

Yogadānam

(Contribution of Prof. G. U. Thite
to Sanskrit Studies)



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BRÁHMAN AS THE ABSOLUTE IN LATE BRĀHMAṆA TEXTS

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In the *Ṛgveda*, *bráhman* generally refers to a sacred utterance seen by a realized seer, whereas in the Upaniṣads, *bráhman* tends to stand for the absolute.¹ Between these, in the Brāhmaṇa texts, *bráhman* often is understood to be the self-born who created the entire universe. This suggests that the explicit and abstract philosophical use of the term *bráhman* in the Brāhmaṇa texts was established before or close to the same time as the composition of the earliest Upaniṣads and serves as a bridge between early and late Vedic genres. As Jan Gonda (1950: 13) points out, *bráhman* already had multiple connotations in pre-Upaniṣadic thought. While many cosmologies in the Brāhmaṇa texts feature Prajāpati as the primordial being, late Brāhmaṇa texts also narrate episodes in which *bráhman* is the primary being who created everything. These cosmologies illustrate how *bráhman* stood for the ground of being in late Brāhmaṇa texts.

Before turning to the Brāhmaṇa texts, a few words are necessary to provide a brief philological background of *bráhman* in early Vedic. Many scholars have written on *bráhman*, including Louis Renou, Gonda, Paul Thieme, Peter Scharf, and Joel Brereton. According to Scharf (2007), in Vedic *bráhman* refers to a Vedic hymn or a sacred poetic composition. Hermann Oldenberg (1917 vol. 2: 65), Thieme (1952: 108, 118, 125) and Brereton (2004: 326) understand *bráhman* as formulation. Renou (1949: 12-18) emphasizes the enigmatic quality of *bráhman* and its religious and priestly power. Similarly, Gonda (1950: 10; 1962: 270) sees

brāhman as “the potency or principle from which all things are derived” and “the power immanent in the words, verses, and formulas of the Veda.” The hymns that comprise the *Ṛgveda* are believed to be *brāhman*, meaning they are sacred utterances seen by sages who have opened their mind to primordial reality. Because when seen, sacred utterances are one with the ground of being, *brāhman* refers both to the hymn and to the source of everything manifest.

In this way, there is no surprise that *brāhman* is one of the main technical terms for ultimate reality in Vedic thought. The idea that the utterances are one with the absolute finds support in the lineage given at the end of the Śāṅḍilya section of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. In a passage closely resembling the beginning of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, ŚBM 10.6.5 narrates a cosmology in which nothing existed in the beginning.² This world was covered by Death, which is hunger. “It made up its mind, [thinking] ‘May I have a body (*ātman*)’” (ŚBM 10.6.5.1: *tan mano'kurutātmanvī syām iti*). He went on worshipping and the waters were produced, then the earth (10.6.5.1-2). Then he made himself threefold and established himself everywhere (10.6.5.3). A lineage is given the end of the *brāhmaṇa*, starting with *brahman*, from which the transmission passes to Prajapati. Here *brāhman* is said to be self-existent (ŚBM 10.6.5.9: *brahma svayambhū*; Gonda 1950: 10). Sacred knowledge, including what is known about the origin, has to start with the origin itself. It is known by one who loses his individual self and becomes the self-existent origin.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* portrays *brahman* as what existed alone in the beginning and, creating the world through heating itself, incarnated through derivatives of itself (ŚBK 3.2.5.1-3; cf. ŚBM 11.2.3.1-6). In this cosmology, the self-existent absolute remained in nonduality until a desire arose to create something else:

*brahma ha va idam agra āsa tad akāmatya katham nu
prājāyeyeti tad aśrāmyat tat tāpo 'tapyata tad devatā
asṛjata tā devatāḥ sṛṣṭvā yāthālokaṁ vyārohayām*

cakārāgnim evāsiml loke yo 'yaṁ pavate tam antarikṣe divy eva sūryaṁ tata ūrdhvā ya itāre lokās teṣv itarā devatās tad yathā ha vā eṣu lokeṣv imā devatā evaṁ ha teṣu lokeṣu tā devatās tad dha brahmā parārdham eva pariṅyāya tasmaḍ yaś caitad veda yaś ca na brahmottaram ity evācakṣate| ŚBK 3.2.5.1

In the beginning, verily [all] this was *brahman*. Then it desired. How indeed could I procreate?" Then it toiled. It performed asceticism. Then it emitted from itself *devatās*. Having emitted from itself those *devatās*, it caused them to ascend to their respective worlds. It caused Agni to ascend to this world. It caused the one who blows to ascend to the intermediate space. It caused the sun to go to the sky (*div*). Then it caused the other deities to go to ascend to the other higher worlds. Like that, it caused the *devatās* verily to ascend to these worlds. In the same way, it placed them in those worlds. *Brahman* spanned the utmost limit indeed. Therefore he who knows this, or not, says, "*Brahman* is higher."

Since there was nothing else in existence in the beginning, *brāhman* created the *devatās* from itself and placed them in their respective worlds. Though they enjoy relative existence among each other, the *devatās*, like the worlds, are nothing but *brāhman*. In this narrative, moreover, *brāhman* is the only thing great enough to embrace all creation within itself.

After creating the worlds, *brāhman* wanted to come down to experience relative existence, but had to figure out how to make the worlds continuous:

tad dhekṣām cakre brahma katham nv imāml lokān pratyaveyām kena nv imāml lokānt samtanuyām iti tad etabhyām dvābhyām pratyaveyāya nāmnā ca rūpeṇa caitāvad vā idaṁ nāma caiva rūpaṁ ca sa yasyāha namāsti taṁ nāma yaśyo nu nāmāsti tad rūpaṁ...|ŚBK 3.2.5.2

Then indeed *brahman* observed, “How can I get down to these worlds? By what means can I make these worlds continuous?” Then, through these two, name and form, it came down. So much verily is this [world]—name and form. That of which he says is the name is its name. About whose name it is, that is the form...

In order to experience individual existence, *brāhman* has to come down through name and form. The occurrence of name and form in this passage is an early, if not the first, philosophical occurrence of name and form in Indian thought. The *Śatapatha* goes on to say what these terms mean:

te haite brahmaṇī mahatī abhve sa yo haite brahmaṇī mahatī abhve veda mahād dhaivabhvaṃ gacchati te haite brahmaṇī mahatī yakṣe sā yo haite brahmaṇī mahatī yakṣe veda mahād dhaiva yakṣam gacchati yado vai paramatam gacchaty athāhur mahad vāvabhvaṃ prāpto mahad yakṣam iti yado vai devā ēte brahmaṇī āpnuvann athāmṛtā āsur martyā haiva tātaḥ purā babhūvur maṇo vai rūpaṃ manasā hi rūpaṃ vededam idam rūpaṃ iti manase vai pūrvam āghāram āghārayati tena rūpaṃ āpnoti vāg vai nāma vācā hi nāmābhivyāharati vāce vā uttaram āghāram āghārayati tena nāmāpnoti te devā ete brahmaṇī āptvāmṛtatvam ajayan brahmaṇaḥ salokatām ajayant sa ya evam ēte brahmaṇī āpnoti sarvam ū haivāsmiṃl loka āyur ety akṣiyam amuṣmīṃl loka ’mṛtatvaṃ jayati devānāḥ brahmaṇaḥ salokatām jayati| ŚBK 3.2.5.3

These are the two *brahmans*—the two great, immense powers. He who knows these two *brahmans*, namely the two great, immense powers, he becomes the same great, immense power. These two *brahmans* are the two great *yakṣas*. He who knows these two *brahmans*, the two great *yakṣas*, he goes to that same great *yakṣa*.

When he goes to the supreme stage, then they say that he has attained the great, immense power—the great *yakṣa*. When the *devas* attained these two *brahmans*, then they were immortals. Before that indeed, they were mortals. Mind is the same as form (*rūpa*), for he knows form through the mind, [thinking,] “This is form.” For the sake of mind, verily, he offers the first sprinkling of the ghee oblation by which he obtains *rūpa*. Speech (*vāc*) is the same as name (*nāma*), for by speech he utters a name. To speech he offers the subsequent sprinkling of ghee, by which he obtains *nāma*. Those *devas*, having obtained these two *brahmans*, won immortality. They won the same worldliness as *brahman*. He who attains these two *brahmans*, he reaches a complete life in this world. He wins inexhaustible immortality in that world. He wins the same worldliness as the *devas* and *brahman*.”

The Brāhmaṇa homologizes *nāma* with speech (*vāc*) and *rūpa* with the mind (*manas*). Both are said to be immense powers (*abhva*) that make the *devas* continuous. Given that the *devas* are dependent on offerings from this world, the relative existence of human beings who employ mind and speech in intellectual functions more than guarantees a constant supply of offerings to the *devas*. And with these offerings, the *devas* give offerings in return, which secures the continuity of the worlds. In *Kāṇva Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.5.1-3, *brahman* is the underlying power, out of which name and form, as well as all that exists emerged.³ This passage shows that *brahman* explicitly represented the nondual whole already in the Brāhmaṇa texts and that *namarūpa* was already understood to derive directly from *brahman* and to be the manifest form of *brahman*. Here *brahman* serves as the creative principle underlying the manifest world as well as everything manifest.

Whereas in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* *brahman* becomes the two great *yakṣas*, in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, it is a great mystery

(*yakṣa*) that *brahman* is alone. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* begins with the assertion that *brahman* alone was the nondual, self-existent reality in the beginning:

*brahma ha va idam agra āsīt svayaṃbhv ekam eva |
tadaikṣata mahad vai yakṣam yad ekam evāsmi,
hantāhaṃ mad eva manmātraṃ dvitīyaṃ devaṃ
nirmimā iti | tad abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat |
tasya śrāntasya taptasya saṃtaptasya lalāṭe sneho yad
ārdram ājāyata tenānandat | tad abravīt—mahad vai
yakṣaṃ suvedam avidam aham iti | tad yad abravīt—
mahad vai yakṣaṃ suvedam avidam aham iti—tasmāt
suvedo 'bhavat | taṃ va etaṃ suvedaṃ santaṃ sveda
ity ācakṣate parokṣeṇa | parokṣapriyā iva hi devā
bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣaḥ | GB 1.1.1*

In the beginning verily there was only *brahman*, self-existent, one alone. It observed, “It is a great mystery [*yakṣa*] that I am alone. Well, let me create from me only a second *deva* of my size.”⁴ It toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism. When it had toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, an unctuousness on the forehead and that which was wet was produced. Due to that, it became happy. Then it said, “I have come to know the great mystery which was easy to know (*suveda*).” Because it said, “I have come to know the great mystery which was easy to know,” from that it became easy to know (*suveda*). And that, being easy to know (*suveda*), they call “sweat (*sveda*)” indirectly. For the *devas* like something not directly seen and dislike what is directly seen.

According to the *Gopatha*’s cosmology, *brahman* was the original absolute principle. Through laboring and heating itself, fluid was produced. Perhaps sweat is linked to the cosmic waters of other creation myths. Thus the original source produced a product, sweat,

and no longer was alone. On account of this created reality, feeling and knowing become possible. It is interesting that there is only one *yakṣa* in the Gopatha account, and it is something knowable. Something that is known presupposes something that knows, marking the beginning of duality, upon which rests the intellectual cognition of the manifest world.

The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* goes on to describe many more rounds of heating and producing new things in an ongoing process of creation. As sweat pouring from the pores formed streams, this world was created, including wives and children:

sa bhūyo 'śrāmyad bhūyo 'tapyad bhūya ātmānaṃ samatapat | tasya śrāntasya taptasya samtaptasya sarvebhyo romagartebhyaḥ prthaksvedadhārāḥ prāsyandanta | tābhir anandat | tad abravīt—ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ dhārayiṣyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ca, ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ janayiṣyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ca, ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ āpsyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ceti | tad yad abravīt— ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ dhārayiṣyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ceti, tasmād dhāra abhavan | tad dhārāṇaṃ dhārātvaṃ yac cāsu dhriyate | tad yad abravīt—ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ janayiṣyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ceti, tasmāj jāya abhavan | taj jāyānāṃ jāyātvaṃ yac cāsu puruṣo jāyate yac ca putraḥ | pun nāma narakam anekasatatāram, tasmāt trāṭīti putras | tat putrasya putratvam | tad yad abravīt— ābhir vā aham idaṃ sarvaṃ āpsyāmi yad idaṃ kiṃ ceti, tasmād āpo 'bhavan | tad apām aptvam | āpnoti vai sa sarvān kāmān yān kāmāyate [ya evaṃ veda] | GB1.1.2

He again toiled, again heated himself, and again practiced asceticism. When he had toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, the streams of sweat flew separately from all the pores of the skin. On account of

those [streams] it became happy. It said, “By means of these [streams] I will hold all this whatever there is. By means of these verily, I will produce all this, whatever there is. By means of these, I will obtain all this, whatever there is.” Because it said, “By means of these [streams of sweat], I will hold everything that there is,” therefore the streams came to be. That is the stream-ness of streams which is held in them. Because it said, “By means of these [streams] I will produce (*janayiṣyāmi*) all this, whatever there is,” therefore wives (*jāyāḥ*) came into existence. That is the wifeness of wives, since out of them, a person is born and a son is born. There is a hell named Put as big as many hundred stars. “He protects (*trāti*) from that” [Put hell], thus *putra*.⁵ That is the son-ness of the son. Because it said, “By means of these [streams] I will obtain (*āpsyāmi*) all this, whatever there is,” therefore they became the waters (*āpaḥ*). That is the waterness of the waters. He verily obtains all desires which he desires [who knows thus].

After creating the nuclear family, *brahman* then toiled and heated itself to give rise to the sage Bṛḡu:

*tā apaḥ sṛṣṭvānvaikṣata | tāsu svām chāyām apaśyat |
tām asyekṣamāṇasya svayaṃ reto 'skandat | tad apsu
pratyaṭiṣṭhat | tās tatraivābhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat
samatapat | tāḥ śrāntās taptāḥ saṃtaptāḥ sārddham eva
retasā dvaidham abhavan | tāsām anyatarā atilavaṇā
apeyā asvādvyas | tā aśāntā retaḥ samudraṃ vṛtvā-
tiṣṭhan | athetarāḥ peyāḥ svādvyah śāntās | tās tatraivā-
bhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat | tābhyah śrāntā-
bhyas taptābhyah saṃtaptābhyo yad reta āsīt tad
abhr̥jyata | yad abhr̥jyata tasmād bhr̥guḥ samabha-
vat | tad bhr̥gor bhr̥gutvam | bhr̥gur iva vai sa sarveṣu
lokeṣu bhāti ya evaṃ veda | GB 1.1.3*

Having created those waters, he observed that in them [the waters] he saw his own shadow [=reflection]. While he was observing that [his own shadow], at that time, his semen automatically fell down. It [the semen] stayed in those [waters]. It toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism right there for them [the waters]. Those [waters] being toiled, heated, and made hot, along with the semen itself became twofold. Out of them, some part of it was extremely salty, not worthy for drinking, and not sweet. Those not peaceful [waters] remained having surrounded the semen, the ocean. Now the other [waters] were drinkable, sweet, and peaceful. It [brahman] toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism right there for them [the waters]. From those [waters] which were toiled, heated, and made hot, whatever semen there was it was roasted ($\sqrt{bhṛj}$). Because they roasted, out of that [semen] Bhṛgu came out. That is the Bhṛgunes of Bhṛgu. One who knows thus, he verily shines in all the three worlds like Bhṛgu.

Next, the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* narrates the creation of the Atharvan priest, to whom *brahman* tells to look after the creatures because the Atharvan priest is said to be equal to Prajāpati.

*sa bhṛguṃ sṛṣṭvāntaradhīyata | sa bhṛguḥ sṛṣṭaḥ prāṇ
aijata | taṃ vāg anvavadat | vāyo vāya iti | sa nyavartata
| sa dakṣiṇaṃ diśam aijata | taṃ vāg anvavadat |
mātariśvan mātariśvann iti | sa nyavartata | sa pratiṣṭhā
diśam aijata | taṃ vāg anvavadat | pavamāna
pavamāneti | sa nyavartata | sa udīcīṃ diśam aijata |
taṃ vāg anvavadat | vāta vāteti | tam abravīt | na nv
avidam aham iti | na hīti | athārvān enam etāsv evāpsv
anviccheti | tad yad abravīd athārvān enam etāsv
evāpsv anviccheti tad atharvābhavat | tad atharvaṇo
'tharvatvam | tasya ha vā etasya bhagavato 'tharvaṇa*

*ṛṣer yathaiva brahmaṇo lomāni yathāṅgani yathā
prāṇa evam evāsyā sarva ātma samabhavat | tam
atharvāṇam brahmābravīt – prajāpateḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā
pālayasveti | tad yad abravīt prajāpateḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā
pālayasveti tasmāt prajāpatir abhavat | tat prajāpateḥ
prajāpatitvam | atharvā vai prajāpatiḥ | prajāpatir iva
vai sa sarveṣu lokeṣu bhāti ya evaṃ veda | GB 1.1.4*

Having created Bhṛgu, he disappeared. That Bhṛgu who was created, he moved toward the east. Speech called after him: “O wind (*vāyu*), o wind.” He returned. He moved toward the southern direction. Speech called after him, “O Mātariśvan, o Mātariśvan.” He returned. He moved toward the western direction. Speech called after him, “O purifying one (*pavamāna*), o purifying one.” He returned. He moved toward the northern direction. Speech called after him, “O wind (*vāta*), o wind!” He said, “I have not known.” “No indeed.” “Now please find it in just these waters toward your side (*athārvān*).” Because he said, “Now try to find it in just these waters toward your side (*athārvān*),” then *atharvan* came into existence.⁶ This is the Atharvanness of Atharvan. Of this blessed sage, Atharvan, just as there are hairs of *brahman*, just as there are limbs, just as there is breath, in the same way it became its complete *ātman* (body). To that Atharvan, *brahman* said—having created the *prajā* (creatures) of Prajāpati, look after them. Because it said, “having created the *prajā* of Prajāpati, look after them,” therefore, he became Prajāpati. That is the Prajāpati-ness of Prajāpati. The Atharvan priest verily is the same as Prajāpati. One who knows thus shines in all the worlds like Prājapati.

After that, more Atharvan sages were produced, along with the formulae that became the *Atharvaveda*.

*tam atharvāṇam ṛṣim abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat
samatapat | tasmāc chrāntat taptāt samtaptād
daśatayān atharvaṇa ṛṣīn niramimataikarcān
dvyṛcāṃs tṛcāṃs caturṛcān pañcārcānt ṣaḍarcānt*

saptarcān aṣṭarcān navarcān daśarcān iti | tān atharvaṇa ṛṣīn abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat | tebhyaḥ śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ saṃtaptebhyo daśatayān ātharvaṇān ārṣeyān niramimataikādaśān dvādaśāms trayodaśāms caturdaśān pañcadaśān ṣoḍaśānt saptadaśān aṣṭādaśān navadaśān vimśān iti | tān atharvaṇa ṛṣīn ātharvaṇāms cārṣeyān abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat | tebhyaḥ śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ saṃtaptebhyo yān mantrān apaśyat sa ātharvaṇo vedo 'bhavat | tam ātharvaṇaṃ vedam abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat | tasmāc chrāntāt taptāt saṃtaptād om iti mana evordhvam akṣaram udakrāmat | sa ya icchet sarvair etair atharvabhiś cātharvaṇaiś ca kurvīyety etayaiva tan mahāvyaḥṛtyā kurvīta | sarvair ha vā asyaitair atharvabhiś cātharvaṇaiś ca kṛtaṃ bhavati ya evaṃ veda yaś caivaṃvidvān evam etayā mahāvyaḥṛtyā kurute | GB 1.1.5

It toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism toward the ṛṣi Atharvan. From that which toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, it created ten ṛṣis who were Atharvans: Those with [= who have composed] one ṛc, those with two ṛcs, those with three ṛcs, those with four ṛcs, those with five ṛcs, those with six ṛcs, those with seven ṛcs, those with eight ṛcs, those with nine ṛcs, and those with ten ṛcs. It toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism toward those Atharvan sages. Out of these who toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, it created ten belonging to Atharvan who belong to the ṛṣi: those with [=who have composed] eleven ṛcs, those with twelve ṛcs, those with thirteen ṛcs, those with fourteen ṛcs, those with fifteen ṛcs, those with sixteen ṛcs, those with seventeen ṛcs, those with eighteen ṛcs, those with nineteen ṛcs, and

those with twenty ṛcs. Then toward those Atharvan ṛṣis and toward those belonging to the Atharvan ṛṣis, it toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism. From those who toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, whatever mantra it saw, that became the Atharvaṇa Veda. Toward that Atharvaṇa Veda, it toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism. From that which toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, one syllable came out upwards, namely “om,” which is the same as mind. He who would desire, “May I perform by means of all these Atharvans and [the formulae] that belong to Atharvans,” by means of this great utterance, he should perform it. One who knows this, for him it becomes performed by means of all these Atharvans and by means of those that belong to the Atharvans. One who knows thus, he performs [the offering] by means of this great utterance.

As the creation process continued, again through heating, the three worlds were created along with the Vedas and the vyāhṛtis.

*sa bhūyo 'śrāmyad bhūyo 'tapyad bhūya ātmanam
samatapāt | sa ātamata eva trīṃl lokān niramimīta
pṛthivīm antarikṣam divam iti | sa khalu pādābhyām
eva pṛthivīm nirmamimīta | udarād antarikṣam mūrdhno
divam | sa tāṃs trīṃl lokān abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapāt
samatapāt | tebhyaḥ śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ
saṃtaptebhyas trīn devān niramimīta | agniṃ vāyum
ādityam iti | sa khalu pṛthivyā evāgniṃ
niramimītāntarikṣād vāyum diva ādityam | sa tāṃs trīn
devān abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapāt samatapāt | tebhyaḥ
śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ saṃtaptebhyas trīn vedān
niramimīta ṛgvedaṃ yajurvedaṃ sāmavedam iti | agner
ṛgvedaṃ vāyor yajurvedaṃ ādityāt sāmavedam | sa
tāṃs trīn vedān abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapāt samatapāt |
tebhyaḥ śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ saṃtaptebhyas tisro*

*mahāvyaḥṛtīr niramimīta bhūr bhuvah svar iti| bhūr ity
 ṛgvedād bhuva iti yajurvedāt svar iti sāmavedāt| sa ya
 icchet sarvair etais tribhir vedaiḥ kurvīyety etābhir eva
 tan mahāvyaḥṛtibhi. kurvīta| sarvair ha vā asyaitais
 tribhir vedaiḥ kṛtaṃ bhavati ya evaṃ veda yaś
 caivaṃvidvān evam etabhir mahāvyaḥṛtibhiḥ kurute|
 GB 1.1.6*

He again toiled, heated himself, and practiced asceticism and he created three worlds from his very body: “the earth, intermediate sphere, and the sky.” Out of his feet, you should know, he created the earth. From his belly, he created the intermediary region. From his head he created the sky. He again toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism toward the three worlds. From these that were toiled, heated, and made hot, he created three gods, namely fire, wind, and the sun. From the earth, you should know, he created fire, from the intermediate region he created the wind, and from the sky he created the sun. He again toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism toward these three gods. From these who toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism he created the three Vedas, namely the *Ṛgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Sāmaveda*. From fire he created the *Ṛgveda*, from wind the *Yajurveda*, from the sun the *Sāmaveda*. He toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism toward the three Vedas. From these that were toiled, heated, and made hot, he created the three great utterances, namely *bhūr bhuvah svaḥ*. “*Bhūh*” is from the *Ṛgveda*, “*bhuvah*” is from the *Yajurveda*, and *svaḥ* is from the *Sāmaveda*. He who would desire, “I should act by means of all these Vedas,” he should do that by means of these great utterances. Verily for him it becomes done by means of all the three Vedas. One who knows this, and who is

wise in this way, performs by means of these great utterances in this way.

According to *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.1 and 1.1.6, self-existent *brahman* as absolute is more basic insofar as it existed prior to *brahman* as sacred utterance in the Vedas. The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* proceeds to then tell of the ocean and Varuṇa, death and the Aṅgiras.

tā yā amū retaḥ samudraṃ vṛtvātiṣṭhaṃs tāḥ prācyo dakṣiṇācyāḥ pratīcyā udīcyāḥ samavadravanta| tad yat samavadravanta tasmāt samudra ucyate| tā bhītā abruvan| bhagavantam eva vayaṃ rājānaṃ vṛṇīmaha iti| yac ca vṛtvātiṣṭhaṃs tad varaṇo 'bhavat| taṃ vā etaṃ varaṇaṃ santaṃ varuṇa ity ācakṣate parokṣeṇa| parokṣapriyā iva hi devā bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣaḥ| sa samudrād amucyata| sa mucyur abhavat| taṃ vā etaṃ mucyūṃ santaṃ mṛtyur ity ācakṣate parokṣeṇa| parokṣapriyā iva hi devā bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣas| taṃ varuṇaṃ mṛtyum abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat| tasya śrāntasya taptasya samtaptasya sarvebhyo 'ṅgebhyo raso 'kṣarat| so 'ṅgaraso 'bhavat| taṃ vā etaṃ aṅgarasaṃ santaṃ aṅgirā ity ācakṣate parokṣeṇa| parokṣapriyā iva hi devā bhavanti pratyakṣadviṣaḥ| GB 1.1.7

Those which remained, having surrounded the semen, the ocean, they flowed (*samavadravanta*) to the east, south, west, and north. Because they flowed, therefore it is called *samudra* (ocean). Being frightened, they said, “We choose the blessed one as our king.” Because they stood, having surrounded, therefore he became Varuṇa (surrounding). Him, being Varuṇa, they call Varuṇa indirectly. For *devas* are fond of something indirect as it were. They hate what is direct. He freed (*amucyata*) himself from the ocean. He became *mucyuh*. Him, being *mucyuh*, they call *mṛtyuh* (death) indirectly.

For the gods are fond of something indirect. They hate what is direct. He toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism towards Varuṇa, who is death. Then from all parts of him who toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, sap flowed. That became the sap of the body (*aṅgarasa*). That which is *aṅgarasa* they call Aṅgiras indirectly. For the gods are fond of something indirect as it were. They hate what is direct.

This section narrates the story of Varuṇa and connects him with the flowing waters of the ocean. In the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (TA 9.1.1, TU 3.1.1), Bhṛgu, the son of Varuṇa, approaches his father to request him to teach *brahman*. This is interesting, because in this Gopatha cosmology, Bhṛgu is created before Varuṇa and is therefore closer to the original ground of being called *brahman*. Nevertheless, in the Taittirīya account, Varuṇa instructs Bhṛgu about *brāhman*:

*yāto vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante| yēna jātāni jīvanti| yāt
prāyantyabhisāmviśanti| tād vījijñāsasva| tād
brāhmēti|*TĀ 9.1.1, TU 3.1.1

“From which these beings are born, by which, once born, they live, when dying, into which these enter—
desire to know that. That is *brahman*.”⁷

Though the figures and terminology may change across Vedic narratives, what the words point to, beyond the words, remains consistent. Continuing the Gopatha cosmology, more Aṅgirasas seers were then created from the practice of asceticism and the Aṅgirasas Veda.

*tam aṅgirasam ṛṣim abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat
samatapat| tasmāc chrāntāt taptāt samtaptād viṃśino
'ṅgirasa ṛṣiṅ niramimīta| tān viṃśino 'ṅgirasa ṛṣiṅ
abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat| tebhyaḥ
śrāntebhyas taptebhyaḥ samtaptebhyo daśatayān
āṅgirasān ārṣeyān niramimīta ṣoḍaśino 'ṣṭādaśino*

dvādaśina ekarcān dvyrcāṃs tṛcāṃś caturrcān pañcarcān ṣadarcān saptarcān iti| tān aṅgīrasa ṛṣīn āṅgīrasāṃś cārṣeyān abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat| tebhyaḥ śrāntebhyas taptēbhyaḥ saṃtaptēbhyo yān mantrān apaśyat sa āṅgīraso vedo 'bhavat| tām āṅgīrasaṃ vedam abhyaśrāmyad abhyatapat samatapat| tasmāc chrāntāt taptāt saṃtaptāj janad iti dvaitam akṣaraṃ vyabhavat| sa ya icchet sarvair etair aṅgīrobhiś cāṅgīrasaiś ca kurvīyety etayaiva tan mahāvyaḥṛtyā kurvīta| sarvair ha vā asyaitair aṅgīrobhiś cāṅgīrasaiś ca kṛtaṃ bhavati ya evaṃ veda yaś caivaṃvidvān evam etayā mahāvyaḥṛtyā kurute| GB 1.1.8

Toward that Aṅgīras ṛṣi, he toiled, heated himself, and practiced asceticism. From the one who toiled, heated himself, and practiced asceticism, he created the Aṅgīrasa ṛṣis consisting of twenty [=those who composed hymns with twenty verses]. Toward those Aṅgīrasa ṛṣis who had twenty, he toiled, heated himself, and practiced asceticism. From those that were toiled, heated, and made hot, he created those Aṅgīras tenfold [verses] belonging to the Aṅgīras, descended from a ṛṣi—those having sixteen verses, those having eighteen verses, those having twelve verses, and those who have one verse, those having two verses, those having three verses, those having four verses, those having five verses, those having six verses, and those having seven verses. Toward those Aṅgīras ṛṣis, who were belonging Aṅgīrasas, descended from a ṛṣi, he toiled, heated himself, and practiced asceticism. From those who toiled, heated, and practiced asceticism, whatever mantras he saw became the *Aṅgīrasa Veda*. In connection with that *Aṅgīrasa Veda*, he toiled, heated

himself, and practiced asceticism. From that [Aṅgīrasa Veda] which was toiled over, heated, and practiced asceticism over, “janat,” consisting of two syllables, was produced. He who would desire, “May I perform with all these Aṅgīrases and the formulae belonging to the Aṅgīrases,” he should perform that [ritual] with this great utterance. Verily, [the ritual] is performed by all the Aṅgīrases and the formulae belonging to the Aṅgīrases. He who knows thus, knowing in this way, performs in this way with this great utterance.

The next section of the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* takes a meta-perspective on creation and, in doing so, connects many of the connotations of *brahman* in the Brāhmaṇa texts.

*sa ūrdhvo 'tiṣṭhat | sa imāṃl lokān vyaṣṭabhnāt | tasmād
aṅgīraso 'dhīyāna ūrdhvas tiṣṭhati | tad vratam sa
manasā dhyāyed yad vā aham kiṃ ca manasā
dhyāsyāmi tathaiva tad bhaviṣyati | tad dha sma
tathaiva bhavati | tad apy etad ṛcoktam |
śreṣṭho ha vedas tapaso 'dhi jāto brahmajñānaṃ
hrdaye sambabhūva | ṛcy ṛgbhūtam yad asṛjyatedaṃ
niveśanam anṛṇaṃ dūram asyeti |
tā vā etā aṅgīrasāṃ jāmāyo yan menayah | karoti
menibhir vīryaṃ ya evaṃ veda | GB 1.1.9*

He stood up. He supported these worlds. Therefore, he who studies the Aṅgīras formulae, he stands up. That is a vow. He should think with his mind that whatever I will think with my mind will become a reality. It indeed happens in the same way. This too has been said by a verse –

“The best Veda [*Atharvaveda*] indeed, born out of asceticism, was produced in the heart of those who know *brahman*. That which was emitted has become a ṛc in a ṛc, this [world], settling down without a debt far from this.”

These verily are missile weapons related to the Aṅgirasas. He who knows thus does heroic activity (*vīrya*) with the help of missile weapons.

The mind here is said to be powerful because whatever is thought becomes a reality. By cleansing the heart through asceticism, the sages know *brahman* directly. This leads to the generation of sacred language so powerful that it is compared to missile weapons. Because they have seen *brahman* directly in their hearts, the Aṅgirasas sages are honored as relatives (*jāmi*) of the sacred formulations. The verse quoted by the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* asserts that a *ṛc* (verse) was born out of a *ṛc*. Since every *ṛc* in the *Ṛgveda* is *brāhman*, the verse implicitly suggests that *brāhman* was born out of *brāhman*. In this way, there is a direct connection between the origins, the sacred utterances, those who can directly see the sacred formulae, and what is generated from it. The subsequent paragraphs provide further details in the chain of creation. But this excerpt is enough for the purpose of this paper to show that *brahman* serves as the original and primary source of all existence in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*.

Like the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, the *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa* begins by asserting that just *brahman* existed in the beginning. Its semen or essence (*rasa*) became redundant, turning into the *brahmā* priest, whose mind became Prajāpati. Gonda (1989: 43) translates:

brahma hi vā idam agra āsīt| tasya tejo raso 'tyaricyata
| sa brahmā samabhavat|
sa tūṣṇīm manasādhyāyat| tasya yan mana āsīt sa
prajāpatir abhavat| SVB 1.1.1-3

In the beginning this (All) was (the) Brāhman. Its semen became redundant (predominated, *atyaricyata*); it became the Brahmān (the masculine term). He considered (the situation) tacitly in his 'mind' (*manas*). His 'mind' became Prājapati.

The creative potential of the neuter *brāhman* became someone whose thinking in the mind turned the mind into Prājapati. This

suggests that every human being was once one and the same as the attributeless source of life and that the mind, through thinking, created the phenomenal world, which the passage describes as “this” (*idam*). In the *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa*, not only is *brāhman* an absolute principle, but its thinking became Prajāpati. The verb *ādhyāyat* means to meditate or reflect on. Whereas in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, “streams” enabled brahman to create itself, here thinking serves as the creative activity. Insofar as thinking occurs by means of language in the mind, the *Sāmavidhāna*’s narrative is similar to that of the *Śatapatha*, which features the nondual *brāhman* generating mind and speech. By the time of the late *Brāhmaṇa* texts, *brāhman* was understood to be the absolute conceived of abstractly as well as everything generated from that source.

In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.360-1), *brahman* also features in a creation myth based on *Ṛgveda* 10.129.1. After quoting the first *ṛc* of the “*Nāsadiya Sūkta*,” the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* asserts that everything existed as one in the beginning:

*iti| tasminn asati sati na kasmiṃś saty ṛtam jyotiṣmad
udaplavata, satyaṃ jyotiṣmad udaplavata, tapo
jyotiṣmad udaplavata| tad yad ṛtam iti vāk sā, yat
satyam iti prāṇas so yat tapa iti manas tat| teśām annam
eva jyotir āsīt| tāny ekam abhavan| tad ekaṃ
bhūtvaitenānnena jyotiṣāplāyata| tad abhavad yathā
madhvaṣṭhi lāvāsv āsiktā syād ṛtir vaivam| tad aikṣata
– hantād hastāt prāṇaṃ karavā iti| tad ad hastāt prāṇam
akuruta, yathaiṣa striyā ad hastād ākāśa evam| tasmād
āpo ’sṛjyanta balabalabality etayā vācā| tad idam āpo
mahat salilam āsīt| yad dha vā idam āhur – āpo vā
idam agre mahat salilam āsīd ity etās tā āpaḥ| ta
ūrmayas samāsyanta phā3l phā3l iti tad dhiraṇyam
āṇḍaṃ samaiṣat | JB 3.360*

When there was nonbeing/untruth and not any being/truth at all, *ṛta* possessed of light floated. Truth (*satya*)

possessed of light floated. *Tapas* possessed of light floated. That which was *ṛta* was speech (*vāc*). That which was truth was vital breath (*prāṇa*). That which was *tapas* was the mind (*manas*). Their very food was light. They were one. Then, having been one, they became abundant with food and light. It became like a beehive (?) would be poured into cuttings.⁸ Motion verily in the same way. He observed, “Oh! Let me make vital breath below.” Then he made vital breath below, just as this space is below women, in the same way. From this, the waters were emitted with the sound, “*balabalabal*.” Then this abundance of water was surging. When they verily said, “This abundance of water verily was surging in the beginning,” these were those waters. The waves became steady, [with the sound] “*phāl phāl*.” Then the golden egg streamed out.

That which was one produced itself by means of a golden egg that eventually cracked open to create the earth and sky. The speech spoken as well as the state of that “one” at the moment of creation is referred to as *brahman*:

*tasya haritam adharaṃ kapālam āsīd rajatam uttaram |
tac chataṃ devasaṃvatsarāñ chayitvā nirbhidyam
abhavat sahasraṃ vā dyumnān | dyumnā ha nāma tarhy
apy āsuh | yāvān eṣa saṃvatsaram tāvantam
saṃvatsarasya pratimāḥ | dyumnair ha sma
saṃvatsaraṃ vijānānti | atha ha tataḥ purāhorātre
saṃśliṣṭe evāsatur avyākṛte | te u agnihotreṇaiva
vyākṛte | tad etayā vācā nirabhidyata sruvasthe sarāṇe
sanyau kapāle vijihāthām | kaṃ lokam abhi jāyā iti |
phaḥ ity evadam āñḍaṃ nirabhidyata | tasya yad
adharaṃ kapālam āsīt, seyaṃ pṛthivy abhavat | atha
yad uttaram āsīt, sāsau dyaur abhavat | atha yad antar
āsīt, yad idam antarikṣam abhavat | sa yām jāyamāno*

*vācam avadat, sa eva trayo vedo 'bhavat| yad
dhaivaiśāgre kiṃ ca devatā jāyamānovāda tad u ha
brahmaiva babhūva| sa aikṣatra – mahaiṃ va imāṃ
pratiṣṭhām asṛkṣīmān lokān| yad vā atas sraṅkṣye
vetsyate vai tat pratiṣṭhām| hanta srja iti| sa
manasātmānam adhyait| tasmin dvau drapsau
samabhavatāṃ vāsantikau māsau || JB 3.361*

It had a golden lower potsherd and a silvery upper one. Having rested for a hundred divine years, it became indivisible or consisting of a thousand powers. The powers indeed at that time remained under water. As much as this is the year, so much is the measure of the year. Through powers indeed they know the year. Now, before that, day and night stuck together only, unseparated.⁹ Those two were separated by the Agnihotra alone. That was divided through this speech. The two moving potsherds situated on the *sruva* spoon split apart.¹⁰ [Thinking,] “Well, may I be born to the world,” the egg broke open: “*pha!*.” Its lower potsherd became the earth. Then the upper potsherd became the sky. Then that which was in between became the intermediate space. Being born, whatever speech he spoke became the triple Veda. Whatever assuredly was in the beginning, that *devatā* being born spoke, that indeed was *brahman*. He observed, “I emitted this great firm foundation, these worlds. That which I will emit henceforth will know verily the firm foundation. Oh, may I be created.” He meditated on himself (*ātman*) in the mind. There two drops arose, the two spring months.

The line to pay attention to in *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.361 is, “Whatever assuredly was in the beginning, that *devatā* being born spoke, that indeed was *brahman*.” *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.380

narrates a different cosmology, but quotes this line verbatim near the end. Thus, the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* refers to the nondual whole at the point of creating itself as *brahman*.

Similarly, after quoting the entire “Nāsadiya Sūkta,” the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.8.9) decidedly remarks that *brāhman* was the original source of creation. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* appends the following details to *Ṛgveda* 10.129:

*kīm svid vānaṃ kā u sá vṛkṣá āsīt| yáto dyāvāpṛthivī
niṣṭatakṣúḥ| mánīṣiṇo mánasā pṛcchátéd u tát| yád
adhyátiṣṭhad bhúvanāni dhārāyan| brāhma vānaṃ
brāhma sá vṛkṣá āsīt| yáto dyāvāpṛthivī niṣṭatakṣúḥ |
mánīṣiṇo mánasā vibravīmi vaḥ |brāhmādhyátiṣṭhad
bhúvanāni dhārāyan| TB 2.8.9*

Pray, what was the wood and what was the tree from which they carved out heaven and earth? O you of inspired thinking, inquire through the mind about that on what he stood [=depended upon] while supporting the worlds. *Brāhman* was the wood and *brāhman* was the tree from which they carved out heaven and earth. O you of inspired thinking, through the mind I tell you: on *brāhman* he stood while supporting the worlds.¹¹

Brereton (1999: 259) explains, “Here the text has done what *Ṛgveda* 10.129 so carefully avoided. It has concluded with an answer to the questions about the origins of things by naming a fundamental principle. That principle is the *brāhman*, which is the verbal formulation of the truth.” Whereas Brereton considers *brāhman* to refer specifically to a “holy composition” or “verbal formulation of truth,” I corroborate that, following other cosmologies in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, the more abstract sense of the original creative impetus is also meant here. In this light, the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* too understands *brāhman* to be the absolute principle and source of everything.

In addition, the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* describes another cosmology in which nothing at all existed in the beginning and, moreover, whatever exists is *brāhman*.

*idám vā ágre náivá kímcanásīt| ná dyáur āsīt | ná
pr̥thivī| nāntárikṣam| tād ásad evá sán máno 'kuruta
syám íti| tād atapyata| tasmāt tepānād dhūmo 'jāyata|
tād bhūyo 'tapyata| tasmāt tepānād agnir ajāyata| tād
bhūyo átapyata... ásató 'dhi máno 'sṛjyata| mánaḥ
prajāpatiṃ asṛjata| prajāpatiḥ prajā asṛjata| tād vā
idám mánasy evá paramám prátiṣṭhitam| yád idám kīm
ca| tād etátsvovasyasám náma brāhma| TB 2.2.9*

In the beginning, this [world], verily nothing at all, existed. There was no sky. There was no earth. There was no intermediate space. Either existing or not existing, it made up its mind, [thinking,] “Would that I exist.” It toiled. From that one toiling, smoke was born. It toiled more. From that one toiling, Agni was born. It toiled more... . From the nonexistent (*ásat*), mind (*mánas*) was created. Mind created Prajāpati. Prajāpati created the creatures (*prajā*). Therefore that which is highest verily is established in the mind alone. Whatever there is, that indeed is *brāhman*, which bestows future welfare.

According to this passage, *brāhman* refers to everything, including what is created by an unnamed primordial being from itself through the practice of heating itself. In this context, *brāhman* is not limited to sacred utterances alone, but includes everything.

When seen from the perspective of these cosmologies in late Brāhmaṇa texts, *brāhman* appears as the self-existent, infinite ground of being familiar to Vedāntic thought. This similarity begs the question of the supposed division of Vedic genres suggested by F. Max Müller and others. Perhaps there is more overlap, more continuity of thought, between the Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka, and

Upaniṣadic genres than initially assumed by pioneering Indologists. This point, mentioned by Professor Thite many times during our reading sessions over the years, serves as just one example of the numerous things Professor Thite has taught me about the Brāhmaṇa texts from his masterful proficiency in this field. Michael Witzel (1989: 126) likewise reflects,

This level of texts [Brāhmaṇa prose] comprises the Brāhmaṇas proper, i.e. those of the RV, YV, SV and AV. Actually, it should be divided into two sub-levels, that of the earlier and that of the later Brāhmaṇas. On the other hand, the older Upaniṣads (like BAU, ChU, JUB) should be included here... The exact classification of all these texts is still a problem, one which has largely been unnoticed.

No doubt, further research in Middle and Late Vedic texts will reveal more clues about how to classify these texts and about the continuity and development of Vedic thought in them. From this paper it remains clear that the use of *brāhman* as a term for the absolute, ever connected to language, was prevalent in late Brāhmaṇa texts and, for this reason, was not a philosophical term (for the original, nondual source of everything) belonging to the Upaniṣads alone.

Abbreviations

AV	<i>Atharvaveda</i>
BĀU	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
ChU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
GB	<i>Gopatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
JB	<i>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
JUB	<i>Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa</i>
RV	<i>R̥gveda</i>
ŚBK	<i>Kāṇva Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
ŚBM	<i>Mādyandina Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
SV	<i>Sāmaveda</i>
SVB	<i>Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa</i>

TĀ	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TU	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
YV	<i>Yajurveda</i>

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Notes and References

- 1 This paper is dedicated to Professor G.U. Thite, whose patient guidance has led me deeper into the world of the Brahmaṇa texts. I am grateful to him for reading with me many of the passages translated here over the course of the last seven years. I have learned so much from this great scholar.
- 2 ŚBM 10.6.5.9: *naiveha kiṃ canāgra āsīt| mṛtyunaivedam āvṛtam āsīd aśanāyayāśanāya hi mṛtyus|*
- 3 Cf. BĀU 1.4.7, 1.6.1, 1.6.3. See also Oldenberg 1997: 41-3.
- 4 The idea is to create another being exactly like *brahman*.
- 5 The etymology given yields *put + tra = puttra*, which is meant to explain *putra* (son).
- 6 There is a word play in Sanskrit, which does not translate into English. The line begins *athārvān.*, “now on this side.” The combination of these words (*atha arvān*) sounds similar to *atharvan*, which is composed of *athar* (fire) and the *-vant* suffix (possessing).
- 7 See TU 3.1-6 in Olivelle 1998: 308-11.
- 8 This line (*yathā madhvaṣṭhī lāvāsv āsiktā*) does not make much sense. *Madhu* means honey, but I am not sure of the meaning of *aṣṭhī*. Perhaps the compound means beehive?
- 9 The word *ā/asatuḥ*, whose meaning is unclear, is not translated.
- 10 I am not sure what *sanyau* means either.
- 11 See also Brereton 1999: 259, upon which my translation is based.