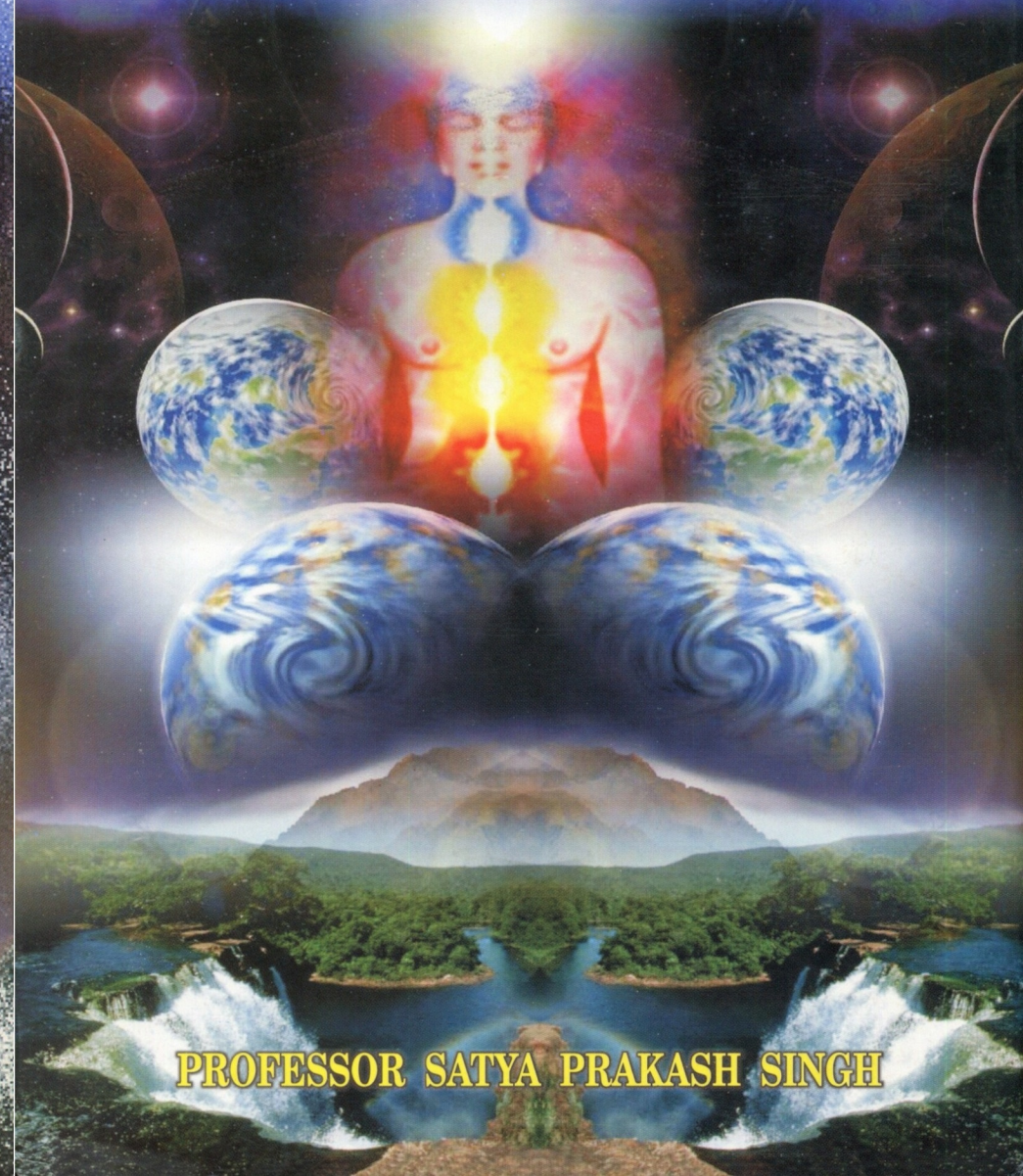


LIFE AND VISION OF VEDIC SEERS

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# VIŚVĀMITRA



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PROFESSOR SATYA PRAKASH SINGH



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Life and Vision of Vedic Seers is a series aiming at reconstructing lives and thought contents of prominent Vedic seers so that they may emerge out in their individual capacities as great contributors to the history of human vision, ideation and understanding. The Series is intended to cover as many seers as possible. This is the first volume of the Series dealing with the life and attainments of Viśvāmitra, the seer of the sacred Gāyatrī mantra. It retraces penetratively the contours of *sādhanā* proceeding along which the great seer could get the vision of the Gāyatrī and predict prophetically enough the unparalleled longevity of the Indian culture and ethos under its aegis: *Viśvāmitrasya rakṣati brahmedam bhāratam janam.*



LIFE AND VISION OF VEDIC SEERS

1

VIŚVĀMITRA

PROFESSOR SATYA PRAKASH SINGH

Senior Fellow and  
In-charge, Vedic Research Centre, New Delhi

Formerly  
Professor of Sanskrit and  
Dean, Faculty of Arts, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh



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E-mail: sr\_allbooks@vsnl.net

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## PREFACE

*Life and Vision of the Vedic Seer* is the result of a line of research built up after decades of study and thinking. It departs from the prevailing trend of research in the area in a twofold manner. In the first place, instead of taking all the seers together and making generalisations on their views, here it is proposed to take up each seer separately and try to make assessment of his views on whatever he has happened to express himself. This method obviously will make each Vedic seer stand on his own legs and speak for himself as is the case with the subsequent thinkers and authors. Scholars have been dissuaded from following this line of research under the impression either that the entire Veda, being a revelation of the Divine, speaks cumulatively in one voice, as has been the case with the traditional scholarship, or that it is a product of the priestly class engaged in a stereotyped act of performing sacrifices, as is the case with the modern scholarship initiated by Occidental Orientalists. Contrary to both these presuppositions, actual readings of the Veda show how each seer is a distinct personality having his own course of life, method of *sādhanā*, mode of thinking and objects of aspiration as well as idiom of expression emerging from the surprising uniformity in all these respects. In view of this self-evident fact, ignoring the individuality of the seer becomes unjustified under any presupposition



whatever. Working out the individuality of the seer and reconstructing his ideas on that line, have the possibility of making a large number of thinkers come down to us afresh and enrich immensely the history of human ideation and thinking. If the Western scholarship through its perseverance could make rise out of ashes of Greek history an enviable team of thinkers, the India scholarship can do the same on a much larger scale by just scrutinising statements of Vedic seers belonging to a period millennia before the Greeks themselves and forming vital roots of a living tradition so much vibrant even today. Our entire tradition directly or indirectly flows out of the Vedic seers, and yet we pay scant heed to the individualities and individual contributions to the stock of human ideation and wisdom from that hoary past. Perusal of lives of Vedic seers individually will not only add to the clarity of the sum total of the Vedic thought but will also and more significantly create the rare opportunity of understanding the epistemology of that thought.

The second point of departure taken up in this work from the usual one is making it thought-oriented rather than letting it go exclusively to the exploration of barely physical facts. The main trend followed so far in the exploration of the Veda in the modern times has been to abstract historical, cultural, sociological, geographical and kindred kinds of data from it and leave the rest as something inconsequential. The result has been that the Veda has come to be treated as a source only of this kind of data and as such having nothing else to teach except a set of blind beliefs. This obviously is a tragic reversal of priorities where the means of expression has come to occupy the central place relegating the idea expressed to the background. Setting right this order of priorities, attempt has been made here to recover the

basic thought content of the seer and rearrange it in as systematic a form as possible. If the earlier scholarship has tried to reconstruct the circumstances of the seer, here attempt has been made to reconstruct his thought content itself, without ignoring, however, the circumstances he lived in.

In reconstructing the life-history of the seer, every care has been taken to draw material directly from the Vedic mantras themselves, particularly from those seen by the seer concerned. For further elucidation, however, the subsequent sources, such as the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, etc. have also been drawn upon wherever found relevant. As a result of the application of this method, the seer concerned has no more remained a mysterious being but comes before us with all the practical feasibility of his life-history. The mode of *sādhana* undertaken by him, as revealed in the mantras concerned, gives inkling into the psychology underlying the visions he has come across.

In reconstructing the thought-content also utmost care has been taken to make the seer understandable in his own way without superimposing on him anything from the later date. By way of comparison, however, ideas from the subsequent literature have also been adduced wherever necessary. This has been done to show the antiquity of the idea concerned as well as the constancy of the human psychology particularly in the dimension of depth. From this viewpoint, the last chapter of the work is particularly interesting, inasmuch as it bears out the coincidence of the seer's vision with modern cosmological ideas in certain respects. The coincidence discovered here calls upon scholars to review the Veda afresh from the perspective much larger than what has been used until now in modern times.



The study, thus, opens a new vista to reappraisal of the Indian thought from all aspects of life and its workings, be it religious, philosophical, psychological, sociological, cultural, historical and even scientific. In view of the Veda having been considered traditionally as the fountainhead of Indian culture in all respects, with all its liveliness even until now, novel ideas lying unnoticed so far and yet likely to be useful for the future adjustment as well as development can be resurrected from it and may be used in the service of the humanity.

This volume on *Viśvāmitra* is just a groundwork and a specimen showing the possibility of fruitful application of this method of study in regard to many other seers including, *Aṅgiras*, *Dadhyañ*, *Dīrghatamas*, *Vāmadeva*, *Atri*, *Bharadvāja*, *Vasiṣṭha*, *Gṛtsamada*, *Kavaṣa Ailūṣa*, *Kaṇva*, *Sunaḥśepa*, etc. Such a study on each Vedic seer separately is sure to create the groundwork for finding out eventually the common denominator of the Vedic thought emerging from the thoroughly scrutinised visions and ideas of these seers. Only that generalisation can be valid which takes proper note of all particularities.

With this end in view, it is proposed herewith to work out the lives and visions of as many seers as possible so as to place the Vedic seers individually as well as collectively in the rank and file of great thinkers of the world who have brought dignity to mankind by directing their mode of behaviour from untold ages.

I shall remain deeply indebted to all those great souls and minds who have helped me anyway in the nurture of this determination. Out of a whole lot of distinguished personalities that come to my mind at this juncture, outstanding are Swami Krishnananda of Rishikesh,

Baba Sripāda of Vrindavan and Professor Kireet Joshi of Delhi.

I am grateful to Shri Mukesh of the Auroville Foundation for the entire design of the present volume including the cover page and the graphics printed in it. Indeed, but for his encouragement and perseverance this volume could not have come so expeditiously and in no case so beautifully. My thanks are due also to Smt. Nisha Saxena for typing out the entire work so neatly.

Last but not the least indebted I am to M/s Standard Publishers (India), particularly to its most enterprising Proprietor, Shri Mohindra K. Vasiṣṭha for undertaking to publish this volume in the present beautiful form.

Darshan Bhawan  
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1.11.2002

Satya Prakash Singh





## Life of Viśvāmitra



### I. Eminence

*Viśvāmitra* is one of the most celebrated seers of the Ṛgveda. He is the seer of the third Mandala of the Samhitā and therefore comes next only to Gr̥tsamada as an author of the Family Books. This fact bears out his antiquity amongst the Vedic seers. The antiquity apart, he is also the seer of the famous *Gāyatrī* mantra which is regarded as *the most sacred amongst* Vedic mantras and serves as the most effective means in spiritual sādhanā even today. Viśvāmitra's name recurs also in the post-Vedic literature as one of the most dynamic personages practising most arduous penance on the one hand and getting involved in the love affair with a heavenly nymph on the other with the consequence of laying the foundation of the dynasty of Bharatas who have given India her celebrated name Bhārata. His name occurs also in the Rāmāyaṇa as the teacher of Rāma in armistice as also the chief motivating force behind latter's confrontation with the Rākshasas resulting in their annihilation. He figures also in the story of Śunah Śepa as not only the latter's rescuer from the clutches of death but also as one who gave him shelter and prestige and led to his recognition as one of the important seers of the Vedic age. He is also said to have had a prolonged rivalry with another important Vedic seer, namely, Vasiṣṭha and to have represented the aspiration of the



royalty to attain to the position of the man of wisdom, that is Brahman. All these spiritual, political, social and historical involvements and dynamism of Viśvāmitra make him not only one of the most fascinating seers of the Vedic age but also the most controversial and challenging to understand.

## II. Viśvāmitra as figuring in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa

Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa gives the most detailed account of Viśvāmitra. These details are revealed by Viśvāmitra himself on being inquired by Rāma while proceeding towards Mithilā. While familiarising Rāma with the terrain beginning from the bank of the river Śoṇa, the seer, by way of telling him incidentally of his own association with it, delves deeper into his pedigree narrating to the young prince all about himself. As revealed in his narration, his dynasty started with King Kuśa who was succeeded by his son Kuśanābha. Gādhi was the son of Kuśanābha and father of Viśvāmitra. He ruled over a well-established empire reportedly for several thousand years. Once he went on an expedition along with his forces and reached the hermitage of the noted seer Vasiṣṭha. The latter had great admiration for Viśvāmitra as king and offered to entertain him and his forces by all means he had at his disposal. Being consented by the king he provided them with all sorts of food as also shelter each one of them desired. This unexpected provision in the wilderness could be possible through the miraculous power of his cow, Kāmadhenu.

The nemesis, however, started with the miracle itself. The king felt greedy of the cow and offered to get her in exchange for one hundred thousand cows of his own. But the seer declined to part with her at any cost. Coming to this end, the king tried to snatch her away by

force. Consequently a fierce fighting ensued between the two sides. On the one side there was a large force commanded by the king and on the other emerged unexpectedly a mighty force emitted by the cow<sup>1</sup>. They, however, were repulsed by Viśvāmitra. Then the Kāmadhenu gave rise to additional forces which killed the soldiers of Viśvāmitra. In retaliation came forward sons of Viśvāmitra, hundred in number. But they were reduced<sup>1</sup> to ashes by the anger of Vasiṣṭha.

Death of his sons in such a large number proved too depressing for Viśvāmitra to keep himself sustained in his rulership. As a consequence, he entrusted the reigns of the empire to one of his remaining sons and retired to the Himalayas for practicing *tapas* and getting a boon from Lord Śiva. After some time Śiva got pleased with him and imparted to him skill in archery, *dhanurveda*. With this skill bestowed upon him by Śiva, he came to the heritage of Vasiṣṭha and caused heavy damage to it. Subsequently Vasiṣṭha retaliated against him by means of his *brahma-danda*. As a result of it, the royal power had to give way to the power of sacred knowledge exercised by Vasiṣṭha. This defeat, however, awakened Viśvāmitra to the efficacy of the power of sacred knowledge and motivated him to acquire it through *tapas*.<sup>2</sup>

With this determination Viśvāmitra proceeded towards the south and practised severe *tapas* for one thousand years to please Prajāpati. At the end of this course of

1 Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (Gorakhpur Edn.) I. 54. 20-23

2 धिग्वलं क्षत्रियवलं ब्रह्मतेजोवलं ।  
एकेन ब्रह्मदण्डेन सर्वास्त्राणि हतानि मे । ।  
तदेतत्प्रसमीक्ष्याहं प्रसन्नेन्द्रियमानसः ।  
तपो मतह समास्थायसे यद्वै ब्रह्मत्वकारणम् । Ibid., I.56.23-24



*tapas*, he came to be recognised by the latter as Rājarṣi, royal seer. It was during this period that Triśanku, a king of the Ikṣvāku dynasty cherishing the desire for elevation to the heaven physically through performance of sacrifice was foiled in this venture by Vasiṣṭha. Under this distressing condition he approached Viśvāmitra for redemption as well as fulfilment of his desire for bodily elevation to the heaven.

Viśvāmitra came to the help of Triśanku. He not only conducted the performance of a sacrifice to this end but also made use of his own *tapas* in favour of Triśanku. The latter was consequently sent aloft to the heaven bodily in full view of sacrificers. He, however, was hurled down to the ground by Indra subsequently out of jealousy or perhaps due to irregularity of his act under the cosmic scheme of things. In retaliation to this act of Indra's, Viśvāmitra started to create an altogether different world with a new set of planets, stars, gods and their respective regions wherein he intended to allot a respectable place to Triśanku. Coming to know of it, Indra got frightened and proposed a compromise to make Triśanku stay in a position intermediate to the heaven and the earth.<sup>3</sup>

All this success notwithstanding, however, Viśvāmitra did not feel satisfied with his achievements in the south. He proceeded, therefore, to the west, particularly to Puṣkara for a further course of *tapas*. Accordingly, he practised severe *tapas* here also living only on fruits and roots of plants. In course of time, an important incident took place here also. Ambariṣa, the then king of Ayodhyā was making preparations for the performance of a certain animal sacrifice. In the meanwhile his

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* I. 60

sacrificial animal was taken away stealthily by Indra. On this, he was advised by his priest either to bring back the same animal or to procure a human being to substitute the lost sacrificial animal, failing which he could come to doom. Unable to get any clue to restoration of the lost animal, he went out in search of a human being as directed by the priest. In this way he reached eventually the mountain Bhṛgutunga where sage Ṛcika was living with his wife and sons. He requested the sage to sell out one of his sons for the sacrificial purpose at the cost of one hundred cows. Sage Ṛcika declined to part with his eldest son while his wife Satyavatī did the same with regard to her youngest son. Listening to the words of his parents, Śunah Śepa, the middle one amongst their sons offered himself to the king for his desired use. While proceeding homeward along with Śunah Śepa, the king came to Puṣkara and rested himself there. During the time of his rest, Śunah Śepa happened to meet Viśvāmitra practicing *tapas* in the company of certain other sages. He recognised his maternal uncle in Viśvāmitra and requested him to do something for his acquittal as well for fulfilment of the king's desire *vis-à-vis* attainment of the heaven.

Feeling pity on his sister's son, Viśvāmitra desired anyone of his own sons to come forward and offer himself to serve as a substitute for Śunah Śepa. Seeing none of them coming forward, he cursed them all to be re-born amongst the people who live on dog's meat. Turning to Śunah Śepa he imparted to him a couple of mantras and asked him to recite the same while lying tied to the sacrificial post dedicated to Viṣṇu. Śunah Śepa did accordingly at the time of the sacrifice. Indra



got pleased with him and granted not only long life to him but also heaven to the king.<sup>4</sup>

Viśvāmitra, however, continued his *tapas* at Puṣkara for one thousand years. Being pleased with his *tapas*, Brahmā accorded him the status of Ṛsi, seer. But Viśvāmitra did not feel satisfied with this much. He kept his *tapas* continued with the same keenness. It was at his juncture that, under the divine dispensation, Menakā, the most beautiful damsel of the heaven came down to Puṣkara in the presence of Viśvāmitra. The latter got infatuated with her and spent ten years under the spell of her beauty and love. Only at the end of this period it dawned upon him how he was entrapped in the lust. This realisation changed his attitude towards Menakā to her utter horror. Viśvāmitra, however, left the place quietly.

This time he went to the north in the Himalayas at the bank of river Kauṣikī and spent another thousand years practicing severest possible *tapas*. Growing in awareness of his spiritual attainments, gods became afraid of him and entreated Brahma, the Creator to redeem them of their fear from him. Brahmā contacted Viśvāmitra and addressed him as *Mahaṛṣi*. Considering this denomination also as inadequate, Viśvāmitra proposed that he would regard himself as in full control over his senses if he was addressed as *Brahmaṛṣi* by the Deity. Brahmā, however, did not oblige him on this point and instead advised him to put in still more efforts towards spiritual upliftment. Following his advice, the seer began to practise *tapas* still more vigorously by standing with both hands raised upward, observing the *pañcāgni vrata* during summer, getting constantly drenched during the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 62

rainy season and standing all the time in cold water during the winter. He elapsed another thousand years practicing *tapas* in this manner until at last Indra became afraid of him and asked another heavenly damsel Rambhā to approach and distract him by her charm.<sup>5</sup>

Undertaking this mission rather hesitatingly Rambhā approached the seer along with Vasanta and Kāmadeva as her helpers. Being helped by these two agents of love, when she cast her spell on the seer, the latter grew conscious of the evil intentions of Indra behind the entire device and getting enraged he pronounced the curse on Rambhā to the effect that she would remain fossilised for ten thousand years. Along with this dreadful pronouncement, however, he came to feel draining out of the power of his *tapas*. Repenting the loss, he resolved this time not to fall in anger anymore and instead established full control over himself, no matter, if he was required for this to go without breathing for hundreds of years.<sup>6</sup>

With this resolve he proceeded to the east and completed again a course of *tapas* for another thousand years. During this period also agents of lust and anger tried to dissuade him from his path but without success. At last when he proposed to break his fast by taking food, Indra came to him under the disguise of a Brahmin and asked for the food the seer was going to take. Viśvāmitra gave the whole of it to the Brahmin and continued the observance of his austerity without any malice in his mind. This time he stopped breathing also for one thousand years. Complete stoppage of breathing

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 63

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 64



generated so much heat in his head that smoke surged out of it. This development caused anxiety in the mind of gods who approached Prajāpati and requested him to find the way out for pacification of the seer. They were afraid that if he was not granted whatever he desired, he was likely to destroy the entire world. Out of this concern, they, along with Prajāpati, came to the seer and accorded him the status of Brahmaṇya, Brahminhood. Prajāpati granted to him also long life.<sup>7</sup> Fully satisfied with these achievements Viśvāmitra further requested Prajāpati to bless him also with the wisdom of Omkāra, Vaṣatkāra and the Vedas and ask Vasiṣṭha to recognise his Brahmihood. In response, Prajāpati made Omkāra etc. flow to him. Under the instigation of Prajāpati, Vasiṣṭha also accorded his recognition to him.

### III. Viśvāmitra in the Mahābhārata

To this account of Viśvāmitra's life as given in the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata does not add anything very significant. It does only elaborate further on two points. One of them relates to the birth of Śakuntalā which has not been referred to in the Rāmāyaṇa at all beyond Viśvāmitra's infatuation with Menakā. Another point elaborated upon in the Mahābhārata is Viśvāmitra's eating the entrails of a dog stealthily in the house of a Cāṇḍāla as a last resort to life under compulsions of a severe draught continuing for twelve years. Needless to point out that this story is an elaboration on Viśvāmitra's life as a *tapasvin*. The clues to the

7 ब्रह्मर्षे स्वागतं ते ऽस्तु तपसा स्म सुतोषिताः ।  
ब्राह्मण्यं तपसोग्रेण प्राप्तवानसि कौशिक ॥  
दीर्यमायुश्च ते ब्रह्मन् ददामि समरुद्रगणः ।  
स्वस्ति प्राप्नुहि भद्र ते गच्छ सौम्य यथासुखम् ॥ *Ibid.*, I. 65, 19-20

elaboration are provided by the Rāmāyaṇa's anecdote of Śunah Śepa in which Viśvāmitra cursed his sons to eat the entrails of a dog in the house of a Cāṇḍāla as they, instead of obeying him in regard to substitution for Śunah Śepa, ridiculed him by commenting on his suggestion as amounting to mixing dog's meat with food.<sup>8</sup> In any case, it too bears out the severity of Viśvāmitra's *tapas* aiming at attainment of Brahminhood along with the corollary of knowledge of the Veda.

### IV. Symbolism of Struggle and Tapas

Thus, according to the Rāmāyaṇa, as elaborated upon by the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, Viśvāmitra is an ascetic *par excellence* who, though a warrior, attained to Brahminhood by means of *tapas*. As is obvious from the account, while *tapas* was used by him as a means of attaining to Brahminhood, gods and Vasiṣṭha worked as his detractors and challengers respectively in this venture. Looking apparently as adversaries, both of them really served as agents of his transformation from a warrior to seerhood. The proud warrior got disenchanted with his prowess and plenty when he came into contact with Vasiṣṭha and his divine cow. The cow is, indeed, the Vedic Wisdom represented symbolically as a cow. By virtue of her melodious voice, four-footedness, beauty of form, capacity of procreating the mighty calf and yielding sweet milk, cow came to be used universally in the Veda as the most appropriate symbol of speech with all its beauty and utility of sound and expression, four stages of manifestation and organically evolving capability. Several of these ideas associated with speech are involved in the

8 कथमात्मसुतान् हित्वा त्रायसे ऽन्यसुतं विभो ।  
अकार्यमिव पश्यामः श्वमांसमिव भोजने ॥ *Ibid.*, I. 62.14



representation of it as a cow in one of the mantras seen by Dirghatamas which recounts how speech as cow has produced the melodious voice while wading through waters by one step, two steps, four steps, eight steps, nine steps culminating in the thousand-syllabled form.<sup>9</sup> The same seer observes a little later how the steps measured by *vāk* as cow are indeed four as understood by the highly thoughtful Brahmins, three of them lying concealed in a cave while the fourth step being used by mankind.<sup>10</sup>

It is against this background of symbolic expression that the sacred Vedic speech came to be represented subsequently as *Kāmadhenu*, the divine cow, born out of churning of the ocean by gods and demons, as the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas recount it so graphically. In course of the churning, while the rest of the thirteen gems were appropriated by other agencies, the divine cow was given to the Vedic seer Vasiṣṭha obviously in view of his pre-eminence amongst the seers.

It is understandably this cow of the Vedic lore which, on account of her extraordinary usefulness, attracted the attention of Viśvāmitra, the mighty king. He tried to have it in exchange for one hundred thousand cows and subsequently by force considering her as an earthly possession. But that was not to happen since, instead of being an earthly possession, she was really spiritual in character. In order to have her as his own, he, therefore, was required to purify, refine and develop his psychic

<sup>9</sup> गौरीर्भिर्माय सलिलानि तक्षत्येकपदी द्विपदी सा चतुष्पदी ।  
अष्टापदी नवपदी बभ्रुवर्षा सहस्राक्षरा परमे व्योमन् ॥ *Rgveda* I. 164.41

<sup>10</sup> चत्वारि वाक्परिमिता प्रदानि तानि विदुर्बाह्मणा ये मनीषिणः ।  
गुहा त्रीणि निहिता नेङ्गयन्ति तुरीयं वाचो मनुष्या वदन्ति ॥ *Ibid.*, I. 164.45

being. *Tapas* happened to be used as an appropriate means to this end, since, as the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka recounts it, it was after the seers had practised great *tapas* that the eternal Veda had dawned upon them.<sup>11</sup> What was obtained by nothing less than *tapas* initially, was sure to need *tapas* subsequently also for its acquisition.

### V. Probable Explanation of the Duration of Tapas

But in the case of Viśvāmitra, the quantum of *tapas* he performed for entry into the Vedic lore cannot be said to be anyway less than what any other seer might have put in. As mentioned above, he practised *tapas* for some four thousand years in the four directions beginning from the south and ending with the east. Besides the usually long duration of *tapas* he was required to put in before the Vedic knowledge could dawn upon him, he had to meet extraordinary resistance from various forces intending to cause distraction to him as well as to test his nerves. When he sought to purchase the cow by means of one hundred thousand cows representing perhaps all that he could draw out for the most precious purchase, he was flatly refused. When he tried to take her away by force, he got thrashed mercilessly. When he tried to take revenge on Vasiṣṭha, the owner of the cow, he got frustrated. When he resolved to attain to Brahminhood over and above his Kṣatriyahood, he was sought to be distracted though Menakā, the embodiment of lust and through his fall in lust he came to learn how not to fall in lust anymore. When he cursed Rambhā approaching him with the same lustful posture, as did Menakā display earlier, he, though not falling in the trap of lust, became victim to anger. This incident taught him

<sup>11</sup> तद्यदेनांस्तपस्यमानान् ब्रह्मस्वयभ्वभ्यानर्षत् तदृषीणामृषित्वमिति । *Tait. Ar.* II.9



how not to be entrapped by anger too. All such trials and tribulations, thus, led him to his complete self-purification. In sum, getting completely rid of lust, anger and pride, he ultimately found out his pure self. It is, indeed, the discovery of the real self through self-purification which was the basic purpose behind his undertaking of *tapas*. This process of self-purification cost him *tapas* for four thousand years practised in the four directions, as the text recounts it. The four directions stand for the wholeness of his being. It was only after he had practised *tapas* in all the four directions that he could come to complete the process of self-purification and reach the state of self-realisation.

The period of four thousand years stipulated for Viśvāmitra's *tapas* is obviously long. It is incredible for one and the same person to have even lived so long, much less to have devoted himself to *tapas*. But what is no less puzzling is that he is said to have ruled over his empire for exactly the same period of four thousand years prior to proceeding for *tapas*. As regards his living for an unusually long period of time after getting perfection through *tapas*, that may be understandable, to some extent, since *tapas* is supposed to have such an effect on the body of one who undertakes it in right earnest. In this connection it is worth noting that when Viśvāmitra attained to perfection through *tapas*, Prajāpati himself blessed him with long life.<sup>12</sup> But living for eight thousand years and plus before attaining to perfection seems obviously an exaggeration. In view of the usual duration of the human life, the period of four thousand years mentioned for ruling over the empire as well as the same devoted to *tapas* may be equivalent to

<sup>12</sup> दीर्घायुश्च ते ब्रह्मन् वदामि समरुद्रगणः ।  
स्वस्ति प्राप्नुहि भद्रं ते गच्छ सौम्य यथासुखम् ॥ *Rāmāyaṇa* I. 65.20.

forty years. A certain amount of support to this surmise accrues out of an account in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself and moreover in the same context. It relates to the period Viśvāmitra passed enjoying life with Menakā. This is said to have lasted for ten years.<sup>13</sup> Here the poet seems to have become realistic in his expression. In this context, the equality of the period of rulership and *tapas* has a certain clue to offer. Viśvāmitra's requiring exactly the same period of four thousand years for *tapas* as he had already passed as a ruler, has the obvious suggestion that one requires normally the same period of time for getting rid of a certain psychic impression or *samskāra* as he takes for its acquisition. By applying the same formula of equivalence, we can suppose that if Viśvāmitra lived for ten years in the company of Menakā at Puṣkara, he would have required almost the same number of years of *tapas* for getting rid of the impression of her company. If so, he would normally have taken just a period of ten years in his practice of *tapas* in the north after leaving Puṣkara.

Thus, allowing the usual period of twenty five years for coming to the age of ascending the throne, Viśvāmitra may be supposed to have relinquished the rulership at the age of sixty five and to have attained perfection or seerhood at the ripe age of hundred and five.

#### VI. Identity of the Vedic and Post-Vedic Viśvāmitras

But the moot question relates to the identity of this Viśvāmitra stalking so colossally in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Is he the same Viśvāmitra as the Ṛgvedic seer or is he an altogether different personage? If he is taken as identical

<sup>13</sup> तस्यां वसन्त्यां वर्षाणि पञ्च च राघव ।  
विश्वामित्राश्रमे सौम्ये सुखेन व्यतिचक्रमुः ॥ *Ibid.*, I. 63.9.



to the Vedic seer, the question arises as to how to account for the aeonic gap of time between the Vedas and the Rāmāyaṇa. In view of this difficulty, it has been suggested that Viśvāmitra of the Rāmāyaṇa was probably a descendant of the Vedic Viśvāmitra rather than the original one himself. This suggestion gets support from the mention of the word Viśvāmitra in plural in the Saṁhitā itself.<sup>14</sup> This support, however, is by no means unequivocal in view of the possibility of use of the plural here in the honorific sense as has been usual in Sanskrit and as also Sāyaṇa accordingly has assigned it alternatively such a sense while explaining the relevant mantras.<sup>15</sup>

In this state of indecisiveness, what is of particular interest is the sameness of the basic roles played by Viśvāmitra throughout the ages with marginal variations in the names of persons and places related with his life and activities. An important incident associated with Viśvāmitra is the role played by him in saving the life of Śunaḥ Śepa. This story occurs most elaborately in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. According to the Brāhmaṇa, when Śunaḥ Śepa gets redeemed of the bondage, he takes resort in the lap of Viśvāmitra. When Ajīgarta Sauyavasi wanted to take Śunaḥ Śepa back to his fold, Viśvāmitra said that as Śunaḥ Śepa was given to him by gods, he would not part with him. When Ajīgarta tried to persuade him to come back to his side by himself, Śunaḥ Śepa refused to oblige him since he had been so cruel to the son as to have sold him out, tied him to the sacrificial post and agreed to kill him just for a fee of

14 उच्छोचिषा सहसस्युत्र स्तुतो बृहद्वयः शशमानेषु धेहि ।  
रेवदग्ने विश्वामित्रेषु शं योर्मृज्मा ते तन्वं इ भूरि कृत्वः ॥ RV. III. 18.4

15 विश्वामित्रेषु विश्वामित्रगोत्रोत्पन्नेषु । विश्वं मित्रमस्येति विश्वामित्र एकः ।  
एकस्मिन् बहुवचनं पूजार्थम् । Sāyaṇa on RV. III. 18. 4

three hundred cows. Viśvāmitra, on the other hand, was so kind to him as to have offered to place him at the top of all his hundred and one sons and on the first fifty ones declining to forfeit their seniority in favour of Śunaḥ Śepa, he threw them out to such far flung parts of his empire as Āndhra, Puṇḍra, Śabara, Pulinda and Mutiba and condemned their progeny to take to the path of wickedness.<sup>16</sup> The Rāmāyaṇa version of the story is basically the same with the variation that the name of Śunaḥ Śepa's father is given as Ṛcika, who is said to have been the husband of Viśvāmitra's sister Satyavati. Another difference lies in the name of the king who had acquired Śunaḥ Śepa for his sacrifice. In the Brāhmaṇa, he is mentioned as Hariścandra while in the Rāmāyaṇa he is named as Ambariṣa. Both of them, however are associated with Ayodhyā. Ambariṣa is mentioned directly as *Ayodhyāpati*, king of Ayodhyā, while Hariścandra is described as *Aikṣvākava*. In both the versions of the story Viśvāmitra curses his sons to fall back to lowly positions as they refused to obey him in regard to Śunaḥ Śepa's seniority amongst his sons. These details unmistakably bear out the oneness of Viśvāmitra as figuring in both the stories, which, as a matter of fact, look to be two redactions of one and the same story with the interpolation of minor differences in details.

As regards the Ṛgvedic position *vis-à-vis* this story, it is obvious that the Brahmanic version should essentially be based on particular references to the story in the mantras seen by Śunaḥ Śepa. In the Saṁhitā there is no doubt about it that somehow or other Śunaḥ Śepa finds himself subject to hatred and anger of Varuṇa and

16 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa XXXII.5



hence, is prone to be killed by him.<sup>17</sup> He feels as if his life was in danger of being cut short,<sup>18</sup> as also he was under the spell of Nirṛti, the goddess of death, as probably he had committed some sinful act.<sup>19</sup> Śunah Śepa, however, narrates all these experiences not on his own but on behalf of a whole class of people or indeed the whole of the humanity, as is evident from his use of the plural even in this state of utmost danger to his life. Moreover, while beseeching the Deity to get him redeemed of the horrible state of things, he, though expressly intending to go back to his parents, mentions neither Ajigarta and his wife, much less Ṛcika and Satyavati, nor Viśvāmitra but, as distinct from all these, Aditi,<sup>20</sup> the boundless and ultimate resort of creation and combining in her both the fatherhood and motherhood of the latter.<sup>21</sup> There is no mention of Viśvāmitra here in any capacity. Thus, it seems, the association of Viśvāmitra with the story of Śunah Śepa is a Brahmanic innovation.

The Brahmana, however, does not provide us with any clue as to how Viśvāmitra reached the court of King Hariścandra on so crucial an occasion in the life of Śunah Śepa. It is understandably for filling up this gap in the story that the Rāmāyaṇa invents the close relationship of Viśvāmitra with Śunah Śepa as the latter's maternal uncle. However, deeply engrossed in *tapas*, Viśvāmitra, as the maternal uncle of the victim of the sacrifice, manages to reach the spot where his

17 मा नो वृथाय हल्वे जिहीडानस्य रीरधः । मा हृणानस्य मन्यवे ॥ RV.I. 25.2

18 अहेळमानो वरुणेह बोध्युरुशंसु मा न आयुः प्र मौषीः । Ibid. I-24.11.

19 वाधस्व दूरे निवृत्तिं पराचैः । कृतं चिदेनः प्र मुमुग्ध्यस्मत् । Ibid. I-24.7.

20 को नो मद्वा अर्दितये पुनर्दात् पितरं च दृश्ये मातरं च ॥ Ibid. I. 24.1.

21 अर्दितिरद्यौरर्दितरन्तरिक्षमर्दितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः ॥ Ibid., I. 89.10.

nephew's life was staked particularly by his father himself. With the establishment of this relationship, it becomes quite natural for Śunah Śepa to take resort to the lap of his maternal uncle particularly when alienated from his mother as well as father.

As regards the third Mandala of the Samhitā comprising mantras seen pre-eminently by Viśvāmitra, there are several references and expressions in it bearing out almost the same pattern of the seer's life as is detailed in the Rāmāyaṇa. As referred to above, the earliest phase of Viśvāmitra's life, according to the Rāmāyaṇa, concerns his acting as a ruler fighting wars, leading military expeditions and trying to take away by force the prestigious cow of Vasiṣṭha. In the Samhitā also there is a mantra seen by Viśvāmitra in which he prays to the sacrificial posts to protect him, as also his associates in the war of sacrifice like the horns protecting the horned animals.<sup>22</sup> Obviously the proper context of this mantra is the sacrifice in which a number of posts have been erected and are being addressed through mantras of praise. In them is seen by the seer the image of long and sharp horns of probably bulls proving protective of the warrior when yoked to his chariot. Occurrence of this imagery to the mind of the seer in the context of sacrifice bears out his close association with war, no matter earlier in life. In another mantra, he describes his forefathers as having devoted themselves to fighting for the cause of cows. In this holy war for cows Indra acts as their supporter by opening the cow-dens.<sup>23</sup> In his

22 शृङ्गाणीवेच्छृङ्गाणां सं ददृशे चपालवन्तः स्वरवः पृथिव्याम् ॥  
वाघदर्भिर्वा विह्वे श्रोपमाणा अस्मां अं वन्तु पृतनाज्येषु ॥ Ibid., III. 8.10

23 नकिरेषां निन्दिता मर्त्येषु ये अस्माकं पितरो गोषु योधाः ॥  
इन्द्रं एषां दृहिता माहिनावानुदगोत्राणि ससृजे दंसनावान् ॥ Ibid., III. 39.4



dialogue with the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī, Viśvāmitra discloses how he was leading the military expedition in the company of bullock-carts and chariots while in search of cows.<sup>24</sup> These details are sufficient to bear out Viśvāmitra's association with war at an earlier stage in his life. That protection of the common man, attainment of kingship, seerhood and highest beatitude were parts of Viśvāmitra's life is evident from another mantra in which the seer prays to Indra craving for his indulgence to make him possibly the protector, king and seer so as to be in a position to take the squeezed Soma as also be capable of possessing the immortal wealth.<sup>25</sup>

### VII. Viśvāmitra as a Rigorous Tapasvin

*Tapas* is another prominent feature of Viśvāmitra's character as is made out in the Rāmāyaṇa as well as the Mahābhārata. Unable to win the divine cow with all his royal prowess, he proceeded to practice penance and persistently kept himself engaged in the practice in spite of all the distractions presented by Indra. Menakā and Rambhā were sent to him one after another with a view to distracting him from his austerity. Menakā was successful in keeping him distracted from his path for ten years and at the end of it he resumed his *tapas* elsewhere. Rambhā, however, evoked only anger in him resulting in her being cursed by him. Thus in these stories Indra seems to play a destructive role in Viśvāmitra's *tapas*.

<sup>24</sup> यद्दृग् त्वा भरताः सन्तरीयुर्गव्यन् ग्रामे इषित इन्द्रजुतः । RV. III.33.11

अतारिषुभरता गव्यवः समभक्त विप्रः सुमतिं नदीनाम् ॥ Ibid., III.33.12.

<sup>25</sup> कुविन्मा गोपां करसे जनस्य कुविद्राजानं मघवन्तृजीषिन् ।

कुविन्म ऋषिं पपिवासं सुतस्य कुविन्मे वस्वां अमृतस्य शिक्षाः ॥ Ibid., III.43.5.

But, as a matter of fact, subjecting Viśvāmitra to these distractions does not prove eventually to be destructive. The devices of distraction emerge ultimately as necessary tests for onward spiritual progress of the seer. After passing through the first phase of *tapas*, Viśvāmitra became spiritually stronger but still vulnerable to lust, as is evident from the story of Menakā. The story of Rambhā, on the other hand, shows that, though by that time he had become invulnerable to lust, he was not free of anger as yet. Thus the devices applied by Indra proved eventually to be well intended for bringing home the lesson to him that howsoever highly accomplished in *tapas* one may be, one does not deserve to be called *Brahmaṛṣi* until and unless one gets oneself completely purged of lust as well as anger. Needless to point out that lust and anger as well as fear are products of the separative state of mind. Menakā and Rambhā are embodiments of Indra's power of enchantment. Being aware of this, Indra himself is not enchanted by them, though he often makes use of them in enchanting others, including Viśvāmitra. One can, therefore, make oneself immune to the enchantments of these divine agencies if one realises one's identity with Indra, the cosmic self.

Elaborated upon so dramatically in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, this idea is made out already summarily in the Āraṇyaka particularly with reference to Viśvāmitra himself. According to the Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka, Viśvāmitra reached the blissful abode of Indra by means of his skill in wielding armaments as well as by virtue of *tapas*. Being pleased with him Indra offered him to ask for some boon. Viśvāmitra replied that he would ask for nothing except understanding about the mystery of Indra himself. Indra first tried to dissuade him from insisting on this boon, but having



tried thrice when he found the seer unflinching in his demand, he explained to him how he was the all-pervading principle in its masculinity and femininity both embodying itself in the form of god Brahman and goddess Brahmanī. When Viśvāmitra pushed his inquiry further, Indra not only confirmed the above but also made it clear to him that the seer himself could realise that he was Indra.<sup>26</sup>

The Aitareya Āraṇyaka makes the same idea still clearer by narrating how after the seer reached the abode of Indra, the latter offered to grant him any boon he desired. When the seer asked him that he would like to understand Indra himself, the latter replied that he was breath, the principle of vitality and essentially everything, including the seer himself with his breath, *prāṇa*, and that he himself as *prāṇa* assumes the form of the sun and moves around in all directions, establishing harmony in everything and owning them all as his food which is the source of his energy. Thus, he makes out how he falls in line with Viśvāmitra by generating heat.<sup>27</sup>

26 विश्वामित्रो ह वा इन्द्रस्य प्रियं धामोपजगाम शस्त्रेण व्रतचर्यया च । तं हेन्द्र उवाच विश्वामित्रं वरं वृणीष्वेति । स होवाच विश्वामित्रस्त्वामेव विजानीयामिति । द्वितीयमिति त्वामवेति तृतीयमिति त्वामेवेति । तं हेन्द्र उवाच - महांश्च महती चास्मि देवश्च देवी चास्मि ब्रह्म च ब्रह्माणी चास्मीति । तत् ह उ विश्वामित्रो विजिज्ञासामेव चके । तं हेन्द्र उवाच - तद्वा इन्द्रो व्याहृतीरूचे । ता उपाप्ता आसन् ॥ *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka I.6*

27 तम् (विश्वामित्रं) इन्द्र उवाच ऋषे प्रियं वै मे धोमोपागा वरं ते ददामीति । स होवाच तमेव जानीयामिति । तमिन्द्र उवाच प्राणो वा अहमस्मृषे प्राणास्त्वं प्राणः सर्वाणि भूतानि प्राणो ह्येष तपति स एतेन रूपेण सर्वा दिशो विष्टोऽस्मि । तस्य मे ऽन्नं मित्रं दक्षिणाम् । तद्वैश्वामित्रमेष तपनेवासीति । *Aitareya Āraṇyaka II.2.3*

## VIII. Devotion to Indra

Thus it is evident that Viśvāmitra was a great devotee of Indra. Through this devotion, he, notwithstanding all the hurdles in the path, could ultimately understand him in his essential pranic form constituting the subsistence of the universal being including the seer himself on the one hand and the sun moving in the sky on the other. It was, indeed, *via* this pranic route that he could establish his intimate relationship with Savitr, the supreme creative principle and have the vision of the spectacular mantra known as Sāvitrī in view of the Deity and Gāyatrī in view of its metre. While seeking to establish this relationship, he naturally had to practice as severe a *tapas*, as the sun himself. A number of hurdles were put in his path so as to test the viability of his venture. He, however, crossed them all successfully.

That Viśvāmitra was a devotee of Indra in particular, is evident from the fact that out of all the sixty two hymns forming the third Mandala of the Samhitā, no less than twenty three hymns have been addressed to this deity alone and that also with utmost intimacy. In one of the closing mantras addressed to Indra, the seer, making Heaven and Earth witness to it, eagerly expects that the sacred prayers he addressed to this Deity would prove protective of the people of Bhārata.<sup>28</sup> "Bhārata" at that time might have referred to only a clan of people inhabiting a part of northern India, but eventually it has come to stand for the whole of India which undoubtedly feels herself protected by the mantras seen by Viśvāmitra, the celebrated Gāyatrī mantra crowning them all.

28 य इमे रोदसी उभे अहमिन्द्रमनुष्टवम् ।  
विश्वामित्रस्य रक्षति ब्रह्मेदं भारतं जनम् ॥ *RV. III.53.12*



As regards the form in which Indra was visualised and worshipped by Viśvāmitra in the Samhitā, it is very much in consonance with what the Āraṇyaka says of the deity. In one of his mantras, the seer views Indra as assuming all and sundry forms in the world through his creative powers and reaching the earth thrice from heaven just in forty eight minutes by means of his mantras and by taking Soma in season and out of season, though acting otherwise exactly in keeping with the law of universal dynamics.<sup>29</sup>

This equation bears out the fact that it was the same Viśvāmitra who visualized Indra as the all-pervading entity in the Samhitā on the one hand and on the other is reported to have been tested by the same deity variously for his spiritual attainments in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and is also shown as being inquisitive of the essence of Indra in the Āraṇyakas. In fact, his use of śastra, armament, and vratacaryā, observance of austerity, for attaining to the abode of Indra, as is reported in the Āraṇyaka, seems to have provided the author of the Rāmāyaṇa with the clue to conceive of or at least develop the story of the seer's feud with Vasiṣṭha for taking possession of the divine cow by means of his armament and having failed in this venture, his taking to the path of tapas for attaining to Brahminhood. This Brahminhood is practically the same as is claimed by Indra for himself in the Āraṇyaka both in its feminine and masculine forms: *brahma ca brahmāṇī ca*.

<sup>29</sup> रूपं रूपं मघवा बोभवीति मायाः कृण्वानस्तन्वं १ परि स्वाम् ।

त्रिर्यद्विद्वः परि मुहूर्तमागात्स्वैर्नैरनुपा ऋतावा ।। *Ibid.*, III.53.8

## IX. The Pedigree of Viśvāmitra

The greatness of Viśvāmitra as an inspired seer has been clearly recognised in the Samhitā itself in a mantra attributed to him. In this mantra Viśvāmitra has been characterised as a great seer, born of the divine as well as inspired by the divine and to have stopped the flooded river to alleviate the misery of the people. By taking Sudāsa across, observes the mantra, he pleased Indra on behalf of the Kuśikas.<sup>30</sup> It is immaterial whether this mantra is seen by Viśvāmitra himself as is maintained by the tradition, or by anyone of his progeny, as seems likely from the mention of Viśvāmitra in it in the third person. What, however, is important is that by the time of seeing of this mantra, Viśvāmitra was recognised as a highly inspired seer having his origin in the divine. This observation in the Samhitā had led to the concoction of stories subsequently elaborating upon the divine origin of the seer. One of such stories occurs in the Sarvanukramaṇī of Katyayana. According to it, Kuśika was the son of Iṣiratha. Wishing for a son equal to Indra, he lived a life of celibacy. As a result of it, Indra himself took birth as his son named Gāthin. In course of time, Viśvāmitra was born of this Gāthin.<sup>31</sup> According to this statement, Viśvāmitra proves to be the virtual son of Indra assuming the form of Gāthin. The Rāmāyaṇa stretches the idea of the divine origin of the seer further by associating him with Prajāpati. According to it, Prajāpati gave birth to Kuśa and the latter in his turn to

<sup>30</sup> महौ ऋषिर्देवजा देवजूतोऽस्तंभनात् सिन्धुमर्णवं नृचक्षाः ।

विश्वामित्रो यदवंहत्सुदासमर्पियायत् कुशिकेभिरिन्द्रः ।। *Ibid.*, III. 53.9.

<sup>31</sup> कुशिकस्त्वैपीरथिरिन्द्रतुल्यं पुत्रमिच्छन् ब्रह्मचर्यं चचार । तस्येन्द्र एव गाथीपुत्रो जज्ञे ।  
गाथिनो विश्वामित्रः । स तृतीयं मण्डलमपश्यत् ।

*Kātyāyana, Sarvānukramaṇī*



Kuśanābha. Of Kuśanābha was born Gādhi who sired Viśvāmitra.

In the two genealogies given above there is almost insignificant difference between the names of the father of Viśvāmitra. It is Gāthin according to Sarvānukramaṇī while Gādhi according to the Rāmāyaṇa. There is, however, slight difference in the names of the father of Gāthin or Gādhi. It is Kuśika according to the Sarvānukramaṇī and Kuśanābha according to the Rāmāyaṇa. While Sarvānukramaṇī stops here having traced the divine origin of the seer, the Rāmāyaṇa shows Kuśa as the father of Kuśanābha and Prajāpati as the father of Kuśa.<sup>32</sup> In any case, both the versions are unanimous in pointing to Kuśa as the forefather of Viśvāmitra.

This is also borne out by the Samhitā. In his famous dialogue with the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī, Viśvāmitra takes pride in introducing himself to the rivers as the son of Kuśika. He asks them to stop their flow for a while as he, the son of Kuśika, has come to them with a great prayer beseeching them for the safety of himself as well as of his retinue.<sup>33</sup> As is evident from the hymn, flow of the flooded rivers was stopped by none but Viśvāmitra himself and this was done in the interest of the Bharatas. In another mantra quoted already at F.N. 30, Viśvāmitra is said to have stopped the flooded river and taken Sudāsa across it. This leads to the veritable conclusion that Sudāsa was only one of the Bharatas. In the mantra under consideration, all this is said to have been accomplished by Kuśikas which obviously stands

<sup>32</sup> Rāmāyaṇa I. 51. 18-20

<sup>33</sup> रमध्वं मे वचसे सोम्याय ऋतावरीरुपं मुहुर्तिवैः ।

प्र सिन्धुमच्छा बृहती मनीषावस्युरह्वे कुशिकस्यं सुनुः ॥ RV. III. 33.5

for the progeny of Kuśika. Thus it is evident that Viśvāmitra and the rest of his family members could as well be referred to after their father Kuśika in the plural. These Kuśikas under the leadership of Viśvāmitra seem to have performed horse-sacrifice on behalf of Sudāsa, for in one of his mantras the seer asked Kuśikas to proceed forward and kindle fire as Sudāsa had untied the horse, killed the Vrtra lying forward, backward and upward and has resolved to perform sacrifice at the highest spot of the earth.<sup>34</sup>

Viśvāmitra is regarded by the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata as an extremely fiery seer. He was so fiery indeed that the heavenly damsels Menakā and Rambhā, when asked by Indra to approach Viśvāmitra one after another so as to enchant him through their charm and love, showed their nervousness in doing so since, as Menakā has observed, he has fire in his mouth, the sun and moon in the pupil of his eyes, god of death on his tongue and as such she was not capable of even touching him.<sup>35</sup> Similarly when Rambhā, on Indra's insistence, approached him while he was practising *tapas* in the Himalayas, she was cursed by him to turn into stone and remain so for ten thousand years.

This aspect of his personality is also in consonance with the Ṛgvedic account of him. In this Samhitā he identifies himself with Agni and claims to be Jātavedas by birth. He further observes that his eye is extremely shining

<sup>34</sup> उप प्रेतं कुशिकाश्चेत्यध्वमश्वं राये प्र मुञ्चता सुदासः ।

राजा वृत्रं जङ्घनत् प्रागपागुदगथा यजाते वर आ पृथिव्याः । । *Ibid.*, III.53.11

<sup>35</sup> हुताशनमुखं दीप्तं सूर्यचन्द्राक्षितारकम् ।

कालजिह्वं सुरश्रेष्ठ कथमस्मद्विधा स्पृशेत् । । *Mahābhārata* I. 71.38.



and there is ambrosia in his mouth. He feels himself as identical to light which in a threefold capacity is responsible for creation of the universe. He also claims his identity with the universal cauldron, i.e. the sun, as well as with what is getting cooked in it for the cosmic sacrifice.<sup>36</sup> This equation also, thus, confirms the oneness of Viśvāmitra as recounted in the Veda on the one hand and the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata on the other.

### X. The Family Life of Viśvāmitra

Closely connected with the ascetic and terrific character of Viśvāmitra is his deep involvement in life, family affairs, power and plenitude. As is recounted in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, as soon as he finds that Vasiṣṭha's cow is so useful, he decides to procure her at any cost, no matter even by force. When defeated by Vasiṣṭha in his misadventure, he makes up his mind to acquire military power by *tapas*. While practicing even so severe a *tapas*, he, however, gets infatuated by Menakā and leads a lusty life for no less than ten years before he gets awakened to the design of Indra. Besides Śakuntalā, as born of Menakā, he has no less than one hundred sons born of him. This aspect of his character dilated upon so picturesquely in the post-Vedic literature is obviously in clear contrast to his asceticism and makes him look rather ridiculous. It is normally taken as a later development in his character to the point as to make him look like a different person altogether, though bearing the same name.

<sup>36</sup> अग्निरसि जन्मना जातवेदा घृतं मे चक्षुरमृतं म आसन् ।  
अर्कस्त्रिधातु रजसो विमानो ऽ जंसो घर्मो हविरसि नाम । । RV.III.26.7

When we look closely into the Saṁhitā, we find that these ingredients are also closely knit in the fabric of his multidimensional personality. While, on the one hand, he is regarded as a great seer of divine origin and inspiration, he, on the other, is described as one in whom desires are running riot while he is offering primeval mantras to Agni. It is while bristling with these desires that, paradoxically enough, he comes to the mighty vision of oneness of the divine essence pervading from within the multitude of forms.<sup>37</sup> Similarly in another mantra he prays to Indra to fulfill the desire of Kuśikas by granting cows, horses and shining wealth to them as also by enriching them in every respect. He further adds that it is out of their desire for the heaven that the Kuśikas are offering prayer to Indra.<sup>38</sup> Obviously it is his keen desire for cow and horse along with other kinds of wealth which seems to have prompted the post-Vedic author to conceive of the story of Viśvāmitra fighting for the cow of Vasiṣṭha as also practicing penance for the acquisition of the martial power as symbolized by horse. His craving for the shining wealth seems to have led to the story of king Hariścandra being approached by Viśvāmitra for wealth which he provided to the seer by selling himself as well as his wife and young son, as is recounted in the Purāṇas.

Besides cow, horse and shining wealth, progeny is another object of craving for Viśvāmitra. He prays to Aryaman, Aditi, Varuṇa and other gods to bestow upon

<sup>37</sup> वि मे पुरुत्रा पंतयन्ति कामाः शम्यच्छां दीधे पूर्व्याणि ।  
सर्मिच्छे अग्नावृतमिदं देम महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् । । Ibid., III. 55.3

<sup>38</sup> इमं कामं मन्दया गोभिरश्वैश्चन्द्रवंता राधंसा प्रप्रथंश्च ।  
स्वर्यवो मुतिभिस्तुभ्यं विष्ठा इन्द्राय वाहं कुशिकासो अकन् । । Ibid., III. 30.20



him as well as upon his kith and kin progeny so that they may not remain barren.<sup>39</sup> In another mantra he prays to Agni to bless the sacrificer with heroic wealth as also sharpen Viśvāmitra himself with the blessing for sons.<sup>40</sup> In yet another mantra he again prays to Agni to make his sons grow in progeny.<sup>41</sup> Viśvāmitra's desire for sons is also supplemented by his eagerness for a wife. This is evident from what he observes in regard to Indra. Addressing Indra in one of his mantras he observes: "O Maghavan, wife is the abode as also the point of union; may your horses take you to her."<sup>42</sup> Similarly in another mantra referring to Indra again he says: "You have taken Soma, O Indra, now you go to your abode since your beautiful and noble wife is a matter of delight there; there is a stand for your large chariot, there is also the facility for unyoking the horses."<sup>43</sup>

In course of his visions Viśvāmitra often comes to the theme of human desire manifesting itself with almost irresistible force. He, however, has no disdain for any such desire. He rather entreats the deity to help him in getting his desires fulfilled. In one of his mantras, for instance, he prays to Indra to fill him with glittering fortune, since desire is throbbing in him as well as in his

39 अर्यमा णो अर्दितिर्यज्ञियासोऽदब्धानि वरुणस्य व्रतानि ।  
युयोतं नो अनपत्यानि गन्तोंः प्रजावान्ः पाशुमाँ अस्तु गातुः । । *Ibid.*, III.54.18

40 अग्ने दा द्वाशुषेँ रयिं वीरवन्तं परीणसम् ।  
शिशीहि नः सूनमतः । । *Ibid.*, III.24.5

41 स्यान्ः सूनस्तनयो विजावाग्ने सा तै सुमतिर्भूत्वस्मे । । *Ibid.*, III.1.23

42 जायेदस्तं मघवन्सेदु योनिस्तदित्त्वा युक्ता हरयो वहन्तु । *Ibid.*, III.53.4

43 अप्पाः सोममस्तमिन्द्र प्र याहि कल्याणीर्जाया सुरणं गृहे तै ।

यत्रा रथस्य बृहत्तो निधानं विमोचनं वाजिनो दक्षिणावत् । । *Ibid.*, III.53.6

likes as the tide in the ocean and needs to be filled up to the brim.<sup>44</sup> He often seems to be so much preoccupied with the idea of lust that he introduces imagery concerning it without any inhibition whatever even in such a sacred act as sacrifice. Talking of a pair of fire-sticks, he observes: "Here is the upper fire-stick; the act of procreation has been accomplished. Bring the wife of Viśvāmitra; we would churn out Agni, as they did in ancient days." "Fire remains hidden in two fire-sticks as is the foetus borne by the pregnant woman. Agni, as such, is to be worshipped daily with oblations by people keeping fully awake." "With perfect awareness make full the lower fire-stick lying with her face turned upward; as soon as impregnated, she has given birth to the mighty bull."<sup>45</sup>

It is these imageries drawn from the act of impregnation which seem to have prompted the subsequent authors to associate Viśvāmitra with inordinate involvement in lust and procreation as is obvious from the story of Menakā and the fact of his having produced as many as hundred and one sons. The idea of Indra's deep attachment to his beautiful wife waiting for him eagerly seems to have given rise to the story of his lustiness while the imagery of production of fire with the use of the lower and upper fire-sticks appears to have helped in the formation of the story of Viśvāmitra giving birth to Śakuntalā through Menakā. The well known couple of

44 आ नो भरु भंगमिन्द्र युमन्तं नि तै देष्णस्यं धीमहि प्रेके ।

ऊर्व ईव पप्रथे कामो अस्मे तमा पृण वसुपते वसूनाम् । । *Ibid.*, III. 30.19

45 अस्तीदमधिमन्थनमस्ति प्रजननं कृतम् ।

एतां विशपलीमा भंगमिन् मन्थाम पूर्वथा । । *Ibid.*, III. 29.1



mantras on the law of succession<sup>46</sup> relates basically to the phenomena of production of fire through the fire-sticks and seems to have provided the central motif of the story of Menakā and Śakuntalā resulting ultimately in the birth of Bharata who even in the Samhitā is mentioned as closely connected with Viśvāmitra. It is for the sake of Bharatas that the seer makes the two rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī stop their flow and bring down the level of their water.<sup>47</sup> It is particularly the Bharatas who are sought to be given special protection by the seer through his mantras.<sup>48</sup>

### XI. Age of Viśvāmitra

It is obvious from the details adduced above that the same Viśvāmitra as was the seer of the R̥gvedic mantras has been subjected to adoration as well as disputations throughout the ages until the age of Rāmāyaṇa where too he figures as a living sage controlling the destiny of the central characters of the epic. He is recounted in the Mahābhārata also but only as a historical figure. As against it, in the Rāmāyaṇa he appears in all flesh and blood and plays an active role in making Rāma confront the Rākṣasas led by Rāvaṇa. But how could it be possible for the same seer to continue to live for such a long period? Incidentally there are certain chronologies given in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Purāṇas which give us

some idea of the length of the period intervening the Samhitā and the Rāmāyaṇa. As recounted in the Rāmāyaṇa, Viśvāmitra acted as a saviour of king Triśanku on the one hand and witnessed the marriage and coronation ceremonies of Rāma on the other. Needless to point out that Triśanku and Rāma both ruled over Ayodhyā. As a matter of record, Rāma came in the lineage of Triśanku after some twenty-seven generations. The dynasty of Ikṣvāku in which Triśanku and Rāma both occur, as per the Rāmāyaṇa, is as follows:

1. Ikṣvāku;
2. Kukṣi;
3. Vikukṣi;
4. Bāṇa;
5. Anaraṇya;
6. Pṛthu;
7. Triśanku;
8. Dhundhumāra;
9. Yuvanaśva;
10. Māndhātā;
11. Susandhi;
12. Dhruvasandhi;
13. Bharata;
14. Asita;
15. Sagara;
16. Asamañja;
17. Añsumān;
18. Dilīpa;
19. Bhagīratha;
20. Raghu;
21. Puruṣādaka;
22. Śaṅkaṇa Sudarśana;
23. Agnivarṇa;
24. Śighraga;

<sup>46</sup> शासद वह्निर्दुहितुर्नृप्यं गाद विद्वो ऋतस्य दीर्घिति सपर्यन् ।  
 पिता यत्रं दुहितुः सेकंमृञ्जन् तं शग्म्येन मनसा दधन्वे । ।  
 न जामये तान्वाँ रिक्थंमारैक् चकार गर्भं सनितुर्निधानम् ।  
 यदी मातरौ जनयन्त वह्निमन्यः कर्ता सुकृतीरन्य ऋन्धन् । । *Ibid.*, III. 31.1 -2

<sup>47</sup> यद्दग् त्वा भरताः सन्तरैर्युर्गव्यन्ग्रामं इषित इद्रंजतः ।  
 अर्षादहं प्रसवः सर्गतक्त् आ वौ वृणे सुमतिं यज्ञियानाम । । *Ibid.*, III. 33. 11

<sup>48</sup> See F.N. 26



25. Maru;
26. Prāsuśruka;
27. Ambariṣa;
28. Nahuṣa;
29. Yayāti;
30. Nābhāga;
31. Aja;
32. Daśaratha; and
33. Rāma.<sup>49</sup>

Now, as per the *Aśrama* system, said to have been fully operative in this dynasty, if we assign twenty five years of time for the rule of each one of these kings, the difference of time between Triśanku and Rāma would obviously be of 675 years. This figure is realistic provided the chronology adduced here is also realistic. If we take the latter for granted, Viśvāmitra would be required to have lived at least for 700 years to have rescued Triśanku on the one hand and to have witnessed the marriage of Rāma and Sītā on the other.

Apart from the *Rāmāyaṇa* where the age of Viśvāmitra is given in tens of thousands of years and in view of which, therefore, the above figure of 700 years gets rendered insignificant, in the *Samhitā* there is a mantra in which Viśvāmitra prays to Indra earnestly to extend his life for one hundred years.<sup>50</sup> Now, if the seer lived just for 100 years or even reasonably a little more, he in any case cannot be supposed to have continued to live up to the age of *Rāmāyaṇa* beginning particularly from the time of

<sup>49</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* I. 70. 22-43

<sup>50</sup> अस्मे प्र यन्धि मधवन्तृजीषिनिन्द्रं रायो विश्ववारस्य भूरेः ।  
अस्मे शतं शरदौ जीवसे धा अस्मे वीराञ्छवंत इन्द्र शिषिन् ॥ RV. III. 36.10

the *Samhitā*. Howsoever strict a canon be applied in calculating the duration between the two classics, it in any case does not seem likely to be covered by the life-time of any single individual.

If, however, in order to make up for this temporal hiatus, we take resort to the view of a number of Viśvāmitras in succession, it also gets annulled by the details adduced above in which the person under consideration retains his identity throughout leaving little chance for the operation of the idea of succession. Under such circumstances the only way out left for us is to admit an unusually long life for the seer on the strength of his *tapas* and yogic attainments until at least some other more convincing alternative is found out. In view of this, Viśvāmitra's desire for a life of one hundred years as expressed in the *Ṛgvedic* mantra referred to above, may be taken to have been expressed on behalf of the common man including the sacrificer. Needless to point out that the Vedic seer often speaks in various capacities ranging from the divine to the common man of any denomination including even the gambler, for instance.

Oneness of Viśvāmitra playing the role of a Vedic seer on the one hand and of a pre-eminent character of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the other finds a parallel not only in Vasiṣṭha but also in the latter's son Śakti and grandson Parāśara as recounted in the *Mahābhārata*. Needless to point out that while Parāśara is the father of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata*, Śakti is his grandfather. On the other hand both of them are seers of Vedic mantras also. If Śakti and Parāśara can serve, as the bridge between the Veda and the *Mahābhārata*, Viśvāmitra can easily serve as the same between the Veda and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.



## XII. Feud between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha

Viśvāmitra's skirmishes with Vasiṣṭha have been a favourite point of discussion among scholars and have led them to a number of wild conjectures. Radhakumud Mookerjee, for instance, is of view that "the story of conflict between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra is that of a conflict between two cultures."<sup>51</sup> This interpretation may have some plausibility only with the interpolation of certain pre-suppositions. Otherwise, the factual position is that Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha both are established Vedic seers speaking the same language, using the same idiom and worshipping the same deities. Not to speak of Vasiṣṭha, even Viśvāmitra is not a new entrant to the Vedic culture. He has a long tradition behind him running on the Vedic line which he refers to several times in course of his compositions. For instance, in one of his mantras he addresses Indra as *sanāśruta*, one heard of since ancient days.<sup>52</sup> Similarly in another mantra referring to Dyāvā-pṛthivī he observes that even ancient seers, perfectly true to their words, knew them.<sup>53</sup> In another mantra he addresses Indra as the royal enjoyer of Soma squeezed in ancient days.<sup>54</sup> In another mantra addressed to Asvins, he talks of *Vipras* born in ancient days.<sup>55</sup> Referring to his own lineage of Kuśikas he observes that they were the first born of Brahman, knew all, brought forth glittering mantras and

each one of them kindled fire in his household.<sup>56</sup> In view of such direct and clear references bearing out the deep-rootedness of Viśvāmitra's lineage in the Vedic thought and culture, it would only be a travesty of facts to project him as a new convert to the Vedic culture and to have belonged originally to the non-Aryan fold.

This clarification notwithstanding, however, the feud between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha remains a problem to be resolved, no matter, within the Vedic fold itself. From this standpoint an explanation has been offered for a feud in terms of rivalry between the two seers for the sake of priesthood of Sudāsa, a prominent king of the dynasty of Bharatas. As is recorded in the *Samhitā*, Viśvāmitra was the priest of Sudāsa at the time of crossing the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī. Subsequently, however, he was replaced by Vasiṣṭha as the new priest. It was under the priestly guidance of Vasiṣṭha that Sudāsa won the battle against the confederation of ten kings operating under the direction of Viśvāmitra. Thus the defeat of the confederation was considered to be a defeat of Viśvāmitra as well. This event might have given edge to his grudge against Vasiṣṭha leading eventually to his replacement by Viśvāmitra again as the royal priest and further aggravation of rivalry between the two seers.<sup>57</sup>

In support of this explanation further proofs may be adduced in terms of the jealous nature of Viśvāmitra as is explicit in two contiguous mantras of the *Samhitā*. In

51 *Radhakumud Mookerjee, Hindu Civilization (Bombay, 1957). pp. 59-60*

52 *RV. III. 52.4.*

53 *उतो हि वां पूर्व्यां आंविन्द्र ऋतावरी रोदसी सत्यवाचं । Ibid., III. 54.4*

54 *त्वं राजसि प्रदिवः सुतानाम् । Ibid., III. 47.1*

55 *विप्रांसो अश्विना पुराजाः । Ibid., III. 58.3*

56 *अग्नित्रायुर्धौ मरुतामिव प्रयाः प्रथमजा ब्रह्मणो विश्वमिद्विदुः ।*

*धुमवद् ब्रह्म कुशिकास एरिर एकैको दमं अग्निं समीधिरे ।। Ibid., III. 20.15*

57 *V.G. Rahurkar, The Seers of the R̥gveda (Poona, 1964), pp. 22-3*



the first one of these mantras the seer prays to Indra to stimulate him and his followers by means of gifts in excessive quantity and of the best possible quality. He further observes that he who is inimical towards them, may be let down and made to breathe his last.<sup>58</sup> In the next mantra he curses his enemy to suffer torments as a tree being struck by an axe or get withered like *semal* blossom and pour out foam from his mouth like a cauldron cracked and seething.<sup>59</sup> Correspondingly Vasiṣṭha also condemns one who shows himself off as a Kṣatriya falsely. He says that Soma does never stimulate the wicked nor one who assumes the title of Kṣatriya falsely; he kills the Raksas; he kills the liar; both of them lie in the trap of Indra.<sup>60</sup> Use of the word Kṣatriya by Vasiṣṭha in this connection is taken as further confirmatory of the feud between the two seers. The Taittirīya Samhitā makes the feud still clearer by referring to it directly while explaining the efficacy of the *Vihavya* hymn seen by Jamadagni. According to it, Viśvāmitra and Jamadagni developed rivalry towards Vasiṣṭha. Jamadagni saw this *Vihavya* hymn. He cut down the sense-power of Vasiṣṭha by means of it.<sup>61</sup>

58. इन्द्रोतिभिर्बहुलाभिर्नो अद्य यांच्छ्रेष्ठाभिर्मघवञ्जूर जिन्व ।  
यो नो द्वेष्यधरः सस्यदीष्ट यमु द्विष्स्तमु प्राणो जंहातु ॥ RV. III. 53.21

59. परशुं चिद्धि तंपति शिंबलं चिद्धि वृश्चति ।  
उरवा चिदिन्द्र येपन्ती प्रयस्ता फेनमस्यति ॥ RV. III. 53.22

60. न वा उ सोमो वृजिनं हिंनोति न क्षत्रियं मिथुया धारयन्तम् ।  
हन्ति रक्षो हन्त्यासद्ददन्तमुभाविन्द्रस्य प्रसितौ शयाते ॥ RV. VII. 104.13

61. विश्वामित्रजमदग्नी वसिष्ठेनास्पर्धेताम् ।  
स एतज्जमदग्निर्विहव्यमपश्यत् । तेन वसिष्ठस्येन्द्रियं वीर्यमवृद्धक्त ॥

Taitt. Sam. III. 17.3

Conversely the story of the *Sasarparī mantra* shows how Śakti, the son of Vasiṣṭha brought *amati*, thoughtlessness, to Viśvāmitra while the latter was performing a sacrifice for Sudāsa. By way of introducing Samhitā III. 53.15 and 16, Sāyaṇa quotes the story of the *Sasarparī mantra* as available to him through the tradition. The story tells us how Śakti, the son of Vasiṣṭha, overwhelmed the verbal power of Viśvāmitra while he was performing sacrifice on behalf of king Sudāsa. Being overwhelmed, Viśvāmitra became depressed. In order to save him from this state of depression, Jamadagni brought down the *Sasarparī mantra* from Brahman or Sūrya and imparted it to Viśvāmitra. Through the efficacy of the *Sasarparī mantra* the seer got cured of his malady. The related mantras also corroborate to this story to some extent as they talk of the *Sasarparī mantra* removing the thoughtlessness of the seer and making a loud sound on being imparted by Jamadagni.<sup>62</sup>

Thus on the Ṛgvedic evidence also, some sort of action and reaction seems to have taken place between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha and to have continued for some time subsequently also between the two families. But to take this feud as indicative of a clash between peoples belonging to two different cultures or as symptomatic of rivalry between Brahmins and Kṣatriyas as a whole is to blow the incident beyond all proportions. Instead of being a case of cultural conflict or class war, the feud seems to be out and out of a personal nature. In this strife, dispossession of priesthood might possibly have played a crucial role at the initial stage. There is no denying about it that most of the Vedic seers, including Viśvāmitra as well as Vasiṣṭha, acted as respectable

62. ससर्परीरमतिं बाधमाना बृहन्मिमाय जमदग्निदत्ता ।

आ सूर्यस्य दुहिता तंतान श्रवो देवेष्वमृतमजुर्यम् ॥ RV. III. 53.15.



sacrificial priests at some or the other stage of their respective lives. Sacrifice was indeed the result of practical application of the supramental visions of the Vedic seers. Acting as sacrificial priests might understandably have served them as their means of livelihood also. But much more important than sacrifice for them was the vision for the sake of which they were prepared to stake anything they possessed in life. It was obviously at the loss of his power of seeing or vision that Viśvāmitra became alarmed about his adversary and managed to recover it by acquiring the *Sasarparī mantra* from Jamadagni, as the above mantra bears out.

Getting the precious vision was indeed the primary concern of Viśvāmitra as well as of other Vedic seers. As soon as the window to the vision happened to be closed by Śakti, Viśvāmitra began to pant for it. It was at this stage of distress that Jamadagni came to his rescue. This point of crisis in his life, along with what preceded and what followed, forms the central motif of stories about him. Whether he was a mere priest of the Bharatas or he was the king of that clan originally as the Rāmāyaṇa recounts, cannot be said decisively from what is known about him until now. If he was a priest, dispossession of that position might well have led to his turning to spirituality. If he, on the other hand, was a king, the efficacy of a man of spirituality, such as Vasiṣṭha, might have served as a factor of motivation in making him to try for its acquisition even at the cost of his kingship. In any case, his confrontation with Vasiṣṭha seems to have made him look for certain higher values of life and motivated him to acquire them by all means. His whole *tapas* as recounted in the Rāmāyaṇa, is a means to this end. Through it he seeks to purge himself of all baser elements in his psyche such as lust and anger which dominated him earlier in his life, no

matter whether he was a priest or king. Stepping in of Menakā and Rambhā during his life as a *tapasvin*, particularly under the dispensation of Indra, a deity whom he venerated most, seems to have been intended for the catharsis of all the dross in him so that he might get prepared for receiving the enlightenment. The Divine seems to have helped him by arranging the trials readily as the seer had sufficient potentiality for enlightenment in him, as is borne out by words like *ṛṣir devajā devajūtah*, the god-born and god-inspired seer.

Thus Indra acted as a real friend of him and by no means as his foe. So did Vasiṣṭha. Whatever the animosity between the two at the initial stage, once Viśvāmitra began rising upward, Vasiṣṭha came to his help by assuming a tough posture towards him so as to eliminate the probable laxity in his character which obviously is an impediment in one's life as a *tapasvin*. This is why until Viśvāmitra became completely purged of lust and anger, Vasiṣṭha did not oblige him by calling him *Brahmaṛṣi* prematurely. The story of Ṛcika, as narrated in the Mahābhārata, according to which Viśvāmitra was born as a result of his mother eating the ball of rice charged with *brahma-tejas* as given by sage Ṛcika and manipulated by the former's mother as against the interest of her own daughter Satyavatī, is, indeed, a veritable cognisance of the innate spiritual potentiality of Viśvāmitra.<sup>63</sup>

This seed of spirituality sought to manifest itself from within his inner being by overcoming and removing whatever was not conducive to it. This long-drawn strife going on in the psyche of the potential seer is indeed the

<sup>63</sup> Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva, 53-54 and Śānti Parva 49. 6-30.



central theme of various stories and anecdotes taken otherwise amiss as to have primarily a certain cultural, social or economic bearing.

Such, indeed, is the allurement of the worldly gravitating against the higher pursuits of the spiritual seeker of the calibre of Viśvāmitra that when he once happens to give way to lust, he is sought to be engulfed by Menakā, when becoming vulnerable to anger he gets dispossessed of the accumulated fruits of his *tapas* and when coming in the ambit of egoism, he gets mercilessly thrashed by Vasiṣṭha.

## XII. Viśvāmitra and the Cāṇḍāla

Kindred is the motif of the story of his eating the dog's leg stealthily in the hutment of the Cāṇḍāla, as is recounted in the Mahābhārata. According to the epic, while Viśvāmitra was undergoing *tapas*, a severe draught took place in the region and continued for twelve years. As a consequence of the draught, most of the inmates of the area including men as well as animals, died. Trees and plants lost their greenery. Viśvāmitra withstood its severity for years until at last he got exhausted of all means of survival. Running from pillar to post in search of food he eventually came to the house of a Cāṇḍāla and entered into it stealthily at night. In the darkness he somehow came upon a dog's leg. While managing to pick it up, he happened to produce some creaking sound inadvertently. As a result, the Cāṇḍāla woke up and caught hold of him red-handed. A conversation ensued between the two, Viśvāmitra insisting on eating the leg while the Cāṇḍāla expressing his indignation at his fallen behaviour. When, however, Viśvāmitra remained firm in his determination to eat the leg, the Cāṇḍāla permitted him

indignantly to take it away to his hermitage. Reaching his hermitage, while he, after making an offering of it to Indra and Agni, began to eat it along with his wife, Indra sent torrential rain down on the earth rendering it habitable again.<sup>64</sup>

This story does not occur anywhere in any text prior to the Mahābhārata. A Ṛgvedic mantra, however, has a definite bearing on it, though seen not by Viśvāmitra but by Vāmadeva. The seer observes that seeing no way out he eventually cooked the entrails of a dog and yet none of the gods showed any mercy towards him. When he saw his wife being disgraced, however, the *Śyena* brought mead to him.<sup>65</sup> The story of the Mahābhārata seems to be an elaboration of this mantra by exchanging its main character Vāmadeva with Viśvāmitra. Cooking the dog's entrail was the most abominable act done under the threat to his survival. Even then, however, it could not make the Divine move. But when the seer showed his faithfulness to his wife and devotion to the Divine even at this stage of extreme scarcity, the Divine could not but show mercy to him and, through him, to all living beings.

The real thrust of the story is exclusive devotion to the Divine and maintenance of personal life with utmost tenacity of purpose, determination and dedication. It seems likely that on account of its depiction of utmost severity of life and yet holding to his determination under such a trying situation by the seer, the content of the mantra somehow came to be understood as equally

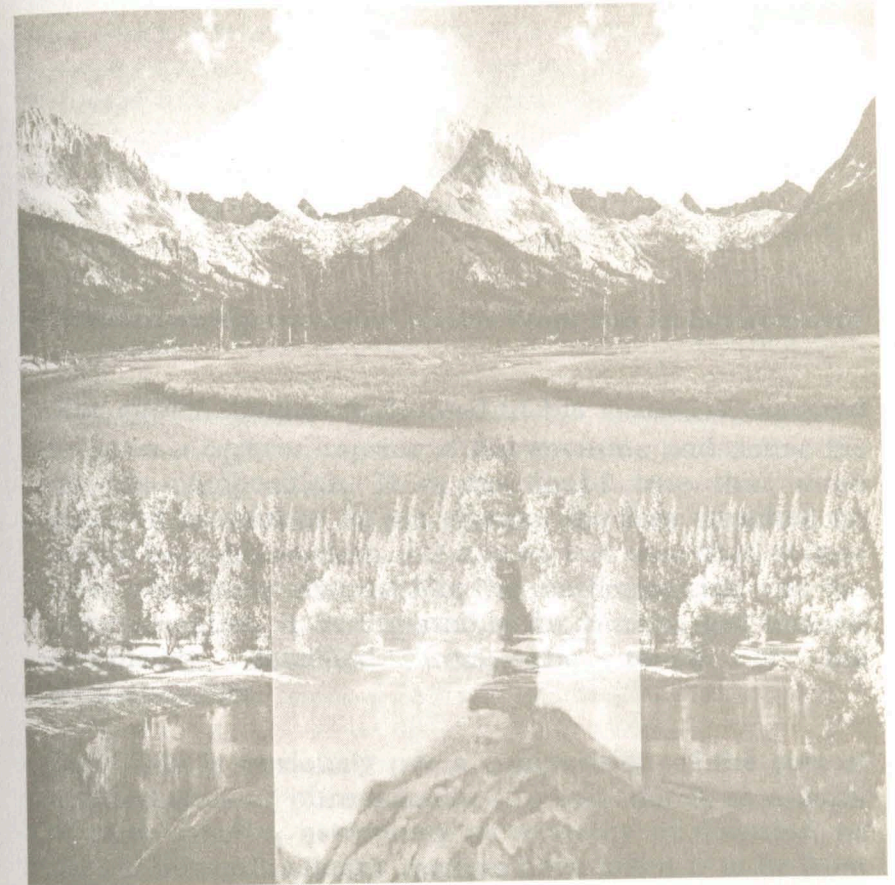
<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, *Śānti Parva*, 141

<sup>65</sup> अर्वा शूनं आन्त्राणि पेचे न देवेषु विविदे मर्दितारम् ।

अपश्यं जायामंहीयमानाम्धा मे श्येनो मध्वाजंभार ॥ RV. IV. 18.13



applicable to Viśvāmitra also and therefore led to the idea of the story given in the Mahābhārata.



## Cultural Background



## I. Relationship between Creative Work and its Environment

*Any author, howsoever* elevated in his vision, is expected to leave a certain imprint of his environs and active life on his composition. It is no doubt true that more elevated an author in his visions, the less attached he would be to his environ, yet it is no less true that, unless he is absolutely abstract like the mathematician and the pure scientist, it is impossible for him to get himself completely detached from the touch of his circumstances.

The Veda is obviously not a composition of the sort of mathematics or pure science. To consider it as a work of pure science, astronomy or anatomy in disguise, as casual but enthusiastic readers have taken it to be from time to time, is over-generalising on stray references having the relevant bearing. So is true of it in regard to its universalism. To take the Vedic tenets as absolutely universalistic in their signification as well as timeless in their origin is straying away from the actual position without understanding properly the underlying import of incidental remarks to the effect. As a matter of fact, the text under consideration cannot but be the work of earthly beings having had traversed this earth at a certain point in human history in full life and blood, as



is evident from references to this effect in the text at places.

## II. Viśvāmitra's Contact with Foot-Hills of the Himalayas

In view of the above consideration, it is but natural to expect Viśvāmitra also to have left in his compositions indications regarding his geographical and cultural background. The most tangible one amongst these references concerns the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī with whom a dialogue of the seer has been staged in one of his hymns. The seer describes the rivers at the very outset as emerging from the lap of mountains, brimming with aspiration like a pair of mares getting free of the binding rope and racing fast or like a pair of white motherly cows licking the common calf.<sup>1</sup> Reference to the mountain in the plural is a sure indication of the fact that the seer had seen the Himalayas with his own eyes in the plurality of its peaks. His acquaintance with the mountain gets further confirmed by his description of the rivers not only as emerging from the mountains but also as racing fast like mares and being white in colour like cows. Obviously rivers descending from the Himalayas have tremendous force in their flow and look excessively white partly due to purity of the water and partly due to emergence of foam caused by the descent from the considerable height. The imagery of the rivers as a pair of cows licking a common calf bears out their close proximity to each other at the foot of the mountain.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> प्र पर्वतामुशती उपस्थादश्वे इव विषिते हासमाने ।

गावैव शुभ्रे मातरां रिहाणो विपादछुतुद्री पर्यसा जवेते ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 33.1

<sup>2</sup> अच्छा सिन्धुं मातृतामामयासं विपांशुमुर्वी सुभगांगमन् ।

वत्समिव मातरां संरिहाणे संमानं योनिमानुसंचरन्ती ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 33.3

As all these details pertaining to the topography of the area stand verifiable even today with slight distancing of the rivers from each other in course of thousands of years that have passed since, it is evident that the seer must have visited the area and seen it with his own eyes. It is also true that the rivers of the magnitude of Vipāśā and Śutudrī are almost unfordable just at the foot of the mountain due to the force of the flow as well as depth of the bed. They become fordable only after they come down to the plains having covered considerable distance. This is much more true of the possibility of crossing them by bullock carts, as further details of the hymn reveal. This is sufficient to suggest that Viśvāmitra was very well acquainted with a vast stretch of the land from the foot of the Himalayas up to considerable distance on the plains.

There are some other references also to show that Viśvāmitra was familiar with massive and high mountains. In one such reference, while taking cognisance of the eternal laws of gods, the seer observes that they are not capable of being violated even by massive mountains.<sup>3</sup> He also compares the descent of the wisdom from Agni with streams of water descending from the mountain.<sup>4</sup> In yet another mantra, while addressing the mountains, he describes them as eternally fixed as well as prone to shed water.<sup>5</sup> Obviously these details can be true only of the Himalayas.

There is also a mantra bearing out his acquaintance with a vast plain land abundantly rich in shining

<sup>3</sup> न पर्वता सि नमै तस्थिवांसः । *Ibid.*, III. 56.1

<sup>4</sup> या तै अग्ने पर्वतस्येव धारासंशचन्ती पीपयंदेव चित्रा । *Ibid.*, III. 57.6.

<sup>5</sup> शुष्वन्तु नो वृषणः पर्वतासो ध्रुवक्षमासो इड्या मदन्तः । *Ibid.*, III. 54.20



wealth.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the mountainous region, this place was easy to move in. It was also abounding in domestic animals. Large streams and ponds filled with crystal water were to be met with here and there. They were so filled with water as to get often interconnected with one another.<sup>7</sup> According to the seer, while the streams were fed by the mountainous water, the ponds were filled by the rainy water, both the varieties, however, having their eventual source in Indra.

### III. Acquaintance with the Sea

Viśvāmitra is also aware of oceans not only in their vast stretch of water but also in their depth. Cognisance of the depth shows that he was not a casual visitor to them but had either himself waded through them to some extent or had at least observed people dive deep into them. In his view, streams of Soma juice enter into Indra, who is wide, deep, mighty by birth and the all-pervading source of all wisdom, like streams entering into the sea.<sup>8</sup> In yet another mantra it has been said that as rivers follow their course in streaming forth so that water reaches the ocean speedily like a pair of horses reaching its destination, even so Indra, the higher one amongst those present in his company, proves so fascinating that the Soma juice fills him up to

the brim.<sup>9</sup> This multiplicity of references to rivers falling in the sea is sufficient to bear out Viśvāmitra's close association with sites of rivers falling in the sea at places in the coastal area of the country. The coastal area he would have been acquainted with must have been pretty vast since there is no site whichsoever in India where several rivers fall in the sea together, discounting, however, branches of one and the same river.

This point gains significance from the fact that it puts things in a perspective quite different from one emerging from the pre-suppositions of a certain section of the Vedic scholarship *vis-à-vis* the homeland of the Vedic Aryans necessarily somewhere outside India. Needless to point out that in view of his antiquity, Viśvāmitra's understanding of the topography of India ought to have been limited only to the North-West frontier in the west and to a limited part of Punjab in the east as per the pre-supposition. Since the whole land is supposed to have been covered more or less by forests throughout along with ferocious beasts infesting them as also the aborigines inimical to the newcomers roaming around, mobility of the latter must have been utterly limited. The war against the aborigines had by no means stopped as yet. Vṛtras were still being killed by Indra.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of killing Vṛtra and extending his help in defeating the enemy, Indra was still being coaxed through the offering of Soma.<sup>11</sup> Under such circumstances, anyone, including Viśvāmitra, could at his best be familiar during his lifetime only with a small stretch

<sup>6</sup> महि क्षेत्रं पुरुश्चन्द्रं विविद्वानादित् सखिभ्यश्चरथं समैरत् । *Ibid.*, III. 31.15.

<sup>7</sup> अपशिचदेप विभ्नो इ दमूनाः प्र सुधीचीरसृजद्विश्वश्चन्द्राः । *Ibid.*, III. 31.16.

<sup>8</sup> गभीरौ उदधीं रिंव कतुं पृष्यसि गा इव ।

प्र सुगोपा यवसं धेनवो यथा हृदं कुल्या इवाशत् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 45.3.

उरुं गभीरं जनुषाभ्यश्चुगं विश्वव्यचसमवतं मतीनाम् ।

इन्द्रं सोमांसः प्रदिवि सुतांसः समुद्रं न सुवत् आ विशन्ति ।। *Ibid.*, III. 46.4.

<sup>9</sup> प्र यत्सिन्धवः प्रसवं यथायुन्नापः समुद्रं रथ्येव जग्मुः ।

अतश्चिदिन्द्रः सर्वसो वरीयान् यदीं सोमः पूणति दुग्धो अंशुः ।। *Ibid.*, III. 36.6.

<sup>10</sup> शृण्वन्तमुग्रमुतयं समत्सु जन्तं वृत्राणि सञ्जितं धर्नानाम् । *Ibid.*, III. 30.22.

<sup>11</sup> वात्रहत्याय शर्वसे पृतनापाहाय च । इन्द्र त्वा वर्तयामसि ।। *Ibid.*, III. 37.1.



of land and that also of the plains, as he had necessarily to accompany his herd of cattle.

Contrary to this expectation, however, Viśvāmitra shows his intimacy with the Himalayan region on the one hand and the vast coastal area on the other along with that of the vast plain land stretching between the two by several thousand kilometers. Under the supposition of these scholars, how could it be possible for one and the same person to have moved over such a vast stretch of land in his lifetime before beginning to compose mantras having reference to both its extremes?

Another myth which gets automatically exploded in the light of these facts concerns the Vedic Aryan's ignorance of salt. Viśvāmitra's thorough acquaintance with the sea is sufficient to demolish this viewpoint, unless, of course, the oceans known to him were filled wholly with sweet water having no ingredient of salt in them at all.

#### IV. Reference to Vast, Plain and Fertile Land

One reference, showing the nature of the land Viśvāmitra usually moved on, lies in a mantra in which the land is characterised as the best one on this earth and while moving on which, one has to strain one's knees least. This bears out the land's plainness for a long distance. It must also be fertile and highly productive in view of its characterisation as the best one on this earth. Freedom of its inmates from disease is also indicative of the congenial atmosphere around it.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> अनमीवासु इळया मदन्तो मितज्ञवो वरिमुन्ना पृथिव्याः ।  
आदित्यस्य व्रतमुपक्षियन्तो वयं मित्रस्य सुमतौ स्याम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 59. 3.

Viśvāmitra's native land is highly agricultural. In one of his mantras he refers to god Mitra as a constant observer of cultivators and hence deserving offering of oblations mixed with *ghṛta*. While supporting the heaven and the earth and making them move around by means of his words of guidance, he looks at cultivators without blinking his eyelids. On account of his special attention towards cultivators as well as on account of supporting the heaven and the earth, Mitra needs to be offered oblation mixed with *ghṛta*.<sup>13</sup>

In confirmation of this, we find him making reference to several ingredients of oblation such as *dhānā*, *karambha*, *apūpa* and *purodāśa*.<sup>14</sup> *Dhānā* is the fried corn while *karambha* is the flour of the same fried corn prepared by mixing curd with it. *Apūpa* is a special variety of food prepared by cooking in *ghṛta*. It is the same as is called *puā* these days while *purodāśa* is almost the same when baked directly in fire. Reference to all these varieties of foodstuff directly in the mantras seen by Viśvāmitra bears out that he lived in a highly developed agricultural setting and was fully aware of different varieties of preparations.

The geographical condition under which such a rich foodstuff could be made available has been referred to by the seer in the form of large areas laden with shining wealth which obviously is suggestive of rich crops growing there.<sup>15</sup> This rich agricultural productivity of the

<sup>13</sup> मित्रो जनान् यातयति बुवाणो मित्रो दाधार पृथिवीमुत्त द्याम् ।  
मित्रः कृष्टीरनिर्मिष्ठाभि चष्टे मित्राय हव्यं घृतवज्जुहोत ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 59.1.  
<sup>14</sup> धानावन्तं कर्मिणामपूपवन्तमुक्थिनम् । इन्द्रं प्रातर्जुपस्व नः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 52.1  
पुरोदाशं पचत्यं जुपस्वेन्द्रा गुरस्व च । तुभ्यं हव्यानि सिसते ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 52.2.  
<sup>15</sup> महि क्षेत्रं पुरुश्चन्द्रं विविद्वानादित्सर्विभ्यश्चरथं समैरत् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 53.15.



land is made further obvious by a reference to large streams of water flowing continuously through the area.<sup>16</sup> It is with the use of water supplied by these perennial streams, that so abundant a crop could have been produced which, when ripened, must have presented a scenario of shining wealth strewn all over the area.

This seems to have been the native place of Viśvāmitra from which he would have moved around to the Himalayas on one side and the ocean on the other and would have returned to it whenever required to perform sacrifice or even otherwise. In view of his so graphic a description of the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī, it is most likely that he belonged originally to its catchment area. That this particular area so dear to Viśvāmitra was somewhere near the bank of river Sindhu is not necessary, since, though making use of the word Sindhu for a certain river, which he as a divinely inspired seer made to stop, he evidently means to point here to the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī and not to Sindhu itself.<sup>17</sup> In this usage, the word Sindhu signifies any river in general rather than the Sindhu as such.

### V. Reference to Tall Fruit-laden Trees

Another feature of Viśvāmitra's native place is abundance of trees laden with fruits, which were plucked with the help of hooks. In the relevant mantra, the seer prays to Indra to bestow upon him such a wealth as might create uneasiness in the mind of the enemy in the same way as the actual share of the share-

<sup>16</sup> अपशिचदेष विभ्वो ३ दमूनाः प्र सधीचौरसृजद्विश्वचन्द्राः ।

मध्वः पुनानाः कविभिः पवित्रैर्युभिर्हिन्वन्यक्तुभिर्धनुत्रीः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 31.16.

<sup>17</sup> महो ऋषिर्देवजा देवजुतो ऽ स्तभ्नात् सिन्धुमर्णवं नृचक्षा ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 53.9.

holder reaches him automatically, if he has been promised by the bestower to this effect. Continuing in the same mantra he wants to get from Indra the redeeming wealth with the same ease as a hook-holder brings down the ripe fruit from the tree with the use of a hook.<sup>18</sup> Use of hook for plucking fruit suggests that the tree concerned might have been considerably tall, so tall indeed as not to have been capable of climbing easily.

### VI. Flora and Fauna

While he is aware of the growth of Soma on high mountains on the one hand,<sup>19</sup> he is also acquainted with *khadira* and *śimśapā* on the other.<sup>20</sup> As per his account, the wood of these trees was used in manufacturing chariots. The seer knew fully how the hub of the wheel on which the latter rotated around the axle was made specially of the *khadira* wood. This was done on account of the exceptional hardness of that wood. In manufacturing other parts, however, one of the woods used was *śimśapā*. *Śimśapā* is the same as is called *seesam* today. It is needless to point out that *seesam* is considered to be the best wood for manufacturing furnitures as well as chariots even today. References to *śimśapa* and *khadira*, however, have the possibility of helping a lot in determining the precise location of the seer. At least this much is certain that the seer must have been born or have lived for a

<sup>18</sup> आ नस्तुजं रुयिं भरंशं न प्रतिजानते ।

वृक्षं पक्वं फलमंकीवं धनुहीन्द्रं संपारणं वसुं ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 45.4.

<sup>19</sup> पीयूषमपिबो गिरिष्ठाम् । *Ibid.*, III. 48.2.

<sup>20</sup> अग्निं व्ययस्व रवदिरस्य सारमोजो धेहि स्पन्दने शिंशापायाम् ।

अक्षं वीळो वीळित वीळयस्व मा यामांद्स्मादवं जीहिपो नः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 53.19.



considerable period of time in such a place where *khadira* and *śimśapā* normally grew.

Another feature of the region Viśvāmitra happened to be associated with is its horses with their meins glittering like the peacock feather. It is also said to be rich in birds and trees where hunters of birds were active in catching them by means of traps. But, at the same time, he also seems to have been acquainted with the desert land, for in the same mantra he prays to Indra to come to him like birds having reached their destination after flying over deserts.<sup>21</sup>

Reference to fruit-laden tall trees on the one hand and to desert land on the other in one and the same hymn brings out the seer's close acquaintance with dense forest on one side and desert on the other. Obviously he seems to have been very well acquainted with the geography of India beginning from the high Himalayas up to the sea along with the deserts of Rajasthan, tall trees of the sub-Himalayan region and the fertile land of the plains of Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh as also several other regions of India. It bears out his exceptional mobility.

## VII. Reference to Destructive People Coming from the West

In one of Viśvāmitra's mantras there is a clear reference to the horse-sacrifice performed by king Sudasa. Viśvāmitra is closely associated with the performance made on behalf of the king. He asks his sons and followers to proceed further and take notice of the horse set free by the king to roam over the empire. In this

<sup>21</sup> आ मन्द्दैरिन्द्र हरिभिर्याहि मयूररोमभिः ।

मा त्वा के विन्नि यमन् विं न पाशिनोऽति धन्वैव तां इहि ।। *Ibid.*, III. 45.1.

context he talks of killing of Vṛtra by the king along with performance of the sacrifice at the best spot on earth. While talking of the killing of Vṛtra by the king, he refers to the east, the west and the north as the directions in which the killing took place and leaves the south without mention.<sup>22</sup> As per the current pre-supposition on the point, the actual killing of Vṛtra ought to have taken place primarily in the south itself, since it was exactly towards the south of Punjab that the Indus civilisation of Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro was flourishing and needed to be demolished by the advancing Aryan force. Exclusion of the south from mention in this context, thus, shows the baselessness of the theory that it were the Aryans who destroyed the non-Aryan culture of Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro.

This contention gets further confirmation from another mantra in which enemies desired to be burnt by Agni are indicated to be lying in the west rather than in the east or the south. In this mantra Agni has been prayed to become, when approached, noble-minded like a friend towards his friend or like parents towards their progeny. Further he describes human settlements as at loggerheads with one another and prays to Agni to burn particularly the westwardly enemies.<sup>23</sup> In this mantra the seer takes note of mutual discord as well as of bitter enmity amongst people. He is displeased with the commonly prevailing tendency of the people to cherish ill-will against one another as against the expectation of developing harmony amongst themselves, since it is one and the same Agni which dwells and works in common

<sup>22</sup> उप प्रेतं कुशिकासश्चेतयंश्चमश्वं राये प्र मुञ्चता सुदासः ।

राजां वृत्रं जंघन्त प्रागप्रागुदगथां यजाते वर आ पृथिव्याः ।। *Ibid.*, III., 53.11

<sup>23</sup> भवां नो अग्ने सुमना उपैती सख्यैव सख्यै पितरैव साधुः ।

पुरुदुहो हि क्षितयो जनानां प्रति प्रतीचीदहतादरांतीः ।। *Ibid.*, III. 18.1.



within all. But he is particularly angry with the westwardly enemies who, as such, must have been proving highly destructive. He prays to Agni to consume them in his heat. Characterisation of these enemies as niggardly, *arātīh*, bring them out as not only abstainers from giving but also as plunderers. As a true representative and well-wisher of the people, the seer wants Agni to safeguard them from the invasions of these westwardly plunderers.

A graphic description of the same westwardly people is given by Viśvāmitra in another mantra in which their land is given the nickname *kīkaṭa* on account of their peculiarly rustic outlook towards life. As Yāska rightly suggests, the word *kīkaṭa* is the vulgarised form of *kim kṛt* meaning 'what is the use of action.' Since the inhabitants of this land did not believe in the necessity of action for earning their livelihood but depended rather on plundering the people of the adjacent area, they are given the denunciatory name *kīkaṭa*. So much did they differ from the highly cultured Vedic people as not to make use of the milk of their cows any way either for mixing it with Soma or for boiling it in the *gharma*, that is, for sacrificial purposes. Instead of giving anything to gods and to the people by way of sacrifice, they had amassed huge amount of wealth by plundering the people as well as by lending money on interest, as Yāska rightly understands. On account of their taking to the lower and immoral course for acquisition of wealth as well as their laxity in regard to sex, they are described figuratively as a tree with its branches lying low, *naicāśakham*. Immoral way of acquisition of wealth also leads to laxity in sex. Being bereft of the consciousness of Dharma, as is indicated by the absence of the sense of sacrifice in them, they naturally took to the path of *artha* and *kāma* rather inordinately and adopted

indiscriminately unfair means of plundering and lending for acquisition of wealth and indulged in looseness of character and breeding.<sup>24</sup> Yāska also refers to these people as *Anārya* as against the Vedic *Ārya* who, as per the above account, lived towards the east of them.<sup>25</sup>

### VIII. Viśvāmitra and the Aryan Problem

It is obvious from the above references that Viśvāmitra is clearly in favour of the *Ārya* and completely against the *Anārya*. While praying to Indra, he mentions how the deity kills the *dasyu* and protects the *āryavarṇa*. But the problem arises as to the identity of the *ārya varṇa* and that of the *dasyu*. While attempting any solution of this problem, it is necessary to take into consideration the whole context where these two expressions occur. As a matter of fact, the particular mantra in which these expressions occur is inclusive also of Indra's gaining in horses, gaining in the sun, gaining in abundant food, cows, gold and other objects of enjoyment.<sup>26</sup> In this account, it is evidently easy to understand Indra's gaining in gold and some other objects of enjoyment under the presupposition of the Aryan Invasion. But the problem is how to account for his gaining in the sun, the horse and the cow? As per the Aryan Invasion theory, it is supposed that the Aryans came to India with their cows, horses and chariots. As such, they, would have had cows, horses and chariots only to lose to their non-Aryan adversaries rather than to gain the same from them, for the latter are supposed to have almost

- 24 किं तै कृष्वन्ति कीकटेषु गावो नाशिरं दुहे न तपन्ति धर्मम् ।  
आ नो भरु प्रमगन्दस्य वेदो नैचाशारवं मघवन् रन्ध्या नः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 53.14.
- 25 कीकटो नाम देशोऽनार्यनिवासः । *Nirkuta*, VI. 32.
- 26 सुसानात्प्रां उत सूर्यं ससानेन्द्रं ससान पुरुभोजसुं गाम् ।  
हिरण्यमुत भोगं ससानहृत्वी दस्युन् प्रायुं वर्णमावत् ॥ *RV.* III. 34.9.



completely lacked in these prized possessions. In fact, one of the important arguments advanced in favour of the view that the Indus civilisation was non-Aryan is the unavailability of the trace of horse in that cultural milieu. As regards cow, the incoming Aryans themselves are supposed to have been accompanying cows in large number and understandably of superior breed and hence they ought to have little liking for the inferior breed available here. Deployment of such a magnificent deity as Indra for winning cows of much inferior breed for them looks, therefore, rather ridiculous. Extolling the deity for winning the sun in their favour is still more ridiculous in view of the sun's natural brightness and emission of abundant heat on the Indian soil as also contrary to the requirement of the newcomers who would have entered India only to have been scorched by the natural sun itself, not to talk of one enhanced in its intensity by Indra.

As regards the character of the adversaries operating at the time of Viśvāmitra, they feature as users of tricks, evil-minded, wielders of bows and arrows, destructive, prone to killing, and opponents of sacrifice. Indra is prayed to act strongly against them.<sup>27</sup> Vṛtra, Vala, Śambara and such other crooked and destructive fellows provide them with leadership. They dwell in *pura*. They are also described as *vivācah*. On the basis of such accounts of them they are taken to be aborigines of India named by incoming Aryans as *anārya*. They were black in colour, wicked in character, destructive in nature and wholly inimical to the Aryans. They are supposed to have been users of a language entirely different from the one used by the Aryans.

<sup>27</sup> इन्द्र दृह्यं यामक्रोशा अंभूवन् युजायं शिक्ष गृणुते सखिभ्यः ।

दुर्मायवो दुरेवा मर्यासो निषुंगिणो रिपवो हन्त्वासः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.30.15

Instead of taking this conclusion as decisive, when we look into the matter seriously, we find that the thing is not so simple as to decide in this simplistic way. In the first place, to take Vṛtra, Vala, Śambara and the rest of the lot as simply human beings representing the aborigines of India as distinct from the incoming Aryans is as great a travesty of facts as to regard Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Sūrya, Agni etc. as simply representatives of the Aryans. In fact, just as the latter are superhuman forces operating on the cosmic as well as intra-psychic plane rather creatively and constructively, even so the former are corresponding forces of destruction, perversion and obstruction corresponding to and operating on the same planes in contrariety to gods. They are envisaged as obstructions in the flow of water, in the coming of light and in the dawn of wisdom etc.

So is the case with the breaking of their *pura* by Indra. When Indra is described as a killer of Vṛtra, breaker of Vala, giver of speed to water, pursuer of light, and obtainer of the heaven, can his breaking of the *pura* simply mean destruction of the forts of the aborigines? If such forts would have existed at all sometime during the second millennium B.C., and would have been destroyed by the incoming Aryans under the leadership of Indra, where have their remains gone? If we identify these forts with the remains of Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa, what is the explanation for the cultural symmetry obtaining on all the layers of these sites which took no less than one thousand and four hundred years to develop as also to meet its destruction? Could those aborigines withstand for such a long period the onslaught of the attacking Aryans remaining persistently at one and the same site, building and rebuilding their so-called forts? Moreover, not a single building is traced



in Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa which can be supposed to have served as a fort. They are either residential quarters and granaries or bathrooms built along the side of the tank.

Thus, the whole theory of Aryan Invasion proves to be a historical myth created through distortion of the meaning of Vedic mantras as well as on account of wrong reading of archaeological remains under the baseless dubious presupposition. Indra in fact, has been described as the forerunner of the divine as well as human settlements.<sup>28</sup> As such, when he is said to have destroyed the *pura* of Vṛtra, Vala, Śambara etc. the act of destruction has naturally to be understood as to have taken place on some superhuman or satanic plane. If it is sought to be brought down to the human plane at all, his accomplishments would naturally assume symbolic instead of realistic significance, leaving little scope for destruction of non-Aryan forts in any real sense of the term. When Viśvāmitra, for instance, observes that “O Indra and Agni, you two have destroyed as many as ninety forts protected by Dasas just by means of a single act of yours”<sup>29</sup>, this does by no means suggest that the act of destruction took place actually on the human plane, as Griffith misunderstands it, for in that case naturally the question would arise as to the remains of at least a few of those forts anywhere to be found today. If, however, they were not forts of that magnitude as to have left their remains to be seen today, howsoever mutilated, can sheer tumbling down of some primitive hutments and barricades by anyone in the name of

<sup>28</sup> इन्द्रं क्षितीनामसि मानुषीणां विशां देवीनामुत पूर्वयावा ।। *Ibid.*, III. 34.2.

<sup>29</sup> इन्द्राग्नी नवतिं पुरां दासपलीरधूनुतम् ।  
साकमेकैः कर्मणा ।। *Ibid.*, III. 12.6

Indra have any relevance to his occupation of the heaven and the earth after this act?<sup>30</sup>

Of course, there is nothing bad in deriving history from literacy creations, but historians have no right to abstract any data out of it by ignoring totally the real thrust of meaning of the text concerned. The Vedas are not out and out of books of history from which things historical can be derived directly nor are they pure myths having no historical background whatever behind them. As a matter of fact, they have a definite historical and cultural background behind them but more than that they are highly spiritualised in their expression as well as basic intent. As such, to see in them everything of historical significance would be as fallacious as to deny total trace of history in them. While gleaning out the historical from the spiritual in them, utmost care has to be taken to separate the two from each other, keeping in mind the basic thrust of ideas intended to be communicated by the seer. For instance, when the seer explicitly treats Vṛtra, Vala, Śambara, and their retinue as cosmic and diabolic forces of obstruction, what justification has the historian to offer for rushing outright to the conclusion that they were nothing but the aborigines coming into conflict with the incoming Aryans?

Apart from Vṛtra etc., there are references to Dasyu, *dāsam varṇam*, Arya and *āryam varṇam* in the mantras seen by Viśvāmitra which have been taken as decisive in drawing the conclusion of the Aryan Invasion of India. While *dāsam varṇam* is taken to refer to the aborigines, *ārya* and *āryam varṇam* are supposed to point to an

<sup>30</sup> इन्द्रो विश्वैर्वीर्यैः ३ पत्यमान उभे आ पृषो रोदसी महित्वा ।। *Ibid.*, III. 54.15



entirely different human race necessarily to have come to India from outside. But when we take into consideration the meaning of the relevant mantras in their proper context, baselessness of any such presupposition becomes more than obvious. We have already seen how acquisition of horses and cows was a difficult proposition for the supposed Aryan people even after killing the Dasyus, since the latter are not supposed to have been in possession of horses at all and to be in possession of only such cows which were much inferior in breed to those possessed by the Aryans themselves and that too in a large number.

Over and above this, in the mantra immediately following the above one, there is a reference to the same Dasyus as *vivācah* and as opposed to performance of sacrifice. For all practical purposes, *vivācah* was taken as referring to those who spoke a language entirely different from the Aryan. But when we consider over the meaning of this word in all its occurrences in the Ṛgveda, the idea of racial and linguistic difference fails to substantiate itself. For instance, while in Ṛgveda III.34.10 *vivācah* refers to those who were hostile to Indra, in Ṛgveda VI.31.1, it characterises those cultivators who involve Indra for protection in the process of attaining something heroic.<sup>31</sup> Obviously these *vivācah* are none but the Aryans themselves. As such, *vivācah* gets wholly discounted as an evidence to bear out any fundamental linguistic and racial difference between believers and non-believers in regard to Indra.

In fact, Indra has been visualised by Viśvāmitra as well as by other seers as an agency of cosmic dimensions, responsibilities and accomplishments. Interestingly

<sup>31</sup> त्वां हीन्द्रावसे विवाचो हवन्ते चर्षणयः शूरसत्तौ ।। *Ibid*, VI.33.2.

enough, these features of the deity get expressed in the same mantra in which he is said to have liquidated Vala, ousted *vivācah* and vanquished the opponents of sacrifice.<sup>32</sup> While his corrective role is brought out in the second hemistich of the mantra, in the first one he is stated to have won vegetations, crops, trees, days and the intermediate space obviously for making life possible in this world. Here day stands for time while the intermediate space is symbolic of space. Vegetations and trees bear out the means of subsistence made available in this world for one and all. Thus, Indra represents that cosmic agency which is responsible for creation of space, time and means of subsistence in this world as also for keeping it protected from the evil design of forces of destruction operating on various planes of being.

In view of this, circumscription of his role to mere vanquishment of the non-Aryans living in their own native land along with demotion of their humble hutments just in favour of invading Aryans simply because the latter provided him with plentiful of Soma juice, is an idea as horribly demonic as can come out only from a totally ego-centric brain.

#### IX. Circumscription of Viśvāmitra's Native Place

It is evident from Viśvāmitra's dialogue with the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī that he belonged originally to a place situated at some distance from the point they come quite close to each other,<sup>33</sup> so close, of course, as to evoke the imagery of two cows licking a common

<sup>32</sup> इन्द्र ओषधीरसनोदहानि वनुस्पतीरसनोदन्तरिक्षम् ।

विभेदं बलं नुनुदे विवाचो ऽथाभवद् दमिताभिकतूनाम् ।। *Ibid*, VI.34.10.

<sup>33</sup> ओ पु स्वसारः कारवं शृणोत युयौ वौ दुरादनंसा रथेन । *Ibid*, III.33.9



calf.<sup>34</sup> This place must be just where the rivers emerge from the Himalayan hills and descend on the plains with considerable force in their flow so as to be likened to a pair of mares galloping fast. If things stand even today like that, it is certain that the seer must have visited that spot himself apart from the question whether he actually crossed them or not. He, however, was fully aware of the situation in which people crossed the rivers sometimes by carts and chariots but more often by boats. In another mantra he observes how he prays to Indra in anticipation of the day of calamity so that he may take him across and make him cross the river of sin, while being invoked by the people lying on both the sides like he himself.<sup>35</sup> This is enough to bear out that navigation in rivers was a common thing in Viśvāmitra's area and that boats were generally used for ferrying people from one side of the river to the other.

Another mantra makes this area more specific. In this mantra the seer offers to Agni to kindle him at the best place on this earth and further locates that place as lying on the banks of the rivers Dṛṣadvatī, and Sarasvatī.<sup>36</sup> It is significant to note that it is particularly these two rivers which have been mentioned by Manu while locating the area of Brahmāvarta. Needless to point out that Brahmāvarta was considered by Manu as so sacred as to have been made by the divine itself.<sup>37</sup>

34 गावैव शुभ्रे मातरां रिहाणे विपादं छुतुद्री पर्यसा जवते । *Ibid.*, III.33.1

35 विवेषु यन्मां धिषणां जजान स्तवै पुरा प्रायुदिन्द्रमहलः ।  
अंहसो यत्रं पीपरद्यथां नो नावेव यान्तंमुभयं हवन्ते ॥ *Ibid.*, III.32.14

36 नि त्वां दधे वृ आ पृथिव्या इळायास्पदे सुंदिनत्वे अहनाम् ।  
दृषद्वत्यां मानुष आपयायां सरस्वत्यां रेवदग्ने दिदीहि ॥ *Ibid.*, III.23.4.

37 सरस्वतीदृषद्वत्योर्देवनद्योर्दन्तरम् ।  
तं देवनिर्मितं देशं ब्रह्मावर्तं प्रचक्षते ॥ *Manusmṛti.* II.17.

Adjacent to Brahmāvarta, according to Manu, is the Brahmaṛṣi Deśa which comprises Kurukṣetra, Matsya, Pañcāla and Sūrasena.<sup>38</sup> It is evident from Manu's account that Brahmāvarta covered the areas west of Kurukṣetra and extended up to the river Sindhu which is probably what in the Rgvedic mantra has been called Dṛṣadvatī. On the basis of these details we are now in a position to draw the conclusion that Viśvāmitra belonged originally to what Manu calls Brahmāvarta.

Within Brahmāvarta also Viśvāmitra seems to have belonged particularly to its northern part, specially the one bordering the Himalayas. This is how we can explain his close acquaintance with the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī as descending from the mountains. Moreover, the seer has several times referred to lion as living in a den and hence as scarcely visible. While talking of Agni he observed that the god was found out by eternal beings from within waters where he was hiding himself like a lion hidden in a den.<sup>39</sup> In another mantra the Maruts have been equated with lions on account of their roars.<sup>40</sup> In the immediately preceding mantra the same Maruts have been described as indomitable and as making the mountains tremble.<sup>41</sup> He also refers to an incident in which animals are accompanying men while they are sitting around the kindled fire particularly at night.<sup>42</sup> Understandably the context of this incident is not

38 कुरुक्षेत्रं च मत्स्याश्च पञ्चालाः सूरसेनकाः ।

एष ब्रह्मर्षिदेशो वै ब्रह्मावर्तादिनन्तरम् ॥ *RV.* II.19.

39 ईयिवांसुमत्तिस्त्रिभुः शश्वतीरतिं सुश्चतः ।

अन्वीमविन्दन्निविरासौ अदुहो ऽप्सु सिंहमिवाश्रितम् ॥ *RV.*, III.9.4.

40 सिंहा न हेषकृतवः । *Ibid.*, III.26.5.

41 बृहदुक्षौ मरुतौ विश्ववैदसुः प्र वैपयन्ति पर्वतौ अदाभ्याः । *Ibid.*, III.26.4

42 त्वां यदग्ने पशवंः सुमासंते सर्मिद्धमपिश्वरी ॥ *Ibid.*, III.9.7



sacrificial, since sacrifices are performed only during the daytime. Animals might sit around fire at night only when it would have been too cold to bear.

But, at the same time, Viśvāmitra also seems to be aware of forest fires which get ignited only where the temperature is considerably hot, the forest is dense and the rainfall is torrential. In the mantra concerned, Agni is said to remain unaging in forests which in themselves are prone to decay and burning. This is why he manifests himself from the fire-sticks rubbed against each other.<sup>43</sup> In another mantra, he speaks of Agni as having returned to his mothers, i.e. waters, after consuming the forests.<sup>44</sup> Here is, evidently, a reference to the forest-fire getting extinguished by rain.

Though living possibly at a place characterised by the features mentioned above, Viśvāmitra even in those days was very well aware of India as surrounded by high mountainous ranges on one side and by deep sea on the other, his vision, however, reaching beyond the height of the mountain as also the depth of the sea, as is evident from his description of the feats of Indra.<sup>45</sup> He considers himself as one of the most profound seers searching for light beyond darkness and aspiring for the state of being untrammelled by wickedness and sin bedevilling the

- 43 निर्मथितः सुधित आ सुधस्थे युवां कुविरंध्वरस्यं प्रणेता ।  
जूर्यत्स्वग्निरजरो वनेष्वत्रा दधे अमृतं जातवेदाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.23.1
- 44 कार्यमानो वना त्वं यन्मातुरजगन्पः ।  
न तल्ले अग्ने प्रमृषे निर्वर्तनं यद्दरे सन्निहाभं वः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.9.2
- 45 न त्वां गभीरः पुरुहूत सिन्धुनादयः परि षन्तो वरन्त ।  
इत्था सखिभ्य इषितो यद्विन्द्रा दुलहं विदरुंजो गव्यमूर्वम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 32.16

worldly life.<sup>46</sup> His spiritual force is the same as that of Indra and is comparable to the golden light of Savitṛ and hence is most cherishable. His good prayer is enclosed by the heaven and the earth in the same way as a child is enclosed safe in the mother's lap.<sup>47</sup> It was probably due to achieving this equation with Indra in spiritual power that the latter has been depicted in the post-Vedic literature as envious of him. Moreover, it is due to this universality of his vision and spontaneity of mantric expression that he in the Brāhmaṇa is considered as the very eye and ear in the human head.<sup>48</sup>

- 46 ज्योतिर्वृणीत तमसो विज्ञानन्तारे स्याम दुरितादभीकं ।  
इमा गिरः सोमपाः सोमवृद्ध जुषस्वेन्द्र पुरुतमस्य कारोः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 39.7.
- 47 तदिन्वस्य सवितुं नकिंमे हिरण्ययीममतिं यामशिंश्रेत् ।  
आ सुष्टुती रोदसी विश्वमिन्वे अपीव योषा जनिमानि ववे ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 38.8
- 48 इमावेव विश्वामित्रजमदग्नी । अयमेव विश्वामित्रोऽयं जमदग्निः ।  
*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIV.5.2.6.  
श्रोत्रं वै विश्वामित्र ऋषिः । युदेनेन सर्वतः शृणोत्यथो युदस्मि सर्वतो मित्रं भवति तस्माच्छ्रोत्रं  
विश्वामित्र ऋषिः । *Ibid.*, VIII.1.2.6.



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## Sacrificial Background

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### I. Complementarity of Sacrifice and Tapas

Generally sacrifice and spiritual *sāadhanā* are taken to represent two different cultural streams getting coalesced with each other subsequently as a result of the dynamics of ancient Indian history. Looking from this viewpoint, when we reflect on the life of Viśvāmītra, we find something more revealing than this simple generalisation. In the Rāmāyaṇa obviously he is devoted to sacrifice as well as to *tapas* or spiritual *sāadhanā*. It was for the sake of safeguarding his sacrificial performances from the demons that he took the trouble of coming to Ayodhyā, requested the king for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, made them accompany him to the forest, imparted to them his knowledge and skill in archery and made them eliminate those bad elements. But, at the same time, it is also evident that his sacrificial performances themselves were just a part of his *tapas* and by no means something entirely alien to it. Indeed, his sacrificial performance here is supportive of his *tapas*. Thus, though a fully accomplished seer of long standing, he had not given up sacrificial performance even by the time of the Rāmāyaṇa.



Needless to point out that while the Ṛgveda is the initial stage in the history and personal equipment of Viśvāmitra and the Rāmāyaṇa the final, yet we find in the Ṛgveda almost the same relationship between sacrifice and *tapas* as in the Rāmāyaṇa. As we have already observed in the first chapter, the spiritual accomplishment of the seer is of the highest order. Interestingly enough, the same is true of him as a sacrificer also. Of course, he himself does not see any contradiction between sacrifice and spiritual *sādhanā*. In one of his mantras addressed to Indra, he characterises Vedic seers, *kavayah*, as accomplished in the performance of sacrifices, *suyajñāh*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly in another mantra, addressing Agni, he observes that the latter is kindled by enlightened seers for whom it is usual to see the light of the mantra and that they keep awake all the time while kindling Agni.<sup>2</sup> This was as much true of his own lineage as of others. He describes the Kuśikas as good fighters against enemies like gales of Maruts, as the first-born of Brahman, as omniscient, stimulators of brilliant mantras and yet each one of them being punctilious in kindling Agni in his household.<sup>3</sup> Offering to household Agni is the most elementary form of sacrifice while Aśvamedha is the most advanced form of it. The descendants of Kuśika were engaged not only in the performance of the former but also in that of the latter. Viśvāmitra instructs Kuśikas to rise and go to king Sudāsa who has set free his sacrificial horse for the sake of sovereignty, has killed Vṛtra in front of him, at

1 तव प्रणीती तव शूर शर्मन्ना विवासन्ति कुवयः सुयज्ञाः । RV. III. 51.7.

2 तं त्वा विप्रां विपुन्यवो जागृवांसुः समिन्धते ।

हव्यवाहममर्त्यं सहोवृधम् ॥ Ibid., III.10.9.

3 अमित्रायुधो मरुतामिव प्रयाः प्रथमजा ब्रह्मणो विश्वमिद्विदुः ।

द्युमवद ब्रह्मं कुशिकास एरिर एकैको दमं अग्निं समीधिरे ॥ Ibid., III.29.15

the back of him, above him and then is performing sacrifice on the head of the earth.<sup>4</sup> He further asks them to recite mantras like swans at the fall of the grinding stone and create delight by means of their recitations along with the pressing of Soma in the sacrifice and drink the delightful Soma in the company of divine beings, as they themselves are inspired seers, serving as eyes of men.<sup>5</sup> Speaking on behalf of other Kuśikas, he observes that he along with them invokes Agni having discovered him meditatively as universal, immanent in the whole of the existence, cognisant of light, liberal, luminous, dynamic and engaging. This invocation, however, is not just verbal. It is substantiated with the offering of oblations, as is obvious from the word *haviṣmantah* used in the mantra.<sup>6</sup>

Offering to Agni seems to have been a universal phenomenon in the history of man. There seems to be no improbability in man having been worshipped Agni with the offering of food-stuffs throughout his whole civilised or even semi-civilised history spontaneously out of his obvious obligation to fire engendered owing to the latter having been instrumental in cooking his food as well as providing him with heat, light and protection. But worshipping the same Agni with the cognisance of its universality and co-existence with the entire tangible reality is something remarkable, as it has to have the necessary pre-requisite of a sagacious vision. This is

4 उप पेतं कुशिकाश्चेतयध्वमश्वं राये प्र मुञ्चता सुदासः ।  
राजां वृत्रं जघनत्यागपागुदुगथां यजाते वृ आ पृथिव्याः ॥ Ibid., III.53.11.

5 हंसा इव कृणुथ श्लोकमर्दिभिर्मदन्तो गीर्भिरध्वरे सुते सचां ।  
देवेभिर्विप्रा ऋषयो नृचक्षसो वि पिबध्वं कुशिकाः सोम्यं मधुं ॥ Ibid., III.53.10.

6 वैश्वानरं मनसाग्निं निचाय्यां हविष्मन्तो अनुपत्यं स्वविदमं ।  
सुदानुं देवं रश्मिरं वंसुयवो गीर्भी रुणवं कुशिकासो हवामहे ॥ Ibid., III.26.1.



implicit in Viśvāmitra's observation that he, along with other seers of his family, has been worshipping Agni as Vaiśvānara. In this difference of outlook, lies the sagacity of the Vedic seer. Worshipping Agni as a tangible and localised benefactor is simply an expression of the sense of obligation of the innocent man while discernment of the same as a universal entity underlying the visible world needs a certain cosmogonic vision of the seer, consistent abstraction of the philosopher, and rigorous experimentation of the scientist. While the philosophic abstraction may serve as a guide to a certain scientific hypothesis, the vision of the seer has the likelihood of generating deeper veneration potent enough to consolidate itself through tangible action. Viśvāmitra's continuing as a sacrificer even after attaining to consummate seerhood is something cognate to this order of vision. He took to sacrifice in preparation of his spiritual *sādhanā* and continued to perform it even after attaining accomplishment in the latter partly with a view to inculcate the same in his young followers and partly also as a necessity even at the pinnacle of wisdom.

The latter is evident from his pre-eminent invocation to Agni in his hymns. While invocation to Agni is always steeped in sacrifice, about half of his hymns are addressed to this divinity. Simply on the ground that hymns to Agni occur in the beginning of his mandalas as well as those of other seers of the *Saṁhitā* excepting 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, it need not be supposed that all the mantras lying in them were composed necessarily at the preparatory stage. Their placement in the beginning is more due to the discretion of the compiler of the *Saṁhitā* rather than to their priority in the date of composition. The discretion of the compiler, on the other hand, seems to have been dictated by the necessity of sacrificial performance at the later stage.

## II. Sacrifice as a means to associating Oneself with the Cosmic Rhythm

Continuance of performance of sacrifice by the seer even after attainment of enlightenment indicates the operation of a certain deeper reason behind it. When we take into consideration Viśvāmitra's mantras from this viewpoint, we do find indications to a comprehensive philosophy underlying the performance. In one of his mantras, the seer refers to kindling of Agni and making offerings to him as per the dictates of the first principles of things as a result of which Agni with his tresses of flame, raiment of light and purifying effect becomes loving to all.<sup>7</sup> This obviously associates kindling with the creative process. Since the creation began with the kindling of Agni, as per the seer's view, we have to start our life, start our daily work, start our half-monthly, monthly and yearly work with the kindling of Agni and making offerings to it. Offering to Agni in the morning, at midday and in the evening was not just to mark the beginning, meridian and end of day but was meant for emulating what might possibly have happened right in the beginning of creation as also what in all probability lies ahead in its finale. By capturing the rhythm through its emulation in the form of sacrifice one can hope to reach ultimately the finale of the universal dynamics after passing through various intermediate stages.

This idea is made still more explicit in the next mantra of the hymn where the seer prays to Agni to take his offerings to gods in the same way as he (Agni) himself made offerings to the Earth and the Heaven through his universal pervasion and omniscience and thus bring

7

समिध्यमानः प्रथमानु धर्मा समक्तुभिरज्यते विश्ववारः ।

शोचिष्केशो घृतनिर्गिक्पावकः सुयज्ञो अग्निर्यजथाय देवान् ।। *Ibid.*, III.17.1.



success to the sacrifice of mankind by taking it across.<sup>8</sup> Agni's sacrifice to Heaven and Earth with his all pervasiveness and omniscience refers obviously to his role in that creative act which made the two move apart from each other and give way to emergence of the intermediate entities.

This idea is borne out quite clearly by another observation of the seer which recounts the circumstances and the agencies involved in the kindling of Agni at the primeval stage. "Gods generated Agni" observes Viśvāmitra, "through kindlings by means of the creative will of Dakṣa intending to go across at the stage of diversification."<sup>9</sup> Dakṣa is the father of gods. Kindling of Agni by gods out of the creative will of Dakṣa at the stage of diversification evidently means the creative act at the primeval stage when nothing except the creator's will for diversification, besides the primeval agents of that act of diversification, was there in existence. What the Creator wished to accomplish through this act was to move from unity to diversity and then perhaps to unity having gone across the intermediate diversity. Kindling of Agni at this stage simply implies start of the creative process under which space came to be formed through explosion and time through eventuation followed by formation of objects through diversification. In this process, Agni, as a product of the creative will of the Creator, served as both, the material and the efficient cause while gods operated as agents of the act of manifestation.

<sup>8</sup> यथायंजो होत्रमंने पृथिव्या यथा द्विवो जातवेदश्चिकित्वात् ।

एवानेनं हविषां यक्षि देवान्मनुष्वद्यज्ञं प्र तिरेममद्य ॥ *Ibid.*, III.17.2.

<sup>9</sup> कल्पा दक्षस्य तरुणो विधर्मणि देवासो अग्निं जनयन्त चित्तिभिः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.2.3

We can understand the significance of this statement of the seer better if we read it *vis-à-vis* what another Rgvedic seer, namely Trita, has stated figuratively and yet almost axiomatically as under :

"Non-being and being both lie in the highest heaven in the birth of Dakṣa and in the lap of Aditi while Agni is the primeval product and bearer of Ṛta and as such, he, in his prior form, was both, the bull and the cow in one."<sup>10</sup>

This very idea gets further crystallised subsequently in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad wherein it is described in the form of emergence of *tejas* out of the primeval *sat*, existence, wishing to become many out of the original one. As the Upaniṣad puts it:

There was *sat* alone in the beginning. It desired: "I may become many and hence let me procreate." Therefore, it released *tejas* out of it. That *tejas* desired: "I may become many and hence let me procreate."<sup>11</sup>

In view of what has been stated above, it is not difficult to understand that *tejas* of the Upaniṣad is indeed the Agni of the Rgveda presented rather philosophically.

<sup>10</sup> असंच्च सच्चं परमे व्योमन् दक्षस्य जन्मन्दितेरुपरस्यै ।

अग्निर्ह' नः प्रथमजा ऋतस्य पूर्व आयुनि वृषभश्च धेनुः ॥ *Ibid.*, X.5.7

<sup>11</sup> सदेव सोम्येदमग आसीदेकमेवाद्वितीयम् । तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।

तत्तेजो ऽ सृजत । तत्तेज ऐक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।।

*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI.2.2.3.



### III. Ṛta, Dharma and Sacrifice

According to Viśvāmitra, however, Agni also is not the final determinant of the sacrificial act. In the last mantra of the hymn referred to above, he talks of someone as a forerunner of Agni also in regard to sacrifice. He describes him as the *hotṛ* priest existing prior even to Agni, deserving sacrifice better than the latter, existing in a twofold manner and forming the source of sovereignty by virtue of his self-subsistence. The seer prays to Agni to conduct the sacrifice in keeping with the dispensation of that Being and make his sacrifice fully satisfying to gods.<sup>12</sup> Obviously the priority of that Being to Agni suggests that he cannot but be Dakṣa, the Creator and Source of the desire for creation. Agni is worshipful and deserves sacrificial offering simply because he lies at the root of the idea of sacrifice. As such, that Being deserves sacrificial offering more eminently than Agni. His twofold existence is the manifest and the unmanifest. His forming the source of serenity in his own right suggests his eternal constancy and blissfulness. His *dharma* must naturally lie in his holding the two forms of diametrically opposed existence together. The unmanifest is unitary and eternally constant while the manifest is diverse and changing. The former is immortal while the latter is mortal. Holding the two together even then is a mystery referred to elsewhere in the Samhitā as lying in the mutation of the immutable, *kṣarana* of the *akṣara*.<sup>13</sup>

The dynamics of this paradox of existence has been termed in the Veda as *Ṛta* and sometimes also as

<sup>12</sup> यस्त्वद्धोता पूर्वो अग्ने यजीयान् द्विता व सत्तां स्वधया च शुम्भुः ।  
तस्यानु धर्मं प्र यजा विक्रित्वो ऽ थां नो धा अध्वरं देववीतौ ॥ RV. III.17.5.

<sup>13</sup> ततः क्षरत्यक्षरं तद्विश्वमुप जीवति । Ibid., I.164.42.

*dharma*. It is called *Ṛta* in view of operation of the law of the Eternal in the dynamics of the ephemeral. It is called *dharma* on account of the Eternal sustaining the ephemeral. *Yajña* or sacrifice is a replica of *ṛta* or *dharma* made available to the human consciousness for understanding the mystery of creation as well as for modelling the pattern of his behaviour in this world.

*Ṛta* or *dharma* is a product of the offering of Itself by the Eternal to assume the form of the ephemeral. This idea has beautifully been brought out in the celebrated Hymn to Puruṣa. The Puruṣa is eternal offering Himself to the succession of time in the form of the past, present and future. He is immortal in heaven by his three feet and offers Himself to mortality by one-fourth of his being. When He wishes to subject Himself to mortality, He allows Himself to be offered as a sacrificial animal to the fire of His own desire. This offering results in emergence of the primeval *dharmas* which serve in the restoration of the ephemeral to the Eternal in the form of the mortal humans attaining to the status of immortal divine beings.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, it is evident that instead of Agni, it is the Supreme Being Himself who is the most primeval invoker, as He has offered Himself in the form of the sacrificial animal for the sake of creation with the help of gods and Ṛsis.<sup>15</sup> Gods are simply products of the Puruṣa Himself as they are born subsequently out of different organs of Him, such as Candramas from His mind, Sūrya from His

<sup>14</sup> यज्ञेनं युज्ञमयजन्त देवास्तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्वासन् ।

ते ह नाकं महिमानं सचन्तु यत्र पूर्वं साध्याः सन्ति देवाः ॥ Ibid. X. 90.16.

<sup>15</sup> तं युज्ञं बर्हिषि प्रौक्षन्पुरुषं जातमग्रतः ।

तेनं देवा अयजन्त साध्या ऋषयश्च ये ॥ Ibid. X. 90.7.



eyes, Indra and Agni from His mouth and Vāyu from His breath.<sup>16</sup> Even then, however, if they are said to have been invoked by the Puruṣa for receiving the oblation of Himself offered by Himself, that is due to the necessity of the presence of *Devatā* as a pre-requisite for making any sacrifice fruitful. So is the case with the Ṛsis. It was obligatory for them to be present on the occasion of the sacrifice to act as priests, *ṛtviks*. But the problem is how they could be there when, as a matter of fact, the Puruṣa alone was there prior to His self-sacrifice. They two, therefore, have to be admitted somehow as to have been implicit in the Puruṣa. Thus, according to the Hymn to Puruṣa, the Puruṣa Himself acted as the sacrificial priest, *devata*, fuel and fire all in one in the cosmic sacrifice which resulted in the emergence of the world.

The Supreme Being is envisioned by Viśvāmitra in the dual form of possibly Dakṣa and Aditi on account of the necessity of presence of both the female and the male in the act of creation. The seer addresses them as divine *hotṛ* priests and proposes to invite them to the sacrifice in which seven varieties of oblations lie in the state of self-relishing. Here whatever the Puruṣa, as a *ṛtvik*, utters, becomes *Ṛta*. He does so in compliance with the law of the Divine. All this is done in sheer contemplation and yet it assumes the form of the reality.<sup>17</sup> The seven oblations referred to in this mantra are most probably the seven planes of being, *paridhayah* of the Hymn to

Puruṣa.<sup>18</sup> These planes are said to take delight in self-relishing, as they are fed by the Infinite itself.

The idea of self-relishing of the seven sorts of oblation along with their inexhaustibility is elaborated upon subsequently in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad as the philosophy of the seven varieties of food produced by the Creator. This philosophy is called *madhu-vidyā* by the Upaniṣadic sage. According to the Upaniṣad, these varieties of food are first that which is common to all eaters, second and third those in the form of offerings to gods in the fire and beside the fire, fourth in the form of milk meant for young ones and the rest as mind, speech and *prāṇa*. Out of these, the last three are taken by the Upaniṣad as symbolic of the intermediate space, the earth and the heaven respectively. They are also supposed to represent the three Vedas, the three planes of being, i.e., gods, fathers and men, as also the three principles of being, i.e. the father, the mother and the child.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, these foods, according to the Upaniṣad, stand for all that has come out of the Creator and serve among themselves as both the food and the eater. The eater not only consumes food but also produces food. This is why, though being taken up constantly by the eater, the food does not get exhausted.<sup>20</sup> This self-breeding as well as self-relishing of the food is made possible owing to oneness of the Creator creating all out of Himself. As He lies embedded in everything, be it earth, water, fire, air,

16 चन्द्रमा मनसो ज्ञातश्चक्षुः सूर्यो अजायत ।

मुखानिन्द्रिश्चानिश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत ॥ *Ibid.* X. 90.13.

17 दैव्या होतारा प्रथमा नृञ्जे सप्त पूक्षासः स्वधया मदन्ति ।

ऋतं शंसन्त ऋतमित्त आहुर्नुवृतं वृतपा दीध्यानाः ॥ *Ibid.* III. 4.7.

18 सप्तास्यासन्प्रिधयस्त्रिः सप्त समिधः कृताः ।

देवा यद्यज्ञं तन्वाना अवध्न्युरुषं पशुम् ॥ *Ibid.* X. 90.15.

19 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, I.5.1-5.

20 'कस्मात्तानि न क्षीयन्ते ऽद्यमानानि सर्वदा' इति पुरुषो वा अक्षितिः स हीदमन्नं पुनः पुनर्जनयते ॥ *Ibid.* I.5.2.



sun, directions, moon, lightning, thunder, sky, sacred law, truth, human being or his self, observes the Upaniṣad, all are interspersed by each other, all share in the being of each other and relish as food the essence of each other.<sup>21</sup> It is on account of the cognisance of the interrelatedness of all things in the creation as well as the unique delightfulness of this cognisance that the wisdom involved in it is called *madhu-vidyā* and is positively acknowledged to have been derived from the Vedic seer known as Dadhyañ.<sup>22</sup>

Viśvāmitra also, however, seems to have had vision of all this by himself, for otherwise, it was inconceivable for him to have talked of the seven varieties of food taking delight in self-relishing while the primeval pair of divine invokers is being duly paid heed to particularly in the context where prayers to *Rta* result in realisation of *Rta* and the guardians of the divine law happen to follow it by sheer meditation, as the mantra quoted above tells us.<sup>23</sup> Indeed it is this vision and the consequent interweaving of ideas emerging from it, which form the basis of his view of sacrifice.

As a matter of fact, it is in keeping with this vision that he makes offerings to Agni taking it not as an ordinary fire but as the undecaying and all-knowing principle indwelling each and every being in the universe.<sup>24</sup> Agni is, no doubt, churned out of a pair of fire-sticks and is kindled for the sake of sacrifice but that is only its manifest physical form. Otherwise, it is the

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II.5.1-15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II.5.16.

<sup>23</sup> See *Supra*, F.N. 17.

<sup>24</sup> जन्मन्मन् निर्हितो जातवेदा विश्वामित्रेभिरिध्यते अजस्रः ।  
तस्यं वयं सुमृतौ यज्ञियस्यापि भुद्रे सौमनुसे स्याम् ॥ RV.III.1.21.

indestructible principle surviving all destructions, as is evident from the conflagration of the forest where everything except Agni gets burnt. It is in this indestructibility of the all-knowing Agni that lies the latter's immortality. Agni is considered immortal because he survives in the midst of destruction.<sup>25</sup> He is luminous and very well visible. But what is specially worth worshipping in him is his omniscience. Similarly he acts as a messenger of gods and moves around taking the oblation of man to gods. Even then, however, he is made by gods the navel of immortality simply because that is his essential nature.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV. Sacrifice as the Principle of Creation

As creation is a result of self-sacrifice of the Supreme Being, sacrifice comes to be envisaged as a basic and most comprehensive principle of creation. Individuals as well as objects are formed here as a result of sacrifices of the many and in their turn again each one of them has to sacrifice himself or itself for the formation of the next generation of individuals and objects. Thus, the creative process involves a long chain of sacrifices made by individuals in the interest of the totality of being. Moreover, the creative process is by no means just horizontal. It is vertical too. In fact, it moves horizontally because it has got to rise vertically. And the vertical elevation needs not mere abdication of the previous position but also transformation in the nature of things. The tragedy of Triśaṅku lies in his unwholesome desire

<sup>25</sup> निर्मथितः सुधित आ सुधस्थे युवां क्विरध्वरस्यं प्रणेता ।

जूर्यस्त्वग्निरजरो वनेष्वत्रां दधे अमृतं जातवेदाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.23.1.

<sup>26</sup> अग्निं सुदीतिं सुदृशं गृणन्तो नमस्यामस्त्वेदयं जातवेदः ।

त्वां दूतमरतिं हव्यवाहं देवा अकृण्वन्मृतस्य नाभिम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.17.4.



to retain his physical body perpetually and yet ascend to the heaven. Agni serves as an agent of the desired transformation by virtue of his existence between the visible and the invisible. If as *tejas*, he has made the existence, *sat*, tangible, he has also the power to transform the tangible into the intangible and indeed the visible into the invisible until it reaches the original *sat*. By consuming the gross oblation he raises his flames to the higher regions and eventually to the heaven. This is how he takes the oblation to heaven through the process of transformation. Proceeding along with the transformed oblation, he takes his seat in the navel of the heaven and makes even the *kuśa* grass bristle with divinities.<sup>27</sup> He, with the help of gods and men, makes the sacrifice performed in all and sundry forms through his latent intelligence. As the principle of consumption and control, he moves around secretly removing obstacles in the company of those who are devoted to performance.<sup>28</sup>

In view of this role of Agni in the performance of sacrifice on the universal as well as on individual scale, the seer asks the Lord of forests to send the oblation to gods under the aegis of Agni who, as an agent of consumption, would refine it suitably and offer it in a truer way by virtue of knowing the origins of gods.<sup>29</sup>

27 ऊर्ध्वो वां गातुरंध्वरे अकार्युध्वा शोचीषिं प्रस्थिता रजांसि ।  
दिवो वा नाभा न्यसादि होतां स्तुणीमर्हि देवव्यंक्षा हि बर्हिः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.4.4.

28 अग्निर्देवेभिर्मनुषश्च जन्तुभिस्तन्वानो यज्ञं पुरुपेशंसं धिया ।  
रथीरन्तरीयते साधंदिष्टिभिर्जीरो दमूना अभिशस्तिचातनः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.3.6.

29 वनस्पतेऽवं सुजोपं देवान्गमिर्हविः शंमिता सूदयाति ।  
सेदु होतां सत्यतरो यजाति यथा देवानां जर्निमानि वेदं ॥ *Ibid.*, III.4.10.

Thus, according to Viśvāmitra, sacrifice is the basic nature of the universal existence. As a matter of fact, it is being performed constantly in some form or the other by all whosoever and whatsoever. All natural processes involving change and transformation are indeed veritable parts as well as forms of this sacrifice. Agni is the principal agent of this sacrifice since he is intimately connected with the Supreme Being on one hand and with the world on the other. The area of the sacrifice extends from the physical to the divine or indeed to whatever has emerged from the Being. The primeval sacrifice is being performed on the divine plane by gods like Mitra, Varuṇa and Agni obviously in the form of the offerings of what they represent each on the physical side. The act of offering on behalf of gods serves as the secret impulse, imperative or intelligence lying embedded in the texture of the universal process and is being acted upon to a great extent automatically by all whosoever dwell or even whatsoever exists in the world. The seer wants man just to capture the cadence of the latent impulse and logic of the secret intelligence and act accordingly, if he wants his life to be made harmonious and sweetened by this mead of divine felicity.<sup>30</sup>

### V. Sacrifice as the Path of Universal Concord

Thus sacrifice, according to Viśvāmitra, is the means to establishing concord in the world and preparing the way for its eventual transcendence. In view of this, even the highly elevated and enlightened seers were required to perform it regularly even after attaining to enlightenment. This is why Viśvāmitra also keeps continuously

30 यं देवासस्त्रिरहन्नायजन्ते दिवेर्दिवे वरुणो मित्रो अग्निः ।  
सेमं यज्ञं मधुमन्तं कृधी नुस्तनूतपाद् घृतयोनिं विधन्तम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.4.2.



performing sacrifice even after he had attained his seerhood. This is evident from his invocation particularly of Agni, the chief custodian of sacrifice. Addressing Agni, he observes that as a sacrificer he prays to the deity along with the offering of the oblation for getting his friendship as well as noble thoughts.<sup>31</sup> In the same hymn further he wishes Agni to take the oblation to gods after rejoicing himself in it.<sup>32</sup> He even refers to the oblation mixed with *ghṛta*, which he offers to Agni addressing him as *vipra* and *ṛsi śreṣṭha*.<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere he points to Agni as the grandson of energy and also as the creativity of the seer-poet and prays to him in the context of sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> He even refers to timings of the kindling of Agni as well as to offerings to be made to him. These are the morning, mid-day, evening and thereafter.<sup>35</sup> From the use of the words *sāva* and *savana* in this context it is evident that in these daily sacrifices Soma juice was also offered. Viśvāmitra, of course, refers to the long tradition of his own family kindling Agni and making offerings to him like mares offering milk to their neighing young ones.<sup>36</sup> Thus it is understandable that the advent of Viśvāmitra with his mighty visions was not something accidental but the culmination of a long tradition of devotion, dedication and contemplation on

Agni carried on meticulously by his forefathers long since.

Besides Agni, several other gods were also offered sacrifice by Viśvāmitra. Indra is pre-eminently one of them. He prays to Indra to come to him and accept the very first offering of the drink and oblige him as he did his ancestors. In this offering he is not alone.<sup>37</sup> Along with Soma, several other things such as *karambha*, *dhānāh* and *apūpa* are also offered to him singly as well as in the company of other gods such as Pūṣan and Ṛbhus.<sup>38</sup> Mitra, Pūṣan, Ṛbhus and Aśvins, besides Viśvedevāh, are other deities who have been offered sacrifice by Viśvāmitra. He has seen one of the best hymns addressed to Uṣas also in which he has affectionately addressed her as taking round of the earth regularly. Scarcely, however, has he associated her with sacrifice.<sup>39</sup>

Besides daily sacrifices, which he performed so meticulously, as is evident from the above account, Viśvāmitra was also associated with such great sacrifices as Aśvamedha. In one of his hymns he gives a detailed account of the sacrificial pillar used in such sacrifices. He recounts how the pillar was cut from a tree, hewn by means of an axe, brought ceremoniously to the sacrificial ground, decorated variously and covered with a piece of cloth. A rope was tied around it. Enlightened seer-poets were involved in erecting it in a pit facing the kindled Agni. It was regarded as an emblem of the sacrifice. In one of these mantras there is

31 ईळं च त्वा यजमानो हविर्भिरीळं सखित्वं सुमतिं निकामः । *Ibid.*, III.1.15.

32 इमं युञ्जं संहसावन् त्वं नो देवत्रा धेहि सुकृतो रराणः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.1.22

33 तुभ्यं स्तोका घृतश्चुतो ऽग्ने विप्राय सन्त्य ।

ऋषिः श्रेष्ठः समिध्यसे युञ्जस्यं प्राविता भव ॥ *Ibid.*, III.21.3

34 ऊर्जो नपातमध्वरे दीद्विवांसमुप दर्वि ।

अग्निमीळे कृविकंतुम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.27.12

35 *Ibid.*, III. 28.1-6.

36 अश्वो न कन्दुञ्जनिभिः समिध्यते वैश्वानरः कुंशिकेभिर्युगे युगे ।

स नो अग्निः सुवीर्यं स्वश्व्यं दधातु रत्नममृतैषु जामृविः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 26. 3.

37 पिवा वर्धस्व तवं वा सुतासु इन्द्र सोमासः प्रथमा उतेमे ।

यथापिबः पूर्या इन्द्र सोमो एवा पाहि पन्यां अद्या नवीयान् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.36.3

38 *Ibid.*, III.52.4.6.7.

39 *Ibid.*, III.61



also an account of a large number of pillars used in the sacrifice. When erected after decoration and covering by means of cloth, they are visualised as presenting the sight of a number of swans flying in a row.<sup>40</sup>

## VI. Sacrifice as a Source of Plenty

As regards the purpose of sacrifice, that can be understood from what the seer talks to a tree while getting it cut for the sake of the sacrificial post. He addresses it as the Lord of trees which is suggestive of the excellence of the tree selected for use in the sacrifice. The tree was supposed to represent the vegetable kingdom. Moreover, while making use of it, the seer wishes its roots to grow in hundreds of branches and the sacrificers in thousands of them so as to attain to great felicity.<sup>41</sup> In fact, there are certain varieties of trees which shoot up in tens and hundreds of sprouts from their roots when cut down. Viśvāmitra understandably approves use of only such trees for making sacrificial posts. Thus, the sacrificial offering is supposed to bring plenty rather than depletion to whatever is offered. This must understandably be true of other offerings also. So is implied in the seer's prayer to the deity to bring prosperity to him as well as to other sacrificers in return for his offerings.<sup>42</sup> Performance of sacrifice involves use of vegetation as fuel, sacrificial post and cereal. It also draws from the animal life milk, curd and *ghṛta* as well as sacrificial animals. Besides these, gold and coins

were also given as the sacrificial fee, *dakṣiṇā*. All these, therefore, were supposed to multiply by virtue of the sacrificial performance.

This is why Viśvāmitra, while making offerings to Agni, prays to the latter to bring to him virility, ownership of a number of horses as also of the gem capable of fascinating the mind.<sup>43</sup> Plenty of progeny is another object desired from the sacrificial performance. All these expectations are obviously in conformity with the idea of sacrifice as the universal creative process enacted in miniature. In fact, the objects expected from the sacrificial performance are naturally to be had in course of the universal process itself. However, as sacrifice is supposed to expedite the process, it can also make the fruit expeditious and plentiful. If the tree by virtue of its use for the sacrificial purpose can shoot up hundreds of sprouts from its root, the sacrificer is expected to multiply thousand-fold through his offerings. The result is more abundant in the case of man simply because, in contrast to the offering of the tree which is unconscious, the offering of the sacrificer is conscious and self-willed.

In this basic difference in the act of offering lies the secret of the institution of sacrifice. Things grow here through appropriation of others. The act of appropriation engenders resistance and thus impedes the process of growth. As against it, will to grow through sacrifice consummating in self-sacrifice, facilitates the creative process and proves much more fruitful.

<sup>40</sup> हंसा इव श्रेणिशो यतानाः शुक्रा वसानाः स्वरवो न आर्गुः ।  
उन्नीयमाना कृविभिः पुरस्ताद्देवा देवानामर्पि यन्ति पार्थः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.8.9.

<sup>41</sup> वनस्पते शतवल्शो वि रोह सहस्रवल्शा वि वयं रुहेम ।  
यं त्वामयं स्वर्धित्तिस्तेजमानः प्रणिनायं महते सौभगाय ॥ *Ibid.*, III.8.11.

<sup>42</sup> सं राया भूयसा सृज मयोभुना तुर्विद्युन्म यशस्वता ॥ *Ibid.*, III.16.6.

<sup>43</sup> स नो अग्निः सुवीर्यं स्वश्व्यं दधातु रत्नममृतैषु जागृविः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.26.3.



## VII. Sacrifice and Self-Purification

Finer the stratum of consciousness involved in the act of offering anything, the greater is the reward in terms of spiritual awakening. It is this aspect of sacrifice which is prominently revealed in the visions of Vedic seers including Viśvāmitra. While erecting the sacrificial post, what the latter aspires for is redemption from thoughtlessness and the consequent upgrading in his fortune.<sup>44</sup> The state of thoughtlessness is obviously the result of utter confusion created by excessive demands of the lower tendencies of mind. Erection of the sacrificial post is symbolic of transcendence of such tendencies. Upgradation in the fortune lies in greater and greater inclination of the mind of the sacrificer towards the Divine. This is evident from Viśvāmitra's observation in the next but one mantra of the same hymn. Here it has been stated that the well decorated and clothed sacrificial post brought to the sacrificial ground gains in greater glory when erected by contemplative wise seers inwardly absorbed in their aspiration for the Divine.<sup>45</sup> Coming to this level of ideation, the sacrificial post becomes symbolic of that aspiration by rising upward and indicating the presence of the higher reality. Interestingly enough, it continues to play that role subsequently also in the form of the shaft erected at the top of places of worship all over the world, no matter, be it a temple, church, pagoda or mosque.

44. समिद्धस्य श्रयमाणः पुरस्ताद् ब्रह्मं वन्दानो अजरं सुवीरम् ।

आरे अस्मदमतिं वार्धमान उच्छ्रयस्व महते सौभगाय ॥ *Ibid.*, III.8.2.

45. युवां सुवासाः परिवीत आगात् स उ श्रेयां भवति जायमानः ।

तं धीरासः क्वव्य उन्नयन्ति स्वाध्यो इ मनसा देवयन्तः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.8.4.

## VIII. Sacrifice and Vision of Mantras

Indeed it is in this elevated state of consciousness that the Vedic mantras are received. The significance of this statement can be understood better if we familiarise ourselves with the bone of contention behind it. To spell it out, there is a raging controversy regarding the circumstances under which the mantras might have been composed. Those who advocate the foreign origin of the Vedic Aryans, take the mantras as a product of the partly bewildered and partly bewitched mind of the alien entrants to the portals of the then India supposedly so different from their original home and so plentiful in natural resources and climatic variations. But, if that were the case, where was the scope for such an abundant background of sacrifice and spiritual culture embodied in the literature left by them? Organisation of stray beliefs and customs into institutions requires sufficient time and rigour of practice which have nothing to provide for in the theory mentioned above.

The *Yājñikas*, on the other hand, regard the mantras as eternal in nature having been revealed right in the beginning of creation just for the maintenance of it through the performance of sacrifice. Now, if this were the case, how to account for references to particular persons and personal matters in the mantras?

Lastly the spiritualists maintain that the mantras descended upon seers in the state of deep meditation while they were absorbed in practicing severe *tapas*. But, if this was the case, how to account for references to sacrifice with which the mantras are replete?

As we have seen in the case of Viśvāmitra at least, seers figure in the mantras as active participants in the



performance of sacrifices. This obviously leaves one with no other alternative except to forge out a point of reconciliation between the ritualistic and spiritual viewpoints on the one hand and the historical on the other, as matters supportive of all these three viewpoints are to be found embedded in the mantras in a considerable measure.

The theory of foreign origin apart, which in any case has nothing to support it in the Veda, one cannot on factual ground deny the historical background of the Vedic compositions. So is the case with sacrificial and spiritual elements also. Total negation of elements pertaining to anyone of these viewpoints *vis-à-vis* the other two, as unfortunately the case has been until now, has been the basic reason of all sorts of misunderstandings regarding the Veda. Veda is, indeed, the product of minds of a certain epoch in Indian history which got highly enlightened through contemplation on various matters including structure of the cosmos and that of the inner being. While sacrifice served as an opportune occasion for contemplation on these problems, contemplation done in the sacrificial context, as well as outside it, prepared the background for revelation of mantras. This is why in a large number of cases revelation of mantras is associated with the sacrificial performance.

We may here review some cases of composition of mantras in order to make clearer the relationship between a particular mantra and the event associated with it. For instance, addressing the sacrificial post when Viśvāmitra observes that the post has been erected facing the kindled Agni and has to rise high for good fortune, there is no doubt that the context of revelation of the mantra is sacrificial. Now the question is: Is this mantra occasioned by the erection of a

particular sacrificial post in the presence of Viśvāmitra or is it a universal observation to be applied to any event of erection of the post anywhere? The Mimāṃsaka would obviously stick to the latter alternative, because it is corroborative of his proposition of the eternity of Vedic mantras. But, then how to account for the reference in the mantra to a particular object and person? If, on the other hand, the concerned mantra be accepted as to have been composed with reference to the particular occasion mentioned in it, the question arises whether it was composed at the very spot on the particular occasion or quite away from the spot imaginatively creating the impression that it is actually a spot composition. It is at least difficult to wholly negate the probability of spot composition of the mantras in several cases. But such mantras should naturally be trivial in their meaning. In the majority of cases, however, they cannot but be envisioned and composed in complete abandonment, though bearing the sacrificial context in them.

Even outside the sacrificial context, there is a serious doubt about those mantras also having been spot compositions which evidently embody local reference. Viśvāmitra's hymn to the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī, for instance, though seemingly a spot composition, is not so at all, for, otherwise, it would be impossible at least to account for those mantras in it which are uttered from the side of the rivers. It is quite possible that the seer was personally involved in any such event as is depicted in the hymn, but plausibly enough, he would have accomplished his task by his sheer spiritual power and would only subsequently have given the whole event a literary form in which it has come down to us.



### IX. Vedic Seer's Role in the Spiritualisation of the Institution of Sacrifice

Today any sacrifice without recitation of Vedic mantras is considered as no sacrifice at all. It would, however, be difficult to say the same thing regarding sacrifice at the initial stage. As the studies of Sir James George Frazer, as embodied in his monumental work "The Golden Bough" bear out, the institution of sacrifice has been associated with man since the very beginning of the human civilisation. If we are not obliged to delink the Veda completely from the course of history, it would have to be admitted that the Vedic sacrifice must also have been somehow or the other rooted in the same primeval milieu, with this fundamental difference, however, that while elsewhere sacrifice has remained almost in the same primitive state in which it was originally conceived, in the Vedic milieu it has undergone a radical transformation. The credit for this transformation evidently goes to Vedic seers whose composition came to give a transformatory re-orientation to the older practice so as to make it universally acceptable in one form or the other.

When the seer himself happened to be the sacrificer or priest, he must obviously have been motivated in his composition by the sacrificial requirement. In one of his mantras addressed to Agni, Viśvāmitra, for instance, observes: "*Motivated by the desire for wealth, we, the Kuśikas, along with the offering of oblation, invoke Agni who is liberal, luminous, dynamic, observer of truth and knower of the heaven. We have contemplated on him as Vaiśvānara, the all-pervading divinity.*"<sup>46</sup> The mantra obviously shows that the seer is offering oblation to Agni

on behalf of all the Kuśikas and is invoking the deity for making the act of offering possible. Thus, the invocation must precede the act of offering. Mantra is admittedly used as a tool of invocation which in the present case, at least, happens not to be composed fully even while the offering is being made. What, however, has evidently been accomplished even before proceeding to offer the oblation is the cognisance of the universal pervasiveness of Agni as Vaiśvānara. Thus, it is in this cognisance that the mantra has its root. Other things, such as invocation and offering, associated with the cognisance are just accessories envisaged so as to make the cognisance take a tangible shape. Now while the cognisance is a result of the seer's contemplation in solitude, the invocation and offering are products of his participation in the sacrificial performance. In this way, the seer's participation in the performance brings to completion the sacrifice on one hand and composition of the mantra on the other. This coordination between composition and performance at the initial stage is very well reflected in the Ṛgvedic mantra attributed to Bṛhaspati in which it has been stated that they reached the source of the sacred word by means of sacrifice and found out the word from within the seers.<sup>47</sup>

In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra himself observes that while making use of slabs of stone for the pressing of Soma in course of sacrifice he controls the Heaven and the Earth through his higher intellect, *manīśā*.<sup>48</sup> In another mantra he, as a *hotṛ* priest, asks the *adhvaryu* to take the seat of the sacrificer and recite mantras following him in praise of Indra.<sup>49</sup> The mantra recited by

<sup>46</sup> See F.N. 6 supra.

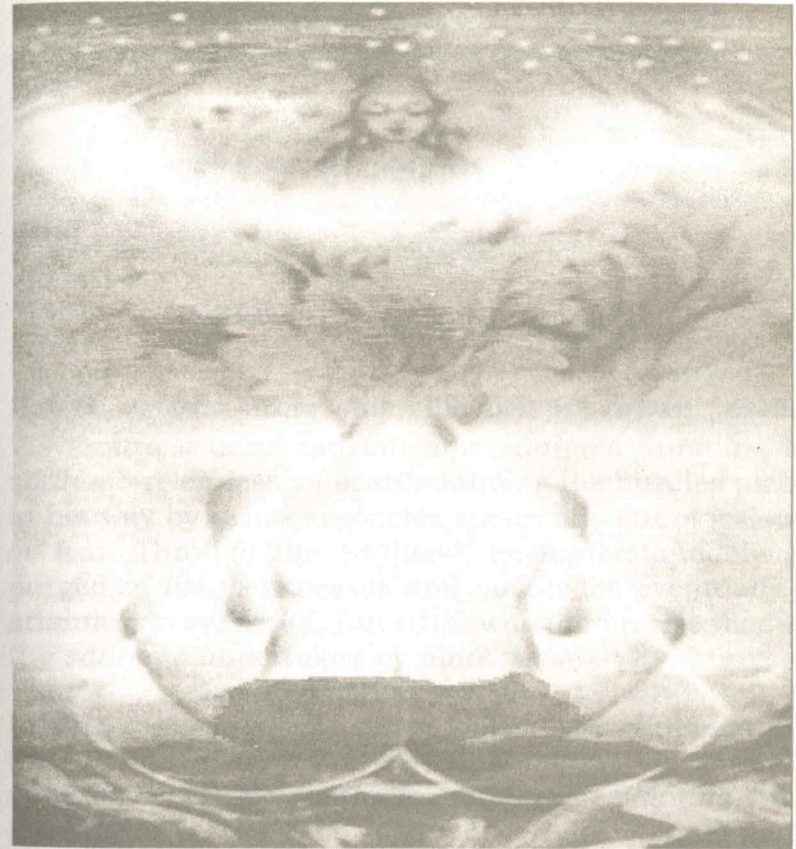
<sup>47</sup> युजेन वाचः पदवीयमायुत्तामन्विकन्दुर्षिषु प्रविष्टाम् । RV. X.71.3

<sup>48</sup> अच्छा विवक्षि रोदसी सुमेके गाव्यो युजानो अंधुरे मनीषा ।। Ibid., III.57.4.

<sup>49</sup> शंसावाध्वर्यो प्रति मे गृणीहीन्द्राय वाहः कृणवात् जुष्टम् ।



him on such occasions, though seemingly his creation, are really, as the seer understands, brought down by the god himself. This is why while invoking Indra to come down, take his seat on the Kuśa grass and enjoy the *puṛodāśa*, he addresses the deity as the bearer of mantras.<sup>50</sup> Likewise in another mantra he states that the forward moving sacrifice has been performed by him in association with others, that the mantra may expand and people may worship Agni by means of wood and obeisance, and that the Heaven may direct the creative powers of seer-poets and pave a path for the strong and inquisitive.<sup>51</sup> In view of this dictative position of divinities in regard to revelation and composition of mantras, Agni himself has been addressed a number of times as the inquisitive seer-poet, omniscient and free from ignorance.<sup>52</sup>



## Sādhanā And Vision of Mantra

एदं बृहिर्यजमानस्य सीदाथा च भूदुक्थमिन्द्राय शस्तम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.53.3

50 इमा ब्रह्मं ब्रह्मवाहः क्रियन्त आ बृहिः सीद ।

वीहि शूर पुरोळाशम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.41.3.

51 प्राञ्चं युञ्जं चंकृम् वंर्धतां गीः सुमिदिभृग्निं नमसा दुवस्यन् ।

दिवः शंशामुर्विदथा कवीनां गृत्साय चित्तवसें गातुमीषुः ।। *Ibid.*, III.1.2.

52 अग्निं होतारं प्र वृणे मियेधे गृत्सं कृविं विश्वविद्वमभूरम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.19.1.



### I. *Sādhanā* versus Innate Seerhood

*As is evident* from his life-sketch drawn earlier, Viśvāmitra was an indefatigable *sādhaka* pursuing his *sādhanā* relentlessly notwithstanding the hurdles placed in his way by certain agencies apparently out of jealousy or fear. Through the *sādhanā*, he understandably got purged of his weaknesses and succeeded eventually in attaining to seerhood. But what was the precise mode of the *sādhanā* undertaken by him?

In this connection one needs only to be reminded that the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata as well as subsequent works use the word *tapas* for pointing out to the spiritual course he might have had to undergo for attaining to his goal. Under *tapas*, what has particularly been brought to notice is his extraordinary restraint on eating, drinking, sleeping and lust. The source of the authors of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata in this, as well as in other respects, must obviously have been the Vedas, since they alone were there basically preceding the age of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. In the Vedas, however, no such details concerning the *tapas* of the seer are to be found in which there might be reference to his abdication of eating, drinking and lustful life as also to his sitting or standing posture for any length of time. What, however,



is to be found unmistakably there in this regard is a number of indications to the course of *sādhanā* the seer might have undergone for his transformation into a spiritual personage of eminence. Indeed, it was by virtue of this *sādhanā* that he came to be recognised by his own family of seers as a great *ṛsi* having his root in the Divine and having been inspired by the Divine so much as to have stopped the flow of turbulent and mighty rivers like Vipāśa and Śutudrī for enabling Sudāsa and his forces to cross them.<sup>1</sup>

The hymn to the rivers Vipāśa and Śutudrī, in which this episode is recounted in full detail, is, indeed, a rare instance of clash between human will and divine dispensation. The rivers are said to have been carved out by the Divine from the very beginning and are expected to flow uninterruptedly under the Divine decree. Viśvāmitra, however, happens to be required to stop their flow for providing passage to the forces of the king. The rivers are in no mood to oblige him as they are in full spate. But the implorations of the seer prove so effective that they were obliged to lower down the level of their water so much as to enable the bullock carts to wade through easily. Owing to the power of the seer, not only the forces of the king find passage across the rivers but the seer's own words of imploration uttered in this context have come to attain the status of mantras immune to forgetfulness for all time to come.<sup>2</sup> This is the measure of the *siddhi* attained by the seer that even Nature is obliged to amend her laws when confronted by

his will. By virtue of his *siddhi*, he has come to be regarded as an inborn seer having his seerhood rooted in the Divine and working always under the divine inspiration.

Innateness of seerhood, however, is not peculiar to Viśvāmitra alone. Regarding Vāmadeva, another Vedic seer, also it has been stated that he discovered the secret of birth of gods while still lying in the womb of his mother.<sup>3</sup> It is probably on the basis of such references that the Vedic seers have come to be regarded as of divine origin, having been born of Prajāpati directly in the beginning of the creation or rather prior to creation and as having extended their help in the emergence of the latter in the company of gods. This is borne out by the Hymn to Puruṣa also where seers and *sādhyas* along with gods, are said to have offered the primeval Puruṣa to Agni resulting in the creation of the world.<sup>4</sup> Such references, however, are not to be taken always literally as, in that case, they would leave no scope at all for *sādhanā* in the life of the seer which gets otherwise suggested in several ways.

## II. Probable Reference to the Teacher of Viśvāmitra

This state of things gets corroborated, among other things through a reference made by Viśvāmitra himself to a number of seers preceding him who had served in the enrichment of the Vedic wisdom. In one of his mantras he speaks of the feat of the Āngirasas who, having comprehended the immensity of their selves and having drawn the primeval sap of life from them, had got

1 महों ऋषिं देवजा देवजूतोऽस्तंभ्नात् सिन्धुमर्णवं नृचक्षाः ।  
विश्वामित्रो यदवहत्सुदासमप्रियायत कुशिकेभिरिन्द्रः ॥ RV. III. 53.9.

2 एतद्वचो जरितमर्षिं मृष्ट्या आ यत्ते घोषानुत्तरा युगार्नि ।  
उक्थेषुं कारो प्रति नो जुषस्व मा नो नि कः पुरुषत्रा नमस्ते ॥ Ibid., III. 33.8.

3 गर्भे नु सन्नन्वेषामवेदमहं देवानां जनिमानि विश्वा । Ibid., IV. 27.1.

4 तं यज्ञं वर्हिषि प्रौक्षन् पुरुषं ज्ञातमग्रतः ।  
तेन देवा अयजन्त साध्या ऋषयश्च ये ॥ Ibid., X. 90.7



delighted. The words they produced in this state of comprehension and realisation, brought warmth to the heaven and the earth resulting in the subsequent creation. This was followed by deployment of the heroes of intellection for the protection of the cows of wisdom.<sup>5</sup> In the immediately preceding mantra they are said to have taken their seat with the desire in mind. They intended by means of it to tread the path of immortality. They kept themselves seated for an unusually long duration in order to get their aims fulfilled. By means of Ṛta they exercised control over time as it passed in months.<sup>6</sup> It was in this state of timelessness that they could draw the milk of the primeval sap of life and experience the delight accruing out of it. They are even counted as seven in number who by means of their enhanced mental capacity and resultant wisdom pierced through even the hard mountain of ignorance and thus found out the exclusive path to Ṛta and entered into it with full understanding.<sup>7</sup>

In yet another mantra, Viśvāmitra draws a remarkable sketch of the intellectual and spiritual attainments of a certain seer preceding him who has unequivocally been regarded by Sāyaṇa as the venerable teacher of the seer himself. Viśvāmitra describes him figuratively as perennial reservoir of water overflowing in hundreds of streams and yet remaining full and explicitly as exceedingly wise and source of all that is worthy of

5 सुपश्यमाना अमदन्नुभि स्व पर्यः प्रलस्य रेतसो दुर्घानाः ।  
वि रोदसी अतप्रह्वोषं एषां ज्ञाते निष्ठा मर्दधुर्गोषु वीरान् ।। *Ibid.*, III.31.10

6 नि गंव्यता मनसा सेदुरकैः कृण्वानासौ अमृतत्वार्यं गातुम् ।  
इदं चिन्नु सदर्शनं भूर्येषां येन मासौ असिपासन्नुतेन ।। *Ibid.*, III.31.9

7 वीळौ सुतीरभि धीरा अतृन्दन्याचारिन्नुन्मनसा सुप्त विप्राः ।  
विश्वामविन्दन्पुथ्यामृतस्यं प्रजानन्निन्ता नमुसा विवेश ।। *Ibid.*, III.31.5

speech. Further the seer points to him as capable of taking his disciple directly to the contact of the Reality. He, according to Viśvāmitra, takes delight in the lap of the heaven and the earth with the same abandonment as a child finds itself in the lap of its parents. He is also characterised as having perfect coordination of truth in his words.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as per Sāyaṇa's interpretation, Viśvāmitra has not only a number of seers preceding him but also one who initiated him in the sacred lore. This lore, indeed, is rooted in the Divine and not in the seer, be he Viśvāmitra or anyone else. As regards the latter, he further refers to *Vipras* who were born much earlier than him and whose words were unquestionably authoritative for him.<sup>9</sup> Having assumed the role of Prajāpati even, he expresses his desire to see the seers of higher intellectual and spiritual achievements. He chisels his mantras brilliantly like a carpenter and undertakes his task efficiently like a well-trained horse and yet when he gets the touch of higher beatitude, he feels the necessity of coming into contact with seers of higher intellectual and spiritual equipments.<sup>10</sup> He considers the birth of seers as so mysterious as to need to be explained by no less an agency than the Ruler of the world Himself. Those seers, in his view, had full control over their minds and were responsible for creating the heaven, as it were.<sup>11</sup> Creation of heaven here obviously means

8 शतधारमुत्समक्षीयमाणं विपश्चितं पितरं वक्त्वानाम् ।  
भेलिं मर्दन्तं पित्रोरुपस्थे तं रोदसी पिपृतं सत्यवाचम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.9.

9 आहुर्विप्रासो अश्विना पुराजाः । *Ibid.*, III.58.3.

10 अभि तष्टैव दीधया मनीषामत्यो न वाजी सुधुरो जिहानः ।  
अभि प्रियाणि मर्मुश्वराणि कुर्वीरिच्छामि सन्दुशं सुमेधाः ।। *Ibid.*, III.38.1.

11 इनोत पृच्छं जनिमा कवीनां मनोधृतः सुकृतस्तक्षत दाम् । *Ibid.*, III.38.2.



exploration and eventual attainment of it through higher intellectual power and noble deeds. Thus, making of a seer was a curious phenomenon even in the estimation of Viśvāmitra. Due to this curiosity, it was sought to be explained in terms of divine instrumentation. Involvement of the Divine in His creation was understandably owing to the seer's intimation of the Divine. After attaining to seerhood, when the seer, through his vision, comes to understand the Divine Itself as the source of his vision, he does not but recognise the former as his source in every respect.

### III. Devotion to Agni

As a matter of fact, each Vedic seer is primarily a worshipper of Agni by way of performing sacrifice. Viśvāmitra is no exception to it. Each one in the family of Kuśika, so is explicitly stated in a mantra, kindled fire in his household as well as fought against enemies and produced mantras having been born of Brahman and having understood everything whatever.<sup>12</sup> Viśvāmitra himself is said to have acted as the chief priest in the *aśvamedha* sacrifice performed by Sudāsa. As is mentioned in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, he was present as a prominent priest in the sacrifice performed by king Hariścandra as also in the one performed by Sudāsa on the bank of river Sarasvatī where Kavaṣa Ailūṣa was excommunicated. In the Ṛgveda itself Viśvāmitra observes how *vīpras* kindle Agni by regarding him as the immortal bearer of oblation by keeping themselves

<sup>12</sup> अमित्रायुधो मरुतामिव प्रयाः प्रथमजा ब्रह्मणो विश्वमिद्विदुः ।  
द्युमवद ब्रह्मं कुशिकास एरिर एकैको दमं अग्निं समीधरे ।। *Ibid.*, III.29.15.

constantly awake.<sup>13</sup> He asks people to churn out Agni which is unequivocal, supremely conscious, immortal, self-evident, bearer of sacrifice and auspicious.<sup>14</sup> In fact, he, along with other seers of his family is so much devoted to Agni that out of all the sixty two hymns seen by the family collectively in the Ṛgveda, as many as twenty nine have been addressed to this deity alone.

### IV. Yajña and Yoga

But while worshipping fire in all its tangibility as is implied by its kindling, offering of oblation, removal of darkness, etc., the seer's main concern is to see Agni operating as a psychic force. He discloses how Agni has been nourished by means of oblations by the Kuśikas for ages like a young horse being fed by his mother in response to his neighing.<sup>15</sup> Along with oblations, they have also been offering prayers to him. Through this long family-tradition of fire-worship extending probably prior even to the Vedic age, the Kuśikas had gradually reached a high degree of refinement in their view of Agni. No more did they take it as something merely physical and confined to the earth. Rather they came to understand it as a universal force manifesting itself as fire on the earth, as lightning in the atmosphere, and as the sun in the sky. Besides this, they also came to have cognisance of Agni as operating inwardly as the basic psychic force stimulating and empowering the inner being of man.

<sup>13</sup> तं त्वा विप्रो विपुन्यवो जागृवांसुः समिन्धते ।  
हव्यवाहमर्मत्यं सहोवृधम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.10.9.

<sup>14</sup> मन्थता नरः क्विमद्वयन्तुं प्रचेतसमुमृतं सुप्रतीकम् ।  
यज्ञस्यं केतुं प्रथमं पुरस्तादग्निं नरो जनयता सुशेवंम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.29.5.

<sup>15</sup> अश्वो न कन्दुञ्जनिभिः समिन्धते वैश्वानरः कुशिकेभियुगेयुगे ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.3.



This last development gave a new turn to the fire-worship interiorising it from *yajña* to what subsequently came to be known as yoga. *Yajña* indeed, is the perusal of Agni in its universality while yoga is the cognisance of it in its intra-psychic operation. The process of interiorisation starts with deep absorption of mind under stimulation of the fire burning ahead. Having visualised it in its universality, as is evident from the use of adjectival name *Vaiśvānara* for it, the *sādhaka* begins to enact kindling of fire, *agni-cayana*, inwardly and offer to it whatever he has got within him and in return aspire only the illumination of it.<sup>16</sup> The intense aspiration for Agni's illumination in the inner being culminates in the realisation of one's identity with Agni itself. Consequently the seer hence onward begins to experience that he is Agni itself and as such the knower of all in their fundamentals, *jātavedāh*. As a result of this elevation and expansion in his consciousness, he feels extraordinary brilliance in his eyes and ambrosial taste on his tongue. He experiences himself as a centre of illumination creating and sustaining the cosmos in its threefold being. He feels as if he is the eternal source of radiance, *gharma*, as well as what is being constantly consumed in it, *haviḥ*.<sup>17</sup> This realisation of identity between the eater and the food on the universal as well as individual scale on the part of Viśvāmitra is cognate to what has been referred to in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad as the highest stage of knowledge where, in words of the

16 वैश्वानरं मनसाग्निं निचाप्या हविर्भन्तो अनुषत्यं स्वर्दिदम् ।  
सुदानुं देवं रथिरं वसुयवो गोभीं रण्वं कुशिकासो हवामहे ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.1.  
वातं वातं गुणगणं सुशस्तिभिरग्नेभामिं मरुत्तामोजं ईमहे ।  
पृषदश्वासो अनवभरोधसो गन्तारो यज्ञं विदथैषु धीराः ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.6.  
17 अग्निरसि जन्मना जातवेदा घृतं मे चक्षुरमृतं म आसन् ।  
अर्कस्त्रिधातु रजसो विमानो ऽ जंसो घृमो हविरसि नाम ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.7.

Sāmaveda, one comes to understand that one is the food as well as the eater, besides being the creator of mantras, the first product of Ṛta and hence senior even to gods as also the navel of immortality.<sup>18</sup>

## V. Realisation of Agni as Self

With this realisation of identity of Agni with the Self, the fire-sticks used for producing fire came to be viewed as symbolic of the human body bearing within them the embryo of Agni. At the next step in the process of symbolisation the idea emerged that just as the mother's body bears the embryo within and brings out the same on maturation, even so man has hidden in him the self which on getting fully realised is experienced as coinciding with the Ultimate Reality, Brahman. It is in view of this possibility of self-realisation through it that Agni is to be worshipped by man regularly and by keeping himself constantly awake and offering oblations, observes Viśvāmitra.<sup>19</sup> Constant wakefulness is to be imbibed from the continuously burning Agni used by the seer as a symbol of the self. Offering of oblation to Agni is symbolic of dedication of everything one possesses for the ultimate objective of self-realisation. This symbolic significance of the mantra under consideration becomes explicit from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad where it has been quoted almost verbatim in course of exposition of the nature of the Ātman.<sup>20</sup>

18 अहमन्नमहमन्नमहमन्नम् । अहमन्नादो ऽहमन्नादो ऽहमन्नादः ।  
अहं श्लोककृदहं श्लोककृदहं श्लोककृत् । अहमसि प्रथमजा ऋतास्य पूर्व  
देवेभ्यो ऽ मृतस्य ना ऽ भायि । *Tait. Up.* III.10.  
19 अरण्योर्निर्हितो जातवेदा गर्भ इव सुधितो गुर्भिणीषु ।  
दिवेदिवे ईड्यो जागृवदिर्भहविष्मदिभर्मनुष्यैर्भिरग्निः ।। *RV.* III. 29.2.  
20 *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, II. 1.8.



Immediately after the mantra quoted above in which he realises his identity with Agni, Viśvāmitra brings out the ensuing experiences which too are highly interesting. In this mantra, he recounts how one having realised his identity with Agni happens to purify the centre of illumination within him by means of a threefold sieve of Agni as manifesting itself in the form of fire on the earth, lightning in the atmosphere and sun in the sky. This purification amounts to raising the level of identification from the sacrificial fire to one obtaining on the cosmic level as is obvious from the reference to the three worlds of earth, atmosphere and heaven. This elevation follows unfolding of the psychic being immediately after the illumination. The unfoldment is followed by pruning of the light-shedding gem which indeed is the self. Being thus pruned, the self is realised as the essential entity around which revolve the heaven and the earth in all their immensity.<sup>21</sup>

#### VI. Sādhanā of Identity of the Devotee with the Deity

Vedic *sādhanā* lies in drawing as close to the deity as possible culminating in the realisation of one's complete oneness with the latter. Devotee and deity are the two poles of devotion standing entirely apart from each other. The process of devotion starts with the cognisance of the difference between them and culminates in complete elimination of the same difference. Unification of the poles is knowledge while difference between them is ignorance. While demons seek their fulfilment in falling apart from the Divine, man strives to draw as close to It as possible. Owing to their innate inclination towards the Divine, the pre-Vedic, as well as other

<sup>21</sup> त्रिभिः प्रवित्रैरपुषोद्धयर्कं दृढा मुतिं ज्योतिरनुं प्रजानन् ।  
वर्षिष्टं रत्नमकृत स्वधाभिरादिद द्यावापृथिवी पर्यपश्यत् ॥ RV.III. 26.8

people in the world, might understandably have started their devotion to the Divine from a position of complete difference. Through constant devotion, however, they would gradually have come to realise their essential oneness with the Divine. The Veda is an account of this unique experience of oneness of the devotee with the Divine. Since it is meant for instruction of the posterity, as Viśvāmitra observes on behalf of the rivers,<sup>22</sup> it has got to be varied in its exposition as per the inevitable difference in the mental and spiritual equipment of the people it is meant for. Otherwise, as is explicit from the mantra recounting the seer's experience of oneness with Agni, Viśvāmitra in himself had already attained that highest stage of oneness and yet he goes on seeing mantras addressed to various deities such as Indra, Viśve Devāh, Aśvins, Mitra, Ṛbhus and Uṣas in a way bearing out his difference from them. Even his son Madhucchandas, though so dear to him and hence very well expected to have been imparted the secret lore by the father, prays to Agni from the point of considerable difference as well as oneness, as is evident from his mantras placed in the beginning of the Samhitā. When Agni is addressed by him as *purohita*, *deva*, *ṛtvik* and *hotṛ*,<sup>23</sup> it shows his cognisance of the point of oneness between the human and the Divine. Even then, however, the same is not stated directly by him also.

No matter expressed directly or indirectly, the seer's experience of oneness with the divinity plays a significant role in the vision of mantras. As regards Viśvāmitra, this is particularly true of Agni. Needless to point out that out of 62 hymns seen by him and

<sup>22</sup> एतद्वचो जरितुर्मापि मृष्टा आ यत्ते घोषानुत्तरा युगार्नि । *Ibid.*, III.33.8.

<sup>23</sup> अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम् ।  
होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥ *Ibid.*, I.1.1.



members of his family, as many as twenty nine have been addressed to Agni alone. This pre-occupation with Agni on his part, culminating at times in the experience of oneness with the latter, led the seer to feel the deity itself as the real seer in him. Agni, in his view, is the winning sage praised by seers as well as appointed by gods as the bearer of oblations.<sup>24</sup> Being churned out and kindled with care, he is addressed as *kavi* and is prayed to set right the pious deed of the seer.<sup>25</sup> Again in another mantra he is addressed as *kavi* and is prayed to rejoice in *purodāśa* in the midday pressing.<sup>26</sup> So is the case with another mantra in which Agni as a *kavi* is said to have entered the heaven and the earth with his brilliance and illumination. In the same mantra he is also characterised as the intellectual power of those who pray to him.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he is described as the best of *kavis*, *kavitamah*, as also an invoker, real sacrificer and creator.<sup>28</sup> In another mantra, he is referred to as cognisant of the path of seers, *kavīnām padaviḥ*.<sup>29</sup> Further in another mantra the idea becomes wholly transparent when the seer addresses Agni as the creative will of the *kavi*.<sup>30</sup> So is the case with another mantra where again the seer refers to Agni as the

- 24 जातो अग्नी रौचते चेकितानो वाजी विप्रः कविशस्तः सुदानुः ।  
यं देवासु ईड्यं विश्वविदं हव्यवाहमदधुरध्वरेषु ॥ *Ibid.*, III.29.7.
- 25 सुनिर्मथा निर्मथितः सुनिधा निर्हितः कविः ।  
अग्नें स्वध्वरा कृणु देवान् दैवयुते यंज ॥ *Ibid.*, III.29.12.
- 26 माध्यन्दिने सवने जातवेदः पुरोळाशमिह कवे जुपस्व । *Ibid.*, III.28.4
- 27 प्रिता यज्ञानामसुरो विप्रश्चित्तां विमानमग्निर्वयुनं च वाघताम ।  
आ विवेश रोदसी भूरिवर्षसा पुरुप्रियो भन्दते धामभिः कविः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.3.4
- 28 आ हौता मुन्दो विदधान्यासथात् सत्यो यज्वां कवितमः स वेधाः । *Ibid.*, III.14.1
- 29 प्रत्यग्निरुषसश्चेकितानो ऽ वीधि विप्रःपदवीः कवीनाम । *Ibid.*, III.5.1.
- 30 तुभ्यं दक्ष कविकतो यानीमा देव मर्तासो अध्वरे अकर्म ॥ *Ibid.*, III.14.7.

creative will of the *kavi*.<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere he is also addressed as a truthful *vipra* and the best of seers.<sup>32</sup>

Obviously these references bear out transference of seerhood to Agni. It is understandable that this could have been possible only when the seer would have established his oneness with Agni, the deity. Characterisation of the latter as *kavi* and *kavitama* is indicative of the idea of original location of the mantra in the deity rather than in the seer himself. This proposition gets further confirmed by the description of Agni also as the creative will of the *kavi*, *kavikratuḥ*. The multiple role of Agni as a source of mantra, visionary of mantra, object of mantra as well as listener of mantra is indicated together in one mantra in which he is referred to as a fast-moving guest.<sup>33</sup> Bṛhaspati is the source of mantras. This idea gets logical formulation in a mantra where it is stated that Agni is invoked by means of mantra because he is the primeval intuition of sacrifice as well as the promoter of the objective of the seer.<sup>34</sup> In the *Saṁhitā* elsewhere it is stated that investigators of the Vedic word reached the source by means of sacrifice and traced it as it had entered into seers.<sup>35</sup>

Thus it is evident that the Vedic word is closely associated with the consciousness which has given rise

- 31 अग्निमीळे कविकंतुम् । *Ibid.*, III.27.12
- 32 तुभ्यं स्तोका घृतश्चुतो ऽ ग्ने विप्राय सन्त्य ।  
ऋषिः श्रेष्ठः समिध्यसे यज्ञस्यं प्राविता भव ॥ *Ibid.*, III.21.3
- 33 तं शुभ्रमग्निमवसे हवामहे वैश्वानरं मातरिश्वानमुक्थ्यम् ।  
बृहस्पतिं मनुषो देवतातये विप्रं श्रोतारमर्तिथिं रघुष्यदम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.26.2
- 34 अग्निर्धिया स चैतति केतुर्यज्ञस्यं पूर्यः ।  
अर्थं ह्यस्य तरणिं ॥ *Ibid.*, III.11.3
- 35 यज्ञेन वाचः पदवीयमायन्तामन्वविन्दुन्ऋषिषु प्रविष्टाम् । *Ibid.*, X.71.3



to the idea of sacrifice. This consciousness is the meeting ground of seerhood on one hand and Divinity on the other. It is supernal and completely liberated, as it has been described by Dīrghatamas as *parama vyoma*, the state of boundlessness.<sup>36</sup>

Next to Agni, Indra is the deity invoked most abundantly by Viśvāmitra and his family. He also has been closely associated with seerhood and descent of mantras. In one of the mantras, addressed to him, he has been described as one who is great, powerful, virile and abundantly accomplished in *kāvya*, seer's wisdom, and creativity.<sup>37</sup> In another mantra, he has directly been addressed as a *kavi* and is said to have been known as winner of wealth and subduer of enemies.<sup>38</sup> In yet another mantra, the seer addresses Indra again as a *kavi* and wishes to strengthen him by means of prayers.<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere he has been described as most abundant in what deserves to be listened to, *suśravastamaḥ*.<sup>40</sup>

That the seerhood and creativity of Vedic mantras have been attributed to the deity due to the seer's experience of oneness with him gets further confirmed by certain other terms used bearing close relationship of him with the seer. One such term is *sakhā*, friend. In one of the mantras, he is addressed as a *sakhā* and has, therefore, been prayed to pervade the new protective wealth.<sup>41</sup> In another mantra, the seer makes the point of friendship

36 ऋचो अक्षरं परमे व्योमन् यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।। *Ibid.*, I.164.39.

37 महो उगो वावृधे वीर्याय सुमाचंके वृषभः काव्येन । *Ibid.*, III.36.5.

38 विदमा हि त्वां धनञ्जयं वाजेषु दधृषं कवे ।। *Ibid.*, III.42.6.

39 ऋभुमन्तं वाजवन्तं त्वा कत्रे प्रयस्वन्तु उपं शिक्षेम धीतिभिः । *Ibid.*, III.52.6.

40 स वावृधान ओजसा पुरुष्टुत भवा नः सुश्रवस्तमः । *Ibid.*, III.45.5

41 बोध्याऽपिरवसो नूतनस्य सखे वसो जरितृभ्यो वर्यो धाः । *Ibid.*, III.51.6.

with the deity clearer by addressing him as a friend and praying to him to listen to prayers of the friend.<sup>42</sup> In yet another mantra, the seer brings out a still closer relationship of him with the deity by conceiving of the latter as father and of himself as a small child taking hold of him by his garments and making him to listen to his sweet words.<sup>43</sup>

All these expressions bearing out friendship, fatherhood etc. of the deity with the seer have been used to establish as close a relationship between the two as possible culminating eventually in their oneness, as has been shown above. Through these expressions of relationship and oneness what the seer intends to achieve is illumination, wisdom and mantra. This is more than evident in one of Viśvāmitra's mantras where the Ṛbhus are addressed as *kavayah* while Indra as *sakhā* and the both together have been prayed to create the mantra of wisdom so as to make the seer the gainer in this world.<sup>44</sup>

How the divinity as the best of the seers, *vipratamah*, opens out the secret treasure of mantras and imparts the divine lore to the seer is made explicit particularly in one of Viśvāmitra's mantras. According to it, Indra as the best of the seer went to the treasure in fulfilment of his friendship with Aṅgiras. The mountain revealed the hidden treasure to Indra, the doer of good deeds. Proceeding along with the Maruts, Indra won over the

42 सखा सख्युः शृणुवद् वन्दनानि । *Ibid.*, III.43.4.

43 तिष्ठ्य सु कं मघवन्मा परां गाः सोमस्य नु त्वा सुषुंतस्य यक्षि ।

पितुर्न पुत्रः सिद्धिमा रंभे त इन्द्र स्वादिष्ट्या गिरा शचीवः । *Ibid.*, III. 53.2.

44 महत्तद् वं कवयश्चारु नाम यद्ध देवा भवंश्च विश्व इन्द्रं ।

सखं ऋभुभिः पुरुहूत प्रियेभिरिमां धियं सातयं तक्षता नः ।। *Ibid.*, III. 54.17



wealth with great effort. This was followed by recitation of mantras by Aṅgiras, the renowned seer.<sup>45</sup> As per this account, it is Indra who is the real seer, of course, the seer of seers. He undertakes to bring down mantras under the obligation of his friendship with the human seer like Aṅgiras. He has to wage war with forces of ignorance like mountains. Maruts help him a lot in this venture of discovering the secret wisdom. It is this secret wisdom which gets revealed to Aṅgiras in the form of mantras. The help rendered by Maruts in this regard may understandably be in the form of vocalisation of the vision through breath which comes under the purview of these deities.

Saramā is another assistant of Indra in this enterprise. It was she who was directed by Indra to make advance probing into the task of this revelation. She discovered a fissure in the mountain having concealed inside it the divine wisdom. Having discovered the fissure, she turned it into a thoroughfare. With her precisely balanced footsteps, she reached the foremost of the syllables and fully cognisant of it, it is she who reached this mysterious sound first.<sup>46</sup> This *akṣarāṇām agram* is evidently the same as has been referred to as *vāco agram* in the famous *jñāna sūkta* of the Samhitā seen by Bṛhaspati, the presiding deity of mantras. The *vāco agram* is the sacred Vedic mantra lying concealed in the psychic cave of the seer and is said to have been

revealed in course of sacrifice, as the hymn states.<sup>47</sup> The same *vāco agram* is referred to here as the *akṣarāṇām agram* and is said to have been discovered by Indra through the agency of Saramā, the divine bitch. The unique power of hearing of the bitch along with its most precise footstep is used here in this symbolic account to bring out the delicateness of the task of getting the revelation of the divine word which is kept concealed from the human reach.

## VII. Agni and Revelation of Mantra

Agni's role in the access to the higher plane of consciousness, revelation and seeing or composing of mantras has been made out in a number of mantras in various ways. In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra observes how he, moving in the company of his associates, has offered sacrifice to Agni and aspires, therefore, that he may get enriched with the song divine. In his view, the mantric creations of seers are ordained by the Divine from the heaven while seers turn out mantras only when the divinity, getting manifested, wishes them to sing in its praise.<sup>48</sup> From this it is obvious that composition of mantras follows elevation of Agni-consciousness through performance of sacrifice. In another mantra the same Agni is said to have become an emblem of gods by virtue of his access to the divine wisdom as embodied in the mantric creation.<sup>49</sup> It is out of this stock of divine wisdom that mantras get

45 अगच्छदु विप्रतमः सखीयन्नसूदयत्सुकृते गर्भमद्रिः ।  
ससानु मरुतो युवभिर्मरुत्वस्यन्थाभ्रवदंगिराः सुद्यो अर्चन् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 31.7.

46 विदद्यदी सुरमा रुग्णमद्रेर्महि पार्थः पूर्व्यं सुध्यंक्कः ।  
अगं नयत्सुपद्यक्षराणामच्छा रवं प्रथमा जानुती गात् ।। *Ibid.*, III.31.6.

47 बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं यत्परंत नामधेयुं दधानाः ।  
यदैषां श्रेष्ठं यदरिप्रमासीत् प्रेणा तदैषां निहितं गुहाविः ।। *Ibid.*, X.71.1.

48 प्राञ्चं यज्ञं चंकृम् वंर्धतां गीः सुमिदभिर्भिन्निं नमसा दुवस्यन् ।  
दिवः शंशासुर्विदथा कवीनां गृत्साय चित्तवसें गातुमीषुः ।। *Ibid.*, III.1.2.

49 आ देवानामभवः केतुरंगे मुन्द्रो विश्वानि काव्यानि विद्वान् ।। *Ibid.*, III.1.17.



manifested or are carved out. Accordingly, in another mantra, the seer indicates the process of composition of mantras by the simile of purification of *ghṛta* for the sake of its offering in a sacrifice. "I produced the mantra of wisdom for Vaiśvānara, the promoter of Ṛta," he observes, "like purified *ghṛta* offered to Agni."<sup>50</sup> Needless to point out that purification of *ghṛta* involves liquification and elimination of the inferior stuff from it. Mantras emerge from the divine or supernal consciousness in a rather crude form. What the seer does is to remove its crudity by chiselling its verbal form.

The extent of involvement of the human agency in the composition of Vedic mantras is obvious from several mantras including one discussed in the sequel. Here it is said that those who are possessed of Iḷā, the well-known mighty song, have got the privilege to know the bliss of the lustrous mighty bull, that is, Agni and rejoice under his rule. They get bedecked with the divine light and lustre.<sup>51</sup> Agni is prohibitive on account of its heat and proneness to burn things coming into its contact. It, however, begins to be felt as auspicious and sweet when it is viewed in its universality and capacity of bringing sweetness to food and drink. Thus the Vedic seers worshipped Agni, contemplated over its mystery in the cosmic context and brooded over it by understanding it in its spiritual role. They articulated in words whatever they experienced by contemplating on Agni in all these forms. This is how mantras came into being. Their content is not just intellectual understanding of things but direct spiritual grasp of what they represent. Understood intellectually, these experiences are

50 वैश्वानरायं क्षिपणामृतावृधे घृतं न पूतमग्नये जनामसि ।। *Ibid.*, III.2.1.

51 जानन्ति वृष्णां अरुषस्य शेवंमुत बुध्नस्य शासने रणन्ति ।

दिवोरुचंः सुरुचो रोचमाना इच्छा येषां गण्या महिना गीः ।। *Ibid.*, III.7.5.

somewhat akin to what the scientist feels on contemplating over light and making experiments on its various forms. Just as light gives to the astrophysicist inkling into the making of the universe, even so contemplation on Agni opened a panorama of mysteries before the Vedic seer. It is this contemplation of the Vedic seer which culminated in the making of what in the Upaniṣad, particularly the Kaṭha, came to be recognised as *agni-vidyā* and formed the content of the second boon of Naciketas. Inkling into this mystery must naturally have caused creative ripples in the inner being of the seer. It is these ripples, which, when given verbal form, have taken the shape of mantras. The seer's contemplation, however, distinguishes itself from that of the scientist by involving his total personality in the object of contemplation culminating eventually in the realisation of his oneness with it. While the scientist is content only with abstractions, the seer goes on up to the experience of oneness with the object of his contemplation.

In another mantra Agni, along with Indra, has been described as one who associates the seer with the mantra.<sup>52</sup> In view of forming the source of mantras, he has also been characterised as the best amongst seers having the vision of mantras.<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere he is invoked to enrich the mantric wealth of the seer in such a way as to give a clear idea of the seer's thinking on the relationship between Agni and the mantra. While prayed to enrich the seer's *Vāk*, Agni is addressed as one associated originally with Ṛta, the principle of universal dynamics. He shines in the universe having emerged from Ṛta. It is owing to the cognisance of his association

52 इन्द्रमग्निं कविच्छदा यज्ञस्य जुला वृणे । *Ibid.*, III.12.3.

53 आ होता मन्द्रो विदथान्यस्थास्त्यो यज्वा कवितमः स वेधाः ।। *Ibid.*, III.14.1



with Ṛta that he is supposed to be in a position to enrich the seer with mantras.<sup>54</sup> That gods like Agni themselves are born of the same source out of which are produced the mantras is also stated at several places. In one such mantra Viśvāmitra wishes that his prayers may promote Agni, the worthy object of *Vāk*, since he is born of the same *Vāk*.<sup>55</sup> This statement of the seer is in conformity with the basic idea expressed in the Hymn to Puruṣa according to which Agni along with Indra and other gods is born of the same Puruṣa who forms the source of Vedic mantras of all varieties.<sup>56</sup>

It is also significant to note that while craving for the sacred word from Agni the seer is also keen not to be given over to thoughtlessness, cowardice, dearth of light, condemnation and enmity.<sup>57</sup> This obviously suggests that the vices mentioned here are obstructions in the seeing of mantras.

The process of emanation of mantras becomes clearer from consideration of certain mantras addressed to Indra. In one such mantra it has been stated that Indra did something delightful to gods by means of the great war he waged against the demons and that *vipras* sing in praise of his feat in the house of Vivasvat by means of

54 अयं ते योनिर्ऋत्वियो यतो जातो अरौचथाः ।  
तं जानन्नमनु आ सीदार्थां नो वर्धया गिरंः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.29.10.

55 अग्निं वर्धन्तु नो गिरो यतो जायंत उक्थ्यः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.10.6.

56 a. तस्माद्यज्ञात्सर्वहृत ऋचुः सामानि जज्ञिरे ।  
छन्दांसि जज्ञिरे तस्माद्यजुस्तस्मादजायत ॥ *Ibid.*, X.90.9.

b. मुख्यादिन्द्रंश्चाग्निश्च । *Ibid.*, X.90.13.

57 मा नो अग्ने ऽ मंतये मावीरतायै रीरधः ।  
मागोतायै सहसस्युत्र मा निदे ऽप द्वेषांस्या कृधि ॥ *Ibid.*, III.16.5.

mantras.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that mantras and hymns addressed to Indra have for their central theme war against demons and victory of Indra over them. As a matter of fact, most of the hymns addressed to Indra centre around his victory over demons, as distinguished from those addressed to Agni which generally have sacrifice as the context of their seeing. Singing of praise by *vipras* in the house of Vivasvat, however, introduces mystery to this otherwise simple affair. Vivasvat is Sūrya who is regarded as the leading god of the heavenly group. 'House of Vivasvat' is, indeed, a concrete expression for what elsewhere has been termed as *parame vyoman* and in which mantra and *devatā* are said to co-exist.<sup>59</sup> Singing of mantras by *vipras* in that house entails presence of the latter also with them. This is provided by Dīrghatamas' mantra also which states that those who do not know how mantra and *devatā* co-exist in the *parame vyoman* have nothing to do with bare mantras and those who know it, get privileged to dwell there.<sup>60</sup> Translated in psychological terms, this cosmological state of things gets reduced to the deep psychic state of the seer where *devatā* and mantra are yet to be separated from each other.

This psychological possibility of the cosmological state of things indicated above gets clear support from a mantra seen by Viśvāmitra himself where the seer describes the prayer addressed to Indra as an idea, *mati*, born of the heart and given the shape of mantra by the versifier in him. Produced in this way out of himself, the seer

58 युधेन्द्रो महना वरिवश्चकार देवेभ्युः सत्यतिश्चर्षणिप्राः ।  
विवस्वतुः सदेने अस्य तानि विप्रा उक्थेभिः कृवयो गृणन्ति ॥ *Ibid.*, III.34.7.

59 See *infra* F. Note 36.

60 यस्तन्न वेद किमुचा करिष्यति य इत् तद्विदुस्त इमे समासते ॥ *Ibid.*, I.164.39.



observes, the mantra gets awakened on being recited in course of sacrifice.<sup>61</sup>

A reconciliation between the two diametrically opposed views of the origin of mantras that is the cosmological and the psychological, can be found in another mantra seen by the seer in which he observes that the mantra he recites is an ancient piece of wisdom transmitted to him by his father, though originally it is primeval, having descended from the heaven, clothed in white garment and awakened only through recitation in the context of sacrifice.<sup>62</sup> Description of one and the same mantra as a descent from the heaven on one hand and as an ancient parental heritage on the other automatically suggests the equivalence of the heaven and the father. The heaven brings out the boundlessness while the antiquity of the parental heritage indicates the timelessness of the source of the mantra. The shining whiteness of the clothes the mantra has descended wrapped in from the heaven bears out the untainted purity of the wisdom embodied in the mantra.

As regards the role of the seer in the descent of the mantra and its assumption of the tangible form, another mantra seen by him is of considerable help. According to it, Indra entered into the enclosures of piercing weapons having embodied in him heroic qualities in abundance. He brought to the consciousness of the seer, a bare singer, these wisdom-laden mantras and spread out

61 इन्द्रं मुतिर्हृद आ वच्यमानाच्छा पतिं स्तोमंतप्टा जिगति ।  
या जागृविर्विदधे शस्यमानेन्द्र यत्ते जायंते विद्धि तस्यं ।। *Ibid.*, III.39.1.

62 दिवश्चिदा पूर्वा जायमाना विजागृविर्विदधे शस्यमाना ।  
भद्रा वस्त्राण्यर्जुना वसाना सेयमस्मे संनजा पित्र्या धीः ।। *Ibid.*, III.39.2.

their lustre all around.<sup>63</sup> Obviously Indra's entering into the enclosure with all his heroism stands for his war against the demons. This event results in the dawning of lustrous mantras in the consciousness of the seer. All this goes to suggest that the mantras addressed to Indra at least are articles of wisdom evoked by the universal struggle of the good against the evil and have their origin in those recesses of the human psyche which are absolutely pure, luminous and impersonal to the extent as to come to be described by the seer himself as the high heaven and yet so intimate as to be considered by him as lying in his own heart or received from his own father. Although a profound recipient of the mantra, costing so much *tapas* from his side, the seer takes himself as simply a singer who receives songs conceived and composed by others and gives just a voice to it. This is partly due to the humility of the seer and partly perhaps due to the whole process being utterly supramental.

Thus, the Divine and human both the factors have alternately been recognised as contributory to the descent and creation of mantras which are taintless words getting harmoniously blended with the innate strength of Indra who serves them as the force binding together the heaven and the earth.<sup>64</sup> It is owing to the blending of the word with the binding force of the universe emanating from Indra that seers, as custodians of the sacred word, have been able to place mystery in this world, make the heaven and the earth face each

63 इन्द्रस्तुजो बर्हणा आ विवेश नृवदधानो नर्या पुरुषि ।  
अचेतयुद्धियं इमा जंरित्रे प्रेमं वर्णमतिरच्छुक्रमांसाम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.34.5.

64 मही यदि धिषणां शिश्नश्चे धात् संद्योवृधं विभवं १ रोदंस्योः ।  
गिरो यस्मिन्ननवद्याः संमीचीर्विश्वा इन्द्राय तविषीरनंत्ताः ।। *Ibid.*, III.31.13.



other, measure and control the two and place the atmosphere between them for their sustenance, as Viśvāmitra observes.<sup>65</sup>

Though the mantras, thus, are all-pervading in essence, they do need the seer for their vocalisation. This is why Viśvāmitra observes;

“I produce mantras when quest for wisdom arises in me. May I pray to Indra before passing away of the day, so that he may take us across the sin. With this end in view, people on both sides invoke him like one who while sailing in a boat is invoked by the people waiting on both sides of the bank.”<sup>66</sup>

The purity of mantra, brought out here by the symbol of white lustrous cloth, lies not only in its spiritual content and austere way of expression given to it by the seer but also in its purifying effect. It is supposed to purify the individual of all what is impure in the fabric of his being. It is in view of this purificatory effect of the mantra that the seer expects *brahman* to do good not only to a certain individual but to the whole of the Bhārata representing at that time perhaps the clan of the Bharatas but subsequently, prophetically enough, the whole of India.<sup>67</sup> He prays to Agni to bestow upon him such

- <sup>65</sup> नि षीमिद्वन्न गुह्या दधाना उत क्षत्राय रोदसी समञ्जन् ।  
सं मात्राभिर्मिरे येमुरुर्वी अन्तर्गही समृते धायसे धुः ।। *Ibid.*, III.38.3.
- <sup>66</sup> खिवेष यन्मा क्षिपणां जजान स्तर्वै पुरा पार्यादिन्द्रमहर्नः ।  
अंहसो यत्रं प्रीपरथया नो नावेव यान्तमुभयै हवन्ते ।। *Ibid.*, III.32.14.
- <sup>67</sup> य इमे रोदसी उभे अहमिन्द्रमनुष्टवम् ।  
विश्वामित्रस्य रक्षति ब्रह्मेदं भारतं जनम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.53.12.

*brahman* as be undecaying and laden with heroic power.<sup>68</sup>

### VIII. Meaning of Mantra-Darśana and Mantra-Jāgaraṇa

The seer, however, is also conscious of his own creativity in the production of mantras. Addressing Indra, as the bearer of *brahman*, he prays to him to sit on *kuśa* grass and relish *purodāśa* while mantras are being created.<sup>69</sup> It is in this spirit that he promises to offer to Pūśan entirely new mantras,<sup>70</sup> as also talks of Indra as being promoted in his cause by mantras, some of which are primeval, some are of the intermediate period while some are quite new.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from this statement that the heroism of Indra was a matter of praise long since, so much so, of course, that the earliest of these prayers had already been regarded as ancient even at the time of Viśvāmitra. The new ones, on the other hand, must have been composed by Viśvāmitra and his contemporaries. Thus, composition of Vedic mantras was evidently a continuous process since long, though at the same time all the mantras, composed no matter whether by ancients or moderns, were supposed to be of Divine origin and hence eternal. The point of reconciliation in this state of polarisation of views on the nature of

- <sup>68</sup> ब्रह्मं वन्वानो अजरं सुवीरम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.8.2.
- <sup>69</sup> इमा ब्रह्मं ब्रह्मवाहः क्रियन्तु आ ब्रह्मिः सीद ।  
वीहि शूर पुरोळाशम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.41.3.
- <sup>70</sup> इयं तं पूषन्नाघृणे सुष्टुतिर्देवं नव्यंसी ।  
अस्माभिस्तुभ्यं शस्यते ।। *Ibid.*, III.62.7.
- <sup>71</sup> यज्ञेनेन्द्रमवसा चंके अवागिनं सुम्नाय नव्यंसे ववृव्याम् ।  
यः स्तोमैभिर्वावृधे पूर्व्यभिर्यो मंष्ट्यमेभिरुत नूतनेभिः ।। *Ibid.*, III.32.13



composition of Vedic mantras seems to lie in admitting the eternal constancy of the content on one hand and amenability to fresh verbal expression of the same on the other. The mantra is, thus, the primeval seed of ideas, *pratna retas*, germinating afresh from time to time. This primeval seed of ideas has its original locale understandably in the Divine Mind lying beyond the purview of the human. As contrasted with the human mind, the Divine Mind reflects in it cosmic forces of creation known as gods. Mantra is the most intimate verbal rendering of their essence, form and function. As such, gods are liable to be recaptured in all these respects through the string of these mantras. Recapturing of the original ethos lived in and communicated through the mantra by the seer is what is called *mantra-jāgarāṇa*, awakening of the mantra while vision of that supramental content and capturing of it in an intimate verbal form is *mantra-darśana*, vision of mantra.

### IX. Seerhood of the Gāyatrī Mantra

Gāyatrī is the most important among the Vedic mantras. It occurs at Ṛgveda.III.62.10 and is taken to have been seen by Viśvāmitra. There is, however, a controversy coming from the time of the *Ṛgvedānukramaṇī* regarding its seeing or authorship. The last hymn of the third maṇḍala of the Saṁhitā in which this mantra occurs comprises eighteen mantras. As the hymn occurs in Viśvāmitra's maṇḍala, Viśvāmitra is generally taken for granted as the author of it as a whole, including the celebrated Gāyatrī mantra. But incidentally in the last mantra of the hymn there occurs the word Jamadagni as a seer. The mantra reads: "Being praised by

*Jamadagni, take your seat in the source of Ṛta and drink Soma, O promoters of Ṛta.*"<sup>72</sup>

This occurrence of the word *jamadagni* here raises the pertinent question as to which of these mantras may come under the purview of his seerhood. According to what the Anukramaṇī points out as the first and foremost probability, it is only the last mantra of the hymn bearing the word *jamadagni* in it which is seen by Jamadagni, the rest of the mantras in it having been seen by Viśvāmitra himself. The second possibility—the author of the Anukramaṇī puts forth—is that all the mantras in the hymn beginning from the fourth up to the end might have been seen by Jamadagni. The ground for this alternative suggestion is the uniform use of the gāyatrī metre in all these mantras in clear distinction from the first triad which is composed in the triṣṭup metre. If this alternative hypothesis be true, the famous Gāyatrī mantra would have to be taken as seen by Jamadagni along with the rest of the mantras composed in that metre. The third possibility suggested by the author of the Anukramaṇī makes Jamadagni the seer of only the last triad of the mantras in the hymn, as the word *jamadagni* is used only in this triad. This alternative is based on the system of triad obtaining in the hymn in regard to the deity. According to this system, the entire hymn has six triads of mantras, the first one being addressed to Indra and Varuṇa, the second to Br̥haspati, the third to Pūṣan, the fourth to Savitṛ, the fifth to Soma and the last to Mitra and Varuṇa.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> गृणाना जमदग्निना योनांवृतस्यं सीदतम् ।

पातं सोममृतावृधा ॥ *Ibid.*, III.62.18

<sup>73</sup> अन्त्यो जमदग्नेय आर्षो वा । चतुर्थ्याद्या गायत्रयः ।

कृत्स्नस्य विश्वामित्र ऋषिरन्त्यस्य तृचस्य जमदग्निर्वा ॥ *Ṛgvedānukramaṇī*



It is obvious from the above details that while the first alternative mooted out by the author of the Anukramaṇī is based on occurrence of the word *jamadagni* in the particular mantra, the second one is based on uniformity of the metre and the third one on uniformity of the Devatā.

The *padapātha* of the word *jamadagninā* in the mantra, however, has a different tale to tell. In this *pātha* as *jamat agninā*, the word has been taken as a compound formed out of *jamat* and *agninā* signifying one who is established in the kindling of fire. As the compound is a *bahuvrīhi*, it must be treated as adjectival rather than substantive. As such, one is obliged to take it as an adjective of Viśvāmitra who, as we have already seen, was a great worshipper of Agni. Under such circumstances, there is a greater possibility of Viśvāmitra himself being intended here by the word *jamadagninā* rather than any other seer actually bearing that name. In this connection, it is also to be noted that there is no dearth of proper names being used as adjectives in the Saṁhitās. Vṛtra, Bṛhaspati and Indra etc. have several times been used as adjectives in these texts. In view of this usage, therefore, there is no harm to Jamadagni as a person if his name happens to be used also as an adjective to some other name. If this be admitted, Viśvāmitra would re-emerge as the undisputed seer of the Gāyatrī Mantra, as the entire Indian tradition, with the sole exception of the Anukramaṇī has been holding since time immemorial.

As regards Jamadagni, he was not only a lively personage of the Vedic age but also a close associate of Viśvāmitra having co-authored with the latter a complete hymn in the Saṁhitā. That hymn is Ṛgveda X.167. It is in this hymn that Indra is said to have won

rulership of the heaven by means of *tapas*.<sup>74</sup> This idea has shaped not only numerous stories regarding Indra in the Purāṇas but also those concerning Viśvāmitra himself insofar as he was sought to be distracted from his *tapas* by Indra out of the fear of losing his throne in favour of the seer. In the last mantra of the hymn *jamadgni* forms a *dvandva* compound with Viśvāmitra besides the mention of a common home of both of them, no matter be it just sacrificial, as interpreted by Sāyaṇa.<sup>75</sup> Their association with each other finds further confirmation in a statement in the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa to the effect that Viśvāmitra practised *tapas* at a place known as *Jāmadagna*.<sup>76</sup> This place, might well have belonged to Jamadagni and Viśvāmitra's practising *tapas* there, therefore, bears out their close relationship with each other. At the top of all this, there are two contiguous mantras in the third maṇḍala of the Ṛgveda in which Viśvāmitra himself acknowledges his obligation to Jamadagni for imparting to him a certain secret knowledge called *sasarparī* by means of which he could get rid of a certain state of thoughtlessness. Regarding the *sasarparī*, it has further been mentioned that it, as the daughter of Sūrya, made loud sound and thus made audible to gods what is undecaying and immortal. It is also said to have expanded as a sound up to all the five classes of people in the world and to have imparted a new lease of life to them.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> तं तपः परितप्याजयुः स्वः । RV.X.167.1.

<sup>75</sup> सुते सातेन यद्यागं वां प्रति विश्वामित्रजमदग्नी दमै । Ibid., X.167.4.

<sup>76</sup> Gopatha Brāhmaṇa I. 2.8. See B.B. Chaubey, *Viśvāmitra in Vedic and Post-Vedic Literature*

<sup>77</sup> ससर्परिरमंतिं वार्धमाना बृहन्मिमाय जमदग्निदत्ता । आ सूर्यस्य दुहिता तंतानु श्रवो देवेष्वमृतमजुयम् । । ससर्परिरभरत् तूयमेभ्यो ऽ धि श्रवः पाञ्चजन्यासु कृष्टिषु । सा प्रक्ष्यात् नव्यमायुर्दधाना यां मे पलस्तजमदग्नीयौ ददुः । । RV. III. 53.15-16.



What is referred to as *sasarparī* in these mantras, has been taken by Pandit K. C. Chattopadhyaya as the famous Gāyatrī mantra.<sup>78</sup> His suggestion is based particularly on the involvement of Sūrya in the *sasarparī* and that of Savitṛ in the Gāyatrī. He also finds confirmation of his view in the *sasarparī* removing the *amati* of the seer while Gāyatrī is recited to stimulate mantras within the seer. Apparently the equation of Pandit Chattopadhyaya seems to be quite convincing but for confusing together things of different order received by the seer understandably at different stages in his life. *Sasarparī* was received by him at an early stage in his life when, still in an immature age, he was psychically overpowered by Śakti, the son of Vasiṣṭha. It is quite possible that, due to a certain psychic power exercised by Śakti, he might have lost the proper track of progress in spirituality. It is also possible that he lost the power of thinking as also of expression. This is suggested by the literal meaning of the word *amati* meaning *thoughtlessness* while removal of *amati*, according to the mantra in question, results in the expansion of sound up to divine beings on one hand and to humans on the other. Being put in this precarious position at that relatively earlier stage in his life, he would naturally have approached Jamadagni on account of his mature age and wisdom, as is implied from the word *palasti*, one of ripe age. The Gāyatrī, on the other hand, is a product of the ripe age in the life of the seer when he had become mellow with wisdom. This is borne out by the sublimity of the idea expressed in it as well as its placing at the end of the maṇḍala. Had Viśvāmitra been imparted the golden chest of wisdom at that stage of his life itself, certainly he would not have been required to undergo all

78 See B.B. Chaubey, *Viśvāmitra in Vedic and Post-Vedic Literature* p.10.

those trials and tribulations which are associated with his life-history.

That Jamadagni himself at a certain stage in his life suffered loss of the power of speech is suggested by the Purāṇic story of king Sahasrabāhu seeking to take away by force the Kāmadhenu of the seer. This story may have its root in a Ṛgvedic mantra seen by Jamadagni in which the seer addresses the sacred *Vāk* as a cow which is the mother of the Rudras, daughter of Vasus, sister of the Ādityas, centre of immortality besides being sinless and hence unworthy of being killed particularly by wise men.<sup>79</sup> Obviously the cow mentioned in this mantra is Aditi, the primeval mother representing *Vāk* which also has been conceived as the mother of gods etc. in the well known Vāgāmbhṛṇī Hymn of the Ṛgveda.<sup>80</sup> What appears as *Vāk* in the Vedas, reappears as Kāmadhenu in the post-Vedic literature. Kāmadhenu is as closely associated with Post-Vedic seers as *Vāk* is associated with the Vedic. Having withstood the crisis of forcible snatching of his Kāmadhenu, *Vāk*, Jamadagni can understandably be taken to have become wise in the restoration of it which Viśvāmitra would have been in need of. Sāyaṇa also takes the word *sasarparī* in the same sense of *Vāk* obviously on the basis of its derivation from the root  $\sqrt{srp}$ , to creep.

Diction of the Gāyatrī mantra also is more characteristic of Viśvāmitra than of any other seer. The word *vareṇya*, for instance, which occurs in the Gāyatrī mantra, has been used as many as eight times by Viśvāmitra while other seers have made use of it once or twice each at the

79 माला रुद्राणां दुहिता वसूनां स्वसादित्यानाममृतस्य नाभिः ।

प्र नु वीचं चिकितुषे जनाय मा गमनागामदिति वधिष्ट ।। *Ibid.*, VIII. 101.15

80 *Ibid.*, X.125



most. Other significant words in this respect are *dhiyah* and *dhīmahī*. Not only has *dhiyah* been used several times by Viśvāmitra in various grammatical forms but once with *vareṇyah* itself in one and the same mantra, as in the Gāyatrī.<sup>81</sup>

There are certain other mantras in which Viśvāmitra seems to approximate what he has achieved in the Gāyatrī. In one such mantra, there is a reference to the golden light, *hiraṇyayīm amatim* of Savitṛ which nobody dares to cherish except for the Heaven and the Earth who keep it in their bosom like mothers keeping concealed their progenies.<sup>82</sup> From *savitur hiraṇyayīm amatim* in this mantra, obviously it was only a step forward to reach *savitur vareṇyam bhargah* in the Gāyatrī mantra.

This mantra also anticipates the basic cosmogonic idea embodied in the Gāyatrī mantra, as enriched by the *Vyāhṛtis*, which, however, were added to the basic mantra subsequently. They occur for the first time in the Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā, III.5, separately from the Gāyatrī which in itself occurring in at III.35. Both Gāyatrī and the *Vyāhṛtis* get mentioned for the first time in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa II.1.4.14 where Gāyatrī stands for the metre in general rather than for the particular mantra. If they occur together for the first time anywhere in the Vedic literature, that is in the last chapter of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, though here also not in that order and compact form in which they

81 धिया चंके वरेण्यो भूतानां गर्भमा दधे ।  
दक्षस्य पितरं तनां ।। *Ibid.*, VIII. 27.9

82 तदिन्वस्य सवितुर्नकिर्मं हिरण्ययीममतिं यामशिश्नेत्  
आ सुष्टुती रोदसी विश्वमिन्वे अपीव योषा जनिमानि ववे ।। *Ibid.*, VIII. 38.8

occur in the post-Vedic literature. In the Upaniṣad, the three *pādas* of the Gāyatrī are interspersed with the famous *madhumatī* mantras followed by the three *vyāhṛtis*, each uttered at each step successively. The offering made to the accompaniment of these three, however, has been regarded as so effective as to infuse life even in a completely dry stump and make branches and leaves sprout of it afresh.<sup>83</sup>

This is how the *vyāhṛtis* became so closely associated with the basic mantra as to appear as a part and parcel of it. The scope for this development, however, is foreshadowed in RV.III.38.3 as quoted at F.N. 82 supra. The *rodasī* of this mantra conceived as having enclosed within it the golden light of Savitṛ gets subsequently represented by *bhūh* and *svah* with *bhuvah* forming the meeting ground of them. The three, thus, come to represent the totality of the manifest reality having enclosed in the midst of them the lovely light of Savitṛ as symbolic of the Ultimate Reality. By meditating on that light and having a feel of its effect, the inner darkness gets completely removed and the aspirant has the possibility of realising his perfect identity with that Reality with the consequence of feeling himself as all-in-all. That this realisation is not just a curt and dry cognition but a substantially blissful experience is suggested by the *madhumatī* mantras interspersed with the *vyāhṛtis* and the *pādas* of the Gāyatrī. Thus through

83 तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यम् । मधु वाता ऋतायते मधु क्षरन्ति सिन्धवः । माध्वीर्नः सन्त्वोषधीः । भूः  
स्वाहा । भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि । मधु नक्तमुतोपसः । मधुमत्पार्थिवं रजं । मधु द्यौरस्तु नः  
पिता । भुवः स्वाहा । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् । मधुमान्नो वनस्पतिः । मधुमो अस्तु  
सूर्यः । माध्वीर्गावो भवन्तु नः । स्वः स्वाहा । सर्वा सावित्रीमन्वाह सर्वाश्च मधुमतीरहमेवेदं  
सर्वं भूयासं भू भुवः स्वः स्वाहेति ।... अपि य एनं शुष्के स्थाणौ निषिञ्चेज्जायेरञ्जारवाः  
प्ररोहेयुः पलाशानीति । *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, VI.3.6-7



this long exercise the Upaniṣad makes only manifest what lies latent in the Gāyatrī mantra.

Another accompaniment of the Gāyatrī or indeed of all Vedic mantras is the sound *om*. This also is supposed to be a later addition to the mantra. In recitation, however, it, as a matter of principle, is added to each mantra in its beginning. This tradition must also have a certain substantial basis, otherwise it could not have been sustained so long. In Dīrghatamas, that sacred sound seems to be implied in what he calls *akṣara* which is said to be the receptacle of gods and *ṛks* together. Gods represent the spiritual reality while *ṛks* are its primeval verbal expression.<sup>84</sup> The same primeval sound seems to be referred to by Viśvāmitra through the expression *pūrvyaṁ vācaḥ*.<sup>85</sup> In the relevant mantra this word is proposed to be offered to Agni as he bears it originally in him in the same way as the Creator bears in Him lights of the mantras. Needless to point out that in the Vedic thought Agni is considered to be a product of *Vāk* which in its most primeval form is the same as *om*.

To come back to the Gāyatrī, it indeed is a consummate product of a psyche mellow with wisdom. The plural optative form *dhīmahi* used in it bears out the universality of its appeal. It is a prayer intended to be made on behalf of all whosoever for stimulation of the capacity inherent in them. That capacity is the power of concentration woven with the fabric of one's being. The power of concentration is operative by itself in the maintenance of our being. For ascension of higher ladders of being, however, it needs a certain stimulant

<sup>84</sup> See F.N. 38 and 61 supra.

<sup>85</sup> प्र होत्रे पूर्व वचो ऽ न्ये भरता बृहत् ।  
विषां ज्योतीषि विभ्रते न वेधसै ।। RV. III. 10.5.

as effective as possible. In the Gāyatrī mantra that stimulant lies in Savitr, the universal stimulator itself as is obvious from the derivative meaning of the word. Thus, this mantra is the best possible stimulator for ascension to a higher and indeed the highest ladder of being. The prayer is made not to any agent of the stimulator but to the stimulator himself. This is what makes the prayer so radical in approach and so sublime in intent.

The word *dhiyah* in the mantra does necessarily not mean 'prayers' as it is generally taken to denote. In fact, we find in the very third mantra after the Gāyatrī use of the word *dhiyā* in the sense of concentration or imperative of the conscience as distinct from prayer which is denoted in it by the word *suṛkti*.<sup>86</sup> The plural *dhiyah* in the Gāyatrī, therefore, is not to be taken as expressive of the plurality of the mantras intended to be received from the deity but of the plurality of individuals involved by the seer in the act of stimulation of their respective concentrated beings or the conscience.

The *vyāhrtis*, on the other hand, form the ladder for ascension of the aspirant to his consciousness. *Bhūh* is symbolic of the physical, *bhuvah* of the vital while *svah* of the mental, as they stand for the earth, the atmosphere and the sky as supervened by Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya respectively. Apparently they represent the three worlds as it is stated at several places in the Brāhmaṇas, including the Taittirīya.<sup>87</sup> But being regarded also as the quintessence of these worlds, they very well stand for the psychic ingredients in man

<sup>86</sup> देवं नरं सवितारं विषां यज्ञैः सुवृक्तिभिः ।

नमस्यन्ति धियेषिताः ।। Ibid., III. 62.12.

<sup>87</sup> एता वै व्याहृतय इमे लोकाः । Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, II.2.4.32



corresponding to these regions of the world. It is why they are regarded as the adhesive meant for gluing together the *trayī vidyā*, i.e. the whole of the Vedic lore having compressed together its three aspects, namely the physical, the vital and the mental-spiritual.<sup>88</sup> *Sādhanā* on the *Vyāhrtis*, therefore, is supposed to bestow upon the aspirant all that is possible to obtain in this world.<sup>89</sup>

Addition of the *Vyāhrtis* to the *Gāyatrī* is thus preparatory of ascension beyond the physical, vital and mental to that highest beatitude of being and consciousness which is represented by the lovely light of *Savitṛ*, the cosmic stimulator, and is symbolised by the brilliant light of the sun. Discernment of the symbolised content from the symbol on this point is crucial to the proper understanding of the mantra. Lacking in such a discernment, how one can have only a travesty of the meaning of the sacred mantra, can be gauged from the following observation on it made by a respectable Indologist:

“Viśvāmitra’s reputation is due in some measure to his authorship of this mantra. Why this mantra should have come to be regarded as the holiest mantra in the Veda is, however, not clear..... If we take into consideration the role of Viśvāmitra as a leader of the expansion of the Vedic Aryans the mantra would appear like a slogan given by Viśvāmitra to the advancing Aryans who must have been

88 एतानि ह वै वेदानामन्तः श्लेषणानि यदेता व्याहृतयः ।

*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, V.33.

89 सर्वाप्तिर्वा एषा यदेता व्याहृतयः । *Ibid.*, VIII.7.

expanding towards the east, i.e. the direction of the sun.”<sup>90</sup>

It is obvious from the above observation how pre-supposition of the theory of Aryan Invasion, which in itself is an utterly dubious proposition, has cast its shadow over the understanding of Vedic scholars in general in the modern times and has led to horrible travesty of meaning. Lacking in the proper clue to the real meaning, when these scholars fail to explain any passage precisely, they immediately rush to the theory of Aryan Invasion taking it as the infallible dogma and the last resort.

90 V.G. Rahurkar, *The Seers of the R̥gveda*, pp. 35- 6.





## Vision of the Supreme Being



## I. The Primeval Word Om

*Though appearing mostly* as a sacrificial priest offering oblation to numerous gods and goddesses such as Agni, Indra, Aśvins, Mitra, Ṛbhus, Uṣas and Viśve-devāḥ collectively as well as individually, Viśvāmitra is very well established in a clear vision of the Creator and Controller of the world forming the essence of all. He is so much absorbed in this mighty vision that he recalls it even incidentally while asking priests to offer to Agni the great primeval Word which the Vedic mantras are understandably rooted in. Generally gods are offered mantras extolling their various deeds in detail. In the particular mantra under consideration, however, Viśvāmitra asks the priests to offer to Agni the primeval great Word itself or perhaps in the form of mantras emerging from it.

As we have already seen in the immediately preceding chapter, Viśvāmitra, as well as other seers, had realised the common origin of the mantra in a single agency or essence. It was, therefore, but natural for them to indicate to that essence by one particular word whatever. Through abstraction this word in one of its variations has come to be conceived as *sat* and has been used, among others, most tellingly by Dīrghatamas in his famous observation: *ekam sad viprā bahudhā*



*vadanti*: "The reality is only one which has been spoken of variously."<sup>1</sup> Abstraction of existence as the Reality permeating the diversity was in itself a marvellous feat at ideation on the part of the Vedic seer understandably as it is rooted in one of his most profound visions.

But, apart from the abstraction and its formulation in the form of *sat*, if the reality and the word have any necessary correlation between them, as has explicitly been stated by another Vedic seer, namely Sadhri,<sup>2</sup> there must be a particular verbal counterpart of the Existence in the Veda.

Most probably it is that counterpart of Existence which has come to be referred to in a certain mantra as the primeval great word proposed to be offered to Agni. Being intimately connected with *sādhanā* of the seer, this great word, however, remains mostly kept secret except for indication to it through such adjectival expressions as *akṣara* and *brhad vacaḥ*. But since it could not but had to be pronounced in the context of sacrifice, as is evident from Viśvāmitra's imperative in this regard, it comes to be used explicitly in the Yajurveda.

That the word was associated originally with the Being responsible for ordaining the world, is clear from Viśvāmitra's use of this association as a simile in the mantra. As per his instruction, the great primeval word is to be uttered with respect to Agni in the same way as it is used for the Supreme Being. The justification for this transference of usage from the general to the particular, according to the seer, lies in their common

1 RV. I. 164. 46.

2 यावद् ब्रह्म विष्टितं तावन्ती वाक् । *Ibid.*, X. 114. 8.

quality of luminousness, though with a fundamental difference. While the luminousness of Agni is physical and tangible to the eyesight, the luminousness of the Supreme Being is manifest only upon seers, *vipras*.<sup>3</sup> Just as Agni out of its luminousness sheds sparks around it, even so the Supreme Being is said to throw out mantras out of the luminousness of His consciousness. It is the same luminousness of consciousness of the Supreme Being which has been sought to be contemplated on in the celebrated Gāyatrī mantra, however, through a different symbolic medium. While in the mantra under consideration it is the luminousness of Agni as kindled in the sacrificial pit which is taken to bear resemblance to the luminousness of the Supreme Being, in the Gāyatrī mantra the solar orb shining in the sky has been chosen to create in mind an image of the Transcendent's luminousness.

There is a marked difference also in the relationship between the symbol and the object symbolised in the two cases. While in the Gāyatrī mantra the solar orb is used as a symbol of the Supreme Being, in the mantra under consideration the latter has been adduced as a simile to Agni kindled in the sacrificial pit and proposed to be offered the great primeval word.

Thus this mantra, as well as the Gāyatrī, bears out how the idea of the Supreme Being with all His spiritual luminousness capable of emanating in the form of mantras was so much present in the mind of the seer as to have easily been available to him on seeing the luminousness of Agni. While in the Gāyatrī mantra the Supreme Being is sought to be meditated on for evoking

3 प्र होत्रे पुर्यं वचो ऽग्नये भरता बृहत् ।

विपां ज्योतीषि विभंते न वेधसे ।। *Ibid.*, III. 10.5



sparks of wisdom in the form of mantras through the solar orb emitting a multitude of rays of light, in this mantra He is brought in so as to sanctify the sacrificial Agni and make it worthy of the great primeval word.

## II. Elucidation of the Supreme Being through Agni

Thus Agni in this mantra is by no means the source of the idea of the Supreme Being, as the modern intelligentsia is prone to consider under the impact of the theory of evolution as applied to thinking on culture. It is used here rather as a medium of understanding of the Supreme Being on account of bearing close resemblance to Him in luminousness as also as an indicator of the presence of Him in objects of worship, such as Agni. The latter point gets elaborated in the Kāṭha Upaniṣad where, while quoting the following mantra of Viśvāmitra's verbatim:

“The omni-knower lies hidden in the pair of fire-sticks like the foetus placed inside the pregnant woman. Agni, as such, has to be prayed to regularly by men keeping awake and making offerings.”<sup>4</sup>

what the Upaniṣadic sage does in regard to this Vedic mantra is just to add to it the simple words: *etad vai tat*, 'That is exactly like this.' Hereby he just makes explicit what lies rather implicit in the Vedic mantra.

Moreover, there are five mantras in one and the same hymn expounding the all-comprehending oneness of the

4 अरण्योर्निहितो जातवैद्या गर्भ इव सुधितो गर्भिणीषु ।  
दिवेदिव ईड्यौ जागृवदिर्भह्विष्मदिभर्मनुष्यैर्भिरग्निः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.29.2;

*Katha Up.* II.1.8.

Supreme Being with reference to Agni. In the first one of these mantras Agni is conceived as a king making his presence felt at numerous places simultaneously, sleeping unnoticed in some of his dwellings and making himself active in forests all at the same time. He has got the Earth and the Heaven as his two mothers. While the former provides him with shelter, observes the seer, the latter gives him nourishment.<sup>5</sup> Conceiving of Agni as a king is to bring out its all-pervasiveness and luminousness. Just as the king, though a single individual, makes his presence felt to diverse sections of the people living at diverse places, even so Agni indwells everything in the world but manifests itself in pieces of wood wherever one of them gets rubbed against the other. The singleness of the king playing diverse roles at diverse places is adduced here to illustrate Agni's grand role of being present implicitly or explicitly at all places simultaneously. What, however, is really sought to be expounded here is neither the effective presence of the king at diverse places simultaneously nor that of Agni at all places. The real burden of the mantra, on the contrary, is the exposition of oneness of the essence of the Supreme Being assuming diverse forms at different places and in different times and thus appearing as divinities of diverse forms, as the seer states: 'The grand essence of gods is but one.' Just as the image of the king is adduced here to bolster the greatness and oneness of Agni, even so Agni in its turn has been brought in to illustrate the immensity and oneness of the Divine essence. It, indeed, is used here to illustrate certain attributes of the Divine rather than as a source of deduction of the idea of them. And there is a vast difference between illustration and deduction. While

5 समानो राजा विभृतः पुरुत्रा शयै श्यासु प्रयुतो वनानु ।  
अन्या वत्सं भरति क्षेति माता महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.55.4.



deduction is the process of understanding something entirely unknown, illustration is the way to concretising anything already known. This confusion between illustration and deduction has done inestimable harm to the understanding of the real thrust of the Vedic expression and indeed to the psyche of the seer himself.

In the next mantra of the hymn, the creative dynamics of the Supreme Being is illustrated through the kindred act of Agni. Production of fire from a pair of fire-sticks was sufficient to bring home to the seer the idea of presence of it in dry wood at least. The same fire, however, is understood by him also as the agent of growth and fruition earlier when the plant is green. Going still back, the very sprouting of the seed is the work of fire inherent in it. All this bears out the fact that fire is present in the plant right from the very beginning. Sprouting, growing and fructifying of vegetation without mating is indicative of the creative power of Agni which otherwise is supposed to be only destructive. Moreover, Agni is but one and yet it acts as the agent of creation in legions of plants throughout the world. This fact bears out the immensity of the might it possesses. In view of this, Viśvāmitra makes use of Agni to drive home illustratively the idea of creative dynamics of the Supreme Being by virtue of which He, though only one, has created the world in all its diversity as well as immensity.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighth mantra of the hymn, Agni again is adduced to bring out the uniqueness and transcendence of the Supreme Being. It is conceived here as a warrior engaged in fighting. Just as a good fighter makes all

6 आक्षित्पूर्वास्वपरा अनूरुत्सद्यो ज्ञातासु तरुणीष्वन्तः ।  
अन्तर्वर्तीः सुवते अप्रवीता महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 55.5.

those take to their heels who are close to him or move towards him charged with the sense of enmity, even so all those who come towards Agni get repulsed by it burning brilliantly. As intellect, it operates also in the inner being of the individual quite beyond the reach of the senses. So is the case with the Supreme Being. He is one and yet so mighty as to win over as well as to stand apart from all those who pose their reality as independent of Him. He also lies in the inmost being of one and all beyond the reach of the senses.<sup>7</sup>

This conception of the Divine is prototypical of one the Taittirīya Upaniṣad makes out regarding Him as the being out of fear from whom the wind blows, the sun rises and Indra along with Agni moves out and so does the god of death.<sup>8</sup> It is also interesting to note that immediately after describing the Supreme Being as the *mysterium tremendum* in the present mantra, the author of the Upaniṣad proceeds further to pronounce Him as one from whom words along with mind come back without getting access to Him.<sup>9</sup>

Now if the first part of the Ṛgvedic mantra forms the prototype of the idea expressed by the former Upaniṣadic verse, the second part of it anticipates the idea of the latter one. Thus, the mantra, as a whole depicts the Divine as one, mighty and tremendous controller of the world lying beyond the reach of senses and hence operating imperceptively. As such, this

7 शूरस्येव युध्यन्तो अन्तमस्यं प्रतीचीनं ददृशे विश्वमायत ।  
अन्तर्भृतिश्चरति निषिधं गोर्महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.55.8.

8 भीषास्माद्दत्तः पवते भीषा उदेति सूर्यः ।  
भीषास्मादग्निश्चेन्द्रश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः ॥ *Tait. Up.* II.8.

9 यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह । *Ibid.*, II.9.



portion of the Upaniṣad seems to be very much based on this mantra of Viśvāmitra's.

The next mantra, in the hymn, views the Supreme Being as the eternal agent of inter-communication and watchfulness operating in one and all. These attributes are brought out again through the medium of Agni. The latter is characterised here as a grey-haired messenger obtaining in vegetations on one hand and moving along the shining heaven in the form of the sun on the other. He is one, says the seer, and yet assuming various forms He observes us all. This role of Agni is considered as illustrative of how one and the same Supreme Being pervades everything with His power of being as well as consciousness. He incarnates Himself in each individual and observes all indwelling them. If Agni pervades all as the principle of heat and light, the Supreme Being pervades each and everything as the principle of existence and consciousness. Though appearing in so diverse forms and capacities as the principle of heat in plants on one hand and as the mighty sun in the sky on the other, Agni is one and the same everywhere in essence. Even so the Supreme Being, though so diverse in His role in the world, is but one. Herein lies His greatness.<sup>10</sup>

The oneness and greatness of the Supreme Being, however, are brought out most vividly by the last mantra to Agni. In this hymn the latter is viewed as the all-pervading and all-protecting being dwelling in immortality and guarding the loftiest position. As such,

<sup>10</sup> नि वैवेति पङ्क्तितो द्रुत आस्वन्तर्मुहांश्चरति रोचुनेन ।  
वपुषि विभ्रंदिभि नो वि चण्टे महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ RV. III.55.9.

he is said to be aware of the entire creation.<sup>11</sup> In this mantra Agni gets identified with Viṣṇu, the highest among gods. In this capacity, he plays the role of the guardian of the highest step of existence by virtue of dwelling eternally in blessedness and immortality. In fact, in the Brāhmaṇas, Agni is considered as the lowermost pole of the Divine while Viṣṇu as the highest one, all the other gods coming between them.<sup>12</sup> In the mantra under consideration this idea of polarity gets eliminated due to identification of Agni with Viṣṇu and transference of the latter's role entirely to the former. The idea of polarity is, indeed, a result of disparateness in the Divine while elimination of it leads to restoration of Its oneness. Just as the symbol ultimately merges with what it is commissioned to symbolise, even so Agni in this mantra merges with the Supreme Being on being accorded the role of Viṣṇu. He comes to be considered as absolutely one, great, eternal, blissful, omniscient and basis of the being of all. This is exactly what qualifies the Supreme Being.

### III. Elucidation of the Supreme Being through the Sun

Sūrya is another divinity through which Viśvāmitra has viewed the immensity and oneness of the Supreme Being. Needless to point out that in the celebrated Gāyatrī Mantra it is the sun which has been used to inculcate the notion of the Supreme Being. However, while in the Gāyatrī mantra the basis of the choice of the sun to represent the Supreme Being is his brilliance, in the mantra under consideration, it is the amazing feat of him which is used to drive home the idea of oneness and

<sup>11</sup> विष्णुर्गोपा परमं पति पार्थः प्रिया धामान्यमृता दधानः ।  
अग्निप्टा विश्वा भुवनानि वेद महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ Ibid., III.55.10.  
<sup>12</sup> अग्निर्वै देवानामवमो विष्णुः परमः ॥ Ait. Brah. I.1



immensity of the Being. In the first one of these mantras, the seer refers to the surprising scheme of things under which the sun sets far away in the west and then subsequently rises at an equally distant place in the east and then moves, as on the previous day, unrestrained across the whole of the sky. Seemingly, he is born of the Earth but is brought up and nourished by the Heaven. He is one, though he has two agencies in the form of the Heaven and the Earth as his mothers. These mutually contrasting positions regarding the sun put up on such a vast canvas as the vista of the heaven and the earth is used by the seer to drive home the idea of immensity and oneness of the Divine. The amazing feats of the sun have been attributed by him to the laws of Mitra and Varuṇa. These laws must have a certain common basis for making operation possible. That basis, according to the seer, is formed by the Supreme Being by virtue of His immensity and oneness.<sup>13</sup>

The second mantra in this order views the sun playing the same roles in his oneness with Agni and thus forming a still better symbol of the Supreme Being in His oneness as well as immensity. He, according to the seer, has the Heaven and the Earth as his two mothers. As Agni, He serves as the messenger of gods and takes His seat majestically in sacrifices. As the sun, He dwells below the earth and moves high in the sky. All this, according to the seer, is sufficient to bear out the Divine in His pervasiveness as well as immensity.<sup>14</sup> One and the same entity can act as the sun in the sky, as Agni on

the earth, and even as sun can rest below the earth and move in the sky and can combine such mutually distant entities as the heaven and the earth in one homogenous fold and yet be so loving as to be sung about in sweetest possible words. Does it not bespeak of the presence of one blissful divine principle behind the entire scenario of nature?

There is also a third mantra in this hymn in which the sun appears more comprehensively as Savitṛ and symbolises the Supreme Being more intimately. Savitṛ stands for the principle of universal stimulation for creation, as is obvious from the derivative meaning of the word. He is, therefore, described in this mantra as Tvaṣṭṛ, the Creator. He is of omni-form and has given birth to beings in various ways. All created beings are intimately connected with him. By virtue of this all-embracing creative power of him, Savitṛ is perhaps the best symbol of the Supreme. This is evident from the Gāyatrī mantra also. Choice of Savitṛ in all his universality as well as soul-stirring luminousness has proved so appealing in this mantra that it is accorded a unique position amongst the mantras. Sūrya, indeed, is just a manifestation of Savitṛ, though, of course, the most impressive one. This has led to the symbolisation of him most intimately by Sūrya. Symbolisation of the Supreme Being by Savitṛ is a step forward in the same direction or indeed the final step where the symbol gets coincided with what it is intended to symbolise.

#### IV. The Supreme as Symbolised by Uṣas

Uṣas in her primeval form is another allied figure used by Viśvāmitra to give us an idea of his vision of the

<sup>13</sup> शयुः परस्तादध नु द्विमाताबन्धुनश्चरति वृत्स एकं ।

मित्रस्य ता वरुणस्य वृत्तानि महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ RV. III. 55.6.

<sup>14</sup> द्विमाता होता विदथेषु समालन्व्यं चरति क्षेतिं वृजः ।

प्र रण्यानि रण्यवाचो भरन्ते महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ Ibid., III. 55.7.



Divine. Dawn is obviously the best indicator of the sunrise. If this is the case today, how richer in colour the dawn must have been during the first rising of the sun at the time of its formation! This primeval natural scenario, mistaken by Sri Bal Gangadhar Tilak as to refer to the polar view of the solar phenomenon, has dawned upon the mind of Viśvāmitra as an apt analogue of the primeval situation in which the Divine chose to manifest Himself in the form of primeval divine beings, their cosmic laws and the cosmos itself one after the other. The primeval dawns presuppose the primeval night which in the famous Aghamarṣaṇa Hymn of the Ṛgveda is said to have arisen immediately after Ṛta and Satya were born of the brilliant *tapas* of the Supreme Being.<sup>15</sup> Birth of night, according to this hymn, is followed by emergence of the surging sea and year-length time bifurcated into day and night. After emergence of the day and night were born the sun and the moon.<sup>16</sup> Thus Aghamarṣaṇa refers to two nights, one coming immediately after the emergence of Ṛta and Satya and the other in plural immediately before the creation of the sun. As these nights are viewed in the plural, so are the dawns of Viśvāmitra. It appears, therefore, likely that the nights understood behind the dawn of Viśvāmitra's are these very nights as visualised by Aghamarṣaṇa. They form the source of matter as well as of physical world comprising all that lies between the

<sup>15</sup> ऋतं च सुत्यं चाभीरुद्धात्तपसोऽध्वंजायत् ।  
ततो रात्र्यंजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥ *Ibid.*, X.190.1

<sup>16</sup> समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अंजायत ।  
अहोरात्राणि विदधुद्विश्वस्य मेषतो वशी ॥  
सूर्याच्चन्द्रमसौ धाता यथापूर्वमकल्पयत् ।  
दिवं च पृथिवीं चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः ॥ *Ibid.*, X.190.2-3.

heaven and the earth including the sun and the moon which give rise to the scenario of day, night and dawn.

On the basis of the above details it can fairly be surmised that the dawns coming prior to the rising of the sun daily would have served Viśvāmitra to shape his vision of the primeval dawns emerging from nights forming the source of matter while our sun would have given shape to the vision of the primeval sun emerging out of those nights and dawns. But since that primeval sun forming the original lump of matter could also not be regarded as *akṣara*, absolutely imperishable by the seer, the imagery of the sun would have required to take a step back to the Eternal Being, — the ultimate source of the world characterised by perishability.<sup>17</sup>

By way of a similar regression, the seer would have used the daily dawn as an analogue of cosmic dawns and the latter as that of the primeval dawn associated with the Eternal Being. That ultimate dawn is the result of the all-comprehending *tapas* of the Eternal Being on the metaphysical plane and hence may also be regarded to have the possibility of coming to the mind of the seer in course of his elevated *sādhanā* prior to the vision of the Eternal. The dawns mentioned in the mantra under consideration are possibly, therefore, the primeval ones looming large before the inner eye of the seer and forming the background of emergence of the *akṣara* from within them in the inmost being of him. By-products of the *tapas* of the *akṣara* on the metaphysical plane are the laws of gods known collectively as Ṛta while on the human plane they get formulated as rules of sacrifice

<sup>17</sup> तस्याः समुद्रा अधि वि क्षरन्ति तेन जीवन्ति प्रदिशुश्चतस्रः ।  
ततः क्षरत्यक्षरं तद्विश्वमुप जीवति ॥ *Ibid.*, I.164.42.



through which gods are sought to be motivated and propitiated.<sup>18</sup>

### V. The Supreme Being as brought out by the Heaven and the Earth

Along with the luminaries such as Agni, Sūrya and Uṣas, the heaven and the earth have also been used by Viśvāmitra as a window to the vision of the Supreme Being. For instance, at one place, he envisages the heaven and the earth as two milching cows, one being the mother while the other her daughter. The mother yields milk only when suckled by the daughter. The seer offers prayer to them at the seat of Ṛta. Obviously the heaven is represented by the motherly cow while the earth by her suckling young one. This is a significant observation inasmuch as it appears otherwise to the commonsense as a part of the visual vista. The earth is taken by the seer to have her origin in the heaven, which now stands vindicated scientifically. The calf which is conceived as drawing milk from them is understandably the sun drawing sustenance from both, the heaven and the earth. It is, indeed, by the sucking power of the sun that the atmosphere is made wet and worthy of living. Thus all these three, appearing otherwise as entirely disjointed entities, are visualised by the seer as forming a whole connected with one another as members of a family. It is due to this organic relationship among them that they together happen to give rise to organic life from within them. Vision of the organic relationship obtaining among them, on the other hand, leads ultimately to admittance of the working of one Divine Being behind the façade of diversity created by them. While the

<sup>18</sup> उषसः पूर्वा अथ यद् व्युषर्महद्विजंजे अक्षरं पदे गोः ।  
वृता देवानामुप नू प्रभूषन् महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.55.1

oneness of the Divine accrues out of the vision of the organic relationship among different constituents of the cosmos, His immensity follows from the requisite capacity to sustain together such massive and mighty entities as the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon or indeed the entire array of planets and stars so as to make an organic whole and result eventually in the emergence of organic beings of numberless varieties on this earth alone. Production and sustenance of organic beings out of seemingly inorganic entities is indeed a mysterious act explicable satisfactorily only with the admittance of an all-pervading principle of organismic nature.<sup>19</sup>

### VI. Ṛta as a Pointer to the Supreme Being

How does the Divine impart organismic capability and life-creating potentiality to the visual vista comprising the heaven and the earth? To put it in other words, how can the Eternal meet the ephemeral and result in such a homogenous effect as the emergence of organic beings? This question is raised by the seer himself through the imagery of the cow and the calf. In this imagery Agni itself is conceived as a calf born of the earth who is symbolised as a cow. Though born of the earth, Agni, the calf, is being licked by the heaven who is also symbolised as another motherly cow. Exactly like a cow, the heaven lows while licking the calf. As a cow, it also emits milk in the form of water. It is this water which serves as the sap of life on this earth. What, however, is the source of this water? "By what creative movement," asks the seer, "the cow happens to have her udder filled?" He identifies Ṛta as the ultimate source of the

<sup>19</sup> माता च यत्र दुहिता च धेनू संबुर्धुं ध्यापयंते समीची ।  
ऋतस्य ते सदसीले अन्तर्महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.12.



milk of the heavenly cow. Needless to point out that Rta, in the Vedic scheme of things, is the dynamics of the Eternal making itself operative on the imperative of the latter. It is the custodian of the creative desire of Him. It is static as well as dynamic. It operates as the principle of dynamics on one hand and as that of settled order in the midst of the dynamics on the other. Thus, it acts as a mediator between the Eternal and the ephemeral as also as the ultimate source of the sap of life milked by the heavenly cow and supplied to the earth for feeding Agni as a calf. Agni, the calf, having taken the milk of the heavenly cow, transforms it into vitality which ultimately comes to serve as the source of life on this earth. It is in this dynamics of the emergence of life out of the Eternal that lies, according to the seer, the immensity and oneness of the Supreme Being.<sup>20</sup>

According to another vision of the seer, the heaven and the earth are united with each other by Indra as two massive bowls filled with treasure and making the deity famous by virtue of possession of it. This state of things, points out the seer, bears out the immensity as well as oneness of the Supreme Being.<sup>21</sup> This vision is based on the commonsense spectacle of the visual vista under which the heaven and the earth appear to enclose a vast spherical space between them by being united with each other. The space inside them is not empty either. It is bristling with treasures that serve as a means of subsistence of all those who dwell within their fold. Accomplishment of this fact under which the two

<sup>20</sup> अन्यस्यां वृत्तं रिहती मिमासु कया भुवा नि दधे धेनुरूधः ।

ऋतस्य सा पर्यसापिन्वितेळां महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.13.

<sup>21</sup> मही समैरच्चम्वां समीची उभे ते अस्य वसुना नृष्टे ।

शुभे वीरो विन्दमानो वसुनि महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.20

massive bowls are conjoined and filled with inexhaustible means of subsistence, is, according to the seer, a powerful indicator of the immensity and oneness of the Supreme Being, since the massivity, vastness and homogeneity of this spectacle resulting ultimately in the emergence of organic and self-conscious beings aspiring for their divine destiny can by no means be the work of anyone less than the Divine Himself.

Additional presence of the sun in the same spectacle makes it a still clearer indicator of the immensity and oneness of the Divine. Gods are many and so are the manes. By virtue of playing the vital role in the emergence and sustenance of the cosmos in its different spheres, each one of the gods is important. So are the manes on account of being our forerunners in treading the higher path. Due to their multiplicity and limitations, however, some of them may prove harmful in the venture of man towards things higher. But the presence of the sun as the leading light between the heaven and the earth, observes the seer, is a sure source of confidence to him that notwithstanding all its massivity and diversity of objects and functions involved in its making, there is an all-comprehending divinity which underlies and controls everything here and serves as our surest guide and guardian. As the sun controls and sustains our visual vista and serves as a source of light by virtue of which the vista is made possible for us, even so the Divine can impart to us the knowledge by means of which we may not only live unhindered in this world but may also know the Divine Himself.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> मो पु णो अत्रं जुहुरन्त देवा मा पूर्वे अग्ने पितरं पदज्ञाः ।

पुराण्योः सदमनोः केतुरन्तर्महद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.2.



It is interesting to note that there is a close correspondence between Viśvāmitra's vision of Dyaus, Pṛthivī and Sūrya on one hand and the thrust of idea in the Gāyatrī mantra on the other, if, of course, taken in conjunction with the *Vyāhṛtis*. The *Vyāhṛtis* refer to the earth, the atmosphere and the heaven respectively. Against the vast background of these three regions, the seer proposes to meditate on the loveliest light of Savitṛ so as to get stimulated the wisdom latent in him. Interestingly enough, what has been put so summarily in this mantra, is made out rather elaborately in the mantras quoted above in which Dyaus, and Pṛthivī have been brought in figuratively as the most motherly cows and Sūrya as the calf so as to bring home the idea of the immensity and oneness of the Divine. Thus, they seem to be preparatory to Viśvāmitra's final jump to the Gāyatrī mantra placed at the end of the collection of mantras seen by him and his followers. With its most sublime proposition of meditation on the supernal light of Savitṛ quite in transcendence of the entire visual vista of the earth, the atmosphere and the interstellar space, the Gāyatrī indeed presents the climax of human ideation and *sādhanā*.

### VII. Time and Space as a Sheath of the Supreme Being

Time and space, along with all their manifestations in the form of whatever is there in the universe, form a sheath enshrouding the Divine. In order to reach the latter, one has to deal with the sheath also. There have been thinkers who have sought to negate the reality of them considering them as some sort of a mirage or the like. This obviously was disruptive of the harmony of things necessary for a homogeneous living. The modern man, on the other hand, has come to think that time and space in themselves form the ultimate reality out of

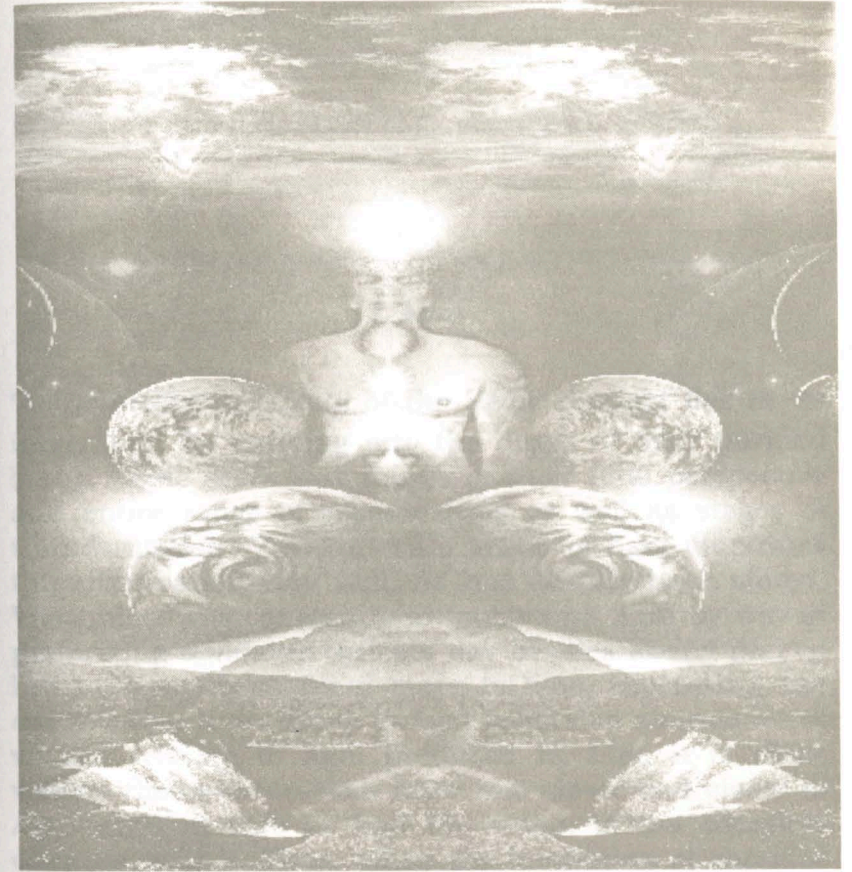
which everything whatever has emerged. As against both these viewpoints, Viśvāmitra admits the reality of the sheath as well as that of what is enshrouded in the sheath and instead of trying to negate, destroy or over-affirm it, he has sought active cooperation of it in reaching the Divine enshrouded in it, in all His immensity and oneness. Pṛthivī, Antarikṣa and Dyaus as *bhūh*, *bhuvah* and *svah* have not only been used by him as stepping stones to the Divine but have also been regarded as conscious and active elevators to Him.

As is the case with space, so it is with time. Viśvāmitra considers time as uniformly one, happening to assume different forms under different circumstances for carrying out the mission of the Divine to manifest Himself in diverse forms and yet to continue to remain all the same in His oneness as well as immensity. The most tangible form of time which is there before us is the division of day and night. Viśvāmitra views them as twin sisters shaped differently as black and white. There is a clear contrast between the white and the black and yet both are fully cooperative in giving diverse shapes and colours to things in the universe. It is due to the dynamics of time that things get manifested in the world. Indeed the Divine would not have manifested Himself in the form of the world, had time not been there to serialise the event of manifestation. Day and night are, therefore, conceived as two mares yoked to the chariot of the Divine to take Him on the path of creative movement. Their difference in colour leaves its impress on the produce. The variety of the products, however, does not impair the oneness of their source. The immensity of the source safeguards the oneness against



all the possibility of disintegration under the stress of the mind-boggling diversity.<sup>23</sup>

Further, day and night have been visualised by the seer as two footsteps of time, one hidden, while the other manifest and yet both of them being full of wonders. They are uniform in their movement and yet diverse in their directions. This uniformity of essence and goal in the midst of the diversity of form and direction of time engaged in the manifestation of the Divine bears out, again, the immensity and oneness of Him.<sup>24</sup> The Divine is one but the time manifesting Him through its movement makes Him look as many by virtue of the difference of its two footsteps, i.e. the day and the night.



## Cosmogonic Visions

- 23 नानां चकारे यम्या इ वपूषि तयोरन्यद्रोचंते कृष्णमन्यत् ।  
श्यावीं च यदरुपीं च स्वसारौ मुहद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.11.
- 24 पदे इवु निहिते दुस्मे अन्तस्तयोरन्यद् गुह्यमाविरन्यत् ।  
सुध्रीचीना पथ्या इ सा विपूची मुहद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.15.



## I. Agni

*The unrivalled constancy* of the Vedic thought lies in its integrality. By entering into the depth of their purified being, Vedic seers saw things in their total perspective and entire range of relationships as well as stages of transformation. Viśvāmitra's vision of Agni illustrates this observation very well. As has already been stated, Viśvāmitra was constantly in touch with Agni by way of performing *agnihotra* thrice a day besides taking part in larger sacrifices from time to time, including the *aśvamedha*. If proximity to Agni facilitated abundance of visions relating to Agni produced by him, it is these visions themselves which drew him closer and closer to Agni until at last he had the vision of his complete oneness with it. Thus, while the institution of sacrifice brought tangibility as well as abundance to the seer's vision of Agni, the visions themselves helped a lot in the elevation of the status of sacrifice to the level where it came to represent the cosmos in miniature. In his concluding mantra addressed to Agni, the seer observes:

“So that we may choose you here today, O highly knowledgeable invoker of gods, in the progress of this sacrifice, you having reached the Eternal and having yourself completely merged in the Eternal, with all



your awareness and understanding of It,  
please do come to Soma.”<sup>1</sup>

In this mantra, there are clear indications to a twofold movement of Agni. On one hand, he is said to have moved towards the Eternal and merged himself in It and, on the other, he is invoked to come down to the sacrifice and to Soma with his awareness and knowledge of the Eternal. While Agni's march towards the Eternal is propelled by the institution of sacrifice, his return from the Eternal is staged mainly by the vision of the seer.

Accordingly, Viśvāmitra visualises Agni to have been born out of the Eternal Being. He, as a master of the seven invokers, observes the seer, has shone from the Eternal. He has grown in the lap of the divine mother Aditi by feeding on her bosom. Being born of the belly of the *Asura*, he, the lovely one, does not blink at all.<sup>2</sup> While looking for the meaning of this account, what we may find for certain is that the seven *hotṛ* priests referred to as working under the aegis of Agni are related to each one of the seven planes of being which elsewhere in the *Samhitā* have been represented symbolically as the seven pedestals formed around the sacrificial pit.<sup>3</sup> Agni, the divine invoker, has appointed one *hotṛ* priest at each plane of being on his behalf which bears out his lordship over all these planes. The mother, in whose lap he grows, is Aditi while the *Asura*, from whose belly he is

- 1 यदद्य त्वां प्रयति युजे अस्मिन् होतृशिवकित्त्वोऽवृणामहीह ।  
ध्रुवमया ध्रुवमुताशमिष्ठाः प्रजानन् विद्वो उर्पं याहि सोमम् ॥ RV.III.29.16
- 2 प्र सुप्तहोता सनुकादरोचत मातुरुपस्थे यदशौचदूर्धनि ।  
न नि मिषति सुरणो द्विवेदिवे यदसुरस्य जृष्टप्रदजायत् ॥ Ibid., III. 29.14
- 3 सुप्तास्यासन्प्रिधयः । Ibid., X.90.15

said to have been born, is Dakṣa. This is what is stated clearly elsewhere in the *Samhitā* where it has been observed that while Non-Being and Being lie in the highest heaven in the birth of Dakṣa and the lap of Aditi, our Agni is the first to be born of Ṛta.<sup>4</sup> It is under the imperative of Ṛta that Aditi and Dakṣa give birth to Agni and nourish him. The *Asura*, from whose belly Agni is said to have been born, is Dakṣa himself. It is on account of his divine origin that Agni does not blink at all and remains constantly awake. Thus, Viśvāmitra's vision, as embodied in the mantra under consideration makes out Agni as having his source in the Eternal and as having been born of the divine parents under the imperative of Ṛta.

Being born of the Eternal, Agni essentially is eternal and it is as such that he gets himself embodied in mortals as the most cherishable eternal light, as has been stated by Bharadvāja elsewhere in the *Samhitā*. Bharadvāja calls him as the first *hotṛ* priest in the same mantra.<sup>5</sup> If Agni is embodied, on one hand, as the immortal consciousness in mortals, he, on the other, has expanded himself so as to pervade the seven rivers nourishing Agni as their young child, white at the time of birth and reddish when coming of age. Just as mares turn to their young ones as soon as they are born, even so the rivers come around the newly born child Agni who got bedecked by gods.<sup>6</sup>

- 4 असंच्च सच्चं परमे व्योमन् दक्षस्य जन्मनदितेरुपस्थे ।  
अग्निर्ह नः प्रथमजा ऋतस्य पूर्व आयुनि वृषभश्च धेनुः ॥ Ibid., X.5.7.
- 5 अयं होता प्रथमः पश्यंतेममिदं ज्योतिरमृतं मर्त्येषु ।  
अयं स जज्ञे ध्रुव आ निषत्तोऽमर्त्यस्तन्वा इ वर्धमानः ॥ Ibid., VI.9.4.
- 6 अवर्धयन्सुभगं सुप्त युहवीः श्वेतं जज्ञानमरुषं महित्वा ।  
शिशुं न ज्ञातमभ्याहृश्रवां देवासो अग्निं जनिमन्वपुष्यन् ॥ Ibid., III. 1. 4



This vision of the seer accounts very well for Agni's pervasion of the cosmos conceived as consisting of seven planes of being moving fast. Rivers as well as mares symbolise that mobility. Indeed, it is due to the fast mobility of motherly mares or rivers that Agni has been so rapid in his cosmic pervasion. Being born of the eternally constant, Agni in his essence is also eternally constant. He becomes dynamic owing to riding the crest of the planes of being. Conversely, there is the possibility of the planes of being becoming dynamic owing to their attraction towards Agni, their newly born child. Anyway, in his dynamic role in the cosmos, Agni is visualised by the seer as the creator of worlds besides being conceived also as the supplier of gods.<sup>7</sup>

The dynamism of Agni has also been brought out by the seer's vision of him as the charioteer of Ṛta, the great. In this role, he moves in diverse directions and serves gods as their priest.<sup>8</sup> In another mantra, he is prayed by the seer to yoke to the chariot of Ṛta two such horses as are hairy, light-shedding and red in colour.<sup>9</sup> They are yet to be yoked by means of ropes meant for the purpose. Here obviously the mobile universal scenario is visualised as the chariot of Ṛta while the sun and the moon with all their mobility and emission of rays of light have been conceived as a pair of horses drawing the chariot under the imperative of Agni. In view of this, he has been considered as a custodian of Ṛta, the law of universal dynamics.<sup>10</sup> He embodies Ṛta in him for making it

<sup>7</sup> चक्रियो विश्वा भुवन्ानि सासुहिश्चकिर्देवेष्वा दुवः ।। *Ibid.*, III. 16. 4

<sup>8</sup> रथीऋतस्य बृहतो विचर्षणिःग्निर्देवानामभवत्पुरोहितः । *Ibid.*, III. 2. 8.

<sup>9</sup> ऋतस्य वा केशिनां योग्याभिर्धृतस्नुवा रोहिता धुरि धिष्व ।। *Ibid.*, III. 6.6.

<sup>10</sup> ऋतावानं यज्ञियं विप्रमुक्थ्य ई मा यं दुधे मातरिश्वां द्विवि क्षयम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.2.13

operate in the universe.<sup>11</sup> Being born of Ṛta, he is so colossal as to have been prayed by the great Heaven and the Earth for his magnification in sacrifice. On account of being true and possessed of Ṛta, they are supposed to stand facing each other in a grand sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> This is how the whole of the cosmos is visualised by the seer as a sacrificial ground. Agni is there by virtue of being the child of Ṛta while the Heaven and the Earth make their presence meaningful by serving as guardians of Ṛta. When this cosmic sacrifice gets condensed into the sacrifice performed at the human level, Agni, the Heaven and the Earth get themselves represented there in their respective miniatures. Here Ṛta becomes sacrifice while Agni acts as its child and the Heaven and the Earth become the guardians of this child.

In the vision of the seer, Agni is also associated with water. If he was born of Ṛta and brought up in the lap of Aditi, he was provided with strength by glorious waters. He laid himself down in the source of Ṛta considering it as his dwelling place which proved to be water of his own sisters.<sup>13</sup> As is evident from the coincidence of water with the source of Ṛta, this water is as primeval as Ṛta itself. It is the same water which has been referred to in the Hiraṇyagarbha Hymn as pervading the whole of the cosmos in the beginning and giving birth to Agni as the essence of all gods.<sup>14</sup> This is

<sup>11</sup> अग्निर्नेता भगं इव क्षितीनां दैवीनां देव ऋतुपा ऋतावा ।। *Ibid.*, III. 20.4.

<sup>12</sup> स होता यस्य रोदसी चिदुर्वी यज्ञयंज्ञमभिवृधे गृणीतः ।

प्राची अध्वरेवं तस्थतुः सुमेकं ऋतावंरी ऋतजांतस्य सुत्ये ।। *Ibid.*, III. 6.10.

<sup>13</sup> उरौ मुहो अनिवाधे वंवर्धापां अग्निं यशसः सं हि पूर्वीः ।

ऋतस्य योनावशयद दमूना जाप्तीनामग्निरपसि स्वसृणाम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.1.11

<sup>14</sup> आपो ह यद् बृहतीर्विश्वमायुनार्भु दधाना जनयन्तीरग्निम् ।

ततो देवानां समवर्ततासुरेकः कर्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ।। *Ibid.*, X.121.7.



evident from another mantra of Viśvāmitra's in which Agni is prayed to go to heavenly waters and talk to gods in their original seat lying in the luminous world beyond the range of the sun as well as stretching downward.<sup>15</sup> This point gets further confirmed by yet another mantra in which Agni is described as a brood of waters as well as a creator who has created the dawns.<sup>16</sup> This description evidently shows waters bearing Agni in their womb as lying above the light of dawns. This is also suggested by the mantra quoted immediately above it in which waters bearing Agni, are characterised as heavenly and as lying above the sun. Thus, they are quite coincident with the original stuff of creation, perhaps of the same order as the *prakṛti* mooted out subsequently by the Sāṅkhyas. While Ṛta brings order to this primeval stuff of creation, Agni emerging out of it on account of it being processed by Ṛta, serves as an instrument of further transformation.

This view of Agni is expressed through the symbolism of cow and calf also. In one of the mantras, the great Agni is said to lie unmoved in the unitary abode of creation. When wishing to manifest himself, he enters in the midst of the heaven and the earth. The expanded, un-aging and unharmed cows act as spouses of the far-strider and yield sweet milk for Agni.<sup>17</sup> This description obviously refers to both the positions of Agni, i.e. the static and the dynamic. He is static while lying outside the purview of the heaven and the earth. Needless to

- 15 अग्ने दिवो अर्णमच्छा जिगास्यच्छा देवो ऊचिषे धिष्ण्या मे ।  
या रौचने परस्तात् सूर्यस्य याश्चावस्तादुपतिष्ठन्त आपः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 22.3
- 16 उदुसिया जर्निता यो जजानापां गर्भो नृत्तमो युत्वो अग्निः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.1.12.
- 17 महान्सधस्थे ध्रुव आ निर्षत्तो ऽन्तर्धावा माहिने हर्यमाणः ।  
आस्कं सपत्नी अजरे अमृक्ते सबर्द्धे उरुगायस्यं धेनु ॥ *Ibid.*, III.6.4

point out that it is the dynamics of space-time which makes things dynamic. Anything lying outside the purview of space-time would, therefore, necessarily be static. So was Agni while lying outside the range of the heaven and the earth. When the Eternal Stasis allows itself to become dynamic, it expands itself giving rise to space and continues giving birth to time. The desire of the Eternal Stasis to become dynamic assumes the form of Agni and expands itself in the form of space represented by the heaven and the earth. The latter are spread around, are un-aging and unviolable and are governed by the Supreme Being. It is they who sustain the new-born child of the Eternal, born of the Waters of the Eternal acting as its Creatrix. Owing to their power of sustenance, they are conceived as cows yielding ambrosial milk. They are owned by the Supreme Being who as the Far-Strider, *urugāya*, has brought them out and maintains them through His dynamics. Agni is His desire to create and is therefore conceived elsewhere as the first and only child of Ṛta, having in him the potentiality of the cow and the bull both together before getting manifested as the male and female separately as agents of creation.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in view of Viśvāmitra, Agni is transcendent essentially and immanent in his manifestation. Both these states of Agni are made out clearly by the seer in another mantra in which referring to Agni, he observes that as soon as born he pervades the entire space covered by the heaven and the earth and transcends them. It is by virtue of his transcendence in particular that he deserves worship from us. His seven-tongued manifestations are expected by the seer to speak out

18 See F.N. 4 Supra.



this truth so as to be audible to both, the heaven and the earth.<sup>19</sup>

Another vision of the seer confirms that Agni is the great son of Tvaṣṭṛ, the divine architect. He is un-aging since he has his source in the Eternal. On entering into the universe, however, he is made to flow by the flowing planes of being which provide him also with energy. Shining with his limbs in the unitary abode, he has entered into the heaven and the earth as if they were one and the same.<sup>20</sup> This vision shows that Agni has his source in the Eternal and is born particularly out of Its creative power. Though, being a child of the eternally constant, he, when born, is made to flow with the universal stream. The flow infuses in him energy which, as a matter of fact, lies in the flow itself. At the time of Agni's entry into it, the universe was uniformly one expanse without any bifurcation into heaven and earth or the higher and the lower. It is through the creative action of Agni that it gets divided into different regions including the heaven and the earth. Thus the vision has a wonderful bearing on the modern scientific theory of creation of clusters, galaxies, stars and planets etc. out of the ball of fire exploding out of heat and density, sparking around to form the heavenly bodies and thus resulting in the creation of various regions in the otherwise uniformly one expanse of space.

By virtue of having his origin in the Transcendent as also on account of pervading the entire space, Agni is to

19 आ रोदसी अपृणा जायमान जुत प्र रिक्था अथ नु प्रयज्यो ।  
दिवश्चिदग्ने महिना पृथिव्या वृच्यन्तां ते दस्नयः सुप्तजिह्वाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 6.2.

20 महिं त्वाष्टमूर्जयन्तीरजुर्यं स्तंभूयमानं वृहतां वहन्ति ।  
व्यङ्गोभिर्दिव्युतानः सुधस्थ एकांमिव रोदसी आ विवेश ॥ *Ibid.*, III.7.4.

be found everywhere. He has been characterised as *parijman*, one moving all around. This is also the precise meaning of his another adjectival name *vaiśvānara*. His universal presence, however, is notable particularly in three places, i.e., the heaven, the atmosphere and the earth. In the heaven he manifests himself in the form of heavenly bodies including the sun. In the atmosphere he takes the form of lightning while on the earth he reveals himself in as many forms as there are beings both living and non-living. The objects, through which he manifests himself, no matter be they in the heaven or on the earth, serve as fuel for his burning. Otherwise he is simply the son of energy, *sahasah sūnuh*. These fuels have been sanctified and provided to him by gods. Provision of fuel to the sacrificial fire at the human level is only a miniature enactment of the cosmic sacrifice in which Agni has been provided with the heavenly, atmospheric and earthly fuels by gods on a permanent basis. Maintenance of the universal process is what is envisaged on behalf of gods through this cosmic sacrifice, particularly in the heaven and the atmosphere. Embodiment of Agni on the earth, on the other hand, is, as the seer visualises, meant for enjoyment of the mortals.<sup>21</sup>

Viśvāmitra, indeed, visualises the manifestations of Agni as of two varieties, perpetual and ephemeral. The heavenly, atmospheric and earthly form the first variety while sacrifice performed by humans comes under the second one. The former is meant for the understanding of the latter in its proper perspective. The seer performs sacrifice on the largest possible extent just to capture as vividly as possible the state of things under which Agni

21 तिस्रो यद्दवस्यं सुमिधुः परिजन्मनोऽग्नेरपुनन्नुशिजो अमृत्यवः ।  
तासांमेकामदंधुर्मर्त्यं भुजंमु लोकमु द्वे उपं जामिर्मायतुः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.2.9.



is latent in each and everything born on the earth, the heaven and the atmosphere.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Viśvāmitra is enamoured more by the vision of Agni's latent presence in each and everything on the earth than by this tangible appearance in the heaven and the atmosphere. In the heavenly bodies, Agni lies rather permanently. This is testified by the aeonic ages of these bodies. In contrast to them, earthly objects, particularly living beings, are extremely short-lived. Even then, however, Agni indwelling them, is in himself undecaying and immortal. Bodies may change, but the fire enlivening them remains always the same un-aging principle. This vision of immortal Agni, indwelling mortal coils looks so impressive to the seer that he comes to regard Agni as worthy of sacrifice and entreats him to take the seer in his good wishes.<sup>23</sup>

Agni, according to Viśvāmitra, has indeed been created or manifested by the secret wisdom of the Divine. This is why he is so adorable and is actually adored by means of mantras representing the wisdom on the occasion of his manifestation from the pair of fire-sticks. Rooted in the divine wisdom, he extends himself to the earth through the agency of the heaven for impregnating living beings here. In this act of procreation, he is all the time accompanied by the father of Dakṣa, that is the Supreme Divine Being.<sup>24</sup> Indeed the latter does not get

22 एता ते अग्ने जर्निष्ठा सनांसि प्र पूर्यायु नूतनानि वोचम् ।  
महान्ति वृष्णे सर्वना कृतेमा जन्मन्जन्मन् निहितो जातवेदाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.1.20.

23 जन्मन्जन्मन् निहितो जातवेदा विश्वामित्रेभिरिध्यते अजंसः ।  
तस्य वयं सुमृतौ यज्ञियस्यार्पि भुद्रे सौमनुसे स्याम ॥ *Ibid.*, III.1.21.

24 धिया चंके वरैण्यो भूतानां गर्भमा दधे ।  
दक्षस्य पितरं तनां ॥ *Ibid.*, III.27.9.

things done by His deputies while Himself remaining away from the scene of action. Rather He keeps Himself involved with each and every point, moment and mode of action, no matter who the actual agent of action be, since He is the essence of one and all and the essential doer of every shred of action. On account of his constant association with the Supreme Being or indeed due to his inhering in the essence of that Being, Agni is visualised by the seer as capable of assuming the form and playing the role of various divinities such as Mitra and Varuṇa as also playing in sacrifice the role of the *Adhvaryu* as well as of the *Hotṛ* priest. He is considered as friendly to what is static, such as the mountain, as also to what is mobile, such as the river.<sup>25</sup> In this capacity, he is also visualised as Vaiśvānara, Mātariśvan and Bṛhaspati all in one. He is supposed to play such mutually contradictory roles as of the inspired seer on one hand and of the listener on the other, as also of guest on one side and of the swift traveller on the other.<sup>26</sup>

In the vision of the seer, Agni represents the Supreme Being not only as the original creative force, physical force, stuff of creation and the divine agent of creation but also as His consciousness. This is evident from Viśvāmitra's characterisation of him as the creative will of the seer-poet, seer-poet of the people, cognisant of the creations of seer-poets, supremely conscious and unfailing poet and as one getting expansion through the

25 मित्रो अग्निर्भवति यत्समिद्धो मित्रो होता वरुणो जातवेदाः ।  
मित्रो अध्वर्युरिषिरो दमूना मित्रः सिन्धूनामुत पर्वतानाम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III.5.4.

26 तं शुभ्रमुग्निमवसे हवामहे वैश्वानरं मातरिश्वानमुक्थ्यम् ।  
बृहस्पतिं मनुषो देवतांतये विष्टं श्रोतारमतिथिं रघुष्यदम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 26.3.



seer's creation.<sup>27</sup> These equations are based not on speculation but on the seer's practical experience of his identity with Agni as the knower of all with brilliant power of seeing in his eyes, ambrosia in his mouth, as being the threefold light, measurer of the intermediate space and as undiminishing illumination as well as oblation itself.<sup>28</sup> This mighty experience eliminates from the seer all dichotomies created by mind in the form of distinction between the subject and the object, the seer and the seen, the mortal and the immortal, the earth and the heaven as well as the eater and the food. In this perspective of his experience, Agni is realised subjectively as well as objectively, as spiritual as well as physical, as the creative stuff of the individual as well as that of the cosmos, as consumer as well as what is consumed in the sacrifice of the universal dynamics, *adhvara*.

## II. Indra

Besides Agni, Indra is another divinity extolled by Viśvāmitra most extensively. The most fundamental vision, the seer has regarding Indra, relates to the multitudinousness of forms he assumes through his creative will. In the seer's view, Indra is used to assuming all possible forms both conceivable and actually existing in the creation. He calls this power of assuming diverse forms by one and the same divinity as *māyā*, the power of creation. His reference to this power

<sup>27</sup> कृविक्रंतुम् । *Ibid.*, III.27.12; विशां कृविम् । *Ibid.*, III.2.10. विश्वंनि काव्योनि विद्वान् । *Ibid.*, III.1.17. कृविमद्वयन्तं प्रचैतसम् । *Ibid.*, III.29.5. वावृधे काव्येन । *Ibid.*, III.1.8.

<sup>28</sup> अग्निरसि जन्मना जातवैदा घृतं मे चक्षुरमृतं म आसन् ।  
अर्कस्त्रिधातु रजसो विमानोऽजसो घर्मो हविरसि नाम् ।। *Ibid.*, III.26.7.

in the plural is meant probably to indicate the multiplicity of these powers possessed by Indra, perhaps as many as there are manifestations of his prototypal form. The prototypal form is the nucleus of his body while the multiplicity of forms in the world gets fashioned after it by the creative powers of him. These powers are operating around the nucleus form.

Thus, as a matter of principle, the nucleus form seems to be absolutely immobile while the rest of the multitude of forms fashioned after it are constantly undergoing processes of formation, deformation and reformation. This is obvious from the seer's observation in the first part of the mantra that the great god has constantly been assuming forms by exercising his creative powers from within his own body.<sup>29</sup> This may be conceived as the potter's wheel producing a multitude of vessels while moving on one and the same axis, with this difference, however, that while the potter's wheel creates vessels by moving itself, Indra creates the multiplicity of forms through the agency of his creative powers, *māyāh*. We find an array of solar imagery involved in Viśvāmitra's as well as other seers' account of Indra.

This, however, does not mean to suggest that Indra is nothing but the physical sun, because the latter cannot be responsible for the creation of all forms in the universe. On the contrary, the sun itself is one of the forms assumed by Indra, or, more precisely, produced by Indra out of himself through his mantras. It is also possible that on account of its brilliance and constancy of movement, the sun has been brought in here to illustrate Indra's capability of stupendous movement in

<sup>29</sup> रूपंरूपं मुघवां बोधवीति गायाः कृण्वानस्तन्वं इं परि स्वाम् ।

त्रिर्यद्विषः परि मुहूर्तमाग्रात्स्वैर्मन्त्रैरनुतुपा ऋतावा ।। *Ibid.*, III. 53.8.



the universe by way of creating all possible forms in this world. The prominence of the sun's appearance from the earth may also be contributory to this imagery.

Involvement of the imagery of the sun along with several other key points in this mantra becomes clearer if we think over it in association with another similar mantra seen by Garga Bhāradvaja and quoted so frequently by Vedantins particularly of Śāṅkara's school for validating the doctrine of māyā. This mantra reads in translation as follows:

"Immanent in each and every form, Indra has become the prototype of all forms. That (prototypal) form of him is worth seeing. Indra moves in multitudinous forms through the agency of his *māyās*, as ten hundred horses are yoked to his chariot."<sup>30</sup>

*Sahasra*, thousand symbolises the infinity in the Veda. Indra's chariot drawn by one thousand horses implies very well the imagery of the solar disc moving across the sky along with the multitude of rays spreading all around.

Indra, however, not being just a figurative representation of the sun, as is generally mistaken, but something of cosmic and extra-cosmic dimension, the imagery of the sun is intended to give an idea of his way of self-manifestation in both the mantras. While in Viśvāmitra's mantra Indra's swiftness of action in self-manifestation is brought out through an implicit reference to the velocity of light, in Garga's mantra it has

30 रूपरूपं प्रतिरूपो बभूव तदस्य रूपं प्रतिचक्षणाय ।  
इन्द्रो मायाभिः पुरुरूपं इयते युक्ता ह्यस्य हरयः शता दशं ।। RV. VI. 47. 8.

been indicated through horses numbering one thousand. Horse is the symbol of speed as well as of the quantum of energy. If a chariot drawn by just a pair of horses can move so fast, how inestimably faster must it move when drawn by an infinite number of horses? Herein, according to Garga, lies the secret of all-around dynamics of the world as also of the assumption of all possible forms by the basic creative force working at the root of the visible phenomenon.

Viśvāmitra states almost the same thing in a slightly different way. He brings out the all-pervasiveness of Indra by referring to the stupendous speed of his movement, but without any reference to his chariot and horses. Chariot and horses, indeed, are just a symbolic means for giving expression to the immensity of the dynamics of Indra. This is more than evident from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad where, in connection with the exposition of the secret of the *madhu-vidyā*, the sage quotes the very same mantra seen by Garga and adds that it is Indra himself who acts as the horses numbering thousand, ten thousand and even more than this, reaching up to the infinity. Further, identifying Indra with Brahman itself, he observes that this Brahman is unprecedented, as also nothing to follow it, nothing inner to it, nothing outside it and that this Ātman is Brahman, the experiencer of all.<sup>31</sup> What indeed is stated so explicitly by the Upaniṣad, lies implicit in Viśvāmitra's mantra. In the first place, he shows the all-pervasiveness of Indra without taking recourse to the imagery of the chariot and the horse. Secondly, while Garga also refers to the *māyā* of Indra in the plural but in a way as if they were somewhat independent of Indra,

31 अयं वै हरयो ऽ यं वै दश च सहस्राणि बहूनि चानन्तानि च । तदेतद् ब्रह्मापूर्वं  
मनपरमनन्तरमबाह्यम् । अयमात्मा ब्रह्म सर्वानुभूः । Brh. Up., II. 5.19.



Viśvāmitra states about them as to have been created out of his own body. This observation of the seer is really very significant from the view point of Vedantic developments subsequently. While propounding his doctrine of *māyā*, Śāṅkara quotes Garga's mantra and derives obvious support from it but he does not take note of Viśvāmitra's mantra which possibly would have dissuaded him from leaving the status of *māyā* undefined *vis-à-vis* Brahman. When this mantra explicitly states that the *māyās* were created by Indra out of his body, how can we say that their relationship with Brahman was indefinable? In the third place, while Garga uses the imagery of the chariot and the horse for showing the multitudinous movement of Indra by way of creating all forms, Viśvāmitra points to Indra's own mantras as the means of that creative movement. Mantra, in any case, is the idea of someone, particularly that of the Divine at least in this case. Thus, while in Garga's description Indra is the ultimate divinity having a chariot, horses and *māyās* being used by him for his creations but placed somewhat beside him, in Viśvāmitra's account, he is the same Ultimate Divinity creating *māyās* out of his own body and using his own ideas as the means of his creative movement. This obviously bears out his more intimateness to the Upaniṣadic viewpoint as compared to Garga's.

Besides this, the perspective in which the Upaniṣad identifies Brahman with Ātman through one of the most significant statements made by mankind as yet, *ayamātmā brahma*, 'this Ātman itself is Brahman', lies very well implied in Viśvāmitra's vision of Indra as forming the essential prototype of all forms prevailing in the world and hence as being most cherishable. This vision obviously implies that it is really Indra as the Ultimate Divinity who fashions everything after himself

as well as indwells them all equally well. His giving his own form to everything in the world and indwelling them all individually as well as collectively, forms the essential metaphysical position under which alone Brahman can be discovered as identical with the Ātman. Thus, Viśvāmitra's vision forms the most intimate anticipation of the Upaniṣadic wisdom embedded in this significant statement.

Curiously enough, it is also brimming with all those ideas which go to the making of Plato's theory of Idea. According to Plato, everything in the world is a sheer reflection of something lying eternally in the heaven in the form of Ideas and these Ideas are ultimately united in the Idea of the Good. In view of this, does it not look absolutely possible to equate the Platonic Idea of the Good with Viśvāmitra's Indra, who fashions everything in the world after his own essential form and himself remains something most cherishable? Can we any way take Indra's cherishability as different from Plato's Idea of the Good?

Another significant point embedded in this mantra is the paradox of *anṛtūpā* and *ṛtāvā*, the perfect follower of Ṛta drinking Soma in season and out of season. Ṛta is the principle of universal order. It is owing to the Supreme Divinity's abiding by this principle that there lies order in the world. But, is that Divinity or Being any way bound by this principle? If so, this in itself would be an adjunct of limitation put on Him and thus liable to render Him short of His supremacy. In contravention of this adjunct, Indra is said to drink Soma by breaking the imperatives of Ṛta. By virtue of this feature, Indra comes close to the Upaniṣadic Brahman as Sarvānubhūh, the experiencer of all, no matter be it



inside or outside, as there is nothing inside Him, and nothing outside.

From the ethical viewpoint, this paradoxical behaviour of Indra has given an extremely important insight into the problem of free will and predetermination in this world. That everything is entirely predetermined is a position emerging from admittance of a wholly mechanical model of the universe on the physical level and acceptance of Ṛta as the sole principle guiding the universal dynamics on the metaphysical level. That, over and above, the mechanical fixity and predictability there is also the probability of quantum jump and operation of free will, is a viewpoint emerging from admittance of the principle of quantum mechanics on the physical level and the Supreme's autonomy *vis-à-vis* Ṛta on the metaphysical. When the Supreme with all the responsibility to run the affairs of the universe as per the provisions of Ṛta, can take the liberty of remaining also free of all those provisions, why can the individual also not exercise the same liberty in his behaviour, particularly as he is made exactly after the model of the Supreme Himself? Herein arises the scope for free will in life in the midst of all the constraints and predeterminations on the level of the individual quite in keeping with Indra, the Supreme Divinity, taking the liberty of breaking the laws of Ṛta in the enjoyment of his creative act as symbolised by his drinking Soma.

That Indra is the fundamental principle or agent of creation creating the world through the agency of nature is brought out through another mantra seen by Viśvāmitra. In this mantra, Indra has been conceived as a bull brought into association with various names of a cow. Further it has been observed that there are certain agents possessing miraculous creative power who

created form in Indra.<sup>32</sup> Now it is interesting to note that while in the mantra quoted a little earlier Indra is said to have been giving form to each and every being in this world, in the present one he himself is stated to have received his form from certain creative agents endowed with miraculous power. Since, in the mantras quoted at footnotes 29 and 30, *māyā* has been used as equivalent to mantra, the *māyīnah* in the present mantra can evidently be taken to refer to seers. By applying this equation to the interpretation of the mantra under consideration, we can safely infer that Indra is essentially formless and that he has been given form by seers themselves.

In the present mantra the form with which he has been imbued is that of a bull. In view of conceiving of him as a bull, the cosmic creatrix operating in association with him has been conceived as a cow bearing several names. The names of the cow are indeed the potentialities to give birth to diverse forms. In this way, this mantra comes as a prototype of that famous Upaniṣadic verse which presents the cosmic Creator and Creatrix as a pair of goat and he-goat of which the former, though only one, red, white and black in colour, when paired by the latter, produces a multitude of kids similar in form but dissimilar in colour.<sup>33</sup> Now to compare the Ṛgvedic mantra with the Upaniṣadic one, we find the basic archetypal idea of pointing to the creation of the world in terms of procreation in common in both of them but with certain divergences. While the Upaniṣad makes use

<sup>32</sup> तदिन्द्रस्य वृषभस्य धेनोरा नामभिर्मिरे सकम्पं गोः ।

अन्यदन्त्यदसुर्यं इ वसाना नि मायिनो मभिरे रूपमस्मिन् ।। RV. III. 38.7.

<sup>33</sup> अजामेकां लोहितशुक्लकृष्णां बहवीःप्रजाः सृजमानां सरूपाः ।

अजो ह्येको जुषमाणो ऽनुशेते जहात्येनां भुक्तभोगामजोऽन्यः ।।

*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, IV. 3.5*



of the he-goat and goat to symbolise the Creator and the Creatrix, the Ṛgvedic mantra conceives of the two in the form of a bull and a cow respectively. Moreover, while the Ṛgvedic bull is conceived as only one, the Upaniṣad brings in a pair of he-goats, one of which pairs with the goat while the other one shuns it. This duality in the he-goat is introduced to bring the imagery down from the cosmic to the level of the individual. Variations in the created beings caused by predominance of *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* in each one of them has led to replacement of the original cow by the tricolour goat producing several kids at a time and of diverse colours. Lastly, the multiplicity of names associated with the Ṛgvedic cow has been substituted in the Upaniṣadic goat by the multiplicity of colours so as to bring out the difference between the three *guṇas* tangibly.

From this comparison, it is obvious that the Ṛgvedic mantra is by no means just a cock and bull story but a summary and highly symbolic statement of the creation along with the processes and modes involved in it. According to it, the entire creation is organic, and it is through such a supposition alone that we can explain the necessary interrelatedness of things here. Secondly, while the Upaniṣad comes down to the destiny of the individual with all his problems of attachment and detachment, the Ṛgvedic mantra remains concerned with the problem of formulating and imaging out the act of creation as a whole and suggesting how the individual has been created by the Creator Himself, of course after Him, through the medium of the Creatrix. Finally, while recounting the process of creation through the images of the bull and the cow, the seer makes it clear that all these images have been introduced by seers just to make things intelligible to people, otherwise neither Indra, the Creator nor his Creatrix has any form

whatever. According to him, even the companionship of the bull and the cow has been conceived by gifted seers on the basis of what has been created as also the possible pre-requisites of the kind of creation. What a candid statement on part of the seer about the real state of things!

Accordingly he is also conceived as lying beyond time and space. In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra observes that Indra took Soma for his delight in the highest heaven as soon as he was born and that on entering the heaven and the earth he becomes the primeval sustainer of the seer.<sup>34</sup> *Parame Vyoman*, in the Vedic terminology, stands for the state of absolute spacelessness serving as the source of all space whatever. Similarly taking of Soma by Indra in that state of absolute spacelessness immediately after his birth is suggestive of his inherent delightfulness. His birth is just a plunge by him in space and time out of the state of absolute spacelessness, timelessness and delightfulness. His emergence in the world as represented by the space intermediate to the heaven and the earth serves as the basic theme for contemplation and composition by the seer.

The state of absolute existence in which Indra primarily dwells has been characterised as one of complete non-opposition, *adrogha*. Herein lies the secret of his unchallenged greatness and inherent delightfulness. There is no limitation of space nor of time in that state of being. In the words of the seer, neither heaven nor days,

34

त्वं सुद्यो अपिबो जात इन्द्र मदाय सोमं परमे व्योमन् ।

यद्दृष्ट्वा वापि पृथिवी आविवेशीरथाभवः पूर्यः कारुघायाः ॥ RV. III. 32.10



neither months nor years are there to put any limitation to his act of self-delighting.<sup>35</sup>

Basic features of this state of being of Indra continue in him to some extent even after entering into the cosmic action. It finds expression in the paradoxical language the seer uses in his descriptions. In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra, for instance, describes Indra as fighting as well as dwelling in absolute sovereignty, as young as well as old, as aggressive in his youthfulness as well as shining in mellow wisdom.<sup>36</sup> It is confirmed by yet another mantra in which the seer observes that Indra is so colossus, lofty, un-aging and young that even the heaven and the earth could not measure or can measure his greatness.<sup>37</sup> Immeasurability by even the greatest instrument of measurement bears out the non-spatio-temporal status of the being concerned. According to another mantra, when Indra killed the dragon, who was using all his powers against him, the heaven could not match his colossusness particularly as he overshadowed the earth by just one of his hips.<sup>38</sup> The seer further observes that Indra defies all measurements in brilliance, all gods in excellence, the heaven and the

earth in might and the intermediate space in drinking Soma.<sup>39</sup>

Indra's proximity to absoluteness is further evident from his description as the constant one amongst all who are just ornamental to him and as self-luminous though clothed in splendour. His real greatness, according to the seer, lies in his remaining immortal notwithstanding assumption of all possible forms.<sup>40</sup> He is constant amongst the mobile, self-luminous in the midst of all ornamentation and remains in the state of eternal delight even after assuming all possible forms. By virtue of his constancy, he is the word of protection incarnate and yet he does a lot of wonderful works which are visualised only by those who are imbued with divine power.<sup>41</sup> Maintenance of eternal constancy in the midst of hectic action and movement is the special feature of Indra as visualised by Viśvāmitra. It is something like the idea of 'Unmoved Mover' mooted out by Aristotle millennia afterwards in his definition of God.

Generally Indra has been sought to be identified as a certain phase of the sun by scholars particularly in the modern times. There are, no doubt, mantras in the Samhitās which give credence to this supposition. In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra, for instance, observes that all are desirous of seeing the mightily brilliant range of illumination at the close of night and unfoldment of the dawn, since they know that Indra, the doer of many

- 35 अद्रौघ सुत्यं तव तन्महित्वं सुद्यो यज्जातो अपिबो ह सोमम् ।  
न धावँ इन्द्र तवसंस्तु ओजो नाह्य न मासाः शरदौ वरन्त ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 32.9
- 36 युध्मस्य ते वृषभस्य स्वरार्जं उग्रस्य यूजः स्थविरस्य घृष्ट्वैः ।  
अजूर्यतो वृजिणो वीर्यांशुणीन्द्रं श्रुतस्य महतो महानि ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 46.1.
- 37 यजाम इन्मसा वृद्धमिन्द्रं वृहन्तमृष्वभजं युवानम् ।  
यस्य प्रिये मुमतुर्यज्ञियंस्य न रोदसी महिमानं मुमातं ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 32.7.
- 38 अहन्नहिं परिशयानुमर्णं ओजायमानं तुविजातु तव्यान् ।  
न तं महित्वमनु भूदधु दौर्यद्वन्यां स्फुर्या ३ क्षामवंस्थाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 32.11.

- 39 प्र मात्राभी रिरिचे रोचमानः प्र देवेभिर्विश्वतो अप्रतीतः ।  
प्र मुज्मनां दिवः इन्द्रं पृथिव्याः प्रोरोर्महो अन्तरिक्षादृजीषी ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 46.3.
- 40 आतिष्ठन्तुं परि विश्वं अभृषञ्जियो वसानश्चरति स्वरोचिः ।  
महत्तदवृष्णो असुरस्य नामाविश्वरूपो अमृतांनि तस्यौ ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 38.4.
- 41 गोपा जिह्वस्य तस्थुषो विरूपा विश्वं पश्यन्ति मायिनः कृतानि ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 38.9.



splendid deeds, has arrived along with his glory.<sup>42</sup> Mantras like this obviously create the impression that Indra is nothing but a personification of the sun itself.

But when we go deeper into the accounts, we find things envisaged quite differently. For instance, while recounting various acts accomplished by Indra, such as supporting the heaven, coming into contact with higher regions, yoking his chariot with the Vasus, illuminating nights etc., Viśvāmitra enumerates therein the creation of sun also by him.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in another mantra, he is said to have given brilliance to the sun and glow to the dawn.<sup>44</sup> In another mantra, the seer maintains that the directions produced and set by Indra day after day cannot be violated by the sun.<sup>45</sup> In yet another mantra, he observes that the noble deeds of Indra are numerous including his support for the earth and the heaven and creation of the sun and the dawn.<sup>46</sup>

In the face of all these and similar references suggesting something entirely different, it would be only naïve to hold Indra as a mere personification of the sun, no matter whether as a whole or in a certain specific phase of it. How can he be simply the sun when the latter itself is taken to have been produced, illuminated and directed in its movement by him? In fact, though

- 42 द्विदृक्षन्त उषसो यामन्नुक्तोर्विवस्वत्या महि चित्रमनीकम् ।  
विश्वे जानन्ति महिना यदागादिन्द्रस्य कर्म सुकृता पुरुणि । । *Ibid.*, III. 30.13.
- 43 धर्ता दिवो रजसस्पृष्ट ऊर्ध्वो रथो न वायुर्वसुभिर्नियुत्वान् ।  
क्षपां व्रस्ता जनिता सूर्यस्य विभक्ता भागं क्षिपणेव वाजम् । । *Ibid.*, III. 49.4
- 44 हर्यन्नुषसमर्चयः सूर्यं हर्यन्नरोचयः । *Ibid.*, III. 44.2
- 45 दिशः सूर्या न भिनाति प्रदिष्टा दिवेर्दिवे हर्यश्वप्रसूताः । । *Ibid.*, III. 46.1
- 46 इन्द्रस्य कर्म सुकृता पुरुणि व्रतानि देवा न भिनन्ति विश्वे ।  
दाधार यः पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां जुजान सूर्यमुषसं सुदसां । । *Ibid.*, III. 32.8

describing Indra in all possible tangible terms, Viśvāmitra himself characterises him as least tangible. “Those deserving a drink of Soma as well as friendship with you,” observes the seer, “crave for you, squeeze Soma for you, offer viands to you and bear condemnation of the people on account of you, O Indra, since you are the source of a certain mysterious wisdom.”<sup>47</sup>

This wisdom is inherent in the nature of Indra. It is illuminating as well as delighting. Both these aspects of the wisdom have been brought out by Viśvāmitra, as well as by other seers, through an array of symbols expressive of them. As regards the wisdom itself, it has been indicated by words like *dhīh*, *ketu* and *praketa*. For instance, in one of his mantras, in the course of describing Indra as the winner of light, producer of days and winner of wars, the seer speaks of him also as the source of consciousness of the day for Manu and finder of light for his great delight.<sup>48</sup> The progeny of the same Manu has been described in the fourth mantra as *dhīraṇāsaḥ*, those taking delight in the secret wisdom. According to this mantra, those taking delight in the secret wisdom do indeed receive it from Indra who is the eternal winner, worthy of choice, giver of victory, winner of light and divine waters, and winner of the heaven and the earth.<sup>49</sup> If we collate *dhīraṇāsaḥ* of this mantra with *mahate raṇāya* of the earlier one, we cannot fail to see

- 47 इच्छन्ति त्वा सोम्यासुः सखायः सुन्वन्ति सोमं दधति प्रयांसि ।  
तितिक्षन्ते अभिशस्तिं जनानामिन्दु त्वदा कश्चन हि प्रक्रेतः । । *Ibid.*, III. 30.1.
- 48 इन्द्रः स्वर्पां जनयन्महानि जिगायोशिग्भिः पृतना अभिष्टिः ।  
प्रारौचयन्मनवे केतुमहनामविन्दुज्ज्योतिर्वृहते रणाय । । *Ibid.*, III. 34.4
- 49 सत्रासाहं वरेण्यं सहोदां संस्रवांसुं स्वर्पश्च देवीः ।  
ससान यः पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमामिन्द्रं मदन्यनु धीरणासः । । *Ibid.*, III. 34.8



that both of them refer to one and the same experience of delight. As such, *mahate raṇāya* cannot but be the delight of the secret wisdom entirely different from the joy of seeing the light of the day which at the most is just the ordinary joy by no means comparable to the delight obtained through entrance into the portals of the secret wisdom.

It is by way of dwelling in the source of this delight that he is said to have taken Soma as soon as born in the highest heaven. The delight of being, he experiences at the source, he pours down on earth in the interest of seers of vision. It, indeed, is the same delight which elsewhere in the Samhitā is said to have been poured down by Aśvins from one hundred pitchers of *surā*.<sup>50</sup> Aśvins, after all, as the story goes, had acquired the secret wisdom of delight, *madhu vidyā*, from Indra through the medium of Dadhyañ, the celebrated seer. What Dadhyañ reportedly taught them through the horse's mouth, came to be delivered by them subsequently through the hoof of the horse, though naturally in a diluted form, as is suggested by the word *surā*, wine in place of Soma or *madhu*, honey. If the delight of wisdom makes the position of Indra as blessed as that of other gods multiplied by one hundred and as equivalent to that of the knower of the secret of the Veda, as the Taittirīya Upaniṣad puts it,<sup>51</sup> its luminousness is borne out by the Bṛhadāraṇyaka's tracing the derivation of the word *indra* from *indha*, meaning the luminous.<sup>52</sup>

50 कारोतराच्छफादश्वंस्य वृष्णः शतं कुम्भं असिञ्चत सुरायाः ।। *Ibid.*, I.116.7.

51 ते ये शतं देवानामानन्दाः स एक इन्द्रस्यानन्दः श्रोत्रिस्य चाकामहतस्य । *Tait. Up.* II.8.

52 इन्धो ह वै नामैष योऽयं दक्षिणे ऽक्षन् पुरुषः तं वा एतमिन्धं सन्तमिन्द्र इत्याचक्षते परोक्षेणैव । परोक्षप्रिया इव हि देवाः प्रत्यक्षद्विषः ।। *Bṛh. Up.* IV. 2. 2.

The wisdom obviously lies in the source of creation and sustenance of the world. It plays an imperative role behind both these functions of the universal process. On account of its so vital a role, the wisdom, as embodied in Indra or personified in his form by the Vedic seer, has been conceived as the sole ruler of the world fighting out forces hostile to the creative process and providing shelter to the docile.<sup>53</sup> He is considered as the best of persons, possessed of abundant creative power, moving creatively and ruling over the world as the primeval being.<sup>54</sup> In view of the creative and sustaining power of his wisdom, he is conceived as the primeval mighty bull procreating all and replenishing himself with the stuff of regeneration available abundantly here. Along with Varuṇa, he, the guardian of rule of wisdom and grandson of the Heaven, upholds the primeval rule, as kings, by means of the wisdom manifesting itself in the form of mantras in course of sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> As sacrifice is a miniature form of the cosmic process, even so mantras used for conducting it are products of the divine wisdom meant for creating and sustaining the world and transfiguring itself to the vision of the seer as Indra, the chief amongst all gods.

To the vision of Viśvāmitra, the world is an automata created by the Divine for replenishing Himself by means of it. This is true most abundantly of Indra. "Abundant are the gifts of him for the mortals", observes

53 महो असि महिष वृष्णैर्भिर्धनुस्पृष्टुंग सहमानो अन्यान् ।  
एको विश्वंस्य भुवन्स्य राजा स योधया च क्षयया च जनान् ।। *RV.* III. 46.2.

54 नृणामुं त्वा नृतमं गीर्भिरुक्थैरभि प्र वीरमर्चता सुबाधः ।  
सं सहसे पुरुमायो जिहीते नमो अस्य प्रदित् एकं ईशे ।। *Ibid.*, III. 51.4

55 असूत पूर्वा' वृषभो ज्यायांनिमा अस्य शुरुधः' सन्ति पूर्वाः ।  
दिवो नपाता विदयस्य धीभिः क्षत्रं राजाना प्रदिवो दधाथे ।। *Ibid.*, III. 38.5



Viśvāmitra, “for while the earth bears profuse wealth for him, the heaven, vegetations, waters, forests and other perishable things keep reserved their prosperity for him.”<sup>56</sup> Under the imperative of the sea, the rivers take with them squeezed Soma for the sake of Indra. By means of their waves used as hands they milk out, as it were, Soma for him and by means of their sweet stream used as sieve they purify it for his sake.<sup>57</sup> Observations like these by the seer simply mean to communicate the idea that all creative and beneficial acts of Nature are motivated by Indra and are intended for his self-enjoyment. Not to mention these, even the earth does not stand any comparison to Indra in comprehensiveness particularly when he gets elated by taking Soma.<sup>58</sup> In another similar vision, the seer observes that just as waters move along a particular river’s bed and reach the sea like a charioteer reaching his destination, even so everything reaches Indra who is larger than the oceanic bed particularly when Soma, being milked out, reaches his belly.<sup>59</sup>

Pressing of Soma by human beings and offering of it to Indra is, indeed, a mere replica of what mountainous rivers do for him. Through his sacrificial offerings man only follows the example of Nature in her service to

- 56 पूर्वीरस्य निष्पिधो मर्त्येषु पुरु वसूनि पृथिवी विभर्ति ।  
इन्द्राय द्याव ओषधीरुतापाँ रयिं रंक्षन्ति जीरयो वनानि ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 51.5.
- 57 समुद्रेण सिन्धवो यार्दमाना इन्द्राय सोमं सुषुतं भरन्तः ।  
अंशुं दुहन्ति हस्तिनाँ भरित्रैर्मध्वः पुनन्ति धारया प्रवित्रैः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 36.7.
- 58 नाहं विव्याच पृथिवी चूनैन् यत्सोमाँसो हर्यश्चममन्दन् । *Ibid.*, III. 36.4.
- 59 प्र यत् सिन्धवः प्रसवं यथायुनापः समुद्रं रथ्यैव जग्मुः ।  
अतश्चिदिन्द्रः सदसो वरीयान् यद्वी सोमः' पूणति दुग्धो अंशुः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 36.6.

Indra.<sup>60</sup> Drinking of Soma by Indra is really consuming the watery substance of nature by him, through the agency of Agni serving as his tongue.<sup>61</sup> In fact, there is a constant interaction between the fiery and the watery elements in nature. It is this interaction which lies at the root of the universal process on the physical plane. It makes rivers flow, wind blow and planets and stars keep moving. As Indra ordains all this for the sake of his fulfilment, he is conceived as accomplishing everything for drinking Soma or in the exhilaration of Soma. In fact, the universal process itself is the producer of Soma brimming with the juice of supernal delight. On account of being rooted in delight, it is always productive of delight. It sprouts out of the delight and grows to fullness for squeezing out the delight. Soma is the symbol of this delight inherently present in the universal process. Indra, as ordainer of the process, is the eventual drinker of this Soma. If sacrifice is the universal process represented in miniature, drinking of Soma in course of sacrifice is symbolic of the experience of supernal joy inherent in this process.

While Indra is the ordainer of the universal process with all its delightfulness, Vṛtra is the element of obstruction inhibiting the process. In the vision of Viśvāmitra, Indra moves around displacing what tends to remain dormant and killing the Vṛtras while for him who follows Indra’s laws, the heaven, the earth and the mountains stand as if firmly fixed.<sup>62</sup> Thus, according to this vision, Indra

- 60 इमं नरः पर्वतास्तुभ्यमापः सर्मिन्द्र गोभिरमधुमन्तमकर ।  
तस्यागत्यां सुमनां ऋष्व पाहि प्रजानन् विद्वान् पृथ्या इ अनु स्वाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 35.8
- 61 अग्नेः पिव जिह्वया सोममिन्द्र । *Ibid.*, III. 35.9.
- 62 त्वं हि षाँ च्यावयन्नच्युतान्येको वृत्रा चरसि जिघ्रमानः ।  
तव द्यावापृथिवी पर्वतासोऽनु वृताय निर्मितेव तस्थुः ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 30.4.



plays a twofold role. On one hand, he brings movement to what is dormant and on the other he gives constancy to what is in the state of flux. Vṛtra, from this viewpoint, is the principle of dormancy. He represents the element of obstruction in the cosmic process. He makes the river stop from flowing. He seeks to confine cows or rays to his enclosure. Indra goes around seeking to kill him and remove the obstruction. He tries to liquidate the obstructive. On the other front, he brings constancy to what are really in the state of flux. The heaven and the earth, including the mountains, are fleeting on account of falling in the stream of the process. They, however, are made to look as constant by Indra in the interest of the followers of his law.

In fact, how wretched the life would have become if everything in the world were to look as lying in a state of flux! It was on account of having realised the utter fleetingness of the world that Buddha happened to denounce it as all wretchedness, *sabbam dukkham*. The Ṛgvedic seer Agastya also had the same realisation millennia earlier under the inspiration of Indra, as is evident from the mantra: "There is neither the present moment nor the tomorrow; who knows what is as yet to occur; the uncontrolled mind is so fleeting that what is contemplated by it is prone to vanish from it completely."<sup>63</sup> In analysing the world as entirely fleeting, the Buddha did something splendid but erred seriously in founding his philosophy on it in complete disregard of the commonsense on one hand and visions of Vedic seers on the other. According to the latter, the world is no doubt fleeting but is made partly constant by the divine agency for making life in it worth living. Indra is

<sup>63</sup> न नूनमस्ति नो श्वः कस्तद्वैदु यददभुतम् ।

अन्यस्यं चित्तमभि संचरेण्यंमुताधीतं वि नश्यति ॥ *Ibid.*, I. 170.1.

that divine principle of constancy. While himself remaining constant, he clears the hurdles coming in the way of the universal process. On the other hand, by virtue of his presence everywhere, he generates the sense of constancy in the stream of flux so as to bring the values of the Eternal down to the ephemeral.

### III. Heaven and Earth

Viśvāmitra conceives of the heaven and the earth as a field providing space for the dynamic role of beings including gods, men and sub-humans. Though diversely and distantly placed, they are homogeneously set *vis-à-vis* each other and though mobile in themselves, they are eternally constant in mutual relationship. Having a common parentage, they are not just a passive field for the action of beings of all sorts inhabiting them, but do actively and consciously participate in their actions.<sup>64</sup> Though the world in its diversity has a common origin, it, under the stress of the polarity between the heaven and the earth, gets diversified into the mobile, constant and fleeting. They have also to bear within them the physical manifestations of mighty gods without getting anyway tired.<sup>65</sup> They are like two cows related with each other like the mother and the daughter. Both of them are filled with milk and suckle each other. All this is made possible because they have their common seat in Rta, the law eternal.<sup>66</sup> Each one of them lows aloud

<sup>64</sup> सुमान्या वियुते दूरेअन्ते ध्रुवे पुदे तंस्थतुर्जागुरूकं ।

उत स्वसारा युवती भवन्ती आर्दुं बुवाते मिथुनाणि नाम ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 54.7.

<sup>65</sup> विश्वेदेते जनिमा सं विविक्तो मुहो देवान् विभ्रंती न व्यथेते ।

एजंद ध्रुवं पत्यते विश्वमेकं चरत्पुत्रि विपुणं वि ज्ञातम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 54.8.

<sup>66</sup> माता च यत्र दुहिता च धेनू संवदुर्वै ध्यापर्येते समीची ।

ऋतस्य ते सदसीळे अन्तर्मुहद्वेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 55.12



licking the calf of the other. The udder of neither of them is visible and yet they both feed each other's calf. Obviously, this is made possible due to the milk of the eternal law trickling in them.<sup>67</sup>

All these details embodied in the visions of the seer regarding the totality of space as represented by the heaven and the earth provide us with extremely interesting facts about the view of space as appearing before the seer. According to it, space is the field of action but by no means absolutely stationary and passive like the four walls and roof of room. It is dynamic and an active participant in whatever takes place in it. It is sensitive to whatever happens in it like the mother towards the acts of her child. Secondly, space is bipolar in its expanse, each one of its poles exerting its gravitational pull on the other. It is, due to this attraction between the poles that they become dynamic themselves and result in the dynamics of beings and their actions. In the third place, though space appears to be a void, it is imperceptively packed with a stuff which concretises itself into beings of all and sundry varieties as also the food for their sustenance. Finally, howsoever potent otherwise, space is by no means sufficient in itself. It, on the contrary, is a sheer extension of Ṛta, the law eternal, is based on the same law and is sustained and provided for by it.

Viśvāmitra has envisioned space in conjunction with time also. He has observed a certain kinship in the layout of the two principles, though otherwise looking dissimilar. Obviously, if space is expansion in simultaneity, time is extension in continuity. Both,

<sup>67</sup> अन्यस्या वृत्सं रिहती मिमाय कया भुवा नि दंथे धेनुरुधः ।  
ऋतस्य सा पर्यसापिन्वतेळां महद्देवानामसुरत्वमेकम् ।। *Ibid.*, III. 55.13.

combined, weave the criss-cross pattern of the universal existence. On account of the mutual intertwining, they have certain akinness in their manifestations.

Time is visualised by the seer as a manifestation of Ṛta which forms the source of space also. On account of deriving its energy directly from Ṛta, it is immensely powerful, *asura*. Though immobile essentially, it carries on its back, like a bull, as many as six bundles. These bundles signify the six seasons coming in succession in a year. Though successive in their occurrences, these seasons, as bundles, are considered as loaded on the back of the bull of time in simultaneity due to oneness of time behind the changing scenario of seasons. Alternatively, the unmoving bull of time is Ṛta itself in its most creative form while seasons are the cows coming in congress with it out of their urge for creation. Besides the six seasons approaching the time-bull as cows, the three divisions of space, i.e., the earth, the intermediate space and the heaven, with all their dynamism, are placed on the back of the bull one upon the other in the same order. Amongst these divisions, one is visible while the rest two are lying hidden.<sup>68</sup> Having a still closer view of the scenario, the seer further realises that as a matter of fact there is no division as such between the load of space and the bull of time. The bull is omni-form with his potentiality for formation of what is still awaiting manifestation. He has three hoofs and three udders and is himself three-dimensional. The burden of space lying on his back is really a manifestation of his own potentiality. Instead of being a burden on the bull, the load is a glory of the bull himself which he is carrying so easily and comfortably as to

<sup>68</sup> षडभारो एको अचरन् विभर्तुतं वर्षिष्टमुष गाव आगुः ।  
त्रिसो मुहीरुपरस्तश्चुरत्या गुहा द्वे निर्हिते दश्येका ।। *Ibid.*, III.56.2



remain constantly flying and providing wings to the universal dynamics. Through this flight and the consequent dynamics, he continues to impregnate the cows of seasons resulting in germination and birth on the earth.<sup>69</sup>

The close relationship between time and space is discovered by the seer in the relationship between the three regions of space on one hand and the three representative gods associated with them on the other. The three regions are the earth, the intermediate space and the heaven while the three gods are Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya indwelling them in the same order. Accordingly, Agni indwells the earth, Vāyu the intermediate space and Sūrya the heaven. These gods are envisioned by the seer as sons of the *Asura*, i.e., Samvatsara or time. The regions are lofty, bright and scarcely attainable. They are ruled over by the sons or agents of time. These agents are described as followers of Ṛta, powerful and indomitable. They are supposed to be present in the sacrifice being performed continuously by nature on the universal scale. The dynamics of the universe is the sacrifice performed in the three regions of space under the aegis of the three gods working as sons or agents of time.<sup>70</sup> As the sacrifice performed on the human level is a replica of the one being performed eternally on the cosmic plane in the form of action of time on space, the same gods are prayed to be present in this sacrifice also so as to make it successful.

<sup>69</sup> त्रिपाञ्चस्यो वृषभो विश्वरूप उत त्र्युधा पुरुध प्रजावान् ।  
त्र्यनीकः पंत्यते माहिनावान्त्स रंतोधा वृषभः शश्वतीनाम् ॥ *Ibid.*, III. 56.3

<sup>70</sup> त्रिरुत्तमा द्रुणशां रोचनानि त्रयो राजन्त्यसुरस्य वीराः ।  
ऋतावान् इषिरा दूळभांसुस्त्रिरा दिवो विदथं सन्तु देवाः ॥ *Ibid.*, III.56.8

#### IV. Dharma

While action of time on space results in the creation of the world, laws of the action sustain the creation. They work as laws of sustenance as well as creation. Agni, for instance, manifests from the Supreme Being through the passage of time and gets concretised with its pervasion in space. Due to predominance of time in its constitution, it is consumptive in its nature. Owing to its pervasiveness in space, it pervades objects and consumes them in their concreteness. Thus, it proves the tool of reducing the concrete into the subtle. This is its primary nature or dharma, according to the seer. The primacy of the dharma lies in its involvement in the manifestation as well as in the working of the object concerned. Since the unseen cosmic agencies are constantly giving concreteness to things subtle including ourselves as well as the means of our sustenance, it is imperative on our part to pay back the obligation by transforming the concrete into the subtle. Agni is the means of this transformation. While in its subtle form it makes the subtle turn into the concrete, in its concrete form it turns the concrete into the subtle. This is its dharma of sustaining the process of the world through this capability.

Having got manifested through Agni as also being destined to be drawn back from concreteness through the agency of Agni, it is necessary for us to follow the dharma of Agni and bring facilitation to its work through conscious effort in the form of sacrifice. Sacrifice needs to be performed on all planes of being, as Agni operates on all of them. The instinct of possessiveness is to be counterbalanced by the higher tendency of sacrifice, otherwise we may prove obstructive in the materialisation of the divine imperative, like Vṛtra and



his associates. "As immortal Agni continues eternally to serve gods," observes Viśvāmitra, "no one can corrupt the eternal laws."<sup>71</sup> It is, indeed, this phrase, *dharmāṇi sanātā*, used by Viśvāmitra in this mantra which happens to lay the foundation of the idea of *sanātana dharma*, as it is here for the first time that the world *dharmāṇi* has been used along with *sanātā* as its adjective. *Sanātā* is the abridged form of *sanātāni* used as per metrical requirements. This usage may be taken to have formed the basis of the adjective *sanātana* used subsequently with *dharma* as its substantive. A variant form of *dharmāṇi sanātā* in the Ṛgveda is *dharmāṇi prathamāni* which, too, has been used for the first time by Viśvāmitra himself in the abridged form *prathamā dharmā*<sup>72</sup> to be followed by Dīrghatamas twice and by Nāryaṇa once.<sup>73</sup>

In its use, as qualified by *prathamā (ni)* also, *dharma* is intimately connected with sacrifice. Here also the primary laws of universe, as signified by *prathamā dharmā* are pointed to as those which govern sacrifice involving putting of inflammable material like *ghṛta* in the fire so as to make it available to gods. The deepest significance of sacrifice, however, is to be found in Dīrghatamas' mantras as well as in the Hymn to Puruṣa in which the basic sacrifice is the self-sacrifice of the Supreme Being in the creation of the world while the primeval laws, *prathamāni dharmāṇi* are the laws of sustenance of the created world. As Agni in Viśvāmitra's account is said to take offerings of gods so as not to

<sup>71</sup> अग्निर्हि देवाँ अमृतौ दुवस्यत्यथा धर्माणि सनता न दूदुषत् । । *Ibid.*, III.3.1.

<sup>72</sup> समिध्यमानः प्रथमानु धर्मा समक्तुभिरज्यते विश्ववारः ।  
शोचिष्कँशो घृतनिर्णिक्पावकः सुयज्ञो अग्निर्यजथाय देवान् । । *Ibid.*, III.17.1.

<sup>73</sup> तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् । *Ibid.*, I.164.43, 50; X.90.16

violate the eternal laws, it is obvious that Viśvāmitra also means by *dharmāṇi sanātā* and *prathamāni dharmāṇi* the same laws of sustenance emerging out of the Eternal. Sacrifice, as contrary to exclusive possessiveness, is the central idea underlying all these laws. This is why it has been emphasised upon so much by Vedic seers, including Viśvāmitra, in their cosmogonic visions. Agni is worshipped particularly because it is the essential tool of sacrifice. Indra, on the other hand, is prayed and extolled so much specially because he is the eliminator of Vṛtra and his associates who are bent upon obstructing the operation of those laws. Heaven and earth, likewise, are taken as the field of operation of those laws while time is conceived as the eventual executor of those laws.

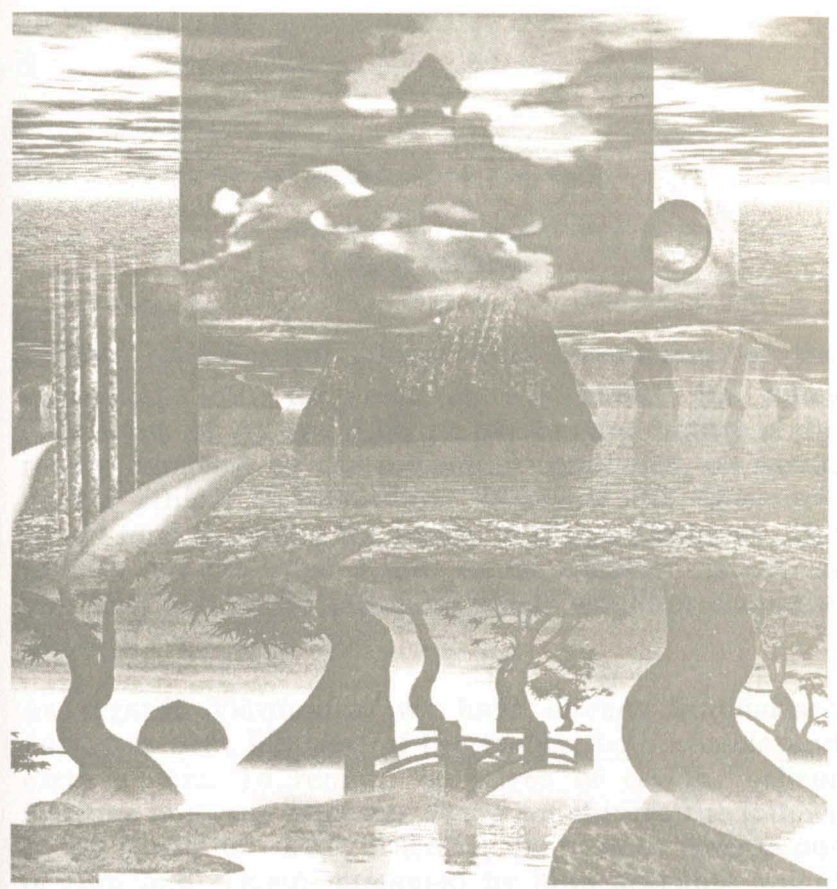
Thus we see how finally credit goes to Viśvāmitra for visualising the laws of the Eternal as the basis of the fundamental laws of human life and terming them as *dharmāṇi sanātā* which led to the idea of *sanātana dharma* as distinct from religion as a set of prescriptions laid down by the propounder concerned to be followed by his followers compulsorily and unquestionably.



The first of these is the...  
the second is the...  
the third is the...  
the fourth is the...  
the fifth is the...  
the sixth is the...  
the seventh is the...  
the eighth is the...  
the ninth is the...  
the tenth is the...

As we set out to...  
the first of these...  
the second of these...  
the third of these...  
the fourth of these...  
the fifth of these...  
the sixth of these...  
the seventh of these...  
the eighth of these...  
the ninth of these...  
the tenth of these...

It is...  
the first of these...  
the second of these...  
the third of these...  
the fourth of these...  
the fifth of these...  
the sixth of these...  
the seventh of these...  
the eighth of these...  
the ninth of these...  
the tenth of these...



## Ethical Visions

It is...  
the first of these...  
the second of these...  
the third of these...  
the fourth of these...  
the fifth of these...  
the sixth of these...  
the seventh of these...  
the eighth of these...  
the ninth of these...  
the tenth of these...





## I. Basis of Ethics

*Ethical considerations* emerge from interaction of the individual with the rest of the reality he takes cognisance of. As would be the horizon and nature of the reality admitted by the individual concerned, so would be his ethical consideration. Ethics of the egocentric would tend to exploit the reality in just self-interest. The selfless, on the other hand, would consider as ethical only that part of his behaviour which would promote the cause of the reality itself.

As regards Viśvāmitra, we have already familiarised ourselves with his view of the reality, both cosmic and extra-cosmic. To remind ourselves of certain salient features of it, one Supreme Being constitutes the totality of the reality by virtue of letting the cosmos emerge out of Him and remain sustained by laws accruing out of Him as also by agencies deployed by Him for this purpose. He is eternal and primeval source of creation, as well as final resort and ultimate addressee of the prayers offered by gods.<sup>1</sup> Instead of being just a postulate, He is the reality, visualised, contemplated on and experienced by the seer most intimately. He indeed is the source of the cosmos and not only the creator of

<sup>1</sup> सनां पुराणमध्यंम्यारामुहः पितुर्जनितुर्जामि तन्ः ।  
देवासो यत्रं पनितार एवैरुरौ पथि व्युते त्रस्थुरन्तः ।। RV.III.54.9.



it. When He lets his eternal stasis surge out as the creative dynamics in the form of Ṛta, His existential being assumes the form of the cosmos under the direction of Ṛta. Thus, the world, according to Viśvāmitra, is the product of *sat* and *ṛta* of the Eternal Being subsisting and acting creatively and playfully for getting restored to His original essence.

## II. Idea of Transformation of the Mortal into the Immortal and its bearing on Ethics.

Individual is a product of the cosmic process involving substitution of the old by the new. As such, he is more or less conscious of his mortality, because that is a matter of common experience. The frequent use of the word *martya*, mortal, to refer to the individual, is suggestive of the extent to which the Vedic seer is conscious of mortality, including his own. But, at the same time, he has also the sense of immortality well established in his mind. This sense in him derives its strength particularly from his contemplation on gods. They are considered as immortal and yet approachable by the mortal. Possibility of association of the mortal with the immortal generates aspiration for immortalising the mortal. "In order to get immortalised," observes Viśvāmitra, "I, while anointing him, bring out the word of prayer for speeding up the great and mighty Indra. You are the forerunner of all who indwell, no matter be it the human settlement or the divine, O Indra."<sup>2</sup>

The seer has also before him the example of the Ṛbhus who by means of virtuous deeds as well as equipoise, attained to the friendship of Indra and became immortal

<sup>2</sup> मुखस्यं ते तद्विषस्य प्र जूतिमिर्यंमिं वाचंमृताय भूषंन् ।  
इन्द्रं क्षितीनामंसि मानुषीणां विशां दैवीनामुत् पूर्वयावा । *Ibid.*, III.34.2.

like gods.<sup>3</sup> The story of the Ṛbhus tells us how they were sons of Manu, obviously a human being, and yet attained to immortality. This is an unmistakable example of the possibility of immortalisation of the mortal. This case of immortalisation had become well known by the time of Viśvāmitra, as it has been referred to by several other Vedic seers also. What Viśvāmitra achieved specially in this respect is the realisation of his complete identity with Agni in all his splendour as the divine being, omniscient, possessed of immense power of seeing and taste of immortality besides the creativity of the world.<sup>4</sup>

## III. Yoga and Yajña as Tools of Transformation

Celebrated instances like that of the Ṛbhus along with the seer's own direct realisation of his oneness with god Agni opened before Viśvāmitra a vast vista of development of the human psyche reaching up to the possibility of divinisation. The human psyche, thus, came to be realised as an epitome of the reality ranging from the gross physical to the metaphysical. If Agni could be an offshoot of the Supreme Being, why can not be so the human psyche with all its potentiality to realise its oneness with the same Agni? Reasoning like this heightened the aspiration of the seer to search out the broad way for taking the whole of humanity on the path leading to the divine destiny.

<sup>3</sup> इन्द्रस्य सुख्यमृभवः समानशुर्मनोर्नपातो अपसौ दधन्विरे ।  
सौधन्वनासौ अमृतत्वमेरिरे विष्ट्वी शर्माभिः सुकृतः सुकृत्यया । *Ibid.*, III.60.3

तेन देवत्वमृभवः समानश । *Ibid.*, III.60.2.

<sup>4</sup> अग्निरसि जन्मना ज्ञातवेदा घृतं मे चक्षुर्मृतं म आसन् ।  
अकस्त्रिधातू रजसो विमानो ऽ जसो घृमो हविरसि नाम । *Ibid.*, III. 26.7.



However, while the realised seer could very well proceed on the path inwardly by himself, he in the interest of the common man envisaged sacrifice as the most convenient way to that end. Sacrifice, in fact, was already popular among people as a means to ends of all kinds and Viśvāmitra himself had solid background of it in the development of his own seerhood. Taking advantage of its popularity as well as of his own direct experience in this regard, he christened it further so as to make it much more straightforward in its approach to the higher end. If the individual, with all his obvious limitations, could be realised by the seer as an epitome of reality, such an epitome could be created by him outside himself for the use of the common man for his understanding of the same reality in all its aspects of existence and operation as the geographer creates the globe for communicating his understanding of the earth to the student. Sacrifice, indeed, is such an epitome of cosmic processes, conceived by the seer to work as a model of the cosmos in all possible respects. For instance, the sacrificial pit or *vedi* is taken to represent the centre of creation having its locale in the heaven where god Agni is seated as the universal invoker invoking all cosmic forces to come together and take active part in the drama of creation and to experience the rapture produced by it. This viewpoint is reflected in Viśvāmitra's observation that the invoker has been asked to take his seat in the navel of the heaven and the *kuśa* grass is, therefore, to be strewn as it is pervaded by the divine.<sup>5</sup> Thus, if the sacrificial pit represents the centre of creation, Agni is the first one to be born of the creative act of the Supreme Being while gods supposed to be seated on the *kuśa* grass around the pit must

<sup>5</sup> दिवो वा नाभा न्यसादि होतां स्तृणीमहि देवव्यंवा वि ब्रुहिः । *Ibid.*, III.4.4.

represent the divine forces operative in the creative act.<sup>6</sup> Besides the sons of Aditi, such as Mitra, Varuna and Indra, goddesses like Bhāratī, Iḷā and Sarasvatī, along with their respective divine companions, are invoked to come and take their seats on the *kuśa* grass.<sup>7</sup> Being kindled in all his strength, Agni is supposed to have come to his full form and contentment and thus to a position to impart to the sacrificer his whole goodwill.<sup>8</sup> The seven planes of being serve as the oblation in this replica of the cosmic sacrifice. Whatever happens to be uttered in this sacrifice by priests following strictly the rules of sacrifice and contemplating deeply on Ṛta, becomes the word of Rta.<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. Ṛta and Satya as Fundamentals of the Vedic Ethics

Vedic ethics is an offshoot of the above view of the reality under which the Supreme Reality manifests Itself as the world and reproduces Itself in miniature form as an individual capable of realising within himself the Supreme Being along with His creative movement as also creating a replica of the Reality and visualising through the same the entire cosmos in all its dynamics. In view of his so intimate a relationship with the Supreme Being, on one hand, and the whole of the cosmos on the other, the individual has but to act in conformity with it rather than as an entirely

<sup>6</sup> आ याह्यग्ने समिधानो अर्वाङ्घ्रिण देवैः सुरथं तुरेभिः ।

ब्रुहिर्न आस्तामर्दितिः सुपुत्रा स्वाहा देवा अमृता मादयन्ताम् । । *Ibid.*, III.4.11.

<sup>7</sup> आ भारती भारतीभिः सजोषा इळां देवैर्मनुष्यैभिरग्निः ।

सरस्वती सारस्वतेभिर्वाक् तिस्रो देवीर्ब्रुहिर्दं संदन्तु । । *Ibid.*, III.4.8.

<sup>8</sup> समित्समित्सुमनां बोध्येस्मे शुचाशुचा सुमतिं रासि वस्वः । । *Ibid.*, III.4.1.

<sup>9</sup> दैव्या होतांरा प्रथमा न्युञ्जे सप्त पृक्षासः स्वधया मदन्ति ।

ऋतं शंसन्त ऋतमित्त आहुरनु व्रतं व्रतपा दीध्यानाः । । *Ibid.*, III.4.7.



independent unit of existence propelled wholly by self-interest and self-will. As the world is governed by the primeval law of the Supreme Being known as *Ṛta*, he has to follow the same *Ṛta* in all his ideation and action, if, of course, he chooses to be in tune with the universal rhythm, the *Ṛta*. If he thinks and acts in conformity with the rhythm, things become facile for him and life becomes as blessed for him as the Divine Himself in His creative movement. Sacrifice is illustrative of the action and ideation done in conformity with the rhythm. This is why the latter in itself is called *Ṛta*. It involves comprehension of oneself in one's depth of being and complexity of relationships and acting accordingly so as to pay back to others at least in the same quantity as one owes to them, including gods, men, animals, birds, insects, vegetations *et al.*

In this scheme of things, gods in their primary function are visualised as guardians of *Ṛta*. Agni, for instance, is prayed to shine brilliantly in his own house as the guardian of *Ṛta*.<sup>10</sup> He is also described as the charioteer of *Ṛta* moving around and serving as the priest of gods.<sup>11</sup> Once he is also addressed as one possessed of *Ṛta* as well as related to sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> Several times he is conceived also as one born of *Ṛta*. Thus, the four functions attributed to Agni in relationship to *Ṛta* bear out his total dedication to the latter. Similarly, the Heaven and the Earth have also several times been addressed by the seer as champions of *Ṛta* or as filled with it. So is the case with Indra and the rest of gods and goddesses prayed to by *Viśvāmītra*. They all are born of *Ṛta*, act as guardians of *Ṛta*, are wholly

<sup>10</sup> गोपा ऋतस्यं दीदिहि स्वे दमै । *Ibid.*, III.10.2

<sup>11</sup> इधीर्ऋतस्यं बृहतो विचर्षणिर्गिन्देवानामभवसुरोर्हितः । *Ibid.*, III., 2.8.

<sup>12</sup> ऋतावानं यज्ञियं ..... । *Ibid.*, III.2.13.

possessed by *Ṛta* and act on behalf of *Ṛta*. As a worshipper has to follow his divinity in all possible respects, he also has to live wholly in tune with *Ṛta* by way of contemplating on it, imbibing its laws in his life and acting accordingly. Concurrence with *Ṛta* implies inculcating a universalistic and dynamic view of life under which one has to share joys of all together as if they were one's own and to act in the interest of others as well as in one's own interest by treating oneself as a part of the all-encompassing dynamics of the Ultimate Reality.

*Ṛta* is closely connected with *Satya*. If *Ṛta* is the dynamics of the Ultimate Being, *Satya* is the cognisance and being in tune with Him. While Agni is said to be born of *Ṛta*, the Heaven and the Earth are characterised as *Satya*, as they are pervaded by the Being and act as a receptacle of whatever is born of the Being through operation of *Ṛta*.<sup>13</sup> In view of this close relationship between the two, one cannot divorce himself from *Satya* if he wants to remain in tune with *Ṛta*. In *Viśvāmītra*'s view, the primeval seers got themselves benefited by the Heaven and the Earth with all their richness in *Ṛta* by being in tune with truth in all respects, including particularly truthfulness in their words.<sup>14</sup>

*Ṛta* and *Satya*, indeed, are so close to each other that they seem sometimes to overlap each other. For instance, in one of the mantras addressed to *Dyāvā-Prthivī* the seer prays to these divinities to turn their *Ṛta* into *Satya* so that he, along with others, may get the

<sup>13</sup> स होता यस्य रोदसी चिदुर्वी यज्ञयज्ञमभि वृधे गृणीतः ।

प्राचीं अध्वरेव तस्थतुः सुमेकेँ ऋतावरी ऋतजातस्य सुत्ये । । *Ibid.*, III.6.10

<sup>14</sup> उतो हि वा' पूर्वा आविद्रिद्र ऋतावरी रोदसी सत्यवाचः । । *Ibid.*, III.54.4.



course of his life facilitated.<sup>15</sup> Thus, according to this usage, while Ṛta is the principle of universal dynamics seeking to take the world on the path of facilitation and to the consequent state of blessedness, *Satya* is the state of actualisation of the same objective. This is why *Satya* is closely associated with the word, particularly one uttered by primeval seers. The primeval seers, according to Viśvāmitra, were great beneficiaries of the Heaven and the Earth by being true to their words. By way of praising one of these great seers in such terms as an inexhaustible reservoir of knowledge, profound author of words worth uttering, source of direct illumination, etc., he characterises him eventually as true to this words and recommends him to the Heaven and the Earth to make him fulfilled in all respects.<sup>16</sup>

Thus while Ṛta is associated with the spatio-temporal manifestation of the Supreme Being, *Satya* is the quintessence of the manifestation as reflected in the human psyche. As the human psyche is a condensed form of the totality of the reality including the universal and the Transcendent both, Ṛta of the universal being, when getting associated with *sat* of the Transcendent, assumes the form of *Satya*. This is evident from the mantra quoted above. Since Ṛta and *Satya* both, however, are so intimately associated with each other in the human psyche, it is quite possible to point to anyone of them by the other. Viśvāmitra himself, indeed, at one place says: "With Agni kindled before us, let us speak the Ṛta that the great divinity of gods is but one."<sup>17</sup> Again, while in the mantra quoted at footnote 16, the

<sup>15</sup> युवोर्द्धतं रौदसी सत्यमस्तु महे षु णः सुविताय प्र भूतम् । *Ibid.*, III.54.3.

<sup>16</sup> श्रतधारमुत्समक्षीयमाणं विपश्चितं पितरं वक्त्वानाम् ।

मेळिं मर्दन्तं पित्रोरुपस्थे तं रौदसी पिपृतं सत्यवाचम् । । *Ibid.*, III.26.9.

<sup>17</sup> समिद्धे अग्नावृतमिद्धदेम महददेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् । । *Ibid.*, III.55.3.

great primeval seer is described by him as *satya-vācam*, in another mantra, seers of the same category following the Law and meditating deeply on it are said to have uttered and praised the Ṛta.<sup>18</sup> Obviously Ṛta as praised by the seer here, is the principle of cosmic dynamics while the same as uttered by him is the truth of the same dynamics. Since the principle is one and the same behind the contemplative vision on one hand and the speech on the other, it has in both the cases been referred to by one and the same word *ṛta*.

Viśvāmitra, indeed, is so much enamoured by *Satya* that while praising Agni as the son of force and bestower of protection and power of all sorts, requests the latter to grant him and his followers thousands of wealth in the form of truth along with the word which does not hurt.<sup>19</sup> As 'thousand' is the symbol of immensity in the Veda, truth, according to Viśvāmitra, is the most prized possession of man equivalent to immeasurable wealth. It is perhaps due to this inclination to truth on his part that subsequently in the Purāṇas he came to be appointed by the Divine to test the truthfulness of Hariścandra, the celebrated king foregoing everything to uphold the truth. While keen to remain always truthful, he is also cautious to see that this truth is expressed in words which are not hurting anyway. Possibly it is this outlook of the seer which got formulated subsequently in the well known instruction: "One should speak truth as also what is pleasing and should not speak what is unpleasant, even though it may be true."<sup>20</sup> This outlook of the seer gets further confirmation from his description

<sup>18</sup> ऋतं शंसन्त ऋतमित्त आहुरनुव्रतं व्रतपा दीध्यानाः । । *Ibid.*, III.4.7.

<sup>19</sup> त्वद्धि पुत्रं सहस्रो वि पूर्वीर्देवस्य यन्त्युतयो वि वाजाः ।

त्वं देहि सहस्रिणं रुयिं नो ऽ द्दोषेण वचंसा सत्यमग्ने । । *Ibid.*, III.14.6.

<sup>20</sup> सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयान् ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्यप्रियम् ।



of Uṣas as the immortal goddess spreading her lustre around and stimulating beauty and truth side by side.<sup>21</sup> While the seer's vision of the ideal beauty is implied in his description of Uṣas as an ever young lady endowed with all possible virtues, his devotion to truth finds expression in her characterisation as possessed of Ṛta, *ṛtāvārī*, and in her account as moving on the path of righteousness, *anuvratam*. Thus, by virtue of combining in it truth as well as beauty Viśvāmitra's vision of Uṣas embodies his paramount ethical ideal particularly in regard to women who, as a matter of fact, act as the touchstone of most of the principles of ethics as applicable to the human life.

Legendary Viśvāmitra's getting entrapped in the enchanting beauty of Menakā and falling apart from her subsequently bears out not so much his voluptuousness towards the female beauty as his capacity to transcend the fascination in favour of his aspiration for truth. This is further confirmed by his remaining unmoved in the face of the amorous postures of Rambhā subsequently and keeping himself undeterred as ever in his pursuit of truth. Of course, these legends, when viewed in the light of Viśvāmitra's description of Uṣas in the Ṛgveda, seem to have been carved out of them and given the form they are found in. His fascination for the beauty of Uṣas appears to have taken the form of his attraction towards Menakā and involvement in her love for the time being while his withstanding the charm of Rambhā, seems to bear out his exclusive devotion to Ṛta underlying the visible splendour of hers. In any case, it is from the bottom of Ṛta that Uṣas as cows are goaded by the

<sup>21</sup> उपो देव्यमर्त्या वि भाहि चन्द्ररथा सुनुता ईरयन्ती । *Ibid.*, III.61.2.

divine bull to spread out along with him to the heaven and the earth, as Viśvāmitra recounts it.<sup>22</sup>

It is this bottom of Ṛta which is described by Viśvāmitra himself elsewhere as a seat of the cow of light and source of manifestation of the Imperishable Reality, *Akṣara*.<sup>23</sup> Viśvāmitra appreciates the beauty of Uṣas conceived as a divine damsel. But, all her enchantment notwithstanding, he does not deviate from his pursuit of the Imperishable Reality. It is, indeed, the same splendour which elsewhere in the Vājasaneyi Samhitā has been described as the golden lid having concealed behind it *Satya*, Truth, *par excellence*.<sup>24</sup> Discovery of the same Truth is the highest objective which Viśvāmitra is in pursuit of. In the way of this objective lies the splendour of Uṣas conceived as a divine damsel. He gets enthralled by her for the time being but does not falter from reaching the goal eventually under her spell. This is what probably assumes the form of the stories of his encounter with Menakā and Rambhā under the instigation of Indra, as the Rāmāyaṇa recounts it.

#### V. Attitude towards the Puruṣārthas

That Viśvāmitra was not averse to conjugal life is evident from his advice to Indra that since wife herself is the home, his horses should take him there, and that Agni as a messenger would call him back whenever the seer

<sup>22</sup> ऋतस्य बुध्न उपसामिषुण्यन्वृषा मही रोदसी आ विवेश । *Ibid.*, III.61.7.

<sup>23</sup> उपसः पूर्वा अध यद् व्युषुर्महद्वि जंजे अक्षरं पुदे गोः ।

व्रता देवानामुप नु प्रभूर्षन् महददेवानामसुरत्वमेकम् । *Ibid.*, III.55.1.

<sup>24</sup> हिरण्मयै न पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् । *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* 40.5.



would intend to offer Soma to him.<sup>25</sup> Addressing him as his brother, he again asks the deity to go home no matter at whatsoever distance and come back whenever invited, since he has his interest at both the ends.<sup>26</sup> Viśvāmitra's address to the deity as his brother vindicates his virtual equation with the latter and hence equal applicability of the advice to the seer himself. Had he not followed the same pattern of behaviour practically in his own life, he would not have dared to suggest it to his magnanimous deity. Attending sacrifice, no matter whether as a deity, seer or sacrificer, is obviously in fulfilment of inclination to *dharma* while meeting the requirement of one's life-companion is a fulfilment of the demands of another *puruṣārtha*, namely *kāma*. If Viśvāmitra does not see any contradiction between the two involvements even in the case of the deity representing obviously *dharma*, there lies no point in seeing any contradiction between the two in the case of man who decidedly is inclined much more to *kāma* than to *dharma*.

In fact, sacrifice as envisaged by the Vedic seer is such an integral undertaking as to have the promise of fulfilling all the *puruṣārthas* together. There is no segregation here between the religious and the non-religious pursuits of life. On the contrary, even what appears to be non-religious here has got to be permeated by the religious, since the same Ṛta as the source of all matters of *dharma* is the fundamental motivating force behind all actions whatever. In this scheme of things, as envisaged by Viśvāmitra, the same Indra can drink Soma to his full content at the sacrifice and then be

<sup>25</sup> जायेदस्तं मध्वन्सेदु योनिस्तदित्वा युक्ता हरयो वहन्तु ।

यदा क्वा चं मुनवाम् सोममग्निष्ट्वा दूतो धन्वात्यच्छ । | RV. III.43.4.

<sup>26</sup> परां याहि मध्वन्ना चं याहीन्द्रं भातरुभ्यत्रां ते अर्थम् । Ibid., III.53.3.

advised to go to his auspicious wife who is the delight of the house. If drinking of Soma during sacrifice relates to *dharma* and going to his wife to *kāma* and *artha*, his breaking the limitations of Ṛta in his drinking of Soma has an obvious bearing on his inclination to liberation, *mokṣa*. As Viśvāmitra visualises the relationship of brotherhood and even of identity with the deity, whatever he talks of the latter can equally well be applicable to himself. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, since the seer expresses himself mostly on behalf of the whole of the humanity rather than merely on his own behalf, the observations made by him in this regard have the possibility of universal appeal and application.

Against this background, we can understand the implication of his observations regarding his aspirations. For instance, at one place he prays to Indra: "Bestow upon us, O Indra, the drinker of Soma to the sediment, such wealth in large quantity as may be to the liking of all; make us live for hundred autumns as well as bless us with a large number of heroes, O one of beautiful jaws."<sup>27</sup> As is obvious from the use of the plural form *asme*, the whole prayer is made on behalf of humanity at large rather than on behalf of Viśvāmitra himself exclusively. Universality of outlook behind the prayer is also evident from the fact that what the seer asks for has got to be of universal liking, *viśvavāryam*, and not suited just to his personal predilections. Similarly, in another mantra, he prays to Agni to come to him as well as to go to all along with his auspicious friendship and protections and create for them all the wealth which could be admirable, famous and capable of

<sup>27</sup> अस्मे प्र यन्धि मध्वन्नुजीषिनिन्द्रं रायो विश्ववारस्य भूरेश ।

अस्मे शतं श्रवदौ जीवसे धा अस्मे वीराञ्छर्वत इन्द्र शिषिन् । | Ibid., III.36.10.



taking the humanity across the hurdles of life.<sup>28</sup> In another mantra, likewise, he prays to Aryaman, Aditi and other gods and goddesses to remove from the path of humanity the state of issuelessness and make all rich in progeny as well as in animals.<sup>29</sup> In still another mantra, he prays to gods in general to make the path of humanity easy to traverse, rich in nourishment and vegetations sprinkled with mead.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in all these instances, the prayer is meant for man in general while what is craved for is of common and basic interest necessary for the fulfilment of *artha* and *dharma* as also preparatory to still higher aspirations.

Viśvāmitra's universality of outlook is further evident in a mantra addressed to Agni, in which he prays to the latter to make descend on him as well as on the whole of humanity a mighty stream of higher knowledge, like a stream of water descending from a mountain, which may not only remain flowing for all time to come but be immensely powerful in its penetration, beneficial in its effect and universal in its comprehension.<sup>31</sup> Needless to point out that this mantra is next only to the celebrated Gāyatrī in implication. Here the seer conceives of a state of being in which Agni, the omniscient divinity, lets flow from its celestial abode a stream of thought like a mountain sending down to plains a mighty stream of water. The stream of water such as the Gaṅgā, for

instance, is viewed as flowing continuously and fulfilling all the requirements of the people for water over a vast stretch of land for all time to come. So is the role expectedly to be played by the stream of thought emerging from the celestial abode of the all-knowing Agni. This stream of thought is further supposed to be highly penetrative in understanding, auspicious in effect and all-comprehending in pervasiveness. It is expected to inundate the whole of the human psyche for all time to come.

Obviously this prayer of Viśvāmitra's anticipates Sri Aurobindo's life-long effort for descent of the Supramental with the expectation that it would correct the aberrations of the human race in the course of evolution and transform it suitably so as to be able to move towards the Divine which is its destined goal.

Thus, while even praying for higher ideas, not to talk of things mundane, Viśvāmitra takes in his purview interest of the whole of the humanity rather than that of himself alone. He does not want himself alone to get enlightened and rule intellectually and spiritually over the world for all time to come. On the contrary, he prays to the Divinity with all possible earnestness to send down such a powerful stream of thought which may illuminate the inner being of one and all universally and perpetually.

## VI. Problem of Evil

If the world has emerged from the Supreme Being who is truth and has deployed *Rta*, His dynamics, in running the processes of the world, why is it that there are falsehood and misery in it? Viśvāmitra, as well as other Vedic seers, accounts for it in terms of the presence of

<sup>28</sup> आ नो गहि सुख्येभिः शिवेभिर्महान्महीभिरुतिभिः सरण्यन् ।

अस्मे रयि बहूलं सन्तरुत्रं सुवाचं भागं यशसं कृधी नः । । *Ibid.*, III.1.19.

<sup>29</sup> अर्यमा णो अर्दितिर्यज्ञियासोऽदंब्यानि वरुणस्य वृत्तानि ।

युयोतं नो अनपत्यानि गन्तोः प्रजावानः पशुमौ अस्तु गातुः । । *Ibid.*, III.54.18.

<sup>30</sup> सदा सुगः पितुमौ अस्तु पन्था मध्वा देवा ओषधीः सं पिपृक्त । । *Ibid.*, III.54.21.

<sup>31</sup> या ते अग्ने पर्वतस्येव धारासंश्रन्ती प्रीपयंददेव चित्रा ।

तामसभ्यं प्रमतिं जातवेदो रास्वं सुमतिं विश्वजन्त्याम् । । *Ibid.*, III.57.6.



Vṛtra and his companions in the process. The entire process of creation is envisaged in such a way that the streams of truth and illumination tend to come down to the world spontaneously but for their retardation by a certain deceptive agency called Vṛtra. What the latter seeks to retard is a certain stream of water, herd of cows or multitude of rays. Here objects of retardation and obstruction are generally taken in a matter of fact sense under the supposed background of tussle for supremacy and occupation between two contending races, i.e., the Aryan and the Non-Aryan. Whether or not there was any such tussle between two such races which took place on such a large scale actually during a certain period in the Indian history, is a matter of great debate which may be entered into separately, but what is germane here to make out is that apart from the actual position to be decided this way or that way, the Veda has to offer a lot of material of philosophical interest in mantras depicting some sort of a tussle.

To dilate upon the point, particularly, with reference to mantras seen by Viśvāmitra, what we find actually is that the seer's account of the scenario of the tussle almost invariably involves a certain moral or spiritual message which seems to be the basic thing sought to be delivered by the seer through various factors of the tussle rather than the tussle itself as a matter of historical verity. For instance, in one of the mantras the seer observes that amongst mortals there is none who may condemn our forefathers who kept themselves engaged in fighting for the cause of cows.<sup>32</sup> The immunity to condemnation by mortals points to the moral and spiritual significance of the fighting for cows

<sup>32</sup> नकिरेषां निन्दिता मर्त्येषु ये अस्माकं पितरो गोषु योधाः ।  
इन्द्रं एषां दृष्टिता माहिनावानुदगोत्राणि ससृजे दुंसर्नावान् । | *Ibid.*, III.39.4

while Indra's active involvement in it bears out his championing the same cause of rectitude. As a corollary to it, forces responsible for creating the confinement must be the source of evil deserving condemnation.

This conclusion gets positive confirmation from the sequel of the mantra. For, in the immediately following one, it has been stated that, along with Navagvas and Dasagvas, Indra entered into the hiding place of evil forces in pursuit of the cows kept captive by them. Having reached the core with difficulty creeping on his knees, he at last found out the sun lying in the midst of pitched darkness.<sup>33</sup> This sun or Sūrya has been qualified by the seer as *satya*, truth. Had bare excellence of the sun been intended to be highlighted in this mantra, the proper word used for communication of that sense would have been *santam* and not *satyam* which over and above the sense of *santam* denotes something ethical and spiritual. Thus, being used in association with *satyam*, *sūryam* becomes symbolic of truth, understandably of the highest order. In this way, the search for *go*, cow, symbolising knowledge, by the highly inspired forefathers takes place with the intervention of Indra who, being befriended by them, does not mind bending himself even on his knees so as to lead them to the Truth involved deeply in ignorance. The Navagvas and Dasagvas are the same forefathers of the seer as have been referred to in the preceding mantra as fighters for the sake of cows. Their names are evidently adjectival being understandably given to them on account of their association with *go*, cow. Sāyaṇa explains these names as having been given to them on account of their performance of sacrifice for nine and ten

<sup>33</sup> सखां ह यत्र सखिभिर्नवैरभिज्ञ्वा सत्त्वभिर्गा अनुग्मन् ।  
सुत्वं तदिन्द्रो दुशभिर्दशग्वैः सूर्यं विवेदु तमसि क्षियन्तम् । | *Ibid.*, III.39.5.



months respectively. As sacrifice itself was used as a means of acquisition of knowledge in the family of Viśvāmitra and as the word *go* also stands for knowledge in the Veda more pre-eminently than for anything else, the words *navagvu* and *daśagvu* must naturally stand for the degree of spiritual preparedness of those forefathers so as to be in a position to attract the attention of Indra and that also on friendly terms and motivate him to lead them to Truth.

The next mantra in the hymn develops the idea still further. According to it, having discovered the cow, Indra found in her abundance of honey, footed and hooped. This is just another way of saying that the cow, thus found out, was entirely honey itself. This honey, described earlier as a cow hidden in a cave, is said further to have been found in water from which Indra took it out and kept in his hand for delivering it liberally to those who deserved.<sup>34</sup> Honey is obviously a symbol of delight and sustenance of life. In the next mantra, the same honey turns out to be the light shrouded in darkness and to have been found out by Indra for the sake of the forefathers of the seer and to have been made available *via* them to the seer himself. It is by virtue of getting this light that the seer expects himself as well as all those lying in his purview to keep away from evil actions even in the teeth of worldly needs, imperatives and compulsions.<sup>35</sup>

In the next mantra, he expresses his earnest desire to see this light spreading in the entire expanse demarcated on one side by the heaven and on the other

<sup>34</sup> इन्द्रो मधु सम्भृतमुसियोयां प्रद्विद्वेद शफवन्मे गोः ।

गुहां हितं गुह्यं गूळहमप्सु हस्तं दधे दक्षिणे दक्षिणावान् । *Ibid.*, III.39.6.

<sup>35</sup> ज्योतिर्वृणीत तमसो विज्ञानन्तारे स्याम दुरितादुभीके । *Ibid.*, III.39.7.

by the earth so that sacrifice, as the function of Ṛta, may go on uninterruptedly and as a consequence of it the whole of humanity may get rid of all evil doings.<sup>36</sup>

Thus cow, honey, light and Sūrya all these in the vision of Viśvāmitra have an identical locale and are found out from it as different elements of one and the same truth, may be in varying degrees, quantum and quantities. It is this truth alone which can make us get rid of the persistent tendency to indulge in evil doings. Vṛtra is the universal custodian of this tendency. Due to his active role in this respect, the world is turned into a battleground of two contending forces, the divine and the undivine representing the good and the evil respectively. In this all-comprehending battle for sustenance and self-consolidation, *Vājasātau*, Indra, as leader of the divine side, is invoked again and again to kill the Vṛtras and wins the wealth of virtues.<sup>37</sup>

As is evident from frequent use of the word *vṛtra* in the plural, Vṛtra is not a person whosoever, but a type or rather archetype of the enemy striving to obstruct the operation of the cosmic dynamics on all planes of existence. At one place, he seems to be an inordinately extended form of ego seeking to segregate the individual from the totality of the reality or conversely inhibiting the sense of the latter from the purview of the former. It is probably in this sense that Viśvāmitra calls him *abhimāti*, 'self-assertiveness' and prays to Indra to overcome him in any event.<sup>38</sup> That he and his followers are powers of falsehood, misleading the creative process

<sup>36</sup> ज्योतिर्यज्ञाय रोदसी अनु प्यादारे स्याम दुरितस्य भूरं । *Ibid.*, III.39.8.

<sup>37</sup> शुनं हुवेम मघवान्मिन्द्रस्मिन् भरे नृतं वाजसातौ ।

शृण्वन्तंमुग्धतयै समत्सु घन्तं वृत्राणि संजितं धर्मानाम् । *Ibid.*, III.39.9.

<sup>38</sup> नामानि ते शतक्रतो विश्वाभिर्गुभिरीमहे । इन्द्राभिमातिसाहं । *Ibid.*, III.37.3.



is evident from another mantra in which the seer prays to Indra to kill them in any case whether they be confronting and pursuing him or be running away from him and thus make the world truthful.<sup>39</sup> Vṛtra's being an embodiment of crookedness gets revealed in a mantra addressed to Agni in which the latter as the all-knowing god is described as the primeval killer of Vṛtra and as such is sought by the seer to take his devotees across all sorts of crookedness.<sup>40</sup> By eliminating Vṛtra, the embodiment of egotism, self-aggrandisement, deprivation, falsehood and crookedness, the seer wants not only himself but the whole world redeemed of these vices and rejoice in openness of outlook, liberality, plentifulness, truth and straightforwardness of thinking and behaviour.

On account of its fluidity, transparency, purity, purifying effect and life-sustaining properties, water is treated as the most appropriate symbol of all these virtues put together. Over and above this, its appropriateness as a symbol in this sense gets very much enhanced by the use of it in the Veda to symbolise the primeval medium of creation operated upon by Ṛta for promotion of the creative surge. On account of this, Vṛtra has often come to be viewed by the seer as a hindrance in the flow of the stream of water while Indra as the remover of that hindrance. Viśvāmitra, for instance, recounting the feats of Indra such as stabilising the heaven and the intermediate world, mentions also the waters flowing ahead as a result of his action.<sup>41</sup> The symbolic sense has become quite vivid in another mantra in which Indra is said to have released

<sup>39</sup> जुहि प्रतीचः अंनूचः पराचो विश्वं सत्यं कृणुहि विष्टमस्तु । । *Ibid.*, III.30.6.

<sup>40</sup> स वृत्रहा सनयो विश्ववेदाः पर्षद्विश्वार्तिं दुरिता गृणन्तम् । । *Ibid.*, III.20.4

<sup>41</sup> अस्तंभ्नाद द्यां वृषभो अन्तरिक्षमर्षन्त्वापस्त्वयेहप्रसूताः । । *Ibid.*, III., 30.9.

the waters which are all-pervading, homogeneous in movement and wholly lustrous and keep moving onward continuously day and night and are getting purified by seers by means of sieves.<sup>42</sup> The all-pervasiveness of the waters suggests that they are cosmic. Their complete lustrousness indicates that they are of the nature of light. The requirement of seers for their purification by means of sieves bears out the accessibility of those waters only to seers in their higher visions. All these features can be met with together only if the waters are regarded as something metaphysical and spiritual and intimately close to knowledge, truth and righteousness, figuring elsewhere in the Veda as cow, light and honey etc. or indeed, as ethical and spiritual values involved in the operation of Ṛta, the dynamics of creation.

Summarily speaking, Viśvāmitra envisions three sources of evil in life: superhuman, human and deeds of the doer himself. No matter, whatever source of the evil, he advises one to counteract it on two grounds: one's own effort and grace of the Divine. As regards the superhuman source of evil, he, as has already been pointed out, attributes it to undivine cosmic forces. According to him, the Supreme Being is the source of creation. He creates and makes the process of creation continuous through His dynamics of creation and sustenance known as Ṛta which regulates each and everything as per its laws made operative through cosmic agencies known as *deva* or gods. The act of regulation, however, presupposes irregularity which is to be removed. The custodians of the irregularity are called *adeva*. In the Brāhmaṇas they are said to be the elder brothers of *devas*, possibly on account of the logic

<sup>42</sup> अपर्षिचक्षेप विभ्वो इ' दमूनाः प्र सुधीर्चीरसृजद्विश्वचन्द्राः ।

मध्वंः पुनानाः कुविभिः पुविद्वैद्युभिर्हिन्वन्त्यक्तुभिर्धनुत्रीः । । *Ibid.*, III.31.16.



pointed out right now. When the Supreme Unity would seek to diversify itself in course of creation, it must give rise to forces going counter to it as well as to those which would act in conformity with it, for, otherwise, the dynamics of creation would become lame. The dichotomy of the Puruṣa and the Prakṛti in the Sāṅkhya system has its relevance obviously in some such logic as this. The undivine forces born in this way in the process of creation seek to obstruct the latter on all planes of being including the human action of all sorts. In the far-reaching vision of the seer, they appear as agencies waging war constantly against the divine forces for retarding and upsetting the process, no matter be it of universal or individual dimension. In one of his mantras, Viśvāmitra craves for the indulgence of god Agni to make him overcome these forces not just arbitrarily but for making himself and all those taken in his purview strengthened by words of divine virility as well as by virtue of inner powers gathered through noble deeds.<sup>43</sup> Understandably, it is these undivine forces for whose elimination Viśvāmitra seeks the help of young Rāma subsequently in Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa.

As regards the source of evil at the human level, Viśvāmitra visualises it as operating in enmity and ill-will. In his view, human settlements are prone to cherish enmity towards one another. Out of sheer enmity they may turn into niggards and prove oppressive. As a remedy from the oppressions of such people, the seer prays to Agni to apply his burning power so that they may get eliminated or possibly be purged of their sense

<sup>43</sup> उपक्षेतास्तवं सुप्रणीते ऽग्ने विश्वेनि धन्या दधानाः ।  
सुरतंसा श्रवसा तुजंमाना अभिष्याम पृतनार्यैरदैवान् । *Ibid.*, III.1.16

of enmity.<sup>44</sup> So far as the ill-will cherished by human beings is concerned, as a remedy to it the seer seeks the indulgence of Agni to make the heaven and the earth so productive and abundant in amenities of life that it may be rendered ineffective.<sup>45</sup> It shows that in the seer's view, ill-will is a product of scarcity of the necessities of life. When the necessities are fulfilled, one sheds it off to a great extent.

### VII. Sin and Purgation

The seer, however, seems to be acutely conscious of sins associated with himself as well as with everyone in the society. Starting from his consciousness of it within himself his vision moves around the whole of the society and, indeed, the humanity as such so as to make him pray on behalf of all for redemption from the sin. He conceives of sin as a river while of the Divinity as a boatman sailing on it. As it is difficult to go across a mighty river by anyone on his own, so the river of sin needs the help of the Divine for going across it. And this help, according to the seer, has to be sought well within the span of this life which has been imaged out as equivalent to the daytime. "I produce mantras whenever inspiration stirs me; may I pray to Indra well before expiry of the day with the intention that sailing in a boat he may take people across the sin, as they, waiting on both sides of the river of sin, are invoking him," observes

<sup>44</sup> भवां नो अग्ने सुमना उपैतौ सखैव सख्यै पितरैव साधुः ।

पुरुदुहो हि क्षितयो जनानां प्रतिं प्रतीचीर्दहंतादरातीः । *Ibid.*, III.18.1

<sup>45</sup> प्र पीपय वृषभु जिन्व वाजानग्ने त्वं रोदसी नः सुदोषैः ।

देवेभिर्देव सुरुचां रुचानो मा नो मर्तस्य दुर्मतिः परिष्ठात् । *Ibid.*, III.15.6.



Viśvāmitra in one of his mantras.<sup>46</sup> It is obvious from this mantra that one of the motives behind the seer's craving for the vision and its verbal expression in the form of mantra is purgation of his sin. Vision of the Divine is expected to get him completely rid of the sin lying in him. He is so much conscious of the sin that he conceives of it as a mighty river to be crossed only with the help of a boat being sailed by the Divine.

If we go into the probable source of this sense of sin exercising the mind of the seer so powerfully, we, as per the details provided by the seer, delineate in it two forms, superhuman and human. As emergence of man is preceded by a long history of superhuman agencies, both divine and undivine fighting with each other incessantly in which the undivine is seeking to upset the scheme of the divine, and since man, being an epitome of the creation, has all this ingrained in him, he, too, forms the battleground of the strife between these two contending forces. As a consequence of this tug-of-war going on continuously in his psyche, he is not all clean within. Having done something under persuasion of the undivine and contrary to the will of the divine, he feels to have committed some or the other sort of sin against the latter. This is why he always craves for forgiveness of the divine or otherwise for the help of the divine against the design of the undivine.

Accordingly, in one of his mantras Viśvāmitra, while praying to Agni, describes him as an observer of men and expects of him to cast his lustre on what are black, lead him onward, get him purged of all his sins and

<sup>46</sup> त्रिवेषु यन्मां क्षिपणां ज्जानु स्तवै पुरा पायादिन्द्रमहन्ः ।  
अहंसो यत्रं पीपरद्यथां नो नावेव यान्तमुभयै हवन्ते । | *Ibid.*, III.32.14

bestow upon him all sorts of riches.<sup>47</sup> Kṛṣṇa, black, may represent the fuel as well as the night while Agni the brightness. Black is the symbol of the undivine along with its vices while brightness stands for the divine along with the virtues associated with it. Accordingly, mention of bright Agni's victory over blackness is intended to highlight the contrast between virtue and vice or indeed between the divine and the undivine. Thus the seer intends to communicate the idea that just as Agni by virtue of its brightness overpowers darkness, even so it, as a god, is expected to eliminate vice and replace it by virtue which is the way to plenty.

Besides this, however, the seer considers human action also as responsible for generation of the sense of sin in the human psyche. Thus, it is quite possible to get rid of the sense of sin by stopping sinful acts from a certain moment in life onwards. But what to do with the sense of guilt lurking in one's psyche as a result of evil acts done already? Viśvāmitra considers this also to be eliminable with the help of the Divine.

### VIII. Law of Karma

Possibility of purgation of the sense of sin with intervention of the Divine notwithstanding, however, the seer has full conviction in the law of Karma and its basic assumption that as you sow, so must you reap. This, in his view, is valid in regard to good as well as bad action. In his dialogue with the rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī, while pleading for passage for himself as well as for his companions, the seer puts forth specially the case of the bullocks yoked to the cart and prays to the rivers not to

<sup>47</sup> त्वं नृचक्षा वृषभानुं पूर्वीः कृष्णास्वग्ने अरुषो विभाहि ।  
वसो नेषिं च पर्षिं चात्यहंः क्रुधी नो राय उशिजो यविष्ठ । | *Ibid.*, III.15.3.



keep the level of water so high as to present danger to lives of those animals since, as he puts it, they have not done any evil deed and are, therefore, completely sinless and hence do not deserve loss of their lives.<sup>48</sup>

In regards to good action and the result commensurate to it, there is the case of the Ṛbhus, referred to in one of his mantras, who attained to immortality by means of noble deeds. Their noble deeds made them get rid of the limitations of individuality and, thus, having made them pervade the entire space and time transformed them from mortals to immortals. As the seer observes, good deeds cause expansion up to boundlessness while bad deeds bring constriction with all its crippling effect on the psyche.<sup>49</sup> That bad deeds of an individual may cripple his psyche to the extent of self-immolation is evident from the Vājasaneyi Samhitā which after dilating upon good results of noble deeds maintains that those who indulge in undivine acts and reach the stage of self-immolation are made to go to the world of utter darkness.

Despite the fair possibility of amelioration of the effect of bad deeds by the Divine, one has, according to Viśvāmitra, to be punished for his evil deeds in the same measure as his deeds call for. This is evident from several mantras including one in which the seer observes in regards to Indra that people praise him on account of his many a noble deed under which he

<sup>48</sup> उद्धं ऊर्मिः शम्या हन्तवापो योक्त्राणि मुञ्चत ।

मादुष्कृतौ व्यैनसाध्यौ शूनमारताम् । *Ibid.*, III.33.13.

<sup>49</sup> सौधन्वनासौ अमृतत्वमेरिरे विष्ट्वी शर्माभिः सुकृतं सुकृत्यां । *Ibid.*, III.60.3.

crushed the obstructive Dasyus.<sup>50</sup> It is in the same spirit that a prayer has been addressed to Indra to make one who hates the seer fall down abysmally as also to make the other one whom the seer hates, be abandoned by his vital breath.<sup>51</sup> Obviously here is expressed the desire to meet differential treatment to the source of hatred. While one who hates the seer is desired to be sent down, but when the seer himself happens to act as the source of hatred, he expects the Divine to help him in making the object of hatred lose his life.

This differential treatment suggested for the same act is presumably due to vast difference in the moral fabric of the seer on one hand and the person whom he happens to hate on the other. While the latter is an abominable fiend, Dasyu, bent upon causing injury to anyone unnecessarily, the seer is a purified soul striving always to throw out from within him whatever shred of hatred, enmity, jealousy or the like might be lying there in his psyche in any form. This is evident from his prayer to god Agni requesting the latter not to hand him over to thoughtlessness, cowardice, paucity, condemnation and hatred.<sup>52</sup> Similarly in another mantra, he observes by way of prayer: "O mighty god Agni, would that we could have control over you and go across all sorts of hatred whatever."<sup>53</sup> While offering prayer to the Divine the seer is much more conscious of his internal enemies in the

<sup>50</sup> महो मुहार्नि पनयन्त्यस्येन्द्रस्य कर्म सुकृता पुरुणि ।

वृजनेन वृजिनान्त्सं पिपेष मायाश्रिदस्यूरभिभूत्योजाः । *Ibid.*, III.34.6.

<sup>51</sup> यो नो द्वेष्यधरः सस्यदीष्ट यमुं द्विष्स्तमुं प्राणो जंहातु । *Ibid.*, III.53.21.

<sup>52</sup> मा नो अग्नेऽमंतये मावीरतायै रीरधः ।

मागोतायै सहसस्पुत्र मा निदेऽप्रद्वेषांस्या कृधि । *Ibid.*, III.16.5.

<sup>53</sup> अग्नें शक्रेम ते त्रयं यमं देवस्यं वाजिनः ।

अति द्वेषांसि तरेम । *Ibid.*, III.27.3.



form of these vices than of the external ones. This is evident from another prayer addressed by him to Agni and Vāyu: "Burn internal enemies, O Agni, as also the speech of the self-conceited enemy outside; O supremely wise Vāyu, burn the unconscientious and let your unaging and constantly mobile rays remain scattered all around."<sup>54</sup>

In view of his elevated state of mind, the seer does scarcely entertain enmity towards anyone, and if perchance he happens to entertain it, the person concerned must really be deserving his wrath on account of the baseness of his behaviour. Since the seer has taken upon himself the task of a saviour of the society from all sorts of evil, no matter abstract or gross, it is necessary on his part to wage war against such elements, be they internal or external.

It is indeed particularly on these moral and spiritual grounds that the Vedic seer seems to have waged war against the opponents mostly internal though not to complete exclusion of the external. Since the situation of war, howsoever internal, psychological and spiritual, needs for vividness of its depiction a certain reference to the gross one, the seer has taken recourse to it often and on creating impression in the mind of the casual reader as if he were an actual fighter on the physical plane itself. As a matter of fact, throughout he is concerned mainly with internal enemies in the form of vices and the motivating forces behind them operating particularly on the cosmic scale. This is evident from the sameness of the enemies in the Veda throughout, notwithstanding the multiplicity of the seers. The same

<sup>54</sup> तपो ष्वग्ने अन्तराँ अमित्रान्तपा शंसमररुषुः परस्य ।  
तपो वसो चिकित्तानो अचित्तान्वि तै तिष्ठन्तामजरा अयासः । *Ibid.*, III.18.2.

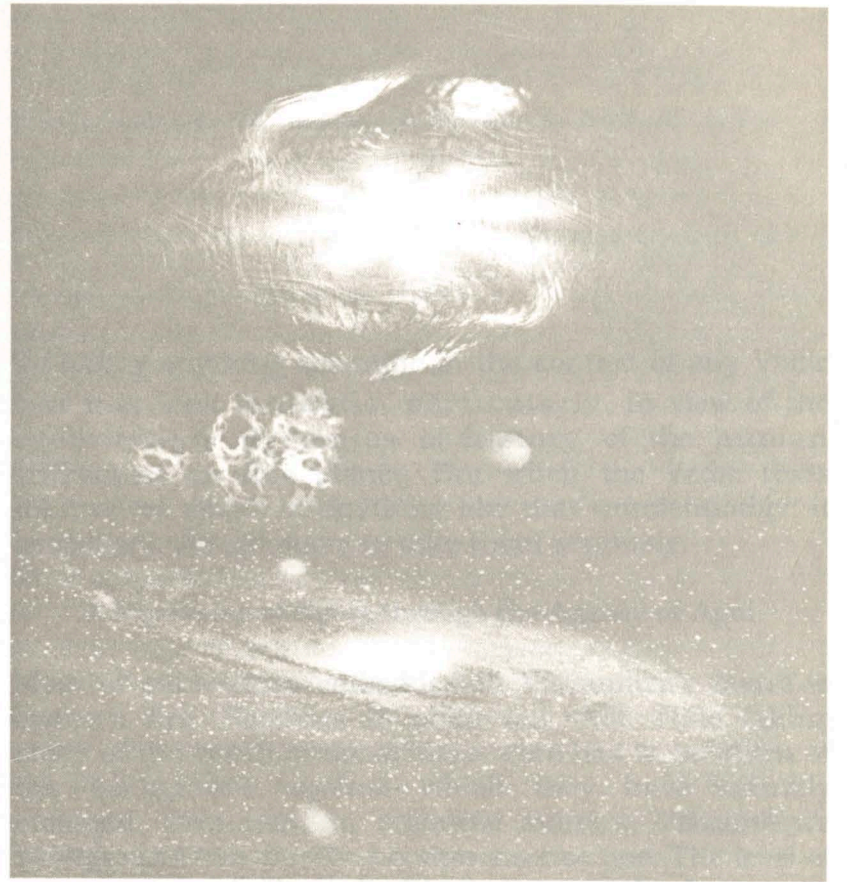
Vṛtra, Vala, Śambara, Nirṛti etc. are recounted everywhere, fighting against gods like Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni and the rest of the agencies of the Divine. To render gods and demons into racial forces is, therefore, a travesty of facts excusable only on the ground of sheer ignorance. References to actual fighting on the physical plane are also there in the Veda, no doubt, but they are only a few as compared to the spiritual and psychological ones and seem to be there particularly as a fall out of the internal ones.



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## Scientific Visions

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*To talk of* anything scientific in the context of any Vedic seer may look fantastic, particularly, in view of the evolutionary dynamics of history of the human civilisation on this planet. But when the Vedic texts themselves speak of anything like that unmistakably, it becomes a desideratum to take them seriously.

### I. Expansion of Space through the Agency of Agni

Most of such ideas embedded in Viśvāmitra's mantras concern fire. Needless to point out that while taking stock of the worth of these ideas, care has to be taken of the background against which they have actually emerged. Obviously, in scientific matters, Viśvāmitra's background was purely a commonsense one. The level of commonsense built up by his time must also have been considerably lower than that it has reached in the modern scientific age. Notwithstanding all this, however, when we think of fire even from the present commonsense level, we find it as burning here and there intermittently and creating light and heat. Anything higher than this goes to the range of scientific knowledge. As such, this much alone at the most was expected of Viśvāmitra as his age supposedly had no other source of knowledge about fire at any higher gradient.



Contrary to this expectation, however, we find Viśvāmitra conceiving of fire not in its intermittent manifestation alone but as a continuous, all-pervading principle of cosmic existence outliving all concretely tangible objects. He visualises fire as pervading the astral world, the earth, vegetations, waters as also giving expansion to the intermediate region.<sup>1</sup> In the heaven, Agni is obviously found in the form of the multitude of stars. But to think of them as made of fire, was a difficult proposition, as what is available to us from them tangibly here on earth, is only their light and not the heat.

Coming to the earth, he conceives of her as having fire inside her as well as on her surface. On the surface, in particular, he sees fire embedded in vegetations. Burning of the dry wood, no doubt, establishes close relationship between the fire and the vegetation, but to conceive of the latter, irrespective of the fact whether it is dry or green, as having fire inside it, is certainly an intricate idea. This, however, might have been facilitated by seeing production of the jungle-fire or more conveniently, the fire produced by the rubbing of fire-sticks in the sacrificial context.

But how to explain his vision of the presence of fire in water which, as a matter of fact, brings extinction to fire? Does the extinction imply entrance of fire into water? If so, how could the fire, prone to extinction just at the touch of water, be supposed to have remained alive in the state of merger in water? This obviously involves the seer's perception of fire not as a matter of stray manifestation but as an all-pervading principle

<sup>1</sup> अग्ने यत्तं दिवि वर्चः पृथिव्यां यदोषधीष्वप्रवा यजत्र ।  
येनान्तरिक्षमुर्वातन्थं तेषः स भानुरर्णवो नृचक्षाः । । RV. III.22.2.

manifesting itself as stars in the sky and agent of cooking, heating and burning the jungle on the earth.

This, however, is a matter of inference, though not of an ordinary sort. It gets more complicated to think of the presence of fire in the digestive system of living beings. But the seer while on one hand conceives of it as a roaring lion in course of consuming the forest, he, on the other, describes it as digesting silently the foodstuff supplied to it in the stomach of living beings. That the fire of the digestive system is essentially the same as that existing outside, was obviously a difficult proposition to arrive at particularly at that stage of human history.

To take another stride ahead, Agni in the Veda is very often associated with the gift of shining gems. In the very first mantra of the Ṛgveda, Agni is characterised as the best giver of gems.<sup>2</sup> While conceding to the view that the word *ratna* in this context may very well stand for anything to the liking of the devotee, it would be unfair to ignore completely the basic meaning of the word in any interpretative venture. In this context, it is interesting to note that it is Agni alone in the Veda which has been characterised as the best giver of gems, *ratnadhātāmam*.<sup>3</sup> This evidently bears out Agni's special relationship with the latter. As a matter of fact, only the direct producer of anything can be the best bestower of it. As regards gems, it is now a matter of common knowledge that they are formed inside the earth owing to heating by the underground fire for a long duration. Without the understanding of this fact, how could the

<sup>2</sup> अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्यं देवमृत्विजम् ।

होतारं रत्नधातमम् । । *Ibid.*, I.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> त्वामग्ने मानुषीरळते विशौ होत्राविदं विर्विचिं रत्नधातमम् । *Ibid.*, V.8.3.



Vedic seer attribute to Agni in particular the task of bestowing gems so pre-eminently? This, unmistakably, shows that the seer was aware of the role of Agni in transforming the baser stuff into gems inside the earth.<sup>4</sup>

While described as pervasive of the heaven in the form of stars and of the earth in the form of the underground heat, vitality of vegetations and digestive heat inside living beings, it is also said to have expanded wide the intermediate space by means of its light.<sup>5</sup> This statement implies that there was a stage when the intermediate space was less expanded or was totally a non-entity and that it was through the agency of Agni that the space was created and expanded. In other words, according to the seer, the whole space lying between one star and the other is the creation of fire. Does this statement not refer to the event of creation in which according to the modern scientist also, fire played the principal role? To remind ourselves of the current scientific theory of creation, in the beginning there was only a ball of fire characterised by immense density and heat. Due to its density and heat, the ball somehow exploded at a certain moment. The explosion made the ball break into a large number of pieces each of which moved away with stupendous velocity due to impact of the explosion and assumed the form of stars. Since a great sound is supposed to have been produced at the time of the explosion, this theory of the origin of the universe is called the Big Bang theory. According to it, the fractions of the primeval ball moved apart from one another with the velocity nearing that of light resulting in the formation of stars, galaxies and clusters. Our sun is just

<sup>4</sup> स जिन्वते जुठरैषु प्रजज्ञिवान्मृषा चित्रेषु नानन्दन सिंहः ।  
वैश्वानरः पृथुपाजा अमर्त्यो वसु रत्ना दयमानो वि दाशुषैः । *Ibid.*, III.2.11.

<sup>5</sup> See Foot Note 1 *Supra*.

one of those fractions giving rise from its own, in course of time, to its planets including the earth. According to one school of scientists, the process of expansion of the universe in the form of movement of the fractions of the ball is still continuing while according to the other the process has already reached the steady state. No matter whichever of these two theories represents the actual position correctly, the scientific position incontrovertibly remains at the moment that the entire space, including the interstellar, interplanetary and what we visualise from our standpoint as lying between the heaven and the earth is really a creation of the primeval ball of fire.

Curiously enough, this is what Viśvāmitra summarily means to suggest when he observes that it is Agni which has given so wide an expansion to the space lying intermediate to the earth and the heaven.

This surmise, however, is not to be taken anyway as wild since references supportive of it are to be met with at several places in the Vedic literature. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for instance, the heaven is said to have been close to the earth in the beginning of the creation.<sup>6</sup> In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, on the other hand, it is observed that in the beginning there was only non-existence which, however, amounted to existence, and that it was out of that state of non-existence that there arose an egg which after lapse of an year's time broke into two parts forming the heaven and the earth.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the Brāhmaṇa talks of expansion of space in the emerging universe, the Upaniṣad goes still backward to the state of the cosmic egg forming the material cause of it. Prior to both the Brāhmaṇa and the Upaniṣad,

<sup>6</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I.4.1.22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad, III.19.1-3.



what Viśvāmitra states is that it is Agni who has brought expansion to the space lying between the heaven and the earth. To say anything more than this in this regard was not possible for him within the limit of a mantra. Nor does there seem to be any intention on his part to say anything elaborately in this context about the creation of the universe. What he has made out in this respect is just casual, as the prayerful mood, free from the intention to expatiate on anything elaborately, can normally permit. But the very casual way of reference to such a significant point bears out the fact that he was fully aware of the underlying idea and that he did not think it necessary to expatiate on it at the moment. Subsequently, however, we find an elaboration on Viśvāmitra's knowledge of cosmology in the story of his determination to create another group of stars in the southern sphere in the midst of the *saptarṣi maṇḍala* when enraged at Indra's order to throw Triśanku down to the earth, as it is recounted in Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>8</sup> Understandably, it was only with the thorough knowledge of the making of the cosmos that he could have thought of creating another universe or even a part of it. That he possessed such a knowledge is evident from the mantra under consideration.

His understanding of fire as the basic stuff of creation is evident in another mantra in which it has been described as the unaging principle of immortality underlying all decaying objects in Nature including vegetations and woods in forests. The context of the cognisance of this fact on his part is production of fire from a pair of sticks in course of sacrifice. According to his statement, fire is produced by churning the sticks and planting the spark of fire thus produced in the

<sup>8</sup> Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, I.60.18-23.

sacrificial pit obviously in the midst of pieces of dry wood. By burning these pieces as well as the offerings, it acts as accomplisher of the sacrifice while practically the real accomplisher of the sacrifice is the seer himself by virtue of having seen the relevant mantra. If Agni is considered as such, that is simply owing to its oneness with the seer by virtue of being omniscient, *jātavedāh*. To state the same thing from another viewpoint, the seer is an epiphany of Agni. As has been stated by several other seers also including Bharadvāja, Agni is the principle of immortality lying in mortals as their consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Viśvāmitra visualises the same Agni as remaining constant behind all decaying and burning woods. While burning and consuming everything that comes into its contact, it remains all the same in all circumstances. Herein lies its immortality.<sup>10</sup>

It is in this idea of immortality that science and philosophy meet together in the Veda. While science is in search of that ultimately constant principle with reference to which everything changing can be explained, philosophy is in pursuit of that principle of immortality which can bear the brunt of suffering arising out of the changing scenario of life. It is due to this expectation of the philosopher that the principle of immortality has not only to be constant but also delightful. While the scientist's principle of constancy is expected to have the promise of giving him intellectual satisfaction by taking from him the burden of coordinating and finally explaining all the sundry data received from the outside world of Matter, the philosopher's principle of immortality is expected to have

<sup>9</sup> इदं ज्योतिरमृतं मर्त्येषु । RV. VI.9.4.

<sup>10</sup> निर्मथितः सुधित आ सुधस्थे युवा कविरध्वरस्य प्रणेता ।

जूर्यस्त्वग्निर्जरो वनेष्वत्रा दधे अमृतं जातवेदा । । *Ibid.*, III.23.1.



the promise of relieving him of all the sense of suffering in him by harmonising all discordant drives, aspirations and ideas in him permanently. In Agni, as visualised by the Vedic seer, both these viewpoints meet together, as while, on one hand, it is the principle of constancy, *dhruva*, in the decaying world, it, on the other, is the principle of immortality obtaining within the mortals. In the words of Viśvāmitra, Agni is the undecaying principle amidst the decaying wood of the forest on one hand and the principle of immortality by virtue of its omniscience on the other. These very aspects of Agni have been brought out more clearly by Bharadvāja when he observes that Agni is the *hotṛ* priest worth seeing as the immortal light in mortals as also the basic stuff of creation lying at the bottom as the principle of constancy in the universe he has manifested out of himself.<sup>11</sup>

The method applied by the Vedic seer in understanding Agni in either of its roles was considerably different from the one applied by the scientist. The scientist tries to reach the primary elements of Nature by eliminating the secondary manifestations in the laboratory. The Vedic seer also does the same to a certain extent but without the aid of any sophisticated instrument or developed laboratory. He makes use of his bare sense organs as tools and of Nature herself as the laboratory. Apart from Nature, if there is anything which can be said to have served him as a laboratory, that is the sacrificial ground. He observes wood etc. being consumed in the fire here as well as in the forest by the jungle fire and understands that while wood etc. have been destroyed, the fire in some form or the other is surviving all

<sup>11</sup> अयं होता प्रथमः पश्यतेममिदं ज्योतिरमृतं मर्त्येषु ।  
अयं स जज्ञे ध्रुव आ निष्तो ऽमर्त्यस्तन्वा ३१ वर्धमानः । *Ibid.*, VI.9.4.

destructions. This is one of the ways he has reached the idea of constancy of fire as is evident from frequent reference to this phenomenon in the Veda.

But this is not all. Had this alone been used by the seer as the method of understanding the mystery of life and the world, the Veda would have no justification for preservation at such a high cost of human diligence for millennia and with the innovation and application of so many intricate and tedious devices of literary preservation as the *pāthas* along with the phonetic laws applied in changing the one into the other. As a matter of fact, the peculiar device the seer uses in unveiling the mystery of creation is to turn inward and look into the basic essence of things with perfect concentration of the force of consciousness. Without going into the details of this process which is very well evident throughout the Veda, we find an unmistakable hint to it in the relevant mantra of Viśvāmitra himself. While describing Agni as having spread its lustre in the heaven, on the earth, inside the earth, in vegetations and water and to have expanded the intermediate space to colossal vastness, he characterises it as an ocean of light and at the same time as an observer of human beings.<sup>12</sup> The ocean of light abounding in tides behind the enormous multiplicity of the tangible world appearing in all its solidity is not an ordinary spectacle accessible to petty inferences made on the basis of flickering of fire here and there on the earth as also in the form of stars in the sky. It is the same luminous and surging ocean which is said to have been born of the *tapas* of the Supreme Being immediately following the birth of Ṛta, Satya and Rātri, as referred to in the famous Aghamarṣaṇa

<sup>12</sup> See Foot Note 1. *Supra*



hymn.<sup>13</sup> While Ṛta and Satya are metaphysical principles and Rātri is the cosmic principle of concealment, it is the luminous ocean abounding in tides which is the first positive and direct source of the manifest creation. It represents the state of transformation of the primeval consciousness into the energy responsible for the creation of the universe. Its luminousness is the self-awareness of the primeval consciousness now on the verge of getting transformed into the luminousness of the primeval fire. Its commotion is the primeval energy lying on the verge of transformation into the physical energy and eventually into Matter. It is this ocean of luminousness lying between the metaphysical and the physical which, as per Viśvāmitra's account, is responsible for creation of space on one hand and, as per the details given by Aghamarṣaṇa, gives rise to time on the other. The *samvatsara* of Aghmarṣaṇa is time as such getting divided into days and nights subsequently with the birth of the sun.<sup>14</sup> Characterisation of this ocean as an observer of human beings is indicative of its supramental nature.

It is significant to note that, notwithstanding its luminousness, the ocean is nowhere indicated to have any element of heat in it. On the contrary, it is so lovely as to have been visualised as lying inside the heart, according to Bharadvāja.<sup>15</sup> Viśvāmitra himself identifies his own self with it when he observes that he is Agni, the

omniscient by virtue of his birth from it, adding further that brilliant is his eye while immortality lies in his mouth.<sup>16</sup> Understandably it is when the brilliance of the ocean comes to evolve heat from within it that this spiritual Agni produces the physical fire out of it culminating eventually in the emergence of the ball of fire, if any, as conceived by the scientist.

Indeed, when the light of consciousness coinciding with free flow of its force in existence comes to meet some sort of deterrence in the process of creation, it happens to have what for the sake of convenience we may call the sensation of touch culminating eventually in the generation of heat. While the touch gives rise to air, the heat produces fire. That air is a product of the same creative process as fire, is evident from another mantra of Viśvāmitra's where he observes that the fundamental force lying in the womb is called *tanūnapāt*; it becomes *narāśamśa* when born; it is called *mātariśvan* when formed in the Mother and when in the state of movement it becomes the surge of air.<sup>17</sup> When the blowing of this primeval air gets some sort of deterrence in the process of creation, it comes to generate heat. Herein lies the occasion of the birth of the physical fire and eventually of the primeval ball of fire.

In this connection it also deserves our attention that Agni is said to have originally been white before it was taken up by the seven streams to be nourished to adulthood, and that it was in its expanded form that it

<sup>13</sup> ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीच्छात् तपसो ऽध्यजायत ।

ततो रात्रयजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः । *Ibid.*, X.190.1

<sup>14</sup> समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अजायत ।

अहोरात्राणि विदधद्विश्वस्य मिषतो वशी । *Ibid.*, X.190.2.

<sup>15</sup> इदं ज्योतिर्हृदय आर्हितं यत् । *Ibid.*, VI.9.6.

<sup>16</sup> अग्निरसि जन्मना जातवेदा घृतं मे चक्षुरमृतं' म आसन् । *Ibid.*, III.26.7.

<sup>17</sup> तनूनर्पादुच्यते गर्भ' आसुरो नराशंसो भवति यद्विजायते ।

मातरिश्वा यदभिमीत मातरि वातस्य सर्गो' अभवत्सरीमणि । *Ibid.*, III.29.11.



became red.<sup>18</sup> Original whiteness of Agni seems to indicate to its spiritual character while the subsequent redness appears to have been evolved in it on assumption of the physicality. In its original whiteness it is also conceived figuratively as a white bull attaining to growth by means of poetic wisdom and letting flow out of it honey and *ghṛta*.<sup>19</sup> This bull is evidently the same as has been envisaged by Vāmadeva as having four horns, three feet, two heads, seven hands, being tied at three places and as having entered into men as the great god and keeping constantly roaring there. He, too, is white in colour and lets flow out of his mouth something which possibly is the same stream of *ghṛta* referred to in the same hymn a little later.<sup>20</sup>

Bull, indeed, is a symbol of might. So is Agni in one of its aspects. It is described as the son of an overpowering force, as also overpowering in itself.<sup>21</sup> It is this force of the primeval Agni symbolised by the might of the bull as well as the tumultuous surge of the ocean which gets transformed eventually into energy constituting the source of the universe along with its entire physical content, as scientists tell us.

<sup>18</sup> अर्धयन्सुभगं सप्त यद्वीः श्वेतं जज्ञानमरुपं महित्वा ।

शिशुं न जातमभ्यारुश्रवा देवासौ अग्निं जनिमन्वपुष्यन् । । *Ibid.*, III.1.4.

श्चोर्तन्ति धारा मधुनो घृतस्य वृषा यत्र वावृधे काव्येन । । *Ibid.*, III.1.8

<sup>19</sup> उपं ब्रह्मा शृणवच्छस्यमानं चतुः शृङ्गो ऽवमीद गौर एतत् । *Ibid.*, IV.58.2

चत्वारि शृङ्गा त्रयो अस्य पादा द्वे शीर्षे सप्त हस्तासौ अस्य ।

त्रिधां बुद्धो वृषभो रौरवीति महो देवो मर्त्या आ विवेश । । *Ibid.*, IV.58.3.

<sup>20</sup> एता अर्षन्ति हृद्यात् समुद्राच्छतव्रजा रिपुणा नावचक्षे ।

घृतस्य धारां अभि चाकशीमि हिरण्ययो वेत्सो मध्यं आसाम् । । *Ibid.*, IV.58.5

<sup>21</sup> सहसस्पुत्र । *Ibid.*, III.14.4.

सूनो सहस्रो । *Ibid.*, III.1.8.

सासहिः । *Ibid.*, III.16.4.

## II. Velocity of Light

There is another mantra seen by Viśvāmitra which besides its extraordinarily profound metaphysical implications discussed already in the sixth chapter, embodies a certain detail of extremely significant scientific value. It reads as follows:

“The great god (Indra) continues to assume each and every form (in the universe) through the exercise of creative powers born of his own personality. This gets materialised owing to his capacity to move from heaven to earth three times well within a *muhūrta* by virtue of drinking Soma in season and out of season in spite of being an observer of the law of universal dynamics.”<sup>22</sup>

What is relevant to this context is Indra's creative movement between the heaven and the earth three times just within a *muhūrta*. The significance of this statement has remained ignored until now due to wrong interpretations given to it by commentators and translators. Sāyaṇa identifies three visits of Indra with the three libations, that is the morning, the midday and the evening, on one hand and explains the word *muhūrta* as a 'moment' on the other in transgression of Viśvāmitra's clear statement that Indra pays the three visits just within a *muhūrta*.

Incidentally, the word *muhūrta* has been used only once more and that too by Viśvāmitra himself in Ṛgveda

<sup>22</sup> रूपंरुपं मधवां बोभवीति मायाः कृण्वानस्तन्वंः परि स्वाम् ।

त्रिर्यद्विवः परि मुहूर्तमागात् स्वैर्मन्त्रैरेनृतुपा ऋतावा । । *Ibid.*, III.53.8.



III.33.5 in the context of his crossing the twin rivers Vipāśā and Śutudrī along with the forces of king Bharata. The seer prays to the rivers to stop their flow for a *muhūrta* so that he, along with the forces comprising pedestrians, bullock carts and chariots may cross over them.<sup>23</sup> Practically, this crossing cannot be accomplished just within a moment. It must take considerable time to accomplish it. But what precisely is the duration of time meant by *muhūrta*?

Fortunately, in Indian astronomy the word *muhūrta* continues to be used for millennia in the established sense of 48 minutes of duration. That duration may understandably fit in very well in the context of Viśvāmitra's crossing the rivers along with the forces of the king. As such, there is possibly no reason for admitting the same duration in the context of Indra's visit to the earth thrice in a *muhūrta* as is recounted in the mantra.

Since *Surya* is the lord of the heaven as per the Vedic accounts, Indra's movement between the heaven and the earth can veritably be taken as that between the sun and the earth.

Having admitted so, it follows arithmetically that each movement of Indra between the sun and the earth takes 8 minutes of time. Interestingly enough, this precisely is the time the solar rays take in reaching the earth at the velocity of 300,000 kms. per second, the distance between the two bodies being approximately 14,5000,000 kms.

<sup>23</sup> रमध्वं मे वचसे सोम्याय ऋतावररीरुपं मुद्दुतमेवैः। *Ibid.*, III.33.5.

Thus, understanding of the time, light takes in reaching the earth from the sun so precisely as to coincide with the same as determined by modern science, may fairly well be taken to imply Viśvāmitra's precise knowledge of the velocity of light as well as the actual distance between the sun and the earth.

As regards the first one of these two last propositions, we have a clear evidence of its prevalence in ancient India in a *Śloka* quoted by Sāyaṇa in his commentary on *Ṛgveda* I.50.4. The *Śloka* reads, in translation, as follows:

“Kindly allow me to offer my obeisance to you, O Lord *Sūrya*, who travel in space at the velocity of two thousand, two hundred and two *yojanas* just within half a *nimeśa*.”<sup>24</sup>

As per the canons provided in Indian texts, including the *Manusmṛti*, for understanding the velocity of light mentioned in this *Śloka*, it comes around 190,000 miles per second as against 186,000 miles per second admitted by modern science. Obviously the difference between the two figures is approximately 2% which, besides being quite insignificant, is also explicable in terms of possible deviation from 100% precision in the conversion from the ancient Indian to the modern scale of measurement. Allowing for that much possible discrepancy, the concurrence of the velocity of light as given by ancient Indian sages with that determined by modern science is really astounding.

<sup>24</sup> योजनानां सहस्रे द्वे द्वे शते द्वे च योजने।  
एकेन निमेषार्धेन क्रममाणाय नमोऽस्तु ते।। Quoted by Sāyaṇa in his  
commentary on *Ṛgveda* I.50.4



As regards the antiquity of this *Śloka*, it, as mentioned above, has been quoted by Sāyaṇa belonging to the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD and that too from some *Smṛti* which must be distantly anterior to him. Since the *Smṛtis* are based on *Śrutis* in their fundamental propositions, the significant cognitive content of this *Śloka* may fairly well be taken to have its source in some Vedic statement. One such Vedic statement to this effect is obviously the present mantra as seen by Viśvāmitra.

It goes without saying that the velocity of light by virtue of its constancy has proved the greatest means in unveiling by science the mysteries of the universe including its age, dimensions and processes of creation. That such a significant key to secrets of the physical world was already known to Viśvāmitra is in itself sufficient to give us an idea of the extent to which his vision on the scientific side also was correct.

### III. Mobility of the Earth

Another significant vision of Viśvāmitra's having scientific bearing relates to the mobility of the earth. It is pertinent to note in this context that the great Āryabhaṭa conceived of the idea of the mobility of the earth on the basis of the view of stationary objects lying on the bank of a river seen behind from a boat moving down stream. He puts his argument for the earth's mobility as under:

“Just as a man in a boat moving ahead observes stationary objects (on either side of the river) as moving backward, even so are the stationary stars seen by people at Lañkā (on the equator), as moving exactly towards the west.”

This however does not mean that he considered the astral world as absolutely stationary. For, in the very next verse he observes:

“The entire group of asterisms together with planets moves exactly towards the west of Lañkā, being driven constantly by the *pravaha* air so as to cause their rising and setting.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, it is evident that, in his view, the earth and the asterism both are mobile, with this difference, however, that while the asterism is drifting away driven by the particular air towards the West, the earth is moving in a rotational way and that also eastward.

This theory as propounded by Āryabhaṭa happened to be criticised by Varāhamihira about a century later and by Brahmagupta in the beginning of the seventh century A.D. It is significant to note that Pṛthūdaka (860 A.D. in his commentary on Brahmasphuṭa-siddhānta of Brahmagupta) argues in favour of Āryabhaṭa's proposition. According to him, the followers of Āryabhaṭa showed their disagreement with the Master out of their fear of the public opinion.<sup>26</sup> However, the arguments

<sup>25</sup> अनुलोमगतिर्नोस्थः पश्यत्यचलं विलोमं यद्वत् ।  
अचलानि भानि तद्वत् समपश्चिमगानि लङ्कायाम् ।  
उदयास्तमयनिमित्तं नित्यं प्रवहेरा वायुना क्षिप्तः ।  
लङ्कासमपश्चिमगो भपञ्जरः सग्राहो भ्रमति । ।

*Āryabhaṭiya* (Edited and translated by K.S. Shukla and K.V. Sarma and published by Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, 1976) Gola Pada, 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.



adduced by them to contradict Āryabhaṭa's proposition are highly interesting and speak of their profound understanding of the situation. Ācārya Lalla, a direct student of Āryabhaṭa, for instance, observes the following while presenting a critique of the teacher's theory:

"If the earth were to rotate, how birds on it would be able to reach their nests; arrows shot towards the sky would in any case always fall towards the West; clouds ought to move always towards the West if the earth were to rotate eastward. If these problems were supposed not to rise at all due to slow movement of the earth, how can it be possible for the earth to take a round just in a single day's time?"<sup>27</sup>

Ironically, the same instance of the bird and its nest which was adduced by Ācārya Lalla in the refutation of Āryabhaṭa to restore the stationary position of the earth, makes an appearance in one of Viśvāmitra's visions turning rather in support of the mobility of the earth. While envisaging the relationship between the astral world and the earth, he takes them as held together in one fold in the abode of Ṛta, though moving differently in themselves. In spite of their diametrically opposite movement, however, their mutual relationship remains constant. This, according to the seer, is due to operation

<sup>27</sup> यदि च भ्रमति क्षमा तदास्य कुलायं कथमाप्नुयुः खगाः ।  
इषवो ऽभिनभः समुज्झिता निपतन्तः स्युरपाम्पतेर्दिशि । ।  
पूर्वाभिमुखे भ्रमे भुवो वरुणाशाभिमुखो व्रजेत घनः ।  
अथ मन्दगमात्तदा भवेत् कथमेकेन दिवा परिभ्रमः । ।

Ācārya Lalla, *Śiṣyadhūvṛddhidam*,  
*Mithyājñānādhyāya*, 42-43.

of one uniform creative will between the two. It works as a bond similar to one working between the bird and the nest. The bird moves around for hours and even for the whole day and yet returns to its nest drawn by some sort of affection. Even so the earth and the astral world keep moving in diverse directions all the time and yet remain tied to each other with a certain bond of interrelationship which the seer terms as the common bond of creative will.<sup>28</sup> It is not difficult to understand that what is visualised by the seer as the principle of creative will between the earth and the astral world, is viewed in modern times, from the purely physical viewpoint, as the law of gravitation.

The mobility of the earth gets confirmed by yet another mantra of Viśvāmitra's. It is addressed to Indra who is said to have made the earth sit in her own house. Here the earth is characterised as homogenous, mobile, vast and impossible to be tread across. Indra is said to have brought stability to the astral world and the intermediate space as well as fluidity to water.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. Possibility of Scientific Vision through Intuition

As regards the equipment of Viśvāmitra for understanding the mobility of the earth and the asterism which required the scientist in the modern age to make use of highly developed mathematics in addition to equally sensitive instruments for observation, what seems likely is that the seer's knowledge of this as well as other phenomena, did not depend on anything like

<sup>28</sup> क्विर्नृचक्षां अभि पीमचष्ट ऋतस्य योना विधृते मदन्ती ।  
नानां चक्राते संदनं यथा वेः समानेन क्रतुना सविदाने । । *RV. III. 54. 6.*

<sup>29</sup> नि सामनामिषिरामिन्द्र भूमिं महीमंपारां सदने ससत्य ।  
अस्तंभनाद् द्यां वंपभो अन्तरिक्षमर्षन्त्वापस्त्वयेह प्रसूताः । । *Ibid., III. 30. 9*



this. He seems neither to have developed any such instrument for observation nor to have evolved any detailed mathematical system. Instead of these, he, as records bear out, had developed such a clarity of consciousness through intensive *sādhanā* or *tapas* that he could understand such things directly without any aid of instruments and detailed mathematical system. That such a knowledge can be acquired through concentration of mind alone is borne out also by Patañjali's claim that by means of *saṁyama* on the solar orb one may have understanding of the working of the cosmos, by means of *saṁyama* on the lunar orb, one may understand the scheme of the position of stars, while by applying the same *saṁyama* on the polar star, one can understand the course of its movement.<sup>30</sup>

#### V. Viśvāmitra as Innovator of the Idea of Zero

In mathematics also, however, he was not so primitive as is ordinarily understood. As regards the numerals, from his frequent use of *sahasra*, thousand,<sup>31</sup> it is evident that the figure was a matter of commonsense in his way of understanding. As per the context, this figure may be taken to signify an abundantly large number, without, however, putting any limit to the seer's capacity of numeration. For, at one place he talks of a figure as large as three hundred, three thousand, thirty and nine. Though this figure is not so large as to be considered any way astounding, as is the case with the Yajurveda, the recurrence of the multiples of ten in it such as thirty, three hundred and three thousand along with the

<sup>30</sup> भुवनज्ञानं सूर्ये संयमात् । Patañjali, *Yoga-Sutra* III.26

चन्द्रे ताराव्यूहज्ञानम् । *Ibid.*, 27.

ध्रुवे तदगतिज्ञानम् । *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> RV. III.13.6; III.22.1; III.30.7

largest one-digital figure, i.e., nine, bears out the fact that Viśvāmitra was fully aware of multiplication by ten which by virtue of its sheer easiness holds in it the key to advanced mathematical development.

Whether the figure zero (0) was practically used or not in this numeration, it is difficult to decide either way from the scanty data we have at our disposal. One thing, however, is certain that it is Viśvāmitra who for the first time in the history of mankind has used *sūna* to denote nothingness which in a slightly altered form such as *sūnya*, comes eventually to be used for the zero in India, which is supposed by all means to have been the homeland of this one of the most significant discoveries of the human mind.<sup>32</sup> We may surmise the source of this discovery in the capability of the human mind to unload itself of all its contents amounting to a state of negation of everything and yet serve as the source of knowledge about everything. That Vedic seers had reached this state of mind is evident from a Ṛgvedic hymn seen by Laukya Āṅgīrasa, envisioning emergence of Existence out of apparent Non-existence. Zero seems to be a mathematical rendering of the same idea of Non-existence serving as the source of all existence.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> माऽदुष्कृतौ व्यैनसाध्यौ शूनमारताम् । *Ibid.*, III.33.13

<sup>33</sup> देवानां पूर्वे युगेऽसंतः सदजायत । *Ibid.*, X.72.2



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Born in the year 1934 near Varanasi, Prof. Satya Prakash Singh is a product of the Banaras Hindu University as also a D.Litt. of the Aligarh Muslim University. Having served the Aligarh Muslim University as a Lecturer, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, he retired as Chairman of the Department of Sanskrit in 1994. He has also served as Director of the Dharam Hinduja International Centre of Indic Research, Delhi for a period of four years. Presently he is a Senior Fellow of the Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, Ujjain as also Incharge of the Vedic Research Centre, New Delhi. By virtue of his merits as a scholar of repute he has been honoured by several awards such as the Ganganath Jha award and the Banabhatta Puraskāra of the Sanskrit Academy, Uttar Pradesh, Rajaji Literary Award of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, Swami Pranavananda Best Book of the Year in Psychology Award, Patna and the Vedic Scholar of Eminence Award of Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, Ujjain. His works have been translated extensively in several languages of India and abroad namely Malayalam, Urdu, Arabic, Spanish and German. Besides scores of research papers having to his credit, Professor Singh has published a number of books of high merit including:

1. Sri Aurobindo and Whitehead :

On the Nature of God

2. Philosophy of Dirghatamas

3. Upanisadic Symbolism

4. Vedic Symbolism

5. Sri Aurobindo, Jung and Vedic Yoga