SÁRAS, SÓMA AND SIRÁ

by
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Worship of Sarasvati has been common in Indian Aryan homes; but few scholars have cared to appreciate the real significance of this name. The present essay is an attempt at this.

Sarasvati as river, is mentioned several times (40) in the RV., and scholars have identified it with the Sarasvati of the Kurukṣetra. In some stanzas, Sarasvati is glorified as a mighty river; and this has led some scholars to identify her with the Indus, which may be right. But Sarasvati of the Kurukṣetra region may have been once as mighty as she was sacred as is clear from RV. II 42.16, which invokes her as “the best of mothers”. From this it would follow that the region watered by Sarasvati was the cradle of the Aryan ritual and culture.

As for the etymology of the word, Sayaṇa has uniformly explained it from Saras meaning ‘water’. But as water is the common constituent of all the rivers it may be pointless to connect this name with water. Brhaddevatā VI. 109–114 throw some light on the meaning of the Saras. The context is:

Upakramya tu devebhyaḥ somo vytrabhayārditaḥ /
nadīm Amśumātīṁ nāmnā abhyatiṣṭhat Kurūṇ prati //
tam brhaspatinaikena abhyayād vytrahā saha /
yotsyamānaḥ susaṁhrṣtair marudbhir vividhāyudhaiḥ //
dṛṣṭvā tāṁ āyataḥ somah svabalenā vyavasthitāḥ /
manvāno vytratīm āyantiṁ jighāṁsum arisenayā //
vyavasthitam dhanuṁ mantām tam uvāca brhaspatiḥ /
marutpatir ayaṁ somasa ehi devān punar vibho //
śrutiṁ devaguror vākyam anartham vytrasaṅkayā //
sobravin neti tam śakraḥ svarga eva balād balī //
iyāya devān ādāya tam papur vidhivat surāḥ //

The purport is clear. Soma, frightened by Vṛtra, fled to the Amśumātī, flowing in the Kurukṣetra region. He settled there and the gods too settled there along with him. They used Soma, and thereby evolved Soma-sacrifices.
Three historical implications stand out clear:—

(a) that the Aryans once lived in a region noted for Sóma, high up in the Himālayas. The Ṛjiká (= beaming) is mentioned as the home of the Sóma.

(b) that Sóma was the chief characteristic of their religion and culture; and

(c) that pressed from behind the Aryans moved forward and settled in the Kurukšetra region which was watered by the river Amśumátī. (Those who lingered on in the Himālayas were called Uttara-Kurus, while those who moved on to south-east became Kuru-Paṅcālas).

An analysis of the geographical data given by Vendidad, Fargard I makes out the Himālayas to be the original home of the Aryans; and this is exactly what is suggested by the Indian tradition incorporated in the Kumāra-Sambhava by Kālidāsa and also in the Meghadūta, where the Yakṣa, representing the Indian Aryan, gone far away from home, traces his march back from the southernmost part of India to the Himālayas, characterised by the Meru-lake-Māna-Sarovara [Brāhmaṇa Sarāḥ : Raghuvaramśa 12.60]. The high praise and divinity bestowed on the Kailāśa and other peaks of the Himālayas by the Purāṇas and other literature confirms it; and this is exactly what Hoernle suggested on philological grounds.

The word Amśū occurs several times in the RV. and generally in all the passages it means Sóma. Amśumatī would, therefore, mean the river rich in the Sóma, i.e. the river on whose banks great Soma-sacrifices were performed. In the Brāhmaṇic as well as post-Vedic literature Kuru-pradēśa is noted for Soma-sacrifices and so it is described by the Kuru-dhamma Jātaka, and Mahābhārata in Vanaparva 129-130. Amśumatī may, therefore, be located in the Kūru-region as suggested by the Brhad-devatā; and if this conclusion is right its identification with Sārasvatī is irresistible.

The above Soma-legend is referred to in the RV. VIII. 96. 13-15 which read:—

áva drapśo amśumātīm atiṣṭhad
iyānāḥ Krṣṇo daśābhiḥ sahasraīḥ /
āvat tām índraḥ śacyā dhāmantam
āpa śneḥitīr nṛmāṇā adhatta //
The purport of the legend is as clear as that of the one told in the Brhad-devatā. Śāyaṇa is, therefore, wrong when he rejects it saying: “etad anārṣatvenādaraṇīyam”. But the words to be noted in these stanzas are: drapsā and Aṃśumātī. We have identified Aṃśumātī with the river Sārasvatī and this is confirmed by the word drapsā. Śāyaṇa explains drapsā by “dṛutām saratitī” taking recourse to the license “pṛṣodarādīni yathopadistām”. To me this explanation seems to be a little strained; and I should prefer to have it from √dṛā ‘run’ and √psā (√bhas ‘eat’), explaining the shortening of ā of √dṛā through the shift of accent on the suffix -ā. The proposed derivation aptly brings out the integrated import of the term: the root √dṛā signalizing Sōma’s extreme dynamism and the verb √psā typifying its supreme food value.

Surely the Vedic Aryans had something very deep in their mind when they coined this term; for, ultimately Sōma was inter-

1. For a similar derivation of rud-dra cp. Vāyu-Purāṇa I, 9.73:—
evam uktas tu rurudur dudruvās ca samantataḥ /
rodanād dravānā caiva rud-drā nāṃneti viśvatuḥ //
From √rud alone cp. Kūrma-Purāṇa 10, p. 90,

I should now derive the word śā-drā also from √svī + √dṛā explaining it as ‘one who runs after material things’ which are gross. Taking clue from śā-drā I should now derive paṇ from √pṛ ‘fill’ as is clear from its cognate pelnas ‘reward’ in Lithuanian. That paṇ had some such significance becomes clear from Bāgavata-Purāṇa III, 6.28:—

ātyantikena satvena
divam devāh prapedire /
dharāḥ rajāsbvabhāvena
paṇayo ye ca tān anu //

This derivation from √pṛ well explains cerebralization. This should also suggest derivation of maṇḍ from √mr signifying ‘the stone which is unusually hard’ fully fossilized and dead for which cp. Dharmaśāhita:—
cakraṁ ratho maṇḍh khaḍgaś carma ratnaṁ ca paṇcamam /
ketur nidhiś ca saptaiva prāṣaḥinān ca kṣate //
interpreted by them as Brāhmaṇa, (= elan vital, Bergson), which lets out of itself the Sāṁśāra (vṛṣṛ 'gō) or jāgat (v'gam, 'ever-moving') and through his essential savor (rāsa) sustains it (cp. RV. IX. 113). The Vedic Aryans prized this Sōma uppermost; and stimulated by this they broke into accents the parallel of which is seldom found in world literature.

There occur not a few stanzas in the RV. which sing of the glories of the Sōma; but its ninth Book is wholly devoted to its rapturous glorification. In the hymns of this book the poet’s intuition reaches high watermark—for it is here that we find real intuitive knowledge i.e. that ‘knowledge of act’ which spontaneously flows into poetic activity as God does into what it creates (X. 82.5); and a poet is indeed a miniature Prajāpati whose intuition is like God’s creative urge purely formative and forming. It is such a state of the poet’s mind which flows into real poetry and it is this virgin poetry, at once pictorial and eloquent, which we find in the ninth book of the RV.

This intuition and the spiritual ecstasy created by it reach their highest when the Vedic sages sing of the glories of Sōma not as a drink, nor as a plant, but as the supreme symbol of the settled order (ṛtā=Tao; see Tao Te Ching ch. XXV. op. rā-tha vṛ 'go') and the vigour that sustains it. This is indeed what constitutes the fundamental dhárman or dhárma, and this is Vedic ṛtā or krātu (=cracy) or power “that keeps the great churn going” and the aptest symbol of this creative force is Sōma.

The Aryans have expressed the principle of ‘motion’ by the root vṛṣṛ; and it is from this root that they have derived words like sāṁśāra (=jāgat ‘ever-moving’), Sarīt ‘river’, Sailihan ‘water’, Saranyū ‘quickly moving’, sārapas ‘fast-running’, Sarámā (dūtīv du ‘run’) and Sarāyu (= Sarīt, name of a river). On RV. III. 53.15-16 Sāyaṇa is right in explaining Sasarpārī by “sarpāsīlā vāṁ”; and in doing so he has aptly hinted at an unbroken Indian tradition regarding the nature of sound for which cp. Brhaddevatā IV. 115-116. We derive the word Sārās from vṛṣṛ and equate it with Sōma that ‘sets the great churn going’. The term drapsā hints at this meaning and the legend referred to in the RV. and Brhaddevatā implies it.

The foregoing discussion insures for us the equation: Arṇsu-māti = Sārāsvatī and the meaning of the word Sārāsvatī as ‘rich in
Sóma' and not 'rich in waters', which perhaps she never was. And the moment we seize this import of the word Sárasvatí the real basis of the name Brahmávártat becomes clear to our mind—for it was truly in this region of the Kúrus that the Aryan ritual, based upon Sóma, was evolved; and it was this characteristic Aryan dhárma that bestowed on this holy region the name Dharma-Kśetra, with which the first verse of the Bhagavad-Gítá opens. There is clear evidence that it was in the country of the Kúrus that the great Bráhmaṇas were composed. According to ŚB. III. 2.3.15 speech has its real abode in the land of the Kúrus, and according to ŚB. 1.7.28, Śáňkháyanaśrautasútra XV. 3.15 and Látyáyanaśrautasútra VIII. 11.18 the mode of sacrifice among the Kurupañcálas was the best in the country. According to RV. III. 23 Deváśravas and Deváváta, the two Kauravá Kings, kindled fire on the Drádvadví, the Apáyá, and the Sárasvatí, that is in the sacred region of the Kurukśetra about which is said in the Mahábhárata:

\[
\text{trayáñám api lokáñám Kurukṣetram viśiṣyate /}
\text{páṃsavo'pi Kurukṣetrád váyuná samudēritah //}
\text{api duśkr̥takarmáñám nayanti paramáñ gatim //}
\text{dakśiññena sarasvatá uttara报案 đr̥sadvatim //}
\text{ye vasanti Kurukṣetre te vasanti triviśtape /}
\text{Kurukṣetre gamārthaṃ Kurukṣetre vasāmy aham //}
\text{apý.ekáṃ vácam utsr̥jya sarvapāpāih pramucyate /}
\text{brahmavedi Kurukṣetram puṇyāṃ brahmaśiṣevitaṃ //}
\text{tasmin vasanti ye martyrā na te śocye kathaṁcana //}
\text{tarantukārantukayor yad antaram}
\text{rāmahradānām ca macakrukasya ca /}
\text{etat Kurukṣetrasamantapañcakam}
\text{pitāmahasyottaravedir ucyate //}
\]

Vana-Parva 83.203-207.

See also:

\[
\text{vedī prajāpater eṣā samantāt pañcayojana /}
\text{kuro r vai yajñaśilasya kṣetram etan mahātmanaḥ //}
\]

Vana-Parva 129.22; 129-130.

And it was again this dharmakśetra, where king Náhuṣa, wishing to consecrate himself for a thousand years, settled on the bank of the holy Sárasvatí after the rivers of other regions had expressed their inability to help him in his mighty venture as is narrated by Bháhaddevatá (VI. 20-24 + RV. VII 95-96):—
Brhaddevata (VII. 155, 157, VIII. 1-9 RV. X. 198) has immortalized the holy legend of Devâpi and Santanu, the two great kings of this region with the emphasis on the extraordinary spirit of renunciation shown by Devâpi for which cp. Viṣṇu Purâṇa IV. 20.24–30.

And I insist on this conclusion on the basis of the term Kuru, which, to my mind, is singularly apt and illuminating. I derive it from the root v'ku 'sing', which gives us also kavi meaning 'a sage', an artist who, being bitten by Poetry cryingly bursts into music. How apt is it then that the Kûrus, the wise men of the north, resorted to Sûma or Amsû, as the source of divine animation; or to put it still better in the words of the RV. and Brhad-devatâ that the Sûma itself sought shelter among them—for they were a people gifted with high imagination and knew how to handle, with reason-gloved hands, the burning accents of rhythm and rhyme.

And there is purpose behind this legend. The location of Sûma, the symbol of striving, among the Kûrus implies a stress upon their gift of practical intellect, which worked itself into that syncretistic medley of beliefs and rituals into which, in the later centuries, was poured the more potent leaven of the Upaniṣadic
message, that arose in the east further from the region of the Kūrus, as is clear from the anecdotes regarding Videha Janaka of Mithilā and other saints mentioned in the Upaniṣads.

And it is by the net of these new connections which the two words Sāras and Sōma have thrown over things in recalling them, that we arrive at this enchanting vision of the Kūrus and their region, flooded and fertilized by the Sōma, that flashing stream of "song and sanctity". How thought shines and glows in this virile region. From generation to generation, a succession of Kūrus, the very breath of the people's imagination, till we arrive at the Bhagavad-Gītā which was not, in reality, the native voice of the Kūrus, and yet was spoken in their region by a man, who stole from nature herself, her secrets of life, and set them into songs that put heart into Ārjuna, when he found himself challenged by his own kith and kin, compelling him to see his perilous instant as a particle in the flow of time. This is Gītā, the 'Song celestial' that has been a guide and solace to struggling humanity, saving them from doubt and swerving and ringing them in as actors by the glorious light of the coming ever-lasting world.

III

From the point of view of motion sound may be as fast as light and sound is the attribute of the sky which is all-pervasive. In order to make the connection between sound and sky more intimate Sanskritists have termed the sky as nābhas, which means "producer or transmitter of the sound". The word is derived from āṅabh 'sound' and it is from āṅabh that we get abh-rā meaning 'cloud producing thunderous sound and raining', the reduction of syllabic nasal ṇ into a being due to the shift of accent on the suffix-rā. Taking into consideration the quick motion of sound Yāska, followed by others, has explained Sārasvati by "Sarpaṇaśilā vāṇī" and in this he is right.

But if Sāras means Sōma in Sārasvatī, meaning a river, it should have the same meaning in Sārasvatī as a name of speech. And the moment we realize this meaning of Sārasvatī (speech) a most propitious and purposeful aspect of speech heaves before our eyes, an aspect which the sages have rendered by such epithets of unmistakable significance as sūnṛta (sūnṛta), sūnāra (beautiful), ṛtambhara (sustaining settled order), Viśvārupa (all-formed), viśvam-invā (actuating all), and Sasarparī (fast-moving); for it was
such an inspired speech with which the sages worshipped their
gods (RV. I. 1137); and it is this Sārasvati, saturated with Sōma,
and therefore acting like a refreshing, rejuvenating and purifying
flood, that has been the sole vehicle of the Brahmanic thought
throughout these ages in contrast to the Prakrits that are poor in
force, in colour, and in variety and are stubbornly fixed in the least
connotations of their meaning and are, for that reason, used by the
common man of the land. It is this Sārasvati, the goddess of
speech inspired by Sōma, which we have been annually worshipping
since time immemorial.

The foregoing observations have raised a new issue of vital
significance. The same is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The RV. is noted for its grand invocations to Agni, Ādityā,
and Indra, but it is in the glorification of Indra that it captivates
us for ever. I'ndra is one of the oldest Aryan gods and he stands
for all that is grand and glorious. He is the husband of Śācī
(force and glory) and is the lord of Śōma (typified in X. 119) the
exhilarating nectar of the gods. The sages attribute Indra’s heroic
exploits to Sōma, invigorated with which he slays the demons
Vṛitra, Sāmbara and Īhi and lets loose rivers for the service of the
Aryan settlements.

Sārasvān is one of the well-known epithets of Indra where
again Sāras should mean Sōma and not ‘water’ as has been wrongly
taken by the author of the Brhad-devatā in :

"Sarāmsi ghṛtavanty asya
santi lokesu yat triṣu /
sarasvantam iti prāha
vācaṁ prāhuḥ sarasvatim"

Obviously, Sōma is the chief source of I'ndra’s strength and it
is this Sōma (= Sāras) that characterizes this particular name of
Indra as does vājra his other names: Vājrabāhu, Vājrahasta, and
Vajrīn.

In RV. VIII. 38.10 :

"āhāṁ sārasvatīrvar āvo vṛṇe /
yābhyaṁ gāyatṛāṁ ṛcyāte"

The word “sārasvatīrvar” is explained by Yābhyaṁ gāyatṛāṁ
ṛcyate” and this also is a hint at the real meaning of Sāras
(= Sōma).
The discussion about Sóma necessitates a few words about its dynamic vitality that leads its devotees to transreality.

RV. IV. 26 stands out as a unique contribution to Indian philosophy. It begins:

“ahām mānur abhavam sûryaś cā
hām kakṣivām ṣirector asmi vipraḥ /
ahām Kūtsam ārjuneyām ny ējye
hām kavir uśāṇā pāśyatā mā” //
ahām bhāmim adadām āryāyā—
hām vrṣṭim dāśuṣe márttyāya /
ahām apō anayāṁ vāvasānā
māma devāso ṣunu kētam āyan //
Aham puro mandasānō vy airm
nāva sākām navatīḥ šāmbarasya /
śatamatāṁ veśyāṁ sarvātātā
dīvodāsam atithīgvāṁ yād āvam //

These stanzas, by virtue of the exceptional force of their gaze turned inwards, typify the deepest philosophy of non-dualism; and there could be nothing more in the sphere of spiritualism than these assertions of the highest confidence and self-respect. “Māma devāso ṣunu kētam āyan” is a veiled hint at the historical event referred to above. In course of his search I'ndra finds out Sóma, drinks him to his heart’s content, and thereby becomes unconquerable singing:

“the winds that awakened the stars
are blowing through my blood.”

And all this is keyed up in RV. IV. 26.7:

ādāya śyenō abharat sómaṁ
sahāsraṁ savām ayūtam ca sākām /
ātrā pūramdhir ajahād ārāṭīr
māde sómasya mūrā āmrāḥ //

After finding Sóma, the wise Indra leaves the niggardly mortals far behind (in the race)—for then he is inspired by Sóma.

And imbued with that spiritual revelation, the poet Vāmādeva grasped the ultimate unity of his self with the God-made universe in a flash of reality bursting forth in its unforgettable individuality, but infinite in its import and echoing capacity, a perception of infinity in a tiny atom which we find in the famous English verse:
"To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower".

And I would hate to be too systematic about these high matters. Nevertheless they call forth to my mind the famous statement of Rimbaud "Je est un autre", "I is another". Curiously enough there is another saying of Lantreamont just the contrary, "si j' existe, je ne suis pas un autre", "if I exist, I am not another". The poetic philosophy of the Veda meditates between these two and RV. IV. 26 is the noblest expression of it—for it implies that subtle invasion of things into the spirit, near the centre of the soul, through Somatic emotion and effective union, by means of which real poetic intuition is born; and it knows all things as one—intentionally one—but one with the self, as resounding in the subjectivity. It is here, in this "widening oneself to be one with mankind" that we have to locate the compelling grandeur of the RV. IV. 26.

RV. IV. 26 then signalizes the high potency of the Sóma and hints at the vital significance of the term. We have proposed the equation of Sáras with Sóma and have seen that it is on account of the Sóma that Indra is called Sárásvān, and it is also on its account that Sárasvatī (=Amśumātī) has received this appellation.

We have now before us the antecedents and components of Sóma. There remains a word about its derivation. The one from √su 'press' is obvious; but we may also have it from √sū 'impel', which gives us words like 'Savitā' and 'Sāvitrī'. The two roots may have originally been one and it was perhaps later that the same root diverged into two; the root √su, becoming restricted to the action in the form of 'pressing' and conjugated in the—nu-class (su-nó-ti), while √su remained generalized in the sense of 'impelling', having its inflection in the accented -ā- class that is 'suvāti' and so on. Besides these two, we have yet another root √sū meaning 'beget, give birth to' or the same root in a different class which is conjugated in the root class, that is sū-te, suvāte and so on.

I should strike a fusion of the three roots in the word Sóma and as a consequence should read a sublimated and integrated meaning of the term, such as should make it possible for the expression of it to rise into poetry. And the moment we arrive at this integrated meaning of the three roots incompassed in the word

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Sóma, an enlarging change in our spiritual vision takes place, when Sóma reveals itself not as a mere plant, nor as mere fluid, but as the "right principle of action", (cp. X. 85, 1-5) which generates the universe, which keeps it going, and which is brewed or distilled from it through the poetic or mystic fervour in the form of basic savour which is signalized in :

"Raso vai saḥ / Rasam hy evāyaṁ labdhvānandī bhavati /

This is Sóma, the real spark of life about which I may quote :

"It lies like the one warm spark
in the heart of an arctic crystal".

This fusion of the roots in the word Sóma has been underlined by the RV. X-85 which opens :

Satyenottabhitā bhūmiḥ
suryenottabhitā dyāuḥ /
ṛtēndityās tiṣṭhanti
divī sōma ādhi śritāh //
Sōmenādityā balīnāḥ
Sōmena prthiviḥ mahiḥ /
ātho nākṣatratāṃ ēṣām
upāsthe sōma āhitaḥ //
Sōmanāḥ manyate papivān
yāt sampiṁśānty ēśadhim /
sōmanāṁ yāṁ brahmāṇo vidūr
nā tāsyāṁ ēti kāścanā //
ācchāvidhānair gupitō
bārhataḥ soma rakṣitāḥ /
grāvṇāṁ ēc chṛpyān tiṣṭhasi
nā te ēśāṁ ētī pārthīvah //
yāt tvā deva prapibanti
tāta ā pyāyake pūnāḥ /
vāyūḥ sōmasya rakṣitā
sāmāntāṁ māsa ākṛtiḥ //

These stanzas graphically signify the compact meaning of the term Sóma as spiritual elan and plant in one; but the real dash is for the Absolute, which is beyond the reach of the worldly man. Yet, the point I wish to make clear, is, that stanzas 1st and 5th have a patent reference to the moon as Sóma; and this is because it impels the world into animation and sends a flow of emotion in the
fabric of the dreaming world, as seems implied in Vāyu Purāṇa I. 23.82-83:

Somaś ca mantrasamīyukto
yasmān mama mukhāc cyutaḥ /
jīvaḥ prāṇabhṛtām brahmaṇ
sarvaḥ pūtvā stanaīr dhṛtam //
tasmāt somamayaṁ caikad
amṛtaṁ caiva samjñitam /
catuśpādā bhaviṣyanti
śvetatvaṁ cāsyas tena tat //

(For details of Soma’s birth cp. Vāyu Purāṇa II. 18.)

And the moment we signalize this aspect of the moon we at once bring it nearer to the sun, which is called Sav-itār ‘impeller’; and thereby evolve a unity of the two based upon the significance of the root v’su ‘impel’; and it is this unity of the two, which is typified in RV. X. 85.19:

nāvo-navo bhavati jáyamānō
‘hnām ketūr uśāsām ety āgram /
bhāgāṁ dévebhyo ví dadhāty āyān
prā candrāmās tirate dīrghām āyuḥ //

(He, born afresh, is new and new forever; ensign of days he goes before mornings. Coming, he orders for the gods their portion. The moon prolongs the days of our existence.)

And this moon, rhythmically expanding and contracting, is, perhaps the best illustration of the Chinese philosophy of K’ai-ho, according to which when you expand (K’ai) you must think of the gathering up (ho) or else you will fly apart through the explosive tendency of creativity, and your structural harmony will vanish; and when you pull the parts together (ho) you should think of the vital force, which gave them birth (K’ai) or else the result will be a dead thing, devoid of spirit.

And, if, in RV. X. 85.19 it is the moon, that symbol of Rta (= tao + K’ai-ho) which is praised as revealing itself into the moon and the sun, in RV. I. 115.5 it is the sun, who assumes this role:

tán mitrāśya vārunasyābhīcākṣe
sūryo rūpām kṛnute dyōr upāṣthe /
anantāṁ anyād rūṣad aṣya pājaḥ
kṛṣṇāṁ anyād dharītaḥ sāṁ bharanti //
Sáras, Sóma and Sírd

(In the sky’s lap the sun this form assumeth, that Váruṇa and Mitrá may behold it. His Bay steeds well maintain his power eternal, at one time bright and darksome at another.)

And so the ‘impelling sense’ which is immanent in both the sun and the moon, is a step that leads to their ultimate unity; and this is so aptly mirrored in the word só-ma.

Sóma’s identification with Mádhú (IX. 50.3; 51.3; 72.2) is a favourite topic with the Védā, while, conversely, Mádhú has been frequently called Sóma, because it is pressed out of the hive and has therefore received this appellation.

And it is this Sóma, the supreme ideal of action in love, from which existence proceeds, and which is in things, as it were, the secret of creative sources, that has inspired the saints of all lands and ages, and it is this dynamic savour that has quickened their utterances into life eternal. Even a tiny drapsá (drop) of this savour is enough to invest everything the poet sees with an inexhaustible fullness and value; and it is only then that the poet’s eye, grafted on his heart, begins to read deeply into the bosom of the universe, and enables his rapturous imagination to comprehend the order of all things and every thing in the light of the Whole.

Let us now pass on to the next paragraph, where this meaning of Sóma and Sáras is made still more unmistakably clear.

VI

RV. II. 3.8 is a unique landmark in the history of Indian philosophy;—

“Sárasvatī sādháyantī dhīyaṁ na
iqā devī’ bháratī viśváturtih /
tisrō devī’ḥ svadhāyāḥ barhīr ēdām
āchidrāṁ pāantu śaranām niśādya” //

This invocation divides speech into three varieties, i.e. Idā, Sárasvatī and Bháratī and calls upon them to participate in the sacrifice of the worshipper.

In RV. I. 188.8;—

“bháratīde Sárasvatī
yā vah sárvā upabruvē /
tā naś codayata śriyē” //

a request is made to the three goddesses for wealth and welfare. RV. I. 13.9, 142.9. II. 1.11; 32.8 constitute a prayer to the three
varieties of speech, while RV. II. 1.11d seems to establish a close relation between Vṛtraḥ (=Śārasvān = Indra) and Śārasvatī, which becomes clear in RV. III. 4.8 (VII. 2.8):

```
“ā bhāratī, bhāratībhīh sajōṣā
īḍā devāṁ manuṣyēbhir āgnih /
Śārasvatī sārasvatēbhir arvāk
tīrō devāṁ bharhīr ēdāṁ sadantu //
```

This stanza invokes the three goddesses along with the deities belonging to the terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial spheres. It should be easy to interpret Iḍā as the terrestrial speech, symbolizing that knowledge which enables us to earn our livelihood; and this is exactly the connotation of Iḍā, īrā, īlā, īṣ all meaning nourishment. A connection between Śārasvatī and the atmospheric Śārasvatī (+ Indra) was suggested by RV. II. 1.11d; this is now confirmed by d of the stanza under discussion, according to which Śārasvatī represents the atmospheric speech and symbolizes the knowledge of diverse rituals, which, when rightly performed, lead us to heaven for a temporary spell of bliss. Bhāratī represents the celestial speech and she symbolizes the knowledge par excellence. This knowledge being derived from the Sun is a sort of illumination, an awakening, which leads us to niḥśreyasa or nirvāṇa; for bharatā means Sun and Sun is the embodiment of light and life divine.

In order to attain material advancement men have developed diverse sciences; Iḍā denotes all these—for objects obtained through these sciences bedew our senses with physical pleasures and enable us to live this earthly life with satisfaction. Indian sages have never included such sciences in the knowledge par excellence, so much so that the Īsopaniṣat passes them over in silence mentioning only two: Aparā vidyā and parā vidyā. By aparā is meant Karmakāṇḍa and this is exactly the sphere of Śārasvatī, the goddess of speech dealing with Śāraś, i.e. the Soma. the Muṇḍakopaniṣad I. 14 too lays down a similar division of knowledge and includes in the Aparā vidyā the four Vēdas together with their subsidiary texts; in fact, all what administers to Karmakāṇḍa. By parā vidyā is meant Bhāratī, the knowledge par excellence obtained from the Sun as the source of light, the exclusive vehicle of the gods, the real devayāna, travelling by which men never return to the physical life again.
The threefold gradation of Iḍā, Śārāsvatī and Bhārati should explain the corresponding threefold divisions of the Veda (Brāhmaṇa, Aranyakā and Upaniṣad and should afford an insight into the Aryan mind which had an ingrained preference for the number three and its multiples (see RV. 1.34; III. 56) and accordingly conceived the idea of God as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa, of Kālā as past, present, and future, of attributes as Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas; of loka as terrestrial, atmospheric, and celestial, and of the ultimate principle as Satyā, Śivā, and Sundara.

Iḍā, Śārāsvatī and Bhārati are symbolized in the three Vyāhṛtis, i.e. Bhūḥ, Bhūvah, Svāḥ of the Gāyatri stanza, which therefore becomes the supreme essence of the Veda and is so much prized in the spiritual field. For standing at the confluence of the three streams of bhūḥ (Iḍā), bhūvaḥ (Śārāsvatī), and Svāḥ (=Bhārati), this holy triped Gāyatri cleanses our sins and grants us boons to our heart’s desire. This Gāyatri is the sign and token par excellence of the holy word, which is called ‘go’ in the Veda and is glorified with an array of imagery and eloquence seldom met with elsewhere. RV. I. 164 illustrates the point I have in mind—for it is here that the Vedist has soared “to Paradise to ease his breast of melodies” and has tried to grapple with the source of speech, its form, and music, which begins where the word stops.

   kathāṁ tvayi sthitāṁ brahma jagac cedam aśeṣataḥ /
   Orīkāraś Sarasastraiś tām yathu devi sthirasthiram //
   tatra mātrātrayaṁ sarvam asti yad devi nāsti ca /
   trayo lokāṁ trayo vedāṁ trayāṇi śravaṇaṁ pāvakaṭram //
   tripi jyotiṁi varṇās ca trayo dharmāgamāṁ tathā /
   trayo guṇās trayah śabdās trayo vedāṁ tathāśramāḥ //
   trayah kālāṁ tathāśvasthāḥ pitaro ‘harmiśadavāḥ //
   etan mātrātrayaṁ devi tava rūpaṁ sarasvatī //
   See also 43.8-14.

2. Cp. Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa 101,23.27:—
   tanmukhād om iti mahan abhūc chando mahāmune /
   tato bhūṣ tu bhuvas tasmāt tataś ca svar anantaram //
   etā vyāhṛtayās tisrāḥ svārūpāṇaṁ tad vivasvataḥ /
   Om ity asmāt svarūpāṁ tu sūkṣmāraṁ raveḥ param //
   tato mahar iti sthalāṁ ganaṁ sthūlataramāṁ tataḥ /
   tatas tapas tataḥ satyam iti mūrtāṁ saṁpadhaḥ //
   sthitāṁ tasya rūpāṁ bhavanti na bhavanti ca /
   Svaḥbhāvaḥ-bhāvayor bhāvaṁ yata gacchanti saṁśayan //
   ādyamānāṁ yat paramāṁ sūkṣmaṁ arūpāṁ paramāṁ sthitam /
   Om ity uktam mayā vipra tat paramāṁ brahmānaṁ tadvapuḥ //

9 [ Annals B. O. R. I. ]
The Vāyu Purāṇa (I. 23) gives a beautiful description of this gō:—

\[
\begin{align*}
t&\text{tato dhyānagatas tatra} \\
b&\text{brahma māheśvarīṁ parām} \\
ap&\text{apaśyad gām virūpam ca} \\
&\text{maheśvaramukhacyutām // 5 //} \\
c&\text{catuspadāṁ caturvāktraṁ} \\
c&\text{caturhasṭāṁ catuḥstānīṁ} \\
c&\text{caturnetrāṁ catuḥṣṛūgīṁ} \\
c&\text{caturdamāṭṛāṁ caturmukhīṁ} \\
c&\text{dvātrimśalokasanyuktām} \\
i&\text{iśvarīṁ sarvatomukhīṁ // 6 //} \\
\end{align*}
\]

* * * *

Brahmā lokanamaskāryah
prapadya tāṁ māheśvarīṁ /

gāyatrīṁ tu tato raundīṁ
dhyātvā brhmā suyantītaḥ // 11 //

ity etāṁ vaidikīṁ vidyāṁ
raundīṁ gāyatrīṁ arpitāṁ /

javitvā tu mahādevīm
rudaḥlokanamaskṛtāṁ /

prapannas tu mahādevam
dhyānayuktena cetasa // 12 //
tatā tasya mahādevī
divyaṁ yogam punah śmṛtā /

tāśvaryaṁ jñānasahāpattīṁ
vairāgyaṁ ca dādau punah // 13 //

See also 23.40 and 49:—

ṣaḍvīṁśat tadgūnā hy eṣā
dvātrimśāksarasannītīṁ /

prakṛτīṁ viddhi tāṁ brahma

tvatprāṣūtiṁ māheśvarīṁ // 49 //

saśa bhāgavatī devī
tvatprāṣūtīṁ svayambhuvaḥ /
caturmukhī jagadyoṁī
drakṛt gauḥ prakṛtīta // 50 //

ajām ekāṁ lohitāṁ suklakṛṣṇāṁ

viśvaṁ sampraṣāmānāṁ surūpāṁ /

ajoḥāṁ vai buddhimāṁ viśvarūpāṁ
gāyatrīṁ gām viśvarūpāṁ hi buddhvā // 51 //
To-day we take our language as an instrument of exploration and communication, a very delicate instrument, liable in all sorts of subtle ways to break down and we are also flexibly aware of what tricky and slippery creatures our words in reality are. That is not so with the Vedists. For them speech is an end in itself, the ultimate reality speaking forth its soul through these sparks of audible sound; the ultimate pattern of music residing at the single root of the powers of the universal soul. And, it is, thus, that Prayer, that potent instrument of the Vedist is couched in speech; and the Lord of Prayer and Speech alike is Bṛhaspāti, who is significantly invoked in the "Knowledge Hymn" of the RV. X. 71 which begins:

\[\text{bṛhaspate prathamām vācō āgrām} \\
\text{yat prairata nāmadheyam dadhānāḥ} / \\
\text{yad eśāṁ śrésṭhāṁ yād aripāṁ āsīt} \\
\text{prenā tād eśāṁ niḥitam gūhāvīḥ} //
\]

O Bṛhaspāti, when men, giving names to objects, sent out Vāks first and earliest utterances, all that was excellent and spotless, treasured in secret, became manifest through their affection.

1. Bṛhas-pāti, as lord of the winged word is explained by Chāndogya (II. 2.1) as:

\[\text{tena tāṁ ha bṛhas-pātir udgātham upāsāṁ cakre} / \text{etam u eva bṛhas-pāṭīṁ} \\
\text{manyante} / \text{vāg vai bṛhatī} / \text{tasyā eva patiḥ} //
\]

This is confirmed by Bṛhadāraṇyaka III. 20:—

\[\text{eṣā u eva bṛhas-pāṭīṁ} / \text{vāg vai bṛhati tasyā eṣa patiḥ} / \text{tasmād u bṛhas-pāṭīṁ} //
\]

See also Bṛhad-devatā II. 39-40:—

\[\text{bṛhatau pāti yal lokāv} \\
\text{eṣa dvau madhyamottamau} / \\
\text{bṛhatā karaṇāṁ tena} \\
\text{bṛhaspātir itīritaḥ} //
\]

Brahma vāg brahma satyāṁ ca \\
brahma sarvam idam jagat / 
patām brahmaṇaṁ tena 
śunahotraḥ stuvān jagau //

Bṛhas-pāti is the lord of all the three varieties of speech, which are called his three seats in RV. IV. 50 1 (triṣaḍhaṁstḥ) for which cp. Bṛhad-devatā III. 14:—

\[\text{saiṣā tu trividhā vāg' vai} \\
\text{divi ca vyomni cēha ca} / \\
\text{vyāstā caiva samastā ca} \\
\text{bhajaty agnīṁ imāṇ api} //
\]

Bṛhad-devatā V. 98-102 conceives Bṛhaspāti's birth from Āṅgiras, who was born out of the contents of vāk, thrown into fire.
Now, this origin of speech, this evolving relationship between name and form is a thing of the utmost wonder and mystery for the Vedist and he has tried all possible words to unravel it; if words can ever reveal what is beyond form and feeling. RV. X. 108 is apt in this respect, where Śāraṁā, the emissary of the gods, goes out in search of the gòs, but is slighted by the paṇīs, who guard the enclosure of these cows.

This legend of the cows, Paṇīs, and Bṛhaspāti is a favourite topic of the Vedists and it raises a question of the utmost importance: what these cows in reality are?

And here the one fact that in all these contexts the god of the cows is Bṛhaspāti, who comes to their rescue and liberates them from their gūhā, (enclosure) should be enough to clear the point—for it establishes the fact that the cows under reference are none else than the speech presided over by Bṛhaspāti, in its diverse forms and patterns and that a study of its origin and growth and also of the art of its handling is the highest aim of life for a Vedist.

Remember that go of the Vedist is, strictly speaking “the speech of the song, the speech of poetry”; that flesh-and-blood of our daily idiom, which is rarest—for it is also the closest to our soul. It arises in the deepest depths of our soul, “the quiet mysterious depths” about which Carlyle spoke so illuminatingly in his Essays (page 9). For, in poetry the man concentrates or retires into the inmost depth of human reality. There he penetrates through quietude: not indeed through the illusory quietude of idleness and void of thought but through that infinite quietude in which all energies and relations are at play. It is from that inmost depth that the music of poetry arises, that spontaneous outburst of words which we hardly recognize as our own—for it is released in a moment of glow when we get free from our strong habitual barriers, which quickly reform themselves the moment that poetic glow is over. We feel in our poetical moments as if some heavy obstruction is momentarily whisked away from the spring of our life. This is what is meant by the gūhā, this cave of the inmost depth, where we repose ourselves before bursting into poetic bloom; and this is exactly what is meant by the release of the cows from the cave or enclosure in RV. IV. 50.5 (see also AV. XX. 8.91):—
But if in these contexts—and they are many and vital, the word go signifies Vák, there are contexts in which its patent meaning is cow, the animal. In this latter sense the word gó is to be derived from the root गाः ‘go’; and the moment we arrive at this fusion of the roots meaning ‘sing’ and ‘go’ in the word ‘gó’ a peculiar image of an animal representing ‘harmony of music in motion’ heaves before our eyes and we get at the real basis of the universal veneration that is accorded to the cow, the animal par excellence.

Sóma, as source of speech is recurrently hymned in the 9th book of the RV., and his sound, in its various forms, is the favourite topic of the Vedists. Sav-ítár, as source of life, represented by the speech-world, is frequently worshipped by the Védâ; and this aspect of his is so beautifully typified by the word ravi (वृ ‘make sound’) meaning ‘one who creates sound’. The word rav-i throws light on the very source of sound i.e. the sun in its ceaseless march of creation and recreation. It is this ravi or rav-átha (RV. I. 100.13) of harmony, integration, and perfection, which is called “the song of the settled order” in RV. IV. 23.8 :—

र्तास्या श्लोको बधिराततादा
कार्ण बुधापाय शुचामाणा अयोः

which is explained by Brhad-devatā II. 43 as :—

रुवनान्तारसावि क्षीपतावि
स्थितो व्योमन्य एष माययाः
र्तास्या श्लोका इत्य एषा
पुनाः सानाम ततोब्रवित

The same mystic sound of the sun is referred to again in Brhad-devatā (II. 59-60) :

रुवन व्योमन्य उदयाम यति
क्रंतत्राद विस्रज्ञन अपाह
दुररवासम अहानाम
स्ववृंहनेऽरुववासिनि
यत् तु प्रच्यावयानं तति
घोषेना महात् मर्तम
तेन मर्त्युम इमाम संताम
स्तुति मर्त्युम इति स्वयं
It is this mystic holy speech to which a pointed reference is made in RV. X. 177.2:

\[
\text{patāṅgo vācaṁ mānasā bibharti} \\
\text{tām gandharvō'vadad gārbe antāḥ} \\
\text{tāṁ dyōtamānāṁ svaryāṁ manīśāṁ} \\
\text{ṛtāya padē kavāyo ni pānti} //
\]

Thus, the seed of the speech, in the form of the holy writ, is said to be residing in the Sun (Rā)v-i who actuates speech in the womb or interior of the man, whom when she has become manifest, the poets arrange melodiously in the seat of the holy order, i.e. the true divine beauty, pure, and clear, and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality or the colours and vanities of human life; i.e. the beauty of the Absolute. The same idea is repeated in RV. X. 189.3 (= AV. VI. 31.3) as:

\[
\text{trimsād dhāma vi rājati} \\
\text{vāk patāṅgāya dhīyate} //
\]

And with a higher import in AV. X. 8.33 as:

\[
\text{apurvēnesitā vācas} \\
\text{tā vadanti yathāyathām} / \\
\text{vādantīr yātra gacchanti} \\
\text{tād āhur brāhmaṇam mahāt} //
\]

Thus the Rav-i, as source of the holy speech, is hymned in the Vēda; and it is to this rāv-a or sound of ṛtā that reference is made by Brhad-devatā II. 81:

\[
\text{sūryāṁ eva satīṁ etāṁ} \\
\text{gaurīṁ vācaṁ sarasvatīṁ} / \\
\text{paśyāmo vaiśvadevēsu} \\
\text{nīpātēnaiva kevalāḥ} // \\
\text{yadā tu vāg bhavaty esā} \\
\text{sūryāmum lokam āśritā} / \\
\text{tathā sūktam uṣā bhūtvā} \\
\text{sūryā ca bhajate'khilam} // 
\]

It is this rāv-a which appears as sūryā in RV. X. 85. The sun, as embodiment of śabda-Brahma is hymned in the Viṣṇu-Purāṇa (II. 11) as:

\[
\text{yathā saptagane'py ekah} \\
\text{pradhānyenādhiko Raviḥ} // 6 //
\]
And it is this "music of harmony" which is praised by Shakespeare in the following lines:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica: look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vestiture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Merchant of Venice, Act V. 54-65.

And still more beautifully by Goethe in the opening lines of his Faust as:—

The sun-orb sings, in emulation,
'Mid brother-spheres, his ancient round:
His path predestined through Creation
He ends with step of thunder-sound.

See also Mārkanṭeyā Purāṇa 78.1-2, 10-15; 101.20-27; 102.1-22; and chapters 103-111 all hymning the glories of Ra-vi as source of the holy Vedic Vāk.

It is, thus, a unique method of the Vedist to compress vast and varied meanings in a word; this way of fusing more than one roots of diverse meanings into one word and then make it a symbol of more than one aspect of life as is clear from a study of the cognate word gā-tū meaning 'song' and 'way' in one.

The connection of Karmakāṇḍa, based upon Sāras (= Sōma) with agriculture and cow was early, long-continued, and at times intimate (RV. III. 55). A few observations regarding these may clear the point I wish to emphasize.

VII

RV. IV. 57.5 deals with the basis of human civilization:—

"Śūnāśīráv imám vácam juśethām
yád diví cakrāthuḥ payah /
tenémām úpa siścatam"

The stanza refers to the good earth, the heavenly milk, the plough-share, and prayer as requisites of agriculture, which leads mankind to civilization and social advancement. The word Síra is strikingly apt in its meaning—for derived from śi ‘bind’ it means the ploughshare, which ties the peasant to the earth, keeping him constantly busy with the seasonal round of toil on his plot of land, year in and year out, from generation to generation, and thereby distinguishes him from the food-gatherers and from the nomadic tribes, who because they are not attached to any special place, have left few footprints on the sands of time.
Imám of the RV. IV. 57.5d may as well refer to speech. If that is allowed, we shall be invoking Śuná and Sírá—the two presiding deities of agriculture—to bedew our speech with savour, for it is men endowed with sweet speech who are prompted to perform righteous acts as is implied in RV. III. 55.7:—

prá rányáni ranyaváco bharante /

The mutual relationship between speech and action is as immediate and as noiseless, as communication among mirrors; and it is this intimacy of connection between speech and act what is implied by RV. III. 55.7.

To what purpose am I submitting these observations about speech and agriculture? What is the conclusion they lead us to?

The one conclusion that follows from them is the intimate relationship between Sasarpári (= cow), agriculture, and prosperity. RV. III. 53.15 purports to describe Sasarpári as dispelling famine and bringing fame to the peasants (kṛṣ-ti, √kṛṣ ‘plough’) of the Fivefold Race. According to RV. III. 53.16 Sasarpári loudly bellows while bestowing imperishable fame on the gods. The latter expression clearly identifies Sasarpári (= Oserpis?) with the Cow (Hesis ‘Isis’ of later times), the divine incarnation of ‘word’ and the symbol of fertility and personal immortality. It is this cow banishing famine and bellowing immortal notes of life, which appears as Kāmadhenu in the famous Vaśiṣṭha-Visvāmitra legend and is the one real object of Gāthín’s longing prayers in the III book of the RV. To be sure this Sasarpári is Śarasvatí (√ṣṛ ‘move’, extension of √Sr ‘move’) the second variety of speech expressing man’s practical intellect in the form of Karmakāṇḍa; and Karmakāṇḍa has been pointedly described by our Dharma-sāstras to be the prime basis of agriculture embodying fruition and fertility; and it is for the requisites of agriculture that a prayer is addressed in the remaining stanzas of RV. III. 53.

And I repeat that the enduring fabrics of history are built only on the bowed shoulders of the peasant, stooping over space or plough, and that India’s vital history has been the history of the plough’s march from north to the south, an history of the art of working well coupled with the art of playing well; and our national literature is nothing if not an impassioned echo of the joyous shouts of this march and an image of all the colours of its possible happiness.
And when the primeval poet, charged with the eros which carries the dream of the world along to ceaseless births, renewals and swarming productivity, sang the glories of the wedlock of Sītā and Rāma he actually glorified the union of Śirā and Śunā (welfare=Rāma) and revealingly described the march of the rural Aryan culture from north to south. Vyāsa, the consummate compiler of the Purāṇas too rapturously rendered the same union of work and prosperity through the wedlock of Viṣṇu (Viṣ, 'be active') and Lākṣmī (Śrī=prosperity), while Mahābhārata's account of Śrīkṛṣṇa's dalliance with Rādhā (Rādh 'prosper') is an apt illustration of the intimate relation that exists between agriculture and human advancement.

Surely, it was not by accident that Vyāsa depicted Śrī-Kṛṣṇa as a cowboy and that our national poet Kālidāsa attributed the birth of Rāghu, the greatest Indian Emperor, to a boon from Nandini, the cow immortal. The two poets were never juster than in this masterly stroke, for they realized the vast potentialities of the cow as basis of agriculture, and as source of creative impulses. To the orderly man and to the tidy-minded woman cow is the one embodiment of the principle of selfless service on which alone the rule of a true democracy should rest. And what is more; the cow has patiently taught us the lesson of forbearance, simplicity, serenity and sanity which are lacking in modern life, in spite of its infinite power and variety. And although to a modern man it would all seem very elementary, yet, for us, Indians, this conception of the cow has been extraordinarily potent and fruitful—for out of it came an ideal of man, a perfect man, and a great moral system based upon charity, sanity and selfless service.

To be sure Vyāsa had a prophetic genius; and he looked away from what he was to what mankind was to become in the future cycles of civilization; and it was on this account that he warned mankind repeatedly emphasizing that an empire, which did not respect cow and agriculture would not flourish; while due regard to these was sure to win prosperity for both the ruler and the ruled. It was this rural universalism that led to the worship of Kṛṣṇa (Krṣ 'plough') as a cow-boy, ever longing to mingle with the lowly and ever expanding the implacable fecundity of becoming; and a rational study of the Kṛṣṇa-cult may prove to be of special assistance at this crucial point in the cultural evolution of our country.
Saras, Soma and Sira

The most significant point yet remains to be made. The root √si ‘bind’, from which we derive the terms Si-rä and si-ná (property) is highly significant—for while it typifies the ‘binding’ aspect of the ‘plough-share’ and ‘property’ it always carries a hint of the longing for liberation from them as bondage and ultimately leads to the ideals of renunciation and disinterested action i.e. Karmayoga. Imbued with these ideals a man turns away from matter and pursues with undistracted ardour the search for good, in all its forms, not for result or accidental advantages but for itself, disregarding the lesser ideals of money, position, and power and content with nothing less than the best of which human nature is capable.

And who was it that propounded this magnificent philosophy? It was Śrī-Kṛṣṇa the cow-boy, the brother of Haladhara (“wielder of the ploughshare”) a man of intense action with no longing for its reward; indeed a true child of the cow immortal.

Saras, Soma, Sarasvatī, Bhāratī and Sīrā are an epitome and explanation of our national achievement; and if anyone wanted a motto for a history of our stable civilization, they might serve his purpose—for it was indeed through their integral totality that we have sought to attain Śu-ná, Viṣ-nu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the true representatives of universal prosperity based upon selfless labour.

Here, then, are some of the bold outlines of the traditional Indian philosophy of life. All this is in danger to-day. Let us learn from it. Let us preserve its spirit—for it is here that “You are going to visit men who are supremely men”.