The Myth of Agni’s Flight and Search for the Clay for the Ukhā

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The preliminary rite of making the ukhā (fire pot) occupies quite an important part in the Agnicayana (the piling of the fire altar). ¹ The clay for molding the ukhā must be of a certain type, because it is in the ukhā where the fire is kept and carried. ² This particular clay is considered to contain Agni; therefore, the myth of Agni’s flight and search for the clay were connected. In this paper, I trace how the interpretation and arrangement of the myth are transformed.

1. The Myth of Agni’s Flight

In the R̥gveda (RV), at 10.51, there is a dialogue between Agni and the gods who looked for Agni in the waters and plants, and have found him. Agni explains to them that he had gone away in fear of the Hotarship, seeing his brothers’ hard work. The gods induce him to return to his task by promising him rewards. According to RV 5.11.6, it was Aṅgirases who found him, in the wood. In Taittirīya-Saṁhitā [TS] 2.6.6.1–2, Agni’s three elder brothers had perished while carrying the offering to the gods. Thus, Agni ran away out of fear, and entered into the waters, but was discovered by the gods after being betrayed by a fish. The gods persuaded him to carry the offering for them, and he asked for a boon. According to TS 6.2.8.4, however, he entered into the plants, trees, and cattle, and he was discovered by the gods without the help of a fish. In fact, Agni’s various hiding places include water (RV 3.1.3, 3.9.2, 3.9.4, 6.48.5, 10.51.3), plant (RV 3.1.13, 6.48.5, 10.51.3), stone (RV 6.48.5), and darkness (RV 10.51.5, 10.124.1). ³

2. Search for the Clay for the Ukhā

The description concerning the ukhā ⁴ is divided into the following eleven parts: 1. The
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Savitṛ offering, 2. The taking of a wooden hoe, 3. The leading of a horse and a donkey to the hole, 4. The stepping of the horse, 5. The drawing of a line around the place, 6. The digging of the clay, 7. The pouring of water into the hole, 8. The gathering of the clay, 9. The mixing of the clay with a goat’s hair, etc., 10. The molding of the ukhā, and 11. The baking of the ukhā. Here, I examine 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6, which are clearly influenced by the myth.

2.1. The Savitṛ Offering

Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā (MS) 3.1.1 (1,1–2,12 <Ed. Schroeder>), Kāṭhaka-Saṁhitā (KS) 18.19 (279,6–280,8 <Ed. Schroeder>), Kapiṣṭhalakaṭha-Saṁhitā (KpS) 29.8 (135,16–136,3), TS 5.1.1.1–3, Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (ŚB) 6.3.1.1–29

The meters departed from the gods saying, “We will not carry your oblation without sharing in it.” The gods offered the Savitr̥ offerings with the eight mantras in order to propitiate the meters (KS, TS). According to the MS, the offering is performed with the aim of discovering Agni. Their first mantra is as follows:

\[ \text{yuvājñāḥ prathamā mānas tatvāya savitā dhīyaḥ} \]
\[ \text{agnīṃ (VS: agnī) jyotīr nicāyya prthivyāyā ādhy ābharat} \]

Yoking mind first, having extended his thoughts, Savitr̥, Having perceived the light, brought Agni from the earth.

In the MS and the KS, Savitr̥ found and brought Agni, who had hidden in the earth. \(^3\) The ŚB identifies Savitr̥ with Agni. Interpreting the mantra, however, the ŚB regards manas as Savitṛ and dhyas as prāṇa, and considers that Prajāpati occupies the Savitṛ’s role. \(^6\)

2.2. The Taking of a Wooden Hoe

MS 3.1.2 (2,13–3,8), KS 19.1 (1,1–11), KpS 29.8 (135,17–136,3), TS 5.1.1.4, ŚB 6.3.1.30–44

The Adhvaryu takes a hoe for digging up the clay. The reason why the hoe is made from a stained and hollow bamboo is explained: Agni had gone away from the gods and entered into the bamboo. He had gone through the hollow and wherever he stayed, that became black. \(^7\) The Adhvaryu recites the following four Savitṛ formulas while taking the hoe:

\[ \text{devāya tvā savitūḥ prasavē śvīnorbhūḥhyaṃ pāṣṇō hāstābhhyāṃ ādade. nārir asi. gāyatřena chándasā prthivyāḥ (MS) / prthivyās (KS) sadhāsthād agnīṃ purśyāṃ angirasvād ābhārā (MS) / ābhara (KS).} \]
According to the MS, the offering is performed with the aim of discovering Agni. Their first mantra is as follows:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Having grasped in your hand, Savitṛ, bearing the hoe of gold, | Having perceived the light, brought Agni from the earth. | With the Anuṣṭubh meter! | Therewith having dug Agni, bring for us light unaging! |

Lines C and D of the last verse in the anuṣṭubh meter in the TS are different from those lines in the other three texts, which are equivalent to lines C and D of the verse employed at the Savitṛ offering (see 2.1). The phrase “aṅgirasvat” appears several times (once in the MS and the KS, five times in the TS and the VS).

### 2.3. The Leading of a Horse and a Donkey to the Hole

MS 3.1.3–4 (3,9–5,1), KS 19.2–3 (1,12–2,20), KapS 29.8–30.1 (136,4–138,1), TS 5.1.2.1–5, ŚB 6.3.2.1–6.3.3.6

They (the Adhvaryu, the sacrificer, etc.) lead a horse and donkey to the hole. In the Black Yajurveda Sarṁhitās (YS), it was Prajāpati who found Agni. Therefore, a horse, which is connected with Prajāpati, is led to the hole. The Aṅgiras first brought the fire. Prajāpati is regarded as this earth, and the ant-heap as its ear. In the ŚB, however, there is no mention of Prajāpati, and the ant-heap is regarded as the earth.

### 2.4. The Stepping of the Horse

MS 3.1.4 (5,1–14), KS 19.3 (2,20–3,14), KpS 30.1 (138,1–17), TS 5.1.2.6–5.1.3.4, ŚB 6.3.3.7–22
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The Adhvaryu makes the horse step upon the clay in the hole. He performs an oblation on the horse’s footprint. In the KS and TS, he places gold on it before the oblation, since this is regarded as the sacrificial fire. According to the MS, Agni became a black antelope, and entered into a horse, then went to an antelope’s hoof; therefore, the horse’s footprint is considered to contain the sacrificial fire.

Stepping upon the clay might mean finding and catching Agni in the earth.

2.5. The Digging of the Clay

MS 3.1.4–5 (5,16–6,19), KS 19.4 (4,3–5,2), KpS 30.2 (139,10–140,10), TS 5.1.4.1–5, ŚB 6.3.3.26–6.4.2.10

The Adhvaryu digs up the clay with the hoe. In the MS he takes the hoe with the four Savitṛ formulas, which are uttered at 2.2. The KS and the MS regard Prajāpati as Atharvan, who first produced Agni.

In the ŚB Atharvan is identified with the breath, the hoe with speech, and Prajāpati digs up the clay together with the other gods. The following two formulas are uttered while digging it up:

-devásya tvā savitúḥ prasavè śvínor báhúbhyaṃ pūṣño hástabhyaṃ prthivyāḥ sadháṣṭhe (VS: sadháṣṭhaḥ) agníṃ puríṣyām aṅgirasvāt khanāmī. jyótiṣmantam tvāṅe suprátīkaṃ ájasreṇa bhānúna dīḍyānam (TS: dīḍyānam) | śívāṃ prajā-pábhyaṃ hínasante prthivyāḥ sadháṣthé (VS: sadháṣṭhaḥ) ’gníṃ puríṣyām aṅgirasvāt khanāmāḥ. (KS, TS: khanāmā) || TS 4.1.3.1, KS16.3 (222,19–22), MS 2.7.2–3 (76,12–15), VS 11.28

On the instigation of the god Savitṛ, with the arms of Aśvins, with the hands of Pūṣān, in (from) the abode of earth, I dig Agni of the dust in the manner of Aṅgiras.

Luminous, you, Agni; having a beautiful face, shining with unaging radience, Auspicious and harmless to offspring, in (from) the abode of earth, I (we) dig Agni of the dust in the manner of Aṅgiras.

The line “devásya tvā savitúḥ prasavè . . . hástabhyaṃ” is uttered again here after the taking of a wooden hoe (see 2.2). The gods mentioned in the line (Savitṛ, Aśvins, and Pūṣan) are closely connected with the sun. However, formulas, including this line, are often employed in other rites without relation to Agni’s flight or the sun. These formulas are uttered with certain acts, which assume a starting-point character; therefore, are accompanied with danger, against which a protection of the gods, especially those connected with the sun, is required. However, in the case of the search for the ukhā clay, that may not be the only reason why the line is employed more than

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twice. It may be presumed that an element of the Vala myth (the myth of the hidden sun) is added to the myth of Agni’s flight, given the repetition of the phrase “aṅgirasvat” (twice here, and see 2.2). 19)

3. Conclusion

In the search for the clay for the ukhā, there are numerous elements of the myth of Agni’s flight. Agni is believed to leave his traces also in the instruments used for getting at the clay (the horse and the hoe). Proceeding to the clay is compared to looking for Agni and digging up the clay to lighting a new sacrificial fire. We should note that it was Prajāpati who found Agni, according to the Black YS. The MS and the KS regard Atharvan as Prajāpati. In the ŚB, however, Prajāpati is not mentioned from 2.2 to 2.4.

The digging up the clay by Prajāpati and the gods (2.5) is abstracted: Atharvan is identified with the breath and the hoe with speech. Further research is needed to examine the possibility that this myth is mixed with the Vala myth.

Notes

1) The description of the ukhā accounts for about one-fourth of the main part (from the beginning to piling the altar) in the brāhmaṇa.

2) According to Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra 10.1 (1.6–8 <Ed. Caland>) Adhvaryu has a hole dug as far in front of sālā as one can throw a śālāy. He has it besmeared (i.e., filled up) with the prepared clay (Ikari 1983: 484–485).

3) See Oldenberg 1923: 120–124 and Hillebrandt 1965: 145–155.

4) For detail, see Rau 1972.

5) MS 3.1.1 (1.6–7) agnir vā yātra yatraṅgachat tāṁ savitāṅvapasyad. yāt sāvitrāṇi hūyante ‘gnēr evāukṣātā. KS 18.19 (279,7–16) chandāṇiśi vai deverbhyo ‘pākrāman. yajīte bhāgadheyaṃ icchamāṇāni, na vo ‘bhāgadheyaṃ havyāṃ vakṣyāma iti. tebhya etac caturgṛhitam prāyaṇcchann . . . savitā vā etat prthivyā jyotis samabharad, yad evāyātra nyaktaṃ tad etena sambharatī. TS 5.1.1.1 chándāṇiśi deverbhyo ‘pākrāman nā vo ‘bhāgāni havyāṃ vakṣyāma iti. tebhya etac caturgṛhitām adhārayān.

6) ŚB 6.3.1.6–7 yād v evaitām āhutim juhoti | savitāisō ‘gnis. tām etayāhutyā purāstāt prīṇāti. tāṁ īṣṭvā prītvāthaināṃ sambharatī. tād yād etayā savitāāram prīṇāti, tāsmit sāvitrāṇi. tāsmād vā etām āhutim juhoti. ||6|| yād v evaitām āhutim juhoti | savitāisō ‘gnis. tām etayāhutyā purāstād reto bhūtām śiṅcatā. yād yād yēn auśaśa sacyate, tādṛṛ yāde. tād yād etayā savitāāram reto bhūtām śiṅcatā, tāsmit sāvitrāṇi. tāsmād vā etām āhutim juhoti. ||7|| ŚB 6.3.1.10–13 sa jahotī | yuñjānāḥ prathamāṃ manaṅ itī. prajāpatir vā yuñjānāḥ. sā manaṅ etas泰山 kārmaṇe ‘yukta. tād yān manaṅ etas泰山 kārmaṇe ‘yukta, tāsmit prajāpatir yuñjānāḥ. ||12|| tatvaya savitā dhīya itī | manaṅ vā savitā. prāṇā dhīya. ‘gnēr jyotir nicāyyāty. agnēr jyotir drṣṭvety etat. prthivyā adhyābhahrad itī. prthivyai hy ēnaḥ ādhyābhahatī. ||13||
7) MS 3.1.2 (2,13–19) sāvitrār dāhram ādattāte. prāṣṭūtyai . . . yātra vā adō ‘āgnī hotrād bhīṣāpākrāmat, sā sārvesu bhūteśv avasad. yām vānaspaṭīv avasat, tām vēnā avasat. sā yātra nirādhat, tāni kalmāśāni abhavān. yēna samācarat, tāt susīrān. yātrāvasat, tāt pārva. yād vāṅnāvy abhīr bhavāti, svēnāvīdarān yōnīnā sāṁbhārati. KS 19.1 (1,1–11) Ōm || sāvitrār abhīram ādattāte. prāṣṭūtyai . . . kalmāśāṁ vāṁnāvāṁ susīrāṇ kuryād. ‘āgnī vair devebhō ‘pākrāmat. sa ‘veṇūṁ prāvīśat. sa etāṁ vāṁnāy anahyāta, yēni pariṁsyaya. tām lokam anvacarad, yat susīras. sa yātra yātrāvasat, tan niradahat. tat kalmāśām abhavad. yat kalmāśī vāṁnāvāṁ bhavāti. sā hy ‘āgneśvāṁā. sāṁrāṇyā. atho yād evāsyātra nyaktaṁ tasyāv-varuddhīya. TS 5.1.1.4 catūrbhīr abhīram ādattat . . . ‘āgnī DeVēbhō ‘nlāyāta. sā ‘veṇūṁ prāvīśat. sā etāṁ āṭim ānu sāṁ acarad, yād vēnō susīrān. susīrābhīr bhavāti. sayonīvāya. sā yātrayatrabhasat, tāt kṛṣṇām abhavat. kalmāśī bhavat. rūpāsāmṛddhīya. ŚB 6.3.1.31–32 sā vāṁnāvāṁ sāyāt | ‘āgnī DeVēbhō ‘udākrāmat sā ‘veṇūṁ prāvīśat. tāṃ tāt sā susīrāḥ, sā etāṁ vāṁnāy abhīto ‘kurtā pārivyā. ānanauprajñāyāya. yāṭra-yatra nidadā. tāṃ tāt kalmāśāṁ abhavān, ||31|| sā kalmāśī sāyāt | sā hy ‘āgeneśvāī, yādī kalmāśīn nā vinded, āpy akalmaśī svāt. susīrā tū svāt. sāṃrāṇyā. sāṃrāṇyān ‘āgmīd. ‘ānanauprajñāyāya. yāṭra-yatra nidadā. yāṭra-yatra nidadā, tāṃ tāt kalmāśāṁ abhavān, ||32||

8) MS 3.1.3–4 (3,10–4,11) ‘āgnī vair yātra yātrāgachat, tāṃ prajāpārīt anvapaśyat. prajāpātāyā sōvā. yād āśvēna yānī, ‘āgnīr evānuśkāyai. prajāpātir vā ‘agnīṁ samābhāryāyāt sā evadyā lōkēbhō ‘śvām nirmāyā digbhyād cāgnīṁ sāmambarat . . . ‘āṅgirasas etām āghre sāmabhārat. KS 19.2–3 (1,12–13) ‘āgnī vair devebhō ‘pākrāmat. sa yātra yātrāgachat tāṃ prajāpārīt anvapaśyat. prajāpātāyā sōvā. yād āśvēna yantar ‘agnīr evānuśkāyai. TS 5.1.2.2–4 ‘āgnīr ‘nlāyāta. tāṃ prajāpātāyā ‘mīnavā avindat. prajāpātāyā sōvā. ‘śvēna sām bharathy. anuvittayai . . . ‘āṅgirasas vētām āghre sātānāṁ sām abharan,

9) ŚB 6.3.3.5 ātā valmikavapā ‘susīrā vyādhvē nūhitā bhavatī | tām ‘ānvikṣata. ‘iyān vair valmi-kavapēyām u vē ime lokā. etād vē ‘enām ēsā lokēṣu vīgrāḥām aichams. tāṭhavaimāyām ayām etād ēsā lokēṣu vīgrāḥhim ichati. ||5||

10) TS 5.1.3.2 hīranyam upāsya jujhoty. agniyātā eva jujhoti. KS 19.3 (3,6–8) ‘āgnī vair vair ‘aruṇāṁh abhyakāmāyata. tasyā tējah parāpate. tatt dhiranyam abhavad yad dhiranyam upāṣya jujhoty. agniyātā eva jujhoti samṛddhīya.

11) According to Hoffmann (1975: 148–150), the fact that a mark of a horse’s Strahl (frog) looks like a footprint of cloven hoofed-animal (amtelope, deer, and so on) is one of the grounds on which the myth of entering of a black antelope into a horse’s hoof was made.

12) MS 3.1.4 (5,9–12) kṛṣṇo vair bhūtvābhīr dās ‘vāṇ prāvīśat. sā etād ‘agadacchād yātra mṛgāsaphō. yād ‘āsvasya pādē ‘juhoty, agniyātā eva jujhoty ayātanaṇavatāt. andhā ‘dhvāryūḥ svāt, yād ‘ānāyatanē ‘juhuyād, etād vē tād yād ‘aṅhur mṛgāsaphām arē ‘nvarād (see Hoffmann 1975: 150–152) iti.

13) Indra stepped over (āṣyākṛāmat) the sacrifice which had gone away from the gods and entered the earth. (MS 3.8.3 [94,15–96,3], KS 25.2 [103,18–104,1], KpS 38.5 [209,6–10], TS 6.2.4.2)

14) MS 3.1.4–5 (5,16–6,16) sāvitrār dāhram ādattāte. prāṣṭūtyai dvābhīyām khanati . . . prajāpātir vā ‘atārvaḥ. sā etām āghre ‘manthat. sō ‘janayat. svā evāinām mānthati. sā ‘janayati. KS 19.4 (4,3–16) sāvitrābhīyām khanati. prāṣṭūtyai . . . athārvaḥ tāv prathamo niramathanad agna iti. prajāpātir vā athārvaḥ. prajāpātir etām āghre ‘manthat. prajāpātir evāinām ‘janayati. TS 5.1.4.1–4 devāsya tāv ‘savītūḥ prasavā iti khanati . . . tām ‘atārvaṇvāpasaḥya.

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15) **ŚB 6.4.1.4-5** sā vā khanāmi khanāma iti khanati | khanāmīti vā etā prajāpatir ākhanat. khanāma iti devā. tasmāt khanāmi khanāma iti || khanāmi vā śāyā khanāna vā ākhanat. vāg vā ābhriyā ākhanat. śarīrāvatvānīmāṃ vācā vā yām ākhanāṃ. tāthāvānām ayām ātām vācāvābhryā khanati. ||5|| **ŚB 6.4.2.1** ātharvā tvā prathamó nīrāmantad agna iti. prāṇo vā ātharvā. prāṇo vā etām āgre nīrāmantad.

16) On the Āśvins’ role as conductor of the sun around sunset and sunrise, see Gotō 1991: 981–987; Goto 2009: 204. On the relationship with Pūṣan, Āśvin and Sūryā (Savitr̥’s daughter) see Kramrisch 1961: 114–117.

17) There are cases where only a last part of the mantra appears in the mantra portion, but this line is added at the beginning of the mantra in the \textit{brāhmaṇa} portion, e.g., TS 1.3.8 and TS 6.3.6.2, TS 1.4.1 and TS 6.4.4.1.

18) For example, sprinkling the sacrificer in the Āśvamedha, pouring the pounded rice, taking a wooden sword or a spade in the Darśapūrṇamāsa, taking a rope in the Agniṣṭoma paśu.

19) Indra freed the cows (Uṣas) from the Vala cave, and Āṅgirases helped him by means of song and ritual activity. (RV 1.11.5, 1.52.5, 1.62.2–4, 1.71.2, 3.31.4–11, etc.) In the RV the Vala myth is already embedded in the verses devoted to Agni (RV 4.1, 4.2). For detail of the myth see Witzel 2005: 1–47.

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