

UPANAYANA

There has been some controversial discussion on the exact meaning of the term *upanayana*. Whereas Stenzler¹ seems to have understood it to denote the introduction of a pupil to his teacher by the father — he translated *ĀsvGS.* 1, 19, 1 *aṣṭame varṣe brāhmaṇam upanayet* « im achten Jahre soll er den Brāhmaṇa (beim Lehrer) einführen » — Oldenberg² argued in favour of the interpretation « (the teacher) introduces (the pupil) to the *brahmacarya* or introduces him with himself ». However, in *Religion des Veda* by the same scholar³ the term is explained as « Einführung beim Lehrer ». Like Hillebrandt⁴, who speaks of « Schulaufnahme » and « Aufnahme beim Lehrer », Keith⁵ seems to have followed Oldenberg's earlier explanation: « a *brahman* child... should be received as a student by a teacher » but Renou⁶ obviously preferred Stenzler's interpretation: « l'introduction auprès du précepteur ». So did von Glasenapp⁷: « die Einführung beim Lehrer ». Other authors⁸ use the brief term « initiation » which leaves the moot question undecided. Recently, Ch. Sen⁹, after explaining « the rite of

1. A. F. STENZLER, *Indische Hausregeln*, vol. I, 2, Leipzig, 1865, p. 46.

2. H. OLDENBERG, *The Ṛgveda-Sūtras translated*, vol. I, S.B.E. 29, Oxford, 1886 (Delhi, 1964), p. 58 f.

3. H. OLDENBERG, *Die Religionen des Veda*, Berlin, 1894, ³1923, p. 464; 607. Cf. also the ambiguous formulation p. 130 « wenn der heranwachsende Knabe zum Lehrer gebracht wurde, der ihn in die Kunde des Veda einführen sollte »; and the translations p. 340 « Schüleraufnahme »; p. 407 « Schülerweihe ».

4. A. HILLEBRANDT, *Ritualliteratur*, Strassburg, 1897, p. 50, referring to OLDENBERG, S.B.E. 29, p. 58.

5. A. B. KEITH, *The religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Cambridge Mass., 1925, p. 369.

6. L. RENO (and J. FILLIOZAT), *L'Inde classique*, vol. I, Paris, 1947, p. 364.

7. H. VON GLASENAPP, *Die Religionen Indiens*, Stuttgart, 1943, p. 91.

8. Among them A. L. BASHAM, *The wonder that was India*, London, 1954 (1956), p. 161.

9. CH. SEN, *Dictionary of Vedic rituals*, Delhi, 1978, p. 137.

initiation in which he (a boy) symbolically is led near his teacher » and quoting the irrelevant place HirGS. 1, 5, 2 (see below), observes « or, probably, he is ushered by initiation into the next stage of life » which, as will be shown below, can hardly be regarded as the original or proper meaning of the term.

A double explanation was, likewise unconvincingly, also proposed by Kane¹⁰: « The word *upanayana* can be derived and explained in two ways: (1) taking (the boy) near the *ācārya*, (2) that rite by which the boy is taken to the *ācārya* ». The at first sight non-existent difference between these two meanings is, according to the author, the following: « the first sense appears to have been the original one and when an extensive ritual came to be associated with *upanayana* the second came to be the sense of the word ». However, the assumption of an « original » or earlier pre-ritual, so to say profane, *upanayana* which in course of time came to be a ritual is mere speculation and in the light of what is known of the religious ideas and practices of archaic, (semi-) primitive and prehistoric man, hardly acceptable: « Whatever there is in life that is variable or contingent is forced into definite, stereotyped and diversified rites as much as is at all possible »¹¹. « All pre-modern, traditional societies accord primary importance to the ideology and technique of initiation »¹². This is of course not to deny that formerly the ritual may have been simpler than or different from that which is described in the *grhyasūtras*.

Nor should we follow Pandey¹³ in regarding the different aspects of this *saṃskāra* as successive stages of a process of development: « initiation of a boy by a teacher into sacred lore », later on, « second birth through the *sāvitrī* », in still later times, « only in physical sense, i.e. taking the pupil near the teacher by his guardians »; finally, « its educational sense has departed altogether ». This author has failed to notice that the authorities whose « explanations » he quotes in substantiation of his view — and who, it is true, were no contemporaries — did not in the places adduced deal with all the aspects of the institution exhaustively but drew attention to no more than one or two of these aspects or confined themselves to a brief definition. He is moreover mistaken in assuming that originally education was the main purpose of this *saṃskāra* and ritual no more than « an ancillary item », and that in course of time the performance of the ritual... « became the chief object and education a secondary one ». It may be true that according to Yājñavalkya 1, 15 the teaching of the Veda was « the highest object of the *upanayana* », what this authority says is that a *guru* should not give instruction in the Scriptures without having performed the

10. P. V. KANE, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. II, Poona, 1941, p. 269.

11. G. VAN DER LEEUW, *Religion in essence and manifestation*, London, 1938, p. 192.

12. M. ELIADE, *Birth and rebirth. The religious meanings of initiation in human culture*, New York, 1958, p. IX f.

13. R. B. PANDEY, *Hindu saṃskāras*, Banaras, 1949, p. 194 ff.

act denoted by the verb *upa-nī-* (*upanīya guruḥ śiṣyaṃ... vedam adhyāpayed enam*), not that the latter act is wholly or almost devoid of ritual significance. Nor does Āpastamba's statement (DhS. 1, 1, 9) « *upanayana* is the *saṃskāra* of (for) a male person desirous of (sacred) knowledge » imply that *upanayana* can not or hardly be called a ritual; it is explicitly said to be one, viz. a *saṃskāra*, but it is the *saṃskāra* for one desirous of instruction, not for the man who wishes to marry etc.¹⁴

After quoting Oldenberg's observations in S.B.E. 29 V.M. Apte¹⁵ expressed the opinion that the German scholar has been « making much ado about a simple point ». « *Upanayana* » he argues, « literally means "drawing or carrying or leading near" and it matters but little who leads the boy-pupil to his teacher; the teacher himself or a relation of the boy ». This argument is untenable. First, we should always try to interpret the texts as completely and exactly as possible, and to elicit the maximum of information, the truth from reluctant sources; secondly, from the ritual point of view it matters much who leads the boy, his father or the *guru*, and to whom or to what he is led.

So what do the texts teach us? There can be no doubt that *upa-nī-* means « to lead or bring near », often especially « ... to something or somebody (regarded as) "higher" »: « to lead up to », « to lead in a modest, more or less submissive, polite, respectful way »; cf., e.g., *upa-sthā-* « to place oneself near, to adore or worship whilst standing erect »; *upa-ās-* « to sit near in order to honour or wait upon; to worship or adore (in sitting position) »; *upa-sev-* « to serve, do homage, honour »; *upa-ni-ṣad-* « to sit down (e.g., or especially) at the feet of a teacher »¹⁶. See e.g. RV. 2, 3, 10... *nayatu... devébhyo daívyah śamitópa havyám* « the divine preparer (Agni) must lead the oblation (respectfully) up to the gods »; MS. 4, 13, 4: 203, 7; KS. 16, 21: 244, 9; ĀpŚS. 4, 7, 2; BhŚS. 4, 10, 1. The active verb *upanayet* is at ĀśvGS. 1, 19, 1 and PG. 2, 2, 1 probably used of the father who is enjoined to bring his son (in his eighth year, if he is a brahmin) to a teacher (... *brāhmaṇam upanayet*): as is well known these anonymous injunctions are in these texts usually addressed to the householder who has to perform the domestic rites or is responsible for the performance. Thus it is clear that the subject of *saṃpreṣyati* in ĀśvGS. 1, 18, 6 is the father who gives orders to the

14. Moreover, PANDEY, *op. cit.*, p. 197, overlooks the fact that Gautama's work is generally agreed to be the oldest dharma-sūtra (± 600-400 B.C.), whereas Āpastamba's work belongs to ± 450-350. See J. D. M. DERRETT, *Dharmaśāstra and juridical literature*, H.I.L.L. vol. IV, 1, Wiesbaden, 1973, p. 28 f.

15. V. M. APTE, *Social and religious life in the grīhya sutras*, Bombay, 1954, p. 198.

16. Cf. L. RENOUE, *Grammaire sanscrite*, Paris, 1930, p. 142 (bibliographical references); B. DELBRÜCK, *Altindische Syntax*, Halle a. S., 1888, p. 454 f.; the same, *Vergleichende Syntax der indogermanischen Sprachen*, vol. I, Strassburg, 1893, p. 693; for parallels in the related languages ibidem, p. 694 ff.; K. BRUGMANN, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen*, vol. II, 2, Strassburg, 1911, p. 913; E. SCHWYZER and A. DEBRUNNER, *Griechische Grammatik*, vol. II, München, 1950, p. 523.

barber: « arrange his (the sons's) hair etc. ». I would therefore avoid translating, with Oldenberg, « let him initiate a *brāhmaṇa* », and prefer Stenzler's rendering « ... soll er den Brāhmaṇa (beim Lehrer) einführen », or rather simply « lead (respectfully) to... ». This is obviously also the sense in the general injunction at BGS. 3, 13, 6; SGS. 2, 1, 10; PGS. 2, 5, 40; GGS. 2, 10, 5 « let them (those concerned, i.e. the fathers or relations) not lead such men (to a teacher); let them (those concerned, i.e. teachers) not teach them; let them (i.e. priests) not perform sacrifices for them; let them (girls and their fathers or families) form no matrimonial alliance with them; let them (people in general) have no intercourse with them ».

Elsewhere however the teacher (*ācārya*) is the subject of the active verb in the formulae VGS. 5, 17 ... *tvā ... brahma santam upanayāmy aham asau* « I lead thou near, O N.N., who art *brāhman* » and BhGS. 1, 7 *kasya brahmacārya asi? kasmai tvā kāya tvā kam upanayāmi?* « whose student art thou?; who art thou?; for whom do I lead thee near?, for Ka (Prajāpati) thee »¹⁷; SGS. 2, 2, 12 *devasya tvā savituh ... upanayāmy asau* « on (participating in and impelled by) the impulse of the god Savitar ... I initiate thee, N.N. » (Oldenberg); Kauś. 55, 12 *ārṣeyam tvā kṛtvā bandhumantam upanayāmi* « I make thee of sacred descent ("belonging to a *ṛṣi*") and lead thee near (the study of the Veda) as one who has a bond (relations) » spoken in reply to the student's request to do so: 11 *ārṣeyam mā kṛtvā bandhumantam upanaya*. Here the question arises as to whom or to which (what) the teacher should lead the pupil. The answer is, it would appear to me, found in those passages which, whilst dealing with the same situation, contain the noun *brahmacarya* « the condition of life of the Vedic student (*brahmacārin*) »¹⁸, in the first place in ŚB. 11, 5, 4, 16 *na brāhmaṇam brahmacāryam upanīya mithunaṃ caret* « one should not have sexual intercourse after having led (introduced) a brahmin to *brahmacarya* ». As this passage deals with the function of a teacher it is clear that it is the very process of introducing a pupil to the mode of life called *brahmacarya* which is denoted by the verb *upa-nī-*. When in the above passages a teacher says *upanayāmi tvā* this idea is no doubt to be supplied and when a father is said to lead his son to a teacher it is in all probability implied. It may be observed that KauthG. 15 uses the term *brahmacarya* for the whole complex of ceremonies where the other manuals have *upanayanam: aṣṭame varṣe brahmacaryam*.

Now, the one who has entered upon the state of a *brahmacārin* is said to be *upeta*, i.e. « to have (reverentially) approached »: SGS. 4, 8, 1 *nyāyopetebhyaś ca vartayet* « to those who have regularly approached (a teacher, i.e. have become pupils) he shall set forth (Vedic texts) » rather than « to (students) who have been duly initiated... » because this English verb might imply that the youths have already been intro-

17. See ŚB. 11, 3, 4, 1 quoted below and e.g. VājS. 7, 29; 22, 20.

18. See J. GONDA, *Change and continuity*, The Hague, 1965, p. 284 ff.

duced into the secrets (of the Veda). Thus ĀpDhS. 1, 2, 11 *upetasyācāryakule brahmacārīvāsah* means « he who has come (to the house of his teacher for instruction) shall dwell there as a religious student », rather than, with Bühler¹⁹, « who has been initiated ». See also PGS. 3, 10, 10, where an *upeta* likewise is a male person who has gone through the *upanayana* ceremonies²⁰. Hence the equivalence of *upāyana* and *upanayana*, the former word occurring in KGS. 41, 1 and MGS. 1, 22, 1 *saptame varṣe brāhmaṇasyopāyanam* and explained by Devapāla (on KGS.) as *ācāryasamīpagamanamekhalābandhanasamskāraḥ* « the *samskāra* of approaching the *ācārya* and the investiture with the girdle »; with the explanation « when this has taken place one is entitled to (the study of) *śruti* and *smṛti* », and by Ādityadarśana (on KGS.) as « *upanayana*, including the binding on of the girdle of *muñja* grass etc. »²¹. Another instructive place is ŚB. 11, 5, 3, 13 *upāyāni bhagavantam iti, sa hovāca... ehy upehīti. tatheti. taṃ hopanīnye* « (Ś. said), "I will approach thee (become thy pupil), reverend sir"; he replied, "... come approach (enter as my pupil)", "so be it", he said. He then led (drew) him near (to himself, i.e. received him as a pupil) » (rather than « he then initiated him »²²). Notice the occurrence of the middle voice of the verb which is also used in the formula *brahmacaryam āgām upa mā nayasva* in KGS. 41, 10; JGS. 1, 12: 11, 7; HGS. 1, 5, 2; ĀgnGS. 1, 1, 3; Kauś. 55, 9 « I have come (the aorist *gā-* beside the present *i-*) to *brahmacarya* (rather than « for studentship »)²³. Compare ŚB. 11, 5, 4, 1 describing the *upanayana* ceremony: *brahmacaryam āgām ity āha: brahmaṇa evaitad ātmānaṃ nivedayati... brahmacāry asānīty āha. brahmaṇa evaitad ātmānaṃ paridadāty. athainam āha ko nāmāsīti. prajāpatir vai kaḥ. prajāpatyam evainam tat kṛtvopanayate* « He says, "I have come to (not, with Eggeling, "for") the mode of life of a student of the Veda. He thereby offers himself to *brahman*. He says, "I should like to be a student of the Veda. He thereby makes himself over to (entrusts himself to) *brahman*. He (the teacher) then says, "What (*ka*) is thy name?" Now *Ka* is Prajāpati. He thus leads (draws) him to himself (receives him) after having made him one belonging to Prajāpati ».

In accordance with the wording of the above formula it reads in HGS. 1, 5, 8 « Then (the teacher) seizes from behind the (boy's) right shoulder with his right hand and the (boy's) left (shoulder) with his left (hand) and draws (the boy's) right arm towards himself (*abhy ātmann*

19. In S.B.E. 2, p. 7.

20. As to the use of *upa-i-* compare also MGS. 1, 1, 18 « by the fact that we approach (*upemasi*), O Agni, with warmth, warmth and the study of the Veda, may we be dear to *brahman*... ».

21. Cf. KANE, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 188 f.

22. Thus J. EGGELING, *The Satapatha-Brahmaṇa translated*, vol. V, S.B.E. 44, Oxford, 1900, p. 85.

23. W. CALAND, *The Jaiminigrhyasūtra*, Lahore, 1922, p. 19 (« for » would rather correspond to the dative). The reading *brahmacaryam upāgām upa mā hvayasva* « ... call me near to thee » of VGS. 5, 16 is in all probability a secondary deviation.

upanayate)... with (the formula), " on (participating in and impelled by) the impulse of the god Savitar... I draw (thee), O N.N., towards myself (*upanaye*, i.e. I declare that I am willing to initiate thee)" »; in KGS. 41, 16 *devasya te savituh... hastam grhṇāmy asā upanaye 'sau. savitā te hastam agrahīd, agnir ācāryas tava. kas tvā kam upanaye 'sau. kāya tvā paridadāmi. kasya brahmacāry asi. prāṇasya*²⁴ *brahmacāry asmīti pratyāha*. See also ĀgnGS. 1, 1, 3: 8, 2. The middle-voice occurs also in the formulae in ĀśvGS. 1, 20, 8 « Whose *brahmacārin* art thou? Thou art the *brahmacārin* of breath. Who does draw thee towards himself and whom (*kas tvā kam* Oldenberg, " to whom...? ") ». See also MGS, 1, 22, 5. These passages — and others dealing with the ensuing acts and *mantras* — precede the instruction in the *savitri* (HGS. 1, 6, 6; KGS. 41, 20; ĀgnG. 1, 1, 3: 9, 20; ĀśvGS. 1, 21, 5; MGS. 1, 22, 13) which is the first stanza the boy had to learn. Cf. also ŚB. 11, 5, 4, 12 ff.; Manu, 2, 173 « the one (student) who has been received must be instructed in the observances and gradually learn the Veda », and Yājñ. 1, 15 « after having received (*upanīya*) the pupil, the *guru* should teach him the Veda and the rules of right conduct ». It is clear that the rites performed by the teacher in taking the pupil by the shoulders, grasping his hand (and later on in touching the region of his heart with a formula to unite their hearts; see HGS. 1, 5, 11) are to bring the two into close contact. Attention may be drawn also to the words in HGS. 1, 6, 6 (and ĀgnG., l. cit.), with reference to a *punarupanayana* by way of *prāyaścitta*²⁵, *atrā sāvitriṃ vācayati yadi purastād upeto bhavati* « he now makes him recite (i.e. teaches him) the *sāvitri* if he has approached (in order to become a *brahmacārin*) before ». If, however, the text continues (7), he is *anupetaḥ* « has not approached... (the instruction does not begin before) three days have elapsed »: through this period the student should keep a special vow (HGS. 1, 8, 1 f.). A period of three days is also mentioned in the very instructive passage AVŚ. 11, 5, 3 « the teacher (*ācāryaḥ*) receiving the *brahmacārin* (drawing him towards himself, *upanayamānaḥ*)²⁶ makes him an embryo within²⁷; he bears him in his abdomen three nights (and days)... ».

The middle voice is, according to expectation, also found in KGS. 41. 24 « (the man) whom somebody knowing thus *upanayate* learns (studies, recites) one, two, or three of these Vedas, or all of them »: such a teacher is qualified for the privilege of being an *upanetar* (Devapāla).

24. « Prajāpati is vital breath (*prāṇa*) (because he is) the thread (holding together everything) of the world » (Devapāla).

25. KANE, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 392 f.; see, e.g., also ViDhŚ. 54, 26 where the object is « those concerned ».

26. W. D. WHITNEY and CH. R. LANMAN, *The Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā*, Cambridge Mass., 1905, p. 636, translate « taking him in charge ».

27. The spiritual preceptor causes the pupil to be born again by imparting him sacred learning. Cf. ŚB. 11, 5, 4, 12 « by laying his right hand on (the pupil) the teacher becomes pregnant (with him), on the third (day) he is born as a brahmin with the *sāvitri* ».

But « the one whom a man unlearned in the Veda *upanayate* comes out of darkness and enters darkness » (ĀpDhS. 1, 1, 11). Injunctions such as ŚGS. 2, 1, 1 *garbhāṣṭameṣu brāhmaṇam upanayeta*; 2, 1, 25; BDhŚ. 1, 3, 7; VāsDhŚ. 11, 49; AVPar. 37, 16, 1 etc. should therefore be taken to refer to the spiritual preceptor.

That, however, the active form (see above) can be found beside the medium appears, e.g., from BGS. 2, 5, 28 *athainam upanayati devasya tvā savituh prasave... upanaye 'sau iti*. Here we should either supply *brahmacaryam* or suppose that the author has not deemed it necessary to express the medial modification explicitly (neutral active)²⁸.

Two passages quoted from later authors may be subjoined in order to show that they agree with the above interpretation. Says Abhiyukta, in *Vīramitrodayasamśkārprakāśa*, I, p. 334 « *upanayana* is that (rite) through which a man is led to the proximity of the *guru*, observances, the Veda, restraints, restrictions and the gods »; « is led to the proximity » (*samīpam nīyate*), not « introduced into ». And Aparārarka, on *Yājñ.* 1, 14 defines the term as follows: « *upanayana* is the establishment of a connexion between the pupil and the *sāvitrī*, brought about by the teacher ».

The above may suffice to show that, as already observed, the use of translations such as « initiation » or « introduction » may create misunderstanding. In classical Latin, the verb *initiare* means « to initiate, admit to secret religious rites »; it derives from *initia* (plural) « elements; first principles; secret sacred rites to which only the initiated were admitted » — according to Cicero, *De legibus* 2, 14, 36 *initiaque ut appellantur, ita re vera principia vitae cognovimus* — which, being the plural of *initium* « beginning », was the Latin equivalent of the Greek *μυστήρια* « secret rites, religious or mystical truths ». This Latin noun derives from *inire* (*ire* being etymologically related to Skt. *i-* « to go »; cf. the above *upeta*), which however means « to go into, to enter, to enter upon », not « to approach ». Moreover, the Indian *upanayana* is the first stage of a long and complex series of rites (cf. *Manu* 2, 108) which ends with the student's returning home after completing his studies and education in the house of his preceptor (*samāvartana*). Essentially, this is a puberty ritual, effecting the transition from childhood or adolescence to adulthood and as such it is obligatory for all members of the three Aryan classes of the Indian society. The Greek *μυστήρια* and the Latin *initia*, on the other hand, were optional and requisite for entering what, in a way, might be called a secret society.

28. See J. GONDA, *The medium in the Rgveda*, Leiden, 1979, p. 38 f.