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Space: Sacred and Profane

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Abstract

This article is an attempt on my part to understand some Vedic myths from a philosophical and phenomenological perspective with special emphasis on the notions of sacred space and its contrast with some other ideas of space that characterize our profane and finite realm of existence. I will start with some Vedic and poetic descriptions of reality that blurs the distinction between inner and outer, subject and object, microcosm and macrocosm, as this is a description of a lived dimension of reality that is poetically intuited by the seer poets who could contemplate the deeper secrets of a living bond that binds one and all. This is also evident in their description of Space and Time as lived and sacred. I will try to understand meaning and significance of sacred space in the Vedic and Upanisadic worldviews from two perspectives: a Kantian framework of space and time as forms of understanding and as part of our innate structures of experiencing the world in our own distinctive human way and also from the contemporary discoveries in scientific worldview that would keep room for a meaningful dialogue between holistic worldviews, from science or from religion.

(Paper Main)

This article is an attempt on my part to understand some Vedic myths from a philosophical and phenomenological perspective with special emphasis on the notions of sacred space and its contrast with some other ideas of space that characterize our profane and finite realm of existence. Contrary to the belief that space and time are universally identical and operate everywhere in a uniform pattern today we think that we know differently, that space and time assume a different meaning, if not a different reality, in accordance with the way in which they are experienced (scientific, economic, aesthetic, etc.). "...to say nothing of the fact that differing historical situations create distinctly different ways of knowing time and space. One glance at a Chinese landscape painting should provide a sufficient corrective for anyone still naive enough to believe that all men know and experience a common spatio-temporal world. Certainly the student of the history of religions knows full well that the space, which is symbolized in myth and ritual, differs profoundly from the space that is known by the modern consciousness."¹

I will start with some Vedic and poetic descriptions of reality that blurs the distinction between inner and outer, subject and object, microcosm and macrocosm, as this is a description of a lived dimension of reality that is poetically intuited by the seer poets who could contemplate the deeper secrets of a living bond that binds one and all. This is also evident in their description of Space and Time as lived and sacred. I will try to understand meaning and significance of sacred space in the Vedic and Upanisadic worldviews from two perspectives: a Kantian framework of space and time as forms

of understanding and as part of our innate structures of experiencing the world in our own distinctive human way and also from the contemporary discoveries in scientific worldview that would keep room for a meaningful dialogue between holistic worldviews, from science or from religion. First part of my article is an exploration into the Vedic worldview with parallelisms in the scientific worldviews.

A.

The mystical cave in the Vedic tradition: The important cosmogonic myth of Indra and Vala (Vrtra) shows a stage where space, the living space containing life, water and light, had to be conquered and freed from oppressing Vala (or Vrtra). Indra's heroic act consists in piercing it and creating an opening to release the light (the cows), called the 'sun in the rock,' (*sva yad asman*). Indra finds the cows in the cave, the hidden light. The demon hides in the cave and is slain by Indra, Brahspati has opened the doors and 'released the cows who have been hidden in the cave in the bond of untruth' (*anrta*), searching for light in the darkness, (*tamasi jyotir iccahn*, RV x, 67, 4). The shining face of the gods is found at the seat of Order (*rtasya pade*) in secret (*guha*). In the first stage creation means the opening of the enclosed space which alone makes life possible like Indra's propping up of the sky and separating it from the earth so that the intermediate space arises (*antariksa*). Kuiper points to 'the parallelism which for the Vedic poets exist between the macrocosmic opening of the primordial hill and microcosmic opening of the mind, as the result of Indra's *Vrtrahatya*. Indra found the treasure of the heaven that lied concealed in the cave, like the young of a bird in the egg, enclosed in the endless rock. The closed cave has the association of darkness and oppression; the open space becomes the seat of the *rta*, 'the rock of heaven,' and is 'the stone house. (*harmya*), 'the womb of the mountain,' (*aprvatasya agrbha*). These may point to the later cave temples and to the structural temples with their *garbhagriha*. Entering into innermost sanctuary means both entering into darkness as well as finding the light, symbolized by the oil lamp burning near the image.²

Another concept closely related to cave and sacred space is *nidhi kosa*, the treasure chest. The Chandogya Upanisad echoes this Vedic idea enlarging it to the dimension of universal space. The Atharva Veda speaks of two places where wisdom of Brahman is hidden (sacred word) like a treasure: 'one here and the other beyond, at the back of heaven and in the cave' and it is the Brahmacari, who is extolled in this hymn, who protects this treasure by the strength of his *tapas* (spiritual energy). Both extreme places 'are hidden and hence the ideal place for the mystery. In the Atharva Veda, *guha* assumes the mystical meaning of the 'secret, mysterious, concealed place,' which has been taken over by the Upanisads. The *parama dhama* is not different from the cave, this type of knowledge is not accessible to everyone it is here, in the hidden recesses of the external / or interior cave that the seer has the vision of the unity of all things (*eakrupam*). Not only that, the greater part of Reality, the three quarters, are concealed and the visible and audible aspect is only one quarter. In the great hymn to *Skambha*, the Pillar of the Universe, we read: 'Though manifest, it lies concealed in the cave, the vast abode (*mahatapdam*) which is called the old: therein is firmly stationed all the moving, breathing universe.' (AV x, 8, 6).³

The reference is here to the sun, the cave may be the dark night-sky, 'but a mere naturalistic interpretation will not do justice to these texts. The Vedic seers were searching for light,



but also for a stable place in which the universe can be firmly supported (*pratistha*), as is obvious from the hymns to Skambha.³ The almost stereotyped use of the participle *nihita*, from the root *nidha*, to place, deposit, fix, preserve etc. in connection with *guha* from the Rg Veda to the Upanisads express this search for stability and security. Expressions like *guhacara*, *nihito guhayam*, apply to *agni* in the Rgveda, and they are transferred to the Atman in the Upanisads. Agni is born in secret and is hidden in the secret place (*guha*): "Though you are hidden (*guha*) you are visible everywhere (*visavdarsatam*), O auspicious one (RV, 8,3). *Guha* has the ambivalent meaning of darkness and mystery." The seers guard the trace (place) of Order, they have hidden their highest names in secret. It is only the most precious thing (the treasure) that is guarded in the cave, hence the close association with *rtasya pada*, the domain of Cosmic Order, which is sacred space.⁴

B.

After a brief introduction to some references made in the Vedic tradition of Space as sacred and as secret place, the reference to the outer space as basically nurtured by inner and intimate region of the cavity of the heart etc., as one nurturing the other I would here highlight the fact that in this integral and intuitive (*adhyatmika*) approach to reality in the Vedas there is no sharp dichotomy here between these two realms, between the different approaches to space, physical, cultural or spiritual. In this background I would like to explore the possibility of a dialogue between contemporary science and Vedic worldview that would reflect some light on the tension that was felt in the Vedic worldview between chaos to order, between an outer space that would not be stable unless sustained and founded on a spiritual realm. This I will understand as the search for security and for meaning and order out of actuality of death and disintegration, this search for meaning as something akin to *apiriri* and innate tendency that is uniquely present in all men, and even in all animals. As against the trend to understand Space only in terms of physical extension, the Vedic conception is holistic as its quest is reacting against this monolithic 'scientist' conception. The Chandogya Upanisad answers to the question, 'what is the goal of this world? (*asay lokasya ka gatih?*)', 'Space is the final goal.' The Upanisadic tradition equates *akasa* to *atman*.⁵ Plato says: Space (*chora*) 'provides a habitat for all created things.'

The dichotomy between inner and outer space reflects distance that we feel now between man and nature, man and man, inner and outer. Outer space is in terms of physical distances considered mainly in Physics, Astronomy while inner space refers to the awareness of the distinction. Natural sciences deal with outer space, philosophy, art Psychology, etc with its meaning in inner sense. Thus the modern architect and the engineer would deal with outer space while the artist would shape the inner space. When space is understood only in terms of expansion and outer realm, as body without a soul, as profane without its sacred, the house ceases to be a habitat and becomes a machine to live by, the fire-place ceases to be sacred and an intimate center for family to share meal together, sharing inner warmth of the spirit and of love with the spiritual and sacred warmth of sacred *agni*, when space as outer and as inner could become one. The same house then becomes an order, a dharma, a sacred place, a habitat; the body too is then a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, one inseparably tied to the other. The artist then

has to be a seer, a contemplator and follow some rituals since there is no outer space without an inner space." "that nothing will influence the outer if it does not come from the inner space, that the arrow will not hit the target if the target is not in our heart." "It is one's inner space, sense of *viveks*, of discrimination that will open up the sense of place, the outer space. Man is in this world, not a soul against a body, man is society and cosmos," the animals, plants and the earth are not just useful or dangerous creatures. They are linked with us more ultimately, like Space itself.⁷ According to modern Astrophysics the universe emerged from chaos and will someday be reabsorbed into chaos, so too the individual moves away from and would return to chaos and equilibrium. "The parallelism of macrocosm and micro is one dominating assumption of western physics, a revolutionary idea of Newton that the same force which pulls the apple to the earth also causes the earth to swing around the sun. For Newton there could be only one physics. With Einstein's relativity all these conceptions changed as space could play an active and creative role, it could be curved into large number of shapes, gravity is created by space itself, that heaven and earth are non dual, gravity and space are non dual too. Expansion seems to be the key of creation. Creation from chaos is the Vedic cosmogony of evolution of order out of chaos, Vrtra destroyed by Indra, Vishnu in the form of the cosmic boar penetrating into the dark, the churning of the cosmic ocean. Chaos and darkness, abodes of the Serpent Sesha, sustains life: the universe is created out of *pralaya*, Chaos in the center of the temple, shrouded in darkness, is protected by stones, priestly traditions, and doorway guardians. Chaos is the *garbha-grha*, the cave in the side of the cosmic mountain, the womb of the earth out of which it has emerged."⁸

Thermodynamics deals primarily with matter in the equilibrium state since every creative process is neutralized by its opposite destructive process, no structure can be present in that equilibrium system. Its entropy measures the degree of disorder.⁹ According to our current understanding of astrophysics and cosmology, the primary source of non-equilibrium in our universe is the expansion of space-time, which commenced with the Big Bang some 20 billion years ago. Only during expansion the complex systems have a chance to continue to exist. Since water symbolized chaos the example of a hotpot of water could illustrate this transformation of chaos into order: "When no heat is applied to the bottom of the pot and the water in the pot has the same temperature as that of the surrounding air, the water is in a state of thermodynamic equilibrium and no systematic pattern of flow of energy or matter are present. But once the flame has been lighted under the pot, the water is forced out of equilibrium because of the temperature differences within, in the pot.... Within the equilibrium of the pan of water the highly regular and symmetrical convection cells lie latent and unexpressed. The astronomical counterparts of such non-equilibrium are legion, ranging from the large-scale expansion, of space and the consequent formation of galaxies and stars to the granules and supergranules on the surface of our sun. Transformation of chaos into cosmos following the breakdown of equilibrium is described in two well-known Hindu myths, the battle of Indra and Vrtra and the churning of the cosmic ocean."¹⁰

Understanding at any given point of time -is relative. But this process of 'knowing' is a dead end. This way knowledge is a part of the social system we are brought up in, wherein reason, explanations, cause-and-effect, objectivity vs. subjectivity



tivity, and so on, are taken to be axiomatic truths of a paradigm that arises out of a split mind, and in which the vehicle of thought, communication, i.e., language itself is dualistic. Therefore, whatever the efforts, or direction, mankind is making towards 'knowledge', 'truth', etc., these are futile in the context of reaching the goals of wholeness, harmony, totality, or whatever other various labels that are—or have been—used in different cultural subgroups (both diachronically and synchronically). "What is required is a change of paradigm, a change of direction which is a 180° turnabout, about our very perceptions, i.e., the very perspective that governs human existence at present. For example, space, *akasa* has to be apprehended individually, subjectively—yet not so in a way, by each being. Consciousness exists as a particular being, and nothing else exists. Truth is always present, and is exactly where we are, 'Here and Now,' it is beyond space and time, beyond cause and effect, and other concepts."¹¹ This living and concrete aspect of the religious essence adds meaning and significance to that which appears as the profane, the sacred re orders the profane relating it to a significant whole. This is how a poet and a seer, a religious mystic and a devotee would grasp the essence in the existence, the sacred in the profane, when *Agni* is defined as a 'burning flame of longing for self transcendence', vehicle which carries man, messenger of the gods and the servant of the gods who brings them to the heaven. He is also a thing among the earthly things; divinity in his own rights, receives all oblations, and is the mouth of all divinities. Soma, the ultimate end of human spiritual endeavor, the fullness of awareness, peace and joy, immortality, is also a thing among things, in the shape of a soma plant, the one thing for which gods are greedy, is both an embodiment and symbol of celestial deity. It is shining forth in full majesty in the purified sacrificial fire, becomes a drink of immortality, it bestows in man freedom from time, in ecstatic joy, as the celestial drink it follows from the fountain head of all transcendent truth."¹²

This is a dimension of lived religiosity which is both profane and sacred, both transcendent and immanent, reconciling contradictions of an abstract principle, of *Rta* that is order, of speech that is also that which is 'said', and is abstract, with concrete personalities of their own, either as resting on the Gurdian God *Varuna* or herself as Goddess *Vak*, the concrete dimension of the abstract 'speech.' *Varuna* in the process becomes a mystic Himself. He is the one who could know the secrets of all, He could even enter into the depth of the unexplored dimension of an apparently abstract and impersonal principle *Rta*, with His loving touch. With His patience for letting the secrets be revealed, He became their great God, the living and the vigilant God is who is also the guardian of abstraction. "Varuna knows hidden names of the cows, enables truth to find expression. The Vedic poets paid attention to the way meaning was generated and conveyed rather than the meaning produced, priority of poetics over hermeneutics."¹³

Unless this ordering by the sacred in the profane is there, space as fragmentary and partial become physical and geometric measurement, the outer as different from the inner, house then becomes a modern comfort machine of bricks and concrete, the earth becomes just a planet, as Heidegger sought to restore the loving relation of man, nature, earth and gods in terms of earth as a habitat, a place to dwell, a home, a place that is sacred. This is the anxiety of modern man with his distance from space and from sacred home toward more

literal, prosaic and profane understanding of reality, where the dharmic bond between one with the other, macro with the micro, man with nature, man and his habitat, is sought to be explained in terms of manipulative and calculative rationalities in terms of human resource, water resource and the whole earth as a gigantic petrol pump or a store house of secrets that can be used for anthropocentric interest only. But that is the price modern man has to pay when space too is just profane and finite. After an analysis of space as sacred which is also a common theme in the philosophy of Vedas and in some others, from the Platonic to the Christian and almost all other religious traditions, I will now make a brief reference to the philosophical situation when this sacred and the inner dimension of space is completely negated by sheer profaneness, when space is understood in terms of geometrical expansion only. I will refer to the works of two great existential philosophers and man of literature of our time, Franz Kafka and Jean Paul Sartre and their search for spiritual solace in a situation where sacred and the religious dimension of life is receded into the background, at a time when God is declared to be dead. In his essay on Kafka, Erich Heller has spoken of "negative transcendence," in the context of his thesis that Kafka's world is an epiphany of the demonic sacred. Heller's analysis of *The Castle* does much to illuminate a peculiarly modern experience of space.

"Kafka's terrifying vision of the world, which surpasses even Gnostic mythology in its portrait of the evil of being, is somehow grounded in acceptance and affirmation. At this point, Kafka's work can bring light to our Christian dilemma. Granting that Kafka's vision is pervaded by a negative transcendence can finally be detached from a positive transcendence? From Kafka's "Reflections on Sin, Suffering Hope and the True Way" illustrate Kafka's paradoxical acceptance of a demonic world: Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached. If you were walking across a plain, has an honest intention of walking on, and yet kept regressing, then it would be a desperate matter; but since you are scrambling up a cliff, about as steep as you yourself are as seen from below, the regression can only be caused by the nature of the ground, and you must not despair. Here, Kafka's symbolical language reproduces an ancient symbol of mythical language, the symbol of the "Center," a symbol that has long attracted the interest of Eliade. With a history at least as old as shamanism, this center is associated with sacred trees, mountains, and cities, and is thought to be the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell. As Eliade says: In archaic and traditional societies, the surrounding world is conceived as a microcosm. At the limits of this closed world begins the domain of the unknown, of the formless. On this side there is ordered because inhabited and organized-space; on the other, outside this familiar space, there is the unknown and the dangerous region of the demons, the ghosts, the dead and of foreigners—in a world, chaos or death or night. Every microcosm has a "Center", where the sacred manifests itself in all its totality; outside of this center there is only void and nothingness. Now Eliade believes that man can 'live' only in a sacred space, only in the "Center"¹⁴

Already a mystical response, although a negative one, to the Godlessness of the world is present in Sartre's first and most important novel, *Nausea*. This novel revolves about a primal experience of nausea produced by man's naked encounter with the world, an experience of deep revulsion against the sheer 'is-ness' of the world. Thus Sartre's system may be justly



termed atheistic mysticism. Both God and being must be negated in the authentic creation of human freedom. "Again, Sartre's system demonstrates once that the deepest affirmation of the profane demands a radical negation of the sacred, which is to say that a dialectical relation exists between the sacred and the profane, neither can become manifest apart from a negation of the other. Yet Sartre's thought has not succeeded in reaching a full dialectical expression, it has not succeeded in identifying negation and affirmation, despite the fact that Sartre's idea of nihilism so powerfully witnesses to the paradoxical presence of the missing God.¹⁵ This longing for the sacred and the religious dimension is also our hope for restoring balance and stability, a center that inner space, that arrow from the heart that gives meaning to something which is otherwise just brutal and basic driving urge.

Is this a necessity in man that man has to long for a sacred center, for Sacred Space the a rejection of which would lead to nihilism and death of God that makes life a journey, a climb in the difficult rocky path, but not for a pilgrimage, not for a goal that nurtures the difficult journey and makes it a joyous act of sacrifice. Is this search for order out of chaos, for a nest and a home, a center that is stable and sacred in this chaos and disorder is just an illusion, a pious hope, a childish dream or is it an innate necessity of our human way of understanding things, not only specifically human, of our animal way of understanding things? I will now refer to the Kantian framework of space and time as *apriori* frameworks that make experience meaningful. I will quote from Frits Staal's article *The Centre of Space : Construction and Discovery*. From disorder to order, from instinct to the conceptualization and to discovery, the cosmos becomes a nest: "*yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam*"¹⁶ Inhabited space transcends geometry space and is transformed into spiritual and sacred, from a cosmic city to a cosmogram *mandala*, from physical boundaries to Plato's ideal city. As *mandala* it is the sanctification of the ideal cosmic city where gods become residents. Frits Staal's article is a lucid exposition of this sacred bond that is there between us and our habitat, our home and dwelling place, a feature which is not exclusively a human privilege. Homes are dear to us as our own sacred dwelling places not only because they fulfill some pragmatic needs protecting us from rain and sun, but also for non-utilitarian sense, it is a sacred place even if it fails to protect from the rain and storm, the nostalgic longing for that native thatched hut than the concrete house later constructed, as if a sacred bond is there. But this is not a distinctively human feature: animals love their nests and dwelling places, build it, decorate it, surprisingly enough: "here are even nests that birds build simply because they seem to like it."¹⁷ From Staal's observations I will briefly summarize the following interesting observations about how these nests are built and decorated:

a) Using all sorts of building materials: "A Carolian Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus*, 'built its nest of hairpins; and a pair of crows in Bombay once built their nest with 25 pounds worth of gold spectacle frames which they stole from an open shop window.' (F.H. Herrick 1935 quoted in Wren, 335). b) The bowerbirds spend long time performing ceremonies within the artificial home or universe they have created for themselves. Many birds spend in fact long periods of time in their nests without living them—a circumstance to which I shall return. The opening in the nest of a hornbill is so small that the female must remain a prisoner within the cavity for one to four months, depending on the species, until she and the

young break out. (Welty, 329.). Flower decoration (even changing fresh flowers) in bowerbirds is akin to the human aesthetic sense. b) According to A. J. Marshall in most birds, both sexes have an inherent urge to nest building. Innate and instinctive behavior may be obsessive that way man is related to animals, these innate tendencies drew attention of Bhartrahri as innate tendency: 'what makes the cuckoo sing in spring, and by whom are spiders taught to weave their webs, or birds to build their nests? Who teaches birds and beasts to eat, make love, fight, swim, etc., activities practiced on account of heredity?' "*svaravrttim vikurute madhau pumskokilasya kah jantvadaya kulayadikarne kena siksita/ akarapriyabhidvesaplavanadikriyasu kahjatanvayaprasiddhasu prayokta mrgapaksinam* | (Vakyaapdiya 11.151.152d) For Staal, building and other activities in birds and animals are partly instinctive and partly learnt.

b) Construction of Ritual Space, decoration and ritualisation of the dwelling place etc. some of these tendencies are innate and universal and some are learnt. The practices had their rudimentary source in our ancestors and predecessors in animal world. "In the Rg Veda the *Maruts* and the gods in general, 'like birds, sit down on the beloved *barhis*. (vayo na sidann adhi barhisi priye: Rigveda 1.85.7d)"¹⁹

The *barhssa* covers of grasses spread on the ground throughout the ritual space." In the Rigveda, gods are invoked again and gain to sit down on it and partake of the offerings. This idea is ritualized and incorporated in the construction of ritual space that is characteristic of Vedic ritual. When the construction of the *Mahavedi* or Great Altar Space is completed, and the altars have been installed; when the Sadas or Hall of recitation has been set up and when, in the ceremonies of *Soma*, he *Havirdhana* or Hall for the *Soma* carts have been finished; the *Adhvaryu* or chief priest goes east with a bundle of sacrificial grass, faces east and recites: 'Divine grass! I strew you soft as a wool, a good seat for the gods!' (*devabahir urna-mrdsam tva strnami Svassatham devebhyah*: Baudhyana Srautra Sutra 6.30: 194.9-10; cf. Taittiriya Samhita 1.1.11.1h)²⁰

The sacrificial pole or the *yupa* is erected at the eastern end of the Great Altar Space, the sacrificial animals are tied to it, the symbolism of the pole is interpreted in the Brahmanas but apart from speculation there are ritual acts that connect this pole with birds. "Apart from the fact that the bird shaped altar immediately faces the *yupa*, there are Vedic ceremonies, for example, the *Vajapeya* (which was performed in Poona in 1955), in which the ritual patron climbs a ladder set against it. When he reaches the top, he spreads his arms like a bird spreads its wings."²¹ There is abundant use of grasses and other nest-like associations in the Vedic rituals. Similar features are present due to common genetic ancestry, homologous similarities there are parallels between animal ritualization and human rites, that there are biological analogies rather than conscious imitation, many similarities between the ritualized movements that birds adopt and human ritual. that man is but a part of nature, apart from scratching and scraping, some birds press their breast against the ground; this is also done in *dandanamaskara* or *sarvanganamaskara*, a reverential salutation where the body is thrown on the ground like a stick, *danda*, with all limbs stretched." Many of the ritual elements we have discussed occur in the beginning ceremonies of the *Agnicayana*. Here mud has to be fetched for the ritual preparation of the *uhas* to be fetched for the ritual preparation of the *ukha* pot, which is the main emblem of the ritual. A solemn procession, led by a horse and a donkey, start out toward the loam pit while



mantras are recited. a man of the vaisya caste protects the area(cf. Heesterman 1967) and all the participants walk clockwise around it. The horse steps over the clay to the east, water is poured over its footprint, grass is strewn around it and an oblation is made. Over them, the Adavryu priest spreads a skin of a black antelope with its neck to the east and its hairy side up. He then takes lumps of clay, each with a mantra. These are eventually made into balls from which the *uktha* pot, and two spares, are made (Baudhyana Sutra 10.2-5:AGNI 11,484-495).²²

Staal comments: "We may recall: The opening in the nest of a hornbill is so small that the female must remain prisoner within the cavity until she and the young break out. We have almost completed our brief survey of some of the parallels between animal reutilizations and human rites. But we still have to refer to the fact that the ritual patron and his wife, like some female birds, cannot leave the nest of their ritual enclosure throughout the ritual performance. During the five (or more) days of the *Agnicaya*, both have to remain within the ritual space which had been set up for the sake of their ceremonies, without bathing, and often fasting, while the ritual patron keeps his fists closed. To a Nambudiri Brahmin lady such confinement is not extraordinary: she is generally sheltered from view by a parasol, and is called *antarjanam*, 'inside person,' because she is expected to stay most of her life inside her home.' Against the functional explanations of nest construction Staal accepts Konrad Lorenz's observations that ritual constructions and constructions of ritual space belong to the same domain of activity, which is engaged in not to reach a specific goal or perform a particular function, but for its own sake. There are numerous other facts and considerations that support this conclusion."²³

There is also an interesting observation that birds do also discover nests. Many nests are from a combination of construction and discovery, birds find nests in holes, rocks, chimneys, trees, or they lay their eggs in others nests. 'There is a distinction between conceptual space (*cidakasa*) and physical space, (*bhutakasa*), for Kant, the notion of space is apriori, necessary condition for any sense perception to take place. Whether birds have any awareness of such a notion does not make any difference. In a construction of ritual enclosure ideas of space that are partly innate are given expression in physical space. A region or a physical space may also be discovered in the outside world because it corresponds to an idea of space, correspond to a particular worldview but also incorporates innate, apriori notions of space that originated much early in the process of evolution and that are part of our mental equipment because we belong to a specific class of animals. And finally, features of space may be discovered outside world that are new: correspond to neither anything known or experienced before nor to any innate notion. The idea of a mythical mountain, the Mount Meru, Mount *Mujavut*, where the best soma is found, Meru with the pole *manadra*, the churning stick, with connections in Buddhist *stupa* and the later Saivite *linga*, the idea of this center of the earth is a common heritage, occurs not only in other parts of the world but also there are predecessors in animal world. Detlev Fehling (1974) found that humans as well as other animals often seek higher places from where they can survey everything." This applies not only to birds but also to many mammals including primates, predators such as tigers, and especially mountain dwellers such as deer, sheep and goats. The predators look around in order to see where they can make a



catch; and many of the others climb to the tops of mountains or hills for the opposite reason, in order to watch and be prepared for against approaching danger. There are also animals that seem to do these things without pragmatic needs or justification, simply because they like it. Gorillas often climb trees "just to sit and look around."²⁴(Schaller 1963:81)

"The earliest reference to a mountain called Kelasa is found in Buddhist scriptures. 'It is one of the five mountains that surround a lake called Anavatapta (Sanskrit) or Anotatta (in Pali), both meaning unheated, that the lake remains always in the shadows of the five surrounding mountains of which Kelasa is one. Four rivers flow from its channels, the five resulting streams are Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu, Mahi. (Aciravati is the modern Rapti, Sarabhu the Sarju, Mahi, a stream in the region Gaya.) This is a description in detail that demonstrate that we are dealing with descriptions based upon travel accounts by people who have actually visited a geographical region. It is not so with Mount Meru where the geographical background, even if there is one, can not be recovered. We are thus not concerned here with 'culturally constructed' space but with real, objective space. In the early Buddhist descriptions of Lake Anavatapta and Mount Kelasa we are clearly dealing with geographical realities, distorted as they may be by the conflict of traditions and the passage of time. This is obvious because of the detailed accounts of extraordinary geographical and geological features of the area, so out of the usual that they cannot correspond to any innate notions or pre conceived worldviews. For it remains true that reality surpasses animal instinct as well as human imagination."²⁵

The moment the realistic description is replaced by more mythical and imaginary description it tends to be unrealistic description, the way in the Mahanirvana Tantra Kailasa is described as "the Lord of Mountains, resplendent with jewels, clad with trees and creepers. Shows how the cultural and conceptual space prevails over objective space. (rising to the majestic height of 22,028 feet height from western Tibetan plateau) but Buddhist account of Lake Anavatapta is based on accounts of geographical facts of travel experiences." Travellers along these routes were familiar with Kailas, that fabulous, yet real mountain, and the extraordinary geographical region around it, with its two lakes and the sources of the four great rivers. Regional and local traditions about the sacredness of the region may have already existed, although they are now only known from later Tibetan literature (See, e.g., Large-Blondeau 1960:228-231). And so the knowledge of this area entered the mainstream of Indian civilization, first Buddhist and subsequently Hindu. In so doing it merged with existing ideas about Mount Meru and the center of space. Thus concepts were depended and widened by physical realities."²⁶

In the construction of Ritual Space and in the preparation of the ritual enclosure, the physical space is sanctified. We have also read construction and discovery of nests and bowers by birds. Man, just like birds and other animals, both construct and discover centers of space in similar spirit. These are not only reflections of myth but also expressions of general structures that are characteristic of our innate nature.

Conclusion:

"The flight into astronomical space may betray a flight of modern man from himself. And yet we cannot escape naked



to our outer planetary flights. We have to take also our earthy Space, our atmosphere and our space-ships when we try to escape. There is something *shamanistic* in our interplanetary feats. And yet, the fictional Man of the technocratic universe carries with him the most distressing anthropological uniformity as practically all futuristic and interplanetary description of popular and non-popular science fiction show..... We cannot avoid from being without landscape. Man is not only a corporeal being, he is also inscape' and landscape. Landscape not only forms, but also informs the human being. A person without a proper landscape becomes dehumanized. This is one of the causes of the erosion of humanness in the agglomerated and over-congested apartments and slums of many big cities. Dehumanization occurs when humans lack the vital Space which constitutes part of their lives." 27

Space constitutes man and man constitutes space. Sacred Space is not just geometrical or physical abstraction. The Vedic seers talked of a mysterious dimension, the sacred, that is beyond simple logic and understanding. As against profane space they related it to a wider and a mysterious dimension, which needs a different mode of approach, a holistic and participatory model of knowing, the spiritual outlook. I feel science too is accommodating that mystery into its fold in its own unique way. Here it is a question of that mystery as a challenge to be understood, which science says, it can be optimistic in that direction. This mystery is recorded in this manner: 'The results constitute striking confirmation of one of the weirdest discoveries of modern science: that the expansion of the universe seems to be accelerating, the galaxies flying apart faster and faster with time, under the influence of some anti gravitational force. the work, astronomers said, opens up a powerful new way of investigating the nature of this 'dark energy' and its effect on the destiny of the cosmos.' ("Evidence shows universe expanding" (The New Indian Express, Vijaywada, May, 18 May, 04, p.11).

The scientists understand that it is due to mysterious encounter with other parallel universes, or due to extra unseen dimension of space, but one thing that is shared by both scientists and Vedic seers is the encounter with a dark, unseen force that leads to a tension between order and chaos, the possibility of becoming a stable cosmos or being accelerating which drew their attention. The responses may be different, in the one, taking recourse to reason and understanding, as it is a problem that is to be tackled by human understanding. On the other it is a prayer, an earnest desire for making the earth a resting place, a stable place to live, a dwelling place that can be understood not as an external observer to the cosmos but imbibing that very spirit of belongingness into oneself. This is what the Vedic seers contemplated to be the hidden mystery of the bond that exists between the inner and the outer, the profane and the sacred, the search for the sacred that is a necessity in us a search that is for philosophy an innate and an apriori understanding that is universal in man and his other animal counterparts in some other form as man is basically a being who is a lover of his own dwelling place transforming the profane into the sacred, an unstable chaotic place to a nest, a cosmos that is stable and sacred, a home, a nest for one and all when the entire cosmos with its space and air, water and fire, earth and grass, everything becomes chaste and the cosmos becomes a nest, '*yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam*', for one and all.

Notes and References

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