

ON MAGICAL THOUGHT IN THE VEDA

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The Yajurveda-Saṃhitās and the various Brāhmaṇas, which constitute the bulk of Vedic literature, have been studied by Indologists for about 130 years. These texts generally have been regarded with incomprehension, bewilderment or derision. Max Müller spoke of them as 'the twaddling of idiots' and L. v. Schroeder, who himself edited two of the major Yajurveda texts, compared them with the written compositions of insane persons. Similarly, Keith (1925, p. 483) characterised them as 'a world of fancy', where only sometimes a text can have 'a moment of sanity'. Even today, the general climate of opinion concerning these texts has changed little. At best, they are regarded as an expression of 'primitive' thought - whatever that may mean (Gonda, 1949 p. 39, 1960 p. 177; [but] cf. K. Hoffmann, 1975/6 p. 207, 527).

The reason for these deprecatory remarks is not the exclusive concern of the texts with endless ritualistic details of the 'jungle of sacrifice' - as the texts themselves say - but the *way* these details are presented and discussed. As it is well-known, the Brāhmaṇas and the *non-mantra* prose sections of the Yajurveda-Saṃhitās (hereafter 'Brāhmaṇas' for shortness sake), do not aim at a point-by-point description of the various Vedic sacrifices but at their explanation; that means: they strive to find and propound the secret, hidden meaning behind all sacrificial acts, spoken formulas, and materials used during the performance of a sacrifice, as well as that of the whole magical ritual as such. It is the way in which such explanations are offered in the Vedic texts that surprise and induce the reader to reread a passage, and ultimately to set it aside as incomprehensible, or worse, as mere 'twaddling of idiots'. To illustrate this, one or two typical examples of a Brāhmaṇa type magical explanation, and the use to which such knowledge is put will suffice:

When the priest fashions the clay *pravargya* pot, which later on in the *pravargya* ritual is heated in the fire until it is glowing red and at that point represents the burning sun (during the hot season before the monsoon rains), he says: "I look down on you (i.e. the pot) with the eye of the sun". The text then continues to explain: 'If he would look down on the pot with then eye of < 4 > a man (i.e. with his own human eyes), the pot would burn away his eye. His children would be born blind. *Only* with the eye of the *sun* he looks down.' This anticipates the identification (made later in the rite) of the glowing red pot with the sun, which is certainly dangerous to look at for a longer period. The priest, who is identified with various gods during the sacrifice, therefore here too transforms his human eyes into godly ones, that is into the ones of the sun - which in turn is thought of to be the eye of god Mitra. The 'dangerous' act of looking at the still unfired clay pot is thus averted; and an additional danger as well: the children of the priest, whose eyes would also have been destroyed, will not be affected either. - The other typical passage of terse magical explanation runs as follows (KpS 47.3): 'He (the priest) brings forwards the waters (to be used in the ritual). The waters are the sacrifice. Having stretched out the sacrifice (fashioned the offering ground), he proceeds. The waters are the abode dear to the gods. Having brought forward the abode dear to the gods, he starts (the ritual). Demon slaying waters are used: this serves to beat away the demons. A *club* are the waters. He hurls forward a *club*, for (the abolishment of) rivalry.'

In this short paragraph, the water used in the ritual is explained as being identical with the ritual itself, with the abode favoured by the gods, and with a club (slaying demons, or abolishing rivals). The secret knowledge of the priest about the water used in ritual is not explained here in detail. The text does not state why the water has all the properties ascribed to it here, as these are standard phrases well-known to any Vedic ritualist. It is interesting to see, however, how this secret (not *mystical*, as Oldenberg and Gonda assert) knowledge about the hidden, 'real' nature of the water to be used in the ritual is applied: the waters being the ritual itself, the priest starts the actual performance with them, a statement already foreshadowed by the earlier Ṛgvedic line *yajñena yajñam ayajanta devāḥ* 'the gods sacrificed the sacrifice by the sacrifice': The priest, too, starts the sacrifice through the sacrifice. Secondly, using the abode favoured by the gods, i. e. the waters, he

starts the ritual, in which the gods are called to attend; that means: by using something connected with the gods, he attracts them to the offering ground. Then, the waters being a club, the priest uses them to drive away the demons who are wont to disturb rituals. At the same time he also uses them as a club to drive away or destroy his or the sacrificer's rivals, thus performing an act of black magic.

In this way, explanations are given for all materials used in a ritual, for all acts performed, for all verbal formulas (*mantras*), including the ritual as a < 5 > whole. These explanations, if *known* to the priest performing a sacrifice, carry an additional power: Without this esoteric and secret knowledge the magical goal of the ritual (whether white or black magic) cannot be attained. (For a recent definition of magic, see Marwick 1975, p. 12.) The identifications of the objects, *mantras* used in the ritual with other entities - as quoted in these two examples - are not intended as poetic similes. The waters are not just *like* a club or that respect, and it indeed would be difficult to visualise a substance like water being a weapon capable of hitting someone, whether a demon or an enemy like the sacrificer's rival. The still unfired clay pot is not like the sun at all (except for its round shape): after all, at the stage when the *mantra* is spoken, the pot has not yet been heated in the fire and it is therefore hard to conceive of any similarity at all. (The fact that both the sun and the pot are round is never mentioned.) The eye of man is not said to be like the sun in this or that respect, it is transformed into, and thus identical with that of the sun, the eye of god Mitra.

Such magical identifications, innumerable as they are in Brāhmaṇa type texts, are usually emphasized strongly (but cf. Gonda, 1948 p. 18, Oldenberg, 1919 p. 111) by the use of such stressing particles as *vai* 'indeed', or *eva* 'only': The priest can look down on the pot *only* with the eye of the sun, not with his human eye. His eyes then have become not only similar to that of the sun, they *are* the eye of the sun. The constant use of these emphasizing particles points to a full equation of both entities and not to a mere similarity of both (cf. Oldenberg, 1919 p. 120 sq.). In some later texts, or in standard phrases like some of the statements about the waters quoted above, these particles are no longer used: These statements already had become part of general knowledge and belief. Because of the importance of the particles for a proper understanding of Vedic magical thought, further

investigation seems necessary (cf. Oldenberg, *Geschichte der ai. Prosa*, p. 18). An additional difficulty in understanding these magical equations is their mutual exclusiveness: The waters are said to be identical with: a particular ritual, the abode of the gods, a club used against demons in general and (to us) a very real club against enemies. To a modern reader, this certainly may look like the 'twaddling of idiots', as it seemed to Max Müller and many other scholars who spent many years in editing or reading these texts.

What then do these identifications mean? Did the Vedic Indians really < 6 > compose and transmit orally in learning by heart the voluminous explanations of the ritual over a period of some thousand years, just to contradict one statement a few sentences further with another one which excludes the former statement, - not to speak of the very content of the identifications themselves which seems mostly to be unintelligible or impossible in any case? In order to answer this a few words will have to be said about the structure of magical thought underlying the explanations offered by the Brāhmaṇa texts. The system as such is never explicitly stated by the texts but it can be established without much difficulty after some investigation into the matter. In fact, this has already been demonstrated by Oldenberg (1919 p. 120 sqq.) and Schayer (1925). Recently, Hoffmann (1975/6 p. 207) has clearly summarized the main point: Any entity, whether a god, a supernatural force, an object or being of nature, of culture, and especially anything said, enacted or used during a ritual, can - according to the examples with in the texts - be identified with another entity, provided both have something, i.e. one attribute, one characteristic, in common.

Some such identifications can easily be understood even by a modern reader, especially when they turn out to be mere definitions (Mylius, 1976 p. 145) like 'Bṛhaspati is the *brahman* of the gods'. But also when the texts say, e.g. 'breath is (god) wind,' then it is immediately clear that both are similar in so far as they constitute a movement of air. Other identifications are more closely linked to specific cultural contexts which are not shared with a modern reader, and which he will have to acquire first before attempting to 'understand' the identification in question.

The modern reader of these texts especially has to take into account the Vedic belief regarding the very nature of the various entities explained through identification: The Vedic Indian regards any force of nature (such as the wind), good or bad luck, illnesses, feelings and even abstract notions like revenge as living, personified powers. These forces have their own life, yet they are bound by certain general laws, especially the one of cause and effect: Nothing is without cause to the Vedic Indian; it is the cause for the existence of a particular entity, its origin and true nature that the Vedic magician wants to find out in order to influence it. A certain cause, or any one from a number of independent particular causes, must, without exception, lead to a particular result. (The possibility of two or more converging causal effects leading to a particular result are disregarded, cf. Gonda, 1960 I 177, Horton 1975, 342). If the priest and magician can find < 7 > out the relation between cause and effect, which is done by establishing magical identifications, the priest, knowing these identifications, can, during a ritual and while employing the proper materials and *mantras* explained by identifications, change the otherwise incontrovertible chain of events. For the Vedic priest it is therefore of extreme importance first to find the hidden, secret knowledge, i.e. the true nature of the entities involved, and to establish their relationship. These findings have been laid down in the various texts of Brāhmaṇa type. It is the importance of this nexus (*bandhu*) and the belief in the chain of cause and effect which leads Oldenberg (1919) to his description of Brāhmaṇa thought as 'vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft'.

In fact, the Brāhmaṇa identifications are not made without a deliberate choice, but according to a system. The concept of identifications as the expression of primitive thought has to be abolished. At their basis, in most cases, the wish can be found to systematize the objective reality'. (Mylius 1976, p. 146). This, indeed, is a fact Brāhmaṇa thought shares with science. Similarly, Horton (1975 p. 342), while describing traditional African thought, points out that it aims at an explanation of the world establishing 'unity underlying apparent diversity'. In doing so 'human mind seems constrained to draw inspiration from analogy between the puzzling observations to be explained and certain already familiar phenomena', so that 'only a limited aspect of such

phenomena... is incorporated into the resulting model. Other aspects are ignored, for from the point of view of explanatory function, they are irrelevant'. This can also serve as an apt description of the procedure of the Vedic priest and magician in establishing his series of identifications and explanations of the world. The basic assumption from which the Vedic priest starts, however, i.e. the truth of an identification like 'water = club', is, of course, a not valid description of nature, and this represents the most important difference of magical thought and scientific one (cf. Marwick 1975 p. 12). The rest of a Brāhmaṇa explanation then is set up strictly logically.

A Vedic priest, being at the same time ritualist, magician and thinker, in this way tries to find out the nexus responsible for the existence, occurrence of entities, objects or beings, of nature, society and ritual. This is not only done by discovering the origin of a certain entity, it also has to take into account the name of this entity (cf. Horton 1975, p. 342 sqq.) by explaining < 8 > its etymology, i.e. frequently, its mythological origin. In the later Brāhmaṇa texts and in the Upaniṣads, a threefold system of mutually connected levels of interpretation is usually used: a particular entity is identical with another in the areas of the macrocosm (gods, universe, world), the microcosm (man) and the ritual. This is the famous *adhidevata*, *adhyātman* (*adhipuruṣa*), *adhiyajña* system of exegesis. At this stage, the trend to systematize objective reality, referred to by Mylius, is fully developed and ultimately results in the identification of *atman* and *brahman*.

Returning to the crucial point of this system of thought, i.e. the identifications, one remains at loss to *understand*, perhaps not the basis of these statements (although they are only *partly* easily explained), but certainly the frequent use of this principle and the close sequences of sentences, which, to our understanding at least, seem to exclude each other, e.g. when the waters in the same breath are said to be a club, an abode or a particular ritual (cf. Gonda, 1960, I p. 36).

It is therefore perhaps not without interest to mention here a few similar cases from other societies. Recently, Basso (1976) has written on a number of Apache 'wise words' which seem to be based on the same principle as Vedic identifications. With the Apache, one can come

across such sayings as: 'girls are butterflies' or 'white men are carrion beetles'.

Now I, as Basso did, wonder why I am a carrion beetle. - The way to understand these sayings is to take them as similes at first: In what way is a girl similar to a butterfly? Not, as we may be tempted to say, by her outward appearance, by her beautiful look or dress. To the Apache, their similarity lies in their identical *actions*: Both are regarded to be restless, not to stay at one place for long, and - most important to the Apache who created this saying in order to criticize - while doing so, girls do not do the work assigned to them but run after distraction and pleasure. While the first characteristic, the restlessness, appertains to both butterflies and girls, the last ones, i.e. pleasure seeking and shunning of work are transferred back from the girls to the butterflies, - because both are regarded as having identical behaviour. This two way transferal of characteristics in establishing an identification can also be observed from the following example: The Dorze of Ethiopia, as described by Sperber (1977, p. 154), have worked out a neat description of their Christian habits as opposed to those < 9 > of their non-Christian neighbours by identifying themselves and the surrounding tribes with certain animals. The leopard is a Christian, the hyena a heathen. - While the Dorze are thought of as leopards, their neighbours are were-hyenas, hyenas in human form.

This set of equations is again based on close observation of animal behaviour: The Christian Dorze kill animals only in a ritual way, and after letting the blood flow out, they eat the raw meat some time later. They also observe particular Christian fasts. The leopard kills more animals than he can eat, and therefore, a certain time usually elapses before eating. Because of this, he is supposed to observe fasts, too. The hyena, however, immediately eats any carrion it can find without 'properly' killing it, or when it comes across any weak or sick animals, it throws them down and starts eating them immediately. This coincides with the alimentary habits of the Dorze's neighbours who do not observe ritual killing and also drink the blood drawn from living cattle. The non-Dorze is thus a were-hyena, a hyena in human form. Accordingly, a Dorze who does not follow the tribe's alimentary customs is accused of being a were-hyena.

It will be apparent that we here have to deal with metaphors. The leopard resembles, or is believed to behave identically to the Dorze while the hyena resembles or is thought of to behave just like the non-Christian neighbours of the Dorze tribe. This *partial* identity in behaviour suffices to establish the classification of leopards as Christians and of hyenas as heathens. Equally, with the Apache, both girls and butterflies have one thing in common, that is, their restlessness. Both carrion beetles and white men share as a common trait their wasteful habits. In all of these instances, the identity of one characteristic serves as the basis for the creation of a metaphor.

Is it permissible to regard the Vedic identifications in a similar way? (cf. Oldenberg 1919 p. 111, Beck 1978). Certainly, when Vāyu, the (god) wind, is identified with human breath, both share their being a movement of air as a common trait. If the sun is identified with the eye of man, one could try to explain this by referring to texts (older than the Brāhmaṇa type ones) which speak of the sun as the eye of god Mitra, or one could say that both the sun and the eye are round and shine with light.

In this way, many of the Vedic identifications might be understood as metaphors, expressed with the same vigour and certainty as the Apache 'wise words' are. However, they are not used to criticize human attitudes but to explain a basic nexus between entities experienced by man. The < 10 > establishment of identity between various entities makes them manageable by the Vedic priest during rituals, - if he applies the proper formulas and actions all of which are based (or, historically speaking, retroactively justified) on an insight into their 'real', hidden nature expressed by identifications.

To the Vedic priest and magician, such identifications are very *real* (cf. Oldenberg, 1919, p. 120 sqq.; Schayer 1925). Indologists, however, generally cannot acquiesce in this (Oldenberg, 191 p. 122; Keith, 1925^{II} p. 143 sq., A. Benke 1976). They stress that such identifications are only *temporal* ones, are made only for the moment, only to be discarded with the next sentence uttered by the Vedic author of the texts (which were composed and transmitted orally through the centuries). To me, this does *not* seem to be a solution either. Neither this explanation nor the earlier views on this problem take into account the fact that an entity may, at the same time, belong to two or more

categories, none of which are in any way related according to our view of the world.

To exemplify this, it is perhaps useful to begin with an example taken from our own experience: The whale (cf. Dutch *walvis*, German *Walfisch*) was generally thought of as belonging to the fish category of sea animals, as its Dutch or German names indicate. If we forget our school learning, we automatically link whale with fish even now. Speaking in Vedic terms, the 'secret nature' of the whale ('the whaleness of the whale', as the texts would say), is disregarded in everyday thought, while it is established by science, which one may here compare to the secret priestly knowledge of Vedic times. - Similarly, the sun may appear to us just as a bright circle in the sky, while we, at the same time, very well know about its real nature as a distant gaseous star.

To the Vedic Indian, too, the sun appears in many forms, belongs to many categories: It is, e.g., a fire in the sky, a heavenly goose, the cut-off head of god Rudra, the eye of god Mitra, *and* a god in its own right, who appears in the East every morning, driving a horse chariot, - statements which seem to contradict each other, in our way of thought. While in the example given first, the contradiction in our concept about the sun is the incompatibility of popular and scientific classification, between two systems of thought, in the Vedic example given just now, the clash seems to be between different statements *of one* system, the magical one of the Vedic texts. < 11 >

Yet we, too, produce multiple exclusive statements of the sort of the various Vedic concepts of 'sun' everyday - without noticing it. In one and the same speech, for example, the University may be referred to as a number of buildings, as a group of persons, or as a juridical body. To someone without our cultural background, these statements would be incompatible: to him, a particular entity cannot be a building, a person or some sheets of printed paper at the same time.

The problem thus seems to be one of semantics, or rather of the many 'meanings' of a particular word, - the innumerable concepts, generally known, remembered, or culturally connected with this word. Or, in the terminology of K. Hoffmann (1975/6 p. 524), a word is the phonetic representation of an agglomeration of concepts, which he calls *noematic aggregates*. A *noem* is the smallest possible item to be

thought of, i.e. in case of the sun, its roundness, brightness, its being the eye (of Mitra) etc. The almost infinite number of noems connected with the concept of 'sun' would then make up the noematic aggregate 'sun'. Many of these noems are only *relevant* to certain cultures, like the sun as the eye of Mitra, - others are generally *irrelevant*, and only become relevant in specific instances, e.g. the sun as the severed and spinning head of Rudra, - a fact only remembered and used in a particular ritual. If one were to draw a scheme of the various noems connected with the Vedic concept of 'sun', one would quickly find out that they form a virtual maze of relationships which interlock this concept with many other entities. This forms the basis for the multiple identifications: *sūryasya sūryatvam* 'the true nature of the sun' is to be found within these relationships.

As already said before, two entities are identified by the Vedic priest, if they have *one* trait in common. The sun is the eye of Mitra in so far as both are round, bright with light, watch people and the world during day time, are not active at night, etc. It is their roundness (viz. brightness, etc.) which put the sun and the human eye into the same category, the noematic category roundness, (viz. brightness etc.). Magical identifications in the Veda are, in fact, established by discovering a noematic category into which both entities to be identified fit. *This* is the labour of the Vedic magician: he has to discover the secret, hidden *bandhu*, (not a mystical one, as Oldenberg (1919) and Gonda(1960,1 175) say), the nexus unifying two concepts, two noematic aggregates. In the same way, the Apache wise men or women strive to discover a category into which a particular human attitude and animal behaviour fit. They, however, do so in order to criticize < 12 > or characterize their fellow men, - just as the Dorze established the view that leopards are Christian while jackals are heathen, in order to criticize their neighbours.

This way of thinking, strange as it may seem, is by no means foreign to present day Western man. When speaking of the University as a number of buildings, a group of people, etc., we do, of course, *not make use* of such statements in order to describe non-university people as an unorganized mass or as lawless, they are not covered by University law, as the Dorze do with their leopard-jackal opposition, nor do we use our knowledge about Latin etymology of the word 'university' for sorcery, e.g. to gain supreme knowledge, as a Vedic

priest would do. But, whenever it seems convenient, Brāhmaṇa type identifications are still used, and usually so in order to criticize: Some ten years ago, and as recently as this spring in a W. German parliament debate, it was fashionable to mark certain leftist groups as 'fascists of the left' - because some of their tactics happened to be the same, while otherwise both groups have very little or nothing in common. Again, such terms as 'social imperialism' are based on the same procedure of selecting just one noematic category to describe an entity composed of many others. This list could be extended. (Curiously, examples are very frequent in the realm of politics.) - Similar cases can, of course, be noticed in other societies as well: When the Nepalese invaded Tibet in 1855, they had to face a shortage of meat (mutton) in the higher ranges of the Himalayas. Forbidden to eat beef, the yak - certainly a bovine (which they knew to breed with cows!) - was officially reclassified by the King's priest (*rājguru*) as a deer so as to provide the troops with meat.

Lying at the basis of these and Vedic identifications is the belief, whether conscious or not, that similarity of one or a few characteristics, i.e. partial identity, means complete identity, (cf. Gonda 1949 p. 119). The axiom *similarity means identity*, which is often adhered to unconsciously by modern (Western) man, too, has to be accepted to understand Vedic texts. On this basis, their argumentation becomes logical (cf. Marwick, 1975 p. 12). This axiom has the same value for the Vedic magician and thinker as an axiom 'scientific statements are true', i.e. they describe reality correctly, would have for us.

I cannot enter here into one obvious problem posed by this axiom and its constant use in the identification technique of the Vedic priest, i.e.: Were the identifications regarded as describing reality correctly also *outside* their ritual setting, or even by other, non-priestly sections of the Vedic Indian < 13 > people? Is it possible to imagine a down-to-earth warrior or farmer who believes that, e.g., the sun is a goose, the eye of Mitra, god Sūrya or a clay pot used in ritual, - at the same time? This is difficult to answer, as we only possess texts composed by priests for this period. However, the active participation in Brahmanical discussions by the gentry and even some women seem to point to a, at least, partial reception of this way of thought by non-priestly groups.

The examples of Vedic identifications so far given have been of the well-established type frequently met with in the texts. It will, however, be interesting to watch the Vedic magician while he evolves new concepts, a new string of identifications, and thus, another set of explanations of his world. This is often done in the form of a mythological tale, which, however, seems to be invented on the spot in order to explain certain customs, peculiarities of beings and objects. Such stories are clearly distinguishable from an older set of myths, which are known from earlier texts such as the Ṛgveda. A typical example of a newly created myth is this one:

'Prajāpati (the creator god) did not know how to give the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*). He put it in his right hand (*dakṣiṇaḥ*). He took it, speaking the ritual formula (*mantra*): For fitness (*dakṣa*) I take you, the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*)'. - Therefore he became fit (*adakṣata*). The one, who *knowing thus*, receives the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*), becomes fit (*dakṣate*).'

This story offers an explanation for the word *dakṣiṇā* 'sacrificial fee' and also explains the benefit of *knowing* this explanation. The equations underlying this tale are: (a) The sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) is connected with the right hand (*dakṣiṇaḥ*): It is taken (and certainly also given) with the right hand. (On a linguistic level, only the gender of both words is different.) (b) The word *dakṣiṇā* is connected with *dakṣa* 'fitness' by similarity of sound. This usually is enough for the Vedic magician to regard both words *and* the entity they denote as identical. (In this case, the explanation even is based on a correct etymology.) - Because *dakṣiṇā* (offering fee) is identified with *dakṣa* (fitness) the conclusion is drawn: who will take the sacrificial fee *with the knowledge* about its secret meaning, he will attain it, he will indeed become fit. Taking the fee *without* this knowledge will have no effect.

When taken out of context, as frequently met with, a statement like *dakṣiṇā* (sacrificial fee) is *dakṣa* (fitness) would be incomprehensible, if one < 14 > could not detect any relationship between the two concepts. Even if one were to try to call up all noems connected with both words, one probably would have to give up, - except for noting a partial identity of the sounds of both words. It is here that the 'native commentary', as it is called by ethnologists, shows its full importance. Luckily, the Brāhmaṇa texts are full of such

commentaries, explaining in detail the way a certain identification is arrived at or providing mythological tales, made up ad hoc, as the one about the *dakṣiṇā*.

Many equations, however, seem to be so well-established already at the time of the composition of the Brāhmaṇa type texts that they never receive any explanation. These are of the type of 'The waters are the sacrifice', 'Agni is seed', Pūṣan is cattle'. They must have been evolved in a period which precedes the composition of the prose sections of the Yajurveda- Saṃhitās and the various Brāhmaṇas. In such cases, the lack of a 'native commentary' immediately puts the reader of Vedic texts into difficulty. However, as pointed out before, such equations are based on the discovery of a noematic category unifying both entities identified. The reader has to re-enact this discovery. This involves 'a creative skill, grounded in an ability to form novel semantic categories' (Basso, 1978).

Even a comparatively simple case, like the sentence 'Indra is a bull', has to undergo quite a long process of deliberation before it is understood. Taken at 'face value', the sentence is of course nonsense. God Indra, the human-shaped warrior god of the Vedic Aryans, is certainly *not* a bovine and was never described (or, later in history, depicted) as such. Yet the author wants to express something meaningful. A Vedic listener to this may here introduce one noem connected with 'Indra' or 'bull' after another in quick succession, recalling them from active memory and thus, from his general cultural background, which is not always known to us perfectly, in order to reach a meaningful interpretation.

Apparently, some noem is involved here which is not usually, not *habitually relevant* in using or hearing the word 'bull', - at least for us. It is not the shape or colour of a bull, which come to *our* mind most readily when enumerating the various noems connected with the noematic aggregate expressed by the word 'bull'. (Interestingly, a late Vedic author like Patañjali also describes a bovine mainly in terms of outward appearance, see Mahābhāṣya, introduction). Similarly, the noems connected with 'Indra' do not help: he is known as a male god who helped in the < 15 > creation of the world, who delivered to mankind water and cows, he is a warrior god who helps the fighting Aryans. It is here that the reader or listener has to call up another

noem, which *may* be connected with many words, i.e. the one 'figurative meaning'. This may, in many cases, belong to a particular cultural background, it may have been established for a certain period.

In other cases, and especially in poetry, this noem is not *habitually* relevant at all, it is not even *occasionally* relevant but relevant *only* in the particular phrase studied. In the present case, where Indra is equated with a bull, however, we are in a slightly better position to understand the sentence. We know that one characteristic of Indra is his enormous strength and also his sexual potency which he shares with the bull. The way to understand this equation thus is to take it as a simile at first: Indra is similar to a bull in so far as he has great strength. Again, the equation is established by selecting one (ore more) peculiarities shared by both entities.

Not all cases, however, are as simple as this one. Scattered over several hundred pages of one text (Taitt. Saṃh.), one can, e.g.; find the following, apparently disconnected statements:

'The horse is connected with Prajāpati'; 'The horse is connected with the waters'; 'The horse (*aśva*) has 'tear' (*aśru*) as its secret name'. - Without the help of a native commentary, as found in the Yajurveda prose explanations, these statements could, perhaps, never be connected with each other. When coming across the sentence 'The horse is connected with the waters', this seems to be an unintelligible statement as many of the equations referred to above. As far as I can see, no relevant noem, no important concept of our encyclopedic knowledge connects 'horse' with 'water'. A Vedic listener's encyclopedic knowledge, however, and nowadays also the one of a Vedic specialist helped by the excellent indexes available, will, after some search come up with the other sentence quoted, i.e. 'The secret name of the horse (*aśva*) is tear (*aśru*). Now this sentence, too, is not immediately intelligible; the active memory of a casual reader of Vedic texts, however, will provide a help in its interpretation; one will connect this sentence with the statement frequently met with "The gods love the hidden, the non-apparent" (*parokṣapriyā hi devāḥ*). When inducing the noem 'hidden meaning' the sentence will yield some sense: *aśva* 'horse' is *aśru* 'tear' because they share, as in the earlier example of *dakṣiṇā = dakṣiṇaḥ*, a similarity in sound. To the Vedic magician, this partial identity in sound is enough to establish an equation, or, in the < 16 > present case, a close relationship of both entities.

One may now go a step further and seek a noematic category unifying the concepts of 'horse ~ tear' and 'horse ~ water'. This is not difficult to find: a tear obviously is salty water. If the horse is related to 'tear', it should or could also be related to 'water'. This still leaves the relationship of the horse and Prajāpati unaccounted for. The solution, once luckily found in the texts themselves, is a rather simple one: A myth is related: 'Prajāpati (the lord of creation) wept. His tear fell down. Out of this, the horse developed. It neighed. It let some dung fall down, turned around, and sniffed at it' (- a good observation of the boundary marking habits of horses). Probably, this story would be remembered by a Vedic Indian if he were to explain the relationship of the three sentences about the horse mentioned before. The myth unifies these statements: The horse is related to Prajāpati, it is of Prajāpati-nature (*prājāpatya*) because it developed from his tear; it is related to the waters as it was born from salty water, from Prajāpati's tear. As it happens, both 'horse' and 'tear' sound similar in Sanskrit: therefore the hidden, secret name of 'horse' can be 'tear'.

The problem is whether this explanation really answers the question posed by these three sentences. The myth which unifies them looks more like a fabrication in the fashion of the other varified tales about Prajāpati, which always come in handy as explanations, (cf. also H.-P. Schmidt 1979 p. 278). One could even suspect that the myth had been created *because* of the similarity of the two words denoting 'horse' and 'tear'.

Yet, in my opinion, this is one of the rare cases where we may be able to trace the origin of these three statements back beyond the time of the composition of Yajurveda prose. It is well known that a gap of time intervened between the late Ṛgveda and the *Mantras* of the Atharvaveda, Yajurveda and between the still later Yajurveda prose. K. Hoffmann (1975/6 p. 509) has shown that the apparent mantra '*yán navám áit'* is in fact part of a prose story with all the typical characteristics of Yajurveda prose. This must have been composed well *before* the sentence became accepted as a Mantra.

The period between the late Ṛgveda and the Yajurveda Mantras thus seems to have known the same type of exegetical activity as evidenced by the Yajurveda-Saṃhitās and the various Brāhmaṇas. The three statements about the horse must have had their origin in this period, as they are not explained in the texts, except by the myth about

Prajāpati. However, already the oldest Indian text, the Ṛgveda (I 163, 1) reads: < 17 >

*yád ákrandaḥ prathamám jāyamāna
udyán samudrād úta vā púrīṣāt
śyenásya pakṣá hariṇásya bahú
upastútyam máhi jāt áṃ te arvan.*

'Als du eben geboren wiehertest, aus dem Meer oder aus dem Urquell heraussteigend, mit den Flügeln des Adlers und den Vorderfüßen der Antilope, - das war deine preiswerte hohe Geburt, du Renner' (Geldner, 1923/51). - This stanza, which is included in a group of riddles (*brahmodyas*), clearly refers to the mythical birth of the horse from the salty waters of the ocean, or from *purīṣa*, which in later language means 'dung'. Now, it is well known that Prajāpati of the Yajurveda myth concerning the horse is a comparatively late god, and the Yajurveda story anyhow looks like just another variant of the many tales about him. It seems only to be an adaptation of a (late) Ṛgvedic concept about the birth of the primordial horse, as described in the stanza quoted just now: In the Ṛgveda poem, the horse is born from (salty) water, it neighs, and there, too, is a reference to 'dung'.

In the Yajurveda story, which is several hundred years younger, the origin of the horse from salty water has been transformed to an origin from (the salty water of) Prajāpati's tear: the horse neighs, too, and it sniffs at its own dung.

Therefore, at the time of the composition of the Yajurveda legend, the myth as told by the Ṛgveda must have been re-interpreted. The new element is a typical post-Ṛgvedic one: the connection by etymology, as fancy as it may appear to us, of *aśva* by *aśru*. If this re-interpretation of the Ṛgvedic myth was undertaken by someone who had knowledge of the Ṛgvedic stanza quoted (which is probable because of the high degree of sanctity the Ṛgveda had attained already at this time), it also shows the effort of the (pre-)Yajurveda thinker who tried to find a concept capable of unifying the noematic aggregate 'ocean' with 'horse'. He found it in the category 'salty water' of which both 'ocean' and 'tear' take part: Even this, however, presupposed or necessitated the concurrent discovery of the hidden identity of *aśva*

'horse' and *aśru* 'tear'. This could then be cast into a new myth about Prajāpati, who as the creator god also to create the horse.

This example indicates the probability of a long period during which the development of particular identifications and magical explanations in Brāhmaṇa style took place. < 18 >

It has already been mentioned that magical thought as met with in the Yajurveda-Saṃhitā prose does not suddenly emerge out of nowhere. Brāhmaṇa type explanations must have existed well before this period, (as shown by the acceptance as a *mantra* of the sentence *yán navám áit*, taken from an early Brāhmaṇa discussion). Yet the development of this type of thought can even be traced back to some parts of the Atharvaveda, (which already contain the typical Brāhmaṇa phrase *ya evam veda*).

Other hymns of the Atharvaveda and many of the *mantras* of the Yajurveda, which were composed viz. got their final form during the same period intervening between the late Ṛgveda and the Yajurveda-Saṃhitā prose, present enough evidence showing that even at this early time, Brāhmaṇa type identifications were common. A well known *mantra* like 'with the arms of Pūṣan, with the hands of the Ásvins . . .' clearly identifies the offering priest with various gods. Especially the 'philosophical' and 'mystical' books of the Atharvaveda contain many examples, such as the identification of the rice pap (*odana*) with various gods, with plants, with metal. In AV V 9.1, (not found in PS), the identification of the sun with the eye, of wind with breath, of the atmosphere with the soul, of the earth with the human body, part of which is common in later Brāhmaṇa type texts, is found. Even the Ṛgveda is not free from such identifications. The funeral hymn (RV X 16), contains the same identification: the eye of man turns into the sun, breath into wind. It is now well-known that the Ṛgveda does not only consist of hymns meant to praise various gods but that it also includes quite a number of magical poems, to which many of the so-called dialogue hymns belong. Such magic is, as the later Atharvaveda and Yajurveda magic, based on the principle of identifying two entities; while applying some force (whether physical or verbal) to one entity, it influences the other one. This can, as it is well-known, also be effected with the help of true, poetically formulated stories (such as the dialogue hymns), to which a sorcery *mantra*, an additional stanza is

added. - Yet the Ṛgveda also seems to contain the germs of the multiple identifications later known as the *adhidevata*, *adhyātman*, *adhiyajña* explanations which establish a connection between macrocosm, microcosm, and ritual. It would take too long to go here into details, so one example may suffice: The cow is frequently called 'dawn' in the Ṛgveda, and this plays a significant role in the New Year ritual when the first dawn of the New Year makes its appearance. This is connected in myth with the release of the cows, stolen by the demons, from their hiding place through the combined action of Indra and the < 19 > the assisting reciting Aṅgiras priests. Here, an implicit identification takes place between the cow on earth, red in colour as the dawn, the mythical cows (= dawns) released by Indra, and the cow as a metaphor of vision expressed by poetical speech, (see H.-P. Schmidt 1975 p. 20 sq.) which makes its appearance in the form of Ṛgvedic stanzas recited at the time of the ritual. We thus find a correspondence of macrocosm (dawns), microcosm (cows on earth, inspiration of the poet), and ritual (recitation in the New Year Soma ritual) not unlike the much later Yajurveda one.

To me, the difference between the representation of Ṛgveda and Yajurveda magic, as met with in the texts, seems rather to be one of style than of content: The Ṛgvedic poems are meant to be recited in public during the ritual, the Yajurveda explanations in Brāhmaṇa style are the secret esoteric knowledge of the priestly class which is taught only to those who have undergone a long period of apprenticeship with a priest, and even then the more secret texts like the Āraṇyakas are not taught to all students. - Lastly, the Ṛgveda also poses the difficult question of the identification of a particular god with one (or more) other one(s), so frequently found (e.g. RV V 3: Agni = Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra etc.). I suspect that these identifications, too, are based but on the discovery by the poet of a particular trait or mythological action which are ascribed to both gods, and he therefore selects to describe one god *in terms of* another. This, however, is a many-sided and difficult problem which has to be investigated separately. For the time being, it may suffice to refer to the critical remarks of H.-P. Schmidt (1979 p. 275-283), evoked by B. L. Ogibenin's book 'Structure d'un mythe vedique', which refute a simple, Yajurveda type *equation* of one god with another.

Already the oldest Indian text, the Ṛgveda thus seems to contain some traces of the magical thought exclusively met with in the Yajurveda prose and in the extant Brāhmaṇas, and this sometimes also offers the possibility to trace back certain Yajurveda equations to a period several hundred years prior to the composition of the Yajurveda itself. One should be careful, however, not to confuse this testimony with the *origin* of such equations: they may date back much further, as occasional evidence from the closely related Iranian material indicates, (e.g. the identification of offering fire and sun). Nevertheless, a thorough comparison of Ṛgvedic and Yajurveda material would help to distinguish such older equations as 'Pūṣan is cattle' from younger ones, as exemplified by the myth about the origin of the horse met with in the Yajurveda. This would also be an aid in tracing the < 20 > development of Vedic thought from *single* equations like 'the eye is/ becomes the sun', which only occasionally are juxtaposed to similar ones, to the *sets* of identifications, well-known from the later Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads on one hand, and the threefold explanations (with identifications of entities found in macrocosm, microcosm and ritual) on the other. Furthermore, a thorough inventory of equations would also enable us to gain at least some part of the encyclopedic knowledge of a Vedic priest. This would allow us to argue from *inside* the Vedic system of thought (cf. Polanyi, 1975), when trying to *explain* the texts, - a task which has, as it may be apparent by now, not really begun even today, when the Brāhmaṇa type texts - one of the oldest examples of Indo-European prose - generally are still regarded as incomprehensible and boring by the very scholars who study them.

This is even more deplorable as these texts play - as it is known - an important role in the development of Indian thought and indigenous sciences. Not only do they lead to the philosophy of Buddhism and of the Upaniṣads, and thus even to the present day Advaita concepts of a large section of the people, but they also are the fountainhead of sciences like Mīmāṃsā, mathematics, phonetics, astronomy, (cf. Schayer 1925, p. 13; Keith 1925, p. 381, ann. 8).

Lastly, these texts contain an enormous wealth of material - running over thousands of pages - of magical thought, which is presented both by its practical aspects (ritual procedure, formulas used, customs connected with this), as well as an elaborate 'native commentary'. This

vast mass of indigenous and contemporary explanations is now accessible in various editions, translations and thorough indexes so that one can pinpoint certain motifs or developments with a very high degree of accuracy and completeness.

The Vedic prose texts therefore are of value not only to specialists but should again also attract the attention of other branches of the humanities interested in magic, because of their unique nature as a collection of early magical thought which allows the study and discovery of its patterns and the following of its development over a period of several hundred years, on a scale probably unprecedented in other cultures by similar bodies of texts.

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