



The Presence of Śiva

STELLA KRAMRISCH

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GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

Vowels should be pronounced as in Italian; a lengthening sign as in ā indicates a long vowel; e and o are always long; ṛ in Sanskrit is a vowel and should be pronounced similar to the ri in ring; c should be pronounced as in church, j as in joy; ś and ṣ similar to sh in ship; h after a consonant should be pronounced distinctly as the th in hot-house.

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The Presence of Śiva

I

THE PRIMORDIAL SCENE

1. RAUDRA BRAHMAN

His name is not uttered. It must not be mentioned; only indirectly is He to be referred to (*AB*.3.34).

A hymn of the *Rg Veda* (*RV*.10.61), the most sacred and most ancient work of Indian religious tradition, begins by calling itself a “wild creation” or “a poem about the Wild God” (*raudra brahman*) (*RV*.10.61.1). The hymn knows whom it evokes by these words, for His presence is in these words. In the lucid frenzy of the images of the hymn He arises and abides.

It is when time is about to begin. In the dawn of the world, when the black cow of cosmic night lies with the ruddy cows of morning (*RV*.10.61.4), two figures appear, the Father and the virgin daughter, his own daughter. They are the two actors in the primordial scene. The Father makes love to the daughter. Suddenly he pulls back, his seed falls down to earth, the place of sacrifice (*RV*.10.61.5-7). “In their concern the gods created a poem, a word of power (*brahman*) and out of this they gave shape to Vāstoṣpati, the guardian of the dwelling, the guardian of sacred order (*vrataṣpā*)” (*RV*.10.61.7). “Like a raging bull did the Father foam, running this way and that way and away with scant understanding. Like one rejected she sped south” (*RV*.10.61.8), into cosmic night. In spite of this mishap or on account of it, soon the patter was heard on earth of the progeny of the Father (*RV*.10.61.9).¹

Creation is an act of violence that infringes upon the Uncreate, the

¹ Different interpretations of this hymn have been proposed. Cf. *Rg Veda Saṃhitā* (*RV*), tr. Geldner, 1951, 3:225-28.

undifferentiated wholeness that is before the beginning of things. And yet another act of violence is hinted at, and this act is kept secret in these wild and portentous *mantras*. He is implied, for it is He who is invoked in this hymn. He, the most powerful, who with the arrow in his hand hit the target (*RV.10.61.3*). The Father was made to pull back from the creative act that was to be prevented or undone by Him, yet lead to the existence of life on earth. Without revealing their source, sparks of meaning flare up in tense brevity in the *raudra brahman*.

A hymn to Agni, the Fire (*RV.1.71*), sheds light on His nature whose name the *raudra brahman* withholds. This hymn celebrates Agni, who had prepared the seed for Father Heaven. But when Agni noticed the lust of the Father for his daughter, this hunter crept along, then boldly shot his arrow at the Father just when he was quenching his desire in his daughter. The hunter had aimed at the creative act itself. Father Heaven shed his seed. It fell to earth. Agni, the Fire, brought to life the Father's progeny, the benevolent host of immaculate Fire-youths (*RV.1.71.5, 8*).

Fire is a hunter. The flame creeps along, lashes out, it hits the victim with its dart. The arrow of Agni strikes the Father in his passionate embrace of the daughter. But Agni's heat had also ripened the seed in the Father. Foaming in hot fury when he is struck by the fiery arrow, the Father spills his seed on the earth, the site of sacrifice, where it will sprout in the splendor of the immaculate and benevolent Fire-youths, the host of the Aṅgirasas, Agni's priests.

The ambiguity of Agni is the ambiguity of fire itself, which both sustains and destroys life. But inasmuch as the Father is the object of this ambiguity, Agni is the name of the hunter who is but a mask of Him whose name is withheld and to whom the gods, the celestial intelligence, in compassionate insight give shape as Vāstoṣpati, the guardian of the dwelling, the guardian of divine law (*vratapā*). They carved (*ataṣan*)²—this is the literal translation—this shape out of the poem (*brahman*) while they created it (*RV.10.61.7*). By their wording of the sacred *mantra* His shape arose in its meter, and the vision took form in the rhythm of the words of this *raudra brahman*, this wild, fierce hymn of the god whose name it hides while he is seen as he

² M. Mayrhofer, *Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*, s.v. *taṣati*.

arises in his unfathomable nature and paradoxical shape as guardian of sacred order, lord of *vāstu*.

The mystery of creation in this simultaneity of manifestations begins with a fateful shot, the wound it inflicts on the Father, the loss of his seed, its fall to earth, and the birth of the poem and of mankind to be. In the beginning is the word sung by the gods, the celestial intelligence, compassionate witnesses of primal passion and of the deed of the hunter. The mystery of the *raudra brahman* embraces the cosmic creative act together with the form-engendering creation of the poem. The *brahman* tells of the mystery and at the same time tells of its mode of telling. It shrouds and at the same time conveys His name in the form it gives to him by calling itself a *raudra brahman*, a wild creation, or Rudraic creation, for this poem and the creation are of Rudra, the Wild God. *Raudra*, an adjective from Rudra, means wild, of Rudra nature.³ Rudra as the name of the god would signify “the Wild One” or “the Fierce God.” According to later Vedic tradition, however, the word Rudra is derived from *rud*, to cry, howl (*TS*.1.5.1.1; *MS*.4.2.12; *ŚB*.6.1.3.10). While the words of the *mantras* conjure up the primordial action and evoke the entire myth, they also carry the effect of this action on the gods, that is, on the evoking consciousness. Reflected in that consciousness, the action acquires the form of the poem. In this transmutation the main actor, whose name is withheld because his action and its effect on his victim fully identify him, arises not as Fire, not as Wild Archer, but as Vāstoṣpati, guardian of the dwelling and guardian of sacred order (*vratapā*). In this shape he emerges from the poem of magic power, the *brahman*. Poetry in the sacred order of its meters is his domain. Therein the fire of the Wild Archer sustains the form. Vāstoṣpati, created by the gods, the celestial intelligence, is the guardian of his domain, the world of sacred order—a rhythmic structure that is art, a cosmos. These are *vāstu*, the house that he guards.

Thus His world comes about. The double meaning of the word *raudra* is intentional: the poem is about Rudra, the wild, formidable god, and it is itself a fiercely wild creation charged with many meanings. They emerge from other hymns, are made more explicit in later texts, and are basic to the cosmos of Rudra, which has its image in myths

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. *rudra*.

and the visual arts. In these two modes of form the mystery of this god has left its imprint over the millennia on the resilient matrix of the Indian mind. The unnamed god evoked in the scene of violence and awe in the primordial moment of the creation of man—when time was about to begin—is the main actor, although he does not figure in the scene. The gods, the collective celestial intelligence, watch the scene and in their concern they turn it into a mantric poem from which the unnamed god arises as Vāstoṣpati, the guardian of sacred order (*vratapā*). Vāstoṣpati means guardian of the *vāstu*, and *vāstu* means both site and dwelling or house.⁴

The Wild Hunter in the precosmic wilderness is Rudra. In the form of their poem, a magic creation (*brahman*), the gods give shape to him as Vāstoṣpati. The *vāstu* that he guards is the cosmos, the site that is his domain is the site of the sacrifice. The sacred order of the cosmos is enacted on the site of the sacrifice in the rhythm of rites and hymns. They are analogous to the rhythms that pervade the cosmos.

2. THE LORD OF ANIMALS

The primordial, paradigmatic myth of Rudra is told in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* of the *Black Yajurveda*. Father Heaven, henceforth acting under the name of Prajāpati, Lord of Generation, desired his daughter Uṣas, the Dawn. She became a female antelope, he became an antelope⁵ and pursued her. While he was taking his perverse pleasure in her, he suddenly turned around toward one who was aiming his arrow at him. Addressing the Archer, Prajāpati in fear exclaimed: “I make you Lord of the Animals (*paśūnām pati*).” “Leave me.” Thus his name is Paśupati, Lord of Animals. The first seed that fell was surrounded by fire produced by Agni (*MS.4.2.12*) (cf. Paśupā: *RV. 1.114.9*; cf. *TS.3.1.5.1*).

Thus he came to be, and everything in existence. When he ap-

⁴ V. S. Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v.

⁵ The animals are *ṛśya* and *rohiṇī*. *Ṛśya* is the male of a species of antelope. *Rohiṇī* connotes a red cow or “a young girl in whom menstruation has just commenced” (Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v.). The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (*AB.3.33*) speaks of *mṛga* and *rohiṇī*. *Mṛga* denotes a wild animal, deer, or antelope. The ritual significance of the black antelope (*kṛṣṇamṛga*) suggests that it was this animal whose shape Prajāpati had taken (*Ch. X.A.2.d*). The shape of Uṣas, the Dawn, would be that of a female antelope.