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# AN INDIAN PROMETHEUS?

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1. The idea that Vedic mythology had a counterpart to the Greek myth of the Titan Prometheus, who stole the fire from Zeus for the benefit of men, is still current among Vedic scholars. It dates back to 1852, when Rudolph Roth in *Jâska's Nirukta sammt den Nighaṇṭavas*, p. 112, discussed Yāska's interpretation of Mātariśvan in the following words: 'Die Deutung von Mâtariçvan auf Vâju lässt sich aus den Texten nicht rechtfertigen und beruht wohl nur auf der Etymologie von W. çvan. Die zahlreichen Erwähnungen im Veda zeigen das Wort in zwei Deutungen. Einmal bezeichnet es Agni selbst ... sodann aber auch denjenigen, der ein anderer Prometheus das von der Erde verschwundene Feuer vom Himmel, von den Göttern herabholt und zu den Menschen, zu den Bhṛgu bringt ... Wie Prometheus der übermenschlichen Ordnung der Titanen angehört und nur darum den Funken im Himmel holen konnte, so ist Mâtariçvan zu jenen halbgöttlichen Geschlechtern zu rechnen, welche die vedische Sage bald in Gemeinschaft der Götter, bald auf Erden wohnen lässt ... Von diesen zwei Bedeutungen des Wortes Mâtariçvan scheint mir die erste, wonach es das Feuer selbst bezeichnet, die ursprüngliche zu sein.' Whatever the value may be of the etymological explanation 'in der Mutter schwellend', on which his last conclusion is based, it should in any case be noted that Roth himself seems to have been well aware of the weak foundation on which his interpretation of the myth rested. To the words 'von den Göttern herabgeholt' he added a special foot-note in which he referred to RS. III. 9. 5 and III. 5. 10 as the 'Hauptstellen'.

Seven years later a book was published which was to become one of the classics in the field of comparative mythology,[1] viz. *Die Herabkunft*

1. Cf. 'A. Kuhn's epoch-making essay' (Eggeling, *SBE*. XII, p. 294 n. 3). This is still true

*des Feuers und des Göttertrankes* (Berlin 1859) by Adalbert Kuhn. In the beginning of the first part (pp. 1–118) Kuhn rather perfunctorily dealt with 'die herabführung des Agni zu den menschen', for which he simply referred to Roth's 'ample discussion' (p. 5). He accepted without further comment Roth's equation of Mātariśvan and Prometheus, whose name he explained from Skt. *pramātha-* 'theft' and *pramantha-* 'twirler' (pp. 16–18, earlier in KZ. 4, p. 124). On p. 18 he concludes: 'Nach diesen vergleichungen bedarf es denn wohl kaum noch der ausdrücklichen erklärung, dass wir in dem feuerraub des Prometheus einen mythos anzuerkennen haben, der sich dem von Mâtariçvan klar zur seite stellt, wie ich denn auch bereits oben angegeben habe, dass auch Roth in diesem einen zweiten Prometheus sehe. Dass er aber mit ihm identisch sei, hoffe ich in der vorangehenden ausführung über seinen namen klar gemacht zu haben ...' The second part of his book (pp. 118–253) was devoted to 'Die herabholung des göttertranks'.

Kuhn was unquestionably right in treating the winning of Agni and Soma as two parallel myths. In various ways the Vedic myths express the idea that in the beginning Agni and Soma were in a world whose power of resistance *(vṛtrá-)* was impersonated by a dragon *(áhi-)*. The following reflexions on the Vedic myth are based upon the assumption that this world was an undifferentiated primeval unity, comparable to the Greek Chaos.[2]

Some myths imply that Agni and Soma were released from this primordial world even before Indra slew Vṛtra. In the Rigveda this is expressed in I. 93. 6: 'One (of you) Mātariśvan fetched from heaven, the other the eagle has stolen from the rock' *ā́nyaṃ divó mātaríśvā jabhārā́, 'mathnād anyám pári śyenó ádreḥ)*.[3] On the other hand it is said

in spite of all justified criticism of later generations, e.g., Vodskov, *Sjæledyrkelse og Naturdyrkelse* I (1890–1897), p. 127.

2. See further, e.g., *IIJ.* IV (1960), p. 219, 270, VIII (1964), p. 107.

3. See Johanna Narten, *IIJ.* IV (1960), p. 123. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, p. 221, denies that this connection of Agni and Soma was 'primitive'.

in one of the Saṃhitās that when Indra was about to slay the dragon, Agni and Soma warned him not to do so because they were in Vṛtra's womb. Cf. TS. II. 5. 2. 2–3 *mā́ prá hār, āvám antáḥ sva íti* and RS. III. 29. 14, where Agni is said to have been born from the womb of the Asura *(yád ásurasya jaṭhárād ájāyata)*. The mythological implication of this version of the Vedic Creation myth is, accordingly, that Agni and Soma had to be liberated from the primordial world before Indra could slay the dragon to found the dualistic cosmos. Many Vedic texts state, indeed, that Indra conquered Vṛtra with the help of Agni and Soma, cf. MS. II. 1. 3 (p. 5, 1) *agníṣómābhyāṃ vaí vīryèṇé 'ndro vṛtrám ahan* and KS. XXIV. 7 (p. 97, 18), KKS. XXXVII. 8 (p. 202, 20), TS. I. 6. 11. 6 = VI. 1. 11. 6 (and Keith's translation, p. 500 with n. 4), ŚB. II. 4. 4. 15, V. 2. 3. 7, AB. II. 3. 12.

In one of the most interesting cosmogonical hymns it is said that Agni, Soma and Varuṇa left the world of the ancient Father Asura, who here represents the primeval world of undifferentiated unity (RS. X. 124. 4, cf. verse 2). Then Indra[4] invited Soma to come outside so that they could conjointly slay Vṛtra (verse 6: *hánāva vṛtráṃ, niréhi soma)*, a procedure which is strongly reminiscent of the Roman *evocatio deorum ex urbibus obsessis* (as Macrobius has it). A mythological parallel is the story of how Indra had to persuade Uśanā Kāvyaḥ to come over from the Asuras to the party of the Devas before the latter could conquer their foes: Jaim. Br. I. 126[8] *asmān abhyupāvartasve 'ti*, Baudh. ŚS. XVIII. 46 (p. 403, 3 f.) *sa hā 'jñapto 'surebhyo 'dhi devān upasamiyāya. tato ha vā etad devā asurān mahāsaṃgrāmaṃ jigyuḥ*. It is clear that God Soma, who strengthens Indra before the combat with Vṛtra, can be said to have assisted him. Cf. the Soma-hymn IX. 61. 22 *sá pavasva yá ávithé 'ndraṃ vṛtráya hántave*. The notion of *Sóma-vṛtrahán-* was, indeed, an inheritance from the Proto-Aryan religion, cf. *Haoma- vərəθrajan-* Y. 9. 16, Yt. 14. 57.

These few details may be sufficient to show how problematical Roth's and Kuhn's equation of Mātariśvan and Prometheus was.

4. Vodskov, *Sjæledyrkelse og Naturdyrkelse*, p. 212, took Agni to be the one who bade Soma to appear.

Kuhn's interpretation basically rested on two assumptions, first, that Agni and Soma originally were in heaven ('in den Wolken entstehend', p. 253) and, second, that the fire was stolen *from the gods* for the benefit of men. It should be noted that when Kuhn wrote (p. 6) 'es heisst nämlich.., dass Mâtariçvan den Agni von den *göttern* hergebracht habe' he omitted the cautious proviso made by Roth. It will be clear that from a mythological point of view the correctness of these words is open to serious doubts. In the Vedic Śyena-myth the eagle (or whatever other bird may have been denoted by the word) steals Soma *for Indra*, the protagonist of the Devas, to give him the force necessary for slaying the dragon. This is not the place to discuss from what world Soma was stolen. The Rigveda specifies it as 'from afar' *(parāvátaḥ)*, 'from the rock', 'from the iron strongholds', 'from the *sā́nu*' (either of heaven or of a mountain), 'from the sky', whereas the brāhmaṇas simply refer in fixed phrases to 'yonder world', 'the third heaven' or simply 'the heaven' (only ŚB.). Whatever the explanation of these terms may be (which I hope to discuss elsewhere), they do not contain the slightest indication that Soma was stolen from the gods. On the contrary, it is sometimes expressly said that the gods tried to win Soma from yonder world (AB., ŚB., see below, p. 95). Not until the Suparṇākhyāna and the Mahābhārata was the fundamental character of this myth so much forgotten that the Soma could be said to have been stolen from Indra. It goes without saying that any attempt to interpret the meaning of the Śyena-myth on the basis of the distorted data of the Suparṇākhyāna (e.g., Jarl Charpentier, *Die Suparṇasage*, 1920, pp. 149, 287, J. von Negelein, *GGA.* 1924, pp. 66f., 117!) is doomed to failure.

2. In view of what was said above about the older version of the Śyena-myth, a brief discussion of a single exception found in a brāhmaṇa must here be inserted. In the Yajurvedic texts the Śyena-myth is presented in a more or less ritualized way. Here it is the three metres which fly up to the sky, the third of which, viz. the Gāyatrī (sometimes in the shape of an eagle), steals Soma from one or more Soma-guar-

dians. The resistance offered by these guardians is no doubt an old feature of the myth. These guardians, although sometimes confused with the Gandharvas, were doubtless serpents.[5] As such, they are characteristic of the parallelism that exists in many points between the primeval world which was undivided and the nether world of the later dualistic cosmos.

Now, while the Taittirīya Saṃhitā refers to these guardians in a rather neutral way, in the words (TS. VI.1.10.5) *eté vā́ amúṣmiṃ loké sómam arakṣan, tébhyó 'dhi sómam ā́haran* 'they indeed in yonder world guarded the Soma; from them they grasped[6] the Soma' (Keith), the Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā confuses them with the Gandharvas, who properly belong to a different episode of the myth. Cf. KS. XXIV. 6 (p. 96,6) *ete vā etad* (read *etaṃ?*) *gandharvā agopāyann amuṣmiṃl loke*. The parallel passage in the Kapiṣṭhala-Kaṭha Saṃhitā has a curious but unmistakable slip in that it here replaces *gandharvā* by *devā*: KKS. XXXVII.7 (p. 201, 10) *ete vā etaṃ devā agopāyann amuṣmiṃl loke*. The scribe who here inadvertently wrote *devā* but left the reference to the *gandharvāḥ* in line 13 intact, may have had in mind a passage like Suparṇākhyāna 12.2, where it is the *devāḥ* that watch over the Soma.

While this is obviously a mere slip, the same cannot be said of two passages in the Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā: MS. III.7.7 (p.84,16f.), 8.10 (p. 109,10) reads *eté vaí devā́nāṃ somarákṣaya: etébhyo vā́ ádhi chándāṃsi sómam ā́haran*. The internal contradiction between the demoniacal beings from whom the Soma is stolen and the notion of 'guardians of the gods' is obvious. There must accordingly have been a shift in the idea associated with the 'guardians', and this shift was probably due to the ritual act of 'indicating' the objects that served as the price of Soma to these Soma-guardians. The ritual of the buying of the Soma *(somakráyaṇam)* was, indeed, considered a re-enactment of the mythi-

5. Similarly K.F. Johansson, *Solfageln i Indien* (1910), p. 65 and J. Charpentier, *Die Suparṇasage* (1920), pp. 138, 148.

6. Read: brought.

cal theft of the Soma from the serpents who were its guardians. Therefore, the guardians might again feel offended by this ritual and to ward off their evil influence they had to be appeased by objects called *somakráyaṇāḥ*, cf. KS. XXIV.6 (p.96,5) *svānnabhrāḍ iti somakrayaṇān anudiśati*. Now the original meaning of this act of 'indicating' the *somakráyaṇāḥ* had come to be reinterpreted in the course of time. The Taittirīya Saṃhitā explains the rite as follows (TS.VI.1.10.5): *yád etébhyaḥ somakráyaṇān nā́ 'nudiśéd, ákrīto 'sya sómaḥ syān, nā́ 'syai 'tè 'múṣmiṃ loké sómaṃ rakṣeyur; yád etébhyaḥ somakráyaṇān anudiśáti krītó 'sya sómo bhavaty, etè 'syā 'múṣmiṃ loké sómaṃ rakṣanti* 'If he were not to indicate to them those that serve as the price of Soma, he would not have purchased the Soma, *and they would not guard the Soma for him in yonder world*. In that he indicates to them those that serve as the price of Soma, he really purchases the Soma, *and they guard the Soma for him in yonder world*' (Keith). Owing to the reinterpretation of the function of the Soma-guardians that is expressed in these additional remarks the author of the passage in the Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā could take a further step and declare them to be guardians who guarded Soma 'in yonder world' for later use *by the gods*. It is evident, however, that his phrase *devā́nāṃ somarákṣayaḥ*, isolated as it is in Vedic literature, does not prove that the Soma was originally stolen from the gods. Nor can such a conclusion be based upon Jaim.Br. I.287 *atha he 'ndrasya tridive Soma āsa* 'Now Soma was in the third heaven of Indra', which merely foreshadows the later notions of the Suparṇākhyāna and the epic. Cf. also Mhbh. V.97.4 crit. ed. *atrā 'mṛtaṃ suraiḥ pītvā nihitaṃ nihatāribhiḥ* (viz. in the *nāgaloka*, which is an old trait!).

An equally curious shift in the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (III. 6.2.8 and 15) is not relevant for the Śyena-myth.

3. Since, then, Soma was stolen for Indra and the Devas and the same must be assumed to hold good for Agni, the contrast with the Greek myth of Prometheus is obvious. Because Prometheus had deceived Zeus (Hesiod, *Theogonia* 537–545, *Erga* 47–48), the latter hid the

fire and withheld it from men. Prometheus, however, managed to steal it from him. See *Theogonia* 565–567 and especially *Erga* 50–53:

> (Ζεὺς) κρύψε δὲ πῦρ · τὸ μὲν αὖτις ἐὺς παῖς Ἰαπετοῖο
> ἔκλεψ' ἀνθρώποισι Διὸς παρὰ μητιόεντος
> ἐν κοίλῳ νάρθηκι λαθὼν Δία τερπικέραυνον

It is curious that this fundamental contrast between this myth and that of Mātariśvan has not withheld the large majority of scholars, up to the present day, to accept Roth's interpretation of Mātariśvan as a second Prometheus. Only Bergaigne, in accordance with his structural, non-comparative approach, does not mention Prometheus by name but he, too, accepts Roth's interpretation. Cf. *La religion védique* I (1878), p. 54: 'Mais au vers III, 9, 5, il est dit en propres termes que le feu caché, et produit par la friction, a été tiré par Mâtariçvan 'd'un lieu éloigné', tiré 'des dieux.' Cf. pp. 17, 52, 55 on the descent of the fire. Of the other authors the following may be quoted in the order of appearance of the first editions of their works. H.S.Vodskov, *Sjæledyrkelse og Naturdyrkelse* (1890–1897), p. 124: 'baade Manu og alle de andre kunde hentet den fra Himlen som Prometheus gjorde det'. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie* (1891–1902), I² (1927), p. 155: 'Die Verse, welche von M[ātariçvan] als Prometheus Indiens sprechen, sind zwar zahlreich genug, um ihn als Feuerbringer zu kennzeichnen, aber den natürlichen Ausgangspunkt seines Wesens hellen sie nicht auf' (cf. n. 5, without comment on III. 9. 5, and II² (1929), p. 352). H. Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* (1894), 3rd and 4th ed. (1923), p. 122: 'sein Bote bringt ihm und damit der Menschheit vom Himmel das Feuer, dessen vornehmste Tugend für den vedischen Dichter seine Wirksamkeit beim Opfer ist. Dies die indisch dürftige Form der Vorstellungen, die der Tiefsinn griechischen Geistes zur weltumfassenden Tragik des Prometheusmythus erhoben hat.' Cf. p. 108 n. 3. A.A.Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (1897), p. 72: 'Mātariśvan would thus appear to be a personification of a celestial form of Agni, who at the same time

is thought of as having like Prometheus brought down the hidden fire from heaven to earth.' E.W. Hopkins, *The Religions of India* (1902), p. 109f.: 'Aryan, as Kuhn has shown, is at least the conception if not the particular form of the legend alluded to in this hymn, of fire brought from the sky to earth, which Promethean act is attributed elsewhere to the fire-priest.' Cf. p. 168: 'no detailed myth was current in primitive times'. Jarl Charpentier, *Kleine Beiträge zur indoiranischen Mythologie* (Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift 1911), pp. 73, 74 (no comment on III. 9.5), pp. 76–77 ('dass Mātariśvan in den älteren Teilen des RV. wirklich eine Art Prometheus, ein halb-göttliches Wesen ist, das das Feuer vom Himmel bringt oder hier auf der Erde erzeugt hat'), p. 81 ('der indische Prometheus'), p. 83. A.B. Keith, *JRAS*. 1916, p. 555: 'It is clear, however, that the Vedic myth already regards the action of the descent of fire in the form of lightning and the fall of rain therewith as a species of theft, and the development of a myth like that of Prometheus is not very difficult.' Leopold von Schroeder, *Arische Religion* (1916/1923), II, p.485: 'Häufiger wird die wunderbare Tat dem Mâtariçvan zugeschrieben, einem indischen Prometheus ...' H.D. Griswold, *The Religion of the Ṛigveda* (1923), p. 163: 'We have here in general the Vedic equivalent of the Greek myth of Prometheus.' A.B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* (1925), p. 138: 'he brings Agni from the sky, from afar for men, or from the gods' ... 'The only alternative view which has any plausibility is that of Oldenberg who sees in him a Prometheus only, without any divine nature other than the bringing down of fire.' P. 162 n. 1 'The legend of the theft of fire (Prometheus, Loki) is only faintly seen in the figure of Mātariçvan.' Johanna Narten, *IIJ*. IV (1960), p. 134: 'Daß in Mātariśvan der indische Prometheus vorliegt, wurde auch bisher nicht bezweifelt ... Doch wurde in der indischen Version das Raubmotiv des griechischen Mythos vermißt ... Die Feststellung der Wurzel *math-* "entreißen, rauben" und ihres Vorkommens in Verbindung mit Mātariśvan innerhalb des ältesten indischen Literaturwerks zeigt, daß

der Mātariśvan-Prometheus-Mythos ursprünglich also auch in diesem Punkt übereinstimmte – in Indien ging dieser Zug allerdings nachvedisch verloren.'

4. Just as in the case of Soma, the place from which Agni is brought to men is described in the Rigveda in various terms. He is said to have been brought 'from heaven', 'from afar', from 'the womb of the waters' or to have freed himself 'from darkness'.[7] Owing to the strict parallelism between the mythical origin of Agni and the ritual act of kindling the fire, references to the first often intermingle in these verses with those to the latter. Cf., e.g., VI.8.4 *apā́m upásthe mahiṣā́ agṛbhṇata, víśo rā́jānam úpa tasthur ṛgmíyam / ā́ dūtó agním abharad vivásvato, vaiśvānarám mātaríśvā parāvátaḥ* 'In the womb of the waters the buffaloes took hold of him, the clans worshipped the king who is to be praised. The messenger of Vivasvant, Mātariśvan, brought Agni Vaiśvānara hither from afar', V.1.2 *mahā́n devás támaso nír amoci* 'The great god freed himself from darkness', VI.15.17 *imám u tyám atharvavád agním manthanti vedhásaḥ / yám aṅkūyántam ā́nayann ámūraṃ śyāvyàbhyaḥ* 'This Agni the arrangers (of the ritual) produce by whirling as (did) Atharvan, him, the unerring one, who moves tortuously, whom they have brought from the dark (places).'

As for the term *parāvát-*, it has long been observed that it often denotes the underworld, e.g. I.48.7 (Uṣas) *eṣā́ 'yukta parāvátaḥ sū́ryasyo 'dáyanād ádhi* 'she just now harnessed (her horses) from afar, from the point where the sun rises', IV.21.3 *ā́ yātv índro divá ā́ pṛthivyā́ makṣū́ samudrā́d utá vā́ púrīṣāt/svàrṇarād ávase no marútvān parāváto vā sádanād ṛtásya* 'Indra should soon come from heaven, from the earth, from the sea or from the firm ground, from Svarṇara, accompanied by the Maruts, to assist us, or from afar, from the seat of Ṛta'. Cf. also Renou, *IIJ*.4 (1960), p. 109. The last words *parāváto vā sádanād ṛtásya*, which Geldner took to mean 'den höchsten Himmel' must rather refer

7. Cf. also X.45.6 *vīḷúṃ cid ádrim abhinat parāyáñ jánā yád agním áyajanta páñca* 'Er spaltete sogar den festen Fels in die Ferne ziehend, als die fünf Völker den Agni anbeteten' (Geldner).

to the nether world, for the sun rises in the morning 'from the seat of Ṛta' (*ṛtásya sádanāt* I.164.47) and Uṣas, who comes 'from afar' (*parāvátaḥ* I.92.3) awakens 'from the *sádas* of Ṛta' (IV. 51.8). See further V.62.1 and in general *IIJ*. IV (1960), p. 226, VIII (1964), p. 107 and cf. the references to the 'stone house' or 'rock' where Agni is born and from which he rises in the morning (*IIJ*. VIII., pp. 111 n. 81, 108, 120 n. 122). As such *parāvát-* is used as an euphemistic term for *Nírṛti-* 'destruction', as Renou, *Ind. Ling*. 16 (1955), p. 124 n. 4 has pointed out.

It remains one of the unsolved problems of Vedic mythology why terms for 'nether world' and 'primeval world' can alternate with 'heaven', 'the highest heaven', 'the third heaven'. Possibly these terms primarily denoted the mysterious world of the totality of the dualistic cosmos, Viṣṇu's third step, and were then also used in application to the undivided primeval world. Be that as it may, this much is obvious that the *parāvát-*, which could be identified with *Nírṛti-*, was not a dwelling-place of the Devas.

The same equivalence of the distant region *(parāvát-)* and heaven is found in the myth of Mātariśvan. On the one hand Mātariśvan is said to have brought Agni for Manu from afar: I.128.2 *yám mātaríśvā mánave parāváto, devám bhā́ḥ parāvátaḥ*, while on the other hand Mātariśvan brought Agni from heaven *(divó)*, in contrast with Soma who is said to have come from the rock (I.93.6, see above p.86).

5. In the Rigveda there is only one version of the myth of the carrying off of Soma. When Indra was about to slay Vṛtra – at a moment, accordingly, when heaven and earth were not yet separated and the world was still the *rudis indigestaque moles*, the *ásat*, from which the cosmos was to arise – the eagle brought the Soma *for him* (and for Manu, IV.26.4). Since, however, Indra stood for the Devas in general, it could also be said that the Devas, in their strife with the Asuras, longed for the beverage of immortality. This version is found in the Yajurveda, side by side with the well-known myth of Kadrū́ and

Suparṇī. Cf., e.g., MS. III.7.8 (p. 85, 13), 8.10 (p. 109, 10) *sómo vaí amútrā 'sīt, té devā́ gāyatrī́ṃ prā́hiṇvann: amúṃ sómam ā́haré 'ti* 'Soma was yonder. The Devas sent Gāyatrī, saying "fetch yonder Soma".' Similarly Ait. Br. III. 25.1 and 26.1–3.

According to this version Soma was brought *for the gods*, cf. ŚBK. II.6.3.1 *devébhyas tásyā āhárantyā avā́d ástā 'bhyāyátya parṇáṃ prácicchedа* (quoted from Eggeling, SBE. XII, p. 183 n. 2) 'while she was bringing him *for the gods*, a (footless) archer aimed at her and severed one of the feathers', ŚBM. III.2.4.2 *tébhyo gāyatrī́ sómam áchā 'patat* 'Gāyatrī flew up to Soma *for them*', III.6.2.8 *sā́ ha kadrū́r uvāca / ātmā́naṃ vaí tvā 'jaiṣaṃ, divy àsaú sómas, táṃ devébhya ā́hara* ... 'Then said Kadrū 'Verily I have won thine own self; yonder is Soma in the heaven: fetch him hither *for the gods* ...' (Egg.), AB. III.26.1 *te devā abruvan gāyatrīṃ: tvaṃ na imaṃ somaṃ rājānam āhare 'ti* 'The gods said to Gāyatrī "Do thou bring king Soma *for us*"'. The Kāṭhaka formulates this in a more general way, cf. KS. XXVI.2 (p. 123, 2–3), KKS. XL.5 (p. 229, 2–3): *sarvebhyo vā eṣa āhriyate manuṣyebhyaḥ pitṛbhyo devebhyas* ... 'Verily, it is for all that this (Soma) is brought: for men, for the pitaras, *for the gods*.'

Since the myth of Mātariśvan runs entirely parallel to the Śyena-myth, it would be quite in line with the general mythological context if Mātariśvan brought Agni from the same primeval world not only 'for Manu' (*mánave* I.128.2) but also '*for the gods*' (*devébhyaḥ*). It should be noted in this connection that nowhere in the Rigveda is Mātariśvan said to be an enemy of the gods. He rather *cooperates* with them to fetch the fire for men, cf. X.46.9cd *īḷényam prathamám mātaríśvā devā́s tatakṣur mánave yájatram* 'Thee, O Agni, who must be invoked first, thee, who deservest adoration, Mātariśvan and the gods have shaped for Manu.'

The preceding conclusion, based upon a purely mythological interpretation of the data, that Mātariśvan must have brought the fire *for the gods*, is in flat contradiction with the view, universally held ever since

1852, that he has stolen it *from the gods*. Now, it seems never to have been sufficiently realized (although Roth had implicitly warned his readers!) that the whole theory of an Indian Prometheus is based *exclusively*[8] upon Roth's interpretation of the form *devébhyaḥ* as an ablative in III.9.5:

*sasṛvā́ṃsam iva tmánā*
*'gním itthā́ tiróhitam/*
*aínaṃ nayan mātaríśvā parāváto*
*devébhyo mathitám pári*

which Geldner translates as follows: 'Der gleichsam von selbst weggelaufen war, den Agni, der dort verborgen war, den führte Mātariśvan aus der Ferne her, von den Göttern weg, nachdem er (aus dem Holze) gerieben war'. Roth inferred from this passage that Mātariśvan 'das von der Erde verschwundene Feuer, vom Himmel, von den Göttern herabholt' and Kuhn (p. 6) 'dass Mâtariçvan den Agni von den *göttern* hergebracht habe' (see p. 88). Similarly Oldenberg, *Religion des Veda*[3-4], p. 122: 'von den Göttern her'. All translators have followed Roth in this respect. Cf.

1876: Ludwig I, p. 336 'ihn fürte Mâtariçvan ausz der ferne, den durch reiben erzeugten, von den göttern her'; Grassmann I, p. 64 'Ihn führte von den Göttern Mātariçvan her, von Ferne den erriebenen'.

1897: Oldenberg, *SBE*. 46, p. 256 'Him Mâtariśvan brought hither from afar, from the gods, when he had been produced by attrition (of

8. As for the Bhṛgus, mentioned in Roth's second 'Hauptstelle' (see above, p. 85), viz. III. 5. 10 *yádī bhṛ'gubhyaḥ pári mātaríśvā gúhā sántaṃ havyavā'haṃ samīdhé* 'wenn Mātariśvan ihn, der sich vor den Bhṛgu's verborgen hielt, als den Opferfahrer entzündet hat' (Geldner), it is not quite clear how Roth interpreted this passage but his general statement 'Da er [viz. Mātariśvan] das Feuer zu den Bhṛgu bringt' and 'der ... das Feuer ... zu den Menschen, zu den Bhṛgu bringt' agrees with most modern translations of this particular passage, e.g., Oldenberg, *SBE*. 46, p. 241 'for the sake of the Bhṛgus', Renou, *EVP*. XII, p. 55 'pour les Bhṛgu'. See also Johanna Narten, *IIJ*. IV, p. 133 f. Anyway, it cannot be used in support of the theory of an Indian Prometheus, in spite of Kuhn, p. 6 ('von den *Bhṛgu* her'). [See now also Hanns-Peter Schmidt, *Bṛhaspati und Indra* (1968), p. 69.]

the wood)'; Macdonell, *Ved. Myth.*, p. 71 paraphrases 'Mātariśvan brought from afar the hidden Agni, produced by friction, from the gods'.

1951: Geldner I, p. 347 (see above)

1960: Johanna Narten, *IIJ.* IV (1960), p. 133, who established the correct meaning of *math-*: 'den führte Mātariśvan aus der Ferne her, den von den Göttern weg geraubten'.

1964: Renou, *EVP.* XII, p. 57: 'C'est Mātariśvan qui l'amena du fond de l'espace, de chez les dieux, (cet Agni par lui) dérobé' (p. 118: équivoque entre 'baratté' et 'dérobé').

As for the formal interpretation of the verse, it should be noted that *mathāyáti* 'he steals' is sometimes construed with the adverb *pári* 'from', which takes various positions with regard to the ablative. It can stand after it (cf. IX.77.2 *yáṃ divás pári śyenó mathāyát* 'whom the eagle stole from heaven') or independently, as in I.93.6 *ámathnād anyám pári śyenó ádreḥ* 'the other the eagle stole from the rock'. Nothing prevents us, therefore, from construing *mathitám pári* with *parāváto* (cf. I.128.2 *devám bhāḥ parāvátaḥ*, p. 94 and VI. 8. 4, p. 93).

Now, it was assumed above that just as Soma had to be stolen *before* Indra's *vṛtrahátya-*, so Mātariśvan's theft of the fire took place in the undifferentiated primeval world. If this is correct, the myth of Mātariśvan may be compared with Agni's leaving the 'Father Asura' at the moment of the creation of the dualistic cosmos. In RS. X. 124.2 Agni goes stealthily away *(gúhā yán ... emi)* and in verse 4 he, Soma and Varuṇa choose Indra and leave the 'Father': *índraṃ vṛṇānáḥ pitáraṃ jahāmi / agníḥ sómo váruṇas té cyavante.*

In quite the same way it is said in I. 141.3–4 that Mātariśvan steals Agni, who is hidden *(gúhā sántam)*, and that Agni is led away from the Father. This father, who can hardly be any one else but the *pitṛ́-Ásura-* of X. 124.3, is here denoted as *mádhva ādhaváḥ*, which Johanna Narten, *IIJ.* IV, p. 133 interprets as 'Herschüttler des Süßtranks'. Cf., however, Renou, *EVP.* 12, p. 102. The relevant lines are the following:

(3cd) *yád īm ánu pradívo mádhva ādhavé*
*gúhā sántam mātaríśvā mathāyáti*
(4a) *prá yát pitúḥ paramā́n nīyáte pári*

'when Mātariśvan steals him who for a long time past has been hidden with the one who stirs the sweet drink'. (4) 'When he is carried away from the highest Father ...'

This Father, who as an Asura apparently stands for the primeval world, cannot possibly be localized in the world of the Devas. For that reason the correct translation of III.9.5cd can only be: 'Mātariśvan brought him, who had been stolen from afar, *for the gods*.' This correct syntactical interpretation of a single word disposes of the 'Indian Prometheus'.[9]

9. For typographical reasons the distinction between *ardhacandra* and *ṃ* had to be ignored, while for editorial reasons *ṃ* has been substitued for *ṁ* of the manuscript.