

**THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF WORLD CULTURE**

Post Box No. 402, 6, B.P. Wadia Road, Basavanagudi,  
Bangalore - 560 004. Telephone : 6678581

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**WHY READ RIG VEDA**

*by*

**R. L. KASHYAP**

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## FOREWORD

Prof. R.L. Kashyap belongs to that rare brand of scholars combining proficiency in an engineering field with almost equal depth and erudition in Vedic studies. He is a Ph.D. from the Harvard University in U.S.A. and is currently holding the position of Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, U.S.A. His association with Purdue University extends over more than three decades. He is the recipient of many International awards and honors for his fundamental contributions to pattern recognition and computer vision. He has authored over 350 papers, a majority of them appearing in academic journals in the field of Computer studies. He has also guided some fifty students in their Doctoral research work.

It is extraordinary that such an eminent teacher in an engineering branch is also known and respected for his abiding interest and insight into **Vedic** studies. His recent book "*Rig Veda Samhita*", co-authored by Prof. S. Sadagopan has been well received in **Vedic** circles. The book was published by the **Sri Aurobindo Kapali Sastry Institute**, of Vedic culture of which he is the Honorary Director. He has brought out an English translation of a Sanskrit book "*Vasishta Vaibhavam*", by Sri Kapali Sastry, which is a biography of his teacher **Vasishta Ganapati Muni**, a great Sanskrit poet, who used to be held in high esteem by both **Sri Aurbindo** and the Mother.

We were truly fortunate that such a versatile scholar delivered a public lecture under the auspices of our Institute on 11 March, 1999 on the subject, "*Why read Rig Veda?*" Having regard to the enduring relevance and value of the lecture, we are issuing it as Transaction No. 102 of the Institute. We feel confident that it will be well received and appreciated both by **Vedic** Scholars and by laymen interested in the **Vedas**.

**K.R. Ramachandran**  
President  
IWC

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# WHY READ RIG VEDA<sup>1</sup>

by R. L. Kashyap<sup>2</sup>

## SUMMARY

Rig Veda Samhita is a vast book of more than ten thousand verses in several metres in ancient Sanskrit. In spite of its antiquity- its age is six millennia or more, its ideals are relevant for the moderns also who are enamored of the slogans of the French revolution of eighteenth century namely, equality, liberty and fraternity. Rig Veda is the only scripture among those of all religions in which the wisdom was revealed both to women and men sages. In which religion other than Hinduism, do we find women find a place as prophets? The idea of equality for all persons, particularly women, is evident in several hymns such as 10.85 [sukta 85 of tenth mandala] where the daughter-in-laws is required to be treated as a queen. It is the only scripture where the sceptics are specifically mentioned and treated with respect without mentioning the threat of hell if they do not change their beliefs. The concept of hell does not find a place in Rig Veda. It mentions the presence of several religions and languages and calls upon all persons to strive to become noble in that pluralistic society.

The Rig Veda is full of spiritual and psychological wisdom and is also magnificent poetry.

It is the earliest book to declare that knowledge is infinite like a vast mountain, in which each peak corresponds to one branch of knowledge.

## BACKGROUND

Rig Veda Samhita [1] is the most ancient book of the Sanatana Dharma, popularly known as Hinduism; Since it dates to 4000 B.C.E or earlier, it is also the most ancient of the scriptures of all religions of humanity.

Rig Veda Samhita is a vast book delineating spiritual and psychological wisdom, the ideals of Vedic Society and its governance, the theories of manifestation of this Universe, and ways in which human beings can develop their artistic, physical, mental, psychological and intellectual powers and many other topics, including Mathematics.

In this essay, we will discuss how the ideals discussed in the Rig Veda are very relevant for the modern age. This will be done by quoting the relevant verses of Rig Veda. We will also compare briefly the ideals of the Rig Veda with the ideals portrayed in later scriptures such as those of Christianity and Islam.

## CRITICS OF RIG VEDA SAMHITA

Rig Veda Samhita has been ignored or vigorously criticised by several groups, based on mistranslation or misrepresentation of isolated verses in the Rig Veda. According to one group, Rig Veda Samhita is a book of rituals with only occasional wisdom in it; only the Upanishads can be termed as the earliest books of Hinduism to deal with wisdom. This group includes several traditionalists and also distinguished academics like Radhakrishnan [2] and Zehner [3] who claim to be knowledgeable, but not experts, in the Veda. My reply is as follows " None of the critics can point to a single hymn in RV out of its 1017 hymns which gives the details of a rite or ritual. For instance, Agni, which is translated as fire in the altar, is mentioned in several hundred verses. If we read carefully all these verses and study all the

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1 This essay is related to the lecture given at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, on March 11, 99.

2 Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Purdue University U.S.A. and Honorary Director of Sri Aurobindo Kapali Sastry Institute of Vedic Culture, Bangalore. Tel: 6346471

descriptive epithets in them we see that Agni is a cosmic power who performs all the actions as stated in RV (1.1.1.). There is no mention of human priests lighting Agni. The hymn (1.44) explicitly states that the cosmic powers Mitra and Varuna kindle Agni, a psychological power in the subtle body of human beings.

Regarding the Upanishads, it is interesting to note that many of the famous quotations of Upanishads are contained in the Rig Veda. The most famous concept of Upanishads namely *ekam sat*, the One Existence, is already found in RV (1.164.49). The famous verse of Mundaka Upanishad comparing the human soul and the Divine to a pair of birds is found in RV (1.164.45). The phrase, 'all human beings are children of immortality, *amrtasya putrah*', quoted frequently by Swami Vivekananda is often ascribed to *sveteshvatara upanishad* [4]; But it actually occurs in RV (10.13.1). We add more information later.

The second group of critics trace the problems of modern Hindu society such as unsociability, casteism etc., to this ancient book. This criticism has absolutely no support from the text of the Rig Veda Samhita, as will be clarified later. Moreover, in every society all over the globe, there is a huge gap between the ideals propounded by various religions in these societies and the actual practices. Attacking only the scriptures of Hinduism on this basis but keeping silent on the gap between the theory and practice in other religions in other societies is nothing but intellectual dishonesty.

## **WOMEN IN THE RIG VEDIC AGE**

RV is the only scripture among those of all religions in which the divine Truths are revealed to women sages also and some of these hymns describing the revelation find a prominent place in the RV Samhita like the hymn 10.125 (tenth mandala, 125 sukta or hymn) attributed to the women sage *Vak Ambrini*. There are more than thirty women sages in RV with specific hymns associated with them. In all the Semitic religions like Christianity, Islam etc., there is no mention of any revelation to women and no woman is listed among the prominent disciples of the founders or prophets of those religions.

There are numerous hymns in the Rig Veda Indicating the high status accorded to women in the Vedic society. For instance the hymn 10.85, the so called marriage hymn, explicitly states that the daughter in law should be treated in the family as a queen, *samrajni*, by all members especially the mother in law, husband, father in law etc. Thus the statement that 'women were oppressed in Hindu society even from the Vedic times' made orally and in popular writings by some moderns is nothing but a patent falsehood. Some of the quotations given by these critics are from the period of the Sutra books which are dated more than two thousand years later than the Rig Veda. Naturally these critics suppress quotations which speak of the high status of women in the society of Rig-Vedic period and the period of Upanishads.

Even today, some orthodox persons deny the right of chanting the Veda to women. However they cannot cite any support from any authoritative scripture for their views. Any book in Sanskrit cannot be accepted as scripture or divine revelation. When the famous poet, Sanskrit scholar and spiritual savant, Vasishta Ganapati Muni, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi, challenged these orthodox persons to provide evidence for their claims, no evidence was forthcoming [5].

## **CONCEPT OF FREEDOM**

Freedom is a key idea in RV; all persons whatever their external condition-men, women, married couples, householders, wandering mendicants and so on-have a right to tread

the paths of immortality. RV does not impose any rigid external prerequisites. RV itself does not debar anyone from reading or following RV. RV even allows the voice of the skeptic who does not believe in the existence of devas. In (8.100.3), a skeptic declares "who is Indra, who has ever seen him". The rishi gives a reasonable reply in the next verse (8.100.4) without invoking any threat of punishment in this world or the punishment in the life after death.

Look upon me here!  
All that exists I surpass in my glory;  
The Truth makes me mighty'

RV has no conception of a hell into which all its critics are cast. There is no great divide between the so called spiritual life and worldly life as in later times. According to RV, every being, not just the human being, develops according to his/her own self-law *svadha*. RV does not speak of a Cosmic Controller who controls all beings, himself staying outside of them. Every human being has to become aware of this self-law and follow the path of immortality unique to him/her. In this learning process, the help of the *devas* is ever here.

Knowledge constitutes the bulk of RV. The range of knowledge contained in it is so vast and so different from the more traditional types of knowledge found in the books like Puranas making it very hard to get a comprehensive view of the RV. It reminds one of the proverbial blind person trying to generalise the physical form of an elephant touching only one particular part of the animal like its rope-like trunk, the iron-like tusk, leaf-like ear etc. As a first step, we can group the verses under several categories like cosmology and cosmogony, human beings and psychology, the role of devas like Agni, evil, suffering and conflicts, every day life, the paths of immortality and so on. in ref. [6] the verses are grouped under different yogas like *Karma*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, *Raja* etc.

The keynote of knowledge in RV is its integrality. It is not divided into several rigid compartments. The knowledge is like a vast net in which each topic is intimately connected to every other topic. Take any verse dealing with one of the topics mentioned above. This verse brings in many other topics also. Similarly every dominant aspect of human personality is intimately connected to the corresponding one in the cosmos. All the realms of mental operations in a man like thinking, intellect, meditation, concentration and so on, are associated with the cosmic world *dyu*, Heaven. Therefore when a person is thinking, he is in touch with the cosmic world of Heave, Since all human beings are in touch with the same world, we see here a neat explanation of the phenomenon of simultaneous discoveries by persons in different continents. Again every human action also has a cosmic dimension. In every action we see the dominant contribution of the devas. Thus both devas and humans are collaborators or co-creators in all activities. Eventually every human being can achieve the perfection natural to a cosmic power, *deva*. This comprehensiveness of knowledge distinguishes RV from all other spiritual books.

Verses like (1.10.2) clearly state that the knowledge is infinite like a vast mountain with many peaks and valleys. The acquisition of knowledge by each individual is unique. No two paths are same. As (1.10.2) describes elegantly, we cannot envision all the details in one step. From one peak only certain details are available. We have to go to a higher peak to get more details.

The analogy of knowledge acquisition to mountain climbing appears for the first time in modern times, in books dealing with the theoretical Physics [14] only at the beginning of twentieth century.

Such comprehensiveness of knowledge is possible because the Supreme Divine or God,

the One without a Second, pervades all existence, both living and non-living. There are many verses describing the spiritual presence of the transcendent God as well as of the God immanent in all existence. Both RV and the Upanishads use the same word *vaishvanara*, the Universal Divine Force, to describe the immanence of God in all aspects of creation ranging from stone to herbs to man. Again the idea of devas, the distinct powers and personalities of the One, conscious of Truth is described both at an individual level such as *Agni*, *Indra* and also at the collective level as All-Gods *vishvedevah*.

## PERFECTION AND EDUCATION

The Vedic sages posed the question of perfection in each activity. What is the source of the ability of the human being to perform certain activities? Can s/he develop capacities to do actions like singing, painting or composing which s/he may not currently possess?

The Vedic sages declare that each deva is a conscious being associated with a particular type of cosmic power. By following certain psychological practices such as aspiration, faith and by chanting the verses, each human being can enter into a conscious relationship with these cosmic forces or devas. The relationship can be very intimate like father, son, friend, spouse and so on. Then the particular deva is pleased to manifest his power in that human being. These powers continue to increase or grow in the human as the corresponding degree of aspiration increases. This idea of the deva manifesting his power in a human is called as the birth of the deva referred to in the RV in hundreds of verses by words like *janayan* or *jagnana* etc. These powers increase in man indicated by the words like *vardhayan*, *uti*. Hence each *deva* has two births *dvijanma* in Veda, one at the cosmic level, the other in each human being.

The first to take birth in man is Agni, the leader. There are many verses which declare that he sits inside us and guides us, . We should remember that man is primarily a thinker, then secondly a performer of actions. Agni infuses the energy and makes the will strong and makes him/her do the work. All the work is done by Gods. Agni worships on behalf of man. He is prayed to perform yajna in (2.9.4). Agni is the leader of yajna, the collaborative effort.

Becoming acquainted with these psychological powers may take a long time. Once some degree of mastery is established, then the person embarks onto the second stage, in this stage, s/ he enquires whether each psychological power that has come to his attention has a universal fount or source from which the corresponding power in all other humans is derived.

According to the Vedic sages, education means getting the knowledge or power directly from the main source. The book is only an instrument.

## SYMBOLISM OF RIG VEDA

If we read an English translation of the RV such as the one by Wilson [8] or Griffith [7], we see that, by and large, it consists either of pedestrian sentences like 'O Indra, drink the Soma and kill Vrtra' or enigmatic sentences like 'The sages smashed the hill by their sound'; 'They smashed the hill using the cows'. On the surface many epithets associated with Agni, the fire makes no sense at all. There are only a small number of verses which appear to be wisdom-full. Often there is no consistency between the several phrases within a single verse, let alone the entire hymn. It is claimed that the translation itself is faithful, but only the tradition of Hindus in assigning wisdom to the RV and its poets is mistaken. This is the view of Many Indian academics for more than a century.

RV is high-class poetry. It is sheer poverty of imagination to read poetry suppressing

symbolism. Veda itself says there is a secret in RV. That secret must be the symbolism. A symbol attempts to describe an experience beyond the realm of the senses. Symbols can be either auditory or visual. For persons who have the gift, hearing a word can create an impression in the inner being which conveys the full power of the symbol. There are four classes of symbols in the RV. Firstly, the *devas Agni, Indra* and so on and the *devis Sarasvati, Sarama, Mahi* represent distinct types of divine powers and associated functions. In the second class are *Vrtra, Vala, Shushna*, the powers of falsehood. The third class of symbols consists of the common nouns like *go*, cow, *ashva*, horse, *adri* hill, *apah*, waters, *nadi*, rivers, *vrka*, wolf etc. Lastly is the class of the names associated with the sages and poets like Kanva, Kutsa.

Each member of these four classes represents a distinct psychological power which is helpful or otherwise. The unravelling of the symbolism behind each word was done by Sri Aurobindo [9] and Sri Kapali Sastry [10] using their intuition. There is considerable support for the symbolism theory in our ancient books like *Shatapatha Brahmana* or the *Brhad Devata*. But we do not have to merely believe what they say. We can set up concrete objective tests to determine whether the symbolic meanings suggested by them are correct or not. For instance, take the word "go" which ordinarily means cattle. It and its synonyms like *usra* occur in more than one thousand verses. Of course, many of these verses may involve other members of the four classes like *adri*, hill. Regard all these words in these verses as unknown. Substitute the symbolic meanings for the unknowns and see whether the verse makes sense. For the verses involving "go", all the verses make excellent sense except those where "go" is used as a simile in which case it is an animal. Then all the phrases which appears enigmatic or senseless become meaningful. 'go' stands for knowledge, each individual "go" standing for one type of knowledge, *adri* is the symbol for the forces of ignorance and in conscience as can be easily guessed.

The phrase 'they smashed the hill with 'go' means the forces of ignorance were overcome by the forces of knowledge. The phrase 'they smashed the hill with their sound' means that the forces of ignorance were destroyed by the power of Mantra, the potent word.

We give the following table the symbolic meanings of some of the members of the four classes.

The recovery of the symbolic meanings of individual words is only the first step. The recovery of the deeper meaning of the verses needs much more work. Once this is done, the consistency of the meaning of all the phrases in a verse and consistency of all the verses in a hymn is assured. The wisdom of RV comes upfront.

### TABLE 1

**Agni:** Fire; It is the cosmic power of heat and light and the will power united with wisdom. Human will power is a feeble projection of this power. It can be strengthened by the RV chants to Agni.

**Indra :** He is the lord of the Divine Mind and Action. In Indian tradition, mind is not a source of knowledge, it manipulates the knowledge to aid action. Indra battles the evil forces on behalf of the human.

**Vayu :** Wind; He is the lord of all the Life-energies, Prana which represent the passions, feelings, emotions, abilities.

**Ashvins :** The lords of bliss and divine physicians who render the human body free of

disease so that it can accept the divine Prana, the life-energy.

**Mitra :** The lord of love and harmony.

**Varuna :** The master of infinities who cannot tolerate restrictive thinking or actions.

Only he can cut the three bonds which restrict the three aspects of every human being-physical, vital and mental.

**Sarasvati :** The Goddess of inspiration

## HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

Rig Veda has a wealth of knowledge about human psychology. But like everything else in the Veda, this knowledge is intimately related to the knowledge of cosmology, devas etc. The seers of RV viewed a human being as a symbol of the Supreme Divine. This is the natural meaning of the famous Purusha hymn (10.90) in RV. It is a grotesque interpretation to claim that this hymn portrays the Supreme Person as having a physical form of the human being, the so called anthropomorphic conception of God. The word Purusha is used in the Veda both for the Supreme Divine as well as for the human. This word literally means a dweller in the city *puri* or one who pervades everything. Every human being has a complex inner structure of which the physical body is only one aspect, the other aspects being those beyond the pale of the senses. In modern language used by the tantriks, every human being is endowed with several bodies which are termed as subtle to distinguish them from the gross physical body. The subtle body is indicated by the word *sadana, sadma, yoni*, etc., in many verses. Each body is associated with a distinct psychological principle. There is an intimate connection between the subtle bodies associated with a human being and the various worlds of the cosmos of Rig Veda. Thus a key idea of the RV is that each human being's structure mirrors that of the cosmos. This connection between the individual human and the cosmos also affirms the connection between the corresponding bodies of all the different human beings. For Instance, the individual human minds are in touch with one another. This feature explains many of the well known facts such as thought-reading i.e., the reading of one person's thought by another, the possibility of simultaneous discoveries in the scientific arena and so on.

As mentioned earlier, the structure of human being replicates that of the macrocosm. Each person has several different sheaths or bodies, one corresponding to each principle of consciousness mentioned above. The same names are used for the sheaths also. However, in most humans only the outer three sheaths associated with the worlds of earth *antariksha* and *dyau* have developed; the fourth sheath termed as *Mahas* in Upanishads is not developed in most humans.

The outermost sheath is the of matter, derived from the world of matter. Next s/he has the sheath of life-energy which deals with ambitions, emotions, higher levels, feelings both noble and petty, goals, urge to dominate, drives, desires to possess, anger, urge for progression, the power of love, faith, sincerity, humility, aspirations, equality, peace, generosity, goodness, emotion, passion, love. The mental sheath deals with our thoughts, understanding, control of senses, intelligence, reason, intuition, ability to make decisions and implement them, control of the organs of actions like speech, hand, legs etc., and the powers of meditation, contemplation, concentration. Typically in an advanced person the sheath of prana or the vital should be under the control of the mind. Often it is the reverse, the vital overpowers the mental and orders the powers of reasoning to come up with reason for doing

the action, which may have no support of our secret inner being.

So when a human is reasoning, he is communing with mental world. When s/he is involved with emotions like love and the powers of the higher vital s/he is communing with the vital world, *antariksha*. Those, who are dubbed intellectual, commune mainly with the vital and mental worlds.

In an ordinary human being, *martya* or *marta*, these different bodies are still in a nascent state. All the associated energies are blocked as it were and the symbolic doors of the respective rooms are closed or almost closed. When the doors are, at least, slightly open, a person, while thinking, will be in touch with the world of dyau, while dealing with life energies is in touch with the mid-world etc.

The key difference between the human being and the Divine is that the cosmic worlds associated with the Divine are perfect. There is a sheath in human being corresponding to every world. But these are in a process of evolution at different stages of development. This is the reason for the distinctness of each human being. Each human being is at a different stage of development. The rishis of RV reached a sufficiently high stage of development in all the four sheaths. In most human beings even the third or mental sheath is not well developed, leave alone the fourth sheath. All the psychological problems faced by the humans are derived from the fact that these sheaths are not fully developed.

The Veda distinguishes between the ordinary mortal *marta* or *martya* and the wise person *vipra*, *rishi* or *kavi*, one who has the vision of entities beyond the range of senses. It tells how one can attain these states of consciousness and other states of mind.

The progress achieved in the humans is indicated in several verses. For illustration, consider the action of *rbhus*, the divine artisans who prepare the subtle bodies of the human beings. One of their actions is indicated by the enigmatic phrase 'They make four bowls out of the one'. Sri Aurobindo explains the symbolism I In an ordinary human being, our physical, vital and mental aspects are all mixed up. Each aspects wants to act independent of the other. The physical body has its needs, the vital body forces its « desires and ambitions on both the physical body and mental body to the harm of the latter. The *devas*, *rbhus* isolate the warring factions and restore order. Thus they form the physical body, vital body, mental body and the body of light from the amorphous single one, the single bowl.

## VEDA AND THE UPANISHADS

The Upanishads have always been regarded in India as the crown of the Veda. We will briefly explore the relationship between the Upanishads and the Rig Veda Samhita. Contrary to the claims made in [11] and elsewhere, several statements in the ancient Upanishads like Chandogya can be traced to Veda Samhitas.

The cryptic symbolism used in Rig Veda prevented the deep knowledge of Veda Samhitas from becoming widespread and the age of Rig Veda come to an end. Much later, perhaps a millennia or so, attempts were made to recover the knowledge of the Vedas. The Brahmana books like the *Shapthapatha* focussed mainly on the rituals whereas the Upanishads attempted to recover the spiritual knowledge. As Sri Aurobindo states: "The rishis of the Upanishads sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge of the Veda by meditation and spiritual experience and they used the text of the ancient Mantras as a prop and authority for their own intuitions and perception or else the Vedic word was a seed of thought and vision by which they recovered old truths in new forms. What they found, they expressed in other terms more intelligible to the age in which they lived". As examples of the first method, we

may mention the *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.12.5) or *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.4.23) which state 'as stated in the Rik, the mantra of Rig Veda'. As an example of the second, we may mention the concept of Brahman. RV mentions repeatedly the Supreme One, or the One Truth, *ekam sat*, which underlies all existence. The Upanishads developed this seed of thought into the magnificent conception of Brahman.

Upanishads themselves are not philosophical, but express their findings in a manner which the intellect can understand. These findings are the basis for the later systems of Indian philosophy. But in the Indian tradition, intellectual knowledge alone will not lead to the realization of the spirit. The Upanishads contain many hints for spiritual practice. But there are not many books in print which discuss the relevance of Upanishadic thought for spiritual practice. One such book is the 'Light on the Upanishads' by Sri T.V. Kapali Sastry (Vol. 1 in [10]) which discusses some of the secret *vidyas* in the Upanishads and relate them to the corresponding ideas in RV. These *vidyas* are identified either by the name of the teacher like *Shandilya Vidya*, *Bhrgu Varuni Vidya* or by their contents like the *Bhuma Vidya*, *Vaishvanara Vidya*, *Madhu Vidya*, *Prana Vidya* and so on. Vaisvanara means the divine force, which permeates every aspect of existence. This knowledge in the Chandogya Upanishad is related to the similar idea in the RV contained in the ten hymns to the Deity *Vaishvanara*. The *madhu vidya* or the doctrine of the honey or bliss as the foundation of all existence, discussed in detail in (*Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*)<sup>1.5</sup> [12] is related to the corresponding mantras in the first book of Rig Veda (1.90). Again the particular method of realisation described in the sixth book of Brhadaranyaka Upanishad (6.3.6) involves the chanting of the famous gayatri hymn of RV (3.62.10) and the *madhu mantras* RV (1.90). This particular method is extolled in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (6.3.12) stating 'if any one sprinkles it on a dry stump, branches would grow and leaves spring forth'.

There are numerous mantras of RV quoted verbatim in Upanishads. There are many key phrases in the Upanishads which have their corresponding ones in RV. A systematic study of the Veda and Upanishads has not been done. We give here just a few examples. The oft-quoted passage of Shvetashvatara Upanishad (2.5), 'Here ye, children of immortality' occurs originally in Rig Veda (10.13.1). The famous hamsa mantra of *Katha Upanishad* (2.2.2) "The Swan that settles in the purity., born of Truth -itself the Truth, the Vast" occurs originally in RV (4.40.5). The famous mantra of the two birds signifying the individual soul and supreme soul found in *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1) [13] is originally from RV (1.164.20). It is hardly a coincidence since the word *supama* translated as bird occurs in more half a dozen verses of RV bearing always the symbol of soul. Some commentators often misinterpret the phrase two birds in RV as husband and wife. The famous utterance of Upanishad that Brahman cannot be attained by duality is in RV (5.12.2). The idea that Brahman cannot be attained by mere action or effort is in RV (8.70.3) and , Brahman cannot be approached by thought is in (RV 1.170.1).

We reiterate that the Vedic sages did not regard the family life as an obstacle to achieving spiritual excellence. A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.

### **VEDIC WAY OF LIFE**

To achieve the goal to immortality or bliss, the RV suggests a way of life referred to as *patha*, *pantha*, *yajna* and so on in more than one thousand verses. However it does not give any external signs of this path. RV does not make any firm distinction between the spiritual life and the so called worldly life. It calls upon all persons differing in their external conditions like men, women, married, householders or wandering ascetic, king, craftsmen, to participate in this way of life. Every sage calls upon the deva to reveal the path to the Truth.

The implication is that the journey of life is mainly psychological, each person has to find a path which is suitable for him or her. For instance (6.9.2) uses the analogy of a loom which weaves cloth :

I know not the woof, I know not the warp, nor what is this web,

That they weave moving to and fro in the field of their Motion and labour (6.9.2).

Then (6.9.3) declares :

The deva Agni knows the warp, knows the woof,

He tells in their tune the things that must be spoken. (6.9.3) Again the deva guides the human being from within. There are many references, one of which is (6.9.5).

An immortal Light set inward for seeing,

A swiftest mind within men that walk on the way (6.9.5).

The entire nature seems to commune with the rishi in (6.9.6).

'My ears range wide to hear and my wide eyes to see,

Wide this Light set in the heart; wide walks my mind..' (6.9.6).

This journey is described as a yajna, not a mere rite but a collaborative effort companioned by the devas. It is also described as a battle against the supraphysical hostile forces Vrtras and dasyus who want to oppose the journey towards the truth. The devas secure the victory in these supraphysical battles on behalf of the humans. Again the journey is described in numerous places as a ship in an ocean (1.99.1) taking the person to the shores of knowledge. Another hymn (1.10.2) describes the journey as going from one peak of mountain to another higher peak. Only at each peak does the person know what to do next. Whenever any help is needed, the devas arrive and offer the help.

One of the striking features of the ideal of Vedic life is that there is no exhortation to give up desire. All later Hindu and Buddhist scriptures from the Upanishads to the Gita regard the overcoming of the desire as the first step in spiritualizing life. This feature together with the mistranslation of some of the prayers of Vedic rishis as asking for cows and horses have made many, both in India and in the West, to regard the RV as devoid of the 'higher aspects' of spiritual life. This is a fundamental mistake.

Veda pursues the strategy espoused in the later yoga of devotion, bhakti yoga. It calls upon the seeker to establish an intimate relationship with each deva, Agni, Indra and others, like son, friend, father, mother etc. When the faith develops in these devas, then this faith gives the certitude to the seeker that the devas will give whatever is needed. Then the hankering after desires disappears. The perfect person is called in RV as a person whose desires have been satisfied *Aptakama*, the same phrase being used in the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* [12].

It is interesting to observe that in RV there is no condemnation of the persons who are skeptical of the existence of devas (8.100.3). There are many references to poets saying that they recite the Vedas, still they are still plagued by a variety of troubles. RV has no conception of hell. Here there is no question of the unbelievers or skeptics being thrust to hell after their death.

### **ADITI AND INFINITY**

She is the Goddess of infinity as the following verse unambiguously declares:

Aditi is Heaven, Aditi is mid-region,

Aditi is the Mother (Earth), Father and Son;

She is all the Gods; She is the five peoples

Aditi is all that is born and what is to be (1.89.10)/

The five peoples are the beings of the five planes of matter (earth), prana (mid-region), manas (heaven), svar (world of light) and ananda (the world of bliss). This verse is also the invocation to the *Prashna Upanishad*.

To understand Aditi, we have to understand the puranic story of Kashyapa and his two wives, Diti and Aditi in a symbolic sense. Diti in the RV denotes finiteness. All the devas are called as *adityas* because they are descended from Aditi. RV makes several interesting references to *Diti* and *Aditi* together.

Let the knower discriminate the knowledge *chittim* and ignorance *achittim*,

The straight open levels and the crooked that shut in the mortals;

God, lavish on us the finite *Diti* and guard the infinite *Aditi*, (4.2.11).

Mitra, Varuna, in the uprising of the Sun

You ascend and then you behold the infinite *Aditi* and the finite *Diti*, (5.62.8).

May we abide in the law of thy

Workings and be blameless before the Mother infinity *aditaye*, (1.24.15).

Aditi is the Mother of all, Mother of all the Gods, Mother of all creation. She is the infinite consciousness. We can become blameless only by rejecting all things that are contrary to the Supreme Law.

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