"Where, like men cleansing corn-flour in a cribble,
the wise in spirit have created language,
Friends we see and recognize the marks of friendship;
their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted."

- Griffith
KEY TO THE RGVEDIC MYSTICISM
(THE RGVEDIC SYMBOLISM)

We are well aware of the relation of Mysticism and Symbolism. The expression of mystical ideas is always possible with help of symbolic quality of the language. Here in this chapter we will discuss the peculiarity of the Rgvedic language that conceals the mystic notions with its symbolicity. The Rgvedic symbols can only be unlocked with help of the Brahmanic passages and their symbolic synonyms. The semantic problems of the Rgvedic interpretation are dealt here to pave the way to the Rgvedic symbolism, which is the powerful media of mystical expression.

1. Semantic problem of the Rgvedic interpretation

The association of the word and meaning does change its force in accordance with the mental, social and cultural status of the person. Even in the spoken language one has to ask the meaning of ambiguous term from the speaker. There is full probability of forgetting the meaning of the word that was spoken thousands of years back. In the Rgveda we have the words of the sages and the illumined minds. Also we know the limits of a language in expressing the mystical feelings and the notions. We have to seek the
similar image and the word that should convey the real sense of the existing object for the fact we have realised in the meditation. The language of physical or material world and the experienced world of a mystic are wedded to correspond in his sayings. The language used by a layman yields the different meanings in the hands of a mystic. This is the limitation of the language that the person has to seek the mystical notions in the same words used by him for his ordinary feelings and thoughts. The words of a language coming from the common use change their meanings and the range of their sense expands and they provide much more subtle and spiritual sense.

At present, we have only words in the Rigveda, not the persons who used them. Also the conditions of our time are quite changed, so the language and its meaning. This is how the commentators searching and supporting a typical meaning, interpreted the veda with quite purposive efforts. While some others of varied temperament and understanding interpreted it otherwise. Getting acquainted with the language and the conditions of the Rigvedic age, we can grasp their meanings with adequate help of the commentators. But the commentaries, glossaries and the old vedic lexicons too give one word in various meanings. It is the wise duty of a reader to seek the right meaning for a word that should fulfil the

1. See Nighantu of Yāska.
necessity of grammar and also suit the spirit of our age and simultaneously doing justice to the age that witnessed the word first. While the Rgveda is not the work of a single person in one time and one geographical condition. Thus a vedic student has varied meanings of a single word before him.

For example, Agni is prayed with various epithets\(^1\) and also it is stated to exist in all the three regions. The description of Agni quite changes its meaning. When a vedic sage extolls Agni as of heaven that is solar fire,\(^2\) or of intermediary region that is lighting,\(^3\) or of earth that is terrestrial fire.\(^4\) In the context of human body fire will mean metabolic acidic element in the body that keeps it warm and that digests the food.\(^5\)

The vedic metaphors, equation and similies\(^6\) that are based on the laws of association or opposition after due period, become the suggestive meaning of one another, that is, upameya and upamāna. Thus it causes the birth of symbols.

Traditionally the commentators accepted the three meanings imbedded in the Vedic words.

---

1. See Epithets of Vedic Gods, J. Gonda.
2. Rv. I.149.4 and Nirukta 7.23.
3. Rv. 10.91.4
4. Rv. 3.29.2
6. Rv. 3.27.14
(2) Threefold meanings of the Rgvedic terms

Here we are to consider the main three divisions of the meanings accepted traditionally. Though we can divide the meanings into various types, yet there are mainly of three types adhyātmika, ādīdaivika and ādhibhautika.

In poetry also, we have three levels of the meaning of the words known as abhidheya, lakṣya and vyārigya (discussed in the previous context of symbolic nature of mystical expression).

There are ten ancient schools of vedic interpretation duly mentioned by Yāska and they can well be included in the above said three divisions. But examining the modern interpretations also H. Aguilar classified the style and meaning in six types.

1. the ritualistic interpretation (Sāyana etc.)
2. the naturalistic interpretation (Maxmuller, Bergaigne, etc.)
3. the evolutionistic interpretation (common to so many authors)
4. the symbolic interpretation (V.S. Agraval etc.)
5. the psychological interpretation (Sri Aurobindo)
6. the metaphysical interpretation (A.K. Coomarswamy etc.)

The main three meanings of the vedic words are shown by Swami Dayānanda in his works. These three types are scattered

1. History and Principles of Vedic Interpretation, Ram Gopal.
2. Sacrifice in the Rgveda, p.17.
hither and thither. Even Sāyaṇa and other ritualists do accept the other two aspects of the meanings i.e., material and spiritual, besides the mythological or sacrificial. Yet Swami Dayananda purposively wove a garb of meaning collected from Brāhmaṇas and Āranyakas. Thus depiction of glory of vedic heritage had been the self-respectful purpose of Swamiji.

(3) Universal language of Symbols

Here we have to show the various meanings of the vedic words and thus seeking the grounds of the language of symbols used by the vedic mystics. As the vedic verses have adopted small metres and poetry form, hence system building and justification of one's thoughts had no place. The brevity is the landmark of mystical expression everywhere. Inspite of varied thoughts and feelings of numerous mystics, there can be a common character of this language found in the Rgveda. There are the symbols used almost by all mystics in the same direction of meanings though varied in their force.

While discussing the nature of mysticism we have propounded about the universality of mystical feeling and state, though they are product of myriad circumstances - spatial and temporal. We can say that the symbols from the farthest past are carrying the almost the same contexts. Though the languages may differ in grammar and scripts, yet the universal grammar of the symbols is the same altogether.
This is how the dictionary of symbols is possible. For example, we take hawk. In vedic literature 'hawk' is the bearer of soma from heaven. As suparna it is 'sūrya' and in spiritual sense 'the soul'. As a 'garutma' it is the name of one reality as Agni, Yama, Indra, etc. In purāṇas it is Garuḍa—the car of Viṣṇu and attacking on the serpent. This symbol of hawk carried the meaning of height, the spirit as Sun and spiritual principle. Generally this also symbolises as a father or male activity. It signifies the struggle between spiritual and mundane principle. This symbol is found in all ancient cultures and religions. Thus the universal language of symbols can well be witnessed in the Rgveda too.

(4) Various opinions regarding Rgvedic Symbols

The considerable number of researchers of the vedic thought accept the role of symbols in carrying a deep sense through the words that appear to be full of gross meaning on surface.

Dr. V.S. Agrawal observes that 'every student of the veda must remember that he is face to face with a language in which lexical meaning is not material, but it is the symbolic meanings that are really important. Vedic symbols are numerous ... forming the alphabet, as it were of rich language designed to convey the imagery of the cosmos.... The language is writ large on the face of nature

and can be read at all times and places. Father, mother, brother, sister, son and daughter are the code-words of a universal dictionary. The seers made use of this language by deliberate intention. Its golden radiance fills all place between earth and sky and a new experience of ecstasy filled the minds of the thinkers at the potency of omni-present medium of expression."¹ Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that the Ṛgveda is itself one considerable document that remains to us from the early period of human thought of which the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries were the failing remnants, when the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed in a concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated.² M.P. Pandit opines that the 'Veda is a book of esoteric symbols almost of spiritual formulae which masks itself as a collection of ritual poems. The inner sense is psychological, universal and impersonal.'³

Kenneth Gilbert observes the tediousness of the vedic language in following words: "This non-intellectual nature of the vedic language is what has made the scholarly interpretations of the hymns so difficult when the rks were finally put down in written form the ancient intuitive

2. Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda,
spiritual and psychological wisdom became concealed in an esoteric symbolism.¹

According to T.G. Mainkar "Symbolism and mythology are the language of the mystic."² Thus we may well proclaim that the Ṛgvedic verses are amply rich in symbols probably in their fixed sense in that age as the repetitions of diction and set norms of style show.³

To search out the richness of Ṛgvedic symbols we should march forward to the myths, parables and allegories and their symbolic nature.

(4) The Ṛgvedic myths and their symbolicity

The Ṛgvedic myths have been studied through various angles such as of comparative religion and cultural anthropology. Here we are concerned only with their role in expression of mystical notions. No doubt, myths play a prominent role in forming the symbols and when we analyse the myths and come to the essence and we get symbols. In relation with the Ṛgvedic myths or Vedic mythology in general, we find the varied classification of myths particularly dealt with angles of gods and demons. Some scholars have presented the Vedic mythology through the perspective of evolution and development of conception. But

1. The Wisdom of the Veda, p.32.
2. Mysticism in the Ṛgveda, p.5.
3. The Ṛgvedic Repeated, M. Bloomfield.
here we have pursued an original way of classification based on the fundamental problems responsible for universal myth-making. When we talk of the Rgvedic myths, we mean the original form of Indo-Aryan myths preserved in the Rgveda and duly followed by Indo-Iranian religion going back to its birth as Indo-European Culture or Proto-Vedic myths.

Classification of the Rgvedic myths:
1) Cosmological myths
2) Season myths
3) Social myths
4) Sacrificial myths
5) Psycho-physical myths
6) Fertility myths
7) Botanical myths
8) Metaphysical myths
9) Hero myths
10) Demon myths
11) Numerical myths
12) Metre myths etc. etc.

1) Establishing the earth, and separating the earth and the heaven, propping the sky over the earth, disappearing

1. 2.12.2 - य: पूर्णकि यथमनामदृश्यः
2. 2.12.2 - यो धामस्त्मानां म जनास इति
3. 2.15.2 - कस्य भस्मसवायु वृहन्तमा रोदस्थी अन्वेषन्तत्त्विकाः

स धारयत् पूर्णकि प्रथमच स्तम्भ तत् मद इत्येकाराः
of stars in daylight,\(^1\) hanging of sun over the earth without any string,\(^2\) the three steps of the sun as morning,\(^3\) noon and evening, the sentinals of Varuṇa,\(^4\) Sun following the Dawn,\(^5\) etc. are mainly the cosmogical happenings and facts which are presented in form of myths as acts of different gods. Here the repetitions are well noticed by the scholars. The reason of repeating the certain act belonging to more than one god is the group of the gods belonging to the luminary region. Yet some exceptions may also be seen.

2) Falling of rain,\(^6\) and struggle of Indra and Vṛtra,\(^7\) the searching out the cows by Sārma,\(^8\) the sprinkling of its semen\(^9\) by parjanya over the earth\(\text{etc.}\) the annual cycle of the seasons and its identification with the sun are the chief season-myths appearing in the Ṛgveda\(^\text{verses}.\)

---

\(^{1}\) 1.24.10 - वमी य शक्ता निविष्टास उच्चा नक्ति देशे कुलक देव्यतः।

\(^{2}\) 4.13.5 - कान्यते अग्निजः काश्य न्युदः पूज्यानां व पर्यन्ते न।

\(^{3}\) 3.25.3 - \text{विभुत्राणि हिरण्यं वस्त्रं वस्तं निफितं। पैर स्पर्शो निविष्टेद।}

\(^{4}\) 5.115.2 - \text{पुष्पव देवी मुख्र शोभामाः मयं न योक्षाम्यैः।}

\(^{5}\) 6.583.6 - \text{दिवो न वृष्टेत् मस्तो रसीर्द्वम प्रतिवच्च कृष्णो अवस्य धारा।}

\(^{6}\) 7.185.9 - \text{धत्यत इन्द्रो नर्धारिस कथा हन्त्रो निरपारो अवस्य।}

\(^{7}\) 8.10.108

\(^{8}\) 9.583.4 - \text{वमीन्यः पृथक्की रेतमावत।}

\(^{9}\) 10.164.48
3. Urvasī and Purūravas, Yama and Yami, Śūryā and Soma and so many other myths having their historic and traditional origin denote certain facts and functions occurring in the nature both external and internal. These myths formed a category consisting of historical symbols. These myths were later interpreted in mystical terms in Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas. The social relations and occupations also played a prime role as we see in Yama-Yami. The work of a carpenter, blacksmith and a metaphor of a house of thousand pillars etc. are adequate examples of this type.

4. First sacrifice of Manu, personal sacrifice, Dakṣinā and sacrificial utensils etc. are the chief myths that helped evolve the sacrificial symbols.

5. Two birds sitting on a twig of tree, Four quarters

---

1. Rv.10.95
2. 10.10
3. 10.85
4. 10.81.4
5. 10.72.2
6. 5.62.6
7. 10.63.7
8. 10.90
9. 10.107
10. Sacrifice in the Rgveda, Potdar.
11. 10.164.20
12. 10.164.45
of the speech, Supreme as Goose, Garutmān, Suparna, Arvan, Gandharva, Veṣa, etc. identifying the essence of the individual soul and universal soul, form a group of psycho-physical myths, which originated the psychological and abstract symbols in the Rgveda.

6) Myths of Mother and Child and Vṛśabha and dhenu are noted fertility myths.

7) Botanical myths contain the myth of Soma-creeper, also its fetching out by syena. We see the questions and queries regarding the creation and it was answered in Botanical terms in later period.

8) Blackpart and white part of the day, flowing of seven rivers etc. are the chief myths pertaining to metaphysical aspect of the nature.

9) Hero and seer myths form a large number of historical symbols. About 35 myths of this type have been narrated by Raghunath Singh. The names of seers, heroes deities have

1. Rv. 9.32.3
2. 1.164.46
3. 1.164.52
4. 1.163
5. 9.85.12
6. 10.123.1
7. 9.114.4
8. 10.5.7
9. 10.81.4
10. Trist Rv. XVIII 8.9.6
11. 6.9.1
12. 2.12.12
been dealt with their mystical and philosophical viewpoint. We will see these in detail as Rgvedic symbols laying the tradition of mystical interpretation.

10) Demon myths are very common in Indo-European mythologies. We see good and evil forces always in conflict. The Rgveda presents the evil forces in names of Vrtra, Vala, Sambara, Namuci, Pipru, etc. They have been noticed as possessing the arts and crafts termed as māyā.

11) Numerical myths may not be ignored as these find a significant role in Brāhmānic and Upaniṣadic thought. Ekam is the name of Secondless principle. The two or couple has found its significance in later dualistic philosophy. Similarly three is the great number occurring in trinity of the religions. Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, fifteen, sixteen, thirty, ninetynine, hundred, thousand and millions are the auspicious and philosophical numbers responsible for numerical symbols in the Vedic Mysticism.

12) Metres have also been dealt with mythic aspects. Numerous myths contain meters. The seven vedic metres have been interpreted in later Brāhmānic literature.

10.132.5 - वहन वर्ष वृषतर व्यासातान्त्रेः व्या वहन वहन ।
संवर्धानात्तेषु कुलसूर्य विवर्कनाः वहन वहनमुक्तीमार्थिन्याः।

20.2.12.3 - येव समीपं वर्षत्र विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः।

30.2.12.11 - यवं समीपं वर्षत्र विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः।

40.2.14.5 - येव समीपं वर्षत्र विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः विवर्कनाः।

50.10.12.11 - कश्चित् त्व: पोष वाशत्र वुपुष्यान्त गायत्रे त्वो गायत्रे।

तुल्य - 10.130.4 शाक्रिर्षु।
While myths give the sense to the symbols, the symbols need no environment presented in myths. They are capable of presenting their complete dynamic character independently. They are capsuled myths in one world.

The myths that possess the sense of explanation through a fanciful story, aiming at unfoldment of the mystery of the natural phenomenon or psycho-physical functioning, do not always lose their superficial meanings besides their suggestive meanings as their motif. But in allegory they lose the behavioural sense of proper nouns and they are forced to produce a secondary sense irrespective of the original one. Allegorical sense always surpasses the limits of literal meanings. Their proper nouns plunge into etymological field, though Agveda rarely presents such examples. Yet allegorical meanings are not obscure to the commentators. We can take the popular verse 20 of Asyavāmiya Hymn. The two birds sitting on a twig of the tree has always been signified with mystical meaning as individual soul and universal soul. This meaning has been hunted by all the commentators. In the same way Indra-Vṛtra struggle has always been taken as falling of rain. Nirukta has served a great purpose in seeking the allegorical meanings of the
Ayvedic verses. Single word 'gauh' has been used in various meanings. This richness of meaning of Vedic word paved the way to symbolicitv of vedic language.

The Ayvedic Parables

The Ayvedic parables too have the same character leading to symbolic form of the Ayvedic language. Parables are the myths through animals and human beings aiming at some useful or moral teaching. We may take the gambler hymn. The gambler has been presented in allurement for wealth through gambling. Dices have been a great attraction for him causing for his ruin. Here in this parable the great beneficial farming or agriculture has been recommended. Similarly through Yama-Yami the pious relation of brother and sister has been presented and is taught that no brother should indulge in malign act of intercourse with the real sister even having been persuaded by herself. The mystic do teach such lessons through stories called parables. These parables are also capable of expounding the metaphysical notions through metaphors woven in a story though fanciful. They may adopt the mythical characters or legendary ones.

Both the Allegories and Parables do possess the symbolic nature and help evolve the symbols though not historical or mythical but psycho-physical and social ones.

1. RV. 10.34
2. RV. 10.10
Before entering the world of Rgvedic symbols we should decide our way to deal with them. It is not an easy task to enumerate and explain the Rgvedic symbols when we have more than one rather varied opinions about the meanings of the symbols proposed by Aurobindo, Dr. Agrawal, A.K. Coomarswamy, Fateh Singh and others. It is an easy way to discern some principles regarding the symbols extracted from the symbolic synonyms more than enough in the Brāhmaṇic works. Brāhmaṇas and Āranyakas are the sources unveiling the hidden treasure of the Rgvedic symbols. The Rgvedic symbols can be followed only through its Brāhmaṇas i.e. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and Kausūṭaki Brāhmaṇa and also its Āranyakas: Aitareya and Sāñkhāyana followed by the Upaniṣads: Aitareya and Kausūṭaki. With the aid of these works we will try to present the bulk of the Rgvedic symbols and their types duly dealt at length. It is the Brāhmaṇic passages that present the key to the symbolic wealth of the Rgveda. These expressions are called symbolic synonyms or parallels.

Syntactical forms of such symbolic expression are mainly of three types:

(a) Connected with va and vai

1. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 6.29
2. Ibid, 2.40
Such expressions lead to the symbolic evolution of language. As in the lexicon they form synonym. But in real sense no word is synonym in the language as each and every word denotes some specific quality and aspect of the objective meaning.

After the deep study of the Brāhmanic expressions leading to the evolve the symbolic meaning of the term, a researcher finds some rules responsible for such symbolic synonyms.

8) **Laws determining the Rgvedic symbolicity**

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa presenting the wealth of the Rgvedic symbols, is quite obvious in giving clue to the rules responsible for evolution of symbolic meanings of the used Rgvedic diction. These rules are as follows:

1. **Assimilation of cause and effect**
   (जन्य-जनक-भाव अथवा कार्यकारण-वेद)

   Prajāpati generated the sacrifice hence the expression

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 2.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ibid, 4.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ibid, 3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is the result of brevity leading to evolve
the identification of Prajāpati and Yajña.

2. Relation of adjective and noun  

Though Indra is associated with Soma sacrifice in
particular. But the expression इन्द्रो यज्ञस्य देवता  
leads Indra to be the deity of sacrifice in general. The
qualified role of Indra has been detached and a universal
nature of Indra has evolved.

3. Identification of end and means  

In Aitareya Brähmana we witness the expression
श्रोत्रेय स्त्रि प्रातिः  as Brähman is heard with ears i.e.
ear is a means for hearing of laudation. But it led to the
brief expression that identifies both the things as under:

4. Relation of base and based  

In the expression प्रतिलोक्ता वा एकाह: one can find
ekāha to be the last one in dealing of the sacrifices. All
the sacrifices end with description of ekāha. Hence प्रतिलोक्ता
and एकाह are identified and in explaining the ekāhain
symbolic sense, one can not but call it as pratiṣṭhā.

1. Aitareya Brähmana, 2.17
2. Ibid, 5.34
3. Ibid
4. Ibid, 2.40
5. Ibid, 6.8
5. **Relation of similar action** (तात्कर्म्य-सम्बन्धः)

In Aitareya Brāhmaṇa we witness an expression as 

In the Rgvedic mythology तवस्तर is the celestial artisan who makes cars and weapons for gods. The craft or creative aspect of ṛvastar may well be seen in speech too. The similarity of action made both identified with each other.

6. **Relation of interconnection** (स्पर्श-सम्बन्धः)

There are two expressions in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa as द्विपादे पुस्म and गतायुः पुस्म: The man is biped and is of complete age of 100 years. Though some other creature may possess two feet yet the age of hundred years is related with the man only. Hence dvipāt too is indication of man expressed symbolically.

7. **Relation of similar qualities and attributes** (समान-गुण-धर्म-सम्बन्धः)

Two things possessing the same qualities and attributes are generally identified. There is an expression विष्णुः यज्ञः. The nature of Viṣṇu and Yajña is the same to be all-embracing. Hence both are identified. In a Brāhmaṇa there is a myth of Viṣṇu’s head cut by worms. Similarly the sacrifice is considered headless if it does not possess

---

1. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 2.4
2. Ibid, 5.17
3. Ibid, 2.17
4. Ibid, 1.15
pravargya. As pravargya is the head of sacrifice. Both the myths identify Viṣṇu and sacrifice being of same nature.

8) **Relation of Analogy**

Analogy is the main role of identification. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa presents an expression as Ṣaṁjña = Ṣaṁkṣeyya: 1 This sacrifice of prāvargya is performed in the beginning of Soma-sacrifice. Similarly Prāṇas are the inspirer of all actions in life. The various movements are the result of Prāṇa. Hence Prāṇas are identified with prātāniya-isti.

The spiritual meanings have been presented in garb of such expressions leading to symbolicity of the terms. These symbolic synonyms are mainly from the Rāṣṭric language. Most of the rules which are discerned above, may become under “upācāra”. 3 Not only the words but letters like pra and ka etc. and also pronouns as Ṣau and Esa too have become the symbols of subtle principles like Prāṇa, Sūrya and Prajāpāti.

The treasure of Rāṣṭric symbols is unlocked with the key presented not only by the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and its Upaniṣads but other Brāhmaṇic and Upaniṣadic passages too. But to have a exhaustive idea of the Rāṣṭric symbols mainly we have to depend on the Rāṣṭric Brāhmaṇas, rarely on other works.

1. Tāndya Brāhmaṇa, 7.5.6 - तांद्य भ्रमण न बान्धवस्य विष्णोऽस्मि। धनुरार्तीः परित्वर्त शिरोभिर्भिः स्वर्गीयोऽक्रमद। - ता 7.5.6
2. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 1.7
3. Kāvya Prakāśa, Acharya Vishveshvar, p.59,