

**EXCERPTS FROM  
A VEDIC READER  
FOR STUDENTS**

**BY**

**ARTHUR ANTHONY  
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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. AGE OF THE RIGVEDA.

THE Rigveda is undoubtedly the oldest literary monument of the Indo-European languages. But the exact period when the hymns were composed is a matter of conjecture. All that we can say with any approach to certainty is that the oldest of them cannot date from later than the thirteenth century B.C. This assertion is based on the following grounds. Buddhism, which began to spread in India about 500 B.C., presupposes the existence not only of the Vedas, but also of the intervening literature of the Brahmanas and Upanishads. The development of language and religious thought apparent in the extensive literature of the successive phases of these two Vedic periods renders it necessary to postulate the lapse of seven or eight centuries to account for the gradual changes, linguistic, religious, social, and political, that this literature displays. On astronomical grounds, one Sanskrit scholar has (cf. p. 146) concluded that the oldest Vedic hymns date from 3000 B.C., while another puts them as far back as 6000 B.C. These calculations are based on the assumption that the early Indians possessed an exact astronomical knowledge of the sun's course such as there is no evidence, or even probability, that they actually possessed. On the other hand, the possibility of such extreme antiquity seems to be disproved by the relationship of the hymns of the Rigveda to the oldest part of the Avesta, which can hardly date earlier than from about 800 B.C. That relationship is so close that the language of the Avesta, if it were known at a stage some five centuries earlier, could scarcely have differed at all from that of the Rigveda. Hence the Indians could not have separated from the Iranians much sooner than 1300 B.C. But, according to Prof. Jacobi, the separation took place before 1500 B.C. In that case we must assume that the Iranian and the Indian languages remained practically unchanged for the truly immense period of over 3000 years. We must thus rest content with the moderate estimate of the thirteenth century B.C. as the approximate date for the beginning of the Rigvedic period. This estimate has not been invalidated by the discovery in 1907 of the names of the Indian deities Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Nasatya, in an inscription of about 1400 B.C. found in Asia Minor. For the phonetic

form in which these names there appear may quite well belong to the Indo-Iranian period when the Indians and the Persians were still one people. The date of the inscription leaves two centuries for the separation of the Indians, their migration to India, and the commencement of the Vedic hymn literature in the north-west of Hindustan.

## **2. ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE COLLECTION.**

When the Indo-Aryans entered India, they brought with them a religion in which the gods were chiefly personified powers of Nature, a few of them, such as Dyaus, going back to the Indo-European, others, such as Mitra, Varuna, Indra, to the Indo-Iranian period. They also brought with them the cult of fire and of Soma, besides a knowledge of the art of composing religious poems in several metres, as a comparison of the Rigveda and the Avesta shows. The purpose of these ancient hymns was to propitiate the gods by praises accompanying the offering of malted butter poured on the fire and of the juice of the Soma plant placed on the sacrificial grass. The hymns which have survived in the Rigveda from the early period of the Indo-Aryan invasion were almost exclusively composed by a hereditary priesthood. They were handed down in different families by memory, not by writing, which could hardly have been introduced into India before about 700 B.C. These family groups of hymns were gradually brought together till, with successive additions, they assumed the earliest collected form of the Rigveda. Then followed the constitution of the Samhita text, which appears to have taken place about 600 B.C., at the end of the period of the Brahmanas, but before the Upanishads, which form appendages to those works, came into existence. The creators of the Samhita did not in any way alter the diction of the hymns here collected together, but only applied to the text certain rules of Sandhi which prevailed in their time, and by which, in particular, vowels are either contracted or changed into semi-vowels, and a is often dropped after e and o, in such a way as constantly to obscure the metre. Soon after this work was concluded, extraordinary precautions were taken to preserve from loss or corruption the sacred text thus fixed. The earliest expedient of this kind was the formation of the Pada or 'word' text, in which all the words of the Samhita text are separated and given in their original form as unaffected by the rules of Sandhi, and in which most compounds and some derivatives and inflected forms are analysed. This text, which is virtually the earliest commentary on the Rigveda, was followed by other and more

complicated methods of reciting the text, and by various works called Anukramanis or 'Indexes', which enumerate from the beginning to the end of the Rigveda the number of stanzas contained in each hymn, the deities, and the metres of all the stanzas of the Rigveda. Thanks to these various precautions the text of the Rigveda has been handed down for 2,500 years with a fidelity that finds no parallel in any other literature.

### **3. EXTENT AND DIVISIONS OF THE RIGVEDA.**

The Rigveda consists of 1,017 or, counting eleven others of the eighth Book which are recognized as later additions, 1,028 hymns. These contain a total of about 10,600 stanzas, which give an average of ten stanzas to each hymn. The shortest hymn has only one stanza, while the longest has fifty-eight. If printed continuously like prose in Roman characters, the Samhita text would fill an octavo volume of about 600 pages of thirty-three lines each. It has been calculated that in bulk the RV. is equivalent to the extant poems of Homer.

There is a twofold division of the RV. into parts. One, which is purely mechanical, is into Astakas or 'eighths' of about equal length, each of which is subdivided into eight Adhyayas or 'lessons', while each of the latter consists of Vargas or 'groups' of five or six stanzas. The other division is into ten Mandalas or 'books' (lit. 'cycles') and Suktas or 'hymns'. The latter method is an historical one, indicating the manner in which the collection came into being. This system is now invariably followed by Western Scholars in referring to or quoting from the Rigveda.

### **4. ARRANGEMENT OF THE RIGVEDA.**

Six of the ten books, ii to vii, are homogeneous in character. The hymns contained in each of them were, according to native Indian tradition, composed or 'seen' by poets of the same family, which handed them down as its own collection. The tradition is borne out by the internal evidence of the seers' names mentioned in the hymns, and by that of the refrains occurring in each of these books. The method of arrangement followed in the 'family books' is uniform, for each of them is similarly divided into groups addressed to different gods. On the other hand, Books i, viii, and x were not composed each by a distinct family of seers, while the groups of which they consist are constituted by being the hymns composed by different individual

seers. Book ix is distinguished from the rest by all its hymns being addressed to one and the same deity, Soma, and by its groups being based not on identity of authorship, but of metre.

*Family books.*--In these the first group of hymns is invariably addressed to Agni, the second to Indra, and those that follow to gods of less importance. The hymns within these deity groups are arranged according to the diminishing number of stanzas contained in them. Thus in the second Book the Agni group of ten hymns begins with one of sixteen stanzas and ends with one of only six. The first hymn of the next group in the same book has twenty-one, the last only four stanzas. The entire group of the family books is, moreover, arranged according to the increasing number of the hymns in each of those books, if allowance is made for later additions. Thus the second Book has forty-three, the third sixty-two, the sixth seventy-five, and the seventh one hundred and four hymns. The homogeneity of the family books renders it highly probable that they formed the nucleus of the RV., which gradually assumed its final shape by successive additions to these books.

The earliest of these additions appears to be the second half of Book i, which, consisting of nine groups, each by a different author, was prefixed to the family books, the internal arrangement of which it follows. The eighth is like the family books as being in the main composed by members of one family, the Kanvas; but it differs from them in not beginning with hymns to Agni and in the prevalence of the strophic metre called Pragatha. The fact of its containing fewer hymns than the seventh book shows that it did not form a unit of the family books; but its partial resemblance to them caused it to be the first addition at the end of that collection. The first part of Book i (1-50) is in several respects like Book viii: Kanvas seem to have been the authors of the majority of these hymns; their favourite strophic metre is again found here; and both collections contain many similar or identical passages. There must have been some difference between the two groups, but the reason why they should have been separated by being added at the beginning and the end of an older collection has not yet been shown.

The *ninth book* was added as a consequence of the first eight being formed into a unit. It consists entirely of hymns addressed to Soma while the juice was 'clarifying' (pavamana); on the other hand, the family books contain not a single Soma hymn, and Books i and viii

together only three hymns invoking Soma in his general character. Now the hymns of Book ix were composed by authors of the same families as those of Books ii to vii, as is shown, for instance, by the appearance here of refrains peculiar to those families. Hence it is to be assumed that all the hymns to Soma Pavamana were removed from Books i to viii, in order to form a single collection belonging to the sphere of the Udgatr or chanting priest, and added after Books i-viii, which were the sphere of the Hotr or reciting priest. The diction and recondite allusions in the hymns of this book suggest that they are later than those of the preceding books; but some of them may be early, as accompanying the Soma ritual which goes back to the Indo-Iranian period. The hymns of the first part of this book (1-60) are arranged according to the decreasing number of their stanzas, beginning with ten and ending with four. In the second part (61-114), which contains some very long hymns (one of forty-eight and another of fifty-eight stanzas), this arrangement is not followed. The two parts also differ in metre: the hymns of the first are, excepting four stanzas, composed in Gayatri, while the second consists mainly of groups in other metres; thus 68-84 form a Jagati and 87-97 a Tristubh group.

The *tenth book* was the final addition. Its language and subject matter show that it is later in origin than the other books; its authors were, moreover, clearly familiar with them. Both its position at the end of the RV. and the fact that the number of its hymns (191) is made up to that of the first book indicate its supplementary character. Its hymns were composed by a large number of seers of different families, some of which appear in other books; but the traditional attribution of authorship is of little or no value in the case of a great many hymns. In spite of its generally more modern character, it contains some hymns quite as old and poetic as the average of those in other books. These perhaps found a place here because for some reason they had been overlooked while the other collections were being formed. As regards language, we find in the tenth book earlier grammatical forms and words growing obsolete, while new words and meanings begin to emerge. As to matter, a tendency to abstract ideas and philosophical speculation, as well as the introduction of magical conceptions, such as belong to the sphere of the Atharvaveda, is here found to prevail.

## 5. LANGUAGE.

The hymns of the RV. are composed in the earliest stage of that literary language of which the latest, or Classical Sanskrit, was stereotyped by



the grammar of Panini at the end of the fourth century B.C. It differs from the latter about as much as Homeric from Attic Greek. It exhibits a much greater variety of forms than Sanskrit does. Its case-forms both in nominal and pronominal inflexion are more numerous. It has more participles and gerunds. It is, however, in verbal forms that its comparative richness is most apparent. Thus the RV. very frequently uses the subjunctive, which as such has entirely died out in Sanskrit; it has twelve forms of the infinitive, while only a single one of these has survived in Sanskrit. The language of the RV. also differs from Sanskrit in its accent, which, like that of ancient Greek, is of a musical nature, depending on the pitch of the voice, and is marked throughout the hymns. This accent has in Sanskrit been changed not only to a stress accent, but has shifted its position as depending on quantity, and is no longer marked. The Vedic accent occupies a very important position in Comparative Philology, while the Sanskrit accent, being secondary, has no value of this kind.

The Sandhi of the RV. represents an earlier and a less conventional stage than that of Sanskrit. Thus the insertion of a sibilant between final n and a hard palatal or dental is in the RV. restricted to cases where it is historically justified; in Sanskrit it has become universal, being extended to cases where it has no justification. After e and o in the RV. a is nearly always pronounced, while in Sanskrit it is invariably dropped. It may thus be affirmed with certainty that no student can understand Sanskrit historically without knowing the language of the RV.

## **6. METRE.**

The hymns of the RV. are without exception metrical. They contain on the average ten stanzas, generally of four verses or lines, but also of three and sometimes five. The line, which is called Pada, ('quarter') and forms the metrical unit, usually consists of eight, eleven, or twelve syllables. A stanza is, as a rule, made up of lines of the same type; but some of the rarer kinds of stanza are formed by combining lines of different length. There are about fifteen metres, but only about seven of these are at all common. By far the most common are the Tristubh (4 x 11 syllables), the Gayatri (3 x 8), and the Jagati (4 x 12), which together furnish two-thirds of the total number of stanzas in the RV. The Vedic metres, which are the foundation of the Classical Sanskrit metres except two, have a quantitative rhythm in which short and long syllables alternate and, which is of a generally iambic type. It is

only the rhythm of the last four or five syllables (called the cadence) of the line that is rigidly determined, and the lines of eleven and twelve syllables have a caesura as well. In their structure the Vedic metres thus come half way between the metres of the Indo-Iranian period, in which, as the Avesta shows, the principle is the number of syllables only, and) those of Classical Sanskrit, in which (except the sloka) the quantity of every single syllable in the line is fixed. Usually a hymn of the Rigveda consists of stanzas in the same metre throughout; a typical divergence from this rule is to mark the conclusion of a hymn with a stanza in a different metre. Some hymns are strophic in their construction. The strophes in them consist either of three stanzas (called *trca*) in the same simple metre, generally Gayatri, or of two stanzas in different mixed metres. The latter type of strophe is called *Pragatha* and is found chiefly in the eighth book.

## **7. RELIGION OF THE RIGVEDA.**

This is concerned with the worship of gods that are largely personifications of the powers of nature. The hymns are mainly invocations of these gods, and are meant to accompany the oblation of Soma juice and the fire sacrifice of melted butter. It is thus essentially a polytheistic religion, which assumes a pantheistic colouring only in a few of its latest hymns. The gods are usually stated in the RV. to be thirty-three in number, being divided into three groups of eleven distributed in earth, air, and heaven, the three divisions of the Universe. Troops of deities, such as the Maruts, are of course not included in this number. The gods were believed to have had a beginning. But they were not thought to have all come into being at the same time; for the RV. occasionally refers to earlier gods, and certain deities are described as the offspring of others. That they were considered to have been originally mortal is implied in the statement that they acquired immortality by drinking Soma or by receiving it as a gift from Agni and Savitr.

The gods were conceived as human in appearance. Their bodily parts which are frequently mentioned, are in many instances simply figurative illustrations of the phenomena of nature represented by them. Thus the arms of the Sun are nothing more than his rays; and the tongue and limbs of Agni merely denote his flames. Some of the gods appear equipped as warriors, especially Indra, others are described as priests, especially Agni and Brhaspati. All of them drive through the air in cars, drawn chiefly by steeds, but sometimes by

other animals. The favourite food of men is also that of the gods, consisting in milk, butter, grain, and the flesh of sheep, goats, and cattle. It is offered to them in the sacrifice, which is either conveyed to them in heaven by the god of fire, or which they come in their cars to partake of on the strew of grass prepared for their reception. Their favourite drink is the exhilarating juice of the Soma plant. The home of the gods is heaven, the third heaven, or the highest step of Visnu, where cheered by draughts of Soma they live a life of bliss.

*Attributes of the gods.*--Among these the most prominent is power, for they are constantly described as great and mighty. They regulate the order of nature and vanquish the potent powers of evil. They hold sway over all creatures; no one can thwart their ordinances or live beyond the time they appoint; and the fulfilment of desires is dependent on them. They are benevolent beings who bestow prosperity on mankind; the only one in whom injurious traits appear being Rudra. They are described as 'true' and 'not deceitful', being friends and protectors of the honest and righteous, but punishing sin and guilt. Since in most cases the gods of the RV. have not yet become dissociated from the physical phenomena which they represent, their figures are indefinite in outline and deficient in individuality. Having many features, such as power, brilliance, benevolence, and wisdom in common with others, each god exhibits but very few distinctive attributes. This vagueness is further increased by the practice of invoking deities in pairs-a practice making both gods share characteristics properly belonging to one alone. When nearly every power can thus be ascribed to every god, the identification of one deity with another becomes easy. There are in fact several such identifications in the RV. The idea is even found in more than one late passage that various deities are but different forms of a single divine being. This idea, however, never developed into monotheism, for none of the regular sacrifices in the Vedic period were offered to a single god. Finally, in other late hymns of the RV. we find the deities Aditi and Prajapati identified not only with all the gods, but with nature as well. This brings us to that pantheism which became characteristic of later Indian thought in the form of the Vedanta philosophy.

The Vedic gods may most conveniently be classified as deities of heaven, air, and earth, according to the threefold division suggested by the RV. itself. The celestial gods are Dyaus, Varuna, Mitra, Surya, Savitr, Pusan, the Asvins, and the goddesses Usas, Dawn, and Ratri, Night. The atmospheric gods are Indra, Apam napat, Rudra, the Maruts, Vayu,

Parjanya, and the Waters. The terrestrial deities are Prthivi, Agni, and Soma. This Reader contains hymns addressed to all these gods, with detailed introductions describing their characters in the words, as far as is possible, of the RV. itself. A few quite subordinate deities are not included, partly because no entire hymn is addressed to them. Two such belong to the celestial sphere. Trita, a somewhat obscure god, who is mentioned only in detached stanzas of the RV., comes down from the Indo-Iranian period. He seems to represent the 'third' or lightning form of fire. Similar in origin to Indra, he was ousted by the latter at an early period. Matarisvan is a divine being also referred to only in scattered stanzas of the RV. He is described as having brought down the hidden fire from heaven to men on earth, like the Prometheus of Greek mythology. Among the terrestrial deities are certain rivers that are personified and invoked in the RV. Thus the Sindhu (Indus) is celebrated as a goddess in one hymn (x. 75, 2. 4. 6), and the Vipas (Bias) and the Sutudri (Sutlej), sister streams of the Panjab, in another (iii. 33). The most important and oftenest lauded is, however, the Sarasvati (vi. 61; vii. 95). Though the personification goes much further here than in the case of other streams, the connexion of the goddess with the river is never lost sight of in the RV.

*Abstract deities.*--One result of the advance of thought during the period of the RV. from the concrete towards the abstract was the rise of abstract deities. The earlier and more numerous class of these seems to have started from epithets which were applicable to one or more older deities, but which came to acquire an independent value as the want of a god exercising the particular activity in question began to be felt. We find here names denoting either an agent (formed with the suffix *tr* or *tar*), such as Dhatr 'Creator', or an attribute, such as Prajapati, 'Lord of Creatures'. Thus Dhatr, otherwise an epithet of Indra, appears also as an independent deity who creates heaven and earth, sun and moon. More rarely occur Vidhatri the 'Disposer', Dhartr, the 'Supporter', Tratr, the 'Protector', and Netr, the 'Leader'. The only agent god mentioned at all frequently in the RV. is Tvastr, the 'Artificer', though no entire hymn is addressed to him. He is the most skilful of workmen, having among other things fashioned the bolt of Indra and a new -drinking-cup for the gods. He is a guardian of Soma, which is called the 'food of Tvastr', and which Indra drinks in Tvastr's house. He is the father of Saranyu, wife of Vivasvant and mother of the primaeval twins Yama and Yami. The name of the solar deity Savitr the 'Stimulator', belongs to this class of agent gods (cf. p. 11).

There are a few other abstract deities whose names were originally epithets of older gods, but now become epithets of the supreme god who was being evolved at the end of the Rigvedic period. These appellations, compound in form, are of rare and late occurrence. The most important is Prajapati, 'Lord of Creatures' Originally an epithet of such gods as Savitr and Soma, this name is employed in a late verse of the tenth book to designate a distinct deity in the character of a Creator. Similarly, the epithet Visvakarman, 'all-creating', appears as the name of an independent deity to whom two hymns (x. 81. 82) are addressed. Hiranyagarbha, the 'Golden Germ', once occurs as the name of the supreme god described as the 'one lord of all that exists'. In one curious instance it is possible to watch the rise of an abstract deity of this type. The refrain of a late hymn of the RV. (x. 121) is *kasmā devaya havisa vidhema?* 'to what god should we pay worship with oblation?' This led to the word *ká*, 'who?' being used in the later Vedic literature as an independent name, *Ka*, of the supreme god. The only abstract deity of this type occurring in the oldest as well as the latest parts of the RV. is *Brhaspati* (p. 83).

The second and smaller class of abstract deities comprises personifications of abstract nouns. There are seven or eight of these occurring in the tenth book. Two hymns (83, 84) are addressed to *Manyu*, 'Wrath', and one (x. 161) to *Sraddha*, 'Faith'. *Anumati*, 'Favour (of the gods)', *Aramati*, 'Devotion', *Sunrta*, 'Bounty', *Asuniti*, 'Spirit-life', and *Nirrti*, 'Decease', occur only in a few isolated passages.

A purely abstract deity, often incidentally celebrated throughout the RV. is *A-diti*, 'Liberation', 'Freedom' (lit. 'un-binding'), whose main characteristic is the power of delivering from the bonds of physical suffering and moral guilt. She, however, occupies a unique position among the abstract deities, owing to the peculiar way in which the personification seems to have arisen. She is the mother of the small group of deities called *Adityas*, often styled 'sons of Aditi'. This expression at first most probably meant nothing more than 'sons of liberation', according to an idiom common in the RV. and elsewhere. The word was then personified, with the curious result that the mother is mythologically younger than some at least of her sons, who (for instance *Mitra*) date from the Indo-Iranian period. The goddess *Diti*, named only three times in the RV., probably came into being as an antithesis to *Aditi*, with whom she, is twice mentioned.

*Godesses* play an insignificant part in the RV. The only one of importance is Usas (p. 92). Next come Sarasvati, celebrated in two whole hymns (vi. 61; vii. 95) as well as parts of others, and Vac, 'Speech' (x, 71. 125). With one hymn each are addressed Prthivi, 'Earth' (v. 84), Ratri, 'Night' (x, 127, p. 203), and Aranyani, 'Goddess of the Forest' (x. 146). Others are only sporadically mentioned. The wives of the great gods are still more insignificant, being mere names formed from those of their consorts, and altogether lacking in individuality: such are Agnayi, Indrani, Varunani, spouses of Agni, Indra, and Varuna respectively.

*Dual Divinities.*--A peculiar feature of the religion of the RV. is the invocation of pairs of deities whose names are combined as compounds, each member of which is in the dual. About a dozen such pairs are celebrated in entire hymns, and about a dozen more in detached stanzas. By far the largest number of hymns is addressed to the couple Mitra-Varuna, though the names most frequently found as dual compounds are those of Dyava-prthivi, 'Heaven and Earth' (p. 36). The latter pair, having been associated as universal parents from the Indo-European period onwards, in all probability furnished the analogy for this dual type.

*Groups of Deities.*--There are also a few more or less definite groups of deities, generally associated with some particular god. The Maruts (p. 21), who attend on Indra, are the most numerous group. The smaller group of the Adityas, of whom Varuna is the chief, is constantly mentioned in company with their mother Aditi. Their number is stated in the RV. to be seven or, with the addition of Martanda, eight. One passage (ii. 27, 1) enumerates six of them Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksa, Amsa: Surya was probably regarded as the seventh. A much less important group, without individual names or definite number, is that of the Vasus, whose leader is generally Indra. There are, finally, the Visve devas (p. 147), who, invoked in many hymns, form a comprehensive group, which in spite of its name is, strange to say, sometimes conceived as a narrower group associated with others like the Vasus and Adityas.

*Lesser Divinities.*--Besides the higher gods, a number of lesser divine powers are known to the RV. The most prominent of these are the Rbhus, who are celebrated in eleven hymns. They are a deft-handed trio, who by their marvellous skill acquired the rank of deities. Among

their five main feats of dexterity the greatest consisted in transforming the bowl of Tvastr into four shining cups.

The bowl and the cups have been variously interpreted as the moon with its four phases or the year with its Seasons. The Rbhus further exhibited their skill in renewing the youth of their parents, by whom Heaven and Earth seem to have been meant.

Occasional mention is made in the RV. of an Apsaras, a celestial water-nymph, the spouse of a corresponding genius named Gandharva. In a few passages more Apsaras, than one are spoken of; but the only one mentioned by name is Urvasi. Gandharva is in the RV. a single being (like the Gandarewa of the Avesta), who dwells in the aerial sphere, guards the celestial Soma, and is (as in the Avesta) connected with the waters.

There are, lastly, a few divinities of the tutelary order, guardians watching over the welfare of house or field. Such is the rarely mentioned Vastospati, 'Lord of the Dwelling', who is invoked to grant a favourable entry, to remove disease, and to bestow protection and prosperity. Ksetrasya pati, 'Lord of the Field', is besought to grant cattle and horses and to confer welfare. Sita, the 'Furrow', is once invoked to dispense crops and rich blessings.

In addition to the great phenomena of nature, various features of the earth's surface as well as artificial objects are to be found deified in the RV. Thus besides Rivers and Waters (p. 115), already mentioned as terrestrial goddesses, mountains are often addressed as divinities, but only along with other natural objects, or in association with gods. Plants are regarded as divine powers, one entire hymn (x. 97) being devoted to their praise, chiefly with reference to their healing properties. Sacrificial implements, moreover, are deified. The most important of these is the sacrificial post which is praised and invoked in a whole hymn (iii. 8). The sacrificial grass (barhis) and the Divine Doors (dvaro devih), which lead to the place of sacrifice, are addressed as goddesses. The pressing stones (gravanas) are invoked as deities in three hymns (x. 76. 94. 175): spoken of as immortal, unaging, mightier than heaven, they are besought to drive away demons and destruction. The Mortar and Pestle used in pounding the Soma plant are also invoked in the RV. (i. 28, 6. 6). Weapons, finally, are sometimes deified: armour, bow, quiver, arrows, and drum being addressed in one of the hymns (vi. 75).

*The Demons* often mentioned in the hymns are of two kinds. The higher and more powerful class are the aerial foes of the gods. These, are seldom called asura in the RV., where in the older parts that word means a divine being, like *ahura* in the Avesta (cf. p. 134). The term *dasa*, or *dasyu*, properly the name of the dark aborigines, is frequently used in the sense of fiend to designate the aerial demons. The conflict is regularly one between a single god and a single demon, as exemplified by Indra and Vrtra. The latter is by far the most frequently mentioned. His mother being called Danu, he is sometimes alluded to by the metronymic term Danava. Another powerful demon is Vala, the personified cave of the cows, which he guards, and which are set free by Indra and his allies, notably the Angirases. Other demon adversaries of Indra are Arbuda, described as a wily beast, whose cows Indra drove out; Visvarapa, son of Tvastr, a three-headed demon slain by both Trita and Indra, who seize his cows; and Svarbhanu, who eclipses the sun. There are several other individual demons, generally described as Dasas and slain by Indra. A group of demons are the Panis ('niggards'), primarily foes of Indra, who, with the aid of the dog Sarama, tracks and releases the cows hidden by them.

The second or lower class of demons are terrestrial goblins, enemies of men. By far the most common generic name for them is Raksas. They are nearly always mentioned in connexion with some god who destroys them. The much less common term Yalu or Yatudhana (primarily 'sorcerer') alternates with Raksas, and perhaps expresses a species. A class of demons scarcely referred to in the RV., but often mentioned in the later Vedas, are the Pisacas, eaters of raw flesh or of corpses.

Not more than thirty hymns are concerned with subjects other than the worship of gods or deified objects. About a dozen of these, almost entirely confined to the tenth book, deal with magical practices, which properly belong to the sphere of the Atharvaveda. Their contents are augury (ii. 42. 43) or spells directed against poisonous vermin (i. 191) or disease (x. 163), against a demon destructive of children (x. 162), or enemies (x. 166), or rival wives (x. 145). A few are incantations to preserve life (x. 58. 60), or to induce sleep (v. 55), or to procure offspring (x. 183); while one is a panegyric of frogs as magical bringers of rain (vii. 103, p. 141).

## **8. SECULAR MATTER IN THE RIGVEDA.**



*Secular hymns.*--Hardly a score of the hymns are secular poems. These are especially valuable as throwing direct light on the earliest thought and civilization of India. One of the most noteworthy of them is the long wedding hymn (x. 85). There are also five funeral hymns (x. 14-18). Four of these are addressed to deities concerned with the future life; the last, however, is quite secular in tone, and gives more information than any of the rest about the funeral customs of early Vedic India (cf. p. 164).

*Mythological dialogues.* -Besides several mythological dialogues in which the speakers are divine beings (iv. 62; x. 51. 52. 86. 108), there are two in which both agents are human. One is a somewhat obscure colloquy (x. 95) between a mortal lover Puraravas and the celestial nymph Urvasi, who is on the point of forsaking him. It is the earliest form of the story which much more than a thousand years later formed the subject of Kalidasa's drama Vikramorvasi. The other (x. 10) is a dialogue between Yama and Yami, the twin parents of the human race. This group of hymns has a special literary interest as foreshadowing the dramatic works of a later age.

*Didactic hymns.*--Four hymns are of a didactic character. One of these (x. 34) is a striking poem, being a monologue in which a gambler laments the misery he has brought on himself and his home by his inability to resist the attraction of the dice. The rest which describe the various ways in which men follow gain (ix. 112), or praise wise speech (x. 71), or the value of good deeds (x. 117), anticipate the sententious poetry for which post-Vedic literature is noted.

*Riddles.*--Two of the hymns consist of riddles. One of these (viii. 29, p. 147) describes various gods without mentioning their names. More elaborate and obscure is a long poem of fifty-two stanzas (i. 164), in which a number of enigmas, largely connected with the sun, are propounded in mystical and symbolic language. Thus the wheel of order with twelve spokes, revolving round the heavens, and containing within it in couples 720 sons, means the year with its twelve months and 360 days and 360 nights.

*Cosmogonic hymns.*--About half a dozen hymns consist of speculations on the origin of the world through the agency of a Creator (called by various names) as distinct from any of the ordinary gods. One of them (x. 129, p. 207), which describes the world as due to the development of the existent (sat) from the non-existent (a-sat), is particularly

interesting as the starting-point of the evolutionary philosophy which in later times assumed shape in the Sankhya system.

A semi-historical character attaches to one complete hymn (i. 126) and to appendages of 3 to 5 stanzas attached to over thirty others, which are called *Danastutis*, or 'praises of gifts'. These are panegyrics of liberal patrons on behalf of whom the seers composed their hymns. They yield incidental genealogical information about the poets and their employers, as well as about the names and the habitat of the Vedic tribes. They are late in date, appearing chiefly in the first and tenth, as well as among the supplementary hymns of the eighth book.

*Geographical data.*--From the geographical data of the RV., especially the numerous rivers there mentioned, it is to be inferred that the Indo-Aryan tribes when the hymns were composed occupied the territory roughly corresponding to the north-west Frontier Province, and the Panjab of to-day. The references to flora and fauna bear out this conclusion.

The *historical data* of the hymns show that the Indo-Aryans were still engaged in war with the aborigines, many victories over these foes being mentioned. That they were still moving forward as conquerors is indicated by references to rivers as obstacles to advance. Though divided into many tribes, they were conscious of religious and racial unity, contrasting the aborigines with themselves by calling them non-sacrificers and unbelievers, as well as 'black-skins' and the 'Dasa colour' as opposed to the 'Aryan colour'.

Incidental references scattered throughout the hymns supply a good deal of information about the social conditions of the time. Thus it is clear that the family, with the father at its head, was the basis of society, and that women held a freer and more honoured position than in later times. Various crimes are mentioned, robbery, especially of cattle, apparently being the commonest. Debt, chiefly as a result of gambling, was known. Clothing consisted usually of an upper and a lower garment, which were made of sheep's wool. Bracelets, anklets, necklaces, and earrings were worn as ornaments. Men usually grew beards, but sometimes shaved. Food mainly consisted of milk, clarified butter, grain, vegetables, and fruit. Meat was eaten only when animals were sacrificed. The commonest kind appears to have been beef, as bulls were the chief offerings to the gods. Two kinds of spirituous liquor were made: Soma was drunk at religious ceremonies only, while

Sura, extracted from some kind of grain, was used on ordinary occasions.

*Occupations.*--One of the chief occupations of the Indo-Aryan was warfare. He fought either on foot or from a chariot, but there is no evidence to show that he ever did so on horseback. The ordinary weapons were bows and arrows, but spears and axes were also used. Cattle-breeding appears to have been the main source of livelihood, cows being the chief objects of desire in prayers to the gods. But agriculture was also practised to some extent: fields were furrowed with a plough drawn by bulls; corn was cut with sickles, being then threshed and winnowed. Wild animals were trapped and snared, or hunted with bows and arrows, occasionally with the aid of dogs. Boats propelled by paddles were employed, as it seems mainly for the purpose of crossing rivers. Trade was known only in the form of barter, the cow representing the unit of value in exchange. Certain trades and crafts already existed, though doubtless in a rudimentary stage. The occupations of the wheelwright and the carpenter were, combined. The smith melted ore in a forge, and made kettles and other vessels of metal. The tanner prepared the skins of animals. Women plaited mats of grass or reeds, sewed, and especially wove, but whether they ever did so professionally is uncertain.

*Amusements.*--Among these chariot-racing was the favourite. The most popular social recreation was playing with dice (cp. p. 186). Dancing was also practised, chiefly by women. The people were fond of music, the instruments used being the drum (dundubhi), the flute (vana), and the lute (vina). Singing is also mentioned.

## **9. LITERARY MERIT OF THE RIGVEDA.**

The diction of the hymns is on the whole natural and simple, free from the use of compounds of more than two members. Considering their great antiquity, the hymns are composed with a remarkable degree of metrical skill and command of language. But as they were produced by a sacerdotal class and were generally intended to accompany a ritual no longer primitive, their poetry is often impaired by constant sacrificial allusions. This is especially noticeable in the hymns addressed to the two ritual deities Agni and Soma, where the thought becomes affected by conceits and obscured by mysticism. Nevertheless the RV. contains much genuine poetry. As the gods are mostly connected with natural phenomena, the praises addressed to

them give rise to much beautiful and even noble imagery. The degree of literary merit in different hymns naturally varies a good deal, but the average is remarkably high. The most poetical hymns are those addressed to Dawn, equal if not superior in beauty to the religious lyrics of any other literature. Some of the hymns to Indra show much graphic power in describing his conflict with the demon Vrtra. The hymns to the Maruts, or Storm gods, often depict with vigorous imagery the phenomena of thunder and lightning, and the mighty onset of the wind. One hymn to Parjanya (v. 83) paints the devastating effects of the rain-storm with great vividness. The hymns in praise of Varuna describe the various aspects of his sway as moral ruler of the world in an exalted strain of poetry. Some of the mythological dialogues set forth the situation with much beauty of language; for example, the colloquy between Indra's messenger Sarama and the demons who stole the cows (x. 108), and that between the primaeval twins Yama and Yami (x. 10). The Gambler's lament (x. 34) is a fine specimen of pathetic poetry. One of the funeral hymns (x. 18) expresses ideas connected with death in language of impressive and solemn beauty. One of the cosmogonic hymns (x. 129) illustrates how philosophical speculation can be clothed in poetry of no mean order.

## **10. INTERPRETATION.**

In dealing with the hymns of the RV. the important question arises, to what extent are we able to understand their real sense, considering that they have come down to us as an isolated relic from the remotest period of Indian literature? The reply, stated generally, is that, as a result of the labours of Vedic scholars, the meaning of a considerable proportion of the RV. is clear, but of the remainder many hymns and a great many single stanzas or passages are still obscure or unintelligible. This was already the case in the time of Yaska, the author of the Nirukta, the oldest extant commentary (c. 500 B.C.) on about 600 detached stanzas of the RV.; for he quotes one of his predecessors, Kautsa, as saying that the Vedic hymns were obscure, unmeaning, and mutually contradictory.

In the earlier period of Vedic studies, commencing about the middle of the nineteenth century, the traditional method, which follows the great commentary of Sayana (fourteenth century A.D.), and is represented by the translation of the RV., begun by H.H. Wilson in 1850, was considered adequate. It has since been proved that, though the native Indian commentators are invaluable guides in explaining

the theological and ritual texts of the Brahmanas and Satras, with the atmosphere of which they were familiar, they did not possess a continuous tradition from the time when the Vedic hymns were composed. That the gap between the poets and the interpreters even earlier than Yaska must have been considerable, is shown by the divergences of opinion among his predecessors as quoted by him. Thus one of these, Aurnavabha, interprets *nasatyau*, an epithet of the Asvins, as 'true, not false', another *Agrayana*, as 'leaders of truth' (*satyasya pranetarau*), while Yaska himself thinks it may mean 'nose-born' (*nasika-prabhavau*)! Yaska, moreover, mentions several different schools of interpretation, each of which explained difficulties in accordance with its own particular theory. Yaska's own interpretations, which in all cases of doubt are based on etymology, are evidently often merely conjectural, for he frequently gives several alternative explanations of a word. Thus he explains the epithet *jata-vedas* in as many as five different ways. Yet he must have had more and better means of ascertaining the sense of various obscure words than Sayana who lived nearly 2,000 years later. Sayana's interpretations, however, sometimes differ from those of Yaska. Hence either Yaska is wrong or Sayana does not follow the tradition. Again, Sayana often gives several inconsistent explanations of a word in interpreting the same passage or in commenting on the same word in different passages. Thus *asura*, 'divine being', is variously rendered by him as 'expeller of foes', 'giver of strength', 'giver of life', 'hurler away of what is undesired', 'giver of breath or water', 'thrower of oblations, priest', 'taker away of breath', 'expeller of water, *Parjanya*', 'impeller', 'strong', 'wise', and 'rain-water' or 'a water-discharging cloud'! In short it is clear from a careful examination of their comments that neither Yaska nor Sayana possessed any certain knowledge about a large number of words in the RV. Hence their interpretations can be treated as decisive only if they are borne out by probability, by the context, and by parallel passages.

For the traditional method Roth, the founder of Vedic philology, substituted the critical method of interpreting the difficult parts of the RV. from internal evidence by the minute comparison of all words parallel in form and matter, while taking into consideration context, grammar, and etymology, without ignoring either the help supplied by the historical study of the Vedic language in its connexion with Sanskrit or the outside evidence derived from the Avesta and from Comparative Philology. In the application of his method Roth attached too much weight to etymological considerations, while he undervalued

the evidence of native tradition. On the other hand, a reaction arose which, in emphasizing the purely Indian character of the Vedic hymns, connects the interpretation of them too closely with the literature of the post-Vedic period and the much more advanced civilization there described. It is important to note that the critical scholar has at his disposal not only all the material that was open to the traditional interpreters, and to which he is moreover able to apply the comparative and historical methods of research, but also possesses over and above many valuable aids that were unknown to the traditional school--the Avesta, Comparative Philology, Comparative Religion and Mythology, and Ethnology. The student will find in the notes of the *Reader* many exemplifications of the usefulness of these aids to interpretation. There is good reason to hope from the results already achieved that steady adherence to the critical method, by admitting all available evidence and by avoiding one-sidedness in its application, will eventually clear up a large proportion of the obscurities and difficulties that still confront the interpreter of the Rigveda.

## AGNI

As the personification of the sacrificial fire, Agni is second in importance to Indra (ii. 12) only, being addressed in at least 200 hymns. The anthropomorphism of his physical appearance is only rudimentary, and is connected chiefly with the sacrificial aspect of fire. Thus he is butter-backed, flame-haired, and has a tawny beard, sharp jaws, and golden teeth. Mention is often made of his tongue, with which the gods eat the oblation. With a burning head he faces in all directions.

He is compared with various animals: he resembles a bull that bellows, and has horns which he sharpens; when born he is often called a calf; he is kindled like a horse that brings the gods, and is yoked to convey the sacrifice to them. He is also a divine bird; he is the eagle of the sky; as dwelling in the waters he is like a goose; he is winged, and he takes possession of the wood as a bird perches on a tree.

Wood or ghee is his food, melted butter his beverage; and he is nourished three times a day. He is the mouth by which the gods eat the sacrifice; and his flames are spoons with which he besprinkles the gods, but he is also asked to consume the offerings himself. He is

sometimes, though then nearly always with other gods, invited to drink the Soma juice.

His brightness is much dwelt upon: he shines like the sun; his lustre is like the rays of the dawn and the sun, and like the lightnings of the rain-cloud. He shines even at night, and dispels the darkness with his beams. On the other hand, his path is black when he invades the forests and shaves the earth as a barber a beard. His flames are like roaring waves, and his sound is like the thunder of heaven. His red smoke rises up to the firmament; like the erector of a post he supports the sky with his smoke. 'Smoke-bannered' (dhuma-ketu) is his frequent and exclusive epithet.

He has a shining, golden, lightning car, drawn by two or more ruddy and tawny steeds. He is a charioteer of the sacrifice, and with his steeds he brings the gods on his car.

He is the child of Heaven (Dyáus), and is often called the son of Heaven and Earth (i. 160). He is also the offspring of the waters. The gods generated him as a light for the Aryan or for man, and placed him among men. Indra is called Agni's twin brother, and is more closely associated with him than any other god.

The mythology of Agni, apart from his sacrificial activity, is mainly concerned with his various births, forms, and abodes. Mention is often made of his daily production from the two kindling sticks (aránis), which are his parents or his mothers. From the dry wood Agni is born living; as soon as born the child devours his parents. By the ten maidens that produce him are meant the ten fingers of the kindler. Owing to the force required to kindle Agni he is often called 'son of strength' (sáhasah sunúh). Being produced every morning he is young; at the same time no sacrificer is older than Agni, for he conducted the first sacrifice. Again, Agni's origin in the aerial waters is often referred to: he is an embryo of the waters; he is kindled in the waters; he is a bull that has grown in the lap of the waters. As the 'son of Waters' (ii. 35) he has become a separate deity. He is also sometimes conceived as latent in terrestrial waters. This notion of Agni in the waters is a prominent one in the RV. Thirdly, a celestial origin of Agni is often mentioned: he is born in the highest heaven, and was brought down from heaven by Matarisvan, the Indian Prometheus; and the acquisition of fire by man is regarded as a gift of the gods as well as a production of Matarisvan. The Sun (vii. 63) is further regarded as a

form of Agni. Thus Agni is the light of heaven in the bright sky; he was born on the other side of the air and sees all things; he is born as the sun rising in the morning. Hence Agni comes to have a triple character. His births are three or threefold; the gods made him threefold; he is threefold light; he has three heads, three bodies, three stations. This threefold nature of Agni is clearly recognized in the RV., and represents the earliest Indian trinity.

The universe being also regarded as divided into the two divisions of heaven and earth, Agni is sometimes said to have two origins, and indeed exclusively bears the epithet *dvi-jánman* *having two births*. As being kindled in numerous dwellings Agni is also said to have many births.

Agni is more closely associated with human life than any other deity. He is the only god called *grhá-pati* *lord of the house*, and is constantly spoken of as a guest (*átithi*) in human dwellings. He is an immortal who has taken up his abode among mortals. Thus he comes to be termed the nearest kinsman of men. He is oftenest described as a father, sometimes also as a brother or even as a son of his worshippers. He both takes the offerings of men to the gods and brings the gods to the sacrifice. He is thus characteristically a messenger (*duṭá*) appointed by gods and by men to be an 'oblation-bearer'.

As the centre of the sacrifice he comes to be celebrated as the divine counterpart of the earthly priesthood. Hence he is often called priest (*rtvíj*, *vípra*) domestic priest (*puróhita*), and more often than by any other name invoking priest (*hótr*), also officiating priest (*adhvaryú*) and playing priest (*brahmán*). His priesthood is the most salient feature of his character; he is in fact the great priest, as Indra is the great warrior.

Agni's wisdom is often dwelt upon. As knowing all the details of sacrifice he is wise and all-knowing, and is exclusively called *jatá-vedas* he who knows all created beings.

He is a great benefactor of his worshippers, protecting and delivering them, and bestowing on them all kinds of boons, but pre-eminently domestic welfare, offspring, and prosperity.



His greatness is often lauded, and is once even said to surpass that of the other gods. His cosmic and creative powers are also frequently praised.

From the ordinary sacrificial Agni who conveys the offering (*havya-váhana*) is distinguished his corpse-devouring (*kravyád*) form that burns the body on the funeral pyre (x. 14). Another function of Agni is to burn and dispel evil spirits and hostile magic.

The sacrificial fire was already in the Indo-Iranian period the centre of a developed ritual, and was personified and worshipped as a mighty, wise, and beneficent god. It seems to have been an Indo-European institution also, since the Italians and Greeks, as well as the Indians and Iranians, had the custom of offering gifts to the gods in fire. But whether it was already personified in that remote period is a matter of conjecture.

The name of Agni (Lat. *igni-s*, Slavonic *ogni*) is Indo-European, and may originally have meant the 'agile' as derived from the root *ag to drive* (Lat. *ago*, Gk. *hágo*), Skt. *ájami*).

## SAVITR

This god is celebrated in eleven entire hymns and in many detached stanzas as well. He is pre-eminently a golden deity: the epithets golden-eyed, golden-handed, and golden-tongued are peculiar to him. His car and its pole are golden. It is drawn by two or more brown, white-footed horses. He has mighty golden splendour which he diffuses, illuminating heaven, earth, and air. He raises aloft his strong golden arms, with which he arouses and blesses all beings, and which extend to the ends of the earth. He moves in his golden car, seeing all creatures, on a downward and an upward path. Shining with the rays of the sun, yellow-haired, Savitr raises up his light continually from the east. His ancient paths in the air are dustless and easy to traverse, and on them he protects his worshippers; for he conveys the departed spirit to where the righteous dwell. He removes evil dreams, and makes men sinless; he drives away demons and sorcerers. He observes fixed laws; the waters and the wind are subject to him. The other gods follow his lead; and no being can resist his will. In one stanza (iii. 62, 10) he is besought to stimulate the thoughts of worshippers who desire to think of the glory of god Savitr. This is the celebrated Savitri stanza which has been a morning prayer in India for more than three

thousand years. Savitr is often distinguished from Surya (vii. 63), as when he is said to shine with the rays of the Sun, to impel the sun, or to declare men sinless to the sun. But in other passages it is hardly possible to keep the two deities apart.

Savitr is connected with the evening as well as the morning; for at his command night comes and he brings all beings to rest.

The word Savitr is derived from the root *su* to stimulate, which is constantly and almost exclusively used with it in such a way as to form a perpetual play on the name of the god. In nearly half its occurrences the name is accompanied by *devá* god, when it means the 'Stimulator god'. He was thus originally a solar deity in the capacity of the great stimulator of life and motion in the world.

## MARÚTAS

This group of deities is prominent in the RV., thirty-three hymns being addressed to them alone, seven to them with Indra, and one each to them with Agni and Pusan (vi. 54). They form a troop (*ganá*, *sárdhas*), being mentioned in the plural only. Their number is thrice sixty or thrice seven. They are the sons of Rudra (ii. 33) and of Prsni, who is a cow (probably representing the mottled storm-cloud). They are further said to have been generated by Vayu, the god of Wind, in the wombs of heaven and they are called the sons of heaven; but they are also spoken of as self-born. They are brothers equal in age and of one mind, having the same birthplace and the same abode. They have grown on earth, in air, and in heaven, or dwell in the three heavens. The goddess Rodasi is always mentioned in connexion with them; she stands beside them on their car, and thus seems to have been regarded as their bride.

The brilliance of the Maruts is constantly referred to: they are golden, ruddy, shine like fires, and are self-luminous. They are very often associated with lightning: all the five compounds of *vidyút* in the RV. are almost exclusively descriptive of them. Their lances represent lightning, as their epithet *rsti-vidyut lightning-speared* shows. They also have golden axes. They are sometimes armed with bows and arrows, but this trait is probably borrowed from their father Rudra. They wear garlands, golden mantles, golden ornaments, and golden helmets. Armllets and anklets (*khadí*) are peculiar to them. The cars on which they ride gleam with lightning, and are drawn by steeds

(generally feminine) that are ruddy or tawny, spotted, swift as thought. They are great and mighty; young and unaging; dustless, fierce, terrible like lions, but also playful like children or calves.

The noise made by them, and often mentioned, is thunder and the roaring of the winds. They cause the mountains to quake and the two worlds to tremble; they rend trees, and, like wild elephants, devour the forests. One of their main activities is to shed rain: they cover the eye of the sun with rain; they create darkness with the cloud when they shed rain; and they cause the heavenly pail and the streams of the mountains to pour. The waters they shed are often clearly connected with the thunder storm. Their rain is often figuratively called milk, ghee, or honey. They avert heat, but also dispel darkness, produce light, and prepare a path for the sun.

They are several times called singers: they are the singers of heaven they sing a song; for Indra when he slew the dragon, they sang a song and pressed Soma. Though primarily representing the sound of the winds, their song is also conceived as a hymn of praise. Thus they come to be compared with priests, and are addressed as priests when in the company of Indra.

Owing to their connexion. with the thunderstorm, the Maruts are constantly associated with Indra (ii. 12) as his friends and allies, increasing his strength and prowess with their prayers, hymns, and songs, and generally assisting him in the fight with Vrtra. Indra indeed accomplishes all his celestial exploits in their company. Sometimes, however, the Maruts. accomplish these exploits alone. Thus they rent Vrtra joint from joint, and disclosed the cows.

When not associated with Indra, the Maruts occasionally exhibit the maleficent traits of their father Rudra. Hence they are implored to ward off the lightning from their worshippers and not to let their ill-will reach them, and are besought to avert their arrow and the stone which they hurl, their lightning, and their cow- and man-slaying bolt. But like their father Rudra, they are also supplicated to bring healing remedies. These remedies appear to be the waters, for the Maruts bestow medicine by raining.

The evidence of the RV. indicates that the Maruts are Storm-gods. The name is probably derived from the root *mar*, *to shine*, thus meaning 'the shining ones'.

## VISNU

This deity occupies a subordinate position in the RV., being celebrated in only five or six hymns. The only anthropomorphic traits mentioned about him are the strides he takes, and the description of him as a youth vast in body who is no longer a child. The central feature of his nature consists in his three steps, connected with which are his exclusive epithets 'wide-going' (uru-gayá) and 'wide-striding' (urukramá). With these steps he traverses the earth or the terrestrial spaces. Two of his steps are visible to men, but the third or highest is beyond the flight of birds or mortal ken. His highest step is like an eye fixed in heaven; it shines brightly down. It is his dear abode, where pious men and the gods rejoice. There can be no doubt that these three steps refer to the course of the sun, and in all probability to its passage through the three divisions of the world: earth, air, and heaven. Visnu sets in motion like a revolving wheel his ninety steeds (= days) with their four names (= seasons), an allusion to the three hundred and sixty days of the solar year. Thus Visnu seems to have been originally a personification of the activity of the sun, the swiftly-moving luminary that with vast strides passes through the whole universe. Visnu takes his steps for man's existence, to bestow the earth on him as a dwelling. The most prominent secondary characteristic of Visnu is his friendship for Indra, with whom he is often allied in the fight with Vrtra. In hymns addressed to Visnu alone, Indra is the only other deity incidentally associated with him. One hymn (vi. 69) is dedicated to the two gods conjointly. Through the Vrtra myth the Maruts, Indra's companions, are drawn into alliance with Visnu, who throughout one hymn (v. 87) is praised in combination with them.

The name is most probably derived from *vis be active*, thus meaning 'the active one'.

## DYÁVA-PRTHIVÍ

Heaven and Earth are the most frequently named pair of deities in the RV. They are so closely associated that, while they are invoked as a pair in six hymns, Dyáus is never addressed alone in any hymn, and Prthiv in only one of three stanzas. The dual compound Dyáva-Prthiví, moreover, occurs much oftener than the name of Dyáus alone. Heaven and Earth are also mentioned as *ródasi the two worlds* more than 100 times. They are parents, being often called *pitára, matára, jánitri*, besides being separately addressed as 'father' and 'mother'. They have

made and sustain all creatures; they are also the parents of the gods. At the same time they are in different passages spoken of as themselves created by individual gods. One of them is a prolific bull, the other a variegated cow, being both rich in seed. They never grow old. They are great and wide-extended; they are broad and vast abodes. They grant food and wealth, or bestow great fame and dominion. Sometimes moral qualities are attributed to them. They are wise and promote righteousness. As father and mother they guard beings, and protect from disgrace and misfortune. They are sufficiently personified to be called leaders of the sacrifice and to be conceived as seating themselves around the offering; but they never attained to a living personification or importance in worship. These two deities are quite co-ordinate, while in most of the other pairs one of the two greatly predominates.

## INDRA

Indra is invoked alone in about one-fourth of the hymns of the RV., far more than are addressed to any other deity; for he is the favourite national god of the Vedic people. He is more anthropomorphic on the physical side, and more invested with mythological imagery, than any other member of the pantheon. He is primarily a god of the thunderstorm who vanquishes the demons of drought or darkness, and sets free the waters or wing the light. He is secondarily the god of battle who aids the victorious Aryan in overcoming his aboriginal foes.

His physical features, such as body and head, are often referred to after he has drunk Soma he agitates his jaws and his beard; and his belly is many times mentioned in connexion with his great powers of drinking Soma. Being tawny (hári) in colour, he is also tawny-haired and tawny-bearded. His arms are especially often referred to because they wield the thunderbolt (vájra), which, mythologically representing the lightning stroke, is his exclusive weapon. This bolt was fashioned for him by Tvastr, being made of iron (ayasá), golden, tawny, sharp, many-pointed, sometimes spoken of as a stone or rock. Several epithets, compounds or derivatives of vájra, such as vájra-bahu *bearing the bolt in his arm* and vajrín *wielder of the bolt* are almost without exception applied to him. Sometimes he is described as armed with bow and arrows; he also carries a hook (ankusá).

Having a golden car, drawn by two tawny steeds (hári), he is a car-fighter (rathesthá). Both his car and his steeds were fashioned by the Rbhus, the divine artificers.

As Indra is more addicted to Soma than any of the other gods, the common epithet 'Soma-drinker' (Somapá) is characteristic of him. This beverage stimulates him to carry out his warlike deeds; thus for the slaughter of Vrtra he is said to have drunk three lakes of Soma. One whole hymn (x. 119) is a monologue in which Indra, intoxicated with Soma, boasts of his greatness and his might.

Indra is often spoken of as having been born, and two whole hymns deal with the subject of his birth. His father, the same as Agni's, appears to be Dyaus; but the inference from other passages is that he is Tvastr, the artificer among the gods. Agni is called Indra's twin brother, and Pusan (vi. 54) is also his brother. His wife, who is often mentioned, is Indrani. Indra is associated with various other deities. The Maruts, (i. 85) are his chief allies, who constantly help him in his conflicts. Hence the epithet Marútvant *accompanied by the Maruts* is characteristic of him. Agni is the god most often conjoined with him as a dual divinity. Indra is also often coupled with Varuna (vii. 86) and Vayu, god of Wind, less often with Soma (viii. 48), Brhaspati (iv. 50), Pusan, and Visnu.

Indra is of vast size; thus it is said that he would be equal to the earth even if it were ten times as large as it is. His greatness and power are constantly dwelt on: neither gods nor men have attained to the limit of his might; and no one like him is known among the gods. Thus various epithets such as sákrá and sácivant *mighty, sácipátílord of might, satákratu having a hundred powers*, are characteristic of him.

The essential myth forming the basis of his nature is described with extreme frequency and much variation. Exhilarated by Soma and generally escorted by the Maruts, he attacks the chief demon of drought, usually called Vrtra, but often also the serpent (áhi). Heaven and Earth tremble when the mighty combat takes place. With his bolt he shatters Vrtra who encompasses the waters, hence receiving the exclusive epithet apsu-jit, *conquering in the waters*. The result of the conflict, which is regarded as being constantly renewed, is that he pierces the mountain and sets free the waters pent up like imprisoned cows. The physical elements in the conflict are nearly always the bolt, the mountain, waters or rivers, while lightning, thunder, cloud, rain

are seldom directly named. The waters are often terrestrial, but also often aerial and celestial. The clouds are the mountains (párvata, girí), on which the demons lie or dwell, or from which Indra caste them down, or which he cleaves to release the waters. Or the cloud is a rock (ádri) which encompasses the cows (as the waters are sometimes called), and from which he releases them. Clouds, as containing the waters, figure as cows also; they further appear under the names of udder (úddhar), spring (útsa), cask (kávandha), pail (kósa). The clouds, moreover, appear as the fortresses (púras) of the aerial demons, being described as moving, autumnal, made of iron or stone, and as 90, 99, or 100 in number. Indra shatters them and is characteristically called the 'fort-destroyer' (parbhíd). But the chief and specific epithet of Indra is 'Vrtra-slayer' (Vrtra-hán), owing to the essential importance, in the myth, of the fight with the demon. In this fight the Maruts are his regular allies, but Agni, Soma, and Visnu also often assist him. Indra also engages in conflict with numerous minor demons; sometimes he is described as destroying demons in general, the Raksases or the Asuras.

With the release of the waters is connected the winning of light, sun, and dawn. Thus Indra is invoked to slay Vrtra and to win the light. When he had slain Vrtra, releasing the waters for man, he placed the sun visibly in the heavens. The sun shone forth when Indra blew the serpent from the air. There is here often no reference to the Vrtra fight. Indra is then simply said to find the light; he gained the sun or found it in the darkness, and made a path for it. He produces the dawn as well as the sun; he opens the darkness with the dawn and the sun. The cows, mentioned along with the sun and dawn, or with the sun alone, as found, released, or won by Indra, are here probably the morning beams, which are elsewhere compared with cattle coming out of their dark stalls. Thus when the dawns went to meet Indra, he became the lord of the cows; when he overcame Vrtra he made visible the cows of the nights. There seems to be a confusion between the restoration of the sun after the darkness of the thunderstorm, and the recovery of the sun from the darkness of night at dawn. The latter feature is probably an extension of the former. Indra's connexion with the thunderstorm is in a few passages divested of mythological imagery, as when he is said to have created the lightnings of heaven and to have directed the action of the waters downwards. With the Vrtra-fight, with the winning of the cows and of the sun, is also connected the gaining of Soma. Thus when Indra drove the serpent

from the air, there shone forth fires, the sun. and Soma; he won Soma at the same time as the cows.

Great cosmic actions are often attributed to Indra. He settled the quaking mountains and plains. He stretches out heaven and earth like a hide; he holds asunder heaven and earth as two wheels are kept apart by the axle; he made the non-existent into the existent in a moment. Sometimes the separation and support of heaven and earth are described as a result of Indra's victory over a demon who held them together.

As the destroyer of demons in combat, Indra is constantly invoked by warriors. As the great god of battle he is more frequently called upon than any other deity to help the Aryans in their conflicts with earthly enemies. He protects the Aryan colour and subjects the black skin. He dispersed 50,000 of the black race. He subjected the Dasyus to the Aryan, and gave land to the Aryan.

More generally Indra is praised as the protector, helper, and friend of his worshippers. He is described as bestowing on them wealth, which is considered the result of victories. His liberality is so characteristic that the frequent attribute *maghávan bountiful* is almost exclusively his.

Besides the central myth of the Vrtra-fight, several minor stories are connected with Indra. In various passages he is described as shattering the car of Usas, goddess of Dawn (iv. 51); this trait is probably based on the notion of Indra's bringing the sun when kept back by the delaying dawn. He is also said to have stopped the steeds of the Sun, apparently by causing the latter to lose a wheel of his car. Indra is further associated with the myth of the winning of Soma; for it is to him that the eagle brings the draught of immortality from the highest heaven. Another myth in the capture by Indra, with the help of Sarama, of the cows confined in a cave by demons called Panis.

Various stories which, though mixed with mythological elements, probably have an historical basis, are told of Indra's having fought in aid of individual protégés, such as king Sudas, against terrestrial foes.

The attributes of Indra are chiefly those of physical superiority and rule over the physical world. He is energetic and violent in action, an



irresistible fighter, an inexhaustible lavisher of the highest goods on mankind, but at the same time sensual and immoral in various ways, such as excess in eating and drinking, and cruelty in killing his own father Tvastr. He forms a marked contrast to Varuna, the other great universal monarch of the RV., who wields passive and peaceful sway, who uniformly applies the laws of nature, who upholds moral order, and whose character displays lofty ethical features.

The name of Indra is pre-Indian; for it occurs in the Avesta as that of a demon; the term *verethraghna* (=Vrtrahán) is also found there as the designation of the God of Victory, though unconnected with Indra. Thus it seems likely that there was already in the Indo-Iranian period a god resembling the Vrtra-slaying Indra of the RV. The etymology of the word is doubtful, but its radical portion *ind* may be connected with that in *índ-u drop*.

## RUDRÁ

This god occupies a subordinate position in the RV., being celebrated in only three entire hymns, in part of another, and in one conjointly with Soma. His hand, his arms, and his limbs are mentioned. He has beautiful lips and wears braided hair. His colour is brown; his form is dazzling, for he shines like the radiant sun, like gold. He is arrayed with golden ornaments, and wears a glorious necklace (*niská*). He drives in a car. His weapons are often referred to: he holds the thunderbolt in his arm, and discharges his lightning shaft from the sky; but he is usually said to be armed with a bow and arrows, which are strong and swift.

Rudra is very often associated with the Maruts (i. 85). He is their father, and is said to have generated them from the shining udder of the cow *Prsni*.

He is fierce and destructive like a terrible beast, and is called a bull, as well as the ruddy (*arusá*) boar of heaven. He is exalted, strongest of the strong, swift, unassailable, unsurpassed in might. He is young and unaging, a lord (*ísana*) and father of the world. By his rule and universal dominion he is aware of the doings of men and gods, He is bountiful (*midhváms*), easily invoked and auspicious (*sivá*). But he is usually regarded as malevolent; for the hymns addressed to him chiefly express fear of his terrible shafts and deprecation of his wrath. He is implored not to slay or injure, in his anger, his worshippers and their

belongings, but to avert his great malignity and his cow-slaying, man-slaying bolt from them, and to lay others low. He is, however, not purely maleficent like a demon. He not only preserves from calamity, but bestows blessings. His healing powers are especially often mentioned; he has a thousand remedies, and is the greatest physician of physicians. In this connexion he has two exclusive epithets, *jálasa*, cooling, and *jálasa-bhesaja*, possessing cooling remedies.

The physical basis represented by Rudra is not clearly apparent. But it seems probable that the phenomenon underlying his nature was the storm, not pure and simple, but in its baleful aspect seen in the destructive agency of lightning. His healing and beneficent powers would then have been founded partly on the fertilizing and purifying action of the thunderstorm, and partly on the negative action of sparing those whom he might slay. Thus the deprecations of his wrath led to the application of the euphemistic epithet *sivá* which became the regular name of Rudra's historical successor in post-Vedic mythology.

The etymological sense of the name is somewhat uncertain, but would be 'Howler' according to the usual derivation from *rud cry*.

### **APÁM NÁPAT**

This deity is celebrated in one entire hymn (ii. 35), is invoked in two stanzas of a hymn to the Waters, and is often mentioned incidentally elsewhere. Brilliant and youthful, he shines without fuel in the waters which surround and nourish him. Clothed in lightning, he is golden in form, appearance, and colour. Standing in the highest place, he always shines with undimmed splendour. Steeds, swift as thought, carry the Son of Waters. In the last stanza of his hymn he is invoked as Agni and must be identified with him; Agni, moreover, in some hymns addressed to him, is spoken of as *Apam napat*. But the two are also distinguished; for example, 'Agni, accordant with the Son of Waters, confers victory over *Vrtra*'. The epithet *asu-héman* swiftly-speeding, applied three times to *Apam napat*, in its only other occurrence refers to Agni. Hence *Apam napat* appears to represent the lightning form of Agni which lurks in the eloud. For Agni, besides being directly called *Apam napat*, is also termed the embryo (*gárbha*) of the waters; and the third form of Agni is described as kindled in the waters.

This deity is not a creation of Indian mythology, but goes back to the Indo-Iranian period. For in the Avesta Apam napat is a spirit of the waters, who lives in their depths, who is surrounded by females, who is often invoked with them, who drives with swift steeds, and is said to have seized the brightness in the depth of the ocean.

## **MITRÁ**

The association of Mitra with Varuna is so intimate that he is addressed alone in one hymn only (iii. 59). Owing to the scantiness of the information supplied in that hymn his separate character appears somewhat indefinite.

Uttering his voice, he marshals men and watches the tillers with unwinking eye. He is the great Aditya who marshals, yatayati, the people, and the epithet yatayáj-jana *arraying men* together appears to be peculiarly his. Savitr (i. 35) is identified with Mitra because of his laws, and Visnu (i. 154) takes his three steps by the laws of Mitra: statements indicating that Mitra regulates the course of the sun. Agni, who goes at the head of the dawns (that is to say, is kindled before dawn), produces Mitra, and when kindled is Mitra. In the Atharvaveda, Mitra at sunrise is contrasted with Varuna in the evening, and in the Brahmanas Mitra is connected with day, Varuna with night.

The conclusion from the Vedic evidence that Mitra was a solar deity, is corroborated by the Avesta and by Persian religion in general, where Mithra is undoubtedly a sun-god or a god of light specially connected with the sun.

The etymology of the name is uncertain, but it must originally have meant 'ally' or 'friend', for the word often means 'friend' in the RV., and the Avestic Mithra is the guardian of faithfulness. As the kindly nature of the god is often referred to in the Veda, the term must in the beginning have been applied to the sun-god in his aspect of a benevolent power of nature.

## **BRHASPÁTI**

This god is addressed in eleven entire hymns, and in two others conjointly with Indra. He is also, but less frequently, called Brahmanas páti, 'Lord of prayer', the doublets alternating in the same hymn. His

physical features are few: he is sharp-horned and blue-backed; golden-coloured and ruddy. He is armed with bow and arrows, and wields a golden hatchet or an iron axe. He has a car, drawn by ruddy steeds, which slays the goblins, bursts open the cow-stalls, and wins the light. Called the father of the gods, he is also said to have blown forth their births like a blacksmith. Like Agni, he is both a domestic and a brahman. priest. He is the generator of all prayers, and without him sacrifice does not succeed. His song goes to heaven, and he is associated with singers. In several passages he is identified with Agni, from whom, however, he is much oftener distinguished. He is often invoked with Indra, some of whose epithets, such as *maghávan bountiful* and *vajrin welder of the bolt* he shares. He has thus been drawn into the Indra myth of the release of the cows. Accompanied by his singing host he rends Vala with a roar, and drives out the cows. In so doing he dispels the darkness and finds the light. As regards his relation to his worshippers, he is said to help and protect the pious man, to prolong life, and to remove disease.

Brhaspáti is a purely Indian deity. The double accent and the parallel name Bráhmanas páti indicate that the first member is the genitive of a noun *brh*, from the same root as *bráhman*, and that the name thus means 'Lord of prayer'.

He seems originally to have represented an aspect of Agni, as a divine priest, presiding over devotion, an aspect which had already attained an independent character by the beginning of the Rigvedic period. As the divine brahman priest he seems to have been the prototype of Brahma, the chief of the later Hindu triad.

## USÁS

The goddess of Dawn is addressed in about twenty hymns. The personification is but slight, the physical phenomenon always being present to the mind of the poet. Decked in gay attire like a dancer, clothed in light, she appears in the east and unveils her charms. Rising resplendent as from a bath she comes with light, driving away the darkness and removing the black robe of night. She is young, being born again and again, though ancient. Shining with a uniform hue, she wastes away the life of mortals. She illumines the ends of the sky when she awakes; she opens the gates of heaven; her radiant beams appear like herds of cattle. She drives away evil dreams, evil spirits, and the hated darkness. She discloses the treasures concealed by darkness,

and distributes them bountifully, She awakens every living being to motion. When Usas shines forth, the birds, fly up from their nests and men seek nourishment. Day by day appearing at the appointed place, she never infringes the ordinance of nature and of the gods. She renders good service to the gods by awakening all worshippers and causing the sacrificial fires to be kindled. She brings the gods to drink the Soma draught. She is borne on a shining car, drawn by ruddy steeds or kine, which probably represent the red rays of morning.

Usas is closely associated with the Sun. She has opened paths for Surya to travel; she brings the eye of the gods, and leads on the beautiful white horse. She shines with the light of the Sun, with the light of her lover. Surya follows her as a young man a maiden; she meets the god who desires her. She thus comes to be spoken of as the wife of Surya. But as preceding the Sun, she is occasionally regarded as his mother; thus she is said to arrive with a bright child. She is also called the sister, or the elder sister, of Night (x. 127), and their names are often conjoined as a dual compound (*usása-nákta* and *náktosása*). She is born in the sky, and in, therefore constantly called the 'daughter of Heaven'. As the sacrificial fire is kindled at dawn, Usas is often associated with Agni, who is sometimes, called her lover. Usas causes Agni to be kindled, and Agni goes to meet the shining Dawn as she approaches. She is also often connected with the twin gods of early morning, the Asvins (vii. 71). When the Asvins' car is yoked, the daughter of the sky is born. They are awakened by her, accompany her, and are her friends.

Usas brings the worshipper wealth and children, bestowing protection and long life. She confers renown and glory on all liberal benefactors of the poet. She is characteristically bountiful (*maghóni*).

The name of Usas is derived from the root *vas*, *to shine*, forms of which are often used with reference to her in the hymns in which she is invoked.

## **PARJÁNYA**

This deity occupies quite a subordinate position, being celebrated in only three hymns. His name often means 'rain-cloud' in the literal sense but in most passages it represents the personification, the cloud then becoming an udder, a pail, or a water-skin. Parjanya is frequently described as a bull that quickens the plants and the earth. The

shedding of rain is his most prominent characteristic. He flies around with a watery car, and loosens the water-skin; he sheds rain-water as our divine (ásara) father. In this activity he is associated with thunder and lightning. He is in a special degree the producer and nourisher of vegetation. He also produces fertility in cows, mares, and women. He is several times referred to as a father. By implication his wife is the Earth, and he is once called the son of Dyaus.

## **PUSÁN**

This god is celebrated in eight hymns, five of which occur in the sixth Mandala. His individuality is vague, and his anthropomorphic traits are scanty. His foot and his right band are mentioned; he wears braided hair and a beard. He carries a golden spear, an awl, and a goad. His car is drawn by goats instead of horses. His characteristic food is gruel (karambhá).

He sees all creatures clearly and at once. He is the wooer of his mother and the lover of his sister (Dawn), and was given by the gods to the Sun-maiden Surya as a husband. He is connected with the marriage ceremonial in the wedding hymn (x. 85). With his golden aerial ships Pusan acts as the messenger of Surya. He moves onward observing the universe, and makes his abode in heaven. He is a guardian who knows and beholds all creatures. As best of charioteers he drove downward the golden wheel of the sun. He traverses the distant path of heaven and earth; he goes to and returns from both the beloved abodes. He conducts the dead on the far-off path of the Fathers. He is a guardian of roads, removing dangers out of the way; and is called 'son of deliverance' (vimúco nápat). He follows and protects cattle, bringing them home unhurt and driving back the lost. His bounty is often mentioned. 'Glowing' (aghrni) is one of his exclusive epithets. The name means 'prosperer', as derived from pus, *cause to thrive*. The evidence, though not clear, indicates that Pusan was originally a solar deity, representing the beneficent power of the sun manifested chiefly in its pastoral aspect.

## **ÁPAS**

The Waters are addressed in four hymns, as well as in a few scattered verses. The personification is only incipient, hardly extending beyond the notion of their being mothers, young wives, and goddesses -who bestow boons and come to the sacrifice. They follow the path of the

gods. Indra, armed with the bolt, dug out a channel for them, and they never infringe his ordinances. They are celestial as well as terrestrial, and the sea is their goal. They abide where the gods dwell, in the seat of Mitra-Varuna, beside the sun. King Varuna moves in their midst, looking down on the truth and the falsehood of men. They are mothers and as such produce Agni. They give their auspicious fluid like loving mothers. They are most motherly, the producers of all that is fixed and that moves. They purify, carrying away defilement. They even cleanse from moral guilt, the sins of violence, cursing, and lying. They also bestow remedies, health, wealth, strength, long life, and immortality. Their blessing and aid are often implored, and they are invited to seat themselves on the sacrificial grass to receive the offering of the Soma priest.

The Waters are several times associated with honey. They mix their milk with honey. Their wave, rich in honey, became the drink of Indra, Whom it exhilarated and to whom it gave heroic strength. They are invoked to pour the wave which is rich in honey, gladdens the gods, is the draught of Indra, and is produced in the sky. Here the celestial Waters seem to be identified with the heavenly Soma, the beverage of Indra. Elsewhere the Waters used in preparing the terrestrial Soma seem to be meant. When they appear bearing ghee, milk, and honey, they are accordant with the priests that bring well-pressed Soma for Indra, Soma (viii. 48) delights in them like a young man in lovely maidens; he approaches them as a lover; they are maidens who bow down before the youth.

The deification of the Waters is pre-Vedic, for they are invoked as *apo* in the Avesta also.

### **MITRÁ-VARUNA**

This is the pair most frequently mentioned next to Heaven and Earth. The hymns in which they are conjointly invoked are much more numerous than those in which they are separately addressed. As Mitra (iii. 59) is distinguished by hardly any individual traits, the two together have practically the same attributes and functions as Varuna alone. They are conceived as young. Their eye is the sun. Reaching out they drive with the rays of the sun as with arms. They wear glistening garments. They mount their car in the highest heaven. Their abode is golden and is located in heaven; it is great, very lofty, firm, with a thousand columns and a thousand doors. They have spies that are

wise and cannot be deceived. They are kings and universal monarchs. They are also called Asuras, who wield dominion by means of *mayá occult power*, a term mainly connected with them. By that power they send the dawns, make the sun traverse the sky, and obscure it with cloud and rain. They are rulers and guardians of the whole world. They support heaven, and earth, and air.

They are lords of rivers, and they are the gods most frequently thought of and prayed to as bestowers of rain. They have kine yielding refreshment, and streams flowing with honey. They control the rainy skies and the streaming waters. They bedew the pastures with ghee (= rain) and the spaces with honey. They send rain and refreshment from the sky. Rain abounding in heavenly water comes from them. One entire hymn dwells on their powers of bestowing rain.

Their ordinances are fixed and cannot be obstructed even by the immortal gods. They are upholders and cherishers of order. They are barriers against falsehood, which they dispel, hate, and punish. They afflict with disease those who neglect their worship.

The dual invocation of these gods goes back to the Indo-Iranian period, for Ahura and Mithra are thus coupled in the Avesta.

## **SÚRYA**

Some ten hymns are addressed to Surya. Since the name designates the orb of the sun as well as the god, Surya is the most concrete of the solar deities, his connexion with the luminary always being present to the mind of the seers. The eye of Surya is several times mentioned; but Surya, himself is also often called the eye of Mitra and Varuna, as well as of Agni and of the gods. He is far-seeing, all-seeing, the spy of the whole world; he beholds all beings, and the good and bad deeds of mortals. He arouses men to perform their activities. He is the soul or guardian of all that moves or is stationary. His car is drawn by one steed called *etasá*, or by seven swift mares called *hárit bays*.

The Dawn or Dawns reveal or produce Surya; he shines from the lap of the Dawns; but Dawn is also sometimes Surya's wife. He also bears the metronymic Aditya or Aditeya, son of the goddess Aditi. His father is Dyaus or Heaven. The gods raised him who had been hidden in the



ocean, and they placed him in the sky; various individual gods, too, are said to have produced Surya or raised him to heaven.

Surya is in various passages conceived as a bird traversing space; he is a ruddy bird that flies; or he is a flying eagle. He is also called a mottled bull, or a white and brilliant steed brought by Dawn. Occasionally he is, described as an inanimate object: he is a gem of the sky, or a variegated stone set in the midst of heaven. He is a brilliant weapon (*áyudha*) which Mitra-Varuna conceal with cloud and rain, or their felly (*paví*), or a brilliant car placed by them in heaven. Surya is also sometimes spoken of as, a wheel (*cakrá*), though otherwise the wheel of Surya is mentioned. Surya shines for all the world, for men and gods. He dispels the darkness, which he rolls up like a skin, or which his rays throw off like a skin into the waters. He measures the days and prolong life. He drives away sickness, disease, and evil dreams. All creatures depend on him, and the epithet 'all-creating' (*visvá-karman*) is once applied to him. By his greatness he is the divine priest (*asuryà puróhita*) of the gods. At his rising he is besought to declare men sinless to Mitra-Varuna and to other gods.

The name *Súrya* is a derivative of *svàr light*, and cognate with the Avesta hvare *sun*, which has swift horses and is the eye of Ahura Mazda

### **ASVÍNA.**

These two deities are the most prominent gods after Indra, Agni, and Soma, being invoked in more than fifty entire hymns and in parts of several others. Though their name (*asv-in horseman*) is purely Indian, and though they undoubtedly belong to the group of the deities of light, the phenomenon which they represent is uncertain, because in all probability their origin is to be sought in a very early pre-Vedic age.

They are twins and inseparable, though two or three passages suggest that they may at one time have been regarded as distinct. They are young and yet ancient. They are bright, lords of lustre, of golden brilliancy, beautiful, and adorned with lotus-garlands. They are the only gods called golden-pathed (*híraya-vartani*). They are strong and agile, fleet as thought or as an eagle. They possess profound wisdom and occult power. Their two most distinctive and frequent epithets are *dasrá wondrous* and *násatya true*.

They are more closely associated with honey (mádhu) than any of the other gods. They desire honey and are drinkers of it. They have a skin filled with honey; they poured out a hundred jars of honey. They have a honey-goad; and their car is honey-hued and honey-bearing. They give honey to the bee and are compared with bees. They are, however, also fond of Soma, being invited to drink it with Usas and Surya. Their car is sunlike and, together with all its parts, golden. It is threefold and has three wheels. It is swifter than thought, than the twinkling of an eye. It was fashioned by the three divine artificers, the Rbhus. It is drawn by horses, more commonly by birds or winged steeds; sometimes by one or more buffaloes, or by a single asa (rásabha). It passes over the five countries; it moves around the sky; it traverses heaven and earth in one day; it goes round the sun in the distance. Their revolving course (vartís), a term almost exclusively applicable to them, is often mentioned. They come from heaven, air, and earth, or from the ocean; they abide in the sea of heaven, but sometimes their locality is referred to as unknown. The time of their appearance is between dawn and sunrise: when darkness stands among the ruddy cows; Usas awakens them; they follow after her in their car; at its yoking Usas is born. They yoke their car to descend to earth and receive the offerings of worshippers. They come not only in the morning, but also at noon and sunset. They dispel darkness and chase away evil spirits.

The Asvins are children of Heaven; but they are also once said to be the twin sons of Vivasvant and Tvastr's daughter Saranyú (probably the rising Sun and Dawn). Pusan is once said to be their son; and Dawn seems to be meant by their sister. They are often associated with the Sun conceived as a female called either Surya or more commonly the daughter of Surya. They are Surya's two husbands whom she chose and whose car she mounts. Surya's companionship on their car is indeed characteristic. Hence in the wedding hymn (x. 85) the Asvins are invoked to conduct the bride home on their car, and they (with other gods) are besought to bestow fertility on her.

The Asvins are typically succouring divinities. They are the speediest deliverers from distress in general. The various rescues they effect are of a peaceful kind, not deliverance from the dangers of battle. They are characteristically divine physicians, healing diseases with their remedies, restoring sight, curing the sick and the maimed. Several legends are mentioned about those whom they restored to youth, cured of various physical defects, or befriended in other ways. The

name oftenest mentioned is that of Bhujyu, whom they saved from the ocean in a ship.

The physical basis of the Asvins has been a puzzle from the time of the earliest interpreters before Yaska, who offered various explanations, while modern scholars also have suggested several theories. The two most probable are that the Asvins represented either the morning twilight, as half light and half dark, or the morning and the evening star. It is probable that the Asvins date from the Indo-European period. The two horsemen, sons of Dyaus, who drive across the heaven with their steeds, and who have a sister, are parallel to the two famous horsemen of Greek mythology, sons of Zeus, brothers of Helena; and to the two Lettic God's sons who come riding on their steeds to woo the daughter of the Sun. In the Lettic myth the morning star comes to look at the daughter of the Sun. As the two Asvins wed the one Surya so the two Lettic God's sons wed the one daughter of the Sun; the latter also (like the Dioskouroi and the Asvins) are rescuers from the ocean, delivering the daughter of the Sun or the Sun himself.

## VÁRUNA

Beside Indra (ii. 12) Varuna is the greatest of the gods of the RV., though the number of the hymns in which he is celebrated alone (apart from Mitra) is small, numbering hardly a dozen.

His face, eye, arms, hands, and feet are mentioned. He moves his arms, walks, drives, sits, eats, and drinks. His eye with which he observes mankind is the sun. He is far-sighted and thousand-eyed. He treads down wiles with shining foot. He sits on the strewn grass at the sacrifice. He wears a golden mantle and puts on a shining robe. His car, which is often mentioned, shines like the sun, and is drawn by well-yoked steeds. Varuna sits in his mansions looking on all deeds. The Fathers behold him in the highest heaven. The spies of Varuna are sometimes referred to: they sit down around him; they observe the two worlds; they stimulate prayer. By the golden-winged messenger of Varuna the sun is meant. Varuna is often called a king, but especially a universal monarch (samráj) The attribute of sovereignty (ksatrá) and the term ásurá are predominantly applicable to him. His divine dominion is often alluded to by the word mayá occult power; the epithet mayín crafty is accordingly used chiefly of him.

Varuna is mainly lauded as upholder of physical and moral order. He is a great lord of the laws of nature. He established heaven and earth, and by his law heaven and earth are held apart. He made the golden swing (the sun) to shine in heaven; he has made a wide path for the sun; he placed fire in the waters, the sun in the sky, Soma on the rock. The wind which resounds through the air is Varuna's breath. By his ordinances the moon shining brightly moves at night, and the stars placed up on high are seen at night, but disappear by day. Thus Varuna is lord of light both by day and by night. He is also a regulator of the waters. He caused the rivers to flow; by his occult power they pour swiftly into the ocean without filling it. It is, however, with the aerial waters that he is usually connected. Thus he makes the inverted cask (the cloud) to pour its waters on heaven, earth, and air, and to moisten the ground.

Varuna's ordinances being constantly said to be fixed, he is pre-eminently called *dhrtravrata whose laws are established*. The gods themselves follow his ordinances. His power is; so great that neither the birds as they fly nor the rivers as they flow can reach the limits of his dominion. He embraces the universe, and the abodes of all beings. He is all-knowing, and his omniscience is typical. He knows the flight of the birds in the sky, the path of the ships in the ocean, the course of the far-travelling wind beholding all the secret things that have been or shall be done, he witnesses men's truth and falsehood. No creature can even wink without his knowledge.

As a moral governor Varuna stands far above any other deity. His wrath is aroused by sin, the infringement of his ordinances, which he severely punishes. The fetters (*pásas*) with which he binds sinners are often mentioned, and are characteristic of him. On the other hand, Varuna is gracious to the penitent. He removes sin as if untying a rope. He releases even from the sin committed by men's fathers. He spares him who daily transgresses his laws when a suppliant, and is gracious to those who have broken his laws by thoughtlessness. There is in fact no hymn to Varuna in which the prayer for forgiveness of guilt does not occur. Varuna is on a footing of friendship with his worshipper, who communes with him in his celestial abode, and sometimes sees him with the mental eye. The righteous hope to behold in the next world Varuna and Yama, the two kings who reign in bliss.

The original conception of Varuna seems to have been the encompassing sky. It has, however, become obscured, because it dates

from an earlier age. For it goes back to the Indo-Iranian period at least, since the Ahura Mazda (the wise spirit) of the Avesta agrees with the Asura Varuna in character, though not in name. It may even be older still; for the name Varuna is perhaps identical with the Greek *ouranos sky*. In any case, the word appears to be derived from the root *vr cover or encompass*.

## **MANDUKAS**

The ... hymn [vii. 103], intended as a spell to produce rain, is a panegyric of frogs, who are compared during the drought to heated kettles, and are described as raising their voices together at the commencement of the rains like Brahmin pupils repeating the lessons of their teacher.

## **VÍSVE DEVÁH**

The comprehensive group called *Vísve deváh* or All-Gods occupies an important position, for at least forty entire hymns are addressed to them. It is an artificial sacrificial group intended to include all the gods in order that none should be left out in laudations meant for the whole pantheon. The ... hymn [viii. 29] though traditionally regarded as meant for the *Vísve deváh* is a collection of riddles, in which each stanza describes a deity by his characteristic marks, leaving his name to be guessed. The deities meant in the successive stanzas are: 1. Soma, 2. Agni, 3. Tvastr, 4. Indra, 5. Rudra, 6. Pusan, 7. Visnu, 8. Asvins, 9. Mitra-Varuna, 10. Angirases.

## **SÓMA**

As the Soma sacrifice formed the centre of the ritual of the RV., the god Soma is one of the most prominent deities. With rather more than 120 hymns (all those in Mandala ix, and about half a dozen in others) addressed to him, becomes next to Agni (i. 1) in importance. The anthropomorphism of his character is less developed than that of Indra or Varuna because the plant and its juice are constantly present to the mind of the poet. Soma has terrible and sharp weapons, which he grasps in his hand; he wields a bow and a thousand-pointed shaft. He has a car which is heavenly, drawn by a team like Vayu's. He is also said to ride on the same car as Indra. He is the best of charioteers. In about half a dozen hymns he is associated with Indra, Agni, Pusan, and

Rudra respectively as a dual divinity. He is sometimes attended by the Maruts, the close allies of Indra. He comes to the sacrifice and receives offerings on the sacred grass.

The Soma juice, which is intoxicating, is frequently termed *mádhu* or *sweet draught*, but oftenest called *índu* *the bright drop*. The colour of Soma is brown (*babhrú*), ruddy (*aruná*), or more usually tawny (*hári*). The whole of the ninth book consists of incantations chanted over the tangible Soma, while the stalks are being pounded by stones, the juice passes through a woollen strainer, and flows into wooden vats, in which it is offered to the gods on the litter of sacred grass (*barhís*). These processes are overlaid with confused and mystical imagery in endless variation. The pressing stones with which the shoot (*amsú*) is crushed are called *ádri* or *grávan*. The pressed juice as it passes through the filter of sheep's wool is usually called *pávamana* or *punaná* *flowing clear*. This purified (unmixed) Soma is sometimes called *suddhá* *pure*, but much oftener *sukrá*, or *súci* *bright*; it is offered almost exclusively to Vayu or Indra. The filtered Soma flows into jars (*kalása*) or vats (*dróna*), where it is mixed with water and also with milk, by which it is sweetened. The verb *mrj* *cleanse* is used with reference to this addition of water and milk. Soma is spoken of as having three kinds of admixture (*asír*): milk (*gó*), sour milk (*dádhi*), and barley (*yáva*). The admixture being alluded to as a garment or bright robe, Soma is described as 'decked with beauty'. Soma is pressed three times a day: the Rbhus are invited to the evening pressing, Indra to the midday one, which is his exclusively, while the morning libation is his first drink. The three abodes (*sadhásthá*) of Soma which are mentioned probably refer to three tubs used in the ritual.

Soma's connexion with the waters, resulting from the admixture, is expressed in the most various ways. He is the drop that grows in the waters; he is the embryo of the waters or their child; they are his mothers or his sisters; he is lord and king of streams; he produces waters and causes heaven and earth to rain. The sound made by the trickling Soma is often alluded to generally in hyperbolic usage, with verbs meaning to roar or bellow, or even thunder. He is thus commonly called a bull among the waters, which figure as cows. Soma is moreover swift, being often compared with a steed, sometimes with a bird flying to the wood. Owing to his yellow colour Soma's brilliance is the physical aspect most dwelt upon by the poets. He is then often likened to or associated with the sun.

The exhilarating power of Soma led to its being regarded as a divine drink bestowing immortal life. Hence it is called amrta *draught of immortality*. All the gods drink Soma; they drank it to gain immortality; it confers immortality not only on gods, but on men. It has, moreover, medicinal powers: Soma heals whatever is sick, making the blind to see and the lame to walk. Soma also stimulates the voice, and is called 'lord of speech'. He awakens eager thought: he is a generator of hymns, a leader of poets, a seer among priests. Hence his wisdom is much dwelt upon; thus he is a wise seer, and he knows the races of the gods.

The intoxicating effect of Soma most emphasized by the poets is the stimulus it imparts to Indra in his conflict with hostile powers. That Soma invigorates Indra for the fight with Vrtra is mentioned in innumerable passages. Through this association Indra's warlike exploits and cosmic actions come to be attributed to Soma independently. He is a victor unconquered in fight, born for battle. As a warrior he wins all kinds of wealth for his worshippers.

Though Soma is several times regarded as dwelling or growing on the mountains (like Haoma in the Avesta), his true origin and abode are regarded as in heaven. Soma is the child of heaven, is the milk of heaven, and is purified in heaven. He is the lord of heaven; he occupies heaven, and his place is the highest heaven. Thence he was brought to earth. The myth embodying this belief is that of the eagle that brings Soma to Indra, and is most fully dealt with in the two hymns iv. 26 and 27. Being the most important of herbs, Soma is said to have been born as the lord (páti) of plants, which also have him as their king; he is a lord of the wood (vánaspáti), and has generated all plants. But quite apart from his connexion with herbs, Soma is, like other leading gods, called a king: he is a king of rivers; a king of the whole earth; a king or father of the gods; a king of gods and mortals. In a few of the latest hymns of the RV. Soma begins to be mystically identified with the moon; in the AV. Soma several times means the moon; and in the Brahmanas this identification has already become a commonplace.

We know that the preparation and the offering of Soma (the Avestan Haoma) was already an important feature of Indo-Iranian worship, In both the RV. and the Avesta it is stated that the stalks were pressed, that the juice was yellow, and was mixed with milk; in both it grows on mountains, and its mythical home is in heaven, whence it comes down to earth; in both the Soma draught has become a mighty god and is

called a king; in both there are many other identical mythological traits relating to Soma.

It is possible that the belief in an intoxicating divine beverage, the home of which was in heaven, goes back to the Indo-European period. It must then have been regarded as a kind of honey mead (Skt. *mádhu*, Gk. *methu*, Anglo-Saxon *medu*).

The name of Soma (= Haoma) means *pressed juice*, being derived from the root *su* (= Av. *hu*) *press*.

### **FUNERAL HYMNS**

The RV. contains a group of five hymns (x. 14-18) concerned with death and the future life. From them we learn that, though burial was also practised, cremation was the usual method of disposing of the dead, and was the main source of the mythology relating to the future life. Agni conveys the corpse to the other world, the Fathers, and the gods. He is besought to preserve the body intact and to burn the goat which is sacrificed as his portion. During the process of cremation Agni and Soma are besought to heal any injury that bird, beast, ant, or serpent may have inflicted on the body. The way to the heavenly world is a distant path on which Savitr (i. 35) conducts and Pusan (vi. 54) protects the dead. Before the pyre is lighted, the wife of the dead man, having lain beside him, arises, and his bow is taken from his hand. This indicates that in earlier times his widow and his weapons were burnt with the body of the husband. Passing along by the path trodden by the Fathers, the spirit of the dead man goes to the realm of light, and meets with the Fathers who revel with Yama in the highest heaven. Here, uniting with a glorious body, he enters upon a life of bliss which is free from imperfections and bodily frailties, in which all desires are fulfilled, and which is passed among the gods, especially in the presence of the two kings Yama and Varuna.

### **PITÁRAS**

Two hymns (x. 15 and 54) are addressed to the Pitaras or Fathers, the blessed dead who dwell in the third heaven, the third or highest step of Visnu. The term as a rule applies to the early or first ancestors, who followed the ancient paths, seers who made the paths by which the recent dead go to join them. Various groups of ancestors are



mentioned, such as the Angirases and Atharvans, the Bhrgus and Vasisthas, who are identical in name with the priestly families associated by tradition with the composition of the Atharvaveda and of the second and seventh Mandalas of the Rigveda. The Pitaras are classed as higher, lower, and middle, as earlier and later, who though not always known to their descendants, are known to Agni. They revel with Yama and feast with the gods. They are fond of Soma, and thirst for the libations prepared for them on earth, and eat the offerings along with him. They come on the same car as Indra and the goods. Arriving in their thousands they range themselves on the sacrificial grass to the south, and drink the pressed draught. They receive oblations as their food. They are entreated to hear, intercede for, and protect their worshippers, and besought not to injure their descendants for any sin humanly committed against them. They are invoked to give riches, children, and long life to their sons, who desire to be in their good graces. The Vasisthas are once collectively implored to help their descendants. Cosmical actions, like those of the gods, are sometimes attributed to the Fathers. Thus they are said to have adorned the sky with stars, to have placed darkness in the night and light in the day; they found the light and generated the dawn. The path trodden by the Fathers (pitryána) is different from that trodden by the gods (devayána).

### **HYMN OF THE GAMBLER**

This [x. 34] is one, among the secular hymns, of a group of four which have a didactic character. It is the lament of a gambler who, unable to resist the fascination of the dice, deplores the ruin to which he has brought on his family. The dice (aksás) consisted of the nuts of a large tree called vibhidaka (*Terminalia bellerica*), which is still utilized for this purpose in India.

### **PÚRUSA**

There are six or seven hymns dealing with the creation of the world as produced from some original material. In the following one, the well-known Purusa-sukta or hymn of Man, the gods are the agents of creation, while the material out of which the world is made is the body of a primaeval giant named Purusa. The act of creation is here treated as a sacrifice in which Purusa is the victim, the parts when cut up becoming portions of the universe. Both its language and its matter indicate that it is one of the very latest hymns of the Rigveda. It not

only presupposes a knowledge of the three oldest Vedas, to which it refers by name, but also, for the first and only time in the Rigveda, mentions the four castes. The religious view is moreover different from that of the old hymns, for it is pantheistic: 'Purusa is all this world, what has been and shall be'. It is, in fact, the starting-point of the pantheistic philosophy of India.

## **RÁTRI**

The goddess of night, under the name of Rátri is invoked in only one hymn (x. 127). She is the sister of Usas, and like her is called a daughter of heaven. She is not conceived as the dark, but as the bright starlit night. Decked with all splendour she drives away the darkness. At her approach men, beasts, and birds go to rest. She protects her worshippers from the wolf and the thief, guiding them to safety. Under the name of *nákta n.*, combined with *usás*, Night appears as a dual divinity with Dawn in the form of *Usása-nákta* and *Náktosása*, occurring in some twenty scattered stanzas of the Rigveda.

## **HYMN OF CREATION**

In the ... cosmogonic poem [x. 129] the origin of the world is explained the evolution of the existent (*sát*) from the non-existent (*ásat*). Water thus came into being first; from it was evolved intelligence by heat. It is the starting-point of the natural philosophy which developed into the Sankhya system.

## **YAMÁ**

Three hymns are addressed to Yama, the chief of the blessed dead. There is also another (x. 10), which consists of a dialogue between him and his sister Yami. He is associated with Varuna, Brhaspati, and especially Agni, the conductor of the dead, who is called his friend and his priest. He is not expressly designated a god, but only a being who rules the dead. He is associated with the departed Fathers, especially the Angirases, with whom he comes to the sacrifice to drink Soma.

Yama dwells in the remote recess of the sky. In his abode, which is the home of the gods, he is surrounded by songs and the sound of the flute. Soma is pressed for Yama, ghee is offered to him, and he comes to seat

himself at the sacrifice. He is invoked to lead his worshippers to the gods, and to prolong life.

His father is Vivasvant and his mother Saranyu. In her dialogue with him Yami speaks of Yama as the 'only mortal', and elsewhere he is said to have chosen death and abandoned his body. He departed to the other world, having found out the path for many, to where the ancient Fathers passed away.

Death is the path of Yama. His foot-fetter (pádbisa) is spoken of as parallel to the bond of Varuna. The owl (úluka) and the pigeon (kapóta) are mentioned as his messengers, but the two four-eyed, broad-nosed, brindled dogs, sons of Sarama (sarameyáu) are his regular emissaries.

They guard the path along which the dead man hastens to join the Fathers who rejoice with Yama. They watch men and wander about among the peoples as Yama's messengers. They are besought to grant continued enjoyment of the light of the sun.

As the first father of mankind and the first of those that died, Yama appears to have originally been regarded as a mortal who became the chief of the souls of the departed. He goes back to the Indo-Iranian period, for the primaeval twins, from whom the human race is descended, Yama and Yami, are identical with the Yima and Yimeh of the Avesta. Yama himself may in that period have been regarded as a king of a golden age, for in the Avesta he is the ruler of an earthly, and in the RV. that of a heavenly paradise.

## VÁTA

This god, as Váta, the ordinary name of wind, is addressed in two short hymns. He is invoked in a more concrete way than his doublet Vayú, who is celebrated in one whole hymn and in parts of others. Vata's name is frequently connected with forms of the root *va*, *blow*, from which it is derived. He is once associated with the god of the rain-storm in the dual form of Vata-Parjanya, while Vayu is often similarly linked with Indra as Índra-Vayú. Vata is the breath of the gods. Like Rudra he wafts healing and prolongs life; for he has the treasure of immortality in his house. His activity is chiefly mentioned in connexion with the thunderstorm. He produces ruddy lights and makes the

dawns to shine. His swiftness often supplies a comparison for the speed of the gods or of mythical steeds. His noise is also often mentioned.

