

trividhaṃ brahmametad:

Three Conceptions of *Brahman* in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.7-12

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Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad begins with some of the oldest questions.

Why were we born? By what do we live? What is the cause of *brahman*: *kimkāraṇaṃ brahma*? or perhaps, in other words, why is there anything at all?¹ Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (ŚU) is ascribed by traditional and scholarly consensus to the corpus of the *Black Yajurveda*.² Olivelle notes in the introduction to his translation of the “early” Upaniṣads that “any dating of these documents that attempts a precision closer than a few centuries is as stable as a house of cards,” but nevertheless based on metrical evidence,³ linguistic analysis, and theistic currents present in the ŚU, Īśa and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads, the text can be placed sometime “in the last few centuries BCE”.⁴ The ŚU differs from the other classical Upaniṣads in three important respects: (1) it is “the only one of the classical Upaniṣads ascribed to an individual, non-mythological author,”⁵ (2) it is a thoroughly theistic and devotional text, and (3) it develops a *triadic* theistic cosmology constituted by the knowing and unknowing masculine aspects of the *ātman* and a mysterious feminine aspect which is connected to the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment (*hyekā bhoktr̥bhogyārthayuktā*).⁶ In this essay we will bear in mind these first two aspects of this text while focusing attention on the third.

Text and Content

The ŚU is a complicated text. Divided into six chapters (*adhyāya*) that don’t appear to cohere in a logical or systematic way, Olivelle compares the somewhat “chaotic” form of the ŚU to the Bhagavad Gītā, “because it [too] seeks to integrate numerous and divergent cosmologies

¹ Olivelle, 415

² Müller, xxxi 1884; Cohen, 213, 2008; Olivelle, 413, 1998

³ Cohen, 232-239, 1998

⁴ Olivelle, 13

⁵ Cohen, 213

⁶ ŚU 1.9

and theologies into its religious doctrine.”⁷ Radhakrishnan too contends that “the Upaniṣad is an attempt to reconcile the different philosophical and religious views which prevailed at the time of its composition.”⁸ While it is unique among Upaniṣads in that it claims to have an individual author by the name of Śvetāśvatara⁹, Cohen points out that a sizable portion of the 133 verses of the text are quotes from older Vedic sources, and that various metrical anomalies evidence a later redaction by a teacher or school of teachers who aimed to clarify the teachings of the Upaniṣad.¹⁰

It is curious, therefore, that the text begins with an inquiry into the *cause* of *brahman*, because it is by no means obvious that the prevailing wisdom of the day conceived *brahman* as the kind of thing which could be caused. This question, Cohen notes, features prominently in the earlier *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6 in the debate between Yājñavalkya and Gārgī.¹¹ Gārgī asks a series of questions about deeper and deeper causes upon which the layers of the world are woven, until she reaches *brahman* and asks, “On what, then, are the worlds of *brahman* woven back and forth?” To which Yājñavalkya responds: “Don’t ask too many questions, Gārgī, or your head will shatter apart! You are asking too many question about a deity about whom one should not ask too many questions. So, Gārgī, don’t ask too many questions!”¹² By taking up the mantle of this question and framing the text in this way, *brahman* is understood in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* as something which *could be caused*. And as Cohen notes an answer is provided in ŚU 6.1: it is “the greatness of God present in the world by means of which this wheel of *brahman* goes around.”¹³ The details of this theistic answer are elaborated throughout the sixth chapter.

⁷ Ibid, 413

⁸ Radhakrishnan, 707, 1968

⁹ Olivelle, 433: ŚU 6.21

¹⁰ Cohen, 235-237

¹¹ Ibid, 216

¹² Olivelle, 85: BU 3.6

¹³ Ibid, 429: ŚU 6.1

The work of transposing the first cause or prime mover from an impersonal *brahman* to the “one god” *eka deva*, a move from monism to theism, which takes place in this Upaniṣad is expressive of a theistic turn in the verse Upaniṣads generally as Olivelle notes:

Of these, the oldest is probably the Kātha, followed by Īśa, Śvetāśvatara, and Muṇḍaka.

All exhibit strong theistic tendencies and are probably the earliest literary products of the theistic tradition, whose later literature includes the Bhagavad Gītā and the Purāṇas.¹⁴

And pertinent to our purpose, Hiltebeitel claims that, in spite of the Upaniṣadic tendency to “demythologize the Vedic pantheon, to reduce all gods to one: to the impersonal *brahman* or its personified form Prajāpati or Brahmā... the Śvetāśvatara in particular develops its doctrine of the ‘three unborns’” which he claims prefigure “the three gods who emerge in classical Hinduism as what we may call the *bhakti* triad: Viṣṇu, Śiva, and the Goddess.”¹⁵ This is a suggestion Cohen doesn’t find particularly compelling for reasons we’ll explore below. For now, I surface this view to call attention to the fact that the devotional aspects of the text, such as the invocations to Savitr in chapter 2, the prayers to Rudra in chapter 3, and the “underlying metaphor” of the *pravargya* ritual which Cohen astutely identified, are part of a dialogue concerning the cause of *Brahman* and the manner in which one attains the saving knowledge of *brahman*; one of the ways in which that dialogue has been rendered intelligible to Sanskrit readers is through the use of triadic formulae.

The triad (*trayaṃ*) of the ŚU is discussed explicitly in verses 1.7-12, but its presence, I’ll suggest, is distributed throughout the Upaniṣad as a symbolic structure into which a multiplicity of forms are mapped. Let’s begin with a close reading of the text of these verses:

¹⁴ Olivelle, 13

¹⁵ Hiltebeitel, 3, 1984

उद्गीतमेतत्परमं तु ब्रह्म तस्मिंस्त्रयं सुप्रतिष्ठाक्षरं च ।
 अत्रान्तरं ब्रह्मविदो विदित्वा लोना ब्रह्मणि तत्परा योनिमुक्ताः ॥ ७ ॥
udgītametatparamaṁ tu brahma tasmimstrayaṁ supratisthāksaram ca /
atrāntaram brahmavido viditvā lonā brahmaṇi tatparā yonimuktāḥ

Olivelle

This highest *brahman*, however, has been extolled thus: There is a triad in it—oneself, the foundation, and the imperishable. When those who know *brahman* have come to know the distinction between them, they become absorbed in and totally intent on *brahman* and are freed from the womb.

Radhakrishnan

This has been sung as the supreme *Brahman* and in it is the triad. It is the firm support, the imperishable. The knowers of *Brahman* by knowing what is therein become merged in *Brahman*, intent thereon and freedom from birth.

संयुक्तमेतत्क्षरमक्षरं च व्यक्ताव्यक्तं भरते विश्वमीशः ।
 अनीशश्चात्मा बध्यते भोक्तृभावाज्ज्ञात्वा देवं मुच्यते सर्वपाशैः ॥ ८ ॥
saṁyuktametatkṣaramakṣaram ca vyaktāvyaktaṁ bharate viśvamīśaḥ /
anīśaścātmā badhyate bhoktr̥bhabajñātvā devaṁ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ

Olivelle

This whole world is the perishable and the imperishable, the manifest and the unmanifest joined together—and the Lord bears it, while the self (*ātman*), who is not the Lord, remains bound, because he is the enjoyer. When he comes to know God, he is freed from all fetters.

Radhakrishnan

The Lord supports all this which is a combination of the mutable and the immutable, the manifest and the unmanifest. And the soul, not being the Lord, is bound because of his being an enjoyer. By knowing God (the soul) is freed from all fetters.

ज्ञाज्ञौ द्वावजावीशनीशावजा ह्येका भोक्तृभोग्यार्थयुक्ता ।
 अनन्तश्चात्मा विश्वरूपो ह्यकर्ता त्रयं यदा विन्दते ब्रह्ममेतत् ॥ ९ ॥
jñājñau dvāvajāvīśnīśāvajā hyekā bhoktr̥bhogyārthayuktā /
anantaścātmā viścrūpo hyakartā trayaṁ yadā vindate brahmametāt

Olivelle

There are two unborn males—the one knows and the other is ignorant; the one is Lord and the other is not the Lord. There is just one unborn female, who is joined to the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment. And then there is the self (*ātman*), limitless and displaying every form, not engaged in any activity. When someone finds these three, he finds this *brahman*.

Radhakrishnan

There are two unborn ones, the knowing and the unknowing, the one all-powerful, the other powerless. Indeed there is (another) one who is unborn, connected with the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment. And there is the infinite self, of universal form, non-active. When one finds out this triad, that is *Brahman*.

क्षरं प्रधानममृताक्षरं हरः क्षरात्मानावीशते देव एकः ।
 तस्याभिध्यानाद्योजनात्तत्त्वभावाद्भूयश्चान्ते विश्रमायानिवृत्तिः ॥ १० ॥
kṣaram pradhānaṁ amrtākṣaram haraḥ kṣarātmānāvīśate deva ekaḥ /
tasyābhidhyānādyojanāt tattvabhāvādbhūyaścānte viścamāyānivr̥ttiḥ

Olivelle

The primal source is perishable, while Hara is immortal and imperishable. The one God rules over both the perishable and the self (*ātman*). By meditating on him, by striving toward him, and, further, in the end by becoming the same reality as him, all illusion disappears.

Radhakrishnan

What is perishable is the *pradhāna* (primary matter). What is immortal and imperishable is *Hara* (the Lord). Over both the perishable and the soul the one God rules. By meditating on Him, by uniting with Him, by reflecting on His being more and more, there is complete cessation from the illusion of the world.

ज्ञात्वा देवं सर्वपाशापहानिः क्षीणैः क्लेशैर्जन्ममृत्युप्रहाणिः ।
 तस्याभिध्यानात्तृतीयं देहभेदे बिश्चैश्चर्थं केवल आप्तकामः ॥ ११ ॥
jñātvā devaṁ sarvapaśāpahāniḥ kṣīṇaiḥ kleśairjanmamṛtyuprahāṇiḥ /
tasyābhidhyānātr̥tīyaṁ dehabhede biścaiścarthaṁ kevala āptkāmaḥ

Olivelle

When one has known God, all the fetters fall off; by the eradication of the blemishes, birth and death come to an end; by meditating on him, one obtains, at the dissolution of the body, a third—sovereignty over all; and in the absolute one's desires are fulfilled.

Radhakrishnan

By knowing God there is a falling off of all fetters, when the sufferings are destroyed, there is cessation of birth and death. By meditating on Him, there is the third state, on the dissolution of the body, universal lordship, being alone, his desire is fulfilled.

एतज्ज्ञेयं नित्यमेवात्मसंस्थं नातः परं वेदितव्यं हि किञ्चित् ।
 भोक्ता भोग्यं प्रेरितारं च मत्वा सर्वं प्रोक्तं त्रिविधं ब्रह्ममेतत् ॥ १२ ॥
etad jñeyaṁ nityamevātmasaṁsthaṁ nātaḥ paraṁ vedityaṁ hi kiñcit /
bhoktā bhogyaṁ preritāraṁ ca matvā sarvaṁ proktaṁ trividhaṁ brahmametāt

Olivelle

This can be known, for it abides always within one's body (*ātman*). Higher than that there is nothing to be known. When the enjoyer discerns the object of enjoyment and the impeller—everything has been taught. That is the threefold *brahman*.

Radhakrishnan

That Eternal which rests in the self should be known. Truly there is nothing beyond this to be known. By knowing the enjoyer, the object of enjoyment, and the mover (of all), everything has been said. This is the threefold *Brahman*.

Two Sets of Three

While verse 1.12 ends by declaring *trividhaṃ brahmametad*, “this/that is the threefold *brahman*,” by reference to the “enjoyer, the object of enjoyment, and the mover of all/impeller” (*bhoktā bhogyaṃ preritāraṃ ca*) the content of the triad is by no means self-explanatory in this or the preceding verses. In fact, two distinct triads (*trayaṃ*) are discernible within the six verses. In the first three verses (1.7-1.9), the triad of the “three unborns” is developed. In the second set of three verses, the triad of the enjoyer, object of enjoyment, and prime mover is developed (*bhoktā bhogyaṃ preritāraṃ ca*). The identification of these two triads is implicit in the parallels in form and content between these two sets of three verses.

Content of the Verses

Olivelle’s translation of ŚU 1.7 suggests, where Radhakrishnan’s does not, that the triad is described fully in this first verse: “There is a triad in it—oneself, the foundation, and the imperishable.”¹⁶ Radhakrishnan on the other hand translates this selection as “... in it is the triad. It is the firm support, the imperishable.”¹⁷ It appears to me that Radhakrishnan’s rendering of *supratisthākṣaram* interprets this word as a part of the *form* of the triad rather than its *content*. ŚU 1.7 discusses how knowledge of this triad leads to freedom from rebirth and ŚU 1.8 distinguishes the Lord (Īśvara) and the *ātman* who is not Lord (*aniśaścatmā*), and claims that the Lord rules over all that is perishable and imperishable, mutable and immutable. This *ātman* is bound (*badhyate*) because he is the enjoyer (*bhoktr*), presumably the enjoyer of the fruits of his own actions, given ŚU 1.2 which claims that “even the self is not in control” and therefore cannot be

¹⁶ Olivelle, 415: ŚU 1.7

¹⁷ Radhakrishnan, 714: ŚU 1.7

the cause of *brahman* “because it is itself subject to pleasure and pain.”¹⁸ In ŚU 1.8 the triad is described as (1) the Lord, (2) the *ātman* and (3) the whole world (*saṃyuktametat*) made up of the perishable and imperishable (*kṣaramakṣaram ca*), and the fruits of the saving knowledge of *brahman* are described as a falling off of all fetters.¹⁹ In ŚU 1.9 the triad is constituted by three unborns: two male and one female in Olivelle’s translation (and in scholarly consensus) and three neuter principles in Radhakrishnan’s translation: one knowing, one unknowing, and one connected to the enjoyer and the objects of enjoyment (*bhoktṛbhogyārthayuktā*).²⁰ The teaching of the triad ends with the formulation: *trayaṃ yadā vindate brahmametat*.

The triad in the second set of three verses (ŚU 1.10-1.12) is not explicitly gendered like the first. In ŚU 1.10 three principles are listed: *pradhāna*, Hara or the Lord, and the one God (*deva ekaḥ*) which rules them both, as ruler of the perishable and the imperishable.²¹ Like ŚU 1.8 ŚU 1.11 describes the saving knowledge of *brahman* as that which frees one from all fetters (*sarvapāśāpahāniḥ*) and focuses on the practice of relating to God through meditation. ŚU 1.12 describes the triad as enjoyer, object to be enjoyed and impeller (*bhoktā bhogyam preritāram ca*) and claims that the saving knowledge described in ŚU 1.11 can be known within one’s own body (*ātman*).

Argument of the Verses

ŚU 1.9 and ŚU 1.12 both terminate with the declaration: *brahmametat* (this is *brahman*). Whereas, in the first set of three verses ŚU 1.7-1.9, *brahman* is proclaimed to *contain* a triad (*tasmimṣtrayaṃ*)²² and be what one finds when one finds out the triad: (*trayaṃ yadā vindate*

¹⁸ Olivelle, 415: ŚU 1.2

¹⁹ ŚU 1.8

²⁰ ŚU 1.9

²¹ ŚU 1.10

²² ŚU 1.7

brahmametat),²³ in the second set of three verses *brahman* is a triad: (*trividhaṃ brahmametat*).²⁴

The first verse of each set of three focuses on the cessation of birth and *pradhāna*, respectively, and as Cohen points out *māyā* (illusory power) is a feminine noun that may be intended by the female aspect of the triad in ŚU 1.9.²⁵ The association with the feminine thus appears either through birth or *pradhāna/māyā* in the opening verse of each respective set of three. The second verse in the two sets of three mirror one another explicitly by discussing how the knowledge of God leads to a “falling off of all fetters,” (*sarvapāśa*); and finally the third verses of each respective set of three echo one another by formulating specific, but I claim, distinct triads and relating those triads to *brahman*.

Given the associations with the feminine present in the first verse of each set, the focus on the bondage of the *ātman* in the second verse of each set, and the formulation of a triad in the third verse of each set, it is possible that a mystical set of correspondences was being deployed in the formulation of these verses wherein the “female unborn” is represented by the first verse in each set, the “unknowing” male unborn represents the second verse in each set, and finally, the “knowing” male unborn would be represented by the third verse in each set. Let’s explore some of the correspondence and see if we can build a case for reading the verses in this way. I should note, first, that Cohen argues ŚU 1.3 indicates the mysterious “female unborn” of the triad is in fact *śakti* or “power” on the basis of her interpretation of ŚU 1.9 and 4.5 which portray “two eternal male principles (the higher and lower *ātman*)... as the lovers of the female unborn.”²⁶ This interpretation is corroborated by F. M. Müller (1884) who, quoting the very same verse 1.3 writes

²³ ŚU 1.9

²⁴ ŚU 1.12

²⁵ Cohen, 216-217

²⁶ Cohen, 217

Now the Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad states distinctly that nature, or what in the Sāṃkhya philosophy is intended by Pradhāna, is not an independent power, but a power (śakti) forming the very self of the Deva. “Sages,” we read, “devoted to meditation and concentration, have seen the power belonging to God himself, hidden in its own qualities.”²⁷

The triad in Cohen’s interpretation thus consists of: (1) a lower *ātman* founded in ignorance who is called the “enjoyer,” (2) a higher, knowing *ātman* which is identified in the text explicitly with the one god (*deva ekaḥ*), the Lord Īśvara, Rudra and possibly Hara (Śiva) and (3) *pradhāna*, or *māyā*, the illusory webs spun forth from *brahman* by virtue of its power (śakti).²⁸ She notes that even though the identification of *pradhāna* with the female unborn (*ajā*) coheres with a later Sāṃkhya reading of the text, the text of the Upaniṣad might not support this identification, given that *pradhāna* is a neuter, and not a feminine, noun.²⁹ She draws on ŚU 4.9 and 4.10 to make the case that *māyā* (meaning “illusory power” or, as Cohen would have it in its early Vedic sense “creative power”) could very well be the third, female unborn of the triad.³⁰ The correspondences I’ve articulated could lend support to a Sāṃkhya reading or a later addition of the second set of three verses by a Sāṃkhya editor given the fact that the term *pradhāna* appears in the first verse of the second set of three, which, I am claiming represented the female unborn aspect of the triad.

What then is the function of the two triads in the Upaniṣad? Given that the text is framed in the first *adhyāya* as an inquiry into the cause of *brahman*, and given also, that the text will

²⁷ Müller, xxxvi, 1884

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Cohen, 218

³⁰ Ibid.

ultimately claim that it is the “one God” who is immanent in the world which causes the wheel of *brahman* to spin as it does, how should we read the juxtaposition of these two triads?³¹ The first and perhaps most plausible reading is to say that the second set of three verses is simply an elaboration on the contents of the first set of three verses. This elaboration may have taken place at the original moment of composition, or may have been a later addition. I do not know the metrical or linguistic literature well enough to speculate in either direction. The fact that both sets of three verses use the terms *bhoktr* and *bhogyā* (enjoyer and the objects to be enjoyed) to refer to two aspects of the triad is a piece of textual evidence in favor of this reading. But if the two sets of three verses make substantively different claims about the content of the triad, as I believe they do, what is the reason for juxtaposing them?

To make clear my claim, I argue that whereas the first set of three verses describes a triad *within brahman* as evidenced by the locative pronoun *tasmimstrayam*³² the second set of three verses describes *brahman* as threefold (*trividham*),³³ and, if the content of these claims is indeed different, then the juxtaposition of the two cries out for explanation. I’ll proceed to read the rest of the ŚU, with far lower resolution, on the assumption that the content of the two triads is in fact different, and to search for a reason to read these two triads together in this Upaniṣad, beginning with verses 1.13 and 1.14, which discuss the visible and invisible aspects of God and the process for attaining vision of God through yoga: “when one makes one’s own body the bottom slab and the syllable *om* the upper drill, by twirling it constantly through meditation one would see God, just as one would the hidden thing.”³⁴

³¹ Olivelle, 429: ŚU 6.1

³² ŚU 1.7

³³ ŚU 1.12

³⁴ Olivelle, 417: ŚU 1.14

Praying with Fire: Savitr̥ as *Ātman* and Rudra as *Īśvara*

Cohen observes that the ŚU is “particularly rich” in fire metaphors and fire imagery and argues that, while implicit, the ŚU “is pervaded by imagery related to the mystical Vedic *pravargya* ritual, which is a part of the *agnicayana* ritual for establishing the fire altar.”³⁵ For instance, just after the triadic doctrine is expounded, ŚU 1.13, 1.14, and 1.15 conjure the image of a fire-drill to explain how the practice of yoga manifests the implicit, inner self. The body that is made through the process of meditating on the syllable *om̐* is a body “tempered by the fire of yoga” (ŚU 2.12) and is modeled first in mythological terms by the invocations to the Vedic sun god Savitr̥ (ŚU 2.1-2.7) and then by yogic teachings (2.8-2.13), and later on through prayers to Rudra. The fire imagery, Cohen contends, is built into the structure of the Upaniṣad due to the “unusually large number of quotations from earlier Vedic texts” and centers on a ritual called the *agnicayana* which “is a central metaphor in the Yajurvedic Upaniṣads.”³⁶ The “focal point” of the *pravargya* portion of the *agnicayana* ritual is the

heating of a pot filled with a mixture of milk and butter. The pot that is heated is known as the *Mahāvīra* vessel. The glowing vessel is identified with the son and worshipped. The glowing vessel is also identified with Rudra. After the contents of the vessel are offered into the fire, the pot itself is ritually destroyed.³⁷

The text thereafter argues by analogy that the body (*ātman*) of the student of yoga is like the vessel which is filled with milk and butter, heated by Savitr̥ and worshipped as Rudra, and eventually destroyed, paralleling the structure of the ritual.

³⁵ Cohen, 222

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 223

First the fire is lit with the drill (ŚU 1.14), as “one makes one’s own body the bottom slab and the syllable *om* the upper drill,”³⁸ and through this meditation on *om* “one grasps that self (*ātman*) in the body (*ātman*)—that all-pervading self, which is contained [in the body] like butter in milk.”³⁹ The Vedic sun god Savitṛ is invoked so that one may understand *brahman* through this meditation on *om*, and the text proclaims that “where the fire is churned, where the wind wafts, where the Soma juice flows over—there the mind is born.”⁴⁰ Having introduced Savitṛ as a model for yogic practice, injunctions are given to the student, who, like the vessel “[obtains] a body tempered by the fire” of yoga; much later in the Upaniṣad, at the end of the penultimate *adhyāya*, it is declared that those who know him as God have “cast aside their bodies,” just as the vessel of the *pravargya* ritual would be ritually destroyed.⁴¹ Before this destruction occurs and immortality is attained, however, the third and fourth chapter of the Upaniṣad focus on the *personal* nature of the one God, calling him Rudra, but also the “excellent [glory] of Savitṛ.”⁴²

Returning to our discussions of the two triads above, we may wonder, who is this one God? Is it Rudra or Savitṛ? Our translations indicate in 1.10 that the Lord is Hara, but, this fact is contested on linguistic grounds as Olivelle notes: “in later times it is an epithet of Śiva. Rau (1964, 29) takes it to mean ‘glow’ (*Glut*) and refers to *śukra* (‘bright’) of ŚU 4.2.”⁴³ Do either of these deities, Savitṛ or Rudra, have a place in the triads articulated in the first *adhyāya*? How does that identification, and the juxtaposition of that identification with the distinctive theologies present in the two formulations of the triad, affect the reading of the text?

³⁸ Olivelle, 417: ŚU 1.14

³⁹ Olivelle, 417: ŚU 1.16

⁴⁰ ŚU 2.6

⁴¹ Olivelle, 429: ŚU 5.14

⁴² Ibid, ŚU 4.

⁴³ Ibid, 617, Note 10.

Looking Ahead

There are grounds for identifying Savitr with the enjoyer (*bhoktr*) which is also the *ātman*, in part because of the shared suffix *-tr* which gives the same sense to verbal roots as *-er* in English,⁴⁴ but also because ŚU 3.2 makes clear that “there is only one Rudra; he has not tolerated a second.”⁴⁵ Cohen points out that, from her perspective, one of the “most intriguing features of the triad in the ŚU is that two of the three aspects refer to two different sides of the same thing: The higher and lower *ātman*.”⁴⁶ Here she is referring to the two unborn males (*jñājnau dvāvajāvīśnīśāvajā*) of ŚU 1.9, one of which is supposedly knowing, the other, unknowing. It’s hard to find room for Savitr in this formulation because it won’t do to identify the Vedic sun god with the lower *ātman*, nor with *pradhāna* or any female aspect of the triad; the only option left open is the higher *ātman*. But wouldn’t this be Rudra, if he is the “only one” who will not tolerate a second? Here I submit the difference in the two formulations of the triads, in the two distinct sets of three verses, matters. In the first set of three verses, where the triad is locatively placed *in brahman*, then Savitr could play the role of the highest self, if *brahman* as a totality is conceived to be Rudra. It is clear that Savitr is modeling the practice of yoga for the student of the Upaniṣad, and therefore makes symbolic sense as the knowing side of the self. By what grounds do we identify Rudra with the totality of the triad?

In the first depiction of the triad, Savitr as the knowing unborn male is connected to the enjoyer (*bhoktr*) the lower *ātman* and unknowing male, and the *pradhāna* as the unborn female mediates the relationship between higher and lower *ātman*. This entire triad, according to ŚU

⁴⁴ Maurer, 488, 1995

⁴⁵ Olivelle, 421: ŚU 3.2

⁴⁶ Cohen, 217

1.7-1.9 is *in brahman*, but, by ŚU 1.12 is identified *as brahman*. This is Rudra. The juxtaposition of the two triads makes space for the logic of the *pravargya* portion of the *agnicayana* ritual to be embodied in a mythological injunction to act as the god Savitṛ. The higher *ātman* is the mythic model for the lower *ātman*. Eventually, however, in the course of the ritual and in yoga one reaches a space where “the sun does not shine, nor the moon and stars; there lightning does not shine, of this common fire need we speak! Him alone, as he shines, do all things reflect; this whole world radiates with his light.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Olivelle, 433: ŚU 6.14

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