

State and Society in Ancient India

Hridayananda Dasa Goswami shows us in this article, by analysis of a specific piece of scholarly research by Prof. W. Rau, how academic conclusions may sometimes be based on personal bias. Such bias does not lead to objective conclusions and it defeats the methodology used to gain objectivity. As explored in The First Indologists, by Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami, scholarly research into Indian and Asian religion is littered with such conclusion. It is important, as Hridayananda Dasa Goswami demonstrates here, for members of the living traditions to learn to communicate with scholars. This will develop healthy debate and add balance to the study of Eastern religion and help us develop wholistic conclusions based on representations of the experience from the tradition and the analysis of the observer.

In a pioneering work, *State and Society in Ancient India* [\[i\]](#) Prof. Wilhelm Rau attempts, through a scholarly study of ancient Vedic literature generally known as the *Brahmana* texts, to reconstruct the political and social situation of early India. Yet even while gratefully acknowledging our debt to him, we shall critically evaluate certain basic and explicit assumptions that guided his selective listing and interpretation of the *Brahmana* texts, and which thus let him to construct a historical picture consistent with those assumptions.

Rau begins by admitting that, 'the title of the present investigation (*State and Society in Ancient India*) will, without doubt, provoke amazement in many readers. After all, it is held far and away as an accepted fact that the Aryan Indians of the early antiquity had formed no States.'

This is true, argues Rau, only if we understand state or government in the modern sense. However our concern here is with state in the most general, universal sense of the term, and, Rau claims, since the pundits of political science have failed to give us this most general definition of state, he turns rather to anthropology, and thus derives the following argument:

- (1) Human beings belong to the 'herd-animals'.
- (2) Like other creatures of this group, humans depend on differentiated social structures for both physical wellbeing and mental development.
- (3) Thus, and here Rau quotes Eduard Meyer, 'the organisation in such groups (herds, tribes) which we empirically encounter wherever we learn about human beings, is not only just as old, but rather far older than human beings: it is the pre-condition for the arising of mankind at all.'
- (4) This implies some form of legal system, which need not be a written one, since, according to Meyer, 'without a legal order, or in other words a generally recognised and steadfast regulation of its external formation, of its authority and position in relation to the individual, even the most primitive tribal group is unthinkable, for without such a system, it would be nothing but an ephemeral union of autonomous individuals.'

Rau happily concludes that 'The state as a legal system of co-existence is found thus everywhere and at every stage of human history.'

Rau then adds the following refinements to his argument: although an individual often owes allegiance to many social groups, including family, professional groups, cults, etc., 'that community which the individual feels himself most duty-bound to obey', is entitled to be called the 'state' for that individual. 'This authority, however, has only as much meaning as it has power to enforce its claims on the individuals. Mere pious sentiments, customs or moral commandments cannot sustain a legal system. The state authority rests on the state power and this power must in some way be represented, be it through aristocratic oligarchic groups, or through a general people's assembly.'

We are now ready for Rau's final working definition of the state in its most general contour: 'The state is the most authoritative social or community form of its time among human beings who consider themselves to belong together. It is internally a legal system valid for all its members (but not therefore equally necessary for all).'

Rau is attempting to set up a type of evolutionary stage model for state development in India. Thus he needs to show that early Indian legal systems or state-forms were quite simple, even animalistic, and only later developed into the more complex forms associated with current notions of government. He reminds us that his simple definition is remarkable for the items it does not contain: 'First of all (for a definition of a state to be valid): states can be conceived in relation with any form of economy. We cannot assign a minimum number of participants in the state. It remains open whether through descent, language, customs or religion they see each other as belonging together. Equality under the law and a written fixing of the law may be lacking.'

Having defined the 'state' for the purpose of his study as a universal feature of human and even of animal life, and having committed himself to an anthropological / evolutionary stage model for the development of early Indian government and social structure, Rau next discusses his sources. He laments that unlike the sources for other areas and periods, the early Indian context 'yields considerable difficulties. Here any sure chronology is missing.'

Indeed, rather than a coherent sequence of historical events linked to verifiable dates, we have merely 'the fact that older and younger types of literature are succeeding one another, redefining and conditioning one another'. Rau concedes that these ancient literatures could be analysed through three methods:

- (1) Philological review which seeks to establish a relative chronology of the texts.
- (2) An historical linguistic study which seeks the same result through statistical analysis of vocabulary, grammar and syntax.
- (3) The method which Rau himself utilised, that of cultural history, which 'tries to include for the dating and the development of living conditions, by utilising what the sources say about the conditions of that time.'

Rau next divides the Vedic texts into the three traditional categories of *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas* (including some early *Upanisads*) and *Sutras*. There are, however, several problems with this scheme:

- (1) Since the 1950s, when Rau wrote this work, our periodisation of Vedic literature has been enhanced and made more precise by the work of scholars such as Michael Witzel who sees, in his article 'Tracing the Vedic Dialects', five, rather than three, strata of Vedic texts:

(a) the *Rig-veda*, which Witzel sees as the oldest linguistic strata of Vedic literature, in a category by itself;

(b) the mantra language, including the verse and the prose texts of the *Atharva-veda*, the *Rig-veda-khilani*, the seventy-five mantras of the *Sama-veda Samhita* which are not found in the *Rig Veda*, and the verse and prose mantras of the *Yajur Veda*;

(c) the *Samhita* prose of the *Yajur Veda*, which differs from the 'mantra-language' in such features as the total loss of the injunctive 'as a living category', the loss of the subjunctive, optative and imperative modes of the aorist, and the appearance of periphrastic aorist forms;

(d) the *Brahmana* prose of the *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, including the earlier and later strata. Witzel also inserts here the 'older *Upanisads*' such as the *Brhad Aranyaka Upanisad*, *Chandogya Upanisad* and *Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana*, and also includes in this fourth strata 'some of the oldest *Srauta Sutras*';

(e) *sutra* language, including 'the bulk of the *Srauta* and *Grihya Sutras*', forms the fifth and final strata.

(2) Furthermore, since the publication of *Staat und Gesellschaft*, Witzel and others have seriously attempted to locate the various Vedic schools in specific geographic areas. Rau, writing in the 1950s, makes no mention or use of any such techniques.

(3) In general, Rau only distinguishes between 'younger' and 'older' texts, but even this technique is applied only (if often) when Rau needs to bolster his speculative evolutionary stage model. In other words, Rau does not systematically segregate the data from various linguistic strata, geographic regions, type of literature (i.e. *Brahmana* vs. *Upanisad*) or according to the various Vedic schools.

(4) Since Rau is anxious, as he repeatedly states, to purify his work of excessive talk on religion, he does not recognise that the texts reveal a variety of religious attitudes which themselves suggest a variety of motives and programs among the different texts, or indeed in the various sections of a single text. Rau seems content, as we shall demonstrate, to relegate (with more than a little scorn) all of the *Brahmana* theology to the category of primitive magic.

In fairness to Rau, we should mention that he openly classifies his work as a preliminary venture into new territory, and that he expects subsequent scholars to refine and develop this work. In any case, we shall proceed through the text of *Staat und Gesellschaft* and point out various arguments or claims which, in my view, need to be scrutinised in terms of the four problems listed above.

While discussing the contempt that European scholars have typically felt for the *Brahmana* texts, Rau remarks:

The *Brahmanas* enjoy, at least with some Western indologists, a rather questionable reputation: they have been compared to the writings of the mentally retarded. They are characterised by monotony in the content as well as helplessness in form and with their abstruse identifications and mysterious nonsense give us an idea of the first attempts at thinking and speaking of the oldest Indian theologians. The authors are still completely unable to construct longer sequences of thought; the shortest sentences seem to be set next to each

other without any relation; logical affirmations are almost unknown; statements of a rational type of observation, barely formulated, get lost again in the wavy chaos of crazy magical ideas, where everything seems to flow in separate directions and merge together at the same time.'

Let us consider some of the above assertions. Rau assures us that 'the authors are still completely unable to construct longer sequences of thought', and yet these texts are said to have been composed long after the exquisite poetry of the *Rig-veda*, which does indeed contain sentences of normal length, as well as a style of composition and complexity of ideas of extraordinary literary and religious merit. In terms of grammar, the *Rig-veda* displays a rather sophisticated system of verbs which was understandably simplified in later Sanskrit. Thus what does Rau mean when he says, 'the authors are still completely unable to construct longer sequences of thought'?

One would rather be led to postulate an age of advanced literary and conceptual ability which later deteriorated into the culture in which the *Brahmanas* were composed. One might also argue that since the *Brahmanas* are precisely '*brahmanas* speaking to *brahmanas*' and not to the general public, what we have are a series of notes of the inner circle. Or perhaps the coherence and syntactic significance of the seemingly unrelated pieces of utterance were known to the Vedic technocrats who worked the sacrificial fires. In that case, we might be dealing with a jargon or technical meta-language, or perhaps even with linguistic icons analogous to the visual ones on a computer screen, and which contributed to a virtual reality in the form of *yajna*.

On the other hand, if we are attached to an evolutionary stage model, all of the above possibilities will hold little interest for us, and we will prefer to see primitive magicians speaking like intoxicated children. But in that case, how are we to explain the reality of an older, and superior strata of literature which, in my view is clearly the product of a highly developed religious and intellectual culture.

Interestingly, Rau himself hints at such a possible 'devolution in the religious life of the Aryans', when he says that (in the *Brahmana* texts) 'one speculates on the meaning of the sacrifice as a magical means to influence the course of worldly events. The gods are being dethroned and degraded to impersonal forces, which are meant to be used as order-suppliers'.

In his well-known work, *The Religion of the Veda* (Delhi, 1988:8), H. Oldenberg sees a similar, and even earlier, transformation on the historical path from the *Rig-veda* to the *Yajur-veda*:

The contribution of the *Yajus*-formulas to the understanding of the Vedic gods is, of course, negligible compared to that of the *Rig-veda*. The gods are here subordinate. One has the impression that they are placed just here and there as accessories, not quite in place. And, therefore, what they have to do accidentally in the context of the sacrificial act has a very loose connection with their real nature. For the compilers of the *Yajus* this aspect of the gods has faded altogether. On the whole compared with the *prime of the Vedic theistic belief* (emphasis mine), there is obviously a fresher approach to these mantras which has asserted itself over the old form of sacrifice: a philosophy for which, heaven and earth, inhaling and exhaling, human senses and powers and verse-measures are as important as, or perhaps more important than, Indra and Varuna.'

The affinities of this 'fresher approach' with the anti-theism of the *purva-mimamsa* should be obvious. Indeed, Rau complains that the *Brahmanas* give us mere mechanistic magic, rather than faithful belief which Oldenberg sees in the earlier *Rig-veda*. If we combine this fact with the obvious literary deterioration that seems to take place between the *Rig-veda* and the *Brahmana* texts, one should rather be led to a theory of devolution in Vedic religion. But Rau does not consider this point.

Rau gives a standard introduction to the 'Aryan colonisation of North India', and rather than focus on the well-known details of that theory, we shall examine some curious aspects of his methodology. It seems that Rau consistently imagines what life must have been like in olden times, and then brings in quotations (which only vaguely or indirectly speak to the point) as confirmation of his view. For example: ' . the different (migrating Aryan) tribes had to defend their land not only against the attacks of the indigenous population that was leaving towards the East, but also against their own kind attacking and following in their footsteps (from the west).' In defence of this, he cites the *Sata-patha-brahmana* (6,7,3,5): 'If one is actually victorious only with the opposite side, then the land that he has conquered will be settled by others. Whoever, on the other hand, is victorious on both sides is unhampered there.'

Here we have a case in which a simple statement of military commonsense, namely that one must secure one's border on both sides, has been mobilised as a demonstration of presumed historical events and social-political realities: namely that later bands of migrating Aryans attacked and raided the land-holdings seized by previous bands of marauding migratory.

Rau seems wont to state his historical speculations as the only possible way in which things might have happened, even when that is obviously not the case. For instance, he claims that during the time of the *Brahmana* literature, 'there were no names of the land; where we are dealing with tribal lands, the sources use the names of the inhabitants. He gives as examples from the texts such names as Kosala, Vidha, Pancala, Madra and Kuru, concluding that 'This way of expression has continued to exist in India until far into the Middle Ages, and is very ancient: *it could only have developed in a time where each individual tribe didn't yet possess any area of settlement, and called that country its own where it happened to be at the moment.*' (emphasis mine)

I find this argument puzzling. First of all, I find the ancient Indian custom of naming the land after the people to be elegant and meaningful. Yet for Rau, 'there were no names of the land'. Or, a name is not a name unless it is different from the name of the people who live on it. To me, this argument is in no way intuitive or logical. Although Rau somewhat frivolously claims that things 'could only have happened in a particular way when by the common rules of logic they could not have happened otherwise'.

Rau's judgement is often jaded by his transparent hostility toward religion and priests. Although this antagonism reaches an alarming crescendo at the end of his work, it permeates the body of the text. Thus Rau is able to fire off a gratuitous salvo even while discussing the apparently innocuous topic of the ancient Indian plough:

The plow (*langala, sira*) is called (in the *Jaiminiya Brahmana* JB 2,84) *vakram daru*, that is, "crooked wood", in which the material, according to *SB* 7,2,2,3 comes from the *udambara* tree and was apparently provided with a metallic edge. This last information is doubtful. Even less credible seems the harnessing with six, eight, twelve and even twenty-four draft oxen. V.M. Apte wants to draw the conclusion from this information that the plows must have been very heavy. I prefer to deduce from this that the priests were greedy. The above mentioned

animals, according to *SB* 7,2,2,21, had to be donated to the *adhvaryu* (priest); the more the better!

At times Rau forces a highly improbable definition on key Sanskrit terms in order to extract an economic, rather than an ideological, cause for the way things 'must have been'. His motive, of course, is to show that mere greed, rather than any serious metaphysical principle, was the motive of ancient Indian behaviour. A clear case in point is Rau's decision to translate the dichotomous terms *sreyas-papiyas* as 'rich man and poor man'.

We shall briefly lay out Rau's line of reasoning. Since the Sanskrit word *sreyas* is derived from the word *sri*, which means, among many other things, riches, therefore *sreyas* (literally 'very *sri*') indicates a very rich man. Thus Rau states:

Sreyas is a person who possesses, as compared to others, the quality of *sri* to a greater extent. Indeed *sri* means 'opulence, reputation based on possession'. To have many wives is a form of *sri*. 'The status of a house-lord signifies *sri*.' *SB* 5,3,3,3; 5.4.3.15: 'When a man reaches *sri*, then one plays the lute for him.' *SB* 13,1,5,1: Only rich men can marry several wives or pay for a lute player.

Towards such a *sreyas*, the poorer man, *papiyas*, was obligated with politeness, readiness to serve and taxes.'

We may also note that the Sanskrit word *papiyas*, which Rau translates as 'a poor man', is derived from the term *papa*, which as an adjective means 'bad, vicious, wicked, evil, wretched, vile, low' etc. The word *papiyas*, analogous to *sreyas*, means 'very *papa*'.

We may observe the following:

(1) Rau does not define the term *sreyas* directly, but rather he reasons that since *sreyas* is the comparative form of *sri*, he can simply cite from the text some uses of the latter word, *sri*.

(2) Even in doing so, he only cites examples of *sri* from a single text, the *Sata-partha-brahmana*, a comparatively late text.

(3) It is well-known that traditionally both *sri* and *sreyas* have a wide range of meanings that go beyond mere economic affluence. Indeed according to the much beleaguered *Monier-Williams Dictionary*, *sri* first means 'light, lustre, radiance, splendour, glory, beauty, grace, loveliness'. This sense of the word is found even in the *Rig-veda*. Then come the notions of 'prosperity, welfare, good fortune, success, auspicious, wealth, treasure, riches, high rank, power, might, majesty, royal dignity', etc.

(4) A cursory dictionary check of the comparative word *sreyas* does not take us closer to Rau's definition, but rather farther away from it. *Sreyas* first means 'more splendid or beautiful, more excellent or distinguished, superior, preferable, better', etc., from the *Rig-veda* on. The word also means 'propitious, well disposed to, auspicious, fortunate, conducive to welfare or prosperity' etc. Curiously enough, nowhere do we find a strong sense of 'the richer man' or 'the one with more money'.

(5) As noted above, if we examine the sense of *papa*, and of *papiyas*, we once again stray from the predominantly economic tilt of Prof. Rau and enter more into a religious or ethical domain of meaning.

Thus Rau distorts the simple meaning of Sanskrit words in order to establish what appears to be a type of Marxist analysis that must have seemed more plausible in the 1950s when Rau did his work than it would today.

Since Rau's next topic, after defining *sreyas* and *papiyas* in strictly economic terms, is that the *papiyas* had to offer respect and service to the *sreyas*, we have here a neat and ready-made economic explanation of status relationships in ancient India. If, on the other hand, we admit for both *sreyas* and *papiyas* their much wider range of actual meanings, then we are plunged into the very situation that Rau so diligently seeks to avoid: that of explaining society, culture and government in ancient India in terms of ideology and religious beliefs about the hierarchy of being.

Rau seems to consistently take the worst-case scenario as the perpetual state of affairs in ancient India. He wants to show that early Indians lived in a primitive state of savagery in which all were pitted against all in a relentless struggle for material goods. Thus we find this statement and quotation:

The principle of the power of the strongest also governed the relations between the sons ... as soon as the fight for the possessions of the father was ended, another fight began for the possessions of the sons; and who would be the winner was not always predictable. After all the oldest did not always have to be the strongest.

"He among the sons who presses for the richest inheritance (in the fight among the brothers) is thought by the people to be the winner here." *Pancavimsa Brahmana*, 16,4,4.'

Although Rau admits in his introduction that we are dealing with a long and uncertain time span, and with a comely array of texts covering different periods (and for that matter, geographic areas), a single quote suffices to characterise the historical period represented by the *Brahmana* literature, if the cited text indicates a suitably primitive state of society. Thus there were no cases of sons who related to one another on principles any more noble than that of greed. There were no peaceful families, nor was there spiritual self-sacrifice.

Rau's conviction that all religious stories of gods are but projections of earthly activities, leads him to conclude that in ancient India hosts could, at their sweet pleasure, sacrifice their guests to gods. ' ... the host had full control over the guest. He could thus also use him as a sacrificial animal, as Manu did (advised by Indra) in the legend in the two quotes mentioned above. (*Maitrayani Samhita* 4,8,1 [4,107,12] and *KS* 30,1 [2,182,30]) .

Rau does not hesitate to reject the claims of the *Brahmana* texts if, in his judgement, they are exaggerated or simply not plausible, as in the case of the large ox teams mentioned above. But he does not hesitate to accept as factual apparent indications of savagery, and indeed he tends to magnify them and to claim for them an all-pervading validity at all times and places in ancient Indian history, even when such claims are made for gods and not human beings, or when the claims appear in but a single text, or in even in a single sentence.

Thus the distinction between historical fact and fancy rests on Rau's vision of the fundamental, material forces of history. Rau exhibits this selective methodology, as well as his relentless animus toward the *brahmanas*, in a curious bit of reasoning:

It is almost impossible to correctly assert the position of the *brahmana* in the political life of ancient India, because our sources, coming from priests on this point, do not describe the facts, but depict the world as it should be according to the view of the authors.

When for example the spiritual order is almost always described as the first, the *brahmanas* as the crown of creation, and all other people appear to be merely their fearful and thereof obedient servants, then this doesn't say much about the real circumstances, as long as independent witnesses from other sources are not added.

Moreover the text themselves contradict their exorbitant remarks with occasional and unintentional remarks (in which the kings or other rulers are portrayed as being superior).'

I find it amazing here that Rau characterised the balancing statements of the texts as 'unintentional', as if the *brahmanas*, being occasionally careless and loose-tongued, failed at times in their normal attempt to conceal the truth about their real, and subordinate, position vis-à-vis the political rulers.

Yet if we assume, as Rau does, that *brahmana* priests were greedy magicians obsessed with self-aggrandisement and self-promotion, then we may also assume that they would invariably attempt to portray themselves as supreme authorities in the state, and so occasional admissions of the power of kings over *brahmanas* could be interpreted as 'unintentional'.

In a curious counter-point, Rau himself reveals that 'Above all, belonging to the priestly class was at first only based on knowledge'; *MS* 4,8,1 (4,107,9) and *KS* 30,1 (2,182,6) teach an old saying:

*kim brahmanasya pitaram kim u prchasi mataram
srutam ced asmin vedyam sa pita sa pitamahah*

What do you ask about the mother or father of a *brahmana*? When he has knowledge about what is worth knowing, then that is his father, that is his grandfather.

Astonishingly, Rau uses this quote only to reinforce a technical argument involving a point of grammar. However, if initially membership in the *brahmana* class was based on wisdom or knowledge, then in what sense can we say that the Vedic society was 'evolving', when this sensible qualification degenerated into a selfish birthright?

Further, if originally *brahmanas* were known by their qualification of learning, or even wisdom, then it is plausible that at a time when those qualifications were taken seriously there would have been a legitimate class of learned men holding the prestigious posts of *brahmanas*. Since this is a real possibility, why should we constantly claim, as Rau does, that the actions and statements of *brahmanas*, even in early *Brahmana* texts, can invariably be best explained in terms of greed for power and money?

Moving on to another topic, Rau tells us that although the Aryans ate meat, including that of the cow, there is a clear stigma against cow-killers:

Cow meat was still considered a valued food in the *Brahmana* period. In the list of sacrificial men, on the other hand, the butcher as cattle dismantler and cow killer is already considered a person worthy of contempt, as well as anyone who begs meat from him.

*mṛtyave go-vyacham antakaya go-ghatam
ksudhe yo gam vikṛntantam bhiksamana auptisthat.*

Death to the butcher. The god of the nether world, Yamaraja, to the cow killer. Hunger to one who begs from a cow dismantler. (*VS 30,18*).

*pipasayai go-vyaccham. nirṛtyai go-ghatam ksudhe go-vikartm
ksuttr-snabhyam tam yo gam vikṛntantam mamsam bhisamana upatishate.*

'Thirst to the butcher. Misfortune to the cow killer. Hunger to the cow dismantler. Hunger and thirst to those who beg flesh from a cow dismantler. (*Taittiriya Brahmana 3,4,16*).

Rau does not explain this dichotomy.

We shall end this brief essay with a few comments on methodology and 'rules of the game'. It is our contention that despite his valuable and diligent scholarship, Prof. Rau's views on early India are coloured by a persistent, non-scholarly tendency to preach against Vedic religion. Thus he relies on reductionistic claims for which there is no conceivable empirical demonstration, and for which there is nothing remotely resembling logical necessity.

A few statements from Rau should help to demonstrate the strident and adamant way in which he denied the religious claims of the texts he claims to explain: '... the power of the priest was not a real one, only an imagined one. One would think that the complete uselessness of such magical manipulations should all too soon have shown its true face in praxis and put an end to these imaginations.' 'The gods are everywhere made in the image of men.'

We may note here that mere resemblance between gods and men proves nothing since one could just as easily claim, as the *Bible* does, that men are made in the image of God, or of the gods. The resemblance then 'proves' the opposite point. If one argues, along with Xenophanes, that people seem to depict their gods with features similar to their own, and that all of these various views of the divinity cannot be simultaneously accurate, the following can be said in reply: 'due to conditioned, individual perception, people tend to see many real, objective items in various ways. For example, various artists may depict the same mountain in a variety of styles, or even colours, but the mountain is one.'

Similarly different perceptions of the divinity may simply prove that individual perception varies, not that the object of differing perceptions does not exist. In fact, although philosophers argue that it proves nothing to say that billions of people through history have claimed some sort of awareness of a divine reality, these same philosophers do not hesitate to claim that we are justified in believing in an objective physical world since so many people believe it to be there. But this is not the place for an extended discussion of meta-epistemology. Suffice it to say that Rau is dreaming if he thinks that he is being 'rational' or 'scholarly' when he simply declares that 'The gods are everywhere made in the image of man.'

But there are further declarations to consider: 'Monarch and the post of king were not gifts of the Godhead, or self-evident rights of a half-godly hero, but rather were transmitted out of utilitarian reasons from equals to one in their midst.'

Interestingly, the claim of divine right of kingship, and the power of kingship to satisfy a utilitarian need, are in no way mutually exclusive. One would rather expect an intelligent and

well-meaning deity to ordain the useful and proscribe the harmful. Thus there is no compulsion to choose between a religious and a utilitarian origin for kingship. It is simply that Prof. Rau is busily engaged in religion-bashing in the name of Indology. 'A few details can be gained from *Sa / KausUp* about the layout of the residence. Here the voyage of a liberated person to *Brahman's* palace is described, and we certainly do not go wrong in the assumption that the conditions in heaven are being sketched from worldly examples.'

A few words are in order here. If, say, in the field of biology, one affirms or denies the claim of a biologist, then one thereby claims to have a knowledge of biology. Similarly to affirm or deny the claim of a historian is to claim knowledge of history, and one's right, thereby, to evaluate historical assertions. Exactly in the same way, to affirm or deny religious claims is to claim for oneself a knowledge of religious matters, and it matters not at all whether one is affirming or denying a religious claim.

Thus the sheer volume of Prof. Rau's declarations on religious matters, along with his unflinching faith in his unproved (and indeed unprovable) insights, adds up to a clear, unmistakable claim on his part to a privileged understanding of religious truths. Surely Prof. Rau has done a significant service to all who would seriously study Vedic texts by patiently amassing from the *Brahmana* literature hundreds of important quotations, and then arranging them in a preliminary order. It is not out of ingratitude that we point out his bias against Vedic religion, but rather because such an animus cannot help but influence the outcome of his thinking. So it is relevant to scholarship itself that we notice these things.

We need the same rules for all Indologists. If purely religious claims can be fairly denied within the boundaries of objective material scholarship, then religious claims can certainly, in principle, be fairly affirmed within the same epistemological, procedural and methodological ground rules. For as that old proverb teaches: 'What's good for the goose is good for the gander'.

[1] *Staat und Gesellschaft im Altem Indien*, Wiesbaden, 1957.