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*R̥gveda: The Mantra, the Sūkta and the Maṇḍala  
or The Ṛ̥ṣi, the Devatā, the Chanda:  
The Structure of the Text and the  
Problems Regarding it*

DAYA KRISHNA

The *R̥gveda*, as everyone knows, is divided into ten *Maṇḍalas*, each having a large number of *Sūktas* which consist of separate, individual *Mantras*, both numbered serially. There seems no principle as to how many *Mantras* constitute a *Sūkta*, or how many *Sūktas* make a *Maṇḍala*. There are *Sūktas* with one *Mantra* only, and there are those which have more than fifty *Mantras* in them.

Each *Mantra* is supposed to have a meter and a *Devatā* to whom it is addressed by a *Ṛ̥ṣi* whose name is given just as that of the *Devatā* to whom it is addressed.

The 'unity' of the *Mantra* is, thus, a function of three independent variables, the *Devatā*, the *Ṛ̥ṣi* and the *Chanda*. But as, for some reason, the *Mantra* has to form a part of a *Sūkta* which usually consists of a sequence of *Mantras*, the unity of the *Sūkta* is supposed to be determined not by the 'meaningfulness' of the arrangement of the sequence in a particular order, but by the *Devatā* to whom it is addressed, the *Ṛ̥ṣi* who addresses and the *Chanda* in which it is composed. This, of course, would imply that the collection of the *Mantra* and their sequence makes no difference to them or, in other words, each *Mantra* is an isolated, atomic entity complete in itself, absolutely unaffected by anything outside itself even when it is supposed to be received or sung in conjunction with others.

Why should there be a *Sūkta* in such a situation, is difficult to understand. Would it not be better to 'free' the *Mantra* from the *Sūkta* and, thus, remove the misleading impression created by their being put together in a *Sūkta*, even though it does not make any difference to them at all?

This, if accepted, would solve the problem created by those innumerable *Sūktas* scattered over all the *Maṇḍalas* where the same

*Sūkta* has *Mantra* addressed to more than one *Devatā*, or by different *Ṛṣis*, or in different *Chandas*, or even all of these together. We would then have only the *Mantra*, and no *Sūkta* as at present, and thus have nothing to worry about.

The proposal, though tempting, runs against the serious difficulties created by, say, *Sūktas* such as the *Nāsadiya Sūkta* or the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, or even the *Sūkta* whose *Devatā* is denoted as 'KA', and a number of others of the same kind.

The problem created by the so-called 'Dialogue *Sūkta*' such as those of Pururavā and Urvaśī in *Sūkta* 10.95 and, Yama and Yamī in 10.10, is of a different order. Here, even the distinction between the *Ṛṣi* and the *Devatā* breaks altogether, as each is the *Ṛṣi* and the *Devatā* successively in the dialogue, but also no unitary meaning can emerge unless we keep in mind the successive stages of the dialogue as conveyed by the 'Mantra-sequence'.

The *dāna-stutis*, the hymns in praise of the *Yajamāna*, the *Yajamāna-dampatti*, and the hymns in praise of the seer or the *Ṛṣi* or the *Ṛṣiksā* raise problems which seem even more intractable as it is difficult to see how one who is being praised becomes a *Devatā* just because he is being praised. Yet, to one's utter surprise, the text seems to indicate that it was so, and was accepted from the very beginning without any objection on the part of anybody. The extant texts of the *Nighanṭu*, the *Nirukta* and the *Bṛhaddevatā* amply confirm the same.

The list of the *Devatās* in the *Ṛgveda* is simply incredible and, if seriously reflected upon, will reveal the utter inadequacy of the idea of a *Devatā* or deity as we think of it these days. The Vedic idea must have been totally different, if it could accommodate all that it has called *Devatās* in that category without feeling any incongruity, or being uncomfortable about it.

The *devatās* whom Yāska classifies as 'terrestrial' are an example of this. Surely, if the Vedic *Ṛṣi* considered 'pestle and mortar', or 'bow and arrow', or the earth, the battlefield and the place where food is cooked as *devatās*, they could not be using the term *Devata* in the normal accepted sense of the term. And yet, if he so regarded them, it is time that we revise our idea of what the term meant to those who used them.

The fact, however, is that this just could not be done and the 'desperate' attempts from Yāska onwards to try to bring some 'sense' and 'order' in this 'chaotic-anarchic' world of the *Rgveda* is an evidence of the same. The recourse to etymology in order to find the meanings of the words 'naming' the *Devata* was an attempt in this direction. So also was the argument that the 'gods', even though having different 'Names', were the same if they had the same attributes, a strategy adopted later on by the author of the *Brahma Sūtra* to explain the divergent conceptions of Brahman in the *Upaniṣads*.

Yet another strategy was adopted to reduce the number of 'gods' to a manageable proportion, and that was to treat the different names as referring to different aspects of the same deity, as was obviously the case with Sūrya or the sun-god in the *Rgveda*. But, though this might reduce their number, it could hardly be applied to all cases as their number was too large and had, for some reason, gone on increasing so that we find the largest number of 'new' gods in the last, i.e., the tenth *Mandala*.

Surprisingly, this *Mandala* also has the largest number of 'new' *Ṛṣis*, thus raising the problem of the relation between the 'new' *Devatās* and the new *Ṛṣis* that are found in that *Mandala*. The appellation 'new' in respect of the *Ṛṣi* only means that they do not belong to the lineage of those *Ṛṣis* who form the central nucleus around which the earliest *Sūktas* seem to have been collected and were given precedence over others. *Mandalas* 2 to 7, as is well known, are organized around the lineage of Āngirasa/Bhārgava, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Ātreya, Bharadvāja and Vasiṣṭha, respectively. It is not the case that the names of other *Ṛṣis* are not found in these *Mandalas*, but they are few and far between and, in the case of sixth and seventh *Mandala*, practically none at all.

The case of the Kāṇva lineage is strange as, though they have a prominent place in the first and the eighth *Mandala*—some occurring even in the ninth—they were never given a separate *Mandala* to themselves. Perhaps, they are late-comers and became prominent later, as is evidenced by the separate and independent *Samhitā* of the *Sūkta Yajurveda*, called after their name, the *Kāṇva Samhitā*. Professor Satavalekar, the eminent scholar of the Veda, has questioned the identity of these with those found in the *Rgveda*, but

there seems little reason to doubt that they belonged to the same lineage as those found in the *Rgveda*, particularly if one remembers the proliferation of the *Ṛsis* belonging to this lineage in the eighth *Maṇḍala* and of some in the ninth *Maṇḍala* also.

In fact, the story is not confined to *Kāṇvas* only. The case of the *Āṅgīrasa* is even more important as—though they had the second *Maṇḍala* to themselves sharing it with the *Bhārgava*—they come into their own only in the eighth, ninth and the tenth *Maṇḍalas* where there are a lot of other 'new' *Ṛsis* also.

What is even more surprising is to find that even those *mantras* belonging to the other major lineages such as *Viśvāmitra*, *Gautama*, *Ātreya*, *Bharadvāja* and *Vasiṣṭha* occur in *Maṇḍalas* other than the ones in which they occupy a prominent, if not exclusive, place for themselves. This suggests not only that the successive generations belonging to the families of these Vedic *Ṛsis* continued to add to the creation of the *Mantra/Sūkta* text of the *Rgveda*, but also that the *Maṇḍalas* in which they occur were incorporated in the standard text of the *Rgveda* later. This is generally accepted for the first and the tenth *Maṇḍala* by most of the scholars who have written on the subject. But the same has also to be done in respect of eighth and ninth *Maṇḍala* on the same grounds has, as far as I know, not been seriously considered in spite of the fact that the same considerations apply to them equally.

It is not that *Ṛsis* different from the seven lineages whom we have designated as 'new' do not occur in the *Maṇḍalas* II, III, IV, V, VI and VII, but their number is far less than those that occur in the rest of the *Maṇḍalas*, i.e., I, VIII, IX and X. In fact, if we include the *Kāṇvas* amongst the 'new' *Ṛsis*, the picture would change even more as they form a significantly large proportion of the *Ṛsis* in *Maṇḍala* I and VIII. The total number of 'new' *Ṛsis* in the lineage *Maṇḍala*, if we exclude the *Kāṇvas*, adds only to 23, 14 of which are found in fifth *Maṇḍala* which belongs to the *Ātreya* family. The II, IV, VI and VII *Maṇḍala* have only one, two and one *Ṛsi*, respectively. The III *Maṇḍala* belonging to the *Viśvāmitra* family has the second largest, i.e., five 'new' *Ṛsis* in it.

The story of the *Devatās* in these 'Family *Maṇḍalas*' is not very different. They add up to 71, of whom 42 are found in the sixth and seventh *Maṇḍala*, 20 and 22, respectively. The II, III, IV and V have 6, 7, 10 and 6 'new' *Devatās* in them, adding to only 29.

As against these, *Maṇḍala* X alone has about 90 'new' *Devatās*. If we add to these the 'new' *Devatās* occurring in I, VIII and IX *Maṇḍala* also, the total number would be about 135 or a little more, depending how we treat the term *pavamāna* when added to *Agni* or *Puṣā* as in *Sūkta* 9.67. There are some differences in this regard between the *Bṛhad Devatā* and the extant text of the *Rgveda* that we have with us as, say, in IX.83. The problem of these differences, in fact, plagues every student of the *Rgveda* as there are not only significant differences between the standard texts on the subject, such as *Nighaṇṭu*, *Nirukta*, *Bṛhaddevatā* and *Sarvānukramaṇī*, but also different interpretations regarding the *Devatā* that is referred to in the *Mantra* on the part of well-known authorities such as *Śākatāyana*, *Śākapūṇi*, *Gārgya*, *Gālava* and others. The significance of these differences in the context of the construction of the text of the *Rgveda* seems to have hardly been appreciated, for if we cannot exactly determine in many cases who is the *Devatā* or the *Ṛsi* of the *Mantra* concerned, how can we talk about it meaningfully if the exact determination of the *Ṛsi*, the *Devatā* and the *Chanda* is considered essential to the construal of a *Mantra* as a *Mantra* in the *Rgveda*.

But whatever the problem created by the difference amongst the texts on the basis of which our present 'knowledge' about the *Rgveda* rests or the diversities of interpretation referred to by *Yaska* in his *Nirukta* itself, there can be little doubt that something significant was happening in the later *Rgvedic* period when new *Ṛsis* brought with them not only new *Devatās*, but also a new ethos, a new way of wonder and thinking and feeling brought to the fore by the women *Ṛsis* or *Ṛsikās* on the one hand and those who composed the *Nāsadiya Sūkta*, the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, the *Kāsmā Devāya Sūkta*, along with the *Sūktas* called *Bhāvavṛttam*, as if it too were a *Devatā* belonging to the Vedic Pantheon.

That there was some sort of a break from the earlier tradition which may be regarded as centering around the families and lineage of the *Ṛsis* of the second to seventh *Maṇḍala*, i.e., the *Āṅgīrasa*, *Bhārgava*, the *Viśvāmitra*, the *Gautama*, the *Ātreya*, the *Bharadvāja* and the *Vasiṣṭha* is shown by the fact that the first, eighth, ninth and tenth *Maṇḍala* breathe a different air. The *Kāṇvas*, who seem to be a latecomer, dominate the first and eighth *Maṇḍala*, while

the latter brings a whole new class of *Sūkta* called *dānastuti*, which though not entirely absent earlier as they are found in the sixth and seventh *Maṇḍala* also, predominate here, in the eighth *Maṇḍala*. As against one in the sixth *Maṇḍala* (6.27) and three in the seventh *Maṇḍala* (7.18, 7.41 and 7.49) there are thirteen in the eighth *Maṇḍala*. It seems that Bharadvāja and Vasiṣṭha had taken a step which broke the inhibitions and made the praise of the gift and the gift-giver equivalent to the praise of the *Devatā* who also were asked for gifts by the *Ṛṣis* and praised for the same.

Similar seems to be the story of the 'self-praise' of the seer or the *Ṛṣi* as if he/she were the *Devatā* of the *Sūkta* as the 'praise' was addressed to him or her. The tenth *Maṇḍala* abounds in these, though the tradition seems to have been well established as it is found in other *Maṇḍalas* also. The anomaly here seems greater as it is difficult to understand how the *Ṛṣi* could treat himself or herself as the *Devatā* as they could certainly not ask or expect 'gifts' from themselves.

Perhaps it was the 'praise-aspect' that made the collectors of the *Samhitā Sūkta* treat them as *Devatā*. But even this hypothesis breaks if we remind ourselves of the 'Dialogue-*Sūkta*' such as those of Purusravā and Urvaśī or Yama and Yamī which abound in the tenth *Maṇḍala* where each is alternatively treated as *Ṛṣi* or *Devatā*, depending upon who is addressing and who is being addressed.

But, is this then the 'real' meaning of being a *Ṛṣi* or a *Devatā* in the context of the *Rgveda Samhitā*? Unfortunately, this is not supported by the evidence if we take the *Sūkta* dealing with Duḥsvapna-nāśanam or Yakṣmānāśanam or Sapatnghanam (10.166) or Sapatnībādhnam (10.145) which, for some strange reason, is also called an *Upanisad*. The *Duḥsvapna-nāśanam* occurs in other *Maṇḍalas* also as, say, in 2.28, 5.82 and 1.120. The *Maṇḍala* 5.82 is mentioned only in *Bṛhaddevatā* and not, as the note there says, in *Sarvānukramaṇī*. These discrepancies raise important issues, which we will discuss later.

But it is not just these that raise disturbing questions regarding what is meant by a *Devatā* in the *Rgveda*. There are *Sūktas* relating to *Prāyaścitta* as in 10.165 or 10.162 or *rājyābhiṣeka* 10.173 and 10.174 where the king is treated as a *Devatā*.

These and some others may be said to have been taken from *Atharvaveda* where they are said to be found in plenty and, thus, not belonging to the *Rgveda* proper. But what shall we say of those *Sūkta* where the *Devatā* is named as *bhāvavṛttam* or even something such as *Jñāna* as in 10.71?

*Bhāvavṛttam* is something special as it is found practically in the tenth *Maṇḍala* alone. There is reference to a *bhāvavṛttam* in *Bṛhaddevatā* to one as occurring in 6.47 but, according to the footnote given in the text, it is not found in *Sarvānukramaṇī*. There are at least six *bhāvavṛttam* in the tenth *Maṇḍala*, including the famous *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (10.129) of Prajapati Parmeṣṭhin. The *bhāvavṛttam Sūkta* where the *bhāvavṛttam* is explicitly mentioned as a *Devatā* are 10.85, 10.129, 10.130, 10.145, 10.154 and 10.190. All these, though listed in the *Bṛhaddevatā* as such, are not always treated or mentioned as such in the text available at present. The *bhāvavṛttam* referred to in 10.85, for example, is one such; another is 10.145 which is called an *Upanisad* in both and also describes by its subject-matter as *Sapatnībādhnam*. *Indrāṇī* is said to be the *Ṛṣi* or rather the *Ṛṣikā*, though she is not mentioned as such. She seems to have some problem with Indra as she also occurs in 10.86 where *Vṛṣakapi* plays some role and there is a strange dialogue between her and Indra. The present text gives Indra as the *Devatā* though, according to the conventions of the dialogue, one who is addressed is always the *Devatā* and one who addresses is the *Ṛṣi*, as in 10.10 and 10.95. Here, 10.154 and 10.190 are described as *bhāvavṛttam* in the present text as are 10.129 and 10.130.

What exactly is meant by a *bhāvavṛttam* is not clear. The *Sūkta* 10.129 suggests the emergence of a consciousness different from the one associated with the *Ṛṣis* of the *Rgveda* who are always addressing the gods, praising them and asking for something in return. The *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (10.129) reflects a 'questioning consciousness' that is concerned with the cosmos as a whole and wonder about its origin and coming into being. Even the *Sūkta* 10.130 contains this element in *Mantra* 3 where it asks 'कासीत्प्रभा प्रतिमा किं निदानभाज्यं किंसासीत् परिधिः क आसीत्। छन्दः किमासीत्प्रउगं किमुक्थे यदेदवा देवम मजन्त विश्वे।।' But 10.154 does not seem to suppose this, though 10.190 takes us again to the cosmic question of the origins, but without questioning it.

These three *Sūktas*, in fact, have something in common with the other well-known *Sūkta* of the *Rgveda* and should, more properly, be classified with them. *Sūkta* 10.121 ascribed to Hiranyagarbha Prājāpatya asks 'कस्मैषा देवाय हविष विधेम' and answers in the last *Mantra* 10 that instead of worshipping so many gods, we might address only that which creates it all, i.e., Prajāpati. The question, in fact, is asked by Sunahśeṣṣ Ājigarti in *Sūkta* 1.24 where it is asked whose auspicious name (चारु देवस्य नाम) shall we invoke and, successively, suggests Agni, Savitā or Bhaga and Varuṇa for consideration. Surprisingly Indra, for some reasons, is left out.

The *Puruṣa Sūkta* 10.90 deals with the same problem and answers 'पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम्' and details at great length how the all-encompassing Being, though pervading all that has been, or will be, yet transcends it also. The *Nāsadīya Sūkta* 10.129 questions even this and raises the problem of there being 'non-being' or 'Being' at the beginning and suggests that the question is 'unanswerable' because of its very nature. The *Sūkta* 10.190 suggests that the answer may lie not in postulating some 'Being', whether personal or impersonal, but rather in seeing an 'order' which makes judgments claiming 'truth' or 'goodness' possible through providing a foundation for their 'actuality' and validation. *Rta* and *Satya* provide the cosmic foundation of the universe and may be apprehended by *tapasa* or disciplined 'seeking' or *sādhana* and realized through them. The *Sūkta* 10.191, the last *Sūkta* of the *Rgveda*, suggests that this is not, and cannot be, something on the part of an individual alone, but is rather the 'collective' enterprise of all 'humankind' and names the 'god' of this *Sūkta* 'Somjñānam' emphasizing the 'Togetherness' of all 'Being' and spelling it out as सं गच्छच्छ्वं, सं वद वं, सं वो मनांसि जानताम्। देवा भागं यथा पूर्वं संजानना उपासते॥

This *upāsana* is not the *upāsana* of the *Upaniṣads*, which is done in loneliness for the attainment of 'Aloneness', but a 'togetherness' of 'mind' and 'heart', as the subsequent verses explicate.

These *Sūktas* which form the speculative core of the *Rgveda* have little to do with *yajña*, but are rather a reflection on problems with which man has been perennially concerned. They all occur mostly in the tenth *Maṇḍala* and are hardly concerned with any of the 'gods' of the Vedic Pantheon, or the 'reflections' of any of the *Ṛṣis* belonging to the major lineages in the *Rgveda*, except Samvanana

Āngirasa to whom the last *Sūkta* is ascribed, and this perhaps is the only *Sūkta* with which he is associated.

All this suggests that something 'new' was occurring in the late Vedic period to which this *Maṇḍala* is generally assigned. The impression is further strengthened by the fact that women *Ṛṣis* came into their own in this *Maṇḍala* and speak with a voice which, though embarrassing to many, was distinctly their own. Surprisingly, when the male voice talks like this in a hundred allusions in the *Rgveda*, it does not seem to embarrass anyone, but when a Yamī (10.10) or Urvaśī (10.95) or a Romaśā (1.126) or Lopāmudrā or Indrānī (10.86) speaks out, most people do not like it. It is not that women *Ṛṣikās* always speak with one voice or are concerned only with expressing their viewpoint on the intimate aspects of their personal life. Like their male counterparts, they too have a wide-ranging cosmological reflection as in 10.125 where Vāgāmaorani sees herself as identical in essence with all the gods and everything else, leading to the puzzling question whether the *Devatā* of this *Sūkta* be considered as *Vāk* or *Ātmā* or the *Ṛṣikā* herself. Different editors of the *Rgveda* offer different opinions according to their own different predilections. The same situation obtains with Śraddhā Kāmāyanī who talks of *Śraddhā* as being the most fundamental thing in life, as without it life can have neither 'roots' nor 'meaning' (10.151). Sūryā Sāvitrī plays the same trick with her name and describes her marriage with a systematic ambiguity as if she is describing the marriage of Sūrya, the sun-god himself. It is not that the *Ṛṣikās* do not write *Sūktas* in honour of the usual gods addressed to in the *Rgveda*. Ghōṣā Kākṣivaṭī, for example, addresses the Āśvinas in *Sūktas* 10.39 and 10.40.

The *Sūktas* ascribed to women *Ṛṣis* deserve an independent study on their own. But there can be little doubt that most of these occur in the tenth *Maṇḍala* of the *Rgveda*, and that they are generally not related to the *Ṛṣis* of the major lineages, though some do belong to them. The presence of Sarparājñī amongst the *Ṛṣikās* suggests that the tribals were being adopted into the Vedic fold, including the women, as belonging to them. *Sūkta* 10.175 seems to be attributed to a tribal *Ṛṣi* also called *sarpa* (Ūrdhvagrāvā Ārbudī) whose *Devatā* is said to be *grāvāṇaḥ* or *prastardikhaṇḍa*, that is a piece of stone.

It is not just the tribals or women who begin to play a more important part in the late Vedic period, but also those who belong to the various professions other than those who belonged to the priestly class. The case of *rathakāra* is well-known as he was given the right to perform the Vedic sacrifice along with *Niṣadasthapatī*, the tribal chief, but the case of *Dhānāka* (10.35-36) or, say, *Tvṣṭā* *Garbhakartā* who occur in the tenth *Maṇḍala* (10.184) do not seem to have been paid sufficient attention in this regard. In fact, if one pays attention to *Sūkta* 9.112 where the *Ṛṣi*, *Śiśu Āngirasa* calls himself as a *Kārū*, i.e., a 'crafter' (*mantra* 3) or maker of verses (*kārūrāhaṁ*) just like others who pursue their craft and has his father who was a *bhiṣaja* or 'doctor' did, or his mother was *Upalaprakṣiṇī*, a profession which the translators do not find easy to understand. There is, in fact, a *Ṛṣi* who is called *Āthavaṇa bhiṣaja* in *Sūkta* 97 of the tenth *Maṇḍala* who has written *Mantras* in praise of medicinal plants or *auśadhi samūha*, which is regarded as a *Devatā* for the *Sūkta*. The name seems to suggest that he was a *Ṛṣi* belonging primarily to the *Atharvaveda* and his inclusion here seems more a matter of courtesy than of right. In fact, the tenth *Maṇḍala* seems to have a number of *Sūktas*, which seem to belong to the *Atharvavedic* rather than the *Ṛgvedic* tradition. Such, for example, are those that deal with the healing or even the magical power of *Mantras* to achieve ends that one would not usually regard as good. The *Sūkta* 10.163 ascribed to *Vivṛhā Kāśyapa* deals with the curing of tuberculosis or *Yakṣamā* (यक्षमानाशने). *Sūkta* 10.161 also deals with *Rājayakṣamānāśanam* and the *Ṛṣi* to whom it is ascribed is called *Yakṣmānāśana Prājāpatya*. While *Sūkta* 10.164 deals with getting rid of bad dreams (*duḥsvapna nāśanam*). *Sūkta* 10.166, ascribed to *Rṣabha Vairāja* or *Rṣabha Śakara*, is supposed to be effective in dealing with co-wives who, presumably, are creating difficulties for one another. Strangely, *Sūkta* 10.145 deals with the same problem, *Saptnibādhama*, and is ascribed to *Indrāṇi* and is, strangely, also called an *Upaniṣad*. This obviously is a *Ṛṣikā* *Indirāṇi* different from the *Vṛṣakapi Sūkta* 10.86 where *Indra*, *Vṛṣakapi* *Indra* and *Indrāṇi* are said to be the *Ṛṣis* and the *Ṛṣikā* engaged in a dialogue with *Indra* as a *Devatā* of the *Sūkta*.

The notion of the *Ṛṣi* and the *Devatā* usually associated with the Vedic *Mantra* need a drastic revision as not only they can easily

interchange places as in this *Sūkta*, but also have nothing sacrosanct about them or an element of the transcendental or the sacred associated with them. The dialogue between *Yama* and *Yamī* in *Sūkta* 10.10 and *Purnruvā-Urvaśi* in *Sūkta* 10.95 are pre-eminent examples of this where each is successively mentioned as a *Ṛṣi* and a *Devatā*, depending upon the situation as the dialogue requires.

But while there may be some justification for such ascriptions in the dialogues as the *Devatā* is usually the one who is addressed and the *Ṛṣi* the one who addresses, there seems to be none in calling *duḥsvapna nāśanam* as *Devatā* (10.164) or *Yakṣmānāśnam* as in 10.163.

The same seems to be the situation in the *Prāyaseitta Sūkta* such as 10.162 and 10.165 where the *Devatā* is described as *garbhasrāva prāyaścitta* (10.162) or *Kapotapachcha Prāyaścitta* (10.165).

It is not that such *Devatās* are not mentioned elsewhere. *Duḥsvapna nāśanam* occurs, for example, in 1.120 and 2.28 also. Similar is the case with, say, *Mṛtuvimocinī* 7.59 and *Pāśavimocinī* 7.88, but there these so-called *Devatās* are embedded in the larger *Sūkta* devoted to some other regular *Devatā* such as *Aśvinī Kumara* or *Varuṇa*. As for *mṛtuvimocanī*, it is embedded in a *Sūkta* dedicated to *Maruta* except for the last *mantra* (12), which is addressed to *Rudra* as *Trayambaka* and is known by this name. The same is true of *Pāśavimocinī* in 7.88 where, in a *Sūkta* addressed to *Varuṇa*, it is only the last *Mantra* No. 7, which seems to be concerned with this. This designation is found only in the text edited by *Satavalekara* from *Pardi* and is missing from the other text that we have that has been edited by *K.L. Joshi*, published by *Choukhamba Press* in 2000. Surprisingly, the *Bṛhaddevatā* does not mention either of these specific titles in the list of deities given in Appendix III, critically edited and translated by *McDonnell* in 1904 in the *Harvard Oriental Series*, though there is a reference to *Tryambaka* in it the context of which the term *mṛtuvimocanī* is used. There is even a problem with the ascription of *duḥsvapna nāśanam* in 1.120 where, in spite of the fact that this designation occurs in both the texts edited by *Satavalekara*, *Joshi* and the *Bṛhaddevatā*, the text does not sustain the specific description in it.

The problem with the *Ṛṣis* and the *Devatās* in the *Rgveda*, as mentioned in the text available with us at present are so many and so baffling, that it is surprising as to how could anyone have hon-



estly said that a Vedic *Mantra* cannot be a *Mantra* unless these two are exactly specified along with the *Chanda* or the meter in which it is composed.

If taken literally, the requirement will create a problem for all the *Sūktas* where the *Ṛṣi* or the *Devatā* or the *Chanda* cannot be unequivocally determined or is given with possible alternatives, or is just absent altogether. The whole of the second *Maṇḍala*, for example, is supposed to be ascribed to both Āngirasa and Bhārgava even though the two lineages are quite distinct in the *Rgveda* itself.<sup>1</sup> This, as everyone knows, is not an isolated case. The whole of the *Rgveda* is replete with similar examples. The situation is even more complicated as, too many a time, the *Ṛṣi* and the *Devatā* are the same as, according to the description given in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, the *Sūkta* is in 'self-praise' of the *Ṛṣi* and, hence, is addressed to oneself. There are also cases of alternative ascriptions where the same person is, alternatively, a *Ṛṣi* and a *Devatā*, depending upon who is being addressed and who is addressing. Urvaśi and Pururvā in *Sūkta* 10.95 and Yama and Yamī in *Sūkta* 10.10 are well-known examples, but there are others as well. Lopāmudrā and Ramaśā (1.179 and 1.126) are other examples found in the first *Maṇḍala*, suggesting that the Dialogue form was not confined to tenth *Maṇḍala* only.

The anomalous problem created by the alternative appellation of the term *Ṛṣi* and *Devatā* to the same person in the Dialogue *Sūktas* of the *Rgveda* is further compounded by the *Sūkta* where the self-praise of the *Ṛṣi* results in his being treated as a *Devatā* of the *Sūkta* to whom the *Mantra* is being addressed. The practice abounds in the eighth and tenth *Maṇḍala*, but is sporadically found elsewhere also. Some of the women *Ṛṣis* of the tenth *Maṇḍala* such as Śacī Paulomī do the same (10.159).

As for *Chanda*, the third pillar on which the identity of a *mantra* is supposed to rest, the situation does not seem any better. If there is indecision about the *ṛṣi* or the *devatā* in so many of the *Sūktas* in the *Rgveda*, the same is also found in the case of *Chanda*, though not to the same extent. The *Sūkta* 4.10, for example, mentions in respect of *mantras* 4, 6 and 7 that these may be in the *Chanda* named पदपंक्ति or प्रशिांक, while *mantras* 5 and 8 are clearly designated as महापंक्ति and प्रशिांक, respectively. The occurrence of different *Chandas*

in the same *Sūkta* is not supposed to affect the 'unity' of the *Sūkta*, just as the existence of different *ṛṣis* and the *devatās* is not supposed to do the same. Where from does the unity of a *Sūkta* come, then? That is the unanswered question in respect of this most basic text of the 'Indian civilization'.

The ambiguity in respect of what is meant by *ṛṣi* or *devatā* in the context of the *Rgveda* is endemic, as has been pointed out at length earlier. But, like the *Chanda*, perhaps more than that, they too abound in multiplicity and difference, as if the very idea of 'unity' did not make any 'sense' to those who 'authored' or 'collected' them.

The idea that the 'unity' to a vedic mantra or *Sūkta* is given by the *ṛṣi*, the *devatā* and the *chanda* is a superimposition on the text, a myth, an *adhyāsa* from which we need to 'free' ourselves so that we may 'look' at it with fresh eyes, unencumbered by the 'misguidance' of the past, enshrined in the texts written on the subject.

The same is true with respect to the *maṇḍala* arrangement at present which, however, convenient it might have been in the past, stands in the way of our understanding and appreciating it now.

#### NOTE AND REFERENCE

1. गृत्समद (आंगीरस शौनहोत्र पयचाद), भार्गव शौनक।