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“WORDS AND THINGS” IN THE *ṚGVEDA*
(TO THE DENOMINATIONS OF “ROAD”, “WAY”, “PATH”)

Specialists in various fields of knowledge try to elicit facts from the *Ṛgveda* (RV), concerning the life of that distant epoch to which this text belongs. One can well understand it, because there are no literary documents from that time, and the collection of religious hymns, addressed to the Indo-Aryan gods, a specimen of the “Indogermanische Dichtersprache” is the only source to which one can turn. But the matter is that this source is of a very peculiar character, and hence many difficulties arise.

The hymns of the RV are addressed to gods. They are not descriptions of the everyday life of the Vedic Aryans. Their aim is to attract the attention of the god, to make him notice the hymn and the sacrifice of the given community, and not that of their rivals. And to reach this aim, the Ṛṣis switched on all the channels of information, including the formal one: the hymn had to be formally refined¹. The dark suggestive style of this esoteric poetry with its highly elevated eulogies of the gods and very exaggerated descriptions of their sacrificial rites exert influence upon the linguistic system of the RV. Not only the functioning of grammatical categories is determined by

1. Cf. T. ELIZARENKOVA, *Language and Style of the Vedic Ṛṣis*, Albany, 1995, Chap. 3.

mutual interference of language and style, but its vocabulary too. And it is just to the vocabulary that the technique of reconstructing culture has been applied not only to the Indo-European family, but to other families as well².

It is well known that the vocabulary of the RV is characterized by polysemy and synonymy. But the approach of a modern scientist to these phenomena seems to be sometimes principally different from that of a Vedic Ṛṣi. Where modern mentality discerns many discrete meanings of a word, the archaic mind might have seen one syncretic meaning, revealing itself in different contexts. As to synonymy, many words are used in the hymns of the RV in a metaphoric and symbolic sense. After these preliminary remarks one can pass to the analysis of the denominations of road in the RV.

As the way of life of the Indo-Aryan tribes at this time was semi-nomadic – they gradually moved further into Hindustan – it would be natural to expect that the topic of roads should be important for this culture (compare for instance the Gypsy folklore). And it was so, judging by the number of substantives that were used as denominations of road, way, path in this text. There are more than 10 words belonging to this semantic field.

ájman- m. (10x) / *ájma-* m. (8x), *ádhvān-* (40x), *éman-* (4x), *gāti-* f. (1x), *gātú-* m. (42x), *cáraṇa-* n. (1x), *pathí-/páth-/pánthā-* m. (153x), *pathyā-/pathīā-* f. (23x), *vartanī-* f. (7x), *vártman-* n. (1x), *vrájana-* n. (1x), *sugá-* n. (13x), *supátha-* n. (8x), *srutí-* f. (7x).

As there are many words designating the notion of “road” in the RV, one should make an attempt to find out what was the difference among them. The problem of method of such an analysis is very important. The following criteria for it can be suggested:

- 1) Semantic analysis:
 - a) principal or peripheral meaning
 - b) denomination of a general concept or its specification
 - c) literal or metaphorical use

2. Cf. C. WATKINS, *How to kill a dragon. Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford, 1995, p. 7.

- 2) Etymological analysis: how much the etymological motivation of the meaning is revealed on the synchronic level
- 3) Frequency of the word
- 4) Structure of the paradigm
- 5) Typical syntactic constructions in which the word takes part
- 6) Compounds, including the given word as its member
- 7) Typical qualifying epithets attributed to the word
- 8) Typical mythological contexts, in which the given word is used.

Applying these criteria according to the peculiarities of the material, one can get a relatively complete characteristics of a word.

The most frequent word for "road", "way", "path" in the RV is *páth-/pathí-/pánthā-* m., a substantive famous for its suppletive paradigm, where the three forms of the stem are in complementary distribution³ without any semantic difference. It is a word with a well-grounded Indo-European etymology⁴. *Páth-* denotes the most general idea of path, and at the same time covers all the range of possible particular meanings of this notion. It designates both roads on the earth and the path of the Cosmic Law.

Páth- in the RV is used mostly in its figurative meaning. The expression *ṛtásya páth-* is quite usual for the hymns. E.g., in an Aśvin-hymn VIII,22,7: *úpa no vājinīvasū | yātām ṛtásya pathibhiḥ* "Come to us, O you two, rich of rewards, by ways of the Cosmic Law!". Sometimes this expression is translated by Geldner as "the right way", as in X,70,2: *ṛtásya pathā námasā miyédho | devébhyo devátamaḥ suṣūdat* "Let (Agni,) the god par excellence, make this sacrificial food savoury for the gods by means of adoration on the path of the Cosmic Law!" Geldner translated it: "Auf dem rechten Wege"⁵, but Renou retains the literal meaning: "par la voie de l'Ordre"⁶. The line of demarcation between the two meanings is very

3. Cf. J. WACKERNAGEL, *Altindische Grammatik*, B. III, 1, Göttingen, 1929, § 159.

4. Cf. M. MAYRHOFER, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen*, II. B. Heidelberg, S. 81-83.

5. Cf. K. F. GELDNER, *Der Rig-Veda aus dem Sanskrit ins Deutsche übersetzt*, 3. T., Cambridge, Mass., 1951, S. 247.

6. Cf. L. RENOU, *Études védiques et pāṇīnéennes*, t. XIV, Paris, 1965, p. 47.

subtle. *Páth-* has a similar meaning in the expression *sukṛtásya páth-* in the Jñānasūkta X,71,6, where it is said about a person who leaves his friend in trouble: *yád im śṛṇóty álakam śṛṇoti | nahí pravéda sukṛtásya pánthām* “What he does hear he hears in vain, for he does not know the path of good action”⁷. The result is that the word *páth-* has acquired a second meaning: “a right path” which is fixed by O. Böhtlingk in his Sanskrit Dictionary⁸.

Páth- in the hymns designates mostly an ideal path, a single abstract notion in contradistinction to the real road — *ádhvan-*, where one can stop in the middle and have a rest, and which is usually opposed to home or to the unharnessing of horses. Once the end of the roads (pl.) is mentioned in the RV, but that means the end of the world — X,5,6: *āyór ha skambhá upamásya nīlé | pathām visargé dharúṇeṣu tasthau* “The pillar of Āyu stands in the nest of the Highest One, in the end of the roads, on firm grounds”. Geldner’s comment is: “Wo die Wege aufhören, d.h. am Ende der Welt”⁹.

Páth- is first of all the way leading to the gods or followed by the gods — *devayāna-*. E.g., VII,76,2: *prá me pánthā devayānā | ámardhanto vásubhir iṣkṛtāsaḥ* “The paths, leading to the gods became visible to me, the blameless ones, established by the gods” — says the Ṛṣi in an Uṣas-hymn about his revelation. *Devayāna-* is one of the constant epithets of the path, and there is no explicit opposition between *devayāna-* and *pitṛyāna-* in the RV, the latter being met with only once in the late part of the text — X, 2,7, where it is said that the gods generated Agni, “who knows the path followed by the ancestors” — *pánthām ánu pravidvāṅ pitṛyānaṃ*¹⁰.

These paths connected with the gods are qualified as wide (*urú-*), endless (*anantá-*), not dusty (*areṇú-*), safe (*árisṭa-*, *avṛká-*), most direct (*rájīṣṭha-*), straightest, best of all leading to the aim (*sādhiṣṭha*).

The Ādityas are the first among the gods who are connected with *páth-*, and this is but natural, because these gods are the guardians of

7. Cf. *The Rig Veda. An Anthology*. Trans. by W. DONIGER O’FLAHERTY, Penguin books, 1981, p. 61.

8. Cf. O. BÖHTLINGK, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung*, 4. T., St. Petersburg, S. 18.

9. Cf. K. F. GELDNER, *ibid.*, 3. T., S. 127.

10. Cf. L. RENOU, *ibid.*, t. III, Paris, 1957, p. 93.

the Cosmic Law *ṛtá-*, watching the *ṛtásya páth-*. They are mentioned in connection with *páth-* as a whole class or separately. *E.g.*, II,27,6:

*sugó hí vo aryaman mitra pánthā
anṛkṣaró varuṇa sādhuír ásti |
ténādityā ádhi vocatā no
yáchata no duṣparihántu śárma ||*

"Easy to go is your path, O Aryaman, O Mitra, thornless, O Varuṇa, (and) right it is! Speak in favour of us on it, O Ādityas! Give us (your) refuge that is difficult to be destroyed!"

Páth- is used in connection with the other gods as well: with the Aśvins (of whom their *vartís-* is more typical); with the solar gods Uṣas, Sūrya, Savitar; with Pūṣan (who is called "Lord of the path" *-pathas pate* Voc. in VI,53,1); with the Maruts, Soma, Agni, Indra, Vāta, etc. It is also used in connection with Yama, king of the dead; with the forefathers; with the deified horse Dadhikrā (but not with real horses which are grazing in the field or running along the race-course); with the rivers, following the course given to them by Indra; with the birds; with the sacrifice, moving from the *vedi* to the gods.

Some of these usages need comments. In case of Soma's path it is often impossible to distinguish whether the path of the juice through the sieve into the vat is meant, or Soma's path to the heaven. *E.g.*, IX,91,3:

*vṛṣā vṛṣṇe róruvad aṃśúr asmai
pávamāno rúśad írte páyo góḥ |
sahásram ḥkvā pathíbhīr vacovíd
adhvasmábhiḥ sūro áṇvaṃ ví yāti ||*

"Roaring loudly for the bull (Indra), the bull Soma-stalk, being clarified, sets into motion for him the white milk of the cow. The singer of hymns, skilful in speech (Soma-) the Sun goes through the sieve by thousand ways free from dust".

One should say that such an identity of terrestrial and celestial Soma is characteristic of the Soma-Pavamana hymns in general¹¹.

11. L. RENO, *ibid.*, t. IX, Paris, 1961, p. 10.

As to Agni's path, the word *path-* is used as a rule, when Agni's way from the sacrificial place to the gods, dwelling in heaven, is meant, that is his way as a *dūtá-*, carrying the sacrifices with him. E.g., V,1,11: *vidvān pathīnām urv āntárikṣam | éhá devān havirádyāya vaksi* "Knowing the ways, bring the gods here through the vast intermediate space for the eating of oblations".

Analysing the RVic contexts, one should always keep in mind that the difference between a literal and a metaphorical use of a word is a very subtle one: what seems to us to be a figurative meaning might have been the main direct meaning, the identity of which in various contexts was evident to the speakers.

Path- can also denominate the path of mortals, in that case they are usually treated as devotees of the gods, whom they plead for a happy life. E.g. V, 51,15: *svastí pánthām ānu carema | sūryācandramāsāv iva* "For luck let us move along (our) path like the sun and the moon!"

It is not often in the RV that the concept of a real road is behind the word *páth-*, like for instance it is said about Indra in VI, 46,13:

*yád indra sárge árvataś
codáyāse mahādhané |
asamané ádhvani vṛjiné pathí
syenāñ iva śravasyatāḥ ||*

"When, O Indra, you will hurry up the runners in (their) course — for the great stake, on the rough road, on the crooked way, (runners, flying) like falcons, craving for fame".

There is no opposition: *on the road* vs. *at home* in connection with *path-*, as it is with *ádhvan-*. Home is mentioned in the *páth-* contexts only once in the latest part of the text — in X,86,21, where Indrāñī says to the monkey Vṛṣākapi: *púnar ehi vṛṣākape |... | yá eṣá svapnanāṃśano | 'stam eṣi pathá púnar* "Come back, Vṛṣākapi, ... so that you who destroy sleep may come again on the homeward path"¹².

Only once, also in the latest part of the text, *páth-* is used in a context unfavourable to the Aryans and their gods — X, 87,6:

12. Cf. W. O'FLAHERTY, *ibid.*, p. 261.

*yátredānīm páśyasi jātavedas
tīṣṭhantam agna utá vā cārantam |
yád vāntárikṣe pathíbhiḥ pátantaṃ
tám ástā vidhya sárvā śísānaḥ ||*

"Where you see him now, O Jātavedas, standing, O Agni, or moving or flying along the ways through the air, pierce him as an archer with (your) arrow, trying your best".

There is one curious exception concerning the path in connection with the RVic gods: *páth-* (or any other name of the way) is never mentioned in Viṣṇu-contexts, though as it was stated by A.A. Macdonell, the idea of motion was characteristic of Viṣṇu¹³. His three steps (*padá-*, *krámaṇa-*, *kráma-*) with which he traverses the whole universe evidently contradict the notion of a single indivisible path.

Another god, who is not associated with the path, is Rudra. This god is not connected with movement. Though he is the father of the Maruts, he is not engaged in their military expeditions¹⁴.

The set up expression — a request to the gods to drive away the wolf from the path (or simply the mentioning of this action) — I,42,2; 105,11; II,23,7 seems to imply the real road as a denotatum, but the matter is that *vṛká-* "the wolf" can mean metaphorically a rival, an enemy, and that changes the interpretation of the whole expression.

The paradigm of cases of such a frequent word as *páth-* is rather complete, represented both by singular and plural forms. A very frequent case is the Instrumental with the meaning: by the way of a god or of an abstract notion. Just this case is absent in the paradigm of *ádhvan-*. Even more frequent is the Accusative singular and plural, the most usual meanings being to know or to find the way (*e.g.*, for the sacrifice or to the gaining of booty), to split (*rad-*) the road for a river (that is to lead a river into a channel), to make the ways easy to pass, etc. The usual meaning of the Accusative plural of *ádhvan-* is to accomplish the route, to reach the end of the way. The Accusative singular of *gātú-* has mostly the meaning — to make a wide way, to create a lucky way out. The verb *kr-* is used with the Accusative of

13. Cf. A. A. MACDONELL, *Vedic Mythology*, Strassburg, 1897, p. 38.

14. Cf. A. A. MACDONELL, *ibid.*, p. 74.

páth- without a predicative adjective very seldom. *E.g.*, IX, 101,8: *sómāsaḥ kṛṇvate patháḥ | pávamānāsa índavaḥ* “The juices of Soma prepare the ways for themselves, being clarified”. At the same time this meaning is expressed by means of composition — there exists a compound word *pathikṛt-* “preparing the way”, “making the way” as an epithet of gods (Bṛhaspati, Indra, Soma) and of the ancient Ṛṣis.

Some derivatives from the stem *páth-* clearly testify to its original concrete meaning, like *ápathi-* “going on the path”, *vípathi-* “going aside of the path”, *paripanthín-* “highway-robber”.

The word *pathyā/pathiā-* f. is derived from the stem *páth-* and has principally the same meaning as the original stem. It should be said that the abstract meaning of *pathiā-* is even more evident than of *páth-*. Typical of *pathiā-* is the combination with *rāyās-* “the path of riches”. *E.g.*, VII, 18,3: *arváci te pathyā rāyā eva* “Let your path of riches come hitherwards!” (Indra-hymn) or VI, 19,5: *sám jagmire pathyā ráyo asmín | samudré ná síndhavo yádamānāḥ* “The paths of riches unite in him like the rivers flowing into the ocean” (Indra-hymn). This concept of the path of riches is personified and deified in the RV — in V, 51,14 this goddess is addressed among other gods:

svastí mitrávaruṇā
svastí pathye revati |
svastí na índraś cāgnís ca
svastí no adite kṛdhi ||

“For the good, O Mitra-Varuṇa! | For the good, O the Rich Pathyā! (Let) Indra and Agni (procure) us good! O Aditi, procure us good!”

Pathiā- denotes usually the path of gods or to the gods, or the path of abstract notions. *E.g.*, III,54,5: *kó addhā veda ká ihá prá vocad | devāñ áchā pathyā ká sám eti* “Who really knows, who will proclaim it here: which way leads to the gods?”; VII, 7,2: *á yāhy agne pathyā ánu sváh* “Come, O Agni, on your own way!”; X,59,7: *púnar naḥ sómas tanvám dadātu | púnāḥ pūṣā pathyām yá svastíḥ* “Let Soma give us again the body, let Pūṣan (give us) the way that is bliss!”.

Like the word *páth-*, *pathiā-* also takes part in the combination *ṛtāsya pathiā-* “the path of the Cosmic Law”. *E.g.*, III, 31,5: *vísṽm*

avindan pathyām ṛtasya "They found each path of the Cosmic Law" (they — the Aṅgirases). Renou translates it "Ils avaient (ainsi) trouvé toute la suite-des-voies de l'Ordre"¹⁵.

This word can also designate the path of the deceased to Yama's kingdom — as usual in the latest part of the text in a funeral hymn — X, 14,2: *yātrā naḥ pūrve pitāraḥ pareyūr | enā jajñānāḥ pathyā ānu svāḥ* "Where our ancient fathers passed beyond, there everyone who is born follows, each on his own path"¹⁶.

In rare cases *pathiā-* designates the real roads of the people. *E.g.*, VII,79,1: *vy ũṣā āvaḥ pathyā jānānām* "Uṣas illuminated the roads of the people".

Ādhvan- m. in the RV is first of all the denomination of a path or road as a distance on which movement takes place, no matter whether it concerns gods or mortals, it can be a road on the earth like in X, 117,7: *yānn ādhvānam āpa vṛṅkte caritrāiḥ*, "The one going on foot accomplishes his route", or a divine path in heaven like in I,113,3: *samānō ādhvā svāsror anantās | tām anyānyā carato devāsīṣṭe* "The two sisters (Uṣas and Night) have a common way, an endless one. They wander on it, one after the other, taught by the gods".

The stretch of the way, its course is important for the semantic volume of this word. *E.g.*, VI,50,5: *śrutvā hāvam maruto yād dha yāthā | bhūmā rejante ādhvani prāvikte* "When, O Maruts, having heard the call, you set out, the lands are trembling on your way stretched far away". Sometimes *ādhvan-* may even acquire the meaning of nom. act. like in VI,51,15: *kārta no ādhvann ā sugām* "Make us a good way (*sugām*) in our travel (*ādhvann ā*)!".

It is a way that can be measured, and its separate parts can be discerned. Once the middle of it is mentioned — X,179,5: *jagāma sūro ādhvano vimadhyan* "The Sun has reached the middle of his path". But it is the end of the way that is marked specially, and coded by the words *ānta-* "the end", *pārā-* "the distant frontier", *vimōcana-* "the unharnessing". *E.g.*, IV,16,2: *āva sya sūrādhvano nānte* "Unharness (your horses), O hero (Indra), like in the end of the

15. L. RENO, *ibid.*, t. XVII, Paris, 1969, p. 71.

16. W. O'FLAHERTY, *ibid.*, p. 43.

way!"; V,54,10: *sadyó asyádhvanaḥ pāram aśnutha* "In one day you reach the very end of this way" (about the Maruts) etc.

Ádhvan- is a road, leading to an aim. This aim is usually conceived to be home or rest. One can say that there exists an established opposition in the RV: *on the way* vs. *home*. E.g., VIII,83,6:

*váyám íd vaḥ sudānavaḥ
kṣiyánto yánto ádhvann á |
dévā vṛdhāya hūmahe ||*

"It's we who call you for help, O gods with beautiful gifts, when we are resting or moving on the way": X,37,10: *yáthā sám ádhvañ chám duroné |tát sūrya drávinam dhehi citráṃ* "So that (be) good luck for us on the way, good luck at home, let Sūrya give us brilliant goods", X,185,2:

*nahí téśāṃ amā caná
nádhvasu vāraṇéṣu |
íše ripúr adhásamśaḥ ||*

"The evil-speaking enemy has no authority over them either at home, or on dangerous roads".

The aim of *ádhvan-* may also be an abstract notion. So, in VIII, 31,11 a wish is expressed that "a wide path to happiness" — *urúr ádhvā svastáye* — should come to the sacrificer. In this meaning *ádhvan-* is very close to *páth-*, cf. e.g., VI,16,3, where the two words are practically absolute synonyms:

*véthā hí vedho ádhvanaḥ
pathás ca devāñjasā |
ágne yajñéṣu sukrato ||*

"But you really know, O organizer of the rite, the ways and paths, O god, leading directly, to the sacrifices, O Agni, the wise!"

It is worth mentioning that while Agni's way to the gods is designated by *páth-*, his black way on the burnt earth is described by the epithet-compound word *kṛṣṇádhvan-* "having a black way".

As *páth-* retains in some cases a literal, concrete meaning, it can be very close in this meaning to *ádhvan-*, like in VI,43,13 (see above).

So, there exists a difference between *páth-* and *ádhvān-* in the structure of the semantic volume of each word, the former representing a general idea of the way, so to say in its punctual form, the latter depicting it as a track, where movement takes place in its duration. Besides, there is a difference in their use, *páth-* being used mostly figuratively, and *ádhvān-* mainly in its literal meaning.

Though etymologically *ádhvān-* is connected with *adhvará-* "a sacrifice", "a rite"¹⁷, it does not reveal on the synchronic level of the RV the meaning "a holy way", as compared to the other synonyms.

Gātú- m. should be called a quasi-synonym of *páth-* and *ádhvān-*, because it expresses a special kind of a generic notion¹⁸. This notion is formed by means of the suffix *-tu-* from the verbal root *gā-* "to go". According to E. Benveniste, the suffix *-tu-* characterizes always a notion as a destination, aim, possibility (while the suffix *-ti-* does it as an effective accomplishment)¹⁹. Commenting on the meaning of *gātú-*, Benveniste says: "*gātú-* est la capacité d'aller, ce qui permet d'aller, non le fait d'aller"²⁰. This is the etymological analysis of the meaning of the word. Sanskrit dictionaries — and they are unique in the treatment of its semantics — give it in a following way: 1) going, motion, unimpeded motion; 2) way, course, way out, access; 3) lucky way out, welfare²¹.

The meaning "movement" is very indistinct in the RV, and in most cases, when it is given by Grassmann, Geldner translates *gātú-* as "way". Only once there is no doubt that *gātú-* means "movement", and that is in IV,4,6: *sá te jānāti sumatím yaviṣṭha lyá ívate bráhmaṇe gātúm áirat* "He knows your favour, O the youngest one, (the one) who brought into movement the sacred word like this one". Renou translates it: "celui qui a donné libre-cours à une formulation-d'énergie..."²².

17. Cf. M. MAYRHOFER, *ibid.*, I. B., S. 68.

18. Cf. YU. D. APRESYAN, *Lexical semantics. Synonymous means of the language*. Vol. I, MOSCOW, 1995 (in Russian), p. 235.

19. E. BENVENISTE, *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européenne*, Paris, 1948, p. 93.

20. E. BENVENISTE, *ibid.*, p. 87.

21. H. GRASSMANN, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, 3. Aufl., Wiesbaden, 1955, S. 394; O. BÖHTLINGK, *ibid.*, 2. T., S. 163.

22. L. RENOU, *ibid.*, t. XIII, Paris, 1964, p. 8.

The usual meaning of *gātú-* in the hymns is “a wide path”, “a wide way out”. *E.g.*, I,136,2: *ádarśi gātúr uráve várīyasī |pánthā ṛtásya sám ayaṃsta raśmībhiḥ |cákṣur bhágasya raśmībhiḥ* “A wider way out appeared for the wide (light). The path of the Cosmic Law became guided by the rays, the eye (of the Sun) — by the rays of Bhaga”. *Gātú-* in this stanza evidently expresses a special kind of a way as compared with the generic notion coded by *páth-*. The adjective *urú-* “wide” is a usual attribute of *gātú-*.

The paradigm of this word consists of two cases in the singular: Nominative and Accusative, the latter being much more frequent, taking part in a number of set up typical constructions. Most frequently *gātú-* in the Accusative is governed by the verb *kṛ-* (to create a free way or a way out) with the Dative of the person, for whom it is created. *E.g.*, IX,85,4: *urúm no gātúm kṛṇu soma mīdhvah* “Create us a wide path, O liberal Soma!”; IV,51,1: *nūnám divó duhitáro vibhātír | gātúm kṛṇavann uśáso jánāya* “Let the daughters of the sky, shining brightly, create now a path for the people!” (Uśas-hymn). The Dative case in this construction can also express an abstract notion. *E.g.*, III,31,9: *nī gavyatā́ mánasā sedur arkáih |kṛṇvānáso amṛtatváya gātúm* “With (their) mind directed to cows, they sat down, creating with the songs the path to immortality” (about the Aṅgirasas).

There are some variations of this construction, retaining the same type, but with the vocabulary of different myths. *E.g.*, VII,47,4: *yábhya índro áradad gātúm ūrmúm |té sindhavo várivero dhātaná no* “To whom Indra bored the way (for flowing, created) a wave — you, rivers, make us free space!”; X,49,9: *yudhá vidam mánave gātúm iṣṭáye* “Through struggle I found the way to search for Manu”. The latter variant of construction is reflected in the epithet of gods *gātuvíd-* “creating a path”; “finding a way out”.

Gātú- may often have a connotation — “a lucky path”. *E.g.*, II, 21,5: *yajñéna gātúm aptúro vividrire |dhīyo hinvánā usíjo manīṣiṇaḥ* “With the help of the sacrifice the Uśijes found a lucky path, crossing the waters, hurrying up their poetical thoughts, thinking (it) over”. The figurative meaning of *gātú-* “welfare” is usually somehow connected with a lucky way or a lucky travel. *E.g.*, VI,6,1: *prá návyasā sáhasaḥ sūnúm áchā |yajñéna gātúm áva ichámānaḥ* “(The hotar came) forward towards the son of power with a new sacrifice, looking

for welfare (or: for a lucky issue) and support”; VII,13,1: *vaiśvānara brāhmaṇe vinda gātúm* “O Vaiśvānara, find a lucky path for (our) sacred word!” (that is: make our prayer reach the gods!). The positive meaning of *gātú-* is supported by the epithet of the hotar *āriṣṭagātu-* “having a secure path”.

As it is usual, in some contexts the distinctive semantic features of *gātú-* are neutralized, and it can be very close in its meaning to *páth-*. Cf., e.g., the two pādas from the same hymn — III,54,18: *prajāvān nah paśumān astu gātúḥ* “Let our path be rich of progeny and cattle!” (where the path of life is meant) and III,54,21: *sādā sugāḥ pitumān astu pānthā* “Let our path always be easy to go and rich of food!”.

Ájman-/ájma- m. (the second form being the result of thematization of the consonantal stem) denotes in the RV, as it was noticed by Grassmann²³ first of all the path of a horse or of a god in the shape of a horse (Agni, Savitar) or compared to a horse. E.g., III,2,12: *samānām ájman páry eti jágrviḥ* “He goes around the same path, being vigilant” (about Agni-Vaiśvānara in the shape of a horse on the arena).

These nouns are derived from the root *aj-* “to drive”, “propel”, “hurry up”, and the meaning of the verbal root reveals itself in its nominal derivatives. *Ájma(n)* in the hymns is not only connected with the image of a horse that is driven on its road, but in a number of contexts it denominates a track for speedy movement. Therefore *ájma(n)-* is a usual name of the march of the Maruts. E.g., VIII,20,5: *ácyutā cid vo ájmann ā lnānadatai párvatāso vánaspátīḥ* “Even the unshakable (things) (shake) during your march, the mountains thunder loudly, the big tree”.

Besides there is a group of contexts, where *ájma(n)-* denotes either a race-course or the race itself (being a synonym of *ājí-* derived from the same root). E.g., I,163,10:

*īrṃántāsaḥ sílikamadhyamāsaḥ
sám śúraṇāso divyāso átyāḥ |
haṃsā iva śreṇiśó yatante
yád ākṣiṣur divyám ájman áśvāḥ ||*

23. H. GRASSMANN, *ibid.*, S. 22.

“The celestial coursers, revelling in their strength, fly in a line like wild geese, the ends held back while the middle surges forward, when the horses reach the racecourse of the sky”²⁴.

The same meaning is found in I,65,6: *átyo nájmann sárgaprataktah śisindhur ná kṣódaḥ ká iṃ varāte* “Dashing along like a shoot, like a courser on a racecourse; † like a waterfall of a river – who could hold him back?” (Agni-hymn).

The abstract meaning “race”, “competition” is testified in VIII, 43,20: *tám tvám ájmeṣu vājīnam ... ṛlate* “They call you who is so victorious in competitions” (Agni-hymn) and in X,103,6: *jáyantam ájma pramṛántam ójasā limám sajātā ánu vīrayadhvam* “Who is winning the race, who is crushing (everything) with his strength – O clansmen, be courageous like him!” (Indra-hymn).

Strange enough that either Grassmann or Böhtlingk do not recognize the meanings “race-course” and “race, competition” of this word²⁵. Monier-Williams seems to be closer this time to the state of things found in the RV with his meanings of *ájman-* “career”, “passage”, “battle”²⁶.

Vartaní- f. in the RV is a polysemantic word formed by an unproductive suffix *-ani-* from the root *vṛt-* “to turn around”, “revolve”, “roll”. According to Grassmann, it has the following meanings: 1) the act of rolling; 2) the felloe of a wheel; 3) the track of a wheel; 4) the path, way²⁷. So, “path” and “way” is a peripheral, derived meaning of this word.

It is difficult to establish the distinctive features of the semantic structure of *vartaní-* meaning “path”, because the material is too scarce. There is a context where it seems to reveal the meaning of “trace” or “track”. It is said about Varuṇa in I,25,9: *véda vātasya vartaním* “He knows the way (= the track) of the wind”. The interpretation of the meaning here is motivated by one of the previous passages — I, 25,7 runs: *védā yó vīnám padám lantárikṣena pátatām* “He knows the

24. W. O’FLAHERTY, *ibid.*, p. 88.

25. H. GRASSMANN, *ibid.*, S. 22; O. BÖHTLINGK, *ibid.*, I. T., S. 17.

26. M. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *ibid.*, p. 10.

27. H. GRASSMANN, *ibid.*, p. 1223.

trace of the birds flying through the air”. As Geldner stresses in his comments on this passage, it means that only Varuṇa is capable of perceiving invisible traces²⁸.

The original meaning of the word is clearly revealed in the figura etymologica in X,172,4: *uṣā́ ápa svásus támaḥ | sám vartayati vartaním sujatátā* “Uṣas (rolls up) the darkness of (her) sister (Night). She rolls up (her) path, because of her noble birth”.

In Indra-contexts, concerning the boring of the channels of the rivers held back by Vṛtra, *vartaní-* functions as a synonym of *páth-* and *ádhvan-*. E.g., IV,19,2: *áhann áhim pariśáyānam árṇaḥ | prá vartanír arado viśvádhenāḥ* “You have killed the dragon, who remained lying around the stream, you have bored the all-feeding channels”. The same about *vartaní-* in combination with *ṛtá-*. E.g., X,5,4: *ṛtásya hí vartanáyaḥ sújātam* “But the ways of the Cosmic Law (bring one) to the nobly-born (Agni)”.

The figurative use of *vartaní-* is in some cases connected with the image of a cow. Twice it is the sacrificial spoon in this shape. E.g., III,7,2: *ṛtásya tvā sádasi kṣemayántam | páry ékā carati vartaním gáuh* “One cow is walking on (her) road around you, dwelling in the seat of the Cosmic Law” (cf. also X,65,6). Once it is Uṣas as a cow — X,172,1: *gávaḥ sacanta vartaním yád údhabiḥ* “The cows follow your track, when (they come) with (full) udders” (about the Uṣases and Sūrya).

There is one passage in the RV, where *vartaní-* denotes a real road — this is in a *dānastuti* part of a hymn, where the poet praises the wife of his patron — V,61,9: *utá me 'rapad yuvatír mamandúṣī | práti śyāvāya vartaním* “And the young woman, who was glad, informed me, Śyāvāśva, about the way”.

So, the original meaning of *vartaní-* as a track can be traced in some contexts, while in others, which are typical of some myths (*vartaním rad-*) or function as formulas in the text (*ṛtásya vartaní-*), the specific meaning of the word is neutralized, and it becomes synonymous to *páth-* and *ádhvan-*.

Srutí- f. is a noun formed from the verbal root *sru-* “to flow” with the productive suffix *-ti-* (though the word itself is not a frequent

28. K. F. GELDNER, *ibid.*, I. T., S. 27.

one). Its first meaning which is testified in the RV only once (VIII,91,1) is “the stream”; the second one — “the way”. Out of a few contexts, where this word is met with, there are three passages, where one can suspect that the way through the waters or a waterway is meant. This is rather obvious in an Indra-hymn II,13,12: *áramayaḥ sárapasaḥ tárāya kām | turvítaye ca vayyāya ca srutím*. “You have calmed down the flowing waters to cross (them); for Turvīti and Vayya you (have made) a way”. It is less evident from the other contexts, but can be sometimes reconstructed from the general mythological or ritual situation.

IX,78,2: *pūrvīr hí te srutáyaḥ sánti yátave* “But you have many ways for moving”. This is an address to Soma, whose ways are either with water and milk with which the juice is mixed in the vat, or from the sky in the form of rain. I,46,11:

*ábhūd u pāram étave
pánthā ṛtāsyā sādhyā |
ádarśi ví srutír diváḥ ||*

“The path of the Cosmic Law appeared in a straight course to pass to the other shore. The way of heaven became visible” (Aśvin-hymn).

This is the description of transition from the end of the night to the morning — the time, when the Aśvins make their tour, crossing rivers — cf. Geldner’s comments on this hymn²⁹.

In contexts of neutralization *srutí-* can be used the same way as *páth-*. E.g., the famous stanza about the two paths in X,88,15:

*dvé srutí aśṛṇavam pitṛñām
ahám devānām utá mártvyanām |
tābhyām idám víśvam éjat sám eti
yád antarā pitáram mātáram ca ||*

“I have heard from the fathers about the two ways: that of the gods and of mortals. All that is moving comes together on them, (all) that is between father (Heaven) and mother (Earth)”.

It is not a proper place to go into details of interpretation of this

29. K. F. GELDNER, *ibid.*, I. T., S. 56.

stanza — K. Geldner's interpretation is followed here. What is important for the aim of this paper is that *páth-* and *ádhvān-* are also *devayāna-* "followed by the gods".

It also deserves mentioning that in a Pūṣan-hymn — and this god presides over roads and journeys — the poet is consciously playing with different names of the roads practically in the same type of contexts, where a real road on the earth is meant. Cf. I,42,1–3:

sám pūṣann ádhvanas tira
vy áṃho vimuco napāt |
sákṣvā deva prá ṇas puráh ||

yó nah pūṣann aghó vṛko
duḥséva ádīdeṣati |
ápa sma tám pathó jahi ||

ápa tyám paripanthínam
muṣivāṇam huraścítam |
dūrám ádhi srutér aja ||

1. "Traverse the ways, Pūṣan, and keep away anguish, O child of the unharnessing. Stay with us, O god, going before us.

2. The evil, vicious wolf who threatens us, Pūṣan, chase him away from the path.

3. The notorious highwayman, the robber who plots in ambush, drive him far away from the track"³⁰.

This Pūṣan-hymn seems also to represent a context of neutralization of semantic differences among the names of the road.

Sugá- is a typical quasi-synonym of *páth-*, because it denotes a certain specification of the general meaning of the way (originally a compound: *su* adj. "good", *ga-* adj. "going"). The meanings of this word are: 1) adj. easily passed, easy to traverse; 2) n. a good path; luck, success (= an easy course). So, this denomination of a path is a substantivization of an adjective. As an adjective *sugá-* is often attributed to the names of the path. *E.g.*, I,41,4: *sugáh pánthā anṛkṣará | ádityāsa ṛtām yaté* "Easily passed, thornless is the path, O Ádityas,

30. W. O'FLAHERTY, *ibid.*, pp. 193–194.

for the one who follows the Law"; VII,42,2: *sugás te agne sánavitto ádhvā* "Easily passed, O Agni, is your way, long since existing".

As a substantive *sugá-* is often used in the Accusative with *kṛ-*, the meaning of the construction being "to create a good path", both literally and figuratively (cf. a similar construction with *gātú-*). E.g., VI,44,18: *āsú smā nō maghāvann indra pṛtsv lāsmābhyam māhi vāri-vaḥ sugám kah* "In these battles of ours, O liberal Indra, create us great wide space (and) an easy course!". The Accusative singular and plural are the most frequent cases in the paradigm of *sugá-*.

Sugá- is opposed to *durgá-*, "a bad path", "a place difficult to pass through", which is the opposition of adjectival prefixes *su-* and *dus-*. E.g., VIII,93,10: *durgé cin naḥ sugám kṛdhi | grṇāná indra girvaṇaḥ* "Even on a road difficult to pass make us a good way, | O Indra fond of praise, when you are praised".

Further development of the figurative meaning results in the meaning "luck", "success". E.g., VII,104,7: *indrāsomā duṣkṛte mā sugám bhūd | yó naḥ kadā cid abhidāsati druhā* "O Indra-Soma, be no success to the evil-doer, who will some time persecute us with fraud!".

Supátha- n. "a good way" is semantically very close to *sugá-*, but its semantic volume is not so wide, as that of *sugá-*.

Supátha- has no adjectival meaning (though Grassmann in his dictionary states it³¹, and is not used metaphorically as "success". It does not take part in any explicit opposition. Its constant epithet is *sugá-* in the adjectival meaning, and the usual construction in which it takes part is that with the verb *kṛ-* "to do, make, create", its paradigm consisting only of one form — Nominative-Accusative plural. E.g., VI, 64,4: *sugótá te supáthā párvateṣu* "Easy to pass are your beautiful ways even in the mountains" (Uṣas-hymn); IX,86,26: *induḥ punāno áti gāhate mṛdho | víśvāni kṛṇvān supáthāni yájyave* "Being clarified, the juice rises upon the containers, creating all the beautiful paths for the sacrificer" (the construction typical of *gātú-*).

This word is naturally also a quasi-synonym of *páth-* and *ádhvan-*. The rest of the synonyms can be only mentioned, because of their very small frequency. Their meaning usually fluctuates between nom. act. and nom. conr.

31. H. GRASSMANN, *ibid.*, S. 1538–1539.

Éman- n. 1) motion, course; 2) way (the root *i-* "to go, move", the suffix *-man-*). Two times it has the meaning "way" in the RV, both times in connection with Agni — I,58,4: *kṛṣṇám ta éma rúśadūrme ajara* "Black is your path, O you, the undecaying with light waves"; IV,7,9: *kṛṣṇám ta éma rúśataḥ puró bhāś* "Black is your path, while you are light — there is shining in front of you".

Cáraṇa- n. 1) moving, wandering; 2) road (the root *car-* "to wander", the suffix *-ana-*). It designates the path of the sun — III,5,5, of the Apsarases, Gandharvas and wild animals — X,136,6, and of the rivers — X,139,6.

Gáti- f. "way" (the root *gam-* "to go", suffix *-ti-*) occurs only once in the RV, but this example is interesting, because this designation of the way is opposed to *páth-* — V,64,3: *yán nūnám aśyāṃ gátim | mitrá-sya yāyām pathá* "If I could now reach a (right) way, I would follow the path of Mitra". Geldner translates it: "Wenn ich jetzt den (richtigen) Weg erreichte, würde ich auf dem Pfade des Mitra wandeln"³². Renou renders: "En sorte que j'atteigne maintenant une (heureuse) issue, je voudrais aller par le chemin de Mitra"³³. The meaning of *gáti-* seems to be very close here to the invariant meaning of *gātí-*.

Vártman- n. "track of the wheel", "way" (the root *vrt-*, the suffix *-man-*) has practically the same meaning as *vartaní-* (cf. also from the same root the substantive *vartís-*, denoting the circuit of the Aśvins round the world), occurring once in the RV — I,85,3.

Vrájana- n. "road", "way" (the root *vraj-* "to go, walk, wander", suffix *-ana-*) met with once in the RV in connection with Agni in VII, 3,2: *ádha sma te vrájanam kṛṣṇám asti* "And then your path is black" (cf. the contexts with *éman-*).

All these are occasional nominal formations (which is characteristic of the word-formation in the RV) from the verbal roots, designating various kinds of motion, with the help of the suffixes which express the meanings of both nom. act. et nom. ag.³⁴

The analysis of the semantic field of "road, way, path" in the RV brings one to the conclusion that the functioning of synonyms in this

32. K. F. GELDNER, *ibid.*, 2. T., S. 72.

33. L. RENOU, *ibid.*, t. V, p. 79.

34. L. RENOU, *Grammaire de la langue védique*, Lyon, 1952, pp. 151–159.

text is regulated not only by semantic motivation — designation of the same denotatum by various semantic distinctive features, but also to a great extent by the style of these esoteric religious poetical hymns. A synonym may be connected with a certain deity and his mythology. The characteristic distinctive features of a word can be neutralized in set up formulas or in certain mythological contexts. The metaphoric and symbolic use of the vocabulary in general make it rather difficult to find out what were the real roads on which the Indo-Aryan tribes moved from the South-West into the depths of Hindustan.

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