

Living Traditions of Vedas

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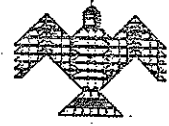


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On the Vedic *Yájamāna*-.

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§1. Every public Vedic sacrifice implied the involvement of several groups of priests on behalf of a man that the Sanskrit texts call *yájamāna*- « the sacrificer ». His presence was essential, since without him no worship would have taken place. Nonetheless, he remains strangely unknown from the beginning of the descriptions and commentaries of the Vedic ceremonies.¹ The nature of the textual sources is to partly explain this situation. In fact the liturgical literature reflects before anything the technical concerns of the priests who had to perform their duty properly. This is particularly true of the *śrauta sūtras*, whose readings served as the starting point for the fundamental works of Schwab,² Hillebrandt,³ Caland, Henry⁴ or Dumont⁵. However, once the sacrificial actions accurately are described, it seems hard to believe that their interpretations could be possible without taking in consideration the nature and the symbolic content of the experiences lived by the main protagonist. By the end of 19th century a particular western school of thought believed to be able to justify the indifference of academic scholars to this aspect of the argument. The best scholars were convinced that the Vedic rituals do not possess a moral content and that they do not demand any spiritual commitment. According to them, everything was nothing but formalism in a primitive culture that truly believed to possess magic that permitted to influence reality. Yet once more the brahmanical view partly explains this mechanical approach to the effectiveness of the worship. However, nothing justifies the disdain with which a great scholar such as Sylvain Lévi declares his convictions.⁶ The most recent researches are certainly not labelled

with such strong bias, but they concentrate on other aspects of the Vedic liturgy, such as its prehistory or the structure of the ceremonies, and they never saw the need to focus on this man who pledged a significant portion of his wealth so that he could be placed on the sacrificial ground amongst the priests. Who was this man, what did he seek and what, or who, did he want to become?

§2. The texts inform us of what he is in his civilian life. He must be a man, but he should be married. His wife is also present on his side at the sacrificial ground. A woman cannot organize public sacrifices and nor can an unmarried man. In fact the worship would originate in the home of the couple and, most importantly, from their own fireplace. It is from the domestic fire of this household that different fire altars are born, in order to be lit up over the sacrificial ground. The couple is of course part of the Vedic society, that is to the *Ārya* society, and usually seems to belong to either the *kṣatriya* cast or *vaiśya*. Suppose now that the sacrificer demands to consecrate a sacrifice of the *agniṣtomá-* type. For a man of ordinary conditions this sacrifice, including a complex *sóma-* press, would be the culmination of his public religious life. There are certainly more prestigious ceremonies and more complex ones, but they are reserved for men of social higher condition, and they would grant thereby a very interesting political sense, applicable only to few people. The benefits of *agniṣtomá-* are to meet the expectations of a good Vedic citizen. What will he accomplish during this sacrifice?

§3. The liturgical sequence that tells us more, and better describes it, is that of the consecration received on the previous day before the beginning of the public ceremony, which bears the Sanskrit name of *dīkṣá-*. It takes place in secret between the walls of a hut built at the western extreme side of the great sacrificial ground also known as *mahávedi-*. This hut is known in Sanskrit as *śālā-* or, more precisely, as *prācānavamśa-* (which means « whose beam is turned to the east »). It is the temporary accommodation for the sacrificer before his public appearance, the day when *sóma-* is pressed, and where the sacrificial victim shall be slaughtered. Why should the sacrificer go through there and what happens inside? The texts are perfectly explicit and consistent about this point. The hut is built along an axis

starting from west towards the east. At its western entrance the first fire altar has been lit, the *gárhapatya-*, which extended the domestic fire. Near the eastern exit door another altar by the name of *āhavanāya-* is lit, intended to receive the first dignified offering, that which consist of paying the flames libation of ghee. Between these two fire altars, exactly on the axis of the hut, a rhombus with convex edges was carved which carried the name of *védi-*. Its surface would be covered with a carpet consisting of freshly cut grasses. This *védi-* represented the silhouette of the female hips, which is shown very explicitly, for instance in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa Mādhyandina:

abhíto'gním áṃsā'ún nayati | yóṣā vái védir vòṣāgnih̄ parigòhya vái yóṣā vòṣānam̄ śete mithunám evaitát prajānanam̄ kriyate tásmād abhíto'gnim̄ áṃsā'ún nayati ||1.2.5.15||

« The two shoulders (of the altar) he carries along both sides of the (Āhavanīya) fire. For the altar (*vedi-*, fem.) is female and the fire (*agni-*, masc.) is male; and the woman lies embracing the man: thereby a copulation productive of offspring is obtained. For this reason he carries the two shoulders (of the altar) along both sides of the fire. »

s« vái paścād vārīyasī syāt | mádhye sámhvāritā púnah̄ purástād urvy évám iva yóṣāa prasáṃsanti pñthúṣronir vímn̄ṣtāntarāṃsā mádhye samgr̄«hyéti júṣtām evainām etád devébhyaḥ karoti ||1.2.5.16||

« It (the altar) should be broader on the west side, contracted in the middle, and broad again on the eastside; for thus shaped they praise a woman: 'broad about the hips, somewhat narrower between the shoulders, and contracted in the middle (or, about the waist).' Thereby he makes it (the altar) pleasing to the gods. » (Translation by Eggeling 1882, 63).

§4. For the sacrificer, the *dikṣā-* mainly consisted in assuming a new appearance. Outside of the hut, if possible in the currents of a river, the *yájamāna-* was washed, shaved and sprinkled. His body and his eyelids were anointed with fresh butter. He then returned to the *śālā-*, where he offered a *puroḍĒśa-*, that is a cake comprising of eleven portions. Frequently the texts expose that this offering is dedicated to the divinities Agni (the fire) and Viṣṇu. Once the cake

had been offered, the sacrificer achieved some libations too. At the moment when the actual consecration starts, either a blackbuck' skin is brought in, or two skins sewed to each other with the interior sides facing. The precise spot at which these skins are extended varies from school to school. Most often these antelope's skins were installed inside the *védi-* itself (*antarvedí* in sanskrit). The sacrificer then crawls on top of the skins in order to sit down on them. Afterwards, the *adhvaryu* priest wears his ceremonial garment which features a sort of white linen coat with a turban and a belt. He also receives an antelope horn, and just after this a cane in *audumbara* wood is also given to him. The *yájamāna-* assumes then the status of *dīkṣitá-* « consecrated ».⁷

§5. The doctrinal texts are unanimous at the moment of interpreting the symbolic content of the shape that the sacrificer takes. They tend to give him the appearance of an embryo. The basic material is already known from the works of Sylvain Lévi.⁸ The most explicit passage certainly is the one found on *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.3:

Punar vā etam n̄tvijo garbham kurvanti yaṁ dīkṣayanty adbhir abhiṣiñcanti reto vā āpaḥ saretasam evainam tat k̄tvā dīkṣayanti navanītenābhyañjanty ājyam vai devānām surabhi gh̄ntam manusyānām āyutam pitōnām navanītam garbhānām tad yan navanītenābhyañjanti svenaivainam tad bhāgadheyena samardhayanty añjanty enam tejo vā etad akṣyor yad añjanam satejasam evainam tat k̄tvā dīkṣayanty ekaviṁśatyā darbhapin̄jūlaiḥ pāvayanti śuddham evainam tat pūtam dīkṣayanti dīkṣitavimitam prapādayanti yonir vā eṣā dīkṣitasya yad dīkṣitavimitam yonim evainam tat svām prapādayanti tasmād dhruvād yoner āste ca carati ca tasmād dhruvād yoner garbhā dhīyante ca pra ca jāyante tasmād dīkṣitam nānyatra dīkṣitavimitād ādityo' bhyudiyād vābhyastamiyād vāpi vābhyāśrāvayeyur vāsasā pror̄huvanty ulbam vā etad dīkṣitasya yad vāsa ulbenaivainam tat pror̄huvanti k̄ṣṇājinam uttaram bhavaty uttaram vā ulbāj jarāyu jarāyuhāivainam tat pror̄huvanti muṣṭī k̄tvā kumāro jāyate tad yan muṣṭī kurute yajñam caiva tat sarvāś ca devatā muṣṭyoḥ kurute tad āhur na pūrvadīkṣiṇaḥ saṁsavo' sti parigñhīto vā etasya yajñāḥ parigñhītā devatā naitasyārtir asty aparadīkṣiṇa eva yathā tathety unmucya k̄ṣṇājinam avabh̄ñtham abhyavaiti tasmān

muktā garbhā jarāyor jāyante sahaiva 'vāsasābhyavaiti tasmāt sahaivolbena kumāro jāyate ||1.3||

« Him whom they consecrate the priests make into an embryo again. With waters they sprinkle; the waters are seed; verily having made him possessed of seed they consecrate him. With fresh butter they anoint; to the gods appertains melted butter, to men fragrant ghee, slightly melted butter to the fathers, fresh butter to embryos. 'In that they anoint with fresh butter, verily thus they make him successful with his own portion. They anoint him completely; ointment is the brilliance in the eyes; verily thus having made him possessed of brilliance they consecrate him. With twenty-one handfuls of *Darbha* they purify him; verily thus purified and pure they consecrate him. They conduct him to the hut of the consecrated; the hut of the consecrated is the womb of the consecrated; verily thus they conduct him to his own womb; therefore (in and) from a firm womb he stands and moves; therefore (in and) from a firm womb embryos are placed and grow forth. Therefore the sun should not rise or set on the consecrated elsewhere than in the hut of the consecrated, nor should they call out to him. With a garment they cover him; the garment is the caul of the consecrated; verily thus they cover him with a caul. Above that is the black antelope skin; the placenta is above the caul; verily thus they cover him with the placenta. He closes his hands; verily closing its hands the embryo lies within; with closed hands the child is born. In that he closes his hands, verily thus he clasps in his hands the sacrifice and all the deities. They say, 'There is no competing pressing for him who is first consecrated; the sacrifice is grasped by him, the deities are grasped; no misfortune is his as there is of him who is not consecrated first.' Having loosened the black antelope skin, he descends to the final bath; therefore embryos are born freed from the placenta; with the garment he descends; therefore a child is born with a caul. » (Translation by Keith 1920, 108-109).

§6. So can we consider that the symbolical analysis of this liturgical sequence is perfectly clear, because the relation linking the action and its brahmanical interpretation is consistent. The sacrificer's consecration consists for him in becoming an embryo. He

is first shaved because it is obvious that an embryo comes to live without beard. His sprinkling represents the coupling, or at least the fecundation, necessary to bring live to the embryo. His liturgical garments intend to represent very precisely the different embryonic covers wrapping the embryo during the uterine life. External behaviours are justified by the same references: for instance, the *yájamāna-* keeps his hands closed because it is the way babies born. My opinion is that all this step of the worship can be understood using this symbolical key. For instance, the fact that the new *dīkṣitá-* stops eating solid food and takes only milky products until the beginning of the sacrifice proper is probably justified by the same desire to concretely represent the ante-natal life. As is perfectly said in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, this embryonic appearance shall be kept throughout the *agnīṣṭomá-* ceremony. He shall only undress once the sacrifice is achieved, when he would bathe again. In other words the state of the embryo will be that of the sacrificer during the progression of the worship.

§7. However, one important detail of this consecratory step still needs an explanation. After his first ritual bathing suggesting the introduction into an embryonic state, the sacrificer proceeds to the offering of a *puroḍāśa-* type pie, baked on eleven shards (*kapāla-*)⁹. The texts seem to agree amongst each other regarding the offering of the pie: the receivers are Agni, because he is the closest god to men, and Viṣṇu, because he is the most distant one. Nevertheless, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, accustomed to mention the divergences of opposing practices or interpretations between the priests, indicates one variety of offering, that is impossible to neglect here (3.1.3.1-5):

*apāḥ pranya | āgnāvaiṣṇavām ékādaśakapālaṃ puroḍāśaṃ nīr
vapaty agnīr vai sārva devātā agnau hí sārvaḥ byo devātā byo júhvaty
agnīr vai yajñasyāvarārdhyò viṣṇuḥ parārdhyàś tát sārvaś caivaitád
devātāḥ parigòhya sārvaṃ ca yajñāṃ parigòhya dīkṣ»' íti tásmād
āgnāvaiṣṇavá ékādaśakapālaḥ puroḍ«śo bhavati ||3.1.3.1||*

« Having brought water forward, he takes out (the material for) a cake on eleven potsherds for Agni and Viṣṇu ; for Agni is all the deities, since it is in Agni that offering is made to all the deities. Moreover Agni is the lower half, and Viṣṇu is the upper half of the

sacrifice: 'I will become consecrated after encompassing all the deities, after encompassing the entire sacrifice', thus he thinks, and hence there is a cake on eleven potsherds for Agni and Viṣṇu. »

tád haika | ādityébhyaś carúḍ nír vapanti tád asti páryuditam ivāṣṭaú putr«so áditer yé jāt«s tanvās pári dev«ñ úpa praít saptábhiḥ párā mārtaṇḍám āsyat (RS 10.72.8) ||3.1.3.2||

« Some then offer a rice-pap to the Ādityas. This is referred to (in the passage, Rig-veda X, 72, 8), 'There are eight sons of Aditi who were born from her body; with seven she went to the gods, but Mārtaṇḍa she cast off'. »

aṣṭaú ha vái putr« áditeḥ | y«m̐s tv ètád dev« ādity« íty ācákṣate saptá haivá té' víkñtam hāṣṭamám janay«m cakāra mārtaṇḍám samdeghó haiv°sa y«vān evòrdhvās t«vāms tiryáu púruṣasammita íty u háika āhuḥ ||3.1.3.3||

« Now Aditi had eight sons. But those that are called 'the gods, sons of Aditi,' were only seven, for the eighth, Mārtaṇḍa, she brought forth unformed: it was a mere lump of bodily matter, as broad as it was high. Some, however, say that he was of the size of a man. »

té' u haitá' ūcuḥ | dev« ādity« yád asm«n ánv ájani m« tád amuyèva bhūd dhántemám vikarāvāméti tám ví cakrur yáthāyám púruṣo víkñtas tásyā y«ni māms«ni samkòtya samnyāsús táto hast sám abhavát tásmād āhur ná hastínam práti gñhñiyāt púruṣāmjāno hí hastti yám u ha tád vicakrúḥ sá vívasvān ādityás tásyem«ḥ praj«ḥ ||3.1.3.4||

« The gods, sons of Aditi, then spoke, 'That which was born after us must not be lost; come, let us fashion it.' They accordingly fashioned it as this man is fashioned. The flesh which was cut off him, and thrown down in a lump, became the elephant: hence they say that one must not accept an elephant (as a gift), since the elephant has sprung from man. Now he whom they thus fashioned was Vivasvat, the Āditya (or the sun); and of him (came) these creatures. »

sá hovāca | rādhnavān me sá praj«yām yá etám ādityébhyaś carúḥ nirvápād íti rādhnoti haivá yá etám ādityébhyaś carúḥ nirvapaty ayám tv èv°gnāvaiṣṇuvah prájñātaḥ ||3.1.3.5||

« He spoke, 'Among my offspring he shall be successful who shall offer that rice-pap to the Ādityas.' Accordingly he alone succeeds who offers that rice-pap to the Ādityas. Only that (cake) to Agni and Viṣṇu is, however, generally approved. » (Translation by Eggeling 1885, 12-13).

In this brief controversial account which the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa alone reveals to us two important facts come to the attention.

§8. The first one is the diverging content between opposing interpretations. On one hand the preparation of the pie offering for supreme beings Agni and Viṣṇu is justified. On the other hand it alludes to Aditi. The point of view is not the same. By dedicating the pie to Agni and Viṣṇu, the closest and the furthest deities, they want to invoke all gods to the sacrifice, since it is evident that by invoking the gods of the two extremes one mobilizes all the other deities found in between them. Nevertheless, by offering the pie to Aditi, one evokes a very well-known legend, the birth of Vivasvant. What counts here is to anchor the worship inside a tradition.

§9. What leads us to the second fact is focusing on the impact that this allusion to Aditi has over the portrait of a Vedic sacrificer that we can depict. Indeed, it is for him that everything changes. What narrative does this heterodox interpretation invoke? Several brief accounts in prose mention it: for instance TS 6.5.6, KS 11,6 or MS 1.6.12.¹⁰ Aditi, a deity whose name suggests being of female gender, desired to conceive an offspring. To achieve this she prepared a porridge (*odanā-*). She offered it to deities who were not characterized. She then consumed the rest of her offering herself and became pregnant. She gave birth to a pair of twins. Happy with her method, she appealed it twice more. Hence, this is how she conceived her first six sons, of which a list has been proposed in MS 1.6.12: Dhātī and Aryamaṇ, Mitra and Varuṇa, Amśa and Bhaga. It goes without saying that these are the first Ādityas. After these three acts which were all successful, Aditi says to herself: « Maybe this time it could be done better, if I serve myself the first of the prepared meals ». This is noticeably a transgression for two reasons. First because the gods should be served before, and second because Aditi is a woman, as she gives birth, and should then eat after those who she cooks for.

Here is the version of this tale which can be found in the Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā :

MS 1.6.12 : áditir vái praj«kāmaudanám apacat sóñśiṣṭam āśnāt tásyā dhāt« cāryam« cājāyetām s«param apacat sóñśiṣṭam āśnāt tásyā mitrás ca várunaś cājāyetām s«param apacat sóñśiṣṭam āśnāt tásyā amśás ca bhágaś cājāyetām s«param apacat saíkṣatónśiṣṭam me' śnaty« dváu-dvau j«yete itó nūnám me śréyaḥ syād yát purástād aśnīy«m íti s« purástād aśitvópāharat t« antár evá gárbhaḥ sántā avadatām āvám idám bhaviṣyāvo yád ādity« íti táyor ādity« nirhant«ram aichams t« amśás ca bhágaś ca nírahatām tásmād etáu yajñé ná yajante' mśaprāsó' mśasya bhāgadhéyam jánaṃ bhágo' gachat tásmād āhur jáno gantavyàs tátra bhágena sámgachatā íti sá v« índra ūrdhvá evá prānám anūdásrayata mñtám itaram āñḍám ávāpadyata sá v«vá märtāṇḍó yásyemé manuṣy^oh praj« s« v« áditir ādity«n úpādhvāvad ástv evá ma idám m« ma idám moghé párāpaptad íti tè' bruvann áthaiṣò' sm«kam evá bravātai ná nó' timanyātā íti sá v«vá vívasvān ādityó yásya mánuś ca vaivasvató yamás ca mánur ev«smiml loké yamò' múṣmin ||

« Aditi, desiring offspring, cooked a rice pap. She ate what was left over. Dhātār and Aryaman were born to her. She cooked another one. She ate, what was left over. Mitra and Varuṇa were born here. She ate what was left over. Amśa and Bhaga were born to her. She cooked another one. She considered : “ By eating what is left over, each time two (sons) are born. Now I would get something even better if I ate of it beforehand.” Having eaten (of it) beforehand, she served it. While the two (sons conceived by her) still were within (her womb), as foetus, they said: “We shall attain the rule in this world which the Ādityas have.” The Ādityas searched for someone who was to knock them out (of the womb). Amśa and Bhaga knocked them out (of the womb). Therefore one does not sacrifice to them at the sacrifice. The stake (*amśa-prāsá-*) is the share of Amśa. Bhaga went abroad. Therefore they say: “ One has to go abroad; there one meets good luck (*bhága-*).” Indra rose upright in accordance with his vital breath, the other egg fell down dead. This indeed was the Märtāṇḍa whose offspring are men here (on earth). Aditi hurried to the Ādityas seeking help, (saying): “This (egg) of mine shall exist. This (egg) of

mine shall not perish in vain.” They said: “Then he shall call himself one of us; he shall not think himself superior to us.” This indeed was Vivasvant, the son of Aditi, from whom are descended Manu Vaivasvata and Yama : Yama in this world, Yama in yonder world. » (Hoffmann 1992, 717-718).

§10. Despite this defiance of good table manners, Aditi's initiative paid off. She becomes pregnant again with a pair of twins that seemed wonderfully promising even before they were born. The elders, worried about their own supremacy, decide to cause an abortion for this pregnancy. In MS 1.6.12 this intervention is attributed to Amśa and Bhaga, who are consequently excluded from the sacrificial offering. Their initiatives were hardly fruitful, since one of the embryos, immediately emerged in a perfectly accomplished adult appearance, and hence became Indra, the king of gods. He who should have been his twin unfortunately did not have such a favorable exit. Deprived from life, he laid on the ground, shapeless and motionless: the *mārtāṇḍá-*, literally the « dead egg ». Most texts suggest that it was Aditi herself who requested that the elders decide the fate of this undersized child, as she herself had decided not to include him in the divine family. Henceforth, they shaped him by cutting away the useless and dead flesh and they gave him what became to seem a human appearance. Thus refashioned, the *mārtāṇḍá-* offered his elder brothers the *carú-*, a custard. Along the way he becomes Vivasvant « the bright one » who sacrifices and begets, thus consequently he achieves immortality and divine status which were his birthrights. Indeed, he would have been destined to become another Indra without the shameful intervention of his elder brothers.

§11. What is compelling from this narrative, is the fact that it corresponds much better to the ritual action that takes place throughout the consecration of the sacrificer. Subsequently it allows to identify the appearance which adorns the sacrificer when he behaves so as to become an embryo. Why does he proceed in this way? What does it mean or, more precisely, what did it originally mean, since the teaching delivered by Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa describes a doctrinal debate and differences of symbolical analysis? My opinion is that the embryonic metaphor of the *dīkṣá-* does not

represent any development of a symbolic ritual of birth allowing the positioning of the sacrificer in a new place, the sacred space. On the contrary, I hypothesize that the narrative framework of the founding myth of the proposed religious ceremony is rather much more concrete than that. By recovering a status of divine nature, Vivasvant, the founder of sexual procreation, has also traced a path for his successors. When proceeding to a sacrifice, the Aryans of the Vedic culture didn't only perpetuate a tradition. They didn't neither remember an ancient narrative, nor commemorate the high existence of a mythological ancestor. They resorted to a magical process because they believed in its efficiency, that is to say in its ability to cause the total transformation process which was capable of operating even within the person who submitted to it.

§12. For the Vedic *yájamāna*- undertaking the execution of an *agniṣtomá*-, the *dīkṣā*- is the consecration allowing him to retake the place of the *mārtāṇḍá*- in Aditi's womb. It is the only interpretation giving a complete meaning to each ritual detail. Evidently this is true at the level of the consecration itself. Neither the general symbolism of birth nor the reference to Agni and Viṣṇu could make understandable all the details of this stage of the ceremony. On the contrary, connecting the ritual to Aditi's myth allows to give meaning to the lesser stage, as well as the smallest gestures. Why would the future consecrated, in other words the future embryo, need Agni and Viṣṇu, the closest and the farthest gods, in order to successfully become a fetus? No one can respond to this question and it is remarkable that the Brāhmaṇas themselves are incapable to do so. On the other hand, when Aditi and her sons are invoked at the moment of cooking the *puroḍāśa*-, the priests and the sacrificer very probably had the intention to create a context, something that the author of Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa no longer understood. This *puroḍāśa*- represents the dish that Aditi prepared in order to become pregnant. The mythical narratives tell us that she served herself the first of the last dish which she prepared. It is not difficult to bring out the coherence between the myth and the rite: the celebrants prepare the *puroḍāśa*- which Aditi ingested immediately and caused her pregnancy. It is in this precise moment that the *yájamāna*- dressed in

the embryo outfit, cautiously crawls over the antelope's skin laid on the *védi-*, which is the space representing Aditi's womb. The consecrated becomes then the new life that Aditi carries inside her.

§13. This exegetical logic also applies to *agniṣtomá-* all across. If the ritual had as clear symbolism the representation of a new birth in a sacred space, we would practically be witnessing this birth. By this I mean that the ceremony would explicitly demonstrate the birth and the physical transformation of the sacrificer. However this is not the case. The sacrificer will keep the ceremonial outfit representing him as an embryo until the end of the worship. He will not take off the outfit until the end of the sacrifice when he and his wife will take the conclusive bath, declaring that their ritual role has been fulfilled. How to explain this apparent paradox? If the *śálā-* and the *védi-* represent Aditi's womb, the event of exiting it for proceeding to press the Soma and the immolation of the sacrificial cattle which are based on the recitations of the verses extracted from the Rigveda, whether chanted or sung, must have a link with the birth. Yet the sacrificer does not strip off his outfit representing him as an embryo as soon as he exits the hut. In my opinion it is precisely because the sacrificer represents the *mārtāṇḍá-*, the aborted fetus out of Aditi's womb that failed to become who he was destined to become, a god, or even better Indra's twin. By proceeding to press the soma three times he accomplishes his destiny. This can clearly be observed in the first pressing, because this ritual step emphasizes the cosmic character that this drama enacts. After the introductory day which includes the consecration, three *upasád-* days have been necessary to organize the ritual space.¹¹ The first day has mainly been dedicated to buy and welcome the soma. During the second day, the *uttaravedí-*, the main public altar of the ceremony, has been measured and built up. During the third day, all the *mahāvedí-* space has been prepared and decorated in the perspective of the *sutyam ahar*, the main day during which the soma will be pressed.

§14. Before this *sutyam ahar*, the sacrificer and the priests must keep awake during the night in order to be sure that they would not miss the appropriate moment to undertake the recitation of a long series of stanzas extracted from the Rig-Veda. It is the

prātarānuvākā-,¹² the long morning Vedic litany that the hotar starts reciting at night, even before the singing of the early birds, as the texts tell us, so that it ends by the crack of dawn. It is at this moment that the first pressing of soma will take place. This nocturnal recitation, which can be very long when it consists of reciting several hundred scanned verses, announces the day which will see the birth of the *mārtāṇḍā-*, a day that is completely identified to the first sunrise inaugurating time. Then the invocations that are made to Agni, Uṣas and the Aśvins install the sacrifice in the moment where *prātarānuvākā-* marks the beginning of a repetition of the cosmogony. The first pressing of the *Soma* that follows will be the identical repetition of the first sacrifice, the one in which the real *mārtāṇḍā-* will become Vivasvant. There is therefore no paradox that the sacrificer would still be dressed as an embryo in the pressing area of the sacred drink. On this area, that is to say outside the womb in which he was granted the status of *dīkṣitā-*, he continues to be an embryo, because he has yet not become Vivasvant.

§15. So does the evidence which points at the consecration ceremony of the sacrificer seem sufficiently coherent to allow the hypothesis that embryonic metaphor behind the *dīkṣā-* refers to a particular myth, that of the birth of Vivasvant. If this is the case, two main consequences emerge immediately. It is already possible to say a word on this subject without further delay.

§16. The first one concerns the Indo-Iranian comparativism. As is well known, Vivasvant is the ancestor of Yama, the first mortal. Both persons were already existing in the Indo-Iranian pantheon inherited from the common period. They are explicitly known from the Avestan Gāthās¹³ and, even more clearly, from the Hōm Stōm of the Yasna.¹⁴ So do we point out mythological characters underlying the Indo-Iranian common ancestral worship based on pressing the soma.

§17. The second relates to the ancient anthropology of Aryan peoples. In the present tale, when we are talking about the myth of *mārtāṇḍā-*, we can see that humanity is not defined as created by a god prior to everything. Humans are descendants of Vivasvant, who was supposed to be Indra's twin. During the *agniṣṭomā-* ritual, the

sacrificer tries to become another Vivasvant in order to regain a part of his original nature.

§18. From this sacrificial dynamics emerges a specific and authentic definition of the archaic Vedic anthropology, perhaps even the common Indo-Iranian anthropology. To my eyes, its originality dwells in the metaphor describing the relation between the gods and humans not as the relation between creator and creature, but as the relation between an injured younger brother and his despoiler elder brother. The first man is before anything, the miscarried child which is the result of a criminal abortion provoked by elder gods who were protective of their own status, becoming coward with the desire of safeguarding their own privileges. The variants are really abundant and they don't all shed the same pessimistic light over the gods. Some of them even attempt to exonerate the first sons of Aditi. But the message is constant over one point: if Aditi's pregnancy had reached its end, it would have resulted in the birth of two new magnificent twins. When one of them is born as a shapeless, miscarried child, it reveals the result of a failure, of an injustice and a crime. The intervention of the older sons of Aditi is not other than secondary, not exactly creative, and with the title of lesser evil. It most often presented by the texts as the fruit of an authoritarian injunction emanating from the mother herself. It limits itself to resize the miscarried child in order to give him shape and make him emerge from flesh to have human appearance. Of the latter, it is never said that he owes to the gods the immediate inspiration which dictated him to make a sacrifice in order to regain the part of his divine life that was taken away from him.

§19. This conclusion is not without interest for the history of ideas. In the ancient Indo-Iranian thought the myth of the human creation by a supreme god did not exist. It is a secondary invention, perhaps justified by the simultaneous concerns, increasing the distance between the first cause and the appearance of man and magnifying the dignity of this divine first cause in order for him to become more venerable. A simplistic and primitive mythical discourse? It is not so sure. Through the unpleasant and seemingly disrespectful image of the innocent miscarried child legitimately allowed to claim its share

of divinity from the bottom of its misery, the Vedic authors translate in their own manner and in a particularly striking way, the perception that they had of their own humanity, based on the paradoxical and hopeless distance between physical finitude and the mental sensation of infinitude whose distortion we all experience at one time or another. The *agniṣtomá-* ceremony didn't only consist in making a trip through a sacred dimension whose access was represented by a new symbolic birth. The complete rite itself was a new birth, and at the end of the worship, the sacrificer was a new man, a completely achieved man: ha had become an other Vivasvant.

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Footnote

- ¹ The meeting of the 6th Vedic Workshop offered me the opportunity to realise that other scholars try to better understand who was the *yájamāna-* : I mainly think to Chisei Ōshima. Oltramare 1903 only represents a totally obsolete approach of the problem.
- ² Schwab 1886.
- ³ Hillebrandt 1879.
- ⁴ Caland & Henry 1906.
- ⁵ Dumont 1927 & 1939.
- ⁶ « En fait il est difficile de concevoir rien de plus brutal et de plus matériel que la théologie des Brâhmanas ; les notions que l'usage a lentement affinées et qu'il a revêtues d'un aspect moral, surprennent par leur réalisme sauvage. Le sacrifice est une opération magique ; l'initiation qui régénère est une reproduction fidèle de la conception, de la gestation et de l'enfantement ; la foi n'est que la confiance dans la vertu des rites ; le passage au ciel est une ascension par étages ; le bien est l'exactitude rituelle. Une religion aussi grossière suppose un peuple de demi-sauvages ; mais les sorciers, les magiciens ou les chamanes de ces tribus ont su analyser leur système, en démonter les pièces, en étudier le jeu, en observer les principes, en fixer les lois : ils sont les véritables pères de la philosophie hindoue. » (Lévi 1898, 9-10).
- ⁷ This step of the ritual action is described in Caland & Henry 1906, 11-27 (§14-18).
- ⁸ Lévi 1898, 103-105.
- ⁹ Caland & Henry 1906, 15 (§15).
- ¹⁰ These texts have been read and analyzed by Hoffmann 1992, 717-720.
- ¹¹ *Upasád-* means "installation", and etymologically refers to the fact of ceremoniously seat down in the society of gods (Caland & Henry 1906, XXVIII for the definition, § 25-111 for the description of the ritual process).
- ¹² Two collections of this litany are translated by Caland & Henry 1906, 417-459. A deeper analysis of the litany has been achieved by Gonda 1981.
- ¹³ See Yasna 32,8.
- ¹⁴ See especially Yasna 9, 4 and 5.