

On the meaning of the word *rāṣṭrá*: PS 10.4

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The word *rāṣṭrá* is naturally very important for the understanding of the kingship of early Vedic India. Half a century ago, RAU discussed the meanings of *rāṣṭrá* in the Brāhmaṇa texts in a succinct but comprehensive way:

Das Wort *rāṣṭra* verdiente eine Spezialuntersuchung, wobei besonders die Bedeutungsübergänge zu klären wären. Ich finde es im Sinne von 1. Königsherrschaft, 2. Königreich = a. Gesamtheit der Untertanen und b. Land; dazu bezeichnet es — vor allem im plur. — vielleicht auch den bzw. die Regenten als Personen. (RAU 1957: 72 n. 2)

RAU arranged the meanings of *rāṣṭrá* from a logical viewpoint. “Königsherrschaft” and “Königreich”, the two major heads of the above list, are general meanings of this word. On the contrary, “Gesamtheit der Untertanen” and “Land” placed under the meaning “Königreich”, are concerned with realia, through which one would have a notion of “Königreich” in the Brāhmaṇa period. So when the meaning of this word is examined from a historical viewpoint, the necessity of which was stressed by RAU in his comment, it is of great importance to understand what *rāṣṭrá* indicates in the early Vedic period at the level of these realia.

As for the early Vedic texts, PS 10.4 provides us with some material, from which we may gain knowledge of the concrete meaning denoted by the word *rāṣṭrá*. As WITZEL pointed out, Book 10 of the PS is “a thematically compact collection of royal hymns” and is “quite extraordinary as the other books usually contain hymns on quite diverse topics” (1997b: 278–279). He has also drawn attention to the initiative of the Kuru dynasty in the compilation of the PS. In the light of this historical background, *rāṣṭrá*, as referred to in PS 10.4,¹ calls for some specific explanations. Summing up in advance, it indicates a king and chieftains submissive to him, who constitute a tribal alliance. As such, *rāṣṭrá* was established in a public meeting, namely the *sámiti*. By treating mainly of PS 10.4, but with additional reference to the RV and the ŚS,² this paper sets out to examine the actual process of establishing *rāṣṭrá*.

¹*rāṣṭra* is also repeatedly mentioned in Book 18 of PS, as WITZEL has already pointed out (1997b: 279).

²As for the translations of these two texts, I quote those of GELDNER and WHITNEY respectively.

King, kingdom and the directions (*pradís*)

In PS 10.4, there are some verses where *rāṣṭrá* indicates that a king is in question, or where it points to a king (*rājan*) concretely. In the following verse, *rāṣṭrá*, to which the directions (*pradísah*) in pāda c pay homage as representative of divine entities, seems to refer to the king himself:

PS 10.4.1

*idaṃ rāṣṭraṃ prathatāṃ gobhir aśvair idaṃ rāṣṭraṃ annenerayā rasena |
asmai ṣaḍ urvīr upa saṃ namantu saptahotrā hata śatrūn sacittāḥ ||*

Let the kingdom here extend with cows and horses. [Let] the kingdom here [extend] with food, draught, and sap. Let the six wide ones (the directions) bow down to this [kingdom] here. Being of one mind, do slay the enemies with the *saptahotr*-formulas.

The idea of the directions (*pradísah*) as cosmic entities came into prominence especially in the AV,³ and the object, which the directions pay homage to and bestow benefits on, is a person in some cases: ‘Let the four directions bow to me’ (*māhyaṃ namantāṃ pradísāś cātasraḥ*, ŚS 5.3.1c), and ‘Let the five directions yield milk to me’ (*duhrāṃ me pāñca pradísah*, ŚS 3.20.9a).

A king also is paid respect and becomes elected by the directions as seen in the following two verses:

ŚS 3.4.1cd (= PS 3.1.1cd)

sārvās tvā rājan pradísō hvayantūpasādyo namasyò bhavehá ||

Let all the directions call thee, O king; become thou here one for waiting on, for homage.

ŚS 3.4.2ab (~ PS 3.1.2ab)

tvāṃ víśo vṛnatāṃ rājyāya tvāṃ imāḥ pradísah pāñca devīḥ |

Thee let the people choose unto kingship, thee these five divine directions.

Referring to the idea of quarters as seen in the above verses, GONDA pointed out that royal power is connected with the idea of spatial extent, which is of great importance in ancient Indian religion, and the king is expected to extend the boundaries of his realm (GONDA 1966: 100–101, 104). In the Rohita hymn, *róhita* (the sun, as the ‘ruddy one’), which is to bring the kingdom, is said to be discovered by the six directions; ‘Him (*róhita*), taken hold of by them (the Dawns), the six wide [spaces] discovered; seeing in advance the track, he hath brought hither the kingdom’ (*tābhīḥ sámṛabdhāṃ áno avindan ṣaḍ urvīr gātūṃ prapásyann ihá rāṣṭrām āhāḥ*, ŚS 13.1.4cd = PS 18.15.4cd).

³It is characteristic for the AV (and for Book 10 of the RV) that a spatial totality is expressed by the four / five / six directions. For example, four directions: RV 10.51.9, 10.58.4, ŚS 2.6.1, 2.10.3,4, 3.22.5, 5.3.1, five directions: ŚS 1.30.4, 3.20.9, 3.24.3, and six directions: ŚS 4.11.1, 4.20.2, 10.7.35.

If we admit that *rāṣṭrā* of PS 10.4.1c cited above is directly concerned with the king, *rāṣṭrā*, which is enriched with animals and food as revealed in the same verse (PS 10.4.1a), could be related to the king.⁴ That a king gets possession of animals and nourishment as his wealth is known from other verses concerning royalty: ‘Portion thou this man in village, in horses, in kine; unportion that man who is his enemy’ (*énám bhaja grāme áśveṣu góṣu nís tām bhaja yó amítro asyá*, ŚS 4.22.2ab = PS 3.21.2ab) and ‘May this king be dear to Indra, dear to kine, herbs, cattle’ (*ayám rājā priyá indrasya bhūyāt priyó gávām óṣadhīnām paśūnām*, ŚS 4.22.4cd ~ PS 3.21.4ab).⁵

The kingdom and *balí*

PS 10.4.3

*idaṃ rāṣṭraṃ kratumad vīravaj jiṣṇūgram idaṃ rāṣṭraṃ gardnumac citraghoṣam |
asmai rāṣṭrāya balim anye harantv ahaṃ devebhyo haviṣā vidheyam ||*

[Let] the kingdom here [be] possessed of power, rich in heroes, victorious, and strong. [Let] the kingdom here [be] full of shouts of joy and loud cries [of victory]. Let other [chieftains] pay tribute to the kingdom here. Would that I satisfy the gods with [my oblation].

It is reasonable to surmise that *rāṣṭrā*, to which tribute (*balí*) is brought as revealed in pāda c of the above verse, has a close connection with the king himself. The tribute is said to be collected for a king in the same book of PS, 10.2.6ab; ‘Let the tributes come together to you. Let the toll go forth to you’ (*tubhyaṃ saṃ yantu balayas tubhyaṃ śulkaḥ pra vīyatām*). A newly-consecrated king welcomes the tribute; ‘Und nun soll Indra die Clane dir allein tributpflichtig machen’ (*átho ta índra kévalīr víso balih̄tas karat*, RV 10.173.6cd) and ‘Thou, formidable, shalt see arrive much tribute’ (*bahúṃ balím práti paśyāsā ugráḥ*, ŚS 3.4.3d = PS 3.1.3d). A king promises the chieftains to protect them in return for receiving tributes. Based on such an idea of reciprocity (GONDA 1966: 11–12), it can be safely said that *rāṣṭrā* of PS 10.4.3c refers to a king.

The fixed expression *rāṣṭrám bhū*, which is found especially in early brāhmaṇa prose (e.g., *sá rāṣṭrám ábhavat*, MS 3.3.7:40.6–7), is interesting in this respect. HOFFMANN explained the expression “*rāṣṭrám werden*” in the sense of

⁴[Editorial note: the author seems to mean that *rāṣṭrāya* must be supplied in pāda c, and that this constitutes proof that the word *rāṣṭra*- itself can designate the king — and hence might do so also in pāda a. Supplying *rājñe* with *asmai* in c, however, would arguably make for a more convincing interpretation.]

⁵It would not be adequate to assume that *rāṣṭrā* means the realm governed by a king. There are few indications of immovable property in the nomadic life of early Vedic India. It is only after the late Brāhmaṇa period that *rāṣṭrā* with the meaning ‘realm’ denotes this significant aspect of kingship.

“*rāṣṭrām* bekommen”, taking *rāṣṭrām* as “prädikativer Nominativ” (1976: 557–9). Some Brāhmaṇa passages clearly speak of a sacrificer as becoming *rāṣṭrá*:

TS 3.4.8.1

rāṣṭrākāmāya hotavyā. rāṣṭrām vái rāṣṭrabhṛto. rāṣṭréṇaivāsmāi rāṣṭrām áva rund-dhe. rāṣṭrām evá bhavati.

(Commenting on the *rāṣṭrabhṛt* mantras recited during the *agnicayana*.) They should be offered for one who desires the kingdom; the *rāṣṭrabhṛts* are the kingdom; verily with the kingdom he wins the kingdom for him; he becomes the kingdom. (tr. KEITH)⁶

TS 5.2.1.4

yám kāmāyeta rāṣṭrām syād iti, tám mánasā dhyāyed. rāṣṭrām evá bhavati.

(Commenting on the mantra accompanied by the *adhvaryu* taking the *ukhya agni* during the *agnicayana*.) If he desire of a man, ‘May he be a ruler’ (TS 4.2.1h), he should think of him with his mind; verily he becomes a ruler.⁷ (tr. KEITH)

These passages provide positive proof that *rāṣṭrá* is the power of kingship to be acquired by a sacrificer, and *rāṣṭrá* as such points to a person endowed with sovereignty.

There is no necessity to confine the king (*rājan*) to the chieftain of a single tribe. The situation surrounding a tribe would have been marked by fluctuating alliances and conflicts with other tribes in the *Realpolitik* of early Vedic India. The Pūru tribe was a conglomerate or coalition of tribes, to which the Bharata tribe belonged, while both tribes seem to have been subdivisions of the Āyu, one of the *pañcajana* (‘five peoples’) (WITZEL 1997a: 326–338). The same person could perform his *purohita*-ship under various kings and possibly mediate a tribal alliance between them (RAU 1957: 12, 123). Thus, a tribe embraced (sub-)tribes, and a king (*rājan*) assumed the leadership of chieftains. In ŚS 3.5.7, the chieftains (*rājānah*) are, together with the other officials, subject to the sacrificer, namely, the king (*rājan*):⁸

⁶ŚB 9.4.1.5 comments on the same mantra as follows: *mithunāni juhōti; mithunād vā ādhi prajātir. yo vāi prajāyate, sá rāṣṭrām bhavaty. árāṣṭram vai sá bhavati yo ná prajāyate* ‘He offers pairs (of oblations), for birth originates from a pair; and he alone is (ruler of) a kingdom who propagates offspring, but not he who does not propagate offspring’ (tr. EGGELING).

⁷KS gives the same comment: KS 19.11:13.14–16. The *Apratirathasūkta* recited during the *agnicayana* is commented on from the same viewpoint: KS 21.10:50.1–3, MS 3.3.7:40.6–8, as already indicated by HOFFMANN (1976: 557). The idea that a person ‘becomes the kingdom’ is found in other ritual contexts: e.g. by seeing the *catūrātra* ritual, Viśvāmitra, the king of the Jahnus, became the kingdom (PB 21.12.2), and the offspring of Aikādaśākṣi became the kingdom (AB 5.30.15).

⁸For the distinction of two types of relationship — the one between king and vassals on the one hand, and a king and his people on the other —, as encountered in ŚS 3.5.7, see SCHLERATH 1960: 125.

ŚS 3.5.7

*yé rājāno rājakṛtaḥ sūtā grāmaṇyās ca yé |
upastīn parṇa māhyaṃ tvám sārvaṇ kṛṇv abhīto jánān ||*

They that are kings, king-makers, that are charioteers and troop-leaders — subjects to me do thou, O *parṇá*, make all people round about.

The election of the king by the tribes is delineated in ŚS 4.22 (= PS 3.21): ‘Make thou this man sole chief of the clans’ (*imám viśám ekavṛśám kṛṇu tvám*, ŚS 4.22.1b = PS 3.21.1b), ‘Let this king be people-lord of people’ (*ayám viśám viśpátir astu rājā*, ŚS 4.22.3b = PS 3.21.2b), and lastly, describing the power of Indra, ‘[I join to thee Indra] who shall make you sole chief of people, also uppermost of kings descended from Manu’ (*yás tvā kárad ekavṛśám jánānām utá rājñām uttamám mānavānām*, ŚS 4.22.5cd = PS 3.21.5cd).

Tribal alliance and the ritual for harmony

The representation of *rāṣṭrá* relies not only on the king of the tribe(s), but also on the tribal alliance which constituted a kingdom in early Vedic India. The chieftains are called upon to be united, as revealed in the following verse:

PS 10.4.6

*apām iva vegalḥ pra śṛṇīta śatrūn diśodiśo rabhamānāḥ sam eta |
ekavratā vi dhanam bhajadhvam purohitena vo rāṣṭram prathayantu devāḥ ||*

Crush the enemies like a flood of water. From various quarters, taking hold of each other, do come together. Abiding by a single vow, share the property among yourselves. Let the gods extend your kingdom through the house priest.

The alliance of the chieftains is frequently stressed:

PS 10.4.5d

athānandinaḥ sumanasaḥ sam eta ||
And do come together, full of delight and good-minded.

PS 10.4.7a

samyag vo rāṣṭram saha vo manāṃsi
[Let] your kingdom [be] united. [Let] your minds [be] together.

PS 10.4.8

*yathāpaḥ samudrāya samīcīr vahatha śriyam |
evā rāṣṭrāya me devāḥ samyañco vahatha śriyam ||*

As waters into the sea, being united, you bring the welfare; so do you, being gods united,⁹ bring the glory to my kingdom.

⁹It is noteworthy that in PS 10.4.8 a king (chieftain) is called and considered a *deva*. Con-

The word *rāṣṭrá* is replaced by *viś* ('people,' or rather 'tribe') in the verses of PS 10.2; 'Let the great tribes long for you' (*tvāṃ vāñchantu viśo mahīḥ*, PS 10.2.6d) is restated in the next verse: 'Let the great kingdom long for you' (*vāñchatu tvā bṛhad rāṣṭram*, PS 10.2.7a). This suggests that the alliance of tribes is intended by the word *rāṣṭrá*.

One of the reasons why such an alliance is needed is to prepare for war. And the chieftains pay attention to the tribe's firm solidarity, as is evidenced in the following three verses of PS 10.4:

PS 10.4.2b

ime rājānaḥ samityānyān vadheyuh |

The kings (chieftains) here, coming together, should slay the others (the enemies).

PS 10.4.12c

idaṃ rāṣṭram hataśatru jīṣṇu ||

[Let] the kingdom here [be] one in which enemies are slain, and [let it be] victorious.

PS 10.4.13

sapatnasāhaṃ pramṛṇam idaṃ rāṣṭram dr̥ḍham ugram |
sādhāmitram abhimātiśāhaṃ sarvā jigāya pṛtanā abhiṣṭi ||

[Let] the kingdom here [be] one overcoming rivals and destroying, firm and strong. [Let the kingdom here be] one slaying the enemy and conquering the foe. [The kingdom here] as a superior one has won all the battles.

PS 10.4 belongs to the category of hymns aimed at harmony (*sāṃmanasyā*). There are several words characteristic of that ritual in the AV, namely, *sacittāḥ* (PS 10.4.1d), *sumanasah* (PS 10.4.5d), *ekavratāḥ* (PS 10.4.6c), *samyak* and *saha* (PS 10.4.7ab). The harmony ritual has the purpose of strengthening the sense of oneness in the community. PS 10.4 constitutes material with which the harmony ritual is administered in order to solidify the tribal alliance for victory in battle.

The sense of oneness does not mean that the members are related on an equal footing with each other, but it is intended that they are subject to one individual, namely, the sacrificer of the harmony ritual.¹⁰ So, for example, the harmony ritual for a family aims to make its members obey the householder (*gr̥hāpati*) as known from ŚS 3.30.2: 'Be the son submissive to the father, like-minded with the mother; let the wife to the husband speak words full of honey, wealful' (*ānuvratāḥ pitūḥ putró mātrā bhavantu sāṃmanāḥ | jāyā pātye mādhumatīm*

trast GONDA (1966: 24 n. 173) who states that the term *devā* is not given to the king in ancient literature. [Editorial comment: this is patently an incorrect understanding of the mantra, where *devāḥ* is voc. rather than nom. pl., and can easily be taken in its usual sense. Cf. 10.4.3d *ahaṃ devebhyo haviṣā vidheyam*, 10.4.6d *purohitena vo rāṣṭram prathayantu devāḥ*, 10.4.7d *samyāñco devā havam ā yantu ma imam*, etc.]

¹⁰As to this harmony ritual which leaves the sacrificer in the position of superior, see BLOOMFIELD (1899: 72–3).

vācam vadatu śantivām). In the same way, the tribal alliance in PS 10.4 is intended to render the chieftains submissive to a king.

This suggests that the AV priest could have been engaged in the politics of kingship. As we know, the tribal alliance occupied a dominant position in controlling the politics of ancient India.¹¹ It is not difficult to assume that the demand for rituals securing the alliance of tribes increased during this period. Several Vedic schools undertook to satisfy the demands for the ritual of forming a tribal alliance, or the ritual of a sacrificer assuming leadership of a tribe. This endeavor can be inferred from the harmony hymns and rituals, such as ṚV 10.191, Khila 5.1, and some *kāmyeṣṭis* prescribed in the ritual texts belonging to the YV (CALAND 1908: vi–xii) which appeared prominently after the late Ṛgvedic period. On the other hand, it can easily be surmised that the AV priests attempted to meet the demand for a ritual of tribal alliance by expanding their textual material for harmony rituals. As for the background behind the AV priests' connections with kingship, various reasons can be supposed; their personal abilities, their motives for rising in the rank of the 'orthodox' ritualists, or even their original position as house priests at a court. However, apart from such subjective or incidental reasons, objective or historical conditions can be assumed, one of which was the increased demand for harmony ritual.

The assembly (*sāmiti*)

The function of the *sāmiti* has already been investigated in detail by ZIMMER (1879: 174–7) and RAU (1957: 82). In the *sāmiti*, the chieftains came together¹² and discussed public affairs such as the distribution of the spoils of war.¹³ Although the participants contended for gaining the initiative in the assembly,¹⁴ it was expected that in the end the assembly would reach an agreement.¹⁵

From the following verse, we can infer that the *sāmiti* was a meeting in which the chieftains anticipated being allied with each other:

PS 10.4.10cd

satyaṃ vadantaḥ sāmitiṃ caranto mitraṃ gṛhṇānā janaso¹⁶ yantu sakhyam ||

¹¹Regarding the tribe alliance as the dominant element in early Vedic history, see RAU (1957: 18–19), and WITZEL (1997a: 326–338, 1997b: 263).

¹²'Wie ein echter König in die Versammlungen wandelnd' (*rājā nā satyāḥ sāmitīr iyānāḥ*, ṚV 9.92.6b), 'Wie die Könige in der Ratsversammlung (sich versammelt haben)' (*rājānaḥ sāmitavo iva*, ṚV 10.97.6b).

¹³'Wenn, o Agni, diese (göttliche) Versammlung stattfinden wird, ... so sollst du da für uns einen gütereichen Anteil ausbitten' (*yād agna eṣā sāmitir bhāvāti ... bhāgāṃ no ātra vāsumantaṃ vītāt*, ṚV 10.11.8).

¹⁴'Eure Beratung nehme ich für mich in Anspruch' (*ā vo 'hāṃ sāmitiṃ dade*, ṚV 10.166.4d).

¹⁵'Einig der Rat, einig die Versammlung, einig sei ihr Sinn, zusammenstimmend ihr Denken' (*samānó māntraḥ sāmitiḥ samānī samānām mānaḥ sahā cittām eṣām*, ṚV 10.191.3ab).

¹⁶*janaso*: the Kashmir ms. seems to point out the correct reading, rather than *jaraso* found in the

Speaking the truth, being engaged in the meeting, and grabbing hold of an ally, let them (the kings) enter into alliance with the people.

The formation of tribal alliance involved the selection of a leader. In the following verse, a king is asked to secure a firm initiative in the *sāmiti*:

ŚS 6.88.3

*dhruvó 'cyutaḥ prá mṛṇīhi śátrūn chatrūyató 'dharān pādayasva |
sārvā díśaḥ sāmmanasaḥ sadhrīcīr dhruvāya te sāmitiḥ kalpātām ihá ||*

Fixed, unmoved, do thou slaughter the foes; make them that play the foe fall below [thee]; [be] all the quarters like-minded, concordant; let the gathering here suit thee [who art] fixed.

The two preceding verses of this hymn are variants of the fourth and fifth verse of RV 10.173, which is known as the installation hymn. ŚS 6.88.3 just quoted, which was newly added as the last verse of this hymn in place of the sixth verse of RV 10.173, shows a characteristic of the AV in that the direction is one of the entities which admit a kingship as already pointed out above when discussing PS 10.4.1. The word *dhruvā* implies the firmness of the kingdom (*rāṣṭrá*) (SCHLERATH 1960: 126, GONDA 1966: 90), which is also observed in the other verses concerning royalty: e.g., 'Fixed [is] this king of the people' (*dhruvó rájā viśám ayám*, ŚS 6.88.1d) and 'Fixed for thee let both Indra and Agni maintain royalty fixed' (*dhruvám ta índraś cágnis ca rāṣṭram dhārayatām dhruvám*, ŚS 6.88.2cd).

In a royal verse of one of the Rohita hymns, the *sāmiti* gives a king the opportunity to ascend the throne:

ŚS 13.1.13cd (~ PS 18.16.3cd)

rōhitam devā yanti sumanasyāmānāḥ sá mā rōhaiḥ sāmityái rohayatu ||

To the ruddy one go the gods with favoring mind; let him cause me to ascend (the throne) with ascensions of meeting.

The exact meaning of *rōha-* *sāmityá-* is not certain, but this phrase seems to have a connection with the recognition of kingship in the *sāmiti*. The verb *ruh-*, which in popular etymology is associated with *rōhita* in this hymn, indicates manifestation of kingship (SCHLERATH 1960: 101). *ruh-* is used in the prescription for the royal consecration (*rājasūya*) in the sense of mounting the throne (*āsandī*),¹⁷

Orissa mss., although BHATTACHARYA adopts the latter reading. The reading of the Orissa mss. makes the pāda impossible to understand. A combination of *sakhya* with the genitive of a god's name is prevalent: e.g., *indrasya sakhyaṁ* (RV 3.60.3a, 9.86.20d, 10.62.1b), *devānām ... sakhyaṁ* (RV 4.33.2c). Taking the reference to *sāmiti* in the preceding pāda into account, the reading of the Kashmir ms., *janaso sakhyaṁ*, fits in this context.

¹⁷Cf. HEESTERMAN 1957: 141–2. E.g., *āsandīm ārohan, ārūḍha* (MānŚS 9.1.4.9) and *tām (= āsandīm) ārohan* (ĀpŚS 18.15.6) in *rājasūya*. In the coronation of the AV: 'He seats [the king] upon a bull's skin on a couch' (*talpārṣabham carmārohayati*, KauŚS 17.3: *laghvabhiṣeka*) and 'He seats [the king] upon a tiger skin on the bigger couch' (*varṣiyasi vaiyāghram carmārohayati*, KauŚS 17.13: *mahābhiṣeka*).

which constitutes the climax of such a ritual. So *ruh-* means the ascending to his status of king in a ritual sense. This verse may mean that a sacrificer is made to ascend the throne by the approval of the assembly.

Although the generalized meanings of *rāṣṭrā*, namely 'kingship' and 'kingdom', are relevant for understanding most of the passages containing this word, what it relates to at the level of concrete matters varies according to the course of history and the change of power structure. In late Vedic times, colonization spread to the East, and the Āryan tribes settled there, subsisting primarily on agriculture. With such a change of lifestyle and the increase of production, a different form of kingship emerged, one that consisted of a solid organization of a governed people and a territory. "Gesamtheit der Untertanen" and "Land", which RAU gave as concrete meanings of *rāṣṭrā*, are reflections of the changes which had occurred by this period. By contrast, in early Vedic times a king who is a sovereign over the chieftains, and the tribal alliance, which is the unity of chieftains subjected to a king, are the meanings most closely related to the notion of *rāṣṭrā*, as evidenced in PS 10.4.*

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