

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

### PRAVARA AND EXOGAMY

THE PRINCIPLE OF EXOGAMY, in virtue of which a man must marry outside his own hereditary group or clan, has come to be recognised as a factor of prime importance in the organisation of many widely divergent types of human society, and its operation among primitive tribes has been closely studied by anthropologists. Up to the present, however, the exogamous system of the ancient Brahmanical families has been largely neglected, and in fact there is no detailed and reliable account in English to which the anthropologist can turn for information. The small interest shown by orientalists in this particular aspect of the social organisation of early India is doubtless due in part to the almost unbelievably corrupt state of the textual transmission of the documents, which is indeed so bad that it is doubtful whether it will ever be possible to reconstitute the text of the long lists of family names with any certainty. In spite of this, however, the main outlines of the system stand out quite clearly; and the present study has, therefore, been undertaken in order to make good this neglect, and to present an account of the organisation of the system at the end of the Sūtra-period (c. fourth century B.C.), as it is described in the so-called *pravarādhyāyas*, which are appendices to the ritual Sūtras. For this purpose the *Gotra-pravara-manjarī* of Puruṣottama-paṇḍita has been chosen as a basis. This work, a medieval treatise on the subject, quotes verbatim the most important Sūtra texts, and comments discursively on them. Before proceeding to the translation of this work, however, it seems desirable to give a general account of the system, and to discuss some of the problems raised. It is hoped that both orientalists and anthropologists will find here material of interest, although naturally the latter will find much that is irrelevant to their purposes in the technicalities of a discussion which has been written primarily from another point of view.

Among the Brahmans, as also among many other castes in Hindu society, marriage is in general restricted in three ways. First, a man may not marry outside his 'caste' (*jāti*). Second, a man may not marry those who fall within certain degrees of prohibited relationships, generically designated his *sapindas*, i.e. persons who share with him in the funeral oblation to a common ancestor. This restriction corresponds in type to the European 'tables of prohibited degrees', and according to the most usual definition, extends back to the seventh generation on the father's side, and the fifth on the mother's.<sup>1</sup> Third, a man must marry outside his own 'clan' (*gotra*). It is with this third restriction that the present work is concerned, and specifically with the early history of the

<sup>1</sup> See for example GautDhS 4. 3-5, Manu 5. 60, Nārada 12. 7.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

exogamous groups among the Brahmans, for whom alone we possess detailed accounts of the system, in the 'pravara-chapters' already mentioned.

Exogamous systems may be conveniently classified in two main groups, symmetrical and non-symmetrical. The former is best exemplified in the well-known dual organisation and its modifications into four- and eight-class systems, where a man belonging to one moiety of a tribe must always take a wife from the other moiety. A rather different type of symmetrical system may be seen in a four-class society, where a man of class A marries a woman of B, a man of B marries into C, C marries into D, and D marries into A.<sup>1</sup> The Brahmanical gotra-system, on the contrary, is non-symmetrical in structure. Thus, a man belonging to one of the eighteen gotras may in general marry into any one of the remaining seventeen, though there are indeed exceptions, which we shall note as we come to them. It is worth noting at the outset that there is not the slightest trace of evidence that the system has developed out of a more symmetrical type of organisation.

The Brahmanical gotra, which persists with little modification to the present day, may be defined as an exogamous patrilineal sibship, whose members trace their descent back to a common ancestor. It is clear that the prohibition of marriage within the gotra overlaps with the *sapiṇḍa* restriction, since many of the *sapiṇḍas* on the father's side are also *sagotras*. It is possible, therefore, that the two regulations were originally independent, and that the historical situation represents a fusion of two distinct cultural traditions. There is, however, no direct evidence on this point, and we must be content to observe that within the historical period both restrictions exist together. An approximate statement of the position, when both regulations are applied, would be that marriage is prohibited within the joint-family up to several (usually five) generations on the mother's side, up to seven on the father's side where descent is through a female, and without limit in the direct male line. This is the prescription of the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*,<sup>2</sup> *asapiṇḍā ca yā mātur asagoṭrā ca yā pituh*, i.e. a fitting bride is one who is not a *sapiṇḍa* of the mother's, and (neither a *sapiṇḍa*) nor of the same gotra as the father. The often quoted verse, usually attributed to Śātātapa, *mātulasya sutām ūḍhvā māṭṛgotrāṃ tathaiṅva ca*, etc., which prohibits marriage also within the mother's gotra, would seem to be a later extension due to an over-zealous puritanical spirit; and the lack of parallels in the legal literature would seem to indicate that it never became part of the regularly accepted practice.

The matter is further complicated by a quite different prescription, namely, that a man may not marry a woman who has the same *pravara* as himself. A *pravara* is a stereotyped list of names of ancient *ṛṣis* or seers, who are believed to be the remote founders of the family. This list is regularly recited at specific points in the sacrificial ritual. In the *Sūtra* appendices, these *pravaras* are classified according to the main exogamous gotras, and in effect therefore this last

<sup>1</sup> Hodson, *Primitive Culture of India*, pp. 92 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 3. 5.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## PRAVARA AND EXOGAMY

prohibition is precisely the same as the restriction as to gotra, since those prevented from marriage by considerations of pravara are also members of the same gotra. It would in fact seem that the sole reason for the pravara rule in marriage was that it formed an infallible test of the exogamous group to which a man belonged, when the prohibition as to gotra was gradually coming to be insufficient by itself, since in the course of linguistic development the word came to be applied loosely to various subdivisions of the exogamous classes, and even to individual families.

In his book, *Hindu Exogamy* (Bombay, 1929), S. V. Karandikar has suggested that in the sacrificial ritual a man originally had the fullest liberty to choose whatever *ṛṣi*-names he wished for the pravara-ceremony, and he deduces that, at the time of this supposed freedom, the exogamous groups had not yet come into existence, and that in fact a man could choose to belong to whatever gotra he pleased. The gotras, he believes, were in origin ritual colleges, which only later became hereditary exogamous groups. Karandikar, however, has completely failed to support this view with logical argument. Even if the pravara-recitation in the sacrifice was originally a matter for complete freedom of choice it is obviously quite illegitimate to argue from this that exogamous groups did not exist at that time; and his suggestion that the Brahmans transformed their ritual colleges into exogamous clans on the model of aboriginal exogamous societies with which they came in contact, would seem to go beyond all bounds of probability. The view that the Brahmanical gotras were fundamentally ritual corporations rather than purely social groupings might be thought to receive some support from the common opposition in the texts between *ārṣa*-gotras and *laukika*-gotras, these two expressions being taken to mean 'spiritual' and 'profane' families respectively. As we shall see, such a view is not probable. Nevertheless, it is clearly desirable that any discussion of the gotra-system which attempts to be comprehensive must include a treatment of the pravara question.

One of the most interesting and important historical problems connected with the system is the relation of the exogamous gotra to the endogamous caste. Senart<sup>1</sup> was of the opinion that the castes were directly related to an Indo-European type of social organisation, and to uphold this theory has equated the Indian gotra with the *gens* of the Romans and the *phratrya* of the Greeks. This theory has been summarily dismissed by a number of more recent writers, chiefly on the grounds that it is not till the Sūtra period that the prohibition of marriage within the gotra is evidenced in Indian sources.<sup>2</sup> In spite of such categorical pronouncements, however, the whole question remains an open one, and a re-examination of the available evidence on the subject of gotra is obviously a desideratum.

<sup>1</sup> *Les Castes dans l'Inde*, pp. 207ff.; English trans. pp. 175ff.

<sup>2</sup> For example, N. K. Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, p. 19; S. C. Roy, in *Man in India* (1934), p. 85, seems to have missed the point of Senart's argument.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The unit of the Brahmanical exogamous system is the *gotra* in the wider sense of the term, and there is no reason to doubt that the connection of the pravaras with exogamy is a secondary one. It would therefore be logical to discuss first the gotras themselves, and thereafter turn to consider the question of the pravaras. But in historical times the two questions had become so closely inter-related that such a course would scarcely provide a satisfactory view of the subject, since the system of gotras cannot be adequately expounded without constant reference to the pravara-system. Therefore, for the sake of clearness, we shall first consider the pravaras.

From the time of the Sūtras onwards, the rule is laid down by the religious and legal authors that a man must avoid in marriage both (a) persons of the same gotra; and (b) persons possessing the same pravara as himself. This *pravara* is a list of names, in most cases three, of (suppositious) ancestors, which is recited at certain points in the sacrificial ritual. The older authorities, however, regularly give only one of the two prescriptions, and it is clear from the detailed exposition of the *pravarādhyaṅgas* also that the two rules are identical in their effect. Each *gotra* is subdivided into several *gaṇas*, or groups, each *gaṇa* with its own distinctive pravara. All the *gaṇas* within one gotra, however, normally have at least one pravara-name in common—that of the eponymous *ṛṣi* of the major gotra; and according to the interpretation of Baudhāyana at the beginning of his pravara-chapter, two pravaras are the ‘same’ for exogamous purposes if they possess even one name in common. There is, however, an exception in the case of the two families of the Bhṛḡus and Angirases, among whom a majority of the names in two pravaras must coincide before marriage is prohibited. In effect, therefore, Bhṛḡus may marry with certain other Bhṛḡus; but under no circumstances can, for example, a Kāśyapa marry with any other Kāśyapa. This peculiar position of the Bhṛḡus and Angirases must be treated more fully later; here it is sufficient to remark that it provides a good reason for considering that the regulation as to pravara is subsequent to the gotra-restriction, since otherwise there would be no conceivable reason for the anomaly. It would seem that the already existing pravaras have been applied to the ordering of a marriage system which they could not quite fit without a certain amount of adjustment in the case of the Bhṛḡus and Angirases. The question, therefore, is why the rule of pravara in exogamy should have been made at all.

The answer lies in the word *gotra* itself. In the Baudhāyana pravara-chapter, the term is defined as: *saptānām ṛṣīnām agastyāṣṭamānām yad apatyam tad gotram*, i.e. a *gotra* is the whole group of persons descended from any one of the seven *ṛṣis* or Agastya. Leaving aside for the minute the case of the Bhṛḡus and Angirases, this definition clearly recognises the eight main exogamous groups named after the *ṛṣis* listed by Baudhāyana in a verse immediately preceding: Jamadagni, Gautama, Bharadvāja, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Kāśyapa, Vasiṣṭha, with the addition of Agastya. These in fact remain throughout the units of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## PRAVARA AND EXOGAMY

exogamy. But as is natural in the course of linguistic development, the meaning of the word *gotra* did not remain fixed in the sense of ‘exogamous unit’, but was frequently applied to subdivisions of these, and even to individual families within them. Thus we find in inscriptions Brahmans described not only as ‘of the Vasiṣṭha-gotra’, etc., but even, for example, ‘of the Bhāguri-gotra’.<sup>1</sup> In the latter case, the Bhāguris are not in any sense an exogamous unit, but, as may be seen from the pravara-lists, are a subdivision of a subdivision of the unit. Pāṇini<sup>2</sup> uses the word *gotra* in a very precise technical sense, which nevertheless cannot be wholly divorced from the everyday usage of his times; and in Pāṇini the word has no reference to the exogamous groups at all, but is applied to the patriarchal ‘Great-families’, each of which can only have constituted a very small fraction of the exogamous clan.

The present work is concerned mainly with the organisation of the Brahmans, and a full consideration of the Buddhist and Jaina sources therefore lies outside its scope.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, worth mentioning the technical use of the word *gotra* by both religions. The theory of Jainism conceives the common Indian *karma*, that is, the sum total of acts, etc., which causally determine a man’s future existences, as something quite substantial which clings to the soul, and requires to be washed away for the attainment of salvation. Among the different kinds of *karma* they name a *gotra-karma*, which is held to determine a man’s caste, social standing, family, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that this generalised sense of ‘status in society’ is not directly derived from the sense of ‘exogamous unit’, but that the word *gotra* had at the time of the construction of the Jaina system a not dissimilar range of meanings from the English word ‘family’.

In the Pāli books, the word *gotta* is not infrequently used in the expected sense, as, for example, *Bhagavā Gotamo gottena*, *Kakusandho Kassapo gottena*, i.e. a Gautama, or a Kaśyapa by gotra. On the other hand, *Vipassī Koṇḍañño gottena*<sup>5</sup> provides an example of the term applied to a subdivision of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. S. Gadre, *Proc. Oriental Congress at Baroda* (1933), p. 669.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 51; also Brough, *JRAS* (1946), pp. 41 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the chief outstanding problem is the position of men who are certainly Kṣatriyas—the most notable being Gautama the Buddha himself, and the Jaina founder Mahāvīra, a Kaśyapa—who nevertheless bear well-authenticated Brahmanical gotra-names. It is perhaps worthy of note that Gautama is most frequently so called in the Pāli works by orthodox Brahmans (*samaṇo Gotamo*); and it may be that we have here in the Buddhist literature concrete cases of the Brahmanical prescription that a Kṣatriya should take the gotra of his *purohita*. Naturally, and especially in a royal household, the position of *purohita* would tend to be hereditary (as indeed it frequently is at the present day), and the *purohita*’s gotra-name would in such cases be applicable to whole families of Kṣatriyas, forming as it were an alternative family name. On the other hand, it may be that we have here to reckon with a direct copying of the Brahmanical organisation by Kṣatriyas. It is well known that at the present day many castes who have never made any claim to Brahmanhood are nevertheless organised for exogamous purposes in gotras bearing the Brahmanical names. Some of these are known with certainty to have adopted the system wholesale from the Brahmans in quite recent times, for example, the Suraj-bansis (*Sūrya-vaṁśin*), who adopted the Brahmanical gotra-names and gotra-exogamy in 1871—see Karandikar, *Hindu Exogamy*, p. 229; Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, II, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Das Gupta, *Hist. of Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> *Digha Nikāya*, II, 3.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Puruṣottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

exogamous group (Sk. *Kaundinya*). In addition to this, the Pāli sources have a term *gotra-bhū* (which, however, occurs only in the latest parts of the Canon) applied to one who has become converted to Buddhism, although he has not yet 'entered upon the stream'. The form *gotra*, as against *gotta* for the non-technical sense, is striking, and because of this Rhys Davids and Stede,<sup>1</sup> although translating 'become of the lineage', suggest that it is etymologically equivalent to the Sanskrit *gotr*, 'protector'. Thus, presumably, a *gotra-bhū* would be one who had come under the protection of the Buddha. Whether or not this is the case (and the explanation is not free from difficulties) there can be no doubt that the word quickly acquired the sense of the Sanskrit *gotra*, and that, moreover, in the generalised meaning already seen in the Jaina usage. Thus, the *gotra-bhū* is regularly contrasted with *puthujjana*, 'the common herd'. By becoming a member of the Buddhist community, he has, so to speak, acquired a new status. It is with the term *gotra-bhū* rather than with *gotta* that the technical use of *gotra* in Buddhist Sanskrit works is to be connected. In the Mahāyānist schools, however, the word underwent further development. In some of the texts *gotra* can be fittingly understood as 'spiritual class', *gotra-bheda* being the distinction between different types of beings, some of whom are 'destined to be Bodhisattvas', some 'destined to become Pratyeka-Buddhas', and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

In the later Brahmanical works, also, the term *gotra* is applied to families and subfamilies as frequently as to the exogamous clans. In fact, the most usual application of the expression 'founder of the gotra' (*gotra-kāra*) is not to the exogamous groups, but to the eponymous seers of the subfamilies within each major gotra. It may be this usage which has occasioned the desperate attempts of such writers as Puruṣottama to interpret the Baudhāyana definition as applying to these subfamilies instead of to the major gotras.<sup>3</sup>

At all events it is clear from the examples cited that in quite early times the word *gotra* had become so elastic in its usage—denoting sometimes the exogamous unit, sometimes a family, sometimes social status generally—that to lay down the rule simply of 'no marriage within the gotra' was by itself quite inadequate, if the exogamous structure of the society was to be preserved. Therefore, we may presume, the Brahmans were forced to express the rule more explicitly, and, finding to hand the pravaras already classified according to the seers claimed as eponymous ancestors of the exogamous groups, naturally turned these to account. It is true that the rule 'no marriage between persons having the same pravara' required a certain amount of modification and interpretation before it fitted the requirements of the marriage system; but compared with

<sup>1</sup> P.T.S. Dict. *s.v.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. N. Dutt, *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 84ff.; Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 51ff. On the theological development of the term *gotra* in the sense of 'saintly lineage', see Obermiller, in *Acta Orientalia*, ix (1931), pp. 96ff.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 205–9.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## PRAVARA AND EXOGAMY

the indefinite range of the term *gotra*, the pravara-rule offered a clear and precise method of determining a man's position in the exogamous structure. For the present day, Risley has remarked<sup>1</sup> that among the Deśastha Brahmans the function of the pravara is to serve as a guide, for exogamous purposes, in the case of families who are not specifically mentioned in the gotra-lists handed down. There can be no doubt that the pravaras have in fact fulfilled this function since the earliest days; but it would perhaps be rash to suggest that this was the chief reason for the introduction of the rule of pravara, since it is reasonable to believe that when the gotra-lists were composed their authors included in them all the families with which they were familiar in their own immediate society.

We find, then, the rule stated as, for example, *asamāna-pravarair vivāhah*<sup>2</sup>—marriage is with persons who have different pravaras; *asamāna-ṛṣi-gotra-jātām (udvahet)*<sup>3</sup>—a man must not marry a woman born in the same *ṛṣi-gotra*, that is, gotra as determined by the *ṛṣi*-names of the pravaras. The *Viṣṇu-Smṛti*<sup>4</sup> prohibits a woman of the same 'pravara of *ṛṣis*' (*asamānārṣa-pravarā*) as well as one of the same gotra (*asagotrā*). Manu apparently felt that the prohibition of *gotra* was sufficient by itself; but Yājñavalkya<sup>5</sup> more explicitly says *asamānārṣa-gotra-jām*, i.e. a woman of a different *ārṣa-gotra*. The *Mitākṣarā* interprets this last expression as a Dvandva compound, 'of a different *ārṣa*, i.e. pravara, and of a different gotra'. This is doubtful, and is certainly misleading, since it suggests to the reader that two separate prohibitions are intended. It has indeed even in modern times been stated that Brahmans avoid in marriage both gotra and pravara. The passage noted above from the *Viṣṇu-Smṛti* is open to the same interpretation, although in this case the term *asagotrā* may have been intended simply to explain *asamānārṣa-pravarā*. But in Yājñavalkya's phrase it is difficult to see any reason for preferring the Mitākṣara's rendering. The word *ārṣa* is primarily an adjective—'concerned with *ṛṣis*'—and could only have the substantival meaning of *pravara* as the result of an ellipsis. It seems preferable to translate it as an adjective here; and this translation is further upheld by the *Viṣṇu-Smṛti* (which could hardly intend *ārṣa-pravara* to mean 'pravara and pravara'), and by the unmodified form of the *Vaikhānasa Sūtra*—*ṛṣi-gotra*. Thus, Yājñavalkya here is quite clearly defining the kind of gotra that a man is to avoid: it is not gotra in the everyday sense of 'family', that is, not the *laukika-gotra*, but the *ārṣa-gotra*, that is, the gotra connected with the *ṛṣis*. In brief, *ārṣa-gotra* means, not 'pravara and gotra', but 'gotra as determined by the *ṛṣi*-names in one's pravara'. In the use of the pravaras, therefore, we are to see simply a mechanism whereby the exogamous group is defined, and the system preserved from the dissolution which the inexact usages of the word *gotra* might have brought about.

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India* (1901), vol. 1, Ethnographic Appendices, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> GautDhS 3. 2; VārāhaGS 10. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Vaikhānasa Sūtra 3. 2.

<sup>4</sup> 24. 9.

<sup>5</sup> 1. 3. 53.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

## THE PRAVARA IN THE RITUAL

The earliest direct references to the pravara-ceremony as an element in the Śrauta ritual appear in the Yajur-veda texts. It is not until we come to the Sūtras, however, that our information becomes at all detailed, since most of the Brāhmaṇa passages which deal with the matter would be largely unintelligible without the aid of the Sūtras. In all these texts the pravara occurs only in connection with the Śrauta ritual, and there is no hint of its employment on any other occasion. But in later times, no doubt as a secondary result of its use in regulating marriage, the pravara came to have a much wider application, so that for the present day a modern Hindu can write:<sup>1</sup> ‘Every Brahman is obliged by law to pronounce the names of his important ancestors who were the founders of his family, whenever he has to perform a sacred act or has to repeat his prayers or invoke the gods, in order to show that, as a descendant of worthy ancestors, he is a fit and proper person to do the act he is performing. Practically, a Brahman repeats their name thrice every day, when he repeats his morning, noon and evening prayers.’ So, too, Monier Williams, in describing the morning Sandhyā, says:<sup>2</sup> ‘The last act but one is a recitation of the family pedigree (*gotroccāra*); for every high caste man is supposed to be under the religious obligation of preserving the memory of his ancestors, and maintaining the line of his family descent unbroken. Not only, therefore, does he worship his departed forefathers with offerings and prayers at the Śrāddha services, but the recitation of his own genealogy forms an important part of the daily Sandhyā ceremonial. For example, the worshipper says: “I belong to a particular gotra (or tribe of Brahmans); I have three ancestors—Āngirasa, Śainya, and Gārgya;<sup>3</sup> I am a student of the Āśvalāyana Sūtra, and follow the Śākala-Śākhā of the Ṛgveda.”’ But such an extensive use of the pravara is certainly not prescribed by the ancient texts—the silence of the Gṛhya Sūtras is probably conclusive for the Sandhyās—and usage has no doubt developed considerably since the time of the Sūtras. But it is clear that before then the pravara was already well established as a frequent and important element in the ritual.

In the ritual texts the description of the pravara regularly occurs in the New-and Full-Moon Sacrifices. But since in effect this form of sacrifice underlies all *iṣṭis*<sup>4</sup> the recitation of the pravara forms an integral part of virtually every Śrauta offering. In the regular *iṣṭi*, the pravara is first recited by the Hotṛ,

<sup>1</sup> P. Chentsal Rao, *Gotra and Pravara*, p. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Brahmanism and Hinduism* (1887), p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> The complete loss of the significance of the *vrddhied* form is certainly surprising. It is worth noting also that the ancient texts give no grounds for confusing the pravara-*ṛṣis* and the *Pitrs*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *SBE* xxx, pp. 345ff.



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Purusottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE PRAVARA IN THE RITUAL

immediately after the Sāmidhenīs, or Kindling-verses. While the Adhvaryu pours a libation of butter on the fire, the Hotṛ proceeds:<sup>1</sup>

*agne mahāṃ asi brāhmaṇa bhārata; bhārgava cyāvanāpnavānavurva jāmadagnya.*

‘O Agni, thou art great, O thou possessed of Brāhman-power, O thou who art kin to Bharata,<sup>2</sup> kin to Bhṛgu, to Cyavana, to Apnavāna, to Ūrva, to Jamadagni.’

Then follows the series of short formulae called Nivids: ‘Kindled by gods, kindled by men, praised by the ṛṣis, delighted in by inspired sages.’<sup>3</sup> This order of ritual seems to be invariable in all the texts. The Brāhmaṇas make it quite clear that Agni is here being invited to officiate as Hotṛ, and it seems most probable that it was from this circumstance that the name *pravara* arose, only later coming to be transferred to the list of names recited in the invitatory formula. The same holds good in the second pravara a little later in the rite. The human Hotṛ-priest, who, as the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* remarks,<sup>4</sup> was not previously ‘in very truth’ a Hotṛ, is ceremonially invited by the Adhvaryu to act as Hotṛ. The formula is similar to the first pravara, but not identical. After a second libation of butter, the Hotṛ says: ‘Announce (*āśrāvaya*) the sacrifice among the gods, announce me among men, for fame, glory and splendour of brāhman-power (*brahmavarcasāya*).’ The Adhvaryu then solemnly addresses the Agnīdhra, *oṣṇ śrāvaya*, and receives his reply, *astu śrauṣaṣaṭ*. He then continues:

*agnir devo daivyo hotā devān yakṣad vidvāṃś cikivān manuṣvad bharatavad; jamadagnivad ūrvavad apnavānavac cyāvanavad bhṛguvad; brahmaṇvad eha vakṣad brāhmaṇā asya yajñasya prāvītārah; (asau) mānuṣah.*

‘Agni the god is the divine Hotṛ, may he sacrifice to the gods, the wise and knowing one; as Manu did, as Bharata did, as Jamadagni, Ūrva, Apnavāna, Cyavana and Bhṛgu did, as Brahman (?) did,<sup>5</sup> so may he bring them (the gods)

<sup>1</sup> TS 2. 5. 9; ŚB 1. 4. 2; KB 3. 2; TB 3. 5. 3; ĀŚS 1. 2. 27ff.; ŚŚS 1. 4. 14ff., etc.

<sup>2</sup> Hillebrandt, *Neu- und Vollmondsopfer*, p. 81 (following Weber, *ISṭ* IX, p. 324) translates: ‘der du dem Brahman, dem Bharata gedient hast.’ It cannot be denied that something of the sort is the meaning in Bhārgava, etc.; but originally Agni Bhārata, so frequently mentioned from the RV onwards, was Agni of the Bhāratas rather than Agni of Bharata; and the brāhman was probably not so concretely personified at so early a date. The sense would seem to be: ‘Thou art great, thou hast the magic power brāhman; moreover, thou art of our race [cf. expressions such as Bharatavarṣa, Bharatakhaṇḍa, in the later literature]; not only that, but also a member of the sacrificer’s clan.’ The Brāhmaṇas absurdly connect Bhārata with *bhar-*, ‘to bear’—‘thou carrier of the oblations’, or (ŚB 1. 4. 2. 2) ‘sustainer of the creatures’.

<sup>3</sup> *deveddho manviddhaḥ; ṛṣiṣṭuto viprānumadītaḥ*. The Brāhmaṇas explain *manviddha* as ‘kindled by Manu’, but the contrast between gods and men seems too pointed to miss. These formulae are certainly very old, cf. Scheftelowitz, *Die Apokryphen des Ṛgveda*, p. 136, and the nominatives where vocatives might have been expected give an indication that the ceremony was pieced together from older material, possibly, though by no means certainly, after the final redaction of the Ṛgveda.

<sup>4</sup> 1. 5. 1. 13. Cf. also 1. 3. 5. 2, and Eggeling’s note, *SBE* XII, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> This again is doubtful. Neither the later god Brahmā nor the Brahman of the Upaniṣads can be intended. The meaning may be ‘as the magic power (of these seers) did’, or else *brahmaṇvat* may simply be a not very meaningful echo of *brāhmaṇa* in the first pravara, on the analogy of *Bhārgava*, *Bhṛguvat*, etc.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62398-9 - The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Manjarī of Puruṣottama-Pandita

With an Introduction by John Brough

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

hither; the guardians of this sacrifice are Brāhmaṇas;<sup>1</sup> NN. is the human (Hotṛ).<sup>2</sup>

Here also in form the pravara directly concerns Agni and not the human Hotṛ. But there can be no doubt that by implication the human Hotṛ is meant. It is he who is really asked to offer sacrifice ‘as Manu did’. As the Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa sagely remarks: ‘By first naming Agni he propitiates Agni.’<sup>3</sup>

Such, in brief outline, is the context of the pravara in the ritual. Apart from quite insignificant verbal discrepancies,<sup>4</sup> there is complete agreement of all the texts which deal with the matter, so that it is certain that already by the Brāhmaṇa period the pravara was firmly established in the ritual. There is only one point which has caused a little trouble, namely, the exact interpretation of the phrase used in the Brāhmaṇas with reference to the pravara—*ārṣeyaṃ (pra)vr̥ṇīte*—a phrase which is picked up again by the Sūtras, both in the ritual and in their pravara-appendices, often with significant alterations by way of exegesis. In view of the uncertainty it is worth considering the matter in detail.

*ĀRṢEYAM (PRA)VR̥ṆĪTE*

There is no doubt at all that by this phrase the Brāhmaṇas no less than the Sūtras intend the recital of the pravara list of names. Karandikar,<sup>5</sup> however, has elaborated a theory of the origin of the phrase which he uses as an argument to reinforce his theory that the pravara-exogamous groups were of very late origin within the Vedic period. It is therefore desirable to examine the question in rather more detail than would otherwise have been necessary, and to try to arrive at a definite idea of the history and import of the phrase.

Haug<sup>6</sup> held that the word *ārṣeya* meant literally ‘the ancestral fire’, no doubt in the belief that this is the traditional interpretation of the commentators. But an examination of typical commentaries<sup>7</sup> on the phrase shows clearly that this is carrying their explanation further than they intended. In fact, the commentators are merely concerned to stress the fact that it is the Āhavanīya fire which is addressed in the pravara, not the *ṛṣis*, and they do not suggest that *ārṣeya* is actually synonymous with the fire. Haug, however, translates *ārṣeya* as ‘ancestral fire’, not only in a passage where the word clearly refers to the

<sup>1</sup> Eggeling, *SBE* XII, p. 134: ‘The Brāhmaṇas (priests) are guardians of this sacrifice.’ The word *brāhmaṇā*, however, is emphatic by position, the point being that they also possess the magic brāhman-power which Jamadagni, etc., possessed.

<sup>2</sup> TS 2. 5. 11; ŚB 1. 5. 1; BŚS 1. 15; ĀŚS 1. 3. 23; ĀpŚS 2. 16; BhārŚS 2. 15; cf. Hillebrandt, op. cit. pp. 87ff.

<sup>3</sup> 1. 5. 1. 15. For this ‘propitiation’, see below, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Such as the omission of the word *daivyo* in the second pravara.

<sup>5</sup> *Hindu Exogamy*, pp. 52ff., following Kṛṣṇaśāstri Ghule, in an article, unfortunately unobtainable, in the Marāṭhī magazine *Citramaya-jagat* (1923).

<sup>6</sup> *AitBr* II, p. 479.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Sāyaṇa on TS 2. 5. 8, ŚB 1. 5. 1. 9; Bhaṭṭabhāskaramiśra on TB 3. 5. 3; and cf. Puruṣottama, below, p. 63.