

Introduction

This book is concerned with the investigation of causal interconnections between a linguistic system and the style of a text representing that language. The language is Old Indian in its most archaic, Vedic variety. The text is the *R̥g Veda*, a collection of hymns to Aryan deities, which probably originated during the last centuries of the IIInd and the first centuries of the ISt millenniums BC, and represents the very beginning of the Old Indian literary tradition.

It is well-known that the history of the Old Indian language—if it may be so termed—appears to be a history of styles succeeding one another, as opposed to a strict evolution of the language. More than thirty years ago Louis Renou wrote about this phenomenon in the foreword to his *Histoire de la Langue Sanskrite*,¹ and this thesis was brilliantly defended in the body of the book itself [121.2].

Thus the correlation between language and style appears to be central to the historical development of the Old Indian language. In a study of the *R̥g Veda* text, which stands at the beginning of this development, the problem of such a correlation acquires special dimensions, because scholars customarily look for reflections of an earlier, undocumented stage of development in the current language. Interest in reconstruction has taken precedence over the study of the language system *per se*, its specific modes of functioning, and its analysis as the first documented stage in a long chain of further diachronic evolution.

The unique importance of the *R̥g Veda* appears to be that, on the one hand, this enormously long text (1028 hymns with an average length of 10 stanzas per hymn) may be the last representative of the Indo-European tradition, but on the other hand, the first document of an original Indian culture. As far as our study of the interaction of style and language is concerned, the former approach tends to dominate.

The comparative and historical approach to the study of the RigVedic poetic language has a long and honorable tradition behind it. It was first sketched back in the 1850s by one of the most distinguished Indo-European scholars of that time, Adalbert Kuhn, who, having compared Ancient Greek

and RigVedic data, succeeded in reconstructing not an isolated word, but a whole phrase, in which he recognized a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) poetic formula—"undying fame" in Old Indian: *śrávas . . . ákṣitam, ákṣiti śrávaḥ* and in Ancient Greek: *Kléos áphthiton* [99.467].

The existence of Common Indo-European poetic formulas presupposes the previous existence of a Common Indo-European language, a notion that was clearly defined only considerably later by J. Wackernagel in his influential article "*Indogermanische Dichtersprache*" [149.186-204],² where he succinctly described the main characteristics of that language from the point of view of morphology, metrics, syntax, and phraseology. A Common Indo-European poetic language could now be reconstructed on the basis of the comparison of a whole series of attested ancient poetic traditions from almost every area of the Indo-European world, including Celtic, Old Norse, Slavic, and Avestan traditions, among others. From these comparisons one can then speak of even narrower, more localized poetic traditions, such as the Indo-Iranian one, which can be reconstructed comparing the *Ṛg Veda* and Avestan data.³

During the last decennia, historical and comparative research of the Common Indo-European poetic tradition has been actively pursued. As a result of these studies, or rather, as an approximate summary of a certain stage of research, Rüdiger Schmitt published a monograph in which the Old Indian data figures prominently [136]. The number of securely-established Common Indo-European formulas and phrases has been steadily growing, work is in progress on themes and genres of Common Indo-European poetry (heroic, sacral, charms and incantations), and the Common Indo-European background of some metrical forms is also under investigation. Most importantly, the figure of the ancient poet and the nature of his creative act is now vigorously under discussion.

Modern research on the Common Indo-European poetic language is distinguished by its tendency to redefine the basic methods of investigation and to look for fresh approaches. Thus Wolfgang Meid [109] pays special attention to the chronological problems of Common Indo-European and its different stages. The similarities in the Greek and the Aryan data are regarded as common innovations originating in the postulated Eastern PIE and reflecting a regional poetic tradition. Only the reconstruction of formulas—as distinct from texts—is considered to be feasible: the former belong to *langue* whereas the latter belong to *parole*. Meid puts forward several principles for reconstructing the Indo-European poet's functions; he defines the RigVedic brahmin as a "transmitter of knowledge" (*veda*) who is charged with formulating "truth" in the language of his own time [109.12].

Enrico Campanile in his study of the Indo-European poetic culture

[62.32-33] also stresses the role of the Indo-European poet as the custodian and transmitter of the basic cultural and social needs of his society. In the initial stages of the Old Indian culture the poetic function was not yet separated from the priestly one—this separation occurred at a later time—and poetic art was still the focus of every kind of verbal activity.

Modern comparative linguistics, using the results of linguistic reconstruction, tries to transcend the confines of language proper and apply itself to cultural and historical fields, including reflections of PIE civilization. This resulted in Emil Benveniste's fundamental reconstruction of fragments of PIE religion, law, social customs, etc. [58]; and his methods have stimulated research in the more specialized field of Indo-European poetics. There have been attempts to analyze Old Indian data from the *R̥g Veda* hymns to establish the degree to which they reflect the basic principles of Indo-European poetics and to define the goals of poetic art as well as the poet's functions [14.36-88; 145.189-251].

A new approach to PIE poetic language owes its appearance to the recently published papers of Ferdinand de Saussure concerning the RigVedic and other ancient Indo-European poetic traditions (including ancient Greek, Latin and ancient Germanic).⁴ De Saussure suggests that ancient poetic texts belonging to those traditions were based on the principles of anagrams: in certain verses the words are arranged around the name of the deity being praised, which occupies the key metrical position. These words can indicate the name both in their complete form and by means of the syllables that constitute them. The RigVedic hymns, which illustrate this principle, testify to a very archaic procedure of grammatical and poetic analysis.⁵ Most importantly, de Saussure pointed out the deliberate and intentional character in the construction of these texts, where formal phonetical and grammatical word-analysis reveals the text's poetic function.

In order to have a clear view of the problems that appear most relevant to modern studies in PIE poetic language, it will be useful to review, if only briefly, some general theories that have influenced the study of various aspects (including linguistic) of archaic cultures. New approaches to the study of oral literature and poetic language must also be discussed.

First to be mentioned is the hypothesis of Marcel Mauss [107], according to which the socioeconomic life of a certain type of archaic society is based on the circular exchange of gifts. The comparative ethno-sociological investigation of some contemporary societies of an archaic type (the North-American Indians, the so-called primitive tribes of Polynesia and Melanesia) led Mauss to conclude that the principle of the modern AmerIndian potlatch can be considered fundamental to any archaic society at a certain stage of its evolution. The potlatch is commonly defined as a

feast set up by tribal chieftains in connection with various important events of social life involving gifts and reciprocal gifts on an ever-increasing scale, wherein all the participants are gradually drawn into the cycle of gift-exchange. Such an exchange concerns various rivalling social groups. The goal of the potlatch is social, not material: it enhances the social standing of the giver (although there is an extreme variant: annihilation of riches as proof of social superiority). The relationship between worshipper and deity follows the same lines: a sacrifice is expected to be reciprocated with a greater boon. Mauss found traces of this pattern in the ancient PIE culture; the Indian tradition of the Epic and Classical periods illustrates them in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Śāstras*.

Benveniste developed the linguistic aspect of Mauss's hypothesis, adding data from ancient Indo-European languages [57.315-326]. Analyzing the semantics of the PIE root *dō-* (meaning "give" in most languages, but "take" in Hittite), he compares it with the Indo-Iranian verb *ā-dā* and concludes that *dō-* originally meant neither "give" nor "take," but was semantically ambivalent. The PIE root **nem-* had a similar meaning: compare Gothic *niman*, "take" but Greek *nemō*, both "apportion" (a share) and "receive" (a share). Such ambivalence is characteristic of a certain lexical stratum (both verbs and nouns) in various Indo-European languages; this fact makes probable the existence of a circular exchange custom in Indo-European prehistory, similar to the North American potlatch.

A novel approach to the study of oral folk traditions was initiated by Milman Parry and Albert Lord [103] who analyzed lexical repetitions in Homer and in the Serbo-Croatian epics. They came to the conclusion that the basic unit of the epic language is the formula—a word or a word-group that is regularly used to represent a certain notion and that occupies a fixed position in the metrical scheme. The metrical conditioning of formulas produces a certain degree of predictability of epic diction. Their methods have been successfully applied to the Old Indian epics in Pavel A. Grintser's fundamental work [5].

Finally, the study of PIE poetics has been directly influenced by Roman Jakobson's work on general linguistics and poetic language. He argues, after Edward Sapir, that the primary essence and aim of the language consists in being a means of communication. The communicative purpose of the language gives rise to two of its principal dichotomies: the oppositions of markedness/unmarkedness and variation/invariance [51.306-318]. Language is a semiotic system whose signs are reciprocally transferrable (Charles Peirce); this property is very important for the communication process, since the possibility of code-switching is opposed to the linguistic multivocity that originates in homonymy and ellipsis.

About Peirce's division of signs into three classes: indices (contiguity relations between signifier and signified), icons (relations deriving from some common actual traits), and symbols (relations based on imputed contiguity), Jakobson notes: "Iconicity plays a vast and necessary, though evidently subordinate, part in the different levels of linguistic structure"[51.323].

Jakobson considers poetic language to be one of the varieties of the act of verbal communication in which the addresser sends a message to the addressee [50.193-230]. The difference between messages lies in a different hierarchical order of functions; the predominant function is referential (or denotative or cognitive). "The set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, the focus on the message for its own sake, is the poetic function of language" [50.202]. The most important characteristic of the poetic function is the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination [50.204].

Novel ideas and fresh approaches in neighboring areas of knowledge could not fail to make an impact on the historical and comparative study of PIE poetic language. Scholars cannot be satisfied with the notion of a "sum-total of formulas"—this has already been mentioned—but they try to study poetic language in its connection with the society where it originated and whose instrument it was. As Calvert Watkins has observed: "On the diachronic as well as the synchronic plane, we require a holistic model of language as a social fact, of language and culture, language and society, language and pragmatics" [151.105]. The task of reconstructing PIE poetry is unrealistic; scholars can only hope to reconstruct a few themes particular to that poetry, and some of the devices the poets used when elaborating on those themes in traditional poetry [153.271]. Among these devices, the leading role is played by formulas, and the task of their reconstruction has made great progress lately [152].⁶ Data have been drawn from a greater variety of sources—in particular, the much wider use of Celtic and Hittite findings, especially from the studies of Watkins⁷ and Campanile. Watkins rightly stresses that the study of PIE poetic language should be simultaneously synchronic and diachronic, both historically comparative and analytically descriptive [155.4]. This language is to be considered as a grammar of sorts with both a phonological component (the domain of metrics and phonetic figures) and a morphological component (the domain of grammatical figures). On a higher level it has a syntactic component (formulaics) and a semantic component (thematics). There is also a pragmatic component (the domain of poet-performer/audience interaction), which dominates the entire grammar [153.270]. Such are the ideas, methods of investigation, and tasks of the comparative and historical study of PIE poetic language at the present time.

Jan Gonda completed the groundwork for the stylistic study of the *Rg Veda*. For the last forty years he has been busy defining key problems of Vedic poetic style, having amassed and classified an enormous amount of data in a series of monographs. Gonda is fully justified in stressing the principle of stylistic repetitions as being central to this document of oral tradition [87]. He treats these repetitions as a special creative device of the Vedic Ṛṣis. Sounds and their combinations are repeated in certain positions of the metrical scheme; the same is true of individual words and balanced syntactic structures; in other words, this principle is consistently carried out on all linguistic levels. But Gonda observes that a mere enumeration of the types of repetitions cannot provide a key to the understanding of the hymns. These repetitions and various parallel structures should not be considered purely stylistic ornaments. The language of Vedic mantras abounds in formulas and is highly conventionalized. Its poetry is rather imitative, since the Ṛṣis were developing the traditions of oral folk literature [82.155-156].

Epithets of gods, enumerated in praise hymns and sometimes in long string formations, are treated from a functional point of view by Gonda. They are frequently used not for the mere description of deities, but rather, for inducing desirable qualities in them [79]. Constant epithets tend to function as theophoric proper names, but the latter are endowed in the *Rg Veda* with particular magic connotations [81]. Gonda has shown that the RigVedic style combines two opposite tendencies: on the one hand, repetition and redundancy manifests itself in the juxtaposition of synonyms or words of similar formal structure; on the other hand, extreme brevity is expressed by the regular omission of words and phrases which can be usually supplied by context (or ellipsis, although brachiology may result in a logical shift) [78]. Phrases containing comparisons are frequently elliptical; such phrases are quite typical of Vedic poetic style [85].

Although of undoubtedly high value, Gonda's studies remain to a certain degree fragmentary because they are concerned with several unconnected—though very important—stylistic problems. There seems to be no supporting uniform theory that encompasses the range of stylistic features and with which those features may be consistently approached. Gonda also deals with certain parts of mythology (or rather, of a model of the universe seen by the authors of the text) that found direct expression in RigVedic language and style—in particular, the relationship between “gods” and “powers” in the *Rg Veda* [86], dyads [76], and triads [88]. Later, this book discusses Gonda's theories concerning the Vedic poet-Ṛṣi and his particular creative role.

Our understanding of RigVedic style has been greatly advanced by Louis Renou's work, and especially by his translations of and commentaries

on hymnic cycles in “Etudes védiques et paniniennes” [118]. Notwithstanding his conciseness, Renou’s work opened up new vistas for further stylistic studies.

The cultic character of the *Rg Veda* collection makes it necessary that the ritual connected with a given text should be taken into consideration in a detailed study of its style and language. But the problem of the relationship between hymn and ritual remains quite obscure and cannot be discussed in detail here [9.37f.]. To put it bluntly: at the time of the composition of the *Rg Veda*, there was probably no single system of sacrificial rites. Different priestly families may have adhered to ritual variants distinct in particular details, and many hymns might have been recited as part of different rituals. Most probably, some of the hymns had no ritual application whatsoever and should be considered religious poetry in its purest form. In most cases it is quite impossible to separate ritual hymns from nonritual hymns, and this fact may be the basis of Renou’s statement that the *Rg Veda* is outside of Vedic religion; i.e. unlike the other Vedas, it is not a manual for religious practice. A prayer that is not clearly connected with ritual can easily slip into magic [129.273]. One should certainly keep in mind the fact that the highly symbolic character and suggestive style of Vedic language does not help us to understand whether the poet’s message is to be related to ritual or myth. Finally, the authors’ aversion to a linear narration of events, their anticipatory breakthroughs and circular backtrackings, make it almost impossible to reconstruct an actual sequence of ritual actions.

The problem of a particular hymn’s ritual relationship must not be neglected when discussing the *Rg Veda* collection as a whole. Much content and style in the *Rg Veda* can be explained if we apply to it Victor Turner’s ideas: the special role of liminal rituals and the two alternating patterns in human relations—the usual pattern and the one that is valid only for the liminal period [46.170].

According to Franciscus Bernardus Jacobus Kuiper’s hypothesis [22.47-100], based on Alfred Hillebrandt’s suggestions, the RigVedic Aryans conceived of time as a cyclical process. At the end of every year the cosmos returned to its point of departure, an undifferentiated state of chaos, to be reborn. The aim of the New Year festival was to gain victory over chaos and to recreate the organized cosmos. The most archaic kernel of the RigVedic collection was connected with that New Year festival. These hymns were only one part of the New Year ritual and were included in poetic verbal contests. Other events also took place on that occasion: sacrificial rituals, generous ritual gift-giving, chariot-races, etc. This interpretation of the RigVedic collection is based on an understanding of the *Uṣas*-hymns as praises to the rebirth of the primordial light, of the triumph over darkness

that gives hope for the new year. In this connection the Goddess is asked for riches, vital strength, male progeny, and prosperity. During such critical periods, when the forces of darkness and light are in confrontation, ritual should help the forces of light, and the importance of priest and poet in the Aryan society increases inordinately (this is the second pattern in Turner's terms [45.170]). According to Turner's notions of that archaic time, the society's survival was dependent on ritual activities.

Quite pertinent to the study of Vedic style and language is the idea of the universality of ritual as a force that gathers and refines all human means of understanding the world [42.7-60]. Ritual developed into a kind of "pre-art" that was originally syncretic and only later became differentiated into various independent branches. There can be no doubt of the existence of some kind of connection between the verbal text of the *Ṛg Veda*—at least of its most ancient strata—and Old Indian ritual, notwithstanding the rather opaque character of that connection. Such opacity mostly concerns the possibility of reconstructing the ritual on the basis of the preserved text. In some cases, particular features of language and style can be most adequately interpreted if we postulate a ritual connection.

This short survey of the present state of the art—the study of Indo-European poetic language and *Ṛg Veda* style, general aspects of the theory of poetic language and the theory of ritual—is offered to clarify the direction of our study. This work was conceived as a synchronic description of the poetic language of the *Ṛg Veda* as a uniform synchronic cross-section. In this regard the present work is basically different from comparative and historical studies in the domain of Indo-European poetic language which incorporate abundant Vedic data. The aim of comparative studies is reconstruction, and the Old Indian facts are thus used diachronically. There can be no doubt that ignoring the results of the genetic approach can only detract from synchronic description and analysis. Some authors now require that the method of research should be both comparative-diachronic and descriptive-analytic (compare Watkins [151]). Modifying this requirement somewhat as it applies to a descriptive study, one may say that the method should be synchronic, but *diachrony should be contained in synchrony*. For instance, the description of Vedic poetic language should also deal with the problem of "the language of gods" vs. "the language of men" as it appears in the present text, although this problem has actually a Common Indo-European background. Such is this work's perspective on the correlation between synchrony and diachrony.

Since the aim of this study is a synchronic description of the language of an ancient *poetic* text, one of the main tasks is to define the ways and means by which the linguistic poetic function made use of the given

RigVedic language system. A pragmatic approach to the language of an ancient document is fully justified for an analysis of the *Rg Veda*. In modern linguistics, pragmatics is defined as “a science investigating language in its relation to those who use it” [36.419]. It studies speech acts and the contexts wherein they are realized.

In this study the main structural unit of the *Rg Veda*, the hymn, or rather the praise-hymn (constituting an overwhelming majority of the collection), is functionally approached as an act of communication between the addresser-worshipper and the addressee-deity. With the help of a hymn, the believer sends a message to the deity. Such an act of communication is normally one-sided, since the worshipper calls upon the deity and speaks to him, but the deity hearkens to him in silence: the gods’ direct speech is extremely rare in the *Rg Veda*. In communication acts of this kind, an exceptionally important role is played by an orientation toward the addressee, which finds its formal (grammatical) expression in nominal vocatives and verbal imperatives. This is “poetry of the second person,” in Jakobson’s words [50.203], because the addressee is completely dependent on the addresser.

Finally, the communicative purpose of the Vedic praise-hymn stresses the importance of its formal side. In order to be acceptable to the gods the hymn should be skillfully made, and the idea of skill denotes, in the first place, the formal construction of a piece of poetry. In this way the poetic function, the self-orientation of language, is highly important for the study of this text.

As shown in a previous paper [69.255-268], the RigVedic praise-hymn may be described as a standard model composed of two parts: explicative (descriptions) and appellative (addresses and invocations). The first part is built upon a hierarchy of oppositions covering distinctive features of various levels, such as the names of actions (characteristic and regularly repeated), epithets (constant actions), attributes (i.e., objects and qualities normally connected with a given deity), and external ties (immanent—such as family connections—or those related to story plot). Units of different levels can be connected by transformational relations: thus epithets, attributes, and ties can often represent implied actions, and may sometimes manifest themselves in the diachrony.⁸

Such a model is characterized by a constant switch of levels and code-change. The appellative part of the hymn normally—though not obligatorily—follows its explicative part. These two parts are usually in mutual balance. Sometimes, however, either of them may virtually disappear. The latter instance mostly applies to purely mythological descriptions or standard requests.

Even though the pragmatic approach to the language and style of the *Rg Veda* is not controversial, there are always grave obstacles in the path of the student dealing with a text from a long-gone civilization. Nothing is left of that time except the hymns of the *Rg Veda*, the unique remaining source about the people whose medium of communication was poetic language. But the study of the speech-act contexts and their concretized demarcation is often impeded or made will-nigh impossible by the intentional obscurity of the hymns. Their contents refer simultaneously to several levels: mythological, cosmological, and ritual. The information obtained from more recent Old Indian texts quite often turns out to be of dubious value because the *Rig Veda* stands at the very source of the Indian tradition and is self-contained. Thus, explaining *Rg Veda* obscurities by extrapolating from later tradition can dangerously distort the real picture.

The functional approach to the language of the *Rg Veda* presupposes a basic knowledge of the cultural milieu of the text. Although our study is a linguistic one, it requires some advance knowledge of the Vedic Aryans' model of the universe. A model of the universe should be interpreted as "a reduced and simplified reflection of the sum-total of all notions about the surrounding world that exist inside a given tradition and are regarded in their system-and-operation aspects" [27.167f.]. The *Rg Veda* presents one variant of the mytho-poetic model of the universe, the essence of which consists of representing nature not through a reflection of primary data but through code-switching, effected by sign systems [27.161f.]. The basic means of interpreting the universe is the myth.

The Vedic model of the universe is cosmos-oriented: it is both a measure and a part of everything. The life of an Aryan is related to the structures of space and time through the law of universal circulation (*ṛtá*) on the level of synchrony. Its diachronical aspect implies a cyclical replacement of chaos by the cosmos, and vice versa, and this is reflected in the annual ritual cycle. Synchrony and diachrony are inseparably linked together: it is a salient feature of a mytho-poetic model of the universe.

The dynamics of cosmology finds its reflection in the very etymology of the word *ṛtá-*, a past passive participle of the verb *r-/ar-*: "to move, be moving." *Ṛtá* denotes the cycle that orders both the universe and society. It is in obeisance to the law of *ṛtá-* that the sun rises and sets. In Vedic mythology the various aspects of the sun are represented by several different deities: thus *Sūrya* is the main sun-god (compare *svár-/sūr-* "sun, light, heaven"); *Savitár* the Inciter (verb *sū-* "to impel, incite"); *Mitrá* the god of friendship and contract as well as of sun and light (as opposed to darkness); *Pūṣán* the god of solar energy, who gives prosperity to people, cattle and pastures;⁹ *Uṣás* the goddess of the dawn (verb *vas-/uṣ-* "to light up"; *Agní-*

the god of fire (in all of its manifestations). Moreover, the common name for "god" is also related to light and day: *devá-* is from the root *div-/dyu-* "to shine" (cf. *dyaúh* "sky; day;" *dívā* "by day"). The daily solar cycle is treated as two suns, the diurnal and the nocturnal (in cosmological riddles). *Uṣas* and her sister Night change places regularly. At regular intervals it rains (*Parjanya*) and thunderstorms take place (*Indra* with the *Maruts*). The god *Soma* rises from the ground as sacrifice and returns again as rain.

Cyclical cosmic phenomena are reproduced by the cyclical performance of ritual. The mytho-poetic mind sees regular rituals (annual, monthly, and daily all within the lunar cycle) as upholding order in the universe, recreating the cosmos and preventing its disintegration at the end of each cycle. In this way the isomorphism of the micro- and the macro-cosmos is manifest. Ritual permeates and controls all activities of Aryan man in all domains of life. Even ritual names in the *Ṛg Veda* are symbolic—*kárman-* "action, deed;" compare the later term *kriyā- id.*, i.e. action in general, par excellence. Ritual serves the main spheres of human life: magico-judicial (to guarantee justice, law, and order), military (to ensure protection and victory), material and biological (to provide wealth, male progeny, and the safety of the tribe).

These two isomorphic worlds are represented by two classes of active figures: the gods (*devá-* or *amṛta-*) and the mortals (*mártya-*). This clear-cut binary opposition is to a certain extent disturbed by a rather inconsistent opposition which can be explained only diachronically: *devāh* "gods of the organized cosmos"—*ásurāh* "gods of the primordial world," on the one hand, and by a fragmentary opposition: *devāh-pitárah* "gods" or "spirits of dead ancestors" (literally "fathers"), with their chief *Yama*, the king of the dead, on the other. Gods and humans took part in a constant exchange and circulation of gifts which acquired a specific socio-cultural aspect. Those who did not believe in Aryan gods are not considered human beings: they are described as *dāsa-/dāsya-*, words denoting both aboriginal enemies and demons. Believers made sacrifices and composed hymns and songs to the gods, the gods in turn bestowed upon the believers solicited gifts: wealth, military victories, glory, abundance, and male progeny.

In such a model there is no hell and no paradise. The region of the gods lies in the North or North-East. *Yama*'s region of death lies in the South, if spatial reference-points are to be used. Terms of the most ancient space-orientation were always ambiguous; in most cases their semantics reflect undifferentiated spatial and temporal meanings, for example: *pára-* "distant," "high," "early"—*ávāra-* "near," "low," "late;" or *pūrvā-* "frontal," "eastern," "early"—*āpara-* "back," "western," "late," etc.

The basic mode of orientation is the circle. Essential for spatial

orientation is the opposition between center and periphery. For the Aryans the basic values in all the isomorphic spheres are connected with the idea of the center, with the correlated notion of the navel of the universe—*bhūvanasya nābhi-*, the navel of the earth—*prthivyā nābhi-*, and the navel of the sacrifice—*ṛtāsya nābhi-* (in some contexts equivalent to *vēdi-* the sacrificial altar). The Vedic Aryans' ideas about time as a sequence of cycles has already been mentioned.

On the socio-ethical level, life is similarly organized by *ṛtā* (law). What conforms to *ṛtā* is good: the Aryan gods and the sacrifices made to them, as well as all Aryan prosperity bestowed by the gods. Evil is everything that contradicts law: the absence of the Aryan gods, or a lack of sacrifices. The terrestrial world is modelled after the opposition between “living” (literally “moving”)—*jāgat-* and “non-living” (literally “standing”)—*sthātār-*. Inside the *jāgat*-class man has no particular distinction among other living creatures, and the opposition is expressed by means of other marks, such as “biped”—*dvipād-* vs. “quadruped”—*cātuspad-*.

The king in Aryan society is an earthly reflection of *Indra*. The royal figure is primarily connected with the notion of military might, victory and glory. Reversing the connection, the result is that if there is no victory, the king should be replaced [134.106]. However, Gods are usually called kings at the peak of their might; thus King *Indra* slayed *Vṛtra* and King *Agnī* overcame darkness. But the power of both magic and law is an attribute of the priests.

In the Vedic model of the universe, diachrony manifests itself through the cosmogonic myths that play a crucial part in the text. All principal myths of the *Ṛg Veda* can be read as fragments of cosmogonic tales. Certain characteristic divine actions can also be considered in the same way—for example, the three strides of *Viṣṇu* and the daily circuit of the universe by the *Aśvins*. The mytho-poetic mind treats cosmogonic schemes as both a precedent and a standard for further reproduction simply because they existed in “primordial” times [49.46 passim]. But the *Ṛg Veda* myths are not mere tales of ancient times (i.e., related to diachrony); travelling through generations of *Ṛṣis*, the composers and custodians of the hymns, they enter synchrony and in this way become destined for the future.

In the Vedic model of the universe, abstract forces are personified and play the role of demiurges along with the gods. The Word, or Sacred Speech, is personified as the goddess *Vāc*, who appears as the Creator of the universe. The most important number in this model is three. The universe is tripartite—although there still remains an archaic dual deity *Dyāvā-Prthivī* “Heaven-and-Earth”. The cosmogonic feat of the great gods consists in creating a third intermediate element between heaven and earth. This inter-

mediary could be aerial space, the world-tree, a pillar, or some other kind of support. The divisions of the cosmos itself could be multiplied by three, and the third, or highest heaven, is of the most special importance.

The most important color characteristics are the following: *svetá-* “white” (also “light, shining”—verb. *svit-* “to shine”), and *kṛṣṇa-* “black,” as well as transformations of the pairs of opposites—“light”-“darkness,” “day”-“night,” “god”-“demon,” “Aryan”-“*Dāsa*.” Also important are *aruṣá-* and other adjectives for “red” together with all transformations of “fire.” The colors also probably differed in their degree of intensity: “red” can be designated by more than ten synonyms, while the dark part of the spectrum is covered by a single term.

Finally, the Vedic model of the universe incorporates several characteristics of magic-mentality,¹⁰ almost inseparable from religion at a certain stage of society’s development. The difference between them could be briefly outlined as follows: while the religious outlook can be characterized by obedience to Divine Will, the magic mentality replaces the deity with abstract entities which can be manipulated with the help of magical techniques. The fundamental principle of any magic is total determinism without causal connections. The world structure is represented as a system of equivalences: everything can be caused by anything.¹¹

The magic mentality finds its consequent expression in a whole system of a series of identifications that are characteristic of later Vedic texts—the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* [37.26f.]. This phenomenon is only incipient in the *R̥g Veda* and lacks a systematic character [157.18f.]. In this respect the *Agni* hymn (2.1; 16 stanzas in all) is quite outstanding consisting mostly of equivalences of the following type:

tvám agne rājā varuṇo dhṛtāvratas
tvám mitrō bhavasi dasmā īḍyah
tvám aryamā sátpatir yásya sambhújaṃ
tvám aṃśo vidáthe deva bhājayúḥ (4)

O Agni, thou art king *Varuṇa* (firm) keeper of the vows,
 Thou art *Mitra* the wonder-working, the invoked.
 Thou art *Aryaman*, the good ruler, whom I should like to resort to
 Thou art *Aṃśa*, the god who bestows (generously) at sacrifice sharing¹²

However, these identifications cannot be perceived as magic equivalences, since an explanatory commentary is given at the end of the hymn:

tvám tñ sáṃ ca práti cāsi majmánā
ágne sujāta prá ca deva ṛcyase
pṛkṣó yád átra mahinā ví te bhúvad
ánu dyāvāpṛthiví ródasī ubhé

Thou art both similar to them and equal (to them) in greatness,
 O Agni, beautifully born, you, O deity, also excel (them),
 When thy might in (all its) greatness unfolds here
 Along the heaven and the earth, along the both worlds!

Some scholars have suggested that the Vedic metaphorical phrases describing mystical correspondences between the divine world and the human world, and comprehensible only to the priests, play the role of identification with respect to a *tertium comparationis* [132.478-482]. This very general sketch of the Aryan model of the universe in the *Ṛg Veda* does not allow for an analysis of its internal contradictions, or for any consideration of fragments of several other accessory systems recognizable also in this document.

We should consider in some detail the Aryans' views of sacred knowledge. According to orthodox Indian classification, the *Ṛg Veda* (*ṛg-veda*, the Veda of the hymns), belongs to the genre of the Vedas. Among them it is the most ancient and the most authoritative; the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sāma Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda* have borrowed on a grand scale from the *Ṛg Veda*. The same classification ascribes the Vedas to the *śruti*-tradition, in which the hymns are said to have been revealed by the gods to the mortal Ṛṣis. The *śruti*-tradition is contrasted with the *smṛti*-tradition, literally "memorizing," i.e., knowledge deriving from human authorities. Thus Old Indian texts are said to contain two kinds of knowledge: sacred and profane.

The orthodox Indian classification belongs to a much later period than the *Ṛg Veda* collection itself. The word-form *ṛg-veda* is not the standard usage adopted in this text because only its components are attested: *ṛc*- "hymn; verse," and *véda*- "knowledge." *Ṛc*- is a feminine root-noun from the verb *arc*- "to shine, glitter; to glorify in song" (compare masculine noun from the same root—*arká*- "a ray; brilliance; sun; laudatory song"). These etymological connections suggest that the notion of a hymn was associated with the idea of light and brilliance; in other words, it was a concept connected with vision. The noun *ṛc*- is quite well-documented in the *Ṛg Veda*, in both its singular and plural forms.

Véda- is a noun derived from the verb *vid*- "to know, to be aware of." It occurs in the *Ṛg Veda* only once, in a later stratum (8.19):

yáḥ samídhā yá áhuti
yó védena dadā́sa máṛto agnáye
yó námasā svadhvaráḥ (5)
tásyéd árvento raṃhayanta āśávas
tásya dyumnítamaṃ yásah
ná tám áṃho devákṛtaṃ kútas caná
ná mártyaḥkṛtaṃ nasat (6)

(He) who with firewood, who with libation
 Who, a mortal, with knowledge honors Agni,
 Who with reverence, beautifully performing the rite, does it
 His coursers race swiftly,
 His is the most brilliant glory,
 No anguish—either caused by a god
 Or caused by a mortal—shall get him.

The context shows that *véda*- here denotes sacred knowledge; it is enumerated along with other ritual means of influencing the gods.

A word that occurs frequently in the *R̥g Veda* is *dhī-* (feminine), whose syncretic semantics reflects a whole set of ideas prevalent in that cultural milieu concerning the means used to understand the surrounding world and to influence the gods. It is a root-noun derived from the verb *dhī-* “to perceive, think, ponder, wish.” The most probable original meaning was “to see,” although the only authority for this is Grassmann [91.683-4]. In the *R̥g Veda* it is quite reliably attested—without a prefix—in the following passage: *yāvāt t́aras tanvò ýavad ójo | ýāvan náras ćakṣasā d́idhyānāḥ* (7.91.4) “As long as the body (has) the overcoming power, as long as (there is) might, / As long as men are able to *discern* with their gaze. . . .” Geldner’s translation is: “mit dem Auge schauen” [74.2.262]; Renou’s: “(sont) aptes-à-considerer du regard” [118.15.108]. Renou (*ibid.*) notes two other passages in the *R̥g Veda* where this verb has the meaning “to look, gaze,” where the prefixes, though making the direction more precise, do not alter its lexical meaning: *úd dyám ivét tr̥ṣṇájo nāthitásó | d́idhayur d́āsarājñé vrt́asah* (7.33.5): “Finding themselves in trouble, surrounded in the Ten-kings-battle, they were *looking* upwards, as (those who are) tormented by thirst (look up) at the sky (hoping for rain);” *tád ít sadhástham abhi ćāru d́idhaya | ǵāvo yác ch́āsan vahatúm ná dhenávaḥ* (10.32.4): “I was *gazing* at that pleasant place toward which milch cows should direct (their journey) like a wedding procession.” In Old Iranian this original meaning is much more in evidence than in Old Indian [108.2.45]. But even in the *R̥g Veda* the regular sense can be defined as “to examine through an inner gaze,” or, in Renou’s words: “voir par la pensée” [118.1.3].

This inner seeing is the meaning of the verbal root that serves as a starting point for Gonda’s understanding of the nominal *dhī-* (“vision,” in his interpretation). In a special monograph devoted to this highly important notion of the spiritual world of the Vedic Aryans [90], Gonda developed his ideas in the following manner. According to Vedic notions, the gods, related to heavenly light, were omniscient, and knowledge was of a visual nature; thus, “to have seen” was “to know.” The faculty of “vision” was the property of the *R̥ṣi*-poets who possessed that *dhī-*. Gonda stresses that *dhī-*

should be taken as an exceptional ability to see within one's mind various objects, connections and causes as they really are. It is an ability of suddenly recognizing the truth, the functions and influences of divine forces, and man's relationship to them [90.68-9]. The truth is hidden from humans and does not manifest itself; it is sacred. The *Ṛṣi*, with the help of *dhī-*, can relate to the nonmanifest and thus, in his mind's eye, his view is divine, making him a participant in the sacral world. And thus the *Ṛṣi* becomes a person who by force of his *dhī-* is able to penetrate the world of the gods.

In the conceptual system described by Gonda, the truth is suddenly revealed to a possessor of *dhī-*: in other words, to him who is *dhīra-* "wise," i.e., "whose *dhī-* is strong." This truth is a static picture, since what the *Ṛṣi* "sees" is situated outside of time, transcendental. It can equally refer to the present, the past or the future, as well as to numerous times at once. And this peculiarity of the *Ṛṣi*'s vision, as it will be shown below, is of immediate relevance to the language of the hymns.

The *Ṛṣi*'s ecstatic visions resemble a rapid succession of static pictures, and during the reading of the *Ṛg Veda*, a feeling of motion results from the speed of the sequence of the "stills," if such an analogy be allowed. There may be no strict, logical coherence between individual pictures. In the archaic mind such a sequence can be rather like a kaleidoscope. This manner of "seeing" hardly encourages a discursive account of events in their logical and causal linear sequence. The kind of account of mythological plots to which the modern man is accustomed is quite rare in the *Ṛg Veda*, at least in its older parts. In most cases myths are not told but only indicated. Often they are mentioned by means of stereotyped phrases, short and frequently formulaic. Many of those myths are not retold in extenso in the later Old Indian literature (the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Upaniṣads*, the Epics and the *Purāṇas*)—although it should be kept in mind that different versions do appear in different texts. The actual content of a myth, however, often remains obscure for us, even if it is referred to in the *Ṛg Veda* quite frequently.

More than once it has been suggested that plots familiar both to the *Ṛṣi* and his audience were in no need of further retelling, but this explanation seems insufficient because such references to plots or the formulaic listing of plots actually reflects the nature of the *Ṛṣi*'s vision. This form is entirely adequate to convey the rapid succession of pictures that appear as inner vision.

The process of mastering and transmitting sacred knowledge presupposes several stages. Its first stage appears in the hymns as a momentary intuitive breakthrough of Divine Truth. The deity reveals knowledge within the poet's heart (*mānas-*, *hṛd-*). In this way, the poet does not create truth—he receives it. After the poet "has seen" Truth, the next stage begins: presenting

Truth in verbal form as declaration. In Old Indian culture since the time of the *R̥g Veda* the declaration of truth was considered to require an immense creative power that reached universal order and influenced the actions of the gods.

According to Gonda [89.ch.2], the Vedic *R̥ṣi* “transposes” the vision revealed to him into verbal form. This form is wholly dependent on tradition, or canon, which in the language of the hymns is called the creation of the ancient, or earlier, *R̥ṣis*. Following the canon the *R̥ṣi* puts his vision into words, thus transforming it into hymn, prayer, or some liturgical text. Being part of the ritual of divine worship, the hymn ascends as offering to the gods who had earlier conferred inspiration on the *R̥ṣi*. And so the circle is complete: an exchange between a deity and his worshipper in the assumed form of poetic art. The deity grants the poet access to mystery and inspiration, and he composes a prayer-hymn in order to support and praise the deity.

The main purpose of the hymn, according to Bernfried Schlerath [133.201-221], consists in the formulation of Truth (*ṛtá-*). Heinrich Lüders [104], whose ideas Schlerath developed, held that Truth was a certain static and absolute quantity occupying a definite place in the cosmos above the gods. A truthful hymn is one that conforms to the law of *ṛta-*, and in order to create such a hymn, a *R̥ṣi* had to use “true” words and phrases. So Schlerath concludes: “But the almost inevitable result of this is that the seemingly loosely connected elements—thought, word, and act—are linked together in a most intimate way” [133.220]. These elements certainly reflect a definite PIE concept, but Schlerath’s findings are equally important for a purely synchronic approach. Such an interpretation models each stage of the truth-achieving, cognitive process; it represents the creation of a hymn as part of the general ritual worship of the gods. In other words, the making of a hymn becomes an integral part of the circle of exchange between deity and worshipper.

Both knowledge of the world and artistic creativity are inseparable from the problem of the subject of cognition and creation, i.e. the Vedic *R̥ṣi*, whose role has been attracting the attention of modern scholars of both the genetic and the synchronic aspects of Vedic culture.

The word *ṛṣi-*, according to the *Great Petersburg Lexicon*, has the following meanings: “singer of sacred songs; poet; a saint of ancient times.” It is usually derived from the verbal root *arṣ-*, *árṣati*, “to gush forth, flow swiftly; rush forth,” which has an established Indo-European etymology.¹³

Various forms of the verb *arṣ-* occur more than 120 times in the *R̥g Veda*, predominantly in Book 9 with only about 10 occurrences outside of that book. Thus this verb can be said to belong to Book 9; it describes the flow of the pressed *Soma* juice at various points of the rite requiring it:

through the strainer, in the vat, mixing with other substances, etc. In other books the verb *arṣ-* is only once used with reference to Soma (1.135.2); all other instances describe the flow of waters and rivers, usually in a cosmogonic context, or illustrate the perpetual law of universal rotation (the *rtá-*): 1.105.12; 2.25.4; 3.30.9; 4.18.6; 8.89.4. In three instances the verb *arṣ-* is applied to *ghṛtá-* “the ghee-fat.” This word, as used in the *R̥g Veda*, deserves to be considered in greater detail. It has been established that its referent is not just “ghee,” an important substance used for ritual purposes in sacrificial offerings. The word has multilevel referents whose interplay and combination contribute to the message of several hymns, as in 4.58, whose subject is the deified ghee. We may quote two stanzas where *ghṛtá-* and *arṣ-* occur side by side:

etā arṣanti hṛdyāt samudrāc
chatávrājā ripúnā nāvacaḥṣase
ghṛtásya dhārā abhí cākāśimi
hiranyáyo vetáso mádhya āsām (5)
samyák sravanti saríto ná dhénā
antár hṛdā mánasā pūyámānāḥ
eté arṣanty ūrmáyo ghṛtásya
mṛgā iva kṣipañór iṣamānāḥ (6)

These (streams of ghee) *flow* from the heart-ocean,
 Surrounded by a hundred fences; they are not to be seen by a deceiver.
 I inspect attentively the streams of *ghee*:
 There is a golden rod in their midst
 The torrents (of speech) flow together like rivulets,
 Purified inside, both by heart and mind.
 These waves of *ghee are running*
 Like gazelles fleeing away from an arrow.

In the introduction to his translation of this hymn, Geldner stated that ghee was praised metaphorically as the actual sacrificial butter, as the *Soma* juice, and as poetic speech soaked in this ghee. But originally, according to him, the hymn was intended to accompany an ordinary *Soma* libation with an obligatory kindling of the sacrificial fire [74.1.488].

Renou, in his analysis of this hymn [118.1.3], noted that *ghṛtá-* was flowing in streams (and pouring into the “ocean,” i.e., a *Soma*-vat), and that process was likened to the growth of poetic imagery. The level of poetic speech acquires more importance when compared to the levels of sacrificial ghee and the rite of *Soma* preparation. “The heart-ocean” is the source of poetic inspiration. “The fences” guard the poetic speech against ill-willed rivals, “the golden rod” denotes *Soma* in his role as the fertilizer of poetic thoughts and as a symbol of masculinity. “The heart” is the strainer through

which poetic speech is filtered and purified: all these images are taken from the *Soma* ritual. In this connection some very interesting considerations were put forward by Gonda [90.69]: since ghee was thought to originate in the celestial ocean, this hymn combines three ideas: 1) the celestial origin of Sacred Speech, 2) the mediatory role of the gods, and 3) the heart as the place in which inspiration is revealed and from which Sacred Speech issues.

Another passage where the verb *arṣ-* appears together with *ghṛtá-* (as the direct object) is found in a hymn praising a generous patron:

tásmā āpo ghṛtám arṣanti síndhavas
tásmā iyám dáksīṇā pínvate sádā (1.125.5)

For him waters (and) rivers flow (with) ghee,
 For him this sacrificial reward always swells up.

The transitive *arṣ-* here (usually *abhí + arṣ-*) is similarly used in a ritual context.

All this seems to confirm the hypothesis that the semantics of the verb *arṣ-* in the *Ṛg Veda* is very closely connected with ritual in general, and more particularly with the *Soma* sacrifice. *Soma* passing through the sheep-wool strainer flowed into the wooden vessel; the priest tasted it, and the hallucinogenic liquid sharpened his intuition so that Truth was momentarily revealed in him. "Having seen" it and having given it the shape of a hymn, the priest-*Rṣi* filtered poetic speech through his heart and let it flow freely in order to enable it to reach the divine and heavenly spheres. This ritual orientation of the verb *arṣ-* could give rise to the nominal derivative *ṛṣi-* with its complex semantics: a participant in a rite who drinks the sacrificial liquid and pours out praises in the form of a hymn.

This interpretation of the meanings of *arṣ-* can also find support in typological parallels from other Indo-European traditions. Benveniste has succeeded in showing [54.ch. 2 "The Libation"] that the verb *spéndō*, *spéndomai* in ancient Greek means "to sprinkle with a liquid in a rite intended to guarantee safety;" its noun derivative *spondē* denotes a libation accompanied by prayer. There are quite remarkable formal coincidences between words denoting praise and invocation on the one hand, and those denoting drinking, swallowing, etc. on the other, attested in several Indo-European languages. Thus, in Russian жрец means "a priest" and жрать means "to devour;" the correspondences of the latter mean "to drink" in some Slavic and Baltic languages [47.2.62-3] (Compare also Old Indian 1.*gr-*, *grṇāti*, *girāti* "to sing, praise"—2.*gr-*, *girāti*, *gilāti*, *grṇāti* "to swallow"—*gur-*, *guráte* "to hail, laud;" each treated as different verbs on the synchronic level).¹⁴

An interesting parallel can be seen in Oleg N. Trubachev's ideas

concerning the innovated terminology of priestly laudation in Proto-Slavic. He suggests that the verb **pěti*, **pojo* “to sing (praises)” is based on the more original **pojiti*, **pojo* “to water, give drink” respectful “to libate.” He suggests that in sacrificial rites, the singing of praises was secondary and was originally preceded by a stage of silent ritual worship. He also adduced Old Indian evidence: a word pair in which the original *juhóti* “to pour” contrasts with the secondary *hávate* “to invoke” [44.319].

It should be kept in mind also that the verb *ar-ṛ-* (from which *arṣ-* is derived with the help of the root-determinative *-s-*), “to set in motion, to begin moving, to rise, to excite, to be excited” (mainly transitive), frequently governs a direct object accusative of nouns with the meanings “voice,” “speech,” “hymn,” “praise,” “prayer;” for example, *íyarti vācam arítēva nāvam* (2.42.1). “It pushes out (its) voice as a steerer (pushes) the boat” (“it” here denoting an ominous bird); *stómāñ iyarmy abhríyeva vātaḥ* (1.116.1) “I set in motion praises as the wind (sets in motion) clouds;” *rtād iyarmi te dhíyam manoyújam* (8.13.26) “Out (of the womb) of Truth I send to thee a prayer harnessed by thought,” where, as Grassmann correctly noted, “out [of the womb] of Truth” means “from the heart” [91.283],¹⁵ etc.

All these suggestions concerning the etymology of *ṛṣi-* may corroborate the hypothesis that in the period of the *R̥g Veda* the *Ṛṣi* participated in the ritual of divine worship and recited hymns that he composed in accordance with an ancient tradition, hymns that were performed in conjunction with sacrificial libations. In this way a *Ṛṣi* combined the functions of the poet, the reciter and the priest.

As a component of the overall ideal picture the Vedic Aryans held about cosmic law, Truth (*rtá-*) and the visionary faculty (*dhí-*), the *Ṛṣi* assumed the role of the mediator between gods and mortals, since he was able to express in words intelligible to mortals the Divine Truth (*rtá-*) he had previously “seen.” But his part was not confined to that particular function. At certain decisive turning points in the life of the society the poet-*Ṛṣi* was thought to have the function of a demiurge, a cosmic creator who assists the cosmos: his victory in the singers’ verbal contest is a decisive contribution to the overcoming of the forces of chaos [22]. It is no coincidence that the goddess *Vāc* (the personification of Sacred Speech) is identified on the mythological level with the basic principle of the cosmic existence that prevails over the gods. And, as was to become usual in later Old Indian philosophy, *Vāc* combines in herself both subject and object, being at once speech (Vedic text) and poet (creator of the text) [14.64].

This dual nature of the *Ṛṣi* is expressed on the mythological level by the semi-divine status of the ancestors of the *Ṛṣiṣ*. Here it should be noted that the families of the *Ṛṣiṣ* kept separate and passed from generation to genera-