V¯ac
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SUMMARY

In the first chapter of his study the author gives a review of the place occupied by the sacred word, or rather, sacred speaking, and of the meaning attached to it in primitive as well as in more highly developed religions and cultures (§ 5-§ 7).

All speaking, in psychological parlance, conjures up certain associations in the hearer’s mind. It is, therefore, through a psychological approach only that moderns can still understand the ancient religious conception of the „word” that the word namely can create things, and even the cosmos itself.

The author distinguishes three kinds of speaking:

1. the speaking at irregular times (sporadic cries, sounds and noises);
2. the speaking at regular times (the sacred speaking in set phrases and expressions in worship, sacred books, the reading of certain pericopes from sacred texts). Here we see how the original, unexpected, divine speaking has been canalized and rationalized liturgy and literature.
3. the inaudible, imaginary speaking. This inaudible speaking is thought of as existing at a great distance from human beings on earth. It is, then, e.g. the divine creative word in pristine ages, the sacred praises uttered by the blessed in heaven, the lamentations in the underworld, the rejoicing and also the wailing at the end of time. It may also become a more or less philosophical system of the phenomena of sounds or, expressed in more primitive terms, a hypostasis of the word leading its own life, apart from this world.

The moment the word turns into a transcendent being, its inviolability and sacrosanctity are open to criticism. Douts arise and questions suggest themselves. Is this imaginary speaking still authoritative? Too great a distance between the sacred word and man tends to suggest that the word desires to forsake the human sphere, thus abondoning man to himself alone.

Then discussions, scientific research, literature and dramaturgy come into play.

In § 8-§ 13 the author briefly summarizes the conceptions of the sacred word current during the various periods of Indo-Aryan religion. He makes an investigation into the way in which the sacred word as a primitive priestly speaking and singing in worship has developed into the sacred word as an inaudible, celestial and eternal power. The passage of the sacred Vedic word: its imperative to transform the world is losing ground. It is gradually, one might say, only a sort of the character of a God-given science begins to free itself from the shackles of theism; thinking is now becoming rationalized literature. The history of the concept of the sacred word in India is one aspect of this culture.

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izes the conceptions of periods of Indo- Aryan the way in which the and singing in worship inaudible, celestial and eternal power. The passage of time makes its influence felt on the sacred Vedic word: its importance as a liturgical ritual, as an effort to transform the world and as a cosmogonical power of magic is losing ground. It is gradually changing into a divine word, having, one might say, only a soteriological meaning for man, i.e. it assumes the character of a God-given means of saving man's soul. Physical science begins to free itself from the bonds of religion. Indian thinking is now becoming more modern.

The history of the conception of the sacred word of the Aryans in India is one aspect of the history of the Indo-Aryan religion and culture.

The author now confines himself, however, to Vedic religion ($ 14 sqq.)

The Vedic word itself i.e. the hymns, melodies and consecration-formulae of the Vedic priests, is sacred for three reasons:

(1) it is spoken or sung to holy beings, e.g. gods;

(2) it is heard at certain times, e.g. during the soma-sacrifice, or during one or other illness, or at times of misfortune. The texts of the soma-sacrifice are collected in the officially recognized Rgveda-Saṁhitā (RS); the texts of the second group are for the greater part collected in the Atharvaveda-Saṁhitā (AS), which, however, was never of equal importance with the RS.

(3) the sacredness of the Vedic word depends on the way in which the priests express themselves during a ritual: first, they recite hymns and verses, which we find in the RS. Later on, derived in part from the RS and in part from other sources, two collections make their appearance. One is an extensive collection of melodies, Sāmaveda-Saṁhitā, for the use of the priestly singers in the official Vedic cult. The other is a collection of prayers and consecration-formula, the Yajurveda-Saṁhitā, for the use of the priests performing the sacred acts. In the latter collection we observe that the consecration of the materials and objects used in worship is bound up with the teaching of the science of liturgy to brahmanic pupils. Here we stand at the beginning of the Brāhmaṇa-literature. The RS is gradually becoming the textbook of the reciting priests alone.

Scholasticism, gnosticism, theosophy and alchemy make their appearance. Vedic literature is connected with the nature and the growth of the Vedic ritual.

In the subsequent part of his thesis the author points out that when studying the sacred word in Vedic texts it is important to pay attention to two phenomena, viz. repetition and monotony, which are characteristic of sacred Vedic thinking and speaking.

(1) There is monotony in the way the priests sing ($ 23-24).
There is monotony and a frequent use of clichés, as Bloomfield has shown, in the structure of the Vedic stanzas (§ 25).

There is monotony even in the ideas about the gods in the RS, as Bergaigne has demonstrated (§ 27). Sometimes the various gods closely resemble each other.

Frequently there is monotony too in the procedure followed when exorcizing, which the AS makes mention of (§ 79).

Monotony is, after all, also the underlying principle of the opinion that the world can be magically transformed and its very substance changed. In this world nothing ever appears that is entirely new; the new is only a modification of the old, wrought by the power of magic.

The gestures of the Vedic priests often harmonize with their thoughts: at times they sing with their eyes closed or recite certain parts of the texts „in thought“ of they have to think of some desirable object before trying to possess themselves of it by reciting aloud.

These ritual gestures, in their turn, are strongly reminiscent of the Vedic conceptions of e.g. the imaginary cow, the imaginary horse, the imaginary sacrificial fire and of the imaginary word. In this further research the author confines himself to the RS and the AS. The actual subject of his study is the Vedic symbolism of sound and, more particularly, of the priestly speaking in worship.

In the second chapter the author argues that, according to the data of the RS, the prayers of the Vedic priests travel throughout the Universe (§ 30–§ 33). Here nature testifies to the immense power and holiness of the liturgical speaking and singing, and symbolizes this power and holiness.

Like any other speaking, the sacred speaking may have various meanings. In the RS these types of speaking are thought of as belonging to three kinds of divine beings. Each kind exists in one sphere of the cosmos: in the atmosphere, in the heavenly sphere and in the earthly sphere, i.e. either on earth or close by it. Here psychology of language is still cosmology.

There are, then, three kinds of divine beings: atmospheric, celestial and earthly beings (§ 34–§ 64). Each group speaks its own language. The language of atmospheric beings is noisy and somewhat irascible, but always benignant. It is the voice of the thunder, of the rain and of the wind. The language of the celestial is noiseless and imaginary. It is the language of the order in the Universe, it is the language of the light. This speaking is, one may say, a Vedic symbol representing the mind. The language of earthly beings is a confidential, intimate speaking and whispering. It is the language of present anxiety and of good or evil.

The beings of the earth

(1) as perceptible, visible,
(2) as more or less omnipresent in the Universe
(3) as entirely imaginary, and also omnipresent in the Universe.

The earthly beings are seen in the RS, by far the most numerous. Their speech is, according to the author, phantastic of all sacred things, and is also omnipresent in the Universe.

In the third chapter the author argues that the sacred word of the priest is closely related to the conception of the world. The sacred word is always omnipresent in the Universe, and is also omnipresent in the mind or soul, and is even omnipresent in the animal world.

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The beings of the earthly
are not gods, but symbols. The gods are,
generally, in the atmosphere and sometimes in the heavenly sphere.
The sacred word of the priests, too, belongs to the earthly sphere,
and is also omnipresent, like other sacred earthly beings, according
to the conception of the Vedic priests. The religion focussing upon
earthly beings is always one of a mystical pattern. The Vedic
conceptions of the word, too, are manifestations of this mysticism.

In the third chapter the author investigates the data of the AS
in relation to the sacred speaking. First non-human speaking
in nature and in worship is discussed (§ 74–§ 75) and afterwards
the speaking of the priests in exorcizing (§ 76–§ 87). The latter
may have either an exorcizing and exterminating faculty or the
power to found a community.

The word as a priestly means of exorcizing is bound up with
the word as a priestly, philosophical problem that we meet with
in the RS. The idea of a magic speaking creating a new, imaginary
world is related to the conception of the word thought of as
a being of immeasurable magnitude which also embodies an
imaginary, new world.

The rite of exorcism may, in the author’s opinion, be thought
of as an artificial ritual creating of divine beings. It also represents
what we now call „intuition” and „chance”. Thus the magician is,
in his own experience, a divine being (§ 81) capable of creating a
new world (§ 82–§ 87).

The earthly beings, including the priests, are, as we have already
seen in the RS, by far the most capable of captivating of all beings.
Their speech is, accordingly, the most dangerous and the most
phantastic of all sacred speaking.

In the fourth chapter some conclusions are drawn concerning the
Vedic word vāc.

Man is in constant need of putting into order the chaotic
situations in life. In primitive culture he does so, aided, among
other things, by the conception of the sacred word. Here the sacred
word is at the same time both a static and a dynamic principle.
It is in part a realistic (audible) phenomenon in the outside world,
in part an imaginary (inaudible) category of the ego. It is these
two aspects of the word that make it a symbol. Never can the
word become a god or a goddess. In primitive culture the sacred word is static, because something authoritative, something irrevocable and something abiding emanates from it. The word is thus the symbol of ancestral tradition, of experiences of former generations, and of experiences and rules of life already become selfevident and almost unconscious. The sacred word always presupposes something belonging to previous history and it sets itself as a criterion to man. It is for primitive man to obey and to imitate. The sacred word is, therefore, omnipresent in primitive culture. In this word is life. The word also contains a dynamic and somewhat revolutionary element, for it opens the way for what is called clairvoyance. All that may happen in this world is already present, even if it be invisibly. A Vedic gnosticism is dawning. And it is especially in the AS that its first symptoms are met with. Dynamic, too, is the word as a means of magically transforming the world. Later on vāc is symbolized by and identified with the streaming waters of the river Sarasvati. At the same time the ritual speaking, as expressed in a certain number of hymns, melodies and formulae, is superseded by learned discussions, meditations and investigations. It is a period of stir: the human mind has awakened and man has become critical. The original, static vāc, however, is confined to the archaic Vedic period and primitive Vedic cult.