

The Ashwins—Indra—the Vishwadevas¹

The third hymn of Madhuchchandas is again a hymn of the Soma sacrifice. It is composed, like the second before it, in movements of three stanzas, the first addressed to the Ashwins, the second to Indra, the third to the Vishwadevas, the fourth to the goddess Saraswati. In this hymn also we have in the closing movement, in the invocation to Saraswati, a passage of clear psychological significance, of a far greater clarity indeed than those that have already helped us to understand the secret thought of the Veda.

But this whole hymn is full of psychological suggestions and we find in it the close connection and even identity which the Vedic Rishis sought to establish and perfect between the three main interests of the human soul, Thought and its final victorious illuminations, Action and its last supreme all-achieving puissances, Enjoyment and its highest spiritual ecstasies. The Soma wine symbolises the replacing of our ordinary sense-enjoyment by the divine Ananda. That substitution is brought about by divinising our thought-action, and as it progresses it helps in its turn the consummation of the movement which has brought it about. The Cow, the Horse, the Soma-Wine are the figures of this triple sacrifice.

The offering of ghr̥ta, the clarified butter which is the yield of the cow, the offering of the horse, aśvamedha, the offering of the wine of Soma are its three principal forms or elements. We have also, less prominent, the offering of the cake which is possibly symbolic of the body, of Matter.

We commence with an invocation of the two Ashwins, the two Riders on the Horse, Castor and Polydeuces of the old Mediterranean mythology. They are supposed by the comparative mythologists to represent twin stars in the heavens which for some reason had a better fortune than the rest of the celestial host and attracted the special adoration of the Aryans. Let us, however, see how they are described in the hymn we are studying. They are first described as "Ashwins, swift-footed lords of bliss, much-enjoying,—dravatpāṇī śubhaspatī purubhujā". The word śubh, like the words ratna and candra, is capable of signifying either light or enjoyment; but in this passage it occurs in connection with the adjective purubhujā, "much-enjoying", and the verb canasyatam, "take delight", and must therefore be taken in the sense of weal or bliss.

Next, these twin gods are described as "Ashwins, divine souls many-actioned, thought-holding" who accept and rejoice in the words of the Mantra "with an energetic thought",—purudaṃsasā narā śavīrayā dhiyā dhiṣṇyā. Nṛ in the Veda is applicable both to gods and men and does not mean simply a man; it meant originally, I think, strong or active and then a male and is applied to the male gods, active divine souls or powers, puruṣas, opposed to the female deities, gnāḥ who are their energies. It still preserved in the minds of the Rishis much of its original sense, as we see from the word nṛmṇa, strength, and the phrase nṛtama nṛnām, strongest of the divine powers. Śavas and its adjective śavīra give the idea of energy, but always with an association of the farther idea of flame or light; śavīra is therefore a very appropriate epithet for dhī, thought full of a

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shining or flashing energy. Dhiṣṇyā is connected with dhiṣaṇā, intellect or understanding, and is rendered by Sayana "intellectual", buddhimantau.

Again the Ashwins are described as "effectual in action, powers of the movement, fierce-moving in their paths," dasrā nāsatyā rudravartanī. The Vedic epithets dasra and dasma are rendered by Sayana indifferently "destroying" or "beautiful" or "bountiful" according to his caprice or convenience. I connect it with the root das not in the sense of cutting, dividing, from which it gets the two significances of destroying and giving, not in the sense of "discerning, seeing" from which it gets Sayana's significance "beautiful", darśanīya, but in the sense of doing, acting, shaping, accomplishing, as in purudaṃsasā in the second Rik. Nāsatya is supposed by some to be a patronymic; the old grammarians ingeniously fabricated for it the sense of "true, not false"; but I take it from nas to move. We must remember that the Ashwins are riders on the horse, that they are described often by epithets of motion, "swift-footed", "fierce-moving in their paths"; that Castor and Pollux in Graeco-Latin mythology protect sailors in their voyages and save them in storm and shipwreck and that in the Rig Veda also they are represented as powers that carry over the Rishis as in a ship or save them from drowning in the ocean.

Nāsatyā may therefore very well mean lords of the voyage, journey, or powers of the movement. Rudravartani is rendered by modern scholars "red-pathed", an epithet supposed to be well-suited to stars and they instance the parallel phrase, hiraṇyavartani, having a golden or shining path. Certainly, rudra must have meant at one time, "shining, deep-coloured, red" like the roots ruṣ and ruś, rudhira, "blood", "red", the Latin ruber, rutilus, rufus, all meaning red.

Rodasī, the dual Vedic word for heaven and earth, meant probably, like rajas and rocana, other Vedic words for the heavenly and earthly worlds, "the shining". On the other hand the sense of injury and violence is equally inherent in this family of words and is almost universal in the various roots which form it. "Fierce" or "violent" is therefore likely to be as good a sense for rudra as "red". The Ashwins are both hiraṇyavartanī and rudravartanī, because they are both powers of Light and of nervous force; in the former aspect they have a bright gold movement, in the latter they are violent in their movement. In one hymn (V.75.3) we have the combination rudrā hiraṇyavartanī, violent and moving in the paths of light; we can hardly with any respect for coherence of sense understand it to mean that the stars are red but their movement or their path is golden.

Here then, in these three verses, are an extraordinary series of psychological functions to apply to two stars of a heavenly constellation! It is evident that if this was the physical origin of the Ashwins, they have as in Greek mythology long lost their purely stellar nature; they have acquired like Athene, goddess of dawn, a psychological character and functions. They are riders on the horse, the Ashwa, symbolic of force and especially of life-energy and nervous force, the Prana. Their common character is that they are gods of enjoyment, seekers of honey; they are physicians, they bring back youth to the old, health to the sick, wholeness to the maimed. Another characteristic is movement, swift, violent, irresistible; their rapid and indomitable chariot is a constant object of celebration and they are described here as swift-footed and violent in their paths. They are like birds in their swiftness, like the mind, like the wind (V.77.3 and 78.1). They bring in their chariot ripe or perfected satisfactions to man, they are creators of

bliss, Mayas. These indications are perfectly clear. **They show that the Ashwins are twin divine powers whose special function is to perfect the nervous or vital being in man in the sense of action and enjoyment.** But they are also powers of Truth, of intelligent action, of right enjoyment.

They are powers that appear with the Dawn, effective powers of action born out of the ocean of being who, because they are divine, are able to mentalise securely the felicities of the higher existence by a thought-faculty which finds or comes to know that true substance and true wealth:—

Yā dasrā sindhumātarā, manotarā rayīnām;
dhiyā devā vasuvidā. (I.46.2)

They give that impelling energy for the great work which, having for its nature and substance the light of the Truth, carries man beyond the darkness:—

Yā naḥ pīparad aśvinā, jyotiṣmatī tamas tiraḥ;
tām asme rāsāthām iṣam. (I.46.6)

They carry man in their ship to the other shore beyond the thoughts and states of the human mind, that is to say, to the supramental consciousness,—nāvā matīnām pārāya (I.46.7). Suryā, daughter of the Sun, Lord of the Truth, mounts their car as their bride.

In the present hymn the Ashwins are invoked, as swift-moving lords of bliss who carry with them many enjoyments, to take delight in the impelling energies of the sacrifice,—yajvarīr iṣo . . . canasyatam. These impelling forces are born evidently of the drinking of the Soma wine, that is to say, of the inflow of the divine Ananda. For the expressive words, girah, that are to make new formations in the consciousness are already rising, the seat of the sacrifice has been piled, the vigorous juices of the Soma wine are pressed out.²

The Ashwins are to come as effective powers of action, purudamsasā narā, to take delight in the Words and to accept them into the intellect where they shall be retained for the action by a thought full of luminous energy.³

They are to come to the offering of the Soma wine, in order to effect the action of the sacrifice, dasrā, as fulfillers of action, by giving to the delight of the action that violent movement of theirs, rudravartanī, which carries them irresistibly on their path and overcomes all opposition. They come as powers of the Aryan journey, lords of the great human movement, Nāsatya. We see throughout that it is energy which these Riders on the Horse are to give; they are to take delight in the sacrificial energies, to take up the word into an energetic thought, to bring to the sacrifice their own violent movement on the path. And it is effectiveness of action and swiftness in the great journey that is the object of this demand for energy. I would call the attention of the reader continually to the consistency of conception and coherence of structure, the easy clearness and precision of

² Yuvākavaḥ sutā vṛktabarhiṣaḥ.

³ Śavīrayā dhiyā dhiṣṇyā vanataṃ girah.

outline which the thought of the Rishis assumes by a psychological interpretation, so different from the tangled confusion and incoherent abruptness of the interpretations which ignore the supreme tradition of the Veda as a book of wisdom and deepest knowledge.

We have then this rendering for the first three verses:

"O Riders of the Steed, swift-footed, much-enjoying lords of bliss, take delight in the energies of the sacrifice.

"O Riders of the Steed, male souls effecting a manifold action, take joy of the words, O holders in the intellect, by a luminously energetic thought.

"I have piled the seat of sacrifice, I have pressed out the vigorous Soma juices; fulfillers of action, powers of the movement, come to them with your fierce speed on the path."

As in the second hymn, so in the third the Rishi begins by invoking deities who act in the nervous or vital forces.

But there he called Vayu who supplies the vital forces, brings his steeds of life; here he calls the Ashwins who use the vital forces, ride on the steed. As in the second hymn he proceeds from the vital or nervous action to the mental, he invokes in his second movement the might of Indra. The out-pressings of the wine of delight desire him, *sutā ime tvāyavaḥ*; they desire the luminous mind to take possession of them for its activities; they are purified, *aṅvībhis tanā*, "by the fingers and the body" as Sayana explains it, by the subtle thought-powers of the pure mind and by extension in the physical consciousness as it seems to me to mean. For these "ten fingers", if they are fingers at all, are the ten fingers of *Suryā*, daughter of the Sun, bride of the Ashwins. In the first hymn of the ninth Mandala this same Rishi Madhuchchhandas expands the idea which here he passes over so succinctly. He says, addressing the deity Soma, "The daughter of the Sun purifies thy Soma as it flows abroad in her straining-vessel by a continuous extension", *vāreṇa śaśvatā tanā*. And immediately he adds, "The subtle ones seize it in their labour (or, in the great work, struggle, aspiration, *samarye*), the ten Brides, sisters in the heaven that has to be crossed", a phrase that recalls at once the ship of the Ashwins that carries us over beyond the thoughts; for Heaven is the symbol of the pure mental consciousness in the Veda as is Earth of the physical consciousness. These sisters who dwell in the pure mind, the subtle ones, *aṅvīḥ*, the ten brides, *daśa yoṣaṇaḥ*, are elsewhere called the ten Casters, *daśa kṣīpaḥ*, because they seize the Soma and speed it on its way. They are probably identical with the ten Rays, *daśa gāvaḥ*, sometimes spoken of in the Veda.

They seem to be described as the grandchildren or descendants of the Sun, *naptībhir vivasvataḥ* (IX.14.5). They are aided in the task of purification by the seven forms of Thought-consciousness, *sapta dhītayaḥ*. Again we are told that "Soma advances, heroic with his swift chariots, by the force of the subtle thought, *dhiyā aṅvyā*, to the perfected Activity (or perfected field) of Indra and takes many forms of thought to arrive at that vast extension (or, formation) of the godhead where the Immortals are" (IX.15.1, 2).

Eṣa purū dhiyāyate, bṛhate devatātaye;
yatrāmṛtāsa āsate.

I have dwelt on this point in order to show how entirely symbolical is the Soma-wine of the Vedic Rishis and how richly surrounded with psychological conceptions,—as anyone will find who cares to go through the ninth Mandala with its almost overcharged splendour of symbolic imagery and overflowing psychological suggestions.

However that may be, the important point here is not the Soma and its purification but the psychological function of Indra. He is addressed as Indra of the richly-various lustres, *indra citrabhāno*. The Soma-juices desire him. He comes impelled by the thought, driven forward by the illumined thinker within, *dhiyeṣito viprajūtaḥ*, to the soul-thoughts of the Rishi who has pressed out the wine of delight and seeks to manifest them in speech, in the inspired mantras; *sutāvata upa brahmāṇi vāghataḥ*. He comes with the speed and force of the illumined mind-power, in possession of his brilliant horses to those thoughts, *tūtujāna upa brahmāṇi harivaḥ*, and the Rishi prays to him to confirm or hold the delight in the Soma offering, *sute dadhiṣva naś canaḥ*. The Ashwins have brought and energised the pleasure of the vital system in the action of the Ananda. Indra is necessary to hold that pleasure firmly in the illuminated mind so that it may not fall away from the consciousness.

“Come, O Indra, with thy rich lustres, these Soma-juices desire thee; they are purified by the subtle powers and by extension in body.

“Come, O Indra, impelled by the mind, driven forward by the illumined thinker, to my soul-thoughts, I who have poured out the Soma-juice and seek to express them in speech.

“Come, O Indra, with forceful speed to my soul-thoughts, O lord of the bright horses; hold firm the delight in the Soma-juice.”

The Rishi next passes to the **Vishwadevas**, all the gods or the all-gods. It has been disputed whether these Vishwadevas form a class by themselves or are simply the gods in their generality. I take it that the phrase means the universal collectivity of the divine powers; for this sense seems to me best to correspond to the actual expressions of the hymns in which they are invoked. In this hymn they are called for a general action which supports and completes the functions of the Ashwins and Indra. They are to come to the sacrifice in their collectivity and divide among themselves, each evidently for the divine and joyous working of his proper activity, the Soma which the giver of the sacrifice distributes to them; *viśve devāsa ā gata, dāśvāṃso dāśuṣaḥ sutam*. In the next Rik the call is repeated with greater insistence; they are to arrive swiftly, *tūrṇayaḥ*, to the Soma offering or, it may mean, making their way through all the planes of consciousness, “waters”, which divide the physical nature of man from their godhead and are full of obstacles to communication between earth and heaven; *apturaḥ sutam ā ganta tūrṇayaḥ*. They are to come like cattle hastening to the stalls of their rest at evening-tide, *usrā iva svasarāṇi*. Thus gladly arriving, they are gladly to accept and cleave to the sacrifice and support it, bearing it up in its journey to its goal, in its ascent to the gods or to the home of the gods, the Truth, the Vast; *medhaṃ juṣanta vahnayaḥ*.

And the epithets of the Vishwadevas, qualifying their character and the functions for which they are invited to the Soma-offering, have the same generality; they are common to all the gods and applied indifferently to any or all of them throughout the Veda. They are fosterers or increasers of man and upholders of his labour and effort in the work, the sacrifice,—*omāsaś carṣaṇidhr̥to*. Sayana renders these words protectors and sustainers of men. I need not enter here into a full justification of the significances which I prefer to give them; for I have already indicated the philological method which I follow. Sayana himself finds it impossible to attribute always the sense of protection to the words derived from the root *av*, *avas*, *ūti*, *ūma*, etc. which are so common in the hymns, and is obliged to give to the same word in different passages the most diverse and unconnected significances. Similarly, while it is easy to attribute the sense of “man” to the two kindred words *carṣaṇi* and *kr̥ṣṭi* when they stand by themselves, this meaning seems unaccountably to disappear in compound forms like *vicarṣaṇi*, *viśvacarṣaṇi*, *viśvakr̥ṣṭi*. Sayana himself is obliged to render *viśvacarṣaṇi* “all-seeing” and not “all-man” or “all-human”. I do not admit the possibility of such abysmal variations in fixed Vedic terms. *Av* can mean to be, have, keep; contain, protect; become, create; foster, increase, thrive, prosper; gladden, be glad; but it is the sense of increasing or fostering which seems to me to prevail in the Veda. *Carṣ* and *kr̥ṣ* were originally derivate roots from *car* and *kr̥*, both meaning to do, and the sense of laborious action or movement still remains in *kr̥ṣ*, to drag, to plough.

Carṣaṇi and *kr̥ṣṭi* mean therefore effort, laborious action or work or else the doers of such action. They are two among the many words, (*karma*, *apas*, *kāra*, *kīri*, *duvas* etc.), which are used to indicate the Vedic work, the sacrifice, the toil of aspiring humanity, the *arati* of the Aryan.

The fostering or increasing of man in all his substance and possessions, his continual enlargement towards the fullness and richness of the vast Truth-consciousness, the upholding of him in his great struggle and labour, this is the common preoccupation of the Vedic gods. Then, they are *apturaḥ*, they who cross the waters, or as Sayana takes it, they who give the waters. This he understands in the sense of “rain-givers” and it is perfectly true that all the Vedic gods are givers of the rain, the abundance (for *vṛṣṭi*, rain, has both senses) of heaven, sometimes described as the solar waters, *svarvatīr apaḥ*, or waters which carry in them the light of the luminous heaven, *Svar*. But the ocean and the waters in the Veda, as this phrase itself indicates, are the symbol of conscient being in its mass and in its movements.

The gods pour the fullness of these waters, especially the upper waters, the waters of heaven, the streams of the Truth, *ṛtasya dhārāḥ*, across all obstacles into the human consciousness. In this sense they are all *apturaḥ*. But man is also described as crossing the waters over to his home in the Truth-consciousness and the gods as carrying him over; it is doubtful whether this may not be the true sense here, especially as we have the two words *apturaḥ* . . . *tūrṇayaḥ* close to each other in a connection that may well be significant.

Again the gods are all free from effective assailants, free from the harm of the hurtful or opposing powers and therefore the creative formations of their conscious knowledge, their *Maya*, move freely, pervasively, attain their right

goal,—asridha ehimāyāso adruhaḥ. If we take into account the numerous passages of the Veda which indicate the general object of the sacrifice, of the work, of the journey, of the increase of the light and the abundance of the waters to be the attainment of the Truth-consciousness, Ritam, with the resultant Bliss, Mayas, and that these epithets commonly apply to powers of the infinite, integral Truth-consciousness we can see that it is this attainment of the Truth which is indicated in these three verses. **The all-gods increase man, they uphold him in the great work, they bring him the abundance of the waters of Swar, the streams of the Truth, they communicate the unassailably integral and pervading action of the Truth-consciousness with its wide formations of knowledge, māyāh.**

I have translated the phrase, usrā iva svasarāṇi, in the most external sense possible; **but in the Veda even poetical similes are seldom or never employed for mere decoration; they too are utilised to deepen the psychological sense and with a figure of symbolic or double meaning.**

The word usra is always used in the Veda, like go, with the double sense of the concrete figure or symbol, the Bull or Cow, and at the same time the psychological indication of the bright or luminous ones, the illumined powers of the Truth in man. It is as such illumined powers that the all-gods have to come and they come to the Soma-juice, svasarāṇi, as if to seats or forms of peace or of bliss; for the root svas, like sas and many others, means both to rest and to enjoy. They are the powers of Truth entering into the outpourings of the Ananda in man as soon as that movement has been prepared by the vital and mental activity of the Ashwins and the pure mental activity of Indra.

“O fosterers who uphold the doer in his work, O all-gods, come and divide the Soma-wine that I distribute.

“O all-gods who bring over to us the Waters, come passing through to my Soma-offerings as illumined powers to your places of bliss.

“O all-gods, you who are not assailed nor come to hurt, free-moving in your forms of knowledge, cleave to my sacrifice as its upbearers.”

And, finally, in the last movement of the hymn we have the clear and unmistakable indication of the Truth-consciousness as the goal of the sacrifice, the object of the Soma-offering, the culmination of the work of the Ashwins, Indra and the All-gods in the vitality and in the mind. For these are the three Riks devoted to Saraswati, the divine Word, who represents the stream of inspiration that descends from the Truth-consciousness, and thus limpidly runs their sense:

“May purifying Saraswati with all the plenitude of her forms of plenty, rich in substance by the thought, desire our sacrifice.

“She, the impeller to happy truths, the awakener in consciousness to right mentalisings, Saraswati, upholds the sacrifice.

“Saraswati by the perception awakens in consciousness the great flood (the vast movement of the Ritam) and illumines entirely all the thoughts.”

This clear and luminous finale throws back its light on all that has preceded it. It shows the intimate connection between the Vedic sacrifice and a certain state of mind and soul, the interdependence between the offering of the clarified butter and the Soma juice and luminous thought, richness of psychological content, right states of the mind and its awaking and impulsion to truth and light. It reveals the figure of Saraswati as the goddess of the inspiration, of śruti. And it establishes the connection between the Vedic rivers and psychological states of mind. The passage is one of those luminous hints which the Rishis have left scattered amidst the deliberate ambiguities of their symbolic style to guide us towards their secret.