The Journal Of

INDO-EUROPEAN STUDIES

ROCKY V. MIRANDA: Indo-European Gender: A Study in Semantic and Syntactic Change ............ 199

WALTER H. MAURER: A Re-Examination of Rgveda X.129, The Nasadiya Hymn .................. 217

JOHN SIMPSON: Comparative Structural Analysis of Three Ethical Questions in Beowulf, The Nibelungenlied, and the Chanson de Roland. .............. 239

DAVID G. ZANOTTI: Another Aspect of the Indo-European Question: A Response to P. Bosch-Gimpera ... 255

ALFRED COLLINS: Reflections on Rg-Veda X.129: Stimulated by Walter Maurer’s Paper. .......... 271

EDWIN D. FLOYD: Dissimilation of Nasals in Greek Περασματικά, etc .................. 283

BOOKS RECEIVED: ................................. 289

Volume 3, Number 3  
Fall, 1975
REFLECTIONS ON RG-VEDA X.129:
STIMULATED BY WALTER MAURER’S PAPER

ALFRED COLLINS
University of Texas at Austin

Maurer’s interpretation of RV X.129, the “Hymn of Creation”, is very stimulating and, I believe, right in many points. These notes will attempt to show, however, that he misses the pivotal function of human thought in the structure of creation in the hymn, and so loses the connection between the ‘primary’ creation described in stanzas 1-3 and what Renou (1956, p.254) has called the ‘secondary creation’ (uśrṣṭi) of the two last stanzas.

Stanza 1 As Maurer says, sāt and āsāt are not abstract nouns — ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ as often translated. He suggests that they are predicate adjectives to an unexpressed sātvam īdām, ‘all this’ (i.e., the cosmos) which appears in stanza 3. I suggest that they refer rather to tād (stanza 2), the neuter ‘that’, meaning the precosmic Being which evolves into the cosmos, and which is referred to under the image of water in pada d. Furthermore, I do not feel that sāt and āsāt are adjectives. In stanza 4 of this hymn, and in RV X.72.2-3 and X.5.7, we have a substantive use of these words, and I suggest that this is the case here also. sāt and āsāt may be translated as collectives: ‘what is and what is not a thing’ — i.e., what is manifest in this world and what is not (remaining unmanifest or indeterminate).

As such, sāt and āsāt would be similar to mṛtyu and amṛta in verse 2, which although apparently abstract nouns (‘death’ and ‘immortality’), actually signify collectivities: mortals and gods. They are, I suggest, predicate nominatives to tād, “that” of stanza 2. In the beginning, the Being which would become this cosmos was neither a thing (collection of things) nor not a thing. But how could it be neither? Why was it not rather sim-

ply asat, an indeterminate quantity, as implied by RV X.72.2? Maurer avoids this difficulty by interpreting sat and asat as existent/non-existent, and holds the pre-cosmic state to have been indeterminate because neither existent nor non-existent. But when the words appear again in stanza 4, Maurer interprets asat as the “unformed, unmanifested world”. Like all other translators of whom I am aware, he does not face the difficulty: if asat is the unmanifest, unformed state from which a formed, manifest world (sät) arises, why is the unmanifest state called neither sat nor asat in stanza 1? A solution is, however possible: perhaps the pre-cosmic Being is neither unmanifest nor manifest because it is coming to be manifest (cf. abha in stanza 3). The cosmos (sät) is in statu nascendi from the unmanifest, named by the profound waters of pada d.

This situation is suggested by the rest of the stanza, most significantly by the verb ā varīval, which I take with Maurer to be from vṛt, “turn”, rather than vṛ, “cover”. ā vṛt, as Oldenberg (1912, p. 346), Geldner (1951, pp. 359-360), and Renou (1967, p. 168) demonstrate, refers to the primordial self-movedness of the original Being; the verb elsewhere names the movement of breathing, or of blowing wind, which fits very well the “windless breathing” of stanza 2.4 Maurer’s “exists” is too vague and colorless. In addition, the absence of rajas (“space, atmosphere”) and vyöman (lit. “separate realm”; “heaven”) suggests a common Vedic cosmogony in which Indra or Varuṇa opens the originally constricted universe to create space in the middle and heaven/earth on either side. I take the absence of rajas and vyöman to signify that the primal Being is not yet a cosmos, but will become one. The words kāśya sārmann, “in whose keeping”, seem to refer to the power of conflation against which the divine act of opening must push.5 This en-

closing power will later be described as “darkness” and “vacuity” (stanza 3).

But the cosmogony described in this hymn does not depend on a divine dragon-slayer (Indra) or proper-apart of heaven and earth (Varuṇa) to release the constriction. Creation is the autonomous self-manifestation of the primal Being, at least on the “objective” level. As we shall see, the part of dragon-slayer/proper-apart is played by the minds of the human poets (stanza 5).

The relatively autonomous cosmogony of this hymn is met with in earlier parts of the RV associated with the fatherless birth of the fire god (principle) Agni.7 Thus in II.35 Agni as the Son of the Waters (Apām Nāpāt) seems to be spontaneously generated by the feminine waters, and only then becomes their husband, with them generating other creatures. A distinction between this hymn and the Agni-waters mythology is that here the primordial waters seem to be neuter in conception as well as grammatical gender (āmbhas), although they do take on a feminine character later in the hymn.

Stanza 2. Amṛta/mṛtyū, as Maurer rightly interprets, mean “mortals” and “immortals”. Together with “day and night” in pada b, they represent the duality of the created world (sät), and in contrast with tād ēkam, “That One” or “that alone”, again suggest a state of cosmic nascence. The “windless breath” of the primal Being refers back to the atmospheric space (rajas) and “breathing”-like movement of stanza 1. Breathing is normally a function of the atmosphere, but here seems to create it. The pre-cosmic waters may be imagined to swell outward like a self-inflated balloon, thus opening an atmospheric space in their midst, which will later make possible the heaven/earth (male/female) opposition of stanza 5.

Stanza 3. Again the self-swelling of the primordial waters: Saśā, although grammatically neuter, perhaps represents a more feminine, fructifying stage than the āmbha of stanza 1.8 The “darkness hidden by darkness” is explained as a “coming to

2. ā vṛt is close in meaning to sam vṛt, “evolve” in stanza 4.
4. The birth of sät from asät in X.72.2-3 likewise results from breath: Brahma-naspati “blowing like a bellows”.
6. sārmann is usually a positively valenced concept: “protection” rather than “bondage”. Nevertheless, these concepts are interchangeable, depending on who does the protecting, and from whom. Thus at I.174.2, Indra breaks open the sārmanns of the (cosmic) enemy to release the waters. For the enemy, sārmann is a protection; for the singer (and Indra) an obstacle to be broken apart. Likewise, the word gopā, “guardian” becomes negative when it refers to the serpent “guarding” the cosmic waters (I.32.11: shigopa).
7. E.g., VI.8.4, VI. 16.35; cf. also X.121.7, X.82.6, X.45.3.5.
be” (ābhū) “covered by emptiness (vacuity)” (tuchyā). Perhaps the sense is that the primordial Being which was coming into manifestation was restrained in this movement by the absence of an entity outside itself. The difficulties inherent in a self-evolved or “autochthonous” creation may be implicit.9 Another possibility is that the evolution was initially hidden from the eyes of the kavi-s (inspired poets) of stanza 4. At any event, the primal Being gives birth to itself (i.e., emanates a part of itself) after gestating or brooding over itself in tāpas, or “inward brooding” to modify Maurer’s evocative rendering of the word. The self to which it gives birth will be seen to be both masculine and intelligent in the next stanza.

Stanza 4. As Maurer says, this stanza is the high-point of the poem; I also agree that the connection of the two hemistiches is of crucial importance. However, I cannot accept his interpretation of the stanza. Specifically, I do not agree that rētas is the evolved product (“offshoot”) of mānas, “thought”, although it clearly is the product of the “inward brooding” (tāpas) of the previous stanza. rētas ordinarily denotes the masculine creative potency (concretely, “semen”: cf. X.61.7), and is here identified with the “desire” (kāma) which evolved through the “inward brooding” of the primal Being. Maurer interprets this as the desire to create a manifest, differentiated world, and considers that it is just this desire which the sages discover to be the link between the unmanifest and manifest world in the second half of the stanza. Although this explanation agrees well with some later cosmogonies, I am not convinced that it is appropriate here. On the contrary, I feel that it obscures the significance of the human thought which appears in this stanza and takes up a crucial role in the further development of the cosmos. This role is clear in stanza 5 where the male energies (retodhā, prāyati) of the later creation (vīśṛṣṭi) were distinguished from the feminine energies (svadhā, mahimān) by the “line” (raśmi) of the kavi-s thought: it is this act of setting apart which makes possible a dualistic, bisexual creation.

But an analogue to the seers’ “line” appears already in stanza 4 as a “family tie”, a bond of kinship or descent (bāndhu).10 This genealogical tie, which they find by eager search in their heart, connects manifest being with the unmanifest.11 In effect, the kavi-s discover that this world arises, is born, autochthonously from the unmanifest Being: this birth is precisely the subject of the first three stanzas.

It is clear that this discovery results from a desire to uncover the origin (bāndhu) of the manifest world (sāt). This is indeed the motive for the entire hymn: beginning with the given, everyday world, the kavi-s try to find out its origin. Now, I take the “search” (pratīṣṭyā) of the kavi-s for the origin of the sāt to result from the kāma, “desire”, which arises in the primal Being as the “seed” (in the sense of producer) of thought. This ‘thought’ (mānas) is closely related to the maniṣā (“poetic activity”) by which the kavi-s search is carried on. But I have said that kāma evolved from the primal Being’s “inward brooding”, while the kavi-s search apparently originates in the subjective sphere of the human mind. How to reconcile these differing origins of what I take to be the same impulse?

The answer can only be that the “desire” of the primal Being was expressed through the kavi-s in the form of thought seeking the origins of the world.12 But we have seen that the “desire” was the self-emanation of the primal Being when it was “born” through tāpas in stanza 3: it is thus an entity with the quality of sāt, a thing in the manifest world. Since thought (mānas) is the immediate result of desire, it too is a constituent of the sāt, and the kavi-s thinking is a case of sāt reflecting on its own origins.13


12. The role of human thought in completing creation in the RV is widely recognized, albeit in different ways: cf., e.g., Thieme (1952) pp. 110-112; Renou (1968) pp. 17-18; Schmidt (1968) pp. 42-52.
13. It may be appropriate to discuss briefly here two patterns of late Vedic cosmogony. The one present in SB X.5.3, cited by Maurer as the earliest commentary on our hymn, begins, in a sacrificial context, with primordial "mind" (mānas), and proceeds through tāpas to increased definition (mārkṣṭata) and solidity (mūrtatva). This is an autochthonous process, involving no second member. The other pattern of creation I wish to point to, and which I feel continues the thought of X.129, occurs when "a primordial being becomes conscious of himself" (van Buiten (1957a) p. 19). In this case, thought arises as the second member of a progenitive pair. A transparent instance is BAU I.4.10: brahma vai idam agra āśīrtadh ātmānām eva-vāt – aham brah-
Stanza 5. The evolved desire of the primal Being which resulted in men seeking and finding the origin of the world in stanza 4 here shows its masculine creativity as retodhā, "placer of the seed". (prāyati, the other "male" element, is obscure.) This masculine desire is paired in bisexual complementarity with the primal Being which has now become feminine (both svadhā and mahimān, which seem to represent the female creative powers, appeared earlier (stanzas 2 and 3) as qualifications of the presexual, self-generative stage of the Being). As a result of the pairing of the male and female energies, the manifest world of sāt (now called viśṛṣṭi) is present in stanzas 6 and 7.

The question can now be raised, what is the relationship between the creativity of kāma (rētas, retodhā) and its motivation of the kaviś’s search? First, it seems clear that a search for the origins of the sāt presupposes that sāt already exists: yet the masculine, impregnating activity of the kāma (retodhā) seems to generate the world. But this generation is secondary: bisexual creation depends on the search for origins. The sexual opposition of kāma (retodhā) and the primal Being arises in the first place as a discrimination between them in thought, but this distinction rests on realization of the autochthonous origin of kāma in the primal Being (stanza 4). We may say that the search

māṣmistat sarvam abhaivait, "This (cosmos) was (only) brahman in the beginning. He knew himself: 'I am brahman'. From this the whole world came to be." In this story desire to know itself plays no part in the primal Being’s self-awareness, but desire is present in a similar story, BAU I.2.1. (SB 10.6.5.1). There, the primal Being is death, or nothingness. This nothingness, however, is the same as hungar (i.e., a privation), which leads to the desire: "May I be myself!" (tan mano kuraita amatman śyām āt). The phrase mano kuraita is especially interesting. If we follow Maurer’s reading of monas at SB X.5.3 as "mind" or "thinking", we would translate this as "he (hungar) made himself a mind"; he then uses the mind to express his desire to become himself (a self). Primordial hunger, then, expresses its desire to be a self through thought (mind). But since hungar is by nature a desire, it is clear that desire comes before thought, which merely expresses it. An alternative translation of mano kurata is proposed by van Buitenen (1957a, p. 18, Note 17), who points to parallels with askāmayata and aikāyata, "desired, willed". On this interpretation, the connection between the primordial desire (hungar) and its expressive thought becomes closer: thought is essentially "will". In either case, thought (will) comes into existence at a certain point in the cosmogony: the point at which the primordial being reflects on itself, sees itself, or tries to gain itself: hence thought is not primordial.

These reflections apply to X.129 with the difference that the primal Being’s self-awareness is here mediated by human thought.

for origins develops into the act of setting apart the masculine and feminine energies which produce the secondary creation (this is the connection of stanzas 4 and 5). Furthermore, this act is simultaneously the act of impregnation which defines bisexual creation. The intellectual desire which evolved in the Being directs itself reflectively against that Being, thus discovering its own rootedness in that. This reflexivity of thought thinking on its roots is expressed in stanza 4, where the kaviś’s searching thought enters their own heart (ṛhā), which is elsewhere (e.g., II.35.2) precisely the source of thought. By so reflecting, thought comes into its own as an autonomous entity: but this autonomy exists only in opposition to thought’s continuing basis in the primal Being. Thinking on its own origins, it becomes, so to speak, its own “father”, while the primal Being becomes its “mother”. The situation is closely similar to RV II.35 where the “Child of the Waters” is autochthonously generated by the maternal waters (stanzas 7, 8, 10) but also engenders himself upon them (stanzas 13 and probably 9). RV X.129 differs from this hymn in representing thought, rather than a god, as the male principle which is generated by the primal Being (here a plurality of females) as the latter’s impregnator.

14. Cf. Renou (1955) p. 24. The assimilation of the roots of thought to the roots of the cosmos is found in the hymn to Speech (Vāc), X.125, stanza 7: Speech, who is the source of thought (stanzas 4 and 5) has her “womb” in the waters, and like them engenders a male principle (the “father”) as a sexual complement. Evidently she stimulates and speaks among men for the same reason (stanza 5). “The heart as source of poetry (inspiration) is called an ocean (=The precosmic waters) at IV.58.5.”

15. The peculiar place of man as a being who attains a relative independence of the maternal principle is expressed rather clearly in X.72.8.9. If, following Hoffman (1957), p. 101, we take mārtāyana, “born of a dead egg”, as signifying “man”, we have a case where the first 7 sons born from the body of Aditi (=the Adityas) become gods and return to the primal condition (purusāyam yugam), i.e., back to her body, while the 8th son, Marṭaṇḍa, is set apart (paūrā āṣyat) to generate progeny and die. Rather than thought, the source of man’s independence seems to be here his mortality.

16. Cf. also VI.16.35; X.121.7; X.82.6.

17. RV X.121 presents a similar but not identical situation. The Unknown God having been earlier credited with the cosmogonic acts of Indra and Varuna (propping apart the worlds, fixing the earth, ruling as a king over all creatures) is in stanzas 7 and 8 compared with two male gods who are first generated by the primordial waters: Agni (7) and Dākaṣa (8). As in X.129 the male god becomes the sexual complement of the waters, but instead of impregnating them, he is said flatly to “generate”
But if thinking initiates bisexuality, and the latter creates the evolved world of sat/vīraśṭi, what are we to say of the place of sat in the original, autochthonous evolution of the primal Being? In stanza 3 we have that the Being “was born”, i.e., evolved or emanated a part of itself, and the kavi-s’ discovery of sat’s evolution out of asat in stanza 4 seems to show clearly that sat did evolve before it was thought about. The question is whether the “world” was autochthonously generated along with kāma, or whether kāma (and thought) developed alone, with the “world” a later, solely bisexual production.

The answer seems to be that kāma and the world of sat did arise together, and the latter merely changed its mode of being following the self-discovery of thought’s origins. When thought discovers its autochthonous birth it thereby comes to be born bisexual as its own “father”. Perhaps because sat and thought are not identical (thought is only part of sat), the generativity of thought with respect to sat is not assigned exclusively to them as well as the cosmos. But this is somewhat illusory: the situations are in fact consonant. The root jen, “generate”, is used in two senses, one appropriate to the female sexual function, the other to the male. Feminine reference is “evolve”, masculine “to speak by”, involving inner transformation and self-manifestation, while masculine engenderment operates from outside, by opening up or impregnating. This can be seen by comparing stanza 9 with stanza 7. In 7, Agni is “generated” by the waters as the embryo of the universe, while in 9 the Agni/Dakṣa-like god “generates” heaven and earth. The latter “engenderment” seems comparable to the propping-apart of heaven and earth recalled in stanzas 1 and 5; that is, the originally closed world is made open and thereby fertile. Thus, when in 9, pada c, the god is said to generate the waters, (by whom he has himself been “generated” in 7) we may infer that this merely specifies the act of propping apart heaven and earth suggested in the first half of the stanza: the matrix in which the heavenly/earthly substance subsisted, which was split in two by their “endgame”, was the waters. The waters would then be engendered only in the figurative sense that they are the material out of which the worlds are “engendered”. Alternatively, we may think that the waters are released (as in I.32, etc.) from their primordia bondage when the worlds are propped apart. In any event, the waters are not produced by the masculine principle in the same way as he is produced by them. (This observation should also apply to the cases of “reversible parenthood” at X.72.4.5 and X.90.9.) As in X.129.5 the masculine principle in X.121 is intelligent: this is conveyed by the phrase ṣopā . . . poryāśatā “watched the waters all around” (stanza 8). Likewise, in X.82.5 the gods, newly born from the embryo borne by the waters, “see” (samāpāsya)...

18. My interpretation of kāma as intellectual desire finds a partial parallel at X.7.123 where preṣ, “love, friendship”, motivates the origin of language and thought, which as in X.129 appear out of obscurity. The result of thinking and speaking is that the poets know their friendship for each other: a social bond rather than the cosmic tie of X.129. Nevertheless, the desire to communicate with each other leads them to discover their (implicit, “unconscious”) relatedness, which that desire already expressed (albeit in a nascent form). Thus, desire to be related reveals, through the mediation of thought and language, a preexistent relatedness. Likewise, at X.129, sat’s desire to be related to its origin reveals, through thought, that it was already so related. In both cases thought changes nothing, but merely brings something out into the light – and yet this act of illumination is precisely the advent of bisexual creation, in X.129, and in X.71, of the ritual apportionment of language. (Cf. stanzas 3 and 11, where the unitary treasure of language is divided into the various priestly roles at the sacrifice.) Common to both is an increasing differentiation by thought: of the cosmos in X.129; of society in X.71.

19. Cf. X.121.8; X.82.5.
obscured. Instead, they are presented as mutually exclusive possibilities: *either* the cosmos evolved autochthonously from the primal Being (as implied by the word for "world", *vīraśāyī*, literally "emanation"), and the verb form *ā bhū*, which refers back to the nominal *ābhū* of stanza 3, denoting "becoming"), *or* it was "put" in place by the masculine overseer functioning as *retodhā*, "impregnator". What is missing is the autochthonous provenance of the overseer himself who, precisely *because* his roots are in the primal Being, could know his origin and that of the cosmos which he would be, in this act, "father". Evidently these last two stanzas represent a degeneration in the *kavi-s* 'thought, which falls into a dualism losing itself in obscurity at both ends. Even bisexuality is nearly lost at this point: the creative principles are wrapped in their respective (temporal and spatial) remotenesses and connect only as complementary mysteries.

Perhaps the significance of these two verses is to show by a negative example that autochthony and bisexuality are mutually complementary: when they are severed, as here, neither makes sense, and the world loses its moorings in the primal Being and, simultaneously, in the thought which realizes that it is moored there.

Nevertheless, we are left with a desire to understand the origin of this world, and are the wiser for understanding that this desire is not merely personal but is rooted in the nature of the cosmos.

**REFERENCES**

Geldner, K.F.  

Gonda, J.  

Hoffman, K.  

Renou, L.  