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## **The Adaptation of Monsoonal Culture by Ṛgvedic Aryans: A Further Study of the Frog Hymn**

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## Editorial Note

We are now well into the third year of the existence of this journal and we have, by now, some 500 subscribed members. We thank you for your continuous interest. Last year, due to a heavy load of other commitments, I could not get out much. Similarly, some colleagues have postponed their own papers, and for the same reasons. It seems that with all our time saving devices we have less free time each year! This year, however, a number of papers are due to appear.

For much of the same reasons, so far only EJVS 1, issues 1–3 are on the www. Due to still limited time for preparing the html versions I will provisionally put a simplified html version of past articles on the web.

For new subscribers I list previous numbers here:

Vol. 1,

Issue 1: General Announcement (April 1995)

Issue 2: M. Witzel, Looking for the Heavenly Casket (May 1995)

Issue 3: P. Koskikallio, Baka Dalbhya: a Complex Character in Vedic Ritual Texts, Epics and Puranas. (Nov. 1995)

Issue 4: M. Witzel, Early Sanskritization: The Origin and Development of the Kuru State (Dec. 1995)

Vol. 2,

Issue 1: Y. Ikari, On Newly Found Manuscripts of the Vadhula School of the Yajurveda (April 1996)

If you wish, I can forward older numbers on individual request.

## Discussion Proposal: The “Aryan Question”

Following a recent email message on this list, I have received quite a number of requests for a discussion of the “Aryan” question, or, to be more precise, the question of an immigration by speakers of an Indo-European language (the Indo-Aryans) into South Asia. Most readers will be aware of the present controversies in India and among western archaeologists about the “Aryan Invasion” (or its absence), sometime in the second millennium BCE.

We had an interesting conference last Fall at Ann Arbor (organized by Madhav Deshpande and Johannes Bronkhorst) where much of this came up for discussion. As I had the occasion to go over most of the relevant literature

recently, I might start the discussion by putting out a summary of the pro and contra positions sometime this summer. We could then enter a discussion of the topic if readers wish.

However, I propose that this is “monitored”, not for content but for the order of topics and their arrangement. For, usually such discussions either become repetitive and / or immediately go off target (especially if someone makes a provocative or less relevant remark on which other participants then expand); consequently, the original topics are completely forgotten.

I therefore propose to number consecutively the points for discussion and ask you for your response. (We will of course add points as the discussion develops).

### **FAQ page**

I also propose to add a page of frequently asked questions (also on our www site). You may have noticed that there are a number of www pages on the net which provide information on the Vedas, including the delightful but entirely fictional Japanese RGVEDA page. This is based on a popular comic book in Japan, where all Sanskrit names appear in Sino-Japanese form (Yasha-Ou, Ten-jiku, etc.) Just take a look at: <http://www.students.uiuc.edu/~a-zhou2/RG/index.html>

However, there also is serious misinformation readily available. To mention an obvious case: items which put the date of the R̥gveda \*before\* that of the Indus civilization, at 5000 BCE; this is a time when neither horses or chariots nor copper/bronze were yet to be found in the Indian subcontinent, while all of these are quite prominent in the R̥gveda.

We will try to provide well established facts and, as far a possible indeed, a common opinion of specialists in the field. Such opinion is, due to the nature of the scientific enterprise, always due to change, even to change radically at times. But new theories have to come with compelling evidence. More about this in our “Aryan” discussion.

I will begin by presenting some abbreviated, general information on the Vedas, taken from a booklet accompanying tapes of Veda recitation which I prepared a few years ago for the International Foundation for Studies in the Vedas, USA (Rahway, NJ) that I introduced in EJVS 1–4.

MW.

# The Adaptation of Monsoonal Culture by Ṛgvedic Aryans: A Further Study of the Frog Hymn

By Gautama V. Vajracharya

## Introduction

The frog hymn of the Ṛgveda has been studied by previous scholars on various occasions. The most recent work on the Frog Hymn is by Stephanie W. Jamison,<sup>1</sup> the main significance of the hymn, however, has not been properly understood. The hymn describes not only the natural phenomena of the Indian rainy season, but also informs us that in the later Ṛgvedic period the Aryans were already settled down in the typical monsoonal region where the frogs aestivate during the summer and emerge from the ground when it is wet and moist due to the heavy rainfall of the rainy season. Most importantly the hymn provides us with a clue to develop a new methodology for the analytical study of Ṛgvedic culture in the light of ecclesiastical meteorology. This new approach is based on the careful observation of the cause and effect of the typical Indian seasons, particularly the monsoon, and the gradual change of the life style and ideas of Ṛgvedic people as a result of the adaptation of different environment of their new home.

## Peculiarities of the Monsoon and its Effect on Early Vedic Culture

The arrival of the monsoon is always dramatic because it sharply contrasts with the preceding dry and hot summer season. It does not rain much from October to April in the subcontinent except along the west coast and in some parts of Sri Lanka. During this period we do see some green vegetation particularly in the area where a winter crop is raised by irrigation. Toward the end of April, however, vegetation practically stops growing. The temperature in most parts of the Indian subcontinent goes up to 110 F. or even higher.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Natural History Notes on the Rigvedic ‘Frog’ Hymn,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* (Poona, India, 1993), vol. 72–73, pp.138–144. My study is, however, based mainly on primary sources.

<sup>2</sup> A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1956) p. 3.

Hot wind starts blowing, trees and shrubs shed their leaves and they look completely dead or burned by intense heat. Animals like elephants and water buffaloes suffer because of the scarcity of vegetation and water sources. In cases of prolonged drought they even die in large number not only due to the lack of drinking water but also swamps where they hide themselves to protect from scorching sunlight. Birds and reptiles disappear and frogs aestivate inside the ground.

Then suddenly around June dark rain-clouds appear in the sky. They grow rapidly and cover the entire atmosphere. The sky looks like the ocean and the ocean becomes indistinguishable from the cloudy sky. Finally torrential rain accompanied with thunder and lightening pours down so overwhelmingly that often people feel that they are inside a body of water and the end of the world is approaching. Meanwhile the temperature rapidly declines from 110 F. to 70 F. Within few days trees and bushes put on new leaves and the entire earth becomes fresh and green with new grasses and other vegetation. Animals, birds, reptiles, frogs and insects appear again everywhere. Moreover, this is the mating time of many species, including the frogs of Indian subcontinent.

The seasonal change also effects human life enormously. Because of the constant shower of rain and swollen rivers and streams travelling becomes difficult. Therefore in ancient India the rainy season is considered to be the time for retreat in a shelter. Except in the rainy season it is possible in most part of the Indian Subcontinent to lead a homeless life without much difficulty. The ideal of an outdoor lifestyle of the subcontinent is based on this meteorologic phenomenon. Although in the later period homeless life and the ritual of the rainy season retreat became a part of religious activity, the nucleus of such lifestyle is, indeed, as old as the Indian climate itself.

Furthermore, due to the height of the Himalayas the monsoonal clouds do not extend beyond the mountain range. Thus the typical phenomenon of the monsoon becomes distinctively local and contrasts sharply with the environment of neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Tibet. It is this unique meteorological feature that helps us to study the process of Indianization of the Vedic culture.

Compare the Avesta with the R̥gveda, for example. Despite the well-known fact that these two texts resemble each other in many ways, since they are the works of same group of people, the Indo-Iranians, there is a remarkable difference between these texts. The Avesta shows little interest in rain-making,

whereas the Ṛgveda is full of prayers for rain and contains many different speculations about the phenomena of rain and lightning. The reason is clear: when these Indo-Iranian people were in Afghanistan, the fertility of their land depended mostly upon snow melt and very little upon rain in the spring season. Only after they moved to the other side of the Hindukush and proceeded toward the bank of the river Ganges did they experience entirely different meteorological phenomena such as the scorching hot summer and cooling monsoon as described in the frog hymn. It is true that most of the Ṛgvedic hymns are composed around the Punjab but not all of them.

Due to the association of agriculture with this meteorological phenomenon there is a general trend throughout the history of Indic culture that divinities and divine figures, although originally having nothing to do with the phenomena of rain, become regarded in secondary development as rain makers. For instance, Varuṇa was originally the god of the night sky representing the primeval water, the ocean of the nether-world, as Kuiper has aptly shown.<sup>3</sup>

In the secondary development, however, already in the Vedic period the god had become a god of the Indian monsoon as exemplified by AV 4.15.12 in which the god is prayed to for the shower of rain so that the speckled-armed frogs start croaking along the water-courses. Similarly, the story of Indra and Vṛtra is, undoubtedly, a creation myth. Modern scholars have presented this view quite convincingly.<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally, however, the story of Indra and Vṛtra is interpreted in India as the story of drought and rain<sup>5</sup> as clearly recorded in Yāska's *Nirukta* already in the c. 5th century B.C. This interpretation, which is so closely associated with the phenomena typical of the Indian climate of summer and rainy season, was not the invention of one author, but is a part of a large pattern that we see repeatedly throughout the history of Indic culture. A careful study of Ṛgvedic hymns associated with the myth shows that the nucleus of this symbolism actually began even in the Ṛgvedic period since the fight of Indra and Vṛtra is depicted there several times using the imagery of the phenomena of rain. For example, compare RV 1.32.13 where Vṛtra is described using the lightning,

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<sup>3</sup> F. B. J. Kuiper, *Ancient Indian Cosmology*, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983) pp. 148–150.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14; W. Norman Brown, "The Creation Myth of the Rig Veda," *Journal of American Oriental Society* (New Haven, 1942) vol. 62, pp. 93–97.

<sup>5</sup> *Nirukta*, 2.16, 7.23;

thunder, fog and hail to fight with Indra. Furthermore only when Indra defeats Vṛtra the *āpas* “waters” start flowing downward.

Here again we should keep in mind that originally *āpas* may indicate primordial waters. The original meaning was, however, going through the process of modification. Thus even for the Ṛgvedic poets often *āpas* were not different from cloud as we know from the story of Bhujyu, who is described in RV 6.62.6 as being rescued by the *aśvins* from the ocean, or from “waters” in RV 1.182.6 . But when the same legend is given in RV 1.116.3 he is described as being rescued by same gods from the rain cloud *udamegha*. Moreover, the waters which were spread by solar rays (RV 7.47.4), and carried away by the wind who is their friend, can only be clouds. Obviously the original meaning of the word was in the process of modification.

### **The Frog Hymn**

The most undeniable evidence for the changing Vedic culture as a result of distinct Indian climate comes from the frog hymn. It is true that it is one of the latest hymn in the Ṛgveda. As a matter of fact, the lateness of the hymn is a main reason that it is so helpful for us to study the new development of Ṛgvedic culture on Indian soil. Due to the puns used throughout the hymn, it is difficult to translate it into English. Here is an attempt:

- 7.103.1. Having lain still for a period of *saṃvatsara* (ten lunar months), the Brahmins who were practicing a *vrata*, and the frogs uttered forth their voice inspired by the rain-cloud.
2. When the celestial waters (rain) came upon him lying like a dry leather-bag in a lake, then the croaking of the frogs joins in unison like the lowing of cows with calves.
3. As soon as the rainy season has come, (the rain-cloud) rained upon them who were thirsty and craving (rain). Making the croaking sound “*akhhala*”, one approaches the other who is croaking, as a son (approaches) his father.
4. One of the two greets the other as they become exhilarated during the downpour of the rain-water. When the frog becomes wet with rain, (he) jumps around, the speckled one mingles his voice with (that of) the greenish yellow one.

5. When one of them repeats the speech of the other, as the student that of his teacher, all that of them is in unison like the eloquent (Vedic) chant that you recite during the rain.
6. One lows like a cow, one bleats like a goat; one is speckled, one of them is greenish yellow. Bearing a common name but having different forms, they adorn their voice in many ways as they croak.
7. Like Brahmins at the nocturnal ceremony (*atirātra*) chanting around (the full bowl of) soma as if it were a full lake, O Frogs, you celebrate that day of *saṃvatsara* which change into the one that belongs to the rainy season.
8. Soma-pressing Brahmins have uttered their voice while offering the prayer associated with *parivatsara* [a synonym for *saṃvatsara*]. *adhvaryu* priests, heated and sweating, have made their appearance. None of them are hiding (any more).
9. They have followed the divine order of twelve months: these men (Maruts, the storm clouds) do not disobey the season. At the end of *saṃvatsara* when the rainy season comes, the heated *gharma* [in terms of the phenomenon, the warm atmosphere of the transitional period of summer and rainy season, in terms of the ritual, the heated milk-offering or the milk pot] obtains release.
10. He that lows like a cow has given, he that bleats like a goat has given, the speckled one, the greenish yellow one has given us prosperity. The frogs prolong our life providing us with hundreds of cows in a thousand-soma-pressing.

### ***Samvatsara***

The term *saṃvatsara* is used here several times. The exact understanding of the word provides us with a clear picture of the changing lifestyle and ideas of Ṛgvedic Aryans. In my unpublished work I have demonstrated that in general the word means a year, but originally it denoted only ten lunar months of gestation. The original meaning, however, remained intact throughout the history of Vedic literature when the word is used in the context of pregnancy, in particular, atmospheric pregnancy, which begins in autumn and ends with the birth of a rain child. My arguments are mainly based on following points:



1. The composer of the Frog Hymn saw the similarities between the frogs and the Brahmins practicing the *vrata* ritual mainly for two reasons. First, the *vrata* concluded when the rainy season began and therefore the chanting of mantras at the concluding nocturnal rite of the *vrata* coincided with the frogs' croaking. The croaking is actually a mating call which lasts for about two months. Second, until the arrival of the monsoon the Brāhmaṇas, like frogs, remained completely silent for a period of *saṃvatsara*. In other words, the vow or *vrata* of silence corresponded with the silence of the frogs. Note that the main reason for the silence of the frogs is not exactly related to their aestivation but the ending of the mating time. Clearly here *saṃvatsara* does not mean a year but most part of a year, the two months period of frogs croaking being excluded. Furthermore, if we study the seventh stanza carefully, it clearly says that after the nocturnal ceremony, *atirātra*, the day (*ahas*) of *saṃvatsara* turns into the rainy season “*prāvṛṣiṃam babhūva,*” which means literally “became one belonging to the rainy season.” Thus it is clear that the *atirātra* ceremony concludes the period of *saṃvatsara* immediately after which the rainy season begins. In other words the Ṛgvedic year, in accordance with a unique system, consists of two units: a period of *saṃvatsara* and the rainy season. Note the expression given in the 9th stanza of the hymn which indicates the twelve months of the annual year being divided into *saṃvatsara* and *prāvṛṣ*.

2. The Ṛgvedic ritual, here simply called *vrata*, later became known as *saṃvatsarasattra*, *gosattra* or *gavām ayana* which lasted only ten lunar months originally. According to the *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* 7.5.1.1–2 two groups of cows practiced the *gavām ayana* ritual; after ten lunar months (*daśa māsaḥ*), as a result of the practice, one group received horns. The other did not get them but found fresh vegetation as the rainy season began at the end of *saṃvatsara*. The text also states that *gosattra* is a *saṃvatsara*. In the light of such traditional evidence, *sāyaṇa*, in his commentary, explains that “the *vrata* (mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*) is same with *saṃvatsarasattra*... *saṃvatsara* means (the period) beginning from the autumn to the rainy season” (commentary on RV 7.103.1).

3. Literally the word *saṃvatsara* means “endowed with an excellent fetus or baby” (cf. Pāṇini 5.2.98) indicating its association with the period of gestation. A Ṛgvedic verse (10.87.17) states that “It takes a period of *saṃvatsara* for a cow to produce milk.” In the Vedic literature it is generally believed that the gestation period of a cow or a horse is the same as that of a woman (ŚB 11.1.6.2). Therefore, it is beyond doubt that in the Ṛgvedic example

*saṃvatsariṇa* does not indicate “one full year,” but “ten lunar months.” It is of interest to see that even after the original meaning of *saṃvatsara* changed and became synonymous with a “year,” as we have mentioned earlier, throughout Vedic literature, in the context of pregnancy, it retained the original meaning. Thus, some statements mention ten lunar months as the normal duration of pregnancy, and others merely use the term *saṃvatsara* to denote the same period of time. Very often both types of statements occur in the same text as illustrated by the following examples:

ŚB 11.1.6. “Therefore a woman or a cow or a mare gives birth in a *saṃvatsara*.”

ŚB 4.5.2.4 “It is ten months when the embryo becomes fully grown.”

KS 7.15 “In a *saṃvatsara* the deposited semen produces offsprings.”

KS 28.6 “In ten months embryos come to birth.”

KS 33.8 “If (an offspring) is born within six or seven months, he dies...; in a *saṃvatsara*, however, the deposited semen produces an offspring.”

For our study it is important to note that in these expressions the word *saṃvatsara* is used in the locative case to indicate the end of the period. In my translation of the Frog Hymn, therefore, I have translated *saṃvatsare prāvṛṣi āgatāyām* as “at the end of *saṃvatsara* when the rainy season has come”.

4. Ṛgvedic Aryans believed that vegetation is identical with human hair. Thus the last phase of Indian summer, which is characterized by the intense heat causing the lack of vegetation, is described in Vedic texts as a result of Agni shaving the hair/vegetation of the earth (*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.5.6.5–6). The author of the Ṛgvedic verse 1.164.44, however, describes exactly same phenomenon of the last days of summer using the word *saṃvatsare*: “(Agni) shaves the hair/vegetation (of the earth) at the end of *saṃvatsara*.” This Ṛgvedic evidence emphatically supports our view. We will be discussing this subject in detail shortly under the subtitle “Hair Shaving Ritual at the End of *Saṃvatsara*”.

5. In ancient India it was believed that the clouds are female and they cannot produce rain without conceiving a rain-child in their wombs. The *Vālmikīya Rāmāyaṇa* 4. 28. 3 and the *Kaṭṭaliya Arthaśāstra* 2.24.7 refer to this view. The

*Rāmāyaṇa*, in particular, clearly states that “The sky delivers the nine-months old embryo, the elixir vitae, the essence drawn by the rays of the sun from all ocean.” Moreover, Varāhamihira’s *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* has an entire chapter called *Garbhalakṣaṇa* “The Signs of Pregnancy,” which has nothing to do with human pregnancy but deals with atmospheric gestation. This is not, however, an invention of later period. My study reveals that the nucleus of this idea goes back to the Vedic period. For example, AV 1.12.1 clearly states that “The first red bull, born out of the placenta (*jarāyujā*), born of windy clouds, comes thundering with rain.” Furthermore, in the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (8.26–28) *āpas*, the rain-clouds, are prayed to for conceiving a baby for ten lunar months. Without being biased by previous interpretation of the word *āpas* if we try to understand the real meaning of the word we do find this concept recorded even in the Ṛgveda. The seventh stanza of the well-known *Hiraṇyagarbhasūkta* clearly states that “When the great *āpas* came, pregnant with embryo pervading everything, giving birth to Agni, he arose from there like the single life’s breath of the gods.” Originally the word *āpas* may mean cosmic water. In the secondary development, however, its meaning was in the process of modification. We have several reasons to believe that here the word is used to indicate that the cosmic water is identical with the primordial rain-cloud who conceived the very first child. First, as we have mentioned before, in the Ṛgveda this word is used synonymously with *udamegha* “rain-cloud.” Second, just like in many Indian languages of the Sanskrit family, *āpas āyan* (literally “waters came”) is a Vedic idiomatic expression for “it rained.” Compare the second stanza of the Frog Hymn where the frogs are described croaking when “waters came = *āpas āyan*.” This expression has nothing to do with primeval waters. Third, according to RV 10.98.5–6 there are two oceans upper and lower. It rains when gods release water from the upper ocean. This Ṛgvedic statement helps us to understand the real meaning of the story of *hiraṇyagarbha* given in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (11.1.6.1) where the rain-clouds (*āpas*) are identified with oceanic water: “In the beginning the *āpas* were, indeed, identical with salty water (*salilam*).” Fourth, *hiraṇyagarbha*, in some aspects, is similar to *puruṣa* because both of them are described in the hymns as cosmic giants (cf. RV 10.121.4 with RV 10.90). Also in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (11.1.6.2) *hiraṇyagarbha* is identified with *puruṣa* who was born at the end of *saṃvatsara*. According to the *Atharvaveda*, however, *puruṣa* was bathed with the rainy season just after he was born. The exact statement given in AV 19.6.11 is this: “With the rainy season they (the sages)

anointed *puruṣa*, the sacrifice born at the beginning” This statement is strikingly different from the Ṛgvedic version 10.90.7 “On the sacred grass they anointed *puruṣa*, the sacrifice born at the beginning.” There is no reference to the rainy season here although in preceding stanza (RV 10.90.6) other seasons such as the autumn, spring and summer are mentioned. But the author of the Atharvaṇic version of the *puruṣasūkta*, describing the cosmic giant being anointed with the rainy season, obliquely identifies him as a child born in the rainy season. The obliqueness of statement is not, however, difficult to understand because the sages would not have been able to anoint the newly born child with rainy season if he was not born in that season. This seems to be reason that the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* states that *hiranyagarbha/puruṣa* was born at the end of *saṃvatsara*. Clearly the interpretation of original Vedic myth was in the process of change due to the influence of the meteorological phenomena of India where the creation begins with monsoonal rain. It may be proved that the original meaning of *āpas* continued throughout the Vedic literature, but, according to the new development that took place on Indian soil, the Vedic authors began to consider that “the waters” are identical with the rain-cloud or atmospheric ocean. Thus, as we have mentioned earlier, Varuṇa the ruler of the primeval water became the god of the Indian monsoon who is prayed to in AV 4.15.12 for the shower of monsoonal rain so that “the speckled armed frogs start croaking along the water courses.”

6. In the Jain calendar of Gujarat and the traditional calendar of Newars of the Kathmandu valley the theory of celestial pregnancy is still intact implicitly. The Jains celebrate *bhādra śukla caturthī* as the beginning of *saṃvatsara* or *saṃvatsarī mahāparva* and after ten lunar months the rain-child is born on *āṣāḍha śukla ṣaṣṭhī*. For the Jains this rain-child is, indeed, Mahāvīra; therefore this day is celebrated a *śrīmahāvīrasvāmiprabhucyavana* “the descent of the lord Mahāvīra.” The Hindu Newars, however, believe that *kārtikeya kumāra* is the rain-child whose birth-day rite is celebrated on *jyeṣṭha śukla ṣaṣṭhī*, the official day of the beginning of the rainy season.<sup>6</sup> In this connection it is important to note that the proper names of the *kṛttikās*, Kumāra’s mothers,

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<sup>6</sup> This particular day is known to the Newars as *sithi*, Sanskrit *ṣaṣṭhī*, the sixth day after the delivery. According to the age-old custom, which has been recorded in the seventh century inscription of King Aṃśuvarman, this day is considered to be the last day for repairing the temples and houses, cleaning the wells and water-tanks annually in order to prepare for the approaching rainy season. For the same reason, outdoor cultural activities such as traditional dance and drama and chariot festivals are also suspended for four months after that day.

which are given in the *Taittirīyasamhitā* 4.4.5, are derived from the synonyms of clouds such as *abhṛayantī*, *stanayantī*, *meghayantī* etc. In early Kuṣāṇa art from Mathura the mothers of Kumāra are depicted holding river/cloud as their main attributes on which I have written in detail in my forthcoming article. Moreover, the main reason that Kumāra receives a peacock as his vehicle is indicative of his original identity as a rain-child.

### **The Worship of Frogs**

The meteorological phenomena such as the dry hot season followed by the outburst of the monsoon and related rituals are so clearly described in the Frog Hymn that there is no reason to doubt that this hymn was composed not before the Aryans came to India but after they settled down in the country where the frogs start croaking during the rainy season. The hymn is not a secular poem, however. The main purpose of the hymn was to secure rain. Rain means vegetation, vegetation means cattle and cattle means prosperity and good health. Therefore, in the last stanza of the hymn, the frogs are praised as the divine figures who can provide them with cattle and long life. This is indeed undisputable evidence of Indianization of the Aryans. The newcomers did not bring the monsoon with them and they did not bring monsoonal rituals and the praise of frogs with them either. They learned it from the native people and assimilated it into their sacrificial rituals.

It is interesting to remark that even these days Jyapus, the farmers of the Kathmandu valley, perform frog worship during the rainy season in order to secure their harvest. On the fifteenth day of the bright half of the *śrāvaṇa* month (July/August) the Jyapus go to their farm to worship the frogs. The ritual is known as *byaṃjānakegu* “feeding rice to the frogs,” which is marked by the local traditional calendar *pañcāṅga*. It is a simple ritual. The Jyapu puts cooked rice and beans in the cavity of four clay containers resembling the figure of a frog. If the clay figurines are not readily available, the rice and beans may be also put in green leaves. Then the Jyapu places the containers or the leaves in the four corners of his field. He stands in the middle of the field, looks upward and praises the frogs in Newari, a language of Tibeto-Burmese family: “O frogs, last year you have provided for us with plenty of rice and other grains. This year too give us plenty.” He repeats this sentence three four times; after that he takes the food from the containers and takes them home but leaves the container in the field. According to the wife of the Jyapu who was

kind enough to show me this ritual, he was supposed to bury the frog figurines in the ground so that the frogs will appear again next rainy season. The concept of this simple ritual is almost exactly as that of the Ṛgvedic Frog Hymn. Due to the usual confusion between cause and effect, the appearance of the frogs during the rainy season is not an effect of the monsoonal rain any more but other way around. Thus the frogs became the cause of rain, vegetation and cattle. The Jyapus are not the cattle-breeders; therefore, they ask for grain instead of cattle. Evidently the Ṛgvedic people must have seen local people like Jyapus worshipping frogs in order to secure rain. The newcomers learned it from the local people and adjusted to their system of Vedic ritual, the *atirātra* ceremony of the *saṃvatsarasattra* being part of it.

### **Hair Shaving Ritual at the end of *saṃvatsara***

Exactly at this time of the year the Vedic Aryans performed another interesting ritual, shaving the hair. The main purpose of the ritual was to secure the growth of vegetation during the rainy season. As we have mentioned briefly earlier Vedic people believed that the hair of the head and body of both sexes are not different from vegetation because the vegetation is the hair of the earth goddess or a creator god. The following examples of Vedic expressions may be helpful to understand their view:

TS, 7.5.25.1 “Hair is vegetation.”

ŚB, 7.4.2.11 “The hair which fell down from Prajāpati’s body turned into this vegetation.”

JB 2.54 “Indeed the vegetation and trees are hair.”

This idea goes back to the Ṛgvedic period as we know from the well-known *apālā* hymn (RV 8.91):

5. O Indra, make these three regions sprout: my daddy’s head and corn-field, and this (region) near my abdomen.
6. That corn-field of ours, and this my body and my daddy’s head—make all of these full of hair.

Explaining the significance of these stanza, Hanns-Peter Schmidt has correctly observed that *apālā*’s father’s head was not permanently bald, but temporarily shorn because he had undergone the ceremony suitable for a rite

to promote the growth of vegetation.<sup>7</sup> His argument is mainly based on the following information derived from the Taittirīya *Brāhmaṇa* 1.5.6.5–6:

“He has (his hair) trimmed with a razor of red copper. When Agni trims this (earth) after the (hot) season has come, he trims her having given (his flames) the form (of a razor); afterwards she becomes more abundant day by day, she procreates. He who knowing thus has (his hair) trimmed with a razor of red copper, has himself trimmed having given (the razor) the form (of fire); afterwards he becomes more abundant day by day, he procreates.”<sup>8</sup>

If we study this statement carefully it becomes very clear that the ritual of shaving the hair was performed at the end of hot summer season but immediately before the rainy season so that the shorn hair would grow together with vegetation as a result of the dramatic arrival of the monsoon. The phenomena of this transitional time is described in the Frog Hymn “at the end of *saṃvatsara* when the rainy season has arrived” (*saṃvatsare prāvṛṣi āgatāyām*). The proper understanding of this expression explains the following riddle-like statement given in RV 1.164.44:

“The three long-haired ones appear at the appointed time; at the end of the summer (*saṃvatsare*), one of them (Agni) shaves the hair (of the earth); one (the sun) surveys the universe by means of powers; and of one (the wind) the onrush is visible but not his form.”

In his study of this statement Brown has pointed out that “Long-haired one” (*keśin*) is an appropriate epithet of both the sun and Agni. The one who shaves at the end of the summer could be no other than Agni, because RV 10.142.4 relates that “(O Agni) you shave the earth as a barber does a beard.”<sup>9</sup>

Evidently the Ṛgvedic riddle-like statement about Agni shaving the hair of the earth at the end of *saṃvatsara* is based on the same idea expressed in the Taittirīya *Brāhmaṇa* to explain the significance of trimming the hair ritually at summer’s end in order to grow plenty of vegetation during the rainy season. Thus it supports our view emphatically that *saṃvatsare* does not mean simply “in a year,” as previous scholars thought, but at the end of summer when the atmospheric gestation ends with the birth of the rain-child. Undoubtedly, the

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<sup>7</sup> Hanns-Peter Schmidt, *Some Women’s Rites and Rights in the Veda* (Poona, India: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1987), pp. 1–29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> W. Norman Brown, “Agni, Sun, Sacrifice, and Vac: A Sacerdotal Ode by Dirghatamas (Rig Veda 1.164)” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (Baltimore, June 15, 1968) vol. 88. no 2, p.217.

Aryan had adopted the monsoonal culture very well even in the Ṛgvedic period.

It is interesting to note that even these days throughout South Asia, including the Kathmandu Valley, traditional Brahmins shave their heads at this time of year. Even more interesting is the fact that this Brahmanic rite is observed exactly on the same day (*śrāvaṇa-śukla-pūrṇimā*) when the Jyapus worship the frogs. It is true that the Vedic system of counting the days of years have gone through many changes. But the Indian seasons have not changed much. Therefore, I believe that this is not a mere coincidence.

### **Commencement of Academic Year and Rainy Season Retreat**

It is a well known fact that originally *upanayana* was the first-day in-school ritual for a boy from a family of a *dvija* “twice born.” Although some later Vedic texts prescribe this ritual to be performed in the Spring season, some other Vedic texts give preference to the rainy season for the ritual. The *Pāraskara Gṛhyasūtra* 2.10.1–2, for instance, clearly states that the annual course of study is opened “on *śrāvaṇī* (the full moon day of the *śrāvaṇa* month) when herbs appear in the month of *śrāvaṇa*”. The author of the Frog Hymn indicates that even in the Ṛgvedic India the rainy season was the time when the annual course of study was open. He makes it implicitly clear comparing the croaking of the frogs with the drill of students repeating after their teacher during the rain. In later periods the full-moon day of the *śrāvaṇa* month became one of the two alternative dates for Buddhist monks to participate in the rainy season retreat. The other date was a month earlier on the full-moon day of the *āṣāḍha* month. The Jains also have the retreat almost in same period of time. This custom of the rainy season retreat was not, indeed, Buddhist or Jain invention; rather it was a continuity of much earlier tradition. The Vedic ritual *Varuṇapraghāsa*, which suggests the arrival of the rainy season, was performed either on the full moon day of *āṣāḍha* or *śrāvaṇa*. The monsoonal cloud advances across the Indian subcontinent not at the same time but from June to September. This seems to be the reason for having two alternative dates for rainy season retreats and rituals. It is, however, clear that the retreat was not originally a religious event but a commencement of an academic session, a pre-Buddhist and pre-Jain custom.



## Conclusion

The Ṛgveda was composed during the transitional period when the Vedic Aryans were going through the process of Indianization. Our study has shown that the typical phenomena of Indian monsoon and Ṛgvedic rituals associated with this phenomena are very helpful to distinguish the new development of the Aryan culture from its pre-Indic origin. Particularly, the Frog Hymn has exemplified how this new methodology can be used for Vedic study very successfully. In brief, our investigation has presented solid evidence to substantiate the following points:

1. The Ṛgvedic Aryans adopted the aboriginal concept of *saṃvatsara* “ten months long atmospheric gestation” ending with the birth of a rain-child at the very beginning of the rainy season.

2. Just like native people, they also began to believe that the frogs acted as rain-makers and the croaking of the frogs was the cause of the monsoonal rain.

3. They shaved their heads just before the rainy season so that the hair would grow together with the vegetation which was considered to be identical with the hair of the creator god or the earth goddess.

4. The Ṛgvedic academic session began during the rainy season, the session being the nucleus of the Buddhist and Jain practice of the rainy season retreat.

Undoubtedly these new developments of Ṛgvedic culture are Indic in origin simply because they are closely related to the unique meteorological phenomena of Indian subcontinent.

Some of these developments may bear some similarities with pre-Indic Aryan belief because the incorporation of new ideas usually begin only if there are some apparent similarities or real similarities. We will discuss this subject matter in detail on different occasion.