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MISCELLANEOUS

THE ASCENT OF SOMA

BY

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The ninth Mandala of the Rg-veda is dedicated to Soma. In the entire Rg-veda there are about 120 hymns dedicated to this God. Statistically its position is third. Soma is treated here as a god, a plant, and as a juice. Mountain, earth and heaven are described as the habitations of Soma. In this article I desire to discuss that compared to the descent of the god from heaven there are many passages in the Rg-veda which allude to the ascent from the earth to the heaven.

In the ninth Mandala, the procedure of the pressing of Soma at times appears to be mystical. Let us now examine the description of the ascent of Soma. In the following passages Soma is described as ascending heaven: 9.71.6; 5.4; 71.8; 11.1; 42.5; 44.1; 98.7; 101.4; 39.1; 25.4; 78.1; 86.7; 107.22. The expression *Devanam eti niskrtam* occurs outside the Pavamana hymns cf. 3.62.13.

Soma like Agni is a messenger of men to the gods (9.45.2; 99.5). Exactly the same is said of Agni in 4.2.3; 3.3.2, etc. Soma stirring the two (god and man) goes between the two (9.86.42). In 9.12.8 it is said: the wise, the soma that is sent flows to the beloved places of heaven in stream. This means that Soma from the sacrificial places goes to the heaven. There, in the extensive dwelling, Soma should praise the gods (9.84.1). Soma, the bull, ascends the heaven (9.85.9). 9.37.3 describes together the rushing to heaven and on the sieve. Soma is sent to the younder side (9.44.2). He sits in the seat of Mitra (9.86.11). Soma goes to the heavenly region (9.22.4-6).

Soma flows forth to the celestial places-dhamasu (9.86.22), sits in the belly of Indra and makes the Sun ascend heaven. Can Dhama be the manifestation, the outward shape? He is made to ascend heaven (9.26.3). In 9.71.2 Soma is described as giving up its covering and comes to the place of the father. The word *Niskrta* occurs 21 times in the Rg-veda. 18 times it is used with the Gen. of the person. Once there is the Acc. for the Gen. Twice the person is the woman. In 1.123.9 we get: The young lady (usas) does not violate the laws of Rta in that she comes to the appointed place day in and day out and in 10.40.6: You two, O Asvains; bring forth with the mouth (i.e., inform) the bees of the honey like the young lady the appointed place.

In our above quoted passage, the word *Niskrta* is without a person. It requires a Gen. which can be *Pituh*. Soma goes there to meet his father. It raises the question as to who the father is? In 9.82.3 Parjanya is mentioned as the father of Soma. Parjanya is the father of the bull provided with the leaves. On the navel of the earth, on the mountains he has taken up his dwelling place. The adjective *Parnin* and the dwelling on the mountain shows that Soma is a plant. When Parjanya is said the father, it is meant that he generally allows the plants to grow.² Soma, the juice, is the child of heaven (9.33.5; 38.5; 89.2, probably also 86.14. Thus, *Pitureti niskrtam* may mean that Soma after being pressed goes to the heaven.

One can think of Soma going to gods in heaven from the sacrificial place on account of the use of the expression *a ruh* employed for the process. In 9.63.22: Flow forth, O God, with Ayu. The invigorating should go to Indra. According to the laws may you ascend towards Vayu. In 9.36.6: You mount the back of heaven, Soma, you lord of strength, longing for horse, cows, and men. In 9.40.2 *Dhruve Sadasi* means the heaven. Therefore, the red one should climb on his seat, the powerful, the pressed one should go to Indra. He should sit on the constant seat. In 9.98.3 for *a rohati* we have *Urdhvo-eti*. For *Induh Urdhvah* in 98.3 we have in 7.31.9 *Indavah urdhvasah*.

Naturally, this ascent of Soma is a mystic process and that may be the reason why in 9.17.5 *rohat* is qualified by a *na*: O Soma, over the regions of light you shone forth as if you were ascending heaven. At the same time you set the Sun in quick motion.