

# Etheogens, Sacraments and Religion

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## Introduction

In Indian mythology the Sanskrit word 'mela' means a 'festival' and 'Khumb' means a 'pot'; a Khumbamela or 'open air spiritual fair'. According to the Vedic literature, at the beginning of time, the Gods got together and churned the ocean to extract a substance which would confer immortality. The Gods agreed to share this mighty elixir, but one of them apparently absconded with the whole pot of Holy Ambrosia. Fleeing with the 'Nectar of the Gods', over the course of twelve days, the decoction Amrita was spilt onto four auspicious places, namely, Prayag, Hardwar, Ujjain, and Nasik.

The most popular version of the Indian myth 'Churning the milk Ocean' is found in the Eighth Canto of the Bhagavata Purana. In Buddhist mythology, Amrita is the drink of the gods, which grants them immortality. The Ninth Mandala of the Rig-Veda is known as the Soma Mandala. According to Terrence McKenna in his book "The Food of Gods", the psilocybin-containing *Stropharia cubensis* mushroom is a likely Soma candidate. Psilocybin, the active psychoactive component in *Stropharia Cubensis* has a strong hallucinogenic nature. Soma (Sanskrit), or Haoma (Avestan) was a ritual drink of importance among the early Indo-Iranians, and the later Vedic and Iranian cultures. It is frequently mentioned in the Rig-Veda, which contains many hymns praising its energizing or intoxicating qualities.

The use of substances in ritual or religious observances is a practice that is abundantly attested in the shamanic world as well as among some yogins, and among the rishis in the

Vedas. We know that Patanjali himself puts simples (ausadhi), together with Samadhi, among the means of obtaining the siddhis.

### **The Aryan Ur-religion**

In the Rig Veda the sacramental basis of the Vedic religion was the preparation and consumption of a decoction obtained by mixing the juice of the fly agaric with other ingredients, one of which may have been hemp, or a beverage prepared by extracting the juice from the Amanita Muscaria fungus. This 'ur-religion' does not begin with the composition of the Vedas, when the Aryans arrived in India, but much further back in time, in the late Ice Age in Siberia. During this cold age, when people had to live most of the time deep inside caves or other dwellings, an inward direction was given to their spiritual endeavors.

Due to this fact and with the aid of certain magical herbs and plants, man first invented religion. When the Aryans came down from Siberia they brought with them their ur-religion and an urgaritic language which became the Vedic and Persian religious expression and later the Indo-European language, which includes Sanskrit and Persian, and the dialects of Greek, Finnish, German, Hindi, and Urdu.

### **Soma Raja, Nectar of the Gods**

Soma in the case of the Vedas, and Hoama in the case of the Iranians, that is, the Persians. These Aryans, a word which originally meant 'noble tiller of the earth', i.e. an agriculturist, 'digging stick in hand', came from Siberia, not by invasion, and not in 1500 BCE, but by a process of diffusion, as described by the famous archaeologist Colin Renfrew, around 7000 BCE. The first Aryans settled in what is called the Saraswati Valley. According to G. Gordon Wasson,

"There is little doubt that the substance called Soma in the Rig Veda has been identified as the fungus Amanita Muscaria." However, there is evidence that successive waves of Aryan immigrants came to India in later years perhaps up to as recently as 2000 BCE.

The evidence for this is centered on three incontrovertible facts:

1. There is a direct affinity between Sanskrit and Finnish. The Aryan speakers who composed the Vedas were akin to the same Aryan speakers who moved to what is now Iran, the latter having composed the Avesta, both of which scriptures center on the cult of the magical substance, Soma. According to Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, a Rig Vedic scholar, "the soma sacrifice was the focal point of the Vedic religion" (O'Flaherty 95).

2. The cult of the Amanita Muscaria has been traced by mycologists to Siberia. This has been proved by not only Wasson but also other eminent botanists such as S. Hajicek-Dobberstein, the author of the paper "Soma siddhas and alchemical enlightenment: psychedelic mushrooms in Buddhist tradition", published in the Journal of Ethno pharmacology. The Amanita Muscaria spoken of in the Rig-Veda has its origin in the northern area around Finland and Siberia, where the fungus still grows and can be seen each year.

3. There is no evidence that the Amanita Muscaria, that is, the Vedic Soma, grows in the Himalayas or in the desert which comprised the Land of the Five Rivers, that is, Arya Bharata. Based on these facts, it is clear that the Aryans came from outside India, brought with them a language very similar to Finnish, a people who had an intimate knowledge of the 'fly agaric' which grows in Siberia, but does not grow in India, and composed the Vedas while under the influence of a psychedelic substance when they arrived in modern Pakistan, after parting

company with their Persian cousins, who stayed in Iran. From these people we got our language which spread over the Middle East, India, and Europe. And, from these people we got the Vedic Religion, a religion which centered on the Soma cult.

As further evidence, please note that the Tibetan word for cannabis is 'So.Ma.Ra.Dza', that is, soma-raja, 'king of soma', and 'bDud.rTsi', which in Tibetan means 'drink juice' as translated from the Sanskrit and taken to Tibet by the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas of Vajrayana Buddhism in the tenth century of our era. The mysterious substance referred to in Buddhist texts, variously described as 'amrita' is none other than a similar decoction containing a similar alkaloid as contained in the soma fungus.

Apparently, the proper performance of sacrificial ritual was of the utmost importance in the Vedic Aryan religion. By means of the sacrifice it was believed that certain individuals could win the favor of the gods. Even before the Aryans entered India, the sacrifice had become a complex and elaborate affair. The sacrifice involved the slaughter of dozens and sometimes hundreds of animals - cattle, sheep, goats, and horses - as priests uttered the sacred formulae and the mysterious chants of the Vedic hymns.

According to historians, J. Bently and H. Ziegler, worshippers partook of Soma, a sort of elixir of the gods, a hallucinogenic decoction that produced "a divine sense of power and inspiration" (103). The hymns are recorded in the Rig Veda, particularly in Mandala X, wherein is described the sacred event as the gods themselves joined the participants and partook in the ritual eating and drinking .

By pleasing the gods with sacrifice, song, drink and food (both coarse and soft) the Vedic Aryans hoped to gain the support of nature, (and much military success), large families, long life and abundant herds of cattle. These sacrifices required the constant attention of a special class of priests who were required to perform no less than five rituals per day for the average common household.

The idea that Soma was an ethnogen, specifically the red capped Amanita Muscaria mushroom, as described in Mandala IX and X of Rig Veda, was first presented by the ethnomycologists R. Gordon Wasson. The Amanita grows in a mycorrhizal relationship with a number of different trees, specifically the pines, firs, and above all, the birches, from which the mushroom must feed from. An example of the readings (from the Ninth Mandala of Rig Veda):

Flow Soma, in a most sweet and exhilarating stream, effused for Indra to drink. The all-beholding destroyer of Rakshasas has stepped upon his gold-smitten birthplace, united with the wooden cask. Be the lavish giver of wealth, most bounteous, the destroyer of enemies; bestow on us the riches of the affluent. Come with food to the sacrifice of the mighty gods, and bring us strength and sustenance. To thee we come, O dropping (Soma); for thee only is this our worship day by day, our prayers are to thee, none other.

Amanita: An alkaloid, of the mushroom species. Its common name is "Fly Agaric" and it has been described by mycologists as Pileus Size: (5) 7 - 25 (40) cm broad; Shape: convex, becoming plane to slightly wavy or depressed in age; Color: blood-red, or various shades of bright, scarlet, or orange-red; becoming lighter toward margin; Surface: smooth, covered with white warts or small patches (remains of the universal veil); sometimes washing off in age;

tacky, sticky or viscid when moist; Margin: striate; at first appendiculate; Flesh: firm when young and becoming soft in age, white (yellowish beneath cuticle); thick; Odor: faint; Taste: pleasant.

### **Alkaloids and Patanjali Yoga**

Mircea Eliade states in his classic book "Yoga: Immortality or Freedom" that in the sphere of shamanism, strictly speaking, "...intoxication by drugs (hemp, mushrooms, tobacco, etc.) seems not to have formed part of the original practice. For, on the one hand, shamanic myths and folklore record a decadence among the shamans of the present day, who have become unable to obtain ecstasy in the fashion of the "great shamans of long ago"; on the other, it has been observed that where shamanism is in decomposition and the trance is simulated, there is also overindulgence in intoxicants and drugs" (338).

Mircea Eliade wrote that only the rudiments of classic Yoga are to be found in the Vedas, and while Shamanism and other techniques of ecstasy are documented among other Indo-European people, Yoga is to be found only in India and in cultures influenced by Indian spirituality (102). Eliade notes: "Possession" by spirits, although documented in a great many shamanisms, does not seem to have been a primary and essential element. Rather, it suggests a phenomenon of degeneration; for the supreme goal of the shaman is to abandon his body and rise to heaven or descend into hell, not to let himself be "possessed" by his assisting spirits, by demons or the souls of the dead; the shaman's ideal is to master these spirits, not to let himself be "occupied" by them" (320).

Yoga Sutra IV, 1:

"Psychic and spiritual powers (siddhi) may be inborn, or they may be gained by the use of simples, or by mantra, or by striving, or by Meditation".

"Simples" mean ecstasy-inducing herbs, from which the elixir of longevity was extracted. In any case, simples produce ecstasy and not the yogic Samadhi. Mircea Eliade believes that these "mystical means" properly belong to the phenomenology of ecstasy and they were only reluctantly admitted into the sphere of classic Yoga. According to Eliade, "Yet the fact that Patanjali himself refers to the magico-ecstatic virtues of simples is both significant and pregnant with consequences; it proves the pressure exercised by the ecstasies, their will to substitute their methods for the disciplines of classic Yoga" (Eliade 338-339).

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