Chapter I

Introduction

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

RELEVANCE OF THE SUBJECT

Since the topic of my research is intimately related to religion, and since the importance of religion is at stake in our society it is natural to any critical minded man to question its relevance in the modern context of man’s life on this globe. The idea of ‘Yajña’ as is popularly understood has come to be regarded as a relic of the past, a ridiculously absurd aspect of ritualistic Hindu religion. But the fact that every religion has had to witness its practical aspect degenerating into mere rites and rituals in the hands of the laity, itself gives sufficient reason to cherish a hope that there will be some significant principle underlying its ritualistic aspect. Moreover the most philosophical poems of Rgveda are found to have ritualistic setting and they are intimately associated with ritualistic details.

1C, Kunhan Raja, Some Fundamental Problems in Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1961), p.137. "The investigations about the absolute have no meaning without the background of the ritualistic religion, except as an attempt at an interpretation of the full significance of the rituals, and the significance of the rituals cannot be realised unless one goes behind the forms and behind the details and try to find out the ultimate basis of such practices".

2 Ibid
No genuine social thinker enforces a code of conduct for its own sake, unless it serves some social purpose. Again, it is also a fact that it is these rituals that make religion concrete and meaningful to the common man. It is through these rituals that the ideal is tied down to the actual or the ideal is made concrete in terms of sense objects, and applied to the daily life of the society. It is plain, that in ancient society the rituals served as a connecting link between people's ambitions and actions and their ideals, set forth to be realized in their social as well as individual life. So unless one makes a close and careful study of the ritualistic aspect of a religion, one cannot do justice to the religion and the people who formulated, practised and popularised it. Moreover, it is in formulating and popularising the rituals that the people concerned have displayed their profound knowledge and practical sense of the various levels of human nature, its motives and movements, its formation and information. So those who want to make revolutionary changes in society or to reform and to reconstruct it require a thorough knowledge of the primary and fundamental forces employed by religion to bind its people and those who want to preserve or protect the present or maintain the 'status quo' also require a thorough grasp of these socialized forces of human nature. In short, both
for the conservatives and for the revolutionaries a deep knowledge of the basic forces which, in the course of evolution, gave birth to the present corrupted religious society, is essential. Eye brows may be raised against this sort of research, doubts may be entertained as to the worth and value of such studies when people are dying of malnutrition and starvation; when they are victims of war and oppression; when they suffer injustices of all sorts. The urgency of these issues cannot be minimized; intellectual activity becomes barren and alienating when it divorces itself from life. At the same time we should not forget the fact that mere short term solutions and technical stop gaps will not do. We need the strength of contemplation and the benefit of the perspective offered by detachment (anāsakti), to provide us with an insight into the deeper strata of reality that might permit us to get to the root of the problems. Roots are essential to sustain and give life to the tree. Such studies as this may not be on the level of practical or technical solutions. They are not about what is happening, but are part and parcel of the total human event itself.

It is a painful fact that those who claim to have something to do with social reform or revolution (of course with the exception of the first-rate among them) seldom give
attention to the underlying causes and forces that lead to malformation and corruption. Not only for social reform but also for a genuine appreciation of social values, a deep knowledge of the basic forces of human nature that favoured a ritualistic pattern of social life, is necessary. For example, for a genuine appreciation and judgement and for developing competency for improvement of the various items of a dish served in a feast, a knowledge of the materials and the chemistry of cooking is essential. But as a matter of fact, it is not necessary that one should become an expert in cooking and a master of bio-chemistry and food-technology before eating and enjoying a feast. But when one attempts to effect some reform or modification of some pattern for food combination a knowledge of the basic laws of food combination and processing becomes essential. This is exactly the case with many of our social reformers of today. Scholars and social thinkers both Eastern and Western have high praise for the philosophy of the Upanisads, which is believed to be the product of Vedic culture, and
contempt \textsuperscript{3} for the same culture as seen through the ritualistic Brāhmaṇism.

Is the Vedic culture as seen through the ritualistic Brāhmaṇism authentic? If it is authentic do we have conclusive evidence to believe that it can take into its fold the entire scheme of rituals as part and parcel of its social content. Are we authorised to believe that it is this culture that produced the highly delicious and strangely sweet food of the mind called the philosophy of the Upaniṣads? How can unsuitable stuff and bad cooking produce a wholesome meal? The meal is good, delicious, highly nutritious, mysteriously enchanting, supremely satisfying and universally serviceable. Then the question is, can this be a genuine produce of ritualistic Brāhmaṇism or is ritualistic Brāhmaṇism a misrepresentation of the 'real Vedic culture'? The question is really


"Ram Mohan Roy when he visited the British Museum and found the late Dr. Roson engaged in preparing an edition of the hymns of the Veda, expressed his surprise at so useless an undertaking. But the same philosopher looked upon the Upaniṣads as worthy to become the foundation of a new religion".

Also Mahābhārata 1.258: "This body of the Mahābhārata (index) is truth and immortality, it is like new butter from curds, like the Brāhmin among men, like the Ṛṣyaṇa from the Vedas, like nectar from medicinal plants, like the sea, the best among lakes, like the cow the highest among animals."

Satapatha Brāhmaṇa 10.3.5.12. "Thus the Upaniṣad is called the essence of the Veda, tasya va etasya yajugo rasa evopaniṣad".
a difficult one, because of the mysterious and obscure nature of the supposed source of information, and confusing and contradictory views of half-digested and ill-equipped scholarship, regarding the source. And yet the question is relevant and worth striving for solution. There is an element of adventurous spirit in it, it is an adventure into the heights and depths of the human mind, an excavation and an exploration into the unknown regions of organic (psychosocial) evolution. There is no question here presenting any human age of the past as a model for the present, nor of extolling the past to the detriment of the present. The importance lies in our observing how past ages have managed to deal with the human condition in different situations and to what extent a certain degree of specialization has enhanced or harmed human harmony and wholeness.

4 Max Muller, History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, p.3.
"... it was extremely difficult for European Scholars to form a right opinion on the real merits of Indian Literature. The literary specimens received from India were generally fragments only of larger works, or, if not, they had been chosen so indiscriminately from different and widely distant periods, that it was impossible to derive from them an adequate knowledge of the rise and fall of the national literature of India."
Here the possibility and feasibility of a reduction and absurdum method cannot be ruled out. But before attempting an answer one has to go to the sources of Hindu Society which are supposed to be formed on the basis of the instructions and injunctions of the authors of the smritis. And these smritis are supposed to be framed and formulated upon the authority of the sruti i.e., the Vedas. And the importance of the Veda in various fields of human endeavour is shown by the famous indologist Max Miller.

Everyone acquainted with Indian Literature must have observed how impossible it is to open any book on Indian Subjects without being thrown back upon an earlier authority, which is generally acknowledged by the Indians as the basis of all their knowledge, whether sacred or profane. This earlier authority, which we find alluded to in theological and philosophical works, as well as in poetry, in codes of law, in astronomical, metrical and lexicographic compositions, is called by one comprehensive name, the Veda.¹⁵

Again, he says "the World of the Veda is a world by itself, and its relation to all the other Sanskrit Literature is such, that the Veda ought not to receive but ought to throw light over the whole historical development of the Indian mind."⁶

¹⁵ Max Miller, Introduction to History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, p. 9.

⁶ Ibid., p. 32
The importance of the Veda is further emphasised by him in the next paragraph of the same page.

The Veda has a two-fold interest: it belongs to the history of the world, and to the history of India. In the history of the world the Veda fills a gap which no literary work in other language could fill. It carries us back to times of which we have no records anywhere, and gives us the very words of a generation of men of whom, otherwise we could form but the vaguest estimate by means of conjectures and inferences. As long as man continues to take an interest in the history of his race, and as long as we collect in libraries and museums the relics of former ages, the first place in that long row of books which contains the records of the Aryan branch of mankind, will belong for ever to the Rgveda.

Since an important aspect of traditional Hindu Society is woven round rites and rituals, the pivot of which is the concept of "Yajña", it is natural and necessary that a genuine inquirer and investigator into the sources of philosophy and culture of the Indian people should set out with his exploration into the field of "Yajña" and its hold on the minds of the makers of the Vedic culture. Hence my attempt is not to enumerate or elaborate upon the popular view of Yajña, but to search for its foundation (source) and to understand the aim or purpose it was expected to serve and its implications in the social life of man and to see whether it has any significant contribution to make for converting modern civilized societies into enlightened ones.

Before the question can be answered, it will be necessary to find out exactly what the concept of Yajña actually embodies. Sanskritists, historians, philosophers, religionists — all who are interested in India's past and the cultural history of this part of the world, its forms and formations will have their separate line of approach.
VEDA AND THE CONCEPT OF YAJÑA

The word Veda is from the root 'vid' which means to know. Veda means knowledge, 'the knowledge par excellence'. According to यज्ञवल्क्य, it enlightens one on the knowledge of supra sensible matters which lie beyond the domain of perception and inference, hence it is called the 'Veda'.

Manu calls the Veda 'the repository or fountain-head of all religions and duties'. The term 'Veda' comprises both the Mantra and the Brāhmaṇa. 'Veda' is the name given to Mantra and Brāhmaṇa jointly. In the introduction to the commentary on the Rgveda, Śāvanācārya also endorses this view. He says, 'the name Veda is given to the vast body of literature made up of Mantra and Brāhmaṇa jointly'. In his commentary on पुर्यविनेश सूत्र, 'Sabarasvāmin is of the opinion that 'Mantra and Brāhmaṇa constitute the Veda'. Śāvana enters

8 Pāṇini, Aṣṭādhyāyī, ed. & tr. Śri Śā Chandra Vasu (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1977), Dhātu Patha, 1064.
9 vid ज्ञाने
   प्रत्ययांनामित्यावा येषौ वै यास्तथा ना विद्यते: [Prāṇika
   'Veda/khila/dharmamūlam' [Note: The translation and context are not provided in the given excerpt.]
   'Mantra-brāhmaṇayorvedanānadhavam' [Note: The translation and context are not provided in the given excerpt.]
12 'Mantra-brāhmaṇātmaka-sabdarāśirvedah'
13 'Sabarasvāmin, पुर्यविनेश सूत्र bhāṣya (Varanasi: Chowkambas Sanskrit Series, 1910), Sūtra 1,2,33.'
into a discussion before stating the definition of the word Veda. In his introduction to the "Veda bhāgya" Sayapa seems to agree with the view that the Veda is the sum of mantras and Brāhmaṇas.

If it is argued that the Veda is a collection of sayings made up of Mantras and Brāhmaṇas that will not do; for it has never been definitely decided what a Mantra is and what a Brāhmaṇa is. Thus it is seen that there is no adequate definition of the Veda. As far as the purpose of this thesis is concerned it is not of much use for us to enter into a discussion of the propriety of these definitions.

Our purpose being an investigation into the nature of Yajña and its relevance we have to rely on the Vedic literature as a whole since it is the most ancient extant authority regarding the concept and its significance. The Rgveda presupposes nothing of that which we know in Indian literature while, on the other hand, the whole of Indian literature and the whole of Indian life presupposes the Veda.

However, what is now called Veda or Vedic literature consists of three different classes of literary works, they are as follows:
I. **Saṁhitas** i.e., "Collections" viz. collections of hymns, prayers, incantations, benedictions, sacrificial formulas and litanies.

II. **Brāhmaṇas** Voluminous prose texts which contain theological matter especially observations on sacrifices and the practical or mystical significance of the separate sacrificial rites and ceremonies. **Brāhmaṇas** are the source books of ritual literature. By **Brāhmaṇa** we have always to understand that part of the Veda which contains speculations on the meaning of the Mantras; gives precepts for their application, relates stories of their origin in connection with the sacrificial rites, and explains the secret meaning of the latter.

III. **Arāṇyakas** (forest texts) and **Upaniṣads** (secret doctrines) which are partly included in the **Brāhmaṇas** themselves or attached to them, but partly are also reckoned as independent works. They contain the meditations of forest hermits and ascetics on God, the world and mankind and there is contained in them a good deal of the oldest Indian Philosophy.

This classification of the Vedic literature gives scope for the assumption that great significant changes took place in the religious life of the people during the later Vedic period. During this age we discover three distinct
# Vedic Literature Consulted

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currents of religious thoughts - the ritualistic, the philosophic and the ascetic.

Rituals and Sacrifices

It is this ritualistic current we are most concerned with. During this period there was the elaboration of the rites and ceremonies concerning the old Vedic religion. In the early Vedic period the ways of worship and the performance of yajña were a simple affair which every householder could do, even on the occasion of public sacrifices. A tribal chief himself used to act as the high priest. In the later age, however, sacrifices became the all-important thing in worship. The sacrifice dominated everything. Gods were subordinate to them. People believed that the Gods would submit to the sacrifice if properly performed. Hymns were considered as charms or spells to be used in sacrifices. They were no longer the outburst of a poetic wonder at some power of nature. Popular superstitious beliefs in spirits, spells, charms, incantations and witchcrafts crept into the sacred canon. The ceremonial side became more elaborate, complicated and expensive. The minutest details of the rituals were worked out and countless varieties of rituals were planned out each to ensure some success or other. A regular science of sacrifice had now evolved. The belief
that gods were propitiated by Yajñas led to an increase in
the number, variety and splendour of sacrifices which were
prescribed for every householder. There were daily and
periodical sacrifices. There are references to sacrifices
lasting for several years and requiring the services of as
many as seventeen priests, each with a definite business at
different stages. In fact the life of an Āryan was a series
of sacrifices performed under the supervision of the Brāhmaṇa
priests. This firmly established the supremacy of the
Brāhmaṇas.

The concept of Yajña

The word Yajña is common in Vedic literature. In
the Rgveda the word Yajña occurs about 50 times 14. Several
compound words of Yajña are also seen. For example, Yajña
Kamah 15, Yajñachīraḥ 16, Yajñā 17, Yajñabandhuh 18, Yajñavartah 19.

14 RV 1.12.7; 1.107.1; 1.159.1. etc.
15 RV 10.51.5
16 8.87.3
17 1.15.12
18 4.1.9
19 3.27.6
Yajñaketu, Yajñahkṣṭah, Yajñanyam. Yajñanyam is used about 186 times. Yajñavahasah, Yajñavyddham, Yajñasaham, Yajñahotsa, Yajña Sadhanah, Yajñiyah, Taittirīya

Āragyaka says:

By Yajña devas have gone to heaven, by Yajña even enemies become friends. All things are established in Yajña; therefore Yajña is supreme.

20 4.51.11
21 10.66.8
22 10.107.6
23 1.86.2
24 6.21.2
25 10.27.4
26 8.9.17
27 1.45.3
28 1.142.3
29 TA 10.63

Yajñena hi devah divam gatah
Yajñena asuran aparandatā Yajñena
dvisaktah mitrabhayanti Yajñaih sarvam pratis-thitam tasmañ Yajñam paramam vadyanti

Also Ts 6.3.5. Yajñena vai devah svargam lokamāvan. By Yajña devas reached heaven.
There is a prayer in Atharva Veda to strengthen the sacrifice.

Let the streams flow together, let the winds and birds assembled come
Strengthen this sacrifice of mine, ye singers I offer up a duly mixt oblation
0 burnt oblations, aid, and ye, burnt offerings this sacrifice
Strengthen this sacrifice of mine, ye singers,
I offer up a duly mixt oblation
Each several form, each several force I seize, and compass round this man
May the four quarters strengthen this my sacrifice
I offer up a duly mixt oblation\textsuperscript{30}.

In the \textit{ASYavamasya Sukta} the Rsi goes to the extent of saying that \textit{Yajna} is the centre (nabhih) of the universe\textsuperscript{31}. It helps in the functioning of cosmic principle. This cosmic principle is called \textit{Rtam}, the principle underlying the creation which is equivalent to truth and moral order. "The sacrifice is the source of \textit{Rtam}\textsuperscript{32}" Rgveda presents the questions and answers them.

\begin{verbatim}
Prichchani tvä paramartam prthivyah
Prichchani yatra bhuvanasya nabhih
Prichchami tvä avasya ketah
Prichchami vácah paramam vyoma
Iyam Vedih paro antah prthivyah
ayah yajño bhuvanasya nabhih
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{30} AV 19.1
\textsuperscript{31} Also TB 3.9.5.5 Yajño Mai bhuvanasya nabhih
\textsuperscript{32} SB 1.3.4.16 Yajño va prtaśya yonih
ayam Soma Vrsno asvasya reto
brahmāyam viśah paramam vyoma
I ask thee of earths' extremest limit, where
is the centre of the World, I ask thee
I ask thee of the stallions seed prolific,
I ask of highest heaven where speech abideth
This altar is the earth's extremest limit, this
Sacrifice of ours is the World's centre
The Stallion's seed prolific is the Soma, this
Brahman highest heaven where speech abideth.\[33.\]

Similarly examples can be multiplied. All these show
the importance of the concept of Yajña in Vedic literature.

Here the reference to sacrifice as the 'Navel of the
earth' is very significant in many ways. For instance the
building of monuments in the ancient world was first and
foremost a rite whereby man sought to identify himself with
the source of cosmic order by placing himself at the centre
of the universe', otherwise known as the Navel of the earth
where the universe was born'. Since every spot where man
was in contact with the divine shared this mythic location
every shrine stood at the centre of the universe. To the
rationalist thinking of the evolutionists, restricting them-
elves to principles of empirical science, the very notion
that every sanctuary should be conceived as the centre of
the world seemed absurd. Hence the notion of every sanctuary
existing at the centre of the universe was seen as another
instance of the 'childishness' of early religions, now it is

33 RV 1.164.34 and 35
increasingly felt that in the ancient world the shrine or the Vedi was a point of passage between the human and the divine worlds.

**The Origin of the Sacrifice**

Sacrifice features in all the ancient cultures. The Babylonian and Graeco-Roman cultures have their own way of sacrifices.  

It is difficult to seek the origin of sacrifices as it is coeval with life and all activities concerned with it. It is a problem by itself. Several theories have been put forward to solve this problem. It is said that the sacrifice was performed to reconcile a deity to avoid its anger or to propitiate it or to have communion with it, sometimes it is represented as a thanksgiving ceremony.

**Natural inclination of the Vedic Aryans to perform sacrifice**

The Aryans of the Vedic Age might have been guided by geographical and historical conditions of their lives to perform sacrifices and offer oblations to the gods.

34 Albright and Dumont, 'A parallel between Indic and Babylonian Sacrificial Ritual' (JAOS, 54, 1934), pp.107 ff; Kurte, *Viscissitudes of Aryan Civilization* Ch. 2.

Agriculture was their main occupation, they had to depend on the co-operation of the natural phenomena for a bumper crop. They were afraid of the unforeseen natural calamities and freaks of nature that hampered cultivation and damaged the harvest. The Vedic Aryans sincerely believed that all natural phenomena, the storm, the cloud, the rain, thunder and lightening, the sun and the wind, etc. . . . were the visible manifestations of different gods. This deification of natural phenomena formed the nucleus of the Vedic religion in general and the sacrifice in particular. For the sake of favourable weather and successful cultivation the people tried their best to appease the gods through the performance of sacrifice. The deities were invoked, and praised in the sacrifice; oblations made of different ingredients were offered in the sacrificial fire which was regarded as the ‘mouth of gods’, whatever is offered in the fire reaches the gods that are invoked and propitiated.

But in course of time, in accordance with the law of evolution and growth of human mind the simple acts of sacrifice and nature worship developed into a highly complicated and comprehensive system of spiritual endeavour incorporating newly discovered phases and dimensions of life of the Aryan people. Thus, in the Brāhmaṇa they did not hesitate to include all righteous acts in the benign fold of Yajña. Yajñō vai sreṣṭhatamam Karmā. Yajña is supreme action.
Prajapati is said to have 'seen' the sacrifices and passed them on to Devas. The sacrifice has come down in the family tradition, sahoradaya, the father handing over the sacrificial lore to his son.

The purpose of sacrifice in general, gathered from the Brahmans could be stated as follows: living demands for welfare the distribution of wealth and possession. Living should never be observed to gratify ones' own self or senses. Therefore, sacrifice shall be performed so that the 'balance' is maintained in every walk of life, visible and invisible.

The sacrifice leads to an understanding of things in their proper perspective. It provides a grounding for the contemplation of the inter-relation of the things in the universe resulting in the attainment of Bliss (Svarga). Growth or Progress (Brahma) which is inwardly expressed in the attainment of Bliss and outwardly in the increase of offsprings, cattle and wealth, is spoken of as resulting from the performance of Yajna. It has an ethical purpose too. Performance of a sacrifice or sanihotra helps a wise person to get rid of his evil acts.

36 TB 2.2.2.1-4 and TB 1.3.2.5
37 SB 1.5.7.4
38 TB 2.1.8.3
39 SB 2.3.1.6
A perusal of the Brāhmanas show that Yajña is a fundamental concept in the Universe and that it is not confined to mere rituals. There is reason to believe that what we get as poetry and rituals in the Samhitā and the Brahmanas are records relating to a far later stage in the development of Indian Civilization, with a long antecedent period of progress and achievements.

As a first step in our analysis of the concept, let us probe a little into the meaning of the word Yajña. Yajña is formed from the root 'Yaj' which means worship or offering an oblation to a deity and paying one's respect to him. But Vedic literature gives innumerable examples to show that the concept of Yajña has outgrown this root meaning of the word. To cite a few, in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa Yajña is called adhvara i.e., an act not involving any harm or injury to any being (i) adhvaro vai Yajñah, (ii) Hailing, Saluting or speaking respectfully to a worthy person is called a Yajña, (iii) Fortune, (iv) Virtue or power and glory or greatness.
is Yaśa,\(^{44}\) (v) A wise or great and learned man is also called Yaśa,\(^{45}\) (vi) Wealth or means of happiness,\(^{46}\) (vii) the sun or celestial regions, Yaśa vai svah\(^{47}\), (viii) the Vedas\(^{48}\) (ix) the portion of the sacrifices\(^{49}\), (x) the sacrificer himself, Yaśamano vai Yaśa\(^{50}\), (xi) the soul, ātma vai Yaśa\(^{51}\), (xii) a man, puruso vai Yaśa\(^{52}\), (xiii) animals, pāṇḍava Yaśa\(^{53}\), (xiv) the universe, Yaśa vai Bhuvanam\(^{54}\), (xv) the waters, āpo vai Yaśa\(^{55}\), (xvi) semen virile, reto vā atra Yaśa\(^{56}\), (xvii) an offering\(^{57}\).

44 SB 6.3.1.18
45 SB 3.5.3.12 Yaśamano means deserving of respect
46 SB 1.7.1.6 Yaśa vai Vasu
47 SB 1.1.2.21
48 SB 1.1.4.3
49 AB 7.2.6
50 AB 1.2.5
51 SB 6.2.1.7
52 SB 1.3.2.1 TB 3.5.2. \(3^{\frac{3}{4}}\) GB 2.5.4
53 SB 3.2.3.11
54 TB 3.3.7.5
55 AB 2.2.1 SB 3.8.5.1
56 SB 7.3.2.6
57 SB 3.1.4.1
(xviii) Vismu, Visnur Yajña \(^{58}\), (xix) Prajapati \(^{59}\), (xx) the sacrifice is the greatest of all actions \(^{60}\), etc. are all called Yajña in the Brāhmaṇa literature. This word is so important that it denotes God as well. So one who is familiar with the methods of Vedic exegesis cannot confine this word to denote some religious sacrifices exclusively.

The Yajurveda says that "life prospers through Yajña" (the spirit of sacrifices). Yajña Yajñena Kalpatām, may Yajña prosper through Yajña \(^{61}\).

In Chandogyopanisad Yajña is said to be an essential element of Dharma \(^{62}\). Again Yajña is said to be the name of the all-purifying air \(^{63}\). In the Brhadaranyopanisad in the Sampratti rite the father is directed to call his son Yajña \(^{64}\). In Taîttrirṣya Upanisad a highly advanced intellect is said to be necessary to perform Yajña, 'understanding performs the

58 GB 2.1.12 TB 3.3.6.1
59 SB 11.6.3.16
60 SB 1.7.1.5 TB 3.2.1.4
61 VS 9.21
62 CU 1.23.2 trāyo dharmaskandha yajña āhyāvaham dānamiti pradhānaṁ
63 CU 4.26.2
64 BU 2.5.27
sacrifice. Bhadārakāyakopanisad says that Yajña is essential for the Brāhmaṇa to know the great Atman.

In the Atharva Veda Yajña is referred to as one of the six principles of Dharma that uphold the earth. "Truth, eternal order that is great and stern, consecration, austerity, prayer, and Yajña—these uphold the earth." In the opinion of Dasgupta it is in the Yajña that we see the first recognition of cosmic order, of law prevailing in Nature.

The evolution of the meaning and importance of Yajña is visible in post Vedic period too. The Bhagavad gītā says "Even this world is not for the man without Yajña, what to speak of any other." It extends the application of the meaning of the word Yajña to various departments of private and public life. Several types of Yajña viz. Yogayajña, Yajña of voga, Svadhivāya Yajña, Yajña of study, jñānāya yajña, Yajña

65  TU 2.5.1
66  BU 4.4.22 ‘Brahmanas seek to know him by the study of the Veda, by sacrifice, by gifts by penance, by fasting ...’
67  AV 13.1.1.1 Satyam Brhad xtam wuram dikṣā taco brahma yajñah prthivim dhārayanti.
68  Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy Vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p.27
69  BG 4.31 also BG 4.24
of knowledge, tapavāna, vajña of tapas, and dravya vajña. vajña of matter or wealth \(^{70}\) etc. have been detailed.

1. In one verse the technique of Praṇayāma is also considered as a Vaiṣṇava \(^{71}\).

2. In another verse, in answer to Arjuna's questions Kṛṣṇa says "the basis of all sacrifices, here in the body is myself" \(^{72}\).

3. It is proclaimed that 'Vaiṣṇavat bhavati parijanvo', the cloud is formed from vajña \(^{73}\).

4. It is also of opinion that the supreme being Brahmā, which comprehends all, ever centres round the sacrifice \(^{74}\).

In the sense of rituals it signifies the system of sacrifices from the simple domestic vajña (Agnihotra) to Śvamedha and Rājaśīva having political and imperial implications.

\(^{70}\) BG 4.24-33

\(^{71}\) Ibid 4.29 In all these Vaiṣṇavas described the metaphor is taken from the most familiar ritual known at that time to Arjuna.

\(^{72}\) BG 9.4

\(^{73}\) BG 3.14

\(^{74}\) BG 14.15
In course of time Yajña became a great public institution developing complicated rituals that required a class of specialists or priests for their performance. The design, structure and functions of these rituals called for a definite branch of literature. It is called the Brāhmaṇas.

The classification of the Vedas into knowledge part and action part is a later development. Yajña taken as rituals is a means to the attainment of the Highest Reality. The purpose is to purify the man. The Čātra echoes it: "Yajño dānam tapascaiva pūvanāni māṁśaṁnaṁ rituals, charity and tanaś are the purifiers of the wise."  

The Mundakopanisad considers Yajña as inferior type of worship. "They are frail rafts in the form of Yajñas; in them, with the eighteen members, the work is of an inferior type." We find similar expressions in the Veda. "No one by work attains Him who works and strengthens ever more; No, not by yajnas (can one attain) Indra, praised of all, resistless, valiant, bold in might."  

**Expansion of the concept of Yajña**

As we have seen earlier, Yajña developed in itself two

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75 BG 18.5
76 MU 1.27
77 RV 8.70.3
meanings (i) the course of worship\textsuperscript{78} and (ii) the Lord who is worshipped\textsuperscript{78}.

"Yajño vai visma" Yajña is verily visma\textsuperscript{79}
"Yajñena yajñam avajanta Devah"
The gods worshipped yajña with yajña\textsuperscript{80}.

It is clear that the term includes all forms of religious activity which can be consistently explained as worship. Neither in this word nor in any other word synonymous with it is seen any idea of slaughter or injury. A reference in the Satapatha Brahmana clearly shows that sacrifice of animals during the yajñas are a later development; only vegetation is considered suitable for the performance of yajñas\textsuperscript{81}. The text says that agni is sacrifice. Human beings could not have performed yajnas in the absence of the vegetation, therefore, only vegetation is suitable for the performance of a sacrifice. Again, according to yaska, the word Adhvara is a synonym for sacrifice; the verb dhvr means to kill; a-adhvara denotes the negation of killing\textsuperscript{82}. While in the Rigveda the object of

\textsuperscript{78} In its post-Vedic development yajña is viewed under a more personalistic perspective. The proper name for this is perhaps rūja, worship, rather than yajña, sacrifice.

\textsuperscript{79} Taittiriya Samhitā 6.6.7

\textsuperscript{80} RV 10.90.16

\textsuperscript{81} SB 3.3.2.9

\textsuperscript{82} Nirukta 1.8
devotion was the gods, in the Yajur Veda sacrifice itself has become the centre of thought and desire. Speaking of the Yajur Veda Macdonell says that a shift of emphasis regarding the plan and purpose of sacrifice is clear. Referring to the artificial nature of the later development of the rituals Macdonell is of the opinion that the religion of the Yajurveda may be described as a kind of mechanical sacerdotalism. And, tracing the bondage of India he arrives at the conclusion that hand in hand with the elaboration of the sacrificial and ceremonial went the growth and consolidation of the caste system, in which the Brāhmaṇas secured the social as well as the religious supremacy, which has held India enchained for more than two thousand five hundred years.

This is one picture of the sacrificial aspect of the Vedic people resulting from an undesirable and disproportionate growth of their Karmakanda.

There is another aspect of the rituals which most of the European scholars have not given much attention to; that is its philosophical aspect. It is in the structure and design of these sacrifices that the Rsis have displayed their knowledge and understanding of the world-process and human nature;

83 SB 3.2.2.9 History of Sanskrit literature, p.153
84 Ibid
the action-bound man, the ambitious and selfish man, the social unit and, the political element in him. Such a man cannot be liberated all of a sudden; no amount of philosophy would suffice to untie the knots of attachment and aversion to objects of senses. He should be gradually taken to a higher plane of spiritual life. So the technique is, first induce him to Karma well designed to suit his taste and level of consciousness with a view to give him an insight into the nature of Reality, attraction of which will persuade him to have detachment from its manifestations. Later the philosophical aspect of *yajña* developed on these lines. It may be in this sense that the *Gītā* distinguishes the spirit of *yajña* from its forms. If the spirit is accepted then the material part of *yajña*, related to the fire, fuel and oblation, may be taken not only literally but also symbolically and figuratively. As mentioned earlier there is *yajña* of *tapas* (spiritual discipline) in which the fire of restraint is lighted and the senses or (sensual pleasures) are the offering; there is the *yajña* of *yoga* in which the vital functions are the offering into the fire of self-control; and there is the *yajña* of sacred studies, *Brahmavajña*; and the *yajña* of *jnana*, knowledge in which *Brahman* – the supreme reality – is fire, fuel and oblation as well as the sacrifices, for men of spiritual discipline and self-dedication. In this way *yajña* is accepted as the central thing in the discipline for higher life.

*To prepare the mind of man for its return journey to its source was the most important problem for the Rsis.* The mind in its...
usual 'dogmatic slumber' blindly enjoys physical reality, and hence is cut off from the divine, becomes bewildered and falls into sorrow. It can be roused to higher levels of awareness by sufficient and convincing images that recommend the experience of saving knowledge within the fully accepted empirical world. Such images are profusely employed by the great poets and thinkers of the world. Such images produced and structured in a particular pattern constitute what can be called a metaphorical language. It has two levels of reference, the image (vehicle) and its application to another meaning (its tenor).

In literature images have tremendous power because they speak of one in the terms of an apparently different and unrelated other. The basic mechanism of symbolism rests on this ability which brings two together, vehicle and tenor, image and meaning. Clearly, such literature cannot be read without interpretation directed at discovering the tenor of its images. Every image vehicle provides a structure upon which to found a meaning, its tenor. Once it is conceded that imagination is the instrument with which the poet explores the patterns of reality, and that the images in his poetry are highlights by which he reveals to us these patterns, then the questions of subject-matter and of theme become relevant to the discussion of the image.

Through images, speculative imagination gives form to the unknown, shaping awareness of the deeper meanings of any reality. An enigma is just such an image applied to various tenors pertaining to the unknown it attempts to reveal. The image presents this unknown,
abstract tenor in terms of a known concrete vehicle that is easily identified and visualized.

The enigmatizing images of Vedic speculation functioned in just this way to awaken consciousness to the noumenal implications of experienced phenomenal forms. Vedic speculation began in part with the serious contemplation of aesthetic shock-producing images that enigmatized ultimate reality, with the institution of the Vedic Yajña. Yajña is an Indian pattern of World Interpretation. Just as the image of the sun enigmatized cosmic order, the wheel image enigmatized the order of the world in which man lived. It responded to questions involving the nature of the invisible order as it pertained to daily life. The wheel image revealed the way things are in creation.

The root metaphors that shape whole world views (or world hypotheses) generally are very few, in any group, tribe or civilization. Sanskrit literature repeatedly compares phenomenal life (Samaāra) to the wheel, or an ocean, or a lotus; its order follows that of the cosmic tree and creation is conceived after the model of a sacrificial dismembering of the primeval person. This procedure is described by as the "traditional analogical method of generating world theories".

Popper says:

The method in principle seems to be this. A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common sense fact and tries if he cannot understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes then his basic
analogy or root metaphor. He describes as best he can the characteristics of this area or if you will, discriminates its structure. A list of its structural characteristics becomes his basic concepts of explanation and description.

The concept of yajña thus served the Vedic poets as a basic analogy or root metaphor born of archetypal images in their endeavour to express and explain their experience of Reality that constitute their visionary consciousness. As opposed to language tied to its referent by the single, explicit string of concrete denotation, enigmatic language implies levels of meaning, being allied with its referent through the techniques of allusion and suggestion. Contemplating the images of such language, Rṣedic enigmatographer visionary poets apprehended the mysterious depths of reality, the "face" of the divine, the light (jyoti) etc.

The concept of Yajña piles image upon image, applied to various tenors pertaining to the unknown it attempts to reveal. The reality expressed by the entire assemblage of images is a whole greater than the sum of its parts. To penetrate these images tumbling out of the poet's motherly imagination allows one to participate in his experience, his wonder, his joy.

From all these definitions and suggestions we may conclude that the concept of yajña has been a poetic mould or root metaphor for the Vedic thinkers to cast their ideas and experiences of 'Process and Reality'. This we shall illustrate in the chapters that follow.

Previous studies on the Veda

Even as early as 8th century B.C., the Veda was subjected to serious study. Attempts were made in the direction of precisely and properly understanding the texts. Lists of synonyms and difficult words were compiled. They were called Nighantu. We may recall that the first Vedic dictionary entitled Nighantu registered all obscure and difficult synonyms of the Vedic words. The Nirukta of Yaska being a commentary of the Nighantu, is held in Indian tradition as the most important instrument in deciding the meaning of the Vedas. We have only one such Nighantu, Nirukta of Yaska purports to be a commentary on the Nighantu. Here the contextual meaning of each word is determined. In interpreting the texts, Yaska follows the suggestion offered by the Vedic texts themselves. In fact, many explanations of Yaska are based on the Brāhmaṇas. There came up, in course of time, several regular commentators who took individually various texts. All of them follow a particular pattern or explaining the word meanings, and they rarely throw light on their implication. The study of the Vedic literature began in the west about 250 years ago. During this period, the western scholars, thoroughly studied the entire Vedic literature, critical editions, annotated translations into English, French and German languages of hundreds of texts of Vedic literature, their exposition, indices, concordance, dictionaries were prepared. It is neither possible nor necessary to name all these scholars and their works. I shall confine myself in this thesis to the most distinguished Vedic scholars (both eastern and western), the analysis of whose works will give us an insight to understand their method and approach in deciding the meaning of the Vedas. In respect of interpretation, however, their approach in general is linguistic. The tradition is disregarded as useless for interpretation. Sri Aurobindo
expresses the impropriety of such an attitude thus:

Western Scholars choose to imagine that the successors of the Vedic Rais are in error, that, except for some later hymns, they put a false and non-existent meaning into the old verse and they themselves, divided from the Rais not only by ages of time but many gulfs and separating seas of an intellectualized mentality, know infinitely better. But mere common sense ought to tell us that those who were so much nearer in both ways to the original poets had a better chance of holding at least the essential truth of the matter, and suggests at least the strong probability that the Veda was really what it professes to be. 

Comparative mythology and comparative linguistics which are made use of by the scholars do not seem to take them far into the understanding of the Veda; instead, they may lead the student away from the true import of the Veda. Such a mode of interpretation prompts to divide the Veda into several units and to look upon them as each having no bearing on the other so far as interpretation is concerned. Bloomfield was aware of this pitfall. He wrote:

For purposes of interpretation, the entire body of Vedic writings are a unit, one of the main faults in the past has been the failure, to investigate courageously and thoroughly the materials outside the mantras, to throw aside the abundant chaff and to derive from what is left the very considerable help which yield often in the most unexpected manner. Conversely, the legends of the Brähmanas and the practices of rituals, though they expand, adapt and symbolise, are usually founded upon the conceptions expressed in the mantra form, and their explanation thus depends in a large measure upon the mantras.

There is another type of approach which may be called mystic approach. The mystic method has received much consideration by our ancient teachers. Many record that the Veda is to be taught along

88 Contributions to the interpretation of the Veda, JAC, 15 (1893), p.153
with Kalpa, practical application, and 'rahasya', secret thereof. It appears that the 'rahasya' part of the exposition remained to be imparted orally. Somehow or other, it was not committed to writing and it is almost lost to us today.

C. Kunhan Raja, writing about the 'Asva Vamasya' hymn says: "The poem is full of philosophy; since we do not know the symbols, we are not able to understand many of the ideas which the author could have had in his mind". There is many a passage in the Veda which clearly calls for a symbolic interpretation.

It is clear from the commentary of Sabaracswamin that the Purva-Mimāṣaka is not against symbolic interpretation. For instance, Sabaracsw-min explains in three ways the meanings of the words Prajñāpati, Vapa, Ani, and Aja, occurring in the Taittiriya Samhitā. First they are taken as air, rain, lightning and food; then as space, air, gastric fire, and seed; thirdly, as sun, rays, fire and plant. Thus we find Mimāṣaka also favours symbolic interpretation of the Veda.

A perusal of the Brāhmaṇas shows that the Veda itself provides hints for the elucidation of its contents. In fact, we can find some definite principles there. The Satapatha Brāhmaṇa for instance, speaks of three modes of interpretation. They are: adhīdevata, adhivaiñca.

89 Manusmriti 2. 140, rahasya may mean agnikahasya
91 TS 2.1.1.4
92 Sabaracswamin, Purva-Mimāṣaka Sūtrabhāṣya 1.2.10 (Varanasi: Chowkamba, Sanskrit Series, 1910).
93 SB 10.2.2, 16-18
and adhyātma. The adhīśavāta mode is to interpret the texts as applied to dieties. Adhīṣṭhva is ritualistic interpretation, and adhyātma is understanding the texts in terms of human life. Herein we see an attitude of looking at fundamental things in nature. This may be called the cosmic view. It is understanding every thing with reference to the universe as a whole. Behind this there is the idea that microcosm and macrocosm are similar in structure. There was from the time of the later Mantras and Brāhmaṇas the habit of seeking for a correspondence between the individual and the world and trying to discover for every important feature of the one, an appropriate counterpart in the other. It represented an effort to express the world in terms of the individual. The Brāhmaṇas seem to suggest that the Vedic texts are to be understood in all these three modes and thus have a complete and comprehensive view of them. It seems that Yāska followed this method.

Therefore, it follows that there ought to be a reorientation in the mode of our approach to the study of the Veda. It may be possible that both the traditional and modern viewpoints can be compromised. We must also take note of the suggestions presented in the texts themselves and follow them carefully to arrive at their proper import. Owing to the limited capacities, environments etc., it may not be possible for scholars in general to acquaint themselves with all these ways of approach. But if we increase our vision through study, we will be able to comprehend the Veda in its totality.

94 M. Hiriyahna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (Bombay: George Allen & Unwin (India) Private Limited, 1976), p.55
Special difficulty owing to Vedic speculative uses of Enigmatic Images.

One of the striking phenomena to the student of Sanskrit Symbolism is the implicit presence of a special, figurative sub language in the Vedas, this specialized sacredotal language clothed and hid its meanings in images deliberately employing an esoteric style to conform to its esoteric context, the sacrifice. In the belief that images gave life to language, the Vedic poets used complex figures to portray their visions and to accompany the rites with sacred speech.

Commentators have studied this metaphorical language from the earliest times (the Nirkta and Brahmanas, and to a much greater extent, the Sayana Bhasya are examples). The works of modern translators and exegetes have furthered the task. Numerous examples of this special language and its interpretative commentaries have been discovered. For example, the sisters symbolize the ten figures that perform the ritual operation either as in R.V. 1.71.1 when they kindle and serve the sacrificial fire (Agni), or when they press the juice from the soma plant as in R.V. 9.65.1 or 9.93.1.

This figurative style participates in all realms of Vedic discourse, in the language of rite and its supporting myth, in the laudatory hymn, and in speculative and cosmological thought. Much

95 RV 1.71.1 Loving the loving one, as wives their husband, the sisters of one home have urged him forward, bright coloured, even as the cows love morning, dark, breaking forth to view, and redly beaming.
of the explicit imagery of the Rigveda (the simile, using the semantic markers \textit{na}, \textit{iva}, and \textit{yatha}) is poetic decoration \cite{96}. In addition, many scholars have discussed and attempted to fathom the meanings of the images of Rigvedic Symbolism, despite the uncertainties involved \cite{97}. Further study is needed, not only of the possible meanings of this

96 Of this voluminous literature, the following is a selection:


v HD Velankar, \textit{Emotional Simile in the Rigveda and}


97 The writings of Coomaraswamy, Agrawala, Kunhan Raja, and others fall under this category. A few of their works include:


iii C. Kunhan Raja, \textit{Asyavamasya Hymn} Ibid.

In Coomaraswamy's works, references to Vedic Symbolism abound, and he devoted specialized articles to the subject, such as \textit{Vedic Exemplarism}, in \textit{Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies}, 1 (1936), 44-64 and \textit{"The Darker side of Dawn}, \textit{Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections}, 94, (1936), 1-18.
fascinating figurative language, but also of its form and function in various contexts, ritualistic, mythic, speculative, and cosmological. I feel that the use of enigmatising images was deliberate and intentional and that their enigmatic form was as important as their speculative content.

Since the time of Bergaigne and the earliest translators of the Rigveda, it has been customary to dismiss enigmatic portions of Vedic language, whether in individual verses or whole poems, as obscure and hopelessly unintelligible. Bergaigne considered such passages to be Vedic balderdash. More than once he referred to the "mystical incoherences" of the verses. In more recent times, notably in Geldner's translations (1951) and the critical studies of Renou, some scholars have tentatively argued that this dismissal was premature, based on a fundamental misconception of the function of figurative speculative language. However, not all recent commentators have agreed. Kunhanrāja claims that many Rigvedic passages are obscure or even unintelligible because the meanings of their symbols have been forgotten and lost. Since scholars continue to disagree with one another on the possibility of interpreting these passages aright it is important to come to an understanding and evaluation of the semantic form and function involved. Operating on the interpretative principle that explicit statements, either from the text itself or from the hymn period in which it was composed, are the primary authority in establishing the meaning and use of its particular

98 Bergaigne, Some Observations op. cit. The entire piece tries to demonstrate the futility of understanding enigmatic images.

modes of thought and language, we must seek our evidence within the Rgveda. Such internal evidence fortunately exists in the text. Some hints are available in the Brāhmaṇas also.

According to Nirukta perfect understanding is guaranteed to the Rsis. "Nothing is clear here (in the Veda) to the one who is not a Rsi or the one who is not given to intense tapas."100

100 Lakshman Sarup, (ed.) rpt., The Nighantu and the Nirukta (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1984) (First Published 1927), 13.12