

# Is Indra a Sun God?

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## 1. Indra in the Yajurveda-Saṃhitās

In the earliest ritual interpretive literature, the Black Yajurveda-Saṃhitās, Indra is depicted and worshipped as a vṛtra-slaking warrior god, while he is also represented as the sun (*sūrya-* or *aśā ādityās* in the Yajurveda-Saṃhitās).<sup>1)</sup> In this paper, I will discuss various aspects of Indra's representation as the sun, with particular attention to Indra's relationship with the "twenty-first sun" in Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā (MS), Kāṭhaka-Saṃhitā (KS), and Taittirīya-Saṃhitā (TS).

## 2. Indra's representation as the sun

Indra as the sun appears as a counterpart to Agni, the fire on earth:

KS 7.4:65.20f. *ubhā vām indrāgnī āhuvadhyā iti. sūryo vā indras. so 'gñim naktam \*praviṣati*  
 "I would like to call you both, Indra-Agni," [he says]. Indra is Sūrya. He enters Agni at night.  
 (cf. MS 1.5.5(2):73.11–12)

Sakamoto (Gotō) (2007a, 800) discusses this passage and points out that Indra-Agni is the deity of the New Moon festival, and that the idea of Indra as a moon-eating (i.e., new-moon) deity, i.e., the sun, is found in RV 10.55.5 = AVŚ 9.10.9, and in Śatapatha-Bṛāhmaṇa 1.6.4.18–20.<sup>2)</sup> Further examples include Indra = sun, Maruts = rays (MS 1.10.16:155.16–20 ~ KS 36.10:77.8–9). In the animal sacrifice for a special wish (MS 2.5, KS 13, TS 2.1.2), Indra, who gives Sūrya radiance, is mentioned frequently, and Indra is associated with Sūrya worship. The myth of Indra as the son of Aditi is found in MS 1.6.12(1):104.10–17, MS 2.1.12(1):13.18ff.<sup>3)</sup> and may have been a factor in Indra's association with *ādityā-* (but these myths have no particular connection to the sun).

### 3. The sun = the twenty-first and Indra/Prajāpati

One of the important aspects of the sun is that it is associated with the number 21:<sup>4)</sup>

KS 33.6:31.4–7 (sattrā chapter; ~ TB 1.2.4) *ekaviṃśa eṣa. etena vai devā ekaviṃśenādityam itas svargaṃ lokam āroḥayan. sa eṣa ita ekaviṃśas. tasya daśāvastād ahāni daśa parastāt. sa eṣa ubhayato virāji pratiṣṭhitas.*

This twenty-first [graha] is [used]. The gods raised Āditya from here [on earth] to the heaven by this 21st [graha]. Such this (the sun) is the twenty-first from here. It (the 21-day festival; one of the variations of sattrā) has ten days from this side and ten days from another side. Such is this, standing firm in Virāj [supported] from both sides.

The number 21 is associated with the sun because it is considered stable (*prātiṣṭhiti-*, *pratiṣṭhā-*). The number 21 as stable is mentioned e.g.,

MS 3.2.3:19.6–8 *ekaviṃśatiḥ kāryā. pratiṣṭhityai; pratiṣṭhā hy èkaviṃśó. 'tho, èkaviṃśatividho hí gārhapatyas.*

21 [fillers] should be used. [It helps] to stand firm, because the ekaviṃśa-[stoma] is a stable foundation. And also, because the gārhapatya fire is made up of 21 components.

There are many similar instances where the number 21 is mentioned along with *prātiṣṭhityai* or *pratiṣṭhā-*.<sup>5)</sup> There is also an explanation that connects 21 with the human body:

MS 3.6.3:63.10f. *ekaviṃśatyā pāvayati. dāśa hástyā aṅgúlyo, dāśa pádyā, ātmáikaviṃśás.*

He purifies by 21 (bunches of darbha grass). The fingers of the hand are ten, the [fingers] of the foot are ten, and oneself (the torso) is the twenty-first.<sup>6)</sup>

The connection between Prajāpati and 21 described below may be based on this. Other explanations are 5 seasons + 12 months + 3 worlds + sun in TS 7.3.10.4f. (sattrā chapter), and Prajāpati = 17 + 3 worlds + sun in KS 12.6:168.17f., TS 5.1.10.3 (agniciti).

There is an example of the 21st = sun being co-located with Prajāpati = horse:

TS 5.4.12.2 (agniciti) *dvādaśa māsāḥ, páñcartávas, tráya imé loká, asāv ādityá ekaviṃśá. eṣá prajāpatiḥ. prajāpatyó 'śvas. tám evā sākṣád ṛdhnōti.*

Twelve months, five seasons, these worlds here are three, [and] the sun yonder is the twenty-first. This is Prajāpati. The horse belongs to Prajāpati. He (the sacrificer) succeeds visibly [in the appearance of] his (Prajāpati's) [form]. (Because it is the sun, so it is clearly visible).

(cf. KS 12.6:168.17 (kāmyā-iṣṭi))

Usually, Prajāpati is not placed together with the sun, but it seems that the sun and Prajāpati are connected through the number 21. Or it could be said that Prajāpati is connected to the representation of the “21st sun.”

KS and TS incorporate the logic of “Indra = sun = Prajāpati” into a similar argument:

TS 5.7.1.3 (agniciti) *ásvam áva ghrāpayaty. asáu vā ādityá índra. eṣá prajāpatiḥ. prajāpatyó 'śvas. tám evā sākṣád ṛdhnōti.*

He (the priest) makes the horse smell it. Indra is the sun yonder. That is Prajāpati. The horse belongs to Prajāpati. He (the sacrificer) succeeds visibly [in the appearance of] his (Prajāpati's) [form].

(cf. KS 22.8:64.22 (agniciti))

Although the number 21 does not appear in this passage, the discussion seems to have the same background as TS 5.4.12 and thus may imply a connection between Indra and the sun as the 21st.

#### 4. The sun as the 21st and Indra in the context of sattrā

As seen above, the 21st sun = Indra did not exist as a direct equation. However, the myth of Indra's involvement in reaching the 21st world is found in the sattrā chapter of TS.

TS 7.3.10.4f. (sattrā chapter) *índro vā ápratiṣṭhita āsīt. sá prajāpatim úpādhāvat. tásmā etám ekaviṃśatirātrám prāyachat. tám āharat. ténāyajata. táto vái sá práty atiṣṭhad. yé bahuyājínó 'pratiṣṭhitāḥ syús, tá ekaviṃśatirātrám āsīran. dvādaśa māsāḥ, páñcartávas, tráya imé loká, asāv ādityá ekaviṃśá. etāvanto vái devalokás. téśv evā yathāpūrvám prāti tiṣṭhanti.*

Indra was not standing firm. So, he rushed to Prajāpati. To him [P] gave the well-known 21-night ritual. He brought it back. He held the sacrifice with it. From that he stood firm. Those who hold many sacrifices but are not stable [financially/socially], they should sit on the 21-night ritual. Months are twelve, seasons are five, these worlds here are three, and the sun is the twenty-first. The worlds of the gods are so many. He stands firmly in them in order.

Moreover, the connection of Indra with the 21st sun is also implied in the following MS myth in which the gods who perform sattrā to reach heaven produce Indra by ekaviṃśastoma:

MS 1.9.4:133.3ff. (caturhotṛ chapter) *té vái caturhotāro nyāsīdant sómagrhapatayā “índram janayiṣyāmā” íti. ... tá ekaviṃśám āyátanam acāyaṃs. ténéndram ajanayaṃs. tá índram*

*janayitvābruvant “svār ayāma.”*

The gods [who were doing a sattra for the heaven] sat [at the sattra sitting] with four priests and Soma as the gṛhapati (the leader of the sattra), [hoping], “We will produce Indra.” ... They noticed that ekaviśa-[stoma] (or the 21st sattra participant) could be a foothold. With that, they gave rise to Indra. After they had produced Indra, they said, “Let us go through the sunlight.” (cf. KS 9.11:113.4-7 (caturhotṛ chapter))

It is a difficult myth to understand, but the key to understanding it is that the ekaviśa-[stoma] implies the 21st participant in the sattra. The gods doing sattra are 15, the priests are 4, and the gṛhapati is 1, for a total of 20. Indra, who is about to be born, is the 21st.<sup>7)</sup> MS I 9 (~ KS 9.8-16) is a chapter with sattra as a hidden theme, and there the word sattra is not used and the mantras are blended into the myth. As Amano (2017) argues, it is more of a secret teaching. Here too, the assonance of Indra = the twenty-first that is hidden in the sattra myth may be indicated as secret teaching.

The association of the 21st sun with Indra is thought to fall within the framework of the idea of sattra, which aims to ascend to the highest heaven beyond the worlds. There, the twenty-first sun was a point of attainment to be attained through a prolonged ascetic ritual of sattra, and Indra was a symbol of the power gained through sattra.<sup>8)</sup>

## 5. Indra and the sun in the Vṛātya hymns of the Atharvaveda Śaunaka recension

Dore (2015, 2016) argues that in AVŚ, Indra = sun is praised as the highest rank and condition to which the people aspire through sattra:

AVŚ 11.5.19 [...] *īndro ha brahmacāryeṇa devébhyaḥ svār ābharat.*

Indra brought the sunlight to the gods with his *brahmacarya*- (ascetic practices at sattra).

AVŚ 13.4.1, 9 *raśmībhir nābha ābhṛtaṁ mahendrā ety āvṛtaḥ.*

Mahendra is going through the rays to the cloud that was brought, being hidden.

AVŚ 15.1.6 *sā ekavrātyō bhavat sā dhānur ādatta tād evēndradhanūḥ.*

He becomes the Only-vrātya, he takes the bow in his hand, the Indra's bow.

AVŚ 17.1.14 *tvām indra brāhmaṇā vardhāyantaḥ sattrām nī ṣedur ṛṣayas.*

Making you, Indra, greater with the *brahman*-, the ṛṣis sat at the sattra.

AVŚ 15 is a prose chapter called the vṛātya hymn, which is related to the sattra, a ritual of the vṛātya (an Indo-Aryan group that invaded India earlier than the main group of the

Ṛgveda bearers and is believed to have been the first to integrate with the native population).<sup>9)</sup> The sattra chapters of KS and TS, and the caturhotṛ chapters of MS and KS, which are hidden sattra chapters, were probably influenced by the ideas surrounding the sattra rituals described in the AVŚ.

### Notes

- 1) The identification of Indra as *asā ādityās* appears in MS 1.10.16:155.19f., 4.7.3:95.14ff., KS 10.8:133.19f., 13.7:188.14, KS 22.8:64.22f., 24.9:100.10, TS 1.7.6.3, 5.7.1.3 (→ 3). The identification as *sūrya-* appears in KS 7.4:65.20f. (→ 2).
- 2) See Sakamoto (Gotō) 2015, 20; 2016, 285, and 2010, 1125.
- 3) For the myth surrounding Indra's birth, see Amano 2013; Indra being the youngest child is also mentioned in TS 7.2.10.2 (sattra chapter).
- 4) *asā āditya ekaviṃśas* appears in KS 26.4:126.6 (soma adhvara), 33.8:35.2f., 34.9:43.9 (sattra). In KS 6.7:56.8–10 (agnihotra chapter), the *ekaviṃśā-* (*stōma-*) is classified in the heaven of three worlds along with the sun.
- 5) Other examples are MS 3.2.1:149f., 3.2.10:131.2f., 3.4.4:48.19, 3.4.5:11f. (agniciti); KS 20.1:19.9f., 20.5:23.4f. (explained with *ekaviṃśatir devalokās*), 20.12:32.10 and 16, 20.13:33.7, 21.12:53.11f. (agniciti), 25.10:119.8 (soma adhvara); TS 2.5.10.2 (*darśapūrṇamāsa*), 5.1.8.5, 5.2.3.6, 5.3.3.2, 5.3.4.2 (agniciti), 6.1.1.8, 6.3.3.6 (soma adhvara), 6.6.11.4 (graha), 7.2.1.3, 7.2.2.2, 7.2.3.2, 7.2.5.6, 7.4.3.3ff., 7.5.8.3 (sattra).
- 6) Cf. KS 20.8:27.2, 23.1:74.6f., TS 6.1.1.8.
- 7) See Amano 2009, 330 n. 1122.
- 8) The myth of Indra ascending to heaven appears in MS 4.3.4:43.7f. *īndro vāi nāmuciṃ nālabhata. sā raśmīṃ kulāyaṃ kṛtvānvārohad amūm ādityām*.
- 9) About vrātya see Edholm 2017; Pontillo and Dore 2016, 1–34; Amano 2016, 35–72.

### Abbreviations

- AVŚ *Atharvaveda* (-*Samhitā*), *Śaunaka Atharva Veda Samhita*. Herausgegeben von R. Roth und W. D. Whitney. Dritte, unveränderte Auflage (nach der Max Lindenau besorgten zweiten Auflage). Bonn: Fred Dümmers Buchhandlung, 1924.
- KS *Kāṭhakaṃ. Die Samhitā der Kaṭha-Çākhā*. Herausgegeben von Leopold von Schroeder. 3 Bde. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1900, 1909, 1910.
- MS *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*. Herausgegeben von Leopold von Schroeder. 4 Bde. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1881, 1883, 1885, 1886.
- TS *Die Taittirīya-Samhitā*. Herausgegeben von Albrecht Weber. 2 Bde. Indische Studien, 11, 12. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1871, 1872.

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