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ASYA VAMASYA HYMN

(*Riddle of the Universe*)

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POET-PHILOSOPHERS OF  
THE ṚGVEDA

VEDIC AND PRE-VEDIC

BY

DR. C. KUNHAN RAJA

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DEDICATED

TO

K. F. GELDNER

under whom I studied Veda and Avesta at Marburg

secure the services of a press to print the book. The Vasanta Press, where my previous book and the publications of Messrs Ganesh and Co., were being printed, was too busy with their own work to undertake any outside publication; there was some delay on this account. I made a personal request to the Vasanta Press to accept this book as a special case and they were kind enough to respond favourably to my request. But the Press could not immediately start the work. The printing was started only in October of last year and when the Press took up the work, the progress was very rapid and the book has come out within a very few months, though the Press had other works of their own to complete. As usual, the printing has been done in an exemplary way. The proof reading was done by the press and I had only to approve what they submitted to me. I record my special thanks to the Press for taking up the work and for finishing it in such a short time, and also for the quality of the printing, which has been always of a high standard in the Press.

C. KUNHAN RAJA

NAIMISHAM

*Dr. C. Kunhan Raja Academy*

Cultural Centre for World Harmony

*Bangalore*

25th April, 1963

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such stories must have got currency through poetry. Then they are alluded to in other poems also.

66. In such stories that are alluded to in the *Ṛgveda* the poem is now assigned to certain characters appearing in the poem. It is likely that the characters lived far earlier and some one composed a poem introducing such characters. Then the characters went down as authors of the poems. There is the story of three poets, Ekata, Dvita and Trita, having been on a journey through the desert; they felt thirsty and they came to a well. Trita went down the well and brought water to the top for the others to drink. They all drank the water. Then the other two pushed Trita into the well and closing the well they took away his wealth and went away. Trita prayed to the gods and the gods saved him from the well. The author is given either as Trita, son of Āpta (Āptya) or Kutsa of the Aṅgiras family. It may be a poem of Kutsa in which Trita is only a character. Kutsa in his poems in the first Book of the *Ṛgveda* alludes to a large number of such stories. The commentators have preserved the skeleton of the stories. The stories indicate the antecedent state of the civilization prior to the *Ṛgveda* times. But they cannot be included in this book.

## VIII. FORMATION OF THE WORLD

1. The *Ṛgveda* is full of evidences regarding a deep philosophy relating to the Form and also to the Formation of the world. There are innumerable references to this topic throughout the text of the *Ṛgveda*. There are a few poems in which there is a definite description of the topic. They are primarily poetry and they are poetry with a philosophical topic. In the other places we have poetry with a philosophical back-ground. We have only poetry in the *Ṛgveda* and we never have a text book on any philosophical topic. There are a few poems within the *Atharvaveda* collection that are of equal interest from a philosophical point of view; but I confine myself to the *Ṛgveda* in this book. In the case of many of them, we do not know who the poet is; the names given are fictitious and in some, the theme and the poet are the same.

### i. EVOLUTION

2. There is a poem of seven verses which contains a very profound philosophy regarding the origin of the world in its evolved condition. The poem deals with the condition prior to the evolution and diversification. The doctrine may not be that there is a real beginning for the world in its evolved condition and that the condition of the world in that prior state is something like what has been described in the poem. The thoughts of the poem are deep and the language is grand.

3. The *Ṛgveda* refers to the two conditions in the world. There is a condition of movement and change and there is also

a condition in which there is no movement and no change. They are known by such pairs of words like *Stātus caratham*, *Jagatas tasthuṣas* and *Amṛtam martyam*. There is an infinity and there is also a finite state with changes and movements. The unmoving, unchanging condition, where it is all still, where there is no diversification, is the basis for the changing and moving world with diversifications. The process is an eternal one, and it is continuous and simultaneous in the different parts forming the finite world. It is very difficult to say whether there is a change in the infinite, and if there is no such change, how the finite world came at all into being. If the finite world is also there as a distinct and independent reality, then the infinite is not infinite; there is the finite world which is a limitation on the infinity of the infinite world; the infinite becomes finite through such a limitation. If the finite world is not distinct from the infinite world, then there is change and movement within the infinite world and this too is a contradiction in terms. Finite units can never form an infinity. In the infinity there can be no numerical or other measuring units possible.

4. A finite is a finite because there is a beyond. Thus a finite reality is known as "this much and something more", which "something more" is indefinite. If that "something more" in relation to a specific object is also known, then that "something more" within that original condition comes within such a "this much", and there is another "something more". In the infinity there is no element of a "thus much" and it does not also have that "something more". An infinity is neither a "thus much" nor a "something more", nor even a combination of the two. The infinite is known by itself. There is no knowing nor a knowledge nor a knower, and as such, it is not an object of a knowledge, through a process within some subject. From the point of view of the finite, it can be designated as what it is not.

i

5. The poem starts with a statement about that infinite. At that time, there was neither a non-being nor a being. There is no absolute non-being nor is there an absolute being within the infinite world. A thing "is not" when there is something else and a thing "is" in relation to something else. Thus we cannot say whether the infinite "is" or "is not". The word used in the text is "*tadānim*"; this means "at that time". Really it must mean "in that state". We take that infinite as related to the world in the same way in which a thread is related to the final cloth. So in the case of a cloth we speak of the threads as in a certain state "at that time"; that is the time when it was a bundle of threads. But in the case of the finite and the infinite, the term "at that time" is not appropriate. There is no time factor for the infinite in the way in which the threads have a time factor. The cloth is the time limitation for the threads. But the finite world is not a time limitation for the infinite; the infinite remains as infinite even when the finite is formed; it does not terminate like a bundle of threads when the cloth is formed.

6. We speak of the finite things as being in space; in the condition of the infinite, there is no space where the infinite "is". The infinite "is" just in an absolute way, not here or there. Space is what is either limited by the measurable objects or is not so limited, as the vast space beyond what we see as the substrate of the finite objects. This latter is the supreme expanse, *para vyoman*. The infinite does not exist even in that expanse. There is no space at all as the substrate of the infinite space.

7. In the case of the finite objects we say that there is space all around it. Then what is it that covered the infinite in that condition of infinity? Where does it rest? Where is it? Was it the deep, the mighty water? The

position is that the infinite has no resting place either in the limited space or in the unlimited expanse, nor does it have a resting place in the deep and mighty ocean.

## ii

8. We speak of a thing as such since we know also the state when it was not, either prior or later. We can say that such and such a thing has a beginning and an end and then we can also say as a contrast to it that another thing has neither a beginning nor an end; such a thing is immortal in contrast to the thing having a beginning and an end. In that primal state we cannot say anything about the beginning or the end, and so we cannot also deny the beginning and the end. We experience a phenomenon called light and we speak about the night and the day. In that state, there is no mark, no sign of this distinction of day and night. There was no time at all in that state.

9. There was that One, just by itself. But even in that state, it cannot be said that there was no "life" in it. The "Life Infinite" is there. But when we live, there is the breath as its sign, as a mark; we find some air being blown out. In the case of the infinite, there is "Life", but no sign of that life. So, there is nothing other than that, beyond of that. The infinite has life; but it does not breathe. It is there just as "One", and there is nothing other than itself, beyond of that. There is no "this and that"; there is no "here and there". It is just as "One", and it has life from within its own power. We live through external factors like food and water and air. But the infinite has life through its own power.

## iii

10. In that primal state at the beginning of all, it was all darkness encompassed in darkness. It may be said that

darkness is "what is not", the absence of light. Then we can even speak of it as something else, what we know as positive. As among the things known to us within the finite world, it is better to speak of it in terms of what are known to us as positive things. So we can say that it is like an expanse of water without anything to mark it out as water. It cannot be known as water. The term was used only to suggest that the infinite is of a positive nature. We know a thing as something positive on account of its being marked out by some sign. We say that a thing is a jar because it has marks which are found in some other things and it does not have features that are found in some other things. The infinite has no such marks, either what are common with others or what are distinct from others. The entirety of this infinite may be spoken of as such an expanse of water without any distinguishing mark in it.

11. That all-encompassing (*Ābhu*) infinite was concealed all around by something which is what cannot be imagined (*Tucchya*), by something which cannot be there and which, yet is there to shroud it. What is infinite cannot be covered up. To say that the infinite has something around it, something covering it, is a contradiction. Yet there was something which kept it hidden. Such an infinity which was hidden became manifest, came into being through its own inherent power. There is the word *Tapas* used, which is what enabled the infinite to become a unit. How is it that it is a unity in itself and how is it that it is hidden from our knowledge? Both its unity and its incognisability are due to the greatness of its own power (*Tapas*). There is the word *Ajāyata*, which means "it was born". There is no birth or origin. What it means is that it is there in that state always; there is no time nor a state when it was what it is not. The word "Born" is used in the *R̥gveda* in many places in this sense. There is no indication of a birth nor of an origin. It simply means

"always, by its very nature." Thus when it is said that "Indra was born without a foe," what it means is that never was there a time when he had a foe. There was no enemy born to him. Here too, what the passage means is that it was never other than "One," other than what is concealed from our knowing. It is not like a cloth that covers an object and prevents it from being seen; this is what is meant by the term "*Tucchya*", what cannot be described, what cannot be even thought of. Its entire nature is from within; there is life (*Ānīt*), there is some power (*Svadhā*), there is some force (*Tapas*).

iv

12. This life and this power and this force imply a "Will." Thus along with these inherent features, there was also the Will. On that infinity there arose a Will. It does not mean that there was a time when that Will was not there. It is there in the beginning (*Agre*), that means, there was no time when it was not there. This Will was the original (*Prathamam*) seed for the mind or, rather, for the mental function. In the infinite nature, it had no mental function. There was not only the *Svadhā*; there was also the life (*Ānīt*). There was *Tapas* too, in the infinite state. What was not in the infinite state is this mental activity. What is called the will (*Kāma*) is not an inherent nature of the infinite. Nor is it a produce; it was always there.

13. I notice some affinity between the theory found in this poem and the theory of evolution found in the Sāṅkhya system. In the *Upaniṣads* we find only the Sāṅkhya system, though the latter has undergone many changes in details. The general line is traceable to the *Upaniṣads*, and that can be traced farther back to this poem. This poem shows that the theory was current at that time, and this theory is the background for the *R̥gveda*; for this poem, it is also the subject

matter. It is said that in the beginning there was darkness, encompassed in darkness. That is the *Tamo-guṇa* or the material aspect in the basic fundamental of the universe. Then there is the life, what is called the breathing without the breath, the power within. That is the *Sattva-guṇa* or the Light or sentience aspect. Then the *Tapas* is the *Rajo-guṇa*, the activity. On account of these aspects, there was the Will, which corresponds to the Buddhi. This primal feature is the seed for the activity of what is known as the *Antaḥkaraṇa* or the internal thinking faculty; that is the Manas.

14. In itself, it cannot be called either as "is" or as "is not". From the empirical point of view, it has to be termed as "not existing"; what is existing is what has features, what has the factor of being known. Yet, it is not the "non-being" in our empirical experience. From the empirical point of view, the "being" side is nearer in relationship to the infinite than the "non-being" side. So the poets who have the necessary intuition and the necessary training, are able to realise this "non-being" as a relation of what is experienced as "being", in their hearts, through their imaginative intuition, after close search.

15. When the poets with trained intuition make the search in their hearts, and when they apply their intuition, then they are able to locate in the "non-being", the infinite, something akin to what is experienced as "being" in the empirical world. That infinite is not a being in the sense in which the beings in the empirical objects come within our experience; yet when they search deeper they find in the infinite something that is more akin to what is experienced as "being" than what is experienced as "non being". Their doctrine is that the entire universe is real, is positive. There is a positive basis for this positive world and there is also the "Life" as a fundamental in this universe, which is an inherent constituent of the positive, real infinite.

## v

16. There was *Tapas*, the *Rajo-guṇa*, the aspect of activity; there was also the "Life" and the *Svadhā*, the life aspect, the *Sattva-Guṇa*. It is on account of them that the mental function started, there being the Will always in the infinite. There must have been rays of light and rays of activity when the internal organs began to function. These rays of activity began to spread about; one wonders whether they were below or whether they were above, in the beginning. How did they begin to stretch all around, where did they come? This is a mystery unknown to anyone. When this activity started there arose activities which bore the seeds for organic life, also the greatness for the inorganic matter with volume. Spatial extension and life activity are the two factors that arose in the infinite when there was the first activity of the mind. That is the nature of diversification. There arose power from within, there arose movement, below and above. That means that at this stage, there grew up a process of change and movement from within, from below and from above. There was no agent for this process.

## vi

17. Was there any one at that time to know this process? Was there any one to explain it to us so that we can know it here? What is it that is to be known and to be explained? The point is the problem whence there was this origination, whence there was this diversification. It was one, and now it has been thrown off in various ways. How can the diverse arise from what was One? It cannot be the gods, who could have known it and who could have explained it; they came into being only after diversification. Then who could know whence this originated, whence it came about?

18. There was no agent for this diversification; it was from within. There was also no agent to know this; there

was no one to explain this. There is no primal Teacher who is Omniscient, to know and to explain the event of the diversification of what was just One. This is a definite Atheism. This is what is found in the Sāṅkhya system also. In the Classical Sāṅkhya there is no original agent for the diversification of the uniform basic fundamental. There is no Omniscient person also, One among the many. All the *Puruṣas* (Self) were alike. There is no supreme Self.

## vii

19. There is something from which there is this diversification. Was it a process of active creation, did he create the diversification or did he not? Was it a natural evolution from within the infinite or was the infinite an active agent in producing the finite world? Perhaps there is some wise being as a witness, as a supervisor, sitting in the highest heaven; he might have been the Lord to control this whole process, to know the process from the very beginning. Sir, if there is such a Lord, then he might know. Perhaps he too does not know. The implication is that there is no such Super Being above to control the process. There is no one who knows it as an eye-witness. The wise poets make a search in their hearts and they know something about that stage of origination through their own powers of intuition.

20. The Sāṅkhya philosophy makes reasoning as the only way to know the truth. There are factors that transcend the powers of reason, and such matters have to be known through intuition and one has to depend on the revelations by such persons having the necessary intuition. There is no God sitting in the highest heaven to work out the process of the change of the infinite into the finite, nor even to control the process; he does not also know that process.

21. The philosophy that can be understood from this poem is what must have been there as the basis of the system



known as the Sāṅkhya in later times. That is the philosophy that is found in the *Upaniṣads*. Here we find no trace of Self, distinct from matter, and what we find is only the infinite that became diversified into matter and activity in the empirical world; the life principle, as an absolute reality was there in that infinite. There was no dualism in that infinite; the infinity was a unity in what could later become matter and life. The dualism between matter and spirit is a later accretion in Indian thought when the idea of salvation, final release, became a powerful factor in the Indian mind. The release must be for something and must be from something. So there must be a Self to gain release; the release so gained must be from the bondages of matter. The strongest point in the later texts on Sāṅkhya for the establishment, through syllogistic reason, of a Self, distinct from matter, is that there is a universal activity with salvation, release, isolation (*Kaivalya*) as the goal. In this grand poem we find the *R̥gvedic* stage of the Sāṅkhya system of thought.

22. The atheism is very patent and this is the atheism of the Sāṅkhya system; there is no Creator for the world process. The evolution is from within some infinite, which infinite contains within itself the powers of life for the evolution of the world with change and movement. As for some Omniscient Being, who is there, but who is inactive, there is only an Agnosticism. If there is, let Him be there; the probability is that He is not. The uncompromising realism and positivism is also very patent. The infinite which "is not" in the sense in which an empirical fact "is", is yet more akin to what "is" in the empirical world than to what "is not" in the empirical world. There are certain fundamental concepts in philosophy which are persistent in Indian thought. The world is real and its basic fundamental, the infinite, is also real. A positive thing can never be created from a "no-thing." The evolution of the diversified world is

from within and there is no external agent. Life is a fundamental in the universe. These are the persistent elements in Indian philosophy and we find all of them in this poem.

23. Here is the root of Indian philosophy; in the *Upaniṣads* we find only the stem far above the root of the tree. The root goes down far below the time when the *R̥gveda* was being composed. This is definitely pre-Vedic. The author is not known. In the ancient indices, Parameṣṭhi (sitting in the supreme abode) Prajāpati (lord of the people) is given as the poet. But he is not a poet. Some poet must have given it as the teaching of the Prajāpati who sits in the highest abode. And it is rather surprising that in that poem there is a doubt, a touch of agnosticism, regarding such a Being who could know the truth, the real beginning of the evolution. It was an old and anonymous poem and it came down with a fictitious authorship.

## ii. TRANSFORMATION

24. There is a poem in the *R̥gveda* where the process of the formation of the world is dealt with as one of a transformation from an Absolute, thought of as a Person. In this poem there is a clear indication of active agents functioning in the process of this formation. There is also a hint that the Absolute had the awareness of such a process as planned, regulated, controlled and effected by itself as a person. Some real, active agents come into the picture even at the earliest stages of the process, like gods and wise men and demi-gods. The process is pictured as one similar to the process of conducting a ritual of worship by many persons in collaboration. It is even expressly stated in the end that the process of the formation of the world from the Absolute is a ritual of worship, the primal Law of moral life in the universe. The poem is one among the most sacred within the Vedas; people recite the poem as a part of their daily worship. Most of the people

## X—154

1. soma ekebhyaḥ pavate  
ghṛtam eka upāsate  
yebhyo madhu pradhāvati  
tānś cid evāpi gamyatām

*somaḥ* Soma. *ekebhyaḥ* for some. *pavate* is being pressed. *ghṛtam* ghee (cooked butter) *eka* some. *upāsate* long for. *yebhyaḥ* towards whom. *madhu* honey. *pradhāvati* rushes forth. *tān* them. *cit* verily. *eva* alone. *api*. even. *gamyatām* may go.

2. tapasā ye anādhṛṣyās  
tapasā ye svar yayuḥ  
tapo ye cakrire mahas  
tānś cid evāpi gamyatām

*tapasā* with penance. *ye* who. *anādhṛṣyāḥ* irresistible. *tapasā* with penance. *ye* who. *svaḥ* heaven. *yayuḥ* went. *tapasḥ* penance. *ye* who. *cakrire* performed. *mahaḥ* great.

3. ye yudhyante pradhaneṣu  
śūrāso ye tanutyajāḥ  
ye vā sahasradakṣiṇās  
tānś cid evāpi gamyatām.

*ye* who. *yudhyante* fight. *pradhaneṣu* in battles. *śūrāsaḥ* valiant heroes. *ye* who. *tanutyajāḥ* abandoning their body, who sacrifice their body. *ye* who. *vā* or. *sahasradakṣiṇāḥ* making a thousand gifts.

4. ye cit pūrva ṛtasāpa  
ṛtāvāna ṛtāvṛdhaḥ  
pitṛn tapasvato yama  
tānś cid evāpi gamyatām

*ye* who. *cit* verily. *pūrve* ancient, early. *ṛtasāpaḥ* guardians of the law. *ṛtāvānaḥ* possessors of the law. *ṛtāvṛdhaḥ* promoters of the law. *pitṛn* forefathers. *tapasvataḥ* performing penance. *yama* O Yama.

5. sahasranīthāḥ kavayo  
ye gopāyanti sūryam  
ṛṣin tapasvato yama  
tapojā api gamyatām

*sahasranīthāḥ* giving a thousand leads. *kavayaḥ* poets. *ye* who. *gopāyanti* protect. *sūryam* the sun. *ṛṣin* sages. *tapasvataḥ* who perform penance. *yama* O Yama. *tapojān* who are born of penance. *api* even. *gamyatām* may he go.

## VIII. i. EVOLUTION

## X—129

1. nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm  
nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat  
kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmann  
ambhaḥ kim āsīd gahanaḥ gabhīram

*na* not. *asat* non-being. *āsīt* there was. *no* not. *sat* being. *āsīt* there was. *tadānīm* at that time. *na* not. *āsīt* there was. *rajaḥ* space. *na* not. *vyoma* expanse. *paraḥ* supreme. *yat* which. *kim* what. *ā* *avarīvaḥ* covered up. *kuha* where. *kasya* whose. *śarman* in the support. *ambhaḥ* water. *kim* what. *āsīt* there was. *gahanam* deep. *gabhīram* great.

2. na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtan na tarhi  
na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ  
ānīd avātam svadhayā tad ekam  
tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ kiñ canāsa

*na* not. *mṛtyuḥ* death. *āsīt* there was. *amṛtam* immortality. *na* not. *tarhi* then. *na* not. *rātryāḥ* of the night. *ahnāḥ* of the day. *āsīt* there was. *praketaḥ* sign. *ānīt* breathed. *avātam* without wind. *svadhayā* with its own power. *tat* that. *ekam* one. *tasmāt* from that. *ha* indeed. *anyat* different. *na* not. *paraḥ* another. *kiñ cana* something. *āsa* there was.

3. *tama āsīt tamasā gūlham agre*  
*'praketam salilam sarvam ā idam*  
*tucchyenābhv apihitam yad āsīt*  
*tapasas tan mahinājāyataikam*

*tamaḥ* darkness. *āsīt* there was. *tamasā* with darkness. *gūlham* shrouded. *agre* in the beginning. *apraketam* without a mark. *salilam* expanse of water. *sarvam* all. *āḥ* there was. *idam* this. *tucchyena* with what is imponderable. *ābhu* all-encompassing. *apihitam* covered up. *yad* which. *āsīt* there was. *tapasaḥ* of power. *tat* that. *mahinā* by the greatness. *ajāyata* was born. *ekam* one.

4. *kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi*  
*manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt*  
*sato bandhum asati nir avindan*  
*hr̥di pratiṣyā kavayo manīṣā*

*kāmaḥ* will. *tad* then. *agre* in the beginning. *sam avartata* there arose. *adhi* ever. *manasaḥ* of the mind. *retaḥ* seed. *prathamam* in the beginning. *yad* which. *āsīt* became. *sataḥ* of what is. *bandhum* companion. *asati* in what is not. *nir avindan* they secured. *hr̥di* in the heart. *pratiṣyā* after searching. *kavayaḥ* poets. *manīṣā* with intuition.

5. *tiraścīno vitato raśmir eṣām*  
*adhaḥ svid āsīd upari svid āsīt*  
*retodhā āsan mahimāna āsant*  
*svadhā avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt*

*tiraścīnaḥ* in various directions. *vitataḥ* spread out. *raśmiḥ* the ray. *eṣām* of these. *adhaḥ* below. *svid* either. *āsīt* it was. *upari* above. *svid* or. *āsīt* it was. *retodhāḥ* bearing the seeds. *āsan* they became. *mahimānaḥ* greatnesses. *āsan* they became. *svadhā* its own power. *avastāt* below. *prayatiḥ* activity. *parastāt* above.

6. *ko addhā veda ka iha pra vocat*  
*kuta ājātā kuta iyam viṣṛṣṭiḥ*  
*arvāg devā asya visarjane-*  
*nāthā ko veda yata ābabhūva*

*kaḥ* who. *addhā* verily. *veda* knows. *kaḥ* who. *iha* here. *pra vocat* explains. *kutaḥ* whence. *ājātā* was born. *kutaḥ* whence. *iyam* this. *viṣṛṣṭiḥ* manifolding. *arvāk* later. *devāḥ* gods. *asya* of this. *visarjanena* than the manifolding. *atha* then. *kaḥ* who. *veda* knows. *yataḥ* whence. *ābabhūva* there came about.

7. *iyam viṣṛṣṭir yata ābabhūva*  
*yadi vā dadhe yadi va na*  
*yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyomant*  
*so aṅga veda yadi vā na veda*

*iyam* this. *viṣṛṣṭiḥ* manifolding. *yataḥ* whence. *ābabhūva* came about. *yadi* if. *vā* either. *dadhe* created. *yadi* if. *vā* or. *na* not. *yaḥ* who. *asya* of this. *adhyakṣaḥ* controller. *parame* highest. *vyoman* in the heaven. *saḥ* he. *aṅga* Sir. *veda* knows. *yadi* if. *vā* or. *na* not. *veda* knows.

## ii. TRANSFORMATION

### X—90

1. *sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ*  
*sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt*  
*sa būmim viśvato vṛtvā*  
*aty atīṣṭhad daśāṅgulam*