

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 29 (1975)

Heft: 2

Artikel: The religious significance of multiple bodily parts to denote the divine : findings from the Rig Veda

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146421>

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THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF MULTIPLE BODILY PARTS TO DENOTE THE DIVINE: FINDINGS FROM THE RIG VEDA*

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“It has been suggested that Indian religious iconography was inspired by that of Ancient Greece; but the material for an iconography is already to be found in the Veda, even to the description of many-armed divinities”.

Louis Renou in *Religions of Ancient India*.

I. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This paper aims to define and analyze the earliest textual references to a fundamental convention in both Indian scriptures and iconography, namely the use of multiple bodily parts to denote the divine. The iconographic convention of multiple bodily parts begins to appear regularly on devotional icons made during the Kushan period (circa 1st–3rd centuries A.D.). However, descriptions of deities having multiple heads, eyes, limbs precede the plastic appearance by approximately one thousand years. Such descriptions begin in the Rig Veda and continue in the Brāhmaṇic and Epic literature throughout the first millenium B.C. The present study which considers the Rig Vedic meaning and significance of the convention is intended as the first in a series of studies tracing the meaning of the convention in the religious texts prior to the regular appearance of the convention in Kushan art. These studies, as a unit, should contribute to the over-all understanding of the main subject of research. This deals with the religious significance of multiple bodily parts in Kushan iconography.

* This work is supported by a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. Parts of this paper were given as talks at the Mathura Museum Centenary Seminar (January 1974) at Mathura, India, and, the American Oriental Society Meeting at Santa Barbara (March, 1974).

Kushan iconography, especially as evidenced in the Mathura region, demonstrates convincingly that multiple bodily parts initially stem from the Hindu tradition¹. Moreover, the unhesitating vigor with which the convention first appears in the art of Mathura suggests that, prior to its plastic appearance, it had a lengthy and well defined development as a religious concept. The validity of this assumption can be tested by a philological analysis of the ancient Hindu textual traditions prior to the Christian era; the aim here is to determine whether the texts themselves mention the convention in contexts where the religious symbolism is discernible. The present paper considers the evidence in the Rig Veda from this point of view.

II. THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF MULTIPLE BODILY PARTS AND FORMS IN THE RIG VEDA

A. Summary of the Findings

The evidence from the Rig Veda shows that 1) the convention is well recognized and is employed in a fundamentally consistent way throughout the text; 2) the use and meaning of the convention in the Rig Veda may be expected to have important implications for our larger study, since pertinent verses to Rudra and Viṣṇu appear, since numerous passages are repeated in later Brāhmaṇic texts, and since several key terms continue and develop in the later religious thought.

These indications are based on the interpretation of approximately 70 verses which associate multiple bodily parts and forms with the divine (see Table I). Though references to multiple bodily parts and forms do not seem to predominate in any one book of the Rig Veda, some conclusions may be drawn from the distribution of the references. About half are in the older Family Books (nos. 2–8); 10 references (to Soma) are

1. For example, perusal of descriptions of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain devotional icons made by Professor V. S. Agrawala (in his *Catalogue of the Mathura Museum* Parts I–IV in the *Journal of the U. P. Historical Society* (1948–1951), shows that during this formative period of Indian iconography, when many conventions crossed sectarian lines, the convention of multiple

from Book 9, and 23 are from the generally younger Books 1 and 10. The convention, therefore, stems from the oldest stratum of the Rig Veda and continues to have currency in the later portions.

Though the convention spans the entire Rig Veda, its underlying religious symbolism does not significantly alter. For it is found that a basic concept underlies the references to divine multiplicity of parts and forms. In the Rig Veda, a deity associated with the act of creation, on a cosmic scale, is denoted as having multiple bodily parts or forms. The type of deity so denoted may change, but not the basic symbolism. Whereas in the older sections the creator gods are almost entirely Asuras and are closely associated with the creative power *māyā*, in the younger sections the creator gods are conceptual abstractions whose creative activity is spurred on by the power of the Vedic sacrifice, the terms *asura*- and *māyā*- no longer adhering to them. However, throughout, multiplicity describes the structure of a deity who creates, fashions or projects forms². This is the most general usage of the convention, whence three discrete definitions follow:

bodily parts is strictly associated with a small set of Hindu deities. Among these are Śiva and Viṣṇu. The exclusiveness of the convention is perhaps best demonstrated by a Jain image in the Mathura Museum (No. 2502), dated by Professor Agrawala to the late Kushan period (see *Mathura Mus. Catalogue* Pt. III [1950], p. 16). It shows the central bust of Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha. On either side, cast in the role of attendant godlings, are two Hindu gods: to the proper right is the 4-armed figure of Balarāma and to the left is the 4-armed figure of Viṣṇu.

2. An exception is the use of multiple bodily parts to describe Rig Vedic demons (see Table I). Of these, Viśvarūpa is most often mentioned with the multiplicity convention. (For passages pertaining to Viśvarūpa, from the Vedic through Purāṇic literature, see W. Kirfel, *Die dreiköpfige Gottheit*. Bonn, 1948, pp. 30–37). He possesses three heads (*triśīrṣān*- 10.8.8; 10.99.6; see also 10.8.9), six eyes (*ṣaḍakṣā*- 10.99.6) and seven rays (*saptāraśmi*- 10.8.8). Viśvarūpa's demonic nature is related to his confining 'cows' (10.8.8), not to his having multiple bodily parts; similar multiplicity expressions occur with the gods Agni (1.146.1) and Narāśaṃsa (Maitr. Sam. IV. 13.8), see A. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* I (Breslau, 1891), 532. Does Viśvarūpa's multiplicity result from his probable *asura*-nature? He is the son of the *asura* Tvaṣṭṛ (see II. C. 1). Demons may be both Asuras (see II. C. 1 and A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* [Strassburg, 1897], p. 156–158) and wielders of *māyā* (see B. A. Parab, *The Miraculous and Mysterious in Vedic Literature* [Bombay, 1952, 64–67]). The Avesta also knows of a demon having multiple bodily parts. The demonic serpent *Azi Dahāka* has three mouths, three heads and six eyes. I am thankful to Professor Mark Dresden for this information.

1. Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates the phenomenal world.
2. Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who represents the raw material out of which the phenomenal world is created.
3. Multiple bodily parts and forms are associated with a deity who creates, projects, emanates forms from its numen into the phenomenal world. It is by these forms that the deity is apprehended in externality.

Why should multiple bodily parts and forms denote a deity associated with the creation process? What is the particular vision that makes this possible?

The Rig Veda seems to present several visions on the nature of the creation process itself. One theory well explored by the studies of Professor W. Norman Brown considers creation as a differentiation process. Creation of the universe in this process is due to the differentiation between unorganized and organized matter³. Another view understands cosmic creation in a seemingly different, unrelated way. Here, birth of the universe is analogous to birth through labor: the forms to fill the physical world are literally emitted out of the creator and into externality. It is this image of the creation which closely relates to divine multiplicity of bodily parts and forms in the Rig Veda.

In this process, the creator creates the universe by emitting all forms which lie dormant in his belly. These manifold forms comprise all dichotomies experienced in human existence. Infinitely various, these forms come into being at the time the fullness of the creator begins to unfold. Being thus pregnant with the forms of the phenomenal world until he initiates parturition, the creator god is with multiple bodily parts and forms much the same way as a mother is with child. A variation is, that the creator god assumes a passive role in the process of emission.

3. See W. Norman Brown, "Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda", *JAOS* 85 (1965), 24.

Though still containing within himself the manifold raw material, others exert to bring it out of him. In both cases, multiple bodily parts and forms describe the structure of the god involved in the process of creation by emission. Moreover, these cases illustrate, respectively, definitions 1 and 2, above.

Definitions 1 and 2 provide an answer to 'how visible, mortal forms were created in the world'. The third definition answers 'how visible, immortal forms were created in the world'. Here the subject of creation is the forms which divinity projects to make itself known in the phenomenal world. In the world, all objects have the property of being apprehensible through their physical, discernible presence. But this is not the intrinsic nature of the numen. It is a 'Power', a form-less, name-less Influence felt to exist. The belief should have been that such a Power does show itself, by its own will, in the physical world. Again by the process of emission, the numinous projects from itself forms that are the visible locations of its particular divine powers.

As would be expected, the numinous and its projected forms occupy two distinctly different regions. The former resides in an invisible, the latter in a sphere visible to Vedic man. Indeed, these spheres are but two parts of a complete cosmological framework⁴. The view of the universe is that it consists of two antithetical hemispheres (the Sat [i. e. the Existent, the Real] that is, the world, and the Asat [lit. the Nonexistent, the Unreal] that is, the underworld). They are separated by a chasm. The upper part, the Sat, consists of the earth, the atmosphere and the heavens. The heavenly region is further divided into two parts which are separated by a vault (*nāka*). The heavenly region below the vault is the visible sky (*div*, *vyoman*) ; the vault is the divider between the visible upper world and the invisible world of heaven. This 'highest heaven' (*parama vyoman*) is the dwelling place of the immortals, of the numinous.

4. See W. Norman Brown, "Agni, Sun, Sacrifice, and Vāc: A sacerdotal Ode by Dīrghatamas (Rig Veda 1.164)", *JAOS* 88 (1968), 203-206 for a recent discussion of this cosmological theory.

The numen in the highest heaven possesses a supra-normal power to construct forms. In this way, the invisible numen projects visible forms into the region below the vault. These divine modalities fill the natural and ritual world of Vedic man. Here he sees, feels and therefore knows of their presence.

Into this scheme of conceptualization fit references to Rudra and Viṣṇu. Rudra, in his capacity to create many phenomenal forms of himself (definition 3) is described as being 'multiformed' (*pururūpa-*). Viṣṇu, though not actually described with the convention, is said to exhibit the manifest 'locations' (*dhāman*) of his divine power. Since such locations correlate with a god's projected forms, the implication is that Viṣṇu has the ability to project forms into the phenomenal world; it is by these visible forms that his divine power may be known (definition 3).

B. Methodology

References in support of the above findings were collected in the following manner:

1. Numerical terms were checked in H. Grassmann, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda* (Leipzig, 1873; 4th ed., Wiesbaden, 1964) for possible nominal, adjectival or compound usage with the bodily part or form of a deity or demon.
2. Collective terms (e.g. *puru-*, *bhūri-*, *viśva-*, *viśvatas*) were checked in the same way.
3. References to the plural of naturally declined dual bodily parts are included; the present study makes use of the references analyzed by S. G. Oliphant in his study of the Vedic duals.
4. Included are references using terms which relate conceptually to the creation or existence of multiple bodily parts or forms (in particular, *asura-*, *dhāman-*, *māyā-*).

5. Samuel G. Oliphant, "The Vedic Dual: Part I. The Dual of Bodily Parts", Johns Hopkins diss. publ. in *JAOS* 30 (1910), 155-185.

In this manner, it has been found that the following divinities are described as having multiple bodily parts and forms: Agni, Aṅgirasas, Aśvins, Asura Bull, Indra, Indra-Vāyu, Tvaṣṭṛ, Puruṣa, Bṛhaspati, Rudra, Varuṇa, Vāc, Vāstoṣpati, Viśvakarman, Viśvarūpa and other demons, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Soma. Of these, the references to Tvaṣṭṛ, the Asura Bull and Indra advance most clearly the argument for establishing the three definitions given in II. A.

C. The Argument

It will be shown first that Tvaṣṭṛ exemplifies definition 1, the Asura Bull definition 2, and Indra definition 3. Next, all other verses mentioning divine multiplicity of parts and forms are discussed in relation to these three definitions.

1. Tvaṣṭṛ

Tvaṣṭṛ is one of the older creator gods in the Rig Veda; conceptually he may well stem from the earlier Indo-Iranian period, since Avestan *Θwarəχštar* 'builder, creator' is to be compared with his Rig Vedic name⁶. In the Rig Veda, he is the creator conceived also as a builder and fashioner. As such, he represents less a particular natural phenomenon than the energizing power in nature which causes apprehensible forms⁷.

Tvaṣṭṛ is the 'one born at the beginning' (*agrajā-*) or 'the first-going' (*puroyāvan-*) in 9.5.9, in the sense that he belongs to the beginning (*agriyā-* 1.13.10)⁸. From him creation unfolds. Tvaṣṭṛ probably precedes Sky and Earth, parents of the gods (1.185.6), since he 'adorned with forms ... sky and earth, and all living creatures' (10.110.9), that is, he created them. Tvaṣṭṛ puts the element of life (*turīpa-*) in creatures (1.142.10; 3.4.9) causing them to multiply⁹. In sum, Tvaṣṭṛ who origi-

6. J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens I* (Stuttgart, 1960), 27. M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen* (Heidelberg, 1953), 539 – hereafter cited as KEWA.

7. Cf. Gonda, *Rel. Ind.* I, 26 ff.

8. W. Norman Brown, "The Creation Myth of the Rig Veda", *JAOS* 62 (1942), 86.

9. On *turīpa-* see M. Bloomfield, *Indogermanische Forschungen* XXV (1909), 191.

nates forms (*rūpá-* cf. 1.188.9) is creator of both animate and inanimate forms appearing in the phenomenal world (on the force of *rūpá* see L. Renou, *Études sur le Vocabulaire du Rgveda* [Pondichéry, 1958] p. 12 to 13).

Tvaṣṭṛ's creative ability probably stems from his belonging to a class of Rig Vedic deities called Asuras¹⁰. Who is an Asura?¹¹ The term is understood as being derived from *asu-* (m. 'live, vital energy'¹²) plus the suffix *-ra*¹³. The basic meaning of *asura-* is 'a being', in particular 'a High Being', one possessing *asu-*. The more specific definitions of *asura-*

10. 1.110.3: *camasám ásurasya* refers to the Soma cup Tvaṣṭṛ made for the gods, with *ásura-* designating Tvaṣṭṛ (Sāyaṇa; L. Renou, *Études Védiques et Pāṇinéennes* 15 (1966), 79 – hereafter cited as *EVP*; P. V. Bradke, *Dyaus Asura, Ahura Mazdâ und die Asuras* (Halle, 1885), pp. 73–74. Cf. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* I, 515. Note also that Tvaṣṭṛ's deeds are mentioned in a hymn (RV 3.55) whose refrain extols the *ásura-*power of the gods (see fn. 26).

11. It is noteworthy that the plural of *ásura-* occurs infrequently in the Rig Veda, the singular being the common form. See Bradke, *Dyaus Asura*, p. 21.

12. Mayrhofer, *KEWA*, 66.

13. So J. Wackernagel, A. Debrunner, *Altindische Grammatik* II/2 (Göttingen, 1954), 856–857 citing among others, such examples from the RV as: *aṃhurá-/aṃhú-*; *dhīra-/dhī-*; *a-śrīrá-/śrī-*; *madhulá-, Sūtras madhura-/mádhu*; from the AV *pāṃsurá-/pāṃsú-*. Cf. Mayrhofer, *KEWA*, 65; R. N. Dandekar, "Asura Varuṇa", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 21 (1941), 179–180. [See these references, plus Burrow and Schlerath, below, for further bibliography.] This position, not free from controversy, has recently been criticized again. B. Schlerath ("Altindisch *asu-*, Awestisch *ahu-* und ähnlich klingende Wörter", in *Pratidānam* [Kuiper Festschrift], ed. J. C. Heesterman, (The Hague, Paris, 1968, 142–153) separates *ásura-* from *ásu-* because he can accept only three of Wackernagel's examples as relevant, and, because the terms *ásura-* and *ásu-* never occur together in the RV or AV. It is not clear why the latter observation should be crucial for the etymology of *ásura-*; two of the three Wackernagel examples Schlerath does accept (i. e. *aṃhú-* and *pāṃsú-*) do not meet this condition either. Moreover, the meanings Schlerath assigns to *ásu-* "das unspezifizierte Leben" and "die Existenz im Jenseits" (p. 148), are meanings I find contextually suitable for *ásura-* as 'one possessing *ásu-*'. It is of additional interest that *ásu-* functions like a substance that can be possessed, or, that can be given more than once (e. g. 10.14.12; 10.59.7). Emphasizing neither the immaterial as *ātmán-* (from which *ásu-* is distinguished in 1.164.4) nor the temporal as *áyus-* 'life-span' (cf. 1.113.16; Renou, *EVP* 3, 44; 52), *ásu-* appears more like a 'life-substance' (cf. Schlerath, 147–148). T. Burrow ("The Proto-Indoaryans", *JRAS* 1973, No. 2], 123–140) separates *ásura-* from *ásu-*, pointing out that whereas *ásu-* means 'life', *ásura-* is 'lord, sovereign'. Burrow bases his definition of *ásura-* on Bradke's findings; but these cannot be taken as conclusive since Bradke defined *ásura-* only from its occurrences as an epithet of gods (see fn. 15).

(e.g. "powerful, m. lord", later on: "evil spirit, demon"¹⁴; "lord, overlord, sovereign"¹⁵ tend to obscure a fundamental feature of the term, namely that it is an ambivalent, amoral term in the Rig Veda¹⁶.

The ambivalence of the term is noted through its contextual usage. Throughout the text there are Asuras who are deities and Asuras who are demons. (Note that in RV 8.96.9 the latter are called *ásura- adevá*; the implication is that this type of demon is complementary and opposite to the *asura* who is a *deva*.) The use of the term *asura*- as 'demon', though sparse in the Rig Veda, is not a late development. The term, plus *asura-han*- 'asura-slayer', appear in Books 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10¹⁷. Further, two gods who are Asuras are themselves characterized by an ambivalent nature. Varuṇa, the Asura *parexcellence* in the Rig Veda, has both a wrathful, sinister side and a compassionate side¹⁸. The same may be said for Rudra¹⁸. It is of more than passing interest that *asu*- also appears to be an ambivalent term. This is best seen in the compound *asu-tīp*; as Bergaigne (*Rel. Véd.* III, 72 ff.) already pointed out, *asu-tīp* is certainly applied to demons in 10.87.14 and to non-demons (probably ṛṣis, possibly gods) in 10.82.7.

In the Rig Veda, nearly all great gods are called *asura*¹⁹. Sometimes *asura* qualifies *deva*²⁰; thus a particular kind of *deva* may also be called

14. Mayrhofer, *KEWA*, 65.

15. This is Bradke's definition in *Dyaus Asura*. It is obtained from analyzing *ásura*- only in contexts where the term is associated with a god. Bradke believes that those contexts where the term is associated with a demon are not representative of the term's usage in the Rig Veda (p. 104-105) and, that the later consistent usage of *ásura*- 'demon' represents an intrusive development (p. 106).

16. This has been pointed out by A. Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique* III (Paris, 1883), 67-88.

17. See Bergaigne, *ibid.* 68-69.

18. Varuṇa's ambivalent nature is observed by Bergaigne (*ibid.*, 115); cf. J. Gonda (*The Vedic God Mitra* [Leiden, 1972], pp. 15-17). For Rudra, see J. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism* (London, 1970), Chap. I. Cf. R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913), Part II, pp. 102-106.

19. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 22. Bradke, *Dyaus Asura*, pp. 119-123 lists the following: Dyaus, (Divo) Asura, Yama?, Rudra, Soma-Rudra, Maruts, Parjanya?, Varuṇa, Mitra-Varuṇa, Aryaman, Ādityas, Indra, Bṛhaspati, Agni, Soma, Savitr, Sūrya, Tvaṣṭṛ, Pūṣan, Uṣas, Sarasvatī, Rodasī.

20. C. W. J. van der Linden, *Concept of deva in the Vedic Age*, diss. (Utrecht, 1954), p. 31.

asura. The latter is superior since the Vedic Indian considered *asura*-ship as an addition or something superior to *deva*²¹. Probably that which sets Asuras apart is their relation to 'creative power'. Asuras seem to be associated, more than other classes of gods, with the term *māyā*-, 'creative power'²².

Māyā, one of the most important concepts in Indian religion and philosophy, signifies in the Rig Veda, a cosmic power enabling those deities having special insights and knowledge to create the truly wondrous. The connotations expressed by *māyā* in the Veda are "power, wisdom, subtle device" and the term *māyā*- may be defined somewhat as follows: "incomprehensible insight, wisdom, judgement and power enabling its possessor to create something or to do something, ascribed to mighty beings."²³

Tvaṣṭṛ is an *ásura* who possesses *māyā*. Tvaṣṭṛ, states 10.53.9, 'knows *māyās*, most skilful of the skilful'²⁴. (The verse expounds on some of his skills in this connection: he brought forth the bowls of the gods and sharpened the iron axe of Brahmanaspati.)

Tvaṣṭṛ, in his capacity as creator god, is considered to be a stimulator of life. Accordingly, he bears the epithet *savitṛ*-. *Savitṛ* though usually the proper name of a separate Rig Vedic deity is applied to Tvaṣṭṛ in 10.10.5 and 3.55.19. The term, from *Vsū* ('to vivify, create, produce' etc.), ought to signify 'one who gives life; a vivifier' when applied to Tvaṣṭṛ in the above verses which emphasize his role as a creator of worldly forms.

Interestingly, the verses which describe Tvaṣṭṛ as *savitṛ*-, also call him *viśvarūpa*- 'omniform'²⁵. Thus in 3.55.19, as creator of mankind, Tvaṣṭṛ

21. Linden, *ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

22. J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (The Hague, 1965), p. 168. Linden (*Concept of deva*, pp. 32-33) also concludes that *asuras* are superior to *devas* because the former possess some special creative ability.

23. J. Gonda, *Four Studies in the Language of the Veda* (The Hague, 1959), p. 126.

24. *tvāṣṭā māyā ved apāsām apāstamaḥ*.

25. Cf. J. Gonda, *Epithets in the Rgveda* (The Hague, 1959), pp. 112-113. Though undecided as to whether *viśvarūpa*- applies to Tvaṣṭṛ's activity or his person, Gonda recognizes that a god's nature and his activity are practically identical for Vedic man. Therefore "a divine being which creates all forms was apt to be characterized as 'omiform'".

is *śavitā viśvárūpaḥ*²⁶. RV 10.10 being a dialogue between the primeval twins Yama and Yamī, Yamī states in verse 5: 'Already in the womb (*gárbha*) the creator made us husband and wife, god Tvaṣṭṛ, the vivifier, the omniform'²⁷. The 'womb' which contained the couple ought to belong to Tvaṣṭṛ himself. This is supported by AV 6.78, a hymn for matrimonial happiness; verse 3 says that "Tvaṣṭṛ generated the wife, Tvaṣṭṛ [generated] thee as husband for her; let Tvaṣṭṛ make for you two a thousand life-times (*áyus-*), a long life-time"²⁸. The strong implication from 10.10.5 and AV 6.78.3 is that Tvaṣṭṛ can generate forms and cause a lifespan because he possesses life-forms in his womb, as it were. It is because he contains such forms within himself that Tvaṣṭṛ is called *viśvárūpa-*. That is why in RV 1.13.10 Tvaṣṭṛ is said to be both *agriyá-* and *viśvárūpa-*; that is, he is 'first', being prior to creation, and 'omni-form' since he contains the forms to be generated when creation takes place.

2. The androgynous Asura Bull

Hymn 3.38 postulates a primordial Asura Bull. He is known, so says verse 4, by the great name *Viśvárūpa*, indicative that he possesses all forms of life. But in the actual process of bringing these forth, he is passive. For other gods possessing *māyā* (i. e. *māyin-*), acting as if they were constructing, bring out or, as verse 7 says, 'measure out' each form located in the Asura Bull. The Asura Bull thus symbolizes the raw material out of which the world is shaped. In the sense that the forms of the world are inside of him, the Asura Bull bears the great name 'Omni-form'. This interpretation rests on 3.38.4,5,7 and a corroborating passage also in Book III, namely 3.56.3.

26. 3.55.19ab: God Tvaṣṭṛ, the vivifier (being) omniform, has fostered creatures and has abundantly created (them). *devás tváṣṭā śavitā viśvárūpaḥ pupóṣa prajāḥ purudhā jajāna*.

27. 10.10.5ab: *gárbhe nú nau janitā dāmpatī kar devás tváṣṭā śavitā viśvárūpaḥ*. According to 5.42.13: he alters forms in the bellies (plural!) of his daughter. Allusion to incest between Tvaṣṭṛ and his daughter Saranyū?

28. W.D. Whitney, *Atharva-veda Samhitā* in HOS VII (Cambridge, 1905), p. 340. *tváṣṭā jāyām ajanayat tváṣṭāsyai tvām pátim/ tváṣṭā sahásram áyūñṣi dīrghám áyuh kṛnotu vām*.

Hymn 3.38 takes for its theme cosmogony. In the manner of the ancient Rig Veda, observes Renou, a primeval Being is conceived in personal, not abstract fashion²⁹. He is visualized as a mighty *asura* bull (or 'male', the terms *vṛṣan-* in verse 4 and *vṛṣabhá-* in vss. 5, 7 could of course mean both), who is androgynous; verse 7 calls him a Bull-Cow³⁰. The same point is made in 3.56.3 where he is described as having both three bellies and three udders³¹. 'Three' in this context probably connotes 'totality' and 'delimitation'³², the idea being that the Asura Bull's nature may be defined by 'total maleness' and 'total femaleness'. It is not surprising that such a definition also relates to his name Viśvarūpa (3.38.4; 3.56.3); in the Rig Veda a 'name' (*nāman*) directly defines the essential nature, not the appearance, of a being³³. The connection between an androgynous and an omniform nature rests on the mythopoeic explanation of how the One, the primeval Being, can by solely responsible for the creation of manifold forms. A self-seminating first principle pregnant with the forms of life, sustains the mystery and satisfies the dilemma³⁴.

How is this capacity to create realized? 'This indeed is the [work] of him, the Bull-Cow' (3.38.7a); he is the Bull, the Begetter of endless

29. L. Renou, *Hymnes spéculatifs du Veda* (Paris, 1956), p. 231.

30. Note that in 10.5.7, Agni is both bull and cow. For an over-all sketch of the androgynous principle in India, discussed within the broader theme of bisexuality see Hermann Baumann, *Das Doppelte Geschlecht; ethnologische Studien zur Bisexualität in Ritus und Mythos* (Berlin, 1955), pp. 142-154.

31. 3.56.3 ab: *tripājasyó vṛṣabhó viśvárūpa utá tryudhā purudhā prajāvān*. For *pājas* see Renou, *EVP* 4, 54; S.D. Atkins, "The Meaning of Vedic *pājas*", *JAOS* 85, 21. Cf. K. Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* I in *HOS* 33, 403, fn. 3a; A. Ludwig, *Der Rigveda* IV (Prag, 1881), 202. Note that the Bull is also *tryaniká*, 'three-faced' probably in the sense of facing (i.e. seeing) everywhere.

32. J. Gonda, *The Savayajñas in Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde n.s.* Vol. 71, no. 2 (1965), 142 and references. See also, for nos. 3, 5, 7, the discussion in W. Kirfel, *Symbolik des Hinduismus und des Jinismus* (Stuttgart, 1959), pp. 95-102.

33. Renou, *Études Voc. RV*, p. 111.

34. The myth of the androgyne in different cultures is treated by Mircea Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne* (London, New York, 1965), pp. 78-124.

forms (3.56.3d), possessing progeny in abundance (3.56.3 b). Further, he is said to “be in the manifestations of immortality”³⁵.

The process by which creation takes place is, as in the case of Tvaṣṭṛ, the emission process. The terminology of verse 5 makes this clear: ‘The older Bull gave birth [as] the first; these, his issues are abundant (*āsūta pūrvo vṛṣabhó jyāyān imā asya śurūdhaḥ santi pūrvīḥ*).’ The process seems to be activated not by the Asura Bull but by the *māyin*- who, ‘taking on ever new *asura*-power, measure out (each) form located in him’³⁶. Who these *māyin*- are is difficult to tell. However, it may be concluded that they, due to their marvellous creative power, individualize manifold phenomenal forms from out of the primeval raw material³⁷.

3. Indra

The case of Indra is most interesting and instructive. Though Indra is called *asura* (e.g. 1.174.1; 8.90.6; 10.96.11; see Bradke, *Dyāus Asura*, p. 121), the *asura*-power (*asurya*; *asuria*) may not originally have been his. It was probably given to him by the gods in order to slay the demon Vṛtra (see 6.20.2; 7.21.7)³⁸. Presumably the gods who gave him this power were Asuras themselves, namely the Ādityas³⁹.

Indra also possesses *māyā*; however the verses do not specify whether he gained this power at the time he gained *asurya*. What is specified is how he uses *māyā*, and this is of considerable interest. 3.53.8 ab says that Indra is in the habit of becoming every *rūpa*, in effecting *māyās* around

35. On 3.38.4d: J. Gonda, *Notes on names and the name of God in ancient India* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde. n.s. Vol. 75*, no. 4 (1970), p. 30.

36. 3.38.7cd: *anyād-anyad asuryam vāsānā nī māyīno mamire rūpām asmin*. For vs. 7 cf. H. Oldenberg, *Ṛgveda. Textkritische und exegetische Noten in Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Phil.-Hist. Kl. n.f. 11, nr. 5 (1909), p. 248. For a different reading see M. Falk, *Nāma-rūpa and Dharma-rūpa* (Calcutta, 1943), p. 4. On the force of *Vmā*, see Gonda, *Language*, p. 167 ff.

37. Cf. Gonda, *Language*, p. 142.

38. See Brown, “Creation Myth”, 89; Bergaigne, *Rel. Véd.* III, 74 ff.

39. Brown, *ibid.*, 88 ff.

his own body⁴⁰, and verse 6.47.18c says that this characteristic of Indra's – to be *pururūpa*- 'multiform' – is due to his *māyās*⁴¹. Given the basic meaning of *māyā*, it must be inferred that *māyā* in these verses applies to the special ability of a divine Being to create *rūpa*. In that *rūpa* is something fashioned (*Vpiś* 10.184.1) or concretized (*Vtakṣ* 8.102.8; *Vmā* 5.42.13), it is understood as 'concrete, outer form', and may be used to mean 'manifestation'.

The sum of the evidence relating to Indra, and specifically to the Indra verses above, would lead to the conclusion that *māyā* refers to the incomprehensible power of a High Being (i. e. *asura*) to assume forms or to project forms of itself into the phenomenal world⁴².

Whereas further study may determine wherein Vedic man located the phenomenal forms of Indra, an attempt may be made at this point to define the transcendental nature of the High Being Indra, the nature out of which the forms proceed. The powers that comprise his essential nature are likely to be 'virile strength' (6.46.3 : *sahasramuṣka*⁴³ *túvinṛmṇa* 'having a thousand testicles and powerful manly strength') and 'omniscience' (1.23.3 *sahasrākṣā*⁴³ 'thousand-eyed' said of Indra-Vāyu). The projection of auspicious phenomenal Indra forms (*surūpa*-) is perhaps related to the ritual invocation (cf. 1.4.1). The possibility that Indra may assume numerous forms is also stressed in that he possesses many names (8.93.17 *puruṇāman*-⁴⁴) and abundant *māyā* (*purumāyā*- 3.51.4; 6.18.12; 6.21.2; 6.22.1; in 1.119.1 *purumāyā*- describes the Aśvins' chariot).

40. 8ab: *rūpām-rūpam maghāvā bobhavīti māyāḥ kṛtvānās tanvām pári svām*. Renou's definition of *māyā* ('la faculté de construire des formes', L. Renou et J. Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique* [Paris, 1947], p. 317) is very suitable here.

41. 6.47.18: *rūpām-rūpam prátirūpo babhūva tād asya rūpam praticákṣaṇāya/ indro māyābhiḥ pururūpa iṇyate yuktā hy āsya hārayaḥ śatā dáśa*.

42. See Gonda, *Language*, p. 128.

43. On the meaning of *sahasra* as 'limitless, all' in compounds having a bodily part as final member, and on the significance of such compounds, see II.D.1.a. For *sahasramuṣka* cf. 8.19.32 (II.D.1.c). On 'thousand-eyed' signifying 'omniscience', see II.D.1.a.

44. On the relation between *nāmas* and *rūpas*, see Falk, *Nāma-rūpa*, p. 19.

D. Other Examples of Divine Multiplicity

Almost all other verses mentioning divine multiplicity of parts and forms illustrate one of the definitions given above. The deities discussed immediately below (Section D.1) are associated with the terms *asura*- and/or *māyā*-, *ugra*-, whence is derived their creative ability⁴⁵. Section D.2 considers the evidence relating to Viśvakarman, Puruṣa and Vāc as illustrative of late Rig Vedic examples of definitions 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

1. Gods whose creativeness relates to *asura*-hood

a. *Varuṇa*

Of all Vedic gods, the title of *asura* belongs preeminently to Varuṇa (e. g. 1.24.14; 2.27.10; 2.28.7; 8.42.1). Possibly he possesses the greatest amount of creative power, the epithet *māyin*- being chiefly applied to him⁴⁶. Because of *māyā*, Varuṇa wields supreme sovereignty over the whole universe, which is said to have been originally created by him⁴⁷. Varuṇa established heaven and earth (8.42.1) and set upon their orderly course such natural phenomena as the sun, the moon, the waters, dawns, the seasons, the fall of rain, growth of vegetation etc⁴⁸. Moreover, he enforces and upholds a self-operating cosmic power (*ṛta*) which establishes, governs and directs physical and psychical norms in worldly, human and ritual activities, causing these to appear as right and true.

These creative and regulatory roles bespeak of Varuṇa's essential nature, characterized by 'all-comprehensiveness', especially as particular-

45. There are two exceptions. In 7.55.1 Vāstoṣpati, a tutelary god of the house, is said to 'enter all forms' (*viśvā rūpāṇy āviśān*; cf. 9.25.4 in II.D.1.b), and 10.78.5 describes the Aṅgirasas as being *viśvárūpa*-. The significance of multiple forms in both cases is unclear. The terminology connotative of a god's ability to create forms, set forth in II.D.1, is not used with Vāstoṣpati or the Aṅgirasas.

46. Gonda, *Language*, p. 143.

47. Dandekar, "*Asura Varuṇa*", 159; Varuṇa's *māyā* is described in 5.85.5,6; 8.41.3. Cf. Parab, *The Miraculous*, p. 62-63.

48. Details on these standard aspects of Varuṇa's activity can be found in any of the well-known accounts of Vedic Religion and Mythology by Macdonell, Oldenberg, Bergaigne, Hilbrandt.

ized in 'omniscience'⁴⁹. Multiplicity of eyes, attributed to Varuṇa in 7.34.10 symbolically represents this divine power.

'Varuṇa having vital/creative power, (the god) with a thousand eyes' (*vāruṇa ugrāḥ*⁵⁰ *sahāsracakṣāḥ*) is the literal translation for 7.34.10 b. But, the connotations for *sahāsracakṣas-* go beyond this. It is found that bahuvrīhi compounds having *sahāśra-* ('thousand') as the prior member, followed by a term for some bodily parts or forms, construct an expression which appears to define the structure of a creator god or an all-inclusive divine power of the numinous, which may also be revealed in its phenomenal manifestations⁵¹. *Sahāśra-* in these compounds is not to be taken numerically but as expressing the idea of 'limitless, total, all' with respect to the bodily parts or forms. Thus 7.34.10, in emphasizing Varuṇa's limitless eyes, is of course implying that Varuṇa 'sees all' (cf. 1.25.5, 16 where he is 'far-sighted'). In that 'sight' often correlates with 'wisdom', 'seeing all' is equivalent to 'knowing all'⁵². This divine power of Varuṇa is elsewhere expressed by the epithet *viśvavedas-* 'all knowing, omniscient' (8.42.1); cf. 1.25.7-9⁵³.

Varuṇa in his capacity as all-seeing/all-knowing is to be posited in the highest heaven⁵⁴, a region conceived as being 'highest' in several re-

49. See Dandekar, "Asura Varuṇa", 186; cf. Gonda, *Epithets*, p. 154.

50. On *ugrā* see J. Gonda, *Ancient-Indian ojas*, Latin *oaugos* and the Indo-European nouns in *-es/-os* (Utrecht, 1952).

51. The evidence, largely cumulative, is based on 6 different compounds pertinent to this study: *sahāsracakṣas-* (7.34.10; 9.60.1, 2; 9.65.7); *sahāstrapad-*, *opād-* (8.58.16; 10.90.1); *sahāśramuṣka-* (6.46.3; 8.19.32); *sahāśraśīrṣan-* (10.90.1); *sahāśraśṛṅga-* (5.1.8; 7.55.7); *sahasrākṣa-* (1.79.12 [cf. 10.79.5]; 10.90.1; 1.23.3). *Sahāśra* compounds describing the structure of a creator god are restricted to 10.90.1 where collectively they apparently mean the same as *viśvarūpa*. "Sahasra is equivalent to *sarvam* (Śatapatha Br., 4.6.1.15), *bhūmā* (Śatapatha Br., 3.3.3.8) and *paramam* (Tāṇḍya 16.9.2), the highest entity transcending all the categories of manifestation". V.S. Agrawala, "Gaurī", in *Indological Studies* in honor of W. Norman Brown (ed. E. Bender, New Haven, 1962), p. 7.

52. Cf. J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets* (The Hague, 1963), pp. 81-82.

53. See also A. Hillebrandt, *Varuṇa und Mitra* (Breslau, 1877), pp. 79-82 on Varuṇa, the All-knowing god.

54. Also the seat of Mitra-Varuṇa. See H. Lüders, *Varuṇa I* (Göttingen, 1951), 54-56. So also Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* ad 6.67.6ab.

spects, one of which is physical. Exegetical studies on RV 1.25.10, 11 would place the omniscient Varuṇa into this invisible sphere above the firmament. Verse 10 says that Varuṇa has rested in the Waters (*pa-styāsu*⁵⁵), from where, according to verse 11, he who knows perceives all transcendental things, those already done and those to be done. For Lüders (*Varuṇa* II, 710–714) Varuṇa's resting place here is in the heavenly Waters located in the highest heaven, and these Waters (Gonda, *Rel. Ind.* I, 80) are to be considered as invisible. The series of hymns addressed to Mitra-Varuṇa (RV 5.62–72) also support the belief that the powers of these divinities originate from the highest celestial regions and operate upon activities below⁵⁶. Only from such a vantage point would it be possible for Varuṇa to see all that is between heaven and earth and even that which is beyond (AV 4.16.5; vss. 1–4 vividly testify that Varuṇa therefore 'knows' of secret thoughts, private talks, all manner of comportment since he and his spies 'see' all earthly activity).

b. Soma

Soma is an *asura* (e.g. 9.99.1); as such, he knows of all existing things (9.74.7)⁵⁷. His knowledge of things in the phenomenal world attests to his omniscience. The epithet *sahāsracakṣas-* (9.60.1, 2; 9.65.7), as in the case of Varuṇa, attributes this power to the godhead. Similarly do two epithets which also emphasize Soma's limitless vision: *viśvācakṣas-* (9.86.5 'All-seeing') and *bhūricakṣas-* (9.26.5 'Many-eyed'). Omniscience is not the only characteristic which Soma and Varuṇa share. Both have spies (e.g. 9.73.4 for Soma; for Varuṇa see Macdonell, *Vedic My-*

55. R. Pischel, *Vedische Studien* II (Stuttgart, 1897), 211ff.

56. The gods' powers operate when assuming the forms wherein they have transposed their powers; Heaven and Earth are the locations of the divine powers of Mitra and Varuṇa according to PB 14.2.4 (commenting on RV 5.68.1–3). See W. Caland, *Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa* (Calcutta, 1931), p. 352; and J. Gonda, *The Meaning of the Sanskrit term Dhāman-* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde*, n.s. Vol. 73, no. 2 (1967), p. 70.

57. *sómo mīdhvāñ dūro veda bhūmanah*. Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* ad 9.74.7b): *bhūman* has two meanings – *bhūmi* and *bhūvana*. So also Renou, *EVP* 9, 86.

thology, p. 23) and both wield *māyā* (9.83.3 for Soma). Perhaps such resemblances and that both gods are immersed in water (see 9.90.2), account for the identification of Soma with Varuṇa in 9.73.3⁵⁸. In the last verse of that hymn, 9.73.9, Soma is also called by the name Varuṇa⁵⁹. Verse 9 seems to say that the *māyā* of Soma/Varuṇa is involved in the process of preparing the soma juice. That is, Soma uses the power of *māyā* to create phenomenal forms recognized as soma juice. As will be shown below, the process by which such forms are created is analogous to the Indra example: the High Being Soma uses *māyā* to project forms of itself; these forms correspond to the phenomenal terrestrial soma juice.

Soma's ability to project forms into externality is specifically referred to in several verses. 'Entering all forms (*viśvā rūpāṇy āviśān*), cleansing himself, he (i. e. Soma, transposed into soma juice) goes ... there where the immortals are seated' (the sacrifice; 9.25.4). "The verb *ā- viś-* (cf. 7.55.1; 8.15.13) 'to enter' is repeatedly used of Soma when going into the vessels or into the stomach of a god ...;"⁶⁰ each newly made soma-juice becomes his newly projected *rūpa-*. Each *rūpa-* of Soma is further believed to be 'the location of his divine power' (*dhāman-*)⁶¹. The correlation between the concepts *rūpa-* and *dhāman-* is demonstrated by 9.28.2 c (*viśvā dhāmāny āviśān*) where *dhāman-* occupies the same position *rūpa-* does in 9.25.4⁶².

The act of transposition from the High Being Soma to the ritual soma juice is clearly described in 9.71.2 b–d⁶³: 'he [as god] unveils the asura-

58. On this verse, and on an analysis of Soma and the Waters, see Lüders, *Varuṇa* I, 268 ff. Lüders has rightly pointed out that 9.73.3 c refers to Soma in the celestial Waters located in the highest heaven.

59. So Lüders, *Varuṇa*, 52; 471; Macdonell, *Vedic Myth.* p. 110; possibly, according to Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* ad 9.73.9 b); Renou (*EVP* 9, 23): Varuṇa (– Soma).

60. Gonda, *Dhāman-*, 47.

61. See Gonda, *ibid.*, 20–21.

62. Gonda, *ibid.*, 46–47.

63. *asuryāṃ vārṇaṃ nī riṇīte asya tām / jāhāti vavrīm pitúr eti niṣkṛtām upaprūtām kṛṇute nirṇijam tādā*. For exegetical studies of this verse see Renou, *EVP* 9, 80–81; for *vārṇa* see also Renou, *Études Voc. RV* pp. 14–15. Renou's translation of *pitú* (*EVP* 9, 20): "Père (= ciel)" does not fit the context well. Cf. Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* and Oldenberg, *Noten* ad 9.71.2. On *nirṇij* as

trait that is his; he abandons the cover, he goes [as] juice to the fixed place [i.e. the sacrifice]; [there] he assumes the flowing [milk] [as his] robe continually'.

The picture that emerges from the foregoing is that in order to come to the sacrifice as soma juice, Soma abandons his *asura* state. This state ought therefore to be both noumenal and supernal. By means of *māyā*, he projects forms of himself into externality, specifically, the ritual. These forms, equivalent to the drops of juice, are the locations of his divine power. The belief is that Soma is in, or better, IS each soma drop, pure or mixed, past, present and future. In the sense therefore that Soma goes into all possible soma juice forms, the god's structure is described as being *viśvárūpa* 'omniform' (cf. 6.41.3)⁶⁴.

The actual soma juice in the ritual undergoes several processes which come in three-s⁶⁵. In consequence, 'three' occurs as the number of bodily parts associated with Soma or with the locus of his divine power, the a milky robe of Soma, see D. Srinivasan, *Concept of Cow in the Rig Veda*. Thesis. (U. of Pa., 1967), 84-85.

64. Soma may also be considered 'omniform' in 4.58.2,3. These verses speak of a great god (*mahá devá*) who is depicted as a buffalo. The thoughts expressed in these two verses seem to be that the ṛṣis will offer ritual praise to *ghṛta* (the sacrificial oblation 'ghee'), which is identified with the soma juice (v. 2; Renou, *Hymnes spéculatifs*, p. 232). The juice, in turn, has the symbolic form of a buffalo (v. 3; Renou, *ibid.*), *gaurá*; thus Soma also should be expressed by this form. Vāc (Speech, both sacred and secular) is *gaurī* in 1.164.41 (cf. Agrawala, "Gaurī", 1ff.). Since sacred speech is inspired by draughts of soma juice, god Soma may be described as lord of Vāc (9.26.4; 9.101.5) and probably the great god *gaurá*. Note also that *gaurá* is the colour of soma in 10.100.2.

The buffalo Soma is said to have 4 horns (vss. 2 and 3; cf. *śṛṅgāṇi* 9.15.4), 3 feet, 2 heads, 7 hands (vs. 3). The numbers 7, 4, 3 occur in both ritual and cosmic contexts to which the Indian religious tradition ascribes the idea of 'completeness, totality' etc. (see Gonda, *The Savayajñas*, General Index for discussion on above nos.). '2' is also charged with the meaning of 'unity within duality' cf. S. Kramrisch, "Two: Its Significance in the R̥gveda", *Indological Studies* in honor of W. Norman Brown, 109ff. It is thus proposed that the multiplicity in 4.58.2,3 describes the omniform structure of the great god Soma who, as juice, is able to enter mortals (vs. 3d). Geldner ("Zur Erklärung des R̥gveda", *ZDMG* 71, 342) points out that the commentaries try to explain the numbers through the ritual; he offers the 4 *bhúva-nāni* as a possible meaning for the 4 horns.

65. The juice is pressed thrice daily; it has three kinds of admixtures (5.27.5); it flows into three kinds of containers. See Macdonell, *Vedic Myth*. Par. 37.

juice. The epithet *tripṛṣṭha-*, usually translated 'three backs', is applied only to Soma in the Rig Veda (7.37.1; 9.71.7; 9.75.3; 9.90.2; 9.106.11). The etymology of the term *ṛṣṭha-* would indicate that *tripṛṣṭha-* could be a symbolic expression for the three different 'projections' or 'types' of soma juice available in the ritual (cf. 8.2.7-9)⁶⁶. *Ṛṣṭha-* ('the back ... the upper side, surface, top ...⁶⁷') can be explained as derived from a verb root meaning 'to stand forth'; it is around this meaning that cognate terms in other Indo-European languages seem to unite. These terms would come from idg. **pr-* 'forth' (etymologically related to *prá*, *pári*, *puráh* etc.) and **stā-* 'to stand'⁶⁸. Thus, *tripṛṣṭha-* could refer to 'three things standing forth' or 'three projections' and as such represent the three types or three forms of juice Soma projects to meet the exigencies of the ritual. Perhaps the three projected forms are alluded to obliquely in 9.73.1c⁶⁹: 'The Asura (Soma) made himself three heads⁷⁰ for the purpose of attaining [the vessels or stomach of a god? Cf. 9.73.3 d: *dhīrā íc chekur dharúṇesv ārábham*, where *dharúṇa* are the vessels; 3 cd states that whereas the great Varuṇa/Soma has concealed himself in the heavenly waters, those possessing *dhī* were able to grasp his identity in the vessels].

66. The possibility of different 'types' depends on whether the juice is left in its pure state, or, whether it is mixed with another ingredient (see 8.2.9).

67. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1960 ed.), p. 647.

68. Mayrhofer, *KEWA* II, p. 338; another interpretation takes *ṛṣṭhá-* with *ṛṣṭí-* and *pársuḥ*. **pr-* **stā* derivation given by A. Walde, J. Pokorny, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen* (Berlin und Leipzig, 1927), II, 35.

69. 9.73.1a-c: *srákve drapsásya dhámataḥ sám asvarann ṛtásya yónā sám aranta nábhayah/ trīn sá mūrdhnó ásuráś cakra ārábhe*. Lüders (*Varuṇa* I, 235) understands *asura* to refer to 'Heaven' who makes himself three heads in order to receive the ascending Soma. The imagery of the whole verse relates, according to Lüders, to the pressed Soma entering in the heavenly stream. The idea of Soma drops uniting into a Soma essence does not seem convincing. Though interpretations on this difficult verse differ, Lüders seems to be alone in his understanding of *asura*. Others: Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 66): 1cd may refer to Soma swimming in the water; Renou: the Asura Soma has given himself three heads so that one may seize him better (*EVP* 9, 22); Oldenberg (*Noten*): Soma (cf. 9.71.2) to whom one holds (cf. v. 3 *śekur ... ārábham*) to attain a goal. Or, Varuṇa?

70. Cf. I.146.1 *trimūrdhṇam ... agním*, see II. D.1. c.

c. Agni

Agni, an *asura*⁷¹, possessing *māyā*⁷², like Soma, uses his power to emit forms into externality⁷³. However, from this point of view, Agni is a very complex god in Vedic mythology. He has several distinctly different forms wherein his powers are located⁷⁴. As a result, he is called by many different names and is more often associated with the convention of multiplicity than any other god in the Rig Veda. RV 3.20.3 illustrates this point. Pādas 3 ab state⁷⁵: 'O Agni, many (are) your names of immortality, O Jātavedas, O Deva, O Svadhāvat'. These different names relate to the different facets of the divinity's nature⁷⁶. For example, Jātavedas (lit. 'knowing all created beings') acknowledges Agni's power of omniscience. The name is applied exclusively to Agni, and according to 6.15.13 marks his capacity to know all births, or rather, all origins of phenomenal creations (*vísṡvā veda jānimā jātāvedāḥ*). The appellative Deva, though as a term imprecise and broadly applied⁷⁷, does designate a deity as "a superhuman and powerful being who was able to help mankind by his own power. This personality of *deva* could be a screen that receives and collects human piety and religious needs, as the strictly Divine Being is too high and too far away ..."⁷⁸ Possibly Svadhāvat 'autonomous One' names that aspect of divinity excluded in the concept *deva*. The meaning of *svadhā-* would allow for this interpretation, though only further study on the relationship between *deva-*, *svadhāvat-* and *asura-* could tell wheth-

71. See Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* III, 84–85. Cf. Bradke, *Dyaus Asura*, 121–122.

72. See Gonda, *Language*, pp. 130, 145, 148; Parab, *The Miraculous*, p. 64.

73. Agni uses his creative power to project phenomenal forms and to create the world; but he is not a prime agent in Rig Vedic creation theories.

74. As is well known and oft mentioned in accounts of Vedic religion and mythology, Agni's forms are: 'fire' both in its domestic and ritual use; 'lightning' in the atmosphere; 'sun' in the sky.

75. *ágne bhūrīṇi táva jātavedo déva svadhāvo 'mṛtasya nāma*.

76. On the function of a name to concretize the numinous experience see G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* I, trans. J.E. Turner (Torchbook paperback, 1963), Chap. 17.

77. Linden, *Deva*, pp. 14–50.

78. Linden, *ibid.*, p. 49.

er it is correct. *Svadhā-* describes ‘‘la situation propre d’une divinité ou d’une force, la fonction naturelle ...’’⁷⁹; the essence, nature, quality inherent in divinity etc.⁸⁰. Agni’s ability to assume many names (concomitant with many forms) is connected in 3.20.3 cd with the many *māyās* of the *māyin-* which have been placed in Agni (called here *viśvaminvá-*⁸¹). It is to be surmised that Agni, like Indra, uses these conferred creative powers to construct various forms, and that he is on that account described as being, again like Indra, *pururūpa-* (5.8.2, 5).

What is the nature out of which the various forms are constructed? The *sahasra* compounds elucidate the powers inherent in Agni’s essential nature. They indicate that his nature is defined by a totality of ‘knowledge’, ‘fire’ and ‘virile strength’.

Agni is *sahasrākṣá-* (‘thousand-eyed’) in 1.79.12 (cf. *sahásramakṣábhīr ... ágne ...* 10.79.5). Limitless sight, as in the synonym *sahásracakṣas-* used with Varuṇa, assigns complete wisdom to Agni much the same way as 10.187.4 says that Agni sees all creatures and 10.11.1 says that he knows all, as Varuṇa, by his *dhī* (‘vision’, i. e. a supranormal mental faculty whose operation causes true knowledge⁸²). Agni’s power of omniscience, symbolized by his limitless eyes, is of course also insisted upon by the many epithets which directly comment upon his total wisdom (*viśvavid-*, *viśva-vedas-*, *jātavedas-* mentioned above; note also *ṛṣi-*⁸³, *kavi-*⁸³, *kavikratu-*).

The completeness of Agni’s knowledge is concomitant with his ability to see with numerous eyes (*akṣábhīḥ*) both classes of beings (2.2.4). The reference could be to the human and divine classes (Renou, *EVP* 12, 42; Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda*), but the implication could equally well be that Agni sees the invisible powers and the visible phenomena and knows the connection between them (cf. 3.55.10 c).

79. Renou, *EVP* 1, 21, fn. 1.

80. Renou, *Études Voc. RV*, pp. 18–21.

81. *viśvaminvá-*: all-pervading; advancing into all; ‘‘all-enlivener’’ (Oldenberg, *Vedic Hymns in Sacred Books of the East* 46, 281).

82. Gonda, *Vision*, Chap. II, esp. pages 84–85.

83. Gonda, *ibid.*, pp. 40–50; Gonda, *Epithets*, p. 86 ff.

Agni's all-knowing power is especially present in the form of the sacrificial fire (cf. 10.79.5 where Agni, manifested as ritual fire, is said to look with thousand eyes upon the sacrificer who tends the fire well). As messenger of the sacrifice and conveyer of the god's oblation from earth through all the realms of heaven, Agni as sacrificial fire officiates in all the different regions. Thus god Agni can, in the same verse (10.21.7), be described as 'beloved priest' (*ṛtvijaṃ cārum*), 'whose face shines with ghee' (*ghṛtāpratīkam*), 'bright' (*śukraṃ*), 'most knowledgeable with numerous eyes' (*cētiṣṭham*⁸⁴ *akṣābhir*). The image of 'all-seeing flames', loci of omniscient Agni, is apparent in these examples; the image may account for Sāyaṇa's rather consistent though misleading explanation for the many eyes of Agni as 'innumerable flames' (1.79.12; 2.2.4; 10.21.7; 10.79.5). The explanation is not entirely accurate since plurality of eyes represents omniscience, a power located in the flames, but not the flames themselves. Agni's flames are symbolized by a separate metaphor, *śṛṅga*, which occurs in another *sahasra* compound.

Agni is *sahāsraśṛṅgo vṛṣabhás* 'a bull with thousand horns' in 5.1.8. That 'horns' are the metaphorical equivalent for 'flames' is given in Yāska's *Nirukta* 1.17. Thus, keeping in mind the value of the *sahasra* compound, Agni's nature is also characterized by limitless fire; undoubtedly this 'fire' power is concretized in Agni's three forms: sun, lightning and earthly fire⁸⁵. Sāyaṇa interprets several passages on this analogy (e.g. 1.140.6; 5.43.13 where he takes *tridhātuśṛṅga-* to refer to flames of three colours). *Sahāsraśṛṅga-* occurs twice in the Rīg Veda; each time it is part of an image which portrays Agni as a strong and powerful bull⁸⁶. Keeping to the metaphorical correspondences, there appears to be a definite relationship between 'fire' and 'strength', and this will occupy us next.

84. Sāyaṇa: *cētiṣṭham* – *atīsayena jñātāram*.

85. Cf. 7.55.7 where *sahāsraśṛṅga-* *vṛṣabhá-* may refer to Agni whose 'fire' could be in the light of stars. The latter, typifying night, causes the people to sleep.

86. 5.1.8 *sahāsraśṛṅgo vṛṣabhás tádojā vísvāñ agne sáhasā prāsy anyān*; in 7.55.7 (fn. 85) the 'power' term is *sahasyá*. Agni as a three-horned bull (5.43.13) is also marked with strength; he is *vayodhāḥ* ('one who has strength').

The concepts 'strength' and 'power' are central to Agni. The well-known phrase *sūnuḥ sahasaḥ* 'son of power' when applied to Agni associates him with a 'power-substance' composed of overwhelming strength and force to conquer, gain supremacy, to resist and sustain (*sahas*)⁸⁷. Agni is 'son of *sahas*' in the sense that he represents and manifests the content of this word; he can, therefore, be conceived as having been sired by the word⁸⁸.

The many references to the strength of Agni could be due to the belief that a phenomenon as wondrous, helpful and powerful as fire originates through the exercise of strength, in particular the friction of the kindling sticks⁸⁹. The rubbing together of these two sticks is likened in the Rig Veda to the sexual act. The analogy rests on the friction applied to the sticks which are said to be Agni's parents, the upper stick being the 'male', the lower the 'female'⁹⁰. The mythic belief that fire comes into being, or, is sired by a strength analogous to sexual strength should have some relationship to Agni's epithet *sahásramuṣka*-⁹¹ 'having thousand testicles' (8.19.32) which assigns limitless virile strength to the god's inherent nature.

In so far as Agni transposes himself into sun, lightning and fire, and as fire becomes apparent in each of the three Vedic sacrificial fires⁹², we may expect three bodily parts to occur in Agni's imagery. 'Three' used as such is associated with Agni's visible manifestations, which in them-

87. J. Gonda, *Some Observations on the Relations between "Gods" and "Powers" in the Veda a propos of the phrase sūnuḥ sahasaḥ* ('s Gravenhage, 1957), pp. 15, 18.

88. Gonda, *ibid.*, p. 10; 105.

89. Gonda, *Rel. Ind.* I, 67, fn. 3.

90. Macdonell, *Vedic Myth.* p. 91.

91. The term occurs one other time, with Indra. Note that Indra, like Agni, is closely associated with 'power-substance' terms. Such associations occur in contexts which suggest that Indra, too, manifests 'strength, power' (see Gonda, "Gods" and "Powers", pages 2, 4, 14ff., 30, 46, 50, 70).

92. On the extent of the Rig Vedic ritual and the three fire-stations, see A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, HOS 31 (Cambridge, 1925), Chap. 17, esp. p. 254.

selves may carry broader implications of divine omnipresence⁹³. The three bodies of light⁹⁴ in 10.107.6 refer to Agni's three visible forms: fire, lightning, sun⁹⁵. 3.20.2⁹⁶ also mentions the 'three bodies' of Agni in addition to his 'three powers', 'three abodes', 'three tongues'. Play on the number 'three', symbolic of cosmic totality⁹⁷, predominates in this verse having Agni's omnipresence as its theme. 'Three bodies' should again symbolize Agni's three manifestations, each of which is located in one of the three regions of the visible world. These regions may constitute Agni's 'three abodes', or possibly, there is an allusion here to Agni's abodes in the highest heaven, the lower heavens and the earth. Since Agni's 'tongue' is a metaphorical equivalent for his 'flame' (cf. 2.1.13), 'three tongues' should represent the fires in each of the three sacrificial altars (in the Brāhmaṇas the altars are symbolic of the three worlds and the fires in the altars come to symbolize cosmic pervasiveness). The 'three powers' may refer to the threefold nature of Agni (i. e. knowledge, fire, virile strength; see above).

In 1.146.1, Agni is described as having 'three heads' and 'seven reins' (*saptāraśmi-* could also mean 'seven rays'). The image may apply to the three ritual fires, 'three heads' being the fires⁹⁸, 'seven reins' being the flames⁹⁸. This image suits well the rest of the hemistich which mentions the kindling sticks as the parents of Agni: 'I praise Agni, who has three

93. An excellent treatment of Agni's triple nature and the resultant multiplicity descriptions is in Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* I, 11 ff.

94. *śukrá-* refers to Agni, cf. 10.21.7, see above. Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* III, 327) and A. Hillebrandt (*Lieder des Rgveda* [Göttingen, Leipzig, 1913], p. 146): *śukrá-* refers to 'Holy Word'; 'three bodies' are the 'three Vedas'. But Agni's association with three bodies is assured by 3.20.2. For Grassmann, 'three bodies' are Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya.

95. So Sāyaṇa.

96. *āgne trī te vājinā trī śadhāsthā tistrás te jihvā ṛtajāta pūrvīḥ / tistrá u te tanvò devāvātās tābhir naḥ pāhi giro āprayuchan //*

97. For 'three' in ancient Indian cosmography see W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie der Inder* (Bonn and Leipzig, 1920), pages 14, 17, 40–43; Lüders, *Varuṇa* I, 57 ff.

98. So Sāyaṇa who also suggests the three soma pressings; this seems doubtful. Seven tongues as flames of Agni are mentioned in 3.6.2. Lüders (*Varuṇa* II, 691, fn. 6) understands 'three heads' and 'seven rays' to refer to Agni in his sun form.

heads and seven reins, who is inferior to none, (who nestles) in the fold of his parents.'

'Four' is a number associated with both ritual and cosmic completeness in Indian religious thought⁹⁹. The capacity of fire to fill out into all the possible spacial directions is represented by attributing four bodily parts to Agni. Thus, in 5.48.5 where Agni with four faces advances himself with his tongue, 'four-faces' (*cáturanīka-*) connotes 'facing in the four cardinal directions'; the description considers the god as flaming fire extending into all directions on earth¹⁰⁰ (cf. 2.3.1) and quite possibly beyond. In the same sense, Agni is said to be facing everywhere and to pervade in all directions (*tvám hí viśvatomukha viśvátaḥ paribhūr ási* 1.97.6). In 10.92.11, the term *caturaṅga*¹⁰¹ 'four-limbed' is used as an epithet of Agni Narāśaṃsa, naming him after his capacity to fill out, as fire, into the four directions. Agni, again in a context evoking the ritual fire, is called 'four-eyed' (*caturakṣá-* 1.31.13); seeing in the four directions is conceptually allied to the all-seeing/all-knowing flames¹⁰².

d. Sūrya

Sūrya, who has an *asura*-nature (8.101.12), is characterized by omniscience. This power is attributed to Sūrya by the usual reference to his 'all-seeing' ability (*viśvácakṣas-* 1.50.2; 7.63.1). On the analogy of the preceding Soma example (i.e. 9.74.7), it ought to be Sūrya's *asura*-nature which is characterized by omniscience. Sūrya is also characterized by limitless rays; this evidence comes from the compound *sahásrapād-* 'thousand-footed' used in all likelihood as an epithet of Sūrya in 8.58.16¹⁰³. *Pād* is according to 8.41.8 'the foot' of the sun, that is 'the

99. Cf. Gonda, *The Savayajñas*, pp. 54, 60, 139, 349.

100. Sāyaṇa: *caturdikṣu prasṛta jvālaḥ*. Note that this verse identifies Agni with Varuṇa, as also in 5.3.1. Cf. Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* III, 137–138; Renou, *EVP* 4, 77.

101. *cáturaṅga-* is a RV hapax legomenon. Sāyaṇa takes it as 'four fires'. Bergaigne thinks of Agni's 4 eyes (*Rel. Véd.* I, 308, 31). Renou (*EVP* 5, 61): 4-limbed Varuṇa.

102. Of similar significance are the hundred eyes of Agni (1.128.3).

103. So also taken in the translations of Geldner, Ludwig, Griffith.

ray'; this is the origin of the classical meaning 'ray' for *pada* and especially *pāda*¹⁰⁴. In addition, AV 7.41.2 also uses *sahásrapād-* to describe the Sun, under the image of falcon.

e. Ásvins

The Ásvins, though not called Asuras, are designated as *māyin-* who use *māyā* (6.63.5), no doubt, to accomplish their miraculous deeds. Their marvellous skills are also indicated by the terms *śacī-* and *daṃsanā-*, which would seem to have connotations similar to *māyā*-¹⁰⁵. It is this skill and creative power which gives the Ásvins the ability to assume many forms (1.117.9 *purú várpāṇsy*)¹⁰⁶.

f. Bṛhaspati

Bṛhaspati partakes of the *asura*-nature (2.23.2); he is great, of powerful nature, full of power (1.190.8), and, one who knows (seeing, as he does, into both [domains?]) – see 1.190.7 and cf. 2.2.4 in D.1.c).

Bráhmaṇ is the divine power over which Bṛhaspati presides; this is indicated by his name and the doublet *Brahmaṇaspati*. Both identify the god as 'lord' (*pāti*) of **bṛh* (= *bráhmaṇ*) in the sense that he possesses and controls *bráhmaṇ*, an esoteric power activated and made manifest through the sacred word (i.e. the Vedic formula). *Bráhmaṇ*, accordingly, is set into operation in the context of the ritual presided over by seven officiating priests¹⁰⁷. These seven praisers recite in unison the sacred word (*vāc* – see 10.71.3 where sacred speech is personified); in this way they evoke the *bráhmaṇ* power. These seven praisers with their seven chanting mouths (cf. 9.111.1 *saptásyebhir íkvabhiḥ*) could thus be mystically designated as the loci of Bṛhaspati's *bráhmaṇ* power. A correspondence between Bṛhaspati and these priests is illustrated by two passages (4.

104. Renou, *Études Voc. RV*, p. 21, fn. 1.

105. Gonda, *Language*, pp. 134–135.

106. *várpas-* emphasizes "la métamorphose divine" (Renou, *Études Voc. RV*, p. 13).

107. Cf. L. Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (London, 1953), p. 32–33.

50.4; 4.51.4) which speak of 'seven-mouthed' (*saptásya-*) Br̥haspati¹⁰⁸. The seven mouths are attributed to Br̥haspati in the highest heaven (*paramé vyòman* 4.50.4); this indicates that the description pertains to his transcendental nature (cf. Section III).

g. Rudra

From 2.33.9 it is learned that Rudra manifests himself in multiple outer forms: 'With steadfast limbs, multiformed (*pururūpa-*), possessed of marvellous and impressive power (*ugrá*)¹⁰⁹, the tawny (god) adorned himself with brilliant gold¹¹⁰. From the master (*īśāna-*) of this world of many (forms)¹¹¹, from Rudra the *asura*-power never leaves.'

Rudra's nature is here portrayed as a typical *asura* nature, a feature not sufficiently stressed in connection with this god. Elsewhere in the text, he is described in the same way. Rudra is *devá- ásurā-* in 5.42.11; he is, in 8.20.17, the *asura* of the sky¹¹². In 5.41.3 and 2.1.6 the *asura* of the sky is probably again Rudra (so Sāyaṇa; Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* III, 34 and Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* II, 324, fn. 17b). Further, in 6.74.1 the dual divinities Soma-Rudra are said to maintain their *asura*-power. Thus, the last line of 2.33.9, which assigns the *asura*-power to Rudra is perfectly in keeping with the other Rig Vedic evidence.

Perhaps in response to his inherent *asura* nature, Rudra is *ugra*. This adjective is etymologically related to the neuter noun *ojas*. *Ojas-* (identical with Avestan *aojah*; Lat. **augus*) may be defined as "vital energy"; "special vital power and creative energy ..." and *ugra* is charged with

108. Renou (*EVP* 15, 64) and Hillebrandt (*Lieder*, p. 60) make the correspondence between the 7 hotṛs and Br̥haspati. Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* ad 4.50.4): 7 Āṅgirasas or the 7 singers. On the number '7' in the Veda, see Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 143 ff., esp. p. 148. Also see fn. 32.

109. Gonda, *ojas*, p. 15.

110. For 'gold' meaning 'immortality' note ŚB XII.5.2,7; XIII.4.1,7 etc., see J. Eggeling, *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, SBE 44 (Oxford, 1900), p. 537.

111. Following Renou's suggestion in *EVP* 15, 159.

112. So Bergaigne, *Rel. Véd.* III, 34; Bradke (*Dyaus Asura*, p. 46) attributes *divó ... ásurasya* either to Rudra, or to Dyaus but states that a connection between the two gods may exist in the RV.

this meaning¹¹³. The words *ugra/ojas* and *māyā*, designating 'power-substances', seem to overlap in areas of meaning; all carry with them the idea of a formidable creative energy¹¹⁴.

That Rudra uses his energies to create phenomenal forms is taken up in 2.33.9 cd. Being *īśāna*- of the world, he stands in relation to the phenomenal as 'one who has power over it, one who is in possession of it'¹¹⁵. His dominion over the world, composed of manifold forms, may be because he generated these; that would explain why Rudra is elsewhere called 'Father of the World' (6.49.10). In any case, his epithet *pururūpa* indicates that Rudra, the Asura, creates multiple material forms which may be considered as the godhead's manifestations. The significance of *pururūpa* is based on the Indra example of 6.47.18; thus Rudra is linked to our definition 3.

This particular creator image of Rudra is in harmony with the subsequent Brāhmaṇic developments of the god. The 8 different forms of Rudra, expressed by the various names, are introduced in ŚB 6.1.3.7 and KB 6.1.9; among these names appears that of *īśāna*, prefigured in 2.33.9 as an epithet of Rudra¹¹⁶. Sāyaṇa should have believed that these forms existed already in the Rig Vedic period; he offers, as one explanation for *pururūpaḥ* in 2.33.9 *aṣṭamūrtyātmakair* But this is unlikely, for a post Rig Vedic development may be discerned: 7 of the 8 names occur in the AV, though as appellations of gods seemingly distinct from Rudra (Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism*, p.104-105); in the VS 16,18.28, the names *Śarva* and *Bhava* are already assigned to Rudra (Macdonell, *Vedic Myth*. p.75).

Of particular interest from the foregoing is the following: though Rudra does occupy a subordinate position in the Rig Veda, he functions

113. See Gonda, *ojas*, p.46; Gonda, "Gods" and "Powers", p.19.

114. Gonda, *Language*, cf. pp.126 and 141. Note that *ugrā-* is also used with Varuṇa in 7.34.10.

115. *īśāna*: participle from *Viś* ('to possess, to be master of') designates one who has 'power' and 'might'; it can also be used with the genitive in the sense of 'being possessed' (cf. 1.73.9).

116. See Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism*, p.105.

as a special god, a High Being. It does seem to me that the deities described thus far – in the main Asuras who possess the power to create and project phenomenal forms – function in the most critical areas of Vedic religious beliefs. Though other minor deities (i. e. the Asura Bull, Sūrya, possibly the Ásvins and Viṣṇu, for which see below) are also part of this group, Rudra alone is so often interpreted as being a Vedic outsider, an amalgamation of Aryan and non-Aryan characteristics. If this were so, then it is puzzling indeed that a minor divinity exhibiting in the Rig Veda a blend of Vedic and foreign elements could become part of such an important and extraordinary group of gods.

Belief in the non-Aryan aspect of Rudra repeatedly centers around two propositions :

- 1) that his malevolent, destructive, ambivalent nature is uncharacteristic for a Vedic god, and
- 2) that features associated with Rudra-Śiva in the later Hinduistic developments are already foreshadowed on a seal coming from a pre- and non-Vedic civilization¹¹⁷.

In both cases, the evidence is inconclusive. Without going too deeply here into matters deserving separate studies¹¹⁸, it should be observed that :

- 1) an ambivalent nature also belongs to the important and thoroughly Vedic Varuṇa (see D. 1. a). Therefore ambivalence need not be considered non-Vedic. Renou considered ambivalence to be characteristic of the Veda and a legacy passed on into Hinduism¹¹⁹.
- 2) the so-called proto-Śiva seal from Mohenjo-daro, usually described as showing a horned deity, having three heads, raised phallus, and seated

¹¹⁷. For example one of the latest accounts building heavily on this line of reasoning is R. N. Dandekar, *Some Aspects of the history of Hinduism*. Poona, 1967; Chap. I.

¹¹⁸. I intend to discuss the so-called proto-Śiva seal from Mohenjo-daro in another publication.

¹¹⁹. Renou, *Religions*, pp. 20; 62.

in yoga posture, would if the description remains uncontested lead to the unexpected conclusion that these features apply better to Rig Vedic Agni than to Śiva's Vedic forerunner, Rudra (see D.1.c for Agni's having 'three heads', a nature consisting of virile strength, and flames symbolically referred to as 'horns').

Undoubtedly the Rig Veda does not portray the complete spectrum of beliefs associated with Rudra. Much more about the popular traits and ritualistic practices are learned from the somewhat later Vedic literature. Yet, a verse as rich linguistically and conceptually in Indo-aryan features as 2.33.9 does argue for Rudra's being more Vedic or less anti-thetically alien than is generally granted.

h. Viṣṇu

Viṣṇu is not called *asura*, nor is he associated with the term *māyā*; he is however connected with the 'power-substance' terms *ojas* (8.12.27) and *dasma*¹²⁰ (3.54.14 *purudasmá*- 'abounding in the extraordinary').

Viṣṇu is mentioned in connection with the gods' *asura*-power in hymn 3.55. This hymn has as its refrain: 'great is the unique *asura*-nature of the gods'. In verse 10 of that hymn, Viṣṇu is honored with the following words: 'Viṣṇu protects (as) a herdsman the highest sphere, exhibiting¹²¹ the dear immortal locations of his divine power (*dhāman*-). Agni knows all these creations. Great is the unique *asura*-nature [lit. *asura*-ship] of the gods'¹²².

It is from the term *dhāman* that Visnu's capability to project forms into the phenomenal world is surmised. The meaning of *dhāman* presumes this capability. As already stated in connection with Soma, *dhāman* signifies the manifest locations of the divine power of the numinous. The

120. Cf. Gonda (*Language*, p. 135) re: the etymologically related term *daṁsanā*- and its semantic affinity to *māyā*-.

121. Gonda, *Dhāman*-, p. 43.

122. 3.55.10: *viṣṇur gopāḥ paramām pāti pāṭhaḥ priyā dhāmāny amṛtā dādhānaḥ / agniḥ tṛṣṇā bhūvanāni veda mahād devānām asuratvām ekam //*

term therefore presupposes the idea that the numinous transposes its holy power from some region of mystery to the region of name and form, that is, reality. It is the forms which the numen wills to create that become its *dhāman*. Thus, when in 3.55.10b Viṣṇu is said to exhibit his immortal *dhāman*, it must be concluded that what Viṣṇu is exhibiting are the projected forms which are the eternal locations of his divine power¹²³. While he exhibits these locations, Viṣṇu protects the highest region (*paramām...pāthaḥ* which is no doubt the same as the highest heaven, *parama vyoman*). Thus the poet is emphasizing a distinction: Viṣṇu protects the unmanifest and exhibits the manifest (cf. Section III). The entire creative process, whereby the numinous becomes concretized form and experienced reality is known to Agni. The refrain connects this process to the gods' *asura*-nature.

What are the various visible forms of Viṣṇu?¹²⁴ Very little can be said with certainty. Perhaps the only way to approach this is to work backwards, and ask the question in the following manner: Given Viṣṇu's divine powers, wherein might these be concretized? An energy both beneficial and supportive seems to characterize Vedic Viṣṇu; this is shown in recent studies which consider the god as representing spacial expansiveness, indicative of the idea of universal penetration and pervasiveness, especially as it relates to a central cosmic axis¹²⁵. Such power would lead to the conjecture that Viṣṇu's projected forms correlate to an axis mundi penetrating the three regions of the world and sustaining all life therein.

123. So also Gonda, *Dhāman-*, p. 43. The term *dhāman-* is of additional interest since its use in the Bhagavad Gītā (± 200 B. C.) indicates that its meaning continues to relate to the 'place of the God's presence' (Bh. G. 8.21; 15.6) see Gonda, *ibid.*, p. 81.

124. *anyārūpa-* in 7.100.6 suggests that Viṣṇu has indeed more than one type of distinct form.

125. Gonda, *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism*, p. 10. Kuiper also considers that Viṣṇu, by his position in the cosmic center, must be associated with the cosmic pillar in Vedic belief (F. B. J. Kuiper, "The Three Strides of Viṣṇu", *Indological Studies in honor of W. Norman Brown*, pp. 144-145). For references on the previously prevailing view, that Viṣṇu is a solar god, see Kuiper, p. 137, fn. 1.

2. Gods whose creativeness relates to the ritual

a. *Viśvakarman*

Viśvakarman, the All-maker, is as his name indicates creative energy thinly concretized as a personal god. He is a late development in the Rig Veda, being mentioned in Book 10 and celebrated in two hymns (10.81; 82) which attempt to explain cosmogony as resulting from the sacrifice. Seen in semi-abstract fashion as a supreme god (*devá ékaḥ* 10.81.3), as master-builder of all things, his personification is slight. He is not called *asura*; indeed 10.82.5 seems to emphasize that Viśvakarman is 'beyond *asura* gods'¹²⁶. Sketched in broad terms, he is father, progenitor, distributor who knows all the locations of divine power (*dhāman-*) and all creations; he is the sole name-giver of the gods (10.82.3), that is, he created them.

In the beginning, how did Viśvakarman cause creation and what material was used? These are the questions the poet of 10.81 asks: "What indeed was the wood¹²⁷, what was the tree from which they¹²⁸ constructed¹²⁹ heaven and earth?" (verse 4) "What verily was the resting-place (the abode)? What manner of thing did he begin from¹³⁰, and how was it, that from which the All-maker, the all-seeing¹³¹, creating the earth, unfolded the heaven by his might?" (verse 2)¹³²

A good starting point for an answer to these questions is 10.81.3, a verse rich in multiplicity images and oft repeated in the later Brāhmaṇic texts¹³³: "Eyes he had on all sides, mouths on all sides, arms on all sides,

¹²⁶. Also possible: 'beyond *asuras* and *devas*' which could mean that Viśvakarman is above both types of divinities 'demons and gods'.

¹²⁷. Renou, *EVP* 15, 168: *vāna* distinct from *vrkṣá*, and meaning 'wood' as 'material'.

¹²⁸. Probably refers to the *sákhi-* in 10.81.5. Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 263) "die Weltschöpfer (Sāy.), die Gehilfen des Viśvakarman".

¹²⁹. *niṣṭatakṣūḥ* "carpentered out", F. Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 61.

¹³⁰. *ārāmbhaṇam*: image of a cosmic support, see Renou, *EVP* 15, 168.

¹³¹. *viśvācakṣas*: omniscient; cf. Renou, *ibid*.

¹³². Edgerton, *Beginnings*, p. 61.

¹³³. e.g. VS 17.19; Mahān U. 2.2 (with slight variations); Śvet. U. 3.3.

feet on all sides, when by using his two arms like fans, he blew up heaven and earth (as a smith would) as he, sole god, created them¹³⁴’.

That Viśvakarman is pictured in this verse as a smith should not be regarded as a fortuitous poetic expression; the image is of Viśvakarman the great fashioner, and at its base represents, as Brown rightly points out, a Tvaṣṭṛ idea¹³⁵. Viśvakarman has other important connections with the ancient Asura Tvaṣṭṛ. The verb *Vjan* ‘to produce, beget’ etc. is used with both (for Tvaṣṭṛ see Brown, “Creation Myth”, p. 86; for Viśvakarman see 10.81.2; 10.82.1, 3, 7); at the same time, neither owes his creation to another source, both being there at the beginning. In this sense, Tvaṣṭṛ is *agrajā-*, *agriyā-* and Viśvakarman is *ajā-* ‘unborn’ (10.82.6). Viśvakarman can indeed be called ‘a kind of transcendent Tvaṣṭṛ’¹³⁶.

Out of what material does he fashion creatures? All creations, states 10.82.6 remained in the first womb¹³⁷; this one womb (*ékam* 6c) is implanted in the navel of Aja. That is, Viśvakarman has within himself the womb containing all creatures as well as all other forms to be created. It is the god’s womb which in 10.82.5 is beyond all creation, being prior to everything¹³⁸. Because his womb contains all creations he knows all creations (10.82.3). Being thus filled with the raw material of creation, he is described, in 10.81.3, as having eyes, mouths, arms, feet on all sides.

In keeping with the late tenor of the hymn, it is in the context of the sacrifice that Viśvakarman brings forth the contents of his belly. He comes to the first sacrifice as seer (*ṛṣi*), as *hotṛ* priest (10.81.1) and there, aided his friends (the other priests?¹³⁹) by giving the first offering, his

134. Brown, “Theories”, p. 30.

135. Brown, *ibid.*

136. Brown, “Creation Myth”, p. 86, fn. 5.

137. *gárbham prathamám*. The idea is that Viśvakarman (like Tvaṣṭṛ) contains within himself the receptacle of life.

138. Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 265, fn. 5ab.

139. They should, by implication, also be prior to creation. Where they come from is however not stated.

body. This act is described in 10.81.5: 'These which are your highest *dhāman*, which (are your) lowest, and these which (are your) intermediate (ones), Viśvakarman, offer¹⁴⁰ (these) to (your) friends for the oblation, O Svadhāvat. Sacrifice yourself, (your own) body, increasing (yourself thereby)' ¹⁴¹.

Viśvakarman is thus both cosmic agent and material. He is, as the Tvaṣṭṛ image ritualized, the arch-fashioner who wills himself to perform parturition so that the primeval sacrifice can cause creation. The example of Viśvakarman typifies our definition 1, although a basically new view is being mythologized here: creative energy needs the sacrifice to stimulate it into action.

b. *Puruṣa*

The numerous studies on the famous *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90) are in agreement that *Puruṣa*, the cosmic Male, represents the raw material out of which the universe is shaped¹⁴². The opening verse of the hymn which describes *Puruṣa* with limitless bodily parts is, in effect, describing the structure of the cosmic Male, from whom the whole universe, category by category, is generated.

10.90.1 states that *Puruṣa* has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. The meaning is that *Puruṣa* is omniform. Like the ancient Asura Bull named Viśvarūpa, *Puruṣa*'s omniform nature is also understood to be androgynous (cf. 10.90.5ab; Renou, *Hymnes Spéculatifs*, p. 247). Thus, an omniform, androgynous Male represents the raw material of the universe: 'Puruṣa alone is all this universe, what has been

140. On *Vśikṣ* see Renou (EVP 15, 168).

141. 10.81.5: *yā te dhāmāni paramāṇi yāvamā yā madhyamā viśvakarmann utémā / śikṣā sākih-bhyo havīṣi svadhāvaḥ svayam yajasva tanvām vṛdhāndh* //. On the last line cf. Renou, *ibid.*; Edgerton, *Beginnings*, p. 61; Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 264, fn. 5 d.

142. Edgerton, *Beginnings*, p. 25, 67; A. A. Macdonell, *A Vedic Reader for Students* (Oxford, 1917), p. 195; Brown, "Theories", p. 26; Renou, *Hymnes spéculatifs*, p. 247; P. Mus, "Du Nouveau sur Rgveda 10.90?" in *Indological Studies* in honor of W. Norman Brown, p. 165 ff. For other translations consult Renou, EVP 16, 148.

and what is to become' (10.90.2). These features, point for point, are clearly reminiscent of the aforementioned Asura Bull.

Significant additional similarities between Puruṣa and the Asura Bull exist. Puruṣa is the passive substance from which others generate forms. Again, owing to the late character of the hymn, the creation of forms is the product of the ritual. Puruṣa is the sacrificial victim (vss. 7, 11) whom the gods use as the oblation (see 10.90.6) when they perform the sacrifice. The process by which the forms come out of Puruṣa continues to be the emission process; the emitted forms are declined in the ablative (e.g. see vss. 5; 12–14), indicative that they originate from Puruṣa¹⁴³. In sum, the use of multiple bodily parts to describe Puruṣa is to be understood as a late Rig Vedic example of definition 2. As such, Puruṣa demonstrates conceptual connections with the earlier example of the same definition, the Asura Bull.

c. *Vāc*

Vāc is holy power experienced as 'the word', especially 'the sacred word'. On that account, she is in her unmanifest state in the *paramā-vyòman-*, *sahasrākṣara-* 'thousand or limitless syllables' (1.164.41). *Akṣara* 'syllable' represents the ultimate measure of the word; from *akṣara* all formulae start and to it their power can be reduced¹⁴⁴. Being the module from which sacred formulae and all words result, *akṣara* is creative in nature. Vāc *sahasrākṣara* therefore represents the power of total sound, especially sacred sound, which is creative.

How does Vāc exercise her creative power? She seems to be a creator of the phenomenal world in that she fashions the primeval floods (*salilá*)¹⁴⁵ which have life-giving potentiality. RV 1.164.41¹⁴⁶ mentions this

143. On the force of the ablative, especially in the last pāda of 10.90.12, see Mus, "Rgveda 10.90", p. 177 ff. (On Mus' position that pādas 12a–c are *atisṛṣṭi* expressions, see Renou's remark in *EVP* 16, 150).

144. J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Akṣara", *JAOS* 79, 178.

145. Cf. Brown, "Rig Veda 1.164", pp. 203, 209, 217.

146. For an interesting analysis of this verse see V. S. Agrawala, "Gaurī", pp. 1–7.

creative activity: 'The buffalo-cow (i.e. Vāc) lowed, fashioning the primeval waters¹⁴⁷, having become one-footed, two-footed, four-footed, eight-footed, nine-footed, she who in the highest heaven¹⁴⁸ is a thousand syllables'¹⁴⁹.

There is evidence that Vāc can produce by the emission process. In 10.125.7 Vāc states: 'I emit (Vsū)¹⁵⁰ the father ...'. In that same hymn, 10.125.3 d, she declares that she caused herself to enter many forms¹⁵¹. Thus Vāc seems also capable of assuming phenomenal forms. A place of manifestation is the *ṛsis*. 10.71.3 states that Vāc was found having entered (note: *pra Vviś*) into the seers. This is a mystic reference to the seers' ability to envision Vedic hymns.

But in what form does she manifest herself? Vāc assumes the forms of sacred formulae recited at the rites. Vedic formulae, as is known, occur in different metrical patterns which are measured by the number of syllables in a quarter-verse or foot (*pāda*). The compounds with *ṇpad* in 1.164.41 are evocative of different meters of verse¹⁵². It thus seems that Vāc is described as one¹⁵³, two, four, eight¹⁵⁴, nine-footed, because she manifests herself in the form of metric formulae.

The multiplicity references to Vāc represent a late Rig Vedic example of definition 3; nowhere is she called an Asura, nor is the term *māyā* linked with her. Instead, she exemplifies, as do the other gods in Section

147. *salilā*: Lüders, *Varuṇa* I, 113: the Heavenly Waters. Agrawala, "Gaurī", p. 3: cosmic Waters as primeval material cause.

148. *paramé vyòman*; Agrawala states that manifest Vāc originates from the *vyoman*. The quest is therefore for the ultimate source in the *parama vyoman* ("Gaurī", p. 7).

149. 1.164.41: *gaurīr mimāya salilāni tākṣaty ékapadī dvipādī śa cātuspadī / aṣṭāpadī nāvapadī babhūvūṣi sahāsrākṣarā paramé vyòman //*

150. See Renou, *EVP* 16, 167.

151. On *bhūry āveśāyantīm*, Geldner, *Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 355, fn. 3 d. For the significance of *ā Vviś*, see under Soma (Section II. D.1. b) and cf. 10.125.6; 10.81.1.

152. Renou, *EVP* 16, 92: these compounds in *ṇpad* and *ṇakṣara* evoke primarily the 'measured' word, secondarily 'the cow'. For different interpretations see V. S. Agrawala, "Gaurī", pp. 4-7; Brown, *Rig Veda* 1.164", p. 217.

153. *ékapadī* is *om* in the later literature – van Buitenen, "Akṣara", p. 180.

154. *aṣṭāpadī* also said of Vāc in 8.76.12.

II.D.2, a type of abstract demiurge whose creative power exalts the importance of the ritual.

III. COSMOGRAPHY AND COSMOGONY

The above analysis regarding the creative activity of High Beings and the resultant significance of multiple bodily parts must be supported by a cosmography having the properties to allow this activity to take place. Descriptions pertaining to such a cosmographic schema are contained in a few monographs of the early 1900s and in more recent philological studies occupied with other Vedic problems¹⁵⁵. The ensuing discussion, too, limits itself to considering only those cosmographic components of the entire schema relevant to the emission process.

In establishing this schema, the extensive connotations of *dhāman* are of major importance. *Dhāman* may refer to “a ‘location’, of a numen, of a divine power, of a deity, i. e. not only or merely a ‘holder’ or ‘receptacle’ of a divine power, a place, being or phenomenon in which a divinity sets or locates itself, functions or manifests itself, or displays its power, or where its ‘presence’ is experienced, but also a particular way of presenting or revealing itself, of locating or ‘projecting’ a mode of its nature and essence, a hypostasis or refraction in which it is believed to be active¹⁵⁶”. *Dhāman* thus implies a set of oppositions, namely the existence of a numen in a transcendental sphere and the existence of a manifestation, corresponding to the numinous, in a phenomenal sphere. It further implies that whereas the manifestation is apprehensible form active with divine power, the numinous corresponds to that divine power devoid of a limiting concrete form. Implicit, of course, is the assumption that the numinous is invisible, otherwise the whole process of revelation becomes meaningless. *Dhāman* therefore implies the existence

155. Macdonell, *Vedic Myth.*, Par. 7; W. Kirfel, *Die Kosmographie*, esp. pp. 1–53. Lüders, *Varuṇa I*, esp. chapters II, III, IV; J. Gonda, *Loka, World and Heaven in the Veda* in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde*, n.s. 73, no. 1 (1966), esp. chapters V–VII; Gonda, *Dhāman*–; Brown, “Rig Veda 1. 164”, 203 ff.

156. Gonda, *Dhāman*–, 19.

of two separate spheres to accommodate the numinous and its manifestation, spheres different though not antithetical since the emission process must be capable of operating between them.

These implications can be stated in another way: in the Rig Veda, *dhāman* implies two regions, one free from, the other charged with the implications of *loka*. If *loka* is understood as a "power position"; "a place which comes into contact with power"; a safe and stable resting place in the phenomenal, visible universe¹⁵⁷, then a *loka* would be the phenomenal sphere wherein is found the *dhāman* of the numinous¹⁵⁸. Therefore, if these *lokas* can be determined, the field of hypostasis and the extent of the Vedic visible, knowable world would be determined.

The Vedic phenomenal world is conceived as being tripartite. Each part is considered a *loka* and together phenomenal space is considered as being *triloka*¹⁵⁹. As such, earth (*pṛthivī*), the atmosphere (*antarikṣa*) and the sky (*div*; *vyoman* etc.) constitute the material and visible lokas of the Vedic universe. The belief in a physical heavenly sky should be emphasized here. This belief accounts for expressions which indicate that the luminous regions of the sky can be produced (... *āmimīta* ... *vī divó rocanā* ... 6.7.7¹⁶⁰) and seen (cf. AV 13.1.39 ... *paśyanti rocanām divi sūryam* ...).

There is however another heavenly region which is hierarchically superior to the foregoing one; it is often designated by expressions which insist upon this superiority (e.g. *parame vyoman*; *paró divā* 10.125.8; *paramám* ... *pāthaḥ* 3.55.10; *paramám pádam* 1.154.6).

This upper heaven is not contiguous to the lower heaven. Wedged in between is the firmament (*nāka*). This vault is arched over the lower heaven, wherefrom come descriptions placing the *nāka* on the 'back of

157. Gonda, *Loka*, 35, 45, 150.

158. The correlation between the concepts *lokāḥ* and *dhāmāni* specified in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (6.3.1.17 explaining RV 10.13.1) should have existed in the Rig Vedic period as well. Cf. Gonda, *Loka*, 62.

159. Cf. Gonda, *ibid.*, 44, 61, fn. 38, 62.

160. On *vi Vmā*, note Gonda, *Language*, p. 170.

the sky' (3.2.12)¹⁶¹. The vault is the divider between the lower visible sky and the upper invisible heaven¹⁶². In effect, it is the *nāka* which separates all that is phenomenal from that which is transcendental, the former characteristically noted as the lower, the latter the upper regions, surfaces etc. (e.g. 1.128.3; 1.164.12)¹⁶³.

This cosmographic progression is assumed to exist in Rig Veda 1.164¹⁶⁴ and it is clearly set forth in Atharva Veda 4.14.3: "From the back of the earth (*pr̥thivyā*) I have ascended to the intermediate space (*antarikṣam*); from that to the sky (*divam*), from the back of the sky, of the vault of heaven (*divo nākasya pr̥sthāt*) I have gone to 'heaven' (*sva*), to (celestial) light (*jyotiḥ*)"¹⁶⁵. The region filled with celestial light is the highest heaven (cf. RV 4.50.4 ... *mahó jyótiṣaḥ paramé vyòman*).

The emission process originates from the region above the *nāka*. Above the *nāka* all forms of a divinity are perceivable; that is, this is the sphere

161. Cf. Macdonell, *Vedic Myth.*, p. 9; Lüders, *Varuṇa* I, 73 ff.

162. Macdonell, *ibid.*, p. 8.

163. Bergaigne has already pointed out that 1.164.12 describes the same deity in pādas ab and cd. Pādas ab describe the deity in the upper half of heaven and cd in the lower part. Thus, the unmanifested and manifested aspects of the same divinity are here being considered (*Rel. Védique* II, 103). The identity of the divinity is not entirely clear. Pāda a calls him 'Father'. A 'Father' is several times mentioned in this hymn, and may be identified as Agni (vss. 16, 22) or Dyaus (vss. 8, 33) according to Brown ("Rig Veda 1.164", pp. 212-215). 'Father' in verse 12 is understood by Gonda (*Notes on names*, p. 87) to be the name of the Universal or Primeval Father; Brown ("Rig Veda 1.164", pp. 208; 212-213): 'Time' or 'the Year'; Lüders (*Varuṇa* II 690): "der Jahressonne"; Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* I, p. 229, fn. 12): The Father in the form of the year, especially the Sun. I too see pādas ab as making a statement regarding the unmanifest nature and power of the Sun, and this because the complementary pādas cd appear to describe the manifest Sun, seeing everywhere as he crosses the sky on his seven-wheeled, six-spoked car (so Brown, "Rig Veda 1.164", pp. 208; 212-213; Lüders, *Varuṇa* II, 690: the sun chariot is *saptācakra*-. Cf. Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 150). Accordingly, the 'Father' may be the Sun as the power which regulates the year (cf. E. Windisch, "Das Räthsel vom Jahre", *ZDMG* 48 [1894], 353); this seems to be what Geldner had in mind. *Pāñcapāda*- 'five-footed', perhaps the five seasons (Brown; Geldner, Ludwig, *Der Rigveda* V, 451); or, the five cardinal points (Bergaigne, *Rel. Védique* II, 150); although I would expect *pāñcapāda* to have connotations related to *sahásrapād*, said of Sūrya in 8.58.16 (see II.D.1.d).

164. Cf. Brown, "Rig Veda 1.164", 203.

165. Gonda, *Loka*, 76.

of the manifold essence of the High Being. And it is from this sphere that the divinity projects his phenomenal forms. These notions are particularly well expressed in two Soma verses: RV 9.85.12 says that 'the Gandharva [Soma] has risen over the vault (*nā́ke*), perceiving all the forms (*viśvā rūpā́*) [that are] his', while 9.86.15 notes that from his station (*padā́*-166) which is in the highest heaven, he proceeds into all confluences (i. e. all phases of the soma juice preparations)¹⁶⁷. Plotting this information onto the foregoing discussion of Soma (II. D. 1. b) the following Vedic beliefs emerge concerning the mystic connection between the High Being Soma and the ritual soma juice :

1. The High Being Soma, Soma in his *asura* state, is to be located above the *nā́ka*.
2. By means of *māyā́*, he projects, below the *nā́ka*, *rūpas*. The *rūpas* of Soma are the soma juices. The god Soma may be described as *viśvarūpa* because he has the capacity to project infinite number of *rūpas*. Further, the *rūpas* are the locations of his divine power (*dhāman*).
3. These divine modalities enter the ritual life of Vedic man.
4. In this way, Soma manifests himself in the terrestrial *loka* as soma juice.

This process of divine manifestation should operate in the same manner for the other divinities illustrating definition 3. However, for some reason not entirely clear, the sequential details of the process can be followed best in the case of Soma.

IV. CONCLUSION

The evidence from the Rig Veda shows that the convention of multiple bodily parts and forms is associated with that divinity who is endowed with a supra-normal power to create phenomenal forms. Creation here

166. Cf. Renou's study in *Études Voc. RV*, pp. 21-22.

167. 15cd: *padām yād asya paramé vyòmany áto viśvā abhí sám yāti samyátaḥ*. Taken in much the same way by Geldner (*Der Rig-Veda* III, p. 80, fn. 15d), Renou (*EVP* 9, 33; 96); Gonda, *Dhāman-*, 45-46; cf. Lüders, *Varuṇa* I, 202; II, 702.

is the act of bringing forth, particularizing, projecting substance conceived as already 'having form'. It is this potentiality to engender forms that defines the structure of the cosmic creator with the multiplicity convention.

The evidence warrants another conclusion, namely that the convention originates from within the Indo-aryan culture. It does not seem possible that a convention exhibiting enough internal consistency so as to permit of three subtle and discreet definitions could come into the Rig Veda from a non-Vedic source. Further, from the outset, the multiplicity convention is woven into a series of Rig Vedic beliefs which continue and, in instances, come to dominate phases of Vedism and Hinduism. For example, beliefs that creation is emission, that divinity is the source of all, that an androgynous nature characterizes the creator, that a creator can emanate forms which transpose his powers from one plane to another, these beliefs are present in such later religious expressions as *śṛṣṭi*, Brahman, Śiva Ardhanārī, *vyūha*, respectively.

Lastly, the religious significance of the multiplicity convention comments upon the purpose of the hymns themselves. The aim of Rig Vedic hymns, long recognized, is to establish mystic correspondences between the sacred and the profane. This purpose colours the whole esoteric character of the hymns: the cryptic language, the revelatory function of the *ṛsis*, the quest for magic power through utterances which establish correct occult relationships. The search for the knowledge of correct correspondences seems to be rooted in the Vedic belief that the physical world is indeed replete with the sacred power of the numen; the power has only to be correctly located to be experienced and tapped.

Table I

Rig Vedic verses describing Gods and Demons with multiple bodily parts and forms.

Agni: 1.31.13; 1.79.12; 1.97.6; 1.128.3; 1.146.1,2; 2.2.4; 2.3.1; 3.20.2,3; 5.1.8; 5.8.2,5; 5.43.13; 5.48.5; 7.55.7; 8.19.32; 10.21.7; 10.79.5; 10.92.11; 10.98.10; 10.107.6

Aṅgirases: 10.78.5

Aśvins: 1.117.9

Asura Bull: 3.38.4,7; 3.56.3

Indra: 1.23.3 (Indra-Vāyu); 3.53.8; 6.46.3; 6.47.18

Tvaṣṭṛ: 1.13.10; 3.55.19; 10.10.5

Puruṣa: 10.90.1

Bṛhaspati: 4.50.4; 4.51.4; cf. 3.5.5; 9.111.1; (7.97.7 *śatápatra?*)

Rudra: 2.33.9

Varuṇa: 7.34.10

Vāc: 1.164.41; 8.76.12

Vāstoṣpati: 7.55.1

Viśvakarman: 10.81.3

Viśvarūpa and other demons: 2.14.4; 10.8.8,9; 10.99.6; 10.99.10

Viṣṇu: 3.55.10; 7.100.6

Sūrya: 1.50.2; 1.164.12; 7.63.1; 8.58.16

Soma: 4.58.2,3; 6.41.3; 7.37.1; 8.15.13; 9.25.4; 9.26.5; 9.60.1,2; 9.65.7; 9.71.7; 9.73.1; 9.75.3; 9.85.12; 9.90.2; 9.106.11