

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING
OF RTA IN THE RG VEDA

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OF RTA IN THE RG VEDA

By

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, it is my contention that the attempts by modern scholars to provide a precise definition of essence for ṛta, through an analysis of this term's etymological roots and by the application of modern English and European terms as possible cognates for ṛta, have failed to account for the rich significance of this complicated term. I suggest that such a precise definition cannot, and need not, be found for ṛta, and that the rich significance of this term can be grasped only in terms of the interrelated network of images, associations and specific applications which encompass it in the Rg Veda. To this end, I lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive study of ṛta by demonstrating that this term is associated with images of wide/safe/free space, pathways upon which entities may travel free from harm, light, and the sound which destroys evil and dispels ignorance. Furthermore, I indicate that in its specific applications--as the mode of being of the sat, as that which regulates and stabilizes all phenomena in space and time, as the sacrifice and the effective force of the sacrifice, and as "truth" in speech--ṛta works to provide the cosmos with the benefits inherent in the images and associations which encompass it. The conclusion of the thesis is that although no single image, association or specific application can adequately define ṛta, these, when melted together into a unified bond, provide the rationale for viewing this complicated term as a kind of "force" or "power" which is the necessary precondition for the freedom, safety, security, stability, truth, order, law, etc. of the established cosmos.

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this thesis is to examine the significance of the word "rta" in the Rg Veda. The thesis will involve prescribing a particular procedure for the study, and then working through various occurrences of the term "rta" in the Rg Veda in terms of the prescribed approach.

Rta, which expresses an idea that is fundamental to the vedic view of reality, needs to be re-examined because modern scholarship¹ on the term has left us with a less than satisfactory understanding of its significance. My dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs is based upon three difficulties concerning the methodology used to obtain definitions of rta and the application of these definitions to the textual material. Three difficulties are: 1) The inadequacy of the root-derivation method for establishing a core meaning for rta; 2) The uncritical

¹Work on the word "rta" began in the middle and late nineteenth century with translations of the Rg Veda by H.H. Wilson, F. Max Muller, Geldner, and R.T.H. Griffith. Other scholars of this period who have had a direct influence upon the present understanding of rta are H. Grassmann (Wörterbuch, Zum Rig Veda), M. Monier-Williams (A Sanskrit-English Dictionary), V.S. Apte (The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary), and Abel Bergaigne (La religion vedique). Among the more recent scholars, H. Lüders has done the most significant work on rta (Varuna). This last one hundred and fifty years of scholarship on Indian thought is what is meant by the phrase "modern scholarship" in the text of this thesis.

application of modern words to ṛta, with the implicit suggestion that the so-called modern cognates are equivalent in meaning to ṛta; and 3) The inability of modern definitions of ṛta to account for the many textual variations of this complicated term.

The root-derivation method has been a favored method for establishing a core meaning for difficult terms. By this method, the verbal root, from which the word in question is derived, is presented and the significance of its meaning is given. It is asserted that the root suggests a certain idea which is embodied in the derivative. Finally, the core meaning arrived at is then tested against the actual use of the word in the text. This particular strategy, however, at least in the case of ṛta, seems deficient. For example, M. Monier-Williams derives ṛta from the root $\sqrt{\text{ṛ}}$ which means "to go, move, rise, tend upwards, to go towards, meet with, fall upon, reach, obtain, to excite, to erect, to raise". He then gives the meaning of ṛta as "(M/F, proper, right, fit, apt, suitable, able, brave, honest; (N), fixed or settled order, law, rule, sacred or pious action or custom, divine law, divine truth".² Lacking in this account is an explanation of the manner in which the meanings attributed to $\sqrt{\text{ṛ}}$ evolved into those given for ṛta. According to Abel Bergaigne, however, Roth and Grassmann did

²M. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (Oxford, 1960), 223.

attempt to make this connection:³

The word rta is only an ancient past participle from the root r, of which the meaning may be traced from two principle meanings 'to rise' and 'to adapt oneself to'....It is from the latter of these two meanings that M.M. Roth and Grassmann have derived the meaning of rta, and I do not feel any hesitation in following here their example. Rta then meant originally "what is adapted".

Bergaigne continues with the suggestion that rta is the principle of adaptation and the term therefore expresses the idea of 'Law' or 'Order' in its definitive form.⁴ V. M. Apte, however, who follows a similar methodology, arrives at a different core meaning for the term. He argues that rta's primary meaning is to be taken in a physical sense:⁵

And yet, in my view, the fundamental physical sense--the primary meaning--of the word, which is alongside of...its widely accepted secondary or derived sense...has not been well established....Rta is derived from r, to go, and we recognize in it the suffix ta...rtá...should therefore,

³Abel Bergaigne, Vedic Religion, V.G. Paranjpe trans., (Poona, 1973), III, 216-219.

⁴One may rightly wonder what the definitive form of 'Law' or 'Order' is. Bergaigne, a Frenchman, who grew up under the shadow of the Napoleonic code, would have imputed meanings to 'Loi' or 'Ordre' which are not present in the notions of 'Law' or 'Order' for those who grew up under British civil law. cf. Bergaigne, III, 220 & 226.

⁵V.M. Apte, "Rta in the Rg Veda", ABORI, 48 (1942), 55.

primarily mean '(something) gone over (correctly)' or better '(the correct order of) going' and secondarily 'the settled Order of Right'.

Apte argues that ṛta, as that which is gone over correctly (or that which promotes the correct order of going) is to be taken in a physical sense because the Rg Veda shows that ṛta is described with attributes of spaciality, location, boundry, extension, and dimension.⁶

Given that both Apte and Bergaigne offer textual evidence for their interpretations, how is it then that they arrive at such different conclusions? The discrepancy results from the nature of the evidence upon which they base their arguments. J. Gonda, for example, points out some of the difficulties inherent in the etymological approach to ancient terms. He maintains that:⁷

...scholars have not infrequently neglected to realize the character of etymologies. First...

⁶Apte, 56-60.

⁷J. Gonda, "Postscript on Mitra", ABORI, XVIII (1977), 60. James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language, (Oxford, 1961), 109, offers support for Gonda's contention. He points out that etymology is a historical study, it studies the past of a word. The etymological source, or history of a word does not, however, provide us with an infallible guide to the meaning of that word at any point in its history: "The main point is that the etymology of a word is not a statement about its meaning but about its history; it is only as a historical statement that it can be responsibly asserted, and it is quite wrong to suppose that the etymology of a word is necessarily a guide either to its 'proper' meaning in a later period or to its actual meaning in that period."

any etymology is by definition a hypothesis and as such never unchallengeable, always liable to constant revision....Next, the investigator who relies too much upon an etymology runs the risk of introducing meanings or shades of meaning that are foreign to the language under discussion....lastly, prehistoric roots and so-called reconstructions of our 'original' forms are no real words but abstractions of our making to symbolize in a brief formula what some related words have, formally and semantically, in common.

On the basis of Gonda's contention, both Apte and Bergaigne have based their arguments upon evidence which is abstract and tentative. The variety of meanings ascribed to the root \sqrt{r} by Monier-Williams is indicative of the fact that this verbal root has itself no rigidly fixed meaning. The connection between the verbal root and the various usages of rta is sufficiently vague and loose to allow for a whole range of possible interpretations. The fact that rta can be connected with any one of several abstract meanings of \sqrt{r} , and that the core meanings thus arrived at can be verified in the text, demonstrates that the notion of a primary or original meaning for the word is completely undermined. The root-derivation method, therefore, holds little promise for establishing a fully applicable core meaning for the term "rta".

Research on the word "rta" has led to a general consensus that it means "Law/Order/Truth". Bergaigne, Roth, Grassmann and Lüders certainly endorse this understanding, and W. Norman Brown seems to accept it without contest.⁸ There are, however, two problems with under-

standing ṛta in this way: 1) Scholars have tended to assume that since the Sanskrit term "ṛta" has been circumscribed within a network of so-called cognates, they somehow have a sufficient grasp of the sense and significance of the word in question. On what basis, however, can one make the assumption that the images and associations connected with these modern terms, images and associations which have developed over a long history, properly fit with the vedic understanding of ṛta? What is the conceptual relation between the Sanskrit "ṛta" and the English "Law/Order/Truth"? Are they exactly equivalent? If roughly equivalent, then at what points do they agree; at what points are they dissimilar? Are the dissimilarities great enough so that the English words would be robbed of their own semantic content when applied to ṛta? Would the French translation of ṛta as "Loi/Ordre/Verite" or the German translation as "Gesetz/Ordnung/Wahrheit" carry the same meanings as the English "equivalents"? Would they impute meanings to ṛta which are not part of the English understanding of Law, Order or Truth? These questions dealing with the semantic difficulties involved in attempting to translate ṛta with the words of modern vocabularies have not been answered. J. Gonda describes the effects of this situation in his

⁸cf. Bergaigne, III, 216-219; H. Lüders, Varuna, (Göttingen, 1959), II, 420-485; W. Norman Brown, "Duty as Truth in the Rig Veda", in J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke eds., India Maior, (Lieden, 1972), 60.

critique of Lüders' understanding of ṛta as das Wahrheit:⁹

When Lüders defended the thesis that ṛta is synonymous with the German Wahrheit, he did not only forget to define this term or to inform us of his view as whether ṛta may, or must, be translated into English by truth, but had also to deprive the German word of a considerable part of its semantic contents as well as to extend these by Procrustean methods, implicitly admitting that ṛta is not 'Wahrheit'.

In the uncritical application of modern terms to the vedic word "ṛta" scholars have run the risk of imputing meanings to that term which simply are not applicable. 2) Even if one could overcome the semantic barriers and establish that ṛta does encompass the meanings of "Law/Order/Truth", one would find that portions of the Rg Veda defy all attempts to strictly limit the meaning of the word with these "cognates". V.M. Apte's interpretation of ṛta is a good case in point (cf. p. 3). Ṛta is viewed in the Rg Veda as an area possessing spacial dimensions; in these cases the sense of ṛta as "Law/Order/Truth" is lost. Similarly, when ṛta is identified with the sacrifice (yajña), or elements of the sacrifice, as at RV 1.105.4 where the ṛsi states: "I ask about the last sacrifice... where has the previous ṛta gone (yajñam prcchāmy avamam... kva ṛtam pūrvyam gatam)?", the understanding of ṛta as "Law/Order/Truth" does not seem to apply. The full significance of ṛta cannot be accommodated by the semantic contents

⁹Gonda, 138.

of either the English terms "Law/Order/Truth" or their European "equivalents".¹⁰

One major flaw in modern attempts to understand rta is the assumption that this term can have a precise definition of essence; i.e., that rta can have a core meaning which firmly fixes the boundries of its application. Gonda, however, points out that ancient terms, such as rta, are essentially untranslatable because "...our modern languages do not furnish us the means of rendering by one single word an 'idea' or 'concept' that is closely connected with lines of thought which are for centuries no longer ours...." ¹¹ One cannot even take refuge in establishing a variety of meanings which then can be shown to be logically and/or historically related:¹²

We should be aware that the apparent multitude of meanings of many important terms...are likely to be illusory....Attempts to account for the various 'meanings'...are often characterized by assumptions of pseudo-historical and essentially unprovable

¹⁰R.T.H. Griffith, The Hymns of the Rgveda, (Varanasi, 1970), 2 vols., also usually translates rta as "Law/Order/Truth". Yet at various points in his translation he resorts to rendering rta as "holy rite" (RV 7.23.4), "the righteous" (RV 1.188.2) and "present" (RV 10.179.3). Although Griffith offers no reason for why rta is translated in these different ways, it is clear that he recognized that this term had applications in the text which could not be accomodated by the notions of "Law/Order/Truth".

¹¹Gonda, 138.

¹²Gonda, 138-139.

often evolutionistic semantic developments....Too often the apparently historical developments.... owe their existence, first to the supposition that the vague, complex, indefinite, prescientific termini are really analyzable in different 'meanings' that are completely equivalent to modern terms and in the second place that these 'meanings' have developed from one another in such a way as would be in tune with some more or less preconceived schemes of our devising.

If rta cannot be defined by one single concept, or circumscribed within a network of interrelated definitions, then how can one possibly understand its significance? In fact, one need not resort to a definition or core meaning in order to grasp what rta signifies. The meaning of rta is found in the combination of images and associations which encompass the term and delimit the field of its significance.

There are a number of terms in modern vocabularies which are perfectly well understood despite the fact that they cannot actually be defined. Wittgenstein, who wrote in German, points this out in his Philosophical Investigations. He takes the word which is translated into English as "games". There are many types of games--card games, board games, ball games etc.--which have no one element common to them all. Not all games are amusing, nor is winning always involved, nor are all games multi-player games. All those things which are called "games" are not related because they share one single common characteristic. Rather, they are related because they form a collage of

overlapping similarities and points of difference.¹³ All the referents to the word "games" are related in a variety of ways despite the fact that the word itself has no firmly fixed boundary or meaning. One may argue, however, that the manner in which this particular word has been characterized leaves it in a state of anarchy. Since the word has no fixed boundaries, could it not, in theory at least, mean anything? In fact, this word, and others of similar nature, simply does not act as a neutral designator; i.e., when one applies this word to a particular activity one recognizes that the activity conforms to certain associations which encompass the term "games". Thus, an activity which is called a "game" is associated with ideas of enjoyment, short term activity, absorbing activity, unnecessary activity (i.e., activity which is not engaged in out of necessity), distraction from daily concerns and so on. This is not to say that all games conform to every one of these associations; but the degree to which an activity does conform to these associations determines whether or not it is to be called a game. These associations delimit the field of the term "games" significance, and furnish the reason why this term can be distinguished from other terms, such as the word "work", which possess their own fields of significance.

¹³Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1963), 31-32.

I propose to treat the difficult term "ṛta" as if it was like the English word "games" and regard it as undefinable in the sense that an essential definition cannot, and need not be found for it. The methodology of this thesis involves a test case application of Wittgenstein's contention regarding definitions to a context study of the term "ṛta" in order to develop a kaleidoscopic "definition" which accommodates the subtle nuances in the meaning of the term without positing "multiple meanings" which, as Gonda has noted, too often rest upon untenable historical assumptions. I will examine the Rg Veda in consideration of the associations which encompass the term "ṛta".

The term "ṛta" occurs in the Rg Veda approximately four-hundred and fifty times. Since this thesis is designed to provide only an over-view of the significance of ṛta in the Rg Veda, I will not deal with every occurrence of the term. I will, however, cite a sizeable percentage of these occurrences (approximately three-hundred). My selection has been guided by several considerations. I have tried to examine those instances of ṛta which shed light upon the importance of this term to the cosmos as a whole. Thus, the applications of this term which are restricted to one particular entity, or to some particular aspect of the ritual, and which could be understood only through a detailed analysis of the entity or ritual, have been left out of this study. I have also concentrated upon

uses of ṛta which occur regularly in the text. I have, however, cited peculiar or unique uses of ṛta, but this has been done only when these less regular occurrences provide information on the meanings of the more regular occurrences of the term.

The thesis will open with an examination of the cosmogony of the Rg Veda. The vedic cosmogony is the account of the origin of the established cosmos; it provides information on the character of those forces which represent the necessary preconditions for the birth of ṛta into the world of ordered being. The discussion on vedic cosmogony will be supplemented by an examination of the impact which the primordial forces have upon the established cosmos; i.e., I will look into the manner in which the forces which gave rise to ṛta affect the operation of ṛta in the established cosmos. These investigations, which comprise the first chapter of this thesis, will provide a brief expositional over-view of the context within which ṛta functioned in the vedic world.

The second chapter is an outline of the significance of ṛta in the Rg Veda. It is divided into two parts. The images and associations which encompass ṛta will be examined in the first part of the chapter. These images and associations delimit the field of this term's significance and provide the basis from which the significance of various specific applications of ṛta will be clarified. The second

part concentrates upon various specific applications of ṛta in the Rg Veda. I will consider ṛta as a sphere/mode of being, as the order, stability and reliability of established phenomena, as the sacrifice and the effective force of the sacrifice, and as satya (truth/the principle of being in accord with being) and truth in speech.

Chapter three will deal with the relation between ṛta and two other closely associated vedic concepts--dharman and vrata. My task here will be to call into question the notion that these words are all synonymous with the words "Law" and "Order", and to demonstrate that dharman and vrata are concepts which emphasize particularly important aspects of ṛta.

In the fourth chapter I will offer a brief discussion on the relation between the vedic ṛsi and ṛta. I will demonstrate that vedic man's concern for freedom, security and safety is intimately bound up with the quest to conform to ṛta.

I will recapitulate my findings in the conclusion to the thesis. I will argue that even though ṛta cannot be defined, it can be understood in terms of the mutual cohesion of its images and associations and specific applications. I will offer also some thoughts on how this study on ṛta could be broadened. Finally, I will reflect upon the significance of this study to the general problem of continuity and change in the Indian philosophical/religious

tradition. I will discuss the various ways in which "continuity" could be understood and present a brief outline for a comparative study of the concept of rta in the Rg Veda and the conception of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā.

I

RTA AND COSMOGONY

The vedic cosmogony is the account of the struggle between the forces of enclosure (forces which tend to inhibit the establishment of the ordered cosmos) and forces of freedom (forces which strive to establish the cosmos). The character of these forces, with which ṛta is either allied or opposed, will serve as the starting point from which the significance of ṛta will be clarified.

There is no unified narrative depicting the origin of the cosmos in the Rg Veda. There are, however, many references scattered throughout the Rg Veda which appear to suggest that several complete accounts of the origin of the cosmos were available to the vedic community. W. Norman Brown has pieced together one such account in his article "The Creation Myth in the Rg Veda".¹ This article deals

¹W. Norman Brown, "The Creation Myth of the Rg Veda", JAOS 62 (1942). I do not wish to involve myself in a debate over the philosophical/epistemological implications of the term 'myth'. Regardless of what Brown may have understood by the term, for the purposes of this thesis I understand the term 'myth' to signify only "the vedic account of the origin of the established cosmos". The reader should also note that the issue over an 'original' or coherent cosmogonic myth in the Rg Veda has not been settled. For instance, Raymond Hodgson, Indra and Vrtra: A Study in Continuity and Change in the Indian Religious Tradition, (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1975), devoted his entire thesis to the

with the struggle between the Ādityas and the Dānavas over the elements necessary for the establishment of ordered being. Below, I will offer a brief over-view of Brown's account. This will be followed by an examination of the myth of the Paṇis which has been pieced together by Doris Srinivasan.² The myth of the Paṇis is not concerned with the origin of the cosmos: it is an order-maintenance myth which carries on with the theme found in the story of the struggle between the Ādityas and the Dānavas. Both myths together present a comprehensive account of the nature of the primordial forces which threaten or support the existence and operation of ṛta in the world of ordered being.

1. The Ādityas and the Dānavas

Before the cosmos had been established, prior to the existence of man and his realm, only gods existed. The gods were of two types: 1) There were devas. Except for the god Indra, the devas did not play a prominent role in the story of the origin of the cosmos; 2) There were also beings called the 'asura'. The asuras were divided into two groups.

claim that no such original myth exists in the Rg Veda. With this in mind, I draw upon the scholarship of Brown and Srinivasan (see n. 1) recognizing that there are alternative views.

²Doris Srinivasan, "The Myth of the Paṇis in the Rig Veda", JAOS, 93.1 (1973).

There were the Ādityas whose mother was Aditi and whose leader was Varuṇa. The character of these asuras is expressed in the etymology of their mother's name. The name "Aditi" is made with the negative prefix "a" attached to the abstract substantive "diti" which is derived from the verbal root $\sqrt{dā}$, meaning "to bind". Hence, "Aditi" literally means "non-bondage".³ Thus, the Ādityas were asuras who acted for expansion, liberation and freedom. Opposed to the Ādityas were the Dānavas. The name of their mother, "Danu", is also derived from the root $\sqrt{dā}$ with the added suffix "nu". The name means "bondage", and this appears to be the chief characteristic of the Dānavas. Vṛtra was the leader of the Dānavas, and his name is derived from the root \sqrt{vr} , which means "to cover or enclose". Hence, Vṛtra, as the leader of the disciples of bondage, is the "encloser".⁴ The Ādityas

³Brown, 90. The reader may wonder how I, having despaired of etymologies in the introduction of this thesis, can now rely upon an etymology to establish the meaning of a name. The reader should note, however, that I restricted my criticism of etymologies to only those words which possess contextual applications which cannot be understood in terms of the information furnished by the etymological root. Other terms, however, possess applications which seem to conform to the meaning of the root from which it derives. In these cases, the etymology of the word can be cited as a reference for the meaning of the term in question. For the use and misuse of etymologies see: James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language, (Oxford, 1961), 107-160. For the role that Aditi plays in the Rg Veda see: A.A. Macdonnel, Vedic Mythology, (Delhi, 1974), 120-123; and Abel Bergaigne, Vedic Religion, V.G. Paranjpe trans., (Poona, 1969), II, 92-102.

⁴Brown, 90.

and the Dānavas were enemies who struggled to bind or set free those elements which were necessary for the establishment of the cosmos.

The Dānavas had the initial advantage over the other asuras. Vṛtra had achieved a place which was foremost among the gods because he had managed to enclose all that was necessary for ordered being. He enclosed both heaven and the cosmic water, whose embryo was the sun (RV 2.11.5).⁵

Try as they might, the Ādityas were not able to secure the components of ordered being from the Dānavas. Varuṇa was powerless against Vṛtra, and it appears that he may have been siezed and enclosed, along with Agni and Soma, within Vṛtra (RV 10.124).⁶ It was clear that since the Ādityas lacked the power to break Vṛtra's grasp upon the necessary elements for the establishment of ordered being, a more potent force was needed if the disciples of bondage were to be overcome. That new force was, in the end, the warrior-god Indra.

The gods arranged for Indra's birth; they generated him for the purpose of destroying Vṛtra (RV 3.41.9). Indra was a warrior as soon as he was born (RV 3.51.8). His stature was immense. He struck fear in all the gods (RV

⁵Brown, 88, 92.

⁶Brown, 92-95.

5.30.5), and they submitted their powers to him (RV 3.51.8, 7.21.7).⁷ After many exploits⁸ Indra finally managed to meet Vṛtra in battle. At first, Vṛtra appeared to be a match for him, for he broke Indra's jaw (RV 1.32.4). But Indra, in return, broke Vṛtra's jaw (RV 1.52.6, 10.152.23), and even bettered him, breaking Vṛtra's face (RV 1.32.6) and splitting his head (4.17.3). Indra's weapon was the vajra (lightening bolt) and with it he split Vṛtra wide open, releasing all that had been enclosed within that demon.⁹

The defeat of Vṛtra had monumental effects. Indra set the cosmic waters free (RV 1.32.4). He converted asat (non-being/anti-being) into sat (being), or he separated asat from sat.¹⁰ Indra scattered the darkness (5.31.3) and he cut a path through the darkness with the sun (6.21.3). Rta was born at the request of Varuṇa (1.105.15), and Varuṇa

⁷Brown, 92-95.

⁸Brown, 92ff. The account of Indra's birth and exploits is interesting but not a propos to the present study.

⁹Brown, 96.

¹⁰Brown, 97. Brown suggests that Indra converted the asat into the sat at RV 6.24.5. Stella Kramrisch translates differently: "Indra made at once the asat and the sat, he co-ordinated these two in their separate distinctness". cf. Stella Kramrisch, "The Triple Structure of Creation in the Rg Veda", History of Religions, 2 (1963), 145; cf. RV 6.24.5; asac ca san muhur ackrir....

was set over the ṛta (RV 10.124.5). Indra and Varuna became the two rulers of the newly established cosmos (RV 3.30, 4.42).¹¹

With the defeat of the Dānavas, the cosmos was divided into two separate spheres of existence which stood in both material and moral opposition to one another. The forces of enclosure were banished to the realm of asat/anṛta where chaos and darkness reign supreme, while the gods of freedom and expansion claimed as their abode the sphere which embraces life-preserving light and order—the realm of sat/ṛta. W. Norman Brown explains:¹²

The Danavas dwell in darkness and cold, under the earth, where the sun never reaches and cosmic order (ṛta) does not obtain....This is, in short, the Aśat, the Non-Existent. The Adityas dwell in the lap of mother Aditi, who is light. Their sphere is the surface of the earth and the free empyrean above it, where the sun reaches and order does prevail, in brief the Sat, the Existent.

Although the Dānavas had been defeated and banished by the Ādityas, the struggle between these two antagonists was not over. As we shall now see, the forces of bondage attempted to gain back what had been lost to their rivals.

2. The Myth of the Panis

The myth of the Panis is an order-maintenance myth which deals with the continued struggle between the forces of freedom and enclosure. The Ādityas and the Dānavas had struggled over the elements necessary for establishing the

¹¹Brown, 96-97.

¹²Brown, 88-89.

realm of ordered being. In the myth of the Paṇis the threat of prohibition and enclosure is directed, at one level at least, against the sacrifice (yajña)--the foremost instrument of the maintenance of ordered being. Srinivasan explains:¹³

The problem of preservation is implicit in the conditions under which the Indra-Vrtra myth achieved creation. According to that myth, the creation of the universe was only won through the utmost exertion of the mightiest gods. Moreover, the forces of evil were not eliminated when the universe was created; they were relegated to a specific area below the vedic world and ruled there by anṛta. That is to say the orderly world was dearly won, precariously maintained and constantly threatened. The chief security against those forces desirous of upsetting the order is the sacrifice.

The forces of enclosure were not discouraged by their failure to prevent the establishment of ordered being. Unable to effect their primary goal, they then turned their attention to stealing away from the realm of ṛta that force which upheld the cosmos--the sacrifice.

In the myth under examination, the Paṇis are the representatives of the world of asat/anṛta. Throughout the Rg Veda the word "paṇi" is used to denote anyone who is a miser (RV 8.64.2, 10.60.6).¹⁴ A human paṇi was particularly obnoxious to the vedic priests because he was part of a group of people who in some way withheld from the sacrifice.

¹³Srinivasan, 55-56.

¹⁴Srinivasan, 48.

Whatever their particular offence may have been, it is clear that the vedic priests held them in utter contempt. Thus, at Rg Veda 7.6.3 the paṇis are described as being without spiritual insight (akratu), false (grathin), speaking contemptuously (mr̥dhraṇāc), without faith (aśraddha), not strengthening (avrdha; i.e., one who does not strengthen the gods through sacrifice), and against the sacrifice (ayajñā).¹⁵

The mythical Paṇis, whose leader is Vala--whose name is derived from the root \sqrt{vr} meaning "to cover/enclose"--, take on a dimension which extends their role beyond that of their human counterparts. More than merely refusing to support the sacrifice, the demoniacal Paṇis work actively to steal the items which are necessary for the performance of the sacrifice. The Paṇis manage to steal cows, horses, riches, the dawn, sun, fire, and the day.¹⁶ Cows, horses and riches are dakṣiṇā gifts (i.e., gifts for the sacrificial offering). At another level of significance, cows and horses are also symbols for rays of light.¹⁷ If we recall that in the myth of the Ādityas and the Dānavas the release of the sun was an essential part of establishing the ordered cosmos, then we can readily see that the Paṇis, in stealing the sun and the rays of light, not only inhibit the sacrifice but also threaten the security of the entire realm

¹⁵Srinivasan, 48. ¹⁶Srinivasan, 53. ¹⁷Srinivasan, 53-54.

of sat/rta.

The word "cow" (go) is also an epithet used to signify speech/song/hymn. According to Stella Kramrisch, the cows are part of the three voices of the cosmos which work to check and neutralize the principles of destruction and disintegration:¹⁸

There are also the three Nirrtis (10.114.2), three awful goddesses or principles of disintegration, which sieze the cosmos and the faculties in man that are exercised on each of the three levels. Against and in spite of them, there is the loyal triple progeny (7.33.7) with their leading light. Theirs are the "three voices"....They are led by Agni...who is the charioteer of the chariot, which is the sacrifice. The three voices express the insight into cosmic and sacrificial law (rtasya dhītim) and the wisdom of the sacred, magic word (brahmano manīsam; 9.97.34). They are the voices of the priests, of the cows, and of Soma (9.33.4). The cows are the hymns (9.50.2). The three voices are the audible voice of the priest, the form in which this voice is heard as song or poem and the inner voice of Soma, the source of inspiration.

The Panis held their treasure of dakṣinā gifts, rays of light, the sun, the dawn, the fire, hymns, songs, poems etc., in their natural abode--the realm of asat/anrta (RV 10.67.4, 2.24.6-7). But this was not to last, for the gods conspired to win back the necessary elements of the sacrifice.

Indra is again the chief protagonist in the myth of the Panis. He managed to cut through Vala and release the

¹⁸Kramrisch, 158.

imprisoned cows (RV 10.67.62). But more often than not, Indra is assisted by other beings or the release of the stolen treasure is effected by someone without the aid of Indra at all. The reason behind this may be found in the fact that the principle weapon of victory is not Indra's vajra (as it is in the struggle between Indra and Vṛtra) but the brahman and the arka. "Arka" means "hymn" or "light". The brahman is the mystic power, imminent in sacred speech, which gives strength and force to songs, prayers and hymns. Doris Srinivasan elaborates:¹⁹

The prayer taps as it were this mystic force and attempts to control it for the welfare of those who believe in vedic rites. Thus the brahman [vedic priest], through the efficacy of his hymn is able to evoke and control the brahman [mystic force].

Although the Panis had stolen all of the elements of the sacrifice, they lacked one essential power which proved to be their undoing. Rg Veda 10.108.6 states that the words of the Panis were no weapons; and this means that their words were unsupported by the power of the brahman. Hence, Brahmanaspati (the name means literally "the lord of

¹⁹Srinivasan, 51. W. Norman Brown, who argued for an evolution in the cosmogonic myth of the Rg Veda in "Theories of Creation in the Rig Veda", JAOS, 85 (1965), would have disagreed with Srinivasan that Indra is not the main protagonist because the principle weapon of victory is the brahman. Since it is not my intention to get involved with the intricacies of the various cosmogonic theories, I will not engage in a discussion on the relative merits of Brown's or Srinivasan's position.

brahman")²⁰ split Vala open with the brahman (RV 2.24.3) and scattered the darkness with the arka (RV 10.68.9). The Aṅgirases, who were brahmans (RV 7.42.1), ṛsis (RV 10.62.4) and knowers of the word (padajñāh; RV 1.62.2), used both the brahman and the arka to split open the enclosure which held the sacrificial treasure (RV 6.65.5). They also assisted Indra with song as he destroyed Vala (RV 2.15.8).²¹

The myth of the Paṇis brings the account of the struggle between the forces of freedom and the forces of inhibition to a new level. Prior to the establishment of the ordered cosmos, the struggle was solely between gods. After the cosmos had been established, men, as the caretakers of sacred hymns and the sacrifice, came to play an integral role in keeping secure the victory which preceded ordered being. Srinivasan explains:²²

...the myth of the Paṇis illustrates the belief that the brahman, activated by the vedic chants, safeguards the sacrifice against forces trying to undermine it. The struggle, waged and won primarily by the mythic priests [Brahmanaspati and the Aṅgirases] and secondarily by Indra, in essence, releases conditions needed for the sacrifice, assures its performance, defends the ṛta and works to uphold ordered existence.

The two myths just outlined illustrate several points which are important to the discussion on ṛta. First,

²⁰For more on the role of Brahmanaspati (Brhaspati) in the Veda see N.J. Shende, "Brhaspati in the Vedic and Epic Literature", DCRIB, 8, 225-251.

²¹Srinivasan, 51.

²²Srinivasan, 55.

ṛta was established only after the forces of freedom and expansion gained victory over the powers of inhibition and enclosure. Thus, ṛta is associated with the powers of freedom, expansion and liberation. Second, although the forces of freedom had gained an initial victory, they did not annihilate the powers which were against ordered being. These powers were only banished to the realm of asat/anṛta. Thus, ṛta is not secure; it is constantly under threat of being subdued by the forces of enclosure. Third, the myths tell us that men and gods must sustain and protect the ṛta if the realm of sat is to be maintained. Man is assigned a unique place in the cosmos because it is by his performance of the sacrifice that the gods are strengthened and the ṛta is secured.

II

RTA IN THE RG VEDA1. The Images and Associations of Rta

The images and associations which encompass rta will now be examined. Since the value and significance of a word is found not only in its use in a text, but also in the use of its opposite, I will begin by giving a brief account of the images and associations which accompany rta's contrary--anrta. Following this I will explore the images and associations of rta.

Anrta is closely alligned with asat, and together they form the realm of asat/anrta. A detailed account of what this world embodies is found in sūkta 7.104 of the Rg Veda, which is a petition to Indra and Soma to destroy the one who speaks and acts counter to the rta.¹ It is a sūkta which is rich in imagery of the realm of asat/anrta.

RV 7.104 informs us that the location of the realm of asat/anrta is below the triple structure of creation (v. 16). This downward place is described as possessing endless chasms (vavrān anantān; vv. 3, 17). There is no light in this lower region; the chasm is a bottomless

¹W. Norman Brown has analyzed this sūkta in "The Rigvedic Equivalent for Hell", JAOS, 61 (1941), 76-80.

darkness (anārambhana tamas; v. 3). The evil person (mūra-deva; v. 24)--who is described as anrtadeva (v. 14) which means either "one who worships a false god" or, according to Brown, "one who has made anrta his god"²--is said to prosper by/in darkness (tamovrdh; v. 1), and he employs demons (raksasas) who fly about at night seeking to harm both men and gods (vv. 17, 18, 22, 23).

The sphere of asat/anrta is a place of silence (niśvaram; v. 5). Brown points out that the noise of the soma-pressing stones helps to slay the demons at v. 17.³ The implication is that the demons cannot stand noise, but I would add that the noise referred to here is a potent weapon against the representatives of asat/anrta because it is connected with the sacrifice.⁴

The world of asat/anrta is associated with the forces of inhibition and enclosure. In line with this is the imagery of bottomless, dark and silent chasms. Thus, asat/anrta is a place where there is no reassuringly safe ground, and where beings who are opposed to the rta thrive in darkness.

In contrast to asat/anrta, the realm of sat/rta appears as a place of wide, free, safe, and secure spaces.

²Brown, 77.

³Brown, 78.

⁴Thus, at RV 1.133.1 the rsi is able to purge the cosmos of demons by performing the sacrifice.

Heaven rests in the abode of ṛta (sādana ṛtasya; RV 4.42.5).⁵ The sons of Aditi thrive in the home of ṛta (ṛtasya vāvṛdhur dorone...putrā aditer....; RV 7.60.5). The Rudras prosper in the dwelling of ṛta (sadaneṣu ṛtasya; RV 2.34.13), and the domain of ṛta (prasitih ṛtasya; RV 10.92.4) is said to be the sky and vast space. The security of ṛta is exhibited by the fact that it is often described as a womb (yoni/garbha).⁶ Thus, heaven and earth rejoice in the womb of ṛta (ṛtasya yonā; RV 3.54.6). At RV 10.65.8, the extent of space which heaven and earth inhabit is called the "ṛtasya yoni". The god Agni is said to have been born in the womb (garbha) which is the womb of ṛta (ṛtasya yonā; RV 1.65.4).

Rta possesses paths along which entities may safely move.⁷ The dawn moves along the path of ṛta (ṛtasya panthām; RV 1.124.3, 5.80.4). At RV 3.12.7 the "visions" of men move along the path of ṛta (yanti dhīṭayaḥ ṛtasya pathyā anu).

⁵For the "abode of ṛta" see: RV (sādana) 1.43.9, 1.164.7, 2.34.13, 4.21.3, 4.42.4, 7.36.1, 7.36.5, 7.53.2, 10.100.10; (sadas) 3.7.2, 3.55.12, 4.51.8, 5.41.1, 10.111.2; (sadma) 3.51.14.

⁶For the "womb of ṛta" see: RV (yonā) 1.65.4, 1.144.2, 3.2.11, 3.54.6, 3.62.18, 3.63.12, 9.13.9, 9.39.6, 9.72.6, 9.73.1, 9.86.25, 10.8.3, 10.65.8, 10.85.24; (yonim) 3.62.13, 5.21.4, 6.16.35, 9.8.3, 9.32.4, 9.64.11, 9.66.12, 9.107.4, 10.65.7, 10.68.4; (garbha) 1.156.3, 6.54.5, 9.68.5.

⁷For the "path of ṛta" see: RV (panthām) 1.124.3, 5.80.4, 10.66.13; (pathā) 5.45.8, 10.33.6; (pathyām) 3.31.5; (panthas) 1.136.2, 1.46.11, 1.128.2, 8.22.7, 8.31.13, 9.73.6, 9.97.32, 10.31.2, 10.70.2, 10.80.6; (panthām) 8.12.3; (patha) 7.65.3; (pathi) 6.44.8.

At RV 8.12.3 the r̥ṣi longs to go along the path of r̥ta (pathām r̥tasya), and in RV 7.65.3 the poet implores Varuṇa to keep him safe from trouble by bearing him along the path of r̥ta (r̥tasya pathā).

Light is also associated with r̥ta. In RV 6.51.1 the sun is called the shining face of r̥ta (r̥tasya suci... anīkam). The dawn, which comes from the dwelling of r̥ta (RV 4.51.8) and the womb of r̥ta (RV 10.8.3), shines according to r̥ta (r̥tenāviskr̥ṇvanā; RV 7.75.1) and lights up the r̥ta (r̥tam avasrann uśaso vibhatih; RV 4.2.19). The "horses" (i.e., rays of light) of the dawn are said to be yoked by/ united with the r̥ta (r̥tayuj; RV 4.51.5, 6.39.4, 7.71.3). At RV 4.21.3 the Maruts are said to come from the realm of light (svarnarāt), which is also called the abode of r̥ta (sadanād r̥tasya).

The dark world of asat/ anr̥ta is marked by silence. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that sound plays an important role in sat/ r̥ta. RV 4.23.8 informs us that the sound/call of r̥ta opens deaf ears (r̥tasya śloka badhirā tatarda karna budhānaḥ sucamāna āyoḥ). Prayers (brahman) start from the abode of r̥ta (sadanād r̥tasya) at RV 7.36.1. An interesting passage occurs at RV 2.24. This sūkta relates the story of how Brahmanaspati split Vala with the brahman (v. 3). The text states that Brahmanaspati had excellent arrows and a swift bow; it also says that the string of the bow was r̥ta (r̥tajyā; v.8). The implication

here is that the brahman, which splits Vala like an arrow, is empowered by the rta. Rta acts like a bow-string because it hurls the brahman at whatever mark Brahmanaspati desires (rtajyena ksiprena brahmanas patir yatra vasti pra tad asnoti dhanavanā; v. 8). Thus, the brahman, the mysterious power of sacred speech, gains its potency from the rta.

Rta is associated with these images: rta is free/vast space, a place of safety/security/stability, it is a womb, and it possesses safe pathways along which both light and men proceed protected from harm; rta is the splendor of light, and the mysterious force of sound which destroys evil. The associations which encompass rta delimit the field of this term's significance. The totality of elements which comprise this field shall be termed hereinafter "the dynamic nexus of rta". I have chosen this phrase because it expresses two fundamental aspects of rta. The meaning of the term "rta" is composed of a nexus of images and associations because no single image or association can encompass the full significance of this complicated term. Neither can rta be understood by loosely stringing together the associations and images which accompany it. These must be melted together into a unified bond, a nexus, if we are to grasp the rich and comprehensive significance of this term. Rta is a dynamic nexus because when each subtle individual association is bound together, and no single clearly defined association remains dominant, the force and

impact of the word is revealed. The conceptual force of the term, however, cannot be explained; our powers of definition break down before it. Thus, rta must remain conceptually ambiguous, but this ambiguity should not be viewed as a defeat. It is this potent ambiguity which gives fluidity and force to the significance of rta. This potent ambiguity is the base from which rta assumes a variety of forms and yet maintains its internal rigor and force.

2. The Specific Applications of Rta

The dynamic nexus of rta demonstrates that this term represents a force which operated for the benefit of the established cosmos. The dynamic nexus foreshadows the significance rta will embrace when it performs a specific function in the text, and the specific functions of rta give it definite form. Hence, both the dynamic nexus and the specific applications of rta come together to express the full significance of the term. Several specific applications will be examined below. Rta will be considered under these four headings: 1) Rta as a sphere/mode of Being; 2) Rta as the order, stability and reliability of phenomena; 3) Rta as the sacrifice and the effective force of the sacrifice; and 4) Rta as satya (truth/the principle of being in accord with being) and truth in speech.

Rta as a Sphere/Mode of Being

In order to gain a clear picture of rta as a sphere/

mode of being, the discussion on this term will be prefaced by a brief examination of anṛta as a sphere/mode of being. Sūkta 7.104 of the Rg Veda had been examined previously in order to gain information on the images associated with the sphere of asat/anṛta. It also indicates how the one whose sphere/mode of being is asat/anṛta may be distinguished from one who is not of this realm. For example, at RV 7.104.8 the ṛṣi petitions Indra to send the one who speaks with words which conform to anṛta (abhicaṣṭe...anṛtebhir vacobhiḥ) to the realm of asat (asann astu) because asat is embodied in his speech (asata vaktā). According to this verse, the evil person properly belongs to the realm of asat/anṛta because he embodies that realm in the manner in which he behaves.⁸ This act of conformity, in which the object assumes the qualities of the sphere to which it belongs, indicates that asat/anṛta represents not only a realm of existence, but also a mode of being. RV 7.104.8 expresses the idea that the evil person should go to asat/anṛta.

⁸At RV 7.104.5 it is stated that silence (nisvaram) is a characteristic of asat/anṛta. Thus, the evil person, in pronouncing asat, utters silence. The solution to this apparent contradiction in terms lies in what had been discovered previously in the myth of the Panis (cf. pp. 20-25). In that story the Panis lacked the power necessary to withstand the assault of the various gods; i.e., their words were not weapons (RV 10.108.6). They lacked the mystic power behind sacred speech--the brahman. The silence of asat/anṛta gives expression to the fact that speech which conforms to that realm of existence is without effective force or power.

because he betrays his true sphere and mode of being in his speech.

RV 7.104 offers further support for the conclusion that asat/anrta represents both a sphere and mode of being. The realm of asat/anrta is characterized by darkness (tamas; v. 3), and the evil persons prospers/is strengthened by/increases in darkness (tamovrdh⁹ v. 1). The evil person gains his sustenance and means of being from asat/anrta because his very being conforms to the darkness of that sphere.

The realm of sat/rta also represents both a sphere and mode of being. Rta as a womb (yoni/garbha), gives birth to the gods. The gods are rtajāta (born of rta), rtaja (born of rta) and rtaprajāta (sprung from/the progeny of rta). The idea expressed in this relationship is that the gods are connected to the rta in an intimate way. They come from rta, their foundation is rta, and so, like the child and its parent, the gods bear the characteristics of rta;¹⁰ the gods function in a manner which conforms to

⁹The compound "tamovrdh" could also be translated as "one who increases/strengthens/supports the darkness". See p. 36 of this thesis for the various translations of the related compound "rtavrdh".

¹⁰J. Gonda, Some Observations on the Relations Between "Gods" and "Powers" in the Veda, A Propos of the Phrase Sunuh Sahasah, (The Hague, 1957), 77, in discussing the relationship between Aditi and the Adityas says: "There seems therefore to be room for the conclusion that..."sonship" implies representation of the idea or ideas inherent in the nature of the parent."

the dynamic nexus of ṛta and take up, as their mode of being, the qualities of the sphere to which they belong.

Ṛta is associated with images of light, broad spaces, safe pathways, etc.. Similarly, the Ādityas, who are described as ṛtajāta at RV 7.66.13, are lords of light (ḥyotiṣas pati; RV 1.23.5) and protectors of all creatures (bhuvanasya gopah; RV 2.27.4). Agni, who is ṛtajāta in RV 1.36.19, 1.144.7, 1.189.6, 3.6.10, 6.13.3, and ṛta-prajāta at RV 1.65.10, is rich in radiant light (vibhāvasuḥ; RV 3.2.2) and he provides men with a broad wide expanse (pr̥tthvi bahulā urvi; RV 1.189.6) to dwell in. Mitra and Varuṇa are ṛtajāta at RV 7.66.13, and elsewhere it is said that they govern all the world with the ṛta and set the sun firmly in its place (ṛtena visvam bhuvam vi rajathah suryam a dattho divi; RV 5.63.7).

There are a number of epithets which indicate the close relationship between ṛta and the gods. Indra is said to have been yoked by/united with ṛta (ṛtayuj; RV 6.39.2) when he destroyed Vala. In giving birth to Mitra and Varuṇa, Aditi is called "ṛtavari" (true to ṛta) at RV 8.25.3. In RV 1.2, Mitra and Varuṇa, who described as being tuvijāta (strong by nature) and uruksayā (who possess a wide domain; v. 8), are ṛtaspr̥ṣ (touching/connected with ṛta; v. 9). The Ādityas are called "ṛtāvan" (true to/associated with ṛta)¹¹ at RV 2.27.4 because they protect all creatures. The epithet "ṛtāvan" is common to

both Mitra and Varuṇa.¹² In RV 5.67.4, Mitra and Varuṇa are described as both rtāvan and rtaspr̥s because they are bounteous in their gifts (sudānavah) and provide much aid to men (urucakrayah). The god Agni is rtāvan at RV 1.77.1, 2, 5 because he brings the sacrifice of men to the gods.¹³

Gods are also often described as rtavrdh. The meaning of this compound, however, has been surrounded by some controversy. V.S. Apte, Monier-Williams and R.T.H. Griffith translate it as "one who strengthens/increases ṛta",¹⁴ while Bergaigne and Lüders take it to mean "one who strengthens/is strong by means of ṛta".¹⁵ It is difficult to determine which of these meanings is intended in the context of the Rg Veda. On the one hand, gods often strengthen or protect the ṛta. For example, the god Agni

¹¹Abel Bergaigne, Vedic Religion, (Poona, 1973), III, 236, and Gonda, 77. Bergaigne prefers to translate rtāvan as "true to ṛta" while Gonda provides "associated with ṛta".

¹²For Mitra, Varuṇa and rtāvan see: RV 1.136.4, 1.151.8, 5.65.2, 8.23.3, 8.25.1, 7, 8.

¹³For Agni and rtāvan see: RV 2.35.8, 3.13.2, 3.20.4, 4.2.1, 4.6.5, 4.7.7, 5.1.6, 5.25.1, 6.12.1, 6.15.13, 7.3.1, 7.7.4, 8.28.2, 10.2.2, 10.6.2, 10.7.4.

¹⁴V.S. Apte, The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (Poona, 1957), 490. M. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (Oxford, 1963), 224. R.T.H. Griffith, The Hymns of the Rgveda, (Varanasi, 1970), 2 vols. (cf. RV 7.66.13). For rtavrdh see: RV (Mitra-Varuṇa) 2.41.4, 3.62.18, 7.66.19; (devās) 6.50.14, 6.52.10, 8.78.1, 10.65.7, 10.66.1; (Ādityas) 7.66.10-13, 7.82.10.

¹⁵Bergaigne, 232, and Gonda, 75 (Gonda endorses Lüders' translation of rtavrdh).

is described as rtasya gopah (protector of the rta) at RV 10.118.7 because he destroys evil beings (rakṣasas). Mitra and Varuṇa are called rtasya gopau at RV 5.63.1, and in RV 1.113.12 the dawn, who is born in rta (rteja), is the protector of rta (rtapa) when she manifests the first light of day. Rta, however, also strengthens the gods. The Ādityas are mighty by means of the rta (rtenāditya mahi) in RV 2.27.8. At RV 4.42.4 Varuṇa is said to have spread out the tripartite cosmos by means of the rta (rtena... tridhatu prathayad vi bhuma). It appears that rtavrdh could be translated as either "strengthenener of rta" or "strengthening by rta" in RV 1.25.5:

rtena yāv rtavrdhāv rtasya jyotiṣas pati / tā
mitravarunā huve.

Those who, by means of rta, are strengtheners of/
strengthening by rta, are lords of light and of rta,
I call Mitra nad Varuṇa.

This verse appears to indicate that the relation between gods and rta is reflexive; i.e., the gods strengthen rta and rta is the foundation for the power of the gods. Thus, rtavrdh may mean both "one who strengthens rta" and "one who is strong by means of rta". If this is the case, then the notion that rta is a mode of being to which the gods conform is brought out even more clearly. The gods gain their strength from rta, and through that strength they protect the rta from the assault of the forces of anrta.

Finally, the idea that rta functions as a mode of

being is supported in several passages of the Rg Veda in which gods are equated with ṛta. Varuṇa is said to have the form of ṛta (ṛtapesās) in RV 5.66.1, and the Asvins have the appearance of ṛta (ṛtapsu) in RV 1.180.3. An interesting equation occurs at RV 9.62.30: "pavamāna ṛtaḥ kaviḥ somah pavitram asadat". Griffith translates this line as: "Soma, true ṛta, Pavamana, Sage, is seated in the cleansing sieve".¹⁶ Griffith's rendering of ṛta as "true" entirely misses the force of the equation between Soma and ṛta. Soma is not merely "true", he is ṛta itself. Presumably, Soma is called "ṛta" because he, like other gods, is closely alligned to the dynamic nexus of ṛta.¹⁷

It is important to note here that the entities discussed above, both those who come from the realm of asat/anṛta and those who belong to sat/ṛta, display their respective modes of being by their acts and intentions. The demons (Paṇis and Dānavas) work actively to undermine the security of ṛta. The various gods strive purposely to inhibit the powers of anṛta. The sharp contrast between gods and demons is indicated at RV 7.66.13 where Mitra and Varuṇa are described as ṛtāvan, ṛtajāta, ṛtavrdh, and

¹⁶Griffith, I, 44.

¹⁷For more on Soma see A.A. Macdonnell, Vedic Mythology, (Delhi, 1974), 104-115, R.G. Wasson, Soma, The Divine Mushroom, (London, 1968), and Bergaigne, II, 21-43.

anrtadvis (haters of anṛta). Function indicates being in the Rg Veda. The gods and demons indicate their respective modes of being through the acts and intentions which conform to either the dynamic nexus of rta or anṛta.

Rta as the Order, Stability and Reliability of Phenomena

The connection between rta and the regular periodic movement of phenomena is indicated at RV 1.123 which states that the dawns possess the same daily form (sadr̥sīr adya; v. 8) because they follow the statute of Varuṇa (sacante varuṇasya dhāma; v. 8), which is the statute of rta (rtasya dhāma; v. 9). Similarly, in RV 4.51.8, the dawns begin their journey from the dwellings of rta (rtasya sadasah) and thus they do not miss the directions (na sargā usaso jarante). Rta, as the force which regulates the periodic movements of phenomena, is associated with the twelve-spoked wheel of the year; the wheel is called the "cakram rtasya" (wheel of rta; RV 1.164.11).¹⁸

The regulating and stabilizing power of the rta is often effected through the rule of Varuṇa. Varuṇa drives

¹⁸The connection between rta and the order, stability and reliability of established phenomena is hinted at by the use of the term "rtu" which, like rta, is derived from the root \sqrt{r} . According to V.S. Apte, rtu means "a season, period of time, fixed order or rule" (p. 490). The relation between seasonal regularity and fixed order is transparent; one implies the other. Thus, in RV 2.13.1, rtu represents the seasons, while at RV 1.162.19 it is the principle of cosmic order. The term "rta" functions in a similar manner.

the chariot of ṛta (ṛtasya rathyaḥ; RV 7.66.12); i.e., he rules by means of ṛta.¹⁹ His power of rule is manifested in holding things distinct, yet related, and in creating definite spheres of activity. In RV 5.62.1, it is stated that Varuṇa established the ṛta by means of his own ṛta, which means that because his sphere and mode of being is ṛta he brings all of the cosmos into conformity with ṛta. According to the same sūkta, Varuṇa established heaven and earth (pr̥thivī/dyu), caused the cows (go; i.e., cows, rays of light, hymns, etc..) to stream forth, caused the plants (oṣadhi) to flourish, and made the rains (vr̥ṣti) fall (v. 3). In RV 7.87.1-2, it is said that Varuṇa cut out a pathway for the sun and make great channels for the days to follow.

The dynamic nexus of ṛta clearly foreshadows this term's role as the force of order and stability in the cosmos. Rta, as the agent of freedom, creates vast space for the cosmos to flourish in. Within this vast space it establishes safe routes and pathways upon which individual entities may perform their functions. Thus, ṛta is manifested in the regular order of temporal and spacial phenomena. The few instances, cited above, by no means exhaust the number of textual occurrences in which ṛta performs this function. The greatest number of references, however, occur when ṛta is used with the verb-√dhr̥ and

¹⁹For Varuṇa as king see H. Lüders, Varuṇa, (Göttingen, 1959), I, 28ff.

its derivative--dharman. I will deal with these instances later in this thesis in the section on the connection between rta and dharman.

Rta as the Sacrifice and the Effective Force of the Sacrifice

Rta is several times identified with the sacrifice (yajña) in the Rg Veda. For instance, the sacrifice is clearly intended in RV 10.179.3 where the ṛṣi declares: "susrātam manye tad ṛtam naviyah (well cooked, I think, is this new rta)". Rta and yajña are also apparently used to designate the same practice in RV 7.21 which states that Indra is roused by the sacrifice (yajña; v. 1), the gods come to the sacrifice (yajña; v. 2), and that they protect the sacrifice (rta; v. 5) from those who are not worthy to participate in it.

The term "rta" is used to designate the sacrifice because it is the force which makes that rite effective. At RV 1.133.1, the sacrificer is able to purge the cosmos by burning up those demons who are against the god Indra (ubhe punāmi rodasī rtena druho dahāmi sam mahīr anindraḥ). Rta as the effective force of the sacrifice is clarified in connection with the god Agni. Agni, the luminous god of fire who is the great envoy of the sacrifice, was established among men as a friend to work according to the rta (RV 3.5.3). Accordingly, he makes the sacrifice agreeable to the gods by taking it to them along the path

of rta (rtasya pathā namasā miyedho devebhyo devatamah susūdat; RV 10.70.2). At RV 4.3.4, the ṛṣi implores Agni to "Be attentive to this our work, the rta, O Agni, you who are the knower of the rta (tvam cin nah samyā agne asyā rtasya bodhy rtacit svādhiḥ)".²⁰ This injunction is followed by a series of declarations which praise the power of the rta:²¹

rtena hi sma vrsabhaṣ cid aktah pumān agnih
ḍayasa prsthyeṇa.

By the rta certainly the bull, the male Agni, anoints with milk the mountains (v. 10).

rtenādrim vy asan bhidantah sam aṅgirasō navanta
gobhiḥ / sunam narah pari sadann usāsam avih svar
abhavaḥ jāte āgnau.

By the rta the Aṅgirasas, cleaving the mountain, opened it out. They cause their voice to resound with the cows. The heroes happily take their seats on the dawn. Light appears after the birth of Agni (v. 11).

This sūkta seems to say that rta, in the form of the sacrifice, is the fundamental force through which men and gods perform their functions in the cosmos.

Those who observe, perform and maintain the rta and the yajña, and thereby gain access to the freedom, safety, security, stability, etc. which the sacrifice provides, are signified by several epithets in the Rg

²⁰This translation is according to H. Aguilar, The Sacrifice in the Rgveda, (Delhi, 1976), 20. Aguilar is so impressed by the close relationship between rta and yajña that he argues that the two terms are virtually synonymous (pp. 26-27).

²¹Translation according to Bergaigne, III, 243.

Veda. Agni gives special wisdom or power (medha) to the one who is rtāyat (who keeps the rta/sacrifice) in RV 5.27.4. All aspects of life are "sweet" (madhu) for the rtāyat (RV 1.90.6). Soma gives prosperity/happiness (bhaga) to the rtāyat (RV 1.91.7). The sacrificer in RV 7.85.4-5, who is able to persuade the Ādityas to promote his welfare, is called rtacit (who knows/has intimate contact with the rta). The ancient fathers (pitṛ), who were ṛsis, attained to the abode of light (svar) because they were rtasap²² (who perform the rta), rtāvan and rtavrdh in RV 10.154.4.

Rta as Satya and Truth in Speech

Throughout this entire thesis a close conceptual relation between rta and sat has been maintained. The meanings of both terms are so intertwined that it is difficult to maintain a rigid distinction between them. Thus, sat is "being" manifested by the establishment of the cosmos, while rta is the mode of being which promotes the freedom, safety, security, and stability of the sat. Rta is also closely aligned with satya--a derivative of

²²According to Monier-Williams (p. 223) the epithet rtasap means "who performs the sacrifice" when it is applied to men, but "who accepts the sacrifice" when it is applied to gods. For the apparent "polysemy" of many Sanskrit terms see T.Y. Elizarenkova, "Concerning a Peculiarity of the Rgvedic Vocabulary", ABORI, 18 (1977), 129-136. For rtasap see: RV (men) 5.41.6, 10.154.4; (gods) 6.21.11, 6.50.2, 7.56.12, 10.66.8.

sat. According to J. Gonda, the meaning of satya can be grasped in a variety of related ways:²³

satya...may be paraphrased by "that what (sic.) is real, true, essential; being in conformity with-, belonging to-, characterized by-, sticking to what is really existent, reality, being, to what is verity; being, essence of the universe, of nature, of (one's) nature etc.; truthfulness in mind, speech of action." Verbal truth is only one side of the concept which is much more general. A being who is satya acts in accordance with real facts and unshakable norms, with that order and truth on which the cosmos is supposed to be founded; he is true to the validity of his own nature, and hence also reliable.

Thus, on Gonda's terms, it seems reasonable to understand the formal significance of satya as "the principle of conformity to the sat".

Satya, when used as an abstract substantive, is a principle as fundamental to the cosmos as rta. For instance, RV 10.190.1 indicates that rta and satya first arose from tapas (fervor/heat) and that the night (rātri) and the ocean (arṇava/samudra) were established after these. Similarly, RV 10.85.1 states that satya upholds the earth (satyenottabhitā bhūmiḥ) while the Ādityas stand secure because of the rta (rtenādityās tisthanti). The principle of being in accord with sat (satya), and the principle of freedom, safety, security and stability (rta) appear to be two fundamental preconditions for the existence of the cosmos.

²³J. Gonda, The Vedic God Mitra, (Leiden, 1972), 62.

Satya is sometimes used with words which signify conformity with ṛta. In RV 3.6.10, heaven and earth are called satya (i.e., they are in accord with sat) and ṛtāvan (true to/associated with ṛta). The dawn is called ṛtajātāsatyah at RV 4.51.7, which means "who is in accord with sat by means of his birth in ṛta". These epithets give expression to the fact that the truth/essence/reality of an entity is established by its association with ṛta and satya.

Rta and satya appear to signify the same thing when used in connection with speech. In these cases either term may be translated as "truth", although one must keep in mind that they signify "truth" by virtue of the fact of conformity to reality. An interesting parallel occurs at RV 9.113. The second verse of this sūkta states that the soma juice is pressed out by the priests by means of tapas (fervor/heat), śraddhā (faith), satya, and ṛtavāka (speaking according to the ṛta). Verse five indicates that the soma juice is made pure by the prayers (brahman) of the priests. It appears, therefore, that speech which conforms to ṛta and satya is possessed of special power. The process of soma purification was a time for inspiration. Soma loosens the inspired thought (manīṣa) of the priest at the time of purification (RV 9.95.5). Soma engenders hymns (go), and he sends his voice to the priest along the path of ṛta (pathyām ṛtasaeyarti vācam; RV 9.95.1-2). Soma

himself declares ṛta (ṛtam vadan) and speaks satya (satyam vadan) at RV 9.113.4. In these instances, it is not possible to distinguish between the significance of speaking according to ṛta or satya. Both types of speech possess the same effective force and power.

Speech which conforms to ṛta or satya appears to have a compelling effect. For example, the ṛsi at RV 1.185.10 declares that he has gained great understanding (sumedha) and that he has spoken the ṛta (ṛtam avocam). On the basis of this he then implores heaven and earth to protect him from reproach and affliction (pātām avadyād duritāt; v. 10) and to let his true speech (satya) come to be fulfilled (idam dyāvāprthivī satyam astu; v. 11). Similarly, the ṛsi at RV 10.35.8 asks the gods to furnish him with the speech which conforms to ṛta (pipartu mā tad ṛtasya pravācanam), and this is followed by a series of requests asking the Ādityas to grant special gifts to the sacrificer (vv. 11-12). It appears that in speaking or declaring ṛta or satya one testifies to the fact that one has brought one's words, and perhaps one's entire being, into conformity with reality. This then provides the basis upon which various divine beings may be exhorted to provide the speaker with the freedom, safety and security inherent in the dynamic nexus of ṛta.

Ṛta and satya are both principles upon which the cosmos is founded. In this respect, they are forces which

no entity can resist because to do so would amount to violating that upon which any entity is established in its being. Most significant to this study is the fact that ṛta, like satya, is used to denote "truth" in speech.²⁴ In discussing the dynamic nexus of ṛta it was mentioned that ṛta is associated with the sound which overcomes evil and dispells ignorance (cf. p. 30). Ṛta, therefore, is "truth" in speech because it is the effective force which, when embodied in the words of men, causes the speaker to commune with, and participate in that upon which the whole of reality is sustained--the ṛta.

²⁴For ṛta as "truth" in speech see H. Lüders, Varuṇa, (Göttingen, 1959), II, 420-485.

III

RTA, DHARMAN AND VRATA

Rta is a principle which represents the necessary pre-condition for the safety, security, freedom and stability of the cosmos. There are two aspects of rta which, owing to their importance to the maintenance of the cosmos, are given independent recognition in the Rg Veda. The two aspects are dharman and vrata. Dharman and vrata are so closely related to rta that several scholars have viewed them as synonyms of rta. Bergaigne, for example, states explicitly his belief that rta, dharman and vrata have the same meaning, while Griffith implies this understanding by his tendency to translate these terms in the same, or similar ways.¹ In what is to follow, however, it will be demonstrated that these are not synonyms, although they are intimately related. Briefly stated, it will be shown that the relation between these terms is such that rta is the comprehensive world principle of freedom, safety, security etc., dharman is the specific aspect of rta representing the power which supports, maintains and sustains the cosmos,

¹Abel Bergaigne, Vedic Religion, (Poona, 1973), III, 227. Griffith, Hymns of the Rgveda, (Varanasi, 1971), 2 Vols., tends to translate rta as holy/eternal law/order (RV 1.24.10, 1.52.1), dharman as holy law (10.44.1, 10.65.5), and vrata as holy ordinance/law (10.65.11).

and vrata is the fixed function of an individual entity through which that entity both manifests the ṛta and maintains itself in relation with the ṛta. The three terms form the ṛta/dharman/vrata complex within which the entire network of reciprocal relations between ṛta, gods and men is expressed.

1. Ṛta and Dharman

No where in the Rg Veda is the notion of the order and stability of phenomena better exemplified than in the relationship between ṛta and the verb $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$, along with its derivative--dharman. The verb $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$ means "to support/hold/fix/establish", and in the Rg Veda we find that the type of action which this verb embodies is often associated with the activities of the gods. For example, Mitra sustains (dādhāra) heaven and earth in RV 3.59.1, and Soma supports (dhārayanta) the sky at RV 6.47 4.

$\sqrt{\text{Dhr}}$ often occurs with ṛta. In RV 2.27.4, the Ādityas, who are described as ṛtāvan (true to/associated with ṛta), uphold (dhārayanta) all animate and inanimate objects. The relation between ṛta and $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$ is further outlined in RV 5.26.1-3 where the ṛsi declares that Mitra and Varuṇa have established (dhruvan) the ṛta by means of the ṛta, and that because of this they have firmly supported (adhārayatam) the heaven and the earth. In RV 4.42.4, Varuṇa, who is described as one who observes the ṛta

(ṛtavota), is said to have set firm (dhāryam) heaven in the seat of ṛta by means of the ṛta. The message of these sample passages is clear; the various gods work to uphold and establish the variety of individual entities in the cosmos by means of the power of ṛta. Because ṛta is their mode of being, they act in conformity with that mode, and part of that activity consists of supporting the individual elements of the cosmos.

In the Rg Veda the notion of "supporting" or "establishing" is abstracted into a power which is represented by the neuter derivative of $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$ --dharman. According to J. Gonda, "dharman" means:²

...a stabilizing, supporting, preserving power, a power of maintenance and stability, a faithfulness to nature, inherent qualities, truth and reality; the innate principle of anything in virtue of which it remains what it is.

The supporting and maintaining power of dharman is brought out when this term appears in conjunction with $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$. In RV 2.13.7, Indra is said to have fixed or established (adhārayah) the streams and plants by means of dharman. Dharman appears as the power of support in RV 8.6.20, where it is said that dharman surrounds the sun and holds it in its place. Similarly, RV 10.88.1 informs us that the gods made themselves broad in order to support (dharmane) the world. The power of dharman allows the sun to follow its

²J. Gonda, The Vedic God Mitra, (Leiden, 1972), 62.

course in RV 1.160.1, and this undoubtedly means that dharman is the force which allows the sun to remain faithful to its nature. "Inherent nature" is also the meaning of dharman in RV 10.44.1, where Indra is said to be large and boisterous according to the dharman.

The word "satya" often occurs with $\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$ and dharman. In RV 10.111.4, Indra supports (dādhāra) the earth by means of his satya. The meaning of this verse must be that Indra acts to support or maintain the earth because he exists in conformity with the sat. Similarly, the epithet "satya-dharman", which means "whose dharman is true (in harmony with the sat)/whose truth is dharman"³, is often applied to the gods. Savitar, in the role of the sun, is called satya-dharman at RV 10.139.3. In RV 1.12.7, Agni, in the form of the sacrifice, is said to be satyadharman. The gods in general are called satyadharman at RV 5.51.2. This epithet seems to embody the idea that harmony with the sat is a precondition for the maintaining and supporting activity of the gods.

Dharman regularly occurs with rta. These two terms are connected in such a way that rta is the foundation or ground of dharman. This is exemplified by the fact that rta never governs the genitive of dharman although dharman

³Paul Bowlby, The Lotus and the Chariot, (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1975), 119.

does govern the genitive of rta.⁴ Thus, we find in the Rg Veda the expression "dharman of the rta". Bergaigne believed that this phrase could be understood literally as "the maintenance of the rta", with the suggestion that it means something like "the order of the law".⁵ A better understanding of this phrase, one which is more in keeping with the evidence gathered in this thesis, is "the maintaining/supporting power of the rta", where by the term "rta" is meant that essence or force of the ordered cosmos which is the condition for the possibility for freedom, safety, security, stability, order, truth, law, etc.. In RV 9.7.1 and 9.110.4 Soma is said to have been created for the dharman of the rta (rtasya dharman); i.e., he was established in order to manifest the potent power of the rta. In line with this, Soma is said to attain dharman when he is purified at the sacrifice in RV 9.97.12. Verse twenty-three of this sūkta states that Soma is called both "rta" and "dharmapati" (lord of the dharman). These references indicate that Soma, in embodying rta, possesses the power which supports the cosmos.

It is not difficult to understand why dharman and rta have been viewed as near equivalents by scholars like Bergaigne and Griffith. Both words play a vital role

⁴Bergaigne, 227.

⁵Bergaigne, 226-227.

in the language of the order and stability of phenomena. The fact that ṛta's connection with stability and order is most clearly brought out when it occurs with ḍhr and dharman is a signal that ṛta means something more than natural order. The specific force of stability and order is the dharman, and the dharman is founded upon ṛta. Dharman, therefore, appears to be a sub-class of ṛta; it is a specific aspect of the ṛta. Thus, dharman appears to pertain most directly to individual things, while ṛta pertains to the cosmos as a whole. The sun, for instance, follows its course both according to the dharman (RV 1.160.1) and according to the ṛta (RV 1.136.2). In the first instance, the sun follows its course because it is its inherent nature to do so; in the second case, the sun follows its course because ṛta governs its place in the over-all cosmic structure. Also, the sacrifice, which is identified with ṛta, has its dharmani (supports; RV 3.3.1). The sacrifice embodies ṛta because it is that which promotes freedom, safety and security while the various elements of that rite are its "supports" which make the sacrifice what it is. Finally, Agni, who works according to the ṛta (RV 3.5.3), possesses his own dharman (svadharman; RV 3.21.2); i.e., he possesses his own inherent nature and supporting force.

2. Rta and Vrata

The meaning of the word "vrata" has been shrouded in

controversy for some time. Modern scholars have experienced difficulty in arriving at a clear understanding of this term because the verbal root from which it is derived is ambiguous. Vrata is sometimes taken as a derivative of the root \sqrt{vr} . There are, however, two such roots. The first root, $1\sqrt{vr}$, means "to enclose/protect/surround"; the second root, $2\sqrt{vr}$, means "to choose/select".⁶ Max Muller derived vrata from $1\sqrt{vr}$ and therefore understood the term to mean "that which is enclosed, protected, set apart, fenced off, settled or determined, law or ordinance".⁷ Monier-Williams derived vrata from $2\sqrt{vr}$ and suggested its meaning to be "will, command, law, ordinance, rule, runction, conduct, custom".⁸ The matter is further complicated by W.D. Whitney and V.M. Apte who chose to derive vrata from the root \sqrt{vrt} which means "to proceed/turn". Thus, Whitney understood vrata to mean "procedure, course, line of movement, course of action, conduct or behavior, obligatory actions imposed by religion or morality".⁹ Apte extended Whitney's understanding of vrata by adding "to turn, turn oneself, turn around, roll, move on".¹⁰ One thing stands out clearly from these attempts to arrive at a core meaning for vrata, as in

⁶M. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (Oxford, 1960), 1042.

⁷V.M. Apte, "All about 'vrata' in the Rg Veda", BDCRI, 3 (1942), 407.

⁸Monier-Williams, 1042. ⁹Apte, 411. ¹⁰Apte, 411.

the case of the term "ṛta", a universally acceptable core meaning for vrata cannot be arrived at solely on the basis of its etymological roots.

Despite the etymological limitations involved with vrata, scholars have arrived at an understanding of this term based upon its contexts in the Rg Veda. W. Norman Brown and Bowlby suggest that vrata is the function or duty of an individual entity.¹¹ Gonda adds to this conception the idea that vrata is the established way of action of an entity based upon fixed intentions.¹² I would add to this, however, that vrata is the fixed/intended function of an entity because it is based upon the ṛta. Thus, the individual fixed functions of entities are established to promote the freedom, safety and security of the ordered cosmos.

The term "vrata" appears to denote the fixed/intended functions of some particular entity. The sun, in RV 5.40.6, operated contrary to its proper function (apavrata) when its light had been covered in darkness by the demon Svarbhānu. Indra is said to have destroyed the vratas of Vṛtra

¹¹Bowlby, 91, quotes from W. Norman Brown, "The Basis of the Hindu Act of Truth", Review of Religion, 5 (1940), 38: "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...fulfill his personal function (vrata) or duty in the cosmos."

¹²J. Gonda, "Het Begrip Dharma in Het Indische Denden", Tijdschrift voor Philosophie, 20 (1958), 221-222 (unpublished trans. by Hans Van Nie).

(RV 10.111.4), which must mean that in slaying that demon Indra prevented him from fulfilling his function of enclosing the cosmic waters. RV 2.38.7-8 states that beasts seek water and birds nest in the forest because of the fixed intentions (vratani) of the god Savitar. Varuṇa's vrata consists of propping up heaven, measuring the expanse of earth, and protecting all living creatures at RV 8.42.1.

The sense that vrata is the fixed function of a being is brought out clearly in connection with the god Agni. RV 1.128.1 informs us that Agni was born for the vratas of men and for his own vrata. Agni's vratas are said to be great in RV 3.6.5-10, where it is said that Agni, who is described as rtajāta, has spread out heaven and earth, brings the gods together at the sacrifice, and provides radiant light for the morning. Thus, Agni acts to create wide space; he is the sun shining in the morning; he is the great priest who summons the gods to the sacrifice. This latter vrata of Agni is especially important. The Rg Veda states that Agni is the messenger of both men (RV 1.128.6) and gods (RV 1.36.4). In RV 6.8.2, Agni is said to be the guardian of the vratas who keeps and observes them well. All the vratas of the gods meet in Agni (RV 1.36.5), and, accordingly, Agni is said to be the mouth and tongue of the gods by which they eat the offerings of the sacrifice (RV 2.1.13-14). Given that the sacrifice taken to the gods by Agni was supposed to persuade the gods to act

for the benefit of the sacrificer, the above references to Agni indicate that this god possessed the special vrata of being able to influence the gods so that they may accomplish their vratas for the well-being of the sacrificer.

Since the various gods are rtajāta, rtāvan and rtavrdh, their activities conform to and maintain the rta. The specific ways in which these divine beings conform to and maintain the rta are their vratas. One may say, therefore, that the rta is made manifest through the acts and intentions of the gods. Hence, the specific vratas of the gods cannot be violated or overcome. It is said of Savitar that no one/thing can disobey his vratas (RV 2.38.7), the waters do not violate the vratas of Brahmanaspati (RV 2.24.12), and the ancient sages did not break the vratas of Indra (RV 7.31.11).

Men, like the gods, have their own fixed functions to perform. The ṛsi in RV 10.65.12 declares that the gods, in establishing the cosmos, spread the vratas of the Aryans across the land. RV 9.112.1 states that the various vocations which men engage in are their various vratas. It is not surprising to find also that the sacrifice, which is the single most important activity that vedic man could perform, is described as a vrata at RV 1.93.8.

There are several passages in the Rg Veda which express the relation between rta and vrata. For instance, RV 1.65.1 states that Agni brings the sacrifice to the gods,

and this is followed, in verse two, with the statement: "rtasya devā anu vratā guh". Geldner's translation of this verse as: "Die Götter befolgten die Gebote der Wahrheit (the gods adhered to the command of truth)",¹³ appears accurate, although the phrase could also be construed as: "the gods, following the vratas of rta, approached (the sacrifice of Agni)". The phrase indicates that the gods follow their fixed functions which are established in the rta. Another example of the relation between rta and vrata is found at RV 3.4.7, where it is said that in speaking rta, while observing the fixed functions (vratapā, which in this case refers to observing the sacrifice), men receive visions (dhi) in accordance with their vrata (rtam...āhur anu vratam vratapā dīdhyānāh). It appears to be the stipulated function of men to receive visions while they perform the sacrifice and embody rta in their speech.

The terms "rta", "dharman" and "vrata" occur together in several sūktas. According to Bergaigne, the semantic differences between these three words are minimal in the Rg Veda. He cites a passage from RV 5.63.7 to establish his point:¹⁴

¹³K. F. Geldner, Der Rig-Veda, (London, 1951), vol. 33 of the Harvard Oriental Series, 86.

¹⁴Bergaigne, III, 227.

We shall find one more proof in the similar texts in 5.63.7: "According to the dharman, O Mitra and Varuna; holy gods; you watch over the vrata with the magic power of the Asura; you reign according to the rta over the entire world", in which a juxtaposition of two or three of the terms under discussion amounts practically to repetition of one of them....

It is clear, however, that in terms of the evidence gathered in this thesis the three words under consideration are not synonyms. The arrangement of these terms in RV 5.63.7 indicates that rta, dharman and vrata possess distinct, yet related meanings. This verse states that Mitra and Varuna rule the entire world according to the rta. Rta is, therefore, the world preserving principle. A concrete aspect of the rule according to rta is the dharman, which is the power of support. In this case, dharman upholds the vrata; i.e., the fixed functions and duties of individuals are supported through the power of dharman.¹⁵ The vratas which are thus upheld are the individual functions of entities which preserve, maintain and support the rta. In connection with this, I would also refer the reader to the use of these terms in RV 10.65, where it is stated that the statutes (dhāma) are supported by the dharman (v. 5), the cow is said to be the leader of the vratas (sacrifices) while serving the gods with the oblation (v. 6),

¹⁵We could also cite the use of the compound dhrtavrata (fixed functions) as evidence for the notion that the vratas are maintained, supported and upheld; cf. RV 1.44.14, 8.25.8, 8.44.25.

and the gods are said to reside in the seat and home of ṛta (vv. 7-8).

In the ṛta/dharman/vrata complex are all those activities and relationship which work together in harmony to sustain the established cosmos. Rta, as the world principle of freedom, safety, security, stability etc., is the mode of being of the sat; it is that which orders and stabilizes each individual thing in space and time; it is the sacrifice and the effective force of the sacrifice which gains freedom and security for man; it is the irresistible force which, when embodied in speech, persuades the gods to act for the benefit of the speaker. The gods receive their being from ṛta and thus they manifest the ṛta by maintaining the world through the power of dharman and by fulfilling their vratas. Men promote ṛta by following their vratas, of which the sacrifice is the most important. The ṛta/dharman/vrata complex describes both the nature of the universe in which vedic man lived and the range of possibilities available to him in his realm of existence.

IV

RTA AND THE RSI

Gods and demons reveal their respective modes of being through their acts and intentions. Demons come from the sphere of asat/anrta and thereby promote falsity, chaos, darkness etc.. Gods, on the other hand, come from the realm of sat/rta, and, with the rta as their mode of being, promote light, vast space, freedom, safety, security, and so on. There is no record in the Rg Veda of gods or demons having had to attain to their respective modes of being; i.e., they exist as already aligned with rta or anrta as a necessary pre-condition of their being. The situation of man, however, is different. Although man belongs to the realm of rta by virtue of the fact that he is part of the established cosmos, he, unlike a god, must strive to bring his acts and intentions into conformity with the rta. It was difficult for man to bring himself into conformity with rta because he could not easily attain to the clear and unambiguous knowledge of the difference between rta and anrta which the gods possessed. This difference between gods and men is brought out in several passages in the Rg Veda. For example, RV 10.124.5 states that Varuna maintains his supremacy by separating rta from anrta, while RV 1.139.2 indicates that Mitra and Varuna are able to distinguish

between rta and anrta. This is contrasted by the ṛṣi in RV 1.105.5 who implores Varuṇa to reveal to him the difference between rta and anrta. In order to bring his acts and intentions into conformity with rta, and thereby gain special ability, vedic man needed to receive a special insight into the rta. In the following paragraphs, I will offer a brief survey of the nature of the vedic man's encounter with, and vision of the rta.

In order to acquire the freedom, safety and security of his environment, vedic man needed to gain access to and conquer the rta. But the conquering of rta was no easy task. Only those who were specially gifted, who were well-skilled in rta, possessed this ability. The men of special ability formed a type in the vedic community known as the ṛṣis.¹ The goal of the ṛṣi was to traverse the path of rta, and he accomplished his goal by receiving from a source other and greater than himself a vision of sacred speech (Vāc)² which conformed to, and thereby "conquered" or "controlled" (or, better, gained him access to the power

¹For a discussion on these ancient visionaries see F.B.J. Kuiper, "The Ancient Aryan Verbal Contest", Indo-Iranian Journal, 4 (1960), 217-281.

²W. Norman Brown, "The Creative Role of the Goddess Vāc in the Rig Veda", in J. Heesterman, et al., ed., Pratidanam, (The Hague, 1968), 393, points out that although the deified Vāc has almost no mythology in the Rg Veda she still came to command a position in the Vedic Cosmology which rivaled that of any other god. Vāc became the supreme power of the cosmos, and men gained access to her power by receiving and understanding her utterances. Also, cf. W.K. Whillier, Vāc: Reality, Speech and Speaking in the Early Indian Tradition, (Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1972).

inherent in) the rta.

RV 10.71 provides a fairly detailed account of the difference between the rsi, who successfully intuit sacred speech, and those who, lacking the proper skill, attempt to catch a vision of Vāc, but fail. The sūkta describes the origins of sacred speech by stating that the first utterances of Vāc occurred when men (rsis) disclosed that which had been hidden previously within them by giving names to objects (v. 1).³ Although sacred speech had been made public by the rsis, only those who belonged to the closely knit brotherhood of rsis understood the underlying truth/reality of the words. Hence, the rsis were able to distinguish between those whose speech was in conformity with reality (rta) and those whose speech was empty and ineffectual. W.K. Whillier's comment on the second verse of this sūkta illustrates this

³The giving of names is more than merely appending appellations to objects. Naming something, or possessing the name of something, provided the namer with some degree of control over or intimate contact with that which is named. Thus, Soma sends his voice to the poets on the path of rta and utters the secret names of the gods (RV 9.95.2). The implication is that the rsi, in uttering the secret names of the gods, is privy to a unique relationship with those beings in which he is able to induce the gods to act in his behalf; cf. J. Gonda, "The Historical Background of the Name Satya Assigned to the Highest Being", ABORI, 48 (1968), 83: "Knowledge of the name is also a means of attracting or transferring to oneself the specific power inherent in its bearer. Its actualization in speech is a potent device for asserting...strengthening and activating the divine power for which the name stands."

point:⁴

The wise in mind have made sacred Speech (dhīrā manasa vācam akrata) by a process of discrimination, because they place their auspicious mark in sacred Speech (lakshmīr nihitādhi vāci).

Sūkta 10.71 indicates that there were four types of individuals who aspired to intuit sacred speech. There were those designated as evil (papaya) because they claimed to receive Vāc although they did not belong to the brotherhood (v. 9). There were those who, having once been part of the brotherhood, had severed their ties with the community of ṛṣis. This type of individual, in renouncing his station in the brotherhood, had forfeited his share in Vāc. Thus, even though he attempted to intuit sacred speech, his efforts were in vain ("yas tityāja sacividam sakhāyam na tasya vācy api bhāgo asti; For the one who has renounced the close knit brotherhood there is no share/part in Vāc"; v. 6). A third type of individual was one who, although belonging to the brotherhood (sakhye sthirapītam; v. 5), lacked the mental swiftness or clarity (manaso java; v. 8) to receive Vāc. This individual does not possess the power to catch hold of Vāc (adhenvā carati māyayaisa vācam), and so the voice he hears bears neither fruit nor blossom (śuśruvan aphalam apuṣpam; v. 5). The fourth type was the well-skilled ṛṣi who actually received the vision of Vāc.

⁴W.K. Whillier, "Ṛsis and Nouveau Ṛsis R.V. 10.71.4 and Gīta 11.8", paper delivered at the annual C.S.S.R., 1979, 2.

These visionaries followed the path (pada) of Vāc at the sacrifice (v. 3). Unskilled members of the assembly possessed eyes, but did not see Vāc, they had ears, but they could not hear her; but to the accomplished ṛṣi Vāc revealed her beauty "...like a beautifully garmented wife, as it were, willing/desirous for her master." (v. 4).⁵

This stanza suggests that the encounter between the ṛṣi and Vāc was as privileged and private as the (sexual) encounter between husband and wife.⁶ The personal nature of the ṛṣi's encounter with Vāc, however, was counter-balanced by the public examination of the visionary by the assembly. Thus, in communing with Vāc, the ṛṣi had to produce speech which carried the proper signs or marks (v. 2). If his speech lacked the proper distinguishing marks, then the assembly would judge that he had pursued Vāc with inadequate power (v. 5). The assembly, however, rejoiced over the ṛṣi whose vision of Vāc was genuine (v. 10).⁷

⁵cf. Whillier, 3-4: "uta tvah pasyan na dadarsa vācam uta tvah srinvan na srinoty enam/ ūto tvasmai tanvaṁ vi sasre jayēva patya usāti suvāsāh (4)...Indeed many a one does not see sacred Speech (Vāc); indeed many a one hearing does not hear her/ Indeed to many a one she unfolds/separates herself (her body/her form), like a beautifully garmented wife, as it were, willing/desirous for her master."

⁶For the intricacies of this imagery see Whillier, 4.

⁷Paul Bowlby, The Lotus and the Chariot, (Ph.D. dissertation McMaster University, 1975), 64, translates RV 10.71.10 as: "All friends are joyful in the friend who cometh in triumph, having conquered in the assembly. sarve nandanti

The vedic poets received, and did not create, their vision of sacred speech. The gods, who hear the truth (satyasruta), are delighted by the songs of men (RV 6.49.6). As a consequence, they give the inspiration or vision (dhi) to the rsis (RV 1.61.16, 6.49.7). The reciprocal nature of the vision of the vedic poet is stated succinctly in RV 4.11.2 where it is said that Agni gives the inspired thought (manisā) to men which is pleasing to the gods. The reciprocal nature of the vision is brought out also in relation with the god Soma. Soma is purified by the rsi with songs and prayers (RV 9.113.2,5,6). He is sent forth to the gods by the songs of the rsis (RV 9.101.3). Soma, however, is also the "lord of vision" (patiḥ...dhiyaḥ; RV 9.99.6) and the "lord of speech" (vacaspati; RV 9.101.5). These epithets are applied to Soma because he incites the voice of song in the rsi (RV 9.101.6); he engenders praise-songs and brings his voice to the rsi along the path of ṛta (RV 9.95.1-2). He enters into the songs of the rsi (RV 9.20.5, 9.95.3), and loosens inspired thought (manisā) in the visionary (RV 9.95.5). Thus, Soma is known as the rsi-maker

yaśasāgatena sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyah.", and comments on the significance of this verse: "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."

(rsikrt; RV 9.96.18). This latter epithet of Soma reinforces the idea that the rsi is not self-generated; i.e., he receives his visions only in the transcendent and supra-personal encounter with divinity.

Bird images are employed in the Rg Veda to symbolize that which mediates the visionary process between gods and men. According to Gonda, the bird appears to represent that aspect in man which is able to catch a vision or seize an inspiration at the crucial moment of encounter:⁸

The rsis also understood the character of inspiration, its sudden appearance, revealing--not creating--ideas regarded as real and already existent: the poet of 1.88.4 compares himself to a vulture circling and waiting (for an opportunity to snatch away, suddenly and unexpectedly, a prey which comes into its range of vision); in the same way he himself circles around the Maruts, vision (dhi) and his own 'Muse' or 'patron saint'.

According to Gonda also, the bird in RV 10.177.2, who bears within its manas ("mind" or "heart") sacred speech (vāc), represents the "...inner light of visionary insight.", which is guarded on the seat of rta (rtasya pade)--representing "...the celestial source of the inspiration considered to be microcosmically represented by the 'heart'--by the rsi.⁹ In this respect also, the god Soma is often connected with the bird. Soma, who often mediates between gods and men, is

⁸J. Gonda, Vedic Literature, (Wiesbaden, 1975), 66.

⁹J. Gonda, 66.

identified with a bird which ascends to the realm of the gods and descends to earth in RV 9.72.6,9. In RV 9.73, Soma is described as a bird which takes the soma juice to Indra (v. 3) and as a bird roosting on the side of the sacrificial bowls (v. 5).

If the bird symbolism represents the "inner light of visionary insight", then the application of this symbol to Soma seems most appropriate; and it may furnish some insight into why the god Soma is so often identified with the poet (kavi) and the ṛṣi. RV 10.123.3, for example, states that the singers ascend to the height of ṛta when they drink the soma juice, while v. 6 of this sūkta indicates that these singers perceive Soma with their "hearts" (hrda) "as a bird which flies into the sky/heaven (nāke suparnam upa yat patantam)".¹⁰ There is an apparent identification in these verses between Soma and the singers; i.e., the singers ascend to the height of ṛta, and the singers perceive Soma ascending. Furthermore, the identification between Soma and the ṛṣi is not restricted to the above passage. Soma is often called a ṛṣi or a kavi (cf. RV 9.59.3, 9.78.2, 9.96.17, 9.107.7). RV 9.96 is of special interest in this respect. The sūkta informs us that Soma, called a bird in v. 19, possesses the "mind" of a ṛṣi (ṛṣimanas; v. 17). The connection between Soma as the manas

¹⁰For the significance of hrda (heart) see J. Gonda, The Vision of the Vedic Poets, (The Hague, 1963), 276-288.

of the ṛṣi and Soma as the bird is perhaps clarified by the statement in RV 6.9.5: "among the things that fly the mind is the swiftest (mano javiṣṭham patayatsu)". Thus, Soma, as the maker of ṛṣis, provides the special manas of the ṛṣi which is able to ascend to the height of ṛta.

A brief mention must be made here also of the close connection between some of those beings which variously assume the image of the bird and ṛta. Soma is called both a kavi and ṛta itself in RV 9.62.30. If Soma, as a bird, represents that element in man which is capable of visionary insight, and if Soma possesses the manas of the ṛṣi, then it seems that this god, who is identified with ṛta, connects the ṛṣi to ṛta in an intimate way. RV 4.40.5 states that Dadhikrāvan (the horse)¹¹, who is described as antarikṣasad (who dwells in the air) in v. 5, is said to dwell among men (nṛṣad), to dwell in ṛta (ṛtasad), to be born of ṛta (ṛtajā), and to be ṛta itself (v. 5). Similarly, in RV 10.5, Agni, in the role of the bird (v. 5) speaks from the "heart" (hr̥da) of the kavi (v. 1), while the poets guard the path of ṛta (ṛtasya padam) and keep the secret names (guha namāni) hidden within them (v. 2).¹² In this capacity, Agni is said to be the first born of ṛta (ṛtasya prathamajā; v. 7). The bird, as the

¹¹For the significance of Dadhikrāvan see A.A. Macdonell, Vedic Mythology, (Poona, 1974), 148-149, and Bergaigne, Vedic Religion, (Poona, 1973), II, 454-460.

¹²cf. Gonda, Vision, 281.

symbol of visionary insight which is itself connected to the rta, brings the ṛṣi into a unique and privileged relationship with the rta.

That which mediates the visionary process between men and gods (the bird) provides the ṛṣi with the manas which harbors vāc and brings him into intimate contact with rta. Thus, in receiving visions (dhi) men speak the rta (RV 3.4.7). The relation between visionary insight and conformity with rta is brought out also in RV 10.67.1 where it is said that vision is sprung from/the progeny of rta (dhiyam rtaprajātām). The vision of rta is received--not created--by the ṛṣi, and in order to receive vision the ṛṣi had to maintain himself in a state of readiness and receptivity. RV 6.9.6 illustrates this point:¹³

Mine ears unclose to hear, mine eye to see him
the light that harbors in my spirit /hrda /
broadens. Far roams my mind /manas / whose
thoughts are in the distance. What shall I
speak? What shall I imagine?

vi me karnā patayato vi caksur vidam jyotir
hrdaya ahitam yat / vi me manas carati dūrādhīh
kim svid vaksyāmi kim u nū manisyē.

When the ṛṣi is thus prepared, when his (inner) ear and eye is open and receptive, the rta manifests itself in a transforming revelation. Gonda's remarks on RV 4.23.8 sum up this point:¹⁴

¹³Translation according to R.T.H. Griffith, The Hymns of Rg Veda, (Delhi, 1973).

¹⁴Gonda, Vision, 176.

Elsewhere, 4.23.8, it is the call of rta which "shining when it is understood, has pierced the deaf ears of the Āyu."...Since the Āyu are ritual officials...makers of mantras...the tenor of the statement must be that the rta...takes the initiative in stimulating a human being who is as such 'deaf', but since he belongs to the class of seers and responds to the call, he is able to formulate the 'revelation' of rta which has come to him.

For the ṛṣi who is able to receive inspiration, and thereby commune with rta in an intimate way, there is safety, security, and freedom. The path is easy for the one who seeks the rta (RV 1.41.4). The one who follows the rta inherits the safe space of Aditi (RV 9.74.3) and the protection of the Ādityas (RV 8.27.20). The idea seems to be that the well-skilled ṛṣi receives the benefits which the gods themselves enjoy. In fact, the accomplished ṛṣi is said to be born of the gods (devajā; RV 3.53.9). Like the gods, he is given the epithet "ṛtāvan" (RV 7.61.2, 1.122.9). The ṛṣi is known as ṛtapā (protector of the rta; RV 7.20.6), and he is said to be ṛtajña (knower of the rta; RV 7.38.8, 10.15.1, 10.64.16, 10.65.3). Finally, the accomplished ṛṣi is said to be ṛtejah (born in rta; RV 7.20.6). These epithets seem to imply that the ṛṣi, who receives visions, communes with Vāc, and speaks the rta through the supranormal insight into reality, conforms to rta in such a way that he, like the gods, has brought his acts and intentions into perfect accord with the rta; i.e., the accomplished ṛṣi is able to seize upon rta as his mode of being.

V

CONCLUSION

The dynamic nexus of ṛta is composed of images of light, wide space, safe pathways, nurturing womb, evil-destroying sound, etc.. Although no single image or association of ṛta defines or describes this term, the images and associations, when melted together into a unified bond, provide the rationale for viewing ṛta as a kind of 'force' or 'power' which is the foundation and source for freedom, safety, security, stability, truth, law and so on, in the sat. This understanding of ṛta is born out by the specific ways in which the term is applied in the text of the Rg Veda. We have seen that ṛta is a mode of being because the gods, who are ṛtajāta, provide light, wide space, safety, security, freedom, stability, 'visions', etc., through their association with, and by means of the power of ṛta. The regulating and stabilizing effect of ṛta is made manifest in its role as the force which relates entities in time and space through the power of support (dharman). Rta as the force which maintains the harmony of the sat is also seen in the connection between this term and vrata; i.e., ṛta is the basis for the fixed functions of gods and men through which these entities maintain both

their relation with ṛta and the security of the cosmos. The sacrifice is identified with ṛta because that rite harnesses the power of ṛta by which men are able to gain the freedom, safety, security, etc., which are necessary for continued existence in the cosmos. Finally, sacred speech is ṛta because such speech, being the result of a super-normal vision of that which is real, is the mark of the ṛṣi who has brought his acts and intentions into conformity with ṛta in such a way that he, like the gods, is able to seize upon ṛta as his mode of being. Thus, ṛta may be understood as the necessary pre-condition for the freedom, safety, security, stability, reliability, order, truth, law, of the sat which is manifested through the acts and intentions of men and gods.

At this point I must caution the reader against the assumption that the above formal characterization of ṛta provides us with something like the "vedic understanding" of this complicated term. The vedic ṛṣi organized reality in ways which are now foreign to the modern world. The ṛṣis were able to append one word to a particularly important aspect of reality which we must labor to understand by stringing together a series of words; i.e., the vedic ṛṣis saw the unity of ṛta, and no matter how closely we can approximate this vision of unity the fact remains that ṛta plays no part in our daily perception of reality, has therefore no modern equivalent, and thus cannot be grasped

in the same manner as the vedic community could grasp it.¹ This is precisely why ṛta must remain conceptually ambiguous. The above formal characterization of ṛta should, therefore, not be viewed as identical with the "vedic understanding" of this term. It should be seen merely as a convenient formula for recalling the complicated interrelations between the images, associations and specific applications of ṛta which combine to express the significance of this term.

Since the methods employed in this thesis deal with only a percentage of the actual occurrences of ṛta in the Rg Veda, the present findings will not be finally validated until all of the usages of ṛta have been examined. Such a task would be enormous. I propose that the definitive study of ṛta be preceded by a series of investigations which concentrate upon one particular theme. A detailed examination of the following topics might be particularly

¹This is precisely Gonda's position in "Postscript on Mitra", ABORI, XVIII (1977), 137: "Our knowledge of...Vedic religion largely depend upon a correct understanding of a considerable number of Indian terms many of which have already been debated for over a century. In studying these terms we are confronted with the difficulty that they are untranslatable into modern languages....The 'world' in which speakers live is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of their communities. This means that it is almost completely impossible to translate important...texts from one language into another in such a way that the translation is completely identical in sense, overtones, impressiveness etc., with the original."

informative: 1) the relation between ṛta and satya; 2) the significance of anṛta, asat and asatya; 3) the connection between ṛta and Aditi; 4) the connection between ṛta and loka; 5) the relation between ṛta, Agni and Soma; and 6) the significance of ṛta to 'vision' (dhī) and Vāc.

If the vedic literature, which includes the Rg Veda, is the foundation of Indian thought, and if ṛta represents a key concept in this foundational literature, then one would expect to find that the ideas expressed in ṛta have had a direct influence on the philosophy of post-vedic literature. Since the Bhagavad Gītā is concerned with the significance of world order/truth/law (dharma) and the order of men within the cosmos (varna), then this document would provide a good place for testing the hypothesis that the ideas expressed in ṛta are reflected in post-vedic philosophy.

A comparison between the Bhagavad Gītā and the Rg Veda over the issue of cosmic order (ṛta/dharma) would be involved with the issue of continuity and change in the Indian philosophical/religious tradition. Before the comparison could begin one must gain clarity on what sort of 'continuity' one is looking for between these two texts. There are three ways in which 'continuity' could be understood in relation to the Indian tradition: 1) The orthodox²

²By the term "orthodox" I mean "one who accepts the Veda as

Hindu understanding of the Indian tradition asserts that that tradition is a continuous and unified whole. It holds that the most ancient corpus of literature, the Veda, forms the suprapersonal and infallible foundation of the tradition. As a consequence, any post-vedic literature which pretends to be authoritative must be grounded in the Veda.³ We might, therefore, term the orthodox understanding of continuity as "unqualified continuity"; i.e., the orthodox Indian would assert that the connection between the Veda and orthodox post-vedic literature is direct and without break. 2) Modern scholars, on the other hand, have been concerned with what might be called the "historical continuity" between vedic and post-vedic literature. Modern scholars have found that many of the Indian attempts to relate post-vedic literature to vedic material have been anachronistic and incredible; this has lead scholars to

the foundation of all truth and knowledge, and who accepts varna (caste) as founded upon Veda". Conversely, the term 'heterodox' refers to one who does not hold these things as true.

³cf. J. Gonda, Change and Continuity in Indian Religion (The Hague, 1965), 9-10: "...among the factors which have brought about this result must have been a deep-rooted want for assuming, maintaining and clinging to continuity... a craving for a firm foundation on which to build one's life and one's ideals...on a basis which, being eternal and 'revealed' in the 'beginning' of history, is infallible and absolutely true and reliable....Thus the 'orthodox' religions of later times claim to be the Vedic past unchanged or purified and adapted to the needs of the ensuing generations."

claim that post-vedic India has had a very inadequate understanding of the Veda.⁴ In training their own critical eyes upon the relation between vedic and post-vedic literature, modern scholars have found significant and fundamental differences.⁵ Scholars have tried to account for these differences by citing various historical and cultural changes and differences. Two chief factors of change have been proposed: a) the influence of the heterodox religions; and b) the influence of the indigenous non-vedic culture which had been conquered by the vedic Aryans.⁶ Modern

⁴Gonda, Change and Continuity, 9: "...the works of medieval commentators give, in their attempts to interpret the ancient texts formally and materially, ample evidence of ignorance and false notions, misapprehending the meaning of the texts and the intentions of their authors and supplying anachronistic...explanations. There is every indication for the contention that India had a very inadequate and incomplete knowledge of the Veda before it was discovered by European scholarship."

⁵Gonda, Change and Continuity, 16. Modern scholars contend, for example, that the vedic yajña (sacrifice) loses its importance in the post-vedic world, and that post-vedic concerns around moksa (liberation), yoga, the guru, and temple rites are not found in the Veda.

⁶Gonda, Change and Continuity, 12-13: "Although some scholars were inclined to attribute an important part in these proceedings to the propaganda and activities of the Buddhists, others emphasized the significance of other influences....The cultures of the substratum, of Dravidians and Austro-Asiatic peoples which must have existed...before the Aryan culture represented by the Veda must, it was argued, have contributed many elements that were to become essential in the post-vedic civilization which...spread over the whole sub-continent."

scholars have found a historical discontinuity between vedic and post-vedic literature; and the discovery of historical discontinuity cast considerable doubt upon the orthodox claim of unqualified continuity. 3) J. Gonda, however, ascribes to a view which differs from both the Indian position and the position of modern historical scholarship. He accepts as obvious and true many of the findings of modern scholarship. He feels, however, that in its zeal to trace historical developments, modern scholarship has too often concerned itself with the change of outward forms while neglecting to give attention to possible underlying structures which may form a bridge between differing forms.⁷ Gonda also criticizes the Indian stance of unqualified continuity. He points out that the Indians have failed to recognize that continuity is no unity, that cultural elements which are preserved are nevertheless subject to change and transformation.⁸ Gonda wants to take seriously the traditional Indian claim for continuity; yet at the same time he does not want to reject the findings

⁷Gonda, Change and Continuity, 17: "Whereas they were first captivated by the changing scene of outward forms and interested in tracing 'historical developments', the attention of traditional Indian scholarship was not rarely arrested by those elements which, actually or in appearance, remained in the course of time unaltered, and by which may be said to reflect a deeper meaning underlying the outward phenomena....".

⁸Gonda, Change and Continuity, 17.

of modern scholarship. He finds a solution to this problem by concentrating upon the continuity of underlying structures. Gonda's conception of continuity may be understood as "structural continuity".

I propose that, in relating the notions of cosmic order between the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā, one should leave behind the problem of the historical development of ideas between these two texts and, following Gonda, seek to establish only a structural continuity; i.e., one should attempt to show that these two texts share a common heritage of ideas and structures. Thus, the examination of the Rg Veda and the Bhagavad Gītā would take on the form of a comparison of two typologies of cosmic order. The significance of rta could be included under three general headings: 1) rta as the condition for the possibility of cohesion/adaptation/order (dharman)/freedom/safety/security in the cosmos; 2) conformity to rta (vrata) as the means by which man maintains the cosmos; and 3) identification with rta as the means by which man attains to the optimum state of being. This could then be compared with the significance of dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā included also under three general headings: 1) dharma as the law/order/essence of the cosmos, and as the duty/function/proper position of man as determined by his varṇa; 2) conformity to dharma by fulfilling one's varṇa duties as the means by which man main-

tains the cosmic order; and 3) egoless/indifferent conformity to one's varṇa, accomplished through bhakti, karma or jñāna yoga, as the means by which one attains to the highest state of being (mokṣa). Two particularly interesting aspects of this comparison come to mind. First, it would be interesting to know what the relation between ṛta and mokṣa may be. Second, the connection between ṛta/vrata and dharma/varṇa may provide some informative insights into the Indian understanding of social law.

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