

KA

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The world is like the impression left by
the telling of a story.

Yogavāsiṣṭha, 2.3.11

Idae enim nihil aliud sunt, quam narra-
tiones sive historiae naturae mentales.

Spinoza, *Cogitata metaphysica*, 1.6

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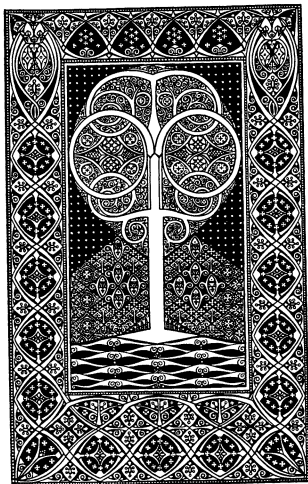
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I



Suddenly an eagle darkened the sky. Its bright black, almost violet feathers made a moving curtain between clouds and earth. Hanging from its claws, likewise immense and stiff with terror, an elephant and a turtle skimmed the mountaintops. It seemed the bird meant to use the peaks as pointed knives to gut its prey. Only occasionally did the eagle's staring eye flash out from behind the thick fronds of something held tight in its beak: a huge branch. A hundred strips of cowhide would not have sufficed to cover it.

Garuda flew and remembered. It was only a few days since he had hatched from his egg and already so much had happened. Flying was the best way of thinking, of thinking things over. Who was the first person he'd seen? His mother, Vinatā. Beautiful in her timeness, she sat on a stone, watching his egg hatch, determinedly passive. Hers was the first eye Garuda held in his own. And at once he knew that that eye was his own. Deep inside was an ember that glowed in the breeze. The same he could feel burning beneath his own feathers.

Then Garuda looked around. Opposite Vinatā, likewise sitting on a stone, he saw another woman, exactly like his mother. But a black bandage covered one eye. And she too seemed absorbed in contemplation. On the ground before

her, Garuḍa saw, lay a great tangle, slowly heaving and squirming. His perfect eye focused, to understand. They were snakes. Black snakes, knotted, separate, coiled, uncoiled. A moment later Garuḍa could make out a thousand snakes' eyes, coldly watching him. From behind came a voice: "They are your cousins. And that woman is my sister, Kadrū. We are their slaves." These were the first words his mother spoke to him.

Vinatā looked up at the huge expanse that was Garuḍa and said: "My child, it's time for you to know who you are. You have been born to a mother in slavery. But I was not born into slavery. I and my sister Kadrū were brides of Kaśyapa, the great *ṛṣi*, the seer. Slow, strong, and taciturn. Kaśyapa understood everything. He loved us, but apart from the absolute essentials took no care of us. He would sit motionless for hours, for days—and we had no idea what he was doing. He held up the world on the shell of his head. My sister and I longed to be doing something with ourselves. An angry energy drove us from within. At first we vied for Kaśyapa's attention. But then we realized that he looked on us as clouds do: equally benevolent and indifferent to both. One day he called us together: it was time for him to withdraw into the forest, he said. But he didn't want to leave without granting us a favor. Immediately we thought of ourselves all alone, amid these marshes, these woods, these brambles, these dunes. Kadrū needed no prompting: she asked for a thousand children, of equal splendor. Kaśyapa agreed. I too was quick to decide: I asked for just two children, but more beautiful and powerful than Kadrū's. Kaśyapa raised his heavy eyelids: 'You will have one and a half,' he said. Then he set off with his stick. We never saw him again."

Vinatā went on: "My child, I have kept watch over your egg for five hundred years. I didn't want the same thing to happen to you as happened to your brother Aruṇa. Impatience got the better of me, and I opened his egg too soon. Only then did I understand what a *ṛṣi* from a distant land, a

pale and angular seer, will say one day: that impatience is the only sin. Thus was the lower half of Aruṇa's body left unformed. No sooner had he seen me than my first child cursed me. I would be my sister's slave for five hundred years. And at the end of that time I would be saved by my other child, by you. This said, Aruṇa ascended toward the sun. Now you can see him cross the sky every day. He is Sūrya's charioteer. He will never speak to me again."

Vinatā went on: "We were the only human beings, myself and Kadrū, with a thousand black snakes about us, all of them the same, and your egg maturing imperceptibly in a pot of steaming clay. Already we loathed each other, we two sisters. But we couldn't do without each other. One evening we were squatting down on the shore of the ocean. You know that I am also called Suparnī, Aquilina, and perhaps that's why I'm your mother. There's nothing my eye doesn't see. Kadrū has only one eye, she lost the other at Dakṣa's sacrifice—oh, but that's a story you could hardly know . . . Yet she too has very keen sight. One evening we were heading in the same direction, bickering and bored as ever, our eyes scanning the waters of the ocean, seeking out the creatures of the deep, the pearls. A diffuse glow in the depths led us on. We didn't know where it came from. Then we turned to gaze at the ocean's end, where sea joins sky. Two different lights. A sharp line separated them, the only sharp line in a world that was all vain profusion. Suddenly we saw something take shape against the light: a white horse. It raised its hooves over waters and sky, suspended there. Thus we discovered amazement. Beside the bright horse we glimpsed something dark: a log? its tail? Everything else was so distinct. That was what the world was made of, as we saw it: the expanse of the waters, the expanse of the sky, that white horse."

Garuḍa stopped her: "Who was the horse?" "I knew nothing at the time," Vinatā said. "Now I know only that this question will haunt us forever, until time itself dissolves. And that final moment will be announced by a white

horse. All I can tell you now, of the horse, is what it is called and how it was born. The horse is called Uccaiḥśravas. It was born when the ocean was churned." Listening to his mother, Garuḍa was like a schoolboy who for the first time hears something mentioned that will loom over his whole life. He said: "Mother, I shall not ask you any more about the horse, but how did it happen, what was the churning of the ocean?" Vinatā said: "That's something you'll have to know about, and you'll soon understand why. You are my son—and you were born to ransom me. Children are born to ransom their parents. And there is only one way I can be ransomed by giving the *soma* to the Snakes. The *soma* is a plant and a milky liquid. You will find it in the sky; Indra watches over it, all the gods watch over it, and other powerful beings too. It's the *soma* you must win. The *soma* is my ransom."

Vinatā had withdrawn deep within herself. She spoke with her eyes on the ground, almost unaware of the majestic presence of her son, his feathers quivering. But she roused herself and began talking again, as though to a child, struggling both to be clear and to say only the little that could be said at this point: "In the beginning, not even the gods had the *soma*. Being gods wasn't enough. Life was dull, there was no enchantment. The Devas, the gods, looked with hatred on the other gods, the Asuras, the antigods, the first-born, who likewise felt keenly the absence of the *soma*. Why fight at all, if the desirable substance wasn't there to fight for? The gods meditated and sharpened their senses, but there would come the day when they wanted just to live. Gloomily, they met together on Mount Meru, where the peak passes through the vault of the heavens to become the only part of this world that belongs to the other. The gods were waiting for something new, anything. Viṣṇu whispered to Brahmā, then Brahmā explained to the others. They had to stir the churn of the ocean, until the *soma* floated up, as butter floats up from milk. And this task could not be undertaken in opposition to the Asuras, but only with their help.

The pronouncement ran contrary to everything the Devas had previously thought. But in the end, what did they have to lose, given that their lives were so futile? Now they thought: Anything, so long as there be a trial, a risk, a task."

Vinatā fell silent. Garuḍa respected her silence for a long time. Then he said: "Mother, Mother, you still haven't told me how you became a slave to your sister." "We were looking at the white horse. The more it enchanted me, the greater the rancor I felt for my sister. I said: 'Hey, One-Eye, can you see what color that horse is?' Kadrū didn't answer. The black bandage leaned forward. Then I said: 'Want to bet? The one who gets the horse's color right will be mistress of the other.' The following morning, at dawn, we were together again, watching the sky. And once again the horse appeared against the background of sea and sky. I shouted: 'It's white.' Silence. I repeated: 'Kadrū, don't you think it's white?' To this day I have never seen such a malignant look in her eye. Kadrū said: 'It's got a black tail.' 'We'll go and see.' I said, 'and whichever of us is wrong will be the other's slave.' 'So be it,' Kadrū said.

"Then we split up. Later I learned that Kadrū had tried to corrupt her children. She had asked them to hang on to the horse's tail, to make it look black. The Snakes refused. For the first time Kadrū showed her fury. She said: 'You'll all be exterminated . . . One day you'll realize.' Vinatā went on in a quieter voice, "that nothing can be exterminated, because everything leaves a residue, and every residue is a beginning . . . But it's too soon to be telling you any more . . . Just remember this for now: Kadrū's curse was powerful. One far-off day it will happen: the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas will fight, almost to the point of extinction, their own and that of the peoples allied to them, so that a sacrifice of the Snakes may fail, so that people recognize that the Snakes cannot be exterminated. That will happen at the last possible moment . . . Kadrū is calamitous, her word is fatal." Vinatā's eyes were two slits. "But where was I? Now we had to get to the horse. We took

flight, side by side. The creatures of the deep flashed their backs above the waters, surprised to see these two women in flight. We paid no attention. The only thing in the world that mattered to us was our game. When we reached the horse, I stroked its white rump. 'As you see,' I said to Kadrū. 'Wait,' said One-Eye. And she showed me a few black hairs her deft fingers had picked out from among all the white ones of the creature's tail. For no apparent reason, they were wrapped around a pole. Some say that those hairs were Snakes, faithful to their mother. Or that there was only one black hair, the Snake Karkoṭaka. Others say that Uccaiḥśravas has black hairs mixed in with the white. It's a dispute that will never be settled. 'I've beaten you. The sea is my witness. Now you are my slave,' said Kadrū. It was then that I sensed, in a sudden rending, what debt is, the debt of life, of any life. For five hundred years I would feel its weight."

"I'll go and win this *soma*, Mother," said Garuḍa with his most solemn expression. "But first I must eat." They were squatting down face-to-face. Garuḍa, a mountain of feathers: Vinatā, a minute, sinuous creature. "Go to the middle of the ocean," said Vinatā. "There you'll find the land of the Niśādas. You can eat as many of them as you want. They don't know the Vedas. But remember: Never kill a brahman. A brahman is fire, is a blade, is poison. Under no circumstances, even if seized by anger, must you hurt a brahman." Garuḍa listened, ever more serious. "But what is a brahman, Mother?" he said. "How do I recognize one?" So far Garuḍa had seen nothing but black, coiled snakes and those two women who hated each other. He did not know what his father looked like. A brahman? What on earth can that be? wondered Garuḍa. "If you feel a fire-brand in your throat," said Vinatā "that's a brahman. Or if you realize you've swallowed a hook." Garuḍa stared straight at her and thought: "So you can't tell a brahman until you've almost swallowed him." But already he was stretching his wings, eager to be gobbling up the Niśādas.

Caught by surprise, the Niśādas didn't even see Garuḍa coming. Blinded by wind and dust, they were sucked by the thousands into a dark cavity that opened behind his beak. They plunged down there as if into a well. But one of them managed to hang on to that endless wall. With his other hand he held a young woman with snaky hair tight by the waist, dangling in the void. Garuḍa, who was gazing ahead with his beak half open, just enough to swallow up swarms of Niśādas, suddenly felt something burning in his throat. "That's a brahman," he thought. So he said: "Brahman, I don't know you, but I don't mean you any harm. Come out of my throat." And from Garuḍa's throat came a shrill, steady voice: "I'll never come out unless I can bring this Niśāda woman with me, she's my bride." "I've no objections," said Garuḍa. Soon he saw them climbing onto his beak, taking care, fearful of getting hurt. Garuḍa was intrigued and thought: "Finally I'll know what a brahman looks like." He saw them sliding down his feathers. The brahman was thin, bony, dusty, his hair woven in a plait, his eyes sunken and vibrant. His long, determined fingers never let go of the wrist of the Niśāda woman, whose beauty immediately reminded Garuḍa of his mother and his treacherous aunt Kadrū. This left him bewildered, while he reflected that quite probably he had already swallowed up thousands of women like her. But by now those two tiny beings were hurrying off, upright, agile, impatient, as if the whole world were opening before them. Garuḍa was more puzzled than ever. He felt an urgent need to talk to his father, whom he'd still not seen. As his wings stretched, another whirlwind devastated the earth.

Kaśyapa was watching a line of ants. He paid no attention to his son, nor to the crashing that announced his arrival. But Garuḍa wasn't eager to speak either. He was watching Kaśyapa, his wrinkled, polished skull, his noble arms hanging down in abandon. He studied him for a while. He

thought: "Now I know what a brahman is. A brahman is one who feeds himself by feeding on himself." After a day's silence, Kaśyapa looked up at Garuḍa. He said: "How is your mother?" then immediately went on to something else, as if he already knew the answer. "Seek out the elephant and the turtle who are quarreling in a lake. They will be your food. The Nisādas aren't enough for you. They go and eat them on Rauhiṇa, that's a tree near here, a friend of mine. But be careful not to offend the Vālakhilyas . . ."

"Who can these Vālakhilyas be?" thought Garuḍa, flying along, the elephant and the turtle tight in his claws. "No sooner does one thing seem to get clearer than another, bigger thing turns up that's completely obscure." While Garuḍa was thinking this over, puzzled again, his wing skimmed the huge tree Rauhiṇa. "By all means rest on a branch and eat," said the tree's voice. "Before you were born you sat here on me, along with a companion of yours, exactly like yourself. Perched on opposite branches, at the same height, you never left each other. You were already eating my fruit back then. And your companion watched you, though he didn't eat. You couldn't fly about the world then, because I was the world." Garuḍa settled on a branch. Surrounded by the foliage that enfolded his feathers, he felt at home and couldn't understand why. Of his birthplace he could remember only sand, stone, and snakes. Whereas this tree protected him on every side with swathes of emerald that softened the merciless light of the sky. Hmm . . . In the meantime he might as well devour the elephant and the turtle, now on their backs on this branch that was a hundred leagues long. He concentrated a moment. He was choosing the spot where he would sink his beak—when there came a sudden crash. The branch had snapped. Shame and guilt overcame Garuḍa. He knew at once that he had done something awful, without having meant to. And it was all the more awful because he had not meant it. A vortex opened up in the tree, and Garuḍa flew out with the broken branch in his beak, the elephant and the turtle

still in his claws. He was lost. He didn't know where to go. He sensed he was in danger of making a fatal mistake. From the branch came a hiss. At first he thought it was the wind. But the hissing went on, peremptory and fearfully shrill. He looked at the twigs. Upside down among the leaves, like bats, dangled scores of brahmanas, each no taller than the phalanx of a thumb. Their bodies were perfectly formed and almost transparent, like flies' wings. Used as they were to hanging motionless, the flight was upsetting them terribly. Garuḍa thought: "Oh, the Vālakhilyas . . ." He was sure it was they, sure of the enormity of his crime. "Noble Vālakhilyas," said Garuḍa, "the last thing I want is to hurt you." He was answered by a mocking rustle. "That's what you all say . . ." Now he made out a voice. "The indestructible is tiny and tenuous as a syllable. You should know that, being made of syllables yourself. The tiny is negligible. So it is neglected . . ." "Not by me," said Garuḍa. And now he began to fly in the most awkward fashion, taking the greatest possible care not to shake the branch he held in his beak. Despondent, he studied the mountains, looking for a clearing large and soft enough for him to put down the Vālakhilyas. But he couldn't find one. Perhaps he would waste away in the sky, circling forever. It was then that a huge mountain, the Gandhamādana, began to take shape ahead, and Garuḍa thought that he might attempt a last exploration. He was flying around the summit, slowly and cautiously, when he recognized the polished head of his father, Kaśyapa, sitting by a pond on the slopes of the Gandhamādana. Garuḍa hovered over him, without making a sound. Kaśyapa said nothing, paid no attention, though the whole of Gandhamādana was veiled in shadow. Then he said: "Child, don't be distressed, and don't do anything rash that you might regret. The Vālakhilyas drink the sun, they could burn your fire . . ." Garuḍa was still hovering above his father, terrified. Then he heard Kaśyapa's voice change. He was speaking to the Vālakhilyas, on familiar terms, whispering. "Garuḍa is about to perform a great deed. Take your leave of him now, I beg you, if you still think well of me . . ." A little later, Garuḍa saw the

Vālakhilyas detaching themselves from the branch, like tiny, dry leaves, gray and dusty. They turned slowly in the air and slowly settled next to Kaśyapa. Soon they had disappeared among the blades of grass, heading toward the Himālaya.

Garuḍa had watched the scene unfold with overwhelming anxiety. Now he felt moved. Long after the last of the Vālakhilyas had disappeared in the vegetation, he said: "Father, you saved me." Without looking up, Kaśyapa answered: "I saved you because I saved myself. Listen to the story. One day I had to celebrate a sacrifice. I had told Indra and the other gods to find me some wood. Indra was coming back from the forest, loaded with logs. He was feeling proud of his strength, and he knew he would be back first. As he was walking along, his eyes fell on a puddle. Something was moving in it: the Vālakhilyas. They were trying to ford it, which was hard going for them. Moving in single file, they held a blade of grass on their shoulders, like a log, and at the same time were struggling to get out of the mud. Indra stopped to watch and was seized with laughter. He was drunk with himself. Just as they were about to get out, he pushed those Vālakhilyas back in the puddle with his heel. And laughed.

"The following day I got a visit from the Vālakhilyas. They said: 'We've come to give you half our *tapas*, the heat that has baked our minds since times long past. It's the purest *tapas*, never corroded by the world, never poured out into the world. Now we want to pour some into you so that you can pour out your seed and generate a being who will be a new Indra, who will be the scourge of Indra, the arrogant, the uncivilized, the cowardly Indra. Such a one shall be your son.' Indra was brought into the world by the will of Brahma. He cannot be ousted by another Indra.' I objected. 'Then he shall be an Indra of the birds. And he shall be the scourge of Indra.' I agreed.

"That night I felt the Vālakhilyas' *tapas* flowing into me. I became transparent and manifold, a veil and a bundle of burning arrows. Your mother, Vinatā, took fright when I came to her bed. The following morning she told me how,

while pleasure had been invading her pores and curling her nails, something dark had raised her to a mattress of leaves, on the top of a huge tree—and she had seen a glow flare up from beneath. Down the trunk ran drop after drop of a clear liquid. She felt sure that that liquid came from an inexhaustible reserve."

Engrossed in his father's tale, Garuḍa had almost forgotten that he was still hovering in the air, claws sinking ever deeper into the elephant and the turtle, who had long been waiting to be eaten. Not to mention that cumbersome branch, still clenched in his beak. Garuḍa didn't dare do anything further on his own account. If he dropped the branch on one of the nearby mountains, even the most barren, and crushed so much as a single brahman, hidden in the vegetation, what then? "Thinking paralyzes," thought Garuḍa, motionless in the sky. Kaśyapa was eager to put an end to his son's wretched predicament. He would have plenty of time, billions of passing moments, to reflect on his crime: that broken branch. Now his father could help him. "Fly away, Garuḍa," he said. "Go north. When you find a mountain covered with nothing but ice and riddled with caves like dark eye sockets, you can leave the branch there. That's the only place where there's no risk of killing a brahman. And there you can finally eat up the elephant and the turtle." Garuḍa flew off at once.

"So many things happening, so many stories one inside the other, with every link hiding yet more stories . . . And I've hardly hatched from my egg," thought an exultant Garuḍa, heading north. At last a place with no living creatures. He would stop and think things over there. "No one has taught me anything. Everything has been shown to me. It will take me all my life to begin to understand what I've been through. To understand, for example, what it means to say that I am made of syllables . . ." He was even happier, drenched in joy, when a barrier of pale blue ice and snow

filled his field of vision, a sight that would have blinded any other eye. The branch of the tree *Rauhiṇa* fell with a thud, then down plunged the elephant and the turtle just a moment before *Garuḍa's* beak forced a way into flesh already wrapped in a gleaming *sepulchre*.

"And now the theft, the deed . . .," said *Garuḍa*. Around him on an endless white carpet lay the stripped remains of the elephant and the turtle. He rose in flight, off to win the *soma*.

At that very moment one of the gods noticed something odd in the celestial stasis: the garlands had lost their fragrance, a thin layer of dust had settled on the buds. "The heavens are wearing out like the earth . . ." was the silent fear of more than one god. It was a moment of pure terror. What came after was no more than a superfluous demonstration. The rains of fire, the meteors, the whirlwinds, the thunder. *Indra* hurled his lightning bolt as *Garuḍa* invaded the sky. The lightning bounced off his feathers. "How can that be?" said *Indra* to *Bṛhaspati*, chief priest of the gods. "This is the lightning that split the heart of *Vṛtra*. *Garuḍa* tosses it aside like a straw." Sitting on a stool, *Bṛhaspati* had remained impassive throughout, from the moment the sky had begun to shake. "*Garuḍa* is made not of feathers but of meters. You cannot hurt a meter. *Garuḍa* is *gāyatrī* and *triṣṭubh* and *jaḡatī*. *Garuḍa* is the hymn. The hymn that cannot be scratched. And then: remember that puddle, those tiny beings you found so funny, with their blade of grass . . . *Garuḍa* is, in part, their child."

Still raging though the battle was, its outcome was clear from the start. The gods knew they were going to lose. They hurried to get away. But what infuriated them most were the whirlwinds of dust unleashed in the heavens by every flap of *Garuḍa's* wings. Dust in the heavens . . . It was the ultimate humiliation . . . Even the guardians of the *soma* were overcome. In vain they loosed their arrows. Just one of *Garuḍa's* feathers spun majestic in the sky, severed by an arrow from *Kṛṣānu*, the footless archer. *Garuḍa* took no

notice of his enemies. The trial still before him was far harder. On the summit of the heavens he found a metal wheel, its sharp spokes spinning without cease. Behind the wheel he could just see a glow: a gold cup, or rather two cups, one turned upside down upon the other, their rims jagged and sharp. And these cups likewise were moving. They opened and closed in a rocking motion. When they closed, their rims fit perfectly together. Between the wheel and the cups hissed two Snakes. *Garuḍa* tossed dust in the Snakes' eyes and concentrated. He must slip between the wheel's blades, he would have to get his beak between the rims of the two cups, he would have to snatch the glow he had glimpsed within. Then escape. But everything had to happen in no more than the blinking of an eye. On that tiny fraction of time depended the fate of his mother, indeed of the world. *Garuḍa* did it. It didn't occur to him to drink the *soma* that dripped from his beak as he headed back to earth. He was thinking of the Snakes, and of his mother.

Indra tried to stop *Garuḍa* as he flew toward the earth. He found an accommodating and contrite expression. "There's no point in our being enemies," said *Indra*. "We are too powerful to be enemies," he added. Then he started to cajole: "Ask me anything you want. I have something I want to ask you: don't let the Snakes get hold of the *soma*." "But I have to ransom my mother," said the obstinate *Garuḍa*. "To ransom your mother all you have to do is deliver the *soma* to the Snakes. You don't have to do any more than that. But I don't want the Snakes to possess the *soma*. I'll tell you what to do . . ." "If that's how things stand . . ." said *Garuḍa*. He was intimidated by *Indra's* self-confidence, and his reasonableness too. "After all," thought *Garuḍa*, "this is the king of the gods talking."

"And now tell me what you want . . .," said *Indra*. He was growing insistent. "That the Snakes be my food, forever and ever," said *Garuḍa*. Whatever it took, he didn't want to risk swallowing a brahman again. And then he

liked eating the Snakes. But now he fell silent a moment, out of shyness. He was about to announce his deepest desire, something he had never uttered before: "I would like to study the Vedas." "So be it," said Indra.

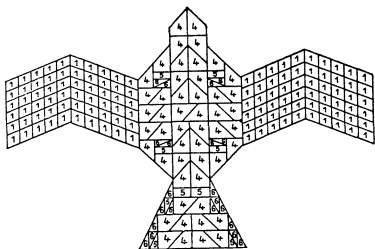
The Snakes had arranged themselves in a circle to await Garuḍa's return. They saw him coming like a black star, a point expanding on the horizon, until his beak laid down a delicate plant, damp with sap, upon the *darbha* grass. "This is the *soma*, Snakes. This is my mother's ransom. I deliver it to you. But before you drink of this celestial liquid, I would advise a purificatory bath." In disciplined devotion, the Snakes slithered off toward the river. For a moment, the only moment of tranquillity the earth would ever know, the *soma* was left, alone, on the grass. A second later Indra's rapacious hand had swooped from the heavens, and already it was gone. Gleaming with water, aware of the gravity of the moment, the Snakes could be seen returning through the tall grass. They found nothing but a place where the grass had been bent slightly. Hurriedly they licked at the *darbha* grass where Garuḍa had laid the *soma*. From that moment on the Snakes have had forked tongues.

Garuḍa said: "Mother, I've paid your ransom. You're free now. Climb on my back." They wandered over forests and plains, over the ocean, leisurely and blithe. Every now and then Garuḍa would fly down to earth to snatch bunches of Snakes in his beak. On his back, Vinatā bubbled with pleasure. Then Garuḍa took leave of his mother. He said his time had come. Once again he flew to the tree Rauhīṇa. He hid among the tree's branches to study the Vedas.

Buried deep among the tree Rauhīṇa's branches, Garuḍa read the Vedas. It was years before he raised his beak. Those beings he had terrorized in the heavens, who had

scattered like dust at his arrival, who had tried in vain to fight him, he knew who they were now: with reverence he scanned their names and those of their descendants. The Ādityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, Varuṇa, Mītra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Tvaṣṭṛ, Pūṣan, Vivasvat, Savitṛ, Indra, Viṣṇu, Dhātṛ, Aṃṣa, Anumati, Dhiṣaṇā, Soma, Brhaspati, Guṅgū, Sūrya, Svastī, Uṣas, Āyu, Sarasvatī. And others too. Thirty-three in all. But each had many names—and some gods could be replaced by others. The names whirled in silence. Perfectly motionless, Garuḍa experienced a sense of vertigo and intoxication. The hymns blazed within him. Finally he reached the tenth book of the Rg Veda. And here he smelled a shift in the wind. Along with the names came a shadow now, a name never uttered. What had been affirmative tended to the interrogative. The voice that spoke was more remote. It no longer celebrated. It said what is. Now Garuḍa was reading hymn one hundred and twenty-one, in *triṣṭubh* meter. There were nine stanzas, each one ending with the same question: "Who (*ka*) is the god to whom we should offer our sacrifice?" Estuary to a hidden ocean, that syllable (*ka*) would go on echoing within him as the essence of the Vedas. Garuḍa stopped and shut his eyes. He had never felt so uncertain, and so close to understanding. Never felt so light, in that sudden absence of names. When he opened his eyes, he realized that the nine stanzas were followed by another, this one separated by a space that was slightly larger. The writing was a little more uneven, minute. A tenth stanza, without any question. And here there was a name, the only name in the hymn, the only answer. Garuḍa couldn't remember ever having seen that name before: Prajāpati.

II



Prajāpati was alone. He didn't even know whether he existed or not. "So to speak," *iva*. (As soon as one touches on something crucial, it's as well to qualify what one has said with the particle *iva*, which doesn't tie us down.) There was only the mind, *manas*. And what is peculiar about the mind is that it doesn't know whether it exists or not. But it comes before everything else. "There is nothing before the mind." Then, even prior to establishing whether it existed or not, the mind desired. It was continuous, diffuse, undefined. Yet, as though drawn to something exotic, something belonging to another species of life, it desired what was definite and separate, what had shape. A Self, *ātman*—that was the name it used. And the mind imagined that Self as having consistency. Thinking, the mind grew red hot. It saw thirty-six thousand fires flare up, made of mind, made with mind. Suspended above the fires were thirty-six thousand cups, and these too were made of mind.

Prajāpati lay with his eyes closed. Between head and breast an ardor burned within him, like water seething in silence. It was constantly transforming something: it was *tapas*. But what was it transforming? The mind. The mind was what transformed and what was transformed. It was the warmth, the hidden flame behind the bones, the succession and dissolution of shapes sketched on darkness—and the sensation of knowing that that was happening. Everything resembled

something else. Everything was connected to something else. Only the sensation of consciousness resembled nothing at all. And yet all resemblances flowed back and forth within it. It was the "indistinct wave." Each resemblance was a crest of that wave. At the time, "this world was nothing but water." And then? "In the midst of the waves a single seer." Already the waters were the mind. But why that eye? Within the mind came that split that precedes all others, that implies all others. There was consciousness and there was an eye watching consciousness. In the same mind were two beings. Who might become three, thirty, three thousand. Eyes that watched eyes that watched eyes. But that first step was enough in itself. All the other eyes were there in that "one seer" and in the waters.

The waters yearned. Alone, they burned. "They burned their heat." A golden shell took shape in the wave. "This, the one, was born from the strength of the heat." And inside the shell, over the arc of a year, the body of Prajāpati took shape. But "the year didn't exist" then. Time appeared as the organ of a single being, nesting inside that being, who drifted on the waters, with no support. After a year the being began to emit syllables, which were the earth, the air, the distant sky. Already he knew he was Father Time. Prajāpati was granted a life of a thousand years: he looked out before him, beyond the cresting waves, and far, far away glimpsed a strip of earth, the faint line of a distant shore. His death.

Prajāpati was the one "self-existing" being, *svayambhū*. But this did not make him any less vulnerable than any creature born. He had no knowledge, didn't have qualities. He was the first self-made divinity. He didn't know the meters, not in the beginning. Then he felt a simmering somewhere inside. He saw a chant—and finally let it out. Where from? From the suture in his skull.

Born of the waters' desiring, Prajāpati began "all this," *idam sarvam*, but he was the only one who couldn't claim to have a progenitor—not even a mother. If anything he had many mothers, for the waters are an irreducible feminine plural. The waters were his daughters too, as though from the beginning it was important to show that in every essential relationship generation is reciprocal.

The mind: a flow restricted by no bank or barrier, crossed by flashes that fade away. A circle would have to be drawn, a frame, a *templum*. "Settle down," Prajāpati told himself. But everything pitched about. "Need a solid base," *pratiṣṭha*, he said. "Otherwise my children will wander around witless. If nothing stays the same, how can they ever calculate anything? How can they see the equivalences?" As he was thinking this, he lay on a lotus leaf, delicate and flimsy, blown along by the breeze, which was himself. He thought: "The waters are the foundation of all there is. But the waters are the doctrine too, the Vedas. Too difficult. Who of those to be born will understand? Need to hide, to cover at least a small part of the waters. Need earth." In the shape of a boar he dove into the deep. Surfacing, his snout was smeared with mud. He began to spread it out on the lotus leaf, with loving care. "This is the earth," he said. "Now I've spread it, I'll need some stones to keep it still." He disappeared again. Then he arranged a frame of white stones around the now dry mud. "You will be its guardians," he said. Now the earth was taut as a cowhide. Tired as he was, Prajāpati lay down on it. For the first time he touched the earth. And for the first time the earth was burdened with a weight.

The dried slime covering the lotus leaf set in a thin layer. Yet it sufficed to give some impression of stability. The

white stones sketched out an enclosure, allowed one to get one's bearings. It was this, more than anything else, that was reassuring, that invited thought. Beneath, immediately beneath, flowed the waters, as ever.

While Prajāpati's back lay glued to the earth, time stretched out within him. One by one, his joints were coated, inside and out, by a corrosive patina: past and future.

In his solitude, Prajāpati, the Progenitor, thought: "How can I reproduce?" He concentrated inside, and a warmth radiated from within. Then he opened his mouth. Out came Agni, Fire, the devourer. Prajāpati looked. With his open mouth he had created, and now an open mouth was coming toward him. Could it really want to eat him, its own creator, so soon? He couldn't believe it. But now Prajāpati knew terror. He looked around. The earth was bare. Grasses, trees, they were only in his mind. "So who can it want to eat? There's no one but me," he repeated. Terror left him speechless. Then Prajāpati knew the first anguish and the first doubt. He must invent a food for the creature he had made if he wasn't to end up in Agni's mouth. Prajāpati rubbed his hands together to conjure up an offering. But all that appeared was some soggy stuff, matted with hairs. Agni wouldn't want that. He rubbed his hands together again—and out came a white, liquid substance. "Should I offer it? Or maybe not?" thought Prajāpati, paralyzed by terror. Then the wind rose and a light filled the sky. Agni devoured the offering and was gone.

Prajāpati sensed he had a companion, a "second" being, *dvitīya*, within him. It was a woman, Vāc, Word. He let her out. He looked at her. Vāc "rose like a continuous stream of water." She was a column of liquid, without beginning or end. Prajāpati united with her. He split her into three parts. Three sounds came out of his throat in his amorous thrust: *a, ka, ho*. *A* was the earth, *ka* the space between, *ho* the sky.

With those three syllables the discontinuous stormed into existence. From eight drops were born the Vasus, from eleven the Rudras, from twelve the Ādityas. The world, which didn't yet exist, was already full of gods. Thirty-one born from as many drops, then Sky and Earth: which made thirty-three. Plus there was *ka*, the space between, where Prajāpati was. Thirty-four. Silently, Vāc slipped back into Prajāpati, into the cavity that was ever her home.

When creating the gods, Prajāpati decided to issue them forth into this world because the worlds below, in the depths of the sky, were pitted and impracticable as a dense thicket. The earth had the advantage of being insignificant. Everything still to be built. There was a clearing—and the wind whistling through empty space.

But no sooner had they appeared than the gods were gone. To seek the sky? They took no notice of the Progenitor. They turned their backs on him at once. The earth was just a point of departure, beneath consideration, a desolate way station. Prajāpati was left behind, alone again, last not first. Something held him back, something still there waiting for him: Mṛtyu, Death, One of his own creatures.

In the dusty clearing, Prajāpati watched Death. Death watched Prajāpati, symmetrical, motionless as his adversary. Each was waiting for the right moment to overcome the other. Prajāpati practiced *tapas*. He generated heat within himself. Now and then, in that dark period of silent affliction, Prajāpati raised his arms. Upon which a globe of light would rise from his armpits and shoot off to bury itself in the vault of the sky. So the stars were born.

The first equivalences were the *sampads* that flashed across Prajāpati's mind as he was dueling with Death. A *sampad* is a "falling together," a chain of equivalences. How did they reveal themselves? Prajāpati was staring straight

ahead, at Death. All around him, the world. The two combatants gazed at each other, studied each other. But didn't move. Each was surrounded by a supporting army. Wooden spoons, a wooden sword, sticks, bows: such was Prajāpati's army. Frayed and frail. Around Death were a lute, an anklet, some powder puffs for making up.

How long would this tension last? As he waited, Prajāpati ran through everything that served as a frame to Death, a frame that amounts to everything that is. It was a long way to run. He penetrated the frame, in its scrolls and flourishes—and the density of decoration would sometimes hide Death from him. He thought: "This is like that, this corresponds to that, this is equivalent to that, this is that." A vibration, a tension, a euphoria flooded his mind. If this is that, then that corresponds to this other thing—he went on. Slender bonds wrapped themselves like ribbons around this and that. The bonds stretched, invisible to many, but not to the one who put them there. With a sentinel's eye, Prajāpati went on watching Death. But with the eye that wanders, that evokes images, numbers, and words, he went on getting things to "fall together," sometimes things that were far apart, getting them to coincide. And the further apart they were, the more exhilarated he felt. The existent world—prickly, numb, empty—let itself be covered, taken, gathered, enveloped, in the mesh of a fabric. Oh, still a loose mesh, for sure . . . Yet this made it all the more exciting, that the mesh was at once so loose and so fine, as though to avoid upsetting the blind breathing of the whole. But Death? Still crouched there, waiting. Prajāpati thought: "If he kills me, what will be left?" Until now, this thought had terrified him. Prajāpati knew that everything proceeded from himself. Imagining himself as not existing meant imagining all existence nonexistent. But now he looked around. Then he saw himself from without: an exhausted, weary, wrinkled old being. All about him, everything was still new, so that looking around he could now see how every dapple of vegetation, every outline of a rock, concealed a number, a word, an equivalence: a mental state

that clung and mingled with another state. As if every state were a number. As if every number were a state. This was the first equivalence, origin of all others. Then Prajāpati thought: "If I were gone, perhaps these things would no longer fall together? Perhaps the *sampads* would dissolve? But how could Death hurt the equivalences? How could she strike them?" Where was their body, for her to wound? They occupied no space, they couldn't be touched. They surfaced in the mind, but where from? As he thought all this, Prajāpati felt a fever, release. He thought: "If the *sampads* elude me, who am myself thinking them, they will be all the more elusive for Death, who knows nothing of them. Death can kill me, but she cannot kill the equivalences." He wasn't aware that a clear, dry voice was issuing from his mouth. He was speaking to Death, after their long silence. Prajāpati said: "I've beaten you. Go ahead and kill me. Whether I am alive or not, the equivalences shall be forever."

In the end, Mrtyu withdrew to the women's hut at the western edge of the sacrificial clearing. He was beaten, humiliated, but not entirely undone. Prajāpati stared out at the empty arena, the clumps of shriveled grass around the edges. He knew now that this solitude, every solitude, is illusory, is inhabited. There is always an intruder—a guest?—hiding in the women's hut.

The brahmins of the Vedic period followed the example of Prajāpati, who had duelled long with Death, vying with him in sacrifices—Prajāpati, who had been about to give up the game for lost, exhausted, inadequate, when the *sampads* flashed across his mind, numerical equivalence, geometry stamped on light, and then he saw how the vast dispersion of all that lived, but above all that died, could be articulated in relationships that did not deteriorate. What the mind sees, when it grasps a connection, it sees forever. The

mind may perish, together with the body that sustains it, but the relationship remains, and is indelible. By creating an edifice of such connections, the brahmins imagined, as their forefather Prajāpati once had, that they had beaten Death. They persuaded themselves that evil was inexactitude. And thus died the more serene.

To bring forth “this,” *idam*, was a long torment for Prajāpati. And likewise to have it become “all this,” *idam sarvām*, including the flies and the gadflies for which he was later reproached. Little by little he was overcome by a tremendous lassitude. A being would appear, and immediately some joint of his would come loose. The lymph shrank in his body like water in a puddle under a scorching sun. As his joints were coming apart, came apart, one after another, he gazed at bits of himself, spread out on the grass, like alien and incongruous objects. Suddenly he realized that all that was left of him was his heart. Beating, begrimed. As he struggled to see himself in that scrap of flesh, he realized he no longer recognized himself. He shrieked like a lunatic: “Self! Self, *ātman!*” Impassive, the waters heard him. Slowly they turned toward Prajāpati, as though to some relative fallen upon hard times. They gave him back his torso, so that it might once again protect his heart. Then they offered up a sacrificial ceremony to him, the *agnihotra*. It might turn out useful, someday, they said—if Prajāpati should ever wish to reassemble himself in his entirety.

As his children were hurrying away, Prajāpati had glimpsed a head of tawny, waving hair, a white shoulder, a shape that cast a spell. “Oh, if only she would come back” he thought. “I would like to join myself to her” Everyone else had gone. Generating creatures seemed the most pointless of procedures. Before they appeared, he experienced a tension, a spasm within. But the creatures appeared only to disappear, in a cloud of dust. Then, in his loneliness, Pra-

jāpati took a bowl and filled it with rice, barley, fruit, butter, honey. He looked like a beggar fussing with his few belongings. He offered his bowl to the void. “May that which is dear to me come back into me” he whispered. It was a windless night. Directly above the bowl he had placed on the ground trembled the light of Rohiṇī, the Tawny One, who ever so slightly shook her hair. One day they would call her Aldebaran.

One question tormented the Progenitor: Why were his children so irreverent, why had they fled from him? And the gods too, why did they pretend not to know him? There was no one to explain, everybody had gone. Prajāpati was left with the corrosive sensation—something that had always dogged him—of not really existing. He looked around in perplexity. All creatures were sure they existed except him, who had given them their existence. Without him, “this” would never have been, but now he felt superfluous in respect to the world, like milk spilled while being carried from one fire to another, milk that one then tosses away on an ants’ nest. Scarcely had he given birth to the other beings when Prajāpati realized he wasn’t needed.

The world was dense, Prajāpati empty, feverish. He lay on his back, unable to get up. Even his breathing grew heavier. He felt all the breaths that had animated him drift away and disappear. There were seven of them, and he bade farewell to each one, calling them by name. He felt he had “run the whole race.” No one came near to moisten his lips. The gods left Prajāpati to die like an old man people have no more time for than a bundle of rags.

Of all Prajāpati’s body, the only part left attached was the sacrificial stone. It alone stood upright amid the desolation. In the silence, the wind blew little eddies of sand off it. There was no end to them. That sand is what has been lost of Prajāpati, forever.

What did Prajāpati look like when he was torn apart at the joints and scattered throughout the world? To one side there was a cold, empty cooking pot.

That was Prajāpati.

When Prajāpati was exhausted, a white horse appeared, its muzzle bent to the ground. For a year it never lifted that muzzle. Slowly, from the horse's head, *āsira*, a fig tree grew, *āsvattha*. The white horse, the fig tree: Prajāpati.

The gods were too plainly present to understand their Father, Prajāpati. They existed—that was all. They told the truth. They weren't complicated enough. They didn't know the death that "doesn't die, for he is within the immortal." They didn't grasp the skein's loose end dangling from the *asat* (which, whatever it may be, is the negation of what is: *a-sat*). Prajāpati thought he would never speak to anyone now. But one day one of his sons, the most solitary and melancholy, eyes gray and distant, came to speak to the Father instead of running away from him. It was Varuṇa. He said: "Father, I want to be your pupil. I want sovereignty." At the time Prajāpati was a dry old man who talked to himself and to animals. He laughed when he heard the word "sovereignty." He said: "Son, you saw how much your brothers and sisters respected me. I was lucky they didn't trample all over me. I know only what is of no use to you people . . ." "The only thing I care about is what you know," said Varuṇa, undaunted. "Teach me for a hundred years." The years passed swiftly and were the happiest of times for Father and son. When Varuṇa went back to his brothers, they got up from their seats, baffled and afraid. "Don't be afraid, we are equals," said Varuṇa. "The sovereignty you see in me is in you too. The only difference is that you don't know it."

Prajāpati's numbers were thirteen, seventeen, thirty-four. Thirteen and seventeen were the numbers of surplus, that extra above a whole (twelve, sixteen) where Prajāpati found refuge. Everyone was careful to avoid them. Nobody wanted to meet him. Indeed, so determined were they not to that they forgot that they would meet him in those numbers. They avoided them and ignored him without even asking themselves why. But what of thirty-four? There were thirty-three gods. Prajāpati came before the gods and after the gods. In front of them and behind them. Always a little to one side. He was the shadow that precedes the body. The gods were born of him, but they didn't want to remember that "all the gods are behind Prajāpati." Transported by sacrifice, intoxicated, the gods conquered the sky, as if it had always been theirs. They didn't deign so much as a glance at the earth, where Prajāpati was left behind, a herdsman abandoned by his herd.

Unlike the gods, who have a shape and a story, or even many shapes and many stories, who overlap perhaps, perhaps merge together, or swap over, but always with names and shapes—unlike the gods, Prajāpati never lost his link with the nameless and shapeless, with that which has no identity. They didn't know what to call him, apart from Lord of the Creatures, Prajāpati—and even that was too definite. Behind that, his secret name was Ka—Who?—and that was how he was invoked. Prajāpati was to the gods as the K. of Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle* is to the characters of Tolstoy or Balzac. His stories were always the stories of a stranger, unknown to gods and men, the origin of gods and men.

No one was more uncertain about his own identity than Prajāpati. He who gave names to others found his own name undetermined by the interrogative and indefinite: Ka. *Anirukta*, *aparimita*, *atirikta*: "inexpressible," "bound-

less,” “overflowing”: that was what they called him. Even those who knew him best never saw his extremities, which ever receded—and were finally lost in infinity. Perhaps that was another reason why none of his children thought of making a portrait of their Father. When they celebrated or invoked him, the only sound was an indistinct murmuring. Otherwise they worshiped him in silence. They said the silence belonged to Prajāpati.

Prajāpati was mind as power to transform. And to transform itself. Nothing else can so precisely be described as overflowing, boundless, inexpressible. Everything that exists had been in Prajāpati first. Everything remained attached to him. But it was an attachment that might well go unnoticed. Where was it? In the mind, buried in our being like a splinter no one can dislodge.

Although Prajāpati liked to tell himself that the gods had deserted him at once, without any consideration for their Father, there had been a moment when some of them asked him the question he least wanted to hear: “When you created us, why did you create Death immediately afterward?” On that occasion Prajāpati answered by going straight into detail and avoiding the crux of the question: “Compose the meters and wrap yourselves in them. That way you’ll be rid of the evil of Death.” Then he explained how the best meter for the Vasus was the *gāyatrī* and the best for the Rudras the *tristubh*. These gods immediately composed the appropriate meters and wrapped themselves in them. Then the Adityas started up with the *jagatī* meter. By now they were all busy earnestly talking about problems of meter. As if the whole world were a question of alternating meters. The meters were like sumptuous garments. By wearing them, placing one over another, the shape of the body was hidden. Thus they believed they could hide their bodies from Death. Suddenly, they had the intoxicating sensation that they were sufficient unto themselves. Even their harrowed,

mysterious Father ceased to be of interest. They didn’t remember that Prajāpati hadn’t answered their question, “Why?” And in the end even Prajāpati himself felt that he had answered the question—that he had offered the most effective help. But they deserted him all the same. Meanwhile Death could still see their bodies, as though they were immersed in transparent liquid.

Prajāpati’s children thought about the Father. They hadn’t wanted to know him. Now they felt his absence. His legacy to them was everything there was, but a fragmented, elusive everything. Only Death, who was part of that legacy, was everywhere. He dwelled in every moment of the year, a flood that swept over them. They tried rites, they tried the *agnihotra*, they tried sacrifices to the new moon and the full moon, offerings to the seasons, animal sacrifices, *soma*. They measured their gestures, their words. But to no end. Then they remembered how Prajāpati, the death rattle in his throat, had called upon Agni, the firstborn. The two had whispered a few words to each other, but no one had heard. Thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and taking Agni as a go-between, they went down to talk to Prajāpati.

Unrecognizable now, overgrown with vegetation, the Father said: “You do not know how to recompose me in all my forms. You go to excess or you fall short. As a result you will never be immortal.” He fell silent, while the gods were overcome by despair. Then Prajāpati spoke again, with the calm, sober voice of a learned master builder. “Take three hundred and sixty border stones and ten thousand, eight hundred bricks, as many as there are hours in a year. Each brick shall have a name. Place them in five layers. Add more bricks to a total of eleven thousand, five hundred and fifty-six . . .” That day Prajāpati announced how the altar of fire was to be built.

Prajāpati’s children, gods first, then men, realized that day that, in order to live, one must first of all recompose the

Father and recompose oneself, rebuild one's own body and one's own mind piece by piece. For if Prajāpati had been scattered and spread across the entire world, how could they—the dust of his bones—claim not to be scattered and spread? Only by patiently sewing, weaving, and tying things together could they expect to acquire a mind—hence a power of attention, rather than a blind vortex—and a body, rather than just limbs bereft of their lymph. This preparatory task would be *the task*. It would take time, it would take all time. Every one of the three hundred and sixty days of the year. Every one of the ten thousand, eight hundred hours of the year (if by “hour” we mean a *muhūrta*, which lasts forty-eight minutes). And then? Preparing life took up every hour life offered. When the time was up, the task began again. An empty clearing, a stick scratching marks in the earth.

This was what they must do: build a huge bird—a bird of prey: an eagle, a hawk—of bricks. How else could they conquer the sky? And here a false etymology, ever friend to thought, came to their aid. *Brick*, they said: *citi*. Bricks in layers. But what is *citi*? It's *cit*, which means “to think intensely.” Every brick, baked and squared, was a thought. Its consistence was the consistency of their attention. Every thought had the outline of a brick. It wouldn't disappear, wouldn't let itself be swallowed up in the mind's vortex. Rather it became something you could lean on. Something you could place a next thought on—and slowly, crisscrossed with joints, a wall was raised. That was the mind, that was the body: the one and the other rebuilt, with wings outspread.

This is what they thought:

“True, we live in a blurred and disjointed state. True, what happens inside these boxes of bone that are our heads leaves no trace on the hard, rough material in which we move. And it's also true that unreality cloaks both ourselves and the things we touch, as if this were the normal state of being. But when we wander about this torpid plain, we do

find, here and there, certain places that vibrate like nerves, certain sounds that peel with clarity, almost as though they meant something, and sometimes an emotion will flood through us, as though we had recognized something. Why so? We live in the broken body of Prajāpati, but we will always be tiny ourselves: only an immensely long voyage, if ever we could undertake such a thing, would allow us to glimpse the white cliff that is the further shore of a broken joint. If life is thus, must we then resign ourselves to this opacity, pierced through though it may sometimes be by the pinpoints of these vain reminders? We were warriors once, violent warriors. But no conquest ever helped us rend that blur. So one day we decided to concentrate all our fury in just one patient, grueling task. As long as time itself. Building the altar of fire.

“To arrange ten thousand, eight hundred bricks, one must start from the edge, from the frame of everything: of the world, of meanings. Start from the place where naturally we are. And the beginning will have something incongruous and obsessive about it: a few stones placed beside an empty clearing. But once formed, a frame evokes a center. And that was the fire of our minds: invisible right to the last step. It had to lie at the center of time, of the endless hours that surrounded it; at the center of the intense thought that made the bricks; that was those bricks laid one upon another. When they reached that point, touched that center, it would, as through a bundle of nerves, affect everything, as far as the furthest of the bricks, as far as the tip of the eagle's wing, as far as the most distant of days. That is what is meant by the altar of fire. But did this come to pass? We shall never be able to say. Why not? When we arrived at that point, time had run out, the year was gone. We would have to begin again, on another clearing, with other sticks, other bricks.

“Apart from the building of the altar of fire, no sacrifice will ever be enough to make us immortal, because each uses too many elements or too few. They don't have the right number. And the right number is the one that corresponds to the wholeness of time: ten thousand, eight hundred

bricks, as many as there are hours in the year, which is Prajāpati.

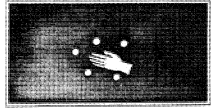
“But what gives us this faith, *śraddhā*, in number and building? Seen from afar, we must look like bricklayers gone mad. From close up, we are a challenge to find a sense in what we do. There’s a moment when we scatter sand on the altar. Why sand? ‘It’s the part of Prajāpati that was lost.’ A vast and numberless part. Who could ever count it? When Prajāpati came to pieces, most of him was lost. And, ‘Prajāpati is the whole *brahman*,’ the texts tell us. That dust, sole inhabitant of the heavens, reminds us how much has been lost.

“We are devotees of the distinct and the articulate, but the infinite festers in our bones. We must circumscribe it, as our skin circumscribes a weave of stuff in which we might otherwise lose ourselves, and which includes, among other things, death herself. Yet this is the only way to live. We are not so ingenuous as to imagine that our building is sound. There is nothing more flimsy and fragile than sacrifice and the place of sacrifice. If it is to work, it must be wrapped in the cloud of the immeasurable and enclose the immeasurable within itself. The greatest must be contained and embraced in the smallest. Thus the sand. Thus the silence, which gives rhythm to the rites. Thus the murmuring that sometimes goes on behind. The sand, the silence, the murmuring; emissaries of the incommensurable. A gesture to that part of Prajāpati we can never reconstitute. Amor-phous, inexhaustible.”

In the beginning, Prajāpati didn’t know who he was. Only when the gods issued from him, when they took on their qualities, their profiles, when Prajāpati himself had shared out their shapes, forgetting none, sovereignty and splendor included, only then did the question present itself. Indra had just killed Vṛtra. He was still shaken by the terror of it, but he knew he was sovereign of the gods. He came to Prajāpati and said: “Make me what you are, make me great.” Prajāpati answered: “Then who, *ka*, am I?” “Exactly what

you just said,” said Indra. In that moment Prajāpati became Ka. In that moment he understood, understood it all. He would never know the joys of limitation, the repose in a straightforward name. Even when they had recomposed him, in the ten thousand, eight hundred bricks of the altar of fire, he would always be a shape shot through by the shapeless, if only in those porous stones, *śrayamātrṇṇa*, avid of emptiness, that were placed at the center of the altar and allowed it to breathe.

Home of the dark germination of all that is, Prajāpati could hardly have an identity comparable to those who issued from him. Yet, in time, he would take his place alongside them—a god like any other, to whom victims are sacrificed, oblations dedicated. Spared the burden of bringing it about, he observed life more calmly now. It relaxed him to mix with the other gods, to lose himself among them. He liked the lower ranks best. Life was a spectacle that no longer depended on him. He loved to watch it, but would still get pains in all his joints whenever he was grazed by the wing of a desire. Which was little more than a memory now. For even desire had migrated into innumerable others. So Prajāpati waited for the moment when he would be forgotten. It began imperceptibly: long liturgies, lists of gods, from which his name would suddenly be missing. Gestures forgotten. Offerings overlooked. Were they considered superfluous, perhaps, for a god so discreet as not to demand them? For a first, long moment, no one noticed, in the celestial crush, that Prajāpati was gone. Everything went on as it always had, no function faltered. For a long time nobody realized, until one evening, as the shadows drew in, someone began to tell the legend of the beginning. At which, once again, there emerged, if only in words, the image of an elusive, indistinct, faceless figure, who had no name, and whom they could only call Prajāpati, Progenitor.



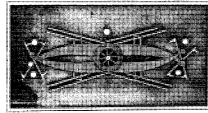
A Note on Sanskrit Pronunciation

The vowels are given their full value, as in Italian, with the exception of the short *a*, which is more like the *u* in *but*. Thus long *ā* is pronounced like the *a* in *father*, *i* as in *fit*, *ī* as in *machine*, *u* as in *put*, *ū* as in *rule*, *e* as in the Italian *nero*, *o* as in the Italian *tenore*, *ai* as *i* in *bite*, *au* as *ou* in *found*. *Ṛ* and *ḷ* are also vowels and are generally pronounced as *r* followed by a very short *i* or *u*, somewhat like *re* in *pretty*, and as *le* in *little*, or in the French *table*.

The aspiration of the aspirated consonants should be heard distinctly. Thus *th* and *ph* must never be pronounced as in English *thin* and *telephone*, but as in *hothouse* and *upheaval*. The same for *kh*, *gh*, *ch*, *jh*, *ṭh*, *ḍh*, *dh*, *bh*. *G* is sounded as in *get*, and *ṅ* as *n* in *king*; *c* is similar to *ch* in *church*, and *j* is pronounced as in *join*. *Ṇ* sounds like *n* in *punch*, but the combination *jñ* may be pronounced somewhat like *dny* or *gny*. The difference between the retroflex *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh*, *ṇ* and the dentals *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh*, *n* is that the former set is pronounced with the tongue turned rather back along the palate, while the latter is produced by bringing the tip of the tongue against the very edge of the front teeth. *S* sounds like *s* in *sin*, *ṣ* like *sh* in *shun*, while *ś* is something midway between the two.

H is in India generally pronounced as a hard *h* followed by a faint echo of the preceding vowel, while *ḥ* is a nasalization of the preceding vowel, rather in the way some French vowel sounds are nasalized. The stress is laid on a long penultimate (Kālidāsa), on the antepenultimate when followed by a short syllable (Himālaya, Gótama), and on

the fourth from the end when two short syllables follow (*kārayati*). A syllable is long if it contains a long vowel (*ā, ī, ū, e, o*, but also *ai* and *au*), or a vowel followed by more than one consonant. It should be noted that the aspirated consonants are considered single consonants in the Sanskrit alphabet. In a few words which are typically Vedic the musical accent called *udātta* has been marked. This stress, which consisted in a higher pitch of the voice, has disappeared in Classical Sanskrit.



Glossary

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| Abhimanyu | Son of Arjuna and Subhadrā; marries Uṭtarā |
| Aciravati | River in the Bihar region |
| <i>adharna</i> | Disorder, illegality, illegitimacy, violation of <i>dharna</i> |
| <i>adhvāryu</i> | Chief priest of proceedings, one of four basic kinds of officiants in the sacrifice of the <i>soma</i> ; the others are the <i>hotṛ</i> , the <i>udgātṛ</i> , and the <i>brahmān</i> . The priest who, more than any other, performs the liturgical actions; he moves around continually, handles the sacrificial implements, cooks the oblations, tends the fire. "The <i>adhvāryu</i> is the eye of the sacrifice" (<i>Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i> , 3.1.4) |
| Āḍi | A demon hostile to Śiva |
| Aditi | Boundless. She who loosens bonds; mother of the Ādityas through her union with Kaśyapa |
| Ādityas | The twelve sons of Aditi and Kaśyapa: Viṣṇu, Indra, Vivasvat, Mitra, Varuṇa, Pūṣan, Tvaṣṭṛ, Bhaga, Aryaman, Dhātṛ, Savitr, Aṃśā |
| Agastya | A <i>ṛṣi</i> born with Vasiṣṭha from the bowl where Mitra's and Varuṇa's sperm fell; sometimes considered one of the Saptarṣis; husband of Lopāmuḍrā |
| Age of the Losing Throw | <i>Kalīyuga</i> |
| Agni | Fire |
| <i>agnidh</i> | He who lights the fire; an officiant who tends the fire |
| <i>agnihotra</i> | Offering to the fire; the simplest and most important of the solemn rites. The head of |

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| | every family of the three upper castes must offer this sacrifice all his life, morning and evening, shortly before the rising of the sun or the appearance of the first star | | |
| | Forward: Agni's secret name | | |
| <i>agre</i> | | | |
| Ahalyā | Unplowable One; wife of the <i>ṛṣi</i> Gotama | | |
| <i>aham</i> | I | | |
| <i>āharavāṇya</i> | Fire into which one pours the offering; one of the three sacrificial fires, together with the <i>gārhapatya</i> , "belonging to the sacrificer," a domestic fire, and the <i>dakṣiṇāgni</i> , "fire of the south." The <i>āharavāṇya</i> is lit with a flame taken from the <i>gārhapatya</i> | | |
| <i>ahimsā</i> | Not to wound; nonviolence toward living beings. A lizard defined it as "the supreme law of all creatures that breathe" (<i>Mahābhārata</i> , 1.11.12) | | |
| Airāvata | Born of the ocean; a white elephant ridden by Indra | | |
| Ajita Keśakambalin | Philosopher who lived at the time of the Buddha | | |
| Akūpāra | Cosmic turtle, immersed in the waters | | |
| Alakanandā | River that rises in the Himālaya and flows into the Ganges | | |
| Albertine | A character in Proust's <i>Recherche</i> | | |
| Aldebaran | A star in the Taurus constellation; it corresponds to Rohini | | |
| All-gods | Viśve Devas | | |
| <i>amāgadho</i> | | | |
| <i>māgadho</i> | Man-not-from-the-Magadha called man-from-the-Magadha | | |
| Amarāvati | Indra's celestial city | | |
| Ambā | A princess of Kāśī, carried off by Bhīṣma with her sisters. Ambikā and Ambālikā | | |
| <i>amba</i> | Mother | | |
| Ambālikā | A princess of Kāśī, marries Vicitravṛya, mother of Pāṇdu through her union with Vyāsa | | |
| <i>ambālikā</i> | An affectionate form of <i>amba</i> , "mother" | | |
| <i>ambus</i> | Water, billow | | |
| Ambikā | A princess of Kāśī, marries Vicitravṛya, mother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra through her union with Vyāsa | | |
| <i>ambikā</i> | An affectionate form of <i>amba</i> , "mother" | | |
| Āmrपाली | Guardian of the Mango Trees, courtesan of Vaiśālī | Āmravana | Park of the Mango Trees, one of the Buddha's favorite parks |
| | | <i>amṛta</i> | Immortal; liquid of eternal life, drunk by the gods, which surfaces during the churning of the ocean (<i>amṛtamānana</i>) and coincides with the substance that men call <i>soma</i> |
| | | Amśā | Portion; one of the Ādityas |
| | | <i>amśā</i> | Portion. The gods can descend into certain human beings with a part of themselves. Thus, of the Pāṇḍava brothers, Bhīma has a portion of Vāyu, Yudhiṣṭhira of Dharmā, Arjuna of Indra, Nakula and Sahadeva of the Āśvins |
| | | <i>ānanda</i> | Joy, beatitude |
| | | Ānanda | Joy; Buddha's cousin |
| | | Ānandavardhana | A poet and writer of treatises, author of the <i>Dhvanyāloka</i> . "The Light of Poetical Suggestion," perhaps the most important Indian work of literary criticism; lived in Kashmir in the ninth century A.D. |
| | | Ananta | Infinite; another name of the snake Śeṣa |
| | | <i>ananta</i> | Infinite, without limit |
| | | Anasūyā | Without envy; daughter of Dakṣa and Viriṇī, wife of Atri |
| | | <i>anattā</i> | Non-Self; a Pāli term of Buddhist doctrine (equivalent to the Sanskrit <i>anātman</i>) that denies the existence of a Self, <i>ātman</i> |
| | | Andrée | A character in Proust's <i>Recherche</i> |
| | | Angiras | A group of <i>ṛṣis</i> , their guide is also called Angiras |
| | | <i>anirukta</i> | Inexpressible, unexpressed, implicit; describes those verses and rites in which the divinity of whom one is speaking is not named; also describes formulas that are murmured or pronounced mentally |
| | | Annappūrṇā | Full of food; a peak in the Himālaya |
| | | Antelope | Mrga, name of the constellation Orion |
| | | Antelope Park | Mrgadāva, park of the king of Vārāṇasī |
| | | Anumati | Consent; daughter of Angiras; also the fifteenth day of the lunar cycle, when the gods look favorably on sacrificial offerings |
| | | Anuruddha | A Buddhist monk present at the Council of Rājagṛha |
| | | Anyataplakṣū | A pond in Kuruksetra where Urvaśī appears with her following of Apsaras |

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| <i>āpah</i> | Waters, from <i>āp-</i> , "to pervade" | <i>ātman</i> | Self |
| <i>aparimita</i> | Boundless | Atri | Devourer: one of the Saptarṣis, to whom are attributed a number of the hymns of the fifth <i>maṇḍala</i> of the Ṛg Veda and one hymn of the tenth <i>maṇḍala</i> |
| <i>apauruṣeya</i> | Not from man; of nonhuman origin | <i>avabhrtha</i> | Ritual bath |
| Apollo | Son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis | <i>avatāra</i> | Descent: a periodic apparition, under a different form on each occasion, of Viṣṇu upon earth. The most widely accepted list gives the ten main <i>avatāras</i> as follows: Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāmacandra, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Kalki |
| Apsaras | Flowing in the waters; celestial nymphs | Avimukta | Creation ground in Kāśī |
| <i>apamścalā</i> | | Awakened One | The Buddha |
| <i>pamścalārvākyū</i> | "Not-whore called whore" | Awakening One | The <i>brahman</i> , according to the <i>Maitrī Upaniṣad</i> , 6.4 |
| <i>araṇī</i> | A twig of <i>asvattha</i> with which the ritual fire is kindled and with which Purūravas first unleashed fire in the world | Āyus | Life's duration; son of Purūravas and Urvaśī |
| Aratī | Dissatisfaction; a daughter of Māra | Badarī | A place of pilgrimage, sacred to Viṣṇu, in the upper Ganges valley on the slopes of the Himālaya |
| Archer | Śarva; one of Rudra's names | Bad Creation | Creation of Ahriman in Avestic theology |
| <i>arhat</i> | Worthy; the fourth level of sanctity in Buddhist terminology; refers to those who have freed themselves from <i>karman</i> | Bahuśruta | He who has heard much; epithet of Ānanda |
| Arjuna | White One; one of the Pāṇḍavas, born of the union between Indra and Kuntī, first wife of Pāṇdu, his putative father | Balbec | A seaside town where certain episodes of Proust's <i>Recherche</i> take place |
| <i>arka</i> | Brilliant; <i>Asclepias gigantea</i> ; a hymn of praise: the mystic name of the holy fire in the <i>agnicayana</i> and the <i>āśvamedha</i> | Balzac | Honoré de Balzac, 1799–1850 |
| Ārtabhāga | A brahmanic master, contemporary with Yājñavalkya | <i>bandhu</i> | Connection |
| Artemis | Daughter of Zeus and Leto, twin sister of Apollo | Banyan Park | Nyagrolhārāma, a park in Kapilavastu |
| Aruṇa | Son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā, Sūrya's charioteer | Baudhāyana | Traditionally recognized as the founder of the school of the "black" Yajur Veda (Taittirīya school); author of numerous Sūtras |
| Arundhatī | One of the Kṛtikās, wife of Vasīṣṭha | Bear | <i>Ursa major</i> ; <i>r̥kṣāly</i> ; residence of the Saptarṣis |
| Aryaman | One of the Ādityas, an ancestor of the Āryas | Bengal | A region in northeast India |
| Āryas | Noble Ones; used by the Vedic texts to refer to members of the three upper castes | Beteigeuze | A star in the constellation Orion |
| <i>as-</i> | To gain | Bhaga | Dispenser of riches; one of the Ādityas, brother of Uśas |
| Āsani | Flash (of lightning); one of Rudra's names | Bhairava | The Tremendous One; epithet of Śiva |
| <i>asat</i> | That which is not (<i>a-sat</i>), the unmanifest | <i>bhakti</i> | Devotion |
| <i>āśrama</i> | Hermitage | <i>bhaṅgā</i> | <i>Cannabis indica</i> |
| Asuras | Gods, the first-born sons of Prajāpati; when they oppose the Devas, the gods par excellence, they become antigods | Bharadvāja | One of the Saptarṣis, to whom are attributed a number of hymns of the sixth, ninth, and tenth <i>maṇḍala</i> of the Ṛg Veda |
| <i>asra</i> | Horse | Bharata | Author of the <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> ; may have lived in the third or fourth century A.D. |
| Aśvajit | One of the first five companions of the Buddha | Bhārhut | Place in Madhya Pradesh holy to Buddhism |
| Aśvala | Priest (<i>hotṛ</i>) of King Janaka | | |
| <i>āśvamedha</i> | Sacrifice of the horse | | |
| <i>asvattha</i> | <i>Ficus religiosa</i> , peepul tree | | |
| Aśvins | Divine twins, sons of Vivasvat and Saranyū | | |
| <i>atirikta</i> | Overflowing | | |

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| Bhārunda | Mythical birds who live in Uttarakuru | | |
| Bhava | Existence; one of Rudra's names. | | |
| bheda | Lesion, fracture, difference | | |
| Bhīma | One of the Pāṇḍavas, born of the union between Vāyu and Kuntī, first wife of Pāṇdu, his putative father | | |
| Bhīṣma | Terrible; son of Śāntanu and Gangā | | |
| Bhrgu | A <i>ṛṣi</i> , head of one of the clans founded by a <i>ṛṣi</i> | | |
| Bhūmi | Earth; <i>śakti</i> of Viṣṇu | | |
| Bībhatsu | He-who-feels-repugnance; epithet of Arjuna | | |
| Bihar | Region in east India, bounded by Bengal, Orissa, and Nepal | | |
| <i>bilva</i> | <i>Aegle marmelos</i> , tree sacred to Śiva | | |
| Bindusaras | Lake of Drops; formed from drops of Gangā fallen to earth | | |
| Black One | Kālī | | |
| Black One | Kṛṣṇa; also an epithet of Śiva | | |
| Blessed One | Epithet of the Buddha | | |
| Boar | Varāha; the third <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu | | |
| <i>bodhāyanti</i> | The Awakening One | | |
| Bodhgayā | The name of the place (near Gayā) where the awakening (<i>bodhi</i>) of the Buddha took place | | |
| <i>bodhi</i> | Awakening | | |
| Bodhisattva | A being destined to the awakening; the name used for those destined to become Buddhas as well as for those who have chosen not to reach the state of Buddha immediately, out of compassion for other beings. Before achieving awakening, Siddhārtha Gautama is a Bodhisattva | | |
| Boru-in-a-reed-marsh | Śaravāṇodbhava | | |
| Boy | Kumāra; one of the names of Rudra | | |
| Brahmā | All the unresolved disputes that revolve around the term <i>brahman</i> can equally well be applied to the meaning of this name. His antecedent is Prajāpati | | |
| <i>brahmacārin</i> | He who behaves according to brahman; the name of those in the first stage of human life, that of a pupil under the guidance of a <i>guru</i> , characterized by chastity and the observance of special rules | | |
| Brahmahatyā | Fury of the Brahmanicide; a girl who pursues those who have killed a brahman | | |
| <i>brahman</i> | The St. Petersburg Dictionary (Böhtlingk- | | |
| | Roth) offers seven meanings in the following order: prayer, magic formula, sacred discourse, sacred knowledge, sacred way of life, the absolute, the caste of the brahmins. The debates over this word have gone on since the beginning of Indological studies. Each of the seven meanings has its supporters, who believe it to be prevalent. Numerous hybrid meanings have also been proposed, as have further translations, for example, "connective energy compressed in enigmas" (Renou); "power of language" (Staal); "powerful word" (Kraunrisch); "link between life and death" (Heesterman). A whole literary genre, the Brāhmanas, was given over to the interpretation of <i>brahman</i> . In the <i>Atharva Veda</i> , 10.8.37, we read: "He who knows the thread of the thread knows the great essence of <i>brahman</i> " | | |
| | Prose texts of ritual exegesis, written between 800 and 600 B.C. | Brāhmanas | |
| | A dispute through enigmas | <i>brahmodya</i> | |
| | Lord of the sacred discourse; the chief priest, <i>parahita</i> , of the Devas | Bṛhaspati | |
| | Vivasvat | Brilliant | |
| | Awakened; the Buddha Śākyamuni, Siddhārtha Gautama, son of Śuddhodana and Māyā; according to Viṣṇuite tradition, the ninth <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu. The dates of his life are still a matter of controversy, but usually considered as straddling the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. | Buddha | |
| | The Buddha who precedes the Buddha Śākyamuni | Buddha Kāśyapa | |
| | The Buddha of the future, who appears after the Buddha Śākyamuni | Buddha Maitreya | |
| | Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha | Buddha Śākyamuni | |
| | Avestic demon of morning-time inertia | Buśyanstā | |
| | Wheel; in Tantrism, the name of the centers through which Devī Kuṇḍalini ascends; also referred to as lotuses (<i>padmas</i>). Their number varies with the traditions; in the <i>haṭha yoga</i> there are seven | <i>cakra</i> | |
| | Southernmost extremity of the Indian subcontinent | Cape Comorin | |
| | Franz Kafka's novel | <i>Castle, The</i> | |

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| Celestials | The Devas, the Apsaras, and the Gandharvas | Delphi | Sanctuary of Apollo |
| <i>chandas</i> | Meter | Desire | Kāma |
| <i>Chândogya Upaniṣad</i> | Together with the <i>Bṛhad Āraṇyaka</i> , the oldest and most important of the Upaniṣads | Devas | Gods, younger brothers of the Asuras |
| Chāyā | Shadow; another name for Sanjñā | Devavrata | One who observes a divine vow; the first name of Bhīṣma |
| <i>cit-</i> | To think intensely | Devī | The Goddess, of whom Pārvatī and Sati are manifestations |
| <i>citi</i> | Brick | Devī Kuṇḍalini | Twisted Goddess; <i>śakti</i> , the "power" of Śiva coiled around the base of the spine |
| Citrasena | A Gandharva and music and dance master in Indra's heaven | Devourer | Agni |
| Coomaraswamy | Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, indologist, 1877–1947 | <i>dexter</i> | Able; Dakṣa |
| Cow of Desires | Kāmadhenu, magic cow possessed by Vasīṣṭha; one of the gems, <i>ratnas</i> , that appeared during the churning of the ocean | Dhanvantari | Physician of the gods; one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appear during the churning of the ocean |
| Cows | <i>Go</i> ; a term in the language of enigmas; cows have twenty-one secret names | Dhanyā | Fortunate; sister of Menū |
| Craftsman | Tvaṣṭṛ | Dharma | Law; the god who fathers Yudhiṣṭhira with Kuntī; name of the dog of Yudhiṣṭhira |
| Creator | Brahmā | <i>dharma</i> | Law, order; in the Buddhist lexicon also means "element" |
| Cyavana | A <i>ṛṣi</i> of the Bṛghu clan | <i>Dharmasūtras</i> | Ancient works of jurisprudence attributed to various founders of the Vedic schools |
| Dadhikrāvan | In the Rg Veda, the name of a regal horse | Dhātṛ | Ruler; one of the Ādityas |
| Dadhyañc | Son of the primordial priest Atharvan; knows the <i>pravarṅya</i> , a ceremony incorporated in the cult of the <i>soma</i> | Dhenuka | Full of cows; a place of pilgrimage in India |
| Daityas | Sons of Kaśyapa and Diti, enemies of the Devas | Dhisanā | Hymn, prayer, intelligence; the cup that contains the <i>soma</i> ; also the goddess who brings wealth and fortune |
| <i>daiva</i> | Fate | Dhṛtarāṣṭra | Blind son of Vyāsa and Ambikā, father of the Kauravas |
| Dakṣa | Skillful (<i>dexter</i>); born from Brahmā's right thumb. Also "Dakṣa was generated by Aditi and Aditi was generated by Dakṣa" (<i>Rg Veda</i> , 10.72.4); father of Sati | <i>dhvani</i> | Poetic suggestion |
| <i>dakṣiṇā</i> | Ritual fee | <i>dikṣita</i> | Initiate; one who submits himself to the rites of the <i>dikṣā</i> , "consecration" |
| Dānavas | Demonic beings, enemies of the Devas, sons of Kaśyapa and Danu | Dinkas | A Nilotic tribe |
| Danu | Daughter of Dakṣa, wife of Kaśyapa, mother of the Dānavas | Dirghatamas Māmateya | Long Darkness, son of Māmātā; the <i>ṛṣi</i> to whom hymns 140–164 of the first book of the Rg Veda are attributed |
| <i>darbha</i> | Grass frequently used in sacrifices | Disorder | <i>Adharma</i> |
| Dark | Kālī; epithet of the Goddess and of Kṛṣṇa | Diti | Limit; daughter of Dakṣa, wife of Kaśyapa, mother of the Daityas |
| <i>darśana</i> | Vision | Draupadi | Daughter of Drupada, king of the Pañcālas, born from the sacrificial fire, marries the five Pāṇḍava brothers |
| Daughter of the Mountain | Pārvatī | Droṇa | Master of arms of both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, born of the seed of Bharadvāja, father of Aśvatthāman, an ally of the Kauravas |
| Daughter of the Sun | Sūryā, daughter of Sūrya | Drupada | King of the Pañcālas, father of Draupadi |
| Dawn | Uṣas | | |
| Dawns | <i>uśāsah</i> | | |
| Dead Egg | Mārtāṇḍa | | |
| Death | Mṛtyu | | |

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| Durvāsas | A brahman and <i>ṛṣi</i> , a portion (<i>amśa</i>) of Śiva | Gārgī | Woman theologian of the Kuru-Pañcālas |
| Dusk | Sandhyā | <i>gārhapatyā</i> | Belonging to the sacrificer; domestic fire; one of the three sacrificial fires. It is from the circular <i>gārhapatyā</i> that one takes the flame to light the <i>āhavanīyā</i> |
| <i>dvāpara</i> | When playing dice the throw that gives a remainder of two. In the sequence of the <i>yugas</i> , it follows the <i>kṛtāyuga</i> and the <i>tretāyuga</i> , and comes before the <i>kalyuga</i> | Garuḍa | Immense eagle, son of Kaśyapa and Vinatā |
| Dvārakā | City where Kṛṣṇa reigns, on the northeastern coast of India | Gaurī | Name of an Apsaras |
| <i>dvītiya</i> | Second | Gautama | Name of the clan into which the Buddha was born |
| Dwarf | Vāmana, the fifth <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu | Gavāmpati | A <i>ṛṣi</i> contemporary with the Buddha |
| Earth | Pṛthivī | Gayā | A place in the Bihar region near which the awakening of the Buddha occurred |
| Elephant | Airāvata, one of the <i>ratnas</i> "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean | Gāyatrī | Daughter of Brahmā |
| Eleusis | Place of the eponymous mysteries | <i>gāyatrī</i> | A Vedic meter made up of three lines of eight syllables |
| Enchantress | Mohinī | Geldner | K. F. Geldner, indologist, 1853–1929 |
| Everything | Sarva; one of the names of Rudra | Geniini | A constellation between Canis Major and Orion |
| Evil of Death | <i>Pāpmā mṛtyubh</i> | Genie | Yakṣa |
| Existence | Bhava; one of the names of Rudra | Genies | Ones who drink words: Rākṣasas |
| Extreme | Uttarā | Genies | Following Śiva; Ganas |
| Eye of the Pond | Hradecakṣus | Ghṛtācī | Name of an Apsaras |
| Father | Prajāpati | Gilda | The protagonist of <i>Gilda</i> by Charles Vidor, 1946 |
| Father Time | Prajāpati | Goddess | Devī |
| Fénelon | French theologian, 1651–1715 | Gokula | A village near Mathurā |
| Fifth Veda | One of the definitions of the <i>Mahābhārata</i> | Good Creation | Creation of Ohrmazd, in Avestic theology |
| Fire | Agni | Gopā | Wife of Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha |
| Forest of Cedars | Devadāruvana; a place inhabited by <i>ṛṣis</i> and their wives, on the slopes of the Himālaya | <i>gopī</i> | Cow girl |
| Forest of Khāṇḍava | A forest near Indraprastha; or Sugar Candy Forest | Gotama | Or Gautama; one of the Saptarṣis, author of hymns 74–93 of the first <i>maṇḍala</i> of the Rg Veda |
| Forest of Naimiṣa | Naimiṣāranya; the forest where Ugraśravas recited the <i>Mahābhārata</i> for the first time | Grace-Done-to- Antelopes | Became the name of King Vārānaśi's Antelope Park after the Buddha, in one of his earlier lives, passed through it in the form of an antelope |
| Four Vedas | The Rg Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda | <i>grāma</i> | Village; temporary settlement of nomad shepherds |
| Fury of the Brahmanicide | Brahmahatyā | <i>grāvastut</i> | Praiser of stones; officiant in the rite of the <i>soma</i> |
| Ganas | Genies who follow Śiva | Great Bear | Or Great Chariot; a northern constellation of seven stars |
| Gandhamādāna | A mountain east of the Himālaya | Great Black One | Mahākāla; epithet of Śiva |
| Gāndhārī | Wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, mother of the Kauravas | <i>grhapati</i> | Leader, guide of the officiants who takes the place of the sacrificer, <i>yajamāna</i> , in the <i>sattra</i> |
| Gandharvas | Celestial demons | | |
| Gandhi | Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 1869–1948 | | |
| Gāṇḍīva | A prodigious bow, given to Arjuna by Agnī | | |
| Gaṇeśa | Lord of the Troops; son of Pārvatī; has an elephant's head | | |
| Gaṅgā | Sister of Pārvatī; the river Ganges | | |

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| Gr̥samada | A <i>ṛṣi</i> attributed with the authorship of the second <i>maṇḍala</i> of the R̥g Veda | Indraprastha | A city of the Pāṇḍavas, corresponds to the present Delhi |
| Guardian of the Mango Trees | Ānrapāli | Indus | Sindhu |
| Guardians | <i>Philakes</i> ; to whom Plato entrusts control of the city | Iran | Erānśahr, "Land of the Āryas" |
| Guṅgū | The new moon | Īśāna | Lord; one of the names of Rudra |
| Harappa | With Mohenjo-daro, one of the two main centers of civilization in the Indus valley, which flourished between 2500 and 1700 B.C. | Island of the Jambū | Jambūdvīpa; ancient name of the Indian subcontinent |
| Hastināpura | A city of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, near the present Delhi | <i>ira</i> | "In a certain sense": "so to speak." "The particle <i>ira</i> stresses indeterminateness, evokes latent values" (L. Renou and L. Silburn, "Nirukta and ānirukta," in <i>L. Sarup Memorial Volume</i> , Hoshiarpur, 1954, p. 76) |
| Head of the Antelope | Mārgasīrsa; month corresponding to November–December | <i>jaḡatī</i> | A Vedic meter made up of three lines of twelve syllables |
| Hegel | G. W. F. Hegel, 1770–1831 | Jamadagni | Devouring fire; a <i>ṛṣi</i> , descendant of Bhṛgu, according to some traditions, one of the Saptarṣis; introduced the <i>vīraḡ</i> meter |
| He-who-came-thus | Tathāgata, the Buddha | <i>jambū</i> | Rose-apple tree. <i>Eugenia jambos</i> ; Island of the Jambū, Jambūdvīpa, is the ancient name of India |
| He-who-feels-repugnance | Bilohatsu; epithet of Arjuna | Janaka | Generator; king of Videha |
| He-who-has-the-blue-neck | Nīlakantha; epithet of Śiva | Jananejaya | One who makes men tremble; son of Parīkṣit |
| He-who-holds-the-bowl | Kapālin; epithet of Śiva | Janapadakalyāni | The beauty of the land; girl betrothed to Ānanda (or, according to some, to Nanda) |
| Himālaya | Himavat | <i>jaṛāyanti</i> | Awakening, making one grow old |
| Himavat | Himālaya; father of Pārvaṭī | Jayā | Maid of Pārvaṭī |
| <i>hims-</i> | To wound | Jayadratha | One who has victorious chariots; king of Sindhu, ally of the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas |
| Hindukush | A mountainous region between Afghanistan and the west of India (Pakistan and Kashmir) | Jena | City in Germany |
| Hipparchus | Hipparchus of Nicaea, second century B.C., astronomer who identified and described the precession of the equinoxes | Jetavana | One of the Buddha's favorite parks |
| Hoffmann | Karl Hoffmann, indologist, 1915– | Jina Mahāvīra | A spiritual master at the time of the Buddha, founder of Jainism |
| <i>hotṛ</i> | He who pours the oblation; one of the four main officiating priests, whose duty is to recite hymns and ritual formulas | K. | Josef K, in <i>The Trial</i> and K, in <i>The Castle</i> , novels by Franz Kafka |
| Hradecakṣus | Eye of the Pond; one of the six Apsaras who escort Urvāṣī | <i>Ka</i> | Who? Secret name of Prajāpati |
| <i>hr̥dyā samudrā</i> | The ocean of the heart | Kadrū | Daughter of Dakṣa, sister of Vinatā, mother of a thousand Nāgas; according to the <i>Śatapatha Brāhmana</i> , 3.2.4.1, she and Vinatā were <i>māyās</i> , "magic forms," evoked by the Devas to win the <i>soma</i> |
| Hri | Modesty | Kafka | Franz Kafka, 1883–1924 |
| I | <i>Āham</i> | Kailāsa | A mountain in western Tibet on whose slopes the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra rivers all flow |
| <i>īdam</i> | This | Kakuda Kātyāyana | A philosopher at the time of the Buddha |
| <i>īdam sarvam</i> | All this | | |
| India | The Island of the Jambū | | |
| Indo-Aryans | Āryas | | |
| Indra | King of the Devas and one of the Ādityas | | |
| Indrāni | Indra's wife | | |

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| Kāla | Time; one of the names of Śiva | Kātyāyāni | Epithet of Durgā, the Inaccessible One; manifestation of Devī |
| Kālakūṭa | The poison of the world, drunk by Śiva during the churning of the ocean | Kātyāyāni | Wife of Vājūnavalkya |
| Kālandakanivāpa | Offered to the squirrels; one of the Buddha's favorite parks | Kauravas | Descendants of Kuru; the name usually used for the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī, cousins of the Pāṇjavas |
| Kalāvātī | Sister of Menā | Kauśikī | River in Bihar, frequently called Kosi |
| <i>kali</i> | When playing dice the losing throw, "the dog's throw," which gives a remainder of one; in the sequence of the <i>yugas</i> , it comes after the <i>kṛtāyuga</i> , the <i>tretāyuga</i> , and the <i>dvāparāyuga</i> | Kaustubha | Gem that appeared during the churning of the ocean |
| Kālī | Black One, Dark One; an epithet of Devī, and hence of Pārvatī | <i>kavi</i> | Poet |
| Kālidāsa | An Indian poet and playwright who lived between the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. | Kāvya | Chief priest of the Asuras |
| <i>kaliyuga</i> | Age of the Losing Throw | Khlyātī | Daughter of Dakṣa and Viriṇī |
| <i>kalpa</i> | A cosmic cycle corresponding to a day of Brahmā; divided into four aeons, <i>yugas</i> , it ends with the <i>pralaya</i> , "dissolution," also known as the "night of Brahmā" | Kosala | A principality of the Bihar region |
| Kāma | Desire, son of Brahmā | Kratu | Will; a <i>ṛṣi</i> of the second list |
| <i>kāma</i> | Desire | Kṛṣā Gautamī | Companion of the Buddha in his youth; in Pāli: Kisā Gotamī |
| Kāmarūpa | Form of desire; ancient name of Assam | Kṛśānu | A footless archer, guardian of the <i>soma</i> |
| Kāñcī | A city in Tamil Nadu | Kṛṣṇa | Black One, Dark One; Obscure One; son of Vasudeva and Devakī, adopted by Nanda and Yaśodā; eighth <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu |
| <i>kapāla</i> | Bowl | Kṛṣṇa | Black One; epithet of Draupadī |
| Kapālin | He-who-holds-the-bowl; epithet of Śiva | <i>kṛta</i> | A winning throw when playing dice; a number divisible by four, leaving no remainder; name of the perfect age |
| Kapilavastu | The Buddha's birthplace; presumably corresponds to Piprāwā, in Uttar Pradesh | <i>kṛtakṛtya</i> | He who has done what must be done |
| Kārapacava | A bend in the Sarasvatī River | Kṛtikās | The Pleiades, the wives of the Saptarṣis; six of them carry Skanda in their wombs and give birth to him |
| Karkotaka | Name of a Snake, son of Kadṛū | Ksamā | Daughter of Dakṣa and Viriṇī |
| <i>karma</i> | Action; initially, sacrificial action | <i>ksatriya</i> | Warrior; noble; the second of the four castes |
| Karṇa | Son of Sūrya and Kuntī abandoned at birth, adopted by Adhirathā and Rādhā | Kunārā | Boy; one of the names of Rudra |
| <i>kāṛṣṭhana</i> | A coin of the Bihar | <i>kunāraka</i> | Boy |
| Kārttika | Month of the Kṛtikās, the Pleiades; October–November | Kumbhāyoni | He whose womb was a pot; epithet of Vasiṣṭha, born together with Agastya from the sperm simultaneously squirted into a pot by Mitra and Varuṇa upon seeing Urvaśī |
| <i>kāśā māḍhumatī</i> | Honey whip; used by the Aśvins | Kuntī | Adopted daughter of Kuntibhoja; mother of Karṇa by Sūrya; wife of Pāṇḍu, mother of Yudhiṣṭhira by Dharmā, Bhīma by Vāyu, and Arjuna by Indra |
| Kāśī | The Splendid; ancient name of Vārāṇasī (Benares) | Kuntibhoja | King of the Kuntī and the Bhoja peoples; adoptive father of Kuntī |
| Kāśyapa | Turtle; one of the Saptarṣis. He always has two wives—either Aditi and Diti or Kadṛū and Vinatā. Or he marries thirteen of Dakṣa's daughters, including Aditi, Diti, Kadṛū, and Vinatā | Kūrma | Turtle; second <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu |
| <i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> | An upaniṣad almost entirely in verse; contains the instructions given by Yama to a young brahman, Naciketas | Kuruksetra | Field of the Kurus; about a hundred and fifty kilometers north of Delhi; place where the gods made sacrifices; site of the battle |

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| | between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas narrated in the <i>Mahābhārata</i> | Mada | Intoxication; a demon |
| Kuru-Pañcālas | Collective name of the Kuru and Pañcāla peoples, who settled in the "middle region" (<i>madhyadeśa</i>), brahmanic par excellence, in the northwestern part of the Ganges plain. The territory of the Kurus was the Kuruksetra | madhu | Honey |
| Kurus | Inhabitants of the Kuru-Pañcāla region | madhura | Sweet |
| Kuśinagara | Capital of the Malla people; in a wood near Kuśinagara the complete extinction (<i>parinirvāṇa</i>) of the Buddha took place | Madhurasvarā | Name of an Apsaras |
| Lake of Drops | Bindusaras | mādhurya | Sweetness |
| <i>lakṣaṇa</i> | Token of perfection; the Buddha has thirty-two <i>lakṣaṇas</i> that distinguish his body from those of other beings | madhurīdyā | Doctrine of the honey |
| Lakṣmī | Consort and <i>śakti</i> of Viṣṇu | Mādri | Second wife of Pāṇḍu, who, by her union with the Aśvins, gives birth to Nakula and Sahadeva |
| Last | Uttarā | Magadha | Ancient name for the present southern Bihar |
| Law | Dharma | Mahābhārata | Epic poem attributed to Vyāsa, said to have been written down sometime between the third century B.C. and the third century A.D. |
| Laws of Manu | <i>Manusmṛiti</i> ; according to tradition, a text in which the <i>ṛṣi</i> Bhṛgu described the institutions of the sacred law as proclaimed by Manu; believed to have been written down between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. | Mahādeva | Great God; one of the names of Rudra |
| Licchavis | The dominant clan in the city of Vaiśālī | mahaśuktha | Great recital: chants intoned by the <i>hoṭr</i> on the day of the <i>mahāvratā</i> , during the mid-day squeezing of the <i>śoma</i> |
| <i>līlā</i> | Game | Mahākāśyapa | Great Turtle; one of the first sixteen <i>arhats</i> , led the Buddhist community after the death of the Buddha |
| <i>līṅga</i> | Sign, token, phallus | Mahākośi | A river that rises in the Himālaya |
| Locke | John Locke, 1632–1704 | mahāvīra | A clay pot made during the <i>pravargya</i> rite, used for heating milk |
| Long | <i>Dīghanikāya</i> , "group of long [discourses]"; name of one of the five sections into which the <i>Suttapitaka</i> , one of the Three Baskets of the Buddha's discourses, is divided | mahāvratā | Great vow; a ceremony that forms part of a <i>sattra</i> lasting a year: at its center is the <i>mahaśuktha</i> |
| Long Discourses | The doctrine of the Buddha expounded in long treatises | mahisī | Consecrated One; the first in rank of the king's wives; she who married him first |
| Lopāṃdrā | Wife of Agastya | Main | Name of the region around Frankfurt, where the Main flows |
| Lord of the Animals | Śiva | Maitreyī | Wife of Yājñavalkya |
| Lord of the Creatures | Prajāpati | Maitri Upaniṣad | An Upaniṣad in which the sage Maitri appears |
| Lord of the Herds | Paśupati | Mallas | At the time of the Buddha, the dominant clan in the north of Bihar |
| Lord of the Mountain | Parvata, Himavat | manas | Mind; Latin: <i>mens</i> |
| Lords of the Ornament | Śubhāspātis | mānasaṅgatas | Sons born of the mind |
| Lord of the Residues | Vastupa; epithet of Śiva | maṅḍala | Circle; the books that make up the Rg Veda are known as <i>maṅḍalas</i> |
| Lumbinī | The place Māyā gave birth to the Buddha, a small wood on the road between Devadaha and Kapilavastu; identified with a village in Terāi (Nepal) not far from Gorakhpur (India), now known as Rummindī | Mandara | A mountain used by the Devas and Asuras for the churning of the ocean |
| | | Man-Lion | Narasimha, fourth <i>arātara</i> of Viṣṇu |
| | | mantra | Incantatory formula, metric unit; the hymns of the Rg Veda are composed of <i>mantras</i> |

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| Manu | Son of Vivasvat and Sāmjña, progenitor of men, who are thus known as <i>mānava</i> . Or the son of Brahmā and Śatarūpā | | <i>Sattapīṭaka</i> , one of the Three Baskets of the Buddha's discourses, was divided |
| Māra | Killer; prince of demons, enemy of the Buddha | Mohenjo-daro | A city in the Indus valley; center of the eponymous civilization, which flourished between 2500 and 1700 B.C. |
| Marcel | Name of the narrator in Proust's <i>Recherche</i> | Mohini | Enchantress. She who deceives; celestial courtesan, female manifestation of Viṣṇu |
| Mārgaśīrṣa | Head of the Antelope; the month corresponding to November–December | Moon | Soma; one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean |
| Marici | A <i>ṛṣi</i> of the second list | Mother of the Universe | Pārvatī |
| Mārtāṇḍa | Dead Egg; the name of the Sun, shapeless son of Aditi | Mountain Girl | Pārvatī |
| Maruts | Darting Ones; Rudra's children, born "from the laugh of the lightning" (<i>Rg Veda</i> , 1.23.12) | Mrga | Antelope; name of the constellation Orion |
| Maskarin Gośālīputra | Philosopher at the time of the Buddha | Mriyu | Death; sometimes male, sometimes female |
| Mātali | Charioteer and messenger of Indra | <i>muhūrta</i> | A unit of time, equivalent to about forty-eight minutes |
| Mathurā | A city of Uttar Pradesh, on the Yamunā River; birthplace of Kṛṣṇa | <i>mūlādharma</i> | First of the <i>cakras</i> , "wheels," through which Devī Kuṇḍalinī ascends the body; situated at the base of the spine |
| Maudgalyāyana | A disciple of the Buddha | Murali | Kṛṣṇa's flute |
| <i>māyā</i> | Enchantment; also illusion, deception, magic; from the root <i>mā-</i> , "to measure" | Nāgas | Snakes; name of the sons of Kadṛū and Vinatā and of all snakes |
| Māyā | Mother of the Buddha | Naksatras | Houses of the Moon |
| Memory | Smara | Nakula | One of the five Pāṇḍavas, twin brother of Sahadeva, whose parents were Nāsatyā, one of the Aśvins, and Mādrī, Pāṇḍu's second wife |
| Menā | Wife of Himavat, mother of Pārvatī and Gaṅgā | Nanda | Herdsman, Kṛṣṇa's adoptive father |
| Menakā | Name of an Apsaras | Nanda | Brother of the Buddha Śākyamuni |
| Meru | The mountain that is also the axis of the world | Nandin | The bull that Śiva rides |
| <i>meru</i> | Spine | Nara | Man from whom the waters, <i>nāras</i> , are born; a <i>ṛṣi</i> , brother of Nārāyaṇa; appears as Arjuna in the <i>Mahābhārata</i> |
| Middle-length | <i>Majjhimanikāya</i> , "group of middle-length"; the name of one of the five sections into which the <i>Sattapīṭaka</i> , one of the Three Baskets of the Buddha's discourses, was subdivided | Nārada | A <i>ṛṣi</i> , son of Brahmā |
| Middle Way | <i>Madhyamā pratīpad</i> ; term used to define the teaching of the Buddha and the Eight-fold Path he preached | Nārāyaṇa | He who moves in the waters; dwelling place of man; epithet of Viṣṇu; a <i>ṛṣi</i> , brother of Nara |
| Milky Way | Flow of celestial waters; the whitish band that crosses the celestial vault, including about 100 billion stars; identified with Gaṅgā | <i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i> | Treatise on the Theater, attributed to Bharata; the first and most important Indian text on the theater, sometimes considered a Fifth Veda |
| Misrakesī | Name of an Apsaras | Nawāb Ja'far Khān | Ruler at whose court in Bengal in 1717 a dispute took place between supporters of <i>svakīyā</i> love and <i>parakīyā</i> love in the cult of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā |
| Mitra | Friend; one of the Ādityas; a divinity who has a dual relationship with Varuṇa | <i>neṣṭr</i> | Priest who leads the wives of the king in the <i>aśvamedha</i> |
| Mixed | <i>Samyuttanikāya</i> , "mixed group"; the name of one of the five sections into which the | | |

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| Neumann | Karl Eugen Neumann, 1865–1915, scholar of Buddhism | Pāṇḍu | Son of Vyāsa and Ambālikā, putative father of the five Pāṇḍavas |
| Night | Rātri | Pāṇini | The greatest Indian grammarian, who lived around 500 B.C. in Salātura in northwest India |
| Nilakanṭha | The Blue-Necked One; epithet of Śiva; refers to the stain that appeared on the god's neck after he drank Kālakūṭa | parakīyā | Another's woman; the object of an adulterous, illegitimate love |
| nīpa | <i>Nauclea cadamba</i> , a tree of scented, orange-colored flowers | parakīyādharmā | Law of the illegitimate one |
| Nirrti | Dissolution | Parikṣit | Son of Abhimanyu and Uṭarā, father of Janamejaya |
| nirvāṇa | Extinction | pāriplava | Circular story |
| Niśādas | Population of India; according to the <i>Laws of Manu</i> , 10.3, "a Niśāda is born from a brahman and the daughter of a <i>śūdra</i> [the lowest caste]" | parivṛktā | Neglected One; the third in rank of the king's wives |
| Noble Ones | Āryas | Parjanya | Cloud; Indra's younger brother |
| nyagrodha | <i>Ficus indica</i> , the banyan tree | Park of the Mango Trees | Ānurvana; a park in Vaiśālī |
| Nymph | Apsaras | parvan | Knot; used of the books that compose the <i>Mahābhārata</i> |
| Oldenberg | Hermann Oldenberg, indologist, 1854–1920 | Pārvatī | Daughter of the Mountain; her father, Himavat, is also called Parvata |
| Olympus | Seat of the Greek gods | paśūs | Domestic animals (including man); animals that can be sacrificed |
| Oniform | Viśvartipa; epithet of Tvastṛ and of his son Trīśiras | Paśupati | Lord of the Herds; one of the names of Rudra, then of Śiva |
| One-and-more | <i>Āṅguttaranikāya</i> ; a group of discourses made up of one or more lines; name of one of the sections into which the <i>Suttapitaka</i> , one of the Three Baskets of the Buddha's discourses, is divided | pāyasa | Rice cooked in milk |
| Order | The Buddhist community (<i>saṅgha</i>) | pecus | Herd; primordial form of wealth, from which comes <i>pecunia</i> , "money" |
| Order | <i>Rta</i> | Person | Purusa |
| Orion | A constellation between Gemini and Taurus; Prajāpati in the sky | Person in the Eye | Indra and Indrānī appear as Persons in the Eye, he in the right, she in the left |
| Orissa | A region of northeastern India | Physician | Dhanvantari; one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean |
| Ośadhipraṣtha | A city in the Himalāya, birthplace of Pārvatī | Place of the Hunter | The celestial region between Sirius and Aldebaran, including the constellations Gemini and Taurus |
| pālāgali | Daughter of the Herald; fourth in rank of the king's wives, of a lower caste than the others | Plaṅka Prāstavana | A place forty-eight days' march from where the Sarasvatī silts up; the center of the earth is a span (<i>prādeśa</i>) to the north of it |
| Pāñcālas | People who share a border with the Kuru people | Plato | +27–347 B.C. |
| Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa | The twenty-five-chapter Brāhmaṇa; similar in theme to the <i>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</i> | Pleasure | Rati |
| Pāṇḍavas | The five brothers born of Kuntī and Mādrī, and held to be the sons of Pāṇḍu, cousins of the Kauravas, descendants of the lunar dynasty | Pleiades | Kṛtikās; a group of seven stars in the Taurus constellation |
| | | Prabhāsa | A city in Gujaraṭ |
| | | prudakṣinā | Ritual circumambulation around a statue, a temple, or a person, in a clockwise direc- |

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| | tion, that keeps the object of veneration on one's right (from <i>dakṣiṇā</i> , "right hand") | Puruṣa | Person; primordial man, who is broken up in the world |
| Prajāpati | Progenitor: Lord of the Creatures; antecedent of Brahmā | <i>purusa</i> | Person |
| <i>prajāñā</i> | Wisdom | <i>pūrvācitti</i> | First thought |
| <i>prakṛti</i> | Nature's fabric, made up of three threads (<i>gunas</i>): the female counterpart of Puruṣa, in the Sāṃkhya doctrine | Pūrvācitti | Name of an Apsaras |
| <i>pralaya</i> | Cosmic dissolution, which occurs at the end of every <i>kalpa</i> | <i>pūrvāhiti</i> | First ritual call |
| <i>prāṇa</i> | Vital breath: man has seven of them | Pūsan | Nourisher; one of the Ādityas, brother (or husband) of Sūryā |
| <i>prāstitra</i> | First portion: when the portions of the sacrificial food are distributed, the first to be cut is a morsel no bigger than a barley grain, which is offered to the brahman on a wooden plate with a handle; it corresponds to the piece of flesh torn from Prajāpati when he was wounded | <i>puṣkara</i> | Blue lotus |
| <i>prati-</i> | Prefix that indicates, among other things, a coming toward, typical of Uṣas | <i>puṣkara</i> | Rock |
| <i>pratisthā</i> | Foundation, base | Pūtanā | Fetid; a demon |
| <i>pratītyasamutpāda</i> | "Production (<i>utpāda</i>) converging (<i>saṃ</i>) in function of (<i>pratītya</i>)" (L. Silburn): "law of interconnection" (T. Stecherbatsky) | Python | Snake of Delphi |
| Precious Stone | Kaustubha; one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean | quincunx | The shape in which the number five is displayed on dice |
| <i>preman</i> | Love | Rādihā | Kṛṣṇa's most celebrated lover, a <i>gopī</i> |
| <i>Prisonnière</i> | <i>La Prisonnière</i> ; the third-to-last part of Proust's <i>Recherche</i> | Rāhula | Son of the Buddha and Gopā |
| Pṛiṭi | Daughter of Dakṣa and Vīriṇī | Raivataka | A mountain near Prabhāsa |
| Progenitor | Prajāpati | Rājagṛha | A city in Bihar where the first Buddhist council was held shortly after the Buddha's death |
| Progenitors | The Saptarṣis | <i>rājāsūya</i> | Rite in which the king was consecrated |
| Propitious | Śiva | Rambhā | Name of an Apsaras |
| Proust | Marcel Proust, 1871–1922 | <i>rasa</i> | Juice, flavor, emotion, essence |
| Pulaha | A <i>ṛṣi</i> of the second list | <i>rāsatīlā</i> | Game of the dance; a circular dance |
| Pulastya | A <i>ṛṣi</i> of the second list | Rati | Pleasure; Kāma's consort |
| <i>punarmṛtyu</i> | Repeated death | <i>ratītilā</i> | Game of pleasure |
| <i>pūr</i> | Most commentators interpret the word as "walls"; W. Rau gives it as "livestock corral" | <i>ratnas</i> | Gems; visions that appeared during the churning of the ocean; including Sun, Moon, the Apsaras, Uccaiṣṛavas, Śrī, Airāvata, Dhanvantarī, Kāmadhenu, and Kaustubha |
| Pūrana Kāśyapa | Philosopher at the time of the Buddha | Rauhiṇa | An immense tree from whose branches hang the Vālakhilyas |
| Purānas | Ancient Ones; texts that tell the stories of the gods and, in relation to them, deal with any other matter, cosmic or human; composed mostly between the fourth and fourteenth centuries A.D. | <i>ṛc</i> | Praise, hymn |
| <i>pūrṇa</i> | Full | <i>ṛddhīpāda</i> | Basis of magic power |
| Purūravas | Lover of Urvaśī, father of Āyus | <i>Recherche</i> | <i>À la recherche du temps perdu</i> by Marcel Proust |
| | | Renou | Louis Renou, indologist, 1896–1966 |
| | | Residue | Śesa |
| | | Rg Veda | Wisdom made up of hymns; A collection of 1,028 hymns divided into ten books (<i>maṇḍalas</i>), belonging to the eponymous Veda. It is believed to have been put together between 1200 and 1000 B.C. |
| | | <i>Ring</i> | <i>Der Ring des Nibelungen</i> , by Richard Wagner |
| | | <i>ris-</i> | To consume oneself |

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| | <i>rocānā</i> | Space of light | | | |
| | Rohini | Tawny One; Aldebaran | | Samjñā | Name: simulacrum of Saranyū created by Saranyū herself; also known as Chāyā, "Shadow" |
| Romance of the Horse | | Narrative implicit in the course of the <i>āśvamedha</i> | | Sāṃkhya | One of the six schools of thought fundamental to Indian philosophy |
| | <i>ṛṣi</i> | Seer | | <i>saṃnyāsīn</i> | Renouncer |
| R̥ṣyaśṛṅga | | Son of the <i>ṛṣi</i> Vibhāṇḍaka; hermit | | <i>sampad</i> | That which falls together, equivalence |
| | <i>ṛta</i> | Order, truth: Heinrich Lüders dedicates a considerable part of his two-volume <i>Varaṅga</i> (unfinished) to a demonstration of how and why the two meanings are copresent | | <i>saṃsāra</i> | Migration: the circle of rebirth, becoming of phenomena |
| | <i>ṛtāvan</i> | Endowed with truth | | Śāntanu | King of the lunar dynasty, father of Bhīṣma, husband of Satyawatī, and father of Vicitravīrya |
| | Rudra | Yelling One or Tawny One, according to the ancient etymologists; antecedent of Śiva | | <i>saṃtati</i> | Continuity |
| | Rudras | Eleven divinities who, with the Vasus, the Ādityas, and the two Aśvins, make up the thirty-three Vedic gods | | Sāñcī | A place in Madhya Pradesh sacred to Buddhism |
| | Rukmiṇī | First wife of Kṛṣṇa | | Sandhyā | Conjunction, dusk; daughter of Brahmā |
| | <i>rūpa</i> | Form | | Samatī | Daughter of Dakṣa and Viriṇī |
| | <i>ruvan</i> | Roaring | | <i>śāntarasa</i> | Flavor of peace |
| | <i>sabhā</i> | Meeting place, assembly hall | | Saptarṣis | The seven <i>ṛṣis</i> who reside in the stars of the Great Bear, also known as <i>ṛṣis</i> of the first list, partly to indicate that they came before all the other <i>ṛṣis</i> and partly because of the antiquity of the tradition that bears witness to them: Bharadvāja, Kaśyapa, Gotama, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Jamaḍagni, and Vasiṣṭha. The <i>ṛṣis</i> of the second list, predominant in the epics, are Marīcī, Atri, Agīras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, and Vasiṣṭha. Bhṛgu is sometimes included in the second list |
| | <i>sāhā</i> | The girl who takes part in the rite of the <i>āśvamedha</i> | | Saramā | Indra's she-dog |
| | Sahā | Name of an Apsaras | | Saranyū | Daughter of Tvastṛ, twin sister of Trīśūras, wife of Vivasvat, mother of Yama and Yamī and of the Aśvins |
| | Sahadeva | The youngest of the five Pāṇḍavas, twin brother of Nakula, whose parents were Dasra, one of the Aśvins, and Mādrī, Pāṇḍu's second wife | | Sarasvatī | Flowing One; wife of Brahmā, sacred river of the Punjab, whose waters sink into the sands of the Rajasthan |
| | Śākalya | A brahman of the Kuru-Pāñcālas | | Śaravānodbhava | Born-in-a-reed-marsh; name of Skanda |
| | <i>śakti</i> | Power; the <i>śakti</i> par excellence is Śiva's consort | | Śāriputra | Disciple of the Buddha |
| | Śakuntalā | Daughter of Viśvāmitra and the Apsaras Menakā; from her union with King Duśyanta she gives birth to Sarvadāmana, later known as Bharata, emperor of India | | Śārnāth | Place where the Buddha began to preach, near Vārāṇasī |
| | Śākya | The royal clan to which the Buddha belonged, hence his name Śākyamunī, "Wise man of the Śākya" | | Sarva | Everything; one of the names of Rudra |
| | <i>śāla</i> | <i>Shorea robusta</i> , <i>Fatica robusta</i> , a resinous tree common in India | | Śarva | Archer; one of the names of Rudra |
| | Śālavatī | An area of the principality of Kosala | | Śaryāti | King, son of Manu, father of Sukanyā |
| | Śālva | A tribe settled on the banks of the Yamunā | | Śatpatha Brāhmana | The Brāhmana of the hundred paths; the most important and complex of the Brāhmanas, attributed to Yājñavalkya |
| | Śāmaśravas | Disciple of Yājñavalkya | | | |
| | <i>śamī</i> | <i>Acacia suma</i> , <i>Mimosa suma</i> , <i>Prosopis spicigera</i> , a tree of the acacia family | | | |
| Samjayin Vairāṭiputra | | Philosopher living at the time of the Buddha | | | |
| | <i>saṃjīvanī vidyā</i> | The science of resurrection | | | |

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| Śataripū | She who has a hundred shapes: daughter and consort of Brahmā | Śiśupāla | King of Cedi, ally of the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas |
| Satī | She-who-is; daughter of Dakṣa and Viriñī, consort of Śiva | Śiva | Propitious. Fortunate. Benign: his antecedent is Rudra; with Brahmā and Viṣṇu, he constitutes the Trīmūrti, defined by Kālidāsa as "a single body divided in three shapes. Each can be the firstborn or last-born in relation to the others" (<i>Kumārasambhava</i> 7.44) |
| <i>sattra</i> | Sitting; a rite without <i>dakṣiṇā</i> , which can last from twelve days to, in theory at least, a hundred years | Skanda | Squirt; son of Śiva and Pārvatī, brought to birth by six of the Kṛttikās |
| <i>sattra</i> | Being, purity; one of the three threads (<i>guṇas</i>) that make up the world | Sky | Dyaus |
| <i>satya</i> | Truth | Smara | Memory; Epithet of Kāma |
| <i>satyarakya</i> | Word of truth; ordeal of the word | Suṛi | Remembrance; daughter of Dakṣa and Viriñī |
| Satyavati | Born from the seed of King Uparicara swallowed by a fish who was the Apsaras Adrikā; mother to Vyāsa through her union with the brahman Parāśara, wife of Śāntanu | Snake | Nāga |
| Savitṛ | He who gives impulse: shape of the Sun, one of the Ādityas | Soma | Divine king, made up of the substance called <i>soma</i> |
| Sāvitrī | Daughter of Savitr, consort of Brahmā | <i>soma</i> | Squeezed, juice; an intoxicating plant that has been identified over the centuries with numerous botanical varieties, both in India and by Western indologists. From the Brāhmanas on, the <i>soma</i> is replaced in the rites (because it is no longer available) by <i>Ephedra</i> , <i>Sarcostemma</i> , and other epiphytes. In 1968, R. Gordon Wasson claimed to have identified the <i>soma</i> as the hallucinogenic mushroom <i>Amanita muscaria</i> . According to D. S. Flattery, on the other hand, it is another hallucinogenic plant, <i>Peganum harmala</i> |
| Sāyana | Commentator of the Vedas who lived in the fourteenth century | Splendor of the World | Śrī |
| Self | <i>Ātman</i> | Squirt | Skanda |
| Śeṣa | Residue, also called Ananta: the snake Viṣṇu rests on as he drifts around the waters | <i>śradhdhā</i> | Trust, faith |
| <i>śeṣa</i> | Residue | <i>śramaṇa</i> | Ascetic |
| Seven Sisters | The seven celestial rivers. "The young daughters of the sky, who do not eat and cannot do harm, do not dress and are not naked" (<i>Rg Veda</i> , 3.1.6) | Śrī | Splendor of the World; appeared during the churning of the ocean and became the consort of Viṣṇu |
| Seven Wise Ones | Saptarṣis | <i>srj-</i> | To squirt |
| Shadow | Chāyā | <i>śruti</i> | That which one hears: revelation, a term used to designate the Vedas as a whole |
| She-who-comes-from-the-north | Utarā | Sthūra | <i>Gṛhapati</i> of a group of officiants of a <i>sattra</i> that was celebrated along the banks of the Sarasvatī |
| She-who-is | Satī | Styx | Inferral river |
| She-who-loosens-ties | Aditi | Subhadra | A wanderer; the last disciple converted by the Buddha |
| She-who-takes-across | Utarā | | |
| Short Discourses | The doctrine of the Buddha, expounded in short texts | | |
| Siddhārtha | He who has reached the goal; name of the Buddha | | |
| <i>siddhaka</i> | Wood used for the club with which the dog is beaten to death at the beginning of the <i>āśvamedha</i> (perhaps <i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>) | | |
| Sindhu | The river Indus | | |
| Sirius | Star in the constellation Canis Major, on the edge of the Milky Way; Rudra, the Archer | | |

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| Subhadrā | Fortunate One; sister of Kṛṣṇa, wife of Arjuna, mother of Abhimanyu | | the mind, that which broods, in the sense of incubates (<i>Brütung</i> , occasionally, in Deussen) |
| Śubhāspātis | Lords of Ornament; epithet of the Aśvins | <i>tapasvīnī</i> | A woman who practices <i>tapas</i> |
| Submarine Mare | Vadavā | Tāraka | A powerful Asura |
| Suddhodana | Nobleman of the Śākya tribe in Kapilavastu, father of Siddhārtha Gauntama, later called the Buddha | <i>tathā</i> | Thus |
| Sugar Candy Forest | Forest of Khāṇḍava | Tathāgata | He-who-came-thus; name the Buddha gave himself |
| Sujātā | Well born; a girl from Uruvilva who lived at the time of the Buddha | <i>tathatā</i> | Being thus |
| Sukanyā | Good daughter; daughter of Śaryātī | <i>tat team asi</i> | "You are that" (<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> , 6.8.7); one of the "great sentences," <i>mahārākya</i> s, of the Upaniṣads |
| Śunaḥśeṣa | Son of the <i>ṛṣi</i> Ajigarta Sauryavasi | Taurus | A constellation between Orion and the Pleiades |
| <i>śūnya</i> | Empty | Tawny One | Rohiṇī, Uṣas |
| Suparṇī | Aquiline One; another name of Vinatā | Taxila | Takṣaśilā, a city in northwest India, now Pakistan, near Rawalpindi |
| Sūrya | Sun; son of Aditi and Kaśyapa | <i>tejas</i> | Flame; luminous force, manifestation of <i>tapas</i> |
| Sūryā | Daughter of the Sun | <i>teletērion</i> | Rectangular building, with columns, where part of the Eleusinian mysteries were enacted |
| <i>sumumā</i> | Central channel, inside the spinal cord, along which Devī Kuṇḍalinī ascends | Ten Sisters | The ten fingers |
| <i>sūta</i> | Caste of charioteers, heralds, and bards | Thirty-three | The Devas; the twelve Ādityas, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, and the two Aśvins (or, in other traditions, Dyaus and Pṛthivī, Sky and Earth) |
| <i>sūtra</i> | Thread, rule enounced with a minimum number of words, in somewhat algebraic formulas, often with no verb; in Buddhism, the word takes on the larger connotation "discourse" of the Buddha | Three Baskets | <i>Tṛipīṭaka</i> , into which the teaching of the Buddha is divided |
| <i>sva-</i> | From self, of self, auto-, one's own | Tune | Kāla |
| <i>svakīyā</i> | One's own woman, legitimate wife | Tiresias | Seer of Thebes |
| <i>svargaloka</i> | Bright world | Tolstoy | Leo Tolstoy, 1828–1910 |
| <i>svāsī</i> | Sister | Tree of Awakening | The fig tree in Gayā under which the awakening, <i>bodhi</i> , of the Buddha occurred. Today the place of the awakening is known as Bodhgayā |
| Svasti | Well-being; one of the names of Devī | Tremendous | Bhairava; epithet of Śiva |
| <i>svayamūṛṭya</i> | Term for the "naturally perforated" stones used in the altar of fire | <i>tretā</i> | When playing dice the throw that gives a remainder of three; in the sequence of the <i>yugas</i> , the <i>tretāyuga</i> follows the <i>kr̥tayuga</i> |
| <i>svayambhū</i> | Self-existing | <i>Trial, The</i> | Franz Kafka's novel |
| Svayamprabhā | Name of an Apsaras | Tricephalous | Trīśiras |
| <i>svayamvara</i> | Independent choice; ceremony in which the future bride chooses one of her suitors, after they have undergone a trial of ability | Triśaṅku | King of the solar dynasty, favorite of Viśvāmitra |
| Taksaka | King of the Nāgas, lives in the Forest of Khāṇḍava | Trīśiras | The Tricephalous; son of Tvaṣṭr, twin brother of Saranyū; also called Viśvarūpa |
| Tāṇḍava | Śiva's cosmic dance | | |
| Tautri | Daughter of Māra | | |
| <i>tapas</i> | Heat; ardor; from the Indo-European root <i>tap-</i> , which gives the Latin <i>tepeo</i> . Long translated with a range of terms (<i>austeritēs</i> , <i>penance</i> , <i>Kasteiung</i> , <i>ascèse</i>), <i>tapas</i> means at once the cosmic heat and the heat within | | |

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| <i>tristubh</i> | A Vedic meter made up of four verses of eleven syllables | Uttarā | Extreme; daughter of Virāta, wife of Abhimanyu |
| Truth | <i>Satya; ṛta</i> | Uttarakuru | A fabulous and inaccessible country in the far north |
| Turtle | Kūrma | Vāc | The goddess Word |
| Tuṣita | Celestial home of the various Bodhisattvas | <i>vāc</i> | Word, voice (Latin: <i>vox</i>) |
| Tvaṣṭr | Carpenter, Craftsman; father of Saranyū and Trīṣṭas, one of the Ādityas | Vaḍavā | The Submarine Mare; from her mouth issues a blaze of heat, <i>vāḍavāgni</i> , that ends up consuming the waters of the ocean |
| Twelve | The Ādityas | Vaijayanta | Indra's standard |
| Twisted Goddess | Devī Kuṇḍalinī | Vaiśālī | The ancient city of the Licchavi clan, in Bihar |
| <i>tyāḍ</i> | That | Vaiśampāyana | A <i>ṛṣi</i> , disciple of Vyāsa |
| Uccaiḥśravas | He who neighs loudly; the White Horse, one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean | <i>vajra</i> | Thunderbolt; supreme weapon forged by Tvaṣṭr for Indra |
| <i>udgātr</i> | One of the four main officiants; the chanter, his task is to sing the ritual hymns (<i>stotras</i>) of the Sama Veda | Vakuda | Place where the last of the Śākya find refuge |
| <i>udgītha</i> | The second and most important part of the <i>stotra</i> ; a trio for voices sung by the <i>udgātr</i> and his assistants | Vala | Cave; the rock that conceals the Cows and the Waters |
| <i>udumbara</i> | <i>Ficus glomerata</i> ; according to legend, it flowers every three thousand years | Vālakhilyas | A race of <i>ṛṣis</i> the height of a thumb, born from Prajāpati's hair; Hymns 49-59 of the eighth book of the Rg Veda are attributed to them |
| Ugradeva | Terrifying God; one of the names of Rudra | Varāha | Boar; third <i>avatāra</i> of Viṣṇu |
| Ugraśravas | A bard who tells the story of the <i>Mahā-bhārata</i> , which he hears from Vaiśampāyana | Vārānaśi | The capital of the kingdom of Kāśī, whence derived the Hindi Banāras, later anglicized to Benares |
| Ulūpi | Daughter of the king of the Nāgas, wife of Arjuna | Vārānavata | City where the Pāṇḍavas live before fleeing the burning of the lacquer house |
| Umā | From <i>u mā</i> , "oh, no"; another name of Pārvatī | Vargā | Name of an Apsaras |
| Unlimited One | Adīti | <i>varṇa</i> | Color, caste |
| Upālī | Palace barber at Kapilavastu, who joins the Buddha's disciples | Varuna | All-embracing; one of the Ādityas |
| Upamiśads | Treatises around correspondences; metaphysical texts, the oldest of which are in prose, the later in prose and verse | Varūthini | Name of an Apsaras |
| Uparicara | King from whose seed, swallowed by a large fish, Sarayvatī is born | <i>vasatīvarī</i> | Overnight waters; used in the <i>soma</i> rites |
| Upavāna | Monk, disciple of the Buddha, his servant before Ananda | Vasiṣṭha | Born from the seed of Mitra and Varuṇa squirted into a bowl, one of the Saptarṣis, author, as tradition has it, of the seventh <i>maṇḍala</i> of the Rg Veda |
| Ūrjā | Daughter of Dakṣa and Viriṇi | Vāstospati | Lord of the Place, Lord of the Sacrificial Residue; one of the names of Rudra |
| <i>ūru</i> | Thigh | Vāsuki | Snake, one of the kings of the Nāgas, used by the Devas and the Asuras in the churning of the ocean |
| Uruvilvā | Locality in Magadha, near Bodhgavā | Vasus | Group of eight divinities, including Soma, Agni, and Vāyu; with the Ādityas, the Rudras, and the Aśvins, they make up the thirty-three Vedic gods |
| Urvaśī | The first of the Apsaras, ancestor of the lunar dynasty, into which the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas were born | | |
| Uśas | Dawn | | |

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| <i>rāvātā</i> | Favorite One: the second in rank of the king's wives | <i>risrj-</i> | To expand, to emit |
| Vāyu | Wind; the god who generates Bhīma through his union with Kuntī | Viśvāmitra | Friend of everyone; one of the Saptarṣis; according to tradition, author of most of the third and fourth <i>maṇḍala</i> of the Rg Veda |
| Vedas | A collection of texts including the books of hymns, the Brāhmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanisads, and the Sūtras. They are divided into the Rg Veda, Sāma Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda (the latter is sometimes excluded, in which case one speaks of the Three Vedas) | Viśvarūpa | Omniform One: another name of Tvaṣṭr and of his son Trīśiras |
| <i>veda</i> | Knowledge | Viśvāvasu | Beneficent to everyone; a Gandharva |
| <i>vedi</i> | Altar | Viśve Devas | The All-gods |
| Vepuvana | Bamboo Wood, one of the Buddha's favorite parks | Vivasvat | Irradiant, Brilliant One: the Sun, one of the Ādityas |
| <i>vi-</i> | Prefix indicating separation and pervasiveness | Voice | Vāc |
| Vicitravīrya | Son of Sāmtanu and Satyawatī, husband of Ambikā and Ambālikā | Vraja | Vṛndāvana; the forest where Kṛṣṇa would meet the <i>gopīs</i> , near Mathurā |
| Videhas | A people in northeast India | <i>vrata</i> | Way of life, vow |
| Vidura | Son of Vyāsa and one of Ambikā's maids, uncle of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas | <i>vrāta</i> | Band, fraternity, group of initiates |
| Vijayā | Maid of Pārvatī | <i>vrātya</i> | Member of a wandering band (<i>vrāta</i>) bound by a vow, <i>vrata</i> |
| Vikrampur | A city in Bengal | Vṛddhaksatra | Father of Jayadratha |
| Vimalakaundinya | Son of Annapālī | Vṛndāvana | Forest where Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā pleasure each other; there is a celestial Vṛndāvana and a terrestrial Vṛndāvana, also known as Vraja, near Mathurā |
| <i>vīṇā</i> | A musical instrument with strings, emblem of Sarasvatī | Vṛṣṇis | The people of Kṛṣṇa |
| Vinatā | Daughter of Dakṣa, sister of Kadrū, mother of Garuda and Arima; according to the <i>Satapatha Brāhmana</i> , 3.2.4.1, Kadrū and Vinatā were two <i>māyās</i> , "magic forms," evoked by the Devas to conquer the <i>soma</i> | Vṛtra | Obstruction, obstacle; his mother is Danu; alternatively, born from the dregs of the <i>soma</i> Indra drank |
| Vināyaka | Without husband; epithet of Gaṇeśa, born from Pārvatī alone | Vyāsa | Son of Satyawatī and Parāśara, natural father of Pāṇḍu, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and Vidura; according to tradition, he arranged the texts of the Rg Veda and was author of the <i>Mahābhārata</i> |
| Vipāsā | A river in the Punjab | Wagner | Richard Wagner, 1813-1883 |
| <i>vipras</i> | Vibrant; epithet of the <i>ṛṣis</i> | Waters | Āpah |
| Virābhadrā | Terrifying manifestation of Śiva | White Horse | Uccaiḥśravas, one of the <i>ratnas</i> , "gems," that appeared during the churning of the ocean |
| <i>viraha</i> | Separation | Wind | Vāyu |
| <i>virāj</i> | A Vedic meter of four lines of ten syllables | Wittgenstein | Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1889-1951 |
| Virāta | King of the Matsyas (Fishes), father of Utarā | Wolf's Belly | Vṛkodara; epithet of Bhīma |
| Vīriṇī | Wife of Dakṣa | Word | Vāc |
| Vīrādhaka | King of the Kosalas | <i>ya evam veda</i> | "He who knows thus," a recurring formula in the Brāhmanas and the Upanisads |
| Viṣṇu | All-pervasive One; from <i>viś</i> , "to enter," or <i>vi-āś</i> , "to penetrate," "to pervade." "For he penetrates in everything" (<i>Vāyu Purāna</i> , 5.36). One of the Ādityas | <i>yajña</i> | Sacrifice |
| | | Yājñavalkya | A <i>ṛṣi</i> , named at the end of the fourteenth book of the <i>Satapatha Brāhmana</i> as author of the whole work |

Glossary

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|---------------------|---|
| Yakṣa | Mysterious; genie, demon; the word appears in the <i>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</i> , 3.203, where it means “prodigious element or being”; all Hindu divinities, and the Buddha, are occasionally referred to as Yakṣas |
| Yama | Twin; son of Vivasvat and Saranyū, twin brother of Yamī, king of the dead |
| Yamī | Twin; daughter of Vivasvat and Saranyū, twin sister of Yama |
| Yamunā | Sacred river, daughter of Vivasvat; in symbolic relationship with Gaṅgā, as the Sun is to the Moon |
| Yaśodā | Adoptive mother of Kṛṣṇa |
| Year | Samvatsara |
| <i>Yogarāsiṣṭha</i> | A poem of around twenty-eight thousand <i>ślokas</i> , “stanzas,” probably composed in Kashmir between the eighth and thirteenth centuries A.D. |
| <i>yojana</i> | A unit of length, corresponding to about fifteen kilometers |
| <i>yoni</i> | Vagina, womb, spring |
| Yudhiṣṭhira | The eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, born of the union between Dharina and Kuntī, first wife of Pāṇḍu, his putative father |
| <i>yuga</i> | Aeon |
| <i>yuṣṭa</i> | Pole to which sacrificial victims are tied |
| Zodiac | Celestial band corresponding to the ecliptic |



Sources

The first number in the left column refers to the page, the second to the line on which the quotation ends. When specific translations are cited, in some cases the wording has been adapted.

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|-------|---|-------|---|
| 21.2 | <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> , 10.5.3.1 | 31.13 | <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> , 13.5.3.3 |
| 21.8 | <i>Āitareya Brāhmaṇa</i> , 2.40 (tr. by A. B. Keith) | 36.10 | <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> , 7.3.1.42 |
| 22.4 | <i>Rg Veda</i> , 10.129.3 (tr. by L. Renou) | 37.1 | <i>Āitareya Brāhmaṇa</i> , 3.21 (tr. by A. B. Keith) |
| 22.6 | <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> , 11.1.6.1 | 47.27 | S. Kraussch. <i>The Presence of Śiva</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 76 |
| 22.7 | <i>Bṛhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad</i> , 4.3.32 | 48.8 | <i>Rg Veda</i> , 4.3.1 |
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| | | 49.19 | <i>Rg Veda</i> , 5.80.6 (tr. by L. Renou) |