

It is a reasonable conclusion therefore that this Mandala was the ritual book for the supreme sacrifice.

Amongst the separate hymns a certain progress may be made out. Towards the beginning of the liturgy are hymns extolling the efficacy of ritual observances. These are followed by descriptions of the process of making the Soma juice. After a laudation of the fully prepared juice (91), come supplications for forgiveness, and a hymn telling how fire is begotten of wood. The Kasyapa verse is speedily followed by further prayers for forgiveness, after which several instances of the value of sacrifice are recounted.

The majority of the hymns are simple invocations, of the fire, the water, the sky, etc. Some were inspired by the circumstances and purely secular concerns of the poets and their friends. But such subjects were merely incidental. The main purpose of the hymns was to provide prayers and praises for divine worship. Agni, the deity of fire, to whom fifty-one pieces are dedicated, is worshipped as "the high priest of the sacrifice," "the minister who presents the offering." He was "the messenger" as well as protector of the home. Indra is addressed in fifty-eight hymns. He was "the shedder of rain." The showerer who "set open the cow-pastures," and hence the giver of all good. "The singers extol Indra with hymns, the reciters with prayers, the (priests) with texts" (7¹).

References to social conditions abound and show that by the time the hymns were collected the Aryan clans had reached a high level of civilisation. Widely differing stages, however, are reflected in the various poems. A time was when "a milch cow, a swift horse and an able son" were the most desirable boons (91²⁰). Pictures of later culture show men living by "beautifully embanked rivers" (38¹¹) on which vessels "moved by a hundred oars" (116³⁵), able to "float over the sea keeping out the waters" might glide. Towns are portrayed "defended by strongholds" (41³), with mansions "where there (were) horses" (83) where chariots, prostitutes and gamesters were known,