Chapter XIII

Dawn and the Truth

Usha is described repeatedly as the Mother of the Cows. If then the cow is a Vedic symbol for the physical light or for spiritual illumination the phrase must either bear this sense that she is the mother or source of the physical rays of the daylight or else that she creates the radiances of the supreme Day, the splendour and clarity of the inner illumination. But we see in the Veda that Aditi, the Mother of the Gods, is described both as the Cow and as the general Mother; she is the Supreme Light and all radiances proceed from her. Psychologically, Aditi is the supreme or infinite Consciousness, mother of the gods, in opposition to Danu or Diti,¹ the divided consciousness, mother of Vritra and the other Danavas — enemies of the gods and of man in his progress. In a more general aspect she is the source of all the cosmic forms of consciousness from the physical upwards; the seven cows, sapta gāvah, are her forms and there are, we are told, seven names and seven seats of the Mother. Usha as the mother of the cows can only be a form or power of this supreme Light, of this supreme Consciousness, of Aditi. And in fact, we do find her so described in I.113.19, mātā devānāṁ aditer anikam, “Mother of the gods, form (or, power) of Aditi.”

But the illumining dawn of the higher or undivided Consciousness is always the dawn of the Truth; if Usha is that illumining dawn, then we are bound to find her advent frequently associated in the verses of the Rig Veda with the idea of the Truth, the Ritam. And such association we do repeatedly find. For, first of all, Usha is described as “following effectively the path of the Truth,” ṛtasya panthāṁ anveti sādhu. Here neither the ritualistic nor the naturalistic sense suggested for ṛtam can at

¹ Not that the word Aditi is etymologically the privative of Diti; the two words derive from entirely different roots, ad and di.
all apply; there would be no meaning in a constant affirmation that Dawn follows the path of the sacrifice or follows the path of the water. We can only escape from the obvious significance if we choose to understand by \textit{panthā r̥tasya} the path, not of the Truth, but of the Sun. But the Veda describes rather the Sun as following the path of Usha and this would be the natural image suggested to an observer of the physical Dawn. Moreover, even if the phrase did not clearly in other passages mean the path of the Truth, the psychological significance would still intervene; for the sense would then be that the dawn of illumination follows the path of the True or the Lord of the Truth, Surya Savitri.

We have precisely the same idea repeated but with still clearer and fuller psychological indications in I.124.3; \textit{r̥tasya panthām anveti sādha, praśnatinva na diśo mīnati}: “She moves according to the path of the Truth and, as one that knows, she limits not the regions.” \textit{Disah}, we may note, has a double sense; but it is not necessary to insist upon it here. Dawn adheres to the path of the Truth and because she has this knowledge or perception she does not limit the infinity, the \textit{br̥hat}, of which she is the illumination. That this is the true sense of the verse is proved beyond dispute, expressly, unmistakably, by a Rik of the fifth Mandala (V.80.1) which describes Usha \textit{dyutad-yāmānāṁ br̥hatāṁ r̥tēna r̥tavārīṁ śvar āvahāntīm}, “of a luminous movement, vast with the Truth, supreme in (or possessed of) the Truth, bringing with her Swar.” We have the idea of the Vast, the idea of the Truth, the idea of the solar light of the world of Swar; and certainly all these notions are thus intimately and insistently associated with no mere physical Dawn! We may compare VII.75.1, \textit{vyuṣā āvo divijā r̥tēna, āvīśkṛtyānāṁ mahimānaṁ āgāt}; “Dawn born in heaven opens out things by the Truth, she comes manifesting the greatness.” Again we have Dawn revealing all things by the power of the Truth and the result described as the manifestation of a certain Vastness.

Finally we have the same idea described, but with the use of another word for Truth, \textit{satyā} which does not, like \textit{r̥tam}, lend itself to any ambiguity, \textit{satyā satyebhir mahati mabadbhir}
devī devebhir (VII.75.7), “Dawn true in her being with the gods who are true, vast with the Gods who are vast.” This “truth” of the Dawn is much insisted upon by Vamadeva in one of his hymns, IV.51; for there not only does he speak of the Dawns “encompassing the worlds immediately with horses yoked by the Truth,” ṛtayugbhir aśvaiḥ (cf. VI.65.2) but he speaks of them as bhadrā ṛtājātasatyāḥ, “happy, and true because born from the Truth”; and in another verse he describes them as “the goddesses who awake from the seat of the Truth.”

This close connection of bhadrā and ṛta reminds us of the same connection of ideas in Madhuchchhandas’ Hymn to Agni. In our psychological interpretation of the Veda we are met at every turn by the ancient conception of the Truth as the path to the Bliss. Usha, the dawn of the illumination of the Truth, must necessarily bring also the joy and the beatitude. This idea of the Dawn as the bringer of delight we find constantly in the Veda and Vasishtha gives a very positive expression to it in VII.81.3, yā vahasi puruṣpārham ratnam na dāsuṣe mayāḥ, “thou who bearest to the giver the beatitude as a manifold and desirable ecstasy.”

A common Vedic word is the word sūṇṛtā which Sayana interprets as “pleasant and true speech”; but it seems to have often the more general sense of “happy truths”. Dawn is sometimes described as ṛtāvāri, full of the Truth, sometimes as sūṇṛtāvāri. She comes uttering her true and happy words, sūṇṛtā irayantī. As she has been described as the leader of the radiant herds and the leader of the days, so she is described as the luminous leader of happy truths, bhāsvatī netrī sūṇṛtānām (I.92.7). And this close connection in the mind of the Vedic Rishis between the idea of light, of the rays or cows, and the idea of the truth is even more unmistakable in another Rik, I.92.14, gomatī aśvāvati vibhāvāri . . . sūṇṛtāvati, “Dawn with thy shining herds, with thy steeds, widely luminous, full of happy truths.” A similar but yet more open phrase in I.48.2 points the significance of this collocation of epithets, aśvāvatīr gomatīr viśvasuvidāḥ, “Dawns with their swiftnnesses (horses), their radiances (herds), rightly knowing all things.”
These are by no means all the indications of the psychological character of the Vedic Dawn that we find in the Rig Veda. Dawn is constantly represented as awakening to vision, perception, right movement. “The goddess,” says Gotama Rahugana, “fronts and looks upon all the worlds, the eye of vision shines with an utter wideness; awakening all life for movement she discovers speech for all that thinks,” viśvasya vācam avidan manāyoh (I.92.9). We have here a Dawn that releases life and mind into their fullest wideness and we ignore the whole force of the words and phrases chosen by the Rishi if we limit the suggestion to a mere picture of the reawakening of earthly life in the physical dawning. And even if here the word used for the vision brought by the Dawn, caksūḥ, is capable of indicating only physical sight, yet in other passages it is ketuh which means perception, a perceptive vision in the mental consciousness, a faculty of knowledge. Usha is pratetāḥ, she who has this perceptive knowledge. Mother of the radiances, she has created this perceptive vision of the mind; gavāṁ janitri akṛta pra ketum (I.124.5). She is herself that vision,—“Now perceptive vision has broken out into its wide dawn where nought was before,” vi nūnām ucchād asati pra ketuh (I.124.11). She is by her perceptive power possessed of the happy truths, cikitvit-sūṁrāvari (IV.52.4).

This perception, this vision is, we are told, that of the Immortality, amṛtasya ketuḥ (III.61.3); it is the light, in other words, of the Truth and the Bliss which constitute the higher or immortal consciousness. Night in the Veda is the symbol of our obscure consciousness full of ignorance in knowledge and of stumblings in will and act, therefore of all evil, sin and suffering; light is the coming of the illuminated higher consciousness which leads to truth and happiness. We find constantly the opposition of the two words duritam and suvitam. Duritam means literally stumbling or wrong going, figuratively all that is wrong and evil, all sin, error, calamity; suvitam means literally right or good going and expresses all that is good and happy, it means especially the felicity that comes by following the right path. Thus Vasishtha says of the goddess (VII.78.2), “Dawn
comes divine repelling by the Light all darknesses and evils,” viśvā tamāṁśi duritā; and in a number of verses the goddess is described as awakening, impelling or leading men to right going, to the happiness, suvitāya.

Therefore she is the leader not only of happy truths, but of our spiritual wealth and joy, bringer of the felicity which is reached by man or brought to him by the Truth, eṣā netri rādhasah sūrtānām (VII.76.7). This wealth for which the Rishis pray is described under the figure of material riches; it is gomad aśvāvad viravad or it is gomad aśvāvad rathavac ca rādhah. Go, the cow, aśva, the horse, prajā or apatya, the offspring, nṛ or vīra, the man or hero, hiranya, gold, ratha, the chariot, śravas, — food or fame, according to the ritualist interpretation, — these are the constituents of the wealth desired by the Vedic sages. Nothing, it would seem, could be more matter-of-fact, earthy, material; these are indeed the blessings for which a race of lusty barbarians full of vigorous appetite, avid of earth’s goods would pray to their primitive gods. But we have seen that hiranya is used in another sense than that of earthly gold. We have seen that the “cows” return constantly in connection with the Dawn as a figure for the Light and we have seen that this light is connected with mental vision and with the truth that brings the bliss. And aśva, the horse, is always in these concrete images of psychological suggestions coupled with the symbolic figure of the cow: Dawn is gomatīa aśvatī. Vasishtha has a verse (VII.77.3) in which the symbolic sense of the Vedic Horse comes out with great power and clearness,—

Devānāṁ ca kṣuḥ subhagā vahanti,
śvetān nayanti sudṛśikam aśvam;
Usā adarśi raśmibhir vyaktā,
icāmghāh viśvam anu prabhūtā.

“Happy, bringing the gods’ eye of vision, leading the white Horse that has perfect sight, Dawn is seen expressed entirely by the rays, full of her varied riches, manifesting her birth in all things.” It is clear enough that the white horse (a phrase applied to the god Agni who is the Seer-Will, kavikratu, the
perfectly-seeing force of divine will in its works, V.1.4) is entirely symbolical\(^2\) and that the “varied riches” she brings with her are also a figure and certainly do not mean physical wealth.

Dawn is described as \(\text{gomat} \overline{\text{i}} \text{aśvāvatī vīravatī}\); and since the epithets \(\text{gomat} \overline{\text{i}}\) and \(\text{aśvāvatī}\) applied to her are symbolical and mean not “cowful and horsed”, but radiant with illuminations of knowledge and accompanied by the swiftnnesses of force, so \(\text{vīravatī}\) cannot mean “man-accompanied” or accompanied by heroes or servants or sons, but rather signifies that she is attended by conquering energies or at any rate is used in some kindred and symbolical sense. This becomes quite evident in I.113.18, \(yā \text{gomatīr} \text{ūsasāḥ sarvavīrāḥ ... tā aśvadā aśnavat somasutvā}\). It does not mean “the Dawns that have cows and all men or all servants, those a man, having offered the Soma, enjoys as horse-givers.” The Dawn is the inner dawn which brings to man all the varied fullnesses of his widest being, force, consciousness, joy; it is radiant with its illuminations, it is accompanied by all possible powers and energies, it gives man the full force of vitality so that he can enjoy the infinite delight of that vaster existence.

We can no longer take \(\text{gomad aśvāvad vīravad rādhah}\) in a physical sense; the very language of the Veda points us to quite another truth. Therefore the other circumstances of this god-given wealth must be taken equally in a spiritual significance; the offspring, gold, chariots are symbolical; \(\text{śravāś}\) is not fame or food, but bears its psychological sense and means the higher knowledge which comes not to the senses or the intellect, but to the divine hearing and the divine vision of the Truth; \(\text{rādho dirghaśuttamam, rayim śravasyum}\) is that rich state of being, that spiritually opulent felicity which turns towards the knowledge (\(\text{śravasyu}\)) and has a far-extended hearing for the vibrations of the Word that comes to us from the regions (\(\text{diśah}\)) of the Infinite. Thus the luminous figure of the Dawn liberates

\(^2\) The symbolism of the horse is quite evident in the hymns of Dirghatamas to the Horse of the Sacrifice, the hymns of various Rishis to the Horse Dadhikravan and again in the opening of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in which “Dawn is the head of the Horse” is the first phrase of a very elaborate figure.
us from the material, ritual, ignorant misunderstanding of the Veda which would lead us stumbling from pitfall to pitfall in a very night of chaos and obscurity; it opens to us the closed door and admits to the heart of the Vedic knowledge.