

THE LOTUS AND THE CHARIOT:

A STUDY OF THE ROOT MEANING OF DHARMA  
IN THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

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IN THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

October 1975

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1975)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE:           The Lotus and the Chariot:  
                  A Study of the Root Meaning of Dharma  
                  in the Indian Religious Tradition

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 379

SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The subject of this dissertation is the concept of dharma in the Indian Religious Tradition. It seeks to validate for the understanding of an outsider to the Tradition, the claim that dharma is most authoritatively known in Veda. To examine the claim, we look at the family of dharma uses in the Rg Veda to establish a core or root meaning of the concept which underlies and gives coherence to the diverse particular usages of the term. Subsequently, we examine the uses of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā in order to know whether the root or core meaning demonstrates continuity within a smṛti text.

The thesis argues that there is a root meaning to dharma established in the Rg Veda which has a demonstrable continuity in the Bhagavad Gītā. That root meaning is

expressed as: the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is. Subsequent to the textual exegesis, very brief consideration is given to the implications of the continuity of dharma's root or core meaning for the scholarly question of continuity and change in the Indian Religious Tradition.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the concept of dharma in the Indian Religious Tradition. The basis of the study is the claim by the Tradition that dharma is known most authoritatively in the śruti literature, and that subsequent smṛti literature recalls that authoritative meaning. The study sets out to validate for the understanding of an outsider to the Indian Tradition the evidence for and nature of that claim. Two texts are examined -- the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā representing śruti and smṛti literature respectively.

Within the Rg Veda we examine the actions of the vedic gods -- primarily Agni, Indra, the Adityas, and Soma -- conveyed by the verb and noun forms of the root dhṛ. Our discussion of those actions is organized in three thematic contexts: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Community. The study of the gods' acts establishes a root or core meaning which we phrased: the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is. Establishment of such a root meaning provides the basis upon which we argue that there is validity to the Tradition's claim that dharma is most authoritatively known in śruti literature.

For our purpose it is not sufficient just to establish a root meaning. The core meaning must demonstrate continuity in the usages of dharma in smṛti literature. For that purpose

we examine the Bhagavad Gītā and show that in Kṛṣṇa's teaching dharma's root meaning is both recalled and retained as the central theme of the text. The examination of dharma's uses in the Gītā is organized according to three themes: (1) Cosmology, (2) transformation of the sacrifice into yoga, and (3) the community.

The textual study established that the root or core meaning of dharma underlies and gives coherence to the diversity of actions of the vedic gods, and, subsequently, to Kṛṣṇa's action in creation. Not only is dharma a significant concept in the Rg Veda, but, also, that root significance is demonstrably present in Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Our contention is that the root or core meaning expresses the "authoritativeness" of dharma's śruti meaning for smṛti literature.

The validation of the Tradition's claim with regard to dharma for the authoritativeness of śruti or smṛti literature has important implications for the scholarly critique of the agreement for continuity in the Indian Religious Tradition. Such critiques have been formulated primarily by Western scholars of the Tradition. Brief consideration is given to the historical and linguistic critique of continuity. Against such claims it is argued that it is essential to see the nature of the claim for continuity on the Tradition's own terms as part of a revelation embodied in Veda and recalled as the basis of change in the subsequent Tradition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Paul Younger, my thesis Supervisor; David Kinsley, John Hitchcock and Wayne Whillier, the members of my Supervisory Committee, for their assistance in the preparation and writing of this dissertation.

I would also like to express my indebtedness to formative teachers: Drs. Cathleen Going, Yün-hua Jan, G. P. Grant and Eugene Combs.

Anne Louise Brookes prepared the manuscript and has my deep appreciation for the attentive care she gave to the job under great pressure.

My greatest debt is to my wife Carol, sine qua non, and to my children, Joseph and Miriam, who put up with it all for so long.

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INTRODUCTION:

THEME AND QUESTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

### THEME AND QUESTIONS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of this study is the concept of dharma. This term perhaps more than any other in the Indian Religious Tradition is central to the conceptualization of widely diverse areas of human experience. It is central to formulations of religious understanding in scriptures and philosophical discourse in the various schools of Indian Philosophy. In addition, dharma formulates the most appropriate and meaningful forms of human action and elaborates them in normative legal and social texts. At the most general level, dharma can convey the meaning of truth in the areas of religious understanding and philosophical discourse and righteousness in the many areas of human action.<sup>1</sup> Taken together these two general meanings suggest that dharma is the term in the Indian Religious Tradition which more than any other expresses the unity of knowledge and action.

Many questions can emerge about a concept like dharma which is basic to so many areas of life in a tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. the discussion of dharma below, pp. 33-48 .which surveys some of the interpretations of dharma.

Not the least of such questions is how dharma came to be central. To ask such a question leads one to the study of the diverse contexts of dharma-usage wondering what basis there is in the various types of usage for discovering the root cause of the concept's centrality.

Once one begins to pursue this kind of question, a whole series of problems begin to arise. Where does one begin to study a concept like dharma? How can one reasonably limit a study which seems at the outset to require the study of a whole tradition? These and many other questions point to the paramount necessity at the very outset to clarify precisely what it is that the writer seeks to know and how that goal can be achieved within reasonable limits.

The task of achieving clarity about what this project proposes to achieve can most usefully be established by examining briefly the discipline within which this study is conducted, the Tradition within which dharma is a central concept, and the term dharma itself. A look at the discipline of the study of religion can provide us with insight into both the purpose of the study and the means by which that purpose can be realized. A look at the Indian Religious Tradition can give us guidance as to how to proceed in the inquiry into dharma consistent with the self-understanding of the Tradition. Finally, a look at dharma can help focus what is important to know about the term. On the basis of

these three considerations we will be able to formulate our thesis about the meaning of dharma and its place in the Indian Religious Tradition.

## 2. THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY OF RELIGION

The emergence of the study of religion in North America and Europe is a recent event.<sup>2</sup> As a result, its assumptions and approach to its subject matter have only been articulated in a preliminary way. One of the basic assumptions underlying this new study is the necessity to inquire into the meaning of the religious traditions of all mankind and especially those whose origin is outside the context of western civilization. The modern study of religion is, therefore, fundamentally concerned with all religious traditions in a way in which earlier studies were not.<sup>3</sup> The implication of this premise is the formulation of a purpose which suggests that insofar as it is practically

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<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade, "The History of Religions in Retrospect, 1912 and after", The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion, (Chicago, 1969), pp. 12 - 36.

<sup>3</sup> This is simply to distinguish the modern study of religion from the theological task rooted in a particular tradition whether that be the Jewish, Christian, Islamic or Hindu. cf. Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, (New York, 1958), pp. 3 - 26.

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possible, the task is to understand the meaning of at least the major religious traditions of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

The full implications of the existence of the study of religion is by no means clear. The task of studying and interpreting religious traditions is certainly not an easy one. It is part, perhaps the axial part, of a project by which men of one civilization try to come to an understanding of men from another. The study of religion goes to the heart of that task by focusing the attention of the student on the experience of human meaning and purpose<sup>5</sup> as it has been expressed in the particular tradition under study. Out

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By formulating the task in terms of understanding we propose that the purpose is to comprehend a tradition as it articulates itself through diverse forms from sacred scripture, to art and social forms. This description is intended to distinguish our task and purpose from that of a comparative study in which fragments of one tradition are juxtaposed with those of another with the scholar as the mediator and interpreter of the evidence. By 'understand' we mean to study the meaning of a particular tradition through its own modes of expression. As Philip Ashby has formulated it, "We know today that every religion must, not ought, to be understood on the basis of its own fundamental and absolute presuppositions or it is not understood."

Philip H. Ashby, "The History of Religions and the Study of Hinduism" History of Religion: Essays in Divinity, Vol. 1, ed. Joseph Kitagawa, (Chicago, 1967), p. 148.

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By 'meaning and purpose' we refer to the conceptual expression of the nature of the cosmos, nature and man and the point or telos which that nature is seen to have. Sacred texts are a major source of the study of 'meaning and purpose' and  
(continued)

from this focal point radiate questions concerning the relationship of human meaning and purpose to the diverse forms or expressions of them in a culture. The study of religion, therefore, can involve the examination of the relationships between scriptural, philosophical and ritual expressions of meaning and purpose; the relation of those forms to the artistic and symbolic forms in a culture and, also, the relationships with the socio-political structures which provide the general institutional framework for realizing meaning and purpose.

The study of religion as we understand it, can, therefore, be said to have two important characteristics. It is one medium by which western civilization seeks to understand other civilizations. Secondly, it is a discipline which understands its task in holistic terms. Both of these characteristics are important for formulating the assumptions of this study of dharma.

It is important to realize that this study is done not by an Indian studying his own ancient heritage. It is done in Canada and it is done within the framework of a discipline, the task of which is to understand in general

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5 (continued)

such texts are normally the description or expression of the religious experience of the great religious figures in, or to whom, the truth about meaning and purpose has been made manifest.

the religious heritage of mankind and, in this particular instance, that of India. The subject matter of this inquiry is dharma and its meaning within the Indian Religious Tradition.<sup>6</sup> While that formulation of the task may not seem unusual, our understanding of the formulation imposes certain restrictions on how we proceed. For example, it requires that our task be informed by the self-understanding of the Indian Religious Tradition in matters concerning how dharma is to be known. We are led therefore in our brief study of the literary heritage of the Tradition to examine

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The word 'tradition' is going to be the subject of extended commentary virtually throughout the study. At this juncture we simply intend its usage to convey the comprehensiveness of the inter-relatedness of religious understanding and the diverse cultural expressions of that understanding. Marco Pallis has summarized the general intent of our present use of the term as follows:

Tradition...embraces the whole of a civilization, in all its modes and departments, and tends to the obliteration of all antitheses, such as 'sacred and profane' even 'creator and creation'. A truly traditional civilization has its roots fixed in a doctrine of the purely metaphysical order. This doctrine gives to the whole a principal or sufficient cause. The other constituents of the Tradition, whether ethical, social, or artistic down to the most petty activities of daily life, all derive their authority from this doctrine, to be exercised in their prescribed spheres. Ideas of a metaphysical order are the cement which binds every part together. The mechanism by which the Truth is made to circulate through the body is the Tradition from Master to Pupil, which stretches back into the past and reaches forward into the future.

Marco Pallis, Peaks and Lamas, (London, 1939) xvii, quoted in Benjamin Rowland, The Art and Architecture of India, (Baltimore, 1967), p. 25.



its fundamental assumptions in order to proceed in our study of dharma in such a way that we do not violate the spirit of that self-understanding.

The fact that we are not a part of the Tradition under study has other implications as well. While the necessity to seek guidance from the self-understanding of the Tradition in order to fulfill our own purpose of understanding may seem an obvious implication, it must also be recognized that we will not always pattern our study on the traditional forms of study at every step. That fact arises simply because our quest for understanding is different from that, say, of a figure like Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā who seeks to know dharma in order to be able to act righteously in a particular situation and to fulfill his devotion of Lord Kṛṣṇa in doing so. The author of this study of dharma is an outsider to Arjuna's quest. Our task is simply to try and grasp the shape and form of the meaning of dharma. That task does not seek to know dharma out of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, but out of devotion to a quest simply to understand what dharma means and in what sense it is conceptually related to devotion to Kṛṣṇa in the context of the Indian Religious Tradition. The task, as a human task, may be consistent with Arjuna's, but, as we mean it, it remains distant from it. Our task is like that of a man in a valley who wonders about the character of a mountain. Such a man may well circle the mountain to see its shape and form, before attempting or perhaps rejecting the task of actual ascent.

The implication in the distance of our task from that which characterizes Arjuna's in the Bhagavad Gītā is that our understanding emerges as we seek validation of claims made about dharma in the Tradition. When, for example, one of the Dharmaśāstra texts states that the source of knowledge about dharma is to be found in Veda, the quest for understanding as we shall pursue it, will be to examine that directive and follow it up in order to know dharma. In following that directive we may use methods and intuitions which are not characteristic of the ways in which an Indian might read and study a vedic text. Indeed, it may well be impossible for us to read the texts exactly as an Indian might. However, the check on our methods throughout, is whether our conclusions are consistent with the spirit and self-understanding of the Tradition. Thus only as our conclusions come together with those of the Tradition can we claim to have understood the subject matter which we have taken up.

In summary, the fact that the study of religion is a western enterprise requires that, for the purpose of the study of dharma, we seek out and follow the self-understanding of the Indian Religious Tradition and at the same time apply to that self-understanding our own methods and approaches in order to come to an understanding which validates indigenous claims. Validation in no sense is to be interpreted as something which the Traditions's own appreciation and use of dharma requires, but rather it is to be understood as the requirement of the

outsider who seeks to understand India's Tradition. As such, validation constitutes the pathway to understanding for someone who stands outside a tradition.

The modern study of religion has another important characteristic. It brings to the task of the study of a religious tradition an holistic approach. That is to say, the study of religion requires that the student examine both the literary heritage of a tradition and the relationships of ideas contained in that heritage to other aspects of the tradition. The holistic focus on, for example, the relationships of ideas and institutions or ideas and art attempts to give recognition to the fact that most traditions hold that religious experience is the basis for making sense of the whole of human experience. By way of contrast, popular and scholarly usage of the English word 'religion',<sup>7</sup> during recent centuries has tended to permit the categorization of

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Wilfred Cantwell Smith has analyzed the use of the word 'religion' with great care and noted its peculiar modern usage. One might note in particular the following statement:

The modern West's adoption of this concept, though misleading for an interpretation of the religious life of the Aztecs, the classical Hindus, mediaeval Europe, contemporary Bushman, and most other peoples, is nonetheless neither fortuitous nor absurd. Its rise in recent centuries in the West has had to do with a great process of differentiation in those recent centuries in that area - a process whose diffusion around the world can be discerned in the present century. This is a process whereby the complexity and proliferating novelty of life have advanced relentlessly and spectacularly. A result has been that religious traditions that were once in practice  
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human experience so as to separate the religious from the social, the artistic, the economic and the cultural. With the emergence of a study of religion, however, there soon came the realization that many languages have no functional equivalent for the term 'religion' and that most traditions do not categorize human experience into exclusive compartments. As a result, within the study of religion the question could be asked again how traditions could be studied holistically, and how a scholar could get past the compartmentalization inspired in large part by the scientific approaches to study within humanistic subjects. Within the study of religion, it became important to ask: Is it possible to study the meaning of the totality of experience as such, or are religious studies to be a synthesis of many separate methods?

At the present time, there are no easy answers to these questions. Nor is there a consensus regarding the appropriateness of various methods and their application to the subject of religious experience or to the patterns of relationships between religious experience and institutions or art. Nor, again, do we have answers to these complex

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and are still perhaps in idea conterminous with human life in all its comprehensiveness, have actually found themselves supplemented more and more by considerations from other or newer sources, so that the religious seems to be one facet of a person's life alongside many others.

W. C. Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion,  
(New York, 1964) p. 113, cf. pp.109-138.

issues. However, suffice it to say, that this study of dharma is located within the necessity to study man's religious traditions in a holistic way. We will make methodological decisions as we proceed in this work and those decisions will inevitably be part of the large debates on how to study religious experience. We will at each juncture describe our important methodological decisions. In making our decisions, however, we have consistently tried to identify the best means to grasp our subject and to grasp it as part of a total or holistic interpretation of human experience within the Indian Religious Tradition.

While we locate this study in an holistic approach, a project in the study of religion must be limited. Thus, our particular project must define its problem in such a way that it contributes to the holistic task of the discipline

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A brief discussion here is warranted on the relation of methodology to subject matter. This is a complex question, but suffice it to say, we follow W. C. Smith here in asserting that a subject calls for its own methods. Objectivity is not best served by strict a priori methodologies which take precedence over a complex subject. As Smith has put it:

The concept of methodology and the stress on method in education, imply that one knows ahead of time what one wants, and has only to find out how to get it. This collides with the principle of humane learning, that one discovers in the course of one's study what one is after, what is worth wanting (what one "wants" in the old-fashioned sense, of what is wanting in one's present stage of becoming).

W. C. Smith "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal" contributed to the symposium of the Royal Society of Canada on "Frontiers and Limits of Knowledge", June 3 - 4, 1974.

without losing itself. Conscious of this double necessity to be limited and to be part of a larger project, we must now turn to the task of establishing the limits for this study of dharma as a central concept in the Indian Religious Tradition. We do so with a view to understanding its meaning in the context of that Tradition. Our first task therefore in establishing the boundaries of our project is to look at the broad structures and assumptions of that Tradition. Subsequently, we can turn to dharma itself to see how its usages and interpretations can assist in further defining and limiting our project.

### 3. THE FIRST BOUNDARY: THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

In turning to the Indian Religious Tradition as a source to help define and limit our study of dharma, it is clear that we are confronted with a vast subject. The Indian Tradition is complex. It would be pretentious to presume to be able to examine carefully all of its aspects. There is one, however - the characteristic of continuity - which is an essential constituent of the idea of Tradition in the Indian context. It will serve to advance the cause of establishing limits to this thesis then, to focus on the nature of the Tradition's claim for continuity and how that claim can guide us in our study of dharma.

Within the context of the study of religion, we are centering our interest on the religious tradition of South Asia. This geographical area is presently constituted politically by Bangla Desh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Republic of Bhārat or India. This vast region is protected to the north by the highest chain of mountains in the world, the Himālayas. Indeed, a fundamentally important geographical-historical fact is the barrier which these mountains present. The barrier can only be penetrated, and there with difficulty, through the passes to the West which provide contact with West Asia and the civilizations of the Mediterranean. The subcontinent is also bound by three oceans: The Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Within this protected and isolated framework of mountains and oceans, has developed one of the most distinctive traditions known to mankind.

The subcontinent is immensely diverse in its geographical makeup: from the Western Ghāts or step-like mountains on the coast, to the deserts of Gujarāt and Rājasthan, through the central plains to the Eastern rain-forests and again to the plains of the South. Within this geographical diversity has emerged a great variety of languages, cultural patterns and religious traditions with a history dating back beyond the first known urban civilization of the subcontinent, the Indus Civilization, the dates of which are normally estimated

to be from 2500 - 1700 B.C.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout these diverse geographical areas and this ancient and varied cultural history, there has been a unified and unifying sense of tradition. That is to say, amidst all of the geographical and linguistic diversity, there have been cultural and religious characteristics which have achieved near universal acceptance and unbroken continuity. One could, for example, cite the thematic continuities in Indian art which can be seen first in the artifacts of the Indus Valley Civilization and which continue in the later tradition. Stella Kramrisch, a noted historian of Indian Art, has pointed out the continuity of the Indian view of nature and life depicted in Indian art:

The ancient art of the Indus Valley was preoccupied with life and recaptured its surge in a modelling that was both firm and resilient. The massive male torso, . . . is in the throes of an inner movement unfolding from the core of the body. On the other hand, when outer movement is represented in the slender figure of a dancer . . . gliding curves and clear-cut planes are intertwined in space, and follow the movement of the dance as their perpetual function. These two modes of sculpture are characteristic . . . . In other words, these two modes of sculpture, the one recording the inner unconscious movement of life within the plastic walls of the body, and the other the outer movement of the body by an act of will within the space encircled by that movement, are typically and perennially Indian.<sup>10</sup>

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Sir Mortimer Wheeler, The Indus Civilization, Third Edition, (Cambridge, U.K., 1968), pp. 110-125.

10

Stella Kramrisch, The Art of Indian Through the Ages, (London, 1965), p. 13 (emphasis added).



Another example of an element which achieved near universal acceptance and thereby contributes to the sense of tradition is the consensus regarding the hierarchical ordering of social relationships, the varna or 'caste' system. As A. L. Basham puts it:

This thoroughgoing recognition that men are not the same, and that there is a hierarchy of classes, each with its separate duties and distinctive way of life, is one of the most striking features of ancient Indian sociology. Criticisms of the pretensions of the higher classes were heard from time to time, and equalitarian propositions were occasionally put forward, but in general this concept has held its ground from the end of the Rg Vedic period to the present day. 11

One might also point to the religious consensus about karma and samsāra, which tells us that each human action (karma) is part of an on-going flux or cycle of change (samsāra), as yet another fundamental element contributing to a sense of continuity and tradition. The origin of this religious conception goes again to the roots of the Tradition. The modern historian of Indian philosophy, S. Radhakrishnan, has described the origins of the karma and samsāra concept in the following way:

We have seen how it arises naturally from the mass of thought by which the Upaniṣad thinkers were surrounded. The Vedas speak to us of the two ways of the gods and the fathers. The original inhabitants of India supply us with the idea of the migration of human souls into trees and animals. The need for recompense is urged

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11

A. L. Basham, The Wonder that was India, (New York, 1954), p. 137.

in the Brāhmaṇas. . . With these ready to hand, the Upaniṣads had only to round them off into the doctrine of saṃsāra.<sup>12</sup>

Emerging in its classical form in the ancient Upaniṣads this theological consensus took such deep root that it was fundamental to religious understanding throughout the Tradition.

To speak of an artistic recognition of a 'typical' and 'perennial' view of life; or of the near universal acceptance of a social system embodying the hierarchical understanding of varṇa or caste; or again, of the theological consensus of karma and saṃsāra is to focus on themes of continuity which need to be traced to a foundation. In the tradition's self-understanding the foundation lay in the body of texts known as the Veda. We must turn therefore, to an examination of in what sense the literary heritage of the Veda could be understood to constitute the authoritative basis for all aspects of a complex Tradition. In doing so, we are concerned to know whether the pattern of authority in the literature has implications for our study of dharma.

The Indian Tradition has placed the literature which is considered the most ancient in the position of the sacred and authoritative source of all knowledge. This body of

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S. Radhakrishnan, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol 1, (London, 1962), p. 255.

literature is known as 'veda', a term which literally means 'knowledge'. The most authoritative part of the Veda came to be described as śruti, or "that which has been heard or communicated from the beginning, sacred knowledge orally transmitted from generation to generation. . . ." <sup>13</sup> Veda as śruti, then, is understood as the source on which all knowledge in the Tradition is founded and by which all knowledge can be measured for its truthfulness.

The śruti part of Veda is made up of four types of literature: the Samhitas, the Brāhmanas, the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. There is no consensus concerning the dates of these collections of texts. They have been preserved primarily through an oral tradition which continues to the present day. Preservation of the Veda has been in the hands of priestly families, a fact which accounts for the remarkable continuity and accuracy of the oral tradition when it is compared with the most ancient written sources accessible to us. The memorization of the entire corpus of the Veda was an exact science which has been carefully maintained in the priestly families entrusted with the task.

The Samhitas are four different 'collections' of hymns each with a distinct character. The most ancient, and in large measure the foundation of the three others, is the

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M. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit - English Dictionary, (Oxford, 1964), p. 1101.

14

Rg Veda. It is made up of 1028 poetic hymns which have been arranged into ten circles or mandalas of diverse length and age. Each poem has been dedicated to a deity or 'power', or to a group of them. The author ship <sup>15</sup> is often unclear, however many of the poems are attributed to specific rsis, inspired poets or sages. Little, if anything, is known about most of these rsis except for their names.

The inspired poetry of the Rg Veda is the basis upon which the other three Samhitas are founded. In the case of the Sāma Veda, this dependency upon the Rg Veda is quite literal. This Samhita is a songbook or text of chants which

14

With regard to the dating of the Samhitas, one might refer the reader to the historian's lament articulated by Louis Renou in Religions of Ancient India. He states: "In the first place, no definite chronology can be established, and this is an embarrassment to Western scholars." He continues, with a view to pointing out the most that can be said on the problem: "It is clear that the oldest Vedic texts in their earliest redactions are posterior to the Aryan invasions of India."

Renou's observation on what it is possible to say is minimal indeed, but perhaps the most important observation that can be made on the whole question is that the date of the vedic collections is not at all fundamental to Indian religious understanding and in particular it is not crucial to the śruti - smṛti distinction which formulates the hierarchy of religious authority. Suffice it to say however, that the historians have not found any facts to contradict the indigenous pattern as we shall attempt to show.

Louis Renou, Religions of Ancient India, (New York, 1968), p. 2.

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The significance of authorship is another instance of contrasting priorities between the Tradition and modern historical scholarship. The fact that the Tradition shows  
(continued)

are for the most part taken directly from the Rg Veda and re-organized for liturgical use in the sacrifice.

The Yajur Veda is dependent upon the Rg Veda in quite a different way. It is the ritual or liturgical text which provides the setting for the use of the poetry of the Rg Veda, either directly or through the distilled chants found in the Sāma Veda. The Yajur Veda at present is made up of two separate collections, a fact which is probably the result of there being two recensions preserved by two different

15 (continued)

little interest in the authors of the hymns is fundamental to the traditionalists's understanding of metaphysical truth and religious experience. The point of the religious quest throughout is to de-personalize in order to achieve mystical identification with transcendent truth. The rsi, the kavi and the vipra were those who achieved that identification and expressed its meaning for the community at large and its ritual life. Louis Renou discusses this point with great clarity:

The rishis to whom tradition attributes the 'vision' are in some cases mentioned in the hymns themselves. It must be remembered however, that the name of an author may have been read into some word or other occurring in the verse. In any case these names tell us nothing about the persons they refer to; at most it happens that the index attributes two hymns to the same author. We should expect that the cycles of Vedic families and of Brāhmanic castes should repeat themselves. The exercise of poetic function was a family matter, and was thus hereditary. There must have been a body of priest-bards the bahvrīcha, "carriers of many verses", attached to a princely or at least a selection from their works. The Rigvedic hymn is not only a song in praise of a divinity: it is composition made with a view to pleasing a prince written in a certain style, subject to the requirements of public competition, of which it mentioned the culminating event. . . . "

Louis Renou, Vedic India, (Calcutta, 1957), p. 4.

priestly families. The first is the Black Yajur Veda which preserves the 'yajus' or sacrificial formulae combined with commentaries, and the other is the White Yajur Veda which for the most part stays closer to the sacrificial formulae.

The last of the Samhitas is the Atharva Veda. It applies the power of the sacrifice to the solution of immediate human needs and aspirations. As such it has been called a text on magic, the application of which is directed toward the following:

". . . charms for long life, (āyushya), to cure sickness or demonic possession (bhaishajya), curses upon demons, sorcerors, enemies (abhichārika), love charms (strikarman), charms to bring about concord (ammanasya) and prosperity (baushtika), charms relating to royalty (rājakarman) or to the Brahmanical power, and expiatory prayers (prayaschita). 16

The three types of literature which constitute the remainder of the śruti part of the Veda are appended to each of the Samhitas. That is to say for each of the four Samhitas there is a Brāhamana, Āranyaka and one or more Upaniṣad. These three literary types share a fundamental characteristic in that each is a form of commentary on its Samhita. The Brāhmanas are commentaries which elaborate the liturgical significance of the sacrifice and the elements which constitute it. The Āranyakas or 'forest texts' are meditations based on the elements of the sacrifice. Finally, the Upaniṣads are

reflective or philosophical texts about the nature of man, the sacrifice and the place of both in the cosmology of the Veda.

The Upanisads are called the 'vedānta', or the end of the Veda and as such mark the point at which it was understood that a qualitative change took place in the literary heritage. Whereas the earliest literature is śruti, which suggests that the knowledge contained within it was known directly in a non-mediated form; the literature which came immediately after it is called smṛti or 'that which is remembered'. Whereas śruti suggests the direct experience of 'hearing', smṛti suggests the 'memory' of what had been heard in times past, or knowledge mediated through the tradition. The implication of the distinction is that while the smṛti literature provides knowledge, it is knowledge derived from the more authoritative knowledge of the śruti texts.

Theoretically, it was then to the authoritative literature of śruti that the artist, or the king concerned with the proper ordering of society, or the priest concerned with theological and liturgical form, looked to discover the authoritative basis both for their religious understanding and for the general delineation of their duties. But the question naturally arises as to how effectively this theoretical system worked. While most scholars acknowledged that the Tradition sees in the śruti literature its ultimate theoretical base, many have pointed out how the Samhitas and Brāhmanas seem to recede gradually from the living center of

the Traditions' self-understanding to become little more than a symbol of authoritative knowledge. No less a scholar than Louis Renou, has remarked on the apparent contradiction between the claims made about the importance of the Veda and the apparent disregard for śruti within the later Tradition. He states:

Examined in the perspective of Indian History, the Vedas present a striking paradox: on the one hand, they are revered, are recognized as the omniscient, infallible, eternal principle - something like God in the form of "Knowledge", a God-made Book (the Bible), Indian Logos- they are referred to as the source itself of dharma, as the authority from which arises the totality of Brahmanic disciplines. On the other hand, what we may call the philological traditions, relating to the Vedas, that form the very substance of the constituent texts, are from a very early date, weakened, if not altered or lost.

Renou continues:

From the very fact that the Veda is supposed to contain everything in its bosom . . . certain authors have come to the point of citing it to justify their data, which are manifestly anachronistic, or what is worse, surreptitiously reinterpreted. One always believes oneself to be in the wake of the Veda, when one turns one's back on it. The term tends to serve as a symbol, and the notion which it covers has been the object of a veritable alienation. 17

Renou's dilemma as a historian is a real one and the apparent contradiction involved between the claims about śruti and the apparent disregard if not manipulation of the literature is a problem which it is important for us to understand. If, as we have said, our goal is to understand a religious tradition, we

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Louis Renou, The Destiny of the Veda in India, (Varanasi, 1965), . p. 1. Cf. Études Védiques Et Pāninéennes, Vol. 6, (Paris, 1960), pp. 1-2.



must do so within the self-understanding of the Tradition in all of its complexity. Thus we will have to ask more carefully just what the Tradition understood by smṛti, 'that which is remembered', and exactly what it understood to be the relationship between the various literary forms in this category and the more authoritative śruti on which they were in some sense dependent.

The smṛti literature is of several different types. The best known are the collections of myths, tales and legends called itihāsa and the legal-like literature, the sūtras and śāstras.

The Itihāsa literature contains the two great epics of the tradition, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana and the collections of mythological tales known as the Pūranas. The Mahābhārata, a vast epic poem often compared to the Iliad of Homer, is referred to in the Tradition as the 'Fifth Veda'<sup>18</sup>. This designation of the Mahābhārata is no doubt intended to claim for this collection of myth, philosophy; social, political and legal speculation, adroitly integrated into the story of the conflicts between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, a special kind of authority somewhat like that claimed for the Samhitas.

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18

V. S. Sukthankar, the editor of the Bhandarkar Institutes Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata alludes to this fact when he states: "The work was evidently meant to be a tome of genuine popular interest, one that should be read, studied and meditated on by all classes of the Indian people, not only by the learned Brāhmanas, Ksatriyas, but also by Vaiśyas and Sūdras, - the fifth Veda (Pañcama vedah) the new Veda of all people, irrespective of caste and creed."

V. S. Sukthankar, On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata, (Bombay, 1957), p. 23.

and the rest of the sruti literature. The underlying theme which ties this otherwise unwieldy mass of literature together is a concern with explaining and illustrating the concept of dharma. For example, the long discussion on 'kingship' in the 'Śānti Parva'<sup>19</sup> section is essentially a discussion of dharma. Even more important both to the epic as it stands and to the whole Tradition which follows, is the Bhagavad Gītā.<sup>20</sup> This portion of the epic contains the dialogue between the warrior-hero Arjuna and Lord Kṛṣṇa who has become manifest in the world to rescue dharma.<sup>21</sup> (4.7)

19

The Śāntiparva is the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata. Two sections in particular are important for the discussion of the nature of kingship. U. N. Ghoshal describes those sections as follows:

By far the most important of these didactic pieces are comprised in the first two sections of the Santiparvan entitled 'the section on royal duties in times of distress' (āpadharma) (Mahābhārata xii 56-167), which purport to describe in successive chapters the discourses delivered by the Kuru sage Bhīṣma in reply to the questions of his royal interlocutor Yudhisṭhira. These chapters contain collectively the largest as well as the most systematic and profound body of political ideas in our ancient literature.

U. N. Ghoshal, A History of Indian Political Ideas, (Oxford, 1959), p. 188.

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The Bhagavad Gītā is found in the Mahābhārata, the sixth book, entitled the 'Bhīṣmaparva,' section vi.

21

Unless otherwise indicated all references to the  
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The designation of the Mahābhārata as both smṛti or 'recollection' and as a 'Fifth Veda' indicates that in the Tradition's self-understanding the epic was in harmony with the intentions of the earlier śruti literature. Later in the thesis we will be examining whether this harmony can be seen in the way in which these two bodies of literature convey the meaning of the concept of dharma.

The Rāmāyana, the other great epic in the Tradition, tells the heroic tales of King Rāmā as he seeks to live according to the laws of dharma as they had come to be established in the Tradition. This poem has very little of the encyclopedic quality of the Mahābhārata. Rāmā's clarity about the meaning of dharma at each moment in the story, is in striking contrast to the Pāṇḍava brothers in the Mahābhārata who, more often than not, are confused and unclear about the meaning of dharma. In consequence, the Pāṇḍava brothers discuss dharma at length and seek for teachers to clarify its meaning.

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21 (continued)

to the Bhagavad Gītā are from: Franklin Edgerton, The Bhagavad Gītā, (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

For whenever of the right  
A languishing appears, son of Bharata,  
A rising up of unright  
Then I send Myself forth.

yadā-yadā hi dharmasya,  
glānir bhavati bhārata  
abhyutthānam adharmasya  
tadā 'tmānam sṛjāmy aham

4.7.

while Rāmā acts almost spontaneously in accord with dharma. This difference would seem to suggest that the Rāmāyana emerged at a point in the Tradition when the meaning of dharma had become clarified and specific. In that sense, it is more typical of the smṛti texts which are intended to remember or preserve an established self understanding.

The Pūranas are another type of itihāsa literature. The Pūraṇa texts are, according to the classical arrangement, eighteen in number and deal with five types of topics (pañchalakṣhaṇa): sarga or the creation of the universe, pratisarga or re-creation of the universe, after destruction, vamśa or geneology, manvantara or the great periods of time dating from Manu, the primal ancestor, and vamśānucharita or the history of the solar and lunar dynasties.

Both the Pūranas and the epic literature reflect the strength of the sectarian movements within the tradition. In these texts, religious experience is often described in terms of devotion to Viṣṇu, Śiva or other manifestations of the ultimate principle of the universe Brahman. In relating the many manifestations of Viṣṇu and Śiva to the vedic Brahman, this literature is careful to establish its continuity with the śruti tradition.

In addition to the myths and legends of the Itihāsa literature, we find in the smṛti corpus a vast collection of normative, legal literature. This literature grew out of the

necessity for commentary on śruti. The vastness of the vedic literature led to the creation of 'aphoristic' or sūtra literature which compacted the essence of the vedic knowledge into short statements which could be memorized and used in rituals. There were several kinds of sūtras. The Śrautasūtras were directly based upon śruti and consisted primarily of Kalpa sūtras or aphorisms on ritual. Another set of sūtras were called the Smartasūtras or sūtras based upon smṛti. This group included the Grha sūtras which instructed the householder on the rituals conducted within the home such as the rites of initiation and personal devotion. Finally, there were the Dharmasūtras which articulated the normative basis for social and political law and custom. There was a long line of Dharmasūtras attributed to famous authors such as Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasīṣṭha, and Āpastamba and these were carefully studied by later generations.

Because of the compactness of the sūtra style of writing, the discussions in Dharmasūtras were soon related in another style, that of the śāstra or scientific treatise on dharma. Generally speaking the Śrautasūtras and Smartasūtras were not the subjects of similar scientific commentary. The most famous of the Dharmasāstras was attributed to Manu, although there were similar texts attributed to Brāhmans such as Yājñavalkya, Viṣṇu, and Nārada. The fact that there were several versions of the Dharmasāstras probably reflects the

fact that these texts too originated with and were preserved by different Brāhmanical families even as the earlier śruti texts had been.

The Dharmaśāstra literature articulates with considerable care its recognition of the authoritativeness of Veda. We find for example in the most widely known text, the Mānava-dharmaśāstra the acknowledgement that:

The whole Veda is the (first) source of the sacred law, next the tradition and the virtuous conduct of those who know the (Veda) further, also the customs of holy men, and (finally) self-satisfaction. 22

In a subsequent passage in Manu the authoritativeness of Veda is emphatically repeated:

The Veda, the sacred tradition, the customs of virtuous men, and one's pleasure, they declare to be visibly the fourfold means of defining the sacred law. 23

The significance of according to Veda the first position upon which knowledge of dharma is based, is reiterated in the words of a ninth century commentator on Manu, Medhātithi, who argues that the Veda is the source of all

22

G. Bühler (trans.), The Laws of Manu, Sacred Books of the East, Vol xxv, (Varanasi, 1967), 2.6

23

Ibid., 2.12.

knowledge in his discussion of Manu 2.6:

As regard the (orthodox) smṛtis of Manu and others . . . their relationship to directly perceptible Vedic texts is quite patent; in some cases they are related to the Vedic mantras, in others to the Vedic deities, and in others again with substances and other details . . . As regards practice, that which consists in what is actually done with a view to invisible results, by persons learned in the Veda, its authoritative character is exactly like that of the smṛti, because that also has its basis in the Veda. 24'

Thus, both Manu and Medhātithi express the conviction that Veda or śruti is not just a symbol of authority, but a concrete authoritative basis for knowledge of dharma.

Another kind of śāstra text is that addressed to artha or the subject of political order. The most important example of this type is the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya. This text which the tradition has ascribed to the Prime Minister of the empire of Chandraguptamaurya, Kauṭilya, is a text on the art of ruling and administering an empire. While it seems to advocate political necessity and expedience as the basis for ruling, nevertheless, the apparent pragmatism is mediated within a framework centering on the concept of

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Medhātithi, quoted in: J. Gonda, Change and Continuity in Indian Religion, (The Hague, 1965), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>  
dharma. As in the case of the Manusmṛti knowledge of  
dharma is founded upon a recognition of the authority of  
Veda. The Arthaśāstra states that "righteous and unrighteous  
 acts (dharmādharmau) are learned from the triple Vedas. . . ." <sup>26</sup>  
 Herein authoritative recognition is being accorded to śruti  
 as it is to be found in the Rg, Sāma, and Yajur Veda primarily,  
 although the text later seems to recognize as well both the  
Atharvaveda and the Itihāśaveda as Veda. <sup>27</sup> The point in this,  
 as in the other smṛti texts, is to emphasize that the authority  
 of smṛti is grounded upon 'that which had been heard' in prior  
 ages by the sages or ṛsis.

From this brief survey it will be apparent that the  
smṛti literature understood itself, not as a new formulation  
 of knowledge, but in relation to the authoritative sources of

<sup>25</sup>

This fact has been persuasively argued by V. P. Varma.  
 He states: "In the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya the word dharma is  
 used in various senses and it is essential to comprehend them  
 to understand his political thought. At least three meanings  
 of Dharma in Kautilya can be distinguished: - (1) Dharma in  
 the senses of social duty, (2) Dharma as moral law based on  
 truth, and (3) Dharma as civil law."

V. P. Varma, Studies in Hindu Political Thought and  
 its Metaphysical Foundations, (Varanasi, 1959), p. 119.

<sup>26</sup>

R. Shamasastri, (trans.) Kautilya's Arthaśāstra,  
 (Mysore, 1915); 2.6.

<sup>27</sup>

Ibid., 3.1.



knowledge already extant in śruti. Smṛti then, as the Tradition understood it, was inconceivable apart from its authoritative foundation śruti. The question then is, in what way did the recognition accorded to śruti, express itself? Was it, as Louis Renou has suggested merely a 'symbol' or was it in fact as the textual sources claim the foundation for the various artistic, social and theological expressions of the tradition?

The question which Louis Renou addresses to the self-understanding of the Indian Tradition regarding its claim for continuity can provide a focal issue around which it is possible to articulate our discussion of dharma. We can take as our task the problem of validating for the purpose of our understanding, the claim made by the Tradition that dharma is authoritatively known in Veda. If we can show that dharma has a core or root meaning which is established in the śruti portions of Veda and is continuous in the smṛti part of the Tradition, the foundation would be established for questioning Renou's challenge to the Tradition's self understanding on this point. For our purposes then, a root or core meaning of dharma must first be articulated in śruti<sup>28</sup> and have a demonstrable continuity in the later literature.

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28

We shall describe what a core or root meaning involves in more detail at the end of our discussion of dharma in "The Second Boundary" below, pp. 47-48. A root meaning is not to be confused with the root dhr from which both the noun dharma and numerous related forms have evolved.

To take the establishment of such a root meaning of dharma as the basic task of our thesis, would seem at first not to constitute a very serious limitation. It would seem to require the study of the corpus of both śruti and smṛti literature. That is clearly impossible, and yet, the necessity to study both bodies of literature is imperative. If śruti usages of dharma are authoritative for the subsequent smṛti usages, then by implication in the Veda the word has a root meaning which stands as the basis for the complex range of usages evolved within the smṛti literature. If so, there is an essential continuity of meaning based upon that root meaning. For us to validate the claim of the Tradition it is necessary therefore both to establish a core meaning in śruti and see if it is possible to demonstrate its continuity within the smṛti context.

Given the necessity to study both śruti and smṛti literature, the question then becomes, how can one study dharma in two such vast bodies of literature. From our survey of the Tradition, two texts stand out which could represent each corpus of literature: the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā. Both of these texts stand at the beginning of, and are fundamental to, their respective category of literature. The Rg Veda is the most ancient of the Samhitas and the Mahābhārta,<sup>29</sup> of which the Bhagavad Gītā is the 'kernel', stands at the

beginning of the smṛti literature. While the hymns in the Rg Veda are not acknowledged to be about dharma, we find in this text the first usages of the concept and its root dhr. It would therefore be a good source to see if there is an authoritative root meaning. The Bhagavad Gītā, as we shall show, is wholly about dharma. It, therefore, is an excellent source to judge the continuity of the root meaning in the midst of the many substantial changes in the Tradition since Rg Vedic time.

Thus far, then, we have established a basic question about dharma in its context in the Indian Religious Tradition. In addition, we have established a basis in the literary heritage through which the question about dharma can be examined. We have said that we want to establish a root meaning of the word dharma and examine its continuity. The issue that remains to be delineated is what exactly it means to establish a root meaning of dharma. To formulate that dimension of the thesis problem, it is necessary to look at dharma and its interpretations.

#### 4. THE SECOND BOUNDARY: A ROOT MEANING OF DHARMA

Thus far we have looked at the Study of Religion and the Indian Religious Tradition in order to establish boundaries within which it would be possible to study a concept like dharma. We have established a basic question: Is it possible to validate the claim of the Indian Religious Tradition that

dharma is authoritatively known in śruti portions of Veda? To respond to that question we want to see if there is a root meaning of dharma in the śruti text, the Rg Veda and test the continuity of that meaning of dharma in the smṛti text, the Bhagavad Gītā. Before turning to that task, however, it is necessary to establish more clearly what we mean by a root meaning of dharma. To do so, we propose to look at some of the interpretations of the term.

Dharma is from the root ✓dhr which can mean to uphold, support or to maintain. From this root, dharma has emerged with a complex diversity of usages. V. P. Varma, an eminent Indian political philosopher, has observed that "Dharma is perhaps the most comprehensive concept in the entire history of Indian Thought."<sup>30</sup> Franklin Edgerton, one of the best of the North American Indologists, has attempted to formulate that comprehensiveness in his article "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Indian Culture".<sup>31</sup> He begins his article with a discussion of dharma and describes its usages as follows:

propriety, socially approved conduct, in relation to one's fellow men or to other living beings (animals or superhuman powers). Law, social usage, morality and most of what we ordinarily mean by religion, all fall under this head. 32

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Varma, p. 106.

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Franklin Edgerton, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Indian Culture" Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 62, pp. 151 - 156.

32

Ibid., p. 151.

In the context of a discussion of 'dominant ideas' of the Indian Tradition, Edgerton's brief survey of the usages of dharma accents the way in which the concept pervades the whole of human experience. One can legitimately ask what dimension of human experience is untouched by one or more of 'law', 'social usage', 'morality', and 'religion'.

A somewhat fuller attempt to formulate in summary form the range of dharma usages has been proposed by G. H. Mees in his important work, Dharma and Society.<sup>33</sup> In his work Mees outlines some fifteen possible distinctive usages for dharma:

1. Something like the old rita;
2. The morally proper, the ethical duty, virtue;
3. Good works;
4. Religious duty, religious virtue;
5. The Ideal;
6. Identical with God and Absolute Truth; a universal law or principle;
7. Divine justice;
8. A compromise between the ideal and actual conditions;
9. Convention, a code of customs and traditions;
10. Common law or Law;
11. International or rather inter-tribal law;
12. Rules laid down by Brāhman authorities for the glorification and elevation of their caste at the cost of the lower castes;
13. The sociological and psychological distinction between svadharma (the dharma of the individual), varnadharma (the dharma of a varna or 'natural class') jātidharma (the dharma of a caste), Hindu-dharma and also between the dharma of the Aryas and that for the Anaryas;
14. The philosophical and psychological distinction between Pravṛti dharma and Nivṛtti-dharma;
15. (Attributes of dharma): Karman . . . bhakti. 34

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Gualtherus Hendrik Mees, Dharma and Society, (London, 1935).

34

Ibid., p. 8.

Despite the democratic bias notable in point twelve, Mees usefully consolidates the diversity of dharma usage and juxtaposes the varying types of expression in a way which broadens and develops the four main categories suggested by Edgerton. It is even clearer from Mees's list that dharma is related to the whole of human experience and the whole of the Tradition with all of its diverse expressions.

From Edgerton's description and, Mees' comprehensive list, it is possible to focus the interpretations of dharma more clearly by discussing three main areas in which it is used cosmology, religious practice and community. By cosmology, we want to refer to those usages which have a place in the formulations of the origin and nature of the whole of creation. By religious practice, we refer to the inseparable relation of thought and action, of concept and precept in the Indian Tradition. Finally, by community, we refer to the way in which the basis for a community is integrated into the total complex of both cosmology and theology. Dharma, as we shall elaborate, is an important concept in each area.

F. D. K. Bosch has, for example, seen the cosmological uses of dharma in the context of his study of Indian symbolism. In the Golden Germ<sup>35</sup> he analyzes in detail the lotus plant

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F. D. K. Bosch, The Golden Germ: An Introduction to Indian Symbolism, (S-Gravenhage, 1960).

and its meaning both in art and the literature. Bosch notes that one of the most important purposes of the lotus as padmamūla or root source on which other symbols stand, is to express iconographically the concept of dharma:

If we now proceed to enquire into the nature and the meaning of the mystic lotus we should concentrate on the fact that according to the products of art we discussed above, the whole creation represented by a lotus plant has its beginning and origin in the primeval lotus which feeds and supports it. Just as the primeval waters are the foundation of all things created and are identified with the dharma (Sat. Br. xi, 1, 6, 24: dharmo vā apas; (the Waters are the Law), so the primeval lotus, the symbol of these waters is their foundation, their pratishtā, and at the same time the supporter of the universe, the dharma of the universe, for dharma means supporter. 36

It is no doubt evident that the connection between dharma and the lotus symbol is part of a complex system of associations between the symbolic realm of art and the literary realm. It is not our purpose to examine the complexity of those associations, but simply to observe that a connection has been seen between the symbol of the lotus in Indian art and dharma. Within the symbolic realm, dharma is seen as the 'supporter' of the cosmos, for dharma is the source of creation, the 'Waters' and underlies creation as its principle of support or its foundation. In turn, the lotus is the symbol of those cosmic waters. The basis of this symbol association is found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa

according to Bosch. This literary connection is significant in that it is evident that Bosch could trace the relation of the lotus symbol as dharma to a śruti text. While Bosch in no way intended his work as a validation of the Tradition's claim that śruti is authoritative, in fact, he discovered that to be the case. The cosmological meaning of dharma then, at least in this instance, bears out the pattern suggested in our survey of the literary tradition.

In addition to the cosmological symbolism of dharma, the concept was of fundamental importance within religious thought and practice in the Tradition. In a formulation of a comprehensive meaning of dharma, Betty Heimann has shown how the theological usages of the term were inseparably tied to the cosmological meaning and a whole range of other usages. She argued that dharma had a basic meaning which she described as the 'fixed position'.<sup>37</sup> Out from that basic meaning Betty Heimann portrayed the various usages of dharma as follows:

Dharma therefore is (1) the fixed position of duty and (2) at the same time of right; in short, the sphere of function; as such still further, Dharma is not restricted to the range of personal ethics, but (3) also designates religious observance and (4) even secular law, prescribing the individual's legal standing within the wider domains of the community, caste and state. Finally Dharma is a general principle,

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Betty Heimann, Indian and Western Philosophy A Study on Contrasts, (London, 1937), p. 68.



or law of Nature, involving in addition the psychological doctrine of the Buddha; in other words, Dharma is everything that is fixed or to which the individual is bound; and this in a two-fold sense, both positively and negatively, by deriving from it support (dhar) and obligation alike. Thus dharma is duty and right simultaneously; and as universal order it assigns to each individuality - be it personal or impersonal - its specific place within the wider community. A final consequence of this conception of dharma is found in Buddhistic logic, where all phenomena, all fixed and definite objects are called dharms. 38

For our purposes, Betty Heimann's interpretation of dharma makes several interesting and related points. She points out that dharma is a central concept not only within Hindu thought, but also is important in Buddhist thought as well. This point can be amplified by a brief reference to typical Hindu and Buddhist uses of dharma.

One of the six schools of Indian thought is Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. The fundamental purpose of this school was the elaboration of the meaning of dharma. In the Mīmāṃsā Sūtra dharma is understood as "that which is indicated by means of the Veda as conducive to the highest good"<sup>39</sup> In this school the study of the Veda to know dharma focuses on the Brāhmaṇa literature because it was argued that it was fundamental to know and obey ordinances of dharma which involved injunctions for action. The Brāhmaṇas were the texts in which the ritual

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38  
Ibid., p. 68.

39  
Jaimini, Mīmāṃsā Sūtra, quoted in: S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, (editors), A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, (Princeton, 1957), p. 487; I. i. 2.

action according to dharma was most carefully formulated. The school of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā therefore delineated dharma as the 'fixed point' of ritual and moral action and founded those meanings of dharma on careful thought of the metaphysical ground for such action.

Dharma was also an important concept within Buddhism. Th. Stcherbatsky has studied the Buddhist use of dharma in his work The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "dharma".<sup>40</sup> In that study, Stcherbatsky describes dharma in summary as follows:

The conception of a dharma is the central point of Buddhist doctrine. In the light of this conception Buddhism discloses itself as a metaphysical theory developed out of one fundamental principle, viz. the idea that existence is an interplay of a plurality of subtle, ultimate not further analysable elements of Matter, Mind and Forces. These elements are technically called dharms, a meaning which this word has in this system alone. Buddhism accordingly can be characterized as a system of Radical Pluralism (sanghāta-vāda): the elements alone are realities, every combination of them is a mere name covering a plurality of separate elements. The moral teaching of a path towards Final Deliverance is not something additional or extraneous to this ontological doctrine, it is most intimately connected with it and, in fact identical with it. 41

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Th. Stcherbatsky, The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma", (Varanasi, 1970). cf. Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought In India, (London, 1962), pp. 92 - 106; Magdalene und Wilhelm Geiger, Pāli Dhamma vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literatur, (München, 1920).

41

Ibid., p. 73.

Stcherbatsky focuses on two essential meanings of dharma. On the one hand dharma refers to the basic atomic constituents of the cosmos and on the other to the 'Path' which leads men to 'deliverance' from the bondage to those atoms and hence, to the cosmos. Dharma, therefore defines both the cosmos and the path through which man gains release from that cosmos.

While Buddhist usage seems to have important parallels with usages of the Hindu stream of the Tradition, in that dharma is an important cosmological concept and a term which defines 'truth' and the appropriate expression of that truth in action, there is a very important sense in which dharma is understood differently. The Buddhists do not look back in the same way to the ancient Tradition for their authoritative understanding of dharma. Indeed, the only relation to the ancient Tradition of the Veda in Buddhist usage of dharma is its place in the refutation of Vedic authority in the name<sup>42</sup> of the individual human capacity to achieve enlightenment. It is this attempted refutation that lead the Hindu tradition to view Buddhism as unorthodox.

However, we would suggest that even though the Buddhist usage of dharma is part of a refutation of Vedic authority, the Buddha's usage, either to describe the 'Path' or the atoms of

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<sup>42</sup> cf. K. N. Jayatilleke, Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge, (London, 1963) pp. 169 - 204.

existence as the basis for a cosmology, need not be seen as entirely divorced from vedic usages. There is little doubt that the Samhitas were extant at the time of the birth of the Buddha. It is likely, therefore, that the Buddha's understanding of dharma as an appropriate term for the purposes of expressing his vision of truth and his path had some connection with vedic usages. We are not surprised to find vedic gods in Buddhist iconography and myth or to see the lotus as an important symbol in both Hindu and Buddhist art.<sup>43</sup> It therefore should not be surprising to posit some continuity of vedic and Buddhist use of dharma, even if the continuity is in the typologies of usages rather than identical cosmologies or concepts of the appropriate path for men to follow.

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43

A similar point to that of the observation of 'parallels' between Hindu and Buddhist thought has been made with regard to Indian art by Heinrich Zimmer. He comments on the relationship as follows:

It is extremely interesting and important to observe that the Buddhist and Hindu representations of such popular divinities do not differ from each other, either essentially or in detail; for Buddhist and Hindu art - as also Buddhist and Hindu doctrine - were in India basically one. Prince Gautama Siddhārtha the "historical Buddha," who taught in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., was a reformer, a monastic reformer, remaining within, and taking for granted the context of Indian civilization. He never denied the Hindu pantheon or broke with the traditional Hindu ideal of release through enlightenment (mokṣa, nirvāṇa). His specific deed was not that of refuting but of reformulating, on the basis of a profound personal experience, the ageless Indian teaching of redemption from the coils of Māyā. The new order of mendicant  
(continued)

As fascinating as this possibility is, as a way to look at the Buddhist usages of dharma, the actual research and study of such continuities must await future consideration. Our concern here can only be within the śruti-smṛti context of the Indian Religious Tradition.

The vedic pattern of authoritative precedence for knowledge of dharma in śruti is evident as well in the communal meanings of dharma. This meaning of dharma is generally speaking 'righteousness' and 'law'.<sup>44</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, one of the most prolific authors on the Dharmaśāstra literature has argued for this meaning with great care. He points out that "Dharmaśāstra means the teaching (or science) of righteousness. . .".<sup>45</sup> According to Derrett, the use of the term 'righteousness' for dharma,

43 (continued)

monks that he established for the practice of his special code of discipline was, in India, one order among a multitude. "I have seen the ancient way," he is reported to have said, "the Old Road that was taken by the formerly All-Awakened, and that is the path I follow." (Samyutta Nikāya, 11.106.).

Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, (New York, 1962), pp. 63-64.

44

J. Duncan M. Derrett, Dharmaśāstra and Juridical Literature, (Weisbaden, 1973).

45

Ibid., p. 2.

makes it possible to distinguish 'law' as it is actually operative within various communities and 'law' as the normative basis for community custom. Dharma as 'righteousness' can thus refer to a normative enterprise carried out by the Brāhman community in the composition of Dharmaśāstras. Dharma translated as law or custom can refer to the actual patterns of law or dharma in various communities throughout the subcontinent. There is, therefore, a hierarchy of authority established. The normative codes such as the Mānavadharmasāstra, accord authoritative precedence to Veda as the basis for knowledge of dharma. Various communities look to the normative Dharmaśāstra literature for authoritative guidance in the formulation of laws for communities and for guidance in determining which laws or customs are 'righteous' and which are not. The authority of Veda is therefore conveyed through the normative texts to real communities as they face the difficult task of living according to dharma. What is important again for our purposes is the fact that there is an operative pattern of authority which resides finally in the śruti literature.

P. V. Kane in his monumental work, History of Dharmaśāstra<sup>46</sup> has drawn out the meaning of dharma in a way which conforms to the distinctions of normative and legal forms of dharma suggested by Derrett. His work comprehensively deals with the normative descriptions of dharma's meaning. For Kane therefore the meaning of dharma can be summarized as follows:

The foregoing brief discussion establishes how the word dharma passed through several transitions of meaning and how ultimately its most prominent significance came to be 'the privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life'.<sup>47</sup>

Kane explains the normative meaning of dharma<sup>48</sup> in such a way that it includes the system of caste order called varṇa which separates men according to four orders: the brāhman or priestly order, the ksatriya or warrior order, the vaiśya or commercial and agricultural order, and the śūdra or labouring order. Dharma also means the four stages of life

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<sup>46</sup>

P. V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. 1-5 (Poona, 1941-53).

<sup>47</sup>

Ibid., Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>

Ibid., Vol. 1, Part 1, pp.4-6.

or the āśrama system, which includes the brahmacārin or the time of life spent under a guru's guidance, the grhastha period as a householder, the vānaprastha period of retirement and finally the sannyāsin or the time of ascetic renunciation. Dharma, then, is understood to be the name for all of the duties appropriate to all the orders of the varna system and all of the stages of life. The normative features of this meaning is emphasized in the fact that the system is understood as totally comprehensive. It is not concerned with the fact that the varna system was unevenly developed throughout the subcontinent or with the fact that not all men follow the āśrama system. Rather, Kane is clear that this is an ideal ordering of society and life according to ideal the principle of dharma. The detailed elaboration of that ideal was the task of the writers of the Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras. Such writers understood their task as the provision of a normative legal interpretation of the vedic meaning of dharma. Many other kinds of interpretations were both necessary and possible as the communal, the artistic and the religious practice interpretations show. The important point for our purposes was the understanding that dharma was authoritatively grounded in Veda in each case.



From this look at some of the attempts to present in a consolidated way the range of dharma-usage, and from the survey of three areas of meaning - the cosmological, the religious and the communal - it is possible to turn to the task of defining the characteristics of a root meaning.

The first characteristic must be that it is founded upon the śruti usages of dharma. From our study of the literary heritage of the Tradition and from the three areas of dharma usage it is clear that the Tradition looked back to the śruti portions of Veda as the authoritative source of dharma. We have already suggested that the most appropriate of the śruti sources for our purposes would be the Rg Veda. On the basis of the usages of dharma in the hymns of that text it will be possible to establish a root meaning of dharma.

Secondly, in our study of the Rg Veda hymns and the uses of dharma within them, it will be important to see two dimensions of meaning for dharma. On the one hand there will be particular types of usages such as would be appropriate to cosmological, religious, and communal themes. However, a root meaning should have a summary form able to sustain the diverse particular usages found within the cosmological, the religious and the communal contexts. It is likely that it will be in this latter summary form that we will be able to see the character of the root meaning.

The third characteristic of dharma must be its continuity. When the smṛti literature looks back to an authoritative meaning of dharma, it looks back with a view to appropriate that meaning in the midst of a significantly different setting. From our study of the literary heritage, the most appropriate text for this purpose is the Bhagavad Gītā. By studying the uses of dharma in the context of Kṛṣṇa's teaching, it will be possible to see whether the root meaning demonstrates continuity with smṛti.

Once we have established that there is a root meaning and identified whether and how it is maintained within the Bhagavad Gītā, it will be possible to re-examine the question of the critique by western historians of the self-understanding of the Indian Religious Tradition.

##### 5. A THESIS ABOUT DHARMA

Before turning to the actual textual study of dharma in the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā, it would be useful to state simply the thesis we propose to argue.

First, it is our contention that dharma has a root meaning which is established in the Rg Veda. That root meaning in its comprehensive form can be formulated tentatively as 'the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is'. On the

basis of this summary meaning, we find that there are several types of usages appropriate to the cosmology of the hymns, the religious usages which focus on the form and purpose of the sacrifice, and communal meanings. However each of these particular types of usage, with differing emphasis, participates in the underlying root or core meaning of dharma.

Secondly, it is our contention that the smṛti text, the Bhagavad Gītā, has as its main purpose the re-formulation of dharma within a theology of tradition.<sup>49</sup> It is our contention that the most important purpose of Kṛṣṇa's teaching is to re-articulate the meaning of the śruti tradition through its focus on dharma. This task is essentially a theology in that it defines anew consistently and coherently the relations between God, man and creation, but it does so in terms of the revelation preserved in the literature of the Veda. As such it is a theology of tradition. In that theology, dharma is central to a different cosmology, different religious practices and different social structures. However, while there is significant thematic change, in each case we shall show that the purpose of the Bhagavad Gītā is to articulate the meaning of dharma in such a way that it is

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cf. Our discussion of the use of the phrase 'theology of tradition' below; pp. 348-354.

consistent with the core or root meaning in the Rg Veda.

On the basis of our textual studies of dharma in śruti and smṛti, it will be possible to reconsider question regarding the meaning and nature of continuity in the Indian Religious Tradition.

PART ONE

THE LOTUS:

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ROOT MEANING OF DHARMA IN

THE RG VEDA

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO DHARMA IN THE RG VEDA

In our survey of the literature of the ancient Indian religious tradition, we noted that the Rg Veda was the oldest of the four samhitas or 'collections' which constituted the body of śruti literature. The title 'Rg Veda' suggests the importance of the samhita which we have chosen to study in order to establish the root meaning of dharma. The term 'rg'<sup>1</sup> means verse, hymn or praise and 'veda' from the root vid, to know, means knowledge. Hence the Rg Veda is the collection of praises, hymns or verses about knowledge. That the hymns were memorized and passed down from generation to generation reflects the conviction that the Rg Veda along with the other samhitas contain all that was considered important to know. Our decision to base our study on this particular collection of knowledge was based upon the antiquity and seminal importance of the Rg Veda in relation to the other samhitas.

Within the collection of hymns in the Rg Veda, dharma is an important concept. We must recognize at the outset however, that the basis for its importance resides in the whole body of references which arise from the term 'dharma's'

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There is no capitalization within Sanskrit. However, as a matter of convenience we shall capitalize Sanskrit terms when they function as proper nouns.

root<sup>2</sup> 'dhr' and not just the familiar noun form of the later Tradition. The root dhr means generally, to uphold, maintain or sustain. A careful examination of Grossman's Wörterbuch Zum Rgveda<sup>3</sup> reveals that there are some 223 textual references which include one or more forms of dhr. Of those references, some 154 are to various verb forms and 69 which refer to the 'forerunner'<sup>4</sup> of dharma, the neuter noun created by the combination of 'dhar' with the neuter ending, 'man'. In total, the forms of the root constitute a substantial body of references which can form the basis for our study.

The importance of the body of references to dhr, however, does not arise from the quantity of textual occurrences. Rather, importance arises from the meaning of these references in their many diverse contexts. J. Gonda, has recognized and sketched out the significance of these usages in the text. With regard to the verb forms of dhr, for example, Gonda

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We will discuss briefly below the forms of dhr and of dharma, and dharman. Throughout our study of the Rg Veda we will use dharma.

3

Hermann Grossman, Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda, (Wiesbaden, 1964) pp. 659-660, 691-694, cf. Appendix one and two in which we list the references to noun and verb forms referred to in the text of the thesis.

4

Jan Gonda, "Het Begripp Dharma in Het Indisch Denken", Tijdschrift voor filosofie, Vol. 20 #2, (1958), unpublished translation by Hans Keijser, p. 221 in the dutch text. (Hereinafter: 'Het Begripp Dharma').

has stated :

The connections in which the verb dhr is found, leave no doubt that it played an important role in the oldest Indian world views and ideas about the coherence of things. 5

Gonda goes on to point out the general importance of the verbal meanings which he describes in the following way:

In the first place it is of interest that several forms of this verb are used in such a way that the subject is a godly power and the object one or more extremely important powers in the universe that is "maintained, fixed or propped" and whose existence or continuing existences is "assured or stabilized" by the godly powers. These are extremely important powers, because their unhindered existence is a condition for the physical, economic and social existence of mankind on earth and for the retention of essential "stability". Very often a god is said to maintain hold onto and fix the earth, or heaven and earth or the several components of the universe. 6

According to this account, the function of the verb forms is to express the maintaining, propping and sustaining actions of the deities in the universe. A study of these verb forms will therefore reveal the ways in which the concept dharma is seen to function among the gods and it will be possible to distill from that body of usages the basis for the formulation of a core or root meaning.

Gonda makes it clear that the verb forms of the root dhr are inseparably connected to the neuter noun form 'dharman'. He finds that this neuter form is similar to important neuter

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<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>6</sup>  
Ibid., pp. 216-217.



forms in Indo-European languages. This correspondence with other languages in the same linguistic family is an asset for the formulation of the significance of the Sanskrit neuter noun in the Rg Veda. Gonda points out, for example, that dharman is "the forerunner of dharma". He continues:

It belongs to a type of neuter with the suffix 'man' a category for which the recently given description, that it consists of abstracts and from them derived indications of affairs and events, is not completely satisfactory, nor is the older description that it contained nomina actionis. It is certain that already in pre-historic time many of the so formed words expressed concepts that were anchored in a philosophy of life and were important elements in it. These concepts of powers and forces occupied the thoughts and emotions of our pre-historic forefathers because they knew or believed that their physical, material and spiritual wellbeing was determined by them. Think of the Latin numen "the force that exists in things" . . . and in Sanskrit think of tokman "sprout, young stalk", brahman - which probably meant "supporting, fundamental power which manifests itself especially in all kinds of powers", dhaman- "the established order", especially that of the gods Mitra and Varuṇa . . . . The suffix men §16 was apparently often used to express the idea of forces which manifest themselves in processes, creatures, or objects; forces that give evidence of their effects without human interference or activity. 7

The general force of the neuter references is to conceptualize the 'forces' conveyed in the actions of the gods according to the verb forms of the root dhr. However, Gonda insists that the nature of this conceptualization must be understood in the context of the way in which concepts are understood in the Rg Veda. Gonda makes clear the nature of that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-222.

conceptualization as he applies the general characteristics of the neuter ending to a usage of dharman in order to illustrate the terms' general meanings. Gonda states:

Thus one may conceive the term dharmāni in Rgveda 1.22.18 as the manifestation of the concept of "carrying, supporting, maintaining" but since 'pure concepts' were alien to ancient Indian thought we must conceive it rather as a manifestation of reality which itself is conceived as power and which gives evidence of existing and being present by means of its effects and consequences: carry support maintain. Everything may in principle be called a dharman in which shows the power-reality "to maintain and support" and also "maintain itself, persist, be lasting, remain conformed with its own nature". 8

For Gonda, then, the importance of dharman is its formulation of that dimension of power which depicts the functions in the cosmos of 'carrying, supporting, and maintaining'. While the noun forms conceive that function, the verb forms portray it as it is accomplished by the gods or powers in the cosmos.

Gonda's presentation of the importance of the meaning of the forms of the root dhṛ in the world-view of the Rg Veda is very suggestive, given our purpose which is to find a root meaning of dharma that has a demonstrable continuity in the ancient literature of śruti and smṛti. Gonda's support in our conviction that the root.

is important in the Rg Veda is however limited, for his purpose is fulfilled simply by surveying a few types of verb and noun references in the whole tradition from ancient to modern uses. Our purpose can only be accomplished by a careful survey of the body of references in order to see how each can be understood to contribute to an underlying core or root meaning.

In order to proceed to a careful examination of the body of dhr usages in the Rg Veda, however, we must formulate the framework within which that study can be carried out. First, we must examine the conceptual framework of the hymns themselves. That involves a brief consideration of the role of the visionary poet, the rsi, as the religious man who sees the vision of reality and power of which the concept dharma is a part, and articulates that vision in the hymns for use in the vedic sacrifice. This context will provide the basis for our understanding of the authoritativeness of the language used in the hymns generally and with particular regard to dharma.

The second dimension of the framework of our study is methodological in nature. The problem is that the references to dhr are found in widely separated verses within the hymns, and, even more problematic, they are spread throughout the ten mandalas of the Rg Veda. As a result we must determine

the importance for our study of the immediate setting of the references and subsequently determine how we can relate the various references to each other. Having formulated the framework for our study of the concept of dharma in the Rg Veda in terms of these issues, we can then proceed to examine those usages in the text.

### 1. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE HYMNS OF THE RG VEDA

In the tenth mandala or cycle of hymns in the Rg Veda, there is a hymn dedicated to 'Ka' or 'What'. The refrain repeated throughout the hymn except in the last stanza asks, "What god shall we adore with our oblation?" kasmai devāya havishā vidhema<sup>9</sup>. This refrain poses a question ever present in the early religious literature of India. It expresses the quest for knowledge of the gods or powers and through them of that source, eternal in nature, which lies behind and sustains all manifest forms including the cosmos, the gods and life itself. The quest for such knowledge as the refrain implies is part of the complex expression of reverence

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<sup>9</sup> 10.121.1. With regard to transcription of Sanskrit in the Rg Veda we shall follow the text of the Rg Veda in: Theodor Aufrecht, Die Hymnen Des Rigveda, Vol. I and II, reprint, (Darmstadt, 1955). Aufrecht follows the tradition of transcription established in German scholarship which differs with the English speaking tradition of transcription typified in Franklin Edgerton's edition of the Bhagavad Gītā. The important differences involve the transcription of the three consonants ś, sh and s which in the Edgerton or English  
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expressed within the ritual life of the community which preserved the Rg Veda. It was essential to the continued vitality of that community that it know 'what' to reverence in the yajña or the ritual of the sacrifice.

The hymns of the Rg Veda are the poetic articulations of the knowledge possessed by the vedic community. Knowledge and ritual were inseparable for that community. It was for that reason that the mantras of the Rg Veda were adapted in the Sāma Veda and the Yajur Veda, for particular use in the context of the sacrifice. Indeed it was the mantra which made the sacrifice effective. Knowledge, expressed as mantra in the yajña was, then, a fundamental expression of the religious understanding of the vedic community.

Within the vedic community there were several names for those men who set out to know 'what' the community ought to reverence. Such knowers were generally called ṛṣi

9 (continued),  
transcription become s, ṣ and ś. Other differences include the elimination of the i in the ṛi to make simply r.

Unless otherwise indicated all translations of passages of the Rg Veda are taken from: Ralph Griffith, The Hymns of the Rg Veda, reprint, (Delhi, 1973). It should be noted, however, that we have carefully compared Griffiths translations to the excellent German translation: Karl F. Geldner, Der Rig Veda, Harvard Oriental Series, Vols. 33-36, (Cambridge, 1951-57), (hereinafter D.R.V.); and the translations by Louis Renou, Études Védiques Et Pāṇinéennes, (Paris, 1955-69), (hereinafter E.V.P.) where Griffith's translation does not  
(continued)

although there were other names as well, such as kavi and  
<sup>10</sup>  
vipra. The rsi or visionary poet performed an heroic

9 (continued)

convey the force of a dhr usage while that of either Geldner or Renou does, we will substitute the more appropriate translation and indicate why we have done so in a footnote.

Finally, all numerical references included in Part One of this work will refer to the Rg Veda unless otherwise indicated.

10

One of the most important books on the nature of the hymns of the Rg Veda is: J. Gonda, The Vision of the Vedic Poets, (The Hague, 1963), (Hereinafter: Vision). In this book, Gonda discusses at length the meaning of 'vision' dhi in the hymns and relates the meaning of that term to the figures who experienced the vision. In addition to the rsi, he discusses the meaning of the term 'kavi', and the term 'vipra'. Gonda summarizes some of the main meanings of rsi as follows:

A rsi obviously is the functionary who enters into contact with divinity: 5, 52, 13; 14; he has an insight in the nature of the gods' greatness: 10, 54, 3; he associates with gods: 1, 23, 24; 10, 90, 7; he may address them: 8, 23, 24, extol them: 8, 26, 10; honour or praise them: 9, 114, 2; 5, 75, 1; and invoke their aid and favour: 1.48.14. . . . (Vision, p. 40)

According to Gonda, the kavi is very like the rsi. While the term is applied mostly to the gods or powers, when it is applied to men, it suggests someone who has come into knowledge of the powers and the nature of the cosmos. This knowledge, as in the case of the rsi is related to the ritual of the sacrifice. The sacrificial priest, or hotr is referred to as a kavi as he chants the mantra and urges the powers to accede to the needs of the community. As Gonda describes it:

"Applied to human beings the title kavih unmistakably denotes those who mentally or spiritually enter into contact with divine power, the transcendent and the world of the unseen. It may obviously be given to a person who knows causes or origins (1, 164, 6; 18; 10, 114, 2), hidden connections (10, 129, 4), or the character of the ritual (1, 164, 5), to those who, "knowing" (cikituṣaḥ), understand the relation between guilt and requital (7, 86, 3), to one characterized by dhiḥ: 1, 95, 8) where kavir dhiḥ may mean kaveḥ dhiḥ or "the sage seer and his vision". (Vision, p. 48)

(continued)

function within the community. It was the rsi who sought to know the gods. His quest was fulfilled by the god or gods who met him and made manifest to him the knowledge needed by the community.

The vision of the seeker alone, however, did not make a rsi. The heroic encounter with the gods in the visionary experience required translation for the community at large. The rsi therefore was a visionary and a poet; he made the vision knowable to the community in speech. That is to say he translated the vision into what could be heard (śruti) as mantra. This process of translation was as inspired an act as the visionary encounter with the gods. The inspired nature of the translation of vision into mantra is expressed in the Rg Veda in two hymns about the nature of speech or language, 10.71 and 10.125.

In 10.71. Vāc, speech or language, is addressed to Brhaspati. In the hymn, it is said that speech fulfills the purpose of providing names for various objects in

10 (continued)

Finally, the vipra or the 'quivering one' applies both to gods and to man and can be used as an epithet for both the rsi and the kavi. Gonda refers to the vipra as "the man who experiences the vibration, energy, rapture of religious and aesthetic inspiration" (Vision, p. 39) a meaning which arises from the root vip-vep - "to tremble, shake, quiver" (Vision, p. 38). In relation to the rsi, the vipra can mean:

"... a rsi is called vipra- (4, 26, 1) but 8, 3, 14 admits of the conclusion that both ideas are not  
(continued)

11

creation. The process of naming objects is not depicted as a chance, haphazard application of name to object, but is a process in which language must be 'sifted' in the same way that wheat is cleansed before it is ground into flour.

10 (continued)

identical: 'welcher Redekundige (viprah) dar sich ruhmen, ein Rsi zu sein?' (Geldner); 9, 96, 6 rsir vripṛānām. The sons of Angiras, are in 10, 62, 5, stated to be descended from Agni and to be rṣayah. . . gambhīraveparasah rsih "deeply moved or excited rsis". (Vision, p. 40).

Similarly, the association is made between the kavi and the vipra, when "Soma desires to present the jewel (ratnam) to the vipra- when he provides him with dhīyah". (Vision, p. 47)

The three terms taken together are; with the idea of 'vision' dhī, part of what Gonda calls a 'semantic field'. That is, taken together, the terms 'vipra' kavi rsi and dhī among others point from differing directions toward a nucleus of meaning concerning the religious thought of the Rg Veda. While not wanting to appropriate all of Gonda's conclusions suffice it to say, that this is one of the most important works on the religious thought of the Rg Veda and its influence on our assumptions about the text are implicit through much of our own work on the text.

11

When-men, Brhaspati, giving names to objects,  
sent out Vāk's first and earliest utterances,  
All that was excellent and spotless, treasured  
within them, was disclosed through their affection.

Bṛihaspate prathamam vāco agram yat prairata nāmadheyam  
dadhānāḥ

yad eshām sreshṭham yad aripram āsīt preṇā tad  
eshām nihitam guhāvih

10. 71. 1

12

Where, like men cleansing corn-flour in a cribble,  
The wise in spirit have created language,

saktum iva - titaūnā punanto yatra dhīrā manasā  
vācam akrata

10.71. 2



13

The rsi is the 'sifter' of words and fulfills that task in the light of the vision which gave him knowledge which he then names in speech.

It is apparent therefore that the rsi as a 'sifter' of language is not the maker of words or of language per se, but is the recipient of language which names truthfully what is seen in the vision granted to him by one or more of the powers. Language, likened to the grains of the field, is coeval with creation; it is the vehicle of knowledge as the grains are the means for sustenance. To be useful words, like the grain, must be 'sifted' and purified so that what is named, is named truthfully.

14

The task of naming, like that of the heroic encounter with the gods in the vision of their form or nature, is incredibly difficult to fulfill. At the same time, it is a terribly important task because the community depends upon the rsi for the mantra, the true name of things in speech, to make the sacrifice effective. The difficulty and importance of possessing true speech about the nature of things is recognized in the knowledge that the task could only be

13

With sacrifice the trace of Vāk they followed,  
and found her harbouring within the Rishis.

yajñena vācaḥ padavīyam āyan tām anv avindann ṛishishu  
pravishṭām

10.71.3

14

cf. Marilya Falk, Nāma-Rūpa and Dharma-Rūpa: Origin  
and Aspects of an Ancient Indian Conception,

(continued)

fulfilled under the inspired guidance of a power. That power was the goddess Speech, (Vāc). She selects the ṛṣi to whom she will reveal herself, in the same way that a wife chooses to reveal her beauty only to her husband.<sup>15</sup> As in the quest for vision (dhī), the quest for true speech is fulfilled in the meeting of the seeker and the power who seeks out her beloved. In their encounter the ṛṣi is inspired to true speech, the expression or translation of knowledge into speech so that the two are one and the same.

The intimate friendship of the goddess and ṛṣi imprints an indelible mark upon the ṛṣi which enables the community at large to discriminate a true ṛṣi from an imposter:

Friends see and recognize the marks of friendship:  
Their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted. 16

atrā saḥyāḥ saḥyāni jānate bhadrāishāṃ  
lakṣmīr nihitādhi vāci

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14 (continued)  
(Calcutta, 1943) for a philosophical study of the idea of naming in the Rg Veda; cf. also, J. Gonda, Notes on Names and the Name of God in Ancient India, (Amsterdam, 1970).

15  
One man hath ne'er seen Vāk, and yet he seeth:  
One man hath hearing but hath never heard her.  
But to another hath she shown her beauty  
as a fond well-dressed woman to her husband.

uta tvāḥ paṣyan na dadarṣa vācam uta tvāḥ ṣṛiṇvan  
na ṣṛiṇoty enām  
uto tvāsmāi tanvaṃ vi sasre jāyeva patya uṣatī suvāsāḥ

16  
10.71.2

10.71.4

All friends are joyful in the friend who cometh in  
in triumph, having conquered in the assembly.

sarve nandanti yaśasāgatena sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyah.

17

The imprint left upon the rsi by his intimacy with the goddess  
is his wisdom expressed in true speech. That wisdom the rsi  
brings to the community's assembly where the beloved rsi  
and the false one are seen for what they are. Their hymns are  
adjudicated by the assembly and recognition is given only  
to the rsi who has given true expression to that knowledge  
which is seen to pervade his whole being. The knowledge,  
pervasive in the rsi, is his identifying mark and is compared  
to being submerged in the primeval waters, the source of all  
creation.

Recognition of the rsi inspired by the goddess empowers  
the communal sacrifice which brings the necessities of life to  
the community as a whole. The rsi is therefore a hero to the  
community because he is the vehicle of knowledge for the  
sacrifice. His heroism brings food, wealth, power, and  
conquest in battle :

---

17  
10.71.10.

18  
The vipra or 'quivering one' is the classic illustration  
of rsi who physically experiences in his shaking or quivering the  
pervasiveness of the gods.

19. cf. 10.71.7; 10.125.7.

He is their blame-avorter, food-provider:  
prepared is he and fit for deed of vigour.

kilbishaspr̥it pitushaṅir hy eshām araṃ hito bhavati  
vājināya

20

Conquest in the communal assembly gives the rsi the  
responsibility to join with others to lead the sacrifice:

One plies his constant task reciting verses:  
One sings the holy psalm in Śakvari measures,  
One more, the Brahman, tells the lore of being,  
And one lays down the rules of sacrificing.

ricām tvaḥ posham āste pupushvān gāyatraṃ tvo gāyati  
śakvarīshū  
brahmā tvo vadati jātavidyām yajñasya mātrām vi  
mimīta u tvaḥ

21

20  
10.71.10; cf. 10.125.4,6.

Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them, -  
each man who sees, breathes, hears the word outspoken.

mayā so annam attī yo vipaśyati yaḥ prāṇiti ya īṃ  
sṛiṇoty utaṃ

10.125.4

I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike and  
slay the hater of devotion.  
I rouse and order battle for the people, and I have  
penetrated Earth and Heaven.

ahaṃ rudrāya dhanur ā tanomi brahmadvishe śarave hantavā u  
ahaṃ janāya samadam kṛiṇomy ahaṃ dyāvāpṛithivī ā viveṣa

10.125.6

21  
10.71.11, cf. 10.125.5

I verily myself announce and utter the word that Gods  
and men alike shall welcome.  
I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him a sage,  
aRishi and a Brahman.

(continued)

The combination of true speech and the proper performance of the ritual ensures the success of the community in meeting its needs. The harmony of the ṛṣi with the gods is conveyed to the community as a whole through the hymns so that it is in turn at one with the powers of the cosmos.

In essence then, vision and speech or language are understood to be the same. Speech names what is seen in the vision and thereby makes it knowable to the community for use in the sacrifice. The authoritativeness of the language of the hymns, therefore, rests upon the inspired relationship of the gods, in particular the goddess Speech, Vāc, with the ṛṣi. The power's revelation through vision enables the ṛṣi to name reality - that name is 'reality'. The basis of the power of the hymns for the sacrifice is this identification, for only true speech can make the sacrifice effective. This identification of speech and reality is magnificently portrayed in a description of the goddess Vāc or Speech, in which she reveals herself, through the ṛṣi, as the reality of creation:

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21 (continued)

aham eva svayam idaṃ vadāmi juṣṭam devebhir uta  
 mānushebhiḥ  
 yaṃ kāmāye taṃ-taṃ ugraṃ kṛṇomi taṃ brahmāṇaṃ taṃ  
 riṣiṃ taṃ sumedhāṃ

10.125.5.

On the worlds summit I bring forth the Father:  
my home is in the waters, in the ocean.  
Thence I extend o'er all existing creatures, and  
touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.

I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest,  
the while I hold together all existence,  
Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens  
I have become so mighty in my grandeur.

ahaṃ suve pitaram asya mūrdhan mama  
yonir apsv antaḥ samudre  
tato vi tishṭhe bhuvanānu viṣvotāmūṃ  
dyāṃ varshmaṇopa sprīṣāmi

aham eva vāta iva pra vāmy ārabhamāṇā bhuvanāni  
viṣvā  
pāro divā para enā pṛithivyaitāvati  
mahinā sam babhūva 22

Vāc as the power of speech or language inspires the ṛṣi to see the very sources of the cosmos in the waters; to see that speech is the source of the male principle of creation, the 'Father'. Indeed, she inspires him to see all that is and all the creatures that animate the Earth. Under the inspiration of Vāc, the ṛṣi names the wind and sees the interrelationships among all things and even sees that which passes beyond the limits of creation to the source of all that is.

This identity of vision and the speech 'sifted' by the ṛṣis under the inspiration of the powers has an important implication for the way in which one views the usages of dhṛ in the hymns of the Rg Veda. It makes comprehensible the claim which the Indian Tradition has made for the authoritativeness of the hymns of the Rg Veda. The hymns

are understood to be revealed speech, about the nature of reality. The uses of dhr are part of that speech. We are therefore concerned in our study of dhr usages to know what those usages reveal about the nature of reality as the vedic seers saw it. If we are able to grasp that, we will have established the basis for articulating the root meaning of dharma and the nature of its authoritativeness in the ensuing literature of the tradition.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the hymns and dharma as part of the inspired, 'sifted' speech of the rsi implies that the task of 'naming' was not a task accomplished through the logical formulation of concepts but through the structure of the hymn taken as a whole. Four fundamental implications for our study emerge from the way in which concepts are set within the revealed speech of the hymns. (1) We must carefully examine the body of references to both the noun and verb forms derived from dhr. This not only follows from the character of the conceptualization in the hymns of the Rg Veda, but also follows the good authority of the surveys of dharma by Jan Gonda<sup>23</sup> and Abel Bergaigne.<sup>24</sup> A root or core meaning must be

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<sup>23</sup>  
Gonda, Op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>  
Abel Bergaigne, La Religion Védique, Tome iv, (Paris,  
(continued)

based upon and distilled from the diverse expressions of specific actions by gods and men expressed through verb and noun forms. It is therefore imperative that we examine the full diversity of those actions in as wide a number of references as possible.

(2) It is important to examine all references in their immediate context within a hymn. We must see what a god does when he acts and that action is conveyed by forms of dhr. We must see what actions the gods are understood to do and what consequences those actions have for other gods and the structures of creation as the object or recipient of the action. In the case of noun forms we must see what state of things is conceived when those forms are used.

The first two implications involved the initial phases of research. That is, the first task was the identification and collection of the references to the forms of dhr. The study of those references in their respective settings was the concern of the second phase of research. That phase gave rise to certain organizational patterns for comprehending and discussing each reference. Those patterns, like the first two implications, emerged as direct consequences of an understanding of dharma as part of the 'sifted' speech

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24 (continued)

1963). V. G. Paranjpe, trans., The Vedic Religion, Vol. iii (Poona, 1973) pp. 215-343. All references to Bergaigne unless otherwise noted will be to the Paranjpe translation.



of the Rg Veda.

(3) A further implication emerged when it became apparent that particular gods repeatedly act through forms of dhr. It seemed appropriate therefore to organize the references by deity and to examine the types of activity which each god performs when functioning according to dhr, as well as the consequences of those actions. Our examination of the references, for example, led us to see that the gods Agni, Indra, the Ādityas, particularly, Mitra and Varuṇa, and finally Soma were the dominant powers which function according to dhr. As the pattern of activity by these powers emerged, it became clear that the way in which the particular dhr meanings could best be discussed would be through showing how each of the gods acts according to the various verb and noun forms.

(4) Finally, the study of the functions of the various deities according to the forms of dhr suggested three general themes. (i) There is, for example, the cosmological dimensions of dhr usage involving each of the gods mentioned above. Such cosmological usages refer to the functions of the gods in forming and structuring the whole of creation. (ii) An important general theme focuses on the functions of the gods according to dhr in the establishment and maintenance of the appropriate religious practice, the sacrifice. We are not concerned to show the whole meaning of the sacrifice in the Rg Veda, but simply

to show the way in which sacrifice involves the meaning of the body of dhr usages. Finally, (iii) a general theme involves the implications of dhr usages for the vedic community. While the communal theme by no means deals with the nature of the vedic community as such, (that is to say that our task is not anthropological), it does show certain implications of the dhr usages for various aspects of community and individual life. Taken together, these three general themes indicate the major thematic aspects which must be accounted for to obtain an adequate understanding of a root or core meaning of dharma.

It will be apparent from the emphasis on the meaning of dhr uses in particular contexts as manifestations of the actions of various deities, that our main concern is with the meaning of those usages. The issue is not to examine the historical evolution of the hymns of the Rg Veda,<sup>25</sup> and, in that connection to look at a historical development of the meaning of dharma in the Rg Veda. Our concern is simply to establish a root meaning of dharma which can sustain the diverse usages of dhr forms in the text. Whether or not there is an historical development toward such a conception in the Rg Veda would involve entirely different type of study.

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25

cf. Renou, Vedic India, pp. 3-4, for a short survey of the basic conclusions of scholarship on the chronological development of each mandala.

In summary, then, it is our contention that by examining the body of dhr references in their immediate setting, and by organizing our discussion of those references according to major dieties and three general themes, we can establish that a root meaning of dharma does exist in the Rg Veda. In the Introduction we tentatively formulated the core or root meaning as follows: 'the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is'. It is our task now to show how this meaning is evident in the various particular references to dhr in the Rg Veda. This will help to establish the validity of the claim made by the tradition that dharma is authoritatively known in śrutī literature, and it will provide a basis from which to evaluate whether such a root meaning has a demonstrable continuity in the Bhagavad Gītā.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DHARMA AND THE COSMOS IN THE RG VEDA

To speak about cosmology is to explore the question of the origin, nature and structure of the whole of creation. The relation of visionary insight and knowledge about the cosmos is an important one in the Rg Veda. For example, when the question is asked in the Rg Veda, "What god shall we adore with our oblation?",<sup>1</sup> it is asked in the context of a hymn which, as a whole, is an account of the beginning of the cosmos. The vedic community understands that 'what' it ought to reverence is the source which brought creation into manifest existence. It is understood that communal sustenance or existence, the sacrifice, and the origin and nature of the cosmos are themes which the ṛsis saw to be mysteriously, and at the same time, inextricably bound together.

The visionary insight has two aspects: in addition to asking 'what' to reverence in the sacrifice, it leads to the articulation of the deepest questions about nature and structure of the cosmos. For example, in 10.81.4 a hymn dedicated to the god, Viṣvakarman, the All-Doer, we find the ṛsis pressing for an answer about the origins and material basis of the cosmos.

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<sup>1</sup>  
10.121.1  
For a discussion of the cosmology in this hymn see, below, "Dharma, Agni and the Cosmos" pp. 75-97.

What was the tree, what wood in sooth produced it,  
 from which they fashioned out the earth and heaven?  
 Ye thoughtful men inquire within your spirit whereon  
 he stood when he established all things.

kiṃ svid vanaṃ ka u sa vṛiksha āsa yato dyāvāprithivī  
 niṣṭatakshuh  
 maṇishino maṇasā prichated u tad yad adhyatishṭhad  
 bhuvanāni dhārayan 2

Through the metaphor of the 'tree' (vana) and the 'wood' (vriksha), two essential ingredients for the sacrificial fire, the power Viṣvakarman, who, among others, contributed to the fashioning of the 'earth' and 'heaven' is asked how creation is possible. The rejoinder in the verse is indirect yet it speaks profoundly to the question. Addressed are the 'thoughtful men' (manishino) and they are directed to "inquire within your spirit" (manasā prichated u tad). Knowledge about how the cosmos was fashioned arises from inquiry into the nature of the human creation and such inquiry is a quest within the 'spirit' for 'vision' (dhī). From within the 'spirit' (manasā) can arise the vision of how the 'All-doer' 'established all things' (bhuvanāni dhārayan).

The question of this hymn is in a very real way, the question which is our concern throughout the entire discussion of dharma in the cosmos. Our concern is to look at the visionary poems of the Rg Veda and grasp the place in the

inspired hymns about the origin and structure of the cosmos of the 'establishment' of all that is. In this instance, the verb 'dhārayan' from the root dhr expresses the activity of Viṣvakarman as he contributed to the task of establishing the cosmos. Many other gods or powers also contribute to that task and we propose now to analyze the relation of dhr to Agni, Indra, the Ādityas, and Soma as each participates in the establishment of the cosmos.

### 1. DHARMA, AGNI AND THE COSMOS

Agni is an important deity in the Rg Veda.

V. S. Agrawala goes so far as to call him the 'supreme deity'<sup>3</sup> while Stella Kramrisch in her seminal article,<sup>4</sup> "The Triple Structure of Creation in the Rg-Veda" argues

<sup>3</sup> V. S. Agrawala, Sparks From the Vedic Fire, (Varanasi 1962), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Stella Kramrisch, "The Triple Structure of Creation in the Rg Veda", History of Religions, Vol. 2, #1 and 2. (Hereinafter, Kramrisch.) It is important to note the significance of this article to our entire argument. While Kramrisch rarely makes even reference to a dhr usage, the conception of the cosmology of the Rg Veda outlined in her article was the key which opened up for our understanding, dharma's place in the structure of the cosmos.

in great detail that Agni is the most significant power among the gods of the Rg Veda. Agni, literally means 'fire'. The name denotes many things in the hymns. Agni is 'light' in its many forms from the sun, to the sacrificial fire. Agni is 'heat' that rises from the fire of the sacrifice and conveys the offerings of the sacrifice to the gods. Furthermore, Agni is the 'light' of knowledge, which the vedic ṛṣi envisions in his relationship with gods and powers and translates into mantra, under the inspiration of the powers, especially the goddess, Vāc.

The many associations connected with Agni are important for a consideration of the meaning of dharma as it pertains to Agni's cosmological function. The basis of Agni's supremacy is his birth, for Agni is the first born of the gods. It will be important for our purposes to see how Agni's birth is connected with the emergence of dharma in creation. Our first discussion, therefore, will be about the beginning of creation, Agni's birth and his functions as expressed through usage of the term 'dharma'.

Sūrya is the name of the power associated with the sun. Sūrya is a god intimately associated with Agni. Another deity connected with Agni through common manifestations in creation is Savitar, which Stella Kramrisch

calls the 'Impeller'<sup>5</sup>, the motive-force of motion in creation. Both of these deities function according to dharma in ways which are complimentary to Agni. As a result our discussion of the role of Agni according to dharma in the cosmos will include reference to these two deities and show how they are related to him in his functions in creation according to dhr related terms. We shall see how dharma is present from the spontaneous emergence of creation; how Agni upholds that creation through his light as Sūrya; through his mantra, which is the truth of reality in the form of poetic language, and, in Savitar the initiator of all motion.

Hymn 10.121, dedicated to the enigmatic 'Ka' or 'What', speaks as a whole about the origin of the cosmos:

In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha,  
born only Lord of all created beings.

hiranyagarbhaḥ sam avartatāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ  
patir eka āsit 6

The first event in this account of the origins begins with the emergence of the 'Golden Foetus' (hiranyagarbha). Later in the hymn we are told that this foetus was found in the 'waters' and that it was the pre-natal form

<sup>5</sup>  
Kramrisch, Vol. 2, #1, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup>  
10.121.1



of the god Agni:

What time the mighty waters came, containing the  
universal germ, producing Agni,  
Thence sprang the Gods' one spirit into being.  
What god shall we adore with our oblation?

āpo ha yad bṛihatīr viṣvam āyan garbham dadhānā  
janayantir agnim  
toto devānāṃ sam avatatāsur ekah kasmai devāya  
havishā vidhema ?

The connection between the 'waters', the Golden Foetus and Agni is elsewhere in the Rg Veda condensed to an epithet which refers to Agni as "the son of waters" (apām napāt).<sup>8</sup> Agni, then, is the first power conceived and born into creation. He represents the "god's one spirit" (asur ekah)<sup>9</sup> which establishes Agni's precedence among the other powers born into creation for he is the first-born and each god

?  
10.121.7.

8  
10.30.4.  
For an important and insightful discussion of the epithet apām napāt as it applies to Agni see: Kramrisch, Vol. 2, #1, pp. 160-175; Vol. 2 #2, pp. 256-260.

9  
Agni, as the first-born creation, has a special and unique position in relation to the undifferentiated source of creation. That source is the asura. Equally important though is the fact that when Agni leaves the source, he becomes the asura, the godhead in creation. cf. Kramrisch, Vol. 2#1 and 2.

10

arises related to that "one spirit".

The cause of Hiranyagarbha-Agni's emergence is mysterious. Agni is a power which is spontaneously conceived, or self-germinated. The Golden Foetus which is Agni simply emerges in the cosmic waters. Such a spontaneous emergence corresponds to another spontaneous beginning recorded in 10.129. There sat 'what is' or 'being' is separated from asat 'what is not' or 'non-being' spontaneously.

10

The significance of Agni as the first manifestation of spirit as asura will be seen as we proceed through the whole study of dharma in the Rg Veda. Each god and power we will examine functions in a very nuanced way in relation to the other gods and powers. Each god or power in creation has its unique function, and also shares in the functions of other gods. Our discussion will focus on the individual ways in which the gods function according to dhr related notions and on the way in which functioning according to dharma is a collective function of the gods. This interrelatedness and diversification of function is a manifest expression of the unity of the gods in the 'one spirit' of of the Godhead.

11

There was not non-existent (asat) nor existent (sat)  
There was no realm of air, no sky above it . . . .

Death was not then, nor was there sought immortal:  
No sign was there, the day's and night's divider.  
That One thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature:  
apart from it was nothing whatsoever.

nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm nāsīd rajo no vyomā  
paro yat

na mṛityur āsīd amṛitaṃ na tarhi na rātryā ahna āsīt  
prakētaḥ  
ānīd avātaṃ svadhayā tad ekaṃ tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ  
kiṃ canāsa

10.129.1-2.

From that primal differentiation of an heretofore unseparated unity the whole of creation emerges or unfolds from 'what is'. Creation is seen to begin in both of these accounts and the cause of that beginning is a mystery acknowledged in the questions posed in 10,81.2,4; 10.129.1,5; but not doted upon as grounds for scepticism. <sup>12</sup> Rather the

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12

W. Norman Brown in his essays on creation has seen the questions found in 10.121, as the basis for skepticism about the creative functions of other gods. Brown argues that Indra is the most important divine creator in his essay, "The Creation Myth of the Rig Veda" Journal of the American Oriental Society, (hereinafter, J.O.A.S.), Vol. 62, pp. 85-98. On the basis of that conviction he argues that 10.121 represents scepticism about the role of Indra in creation of all that is. He states about 10.121:

The background is disbelief in Indra as Creator and Sole God; as the hymn stands, and assuming that the final stanza is original, it could be a polemic against Rv 2.12 with the purpose of establishing Prājapati as the Sole God, i.e., it is monotheistic.

(J.O.A.S., Vol.85, p. 32)

Brown's conviction about the exclusiveness of Indra's creative function and hence about the scepticism that he finds in 10.121 seems to us to be ill-founded. Both on the basis of Stella Kramrisch's articles on "the Triple Structure of Creation in the Rg Veda" and on our own research into dharma, we are convinced that the gods function symbiotically to create the cosmos. Indra is but one power involved in creation and his functions along with those of Agni are essential for creation to come into being. In that light, 10.121, does not represent scepticism but a formulation of the deepest insight into the source, albeit mysterious, of all of creation.

hymns envision and celebrate the deepest insight into the mysterious unfolding of creation.

In the account of that mysterious beginning in 10.121.1 the Golden Foetus, even in its prenatal state, acts to uphold creation.

He fixed and holdeth up [dādhāra] this earth and  
heaven  
What God shall we adore with our oblation?

sa dādhāra pṛithivīm dyām utemām  
kasmā devāya havishā vidhema 13

The Golden Foetus, Hiraṇyagarbha, is seen to uphold the earth (pṛithivīm) and heaven (dyām). The upholding function of Hiraṇyagarbha is echoed in another hymn which is dedicated to Agni in which it is stated:

He like the Unborn, holds the broad earth up [dādhāra]  
and with effective utterance fixed the sky.

ajo na kshām dādhāra pṛithivīm tastambha dyām  
mantrēbhiḥ satyaiḥ. 14

Here Agni is compared to his prenatal form, the unborn aja<sup>15</sup> and is shown to perform specifically the same action as Hiraṇyagarbha in 10.121; he holds up or supports the Earth.

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13  
10.121.1.

14  
1.67.5.

15  
For a discussion of 'aja,' cf. Kramrisch, Vol. 2,  
#2, pp. 268-274.

In yet another instance, Agni the first-born is said to act to support or uphold the 'world' in conjunction with other gods.

The Gods spread forth through his Celestial Nature, that he might bear the world up and sustain it.

dharmāṇe

tasya dharmāṇe bhuvanāya deva dharmāṇe kaṃ svadhayā  
paprathanta 16

Here, Agni, the 'one spirit' (asur ekah 10.121.7) out of which all the gods arise is seen to pervade the many gods of creation; out of their respective, autonomous, yet symbiotic actions, the world is upheld.<sup>17</sup>

16  
10.88.1

17  
Geldner's translation of this passage is very like that of Renou:

Durch seine Eigenkraft breiteten sich die Götter aus, um die Welt zu tragen, zu erhalten.

D.R.V., 10.88.1

Renou, however, emphasizes that the gods are spread out according to their 'autonomie' in order to support Agni and to maintain the universe. Renou translates the passage:

Les dieux se sont déployés selon leur autonomie afin de porter cet (Agni), afin de maintenir l'univers.

E.V.P. Vol. 14, p. 23.

Renou's emphasis on the gods upholding Agni as compared to Griffith's and Geldner's emphasis on the gods in and with Agni supporting the world, does not posit a conceptual difference to our point. That is, it is our position that the gods together must participate in the upholding of the cosmos. All are indispensable and can support each other as Renou is suggesting; as we prefer. The gods in and with Agni 'bear the world up and sustain it'.

The means by which Agni acts to uphold the world and Heaven and Earth is indicated in 1.67.5. There it is suggested that the sky is 'fixed' in its place through effective utterance, mantrabhiḥ satyaih. That is to say, Agni upholds the world through the 'mantra' which is 'true' or effective. Here, Agni is understood to be like Vāc, the source of language as mantra. In the creative process, Agni's speech is his contribution, along with the actions of other powers, to the upholding of the structure of the cosmos with Heaven above and Earth below. The power of Agni's speech as it functions in the establishment of the cosmos is expressed somewhat differently in 10.121.9. Hiraṇyagarbha is spoken of in the following way:

Ne'er may he harm us who is earth's begetter,  
 Nor he whose laws are sure, [satyadharmā] the  
 heavens' creator,  
 He who brought forth the great and lucid waters.  
 What god shall we adore with our oblation?

mā no hinsīj janitā yaḥ pṛithivyā yo vā  
 divaṃ satyadharmā jajāna  
 yaḥ cāpaḥ candrā bṛihatīr jajāna kasmai devāya  
 havishā vidhema 18

#### 10.121.9

Here we find a counterpoint to the 'effective utterance' (mantrabhiḥ satyaih) of 1.67.5 in the form of a description of Hiraṇyagarbha as the power whose creative activity brings forth

Heaven and Earth and as a power whose dharma is satya, whose truth (satya) is his dharma. That truth is expressed in his creative activity in the cosmos as dharma, the function of upholding Heaven and Earth in their place within the structure of the cosmos.

The implication of uniting the creative attributes of Agni-Hiranygarbha and the idea of satyadhama are interesting for understanding both the meaning of dharma and the whole idea of the creation of the cosmos in the Rg Veda. The emergence of the Golden Foetus and its power manifest as Agni is the first step in the emergence of creation from the undifferentiated mass expressed as the cosmic waters. The cosmic waters include all of the elements potentially necessary for the beginning of creation and the cosmos. It includes the material elements of the cosmos which can become Heaven and Earth. It includes the potential for heat or fire which are intimately associated with the first-born of the gods, Agni. In addition, the potential is in the waters for speech as mantra and hence satyadhama, the truth of Agni's divine, upholding function. Creation of the cosmos, is the establishment of order out of the undifferentiated mass of the waters. While the undifferentiated pre-creation is not chaos - we are not told what pre-creation is like - when creation spontaneously

begins from the potential in the waters that potential becomes and orderly cosmos. Agni upholds that cosmos by his truth as mantra. In 10.129, Creation begins with the spontaneous division of sat being or what is from asat non-being or what is not. The cosmos as a whole, is located within sat and as such displays its form and nature in the truth upholding all that is, satyadharma.

In this account of creation all basic elements required for creation are eternal. They exist in the cosmic waters and as the latent potential for the infinite forms of 'sat' or 'what is'. The eternality of the basic elements of creation is the first premise of many creation accounts in the literature of the Indian tradition. As we shall see below in our study of the Bhagavad Gītā<sup>19</sup> it is crucial to Kṛṣṇa's teaching that what is here called "creation" is really the manifestation and reorganization of the eternally existant elements. The Gītā's account portrays that eternality of creation following the cycles of the Four Ages of Brahman, the underlying premise is that 'what is' or sat is eternal.

The spontaneous division of sat and asat, as the first step in the emergence of creation from the cosmic waters, corresponds to another division of a unified whole which, in this latter instance, gives rise to the structure of the cosmos.

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<sup>19</sup>  
cf. "Dharma, Kṛṣṇa and the Cosmos" below pp. 249 - 283 and, Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, (New York, 1962), pp. 3-22.



The exact manner in which the division of Heaven and Earth corresponds to that of sat and asat is not made clear except that in both instances what was unitary and undifferentiated becomes the division of sat and asat. This is the first and most basic of such differentiations. From that first division all others are potentially possible as 'what is' or sat becomes increasingly further differentiated into the basic elements of creation. In this process of differentiation the separation of Heaven and Earth makes possible the manifestation of the structure of the cosmos.

Heaven and Earth, together are referred to as the two great 'mothers'. As we shall see in more detail below, the two 'mothers' are separated by the power of Indra.<sup>20</sup> Heaven and Earth are parted and in the mid-region emerges their son, Sūrya, the Sun which is one of the most important celestial manifestations of Agni's light. This birth of Agni as the Sun is one of many such births. He is re-born at each kindling of the sacrificial fire. Thus it is not to be seen as exceptional that Agni is born again in the cosmos, first as Hiranyagarbha then as the Sun and then the ritual fire. Indeed,

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20

cf. "Dharma, Indra and the Cosmos" below, pp. 97-108 In addition, cf. Kramrisch, op cit and Brown, op cit for two very differing accounts of the place of Indra's separation of Heaven and Earth.

these different births are essential to the process of increasing differentiation which gives rise to the vast diversity that constitutes the universe. From the primordial division of sat and asat there emerges, step by step, the ever increasing complexity of all creation.

Within this step by step process of differentiation Agni is re-born in various forms. In each particular form he embodies a particular function which is conveyed by the forms of dhr. For example, when Sūrya emerges between the separated Heaven and Earth it illustrates a dharma-characteristic.

The Sun travels by 'fixed decree' (dharma) in 1.160.1:

These, Heaven and Earth, bestow prosperity on all,  
sustainers of the region, Holy Ones and wise,  
Two Bowls of noble kind: between these Goddesses the  
God, the fulgent Sun, travels by fixed decree  
[dharmanā]

te hi dyāvāprithivī viṣvaṣambhuva ritāvarī rajaso  
dhārayatkavī  
sujanmanī dhishane antar īyate devo devī dharmanā  
sūryaḥ suciḥ

Sūrya derives this characteristic of dharma from two sources. The first, is that as a particular type of light, the Sun is a manifest form of Agni born into creation. From conception, Agni as Hiraṇyagarbha, was satya dharma - the truth which is dharma - and all his manifest forms, in differing ways, manifest that truth. In the Sun, dharma is manifest in its orderly motion in the mid-region. That motion has important

implications. As the Sun moves by dharma or 'fixed decree' in its yearly course there results the changes of seasons, and its daily movement causes light to replace darkness. In making possible the days and the seasons, Agni, as the Sun expresses one dimension of the truth that is his dharma.

The fact that the Sun is the offspring of Heaven and Earth also points to the fact that dharma is one of its main characteristics. Heaven and Earth are embodiments of satya, (truth) in the cosmos, and out of that truth dharma is made manifest as the definitive characteristic of the offspring, Sūrya.

Ihr beiden schützet die Wahrheit um alles,  
was steht und geht,  
zu erhalten und (ihr schützet) den schritt  
eines aufrichtigen Sohn.

sthātuṣ ca satyaṃ jagataṣ ca dharmani putrasya pāthah  
padam ādvayāvinaḥ 21

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21 D.R.V. 1.159.3.

In their translation both Geldner and Renou make clearer the force of the use of dharmani in this passage. Renou translates it as follows:

(Vous deux qui êtes) la réalité du (monde) immobile et du monde-animé selon l'ordre-natural-des choses, vous veillez sur le(s) pas de (votre) fils (humain) exempt de duplicaté.

E.V.P. Vol. 15, p. 115.  
(emphasis ours)

By contrast, Griffiths conveys dharmani by the term 'station' which does not convey the importance of the term in the context. To keep the truth of all that stands and all that moves ye guard the station of your Son who knows no guile.

1.159.3

With the establishment of the Sun, Sūrya, in the sky to provide light, a pattern emerges in which dharma is passed from one stage of creation to the next. Each in turn and each in its own way, - Hiranyagarbha, Agni and Sūrya - support the entire triple structure of the cosmos. First, Hiranyagarbha and Agni uphold the structure of Heaven and Earth. Then in a new offspring within the already 'upheld' structure of creation, Heaven and Earth give birth on their separation to the Sun which in its 'fixed' motion, upholds the structure of creation.

Radiant, as high Truth, cherished, best at winning strength, Truth based upon the statute that supports the heavens,

vibhrād bṛihat subhṛitaṃ vājasātamaṃ dharman divo  
dharuṇē sātyam arpitam 22

Here the action of Sūrya in upholding (dharuṇē) the heaven is understood to be grounded in dharma. Dharma is Sūrya's truth just as Agni's dharma and Heaven and Earth's dharma were their respective truths.

As the pattern of the successive stages of the emergence of creation unfolds, we find that at each moment and in each form which emerges in creation the truth, as part of 'what is', is given expression as dharma. Taken as a whole,

the unfolding of creation from the primordial division of sat and asat reveals a process of creation in which the potential and the actual homologize in the expression of truth as dharma. Each successive event of creation passes to its offspring its essential truth as dharma.

This pattern is expressed again in Agni's manifestation as Savitar, the 'Impeller' of motion in creation. Like Agni,<sup>23</sup> Savitar is called 'the child of waters' (apām napāt), and among his actions he "fixed the earth with bands to bind it, and made heaven steadfast where no prop supported" (savitā yantraih prithivīm aramṇād askambhane savitā dyām adriṅhat)<sup>24</sup> In doing these acts, Savitar "obeys his law for ever" (sa u asyānu dharma)<sup>25</sup>. An example of this dharma is the fact that Sūrya is impelled along his seasonal and daily paths in the sky by Savitar:

To the three spheres of light thou goest,  
Savitar, and with the rays of Sūrya thou combinest thee.  
Around, on both sides thou encompassst the night:  
yea, thou O God, art Mitra through thy righteous laws.

uta yāsi savitas trīṇi rocanota sūryasya  
raṣmibhiḥ sam ucyasi  
uta rātrīm ubhayataḥ parīyasa uta mitro bhavasi deva  
dharmabhiḥ 26

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<sup>23</sup>  
10.149.2

<sup>24</sup>  
10.149.1

<sup>25</sup>  
10.149.3

<sup>26</sup>  
5.81.4

Here Savitar joins with Sūrya and moves the Sun on its way so that the night is always bracketed by the light. As such, Savitar is Mitra, the friend to creation and man. He thereby fulfills his dharma, in the orderly motion of Sūrya. In doing so, Savitar fulfills his 'duties' (vrātāni)<sup>27</sup> to all of life in that the sun will follow its paths making possible the survival and regeneration of creation. Savitar fulfills his duty by 'upholding' them (dhṛtavrata).

Lighting all living creatures, ne'er to be deceived,  
Savitar, God, protect each holy ordinance,  
He has stretched out his arms to all the folk of earth,  
And, with his laws observed, rules his own mighty course

adābhyo bhuvanāni pracākaṣad vratāni devaḥ savitābhi  
rakshate  
prāsrāg bāhū bhuvanasya prajābhyo dhṛitavratato maho  
ajmasya rājati 28

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27 4.53.4.

In the translation of vrata we are following W. Norman Brown, "The basis of the Hindu Act of Truth", Review of Religion, 5(1940), p. 38. Brown states:

"If we examine the instances in the various texts, we see that in every case the basis for the Act of Truth is the singleness with which the performer himself or some other person used by the performer as a dynamic reference fulfills his personal function (vrata) or duty in the cosmos."

cf. V. M. Apte, "All about 'vrata' in the Rgveda", Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, \*3 (1941-42) pp. 409-482.

P. V. Kane, "The word vrata in the Rgveda", Journal of the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, \*29 (1954), pp. 1-28.

28  
4.53.4

The use of dhr̥ta with vrata suggests that the basis upon which a duty is performed is dharma. The vrata is an 'act of truth', (ṣatya) because it is an act expressing the divine function to uphold the cosmos. Savitar fulfills his duty to impell the Sun along its way and in that vrata, Savitar is identified with Sūrya, Agni and the Golden Foetus in the upholding function which the verb dhr̥ conveys. .

Savitar through the light of the sun pervades Heaven and Earth and as the impeller of the motion of the Sun and the rays of light, he calls the light to awaken in fulfillment of his dharmane:

He hath filled full the regions of the heaven and earth:  
the god for his own strengthening [svaya dharmane]  
waketh up the hymn.

āprā rajāṅsi divyāni pārthivā ṣlokaṃ devaḥ kṛiṇute  
svāya dharmane. 29

This awakening call at the coming of the light of day, a call which comes as Savitar performs his duty to impell the Sun on its 'fixed' path, is the occasion for the sacrifice among men and it is also the time to chant the hymn which 'strengthens' Savitar for his duty. Savitar's call is his stretching out his arms to all the folk on the Earth<sup>30</sup>

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29  
4.53.3

30  
4.53.4

through the rays of Sūrya. The regularity of his 'call' is the orderliness of night and day; an orderliness which provides the time framework for the sacrifice in the vedic community. Accordingly:

Then afterwards, they looked around, awakened, when first they held [dhārayanta] that Heaven treasure.

Now all the Gods abide in all their dwellings. Varuṇa, Mītra, be the prayer effective.

ād it paścā bubudhāna vy akhyann ād id ratnaṃ dhārayanta  
dyubhaktam  
viṣve viṣvāsu duryāsu devā mitra dhiye varuṇa satyam  
astu 31

Savitar's call in the rays of Sūrya awakens man and he sees the 'treasure' (ratna) upheld (dhārayanta) in the sky which is the Sun and Agni, to whom 4.1.18 is dedicated. Seeing that treasure is a manifest sign of the orderliness of all things in the cosmos; that the Gods are all to be found in their place, and are therefore accessible to the sacrificial appeals which Varuṇa and Mītra can make successful.<sup>32</sup>

The sacrifice occasioned by Savitar-Sūrya's call is the framework for yet another manifestation of Agni as the sacrificial fire. Agni is reborn at dawn and at each lighting of the sacrificial fire:

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31  
4.1.18.

32  
We will be discussing the way in which Mītra and Varuṇa function in the sacrifice in "Dharma, the Ādityas and the Sacrifice", pp. 165-171



He hath filled heaven and earth and the great realm  
of light,  
when at his birth the skilful held him in their  
hold [adhārayan].  
He like a horse is led forth to the sacrifice, Sage,  
graciously inclined that he may win us strength.

Man's sacrificial food hath sharpened like an axe, for  
brightness, him the Sage of men, the people's Lord.  
Busied with sacred rites he mounts and he descends  
He hath laid down [dīdharat] his vital germ within  
these worlds.

ā rcdasī aprīṇad ā svar mahaj jātaṃ yad enam apaso  
adhārayan  
so adhvarāya pari nīyate kavir atyo na vājasātaye  
canohitaḥ

viṣāṃ kavim viṣpatim mānushīr ishah saṃ sīm akrīṇvan  
svadhītim na tejase  
sa udvatō niyato yāti vevishat sa garbham eshu  
bhuvaneshu dīdharat 33

In this passage, Agni is said to have "laid down [dīdharat]  
his vital germ (garbha) within these worlds". In this  
context that garbha or 'germ', which recalls the first foetus,  
Hinanyagarbha, has two forms. First it is light which fills  
Heaven and Earth. At the sacrifice that light will be the  
Sun, the dawning of which is the sign for the sacrifice. The  
light will also be the sacrificial fire, which, again, is  
Agni in the form of light. Secondly, Agni is the kavi, the  
'sage' who brings with his first birth in creation from the  
Golden Foetus the mantra. As light and as kavi, Agni moves  
to and from the sacrifice. He brings to it the fire and the  
mantra which are two essential ingredients in the sacrifice.  
He leaves the sacrifice with the offerings which nourish the

gods so that they will continue in their respective duties in creation.

It is critical to see in this context that the pattern of differentiation which started with sat separating from asat and was then repeated in the separation of Heaven and Earth is now extended into the human community. Agni as light and mantra is the kavi born in the world who sees the vision and speaks the mantra. Agni as light is born as the sacrificial fire. The power of the sacrifice depends upon the truth of the mantra chanted at the sacrifice. Its truth derives from its birth in Agni at the very beginning of creation and its corresponding re-birth on Earth.

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34

The correspondance of Agni as kavi and the human kavi, to the extent that they are understood as one (10.12.3), is a way of thinking which, in the Upaniṣads, is expressed in the correspondance of the cosmic principle, Brahman with the microcosmic principle Ātman. In no sense is this latter correspondance in the Rg Veda, however, it is clear that the pattern of correspondences in the cosmology that is there establishes the basis for the Upanisadic form of cosmological expression.

cf. Bergaigne, Op. cit. Vol. 3, p. 223. Where Bergaigne discusses "The Idea of Law as understood in Liturgical Ideas". Bergaigne states:

But the very fact that the persons who are charged with the duty of providing the material of the rites and watching over their observance are called in these passages Agni or Soma would show that the celestial phenomena, excepting those cases where they might be expressly mentioned as a necessary part of the terrestrial sacrifice, may be themselves regarded as constituting a sacrifice. In fact the idea of the sacrificial rites and that of the world-order appear to have been thus several times identified in the same passage by using some one of the four words dhaman, dharman, ṛta and vrata of which we are at present studying the relevant passages.

Agni's modes of functioning in creation and in the sacrifice indicates that the pattern of differentiation focuses, finally, on man and his cosmic task of upholding Heaven and Earth.

When the cow's nectar wins the God completely,  
men here below are heaven's and earth's sustainers.

svāvṛig devasyamṛitaṃ yadī gor ato jātāso dhārayanta  
urvī 35

Mighty is homage: I adopt and use it. Homage hath  
held in place the earth and heaven.

nama id ugraṃ nama ā vivāse namo dādharma prithivīm  
uta dyām. 36

Men support Heaven and Earth by the sacrifice. Through the ritual offerings made at the sacrifice which nourishes

35  
10.12.3

36  
6.51.8; cf. 3.38.2  
Ask of the sages mighty generations: firm-minded  
and devout they framed the heaven.  
These are they heart-sought strengthening directions,  
and they have come to be the sky's upholder.

inota pṛicha janimā kavīnām manodhṛitaḥ  
sukṛitaś takshata dyām

imā u te praṇyo vardhamānā manovātā  
adha nu dharmaṇi gman.

While this hymn is dedicated to Indra, it mentions him only in the last verse of the hymn. For our purposes it is useful because it shows the human kavis to be manodhṛita, 'firm-minded' that is embodying the function of dhr and 'as such they are the 'sky's upholder' dharmaṇi participating with Agni in the duty to support the structures of the cosmos.

and sustains the gods for the performance of their dharma in creation, man participates in the function expressed by the verbals of dhr. to uphold the cosmos.

In summary, we have seen Agni in relation to the various forms of dhr. in many contexts. He brings to creation the many forms of light and the mantra. In his functions as light he is the Golden Foetus, the Sun, Sūrya, impelled on its way by Savitar, and the sacrificial fire. In each manifestation of light we have seen that dharma expresses the truth of Agni's functions and manifestations. The same can be said of his manifestation as the mantra which is Agni's truth in speech or language. By that manifestation, Agni supports the cosmos. Agni conveys the mantra into the vedic community when he 'lays down his vital germ' on Earth as the visionary poet or sage, the kavi, thereby making possible the sacrifice and its role in implicating man into the task of supporting Heaven and Earth.

## 2. DHARMA, INDRA AND THE COSMOS

In turning to a consideration of Indra, we turn to a power whose functions compliment and supplement those of Agni. The relation of these two powers is important in the Rg Veda.

37

Indra is Agni's twin brother and the complimentary nature of their functions is based on their fraternal relation. While Agni is light and mantra, Indra is pre-eminently manifest in the strength and force required for the unfolding of creation. This form of manifestation is expressed in the text by the image of another family relationship. Indra, like Agni, is the son of Tvaṣṭṛ, the fashioner of the creation. Indra's strength and force is indispensable to the unfolding of creation, and is, therefore, an important compliment to the cosmological work of his father and his brother. These family relationships, particularly with Agni, are important for us to examine in the context of the uses of dhr. Therefore, as we proceed, we will examine both those functions which Indra shares with his brother Agni, as well as those functions which show his unique role in the creation.

Both Agni and Indra are gods whose manifestations pervade the entire cosmos. The vision of the pervasiveness of

37

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cf. 6.59.2 and Kramrisch, Op cit. Vol. 2.1, p. 155. Kramrisch states: "Indra and Agni are twin brothers (6.59.2). They have the same father; he is Tvaṣṭṛ, Agni's father (1.95.2). Agni is the elder of the twins. He dwelt in the Asura, the Godhead, before Indra bade him to leave the ancient rule and join him and the other gods". (10.124.1-6).

Indra's power in the cosmos has been expressed by the rsis:

That highest Indra-power of thine is distant;  
that which is here sages possessed aforetime.  
This one is on the earth, in heaven the other  
and both unite as flag with flag in battle.

tat ta indriyam paramam parācair adhārayanta kavayaḥ  
puredam  
kshamedam anyad divy anyad asya sam ī pricyate  
samaneva ketuḥ 38

The importance of Indra's pervasive power has been 'possessed'  
(adhārayanta) by the kavi the seer-poet. It is the possession  
of that insight which provides the knowledge about the  
necessity of Indra's strength and force in the upholding of the  
cosmos.

Like Agni, Indra's pervasive power is grounded in his  
'asura-nature' which is to say that his power is grounded in  
the godhead.<sup>39</sup> As such no power can stand in the way of Indra  
as he upholds all that is:

Yea, might I esteem his Godlike nature:  
none hindereth what he hath once determined.  
Near and afar he spread and set the regions,  
and every day the Sun became apparent.

adhā manye bṛihad asuryam asya yāni dādhāra nakir ā  
mināti  
dive-dive sūryo darṣato bhūd vi sadmāny urviyā sukratur  
dhāt. 40

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38  
1.103.1.

39  
cf. Note 9 above, p. 78

40  
6.30.2.

In his 'determined' (dādhāra) action Indra shapes the structure of the cosmos and in so doing makes possible the daily emergence of Agni's sign in the mid-region, Sūrya. The accomplishment of these heroic acts is brought about through Indra's great battles with those powers which would withhold creation.

The first of those great acts is Indra's separation of Heaven and Earth:

Unwearied, won with lauding hymns, he parted of  
old the ancient Pair, united ever.  
In highest sky, like Bhaga, he the doer of marvels set  
both Dames and earth and heaven.

dvitā vi vavre sanajā sanīle ayāsyā stavamānebhīr arkaiḥ  
bhago na mene parame vyomān adhārayad rodasī sudaṅsāḥ 41

The primordial union of Heaven and Earth, the two mothers of creation is separated by Indra's strength. With their separation, Heaven is 'set' (adhārayad) in its region above and Earth below with the mid-region in between:

Thou hast spread out wide earth, a mighty marvel,  
and, high thyself, propped lofty heaven, O Indra,  
Both worlds, whose Sons are Gods, thou hast supported,  
adhārayo  
young, Mothers from old time of holy order [ṛitasya].

paprātha kshām mahi danṣo vy urvīm upa dyām ṛishvo  
brīnad indra stabhāyah  
adhārayo rodasī devapūtre pratne mātārā yahvī ṛitasya 42

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41

1.62.7. (emphasis mine)

42

6.17.17.

The separation of Heaven and Earth releases into creation the sons of the primordial pair, the gods. Indra's 'support' of the primordial mothers is essential for the release of the sons into creation. Among those sons, we have already discussed Sūrya, one of the manifest forms of Agni.<sup>43</sup> In addition to Sūrya, Indra's support of Heaven and Earth is in accord with rta,<sup>44</sup> the patterns of orderly motion in creation.

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43

cf. our consideration of the Ādityas, in particular Mitra and Varuṇa, where we will discuss the relation of the usages of dhr̥ and rta in more detail; pp. 108-125.

44

Indra's separation of Heaven and Earth is critical for Agni's manifestation as the Sun. This is clearly seen in the following references:

When, Indra, thou whose power is linked with thy  
 Bay steeds hadst smitten Vṛitra, causing floods to  
 flow for man,  
 Thou heldst in thine arms the metal thunderbolt,  
 and settest in the heaven the Sun for all to see.

jaghanvān u haribhiḥ sambhṛitakratav indra vṛitram  
 manushe gātuyann apāḥ  
 ayachatahā bāhvor vajram āyasam adhārayo divy ā sūryam  
 dṛiṣe

1.52.8.

Honour that Indra, Puruhanaman for his aid, in whose  
 sustaining hand of old.  
 The splendid bolt of thunder was deposited, as the  
 great Sun was set in heaven.

indram tam ṣumbha puruhanmann avase yasya dvitā  
 vidhārtarī  
 hastāya vajraḥ prati dhāyi darṣato maho dive na sūryaḥ

8.59.2 (Griffith)  
 8.70.2 (Grossman/  
 Geldner)

(continued)



That pattern involves first the separation of the primordial mothers; then the birth of the sons, the gods. Thus the process of differentiation by which the structures and gods of creation came to be follows a pattern of orderly motion. The pattern is then duplicated in all forms of life within creation. But, it is Indra who, by his strength, initiates this orderly process of reproduction with his separation of Heaven and Earth.

Indra's second great cosmogonic act, the slaughter of Vṛtra, the one who would withhold the 'waters' from creation, is another illustration of his strength which serves the unfolding of creation. Above all else this act is the expression of Indra's truth (satya) and is an act of paramount importance for the provision of the necessities for life on Earth. There is already light, heat and speech. Indra

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44 (continued)

When yonder sun, that brilliant light, thou settest  
[adhārayah] in heaven above,  
 Even then all creatures that had life bowed down to  
 thee.

yadā sūryam amuṃ divi śukraṃ jyotir adhārayaḥ  
 ad it te haryatā harī vavakṣatuḥ

8.12.30.

In each of the cases noted above, the application of Indra's force in establishing the Sūrya in the mid-region, is a function conveyed by dhr related terms. This use suggests that Indra's strength is applied in creation in these instances so that the effect is in support of life within creation.

now adds the water.

Praised by Angirases, Indra, demolished with might the works of the great watery monster. Full many regions, too hath he pervaded, and by his truth supported earth's foundation.

indro mahnā mahato arṇavasya vratāminād angirobhir  
grīnānaḥ  
pūrūṇi cin ni tatānā rajānsi dādhāra yo dharuṇam  
satyatātā 45

The slaying of Vṛtra is illustrative of Indra's pervasive presence in creation as strength and force. He uses that force in an act of truth which supported Earth's foundation by the release of the waters so they could flow on the Earth. In doing so, Indra supplements Agni's presence in creation with more of the conditions for the fruitful unfolding of life.

The strength involved in Indra's two great cosmological acts is also applied to establish constancy and regularity in creation. Indra firmly fixes the Earth in its place:

He spread the wide earth out and firmly fixed it, smote with his thunderbolt and loosed the waters.

sa dhārayat pṛithivīm paprathac ca vajreṇa hatvā  
nir apah saṛja 46

In addition, Indra establishes 'duties' (vratāni) which the gods all perform as part of their support for the structures of creation:

45  
10.111.4.

46  
1.103.2.

Many are Indra's nobly wrought achievements,  
and none of all the Gods transgress his statutes.  
He beareth up this earth and heaven, and,  
doer of marvels, he begat, the Sun and morning.

indrasya karma sukṛitā purūṇi vratāni devā na  
minanti viṣve  
dādhāra yaḥ pṛithivīm dyām utemāṃ jajāna sūryam  
ushasaṃ sudānsaḥ. 47

By virtue of his power Indra rules the cosmos. The gods, who are the sons of Heaven and Earth, obey their respective vrata in creation in the same way as Indra does when he 'upholds' the cosmic structures and establishes the sun, Sūrya, in the sky so that, as it is impelled on its orderly course, the Dawn (Uṣas) can be manifest at the appropriate moment.

Indra's strength steadies the Earth and its diverse geographical and geological formations after the cosmogonic battles.

He firmly fixed [adhārayed] the plains and mountains as they shook.

gīrīnr ajrām rejamānān adhārayad krandad antarikshāni kopayat 48

He with his might [ojas] made firm the forward bending hills,  
the downward rushing of the waters he ordained.  
Fast he upheld [adhārayat] the earth that nourisheth all life,  
and stayed the heaven from falling by his wondrous skill.

sa prācīnān parvatān dṛiṅhad ojasādharācīnam akṛiṇod  
apām apaḥ.  
adhārayat pṛithivīm viṣvadhāyasam astabhnān māyayā  
dyām avasraṣaḥ 49

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47  
3.32.8.

48  
10.44.8.

49  
2.17.5.

In 2.17.5, we have particular reference to Indra's strength which is called ojas. According to Jan Gonda, the term means, "that special vital power and creative energy".<sup>50</sup> In this context Indra's ojas steadies the hills and establishes the downward movement of the waters. This suggests that perhaps his power is expressed in the law of gravity in creation. Indra upholds the Earth (adhārayat) which in turn provides the nourishment for all of life.<sup>51</sup> Finally, his strength holds the sky in its proper place. In the hymn this act is recognized as an even more wondrous expression of Indra's power.

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50

J. Gonda, Some Observations on the Relations Between "Gods" and "Powers" in the Veda, A Propos of the Phrase Sūnuh Sahasah ('s-Gravenhage, 1957), p. 19.

cf. J. Gonda, Ancient Indian Ojas, Latin \*augos and the Indo-European nouns in -es- -os-, (Utrecht, 1952)

51

The heavens with streams of golden hue,  
earth with her tints of green and gold-  
The golden Pair yield Indra plenteous nourishment:  
between them moves the golden one.

dyām indro haridhāyasam pṛithivīm harivarpasam  
adhārayad dharitor bhūri bhojanam yayor antar hariṣ  
carat

3.44.3

Thou who hast spread abroad the streams by established law,  
and in the field the plants that blossom and bear seed;  
Thou who hast made the matchless lightnings of the sky, -  
vast, compassing vast realms, meet for our praise art thou.

yah pushpiṇīṣ ca prasvaṣ ca dharmanādhi dāne vy avanīr  
adhārayah  
yaṣ cāsamā ajano didyuto diva urur ūrvān abhitaḥ sāsy  
ukthayah

2.13.7.

In addition to the application of Indra's ojas to steadying the mountains and the streams so that the Earth can nourish life, we also find that his pervasiveness extends to the vital 'creativity' in life itself. Specifically, Indra's act of freeing the waters is identified with the setting of milk in the udders of cattle:

Who cleft the water cloud in twain, loosed river for  
their downward flow,  
And set the ripe milk in the kine.

ya udnaḥ phaligam bhinan nyak sindhūnr avāsṛijāt  
yo goshu pakvaṃ dhārayat 52

The significance of this identification of the waters and the milk in the cows is accented in another reference that states that the cows receive Indra as the garbha, the 'life-germ' or foetus through their mouth:

Indra, these spotted cows yield thee their butter  
and the milky drought,  
Aiders, thereby, of sacrifice;

Which, teeming, have received thee as a life-germ,  
Indra, with their mouth,  
Like Surya who sustaineth [dharmeva] all.

imās ta indra pṛiṣṇayo ghr̥itam̐ duhata āṣīram  
cnām̐ ritasya pīpyūshīḥ

yā indra prasvas tvāsā garbham acakrīran  
pari dharme

---

52  
8.32.25.

53  
8.6. 19.20

Here, the fact that Indra's cosmological acts are the basis for the nourishment of life, indicates that Indra enters into the cattle, perhaps as the waters which flow on earth. Having entered into the cattle, Indra becomes identified with Agni as Sūrya, in the function of sustaining (dharmeva) all that is.

The pattern of relationships does not stop with the identification of Agni, Indra, the waters, and the milk in cows for the milk which cattle possess can be used in the sacrifice and for human nourishment. In the sacrifice the butter and the milk which are offered to the gods as their sustenance can also be human food. In all of this there is an unbroken circle of relatedness. Indra's actions bring the waters and the milk to the cows thereby making possible the sacrifice. In turn the sacrificial offerings of milk and butter nourish Indra making possible his continued sustaining actions. In this circle of relatedness, and in keeping with the orderly motion of ṛta<sup>54</sup> as a 'sacrifice' ("der (opfer) ordnung")<sup>55</sup> Indra's strength is directed according to the need of all parts of creation to be upheld.

<sup>54</sup>  
8.6.19.

<sup>55</sup>  
D. R. V., 8.6.19.

It is apparent from this description of Indra's cosmogonic actions that it is not appropriate to conceive either Indra or Agni as a creator god. No one power creates the cosmos, nor does one power sustain or uphold it. Rather both Agni and Indra, and other powers as well, work together, inseparably and symbiotically, in the unfolding of the cosmos. While the picture is not complete, a pattern is established with the first born of creation and his brother. In the symbiotic functioning of these two gods, we also note that dhr usages convey the duty of the gods to act according to their truth, (satya), for the continued establishment of creation. The inter-dependence of each aspect in that creation reflects the duty of each part and power to uphold all that is.

### 3. DHARMA, VIṢṆU, THE ĀDITYAS AND THE COSMOS

We have examined the dhr uses in connection with the cosmological actions of the twin brothers, Agni and Indra. We have noted that while Agni made manifest the forms of light and speech as his form of pervading the cosmos, Indra's power and strength established the structure of the cosmos, steadied it and made possible the conditions for life. We turn now to Viṣṇu and the Ādityas. Viṣṇu is not often referred to in the Rg Veda, though that does not diminish in significance

his great cosmological act which is to stride across the triple structure of creation so that it holds together as a unity. The Ādityas are a group of powers, the sons of Āditi,<sup>56</sup> which includes Aryaman, Bhaga, Dakṣa and Amśa and most important, Mitra and Varuṇa.<sup>57</sup> Among the Ādityas our major interest concerns Mitra and Varuṇa. Their function in the expression of their princely power is to maintain the orderliness (rta)<sup>58</sup> of movement in the cosmos, including that of Viṣṇu himself. Viṣṇu, Mitra and Varuṇa bring unity and order to the cosmos. Our concern is to show that the symbiotic actions of these gods is an expression of their function to uphold the cosmos.

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<sup>56</sup>  
cf. A. A. Macdonnell, The Vedic Mythology, (Reprint, Varanasi, 1963), pp. 43-46.

<sup>57</sup>  
2.27.1.

<sup>58</sup>  
For the sake of simplicity we have chosen to translate rta as "order" or "orderliness". This by no means exhausts the nuances of meaning in this important term, however it does convey the significance in the references we are studying, that motion in the cosmos must follow its proper pathway. Jan Gonda has recognized this significance in the context of his study of the Vision of the Vedic Poets: "rta is not rarely represented as a power by which those potencies and influences which are conducive to the maintenance of life and order are regulated and set in motion; the fundamental power by which the rivers flow, the dawns shine and the cows yield milk", (Vision, p. 175). Cf. also: Bergaigne, Op. cit., Vol. 3, pp. 215-278. Gonda, Vision, pp. 170-208 and the most detailed study of rta: H. Luders, Varuṇa, Vol. 11 Varuṇa und das Rta, (Gottingen, 1959), pp. 406-654.



In 1.156.4, it is stated that "Vishṇu hath power supreme" (dādhāra daksham . . . vishṇuḥ). The principle expression of this power which, in a more literal translation, Viṣṇu "carries", is his three strides across creation. The three strides "establish his high decrees":

Vishnu, the guardian, he whom none deceiveth,  
made three steps; thenceforth  
Establishing [dhārayan] his high decrees [dharmāni].  
trīṇi padā vi cakrame viṣṇur gopā adābhyah  
ato dharmāni dhārayan 60

Viṣṇu is portrayed as the gopa, the guardian, and his three strides are the expression of that guardianship. In turn, the strides establish (dhārayan) his 'dharmāni', his high decrees'.

The important question is, what the content of these 'high decrees' can be? Jan Gonda rejects the notion implicit in Griffith's translation as 'decree' and Geldner's "die Gesetze festsetzend".<sup>61</sup> Rather, he asks, "Does it ṛta not rather indicate the inherent principle of everything because of which, it is what it is?"<sup>62</sup> Gonda's question is

<sup>59</sup>  
Renou translates this phrase: "Il a toujours porte la force-agissante supreme". E.V.P., Vol. xv, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup>  
1.22.18.

<sup>61</sup>  
D.R.V., 1.22.18.

<sup>62</sup>  
Gonda, "Het Bergripp Dharma," pp. 220-221.

incisive and to follow its implicit suggestion provides a sound basis to understand the expressions of Viṣṇu's dharma conveyed by some of the verbs of ḍhr.

Consider for example Viṣṇu's functions which are strikingly similar to some of Indra's:

The vast high vault of heaven hast thou supported and fixed earth's eastern pinnacle securely.

Both these world's Vishṇu hast thou stayed asunder and firmly fixed the earth with pegs around it.

ud astabhnā nākam ṛishvam bṛihantaṃ dādhartha  
prācīm kakubham pṛithivyāḥ

vy astabhnā rodasī vishṇav ete dādhartha pṛithivīm  
abhito mayūkhaiḥ 63

Here Viṣṇu's 'dharmāni' are identified as the 'support' of the 'vault of heaven' in its separateness from earth. While this act is similar to the upholding function of Indra, in no sense is it to be understood as precisely the same act.<sup>64</sup> Viṣṇu

63  
7.99.2,3.

64  
Stella Kramrisch has described the details of the distinction between Indra's support of Heaven and Earth and that of Viṣṇu. She states:

God, Viṣṇu is the support of this triple world (tridhātu), but, unlike the other gods who keep the vault of heaven high above this earth, though he too did pillar asunder heaven and earth (7.99.3), this operation, in a mode particular to Viṣṇu only unites the triple world. With three strides (1.154.34) from here below he traverses and pervades this cosmos. Where his third footfall is, none can reach, not even the birds in their flight (1.155.5). It is in the light space of heaven (1.155.3) where the source of the honey (madhva utasah; 1.154.5) wells forth.

(continued)

does not separate Heaven and Earth, but rather, once they are separated, he joins with Indra in supporting Heaven in its place. The structure of creation "is what it is" because Viṣṇu has established his dharma so that each part has its place in the unity of the cosmos.

Who verily alone upholds the threefold,  
the earth, the heaven and all living creatures.

ya u tridhātu pṛithivīm uta dyām eko dādharma bhuvanāni  
viṣvā 65

Viṣṇu extends his dharma, like Indra, to all living creatures thereby integrating them in the unity of all that is.

The distinguishing feature, therefore, of Viṣṇu's role is that he ties together the whole of the cosmos according to the place and its special function. By establishing his 'dharmāni' Viṣṇu does not usurp Indra's functions; he compliments them by adding a subtle nuance, or an elaboration of what it means to uphold the cosmos. The cosmos must be a unit within which all the parts have their place and function in order for each to be 'what it is'. Equally important the whole of the cosmos must be held together for it to be 'what it is'. Viṣṇu is the key power in establishing that unity. Viṣṇu's role is one of consolidation,

64 (continued)

Viṣṇu is not primarily a demiurge. Stepping out widely he penetrates and traverses the space that Indra creates (1.154.1; 8.100.12). He is both the pillar and the movement that links and fills the triple world.

Kramrisch, Op. cit., 2, #1, p. 148.

65  
1.154.4.

unification and maintenance.

Viṣṇu's three steps are accomplished according to dharma. However, his great act, is realized not only according to his own dharma, but according to that of Mitra, the guardian of orderly motion:

Tis he who made the lauds his own and boldly  
drank the Soma juice.  
He to whom Vishnu came striding his three wide  
steps, as Mitra's statutes ordered it.

ya ukthā kevalā dadhe yah somaṃ dhṛishitāpibat  
yasmai viṣṇus trīṇi padā vicakramā upa mitrasya  
dharmabhiḥ 66

The fact that Viṣṇu takes his three strides according to Mitra's dharma adds a nuance in the relationships of the vedic gods. Viṣṇu's three steps establish his "highest decrees" which involve assisting Indra in supporting Heaven and Earth in its place. Viṣṇu establishes his dharma at the behest of Mitra. In no sense is this to be understood as a usurpation of divine function, but rather, it indicates a subtle nuance in the visionary insight into the complex functioning of the cosmos and the role of the gods and powers which keep its constituent functioning in an orderly way.

To understand why Viṣṇu's cosmological act is done at the behest of the god Mitra, it is necessary to see the primacy of the function of the Ādityas generally, and Mitra and Varuṇa in particular, in the maintenance of orderliness (ṛta)

in the motion of the cosmos. Viṣṇu's strides across the cosmos forms but one of many patterns of orderly motion within the created order. The Ādityas possess the sovereign power to oversee this orderly motion. The Ādityas, like Agni and Indra, are rooted in the asura, the Godhead<sup>67</sup>. This common basis in the asura is one reason why the gods together share in the task of upholding the cosmos. In the case of the Ādityas, they share identical functions with Agni, Indra and Viṣṇu, but their specific role is to uphold rta. This is expressed in the following verses:

Upholding [dhārayanta] that which moves and that which moves not,  
 Adityas, Gods, protectors of all being,  
 Provident, guarding well the world of spirits,  
 true to eternal law, [ṛitāvānaṣ] the debt exactors.

With their support they stay three earths, three heavens; three are their functions in the God's assembly;  
 Mighty through law, Adityas [ṛitenadityā] is your greatness;  
 Fair is it Aryaman, Varuṇa and Mitra.

Golden and splended, pure like streams of water,  
 they hold aloft [dhārayanta] the three bright heavenly regions;  
 Ne'er do they slumber, ever close their eyelids,  
 faithful, far-ruling for the righteous mortal.

dhārayanta ādityāso jagat sthā devā viṣvasya bhuvanasya  
 gopāḥ  
 dīrghādhiyo rakshamānā asuryam ṛitāvānaṣ cayamānā  
 ṛināni

tisro bhūmīr dhārayan trīnr uta dyūn trīni vratā  
 vidathe antar eshām  
 ṛitenādityā mahi vo mahitvaṃ tad aryaman varuṇa mitra  
 cāru

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67

cf. 2.27.4; 5.63.3,7.

trī rocaṇā divyā dhārayanta hiraṇyayaḥ sucayo  
 dhārapūtāḥ  
 asvapnaḥ animishā adabdhā uruṣaṅsā r̥ijave martyāya<sup>68</sup>

Specifically, the Ādityas are depicted as upholding (dhārayanta) "that which moves and that which moves not." That is to say, they, with other powers, support both those parts of creation which are in motion and those which are still. Like Viṣṇu, the Ādityas are gopa or guardians. They guard the world of the spirits (asura) according to rta. The movements of the asura powers are therefore orderly. Thus the Ādityas are present in the orderly unfolding patterns of creation from conception (hiraṇyagarbha) or the separation of Heaven and Earth through to its completion with the establishment of the Sun in its place, the sacrificial fire among the community of men and the release of the waters which nourish creation. The Ādityas pervade the cosmos, like Agni and Indra, as the diverse forms of order.

The nature of relations of the Ādityas to the other powers also suggested in the imagery used to describe them. For example, they are associated with the light of Agni in that they are "golden and splendid" (hiraṇya, sucayo),<sup>69</sup> and

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68  
2.27.4, 8, 9.

69  
2.27.9.

they are also "pure like streams of waters" (dhārapūtāh)<sup>70</sup> which associates them with Indra and the release of the waters. It is consistent, therefore, that "they hold aloft the three bright heavenly regions".<sup>71</sup> In each case their specific contribution focuses on ṛta, the orderliness of within the cosmos. The Ādityas, therefore, are in fundamental harmony with the collective task of all the powers born into creation to support and uphold the complex, interrelated cosmos. They reinforce the notion that no one god 'creates' and maintains the cosmos but rather, that all gods and man contribute to the on-going task expressed by dharma.

In the dhr references and in the Rg Veda generally, the most important of the Ādityas are Mitra and Varuṇa. Both powers are known as the "king's"<sup>72</sup> of creation, and act according to dharma in their regal function with particular regard to assisting Agni and Indra in their interrelated functions.<sup>73</sup> With regard to Agni, for example, Mitra and Varuṇa, armed with the magic power arising from the asura, (asurasya māyayā), act according to their dharma to be the guardians (gopa) of

70  
2.27.9.

71  
2.27.9.

72  
5.63.3.5.

73  
cf. 5.63.4.

vrata: "Wise, with your law [dhārmanā] and through the asura's magic power ye guard the ordinances, [vrata] Mitra-Varuna"

(dhārmanā <sup>74</sup> mitrāvaruṇā vipaścītā vratā rakshethe asurasya māyayā). That is to say, Mitra and Varuṇa use their power to ensure that the gods, such as Agni, fulfill their duties (vrata). Agni's vrata is expressed in the appearance of the Golden Foetus, in the daily and seasonal appearances of the Sun, and in the sacrificial fire. In urging Agni to keep his vrata, Mitra and Varuṇa help Agni as Sūrya to move across the skies in an orderly fashion. Thus it is said of Mitra and Varuṇa in 5.63.7: "Ye by eternal order [ritena] govern all the world. Ye set the sun in heaven as a refluent car" (ritena viṣvam bhuvanam vi rājathah sūryam ā dhattho divi citryam ratham). It is Mitra and Varuṇa who uphold the presence of light in the triple structure of creation:

Die drei Lichträume und die drei Himmel, die drei (Luft) räume erhält [dhārayatho] ihr, Mitra and Varuṇa, die Herrschererscheinung erhöhend, über das unverwelkliche Gesetz [vrataṃ] wachend.

trī rocanā varuṇa trīnr uta dyūn trīṇi mitra dhārayatho  
rajāṅsi  
vāvṛidhānāv amatim kshatriyasyānu vratam rakshamānāv  
ajuryam 75

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74  
5.63.7.

75  
D.R.V., 5.69.1. Griffith misses the force of the verb, 'dhārayatho' in his translation. He puts it: "Three spheres of light, O Varuṇa, three heavens, three firmaments  
(continued)"



More specifically, Mitra and Varuṇa, through their ṛta, assist Agni in the daily and seasonal movements of the sun as in 5.62.1:

By your high law [ritena] firm order [ritam] is established [dhruvam] there where they loose for travel Sūrya's horses. Ten hundred stood together: there I looked on this the most marvellous Deities one chief glory.

ritena ritam apihitam dhruvam vām sūryasya yatra  
vimucanty aṣvān  
daśa śatā sāha tasthus tad ekaṃ devānām śreshṭham  
vapushām apasyam

By the ṛta upheld by Mitra and Varuṇa, the horses which pull the Sun across the sky, do so according to the proper pathways established for their movement in the cosmos. Agni is the Sun as Sūrya; Savitar impells the Sun in its movement while Mitra and Varuṇa establish Sūrya's diurnal and seasonal courses of movement.

5.63.1 indicates that Mitra and Varuṇa also act to assist Indra.

Guardians of order, [ritasya] ye whose laws are ever true, [satyadharmana] in the sublimest heaven your chariot ye ascend. O Mitra-Varuṇa whosoe'er ye favour, here, to him the rain with sweetness streameth down from heaven.

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75 (continued)

ye comprehend [dhārayatho], O Mitra, . . . . Renou is almost identical to Geldner: "Les trois espaces-lumineux, ô Varuṇa, et les trois cieux, les trois espaces (-médiens), ô Mitra, vous les maintenez [dhārayatho]" E.V.P. Vol. 5, p. 82.

ritasya gopāv adhi tishṭhatho ratham satyadharmānā  
 parame vyomani  
 yam atra mitrāvaruṇāvatho yuvaṃ tasmai vṛiṣṭīr  
 madhumat pinvate divah

Here Mitra and Varuna are both called guardians (gopa) of rta whose dharma is true (satyadharmānā). The expression both of their rta and of their truth as dharma is to be seen in the movement of their chariot to Heaven and in the descent of the waters to the Earth from Heaven. The truth of the gods is in their movement in support of Indra's task to release the waters for the Earth. Mitra and Varuna do not participate as warriors to assist Indra in his conquest, but rather, set the waters in their downward flow. More generally one might say that they set things in their place or set the direction in which things move according to the law of gravity. The closeness of the association with Indra goes to the extent that it is sometimes said that Varuna is Indra, as in 4.42.3,4:

I Varuna am Indra: in their greatness, these  
 the two wide deep fairly-fashioned regions,  
 These two world-halves have I, even as 'Tvashtar  
 knowing all being, joined and held together [dhārayam]

I made to flow the moisture shedding waters, and  
 set [dhārayam] the heaven firm in the seat of order,  
 [ritasya].  
 By law [ritena] the son of Āditi, Law observer,  
 [ritāvotā] hath spread abroad the world in  
 threefoldmeasure.

aham indro varuṇas te mahitvorvī gabhīre rajasī sumeke  
 tvasṭeva viṣvā bhuvanāni vidvān sam airayam rodasī  
 dhārayam ca

aham apo apinvam ukshamānā dhārayam divam sadana  
 ritasya  
 ritena putro aditer ritāvota tridhātu prathayad  
 vi bhūma 76

The identification of Varuna and Indra is expressed in the upholding or maintaining of the separation of the two 'world-halves', Heaven and Earth, in their separateness. 77

Within that structure the two powers in their mutual identification ensure that heaven is set in rta, above the Earth which is its place in the cosmos, so that the waters can flow to the Earth. Upholding here, then, is found in rta which assigns things to their place in the cosmos, and sets them in their proper pathway for motion. Indra and Varuna make an indispensable contribution to the total task expressed by the term 'dharma'.

Mitra and Varuna are also associated with Indra in his concern for the necessities of life upon the earth.

O Mitra-Varuna, ye by your greatness, both Kings have firmly established [adhārayatam] earth and heaven. Ye caused the cows to stream, the plants to flourish and scattering swift drops sent down the rain-flood.

adhārayatam pṛithivīm uta dyām mitrarājānā varuṇā  
 mahobhīḥ  
 vardhayātam oshadhīḥ pinvatam gāava vṛisṭim srijatam  
 jīradānū 78

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76  
 cf. 1.25.8

77  
 cf. 6.70.1.

78  
 5.62.3.

The expression of Mitra and Varuṇa's upholding of Heaven and Earth is realized in the flourishing of life upon the Earth, from the fruitfulness of cows in providing milk, to the regeneration of plants and the coming of rains. These are also characteristic of Indra's actions which are here complimented by Mitra and Varuṇa the two kings (rāja). Again, it is not that Mitra and Varuṇa take over Indra's action, but rather, they supplement his strength with order.

As in the case of Indra, this concern for the flourishing of life within creation also involves human existence. In the maintenance of their ruling power, ksatra Mitra and Varuṇa not only prop up Heaven but, also they provide food for men:

So, through the days maintaining [dhārayathe] a princely power,  
ye prop the height as 'twere from the loftiest heaven.  
The Star of all the Gods, established, filledth the  
heaven and earth with food of man who liveth.

tā hi kshatraṃ dhārayethe anu dyūn dṛiṅhethē sānum  
upamād iva dyōh  
dṛiḥo nakshatrā uta viṣvadevo bhūmim ātān dyām  
dhāśināyoh 79

The provision of food, as in the case of both Indra and Agni, is related directly to yajña. We have seen that the sacrifice functions to implicate the vedic community in the task of supporting the cosmos. This is illustrated in 5.62.1 wherein

we have already seen the connections established between the rta of Mitra and Varuṇa and the movements of the Sun, and the waters to Earth. An extension of that function is the role of these two gods envisaged in the sacrifice:

Indem ihr (das Gesetz), das eure berühmte,  
weite (Herrscher) erscheinung entsprechend erhöht,  
wiedas Earheis durch opferspruch schützt,  
sitzet ihr Huldigungen empfangend auf eurem  
Hochstuhl im Überfluss,  
O Mitra und Varuṇa von fester Willenskraft, [dhritadakshādi].

anu śrutām amatim vardhad urvīm barhir iva  
yajushā rakshamānā  
namasvantā dhritadakshādhi garte mitrāsāthe varuṇe lāsv  
antah 80

Here Mitra and Varuṇa guard the sacred grass and uphold the the power (dhritadakshādi) of the liquid offerings of the sacrifice as they sit upon the throne. Mitra and Varuṇa make the sacrifice effective by ensuring that the offerings are conveyed along the pathways to the gods. The effective sacrifice brings food and sustenance to the community. The movement of the offering to the gods and the gods response in meeting the needs of the community, is a pattern of orderliness which requires maintaining. Mitra and Varuṇa perform that function at the sacrifice and in the cosmos on

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80

D.R.V., 5.62.5. In this instance, Griffith conveys the meaning of dhritadakshādi, though his syntax obscures its meaning somewhat.\* Griffith puts it as follows:

To make the lustre wider and more famous,  
guarding the sacred grass with veneration,  
(continued)

the grand scale.

In the context of the sacrifice, Mitra especially is the friend of the man who performs yajña. His eternal vigilance out of his friendship contributes to the upholding of the cosmos and the maintenance of the connections between the gods and men through the yajña.

Mitra, when speaking, stirreth men to labour,  
Mitra sustaineth [dādhāra] both the earth and heaven.  
Mitra beholdeth men with eyes that close not.  
To Mitra bring, with holy oil, oblation.

mitro janān yātayati bruvāno mitro dādhāra pṛithivīm  
uta dyām  
mitrah krishtīr animishābhi casṣṭe mitrāya havyam  
ghritāvaj juhota 81

Mitra acts specifically here to uphold 'the earth and heaven', but the entire context deals with men and their work, an important part of which is the offering of an oblation ghrita (holy oil). The reciprocity in the relationship between gods and men is reaffirmed here. Mitra, as Gonda has pointed out, seems to have a particular concern for the human dimension of upholding order:

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80 (continued)

Ye Mitra-Varuṇa firm, strong awe-inspiring,  
are seated on a throne amid oblations.

Renou translates the meaning of [dhṛitadakhādī] as "tenant-ferme (votre) force-agissante" which parallels Geldner. E.V.P. Vol. 5, p. 78.

81  
3.59.1.

Gonda states :

It would appear to me that the Mitra of the Vedic texts - who "does not possess any individuality on the physical side" - rather is the god who, while maintaining the ṛta - that untranslatable term which may be approximately described as the supreme and fundamental order-and-reality conditioning the normal and right, natural and true structure of cosmos, ritual and human conduct - puts things right, regulates the contacts between men and between men and the divine powers, and exhibits benevolence and active interest. Whereas Varuṇa the representative of the static aspects of kingship, is a guardian of that ṛta, his companion and complement Mitra, being no less concerned with it and no less its promoter, is rather its maintainer, the one who keeps its manifestations in the right condition, who redresses if something has gone wrong, who adjusts, restores, appeases, stabilizes, the god also who unites men. 82

Mitra and Varuṇa are both concerned with order, but Mitra is specifically involved in the human context as the 'Friend' who establishes order in human relationships and in the relationships of men to the gods via the yajña. The ritual is a pattern of action the order of which must be maintained. The dharma of both Mitra and Varuṇa is directed to this end.

In summary, we find in Viṣṇu and the Ādityas powers which participate with Agni and Indra in the task of upholding the cosmos. While Viṣṇu holds the cosmos together, the Ādityas pervade the unfolding pattern of creation with their royal power and govern the patterns of orderliness.

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82

J. Gonda, The Vedic God Mitra, (Leiden, 1972), pp. 109-110.

#### 4. DHARMA, SOMA AND THE COSMOS

In the establishment of the cosmos, Agni was the first-born who illuminated the cosmos while his brother, Indra, shaped and stabilized it. Viṣṇu in his three strides established its unity. The Ādityas ordained the place for each constituent part of the cosmos and sustained the pathways of orderly motion within the cosmos. The upholding function of the gods was linked to the provision of the necessities for life through the sacrificial rites. Consequently, the vedic community understood itself to be integrated into the total responsibility for upholding the cosmos. In turning to an examination of Soma, one of the key elements in the maintenance of correct ritual relation with the gods, we are examining a power whose function is directly related to the yajña. Within that context, Soma supports the cosmos through his power of mediation between the sacrifice on Earth and the powers.

This power of mediation is based in Soma's function as the sacrificial food, <sup>83</sup> the essence of the waters which Soma conveys back to Indra and to the source of creation.

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83

In current scholarly literature there is perhaps no greater controversy than the one inspired by R. G. Wasson in which he argues that Soma is a mushroom. Wasson's book,  
(continued)



May Pavamāna, King and God,  
 speed with his wave over the sea the lofty rite:  
 May he by Mitra's and Varuṇa's decree [dharmanā]  
 flow furthering the lofty rite.

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83 (continued)

Divine Mushroom of Immortality, (New York, 1968) argues from the references in the Rg Veda to Soma, that it was the fly-agaric type of mushroom that, once purified according to methods in the text, was the basis for the visionary experiences of the rsis. Wasson's thesis has been critically examined by J. Brough, "Soma and Amanita Muscaria" Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 34 (1971), pp. 331-62. Wasson's rejoinder to Brough's criticisms is found in: Soma and the Fly-agaric: Rejoinder to Professor Brough (Cambridge, 1972). A similar debate has taken place between Wasson and the eminent Sanskritist, F. B. J. Kuiper. Kuiper's review was in: Indo-Iranian Journal 12 (1970) pp. 279-285 and Wasson's rejoinder is in Indo-Iranian Journal, 12 (1970) pp. 286-98.

Frits Stall has commented incisively on the nature of the debate inspired by Wasson's hypothesis. In an appendix to his recent book Exploring Mysticism, (Middlesex, 1975), Stall points out that:

. . . the only weakness that seems to be apparent in Wasson's theory is a certain unfalsifiability. A good theory should be liable to falsification. But some apparent counter-examples to Wasson's theory can be interpreted as consistent with the theory. When opponents point out, for example, that there are descriptions in the Veda which do not fit a mushroom, Wasson replies that the identity of the Soma was intentionally hidden by the Brahmans, or that these descriptions fit creepers and other substitutes. . . . Although the theory has therefore not been refuted by such criticisms, the answers have not demonstrated its correctness. (p. 188)

Stall goes on to point out that presently, Wasson's theory is the only one available:

Since there is at present no theory which offers another candidate for the identity of the Soma with the same amount of seriousness and detail as does Wasson's theory, his identification stands in splendid isolation as the only, and therefore the best theory. (189).

(continued)

tarat samudram pavamāna ūrmiṇā rājā deva ṛitam brihat  
arshan mitrasya varuṇasya dhārmaṇā prahinvāna ṛitam  
brihat 84

In this passage, Soma is part of the orderliness (ṛta) of the sacrificial rite (yajña) according to the dharma of Mitra and Varuṇa, the guardians of ṛta. Through the sacrifice the food as offering does not flow indiscriminantly, but flows to the god to whom the sacrifice, as ṛta, is offered. In fulfilling this function Soma joins with Viṣṇu and Indra in particular in fulfilling the dharma ordained for them by Mitra and Varuṇa. Soma must flow according to ṛta and be integrated with the other powers in the symbiotic task of upholding the cosmos.

The pathway of ṛta as the sacrifice sends Soma on its way through the pillar (skambha)<sup>85</sup> which props apart Heaven and Earth, and contains the pathways through which Soma can reach the gods from the ritual. Thus, in 9.74.2:

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83 (continued)

We do not propose to comment in general on the debate as it is not essential to our thesis. However, in our view, it is important that within the debate it be kept in mind that Soma is a divine power in the text. While generally speaking we are sympathetic to naturalistic interpretations of the powers functions in the Rg Veda, such interpretations must never lose sight of the importance of the revelatory nature of the hymns and the experienced reality of the powers as divine.

84  
9.107.15.

85  
For a discussion of the skambha, cf. Bosch, Op. cit.  
pp. 93-94, 150-215.

A far-extended pillar that supports [dharuṇaḥ]  
 the sky,  
 The soma-stalk, filled full, moves itself every way,  
 He shall bring these great worlds while the rite  
 proceeds:  
 The sage holds [dādhāra] those who move together  
 and all food.

divo ya skambho dharuṇaḥ svātata āpūrṇo aṅsuḥ  
 paryeti viṣvataḥ  
 seme mahī rodasī yakshad āvritā samīcīne dādhāra  
 sam ishaḥ kaviḥ

From the ṛta, or orderly performance of the sacrifice, Soma moves through the skambha which is his "path" - along which he moves to and fro - of communication with the gods. The return movement brings the 'great worlds' (mahī rodasī) within the sight of the sage (kavi), making possible the translation of sight or vision into mantra for the yajña. As part of the skambha, Soma supports (dharuṇaḥ) the sky. This mediation between Heaven and Earth enables the kavi to uphold (dādhāra) the movement in the cosmos and the food which sustains it. Soma's mediation, then, is fundamental within the total task of upholding the cosmos, for it conveys sustenance to the gods and to the community:

Flow on to win us strength,  
 Flow on to lofty lore of every kind.  
 Thou Soma as Exhilarator was the first to  
 spread [dhārayo] abroad the sea for Gods.

Flow to the realm of earth,  
 Flow to the realm of heaven,  
 O Soma in the righteous ways [dharmabhiḥ].  
 Fair art thou whom the sages, O far seeing One,  
 Urge onward with their songs and hymns.

pavasva vajasataye ' bhi viṣvani kavya  
 tavṃ samudram prathamo vi dhārayo devebhyaḥ soma  
 matsarah

sa tu pavasva pari parthivaṃ rajo divya ca soma  
 dharmabhiḥ  
 tvam viprāso matihbhir vicakshana ṣubhram hinvanti  
 dhitibhiḥ 86

The flowing action which mediates Heaven and Earth is the  
 expression of Soma's dharma<sup>87</sup> and serves to 'spread abroad'  
 the waters for the gods. While Indra releases the waters  
 for the Earth's nourishment, Soma conveys the essence of  
 the waters to the gods.

This even this, is he who hath created the breadth  
 of earth,  
 the lofty height of heaven.  
 He formed the nectar in three headlong rivers.  
 Soma supports the wide mid-air above us.

ayam sa yo varimāṇam pṛithivyā varshmāṇam divo  
 akrinod ayam saḥ  
 ayam piyūsham tīrīshu pravatsu somo dādharorv  
 antarisksham 88

Soma moves between the Heaven and the Earth through the  
 mid-region which he supports with his skambha.

In these passages, Soma has two important characteris-  
 tics. One the one hand the fluid character of the material  
 element enables Soma to flow and move between the structures

86  
 9.107.23,24; cf. 9.63.14.

87  
 9.107.24.

88  
 6.47.4, cf. 9.86.8,9.

of the cosmos, and thereby mediate between them. On the other hand, Soma is also in the skambha, the pillar which upholds the structures of the cosmos in their place. As such Soma is "High heaven's sustainer at the central point of Earth" (nābhā prithivyā dharuno maho divah)<sup>89</sup>. This function of being understood as a fixed pillar at the centre of the Earth attributes to Soma a characteristic of stability in addition to his liquid motion. This complimentary nature is elsewhere depicted in the image of his resting place being in a golden mountain which is also the 'place of the law', rta:

Cleansing thee, Soma in thy stream, [dhārayāpo]  
 thou flowest in a watery robe:  
 Giver of wealth, thou sittest in the place of law,  
 [ritasya]  
 O God a mountain made of gold.

punānaḥ soma dhārayāpo vasāno arshasi  
 ā ratnādhā yonim ritasya sīdasy utso deva  
 hiraṇyayaḥ 90

Here Soma flows in water (dhārayāpo) thereby acting according to his dharma. In fulfillment of that motion, Soma is also seen to be sitting in the golden mountain which is the place of rta. The source of Soma, like the streams, is in the mountains from where he flows in orderly pathways. The pathways and the Soma which flows in them

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89  
9.86.8.

90  
9.107.4.

are fixed and stationary like the mountains, and, sharing another characteristic of the mountains, Soma as the skambha supports Heaven and the mid-region in their place. Soma's firm stability then is as essential to the cosmos as is his dynamic movement.

Because of his support and mediation of the whole of the cosmos, Soma is called the 'King of the Cosmos', thereby joining Mitra and Varuṇa as ruling powers. This regal attribute is recognition of his pervasive power in the cosmos:

O thou who seest all things, Sovran as thou art and passing strong, thy rays encompass all above, Pervading with thy natural powers [dharmabhiḥ] thou flowest on, and as the whole world's Lord, O Soma, thou art king.

viṣvā dhāmāni viṣvacaksha ṛibhvasaḥ prabhos te  
sataḥ pari yanti ketavaḥ  
vyānaṣiḥ pavase soma dhārmabhiḥ patir viṣvasya  
bhuvanaśya rājasi 91

Pervading the whole cosmos by his flowing movement is the 'natural power' or dharmabhiḥ of Soma, and it is upon that dharma, as the mediator in the cosmic structure, that Soma rules all that is. Soma's regal role as the pervasive mediator within the cosmos is associated both with the bringing of light, hence with Agni, and with the waters, thereby associating him with Indra. Both of these associations establish Soma's dharma over the whole Earth:

The sovran dips him in the sea and in the streams,  
and set in rivers with the waters waves moves on:  
High heaven's sustainer [dharuṇo] at the central  
point of earth,  
raised on the fleecy surface Pavamana stands.

He on whose high decree [dharmabhiḥ] the heavens  
and earth depend  
hath roared and thundered like the summit of the sky.  
Soma flows on obtaining Indra's friendly love  
and, as they purify him, settles in the jars.

Thou art the sea, O sage, who bringest light;  
under thy law [vidharmani] are the five regions  
of the world.

Thou reachest out beyond the earth, beyond the  
heavens:  
thine are the lights, O Pavamana, thine the Sun.

rājā samudraṃ nadyo vi gāhate pām ūrmiṃ sacate  
sindhushu śritah  
adhy asthāt sānu pavamāno avyayaṃ nābhā prithivyā  
dharuṇo māho divah

divo na sānu stanayann acikradad dyaus ca yasya  
prithivī ca dharmabhiḥ  
īndrasaya sakhyam pavāte vivevidat somaḥ punānah  
kalāṣeshu sīdati

tvam samudro asi viṣvavit kave tavemāḥ pañca pradiṣo  
vidharmani tvam dyām ca prithivīm cātī jabhrishe  
tava jyotinshi pavamāna sūryaḥ 92

93

Within Soma's realm the 'five regions of the world' the waters  
of the sea and the light of the heavens are engulfed by the  
influence of his dharma. He sustains Heaven (prithivyā  
<sup>94</sup>dharuṇo), and, in consequence, both Heaven and Earth are  
dependent upon Soma's dharma. Indeed, the point is that the  
whole cosmos and all life within it depend upon Soma in his  
capacity to mediate between the particulars in all that is.

The effect of Soma's dharma which is mediation is to

92  
9.86.8,9,29.

93  
9.86.29.

94  
9.86.8.

establish contact with the powers. Consequently, Soma moves from the sacrifice to the gods as in 9.63.22:

God, working with mankind, flow on;  
to Indra go thy gladdening juice:  
To Vāyu mount as law commands [dharmaṇā].

pavasva devāyushag indraṃ gachatu te madaḥ  
vāyum ā roha dharmaṇā.

Here, inspired by the yajña, Soma flows to Indra and to Indra's charioteer, Vāyu. In doing so, Soma conveys from man to the gods the sacrificial food, and inspires the god to bring wealth and strength to the sacrificial community. This affirms the reciprocity of relation between gods, powers, and man.

Pour hitherward, O Soma wealth in thousands and  
heroic strength,  
And keep renown secure [dhāraya] for us.

Soma do thou secure [dhāraya] for us the treasures  
of the earth and heaven,  
Indu, all boons to be desired.

āpavasva sahasriṇam rayiṃ soma suvīryam  
asme śravāṅsi dhāraya

asme vasūni dhāraya soma divyāni pārthivā  
indo viśvāni vāryā 95

In summary, Soma upholds the cosmos by mediating between the structures of the cosmos, and the powers and life forms which inhabit it. Soma's skambha supports the structure and his pervasive presence in the waters released



into creation by Indra enables him to flow from the yajña to the gods and back again. In doing so, Soma follows the pathways established by Mitra and Varuṇa. Without Soma, then, a vital link in the upholding task of the gods would be absent from the created realm. Soma is an essential component in the upholding function of the gods, the integration of which is essential to the functioning of the cosmos in whole and in its many parts. He is an essential power in the collective upholding of the inter-relatedness of all that is.

##### 5. DHARMA AND THE COSMOS: A SUMMARY

At the outset of this consideration of the references to dharma and its related forms in the Rg Veda, it was suggested that the task involved looking at all the references in their immediate setting and in relation to a larger cosmological theme. On the basis of such a study, we proposed that it would be possible to grasp a broad picture of what is expressed in dharma's various meanings and on the basis of that picture, establish a core or root meaning.

The picture that has emerged has certain basic characteristics. For example, in the associations of the gods we have seen a picture of a pantheon of powers who act in accord with one another and with man to uphold the cosmos.

Agni, the first-born of creation brings into creation both speech as mantra and light as the Sun, and the sacrificial fire. Indra, his brother, brings the strength to conquer the forces that withhold creation and the nourishing waters. Viṣṇu works in accord with Indra by holding the triple structure of creation together and the Ādityas pervade the movement of the cosmos in accord with rta, the pathways of movement for the sun, of regeneration and of the sacrifice. Soma, the essence of the waters moves between the sacrifice and the gods to provide the sustenance for all that is in creation.

While this picture is a simplification of a very complex and interrelated set of actions by the powers, it is a picture in which one can discern a broad pattern which reflects the manner in which the gods act according to their truth as dharma to uphold the cosmos in a co-operative and co-ordinated way. The symbiotic actions of the gods suggests that dharma is in creation from its conception as an inherent expression of sat and hence satya, truth. In the revelatory speech of the hymns of the Rg Veda, dharma is the word, first seen by the ṛsis, which is the linguistic expression of the upholding, or supporting power-principle in creation. This power-principle is conveyed on some occasions as 'dharma' and hence as a concept, but more often

it is expressed in the forms of concrete action by the gods. In many and diverse ways, the gods act through verb forms of √dhr to show what it means to uphold the cosmos - a task so complex, that it requires many powers to co-operate in a shared duty so that the whole of the cosmos and each part within it can be its truth in its action.

On the basis of the significance seen in the meanings of dharma in the cosmological context, we have established the basis for articulating the core or root meaning of dharma as the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is. Our task now is to examine the relation of the cosmological meanings to the theme of the sacrifice and subsequently to the vedic community which preserved the Rg Veda.

## CHAPTER THREE

DHARMA AND THE SACRIFICE (YAJÑA)

In the section 'Dharma and the Cosmos' we saw that the sacrifice was the ritual means whereby man participates in the upholding of the cosmos. Man joins Agni and Indra, the Ādityas and Soma in propping up Heaven and Earth. In this section, the ways in which dharma references are used in the actions of the gods and man in the sacrificial rites will be considered. Our purpose is not to discuss the nature of the sacrifice in toto as it is referred to in the text,<sup>1</sup> nor to interpret the meaning of the sacrifice in the Rg Veda in all its aspects.<sup>2</sup> The ways in which the powers we have thus far examined - Agni, Indra, the Ādityas,<sup>3</sup> and Soma - function in relation to the sacrifice through the

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<sup>1</sup>  
For a discussion of the various vedic sacrifices, cf. Louis Renou, Vedic India, pp. 93-120. For specialized examination of the royal consecration sacrifice see: J. C. Heesterman, The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration, (The Hague, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>  
For an interesting interpretation of the sacrifice, cf. M. Eliade, Cosmos and History, The Myth of the Eternal Return, (New York, 1959), esp. "Archetypes and Repetition" pp. 1-48.

<sup>3</sup>  
Henceforward we shall simply refer to the Ādityas, since Viṣṇu's dharma only involves his three steps establishing the unity of the cosmos.

diverse forms of the root dhr will be examined in order to establish whether these references contribute to the formulation of a core or root meaning of dharma. By way of introduction, an examination of the hymn 10.90, will show a correlation between the origin of sacrifice and the origin of creation which will provide a framework for understanding the patterns of correspondance between the sacrificial functions of the gods and those of man. That is to say, there is an identifiable correlation in 10.90. between cosmological and ritual actions of the gods. In turn, the vedic ritual is modeled on the ritual of the gods and is the medium which, as we have seen, integrates man into the cosmic upholding task of the gods. To understand the correspondences between the cosmological functions of the gods, the gods sacrifice and the vedic sacrifice we want to consider the significance of the fact that the god's ritual is a pattern of actions understood to be an expression of dharma.

The patterns of correspondence are based upon the fact that the gods were the first to offer the yajña. In 10.90. 6-13, yajña by the gods entailed the dividing-up of one-quarter of the Puruṣa, the cosmic spirit, into the many aspects of the cosmos. The actions of the gods were the means by which the Puruṣa was differentiated. Creation itself is the sacrificial offspring, offered up by the gods to that three-quarters of the Puruṣa which transcended

4  
creation. In consequence of the yajña, the gods ascended to the pinnacle of heaven.

One of the most important facts about this sacrificial rite is that it is spoken of as the earliest expressions of dharma:<sup>5</sup>

Gods, sacrificing sacrificed the victim:  
these were the earliest ordinances [dharmāni].  
The mighty ones attained the height of heaven,  
these were the Sādhyas, Gods of old as dwelling.

yajñam yajñam ayajanta devās tāni dharmāni  
prathamāny āsan  
te ha nākam mahimānaḥ sacanta yatra pūrve sādhyāḥ  
santi devāḥ 6

The 'earliest ordinances' are the actions of the gods which contribute to the creative process of differentiation in which the Puruṣa, the unitary spirit which enfolds all that is (sat), takes diverse forms in creation: - as the gods, as the seasons within Heaven and Earth, as the Vedas and all forms of life on the Earth.<sup>7</sup> The unfolding patterns of creation which we saw in our discussion of the cosmology of the Rg Veda, are here portrayed in the image of a cosmic

4  
cf. 10.90.3.

5  
Our major concern here is with the ritual of the hymns and not their chronological setting. For a discussion of the chronological issue of the Tenth Māṇḍala cf. Renou, "La Composition Du Dixieme Māṇḍala" E.V.P. 2, pp. 1-29

6  
10.90.16; cf. the same passage in 1.164.50.

7  
10.90.3-16.

sacrifice. The gods are the sacrificers and as they act to offer the sacrifice, creation unfolds in all its diversity. All of the actions of the gods are here portrayed as ritual actions and as such are expressions of what dharma means.

In the correspondence between the processes of creation and the offering of the sacrifice the functions of the gods are also differentiated according to their respective manifestations so that they function individually in the process of creation and in the yajña. The gods functions are co-ordinated, so that they meld together to constitute a sacrifice. The sacrifice has many constituent factors, but it is also a composite whole in which all parts are indispensable. This corresponds to the symbiotic functions of the gods in creation. In order to see the complexity of the correspondences between the meaning of dharma in the cosmology and the sacrifice of the gods and man, we must examine each of the powers which express their sacrificial functions through the root dhr and see how each thereby contributes to the sacrifice. This will help determine whether the identification of the sacrifice and the creative process is also reflected in an identity of root meaning.

## 1. DHARMA, AGNI AND THE SACRIFICE

In the symbiotic functions of the gods, Agni, as the first-born, "son of waters" apām napāt, brought into creation light - as the Golden Foetus, the Sun and the sacrificial fire - and mantra, the speech which names all that is. Both light and mantra are manifest forms of the rite of sacrifice. The coming of the Sun at dawn<sup>8</sup> establishes the time of day for the sacrifice and the Sun's seasonal movements set the time in the year for various sacrifices. As the sacrificial fire Agni is an indispensable part of the ritual itself<sup>9</sup> and as the bringer of the mantra, Agni is the power of truth in the sacrifice. Agni's manifestations are in the cosmos at many levels, from the foetal beginning to the sacrificial fire. Agni is therefore pervasive in all creation and all life-forms. That man also upholds the cosmos through the sacrifice, is made possible by the correct utilization of the elements, light and mantra, which Agni brings into creation.

In elaboration on the earlier discussion of Agni, consideration must now be given to the ways in which Agni functions specifically in the sacrifice through references to dhr and dharma in order to establish if those functions

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<sup>8</sup>  
cf. 1.48.3.

<sup>9</sup>  
For a careful discussion of Agni's manifestation on Earth as the Sacrificial Fire, see Kramrisch, Op. cit. pp. 2, #1, pp. 171-175, 2, #2, pp. 260-265.



contribute to a root meaning of the term. We shall examine Agni's manifest forms in sacrifice to see how they are related to light and mantra. We shall then examine how those manifest forms in the sacrifice tie together the functions of numerous powers - Agni, Indra, and Varuṇa in particular - establishing dharma as yajña and as the basis for the relatedness of all that is.

In the ritual, Agni is a manifest form of light as the sacrificial fire which, when lit, brings the gods to the yajña:

Duly enkindled after ancient customs, bringing  
all treasures  
he is balmed with unguents, —  
Flame-haired oil-clad the purifying Agni,  
skilled in fair rites,  
to bring the Gods for worship.

samidhyamānaḥ prathamānu dharmā sam aktubhir  
ajyate viṣvavārah  
śocishkeṣō ghritānirnik pāvakaḥ suyajño agnir  
yajathāyā devān 10'

Agni is ignited 'after ancient customs' dharma, that is, in direct imitation of the sacrificial dharma of the gods.

Agni is not, however, simply a manifestation of light as the sacrificial fire. In his manifestations related to the mantra, Agni is first the kavi, the visionary poet and also the priest who chants the mantra in the rite. As the kavi, Agni functions according to dharma, as the god who abides within the mundane order as the yajña and at the

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10  
3.17.1, cf. 4.58.2.

hearth - there to be the divine kavi who sees the gods. In essence Agni becomes the visionary who speaks the mantra:

This sage, the Sages, ne'er deceived, commanded,  
setting him down in dwelling of the living.  
Hence mayst thou friendly God, with rapaid footsteps  
behold the gods, wonderful, fair to look on.

kaviṃ śasāsuh kavayo 'dabdhā nidhārayanto duryāsv āyoh  
atas tvaṃ drīsyān agna etāṃ padbhiḥ paṣyer adbhutān  
arya evaiḥ 11

The kavi expresses the manifestation of Agni. When one sees the gods, the vision is witness to the indwelling of Agni. It is this indwelling which distinguishes the kavi who speaks the truth from the one who claims to speak the truth, but speaks falsely. Only Agni's words can be the mantra for the sacrifice. Thus Agni is praised in the mantra as the kavi whose truth is dharma:

Praise Agni in the sacrifice, the Sage  
whose ways are ever true, [satya dharmānam]  
The God who driveth grief away.

kaviṃ agnim upastuhi satyadharmānam adhvare  
devam amīvacātanam 12

The effect of Agni's dharma is the gift of vision to the kavi. That gift ensures that the community possesses true knowledge in the mantra which ensures that yajña is efficacious. Agni is praised in the sacrifice as the kavi because the knowledge which he brings through vision as expressed in mantra ensures

11  
4.2.12.

12  
1.12.7.

that the community will be well-nourished and sustained, knowing no 'grief'. In making his truth known to the sacrificial community, Agni completes the circle of relatedness holding all creation together, in the truth which functions as dharma

In addition to being the ritual fire, and in addition to his intimate relationship to the visionary as poet and mantra, Agni is the Priest, the hotr who chants the mantra:

That Priest before thee, yet more skilled in worship, established of old, health-giver by his nature, - After his custom [dharma] offer, thou who knowest, and lay our sacrifice where God may taste it.

yas tvad dhota pūrvo agne yajīyān dvita ca  
sattā svadhayā ca sambhuḥ  
tasyānu dharma pra'yajā cikitvo 'thā no dha adhvaram  
devavītau 13

As the priest among the gods, Agni, according to his dharma, conveys the sacrifice to the god to whom it is offered. As the gods offered the original sacrifice of Puruṣa to Puruṣa, the sacrifice which is offered within the vedic community in re-enactment of that divine model, offers the manifest forms of Agni - the fire and the song as the mantra - to the gods and powers. As the gods in their sacrifice rise 'to the highest height' of heaven close to the source of creation so is the mundane yajña conveyed to the gods by Agni.

The parallel between the divine sacrifice and the human sacrifice depicts Agni as functioning in both. As such, Agni acts according to dharma to uphold both the gods and men:

Him Agni, Gods and men have made their chief support, [dharmānam], who drinks the fatness and completes the sacrifice.

imam añjaspām ubhaye akṛiṇvata dharmānam agniṃ vidathasya sādhanam 14

This dharma, as the most ancient of principles in creation, abides in Agni and his manifest forms:

The holy statutes [dharmāna] rest by thee, as 'twere with ladles that overflow.

tve dharmāna āsate juhūbhiḥ siñcatīr iva 15

The inseparable association of Agni and sacrificial rites as dharma is reflected in several epithets which celebrate Agni's precedence in creation and his significance in the yajña as a manifestation of dharma in operation within creation. For example, Agni is the 'King' (rāja) of Men, who is the overseer or "President of Holy Laws" (adhyaksham <sup>16</sup> dharmānam). He is also the 'Friend' (mitra):

Den Agni rufe ich an, den Jüngsten der (Opfer-)geniesser, den freund, der durch Befehl schwer festzuhalten ist, in dessen Gehot die bunten (Flammen) die Sonne ehren, das Euter der Mutter.

J'invoque Agni, le plus jeune des (dieux) qui

14  
10.92.2.

15  
10.21.3.

16  
8.43.24.

jouissent (du sacrifice),  
 l'ami difficile à tenir un commandement,  
 (Agni) sous l'ordre- corrélatif duquel (ses flammes)  
 bigarrées honorent le soleil (comme les veaux  
 honorent) la mamelle de leur mère.

agnim Īle bujāṃ yavish\_ṭhaṃ sāsā mitram  
 durdharitum  
 yasya dharman svar enīḥ saparyanti mātur  
 ūdhaḥ 17

As the 'Friend', Agni is a participant in yajña. As such, he keeps firm difficult commands. The commands are the rites in which dharma expresses the movement of the ritual fire upwards to the Sun, Sūrya. The correspondence of the fire and the Sun is based upon Agni's manifestation as light. Agni (fire) rises to Agni (Sun) and this movement celebrates the way in which all aspects of creation are tied together. This relatedness is conveyed in the images of fire, Sun, cow and calf. As the fire 'honours' the Sun by rising toward it, there is acknowledgement that the Sun, like the breast of the mother cow, is the source of nourishment. The Sun in turn is the off-spring of the two great Mothers, Heaven and Earth and these two main parts of the triple structure of creation look back to the primordial division of sat from asat with which creation began and out of which arose Agni, the first born in the Golden Foetus. All forms of creation are related

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17

D.R.V. 10.20.2, E.V.P. 14, pp. 10-11. Griffith misses the complexity of the relationships between the verb and noun uses of the root dhr in this passage. He translates 10.20.2 as follows:

(continued)

and all function to uphold that which is (sat). In those upholding functions, the sacrifice ties creation together because it involves an offering up of the totality of creation to Puruṣa when the gods sacrifice, and the offering up of food to the gods when the vedic community sacrifices. Agni as the ritual fire is the vehicle which carries the offering to Sūrya who in turn nourishes Agni and the Earth with light and heat. The sacrifice and Agni's dharma in it is the link which connects the vedic community to the gods, and the source of creation itself.

This place of the yajña as dharma in the relatedness of all aspects of creation is further illustrated in the epithets which describe Agni as the messenger or 'Envoy of the Gods'.

Victor of thousands, Agni, thou enkindled  
cherishest the laws [dharmāni]  
Laud-worthy envoy of the Gods.

samidhānaḥ sahasrajid agne dharmāni pushyasi  
devā nām dūta ukthyah 18

---

17 (continued)

I worship Agni youthfulest of Gods, resistless,  
Friend of Laws;  
Under whose guard and heavenly light the Spotted  
seek the Mother's breast.

18  
5.26.6.

According to his dharmāni, Agni, as 'envoy', is the kavi<sup>19</sup> who calls the gods to the sacrifice, and, once they are present, he functions as the Priest (hotr)<sup>20</sup> who chants the mantra at the rite to entice the powers into meeting the needs of the community.

As the messenger or 'Envoy of the Gods', Agni is depicted as the bringer of wealth<sup>21</sup> to the human community and to the gods. Thus in a repeated refrain in 1.96 it is said that "the gods possessed the wealth bestowing Agni" (devā agnim dhārayan dravinodām)<sup>22</sup> and the entire context of the hymn makes clear that the wealth is Agni's gift of wisdom and progeny to both men and gods<sup>23</sup>.

The fact that Agni is 'possessed' (dhārayan) by the gods in his function of bringing wealth expressed the necessity of the interrelated functioning of Agni and the

19  
5.26.3.

20  
5.26.4.

21  
cf. 5.15.1 8.27.16. The function of the gods to bring wealth to the vedic community will be an important part of our discussion below of 'Dharma and the Vedic Community', p. 184 f.f.

22  
1.96.1-7

23  
cf. particularly, 10.96.1, 6,7.

other powers in the fulfillment of dharma. The relatedness is expressed in the identification of one god with another. Thus, Agni is Varuṇa, who upholds duties, dhṛitavrata, and Mitra, Aryaman and Anṣa:

Agni, thou art King Varuṇa whose laws stand fast  
[dhṛitavratas]:  
 as Mitra, Wonder-Worker, thou must be implored.  
 Aryaman, heroes' Lord, art thou, enriching all and  
 liberal Anṣa in the synod, O thou God.

tvam agne rājā varuṇo dhṛitavratas tvam mitro bhavasi  
 dasma idyah  
 tvam aryamā satpatir yasya sambhujam tvam anṣo  
 vidathe deva bhājayuh 25

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24

cf. 10.66.5,8. This hymn is dedicated to Viṣvadeva, or 'All Gods' and emphasizes thereby the inseparable relationships of the gods to one another:

With Holy thoughts Sarasvān, firm-lawed Varuṇa,  
 great Vāyu, Pūshnan Vishṇu and the Aṣvins Twain,  
 Lords of all wealth, Immortal, furthers of prayer,  
 grant us a triply-guarding refuge from distress.

Potent, with firm-fixed laws, arranging sacrifice,  
 visiting solemn rites in splendour of the day,  
 Obeying Order, these whose priest is Agni, free from  
 falsehood, poured the waters out when Vṛitra died.

sarasvān dhībhir varuṇo dhṛitavratāḥ pūshā vishṇur  
 mahimā vāyur aṣvinā  
 brahmakṛito amṛitā viṣvavedasaḥ sarma no yaṅsan  
 trivarūtham anhasaḥ

dhṛitavratāḥ kshatriyā yajñanishkṛito bṛihaddivā  
 adhvarānām abhisriyaḥ  
 agnihotāra ritasāpo adruho 'po asṛijann anu  
 vṛitratūrye

25

2.1.4; cf. 1.44.14.



The visionary expresses Agni's identification with these gods as he arises from the sacrificial fire as the envoy or messenger. Agni conveys the sacrificial offering to these gods, calling them to be present at the rite to receive the offering. In turn, the gods, nourished by the sacrifice, in their respective ways, act to uphold the cosmos. Because Agni is the vehicle for the gods' nourishment, he is identified with the gods and their functions. Thus Agni is Varuṇa who upholds the vrata or duties.

Agni is also identified with Indra in connection with the Asvamedha or Horse Sacrifice.

Indra und Agni: Erhältet bei Aṣvamedha, dem Hundertshenker, die Meisterschaft, die Herrschaft so hoch wie die Sonne am Himmel, nie alternd!

indrāgnī śatadāvny aṣvamedhe suvīryam  
kshatram dhārayatam bṛihad divi sūryam ivājaram 26

26

D.R.V. 5.27.6. Griffith misses the force of dharayatam almost entirely in his translation:

To Aṣvamedha who bestows a hundred gifts,  
grant hero power, O Indra-Agni!  
Lofty rule like the unwasting Sun in heaven.

Renou, like Geldner is closer to the mark in interpreting the significance of the term:

O Indra et Agni, maintenez chez (cet) Aśvamedha, donneur de cent (vaches), l'abondance en hommes-d'élite, le pouvoir séculier haut come le soleil au ciel, exempt de vieillir.

E.V.P., 13, p. 34.

Here Agni and Indra are sustained by the Aṣvamedha sacrifice. In turn it is expected that Agni and Indra will support the kshatra, royal power, in the same way that they support the Sun in its celestial orbits. The yajña is a means through which the needs of the vedic community are realized. Agni and Indra each contribute in this task: Agni through his presence in the sacrifice as fire and Priest and Indra by extending his strength or force to the activities of the newly enthroned king who offers the Aṣvamedhayajña.

The relationship which is established between Agni and the sacrifice then is one in which Agni brings the elements into creation necessary for the sacrifice and makes those elements function according to his dharma. In its functioning, Agni conveys the sacrifice to the gods empowering their respective participation in the cosmos and in the rite according to their individual and collective dharma. This interrelatedness of the gods, the sacrifice and Agni is described in terms of the relation of the rim or 'felly' and the spokes of the wheel:

By thee, O Agni, Varuṇa who guards the law,  
Mitra and Aryaman, the Bounteous are made strong;  
For as the felly holds the spokes, thou with thy  
might pervading hast been born encompassing the round.

tvyā hy agne varuṇo dhṛitavrato mitraḥ śāṣadre  
aryamā sudānavah  
yat sīm anu kratunā viṣvathā vibhur arān na nemiḥ  
paribhūr ajāyathāḥ 27

In this hymn Agni is the power which enables Varuṇa to uphold the law (dhṛitavratā), and their relationship is compared to the rim of a wheel which holds the spokes in place.

The spokes in turn support the wheel in its movement. Agni is the rim which enfolds the gods who are the spokes and in the enfolding Agni enables them to function according to their respective dharma. Varuṇa upholds their duties (dhṛitavratā). The gods as the spokes support Agni while Varuṇa enables Agni to uphold his duties:

Agni to thee whose laws stand fast [dhṛitavratāya]  
our resonant songs of praise speed forth  
as rivers hasten to the sea.

agne dhṛitavratāya te samudrāyeva sindhavaḥ  
giro vāsrāsa īrate 28

Agni's vrata involves receiving the songs offered at the yajña, and conveying them to the gods as 'rivers hasten to the sea'. Thus Agni functions as the founder and provisioner of the yajña, and as the power who makes the ritual possible by maintaining the relatedness of the sacrifice and the gods.

Agni's upholding of vrata (dhṛitavratā) complimented by the same function attributed to Varuṇa, is the reflection of the fact that these two must maintain their duties by following the pathways of orderliness (ṛta) which forge and maintain the interrelatedness of all creation. As the 'song'

29

moves forth from the yaṅṅa "as rivers hasten to the sea"  
so too, the gods move to attend the yaṅṅa and gain sustenance  
from it.

Let those who strengthen law [ritavridah] who  
bountifully give,  
the fire tongued Maruts, hear our praise,  
May law-supporting Varuṅa [dhritavrato] with the  
Aṣvins twain and Ushas drink the Soma juice.

ṣrinvantu stomam marutaḥ sudānavo 'gnijihvā  
ritāvridhah  
pibatū somam varuṅo dhritavrato 'ṣvibhyām  
ushasāsajuh. 30

In their movement to the sacrifice the gods are "those who  
strengthen law (ritavridha) or orderliness. That is, the  
gods strengthen the pathways of movement connecting the  
sacrificial fire, the sacrificial songs, and themselves. Thus  
Agni, as the 'fire-tongued Maruts' or the leaping flames  
of the sacrificial fire, hears the praise of the sacrificial  
song and calls the upholder of duties (dhritavrata),  
Varuṅa, the Aṣvins, and Uṣas (dawn) to drink Soma at the  
yaṅṅa. These gods, then, are all represented as moving to  
and from the sacrifice along the pathways (rta). Agni as  
the Maruts or flames of the ritual fire keeps his commitment  
according to the wishes of the power, Varuṅa, who is  
responsible for upholding all duties.

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29  
8.44.25

30  
1.44.14

Agni maintains this interrelatedness between the gods and powers, and the sacrifice offered by the vedic community, through his own adherence to the pathways (ṛta) of orderly motion.<sup>31</sup> Like Agni, these pathways take many forms. We have seen one expression as the orderly movement of the Sun in its seasonal and daily pattern, but the term (ṛta) is also used to convey the name of the sacrifice. The orderliness of the rite involves following the timing established by the Sun for ignition of the sacrificial fire. Then there is the correct chanting of the mantra and the making and offering of the sacrificial food and Soma. When all of these aspects of sacrifice are orderly, the offering is conveyed upward by the fire to the gods. This ascent is also called 'ṛta'. These various forms of ṛta which are connected with the sacrifice further establishes the relatedness of all that is:

By holy law [ṛitena] they kept supporting order  
[ṛitam dharunaṃ] by help of  
sacrifice in loftiest heaven.

They who attained with born men to the unborn,  
men seated on that stay, heaven's firm sustainer

[dharmandharuṇe]

ṛitena ṛitam dharunaṃ dhārayanta yajñasya śāke parame  
vyoman  
divo dharman dharuṇe sedusho nṛīn jātair ajātān abhi  
ye nanakshuh 32

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<sup>31</sup>  
cf. 10.66.8.

<sup>32</sup>15.2.

By the principle of rta, the orderly relatedness is established and maintained through the yajña. Moving along these pathways, the sons of creation, both the gods and men, attain the 'unborn' (ajātān) source of all creation and are upheld (dharune) by the dharma manifested in the heavens which comes from that unborn source. Thus dharma functions to support the pathways of rta. Rta is transparent to dharma. When the gods and men act in accord with rta they do so because it is in accord with the dharma which supports orderliness.

Agni's founding of the sacrifice and his movement from the rite to the gods and from their sacrifice to the source of creation along the pathways of rta is understood to be Agni's characteristic function according to dharma:

To him who shines afar, Vaiṣvānara, shall bards  
give precious things that he may go on certain paths;  
For Agni the immortal serves the Deities, and therefore  
never breaks their everlasting laws.

vaiṣvānarāya prithupājase vipo ratnā vidhanta  
dharuṇeshu gātave  
agnir hi devān amṛito duvasyaty athā dharmāṇi  
sanatā na dūdushat 33

Agni, in his earthly manifestation as Vaiṣvānara, is offered by the vipra, the 'bard' who is the 'quivering one', precious things (ratna) in order that Agni will go to the foundation (dharuṇeshu) of all that is. Agni as the immortal one (amṛita), who by virtue of his pervasiveness and source in the foundation of all that is, follows the pathways of movement in all creation.

In summary, Agni's dharma with regard to the sacrifice is of a foundational order. Not only does he bring into creation the elements which constitute the sacrifice, but he also participates through those elements to make the ritual a powerful vehicle of dharma. As an expression of dharma, yajña functions to uphold the relatedness of the gods and the human community to the very source of all creation and provides the vehicle of maintaining that relatedness.

## 2 . DHARMA, INDRA AND THE SACRIFICE

Indra compliments his brother Agni's manifestations in the fire and in the mantra with the strength or force which releases the waters from their bondage in Vṛtra. Once released the waters make possible the flourishing of life on earth. These functions performed by Indra are supported by the yajña for it is in the sacred ritual that Indra is fed with the mysterious food Soma which stimulates him to achieve his heroic deeds. There is therefore an important connection between Indra and the sacrifice. Our concern is to see the relationship between Indra and the rite through the references to dharma. We shall first examine Indra's strength as his characteristic in the sacrifice and then see how Indra applies his strength as his dharma to the task of making the ritual effective. In doing so, Indra is the guardian of the yajña and, with Varuṇa, helps to uphold the vrata or duty of all the

gods who must also contribute their characteristic functions to make the sacrifice effective.

Indra's strength is awesome and for our purposes it is most important to see that Indra's strength is a 'quality' (dharma) of his nature:

Du, Indra, besitzt die Eigenschaften [dharmanām]  
grosser Mannhaftigkeit um sie wie einen Berg  
zu nutzen.

tvam tam indra parvatam na bhojase maho nṛimṇasya  
dharmanām irajyasi 34

Indra's dharma or 'quality' is his strength. This quality is based on his source in the asura, the Godhead:

Thy raptures ever were for all men's profit:  
so evermore have been thine earthly riches.  
Thou still has been the dealer-forth of vigour,  
since among the gods thou hast [dhārayathā]  
power and godhead.

satrā madāsas tava viṣvajanyāḥ satrā rāyo 'dha  
ye pārthivāsaḥ  
satrā vājānām abhvaḥ vibhaktā yad deveshu dhārayathā  
asuryam 35

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34  
D.R.V. 1.55.3. Griffith's translation misses the meaning of dharma in this passage as 'quality' or 'characteristic' of Indra. Griffith reads:

Thou swayest Indra all kinds of great manly power,  
so as to bend, as 'twere, even that famed mountain  
down.

Foremost among the Gods is he through hero might,  
set in the van the Strong one,  
for each arduous deed.

1.55.3

35  
6.36.1.



The combination of Indra's source in the Godhead and the characteristic of his dharma as strength assures that the applications of strength or force will be in support of creation. For example, we have seen how Indra releases the life supporting waters into creation. Similarly in 6.63.1, his strength is 'for all men's profit'.

The quality of Indra's power as dharma is applied not only to the great cosmological act of slaying Vṛtra, but is also directed toward empowering the sacrifice. Armed with his mighty weapon, the vajra, Indra directs his weapon at the demon. As a ritual response to Indra's show of strength, he is offered up the food which sustains his mighty power:

Down from the mountains Indra shot hither his  
well-directed shaft:  
He gained [dhārayat] the ready brew of rice.

nir āvidhyadgiribhya ā dhārayat  
pakvam odanam  
indro bundam svātataṃ 36

Since the context of offering food to the gods is in the sacrifice, 8.77.6 suggests a correlation between Indra's great act against Vṛtra and his own sustenance gained from the sacrifice. This correlation is comprehensible in the light of Rg Veda 10.90 in which the unfolding of creation is a ritual act of the gods. In the ritual the gods offer creation to the Puruṣa. Within the ritually established

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<sup>36</sup>  
8.77.6, (Griffith, 8.65.6.)

creation, the sacrifice or yajña is established by the gods, then imitated and maintained by the vedic community. From the sacrifice in the mundane world, comes the 'ready brew of rice' as the offering to Indra for his presence in creation as strength and force. The connection between the offering and the necessity for Indra's strength in the sacrifice is celebrated in 10.44.1:

May sovran Indra come to the carousal,  
he who by Holy Law [dharmanā] is strong and active,  
The overcomer of all conquering forces with  
his great steer-like power that hath no limit.

ā yātv indrah svapatir madāya yo dharmanā  
tūtujānas tuviśhmān  
pratvakshāṇo atī viṣvā saḥānsy apāreṇa mahatā  
vrishṇyena

In this reference the emphasis is on the direct connection between Indra's dharma which is his strength, and the support which is given to that power in the sacrifice. In 10.44.5 one application of Indra's strength and of his relationship to the sacrifice is his empowering of the sacrificial vessels according to his dharma:

May precious treasures come to us, - so will I pray.  
Come to the votary's gift offered with beauteous laud.  
Thou art the Lord as such sit on this holy grass:  
thy vessels are inviolate as Law [dharmanā] commands.

gamann asme vasūny ā hi saṁsisham svāśisham bharam  
ā yāhi sominah  
tvam īsishe sāsminn ā satsi barhishy anādhrishya  
tava pātrāṇi dharmanā 37

Indra's power, then, functions in the great cosmological acts and in the most minute aspects of the sacrifice in order that both he and the rite can fulfill their respective function effectively.

One of the most important characteristics of Indra's presence at the sacrifice is the way in which his strength makes the various gods' manifestations in the sacrifice effective. Thus Agni's manifestations become Indra's 'vessels' patra:

All diese Soma opfer hast du wirkungsvoll gemacht,  
welche du, Sohn der Kraft, selbst dir angeeignet hast.  
Nach deinem Wunsche, zu deiner Verfügung  
sind der Reihe nach der Pecker, das Opfer,  
das Dichterwort, das angehobene  
Erbauungswort und die Rede.

etā viṣvā savanā tūtumā kṛishe svayaṃ sūno sahaso  
yāni dadhishe  
varāya te pātraṃ dharmāṇe tanā yajño mantrō  
brahmodyatam vacaḥ. 38

In this passage Indra is directly associated with the

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38

10.50.6. Griffith makes it very unclear what dharmana means in this passage:

All these libations thou makest effectual,  
of which thou art thyself supporter, Son of Power.  
Therefore thy vessel is to be esteemed the best,  
sacrifice, holy text, prayer and exalted speech.

Geldner emphasizes that it is according to Indra's dharmana or ordinance that the vessels are in their proper place.\*

39

yajña, mantra, brahmodyata and vāc. These 'vessels', all of which are related to the yajña, function according to Indra's dharma in order that "the work consisting of sustaining, of maintaining, be accomplished".<sup>40</sup> The yajña as a whole and its parts - mantra, brahmodyata and vāc - gains its effectiveness through Indra, who is the 'Son of Power'. While Indra's brother, Agni, brings the sacrifice, the mantra and Speech into creation, it is his brother who makes those elements function powerfully. In doing so Indra fulfills his characteristic dharma, and assists Agni to fulfill his.

Like his brother Agni, Indra is in the sage, in this instance called the vipra, 'the quivering one'<sup>41</sup> and his presence in the vipra inspires the chanting of a Sāma hymn:

39

Griffith's translation of brahmodyata as 'prayer' is not very adequate. Geldner uses 'das angehobene Erbauungswort' (D.R.V. 10.50.6.) which emphasizes the sense of devotional or spiritual word. Later use of the term suggests that it refers to theological debate, though that sense may not be appropriate here. Perhaps the best that can be said, is that there is a sense of spiritual or devotional action in the term.

40  
Bergaigne, Op. cit., p.223.

41  
cf. note. 10, Part One, Chapter One, p.

To Indra sing a Sāma hymn, a lofty son to softy sage  
To him who guards the Law, inspired and fain for praise.

Indraya sāma gāyata viprāya bṛihate bṛihat  
dharmakṛite vipaścite panasyave 42

Indra is also the power in the context of the sacrifice who 'guards' dharma. This guardianship is intimately connected with his function as vipra. Indra's power, as a result of the ritual chanting of a Sāma hymn, empowers the vipra to see a vision. Here then Indra joins with Agni to inspire the vipra to make manifest the visionary and poetic requirements for the sacrifice. In so doing, Indra fulfills or upholds his vrata:

Bards joined in song to Indra so that he might drink  
the Soma juice.  
The Lord of Light, that he whose laws stand fast  
might aid with power and with the help he gives.

sam īm rebhāso asvarann indraṃ somasya pītaye  
svarpātīm yad īm vṛidhe dhṛitāvratato hy ojasā sam  
ūtibhiḥ 43

Indra's ojas or power upholds his vrata or duty (dhṛitavrata). That ojas was the strength in Indra for his great cosmological acts and in the context of the sacrifice it makes a sequence of actions powerful. The vipra chants the song in the yajña where Indra is nourished with Soma. In turn, Indra uses his strength, reinvigorated with Soma, to inspire the vipra to new visions of the gods and their functions.

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42  
8.98.1.. (Griffith, 8.87.1)

43  
8.97.11. (Griffith, 8.86.11)

In Indra's relation to the vipra and to the sacrifice there is a reciprocal relationship established. On the one hand Indra's power is sustained by the sacrifice and the food (Soma) offered in the rite. On the other, Indra's power functions according to his dharma and vrata to make the sacrifice effective. These reciprocal aspects of inter-dependence are based on the way in which the concept of dharma conveys the individual, yet symbiotic roles of the gods and, through the sacrifice, of man. Each has its function and unique contribution, yet each is indispensable in the total picture of the cosmos and the sacrificial rite. Furthermore, each example of relatedness and reciprocity is connected to other examples. Thus, Indra's upholding of the vrata is related to his identification with Varuṇa and his regal function to uphold the vrata of all gods:

True to law [dhṛitavrata] Indra-Varuṇa drinkers of the  
juice,  
drink this pressed Soma which shall give you  
rapturous joy.  
Your chariot cometh to the banquet of the Gods,  
to sacrifice as it were home, that ye may drink.

indrāvaruṇā sutapāv imaṃ sutam somam pibatam madyam  
dhṛitavrata  
yuvo ratho advaram devavitaye prati svasaram upa  
yāti pitaye 44

Indra-Varuṇa keep the vrata by drinking the Soma at the 'banquet of the gods', the sacrifice, which is the model for the vedic yajña. Together, in keeping their vrata, Indra with Varuṇa maintain their part in the reciprocal relatedness so that the sacrifice can be effective.

This reciprocal relatedness is illustrated again in 10.167.3 in which it is Soma and Varuṇa's dharma in conjunction with Indra and other powers which enables the sacrificer to drink the Soma:

By royal Soma's and by Varuṇa's decree [dharmani],  
under Brihaspati's and Anumati's guard,  
This day by thine authority, O Maghavan, Maker,  
Disposer,  
thou! have I enjoyed the jars.

somasya rājño varuṇasya dharmani brihaspater  
anmatyā u śarmani  
tavāham adya maghavan upastutau dhātar  
vidhātāḥ kalaṣān abhakshayam

Here several powers meld their functions together under the dharma, of the royal pair, Soma and Varuṇa, to enable man to participate in the sacrifice and drink the Soma. The function of both Soma and Varuṇa, as we have seen, is the duty to uphold the orderliness of motion and mediation. In addition, Brihaspati, Anumati and Indra (Maghavan) all are here portrayed as participating in the (dharmani) of the sacrifice, so that it will be effective enabling the sacrificer to drink the Soma. The important point, for our purposes, is that each of these gods contributes to the sacrifice under the rubric

of the concept of dharma. Each in his own way has an indispensable part to play in the task of making the sacrifice powerful and effective.

In summary, Indra's function according to dharma in the sacrifice is essentially to make it effective. When the sacrifice is powerful, it supports the gods with food in the form of Soma and other offerings. With this support a god like Indra sustains the cosmos and the vedic sacrificing community.

### 3. DHARMA, ĀDITYAS AND THE SACRIFICE

In our discussion of the Ādityas and their role in the cosmos, the central theme of their function was focused around the concept of rta, the orderliness of motion or movement when the gods uphold the cosmos. Among the Ādityas, the two powers who were the most important were Mitra and Varuṇa, and in the present discussion, these two powers are the only Ādityas which function in the sacrifice in such a way that their action is expressed by one of the forms of dhr or dharma.

Our focus, then, is to see how the concern for orderliness on the part of Mitra and Varuṇa is given expression in the sacrifice.



In hymn 7.66.2, Mitra and Varuṇa are called exceedingly wise (sudakshā) for they have as their father wisdom itself (dakshapitarā). Their wisdom arises from their source in the Godhead, the asura and is sustained or upheld (dhārayanta) by all the gods.

The two exceeding wise, the Sons of Daksha,  
when the gods ordained [dhārayanta]  
For lordship excellently great.

ya dhārayanta devāḥ sudakshā dakshapitarā  
asuryāya pramaḥasā 45

Later in the same hymn, we find that these two deities are said to be: "true to law" (ritāvāna), "born in law" (ritajātā)<sup>46</sup> and "strengtheners of law" (ritāvridha). When the gods support Mitra and Varuṇa in their wisdom, they do so because, in turn, Mitra and Varuṇa maintain the orderliness in all the movements of gods and the cosmos. One manifestation of the orderly movement upheld by Mitra and Varuṇa is illustrated in the movement of the sacrificial 'song' upward to the gods:

Him who hath wrought for you this car in spirit,  
who makes the song rise upward and sustains it,  
Bedew with fatness, Varuṇa and Mitra:  
ye kings make glad the pleasant dwelling-places.

yo vāṃ gartam manasā takshad etam ūrdhvāṃ dhītiṃ  
kṛiṇavād dhārayac ca  
ukshethām mitrāvaruṇā ghṛitena tā rājānā sukshitīs  
tarpayethām 47

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45  
7.66.2.

46  
7.66.13.

47  
7.64.4.

Like the movement of the gods according to ṛta, the sacrificial chants must move along the proper pathways from the ritual setting to the assembly of the gods and it is the function of Mitra and Varuṇa to sustain and facilitate that movement.

In another hymn, the two gods are first called the 'charioteers', who uphold the vrata and then kings whose rule is in conformity to ṛta.

So, too like charioteers are they, Mitra and  
sapiant Varuṇa,  
Sons high-born from of old, whose holy laws  
stand fast.

They true to Law, exceeding strong have sat them  
down from sovran rule:  
Princes whose laws stand fast, they have obtained  
their sway.

mitra tana na rathyā varuṇo yaṣ ca sukratuḥ  
sanat sujatā tanaya dhṛitāvratā

ṛitāvānā ni shedatuḥ samrājyāya sukratū  
dhṛitavratā kshatriyā kshatram aṣatuḥ 48

As charioteers, and through their regal power (kshatriyā  
kshatra), these two gods are manifest in the function to  
uphold duty (vrata) so as to be 'true to law' (ṛitāvānā).  
Similarly, in 1.25.10, Varuṇa in the upholding of his vrata  
(dhṛitavrata) "sits down among his people; he, most wise  
sits there to govern all" ni shasāda dhṛitavrato varuṇaḥ  
pastyāsv ā sāmrajyāya sukratuḥ ; Varuṇa and Mitra are

depicted as 'princes' ksatriya who rule the cosmos. As rulers their task is to uphold the vrata of the various gods. Underlying this regal function is the concept of dharma. In each case, Varuṇa and Mitra must uphold rta or uphold the vrata. Dharma, then, is transparently present in the kingly duties.

Varuṇa's regal functions are sustained by those who offer the sacrifice:

This, this with joy they both accept in common:  
never do they fail the ever-faithful [dhritavratāya]  
worshipper.

tad it samānam aṣate venantā na pra yuchataḥ  
dhritavratāya dāṣushe 49

Here, the 'ever-faithful worshipper' binds Mitra and Varuṇa to their vrata by the offering of hymns in the sacrifice. This offering is said to bind Varuṇa's heart to compassion for those who are not in conformity with his duties or functions, for in his wisdom neither Varuṇa, nor for that matter, Mitra can be deceived.

Another aspect of Mitra and Varuṇa's function according to their dharma is to make the sacrifice effective for the men who offer the rite. Thus it is the result of a

49  
1.25.6.

50  
cf. 1.25.1,3.

51  
cf. 1.15.6.

vrata that men possess peace and the result of dharma that men are united to offer the Soma in a rite to Mitra and Varuṇa:

En vertu du voeu (divin) [vrata] vous (assurez aux hommes) une solide possession - pacifique; [dhruvakshemā]; en vertu de la loi (humaine) [dharmanā], vous faites s'organiser les hommes. Prenez place sur la litière afin de boire du soma.

Durch euer Gebot seid ihr Friedenshalter, von Rechts wegen einet ihr die Völker.  
- Setzet euch beide auf das Barhis zum Somatrunk.

vratena stho dhruvakshemā dharmanā yātayaḥjanā  
ni barhishisadataṃ somapītaye 52

The sacrificial offering to Mitra and Varuṇa inspires them to fulfill their function according to dharma and keep the cosmos moving in its orderly way:

Bring gifts to Mitra and to Varuṇa who, Lords of all, in spirit never fail the worshipper, whose statute [dhāma] shines on high through everlasting law [dharmanā]; whose places of sure refuge are the heavens and earth.

mitrāya śikṣa varuṇāya dāṣushe yā samrājā manasā na prayuchataḥ  
yayor dhāmā dharmanā rocate bṛihad yayor ubhe rodasī  
nādhasī vṛitau 53

The regal function of Mitra and Varuṇa is carried out according

52

D.R.V. 5.72.2, E.V.P. 5, p. 83. Griffith translates the passage as follows:

By ordinance and law ye dwell in peace secure,  
bestirring men,  
Sit on the sacred grass to drink the soma juice.  
Both Renou and Geldner, in contrast with Renou,

rightly emphasize the connections between vrata and the 'solide possession-pacifique' and dharma with its connection with Mitra and Varuṇa's role to 'faites s'organizer les hommes'.

53

10.65.5.

54

both to their dhāma, and dharma. Dhāma here, following the suggestion of Bergaigne, means 'nature' or essential characteristic. Thus, the phrase in 10.65.5 can be interpreted to mean: Mitra and Varuṇa's nature or essential characteristic shines on high by virtue of its foundation in dharma. Together, dhāma and dharma in this passage convey the meaning that it is the essential characteristic of these two gods to uphold and maintain the orderly relatedness between the sacrificial rite and the structures of the cosmos in Heaven and Earth. This function is the essential characteristic of Mitra and Varuṇa in their functions or duties according to dharma.

In summary, this discussion of the Ādityas and the sacrifice makes it apparent that the two powers Mitra and Varuṇa act according to dharma to maintain the sacrifice through which man is in contact with the gods, and to assist them in fulfilling their functions. As man assists the gods with his sacrificial offerings, the gods reciprocate and assist man. In the reciprocity between the two it is the function of Mitra and Varuṇa to insure that the orderly patterns of motion are followed by the gods in the performance of their

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54  
On dhāman cf: J. Gonda, Meaning of the Sanskrit Term Dhāman, (Amsterdam, 1967), Gonda summarizes the meaning of dhāman as follows:

(continued)

actions and by man in the performance of the sacrifice.

#### 4. DHARMA, SOMA AND THE SACRIFICE

Thus far, we have seen that Soma is very deeply involved in the yajña as the power which, as the sacrificial food, mediates between the gods and the vedic, sacrificing community. Soma pillared apart Heaven and Earth in the skambha and moved within it to convey the sacrificial food to the gods. In the sacrifice, Soma follows a complex path from the stages of preparation as a sacrificial offering to the movement from the rite to the gods. In this movement, Soma joins with Agni, Indra, Mitra and Varuṇa to make the

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54 ( continued )

Anticipating the results of the following examination of texts a Vedic dhāman - may, as far as I am able to see, to a certain extent be described as a 'location' of a numen, of divine power, of a deity, i.e. not only or merely a 'holder' or 'receptacle' of divine power, a place, being or phenomenon in which a divinity sets or locates itself, functions or manifest itself, or displays its power, or where its 'presence' is experienced, by also a particular way of presenting or revealing itself, or locating or 'projecting', a mode of its nature and essence, a hypostatsis or refraction in which it is believed to be active. (p.19)

cf. Bergaigne, Op. cit., pp. 215-278, esp. p. 215. In his discussion Bergaigne emphasizes the basic meaning as 'essence' or 'nature' of something so that its use as 'law' refers to the essential nature of an institution. With regard to the basic meaning Gonda and Bergaigne are close, however, Gonda does not go on to see the term as 'law' as does Bergaigne. For Gonda's critique of Bergaigne's extension of the basic meaning to mean law, cf. Gonda, ibid., p. 7-8. For our purpose, we simply follow Bergaigne to the point where there is no basic disagreement with Gonda and apply it to 10.65.5.

sacrifice effective. Our interest in this section, is not to follow all the stages in the preparation of Soma,<sup>55</sup> nor to see all the ways in which Soma makes the sacrifice effective, but rather, to see how these dimensions of Soma's function are related to the uses of the term dharma.

Soma is a divine power rooted in the asura,<sup>56</sup> the Godhead, exactly as the other divine powers we have examined have been. Soma's divinity does not set Soma apart from the manifest forms which he takes within creation. Indeed his divinity and its concrete manifestation are inalienable. Thus Soma is a 'splendid steer' which ordains 'laws' (dharmāni):

Soma, thou art a splendid steer, A Steer, O God,  
with steer-like sway:  
Thou as a steer ordainest laws [dharmāni]  
vṛishā soma dyuman asi vṛi\_shā deva  
vṛisha\_vratah  
vṛishā dharmāni dadishe 57

As a steer Soma possesses great strength which is used to establish laws (dharmāni). The meaning of 'dharmāni' is

<sup>55</sup>  
cf. note 1 in "Dharma, Soma and the Cosmos" above, pp. 125-126 for reference to the appropriate literature on Soma.

<sup>56</sup>  
cf. 6.74.4.

<sup>57</sup>  
9.64.1

to be seen in Soma's role in relation to the sacrifice. For example, Savitar assists Soma on his way to the sacrifice by impelling him through the purification process. Soma is passed through the 'Press-Stones' in order that his steer-like strength will be transformed for use as the sacrificial nourishment for the gods:

May Savitar the God, O Stones, stir you according to the law [dharmanā]:  
Be harnessed to the shafts, and press.

May Savitar the God, O Stones stir you as Law commands [dharmanā]:  
for him who sacrifices, pouring juice.

pra vo grāvānaḥ savitā devaḥ suvatu dharmanā  
dhūrshu yujyādhvam sunuta

grāvānaḥ savitā nu vo devaḥ suvatu dharmanā  
yajamānāya sunvate 58

The exact way the Press Stones function as purifiers of Soma is not clear.<sup>59</sup> However, it is clear that the process is accomplished according to the 'law' (dharmanā) and that Savitar, the Impeller, moves Soma through the purification process. In doing so, Savitar enables Soma to fulfill his function for those who offer the sacrifice.

Once Soma's power is released by the Press Stones and Soma is in his liquid state for the sacrifice, Soma flows according to the dharma of Mitra and Varuṇa:

58  
10.175.1,4.

59  
cf. Wasson, Op. cit.



May Pavamāna King and God speed with his wave over  
the sea the lofty rite,  
May he by Mitra's and Varuṇa's decree flow further-  
ing the lofty rite.

tarat samudram pavamāna ūrmiṇā rājā deva ṛitam  
bṛihat  
aiśhan mitrasya varuṇasya dharmanā prahinvāna  
ṛitam bṛihat 60

Soma's associations with Mitra and Varuṇa in this passage are numerous. Soma is rājā or King as is Varuṇa. Soma flows in the 'rite', called in this passage 'ṛta'. That is to say, Soma's role in the sacrifice is to flow according to the 'order' which is the rite of the sacrifice. The question is, why must Soma flow? What nuance does Soma's flowing contribute to the co-operative functions of the gods in the sacrifice?

In the yajña Soma's flowing movement acts 'for maintenance of Law' (dharmann ṛitasya) because in his movement Soma knows the proper, orderly pathway of the sacrificial rite:

Forth on their way the glorious drops have flowed  
for maintenance of Law,  
Knowing this sacrifice's course.

asṛigram indavaḥ pathā dharmann ṛitasya suṣriyaḥ  
vidānā asyayojanam 61

60  
9.107.15.

61  
9.7.1.

In the knowledge of the proper order/ sacrifice, Soma makes the sacrifice consistent with his dharma. When the sacrifice is conducted properly it becomes a powerful rite which can then sustain and nourish the gods. Thus Soma flows according to his dharma along the pathways of rta in the sacrifice in order to nourish the gods:

He goes to Indra, Vāyu, to the Aṣvins, as his custom is,  
With gladdening juice which gives them joy.

sa vāyūm indram aṣvinā sākam madena gachati  
raṇā yo asya dharmabhiḥ. 62

Here, Soma flows to Indra, Vāyu, and the Aṣvins according to dharma in order to nourish the gods and bring them pleasure. The effect of this nourishment is to make the gods, including Soma, flow back to the community to bring it strength:

Thou didst produce him Deathless God  
mid mortal men for maintenance of Law [ritasya dharmann]  
and Lovely Amṛita  
Thou evermore hast moved making strength flow to us.

ajījano amṛita martyeshv ān ritasya dharmann  
amṛitasya caruṇaḥ  
sadāsaro vājam achā sanishyadat 63

Soma is immortal amṛta and his function through his dharma in support and maintenance of rta is equally immortal. The strength of Soma's immortality flows along the orderly

62  
9.7.7.

63  
9.110.4.

routes of ṛta to men where it invigorates them by bringing strength. This mediation of strength to the men of the sacrificial community is the fulfillment of Soma's dharma:

Quand la parole (née) de l'esprit du Voyant eut façonné (le soma), ou (quand il s'agissait d') établir (le sacrifice) en présence du plus puissant bétail, alors les (laites de) vaches sont venues librement, hurlant ver l'époux aimé, ver le suc-de-soma dans le vase.

Donneur de dons, gonflant ses dons, (le soma) céleste pro (cède); Ordre, il se clarifie en vue de l'Ordre, lui sage. Il a (toujours) été mainteneur de ce qui appartient-à-la-secte, (ce) roi; avec les dix rênes (les doigts de l'opérateur) il a été porté en avant (à travers) la terre.

So oft ihn die Rede aus dem Geiste des schauenden (Sehers) heraus formte oder bei der Entscheidung angesichts des besten Stückes Vieh, da kamen nach Wunsch zu dem Saft als dem beliebten Gatten voll Verlangen die Kühe in dem Krüge.

Der himmlische Gabenspender (strömt) gabenschwellend hervor; der Weise, das (verkörperte) Gesetz, läutert sich für die (Opfer) sätzung. Er ward der massgebende König eines jaden, der zur Opfergemeinschaft gehört. Mit zehn Zügeln war es reichlich vorangebracht.

takshad yađī manaso venato vāg jyeshṭhasya vā  
dharmani kshor anīke  
ād īm āyan varam ā vāvaṣānā jusṭam patim kalāṣe  
gāva indum

pra dānudo divyo dānapinva ṛitam ṛitāya pavate  
sumedhāḥ dharmā bhuvad vṛijanyasyā rājā pra  
raṣmibhir daṣabhir bhāri bhūma 64

64

E.V.P., 9, p. 48; D.R.V. 9.97.22,23. Griffith's translation of these two passages, while giving emphasis to the uses of dharma does not seem, in this instance to catch the nuance of the total passage. Griffith reads:

(continued)

Soma's dharma as king is to uphold strength. That task begins as he is guided from the udder of the cattle by the reigns of the ten fingers which milk the cattle. From that beginning, Soma flows according to rta, the orderly pathways, and in doing so rta itself is made strong.<sup>65</sup> Soma flows then according to rta from the cows to the beakers or vessels used in the sacrifice where, according to his dharma,<sup>66</sup> he inspires the spirit of the seers. In this sequence of movements we see the many stages through which Soma flows according to rta. From a natural source in cattle, Soma moves to the sacrifice impelled by Savitar. There, as the sacrificial food Soma transmits his strength to the gods and to the vedic community as he is consumed as the sacrificial food. Soma as the food, then, permeates the god or man who has drunk the sacred liquid and, in doing so, sustains and

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64 (continued)

What time the loving spirit's word had formed him  
 Chief of all food, by statute of the Highest,  
 Then loudly came the cows to Indu, the chosen, well-  
 loved Master in the beaker.

The Sage, Celestial, liberal, raining bouties, purse  
 as he flows the Genuine for the truthful.  
 The king shall be effectual strength's upholder:  
 he by the ten bright reins is mostly guided.

65  
 9.97.22.

66  
 9.97.22.

strengthens him with visions of the true nature of things.

The most important manifestation of Soma's transmission of strength to man who drinks the sacrificial food is vision. In this, Soma unites with Agni as the kavi or visionary-poet. Soma is a 'sustainer' or 'upholder' (vidhartr)<sup>67</sup> who desires to convey to a vipra, 'the quivering one', the treasure of vision. Soma is inspired in his upholding function as both kavi and vipra by the sacrifice and the hymns:

Pleased with the hymn, impelled by prayer, Soma is hurried far away.  
The wise One in the Singer's stream.

matī jushṭo dhiyā hitaḥsomo hinve parāvati  
viprasya dhārayā kavīḥ 68

In his distant travels from the place of sacrifice, Soma is sent according to his dharma by the sacrificial song to Vāyu,<sup>69</sup> the charioteer of Indra. Thus the movement of Soma from the sacrifice is understood to invigorate Indra in his travels through the cosmos and perhaps most importantly in his battle with Vṛtra for the release of the waters.

67  
9.47.4.

68  
9.44.2.

69  
9.25.2.

O Pavamāna sent by song, roaring about thy dwelling-  
place.  
Pass into vāyu as Law bids.

pavamāna dhiyā hito'bhi yoniṃ kanikradat  
dharmanā vāyum ā viṣa 70

The power of the songs which sends Soma on his way to Vāyu  
also impels Soma to inspire the minds with the visions which  
bring new insight and understanding of the gods and their  
functions:

Our songs in concert go to thee as streams of water  
to the wells,  
Soma, that we may live, grant - at your glad carouse -  
full powers of mind, like beakers, Thou art waxing  
great.

sam u pra yanti dhītayaḥ sargāso 'vatān iva  
kratuṃ naḥ soma jīvase vi vo made dharayā camasān  
iva vivakshase 71

The vedic community's dependence on the visionary poet for the  
inspired hymns which empower the sacrifice is a dependence on  
Soma and his power of inspiration both for man and the gods.  
In the community of men, Soma's presence is as the 'Lord  
of dharma' :

On whose way, Lord of Holy Law, most rich, as he is  
purified,  
The people all have set their hearts.

viṣvo yasya vrate jano dādharma dharmanas pateḥ  
puṇānasya prabhūvasoḥ 72

70  
9.25.2

71  
10.25.4.

72  
9.35.6.

As lord of dharma, Soma keeps his vrata and inspires men to uphold or purify their dharma in the same way that Soma does as he flows through the cosmos sustaining both the gods and men.

Soma's dharma is therefore focused around the function of nourishing the gods and men through the sacrifice. Soma in his function reveals the inter-dependence and inter-relatedness which exists in creation between the gods and the human community. Without the tending of the cattle, the purifying of Soma in the Press Stones, the offering of the sacred Soma in the context of the sacrifice, Soma could not flow according to his dharma. But at the same time, none of these functions are possible without Soma's inspiration of the visionary insight which sustains the whole conception of the sacrifice and the sacrificial functions of the vedic community. What the visionary sees is the primordial cosmogonic sacrifice of the gods in which each functions to differentiate the cosmos and simultaneously offer the sacrifice. Each power functions uniquely and in relation with the other gods to make the sacrifice effective. All of these functions are realized in accord with the upholding meaning of dharma which pervades the functions of the gods. Soma's dharma is to nourish and thereby strengthen the gods and man in their sacrificial functions.

## 5. DHARMA AND THE SACRIFICE: A SUMMARY

In our discussion of 'Dharma and the Cosmos' it was established that the powers each made indentifiable contributions to the task of upholding the cosmos. Agni contributed diverse forms of light and the mantra. Indra contributed the force or strength. Viṣṇu upheld the unity of the cosmos while Mitra and Varuṇa upheld the orderliness of motion and inter-relatedness within the cosmos. Finally, Soma mediated between the sacrifice and the powers and propped up Heaven and Earth. These respective contributions by the gods, were also seen to be part of co-operative patterns of actions in which their functions overlapped. Individual functions melded with those of other gods to manifest a symbiotic pattern of divine powers and actions in creation. Underlying the individual and collective duties of the gods was the concept dharma which was a manifest part of the pattern of relatedness in the cosmology.

We have now seen that the gods establish the yajña and act according to dharma individually and collectively to uphold the sacrifice. Agni, as the first-born, brings to the sacrifice the many forms of light and mantra. He is the fire, the visionary poet and the sacrificial priest, and each of these manifestations is an expression of his function according to dharma. Indra upholds the sacrifice with his mighty



strength, thereby making it effective. Made effective by Indra, the sacrifice becomes the link in the reciprocal, relatedness of the gods and the community. Mitra and Varuṇa maintain the orderliness of communication between the gods and men in the sacrifice. Finally, Soma follows the ṛta of the sacrifice to nourish the gods and men inspiring them both with the sacrificial food. In Indra, the Ādityas and Soma we again find that their functions are part of a symbiotic pattern of relatedness, the key to which, is the recognition of the way in which dhr-forms and the term dharma express the connections between the functions of the gods in creation and the sacrifice as part of an underlying purpose in which all that is must be upheld. The gods and man must fulfill their vrata, their duties, in the sacrifice so that each part of creation can realize its own nature as part of creation.

Taken together, the discussion of the sacrifice and the cosmos suggests a picture of the root meaning of dharma. Underlying the individual nuance of divine functions is a relatedness of function among the gods taken as a whole. In that relatedness dharma emerges as a comprehensive principle which is present at the moment of the beginning of creation and pervades all that is born throughout the entire structure of creation. Its presence in the sacrifice parallels and

confirm the significance of dharma in the cosmology and lends further evidence that there is a root meaning for dharma which can be expressed as the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is.

It remains now to see if this picture of the root meaning of dharma is sustained in the implications of the divine functions for the vedic community.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DHARMA AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY

Thus far, in our study of the references to dhr- forms and dharma, we have seen a developing pattern in which the functions of the gods are seen by rsis to be co-ordinated. The common function of upholding all that is underlies many aspects of the co-ordinated actions of the gods. In turning to the vedic community, our interest cannot be in the nature of that community as such. Rather we are interested primarily in the implications of the pattern of dharma's usage for vedic society and individual existence within that society. This focus on implications arises from the nature of the references to dharma. They speak primarily about the receipt of wealth or visions or long life which comes from harmony with the principle of upholding and the gods which make that principle manifest.

As in the previous sections, we will examine the usages according to their relation to the various gods, Agni, Indra, Mitra and Varuna and Soma.

#### 1. DHARMA, AGNI AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY

In our discussions of Agni and dharma thus far, we have seen that the function of his power was to uphold the

cosmos through his diverse manifestations as light and mantra. These two manifestations in their various forms are essential to the cosmos and the sacrifice. With the mantra, Agni bears into creation the truth which functions as dharma. Through Agni and other powers the rsi is inspired to see and speak this truth as the hymns for the sacrifice.

Within the cosmos, Agni is the Sun and the sacrificial fire. The Sun establishes by its movements the time of the sacrifice while the fire is the very centre of the sacrifice. Agni as the Priest, chants the mantra and the fire conveys the song and the sacrificial offering to the gods.

Thus, Agni with the light and the mantra establishes and maintains the relatedness of the gods and the vedic community through the sacrifice. This relatedness is a manifestation of the dharma made manifest in Agni from the very beginning,<sup>1</sup> and according to which Agni moves in his many functions to relate all aspects of the cosmos.

The sacrifice that is performed by the vedic community is an imitation of the first sacrifice offered by the gods, and, significantly, for our purposes is a participation in the dharma, or the upholding principle which underlies the function of the sacrifice:

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<sup>1</sup>  
cf. 10.90.16, 1.164.50.

I saw from far away the smoke of fuel with spires  
that rose on high o'er that beneath it.  
The mighty men have dressed the spotted bullock.  
These were the customs [dharmāni] aforetime.

ṣakamayam dhūnam ārād apaṣyam vishūvatā para  
enāvarena  
ukshāṇam priṣnim apacanta vīrās tāni dharmāni  
prathamāny āsan 2

The smoke of the sacrificial fire is seen both at the  
sacrifice of the gods and at the sacrifice of men. The  
fire and smoke establishes the relatedness of gods and men  
in their common function of offering the sacrifice. The  
heroes or 'mighty men' (vīra) of the community prepare the  
fire and prepare the 'spotted bullock' as the sacrificial  
food for the gods according to the ancient 'customs' (dharma).  
In doing so contact is established with the gods so that they  
will come to the sacrifice and accept the offering prepared  
for them. In 8.35.13 which is dedicated to the celestial  
twins, the Aṣvins, many powers are called to the sacrifice by  
the songs and among them is Dharma:

With Mitra, Varuṇa, Dharman, and the Maruts in your  
company approach unto your praiser's call.  
Accordiant of one mind with Sūrya and with Dawn  
and with the Ādityas, Aṣvins come.

mitrāvaruṇavantā uta dharmavantā marutvantā jaritur  
gachatho ṇavam  
sajoshasā ushasā sūryeṇa cādityair yatam aṣvinā

Dharma's presence among the gods - Mitra, Varuṇa, the Maruts,

Sūrya, the Dawn and the Aṣvins - reflects the celebration and accentuation of dharma's presence as a principle or power in the sacrifice.

The presence of Agni and dharma at the sacrifice is the basis for the power of the rite. The priest in one hymn is called 'agnidha' and is characterized as the 'upholder of power' (dhritadaksha)<sup>3</sup> at the sacrifice. The combination of the play on Agni's name as the sacrificial priest and the fact that the role of this figure is 'to uphold power' suggests the way in which the communal sacrifice is understood as the imitation of, and participation with, the divine rite. The sacrificial fire and priest act in imitation of Agni and the hymn which is chanted is Agni's mantra that had been revealed to his beloved ṛṣi. The power of the communal sacrifice is in direct consequence of the perfect imitation of the first dharma brought into creation at the beginning, with the birth of Agni.

Two major implications follow from Agni's connection with the sacrifice and the concept of dharma for the vedic community. First, Agni is an important power in the upholding of human existence within a framework of the known mortality of all forms of life. Secondly, Agni is important in bringing wealth to the community. Both of these implications for the vedic society are related to dharma. In each case our

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<sup>3</sup>  
10.41.3.

purpose is served in simply showing that the power of upholding is expressed by Agni in these two contexts. In no sense can we explore these themes in detail.

The first implication of Agni's power in the sacrifice is to uphold life. In a hymn dedicated to Asamāti and others, two verses refer to Agni acting to maintain life by holding the spirit (manas) of man in his body:

As with the leather thong they bind the chariot yoke to hold it fast [dharuṇāye],  
So have I held thy spirit fast [dādhāra]  
held it for life and not for death,  
held it for thy security.

yathā yugam varatrayā nanyanti dharuṇāya kam  
evā dādhāra te mano jīvātave na mṛityave  
'tho arisṭatātaye 4

Agni holds together body and spirit (manas) in the same way that leather connects the chariot to the horse.

In a parallel passage, 10.60.9, Agni 'holds the spirit fast' in the same way that trees are rooted in the ground:

Even as this earth, the mighty earth, holds fast [dādhāremān]  
the monarchs of the wood,  
So have I held [dādhāra] thy spirit fast, held it  
for life and not for death,  
held it for thy security.

yathayam pṛithivī mahī dādhāremān vanaspatīn  
evā dādhāra te mano jīvātave na mṛityave 'tho  
arisṭatātaye 5

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4  
10.60.8.

5  
cf. 10.59.5.

These two passages together express Agni's function to uphold life and yet to uphold it within a framework of a natural pattern of mortality. While Agni upholds life, just as the leather binding a chariot to its source of power and motion can break suddenly, so too can life be suddenly and abruptly brought to an end. Equally important, Agni upholds life in such a way that the context of mortality can be like the trees of the forest in their strength which endures for ages and yet they too fall and decay in time. The main point here is that while Agni functions to uphold life, that does not make man immortal. Death is the natural conclusion to life.

When death does come, one passage, 10.16.3, suggests that the elements of the body disperse to corresponding parts of creation. Thus 'as thy merit is' [<sup>6</sup>dharmana] or as Geldner puts it "nach der Bestimmung" and Renou in a subtle and more accurate way, "selon, l'affinite-naturelle"<sup>7</sup>, the eye goes to the sun, the spirit (manas) to the wind:

The sun receive thine eye, the wind thy spirit;  
 go, as thy merit is, to earth and heaven.  
 Go, if it be thy lot, unto the waters;  
 Go, make thine home in plants with all thy members.

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<sup>6</sup>  
D.R.V., 10.16.3.

<sup>7</sup>  
E.V.P., 14. p. 107-108.



sūryaṃ cakshur gachatu vātam ātmā dyāṃ ca gacha  
 prithivīm ca dharmaṇā  
 apo vā gācha yadi tātra te hitam oshadhīshu prati  
 tiṣṭhā śarīraiḥ 8

This passage emphasizes that a human life has many constituent elements. Each part corresponds to parts of the total fabric of the cosmos including such manifestations of godly powers as Sūrya, the Sun and the Wind and such godly and material forms as the structure of cosmos, Heaven and Earth, and the waters. The identification of the gods and their material manifestations would suggest that this passage expresses the return of the elements of human life - spiritual and material - to a corresponding aspect of the created order which is both spiritual and material, the gods and the Earth. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of 10.16.3. It can be seen as a strictly materialistic<sup>9</sup> hymn in which the matter of life simply returns to the material forms creation.

In another funeral hymn, 10.56.3, dedicated to Viṣvedevas or, All Gods, the dead are instructed to "fly

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8  
10.16.3.

9  
The best single work on materialism in Indian thought is Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Lokayata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism, (New Delhi, 1959). Cf. A.L. Basham, History and Doctrine of the Ajivikas, (London, 1951) and Dale Riepe, The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Thought, (Delhi, 1964).

happily to the Gods with easy passage, according to the first and faithful statutes (suvito dharma prathamānu satyā suvito devān suvito 'nu patma)<sup>10</sup> According to dharma, the dead go to the gods. This emphasizes only the dimension of spirit while 10.16.3 emphasized the dispersal of the composite spirit/matter complex which makes up persons and all other aspects of creation.

In general, our only point is that the uses of dharma in this context establish a pattern of support for life and the constituent elements of life when they disperse at death. Agni is one power which acts to provide that support. The principle of upholding is present in all of creation whether its presence is in support of living beings or the constituent parts of matter and spirit, the union of which is dissolved at death. This presence of the principle of upholding in life forms and after death simply emphasizes the pervasive presence of the principle of dharma in the cosmos from the very beginning of creation and throughout all its aspects.

In addition to the function of dharma in upholding life and the constituents of life, there are other expressions of Agni's strength operating according to dharma. For example, Agni's strength is conveyed to the community by its rulers:

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<sup>10</sup>  
10.56.3.

Do thou bestow, O Agni, on our wealthy chiefs,  
rule, with good heroes, undecaying, bending not

asmākam agne maghavatsudhārayānāmi kshatram ajaram  
suvīryam 11

Here Agni is appealed to, to uphold (dhārayānāmi) the rulers of the community in such a way that they will be wealthy and assisted by great heroes.

Agni's concern for wealth goes beyond its association with the rulers of the community. He supports the wealth of the community as a whole:

To him the far-renowned, wise Ordainer, ancient and glorious, a song I offer:  
Enthroned in oil, the Asura, bliss-giver, is Agni  
firm support of noble riches.

May strength preserve the compass of thy vigour, God!  
that broad stream of thine that beareth riches.

pra vedhase kavaye vedyāya giram bhare yaśase pūrvyāya  
ghṛitaprasatto asuraḥ suśevo rāyo dhartā dharuṇo  
vasvo agniḥ

vājo nu te śavasas pātv antam uruṃ doghaṃ dharuṇam  
deva rāyaḥ 12

Here Agni, as the asura the first power of the Godhead, is celebrated in song and oil (ghṛta) at the sacrifice so that he will bring to the community by his dharma riches and 'bliss' or goodness. This function flows forth like a stream of light that upholds the community's wealth, and receipt of this wealth is tied directly to the sacrifice:

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11  
6.8.6.

12  
5.15.1,5.

Arrangers in our synods, Agni, while they sang,  
 Vasishthā's sons have called thee down, the Potent One.  
 Maintain the growth of wealth with men who sacrifice.  
 Ye Gods, Preserve us with your blessings evermore.

ni tvā vasishthā ahvanta vājinam gr̥ṇanto agne  
 vidatheshu vedhasaḥ  
 rāyas poshaṃ yajamāneshu dhāraya yūyam pāta svastibhiḥ  
 sadā naḥ 13

The ritual of the sacrifice separates and distinguishes the  
 vedic community from other communities and so the appeal in  
 the sacrifice for Agni to "maintain the growth of wealth"  
 among those who sacrifice can apply as narrowly as a  
 particular family, in this instance the sons of Vasishthā,  
 or expand to bring wealth to the entire community through  
 its rulers.

In a hymn dedicated to 'waters and cows', Agni and  
 Soma together support the wealth and riches of the community.  
 In this instance, it is to be understood as the cattle or  
 herds owned by the community:

Turn, go not farther on your way;  
 visit us O ye wealthy ones.  
 Agni and Soma, ye who bring riches again, secure  
 us wealth.

Let them return to us again:  
 under this herdsman let them feed.  
 Do thou, O Agni, keep them here,  
 and let the wealth we have remain.

ni vartadhvam mānu gātāsmān sishakta revatīḥ  
 agnīshomā punarvasū asme dhārayataṃ rayim

punar etā ni vartantām asmin pushyantu gopatau  
 ihaivāgne ni dhārayeha tisṭhatu yā rayiḥ 14

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13  
 10.122.8.

14  
 10.19.1,3.

It is significant that Agni is associated with Soma in this passage. The intimate association of Soma and the elements of the sacrifice which are from Agni is paralleled with Soma's association with the milk of the cows in the sacrificial drink. <sup>15</sup>

In summary, Agni's dharma has two major expressions as implications for the sacrificial community. Agni functions alone and in conjunction with other powers to uphold life in a framework of mortality, and he functions through the sacrifice to support the riches and wealth of the community. In both life and death the power of upholding never ceases to function, emphasizing the clarity of the understanding that dharma was a pervasive principle of the cosmos from the very conception of creation. That dharma is understood to be the basis of affluence for the community accents the pervasive, day to day, functioning of the principle in the midst of the sacrificial community.

## 2. DHARMA, INDRA AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY

On the basis of what we have seen thus far about Indra, it should not be surprising that he, more than any other of the vedic deities, brings the majority of implications of dharma for the vedic community. His cosmological acts to

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<sup>15</sup>  
cf. our discussion of "Dharma, Soma and the Sacrifice" above, pp. 171-181.

separate Heaven and Earth to conquer Vṛtra were in support of the unfolding of creation. His sacrificial acts were to use his strength and force to make the sacrifice effective. The effectiveness of the rite brings many things to the vedic community. Our task is to see what Indra upholds for the vedic community by virtue of his strength or force. In particular, we shall examine how Indra brings varying forms of wealth and power to the sacrificing community, and especially to its rulers.

Indra's function according to dharma is expressed in his friendship and skill which he offers to the community:

Rich in good actions, skilled in operation  
the Son with might, maintains [dādhāra] his  
perfect friendship.  
Thou in the raw cows, black of hue or ruddy,  
storest the ripe milk glossy white in colour

sanemi sakhyam svapasyamānaḥ sūnur dādhāra śavasā  
sudaṅsāḥ  
āmāsu cid dadishe pakvam antaḥ payaḥ kṛishnāsu ruṣad  
rohiṇīshu 16

Indra's friendship which he upholds (dādhāra) with his 'might' and 'skill' expresses itself in the placing of milk in the cows for the nourishment of the community and the gods through Soma. In addition, Indra brings to the sacrificial community, in company with the celestial twins, the Aśvins, 'a thousand treasures' which he 'possesses' (dhārayah).<sup>17</sup>

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16  
1.62.9.

17  
10.73.4.

The friendship which Indra has for the community is based upon the performance of the sacrifice and the offering of the Soma to Indra:

Thou helpest him whose grass is trimmed who sheds the juice, O Satakratu, drink Soma to make thee glad. The share which they have fixed [adhārayan] for thee, thou, Indra Victor o'er all hosts and space, begirt with Maruts, Lord of Heroes, winner of the floods.

Avitāsi sunvato vṛiktab arhishah pibā somam madāya  
kaṃ ṣatakrato  
yaṃ te bhāgam adhārayan viṣvāḥ sehānaḥ pṛitanā uru  
jrayaḥ sam apsujin marutān indra satpāte 18

As a result of the reciprocal relationship of Indra and the vedic, sacrificing community, Indra is given the Soma which is his share of the bounty of the earth that is 'fixed' or held (adhārayan) for him. In return for this offering, Indra holds (dīdharo) the portion for him who offers the sacrifice:

When Indra, thou securest [dīdharo] me my portion, with me shalt thou perform heroic actions.

yadā mahyaṃ dīdharo bhāgam indrād in mayā kṛinavo  
viryaṇi 19

Indra's response to the sacrifice is to identify with the man who offers the sacrifice and with him achieve great heroic deeds.

By giving wealth and strength to the sacrificial community, Indra upholds his vrata:

18  
8.36.1.

19  
8.100.1, (Griffith, 8.89.1.)

With steadfast law [dhr̥itavrata] wealth giver,  
 strong through Soma <sup>ne·hath</sup> much fair and precious  
 food to feed us.  
 In him unite all paths that lead to riches, like  
 rivers that commingle with the ocean.

dhṛitavratō dhanadāḥ somavṛiddaḥ sa hi vāmasya  
 vasunāḥ purukshuḥ  
 saṃ jagmire pathyā rāyo asmin samudre na sindhavo  
 yādāmānāḥ 20

From the milk which Indra deposits in the cows comes the Soma which, when offered through the sacrifice, makes Indra strong. This reciprocal pattern, in which the gift of the gods is returned through the sacrifice, is echoed again by the fact that the community understands that its food comes from Indra's upholding of vrata. Indra thus becomes the focus in so many hymns because the sacrifice is made effective by his power. Through it Indra is the bestower of wealth and nourishment and, to insure the continuance of that function, he is the power most often offered the Soma. Both Indra and the vedic community are thereby insured their vitality. Conveyed to the community which offers the sacrifice is the same strength which enabled Indra (<sup>21</sup>trita) to slay the demon Vṛtra and release the waters for life on earth.

Now will I glorify food that upholds [dharmānam]  
 great strength  
 By whose invigorating power Trita rent Vṛtra limb  
 from limb.

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20  
 6.19.5.

<sup>21</sup>  
 cf. Kramrisch, Vol. 1, pp. 159-160 for a  
 discussion of Indra as 'trita' the third.



pituṃ nu stosham mahā dharmānam tavishīm  
yasya trito vy ojasā vritram viparvam ardayat 22

This strength is comparable to Indra's ojas. The comparison suggests that the god Indra gives to the vedic community through the gift of food, a power for creating and ruling in creation. That power is not unrestrained, but is guided and limited in its application. The limiting of power, ojas, is illustrated in Indra's strength which is used for creation in the killing of Vṛtra or for the growth and regeneration of food. Thus Indra "upholds the streams that flow along the earth"<sup>23</sup> and thereby takes possession of the land of the Seven rivers; and upholds the milk in cows<sup>24</sup>. Both of these types of acts are expressions of his power used in support of creation.

Indra's creative and ruling strength has several types of implications when he grants it to the vedic community. For example it enables the members of the community to achieve great heroic deeds:

By thee these exploits were achieved, the mightiest deeds, abundantly:

Firm in thy heart thou settest [adhārayah] them.

etā cyautnāni te kṛita varshishṭhāni parīnasā  
hṛidā vīdv adhārayāḥ 25

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22

1.187.1, cf. 10.24.1; 1.30.22; 8.95.8; 8.84.8.

23

10.49.9.

24

10.49.10.

25

8.77.9 (Griffith, 8.6 .9.)

Against the Gungus I made Athigva strong and  
kept [dhārayam] him mid the folk like Vṛitra-  
conquoring strength.

When I won glory in the great foe-slaying fight,  
in battle where Karanja fell and Parṇaya.

aḥaṃ guṅgubhy atithigvam ishkarāma ishama na vṛitratuṛama  
vikṣhu dhārayama  
yat parṇayaghna uta vā karaṅjaha prāham mahe  
vṛitrahātye aṣuṣravi 26

In this instance the great deed is achieved in battle, an imitation of Indra's conquest of Vṛitra. Indra is the god which inspires the warrior Athigva to keep his courage as he fights. Indra's support for the heroic warrior is always tied to the fact that his aid goes out only to those who offer the sacrifice. Against his enemies, that is those who do not sacrifice, nothing gives them strength:

Not even in wide stronghold may all the folk  
stand firm [dhriyate]  
who have provoked to anger his surpassing might.

durge cana dhriyate viṣva ā puru jano yo asya tavishīm  
acukrudhat 27

In defeat of the enemies, Indra finds yet another way to bring wealth to his community in order that they might offer the sacrifice to him again. He gives them the plunder of war.

This separation of peoples according to whether or not they offer the sacrifice is accomplished by both Indra and Varuṇa.

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26  
10.48.8.

27  
5.34.7, cf. 8.57.19.

Self lucid in their seats, e'en heavenly Waters  
 endowed with Godhead Varuṇa and Indra.  
 One of these holds [dhārayati] the folk distinct  
 and sundered,  
 the other smites and slays resistless foemen.

āpaṣ cid dhi svayaśasaḥ sadassu devīr indraṃ varuṇaṃ  
 devatā dhuḥ  
 kṛiṣṭīr anyo dhārayati praviktā vṛitrāny anyo  
 apratīni hanti 28

From the source of the gods in the 'waters' (āpaṣ), Varuṇa  
 rules, that is, he possesses part of the regal power and  
 with it he separates the sacrificers from those who do not.  
 Indra with his might slays those outside of Varuṇa's power.

This support for the sacrificial community is not  
 limited just to Indra and Varuṇa. In a hymn dedicated to a  
 ruler or king numerous powers are seen to function in  
 support of the sacrificial community and its rulers:

This man hath Indra stablished [dhruvaṃ], made  
 secure [dhruveṇa] by strong oblations' power.  
 May Somā speak a benison, and Brahmaṇaspati, on him.

Stedfast, [dhruvaṃ] may Varuṇa the King, stedfast,  
 the God Bṛihaspati,  
 Stedfast, [dhruvaṃ] may Indra, stedfast, [dhruvaṃ]  
 too may Agni keep thy stedfast [dhārayatām] reign

imam indro adīdharad dhruvaṃ dhruveṇa havishā  
 tasmai somo adhi bravat tasmā u brahmaṇas patiḥ

dhruvaṃ te rājā varuṇo dhruvaṃ devo bṛihaspatiḥ  
 dhruvaṃ ta indraṣ cāgniṣ ca rāshṭraṃ dhārayatām  
 dhruvaṃ 29

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28  
 7.85.3.

29  
 10.173.3,5; cf. 10.144.6, 10.60.5.

In 10.173,3 Indra upholds the king and makes him strong through the sacrifice. In the sacrifice, Soma and the lord of Brahmans, Brahmanaspati, speak to the king and the speech conveys how many powers acting together according to dharma support the royal power of the king. Thus Varuna, Indra, Brahmanaspati and Agni, each function to maintain kingly powers. In a subsequent passage this upholding of the king is compared to the cosmic function of the gods in keeping the structure of the cosmos in its place:

Firm [dhruvā] is the sky and firm [dhruvā] the earth, and steadfast [dhruvāsah] also are these hills. Steadfast [dhruvā] is all this living world, and Steadfast [dhruvo] is the King of men.

dhruvā dyaur dhruvā prithivī dhruvāsah parvatā ime  
dhruvam viṣṇam idam jāgād dhruvo rājā viṣām ayam 30

In 10.173, 3, 4, 5 Indra's most important characteristic, his ojas or strength, is located within the collective responsibility of the gods to make the king powerful. While Indra is clearly the most important of the gods in making the sacrifice effective and, through it, the social institution of kingship, Indra does not accomplish either function alone. Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Soma are all called regal powers. Each supports the community in his characteristic way. Indra's significance is in the support for kingly strength. By contrast Agni can support the king ritually through the rites, Varuna through the support for orderliness and Soma in the

rite by which all the gods are nourished to support the king's rule.

Throughout 10.173 the basis of the king's power and position in the community is the sacrifice and the offerings made to the gods. The rite is the key which enables the king to rule; to conquer his enemies and gain new wealth:

On constant [dhruvam] Soma let us think with  
constant [dhruveṇa] sacrificial gift  
And then may Indra make the clans bring tribute  
unto thee alone.

dhruvam dhruveṇa havishābhi somam mṛiṣāmasi 31  
atho tā indrah kevalīr viṣo balihṛitas karat

The Soma which the community offers as the sacrificial food to the gods inspires Indra to support the king and his power so that no enemy challenges his rule, but rather, pays tribute to his well established power.

This entire relationship, based upon the sacrifice between the gods and the community, is echoed in a hymn offered to both Indra and Agni:

The strength-bestowing offering thus to Indra-Agni  
hath been paid, as butter, purified by stones.  
Deal to our princes high renown, deal [didhṛitam]  
wealth to those who sing your praise, deal [didhṛitam]  
food to those who sing your praise.

evendrāgnibhyām ahāvi havyam śūshyam ghṛitam na pūtam  
adribhiḥ  
tā sūrīshu śravo bṛihad rayim grīnatsu didhṛitam ishām  
grīnatsu didhṛitam 32

In this passage the effectiveness of the sacrifice is affirmed

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31  
10.173.6.

32  
5.86.6; cf. 4.4.8; 8.13.2.

and the appeal is made that the powerful effects of the sacrificial offering will include power for the 'princes', songs of praise, and an abundance of food. The power of the sacrifice, the power of the gods, and the power of the community are here so profoundly integrated that their relations can only be understood as part of an inseparable inter-dependent relatedness. Each part must function according to its characteristic power expressed through forms of dharma in order to realize its place and function within creation. It is not just that the vedic community is dependent upon the actions of the gods for strength and nourishment, but that the gods themselves rely upon the sacrifice for nourishment. For this reciprocal relatedness to operate the gods must act to fulfill their respective functions, and, paralleling that, there is a division of functions within the human community which offers the sacrifice. There are those who are visionaries, or warriors, or kings or those who tend the cattle. <sup>33</sup> Each part is essential to the whole.

One illustration of the implications of this reciprocal relatedness is illustrated in a hymn to the Ribhus, a group of priests who, because of their priestly function in

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<sup>33</sup>  
cf. 10.90.12. in which the divine sacrifice involves the creation of the four-fold varna system.

fulfilling their duty (vrata) to the gods according to

dharma won a share in the sacrifice of the gods:

With Ribhu near, and Vāja, Indra, here exult,  
with Śachi praised of many, in the juice we pour.  
These homes wherein we dwell have turned themselves  
to thee,  
-devotions to the Gods, as laws [dharmabhiḥ]  
of men ordain.

indra ribhumān vājavān matsveha no 'smin savane  
śacyā puruṣṭuta  
imāni tubhyaṃ svasarāni yemire vratā devānām man-  
ushaṣ ca dharmabhiḥ 34

As ministering Priests they held [adhārayanta],  
by pious acts they won themselves,  
A share in sacrifice with Gods.

adhārayanta vahnayo 'bhajanta sukṛityayā  
bhāgaṃ deveshu yajñiyam 35

The Ribhus great act was to fashion the vessels which can hold the Soma for the sacrifice from a single sacrificial vessel formed by the great 'fashioner, Tvastṛ, the father of Indra. In consequence of this act the Ribhus were admitted to the sacrifice of the gods, which was the foundational, primordial sacrifice and became minor powers intimately related to Indra. In return for fashioning the sacrificial bowls for the gods, the Ribhus receive a place among the gods. Such reciprocity is characteristic of the relatedness between men and gods based in the sacrifice.

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34  
3.60.6.

35  
1.20.8.

36  
cf. 8.77.9 (Griffith, 8.65.9)

In summary, the implications of Indra's dharma has, in essence, been a series of variations on one main theme. Indra's most important function is as strength or force. This characteristic is given expression in many ways from the conquest of Vṛtra, to the effectiveness of the sacrifice. For the vedic community Indra conveys his strength to the community as a whole and most particularly to the rulers of the community. Indra shares his power and when that sharing is celebrated in the sacrifice and Indra is sustained by Soma the pattern of interrelated upholding of all that is manifest in the vedic community.

### 3. DHARMA, ĀDITYAS AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY

Both in our discussion of the cosmology and of the sacrifice the function of the Ādityas was related to rta or orderliness. In all motion from that of the sun to the ritual pattern of the sacrificial rite, Mitra and Varuṇa in particular, regally preside over and maintain all forms of order. With regard to the duties or vrata, the power of Mitra and Varuṇa primarily, though not exclusively, operated to insure that each power fulfilled his duty. With regard to the implications of these two gods' dharma for the vedic community, we shall examine how they guard the community as judges of human action.



In the context of Mitra and Varuṇa's concern to uphold vrata or duty, it is not extraordinary that the Ādityas and Varuṇa in particular, have a function rather like that of a judge. As a judge, Varuṇa can be appealed to in order to remove punishment for violations of dharma:

O Varuṇa whatever the offence may be which we as men commit against the heavenly host,  
When through our want of thought we violate thy laws, [dharma]  
punish us not, O God, for that iniquity.

yat kiṃ cedam varuṇa daivye jane ' bhidroham  
manushyāṣ carāmasi  
acittī yāt tava dharmā yuyopima mā nas tasmād  
enaso deva rīrshaḥ 37

Varuṇa does not act alone to perform this task:

Upholder's of the law, [dhṛitavrata] ye strong  
Ādityas,  
remove my sin like her who bears in secret.  
You, Varuṇa, Mitra and all Gods who listen,  
I call to help me, I who know your goodness.

dhṛitavratā ādityā ishirā āre mat karta rahasur  
ivāgaḥ  
ṣṛiṇvato vo varuṇa mitra devā bhadrasya vidvan  
āvase huve vaḥ 38

In their function as judges, the Āditya's as the 'upholders of commitments' (dhṛitavrata), can remove the punishment from those who fail to act according to dharma as naturally as a woman bears a child. Thus, not only is dharma understood to be the norm for all action, divine and human, in

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37  
7.89.5.

38  
2.29.1.

creation, but the breaking of the norm can be absolved by the Ādityas as the function to uphold vrata. Re-establishment of harmony with the gods is as much a part of upholding vrata as is performance of the sacrifice.

In this context in which the Ādityas can both guard the community by helping it function according to dharma, and, failing that, restore the community to harmony, it is not suprising to find that the Ādityas are involved in maintaining the continuity of the community itself through support for human reproduction:

Untouched by any evil every mortal thrives and following the law, [dharmanas] spreads in his progeny. Whom ye with your good guidance, O Adityas, lead safely through all his pain and grief to happiness

arishṭah sa marto viṣva edhate pra prajābhir  
jāyate dharmanas pari  
yam ādityāso nayathā sunītibhir ati viṣvāni duritā  
svastaye 39

Support for the continuity of the community is intimately related to the dharma of Mitra and Varuṇa to ensure that the community maintains the sacrifice. In the reciprocity of relatedness between the gods and the human community, failure to ritually maintain the gods bring's Varuṇa's judgement and also the possibility of re-integration into the reciprocal patterns of relatedness. This possibility

is important for the continued vitality of the community. All wealth and riches are understood to be based upon the sacrifice, the key to maintain patterns of relationships between the gods and men. Varuna's dharmā as a kind of judge, therefore, has important implications for the vedic community.

#### 4. DHARMA, SOMA AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY

The implications for the vedic community of Soma's actions are deeply associated with functions which are already well established by other powers. Soma's power to mediate between the sacrifice and the gods is supportive of implications already established by Agni, Indra, and the Ādityas.

Illustrative of Soma's gifts to the community, which are identical to those of other powers, is his support of wealth.

O Pavamāna, bring [dhārāya] us wealth bright with a thousand splendours, yea, O Indu give us ready help.

ā pavamāna dhārāya rayim sahasravarcaṣam  
asme indo svābhuvam 40

In bringing or supporting wealth, Soma flows to Indra from the wealth which comes from cattle. Thus when Indra brings wealth to the vedic community he does so in terms of cattle.

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<sup>40</sup>  
9.12.9, cf. 9.22.7.

In addition, Indra even implants the milk in the cows. From such milk, at least in part, Soma is made and in turn is offered to Indra in the sacrifice completing the pattern of reciprocal relatedness.

Flow to us, Indu, passing strong  
effused with wealth of kine and steeds:  
I will spread forth above the milk they radiant hue.

gomam na indo aṣvavat sutaḥ sudaksha dhanva  
ṣuciṃ te varṇam adhi goshu didharam 41

Soma transforms the colour of the milk for the sacrifice. This transformation of varṇa or colour of the milk through the upholding power of Soma may well refer to the purification process of the Soma in which the liquid passes through the 'press stones'<sup>42</sup> in preparation for offering at the sacrifice. This preparation or purification process ensures the effectiveness of the sacrifice by assigning to the Soma the qualities (dharmāni)<sup>43</sup> appropriate for the sacrifice. Possession of these dharmāni or qualities makes Soma the food for the gods, enabling Soma to mediate between the communal sacrifice and the gods.

The fact that Soma inspires the ṛsis to vision and true speech enables Soma also to empower the visionaries to

41  
9.105.4.

42  
cf. Discussion of "Dharma, Soma and the Sacrifice"  
above, pp. 171-181.

43  
9.97.12.

discriminate between those who make true claims and those who do not:

Never doth Soma aid and guide the wicked or him  
who falsely claims the warrior's title.  
He slays the fiend and him who speaks untruly;  
both lie entangled in the noose of Indra.

nā vā u somo vṛjinaṃ hinoti na kshatriyam mithuyā  
dhārayantam  
hanti raksho hanti āsad vadantam ubhāv indrasya  
prasitau śayāte 44

Soma acts with Indra to kill those who make false claims. It is not so much that Soma does the killing as it is that he enables the ṛṣi to recognize whoever speaks falsely so that Indra's strength can destroy the false-speaker.

Soma's function of inspiring vision is translated into visionary poetry, for the sacrifice has a concrete, almost practical, implication within the community. It is possible through Soma to know who truly is the great warrior and the true speaker.

##### 5. DHARMA AND THE VEDIC COMMUNITY: A SUMMARY

The implications of dharma for the vedic community can be described at two levels. At the most general level, the offering of the sacrifice ties the community into the patterns of reciprocal relatedness which pervade the entire

orderly structure of creation. Particular sacrifices at which hymns to particular gods are offered tie the community to those powers. But, more important, the idea of the sacrifice and the hymns as a group tie the community to the complex relatedness involving all the powers. As we have argued throughout, this pattern of relatedness both among the gods and between the gods and the vedic community, is a manifest expression of dharma, the power of upholding as it pervades all that is.

The implication of this general level of relatedness for the vedic community includes the well-being of that community in wealth and strength. In one form or another each of the gods which we have discussed have contributed to the community a form of strength and wealth. Agni brought the elements of the sacrifice itself to be the basic link in the relatedness. The rite, then, forms the basis for the strength and wealth of the community. Indra empowers the sacrifice and makes it effective and in doing so conveys his strength and power to kings and visionaries and warriors. Mitra and Varuṇa perform a judicial function which can redeem the community which has ceased to participate in the sacrifice. Finally, Soma flowing along the pathways, or propping the cosmos in its place, brings the wealth and strength in the form of the sacrificial food and the inspiration for visionaries.

Both at the general and at the more particular levels in concern for wealth and strength the gods and man are seen to be framed in a picture of harmonious reciprocity. As the community functions in the sacrifice, it shapes communal life according to dharma and inspires the gods through its offerings to sustain and maintain the community through their respective and symbiotic functions. In their mutual reciprocity, the community and the gods function together to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE ROOT MEANING OF DHARMA IN THE RG VEDA

At the outset of this study of dharma, we proposed to validate for our own understanding the claim of the Indian Religious Tradition that dharma is authoritatively known in the śruti body of literature. From that literature we chose to study, the Rg Veda Samhita and the way in which dharma and its related verb forms were used in the hymns. The references were examined in their immediate setting, as part of a body of actions performed by one or more of the gods or powers in the Rg Veda and as part of one of three main themes: Cosmology, Sacrifice and Community. Having surveyed the body of references, by way of summary and conclusion to this part of the study, we want to consider how the task of validation of the Tradition's claim about dharma has been advanced.

At the most basic level our understanding of the Traditions's claim has been advanced through the demonstration that dharma and its related verb forms are significantly present in the hymns of all ten mandalas of the Rg Veda. Not only is there a numerical significance to the references, but also, and this is most important, we have been able to show



a conceptual significance to those references.

The conceptual significance is present in two ways. First, there are the specific actions of various gods - primarily Agni, Indra, the Ādityas and Soma - in the fulfillment of those duties which are expressed by dhr. In the cosmological theme, we saw that no one god acts to create or support the cosmos, but each power acts according to its own nature to contribute a nuance to the unfolding structures of creation. Agni's light and mantra, Indra's force, Mitra and Varuṇa's rta and Soma's mediations constitute the characteristic expressions of the gods in creation. Such characteristic expressions are not, however, portrayed in isolation from one another. In the unfolding of the Cosmos, in the Sacrifice and in the Community, the gods act in a symbiotic way to uphold creation, to found and maintain the sacrifice and to bring their respective implications to the vedic, sacrificing community. In each theme the gods contribute a nuance to the total picture of actions conveyed by dhr.

Seeing the co-operative and reciprocal relationships between the gods and the vedic community suggested a second, broader conceptual significance of dharma. That broader significance we have called the core or root meaning of dharma, which was tentatively expressed at the outset as: the orderly relatedness of all that is. Our contention is

that this core or root meaning is the basis for the Tradition's claim that dharma is authoritatively known in śruti. The basis for that contention is that the core meaning conveys the underlying coherence of the family of dharma references. That underlying coherence has three main aspects. 1) There is the basic function of 'upholding' which is realized by the gods or powers in the Cosmology, the Sacrifice and the Community. 2) There is, in the gods' functions of upholding, the characteristics of 'orderliness' and 'relatedness'. The gods act to uphold things in such a way that their actions and the effects of those actions are orderly. In addition, particularly in the sacrifice, there are manifest the patterns of reciprocal relatedness between the gods and the community. 3) Finally, Dharma is a principle which pervades 'all that is'. All powers and all aspects of creation are upheld. Indeed to be upheld is an essential characteristic of all that is.

These three aspects of the core meaning underlie the way in which dharma was used in the hymns and in each of the themes. The cosmological was the most important because it was in that context that we saw dharma as a constituent of the cosmos from the very outset of creation. Dharma was present in hiranyagarbha - Agni as the functional expression of satya or truth. From Agni, dharma pervaded all the gods and their respective, nuanced contributions

to creation. It was in this theme as well, that the gods showed their co-operative relatedness. Each god functions in a characteristic way, but each contributed to the manifestations of other gods so that it became evident that each was dependent upon the other powers. In essence the cosmological theme set the basic pattern of upholding, and orderly relatedness. The comprehensive necessity for both upholding and orderly relatedness suggests that the root meaning expressed the coherence underlying all the gods' actions expressed by dhr.

The pattern set in the cosmological theme was carried over into the sacrifice. There the gods established a pattern of reciprocal relatedness between the vedic community and their own actions through the ritual of the yajña. The gods acted in the ritual to differentiate the Purusa and make creation manifest. The vedic community imitated that sacrifice. In doing so they support the functions of the gods with the sacrificial offering. In turn the gods brought to the vedic community the basic necessities for life. In this reciprocal relatedness, the vedic community became integrated into the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is. The implications of that integration for the vedic community was the receipt

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of wealth, power and long life.

In summary, the root meaning can be said to underlie all aspects of the divine functions. As such it is a basic principle seen by the ṛsis to be an integral part of creation. On the basis of that vision about dharma we want to argue that the authoritativeness of dharma for the later Tradition resides in the core or root meaning. On the basis of such a meaning it became possible for the Tradition to change, develop, and reconstitute what dharma means cosmologically, in religious practice and for the vedic community, while, at the same time, remaining authoritatively dependent upon the Rg Veda's use of dharma. The authoritativeness of dharma in the Rg Veda is, then, its root meaning, underlying the specific actions of the gods but visible in the coherence of those actions.

It remains now for us to look ahead to the Bhagavad Gītā, where, it is our task to show the continuity of the

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Such phrases as vedic community and needs of the community have sociological and anthropological implications which involve valid issues which are, however, beyond the reasonable limits of this work. Of more direct relevance to this work are those questions of a more strictly 'theological' nature which involve the community, its 'needs' and expectations. For a thorough consideration of this sort of question the reader is referred to Stein Rhode's study, Deliver Us From Evil, (Copenhagen, 1946), which to date, remains the most humane and thorough examination of these issues.

root meaning of dharma. It is only legitimate to see the root meaning as the expression of the authoritativeness of śruti for smṛti when it is possible to demonstrate that the root meaning is present in the coherence of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā.

PART TWO

THE CHARIOT:  
CONTINUITY OF THE ROOT MEANING OF DHARMA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO DHARMA IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

At the outset of our study we stated that our purpose was to validate the Tradition's claims about dharma by establishing a root meaning for the term. The first phase of that task was to examine the most ancient text of the Indian Religious Tradition, the Rg Veda and its usages of dhr in both the verbal and noun forms. On the basis of our study we formulated a root meaning: the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is.

From our discussion of the śruti-smṛti structure of the Indian Religious Tradition, we determined that a root meaning must not only have a śruti basis, but also must demonstrate continuity amidst the profound changes which occurred within the religious tradition. We turn, therefore to the question of the continuity of dharma's root meaning. Is continuity a matter of simple identity with the Rg Vedic meanings or is it something new?

In turning from the Rg Veda to the Bhagavad Gītā, we are turning from what the tradition called a 'śruti' text to one which was understood to be 'smṛti'. As we have already noted, many Western scholars have been mystified by the claim of authoritative precedence attributed by the

tradition to śruti. We noted, for example, that Louis Renou could find at best a 'symbolic'<sup>1</sup> significance to the claim and therefore asserted that there was in reality a profound discontinuity between the Rg Veda on the one hand and the more 'rational' literature of smṛti on the other. The charge of discontinuity against the self-understanding of the tradition is an important one with regard to the development of our thesis. It is therefore important for us to determine whether the overwhelming characteristic of the Bhagavad Gītā is the changes to be found within it when compared to a text like the Rg Veda or whether there is any significant ground for asserting continuity.

Within the Bhagavad Gītā the charge of discontinuity rests upon a set of admittedly very significant changes evident by comparison with the Rg Veda. For example, the Rg Veda is a collection of hymns or chants, the purpose of which was to name and praise the gods so that they would come to the sacrifice and receive the offerings presented by the community. These offerings accepted by the gods inspired them to maintain the cosmos and the community. By way of contrast, the Gītā, while literally being called a 'song' seems not to have any ritual function. Rather its purpose,

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<sup>1</sup>  
cf. Chapter One: "Themes and Questions" pp. 1 - 50



along with the entire Mahābhārata epic, is didactic.<sup>2</sup> At the most obvious level, the warrior hero of the Gītā, Arjuna, is rent by confusion about dharma at the outset of the song and the substance of the text is Kṛṣṇa's teaching to Arjuna intended to remedy his confusion so that he can fight a war against his enemies.

Another profoundly significant change between the two texts is the fact that in the Rg Veda there is a pantheon of gods who function symbiotically. In the Bhagavad Gītā, there is but one God, Kṛṣṇa, who makes himself manifest in human form according to verse 4.7 in the Gītā to rescue dharma. While the gods act in conformity with dharma in the Rg Veda Kṛṣṇa sees his function in the world not only to act according to dharma, but also to teach it. The shift from many gods to one god who reveals both himself and his teaching constitutes a striking change in emphasis in the relation of man and community to the source and power(s) in creation.

Generally speaking the cumulative effect of such changes can be expressed as a shift from a ritually focused

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<sup>2</sup>  
cf. Sukthankar, pp. 58-60, 86-90, 121-124. In these passages Sukthankar argues for a didactic purpose on 'mundane', 'ethical' and metaphysical levels. Each level is inseparable from the other, yet taken as a whole presents an overall unity of purpose to the epic as a whole.

text to one which is a didactically focused theology of tradition.<sup>3</sup> Within the shift we find that there have also been striking changes in the usage of dhr and its derivative forms both verbal and nounal. For example, while Kṛṣṇa upholds the cosmos in a way similar to that depicted in the Rg Veda<sup>4</sup> he is also responsible for the rescue of dharma.

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<sup>3</sup>  
The use of theology in the 'theology of tradition' is intended to convey that the teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā is a coherent and consistent whole. We speak of a 'theology of tradition' because the teaching is also a self-conscious recollection (smṛti) of śruti, intending to articulate in its main theme, dharma, the continuity of the Tradition.

To speak of the 'theology of tradition' in the Gītā is not intended to suggest that there is but one theological view expressed about the text. Śankara and Rāmānuja viewed the text very differently. Our concern is not with the viewpoints of the schools which commented on the Gītā. Our concern is to look directly at the text and examine its use of dharma and the relation of those uses to the śruti tradition.

cf. J.A.B. Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja on the Bhagavad Gītā, (Delhi, 1968). J. B. Carman, The Theology of Rāmānuja, (New Haven, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>  
cf. 14.27, 15.13.  
Unless otherwise indicated all references in this section will refer to the Bhagavad Gītā.

The Rg Vedic gods do not rescue dharma, so in this and other similar dharma functions, it is clear that what is to be done in the Bhagavad Gītā is very often quite different from that in the Rg Veda.

The most important of the differences revolves around the fact that dharma is now a central concept both in the Bhagavad Gītā and in smṛti literature in general. While verbal types of usages remain important in conveying the meaning of dharma, more significantly the actions to be done are conceived through the use of the noun forms of dharma. The concept is self-consciously used to describe a whole range of actions, the performance of which is in harmony with the principle of dharma.

The shift of emphasis from a verbal usage to a conceptual usage<sup>5</sup> is an important consequence of the shift from a ritual text such as the Rg Veda to a theological text like the Bhagavad Gītā. Kṛṣṇa's didactic task is to teach Arjuna the meaning of dharma. The fact that Kṛṣṇa's teaching contains so much that is different seems to offer considerable support to those who would argue that there is

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<sup>5</sup> There are 74 references to words derived from dhr in the Bhagavad Gītā. Of those 9 are the name of Dhṛtarāstra; 36 are forms of dharma alone or in compounds; 29 are verb forms.

a dramatic discontinuity in the Tradition. However, it is our intention to argue that while, many actions are quite different in the two texts considered in this thesis, there is an essential continuity of the root meaning underlying the diverse forms of dharmā in the Bhagavad Gītā. Our contention is that this continuity is not just an accident of the linguistic history of the forms of the root  $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$ , but the very essence of what the Tradition intends when it posits that śruti literature is authoritative for what follows. While much of the content of what it means to act in harmony with dharmā may be changed, the purpose of dharmā established in the Rg Veda (that the orderly relatedness of all that is, is to be upheld) remains the fundamental basis for the new developments in the meanings of dharmā.

The articulation of the root meaning of dharmā is expressed in the Bhagavad Gītā in the context of an interpretation of Tradition. The whole teaching about dharmā is formulated in such a way that Kṛṣṇa appropriates the essence of dharmā from śruti teachings about the Cosmos, about the Sacrifice and about the Community, while at the same time re-articulating each in a new way.

In order to be in a position to argue the continuity of the root meaning in the Tradition, we must first consider

the connection of the Gītā's purpose with that of the larger epic, the Mahābhārata. Secondly, we must examine Arjuna's statements regarding his confusion about dharma in order to grasp the dimensions of the problem that faces Kṛṣṇa in his teaching. Thirdly, we must outline our approach to the Bhagavad Gītā. We can then turn to the task of examining the uses of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā with a view to showing the continuity of its root meaning with that established in the Rg Veda.

#### 1. THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AND THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

The Bhagavad Gītā is set within the Mahābhārata. In terms of the text it is found in the 'Bhīṣma Parva' which is the sixth of the eighteen divisions of the epic. The 'Bhīṣma Parva' is divided into five subsections, the fourth of which is the Bhagavad Gītā. The 'Parva' has as its subject matter the final preparations for war between the Kauravas and their cousins, the Pāṇḍavas. In the first section, Bhīṣma, the aged patriarch of the Kauravas, is installed as the general heading the forces of Duryodana, the ruler of the Kaurava household. The geography of the battlefield is analyzed in detail in two sections and the war commences

with the first chapter of the Gītā. The 'Parva' ends with the incapacitating of Bhīṣma by Arjuna, the greatest warrior among the five Pāṇḍava brothers. In all, the 'Parva' covers the preparations, the inception of the battle and ten days of its duration during which neither side in the battle gains any great advantage.

How events had reached the point of a cataclysmic war is the subject of the first five sections of the Mahābhārata. The protagonists in the battle, the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, are cousins. The battle is over their respective claims for the kingdom. In each case their claims to the throne are grounded in a complex geneological history of the clan as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Suffice it to say, that each side has a valid claim, but there is apparently a greater validity to that of Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the five Pāṇḍavas. An extensive part of the initial books of the Mahābhārata is an account of how Duryodana, the eldest son of the Kauravas, tries to claim the throne first through an attempt to murder Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers and subsequently by playing upon Yudhiṣṭhira's devotion to dharma and his passion for gambling.

While the murder attempt fails, the gambling match succeeds in temporarily removing the Pāṇḍavas from the kingdom, Yudhiṣṭhira's loss at dice, results in his exile with

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For a careful account of the geneology, cf. The Mahābhārata, Vol. I translated and edited by J.A.B. Van Buitenen, (Chicago, 1973), pp.12-13.

his brothers and their wife for twelve years with a thirteenth in secret hiding. During the last year, should the Pāṇḍavas be discovered, the exile must be repeated. Duryodana claims the right to rule throughout the period of exile. The exile of the Pāṇḍavas is the subject of sections three and four of the Mahābhārata and the fifth section deals with the diplomatic negotiations at the end of the exile in which the Pāṇḍavas seek to re-establish their claim for at least part of the kingdom. The failure of these negotiations makes the war between the two families inevitable. With the Bhagavad Gītā, that war commences.

The conflict between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kaurvas has many levels of significance which are rooted in basic themes about dharma in the Rg Veda.<sup>7</sup> For example, the conflict between the cousins is over the question of succession; over which line within the family will inherit the wealth and power of kingship. In our discussion of the usages of dharma with regard to the vedic Community an important consequence of the reciprocal relatedness of all that is, was the receipt of wealth and power. The power struggle between Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodana can then be understood as a struggle for power

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<sup>7</sup> cf. V.S. Sukthankar's discussion of the meaning of the epic on the ethical plain and especially, his discussion of both dharma's meaning and its place in the thought of the epic as a whole.

and wealth fought within the framework of dharma. While Duryodana must be understood to have some legitimacy to his claim, he is depicted in the epic as willing to act without restraint to gain his ends. Typical is his attempts to murder the Pāṇḍavas. By contrast the Pāṇḍavas act within a framework of dharma to establish their claim. Yudhiṣṭhira knows his own weakness for gambling, but will not withdraw because the situation requires that he act according to dharma and accept his cousin's challenge. Furthermore, the Pāṇḍavas go into exile rather than revolt against their fate because it is required by their understanding of dharma. The Pāṇḍavas explicitly assume that by acting in harmony with dharma, wealth and power will come to them in spite of temporary setbacks.

The assumption that action in harmony with dharma brings wealth and power is set within the complex rules of ksatriyahood which had evolved during the periods between the Rg Veda and the Mahābhārata. While we find in the Rg Veda that the gods protect the community which functions in harmony with dharma, and the varṇa structure of the community in one instance is described as emerging from the different aspects of the Puruṣa or Spirit in a hierarchically differentiated form made up of priests and warriors, landholders and serfs,



it is problematic to know to what extent that social differentiation actually characterized the vedic community. By the time of the Mahābhārata however, it is clear that the hierarchical structure which differentiated extended families according to the fourfold pattern was established and the succession battle was fought out within the framework of the rules or customs which govern the kṣatriya portion in that hierarchy.

The question which haunts the Pāṇḍavas is the meaning of dharma as custom had come to interpret it, in the midst of a confused situation where specific customs seem to be at odds with each other. Dharma seems to be at odds with itself. At stake for the Pāṇḍavas is a question of succession, wealth and power, but also the whole idea and nature of harmonious integration in an order which is understood to interrelate and uphold the whole structure of the cosmos and human existence. While the broad issue is made concrete in the context of a specific family of a specific varṇa, we shall see in detail as we analyze Arjuna's dilemma and Kṛṣṇa's teaching that the conflict is applicable to the entire varṇa system - that is the whole community, and is inseparable from the root meaning of dharma established in the R̥g Veda.

The question posed in the whole epic and in the Gītā, is the meaning of dharma at a time when its usages appear contradictory and confusing. The fact that the whole epic

describes in detail how difficult it is to know dharma suggests that there was a consensus that the proper functioning of creation and human existence depended upon such knowledge as the basis for human action. This conviction informs the many long discourses on various subjects throughout the epic; for example, the one on kingship in the 'Śānti Parva'. Such didactic sections of the epic combine with the story to confirm the consensus that dharma is central; to pose the question of the meaning of the multitude of confusing usages; and to respond to such confusion. In such a framework, the Bhagavad Gītā, as V.S. Sukthankar has stated, is the 'kernel'<sup>9</sup> of the whole epic because it is the central teaching about dharma.

In essence, the relationship of the Bhagavad Gītā to the epic as a whole is one in which the issues of the diverse meanings of dharma are reduced to their essential components and responded to. The teaching formulates the continuity of tradition and dharma's core or root meaning as the conceptual framework within which the diverse forms of the term's use have their meaning and purpose.

## 2. ARJUNA'S CRISIS OVER DHARMA

Having outlined some of the ways in which the Gītā is related to the Mahābhārata epic, our task now is to examine Arjuna's dilemma both in the light of the larger

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<sup>9</sup>  
Sukthankar, p. 115.

issues of the epic and what we have seen of the root meaning of dharma in the Rg Veda. The purpose of this inquiry is to establish the dimensions of the problem which face Kṛṣṇa in his teaching. We want to indicate how dharma is the conceptual focus for the crisis and thereby establish why Kṛṣṇa's response is articulated in the form of a theology of tradition, the main theme of which is dharma.

The setting for Arjuna's crisis is a battlefield. The name attributed to this field in the Gītā is both Kurukṣetra and Dharmakṣetra.<sup>10</sup> The field where Arjuna collapses in despair over the battle in which the whole of the Kaurava clan faces the prospect of destruction is known by the name of dharma. Many complex interpretations are possible on the basis of the two names of the battlefield, but suffice it to say at this point that the fact that one name contains dharma calls attention to this important concept at the very outset of the text.

The beginning of the battle to be fought on the Dharmakṣetra is announced by the Kaurava forces under Duryodana. With the cacophonous cry of conchshells, drums and cymbals both sides begin the advance toward battle. In the midst of the clash of sounds, Arjuna raises his bow as if to charge into the melee, but instead instructs Kṛṣṇa his charioteer to drive to a point in the middle of the

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<sup>10</sup>  
1.1.

battlefield and halt. From this vantage point, Arjuna surveys the armies already engaged in battle. What Arjuna sees can be described as his "first vision" which stands in striking contrast with his "second vision" that of Kṛṣṇa's eternal form described in Chapter xi of the Gītā.

Arjuna's first vision is with his natural eyes and what he sees naturally constitutes the ground for his confusion about dharma. Arjuna sees that both armies in this battle are made up of fathers and grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons and friends.<sup>11</sup> The effect of seeing all his relatives and friends gathered to do battle is devastating. Arjuna becomes both depressed (viśidann) and filled with compassion (krpaya)<sup>12</sup> to the point that he is rendered incapable of fighting<sup>13</sup>. In addition, he sees 'portents' (nimittāni)<sup>14</sup> that reflect in the cosmos the disharmony which he feels in the face of the necessity of this battle. In consequence Arjuna states:

Them I do not wish to slay,  
Even tho they slay (me), O slayer of Madhu,  
Even for three-world rulerships  
Sake; how much less for the sake of the earth.

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<sup>11</sup>  
1.26-27.

<sup>12</sup>  
1.28.

<sup>13</sup>  
1.26-36.

<sup>14</sup>  
1.31.

Having slain Dhṛtarāṣṭra's men, to us  
 What joy would ensue, Janārdana?  
 Evil alone would light upon us,  
 Did we slay these (our would be) murderers.

etān na hantum icchāmi  
 ghnato 'pi madhusūdana  
 api trailokyarājyasya  
 hetoḥ kim nu mahīkrte

nihatya dhṛtarāṣṭrān naḥ  
 kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana  
 pāpam evā 'śrayed asmān  
 hatvai 'tān ātatāyinaḥ 15

Arjuna's reaction to what he sees on the battlefield leads him to conclude that the consequences of the battle, irrespective of which side emerges as the victor, would be disastrous. He suggests that power and wealth are not ends in themselves, but goals to be realized for the sake of the family as a whole. To kill relations, teachers and friends is to dissolve the point of acquiring wealth and power, and furthermore, it is against customs arising from dharma. To do battle with elders and teachers is to break patterns of reverence and authority among men. Furthermore, he sees that the consequences for his own destiny are evil (pāpa). He argues that the price of such evil is not worth the conquest of the triple structure of creation (trailokya)<sup>16</sup> let alone ruling power in this world alone. Arjuna therefore concludes:

Therefore we should not slay  
 Dhṛtarāṣṭra's men, our own kinsfolk.  
 For how, having slain our kinsfolk,  
 Could we be happy, Madhva?

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15  
 1.35-36.

16  
 1.36.

Even if they do not see,  
Because their intelligence is destroyed by greed,  
The sin caused by destruction of family,  
And the crime involved in injury to a friend,

How should we not know enough  
To turn back from this wickedness,  
The sin caused by destruction of family  
Perceiving, O Janārdana?

tasmān nā 'rhā vāyam hantum  
dhārtarāṣṭrān svabāndhavān  
svajanam hi katham hatvā  
sukhinaḥ syāma mādhava

yady apy ete na paśyanti  
lobhopahatacetasāḥ  
kulakṣayakṛtam doṣam  
mitradrohe ca pātakām

katham na jñeyam asmābhiḥ  
pāpād asmān nivartitum  
kulakṣayakṛtam doṣam  
prapaśyadbhir janārdana 17

In these passages, Arjuna begins to develop his argument against fighting in the war. Not only does he see it as an objective evil against his own happiness, but he also sees that it is incumbent upon him, having recognized the evil which will ensue by the war, to withdraw from it. While his cousins, the Kauravas, cannot see things as he does because their consciousness is fragmented by greed (lobho -  
18  
pahatacetasā). Arjuna can see, and hence, he concludes it is better that he not fight than murder his would-be murderers.

The force of this argument against participation in the battle is essentially that it constitutes a sin (doṣa). The ends - conquest and realization of power and wealth - cannot be justified by the means necessary to attain them.

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17  
1.37-39.  
18  
1.38.

Seeing this, Arjuna has established the basis for re-stating his position in terms of dharma. The power of this new stage in the argument is accented by the fact that Arjuna has been throughout the epic a great and heroic warrior who has never shrunk from the necessity of battle. Drona, his guru in the arts of war and ksatriyahood, had taught him well. He therefore knows his task and duty. It is in the light of his fulfillment of his ksatriyadharmā throughout the epic story that the critical proportions of his dilemma are clearly visible and given emphasis at this juncture.

Accordingly, Arjuna argues that to perform his dharma as a warrior in this war will destroy the kula or family. For example, a kula constitutes the families of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kaurvas, both of which are part of one jāti or kin group.<sup>19</sup> Thus with this war, and the destruction of the kula

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<sup>19</sup>  
Irawati Karve Kinship Organization in India, Third edition (Bombay, 1968), pp. 46-47.  
Karve states:

Kula,... seems to refer to the whole of the patri-family residing at one place. Kula is thus the aggregate of kin in a great family.

She continues later:

The kula may be called a phratry, a gebrüderschaft, which remained an exogamous unit as long as it was based on one locality. This dependence on locality was due to the custom of changing the name of a kula either through change in locality or through choosing any one of the different ancestors as kulakara.

Karve also points out that the use of the name 'Pāṇḍava' rather than 'Kaurava' which is the jāti name is an illustration of the use of Kula.

the eternal dharmas of the family (kuladharmāhṛāṇātānāḥ)  
 will be destroyed.<sup>20</sup> The effect of the destruction of family  
 and dharma results in the rule of adharma which brings  
 destruction to the kula in its entirety.<sup>21</sup> That is to say,  
 since the war will destroy the protectors of the family, the  
ksatriya warriors, the surviving family will be exposed to  
 the forces of adharma, the consequences of which will  
 ultimately destroy the family in its entirety through  
 corruption of women and mixture of varna, the hierarchical  
 caste order:

Because of the prevalence of lawlessness, Kṛṣṇa.  
 The women of the family are corrupted;  
 When the women are corrupted, O Vṛṣṇi-clansman,  
 Mixture of caste ensues.

adharmābhibhavāt kṛṣṇa  
 praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ  
 strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārsneyā  
 jāyate varṇasaṃkarāḥ 22

Arjuna's understanding that the war is sinful (doṣa)<sup>23</sup>  
 and evil (pāpa)<sup>24</sup> is in his view, a consequence of the mixture  
 of varna as adharma prevails.

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20  
1.40.

21  
1.40.

22  
1.41.

23  
1.38,43.

24  
1.36,39.



Mixture (of caste) leads to naught but hell  
 For the destroyers of the family and for the family;  
 For their ancestors fall (to hell),  
 Because the rites of (giving) food and water are  
 interrupted.

sankaro narakāyai 'va  
 kulaghnānām kulasya ca  
 patanti pitaro hy eṣām  
 luptapīṇḍokakakriyāḥ 25

As women marry men from levels in the varna hierarchy to  
 which they do not belong the purity of the kula is destroyed,  
 and no one possesses the sacred duty to offer the sacrifice  
 of food and water to the fathers (pitṛ), the founders and  
 maintainers of the family. The sin which begins with  
 participation in the war brings its inevitable consequence  
 that a varna is no longer pure and both the jātidharma or the  
 'law' of an extended kinship group such as that of the whole  
 Kaurava clan and the kuladharmā, the 'law' of a family like  
 the Pāṇḍavas, are destroyed. The final consequence of  
 destruction of the kula is that those who participate in the  
 destruction dwell in hell eternally<sup>27</sup>. Significantly, the  
 ground for Arjuna's conviction concerning this entire pattern  
 of cause and consequence is śruti for he states at the end of  
 1.44 that his whole understanding is based upon what he has

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25  
 1.42.

26  
 1.43.

27  
 1.44.

heard (anuśuśrūma), refering probably, to the teaching about śruti conveyed to him by Drona, his guru in the context of his training in ksatryadharma and by Bhiṣma the family patriarch a recognized expert in the 'Śānti Parva' on dharma.

As a result of this understanding of the implications of doing his dharma as a warrior, Arjuna resolves not to fight:

Ah woe! 'Twas a great wickedness  
That we had resolved to commit,  
In that thru greed for the joys of kingship,  
We undertook to slay our kinsfolk

If me unresisting,  
Weaponless, with weapons in their hands,  
Dhṛtarāṣṭra's men should slay in battle,  
That would be a safer course for me.

Thus speaking Arjuna in the battle  
Sat down in the box of the car,  
Letting all his bow and arrows,  
His heart smitten with grief.

aho bata mahat pāpaṃ  
kartuṃ vyavasitā vyaṃ  
yad rājyasukhalobhena  
hantuṃ svajānam udyatāḥ

yadi mām apratikaram  
śāstram śāstrapāṇayah  
dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus  
tan me kṣemataram bhavet

evam uktvā 'rjunah saṃkhye  
rathopastha upāviśat  
viśṛjya saśaram cāpam  
śokāsaṃvignamāṇasaḥ 28

In Chapter Two of the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna briefly restates his argument and his resolve against fighting. He argues that Bhiṣma the family patriarch and Drona his guru

in the arts of war deserve pūjā or reverence, not slaughter  
 at his hands. <sup>29</sup> In addition Arjuna states that he does not  
 know which were better "whether we should conquer, or they  
 should conquer us" yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuh. <sup>30</sup> As a  
 result, Arjuna concludes:

My very being afflicted with the taint of weak  
 compassion,  
 I ask Thee, my mind bewildered as to [dharma] the  
 right  
 Which were better, that tell me definitely;  
 I am Thy pupil, teach me that have come to Thee  
 (for instruction).

kārpanyad~~o~~ṣṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ  
 prcchāmi tvāṁ dharmasammūdhacetāḥ  
 yac chreyaḥ syān niścitam brūhi tan me  
 śiṣyas te 'ham śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam 31

In the darkness of his confusion of consciousness about  
 dharma(<sup>32</sup>dharmasammūdhacetāḥ), Arjuna resolves: "I will not  
 fight" (na yotsya iti) <sup>33</sup> and submits to Kṛṣṇa as his teacher.

As he has described it, Arjuna's crisis has three  
 dimensions to it. When Arjuna submits to Kṛṣṇa as his teacher,

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29  
 2.4-5.

30  
 2.6

31  
 2.7

32  
 2.7

33  
 2.9

34

he says he is confused about dharma . In a general sense Arjuna is asking what is important for man to know. Kṛṣṇa's response, as we shall see, is that it is important to know Him as the source and maintainer of all that is. Arjuna's confusion then is to be understood in its broadest form in cosmological terms. To know dharma will require that he know the source and nature of creation.

The second dimension of Arjuna's crisis is the necessity of the battle at Kuruksetra. Arjuna is asking what he must do, and, more generally, what is important for man to do. This is a dimension of his problem related to appropriate religious action. Kṛṣṇa's response is in terms of the universal sacrifice of yoga. To know yoga as dharma is to know how man can act in such a way that he is in harmony with the cosmos and the principle of dharma.

Thirdly, Arjuna's crisis is rooted in the communal dimension of human experience. How could the community have reached the point that it was at war with itself for wealth and power? How can the varna order be in harmony with dharma when it seems to bring the community to such a cataclysmic end? It is important therefore that we see how the varna system is part of the larger order established by the teaching of Kṛṣṇa.

In these three dimensions of Arjuna's crisis we see that Arjuna is faced not just with an immediate crisis but one which requires a comprehensive account of cosmology, religious action, and community. What is strikingly different from our discussion of the Rg Veda is that Arjuna's problem arises from his understanding of an already existing tradition in which dharma was an important concept. Within the response to that problem, therefore, it is not sufficient simply to offer a teaching about cosmology, religious action or community. The teacher must address the task of correcting Arjuna's understanding of the tradition as he had received it. As we examine the usages of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā, we must not only see what dharma means in each particular use, but also see its meaning as a re-interpretation of an existing understanding of dharma. It is on the basis of this dual task that we have called Kṛṣṇa's teaching a theology of tradition. In the theology it is necessary to teach dharma both in the light of an existing meaning and in the light of a problem about that meaning, which Arjuna has delineated with great force and clarity.

It is apparent therefore that the problem which faces Kṛṣṇa is somewhat analogous to our own problem. We are interested in establishing the continuity of the root meaning of dharma. Kṛṣṇa is concerned to show Arjuna that

he has misunderstood the meaning of dharma and must see it as an integral part of the existing Tradition, of which the Rg Veda is the basis and see it in his situation as the key to the resolution of his dilemma. The issue of continuity is therefore at the very heart of Kṛṣṇa's own teaching.

The question now is how can we proceed to study dharma in the context of that problem.

### 3. THE STUDY OF DHARMA IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

Thus far we have located our study of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā within our continuing task of establishing a root meaning for dharma. Such a meaning requires, according to the self-understanding of the Indian Religious Tradition, both a śruti root form and demonstrable continuity. The Bhagavad Gītā is a smṛti text and as such has many characteristics which legitimately pose a problem for understanding both the idea of continuity in the Tradition and in particular the continuity of the root meaning for dharma from its conception in the Rg Veda.

With regard to the Bhagavad Gītā however, we have established that, generally speaking, the song of Kṛṣṇa is contained within an epic the general concern of which is instruction in dharma. The Bhagavad Gītā, as the 'kernel' teaching of the epic, sees dharma in a pervasive crisis of

immediate and cataclysmic proportions exemplified both by the war to be fought by the forces of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and by the crisis of the Tradition which the war symbolizes in the person of Arjuna.

The question now is, how shall we proceed to examine Kṛṣṇa's teachings in the face of Arjuna's crisis? When we examined the usages of dharma in the Rg Veda we faced the problem of organizing disparate references to dhṛ from various hymns according to thematic patterns and interpreting the references in their respective contexts in particular hymns. By way of contrast with the Rg Veda, the Bhagavad Gītā is a unified text setting forth a problem and a teaching intended to resolve the problem. The change in the character of the text requires a change in approach to the text and the study of dharma within it.

Generally speaking, scholarship on the Bhagavad Gītā is not very helpful in setting forth guidelines for the study of the text suitable for our purposes. Western scholars now generally say they agree with their Indian counterparts that there is a unitary character to the text. However,

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In the most recently published edition of the Bhagavad Gītā, R. C. Zaehner states in his introduction:

It was once fashionable to emphasize the various strands that go to make up the Gītā as we now have it, and to classify them as Samkhya, Vedānta, or Bhakti

(continued)

certain facets of that unity continue to pose problems for the western scholar. For example, historical and critical interest in the Gītā continues to be frustrated by lack of clarity on questions of authorship and dating while, generally speaking, neither question is of serious importance to Indian scholarship.<sup>36</sup> The consequence of the western view is that the unity of the text is compromised by the conviction that there were many recensions of the text over a period of time as long as from the fifth century B.C. to the first century A.D.<sup>37</sup> A further consequence of this critical

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35 (continued)

as the case may be, thereby emphasizing the apparent incoherence of the poem. It therefore seemed to me that the only sound way of tackling the Gītā might be 'by putting as little as possible of oneself into it . . . to consider it as a whole that should be explained by itself and by the milieu out of which it grows. . . .

Zachner continues:

It was only after teaching the Gītā for a number of years that it appeared to me, with each re-reading to be a far more unitary work than most modern scholars had been prepared to concede. . . .

R. C. Zachner, trans., The Bhagavad Gītā, (Oxford, 1969), p. 2.

36

The striking contrast is evident, for example, in Rudolf Otto's The Original Gītā in which he argues that the Gītā is part of the Kṛṣṇite recension of the Mahābhārata. By contrast, the commentaries of Śankara, Rāmānuja and the contemporary works of Tilak, Aurobindo and Vinoba Bhave are focused upon the task of interpreting the meaning of the teaching found within the text.

37

For a discussion of the date of the Bhagavad Gītā see: S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavad Gītā (London, 1949), pp. 14-15 Suvira Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism, (Delhi, 1967), pp. 14-5, 75.

(continued)



approach to the text arises even for those who would argue that the unity of the text is theological. In the face of the numerous instances of apparently contradictory statements important to the teaching of the text, it is argued that the text is inconsistent at specific points and the inconsistency is in part due to the various recensions of the text. The end result of this kind of thinking is a basic scepticism about the resolution of Arjuna's problem and confusion as to how the text could have been revered by the Tradition for so many hundreds of years.

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37 (continued)

Radhakrishnan argues for the fifth century B.C. while Suvira Jaiswal opts for a date in the last two centuries B.C. The evidence in the debate is hardly supportive of any specific date. Jaiswal does point to the first reliable reference to the text in the writings of Āryadeva who lived toward the end of the second century A.D.

38

An illustration of this kind of thinking is Franklin Edgerton's discussion of āhimsa or non-violence in the Bhagavad Gītā. He points out how contradictory it is to speak of āhimsa in a text, the purpose of which is to convince Arjuna to fight in a war. Edgerton simply sees a contradiction because he has not seen the subtlety of the problem facing Arjuna nor the subtlety of the response in which dharma as duty has many forms in many circumstances for many different people. In addition, as we shall see below, Kṛṣṇa's first teaching is to show that Arjuna can kill no one, for all life and creation is eternal.

cf. F. Edgerton trans., The Bhagavad Gītā, Harper Torchbook Edition, (New York, 1964), pp. 185-186.

Our approach to the study of dharma and the texts we have chosen to study has been to accept the claims of the Tradition at face value and, as an outsider to the Tradition, to try to understand its meaning by the process of verifying those claims. In approaching the Bhagavad Gītā we propose to assume the unity of the text. This is not to question the probability that there were various recensions of the text. It is simply to accept the text as it stands, assuming that however many recensions there may have been, those who edited the text had sufficient unity of purpose to have given it editorial unification. The text has stood in its present form without substantial alteration for centuries and has proven to be a paramount source in the Tradition for philosophical reflection and meditation. That it has proven through time to be acceptable to the Tradition makes it likely that the solution to our problem about the continuity of the root meaning of dharma in the later Tradition will be found in the text as it stands, taken as a whole.

To take the text as a unity is not to suggest that we are going to discuss everything that is in the text. Our task is simply to study dharma as it is presented in Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Arjuna's presentation of his dilemma would suggest that the meaning of dharma continues to have cosmological, religious and communal dimensions. As a result we will

organize our discussion of dharma thematically around these three topics. It is important, however, to recognize that Arjuna's dilemma is not reducible to any one of the three parts, nor is Kṛṣṇa's response just a cosmology or a new interpretation of religious action or re-affirmation of the varṇa order. Each is part of a theology of tradition which constitutes Kṛṣṇa's teaching about dharma. As a result many references will be applicable to discussions in one or more areas.

Finally, it is important to state that our discussion of the cosmological, the religious and the communal dimensions of the Bhagavad Gītā will focus on the issue of the continuity of dharma's root meaning. It is not our intention to describe the cosmology comprehensively by examining all the facets of meaning of such terms as puruṣa or prakṛti. Rather, our task while outlining the cosmology will be to show dharma's place within prakṛti and puruṣa and that the root meaning of dharma is basic to that cosmology. The same limitation applies to our discussion of yoga as the new key to the definition of appropriate religious action. Like prakṛti, yoga is a very complex term in the text. We are simply concerned to show that yoga is dharma and that the significance of that association is to provide a form of religious action which expresses the root meaning of dharma. The same purpose will apply to our

discussion of the communal implications of dharma. We shall want to establish that the varṇa system is appropriated by Kṛṣṇa's teaching in order to express the way in which society can be integrated into the underlying purpose expressed in the root meaning of dharma.

## CHAPTER II

### DHARMA, KR̥ṢṆĀ AND THE COSMOS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In our discussion of dharma and the Cosmos in the R̥g Veda, we saw that the beginning of creation was the emergence of the golden foetus (hiranyagarbha) and subsequently the birth of Agni and his twin brother Indra. With Agni the mantra and the light came to be. With Indra came the effective force to separate Heaven and Earth; to conquer Vr̥tra and release the waters as the basis for life in all its diversity. Subsequently other powers emerged in creation. Mitra and Varuṇa brought orderliness of motion (r̥ta) and Soma's power mediated between the gods and man.

In essence, the cosmos was populated by powers which functioned according to their respective dharma. Often that dharma was not expressed in noun forms, but forms of the root dhr̥. We were able to see a root meaning of dharma primarily by tracing out the actions performed according to the verb in the context of the cosmological functions of the major deities.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, while many of the Gods which we discussed in the R̥g Veda are referred to in the course of the text, their presence is always subordinate to Kṛṣṇa's.

The gods of the Rg Veda are presented as ancient manifestations of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, it is unnecessary to trace the history of the emergence of Kṛṣṇa in the Tradition from the Rg Veda forward. Our task here and in subsequent sections is to interpret the references to dharma to show the nature of the continuity of the root meaning. Such a purpose is not dependent upon the complex history of the emergence of Kṛṣṇa as a as a major deity within the smṛti literature of the Indian Tradition.<sup>2</sup>

There is however one step in the tradition which it is important to recall in order to grasp the significance of Kṛṣṇa's cosmic functions and the place of dharma within them. The last of the śruti literature was the Upaniṣads, and these texts thought out with great care the imagery of the cosmology and the sacrifice of the ancient śruti texts. The central theological affirmation which characterizes the

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<sup>1</sup>  
cf. 10.20-42.

<sup>2</sup>  
The oldest and most basic history of Vaiṣṇavism is: R. G. Bhandarkar's Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems, (Varanasi, 1965). The best current text on the early history of Vaiṣṇavism is: Suvira Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism, (Delhi, 1967). Important, though not for its historical reconstruction of Vaiṣṇavism, but for an account of the conceptual roots is: J. Gonda, Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism, (Utrecht: 1954).

Upanisads<sup>3</sup> is the equation that ātman or the soul in all life is the same as Brahman, the source and sustenance of the whole cosmos. This affirmation is critical in order to understand the fact that Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavad Gītā is Arjuna's friend and charioteer. He is a man. At the same time, V. S. Sukthankar is undoubtedly correct when he asserts that throughout the epic there is an indisputable awareness and affirmation of Kṛṣṇa's divine nature<sup>4</sup>. That he can be both rests upon the theological understanding made explicit in the Upanisads that man's soul is the same as Brahman. We shall see in detail as we proceed that the distinguishing mark of Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, is his knowledge of his divine nature, while Arjuna also a man, stands as Kṛṣṇa's pupil in need of both hearing Kṛṣṇa's teaching and seeing his divine nature. Arjuna thus stands in line with the ṛṣi's of old, in the quest for the truth behind the diversity of creation. While such knowledge came as the gift of Vāc for her beloved in the Rg Veda, in the Bhagavad Gītā it comes as the revelatory teaching and vision given to Arjuna by his friend, Kṛṣṇa. That is to say, knowledge comes from the God who is man, to the man who must learn that he is eternally one with God.

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<sup>3</sup>  
cf. Chandogya Upaniṣad, V. 10.2 - V. 24.5. Here the correspondence is in terms of a universal atman or self and the self or ātman in each human.

<sup>4</sup>  
Sukthankar, Op. cit., pp. 91-124.

While an understanding of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature is essential for our purposes, the focus of our attention in this section is the cosmological uses of dharma. Taken together there are two basic dimensions to Kṛṣṇa's dharma. He is the source and upholder of the whole of creation and secondly Kṛṣṇa is a teacher and savior of mankind. In the text, these two functions are part of an essential conceptual unity. For the purposes of an exposition of that unity, we must first separate them and then see them in relationship. We shall therefore deal with Kṛṣṇa's teaching function in the context of our discussion of yoga.

Kṛṣṇa's dharma as the upholder of the cosmos is presented in several contexts in the Bhagavad Gītā<sup>5</sup>. These references are representative of Kṛṣṇa's actions which are directly identifiable with the upholding and supporting actions of the powers in the Rg Veda. This is true in a conceptual and in a linguistic sense. All the actions of upholding are functions which are identical to those Rg Vedic powers. Significantly all are verb forms of dhr as well. However, a careful examination of these references also reveals that the structure of the cosmos within which these functions are performed has come to be seen in a very different way than was the case in the Rg Veda. Rather than emphasizing a triple structure of creation, to which there are only a few

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5  
7.4-6, 9.34, 12.3, 13.6, 14.27, 15.13.



6  
 references, the cosmos is depicted as part of Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti or natural force which both orders and brings creation into being and supports it. Kṛṣṇa's form is not however, exhausted by prakṛti, he is also puruṣa or Spirit which watches the orderly functions of prakṛti but remains indifferent to its diverse functions.

The change from the triple structure of creation populated by many powers to a cosmos depicted in terms of prakṛti and puruṣa must be examined with care to see if the change in structure brings with it changes in the root meaning of dharma.

It is our contention in the face of these types of cosmological use of dharma in the Gītā, that Kṛṣṇa's paramount tasks can only be grasped properly in the context of dharma's root meaning. The root meaning provides the underlying purpose within which both the continuities and changes of meaning can be understood. For example, while many gods uphold the cosmos in the R̥g Veda, in the Bhagavad Gītā, it is Kṛṣṇa's dharma to be the source, maintainer and even ultimately the destroyer of all creation. While the structure of that creation is articulated in a different way, the divine functions as manifest expressions of dharma's root meaning remain.

## 2. DHARMA AND KṚṢṆA'S ETERNAL NATURE

In order to show the fundamental continuity of the

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6  
 1.35, 3.22, 11.20.

root meaning of dharma, we want to examine the eternal nature of Kṛṣṇa to show that dharma constitutes an essential and fundamental dimension of that nature. It is our contention that not only is there an identifiable continuity in the meanings of dharma from the Rg Veda but those meanings are part of the underlying root meaning which is to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is.

The two terms which are most important in Kṛṣṇa's depiction of His eternal nature are prakṛti and puruṣa. Both of these terms present complex difficulties for interpretation in the Bhagavad Gītā. Not the least of those difficulties is the fact that these two terms are central to one of the philosophical schools of the Indian Tradition, Sāṃkhya.<sup>7</sup> The question that arises because of the Gītā's use of terms such as puruṣa, prakṛti and others in common with the school of Sāṃkhya is whether that school constitutes a major influence on the teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā. The references in the text make this a very difficult problem to solve. For example, the term 'sāṃkhya' itself is used in the Gītā on several occasions and normally its use

<sup>7</sup> The basic source for knowledge of sāṃkhya philosophy is the Sāṃkhya Karika. Editions of the Karika include:

John Davies, The Sāṃkhya Karika of Īśwara Krishna, (Calcutta, 1881).

A. M. Esnoul, Les Strophes De Sāṃkhya, (Paris, 1964). Of the two editions, the French edition by Esnoul is the best source.

seems to suggest simply 'knowledge' rather than the designation of a philosophical school.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the presentation of the various material and conscious forms of prakṛti that are characteristic of the Sāṃkhya cosmology and psychology do not appear to have the same meaning in the Bhagavad Gītā as they do in the Sāṃkhya system.<sup>9</sup>

The simple fact that there are significant differences in the use of terminology common to both Sāṃkhya school and the Bhagavad Gītā leads us to conclude that the most straightforward way to interpret the Bhagavad Gītā is to examine terms like prakṛti and puruṣa within the text itself and not attempt to formulate their meaning through Sāṃkhya philosophy. Such a procedure finds support on historical grounds as well. The fact that scholarship does not have consensus on a date either for the beginnings of Sāṃkhya or the composition of the Bhagavad Gītā makes the whole question of which influenced the other inconclusive.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>cf. 2.39;3.3;5.4;13.24;18.13.

<sup>9</sup>cf. S. Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 461-479, esp. 464-5

<sup>10</sup>  
- - If anything, following the argument of S. Dasgupta, the Gita could well be the source for the Sāṃkhya system. Dasgupta states: "It is easy to notice here the beginnings of thought which in the hands of other thinkers might well be developed into the traditional school of Sāṃkhya philosophy". If Dasgupta is correct it could be positively misleading to read the philosophical into the Bhagavad Gītā.

Of the two terms, prakṛti and puruṣa, the most often discussed in the Gītā is prakṛti. This fact arises because prakṛti means, in our expression, natural force or power. Prakṛti is the source of both the material cosmos and the conscious powers found in varying degrees in all of life. Puruṣa in the Bhagavad Gītā is both in and outside of prakṛti hence the forms of material and conscious power. The puruṣa is described most often through epithets which speak of it simply as 'higher' (para) or 'unmanifest' (avyakta) or 'lightest spirit' (puruṣottama). These and other forms of description accent its transcendence of prakṛti. However, the most important characteristic of the Bhagavad Gītā is that puruṣa and prakṛti are consistently interpreted as dimensions of the integral divine nature of Kṛṣṇa. There is not a dualism of 'spirit' and 'matter' as is often the case in the interpretations of the Sāṃkhya school. Rather, Kṛṣṇa is both puruṣa and prakṛti. Kṛṣṇa is the manifest unity of all that is.

To know exactly what the Bhagavad Gītā means by the puruṣa is very difficult to establish. This fact is even acknowledged in the text itself.<sup>11</sup> It is pointed out that it is much more difficult to know the forms of the spirit which are described as "imperishable (akṣara), undefinable (anirdēśya), unmanifest (avyakta), omnipresent (sarvatraga),

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11  
12.5.

and unthinkable, (acintya)<sup>12</sup> than it is to know Kṛṣṇa. This language that is used to speak about the puruṣa in Kṛṣṇa is intended to emphasize its transcendence of form and matter.

Transcendence however is not to suggest that puruṣa is distinct from creation and all its forms. The puruṣa enters into the world (loka) of creation in two forms.

Here in the world are two spirits,  
The perishable, and the imperishable,  
The perishable is all beings;  
The imperishable is called the immovable.

dvāv imau puruṣau loke  
kṣaras cā 'kṣāra eva ca  
kṣarah sarvāṇi bhūtāni  
kūṭastho 'kṣāra ucyate 13

Within creation the puruṣa enters into all life forms. Once a part of those forms it moves through the cycles of change which begin with birth and continue through life to death and re-birth. In the sense that puruṣa is entered into creation, it is subject to the cycles of mortality of creation. But puruṣa is not limited to those forms which are subject to change. Puruṣa is 'aksara' or not perishable and as such it is called the 'immovable' kutastha. But even the polarities of ksara and aksara, 'perishable' and 'imperishable' cannot exhaust the extent of spirit. There is yet a higher spirit:

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<sup>12</sup>  
12.3.

<sup>13</sup>  
15.16.

But there is a highest spirit, other (than this),  
 Called the Supreme Soul;  
 Which, entering into the three worlds,  
 Supports them, the undying Lord.

uttamaḥ puruṣas tv anyah  
 paramātmē 'ty udāhṛtaḥ  
 yo lokatrayam āviśya  
 bibharty avyaya īśvaraḥ 14

The name of the supreme soul (paramātmā) is īśvara and his function in creation is to 'support' the cosmos. īśvara or the paramātmā, the highest soul, is not contained within a polarity such as akṣara and kṣara which are also forms of the spirit in the world.

Spirit however is not just called īśvara. It is also called Kṛṣṇa. Like īśvara, Kṛṣṇa is in the world of creation and is not limited to the polarities of the 'perishable' and the 'imperishable':

Since I transcend the perishable,  
 And am higher than the imperishable too,  
 Therefore in the world and the Veda I am  
 Proclaimed as the highest spirit.

yasmāt kṣaram atīto 'ham  
 akṣarād api co 'ttamaḥ  
 ato 'smi loke vedeca  
 prathitaḥ puruṣottamaḥ. 15

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14  
 15.17.

15  
 15.18.

cf. 11.3. Here Arjuna is portrayed requesting to see the divine form of Kṛṣṇa. In doing so Kṛṣṇa is asked to reveal himself as 'parameśvara' and as 'īśvara' and 'puruṣottoma', (11.3). After giving Arjuna his 'third eye', Kṛṣṇa reveals himself in his "supernal form as God" paramam rūpam aiśvaram, (11.9). These all suggest that in the hierarchal pattern of the divine form, certain names are 'higher' because they portray the transcendence of lower forms and the unity of all forms of spirit.

Kṛṣṇa, Iśvara, Puruṣottama: in each of these names we have spirit understood as an integral unit. In its lower forms, spirit is understood to be in the world and subject to the contradictoriness or polarities which characterize creation. Spirit is not however just subject to the limitations of creation, but transcends them in its unity. This unity is established through an hierarchical pattern intended to portray the spirit so that it both pervades all creation in its lower aspect and at the same time totally transcends it in its higher unity. The paramātmā is therefore para or 'higher' than the spirit which is aksara and ksara. This is not to establish a separation of one aspect of spirit from another, but rather to depict creation as pervaded by puruṣa and at the same time to portray spirit entirely free of the limitations of the creation it pervades.

Puruṣa's pervasive presence in creation and, at the same time, its total transcendence of the limitations of creation is portrayed with great subtlety through the Bhagavad Gītā in the way in which Kṛṣṇa claims to be all that is in creation, all that is done in creation and at the same time, totally indifferent to creation. In terms of the theory portrayed about the puruṣa, this participation is founded upon the relation of puruṣa and prakṛti. Prakṛti is the source of matter and power and the conscious faculties in life-forms. It, like the puruṣa is eternal.

Both material nature (prakṛti) and the spirit (puruṣa),  
Know thou, are equally beginningless;

prakṛtiṃ puruṣam ca 'va  
viddhy ānādi ubhāv api. 16

When the spirit enters into creation, therefore, it enters  
in the various forms of prakṛti. Once in this association,  
puruṣa functions as the 'experiencer' of pleasure and pain:

The spirit, in pleasure-and-pain's  
Experiencing is declared the cause.

For the spirit, abiding in material nature,  
Experiences the Strands (guṇa) born of material  
nature.

puruṣaḥ sukhadukkhānām  
bhoktṛtve hetur'ucyate

puruṣaḥ prakṛtiṣtho hi  
bhukṣtē prakṛtijān guṇān 17

In its lower aspect the puruṣa is said to be the experiencer  
of the polarities which characterize creation such as 'pleasure  
and pain' sukha and duḥkha. Such 'experience' is aksara  
or impermanent and therefore characteristic of being in  
creation. In this form, puruṣa is, subject to the powers which  
operate in prakṛti, the guṇas.<sup>18</sup> As it experiences the works

16  
13.19.

17  
13.20-21.

18

It is not necessary for our purposes to consider the  
complex operations of the guṇas as they are portrayed in the  
Gītā. Suffice it to say, prakṛti takes many forms within  
creation as a result of the inter-action of the powers or guṇas.  
The powers are called sattva, rajas and tamas. The sattva  
power functions to bring the other powers to rest and unity  
with the eternal divine nature (14.6, 11,14). Rajas functions  
as passion force and strength (14.7,12,15). Tamas functions  
as the power which pulls life downward in subjugation to  
lowest faculties of life the senses and the need to fulfill

(continued)



of those powers, the spirit forms attachments which perpetuate its presence in the cycles of rebirth to which all creation is subject.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the fact that purusa is never limited to its participation in creation through prakṛti, means that it functions in fact in totally passive and indifferent ways even as it experiences and is subject to the powers of prakṛti. Characteristic of these ways of functioning include the following:

The onlooker and consenter,  
The supporter, experiencer, great Lord,  
The supreme soul also is declared to be  
The highest spirit, in this body.

upadraṣṭā 'numantā ca  
bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ  
paramātmne 'ti cā 'py ukto  
dehe 'smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ. 20

In this passage, the maheśvara, paramātmā and para purusa are located 'in this body' (dehe 'smi). Their functions are that of an 'overseer' upadraṣṭā and consenter anumantā on

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18 (continued)  
them (14.8,12,15). In addition each of these powers is indispensable to the functioning of prakṛti in the creation of the panormic diversity that constitutes all of creation. Yet each stands in a hierarchical relation to the other, in the same way in which the levels of spirit move hierarchically from those which are found in creation to those which in their unity stand in transcendence of it.

<sup>19</sup>  
13.21.

<sup>20</sup>  
13.22.

the one hand and bhartā or 'supporter' and bhoktā, 'experiencer' on the other. The function of overseer suggests a function totally apart from experiencing of pleasure and pain. While the other functions suggest the participation of purusa in creation, there is not however an absolute division of forms of purusa. The unity of Īśvara as Lord of all that is, is inseparable from the purusa which participates in creation while standing apart from it. The Īśvara which rules the cosmos, indeed, is the spirit within which all beings and all creation have existence and is the macrocosmic aspect of the purusa. It functions in prakṛti and its powers and yet remains apart from them. Purusa then, as we have depicted it here, is the translation of the Upaniṣadic equation that Brahmanis ātman: the principle which is the source of all that is (Brahman) is also in creation as the soul or ātman in all of life.

With regard to the relation of purusa and dharma, it is useful for our purpose to differentiate between those references which specifically describe the purusa in relation to dhr and those which refer directly to Kṛṣṇa in his unitary form as Īśvara or Puruṣottama. There are many references to Kṛṣṇa's dharma and we shall discuss them below. With regard to the purusa, there is really only one dhr reference in a verb form. Kṛṣṇa states:

But those who the imperishable, (aksara) undefinable,  
 Unmanifest, revere,  
 The omnipresent and unthinkable,  
 The immovable, unchanged, fixed (dhruvam)

ye tv akṣaram anirdeśyam  
 avyaktam paryupāsate  
 sarvatragam acintyam ca  
 kūṭastham acalam dhruvam 21

In this passage, the purusa is in its 'imperishable' form, that is, in a form which is in creation. It is the eternal spirit as distinguished from its polar opposite which is subject to impermanence, ksara. The purusa is described as 'fixed' (dhruva). This characteristic of the spirit is not explained in the context, though it would seem to be appropriate to see the fixed character of the aksara in terms of the eternality of spirit, and in terms of its purpose in creation to be the 'onlooker' indifferent to the powers of prakṛti and to the experiences of pleasure and pain while participating in all that is. The force of this interpretation will become clearer, as we examine the functions both of prakṛti and of Kṛṣṇa, and see the necessity of a 'fixed' spirit in the midst of the actions of prakṛti.

If the purusa is at once the unitary transcendent spirit indifferent to creation and the pervader of that creation, prakṛti is the natural power which is the vehicle of the spirit's presence in creation. Like the purusa, prakṛti is eternal. <sup>22</sup> Prakṛti is the 'cause' hetu of

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21  
12.3.

22  
13.19.

anything that concerns effect, instrument, or agent'  
 (kāryakaranakartrtva.)<sup>23</sup> In essence this phrase is saying  
 that within creation all action is a product of prakṛti.  
 The most important of prakṛti's actions is the creation of  
 the whole cosmos. Prakṛti is therefore to be understood as  
 the 'agent' kartr in creation. The instruments karana  
 which prakṛti uses to create are called the guna or powers  
 and it is the guna which realize effects kārya, that is,

23  
 13.20.

We are in essential agreement with Franklin  
 Edgerton on his interpretation of this phrase. He  
 states:

[S] Śāṅkara, [R] Rāmānuja explain kārya as  
 'elemental body,' which is an 'effect' in the later  
 Sāṅkhya sense, and karana ([R] karana) as the senses  
 with manas (and ahamkāra and buddhi, [S]) which are  
 'causes' or 'factors' (productive elements) in that  
 same sense. These both are construed as depending  
 on kartrtve, 'in the production of effects and  
 causes' i.e. of gross body and senses. Approximately  
 so most moderns (Telang, Garbe, Senart, Hill, and  
 apparently Barnett). I find this very forced and  
 and artificial. The only natural interpretation is  
 to take kārya, karana kartr as a three-member  
 dvanda, made into an abstract by adding the suffix-  
tva. The three nouns derived from the root kr,  
 'act' are meant to include all phases of action  
 (cf. xviii. 18 for a very close parallel, where  
karman replaces kārya): kārya, 'thing to be done;  
karana, 'means of doing it'; kartr, 'doer, agent';  
 the addition of tva makes the whole compound mean  
 approximately 'effectuation, instrumentality and  
 agency.' Prakṛti alone is at the bottom of all  
 that concerns all of these, that is all phases of  
 action. So in xviii. 18 karana, karman, and  
kartr constitute the threefold 'complete summary'  
 of action. Deussens comes very close to this by  
 wrongly takes tva only with kartr.

make the panorama of creation what it is.<sup>24</sup>

Prakṛti as 'agent', 'instruments' and 'effect' of all that is, is made up of numerous elements. In chapter seven they are described in terms of two parkṛtis which parallel the two puruṣas, akṣara and kṣara.

Earth, water, fire, wind,  
Ether, thought-organ, and consciousness,  
And I-faculty: thus my  
Nature is divided eight-fold.

This is my lower (nature). But other than this,  
My higher nature know:  
It is the Life (soul) great-armed one,  
By which this world is maintained. (dhāryate)

bhūmir āpo 'nalo vāyuḥ  
khaṃ mano buddhir eva ca  
ahaṃkāra iti 'yam me  
bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭedhā  
apare 'yam itas tv anyām  
prakṛtim viddhi me param  
jīvabhūtāṃ mahābāho  
yaye 'daṃ dhāryate jagat 25

The 'two prakṛtis' like the two puruṣas discussed above, are not to be understood in any sense as separate entities. Rather one prakṛti is understood to be a 'lower' aspect bringing with it into creation 'lower' elements of material and conscious creation. The second or 'higher' prakṛti brings into creation living being jīvabhūta,<sup>26</sup> that is to

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24

cf. 18.18-28.

While the focus in these passages is on the functioning of the guṇa in the individual, the identity of microcosm and Kṛṣṇa's macrocosmic form makes them entirely applicable to the cosmology of the text.

25

7.4-5.

26

Van Buitenen translates jīvabhūta as 'spiritual  
(continued)

say, it brings the powers or forces which pervade creation and most important for our purposes, function to 'uphold' or 'maintain' it according to dharma.

It is therefore evident that prakṛti has an hierarchical pattern in this passage based upon its constituent elements. The hierarchy extends to a division of constituents which make up the 'lower' prakṛti. There are the five 'material' elements - earth, water, fire, wind, and ether. Without these five elements creation as a material entity would be impossible. They represent the eternal material potential in prakṛti. The second part of Kṛṣṇa's lower prakṛti is made up of three faculties: the manas<sup>27</sup> or faculty of thought, the buddhi<sup>28</sup> which we shall call the 'faculty of

26 (continued)

being' however, we have chosen 'living being' to emphasize jīva or life in the compound.

Van Buitenen (Op. cit., p. 100-101).

27

2.56, 57, 342, 5.11.

The manas in the hierarchy of faculties depicted in 3.42, is above the senses and below the buddhi, the faculty of integration. The point of yoga is to bring the senses under the control of the manas which in turn is focused by the buddhi on the embodied spirit or ātman. The singularity of focus throughout the hierarchy of faculties is the realization of non-attached yoga in which the whole psycho-physiological system functions, yet is indifferent to what it does.

28

The interpretation of the buddhi as faculty of integration is based upon 2.41 in which there are two modes of this faculty. The first mode is 'resolute' when yoked to yoga. The second is 'irresolute' and lost to the powers of the manas as it serves the needs of the senses. Under the power of yoga, the buddhi focuses the attention of the senses, the manas, faculty of thought and the ego or faculty of doing (aḥankāra) on the soul ātman.

29

integration and the ahamkāra or the faculty of 'ego' or more literally I-doer. The fact that the three faculties of consciousness are constituents of 'lower' prakṛti suggest that they are to be understood as inseparably related to the material base of creation made up of the five material elements.

These eight elements of prakṛti must be understood to be the basis for all of creation in its material aspects and the capacity in life for thought, integrative functions and individuated action. Each of these are major topics of concern to understand prakṛti. Suffice it to say here, however, that the faculty of thought (manas) in the Bhagavad Gītā is most concerned with the senses and their direction either for the purpose of achieving their objects or for controlling them in the practice of yoga. The buddhi

29

The ahamkāra, which we translate as 'I-doer' is a complex concept on the Bhagavad Gītā. On the one hand one must dispense with all sense of "I" as ego as the doer of anything in yoga and at the same time one must act. The use by Kṛṣṇa of aham throughout the text is particularly important in understanding ahamkāra as I-doer. Kṛṣṇa does all and knows that he does not act and that is his yoga. The ahamkāra therefore is the faculty of doing which when yoked to yoga knows it does not act.

This interpretation was arrived at with the particular assistance of J. A. B. van Buitenen in his brilliant survey of the history of the concept of ahamkāra.

cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Studies in Sāṃkhya (II)" Journal of the American Oriental Society, LXXVII (1957), pp. 15-25.

as the faculty of integration is such that it is dissipated when the senses subject thought to the necessity of realizing satisfaction in sense objects. By way of contrast, the buddhi is the faculty which focuses the attention of the senses and manas on the Ívara or Highest Spirit, purusottama, when it is controlled by yoga. The I-doer or ahamkāra is one of the most important of the faculties mentioned in the Ġitā. Kṛṣṇa is the 'I-doer' of all that is done in creation, but this action is always accomplished as a yoga with the buddhi integrating all the faculties to act without attachment to ends. Throughout this discussion there is understood to be a direct correspondance between the anthropomorphic depiction of the divine and the human form. Both are pervaded by purusa and function through prakṛti. Manas, buddhi and ahamkāra therefore must be understood as attributes both of Kṛṣṇa as the cosmic spirit and as man who functions within creation.

Kṛṣṇa's higher prakṛti is the jīvabhūta which Edgerton translates as the 'Life (soul)'. More accurately jīvabhūta is 'living being'. Conveyed in this translation is the fact that prakṛti is pervaded in all its forms by the purusa. The function of 'living being' is to maintain creation. We have already seen that in 12.3 one of the characteristics of purusa in creation is that it is dhruvam 'fixed'. In the higher prakṛti, however, the 'fixed' dimension of the spirit is maintained through an active manifestation



of prakṛti which upholds dharayate creation (jagat).

The exact way in which we are to understand the function of maintaining creation is not exactly clear in 7.5. However, there are several clues to what it could mean in the next passage.

Beings spring from it,  
All of them be assured.  
Of the whole world I am  
the origin and the dissolution.

etadyonīni bhūtāni  
sarvāṇi 'ty upadhāraya  
ahaṃ kṛtsnasyajagatah  
prabhavaḥ pralayas tāthā. 30

In this passage we are told that 'it' (etat) is the yoni or womb from which all beings (bhūtāni) come. Exactly what the term 'etat' refers to is not directly evident. It could refer to the jīvabhūta simply or it could refer to the total complex of lower and higher prakṛti. The consensus of commentators is that 'etat' refers to prakṛti as a whole. Following that consensus, prakṛti is to be understood as the womb from which all beings come. To emphasize this point, Kṛṣṇa states to Arjuna that he should be 'assured' (upadhāraya) of this fact. 'Upadhāraya' is accurately represented as 'be assured' however its more literal meaning, based upon its dhṛ

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30  
7.6

31  
Edgerton points out that "Both [S] Śāṅkara and [R] Rāmānuja, followed by Telang, Garbe, Deussen, Barnett and Hill, take this to refer to both the 'natures' of vrs. 4 and 5. (Edgerton, p. 183.)

root can simply be that Arjuna must 'hold' onto this teaching in his consciousness or 'meditate' upon this teaching. What Arjuna must understand and be certain of is that prakṛti is the eternal basis for all action in creation.

This essential teaching is made clear in the second half of the verse. There Kṛṣṇa claims to be 'the origin and dissolution' of the whole world. This creative and destructive action is the function of the 'aham' the 'I' of the ahamkāra in the lower prakṛti. Elsewhere this point is described with the yonī being called Brahman and Kṛṣṇa as the 'aham', the fertilizer of the womb.

For me great Brahman is a womb  
Therein I plant the germ,  
The origin of all Beings  
Comes from that, son of Bharata

In all wombs, son of Kuntī  
Whatsoever forms originate,  
Of them great Brahman is the womb  
I am the father that furnishes the seed.

mama yonir mahad brahma  
tasmin garbham dadhāmy aham  
sambhavaḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ  
tato bhavati bhārata

sarvayoniṣu kaunteya  
mūrtayaḥ sambhavanti yāḥ  
tāsāṃ brahma mahad yonir  
aham bījapradāḥ pitā 32

Here the creative act between Kṛṣṇa as 'aham' and Brahman as the womb which holds the foetus (garbha) fertilized by

Kṛṣṇa's seed (bīja) is intended to convey the way in which puruṣa pervades all creation as its source and its enfolding support. All creativity is Kṛṣṇa's function. It is through prakṛti infused with puruṣa that action is done.

This creative function in which Kṛṣṇa acts to conceive creation out of his divine nature begins a process which ultimately brings all of creation into being.

A part just of Me in the world of the living  
Becomes the individual-soul (jīvabhūta), the  
eternal;  
The (five) sense, with the thought-organ as sixth  
Which rest in material nature, it draws along.

mamāi 'vā 'mso jīvaloke  
jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ  
manuṣṣaṣṭhānī 'indriyāni  
prakṛtiṣṭhāni karṣati 33

Here we find that Kṛṣṇa specifically identifies jīvabhūta as a fraction of himself. With it, the other constituents of prakṛti are drawn into creation. The world (loka) is the world of the jīva and the function of the jīva is to maintain creation. Indeed Kṛṣṇa states this specifically in a subsequent passage of the same chapter:

And entering into the earth, (all) beings  
I maintain [dhārayāmi] by (My) power;  
And I nourish all plants  
Becoming the juicy soma... .

I, becoming the (digestive) of all men,  
Dwelling in the body of (all) living beings,  
In union with the upper and nether breaths  
Cook (digest) their food of all four sorts.

gām āviśya ca bhūtāni  
 dhārayāmy aham ojasā  
 puṣṇāmi cau 'śadhīḥ sarvāḥ  
 somō bhūtvā rasātmakāḥ

aham vaiśvanaro bhūtvā  
 prāṇināṃ deham āśritaḥ  
 prāṇāpāṇasamāyuktaḥ  
 pacāmy annam caturvīdham 34

As the jīvabhūta which has entered into creation, Kṛṣṇa by this fraction of himself, uses his power ojas, much in the same way that Indra did in the cosmology of the Rg Veda to uphold all of life that is in creation. The function of this ojas is pervasive. It nourishes plant life and is the unconscious actions of digestion within the body of men. Both of these types of functions, which take place in creation are thus accomplished by Kṛṣṇa's actions.

Maintenance of creation is then a divine function. It must be understood as comprehensive of all action which is performed from the very conception of creation itself to the biological process of all forms of life. Since Kṛṣṇa must be understood as the doer of even the unconscious bodily activities as his dharma then all the more must he be understood as the doer of those actions which confront Arjuna on the battlefield. What Arjuna must know is that in no sense does he act, but that it is Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti which acts in him. What he must do is harmonize his knowledge and his actions, so that he knows the comprehensiveness of Kṛṣṇa's actions as the fulfillment of the meaning of dharma. Then he too will participate in the

cosmic task of maintaining all that is.

Recognition of the comprehensiveness of Kṛṣṇa's functions in creation is critical to see continuity of the root meaning of dharma. We saw in the Rg Veda that the gods functioned symbiotically to uphold creation. Kṛṣṇa, as the name of the one god who conceives creation and maintains it by his power, constitutes a direct appropriation of a major dimension of the vast meaning of dharma. Creation requires maintenance in the cosmology of both texts. That function is fulfilled by 'living being' or higher prakṛti in the cosmology of the Bhagavad Gītā.

This function of maintenance according to dhr is not a static act by prakṛti but follows a pattern of motion. The cosmos moves through cyclical patterns of creation and dissolution which correspond to the day and night of Brahman.

As far as the world of . . . Brahman, the worlds  
are subject to recurring existences, Arjuna;  
But having come to Me, son of Kuntī,  
no rebirth is found.

As compassing a thousand world-ages  
When they know the day of Brahman,  
And the night (of Brahman) as compassing a  
thousand ages,  
Those folk know what day and night are.

From the unmanifest all manifestations  
Come forth at the coming of (Brahman's) day,  
And dissolve at the coming of night,  
In that same one, know as the unmanifest.

The very same host of beings coming,  
Coming into existence over and over, is dissolved  
At the approach of night, willy-nilly, son of Pṛthā,  
And comes forth at the approach of day.

ā brahmabhuvanāl lokāḥ  
punarāvartino 'rjuna  
mām upetya tu kaunteya  
punarjanma na vidyate

sahasrayugaparyantam  
ahar yad brahmano viduh  
rātrim yugasahasarāntām  
te 'hōrātravido janāḥ

avyaktād vyaktayaḥ sarvāḥ  
prabhavanty aha'ṛāgame  
rātryāgame praliyante  
tatrai 'va 'vyaktasamjñake

bhūtagrāmaḥ sa evā 'yam  
bhūtvā - bhūtvā praliyate  
rātryāgame 'vaśaḥ pārtha  
prabhavaty aharāgame 35

We find depicted here a portrait of the cycles of creation. They move from conception in the womb of Brahman into created existence and then to the night of Brahman, the mysterious phase of non-creation, only to emerge again at dawn.

This cyclical pattern is characteristic not only of the cosmos as a whole but of life at the microcosmic level. Kṛṣṇa's first teaching to Arjuna after the warrior has announced his intention not to fight was to announce that in eternity there was never a time in which He (Kṛṣṇa), nor all the warriors assembled on the battlefield, nor Arjuna did not exist. <sup>36</sup> The eternality of life is reflected in the recurring cycles which perpetuate life over and over again:

As the embodied (soul) in this body  
Come childhood, youth, old age,  
So the coming to another body  
The wiseman is not confused herein.

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35  
8.16-19.

36  
2.12.

dehino 'smin yathā dehe  
 kaumāraṃ yauvenaṃ jarā  
 tathā dehāntaraprāptir  
 dhīras tatra na muhyati 37

This cycle of rebirth, however, is a 'certainty' dhruva  
 or is fixed in the eternal order of the cosmos.

For to one that is born death is certain. (dhruvo)  
 And birth is certain (dhruvam) for one that has died;  
 Therefore, the thing being unavoidable,  
 Thou shouldst not mourn.

jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur  
 dhruvam janma mṛtasya ca  
 tasmād'aparihārye 'rthe  
 na tvam śocitum arhasi 38

At the level of the microcosm, that is the panoply of life  
 within creation, the cyclical patterns of birth and rebirth  
 are fixed. The pattern is a manifestation of the maintenance  
 of creation performed by the 'living being' jīvabhūta in  
prakṛti. That is, the 'living being' is an inherent constit-  
 uent of prakṛti and its function is to uphold all beings.

The way in which the jīvabhūta or higher prakṛti  
 functions both in relation to 'lower' prakṛti and in  
 relation to the purusa is nowhere made more clear than in  
 Chapter Nine of the Gītā. There Kṛṣṇa is teaching Arjuna  
 a 'royal science' rājavidya and a 'royal mystery' rājaguhya.

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37  
 2.13.

38  
 2.27.

While dhruvam may only have a distant etymological  
 relation to dhr in the Bhagavad Gītā, since it is a form  
 which we saw in the Rg Veda, it is useful to see its use  
 in the Gītā.

This teaching is described at the very outset as related to dharma. It is called among other things 'righteous' (dharmayam) and subsequently 'religious truth' (dharmasyā):

A royal science, a royal mystery,  
a supreme purifier is this,  
Immediately comprehensible, righteous  
Easy to carry out, imperishable.

Men who put no faith  
In this religious truth, scorcher of the foe,  
Do not attain Me, and return  
On the path of the endless round of deaths.

rājavidyā rājagubhyam  
pavitram idam uttamam  
pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam  
susukham kartum avyayam

śraddadhānāḥ puruṣā  
dharmasyā 'sya parāmtapa  
aprāpya mām nivartante  
mṛtyusamsāravartmani 39

In the context of this portion of Kṛṣṇa's teaching, the first subject of the dharma which men (puruṣa) must give their faith (śraddha) is Kṛṣṇa's relation to the cosmos through the puruṣa and the prakṛti dimension of his nature.

Kṛṣṇa states:

By me is pervaded all this  
Universe, by Me in the form of the unmanifest.  
All beings rest in Me  
and I do not rest in them.

And (yet) beings do not rest in Me:  
Behold My divine mystery (or magic)  
Supporter of beings, and not resting in Beings,  
Is my Self, that causes beings to be.



mayā tatam idam sarvaṃ  
 jagad avyaktamūrtinā  
 matsthāni sarvabhūtāni  
 na cā 'ham teṣv avasthitah

na ca matsthāni bhūtāni  
 paśya me yogam aiśvaram  
 bhūtabhirn na ca bhūtastho  
 mamā 'tmā bhūtabhāvanah 40

Here Kṛṣṇa states that in his unmanifest (avyakta) form he pervades all creation. The beings (bhūtāni) in creation 'rest' or are in Kṛṣṇa; Kṛṣṇa is not in them. In the distinction between the fact that beings are in Kṛṣṇa and He is not in them is to be seen the comprehensiveness of the 'spirit'. That the macrocosm enfolds the microcosm of man or life in general, while not being 'in' it emphasizes the transcendence of Kṛṣṇa beyond the fraction of himself which is creation.

All of this would seem very straightforward on the basis of what we have already seen of the relation between the puruṣa and prakṛti were it not for the fact that Kṛṣṇa contradicts the statements in 9.5. Kṛṣṇa states that beings do not rest in him and instructs Arjuna to see his yoga which he calls 'aiśvara' or simply īśvara.

40  
 9.4-5.

41  
 cf. 7.7.  
 "On me all the (universe) is strung,  
 like heaps of pearls on a string".  
 mayi sarvaṃ idam protam  
 sūtre maniganā iva.

42  
 cf. 10.41-42.

This contradiction is intended to bring Arjuna to see (<sup>43</sup>paś) or 'behold' the heirarchy of the divine form. Within creation and according to an either-or logic, beings must either 'rest' in Kṛṣṇa or Kṛṣṇa 'rests' 'in beings'. One or the other is true. However, as we have seen, within creation experience is trapped in polarities such as 'pleasure and pain', sukha and duḥkha, or akṣara and ksara 'impermanence' and 'permanence' of spirit. Kṛṣṇa wants Arjuna to 'see' beyond the limitations of those polarities. Such seeing is based in faith 'śraddha' in the certainty or 'assurance' of Kṛṣṇa's own words about Himself. Those words speak of His form which transcends all polarities and is called Īśvara. In Īśvara he must see both that aspect which transcends creation and that which participates in creation. The relation between transcendence of and participation in is knowable in Kṛṣṇa's Īśvara yoga. In that connection, it will be recalled that Īśvara is one of the names of the puruṣa which is not limited by the polarities and contradictions of ksara and akṣara. Here Arjuna must see beyond a different set of polarities to see Kṛṣṇa who is also Īśvara and the way in which he act according to yoga.

The content of that yoga is first described in a very poetic way:

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<sup>43</sup>  
cf. 11.8,9. in which Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna a third eye with which to see his eternal nature.

As constantly abides in the ether  
 The great wind, that penetrates everywhere,  
 So all beings  
 Abide in Me; make sure of that (upadhāraya).

yathā 'kāśasthito nityam  
 vāyuh sarvatrago mahān  
 tathā sarvāni bhūtāni  
 matsthāni 'ty upadhāraya 44

The relationship of beings to Kṛṣṇa in the Īśvara yoga is comparable to the relationship of the 'great wind' vāyu and the 'ether' which is the space within which the great wind blows. Both the wind and the ether, are constituents of the lower prakṛti.<sup>45</sup> As the wind blows in the ether so too, all beings are to be understood as 'abiding in Me' (matsthāni) or abiding in Kṛṣṇa. To say that points to Kṛṣṇa's transcendence of the contradictory statements in 9.4 and 9.5. He resolves them in a higher synthesis of His Īśvara yoga. This resolution through transcendence is a certainty. Kṛṣṇa states 'make sure of that' or 'be assured' upadhāraya as it was put in 7.6. In 7.6, Kṛṣṇa stated that "Beings spring from it (prakṛti), All of them, be assured (upadhāraya)<sup>46</sup> . There is a direct parallelism in content between 7.6 and 9.6.

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44  
 9.6.

45  
 cf. 7.4.

9.6 the term is ākāśa, while in 7.4, kha is the term for 'ether' and in they are synonyms.

46  
 7.6.

The root  $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$  conveys the 'assurance' that Kṛṣṇa's words are true and emphasizes how beings are part of His prakṛti. All beings are contained within His nature and maintained through His Īśvara yoga. Kṛṣṇa states:

All beings, son of Kuntī,  
Pass into My material nature  
At the end of a world-eon; them again  
I send forth at the beginning of a (new) world-eon.

Taking as base My own material-nature  
I send forth again and again  
This whole host of beings,  
Which is powerless, by the power of (My) material  
nature.

And me these actions do not  
Bind, Dhanamjaya, -  
Sitting in ās one sitting out (participating as one  
indifferent),  
Unattached to these actions.

With Me as overseer, material nature  
Brings forth (the world of) moving and unmoving (beings);  
By this motive-force, son of Kuntī  
The world goes around.

sarvabhūtāni kaunteya  
prakṛtiṃ yānti māmikāṃ  
kalpakṣāye punas tāni  
kalpādāu viśrjāmy aham

prakṛtiṃ svām avastābhya  
viśrjāmi punaḥ-punaḥ  
bhūtāgrāmam iṅgāṃ kṛtsnam  
avaśam prakṛter vaśāt

na ca mām tāni karmāṇi  
nibadhnānti dhanamjaya  
udāsīnavad āsīnam  
asaktam teṣu karmasu

mayā 'dhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ  
sūyate sacarācaram  
hetunā'nena kaunteya  
jagad viparivartate 47

At the specific description of his īśvara yoga, Kṛṣṇa first shows that prakṛti is the agent by which beings are taken into his form at the end of one aeon and it is also the agent which sends them forth at the beginning of another. He goes on to point out that beings are avaśa or 'powerless' in themselves and it is only the power (vaśa) which is prakṛti, (natural power) which brings beings into existence and maintains them within all the cycles. All this is 'certain' within the orderliness of creation.

That prakṛti functions to do all of this creating and maintaining is the basis for all action performed within creation. The true nature of all action is however a yoga, for that is how Kṛṣṇa transcends and maintains all creation. The way in which this divine yoga is to be understood is that while prakṛti functions to create beings and empower them, Kṛṣṇa or īśvara is in no way affected by those actions. Such actions (karma) do not 'bind' Kṛṣṇa. Rather the image of Kṛṣṇa is one who is "sitting in as one sitting out" (udāsīnavad āsīnam). That is to say the puruṣa enters into prakṛti's forms. Thus puruṣa is 'sitting in'. But the puruṣa is also totally transcendent of the forms and active powers of prakṛti. The contradiction is resolved in the 'higher' forms of the puruṣa the integral forms of īśvara, Kṛṣṇa and Puruṣottoma. The consequence is that Kṛṣṇa is 'unattached' (asakta) to all action. Such is certainty of the īśvara yoga. Such is the 'royal science and royal mystery

which is 'righteous' (dharmayam) and 'religious truth' (dharmasya)

In terms of the root meaning of dharma, the content of the teaching in chapter nine which is twice called dharma and speaks of the 'certainty' of the teaching conveys several important points. The orderly cyclical motion of the cosmos suggests the orderliness of all motion or action. The cosmos moves in and out of existence according to a regular pattern. That pattern is transmitted to the forms of life in creation which exist within the ordered certainty of birth, death and re-birth.

The comprehensiveness of Kṛṣṇa's action according to his Īśvara yoga also has important implications for the continuity of the root meaning. We have seen that Kṛṣṇa maintains all creation by His ojas or power. <sup>48</sup> Kṛṣṇa's ojas is used in Kṛṣṇa's yoga. Kṛṣṇa's divine function is fulfilled by his prakṛti which is pervaded by spirit or purusa. Yet Kṛṣṇa's yoga also means that only a fraction of his nature is in prakṛti. He is Īśvara which transcends all that is in creation. This latter is Kṛṣṇa's higher form. This 'higher' and 'lower' form is comprehensive of all that is. The principle by which the integral unity of Kṛṣṇa's higher and lower nature is expressed is dharma.

This principle of dharma in the cosmology is, then, the term which articulates the comprehensiveness of Kṛṣṇa's action and the orderliness of those actions. Most important in

the comprehensiveness and orderliness, we find Kṛṣṇa upholding all that is. While all of this is framed in a different conception of what orderliness is like or what creative action is like when compared to the gods' functions in the Rg Veda, that fact does not in any way contradict the continuity of purpose expressed in dharma's root meaning.

## CHAPTER III

### DHARMA, KRṢṆA AND YOGA

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In our study of dharma in the Rg Veda we looked first at the cosmology and how the gods functioned according to dhr to express the truth (satya) as dharma. As a parallel to that study we have looked at the cosmology of the Bhagavad Gītā and seen that, while the structure of the cosmology is substantially changed, in continuity with the root meaning the functions of Kṛṣṇa expressed by dhr remain to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is. In the fulfillment of his dharma he pervades the cosmos as its creator, maintainer and destroyer and he embodies the totality of all that is to be known. All of Kṛṣṇa's functions are an expression, then, of His truth which is His dharma.

Subsequent to our study of the cosmology of the Rg Veda we examined the theme of the sacrifice, yajña. We saw that it was the creation of the gods and the ritual form by which man was integrated into the comprehensive task of upholding the orderly relatedness of all that is. The sacrifice was the very basis of the relatedness between the gods and man. The parallel to that study in an examination of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā is yoga. At the very outset of this section of our study of dharma,



therefore, we are confronted with a striking change. The sacrifice is no longer the fundamental basis of relatedness but it is the object of substantial criticism within Kṛṣṇa's teaching. It is important for us, therefore, to confront this transformation directly and to examine its implications for the continuity of the root meaning of dharma.

The problem raised by the criticism of the sacrifice is further complicated by another, in some ways, even more confusing criticism. On the one hand we shall see that dharma is yoga and yet many forms of yoga are criticized as severely as is the sacrifice. Establishing the exact meaning of yoga in the Gītā is, therefore, a fundamental task in our study. It is only on the basis of the fundamental meaning of yoga that we can establish how it is an expression of dharma and whether that expression continues the root meaning.

With regard to these issues, it is our contention that the shift from describing religious action in terms of sacrifice to describing it in terms of yoga was only possible because of an underlying continuity based on the continuing root meaning of dharma. We shall show that yoga is to be understood in terms of dharma and that yoga represents the universalizing of sacrifice so that all action becomes a form of sacrifice and an expression of dharma. Furthermore, we shall show that the yoga taught by Kṛṣṇa is a universalizing of the yogic exercises so that all action becomes a yoga and

an expression of dharma. In consequence, it is our basic contention that yoga as the content of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā is not only in direct continuity with the root meaning of the term established in the R̥g Veda but the very change from yajña to yoga is based upon that continuity.

In order to show this continuity of the root meaning of dharma we will first examine Kṛṣṇa's role as a teacher, a function which is a manifest example of Kṛṣṇa's Īśvara yoga. We shall then turn to the content of the teaching on yoga in order to show that Kṛṣṇa's yoga is the paradigm for all yogas and that in every case yoga is the expression of dharma and its root meaning.

## 2. KṚṢṆA: THE TEACHER OF DHARMA

Thus far we have surveyed Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature and seen that dharma is the principle which expresses his orderly and comprehensive action through his Īśvara yoga. One of the most important of Kṛṣṇa's functions in creation is his teaching and while it is not in any sense fundamentally separate from his creating and maintaining actions, it is a particularly important expression of that yoga. We have therefore set it apart for special consideration in this context because the central expression of Kṛṣṇa's teaching about dharma is yoga.

There are several references to the fact that Kṛṣṇa considers the main subject of his discourse with Arjuna to be dharma. He refers to their discussion as a 'colloquy on dharma between us two' (dharmayaṃ samvādam āvayoh);<sup>1</sup> he refers to the discussion of the 'royal science' rājavidya as having dharma as its subject and,<sup>2</sup> of course, we have already referred to the fact that Kṛṣṇa understands that his purpose in creation is to rescue dharma.<sup>3</sup> Kṛṣṇa's teaching, then, has dharma as its main subject and yoga, as we shall show, is the content of what dharma means in Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Yoga has its point and purpose within the framework of the meaning of dharma as a fundamental principle of creation.

That Kṛṣṇa comes into creation to teach the meaning of dharma is an expression of his love for his creation. That Kṛṣṇa can love his creation and fulfill his īśvara yoga which requires non-attached action in all that he does at the same time reflects the subtlety of the meaning of yoga.<sup>4</sup> Kṛṣṇa knows that he acts and yet does nothing at all. He can therefore claim to be and do many things in creation which

<sup>1</sup>  
18.70.

<sup>2</sup>  
9.2, 3.

<sup>3</sup>  
4.7.8.cf. Our discussion of Arjuna's dilemma above and the way that he sees dharma as the central issue at stake, pp. 230 -242.

<sup>4</sup>  
4.13.

appear at first to be patently contradictory. For example, Kṛṣṇa can claim to be kāma or passionate desire in 7.11 while at the same time teaching that kāma is a major power which threatens the possibility of acting according to yoga. For example, kāma is one of the three powers of the emotions which destroys the integrity of the conscious faculties and perpetuates beings in the eternal, 'certain'<sup>5</sup> cycles of rebirth. However, when Kṛṣṇa claims to be kāma or desire, he claims to be kāma consistent with dharma:

Mighty of the mighty am I, too  
 (Such as is) free from desire and passion;  
 (So far as it is) not inconsistent with right [dharma]  
 in creatures  
 I am desire, O best of Bharatas.

balam balāvataṃ cā 'haṃ  
 kāmaṅgavivarjitaṃ  
 dharmāvīruddho bhūteṣu  
 kāmo 'smi bharatarṣabha 6

The point of Kṛṣṇa being desire, aside from the fact that he is all things in creation, is to further demonstrate his yoga. The very power which can be in opposition to yoga<sup>7</sup> can be transformed into Kṛṣṇa's affection for all beings in creation.<sup>8</sup> This friendship is most deeply expressed in the teacher-pupil relationship of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. In that

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<sup>5</sup>  
2.27.

<sup>6</sup>  
7.11.

<sup>7</sup>  
kāma: eg. 2.62-64.

<sup>8</sup>  
5.19.

relationship, Kṛṣṇa is the source and object of all knowledge.<sup>9</sup>  
 The purpose of this teaching function is to 'rescue' dharma<sup>10</sup>  
 when, in the cycles of creation, its meaning has become  
 obscure and lost. His teaching about dharma is the trans-  
 formation of kāma into devotion for the beings strung out by  
prakṛti<sup>11</sup> in creation. Kṛṣṇa comes into that creation as a  
 teacher of dharma and 'Savior' 'samuddharta' of the man who  
 is his devotee.

For them I the Savior [samuddhartā]  
 From the sea of the round of deaths  
 Become right soon, son of Prthā,  
 When they have made their thoughts enter into Me.

teṣāṃ aham samuddhartā  
 mṛtyusamsārasāgarāt  
 bhavāmi nacirāt pārtha  
 mayy āveśitacetasām 12

Here Kṛṣṇa's action in creation for his devotee is to be the  
 power which literally lifts him out of (sam-ud-dhr)<sup>13</sup> of the

<sup>9</sup>  
13.1-18.

<sup>10</sup>  
4.7-8.

<sup>11</sup>  
7.7.

<sup>12</sup>  
12.7.

<sup>13</sup>  
The root √sam-ud-dhr which constitutes the basis for  
 the term 'savior' has an important meaning when used in an  
 ablative form. Monier-Williams illustrates its meanings as  
 "to rescue, save, deliver from". Other forms of the compound  
 such as 'samuddhara' mean 'drawing out', a meaning deeply  
 connected to the whole notion of 'maintaining' or 'upholding'.  
 (continued)

cycles of rebirth and death. The means by which Kṛṣṇa is encountered as the savior (hari) by men is through yoga in its many possible forms. Kṛṣṇa, out of the power of yoga, is the real source however, of the forms of yoga in creation and therefore it is his saving action which is expressed in the performance of any yoga at the human level.

It is our contention then that Kṛṣṇa, being kāma or desire consistent with dharma, is the expression of prakṛti's power in creation, in teaching and saving mankind. The teaching is expressed by the whole Bhagavad Gītā and the saving culminates in the vision of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature depicted in chapter eleven of the text. Essential to the present teaching, is the fact that Kṛṣṇa's dharma as a teacher is a function which he has performed throughout the cycles of time, and hence from the very beginning of the śruti tradition. The whole of Kṛṣṇa's teaching is therefore set in a theology of tradition intended to show the eternality of all knowledge revealed in veda and continued in smṛti.

There are numerous ways in which this eternal teaching function is presented in the text. The most important is

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13 (continued)

That the root can also mean to destroy locates the conceptual relation to Kṛṣṇa's eternal form and the cycles of creation which move from conception through destruction and re-creation. That these functions are part of Kṛṣṇa's dharma realized by his yoga emphasizes the nature of Kṛṣṇa's lordship as hari.

14  
12.8-19.

found in Chapter Four, the yoga of knowledge jñānayoga.

Kṛṣṇa traces the history of his teaching:

This discipline to Vivasvant  
I proclaimed; 'tis eternal;  
Vivasvant told it to Manu,  
Manu spake it to Ikṣvāku

Thus received in line of succession,  
The royal seers knew it,  
In a long course of time in this world this  
Discipline became lost, scorcher of the foe.

This very same by Me to thee today  
This ancient discipline, is proclaimed.

imam vivasvate yogam  
proktavān aham avyayam  
vivasvān manave prāha  
manur ikṣvākave 'bravīt

evam paramparāprāptam  
imān rājaraṣayo viduh  
sa kālēne 'ha mahatā  
yogo naṣṭaḥ paramtapa

sa evā yam mayā te 'dya  
yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ 15

Here Kṛṣṇa calls his teaching yoga and claims that this subject has been taught by a lineage of ṛsis from Vivasvant through Manu and Ikṣvāku. This lineage of teachers Arjuna finds confusing, for he does not recognize that Kṛṣṇa in his eternality is no different from the truth which is his teaching. Both are eternal (avyaya)<sup>16</sup>. Kṛṣṇa like Arjuna has passed through many births as have royal seers (rājarsaya).

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15  
4.1-3. cf. 10.6, 10.13, 13.4.

16  
4.1, cf. 13.1-17.

What distinguishes Kṛṣṇa from Arjuna is that he knows all  
of his births and knows that he is eternal.<sup>17</sup> Arjuna must be  
taught that eternality.<sup>18</sup> In presenting that teaching Kṛṣṇa  
connects the functions of his prakṛti with the teaching of  
dharma in creation:

The unborn, tho My self is eternal,  
The Lord of Beings  
Resorting to My own material nature  
I come into being by My own mysterious power.

For whatever of the right [dharmasya]  
A languishing appears, son of Bharata,  
A rising up of unright [adharmasya]  
Then I send Myself forth.

For protection of the good,  
And for destruction of evil-doers,  
To make a firm footing for the right [dharma]  
I come into being in age after age.

aḥo 'pi saṁn avyayātama  
bhūtānāṁ īśvaro 'pi saṁ  
prakṛtiṁ svāṁ adhiṣṭhāya  
saṁbhavāmy ātmamāyāyā

yadā - yadā hi dharmasya  
glānir bhavati bhārata  
abhyutthānam adharmasya  
tadā 'tmānaṁ sṛjāmy aham

paritrāṇāya sādḥunāṁ  
vināśāya ca duṣkṛtāṁ  
dharmaśaṁsthāpānārthāya  
saṁbhavāmi yuge-yuge 19

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17  
cf. 7.26-30, 6.3-8, 7.18-23, 13.17.

18  
4.5.

19  
4.6-8.



Kṛṣṇa's eternality is focused in his ātman which is Īśvara. Through his prakṛti and by the mysterious power of illusion (māyā), Kṛṣṇa's ātman or soul becomes being (bhūta). The condition which calls forth Kṛṣṇa's manifestation as an ātman in creation is the decline of dharma and the 'rising up' of adharmā. Then aham, 'I' or Kṛṣṇa, sends himself forth into creation, 'to make a firm footing for the right' (dharmasamsthāpanārthāya).

There are many levels at which these references to dharma can be interpreted. At one level it is clear that the rising up of adharmā refers directly to Arjuna's description of the confusion in his mind.<sup>20</sup> It also refers to the battle<sup>21</sup> which must be fought because it is a battle about dharma. Arjuna's confusion cannot penetrate the mystery of how the battle can be in the service of dharma when it brings with it such pervasive destruction. What Arjuna needs to grasp is that even as the cosmos follows a cyclical pattern and life moves through the cycles of births, so too does knowledge of dharma. Dharma then refers to the whole teaching of the Vedas as Kṛṣṇa's own teaching in previous ages. Dharma, as the divine revelation of Veda, follows a cycle in creation from clarity to confusion and renewal in the minds of men.

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20

2.7.

21

2.33.

While the meaning of dharma is eternal in that it is Kṛṣṇa, the source and teacher of its meaning, that eternal meaning is not always perceived and known. Some sages and men know dharma more clearly than others. Whether it is known or not does not change dharma's eternal presence in creation. Thus the most important level of meaning for dharma in these passages is to express the eternality and hence continuity of dharma as part of creation and as the symbol for the whole of Kṛṣṇa's teaching from the Samhitas forward.

This last level of meaning is not without its roots in the Rg Veda, though there is clearly a new dimension to its meaning. Agni brings the mantra into creation and his actions transmit to the rsis both satya as truth and its 'function' as dharma. That Kṛṣṇa can then appropriate dharma as a term to refer comprehensively to His truth and its function in creation is entirely consistent with earlier usage. While the satya of Agni does not seem to look back to a previous age and revelation, in the theology of tradition of the Bhagavad Gītā we find this looking back is a necessity. Even though this regard for earlier teachings constitutes a change and with it comes the shift of focus from sacrifice to yoga as the expression of divine and human action, those changes do not constitute a change in the root meaning of dharma.

Kṛṣṇa's insistence on the continuity of dharma is based, not upon the changes in usage, but upon the purpose of His own functions in creation. Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti, pervaded and transcended by puruṣa, functions to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is. Within that continuing purpose, Kṛṣṇa moves into creation, into that realm of contradictions and polarities where his truth is veiled in māyā or illusion. There he can even be desire (kāma) that is consistent with dharma. In doing so Kṛṣṇa functions to maintain creation by teaching the meaning of dharma anew when it is obscure and confusing. As such he is the savior of all life enmeshed in the eternal cycles of the cosmos. This above all is Kṛṣṇa's dharma. His maintenance in a 'fixed' form of the relatedness of all that is.

### 3. DHARMA, KṚṢṆA AND YOGA

The expressions of Kṛṣṇa's functions to teach the Truth which is Himself within creation are many and varied. To read the text and simply note each reference to 'aham',<sup>22</sup> 'I', as it refers to Kṛṣṇa's depictions of what He does, is to see His infinite possibilities throughout eternity and throughout creation. Kṛṣṇa states for example:

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22

eg. 3.22-24, 7.8-15, 9.16-20, 10.19-38, 11.32, 15.13-15.

I am the soul, Guḍākeśa,  
That abides in the heart of all beings;  
I am the beginning and the middle  
Of beings, and the very end too.

Of the Ādityas I am Viṣṇu,  
Of lights the radiant sun,  
Of Maruts I am (their chief) Marīci,  
Of stars I am the moon.

Of Vedas I am the Sāma Veda  
Of gods I am Vāsava (Indra)  
Of sense-organs I am the thought organ,  
Of beings I am the intellect.

aham ātmā guḍākeśa  
sarvabhūtāsāyasthitaḥ  
aham ādiś ca madhyam ca  
bhūtānām anta eva ca

ādityānām aham viṣṇur  
jyotiśam ravir anśumān  
marīcīr marutām āsmi  
nakṣatrānām aham śaśī

vedānām sāmavedo 'smi  
devānām āsmi vāsavaḥ  
indriyānām manas ca 'smi  
bhūtānām āsmi cetanā. 23

In this list of things which Kṛṣṇa claims to be, he is the soul ātman in beings and he claims to have been many of the important deities which were encountered in our study of dharma in the Rg Veda. Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu of the Ādityas; the sun, one of the important manifestations of Agni, and the Maruts' chief. In each case Kṛṣṇa is claiming to be the most important aspect, whether it be of a group of gods such as the Maruts, or the Ādityas, or the most important of the celestial stars, the sun. Similarly Kṛṣṇa claims to be the Samhita

which is the distilled essence of the Rg Veda, the Sāma Veda.

Later in Chapter Ten, Kṛṣṇa expands upon his many manifest forms as knowledge:

Of creations the beginning and the end,  
And the middle too am I, Arjuna;  
Of knowledges the knowledge of the over-soul  
I am speech of them that speak.

Of syllables (letters) I am the letter A,  
And the dvanda of compounds,  
None but I am immortal Time,  
I am the Ordainer (Creator) with faces in all directions.

I am death that carries off all,  
And the origin of things that are to be;  
Of feminine entities I am Fame, Fortune, Speech,  
Memory, Wisdom, Steadfastness, [dhṛti] Patience.

sargānām ādir antaś ca  
madhyām cai 'vā 'ham arjuna  
adhyātmavidyā vidyānām  
vādaḥ pravadatām aham

akṣarānām akāro 'smi  
dvāndvāḥ sāmāsikasya ca  
aham evā 'kṣayaḥ kālo  
dhātā 'ham viśvātomukhaḥ.

mṛtyuḥ sarvahaṛaś ca 'ham  
udbhavaś ca bhaviṣyatām  
kīrtiḥ śrīr vāk ca nārīṇām  
smṛtir medhā dhṛtiḥ kṣamā 24

After claiming to be creation in all of its stages from the beginning to its dissolution we find contained in Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature all knowledge and speech (vāc). Kṛṣṇa takes the form of language as letters and words. He continues in 10.35, to claim to be both the sacrificial chants and the meter which conveys the rhythm of those chants. In essence Kṛṣṇa claims

to be all knowledge that has ever been revealed and language, the means by which knowledge is expressed within creation. He is therefore both the content of revelation and the forms of its expression. It is not surprising therefore to see that Kṛṣṇa is dharma.

Dharma in Kṛṣṇa's nature is formulated in this instance in the context of his claim to be all 'feminine entities'. As such he is fame (kīrti) and fortune (srīr). Both of these constituents of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature are very important both in the Rg Veda and in the Mahābhārata. In the former, we saw that the gods bring wealth to the community which offers the sacrifice and fame to those great heroes, rsis and warriors alike. In the Mahābhārata the issue at stake is whether wealth and fortune can be achieved by the use of force or whether it is realized by actions in harmony with dharma. That Kṛṣṇa claims to be these two ends of human action suggests that dharma is the key to realization of both.

In addition to fame and fortune, Kṛṣṇa is Speech (vāc), the goddess in the Rg Veda who reveals to her beloved rsi the mantras for use in the sacrifice. That Kṛṣṇa is the revealer of truth in speech in the Bhagavad Gītā reflects the continuity of this function of the goddess. That continuity is given explicit confirmation in the fact that Kṛṣṇa is 'smṛti',

the recollection of the original revelation made known by the goddess.

In addition, Kṛṣṇa is intelligence or 'wisdom' (medha), dhṛti or 'steadfastness' and finally 'patience' (ksama). That Kṛṣṇa's wisdom produces both speech and recollection as manifest forms or that Kṛṣṇa is 'patient' as the cycles of the cosmos and life follow their eternal motion seem to be entirely obvious aspects of Kṛṣṇa's nature. What is important for our concern however, is that Kṛṣṇa is 'steadfast' dhṛti, and that this usage of the root  $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$  is a manifest form of his existence in creation.

Dhṛti is one of the more frequently used forms of the root  $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$  in the Bhagavad Gītā. We find, for example, that it is used in chapter thirteen as a constituent of the 'field' (ksetra).

The gross elements, the I-faculty,  
The consciousness, and the unmanifest,  
The senses ten and one,  
And the five objects on which the senses (of perception)  
play,

Desire, loathing, pleasure, pain  
Association, intellect, steadfastness, [dhṛti]  
This in brief as the Field  
Is described, with its modifications.

mahābhūtāny ahaṁkāro  
buddhir avyaktam eva ca  
indriyāni daśai 'kaṁ ca  
pañca ce 'ndriyagocārāḥ

icchā dveṣaḥ sukhaṁ duḥkhaṁ  
 saṁghātaś cētanā dhṛtiḥ  
 etāt kṣetram samāseṇa  
 savikāram udāhṛtam 25

The 'field' described in verse 13.5 includes the major constituents of lower, and higher prakṛti.<sup>26</sup> In 13.6, we find reference to the 'modifications', savikāra. The 'modifications' are 'experiences' caused by the purusa<sup>27</sup> as it pervades prakṛti. Thus the experiences of desire and loathing, or pleasure and pain modify faculties of prakṛti and their capacity to know the true nature of things. In particular these modifications obscure the patterns of 'association' (saṁghātas) or the relatedness of all of the constituents of prakṛti with the result that the cit or 'intellect' cannot discriminate between, for example, desire or kāma and desire which is consistent with dharma. Finally, the 'modifications' can obscure the meaning or knowledge of 'dhṛti' or 'steadfastness'. Dhṛti as part of the 'field' and the modifications, is a constituent of prakṛti. It is not clear however, in this context, what role dhṛti plays in the 'field' or body and the 'modifications' which occur in experience.

Our contention is that dhṛti refers to the capacity for and the experience of yoga. It is one of the 'feminine entities' which are part of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature and a

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<sup>25</sup>  
13.5-6.

<sup>26</sup>  
cf. 13.19.

<sup>27</sup>  
cf. 13.20.



constituent of Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti. It is one fundamental characteristic of Kṛṣṇa's mode of being within creation through his Īśvara yoga. For example, Kṛṣṇa describes the 'agent' (kartr) which functions in creation pervaded by the power (guna) of sattva as 'steadfast':

Free from attachment, not talking of himself,  
Full of steadfastness [dhṛti] and energy,  
Unchanged in success or failure,  
Such an agent is called one of goodness.

mukta saṅgo 'nahaṃvādī  
dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitah  
siddhyasiddhyor nirvikārah  
kartā sāttvika ucyate 28

Dhṛti refers to the capacity to act in such a way that one is free from attachment. Such an action is knowable in that there is no 'self' which is known to be the 'agent' performing the action. Therefore whatever the results of the action, the agent remains 'unchanged'. This depiction of the 'agent' in action corresponds to the description both of the Īśvara yoga by which Kṛṣṇa maintains the cosmos and of the way in which action must be done by persons according to yoga within creation. More important than other characteristics of yoga is the fact that it is the form of acting in creation which is the expression of dharma and, consequently, the expression of harmony with the divine yogi , Kṛṣṇa.

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28  
18.26. cf. 18.26-27 for the tamas and rajas  
forms of dhṛti.

Our task then must be to analyze the way in which these usages of dhr connect the Iśvara yoga of Kṛṣṇa and the performance of action according to yoga on the part of persons within creation.

Kṛṣṇa first introduces his discussion of yoga by distinguishing it as a topic from the first theme of his teaching, the eternality of the soul, called sāṃkhya.<sup>29</sup> Sāṃkhya in the Bhagavad Gītā seems to refer to the essential knowledge which the faculty of integration, the buddhi requires in order to know the true nature of the divine. Yoga is to be understood as the compliment of that knowledge in the form of action, and is equally essential in order for the buddhi to know the divine.

This has been declared to thee (that is found)  
in Reason - method,  
This mental attitude: but hear this in Discipline -  
method,  
Disciplined with which mental attitude, son of Pṛthā  
Thou shalt get rid of the bondage to action.

eṣā te bhīhitā sāṃkhye  
buddhir yoge tv imām śṛṇu  
buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha  
karma bandhaṃ prahāsyasi. 30

The combination of sāṃkhya and yoga appropriated by the faculty of integration (buddhi) is the basis, assures Kṛṣṇa, for the throwing off of the 'bondage to action' karma bandha.

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29  
cf. 13.19.

30  
2.39.

This assertion of the power of knowledge and yoga is emphasized in the next verse, in the context of which, yoga is identified as dharma:

In it there is no loss of a start once made,  
Nor does any reverse occur;  
Even a little of this duty [dharmasya]  
Saves from great danger.

ne 'hā 'bhikramanāśo 'sti  
pratyavāyo na vidyate  
svalpam apy asya dharmasya  
trāyate mahato bhayāt 31

The power of dharma as yoga is great. On the one hand the yoking of the faculty of integration (buddhya yukto) is such that it gets 'rid of the bondage to action' and on the other hand it 'saves from great danger'. The exact meaning of these two expressions of the power of dharma as yoga is not made clear in these two references, though the faculty which is critical in the realization of the effects - the buddhi - is indicated and in the next verse described in its two modes.

The two modes of the buddhi or the faculty of integration are its nature when yoked (yukta) by yoga or its nature when not yoked.

The mental attitude [buddhi] whose nature is resolution  
Is but one in this world, son of Kuru;  
For many-branched and endless  
Are the mental attitudes [buddhi] of the irresolute.

vyavasāyātmikā buddhir  
eke 'ha kurunandana  
bahuśākhā hy anantās ca  
buddhayo 'vyavasāyinām 32

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31  
2.40.

32  
2.41.

When the faculty of integration is 'resolute' (vyavasāyātmikā) then its mode is singular, eka. This is the characteristic of a yoked buddhi. By way of contrast, when the buddhi is 'irresolute' (avyavasāyinā) it is 'many branched and endless' (bahuśākhā hy anantās ca). This corresponds to the unyoked faculty.

The 'irresolute' mode of the buddhi is dominated by kāma or desire which is not in harmony with dharma. The expression of this mode of the buddhi is the quest to achieve goals.<sup>33</sup> By way of contrast, in the 'resolute' or yoked mode of the buddhi the connection is severed between an act and its consequence:

On action alone be thy interest,  
Never on its fruits;  
Let not the fruits of action be thy motive,  
Nor be thy attachment to inaction.

karmany evā 'dhikāras te  
mā phaleṣu kadācana  
mā karma phalahetur bhūr  
mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmani 34

The severance of the connection between actions and the 'fruits' or goals of action is an essential characteristic of yoga and the oneness of the buddhi. This is reflected in Kṛṣṇa's Īśvara yoga. Kṛṣṇa acts through his prakṛti and yet knows himself not to act at all.<sup>35</sup> As such Kṛṣṇa is dhr̥ti or steadfast.

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33  
2.43.

34  
2.47

35  
cf. 5.8-9, 4.13-14.

Similarly, the emphasis in the yoga of the buddhi is that action is imperative. No person can live and not act.<sup>36</sup>

The focus of attention therefore must be simply on the performance of action without thought for the goals or fruits of action, in order to embody the 'steadfastness' characteristic of Kṛṣṇa.

The locus for this realization of 'steadfastness' through yoga is the buddhi. According to the three powers of prakṛti, or gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas, the buddhi has three types<sup>37</sup> of existence. Of those, sattva is yoked through yoga and is therefore 'dhṛti' or 'steadfast' while lower on the scale of steadfastness are the two modes of the unyoked or 'irresolute' buddhi.

The distinction of intelligence [buddhi] and of firmness [dhṛti], also, Threefold according to the Strands, hear Fully expounded In their several forms, Dhanamjaya.

Activity and cessation from it,  
Things to be done and not to be done, danger and security,  
Bondage and release, that which knows these  
Is the intelligence that is of goodness [sattva],  
son of Prthā.

Whereby right and unright [dharman adharman]  
And things to be done and not to be done,  
Are understood incorrectly,  
That intelligence [buddhi] son of Prthā is of passion.

Right as unright what [adharman dharman]  
Conceives, obscured by darkness,  
And all things contrary (to the truth),  
That intelligence [buddhi] son of Prthā, is of darkness.

36  
3.5

37

cf. Note 18 in "Dharma, Kṛṣṇa and the Cosmos" above for a discussion of each guṇa, above p.260, also 230-242

buddher bhedaṃ dhr̥ṭeś' caī 'va  
 gunatas triviḍham śr̥ṇu  
 pr̥ocyamānam aśeṣeṇa  
 pr̥thaktvena dhanamjaya

pravrt̥tim ca nivrt̥tim ca  
 kāryākārye bhayābhaye  
 bandham mokṣam ca yā vetti  
 buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī

yayā dharmam adharmam ca  
 kāryam cā'kāryam eva ca  
 ayathāvat prajānāti  
 buddhiḥ sā pārtha rājasī

adharmam dharmam iti yā  
 manyate tamasā'vrt̥tā  
 sarvārthān viparītāms' ca  
 buddhiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī 38

In this account, the modes of the buddhi under the classifica-  
 tions (bheda) of the three gunas are outlined showing the  
 effects of each guṇa on the 'steadfastness' dhr̥ṭi of the  
 faculty of integration. In the sattva classification, the  
buddhi is steadfast and therefore 'resolute'. In this state  
 of 'oneness' (eka)<sup>39</sup>, the buddhi can discriminate between the  
 polarities of "activity and cessation", "things to be done  
 and not to be done, danger and security, bondage and release".  
 Such discrimination corresponds to the ability outlined in  
 2.47 to act without concern for the fruits of action. It  
 also corresponds to the assertion that to act according to  
yoga saves from the 'danger' of rebirth and the 'bondage to  
 40

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38  
 18.29-32.

39  
 cf. 2.41.

40  
 2.40.

41  
 action' . Most important, in its sattva mode the faculty of integration discriminates between that which leads to 'bondage' (bandha) and that which leads to moksa or release from bondage. Essentially, this last discrimination refers to the knowledge that Kṛṣṇa does all action through prakṛti and Īśvara yoga. Such knowledge is oneness of the buddhi in the ātman which is Kṛṣṇa.

This capacity to discriminate between the polarities of experience rests upon the discipline of yoga as the means to realize 'steadfastness':

The firmness [dhṛtya] with which one holds fast [dhārayate]  
 The activities of the mind, life-breaths, and senses,  
 And which is unswerving in discipline,  
 That firmness is of goodness, son of Pṛthā.

dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate  
 maṇahprāṇendriyakriyāḥ  
 yogenā 'vyabhicāriṇyā  
 dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī 42

Here dhṛti is described as the holding fast (dhārayate) of the functions of the mind, prāṇa or breath and the senses according to yoga. The two uses in 18.33 of dhṛ emphasizes the connection between the buddhi, its capacity to be singular (eka) in the face of the multitude of activities and experiences of the mind and senses. That capacity for oneness is realized by yoga and the consummation of being and acting in harmony with dharma and Kṛṣṇa.

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41  
 2.39.

42  
 18.33.

The fact that buddhi yoga is the performance of dharma is elaborated further in the description of rajas and tamas effects on the buddhi. In both instances the buddhi is incapable of discriminating what action is consistent with dharma and what is not. In the case of each guna, there is a hierarchy of knowledge and powers to effect the state of the buddhi. Sattva is the highest in that it establishes the harmony of the person with the dharma and yoga of Kṛṣṇa. Below it is rajas and below that is tamas, each of which is 'lower' on the scale of knowledge and capacity for integration. Thus, the buddhi when it is dominated by the power of rajas cannot distinguish what is dharma and what is not dharma correctly. Therefore it is impossible to know what is to be done and what is not to be done. As a result, action is performed with goals or 'fruits' in mind. Such 'fruits' can even include dharma:

But when to religion [dharma], love [kāma] and wealth [artha]  
 With firmness he holds fast [dharayate], Arjuna  
 With attachment, desirous of the fruits,  
 That firmness [dhr̥ti] is of passion, son of Pṛthā.

yayā tu dharmakāmārthān  
 dhṛtyā dhārayate 'rjuna  
 prasaṅgena phalākāṅkṣī  
 dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha rājasī 43



Dharma here has two levels of meaning. On the one hand there is the dharma which is yoga, the highest form of action realized by a buddhi which is sattva. This dharma integrates the yogi into the eternal nature of Kṛṣṇa because he knows that all action is accomplished by Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti and not by a self. A second level of meaning for dharma is the performance of actions - including dharma acts - but not as a yoga. This refers to the performance of the sacrifice according to the Samhitas<sup>44</sup> or to the performance of tapas,<sup>45</sup> or forms of yogic action with a view to achieving results. An illustration of such actions is the necessity to perform one's birth-determined varṇa dharma.<sup>46</sup> These actions however can be performed either as a yoga or as a simple duty. Without yoga all of these actions are performed under the power of rajas and therefore do not save the actor from continued existence in the cycles of rebirth.

Both the dharma performed under the power of sattva and the dharma performed under rajas, however, are understood to be forms of dharma. Actions performed by the buddhi of prakṛti when dominated by the power of tamas however, are

<sup>44</sup>  
9.21.

<sup>45</sup>  
17.18.

<sup>46</sup>  
cf. 2.31, 33, 3.35, 18.40-45.

steadfast in their opposition to dharma. Dharma becomes adharna and dhr̥ti or steadfastness is lost in confusion:

Whereby sleep, fear, sorrow,  
Despondency, and pride,  
The foolish man does not let go,  
That firmness is of darkness, son of Prtha.

yayā svapnaṃ bhayaṃ śokaṃ  
viṣādaṃ madam eva ca  
na vimuñcati durmedhā  
dhr̥tiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī 47

Here there remains a form of 'steadfastness' or firmness, but it is such that <sup>48</sup>viṣāda or despondency and arrogance (mada) among other things result in actions which are positively opposed to dharma, hence are called adharna.

The hierarchical structure of the relationships between the faculty of integration (buddhi) and yoga as dharma is critical in order to understand Kṛṣṇa's criticisms of the sacrifice and yoga exercise or ascetic practices like tapas. In the case of each of these types of action, Kṛṣṇa is critical, not of the forms of action as such, but of the motivation which lies behind the performance of the act. The buddhi functions in human consciousness to integrate knowledge and action. Buddhi yoga is a form of knowledge (sāṃkhya), and action, yoga, which yokes the buddhi so that it is singular (eka) in its focus and can therefore function in action while knowing that no action is really done outside

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47  
18.35.

48  
cf. Arjuna's depression (visīda) in 1.28.

of prakṛti. The meaning of this yoga is therefore not limited to any specific act such as the sacrifice, yoga exercises or tapas. Rather, Kṛṣṇa is establishing a meaning for yoga and hence dharma which is modeled on his Īśvara yoga. This yoga as dharma is universal in its implications for it comprehends all action done in creation.

Within the universal yoga as dharma, all actions are accomplished without thought for the fruits or results of the action performed. If therefore the sacrifice is enacted with a view to achieving certain forms of merit then it is not an act accomplished by a yoked faculty of integration under the power of the sattva guna. It is confused fulfillment of dharma, subject to rajas or tamas.

Consider for example the fact that dharma is used as the name for the complex of the vedic literature and the sacrificial ritual in the Gītā. This use of dharma is entirely consistent with Kṛṣṇa's own claims to be both the source and object of all knowledge and all action. Vedic knowledge and sacrificial action are characteristic of created existence and a product of Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti. The sacrifice is therefore an expression of dharma irrespective of whether or not it is fulfilled as a yoga.

Because the sacrifice and the Samhitas are Kṛṣṇa's creation and because they are dharma, the sacrifice and Veda

are always powerful. When the sacrifice is performed under the power of the rajas guna it still produces limited results, but those results must be interpreted in the hierarchy of dharma and its relation to yoga.

The three-Veda-men, soma-drinkers, purified of sin, Me  
With ritual worship worshipping, seek to go to heaven;  
They, attaining the meritorious world of the Lord of  
the gods (Indra),  
Taste in the sky the divine enjoyments of the gods.

They, after enjoying the expansive world of heaven,  
When their merit is exhausted, enter the world of  
mortals,  
Thus conforming to the religion dharma of the  
three Vedas,  
Men who lust after desires get that which comes and  
goes.

traividyaṁ mām somapāḥ pūtapāpā  
yajñair iṣtvā svargatiṁ prārthayante  
te puṇyam āsādyā surendralokam  
aśnanti divyān divi devabhogān

te tam bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālam  
ksīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti  
evam trayīdharmam anuprapannā  
gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante 49

Here, the sacrifice as dharma produces as its fruit, 'the meritorious world of the lord of the gods', because the sacrificer offers the rite under the influence of kāma, or desire. This is not the kāma which is consistent with dharma noted above, though, on the other hand, it is not an act which is positively adharma or against dharma.

The offering of the sacrifice is consistent with dharma, but it is not the highest expression of dharma because the rite is offered with a view to achieving results. Such motivation locks the actor in the cycles of the cosmos and rebirth. By contrast, as we have already seen, dharma as buddhi yoga under the sattva guna results in actions which bring release from the cycles and eternal union with Kṛṣṇa because the karma-yogi knows that only Kṛṣṇa acts.

It is clear therefore that the sacrifice remains an entirely legitimate ritual act within Kṛṣṇa's teaching. It remains, however, in two forms. First it is the sacrificial rite, which, as a form of action, remains rooted in prakṛti and the power of the gunas. Under the powers of both sattva and rajas, the sacrifice remains dharma even though, when performed under the power of rajas guna, the sacrifice brings results which remain within the cyclical movements of creation.

More important however, for our purposes, is the second form in which the sacrifice remains an integral and fundamental part of the teaching of Kṛṣṇa. The sacrificial rite is the symbol of non-attached action. It is therefore the basis for the universal yoga. The sacrifice, as we saw it in our study of the Rg Veda, was grounded in dharma and clearly separated the necessity of action and the 'fruits' which came to the community. The sacrifice called the gods

to the rite, offered them Soma the sacrificial food and in return the gods brought to the vedic community offspring, wealth, power and great heroes. The results of action were understood as gifts from the gods and in no sense were they seen to arise simply from human action. At the symbolic level within the Bhagavad Gītā, therefore, this basic separation of act and results is extended to apply to all action. Every act becomes a sacrifice in the fulfillment of dharma as yoga.

Our interest is primarily in the way in which this second dimension of sacrifice is developed in Kṛṣṇa's teaching. It constitutes a significant change in the meaning of the sacrifice. The change involves a movement from ritual pattern of action which was performed by the Vedic community among other actions, to an interpretation of all action as a sacrifice. In the vedic context the sacrifice was the pattern of actions which established the vedic community in the framework of dharma. We must now see whether the symbolic meaning of the sacrifice performs the same function within the teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā.

The principle of the sacrifice and the way in which it is universalized is outlined in Kṛṣṇa's account of the origin and nature of the sacrifice. Kṛṣṇa states that the sacrifice was begun by Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures, a god who is a

manifestation of Kṛṣṇa in previous times.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the sacrifice was founded by a god is consistent with the principle which we saw in our study of the founding of the sacrifice in the R̥g Veda. Another expression of continuity is the fact that the gods who receive the sacrifice when it is offered are responsible for bringing the results of the sacrifice. Kṛṣṇa quotes Prajāpati as he describes these facets of the sacrifice:

After creating creatures along with (rites of) worship,  
Prajāpati (the Creator) said of old:  
By this ye shall procreate yourselves-  
Let this be your Cow-of-wishes.

With this prosper ye the gods,  
And let the gods prosper you;  
(Thus) prospering one the other,  
Ye shall attain the highest welfare.

For desired enjoyments to you the gods  
Will give, prospered by worship;  
Without giving to them, their gifts  
Who so enjoys, is nothing but a thief.

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣtvā  
puro'vāca prajāpatiḥ  
anena prasaviṣyadhvam  
eṣa vo 'stv iṣṭakāmadhuk

devān bhāvayatā 'nena  
te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ  
parasparam bhāvayantaḥ  
śreyāḥ param avāpsyatha

iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā  
dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ  
tair dattān apradāyai 'bhyo  
yo bhunkte stena eva saḥ 51

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50  
11.39.

51  
3.10-12.

Prajāpati is the creator of creatures and the sacrifice. By the sacrifice, Prajāpati states, creatures can procreate themselves. Furthermore, the sacrifice is the means to realize all wishes or purposes. By worshiping the gods through the sacrifice the gods will bring prosperity and the 'highest welfare'.

The point is that the sacrifice and the gods are depicted as the means by which procreation, and prosperity are achieved. It is not just the individual act of sexual union which results in offspring. Nor is it just, for another example, the act of the warrior who conquers enemies and gains their possessions. With those actions and the sacrifice, it is the gods who bring results. It is not a reflection of the lack of knowledge that sexual union is required for procreation or that a warrior must conquer enemies by his skill in battle, that lies behind this conception of the purpose of the sacrifice. Rather it is a reflection of a knowledge about the limited capacity of human actions to bring desired results. Actions can have many kinds of results. Sexual union need not bring offspring. Battles can be lost. In either case, the realization of results is not a direct consequence of the act(s) performed and the motive which inspires them. Rather, consequences of actions are understood in the Rg Veda as gifts from the gods based upon the performance



of the sacrifice.

Similarly not to perform the dharma of the sacrifice is to believe that human actions and skills are sufficient to achieve results. According to Prajāpati - Kṛṣṇa, such a belief makes one a thief who steals the gifts of the gods in creation. A thief is, in the hierarchy of dharma as yoga, the man who acts under the power of tamas against dharma because he arrogantly assumes that he, not the gods or Kṛṣṇa, accomplishes all that he does and receives.

The essential point about the sacrifice is, therefore, that an act or a skill is but one factor in bringing about desired results. The sacrifice mediates human motives and desires to the gods who are responsible for bringing wealth, power and conquest, to mention only a few of the gifts, to those who offer the rite. The sacrifice was the sign of harmony with the powers of the cosmos in its truth (satya) and its functioning (dharma), exactly as it was in the Rg Veda.

At the very heart of this depiction of sacrificial action is a profound conceptual continuity from the Rg Veda. Just as the gods and the sacrifice were understood to mediate between the sacrifice and its results in the Rg Veda, so too, in the Bhagavad Gītā, it is Kṛṣṇa who, in the performance of his Īśvara yoga and dharma, accomplishes all action and brings all results. To know that is to see Kṛṣṇa as Prajāpati, <sup>52</sup> to

see that Kṛṣṇa is the Veda and the sacrifice,<sup>53</sup> and to see  
 that it is Kṛṣṇa who will act to destroy the Kauravas<sup>54</sup> .  
 To know this is also to know that Kṛṣṇa is the one who,  
 according to his dharma and dhṛti, steadfastness, does not  
 act at all. Such is Kṛṣṇa's Īśvara yoga and his dharma as  
 the upholder of the orderly relatedness of all that is.

In doing this dharma, Kṛṣṇa is the essence of the  
 sacrifice,<sup>55</sup> adhiyajña, and he is also the 'recipient and lord'  
 of 'all acts of worship'<sup>56</sup> . As Brahman, Kṛṣṇa is all aspects  
 of the sacrifice:

The (sacrificial) presentation is Brahman; Brahman is  
 the oblation;  
 In the (sacrificial) fire of Brahman it is poured by  
 Brahman;  
 Just to Brahman must he go,  
 Being concentrated upon the (sacrificial) action  
 that is Brahman.

brahmā 'rpaṇaṃ brahma havir  
 brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam  
 brahmai 'va tena gantavyam  
 brahmakarmasamādhinā 57'

53  
 10.32.35.

54  
 11.26-27.

55  
 8.4.

56  
 9.24.

57  
 4.24.

While being all of these aspects of the sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa knows that he does not act at all. Thus as Kṛṣṇa develops the essential separation of motive and action established in the Rg Vedic conception of the sacrifice, it is transformed into the universal form of action performed by his prakṛti. As Kṛṣṇa is the source of creation and the doer of all action within creation he accomplishes all of that without any attachment to his action. Kṛṣṇa knows that prakṛti and the gunas do all that is done while he does not act at all. Kṛṣṇa therefore embodies the essential principle of the sacrifice and universalizes that principle into yoga.

Within this universalization of the sacrifice into yoga, we find that the basis of both the original conception from the Rg Veda and the universal sacrifice is based upon the continuity of the root meaning of dharma. In the Īśvara yoga of Kṛṣṇa we find the complement of the function of the gods according to dharma. The gods established the sacrifice, travelled to it and accepted the offering of the sacrificers. In response to the offering the gods moved along the orderly pathways of ṛta to sustain the cosmos, bring offspring to all forms of life, or bring wealth, power, conquest and great heroes to the community. All of this expressed the manifold forms of upholding the orderly relatedness of all that is. Kṛṣṇa now does all that the vedic gods did through the inherent

necessity of prakṛti to act to create all that is and sustain it in its orderly cyclical patterns. Kṛṣṇa is the teacher who reveals knowledge, which is His nature, to his friends in creation. In doing all of this, he fulfills his dharma, the essential purpose of which is to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is.

The continuity of the root meaning of dharma is expressed in Kṛṣṇa's teaching about the sacrifice in two forms. First, it is expressed at the level of purpose. The universalization of sacrifice into yoga remains the mode by which men participate in the truth or knowledge of the divine through their actions. The extension of the fulfillment of that purpose from the performance of ritual acts to all action in no way alters the meaning of either the sacrifice or of dharma. All action is to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is. Thus while there is the change of meaning from the specific ritual act as dharma to the comprehensiveness of all action as a sacrifice, the change is based upon an essential underlying continuity of meaning both of the sacrifice and dharma.

Within the discussion of the sacrifice the central focus is on karma or action. The sacrifice, yajña, is karma, an act. In the universalization of the sacrifice the ritual, as a specific set of actions, becomes a symbol for all action done as a yoga. This emphasis on action is characteristic of the discussion of the sacrifice and is crucial to understand

buddhi yoga as dharma. In the yogi who has withdrawn from society and from the sacrifice, who sits rapt in meditation and who is the embodiment of stillness and inaction, we have an important image which complements the emphasis on karma from the discussion of the sacrifice.

Like the sacrifice, yoga can be done in such a way that it is thought to be renunciation of all action or it can be done as a form of buddhi yoga. To think that it is possible to renounce all action is a delusion comparable to thinking that no sacrifice is necessary. In the same way that it is necessary to know that all action is a sacrifice, it is necessary to know that one does not act:

'I am (in effect) doing nothing.' - so  
The disciplined man should think, knowing the truth,  
When he sees, hears, touches, smells,  
eats, walks, breathes,

Talks, evacuates, grasps,  
Opens and shuts his eyes;  
'The senses (only) on the objects of the sense  
Are operating' - holding fast to this thought [dhāraṇā].

nai 'va kiṃcit karomī 'ti  
yukto manyēta tattvavit  
paśyañ śṛṇvan sprśaṇ jighraṇ  
āśnan gacchan svapaṇ śvasan

pralapan viśṛjan grhṇann  
umiṣan nimiṣann apī  
indriyāṇī 'ndriyārtheṣu  
vartanta iti dhāraṇā 58

In this passage, the root √dhṛ, conveys the necessity to 'hold [ing] fast to this thought' [dhāraṇā], that one does nothing in the midst of all of the activities of the body.

The yogi rapt in meditation stands as the image of 'doing nothing' and the sacrifice stands as the image of the necessity to continue to act. Together the two images combine to convey the essential meaning of buddhi yoga and hence the content of dharma.

Within the context of the double necessity to act and yet know that one does not act at all, the yogi embodies the principle of the knowledge of inaction:

Let the disciplined man ever discipline  
Himself, abiding in a secret place,  
Solitary, restraining his thoughts and soul,  
Free from aspirations and without possessions.

In a clean place establishing  
A steady seat for himself,  
That is neither too high nor too low,  
Covered with a cloth, a skin, and kuśa-grass,

There fixing the thought-organ on a single object,  
Restraining the activity of his mind and senses,  
Sitting on the seat, let him practise  
Discipline unto self-purification.

Even body, head, and neck  
holding (dharayann) motionless, (keeping himself) steady,  
Gazing at the tip of his own nose,  
And not looking in any direction,

With tranquil soul, rid of fear,  
Abiding in the vow of chastity,  
Controlling the mind, his thoughts on Me,  
Let him sit disciplined, absorbed in Me.

yogī yuñjīta satatam  
ātmanam rahasi sthitam  
ekākī yatacittātma  
nirāśīr aparigrahaḥ

śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya  
sthīram āsanam ātmanah  
nā 'tyucchṛitam nā 'tīñcam  
cailājīnakusottaram

tatrai 'kagraṃ manah kṛtvā  
yatacittendriyakriyāḥ  
upaviśyā 'sane yuñjyād  
yogam ātmavisuddhaye

śamaṃ kāyaśirogrīvaṃ  
dhārayann acalaṃ sthīraṃ  
sāmprekṣya nāsikāgram svam  
diśaś cā 'navalokayan'

praśāntātmā vigatabhīr  
brahmacārivrate sthitaḥ  
manah sanyamya maccittō  
yuktā āsīta matparaḥ 59

In this depiction of the yogi in the midst of meditation we find that the root dhṛ is used to convey the way in which he must hold his body motionless in the midst of concentrated meditation. At the same time, in the stillness of contemplation which brings tranquility of soul (prasantātma), the liberation from fear (vigatabhīr), and control of the mind (manas), we find this yogic meditation ultimately brings union with Kṛṣṇa. The thoughts of the yogi are concentrated on Kṛṣṇa and he is yoked (yuktva) and 'absorbed in Me' (āsīta matparaḥ). The image of the motionlessness of the yogi is the expression in creation of Kṛṣṇa's self-knowledge in which, by his Īśvara yoga, he knows that he acts to maintain all beings while the purusa knows that no action is done. The yoga exercise is therefore both the image of the purusa's pervasive presence

in creation and an indispensable expression of an action consistent with dharma. Possessing the knowledge of the ātman or soul in harmony with Kṛṣṇa, dharma as yoga is established, so that one is motionless in action.

Yoga exercise is therefore a pattern of acting entirely consistent with buddhiyoga and dharma. This is not to suggest, however, that yoga exercises cannot be a form of delusion for understanding action. Illustrative of the potential for delusion in such exercises is the analysis of tapas as an extreme form of asceticism. Such exercises are conditioned in their appropriateness by the state of the buddhi which controls the motivation for doing action. Thus, under the power of each of the gunas, tapas can have varying forms of appropriateness:

With the highest faith performed,  
This threefold austerity, by men  
Not seeking fruits and disciplined,  
They call (austerity) of goodness.

With a view to respect, honour and reverence,  
And with sheer hypocrisy, what austerity  
Is performed, that is called in this world  
(Austerity) of passion; it is insecure (śāstruvam)  
and impermanent.

If with deluded notions, or with self-  
Torture, austerity is performed,  
Or in order to destroy another,  
That is declared to be of darkness,

śraddhayā parayā taptam  
tapas tat trividham naraiḥ  
aphalākāṅksibhir yuktaiḥ  
sāttvikam paricakṣate



satkāramānapūjārtham  
 tapo dambhena ca i 'va yat  
 kriyate tad iha proktam  
 rājasam calam adhruvam'

mūdhagrāheṇā 'tmano yat  
 pīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ  
 parasyo 'tsādanārtham vā  
 tat tāmasam udāhṛtam' 60

Here, tapas is a form of yoga which is performed in faith (śraddha) and not seeking 'fruits' or results from the act. This is tapas under the power of the sattva guṇa. By way of contrast, the tapas which has goals such as the gaining of 'respect, honour' and reverence' is done under the power of rajas. It is specifically described as adhruvam, which can best be put as 'not fixed', in order to accent the contrast with the way in which buddhiyoga brings with it 'steadfastness' (dhṛti) and release from the cycles of rebirth. Finally, the tapas done under the power of tamas is action based upon delusion and is destructive not only of the actor but potentially of others.

Within this hierarchy there is no sense in which tapas is excluded from action consistent with dharma. It is presented simply so that the focus is not what is done, but whether it is done under a motive which seeks results. This is precisely the distinction which characterized the sacrificial

rite and yoga exercises. Each has its power not in the act itself but in the state of the buddhi or faculty of integration and whether it is yoked yoga.

Thus, what emerges from this hierarchical presentation of tapas is that asceticism must be understood as a form of action even when its purpose is to establish motionlessness and stillness. When it is known as an act, it is known that its power arises from Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti. In that knowledge comes the realization of yoga as dharma in union with Kṛṣṇa. Thus the yogi becomes the one whose buddhi is 'held with firmness' dhṛtigrhitaya and is one with Kṛṣṇa:

The desires that spring from purposes  
Abandoning, all without remainder,  
With the thought-organ alone the throng of senses  
Restraining altogether,

Little by little let him come to rest  
Thru the consciousness [buddhi] held with firmness  
[dhṛtigrhitayā]  
Keeping the thought-organ fixed in the self  
He should think on nothing at all.

Who sees Me in all,  
And sees all in Me,  
For him I am not lost,  
And he is not lost for Me.

saṅkalpaprabhavāṅ kāmāṃs  
tyāktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ  
manasai 've 'ndriyagrāmam  
viniyamya samantataḥ

śanaiḥ-śanair uparamed  
buddhyā dhṛtigrhitayā  
ātmasamsthām mānaḥ kṛtvā  
na kimcid api cintayēt

yo mām paśyati sarvatra  
 sarvam ca mayi paśyati  
 tasyā 'ham na pranaśyāmi  
 sa ca me na pranaśyati 61

The yogi holds the senses in restraint by the faculty of thought, the manas. In doing so, the buddhi, the faculty of integration is steadfast (dhr̥ti) and the manas is fixed in the soul (ātman). In this state of fixed meditation on the ātman or soul which is Kṛṣṇa there is no thought, for thought itself is part of prakṛti and an action. The soul, as Kṛṣṇa, knows it does not act. Thus, the absence of thought reflects the fullness of knowledge that it is Kṛṣṇa who is in all and does all. In this knowledge is the fullness of yoga as dharma.

The consumation of this teaching comes with Kṛṣṇa's self-revelation of his eternal nature in Chapter Eleven of the Gītā. There, through the gift of a third eye, Arjuna is given the capacity to see Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature. In the midst of that vision Arjuna sees the comprehensiveness of Kṛṣṇa both as the doer of all that is done and as the one who eternally does not act at all. For our purposes it is most important that Arjuna sees Kṛṣṇa as the source and basis of dharma:

Thou art the Imperishable, the supreme Object of Knowledge;  
 Thou art the ultimate resting-place of this universe;  
 Thou art the immortal guardian of the eternal right  
 [sāśvatadharmagoptā],  
 Thou art the everlasting Spirit, I hold.

tvam akṣaram paramaṃ veditavyam  
 tvam asya viśvasya param nidhānam  
 tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā  
 sanātanas tvam puruṣo nato me. 62

Kṛṣṇa is celebrated as the 'Imperishable', (akṣara), the 'supreme object of knowledge' and 'the ultimate resting-place of this universe'. In each of these three epithets, we find emphatically stated the comprehensiveness of the eternal nature of Kṛṣṇa. What is, is Kṛṣṇa. As such, he is the 'immortal guardian of the eternal right' (śāśvatadharmagoptā). Kṛṣṇa's puruṣa is the akṣara which pervades all that prakṛti does in creation. That Kṛṣṇa brings all that is into creation, and is the sum total of all that is to be known by men in creation, constitutes the full expression of the meaning of dharma. In all that Kṛṣṇa does, therefore, he is the guardian, gopta, of dharma.

The meaning of this guardianship, however, is exceedingly difficult for Arjuna to grasp. Even in the midst of the vision of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature Arjuna sees that among the manifestations of Kṛṣṇa's guardianship of dharma is the very destruction of the cosmos as the last of the four ages of Brahman comes to an end. Kṛṣṇa's guardianship involves a destructive aspect the sight of which so shakes Arjuna's soul that he finds no dhṛti 'steadfastness' in what he sees.

Thy great form, of many mouths and eyes,  
 O great-armed one, of many arms, thighs, and feet,  
 Of many bellies, terrible with many tusks, -  
 Seeing it the worlds tremble, and I too.

Touching the sky, aflame, of many colours,  
 With yawning mouths and flaming enormous eyes  
 Verily seeing Thee (so), my inmost soul is shaken  
 And I find no steadiness [dhṛti] nor peace, O Viṣṇu

rūpaṃ mahat te bahuvaktranetraṃ  
 mahābāho bahubāhūrupādam  
 bahūdaraṃ bahudaṃṣṭrakarālaṃ  
 dr̥ṣṭvā lokāḥ pravṛyāthitās tathā 'ham

nabhaḥspr̥śam dīptam anekavarnaṃ  
 vyāttānaṃ dīptaviśālanetraṃ  
 dr̥ṣṭvā hi tvam pravṛyathītāntarātmā  
 dhṛtiṃ na vindāmi samaṃ ca viṣṇo 63

Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's terror and his lack of dhṛti at the sight of his destructive form is to acknowledge in speech that he is the destroyer of all that is, including those who face the warrior Arjuna across the battlefield. Kṛṣṇa is the doer of all that is done and that is the only basis for knowing dhṛti, steadfastness.

The Blessed One said:

I am Time (death), cause of destruction of the  
 worlds, matured  
 And set out to gather in the worlds here.  
 Even without thee (thy action), all shall cease  
 to exist,  
 The warriors that are drawn up in the opposing  
 ranks.

Therefore arise thou, win glory,  
 Conquer thine enemies and enjoy prospered kingship,  
 Be Me Myself they have already been slain long ago;  
 Be thou the mere instrument, left-handed archer!

Drona and Bhīṣma and Jayadratha,  
 Karṇa too, and the other warrior-heroes as well,  
 Do thou slay, (since) they are already slain by Me;  
 do not hesitate!  
 Fight! Thou shalt conquer thy rivals in battle.

śrībhagavān uvāca

kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho  
 lokān samāhartuṃ iha pravṛttah  
 r̥te 'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve  
 ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyanīkeṣu yodhāḥ

tasmāt tvam uttistha yaśo labhasva  
 jitvā śatrūn bhukṣva rājyaṃ samṛddham  
 mayai 'vai 'te nihātāḥ pūrvam eva  
 nimmittamātram bhava śavyasācin

dronam ca bhīṣmam ca jayadratham ca  
 karṇam tathā 'nyān api yodhavīrān  
 mayā hatāms tvam jahī mā vyathisthā  
 yudhyasva jetāsi rane sapatnān .64

Even in the midst of the vision, Arjuna cannot see that dhṛti  
 cannot be established upon fear even of Kṛṣṇa<sup>65</sup>. Rather it  
 is founded upon the revelation of Kṛṣṇa and his eternal  
 nature in its comprehensiveness. That His nature is expressed  
 both in the form of friendship and in a terrifying aspect is  
 not a matter of choice for Arjuna but a matter of acceptance  
 of what he sees and hears from Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's imperative,  
 'fight' (yudhyasva) is an imperative which arises from the  
 necessity for Arjuna to conform his actions with what he  
 has seen of Kṛṣṇa's actions. He has seen that it is  
 Kṛṣṇa who kills the enemies in his eternal function as the  
 guardian of dharma. To accept that knowledge and to act  
 through yoga in harmony with it, is Arjuna's dharma as yoga.

This integration of knowledge and action, of knower

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64  
 11.32-34.

65  
 11.35.



dharma. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa is later called in chapter 14, the foundation of dharma.

For I am the foundation of Brahman,  
The immortal and the imperishable,  
And of the eternal right [dharmasya],  
And of absolute bliss.

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā 'ham  
amṛtasyā 'vyayasyā ca  
śāśvatasya ca dharmasya  
sukhasya 'kāntikasya ca 68

Kṛṣṇa's function as knowledge in creation as the savior and teacher is, then, intended to bring the soul of all beings into harmony or oneness with his own nature. In all that Kṛṣṇa does in creation from the very beginning of the conception of creation through his many existences as teacher, ṛṣi and all beings, Kṛṣṇa represents the meaning and expression of dharma.

Nowhere is the supremacy of this knowledge expressed more clearly than in Kṛṣṇa's final words to Arjuna. There he urges Arjuna to realize the highest dharma which is integration with Him and his dharma:

Abandoning all (other) duties,  
Go to Me 'as thy sole refuge;  
From all evils I thee  
Shall rescue: be not grieved!

sarvadharmān parityajya  
mām ekaṁ śaranam vraja  
ahaṁ tvā sarvāpāpebhyo  
mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ 69

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68  
14.27.

69  
18.66.



To abandon dharma as all forms of ritual, yoga or varṇa duty in order to know Kṛṣṇa is to realize the dharma that is Kṛṣṇa who is and does all. Such knowledge is the release from Arjuna's depression and the freedom to act and fight in the battle which faces Arjuna without fear of the consequences of such actions. This is Arjuna's highest dharma.

By way of summary, the highest meaning of dharma would seem to have great significance for our concern to show the root meaning of dharma and its continuity. We have seen, for example, that the universal yoga as dharma is the key to the cosmology in the Gītā and the way in which the cosmos is upheld by Kṛṣṇa's Īśvara yoga. In the realm of religious practice, the universal yoga establishes the possibility of integral unity with the divine Kṛṣṇa and consequently with his dharma. All action becomes a sacrifice performed as a yoga. Rather than just the sacrifice, all action becomes the basis for integration with Kṛṣṇa. While this is a change it is one in direct continuity with the Rg Veda and is based upon the root meaning of dharma: to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is.

## CHAPTER IV

### DHARMA, KR̥ṢṆĀ AND COMMUNITY

In our discussion of dharma in the R̥g Veda our concern was to show simply that the cosmic and sacrificial themes in the root meaning of dharma had important implications for the community which preserved the R̥g Veda and the other Samhitas. Within the creation which began as a Golden Foetus there emerged an orderly cosmos upheld by the symbiotic functions of the gods. The human community participated in the gods' upholding task through the sacrifice. From the performance of the sacrifice the gods ensured such things as food, long life, offspring, wealth and power, the justice of Varuṇa, and heroic r̥sis for the community.

In turning to the implications of dharma and its root meaning within the Bhagavad Gītā we find that many of the implications which came to the community from the sacrifice remain within the framework of the universal sacrifice called yoga. There is however, one important change. Dharma as yoga functions at two levels of meaning for the community. First, it functions as the continuing basis for the integration of the community into the divine order. At this level, the consequences of dharma remain the gift of creation as the basis for human sustenance, offspring and all the other gifts

of the gods.

At another level, higher in significance, dharma involves the integration of individual human knowledge and experience into the cosmic function of Kṛṣṇa to uphold the whole of creation. At this level, dharma is buddhi yoga which brings the yogi into integral unity with the divine, eternal nature. Thereby, the yogi gains release from the eternal cycles of the four ages of the cosmos and the cycles of rebirth which function within them. In essence, integration into the divine nature is the consummation of dharma. This consummation, while it is a significant change in the content of dharma fundamentally continues the root meaning established in the Rg Veda.

These two levels of usage of dharma have important implications for the conception of community. One can speak of the community which preserved the Rg Veda as a sacrificing community because of the central and indispensable role the sacrifice played. In the Bhagavad Gītā we have the universalization of the idea of sacrifice as yoga and with that comes the sacralization of the whole of the community, and of all life which is framed by the structures of that community. This conception of a universal sacral community is again a change in the implications of dharma from those which we saw in the Rg Veda. That change is founded upon the continuity of the root meaning of dharma. Society as a whole is structured around the

normative, hierarchical varṇa system. That system comprehends all people in society and provides the framework within which there is a division of labour which sustains the society. The laws and customs which elaborate the normative division of labour are however seen to be the framework in which individuals can realize the fullness of knowledge and ultimate release from the necessities imposed by the structures of society. That release, mokṣa, is union with Kṛṣṇa. The lower and higher meanings of dharma therefore correspond to the two purposes inherent in the varṇa structure of community. The same structure has a functional and a sacral meaning, corresponding to the division of labour and the human goal of ultimate release from rebirth. The fact that we can refer to the whole society as a sacral community and to the universalization of dharma as the basis for the socialization of community rests upon the fact that the whole of creation including human community is metaphysically grounded in Kṛṣṇa's creative action according to dharma.

Through his Īśvara yoga and according to his dharma, Kṛṣṇa creates the structures of the community.

The four-caste system was created by Me  
 With distinction of Strands and actions  
 (appropriate to each);  
 Altho I am the doer of this,  
 Know Me as one that eternally does not act.

cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭaṃ  
 guṇakarmavibhāgaśah  
 tasya kartāram api mām  
 vidhy akartāram avyayam 1

The varṇa system is Kṛṣṇa's creation in the same way in which, within the Rg Veda, we find the Puruṣa as the source of the varṇa order.<sup>2</sup> The structure of Kṛṣṇa's community in which there are priests warriors, tradesmen/agriculturalists, and workers, constitutes the normative division of labour within society. Each level of the hierarchy has its own basic characteristics:

Of brahmans, warriors, and artisans,  
 And of serfs, scorcher of the foe,  
 The actions are distinguished  
 According to the Strands that spring  
 from their innate nature.

Calm, (self-) control, austerities, purity,  
 Patience and uprightness,  
 Theoretical and practical knowledge, and  
 religious faith,  
 Are the natureal-born actions of brahmans.

Heroism, majesty, firmness [dhṛti] skill,  
 And not fleeing in battle also;  
 Generosity, and lordly nature,  
 Are the natural born actions of warriors.

Agriculture, cattle-tending, and commerce  
 Are the natural-born actions of artisans;  
 Action that consists of service  
 Is likewise natural-born to a serf.

brāhmanakṣatriyaviśāṃ  
 sūdrāṇāṃ ca paraṃtapā  
 karmāni pravibhaktāni  
 svabhāvaprabhavair guṇaiḥ

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1  
 4.13.

2  
Rg Veda 10.90.

śamo damaḥ tapaḥ śaucaḥ  
 ksāntir ārjavam eva ca  
 jñānaḥ vijñānaḥ āstikyam  
 brahmakarma svabhāvajam

śauryam tejo dhṛtir dākṣyam  
 yuddhe cā 'py apalāyanam  
 dānam īśvarabhāvaś ca  
 kṣātram karma svabhāvajam

kṛṣigaurakṣyavāñijyam  
 vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam  
 paricaryātmakam karma  
 sūdrasyā 'pi svabhāvajam 3

Within the division of labour of the varna system and the general characteristics which are normative for each particular varna, Brahmans are described as possessors of 'knowledge', 'purity' and 'patience'. The normative aspect of these characteristics is manifest in the fact that in each case the Brahman must come to know these characteristics, and, through buddhi yoga, integrate them so that they become the natural expression of dharma and yoga in daily existence.<sup>4</sup> The warrior must come to know and naturally embody "heroism, majesty, firmness dhṛti and skill", all of which are normative characteristics of the varna into which Arjuna was born.

Because the normative characteristics of each varna must be learned and embodied through yoga, no aspect of the varna order is closer or further from potential realization of

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<sup>3</sup>  
18.41-44.

<sup>4</sup>  
18.45-54.

integration with Kṛṣṇa, and hence with dharma. For example, Arjuna as a warrior must come to know dhṛti or firmness<sup>5</sup> which, for example, we have seen is a manifestation of dharma as yoga, in the same way in which he must come to know the skills which a warrior must possess. No part of the varṇa order is further from the possibility of realizing dharma as yoga in union with Kṛṣṇa.

To know yoga as dharma is to know Kṛṣṇa and that is a universal human possibility irrespective of varṇa. The power of this yoga is universally applicable:

Even if a very evil doer  
Reveres Me with single devotion,  
He must be regarded as righteous [sādhū]  
in spite of all;  
For he has the right resolution.

Quickly his soul becomes righteous [dharmātma],  
And he goes to eternal peace.  
Son of Kuntī, make sure of this:  
No devotee of Mine is lost.

For if they take refuge in Me, son of Pṛthā,  
Even those who may be of base origin,  
Women, men of the artisan caste, and serfs too,  
Even they go to the highest goal.

How much more virtuous brahmans,  
And devout royal seers, too!  
A fleeting and joyless world  
This; having attained, devote thyself to Me.

api cet sudurācāro  
bhajate mām ananyabhāk  
sādhur eva sa mantavyaḥ  
samyag vyavasito hi saḥ

kṣipraṃ bhavati dharmātmā  
śāśvacchāntiṃ nigacchati  
kaunteya pratijānīhi  
na me bhaktah pranaśyati

mām hi pārtha vyapāśritya  
ye 'pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ  
striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās  
te 'pi yānti parām gatim

kim punar brāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā  
bhāktā rājarṣayaś tathā  
anityam asukhaṃ lokam  
imam prāpya bhājasva mām 6

The power of yoga outlined in this account in which one act of devotion is sufficient to know Kṛṣṇa makes clear that such knowledge is a human potential irrespective of varṇa. Within the cycles of rebirth, there may be a greater potential, based upon the training from birth, that a Brāhmaṇ or Kṣatriya will know dharma as yoga. That fact is acknowledged by Kṛṣṇa.

This conception of society is therefore sacral in purpose because it provides the orderly framework within which persons can move toward enlightenment and release from rebirth. "Sacral" however does not imply that the society is to be understood as in any sense sacred in itself. Rather it is "a fleeting and joyless world".<sup>7</sup> Therefore, at best it is to be used as the framework within which persons can come to know the eternal divine nature and act in harmony with the

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6  
9.30-33.

7  
9.33.



knowledge according to dharma as yoga to attain release from it. The sacral dimension of society therefore corresponds to the sacral dimension of the cosmos as a whole. All that is, is a divine creation.

Within this sacral purpose of society, the realization of knowledge of yoga and of Kṛṣṇa in no sense alters the fact that the knower is in creation and in community. In no sense therefore does the realization of the 'higher dharma' of enlightenment involve release from the structures and duties of the community. Dharma remains a unitary conception having higher and lower forms of meaning. Thus the enlightened man knows that he acts through Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti and in that knowledge functions in conformity with dharma to do his varṇa duty, perform the sacrifice or yoga. It is clear however, that the same act of varṇa duty can also be performed outside the context of yoga, and such an act is accomplished under the power of the rajas guṇa. Rebirth in the cycles of rebirth is the fruit of lower dharma. However, both such acts according to varṇa duty are dharma, with the first as a yoga being the higher. By way of contrast, Arjuna's threat not to fight constitutes adharmā, an act against dharma.

For the community then it becomes possible to define those actions which are dharma and adharmā and thereby establish

a vast normative system of law and custom which defines the proper order for a sacral society. However, this is not a social framework which leads to enlightenment. It is a framework within which enlightenment and release are potentially possible for all men who know the highest meaning of dharma as yoga. It is therefore within the context of the hierarchical meaning of dharma that we must interpret Kṛṣṇa's imperative to Arjuna to fight the battle against the Kauravas. At a minimal level, Arjuna must fight because it is his varṇa duty to do so. To refuse is adharma. Furthermore, to fight the battle in the knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's revelation of his eternal nature which showed Arjuna that it is Kṛṣṇa who kills those who die, is to fight as a yogi and fulfill the highest dharma.

Likewise having regard for thine own (caste) duty  
 Thou shouldst not tremble;  
 For another, better thing than a fight required of  
 duty  
 Exists not for a warrior.

Presented by mere luck,  
 An open door of heaven -  
 Happy the warriors, son of Pṛthā,  
 That get such a fight!

Now, if thou this duty-required  
 Conflict wilt not perform,  
 Then thine own duty and glory  
 Abandoning, thou shalt get thee evil.

Either slain thou shalt gain heaven,  
 Or conquering thou shalt enjoy the ear th.  
 Therefore arise, son of Kuntī,  
 Unto battle, making a firm resolve.

svadharmam api cā 'vekṣya  
na vikampitum arhasi  
dharmayād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat  
kṣatriyasya na vidyate

yadṛcchayā co 'papannaṃ  
svargadvāram apāvṛtam  
sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha  
labhantē yuddham īdrśam

atha cet tvam imam dharmyaṃ  
saṃgrāmaṃ na kariṣyasi  
tataḥ svādharmam kīrtim ca  
hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi

hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṃ  
jītvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm  
tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya  
yuddhāya kṛtāniścayaḥ. 8

Because varna dharma is simply consistent with the totality of dharma's meaning, it is legitimate that Arjuna should be ridiculed if he refuses to fight. Performance of one's dharma is the only way to act which brings good for himself, the community and the cosmos. Not to act according to varna dharma is adharma and constitutes disharmony in the interrelated structures of creation.

If Arjuna performs his dharma as a warrior, he will at most be killed in the battle and thereby attain heaven. Not to fulfill his dharma will bring ridicule from his allies and his enemies and positive evil in future existences. Should Arjuna fight with his brothers and win, he will gain 'power',

'wealth' and 'fame' in the world. Kṛṣṇa affirms that all of these ends are entirely legitimate fruits arising from the performance of dharma for in the midst of Kṛṣṇa's self-revelation to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa states:

Therefore arise thou, win glory,  
Conquer thine enemies and enjoy prospered kingship;  
By Me Myself they have already been slain long ago,  
Be thou the mere instrument, left-handed archer.

tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva  
jītvā śātrūn bhukṣva rājyaṃ samṛddham  
mayai 'vai 'te nihatāḥ pūrvam eva  
nimittamātraṃ bhava sāvyasācin 9

Arjuna must be the 'mere instrument' of Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti in the cataclysmic battle and in the performance of dharma both as yoga and as varṇa dharma. Kṛṣṇa has determined that the Kaurava-Pāṇḍava war concerns dharma<sup>10</sup> as much as his teaching to Arjuna concerns dharma. In action it is necessary to conform to dharma and in knowledge it is necessary to know Kṛṣṇa. The union of action and knowledge in Arjuna is his performance of varṇa dharma as Kṛṣṇa's 'instrument'. When he acts as Kṛṣṇa's yogi the battle can be fought and won, the material fruits of the battle - conquest, wealth, power - can be realized. In addition, if in the performance of dharma, Arjuna acts through yoga, then, in addition to all else, Kṛṣṇa brings him into his own nature and gives release from the cycles of rebirth.

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9  
11.33.

10  
2.33.

The necessity to fight illustrates the general theory  
of action applicable to the whole of the varna system:

Taking delight in his own special kind of action,  
A man attains perfection;  
Delighting in one's own special action, success  
How one reaches, that hear!

Whence comes the activity of beings,  
By whom this all is pervaded, -  
Him worshipping by (doing) one's own appropriate  
action,  
A man attains perfection.

Better one's own duty, (even) imperfect,  
Than another's duty well performed  
Action pertaining to his own estate  
Performing, he incurs no guilt.

sve-sve karmaṇy abhirataḥ  
saṃsiddhiṃ labhate naraḥ  
svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṃ  
yathā vindati tac chr̥ṇu

yataḥ pravṛttir bhūtānāṃ  
yena sarvaṃ idaṃ tatam  
svakarmanā tam abhyarcya  
siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ

śreyān svadharmo vigunaḥ  
paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt  
svabhāvaniyataṃ karma  
kurvan nā 'pnoti kilbiṣam ll

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ll

18.45-47. cf. 3.35.

Better one's own duty [svadharmo] (tho) imperfect,  
Than another's duty [paradharmāt] well performed;  
Better death in (doing) one's own duty [svadharme]  
Another's duty [paradharmo]

śreyān svadharmo vigunaḥ  
paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt  
svadharme nidhanam śreyah  
paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ

The special duty of all men is dharma. That dharma ranges from birth-given duties according to varṇa to the highest dharma as yoga. All such action is pravṛtti,<sup>12</sup> action that must be done. According to Kṛṣṇa all 'beings' are in prakṛti and find their fulfillment in the 'maintenance' of all that is.<sup>13</sup> Thus action according to dharma, both in its higher and lower forms, participates in the 'maintenance' of all creation. In this unity of function according to dharma, we have the metaphysical basis for the sacral meaning of community and a direct example of the way in which dharma retains its root or core meaning.

The concern of the Bhagavad Gītā is not however, to relate the details of all that dharma means. Rather the intent is to convey the metaphysical ground for the sacral meaning of action and community. The details of normative types of dharma action are to be found in the sāstras, to which Kṛṣṇa makes reference.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore let the law [sāstra] be thy authority  
In determining what should and should not be done.  
Knowing (action) laid down in the law's injunctions,  
Thou shouldst do such action in this world.

tasmāc chāstram pramāṇam te  
kāryākāryavyavasthitau  
jñātvā sāstravidhānoktam  
karma kartum ihā 'rhasi' 15

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<sup>12</sup>  
cf. 18.30 and the fact that the steadfast buddhi knows the distinction of pravṛtti and nivṛtti.

<sup>13</sup>  
7.5, 15.7

<sup>14</sup>  
16.24, 17.1.

<sup>15</sup>  
16.24. The usual translation of 'sāstra' is 'sacred text'.

On the basis of performing the actions required by the śāstras Kṛṣṇa brings to the community and to individuals the 'fruits' of acting in harmony with dharma. As the gods had brought the gifts of creation to those who offered the sacrifice, Kṛṣṇa brings to men the 'fixed' fruits of dharma:

Where is Kṛṣṇa the Lord of discipline  
And where is the Bowman, the son of Pṛthā  
There fortune, victory, prosperity  
And statecraft are firmly fixed [dhruva] I ween.

yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo  
yatra pārtho dhānurdharaḥ  
tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir  
dhruvā nītir matir mama. 16

As the Gītā ends on the note which recalls that Kṛṣṇa is the 'lord of yoga' yogeśvara and that Arjuna has acceded to his teaching about dharma<sup>17</sup> and commits himself to fight the war, we find the affirmation that the consequences of dharma are fixed for those who know dharma and act in harmony with it.

In the unity of Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature comprehending all that is and all that is done, we find the continuity of the root meaning of dharma as the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is.

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16  
18.78.

17  
18.73.

## CHAPTER V

### DHARMA AND THE THEOLOGY OF TRADITION IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

We have examined dharma in three contexts - Cosmology, Yoga and Community. In our discussion of the origin and structure of the cosmos we saw that all creation had its source in Kṛṣṇa and was structured within and by his prakṛti. Kṛṣṇa was the source, the maintainer and destroyer of creation. Within creation He maintained all creatures including man by his prakṛti. He functioned through Iśvara-yoga according to dharma. Indeed the whole structure of the created order and all motion in the cosmos was possible because it was upheld by Kṛṣṇa.

Important to Kṛṣṇa's maintenance of creation was his function as a teacher. He claimed to be all of the great ṛṣis who had seen the vision of reality and translated that vision into the mantra. In continuity with that function, Kṛṣṇa returned to his creation in embodied form to continue to teach dharma. In this teaching, Kṛṣṇa universalizes yoga and the vedic sacrifice to express the meaning of dharma. All action must become a sacrifice and a yoga in order to express the highest meaning of dharma. Kṛṣṇa



therefore explicitly claims a continuity for dharma and specifically for dharma as yoga.

In this teaching there is a hierarchy of meanings for dharma. Below the universal yoga, the highest meaning of dharma, are those forms of action which, like the sacrifice or varṇa dharma, can be enacted simply out of a recognition that such action is religiously required. While such acts are dharma they are motivated by the desire for results of one kind or another. As a consequence such action binds the actor in the recurring cyclical movements of creation and re-birth. By contrast, in the universal yoga all desire is Kṛṣṇa and is in harmony with dharma. All action is known to be Kṛṣṇa's action and that knowledge, which itself is dharma and Kṛṣṇa, brings release from the recurring cycles of creation and eternal union with Kṛṣṇa.

The purpose of our discussion of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā was to see if all of the particular meanings of dharma had, as in the Rg Veda, an underlying coherence which we called a root or core meaning. In particular we wanted to know if such a core meaning was the same as that in the Rg Veda. If it was the same, there would be grounds to claim that we had validated for our understanding the continuity of dharma from the śruti text, the Rg Veda, to

the smṛti text, the Bhagavad Gītā.

In the Rg Veda we saw that the root meaning was based upon the symbiotic functions of the gods which individually contributed specific functions and aspects to creation. Agni made the light and the mantra manifest in creation; Indra brought the waters through his power. The Ādityas brought orderly motion and Soma nourished both the gods and men with the sacred food for the sacrifice. In each of these manifestations we found functions of the gods expressed through forms of √dhr̥. It was particularly important for the formation of the root meaning that each of the powers and each aspect of creation was inseparably tied together in the necessity to act according to dharma in order that the whole creation could be upheld. Each part of creation contributed to the total function of upholding and in doing so expressed the orderliness and indispensable relatedness of each aspect of creation. Dharma was found to be, then, the conceptual expression of the upholding of orderly relatedness in all that is.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, the meanings of dharma were concentrated in the divine nature of Kṛṣṇa. All of the functions fulfilled by the diverse powers of the Rg Veda are taken up by Kṛṣṇa and, most important for our concern, are understood to express his functions according to dharma.

Kṛṣṇa created and maintained all beings and taught Arjuna because such actions, accomplished through his Īśvara-yoga, were manifestations of dharma. Kṛṣṇa not only appropriated the forms of dharma articulated in Veda but articulated in his teaching of yoga, changes in the content of dharma which can only be understood in the light of an underlying continuity and coherence of the root meaning first seen in the Rg Veda.

To articulate the continuity of dharma's root meaning in its setting in Kṛṣṇa's teaching, we stated that dharma was the central term in a theology of tradition. The use of the term 'theology' was intended to convey the coherence of Kṛṣṇa's teaching as a whole. The term 'tradition' articulated the way in which Kṛṣṇa saw his teaching as consciously related to the revelation of mantra to the vedic ṛṣis. Both the coherence and the relation to the vedic mantra were based upon the root meaning of dharma.

Dharma is central to the coherence of Kṛṣṇa's teaching as its main theme. Dharma is the problem about which Arjuna expresses his confusion. Dharma's hierarchical pattern of meanings from dharma as yoga, through dharma as many forms of action - varṇa-dharma, sacrifices, yogic meditation, to name but a few - provide the framework within which Kṛṣṇa's teaching as whole can be understood. The criticisms of both

yoga exercises and the sacrifice find their rationale within the hierarchy. Dharma as yoga becomes the expression of the knowledge that one does not act, only Kṛṣṇa's prakṛti acts. The sacrifice expresses the necessity to act but does so in the knowledge that only Kṛṣṇa acts. The paradox of inaction in action is the highest dharma, the key to unlock the coherence of all Kṛṣṇa's teaching.

Coherence alone is not, however, a theology of tradition. Kṛṣṇa's teaching about dharma draws upon the established core meaning of dharma to show that the vision of the vedic poets remains the authoritative source for all that follows. Two main points can illustrate the traditional dimension of the theology and its basis in the core meaning of dharma. First, Kṛṣṇa upholds the cosmos. While, the gods of the Rg Veda acted symbiotically to uphold the cosmos, Kṛṣṇa uses the many powers of prakṛti to accomplish the same end. All creation holds together in Kṛṣṇa's nature. While Kṛṣṇa may not be a god in the Rg Veda, what is essential, is that He embodies the principle that creation is upheld in each of its manifold aspects and as a unitary whole.

Secondly, Kṛṣṇa's yoga as dharma is tied intimately to the sacrifice. The sacrifice, as it was established by the gods in the Rg Veda, was the key to integration of the

vedic community into the harmony of the cosmos. In the Gītā, the sacrifice is yoga and all action, not just a ritual, becomes the basis for integration of the community into the sacral order.

The ultimate expression of integration in the Gītā is union with Kṛṣṇa. Whether it be integration into the sacral order or with Kṛṣṇa, dharma conveys the underlying principle of upholding through yoga in the same way that it did in the sacrifice in the Rg Veda. The point of action as dharma was to be at one with the satya, the truth which functions in creation as dharma. Similarly, in the Bhagavad Gītā, the point is to know Kṛṣṇa and function through the hierarchy of dharma's meaning. While the detailed actions may be altered, the principle of dharma expressed in its root meaning remains the same.

In summary, dharma, as part of a Theology of Tradition does not refer to a strict identity of particular divine or human functions. Rather, it refers to an interpretation of a god, such as Kṛṣṇa or a religious practice such as yoga in terms of the basic presupposition which we have called dharma's root or core meaning. The 'newness' of Kṛṣṇa as a god when compared to Agni or Indra is an important change in the Tradition. However, the key point is that we are talking about a change taking place - in a tradition. To be divine

Kṛṣṇa must uphold the cosmos, for dharma is an inherent principle in the cosmos. It is inconceivable that Kṛṣṇa's eternal nature could be seen devoid of that principle. Kṛṣṇa's divine nature then is only comprehensible because its manifestation in the Gītā is based on Veda, the records of the ṛsis who saw the inherent principle of dharma as the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is. Such a vision underlies and shapes the vision of dharma in the divine nature of Kṛṣṇa. Such a vision underlies the critical absorption of the sacrifice into dharma as the universal yoga.

Dharma then demonstrates a continuity from the Rg Veda to the Bhagavad Gītā. Having shown that continuity, our task now is to see the implications of that fact for the problem of continuity posed by western scholarship.

CONCLUSION

THE LOTUS AND THE CHARIOT

## CONCLUSION

### THE LOTUS AND THE CHARIOT

The centrality of the notion of dharma led us to seek to validate the claim made in the Tradition that dharma can be known most authoritatively in the śruti literature. The textual basis for validation was located in the Rg Veda and then in the Bhagavad Gītā. The question asked in these texts was whether there was a root or core meaning of dharma which could support the diverse types of meanings which occur in various contexts. The Rg Veda was examined to establish the root meaning; the Bhagavad Gītā was examined to determine whether there was continuity of the root meaning.

Having surveyed dharma in these texts, we have argued that indeed dharma can be understood to have a core or root meaning and that despite certain types of changes in the Tradition, the concept of dharma has a demonstrable continuity. In the diverse usages and meanings of the term there is an underlying conceptual coherence which we have expressed as: to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is. Amidst all that stands for change in the specific content of dharma, there remains continuous revelation in the Tradition that creation is an interrelated whole, orderly in its movements which is upheld and maintained.



The task of upholding in the Rg Veda is comprehensive, incorporating all the gods, all of creation, and all of life. In the Bhagavad Gītā, that comprehensiveness is depicted in the eternal nature of Kṛṣṇa. At one level, that nature is manifest as Kṛṣṇa. Beyond that anthropomorphic manifestation is an Absolute which transcends all images and all language. In both the gods of the Rg Veda and in Kṛṣṇa, dharma expresses the principle of truth as it functions in creation. The gods act to uphold, Kṛṣṇa upholds. In the Rg Veda, the ṛsis envisaged the true dharma (satyadhama); in the same language of "seeing", Kṛṣṇa enabled Arjuna to see that He was both the Truth and the expression dharma which upholds Truth. In essence, then, dharma's root meaning - the upholding of the orderly relatedness of all that is - is the principle that emerges in sat, Being or 'what is', as its mirror image in the realm of function.

#### 1. DHARMA AND THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITION

Affirmation that there is a root meaning of the term dharma which has a demonstrable continuity in the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā can serve as a basis for a brief reflection on the scholarly question of continuity and change in the Indian Tradition.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, the

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It would be a major undertaking to survey even the  
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questioning of the claim for continuity has been pressed

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1 (continued)

most recent literature on continuity and change in the Indian Tradition. We propose with the exception of a brief reference to one of the earliest advocates of discontinuity in the Tradition, to make reference only to Louis Renou, one of the most vigorous and articulate advocates of discontinuity.

There is however important literature on the theme of continuity and change which we cannot consider in detail. There is W. Norman Brown's work, Man In the Universe; Some Continuities in Indian Thought (Berkeley, 1966); Paul Younger, The Indian Religious Tradition, (Varanasi, 1970); Jan Gonda, Change and Continuity In Indian Religion, (The Hague, 1965).

Brown's work focuses on the metaphysical symbols of continuity and without detailed argument, briefly relates the symbols to current anthropological thinking on the question, such as: Robert Redfield, The Little Community: Viewpoint for the Study of the Human Whole, (Chicago, 1955); M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (Berkeley, 1968); Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes, (New York, 1972).

Younger's provocative work sets out to view the Indian Tradition in terms of 'periods': the 'Background Period'; the periods of 'Formulation', 'Consolidation' and 'Survival'. Younger emphasizes the seminal role of Buddhism in the period of 'Formulation' and sees as a result an ambiguous (at best) relation between the Formulated Tradition and the 'Background Period' which includes both the Rg Veda and the Indus Valley civilization. While Younger does not see an absolute discontinuity, he does see limited continuity from the Samhitas to the Bhagavad Gītā.

Gonda's work, Change and Continuity is with Louis Renou's works, the most sustained writing on the question. He contributes a major essay that surveys the issues at stake by way of introduction and then presents the reader with a series of essays which illustrate the complexity of the issue at stake. Gonda's position is not absolutely clear on the question of continuity. On the one hand he subscribes to the basic arguments of Louis Renou. He is prepared to say: "There is every reason for the contention that India had a  
(continued)

from two broad perspectives: the historical and literary

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1 (continued)

very inadequate and incomplete knowledge of the Veda before it was discovered by European scholarship": (p. 13). Furthermore, Gonda displays a clear insensitivity to the theological dimension of the claim for continuity in the Tradition. He goes so far as to state:

There is of course room for the observation that this consciousness of continuity on the part of the Hindus themselves is not based on scientific research and insight . . . . This consciousness of continuity is on the contrary based on mere traditions and religious convictions and it is utterly improbable that a tradition-ridden community which has unshakable belief in pre-historic 'revealed' origin of its views, institutions and way of life would think of anything like an interruption of the tradition by which they feel themselves to be connected with that 'revelation'. (p. 14, emphasis added).

In spite of these statements, Gonda wishes to express caution and the need for further research on the complex questions involved. Immediately following the above statements he continues with an affirmative view of continuity:

. . . from an objective point of view there are many arguments for the thesis that the Indian culture which is expressed and reflected by the uninterrupted literary production from the Ṛg Veda onward is an unmistakable continuum which while transforming and rejuvenating itself has always been subject of processes of adaptation and assimilation, that - to express myself otherwise - there is in many respects no occasion whatever to deny the Hinduist traits of culture have developed from Vedic beginnings: e.g. the respect for and sanctity of the cow, the 'magic power', attributed to an appeal to truth which appearing already in the Ṛg Veda underlies later conceptions of the power of truth, including Gandhi's theory about satyāgraha -; the eager desire to be freed from the impending dangers of death and other worldly ills, a desire already before the early Upaniṣads known to Vedic man. . . .

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approaches to the texts of the Indian Tradition. Generally speaking the historical approach has sought out the descriptive evidence which texts like the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā can provide into social conditions, ritual patterns, the history of ideas and religious life. The literary approach has dealt with such issues as the relation of Sanskrit to the Indo-European family of languages and literature, and more specifically, the history of Sanskrit language and literature. Both approaches have led to general

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the much repeated statement that Hinduism in its consciousness of cultural continuity and homogeneity regarded, contrary to historical fact, many non-vedic ideas and beliefs in connections with saṃsāra, karman, mokṣa and the principle of ahimsā, as Vedic does not settle the question: here also matters are much more complicated than the formula: "non-vedic and therefore to be considered as borrowed from the substratum, "would have us believe.

In essence, Gonda's position can at best be described as sympathetic to the indigenous claims of the Indian Tradition, but insistant that those claims must meet the test of scientific inquiry into the claims.

While our own project can be viewed in the context of Gonda's position, in that we are seeking to verify the claim made about dharma that it is known authoritatively in the Veda, we are less confident than Gonda of a priori methodologies as the means to verify the claim (cf. footnote 5 below, for some literature on the encounter of scientific methodologies and non-western societies).

conclusions about the question of the continuity and change. Those conclusions have often been at odds with the claims made by the Indian Tradition itself for continuity.

Illustrative of the type of conclusions reached through an historical approach to the literature is an oft-quoted passage by M. Winternitz which describes the changes reflected in the literature concerning the world-view of the vedic people:

In the Vedas we find an active, joyful, warlike people, of simple, and still partly savage habits. Singers implore the gods for help against the enemy, victory, glory and booty, wealth, god, cattle, rain children and long life. As yet we do not find in the songs of the Rg Veda that effeminate, ascetic, and pessimistic trait of the Indian character which we shall meet again and again in Indian literature. 2

The descriptions of the change from 'active', 'joyful' and 'warlike' to 'effeminate', 'ascetic' and 'pessimistic' are changes accurately reflected in the literature in a descriptive sense. However, the question we would address to Winternitz is whether it is adequate to view the Rg Veda just as an historical source when the literature itself does not function in the Indian Tradition as such? This question is especially important when the evidence leads Winternitz to conclusions

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M. Winternitz, History of Indian Literature, Vol. 1, (Calcutta, 1962), p. 73.

which portray the changes in the Tradition in terms of a basic discontinuity.

The limitation in the historical enterprise is not unrelated to that of the study of Sanskrit literature. The study of the Sanskrit texts as literature, rather than as religious literature embodying and conveying the fundamental presuppositions of a religious Tradition, brings much the same result as the historical enterprise on the question of continuity. For example, Louis Renou has argued that the Veda stands as little more than a 'symbol' in the smṛti tradition.

La smṛiti (qui se poursuit au-delà du Veda par la Dharmasāstra classique) introduit une formulation directe une pensée rationaliste, pourrait - on dire, qu'il s'agisse de textes erudits ou de textes (pre)-scientifiques; la śruti, tout au contraire est d'essence symbolique, se fondant sur une sémantique indirecte et "seconde". 3

Here Renou argues that the substance of the change between śruti and smṛti literature is a move from 'symbolic' language to rational language. Renou does not explain what he means either by 'symbolic' or 'rational' in the context. That distinction, however, is not the key issue for our purposes, so it is unimportant that he is unclear on such questions.

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<sup>3</sup>  
E. V. P., Vol. 6, p. 27.

Rather, the main point is that Renou sees in the character of the language of śruti and smṛti a significant and fundamental change. The change he sees in the language brings with it conclusions which portray the stages of the Tradition in fundamental discontinuity. Renou states, for example:

The Vedic contribution to Hinduism, especially to Hindu cult - practice and speculation, is not a large one; Vedic influence on mythology is rather stronger, though here also there has been a profound regeneration. Religious terminology is almost completely transformed between the Veda and the Epic or Purāṇas, a fact which has not been sufficiently emphasized; the old terms have disappeared or have so changed in meaning that they are hardly recognizable; a new terminology comes into being. <sup>4</sup>

Renou finds the differences between the language of the Rg Veda and the later smṛti literature deep and profound and argues that there is, in consequence, a fundamental discontinuity in the Tradition between 'Vedism' and 'Hinduism'.

By way of contrast with Winternitz and Renou, to investigate the fundamental presuppositions of the Tradition by seeking to validate indigenous claims leads one to quite different insights into the question of continuity. We discovered an underlying conceptual continuity in the uses of

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L. Renou, Religions of Ancient India, (New York, 1968), p. 47.

dharma in the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā. On the basis of that we can appreciate the claim that dharma is known authoritatively in the Rg Veda. The validity of that claim in turn provides a basis to acknowledge the more general claim for continuity.

The difference between the conclusions we have reached and those of Winternitz arises from differing methodological concerns. Winternitz generally speaking formulates his approach to the Indian literature in terms of the Nineteenth Century presuppositions on the nature of religion and cultural evolution. The validity of such presuppositions has been challenged<sup>5</sup> by much of modern scholarship. Our thesis can be seen to add weight to that challenge by suggesting that what is important for outsiders to know is how the Indian Tradition formulates its self-understanding on the questions of continuity and change and

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5 cf. Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), Rationality, (New York, 1970). Particularly important on this issue is the debate between Peter Winch, author of "The Idea of a Social Science" and "Understanding a Primitive Society" over against Alasdair MacIntyre, author of "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing" and "The Idea of a Social Science". Important reflection on the relation of the positivist account of rationality and the social sciences is Eric Voeglin's The New Science of Politics, (Chicago, 1952) and a fundamental philosophical reflection on the foundation of the whole issue is Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, (Chicago, 1953).



what the evidence is for that self-understanding. Such an approach can acknowledge the accuracy of Winternitz's description of change in the Tradition, but seek to know how that change is understood in the context of the Indian Tradition.

Similarly, our point is not to dispute Renou's assertion that there are profound changes in language between the Rg Veda and smṛti literature. Indeed throughout our study of the Bhagavad Gītā we acknowledged many changes between the two texts we considered in this study. Our point is to suggest however, that the Tradition has its own assumptions which assert the continuity of the Tradition and provide a framework within which change can be understood and acknowledged. For example, one could refer to the account of time in the Indian Tradition which, unlike the western linear conception is based upon a cyclical pattern. In the cycles, the perfect age is at the beginning and subsequent ages reflect the slow decline of creation until its destruction and reabsorption into the cosmic waters. In this account of time, change is a matter of decline. The revelatory visions and mantras of the Rg Veda do not look back to a previous age, but represent the literary remnants of the first age. Smṛti, of which the Gītā is a part, is dependent upon

śruti for its knowledge, but it is a recollection of it, not the knowledge itself. The change is a matter of decline in relationship to the fullness of knowledge of Veda, but it is a decline which is comprehensible only within a framework of continuity with the original vision of mantra and Veda. Thus, throughout the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa looks back to Veda as the manifestation of his own nature in another age. Veda and Kṛṣṇa are coeval with creation. Within Veda, dharma is present from the very beginning as a fundamental principle in creation. We have expressed that principle in terms of a root or core meaning of dharma: to uphold the orderly relatedness of all that is. This core meaning underlies the diverse forms of upholding carried out by the gods in the Rg Veda and by Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā. There are changes in dharma's meaning in the world view and in linguistic use, as Winternitz and Renou state, but the changes are part of a framework of continuity tied to the original revelation to the vedic ṛsis and Agni's mantra.

In essence, we are arguing that, to discuss the question of continuity in the Indian Religious Tradition without reference to Tradition's own conception of continuity is to miss the core of the Tradition. This study has been an attempt to grasp something of that core or root through a study of dharma.

## APPENDIX ONE

References to the noun dharma in the Rg Veda:

1.12.7.	9.7.7,1.
1.22.18.	9.25.2.
1.55.3.	9.35.6.
1.134.5.	9.63.22.
1.159.3.	9.64.1,11.
1.160.1.	9.86.5,9.
1.164.43,50.	9.97.12,23.
1.187.1.	9.107.15, 24.
	9.110.4.
2.13.7.	
	10.16.3.
3.3.1.	10.20.2,3.
3.17.1,5.	10.21.3.
3.38.2.	10.44.1,5,8.
3.60.6	10.50.6
	10.56.3,5.
4.53.3,4,5.	10.63.13.
	10.65.5.
5.15.2.	10.88.1.
5.26.6.	10.90.16.
5.63.1,7.	10.92.2.
5.72.2.	10.149.3.
5.81.4	10.167.3.
	10.170.2.
6.70.1,3.	10.175.1-4.
7.89.5.	
8.6.20.	
8.27.3,5,16.	
8.35.13.	
8.43.24.	
8.98.1. (Griffith,8.87.1)	

## APPENDIX TWO

References to the root dhr in used in this study:

1.15.6.	5.15.1,2,5.	8.68.19 (8.57.19)
1.20.18.	5.27.6.	8.70.2. (8.59.2)
1.22.18.	5.29.1.	8.77.6,8.(8.65.6,8)
1.25.6,8,10.	5.34.7.	8.93.13. (8.82.13)
1.30.22.	5.62.1,3,5.	8.94.2. (8.83.2.)
1.37.7.	5.69.1.	8.95.8,15(8.84.8,15.)
1.44.14.	5.72.2.	8.97.11. (8.86.11.)
1.48.3.	5.86.6.	8.100.1. (8.89.1.)
1.51.4.		
1.52.8.		9.12.9.
1.62.7,9.	6.8.6.	9.22.7.
1.66.3.	6.17.7,16.	9.35.6.
1.67.5.	6.19.5.	9.44.2.
1.96.1-7.	6.30.2.	9.47.4.
1.103.1,2.	6.36.1.	9.63.1,14,30,
1.134.5.	6.44.24.	9.74.2.
1.139,8,10.	6.47.4.	9.86.6,7.
1.141.9.	6.51.8.	9.105.4.
1.156.4.	6.67.6.	9.107.4,23.
	6.68.10.	
	6.74.1.	
2.1.4.		10.12.3,7.
2.13.7.		10.18.13.
2.17.5.		10.19.1,3.
2.27.4,8,9.	7.64.4.	10.20.2.
2.29.1.	7.66.2.	10.24.1.
	7.85.3	10.25.4.
3.2.7,10.	7.99.2,3.	10.44.8.
3.3.1.	7.104.13.	10.48.8.
3.32.8.		10.49.9,10.
3.38.2.		10.59.5
3.44.3.	8.12.30.	10.60.5,8,9.
3.59.1.	8.13.12.	10.66.5,8.
	8.15.2.	10.70.5.
4.1.18.	8.17.13.	10.73.4
4.2.12.	8.25.2,8.	10.81.4.
4.3.4.	8.27.3.	10.92.10.
4.4.8.	8.32.25.	10.111.4.
4.42.2,3,4.	8.36.1.	10.121.1.
4.53.4.	8.41.10.	10.144.6.
4.54.4.	8.44.25.	10.170.2
4.58.2.		10.173.2,3,5.

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