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THE AGNI MARGA¹

I. The very early mist

The last Glacial Period ended when the extremely low temperature was broken, and began a gradual rising of heat. Such a thing happened about 18.000 years ago. The tiny but continuous warming produced an uniform melting of the huge ices of the Arctic with a consequent colossal increase of flow in all the major rivers of the Northern hemisphere. In those days was born The Great Caspian.² However, the lilting rising of heat was stagnated and remained flat between the 8th and 5th millennium B.C. (*Nature* N° 400, 22 July 1999, pp. 344-348: Barber, D. C., and others, “*Forcing of the cold event of 8.200 years ago by catastrophic drainage of Laurentide lakes*”). This thermal process with flat temperatures and climatic regularity was the ideal scenario that allowed the boosting of the agriculture. But this ideal weather ended with a sudden new increase of heat, which could happen around the 5000 B.C. It could be a fast event (in a few years). The result was that the remaining great Arctic was melted completely (and also other large glaciers there were in the Tibet-Himalayas). The flood and disaster is remembered in the Eastern oral traditions as the great atonement and God’s punishment, or «Great Deluge».

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² This subject has been our hypothesis, presented twice at the “Hispanic Community of Indo-iranian Studies”, at their congresses of the year 2014 and 2016, in Sevilla, and Murcia, Spain.

The Great Caspian maintained its huge extension while there was regularity in the cadence of ice-melting. The time between the 8th and 5th millennium, marks the beginning of the retreat of the great Caspian. “The flood” is the highest peak in height and extension; then again begins the involution and retreat of the waters, to be what it is today: a lake bottom barren and dry.

I.1. The image of fire

We know little of the characteristics of the human population of the post-glacial period. But, we can infer that human triumph over nature was due to the rapid adaptation to change without requiring physical mutations; the intelligence applied to social organization, the making of instruments, the use of traps, wrap with skins, and especially because they had control and mastering in the use of the fire.

In the northern hemisphere, the groups who were affected by the icing climate were intrinsically linked to the use of fire. The fire was the silent cry of triumph, the symbol of the determination to live and subdue a terrible nature. The dancing of the flames expresses joy, success, fortune. The fire is the tribal unity. When the blizzard, hail, or wild beasts could well end the fragile human existence, the fire was light and freedom. The fire was printed in the depths of the *psyche*; the fire covered the human soul as warm clothes, and protected the being as a shelter of Hope.

I.2. Map of decreases: swamps, marshes, mangroves

The end of the Glacial Period involved the opening of huge tracts of land, which were transformed into marshes and wetlands. In a geologically rapid process, the world changed. Huge and dark forests grew in Europe, large grasslands in Asia where herds of cattle and other herbivores were multiplied. The human groups also prospered. However, the “Great Caspian” basin was one of the favorite areas where the human groups

expanded. The broad edge and through the marshes roamed herds of animals, followed by hunters who in that area had abundant food. In those times the human diet was better. It included now fruits and eggs of birds of the mangroves; there were many materials to make baskets and utensils for the capture, and for the conservation of food.

Personally, I am convinced that between 15000 to 5000 B.C. is the time of consolidation of the primary level of the Indo-European languages. It is in this precise great zone where was developed the base of what Bopp called *Ur-Sprache*. Definitely, this is the scenario in which was born and develops the “language of the fire”.

The great flood did not affect significantly the Central Asian region. There is no memory of such event in any *indoaryan* tradition, as yes there is in the farmers of Middle-East southern regions. However, the beginning of the 5th millennium marks the reduction of the Great Caspian. The margins are smaller and the circle of hunter-gatherers is narrowed. Note that the tribes that frequented the banks were moving through a strip of not more than 100 Km around the *Great Caspian*. Without touching the ethnological problem, I dare to say that the area was already inhabited by a certain ethnic type with some similarity, which tends to be standardized because the increasing closeness and mixtures. Smaller was turning the Caspian Sea, narrower were the concentric areas of contact. The millennium between 3000 to 2000 B.C. was the time of greater coexistence; then, begins the dispersion of the Indo-European people.

What is decisive for the following developments, however, is to turn the contact of these nomadic societies with societies of sedentary farmers already existing in the Bactria.

I.3. The old Bactrian civilization of the Oxus

The findings of Viktor Sarianidi (1976) were known only into the interior of the Soviet Union (URSS). But, from the 90', Sarianidi's works were translated to western languages, and his discoveries have been truly appreciated. Sarianidi located accurately a culture in the Margiana region named *Oxus Old Civilization*, or *Bactrio Margian-Ancient Civilization*, or *BMAC*, and he set a timeline for its flourishing period, which is from 3.000 to 1.700 BC.

The *BMAC* would have been a sedentary culture with full use of bronze. The same area had been explored by Aurel Stein between 1940 and 1950. Stein suggested the existence of cities that had a fluent exchange with the Indo Valley civilization, and also with cities of Mesopotamia. Aurel Stein found sufficient evidence showing the existence of strong influence, to one side and the other.

However, Sarianidi's excavations revealed the existence of a degree of original development. The cities are of big size, with walls and fortifications which suggest a sense of defense and high organization in a dangerous zone; and on the other hand a great ability to develop indigenous technology. We argue that there is a parallel between the *BMAC* with both contemporaries: the civilization of Mesopotamia and the Indo, and these three generated a triangle of civilizations, where there was intense commercial exchange.

Without delving into the characteristics of the *BMAC*, we want to highlight the fact the dynamism and simultaneousness existing between nomads and sedentary societies that inhabited the ancient Great Caspian basin. To the extent that has been found old settlements, they show that there is not a logic of exchange East-West resembling something as "a silk route of the Neolithic" as was the proposition of Aurel Stein. We think that despite the trade with Mesopotamia or with the Indo Valley, the *BMAC* had a local intense life, with their own problem of interrelation with nomads of the Basin. With them, they exchanged all types of goods, or in other moments was a hostile

relation. The nomads of the Caspian sometimes were pacific, other times nomads were the worst enemies of the Oxus cities.

Therefore, we propose just as a working hypothesis suggesting the existence of many groups of Indo-Iranian stock opposite to the Oxus civilization established around or in some proximity. And therefore the cities mentioned in the *Avesta* or in the *Rig Veda*, are not those of the Indus Valley but those of Bactria. Therefore, the legend about the friction between *indoaryan* tribes and urban people could be very much before the arrival of these same *indoaryan* to India. Therefore, the story of Rudra and his Fire sacrifices are related to the years in the Caspian-Oxus world, between 2500 to 2000 B.C.

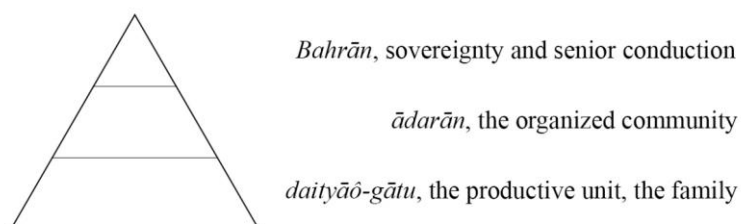
II. The triadic value of fire: wood, air and spark; a foundation for superior thought

Since the oldest times, when the knowledge about the fire was apprehended, it was understood that its magic operated braiding three elements: air, fuel, and initial spark. On a wet and cold media, with scarce dry wood, men learned to search the proper fuel, blowing out using their own warm breath, and doing sparks with stones. The miraculous fire was a heavenly possession. They used charcoal, and even oil in natural state which are in dirty pools in the Caspian Basis; this one material comes from the land. The breath was the human contribution. The spark was the inexplicable divine gift coming from the sky, as the lightning which sometimes is discharged from the heaven and burns the forest.

The sacred fire allows the life, it gives food; feeding with hot meals that are the best food. It lit the body, it gives heat. If the man is warm and healthy, the evilness does not affect (*Avesta*). The fire scares and makes run away to the demons (*spanjagrya*). The fire, is good, and exists in all parts; but the brilliant man (*aryan*) is who carries it doing light everywhere he goes. That is the fire *Âtar*, with the time called the son of Ahura Mazda (*Avesta, Yazna* 17). That is the portable fire; it's like lightning

falling from the sky burning trees in the middle of the rain. The fire which is like a sword is the characteristic of the warrior; in contrast to the inhabitant of the villages, who hides their fire for cooking.

He, the fire, was a fanal, a mark of pride, and of location (still are done in Iran). In a parallel process to the development of expansion of the *aryan* tribes in India, the Iranians in the Iranian plateau, they installed fires in each town that they inhabited. They called to such fires *Bahrān*; the fire that marks a place, and declares it real possession. In a process several centuries, was born an order, consisting of three areas or functions:



The three hierarchic fires have been studied by Wikander and George Dumezil. Dumezil, properly, with his well-known theory of the triple functions, which he saw in any association or institution of *indoeuropeans*. The fire, as a central and monolithic entity of course has a trivalent symbolism. The fire is the essence of the Iranian cosmos, and it was made a permanent part of any social structure. The sacred fire, is the essence of the Iranian theology, and is present in all the *Avesta*, and in all sacred literature,³ even in so tardy works as the *Shah Namah* of Firdousi⁴ (s. X).

³ Dhalla, M.N., *Zoroastrian Theology*, New York, 1914.

⁴ Carrasco-Alvarez, Sergio Melitón, *The Shah Namah of Firdousi*, UCV, Valparaíso, 1985.

III. The Agni immigration to India versus the fire as meal in the Indo valley community

In India, the value of the fire had two aspects: *aryan* and non-*aryan*. But, it should be noted, that the *aryan* contribution came already advanced in a mental structure which did contain the archaic experience “of the era of the *Great Caspian*” plus the early contact with the Oxus civilization.

The Indo Valley Civilization developed his own fire symbolism from also very old times. The fire was for them just a working tool; fire had no magical or sublime connotation, nor was a central deity. Their fires were completely assimilated in the domestic economy and tasks. The warm fire was a homely fire. Or, it was part of very specific works. The fire was associated to the cooking of food, preparing the daily meal; or for manufacturing ceramics, firing bricks; but, always it had no ritual or ceremonial value. In the bids ancestral, more than fire had importance the light (*dipā*), symbol of festivity and joy.

In any *pūjā*, or any hindu-dravidian sacrifice (in the understood of the studies from Robert Caldwell, and followings; or T. Burrow and M. B. Emeneau, *Dravidian etymological dictionary*) is offered water, light, fruits, particularly coconuts, leaves of betel, incense; however never are offered hot meals. All the gifts, presentation or donations, are part of an ancient and extremely complex symbolism of giving and receiving (*dāna*). This way of transaction was the millenary manner of building and managing the world; for humans and gods. And it is the basis of laws of cause and effect, and the Karma doctrine. In what moment it was produced the fusion of both concepts, the *indoaryan* type of sacrifice, and the ceremony of offerings fruits, the calling to deities and the forces of nature?

It was when the threefold *indoaryan* key was transformed into the fivefold key, and included the mathematical conception of the world already existing in the mind of the Indus. New key to open a new time! The process is reflected in the first stage of the development of the *Vedas*. We can see in the oldest sections that they are purely triadic, instead that the most recent are pentadic. Such development is chronologically datable between

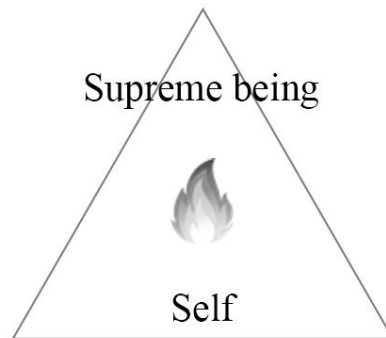
1500 to 1000 B.C. and was due to the need to organize the new Brahmanic cosmos and fully incorporate into it to the Dravidian society. Just as example, the sage Gautama (*Chandogya Up.*, “Doctrine of the five fires” or *pañcāgni vidyā*), explains the fivefold system, enumerating the five most important things:

- i. *Loka*
- ii. *Parjanya*
- iii. *Pṛthvī*
- iv. *Puruṣa*
- v. *Yoṣa*

Gautama says that the order of the cosmos is synchronized with the order of sacrifice; and that such a primary order was established by the gods with their own initial sacrifice. All the gods as the form of *Agni* offered faith and produce *Soma*; the *Soma* inseminates the sky and caused the rain. The rain spilled over the burning soil, and cause that sprout plants (*varṣa*). The men collected the food, feed and produce semen. Semen, in the heat of the womb of the woman generates the life of the embryo (*retas*) that develops and is born (*garbha*). Everyone repeats the cycle, doing any of the many type of five actions that are the *pāñcakarma*, until the man is consumed by the fire, in the funeral pyre.

III.1 The Vedic Fire (*Agnihotra*)

David Knipe (*In the Image of Fire*, 1975) asserts that all doctrine and original Vedic structure is triadic and only focused on the ceremonial fire: the *Śrauta* ritual.



Ch. Up. 6. 1-5 Threefold Agni rūpa (the three forms of Agni)

But, in the miscegenation Aryan + Dravidian = the tripartite fire, is transformed into the pentadic, to incorporate the fivefold new *Brahmanical* order.

- Five materials of the world: earth, air, water, light and *ākāśa*.
- Five winds.
- Five *lokas*.
- Five moons.
- Five peoples.

In the *Śatapatha Brahmana*, a significant proportion of the corpus is dedicated to the *agnicayana*, the procedure of construction and layout of the altar of five levels. In general, the *Samhitās*, have structure, nomenclature and symbolism for the pentadic *yajña* (fivefold sacrifice) and invocations (*Āhvāna nāmah*) or the calling to the deity by his/her name (*Agnihotra* invocation). In the process of development of the Vedic literature, in the same time that were incorporated more indigenous elements, was being reorganized the tri-cosmos into a new pentadic cosmos (as also did happen in Greece with the idea of the *diakósmesis*); while the ritual made increasingly more complex (*pañcāvarga*). With the passage of time, and the development of speculative thought, adopts the pentadic

doctrine as it is already enshrined in the *Upaniṣads*, that fire has been converted into the mystic sacrifice: *pāñcatapas*.

The Sanskrit literature of the centuries 8th to 3rd explores the doctrine of the five sacrifices; and is in many things that are arranged in five levels or *vyūha* doctrine. In the *Mahābhārata* and its miscellany presentation, there are a clear number declared with the five Pāṇdavas.

IV. Agni / Soma

The period of convergence of both forms of worship and pay tribute to the deities is during the first phase of consolidation of Brahmanism, and accumulation of the oldest *mandalas* of the *Veda*. By then, merge into gradual embrace, ideas of synchronicity and mutual relationship between the human nature (*Yoga*) with the *Aryan* sacrificial piety.

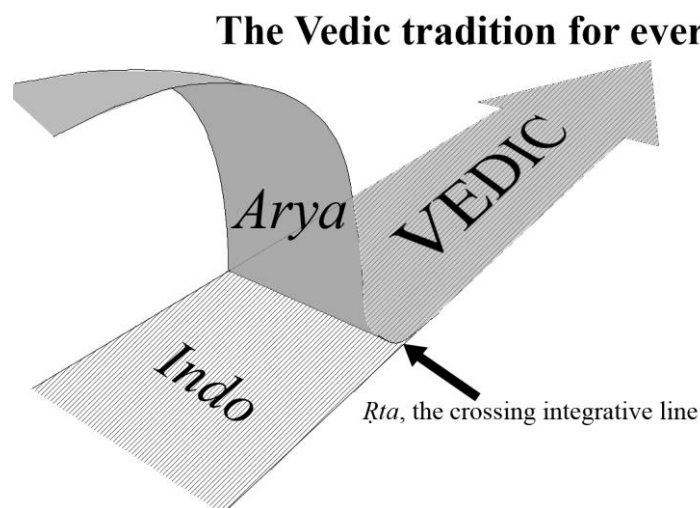
The crossing is manifested in the ritual fire (Agni) that produces the Soma (*Ṛta*). This unity, duality, and trivalent spirit resolves all aspects that worried and should be formulated every day, every morning, every evening by members of the new society in the process of mixture. Again, put this convergence of the two perceptions, the *Aryan* and the *Dravidian*, between 1500 to 1000 B.C. However, this process with its speculative explain was taken and ordered later, throughout the first Millennium B.C., in special manner in the *Upaniṣads*. Agni, the archaic fire, with its load of millennia; symbol of social life, and freedom of the man over the terrible nature, transmuted in the vertical and hierarchical symbol of the new Brahmanic society.

The Soma, the divine elixir that is poured out upon the human or physical (*prakṛti-bhumi*), is the horizontal flow; is a river that flows slow but deep. Agni and Soma, were the two aspects of the harmony, through the shaft of the ritual. Was in that way organized a new triangulation, absolutely own of the Brahmanic India, then mixed and turned into the original power of creation in the triad Agni-Ṛta-Soma; the new doctrine of Brahmanic sacrifice that absorbed and reissued the history of *Aryans* and non-*Aryans*. Said the relationship between the world

and sphere of the gods (*Para-prākṛti*), and the human; then, is the key to apply and realize the obvious structures, such as the order of the society. This triad derivate into five forms, five fires, the five steps (*pāñcapādāni*).

In the initial Vedic phase, the mayor *śrauta* rituals maintain strictly the essential triadic structure. Agni is threefold (R.V., 3.20.2; 2.36.4; 4.1.9). Agni is always present in three locations; in the Heaven, in the Sacrifice, and in the Man.

This creation is what has amazed to researchers, that have seen in the fineness and complexity of the Veda a perfect expression, physical and mathematical.



Tad ekam = the one who is two, and three, and the four critical element, to be finally the five, the perfect equilibrium.

Brahmanic society, his account of the world and its three *vārnas*, is enriched (Knipe says that it is “disturbed”) by the *sudra vārna*; with that completed and closed society, being whole, five-this process, since the Vedic times is the development of tripartite ritual (*trīṇi padāni*) and the fire in the penta-ritual and its fire with five parts (*pāñca padāni*). This is the *Agnicayana*; the reconstruction of the Universe, which is

One and also is Three, it is destabilized and finally is Five. *Sattapatha Brahmana*, 3.1.25, refers to the *Agnicayana* as “The three parts of Agni that overcome five through the correspondences (*te pāñcasampadā bhavanti*)”.

Agni, the fire that manifests the vibrant life (make real the unmanifest Being), that sacrifice is transformed into zeal for the correct duty, the energy that moves the wheel of Destiny and makes the Dharma, is present in all:

- Five times
- Five places (*lokas*)
- Five steps of the sacrifice (*pāñcapāda*)
- Five original tribes
- Five elements
- Five parts of the body, five colours, flavours, smelts,
- Five *kendriyas*, etc.

And the returning path is the one as it is explained in the *Svestasvatara Up.* 2.12: “When it has been transcended all five types of things, the Fire is the Union (Yoga) and everything returns to its origin”.

V. The ritual reassembly of Agni Prajāpati

Unlike of the Iranian cosmos where the fire kept its primordial image intact, in India the whole image and the deep symbolism was affected by a series of modifications and evolved from a formal ceremonialism (with much social significance), to a progressive personal and ecstatic sense. Curiously, the strong communitarian sense of the millenarian tradition of the Indus created the new condition for the process of individualization of the “fire experience”. The *Agni Path* reflected perfectly the incorporation of many indigenous traditions and is the reflection of the new Hindu order. The “ceremonial fire” is the image of a burning *cāturvarṇya* system, dynamic and powerful as a pregnant being capable to create new situations and moving forward in the middle of the historical

changes. The “ceremonial fire” is the power of the changing world.

On the other hand, the personal “ceremonial fire” is the mystical path, the yogic way, Agni in the road to be also the burning hearth of Śiva, or Viṣṇu, or Brahma. Under that fine shape is present in all the literature classic; from the *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, *Upaniṣads* and subsequent Sūtra literature.

However, the essence of the Fire concept was never altered because the Great Agni always has been the axis, reason and purpose of the sacrifice (Sylvain Levy, *The Doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brahmanas*, 1898). The religious History of India, is the sequence and process of the sacrifice of the humankind, from the oldest times to the political concepts of freedom and fighting as it was used by the founders of the modern India. As Bergaigne has said, from the oldest times, since the pre-Vedic doctrine of sacrifice, India has searched for the path of the Supreme organization. Achieves it correspondence between the sacrificial and its object, through its transformation of the self in the victim, and the sublimation of his/her own soul when is consumed by its own internal fire (*tapas*). Thereby causes the complete communication with the Supreme Being, the *Atman*, achieving the perfect *Yoga*.

For other scholars of Vedic literature, that same Vedic doctrine of the correspondence reaches its zenith in the *Upaniṣads* and following philosophical literature. The realization of correspondences, the synchronicities, and the equivalences is the subject of the high Indian philosophy of early medieval period, as Madhva, Ramanuja or Śankara.

Tapas, the renunciation, have two aspects: the “energy saving” of indigenous origin, and the generous donation of Aryan precedence; donation and delivery to the cause. On the long experience of the Indus civilization, the varied expressions of the restriction and reduction of consumption to save and provide food, was the basis for the development of the resignation as individual process of mortification for the control of the personal life, the social, and universal life.

But, India was the divine abode for the process we are trying to explain. The *Aryan* experience of Fire, also is the expression of building equality among the tribal members to achieve the tribal unit, also meant a road of perfection (in contrast with the strong individualism manifest in other indoeuropean people, as the *hybris* in the Greeks).

Tapas, as personal sacrifice, evolved from Vedic times as total control of the life, for living the life as continuous sacrifice. Agni, the mystic fire, was from the beginning the inner sacrifice of the human being, in active correspondence and super synchronicity with the universal Cosmos. *Anorāṇiyan-Mahātomāniyan* The macrosmos and the microcosm, in harmony and concordance. In the early Vedic times, the *asvāmedha*, had that value of recomposing the cosmic order from a huge sacrifice. With the passage of time, the possibility of influencing the immediate cosmos, was through the exercise of the mystical action (*karmakānda*) daily that the sacrificer achieved through his/her small immediate universe. The *Aitatreya Brāhmaṇa*, says that success in the action is when the action is carried out precisely in the right place. And the best place, is the inner own silence, where it consumes the ego in the inside fire of the *samādhi*. This is the perfect Brahmanical concordance.

VI. Agni, in the Bhagavad-gītā⁵

In the Chapter V of the *Gītā* “The Path of Renunciation”, Śrī Kṛiṣṇa answered to the question of Arjuna, making the difference between Sāṅkhyayoga and Karmayoga. Śrī Kṛiṣṇa describes the glory of the Sāṅkhyayogī and Karmayogī, and says that *Dhyānayoga* (meditation) permits to attain the supreme peace through the realization of the Being and that is the goal of all sacrifices.

⁵ *Srimad Bhagavadgita*, by Jayadayal Goyandka, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, India, 1993 (1969).

In the **V Chapter**, Śrī Kṛiṣṇa says:

*..bhoktāram yajñatapasām sarva-loka-maheśvaram
Suhṛdam sarva –bhūtānām jñātva mām śāntim ṛcchati*
[5.29]

Me (the Lord) I am the celebrant priest of the sacrifice, I am the sacrificial fire and I am also the victim. Me (the Lord) I am the purpose of any and all waiver and the object same of all hardship and penances and of the disinterested actions. I am the fire of the beginning and the fire of the end.

In the **VII Chapter**, Śrī Kṛiṣṇa says:

*Puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyām ca, tejaś cāsmi vibhāvasau
jīvanam sarva bhūteṣu tapaś cāsmi tapasviṣu* [7.9]

I am the original fragrance of the Earth; I am the heat in Fire. I am the life of all the Lives, and I am the penances of all the ascetics.

In the **IX Chapter**, Śrī Kṛiṣṇa says:

*Ahaṁ kratur ahaṁ yajñah; svadhāham aham auśadham
mantra 'ham aham evājyam aham agnir aham hutam*
[9.16]

I am the ritual, I am the sacrifice. And I am also the oblation, I am the offering sacred and the recitation of the mantras, I am the (ghee) butter melted, I am Agni, the fire sacrificial. I am the Being and I am Agni.

*Agnim īle puróhitam yajñasya devam ṛtvijam hotāram
ratnadhā tamam. R.V. [I,1]*⁶

⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Published by Sri Aurobindo Memorial Fund Society, Pondicherry, India, 1972. Available on line:

http://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/11/hymns_to_the_mystic_fire_eng.pdf

Cfr. *The Rig Veda Samhita*, by Dayananda Saraswati (ed), Paropakarini Sabha, Ajmer, 1984 (2041 Vikrami).

