

## Chapter - V

# PRAJĀPATI IN THE UPANIṢADIC LITERATURE

Prajāpati's exalted position which overpowered the whole range of the Brāhmaṇical literature has lost sight of in the principal Upaniṣads. We notice a new trend in the Upaniṣadic literature. All the individual gods are made subordinate to the concept of Brahman who is the Absolute and Ultimate Reality according to the Upaniṣadic literature. It teaches the unity of the Brahman and Ātman or the identity of the human Soul with the universal Self.<sup>1</sup>

The hymns of creation are the forerunners of the concept of monism in the Upaniṣads. The naive pantheism of the early Vedic Indian gave place to profound monism. No doubt, the gods played their part, but these were of lesser importance than the fundamental questions of the origins of this universe troubling the minds of these men. The enquiry was objective. Man was intrigued by nature, and when he found that he could not explain nature either by the postulation of divinities or by rational thinking he was lost in bewilderment. It is this that leads one smoothly into the speculative thinking of the Upaniṣads.

Ancient Aryan's conception of gods behind nature, his way of worship, his classification of the gods, his quest after unity among

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1. ayamātmā brahma /

Br.U., 4.4.5

them and his marked monotheistic tendencies, his search for the Supreme god, his ultimately rising to the transcendental Reality beyond all limitations-- in all these and many more of his religious striving can be perceived the dawn of the Indian Philosophy.

The ancient Aryans composed and sang the Vedic hymns to praise some superhuman invisible beings and to get a glimpse into the original fervour. The hymns are those of the Saṁhitās and the rituals are described in the Brāhmaṇas. The quest of the worshippers, who propitiated the gods through the rituals for their mercy or boon, had developed the conception of a superhuman nature behind it. When the Aryans saw the phenomena of nature – clouds' gathering, lightning, flashing, the sun rising and setting, the moon waxing and waning etc., – their simple faith made them believe in the existence of a conscious agent, called a *deva* or god, behind each of these phenomena.

Gradually, the Aryans accepted the existence of devas or gods, who, in later philosophical development, are considered to be the manifestation of one god, whom they called the Supreme Brahman.<sup>2</sup> The transcendental Reality, which is beyond all limitations of the universe, is described in the *R̥gveda* as '*ekam sad*' or 'That Real'.<sup>3</sup> This conception gave rise to the thinking of a non-dual Reality, which is best developed and most clearly expressed to acquire the conception of the Supreme Brahman. The absolute as the transcendental Reality

2. katyeva devāḥ yājñavalkyetyeka ityomiti hovāca / .Ibid., 3.9.1

3. ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadantyagnim yamaṁ mātariśvānamāhuḥ /

R.V., 1.164.46

is described in many typical passages of the Upaniṣads.<sup>4</sup>

The word used in the Upaniṣads to indicate the Supreme Reality is 'Brahman'. It is derived from the root *br̥mh*, 'to grow', 'to increase'. Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary to the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* clearly states-- '*br̥mhati br̥mhayati tasmāducyate param brahmeti*'.<sup>5</sup> Brahman is the all-pervading soul and spirit of the universe from which all created things are produced. Thus, the term Brahman suggests ceaseless growth, i.e. *br̥hattva* which means vastness. Śaṅkarācārya also categorically states-- '*br̥hattamatvād brahma*'.<sup>6</sup> Madhvācārya explains the term Brahman, the person whom the qualities dwell in fullness, '*br̥hanto hyasmin guṇāḥ*'.<sup>7</sup>

The Upaniṣadic literature describes Brahman thus-- 'Brahman is that from which all the material things have appeared, that which supports all these created things and that to which everything goes finally.'<sup>8</sup>

Brahman is that which is formless and which is *Satya*;<sup>9</sup> Brahman is that which is without fear;<sup>10</sup> Brahman is that which is Truth (*Satya*),

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4. (i) sa hovāca, etad vai tad akṣaram...asthūlarṁ, anaṇu.../ Br.U., 3.8.8-11

(ii) yad arcimad yad aṇubhyo'ṇuca...tad etad akṣaram brahma.../

Mu.U., 2.2.2

5. Śaṅkara on Śvet.U., 1.1

6. Śaṅkara on T.U., 2.1

7. cf. Radhakrishnan, S., *The Principal Upaniṣads*, p.52

8. yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyate yena jātāni jīvanti/  
yatprayantya bhisamviśanti/  
tadvijijñāsasva/ tadbrahmeti/

T.U., 3.1

9. yadamūrta tatsatyam tad brahma/

Mai.U., 5.3

10. abhayaṁ vai brahma/

Br.U., 4.4.25

Knowledge (*Jñāna*), and Infiniteness (*Ananta*);<sup>11</sup> Brahman is eternal (*Nitya*) and bliss (*Ānanda*).<sup>12</sup> The Ātman is also regarded as Brahman.<sup>13</sup> Brahman is the single entity and is without a second; hence it is said– ‘Brahman was one in the beginning and it became everything’;<sup>14</sup> ‘Brahman is single without a second, multiplicity does not exist in Brahman’;<sup>15</sup> ‘Brahman is *Amṛta* (immortal) and pervades all directions’.<sup>16</sup>

All that comes out of the above discussion is that the single one (*ekam*) which *Rgveda* refers to,<sup>17</sup> is the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. He is both the efficient and material cause of this universe. The following statements indicate that the universe is established in Brahman – ‘Brahman is the seat of establishment of everything’; ‘The whole universe is established in Brahman’.<sup>18</sup> Brahman was there before all these material things came into existence.<sup>19</sup> He knows the highest place of Brahman, where the universe is put and shines brightly.<sup>20</sup> No distinction is made between Brahman and this

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| 11. | satyaṁ jñānāmanantaṁ brahma/                                       | T.U., 2.1      |
| 12. | nityānandamayāṁ brahma/  | Ibid., 6.72    |
| 13. | ayamātmā brahma/   | Mn.U., 2       |
| 14. | brahma vā idamagra āsīttadātmānamevāvet/                           | Br.U., 1.4.10  |
| 15. | sadeva soumyedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam/                          | Chā.U., 6.2.1  |
| 16. | brahmaivedamamṛtaṁ purastād brahma paścāddakṣiṇataścontareṇa/      | Mu.U., 2.2.11  |
| 17. | ekaṁ sad viprā bahudhā vadantyagniṁ yamaṁ mātariśvānamāhuḥ /       | R.V., 1.164.46 |
| 18. | tasmillokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tadu nātyeti kaścan/                      | Kaṭh.U., 2.5.8 |
| 19. | sadeva soumyedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam/                          | Chā.U., 6.2.1  |
| 20. | sa vedait paramaṁ brahma dhāma yatra viśvaṁ nihitaṁ bhāti śubhram/ | Mu.U., 3.2.1   |

universe which is evident in the following statements – ‘Brahman is this whole world’;<sup>21</sup> ‘Everything is Brahman’;<sup>22</sup> ‘What all we see here is Brahman’.<sup>23</sup>

Prajāpati is otherwise known as Brahman in the Upaniṣadic literature. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* states – ‘eṣa prajāpatiryaddhr̥ḥdayametadbrahmaitat’.<sup>24</sup> While explaining the relevant passage, Śaṅkarācārya has commented that Prajāpati is called Brahman because he is great and he is the soul of all the creatures. He is the creator of the mankind.<sup>25</sup> All the gods and the demons are the descendants of Prajāpati. For obvious reasons the gods were indeed few in number and the demons more numerous. They rivalled each other for the ownership of these worlds. The gods intended to defeat the demons through the Udgītha in the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice.<sup>26</sup> Here, by the words descendants are meant the organs of speech, hearing etc. They signify both gods and demons. When the organs think and act properly according to the scriptural injunctions to gain spiritual ends, they are called gods. On the other hand, the organs become demons

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| 21. | brahmaivedaṁ viśvamideṁ variṣṭham/  | Ibid., 2.2.11  |
| 22. | sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma/  | Chā.U., 3.14.1 |
| 23. | brahmaivedaṁ sarvam/  | Nṛsm.U., 7.3   |
| 24. | Bṛ.U., 5.3.1  |                |
| 25. | prajāpatiḥ prajānāṁ sraṣṭā/ etad brahma bṛhatvāt sarvātmatvācca brahma/   | Śaṅkara, Ibid. |
| 26. | dvayā ha prajāpatyā devāśvāsuraśca/ tataḥ kānīyasā eva devā jyāyasā<br>asuraṣṭa eṣu lokeṣvaspardhanta te ha devā ūcurhantāsurānyajña<br>udgīthenātyayāmeti/ | Ibid., 1.3.1   |

when their actions and thoughts are directed to secular ends.<sup>27</sup>

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Prajāpati is identified with the Āditya, i.e. the Sun.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere in the *Upaniṣad*, the Sun is said to be the offspring of Prajāpati.<sup>29</sup> He is called Prajāpati as he protects all the creatures.<sup>30</sup> Prajāpati is stated as sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> Puruṣa, the ultimate support of the universe, is identified with progeny and its deity, i.e. cause is Prajāpati, the father.<sup>32</sup> The three-fold offspring of Prajāpati are – gods, men and Asuras, and they earnestly follow Prajāpati, their father as religious students.<sup>33</sup> Prajāpati is stated to rest in the mother's womb.<sup>34</sup>

In the Upaniṣadic literature, Prajāpati is stated as the creator of the universe.<sup>35</sup> The *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* states that Prajāpati (Virāj) created the organs. These, after being created, competed with

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27. ke te/ devāścāsuraśca/ tasyaiva prajāpateḥ prāṇā vāgādayaḥ/ katharṁ  
punasteṣāṁ devāśuratvam/ ucyate— śāsrajanitajñākarmabhāvitā  
dyotanāddevā bhavanti/ ta eva svābhāvikapratyakṣānumājanitadṛṣ-  
ṭaprayojanakarmajñānabhāvitā asurāḥ/ Śāṅkara, Ibid.
28. prajāpatiḥ savitā/ Chā.U., 1.12.5
29. sūrya prajāpatya/ Īśa.U., 16
30. prajāpatiḥ pālanāt prajānām/ Śāṅkara on Chā.U., 1.12.5
31. yajñāḥ prajāpatiriti/ Bṛ.U., 3.9.6
32. puruṣaṁ sarvasyātmanaḥ parāyaṇaṁ yamātha ya evāyaṁ putramayaḥ  
puruṣaḥ sa eṣa vadaiva śākalya tasya kā devateti prajāpatiriti/  
Ibid., 3.9.17
33. trayāḥ prajāpatyaḥ prajāpatou pitari brahmacaryamūṣurdevā manuṣyā  
asurā/ Ibid., 5.2.1
34. prajāpatiścarasi garbhe/ Pra.U., 2.7
35. prajāpatirivā eko'gre'tiṣṭhatsa nāramataikaḥ sotmānamabhidhyātvā bahvīḥ  
prajā asṛjat/ Mai.U., 2.6

one another. The organ of speech resolved that it would go on speaking. The eye said that it would see. The ear stated that it would hear. So did the other organs according to their functions. Death seized them in the form of exhaustion. It overtook and then restrained them. Therefore, the vocal organ, the eye and the ear got tired. But death could not overtake the vital force in the body. The other organs resolved to know it and they realized that this verily is the real thing. They all assumed its form alone. Hence they are called by its name of *Prāṇa*.<sup>36</sup>

Water was, at first, this world. Water indicates here the unmanifested state of the world, before its creation, together with the creator; therefore it is the seed of all creation. Water created truth. Truth is Brahman, Brahman created Prajāpati, Prajāpati created the gods.<sup>37</sup> Prajāpati brooded on the worlds. From them, thus brooded upon, the threefold knowledge issued forth. He pondered on this. And from this, thus pondered upon, issued forth the syllables *bhūh*, *bhuvah* and *svah*.<sup>38</sup> In his commentary, Śaṅkarācārya elaborates the idea that Prajāpati, i.e. Kaśyapa or Virāj, in order to draw the essence of the worlds brooded upon, i.e. performed austerity in the form of meditation.

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36. prajāpatirha karmāṇi sarje...sarve rūpambhavamstasmādeta  
etanākhyāyante prāṇa iti/ Br.U., 1.5.21
37. āpa evedamagra āsustā āpaḥ satyamasrjanta satyaṁ brahma brahma  
prajāpatiṁ prajāpatirdevāṁste/ Ibid., 5.5.1
38. prajāpatirlokānabhyatapattebhyo'bhītaptebhyastrayī vidyā  
saṁprāsraṇavattāmabhyatapatasyā abhitaptāyā etānyakṣarāṇi  
saṁprāsraṇavanta bhūrbhuvah svariti/ Chā.U., 2.23.2

From these, thus brooded upon, their essence, the threefold knowledge issued forth, i.e. appeared in the mind of Prajāpati. He brooded upon this as before. From this thus brooded upon, these syllables issued forth, i.e. the vyāhrtis, *bhūh*, *bhuvah* and *svah*.<sup>39</sup>

As a creator, it is noted that Prajāpati thought of himself to provide him a firm basis. So he created woman and then resorted to her.<sup>40</sup> The *Aitareya Upaniṣad* identifies Prajāpati as Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. It is stated that Prajāpati is Brahman. Prajāpati, who is recognized as the Supreme Brahman is none other than Indra and he is all the gods.<sup>41</sup> Śaṅkarācārya in his commentary on the relevant passage has stated that Prajāpati is the first-born and all the Lokapālas such as Agni and others are produced from his body.<sup>42</sup>

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* also extols Prajāpati as Brahman and states that the Brahman is indeed, Agni, Āditya, Vāyu and Candramas; and he is the pure shining one, the Brahman, the water

39. prajāpatirvirāt kaśyapo vā lokānuddiśya teṣu sārājighṛkṣayābhyatapa-  
dabhitāpaṁ kṛtavāndhyānaṁ tapaḥ kṛtavānityarthah/ tebhyo'bhīptebhyaḥ  
sārabhūtā traī vidyā samprasravatprajāpatermanasi pratyabhādityarthah/  
tāmabhyatapat pūrvavat/ tasyā abhitaptāyā etānyakṣarāṇi samprāsravanta  
bhūrbhuvah svariti vyāhṛtayah/ Śaṅkara, Ibid.
40. sa ha prajāpatirīkṣaṁcakre hantāsmāi pratiṣṭhāṁ kalpayānīti sa striyaṁ  
sasṛje tām sṛṣṭvā' dha upāsta/ Bṛ.U., 6.4.2
41. eṣa brahmaiṣa indra eṣa prajāpatirete sarve devā/ A.U., 5.3
42. eṣa prajāpatirya prathamajaḥ śārīrī/ yato mukhādinirbhedadvāreṇāgn-  
yādayo lokapālā jātāḥ sa prajāpatireṣa eva/

Śaṅkara, Ibid.

and Prajāpati.<sup>43</sup> The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* also reiterates the same idea which states that Brahman is Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya, Candra, Śukra, Amṛta, the waters and Prajāpati.<sup>44</sup> In the same *Upaniṣad*, it is also stated that Prajāpati is the first-born.<sup>45</sup> He is the endless source of bliss (*Ānanda*) – ‘one hundred units of Bṛhaspati’s joy make the joy of Prajāpati’.<sup>46</sup> This reminds the character of Brahman – ‘*ānando brahmeti vyajānāt*’.<sup>47</sup>

All the vowels are the parts of Indra’s body and all sibilants are the parts of Prajāpati.<sup>48</sup> It is also said that Prajāpati is the syllable ‘*him*,’ for Prajāpati cannot be defined and the syllable ‘*him*’, too, is indistinct.<sup>49</sup> If any one would censure him for his sibilants, he should tell him that he had taken refuge in Prajāpati and he would ruin him.<sup>50</sup>

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43. tadevāgnistadādityastadvāyustadu candramāḥ /  
tadeva śukraṁ tadbrahma tadāpastamprajāpatiḥ // Śvet.U., 4.2
44. tadevāgnistadvāyustatsūryastada candramāḥ /  
tadeva śukramamṛtaṁ tadāpaḥ sa prajāpatiḥ // Mn.U., 1.7
45. parītya lokānparītya bhūtāni parītya sarvāḥ pradiśo diśasca /  
prajāpatiḥ prathamajā ṛtasyātmanātmānamabhisambabhūva // Ibid., 2.7
46. te ye śataṁ bṛhaspaterānandāḥ sa ekaḥ prajāpaterānandāḥ / T.U., 2.8.4
47. Ibid., 3.6
48. sarve śvarā indrasyātmānaḥ sarva uṣmānaḥ prajāpaterātmānaḥ sarve  
sparśa mṛtyorātmānastaṁ yadi svareṣūpālabhetendraṁ śaraṇaṁ  
prapanno’bhūvaṁ sa tvā prati vakṣyatotyenaṁ brūyāt / Chā.U., 2.22.3
49. prajāpatirhiṅkāraḥ/ āniruktyāddhiṅkārasya cāvvyaktatvāt/  
Śaṅkara, Ibid.
50. atha yadyenamūṣmasūpalabheta prajāpatiṁ śaraṇaṁ prapanno’bhūvaṁ sa  
tvā prati pekṣyatītyenaṁ brūyāt / Ibid., 2.22.4

Prajāpati brooded over the world and from them, thus brooded over, he extracted their essences. From the earth he squeezed fire, from the sky, air; and from the heaven, the sun. Then again, he brooded over the three deities and from these too, he extracted the essence in the form of the three Vedas. Again he brooded over the three Vedas and from them he extracted the three vyāhṛtis, *bhūh*, *bhuvah*, and *svah*.<sup>51</sup>

Prajāpati is the *hṛdaya*, he is Brahman and he is the all. *Hṛdaya* consists of three syllables. The first syllable is 'hr', which means that the senses and the rest perform their works. The second syllable is 'da', which means the senses and the rest bestow power on him. The third syllable is 'ya' and thereby it is meant that he, who thus knows, proceeds to heaven, his place.<sup>52</sup> Śāṅkarācārya states that the term '*hṛdaya*' here means '*hṛdayasthā buddhiḥ*'.<sup>53</sup>

Prajāpati is the presiding deity over time. He is described as the year and has sixteen digits. The lunar days are his fifteen digits, and his sixteenth digit is verily fixed. He, as the moon, waxes and wanes through the lunar days. Through the above sixteenth digit he pervades all these living beings on the new moon night, and arises

51. prajāpatirlokānabhyatapatteṣāṁ tapyamāvānāṁ rasānprāvṛhadagniṁ  
pṛthivyā vāyumantarikṣādādityaṁ divāḥ..../ Ibid., 4.17.1-3

52. eṣa prajāpatiryaddhṛdayameta brahmaitat sarvaṁ tadetatryakṣaraṁ  
hṛdayamiti hr ityekamakṣaraṁabhiharantyaasmai svāścānyai ca ya evaṁ  
veda da ityekamakṣaraṁ dadatysmai svāścānye ca ya evaṁ veda yamitye  
kamakṣarameti svargaṁ lokaṁ ya evaṁ veda/ Br.U., 5.3.1

53. Śāṅkara, Ibid.

from there in the morning. Therefore, in honour of this very deity, one should not, on this night, snatch the life of any living being, not even of a chameleon.<sup>54</sup> In the *Praśna Upaniṣad* also, it is stated that Prajāpati is the year. In the year there are two movements of the sun, the one towards the south and the other towards the north.<sup>55</sup> Prajāpati is also described as month. Its dark half is *rayi*, the bright half is *prāṇa*.<sup>56</sup> He is the day and night. What is his day, is *prāṇa*, what is his night, is *rayi*.<sup>57</sup> Prajāpati is described as food. From it is produced the semen and out of it all beings are born.<sup>58</sup> It is also stated that Prajāpati desired progeny; therefore, he practised *tapas* and thereafter he created

54. sa eṣa saṁvatsaraḥ prajāpatiḥ ṣoḍaśakalastasya rātraya eva pañcadaśakalā  
dhruvaivāsya ṣoḍaśī kalā sa rātribhirevā ca pūryate' pa ca kṣīyate  
so' māvāsmān rātrimetayā ṣoḍśyā kalayā sarvamidaṁ  
prāṇabhṛdanupravisya tataḥ prātarjāyate tasmadetaṁ rātrim prāṇabhṛtaḥ  
prāṇaṁ na vicchindyādapi kṛkalāsasyaitasyā eva devatāya apacityai.

Ibid., 1.5.14

55. saṁvatsaro vai prajāpatistasyāyane dakṣiṇaṁ ca/ tadye ha vai tadiṣṭāpūrte  
kṛtamityupāste te cāndramasameva lokamabhijayante/ ta eva  
punarāvartante tasmādete ṛsayāḥ prajākāmā dakṣiṇaṁ pratiyante/ eṣa ha  
vai rayiryāḥ pitryāṇaḥ/

Pra.U., 1.9

56. māso vai prajāpatistasya kṛṣṇapakṣa eva rayiḥ śuklaḥ prāṇastasmādete  
ṛsayāḥ śukla iṣṭaṁ kurvantītara itarasmin/

Ibid., 1.12

57. ahorātro vai prajāpatistasyāhareva prāṇo rātrireva rayiḥ/

Ibid., 1.13

58. annaṁ vai prajāpatistato ha vai tadretastsmādimāḥ prajāḥ prajāyanta iti/

Ibid., 1.14

a pair, namely *rayi* and *prāṇa*. Then, Prajāpati expected that both of them would create for him manifold progeny.<sup>59</sup>

The *Praśna Upaniṣad* deals with six questions (praśnas), which are put by six explorers of Brahman to the wise Pippalāda, with six main points of the *Vedānta* doctrine. The first question, from where the beings originate, serves only as an occasion to divide nature, as the product of Prajāpati, into two parts: *rayi*(matter) and *prāṇa*(life). Under the first part the dark side of the world is grouped, viz. the moon, the winter, the dark half of the month, the night; while under the later part the bright side of the world is grouped, viz. the sun, the summer, the bright half of the month, and the day.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Prajāpati is treated as the creator of the universe. All the creative activities are attributed to Prajāpati. He is also extolled in the Upaniṣads as the preserver of the universe. Prajāpati is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

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59. prajākāmo vai prajāpatiḥ sa tapo'tapyat sa tapastaptvā sa  
mithunamutpādayate/ rayim ca prāṇam cetyetou me bahudhā prajāḥ  
kariṣyata iti/ Ibid., 1.4

60. Ibid., 1