



Summary

Śruti, or the Ancient Indian ‘Heard Word’ about the Deeds of the Creative Mind

Almost a decade ago I published a book in the Polish language entitled *The Encounter with Hinduism*. In that book, I included the text of my paper presented at Oxford in 2015,¹ where I summarised the main idea that guided me while writing it. I tried to show that in a globalised world Christianity and Hinduism are destined to engage in friendly dialogue rather than unfriendly confrontation. My conviction that this is possible stems from the study of ‘The Heard Word’ (*Śruti*), i.e. the Vedic hymns, which – to my mind prove that – when St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Hebrews: ‘In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways² – by ‘our ancestors’ he should have meant mankind’s ancestors rather than only Jewish ancestors. Especially so in the light of what the same author writes in his Letter to Galatians: ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’.³ Thus my contention is that the said Vedic hymns should be included in what Christians call the Old Testament – in this case, of entire humanity – especially since the vision of creation presented in the Vedic lore, on the one hand, is much more in tune with what the current cosmological research offers as compared to the Genesis of the Bible. On the other hand, it evokes also – so far ignored – the creative character of the redemptory sacrifice of Yehoshua and, as a consequence, his martyrdom on the cross appears in this light as the repetition in time and space of the creative sacrifice of the Person-Lord of Creatures (*Puruṣa-Prajāpati*).⁴

My underlying presumption of this study is that, according to the Vedic perception of creation, consciousness as such is the creator and not the final subtle product of creation. That

¹ M.K. Byrski, ‘The Sacrifice of God in the Vedas and Christianity’, *Journal of Academic Perspectives*, Vol. 2015, No. 3. <https://www.journalofacademicperspectives.com/back-issues/volume-2015/volume-2015-no-3> (accessed 20.01.2022).

² <https://biblehub.com/niv/hebrews/1.htm> (accessed 20.01.2022).

³ <https://biblehub.com/niv/galatians/3.htm> (accessed 20.01.2022).

⁴ ‘The idea of Prajāpati dying in the creative process is most explicitly expressed in the *agni-cayana* myths of the OEB, in which Prajāpati does not extract milk or any other food out of himself, but, having created the world, he himself becomes the food of Agni: he dies in order to be eaten by fire. Here, besides the life-giving aspect of the food assuring the existence of fire, we can clearly see the aspect of food which is connected with death: in order to become food one must die, exactly as Prajāpati did’. J. Jurewicz, ‘Prajāpati, the Fire and the *pañcāgni-vidyā*’, *Studia Indologiczne*, Vol. 7 (2000), p. 191–192.

which 'The Non-Being Hymn' (*Nāsadīya Sūkta*) calls neither *Being*, nor *Non-Being* and which as *One* (we may see this as a poetic anticipation of cosmological Singularity) breathes with its *Will* (*svadhā*) and in consequence, what was to become, by the power of heat was born and at the beginning *Love* (*kāma*) enveloped what was the first seed of mind. This entire description of creation I treat as referring to *Consciousness* (*cit*). The nature of consciousness is cognition and cognition can be operative only in time and space, so consciousness by the power of heat had to generate time and space. That heat remains in time and space in the form of Fire (*Agni*), for combustion is the source of life – whether it is the burning Sun or the *digestive pan-human heat* (*vaiśvānara Agni*). The human faculty of generating fire as well as the faculty of speech signify that the creative power of consciousness incarnate in the living beings is all the time active, and the human species, thanks to these faculties, creates civilisations not unlike bees, ants and termites, who also communicate! The celebration of *ritual of fire sacrifice* (*yajña*) is a way to declare the conviction that this is the truth about the source and the nature of existence! That is why in the first hymn dedicated to *Agni / Fire* – which opens the *Rigveda* – this very *Agni* is called the *heavenly being of sacrifice* (*yajñasya devah*). Now the question arises why the cosmic creative combustion is called sacrifice? The hymn entitled *Puruṣasūkta* gives the answer to this question. The act of self-cognition of consciousness – that *Being and Non-Being* – accompanied by the emission of heat which is the very nature of active creative consciousness is conceived as the offering of *Puruṣa* – the *sacrificial animal* – by the *heavenly beings* (*deva*) as their oblation and it turns it into the *three-footed Person* (*Puruṣa*) (I, YOU, HE/SHE/IT), who remains above, i.e., outside time and space, but who leaves within time and space one-fourth of IT[SELF]! This one-fourth incarnates in all living beings – plants included. This idea seems to anticipate what Yehoshua, obviously identifying himself with the *Person* – his *Father* – said about himself much later: 'ego sum via et veritas et vita'! Consequently, he also offered himself as the sacrificial *Agnus Dei*.

Yet in order that this self-sacrifice fulfils its creative task – which is the incarnation – the *generated fire* – *Agni* – has to subside so that the *primary material substance* (*dravīṇam*) is preserved, i.e. that the Sun does not burn out too soon and that the *Person* (*Puruṣa*) can incarnate himself in living beings. This is the subject of the following hymn addressed to the *All-Creator* (*Viśvakarman*). From the point of view of Hindu-Christian dialogue the end of the fourth strophe seems to be very meaningful. It contains a question regarding the timber out of which the Earth and the Heavens were chiselled into shape and on which the *All-Creator* supported himself while he created the worlds. Sayana rightly treats these questions as rhetoric ones, but for Christians they seem to anticipate the Tree of the Cross. In the subsequent strophe, the *All-Creator* is requested to allow the faithful to know which are the higher, lower and middle abodes where he dwells. Here, Sayana comes to our help with the suggestion that the higher abodes mean *heavenly beings* (*deva*), i.e. the elements or Fire, Sun, Wind, Earth, which in this tradition are anthropomorphised; the middle are human beings, and the lower are insects and worms. For a Christian, this is confirmed by Yehoshua when he says: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).⁵ Life is the only way to realise the sense of existence in the acts of cognition.

A second hymn also addressed to the *All-Creator* calls him the *Father of the Eye*. The persistence of thought that is ascribed to him indicates that the creative consciousness is all the time at work and calling him the *Father of the Eye* indicates his responsibility for almost

⁵ <https://biblehub.com/niv/john/14.htm> (accessed 20.01.2022).

biblical division of light from darkness which enables the *Eye* to function. Further on, this hymn says that the *All-Creator* satiates the *Sages* symbolised by the constellation Ursa Major. The *Sages* are the depositaries of *Speech*, which is the manifestation of consciousness in the shape of the *Heard Word of the Veda* and which the hymn calls the *Nectar* thanks to which man can truly know his *self* (*ātman*). There is one more fascinating idea in this hymn when it says that there is something which is beyond the precincts of time and space: a *blastema* (*garbhām*) in which all *heavenly beings* (*devāḥ*) – that is, the elements – can be seen. This may be perceived as a striking poetical vision of what modern cosmology terms ‘Singularity’. The hymn ends with a very severe admonition directed towards priests pointing them out as those who enjoy life while mumbling laudatory hymns – very topical indeed!

The main reason for choosing for analysis the hymn ascribed to the sage named *Long-darkness* (*Dūrghatamas*) is the question formulated in the 4th strophe: ‘I ask, unknowing, those who know, the sage – as one all ignorant – for sake of knowledge, what was that ONE who is the Unborn’s image hath established and fixed firm these worlds’ six regions?’ (as translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith), and what I consider the main answer to it expressed in the 46th strophe: ‘They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is nobly-winged Garutmān. To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan’ (RV. I. 164. 46; Griffith). Unless and until humanity accepts this truth, a true communion among the followers of different confessions will be difficult to achieve. This does not only concern the names but also the imagery that they signify and the ideas behind them. This comparatively long hymn of 52 strophes contains many fascinating observations, but since our basic premise is the Hindu-Christian encounter and dialogue, from this point of view, the 8th strophe is particularly significant, for it can be taken as a sort of anticipation of the Nativity of Yehoshua. This strophe, in my translation which differs substantially from R.T.H. Griffith’s proposal,⁶ is as follows: ‘Mother welcomed the Father at the time proper, earlier she met him mentally and cordially. In her womb she had to carry the Essence – She delivered – therefore they came with obeisance and hymn’. The context of it – of course – is the relationship of *Mother Earth* (*Prthvī mātā*) with *Father Heaven* (*Dyaus pitā*). It is significant that the birth of Yehoshua, who for the faithful is Christ – the Anointed One, is described in similar terms, as if indicating its cosmic implications! Of course, the majority of the strophes of this hymn refer to cosmology while evoking the imagery of a starry sky, a potter’s wheel, of cows in the pastures, of a lowing calf etc. It ends with an invocation addressed to the lovely *Feathered Bird*, the guardian of waters, nice to watch, *Heavenly Bird*, mighty and born out of waters and herbs, who satiates all desires with heavy rains – imploring him to come and defend us! The idea of the *Feathered Heavenly Bird* evokes the fourth strophe of the Psalm 91:

He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.⁷

The reason to choose for detailed scrutiny the last hymn of the third *Mandala*, dedicated mainly to Indra and Varuna but also to other gods such as Savitar, Brihaspati, Pushan, Maruts,

⁶ ‘The Mother gave the Sire his share of Order: with thought, at first, she wedded him in spirit. She, the coy Dame, was filled with dew prolific: with adoration men approached to praise her’.

⁷ <https://biblehub.com/niv/psalms/91.htm> (accessed 29.01.2022).

Bhaga and Soma, is that it contains the famous *Gāyatri Mantra*, whose role for the Brahminic Hinduism is comparable to the role of Lord's Prayer for Christianity. Since the evoked gods personify the elements brought to existence by the creative consciousness – i.e. *Brahman*, the Vedic Word, whose creative capacity in Upanishadic thought is defined as *Being-Consciousness-Satisfaction (Sat-Cit-Ānanda)* – it is not surprising that the words of the hymn are the proper means to communicate with them, 'the offsprings of creative consciousness'. The *Gāyatri Mantra* itself embodies well this approach, treating the Sun – Savitar as the impeller of thoughts and not only the source of warmth but also as somebody whose benevolence makes us actively beseech Bhaga – the Dispenser for his gifts. The hymn ends with the invitation of the main addressees of this hymn, i.e. the two gods Mitra and Varuna, to participate in the ritual of fire sacrifice, which is the very Womb of Order (*yonāv ṛtasyā*). This invitation confirms their role as the guardians of that Order which determines the shape of Reality.

The hymn whose analysis closes this study is not from the Rīgveda. It belongs to the Atharvaveda but its perfectly universal message is well formulated even in its very title *Parasparaprītyupadeśāsūktam* – i.e. *Instruction on Mutual Kindness*. What deserves special attention is the reference to the sacrificial fire. In strophe 6 the hymn says: 'Let your food and water-source be common. Let me harness you to a common yoke. As the spikes join the wheel hub from all-round – in that way in harmony together praise the Fire!' It may be added that the ritual act of sacrificial Fire adoration implies the same attitude towards the household fire and towards the Sun – the Fire of which not only sustains life but also stimulates our thoughts!

The main idea pinpointed in the afterword to this study is a striking convergence between the creative (*sic!*) sacrifice of the *Person-Lord of Creatures (Puruṣa-Prajāpati)* in the Vedic Hinduism and the crucifixion of Yehoshua in Christianity. From the Christian point of view, it can be noticed that the liturgy of the Holy Mass, which is supposed to be the recreation of the crucifixion of Yehoshua, means to worship him as an eternally living and eternally dying *Being* – the source of life, whom Pope Benedict XVI calls the *Creative Mind* and who becomes *our daily bread*. The final conclusion is that the sacrifice of Yehoshua is not so much the redemptive sacrifice of the Son offered to the Father for our sins, as it is, above all, the re-enacting of the creative sacrifice of the Father, who in this case is rather the Person-Lord of Creatures, and not Yahweh. Its redemptory character could be associated with the fact that such sacrifice removes ignorance of the proper source of existence, which is the self-immolation of the Creative Consciousness.

The main purpose of this study is to bring about better mutual understanding between the followers of Christianity and the followers of Hinduism with special reference to the Vedic vision of the Ultimate. For as Hans Küng puts it,

No peace among the nations
without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions
without dialogue between the religions.
No dialogue between the religions
without investigation of the foundations of the religions.⁸

⁸ H. Küng, *Islam. Past, Present, and Future*, trans. J. Bowden, Oxford, 2007, p. XXIII. I am very much beholden to Professor Józef Majewski for bringing this thought of Hans Küng to my attention.