

II. Introductory Essays on Rig Veda

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1. Overview of Rig Veda

The Rig Veda has 10, 552 mantrās, each of which is in one of several specific metres like Gāyatri, Anuṣṭup etc. They are grouped into 1028 sūktās or hymns, each having roughly ten mantrās. The sūktās are further grouped into ten Maṇḍalās. However the size of these Maṇḍalās are uneven. Maṇḍala 2 has 43 sūktās while Maṇḍala 1 or Maṇḍala 10 have 191 sūktās.

These hymns deal with all aspects of wisdom, such as different cosmic powers and the ways of manifesting these powers in our everyday life, difficulties faced by a spiritual seeker and the ways of overcoming them, the paths of devotion, knowledge, etc. Even though RV is not a book on mathematics or science, it has a wealth of information on arithmetic, astronomy, Āyurveda, chariot-making etc. Some persons associate the word wisdom only with the knowledge of the transcendental state of the Supreme, completely separated from the life on earth. Obviously, Rig Vedic seers do not have such a narrow view of wisdom.

Every sūkta or hymn of RV has several mantrās or verses and a header having three items namely:

- (a) Rīṣhi (or Rīṣhis) to whom the sūkta was revealed
- (b) The metres of the various mantrās

- (c) The cosmic powers or Gods or devās or devīs with whom the rīṣhi communes using these mantrās.

We will first give brief definitions or descriptions of some of the terms introduced above such as mantra, metre, Rīṣhi, Gods or cosmic powers or devatās. We also mention briefly the message or essence of the RV. Detailed discussions of these terms such as devata will be clarified in the next several sections.

Mantra: A mantra in the Rig Veda is outwardly a poetic verse. At a deeper level, it is the expression of the intuition arising out of the depths of the soul of the rīṣhi. It is the voice of the rhythm which has created the worlds and is still creating perpetually several of its aspects. A mantra is packed with the power of the askesis (*tapas*) of the rīṣhi to whom it was revealed. Even a person who has no earlier exposure to the Veda can feel its power when a devotee chants it in the proper mode. Note that the verses of the poems or epics of famous poets like Kālidāsa are melodious and full of aesthetic beauty, but they are not mantrās. Every mantra in Rig Veda is called as a rik or ṛk, a Word of illumination. It is in one of several metres such as Gāyatri, Anuṣṭuph etc. The number of syllables or akṣharās in the mantra determines the metre to which it belongs. For instance a mantra in Gāyatri metre should have 24 akṣharās.

Every mantra in the Rig Veda is either a prayer or an adoration addressed to a cosmic power or devata such as Agni or a call for a Cosmic Power to manifest in the rīṣhi or a call for some action by the cosmic power. Many mantrās are celebrations of the actions of the devata including the gifts of powers of light and might. We have more to say on the mantrās in another subsection.

* संस्कृत भाषान्तरं 21 पृष्ठे दृश्यतां

Riṣhi: A riṣhi in the Rig Veda is a person who has the revelation of at least one ṛk mantra of the Rig Veda. The riṣhi literally hears the mantra by supra-physical methods. Sometimes the riṣhi hears the inspiration and he may supply words and the metre to complete it. Since the riṣhi has also supra-physical visions of the Truth, he/she is also called a seer (*draṣṭā*). There are about 400 riṣhis in the Rig Veda of whom at least 25 are women. Note that no one is born as a riṣhi. Being a son or a daughter of a riṣhi does not automatically give the person the powers of the riṣhi. A person performs intense spiritual practices including askesis (tapas) to become a riṣhi. There is no specific procedure for becoming a riṣhi. One becomes a riṣhi by the grace of the cosmic powers or devatās. In RV (1.31.16) deva Agni is said to create or form a riṣhi. (*ṛṣhikṛt*). Similarly RV (9.96.18) declares that Soma, the Lord of Delight, creates seers. A riṣhi is identified by two names, his own name and that of his lineage or teacher. The first sūkta of RVS was revealed to Madhuchchhandāḥ Vaishvāmītrāḥ, a disciple or son of Vishvāmītra. The famous Gāyatri mantra RV (3.62.10) was revealed to Vishvāmītra Gāthin, i.e., Vishvāmītra, son of Gātha. The name of the riṣhi indicates clearly the sex. The daughter of the riṣhi Kakshivān is Ghoshā Kakshivātī, who is herself the seer of RV (10.39) and (10.40). There are about 25 women seers of RV, such as Aditi Dākṣhāyaṇī, (RV 10.72), Apāla Ātreya (RV 8.91), Dakṣhiṇā Prajāpatya (RV 10.107), Yamī Vaivasvatī (RV 10.10), Vāgambriṇī (RV 10.125) etc. A riṣhi can be either celibate or married. A riṣhi is not only a man of contemplation, but also a man of action. Even though riṣhis advised the kings and helped them and their priests in the performance of the rites or rituals of the outward yajña, the riṣhis were not priests. In the Vedic period, riṣhi alone was considered as the teacher who gave his teaching both orally as well as by occult methods as stated explicitly in the Atharva Veda.

The seven riṣhis (*sapta ṛṣhayaḥ*) are mentioned explicitly by name in RV (10.137) namely Bharadvāja, Kashyapa, Gotama, Atri, Vishvāmītra, Jamadagni and Vasīṣṭha.

Both the collective of riṣhis and the collective of devatās work harmoniously for the welfare of not only the human beings but of the entire earth. Many legends in the Purāṇās which deal with the quarrels among the devatās do not find a place in RVS. Note that Purāṇa books were composed thousands of years later than the Rig Veda Samhitā.

Deva or Gods: '*deva*' means a luminous power. *deva* or *devata* is usually translated as Gods. These words and their relatives occur in the text in more than 1300 mantrās. It is a mistake to regard the devās or Gods as mere personifications of qualities. They are incarnations or emanations of cosmic forces endowed with a high level of consciousness. By reciting the mantrās and performing meditation, human beings can enter into concrete touch with these powers; they can help man and show him the way to a Divine Consciousness and immortal life. These Gods can literally take birth in human beings and guide him or her from within.

Every deva represents an outward aspect and an inner or psychological power. For instance Agni is the physical fire or the fire of digestion outwardly. At a deeper level, Agni is the Divine Will. Indra is the Lord of the Divine Mind. Sarasvati is the goddess of inspiration. By getting in touch with these gods, a human being can develop the psychological powers associated with them.

Message of the Rig Veda: The aim of both the riṣhis and the devās or Gods is to systematically lead every human being to higher and higher levels of perfection. This journey never stops till it culminates in all round perfection of every person, not only at an individual level but also at

the level of interaction between human beings and at the level of society. Even to imagine such a condition of all round perfection is hard. Let us try. Each one of us has familiarity with several professions say cooking, computer software, animal handling, health and healing, several physical sciences, electronic gadgets for audio and video etc. The experts in each field can suggest various changes for improvement. We can envision integrating all these changes. This is only a step towards perfection. The Vedic seers realised that such a radical goal of all round perfection cannot be intellectually described. According to them there already exists the plane of *satyam ṛtam brhat* --the Truth, the Right, the Vast -- which incorporates in itself the seed of the perfect perfection to come. To attain this state, we have to get in touch with the consciousness in that plane, Truth-Consciousness (*ṛta chit*). Rig Veda Samhitā gives detailed hints about the paths to be followed so that each one of us can become perfect and achieve this state of consciousness and the status of a ṛishi (1.164.40; 7.41.4). Such a great task cannot be achieved by human effort only. In every human task the Gods are the collaborators who do actually most of the work.

Every time a human being does a task with some consciousness, he can see or feel the collaboration of the Divine Powers. The human journey towards perfection is compared to climbing a mountain from peak to peak (RV 1.10.2) or to a journey in the uncharted waters of the ocean in a boat. After a certain stage, the human being feels that all the work is being done by the gods themselves.

There are also adverse cosmic powers in nature which pose obstacles in the path of the human seeker after perfection. These are forces of darkness and falsehood called as Dasyu, Vṛtra, Ahi, Vala etc. The Veda has numerous references to the symbolic battles between the Forces of

Light headed by Indra and Agni and the forces of darkness. The victory of the Gods is celebrated by the ṛishis with hymns to the deities.

Finally Rig Veda has several references to the realization of the Supreme One which encompasses everything in the universe. Upanishads describe some sādhanās or vidyās some of whose mantrās are in the Rig Veda Samhitā.

2. Rishis

The ṛishi has been held throughout the ages as the object of highest reverence. There was clearly an overwhelming distinction between the ṛishi and the priest. The ṛishi experienced the truths; he had the supra-physical revelation or hearing of the truth.

The ṛishi was not only a person (woman) of contemplation, but also of action who was capable of handling the most difficult situations of human life. He gave clear and unambiguous guidance. He was not necessarily a scholar or an intellectual. He had access to intuition, inspiration and other superior modes of knowledge and action. A verse of the Rig Veda is called a ṛik or word of illumination. Ṛishi or Rishi is one who has a vision of the rik or a supraphysical hearing of the rik. All the mantrās of the RVS have been revealed to 400 ṛishis of whom 25 are women. Some of the ṛishis were celibate and others were married. In the Vedic period, ṛishi alone was considered as the teacher who gave his teaching both by the oral instruction as well as the occult methods as indicated in Atharva Veda (11.5.3).

“The āchārya initiating him, takes the

Brahmachārin within him as a mother the child;
Three nights he carries him like a mother bearing
the child in her womb,

And to see him when born, devās come in a
body.”

In the Vedic period, there were communal celebrations of the Gods or cosmic powers. However it is a mistake to identify the important word *yajña* exclusively with these outward rites. The *ṛishis* were always engaged in the inner or internal *yajña* occurring in their subtle bodies. They would help guide the community in the performances of rites, but they would not be the priests. The physical rite was a physical representation of the work in the subtle body within.

Recall that 1028 *sūktās* of RVS are assigned to one of ten *Maṇḍalās*. The special characteristic of the six *Maṇḍalās*, *Maṇḍala* two through to *Maṇḍala* seven is that all the *sūktās* of each of the *Maṇḍalās* were revealed to a single *ṛishi* and his disciples. The *ṛishis* of these six *Maṇḍalās* are *Ṛṛisamada*, *Vishvāmitra*, *Vāmadeva*, *Atri*, *Bharadvāja* and *Vasiṣṭha*. Note this list is different from that of the *Saptarṣhi* in RV (10.137). *Shukla Yajur Veda* (34.55) giving the same list of seven *ṛishis* as in RV clearly states the esoteric nature of the *ṛishis*. “The seven sages are lodged in the body (*pratihito sharire*); the seven guard the home unerring.”

The *sūktās* of the remaining *Maṇḍalās* i.e., one, eight, nine and ten have several *ṛishis* of different lineages. As mentioned earlier the total number of *ṛishis* in RV is 400. All the *sūktās* of the first *Maṇḍala* having 191 *sūktās* were revealed to about 18 *ṛishis*. Some *ṛishis* appear in more than one *Maṇḍala*.

The Vedic *mantrās* are the records of the spiritual realizations and experiences of the *ṛishis*. In the Indian tradition the meaning of the word ‘spiritual’ is quite different from religion as commonly understood. Spirituality is free of any dogma or creed. Spiritual experience is an experience of the spirit or spiritual consciousness or consciousness which pervades the entire cosmos including all the activities of generation

and change. For instance, for our ordinary consciousness, each human being is different from another and also different from every other being, living or non-living. But from the point of view of spiritual consciousness, each one of us is a point in the ocean of consciousness; the thoughts, the desires, the emotions, etc., of each being appear to be waves in the ocean of the spirit, each wave waxing and waning through each point of the cosmos, each point corresponding to each human being. The movement of a particular wave of desire through a particular point gives the impression that the associated person has that particular wave of desire which she/he thinks originated in her/him. Similarly the power of a person depends on the cosmic forces of which she/he has conscious or unconscious control. Consequently there is no hard barrier between the individual humans and the cosmic powers called as *devās*, including the Supreme One. The persons in the Rig Veda who had special spiritual experiences are called as *ṛishis*.

They are also called seers because they literally see the actions of the cosmic powers. They communicate with the cosmic powers of Gods using the potent Words or *mantrās* which are vastly more powerful than the ordinary speech. Each verse of the Rig Veda is a mantra.

Sri Aurobindo hastens to add that these *ṛishis* or seers are not ‘intellectuals’. The age of Rig Veda which is four five millennia before the Christian era is clearly anterior to the intellectual age. These seers did not invent any special vocabulary to describe their experiences. Rather they applied the fluid character of the speech in that age to use certain words of common parlance as symbols of certain concrete spiritual expressions.

Whereas the Gods of the Rig Veda form a hierarchy with the supreme God being simply mentioned by the phrase ‘That ONE’ (*tad ekam*),

the Seer experienced the ONE through individual Gods, primarily Agni. Agni is not only a distinct power and personality of the ONE, namely the illumined will, the knower of births of all creatures, the youngest God, the God who brings all other Gods into their habitation in the individual human being, etc. He is also seen and experienced as the Universal person or being by several ṛishis. We clearly see here how the strength of the spiritual experience or sight prevents them from forming cults or groups, each of whom claim superiority for one particular God. For instance, the Seer Nodha Gautama hymns Agni as the Universal person in the sūkta (RV 1.59) and in the sūkta (RV 1.60); he also adores the deity Indra as the Ancient Person, 'whose greatness exceeds beyond heaven, earth, and midregion' (RV 1.61.9). The Rig Veda is a happy compilation of the distinct and individual experiences of more than four hundred seers with no note of discordance or disharmony.

3. Mantra, Metre and Accent Marks

A poem of high calibre has three basic components namely (i) the rhythmic-sound movement, (ii) the interwoven verbal form and thought substance, and (iii) the soul's vision of the Supreme and the all-encompassing Truth. When the intensities of all the three components are at the highest level then that poem or verse is a mantra. Every verse of Rig Veda is a mantra.

The word-rhythm of the mantra which we hear with our physical ears is only a part of what we hear. It is the support of what we listen with our inner ear, the Ear of the ear, (*shrotrasya shrotram*) (Kena Upanishad). The Vedic metre (*chhandas*) is the fixed and balanced system of the measure of sound (*mātra*). The ancients believed that the spirit of creation framed all the movements of world by *chhandas*, in certain fixed rhythms of the formative word and it is because

they are faithful to the cosmic metres that the basic world movements unchangingly endure. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things; metrical movement is nothing else than creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own power.

It is the musical sound-image which most helps to fill in, stabilise and deepen the thought impression or the emotional or vital impression and carry the sense beyond itself into something beyond intellectual expression, something ineffable.

This truth was better understood on the whole by ancients than by the modern mind, perhaps because they were more in the habit of singing, chanting or intoning their poetry. We moderns are content to read a poem which may bring out the intellectual element, but unduly depresses the rhythmic value.

Verbal Form and Thought Substance

The rhythm carries the thought movement in the word. The total meaning is something more than that given by the individual words. After sometime, the meaning flashes (appropriately called *sphoṭa*) in our inner being. Like painting or sculpture poetry appeals to the spirit of man through significant images. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of the sight or be included in it. Mantra conveys its essence through its form (*mantra darshana*). The Vedic poet was not merely a rhapsodist, not merely a thinker in stanzas, but is a seer, he who sees the world beyond the physical senses and the surface mind and finds the revealing word. The aim of poetry is not mere realistic imitation of nature, but to reveal the happenings in many planes closed to our ordinary waking consciousness.

Vision

No mantra is possible without a vision of the supraphysical reality. The vision need not be couched in philosophical language. The philosophers business is to look at a proposition, recognise its components and understand the relationship between these components which gives force to the proposition. The poet's business is to see the features in his vision and, excited by the vision, create a poem embodying the beauty. The Vedic poet (*kavi*) makes us see the vision which he has experienced. A person who repeats the mantra with full faith will eventually have the vision of the non-physical world experienced by the poet.

Power and Source of Mantra

According to Sri Aurobindo, mantra is the poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality.

The inspired Word secretly comes from the home of Truth (*sadanam rtasya*, RV 1.164.47) above the mind. It is plunged first into our intuitive depths and emerges imperfectly to be shaped by the poetic feeling and intelligences.

There is a subliminal power, the transmitting agent, concealed in some secret cavern, *nihitam guhā*, RV (1.130.3), (1.164.45); *guhāhitam*, RV (4.7.6); *nihitam guhāvīḥ*, RV (10.71.1).

The more we can bring in of its direct power and vision, the more intuitive and illumined become the words of our intelligence.

A mantra is potent with a certain power. What kind of power is it? The essential power of the mantra is to make us see the world or thought beyond our senses. This contact with the supraphysical world endows the person, who sees, with a certain power the intensity of which depends on the person.

The reciter of mantra experiences the *rasa* which was enjoyed by the poet-seer (*kavi*).

Sri Aurobindo on Mantra

“The mantra cannot only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychological being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did not possess before, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the production of material forms on the physical plane.” (Kena U. p.169-170, quoted by M.P. Pandit, in ‘Vedic Deities’, p.15).

Vāk, the Inspired Word

Even though Vāk is often translated as speech, it is important to distinguish between the speech of the ordinary persons and the Speech, the potent Word which has its home in the highest Truth-consciousness and which comes out of the mouth of the ṛishi as mantra. This distinction is highlighted by the great poet Bhavabhūti who states [quoted in E3, vol. 1, p. 346] that the characteristic of speech of even good persons, *sādhus*, is that it is (or at least is expected to be) consistent with the corresponding thought which has been already formulated in the mind. But the Vāk of the ṛishi does not originate in the mind. It comes directly from the highest plane of Truth-consciousness and when it comes out of a ṛishi, it has the creative power of changing the world or the environment of the ṛishi so that the world becomes consistent with the spoken Vāk. When the inspired word is uttered, the falsehood is destroyed.

Metres or Chhandas

Even though the metres of the RV mantrās are numerous, most of the mantrās are in seven metres namely Gāyatri, Uṣṇik, Anuṣṭubh, Bṛhatī, Virāt (Virāj), Triṣṭubh and Jagatī which are listed in RV (10.130.4). The type of metre is primarily characterized by the number of syllables (*akṣhara*) in the mantra. Gāyatri has 24 syllables.

The seven metres have respectively 24, 28, 32, 36, 40, 44 and 48 syllables. In the traditional listing of metres, the metre Pañṅkti replaces Virāṭ, both having 40 syllables. RV (1.65.1) is in Dvipadā Virāṭ, i.e., Virāṭ with 2 feet each of 20 syllables. Every syllable is pronounced in one of three ways, *udāṭṭa*, *anudāṭṭa* and *svarita*. The printed text of RV indicates the pronunciation for each syllable by diacritical marks, a vertical line above the letter or a horizontal line below the letter. The mantrās 4 and 5 in the creation hymn RV (10.130) associate a cosmic power or devata with each metre as follows: *Gāyatri*, Agni; *Uṣhṇik*, Savitṛ; *Anuṣṭubh*, Soma; *Bṛhatī*, Bṛhaspati; *Virāṭ*, Mitra and Varuṇa; *Triṣṭubh*, Indra; *Jagatī*, Vishvedevāḥ.

4. Vedic Gods

A deep understanding of spirituality, interpreted in a broad sense, is not possible without a good understanding of the nature and the role of gods mentioned in the Rig Veda.

The word deva occurs in about 1300 mantrās out of the 10,552 mantrās of the Rig Veda. Even though deva is rendered as God in English translations, we prefer the word deva; it is derived from the word *div*, to shine or illumine. The devās are supraphysical beings without bodies endowed with consciousness, knowledge and power. They carry out the actions directly from their consciousness without the need for a body.

As Sri Aurobindo says, gods are not personifications of qualities or powers, but incarnations or emanations of conscious forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they can help man and show him the way to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

Most of us are aware of the immense complexity of the life around us, even in its external forms. Unravelling the mystery of the

external world is, after all the goal of physical sciences. A complete analysis of all our experiences, physical, vital and mental, is impossible for most of us. Faced with this formidable situation, it is tempting to say that there is no order in this world and all the occurrences are the results of 'pure chance', whatever that word may mean. Many agnostic philosophers like Bertrand Russell have written extensively their reasons for not believing in the existence of a God who controls this universe. However, a close analysis of their writings reveals that these authors are only demolishing the limited conceptions of God in their minds. Again, the explanation of some theists that after death all go to a place called heaven or hell is also very simplistic. To appreciate the connection between the various suggestions of philosophies and religions, we have to remember the tale of five blind men who reported touching a creature which was as huge as the trunk of a big tree, as slithery as a snake, as hard and smooth like granite, and as broad as a huge leaf. It is easy to dismiss their reports as meaningless unless one has seen an elephant whose different parts of the body correspond to the diverse description given by the blind men.

An integrated view of the human beings and all the forces surrounding us cannot be obtained by any reasoning just as a person who has not seen an elephant cannot visualise it using all the partial descriptions given by others. The integral view has to be attained by a power beyond the ordinary mind such as intuition. Once the integrated view is revealed to us, we can use it to interpret all our experiences, just as a person who has seen an elephant can explain all its partial descriptions. Rig Veda Samhitā is a record of the realizations and the experiences of the seers and their integrated view.

The Vedic sages realised that the manifestation is like a multi-tiered hill which can

be adequately described by seven planes of existence which are the lower triple worlds, namely the world of matter, the world of life or vital and the world of mind; the higher triple worlds named as the world of existence, world of knowledge, and the world of bliss; and finally the world linking the lower three to the upper three, namely the world of Mahas or Vijnāna. Vijnāna is mistranslated as intellect. The power presiding over each plane is a deva or god. Thus, a god is a distinct power and personality of the Supreme.

It is worthwhile reiterating that these worlds are not the physical worlds and they cannot be reached by physical means. These worlds are in reality different states of consciousness. A human being who is conscious of only matter is at that time living in the world of matter. When his consciousness is dwelling on desires, feelings, emotions, etc., then he is living in the vital world. When he is immersed in thought, then he is in the mental plane or world. The god Agni presides over the world of matter, the god Vāyu presides over the vital world, and the god Indra over the mental world. Most human beings are conscious of only the three lower levels of existence.

The meaning of the gods is not exhausted by their descriptions as rulers of different planes. Let us take the God Agni. Agni, of course, in the physical sense stands for the principle of fire. But even in the first hymn of Rig Veda the god Agni is described as a herald, a priest and as one who leads all other gods to the worshipper. Western academics have been wont to dismiss these epithets as typical exaggerations, conferred on an anthropomorphic conception of the god Agni. Sri Aurobindo and Sri Kapāli Sāstry explain that the god Agni in the esoteric sense stands for the principle of aspiration in man to achieve higher things than his present state. Progress is not possible without aspiration. Hence, only if Agni is active, can he bring in the other gods or powers,

i.e., the other powers can manifest in man. Thus, at the beginning of Rig Veda Samhitā the sages describe spiritual progress as a journey (adhvara) from one peak of the multi-tiered hill to another. If we are at a peak, we get a much better view of the road to be traversed than if we are near the base of a hill. This conception is clearly very modern, but it is a paraphrase verse (1.10.2) of the Rig Veda Samhitā.

One can establish a conscious relationship with each cosmic power. Consequently that power enters the human being and grows in him/her like a plant. The idea of the *deva* manifesting his power in a human is called as the birth of the deva in hundreds of mantrās indicated by words like *janayan* or *jajnāna*. These powers increase in man as indicated by the words like *vardhya*, *ūti*.

A seer hymns a God with some epithets used by others and some not used by others. If we compile the hymns of different seers to the same God (as Sri Aurobindo did regarding the deity Agni), we can easily see the special powers and personality associated with each deity. For instance, take the word '*adhbhuta*' or wonderful. It is used more than twenty times in the Rig Veda, almost always as an appellation of the God Agni (except once when it is used for Indra). Again the word *kumara* or *jātavedas* is used only in connection with Agni. Even though the Gods are described in superlative epithets, the set of phrases describing each God is clearly distinct, indicating that the different Seers who hymn Indra really had the vision of that deity doing the divine tasks attributed to that deity.

To understand the powers common to all the *devās*, we have to read the hymns dedicated to the Vishvedevāḥ or All-Gods or the collective of all the Gods.

In the Vedās Aditi is the mother of all the Gods. We will quote Sri Aurobindo to illustrate the

connection between the reality and myth regarding Aditi “...originally the pure consciousness of infinite existence, one and self-luminous; she is the Light that is Mother of all things. As the infinite she gives birth to Dakṣha, the discriminating and distributing Thought of the divine mind, and is herself born to Dakṣha as the cosmic infinite, the mystic cow whose udders feed all the words . . . In the cosmos Aditi is the undivided infinite unity of things free from duality (*advaya*), and has Diti, the separative dualizing consciousness, for the obverse side of her cosmic creation, her sister and rival wife in the later myth.”

A word about the connection between the Vedic Gods and Purāṇic Gods is appropriate here. In the Veda, all the Gods are pure and harmonious with no bad qualities like competition and others associated with the vital human nature. Each Vedic God has a distinct power and personality, but he or she carries also the presence of the Supreme, ‘That one.’ All the Vedic Gods harmoniously work together in divinising the individual person by being born in him. When the age of the Vedic Samhitā came to an end, several centuries later the Upanishad period started to capture the truths of the Vedic period. At a much later period, the Purāṇās started to state the esoteric truths of the Veda in a language accessible to the so-called common man or woman. However, in this attempt the qualities of the Vedic Gods were mixed up with the qualities of some lower Gods of the Prāṇa or vital plane. Thus in the Purāṇās, the various Gods sometimes work together, but also compete with one another.

5. Brahma, Viṣṇu and Rudra-Shiva

From the point of view of functionality, the triad of these deities is intimately connected to the corresponding triad in the Purāṇās. However the

Purāṇās have many myths associated with these deities. These myths must not be literally imposed on the corresponding Vedic deities. The myths embody a symbolism which are relevant for the Vedic deities also.

Further some Indologists declare that Viṣṇu and Rudra are minor deities in the Rig Veda since the number of mantrās dedicated to them in RV is much smaller than that dedicated to Agni and Indra.

Why are there such a large number of hymns devoted to Indra or Agni? The hymns stress the role of the deities whose favour is indispensable in the upward path of the ancient ṛishis engaged in the inner sacrifice. Neither Viṣṇu nor Rudra are as relevant in the early stages of ascent as Agni or Indra.

The analogy is one of popular education. The masters degree in a field is achieved in one or two years whereas a child spends 8-10 years in the grade school. Only after the firm foundation of grade school, can one go to the college to obtain bachelors or masters degree. Agni and Indra prepare the foundation for the spiritual life. Hence the number of hymns to them is larger.

Brahma and Brahmaṇaspati

In the Veda the three terms--Brahmaṇaspati, Bṛhaspati and Brahma--relate to one deity. In the Veda Brahma stands also for mantra. Brahmaṇaspati is the lord of the mantrās. He gives form to the various aspects of the Universe. RV (10.72.2) states that just as a blacksmith gives the specific shapes to objects, Brahmaṇaspati gives the specific shape and functionality for each object of the Universe.

Brahmaṇaspati is stationed within man, as if asleep. In the hymn 43, there is first a prayer to him to awake. By the power of his Word, the happy speech of truth, the Maruts, Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryamā and other Gods take their

positions in the sacrificer. He himself takes his dwelling in the sacrificer. His powers and functions as the creator have been clarified briefly in section 3 earlier.

Vishṇu

Vishṇu creates or manifests the Universe of seven planes, unveils its laws and maintains the Universe under these laws. This happens not only in the macrocosm, but also in the microcosm, the subtle body of man. “Vishṇu paces out the vast framework of the inner worlds in which our soul-action takes place. It is by him and with him that we rise into his highest seats where we find waiting for us the Friend, the Beloved and the Beatific Godhead.” [Sri Aurobindo]

Each plane is manifested by Vishṇu is based on a particular principle. For instance this world, earth, is dominated by matter. The midworld, *antarikṣha*, is dominated by life-energies, emotional energies etc. The world of heaven, *dyu*, is dominated by the mental energies. The highest station is said to be Vishṇu’s supreme step. He creates the path by which the mortals can reach the supreme station after traversing the intermediate worlds. Upholding the Universe with his three steps, Vishṇu creates for Indra a wide station amongst us mortals by which we can reach the supreme station above.

“When Vishṇu is said to sleep on the folds of the snake *ananta* upon the ocean of sweet milk, *ananta* is clearly seen to be not the common serpent, nor the milk the material sweet milk, nor the ocean an expanse of milky liquid. The symbolic meaning is that the All-pervading Vishṇu rests on the coils of the Infinite in the blissful ocean of Eternal Existence. Some persons who do believe that Veda has no wisdom in it say that, “the authors of the purāṇās were priests, gross minds who knew not even the truth of the solar and lunar eclipses; how could they be in the know of profound varieties? They mean only the

usual physical serpent and the material ocean of real milk and it is we who read into them the symbolic meaning we could point out that there is no necessity for us to imagine so.” These poets themselves have imprinted the symbolic thought by means of figures and words and made known impenetrable truths for the benefit of all. Note, those words are: Vishṇu means all-pervading, the serpent *Sheṣha* is *ananta*, the infinite; sweet milk is a symbol of bliss; the ocean is a symbol of the Eternal Existence” [E3, Vol. 4, P. 180].

Rudra-Shiva

Rudra forcibly leads this creation upwards. He puts down all those who arrogantly obstruct his courses and kills the evil opponents. Though thus terrible, he is beneficent, and compassionate to the distressed.

Both in the Purāṇās and the Āgamās, Rudra is lauded as Shiva the benevolent and the destroyer. Though Gods like Agni have specific features in the front according to their several functions, yet each is only a front of the All-Gods supporting from within, one light of the original Godhead. Hence though specific features of each deity are denoted, yet mention of those of other deities alongside makes it difficult to determine the sole specialty of each. Thus in certain hymns (e.g. 4.3.1) there is hardly any distinction between Agni and Rudra; similarly between Indra and Rudra elsewhere. Still inspite of the fact that the features of Agni, Indra, the supreme Godhead, are ascribed to Rudra, it is possible to sift certain specific characteristics of Rudra.

Even derivatively, the word Rudra denotes the fierce or terrible one. The hymns speak of him as the source of life-strengths, father of Rudrās, parent of Maruts, as Shiva the benevolent. They speak of his greatness, plentiful progeny, parentage of Maruts and giver of the universe, who spreads felicity among all. The profound Mantra, *trayambakam yajāmahe* (7.59.12)

celebrates his power to liberate all persons from premature death. The half of the Mantra illustrating the release from bondage contains a truth of direct experience in yoga relevant even today. It reads, *urvārukamiva bandhanāt mṛtyor mukṣhīya māmṛtāt*; even as the fruit as it ripens gets loosened from the hard shell covering it, the soul within gets separated from the external body subject to death. So, the ṛṣhi says: release us from bondage to death, but not from immortality. This is the basis of the passage in the Kaṭha Upanishad (6.17) which speaks of extracting the soul from the body as the fibre from a blade of grass.

6. Yajña

Let us understand yajña by studying the epithets ascribed to it in more than one thousand verses. It is a fundamental mistake to regard yajña merely as a ritual or rite. Veda describes yajña as journey, as climbing a hill, as a battle and also as worship or rite. The worship or rite is not that done by a human being. Agni the *deva* is called upon to perform the rite; Agni is requested to do all the functions associated with the various priests. Agni is called upon to worship on behalf of the ṛṣhi not only the *devās* but also the human beings who have attained perfection (1.45.1).

According to the Rig Vedic mystics, a human being performs an action only because of the assistance s/he gets from the *devās*. As a matter of fact, the contribution of the human in each action is nominal. Even great poets like the Vedic poets obtained inspiration from superior planes and their main contribution is in transcribing the revealed verses in appropriate metres. Yajña is that activity which recognises the collaboration between the *deva* and the human. Yajña is not a mere rule or ritual. A ṛṣhi is conscious of the Divine's Hand in the performance of all activities. The later scripture *Bhagavad Gīta* specifically

mentions the different yajñās by name like yajña of obtaining material objects, yajña of obtaining knowledge, yajña involving self-study and so on. The sages are also conscious of the role of the *deva*, especially of Agni, so that they request him to perform the yajña (or the activity) on their behalf.

Let us discuss the various epithets assigned to yajña beginning with *adhvara*, journey. *Adhvara* is derived from *adhva* path and *ra* to move. Ritualists regard this word as a synonym for rite since one of the principal priests in the rite is called *adhvaryu*. The function of the priest is to direct the rite and this function is in tune with the meaning assigned to *adhvara*. What is this journey? Every action in our life is a step in our journey towards realising the goal, namely bliss, an all-sided perfection of not only the physical body, but the vital and mental bodies, not only an individual perfection but perfection of the entire society. Veda uses the imagery of voyage for yajña. Just as merchants go in their boats to distant countries and bring valuable treasures from these countries, a person who does yajña reaches different states of consciousness, gets priceless experiences and brings them back to the ordinary living conditions and thus makes the human life Divine.

The yajña is also climbing from one peak to another, from one degree of perfection to another, (1.10.2). It is explicitly stated that we are not consciously aware of the entire journey. We can know only of what can be done at that stage. Whenever help is needed in this climbing, the *devās* again manifest and help us along.

Yajña is also a battle. We have mentioned only helpful powers of the nature, the *devās*. There are also the powers that hinder our journey towards perfection. These powers are called *dasyus*, the thieves or destroyers, *Vṛtra* and *Vala* being prominent among them. These *dasyus*

impede our progress. They are called *ayajvānaḥ*, people who do not recognise the principle of collaboration or yajña. They foster in human beings, who come under their influence, the qualities like jealousy, greed etc. The human collaborators call upon the *devās* to battle against these adversaries. Hence yajña is also a battle.

Yajña is a rite or ritual too, which is a symbolic physical representation of the various steps involved in collaboration. The ritual begins with the invocation of Agni by lighting the physical fire. The dry fuel *samit* is fed to the fire as representing all the qualities which are not necessary or not appropriate. The fire is nourished by the ghee which symbolises mental clarity. The Soma herb which stands for the bliss released in all actions is also offered to Agni as well as rice and grains. These are some of the steps in the famous Soma rite.

Every rite has four priests namely *hotṛ*, *adhvaryu*, *udgātṛ* and *brahma*, whose names indicate their functions. *Hotṛ* is the *deva* who calls all the other *devās* to come and participate in the divine activity yajña. *Adhvaryu* lays down the various steps in the successful performance of the yajña. *Udgātṛ* is the *deva* who chants the prescribed mantrās in the appropriate metres at requisite times. In RV there is no mention of the four faced creator-god of that name, *Brahma*. In the Veda *brahma* always stands for the *mantra*, the potent Word. *Brahma* is the priest who presides over the entire yajña and makes sure that everything is performed in the correct manner. In the RV, it is the *deva* Agni who performs all these functions in the psychological yajña, the collaborative and co-creative actions of the *devās* and the humans.

Yajña is intimately connected with mantra. We have to invoke the Gods in the inner sacrifice by the Voice potent with the power of the mantra. To them offering of whatever is ours is made;

receiving all that is given by them in return, we shall be enabled and made competent to ascend the path of the goal.

7. Secret of the Veda in Aphorisms

[These aphorisms have been prepared by Shāstra-Chūḍāmaṇi, Veda Kamala Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao based on the *bhūmika* of the Rig Vedic commentary *Siddhāñjana* of Sri T.V. Kapāli Sāstry using TVK's own words. S.K.R. hopes that these aphorisms illustrate the general framework of Vedic Interpretation accepted by Yāska, Shaunaka, Kātyāyana, Ānandāīrtha, Rāghavendra Swāmi and in recent years, by Sri Aurobindo.]

1. The Veda is eternal, because it made its appearance from the highest space without limits, known as *parama-vyoma* or *bṛhad-dyauḥ*, beyond the three realms of existence (*bhūḥ*, *bhuvah* and *suvah*).
2. The Veda is primarily intended to aid spiritual study, contemplation and spiritual practices.
3. The Veda that is most ancient is but one; it is called Rig Veda, a collection of riks (mantrās).
4. For the sake of performing rituals, the mantrās of Yajur Veda and the Brāhmaṇa-texts were prepared at a later period.
5. The mantrās of the Rig Veda were direct perceptions of the seers.
6. The seers who perceived the mantrās dwell, before their birth and after their passing away, in the highest space (from which the Veda made its appearance).
7. The seers, abiding in a state of high austerity, encountered directly the mantrās (known by the name *brahma*), according to Yāska.
8. The Veda is not concerned with dharma (rules of good life) and Karma (rituals) only; there is in the Veda a hidden teaching which is spiritual in nature, pertaining to the Self.

9. This essential import of the mantrās was concealed by a secret (or coded) language; the seers hid the secret within the mantra.
10. The inner import is that it takes the form of symbols and abides in the mantrās.
11. The seers employed the symbols for the sake of preserving the real meaning of the Veda.
12. It is proper therefore that one must understand the significance of the symbols in order to determine the true import of the Veda.
13. The secrets indicated by the symbols pertain to the internal or esoteric mysteries.
14. One must attempt to comprehend the purport of the mantrās only in accordance with the inner meanings.
15. An understanding of the system of symbolism is the gateway to get at the secret of the Veda.
16. In all Veda there is but one system of symbolism.
17. For all the seers of the mantrās, there is but one goal, one hidden teaching and one tradition of symbolism.
18. The hidden teaching is this: The supreme and solitary divinity is Sūrya, the Supreme Person.
19. Sūrya abides bearing several names and assuming several deity-forms.
20. The real is but one, but bearing a multiplicity of names and forms.
21. The origin of all deities is but one, the nature of all deities is also one, and the goal of all of them is one too.
22. The differences among the deities are in accordance with their functions and their personalities.
23. The deities can be apprehended by one's inner perception.
24. The nature of the deities, however, are capable of being perceived by the eye that is opened by the divine or inner vision.
25. All the deities begin to function only at the level of the supreme reality (viz., the highest space, *brhat-dyauh*, from which the Veda makes its appearance, and in which the seers dwell); and their actions have a tendency to ascend.
26. The Veda presents the picture of the deities with their own names, qualities and actions, but who are all in reality so many aspects of the one great self, known by the name Sūrya.
27. The sacrificial ritual is also symbolic; the supreme purport of the Vedic sacrifice is but inner worship.
28. Whoever is the wise person, equipped with vision and learning, who becomes competent enough to realise the hidden teaching of the mantra, it is for him that the Veda reveals itself.
29. For him, the symbols of their own accord would reveal the secret import.
30. One must therefore make efforts to understand aright the true meaning of the mantrās.

7. वेदगूढार्थबोध सूत्राणि

[शास्त्रचूडामणि, वेदकमल सा.कृ.रामचन्द्र राय महोदयैः रचितानि एतानि सूत्राणि वेदानां रहस्यार्थावबोधने सहायकानि भवन्ति । एतानि कपालिशास्त्रि विरचितस्य ऋग्वेद सिद्धाञ्जनाख्य भाष्यस्य भूमिकायाः आधारेण रचितानि । तानि च यास्क, शौनक, कात्यायन, आनन्दतीर्थ, राघवेन्द्रतीर्थैः एवं अर्वाचीनैः श्री अरोबिन्दो इत्यादि महाशयैः अङ्गीकृतं वेदव्याप्तिं स्पष्टीकुर्वन्ति ।]

1. परमव्योम्नि समुद्भूतत्वाद्देदो नित्यम् ॥

2. कृत्स्नस्य वेदस्य स्वाध्याये जपे ध्याने एव सामान्य विनियोगे बोध्यः ॥
3. एक एव परो वेदः पुरातनः । स ऋग्वेदः ।
4. यज्ञकर्मकलापसमृद्धै यजुषां मन्त्राणां च कल्पना उत्तरकालीना ॥
5. ऋचः ऋषीणां दृष्टयो भवन्ति ॥
6. मन्त्रदर्शिनि ऋषेर्जन्मनः प्राक् मृतेः परं च सिद्धमेव परमं व्योम ॥
7. तपःस्थितानां ऋषीणां ब्रह्मपदवाच्यो मन्त्रः प्रत्यक्षोऽभवदिति यास्कः ॥
8. न केवलं धर्मकर्मपरो वेदः । अध्यात्मविद्यादिरहस्यमस्ति वेदे ॥
9. रहस्यभाषया मन्त्रार्थो गोपितो भवति । मन्त्रेषु ऋषिभिः रहस्यं निक्षिप्तम् ॥
10. अन्तरर्थे एव सङ्केतरूपं धृत्वा मन्त्रे स्थितः ॥
11. ऋषिभिः प्रयुक्ताः सङ्केताः वेदार्थगोपनार्थम् ॥
12. वेदसूक्तार्थविचारे सङ्केतरूपार्थग्रहणं न्याय्यम् ॥
13. निष्पद्यपदार्थभूतरहस्यानि ॥ ऋ. (4.3.16)
14. मन्त्रतात्पर्यावगाहनं अन्तरार्थानुसारेण कर्तव्यम् ॥
15. सङ्केतव्यवस्थापरिज्ञानं वेदरहस्यावगाहनस्य द्वारम् ॥
16. समस्तेऽपि ऋग्वेदे एकरूपा सङ्केतव्यवस्था ॥
17. सर्वेषां मन्त्रदृष्ट्याणां एक एव परमं लक्ष्यं, एकमेव रहस्यं, एकमेव सङ्केतसम्प्रदायः ॥
18. रहस्यं त्विदम् । एक एव परो देवः सूर्यात्मा परमः पुमान् ॥
19. सः बहुदेवतात्मकतया बहूनि नामानि विभ्रदवतिष्ठते ॥
20. एकः परो नानामूर्तिनामस्वरूपधृक् ॥
21. देवानां एकमूलत्वं एकात्मत्वं एकलक्ष्यत्वम् ॥
22. तेषां पृथक्त्वं तु नामतो व्यापारतो व्यक्तितश्च ॥
23. यच्चेतना एव देवाः अन्तर्दृष्टिगोचराः ॥
24. देवानां स्वरूपाणि तु दिव्येनाभ्यन्तरेण वा उन्मीलितेन चक्षुषा ग्राह्याणि ॥
25. सर्वेषां देवानां कर्माणि परमाद्भ्रातः प्रारभन्ते, ऊर्ध्वमूलानि च भवन्ति ॥
26. एक एव महानात्मा सूर्यपदवाच्यः यस्यैव मूर्तिभेदाः व्यक्तिविशेषाः अङ्गप्रत्यङ्गभूताः तत्तद्गुणक्रियोचितानि नामानि विभ्रते देवाः वेदे प्रतिपादिताः ॥
27. यज्ञोऽपि सङ्केतरूपः । वैदिकाध्वरस्य परमार्थं अन्तर्यजनमेव व्याचक्षते ॥
28. यस्तु विज्ञः दृष्टिश्रुतिसम्पन्नः मन्त्ररहस्यं साक्षात्कर्तुमधिकारी भवति तस्मै ऋगात्मिका वाक् स्वयं प्रकाशं भवति ॥
29. सङ्केताः स्वयमेव विवृतगूढार्थाः स्पष्टं लक्ष्यन्ते ॥
30. अतो मन्त्रार्थावगत्यै यत्तः कार्यः ॥