

IV Vedic perspectives

The Vedic texts on giving and taking concentrate on sacrifices and on the *dakṣiṇā* (fee?) obtained by officiating priests.¹³² We will also mention teaching and rituals, both Vedic and post-Vedic.¹³³

A Reciprocity in Vedic sacrifices

The Vedic sacrifice was grounded on reciprocity—as the locus classicus, found in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, shows:

⟨34⟩ *pūrṇā darvi pārāpata*
sūpūrṇā pūnar āpata |
vasnéva víkrīṇāvahā
īṣam ūrjaṃ śatakratu |
dehī me dādāmi te
nī me dhehi nī te dadhe |
nihāram in nī me harā
nihāraṃ niharāmi te ||¹³⁴

O ladle, fly away filled,
And well filled do thou fly back;
Like wares, O Śatakratu,
Let us barter food and strength.
Give thou to me; I shall give to thee;
Bestow upon me; I shall bestow upon thee;

132 Candotti et al. (2021) present a very nuanced and complex analysis of this term from early Vedic to Pali sources. From the perspective of their work, the conception of *dakṣiṇā* in this book is only the late Vedic one. A subset of these authors (Candotti & Pontillo 2019) analyses the dangerous action of *pratigraha* (accepting) in Vedic sources.

133 A careful study on “ ‘Gifts’ and ‘Giving’ in the Ṛgveda” is presented by Gonda (1975).

134 TS 1.8.4.1–2 where I have placed *niharāmi te* before the *daṇḍa*.

Accept my offering;
I shall accept thy offering.¹³⁵

The relationship between sacrifice-performing humans and the gods was perceived as durable:

⟨35⟩ *asmāñ avantu te śatām asmānt sahasram ūtāyaḥ |asmāñ víśvā abhīṣṭayaḥ ||
asmāñ ihā vṛñīṣva sakhyāya svastāye |mahó rāyē divítmate ||*¹³⁶

Let your hundred means of help help us, us your thousand, us all your superior powers. Choose us here for comradeship, for well-being, for great, heavenly wealth.¹³⁷

Humans hoped for diverse gifts from the gods: women wanted a husband (*pati*)¹³⁸, men sought good cows (*sugavaḥ*) or a long life (*dīrgham āyuh*)¹³⁹, among other things. One might think that the humans depend on gods, but do not have much to offer themselves. However, this is not quite true. The dependence goes both ways, as is seen from the following hymn to Indra:

⟨36⟩ *nā sóma imdram ásuto mamāda nābrahmāṇo maghāvānaṃ sutásah |
tāsmā ukthāṃ janaye yáj jújoṣan nṛvān nāvīyaḥ śṛṇávad yáthā nah ||*¹⁴⁰

Soma, unpressed, does not exhilarate Indra, nor do pressings unaccompanied by sacred formulations (exhilarate) the bounteous one. For him I beget a hymn that he will enjoy, a newer manly one, so that he will listen to us.¹⁴¹

Oberlies (1998, p. 273) argues that the necessary pressing alleviates the asymmetric relationship between Indra and the humans.

The natural cycle of water going up from the earth and coming down upon the earth is a metaphor for how humans and gods give to one another in turn. Thus, one expression of Vedic reciprocity is the water cycle analysed by Wilden (2000) and hinted at in the Ṛgveda:

⟨37⟩ *samānām etád udakām úc caíty áva cāhabhiḥ |
bhúmiṃ parjányā jínvanti dívaṃ jinvanty agnáyaḥ ||*¹⁴²

This water remains the same: it goes up and down throughout the days. Thunderstorms vivify the earth, and fires vivify heaven.¹⁴³

135 Keith (1967)

136 RgV 4.31.10–11

137 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

138 RgV 1.117.7

139 RgV 1.116.25

140 RgV 7.26.1

141 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

142 RgV 1.164.51

143 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

A somewhat different twist on the water cycle is seen in the middle Vedic Kāthaka Saṃhitā. The sacrifice (presumably the smoke from the sacrificial fire) goes up and rain pours down as a consequence:

⟨38⟩ *yā vā ita āhutih udayate sāmuto vṛṣṭim cyāvayati svayaivāhutyā divo vṛṣṭim ninayati*¹⁴⁴

The libation that goes up from here makes the rain move from there. With his own libation, he leads rain down from heaven.¹⁴⁵

In the classical period, Kṛṣṇa clearly expresses the concept of such sacrificial reciprocity in the Bhagavad Gītā (⟨120⟩).

B Singing and sacrificing for a fee

The Vedic hymns were addressed to gods such as *Agni*:

⟨39⟩ *evā no agne amṛteṣu pūrvya dhīṣ pīpāya brhāddiveṣu mānuṣā |
dūhānā dhenūr vṛjāneṣu kārāve tmānā śatīnaṃ pururūpam iśāṇi ||*¹⁴⁶

In this way, o foremost Agni, (*hymnic*) vision swells for us among the immortals dwelling in lofty heaven through the human (lifespans)—(a vision like) a cow giving milk to the bard in the (ritual) enclosures, (bringing) by herself multiform (prizes) in hundreds at her impulsion.¹⁴⁷

Patel (1929, pp. 3–4) offers this interpretation: Family clans earned their living with hymns. This transpires from the “cow giving milk to the bard”. If the lord commissioning the sacrifices was satisfied with the bards’ performance, the latter could expect a *dakṣiṇā*. This hybrid form of payment is the subject-matter of section XVII.D. See also Jamison and Brereton (2014, p. 1571) on a hymn praising the *dakṣiṇā*: “[A] *dakṣiṇā*, once given, brings untold benefits to the giver, both material and spiritual, far exceeding the value of the original gift.”

Importantly, *dakṣiṇā* had a close cousin in Vedic sacrifice, *vāja*. The latter may mean “reward” or “contest”. The contest in question is one between poets or priests, vying to be commissioned with composing praise or conducting ritual, respectively. Having stressed the role of Indra as the warrior god,¹⁴⁸ Oguibénine (1998, pp. 105–119) points out that *vāja*, more so than *dakṣiṇā*, has war-like undertones:

⟨40⟩ [W]on by the officiant poets and coming from and through the patrons of the sacrifice, the *dakṣiṇā* and the *vāja* are given to the officiants as a reward which crowns their para-warrior efforts and ensures the solidarity of the two groups

¹⁴⁴ KS 25.5

¹⁴⁵ After Wilden (2000, p. 132).

¹⁴⁶ RgV 2.2.9

¹⁴⁷ Jamison & Brereton (2014)

¹⁴⁸ Oguibénine (1998, pp. 59–70)

involved in the sacrificial ritual. [...] [*vája*] tends to be associated with the outside rich in war references, whereas [*dakṣiṇā*] does not step out of its zone of origin and is associated with war only in a relative way by virtue of the competition between the officiant poets.¹⁴⁹

Thus, a *dakṣiṇā* is something like a fee for priests who perform sacrifices. Consider a few verses from the following *dakṣiṇā* hymn. The first one (compare <32>) hints at an identification of the sacrifice (to gods) with the *dakṣiṇā* (to priests):

- <41> *daivī pūrtír dākṣiṇā devayajyā ná kavāribhyo nahí té prṇāmti |*
 [...] || (3)
dākṣiṇāśvaṃ dākṣiṇā gāṃ dadāti dākṣiṇā candrām utá yád dhiraṇyaṃ |
dākṣiṇānnaṃ vanute yó na ātmā dākṣiṇāṃ vārma kṛṇute vijānān || (7)
ná bhojā mamrur ná nyarthām īyur ná riṣyaṃti ná vyathaṃte ha bhojāḥ |
idāṃ yád víśvaṃ bhúvanaṃ svás caitát sārvaṃ dākṣiṇaibhyo dadāti || (8)¹⁵⁰

The priestly gift (*dakṣiṇā*) is the divine bestowal, a sacrificial offering to the gods (*devayajyā*); it is not for the stingy, for they do not bestow.[...] (3) The priestly gift gives the horse; the priestly gift the cow; the priestly gift the lustrous and what is golden. The priestly gift wins the food that is our very lifebreath. He who understands makes the priestly gift his armor. (7) The benefactors (*bhoja*) have not died, nor have they gone to a failed end; the benefactors are not harmed, nor do they falter. What is this whole world and the sun, all this does the priestly gift give to them. (8)¹⁵¹

Turning to etymology, the Sanskrit *dakṣa* means “suitable, fit”, etc., from which *dakṣiṇā* may carry the meaning “able to calve and give milk, a good dairy cow”. And then, since a cow seems to have been the primary fee or present given to the officiating priest in Vedic times, *dakṣiṇā* came to carry the meaning of fee or present. A second meaning transpires from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa:

- <42> *ghnānti vā etādyajñam | yādenaṃ tanvāte yānnv eva rājānam abhiṣuṇvānti*
tattāṃ ghnanti yāt paśūṃ sañjñapáyanti vviśāsati tattāṃ ghnanty ulūkhalamu-
salābhyāṃ dṛṣadupalābhyāṃ haviryajñāṃ ghnanti ||
sá eśā yajñó hato ná dadakṣe | tāṃ devā dākṣiṇābhir adakṣayaṃs tadyādenaṃ
dākṣiṇābhir ádakṣayaṃs tasmād dākṣiṇā náma tadyád evātra yājñasya hatásya
vyáthate tád évāsyaitad dākṣiṇābhir dakṣayatya átha sámṛddha evá yajñó bhavati
tasmād dākṣiṇā dadāti ||¹⁵²

Now, in performing that sacrifice, they slay it; and in pressing out the king (Soma), they slay him; and in quieting and immolating the victim, they slay it. The haviryajña they slay with the mortar and pestle, and with the two

149 Oguibénine (1998, pp. 111–112, 118)

150 RgV 10.107.3ab, 7–8

151 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

152 ŚB 2.2.2.1–2 and, identically, ŚB 4.3.4.1–2

mill-stones. When slain, that sacrifice was no longer vigorous. By means of *dakṣiṇās* (gifts to the priests) the gods again invigorated it: hence the name *dakṣiṇā*, because thereby they invigorated (*dakṣay*) that (sacrifice). Whatever, therefore, fails in this sacrifice when slain, that he now again invigorates by means of gifts to the priests; whereupon the sacrifice becomes successful: for this reason he makes gifts to the priests.¹⁵³

It seems that *dakṣiṇā* comes under three different forms: Firstly, in Vedic times, singers presented hymns to the Vedic gods and obtained a *dakṣiṇā* from the king or other noble persons. Secondly, a priest performed a sacrifice for noble or not so noble people and, again, expected a *dakṣiṇā* in return. This is a complex case because the *yajamāna* gave in a twofold manner, for the sacrifice itself and for the *dakṣiṇā*. Very similarly, a classical *mahādāna* was typically accompanied by lavish gifts to officiating priests (see subsection VI.H(2)). In that respect, a *mahādāna* is closer to a Vedic sacrifice than to a *dharmadāna*. Lastly, the graduating student is to present a gift to his *ācārya*.

It is not quite clear how the roles of poets and priests were differentiated. Jamison and Brereton (2014, pp. 9–10) write:

- ⟨43⟩ Who is the poet, and why is he composing poetry? The poets participate in an elaborate patronage system. They are hirelings, but of a very superior sort. As craftsmen of the word, their contribution to the success of the sacrifice that establishes and maintains the mutually beneficial relationship between men and gods is critical, and they serve the patrons, often royal patrons (whatever ‘royal’ meant at this period), who arrange for and underwrite the sacrifice. The poet provides the praise poetry that the patron needs to put the gods in his debt, and he speaks on behalf of his patron, in making specific requests of the gods for goods and services. The poet’s reward comes as a second-hand or indirect benefit of the success of his verbal labors: the patron should receive from the gods what he asked for, and he provides some portion of that bounty to the poet in recompense. This payment from his patron is sometimes celebrated by the poet at the end of his hymn, in a genre known as the *dānastuti*, literally ‘praise of the gift,’ in which the largess of the patron—cows, horses, gold, women—is catalogued and glorified. Or, if it is less than expected or desired, scorned. The tone of the *dānastuti* is often teasing and jokey, and the language colloquial. But the making of poetry is not simply a business proposition. Poets take great pride in their work and often reflect on their part in the poetic tradition and also on their ability to use the tools of the tradition in innovative and creative ways.

From the Buddhist tradition, compare the 12th c. *Upāsakajanālaṅkāra* (⟨180⟩), where the relationship between the gift to teachers is related to the southern direction.

153 Eggeling (1882–1890)

Somewhat irreverently, in the following “charming little hymn”,¹⁵⁴ the wish to obtain the *dakṣiṇā* seems similar to the hope for good business of carpenters and the like:

⟨44⟩ *nānānāṃ vā u no dhīyo ví vratāni jánānām |
tākṣā riṣṭām rutām bhiṣág brahmá sunvāmtam icchatīṃdrāyemdo pári srava* ||¹⁵⁵

Truly our thoughts are various, and the business matters of peoples are different: a carpenter seeks the damage, a healer the break, a priest a man who presses soma. – O drop, flow around for Indra.¹⁵⁶

It is not difficult to find verses that highlight the importance of *dakṣiṇā*:

⟨45⟩ *ucchāmtīr adyá citayamta bhojān rādhodéyāyośaso maghónīḥ |
acitré amṭáh paṇáyaḥ sasamtv ābudhyamānās tāmaso vímadhye* ||¹⁵⁷

Dawning today, the bounteous Dawns brighten the benefactors for the giving of largesse. In (a place) without brightness let the niggards sleep, unawakening in the middle of darkness.¹⁵⁸

or:

⟨46⟩ *tébhyo dyumnám bṛhád yása úšo maghony á vaha |
yé no rádhāmsy ásvyā gavyā bhájamta sūrāyaḥ sújāte ásvasūrte* ||¹⁵⁹

To them bring lofty brilliance and glory, O bounteous Dawn, to the patrons who apportion to us benefits consisting of horses and cows – O well-born lady, liberal with horses.¹⁶⁰

C Teaching sons in Vedic and post-Vedic times

In the Vedic and post-Vedic periods, teaching was primarily done within families. It seems that the idea of keeping traditions alive was well on the families’ minds, as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* seems to convey:

⟨47⟩ *athātaḥ samprattiḥ | yadā praiṣyan manyate ’tha putram āha tvam brahma tvam
yajñas tvam loka iti | sa putraḥ praty āhāham brahmāham yajño ’ham loka iti |
yad vai kiṃ cānūktam tasya sarvasya brahmety ekatā | ye vai ke ca yajñas teṣāṃ
sarveṣāṃ yajña ity ekatā | ye vai ke ca lokās teṣāṃ sarveṣāṃ loka ity ekatā |
etāvad vā idaṃ sarvaṃ | etan mā sarvaṃ sann ayam ito bhunajad iti | tasmāt
putram anuśiṣṭam lokyam āhuḥ | tasmād enam anuśāsati* |¹⁶¹

154 Jamison & Brereton (2014, p. 1363)

155 RgV 9.112.1

156 After Jamison & Brereton (2014).

157 RgV 4.51.3

158 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

159 RgV 5.79.7

160 Jamison & Brereton (2014)

161 BĀU 1.5.17

Next, the rite of transfer. When a man thinks that he is about to die, he tells his son: “You are the *brahman*! You are the sacrifice! You are the world!” The son replies: “I am the *brahman*! I am the sacrifice! I am the world!” All the vedic learning that has been acquired is subsumed under “*brahman*”; all the sacrifices are subsumed under “sacrifice”; and all the worlds are subsumed under “world”. That is the full extent of this whole universe—“By becoming the Whole, may he assist me from here.” Therefore, they say that an educated son opens up the world, and for this reason people educate their sons.¹⁶²

As time went on, teaching seems to have been professionalised. See section XV.B. The details of knowledge and ritual transmission lie well beyond the scope of my book. For the Vedic time, see Houben (2016).

D Rituals, Vedic and post-Vedic¹⁶³

Rituals intended to bring about worldly effects were performed long after the Vedic period. For example, Brahmins could have served as ritual protectors of state. With respect to Śaiva officiants, Sanderson tells about an inscription from the 12th c. where “an army from Sri Lanka had invaded the mainland, removed the door of the Rāmeśvaram temple, obstructed the worship, and carried away all the temple’s treasures” whereupon a Śaiva officiant “was engaged by the emperor to perform a ritual that would bring destruction on those responsible for this desecration. According to the inscription, the ceremony was continued for twenty-eight days and at its end the invading army was indeed defeated.”¹⁶⁴

It is clear that success in these ways would ensure “close links with the institution of kingship and thereby with the principal source of patronage”.¹⁶⁵ See, for example, the Atharvedaparīṣiṣṭa:

⟨48⟩ The kingdom of that king in whose realm dwells an Atharvavedic master of the rites for warding off ills will prosper, free of all calamities. The kingdom of that king in whose realm he is not present is oppressed by diverse dangers. It sinks like a cow in the mud. Therefore to that Atharvan [chaplain] whose senses are controlled the king should show exceptional honour at all times, by means of gifts, marks of distinction, and demonstrations of respect.¹⁶⁶

In some traditions, the Atharvavedic knowledge of a *purohita* was a requirement for serving as a chaplain.¹⁶⁷

162 Olivelle (1998)

163 This section borrows freely from Wiese (2023a).

164 Sanderson (2004, pp. 233–234)

165 Sanderson (2004, p. 232)

166 AP 4.6.1–3, translation by Sanderson (2004, p. 269)

167 Sanderson (2004, p. 233)

E Contract-keeping and truth-telling

According to Thieme (1957), Varuṇa and Mitra are Vedic gods involved in contract-keeping and truth-telling. In classical Sanskrit, *mitra* is a neuter (!) noun, meaning friend. Thieme (1957, p. 18) clearly sides with Antoine Meillet, who claims that, in Vedic times, the meaning of *mitra* was “contract”, from which the meaning of friendship and then friend subsequently developed. Thieme cites the R̥gveda to support Meillet’s and his own claim:

⟨49⟩ *mitró jánān yātayati bruvāṇó* [...] |¹⁶⁸

Contract, when named, makes peoples array (arrange) themselves [with regard to each other] (= ‘causes them to make mutual arrangements’).¹⁶⁹

He adds that “[a]lso other gods may receive this qualification: God Fire (Agni), the fire being invoked as a witness at the conclusion of certain contracts [...] or God Varuṇa, that is the personified Oath [...] or, as I should prefer, the personified True Speech.”¹⁷⁰

Mitra and Varuṇa are often mentioned together:

⟨50⟩ *vraténa stho dhruvákṣemā dhármaṇā yātayájjanā* |¹⁷¹

You two (Mitra and Varuṇa, i.e., Contract and True-Speech) are of firm peace through vow (= you secure peace by seeing to it that vows are kept), you cause people to make mutual agreements through firmness (= you make contractual agreements desirable as establishing firm relations).¹⁷²

These two gods produce very beneficial results:

⟨51⟩ *ádhārayataṃ pṛthivīm utá dyāṃ mītrarājānā varuṇā máhobhiḥ |
vardháyataṃ ósadhiḥ pínvataṃ gā áva vṛṣṭím srjataṃ jīradānū* ||¹⁷³

You two, king Contract and king True-Speech, made firm earth and heaven by your greatness. Cause plants to grow, cause cows to swell [with milk], send down rain, you of live wetness!¹⁷⁴

Thieme (1957, p. 43) comments: “The original motivation for their creating prosperity is, of course, that Contract and True-Speech secure peace.” Of course, there must be some sanctions if somebody does not keep a contract:

⟨52⟩ *tá bhūripāśāv ánr̥tasya sētū duratyétū ripáve márt̥yāya* |¹⁷⁵

168 RgV 3.59.1a

169 Thieme (1957, p. 39)

170 Thieme (1957, pp. 40–41)

171 RgV 5.72.2ab

172 Thieme (1957, p. 41)

173 RgV 5.62.3

174 Thieme (1957, p. 43)

175 RgV 7.65.3ab

These two (Contract and True-Speech) have many slings (in which to catch a cunning transgressor), they are fetterers of untruth, difficult for the deceitful mortal to circumvent.¹⁷⁶

F Hospitality

Dealing with Vedic *ari* in “Der Fremdling im Ṛgveda”, Thieme (1938) claims “stranger” as the original underlying meaning of both enemy and, in the Ṛgveda, guest. According to Thieme, “the figure of God Aryaman [...] is the personified and deified hospitality. He is the god who rewards the host, protects the guest, punishes those who act disgracefully (against guests) and watches over truth.”¹⁷⁷

176 Thieme (1957, p. 52)

177 Thieme (1938, p. 82). Note, however, Oberlies (1998, pp. 342–343: fn. 44), who argues that “function” (and not “personification”) provides the suitable perspective.