5; 147. 2.

224. na tā minati māyino na dhīra vṛata devaṇām pratamām dhruvāṇi. (RgV. 111. 56. 1 ab)


226. op. cit., p. 293.


228. op. cit., p. 150.

229. The contrast between amhas and varivas will be examined in the section on the ethical aspect of rta.


230. cf. J. Gonda, "Vision." "the verb dhā... often conveys the idea of 'to establish, to institute, to create, lay down, dispose'". p. 174.

231. cf. RgV. X. 190. 1.

232. vidhiśārā vī te dadhur-ajāsṛa ṛtaṇāyavu rucucanta dasmān. (RgV. IV.55.2cd).

233. ṛdāsāryag nahi taj-jārya varvartt ca kramā pari dīyam ṛtaṣya. a putrā agne mithunāso atra sapta śatānī viṇāsāt ca tathuh. (RgV. I. 164.11.)


235. cf. L. Renou, E.V.P.: "dhāmān- est voisin du sens de 'séjour', lieu où prend naissance une 'Institution' divine, ou se développe une 'fonction'". vol. V. p. 73. vol. V. p. 38: "structure en profondeur, position-clef".

236. J. Gonda favours the connotation of "locations of modalities or manifestations of divine powers" (dhāmān). 1967, p. 35.

237. Dumezil, "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, dès lors, il devient facilement équivalent." (p. 140).

238. ṛtasya dhāman rapayantya devāḥ (RgV. IV. 7.7b).

239. "dhāman". 1967, p. 20-1. dhāma-pāpyagam-hāma. (RgV. VII. 41.10c)

240. ṛdīṛgham saṃcātā varunasya dhāma. (RgV. I. 123.8b).

241. 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.

242. ṛtasya dhāma vi mīme purūpi. (RgV. XII. 3.8b). The many dhāma of Agni are listed in J. Gonda's "Dhāman." p. 24. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c)

243. ṛtasya dhāma vi mīme purūpi. (RgV. XII. 3.8b). The many dhāma of Agni are listed in J. Gonda's "Dhāman." p. 24.

244. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

245. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

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249. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

250. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

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252. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

253. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

254. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

255. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

256. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

257. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

258. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

259. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

260. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)

261. ṛtasya dhāma pāpyagam-mame. (RgV. VII. 41.10c). cf. RgV. IV.7.5. and VII. 19.14. cf. the seven dhāma of the earth. (RgV. I. 122.16)
259. dharmapā ... vy-avānre-adhārayaḥ. (Rgv.11.13.7a)

260. Rgv. IX. 109.6

261. dharman rtasya (Rgv. IX. 7.1).

262. dharmapāsāt vā. (Rgv. IX. 35.6). cf. dharmapā vāyum a vīṣa đa (Rgv. IX. 25.2):
"He enters vāyu in accordance with the dharman."

263. sadhārana. cf. Rgv. XI.12.7.

264. cf. Rgv. IV. 53.3.

265. dharmānrtasya tavisām. (Rgv. I. 187.1)

266. satyadharman. (Rgv. I. 12.7)


268. rtasya gopāḥ. (Rgv. VII. 11.43.24)

269. mā no himiṣiṣyajana yāp prṭhivyā yo vā diyām satyadhārma jajāna. (Rgx. X. 121.9ab)


271. cf. Rgv. IX. 97.23c where the later sense of dharma is already perceptible:
"dharma bhuvad vṛjanyasya rāja. "The king shall be the upholder of the community."


274. Most scholars favour the derivation from vṛt to choose.


276. "On the etymology of the Sanskrit noun vrata". J.A.O.S. XI. 1884. p. cxxix-cxxxi, where he surveys the Western scholars' derivation of vrata from vṛt but chooses to derive the word from vṛt so that the word would mean "procedure, course, line". cf. Bergaigne "La religion Védique." 1883. p. 212, 215 ff.


278. rtasya devāḥ anu vratāḥ guh. (Rgv. I. 65.3)


280. Rgv. III. 38.6. and VII. 75.3. cf. J. Gonda's translation of Rgv. III. 4.7. anu vratam vratapa didhyanah "receiving whilst observing the religious ordinances, visions in accordance with the ordinance" ('Vision' p. 206).

281. Rgv. IV. 53.4.


283. viṣaye hi visvavedaso varuṇo niṭro aryamā vrataḥ padeva saścire pāṇī martyam rīṣaḥ. (Rgv. VI. 73.3)

284. op. cit. p. 417.

285. madhu no dyāvapṛthivī mīmāṁsātmā madhuducatā madhudughe madhuvratāḥ (Rgv. VI. 70.5ab)

286. viṣvāsya hi pṛṣeito raksasā vrataṃ. (Rgv. X. 37.5a)

287. Rgv. XI. 38.9.

288. Rgv. XI. 38 & IV. 53.4.

289. lokam devāḥ kṛpute śvāya dharmane (Rgv. IV. 53.3b).

290. pūrṇam devi ṣvāyatiḥ puruṣāḥ-anu vrataṃ carasi viśvavāre (Rgv. III. 61.1cd).

291. Rgv. V. 83.5. cf. Rgv. VII. 94.2. "She (i.e. Prṣṇi) in whose lap all the gods maintain (ṛṣya-rantar) their vratas."

292. tava dyāvapṛthivī parvataḥo anu vrataḥ nimitteva tathuh (Rgv. III. 30.4cd)

"For those who follow thy vratas, Heaven, Earth and the mountains stand as though firmly fixed."

293. viṣvāsya ... visvāya devāḥ anu vrataṃ. (Rgv. VII. 41.7) cf. Rgv. VI. 67.3; VI. 67.5.

294. cf. Rgv. I. 24.14; 35.7; II. 27.10; 28.7; VII. 42.1. 295. cf. Rgv. IV. 41.1; VII. 87.1.

296. rtasya gopah.

297. Rgv. I. 25.10

298. Rgv. I. 25.10; 1061620; II. 27.10.

299. satō asya rāja. cf. (Rgv. VII. 87.6d)

300. rtrapasās (Rgv. VI. 66.1)

301. viśve hi kamparvate na śrītāṁ apraptatāḥ vratāṁ (Rgv. II. 28.8cd)

302. cf. Rgv. VIII. 85.2; 1.24.6.7; 10; IV. 42.1-4; VII. 41.7.

303. "Jñānānti dairvānyāṁ vratāṁ. (Rgv. VII. 75.3d)"
3cf. RgV. VII, 87, 5
3cf. RgV. VII, 82, 2; IV, 42, 162. RgV.
3cf. RgV. VII, 89
3cf. RgV. VII, 49, 3b. cf. RgV. I, 24, 10; VII, 43-10; I, 28, 4, V, 85, 2-6.
"Es gibt kein anderes Lied in der ganzen vedischen Literatur, welches die göttliche Allwissenheit in so nachdrücklichen Worten ausspräche..."

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

33cf. RgV. VII, 49, 3. cf. RgV. II, 39, 5, where Indra also "found the sun lying hidden in darkness".

33cf. op. cit. p. 12.
33cf. RgV. VII, 81, 1.
33cf. RgV. VII, 81, 1.
33cf. RgV. I, 30, 385 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.

33cf. op. cit. p. 12.
33cf. RgV. VII, 35, 12a; V, 51, 2; II, 27, 4.
33cf. It is also significant that this picture may be found in RgV. I, 30, 385 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.

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III.3. 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 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". 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" 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, Soma, Rudra, Indra, Heaven and Earth and Dawn, the waters, Aditi, Savitr, Surya, Brhaspati, 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."
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

"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 Varuna placed in the human heart kratu, 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. Varuna, the path-finder, the opener of the way (gātuvidam) "makes the prayer" (brahma knoti), or, as J. Gonda explains

"causes manifestations of brahma to appear in material form". He "opens out in the heart the inspired-thought" and thereby "brings about a new (vision of) rta". 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", the "upholders of the law" (dhrtavrata) par excellence, to remove his sin. Since the Adityas are custodians of rta, 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 so that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children; the causes of, or excuses for, sin being delusion, wine, anger, deceit or thoughtlessness.

But mortals do recognise the eternal law of the gods and proclaim it. Those who observe the rta follow the ordinances (vrataṇi) of the gods as established by their laws and thereby enjoy the protection of these; and it is through the upholding of religious ordinances that the patriarchs became illuminated and inspirers of their descendants.

But life presents many facets and cosmic order, the transcendent ideal as prevalent in the heaven of the devas.
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." Trust in the gods and a willingness to abide by the path of rta 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 rta, Mitra, Varuna, let us cross over the (ocean of) evils as a ship over the waters." 19

Agni, the "knower of births" is entreated to "lead us across the ocean of all difficulties, even as a ship across (all) perils." 20

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." 21

For "the paths of rta are fair to tread" 22 for those whom the gods protect, those who remain true to the gods; these guard from all kinds of evil. 23 For "these sons of Aditi know how to ward off enmities; peerless, they grant freedom from distress." 24

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." 25

"May I reach the path now, may I follow in the steps of Mitra (men) abide in the protection of this dear, harmless, one." 26

111.3.3. The meaning of anrta

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 rta, which your anrta." 27

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?" 28

To what kind of rta is he referring? The social order, ethical norms, or ritualistic practices which may be disregarded? The separation between rta and anrta 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, rta and anrta, 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 disorder. 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 rta41 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 to 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 light44 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:

"Brhaspati seeking light in the darkness, drove out the morning-beams 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 gopapūjan,47 full of cows, a word which in Vedic mythological language means rays of light. Brhaspati

"mounts the refulgent chariot of rta"48 chasing away the darkness, opening the cowpen and finding the light (svārvidam).

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 Vṛtras, the Dānavas, the Dasyus, the Pani; 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 Vṛtra". 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 Vṛtra is identified with these. A.B. Keith considers this verse "a late and absurd legend". 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.

The theme of a hidden treasure that grants life and light, is a recurring one in the Rgveda. 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!"

That which is called the "highest treasure" (nīḍhīn paramān) of the Pani is also described as "fast hidden"; to find it the Angirasas first detect the āntā, and having recognised it for what it is, they once again ascend the high paths. In this case, the ānta 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 Angirasas, 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 Pani for us revealed the life-nourishing sun-light."

Agni and Soma in concerted action stole the treasured kine from those that withheld them and thereby

"found the one light for the many!"

This part of the verse reveals the psychological intent of the thought behind the mythological story.

In all these myths the Pani 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 Reneou interprets such withholding in terms of engendering disorder:

"It is disorder which the Pani engender by keeping the cows (symbol of light) prisoner. Such an act disrupts the regular march of the cosmos."
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, 0 Angirasas, and shining forth break open the treasure-possessing rock."

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 anrta" waiting to be opened up, or, of the sun hidden in the rocky cave waiting to be released and set up in the sky. Anrta, 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 Vrtra, Vala, the Paniis, those that hold back, constrict or obstruct, those that hide the treasure; hence the development of anrta from disorder to wrong, to false, to untruth.

In this respect V. M. Apte makes the pertinent remark that "... the prasiti (the ensnaring net) of rta probably means this complicated and involved tangle or web of rta and anrta and represents the ramifications of the nooses of Varuṇa, escape from which was, however, possible by strict adherence to the path of rta ... Rta (or its custodians Mitra and Varuṇa) was itself the bond that bound (the snares of) anrta ... To separate the confused strand of rta and anrta in this tangled skein was no easy task for god or mortal."

Hence the poet's predicament:

"Which is your rta, which your anrta." We are faced once again with that ambivalence which, to the rṣis, was characteristic of the universe.
Anrta acquired the meaning of falsehood or untruth either early in Vedic times or as a secondary meaning to disorder - anrta as opposed to rta, 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 anrtaḥ and asatyaḥ are pāpasaḥ "sinful," whilst those who are "observant of the rta are truthful." since they are in harmony with that which is the expression of truth. But since what could have been the original meaning of anrta as the opposite of rta 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 rta fell out of use.

L. Renou sees the opposition between rta and anrta on the ethical plane and between rta and nirṛti on the cosmological plane:

"There is an opposition between rta and anrta, disorder or falsehood, on the ethical plane, and between rta 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." These cosmic intelligences, being embodiments of those powers that conduces 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 rta."

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 rta, 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 rta, 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 rta as the ultimate or ideal order and its immediate realisation in manifestation, is well brought out by H. Lefever:

"Rta in the natural world is only a manifestation and never a complete manifestation of the transcendent reality (cf. I.139.2). Rta, as objective unity, is transcendent, not only in relation to the world but also in relation to the Gods. 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" (l.23.5. cf. V.15.2)."

In this task of "actualisation" of rta 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 rta are the chastisers or haters of all falsehood. So Varuna "discerns truth and falsehood prevalent among men", and "sifts the anrta by means of the rta".

So man's transgression is a debt (arna) which he contracts at the hands of the guardians of rta, a debt which he must pay in order to re-establish the balance he has upset. Indra is the prayāha, he who demands fulfilment of one's obligations. The Adityas, "true to rta" (rta-vānah) are the debt-exactors. 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. 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".

For all works towards the greater harmony and therefore well-being of all. The ultimate criterion of rta 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.
JIII.3.4. 

Karma inherent in the conception of ṛta in the moral sphere.

H. Lefever, in his study of Vedic sin\textsuperscript{80} observes:

"... when ṛta 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 singer for another man's trespass."

Pleas such as the following are very frequent:

"Let me not suffer, King, for what others have done," \textsuperscript{81}

"Let us not suffer for another's sin, nor commit those deeds that ye, O Vasus, punish." \textsuperscript{82}

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. Shamasastry\textsuperscript{83} finds this a proof against the prevalence of a belief in the doctrine of karma in Ṛgvedic 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. Shamasastry is from Ṛgveda 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 Ṛgvedic 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 Varuṇa would slay his friend (i.e. the poet himself, if indeed the ascribing of such a wish to Varuṇa 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." \textsuperscript{84}

R. Shamasastry goes on:

"As a 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."

Such a view as propounded by R. Shamasastry 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 Ṛgvedic 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 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, 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 virtù 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 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 Brhadaranyaka 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."

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 rta, in as much as rta 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 anrta, 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 identifies the law of karma with rta 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 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), dharmam, and especially rta - 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 Samhitas; 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 Upanishads 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 Gita." 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 rta 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,95 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).\(^9\)

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 Karman."\(^98\)

The good that is done, or the "well-made"(sukṛtam)\(^9\) 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.\(^100\)(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.\(^10\)

What has been sown by way of "good" is reaped as a reward in heaven to which the departed is said to come "again".\(^102\) In Rgv.X.135.5-6 a curious question is asked about the newly dead boy:

"How was his equipment?" (verse 5)\(^103\)

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)\(^104\)

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\(^105\) as they are, are credited with the ability to read the human heart, to look within, to perceive even when their eyelids are closed\(^106\), beholding the crooked (vṛjina) and the straight (sādhu)\(^107\), observing the anṛta of human beings\(^108\); that Varuṇa has many spies that move among men\(^109\) and a thousand eyes\(^110\); that numbered of him are the winkings of people\(^111\); that the sun beholds the straight (ṣju) and crooked deeds of men\(^112\); that Soma parts like a knotted tangle right and wrong conduct\(^113\); 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."\(^114\)
Such action is "known" to the gods and sweeps into its train a particular effect, be this termed the "noose" of Varuna, should the cause be transgression, or _madhu_, sweetness, should the cause be right living. The verse

"Sinners are false and untruthful; they dig their own deep ditch" 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 Varuna ... 'let them (the plants) deliver me from the noose of malediction and from the noose of Varuna 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.1.41.8) rather than that of which the victim of the curse would find himself imprisoned by ... the noose of Varuna 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." 7

The Atharvaveda qualifies this law as "mighty", or "terrible" 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." 9

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 of 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." 10

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." 11

On the other hand, those who do not live in accordance with _rta_ 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".

All these examples show the conception of the law of karma already well developed. _rta_, 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 since the moral meaning which belief in karma give to "all conduct" was already present and developed in ṛtā, 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 ṛtā is one which, like the moral elevation of Varuna 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" 124

is to fail completely to assess the law of karma and of dharmā in their essential significance. There is no gulf stretching between the Vedic ṛtā and the Hindu dharmā 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 dharmā are the Hindu equivalent of the ṛgvedic ṛtā. ṛtā is more universal in its application and contains all norms; dharmā 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 ṛgveda, 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 ṛṣis and may be gathered from the text of the ṛgveda.

111.3.5 The conception of sin in the ṛgveda

As remarked by J. Gonda it is difficult to assess what exactly Vedic man meant by āgas:

""the usual translations - 'Sunde, Unrecht' (Grassman); 'transgression, offence, injury, sin, fault' (Monier Williams), 'Vergehen' (Geldner) etc. - give no complete picture of the idea conveyed by this term." 125

J. Gonda ascribes to āgas the sense of "pollution" in accordance with the later texts and explains e.g. a line from the Satapatha 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 Varuna's wrath". 126

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." 127

Several terms are used in the sense of transgression against what is right: āgas, enās, agha, pāpa, āsānī, duskrta and āñā meaning having gone against or transgressed, hence what is morally owed, a debt. H. Lefever venturs to describe enās 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 ṛṣis may have given far more thought to man's conduct and transgressions that 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" 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."

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."

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."

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 (vṛjināyat) and perverter of truth (satya dhurtah). Incest is referred to as sinful (pāpa) in the famous dialogue between Yama and Yamī and as against the dharma of Mitra and Varuṇa. It is also anazta, against the great law. 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); 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 deivas, 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.

The removal of hatred is a constant theme in the various appeals to the gods, not surprisingly, as hatred is divisive and thus works against harmony, rta. Deceit, lying are also strongly reprehended. They stand against truth (satya) which, with rta, 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." 141

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, is conceived as sustaining all and through it alone all is secure, hence rta, 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 rta" 143

Here rta 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" 144

Truth (satya) and law (rta) 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 Upanishads: in the Taittirīya as

"speak the truth, act the truth, never swerve from the path of truth" 145

in the Mundaka as

"By truth is the divine path laid out by which sages, having obtained what they desire, ascend the supreme abode of truth." 146

and as

"Truth alone triumphs and not untruth" 146

which takes us back to the original Rgvedic conception

"By truth is the earth upheld" 147

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.

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. 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 Upanisad which incidentally describes what the daksīna of the priest really means:

"Austerity, alms-giving, uprightness, harmlessness, truthfulness — these are one's gifts for the priests." 151

The derivative word ahimsāna is used in Rgv.V.64.3 qualifying Mitra who does not harm his devotees, and ahimsyamāna, being unharmed, is found in Rgv.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 (xipram), what pollution (śamalam), and what wrong (duṣkttram) we have committed, let the waters purify me from that." 152

Disease of the body is an effect of psychological illness. The nonrecognition of this, in the nineteenth century, led scholars to assess the Vedic ethics as purely materialistic. In commenting upon Rgv.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", 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. 154 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. Shamsastry, 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 (enás, ágas, druğa, pídā) indicates an "external cause" for evils of all kinds. The second series (amhas, tāmas) 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 mischiefous or positive and beneficial."

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 Rgveda 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 for gods and men claim a common (samānyā) brotherhood (bhrātṛtvam) in the same mother's womb. They are "related" (āpayah). 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. Lefeaver:

"The Gods ... are 'charioteers of rța', 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 rța. Therefore the breach of such statutes is not so much a personal offence against the Gods as a violation of the rța which the Gods protect."

"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 Rvedic idea of sin."

"The sole duty of the Gods, as guardians of rța, is to punish the violation or to reward the keeping of rța."

"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 Kim 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

III.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 (sazzvatāti) the very boon asked of the gods, and that rta, the transcendental law grants that vision of wholeness, a vision which, to the rṣis, 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 rāvān, 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 Ṛgveda (X.191.2-4), and one in the Atharvaveda (III.30.1-3) 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 Ṛgvedic 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, wholeness, 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, Varuna and
other gods. 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." 176

A human being who is in harmony, performs his duty perfectly, fulfills his obligations under the rta, lives in accordance with the inherent law of his being, is then called rta\textsuperscript{avan}; he conserves the rta and is said to be "true", satya, hence the great power attributed to the declaration of truth. 177 Rta, when it applies to the human moral order, is truth. He who follows rta, the path of righteousness, is a man of truth and has at his command the power that only truth can wield:

"Contemplation of rta annihilates transgressions." 179

"Under the rta" as remarked by W.N.Brown "every human being too has a duty, a specific function called his vrata, a word which in the later language means 'vow'." 180

Within the inclusive norms of rta 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."

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 Bhāgavad 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 (vīśā) 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 dīh
invigorate the kṣatriya (ruling power) and the heroes,
invigorate the kine, invigorate the people."

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 kṣatriyas, 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. 184 Indra, the ksatriya par excellence whose task is to fight all opposition to Order is called brāhmaṇ in Rgv.VI.45.7, 185 both functions being shown as closely linked.

The rigidity with which in later times each of the varnas was differentiated from the other, does not seem to have existed in the Rāṣṭrvedic 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 rṣi, drinker of Soma juice, a skilled-controller of immortal riches? 186

The sādras or tillers of the soil, a word used but once in the Rāṣṭrveda, are mentioned far more in the Atharvaveda. In the latter a comparison is made between the poets, kavyaḥ, 187 the term with which the seers style themselves, and the tillers. A song of the Rāṣṭrveda 188 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. 189

That the varnas 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". 190

In the purusa sūkta (Rgv.X.90.12), considered one of the later compositions of the Rkṣamhitas, the four classes which came to be distinctive of Hindu society are enumerated: the brāhmaṇaḥ, rājanyaḥ, vaiśyaḥ, śādrea. Being born from various parts of Purusa'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 Rāṣṭrveda, the Atharvaveda and the Yajurdeva:

"Give brightness to our priestly folks, make bright our ruling folks, bright our traders and tillers, and through that brightness give brightness to me." 191

"Where the spiritual and the ruling power move together of one accord, that world where dwell devas with Agni, shall I know as holy." 192

This is obviously the ideal social order envisaged by the rṣis, 193 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." 194
That human nature is liable to transgress, to err widely, that at times man does not even realise that he has committed wrong 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."

The belief that retribution follows sin, that wrong committed will have to be paid for in some unpleasant way or other, can be inferred from the many entreaties for forgiveness addressed not only to Varuna 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. Varuna, may forgive out of his own graciousness, sin can be wiped out, or else, as said of Brahmanaspati, 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. The many pleas to be "gracious" or show mercy as the verb mṛī 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 mṛī be gracious, and the substantive mṛīka, mercy, are very often used with reference to Rudra, Varuna, Soma, thus showing a belief in the possibility of sin's annulment or the wiping out of human "debt" (ṛṇa) 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 ṛta. Neither ṛta in the first period nor karman as it slowly begins to emerge in the pre-Upaniṣad period is an automatic, merely mechanical force: both ṛta 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."

Such an idea seems to be touched upon in both Rg. VIII. 67. 17 and II. 24. 6.
The Sanskrit verb used in the first of these, pratiyanjana, 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, 0 ye wise gods, vouchsafe that he may live"20

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 Varuna, whose laws determine the straight course of the stars ... Only when one has 'returned' can one be forgiven: 'ye make to live, 0 ancient gods, every one who returns from his sin'. This return is implied in petitions where the suffering sinner begs for relief."202

It is also implied in the refrain of Rgv.VII.51.1:

"We choose freedom and wholeness."203

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 guha 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.1.67.2) and the latter the essence of Deity which the Upanisads were to call the atman:

"They drew near; they reached out towards that supreme treasure of the Panis secretly hidden away; those knowing ones, having viewed the falsehoods, turned back again whence (they had come) seeking to penetrate that."204

That which the sages wish to enter is the "supreme domain", the state of immortality which is the highest treasure kept hidden away by those who are loath to reveal it.207

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."208

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". 209

Forgiveness is contingent upon a change of mind and heart ...

The forgiveness of sin is conceived in terms of a removing210 of defilement, but especially as a release, an "untying" from "bond"; the many verbs used in connection with sin point this out very clearly: \( \text{yava-srij}, \) "let loose, dismiss, pardon"; \( \sqrt{\text{sra}}\text{th}, \) "loosen, untie, remit, pardon"; \( \sqrt{\text{vi-sra}}\text{th}, \) "loosen, untie, remit, pardon"; \( \sqrt{\text{pra-muc}}, \) "release from, loosen, untie".

Rudra is asked to

"drive far away from us hatred, away distress, away diseases in all directions" 212

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" 213

Soma, it is claimed, when purified by harmonious thoughts, conquers all malignities. 214 Agni's flame can chase sin away. 215 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, 0 Agni." 216

That even great sin could be forgiven is indicated in the next verse:

"Even before great sin, 0 Agni, (free us) from prison of the gods and mortals! 217

and also in the following:

"I desire-to-overcome even committed sin by means of homage". 218

The particle \( \text{cid} \) used here and translated as "even" is noteworthy. Emphasising \( \text{krtam}, \) \( \text{cid} \) 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 Varuna 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.

"Not for one offence (āgas) O valiant one, not for two, nor for three, do thou strike us, nor yet for many." \(^{219}\)

"Aditi, Mitra, Varuna, whatever sin we have committed that forgive us." \(^{220}\)

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 daksaiḥ), or human weakness or sheer wickness, "do not hurt us". \(^{221}\)

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 Varuna loosen that from us." \(^{222}\)

Many an imploration to Aditi is for forgiveness of sin, or similar entreaties are addressed to other gods that man be made "sinless in the sight of Aditi" or "unto freedom", sinlessness being a condition of freedom and safety:

"Whatever sin we have committed, that forgive us, Aditi, Mitra, Varuna. May I obtain freedom and light free from fear, O Indra, may the spreading darkness not reach us." \(^{225}\)

A similar request is formulated thus:

"May I attain the fearless light", \(^{227}\)

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, the holy, \(^{228}\) and her sons protect or rescue human beings from guilt, anguish (anhaś), from every kind of evil or malignity, these in human terms of reference, being connected with disease, want, obstruction and thus destruction or disintegration (nṛtri) and death:

"May Aditi protect us, may Aditi grant us shelter." \(^{230}\)

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-ājasraṃ) \(^{335}\) 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 (uru) hence freedom, the whole world belongs to the pure:

"O devas, from distress there is freedom, for the sinless a treasure." 236

Brahmagaspati 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 Brahmagaspati thou protectest as a good herdsman." 234

"Now Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman vouchsafe us freedom (varivas) for us and for our offspring." 239

The "ever strengthening" (sadaśvādhā) Aditi protects men from coming to grief, that is from amhas. 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." 245

The fearless light could also refer to freedom from the shackles of mortality, that wide place, urum 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." 246
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 (*anāgāstye*) that is purity, wholeness, as well as freedom (*adītive*). In a *sūkta* addressed to Agni, the treasure-laden, divine flame is identified with Adīti:

"Thou grantest sinlessness, 0 Adīti, completely."

The word translated as "completely" (*sarvatāti*) 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, 0 ye Vasus."

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 adītīm vṛnimahē*) as containing an explanation or qualification of *sarvatāti*: 'we entreat a safe and sound condition', *adītī-* (freedom, free scope ...), the wish: may we be, or remain, uninjured, is ... extended by the prayer for 'free scope ... unimpeded by distress, Indigence' ...".

*Sarvatāti* points to the total integration of the human being.

We may have in this contrast between *amhas* anguish, constriction and *varivas*, space, free scope, bliss, or *adīti*, 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 Adīti seems to be Adīti's light. On this light the poet would meditate:

"Let us meditate on that beneficent light of Adīti and the praise of Savitr, the god who fosters the *ṛta*."
This light cannot be obstructed (anarva); over it the evil-minded (aghadamsa) has no power:

"the enemy has no hold over those to whom Aditi's sons give their eternal light to live."\(^{154}\)

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 rta, can fear no adverse consequences:

"For the righteous one sweet blows the breeze
sweet flow the oceans!"\(^{255}\)

As pointed out by H. Lefever

"... prosperity is the reward but not the goal of right-doing"\(^{256}\)

### III.3.8 Varuna and the fetters of sin

Varuna's role as that of the controller and the binder (pasin) is of paramount importance in the examination of the Vedic conception of sin. Being the ruler of the cosmic waters\(^{257}\) which seem to be the primordial substance out of which the universe is fashioned, he is described as the "mysterious ocean",\(^{160}\) the "support of the worlds"\(^{261}\) in whom is all wisdom.\(^{212}\) As he encompasses all creation, 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.\(^{264}\)

The word Varuna is taken by most scholars to be derived from the root \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{r} \) to cover, encompass. This root also yields \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{a} \) 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 \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{r}\), cover, so that the first meaning would be the coverer or encompasser... If so, the parallel and contrast with Vṛtra are interesting. It is possible that it originally was an epithet of the sky as the all-encompassing."\(^{255}\)

With regard to \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{a} \), A A Macdonell makes the following point:

"There can be no doubt that the word \(\text{vr} \text{t} - \text{a} \) is derived from the root \(\text{vr} \) 'to cover or encompass'. Poets several times speak of \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{a} \) as having encompassed the waters, āpo varivāmsam (2.14.2 etc.) or \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{v} \text{i} \text{l} \) (1.52.6) or as being an encompasser of rivers, \(\text{na} \text{d} \text{i} \text{v} \text{r} \text{t} \) (1.52.2; 8.12.26. cf. 6.30.4; 7.21.3). These are clearly allusions to the etymology of the name".\(^{265}\)

A play upon the etymology of the word... seems to be present in Rg.111.34.3 where Indra is said to have "encompassed the encompasser" (\(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{r} \text{a} \text{m} \text{a} \text{v} \text{r} \text{n} \text{t} \))

A Bergaigne, E Benveniste and L Renou are also of the opinion that \(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{a} \) is derived from \(\text{vr} \) 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 (\(\text{vr} \text{t} \text{a} \)) and certain gods such as Tvastr and Varuna, whose names seem to have had, at least in the eyes of the Rishis, the same etymologic sense as that of Vṛtra."\(^{267}\)
We do not believe in a "confusion" between the two entities, Varuna and Vṛtra, 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 Rg. IV.42, a hymn where Varuna and Indra are made to expose their claim to superiority,

"... besides the idea of rivalry between Varuna and Indra ending in the latter's triumph, a more or less clear allusion to certain similar characteristics between the divine person of Varuna and the demonic person of Vṛtra."

Both Varuna and Vṛtra 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 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 páda Varuna claims:

"I rule over man's highest vesture." The keyword, vavri, given by O. Bohtlingk and R. Rudolf as "Versteck, Hülle, Gewand", refers to a highest place of concealment or covering of man over which Varuna is king, which may be not only "heaven" but what was later to be explained as a kāda, or "sheath", "covering", in the fourfold division of the human constitution of the Upaniṣads (cf. ananda maṣā kāda). The very word "highest" in the Rgvedic verse hints that there must be several such "coverings". The fact that Varuna rules over this highest vesture might mean that his is the last veil that conceals the innermost core of the human being. Varuna 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. On the other hand, Vṛtra holds back the waters of life or hides the sun and Vala 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 (tāmas) of nature — obstruction, friction, darkness — which, translated in mythological terms, becomes the selfishness of demons.

Mitra and Varuna 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. But they bind "with bonds not made of cords" a verse which gives away the figurative meaning of their action. They are the binders of anātra.
Varuna's fetter or noose (pāśa), that power to fetter which is peculiarly his (varunya), is dreaded by the sinner who implores to be released from the pāśa. The latter is really the symbolic expression of the effect of the disturbance of rta. H. Lefever remarks:

"This fetter is not to be understood here as merely the punishment which Varuna inflicts on those who break his laws. It is the direct effect of the sinful action which disturbs the rta. 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." 280

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 anrta" (anṛtasya setū) are "equipped with many nooses" (bhūri pāśau), "difficult to overcome" (duḥratyetū) for "the evil mortal" Retribution comes in the shape of "nooses" or "avengers":

"At every step are bonds equipped with nooses", 282

"Avengers follow the falsehoods of men". 284

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 0 Varuṇa, the lowest, the midmost; may we then 0 Aditya, in accordance with thine ordinance belong, in all purity, to Aditi." 285

"Release us from the upper noose, loosen us from the midmost and the lowest, that we may live." 286

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 anrta" (anṛtasya setau), "above one, below two, opening up the three [doors?] as he releases the rays of light through the three levels of manifestation. 287

The legend of Sunahṣeṣa bound to three posts is also brought to mind.
in the highly allegorical hymn of the horse, the steed is described as being bound by three bonds (bhanda) in heaven, three in the waters and three within the ocean. At the highest level, the sacrificial horse appears to the bard, as Varuna. 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 (antariksa) 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.°

The fetters of Varuna, described as such because typical of the effect of transgressions against Varuna's statutes, are imposed upon humans as well as unclasped not only by Mitra and Varuna but also by other deities. Agni is asked to "loose from us the bonds that bind us". Since he is the "knower of Varuna" it is trusted that he will appease the latter's anger and "release from us all hatred". R. T. H. Griffith translates this line as "remove thou far from us all those who hate us", 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 Varuna's anger, but can be removed either through Agni's intercession (by way of the sacrificial ritual) or through Varuna's mercy, as the case might be. So Agni "shall protect us from Varuna's chastisement, from the great god's chastisement".

Similarly, Rudra and Soma are asked to "... be merciful to us, release us from the noose of Varuna, in your graciousness protect us." Varuna's fetter seems to entail death or disease. Thus the poet entreats: "Be thou not displeased O Varuna; attend thou here, O thou praised-by-many; do not steal away from us our span of life." "Whatever ordinance of thine, do we, as men, daily transgress, O God Varuna, deliver us not to the fatal slayer, to the fury of thine hostile wrath."
The Atharvaveda goes so far as to say: "There is no escape from King Varuna (even) for whosoever would creep further away from the sky." 297

Varuna stands undecifiable (adabdhah) and is implored not to strike mortals with his dread weapons that wound the sinner. 300 Reading the human heart as he does he is asked to liberate man from the distress (anbhas) of speaking untruth. Falsehood constrains 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 (dharma), for that offense, O God, do not harm us" 305

"0 that we be found guiltless in the presence of Varuna who is merciful even to him who commits sin, as we accomplish Aditi's laws." 304

From the previous examples it is clear that Varuna 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, the friend to whom one may talk. To Varuna pardon is asked for trespasses whether committed by one's self or by others, his favour is entreated to loosen the sinner from his sin as from a rope so that men may succeed in finding the "aperture of rta", hence open their consciousness to the significance and implications of the divine order and thereby live accordingly.

Varuna's "healing remedies are countless"; they are the gift of life. He is indeed asked to "prolong our lives for us". There is always hope, through prayer and offering that his wrath should subside, that his "good disposition should spread far and penetrate deep". 313

The words sumati (good disposition) and mrIrIka (favour) or mercy are distinctive epithets used in connection with Varuna. He is the great Lord before whom the penitent is powerless, yet keeps hoping. This whole attitude is summed up thus:

"0 Varuna keep dread far away from me; 0 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 Varuna. 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" (priyasah). Elsewhere the deliverance from anrta or wrong-doing is ascribed to Varuna as though to his compassion:

"Our wrong-doing which faultless Varuna 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 role of *nirrti* in the cosmic order

The question of the meaning of *nirrti*, dissolution, and its place in the Rgvedic vision of cosmic order is still moot. In a prayer addressed to Varuna, the worshipper implores:

"Far from us, far away drive thou destruction." 3/7

The word *nirrti* has been taken in opposition to *rta* but its connotation is different from that of *anrta*, the latter meaning disorganisation in the sense of disorder, the former, i.e., *nirrti*, meaning disorganisation in the sense of dissolution and therefore destruction. *Nirrti* has its role 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 *Vrtra* 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.31 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 rtasya* is asked to burn the *raksas*

"for maintenance of the fundamental order implies destruction of demoniac beings". 311

Similarly Agni’s fetters (*bandharasah*) await "those who drink from the cup of *anrta*" or, "those who protect the seat of *anrta*" as the same verse could be translated.323

*Nirrti* does not seem to be completely identified with death in the Rgveda though in many passages it may be so taken, but it appears to be so in post-Rgvedic 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 (*rta*) 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.314 *Nirrti* thus represents the Rgvedic 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.\textsuperscript{325} Nirrti 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 nirrti rule over us".\textsuperscript{326}

Similarly, the verse already quoted, "far from us drive thou destruction"\textsuperscript{327} could simply imply the fear of death, the wish for long life which is so typical of the Rgveda, but as it is followed by the plea

"free us from the sin we have committed"\textsuperscript{328}

the moral overtone and the fear of retribution cannot be ignored. In this particular case nirrti could personify the forces of moral disintegration that eventually destroy the human being, if allowed to run riot.\textsuperscript{329}

Nirrti appears in two enigmatic verses discussed by L. Renou in his "Védique nirrti" 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."\textsuperscript{331}

According to L Renou the problem

"... concerns an entity which 'hidden in the bosom of the mother, has penetrated into nirrti 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. Nirrti is here the apparent cessation of activity, a rupture of organic circuit (xta)."\textsuperscript{332}

This stanza could have a cosmological as well as a human implication. The first pada brings to mind the last verse of Rg.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".\textsuperscript{333}

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 Rgv.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; this word signifying activity, and activity birth, growth and dissolution: to enter into activity is to enter Into the realm of
dissolution, nirrti, to create and to abolish. This is indeed part of the eternal rhythm, hence rta. 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.11.14.2 these forces of destruction which are at the root of the universe can themselves teach the r̄ṣis 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 nirrtis for instruction. The sages have perceived the connecting link (nīdāna) of these within the secret and remote inroads (of the universe)." 335

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, rta, though from man's point of view, construction and order stand for rta, 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 rta. 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 r̄ṣis referred to as viśvam bhuvanam, jagat or tat sarvam. 336

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 nirrtis 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 nirrtis are those factors of entropy... the forces of rupture of the rta 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." 337

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. 338

Nāka, the "painless world" is heaven. Nirṛti is taken by the commentators
as bhūmi the earth, the world of the transient; avasthānam, 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 nirṛti? Is the point of dissolution the laya 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 is the epitome of the darker side of the cosmic order for he stands at that stage where conflict prevails prior to that further stage 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 (lokaṃ kṛṣṇu)
release the bound one from his bonds!
Like a new born child, freed from the womb,
be free to move on every path."
NOTES

1. puruṣatvata (Rgv.IV.54.3).
2. gatā amṛtam ca mṛtyus' ca puruṣo'dhi samāhite (Athv X.7.15)
3. amṛtave uttame mārtam dadhasi (Rgv I.31.7b)
4. cf. Rgv.IV.12.4d
5. cf. Rgv. VII.48.5.
6. cf. Rgv.VI.74.3
7. cf. Rgv.X.89.889; I.1046; VII.45.34
8. cf. Rgv.X.35.3
10. cf. Rgv.'tta.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. devaśo hi śām manave samanyavo viśve sākṣam sarātayaḥ (Rgv.VII.27.4ab)
15. Griffith's translation
18. vyurnoti hṛda matim navyo jāyatam ṛtam. (Rgv.I.105.15cd)
19. ṛtama mahi
20. cf. Rgv.II.29.1
21. cf. the expression "we men" viśāḥ (Rgv.I.25.1), puruṣatvata "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 prāvācanam devānām yan manuṣyād ammanah (Rgv.X.35.8)
25. "promote this my proclaiming of the law of gods as we humans recognise It."
26. cf. Rgv.III.59.2b;3c;60.6cd
27. cf.Rgv.I.83.5;1V.1.13ab
28. ṛtasya epīn avamā sadāṃsi pareṣu yā guhyēṣu vraterṣu (Rgv.IV.54.5cd)
29. parṣi naḥ param anahsah svasti. (Rgv.XI.33.3c).
30. ṛtasya mitrāvarūṇā pathā vām apo na nāvā durita tarama. (Rgv.VI.65.3cd)
31. viśvāni no durgāhā jātavedāpa sindhum na nāvā duritāti parṣi. (Rgv.V.4.9ab)
32. ṛtham na durgād vasavas sudānavo viśvāśmān no anahasah nippartana (Rgv.I.106.1cd)
33. cf. also Rgv.X.133.6. "Let us clasp Indra's friendship" (sakhitvam ārṇabḥāme)
34. "that by the path of ṛtā it may guide us beyond all misfortunes (ṛtasya naḥ pathā nāyati viśvāni duritā.)."
35. cf. Rgv.VII.86.5d; sarma no yamsan trivarūtham anahsah. "Grant us a threefold protecting shelter from distress."
36. te hi putrāsō aditer vidur dveṣāṃsi yotave amhaś cid urucakrayo anehasah. (Rgv.V.18.15)
37. na hanyate na jīyate tuvoto naimam ambo asnāty-antito na dūrtāt. (Rgv.III.59.2cd)
38. cf. Rgv.X.133.6.
39. yan nīnām asyām gatim, mitrayā yāyām pathā asya priyasyā śarmay-ahimsāyasa saṃcire. (Rgv.V.6.3), cf. Rgv.VII.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.123.466 6 II.26.4.
40. kad va ṛtām kad anṛtām. (Rgv.I.105.5cd)
41. kva ṛtām pūrṇyam gatam kasi tad bhīhāriti nītāno. (Rgv.II.105.4cd)
42. yaddha tyan-mitrāvarūṇā-vṛtād-adhy-adadvāthe anṛtāṃ svema manuyānā. (Rgv.I.139.2ab).
43. J. Gonda "Vision" 1963.p.69. Some interpretations of this ambiguous verse are so ingenious that they should be mentioned: cf. Deo Prakash Pandanjal Shastri's explanation: "In the present context of Mitra (Hydrogen) and Varūṇa (Oxygen), ṛta can mean nothing else but 'water'. Now, in view of the statement of the mantra, that Mitra and Varūṇa take or bring (ādhyā) '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. \( \sqrt{as} \) 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 'anrta' and non-elemental 'anrta' which denotes their creative function. The gods Mitra and Varuṇa convert the 'anrta' elements into 'anrta' i.e. water in its liquid form by their energy i.e. union."

(A critical study of Rgveda (I.137-163) 1963 p.84)

ava atiratam anṛtāṁ viśva ṛtēma mitrāvaruṇā ą sacethe (Rg.v.1.152.1cd)

ṛtam piparty

anṛtāṁ ni tāṛt.

"Un hymne à énigmes du Rgveda." (Journal de psychologie.1949) p.270


40. "Un hymne à énigmes du Rgveda." (Journal de psychologie.1949) p.270

41. "Un hymne à énigmes du Rgveda." (Journal de psychologie.1949) p.270

42. 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 prmeval 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 Rgveda." 1959 p.137). Only a portion of this stanza is examined here.

43. cf.Rgv.X.67.4; 11.24.3:133.10.

44. gã guhã tiṣṭhantir-anṛtasya setau bhāspatis tamasi jyotír-ichān ud uṣrā ākār ... (Rg.v.67.4bcd). Only a portion of this stanza is examined here.

45. cf.Rgv.11.24.3; 11.6.8-11.


47. "Un hymne à énigmes du Rgveda." (Journal de psychologie.1949) p.270

48. 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 prmeval 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 Rgveda." 1959 p.137).

49. e.g. the Panis conceal their treasure, Vṛtra holds back the flow of the vital waters.

50. Athv.IV.10.5. A similar idea is expressed in Rg.v.1.23.19 where "immortality and healing balm" are said to be "present in the waters" of space. (Apsu antar amrtam apsu bhasajam 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 gālham ā sūryam. Rg.v.X.72.7)

51. Rg.v.11.39.5d.

52. Rg.v.11.39.7a.

53. cf.Rgv.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 prmeval 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 Rgveda." 1959 p.137).

54. 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.

55. avindad dīvo niḥtām guhā niḥdīm verna garbham parivātam aśāmī añante antar aśāmī. (Uṣ.2.45.3a-b)

56. cf.Rgv.11.24.6. For trans. see p.77

57. Rg.v.11.24.7.


59. When Indra is represented as having prospered and acquired much delight through human prayer he is asked not to be a pānis (mā panir-bhuhī) Rg.v.11.33.3; not to withold from man the treasure that has light from within himself.

60. dīvas putrā aṅgiraso bhavema adriṃ rujema dhaninam ṣucantaḥ. (Rg.v.IV.2.15cd)


62. When Indra is represented as having prospered and acquired much delight through human prayer he is asked not to be a pānis (mā panir-bhuhī) Rg.v.11.33.3; not to withold from man the treasure that has light from within himself.

63. Rg.v.11.24.7.


66. kad va ṛtēma kad anṛtām (Rg.v.1.105.5cd.)
67. papaśah santo anṛtā asatyā. (Rg.v.5.5c) "the sinful are false, untruthful".
68. ya yatāsāpaḥ satyāḥ (Rg.vi.50.2c)
70. trīy-yaśudhānaḥ prasitiṃ ta eva-yaḥ yo agne anṛtana hanti. (Rg.v.87.11ab)
72. cf. Rg.v.1.152.1
73. anṛtasya bhūreb (Rg.vi.60.5)
74. madyyesa satya anṛte avapacyaḥ janānām. (Rg.vi.60.5)
76. Sin is stated to be committed in ignorance or in sleep as well as in knowledge. cf. Rg.v.164.3; 12.5.
77. na jānā minanti mitram. (Rg.v.89.8c)
79. māṃsaṃ rūjanaṃ anya-kṛttena bhōjanaṃ. (Rg.vi.28.9b)
81. mare vo bhujema anya-kṛttena bhōjanaṃ. (Rg.vii.52.2cd) cf. Rg.vi.51.7a
83. "The conception of sin in the Vedas." (Festschrift Moritz Winteritz,1865-1933) p.141
84. ava drugānāni pitṛyā spījā no ava yā vayaṃ cakṛmā tanubhiḥ. (Rg.vi.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. ma vo bhujema anya-kṛttena bhōjanaṃ. (Rg.vi.28.9b) 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."
87. ma vo bhujema anya-kṛttena bhōjanaṃ. (Rg.vi.28.9b) 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."
89. yathā kāmo bhavati tat kṛatur-bhavati yat kṛatur-bhavati tat karma kurute yat karma %urute tad abhisampadyate. (Brh.Up.4.4.5) cf. Brh.Up.3.2.13.
94. op.cit. p.334; 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."
97. See Rg.vi.29.5 which shows a purely personal relationship between the sinner and the gods.
98. 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 Rg.v.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 Vedas." 1974.p.184 ff.
102. 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.)
punar RgV.x.14.8 and AthV.XVIII.3.58
anudeyi yatha abhavat.
yathā abhavat anudeyi tato agram ajayata.

purustād budhna atataḥ pāścān nirayanaṁ kṛtam.
the meaning of purastāt 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.

adabadhāsah (RgV.VI.67.5)
RgV.VII.28.9
RgV.I.27.3
RgV.VII.61.5
RgV.I.25.13
RgV.VIII.34.10
RgV.VII.41.7
RgV.VI.51.2 cf.RgV.IV.1.17d
granthim na va iva grathitam ... ījum ca gacum vrjinaṁ ca soma (RgV.IX.97.18ab).
op.cit.p.26
RgV.I.90.6
pābāsah santo anṛtā asatyā idam padam ajananā gabhiram, (RgV.IV.5.5cd)
"La religion védique," 1883, tome III.p.159. (Trans. J.M.)

rāt ugram.
satyam bhad rāt ugram dīksā tapo brahma yajñāḥ prthivīm dhārayanti.
(ATHV.XII.1.1ab)

madhu vātā rātīgatyā madhu āṣaranti sindhavaḥ. (RgV.I.90.6ab)
yatra brahma ca kṣatram ca sāmyāñcau ca rataḥ saha
tal lokam pumyamprayāṣeṣam yatra devāḥ saha agnim. (YjXX.25)
dhruvaḥ sacante anṛtā janāṇām (RgV.VII.61.5cd) tātās paḥbhār na āsaranti duskrītāh (RgV.IX.15.6 ed)

An outline of the religious literature of India." 1967. (1st ed. 1920) p.35.
"Religion and philosophy of the Veda." 1925.p.35
op. cit.p.81


"Ethics of India." 1924.p.30
"Hindu ethics." 1922.p.7
op.cit.p.10-11
RgV.X.27.1
RgV.X.10.12
RgV.X.10.6
RgV.X.10.4; cf.RgV.II.32.2; 42.3; 29.5; 1.147.4;VI.12.5; X.34.13; 85.9;
8.38. sukṛtasya pānthām (RgV.XI.71.6d)
9.39. RgV.X.I77.6
RgV.X.II.27.7;33.2;IV.1.4;V.9.6.
111. Māhāmāraḥ rājjan varupa anṛtām dīhu pūrvaḥ tasmāṁnaṁ nānā paryayahashah. (AthV.XIX.44.8)
112. cf.also RgV.I.147.5
113. cf.RgV.XI.190.1 and AthV.XII.1.1
114. pānthām ṛsasyā yātave tam īmahe. (RgV.VIII.12.3cd)
115. ṛm nam padana ṛtayumma satyaṁ vadantu satyakarman. (RgV.IX.113.4ab)
116. satyaṁ vada dharmam caraḥ satyāṁ na pramaditavanyām. (Tait.Up.I.113.)
117. Mund.Up.I.11.6
118. RgV.XI.85.1 cf.AthV.XIV.1.1
119. cf. Abhidroha, oppression, injury, repas, stain, wrong, fault, sin, kilbisa, offence, sin, guilt, drugdha, injury, offence, ripra, impurity, samala, also impurity, sin, blemish, avadya, blamable, Imperfection.
120. cf. Abhidroha, oppression, injury, repas, stain, wrong, fault, sin, kilbisa, offence, sin, guilt, drugdha, injury, offence, ripra, Impurity.
123. "Ethics of India." 1924.p.30
"Hindu ethics." 1922.p.7
op.cit.p.10-11
RgV.X.27.1
RgV.X.10.12
RgV.X.10.6
RgV.X.10.4; cf.RgV.II.32.2; 42.3; 29.5; 1.147.4;VI.12.5; X.34.13; 85.9;
8.38. sukṛtasya pānthām (RgV.XI.71.6d)
9.39. RgV.X.I77.6
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The conception of sin in the Vedas, (Festschrift Moriz Winternitz, 1865-1933), 1933 p. 141.

The Vedic idea of sin, 1935 p. 18.

The Vedic experience, 1977 p. 482-3

The Rig-Veda and Vedic religion. (Christian Literature Society for India, 1913) p. 162

The Vedic experience, 1977 p. 483

"The Rig-Veda and Vedic religion." (Christian Literature Society for India, 1913) p. 162

The Aryan varṇa was certainly recognized as such since Indra is mentioned as protecting it against the Dasyus (RgV.111.34.9)

brahma jinvatam uta jinvatam dhiya kṣatrāṃ jinvatam uta jinvatam nṛṇ
dhemūr jinvatam uta jinvatam visah. (RgV.111.35.16.17.18) cf. RgV.1.1136.
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cf. RgV.1.24.5825.1-3.

37. *gāv. v. 57
40. *gāv. no dhei bhūmāneṣu rucām rājasu nas kṛḍhī
rucām viśeṣu śūndreṣu maṣi dhei rucā rucām. (Yjv. 18, 48) cf. Yjv. 26, 2.
41. yatra brahma ca kṣatram ca sāmyāñcāu ca rāmaḥ saha
taṭ-lokaṃ punyaṃ praṭīṣṭeṣu yatra devaḥ saha agnīṇa. (Yjv. 20, 25).
44. na devādām ati vratāṃ sātaṃ caṇa jīvāti. (Rgv. X, 33, 9ab)
45. cf. Rgv. X, 164, 3; 12, 5 and 137
46. yad āsāsa niṣṭāsa abhīāsa upārīma jāgraṭo yat swapanaḥ
47. cf. Rgv. X, 89, 8-9
48. anu vāsaṃ janm adadiḥ: "remitting the debt according to his will." (Rgv. X, 24, 15c)
51. A parallel case is found in the Greek term metanoia (cf. N. T. Luke X, III, 3, 4, 5 and
I V, 11, 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
52. sāśvantaḥ hi pracetasaḥ pratiyantamaḥ cid enasaḥ devaḥ krūṣṭaḥ jīvase. (Rgv. VII, 67, 17)
53. op. cit. p. 33
54. ā sarvatātātm aditīṃ vṛtiṣmaḥa.
55. abhinakṣanto abhi jē tam ānaśa-nidhiṃ papinām paramaṃ guhaḥ hitam
te vidvāmaḥ pratikṣaṇa aṅṭaḥ punar yata u āyaṇ tad ud iṣu vāriṣām.
(Rgv. X, 24, 5)
56. dhāma paramam (Rgv. X, 181, 2).
57. amṛtasya dhāma (Rgv. IX, 37, 32).
58. The word Pāpi usually thought of as demons or "niggards" is derived from 
which also means to honour, praise, as well as to barter. To the Vedic mind,
the Pāpi 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 Pāpis should be reconsidered.
59. rājanī vāpirakṣaṇa aṅṭaḥ punar ā ata ā tasthuh kavayo mahāsa pathaḥ. (Rgv. I, 24, 7ab)
60. yāh sārdhate na anudāṣati śṛṅgām. (Rgv. I, 12, 10c)
61. cf. N. T. John 1, 29; Rev. 1, 5; O. T. Pscil. 12, 2 Sam. xii, 13.
62. The conception of the untying of sin as of a fetter will be considered in
connection with Varuṇa.
63. vi asmad dveṣo vitarāśa vi amṛṣa cātayavaśa viṣuḥ. (Rgv. X, 33, 2cd)
64. idam āpaḥ pre hāhaya yat kīṃ ca dūraṃ mayi yad va aham
abhidurohṇa yad vā ṣeṣa uta anṛtam. (Rgv. I, 23, 22).
66. apāṣuc to drive off by flame. Rgv. I, 97, 1
67. yac cid hi te purasād yavistha acittibhiḥ cakṣma kac cid āgah-
kṛḍhī gva 'smān aditer-anādṛtā vṛ-enaṃsi śiśratho viśeṣa-agni. (Rgv. X, 12, 4)
68. cf. also Rgv. I, 31, 16; VII, 93, 7.
69. mahās cid aṅga eṇaḥ ahīha uvād devanām uta martyayaḥ. (Rgv. X, 12, 5ab)
70. cf. Rgv. II, 7, 10d.
71. kṛtam cid eno namasaḥ ā vivāse. (Rgv. VI, 51, 8d)
... mā na ekaśmin āgasi mā dvayor-uta trigu vadhīr-mā śūra bhūriyug. (Rgv.VII.11.45.34).
221. adite mitra varūṇa uta mṛla yad vo vāyam cakṛmā kac cid āgah. (Rgv.VI.27.14).
222. mā na ... śīrīgas. cf. Rgv.VI.11.89.54; IV.54.3.
223. aryamāṃ varūṇa mītrymāṃ vā sakhāyam vā sadam id bhrātaram vā veṣam vā nityam varūṇa arapam vā yat śīrīgas cakṛmā śīrāthes tat. (Rgv.V.85.7).
224. cf. Rgv.I.162.22c; 11.27.14; VII.93.7.
225. anāgasā adityaye. Rgv.V.82.6.
226. adite mitra varūṇa uta mṛla yad vo vāyam cakṛmā kac cid āgah uru aśyam abhaṇyam jyotir-indra mā no dhīrgha abhi naśān tamisrāh. (Rgv.VI.11.47.9).
227. abhayam jyotir-āśyam. (Rgv.II.27.11d).
228. dhārayatāt. (Rgv.I.136.3).
229. tātāṃ, Rgv.VII.I.25.3.
230. cf. Rgv.X.63.768; 66.6; VII.14.1.47.1.18.5; I.136.5; VI.62.8.
233. rāpas, kṣetraśa.
234. aditya-ṇa uṣrayatāt aditiḥ śārma yacchatu. Rgv.VII.I.47.9ab.
235. Rgv.X.185.3.
236. asti deva āghor-uru asti ratnam ... (Rgv.VII.11.67.7a) cf. Rgv.X.63.4.35.3.
237. uṣrayatāt īm anhaśo raktatī rīgo amhōś cid āsma urucakriṣ-ādbhutaḥ. (Rgv.III.26.4cd).
238. na tam āmho na duritaṁ kuta ca na arāṭ�yas titiruṛ-ṛa dvayaśīnaḥ viśvā id āsmaḥ dvhāsa vi bādhvæ yam sugopā raksati brahmaṇapaste. (Rgv.I.23.5).
239. nu mitro varūṇo aśraya naśa tmaṇe tokaya varīvo dadvantu. (Rgv.VII.63.6ab) cf. Rgv.I.23.6.
240. adityaḥ pātu amhaśaḥ sadāvaḥṛdhā (Rgv.VII.18.6d) "O ever fostering Aditi protect us from anguish".
241. tat su naḥ śarma yacchata ādityaḥ yan muncati enavantam cid enasah sadānavaḥ. (Rgv.VII.11.18.12).
242. ... mṛla yad vo vāyam cakṛmā kac cid āgah uru aśyam abhaṇyam jyotir-indra mā no dhīrgha abhi naśān tamisrāh. (Rgv.VI.27.14).
243. uruṁ no lokam anu naśi vidvānt svarvaṁ-ju-jotir-abhaṇyam svasti (Rgv.VI.47.8ab).
244. vyacīṣṭhe bahāpyēye yatemahī svarāyē. (Rgv.V.66.6). cf. Rgv.II.27.11d.
245. vi su dveṣo vyamhatim ādityāṣo vi samhitēm viṣṇe-viḥ potenā navā ṣa ṣaḥ. (Rgv.VII.67.21).
246. Rgv.VI.18.5: te hi putraso aditer-vidur-dvēsēṁ yottayē amhōś cid urucakrāyo aneṣaḥ. "For these sons of Aditi we'll know how to ward off hostilities; giving broad scope; incomparable, they protect from distress."
247. Rgv.VI.51.1. cf. J. Gonda: "An intimate connection between the state of being anaga- 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 āgас (anągastve adititve)’.” ("Gods and Powers." 1957.p.91).
248. evam ... dādāso aneșagastvam adite sarvaṭātā. (Rgv.I.94.15ab).
250. FromἘάρλ to press together, to strangle.
251. amhōśo vidur-ābhṛtṛaḥ devasyā dlokam savītur-manamhe. (Rgv.VI.82.10cd).
252. aneho ātābhṛtṛaḥ aditya-ṣaṁvihāvā ṣaṁvihāvā yuvaṁ varām. (Rgv.VI.90.6ab).
254. avadhṛam jyotir-aditer-ṛtvṛdho devasyā ślokaṁ savītur-manamāhe. (Rgv.VI.82.10cd). cf. Rgv.I.11.23.15 where Brhaspati is asked to bestow a bright-hued treasure with power refulgent.
257. praśīgīrāḥ (Rgv.X.66.2).
258. cf. Rgv.VII.41.7-10; I.161.4.
259. Rgv.IX.129.163; X.190.2.
260. apīcyāḥ samudraḥ (Rgv.VII.14.118).
261. dharāṭi bhuvanaṇām (Rgv.VII.14.1.5).
262. *yasmin visvāmi kāvyā* (Rgv.VII.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.


269. op.cit. tome II.p.202

270. op.cit. tome III.p.144

271. cf. Rgv.II.11.265 where Indra releases the streams pent up by the dragon. cf. also Rgv.VII.78.4d "slay Vētra, win the light of heaven" (hano vrtram jaya svāḥ) and Rg.V.16.7.VI.20.2. Indra slays Vṛtra whilst Varuṇa guards the vratas. cf. Rgv.VII.83.9.

272. "śāmi kṛṣṭer-upamasya vavṛ Sense (Rgv.IV.42.1d)


274. They are mentioned in Athv.X.2.31.32.

275. smadabhīṣa (Rgv.VII.25.24)

276. "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- not into temptation'." (Ethics of India." 1924.p.43).

277. "ta bhūri paśe anṛtasya setū duratyeta ripave martyāya (Rgv.VI.65.3ab)

278. "The bonds of anrta are equipped with many nooses difficult for the false mortal to overcome."

279. pade pade paśīnāḥ santi setavā. (Rgv.IX.73.4d)

280. ud uttamaṃ varuṇa paśaṃ asmad avadhāmaṃ vi madhyamaṃ śrathāya athā vayam āditya vrataye tavanāgaso aditaya syāmsa. (Rgv.I.24.15)

281. "at eva asmad agne vi mumugdhi pāśā. (Rgv.IV.2.7ab)

282. ud uttamaṃ mumugdhī no vi paśaṃ madhyamaṃ cṛta avadhāmaṇi jīvase. (Rgv.I.25.21)

283. aavo dvābhukṣam para ekaya ... tisra aśvāḥ. (Rgv.X.67.4) J. Gonda ("Triads." 1976 p.16) gives no explanation to the meaning of these three.

284. ud uttamaṃ mumugdhī no vi paśaṃ madhyamaṃ cṛta avadhāmaṇi jīvase. (Rgv.I.25.21)

285. ud uttamaṃ varuṇa paśaṃ asmad avadhāmaṃ vi madhyamaṃ śrathāya athā vayam āditya vrataye tavanāgaso aditaye syāmsa. (Rgv.I.24.15)

286. ud uttamaṃ mumugdhī no vi paśaṃ madhyamaṃ cṛta avadhāmaṇi jīvase. (Rgv.I.25.21)


288. cf.Rgv.V.85.86.I.128.7

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 asmad agne vi mumugdhi pāśā. (Rgv.V.2.7.cd)

291. "varuṇasya vidvān. (Rgv.IV.1.4a)


294. cf.Rgv.V.2.7ab

295. sa nas trāsate varuṇasya dhūrter-maho devasya dhūrteḥ. (Rgv.I.128.7d)
296. *... somārudrāviha su mṛlataṁ naḥ
pra no muñcatam varuṇasya paśād gopāyatam naḥ suhanasāyamana. * (Rgv.VI.74.4bcd)

297. ahejamāno varuṇa īha bodhy-urūṣasā ma na āyuḥ pra moṣāḥ. * (Rgv.I.24.11cd)

298. yo mṛlayāti cakroṣe cid āgo vayāṁ syāma varuṇe anāgāḥ
anu vratany aditer-rdhantah ... * (Rgv.VI.87.7abc)

299. uta yo dyām ati sarpāt parastāna su muciātai varuṇasya rājñaḥ. * (Athv. IV.16.4)


301. cf. Rgv.II.28.5, 7, 9

302. Athv. XIX.44.8

303. acītīyat tava dharma yugopima ma na tasmād enaso deva rīṣiṣaḥ. * (Rgv.VII.89.5cd)

304. yac ca caste anītasya panti dhadyuresa, * (Rgv.I.25.321)

305. samrād dhantā vrtram varuṇaḥ pūrave kaḥ. * (Rgv.IV.21.10) "the mighty king, slayer of Vṛtra" (granted) man free scope!"

306. L. Renou explains nirṛtī as "a derivative in ti (thus bearing a priori some dynamic value which makes it appropriate for personification) from the root [va] (ar) pointing to a certain fixed order, a foreseen arrangement of time, cosmos, human or ritual activity ... With the prefix nis, nirṛtī will inversely signify disorder - the term denoting a factor of entropy."


308. cf. Rgv.VI.74.2 where Soma and Rudra are also asked to drive nirṛtī far away and Rgv.X.59.1-4, X.76.4.


310. Samārudrāviha su mṛlataṁ naḥ. * (Rgv.VI.74.4bcd)
526. mā duṣṭvadātā nirṛtir-na īṣāta (Ṛg. X. 36. 2c)
527. Ṛg. 1. 24. 9
528. kṛtam cid enaḥ pra mumugdhiḥ asmat (Ṛg. 1. 24. 9d)
529. R. Panikkar considers nirṛti as "the personification of dissolution, destruction, death, and also the abysmal abode of dissolution". ("The Vedic experience," 1977) p. 456-7. This is more strongly evident in post-Vedic literature, cf. Sat. Br. 5. 2. 33; 7. 2. 1. 3
530. op. cit. pp. 13-14
531. ya īm cakāra na so asya veda ya īm dadarśa hirug-in nu tasmāt
sa mātur-yonā pariväto antar-bahuprajā nirṛtim ā viveśa. (Ṛg. 1. 164. 32.)
533. cf. also Ṛg. X. 82. 7ab
534. cf. Ṛg. X. 5. 7 where Agni, first born of rta, both bull and cow, lies in Dakṣa's birthplace, in Aditi's lap.
535. tisro destraya nirṛtir-upāsate dīrghaśruto vi hi jānanti-vah nayaḥ
tāsām ni cikyuyā kavyaḥ niḍānaṁ paresu yā guhyesu vratēsu. (Ṛg. X. 114. 2)
536. cf. also iha...āyaṁ, this here as against asaṁ...amatra, that there.
538. uṭa kṣodanti rodaya mahītvā naṅṣante nākam nirṛtir-avamāyāt. (Ṛg. VII. 58. 1cd)
539. According to the Nīruktā this word is made up of two words meaning na aka, where there is no pain, heaven being the place of bliss.
540. In this respect it is interesting to note that Indra found for man the way to "fulfilment" (istaye) through conflict (yudha) (Ṛg. X. 49. 9).
541. 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 rta 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, 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 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 rta, 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."[2]

"All the gods worshipped in sacrifice the divine-life."[3]

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" (apās) par excellence - is a peculiar characteristic of the Vedic conception of the sacrifice, a characteristic which explains its intimate link with rta, 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, through and by means of which all creatures live.

Sacrifice, like rta, is intimately connected with the beginnings. In this respect R. Panikkar's dichotomy of the trend in human intuition concerning the origin of all into two possibilities explains the process of manifestation, as viewed by the rṣis, 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 nāsadīya 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."

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."
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.

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, 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."

"The spring was the melted butter,
the summer the fuel, the autumn the oblation."

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 Purusha, 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."

The Rgveda sums up this whole conception thus:

"All the gods worshipped in sacrifice the divine-life".

M. Winternitz evidences an incapacity to understand this original sacrifice in his comments on the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa concerning Prajāpati. He observes in
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, 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 yaj which means to 'worship', "pay honour to". It is an act of relatedness linking one level to another, making use of the concentration of mental power which "yokes" the mind to the object of worship. 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."

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.\textsuperscript{21}

"0 Agni, sacrifice with thy mouth to thine own self\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{23} 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.\textsuperscript{24}

A.B. Keith's speculative chapter on "The nature of the Vedic sacrifice",\textsuperscript{25} 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 Rgveda, namely the ritual as a mirror of the cosmic process,\textsuperscript{26} 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 samhitās of the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda" but

"is not precisely that which is contemplated by the hymns of the Rgveda".\textsuperscript{27}

The period that intervened between the sacrificial conception that one may gather from the Rgveda 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.\textsuperscript{28} To assess the significance of the Rgvedic 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 Rgvedic sacrifice, is certainly conducive to a wrong evaluation and to erroneous conclusions.

The Rgveda itself gives sufficient hints to afford us a glimpse into the essence of the Rgvedic sacrifice, especially in its relation to rta.
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." 129

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 30 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", 31 the ministering priest par excellence:

"With our homage rich in oblation, let us arouse that performer of the sacrifice by the path of ṛta." 32

"Reverencing with oblation In our spirit Agni Vaisvānara, the truth-bearer, the light-finder" 33

The mythical Ṛbhus are said to have "fashioned prayer for the sake of Agni", 34 that is, made the invocative word, brāhma, their prayer, worthy of Agni. And so, the poet goes on,

"let us also proclaim for Agni the great and glorious praise." 35

"All indeed partake of thy divinity as they keep, each in his own proper way, the eternal law." 36

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 ṛta both as the eternal order and the eternal rite, for ṛta here bears both meanings. 37

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" 38 which the poet has conceived and offers

"he brings to birth an inspired-thought within the heart as light." 39

So the poet clothes him with his thought (manmanā) as it were with a robe. 40 Similarly, to the partaking of Soma in the sacrifice, is attributed the
stimulation of spiritual insight (svadhā):

"Wisely have I taken my share of that honeyed oblation generous in spiritual insight".41

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-Varuga, I purify a flawless intuition whilst outpouring the Soma"42

proves that the manīśā 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 Vasistha's hymns to Varuna.43

"And now what has become of our friendship of old when we two kept unhindered company? O law-abiding Varuna, I went into thy mighty mansion, thy thousand-gated home."44

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.45

The worshippers' songs and homage, their visionary thoughts translated into hymns (dībbhiḥ), 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".47

With Indra they bring about "visionary contact"48 by means of their inspired thought (manīśā),49 to Agni they present

"a new and mightier vision; I bear my words and thought to the son of strength."50

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."51

Agni is enjoined to

"shine riches on us through our fine praise-songs".52

The action is reciprocal and is summed up in the sacrificial chariot travelling hither and thither like

"conquering chariots gaining wealth, giving aid".53
Hymns, visions and aspirations, rise upwards to the gods upon the flames of Agni, 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 yearned that he may enter the gods' assembly. When Agni, "the wise son of heaven," the "redeemer" (kīlbindōrt) is specifically asked to "bring the gods hither one by one (ṭdhak) for worship" 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..." 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," 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 brahmans" 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. The whole sacrificial ritual was conceived as a bringing together of gods and men 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.111.27) bears witness to this. Verse 6 states that the officiants "worshipping with true vision have prepared Agni for our aid" 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."
Of particular interest is the order of precedence: 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 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 \( (mātis) \) "within" (i.e., in the heart) follows, or "joins", the "gift of the cow", or ghee or milk-oblation. 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 exeges tried to fit the Rigveda.

The few passing references to animal immolation, specifically to Indra, may be indicative of certain animal sacrifices 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 Rigvedic sacrifices. This is borne out in every hymn addressed to Agni and Soma who are indeed the archetypal highpriests. The sacrificial action which consists in the lighting of the fire, the pouring of the ghee or ghee, the pressing of the Soma and its preparation with milk by means of which songs of praise and visions translated into hymns are offered up to the gods is the Vedic ritual par excellence.

The original idea, as implied in the Purusa sūkta, simply expressed the offering, by the gods, of the divine life, the purusa 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. The giving and the taking, that universal rhythm which is part of the vast becoming, rta, 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."

But of its intrinsic meaning he shows not the slightest inkling and refers to it as "the foolish sacrifice." 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 Upanisads, 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."^76

That which the Western scholar considers a mock business was deemed by the ancient rṣi 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 Upanisads. 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 Upanisads 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."^77

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 Rgveda is concerned, that, in the words of E.W. Hopkins

"the same presumptuous assumption that the gods depend on earthly sacrifice is often made",^78

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 Rgveda.^79

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."^80

The very fact that rta the cosmic order and yajña the sacrifice came to be equated in many passages of the Rgveda^81 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.  

"They established the _ṛta_; they maintained its vision", 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."  

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".  

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_".  

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. Roller, 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 _ṛṣis_ was to ensure the ordered functioning of the world and of religious ceremonial by reproducing the succession of cosmic events, the _ordo xerōm_, 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."

In contrast to nineteenth century contemptuous dismissal of the Brahmāṇas' 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."  

This applies perfectly to the Rāṣvedic 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.89 We are at last coming closer to the realisation that the rṣis had recognised through their vision, the interconnectedness of all things and had summed this up in the vision of the cosmic order, rta, expressed in their ritual.

J.M. Koller clarifies the relation between yajña and rta thus:

"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 rta. 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 ..."90

"Since the effect of yajña is maintenance of order, and rta is the highest order of reality, these concepts are closely related and are clearly normative."91

H. Lefever sums up the position thus:

"In the hymns of the Rgveda, the term rta 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."92

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 rta, 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 rhythmical course of nature."93

The yajña is compared to a web (tantu) woven by a hundred and one ministers.94 The ritual is a spinning, the web the fabric of the universe which man also spins,95 this being his contribution to the world process, from the sacrificial enclosure right to the vault of heaven.96 It is an "ancient" participation. Thus Agni is asked to spin out the "ancient thread" (tantum purvyam)97 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
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 Varuna's maṇḍa. Only the 'wise ones' who desired to attain that have reached it".98

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 Varuna's magic.99 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"100

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"101 resulting in the generation of the "great ones", are evoked.102 An invitation is then extended to the bards to commemorate and re-enact this ancient feat through the power of visioning.103 Through thus "setting their mind to contemplation"104 the seers "discovered"

"the primeval sacrificial formula that trickled down as a pathway-to-the gods".105

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"106 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.107 The verb ṛpañ "purify" is used with both the word yajña and ṛta as reflected in the sacrifice. Thus:

"By ṛta I purify heaven and earth"108

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." \(^{109}\)

And from that centre originates the amrta. \(^{110}\) 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 satyam 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 Rg. VI. 51 the poet praises the power (ugra) of homage (nāmas) 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 early 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 ..." \(^{112}\)

Prayers addressed to Agni show him as the purifying agent par excellence:

"Burn up our sin away," \(^{113}\)

"0 Agni, with thy flame outspread as a filter, purify this our prayer." \(^{114}\)

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." \(^{115}\) 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. \(^{116}\)

Soma the "father" is asked to

"purify us with (his) filter." \(^{117}\)

Three filters are said to be set within his heart. \(^{118}\) Each of these may apply to one of the three levels of human experience: physical, emotional, psycho-mental. \(^{119}\) 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" (r̥tavākona satyena)

"with tapas, with faith (śraddhāyā)." \(^{120}\)

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" 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." 121

In an invocation addressed to Vāyu Soma is stated to be pressed by men who have cleansed themselves from sin. 122 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) 123 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. 124 The dhiyā 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 dhiyā act as (be) expiation". 125

Visions-translated-into-songs thus do have a ritual function:

"Along the path of ṛta, from the sacred-work, speed forth the hymns to Indra-Agni." 126

According to the traditional order which has become the path of ṛta, 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" 127 is, in the next verse, proclaimed as "the divine embryo of the sacrifice that purifies resourcefulness". 128

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 ṛta 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."  

We shall see that by such paths the sages found

"that which had been hidden away as the supreme domain
of the sacrificial rite".  

IV.4 Examination of yajña = rta  

Examining rta in its connotation of ritual offering or sacrificial rite,  

we could turn first to J. Gonda's remarks in his study on dhāman;

"Another 'seat' or 'manifestation' of rta is the recurrent ritual,
for without contending that 'rta' and 'sacrifice' are
completely synonymous, which is denied by Lüders-Alsdorf
(Varuga 1951-59 p.478), who however were too much fascinated by
the belief that rta only means 'verbal truth' - the regular rites
were intelligibly enough regarded as representing the fundamental
principle of rta."  

V.A Gadgil in his article "Rta and the law of karma" holds that there
can be no difficulty in interpreting rta 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 rta occurs in the singular that European scholars
... interpret it generally as the universal law or order and very
rarely as a sacrificial act."  

L. Renou agrees that

"... in book IX ... rta does not signify anything more than rite,
function or manifestation of the sacred understood in a general way."  

H. Lefever fathoms the Vedic standpoint:

"If rta 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 rta".  

The word, however, is also used in other books of the Rgveda 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 rta".  

"By rta I purify both heaven and earth".  

"May this rta protect me for a hundred springs".  

"I sing to Heaven and Earth and offer (this) rta".  

"Come forth O golden-handed Savitr and pay heed to him in
the offering of the rta".
Agni, "eye and guardian of mighty rta" (order) is identified with Varuna

"When thou approachest the rta" (ritual)

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".

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 of the ancient vision abounds in the (norms of) the cosmic order. 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. 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"

and

"the sun illuminates by means of the song born of rta".

The ancient fathers thus "fostered the rta" as they "gained their bright inspiration whilst singing their praises".

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" 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".

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, the freeing of cattle from within the darkness by means of celestial speech whilst striving after the rta, the finding of the light and the pathway of rta and immortality.

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".
The meaning of the darkness to be overcome and the treasure awaiting discovery is indicated by the words "light", "immortality" and "heaven": 

"They made for us a way to lofty heaven". This way is the institution of the "rites of sacrificial worship" whereby all come together to pay homage to the gods and commune with them:

"Stating the rta, visioning aright ... they first thought out the forms of the sacrificial rite". 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 rta" (dadhann rtaṁ), they "stimulated its visioning", they "marked out the ancient unmeasured spheres".

"By means of rta, with the power of sacrifice, they upheld the all-supporting rta in the highest heaven". By means of the ordered, ritualistic expression of the universal oblation established on earth as a token of the heavenly rta 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".

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, 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 rta, 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 rta" evidences the rsi's aspiration towards the full accomplishment of the rta 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 rta is in verse 9 used in its dual meaning of law and sacrifice. The poet claims that he is "soliciting the rta regulated by the rta" 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)."

The image in the second pada — 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, rta — surely has a bearing upon the first pada: 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 rta 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 ethics of society. The cow could here personify the rta 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 rta. 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, nature thereby fructifies; so butter and milk, the essence of nature's gifts, are extracted from heaven. The soul-infused cloud (atman 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 rta 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".
Heaven and Earth themselves are asked to accomplish their task (prakrti) through the poet's new songs, in the matrix of rta. 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. Between these two also journeys the sun in accordance with the rhythm of the cosmos, i.e., established law. At the ritual level—the dramatised expression of the rta—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 rta of Mitra".

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. Thus is the great rta kept going.

"Serving the rta with the rta" also alludes to the means whereby the rta in its cosmic sense is best expressed by the rta 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".

A similar complex thought is voiced in the following:

"By rta is rta firmly fixed there where they unyoke Sūrya's horses." Thus by rta the law of harmony, as it is in heaven at the transcendental level, is rta its reflection both in the ethical and ritualistic domain of men's endeavours, firmly established.
Chapter IV: Section IV, 1, 2, 3, 4.

1. C. A. C. Bose, "The call of the Vedas," 1970, p. 49. "... Rita is right 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. yajñaṇa yajñam ayajanta devās tānī dharmāṇi prathamāṇī āsan. (Rg. X. 90, 16a)

3. devā devam ayajanta viśve. (Rg. X. 130, 3d) cf. Rg. X. 81, 566.

4. Rg. X. 90, 8-14.


6. Rg. X. 90, 8-14.

7. tapasas tan mahīnā ayāyata ekam. (Rg. X. 129, 3d)


cf. Alt., Br. II, 13, where the gods are said to have conquered heaven by means of the sacrifice, austeries, 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.

See p. 65 for this meaning and cf. Rg. X. 51, 8

9. Rg. X. 90, 4

10. Rg. X. 90, 5

11. Rg. 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 viśve. (Rg. 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.


16. Rg. IX, 67, 22 where Soma is pressed for the ritual and is asked to "purify us with his filter" (pavītreṇa... punātū naḥ). cf. Rg. I, 133, 1a ("With ṛta I purify both Heaven and Earth"). In Rg. IV, 12, 4 Agni the priest of the sacrifice is invoked and asked to "make us sinless in the sight of Aditi!"

17. Rg. VI, 11, 4b where Agni is invoked to "pay honour to both wide worlds" (agnie yājasva rodasī urucī), he whom as "the divine-priest, oblation-receiver... the five races anoint with their homage" (āyum na yam nāmasā rātahavyā anjanti... pañcajanāḥ) Rg. VI, 11, 4cd. The terms commonly used for the sacrifice are: yajñā (yga to worship) havis (vī to pour out) adhvara (adhvan the way).

18. (yuj yielding yoga.)


"The proper sphere of sacrifice is the sphere of communication, and communication constitutes the very structure of the universe." (p. 357).

"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).


"... the Brahmanas cannot become adequate guides for the Vedic ritual viz. the chronological gap that separates the two and the possibility of the consequent changes in the ritual performances." (p. 7).

Nevertheless the Sat. Br. and the Alt. 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" (prajapatir-ātmanah pratītam asrjata ya da yajñam) (Sat. Br. 11.11.8.3) "The sacrificer is indeed the sacrifice" (yajamano vai yajñah) (Alt. Br. 1.28) cf. Rg. V.81.6 "O all-creator, exalted by the sacrifice offer up for thyself both Heaven and Earth."

op. cit. p. 252.


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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").


cf. Rg. V. 1.7.7c

namasa rātahavya (Rg. V. 1.7.7c)

tam yajñasadham api vatayamasi ātasya pathā hamsā havigmatā. (Rg. V. 1.28.2ab.). cf. Rg. V. 51.1 where the sacrifice is stated to be a means to freedom and sinlessness.

vaśvānaram manasa agnim nicāyēśa havigmanto anuṣatayam svarvīdam. (Rg. II. 26.1ab.) cf. Rg. II. 35.12ab.; I.93.6.

agnaye brāhma ṛṣhayā sltakaḥṣu. (Rg. V. 80.7a)

agnim mahām avocāma svyektaṁ. (Rg. V. 80.7b)

bhajanta viśve devatām nāma tām sapanto amṛtam evaiṁ. (Rg. I. 68.2cd)

cf. also the use of the word cetana in connection with Agni and the sacrifice (Rg. I. 3.8; II. 5.1; I.170.4; VII. 13.18.

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 Ubhi pavitram-apupod hi arkam. (Rgv.I.11.26.8b)
39 hrda matim jyotir-anu prajanan. (Rgv.I.11.26.8a)
40 cf.Rgv.I.1.140.1c.
41 svadob-abhaksi vayasaḥ summedhaḥ svaadhya varivottarsasya. (Rgv.VII.48.1ab)
42 punge vam arakṣasam manisam somam indraya varunāya juhvat. (Rgv.VII.85.1ab)
43 cf.Rgv.VII.86,87,88
44 kva tyāni nau sakhyā babhūyuh sacāvahye yad avrkam purā cit
bhantam mānām Varuṇa svadhāvah sahasradvāraṃ jagama γṛham te. (Rgv.VII.88,5)
45 cf.Rgv.X.101.2
46 cf.Rgv.V.25.4;VIII.96.5d.
47 ebhir-no arkarbhavā no arvāho svarpa jyotिः (Rgv.IV.10.3b) The song
of praise is like a milk cow that never fails. It draws the milk
of heaven. (cf.Rgv.VII.27.11).
48 J. Gonda’s expression, “Vision.” p.203
49 didhāyo manisā. (Rgv.II.20.61c)
50 pra tavāyām navrayām dhītim agne vāco matīṣḥ sasahāḥ śunāve bhare. (Rgv.I.143.1ab)
51 ṛāya ese ‘vase daddheta dhīp. (Rgv.V.41.5b)
52 ṛāyo didhī naḥ suryabhīh. (Rgv.V.25.33d)
53 saukṛta cha ṛtāḥ akṣataḥ prajayanto ratkā īva. (Rgv.VIII.3.15bd)
54 cf.Rgv.I.423.6;I.143.4.
55 cf.Rgv.I.38.1cd;VIII.84.5685.5.
56 gṛhdag devāṁ iha yajā. (Rgv.I.11.25.1d)
57 op.cit.p.274.
58 tam tvā vayam dama ā dīdvānsam upa jñubādho namasa sadema. (Rgv.VI.1.68)
59 cf.also Rgv.I.110.6.
60 hrda taṭyese manaso javegu yad brāhmaṇāḥ samyaṇantre sakhyāḥ. (Rgv.X.71.8ab).
61 The question of the heart will be taken up again at the end of this chapter. cf.Rgv.I.93.8
62 cf.Rgv.X.191.
63 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.
64 itthā dhiyā yajñavantāḥ ā cakrur-agnim āgamīr ātaye. (Rgv.II.17.27.6) cf.Rgv.V.1.7
65 sūktavānam prathamam ād id āgnim ād id havir-ajuanayanta devāḥ. (Rgv.X.88.8ab)
66 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.
67 cf. devattam brahma gāyata. (Rgv.VIII.32.27). “Sing forth the god-
given prayer”.
68 antar-maṇiś-carati nṛṣidham goḥ. (Rgv.I.55.8c)
69 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.
70 H. Oldenberg’s survey of animal sacrifices in the Rgveda is rather
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.Reinou.
"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 hymn 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... 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.111.28;11.2.1. etc.
71 cf. RgV.1.36.11;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


74 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 Brâhmâṇas. F. Kittel ("A tract on sacrifice," Mangalore, 1872) quotes from the Sat. Br. to prove his point: that human sacrifices were current: "man is indeed the first of the sacrificial victims" (Sat. Br., 6.2.118) 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 Sat. Br.: "This which is sacrificed is the soul of all beings and of all gods." (Sat. Br., 14.3.2.1) a quotation which confirms our main contention that the purusa 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 (pratima) (Sankhayana Brâu-tra Sutrâ X.3;XI.8), and "the animal is ultimately the sacrificer himself" (Ait. Br.12.11) cf. Tait. S., VI.11.16. Sat. Br. 3.3.4.21.

75 cf. K.R. Potdar. "Sacrifice in the Rgveda." 1953 pp.96-122 where the gods, are clearly stated to be instrumental in the success of the sacrifice. The sacrifice is said in RgV.XII.18.19. to be the Adityas' "inner monitor": yajña hîlo vo antara”, for men are of the same race as the gods (sañâtya).

77 op.cit.p.76.
78 "The religions of India." 1895.p.149.
79 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 Brâhmâṇa period, but not to the Rgveda.

80 "Theories of sacrifice as applied to the Rgveda." (ASU, vol.16,1896. p.cxxxix.)

81 cf. RgV.1.133.1ab."With r̥ta I purify both earth and heaven" (ubhe punāmi rodasi r̥tana) where r̥ta is the sacrificial rite as well as the harmony mirrored therein. The same meaning applies to RgV.V.59.1: "I offer the r̥ta to Heaven and Earth" (dive pra prthivyā r̥tam bhare). cf. RgV.VII.21.5d: "Let not the phallic worshippers enter our r̥ta" (mā śiśnadēvā api gur-r̥tam naḥ) where r̥ta is the sacrificial enclosure. cf. RgV.VII.38.2b and 59.16 where the r̥ta is "offered" (r̥br̥ta-vr̥tá-sya r̥tam bhare). cf. RgV.VII.101.6c. "may this r̥ta protect me"; cf. RgV.X.67.2: "praising r̥ta; thinking aright... the Angirasas... first thought out the institution of the sacrifice" (r̥tam sāmsanta r̥ju dīdhyānā... yajñasya dhāma prathama mananta...)
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 ρ6.5.2.22 explicitly based on an identity." p.57)

dadhanm rtam dhanayann asya dhItim (RgV.1.71.3a)


"The Vedica idea of sin." 1935. p.2-3


RgV.X.130.1.

pumān enam tanute. (RgV.1.103.2a) "the man extends it".

vi tatne adhi nāke asmin. (RgV.1.103.2b) "even to yonder vault has he outstretched it."

RgV.1.142.1.

ṛṣtasya tantur-vitataḥ pavitra ā jihvāyā agne varūpasya māyāyā dhīrās cit tat sam inakṣanta ātātra kartam ava padāty-aprabhavā. (RgV.5.

cf. the Christian transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord.


asā ukthāya,

cf. RgV.V.45.3,

tād dhīyam kṛpayāma. (RgV.V.45.6ab) "Let us perform the dhīyā".

manasā didhyānā,

te avindan manasā didhyānā yajuh skannam prathamam devayānam. (RgV.X.181.3ab)

dadhanm rtam dhanayann asya dhItim. (RgV.1.71.3a)

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.

ubhe puńāmī rodasi ṛtena. (RgV.1.133.1a)

aṅkarepa prati mima-etāṃ ṛtasya nābhaḥ adhi sam puńāmi. (RgV.X.13.3cd)


RgV.IX.74.4b.

cf. RgV.X.170.2; 85.1

... sukum hinomy-adhvarāḥ sukibhyāḥ / ṛtena satyam ṛtasāpa āyam ...

(RgV.VII.56.12)

Jj3 apa naḥ śosucad aghan. (RgV.1.97.1a).

yata te pavitraṃ arciṣya-agne-vitattam antar ā brahma tena puńiḥ naḥ. (RgV.IX.67.23abc) cf. RgV.VI.11.2.

yad didayad divi. (RgV.VI.16.36c)

cf. also RgV.I.44.10; 68.10; 72.1; VI.22.3; VII.43.32; 46.8; IX.106.4; 107.21.
117 pavitrena ... sa punātu naḥ. (Rgv. IX.67,22a,b)
118 trī sa pavitrā bṛdy 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. IX.26,8.
120 rōvākena satyena śāṛdhāya tapasā suta. (Rgv. IX.113,2c) see also p.173-4.
121 cf. Rgv. IX.67,2. This aspect will be taken up in the last section of this chapter.
122 granthīṁ na vi śya grathītaṁ punāṇā ātmam na gātum vṛjīnam ca soma. (Rgv. IX.57,18, ab.) (Griffith's trans.)
123 cf. Rgv. IX.111,2 where Soma is said to be adored by the "mothers" who seem to be the dhiyās.
124 devān vya-cakrāma kac-oṣṭā ṣaḥkāyaṁ vā sadām āj-jās patiṁ vā īyām dhir-bhūyā avayānam eṣām. (Rgv. I.185,8abc).
125 ināṇīṁ apasas pary-upa pra yanti dhiyāyāḥ ṛtasya pathyāḥ anu. (Rgv. IX.112,7) cf. rtād īyāmi te dhiyām manovijayam. (Rgv. VII.13,26b). "From [the seat of] rta I send thee a mind-yoked dhiyā."
126 ṛyām te rōvīvāvāte dhiyir-eti naviyasi saparāṁtyā purūrīyā mimita it. (Rgv. X.12,10) "This new visionary-hymn, worthy of attention and dear to many I measure out in its own-proper time."
127 garbhō yajñāsya devayaḥ kramāḥ punāta. (Rgv. VIII.12,11)
128 tantum tavan rajas bhānam anu īḥ yotismatāḥ patho rakṣa dhiyāḥ kṛtān. (Rgv. X.11,12.11)
131 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935,p.3
133 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935,p.3
134 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935,p.3
135 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935,p.3
136 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935,p.3
137 ma śīśnadevā api guṇ-ṛtām naḥ. (Rgv. VII.11,21,5d)
138 ubhe punāṁ rodasā ṛtana. (Rgv. I.133,1a)
139 tan ma ṛtām pātu sāta sāradāya. (Rgv. VII.10,16c)
140 arcā dive pra prthivyā ṛtām bhare. (Rgv. V.59,1b) cf. also Rgv. VII.38,2; V.21,4; III.12,7. 141 ud u tiṣṭha savitah śrūdyasya hiranyapāpe prabhṛtāu ṛtasya. (Rgv. VIII.12,11)
142 yad ṛtasya vṛṣi. (Rgv. VIII.12,11)
143 ṛtām dive tad avocat prthivyā abhiśāvayā prathamam sumedhāḥ. (Rgv. I.185,10ab)
144 naviyasya gṛtām.
145 dhiyāṃ pratnām.
146 ṛtasya pipyutām. This is the vision, abounding in rta, which the worshipper offers to Indra. (Rgv. VII.95,5)
147 cf. Rgv. X.31,11.
148 ṛtasya hi saddasoc dhītin-advaya. (Rgv. X.111,2a)
149 śūcoca sūrya ṛtajñātāḥ gṛtā. (Rgv. X.138,2d)
150 ṛtām āṣauṣāṇāḥ / svacid id-ayan didhitim ukthāśāsāḥ. (Rgv. IV.2,16bc).
151 yajñenā daśaṅgāḥ samaktā. (Rgv. X.62,1a) J. Gonda defines daśaṅgā thus: "A daśaṅgā which is often incorrectly translated by 'fee' or 'salary' is a gift which being presented to the officiating priests and other brahmans, establishes ... a bond between giver and recipient; which produces rich returns for the giver and establishes a generative alliance between both parties concerned." "Vision."
152 ye rtenā sūryām a arohayan divī. (Rgv. X.62,3a)
153 cf. dadh vãoṣo adrim. (RgV. IV. 1.13)
154 cf. RgV. IV. 1.13-18; III. 31.569.
155 cf. rta am ōṣuṣaṇāḥ. (RgV. IV. 1.13)
156 cf. vidanta jyotiṣī. (RgV. IV. 1.14)
157 viśvām avindanaṁ pathyām rtaṁ. (RgV. III. 31.5) "they found the whole
pathway of rta". cf. RgV. IV. 3.11.
158 arkaṁ kṛṣṇānāṁ amṛtaṁvāya gātum. (RgV. III. 31.9) "Fashioning with
their flashing songs a path to immortality."
159 divas putrāḥ ṃbhaveṁ adrim rujema dhanināṁ sucantaṁ. (RgV. IV. 2.15cd).
   cf. RgV. I. 109.3.
160 jyotiṣī. (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
   treasuries of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places".
163 cakrus dvāravāhito gātum asme. (RgV. I. 71.2c)
164 yajñasya dhāma.
165 rtaṁ saṃsantā jye dīdhyaṇāḥ yajñasya dhāma prathamaṁ manantaṁ.
   (RgV. X. 67.2a, d)
166 dadhanāṁ rtaṁ dhanayann asya dhṛtim. (RgV. I. 71.3). J. Gonda ("Vision")
   explains this verse thus: They established a special manifestation
   of rta and made ... the intuitive and visionary 'sight' of It an
   institution" (p.174).
167 purvā dhāmānya-amānāṁ māmāṁ. (RgV. X. 56.5b) dhāma would here be the
   institution of the rite.
168 rtena rtaṁ dharanāṁ dharāyanta yajñasya sāke parame vyōman.
   (RgV. V. 15.2ab). cf. the prayer to the Bbhus, RgV. IV. 37.7.
169 avindanaṁ te atiḥitaṁ yad āṣaṇa yajñasya dhāma paramaṁ guhā. (RgV. X. 181.2ab).
170 This will be explained in the section on Soma.
171 suyāma id rtaṁyā ṃrtaḥ. (RgV. VIII. 19.35cd)
172 rtena rtaṁ niyātāṁ ṛīle ā gor-āmā sacā madhumat pakvam agne.
   (RgV. I. 71.9ab).
173 ātmanvāḥ nabhā duḥyate gṛtam paya rtaṁyā naḥbir-ārtaṁ vi śāyate.
   (RgV. I. X. 74.4ab)
174 cf. RgV. I. X. 86.14c
175 rtaṁyā dhṛnti parame duḥaste. (RgV. IV. 23.10d)
176 pra pūrvajāḥ pitarāḥ navagisāḥhīr-girbhirāḥ kṛṣṇāvam sadāne rtaṁyā.
   (RgV. VI. 53.2ab)
177 dve sruti āsātvām pitṛnāṁ ahāṁ devānāṁ utaṁ mārgyānāṁ tābhāyām
   idām viśvāṁ ejat sam eti yad antarār pitarām māṭaram ca. (RgV. X. 88.15).
178 antarāryate devo devi dharmāṇāḥ sūryaḥ sūciṣāḥ. (RgV. I. 160.1d) "Between
   these goddesses the godly, effulgent Sūrya travels in accordance with
   the statute."
179 mitrasya sādhathās ... rtaṁ pari yajñāṁ ni sēdatuḥ. (RgV. IV. 56.7)
180 cf. RgV. I. 139.1; VIII. 32.16.
181 rtaṁ rtena sapantā. (RgV. V. 68.4a)
182 bṛhatāṁ gartam āśate. (RgV. V. 68.5c)
183 rtena rtaṁ apihitam dhṛtvam vāṁ sūryasya yatra vimucanty-āśvān.
   (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 rta.

In respect to Soma two points of importance will be examined:

1. Soma as the knower and the inspired-and-inspirer (kaviḥ) and Soma as the essence of the rta.

Born in the womb of rta 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 rta in its deepest sense.

Soma is asked, as "king and as god"
"to accomplish the lofty rta".
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 rta".
He flows in accordance with that circuit of "true orderly process" in which is mirrored the great rta. Compared to a "stallion" (vṛsan) "following the vrata of the stallion, thou, O stallion, hast established the statues" and as "lord of the dharman" i.e. of the maintenance of the rta in all its senses
"he journeys along the paths of rta".
"knowing the course of the sacrifice".

The expression "womb of rta" (ṛtasya yoni), "seat of rta" (ṛtasya pāda) - elsewhere sadas and sadana 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 rta the seers keep watch over their intuitive insights, luminous-as-heaven and bright-like-lightning."
"Inspirations hasten towards the Soma... even like billowy waters."
"Men urge Soma forth to the sacrifice with all-expressive vision". 

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". 

Soma's drops, described as "causing inspiration" (vipāsōcitah) through inspiration have attained to visions. 

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" according to "primeval plan" as R.T.H. Griffith translates, 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 rta" (garbhō rtasya) born in the rta, i.e. in accordance with the course of immemorial practices, engenders the rta 17 and grows mighty by rta and is identified with the "mighty rta" in both its ritual and cosmic sense:

"He, born in rta, waxing strong by rta, king, god and mighty rta."

"Swiftly he flows as the vast law to the purifying sieve." 

That Soma the "inspirer", or divine-poet (kaviṣṭa) 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 rta beyond the twins". 

Is Soma generated by thought? Elsewhere (Ṛg.1.46.8) the Soma drops are said to be prepared by means of dhīya, the visionary insight of the poet. Are these "drops" a technical term referring to the culminating point of an experience preluded by the dhīya, 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 Ṛg.1.68.5 (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".
When "purified" (punāna) Soma, the "arouser" (upavaktā)
"unseals the intuitive-perception of the priest".22

The mental activity which generates him seems linked to dhītih or
visioning, since the visions of ētā are seemingly considered his "mothers":
"Thou, together with thy mothers adornest thyself in
thy home, with visions of ētā, in thy home."23

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 ētā. 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 ēśī. Hence
he is the "treasure-granter" (ratnadā), seated "in the womb of ētā"24 very
"soul of the sacrifice"25, very core of the worship.

For such reason Soma is proclaimed the "lord" of the poet's "vision"26,
the "lord of unalloyed speech"27, the "truly inspired one".28 Since he makes
the vision of ētā perceptible he is ēśīsad:

"He flows, king of all celestial seers, roaring forth.
the vision of ētā, surpassing the ēśī."29

This supreme "vision of cosmic order" coming to the ēśī through Soma in
the ritual is a transcendental experience that surpasses the ordinary mental faculties.
Visioning and singing are the essential qualifications of the ēśī; these are
enhanced by Soma, the ecstasy-granter, who

"releases the mind-yoked vision even as the
thunder releases the rain."30

The whole ritual is implied as helping to bring to consciousness that which is
deeply buried in the ēśī. This is the

"glory for which Soma is born"31
that he should

"give glory and vigour to the singers (who)
donning (his) glory have reached Immortality."32

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.33

Since Soma gives eloquence to the poet, he is the "tongue of the ētā"34
as that eloquence expresses itself through man:

"As the tongue of the ētā, the speaker, undeceivable lord
of this vision, purifies the cherished meath."35

He is chosen to proclaim the ētā:

"Knowing the ētā, he foremost, wisest, celestial lord,
was indeed chosen to proclaim it."36

"Declaring the ētā, exalted by the ētā, speaking the truth,
acting the truth, declaring faith"37
Through the impact of inspiration and visioning the seer bursts into eloquence. And this eloquence serves to exalt the rta: 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 rta, 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 (ṛtvākena), with truth (satyena) with faith and contemplative exertion (tapas) is (Soma) pressed".38

It may be that the true Soma, that which grants illumination, that which only the Brahmans know 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 Brahmaṇaspati, the Lord of prayer (brahman), of that power of the utterance and invocation which blends appeal and command:

"Outspread is thy purifying filter, O Brahmaṇaspati;".40

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".41

This verse, translated in accordance with L. Renou's comments 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 rta.

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 rta, the intuitive perception [manifesting]brahma."43

The "conveyor of the vision of rta" declares the function of Sōma, the opener of the inner eye to the perception of the cosmic order. The fact that brahmāṇā maniṣam is juxtaposed to the "vision of rta" 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."

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, 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.

The whole purpose of the sacrificial ritual is here set forth; hence the identification of rta with yajñā. As 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."

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 habitats, 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 rsis, hence his dhāma, his sphere or domain of action. For his threefold estate and even a fourth one 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 (mahāsā) strives after his third estate."

"The mighty one declares his fourth estate."

The desiderative form of wish to gain, might imply that his third sphere 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 rsis' search for the divine word during their act of worship:

"They tracked down the path of vāc by means of the sacrificial rite."

The act of worship, yajñā, opens up the realm of sound, vāc, the rsis following the path to vāc. The verse adds that they discovered her "abiding" (pravīśtām) among the rsis (ṛṣīs), 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".\textsuperscript{54}

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 rsi Dhṛghatamas mentions that only when visited by the "first-born of order"\textsuperscript{55} 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.\textsuperscript{56}

The rsis 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 ārka is a ray, flash of lightning as well as a hymn and praise. "Sing forth a prayer"\textsuperscript{57} may as well be rendered by "shine forth a prayer"). Songs "glow with the force of fire".\textsuperscript{58}

"By the currents of rta"\textsuperscript{59}, the bards and their concealed visions proceed to glow (śocanta)\textsuperscript{60}. "Light-winning", or "heaven-possessing" (śvarsa) is a characteristic of the thought or song or eulogy. Agni is invoked for brahma\textsuperscript{61} that the latter "may shine in heaven".\textsuperscript{62} 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 rsi, was described as sunlight or celestial light. "Visions vie for the sunlight as people".\textsuperscript{63}

The rsis' 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"\textsuperscript{64} wins him the title of "lord of mind"\textsuperscript{65} and "all-knomer", the far-seeing, wise one,\textsuperscript{66} 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".\textsuperscript{68} The reference to "bright eyes"\textsuperscript{69} is characteristic of Soma whose drops arouse, or bestow, an intuitive perception (manīṣa)\textsuperscript{70} which as abhitih or visionary insight is said to "shine from the seat of rta".\textsuperscript{71}

Soma's drops are manīṣinah, i.e. they incite to wise perception, they find celestial light (śvarvidah)\textsuperscript{72} for the seer.

"Seated in the womb of rta he perceives by means of heaven's light",\textsuperscript{73} and as the "inspirer, he illumines the bright sphere of heaven".\textsuperscript{74} Through the effect of Soma the rsi is enabled to penetrate or see "heaven"
which otherwise remains obscure to his ordinary perception.

"Far-sighted, brightly-he-shines"75

"thousand-eyed"76 hence his eyes, by implication, grant illumination in the seer, make him "sun-eyed".77 In a state of heightened awareness the Vedic bards admitted to beholding the "golden one"78 not with visionary thoughts or mental insight,79 but with the "very eyes of Soma (our) very eyes".80

The close link between Soma and the all-seeing sun, the "overlord of sights"81 as the Atharvaveda qualifies Sūrya who, in the Rgveda, is called the "wide-visioned one" (uzucaksas),82 is a pointer to Soma's illuminating action in man. He is said to "generate the sun",83 to "place the eye with the sun",84 that is, to illumine human consciousness, to "produce" Sūrya "midst mortals for maintenance of the law and for prized immortality."85 This, together with such statements as

"Having received from my father the vision of rta, I was born even a sun"86

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,87 Soma mounting up with Sūrya to the sky,88 Soma making Sūrya ascend the heavens89, Soma shining by means of the sun,90 Soma "donning the rays of Sūrya",91 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 rta".92 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 (uttaman): "Right to the heights have they reached out, to the ultimate spun-out warp".93 The action of the ritual is often compared to a thread spinning out a web,94
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 being spun in the "sieve", this being made possible through the magic power of Varuna. Thus the action of men and gods is closely interlinked; man sets the warp 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". To this verse R.T.K. 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".

This is quite in keeping with the rSis looking back to a golden age of seership whose continuity does not seem to have been broken.

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, 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"

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 rtasya), like Agni, "cleaver of the heaven" (rajasturam), true "centre of earth" and "support of mighty heaven". In connecting both, Soma is equivalent to Agni who, too, is both head of heaven and centre of earth.

From the "central point" (nabhā) of the ritual, works Soma "receiving us in the centre".

The word nabhī elsewhere qualified by prthivi 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-solution. 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".
He is present both in the terrestrial and in the spiritual (mountain or height), uniting them, enlightening the earthly. This central point 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 rṣi 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".

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 (pāra) 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 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".

Through him man enters into a dimension out of all relation to our space-time world, a state of illumination which the rṣis 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 (tva 'in the') the celestial catalyst, the 'primeval sacrificers' placed their vision', as we have seen, "effecting union and release for our
The juxtaposition of the two actions which one may consider as opposite, union and release, is also worthy of special notice. 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 rṣi's entering into, or merging with that loftier state of illumined consciousness that enabled him to "see the gods" 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 unfailing fountain-spring as beverage for man!"

This unfailing 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 unfailing 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."

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."

Soma is not only the "mighty rta, 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 rta that would otherwise be lost to us: the amṛta

"secretly hidden away as the supreme domain of the sacrificial rite!"

"originates from the navel of rta."

Sacrifice is rta as it establishes the balance between the great inflow and outflow of life, the ingoing and outgoing pulsation of all. The very centre of rta is the essence of harmony 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 \( \text{rta} \), 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 \( \text{rta} \) is essential being (\( \text{sat} \)).

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 \( \text{rta} \), such action being couched again and again in mythological language. 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". 126

"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 praise of prosperity. We have made acquaintance with the immortals". 127

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 \( \text{rsis} \) may have known far more than their hints give us to understand, and to reiterate that this action is visualised by the \( \text{rsis} \) 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 \( \text{svar} \), 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 \( \text{rta} \), 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 \( \text{rsis} \) attached to their ritual.
NOTES

1 A kavih 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 samudram pavanam urmipā rājā devā rtaṃ buddhat
drāgān mītrasya varupaṣya dharmā pavānā prā hinvānā rtaṃ buddhat. (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-Varuna's decree may he foster the mighty rta."

3 devān rtaṃ buddhaḥ. (Rgv. IX. 42.5)

4 satye vīdharmān. (Rgv. IX. 109.6)

5 vṛṣa-vratarā Ṛṣa dharmāṇi dādhīge. (Rgv. IX. 64.1bc)

6 dharmāpas paṭiḥ. (Rgv. IX. 35.6)

7 cf. "for maintenance of the 'law" (dharmann rtaṃya)

8 ṛtaṃya yati paṭhibhiḥ. (Rgv. IX. 86.33). cf. Rgv. IX. 97.32; 22.4

9 vidānā asā 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 svaryān maniṣām ṛtaṃya pade kavayo ni pānti. (Rgv. X. 177.2cd)

12 āpāṃ iva id uṃmayas ... pra maniṣā ṛtate somam acoha. (Rgv. IX. 95.3ab)

13 ... sāhī naraḥ somam viśvāya ṛṣiāya ṛtaṃya hinvantī ... (Rgv. IX. 12.7)

14 samudrāṇāṃ āsaśa hotāraḥ saśa jāmāḥ padam aksyaḥ pīrataḥ. (Rgv. IX. 10.7)

15 viṇā viṇānaṣur dhiyāḥ. (Rgv. IX. 22.3c)

16 devo devebhyaḥ. (Rgv. IX. 42.2)

17 Rgv. IX. 66.24.

18 ṛtena ya ṛtajāto viṇā ṛtah rājā devā ṛtaṃ buddhat. (Rgv. IX. 108.8cd)

19 pari soma ṛtaṃ buddhad āsūḥ pavitre arṣatī. (Rgv. IX. 56.1ab)

20 saṃ dākṣena manasa jāgate kavi-rṛtasya garbho nihito yamā paraḥ. (Rgv. IX. 68.25)

21 āyam me pīta ud iṣṭarti vṛcram ayaṃ maniṣām uṣṭām aṣṭam. (Rgv. VI. 47.3. ab)

22 hotuḥ punāha indo viṇā maniṣāṃ. (Rgv. IX. 95.5b). cf. J. Gonda's comment on maniṣā: "... like dhīṃ maniṣāś is also the thought converted into a hymn or eulogy addressed or offered to a god." ("Vision." p. 52).

23 ... sam mātrāḥ-marjayasi sa va dāma ṛtasya dhītibhir-dama. (Rgv. IX. 111.2b)

24 ā ratnadhā yonim ṛtasya sīdasi. (Rgv. IX. 107.4c)

25 āmā yajhāt̄a. (Rgv. IX. 6.8a)

26 paṭiḥ-dhiyāḥ. (Rgv. IX. 75.2). cf. Rgv. IX. 99.6

27 paṭim vāco aṇābhyaṃ. (Rgv. IX. 26.4c)

28 ṛtaḥ kavih. (Rgv. IX. 62.3)

29 viśvasya rājā pavate svaravā ṛtasya dhītim ṛṣīgaḥ avīvasat. (Rgv. IX. 76.4ab)

30 tvam dihyam manovyajam sṛja ṛṣīthin na tanyatūḥ. (Rgv. IX. 100.3ab)

31 śriye jātaḥ. (Rgv. IX. 94.4a)

32 śriyam vaiyo jātrīḥbhoyo dāhātī śriyam vasāṇā arāṭvatvam āyan. (Rgv. IX. 94.4bc)

33 cf. Rgv. IX. 139.2

34 Rgv. IX. 75.2; as well as of the gods cf. Rgv. IV. 58.1 (jīhva devāṃām).

35 ṛtasya jīhva pavate madhu priyam vaktā paṭiḥ-dhiyāḥ asya aṇābhyaḥ. (Rgv. IX. 75.2)

36 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.).
jānann rtam prathamām yat svarṇaram prasastaye kam vṛṣṭa sukṛatuh.
(Rgv. IX.70.6.)

ṛtam vadann ātadyumma satyaṁ vadant satya karman ērddhām vadant.
(Rgv. IX.113.4.)

ṛtavākena satyaṁ ērddhāyā tapasa ātata, (Rgv. IX.113.2)

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 one born can taste of thee,"(4)
Pavitraṁ te vitātām brahmānapate, (Rgv. IX.83.1a)

dūtaṁ na pūrvaciṣṭaye ā śasate maniśināh. (Rgv. IX.99.5cd)

E.V. IX.53: VII. p.18.

tisro vāca śrayati pra vahniṁ-ṛtasya dhātinī brahmāno maniśam. (Rgv. IX.97.34ab). Translated in accordance with J. Gonda's comments ("Vision," p.52).

vidad gātum brahmāṇe pūyamānaḥ, (Rgv. IX.96.10d) cf. Agni Rgv. VII.13.3c. "Vision." p.178, cf.also p.74 of the same work: "It may ... be contended that the qualification 'lord of dhī,' was given to Soma to characterise this divine power as being able or willing to dispense visions."

op.citip.178
cf. Rgv. IX.111.2

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 Manjukya Upaniṣad.

ṛṣimana ye ṣrīṅkat sāhasraśatkaḥ padavāṁ kavanām

ṛṣayām dhāma mahāgaṇaṁ śīśasat ... (Rgv. IX.96.18) cf. Rgv. IX.73.8b the three purifiers set in Soma’s heart: tīṣa a pavitra ṛṣi antar ā dadhe

turīyaṁ dhāma mahāgaṇaṁ vivakti. (Rgv. IX.96.19.d) and (Rgv. IX.75.3).

cf. yajñasya dhāma paramam, (Rgv. X.181.2b). The words ‘dhāma paramam’ could also be translated as "highest attainment".

yajñena vācaḥ padavāṁ āyaṇ. (Rgv. X.71.3ab)
cf. R. Panikkar. "The Vedic experience." 1977. "The word is not only speech, though constitutionally 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).

tām āhātya vipaddhah purutēṣa. (Rgv. X.71.3c)

prathamaṁ ṛtasya, (Rgv. I.164.37c)

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. Sat. Br. I.1.13.16.

Taittirīya Up. 1.5.1-5 and Maitrī Up. VI.6.
arca brahma. (Rgv. V.85.1)

agnitapobhir-arkaṁ. (Rgv. X.68.6.)

ṛtasya dāharpaya. (Rgv. VIII.16.8)

Rgv. VIII.16.8.

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.)

cf. "Bring fruitful prayer ... '0 Agni, that it may shine in heaven' brahma prayāvad bharā ... agna yad dīrdayad divi. (Rgv. VI.16.36).

sparadhante dhīyaṁ surga na viśāp. (Rgv. I.X.94.1b).

hinnavan ṛtasya dīrhitim pra adhvare. (Rgv. IX.102.1b&8c)

manasas patiḥ. (Rgv. IX.11.828)

viśvavid (Rgv. IX.28.1)

kratur-indur-viṣaksana. (Rgv. IX.107.3b)
kratva sukrebhir-aksabhir-xpor-apa vrajam divaeh hinvanm rtasya dhitimit pra adhvare. (Rgv.IX.102.8) "Through thine understanding, with thy bright eyes, thou hast opened out heaven's stall, fostering the vision of rta for the ritual."

"Sukrebhir-aksabhir..."

manisam udatlm aji'gah. (Rgv.VI.47.3)

rtasya hi sadaso dhiftir-adyaut. (Rgv.X.111.2a)


svardr$ah yonav-rtasya sIdata. (Rgv.IX.13.9b)

aruhud vidivo rocana kavih. (Rgv.IX.85.9b)

vicakS$ano virocayan. (Rgv.IX.39.3)

sahasra ca$a. (Rgv.IX.60.1)

suracaksah. cf.Rgv.1.139.2 and VIII.48.3.

apa$yama hariprya$yam. (Rgv.I.139.2)

dibhi$cana manasa. (Rgv.I.139.2)

svehibhir-aksabhir somasya svehibhir-aksabhir. (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.

surya$ ca$kusa$m adhi patih sa. (Athv.V.24.9).

cf.Rgv.VII.35.8663.4

ajljano hi pavama$a svrxyam. (Rgv.IX.110.3a)

cf.svargcir $urye saca. (Rgv.IX.10.88b)

ajljano ... martyeso $ rtasya dharmam amartasya caryah. (Rgv.IX.110.4ab).

aham id hi putus pari madham rtasya jagrabha ah$a surya iva ajani.

(Rgv.VIII.11.10)

cf.Rgv.IX.75.1

Cf. Rgv.IX.28.5;85.9.

Cf. Rgv.IX.107.7

Cf. Rgv.IX.2.6.

sa suryasya ra$mibhih pari vyata. (Rgv.IX.86.32a) cf.Rgv.IX.76.4ac.

cf.Rgv.IX.86.29

sa suryasya ra$mibhih pari vyata tantum tanvanas tri vr$tam yath$a vide

nayann rtasya pra$ido navvyasihi ... (Rgv.IX.86.32abc)

tantum tanvanam uttamam anu pravata $as$a. (Rgv.IX.22.6ab)

yo yajno vi$vat$a tarutuh$hih tatah. (Rgv.IX.130.1a) "the sacrifice drawn out with threads on every side". Cf.Rgv.IX.22.7d.

rtasya tantuh,

cf.Rgv.IX.73.9.

Cf. pitubhro na tantum it sudanava$p prati dadhmo yajamasai.

(Rgv.X.172.3) "as food offerers we set the warp, liberally we offer up the sacrifice".

Cf. Rgv.IX.109.3 and p.8 of this thesis.

ubhe soma avaca$aka$an mgzo na takto ar$asi sidann rtasya yonim a.

(Rgv.IX.32.4)

nabha prthivy$a.

dharupu maho divo$h (Rgv.IX.72.7) cf.Rgv.IX.86,8 and Rgv.IX.48,4:

vi$svasma it svard$pse s$a$dha$r$pam rajasturar$am gopa$m rtasya vir-bharat:

"for all to see the universal light the bird brought us the guardian of rta, the cleaver of the heaven."

Cf. Rgv.IX.72.7;86.8

nabha prthivy$a girisu kṣaya$m dadhe. (Rgv.IX.82.3b)

cf.Rgv.IX.72.7;86.8.

iyam vedih para antah prthivy$a ayam yajno bhuvasya nabhih

ayam some p$ma a$svas$ya reto braham$ ayam vac$a$p paramapa vyama.

(Rgv.I.164.35)

Although braham$a is in the masculine form and thus means the priest, the latter may be thought of in terms of prayer, he who wields the divine word, braham$a (neuter), hence our translation emphasising the word rather than the wielder of the word.
110 cf. RgV. VII.1.53.2; X.65.8; 111.62.38

111 daivyā ... janimāni ... amṛtatvāya. (RgV. IX.108.3)

112 prathamā vṛkta barhiṣṇaḥ. (RgV. IX.110.7a) "those whose grass was twisted"

113 dhīyaṃ dadhuh. (RgV. IX.110.7b)

114 kṛṣṇant samīrtam vicṛtām abhiṣṭaḥ. (RgV. IX.84.2c)

115 dīvāḥ pūrṇaṃ pūrvaṃ yad ukthyaṃ maho gāhād dīva a nir-adhukṣata. (RgV. IX.110.8ab)


117 tatārdhitā utsām na kām cīj-janapānām aṅkṣitam. (RgV. IX.110.5)

118 śukrovibhāṣya-amṛtasya dhamā. (RgV. IX.97.32b)

119 ṛgV. IX.108.8.

120 avindan te atihiṣitam yad āśāṃ yajñasya dhamā paramam guhā yat. (RgV. X.181.2ab) "they found what had been kept secretly hidden away, the supreme domain of the sacrifice." The word dhamā as seen in Section III.2.7 is susceptible of various interpretations and renderings. cf. ṛgV. X.67.2 yajñasya dhamā - rites of worship; ṛgV. VII.36.5 rτasya dhamā - particular modality of rta, or "foundation of order" as L. Renou translates this in E.V.P. VII. p.38, cf. ṛgV. IX.97.32 amṛtasya dhamā.

121 ṛtaśya nābhīr-amṛtām vi jāyata. (RgV. IX.74.4b)


123 cf. ṛgV. IX.102.8

124 ṛgV. VII.11.48.3

125 cf. ṛgV. IX.102.8

126 apāma somam amṛtā abhūma aganma jyotir-avidāma devān. (RgV. VII.11.48.3)

127 adhyātī dhīti ... tīrthe na dasmam upa yānty-umāh abhi ānaśma suvītasas śuṣaṁ navedasa amṛtaṇām abhūma. (RgV. X.31.3)
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. With Soma's "heavenly milk" he has been "anointed by rta", he the "resourceful inspirer" of men. The very "weal" he "bestows on (his) worshipper" is his "truth". Both Soma and Agni are said to grant immortality, Agni through his intelligence (kṣatru), Soma through his exhilaration. Their action precipitates inspiration-exaltation-ecstasy.

But Agni alone is called the highpriest (purohitap) "placed foremost", the "highpriest of order" who "celebrates the rta", the "cherished one in the rite", the "god among men in our assembly":

"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."

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."

"Agni as the sacrificial element par excellence and the archetype of every human priesthood is the very embodiment of ritualistic order."

"Of the three strands of meaning in the rta 'order', namely cosmic, ethical and ritualistic, the meaning ritualistic order is naturally prominent in connection with Agni."

For this reason he is "the lord of mighty sacrifice, Agni, of all oblations."

In his function of "guardian of the rta", "friend, as it were, of mighty order", its "inspirer", its "charioteer", 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 rta in some concrete form."\(^{20}\)

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 rta 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 rta 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 rta, the chamber of grass",\(^ {21}\) i.e. the enclosure where the rite is performed to

"celebrate the lofty rta in (his) own domain"\(^ {22}\)

to

"shine forth in thine own home, as guardian of the rta"\(^ {23}\)
cosmic, social, ethical, ritualistic. He is asked, as performer of the yajña, to come by the path of rta, 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."\(^ {24}\)

For he, as he takes up "the reins of rta when sacrificial food is offered"\(^ {25}\)
is the one "most godlike" and thus capable of

"guiding aright our homage and offering it unto the gods along the path of order".\(^ {26}\)

Agni is thus the conveyor of man's aspirations and the giver to man of the gods' grace: "eye and guardian of mighty rta (order)

thou art Varuna when to the rta (ritual) thou comest."\(^ {27}\)

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 rta, he is not exactly said to be the rta, 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 rta.

Working "in accordance with the law" (ṛtena) Agni "reaches out over both worlds".\(^ {29}\)

He is "head of heaven", "fleet-messenger of earth";\(^ {30}\) the "deathless oblation-bearer"\(^ {31}\) who, by means of "vision (dhiyā)" "brings together" (samrṇvi)\(^ {32}\), i.e. he joins vision and offering, man and gods, heaven and earth, ritual and order. He "holds up" or "offers our visionary thought".\(^ {33}\) This function of "Unite", like that of Soma, is expressed in various ways, e.g. in the plea to his to "worship (with oblation) both wide worlds"\(^ {34}\), or in his ascending and descending: "he mounts and he descends",\(^ {35}\) he, "vehicle of the transcendent"\(^ {36}\)
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 of that which lies beyond these worlds, i.e. the transcendent. As the intermediary between heaven and earth, as "conveyor of oblations", as "ensign of sacrifice", as "highpriest of the gods", the inspired highpriest, unerring in sacrifices, he enters into the houses of men, he is the "guest of men", so men themselves have "established Agni as their priest".

"In the abode of mortals, the immortal, the king has sat down, furthering the religious rites," bringing about the means of communication between two worlds.

Agni's function as officiating highpriest and mediator between gods and men is constantly brought out by such words as vahmi, 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 Varuna and the Waters "in heaven" (divi). The word yoga which implies the act of joining or harnessing is occasionally used governing rta: thus "In the performance of the rta" (rtasya yoge), in the "yoking" of the rite as a reflection of the universal process 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 rta 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." 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 rta." 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 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" (*satyayajam*), 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." 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" (*mānasir iṣāh) "making him an axe (*svadhitim*) for the sake of *tejas*, radiance." 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" (*sūraoakṣasah*) i.e. radiant and are therefore wise, with Agni as their tongue, "flame-tongued (*agnijihyah*)" "foster the *ṛta*" and are fostered by it. They grow in understanding of, and through adherence to, the *ṛta*. 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 *kavikaṛatuh*, 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 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.

"Through the power of his splendour he clasps the rein of *ṛta*." This clasping symbolises man's harnessing of the ritual for purposes of reflecting the cosmic order 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. 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." 63

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." 64

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 rṣis' 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". 65

Sukrātu and ajākitvān are epithets specifically applied to Agni. His kratu is described as "most inspired". 66 As "wisest of priests" (sukrātah purohitah) he, with "wise insight" (kratvā)

"attends in every house to the sacrificial rite", 68 and "reveals all generations to him-who-endeavours" 69 to obtain knowledge. So on him "the very wise" men are enjoined to "meditate", 70 for he is the "knower", 71 the "knower of all wisdom", 72 the "knower of generations" (jātavedas) the "all-knowing". 73 No wonder that to him goes that most ancient of human cries:

"Shine forth auspiciously upon us that we may reach wise understanding". 74

Agni's action on man, as "the finder of light" (svarvid) 75 is similar to Soma's:

"thou prevailst over every thought; thou promotest the intuition of the wise". 76

"May he stimulate us to vigour and vision." 77

"From thee 0 Agni inspired-wisdom, from thee intuitions, from thee accomplished utterances are generated." 78

His is the quality of the sage (kāvyā): intuitive insight (manīgā), that wisdom imparted by inspiration which is the poet's gift, and inspired
utterances (uktha). Like Soma, he is a rsi. To him goes the same plea as to Soma to "open out" (visya) the manasa, hence to release the inner vision and to offer it on high in his function of highpriest (prahotā vrata) by the power of māya.

Agni's action as "bringing to birth within the heart a thought as light", 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".

The thought becomes a colourful song since aksa 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 (matis) moving forth from the heart fashioned in praise goes to Indra, the Lord."

"With pleasing hearts let us approach—with-veneration, Agni, the pleasing, beloved of many, the sharp-rayed purifying flame."

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 (dhāś) which translated itself into a hymn, which granted the rsi a penetrative insight into the laws of the universe, an intuitive perception which is itself offered up to the gods in the sacrifice 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."

Here is set forth unequivocably 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" 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."

The "guest" in "every house" 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."

The second part of the verse is even more revealing:

"Let these be oxen, bulls, cattle to thee,"

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 Rg.v.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."

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.

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 rsis 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. Agni, "lord of abundant amṛta" himself is made "centre of immortality" by the gods as he is both their flame of aspiration and their very achievement. They protect the "boon-bestowing" (dravipodām) Agni as their own immortal state.

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."

"Far-seeing mind, enlightening, light-bestower ... the mighty one (Soma) strives after his third estate that third estate which seems to be the "supreme domain of the sacrifice", its
innermost secret, immortality. In the one case, the heroic power is enhanced through Agni's action. In the other, the desiderative form of ṣan 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", giver of "vigour" (vayodhāḥ) is asked for a share of his riches, those riches that are mental ability and insight. "Bring us that resplendent courage that will find heaven" is a plea addressed to Soma, but could equally be addressed to Agni. 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. Rta 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" He sits "in secret place" (guhā nisūdan), i.e., in the human heart "where men find him whilst meditating and reciting their mantras which they fashion in their heart".

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. This has been disregarded in the evaluation of the Rgvedic 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?"111

"My songs-of-praise, high-aspiring, speed-forth as messengers to
Indra... uttered by my spirit to touch his heart..."112

"May this song-of-praise be foremost in touching thy heart,
in blessedness".113

"O Maruts, ye gods, to you with homage is offered this song-of-praise
shaped with heart and mind."114

Soma's boons of insight and intelligence touch the heart (hrdisprasas).115 To
touch Varuna's spirit and win his mercy the poet attempts to "bind" him with
his songs.116

Brahman companions, as already mentioned, come together for worship
"with mental impulses fashioned by the heart"117 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?)"118
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.119

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 Varuna "reveals" or
"opens out his thought by means of the heart"120

as a result of which a new manifestation of rta 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
Varuna placed kratu121 which therefore combines intelligent awareness and
intuitive perception and yields the higher wisdom. This Is the meaning of the
later word, buddhi.

The heart122 Is thus the secret or hidden place (guhā) wherein knowledge,
the divine treasure, is stored. Several verses refer to that knowledge received in secret (pinam). 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." 124

"That which was established as Visnu's supreme seat, therewith thou guardest the cow's secret name," 125

The name being the essence of a thing, the cow's 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", 126

"I bring to thee 0 Agni, the offering with the sacred utterance (st) fashioned in the heart." 127

To the Maruts is offered the praise "shaped in the heart and mind" 128 and to Indra, the soma drops are "offered from the heart". 129 The original oblation offered by man was Manu's, the first human, by means of his spirit, with kindled fire. 130 That Agni "found the path to prayer" 131 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, 0 Agni-Soma, protect his way, guard him from distress. "Strengthened by prayer" 133 both Agni and Soma grant the worshipper ample room (urup lokam) or free scope for his sacrifice. 134 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" 135...
does not please Indra. Likewise the Soma juice pressed without prayer (abrahamano) finds no favour in his eyes. 136 For Indra thrives (vardhanam) not only on Soma but on prayer as well as the sacrificial oblation. 137

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 (sumâyayah and devayantah), whilst seeking Agni, their "protector" (trātā), father and mother. 138 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 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) that man can use to invoke the noumenal or come into the gods' presence, then the sacrifice, such as it was conceived in Ṛgvedic 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." 139

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." 140

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 samhita, 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 concelebrates with the whole universe, taking his place in the cosmic sacrifice in which all the Gods are engaged together."

"Rta 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."

So long as the rṣis 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.
NOTES

1. \[\text{manis
} \text{manas priypanah somagopah. (Rgv. X.45.5)}\] cf. \[\text{Rgv. IV.10.2; X.46.5}
\[\text{cf. Rgv. I.1.9.4d, Agni as the "deviser of pure speech" (Sukrasya vacaso\nmanotā) and Soma as manasaspatiḥ (Rgv. IX.11.8; 28.1) and as visvavid\n(Rgv. IX.28.1).}\]

2. \[\text{ītēna ... aktē ... agniḥ payasā prsthyna. (Rgv. IV.3.10) cf. Rgv. I.79.3.}\]

3. kaviKRATHUH.

4. \[\text{yad anga daśuge tvam agne bhadram karisyasi tavet tat satyam. (Rgv. I.1.6)}\]
\["just what good thou dost to the worshipper that is thy truth."}\]

5. cf. \[\text{Rgv. VI.7.4c; V.3h; III.17.4} \]

6. cf. \[\text{Rgv. IX.106.8; VIII.48.3.}\]

7. cf. \[\text{Sukratuh purohitah "most wise high-priest" (Rgv. I.128.4); hotara-
rtasya hotādhvruk "highpriest of order, undecivable highpriest"}
\[\text{(Rgv. VI.61.14). cf. Rgv. VI.1.1ab.}\]

8. \[\text{ītām hotā ... yajēti (Rgv. VII.39.1) cf. Rgv. VI.15.14}\]

9. cāsur-adhvaro. \[\text{(Rgv. I.94.13)}\]

10. antar-devo vidathā martyrēgu (Rgv. VI.11.2b)

11. \[\text{hotāram citsrāratham adhvarasya yajnasaya yajnasya ketum rudāntam}\nprati ārdhām devasya devasya mahā śrīyā tu agnim atithim janāhām.}
\[\text{(Rgv. X.1.5)}\]


13. op. cit. p.166

14. op. cit. p.166

15. \[\text{agnir-īśe brhato adhvarasya agnir-visvasya havisah kṛtasya. (Rgv. VII.11.4)}\]

16. \[\text{ṛtasya gopāḥ (Rgv. I.11.10.2) or ātapaḥ (Rgv. VI.3.1)}\]

17. \[\text{agni mitro adhvarasya asī. (Rgv. VI.13.2)}\]

18. \[\text{ṛtaskaviḥ (Rgv. VII.60.5). cf. Rgv. I.11.2.10 "the people's inspirer"}
\[\text{(visām kavīm). We prefer to translate kavī as "inspirer" rather than}
\[\text{poet" for the ancient meaning of poet is he who is inspired and capable}
\[\text{of inspiring by his words, the modern meaning stressing too much the}
\[\text{technicalities at the expense of inspiration.}\]

19. \[\text{rathīr-ṛtasya brhato. (Rgv. IV.10.2)}\]


21. \[\text{ṛtasya yonim ā asadah sasasya yonim ā asadah. (Rgv. V.21.4d)}\]

22. \[\text{ītām brhād agne yakṣī svam damam. (Rgv. I.75.5bc)}\]

23. \[\text{gopaḥ ṛtasya didhi sve dame. (Rgv. I.11.10.2). cf. Rgv. I.11.8.}\]

24. \[\text{tām yajnasādham api vātāyāmasi ṛtasya pathā nāmasā haviśmata. (Rgv. I.128.2ab)}\]

25. \[\text{saṁ yad igo vanāmahe sam havyā mānusānām ... ṛtasya rāmdhīn ā dāde}
\[\text{(Rgv. VII.7.3). "When together with the libation and oblation of men we}
\[\text{conquer himi he ... grasps the rein of ṛta".}\]

26. \[\text{ṛtasya pathā nāmasā miyedho devebhya devatamaḥ susūdat. (Rgv. X.70.2cd)}\]

27. \[\text{bhuvāḥ caksür-māha ṛtasya gopaḥ bhuvo varuṇo yad ṛtasya vesi. (Rgv. X.8.5ab)}\]

28. \[\text{ṛte ā jatam. (Rgv. IV.71)}\]

29. \[\text{ā yas tatāna rodasiṛtena. (Rgv. VI.1.7c)}\]

30. \[\text{mūrdhṇaṁ dīvo; aratiṁ prthiyā. (Rgv. VI.7.1) cf. Rgv. I.44.12; 59.2;}
\[\text{VIII.44.16; V.7.4c.}\]

31. \[\text{havyavāj amartya. (Rgv. I.11.11.2a)}\]

32. \[\text{agnir-dhiyā sampratī. (Rgv. I.11.11.2b)}\]

33. \[\text{ud u no yamsate dhiyām. (Rgv. I.143.7d) cf. Rgv. I.144.1b.}\]

34. \[\text{agni yajasva rodasī urucī. (Rgv. I.11.4b)}\]

35. \[\text{sa udvato nivato yāti. (Rgv. I.11.2.10c)}\]

36. \[\text{addhutasya rathīḥ. (Rgv. I.77.3)}\]

37. cf. \[\text{vicarṣamīr-agnir-devāṇām ... purohitah. (Rgv. I.11.2.8) "Most active}
\[\text{Agni, highpriest of the gods".}\]

38. \[\text{uṇāsīnaṁ ṛṣabhyate (Rgv. I.13.10.4). Cf. Rgv. I.11.10.7.}\]

39. \[\text{dṛṣṭā yajnasādham api vātāyāmasi ṛtasya pathā nāmasā haviśmata. (Rgv. I.128.2ab)}\]

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52. cf. \[\text{vicarṣamīr-agnir-devāṇām ... purohitah. (Rgv. I.11.2.8) "Most active}
\[\text{Agni, highpriest of the gods".}\]
"Agni, thou art the wise offspring of heaven born constantly of earth and knower of all."

"May he secure for us in heaven through the sacrifice the grace of Mitra, Varuna, and the Waters."

"In the performance of the rite let the udder flow."

"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.)

"Vision." p.183. 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.)

"Plous knower of the law be attentive (to us)."
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.

tvam hi visvam abhy-asi manma pra vedhasā cit tirasi manigam.
(Rgv.IV.6.1) cf.Rgv.I.140.1;VI.1.1

dhiye vājāya hinvatu. (Rgv.I.27.11) If vāja be a generative power as J. Gonda explains it ("Vision",p.141) then this verse would mean that Agni helps to generate vision.

tvad agne kavyā tvan manigam tvad uktāḥ jāyante rādhyāni. (Rgv.IV.11.3ab)

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.

dhiye vajaya hinvatu.
(Rcv.I.27.11)

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vanīvāno mama dūtāsā indraṃ stomāsā caranti ...

ḥṛḍīspṛśo manasa vacyamānā asmabhūyāṃ ...(Ṛgv.X.47.7abc)

ayam te stomo agriyo ḫṛḍīspṛṃ astu śantaṃah ...(Ṛgv.I.16.7ab)

eṣa vaḥ stomo maruto nāmasvān ḫṛḍā taṣṭo manasa śāhyā devāḥ. (Ṛgv.I.171.2abd)

Ṛgv.I.25.2a

Ṛgv.I.25.3

(Ṛgv.X.71.8) Trans. on p.166 note 57.

te in noyam ḫṛḍīyasya prakataḥ sahasra vālasah abhi saṃ caranti.

(Ṛgv.VII.33.9ab) "they, with the Insights of the heart, move together in secret towards the thousand-branched" tree.

Ṛgv.X.129.4

vi ṛṣpoti ḫṛḍā matim. (Ṛgv.I.105.15c)

Ṛgv.V.85.2. cf. J. Gonda "Epithets in the Ṛgveda".1959.p.137.

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 Ṛgvedic doctrine, a doctrine which stems from a vision.

Ṛgv.I.67.2;VII.33.9ab;V.3.3;IV.5.3, 4

padam na gor-apagūḥma vividvān agnir-mahyāṃ pra īd uḍ vocat manīṣām.

(Ṛgv.IV.5.3cd)

padam yad vīśno-r upamāṃ niḍhāyī tona pāṣi guhyāṃ nāma gōṇām. (Ṛgv.V.3.3cd)

vidhāna naṇavā mahā girā. (Ṛgv.II.24.1b)

a te agna ṛcā havihr-hṛḍā taṣṭaṃ bharāmsi. (Ṛgv.VI.16.47ab).

cf.Rgv.VII.I.76.8;X.91.14;I.60.3;I.I.26.1;39.1;I.I.35.2

ḥṛḍā taṣṭo manasa. (Ṛgv.I.171.2a)

sutaḥ somaso ... ḫṛḍā hūyaṃtaa" ... (Ṛgv.VII.I.76.8)

Ṛgv.X.63.7b

brahmaṇe vinda gātum. (Ṛgv.VII.I.13.3c)

agnisomā haviṣā saparyād devadrīcā manasaḥ yo gṛṛtena tasya vrataṃ rakṣataṃ pātaṃ amhaṃso ... (Ṛgv.I.93.8abc)

Ṛgv.I.93.6cd

brahmaṇā vāvṛṇdhāṇā. (Ṛgv.I.93.6c)

Ṛgv.I.93.6cd


Ṛgv.VII.I.26.1b.

Ṛgv.II.12.14VI.38.4.

Ṛgv.VI.1.5;7ab.

"The Vedic experience." 1977.p.782


op.cit.p.28;351.
CHAPTER V

RTA AS DEITY

Section V.1  Rta, world-embracing power

The question whether rta held, as H. Lefever 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, rta 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 Varuna and Mitra govern all the world.

H. W. Wallis claims that

"The rta 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."

A similar opinion is voiced by A. B. Keith:

"As a deity ... the Rta does not obtain an established rank. The occurrence of such phrases as the idea of the Dawns coming forth from the place of the Rta, or of the place of sacrifice as the seat of the Rta, or of the charioteer or the wheel or the steeds or the vehicle or the ship of the Rta, 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 Rta is not included."

This is very far from accurate. Injunctions to meditate on rta can be found as well as invitations to pay homage to rta and straightforward invocations.

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.
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, īlā, tapas, tejas, sabha; 3) and personifications of abstract nouns, such as śraddhā, faith, manyu, zeal, mettle, takman, fever.

Three hymns e.g., one to manyu (Rg. X.84.4), one to ṛtu (season) (Rg. I.15), one to śraddhā faith (Rg. 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; O Faith, inspire us herewith with confidence."

This is what Keith describes as "deifying" 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"

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" 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".12

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.15 The gods follow its vrata, hence are its charioteers (rathi), Soma flows under its dharma, its commandments (pradisah) make Indra mighty.14 To it the gods are faithful (stavati), in it they are born (rajata). 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 rta,15 dharman rta,16 Many other expressions such as sadas,17 saṃmi,18 cakram19 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. Varuna and Mitra.20 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' (1.23.5 - 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 transcendental."21

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 daksam "efficient", and coming "from lofty heaven" (divo brhato).22 This is rta which the gods (Mitra-Varuṇa)yoke (yujñāthe) to the work (apās) as to the pole is bound the ox. Hence the gods are both its charioteers (rathi) and its
guardians (gopāḥ) or superintendents. They "proclaim rta" i.e., their every action is a manifestation of rta because they only work in accordance with it. So Indra "harnesses" or "steers" the rta, Viṣṇu gives the worshipper his "share of rta", 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 rta both in the phenomenal and in the human fields. Hence the "rta of Varuṇa", the "rta of Mitra", refer to that sphere of rta which is under the superintendence of these gods and do not necessarily mean subordination of the rta to these gods. Hence, by Mitra-Varuṇa's "rta is rta firmly established", however much the gods may use the power of rta, i.e. act in accordance with the law, they ever remain its custodians (gopāḥ). To be "born of rta" may have been considered the highest praise. Occasionally we find the culmination of praise extending as far as identification with rta, but this may be the highest blessing that the poet may imagine for his deity. Thus Soma is "the vast rta". Thus Mitra Varuṇa, mighty lords "are the great rta".

These few examples serve to show the extreme reverence in which the rta was held by the rṣis. 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, rta is the way to the source, Brahman is the source.

In K.R. Pottār's opinion "From the variety of epithets, derived from 'Rta', applied to the gods as 'ṛtaprajāta', 'ṛtajña', 'ṛtadyumna', 'ṛtapeśaḥ', 'ṛtvānah', 'ṛtvṛdhah', 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 rta seems to have survived..."

The Dawn described as coming from the place of rta is in Keith's eyes only proof of the Vedic "concreteness of expression". For V.M. Apte, this shows that rta is a concrete entity with a specific location in the heavens. 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 rta was different in kind from the conception of law expressed by the other terms."
M. K. V. M. Apte brings forward some quotations which, in his opinion, show that ṛta ranked as a deity in the Vedic mind. He writes:

"The mighty (mahad) ṛta figures as an independent deity among deities like Aditi, Dyāvaprthivi, Indra, Viṣṇu and Savitr invoked for protection in X.66.4."33

This verse, literally translated, runs thus:

"Aditi, Heaven and Earth, ṛta the mighty, Indra, Viṣṇu, the Maruts, the lofty empyrean we call upon the gods, the Adityas for help, the Vasus, the Rudras, Savitr of mighty accomplishment."34

Here ṛta 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 ṛta could also have been called upon as a deity in its own right. But the term svaḥ brhat should also be noticed. Is this different from dyāus, and if so is it considered a deity? Not necessarily, in which case ṛta 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 Varuna to drink, the pleasant juice for ṛta to drink."35

The word ṛta here again seems to rank as equal in status with the gods quoted alongside with it. The whole argument of the status of ṛta 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 Upanisads the impersonal Brahman assumes precedence over every personal deity. E. W. Hopkins considers that ṛta was personified "as a divine personal Power" towards the very end of the Rgveda but that

"... in no passage is Varuṇa subject to ṛta as a superior power, but rather ṛta (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."36

There is however no extant verse stating that ṛta has its source in the wise spirit, Varuṇa,37 unless Varuṇa be equated with the Ordainer (ṛhatr) of Rg. X.190.3, and even here ṛta 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 (Rg.v.1.137.2) is used in the same dative case as Mitra, Varuna. The construction of the sentence also shows this kind of equality: pitaye applies to Mitra Varuna and the second pitaye applies to rtaya 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",38 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 rta 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 rta, thine own domain".39

According to A. Bergaigne the mighty rta 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 rta"

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 rta which entitled it to the offering of Soma and sacrificial worship generally."41

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".42

"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 ātam bžhat is also the object of yajā. H. Lefever sees in the epithet bžhat, so often used with rta, an example of an incipient personification.43

This "worship with sacrifice" is thus, strictly speaking, addressed to Mitra Varuna; to the gods, to the cosmic order.

The status of rta as a personified deity as made out in the other examples mentioned by V.M. Apte - Rg.v.6.5a, V.8.1c.VII.39.1d - seems, however, rather dubious. Rg.vII.39.1 could for example be translated thus:
"May our quickening-priest celebrate the rta"
or, "may our quickening-priest pay homage to the rta".44

In the first case the rta would simply refer to the sacrificial ritual as a mirror of the universal order so that the celebration is a holy act wherein man pay homage to the cosmos. In the second case it could be a personified deity.

However, whether personified or not, rta 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."45

Perhaps rta was the best expression of Deity in manifestation that the rsis 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 rta, shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms"46

That, in the final analysis, all creation pays homage to the rta is stated in bold imagery:

"To Law wide Earth and deep (Heaven) supreme milch kine, render their milk".47

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 Purusa 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 rta. Contemplation of rta removes transgressions."48

The word suruddha meaning riches, comforts or invigorating-draughts, shows rta 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 rta opens the deaf ears of the priest; therefore
to praise the rta is to effect some transformation in the human being. Verse
10 emphasises a similar thought:
"Whoso harnesses the rta wins the rta",49
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 rta fervently speed onwards".50
In this way is all accomplished in accordance with the rta.
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 rta, 0 attentive one, to the rta,
split open the many streams of rta."51
In other words, open the sources of rta. 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 rta" (rtasya praveśa), with the "visionary
insights of rta".52 This concentration on the rta is like an opening of one's
mind to the divine inflow. The direct action of the rta 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 Brahma.
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 rta, 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 rta 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 rta. To attune oneself
to rta 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 rta is born
immortality".53 This is the essence of the Rgvedic vision and its message.
This is the Vedic revelation (sruti).
NOTES

2. Rgv.V.63.7
4. "Religion and philosophy of the Veda". p.84
5. cf. Rgv.IV.23.10;IV.12.2
6. cf. Rgv.I.75.5
7. Rgv.IV.3.9
9. śraddhāṃ prātar havamahe śraddhāṃ madyāndinam pari śraddhāṃ sūryasya nimruci śraddhāṃ śraddhāpayā iha naḥ. (Rgv.X.151.5)
10. cf. Rgv.IV.57 addressed to the lord of the field, to the plough and the furrow.
11. sraddham pratar havamahe sraddham madymardinam pari sraddham suryasya nimruci sraddhe sraddhayata iha naḥ. (Rgv.X.151.5)
12. cf. Rgv.IV.57 addressed to Īlā first personified, then deified.
14. rtena rtam niyatam lie. (Rgv.IV.3.9)
15. cf. Rgv.IV.3.9
16. Rgv.VI.9.5. The Sanskrit of this verse appears on p.75.
17. cf. Rgv.X.190.1
18. cf. Rgv.VII.89.4
19. cf. Rgv.I.164.11 cf. rtasya dhīti (Rgv.I.68.5;IX.111.2), rtasya garbham (Rgv.I.156.3;IX.68.5), rtasya jīvā (Rgv.IX.75.2) rtasya pada (Rgv.IV.177.2; IV.5.9;X.5.2), rtasya yoni (Rgv.X.68.4;165.7;111.54.6) rtasya pantha (Rgv.V.80.4;X.31.2;133.6;1.136.2;136.4,1;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.11.28.4;IV.56.7;V.62.1 cf. Rgv.IX.66.24 where Soma engenders rta.
23. rtem yemānāḥ (Rgv.IV.23.10)
24. rtasya bhago (Rgv.I.156.5)
25. cf. Rgv.II.12.8.4;IV.56.6&7
26. Rgv.V.62.1
27. Rgv.IX.68.8
28. rtem bṛhat. (Rgv.IX.108.8)
29. pra vo mitrāya gāyata varūṇāya vipā girā mahikṛtāt evam bṛhat. (Rgv.V.68.1) 'Sing forth for your Mitra-Varuṇa an Inspired song; mighty lords they (are) the great rta'.
32. op.cit.p.6
33. op.cit.p.181
34. adhitr-dvāvātṛthi rtem mahad indraivān marutāḥ svar-bṛhat devān adityān avase havāmahe vasūn rudrān savitarām sudāmśasan.
35. suto mitrāya varūṇāya pītaye cāru-rūṣyā pītaye. (Rgv.I.137.2)
36. "Ethics of India". 1924. p.40-1
The rta of Varuṇa as explained above, does not necessarily refer to the source of rta. That source is in the original act of creation, tapas from the impersonal that or tat (Rg.v.190,l). All the devas are offsprings of rta (ṛta-jātāḥ) and the first born of rta (prathamajā ṛtasya). This cannot be otherwise as rta is the first to manifest (Rg.v.190,1).


39 yajā no mitrā varuṇā yajā devān ṛtama bhṛhat agna yakṣi svām damam. (Rg.v.1.75,5)


37 op. cit. p. 182.

36 op. cit. p. 99.

35 "The Vedic idea of sin." 1935. p. 8. Cf. also the suffixes jña, knowing, yān faithful to, jāta, born in, applied to rta and not to dharma, dhāman and vrata. That the gods are said to be born in rta 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 rta, the embodiments of immortality, etc.

44 ṛtam hota na īśāto yajāti. Similarly in the case of Rg.v.68.1c translated on p 210, the verse could mean "sing a song for Mitra *not 29 Varuṇa, for the great ṛta."


46 ṛtasya dharmāṇi santi purūṇi candrā vāpye vāpyaṃśi. (Rg.v.1,68,2) ṛtāya prthvī bahule gabhīre ṛtāya dhenū parame duhāte. (Rg.v.1,23,10cd)

47 ṛtasya hi śudhyā santi pūrvir ṛtasya dhītir-vṛjīnān hanti. (Rg.v.1,23,8)

48 ṛtām yemāṇā ṛtam ādī vanoti (Rg.v.1,23,10a)

49 ṛtasyā Ṛugma turayā u gavyaḥ. (Rg.v.1,23,10b)

50 ṛtām cikītva ṛtam ācikītyaḥ-ṛtasya dhārā anu tṛṇahī pūrvīḥ. (Rg.v.1,12,2)


52 ṛtasya dhītih. (Rg.v.1,68,5)

53 ṛtasya dhītih. (Rg.v.1,74,4)
CONCLUSION:

RTA, COSMIC HARMONY

The whole trend of this investigation into the significance of rta has been an endeavour to examine the many facets of the Rgvedic vision of rta, 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 rta is just the fixed order of things, or just truth, or just law, but its meaning includes all these and goes far beyond; for rta 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 as well as the more popular types of expositions on India's earlier forms of religion, which considers the Rgveda as a collection of more or less primitive songs, of nature worship, the tribal cult of simple minds, a "naive religion", needs complete reviewing. S. Radhakrishnan summed up the general position in the following words:

"A study of the hymns of the RgVeda 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."

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 Rgveda is being studied in depth with an open mind and the claim of the rsis 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*, or the *aja*, the unborn one of the origins, the *rta* as the foundation and mover of the continuous development, the *asuratvam ekam*, or one godhood of the *devas*, the furtherers of this *rta*, that *one-intentioned move together to the one purposeful Intelligence* the *visvam ekam* of this incessant activity which A.T.de Nicolas aptly translates as "Integral multiplicity", underly, emphasise and glorify oneness:

"That which is one has developed into the all", "One whole governs the moving and the stable, that which walks and files, this variegated creation".

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 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.

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*. 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 rta. We have called rta the cosmic order, the universal harmony because on viewing these three main facets of rta, 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 rta:

"Immanence and transcendence are intrinsically correlated and are possible only when held together in mutual tension."14

This holding together in mutual tension is the essence of rta: 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 rta 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.15 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 rta. Motion and stability are united in rta. 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 rta in our space-time dimension, nevertheless reveal a cosmos (in the heavens as in nature) which is the phenomenal expression of the transcendent rta. 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 rta, immortality, the essence of that which underlies the harmonious working of all things: hence rta 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 pūrṇa 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, rta, and hidden within that law is the eternal sacrifice, the immanent and transcendent pūrṇa 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 puṣūga. This equivalence which is not explicit but fully implicit in the Rigveda, is one of the most arresting conceptions in the Vedic vision of ṛta as sacrifice, yajñā, 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 Vedic fashion, in the cryptic formula addressed to the All-Creator:

"Sacrifice thyself for thine own exaltation."

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: dharma-karma, kalpa-yuga and brahman-ātman. From this standpoint we can maintain that that which was peculiarly Vedic, namely the vision of cosmic order, of wholeness, of harmony, of integration, becomes the fountainhead of the subsequent peculiarly Hindu doctrines of dharma and karma, of the law of cycles and of the essential oneness of all creatures with their Ultimate Source.

The roots of the doctrine of karma and dharma are embodied in the two aspects of ṛta: ṛta as 1) the sacrifice representing both the work (āpas or karman) 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 karma, 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 dharma, 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, svadharma; a doctrine which was to be further amplified in the theory of the varṇas and āśramas. Ṛta in its cosmic sense becomes specialised as dharma in a social or human sense, but a
dharma not imposed by any one from outside, a dharma 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 dharma "embraces the whole world" it is the world's foundation. Nevertheless it may be said that the great vision of cosmos as peculiar to the rṣis of the Rgveda 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 rta 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 srstī and pralaya, the great kalpas and māhā yugas as propounded in the Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata, in the microcosm, punarjanman, rebirth first clearly explained in the Upaniṣads. Of these two doctrines only a few references can be found in the Rgveda, but they are sufficient pointers both to the future of the teachings and to the fact that such ideas were already prevalent in Rgvedic times. Thus "the plants that were born of old three ages before the gods" and the prayer of obeisance to the gods, the "mighty and the lesser" the "elder and the younger" 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" (anucīnā jīvita) which Savitr grants man (Ṛg.īv.54.2) which, contrary to prevalent scholarly opinion, shows far more than a "trace" of the doctrine of rebirth. That this doctrine of karma and punarjanman was regarded as a secret one may be gathered from the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. This would account for the scarce references to it in the Rgveda.

The vision of rta 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 rta. The Rgvedic distinction between rta and satya was lost sight of, the two ideas coalescing, satya being kept as the term for reality, truth and rta being dropped: so that the notion of rta 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" 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. Knowledge of the truth is power. Satya is brahman which the sacrifice expresses. If satya is the foundation of the universe, satya is itself founded on brahman which in turn is based on tapas. 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" 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." 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" 
"Brahman is satya" 
"The wise invoke him as rta, as satya as highest brahman". 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 Rgveda 1.67.2:
"He who knows brahman as the real (satya) as knowledge (jñana) 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 Brahma."

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 Rgveda 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 Rgveda and was to be taken up, developed and expounded in a different language in the Brāhmaṇas, the Upaniṣads, the Vedanta Sūtras, the Epics and the Purāṇas.
NOTES

Conclusion:

2 A.L. Basham. "The wonder that was India." 1954 (reprinted 1974)
5 book in Indian philosophy". 1967. p.3.
6 op.cit.p.3.
7 Rgv.X.129.3
8 Rgv.I.164.6
9 Rgv.I.11.55.1
10 Rgv.VI.9.5
11 Rgv.I.11.54.8
13 Rgv.VI.70.3 with Kaṭhā Up. I.2.23 and Mund. Up. III.2.3. Rgv.I.164.20
14 with Mund. Up. I.1.1. and Bh. Gita 15.16. Rgv.I.24.7 with Kaṭhā Up. II.3.1
15 and Bhagavad Gita 15.1. Rgv.IV.40.5 with Kaṭhā Up. II.2.2, Rgv.I.89.8
16 with Mund. and Praśna Up. (opening lines.) cf. also Rgv.X.90.1-4 with
19 Rgv.I.11.55.16VI.9.5
20 cf. Śat. Br. (14.3.21). "That which is sacrificed is the soul of all beings
21 and all gods." cf. also Rgv.X.81.566.
22 cf.Śat. Br. 7.2.4. "The herbs first grown three ages before the gods".
24 (reprinted 1967). "There is no trace of transmigration in the hymns of the
25 Vedas" (p.33). cf. A.B. Keith "Pythagoras and the doctrine of trans-
26 migration" (J.R.A.S.1909) where p.574-5 he discusses the Hindu doctrine
27 and states that "most authorities are agreed that it can be found only
28 in the Upaniṣads". Hopkins, "Religions of India" ascribes it first to the
29 Śat. Br. with a possibility in Rgv.I.164.30.38. cf. A.A. Macdonell
30 "History of Sanskrit literature" p.115. Geldner "Vedische Studien" ii.288;
31 iii.3. The discussion centres mainly around Rgv.I.164.30.38 which verses
32 are most ambiguous and no account is taken of Rgv.IV.54.2 which is the
only clear statement in the Rigveda, 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 pītyāna in the Rigveda I.162.4; IV.37.1; X.2.7; 88.15; 181.3.
27 op. cit. II.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. brahma, the prayer, or with the power which was inherent in the prayer. (cf. Sat. Br. 2.1.410). (p. 57).
29 vibhrād bhat subhṛtaṃ vājasātām dharman divo dharunā satyam arpitam. (Rg.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 Rg.v.X.85.161.105.12b.
32 cf. Ait. 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. Chand. 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. 2.4.4.10. (9.67) (Aśv.).
35 Chānd. Up. VIII.3.4.
36 Bṛhad. Up. V.5.1. cf.V.4.1
38 See p. 111 and 113.
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INDEX
(Selective. The alphabetisation according to the English order.)

adabdah
(undecidable) 4 ff

adaptation 17

adhvan (course) 29

adhyaksa (overseer) 19; 138

aditi (infinite) 17; 53 ff; 121

adri (rock) 6

āgās (aim) 109 ff

āgha (impurity) 112

ahimsa (non violence) 112

altar 179

ambivalence 41 ff; 74; 126

amhas (anguish) 121 ff; 123

āmrta (immortality) 162; 179 ff

āngirasas 100 ff

instituted the rta 161

anguish
see amhas

āmrta 98 ff

antariksa (mid-region) 57

apas (sacred work) 145 ff; 158; 195

ārāmāth (adoration) 18

arka (ray) 191; 176

artisan see kāru

asat see sat

asu, asura 69 ff

ātman 119; 216

ātmanvan nabhās
(soul-infused cloud) 162

bhakti (devotion) 150

bhūm 193

brahman god-given power 196

invocation 179; 195; 218

meaning 14; 176; 183

cakreṇa (wheel)
constriction
see amhas

cow (s) 162; 179; 195

as morning beams 99

creation
continuous 43 ff

as projection 39; 75

dakṣa 5; 53 ff

dakṣaṇā 112; 169

dāmū, dānakṣ ā

darkness 69; 100

99 ff

debt see rta

déceit 111 ff

dhāmaṇ 28; 75 ff; 159; 175; 180

dhamas 77 ff

dharma 78; 217

dhātā (ordainer) 38; 82

dhān 4 ff

definition 4

and Agni 191

and Soma 172 ff

insight into rta 6 ff

mystical perception 26

opening to knowledge 6

purifying function 158

result of aspiration 191

seven-headed 5

role of 158

distress 98; 122

divākara 100

dualism 39 ff

dyana 56

eānas 109

enlightenment 123; 176; 179; 192 ff

etapa 30

evil 40 ff

faith see ārddhā

falsehood see ārta

fetter (s) see pāśa

filter 157

forgiveness 118 ff

freedom 120 ff

see also varivas

friction 40 ff; 132

generosity 112

give and take

law of 162

wheel of 179

guṇā 194

guṇa hitam 119

guṇa mīśadan 193

harmony 82; 104; 132; 180 ff; 197; 212

hatred 110 ff; 127

havis (oblation) 192

hṛd (heart) 9; 157; 190 ff

Heaven and Earth see dyana, prthivī

holiness 115 ff

holy see rtaṇa

illumination 6; 179; 215

illumined 180

immense see transcendence

immortality see āmrta

integration 109; 123; 133; 181; 189;

integrity 197; 209; 214 ff

integrate

kalpa-yuga 216

kāma 38 ff

karma 104 ff; 145 ff; 216

and tapas 19
kavih 182
kavikratuh 189
kosa (sheath) 125
kratu definition and Agni 186; 190
light aditi's enlightened sound and sound 176 ff
manasa (inspired insight) 10; 150; 176
mru (zeal) 54; 203
mattis (thought) 9; 191
maya 70 ff
medha (wisdom) 6
mercy see mrlika
moksa (liberation) 122
mrlika (mercy, favour) 118; 128
maha (navel, centre) 60; 178 ff
mamas (homage) 18; 157
mridham paramam 100; 119
nirrti (dissolution) 46; 102; 129 ff
noose (upper, midst, lowest) 126
see also pâsa
pâsa 100 ff
papa (sin) 102; 109
parinama (evolution) 42
pâsa (noose) 126 ff
permutation 51; 60; 62; 64 ff
polarities 39 ff
pollution 112
see also sin
power divine 52
personal impersonal 54; 203 ff
pradisha (directions) 67
prama (means) 3
pratishtha (sphere) 18
pratiyantam (returning back) 119
prayer 174; 179; 195 ff
see also brahma
prthivi 58
projection see creation
pujarjaman (rebirth) 217
punishment and reward 114
punish 126
purifying 112; 156 ff
purohita (highpriest) 186
puruṣa 65; 146
spiritual essence transcendent and immanent 152
retribution 116; 112
rta (debt) 103; 106; 118
râman (holy) 60; 115 ff
sabda (verbal testimony) 3
sacrifice essence of institution of meaning of 144 ff
sadas, sadana (seat) 28 ff
sarvatâti (wholeness completeness) 115; 123
sat essential being core of rta ultimate reality and asat 21 ff and 44 ff
satyâ 102; 157; 174; 217 ff
and rta 20 ff
seership golden age of 7
sin and karma 104 ff
as pollution outstanding sins 112 ff
Vedic conception of 123
sound and light 175 ff
sraddha (faith) 157; 174; 203
sóti (revelation) 1.3
sukrtam 107
sumati (good disposition) 128
surya 177; 181
sva (one-eyed) 30; 177 ff
svadhi (spiritual insight) 150
svar 181
svarvidah 99; 176
(m)
tapas explanation 19
contemplative exertion 59; 147
power of creation 145 ff
primary impulse 38 ff
and sraddha 174
and tejas 189
tejas 189
transcendent (ence) 179; 181; 187 ff; 209
and immanence 214
transgression see sin
truth see also satya
uttansapad 38 ff; 59
vâc 1; 151; 175 ff
varivas (space freedom) 121; 123
varna 116 ff; 216
wâpi (vesture) 125
vidya (wisdom) 175
violence (primeval) 41
viraj vision 65
vision see dhâta
vrata 70; 78 ff
vrtta 41; 100 ff; 124 ff
wheel of give and take 179
see also cakram
wholeness see also sarvatâti
yajña 145 ff
purifying function 156 ff; 196-7
see also sacrifice
yojana 29
yoga 188
zodiac 24 ff