# RIVISTA DEGLI STUDI ORIENTALI

## NUOVA SERIE

# RIVISTA

DEGLI

# STUDI ORIENTALI

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NOTE

RECENSIONI

# INTERPRETING THE TERM *ŚAKTÍ* IN THE VEDIC CONTEXT

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As it is well known, the term *śakti* denotes "the feminine, personified might of the gods", the power "in act" of a divinity or "the agency by means of which the gods execute their actions". As to the earliest Indian texts, the question is: is such a meaning already appropriate in the Vedic *corpora*? Is it possible that in the Vedic texts the term *śakti* implies a different interpretation? Finally, how can we interpret such a term in a multi-faceted cultural stage as the Vedic one? The point is not interesting only from the historical linguistic perspective, but also from a wider cultural perspective: which is the relationship between abstract and concrete values.

THIS research is focused on the interpretation of one of the Skr. terms connoting the Indian culture: the term *śakti*. As it is well known, it denotes "the feminine, personified might of the gods",[1] the power "in act" of a divinity or "the agency by means of which the gods execute their actions",[2] connected to the development of the Śaktism.[3] As to the earliest Indian texts – the Vedic ones – the common question is whether such a meaning is already appropriate, or the Vedic term *śakti* can imply a different interpretation, especially thanks to the linguistic-comparative approach. The answer to this question is already found in Ronzitti's paper, especially in §4.3.

However, the aim of this paper is not only to display the Vedic occurrences and to enumerate their possible meanings in connection to Vedic linguistic data, but also to interpret such a term in a multi-faceted cultural stage as the Vedic one. As to the etymological studies, they do not resolve the ambiguities of the term *śakti*: among the Old-Indo-Aryan languages, in the Vedic language two forms are attested: *śaktí-* and *śákti-*. They can be interpreted as two different apophonical forms of the same IE root, belonging to the same semantic sphere "to be powerful, power, etc.".[4] However, the context of some Vedic occurrences suggests a more concrete and material meaning like "sharp object, weapon", so that it is possible to hypothesize a homophone *śáktí*, derived from a different IE root, referred to a different semantic sphere: "to be sharp, spear, etc.", without such a semantic ambiguity depending strictly on the position of the accent.[5] In fact metaphorical values based on phonetic

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[1] KINSLEY 1986: 17.
[2] DAS 1934: 11.
[3] See RONZITTI's paper, in this volume §3.
[4] See RONZITTI's paper, in this volume, §1.
[5] See RONZITTI's paper, in this volume, §2.1.

plays, so typical in the Vedic texts, especially in *Ṛgvedasaṃhitā* (= RV), make
the Vedic language very cryptic, swinging from denotative meanings, ety-
mologically attested, to connotative values, poetically constructed. More-
over, Ronzitti's linguistic analysis points out that the term *śáktí* can be inter-
preted either as a *nomen actionis*, conveying the abstract meaning of "power",
or as a *nomen agentis*, resulting from processes of personification and objecti-
fication of the abstract value.

In my opinion, this point suggests that the interpretation of the Vedic term
*śáktí* must be inserted in a wider cultural perspective, that is we must ask our-
selves how the Vedic culture can "image" or "think" whatever is not present
and concrete in the objective reality. In effect, also according to the Śáktism,
the term *śakti* conveys in itself a double value: on the one hand it is an ab-
stract term, referred to an abstract realm – "power-potentiality" – or to an ex-
tra-human realm – "divine energy" – not corresponding to a concrete object
of the human realm. However, on the other hand, every "effect"-"fruit", con-
sequence of actions is due to it, that is to say that every element of existence
(human or extra-human) is realized through such a "power": *śakti* implies the
explicit and the concrete realization of existence, and represents such a real-
ization in act. Moreover, it is worth noticing that also the Hindu tradition ad-
mits a different and more "concrete" meaning for the term *śakti*: in *Mān-
avadharmaśāstra* 8.315 the expression *śaktiṃ cobhayatas tīkṣnām* is inserted in a
list of weapons, and in this case *śakti* denotes a ʿweapon well sharp on both
the sidesʾ, probably a spear or pike; moreover, such a meaning is attested al-
so in the Paninian grammar, where in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.4.59 *śaktí-yaṣṭy-ór īkáK* sug-
gests that *śāktīká-* means ʿwielder of spearsʾ or ʿwhose weapon is a spearʾ.

Therefore, this term can be placed in that threshold between abstract and
concrete sphere. It represents the core of the notion of "culture": the capac-
ity of giving existence to Otherness, either in a technical sense – the ability to
shape or to produce hand-manufactured objects – or in a cognitive sense – the
capacity of "imaging" or "thinking" the existence of "Other" beyond the ob-
jective reality. In particular, such a capacity passes through language, espe-
cially the poetical language: words are able to say what is present and absent
at the same time.

At the light of these hypothetical considerations, a study on the term *śak-
tí-* in the Vedic texts can be a starting point to verify the multiplicity of the ex-
pressive possibilities of the word, especially taking into account that the
Rigvedic word is metaphorically and imaginatively connoted.

As to the Vedic texts, I have considered all the occurrences of the term *śak-
ti* in the *Ṛgvedasaṃhitā* (16), and in the *Atharvavedasaṃhitā* (3, out of which 2
also in RV); moreover, I have checked other citations in the mantric texts: SV,
VS, TS, MS, KS (6, out of which 2 already quoted in RV), and in the *Brāhmaṇa*
texts (5, out of which 3 quoted also in RV); finally I have considered the oc-
currences of the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad*, with especially attention to 2.2.

After the linguistic analysis of the occurrences, I have decided to catalogue them in a grid in order to have a synoptic view and to sketch out an interpreting map; taking mainly into account of the linguistic data, I have selected the following data:

- morphological data: inflected form and number of the noun *śakti-*;
- syntactical data: the verbal form connected to the term *śakti-*, and the inflected form of nouns/pronouns which the term *śakti* is linked to;
- the compounds with the term *śakti* (*śaktīvan-*; *suśakti-*)

This linguistic analysis has displayed some correspondences: the term *śakti* is quoted only in three inflected forms (nom., acc., and instr.), and the singular number is prevalent. When it is quoted in accusative form it represents the arrival point of the action – the object itself, but in 3 occurrences (out of 6) the accusative is connected to verbs like *to come, to wish*, the "object" of which can be interpreted as a verbal noun used as infinitive (*to come to do s.th*), underlining the action itself, and not the final point. Furthermore, *śakti* is mainly connected to the dative form:[6] it seems to highlight the "transitive" value of the term, that is *śakti* makes the action itself "translate, transfer" until the final point – the dative form. When it is quoted in nominative form the clause is nominal, excepted for one occurrence: it seems as if the dynamism of action is getting "solidified" and "objectivised" into static being, so that *śakti* assumes the *status* of *nomen*, either *nomen actionis* or *agentis*. As to the instrumental inflected form, *śakti* is quoted both as singular and plural, especially as equivalent to the term *śácī*:[7] it denotes something or someone through/with which the action is performed, that is it is no more the action itself in act, but its process of objectification and personification is getting realized, and *śakti* can already denote concrete object, personified entity, or abstract notion. As to the compounds, *śaktīvan-* 'who is gifted with *śakti*', can be interpreted either as *nomen actionis* ('who is able to act'), or as objective element of reality (concrete object, personification of the action); *suśakti-* is used in RV 7.32.21c as equivalent to the ritual gift – richness – concrete objectification of the ritual effectiveness.

  Secondly, I have considered other criteria in the grid, such as the following co-textual data:

- Position of the verse in which the term *śakti* is quoted: I have pointed out not only the Vedic text in which the term occurs, but also its position in relation to the whole text, especially in the case of Rigvedic hymns, in order to permit a reflection on the *omphalós* theory proposed by Jamison.[8] As to the first point, 10 quotations belong to the ancient *mandalas* of the *Ṛgvedasaṃhitā*, the other ones belong to the so called mantric texts (recent

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[6] See RONZITTI's paper, §4.1.    [7] See RONZITTI's paper, §4.2.
[8] As to the "omphalos" hymnic structure, it has been proposed by JAMISON 2004.

Rigvedic *maṇḍala*s, *Atharvavedasaṃhitā,* the other Vedic *saṃhitā*s), and some of these are the same, cited also in *Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣad* texts. Therefore, about half of the occurrences are present in the ancient Rigvedic hymns. As to second point, four quotations, out of 10 belonging to the ancient Rigvedic texts, are found in central verses of hymn (i.e. in the grid RV 5.31.6 is framed as "out of 13", that is "out of 13 strophes), and only two cases are present in the recent Rigvedic texts. All these data might suggest that the term *śakti* assumes a central value in the Rigvedic hymns: it might be referred to the manifestation of divinity, so often evoked and impelled to reach the ritual space through such a kind of texts; thus the divinity appears in the middle of the hymn, which represents the acme of the ritual act, according to the *omphalós* theory.

- Divinities involved in the sphere of the term *śakti*: they are mainly Indra, the warrior and cosmogonic god, the twin gods – Aśvins, who lead the daily lights out of the night every morning, Agni and Soma, the two principal divinities of the sacrificial sphere, Savitṛ the "impeller" "stimulator", often identified with the sun, Aditi, the female generative divinity, and the Fathers, the ancestral beings. All these divinities have a double status: they are divine, but they cooperate to link the human sphere to the extra-human one, and favour the translation from one level to another one. For instance: the sacrificial divinities bring the sacrificial offerings from the human level to the celestial one; the Aśvins support the passage from night to day; the generative and cosmogonic divinities lead to a new cosmic order or to existence, and so on.

- Poetical synonyms or equivalences: according to the usual play of equivalences among different elements of reality, so well represented in the poetical language – especially in the Rigvedic one – terms used in the same occurrences of the term *śakti* are often its equivalence: i.e. *rays of sun – tongues or sparks of fire – reins of horse – rays of wheel* are considered equivalent, being each one the "substitute" of the other ones in the symmetrical structures of the Vedic verses, thus evoking different semantic spheres and metaphorical relationships. From this last criterion five semantic spheres of equivalence can be attributed to the term *śakti*: the military one, the technical and manual sphere, the generative-cosmogonical sphere, the poetical sphere, and the sacrificial sphere.

Lastly, I have tried to frame all these linguistic and co-textual data in a coherent cultural context: it should be a sort of macro-criterion, under which all the data can be systematized. At the light of the Vedic texts it is evident that the Vedic culture is focused on the relationship between human realm and extra-human realm, with especially attention to ritual realm, where the human one and the not human one – or Otherness – meet each other. In other words, the Vedic culture presents a dichotomy between the realm of *hic et nunc* and the realm of Otherness/*alibi*, either on horizontal level (village *ver-*

*sus* forest or enemies, taking into account the references to the military sphere, so frequently present), or on vertical level (earth or human space *versus* celestial world or divine space). Moreover, the Vedic culture seems to assume existence only in fact of being into such a relationship: it represents the tensioning space of that intermediate level itself between micro and macro cosmos, the so-called meso-cosmos, or the threshold in which inter-changes occur / inter-run. Here, the common word and the common action are not enough to make these two realms communicate one each other; here, words and actions must be enriched of an over-value in order to permit the communication. In fact, they are "poetical" words and "ritual" actions: they must be "effective", that is they must impel extra-human beings to appear and to support the human beings, they must provoke the connection between micro and macro cosmos.

In this perspective the grid offers the scheme of the cultural taxonomy in which the term *śakti* is inserted:

*A macro ↔ micro*: the action passes through the two antithetical spheres of the dichotomy: from the human one to the extra-human one, and reverse, reciprocally inter-acting; the divinity is requested to presence, to grant requests in exchange of something, generally praise. Here the sacrificial sphere is not directly mentioned, but the Vedic strophes allude to mythical deeds and cosmogonical acts, especially of Indra and Aśvins: *śakti* represents the "tensioned" thread between macrocosmic phenomena and microcosmic concrete objects. Examples:

RV 2.39.7ab:   *hásteva śaktím abhí saṃdadī́ naḥ kṣā́meva naḥ sám ajataṃ rájāṃsi |*
             Like two hands, they [the Aśvins], grasping together *śaktí-*, give it to us
             Like earth and heaven they collect together the intermediate sphere for us.

This hymn consists of a catalogue of comparisons between the gods in pairs and animals / parts of bodies / phenomena always "double" or in pairs in nature, so that it result an hymn-climax. Here it is the penultimate strophe: from the human micro cosmos – two hands/body parts – to the macro-cosmic space between earth and heaven, which are the sections in pairs supporting the universe.[9] Here the term *śakti-*, with accent on the last syllable, can denote not only a "power", but also an object, which is handled through two hands "together": the particle *sam* is repeated also in *sam aj*: to bring / to lead "together". This is an example of that play of correspondences so common in the Rgvedic texts: the two sections of the verse, with doubled terms *iva / sam / naḥ*, are perfectly symmetrical, probably to express through the words themselves the perfect parallelism of the twin divinity. In such a parallelism the term *śaktí* is "equivalent" or in pairs with the term *rájāṃsi*, nt.pl. from *rajas-*, the mist or vapour of the atmosphere, the space in the middle of

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[9]  As to meaning of the dual *dyā́vākṣā́mā*, see RONZITTI 1995.

the twin cosmic sections. Therefore, *śaktí* itself, in this context, represents what is able to divide and to connect together at the same time:[10] like a weapon,[11] it can be handled and thrown to disperse enemies, or can "hook" the enemies, making them under "control, power"; like "power-energy", it can "act" on both the sections of the universe, joining together/"hooking" them, or distinguishing micro and macro cosmos, "scattering" them. Because of such intermediate position, between two hands, two cosmic sections, between concrete object and abstract/ethereal realm (clouds/mists), manual ability and cosmic energy, I have decided to insert this strophe under the point *A macro ↔ micro*.[12]

RV 4.43.3:    *makṣū́ hí ṣmā gáchatha ī́vato dyū́n índro ná śaktím páritakmiyāyām*
               *divá ā́jātā diviyā́ suparṇā́ káyā śácīnām bhavathaḥ śáciṣṭhā ‖*
               Come quickly to the heavenly/daily lights, you two [Aśvins], as you are, like Indra, to *śaktí* in the wondering night;
               You two, heavenly birds, born from heaven, which of the abilities are you the ablest through?[13]

Here the Aśvins are represented as the divinities of the morning lights, who lead the rising Down from the night to the day; therefore, they are connoted as divinities of the intermediate sphere, of the threshold between night and day. The term *śaktí-* is symmetrical with the term *dyu-/div-*, being both accusatives connected with the verb *ā gam-* "to come"; therefore they can be interpreted:

- as terms denoting places, to which the gods are requested to come; *dyū́n* are the heavenly and lighting place, *śaktím* is a place related to night;
- as terms denoting space, <u>through</u> which the gods are called to come; that is *dyū́n* and *śaktím* are the edges of the space where the Aśvins move themselves;
- Geldner[14] considers *śaktím* as a form of infinitive in accusative to express a final clause: "you come to act/to support effectively", "you come for acting/supporting effectively"; in this case the parallelism with *dyū́n* would be only phono-morphological, but not syntactical. However, according to such a hypothesis, *śaktí* represents the "action in act", dynamic "tensioned" thread which combines antithetical cosmical spheres – day and night.

Lastly, there is parallelism between the Aśvins and Indra: as the Aśvins come to the heavenly lights, so Indra "comes to *śaktí*", being there a danger, the

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[10] As to the ambiguity of the text, see WITZEL & GOTŌ 2007: 821.

[11] So GELDNER 1951 suggests also "Speer" or a weapon to throw.

[12] Three occurrences out of five, belonging to the category A, are addressed to the Aśvins: in effect, they seem to be characterized through terms deriving from the same root *śak-*; for instance, one of the Ṛgvedic epithets of the Aśvins is *śácīvasu-* (7.74.1; 1.139.5), "rich in *śacī*", that is "rich in succouring/supporting power" (see GONDA 1959), or "rich of skills/abilities", where the term *śacī-*, deriving from the same root *śak-*, seems to denote an ability, through which an action is successful or effective.

[13] As to the relationship between the gods Aśvins and the term *śacī*, see RONZITTI's paper §4.3.1, and also RV 7.67.5.                                                                    [14] GELDNER 1951.

wandering night; in this case *śaktí* can be also considered as an object, one of the weapon of Indra, through which he can front the danger / enemy.

Anyway, such an ambiguity between "cosmical act" and "concrete object" is the core of the relationship *macro ↔ micro*. Moreover, it is worth noticing that this so intricate strophes is located in the middle of the hymn, probably just to signify that cosmical and linguistic elements combine all together to mark the intermediate and delicate threshold of the manifestation of being (day, divinity).

RV 5.31.6:    *prá te pūrvāṇi káraṇāni vocam prá nūtanā maghavan yā́ cakártha*
*śáktīvo yád vibhárā ródasī ubhé jáyann apó mánave dā́nucitrāḥ ‖*
I will proclaim your ancient deeds, and those which you have just done, o generous, the new ones:
when you, o *śáktīvan*, separated both the cosmical sections, winning waters, shining of gifts, for the man.

Here the term *śaktí* is used in a secondary adjectival formation *śáktīvan*, "what is gifted with *śaktí-*", so that it is used as epithet of Indra; here Indra is represented as a cosmogonical hero, who sets the waters free, opening / separating the universe in two sections (earth and heaven), killing *vṛtra*, "the obstructor", or the prisoner of waters. What is *śaktí-*? It can be Indra's ability or the energy[15] able to separate, to divide; but also Indra's weapon, a concrete object used in such a deed. Last observation: this strophe is located in the middle of the hymn; therefore, it can represent the epiphany of the divinity, and the central point of the ritual through which *śaktí* has been burst forth and realized: it is going to transfer its dynamism into a static cosmic element, either as concrete object or as abstract notion of "ability, power".

*B macro ← MESO → micro*: when the relationship *macro ↔ micro* is more focused on the ritual action itself, which is the Vedic meso-cosmos for excellence (*macro ← MESO → micro*), the action passes from macro to micro and reverse with a special passage in the middle of the way, into the ritual space. Here *śakti* is a component fundamental of the ritual performance, permeating the action itself; it is guarantee of interchange between gods and men.

Here the texts are particularly elaborated: action and word are perfectly interwoven in a metaphorical net not so easy to extricate. *Śakti* is the dynamic subject of meso-cosmos, the "dynamism" produced when multiplied levels of reality converge: it represents both tension of ritual actions in act and expressivity and metaphorical tension of ritual words. When the acme of the ritual tension is realized, that is the god appears, such a dynamism is converted in a static object: the requested gift (wellness, ability to generate, poetical ability); also the words loose their metaphorical tension: denotative and

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[15] See Varenne 1982: 81-82 *śáktīvan-*: "détenteur du pouvoir d'exécution".

connotative values are not so implicitly intermingled. So the category *C meso ↔ micro* is introduced. Examples:

RV 3.57.3:   *yā́ jāmáyo vŕ̥ṣṇa ichánti śaktíṃ namasyántīr jānate gárbham asmin*
            *áchā putráṃ dhenávo vāvaśānā́ maháś caranti bíbhrataṃ vápūṃṣi ‖*
            Those sisters who desire *śakti* for the bull, they, with reverential salutation, know the embryo into it;
            the cows, plenty of desire, wander moving to the son, which brings abundance, shapes

This strophe is very complex, because a mythical narration, referred to one of Indra's deeds, is superimposed on a ritual scene: the terms *maháś* and *vápūṃṣi* can be interpreted respectively either as abundance and shapes, with allusion to the generative act, or as sacrificial offering and flames of fire. The hymn is devoted to Agni, and generally to All the Gods, but, as to this strophe, Sāyana considers the bull an equivalent to Indra. Thus, it is a very metaphorical text: the ritual action becomes more effective through a poetical and connoting word: the sisters can be the cows (Sāyaṇa), but also the fingers of the priest, who takes care of the fire, often defined "embryo" of the ritual. And *śakti*? Here it can be considered a form of infinitive, linked to the verb "to wish" and to the dative *vṛṣṇe* (*vṛṣṇa* < *vṛṣṇe* according to the *padapāṭha*): the sisters wish *to support, to act effectively in favour* of the bull;[16] otherwise, if *vṛṣṇa* is interpreted as a genitive, *śakti* can be already a *nomen actionis* denoting the "*power* of the bull", the microcosmic animal equivalent to the god Indra. The term *śakti* combines all these values, representing the mesocosmic realm: it is located in the middle of the hymn.

RV 4.22.8:   *pipīḷé aṃśúr mádiyo ná síndhur ā́ tvā śámī śaśamānásya śaktíḥ*
            *asmadríak chuśucānásya yamyā āśúr ná raśmíṃ tuviójasaṃ góḥ ‖*
            The intoxicating filament [of the soma plant], pressed, has produced [juice] like stream: the *śaktí*, of what has been forced by effort, may lead you, strong vigour for the cow, here; [the *śaktí*/the effort] of what has been kindled [may lead you] until us, like the quick one [leads/holds] the reins.

This is an example of "poetical" Rgvedic strophe: the literally translation is almost impossible, because of polysemical and implicit values of the words; they refer to the ritual sphere: soma juice, produced by pressing the filament of soma plant, and kindled fire are quoted, but with periphrasis;[17] there are similitude ("like stream", "like the quick one"), metaphors ("the quick one" can be an horse"). Here the play of the equivalence is amplified, with a continuous shift from a semantic field to another one: soma juice is equivalent to

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[16] See RENOU 1955-1969: IV, 55.
[17] "What has been forced by effort" is the filament of soma plant; *śamī* is the effort used to press soma plant; "strong vigour for the cow" is the bull, often equivalent to Indra, the warrior-divinity who is requested to drink soma.

*ojas-* "masculine vigour", which is equivalent to *raśmí-* 'rein', suggesting the image of horse or chart; however it is synonym of ray, and evokes the image of sun and of fire. It is a sophisticate "tension" of multi-varied meaning. Also the phonetic repetitions contribute to provide the impression of running along such semantic tension… Through the linguistic tension, a running Indra is pictured: Indra is requested to come quickly to drink soma juice. And *śaktí*? Here it is a property of soma juice and/or of fire: thanks to it, Indra is able to come; in fact it is "like the quick one", the horse, which leads quickly s.one/s.th holding it. Once more *śaktí* represents a means to attain a result: in this case, it is what makes the sacrifice effective and successful, and, at the same time, it is what makes Indra himself able to come/to do/to gain…

Also in RV 10.25.5 the soma juice is related to *śaktí*: it is the intoxicating soma juice itself, represented as flowing streams which permeate the ritual meso-cosmos, soaking gods, worshippers and singers-priests; through it different levels of reality converge, and passes one through each other, in a "metaphorical" process, so that each one implies Other, and the strophe – located in the middle of the hymn – represents such a multiple reality, consisting of polysemic expressions. The expression "to open the fold…" has more connotative values: it refers either to micro-cosmical reality, or to mythical deeds, but also to the ritual word as flux of the inspired strophes, or to a particular action, performed during the ritual. However, *śaktí* is inflected in instrumental form: the "poietical" tension of the ritual is turning into a fixed and monolithic element, either as concrete object, personified instrument to produce something, or as preformed strophe, linguistic expression which is not so implicitly connotative and polysemic.[18]

*C meso ↔ micro*; *D macro ↔ meso*: when the attention is focused more on the results or "fruits" of the ritual – wellness and richness in the microcosmos, or heavenly condition in the macrocosmos – rather than on the ritual itself with its "poietical" expressivity and tension in act, the relationship *macro ← MESO → micro* is loosing its internal dynamic reciprocity: the texts tend to describe rituals, without "translating" the ritual in act through the metaphorical and connotative words; implicit connotative values are missing, the denotative and explicit ones are prevalent, and the polysemical ambiguity is limited. On the one hand, the sacred sphere is "humanized" by explicit references to the same concrete objects used in the profane and human sphere, and the

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[18] See RV 1.31.18: *eténāgne bráhmaṇā vāvṛdhasva śáktī vā yát te cakṛmā́ vidā́ vā | utá prá ṇeṣi abhí vásyo asmā́n sáṃ naḥ sṛja sumatī́° vā́javatyā ||* 'Increase yourself, o Agni, thanks to this sacred formulation, which we have done both through śaktí and wisdom, | Lead us to more wellness, join us to benevolence, which is gifted with the prize of the victory'. Also here *śaktí* objectivises the "poietical" effect, through which the ritual becomes effective; however, such an instrument is not represented in act, in the metaphorical imagery and device of the Vedic poetry, but in a unique denoted term: *śaktí*. Likely, in KB XXIII. 5.1-23, quoted in RONZITTI's paper (§4.2), the poetical *śaktí* is concretized into a kind of strophe – *śákvarī* – resulting from a process of theorisation of poetry, not from its application into the "poetical" ritual performance.

terms do not evoke the extra-human realm, through symbolical equivalence, but the human microcosmical reality. The dynamic tension *macro ↔ micro* is getting broken, and the relationship is reduced to *meso ↔ micro*: *śakti* – here mainly inflected in instrumental form – is turned either into manual ability, through which the required richness is materialized in concrete objects, or into concrete tool of the ritual staff, through which richness and prosperity are obtained. On the other hand, the sacred sphere refers *śakti* to the macrocosmic realm, there transferring its effectiveness: the ritual offering is source of vitality for the divinities, so that *śakti* represents such a new "energy", gained through the ritual itself, but in the macrocosmic realm, distinguished from the human reality.

In this case the relationship is reduced to *D macro ↔ meso*. Finally, in this context the semantic ambiguity is getting solved into two separated values: *śakti* can be either a concrete and personified element of reality, or an abstract conceptualized notion *power*. The instrumental form is prevalent, but also the dative one occurs: the term *śakti* denotes definitely a *status* to which someone aims; it is no more a transversal tensioned thread to connected different realms, but a sort of fixed target, which marks the differences among realities, being always beyond the present one.

*C meso ↔ micro* examples:

RV 1.83.3:    *ádhi dváyor adadhā ukthíyaṃ váco yatásrucā mithunā́ yā́ saparyátaḥ*
               *ásaṃyatto vraté te kṣeti púṣyati bhadrā́ śaktír yájamānāya sunvaté* ||
               You had placed words of praise in the two [priests] who worship [you] in
               pairs, with the outstretched spoon;
               In the devotion to you, [the worshipper] settles down, becomes prosper-
               ous. For the promoter of the sacrifice, who presses [soma plant], *śaktí* [is]
               prosperous.

This strophe belongs to a hymn addressed to Indra, so "you" is Indra, for whom soma juice is prepared.[19] *Śaktí* represents abundance of richness, resulted from the ritual offering, so that it is getting "translated" from meso-cosmical sphere to the micro-cosmical one, almost as a personified entity. *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 11.63c; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4.1.6.3c:

               *devas tvā savitodvapatu supāṇiḥ svanguraḥ subāhur uta śaktyā* |
               *avyathamānā pṛthivyām āśā diśa āpṛṇa* ||

The god Savitṛ, gifted with good hands, good fingers, good arms, may shake you out by means of *śakti*.
On the earth, fill you spaces, regions, without trembling.

These verses belong to the mantric repertoire of the Vedic *saṃhitā*s: it refers to a scene of the *agnicayana*, the most complex Vedic ritual, focused on the

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[19]  It is quoted also in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.29.13 in the description of the soma sacrifice.

construction of the three Vedic fireplaces. Here it is pictured the moment in which the sacrificial cinder is shaken away, turning the fire vessel upside down. The ritual scene is represented as familiar-micro-cosmical scene, where the divinity has assumed human traits: hands, fingers, etc. This process is more evident in the next verses (from the *agnicayana* again), where the ritual act is influenced and determined by the human sphere. Thus, the meso-cosmos, wearing the denotation of the micro-cosmos, is completely separated from the macro-cosmos. Also the text has lost its imaginary value, because of the explicit comparison. Here *śakti* is manual ability, even a concrete tool-object to empty vessels or to shape it.[20] The process of abstraction and of imaging Other than the concrete and objective sphere is blocked, the "file rouge" that connected microcosmos to macrocosmos is cut off.

The last example is RV 10.134.6, the unique occurrence of the term *śákti* which is clearly compared with a "hook, spear". Here Indra is involved in the ritual of the animal sacrifice, in which the wood sacrificial post (*yupa*) is fixed.[21] The ritual action seems to be modelled on the concrete microcosmic sphere: Indra is equivalent to a he-goat, which is fastened to a wood-branch with fore leg, as the explicit comparison indicates. The levels of reality are not implicitly intermingled, with a metaphorical net of different semantic sphere; here the connection is evident either in the linguistic expression (*yathā*), or in the ritual scene; the divinity has lost his mythical and imaginary value, and is materialized in he-goat. Also *śákti*, the equivalent to the wood-post, is an object, a sort of hook.

RV 10.134.6:    *dīrghám hí* aṅkuśám *yathā* śáktim *bíbharṣi mantumaḥ*
*pūrveṇa maghavan padá ajó vayám yáthā yamo*
*devī́ jánitry ajījanad bhadrá́ jánitry ajījanat ‖*
Oh wise god, you bring *śákti* similar to a long hook,
Oh generous, you keep the branch similar to a he-goat with fore leg.
The generating goddess generated [you], the generating prosperity generated.

Here the term *śakti* is quoted in accusative form, not in instrumental one; however, it is not used as an infinitive conveying "action in act", but as a *nomen actionis* which is getting objectivised into a concrete object of the ritual space: the "hooked" wood-post. In effect, such a process is already evident in strophe 3cd,[22] where the epiphany of the god Indra is introduced through *śacī-* inflected as instrumental plural: in the Rigvedic texts it is frequently quoted as the equivalent to *śakti*, and denotes the ability to realize something; in this

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[20]    *subāhur uta śaktyā* is a sort of formulaic expression, quoted in many Vedic texts (*Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* 2.7.6c: 81.20; 4.9.1c: 122.2; *Kaṭha Saṁhitā* 16.6c; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.5.4.11c; *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 4.3.2c). With the same objectivised value also *Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā* 11.57.c; *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* 4.1.5.3a.
[21]    This sacrifice is described in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2.1, where the same verses is quoted.
[22]    See RONZITTI's paper §4.2.

case it is the ability to realise the process of objectification and personification of *śakti* itself.

Thus, the dichotomy macro-micro is broken, and the circuit-realm of *śakti*, synergy-inner connection-tension and means for "transferring", among all the levels of reality, is interrupted. It is reduced only to *meso ↔ micro* or to *meso ↔ macro*.

*D meso ↔ macro* example, *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4.1.1.1c; *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* 2.2c:

> *yuktena manasā vayaṃ devasya savituḥ save | suvargeyāya śaktyai ||*

With minds yoked, we [make the offering] under the stimulus of the god Savitar for a heavenly abode, for *śakti*.[23]

It is worth noticing that the redaction of the text is philologically debated, especially with reference to the term *śakti*: Olivelle, in his edition of the *upaniṣad*, chooses textual variant with dative form (*śaktyai*), while in the mantric and brahmanical texts the variant with the instrumental inflected form (*śaktyā*) is prevalent (*Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* 11.2c; *Kaṭha Saṃhitā* 15.11c; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.* 6.3.1.14). However, the expression *śaktir asi śaktyai*, "You are *śakti* for *śakti*" (*Kaṭha Saṃhitā* 29.5), already reveals that the process to abstraction of *śakti* is getting realized: it is the final point of the action, beyond the action itself; it is s.thing / s.one able to act, it is agency able to gain s.thing / s.one, aiming at reaching what is not present in this reality, and giving existence to Otherness.

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[23] Translation after OLIVELLE 1998.

APPENDIX
*Interpreting the term śakti in the Vedic context*

| RELATIONSHIP macro/meso/micro | CASE | NUM | VERB | SYNTAX | SEMANTIC EQUIVALENCE | DIVINITY | TEXT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A) macro<>micro | acc | pl | ā vaśmi | | te sakhiyáṃ | Indra | RV 3.31.14a (*out of 22*) |
| | voc | sing | vibhárā | | ródasī ubhé | Indra | RV 5.31.6 (*out of 13*) derivate śáktīvan- |
| | acc. | sing | abhí saṃdadí | naḥ: dat./gen. | hásteva sám ajataṃ rájāṃsi | Aśvin | RV2.39.7ab (*out of 8*) |
| | acc/inf. | sing | ā gáchatha | | dyū́n | Aśvin/Indra | RV 4.43.3 (*out of 7*) |
| B) macro <> meso <> micro | acc./inf. | sing | ichánti | vŕ̥ṣṇe - dat | gárbham dhenávaḥ | Agni/Indra | RV 3.57.3 (*out of 6*) |
| | nom | sing | ā yamyā̄ | ā + acc. (?) ā tvā | śámī śaśamānásya āśúḥ raśmíṃ tuviójas- goḥ | Agni/Indra | RV 4.22.8 (*out of 11*) |
| | instr | pl | | tava | níkāmāso ví ṛṇvire dhīrās | Soma | RV 10.25.5 (*out of 11*) |
| | instr | pl | ájījanañ | | rodasiprám | Agni | RV 10.88.10 |

| RELATIONSHIP MACRO/MESO/MICRO | CASE | NUM | VERB | SYNTAX | SEMANTIC EQUIVALENCE | DIVINITY | TEXT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | acc | pl | anuyáchamānāḥ | pitṝṇám gen. indrāgníbhyāṃ - dat | raśmī́ṃr | Indra / Agni | RV 1.109.3 TB.3.6.9.1b |
| | nom | pl | | | vayodhā́ḥ íṣubalā | Hymn of weapons | RV 6.75.9 (out of 19) VS.29.46b TS.4.6.3b derivate śáktivan- |
| C) meso<>micro | nom | sing | | mā́vate: me avate - dat | su-śákti deṣṇám | Indra | RV 7.32.21 (out of 27) SV 2.2.13.2 |
| | nom | sing | ṣú astu | jaritré - dat | vásvī / suastíbhiḥ | Indra | RV 7.20.10 (out of 10) |
| | nom | sing | | yájamānāya sunvaté - dat | bhadrā | Indra | RV 1. 83. 3 (out of 6) AB.1.29.13 AVś 20.25.3 |
| | instr | sing | ápinvatam śaktam | vṛkā́ya cij jásamānāya | śácībhiḥ barren cow waters | Aśvin / Indra | RV 7. 68. 8 (out of 9) |
| | instr | pl | adhi brūhi | naḥ - dat / gen | dispute / request | Indra | AVś 2.27.7 |

| RELATIONSHIP MACRO / MESO / MICRO | CASE | NUM | VERB | SYNTAX | SEMANTIC EQUIVALENCE | DIVINITY | TEXT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | instr | sing | vāvṛdhasva | | bráhmaṇā śáktī vā vidā | Agni | RV 1.31.18 (*out of 18*) |
| | instr | sing | udvapatu | | | Savitar | VS.11.63c; TS.4.1.6.3c Etc. |
| | instr | sing | | | svargyāya | Savitar | VS 11. 2 |
| | instr | sing | kṛṇotu | | garbha dhí | Aditi | VS.11.57a; TS.4.1.5.3a |
| | acc | sing | bíbharṣi | | aṅkuśáṃ yāma- | Indra | RV 10.134.6 AB 2.1 |
| | instr | pl | ávīvarata | | waters | Indra | |
| D) meso< >macro | dat / inf | sing | | svargyāya | svargyāya | Savitar | TS 4.1.1.3 śvUp 2.2 |