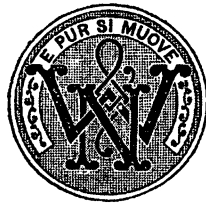
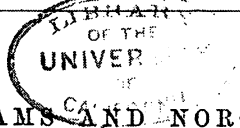


THE
COSMOLOGY OF THE RIGVEDA,
AN ESSAY

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5. May this hymn please Parjanya, the monarch, may he accept it favourably; may quickening rain be ours, and fruitful plants tended by the god.

6. He is the fructifying bull of the multitude of maidens (waters cf. III. 56. 3.), in him is the breath of all that moveth and standeth; may this sacrifice protect me for a thousand years—protect us ever, ye gods, with blessings.”

The principle of cosmogonic generation was, however, already in the R̥gveda extended beyond the union of the light and the waters. We find mention in one hymn of a primordial substance or unit out of which the universe was developed. This is ‘the one thing’ (*ékam*) which we have already met with in connection with Aja, the Unborn,¹ and which is also used synonymously with the universe² in accordance with the principle which is the key to much of the later mysticism that cause and effect are identical. The poet endeavours in a strain, which preludes the philosophy of the Upanishads, to picture to himself the first state of the world, and the first signs of life and growth in it. The speculations of the Veda are, however, characterized by a marked difference of tone as compared with those of the Upanishads in the absence in them of the practical end and object of the latter, deliverance from the world.

¹ I. 164. 6, 46., X. 82. 6.

² III. 54. 8., X. 48. 7., Vā. 10. 2.

X. 129. 1.¹ “The non-existent was not, and the existent was not at that time; there was no air nor sky beyond; what was the covering in? and where? under shelter of what? was there water—a deep depth?

2. Death was not nor immortality then, there was no discrimination² of night and day: that one thing breathed without a wind of its own self; apart from it there was nothing else at all beyond.

3. Darkness there was, hidden in darkness, in the beginning, everything here was an indiscriminate chaos; it was void covered with emptiness, all that was; that one thing was born by the power of warmth.

4. So in the beginning arose desire, which was the first seed of mind; the wise found out by thought, searching in the heart, the parentage of the existent in the non-existent.

5. Their line was stretched across; what was above? what was below? there were generators, there were mighty powers; *svadhá* below, the presentation of offerings above.

6. Who knoweth it forsooth? who can announce

¹ The latest of the many commentators on this hymn are Professor Whitney in the Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. xi. p. cix, and Dr. Schermann, Philosophische Hymnen aus der R̥g- und Atharva-Veda-Samhitā verglichen mit den Philosophemen der älteren Upanishads, 1887.

² Or *praketa* may perhaps have here the sense of ‘light-giver, illuminator,’ which would also be suitable in I. 113. 1. and I. 94. 5. We should then translate in verse 2. ‘there was no light of the day nor of the night,’ and in verse 3. ‘all this was a lightless chaos.’

it here (= III. 54. 5.)? whence it was born, whence this creation is. The gods came by the creating of it (i.e. the one thing); who then knoweth whence it is come into being?

7. Whence this creation (lit. emission) is come into being, whether it was ordained or no—he whose eye is over all in the highest heaven, he indeed knoweth it, or may be he knoweth it not.”

If we accept the text as it stands, *eshām* ‘their’ in verse 5 will refer to *kavāyah*, ‘the wise.’ ‘Their line’ is a beam of their light. The word *prāyati* in the other passages where it occurs has only the meaning ‘presentation of sacrifice’; if we retain this meaning and the allusion to the ancient fathers, technically, expressed by the word *svadhā*,¹ we obtain a natural parallel to the contrast of the preceding *pāda* between *retodhāh* and *mahimānaḥ* in the free action or enjoyment of the fathers below and the sacrifice of the gods above. The chief difficulty which presented itself to the mind of the poet was to make a division between the upper world and the lower, to bring dualism out of unity: it is for this purpose that he introduces ‘the wise,’ who draw their line across, dividing heaven and earth. This solution, however, failed to satisfy him, and he gives

¹ The primary meaning of *svadhā* is ‘free action according to the unfettered will of the actor;’ accordingly it is used of the happiness of the fathers: *dhā* has in the compound almost the sense of our *do*, as in *éno dādhānaḥ* II. 12. 10., *aghāya dhātā* I. 123. 5.

up the problem in despair. The principle of generation, on the other hand, underlies the whole as a self-evident principle of cosmogony: desire (*kāma*, ἔπος) is the first requisite of generation; it is the seed of thought; the wise find the *bāndhu*, ‘relationship’ or ‘parentage’ of the existent in the non-existent; the fathers are represented as *retodhāh*, the generators. Hence the translation ‘warmth’ is preferable to ‘asceticism’ for *tāpas*; the warmth explains how the process of birth became possible.¹ The hymn is remarkable for the clearness of expression of the automatic evolution of the world; the universe is represented as emanating of itself from the one thing, like a stream issuing from a fountain-head.

Lastly we come to the expressions *ásat* and *sát*, the ‘non-existent’ and the ‘existent.’ The word *ásat* is used in the R̥gveda in two senses, as an adjective with *vācas* ‘speech’ and as the converse of *sát* as in the passage before us. In the first case the meaning is clear; it is equivalent to *asatyá*,

¹ cf. X. 190. 1. The question as to the relation of *kāma* and *tāpas* in these verses to the later *tāpo* ‘tapyata’ and *só* ‘*kāmayata*’ of the Brāhmaṇas is a part of the general question of the relation of the R̥gveda to the Brāhmaṇas. The cosmological importance of warmth in the view of the ancient Aryas receives a full treatment in M. Emile Burnouf’s *La Science des Religions*, pp. 207 ff. “Trois phénomènes ont frappé l’intelligence des Aryas, dès le temps où ils n’habitaient encore que les vallées de l’Oxus: ce sont le mouvement, la vie et la pensée. Ces trois choses, prises dans leur étendue, embrassent tous les phénomènes naturels sans exception.” He proceeds to show how *warmth* was regarded as the principle explaining all three forms of action.

the unreal or the false, the converse of that which is really the fact.¹ When used with *sát* it occurs invariably in passages of a cosmogonic character; *sát* is said to be born from *ásat*, that is, translated into modern idiom, *ásat* precedes *sát* or *ásat* becomes *sát*; we are told that Indra made *ásat* into *sát* in a trice; or *ásat* and *sát* are mentioned as in our hymn as belonging to the first creation.² Where the two words are coupled together by a conjunction, *ásat* always precedes *sát*. The *ásat* 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 *bhávati* is elsewhere opposed to *sát*,³ *jāyamānam* to *jātām*, and *bhāvya* to *bhūtām*. It is not colourless as our word 'nothing,' it is the negation of *sát*. Thus the whole meaning expressed by these dark words is nothing more than the process of becoming, the beginning of development or creation.

The subject of this chapter is of special interest as illustrating the relation between the symbolical

¹ V. 12. 4., VII. 104. 8, 12, 13. cf. *ásatī* IV. 5. 14.

² X. 72. 1, 2., VI. 24. 5., X. 5. 7. The philosophic comment of Sūyana on verse X. 129. 1. is disproved by the expression *satō bāndhum ásatī nīr avindan* in verse 4. If we treat the hymn philosophically, we must assume a stage between those states described in verses 1 and 4 in which *ásat* was present, but there was as yet no *sát*. The context, however, shows that the poet merely wished to shadow forth a condition in which absolutely nothing existed; and the presence of *ásat* is denied because it was inseparably associated with *sát*.

³ I. 96. 7., A. V. VII. 1. 19.

or allegorical manner of thought, which is an important factor in the formation of mythology, and the analogical or metaphorical method of early speculation. In the one case forces and agencies are clothed with a distinct personality, they are endowed in some measure with an active will and character; in the other the actions only are viewed as partaking of the nature of human actions. The poets of our hymns feel themselves less constrained to analyse the processes of creation, the mode of working of the different productive forces, than to define and specify the nature of the agents. The nouns—to borrow the phraseology of grammar—lose their anthropomorphism sooner than the verbs. The two metaphors which have now been passed in review, the metaphor of building and that of generation, are used almost indiscriminately to express the action of any creative agent; and in the following chapters we shall meet with no further attempt to elucidate the process of creation.