

2. **Akṣa.**—This word occurs frequently, from the Rigveda onwards, both in the singular and plural, meaning 'die' and 'dice.' Dicing, along with horse-racing, was one of the main amusements of the Vedic Indian; but, despite the frequent mention of the game in the literature, there is considerable difficulty in obtaining any clear picture of the mode in which it was played.

(1) *The Material.*—The dice appear normally to have been made of Vibhīdaka nuts. Such dice are alluded to in both the Rigveda¹ and the Atharvaveda,² hence being called 'brown' (*bābhru*), and 'born on a windy spot.'³ In the ritual game of dice at the Agnyādheya and the Rājasūya ceremonies the material of the dice is not specified, but it is possible that occasionally gold imitations of Vibhīdaka nuts were used.⁴ There is no clear trace in the Vedic literature of the later use of cowries as dice.⁵

(2) *The Number.*—In the Rigveda⁶ the dicer is described as 'leader of a great horde' (*senānīr mahato gaṇasya*), and in another passage⁷ the number is given as *tri-pañcāśaḥ*, an expression which has been variously interpreted. Ludwig,⁸ Weber,⁹ and Zimmer¹⁰ render it as fifteen, which is grammatically hardly possible. Roth¹¹ and Grassmann¹² render it as 'consisting of fifty-three.' Lüders¹³ takes it as 'consisting of one hundred and fifty,' but he points out that this may be merely a vague expression for a large number. For a small number Zimmer¹⁴ cites a reference in the Rigveda¹⁵ to one who fears 'him who holds four' (*caturāś cid dadamānāt*), but the sense of that passage is dependent on the view taken of the method of playing the game.

(3) *The Method of Play.*—In several passages of the later

¹ vii. 86, 6; x. 34, 1.

² Av. Paipp. xx. 4, 6.

³ Rv. x. 34, 5; Av. vii. 114, 7; Rv. x. 34, 1.

⁴ Sāyaṇa on Taittirīya Samhitā, i. 8, 6, 12; Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, v. 4, 4, 6.

⁵ Sāyaṇa, *loc. cit.*, and on Rv. i. 41, 9; Mahīdhara on Vājasaneyi Samhitā, x. 28.

⁶ x. 34, 12.

⁷ x. 34, 8.

⁸ See his translation.

⁹ *Über das Rājasūya*, 72.

¹⁰ *Altindisches Leben*, 284.

¹¹ Following Sāyaṇa on Rv. x. 34, 8.

¹² In his translation.

¹³ *Das Würfelspiel im alten Indien*, 25.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, 287.

¹⁵ i. 41, 9.