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A RE-EXAMINATION OF ṚGVEDA X.129, THE NĀSADĪYA HYMN

WALTER H. MAURER
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 Nāsadīya 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 *ásat* to *sát*, so to speak, I here express my profoundest gratitude.

1. This term Nāsadīya is derived, by the addition of the suffix *-īya*, from the first two words of the hymn, *ná ásad* (contracted into *násad* by vowel coalescence). A longer name, Nāsadāsiya, made similarly from the first three words, *násad āsīm* (minus the final consonant!), is occasionally seen (e.g. it is used by Ludwig and Deussen).

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 repeat the English translation as a unit, unbroken by commentarial 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?
Seedplacers 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?

43. Cf. Thieme, *Gedichte*, p. 67, who translates: '... ob sie getätigt worden ist (von einem Agens) oder ob nicht.'

7. 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!

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