

# Chapter II

# CONCEPT AND PHILOSOPHY OF YAJÑA

## ❖ Types of Yajña and its practical importance:

Vedic sacrifices continued to be performed with great zeal. There are numerous references to persons engaged in performing sacrifices. Agni is the support of the sacrifices, and drinks soma at the sacrifices and consumes oblations.<sup>1</sup> The sun, the moon, the gods and the demons are said to gratify him with the oblations and obtain their desired things. Hindu writers divide the various kinds of sacrifices into two principal classes – nitya (regular) and naimittika (occasional or special) karmāṇi. First one follows the course of the year or the duties imposed upon man during life. The other incidental offerings are occasioned by special wishes of the sacrifice. The BrahmāPurāṇa deals with various types of sacrifices, the kings who performed them, the rites to be performed in them, the priests to be employed therein and the merit that was entailed by them. A sacrifice lasting twelve years was performed and many people gathered to witness it.

There was another sacrifice called satrayāga in which a samitara was appointed and an animal was offered. It was believed that without offering an animal, a man did not get immortality. The vessels and other things required for the sacrifice were prepared and it lasted for a year.<sup>2</sup> There is another reference to the saṁvatsarika sacrifice which the sage Agastya performed in the company of the other sages. These are the periodical sacrifices.

There are references to the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice also. The Rājasūya is a very complex ceremony extending over a long time (more than two years) and comprising a number of separate Īṣṭis. The Brahma Purāṇa makes a reference of king Pṛthu as the first amongst those to be anointed at the Rājasūya

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<sup>1</sup>MārkaṇḍeyaPurāṇa, Ed., Pargiter, F.E., Calcutta, 1904, p. 95-98

<sup>2</sup> Brahma Purāṇa, Anadashram Press, Poona, 1895, p. 48.

sacrifice. There are references to the performance of the Aśvamedha sacrifice also.<sup>3</sup> It was performed with various motives. It was performed to expiate the sin of Brāhmaṇa murder. It was considered to be highly meritorious. The Aśvamedha was considered to be a difficult sacrifice and Rāma was credited with completed ten such sacrifices without obstruction. King Puruṣ is said to have performed the Agnihotra sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> There is a reference to the performance of the Naramedha. The altar, the maṇḍapa, the kuṇḍa, the yūpa, the horse etc. were created beforehand. Vasā, loma, māṁsa and tvag were offered in fire and the mantras were recited. Sometimes a human being was offered in it, but at times, he was only tied there and not offered.<sup>5</sup> Another sacrifice called sirayajña was performed by the farmers. The mountain-dwelling people should perform giriyajña or goyajña. The Brahma Purāṇa gives an elaborate description of the Brahma's sacrifice in which first of all the animal sitting on the kuśa grass was anointed. The yūpa, the praṇita, the kuśa, the ṛtvik, the Yajña, the śrvava, the puruṣa, the pasa were offered in the sacrifice after the whole world emerged from the puruṣa. Then Brahma offered oblations in the Gārhapatya, the Dakṣiṇāgni and the Āhavanīyāgni. In each of them he meditated on the puruṣa, the cause of the world. The lord of the world took a white form and manifested himself in the Ahvaniya, a black form in the Dakṣiṇāgni and a yellow form in the Gārhapatya.

Agni, the god of fire had a significant role in the sacrifices. In other words a sacrifice could not be performed without Agni. From the description of the Varaha incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, one can get the idea of the objects of sacrifice. It is said that the four Vedas are his feet, the yūpa is his jaw, the Yajña his teeth, the cities his mouth, the fire (hutāśana) his tongue etc. for obtaining this world. According to the ViṣṇuPurāṇa, Pururava is said to have performed the agnihotra sacrifice and Agni is divided into three parts. The VāyuPurāṇa confirms

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11-24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*

Purarava's sacrifice in which he split the fire into three parts. As fires consumed sacrificial offerings and carried the same to the gods, it is variously called hutāśa, hutabhuja and hutavāha. There are references to brahmanas maintaining sacred fire (āhitāgni).<sup>6</sup>

### ❖ Agni-ādhana (Establishment of the Fires) and The Three Fires

It is not a matter of conjecture that the Śrautasūtras fuse the various previous practices together; and the original variations in rituals at that stage get blurred. The Taittiriya Brahman (TB), presenting the Taittiriya School, is older than the Śatapatha School since traces of some details from the Taittiriya tradition, negated by the Śatapatha Brahman (SB) come to the fore by comparing the rituals at the two levels. But, in many other cases, the SB advises rejection of earlier (or, contemporary) practices, which it is not very easy to trace. For that matter, even the TB shows disregard for certain practices, which obviously existed at its time, may be in a different tradition or in its sub-tradition.

The main rites in the ritual of the establishment of the fires (three, or five with the Sabhya and the avasathya) are – the kindling of a fire at the evening of the day previous to the one set for the adhana rite, cooking the brahmaudana (food for priests), keeping awake in the night by the side of this fire which has to be kept ablaze throughout the night, the kindling of a fresh fire early next morning for being carried to the various altars (places of fire), carrying fire to the Āhavanīya and the Dakṣiṇa fireplaces and establishing it, and the full offering (pūrṇāhuti). But, there are other minor, but not less important details of ritual, such as the

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<sup>6</sup>ViṣṇuPurāṇa, 1.4.32 Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1969 &BP., opcit, 213.32-42 :

placing of the sambhara prior to the establishment of the fires. We shall start with the sambhara, as that rite precedes the actual laying down of the fires.

Two types of sambhara (the objects comprising earth and those from the wood) are mentioned in this connection. Usually these are seven each. The TB (II.1.3) mentions the following with arthādas (aetiological reasons). Associated with the arthavāda, the rite is sought to be given importance; and the arthavāda differs from text to text, though similarity in certain cases is not entirely ruled out. Prior to the placing of the samharas, the surface of the ground chosen for the sacrifice is to be dug out (udhanti). This is said to be for the purpose of driving away from it whatever is impure therein. As, by this act, earth gets injured, water is sprinkled over it to make it calm.<sup>7</sup> Then, the following things are deposited:

1. Sand (sikata); and it is said that sand is the aspect of fire.
2. Saline earth (usah); for, this is said to be for nourishment; saline earth is also said to be the gift of heaven to the earth; likewise the dark spot seen in the orb of the moon is said to be the gift from the earth. These gifts were exchanged when these worlds (Heaven and Earth), formerly in close embrace, were separated. Hence, it is enjoined that, while depositing the saline earth on the ground for sacrifice, one should think of the spot in the moon.
3. Earth dug up by the rats; it is said to be the essence of the earth.
4. Earth from an ant-hill (vālmīka-vapa); for, the ant-hill is said to be the 'ear' of the earth<sup>8</sup> (probably due to its shape), in addition to its being considered earth's strength.
5. Clay from a never-drying lake (suda); this is for food.

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<sup>7</sup>TaittirīyaSamhitā, I.1.3.1 apo voksati; this is the reasoning given at the digging of the actual altar, cf. op cit, Upadhyay G.P., I.2.5.19; III.6.1.19.

<sup>8</sup>Taittirīya Brahman, I.1.3.4 - srotramhyetatpṛthivyah yad valmīkah, op cit, Apte, H.N., p. 12

6. Pebbles (sarkarā); this is for making the earth firm. It is said that when Prajāpati brought up earth from the primeval waters, himself taking the form of a boar, and spread it on the leaf of a blue lotus, it kept on shaking. So, he made her firm by placing pebbles. Here the explanation is twofold. In addition to the sambhara being for firmness, it is associated with the prick of the boar that brought out the earth. Hence clay (earth) and the pebbles.
7. Gold; for it is the semen of the fire. It is deposited into the northern side, as it is said to be semen; and man does not touch his semen.

Among the things relating to wood (symbol of equivalent to faggots) are the following : aśvattha, as the fire hid himself in this tree taking the form of a horse; udumbara, in a place where the gods placed their energy this tree sprang up; parṇa, as it was produced from the feather of the Gāyatrīmetre when she carried Soma away from heaven taking the form of the bird suparṇā;<sup>9</sup> sāmi, as with this tree Prajāpati made fire calm (from sam), lest it should burn Prajāpati himself; vikaṅkata,<sup>10</sup> as fire deposited his lustre in it, from a tree struck by the lightning. These are six, as mentioned by the TB (loc.cit.9-12); the last symbolizes the fire with its 'heart' (sahrdayo'gnih).

The SB which says that the digging of the ground is to prepare the sacrificial place (the word used is ullikhati), so that the evil associated with it should be destroyed (the word used is udhanti), mentions the following things as sambhara (II.1.1.1ff); but, they are only five:

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<sup>9</sup> A well used myth; for detailed study see, Dange, Legends in the Mahabharata, Delhi, 1969, pp.67.; also Myths from the Mahabharata, Vol. 1, Aryan, New Delhi, 1997, pp.56

<sup>10</sup> Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol.II.ii, Poona, 1974, p.988 has it as vikarikata, on the authority of Āpastamba S.S.V.1.4.

1. Water; but, this is not said to be for calming down the ground that is injured. It says that waters symbolise food, and also that they are “woman”, the fire being the man. This forms the procreative couple;<sup>11</sup> that the union of waters and fire procreates gold, which is the semen of fire.
2. Gold; as it the semen of fire, as noted above. The point to be noted is that this explanation of the production of gold is more polished than that from the TB as the waters are said to be the wives of Varuṇa, which is a well-settled association, but the further explanation is awkward. The fire-god is said to have longed for them, and his semen got ejected; this became gold. Here, the relationship between fire and the water is direct, without their being wives of any other god. Gold is said to endow fire with semen.
3. Saline earth (usah). The legend from the TB is absent here; but this sambhara is associated with cattle.
4. Earth dug out by the rats. The explanation is about the same that obtains at the TB.
5. Sarkarah. The explanation is the same, except for the detail that Prajāpati took the form of the boar etc. which is absent here. It is said that as the earth was unsettled, going now to the gods and now to the asuras, the gods made her stable with the pebbles; then they could sacrifice on this stable earth.

Here the AV clearly says that these five sambharas should only be laid, as the sacrifice is five-phased etc.<sup>12</sup> It also resorts to a well set symbolism, saying that ‘five’ stands for the nyuna, or it is nyuna (as against atirikta), and that it is from the nyuna that procreation takes place.<sup>13</sup> This makes it very clear that this text

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<sup>11</sup> The Vedic ritual is replete with such symbolism; see Dange, *Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual*; the usual expression is *mithunamprajananam*; cf. *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., II.1.1.13, p. 48

<sup>12</sup> *op cit*, Upadhyay, G.P., II.1.1.12 *tan vaetanpañcasambharansambharati, parikoyajñah, panktahpasubpancartavahsamvatsarasya.*

<sup>13</sup> The explanation of Sāyana here - - *stripumsayorvirasyaparaspara-nyunatve sati tasmattyunatmithunat...* is not sound. In all such cases, *nyuna* (something less=female organ) stands for the female, while *atirikta* (more = protruded organ) for the male. A procreative *mithuna* is formed

does not approve of the seven sambhara concept. The sambharas being five is attested by the tradition as a variation; and this seems also to be an old tradition. Thus, the KāṭhakaSaṁhitā (VIII.2) recommends five sambharas, with the gloss that this number corresponds to the sacrifice being five-phased (pankta). According to this text, the sambharas are – (1) uṣaḥ; (2) sarkarah; (3) vālmīkavapa (earth from the ant-hill). In connection with the vālmīka-vapa it is said, that, formerly, the earth was caused to be dead by Vṛtra. The ants knew where the holy ‘life’ of the earth lay hidden, which was also sacrifice-worthy. In establishing the earth from the ant-hill that life is restored;<sup>14</sup> (4) earth dug by the boar. A popular myth is employed in this connection. It takes the form of the boar. When he came out, some clay remained sticking to his snout. That much (snout-sticking) clay formed into this earth. When that much earth from the ant-hill is used for the rite, it conforms to the original shape of the earth. And moreover, it is the boar that “sees” food in the earth. The idea obviously is that the tusk of the boar was the earliest form of the plough, giving place to the other later forms. (This detail of the sambhara occurs also at MS referred to later, below); and (5) water. From the SB one gets to know that, at the period of this text, there was also another view that discarded the sambhara concept and practice altogether. This view was that it is not necessary to have any sambhara; because they are all in this earth itself;

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by the nyuna and the atirikta together; only a nyuna (or an atirikta) cannot form a mithuna. However, it is a common experience, and observation that the actual birth is from the nyuna (female organ); on this point, see Sexual Symbolism..... Actually, the passage here has nyunam u tarhimithunamprajananam; the Kanva version has simply, but rightly, nyunam u vaiprajananam. Eggeling’s rendering : “... the very deficiency itself is rendered a productive union”, and his note, “a deficient pairing is effected (on account of the uneven number)” is short of the mark, as it does not show acquaintance with the broader concept of nyuna-atirikta. For Eggeling, J. E., SB., Vol.XII, Delhi, 1963 (1882), p.281. The sense is ‘the less (=cavity) is, indeed, the place of procreation (and truly) a pairing’.

<sup>14</sup> In the context of the rite of piling the fire (Agnicayana) also earth from the ant-hill is used as sambhara. In that context, the Kathaka Sam. (XIX.2) explains that the earth is prajapati, and her (his) ear is the ant-hill (iyam vasa prajapatistasyaesakarno yad valmikah); when the earth from the ant-hill is collected a mantra is recited, so that Prajapati should hear that this rite is being performed and the earth is taken.



and when one prepares an altar for the sacrifice (on the basis of the identification of the vedi with the earth),<sup>15</sup> it is not necessary to place the (additional) things (loc.cit.14). The position of the SB however, is that the sambharas are necessary. It does not mention the thing comprising wood in this connection, though they are necessary, and are mentioned by other texts. They are the sticks of Udumbara, Aśvattha, a tree struck by lightning and Parna (palāśa).

The subject of ādhāna is dealt with in some detail at the MS (I.6.3); and it will be good to note some points of interest. The plan generally is the same as obtains in the Brahman Texts mentioned above. According to it, for the establishment of the fires and for the altar, the ground has to be sprinkled over with the water. The sprinkling of water on the place for the altar is said to be to make it pure and sacrifice-worthy. The sprinkling of water is explained differently. Here it is said to serve the purpose of lessening the heat of the fire (to be established) of which the earth was afraid. Moreover water is said to be the very body of Prajāpati. This is also said to secure for the sacrifice all glory, cattle and righteousness. From among the sambharas, the first mentioned is earth that is dug by the (tusk of the) boar, an item dropped later by the context of the sarkarah. The reason for the boar-dug earth is cited as follows. The earth was, formerly only as hollow as the snout of the boar (yāvadvaivarāhasyacasalamtāvati). In placing first the earth dug by a boar, that original form of the earth is restored. Hence, it is said, that the earth gets softened for the boar. It is said that the boar holds the whole span of the earth.

Here, the importance of the earth dug by the boar (varāha) is sought to be explained by an interesting explanation (arthavāda). It is said that the asuras named “Devapanayah” stole the cows of the gods, and followed them. Now, the milk of the cows got lost to the gods and also to the asuras. The asuras said, “What

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<sup>15</sup>*op cit*, Wilson, H.H., I.164.35; *op cit*, Upadhyay, G.P., I.2.5.7, 11, p. 26

was excellent (varam) of the cows is abandoned.” That came to be “Vara+aha” (=Varāha) and came back to the gods. Thus, is the Varāha (boar) important! Hence, it is said, whosoever uses the boar-dug earth for the sambhara gets prosperity.<sup>16</sup> The succeeding to be cited is the earth from the ant-hill (vālmīka-vapa), which is said to be the very core of the earth. The ant-hill is also said to be the breast (stanah) of Prajāpati. Then there are the usual objects – usah ‘sikata, sarkarah and the akhu-kiri (saline earth, sand, pebbles and the rat-dug earth). Last comes gold, as the sambhara. The MS prescribes two purodāśas to be placed as offering, after gold is laid, as necessary sambhara. It says that one who, thus, lays down gold gets all prosperity and food. The purodāśas (cakes) to be deposited are to be made, one from barley-flour and the other from rice-flour. The one from barely flour is to be laid down to the west of the place where fire is to be established, while the one from rice should be placed to the east. These are to be placed on the leaves of trees that grow in a forest. These two purodāśas are said to be the two breasts of Prajāpati (here represented by the fire). The purodāśa to the west is intended to be laid down with the chanting of bhūrbhuvaḥ, while the one to the east with bhuvaḥsvāḥ, the mantra is to have the exact name of the deity depending upon the varṇa and gotra of the sacrifice. Thus, for the Angirasa brahmana- “bhūrbhuvasvo’ arigirasamtvadevānām’ vratena a dadha”; for a brahmana of the Vaiśvanara gotra – agnestvadevasyavratena...”; for a kṣatriya- “indrasyatvamarutvataḥ...” etc.

The usual altars for the fires are constructed, the one for the Āhavanīya being to the east of that for the Gārhapatya; and the one for the Dākṣiṇa fire is to the south-

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<sup>16</sup>. Boar-dug earth is used also in the rites at marriage. This belief at the MS forms the basis also for the myth of the earth being dug up by Visnu-Varaha; and sculptures show earth, anthropomorphised, clinging to the tusk of the Boar-Visnu. However, the earliest concept came from the rounded earth sticking to the round snout (casala) of the boar. This will also show the Vedic belief in the earth being round. This will also show the Vedic belief in the earth being round, which is supported from the SB (VII.1.1.37) ayamvailokogarhapatyahparimandala u vaayamlakah). In the context of the Rajasuya, the boar is said to be produced from ghee, and friendly to the cows, op cit, Upadhyay, G.P., V.4.3.19, p.

east of the Gārhapatya. About the distance of the Āhavaniya shed from that of the Gārhapatya, there is difference of opinion; and this is indicated by the TB. It says that it should be twelve steps, in view of the twelve months. It sets forth an alternate view that the distance should not be actually measured; for, if actually measured, it would be “limited” (parimita); and that is not beneficial. Hence, it should be covered with the eye and the place should be fixed. It may be slightly more or less (I.1.4.1). By doing so, it is said, one attains both the “limited” and the “unlimited”. The SB, does not have any such suggestion for the distance. It is clear from the commentary (Sāyana) that this distance varied in the process of evolution, according to the varṇa of the sacrificer.<sup>17</sup> The MS prescribes twenty-four prakrāmas, in view of the twenty-four syllables of Gāyatrī, the metre of Agni.

The activities on the day previous to the actual establishing of the fires comprise the kindling of the fire, cooking the brahmaudana (boiled rice or barley for the brahmanas), feeding the four priests invited for the rite and keeping awake in the night on the part of the sacrifice with the fire kept ablaze. Both the sacrificer and his wife take part in these rites, as they do in the whole sacrifice. The cooked rice is called catusprāsya, as it is to be partaken of by the four priests. The TB Supports the cooking of the odana with a legend, according to which Aditī was desirous of sons. She cooked grains four times, one caru (vessel) each time she desired as son. She offered the food to the Sādhyas (semi-divine beings) and herself ate what remained each time, as it was given back to her by the Sādhyas. This remaining food was symbolic of the semen (I.1.9.1) tasyauccheśānām adaduh tat prasnatsaretodhata). Thus, she got four sons. In the ritual, clarified butter is poured into the odana, which is then served to the four priests in four plates. Prior to the priests partake of the food, three faggots are smeared with the remaining clarified butter; and they are offered one after the other into the fire, which is the

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<sup>17</sup> TB I.1.4.1, and its introduction; cf. K.S.S.IV.8.19. The Kathaka Sam. (VIII.3) has: brahamanaSacrificer 8 prakrama-s ksatriya 11; vaisya 12; or as far as the eye sees and one likes.

same (brahmaudanika) fire. This act is explained as follows. Aditī gained semen (of the Sādhyas) through the remaining food; hence by offering the faggots smeared with clarified butter, one (the sacrificer and his wife through him) gains semen. Three faggots symbolise the mithuna (father-mother), which includes the son (or progeny). The faggots should be offered with the recitation of a verse in Gāyatrīmetre in the case of a brahmana sacrifice; with the Triṣṭubh in the case of a kṣatriya; and with the Jagatī in the case of a vaiśya, the syllables being, respectively, eight eleven and twelve. The fire has to be kept burning till the day of the actual establishment, may be for one whole year or twelve days or for three days. If he could not establish the fires for a whole year, at the completion of the year he is enjoined to go through the offering of the faggots again. He has to keep awake for the night, after offering the faggots and the food to the four priests. If the faggots are not offered into the fire, the establishment of the fires would be fruitless as said in the text. The MS which represents the older tradition, has the odana termed catuhsaravam (cooked in four saucers) which is described as jivatandulamiva (like rice with life). It also gives the account of the sons of Aditi in the same context. Till the fire is finally established – may be after one year, twelve days or three days - fire from his house is not to be carried by any one for kindling his own ritual-fire. Also there is no mention of the difference as to the varṇa while placing the faggots. In this context the MS refers to the legend of Pururavas and Urvaśī to explain the use of the faggots of Śami and Ásvattha. According to it, the son of Pururvas and Urvaśī (Ayu) was given a form of the fire-god which he placed on his lap, placing it in the ukha (fire-container). Here the fire is said to be in the form of the tree Asvattha, and the ukha is said to be from the Śami tree. The legend as it occurs at the SB (XI.5.1.1) has the lower kindling apparatus (araṇi) from Sami, the upper one being from the Asvattha. The MS further says that the Asvattha was produced from the semen of Agni, while Sami from the womb (ulba) in which it fell. The point is interesting, as the ukha is generally said to be the mother of the fire; also, the ukha is generally made of

clay, while here it is said to be made from the wood of the Sami tree. At the SB, the lower araṇi takes the place of the ukha. It appears that the ukha was, in the earlier phase, a veritable lower araṇi itself, which gave place to the slab of wood with a dimple in the middle to fix the churning rod.

The SB, has some interesting variations, which the TB does not have. The latter says nothing about the taking of food by the sacrifice on the day of the cooking of the brahmaudana. From the SB, it becomes clear that there were two views in this matter. The day is called upa-vasatha; because the gods, knowing of the adhana, which is to follow, come and stay in the house of the sacrificer on this (previous) day. The common view, as indicated by the SB, is that he should eat during the day itself; so that he does not eat when the gods have actually arrived at the oncoming of the evening to stay at night. The SB, however, says that he may eat even at night.<sup>18</sup> The reason given is, that at this time he has not yet established the fire (which are to be established the next day only); and, for him who is not an āhitāgni (as he is not at this moment), there is no vow. At this time he is only a common man. Another practice mentioned by this text is to tie a goat near the fire, with the belief that the goat is the beast of the fire-god, and that this would give fullness to the ritual and to the fire.<sup>19</sup> Though the SB mentions this practice as being followed by some, it does not approve of it. It says that if the sacrifice can procure a goat, or has it, he may give it to the Agnidh priest next morning. In the later tradition, however, the KatyāyanaŚrautaSūtra (KSS) does not strictly follow the Brahmana of its own school and says that he may tie the

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<sup>18</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyay, G.P., II.1.4.2 tadvā pi kāmamevāśniyat, p.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, II.1.4.3 taddhaikeahamupabadhnantiagneyo 'jo' gnerevasarvatvayetivadantah. The TB does not mention this detail though its Srautasutra, Baudh.S.S., mentions it with the belider, that he may cross over death thereby, II.15 mrtyumtaramyhamity' uttarenagarhapatyas-yayatanamkalmasamajambadhni. This is one of the many instances of the later tradition getting mixed up. The goat, however, obtains as a symbol of fire in the tradition, Vedic and later. *op cit*, Wilson, H.H., I.163.2,3; fire is āhāvhaṇa, Matsya P. 260.11. Archaeological evidence supports this symbolism. See Agrawal, R.C. "Agni in Early Indian Art", J. Indian History, Vol 43, pt. 1, Trivandrum, 1965, p.153

goat or he may not, thus suggesting an option. The detail of the *catusprasyamodanam* shows yet interesting variations.

The TB does not give many details; but the SB presents a controversy in this connection. It gives the view that some people cook this *odana* with the belief that thereby they would please the metres, which indicates the desire to strengthen the priests who would sing the mantras later during the course of the sacrifice. The plea for feeding the priests with the *catusprasyaodana* is, that this is like well preparing the chariot in which one is to travel. This plea of feeding the priests with this belief is not acceptable to the SB which, however, prescribes the feeding of the priests ultimately. There seems to have been a variation of this practice, according to which the *odana* was not offered to the four priests. The whole of the *odana* (cooked rice) was scooped in a plate, hollowed in the middle and clarified butter was poured into it. The three faggots were dipped into the butter, one after the other, and were then offered into the fire, with verses having the word *ghṛta*. But, this practice is set aside (though mentioned by the SB neither commending it nor criticizing it), with the remark, that this could be done if that fire was to be used for making into the *Dakṣiṇāgni* (*Anvāharyapācana*). *Indradyumna*. *Bhallaveya* is mentioned in this connection, with the remark that he commended the practices of offering, in this way, the faggots into the fire, saying that what is to be offered to the fire has to be so offered; hence, that, the *catusprasyaodana* is not really for feeding the priests, but for offering into the fire along with the faggots to which it sticks. The position of the SB is that the fire into which the offerings are cast with the suitable verses cannot be turned into the *Dakṣiṇāgni*.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the *odana* is not for the fire, but it is for the priests. It is only when the priests have partaken of the *odana* that the remaining portion is cast into the fire along with the faggots smeared with clarified butter.

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<sup>20</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 321 - *atoDākṣiṇaharanamanugamanamvahuti-samskrtasyagnernavakalpate*. Actually, this does not seem to be the purport of the statement of *Bhallaveya*.

What has been said above would show how the rite of the *catusprasyaodana* varied in the early period. The later period (*Sūtras*), however, prescribes the *odana* as for the priests. Another point to be noted is that the legend of *Aditi* indicates the cooking of the *odana* four times, one after the other; not in four vessels at the same time. Is it likely that the earlier practice was to cook one vessel full each day up to four days?<sup>21</sup>

About keeping awake during the night near the fire, to see that it does not get extinguished, till the next morning, the *SB* has the following prescription. It says that, if the sacrifice has become weak due to fast on that day, he may go to sleep. It says that the weakness of the sacrifice may get enhanced by keeping awake to please the *gds* that have arrived at his place on the *upavasatha* day. He becomes fit for the *ahana* rite merely by his keeping awake as late as possible; so there is no harm if he sleeps. Moreover, he is as yet not an *ahitagni*; and there are no hard and fast rules for him, as he is, at this time, only a common man.

Then, follows the rite of the kindling of the fires<sup>22</sup> and taking them to their places. There is no clear indication in the *MS* which has to be taken as representing an older practice, as to whether the *Gārhapatya* fire to be kindled in the place of the fire on which the rice for the four priests (*catusprasya-odana*) was cooked. But, it is clear that the *brahmaudana* was prepared in the night prior to the day on which in the morning, the *Gārhapatya* was kindled.<sup>23</sup> From the passage immediately

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<sup>21</sup> Especially with the practice of preparing the *odana* daily for a period of even a year, or twelve days, this seems probable; cf, *TB* I.1.9.6.

<sup>22</sup> . The kindling of the fire has certain details which allude to a myth. The lower slab for kindling (*adhararani*) is invoked as *Urvasi*, while the kindling rod is invoked as *pururavas*. Prior to kindling, the lower end that fits in the slit of the lower slab is smeared with clarified butter. The rod has a string to get it rotated. It is rotated swiftly thrice with three jerks to the right, so that the fire be kindled. For the myth of *Pururavas* and *Urvasi* and its variations, see Dange, “*pururavas, a Research for Identity*” in *A Corpus of Indian Studies being a Fel, Vol. in honour of Gaurinath Shastri*, Calcutta, 1980, pp.52-60. For a discussion on the meaning of the myth, see by the same author, *sexual symbolism from the Vedic Ritual*, Delhi, 1979, pp. 177-212 (“*The Fleeting Nymph and the Cane-Rod*”).

<sup>23</sup> *MS* I.6.12 *yasyaratryahprataragnimadhasyamanahsyat tam ratrimcatuhsaravamodanampaktva*.

preceding, one gets the impression that it was to be cooked on the fire (which would come to be later called) Dakṣiṇāgni. Here the MS shows two methods. According to one, this fire was to be brought from the house or the hearth of someone who is prospered (or of the sacrifice himself) (bhrastrad-Dakṣiṇāgnimhareyuh); for the hearth (bhrastra) is the means of preparing food. The explanation is interesting. It is also said earlier that cattle multiply and go following the fire that is carried; the fire is Rudra (and Rudra controls cattle). But, this is not favoured by some who think this is like bringing a low-born person (vrsalah). Hence, it is suggested that it should be freshly kindled. The odana for the brahmanas may be from barley or rice as these grains are said to represent cattle. A person who does not perform a Soma-sacrifice is ordained to the gods only clarified butter for a year, where after he may offer oblations prepared from grain mentioned above. The general practice, as mentioned by the TB (though not mentioned as such by the SB) is that the act of attrition for kindling the fire is to be done on the place of the brahmaudanika fire, which was kindled in the Gārhapatya abode on the previous day in the afternoon. For this, the fire is to be extinguished, and the ashes are removed. Before doing this the two araṇis for kindling the fresh fire are heated on the brahmaudanika fire. These two acts, the heating of the apparatus for kindling the new fire and the place of the old fire serve for the continuity of the two fires.<sup>24</sup>

Now, there are variant views as regards the kindling of the fresh fire. This fire is to be kindled in the shed meant for the Gārhapatya fire itself, where the brahmaudanika fire also was kindled the previous day in the afternoon. The position of the TB is that, the Gārhapatya is to be established on the next day before sunrise, when it is still night; this would mean that the kindling and establishment of this fire (Gārhapatya), should be done when the day has not yet

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<sup>24</sup> TB loc.cit., and 10, sagnehsantatih; this principle obtains quite often in the ritual tradition; cf. Kausitaki-Br. VII.3; Aitareya Br.II.5.



broken; it says, that the night belongs to Agni, while the Āhavanīya is to be established at day. The reasoning is that the night is also meant for cattle. The day belongs to Indra (= the sun) and the Āhavanīya. In connection with the order in which the fires are to be established, an account obtains at the TB though it may be set aside as an arthavāda, there appears to be an indication therein of probable customs in connection with this rite. According to the account, Idā, the daughter of Manu, desired to know how the asuras established their fires. She went to them and saw that they established the Āhavanīya first, then the Gārhapatya and lastly the Anvāharyapācana (i.e. Dakṣiṇa). She knew it to be a wrong method, as she was adept in the science of sacrifice (Yajñanukasini). Then she went to the gods. She observed that they established the Anvāharyapācana first; then the Gārhapatya, and lastly the Āhavanīya. She thought and understood that the asuras would gain glory for some time, but their glory will go away from them, turning away (praticī). This is because the asuras proceeded from east to west. In the case of the gods she knew, that they would prosper well, as they went from the west (Gārhapatya) to the east (Āhavanīya), but that they would not win progeny; (and at the beginning they actually came back to the north-west from the Anvāharyapācana to the Gārhapatya before starting for the east to the Āhavanīya). She told Manu of the proper way to establish the fires. She established the Gārhapatya first, then the Anvāharyapācana and, lastly, the Āhavanīya. In this symbolism the Gārhapatya fire is associated with progeny. Hence to establish this fire first is to make sure of the gain of progeny and cattle. The account presupposes that the fireplaces are already fixed. It will be seen, that in the first two methods (i.e. of the asuras and the gods) there is going to the west at some point; in the last method, as suggested by Idā. There is no going to the west at all. One starts from the west; goes to the south-east to the Anvāharyapācana, and thence slightly to the north-east to the Āhavanīya. This is expected to be the right method of establishing three fires; but, this is not corroborated from the Śrauta tradition, wherein the Gārhapatya is established

first, and then straight the Āhavanīya. About the Anvāharyapācana there is no definite method. Yet, if we see closely, there is indication that the Anvāharyapācana was the first to be established' for, the gods are said to have followed this method. There is indication even in the tradition to the effect that first the Anvāharyapācana was established. This is clear if we study the variation given on the name of Bhallaveya by the SB. In the midst of the discussion regarding the catusprasyaodana, it is said that, if that fire, in which the faggots are offered with the ṛc, sāman or the yajus, is carried to the south it becomes the Anvāharyapācana (SB II.1.4.6). Actually the three faggots are offered with Gāyatrī verses for the brahmana sacrifice, with Triṣṭubh for the kṣatriya and with Jagati for the vaiśya. Hence, it is clear that there were two different methods associated with the brahmaudanika fire. One was to extinguish it, and the other was to take it to the altar for the Anvāharyapācana.<sup>25</sup> In the practice wherein the fire was extinguished, or removed from its place (the remaining embers being extinguished), the ashes were cleaned' that place was marked by the wooden short sword called sphya (as is known from other texts, though the SB and the TB are silent about this detail); a new fire was churned out on the place of the old (brahmaudanika) fire; and as soon as the new fire was seen, it was caused to flare up, by exhaling on it and inhaling from,<sup>26</sup> and was led to the east, in the Gārhapatya abode itself, and was settled there. If we take into account the variation in regards to the disposal of the brahmaudanika fire, the practice of taking it to the south and establishing it as the Anvāharyapācana precedes the

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<sup>25</sup>*Op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., II.1.4.6 Dākṣiṇavahyenamharantyanvaharyapacano bhavisyatityanuvagamayanti.

<sup>26</sup> The TB indicates the breathing, I.2.1.19; the K.S.S., IV.8.26.27 prescribes exhaling and inhaling, abhisvasa and ucchvasa; the Baudh.S.S., II.16 simply mentions the mantra-s from Taitt.Sam. above without any direction as to breathing upon. Kane's observation (op.cit., p.993), that the sacrifice "breathes over it", has to be, probably, taken as including inhaling and exhaling. The mantra-s that Kane mentions in this connection are not from this context; they are both (TB II.5.8.8 upavarohajatavedaḥ, and Taitt.Sam. IV.2.9.1 prajāpatistva etc.) from a different context. They are not found, in this context, even in the Srautasutras mentioned above. Kane does not mention the text. The first mantra is from a general stock; the second is from Agnicayana.

establishing of the Gārhapatya, which requires fresh kindling. This will show that the method referred to as being followed by the gods was almost the same as this one. It is this one that is prescribed by Bhallaveya, according to the SB. It is clear that at the period of the TB, this fell a bit into background, as this text does not mention it, probably because it does not approve of it, the SB on the other hand notes it; but, it does not specifically reject. The KSS of this Brahmana, however, mentions it and prescribes it as an alternate practice (IV.8.15). It has to be noted that the BSS (of the Taittiriya tradition also mentions the two alternatives. But they do not come there for the brahmaudanika fire. The position there is that (after the brahmaudanika fire is extinguished) a fresh fire is kindled in the abode of the Gārhapatya fire; and this fire is established in the altar for the Dākṣiṇa fire as Anvāharyapācana; or alternatively, the new fire is established first as the Gārhapatya, and then from it, the one for the Anvāharyapācana is taken to the south from the southern gate of the abode (I.17). The MS which has the legend of Idā, the daughter of Manu knowing the methods of establishing the fire (Mait.Sam.I.6.13), has the same purport; but it does not specifically mention the names of the three fires in this context. It has imam (this) for the Gārhapatya and the Anvāharyapācana and amum (that) for the Āhavaniya.

Variation obtains in the rite of carrying the Āhavaniya fire from the Gārhapatya. We have noted above, that, according to the TB the Gārhapatya fire was produced by attrition and also established when it is still night (I.1.4.2). This text further enjoins the establishment of the Āhavaniya fire at its place as the sun is half above the horizon. The SB however, criticizes this practice. It says that those who follow the practice of churning the (Gārhapatya) fire when it is yet night, and taking fire from it to the east to the Āhavaniya fireplace, at half sunrise, believe, that, thereby they secure both the day and the night, and thereby, the incoming and out-going breaths and the mind and speech, but this is not correct, according to the SB ; because, when they churn the fire before the break of the day (when it is yet

dark), they get both their fires established before sunrise itself. It says, that darkness is evil; and he who churns his fire before it is sunrise, dies before his full span of life. He who churns (and also, carries) the fire after sunrise lives his full span of life. The MS prescribes kindling at sunrise, saying that if the fire is kindled prior to sunrise it would become fit for the asura-s and against the gods (napuraSūryasyodetormanthitavaasuryovidevaadhiyate); hence it should be churned as the sun-rays get rising (udyatsurasmisumathyah). It is interesting to note that the SB uses the following expression in this context: (uditaĀhavaniammanthet). Now, the traditional practice is that fire from the Gārhapatya itself is carried for the Āhavanīya, by means of some fuel-sticks getting them lit on the Gārhapatya.<sup>27</sup> As against this, the mention (at SB) of the Āhavanīya being ‘churned’ is unique. The point is, whether there was as fresh churning for the Āhavanīya, as different from that for the Gārhapatya. In other words, do both, the separate churning and carrying, refer only to the Āhavanīya and whether there was no difference regarding the establishment of the Gārhapatya in the Taittirīya and the SB practices? The KSS (IV.9.10) does not mention a separate churning. It prescribes the carrying of the fire from the Gārhapatya as noted above. But, the case of the Sabhya fire may be compared. This fire was produced from attrition freshly. There is hardly any variation regarding the carrying of the horse before the fire to the Āhavanīya fireplace in the two texts which is also noted at MS (hence, we leave the rite here). The horse is called purva-vat (SBII, 1.4.17 – “one who is harnessed for the first time; fresh and young”). The SB has a small detail in the manner the fire is led. It says that the fire should be held in such a way that it should reach the holder (the smoke from the fire, according to the KSS IV.9.11 yathainamdhumaupeyat).

This detail is absent in the TB. Unlike the TB which prescribes only the young pūrvavat horse in this rite, and so does MS, the SB says that, if such a horse is not

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<sup>27</sup> Kane, op.cit., p. 994

available, any horse would do; that, in the event of a horse not being available, one even take a bull, because the horse is the “bandhu” of the bull. The TB says that the fire (after being placed in the pan of clay) should not be held above the head; for, if does so, his vital breaths would be cut. The MS dwells on this detail and explains it with a sort of on arthavāda, which indicates two different methods of carrying the freshly kindled fire. It says, that Prajāpati created the creatures, which got lost in the primeval darkness in the world! He grieved and heated himself; from him (in his heat) the fire got produced; he placed it down (on the ground); to him (i.e. to the fire) the creatures of this world turned. He then lifted it as far as his calf; to him the creatures that were in the upper world got turned. Then he lifted up to his knees, then to his shoulders, to his ears; by this, the creatures that were in yet upper region got turned to it. Beyond the ears, it is said, the fire should not be held up; for in the case the fire, being above the sacrifice, would burn him. As against this, another method approved by the MS is that, the freshly kindled fire should not be placed down at all. It should be held first as far as the knees; then up to the navel; then up to the shoulders. Not beyond the shoulders. This detail does not occur in the SB, or in the KSS. The horse steps on the sambhara at the Āhavanīya; he is led to the east (along the north) of the Āhavanīya fireplace and is turned to face the west. The SB has the same; but has it that the sacrifice lays the fire on the footprint of the horse. The TB (I.1.5.9), however, forbids this act, saying that if this is done. Rudra would kill the sacrificer’s cattle; because fire is Rudra; and if fire is to touch the footprint of the horse it would burn cattle, whom the horse represents. Actually, the rite, generally, requires the placing of the foot in the Āhavanīya altar itself prior to the fire being placed. The reasoning of the TB is that if, on the other hand, the horse does not place its foot in the mound for the altar, the sacrifice may not have cattle at all. Hence, this text prescribes the placing of the foot by the horse by the side of the actual altar-mound. Another detail from the SB (25) is that when the footprint of the horse is made, the fire is lightly touched to the print; it is again

lifted, and once again touched, at the third time it is laid down. The TB displays familiarity with this practice, but does not approve of it, for, it says that by doing so the fire gets unsettled. It recommends that the fire should be held in one position itself (below the head, as mentioned by it earlier, I.1.5.7) and finally it should be settled (I.1.8.6). Another practice, which is recommended by the TB and followed in the tradition, is that to the south of the sacrificial ground from the Gārhapatya to the Āhavanīya, is rotated a chariot, or a chariot-wheel, up to three revolutions, the idea being that with this rotation the fire-god is taken ahead in the chariot.

The SB does not refer to this practice, nor does its Śrautasūtra, the KSS The BSS and the Śrautasūtra of the TB prescribes it (II.17). However, the rotating of the chariot-wheel thrice appears to be an old practice. Thus, the MS mentions it saying that it should be done in the case of a sacrifice who has enemies –

*yaḥsapatnavānbhratṛsansyattasyarathacakramtriranuparivarta  
yeyuh*

Among the formulae and the verses to be recited when the fire has been carried to and established in the Āhavanīya fireplace, the hymn called Sarparajni (RS X.189.1-3) figures. The situation of the SB, regarding these Sarparajni verses is that they are to be recited; but, it mentions another opinion according to which they were not to be recited (SB II.1.4.30). However, this text keeps the option open for the recitation of these and other verses. They may, or may not, be recited.

The sacrament ends with the pūrṇāhuti, which comprises the offering of a scoopful of clarified butter into the Āhavanīya fire, after taking it from a pot in which this butter has melted on the Gārhapatya fire. The TB does not refer to this offering, though the Baudhayana Śrautasūtra (II.18) states it. The SB (II.2.1.1) mentions it and says that it is for making the fire tranquil; for, otherwise the fire

would burn either the Adhvaryu priest or the sacrifice, as they move very near the fire.

### ❖ **Dakṣiṇāgni (The Southern Fire)**

We have noted that the Vedic tradition of sacrifices mentions three fires, Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya and the Dākṣiṇa. We have also referred to the opinion of the MS as regards the Dakṣiṇāgni. Though these names are very common in the post-Rgvedic literature, the R̥gveda does not show acquaintance with these three names. The only doubtful name that it mentions is Gārhapatya; but, it is very clear, that it does not indicate the Gārhapatya fire-altar. The word Gārhapatya in RS indicates the household duties of the householder, and nothing else. Though the fire-god is called Gṛhapati of the house (I.12.6 and of places), the word Gārhapatya, in the later sense of a fire-altar, has nothing to do with it. Likewise, the word *tri-sadhastha* does not indicate three fire-altars to answer to the later concept. It only suggests “three places”, which are not the three altars. Very often it is used for the sacred grass which has three shoots form on stem, a popular trait preferred in even later worship-tradition, as seen in the case of the durva. The non-mention of the three types on altars in RV clearly shows that they were not known (or, at least, not favoured) at its period, when, in the later Saṃhitās and Brahmana texts they appear, the Dakṣiṇāgni (i.e. the Southern fire, and its altar) presents some interesting problems. On scrutiny, it becomes clear that only the first two, Āhavanīya. On scrutiny, it becomes clear that only the first two, Āhavanīya and the Gārhapatya were usually established such a way as having close affinity. The rite of the establishing of the fires (agnyādhāna) mentions the affinity among the three fires, all right; and there is also the legend of Idā, already mentioned above, showing which of the three are to be established first, whence, showing which of the three fires are to be established first, whence fire could be taken to others in a specific order. Yet, texts like the SB mentions

only two fires;<sup>28</sup> and, according to the established practice of carry the fire from the Gārhapatya, which is kindled first, to the Āhavanīya, established in the latter's altar in the east of the hall, it gets clear that, the third fire, the Dākṣiṇa, had no necessary association with the Gārhapatya, whence it could be taken and placed in its place to the south (actually, to the south-east of the Gārhapatya). This will mean, the southern fire was a later adjunct, and was not of the same importance as of the first two, though it figured in some rites.

The status of the Southern fire vis-a-vis the other two will be clear from the fact that it has no one name. It is called, in addition to Dākṣiṇa(Southern), Anvaharyapācana, and also Odana-pācana, indicating that its main function is to cook (pacana). It is remarkable that the Āhavanīya is not given a name based on the quarter, say purvāh (as it is established in the east), nor is the quarter, say Purvāh (as it is established in the east), nor is the Gārhapatya termed (also) Praticāh or Paścāh. The reason is that both had their quarter and function fixed, the Gārhapatya being a replica of the household fire but specifically kindled at the sacred hall, as the ritual developed. Without doubt, in the ritual that was simple and original, the usual household fire was the source, whence some embers could be taken separately for rites. In other words, the Gṛhapati fire was the source of the ritual-fire. In a variant from RV itself, a fresh ritual-fire was kindled. But, it could hardly be dissociated from the Gṛhapati fire. And, if we take a hint from the established practice seen in later texts, the kindling apparatus (araṇis), which RV mentions, must have been heated on the Gṛhapati fire prior to their being rubbed for the 'birth' of the new fire (who is variously described; and also as a new-born baby).<sup>29</sup> This new fire was not called so; but it was the veritable Āhavanīya. So, there were only two main fires: the Gṛhapati; and the fresh one. The fresh one was either taken from the Gṛhapati; or, was freshly

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<sup>28</sup> SB, I.1.2.1 agniadadhita... agniadadhita... agniadadhire; 4.15 devānavāgniadhāsyamanan etc.

<sup>29</sup> *op cit*, Wilson, H.H., III.29.2; III.15.6 etc., p. 42-56



kindled, as noted above. A portion of the original one was used for preparing or cooking it, this was done with the Gārhapatya fire in later times. The new one was the one that carried to the gods the offerings dropped into it. He was the dūta, the carrier of the offerings to the gods.<sup>30</sup> His later name, Āhavanīya, is due to the fact that it was through him that the gods were invoked. The original Gṛhapati (later Gārhapatya) and the fresh one (or, alternatively, the portion of the Gṛhapati separated for the purpose of offering into) were associated only with the offerings to the gods. This continued to be true in the later practices also. However, as the sacrament progressed, a separate fire for preparing food for the priests was required. This was the stage of the highly structured Darṣapūrṇamāsa sacrifice (the rites to be performed on each New-moon day and Full-moon day) not the daily Agnihotra, the later being a modest day-to-day offering circumscribed to the householder himself. The former required at least four priests, who had to be offered odana (boiled rice; it was boiled in milk, and profuse ghee was added to it). As this odana was for the priests (Brahman-s), it was called brahmaudana; and the fire on which it was prepared was termed as Odanapācana. It was known as brahmaudanika too. The odana (also called catusprasya, as it was to partaken of, by four priests) was prepared on the preceding night and presented to the priests. As noted previously, after it served the purpose of cooking, this fire was either turned off or it was taken to the south, to serve as the Dākṣiṇa fire.<sup>31</sup> The name Anvāharya-pācana is to be described as anu + āharyaḥ ca pācanaḥ ca; i.e. “to be carried, having been used for cooking.”<sup>32</sup> Actually, a portion of the Gārhapatya fire is carried to the east, as we have already noted above, to serve as the Āhavanīya.

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>31</sup>*cfop cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 59 Dākṣiṇavaenamharani anu vagamayanti.

<sup>32</sup>Sāyana, commenting on SB., I.2.3.5 indicates that it is the fire which takes away the faults committed by the sacrificer, during the performance of the sacrifice. The St. Peter SB urg Dictionary offers explanation of it as ‘that which serves to supplement (anu + a + √ hr) the sacrifice, as mentioned by Eggeling, SB., E, Vol.12, p.49. However, this does not seem to be even probable.

In the Cāturmāsyā sacrifice also fire from the Āhavanīya (or, the Gārhapatya, according to some schools) is taken to the two altars constructed further to the east of the usual altar. Thus, aharyatva (the trait of being carried) is common to all the fires, including the one called Dākṣiṇa (=Anvaharya); but, pacanatva (cooking) for the priests is special to the Dākṣiṇa fire. Hence, the both the names (Anvāharyapācana and Odana-pacana) are, rooted in the brahmaudanika fire, which cooks food for the non-gods, or humans. This seems to be the motif behind the Dākṣiṇa fire (carried to the south to be made a separate fire) being associated with the manes (pitṛs). In a variant practice, the brahmaudanika fire is not carried thus; it is extinguished as noted above. In either case, the fire to serve as the Gārhapatya is churned (with the araṇis) on the ashes of the brahmaudanika, to maintain the continuity, a principle very closely followed in the Vedic ritual tradition.<sup>33</sup>

Where the Dākṣiṇa fire is not the one carried from the brahmaudanika, there are interesting variations (Kāthaka Saṁhitā.VIII.12) :

1. It is freshly churned and established, to gain brahmavarcas;
2. It is brought from any blazing fire (not necessarily the Vedic altar);
3. It may be fetched from a common hearth; this is in case one wants ample food to be the gain; for, the hearth is his (i.e. of the Dākṣiṇa fire) food-eating body; and
4. It may be fetched from the house of brahmana or a Vaiśya, who is fat like an asura; but, in his house he (the sacrificer) should never take food thenceforth.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> TB I.1.9. 9 tasminnupasyusamaraṇiṣṭāpet; and 10 apoduhyaabhasma-agnimmanthati; saivasagnehsantatiḥ .

<sup>34</sup> MS I.6.12, which has the same reading, yobrāhmanovāvaiśyovāpuṣṭo asura ivasyāt. but Kane, P.V., says, the Dakṣiṇa fire could be fetched from the house of a brahmana kṣatriya, vaiśya or even a śūdra who is extremely prosperous like an asura (if the sacrificer desires prosperity)", op.cit., p.95. The brackets are his. However, he does not give any reference for this statement.

In row with the first variation, it is said that this fire is not to be kept always, nor is it possible to keep it; hence, it should be agitated every day (i.e. on such days as is necessary).

The points noted is that the position of the Dākṣiṇa fire was lower than that of the other two fires; also, that its status was not fixed. The instruction that one should never take food in the house of the person from whose house this fire was brought, may be linked with another belief regarding this fire. The Gārhapatya is said to have the sacrifice as the deity (yajamāna-devatyah); but, the Dākṣiṇa fire is bhratr̥vya-devatyah (having the enemy as the deity); hence, it is not to be daily carried from the Gārhapatya fire. It is also to be noted, that for the creation of the Dākṣiṇa fire there is no chanting of any of the vyahṛtis, while for the Āhavanīya all the vyahṛtis are to be uttered (bhūrbhuvahsvah) and for the Gārhapatya only bhūrbhuvah.<sup>35</sup> The instruction that the Dākṣiṇa fire is not to be carried daily (as noted above) comes in the circumstances of the daily Agnihotra offerings and the homage to the fires. The carrying of it (or taking it) from the Gārhapatya fire is enjoined for the Full-moon day and the New-moon day only so that it could be used as the Anvāharya-pācana.<sup>36</sup> This would specify that it was not to be attended to daily basis. Another occasion when the Southern fire is to be taken is when there is a change of the dwelling; and, on such occasions also, food for the priests is to be cooked on it. This would make his enemies powerless. This also clarifies its status as Anvāharyapācana, as noted above, or the non-god fire.

The context of the Southern fire mentioned above is the Darṣapūrṇamāsa (Agnihotra included). In the context of the sacrifices known as the Cāturmāsya - istis, the usual Dākṣiṇa fire (i.e. the Southern = Anvāharyapācana) has a purpose,

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<sup>35</sup> SB, II.1.4.14, p. 34 & TB I.1.5.2., p. 67 However, later a vyahṛti is seen even in the case of the Dākṣiṇa fire; cf. commentary of Karka on KātyānaŚrauta-sūtra IV.9.19 where bhuvah is said to be used. However, the Śrauta-sūtra proper does not mention any. Yet, the BaudhāyanaŚrauta-sūtra (II.17) recommends bhurbhuvah for the Dākṣiṇa, like the Gārhapatya.

<sup>36</sup> This is after the rite of the establishment of fires (ādhana) is already done.

in the Śākamedha part of the sacrifice. The fire from the Southern altar (i.e. the Dākṣiṇa) is to be carried onto the raised altar specially prepared to the south of the Southern altar. This new altar is different from the ‘Southern’ one for the fire carried to the east, as noted earlier. This is a one to the south, and has four corners having angles to the sub-quarters, as this altar is meant for the manes (pitarah).<sup>37</sup> The fire from the Dākṣiṇa altar is to be placed in the centre of this altar; and the rites in respect of the manes are to be performed on this altar. This will show that the Anvāharyapācana, which used for cooking food for the priests, and was carried to the south to be stationed there for subsequent rites, serves as offering oblations to the manes, its portion being taken yet to the south. The Southern fire has always a low profile in relation to the other fires; and, this is true even in the case of the Varuṇapraghasas and the Śākamedha parts of the Caturmāsya, where two additional altars are prepared to the east of the usual Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar with its usual three fires; one of the two altars is to the north; the other is to its south. Because of the association of the Dākṣiṇa fire, in respect of the Anvāharyapācana for the mortal priests and the manes who died, this fire is associated with death; so is its altar. This is due to the belief that south is the quarter of destruction; and we have accounts to that effect. Thus according to an account, the celibates are said to have run to the eastern portion of the great altar (Mahāvedī) at the Soma sacrifice, as they were being devoured by the wolves at the southern portion of it. This eastern portion has the Uttaravedī (so called, as it is raised),<sup>38</sup> as far as the usual Soma-sacrifice (Agniṣṭoma) is concerned.

### ❖ The Pavamāna-offerings at the Agnyādhāna

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<sup>37</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., II.6.1.10; 11; the South is their quarter,9; also they have the sub-quarters, *op cit*, Griffith, R.T.H., p.11.

<sup>38</sup>*op cit*. TS, Keith, A.B., p. 98

After the rite of Agnyādhāna and prior to the starting of the Agnihotra, there is an important ceremony of offerings that are called the pavamāna-havimsi. The ritual of the creating the fires comes to a close, technically, after the ‘full offering’ is cast it is not yet supposed to be fit for the sacrifices that follow, the Agnihotra, being the very first in the long chain. The TB which does not name any pūrṇāhuti, as such, states that the pavamāna offerings are to be cast into the Āhavanīya. The name pavamāna given to the complete group of the three offerings. The first starts with Agni Pavamāna. The two more to follow are for Agni Pāvaka and Agni Śuci. Commenting on the three offerings Sāyana remarks that Pavamāna is pure in himself; Pāvaka is the one that purifies others, and Śuci is one that is shining. These offerings are prepared and offered by the sacrifice after twelve days<sup>39</sup> have passed from the time of the establishment of the fires. According to Sāyana, the first offering is said to be for the second on for the gain of food, and the third one is for the gain of spiritual grandeur. He goes on to say that unless these offerings are offered, the three fires do not, in reality, get created (though established). Hence they are a must.

The TB stresses the importance of these offerings with the help of an Arthavāda. According to it, the gods and asuras were in fight. The gods kept all their possessions with Agni. They thought that if they were defeated, they would fall back upon this deposit with Agni. Now, Agni could not bear the weight of the belongings; so he divided them into three equivalent portions. One part he positioned among cattle; the second one he positioned into water; and the third one he positioned into the sun. When the gods gained victory, they came back to Agni; and, knowing the position, they got each of these parts with a ceremony of offering. They offered to Agni Pavamāna a sacrificial cake (puroḍāśa) prepared on eight pot sherds; for, Agni pavamāna and Cattle are the same; another one to

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<sup>39</sup> . These twelve days symbolize the whole year with its twelve months, cf op cit, TB I. 1.6.7., p. 21

the Agni Pāvaka, for he is the same as water; and to Agni Śuci, as he is identical with Aditya, the sun. The arthavāda is to demonstrate the identification, and also to stress the importance, of the offerings. Totally these sacrificial cakes will be on twenty-four pot sherds. In addition to this, a separate one is prescribed for Agni himself, as the deity of the establishment of the fire. This special one is said to be the ‘self’ of Agni, while the three stated earlier are considered to be his limbs. So, it is maintained that, if only one for Agni is offered, the god will be himself but without his limbs. On contrary to it, if these three are offered and not the one for Agni pure, then there will be only limbs and no soul!<sup>40</sup> Hence it is said that these offerings should not be made until twelve days have elapsed; since, if it is done within that limit, the sacrifice may lose his cattle.

The SB takes up the point of the three offerings to be offered after the pūrṇāhuti, which it names as such (II.2.1.1 uddhṛtyāhavanīyampūrṇāhutimjuhoti). These offerings are termed by this text “final offerings” or “subsequent oblations” (uttaraṇihavimsi); and here a variant opinion is piloted in. According to some, after the ‘full offering’ (pūrṇāhuti), these subsequent oblations are not to be offered; for the same fruit gathers with the pūrṇāhuti alone. According to this opinion, pavamāna is life-breath; Pāvaka is food; and Śuci is vigour. All these he gains by the pūrṇāhuti itself. The final opinion of the SB is that these oblations are necessarily to be offered; because these gains are indirect, and not seen at the purnhuti; here, they become tangible with these subsequent offerings. The explanation is, that, unless these oblations are offered, the kindled and established fire remains without proper traits of life, i.e. without life-breath (Pavamāna), without food (Pāvaka) and without vigour (Śuci.) . Hence it is clearly said that, the other practice of not offering the three subsequent oblations is faulty.

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<sup>40</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p.304, n.1 says that the first is for Agni in the first isti; the second isti; the second isti has the remaining two offerings; and the third isti comprises a caru to Aditi; the point will be clear further in our observations.

This text, recommending these three offerings, gives its reasoning for this practice with its own arthavāda, which is officially different from that of the TS; but it has the same stress. According to TS, when Agni came to the world of the humans, he did not arrive with his whole body. He placed his form as Pavamāna in this earth (Prthivyam; not in cattle as the TB says), his Pāvaka aspect in the mid-region (antarikṣe; not in the waters); and his Śuci aspect in heaven (divi; not in Āditya, though it has about the same association as in divi). The ancient sages knew, that Agni did not come to them with his whole body; hence they decided to bring them by means of these three oblations. So, it is clear why this text consider the three subsequent oblations necessary.

If we compare these two Brahmanas, it becomes clear that the three oblations are common to both: yet, the reason behind performing them is different. Another point is, that the TB appears to prescribe these offerings in place of the pūrṇāhuti, which it does not declare. The SB on the other hand, mentions the pūrṇāhuti and recommends it; it also prescribes the three subsequent offerings. It seems that at the period of the TS, which indicates the earlier phase of ritual, the three offerings were a rule; but there started (or was already there!) another trend whereby the pūrṇāhuti came to replace the three offerings; also that another practice favoured the pūrṇāhuti and did away with the three subsequent offerings. This phase is visible in the SB. These offerings were explained as being associated with the “bodies”; hence they were known also as “Tanuhavimsi”.<sup>41</sup> Now, it is interesting to note that this name – even the word tanu – does not occur in the SB. The K.S.S. takes it from the Taitt. Tradition, as is clear from its indication at the TB (I.1.6.3 tanuvovorvaita Agnyādheyaśya) “these are, indeed, the bodies of the ritual of establishing the fires”. There is no indication at the TB (or at the BSS) of the first offering being a separate one while the two later ones being common.

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<sup>41</sup> K.S.S. IV.10.12 dvadasahantetanuhavimsinirvapati.

The SB however, precisely says that the first oblation, to the pavamāna Agni is separately offered on one grass (kevalabarthi), while for the Pāvaka and the Śuci there is a common grass and oblation (samanabarthi). The reasoning given is as follows. The first oblation is identical with the earth, which is firm, while the characteristic of the two latter ones is the same; both are unstable, being the mid-region and heaven. Here also the sacrificial cake for each of the deities – which are the aspects of fire – is on eight pot sherds. There is indication in the TB that each of these three oblations was offered separately (I.1.6.7.8). But the said text is against such a practice and prescribes that the first be offered separately, while the other two in one (uttaresamasyet). The clarification for doing this is, however, different from the one given by the SB which hints at the beliefs at that period. It says that, if each of the three be offered separately, it would be like fillings three separate fields with the produce from the grains sowed. As these three offerings are associated with the three worlds, all the three worlds will be filled; there will be no space for the sacrifice to procreate freely. Hence it is, that the first be offered separately while the other two in one unit, so that both collectively will fill only one world. This, together with the earlier (first) offering, would fill two worlds leaving (this) one world (earth) for free procreation.<sup>42</sup>

We have noted above, that, without mentioning the Pūrṇāhuti, the TB prescribes three offerings of puroḍāśa prepared on eight potsherds each and also that, in addition to these, one more and similarly on eight potsherds, for Agni, so that Agni (the last offering) with his three bodies (the offerings to Pavamāna, Pāvaka and Śuci) be built up. Now, this last offering for Agni is identified with the sacrament of Agnyādheya itself. This solves the riddle of the absence of mention

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<sup>42</sup> *op cit*, TB I.1.6.8 yathātrinyavapananipurayettadṛk tat naprajānānāmucchinset, Ekamnirūpyauttaresamasyet, p. 16



of the pūrṇāhuti; for, according to this text, as the whole body or Agni (himself with three aspects) was yet to be fully formed, Pūrṇāhuti was not necessary then.

Now, as the whole body is formed, a separate Pūrṇāhuti is unwanted. This seems to be the hint, though it is not mentioned in so many words. Its Śrauta-sūtra, prescribing the Pūrṇāhuti, obviously does so under influence of the SB (or better, the Vājasaneyī-tradition later).<sup>43</sup> The SB which has the three puroḍāśas on eight potsherds for each of the aspects of Agni, also prescribes one more eight potsherds-puroḍāśa for Agni; but only as an alternative method that it prescribes the puroḍāśa to Agni. However, even in this case, this puroḍāśa is to be followed by a caru to Aditi. This completes the ceremony of adhana, with a cow as a sacrificial gift, according to the SB. The TB, however has a slightly different and prolonged scheme. Thus, after puroḍāśa to Agni (i.e. the self of the Agnyādhāna ritual), it prescribes a puroḍāśa on eleven potsherds for Agni and Indra together; it is followed by the caru to Aditi.<sup>44</sup> For the caru to Aditi, the SB gives the explanation, that by the three earlier oblations (to the three aspects of fire symbolizing the three regions) the sacrificer slowly goes up to the region of heaven from the earth plane, the mid-region. Now, he has to come back on the earthly plane. The caru to Aditi brings him back, as Aditi is earth.<sup>45</sup> The TB on the other hand, says that, by the joint offering, the sacrificer gets back his vigour and strength, while by the offering to Aditi, he stands firm on this earth. The pattern of these subsequent offerings (= Pavamāna or Tanu offerings) in the two texts is as follows:

|  | Pūrṇā-huti | Tanu-offerings<br>(Three) | Agni | Indragni | Aditi |
|--|------------|---------------------------|------|----------|-------|
|  |            |                           |      |          |       |

<sup>43</sup>Cf. *op cit*, Upadhyaya, G.P., cf. Baudh.S.S.II.18; K.S.S.IV.10.5 pūrṇāhutimjuhuti, p. 67 & 82

<sup>44</sup>*op cit*, Apte N.H., p. 17

<sup>45</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyaya, G.P. 32

|  |   |   |                        |   |   |
|--|---|---|------------------------|---|---|
| TB   | × | √ | -                      | - | - |
| SB   | √ | √ | √ (option)             | - | √ |
| The Pattern at Śrautasūtra s of th these texts is as follows |   |   |                        |   |   |
| BSS  | √ | √ | -                      | - | - |
| KSS  | √ | √ | √                      | - | √ |
|  |   |   | (option) <sup>46</sup> |   |   |

An important point to be noted here is that the three Tanu oblations are to be offered only after twelve days of the completion of the adhana. The SB does not have any indication of such restriction, which would indicate that they could be offered any day before that limit, or maybe even on the same day. Though this is not clearly stated in the Brahmana proper, but Śrautasūtra fills its gap. It says that they may be offered any time- may be after twelve days, after a month, or after two or three or six months or even after a year. Well, they could be offered even immediately or they may not be offered at all.<sup>47</sup> The Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra (BSS) (II.20), however, follows its Brahmana, without giving any option to the period of twelve days.

After these Tanti-offerings, we have a small detail in the TB. A doubt is raised, as to whether, instantly after, the Agnihotra oblation is to be offered or not. This is, obviously, due to a variation of customs regarding this offering. It is to be remembered however, that Agnihotra is not the practice that follows the Agnyādhāna as a regular one. Sāyana makes this point clear by saying that this discussion does not refer to the nitya-agnihotra; for that, it denotes to a

<sup>46</sup> *agneyaevavāpurastādādityasya*, *Ibid*, p. 34

<sup>47</sup> Kauśitaki Brahman, Ed., Cowell, E.D., Monohararam, Calcutta, 1861, p, 98 - dvādsāhantetanuhavimsinirvapati; māsedvītyesamasesamvatsaresadyovānavā.

subordinate oblation to the fire, prior to the pūrṇāhuti. This detail is absent in the SB; and we have noted that the TB does not refer to the Pūrṇāhuti. Hence, this 'Agnihotra' has to be taken as being immediately after the adhana and in place of the Pūrṇāhuti which occurs in the other tradition. The TB also is doubtful about this 'agnihotra' and gives its own reasoning. It says that, if this oblation is not offered, the newly established fire (Āhavanīya) would turn away due to its not getting any offering. If on the other hand, it is to be offered like the normal Agnihotra offering with a yajus, that would mean that the oblation has been improperly offered.<sup>48</sup> Hence, to avoid these faults he should offer silently. The idea that the fire would turn away in the absence of the offering is almost similar as with the pūrṇāhuti, as mentioned by the SB (II.2.1.1), though the words are not exactly the same. The SB says that, by this offering, he offers food to the fire, which is like a mother giving her breast to a new-born. Thus satisfied, he waits for the Tanu offerings.

About the gifts to be given at the close of the ritual of ādhāna, there is similarity regarding the number, which may be six (= six seasons), or twelve (=twelve months), or twenty-four. However, both texts are for giving unlimited number of gifts. The SB does not name the gifts, while the TB names them (i.e. the six which are as minimum): a cot and bed to the Agnidh; the horse used in the ritual to the Brahman; a cow to the Hotṛ; a bull to the Adhvaryu. In addition to these, a pair of cow-and-bull may be given (to the Adhvaryu); and cloth also. This marks the completion of the ritual at adhana.

## ❖ Five Fires - In Daily Rites

After having seen the main details in the ritual of the establishment of the fires, we now turn once more to the concept behind the fires; but, a closer look at it is

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<sup>48</sup> In the regular Agnihotra, the first offering comes in the evening; here this Agnihotra is at day.

further welcome. We have referred to the three main fires. The other two, sabhya and the Avasathya, are of lesser status. Also, the case of these fires is yet unclear. All the five fires are, however, stated by the TB where it gives their figurative names and explains their formation. According to it (I.1.10.1) after Prajāpati created this creation, he felt himself empty inwardly. So he heated himself (tapoatapyata); he, thereby, saw vigour in himself; he caused it to grow in himself. That vigour shot forth from him. It became a cow called Viraj. That was demanded by both the gods and the asuras.

The gods said to the asuras, that the cow was their property and belonged to them and that the milk may belong to the asuras. The cow then ran away with her face to the east. Prajāpati caught her with a mantra to the fire "O Athravan, protect my food". She again ran away. This time Prajāpati invoked Agni by another name saying, "O Narya, protect my progeny". Likewise, the cow ran totally five times; and Prajāpati invoked the fire five times. The third time as "Samsya, protect my cattle"; then "Sapratha, protect my sabha (assembly)"; and finally, "Ahi Budhniya, protect my mantra". Sāyana suggests that these names are identical with the five aspects of the ritual fires. Thus: (1) Atharvan = Dakṣiṇāgni; (2) Narya = Gārhapatya; (3) Samsya = Atharvan; (4) Sapratha = Sabhya (also, it might be so called as he is asked to protect the sabha); and (5) Ahi Budhniya = avasathya. (ib.3). The identification suggested by Sāyana is to be accepted in view of the fact that the TB itself names the five fires just later, in the same order. The characteristics of the fires mentioned by the TB are as follows:

1. In the Anvāharyapācana, anvaharya (i.e. the cooked food for the priests) is cooked; 2.
2. In the Gārhapatya, oblations of clarified butter are offered; also, in it the offerings for the wives of the gods are cast; hence he is 'pati' in respect of the 'patnis';
3. In the Āhavaniya, offerings for the gods are cast;

4. In the sabha (assembly) the sacrificer wins the cow (with the ritual-game of dice; especially in the case of the *kṣatriyas* sacrificer); and 5. On the place of the Avasatha, they consume food.

This myth is told by the TB to prescribe the establishment of the fires in the constellation Rohinī; because, it says, the cow became Rohinī. Now, if we accept the order of the fires mentioned above (on the authority of Sāyana and the validation from the TB as noted above),<sup>49</sup> it seems that the Anvāharyapācana-Dakṣiṇāgni is the first to be established. Then the Gārhapatya and then the Āhavanīya an order followed by the gods as reported by Idā.

But, at another place the same text (I.2.1.25.26) has the order and the same mantras as - Narya, Atharvan, Samsya, Sapratha and Ahi Budhniya, where the rest of the fires retain their position, while the Narya (Gārhapatya) comes first and Atharvan (Anvāharyapācana) follows, the Āhavanīya coming thereafter. This is the order- Idā recommends for Manu, though not the one followed firmly by the Vedic ritual tradition. One thing to be observe here is that the order for the Anvāharyapācana was not fixed. The SB does not deal with this point in such a minute way, though it mentions the two other fires in the context of "attendance on the fires" (II.3.2.1 ff); here Sabhya may be inferred, and slightly the Avasathya; but from the TB it is clear that the Anvāharyapācana could be established either before the Gārhapatya or even later. We may not be wrong in supposing that - if the Anvāharyapācana was established first, (i) it was the original brahmaudanika fire of the previous night or (ii) it was a freshly kindled fire, the next morning, but carried to the Dākṣiṇa fire-place before the Gārhapatya was established or (iii) it may be a fire, separate from the fire kindled at the Gārhapatya fire-place (brahmaudanika or the fresh one), and may be brought from some other person's house. However, it was established later than the establishment of the Gārhapatya

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<sup>49</sup> . However, the dispute regarding the establishment of the Sabhya and the Op cit, Griffith, R.T.H., asathya fires continues even later, Kane, op.cit., p.989, n.2240.

fire, a portion from it was taken to the south to establish it as the Anvāharyapācana (Dākṣiṇa). Though there is no mention of the establishing of the Dākṣiṇa fire in the context of the ādhāna at the SB, the TB indicates the antiquity of the three fires with an arthavāda account, according to which Prajāpati divided the fire into three, lest it should burn him (I.1.5.7,8)

*tasyatredhamahimānamvyāuhata...yattredha'gniradhiyāta.*

The statement from the TB shows that the Anvāharyapācana here was taken from the freshly kindled fire itself, as it is mention in the context, in the act, of the Āhavanīya being carried to its place. In the context of daily attendance on the fire (upsthāna), some interesting details regarding the fires are noticed at the SB. The fires are identified as follows:

Āhavanīya = Indra

Gārhapatya = Yama, the king; and

Anvāharyapācana = Nada Naiśidha.

Sabha -fire (or Sabhya) = AnasnatSangamana

AvasanPamsava = where ashes are deposited.

Now, for the daily Agnihotra (offerings into the Āhavanīya) the fire meant to be the Āhavanīya is to be carried from the Gārhapatya. The status of the Anvāharyapācana is to be marked here. The fire for the Āhavanīya is carried daily. This is done in the evening while the sun is yet to set (though the actual offering is to be cast after sunset) and in the morning when it is yet to rise.<sup>50</sup> But, the Anvāharyapācana fire is not to be taken out daily to the altar to the south. The motive behind this as given by the SB is as follows: "The Gārhapatya fire has the sacrificer as its deity (yajamanadevatyah), while the Anvāharyapācana as his

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<sup>50</sup>cf "Agnihotra"; also *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 45

(sacrificer's) enemy for deity (bhratryadevatyah)", a point already noted above. So, it should not be taken out daily. By not taking it out everyday he remains without any enemy (SB II. 3.2.6). The Anvāharyapācana is to be carried to its place (as the Dākṣiṇāgni) only on a day of fast preceding to a sacrifice, or when the sacrificer moves to a new dwelling. In both cases, as it is called the Anvāharyapācana, it is used for cooking the food which is to be consumed of by the priests or brahmanas as is the case with the brahmaudanika fire. This trait of the Dakṣiṇāgni (Anvāharyapācana) shows that it was in origin a non-atrition fire, but one taken from the common fire. Though it has been said that the Dakṣiṇāgni is not to be taken out from the Gārhapatya daily to its altar, there is scope to believe that, according to one method, it was so taken. This is indicated by the SB itself from its negation. The K.S.S. (IV.13.4-8) actually mentions this method as an alternate one, mentioning the following three alternatives. It says – *NityoDakṣiṇāgnih* (the Dasinagni is to be kept constantly; and remarks:

- a. sadāvāharanam (it should be always carried);
- b. ekesamupavāsathe (some say that it should be carried only on the upavāsatha day, i.e. the day of fast); and
- c. nāvasitevā (variant, nāvavāsatheva, i.e. in the new dwelling).

The practice of carrying the Anvāharyapācana to its altar (from the Gārhapatya) for the daily Agnihotra is, actually, mentioned by the SB itself, where it says that, "because daily they carry this fire (Anvāharyapācana) to the south, they say that Nada Naiśidha carries king Yama to the south".<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> . *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., II.3.2.2 tad yadetamaharahaDākṣiṇa ta aharanti, p. 49





## Yajña in Religious and Shastric Texts

### ❖ Vedic tradition of Fire-God Agni in the Nirukta

As we understand from the study of the sūtra literature that the Indo-European fire cult elaborated in India separately in the Atharvanic rituals. The fire cult maintained its own importance in the Guhyasūtras. The sacrifice being the centre of the Aryan cultural activities attracted the whole community. Every member of the society helped and took part in the sacrificial performance.

Yāska is fully familiar with the Vedic tradition of fire god Agni and the derivation of his name which gives an idea of his specific character. According to Yāska, Agni is derived from *agra+ni* (the leader).<sup>52</sup> He is the foremost leader in the sacrifice. The important characteristic of leadership in Agni's character has been commonly referred in the Vedic texts. The other derivation of Agni is *agram* and the root *ni* (to carry) is to take the verb in passive voice.<sup>53</sup> This etymology, besides being supported by the sacrificial ritual, involves the going around the Agni before a sacrifice. In the post-Vedic tradition Agni's another derivation from *anga+ni* means one who reduces everything to himself; or from *akna* i.e. "one who does the reverse of wetting" that is burning.

According to Śākapuni, it is derived from three verbs, from going, from shining or burning and from leading. He, definitely, takes the letter from the root ई (to go), the letter 'g' from the root अज् (to shine) with the root नी (to lead) as the last member.<sup>54</sup> This derivation shows the different characteristics of fire viz motion, heat and light which together attracted the attention of early man. Therefore, the name Agni refers to the most natural and glaring attribute of fire. Agni is the best

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<sup>52</sup>Yāska, Nirukta, 7.14 – अग्रणीभवतिअग्रंयज्ञेषुप्रणीयते | अग्निवैदेवानांसेनानी ||, *op cit*, Roth, Rudolph, p. 98

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid*, – अग्रप्रथमंयज्ञेषुप्रणीयते |

<sup>54</sup>*Op cit*., Sarup, L., p.120

‘giver of gifts’. He is the most generous deity. Agni brings the gods to this place (sacrifice). Agni should be adored by old seers as well as younger ones. Yāska explains that Agni should not refer to the earthly fire only but two higher luminaries (lightning and the sun) are also called Agni which is in support of the Ekat, Dvita and Trita as the three forms of Agni as appearing in the three worlds.<sup>55</sup>

Yāskathrows light on the concept of divinity and the nature of its worship. He states that “Deva (god) is (so called) for making gifts or for being brilliant or for being radiant (dyuta,) because his domain is heaven. He who is called god (Deva) is also called deity (devatā)”. He says “I praise Agni, I beseech Agni”.<sup>56</sup> According to the etymologists, Yajña is a well-known act of worship and Yāska maintains that it is an act of imploring the gods. Hota (sacrifice) is derived from the root hu (to sacrifice) says Aurnavabha.

Yāska explains the divinity of the fire and maintains the Vedic tradition of the fire god Agni. Agni is the giver of wealth.<sup>57</sup> Idhama is Agni’ says Sakapuni. Tanunapat is an epithet of Agni in the Vedic tradition. Waters are called ‘tanu’ because they are spread in the atmosphere. Herbs and trees are produced from waters and this (fire) is produced from herbs and trees. In the Nirukta, Tanunapat means ‘one’s own son’. According to Durga, it means a grandson. Agni is the grandson of waters.<sup>58</sup>

Nara-samsa is sacrifice, says Katthakya, but Śākapuni observes, ‘It is Agni’, he is to be praised by men.<sup>59</sup> Agni is associated with Vasus. Agni, enjoys the offerings with honey and clarified butter. Agni is the chief of the gods. There is a question about the Āpri deities as to who is the god to whom the introductory and the concluding oblations are offered? According to some, they are offered to

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 7.15

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.2

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.5; L. Sarup, op.cit., p.132. fn. Durga’s opinion

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p133

Agni.<sup>60</sup> Āgnayī is the wife of Agni, call her for wellbeing and for drinking soma.<sup>61</sup> Agni is also called Rudra. Yamadagni would be derived by Nirukla as Yam plus Agni. Agni exclusively bears the title of jātaveda (which occurs 120 times in the Ṛgveda) and explained as “He who knows all created beings”. Agni jatavedah helps us to overpower the difficulties. The oblation is offered to the Agni Jātavedas. The title of vaiśvānara is restricted to Agni, occurring about sixty times in the Ṛgveda. In the Naighantuka, Vaiśvānara is given as one of the names of Agni. Yāska while commenting on the epithet states that ancient ritualists (yajnikah) took Agni Vaiśvānara to be the sun, while Śākapuni considered him to be this Agni.<sup>62</sup> Later on Yāskacites his own opinion that the Agni vaiśvānara who receives praise and sacrifice is this (terrestrial) Agni. While the two higher (uttare) lights (i.e. the aerial and the celestial) only occasionally share this description.

Yāska states, “Some say, they (gods) resemble human beings in form (puruṣavidhah) others say, the gods do not resemble human beings in form (apuruṣavidhah), because those gods that are (actually) seen do not resemble human beings in form, as for instance Agni (fire-god), Aditya (sun-god), Pṛthavī (earth-Goddess), Candramā (moon-god) etc”. Now it can be observed that Yāska does not give any specific statement on which it could be said that the worship of image in general and of fire-image in particular, was in trend in his time. The god was worshipped with Gāyatrī mantra and the oblation was offered to the terrestrial Agni. Agni is jointly praised with the gods like Indra, Soma, Varuṇa, Parjanya and the Ṛtvas.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, pp.124-25.. Yaska’s explanation that Agnayī is the wife of Agni, but she is associated with drinking soma – a function not very appropriate for the wife of Agni.

<sup>62</sup> *op cit*, Roth, p. 34

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*

The religious conditions as described in Pāṇini contain details about Yajña or sacrifice. He also mentions the Vedic deity Agni both individually and in pairs. Pāṇini refers to Agni as an agent carrying the offering of the sacrifice to the gods. Pāṇini mentions the different names of Agni like apamnaptri meaning as bounced from water to whom special oblations were offered. Another name is havyavāhana because Agni as an agent carries the offerings of the sacrifice to the gods and havyavāhana as he carries the offering to the manes. Agni is also mentioned in the Astadhyayi as a devata dvandva with other deities Agni and Varuṇa,<sup>64</sup> Agni and Soma.<sup>65</sup>

### ❖ Fire worship in the Rāmāyaṇa

The Epic, Rāmāyaṇa denotes the initial, clear and absolute picture of the Aryan culture. In this Epic, the association between human and the divine world is of a very closely characterized. Vedic gods like Soma, Āditya, Indra and Agni etc. who were originally representatives of the various phenomena of nature had their character concealed due to the tendency of (acquired) human traits. Agni the god of fire of the Rāmāyaṇa holds almost all the prominent characteristics of the Vedic period. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Agni keeps some of his earlier titles like Pāvaka (purifier), citrabhānu and vibhāvasu (shining with light), havyavāha (oblation carrier) and araṇi-suta (son of araṇis). Agni has many names also like vāhini (he who received the homa), vitihotra (he who sanctifies the worshipper), dhanañjaya (he who conquers riches), jīvalana (he who burns), dhumketu (he whose sign is smoke), chhagaratha (he who rides on a ram), saptajihva (he who had seven tongues). Agni's wife is Svāhā. He is the father of Kumara Skāṇḍa. According to

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<sup>64</sup>Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī with Preface, containing separate words, mode of explanation, supplementary rules*, Ed. Pande, Gopal Datta, ChaukhambaSurabharatiPrakashan, Varanasi, 2012, p. 65

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p, 42 & 68

a myth, the gods and sages were in search of a senāpati, in their war against the asuras and they approached Brahma for advice and were told that Agni and Gaṅgā together would produce the senāpati they needed. Then they went to mount Kailash and employ Agni to produce a son to Gaṅgā (the daughter of the mountain). When Agni approached Gaṅgā, she took a divine form and as a result of their unification, the whole mountain became golden in tint and a son Kumara took shape, and the gods involved the Krittikas to nurse him; they claimed him as their son and he became Kārttikeya.<sup>66</sup> The sage Suprabha and the VanaraNila are also his (Agni) sons. He is also said to have shaped the Sveta mountain by entering Śiva's energy in conjunction with Vāyu.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, the three fires are mentioned several times. But the name of three fires gārthapatya, dakṣiṇa and Āhavanīya are not mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa. Sometimes the reference of five fires is also found in the Rāmāyaṇa. The four fires blaze in four altars and the sun is mentioned as the fifth fire over the head. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions the ananta fire which consumes the worlds.<sup>67</sup> Agni's place is the vedi (altar) in the agnayagāra, agniśāla or agniśaraṇa (the five chambers), where he dwells and feeds himself on the havya (offering to the gods) and the kavya (offering to the manes). Agni as a god in the Rāmāyaṇa is more noticeable in his role of a witness of the world (lokaśakhi). He (Agni) observes everything done openly or secretly. Therefore, he is invited to be a witness in marriages. When all the preparations for the marital ceremonies of Rāma were made, then the bridegroom Rāma arrived at Janaka's house for the main ceremonies and was taken to the vedi (altar). In the presence of the matrimonial fire, three important rites, that is, the paṇigrahaṇa, the Agni-Parinayana in which the bride and the bridegroom were led round the wedding fire, which was kept in the sacred altar, were performed. The marriage being complete with the rite, the

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<sup>66</sup> Op cit, Wilson, H.H., p. 93

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. .98

svastyāyana (kanyā-dāna) was performed. Unions are intensified in his presence. So, the god of fire was invoked as eyewitness on these occasions. Not only this if a wife whose loyalty to her husband is questioned Agni is invoked in her support to testify her purity. In the Yuddhakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, when Sītā in desperation undergoes a trial, she approaches the brightly burning fire with joined palms and prays “If my heart has never strayed away from Rāghava, may the god of fire, who sees all that happens in the world, protect me on all sides.<sup>68</sup> If Rāghava wrongly judges me, who am innocent, as having misbehaved, may fire, the universal witness save me from all danger. If I have never been guilty of transgression in thought, word or deed against Rāghava, who knows all Dharma, may fire protect me! If the gods know that I am blameless, may the fire do me no harm”, uttering these words as she circumambulated the fire. Vaidehī walked into it, her mind wholly untroubled by doubts. The fire god rose up from the fire with Janaka’s daughter, and he gave Vaidehi who was seated on his lap, to Rāma. The fire god the witness of all that happens in the world told Rāma there is no sin in her.<sup>69</sup> In fact the Vedic pantheon was still alive. Kaikeyī tells to Daśaratha that the gods like the moon, sun, Śiva, Varuṇa and Agni etc. were invoked to shower blessings on Rāma. Hanuman entered the city of Laṅkā at night. He searched Sītā again and again. Then Hanuman bows to Rāma, to Śiva, to Indra, to Vāyu, the moon and the fire (Agni god) and prayed them with thoughts intent. Thus, it is clear that the Rāmāyaṇa in religion and moral kindness is more similar to the Vedic traditions. The Rāmāyaṇa also tells us that we should always do good actions. Vālmīki tells that even the gods are subject to moral laws and they also pay the penalties of their actions. Even Agni, Vāyu and Soma reaped the fruits of their own actions, so one should do only that which is good.

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<sup>68</sup> *op cit*, Wilson, H.H. p. 97

<sup>69</sup> Raghunathan, N., *SrimadVālmīkiRāmāyaṇa*, Vol.III, Vighneshvara Publications, Bangalore, 1966, pp. 337-341

The demons also worshipped the god Agni. The demons always kept *ahitagni* in their homes and people like Indrajit, before going to the battlefield, offered oblation (libation) into fire and sacrificed a goat and the bright smokeless flame with his flickering tongue, rose up of the *Yajñagni* to ensure their victory in the war. Similarly, on Sītā's prayer Agni with his bright and steady flames bending towards the right communicated to her the well-being of Hanuman.<sup>70</sup>

According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it was necessary for a household to perform certain *saṁsākaras*, on certain times. With regards to the *vivāha* and the *antyesti*, the presence of the Agni was necessary. In the *vivāhasaṁsākara* he was present as an eyewitness in the form of a sacred god. During the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cremation was the only prevalent mode of disposing the dead body. According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there seems to have been a belief that until the corpse was duly given to the flames, the spirit of the deceased kept dwelling around in this world, and it was only with the implementation of this *saṁsākara* that it attained to heaven.<sup>71</sup> It is to be noted that the cremation of an *āhitagni* was performed with the help of the three sacred fires, which were carried by the priests to the cremation grounds. These fires can also be ignited in the utensils used by the deceased in the performances of sacrifices, were laid on the pyre and were cremated along with him.

The poet Vālmīki informs us that the people of Ayodhya performed sacrifices. The action to which the brahmanas devotedly used themselves was the performance of sacrifices. The daily *agnihotra* and the various occasional sacrifices were performed by them.<sup>72</sup> The performance of the *agnihotra* is mentioned in relation to the hermitages of Vasiṣṭha, Bharadvāja, Atri and Śarbhaṅga. Sage Bharadvāja's hermitage also had a definite hut for the fire

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<sup>70</sup>*op cit*, Wilson, H.H. pp. 97, 74, 123 & 134

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid*, 84

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid*, p. 78

(agniśāla). There was apparently no restriction on women performing Vedic rituals independently. Kausalyā performs puja to Viṣṇu and makes oblations into the fire. Keeping everlasting fire was the most important responsibility of an Aryan's life of which he became free only at the end if he went for the vānaprastha as Rāma.

Agnihotra (home) was the item in the daily rites. In every home the householder maintained the holy fire in which head of the family along with his wife, offered oblations of clarified butter and cooked food to various devas and pitris. The periodical sacrifices, which were known as the parva-kala home. These were performed usually on the purnima and amavasya and were the most important of this group.<sup>73</sup> The daily and periodical rites were considered compulsory, but the Śrauta rites were optional. It was believed that performance of these rites generates fruitful results in favour of the yajamana. So, they generally commenced to perform certain special Yajña with the aim of achieving some definite results.

In the Bālakāṇḍa king Daśaratha, in order to become a father, performed putrestiYajña. Some sacrifices are closely associated with kingship. Like Rājasūya, vājapeya, Aśvamedha, agniṣṭoma, sautrāmani and puṇḍarika. These sacrifices were supposed to be performed by the kṣatriya prince. In the Rāmāyaṇa we find that every individual who had the means to perform these yajna's took pride in performing it. The most important of these Śrauta sacrifices was the Aśvamedha, which a kṣatriya king generally performed after the tough duty of his career. Its performance was a matter of glory and pride for the prince.<sup>74</sup> Rituals were quite long, sumptuous and complicated out of which the

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<sup>73</sup>*Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>74</sup>*TataḥPritamāṇarājāprapyayajñamanuttamam,*

*Svargyampapmapahancaivaduṣprapamsarvaparthivaiḥ*; I 10.45-46. The performance of Asva-medha involved as assertion of power and a display of political authority such as only a monarch of undisputed



Aśvamedha is described in greater which is natural for the core of the epic. In the Uttarakāṇḍa a prophecy is made by Mahaeśvara (who is in fact Agni or Brahma not Śiva), when it is declared that Rāma, after resuming the kingdom, will establish the Ikṣavāku dynasty, celebrate an Aśvamedha and gain unparalleled fame. Lakṣmaṇa called it a mahāyajña, a kratuttama and ‘a purtifier from sin’.Sagara is believed to have performed it for the sake of svarga (heaven).

The word pancamahāyajña does not occur in the Rāmāyaṇa but there are numerous direct and indirect references which show their presence during that time. Words like homa, tarpana, japa, svādhyāya and atithipūjana are there. In the Rāmāyaṇa, it is said that Rāma took his bath, duly performed his japa, kindled fire with the sacred matras and then offered oblations into it for gods and manes. He also offered water to the pitris and then offered bali to the bhutas.<sup>75</sup> The major deities whose names occur frequently in the Rāmāyaṇa are Agni, the Asvins, Brahma, the Maruts, yama, Varuṇa, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Soma etc. The deities mentioned and their relative frequency reminds us of the popularity of Vedic Pantheon.

### ❖ Fire worship in the Epic Mahābhārata

In the period of Mahabharata the picture of religion is substantially changed. The Epics, viz., Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, are the holy books of popular Hinduism. The Epic mythology gives importance to those gods which gratify the emotional needs of the time. It is unavoidable that fresh religious thought like avatāravāda, bhakti was reflected in the Epics and as result of this some of the earlier deities lost their importance and in fact came to be subordinated to Viṣṇu or Śiva. The

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supremacy could have ventured upon without humiliation. Law, N.N., *Aspects of Ancient Indian polity*, p.19; R.Sharma, op.cit., p.166

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 86

Epics inform us about the ways of fire-worship, concept of the deity, his esteem and importance of sacrifice in the period of their composition.

In the Vedic tradition Agni, the supreme deity derived from root agre or agri means he (Agni) generated him first (agre) of the gods and therefore he is called Agni. He being generated went forth as the first (purva), so he is the head.<sup>76</sup> The Mahābhārata also adopted the same Vedic and Nirukta tradition of grammatical derivation.<sup>77</sup> Third derivation of Agni is अगिगतौ (to move) अंगति + नि = अग्निः means something moves and keeps everything going. Agni is the supreme deity. His most significant name is formed with the root of movement. The Supreme Being is incredible static energy that is always in motion. In his movement the creation goes on appearing and disappearing. Ācārya Śaunaka has accepted these three grammatical derivations. According to the Mahābhārata, in every religious ritual the first ahuti or oblation is offered to the sacred fire or Agni.

This shows his leadership. Agni is the oldest leader or dutam. In the Gita, he is param rupam.<sup>78</sup> Agni is antahshar (moving inside everything). He is antardootahvivekah. In the Mahābhārata Agni has two forms. When he is formless (nirakar) he is invisible (paroksha), O purifier Agni, you move invisibly in the body of every creature. When he assumes form, he is visible in the form of creation (pratyakṣa) in Yajña, where Agni is the chief sacrifice or hotā. Agni is present in many varieties in the agnihotra, yoga, in karma and in other sacrifices.

The description of the fire god in his human form is also available in the Mahābhārata. Agni is the seven flamed deity. The cruel deity of fire with seven tongues and seven mouths coming towards our body with all speed. Agni has

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<sup>76</sup>*op cit*, Wilson, H.H., X.121.8; X.5.7; YV. 31.12; TB, 3.2.8; TB, 25.9.2; *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., II, 2.4.2.

<sup>77</sup> MB, Asvamedhic Appendix No.1.4.2563-64 :यस्मादग्रेसभूतानांसर्वेषांनिर्मितोमया | MB, Asvamedhic Appendix No.1.4.2566 :यस्मात्सर्वकृत्येषुपूर्वमस्मैप्रदीयते | Tripathi, Shivsagar : Ramayana aivam Mahabharata ka SabdikVivechana (Hindi), p.48

<sup>78</sup>*op cit*, SBG, p. 68

copper coloured eyes and of real neck.<sup>79</sup> Agni has fiery and coppery eyes and flaming tongue and large mouth and also fiery hair on his on his head. Agni's son is the handsome Kumara, who was born in the forest and as he was reared up by kirtika and others he was called Kartikeya. After him were born his three brothers, namely Shakha, Vishakha and Naigameya.<sup>80</sup> In the Aranya parva of the Mahābhārata, there is the legend connected with Skāṇḍa kumara (son of Agni). Markaṇḍeya is the storyteller of the story of the wonderful, famous and highly active son of the adbhuta Agni who was begotten by the wives of brahmarsis.<sup>81</sup> Agni performed his usual function of carrying the offerings made in the āhavanīya fire to the gods. When he (Agni) saw the lovely wives of sage, he fell in love with them. So, he went to a forest in utter frustration. There Svāhā the daughter of Dakṣa, loved Agni and so she assumed in turn the forms of the six wives of the rsis excepting Arundhatī, the wife of sage Vasiṣṭha and thus courted Agni. In order to hide her identity as she carried Agni's semen up the mountain summit, she changed into a hawk (garuda) and deposited it in the pond, surrounded by sara (reeds). Skāṇḍa worshipped his father Agni who became his protector. In the Mahābhārata, occurs the hint of Brahma repeating to Mahasenā, the story of his birth from Rudra and Ima. It is significant to note the identification of Rudra with Agni and Svāhā with Umā. In the Mahābhārata the word Rudra's derivation is similar to Vedic tradition. Rudra is composed of all that consumes, all that is sharp, fierce and powerful. All these outstanding aspects are found in the god Agni also. We find that Rudra is identified with Agni.<sup>82</sup>

According to Mahābhārata Śiva is known as Tryambaka, Hara and Rudra. These titles are used in the Vedas for Agni. The Śatapatha Brahmana<sup>83</sup> tells us that Sarva

<sup>79</sup> MBH, Ch. CCXXXIV, 19

<sup>80</sup> MBH, Sabha Parva, Ch. LXVI, 24-25, pp. 856-860

<sup>81</sup> MBH, Aranya Parva, Ch. CCXXII-CCXXXII

<sup>82</sup> MBH, Vana Parva, Ch. XXII, 7.16 : रुदमग्निद्रिजाः प्राहुः ।

<sup>83</sup> *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., I.5.6 : अग्निर्वैसदेवाः । तस्येतानि नामानि शर्वइतियथा प्राच्या आचक्षते । भवइतियथा वाहीकाः पशूनां पतिः रुद्रः अग्निरिति । तान्यस्य अशान्तान्येवेतराणि, अग्निरित्येव शान्ततमम् । Goyal, S.R., A Religious History of Ancient India, Vol. II, pp. 248-49.

was a name of Agni among the eastern people and the Vahikas call him Bhava, Pasupati, Rudra and Agni. These are his names of restlessness. Agni is the most peaceful one. Agni is Rudra. Agni is Paśupa i.e. Paśupati in the R̥gveda. In the Yajurveda, Agni, Vāyu or Sun are also known as paśu. In the Mahābhārata, Rudra is called Paśupati, because he fosters all creatures and he is their Lord or master. In this Parva brahmanas call him the eldest of all beings and from his mouth he created Agni.<sup>84</sup>

According to Atharvaveda a sage said, ‘My salutation to Rudra, the Agni, who is Rudra in Agni, who permeates the plant, creepers and waters and who created all the worlds.’<sup>85</sup> In the Mahābhārata Śiva has another name Hars. But in the Vedic literature Mahadeva Śiva is the developed form of Agni Rudra. Sages of the Mahābhārata describe Mahādeva as Agni. The god has two forms, one of these is terrestrial and the other auspicious and mild. The form which is fierce and terrible is considered as identical with Agni.<sup>86</sup>

The character of the fire god is well-reflected in his names and epithets found in the Mahābhārata. The popular epithets of the god Agni are the Vibhāvasu and Mahābhāga.<sup>87</sup> Another epithet is purifier. Agni the god of fire has many names in the Mahābhārata as Pāvaka (sanctify everything), kṛṣṇabartana (having smoke for maring your trap), havyavahana (carry the sacrificial libation of ghee), Jātavedas, suresha (chief of the celestials), chitravanu, anala, sargadarsparsi, vivavasu, hutasa, jalana, sikhi, vaiśvānara, pingesa, plavanga and bhuitagas, rudragarva and hiranyaksit.<sup>88</sup>

There is a myth about Kadru and Vinita as given in the Suparnadhyaya who must have originally been an ancient animal sage in which the chief actors were the

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<sup>84</sup> MBH, Anushasana Parva, Ch.CLXI.25

<sup>85</sup> *op cit*, Griffith, R.T.H., VII.92.1; 19.55.5 : रुद्राय नमो अग्रये | & II.19.1

<sup>86</sup> MBH, Anushasana Parva, Anushasanika Parva, Ch.CLXI.1-4

<sup>87</sup> MBH, Adi Parva, Astika Parva, Ch.XXII&Pauluma Parva, Ch.VII.1

<sup>88</sup> MBH, Adi Paopcit, Wilson, H.H.,a, Khandavadaha Parva, Ch.CCXXXI.23.

serpent and the eagle. The suparna has an epithet of śyena(the bird). The sūparṇa is not applied to the bird only but to so many other things. Thus,sūparṇa is said to be the omniscient god. Agni is sūparṇa. The fire-altar is sūparṇa.Sacrifice is sūparṇa.<sup>89</sup> The name of a fire altar is ‘śyenaciti’ which lead the sacrifice to heaven as Gāyatrī, becoming śyena, went to heaven.

In the Mahābhārata Agni is represented as having exhausted his vigour by consuming too many offerings and desiring to consume the whole khaṇḍava forest as a means of gaining his strength. He was at first stopped from doing so by Indra, but having obtained the assistance of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, he baffled Indra and completed his object. There is a myth in the Khaṇḍavadahaparva that there was a great sage Mandapala, who went to the region of the pitris. But he did not get the fruits of his virtuous actions because he had no offspring, sage thought the bird alone have the greatest power of productiveness. Becoming a sarangaka, he had union with female sarangaka and had four sons. When Agni was coming towards the Khāṇḍavavana, the second son of SarangakaMandapala prayed to Agni, ‘O Agni protect us with your auspicious form, you are the giver of heat, you create the three worlds. You are the progenerating mother of the whole universe’.<sup>90</sup>Agni is protector. Agni the god of fire possesses triple nature. This universe is erected by Agni. Agni charged the clouds with lightning. The flames of Agni munch every creature. To the blazing deity Agni on which all creatures mobile and immobile depend upon. Agni is the creator, the consumer, the Vrihaspati himself. At the time of Mahābhārata the god Agni was adored with great respect. When the Pandavas gave up their kingdom, went with Draupadi in their great journey (Mahaprasthana), they met Agni when they arrived at the sea

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<sup>89</sup>Gopatha Br. Purva III.10 &Jaiminiya Br., III.158; MS, nI.12.2 : भुजीसुपणोयज्ञोगन्धर्वैः | Tandiya M. Br., XIV.3.10.

<sup>90</sup> MBH, Vana Parva, Tirthayatra Parva, Ch.LXXXII, 13., p. 785

of red waters. After worshipping him (Agni) with great respect they returned to him the great heavenly bow gandiva.

In the PaulumaPavrrva of Mahābhārata,<sup>210</sup> it has been said that once Agni was cursed by Vriṣṇu (Puloma's husband), so Agni, in anger, removed himself from all places in the world, from the agnihotra of the twice born, from Yajña, from places of holy rites and from other ceremonies.<sup>91</sup> All creatures became very much distressed for want of fire. When the creator of the world heard this, he called Agni and told him in soothing words about his character, i.e., Agni is eternal like him and is the creator of all. He is the master of all creatures; He preserves the three worlds. He is the organizer of all sacrifices and ceremonies. Agni is always pure in the world. Agni is the supreme energy, born of his own power. The god of fire is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all beings.

During the time of the Mahābhārata the sacrifices became more complicated. The priests strengthened their position by gaining the sole monopoly over sacred rites. In every house, there was a sacred room, where the holy fire was kept, burning brightly. The sages said about the importance of the sacrifices and also their fruits to be obtained here (in this birth) and hereafter (in the next birth). Pulastya said that one should go to that excellent tirtha called Pravasha; Hutāśana (Agni) himself is always available there. When Kśyapa was performing a sacrifice for begetting a progeny, all the gods, the gandharvas and the sages gave him their cooperation. It may be noted that the weight is on the ritual order which in its regularity and fatalism is controlled over by Agni.

During the age of the Mahābhārata we also notice a change from the older form of polity to hereditary kingship which fixed firmly the growth of aristocratic nobility.<sup>92</sup> Two important sacrifices mentioned in the Epic, Aswamedha and Rājasūya were performed by kings who had accumulated much wealth and gained

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<sup>91</sup> MBH, Adi parva, KhandavaDaha Parva, Ch.CCXXXIV, 15.25, p. 982

<sup>92</sup> Mishra, K.C., *Tribes in the Mahabharata*, Munshiram Publications, 1966, p.366.

supremacy over their contemporaries. Nārada narrates the story of the great king Harisśacandra who was very powerful and having conquered the whole of the earth, he made preparation to perform a great RājsūyaYajña. When Yudhiṣṭhira heard these words of the sage Nārada, he desired to make preparations for the Rajsuya sacrifice.<sup>93</sup> It may be observed that a sacrifice was not only a religious ceremony to appease the gods, but had also proved a useful means for the appropriation of wealth among three upper classes. Sacrifice had become mandatory for all the four castes. Even sudras were to perform pakyajan, where in the fee the priest was one pūrṇāpatra or a basket full with grain.<sup>94</sup> The Mahābhārataspecifies five kinds of Yajñas.

The Epic literature also gives information about the saṁsāaras. Many religious and ceremonial elements find mention in the huge body of the Mahābhārata. In the Vavahika Parva Veda knowing priest kindled the sacred fire and poured the potions of ghee in the blazing fire with proper mantras. That Mantra knowing brahmana called Yudhiṣṭhira and united him with Kṛṣṇā (Draupadī). They walking round the fire for seven times, the bride and bridegroom took each other's hand. Thus, they were married in the presence of holy fire.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> MBH, Sabha Parva, Rajshyuarambha Parva, Ch.XIII, 1-4.

<sup>94</sup> MBH, XII, 1-12., p. 678

<sup>95</sup> MBH, Sambhava Parva, Vavahika Parva, Ch.CC, 10-11, pp. 88-120.

## **Vedic Modes Of Worship In Kautilya's Arthaśāstra**

Kautilya's Arthaśāstra belongs to the school of early Hinduism when the Vedic modes of worship were still existing and when the Vedic sacrifices and rites were yet customary. Chandragupta Maurya certainly began as an orthodox follower of the Vedic religion as is seen from his association with Kautilya. Whenever the kingdom or king was visited by Vyasana or dangers good luck prayers were offered to the Vedic deities like Indra, Varuṇa, Agni, Asuins, Jayanta and others.<sup>96</sup> The belief was commonplace that by appeasing the gods' disasters of all sorts could be prevented or at least lessened to a considerable extent. Elsewhere in detailing the magic formulae used for different purposes, the Arthaśāstra mentions Aditi, Anumati, Sarasvati, Savita, Agni, Soma, Krishna and Paulomi. The pantheon stands fairly close to that of the later Vedic age. The fact again that Kautilya wrote for his king and the statement that the king gave audience about the chamber of the sacred fire are further proof that Chandragupta was Brahmanical in his religion and worshipped the fire god Agni. A prominent position is indeed attached to the performance of Yajñas or sacrifices and there is an unreasoned belief in the effectiveness and fruitfulness of such sacrifices. The brahmanas practiced the Vedic religion of sacrifice and they were encouraged in the practice of learning and spiritual pursuits by the donation of brahmadeya lands yielding sufficient produce and exempted from taxes and fines (adandakaraṇi). Near the royal palace a sacrificial hall was provided.

According to Megasthenes the king used to go out during sacrificial sessions.<sup>97</sup> Commenting on this passage Lassen is right when he maintains that this does not refer to the daily sacrifices but only to special sacrifices. This is

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<sup>96</sup>Kautilya, Arthasastra, Ed. & Tr., Shamastrī, R., University Press, Maysor, 1955, pp. 448

<sup>97</sup> Mc Crindle, *Ancient India (Megasthenese and Arrian)*, Fragn, p.



corroborated by Kautilya.<sup>98</sup> It will, thus, appear that Kautilya knows more of Vedic religion, sacrifice, deities and the Atharvanic rites.

The Śunga age was a period of Brahmanical revivalism. So, the various traditional forms of Yajña and ceremonial practices became popular during the period. Patañjali, the author of the Mahabhasya, who flourished in the time of PuṣyamitraŚunga has referred to god Agni.<sup>99</sup> Patañjali at one place writes, Indragñi devata.<sup>100</sup> From this it can be easily inferred that Agni was ground in the category of Gods. People worshipped the god. The gods Agni and Vāyu are invoked or offered oblations in pair, so they are dual deities.

During the time of the Sungas the various sacrifices were in trendout of which the god of fire has an important role. The first ruler of Śunga dynasty Puṣyamitra was now undisputed master of northern India. In order to proclaim his authority, he undertook the performance of Aśvamedha (horse sacrifice) Yajña, the time honoured Vedic rite which was considered as the symbol of royal glory. According to the Ayodhya inscription of Dhanadeva, PuṣyamitraŚunga had performed two AśvamedhaYajñas. There is a reference in the Mahabhasya. While commenting on Pāṇini III.2.123, Patañjali gives an example and says that we are performing here the sacrifice for Puṣyamitra. Patañjali himself had served Puṣyamitra as his sacrificial priest.<sup>101</sup> Mālvikāgnimitra of Kalidāsa also bears an evidence to a sacrifice being performed by Puṣyamitra.<sup>102</sup> According to the Mahābhāṣya, the Rājasūya and vājapeya sacrifices were also popular.

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<sup>98</sup> Lassen, C., Indische Alterthumskunde, II, p.270 quoted by V.R.R. Dikshitar, op.cit., p.347

<sup>99</sup> Patañjali, *Mahābhāṣyam*, Shastri, Charudeva, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1984. VI, 3.35 :

अग्न्याग्नीदेवतास्य |, p. 258

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. V.1.59 – इन्द्राग्नीदेवता VI.3.26 - देवताद्रन्दउभयत्रवायोःप्रतिषेधोक्तव्यः | वाचवग्नीअग्नीवायू |, p.356

<sup>101</sup> *op.cit.*, Shastri, Charudeva, इहपुश्यमित्रंयाजयामः | p.123

<sup>102</sup> Kalidāsa, *Mālvikāgnimitra*, Act V, p.105

## ❖ Fire Worship in the Purāṇas

The Purāṇas provide useful information about fire worship in ancient India. They throw some light on the concept of fire god, his place among other Hindu gods and associations with other gods. He played an important role in the sacrifices, rituals, as well as in the society as a whole.

In the Purāṇas Agni is celebrated numerous times. The Agni Purāṇa also known as Mahāpurāṇa, originated as a work in admiration of Agni (god of fire). As far as Hazra's outlook is concerned Agni Purāṇa praises Agni as the highest deity and deals with the sacrificial rites and conduct of āhitāgni.<sup>103</sup> Agni is able to uphold its character not only in the Agni Purāṇa but other Purāṇas also. In the opening chapter of the Agni Purāṇa, Agni is signified as Viṣṇu, Kālāgni and Rudra.<sup>104</sup> Viṣṇu has two forms one of which is Agni. It adds that the Vedas have common view in holding that fire is the supreme soul and the mouth of the gods. Agni is the embodiment of Viṣṇu and he is meditated upon, worshipped, evoked, admired and respected because he destroys all sins. According to Agni Purāṇa when Śaunaka and others were performing sacrifice in honour of Hari, the sage asked the suta to explain the essence of learning knowledge of which confers perfection. The suta said that the knowledge of the god Viṣṇu or Brahmana was the perfect example of all knowledge leading to perfection. This knowledge he obtained from Vyāsa, who in his turn got it from Vasiṣṭha. And Vasiṣṭha himself received the knowledge direct from the god Agni. Thus, final source of this quintessence of knowledge was Agni.<sup>105</sup>

In the Ṛgveda, he is the embodiment of the sacrificial fire. He is therefore the gods of the priests and the priest of the gods. He is one of the most prominent

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<sup>103</sup> Hazra, R.C., Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Custom, Vol.I, Delhi, 1975, p.213.

<sup>104</sup> Agni Purana, Ed. & Tr., Dutta, Maninatha, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 130-145

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., I.3-10

diety of the Vedic gods.<sup>106</sup> But in the later mythology, Vedic conceptions of Agni are partly kept the same and they are occasionally changed. So, accordingly he gives all the gods the means of their survival and he is the mouth of the gods and cheers up all the gods by devouring the oblations. He is the life-breath of the gods. He is the beautiful essential truth dwelling in the lotus heart of every being. He sprang before all the created beings. He is said to fatten and nourish the gods, dānavas, yakṣas, daityas, gandharvas, rākṣasas, men, cattle, trees, animals, birds, reptiles and is also said to be the cause of their creation and destruction.<sup>107</sup> He creates and consumes the waters and makes them wholesome so as to make them the source of nourishment for the living beings. Agni is guardian of the world. As per BrahmaPurāṇa, he (Agni) resides within the body in the form of the given of food. With the help of the other gods, Agni gained the power to go everywhere. The Svarga khaṇḍa of the Padma Purāṇa shows that the Agnihotrits of the Yajurveda praised Sūrya and Agni. Here it also defines the regions (loka) of Bhānumat (i.e. the Sun), Mahendra and Agni, the chanting of Gāyatrī and the completion of sacrifices has been praised, special attention has been given to the fire god.

## ❖ Four Kinds Of Yajña

- The Vedic Altar – Types and Evolution

Altar is a very significant structure in the Vedic ritual. The main sacrifices are Darṣapūrṇamāsa, Paśūbandha, the various Soma-sacrifices, and the main being Agniṣṭoma.

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<sup>106</sup>Macdoell, A.A., *Vedic Mythology*, Motilal Banarasi Das, Varanasi, 1963, p.88

<sup>107</sup>*op cit*, Pargiter, F.E., pp. 348-420

### Description of the altar:

The regular size of the altar is: three *araṇis* in the eastern side; one *vyāma* (the distance between the tips of the fingers of the two hands, extended to the two sides fully) in the western side; and the length be “that of a man” (*puruṣa-sammita*)-

*vyāma-matripaścādityahuḥ, etavānvaipuruṣaḥ, puruṣa-sammita hi, tryaratniḥ ...*<sup>108</sup>

The common shape of the Vedic sacrificial altar is said to be like a woman, in the act of embracing the *Āhavanīya* fireplace. Her two shoulders are said to be the *amsau* of the altar, which are the two corners of the eastern side. This side is smaller than the western one, the corners of which are said to be the buttocks, *sroni*. To make the resemblance to a woman even more clear, the altar is approved to be contracted in the middle which would give the idea of a beautiful woman with slender belly-

*pārthu-śronivīrstantaramsamadhyesamgradhya* for a woman; and there itself just before, *paścadvariyaśisyat*.  
*Madhyesamhvārīta punch purastadūrvi*<sup>109</sup>

Though the description does not clearly say, what exactly the pose of the woman would be, it is to be taken for granted that the woman in this pose has her legs contracted and folded under her buttocks; they are hidden under her buttocks with knees folded. If that be the case, and there is hardly any about it, what could be the original size of the altar? For this, we have to look to other details.

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<sup>108</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyay G.P, p. 14

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 126-158

The point is, what does *puruṣa-sammita* mean? Even leaving away the apparent contradiction between the concept of the embracing woman and the *puruṣa* in one, can we really take the expression to indicate the full height of a man in standing position?

At another later text, it is said that the altar in the *Darṣapūrṇamāsa* sacrifice should be, if at all possible, of the size of the sacrifice.

*Darṣapūrṇamāsa* *ikivedirya* *ajamāna-*  
*matribhavati* *aparimitavā*<sup>110</sup>

Though this goes well the concept of the sacrifice being recognized with some projecting things in the sacrifice, such as the sacrificial pole or the bunch of sacred grass (*praścara*),<sup>111</sup> the length does not appear to be corresponding to the full size of a standing or lying man. The SB which gives various details does not say whether the altar, although it suggests it to be *puruṣa-sammita*, should be as long as the full height of a man (say, the sacrifice); and, though it says that it should be like an embracing woman, it leaves the question open, by saying that it may be of any size as one desires.<sup>112</sup> Though, again, it differentiates the altar at the *Darṣapūrṇamāsa* in size, from that at the Soma sacrifice (which it calls *Mahāvedi*), it gives no sign about their mutual difference as regards the shape. The altar at the Soma sacrifice being the “Great Altar” (*Mahāvedi*) cannot be taken as the original altar; and, it is actually a fresh big altar beyond the original *Darṣapūrṇamāsa* altar. A detail from the TB would be useful in this context. Like the SB this text has the strife of the Devas and the demons; and, in this context, it said that the whole earth was with the asuras. When the gods went to the latter

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<sup>110</sup> BSS. 24.24.

<sup>111</sup> *op cit*, UPADHYAY G.P., III.7.1.11; I.8.1.44; Ai.Br.VI.3 = 26.3

<sup>112</sup> *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., I.2.5.14 *nātramātra*’sti, *yāvatimevasvayammanasamanyetatāvatimkuryat*, p.

to ask for some portion of the earth for sacrifice, the asuras granted only that much portion as a man would “see” in a sitting posture –

Yāvadasinahparāpaśyatitavaddevānām.<sup>113</sup>

This would show that the original sacrificial altar was of the size and length of a man as he sat and glanced easily forward; the length would be from the seat to the point which easily catches his eye-alternatively, where his hand reaches when stretched. In this alternative position, his feet would be under his buttocks, and not stretched back to show the full size of his body. In other words, this would be roughly half position, corresponding to the description of the women, showing only her hips and shoulders, noted above. This would indicate that the expression *puruṣa-sammita* has to be understood, not as meaning “corresponding to the whole height or length of a man” but, as “corresponding to the upper portion of a man”, woman included. The altar was *puruṣa-sammita* to indicate the general length, but it was the “woman” in respect of the *Āhavanīya* fire, who is conceived as “her” male to form a ‘procreative couple’, that would relate to the procreative aspect of the sacrifice.<sup>114</sup>

Other than from the identification of the altar with the earth, embracing the *Āhavanīya* fireplace, positioned in the eastern part, that stands for the heavenly representative collecting the offerings, the upper portion of the body appears to be a dominant factor. It is already declared, that the upper portion is pure (*medhya*), the portions lower than the navel being impure.<sup>115</sup> The dividing line for these two portions was the *Rasanā*. So, the waistband was necessary for the sacrifice to be worn by him and his wife at the sacrifice.

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<sup>113</sup>*op cit*, Apte, H.N., p. 49

<sup>114</sup>*yośāvaivedirvṛṣāgniḥ....mithunamevairprajānānām kṛiyate*, *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 34

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid*

The word *vedi* has been explained differently in different circumstances, a myth associated with the gain of the original *vedi* would be useful to determine the earliest size of the altar. The myth is well known. According to it, the asuras were mutually brothers, the asuras wanted to dupe the gods; and hence, they began dividing the earth secretly. They did it with the help of bull-hides. When the gods knew this, they approached the asuras and requested for their share. The asuras said that they would get earth only of the size of the dwarf that was among the gods. This dwarf (*vāmana*) was Viṣṇu. The gods agreed, saying that that much portion was enough for them; for, the earth of the size of Viṣṇu -*vāmana* would be fruitful, as Viṣṇu himself is sacrifice. Now, the gods laid Viṣṇu -*vamana* on the earth, encircled him from three sides, leaving the east. And, that was the *vedi*.<sup>116</sup> There are two points here. The first one relates to the discussion in hand. It is, that the original altar was not of the full size of a man, the dwarf Viṣṇu coming only about half of the full man. The other point is the mystic importance of the dwarf, as such. It is not improbable that, looking to the unique and universal importance of the dwarf, and the belief associated with him, the dwarf Viṣṇu figured in the account of the altar, which indicates that the Vedic people had parallel acceptance in the mystic power of the dwarf. But the point goes further than the dwarf in the Vedic context. We get a twofold equation in the Vedic context. In one case Viṣṇu is identified with the black antelope; and it is often said that the sacrifice went away from the gods assuming the form of a black antelope. The hide of the black antelope is also identified with, and is a symbol for, the sacrifice.<sup>117</sup> Now, a detail from the BSS is interesting from this point. Giving the various details of behaviour regarding the performance of sacrifice, the said *sūtra* says that when the sacrifice, who is the one who has kept the three fires, is out of his sacrificial chamber on a journey, he should prepare an altar of

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<sup>116</sup>*Ibid*, p. 21

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid*, p. 41

such a size as would correspond to the place required for a black antelope to sit upon –

*Yāvatikṛṣṇamṛgaupāviśettāvadavar-  
ardho 'dhvगतoviharah<sup>118</sup>*

This detail is not verified from the Brahmana texts, but it appears to be significant as marking an important stage in the evolution of the Vedic altar. Looking to the symbolic use of the hide of the black antelope in various acts, such as the covering of the sacrifice, for placing the corn for being used to prepare the corn-offering from and in the Soma-sacrifice for keeping the shoots of Soma on, and so on, one wonders if the motif behind the dwarf is not transferred to the deer or the deer-hide. If we look to the size of the deer seated on the ground with its legs folded, and from the lips to the tail, it would correspond to the hide roughly; and the length would also, roughly, correspond to the height of the dwarf. The same would also be the size of the ground covered by a man in a sitting posture, with his palms and arms stretched forward.

This, then, was the most original length of the Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar; and it corresponds, roughly, to the idea of the sitting man, the dwarf and the sitting antelope. But, this original size went a bit changing, though maintaining the shape of the shoulders to the east and the buttock to the west. Yajñavalkya is the first to mark the change and say, “There is no fixed measure here; one may prepare it as one’s mind chooses”<sup>119</sup>. This holds good even for the altar of the daily Agnihotra. Herein also the usual three main fires are established.

As there is variation as regards the size (length) of the altar, there is variation regarding the depth. The SB says that the gods could not see Viṣṇu, the dwarf, as

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<sup>118</sup>*BaudhāyanaŚrautasūtra*, Ed., Caland, W., Bibliotheca Indica, Delhi, 1904, p. 28

<sup>119</sup>*Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, Ed., Gharpure, J.R., Bombay, 1936, p. 51



they laid him on the earth for measuring the earth. This was because he went below the surface of the earth, being unable to move, as he was fixed by the gods with mantras. So, they dug the earth as far as three angulas; because Viṣṇuhid himself among the roots of the herbs that lies three angulas deep. Hence, to avoid the roots, the place for the altar should be dug as far as three angulas.<sup>120</sup>

But, there was also a practice of digging as far as only two angulas, as indicated by the BSS; and the TB Says, that it should be four angulas, as the roots of the herbs go as far as four angulas.<sup>121</sup> The SB refers to the opinion of panic, who recommended the altar at the Soma-sacrifice to be dug as far as three angulas, but it adds “This is not to be followed”. As the correct method, it prescribes no exact measure, but simply says that it should be dug so far as the roots are not further visible.<sup>122</sup>

### ❖ Altar in the Brahman Period

Variations in the structure and shape of the altar are to be noted in the Yajurveda Brahmanas, and not in the Ṛgveda Brahmanas; and the reason is, obviously, that the Yajurveda deals with the sacrifice more prominently. As there are variations as regards the shape and structure of the altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa sacrifice, there is disparity as regards the same at the Paśubandha and the Soma sacrifice. The Brahmana texts rarely give the details of the altar at the Paśubandha (or, Nirudha-paśubandha), while they are somewhat elaborately described in the

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<sup>120</sup>*Tasmātryaṅgulavediḥ, op cit, Upadhyay G.P., p. 14*

<sup>121</sup>*dvyāṅgulaṁkheyaityekesām, op cit, Caland, W., p. 46; and caturāṅgulaṁkheyaApte, H.N., p.13*

<sup>122</sup>*op cit, Upadhyay G.P., p. 23*

Śrautasūtras. The Nirudha-paśubandha is referred to by the Samhitās and SB,<sup>123</sup> but, it is the *Yūpa* that gets a noticeable attention, and not the altar. Hence, it is not quite possible to have an idea of the shape and size of the altar at the Nirudha-paśubandha in the Brahmana period. There is, hence, ground to believe that the altar at this sacrifice at the period of the Brahmanas was not much different from that at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. The measurement of the Mahāvedi (at the Soma sacrifice) given by the SB is that its eastern side would be twenty-four prakramas, the western side should be thirty prakramas, and its east-west length should be thirty-six prakramas. But, the Brahmana, also records a variation for the western side, which is thirty-three prakramas (instead of thirty).<sup>124</sup> In the first measurement, the Brahmana, roughly, follows the TS roughly, because, the measurement being the same, in place of the prakramas.<sup>125</sup> As this altar is the Mahāvedi, far exceeding the size of the normal altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa, the details of femininity are not so prominent here. It is not prescribed to be “compressed in the middle” (*madhye-samvharita*), though, conceptually, it is the woman with the “shoulders” and the “buttocks”, and the symbol of the earth.

Another point to be noted in the case of this altar is that, in spite of the variation noted above as regards the western side, there is no further option, with the words “as the mind feels”, as is the case with the Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar. In spite of the option of thirty-three prakramas, the norm appears to be of thirty prakramas only.

A new image seems to have developed, hence, without disturbing the concept of the “woman”; and this was that of a chariot. In fact the semblance of a chariot in

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., III.64, which does not differentiate it from the Soma sacrifice (*Agnistoma*) and XI.7.1.2 which make a difference between the Haviryajna type of the Pasubandha and the Somayajna type; the Pasubandha is mainly an animal sacrifice requiring the elevated altar to the east. It is the prototype of the great altar at the Soma-sacrifice.

<sup>124</sup> *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., pp. 67-78. The number of prakramas are explained as 30= Virat; 33= a variety of Virat; 36 = Br̥hati.

<sup>125</sup> *op cit*, Keith, A.B., p. 76

the altar – with the narrower eastern side, as compared to the western one – had already developed, the indication thereof being the altar at the Nirudha-paśubandha, though it is not clearly stated. The Śrautasūtras show that the altar at the Nirudha-paśubandha largely conforms to the size of the altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. Its eastern side is said to be three aratnis, the western one four aratnis;<sup>126</sup> but, the east-west length is prescribed to be six aratnis. In a variation, both the eastern and the western sides are to be three aratnis each.<sup>127</sup> This would mean, that the altar, in this case could be oblong quadrangular. This shape, and also the east-west length of six aratnis, goes beyond the shape of a crouching woman, which is so marked in the altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. It is here that the detail of the middle being contracted was dropped. The new image that emerged was that of the sakata or ratha. That is why, it is said that the altar now should be equal to the axle of a chariot or a cart at the west; and, on the eastern side it should be of the width equal to the distance between the two holes of the yoke.

*ratha-*

*sammitasyātrathaksenāpaścattiraścirathesayapraciratha*

*yugenapurastat*<sup>128</sup>

A further variant is: east 8, west 10; and the length 12; and, further 10 × 10 on all the four sides, or as pleases the eye;<sup>129</sup> in this last type it would be square. This altar at the nirudha-paśubandha became the norm, as far as the size is concerned, for the uttaravedi on the Mahāvedi at the Soma-sacrifice. The uttaravedi was so called as it was raised up in relation to the Mahāvedi; and it was constructed to the east. There is indication that the uttaravedi symbolizing the earth had varied height (i) of the same level as the Mahāvedi; (ii) of the height of the upara

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<sup>126</sup> *ĀpastambaŚrautasūtra*, Caland, W., Gottingen, 1921, p.1112.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>128</sup> *op cit*, Ed., Shama, S.R., p. 567.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*

(which is the portion of the sacrificial pole un-chiselled and placed in the pit); (iii) up to the rasanā; and (iv) up to the casala. The heights at ii, iii and iv correspond to the desire of the sacrifice, respectively, for the region of the manes, that of the humans by rebirth, or for the gods, after death.

These fantastic details do not occur at many books and must have been left out, for one standard height later. However this uttaravedi was raised and was called the (raised) nose of Prajāpati. The KS mentions four names for the uttaravedinasika (nose) kasari (backbone?), Simhi (lioness) and uttaravedi of these the name Simhi is common. Hence, after it is structured and when water is sprinkled over it to purify it, the mantra addressed to her is – “Thou art the lioness” (SBIII.5.2.8). However she is also believed to have taken the form of a she-buffalo and stood in between the gods and demons; hence addressed as “Lioness thou art; She buffalo art thou. (KS - ‘*asimahiṣṭāsisimhīrupamiva hi tan mahiṣirupamivabhutvantaratisthat*’; similar is found in TS. 1.2.12.2, VI.2.7.3).

The enclosing sticks and the sambharas for the uttaravedi are laid down. They are sticks of pitudaru (pine), a bunch of wool (urnastuka), fragrant herb or bamboo, and gulgulu (or guggulu), which is the fragrant gum of a certain tree (cf KS. XXIX.6; TS.VI.2.8.4-6; SB.III.5.2.15ff). These objects are said to be aspects of fire; and in a myth they are said to represent three brothers of the fire-god who ran away earlier, being afraid of the thunderbolt in the form of Vasat.

Having seen the variation of the altar at the period of the Brahmana texts, and further at the Sūtra period, we revert to the Ṛgveda. Here there is indication that the altar was considered as symbolizing the women, having four braids of hair, *catuskapardayuvatih* (X.114.3). Whether this was a square one, quadrangular one, or the one contracted in the middle to give the semblance of a woman, is difficult to say. But the probability of its being of the shape of the later Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar is very great. On the other hand, there is a very interesting

detail in the hymn of Vṛṣākapi, which has been left unnoticed by scholars. Vṛṣākapi, who is the big ape that is sacrificed, is desired to gain not only the knife, the boiling pan and the new vessel, but also the “well arranged cart of the fire”.<sup>130</sup> That the ape is sacrificed is clear from the verses.<sup>131</sup> There is also reference to the sacrifice being a Soma-sacrifice.<sup>132</sup> If, then, the *anas* (*edhasya ana acitam*) associated with the sacrifice of the ape indicates the altar of that shape, this detail in the Vṛṣākapi hymn has to be taken as the earliest indication of the shape of the altar at the Soma-sacrifice, or that at the Nirudha-paśubandha.

### ❖ The Concept Of The Double Altar

As indicated above, the Vedic ritual tradition has two main types of altars, which could be said to be distinct and original. The one is at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa sacrifice, though the name of the sacrifice does not appear in the Ṛgveda. The other altar is the one at the Paśubandha (or, Nirudha-paśubandha) and at the Soma sacrifice. The first type is a simple one, with the Āhavanīya fireplace in the eastern quarter and Gārhapatyapositioned at the back, with the Dākṣiṇa fireplace to the south-east of the Gārhapatya. Here the altar, as such, is only one. At the paśubandha, in addition to the usual altar (mentioned at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa),

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<sup>130</sup>*op cit*, Wilson, H.H., p. 876 *asimsunamnāvamcarumedhasya ana acitam*; the idea is that the Ahavaniya fire to the east, i.e. at the yoke-side, controls the cart (or chariot) as the driver. He takes the victim (here the ape), along with the various things mentioned above, to heaven to the gods.

<sup>131</sup> For a full discussion see Dange, S.A., Vedic Concept of ‘Field’ and the Divine Fructification’. University of Bombay Pub., 1971, pp.49-67; Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual, Delhi, 1979, pp.33-36. There is hardly any doubt that the ape-sacrifice was the precursor of the Horse-sacrifice. The difference is that the sacrifice of the vṛṣā-kapi was a purely fertility ritual, while the Horse-sacrifice was also for royalty. The latter had a broader base among the Aryan people, being prevalent among the Romans and others.

<sup>132</sup>*cf. op cit*, Wilson, H.H., p 86, the very first verse *vi hi sotorasrksata; v.2 somapitaye*.

there is one altar to the east of the usual Āhavanīya. The same is the case at the Soma sacrifice, of which the Agniṣṭoma is the norm. This new altar, called Mahāvedi (“Great altar”) due to its size, has an raised platform in its eastern side, at the middle; and it is called Uttaravedi (not to be mistaken as “northern altar”) as it is “raised” (ut-tara) in comparison with the rest of its space as we have noted earlier. Apart from these two main types, we have also a third type, which is a combination of these two types; here, in addition to the new (and extra) altar to the east of the original Āhavanīya, there is one more to the south of the extra altar. However, both these are not as specious as the Mahāvedi of the Soma-sacrifice. They are much smaller. This second extra altar is termed “Southern” (Daksinavedi); and, as such, the first extra one gets to be called “Northern” (Uttaravedi), though it has its own uttaravedi (the raised platform) in its eastern middle part. This third type, having two extra altars to the east of the original Āhavanīya of the usual Darśapūrṇamāsa, is to be found at the Varuṇapraghasa, and the Śākamedhaparvans of Cāturmāsya sacrifice, and also at the sub-sacrifice called Sautāmaṇi. For the Varuṇapraghasa-Śākamedhaparvans the Darśapūrṇamāsa is the norm, while for the Sautāmaṇi it is the Soma sacrifice. Thus the types of the Vedic altars are : (i) the single altar (Darśapūrṇamāsa); (ii) two altars, with one extra (Paśubandha and Soma sacrifices) but of different sizes; and (iii) Three altars, with two extra altars, one to the south of the other (Varuṇapraghasa-Śākamedha, and Sautāmaṇi).

Apart from the statistic that there is a slight variation as regards the measurement of these altars in various Śrauta texts, the position at the Brahmana-s being yet different, there appears to be a solid evolution of their structure and the shape. Though the additional altars at the paśubandha and that at the Soma sacrifice are similar in being to the east of the original Āhavanīya, the one at the paśubandha is a small altar in comparison with the one at the Soma sacrifice.

We have indicated that, as an alternate to the concept of the altar being conceived as a crouching woman, there was the cart-base type. The cart-base shape is seen at the Varuṇapraghasa and the Śākamedha sacrifices of the Cāturmāsya more vividly. The two additional altars prepared to the east of the usual Āhavanīya fireplace (of the Darṣapūrṇamāsa sacrifice) in these sub-sacrifices, are slanting towards the east. The “raised” altar (ut-tara) is found in the northern one of the double altars at the Varuṇapraghasa and the Śākamedha also; and, like the Mahāvedi, it is located in the eastern portion of the altar, and the same is the case with the altar in the paśubandha. On this “raised” altar, fire is to be carried from the original Āhavanīya (or from the Gārhapatya according to a variation).<sup>133</sup> This becomes the new Āhavanīya for that certain rite. The measurement of the new Uttaravedi (northern altar) at these two sacrifices at the Cāturmāsya is about the same as at the Paśubandha, which, again, shows that the latter was the model for such new altars at the north, a point corroborated by the altar at the Sautāmaṇi, as we shall see further. It was: Eastern – 3, Western-4, East-West-6/7 in aratnis. The Dakṣinvedi (southern altar) was slightly smaller. Though the SB does not mention the shape of these altars, the BSS (V.5) states that the northern altar should be like one at the paśubandha, and that the southern one should be like the one at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. These two are said to be on the same line to the west, but to the east the southern one is short. They are separated from each other by the distance of a palm. This description obtains from other Śrauta -sūtra s also.<sup>134</sup> But, the Maitrayani Sam. indicates that the size of the two altars was equal,<sup>135</sup> which indicates an older tradition, or at least, a different tradition. However, though the

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<sup>133</sup> Kane, op.cit., p.1097, who refers to the ASS and the KSS for the praṇayana from the Gārhapatya and the Āhavanīya respectively. Katyayana does not mention clearly the Āhavanīya; it is mentioned by the commentator.

<sup>134</sup> *op cit*, Caland, W., p. 20-22.

<sup>135</sup> This could be the meaning if we understand the word *praci* as indicating the east-west length; cf. *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 59

two altars, which are to be taken as a double altar unit, are differentiated as one being like the Paśubandha-altar and the other from the Darṣapūrṇamāsa context, there is hardly any further indication of the shape of the southern altar. Should we suppose that this one was exactly like the Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar? If yes, its shape has to be the same: contracted in the middle to give the exact appearance of a crouching woman, trying to embrace the fire! The Śrauta tradition hardly follows this practice.

The SB which prescribes the Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar to be “contracted in the middle” says that this altar should be of the following measurement : Eastern side – 3 aratnis; Western – of the distance between the tips of the fingers when both hands with palms are fully stretched to the sides (vyāma-matṛi); East-West – of the extent of a man (puruṣa-sammita).<sup>136</sup>an expression of uncertain meaning; for, it does not make it clear if the man is to be understood as lying fully flat, or in a bending posture (cf. The image of the woman, with her buttocks and shoulders visible). The measurement could be more, “as pleases one’s mind”, according to the said text (i.e. SB). The Katyayana (K.S.S.) (V.3.12) prescribes the northern altar to be of measure of a chariot (rathamtri), while in the absence of a special size mentioned for the southern altar it could be assumed to be of the size of the one at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa, the prakṛti which means, it may be puruṣa-sammita or of any chosen measure, but less than the northern one. This would show that the measurement of the northern altar is that of the paśubandha, which is more or less a fixed one, along with the image of a chariot.

As it is reflected from the statement made above, that the Cāturmāsya altars, referred to above, show a mixed concept. As a vikṛti of the Darṣapūrṇamāsa, the Cāturmāsya, as a whole, with its entire fourseasonal sacrifices, had originally no

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<sup>136</sup> Actually the SB (I.2.5.14) mentions this length to be three aratnis. See also note by Weber, The Śrautasūtra of Katyāyana, Chaukhamba Skt. Series, Varanasi, 1972, p.208



special (extra) altar. This is clear from the case with the first and the last parvans. In the Varuṇapraghasa and the Śākamedha, the additional altar to the east of the original Āhavaniya was a superimposition of the paśubandha; but to differentiate the sacrifice from the Paśubandha, and to keep to its original source (prakṛti), the southern altar was structured to be the “northern” altar. This apparatus of the Cāturmāsya had mixed purpose- Śrauta and Gṛhya; or, in other words, socio-spiritual and domestic, but purely individual (mainly, domestic). The latter is clear in the symbolism of the male and female ram made of malt, the “killing” of the wife’s paramour(beloved), if any, by Varuṇa, the ritual of the manes at the Tryambaka-yāga, the karira-symbol for rain and so on. The former is in the Paśubandha alter, which is the model of the Mahāvedi at the Soma-sacrifice.

Though there is no indication of the Cāturmāsya being known in the Rgvedic period, the later Saṁhitās show knowledge of it, and describe it.<sup>137</sup> The AB does not mention the Cāturmāsya at all; but, the Kauśītaki-Brahman describes it in short, without mentioning the two extra altars etc. However, it indicates that these sacrifices have the Darṣapūrṇamāsa as the standard; because, it says that in the first parvan (Vaiśvadeva) the sacrifice offers to Agni and Soma “as these gods belong to the Darṣapūrṇamāsa” (darsapūrṇāmasikevāetedeivate). This Brahman Terms the Cāturmāsya s Bhaiṣajya-Yajña. The Gopatha Brahman (I.21-25) only gives a brief outline of the deities etc. The TB (I.6.2) gives details regarding the altars and other things, as does the SB. If we trace the arthavāda regarding these two altars, interesting points come out. Of these two, the northern one is related with life and protection from death, while the southern one is related with death or destruction. The northern altar is associated with progeny, which is the “eater”, while the southern one is associated with the progeny that is “eaten”.<sup>138</sup> Both these altars were created, as a generally acknowledged practice, at the two middle

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<sup>137</sup>MaitrāyaṇiSaṁhita, Ed., Schroeder, Von, Leipzig, 1881, p. 89

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid*

sacrifices of the Cāturmāsya. But, there is ground to believe that, originally, only one altar (the northern one) figured; the other one (known as the southern one) was added later. Thus, according to one account, after Prajāpati created the offspring, its left hand was naturally well stretched, but the right hand was shrunk. So, he constructed one more altar, now to the south of the altar that was created.<sup>139</sup> It is clear that the first altar, which was in addition to, and to the east of the original Āhavanīya of the Darṣapūrṇamāsa altar, was the only addition; and this was on the lines of the altar at the Paśubandha, which was the recognized norm, as has been made clear above. The altar termed ‘Southern’ was a later addition, as the ritual developed, and also to differentiate two Cāturmāsya parvans from the Paśubandha.

The double altar, with the same motif of the northern being associated with life and the southern with death, or with the dead, appears also at the Sautāmaṇi. Here the standard for the altars is the Varuṇapraghasa.<sup>140</sup> The northern altar is associated with gods, while the southern one with the manes (soul of ancestors). As in the Varuṇapraghasa, fire is carried to the new altars from the original Ahavanīya. However, the details of the altars vary from the SB as they occur in the KSS while, according to the Śrautasūtra, the northern fire was placed on the northern altar the southern one was not placed on the altar, as such;<sup>141</sup> it was placed away from it.

According to the SB however both the fires were placed on the altars. Behind these fires, cups of milk (on the northern one) and those of wine (on the southern one) were placed. According to the SB offerings of milk for the deities (Asvins, Indra and Sarasvatī) were poured into the fire (now called Āhavanīya according

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<sup>139</sup>*op cit*, Apte, H.N., p. 89 - *tāsāmdakṣinobahurnyaknaāsitsavyahprasrtah; saetamdvitīyamDākṣiṇa to vedimudahan.*

<sup>140</sup> Cf. K.S.S. p., 78 *vedimitevaruṇapraghasavat.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 310-12 *agnivarunapraghasavat; avedirDākṣiṇa.*

to the set plan as noted above) on the northern altar; and those of wine for the manes were poured in the one on the southern altar. Though there appears a variation in the later practice, the SB is sure on the point that fire from the original Āhavanīya (i.e. from the altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa ) was carried onto both the new altars, i.e. the northern one and the southern one, and both became ‘Āhavanīya’. This is clear from an arthavāda passage which centres round BalhikaPratīpiya and SthapatiCakṛa (SB XII.9.3.1).

The later was to celebrate at the Sautāmaṇi sacrifice of DustarituPaumSāyana for the gain of the lost kingdom of Dustaritu. BalhikaPratīpiya puts forth a riddle to Cakṛa. He asks Cakṛa if he would offer the cups of wine into the Āhavanīya fire; for, says he, if he does so he would commit a sin; and, if he does not pour the wine-cups into the Āhavanīya fire but somewhere else, than the Āhavanīya, the king for whom he is officiating would be kept away from his kingdom for good! Cakṛa replies that he would offer the wine-cups in the Āhavanīya itself, and also not in the Āhavanīya. How? As the fire in the southern altar is taken from the original Āhavanīya, it is Āhavanīya itself; wine-cups offered into it would, thus, be offered into the Āhavanīya. On the other hand, as it is not carried back into the original Āhavanīya, it is non-Āhavanīya (an-Āhavanīya). Likewise, the fire in the northern altar is both Āhavanīya and non-Āhavanīya.<sup>142</sup> Thus, it is clear that both the fires had altars. This seems to be the older practice. The two new altars were to be made in front of the original Āhavanīya, to its east, as we have seen. Now, the SB (XII.9.3. 10) makes the point clear, when it says that the (original) Āhavanīya is the “womb of the gods” (deva-yonih); and the two fires that are established in front of it are its immortal wings. Here there is no clear suggestion of the southern fire being out of the southern altar. However, at another place, where the Sautāmaṇi forms the final part of the Rājasūya, there is

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<sup>142</sup>*op cit*, Upadhyaya, G.P., p. 367 - *tad yad etav ‘agni’ ahavniyad vi hriyetetenāhavanīyavatha yad ahavaniyampunarnasnuvatetenobhauhomaupanotiyascāhavanīyeyascanāhavanīye*.

hint that the northern fire is the northern altar, while the southern fire is on just a raised platform.

One point ought to have an examination in this context. It has to be documented that the southern fire spoken of here for the various rites cannot be the Dākṣiṇa fire at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. It is the one on the southern altar or the one by the side of the southern altar (KSS). In both cases, it is ‘southern’ one in respect of the other one placed on the northern altar. Both these are new ones being carried from the original Āhavanīya, as is very clearly stated in the SB.

In fine, both the Cāturmāsya and the Sautāmaṇiseem to be chronologically later than the other important sacrifices. As such, the idea and ritual of the double altar were a later addition, the line of evolution being that the double altar at the Sautāmaṇi followed the pattern of the Varuṇapraghasa (from the Cāturmāsya), where the northern altar had its norm in the altar at the Paśubandha. In all probability, the additional new altar to the south was itself a later one than the one called ‘northern altar’, as the association of the fire, carried from the original Āhavanīya to it remained fluid, being on it or out of it to one side. We have already read the arthavāda, in this respect, implying that it was originally a “shrivelled” right hand. The word nyakna (TB I.6.4.1-2) indicates “lowly” or even short. This answers the description of the southern altar at the Sautāmaṇi, which is said to be only udhata<sup>143</sup> (slightly raised) as compared to the northern altar which is described here, and also at the Varuṇapraghasa, with the words upavapanti or upakiranti, indicating it to be adequately raised with the layers of sand. The word nyakna would also indicate that it was not raised at all; but, the word udhata (SB V.5.4.21), in association with the southern fire, is not so much for the altar as it is for the place to keep the fire. The low structure of the southern altar

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<sup>143</sup>*op cit*, Apte H.N., p. 120 Dākṣiṇa to vedimud-ahan; however, up-hanti indicates, simply “digging”; *op cit*, Upadhyay G.P., p. 198 has ullikhati for the ground and udhanti for the evil which is supposed to ‘go up’ (away).

is explained in the arthavāda by saying that the northern one is Ksatra and the southern one the Vis, indicating the former to be the enjoyer (“eater”) and the later the enjoyed (“eaten”); also that the Kṣatra is higher than the Vis.

Another point to be noted is that the offerings of wine, in the Saurtamani, had a varied tradition. We have already seen how it was sought to be shown that the southern fire was the Āhavanīya itself. A different practice was to hold the jar of wine, with a hundred holes or nine, trickling wine into the Āhavanīya itself; but, undoubtedly, the Āhavanīya could never be the original one, but the fire on the additional altar brought forth from the original Āhavanīya altar (SB V.5.4.28 upary ‘uparay’ Āhavanīyam dharavanti).

At another place at the SB (XII.8.1.18) offerings of clarified butter are said to be poured into both the northern (uttara) fire and the southern (Dākṣiṇa) fire. If one reads the riddle of Balhika Pratīpiya to Cakṛa, stated above, with the detail from the SB itself about holding the jar of wine on the “Āhavanīya”, one is led to believe that in it there is a glimpse of the practice of offering wine in the northern (“Āhavanīya”) itself and (or) also, as a variant, in the southern one, like the offerings of clarified butter. In that case, Cakṛa makes clear that he is not offering wine in the “Āhavanīya” (the northern), but into the southern fire (following the changed practice); for, both are Āhavanīya and also non-Āhavanīya. This shows a practice getting gradually fixed up, followed later in the Śrautasūtras, to offer wine into the southern fire (= earlier carried from the original Āhavanīya), and not into the northern, though both were “Āhavanīya”. There is no doubt that this fire was not brought forward from the original Dākṣiṇa fireplace.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> . Kane’s statement, op.cit., p.1227, “brings fire from the Dākṣiṇa fire and establishes it on the mound” has to be modified as referring to this new Dākṣiṇa fire earlier brought from the Ahopcit, Griffith, R.T.H., anīya.

Though it is very difficult to be quite sure about the evolution of the various altars, due to the fusion of practices at a very early period, it is not impossible to trace its direction. What appears to be more or less certain, is that the later developed altar at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa is proposed from the catuskapardayuvatīh at the Ṛgveda, which hardly knew any other altar along with it for normal occasions. This was for the domestic ritual of day-to-day need. It was three aratni-s in its eastern side, and was of the same length east-west; on the western side it was vyāma-matra (roughly four aratni-s) giving the idea of a bending woman, trying to embrace the fire in the east, attached to it, with her legs under her buttocks (sroni). This size continued, with the addition of the name Āhavanīya, to the fire; the Gārhapatya and the Dākṣiṇa were added later. The figure of this altar got gradually increased; and, by the time of the SB it could be as one chose. For the animal sacrifice, Paśubandha as it is termed, the altar of the shape of a chariot-base was already known to the Ṛgveda (cf. X.86, Vṛṣākapi-hymn): from this one developed the Mahāvedi. The size of the Mahāvedi was fixed, there being only slight variation in its length. As against this, the altars at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa and Paśubandha show variations in size. The chariot-shaped altar and the one at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa were, outwardly, similar in shape-border at the west than at the east, excluding the curve (or contraction) in the middle for the later one. The concept of the vedi being the woman, hence got transferred onto the chariot-shaped altar from the “yavati” or the one at the Darṣapūrṇamāsa. Hence, the concept of vedi=woman=earth was common for both.

The development of ritual required a combination of two altars; and the two from the Paśubandha and the Darṣapūrṇamāsa were combined. But, even in the combined unit, the difference of size between them was maintained, the northern (Paśubandha) being bigger than the southern (Darṣapūrṇamāsa) one.

## ❖ Traditional Part of Yajña

Agni, the god of fire of the Vedic age is often mentioned in the works of the post-Vedic period, because these texts are still closely connected to the sacrificial rituals, in which Agni has an important position. Although the god maintains his character and function of the Vedic period. One cannot deny the fact that the most active period of Agni's career is to be found in the Ṛgveda after which he gradually returns to the pre-mythical natural element, a shadow of his old mythical self.

The Śrautasūtra s along with the Gṛhyasūtra s and the Dharmasūtras form an important link between the Vedic literature and the classical literature. The Sūtras deal also with Vedic rituals, domestic rituals and sacrifices which played a significant role in the period of Śrautasūtras. So many Vedic deities, including the later ones, are mentioned in them. The fire god Agni is very recurrently mentioned in the Śrautasūtras. At numerous places oblations are said to be offered to Agni. Many names and labels of Agni occur in the Sūtra literature. They are Agni-agnimant Agni-agnivant Anukvavant-Agni, apsumant-Agnibahmant-Agni, bhagin-Agni, budhvant-Agni, datr-Agni,<sup>145</sup> Gṛhapati -Agni, inumat-Agni, Jātavedas-Agni, jyotismant-Agni, kama Agni, kavyaharana-Agni, Ksamvant-Agni, murdhanvant-Agni, pathikrt-Agni, Pāvaka-Agni, pavamāna Agni, prtikavant, pravant-Agni, putravant-Agni aksohan-Agni, asavant-Agni, sahintya-Agni, samlmant-Agni samkusuka-Agni, samvaryā Agni, Śuci-Agni, surabhimant-Agni, svastimat-Agni, svistakrt-Agni, tapasvant-Agni, janadvant-pavakavant-Agni, tejasvant-Agni, vaisvanara-Agni, vasumant-Agni, vipri-Agni, viprci-Agni, viti-Agni, vivici-Agni, vratabhrt-Agni. If we closely observe the titles of Agni, we will find that some titles are merely the qualities of the god, like rukmant-Agni and surabhin-Agni.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>*op cit*, Caland, W., p. 452

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid*

Some epithets(names) are gained by him on account of the granting of certain things upon his worshippers that is vajasrt-Agni, putrin-Agni, annada-Agni, annapati-Agni, ayusmant-Agni etc. Some epithets signify its relation with certain things – balimant- Agni, yavistha-Agni, vratapati-Agni, and tantumant-Agni. Some epithets are due to his relation with other deities, such as, rudravant-Agni, suryavant-Agni. Agni is described as radiant, glossy, brilliant, shining, magnificent, compassionate, kind, protector, lord, wise, knower of all beings, omnipotent, omniscient, the foremost (among gods), bestower of happiness, food, long-life and wealth, depositor of kavya, libation to the pitrs, guide, purifier and so on. These epithets also bear evidence to the importance and popularity of the deity in the sacrifices. Agni's relation with other gods are also mentioned in the Sūtra s. The fire is also known by varun's name. Viṣṇu's three strides are very famous in the vedic literature. According to Śākapuni these three strides are the three appearances of one and the same god, as Agni on earth, Indra or Vāyu in the sky and as the sun in the heaven.

During the time of the sūtra s also, worship of deities and sacrifices formed the basis of the religion. In fact, the general tendency of Indian religious literature at this time was to ritualize all actions and spiritualize all life and the ritual activity chiefly centered round the fire worship. In fact, throwing oblations into the fire and reciting appropriate mantras are the necessities of every ceremony. Agni being the priest, the messenger and the intermediary between heaven and earth, the gods were appeased principally through oblations offered into Agni who was the oblation bearer havya-vahan. Many objects of sacrifices are mentioned in the Śrautasūtra s. According to the Baudhayana Śrautasūtra, in a rite called abhicara, one who has to practice abhicara should offer cake on eight potsherds to rudravant Agni.<sup>147</sup> If anyone wants to become the lord of animals, he should offer oblation

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<sup>147</sup>*Ibid*, p. 385



with milk in agnihotra sacrifice. For wisdom one should offer clarified butter and for power and strength he should offer curd and grains respectively.

In the age of the Sūtras the sacrifices are classified into two categories, that is, Śrauta and smarta. The Śrauta sacrifices are divided into 14 types. Of these seven are designated as havis sacrifices and the other seven are called soma sacrifices.<sup>148</sup> The havis sacrifices are Agnyādhāna, agnihotra, darśpunamasa, Cāturmāsya, agraḥayana, nirudhpaśubandha and sautrāmani. Milk, clarified butter, porridge, grain, cakes etc. are offered in the havis sacrifices. Of the havis sacrifices the agnihotra is the most common. In this sacrifice the daily morning and evening oblations of milk are made to the three fires. The Darśapūrṇamāsa (the new and full moon sacrifice) is the most important of the others. Another type is the soma sacrifices, which are seven in number, that is, Agniṣṭoma, antyAgniṣṭoma, ukthya, sodasā, vājapeya, atiratra and aptoryama. Soma is used in them.<sup>149</sup> Agniṣṭoma is the easiest of the Soma sacrifices.

The domestic rites and moral codes are described in the Gṛhya and Dharma sūtras. So, they come under the second category. The Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra gives the most comprehensive description of the setting up of the Gṛhya-fire and of the Gṛhya sacrifices. To offer oblations in the gṛhya fire in the morning and evening is the regular daily duty of the snataka. Similarly, if somebody's fire worship starts from the time of marriage, the oblation is offered in the morning and evening. In the evening, the first oblation is offered with the formula "To Agni, Svāhā" In the morning the first oblation is offered "To Sūrya Svāhā". From the time he begins to offer these two daily sacrifices, he should perform them himself or should have them performed for him by someone, till the end of his life. The five great sacrifices (panca-mahāyajñas) which a married snataka has to offer every day,

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<sup>148</sup> *Op cit*, Macdonell, A.A., A History of Sanskrit Literature, p.209; & Barnett, L.D., Antiquities of India, p.181; Trivedi, Ram Govind, Vedic Sahitya, p.249; Sharma, R.N., op.cit., p.180.

<sup>149</sup> op.cit., Sharma, R.N., p.181.

that is, the sacrifice to the gods, the sacrifice to the fathers, that to the beings and to men and the sacrifice to brahmana.

Yajamāna was one who performed the sacrifice for his own wellbeing. In the Soma sacrifices he was called sunvana. In small rituals and domestic rituals, one could act as a priest as well, if he was a brahmana. The office of the priest was restricted to the brahmana varṇa only.

In the case of big Śrauta sacrifices it became necessary to employ other priests. A sacrificer who performed many sacrifices was known as yayajuka and he who had already performed the sacrifice was known as iṣṭi.<sup>150</sup> One who performed the sacrifice on behalf of the yajamāna was called yajaka. The number of yajakas differs from sacrifice. In the Rgvedic period, the sacrifices were performed by a few priests, but as the rituals were developed fully in the Brahmana and the Sūtra period, the number of priests was increased. Following are the main priests referred to in the Śrauta works:

Hota and his assistants<sup>151</sup> – The organization of the hota seems to be the oldest. His important function was to call upon the gods by reciting hymns and make offerings to them. Agni also played a similar role, as he is called the hota of the gods. The prasasta or upavakṛta used to assist him in the sacrifices.

Udgata was a priest whose job was to sing the hymns at the sacrifices. He was assisted in the work by prastota, pratiharta and subrahmanya.

Adhvaryu's main task was to look after the details of the functioning in association with the hota priest. He was assisted by pratiprasthata, nestā and unneta.

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<sup>150</sup> Agnihotri, P.D., Patañjali, Kalina Bharata, 2001, p.45

<sup>151</sup> Kasikar, ŚrautaKosa, Vol. I, pp.8-9

In the later Vedas, the Brahmanas and the sūtras, Brahma is always referred to as the person who administered the functions of the other priests and remedied the mistakes committed by them during the yajna.

This fire-worship was not confined merely to the fire-chamber Yajñasala but was sometimes performed in the open air also as “devaYajña-desā” where sacrifices are offered to the gods. The protection of the fire and the sacrificing of oblations to the fire-god were ongoing features of the popular religion.

The worship of fire played an important and fundamental role in almost all social and religious rites and ceremonies of the Sūtra period. It is indicative of the popularity of fire-worship in India at the time of the Sūtra s. The power of sacrifices on the social mind was great. They classify the entire domestic rituals under the names of different sacrifices.

This class includes the samskaras from the vivāha to the simantonnayan. Where after making offerings to the fire, presents are given to the Brahmins it is called prahuta. This group contains the samskaras from the jatakarma to the chaula. Ahuta sacrifices are those, where after offerings to the fire, one receives presents from others. The upanayana and the samavartana samskaras are included in this list. The last one is called Praśiṣṭa.

In the Gṛhyasūtras jātakarmasamskara is fully described. When the child was born a fire was lighted in the room to warm and to smoke the child and the mother.<sup>152</sup> This fire was kept burning for days. Grains of rice and muster seeds were thrown into the fire to get rid of various kinds of evil spirits. When the proper jātakarma ceremony commenced, one item of this ceremony “āyusya” ensures long life to the new born baby. Near the navel or right ear of the baby the father murmured, Agni is long lived; through the trees, he is long lived”. Sacrifice is long lived; through sacrificial fire. In the namakarana samskara offerings were

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<sup>152</sup> Swami Dayananda Saraswati, The Samskara Vidhi; R.B. Pandey, op.cit., p.143.

made to Prajāpati, Agni and Soma. Then the name was given. After one month of the child birth the parents sacrifice to many gods of which Agni is important.

The role of Agni is much more important in the beginning ceremony. The parents took the child, where the sacrificial fire was burning in the altar. When the teacher took charge of the student, he (teacher) said, “Agni is thy teacher, Indra’s pupil is thou”. Then after taking a round of the fire and offering to it, the teacher delivered the instructions. The first rite comprised of enkindling and feeding of the sacred fire. The student wiped with his hand the ground round the fire with the formula, “Agni glorious one, make me glorious. As thou glorious Agni, art glorious, thus, O glorious one, bring me to glory. As thou Agni are the pre-seaver of the treasure of sacrifice for the gods, thus may I become the preserver of the Vedas for men”.

Then he put fuels on the fire with the prayer, “To Agni I have brought a piece of wood, to the great jātavedas”. As thou, Agni, are inflamed by wood, thus I am inflamed by life, insight, vigour, offspring, cattle, holy luster”. The sacred fire was the symbol of life and light, for which the student struggled. After this ceremony worship began in the student career and continued throughout his life.

The samavartana ceremony took place in the following way. At the mid day the student holds the feet of his teacher in his arms and paid his last honor to the Vedic fire by putting some fuel on it. Eight vessels full of water were kept there. The student drew water out of one vessel with the words, “The fires that dwell in the waters, the fire that must be hidden, the which must be covered, the ray of light, the fire which kills the mind, the unbearing one, the pain causing one, the destroyer of the body, the fire which kills the organs, these I leave behind. The shining one that I seize here, therewith I besprinkle for the sake of prosperity, of glory, of holiness, of holy luster”.

In the vivāhasamskāra the worship of the fire is commended at different events. Vivāha samskāra is the origin and center of all domestic sacrifice. So, marriage was regarded as a sacrifice. We can see Agni's importance at the time of marriage in Devala's testimony that in the forms of marriages starting from the gāndhārva to the piśāca the marital rites have to be performed in the presence of fire. The Hindus believe that different gods keep control over the different stage in the physical development of a girl and these gods are mythologically regarded to be her husband, Agni is one of them. The lord of fire brings about the menstrual flow so that women can bear babies. Agni then gives her to man, her pati or lord.

A variety of sacrifices are performed in the marriage ceremony that is *rastrabhṛt*, *jaya*, *abhyatana* and *lajahoma*. In the first three sacrifices the god Agni is called upon for victory and protection from known and unknown unfriendly powers. In the last sacrifice bride prayed to Agni for prosperity, fertility and to strongly unite her with her husband. The couple, then, take circumbulation round the fire that is called Agni- *pradākṣiṇa*.

The last ritual in the life is the *antyeṣṭi*. In the Śrautasūtra *pitṛmedha* is described as a sacrifice. According to Sāyana burning of the corpse is *pitṛmedha* and it is a Yajña.<sup>153</sup> The Śrautasūtras mention three types of sacrifices which are to be performed before and after the death of the *ahitagni*. They are the *pitṛmedha*, the *brahmamedha* and the *piṇḍapitṛyajña*. If someone dies after the evening *agnihotra*, the morning *agnihotra* should be performed. His (dead man's) son or pupil should offer a cake on to Agni. Then the actual burning ritual begins, which is regarded as an offering into the sacred fire, conducting the corpse to heaven as a sacrificial gift. In the sūtra period the cremation was performed by the flames of the three or five fires kept by the householder.

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<sup>153</sup> Shastri, D.R., *Origin and Development of the Ritual of Ancestor worship in India*, pp.16-20