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REBIRTH ESCHATOLOGY IN THE ṚGVEDA  
IN SEARCH FOR ROOTS OF TRANSMIGRATION

*1. Introduction*

In this paper I would like to join the discussion about transmigration in Vedic times. It is generally assumed that the ideas of transmigration were introduced by the kṣatriyas, as attested in the Upaniṣads (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Kauṣītaki*)<sup>1</sup>. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* present the ‘knowledge of five fires’ (*pañcāgnividyā*) together with the division into the *pitṛyāna* and *devayāna*, paths taken by the dead according to their past deeds. The model of five fires is used to explain how the world works also in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (1.45-46, 49-50). This Brāhmaṇa too presents two possible ways the dead can take, depending on their knowledge.

A lot of scholars maintain that no belief in transmigration had existed before the Upaniṣads<sup>2</sup>. However, Killingley presented evi-

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1. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.1.9 ff and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.4 ff and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 1.2.

2. Apart from classic approaches such as Keith A. B. *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. 2 Vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1989 (First Edition 1925); Frauwallner E. *Historia filozofii indyjskiej*. 2 Vols. Warszawa: PWN, 1990 (Polish translation of *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, Otto Mueller Verlag, Salzburg 1953); see Butzenberg K. “Ancient Indian Conception on Man’s Destiny After Death. The Beginnings and the Early Development of the Doctrine of Transmigration. I”. *Berliner Indologische Studien*. 9/10, 1996, pp. 55-118, partly refuted by Bodewitz H. W. “Yonder world in the Atharvaveda”. *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 42, 2, 1999, pp. 107-120.

dence that shows that the topics of the *pañcāgnividyā* and *deva-pitṛyāna* have their antecedents in the earlier Brahminic texts<sup>3</sup>. He claims that theories of karma and rebirth are made up of several ideas already present in Vedic thought. Also Tull shows that the conceptual framework of the Upaniṣadic idea of transmigration had been established already in the Brāhmaṇas with their idea of sacrifice during which the sacrificer symbolically experiences death and rebirth during his journey to heaven<sup>4</sup>. Oberlies goes even further back and tries to reconstruct a possible Ṛgvedic belief according to which the dead came back to earth to be reborn in their progeny<sup>5</sup>.

We can put this belief into broader conceptual frames as it is very close to the beliefs characteristic of ‘small scale’ or ‘tribal’ societies. Obeyesekere maintains that the belief in rebirth after death is quite widespread and varies in different cultures<sup>6</sup>. Contrary to the mature Upaniṣadic form of the rebirth eschatology, the rebirth eschatologies characteristic of small scale societies are not linked to ethical causation.

Obeyesekere believes that the kṣatriyas in the Upaniṣads who expound their views about transmigration implicitly are in discussion with traditions that ‘seem to believe that after death one can be reborn in the human world or in a subhuman one’<sup>7</sup>. Instead of inventing a new theory, the kṣatriyas incorporate views that are already known to them. In order to explain this, Obeyesekere claims that

‘because rebirth eschatologies are empirically widespread and perhaps prior to karmic eschatologies, India might well have had similar (rebirth) eschatologies before it developed its karmic ones. (...) After all, India was nothing but a conglomerate of small-scale societies (villages and

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3. Killingley D., “The paths of the dead and the five fires”. In: P. Connolly, S. Hamilton (Eds.). *Indian Insights: Buddhism, Brahmanism and Bhakti. Papers from the Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions*. London: Luzac Oriental, 1997, pp 1-20.

4. Tull H. W. *The Vedic Origins of Karma. Cosmos as Man in Ancient Indian Myth and Ritual*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1989

5. Oberlies T. *Die Religion des Ṛgveda. Erster Teil. Das Religiöse System des Ṛgveda*. Wien: Gerold, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, pp. 478-483.

6. Obeyesekere G. *Imagining Karma. Ethical transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2002

7. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining...*, p. 13.

tribes) prior to the period of Buddhism, which was also the period of its second urban transformation’<sup>8</sup>.

Like many other scholars, Obeyesekere maintains that we lack evidence for such a belief before the Upaniṣads but he thinks that the preserved texts do not necessarily represent the whole religious situation in ancient India. ‘It is true – he says – that there is no way to trace the history of the theory of rebirth backward, but there is a methodological way out by examining how it *might* have originated’<sup>9</sup>. Then Obeyesekere creates – what he calls ‘a theoretical possible model’ to explain the problem.

My paper will support this model with textual evidence. I would like to show that there are at least three stanzas in the *R̥gveda* (RV) from which the belief in rebirth can be reconstructed. The argument is based not only on the philological data, but also on the consistency of the whole reconstruction and its power to explain many unclear issues, concerning both the interpretation of some R̥gvedic stanzas and the development of the concept of rebirth. I may add that I had managed to find the evidence supporting my argument before I became acquainted with Obeyesekere’s book<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. *Theories of rebirth of small scale societies and the RV*

Obeyesekere describes the rebirth eschatology of small scale societies in the following way:

‘The fundamental idea of reincarnation is that at death an ancestor or close kin is reborn in the human world whether or not there has been an intermediate sojourn in another sphere of existence or afterworld (...) The most obvious place [of rebirth] is in one’s own family or group’<sup>11</sup>.

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8. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining...*, p. 18

9. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining...*, p. 14.

10. I would like to thank Richard Gombrich for paying my attention to this book.

11. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining...*, p. 15-16.

## 2.A. RV 10.16.5

The first stanza which, in my opinion, attests the belief in rebirth characteristic of small scale societies is RV 10.16.5:

*áva sṛja púnar agne pitṛbhyo yás ta áhutaś cárati svadhābhiḥ |*  
*áyur vásāna úpa vetu śéṣaḥ sám gachatām tanvā jātavedaḥ ||*  
 (10.16.5)

The stanza expresses a request to the cremation fire to do – the question is *what?* The form *pitṛbhyas* in pada *a* can be either dative or ablative. All translators take it as dative and interpret this verse as a request to Agni to send the dead person again to his fathers<sup>12</sup>. In my opinion this interpretation is too narrow. A brief survey of the semantic range of the verb *áva sṛj-* will show that both cases should be accepted here in order to get the full meaning of the stanza, which is brilliantly constructed.

In reconstructing the meaning of the R̥gvedic words, I accept the principles of cognitive linguistics, according to which language is grounded in human cognition and words reflect what people think about entities, relations or states named by them. The word meaning includes ‘not only designating meaning (dictionary meaning), but also features which are referred to as cultural connotation, i.e. features which encode historical and cultural experience of a speech community’<sup>13</sup>. Thus understood, the meaning is a complex structure, the elements of which are internally bounded and rationally motivated<sup>14</sup>. Usually the concrete senses that refer to everyday experience are primary, while the more abstract and general senses are derived from them<sup>15</sup>.

12. Elizarenkova T. Ya. *Rigveda. Mandaly IX-X*, Moskva: Nauka, 1999, Geldner K. F. *Der Rig-Veda*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Vol III, 1957, O’Flaherty W. Doniger, *The R̥gveda. An anthology*. London: Penguin Books, 1981.

13. Bartmiński J. “Etnolingwistyka słowiańska – próba bilansu”, *Etnolingwistyka* 16, 2004, pp. 9-27. I quote from the English version of the article (*Basic assumptions of Slavic ethnolinguistics*) made me available by Professor Jerzy Bartmiński.

14. Tokarski R. “Prototypy i konotacje. O semantycznej analizie słowa w tekście poetyckim”. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 81. 1990, No 2, pp 117-137.

15. Sweetser E. *From etymology to pragmatics. Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

The word's meaning, understood as above, is an open, dynamic structure, which finally realizes itself in the particular context of a given expression<sup>16</sup>. Poetry in particular is a linguistic creation which plays with words and their meanings by modifying and elaborating the context<sup>17</sup>. The use of a word in a particular context evokes the images and concepts stored in the memory of recipients<sup>18</sup>, which, often, are not included in the designating meaning of the word. In this way, a word's meaning in a particular usage can highlight rare or unexpected aspects. The demands of orality seem further to prompt such an activation of the wide semantic range of words because of the need to express as much as possible in a relatively short linguistic message.

As a cognitive phenomenon, the word's meaning is motivated by mental operations such as metonymy and metaphor. Metonymy is a mental strategy which gives access to a whole conceptual domain via its salient point (e.g. "head" is a salient point of "person")<sup>19</sup>. Metaphor is a mental strategy which allows humans to think about a conceptual domain in terms of another domain (e.g. we conceive time in terms of money)<sup>20</sup>. Whenever I use the words 'metonymy' and 'metaphor', I understand them in this way.

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16. Langacker R. "Context, Cognition, and Semantics: A United Dynamic Approach". In: Wolde E. van. (Ed.) *Job 28: Cognition in Context*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 179-230.

17. Lakoff G., Turner M. *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, Freeman M. H. "Poetry and the scope of metaphor. Toward a cognitive theory of literature". In: A. Barcelona (Ed.) *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads. A Cognitive Perspective*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000, pp. 253-281, Tannen D., 1989. "Repetition in conversation: Towards a poetics of talk". *Language* 63, 1989, pp. 574-605.

18. Minchin E. *Homer and the resources of memory. Some applications of cognitive theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

19. Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 36ff, Radden G., Dirven R. *Cognitive English Grammar*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2006, p. 16.

20. Lakoff G., Johnson M., *Metaphors...*, pp. 80ff, Radden G., Dirven R., *Cognitive...*, p. 16.

## 2.A.a. The meaning of *áva sꝛj-* (Part I)

The concrete meaning of *áva sꝛj-* is ‘to untie a human being or an animal’ (a thief, a calf), evoked in 7.86.5 as the source domain of the simile. The concepts evoked as the source domains of similes are often conventionalized and serve as the model enabling the recipient to understand the target domain better: by referring to what is more familiar one can grasp what is more abstract. This is the explanatory function of the simile<sup>21</sup>. *Áva sꝛj-*, which means ‘to untie a human being or an animal’, is the source domain of a simile of which the target domain is the abstract idea of forgiving sins and absolving from them (7.86.5). This is the most abstract meaning of *áva sꝛj-*.

More general meanings are construed on the basis of the concrete meaning of untying. These are, on the one hand, ‘to give cattle to someone’ (10.108.5, 10.28.11) and, on the other hand, ‘to free someone from captivity’ (5.2.5, 5.2.6). In the stanzas that instantiate this latter meaning, it is fire that is freed from captivity, whereas its common Ṛgvedic conceptualization as a bull (*vr̥ṣan*) motivates this meaning even further. The most general meaning of *áva sꝛj-* instantiated in the RV is ‘to let (someone) go’ (5.30.13, 10.85.13) and ‘to give (someone to someone)’ (10.65.12).

In a ritual context, the concrete meaning ‘to untie an animal’ is extended to the meaning ‘to offer an animal oblation’. In 10.91.14, *áva sꝛj-* is used together with *á hū-*, as in 10.16.15, to express offering cattle as an oblation to fire. This meaning is even clearer in the *āprī* hymn 1.13.11ab (*áva sꝛjā vanaspate déva devébhyo havíḥ*), where *devébhyo* is to be interpreted as the dative because the gods are the recipients of the sacrifice. In a similar way, other usages of *áva sꝛj-* in the *āprī* hymns are interpreted by scholars as evoking the meaning of freeing an animal from a cord and expressing sending a sacrificial victim to the gods<sup>22</sup>.

21. Minchin E. *Homer...*, p. 138.

22. In all these instances dative is not used 10.110.10: *upāvasꝛja tmányā samañ-ján devānām pátha ṛtuthá havīm̐si* |, 3.4.10=7.2.10: *vānaspate ‘va sꝛjōpa devān agnīr havíḥ sámītā sūdayāti* |, 1.142.11: *avasꝛjānn úpa tmānā devām̐ yakṣi vanaspate* |, 2.3.10: *vānaspátir avasꝛjānn úpa sthād agnīr havíḥ sūdayati prá dhībhiḥ* |. See Bosch L. van den. “Some reflections on the *Āprī* hymns of the Ṛgveda and their interpretation”. In: R. N. Dandekar, P. D. Navathe (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Vth World Sanskrit*

The second concrete meaning of *áva sṛj-* is ‘to shoot an arrow’ (6.75.16). One could presume that this meaning too is motivated by the idea of a cord present in the first concrete meaning, ‘to untie’. This is so because bowstring could be viewed as a kind of cord binding an arrow until it is released.

Taking into consideration the meanings reconstructed above, the interpretation of the verse *áva sṛja púnar agne pitṛbhyo* would be ‘release him to his fathers’. The dead person is placed in the cremation fire as the oblation (he is *áhuta*, according to 10.16.5b) and then sent by it to his ancestors like other oblations. In this case, the dead person is conceptualized as the animal oblation; this conceptualization is evoked by the semantic range of *áva sṛj-*, which – on the general level – expresses various activities the object of which is cattle. One could wonder if the meaning of shooting an arrow is not evoked here, too, to activate the image of the dead person being shot to his fathers like an arrow.

## 2.A.b *Svadhā* and the sun as the abode of the dead

Like *áva sṛj*, the word *svadhā*, used in 10.16.5b (*yás ta áhutaś cārati svadhābhiḥ*), has a wide semantic range in the RV. Here I will outline only those semantic aspects, which are relevant to this paper. The word *svadhā* qualifies the movement of the dead in two other stanzas as well (1.164.30: *carati svadhābhir*, 1.164.38: *eti svadháyā grbhūtó*). Most scholars in their translations choose words denoting will, right or autonomy<sup>23</sup>. In my opinion, however, the main idea con-

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*Conference*, Varanasi, October 21-26, 1981. New Delhi: Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, 1985, pp. 65-77. Potdar K. R. “Āpṛi hymns in the Ṛgveda. A study and theory”. *Journal of the University of Bombay* 13/14, 1944-46, pp. 26-42, 27-57 interprets *vānaspāti* as referring to Agni and does not interpret the verses in which *vānaspāti* is evoked as referring to the animal sacrifice, but accepts the idea of binding and releasing the oblation as expressed by *áva sṛj-*.

23. Elizarenkova T. Ya, *Rigveda. Mandaly I-IV*, Moskva: Nauka 1989, Vol. I: ‘po svoej vole’, ‘svoim obychaem’, Geldner K. F. *Der Rig-Veda*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1951, Vol I: ‘nach eigenem Ermessen’, ‘durch Eigengesetz’, O’Flaherty W. Doniger. *The Ṛgveda...*: ‘as his nature wills’, ‘as his own nature wills’. Renou L. *Etudes védiques et pāṇinéennes*. Vol. XVI. Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1967: ‘autonomie’.

veyed by *svadhā́* in these two stanzas is that of contradictoriness. The movement of the dead person is contradictory in four respects. He moves and does not move at the same time (1.164.30ab: *chaye turágātu... éjad dhruvám*). He moves towards and backwards (*ápāñ prāñ eti*: 1.164.38a). He breathes, he is alive, and he is dead (*anác...jīvó mṛtásya* 1.164.30a,c). The fourth respect is not explicitly expressed in the stanzas, but can be easily inferred: the dead person moves although he has no vehicle, which would enable him to move, because his body has been cremated. So, in these two stanzas the word *svadhā́* expresses the mysterious power that enables the dead person to remain in a contradictory state.

This is not an isolated example of such meaning of *svadhā́*. The meaning of contradictoriness is conveyed in the stanzas where *svadhā́* qualifies the miraculous birth of mother from calf (1.95.4), the Creator's ability to breathe without breath (10.129.2), the mysterious power of the sun to move high in the sky without falling down (4.13.5, 4.14.5)<sup>24</sup>. *Svadhā́* itself is internally contradictory: it is a power that enables entities to move, but it is wheelless (4.26.4, 10.27.19).

I would argue then that in 10.6.5b the expression *carati svadhā́-bhiḥ* evokes the idea of contradictory movement of the dead person whose body is burnt by the cremation fire<sup>25</sup>. One can ask now where this movement takes place. In my opinion, there is sufficient evidence in the RV to accept the view that the sun was conceptualized as the abode of the dead. The word *svadhā́* is used in 9.113.10, in the hymn describing the place obtained under the influence of Soma. This place is undecaying (*ákṣita*) and immortal (*ámṛta*); the sun or its shining (*svàr*) is there together with everlasting light ( *jyótir ájasram*); there are shining spaces there (*lokā́ jyótiṣmantah*); it is high up in the sky (*trináké tridivé diváh*, 9.113.7, 9). The place described in this way evokes the idea of the sun understood not as the heavenly body but as the embodiment of extra-terrestrial happiness gained in Somic exaltation. At the same time, this is the place ruled by Yama, who is here

24. *Svadhā́* qualifies the movement of the sun also in 10.37.5.

25. At the same time, such passages betray the beginning of formation of the meaning of *svadhā́* as the 'food for the dead': the mysterious power which enables the dead to move begins to be conceptualized in terms of the special food which, analogically to the human food, enabled the dead to live and move.

called King Vaivasvata (*rājā vaivasvatāḥ*, 9.113.8). This very name makes us think about the sun because *vivásvant* is explained as the sun in the RV<sup>26</sup>. We may presume that King Yama, who was the first to die and to show the way to all mortals, went back to his father's place, i.e., to the sun<sup>27</sup>.

The hymn mentions *svadhā* together with various kinds of wishes and desires (*kāma nikāmāḥ*) and with the possibility of their accomplishment (*tṛpti*, *kāmasya...āptāḥ kāmāḥ*, 9.113.10, 11). In 4.33.6, *svadhā* means the ability that enables one to realise one's desire, and one could assume that in 9.113 too *svadhā* ensures *tṛpti*, i.e., the accomplishment of all the wishes one can have. The ability to move according to one's will (*anukāmām cāraṇam*, 9.113.9)<sup>28</sup> also expresses the total freedom of a person who is in that shining place: in everyday life on earth one cannot move about as one wants. If the limitations of the human organism come from the body, its burning gives the dead person the possibility to move freely, even in various directions simultaneously, or to move and not to move at the same time – as described in 1.164.30, 38. In these two cases (as in 10.16.5b, as has been just shown) it is *svadhā* that ensures such movement, and hymn 9.113 reveals the location of this contradictory situation: it is high in the sky, in a shining place, which is conceptualized as the sun.

There is more evidence that supports this thesis. The fathers are said to exalt with *svadhā* in the middle of the sky (*mādhye dīvaḥ*, 10.15.14), which is the place where the sun is (10.139.2) and where Indra and Agni exalt with *svadhā* too (1.108.12). Fathers are described as being together with the step of Viṣṇu (*vikrāmaṇam viṣṇoḥ*, 10.15.3),

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26. Macdonell A. A., *A Vedic Mythology*. Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Truebner, 1897, p. 43.

27. In my opinion, the convergence of the place gained under the influence of Soma and of the place where the King of The Dead is does not necessarily mean that the poet asks Soma to ensure him well being after his death. Taking into account that the hymn begins with the description of everyday sacrifice I would argue that the poet asks Soma to take him alive to the place, which, without Soma drunk during the sacrifice, can be gained only after death. Thus the poet experiences an internally contradictory state: the state of a living person in the world of the dead is opposite to the state described as *jīvo mṛtāsya* but the contradictoriness is the same.

28. CU 7.25.2 expresses the same idea in its description of the liberated: *tasya sarveṣu bhūteṣu kāmācāro bhavati*.

which is usually interpreted as the third step of Viṣṇu identified with the sun at its zenith<sup>29</sup>. The close connection between the dead and the sun is also expressed in 10.154.5, according to which the dead are expected to go to the poets who guard the sun.

My interpretation that the abode of the dead persons is on the sun is not necessarily incompatible with Bodewitz's theory that the dead go to the subterranean world<sup>30</sup>. In one stanza, the fathers are presented as sitting in the womb of the reddish ones (*ásināso aruññām upásthē*, 10.15.7). *Aruná* often qualifies dawn (e.g. 1.112.19, 4.1.16, 4.14.3), so to sit 'in the womb of dawns' means to sit in the place where the dawns are born, i.e., in the nether world identified with night<sup>31</sup>. It is possible then that the afterlife track of the dead was conceived as follows: first they went to the nether world and then they were raised to the sky by the rising sun. This was the way, at least, for those who were properly cremated. It is possible that the rest remained in the nether world forever<sup>32</sup>.

If we agree that the dead were in the sun, then we will see a symmetry between everyday *iṣṭi* and the final *iṣṭi*, i.e., *antyeṣṭi*: the fire of cremation – like the fire of everyday sacrifice, brings the dead to the sun – as it brings the oblation<sup>33</sup>. That a dead person was treated as an oblation has already been mentioned above: it is implied by the meaning of *áva sṛj-*, which denotes operations done upon animals, more precisely upon cattle.

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29. and with Agni (*[apám] napát*). The third step of Viṣṇu as the sun: 1.154.6, 1.155.3,5, 1.22.20-21, see Elizarenkova T. Ya., *Rigveda. Mandaly V-VIII*. Moskva: Nauka. Vol. II, 1995, p. 555, Geldner K. F., *Der Rig-Veda...* Vol. I: 22. In RV 5.3.3, 10.1.3 it is Agni, who is present in the third step of Viṣṇu. See also Macdonell, *Vedic...*, p. 178.

30. Bodewitz H. W. "Yonder world in the Atharvaveda". *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 42, 2, 1999, pp. 107-120, Bodewitz H. W. "Pits, pitfalls and the underworld in the Veda". *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 42, 3, 1999, pp. 211-226.

31. Kuiper F. B. J. "The bliss of Aśa", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 7, 2, 1964, pp. 96-129, Elizarenkova T. Ya. 'To the meaning of the R̥gvedic *harmyá-/harmiá-*'. *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 62/63, 1991-199, pp. 573-582, Bodewitz H. W. "Life after death in the R̥gvedasamhitā". *Wiener Zeitschrift zur Kunde des Sued- und Ostasiens*, 38, 1994, pp. 23-41.

32. See: Oberlies, *Die Religion...*, pp. 471-473.

33. Tull H. W. *The Vedic...*, pp. 108-119 shows symmetry between the Agnicayana and the Śmaśanacayana.

Conceptualization of the dead person as an animal oblation finds its ritual expression in the protection of the dead body against fire by cowhide, which is expressed in 10.16.7a (*agnér várma pári góbhīr vyayasva*)<sup>34</sup>. However, it is worth noticing that 10.16.7a is the only place in the RV where the word *gó* in plural refers to cow hide. Usually, in its metaphorical sense, this word is used to denote the milk with which Soma is mixed<sup>35</sup>. This common Ṛgvedic usage makes the recipient activate the meaning of *góbhīr* in 10.16.7a as referring to the milk too. The validity of this activation is supported by that there was a custom of covering a dead person with some milky food if a cow was not killed during the cremation rite<sup>36</sup>. Taking this into consideration, one can assume that the intention of the poet was to create the image of the dead identified not only with an animal oblation but also with the Somic oblation mixed with milk.

Thus the symmetry between everyday sacrifice and cremation is clear: the dead person, being an animal or a Somic oblation, was poured (*áhuta*) into the cremation fire. It was believed in the RV that the earthly fire has its cosmic form, which is the sun. The cremation fire took the dead to its cosmic, solar form, as it happened with every oblation poured into the fire<sup>37</sup>. In this way, the concept of afterlife would be incorporated into the Ṛgvedic model of sacrifice.

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34. See Evison G. *Indian death rituals: the enactment of ambivalence*. D. Phil. Thesis. University of Oxford, 1989, pp. 314, 324, 330, 331.

35. E.g. 1.134.2, 3.35.8, 9.32.3, 9.74.8, 9.103.2. Srinivasan D. *Concept of cow in the Veda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979, pp. 61 ff. According to Macdonell A. A., Keith A. B. (*Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*. 2 Vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967 (First Edition 1912), Vol. I, p. 234) the word *gó* 'frequently means milk, but rarely the flesh of the cow', the only example they give is 10.16.7a.

36. See Evison G. *Indian...*, p. 372.

37. The belief that the oblation was poured into the fire identified with the sun is explicitly expressed in 10.88.1 where fire into which the oblation is poured is qualified as 'finding the sun' (*svarvíd*) and 'touching the sky' (*divispfís*) which implies that fire filled with oblation goes up to the sky in order to touch it and to identify itself with the sun. On transformation of fire into the sun see also Bodewitz H. W. "The Cosmic, Cyclical Dying (parimara)". In: W. Morgenroth (Ed.) *Sanskrit and world culture. Proceedings of the IV<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies*, Weimar, May 23-30, 1979. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1986, pp. 438-443.

## 2.A.c. The meaning of *áva sꝛj-* (Part II)

The above reconstruction of the afterlife does not solve one problem: why does the poet say that the dead person should be sent to his fathers 'once again' (*púnas*)? The answer can be found in other semantic aspects of *áva sꝛj-*. The meanings presented above do not exhaust the whole semantic range of this verb. The most frequent usage of *áva sꝛj-* in the RV is to denote freeing of waters by Indra<sup>38</sup>. This semantic extension too seems to be motivated by its first concrete meaning, 'to untie': there is a similarity between a snake and a cord<sup>39</sup> and the waters are tied by the snake Vṛtra as a calf or a thief is tied by a cord. What is more, waters are often conceptualized as cows, so the meaning 'to untie an animal' strengthens the rationale lying behind the usage of *áva sꝛj-* to denote freeing waters.

The idea of the direction downwards is inherent in the range of this semantic aspect of *áva sꝛj-*. Waters freed by Indra symbolise waters that make the existence of the world possible: these are rivers and rain. The idea of movement downwards is obviously present in the idea of rain. It is also present in the idea of rivers which have their sources in the mountains and flow down to the ocean (3.33.1, 5.43.11, 6.61.2, 7.95.2). There is a group of hymns that use the noun *nimná* to express the direction downwards<sup>40</sup>. In these hymns the idea of waters conceived as flowing downwards is evoked in the source domain of similes explaining the movement of Soma (most frequently). This allows us to treat this image as conventional and the direction downwards as the essential feature of the movement of waters<sup>41</sup>. There are

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38. 1.32.12: *ávāsꝛjah sártave saptá síndhūn*, 1.55.6: [*á*]va ... *sártavá apáh sꝛjat*, 1.57.6: *ávāsꝛjo nívr̥tāḥ sártavá apāḥ*, 1.80.4: *sꝛjá... áva... imá apó*, 1.174.4: *sꝛjád árñāmsy áva*, 2.12.12: *avāsꝛjat sártave saptá síndhūn*, 6.30.4: *árñó 'vāsꝛjo apó áchā samudrām*; 10.113.4: *áva sasyádaḥ sꝛjad*.

39. Expressed explicitly thousands years later by Śāṅkara in his famous example explaining the nature of the false knowledge.

40. Lubotsky A. *A Ṛgvedic Word-Concordance*. Parts I-II. New Haven, Connecticut, American Oriental Society, 1997, *nimnám*, *nimnéna*, *nimnáḥ*: 5.51.7, 8.32.23 = 4.47.2, 9.97.45, 9.17.1, 9.97.7, 1.57.2, 10.78.5, 10.148.5. See also 7.18.15.

41. Renou L., *Etudes védiques et pāṇinéennes*. Vol. XV. Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1966 interpret *nimnám* in 4.33.7 as the expression of the place where waters are and not as the direction of their movement. I think however that one can interpret

two stanzas that explicitly express the downward movement with the use of *áva sṛj-* to describe the release of waters by Indra (8.32.25, 10.133.2)<sup>42</sup>. In 5.62.3 *áva sṛj-* expresses raining<sup>43</sup>.

There is no doubt, then, that when *áva sṛj-* is used to denote freeing of waters, *áva* highlights its basic meaning ‘down, downwards’, which modifies the meaning of the verb. I would argue that the intention of the poet of RV 10.16 was to activate the whole semantic range of *áva sṛj*, together with its meaning of freeing (waters) downwards. In this case *pitṛbhyo* should be interpreted as an ablative, ‘from [his] fathers’, and the pada understood in this way expresses a request to Agni to release the dead person downwards. This interpretation allows one to assume that *púnah* evokes the idea of a repeated homecoming, explicit in padas *c-d*.

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it also as expressing the movement: the stanza describes creation of the world done by Ṛbhu-s who they make everything as it should be; their creative act sets the model for the future entities and their behaviour, so they make waters flow down too.

42. 10.133.2ab: *tvám síndhūṁr ávāsṛjo’dharáco áhann áhim*; 8.32.25ab: *yá udnáh phaligám bhinán nyák síndhūṁr avásṛjat*. The word *phaligá* is uncertain (Mayrhofer M. *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Woerterbuch des Altindischen. A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*. 3 Vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winter. Universitätsverlag, 1956, 1963) but the context evokes the idea of rock (which encloses the cows) and of the vessel (which encloses the rain), so the meaning of stanza is creation of rivers and of rain, the idea of rain strengthens the idea of movement downwards. Witzel M. (“Vala and Ivato. The Myth of the Hidden Sun in India, Japan, and beyond”. *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*. 12, 1. <http://www.ejvs.laurasianacademy.com>, 2005, p. 4) translates *phaligá* as ‘a robust rock’ which blocks the cave in which the sun is hidden; the possibility to interpret *phaligá* as the container both for water and the sun results from Ṛgvedic conception of the sun which is the container and the source of water, see below 2.B.

43. *vardháyatam oṣadhīḥ pínvataṁ gā áva vṛṣṭím sṛjatam jiradānū* || 5.62.3 cd. The direction downwards is also evoked in 7.46.3: *yá te didyúd ávasṛṣṭā divás pári kṣmayá cárati*. It is also possible that *áva sṛj-* expresses the movement downwards in 1.151.6c (*áva tmánā sṛjātaṁ pínvataṁ dhíyo*) of the gods who come to the sacrifice to eat and drink the oblations, sitting on the barhis. Two more usages of *áva sṛj* seem to be motivated by the idea of ‘down’ conveyed by *áva*. In 4.19.2 the gods who remain behind Indra are compared to the old people. The idea of being down is evoked in the image of the old people who not only remain backwards, behind their young leaders, but also fall down on the earth. In the second use *áva sṛj-* is used to express the sinful state (1.189.5), the ideas of sin and of what is down are combined in the RV (Bodewitz H. W., *Yonder world...*, similarly in the Atharvaveda, see Bodewitz H. W. *Pits, pitfalls...*).

## 2.A.d. The meaning of padas *c-d*

In my opinion, we can safely assume that these padas express the return of the dead to their relatives to be reborn among them<sup>44</sup>. Even though *śéṣas* can mean burnt remains of a human body (it is so interpreted by Sāyaṇa), in the RV the word definitely means ‘offspring’ and there is no reason why this meaning should not be activated. The word *āyus* found in the expression *āyur vāsāna* is consistently used in the RV to denote human life evaluated in a very positive way. And I think that this common meaning should be evoked first, before other possible meanings. Finally, the word *tanū* in the RV denotes ‘the body, the person, the self’ and this meaning matches the whole image which is – in my opinion – created in the stanza: the cremation fire, having burnt the body of the dead person and having taken the person to the world of his fathers, is requested to release him back to his offspring, in whom he can be brought back to life again.

From what has been said above it follows that the expression *áva sṛja púnar agne pitṛbhyo* activates the full semantic range of *áva sṛj-* outlined above. Thus the poet could express the bi-directional movement of the dead person: his movement upwards where he could experience the contradictory state of the existence of the dead (compare 1.164.30: *jīvo mṛtāsya carati svadhābhiḥ*) and his movement downwards, back to earth. This cycle of rebirth is very close to what Obeyesekere describes as the rebirth theory in small scale societies<sup>45</sup>.

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44. O’Flaherty W. D. *The Ṛgveda...* considers a possibility that the padas *c-d* express the return of the dead to the earth. Geldner K. F. *Der Rig-Veda...*, Vol. III maintains that the dead comes back during the sacrifices to the manes; I will discuss his view below (analysis of 10.14.8).

45. I would like to pay attention to the expression *avaródhanam diváḥ*, which is used in RV 9.113.8. This word appears once, only here, but in four other places the expression *āródhanam diváḥ* is used (three stanzas describe the function of Agni which brings the oblations to gods in his solar form, in two Agni knows *āródhanam diváḥ*, 4.8.2, 4.8.4, 4.7.8). Grassmann H. *Wörterbuch zum Ṛgveda*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1873 interprets both words as ‘der verschlossene Ort, das innerste Heiligtum’, Elizarenkova T. Ya. (*Rigveda...*, Vol. III), Geldner K. F. (*Der Rig-Veda...*, Vol. III), Renou L. (*Études védiques et pāṇinéennes*. Vol. XVI. Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1961) in their translation of *āródhana* follow Sāyaṇa who understands it as *ārohana*. If Sāyaṇa is right, then *avaródhana* can also be interpreted in the same way: as *avaróhana*, i.e. the place through which the people come back to the

So finally, I would propose the following interpretation of RV 10.16.5:

‘Release him to his fathers and again down from them, [him] who, poured into you, travels according to his will. Let him, who wears life, come to his offspring. Let him join his body, Jātavedas!’

## 2.B. RV 10.16.13-14

The fact that in the RV *áva s̥j-* is regularly used to denote the release of waters allows one to presume that it was believed that the dead come back to earth in the form of rain. This belief is consistent with cosmological assumptions because already in the RV the sun was thought of as the source of rain<sup>46</sup>. The belief can also be reconstructed from RV 10.16.13ab: *yám tvám agne samádahas tám u nír vāpayā púnah*. According to padas *c-d* of the stanza, water plants (*kiyāmbu, pākādūrṡá, vyàlkaśā*) are supposed to grow on the cremation ground.

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earth. There is no doubt that the poet exalted with Soma, if he reached the heavenly place during the sacrifice, while he is alive (see Note 27), would really wish not to stay in the world of dead but to come back to his family (for dangerous character of the sacrificial journey and the wish of the sacrificer to come back to the earth see Smith 1985, 1989). And similarly the real dead could wish to come back to his family (as Obeyesekere writes, such wish is very strong and constitutes the emotional rationale for the rebirth eschatologies). It is very consistent then that Agni in its form of messenger should know the *āródhana* to the sky, contrary to the human beings who – dead or alive – would like to know the *avaródhana* from the sky.

46. Kaelber W. O. *Tapta Mārga. Asceticism and initiation in Vedic India*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publication, 1990, pp. 15-16. That the water is on the sun, the abode of the dead, is expressed also in RV 9.113.8, which presents it as the place where there ‘those young waters’ (*amūr yahvātīr āpas*) are. The waters are young because they are very close to their heavenly source. The expression *yahvātīr āpaḥ* is once more used in 1.105.11 which creates the image of birds which sit at the ascent to heaven (*āródhane diváh*) and which chase away the wolf who crosses young waters; this image implies the connection between *yahvātīr āpaḥ* and *āródhana*, implied also by 9.113. A very similar to *yahvātīr āpas* is *svàrvaṡīr āpas*: the celestial or solar waters are gained by Indra (1.10.8, 8.40.10-11) or by the poets (5.2.11). This expression also implies the presence of waters on the sun. I have discussed this important part of the R̥gvedic cosmology in my book (Jurewicz J. *Kosmogonia Rygwedy. Myśl i metafora*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2001) which is now being translated into English.

In the next stanza, water plants are requested to join with a female frog to gladden the fire.

According to Bloomfield, *nir vāpaya* means ‘simply <extinguish>’<sup>47</sup>. It is similarly interpreted by Elizarenkova, Geldner, O’Flaherty (*ad loci*). According to Grassmann (*op. cit.*) and Lubotzky (*op. cit.*) the form *nir vāpaya* comes from *vā-*, ‘to fan, to blow’.

Bloomfield quotes some later texts that comment on this Ṛgvedic verse. All of them understand *nir vāpaya* as expressing the extinction of fire with the aid of a fluid, like milk (*Śāṃkhāyana Śrautasūtra*, *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*) and/or honey (*Kauśika Gṛhyasūtra*). Sāyaṇa glosses *nir vāpaya* (*ad. Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 4.1.2) as *itaḥ sthānāt niḥ sāraya*, ‘Make [him] flow from this place’. These readings find their confirmation in ritual practice: the cremation ground is “cooled”, i.e., water is poured on it and then water plants are sown; this ritual practice is evoked in 10.14-15<sup>48</sup>.

According to Evison (*op. cit.*), during the cooling ceremony milk and water were sprinkled with a branch, and it is possible that *nir vā-* evokes the idea of fanning with a wet branch. On the other hand, fanning or blowing on fire enkindles rather than extinguishes it (this is expressed by the RV itself which qualifies fire as *vātacodita* in 1.58.5, 1.141.7)<sup>49</sup>.

The form *nir vāpaya*, however, can also come from the verb *nir vap-*, ‘to scatter, to throw, sow’. It was Ludwig<sup>50</sup>, who interpreted *nir vāpaya* to express sowing, and I think that in this context this interpretation is fully justified. By activating of the idea of sowing, the poet could not only refer to what actually happened on the cremation ground, but also express the cosmic and eschatological dimension of the ritual activity.

47. Bloomfield M., 1894. “On a Vedic group of charms for extinguishing fire by means of water-plants and a frog. Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda.” *The American Journal of Philology*. Baltimore 1890, 11, No 3, p. 26.

48. Bloomfield M., *On a Vedic...*, O’Flaherty W. D. *The Ṛgveda...*, Elizarenkova T. Ya. *Rigveda...*, Vol. III, p. 426.

49. One has to blow on fire, making it with stick. In traditional societies the fire was not extinguished at night but kept in the warm ashes and in the morning it was lit again by blowing on it. In the RV *vā-* is used to express the spreading of fire caused by the wind (1.148.4, 4.7.10, 7.3.2, 10.142.4).

50. Ludwig A., 1877 *Der Rigveda oder die heiligen Hymnen der Brāhmana*. Prag: Verlag von F. Tempsky.

## 2.B.a. Raining As Sowing (Barley) Metaphor

Like other Ṛgvedic words, the verb *vap-* has a wide semantic range, the full analysis of which would go beyond the scope of this paper. I will mention here only those aspects of its meaning which are relevant for understanding RV 10.16.13b. The meaning of *vap-* ‘to sow’ is attested explicitly in the first and tenth *maṇḍalas* (1.117.21, 1.176.2, 10.68.3, 10.94.13, 10.101.3). Sowing involves scattering grain and then watering it either by human beings or by rain. There is one stanza in which *vap-* is used in such a context that it may evoke the idea of rain: in 7.56.3 *abhī vap-* is used to express activity of the Maruts; taking into account their rainy character, it is possible to interpret *vap-* as ‘to scatter drops of rain’<sup>51</sup>. In 10.85.37 *vap-* expresses insemination (*tām pūṣaṇ chivátamām érayasva yásyām bíjam manusyā vápanti*), the description however evokes descriptions of ploughing and sowing the earth conceived as a woman (compare 4.57.7: *índraḥ sítām ní gṛhṇātu tām pūṣānu yachatu*). It is possible to activate the concept of rain in the description of insemination because in the RV the idea of insemination was the basis for metaphorical conceptualization of raining: e.g., in 5.83.4 rain is conceived in terms of Parjanya’s semen, which inseminates the earth.

In some stanzas a more specific domain of sowing barley is evoked in order to express the sunrise and raining. The golden colour of barley links it with rays of the sun. It is also significant, in this context, that the RV uses the concept of container full of grain as referring to the sun<sup>52</sup>. On the other hand, in the RV barley is presented as a

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51. Elizarenkova T. Ya, *Rigveda...*, Vol. III, Renou L. *Etudes védiques et pāṇinéennes*. Vol. X. Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1962, interprets the *svapú* as ‘ornaments-luisants’ but he also thinks that the idea of rain is evoked in this description, according to him the rain clarifies ornaments. Geldner K. F. *Der Rig-Veda*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951, Vol II.: ‘Reinigungsmitteln’ but adds in note: ‘Den Regentropfen’. In two places (8.7.4, 10.73.5) *vap-* expresses creation of fog, such usage evokes the idea of creation of something, which is wet and consists of drops.

52. See especially RV 3.5.6 (*sasásya cárma gṛtávat*), 4.5.7, (*sasásya cárman*), 4.7.7 (*sasásya údhan*). The image of the bag with grain, used as the source domain in metaphoric mappings, needs a separate analysis. The life-giving character of the sunrise is expressed in the RV also in that it is the moment when the food appears, see RV 1.72.8,9, 3.38.3, 3.44.3; the food is sometimes identified with the sun (RV 1.72.8, 3.44.3).

plant which needs rain to grow properly<sup>53</sup>, so there is a conceptual link of cause and effect between the concepts of rain and barley. I will analyse one example which reveals the metaphoric mapping Raining Is Sowing Barley:

*br̥haspátih̥ párvatebhyo vitúr̥ya nír gá̃ ūpe yávam iva sthivíbhyaḥ* || 10.68.3cd

Br̥haspati, having led the cows from the mountains, sowed them like barley from sacks.

The expression *párvatebhyo vitúr̥ya nír gá̃ ūpe* may be directly understood as describing the creation of the morning on the basis of the conventionalized metaphorical conceptualization of dawns in terms of cows<sup>54</sup>. But in the RV also streams of waters are metaphorically conceptualized in terms of cows, and this metaphor should be evoked in this context too<sup>55</sup>. In this case, ‘the mountains’ refers not only to the nocturnal sky but also to rain-clouds. The word *sthiví*, which appears in the simile’s source domain, activates the R̥gvedic concept of rain metaphorically conceived as pouring water from a container (called *útsa*, *avatá*, *kóśa*, *d̥ṭi*, *kávandha*)<sup>56</sup>. The word *nír ūpe* activates the scenario of sowing, which includes raining. There are the following correspondences between the similes: sacks in the source domain correspond to the mountains in the target domain, grains of barley correspond to the cows. The simile compares two conceptual metaphors expressing raining. The metaphor in the simile’s source domain conceptualizes drops of rain in terms of grains of barley and clouds in terms of sacks. The metaphor in the simile’s target domain conceptualizes drops of rain in terms of cows and clouds in terms of mountains.

53. 2.5.6, 5.85.3, 10.43.7.

54. For data see Srinivasan D., Concept...

55. For data see Srinivasan D., Concept...

56. Jurewicz J., “Spring, well and Bucket in the R̥gveda”. In: D. Stasik., A. Trynkowska (Eds.) India in Warsaw. Indie w Warszawie. Tom upamiętniający 50-lecie powojennej historii indologii na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim (2003/2004). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, pp. 252-276.

## 2.B.b. *vap-* ‘to sow’ and *vap-* ‘to shear, to shave’

In the RV another verbal root, *vap-* ‘to shave, to shear’, is used to express the activity of fire, and according to Mayrhofer this root is distinct from the root *vap-* ‘to sow’<sup>57</sup>.

The aim of the following argument is not to challenge that opinion. I will just claim that since *vap-* ‘to scatter, to throw, sow’ and *vap-* ‘to hear, to shave’ are phonetically identical and their inflection is the same too, the poets could use this identity to express a wider sense construed on the basis of both verbs<sup>58</sup>. The following stanza will show the mastery with which a context is created to evoke the meanings of shearing and sowing:

*yé te śukrāsaḥ śúcayaḥ śuciṣmaḥ kṣām vāpanti viśitāso āśvāḥ |*  
*ādha bhramās ta urviyá ví bhāti yātáyamāno ádhi sánu pṛśneḥ || 6.6.4ab*  
 Your bright, pure horses, set loose, shear the earth. And your whirling  
 flame shines widely, arranged on the summit of the dappled one.

The horses of fire are its flames that go around the earth and ‘shear’ the hair of the earth, i.e., burn the grass and plants. Pada *d* of the stanza presents fire as being ‘on the summit of the dappled one’ (*ádhi sánu pṛśneḥ*). As suggested by other scholars, here *pṛśni* refers to the cow identified with the earth, on the peak of which the fiery horses run<sup>59</sup>. One can assume that the summit of the earth is the place from which the sky can be reached<sup>60</sup>. One can also assume that – in order to express the cosmic form of fire, which is the rising sun – the

57. However see Mayrhofer M. *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindiarischen*, Vol. II, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1992, p. 504, Goto T. Die ‘I. Präsensklasse’ im Vedischen. Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1987, p. 287.

58. Like they do with *su-*, *sunoti*, ‘to press’, *sū-*, *suvati*, ‘to impel, sū-, sūte, ‘to procreate’ (Heestermann J. C., 1957. *The ancient Indian royal consecration. The r̥jasūya described according to the yajus texts and annotated*. ‘s-Gravenhage: Mouton and Co, 1957, p. 72-73.

59. Elizarenkova T. Ya., *Rigveda...*, Vol. II, Geldner K. F. *Der Rig-Veda...*, Vol. II, Renou L., *Etudes védiques et pāṇinéennes*. Vol. XIII. Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1964

60. Is this the place named by *āródhana diváh?*

stanza evokes the image of horses ascending the cosmic mountain<sup>61</sup>. In this case, if one understands *vap-* as ‘to shear’, one will get the meaning of the sun burning the earth<sup>62</sup>.

But at the same time, the horses of Agni are *vīṣitāsaḥ* – ‘set loose’. As in everyday life, horses are set loose after a long march; similarly the fiery horses are set loose after a long run up to the peak of the earth. Then, like ordinary horses, they not only eat grass, but are tired and sweating too. In the RV sweat (*svéda*) is the basis for conceptualizing rain (5.58.7: *varṣām svédam cakrire rudrīyāsaḥ*)<sup>63</sup>. It is worth noticing that the participle *vīṣita* is used in the RV to qualify horses running freely (3.33.1) and the quick fire (6.12.5, 10.27.14), which usage is confirmed in 6.6.4. But it is also used to express a gourd with rain that is opened in order to set rain free as well as the streams of rain themselves (5.83.7, 5.83.8). In my opinion, all these contexts of *vīṣita* are evoked in 6.6.4 in order to highlight the rain-making function of fire<sup>64</sup>.

If the idea of rain can be evoked in the stanza, the phonetic resemblance between *vap-* ‘to shear’ and *vap-* ‘to sow’ is activated and the *vapanti* may convey both meanings: of shearing, i.e., burning, and of sowing, i.e., raining. The conceptual metonymy (which activates the concept of a whole when we think of its part) would justify the expression *kṣām vāpanti*: ‘seed’, which is the natural direct object of *vap-*, ‘to sow’, is replaced here by ‘the earth’ (*kṣām-*), because seed, when sown, becomes part of the earth<sup>65</sup>.

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61. A similar image is created in 1.58.2.

62. Heestermann J. C., *The ancient...*, p. 111, 215-219, Elizarenkova, *Rigveda...*, Vol II, p. 576.

63. Kaelber W. O. *Tapta Mārga...*, p. 22. It is also possible that the idea of urination is evoked here; in the RV “rain” was conceived in terms of “the urine” too (1.64.6)

64. Elizarenkova’s translation of *bhramá* as ‘vodovarot’ activates the idea of rain expressed by this word.

65. The same metonymy motivates the usage of many verbs expressing the opening or destruction of an enclosure; their direct objects describe the contents of the enclosure instead of the enclosure: e.g. 8.63.3: *ápa vṛ-*, ‘to open cows’; 10.38.2: *ví vṛ-*, ‘to open riches streaming with cows’; 9.108.6: *nír kṛt-*: ‘to cut out cows’; 6.17.3: *abhí tṛd-* ‘to bore cows’; 7.49.1: *rad-* ‘to bite the water of rivers’. For conceptual metonymy PART FOR WHOLE / WHOLE FOR PART see Radden G., Kövecses Z. “Towards a Theory of Metonymy”. In: Radden G., Panther K.-U. *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1999, pp. 17-59.

The only place in the RV where *vap-* clearly denotes ‘to shave’ is 10.142.4cd:

*yadā te vāto anuvāti śocīr vāpteva śmāśru vapasi prā bhūma ||*

When your wind blows after your flame you shave the earth, like a shaver [shaving] a beard<sup>66</sup>.

The only other R̥gvedic usage of *vap-* with the preposition *prā* is at 10.115.3, which refers to Agni qualified as *pravāpantam arṇavām*. Since *arṇavā* means ‘waving water’, such qualification of Agni activates its rainy aspect and, in this context, *prā vap-* should be interpreted as ‘to sow’ with its extension of raining, rather than ‘to shave’ with its extension of burning<sup>67</sup>. It is possible then that *vapasi prā bhūma* is meant to evoke the idea of sowing too, with a metonymic government of the direct object like that in *kṣām vāpanti* in 6.6.4b.

## 2.B.d. Final interpretation of RV 10.16.13b

From what has been said above, it follows that it is justified to interpret *nīr vāpaya* as a form coming rather from *vap-* ‘to scatter, to throw, to sow’ than from *vā-*, ‘to fan, to blow’<sup>68</sup>. Here the verb *vap-* highlights its meaning of sowing. So I propose to render 10.16.13ab in the following way:

‘O Agni, sow again the one you burnt [before]!’

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66. The construction of the stanza is beautiful, it is based on the phonetic play of few consonants (*p, b, v, ś, s*) and words like with *udvāto nivāto ... vāto anuvāti... vāpteva ... vapasi*. It is possible that the aim of this play is to bring closer the meanings of *vap-* and *vā-* too. This would confirm my thesis that 10.16.13ab aims at activation of both roots, *vā-* and *vap-*.

67. The stanza is construed so masterly that the meaning of shaving is activated immediately after the recognition of the pada *c* of the stanza, which presents Agni being a driver whose mouth is flame.

68. I use the word ‘rather’ consciously because I think that both meanings can be evoked by the recipient. They are complementary and not mutually exclusive. The recipient, having construed the scenario of raining, may also understand *nīr vāpaya* as coming from from *vā-* and activate the idea of wind that accompanies rain.

The cremation fire, having burnt the dead person, is now requested to sow him. One should remember that Agni, as the recipient of the requests expressed at 10.16.5 and 10.16.13, is not only the cremation fire but also fire in its cosmic form, i.e., the sun. And as it was believed that the sun was the source of rain, so the request to Agni for transforming the dead into rain and pouring it back to the earth is consistent with the Ṛgvedic cosmology.

It is possible that the form *nír vāpaya* prompts the recipient to construe an image similar to that of 10.68.3 and to create the image of Agni, who sows the dead person like barley from sacks; this possibility is strengthened by the fact that Agni and Bṛhaspati are identified in the RV. At the same time, the figurative meaning of sowing to express insemination allows the recipient to create the image of Agni, which inseminates the earth with the dead person as seed so that he can be reborn from it. In this function, Agni is very close to Parjanya fecundating the earth with rain. If my reconstruction of RV 10.16.13b is correct, then we can even see the closeness between the images construed in this stanza and those in the descriptions of Parjanya: Agni throws away barley from his sack as Parjanya empties his bucket of water (5.83.8). This opens the way to the later belief that the dead are reborn in plants. The conceptualization of the dead as a Somic oblation makes the above suppositions even more probable, because in the RV Soma is compared to barley (2.14.11, 8.2.3) and identified with rain.

In that case, the cooling ceremony and the ritual sowing would be the external manifestation of the cosmic process just reconstructed<sup>69</sup>. As in 10.16.5, the adverb *punáh* is used in 10.16.13 to express the recurrent return of the dead.

## 2.C. RV 10.14.18

Let us recapitulate the rebirth eschatology reconstructed on the basis of the Ṛgvedic evidence: the dead person, properly cremated,

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69. About ritual ploughing at funeral and its sexual and procreative meaning see Wojtilla G. "Aspects of ritual ploughing in India and its possible external affinities." *The Mankind Quarterly*, 27, No 2, 1986, pp. 193-199.

was poured as a Somic oblation into the cremation fire (*yás ta áhutaś*). He reached the sun (*áva sṛja púnar agne pitṛbhyo, pitṛbhyo* as dative), where he enjoyed the contradictory afterlife state (*cáрати svadhábhīḥ*). Then he was sent back by the sun in the form of rain (*áva sṛja púnar agne pitṛbhyo, pitṛbhyo* as ablative, *yám tvám agne samádahas tám u nír vāpayā púnaḥ*) to be reborn among his relatives (*áyur vásāna úpa vetu śéśaḥ sám gachatām tanvā*). This cycle can also be reconstructed on the basis of RV 10.14.18:

*sám gachasva pitṛbhiḥ sám yaméneṣṭāpūrténa paramé vyòman |*  
*hitvāyāvadyám púnar ástam éhi sám gachasva tanvā suvárcāḥ ||*  
 (10.14.8)

Unite with fathers, unite with Yama, unite with sacrifices and good deeds in the highest heaven. Having left [everything that is] blameable, come home again, unite with your body, O [you], beautifully shining.

Verses *a-b* express the request that the dead should go up to the sky to meet not only Yama but also his fathers. This agrees with the common belief that the world where the dead go is the world of their ancestors (Obeyesekere 2002). *iṣṭāpūrtá* is a hapax legomenon and one can only presume that good deeds done during the lifetime positively influence the situation in the afterlife<sup>70</sup>. This would anticipate the later ethicised versions of rebirth eschatology (see Conclusion). *Paramá vyòman* is a place situated somewhere at the borders of the universe. According to 10.129.1, it did not exist before the creation; 10.129.7 adds that this is the place where the eye-witness of the world remains<sup>71</sup>. The highest heaven is the place where the gods are born and grow up<sup>72</sup>. It is also the place that supports the sky, the earth and the truth (*ṛtá*) (1.62.7, 5.15.2). Although there is no direct evidence in

70. Bodewitz H. W., *Life after death...*, pp. 35-36.

71. For a full reconstruction of the concept of *paramá vyòman*, see Jurewicz J., *Kosmogonia...*

72. Birth of Agni in the highest heaven: RV 1.143.2, 6.8.2, 7.5.7. Birth of Bṛhaspati in the highest heaven: RV 4.50.4. Indra drinks Soma in the highest heaven: RV 3.32.10. Indra grows up in the first (*prathamá*) heaven: RV 8.13.2. The Maruts are shaped in the highest heaven: RV 7.82.2. In the highest heaven a *gaurí* who creates the world remains (1.164.41-42).

the RV that this place was identified with the sun, in my opinion this is the most probable interpretation. Even the very name of this place suggests that it is a sphere situated somewhere high up in the sky<sup>73</sup>.

According to the second hemistich, the dead person should ‘come home again’. Geldner maintains that it happens during sacrifice to the manes; Renou observes the equivocality of the phrase and believes that it may have expressed a request to the dead to come back to the earth<sup>74</sup>. In view of the preceding analysis, there is no reason why we should not agree with Renou. As we have seen, the most obvious place of rebirth was one’s own family. I would like to point out that the verbal root *saṁ gam-* used with a noun in the instrumental form very clearly expresses the idea of uniting. Taking this into account, we will see that the phrase *sám gachasva tanvā suvárcāḥ* (like the phrase *sám gachatām tanvā jātavedaḥ*, 10.16.5d) expresses the wish that the dead person should unite with themselves when they come back home. In my opinion, the idea of rebirth expressed here is more probable than the return of the dead for the sacrifice to the manes because, in the latter case, it would be difficult to state which self they are expected to unite with. Especially that we do not know much about the Ṛgvedic sacrifice to the manes<sup>76</sup>. What is more, in some contexts, the word *tanú*, ‘the body, the person, the self’ activates the idea of vis-

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73. Obeyesekere G. *Imagining...*, p. 16, compare Oberlies T. *Die religion...*, p. 480-481. There is one aspect of the Ṛgvedic belief about afterlife which is not discussed here (due to lack of space and because it is less relevant to the topic of transmigration). It was believed that the dead person underwent transformation thanks to the influence of the cremation fire and Soma, which he drank on the sun, just as he had drunk it at the sacrifices during his life (see Jurewicz J. *Kosmogonia...*, compare Oberlies T. *Die Religion...*, pp. 474 ff). This transformation is activated by *hitvāyādyám*, which highlights perfection gained by the dead person thanks to cremation fire and Soma, which gives him freedom from any blame or shame. The influence of Soma is also expressed by the epithet *suvárcas*, ‘shining’; we know from the RV that Soma influenced its drinker in such a way that he became shining (e.g. 8.48.3, 6). This is discussed in Jurewicz J. *Kosmogonia...*

74. Renou L. *Hymnes spéculatifs du Véda*. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.

75. In the sense of mixing and meeting, see especially mixing Soma with milk expressed in terms of a bull’s meeting cows 9.93.2, see also 1.23.23, 10.9.9, 10.5.2.

76. Compare Potdar K. R. *Sacrifice in the Ṛgveda (Its nature, influence, origin and growth)*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1953: pp. 128-130, Oberlies T. *Die Religion...*, pp. 310-312.

ibility<sup>77</sup>. *Suvárcas* too activates this idea in 1.95.1d, where it is used to denote Agni visible at night as fire (*chukró anyásyām dadṛṣe duvārcāḥ*)<sup>78</sup>. One can presume that idea of visibility is also expressed in 10.14.8.d and that the stanza expresses the expectation that the dead person will appear in his visible self. Probably, the poet intended to activate all the meanings of the word *tanú* ('the body, the person, the self') to express the concept of the rebirth of a dead person in his own family group (at 'home'), and thus his regaining a new body and life, preserving at the same time his individuality<sup>79</sup>.

### 3. Conclusion

This rebirth eschatology reconstructed above has all the features of the rebirth eschatology characteristic of small-scale societies described by Obeyesekere (*op. cit.*). In my opinion, it is referred to in later thought and elaborated in accordance with the needs of its recipients.

The *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* version of the *pañcāgnividyā* does not mention the *kṣatriyas*. On the other hand, its view of how the world works is very similar to the Upaniṣadic model. It begins with the sun identified with Agni Vaiśvānara. The first oblation is immortality [and] waters (*amṛtam āpas*). The next oblations are King Soma, then he becomes rain, food, semen and a human being. It is clear from the sentence closing the description that the five levels of the model are seen as levels of transformation of water:

*pañcamyām viṣṣṭyām divyā āpaḥ puruṣavāco vadanti*

At the fifth creation the divine waters speak with a human voice (1.45)<sup>80</sup>.

I have shown elsewhere that the first oblation in the model of the *pañcāgnividyā* can be understood as a manifestation of the dead per-

77. The dawn makes her body visible: 1.123.11, 5.80.4, the bodies of Agni are visible: 10.51.1-2.

78. The third usage of *suvárcas* refers to Sūryā (10.85.44b).

79. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining...* shows that a person is a conglomerate of his own individuality and of the individuality of his ancestor.

80. Bodewitz's translation (Bodewitz H. W. *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa. Translation and commentary with a study of Agnihotra and Prāñāgnihotra*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

son who rises from the funeral pyre: his immortal part reaches the sun and becomes water<sup>81</sup>. Thus understood, the model of *pañcāgnividyā* describes the world as animated by the dead circulating between heaven and earth, and the upaniṣadic *pitṛyāna* presents this process from the point of view of an individual. Viewed from this perspective the similarity between the *pañcāgnividyā* model of *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and the Ṛgvedic rebirth eschatology is clear: the sun is the final point of the dead person's journey, water is the form under which he comes back to earth.

Then the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* describes two ways the dead person may take, depending on his understanding of himself. If the dead person does not understand himself, his good deeds are divided into three: the first part is taken by a guardian of the sun, the second one disperses in the air, and with the third one the dead person returns to the world. Then he dies again (1.46). If the dead person answers the question properly, his good deeds are taken by his fathers and grandfathers (compare RV 10.14.8). He stays in the sun and never dies (*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.49-50).

The model of *pañcāgnividyā* established in JB 1.45 is repeated in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* with some minor changes which do not modify the main idea of how the world works. The *pitṛyāna* develops and elaborates the idea of the return of the third part of the dead person, using the Ṛgvedic belief that he comes back to earth in a watery form.

The afterlife situation depends on knowledge (which leads to the *devayāna*) and on deeds (which leads to the *pitṛyāna*). The really new thing is – as Obeyesekere shows it – the ethical dimension of the final form assumed on the *pitṛyāna* track, which depends on good and bad deeds. Gombrich's argument, when he shows how the Buddha ethicized the Brāhmaṇic ontology, takes the same direction<sup>82</sup>. It is worth adding however that the author of the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* had al-

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81. Jurewicz J. "Prajāpati, the Fire and the *pañcāgnividyā*". In: Balcerowicz, P., Mejer, M. (Eds.) *Essays in Indian philosophy, religion & literature*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 2004, pp. 45-60

82. Gombrich R. *How Buddhism Began. The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. London & Atlantic Highlands: Athlone 1996

ready made a step towards ethicization: in his model the dead person who does not know himself is not reborn in the family (as implied by the Ṛgvedic evidence) and the place where he is reborn depends not only on his knowledge but also on his charity<sup>83</sup>. It seems that this step had already been prepared in RV 10.14.8 where the dead is supposed to meet ‘sacrifices and good deeds’ (*iṣṭāpūrtá*). The kṣatriyas transformed this into a general concept of an ethical dependence of the afterlife upon deeds<sup>84</sup>. Thus they introduced the idea of personal responsibility and of individual freedom, which enables human beings to influence and guide their future.

I am aware that many of these problems still need a solution. One of them is why there are so few references to the rebirth theory in the RV. As Kuiper showed, the earlier maṇḍalas were composed to fulfil the needs of other rituals (such as the New Year’s Festival)<sup>85</sup>. According to Obeyesekere, in the times of the RV there may have been various beliefs that influenced the religion attested in the RV. That hymns connected to cremation and death ceremonies appear only in the last maṇḍala of the RV<sup>86</sup> reflects a broadening of interests and new needs which could be caused by that influence.

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83. *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.46: *sa yo hāsya dānajito loko bhavati*. It is worth noticing that according to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 10.4.3.9-10 the immortality can be gained by knowledge (*vidyā*) or by ritual (*kārman*), both identified with fire-altar (*āgni*). People who have knowledge or perform ritual, having died, are reborn again and become immortal. Those who do not have knowledge or do not perform ritual, having died, are reborn and again become the food of the death. I would add this passage to the evidence gathered by Killingley, *The paths...*, which confirms the Vedic sources of the Upaniṣadic *deva-/pitṛyāna*.

84. The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*’s version is between the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* and the Upaniṣadic version: the afterlife lot depends on the dead person’s knowledge, but the future birth depends on deeds too (*yathākarma yathāvidyam* 1.2.). The dead person reaches the moon, and not the sun (*etad vai svargasya lokasya dvāraṃ yac candramāḥ* 1.2), then he either goes back to the earth or to brahman passing through the worlds of fire, of wind, of Varuṇa, of Indra and of Prajāpati. The right answer is the same verse as in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, but it is the moon, who asks the question, not the season, the guardian of the sun.

85. Kuiper F. J. B. “Ancient Indian verbal contest”, *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 4, 1960, p. 217-281

86. 10.14, 10.15, 10.16, 10.18, 10.154

If my interpretation of the three stanzas of the RV is right, then Obeyesekere is wrong in one point. He writes: ‘any attempt to trace the history of the idea of rebirth from texts that exist only through the accident of history is by definition futile’<sup>87</sup>. I hope that my presentation has shown that even if the texts exist through the accident of history, they may help us to trace the history of the idea of rebirth.

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87. Obeyesekere G., *Imagining Karma...*, p. 14.