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Introduction

1. The aim of the book

This book is an attempt to reconstruct the foundations of Indian philosophy which are reflected in early Indian texts dated between 13th and 6th B.C.E. They are religious texts composed in Sanskrit which were transmitted orally in the families of priests called Brahmins[1]. They constitute the intellectual foundation of Indian culture called Śruti (*śruti*), literally, ‘what has been heard’. They are generally called Veda (*veda*) which means ‘knowledge’. These two names reveal a specific feature of early Indian culture that it is founded on knowledge preserved in texts remembered by priests who heard them from their teachers. For this period, we do not have other archaeological evidence of religious cults such as temples or images of gods[2]. Even if they were created, the fact that they disappeared shows that they were less important for the culture and its survival than the corpus of the Veda which has come down to us in a magnificent and well maintained condition as a literary text.

The sources forming the basis for the analysis presented in this book come from three layers of the Vedic tradition. The earliest layer is the four Vedas: the Veda of Ṛk-stanzas (*Ṛgveda*, ṚV), the Veda of Sāman-chants (*Sāmaveda*, SV), the Veda of Yajus-formulas (*Yajurveda*, YV) and the Veda of Atharvans (*Atharvaveda*, AV). The ṚV is the oldest from around 15th–13th B.C.E. It preserves many traces of the earlier Indo-European tradition and defines the conceptual frames for later Indian thinking and practice. Its role can be compared to the role of Presocratics in ancient Greece in that we witness here the beginnings of philosophical investigation which chart the pathway, both conceptually and linguistically, for the later tradition. Due to the power of human memory, we are fortunate to have 1028 hymns, composed in a highly sophisticated way, which give us an insight into these beginnings.

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[1] For education in ancient India, see Scharfe (2002).

[2] Staal (1983, I: 94). As Kulke, Rothermund (2008[1986]: 35) write: ‘The Vedic texts, and in particular, the Rigveda, still remain our major source concerning the early phases of Vedic culture in northwest India. But we always have to keep in mind that these texts express the priestly world-view of the Brahmins.’

While most of the Ṛgvedic hymns or stanzas were recited, some of the stanzas were intended for singing. They are gathered in the SV which comprises 1549 stanzas (Michaels 2004), primarily from the ṚV, some of which are changed due to the specific way in which they were to be sung. It also contains manuals for the correct singing of the stanzas. Composition of the SV was a consequence of the growing role of priests and ritual in Vedic ritual. It is also reflected in the YV which is divided into two schools called the White YV (*śuklayajurveda*) and the Black YV (*kṛṣṇayajurveda*). The former contains stanzas, partly from the ṚV, used in sacrifices, while the latter also explains their meaning, the meaning of the ritual implements and the actions to be taken. As they are composed, ritual becomes as important as sacred texts. Similarly to memorisation and recitation, ritual is an activity which does not leave archaeological evidence. So again we owe our knowledge of this further cultural treasure of ancient India to the power of human memory.

The AV was not included among the sacred Vedas from the beginnings of Indian tradition[3]. It is commonly known as the 'Veda of charms', though, as Brockington comments, there is not much difference between charm and sacrifice because their aims are similar (1990: 29). Moreover, the Sanskrit term, which is usually translated as 'charm', in the context of the AV is *bráhman*. The same term is used in the early Vedic text to denote the sacred word and its power. The difference lies in their use: while the Ṛgvedic hymns and stanzas were mostly used in solemn rituals destined for establishing and maintaining the social order, those in the Atharvavedic were more connected with the everyday needs of people[4].

Four Vedas, called *saṃhitā* ('what is put together'), constitute the first layer of the early Indian tradition. The next layer is constituted by the Brāhmaṇas the name of which is derived from the word *bráhman*. They are an exegesis of the sacred word and its power and, since in the Brāhmaṇas the word *bráhman* also includes three Vedas (ṚV, YV, SV), they are their exegesis as well. Thus the Brāhmaṇas continue the exegetical tradition of the YV with each Saṃhitā commented on by at least two Brāhmaṇas[5].

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[3] Witzel (1987a, 1997).

[4] But there are parts of the AV which are also connected with solemn ritual (Rājasūya), Lelli (2015). Indian tradition discerns one more layer of the Śruti which are the Āryaṇyakas, composed between the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads. The distinction between the Āryaṇyakas on the one hand, and the Brāhmaṇas, on the other, is not very distinct, sometimes the Āryaṇyakas form the last part of the Brāhmaṇas, e.g. *Bṛhadāryaṇyaka Upaniṣad* is included into Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in its Mādhyandina recension (see Keith 1989 [1925], Keith 1969, Gonda 1975c, Malamoud 1997, Houben 1991, Pataskar 2009).

The life of Indian priests focused on ritual and, therefore, an explanation of ritual is an explanation of their life. Thus seen, the Brāhmaṇas are proof of the basic human need to make life meaningful[6]. The composers of the Vedas were looking for the meaning of reality and that meaning is then realised in ritual. Ritual is therefore a meticulous and perceptible manifestation of the thought and speech of ancient Indians constructed in the sacred sphere.

The third and final layer of early Indian tradition that is examined in this study is the Upaniṣads which were composed before the Buddha, i.e. before the 5th century BC (Gombrich 1992)[7]. These texts can also be seen as resulting from the exegesis on the concept of *bráhman*. Now the concept becomes ontological and refers to absolute reality which transforms its aspect in cosmos and man. Reality also manifests itself as their innermost essence. Ritual activity becomes internalised as a pattern of human activity which leads towards the cognition of reality.

The first part of this book's title refers to these three layers of ancient Indian tradition. The concept of fire is the central metaphysical concept of Ṛgvedic thought (Jurewicz 2010a) and remains such until the Brāhmaṇas. However, the primary focus of the composers of the Brāhmaṇas was on the concept of death seen as a manifestation of fiery reality. It will be argued that Upaniṣadic thought could not develop without this rich earlier background, therefore the word 'philosophy' refers not only to Upaniṣads, but also covers the whole of early Indian tradition. I come back to this problem later.

The second part of the title refers to a further aim of the book, which is to present a history of ancient Indian thought. I will focus on its development and show how tradition is transformed and redefined. This approach is in line with the attitude of the Vedic priests towards their own tradition, who saw each layer as a commentary on that which came earlier[8]. We could say that they realised in practice Gadamer's concept of the fusing of horizons within the frame of which man can then meet his tradition and enter into dialogue with it (1993 [1975]). This dialogue allows man to understand himself and the world in which he lives. The Indian priests were fully immersed in their cultural heritage which, during everyday loud recitation, would have been experienced more vividly and intensely than *via* other means of transmission. I will try to reconstruct the main lines of this dialogue.

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[5] The Brāhmaṇas of the RV: *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*. The main Brāhmaṇas of the SV: *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa* or *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*, *Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (Kauthuma and Rānāyanīya schools), *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* (Jaimīniya school). In the Black YV, exegetical texts are already included in the Saṃhitās (*Maitrāyaṇī*, *Kaṭha*, *Kapiṣṭhalakaṭha*, *Taittirīya*), the separate Brāhmaṇas are *Kaṭha Brāhmaṇa*, *Kapiṣṭhala Brāhmaṇa* (both in fragments), *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*. White YV: *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in two recensions (*Mādhyandina*, *Kāṇva*). The Brāhmaṇa of the AV: *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*. For details, see Jamison, Witzel (2003). For the commentarial character of Brāhmaṇas, see Lubin (20100).

[6] For the role of religion in making human life meaningful, see Geertz (1973b).

[7] The Upaniṣads of the RV: *Aitareya Upaniṣad* and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*. The Upaniṣad of the SV: *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (Kauthuma school), *Kena Upaniṣad* (Jaiminīya school). The Upaniṣads of the Black YV: *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, *Katha Upaniṣad*, *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. The Upaniṣads of the White YV: *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *Īśā Upaniṣad*. The Upaniṣads of the AV: *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* (Śaunakīya school), *Praśna Upaniṣad* (Paippalāda school).

Most histories of Indian philosophy begin with the Upaniṣads and the earlier texts are only briefly mentioned[9]. The reference to the earlier tradition is limited to most explicit and late hymns of the ṚV (mainly the *Nāsadīyasūkta*, 10.129) and the *Puruṣasūkta* (10.90). The philosophical hymns of the AV are mentioned more rarely while the Brāhmaṇas are either mentioned generally or not mentioned at all. Moreover, early Vedic thought, even if it is mentioned, is treated as an example of mythological thinking and ritualistic speculations with the implication that it cannot be treated as a subject for serious philosophical investigation. In my view, this is the result of the specific bias in Western thinking which narrows the meaning of philosophy to one kind of mental activity.

True, if we define philosophy as a discipline performed with aid of reason and logic, there is no philosophy in ancient Indian thought even in the Upaniṣads. Such kind of investigation appears only with the beginning of the six classical philosophical schools called Darśanas in the first half of the first millennium B.C.E (Potter et al. 1981–2015). However, the problem in which I am interested is how philosophy began. As mentioned above, Indian tradition preserves multiple texts which provide us with the possibility of tracing back through time human endeavours for understanding the world and themselves. They are therefore of great value not only for Indological studies but also for general studies on the human mind and its ability to create philosophy. Within the scope of Indology, which is the main field of research here, my argument is that Upaniṣadic philosophy could not evolve without the efforts of earlier philosophers and that it is deeply grounded in a tradition which begins already in the ṚV.

Ancient Indian texts attest mental activity which can be called philosophical if we enlarge the definition of philosophy and understand that it is a mental activity the aim of which is to answer some of the most basic questions of thinking man. These include the beginnings of the world and its functioning, the role of man, the problem of evil and the problem of death. Philosophy in these terms is a conscious activity by which people try to construe a coherent conceptual structure whose elements explain other elements and which can be treated as an overall explanation of such basic questions.

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[8] See the study of exegetical strategies attested in the *Bṛhaddevatā* and its role for the later Indian canonical texts by Patton (1996).

[9] Just to mention Dasgupta (1951–1955), Frauwallner (1990[1953]), Kumar (1991), Gupta (2012).

It is generally agreed that abstract terms are necessary for philosophical investigation. Abstract terms refer to abstract concepts which at their broadest do not refer to immediate experience. So it could be argued that if there are no abstract terms, then thinking is not abstract. In his study of Presocratic thought, Havelock (1983) mentions such terms as being, change, time, dimension and space, body and matter and so on, which were coined by the early Greek philosophers. And it is true that early Indian texts, especially those composed before the Upaniṣads, do not contain many such terms. The question is if this means that their composers were not thinking in an abstract way that could be considered philosophical.

The problem of the relationship between concepts and language is very much discussed in the philosophy of mind and in cognitive science[10]. Experiments done by Mandler and others on infants younger than one year show that it is possible to have simple concepts without an accompanying language[11]. Moreover, the concepts created by infants are abstract and general, though, of course, more detailed conceptualisation comes with acquisition of language. As far as adult human who have language are concerned, it seems that there is a group of abstract concept which may exist without linguistical expression. Such mental abstract concepts are unconsciously used in a coherent way and motivates linguistic and the bodily behaviour.

For example, the concept of category is such a concept. We can infer its existence on the basis of the fact that people are able to organise their knowledge and experience in conceptual wholes and include various elements within specific slots and create new ones. Even if a culture does not have a word for category, and many cultures do not, its participants do categorise[12]. Another example is number. Again, even if a given culture does not have the word for this concept, its participants calculate objects and they treat some objects as being impossible to count. The image schemas (VERTICALITY, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, CENTRE-PERIPHERY etc., see below) which are developed in early childhood are further examples of abstract concepts which do not have verbal expression[13]. The existence of image schemas can be inferred on basis of the way people conceive and evaluate various aspects of their experience (Johnson 1987). Yet another example is the syntax of a given language. It is a whole conceptual system of rules that govern the structure of sentences which the speakers of a given language use often without being aware of it.

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[10] See e.g.: Givón (1988), Paivio (2007), Logan (2008).

[11] Mandler (1992, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012b, b, 2014), Mandler, McDonough (1996).

[12] See categorisation in Dyirbal language in Lakoff (1987).

In Jurewicz (2010a), I have argued that the Ṛgvedic poets had general concepts which I called general domains and this allowed them to gather various kinds of experiences into conceptual units (see also below, section 7). I have also argued for the existence of an overall metaphysical system the core of which is the concept of an internally contradictory reality called Agni the existence of which can be inferred from textual evidence[14]. The main difference between the examples given above and the abstract concepts in the ṚV is that the analysis of the latter allows me to postulate that their composers consciously created and transformed them in order to create a coherent system of thought[15].

In case of ancient Vedic texts, at least in the ṚV, AV and in the Brāhmaṇas, the situation looks as follows. At the level of linguistic exposition, these texts evoke many concrete situations which refer to abstract cosmogonical and cosmological systems. There is no doubt that the composers of the ṚV did not want to describe what happened to them in everyday life. Although they mention its elements (elements of social life and individual experience), reconstruction of what really happened to them is very difficult, if not impossible, as the ṚV is not an historical text. The composers of the AV present mantras which refer everyday life situations, but again, these situations are difficult to reconstruct. And the so called philosophical hymns of the AV are clearly far from everyday life experience, although they abound in everyday life terms. Finally, the ŚB allows us to reconstruct ritual whose exegesis was one of the reasons for its composition. However, a further reason is to explain the metaphysical rationale which makes the ritual meaningful and this explanation is based on earlier metaphysical thought. Yet, the composers of the ŚB present reality in very concrete terms. Although one can see on the level of words some mutual dependence between elements of ritual and the elements of a cosmogony the ritual is supposed to explain, it is usually difficult at first glance to see such dependence on the level of concepts. It is only in the Upaniṣads that concrete descriptions appear in contexts which leave no doubts that they are being used by the composers to illustrate abstract concepts.

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[13] Image schemas were described only in second half of the previous century (Johnson 1987). As far as I know, they only have technical terms created by scholars.

[14] In her monumental study about multiplicity in Indian art, Srinivasan (1997) also looks for the abstract concepts which are not expressed in language. She discerns three definitions of the multiplicity convention in the RV. They can be reconstructed because they are applied remarkably consistently throughout the whole text and are ‘unexpectedly stable’ (1997: 24). The basic symbolism of the convention is preserved, notwithstanding the type of deity to which it applies. Moreover, she shows that the multiplicity convention expressed by these definitions motivates in a significant way later Vedic and Hindu thought as its conceptual basis. Her study is the proof that general and abstract concepts are possible to be created and understood even if they are not expressed in language.

[15] In her research on the Ṛgvedic mantra, Findly (1989) argues that although the term *mantra* is a late Ṛgvedic concept it is possible to look for its concept in the earlier strands of the RV. As she writes: ‘inattention to a term in the ṚV does not always mean inattention to the corresponding concept’ (Findly 1989: 15).

This peculiar feature of Vedic thinking is closely connected with the fact that the texts in which it is expressed were created and transmitted orally. One of the peculiarities of oral transmission is wording which is relatively concise by comparison with the thought expressed by it[16]. The composer of an oral text must know the ways how, using such concise wording, to make his recipient understand its richer content. The concept of script used in the investigation of oral poetry[17] is a further example of an abstract concept which is not expressed verbally but governs its creation in a structured way.

The dual-coding theory (DTC) proposed by Paivio (2007) can be useful to explain the relationship between the level of words and of thoughts in oral poetry. According to this theory, knowledge is coded in verbal and nonverbal subsystems. They are composed of representational units called logogens and imagens. These units 'are activated when one recognises, manipulates or just thinks about words or things' (Paivio 2006). The relationship between them in this respect is seen by Paivio as follows:

> The verbal system is a necessary player in all 'language games' but it is sufficient in only a few. In the most interesting and meaningful ones, the verbal system draws on the rich knowledge base and gamesmanship of the nonverbal system. Conversely, the nonverbal system cannot play language games on its own, but it can play complex nonverbal 'solitaire'. (2006: 3)

Pavio and his collaborators have been doing research on memorisation by application of the DTC. Inter alia, this has resulted in the formulation of the conceptual peg hypothesis. This has been supported by experiments that demonstrate that a logogen creates imagen which further activates other logogens and imagens which thereby facilitates memorisation (2007: 23, 60 ff.)[18]. Experiments have shown that concrete words and images are more effective in activating abstract content in memory than an abstract phrase. To quote one simple example (Begg 1972, quoted in Paivio 2007: 74):

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[16] See Jamison (2002, 2007, and 2015). For peculiarities of Indian oral tradition, see Staal (1986), Scharfe (2002).

[17] Schank, Abelson (1977, 1995), Minchin (2001, 2008, 2011).

> [A] concrete phrase such a *white horse* can be remembered as a single integrated image (a white horse), whereas an abstract phrases such as *basic truth* does not activate an image and therefore must be remembered as two words.

A further example of the conceptual peg is the famous madeleine sponge dipped in tea which activated Proust's memory of times past which he then proceeded to set out in his *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (2007: 60). Oral texts usually preserve such conceptual pegs which are meant to do the same. Proust could compose his book only because he could write those memories down. If, on the other hand, he were an oral composer, he would probably describe the madeleine sponge in more detail and only briefly mention some important moments of his life. But Proust would have to have profile the description in such a way that he could be sure that the recipient would think about 'home, garden, street, village, the pleasures experienced' and feel the feelings expected of him (Paivio 2007: 60). In other words, he would have to be a specialist in the relationship between words and thoughts as are oral composers.

Taking this into account, it is not surprising that early Indian texts are much more concrete in their verbal exposition even when their intention is to convey abstract content. This content is reintegrated and understood on the unconscious level. As Paivio argues:

> It has become increasingly clear over more than a century that much cognitive work goes on at an unconscious level, psychologically inaccessible to introspection and verbal description. (2007: 55)

Oral composition and transmission of texts would not be possible if their composers were unable to reach this unconscious level and manipulate words that make their art meaningful to recipients. As I have argued in Jurewicz (2010a), the Ṛgvedic composers went a step further as they elaborated material stored in the collective memory to build a coherent system which made life meaningful.

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[18] See also Paivio, Walsh (1993[1979]).