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A RE-EXAMINATION OF RGVEDA X.129,
THE NĀSAĐĪYA HYMN

WALTER H. MAUER
University of Hawaii

'This article is dedicated to the revered memory of Dr. W. Norman Brown, under whose inspiring tutelage its author first became acquainted with the tantalizing problems of the Veda.'

This well-known hymn is here re-examined in the light of the extensive study that has been expended upon it by many scholars over the years. Each stanza is discussed and annotated in detail and a new, closely literal translation provided, which, it is hoped, reflects greater clarity and cohesiveness in the development of the ideas from one stanza to the other.

The Nāsadiya 1 Hymn, or Creation Hymn as it is often somewhat misleadingly called, belongs to a group of hymns, numbering under a dozen and almost entirely confined to the

*The writing of this paper has been a gradual process involving several separate stages, in the course of which I have made many small modifications in my original views as first presented to the XXIXth International Congress of Orientalists, Paris, 1973, partly as a result of exchanges with colleagues and students, and partly in consequence of further reflection and study of my own. To all those whose views have contributed to the evolution of this paper from āṣat to sāt, so to speak, I here express my profoundest gratitude.

1. This term Nāsadiya is derived, by the addition of the suffix -īya, from the first two words of the hymn, nā āsad (contracted from nāsad by vowel coalescence). A longer name, Nāsādaśīya, made similarly from the first three words, nāsad āṣin (minus the final consonant!), is occasionally seen (e.g. it is used by Ludwig and Deussen).
tenth and last Mandala of the Rgveda, that address themselves to the question of the origin of the world. These cosmogenic hymns are immensely important to the understanding of the gradual evolution of Indian philosophic thought from its earliest beginnings in the Rgveda to the Upaniṣads and the great systems or darsīnas. It is not to be supposed, however, that the speculative matter contained in these hymns constitutes in any sense a single and coherent system of thought. The fact is quite the reverse: not only are many opinions ventured as to how the world began, but within the same hymn are found contradictions, so that it is quite impossible to present one homogeneous Vedic cosmogony. Furthermore, the different theories are in general presented in a fragmentary, incomplete form tantalizingly lacking in detail or elaboration. What one finds is a series of gropings, attempts to offer some acceptable explanation of how it all began. In one place it is asked: 'What, pray, was the wood, what was the tree from which they fashioned heaven and earth which are firm and unaging, while the days and former dawns have perished?' 2 The answer to this question is given not in the Rgveda but in the Taittiriyabṛāhmaṇa, where we read: 'Bṛāhmaṇ was the wood, Bṛāhmaṇ was the tree from which they fashioned heaven and earth.' 3 In yet another place the creation of the world is ascribed to Viśvākarma, the great artificer of the gods, who performed his work like a mighty smith with bel lows and fan. 4 Elsewhere to Tvāṣṭṛ, the divine artisan. 5 In another passage the world is attributed to Hiranyakarṣaṇa, the 'golden germ,' who arose in the beginning and became the one lord of all, upholder of heaven and earth, giver of life and breath. 6 Another hymn asserts that the world originated from a great sacrifice in which the gods offered as victim the primeval giant Pūrṣa, parts of whose body became portions of the universe. 7 But certainly the boldest and by far the most remarkable of all these attempts to explain the beginnings of things is to be found in the Nāsadiya Hymn, X.129.

In all probability no hymn in the entire Rgveda has been the object of more attention than this short hymn of but seven stanzas. Moreover, it has been translated more than any other hymn in the whole collection, and it can rightly be said that practically every Sanskritist of note has made a translation of it, whether in a separate article devoted to this hymn or in connection with a larger study involving Vedic exegesis. 8 Some scholars have been lavish in their praise of it. For example, the German Sanskritist and philosopher, Paul Deussen, says in his Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie: 'In its noble simplicity, in the loftiness and purity of its philosophical ideas this famous ... hymn is perhaps the most remarkable bit of philosophy that has come down to us from ancient times.' 9 The greatest of American Sanskritists, William Dwight Whitney, however, was somewhat less favorably disposed to this hymn: 'The unlimited praises which have been bestowed upon it, as philosophy and as poetry, are well-nigh nauseating.' 10

But in spite of the attention that has been accorded this hymn, many difficulties continue to impede its interpretation. Unfortunately the translations, though numerous, tend to borrow from one another, especially in those parts where a fresh interpretation would be most welcome. In addition to failing to pierce the veil of darkness and provide anything essentially new, some of the more recent translations often compound the problems by an awkward obscurity of phraseology, occasionally enhanced by an insistence upon a metrical translation.

The chief example in the hymn of an old notion to which almost all translators have adhered occurs in stanza 4 where we are told that 'in the beginning desire arose upon That.' In the

2. R. V. X. 31. 7: kīṁ svaṁ vānaṁ kā u sā vrṣā āsa yāto dyāyopṛitvā niṣṭataḥ | saṁtarthāne naye iti itāhā śanti purīr maśa jāntat | 3. Taittiriyabṛāhmaṇa II. 8. 9. 6: bṛāhma vānaṁ bṛāhma sā vrṣā āstā | yāto dyāyopṛitvā niṣṭataḥ |
4. R. V. X. 81 and 82.
5. No entire hymn is addressed to Tvāṣṭṛ, but he is often mentioned (e. g. Macdonell, Vedic Mythology. § 386, p. 116ff.).
6. R. V. X. 121.
7. R. V. X. 90.
8. Some of the most important studies of this hymn (which contain translations) are given in the bibliographical references at the end of this article. The frequency of its translation was noted as long ago as 1883 by Ludwig who remarked: 'Diese säkturn gehört zu den am häufigsten übersetzten des Rgveda' (Der Rgveda, p. 433).
9. Deussen, pp. 119-120: 'Dieser berühmte ... Hymnus ist in seiner edlen Einfachheit, in der Hoheit und Reinheit seiner philosophischen Anschauungen vielleicht das bewunderungswürdigste Stück Philosophie, welches aus alter Zeit uns überkommen ist.'
latter half of this stanza, which in my opinion contains the key
to the entire hymn and, at the least, represents the culmination
of its ideas, it is stated that 'wise men found out the connection
of the existent in the non-existent, after searching with the wis-
dom in their heart.' But when the two parts are thus translated,
they lack interrelationship, as the notion of desire is not ex-
tended to the second half where nothing further is made of it.
The two parts can be brought intimately and meaningfully
together if 'desire' is understood as object of the verb 'found
out' with the remaining words of the third verse serving as its
explanatory adjunct. The discovery made by the seers, then,
would be that 'desire is the connecting link between the exist-
ent (i.e. the world of reality) and the non-existent (i.e. the in-
determinate condition of primordial time).'

If this notion is correct, it serves not only to make a more homogeneous unity
out of stanza 4 and more closely integrate it with the preceding
and following stanzas, but to bring this hymn into more direct
and intimate relationship to later Indian philosophic thought,
where this notion of desire as the starting point of creation is
common.

One of the problems presented by this hymn is to what ex-
tent later philosophic ideas are dependent on it. The vague-
ness and condensation of its phraseology are such that it can be
regarded as providing the basis of both the Sāmkhya and
Vedānta systems. In fact, the great Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa,
who has two entirely separate commentaries on the hymn, in
the one gives a Sāmkhya interpretation of it, but in the other a
Vedāntic. Doubtless this problem cannot be solved, and the
truth of the matter may with much probability be that the
hymn simply sums up or reflects some of the cosmogonic ideas
that were afloat at the time of its composition and out of
which, rather than out of the hymn itself, subsequent philo-
osophic thought evolved. Whatever may be the precise relation-
ship, then, between this hymn and later ideas, its interest is very
great, and one cannot but pursue it with much the same feeling
as that voiced by Deussen.

In what follows an attempt is made at yet another transla-
tion of this hymn, based upon a close examination of most of
the studies and translations that have appeared so far. The
translation is as literal as English idiom permits, and words have
been supplied only in those few instances where they are need-
ed to carry the sense. These have been inserted in parentheses.
Each line of the translation corresponds to the same line of the
Vedic text. On the whole, overly technical and amplificatory
matter that is likely to be meaningful principally to the specia-
list has been omitted from the commentary subjoined to each
stanza and relegated to the exegetical notes.

1. nāṣad āsīn nó sād āsīt tadānīṁ
nāṣid rájo nō viomā parā yāt
kim āvaroṁa kū ḍaśya śārmam
āṃbhaṁ kim āṣid gāhanam gahīṁ

| Not non-existent was it nor existent was it at that time:
there was not atmosphere nor the heavens which are
beyond.

What existed? Where? In whose care?
Water was it? An abyss unfathomable?

The first verse is generally rendered: ‘There was neither non-
being nor being at that time.’ But this suggests a greater degree
of abstraction than was probably meant. In this translation the
two Sanskrit words āsāt and sāt, which are thus generally made
into the abstract nouns ‘non-being’, and ‘being’, are taken as
predicate adjectives (‘non-existent’ and ‘existential’) to sārvaṁ
idām ‘all this (world)’ not actually expressed until the third
stanza, but here assumed to be the implicit subject of āsāt ‘was.’
In the English ‘it’ serves as this implicit subject: ‘Not non-
existent (āsāt) was it nor existent (sāt) was it.’

11. Geldner, Der Rigveda in Auswahl, p. 207, is very explicit regarding the depen-
dence of the later theory of creation' upon this hymn: ‘AUF dieses alte Schöpfun-
geschehen ist vielfach die spätere Schöpfungstheorie gegründet. War hier nur durch einen
Spiegel in einem dunklen Worte geschaut, wird später im einzelnen ausgemalt.’

12. Almost no one takes the words āsāt and sāt as predicates to an implicit sārvaṁ
idām. Oddly enough Geldner, who did so construe these words in several early treat-
ments, e.g. in his Kosmoslogie, p. 16 (‘Als Subjekt ist aus Strophe 3 ‘dieses’ sc. Weltall
hieraufzudenken...’), and Der Rigveda in Auswahl, p. 208, seems later to have chang-
ed his mind, as his translation of this hymn in the Harvard Oriental Series reads:
‘Weder Nichtsein noch Sein war damals.’ But it may be worth pointing out that in
Śātāpatahārāmana X.5.3.1, which appears to be the oldest comment on the hymn,
the pronoun idām ‘this’ is actually expressed in the paraphrase, thus: nesā vā idām
agre ’sād āśīn nēse sād āśīt (‘In the beginning this (world) was not, as it were,
non-existent; not, as it were, was it existent’). Oldenberg, p. 346, however, considers this
passage from the Śātāpatahārāmana to be valueless in deciding the issue (‘Die
älteste Erklärung der Worte’ ... besitzt in solcher Frage m.E. keine Autorität’) and
'At that time' (tadānīm) means, of course, 'at that primordial time, in the beginning.' In the next stanza this idea is expressed by 'then' (tārhi), a similar adverb, but in the third and fourth occurs the more explicit 'in the beginning, at first' (āgri). We are told, then, that in the beginning of things this world was in an indeterminate, unformed state that does not admit of description in ordinary terms: though it did not exist in the sense of the existent world about us, yet it did not wholly not exist. In fact, as will become apparent in the second stanza, something did exist—an indescribable 'It' or 'That,' a spiritual principle in which adhered the potentiality of creation.

The words kim dvāriṇāh, here rendered 'What existed?' have occasioned much discussion among commentators since the verb form dvāriṇāh may with almost equal probability be regarded as an imperfect of either the verb 'cover' or the verb 'move about, exist.' If it is assumed to mean 'covered,' then the interrogative kim might be the subject or object, thus: 'What covered (it)?' or 'What did (it) cover?' But in the second verse the poet clearly indicates the absence of any cover, whether atmosphere or heavens beyond, and we do not therefore expect him to ask what covered the world in the next verse. It seems more reasonable to suppose that, having posited a condition intermediate between non-existence and existence, where there was not the heaven to serve as cover, he would ask, in effect, 'What, then, was there?' In the fourth verse two answers (in the form of questions!) to the query as to what existed are offered, viz. water or a vast chasm. In the translation of this last verse it has been assumed that kim is used simply as an interrogative marker, not as a neuter pronoun 'what.' Many, however, follow the latter course and render the verse: 'What was the water deep, unfathomable?' By this view, then, both gāhanāṁ and gabhīrāṁ are taken to be adjectives modifying 'water' (āmbhas). The interpretation adopted here makes gāhanāṁ a noun signify-

15. The majority of them may be found in Scherman, p. 1. Gonda, p. 677, is of the opinion that the line means: 'Was there the water, the unfathomable, deep?' ('Was er het water, het grondeloze, diepe?'), with an implication of doubt on the poet's part as to whether water was, as widely accepted, the primordial substance. This interpretation is, of course, not precluded by the translation adopted here. With regard to the 'abyss' mentioned in Id v. Brown's article on the Rgvedic equivalent of hell.

16. According to Whitney, p. cX, 'a very unnecessary amplification; since if there was, as already declared, neither existence nor even non-existence, there evidently could occur no cessation of existence, nor could there be anything that prolonged an existence without cessation.'

17. Geldner, Kosmogonie, p. 17, translates 'Damals war nicht Tod, nicht Unsterblichkeit,' but adds 'Es gab weder Sterbliche noch Götter.' Deussen, p. 122, similarly subjoins 'die Menschenwelt und Götterwelt' and refers to RV. X.121.2.e where amṛta and mṛtyuḥ are again probably used as equivalents of concrete nouns.

18. Geldner, Kosmogonie, p. 18, compares svadhā here to the later sūkti, the creative power that inheres in the world-cause. Gomaraswamy, p. 57, equates...
unity in subsequent Indian thought is not to be questioned. But it is doubtful whether the union of these two words was so close in this earliest usage. It is perhaps noteworthy that ādām occurs in the last line of this stanza without ēkām and similarly in the first line of stanza 4.19 Only in the last verse of stanza 3 do both ādām and ēkām again occur, but there with words inter-vening.

3. tāma āsit tāmasā gūlhām āgē apraketaṁ salilāṁ sārvaṁ ā ādām tuchyēnābhū āpīhitāṁ yād āsit tāpasas tān mānājāyataikam ||

Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning: an undistinguished sea was all this.
The germ (of all things) which was enveloped in void,
That alone through the power of brooding thought was born.20

A question may here arise as to whether the first two words tāma āsit ‘Darkness it was’ should constitute a sentence and so be separated from what follows, thus: ‘Darkness it was; hidden by darkness in the beginning, all this was an undistinguished ocean.’ But this is hardly substantially different from construing the first verse as a unified whole (‘Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning’) and taking the second also as forming a unit by itself, though with the implication that it is the consequence of the state of things described in the first verse (‘an un-

21. Śaiva alternatively suggests that a particle of comparison may be omitted with salilām (yedvā salilam iti luptopamam | salilam eva), Gonda, p. 682, is insistent on taking salilām not in the sense of ‘ocean’ or ‘water’ but ‘wave’ or ‘something waving’ (so in his English translation, p. 695). But his justification for this, while extended, is not entirely convincing and seems to me in part contradictory, since he gives as reasons the doubt expressed in 1d concerning the existence of the waters and the fact that, according to 2d, there was nothing else than the primal being, but then proceeds to speak of the waves of the ocean (de golven van de oceaan) as being frequently mentioned in cosmogonic texts as the impregnating place of the primordial germ.

22. i.e. < a- > ābhū which occurs in the form ābhāhāna in 6d and 7a; Macdonell, Reader, p. 209, translates 'coming into being,' with the value of a present participle, and Edgerton, p. 73, regarding ābhud as a noun to a- ābhū, renders somewhat freely by 'generative principle'; close to this is Tola’s ‘principio de devenir’ (p. 300). Geldner, H.O.S. III, p. 360, on a somewhat different tack, has ‘das Lebenskräfte’. But in sharp disagreement with all these, Ambrosini, pp. 129-130, has proposed that ābhū means ‘water’ and belongs to the same word-family as āmhas and āmha, the initial vowel representing PIE. *ǵi* or preferably *ǵy*, if the reading ābhū be rejected in favor of ābhū (against the Padapātha).23

23. On tāpas a great deal has been written, but v. especially the monograph by Blair. Regarding tāpas in this passage the author says that it ‘has become not only a completely abstract entity, but also a great creative, primeval power’ (p. 67). Cf. also
suitable rendition, as it combines the notions of concentrated thought and heat.

4. kāmas tād āgre 24 sām avartatādhi
mānasam rētaḥ prathamām yād āsīt
satō bāndhum āsati nir avindan
hrāt pratiṣya kavāyō maṇiśa.25

Upon That in the beginning,24 arose desire,
which was the first offshoot of (that) thought.
(This desire) sages found out (to be) the link
between the existent and the non-existent,25
after searching with the wisdom in their heart.

This stanza, though it has generally been accorded less
attention by scholars than the following, is really the highpoint
of the entire poem, as was noted in the introductory remarks.
As it is almost invariably translated, however, its two halves
hang but loosely, almost incoherently, together, and as a whole
it bears an obscure relationship to what precedes and what
follows. We are told that ‘Upon That in the beginning arose
desire’ and we may infer, in agreement with subsequent Indian
ideas, that it was a desire to create the objects of the world.26
The second line, consisting of a relative clause which explains
and amplifies this notion, is almost always rendered by ‘which
was the first seed (rētas) of the mind (mānasas).’ But what do
the words ‘first seed of the mind’ mean? Was the desire the
first seed of the mind in the sense of the source or origin of the


24. Hillebrandt, p. 133, note 4, suggests that by āgre (in the beginning) is here meant tāpas āgre, i.e. ‘in the beginning of the brooding thought’ which seems better than ‘in the beginning’ in the more general sense of cosmic antiquity.

25. Thieme, Gedichte, p. 67, translates maṇiṇī ‘by durch Nachdenken,’ but in his extended article ‘Vedisch maṇiṇī’ (sic) renders it by ‘in (ekstatischer) Erregtheit’ (Kleine Schriften I, p. 245), congruent with which view is that of Gonda, pp. 688 and 696 where he translates ‘with the inspired thoughts of their minds.’

26. Sāyaṇa specifically asserts this (visṛṅkā jātety arthaḥ). Muir, O.S.T. IV, p. 4, note 3, remarks that ‘the creative acts of Prajñāpati are constantly said to have been preceded by desire’; e.g. Taittirīyasaṁhitā III.1.1.1.: praṇāptir aḥāmāyata praṇāyā śrēṣṭṛ bṛddhaḥ sa tāpō ‘apyaśaśaḥ sarpaḥ arpaṇa. Cf. also Wintermēs, p. 87, note 1: ‘Nicht der Schopenhauersche ’Wille,’ wie Deussen und andere annehmen. Wie die sinnliche Liebe zur Zügung und Entstehung der Wesen führt, so dachten sich diese alten Denker die Sinnenlust als den Urquell alles Seins.’

mind? And if so, what is meant by ‘mind,’ not a word more
being said about it either in this stanza or the remainder of
the hymn. These problems can be solved if it is assumed that by
‘seed’ is meant not ‘source’ or ‘producer’ but ‘product’ or
‘offshoot’27 and, further, that mānas is used in its more original
sense of ‘thinking, thought.’28 The desire that arose upon That
was, then, the resultant product – the very first product – of
the brooding thought or tāpas, whereby it had come to life as
the germ of all things. This line of reasoning, if correct, leads us
inevitably to the assumption that the first principle or That and
mānas are ultimately one and the same.29

The second half of this stanza contains the solution which
ancient sages found to the mystery of the world’s origin, viz.
that the link between the existent world of everyday life, the
sāt, as it is called in the text, and the unformed, unmanifested
world, loosely termed the non-existent or āsāt, is the desire
which arose upon That. Generally, however, these last two lines
are translated ‘Sages found out the bond of the existent in the
non-existent’ etc.,30 without any reference at all to the desire

27. Wintermēns, p. 82, also takes rētas as ‘product’ and translates ‘als das erste Erzeugnis seines Geistes.’ This same meaning is also hinted at by Gonda, p. 687: ‘Of moet men de oude autoriteit die in TA. 1,23,1 aan het woord is opvatten: het verlangen dat het eerste zaad, d.i. product van het manas is?’ In this connection ought to be mentioned the fact, noticed by Gonda, p. 686, note 60, that in later times Kāma as the God of Love is called Manabhava (and other synonymous names), literally ‘whose origin is the mind,’ i.e. born from or arising from the mind. Etymologically, rētas first means ‘flow, stream’ then ‘spont, seed;’ v. Mayrhofer, Lieferung 18, p. 73 s.v.

28. i.e. as a simple noun actionis, ‘act’ or ‘process of thinking.’

29. With regard to this identification of mānas (‘mind’ or ‘thinking’) with the first principle (tād) it is interesting to note that precisely the same view is expressed in Satapathabrähmana X.5.3.1ff. which, it was observed above under note 12, is the earliest comment on this hymn. It is worth quoting this passage in full: ‘In the beginning this (world) was, as it were, neither non-existent nor existent. In the beginning this (world) was, as it were, and it was not, as it were, for it was only that mind (mānas). For this reason it is stated by the Bṛihṣ with reference to this (condition of the world): It was neither non-existent nor existent at that time (i.e. X.129.1a). For the mind is neither existent, as it were, nor non-existent, as it were. This mind desired to become manifest (as something) created. It sought after a more defined (and) more concrete nature. It engaged in tāpas. It took shape,’ etc. In his introductory comments to his translation of this hymn in the H.O.S. III, p. 359, Geldner remarks: ‘Das ēham, das Eine, ist zunächst reines mānas, bloss Denken, ganz geistig.’ Gonda, p. 687, also feels that mānas and the primal being may be identical (‘De oplossing is hoogstwaarschijnlijk deze, dat manas en het Ene hiep identiek zijn’) and refers to the teaching of this identity in this same passage in the Satapathabrāhmana.

30. The bare notion that the existent derives from the non-existent is, to be sure,
to create which is the theme of the first half of the stanza. This interpretation has the effect of separating the second half from the first and destroying the unity of the stanza. Furthermore, the culmination of ideas which ought to reach its peak at this juncture falls considerably short of the mark, since finding out the bond or link of the existent in the non-existent is hardly any discovery at all. It is worth noting also that the idea that desire is the connection between āsat and sāt is quite in accord with later speculative conceptions where it takes many different forms. It is a commonplace in Indian thought that desire is the root of all clinging to this world and the suffering that it entails. By the simple expedient of supplying, or more accurately carrying over, the word ‘desire’ (kāmās) from the first half of this stanza to the second, the two halves are closely linked together and the search by the sages for the truth of the world’s origin has a meaningful conclusion.31

5. tiraśčno viśato rāmīr ēsān
   adhāh śvād asād āpātiv śvād āsāt
   retodhā āsan mahīmāna āsan
   svadāh āvāstāt prāyatīh parāstāt

| Straight across was extended their line (of vision):
| was (That) below, was (That) above?

Seedplaces there were, powers there were:
potential energy below, impulse above.

This stanza has always been a focal point of discussion, but in spite of its disconcertingly condensed mode of expression voiced elsewhere in the Rgveda. But that is no reason to suppose that, just because the same two terms (sāt and āsat) are also juxtaposed here in X.129.4c, the same philosophy must necessarily prevail. Though grammatically it is of course possible to translate 'Sages found out the link of the existent in the non-existent,' it is equally possible grammatically to supply kāmam from the preceding thought and render 'Sages found out (desire) as the link of the existent in the non-existent.' The fact, then, that RV. X.72.2 states that 'In a prior age of the gods the existent was born from the non-existent' (devaṁ ēsā sat ēsā jat ēsā jātvī) does not mean that the same notion is being propounded in our hymn.

31. For the most part it is only the earlier translators of this hymn who supply kāmam as object of nīr avindan in 4c and thus takes bāndhum as its direct object, that is to say, the sages’ discovery is not that desire is the connecting link (bāndhum) between sāt and āsat, but the ‘bond of the existent in the non-existent,’ which he explains as ‘the mysterious connection or relation, on the other hand, between fact, or phenomena in this world and, on the other hand, the eternal, transcendental background of things, in which everything earthly has its origin and in which it finds its explanation and motivation’ (de mystérieuse connectie der relaties tussen enerzijds te vinden, begeven van verschijnselen in deze wereld en anderzijds de eeuwige transcendentie achtergrond der dingen, waarin al het aardse zijn oorsprong heeft en waarin het zijn verklaring en motivering vindt). In view of the meaning of bāndhu as connecting link in the literal sense of ‘that which connects one thing with another,’ I am, of course, taking it in its etymological value. I do not question the ritualistic use of this word in the Brāhmaṇas so admirably and exhaustively discussed by Gonda in his article ‘Bandhu- in the Brāhmaṇa’s’ in the Adyar Library Bulletin, vol. XXIX (1965), pp. 1-29. But that a word has a particular technical use does not mean that it cannot elsewhere be employed in another non-technical sense.

Passing allusion may here fittingly be made to the well-known passage in the Chāndogypaṇiṣad which questions the validity of the doctrine that the existent emanates from the non-existent and resolves the problem by postulating that the world was at first only secondless existence which became diversified by the desire to procreate (V.2.1.1).}

32. Whitney’s declaration that ‘No one has ever succeeded in putting any sense into it, and it seems so unconnected with the rest of the hymn that its absence is heartily to be wished’ (p. cxii) is too extreme to merit serious refutation. Macdonell, however, omits this stanza entirely in his translation of this hymn in his History of Sanskrit Literature, pp. 136-137. According to Goldner, Siebenzig Hymnen, p. 166, who along with Roth (Preface, p. viii) was of the opinion that this hymn was original-
tent and non-existent (sát and ásat) was the desire to create the world which had arisen upon That, are now said to have extended the ‘line of their vision’ (raśmís) directly across that primordial being as envisioned in their heart. They saw that it had evolved into a duality of forces, male and female, through the union of which the objective world of reality was produced. In this dichotomy of sexually differentiated energies, the male are conceived to be arrayed above, the female below, doubtless after typical old dualities like heaven and earth, the former as impregnator with his fructifying rains, the latter as ground of all nature’s abundance.

Much has been said about the probable meaning of raśmís, literally ‘cord’ or ‘ray’, here translated as ‘line of vision.’ But when all is said, it is hard to see how anything other than the ‘cord’ or (figuratively) the ‘ray’ of the sages’ intellect can be meant, an interpretation which flows without difficulty from the assertion in the previous stanza about the sages having searched in their heart for the answer to the riddle of the relationship between the sát and ásat. It matters little whether the line of vision be viewed as a carpenter’s cord, as some would insist on the basis of similar wording elsewhere in the Rgveda.

The second verse, which consists of two contrasted questions, is a bare skeleton of the twice-recurring verb ‘was’ (asát ly divided into four strophes, there has been lost between 4 and 5 a stanza mentioning the various beings and worlds that sprang into existence across which the wise men drew their line. But the idea of the loss of a stanza just because it is supposed that there is a gap in the sequence of thought (‘... der erste Vers der dritten Strophe aber zwischen v. 4 und 5 ausgefallen, wie die Lücke in der Gedankenfolge zeigt’) seems quite unjustifiable in a tradition such as that by which the Rgveda has come down to us. Presumably, however, Geldner subsequently abandoned this view, as he makes no mention of it in his translation in the H.O.S.

33. With regard to the differentiation of the primordial being into male and female principles Gonda, pp. 691-692, rightly draws attention to parallelsisms elsewhere in the Veda. Thus in Brhadaranyakopanishad I.4.3 the Átman, no longer wishing to be alone, divides himself into a male and female half, and in RV. X.90.5 the female Virāj is born of the Puruṣa as a creative force. The later concept of śvarā and śakti seems to be a special extension of this male-female dichotomy of the primordial being.

34. v. Geldner’s discussion in Der Rgveda in Auswahl, p. 213, in which he mentions both views but prefers the figurative, and cf. also his remarks in H.O.S. III, p. 360. Oldenberg, p. 347, seems to insist on the literal interpretation, but it is hard to see what sense can be made of this. Sāyaṇa on Taittirīyabhrāmaṇa II.8.9.5 considers raśmís to be a self-luminous beam of consciousness emanating from the Supreme Self, which cannot be localized as below or above, but is all-pervasive, like the clay that constitutes the pot.

35. The protraction of the vowel (pluit), indicated by the Devanāgarī numeral for ‘9’ after the final vowel of asāt in both occurrences, and the udatta accent on the final syllable of the first asāt are prescribed under Pāṇini VIII.2.97: [viciyāyaṁanānam] [‘The final vowel of sentences which denote a balancing of alternatives [is protracted and udatta].’ The use of the anudatta in the second part of the disjunction, instead of the expected udatta, is covered under Pāṇini VIII.2.102 which actually quotes the words upāra snidh asāt as falling also under VIII.2.101 which requires a final anudatta when the particle cīt is used in the sense of ‘like.’ Ordinarily disjunctive questions in the Rgveda neither show any difference in accentuation nor do they have a protracted vowel in any part, e.g. RV. VI.18.3: asāt svin ni vṛṣyaṁ tāt to Indra nā svid asāt tād rthuḥāḥ vī tvačaḥ (‘Is this your heroic deed, Indra, or is it not? Proclaim it in due season.’)

Since this peculiar usage is exemplified half a dozen times in the Atharvaveda and is fairly common in the Brāhmaṇas (according to Whitney, p. cxl), it may be assumed that it is a later phenomenon, so that here we have an outward mark of the relative lateness of the Nāṣadiya hymn.

36. Scherman, p. 3, joins the two lines in this way (‘Ihre querüber ausgespannte Schnur, war sie wohl unten oder war sie oben?), but he is apparently alone in this.

37. e.g. Wallis, p. 59: ‘What was above? what was below?’ (a reversal of the order in the hymn); Griffith, p. 576: ‘What was above it then, and what below it?’; Deussen p. 125: ‘Was war darunter, was war darüber? (wörtlich: war es darunter, oder war es darüber?)’; Edgerton, p. 13: ‘below (what) was there? above (what) was there?’

38. So Macdonell, Vedic Reader, p. 210; von Schröder, Thieme and many others. Ludwig, Der Nāṣadiya-hymnus, p.4, expands this notion by openly posing the question: ‘Can one in this case speak of an above and a below?’ (‘Kann man dabei von einem oben oder unten sprechen?’). Both in his Körnmonogonie, p. 22, and Der Rgveda in Auswahl, p. 213, Geldner makes adhās and upāri nouns, but in the latter he adds: ‘whoever finds this too artificial must supply the One as subject of asāt’ (‘Wem das zu künstlich erscheint, muss zu asāt das Eine als Subjekt supplerieren’).
mahimánas, literally merely ‘powers, forces,’ would be vague and might imply either male or female energies, but since it is quite clearly employed in opposition to retodhā, it must signify female powers. In the final verse are stated the relative positions of these female and male principles, both with respect to each other and to the sages’ line of vision. While indistinctive in themselves as indicators of female or male powers, the terms svadhā and práyatā must here be referred respectively to the female and male principles by reason of their positions below and above which they are said to occupy. As in 2c, svadhā may be rendered ‘inherent power,’ or perhaps, as Edgerton suggests, ‘innate power,’39 in any case a passive force in contradistinction to práyatā, which, whatever may precisely be its derivation, seems to mean something like ‘impulse’ or ‘effort.’40

The chiastic order of ideas in the last two verses is noteworthy: seedplacers — powers / potential energy below — impulse above, i.e. male — female / female — male. Probably this rhetorical device is not here accidental, but is intended to imply the interplay between the two forces of creation.

6. kā addhā veda kā ihā prā vocat
   kuta ājātā kūta iyāṃ viśrṣṭīḥ
   arvāg devā asyā viśājanena
   ātā kū veda yāta ababhūva ||
   Who, after all, knows? Who here will declare
   whence it arose, whence this world?
   Subsequent are the gods
   to the creation of this (world).41
   Who, then, know whence it came into being?

39. Edgerton, p. 73, and note 3.
40. Śāṇḍya clearly enough derives práyatā from pra- jyot, not from pra- jyām, and is followed in this by Geldner, Der Rigveda in Ausw. p. 213, and H.O.S. III, p. 360. Oldenberg, p. 347, however, insists upon the derivation from jyām, largely because the derivates made with the suffix -j have the accent usually on that suffix (but Whitney, Sanskrit Grammar, 2nd ed., § 1155.f gives examples with the accent on the prefix).
41. It matters little whether arvāk be taken as a preposition governing the instrumental viśājanena (‘subsequent to the creation’) as here, or as an adverb, as, for example, by Edgerton, p. 74: ‘The gods (arose) on this side (later), by the creation of this (empiric world, to which the gods belong).’ Both constructions are possible, and there is no difference in meaning; cf. Deussen’s remarks on the matter, p. 125. Śāṇḍya too, construes arvāk as a preposition to judge from his summation: bhūtāraṇ-ētā paśca jāta ity arthāh.

A RE-EXAMINATION OF RGVEDA

Up to this point, with the exception of some doubts voiced in the first stanza, the author has proceeded with fair certainty about his cosmogonic reflections. But now that he has concluded his account, he seems suddenly overcome with doubt and he lays the whole matter open to question.

The second verse can alternatively be construed as yet another independent question parallel to those posited in the first verse. But this seems less desirable than taking it as an indirect question dependent upon ‘Who here will declare’ (kā ihā prā vocat), which, apart from being grammatically possible, is logically more satisfactory.

The repetition of the interrogative kūtas in the second verse may be explained as an example of epanalepsis: ‘whence, whence this world arose’ or kūtas may introduce two separate questions, the alternative adopted in the translation: ‘whence it arose (kūta ājātā), whence this world (kūta iyāin viśrṣṭi)?’

7. iyāṃ viśrṣṭiḥ yāta ababhūva
   yād vā dadhē yād vā nā ||
   yō asyādhyakṣaḥ paramē viśaṃ
   sō anig veda yād vā nā vedā ||
   This world — whence it came into being,
   whether it was made or whether not —
   He who is its overseer in the highest heavens
   surely knows — or perhaps He knows not!
   The principal point of dispute here among translators has always been the Sanskrit word dadhē in the second verse, here rendered ‘(it) was made.’ Here again it is the extremely laconic style, characteristic of the author, that is the source of the problem. No subject of dadhē is expressed and, depending upon whether we assume it to be ‘this world’ (iyāin viśrṣṭi) implied from the first verse or the ‘overseer’ (ādhyakṣa) referred to in the second half of the stanza, dadhē may be translated ‘(it) was made’42 or ‘(He) made (it).’ The former translation, adopted
here, by omitting all mention of the agency, might imply either
the kind of evolution which has been the principal subject of
the hymn or some cosmic agency, not necessarily the overseer,
however.43

At this point, in the interest of clarity, it may be well to re-
peat the English translation as a unit, unbroken by commen-
tarial matter and without even the occasional parentheses to mark
words that are supplied. For only in this way, when the poem is
viewed as a whole, can the coherence and interrelationship, as
they are developed from stanza to stanza, be appreciated.
1. Not existent was it nor non-existent was it at that time;
there was not atmosphere nor the heavens which are beyond.
What existed? Where? In whose care?
Water was it? An abyss unfathomable?
2. Neither mortal was there nor immortal then;
not of night, of day was there distinction:
That alone breathed windless through inherent power.
Other than That there was naught else.
3. Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning:
an undistinguished sea was all this.
The germ of all things which was enveloped in void,
That alone through the power of brooding thought was
born.
4. Upon That in the beginning arose desire,
which was the first offshoot of that thought.
This desire sages found out to be the link between
the existent and the non-existent,
after searching with the wisdom in their heart.
5. Straight across was extended their line of vision:
was That below, was That above?
Seed placers there were, powers there were:
potential energy below, impulse above.
6. Who, after all, knows? Who here will declare
whence it arose, whence this world?
Subsequent are the gods to the creation of this world.
Who, then, knows whence it came into being?

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COMPARATIVE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THREE ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN BEOWULF, THE NIBELUNGENLIED, AND THE CHANSON DE ROLAND

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Three questions frequently asked by critics of Beowulf, the Nibelungenlied, and the Chanson de Roland are these: (1) Does Beowulf fail his responsibilities as king when he dies in the dragon fight? (2) Does Hagen commit the ethical crime of untriuwe when he deludes Kriemhild in order to eliminate Siegfried? (3) Is Roland guilty of desmesure when he refuses to summon help by sounding the horn? Most critical studies fail to answer such questions successfully because they employ critical perspectives which are too limited, which demand that one reduce the problems of interpretation of these poems to a determination of the ratio of pagan to Christian influence in the poems.¹ This reduction is an oversimplification. It seems obvious that all three of these poems were written by Christian poets for Christian audiences, audiences long since converted from active paganism. However, conversion certainly does not obliterate cultural continuity, not in this case at least. Regardless of the Christian presence in these poems, one should not forget that all three of them spring from Germanic peoples, the Anglo-Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Franks, all of whom seem to have preserved strong cultural affinities with one another and with their Indo-European forebears.

Once one recognizes the necessity of considering the cultural heritage of these poems, he immediately faces the unfortunately limited body of information regarding the ancient Germanic peoples. How can one cope with this paucity of concrete