

# ICONOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF SURYA: WITH REFERENCE TO SURYOPANISHAD

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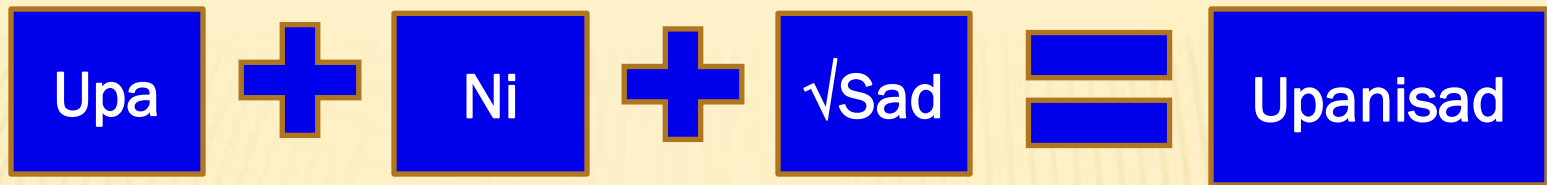
M. Winternitz opines, “Epithets, which at first emphasised a particularly important side of a natural being, became gods’ names and new gods. Thus savitr ‘the inspirer’, ‘the life-giver’ and Vivasvata, ‘the shining’ were at first epithets then names of the Sun and finally they became independent Sun-gods besides Surya.”

According to Yaska, the word 'Surya' is derived from sr (to move) or from su (to stimulate) or from Svir (to promote well).

He is called Savitr because he is the stimulator of all.

The time of Savitr is that when the sky, with its darkness dispelled, is overspread by the rays of the Sun. There is no direct reference to the Sun-worship in the Astadhyayi of Panini. It mentions Surya, Pusan, Divakara, Usas, Candramas and Soma etc. Yaska's *Nirukta* -10.31

- Surya is known as Vama because he is the nourisher of the world. [AV.IX.14.1.].
- Surya is lustrous hence known as Sukra [AV.VI.5.3.1 *Sayana Bhasya*].
- Similarly as he is the motivator of all and hence he is known as Savitr [AV.VI.1.1 *Sayana Bhasya*].
- *Sayana* in his *Bhasya* on V.V.81.4 calls Surya before rise as Savita.



- **Upa = Near**
- **Ni = With certainty**
- **Root Sad = to split up (destroy)**  
**= to go (reach, attain)**  
**= to loosen**
- **Upanisad = that knowledge which splits up, injures or destroys the seeds of worldly existence such as ignorance, etc.**
- **Imparts knowledge:**  
**Through advice, through stories and through order**

We find the seven names of Surya in *Suryopanisad*, viz. Surya, Suryanarayana, Aditya, Savitr, Mitra, Bhanu and Ghrni.

In AV Surya is eulogized with different names viz. Bradhna, Vama, Sukra, Savitr, etc. Surya is known as Bradhna because he engages a person in his *Karman* and its fruits.

In the *Samba Purana*, Surya is raised to the rank of a principal deity of the Saura cult. In fact, it is Surya who receives worship in this cult in the name of Savitr. Surya is also worshipped as the chief of the *Nava-grahas* (the nine planets) who are invariably adored in the beginning of nearly all the religious ceremonies with a view to avoiding inauspicious happenings.

In the *Samba Purana*, Surya is regarded as the head of the *Grahas* (VII.57-8), because of the *Grahas* have come from the Sun (VII.60).

*Visnu Purana* has tried to visualise some solar qualities in Agni making them both interdependent. This could be the reason why the Vedic people invoked Agni so often on account of the solar qualities present in it. The ancient society living under the protection of the Sun, conceived fire as a part of the Sun or an earthly Sun playing before him, providing comfort amidst cold with its pleasing warmth and dispelling darkness with its light.

He is Agni on the earth either in sacrificial fire or in forest or in the houses of people; vidyut or lightning in the air and Surya in heaven and Surya being nothing but a hot ball of fire, itself as a form of Agni.



In the *Surya-sukta* of (RV.-I.115.5-6), it is said that Surya being extremely lustrous comes in the east to lighten, brighten the earth. Though there are references to the rising Sun, the ascent and the setting of the Sun, which indicates that the concept of the Sun was still based upon the physical phenomenon. Yet he becomes primarily a great force of magic and medicines in the AV.

In the *Rgveda*, Sun is mentioned as the giver of eye-sight to the whole world; which is the day to day experience of all of us. He is the only God who, being directly connected with light, radiantly illumines the universe. The rays carry the Surya so that the world may see.

Literary evidence testifies that veneration of the Sun-god was in vogue in the Vedic Age in symbolic form and His worship in human form is of much later date, but the seeds for the humanisation of the Sun-god was well laid in the *Rgveda* itself. Wherein he was concealed as having a chariot of a single wheel.

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*Suryopanisad* personifies Surya as having golden complexion, four arms, two lotuses in hand and the position of the hand in '*Abhaya*' or '*Varada*' *mudra*. He is yoked to a horse, and is portrayed as the propeller of the time and as one who is seated on a red lotus.

## SUN AS REGULATOR OF TIME: CONCEPT OF *KALACAKRA*

The Sun serves the world as the only metre of time (RV. I.50.7) and *Samba-Purana-VIII.7*). He measures the day and the night (RV-I.50.7) and this fixes the span of life of all (RV-VIII.48.7). Therefore, He is the spirit of all the movable and immovable creation on this universe (RV-I.115.1). The *Rgveda-Samhita* states : There is a wheel of twelve rims, three naves and 360 bolts which are both moving and unmoving by nature.

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Here the wheel denotes the Sun. The twelve large circles means twelve months in a year. The three naves indicate the three-substantial positions occurring once a year. These points are situated on the lines of Cancer, Equator and Capricorn. The bolts signify the days of a year i.e. 360. Here, day means a period of 24 hours beginning from one Sunrise to the other.

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In the *Brahmanas*, the lotus flower was added to the list of the paraphernalia of this god. This lotus can be regarded as one of those factors, which played a leading role in the Indian religion. The lotus has always remained as one of the symbols representing the Sun-god and is seen with the images of almost all the gods.

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Surya is usually shown seated in a chariot or a pedestal, without a chariot of course, the latter types are occasionally found. In all the three temples of Surya at Umri, Markhera and sesai. Surya is represented at the *Lalata-bimba* over the door-way, seated on a chariot drawn by seven horses, with Aruna as his charioteer. The Sun-god wears a *Kavaca* (armour), holds lotus in both his hands and is attended by Danda and Pingala.



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A blooming lotus flower in another popular symbol of the solar deity as found on coins and seals found at Era (3rd century, BC)”, states L. P. Pandey.

In due course, the lotus flower, symbolising the Sun, and its creative force, and representing other ideas or principles connected with the Sun came to hold such a unique position in Indian art of all ages and all religions that it was used variously and in many ways to depict their respective gods and beliefs.

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The Sun god-worshippers showed the Sun-god holding two lotus - flowers in both his hands, a feature which became later on an essential and permanent part of his icons.” The Sun-god with lotus in hands, seems to be the later concept, because it was not found till the Sunga period (200 B.C.-100 A.D).

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*Surya Upanisad* is a later *Upanisad* than 3rd century AD as it describes Surya with lotus in his hands which appears to be a later feature. The iconographical evidence of found in the *Suryopanishad*, is also found in the Sun-image of South Indian tradition - of the period of the Pallavas (c.900 AD).

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The chariot which Surya rides and Surya's charioteer, Aruna, as well as seven horses which are said to drag the chariot of Surya are appropriately represented below the feet of Surya in the order of Aruna seated above with the reins of the horses in his hands and the horses below in the alignment of three on either side of one central horse facing the spectator.

**THANK  
YOU**