In the section of the Taittiriya Brähmaṇa devoted to the Agnyādhāna there is a passage that lists the mantras to be used by various men when they establish the sacred fires. What is at stake in this passage is the deity — which one is to be invoked by each class of men.

Thus Brahmins set the fires taking the Ādityas as their deities, or more specifically, they set the fire by the observance of the Ādityas. For the Brahmins descended from the Bhṛgus or the Aṅgirases, one of these two groups of mythical priests becomes the deities. For a consecrated king the deity is Varuna; for a Rājanya, Indra, for a Vaiśya, Manu Grāmani, and finally for the Rathakāra, the Rbhus. As can be seen from the exposition at the beginning and end of the passage, the intention of the Brähmaṇakāra is the appropriate assignment of deities. If one does things yathādevatāṁ, one is not cut off from the gods; one becomes prosperous. But what the Brähmaṇakāra stated without difficulty or further explanation provoked a controversy in later times: among those listed as eligible to perform the Agnyādhāna was the Rathakāra, a name which means “chariot-maker.”

In making this allowance for the Rathakāra, the Taittiriya sākhā appears to be innovating. Comparable passages from Maitrīyaṇi Saṃhitā (1.6.1) and Kāthaka Saṃhitā (7.13) list similar mantras for the Agnyādhāna but omit any mention of the Rbhus or the Rathakāra. What motivated this inclusion is problematic and will be discussed below. Let us turn to its impact on the literature of the period that follows.

The question of whether the Rathakāra, who is presumably not a member of the twice-born classes, is eligible to perform Vedic sacrifices is treated variously in the later literature. The śrautasūtras of the Taittiriya school take account of TB 1.1.4.8 but without enthusiasm. Baudhāyana (2.12 and 24.16), Āpastamba (5.3.18), Bhāradvāja (5.2.4), Vaikhānasa (1.1), and Satyāśādha (3.2) state that while the Brahmīna may set the sacred fires in the spring, the Rājanya in the hot season, and the Vaiśya in the autumn, the Rathakāra may do so in the rainy season. Kātyāyana (4.7.7), the śrautasūtra of the Śukla Yajurveda, also prescribes the rainy season for the chariot-maker, as does Vārāha (1.4.1.1), the later sūtra of Maitrāyanī Samhitā, and so may Āśvalāyana, one of the two Rgveda schools. But neither Śāṅkhāyana, Vaiśāṇa, nor Mānava specify this privilege for the Rathakāra.

The Taittiriya sūtras dutifully prescribe the recitation of the mantra “rbhūṇām tvā...” for the Rathakāra at the time of setting the fires. However no further rules are given in those sūtras for the Rathakāra. That is, in the many passages where operative distinctions are made between the varṇas the Rathakāra is ignored. For example, Bhāradvāja 5.2.15 prescribes the distance to be left between the Āhavaniya and Gārhapatiya fires when they are built at the Agnyādhāna: 8 prakramas for a Brahmīna, 11 for a Rājanya, and 12 for a Vaiśya. No mention is made of Rathakāras. Bhāradvāja 5.3.12–33 states that when kindling sticks are placed on the Brahmāudānika fire at the Agnyādhāna, a Brahmīna recites three gāyatrī verses, a Rājanya three trisūdabha verses, a Vaiśya three jagati verses. No mention is made of Rathakāras.

The sūtras reflect differences of opinion on two crucial questions: First, is the Rathakāra a member of the three upper varṇas or not? Āpastamba 5.3.18–19 takes the term rathakāra etymologically, claiming that a Rathakāra is a member of one of the three varṇas who happens to make chariots by profession. Āśvalāyana 2.1.13 is probably also to be read this way. On the other hand, Bhāradvāja 5.2.9 records conflicting views on whether the Agnyādhāna may or may not be performed by the fourth varṇa. This appears to refer to a dispute about the Rathakāra. The second question is, whoever the Rathakāra may be, what śrauta rites is he entitled to perform? The sūtras cited above all permit him to perform the Agnyādhāna, but a controversy is recorded in Kātyāyana 1.1.9–11, where the opinion of the teacher Vātsya against the Agnyādhāna for Rathakāras is cited. Further, Satyāśādha 3.1.15 explicitly limits the Rathakāra to the