

CHAPTER – II

**A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE VEDIC SACRIFICES
DESCRIBED IN THE *ŚATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA***

A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE VEDIC SACRIFICES DESCRIBED IN THE ŚATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA

Meaning and importance of the Vedic sacrifices :

In the Vedic age, ritual means performance of different rites of the sacrifice. The term ‘*Yajña*’ is derived from the √*yaj*. According to *Nirukta*¹ *Yajña* means where Gods are worshipped (*yaj*) or where different prayers are recited (*yāc*) or which causes moisture (*yajur-unna*) by the hymns of the *Yajurveda* or which is completed gradually by means of the hymns of the *Yajurveda* (*yajus-nī*). In Avesta *Yajña* is called *yasna*. Terminologically, *Yāga* means offerings to a particular deity or deities for attaining his or their favour- ‘*Dravyam devatā tyāgaḥ* |’². In fact *Yajña* is a means by which a link is established between human beings with divinities. In establishing a link or connection between men and gods, oblations are offered to the Gods and fulfilment of some cravings is prayed for. We wish to offer our most valuable thing to god and in return we seek his favour and kindness. Gods are propitiated with oblations. Thus says in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* ‘*Yajño hi devānām annam* |’³. Prayers are the best means of pleasing a God. But in all cases, purpose is not served by praise alone. So the effort of the sacrificer is noticed in different paraphernalia of the sacrifice in order to propitiate gods by chanting hymns along with eulogies after inviting him in a sacrifice. But it will

¹ *Nir-* III/19-“*Yajñah kasmāt | Prakhyātam yajati karmeti nairuktāḥ | Yācño bhavātīti vā | Yajurunno bhavati vā |*”

Ibid- VIII/12-“*Yajñam manuṣyasya yajanāya |*”

² *Kāty.Śr.Sū-* I/2/2

³ *Śat.Brā-* V/1/1/2

be unwise to think that Vedic rituals are meant for fulfilment of a desire or to obtain some favour of god. Vedic seers realized the nature of supreme soul (*Virāt*) with utmost devotion and faithfulness and as such, they desired to have unification with supreme self by means of offering oblation. They do not negate the achievement of materialistic necessities, but at the same time, they have inner urge to uplift their spiritual consciousness. With the expansion of human civilization, the system of sacrifice; which was grown up for propitiating the gods attained great importance gradually in the Vedic society. The *Brāhmaṇas* of the *Vedas* grew up comprising only the subject- matter of sacrificial rites and in the *Brāhmaṇas* sacrifice is repeatedly mentioned as the best task- ‘*Yajña vai sreṣṭhatamaṃ karma*’⁴. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it is mentioned that the rituals are compulsory works of man, since human beings are indebted to divinity right from their births and they have to repay the debts by performing the sacrificial rites-‘*sa yena devebhya ṛnam jāyate । Tadenāstadavadayate.....yadyajate’tha yadagnau juhotti tadenāṃ stadavadayate tasmādyaktiñcā’gnau juhati tadvadānaṃ nāma ॥*’⁵. There is also the belief prevailing that sacrifice was behind the creation and the creator of this universe. Sacrifice is the only means of attaining goals of human life. Sacrifice is the dispeller of all sins and bestower of sanctity to all. Even the magnanimity or sublimity of gods depends upon this sacrifice. It is said in the

⁴ *Śat.Brā-* I/7/1/5

⁵ *Ibid-* I/7/2/6

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa that the gods attained godhead by performing the sacrifices- ‘*devā ayajanta teneṣṭaivatadbhavannyadidaṃ devāḥ* |’⁶.

The rituals are, as if, like a boat journey and the priests are its sailors. It is like a ship sailing to heaven ward⁷. If the boat is sailed smoothly, it reaches to the destination safely; even so, if the sacrifice is performed in due order by the priests, it confers on the sacrificer his desired object. Again, if the sacrifice is not performed accordingly, the priests will incur sin for their mistakes in the sacrifice. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* numerous legends are met with in this context⁸. There it is said that the priests have turned the sacrificial rite almost equal to conjuring art for the sake of their erroneous performance of the sacrifice.

Even today, we see the performance of the sacrificial ceremony in some particular occasion or in the dwelling house of a rich man. But this sacrificial ceremony is not like that of the Vedic sacrifice performed in the Vedic age. We, therefore, want to know the nature or form of the Vedic Sacrifice. But the subject is very complicated. This complicacy does not occur all of a sudden. As we have the gradual change in our life, even so, there is some change in our sacrificial ceremonies from the time to time. In the primary stage the method of sacrifice was very simple. But in the later *Brāhmaṇas* and in *Śrauta* treatises many complications and debates relating the ritualistic rites are noticed. In the

⁶ *Śat.Brā-I/5/2/6*

⁷ Ibid- VI/2/5/10- “*Yajñō nauḥ svargyā* | ”

⁸ Ibid-I/7/3/19-“*Tadu ha bhāllaveya* | *Anuṣṭhubhamnubākyāṃ chakre triṣṭhubhaṃ yājñāmetadubhayaṃubhe vā triṣṭubhau* | | ”

ancient Vedic societies the rituals were the main social ceremonies. With the passage of time these sacrificial rites became exhaustive and very complicated. Another cause of its unintelligibility is that nowhere in the Vedic literature a detailed or systematic account of the sacrifice is obtained. Though the main topic of discussion of the *Brāhmaṇas* is the sacrifice, nevertheless, therein also we do not find serially all the accounts of the sacrificial rites. While narrating the Vedic rites the authors of the *Brāhmaṇas* occasionally explain the significance of these rites in detail. The expositions on the significance are not free from exaggeration. They used to give these explanations in accordance with their own belief. Sometimes there is difference of opinion between the two learned authors regarding the same sacrificial rite. In that case, two opinions are recorded and both the opinions are taken as unerring guides. Apart from the *Brāhmaṇas*, a serial account of each sacrifice is met with in the *Śrautasūtras*. Like *Brāhmaṇas*, these *Śrautasūtras* also belong to particular *mantra- saṃhitā*. Though there is complicity regarding the sacrificial rites, an exterior form of these rituals as available from the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śrautasūtras* are being presented -

Types of Vedic Sacrifices (*Śrauta and Gṛhya*) :

We may classify broadly the Vedic sacrifice in to two divisions, viz. *Śrauta* and *Gṛhya*. The *Śrauta yajña* is one, the detailed description of which is found in the *Śruti* or *Veda*. In this category of sacrifice the oblation is offered to the fire after burning it in three separate holes called *Āhavanīya*, *Gārhapatya* and *Dakṣhināgni*. On the other hand, the *Gṛhya yajña* is that type of sacrifice in

which the oblation is offered to a single cavity of fire (*agni-kunḍa*). We do not find any regular description of this type of sacrifice in the *Vedas*. In some *Gr̥hya* sacrifice there is no necessity of fire. The *Śrauta* sacrifice is performed generally for the welfare of the house-holder or for his house wife; whereas, the *Gr̥hya*-sacrifice is performed for the benediction of some of the members of the house. In the *Śrauta*-sacrifice, a house-holder is liable only to himself or to his divinities, whereas, in the *Gr̥hya*-sacrifice he is responsible to all the members of his family. In most cases, the fruit of the *Śrauta* sacrifice is the attainment of heaven or mundane prosperity.

Śrauta and Gr̥hya karma :

In the Vedic age, the education system was residential. The pupil had to stay in the preceptor's house and got his necessary education. In the preceptor's dwelling house, the pupil had to stay for long twelve (12) years. There in preceptor's house, the pupil had to offer the sacrificial fuel daily in the preserved fire-cavity in the dawn and in the dusk. And after the end of his education, the pupil had to offer the last sacrificial fuel to the fire preserved in his preceptor's house and left for his own house with some portion of the enkindled fuel and establish it in his house in a fire-cavity. This fire, which is preserved in the house, is called *Gr̥hya*, *Smārta*, *Āvasathya* and *Upāsan Agni*. There are different names of the single fire. In this fire, the work which is to be done is called *Gr̥hya karma* or house hold task. Numerous house-hold works are there, *Upāsanā homa* is one of them. Every day, in the morning and in the

evening this work is to be performed. In the evening, the chief god of this *homa* is *Agni* and in the dawn the Sun.

What may be the case with *Grhya karmas*, in the *Śrauta* works all oblations are to be offered in the fire. *Araṇi* has to be made by the branch of an *Aśvattha* tree which is issued forth from the interior of a *śami* tree. Unlike *Grhya* work where one *Agni- Kuṇḍa* is enkindled, in the *Śrauta*-sacrifice three *Agni kuṇḍas* or fire cavities are to be ablazed. As mentioned earlier these three fires are named as *Āhavanīya*, *Gārhapatya* and *Dakṣhināgni*. These fires are also known as *Vaitānika Agni* or *Tretāgni*. First, fire has to be enkindled by rubbing two *Araṇi*- sticks and then this fire is to be kept in *Gārhapatya Kuṇḍa*. This fire is to be preserved ablazed until death. After his death, the householder is to be cremated in the crematorium by this *Gārhapatya* fire. This is his last sacrifice and, as such, this cremation is called *Antyeṣṭi* (or last Sacrifice). However, from the *Gārhapatya- kuṇḍa*, a few ablazed fuels are to be taken and kept in the cavities known as *Dakṣhina* and *Āhavanīya*. This task is called *Agnyādheya* or *Agnyādhāna* or in other words, establishing fire in the cavity. A householder will not be called *Āhitāgni* though in his abode house hold fire is preserved. But he is truly *Āhitāgni* who has enkindled the *Vaitānika* fire in the three receptacles of fire.

Pakṛti and Vikṛti yāga :

The main rite may be performed in the full moon day or in the new moon day. Or it may be performed some other day in the white fort-night. The main sacrifice is called *Pakṛti* or model and the accompanying rites are its

Vikṛti modifications which follow the pattern of the model. Sacrifice may be classified into five classes viz. *Homa, Iṣṭi, Paśu, Soma and Satra yāga*. Each Vedic *yāga* is of two types considering *Pakṛti* and *Vikṛti*. *Pakṛti yāga* is also known as *Pradhāna yāga* or main sacrifice. Each *Pakṛti yāga* has many accessories or *Vikṛti*. The *Vikṛti yāga* or modification follows the patterns of the model or *Pakṛti yāga*. The other name of the *Vikṛti yāga* is *Aṅga yāga* or accessory sacrifice. The *Pakṛti yāga* is the whole (*aṅgi*) or main *yāga* and *Vikṛti yāga* its limb (*Aṅga*). The full description of the entire rite is depicted in the *Pakṛti yāga* along with its trifling matter while in the *Vikṛti yāga* only the accessory portion of the *Pakṛti yāga* is delineated. Thus the *Pakṛtis* or models of the five types of Vedic sacrifices i.e. (*Homa, Iṣṭi, Paśu, Soma and Satra*) are as follows :

a) *Homa* sacrifice is also known as *Darvī-homa*, as the offerings are poured in to the fire by means of a ladle called *Darvī*. *Agnihotra* is the model for the *homa* type of sacrifices. The offerings for this oblation are milk, curd, rice, and many others to the Sun God and *Agni*, everyday in the morning and in the evening. The higher three castes has to perform the *Agnihotra* daily in the early Vedic age. It was obligatory for a *Brāhmiṇ* priests to perform the *Agnihotra* everyday along with his wife throughout his lifetime. Therefore the *Agnihotra* is called the '*Jarāmarāṇa satra*' as one can be exempted from its performance either due to excessive senility of old age or death⁹.

⁹ *Śat.Bra-* XII/4/1/1 “ *Etad vai jarāmaryaṃ satraṃ yadagnihotraṃ jarayā vā hyovāsmān mucyante mrtyunā vā | |* ”

b) The model for *Iṣṭi* type of sacrifices is called *Darśapaurṇamāsa*. *Darśa* means the confluence of the sun and the moon (*suryendu sangamaḥ*). *Purnamāsi* means the full moon and the dusk moon called *Amāvasya*. This sacrifice is to be performed on the new moon and full moon days. A person belonging to one of the three higher castes who is neither a bachelor nor a widower and who has already established his *Gārhapatya* fire has the right to perform this sacrifice.

c) *Diksā* or *Prajāpatya paśu* is the model for all *Paśuyāga*. It is also called *nirudha paśu bandha*. The person who has established his *Gārhapatya* fire has the right to perform the *Paśuyāga* every year. It may be performed once or twice or six times in a year. If it is performed once only, it should be done in the rainy season, if performed twice in a year; one sacrifice should take place in the *uttarāyaṇa* of the sun and another in the *dakṣināyaṇa*. If anyone desires to perform six times in a year, the performance should take place in each of the six seasons. The offering of this sacrifice is an animal. Therefore the *yāga* is termed as *Paśu yāga*.

d) *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice is the model for all *Soma* sacrifices. It is also called *Jyotiṣṭoma*. The main oblation of this sacrifice is the juice of the creeper *soma*. The twelve *stotras* are sung in this sacrifice and the last one goes by the name of *Agniṣṭoma* and the sacrifice terminates with this *stotra*, therefore the sacrifice is termed as *Agniṣṭoma*.

e) The *Gavāmayaṇa* is a sessional sacrifice and is the model of all *Satras*. Though *Gavāmayaṇa* is a *soma* sacrifice and *Agniṣṭoma* is the model

for it, but it is separately enumerated from *Agniṣṭoma* according to its time element. Sacrifices which are completed in one day are called 'Ekāha' or one day sacrifice; sacrifices which cover more than one day but less than twelve days are termed 'Ahina', and these which exceed more than twelve days and take a long time for completion are termed as 'Satras'. According to the nature of sacrifice, the *Gavāmayana* take one year, ten year, hundred years or even thousand years for its completion. The model for all *satra yāga* is *Gavāmayana*.

Brief description of three fire cavities or *Agni kuṇḍa* :

In most of the Vedic sacrifice, the three fire cavities viz. *Āhavanīya*, *Gārhapatya* and *Dakṣināgni* are required. A brief description of these fire cavities are presented below.

Among the three cavities (*kuṇḍa*), the *Āhavanīya kuṇḍa* is rectangular in shape and is kept in the eastern side. Gods are lustrous and in the eastern direction the luminous Sun shines. Hence, oblation is to be offered to the Gods in the fire-cavity of eastern side. The *Gārhapatya kuṇḍa* is circular and remains in western side. In this direction the fatigued Sun, as it were, returns to his home to meet with his wife. The oblation is offered to the consorts of the deities in the fire kept in the western direction. The Southern direction is for *Yama*, the God of death and for manes. Hence, the oblation is offered in the fire lying in the southern direction for manes and for the evil spirits. This fire is otherwise called *Anvāharya* since the rice for sacrificial fee (or *dakṣinā*) is boiled in this fire called *Dakṣinā*. The other name of the *Dakṣināgni* is

‘*Ānāya*’. But there is no fire-cavity in the northern side of the altar. Only in the *Soma yāga* there lies a ‘*sthaṇḍila*’ called ‘*Āgnīdhrīya dhiṣṇya*’ in the northern side.

Gārhapatya Agni is, as though, the representative of the house-holder. If this fire is once ablazed, it should be preserved day and night; otherwise, the *Yajamāna* incurs sin. The *Gārhapatya* fire is necessary for heating the sacrificial vessels and also for the preparation of the *havis* (oblations) and other things to be offered. The other two fires called *Āhavanīya* and *Dakṣhina* are not enkindled day and night. At the time of sacrificial rite these two fires are ablazed taking enkindled fuels from the *Gārhapatya* fire. It may be likely that once the Aryans lived in a cold country and hence, this practice of preserving the ablazed fire might be prevalent. Besides, fire was not easily obtainable; one had to rub the two pieces of *Araṇi*-sticks in order to enkindle fire. First it was in vogue for bare necessity and thereafter, it became a ritualistic practice or conduct. If any of the fires has become pale after the activities of *Ādhāna*, then in that case, the preserved fires have to be replaced by enkindling new fires. This replacement is called *Punarādhāna*.

Difference between *Yajña* and *Yāga* :

The meaning of the terms *Yajña* and *Yāga* is almost same; but the term *Yajña* has wider denotation having common name, while the term *Yāga* is a particular name having narrower denotation. The offering of something to a deity is popularly called *Yajña*; but *Yāga* signifies some special or particular rite, such as, *Iṣṭi-yāga*, *Paśu-yāga*, *Soma-yāga* and others. Again, *Yāga* and

Homa though superficially of same meaning, yet there is difference between the two. *Yāga* is derived from the √yaj and *Homa* is derived from the √‘hu’. In *Yāga*, oblation is to be offered by standing and saying ‘*vauṣaṭ*’ at the end of the *mantra*, while in *Homa* oblation is to be offered being seated uttering ‘*Svāhā*’ at the end of the *mantra*. In *Yajña*, the oblations comprise milk, ghee, curd, butter, water of butter, liquid ghee and others.

Duties of the four priests :

The house-holder who arranges the *Yajña* (sacrifice) in his house for his own welfare is called *Yajamāna* and the persons with the assistance of whom he performs the sacrifice are designated as *Yāgnika* or *Ṛtvikas* i.e. *Yājakas*. The system of the *Śrauta*- rituals are such only an *Agnihotra yajamāna* is himself entitled to offer oblation in the fire by chanting mantras, but in case of other sacrifices he has to take assistance of *Ṛtvikas*. As a rule, four priests are necessary for performing a sacrifice, viz. *Hotṛ*, *Adhvaryu*, *Udgāṭṛ* and *Brāhmaṇ*. The *Ṛgvedic* priest is called *Hotṛ*, who invokes the deities in a sacrifice reciting verses from the *Ṛgveda*. The Priest of the *Yajurveda* is termed *Adhvaryu*. He is entrusted with the work of preparing the altar. The *Sāmavedic* priest is called *Udgāṭṛ*, whose duty is to chant hymns from the *Sāmaveda* to praise and please gods. The fourth priest is the superintending priest of the sacrifice called *Brāhmaṇ* who is versed in all the three *Vedas*; *Ṛk*, *Sāman*, and *Yajus*. *Brāhmaṇ* is responsible for smooth conduction, safe completion and any flaw of the sacrifice. In course of time, sacrifices became more and more complicated, hence as it became impossible for four priests to perform all the

rites, the number of priests swelled in number, three priests being given as assistants to each priest. Thus we find four *Ṛgvedic* priests, four *Yajurvedic* priests, four *Sāmavedic* priests and four *Brāhmaṇas* making sixteen in all.

The four *Ṛgvedic* priests consist of *Hotṛ*, *Maitrāvaruna*, *Acchāvāka* and *Grāvastut*. The group of *Yajurveda* priests comprises *Adhvaryu*, *Pratiprasthāṛ*, *Neṣṭṛ*, and *Unnetṛ*. The *Sāmavedic* Priests are *Udgāṛ*, *Praṣṭotṛ*, *Pratihāṛ* and *Subrahmanya*. While *Brāhmaṇ*, *Brāhmaṇācchansi*, *Agnidhra* and *Potṛ* go to the composition of the group of three *Vedas* known as (*Trivedi*).

Sacrificial Fees :

In this context, it is necessary to say a few words regarding the sacrificial fees of the priests since it is said that without giving sacrificial fees, a sacrifice remains incomplete- ‘*Tadu tad yajñasya karma na vāmucya yad daksināmāsit* |’¹⁰. In the Vedic sacrifice, the *Yajamāna* is the sacrificer and the enjoyer of the fruit of the sacrifice. On behalf of the sacrificer, the priests perform the sacrifice, and after giving the sacrificial fees at the end, the ritual is completed. The ancient seers learned in the Vedic lores; do not consider the sacrificial fees as the salary of the priests for their services rendered in a sacrifice. They consider the sacrificial fees as a part of the sacrifice. The sacrificial fee is regarded as an auspicious thing which causes the well-being of the sacrifice. Offering sacrificial fee is considered as a religious duty on the part of the sacrificer. Thus without the sacrificial fee the sacrifice is like a cart without the bullocks. Hence, just as a cart without the bullocks harms the driver

¹⁰ *Śat.Brā-III/5/1/18*

and is useless, like wise a sacrifice without the fee harms the sacrifices. Without adequate sacrificial fees the sacrifice remains incomplete and for which the sacrificer incurs sin. The Gods known as *Āptyas* curse the sacrificer if he makes offering without *dakṣinā*¹¹. The sacrificial fee is the fore-runner of the sacrifice to the world of haven. Hence it is said in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that if the priests are satisfied with the adequate fees, the sacrificer obtains eternal peace in the other world¹². Therefore, the bestowing sacrificial fee to the priests is one of the obligatory duties of the sacrificer. But he should not be compelled to pay sacrificial fee beyond his capacity. It is clearly mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, a sacrificer has to pay sacrificial fee as much as his ability since without sacrificial fee sacrifice remains incomplete. ‘*Yacchaknuyāt tad dadyān nā dakṣiṇam haviḥ syāditi* |’¹³.

Use of Sacrificial Utensils or *Yajñāyudha* :

In the sacrificial task, some sacrificial utensils are also necessary. In the midst of the description of the sacrifice in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, these utensils are mentioned. The utensils which are used in the sacrificial work are commonly termed ‘*Yajñāyudha*’ in the Vedic texts¹⁴. The ten *Yajñāyudhas* are viz. *Sphya*, *Kapāla*, *Agnihotrahavani*, *Surpa*, *Kṛṣṇājina*, *Samyā*, *Ulukhala*, *Musala*, *Dusada* and *Upalā*. There is also another obligatory duty which must

¹¹ *Śat.Brā -I/2/3/4-“Tasmānnādakṣiṇeṇa haviṣā yajetā āptyeṣu ha yajño mṛṣṭo āptyā.....yajate | ”*

¹² *Ibid- IV/3/4/4-“Āhutibhireva devān prṇāti dakṣiṇābhirmanuṣyadevānsvargolokambhivahanti | | ”*

Ibid-IV/3/4/6-“Yo yajate soasyaiṣa yajño devolokamevā ’bhīpraiti | ”

¹³ *Ibid- XI/1/4/4*

¹⁴ *Taitt.Saṃ-I/6/8/2-3-“Ya vai daśa yajñāyudhāni veda mukhatosya yajña kalpate sphyaśca kapālāni cāgnihotrahavani ca surpam ca kṛṣṇājinaṃ ca śamyā colukhulaṃ ca musalaṃ ca dṛṣaccopalā caitāni vai daśa yajñāyudhāni | | ”*

be mentioned here. This is the application of the Vedic *mantras* at time of Vedic ritual. *Mantra* is said to be the soul of Vedic work. *Mantra* renders completeness to Vedic rite. The Priests invoke gods in the sacrifice by chanting *mantras*. All the trifling matters of the sacrifice are performed along with the pronunciation of *mantras*. Likewise, oblations are offered to the fire for the gods pronouncing the *mantras*. The three types of *mantras* of *Rk*, *Sāman* and *Yajus* are applied during sacrificial performance.

Only Tri-Varna has the right to perform Vedic Sacrifice :

Though the sacrifice is the worship of God, yet all are not entitled to perform Vedic sacrifice. The person, who is married, who is learned in Vedic lores, or who has faith in Vedic sacrifice has right to perform Vedic sacrifice. In keeping with the old social system, the *Śudras*, who formed the bulk of the human population of ancient India, did not have right to Vedic studies or to perform Vedic sacrifice. But according to modern sociology, the *Śudras* face no obstacle to study Vedas or to perform Vedic sacrifice. Again, the person though belonging to *traivarnika* class, may lose his hereditary Vedic right at his own sweet will if he has no faith in *Vedas*. Hence in the modern days, we presume, nobody has any misgiving regarding the right to sacrifice.

To Vedic Aryans, sacrifices were the best works. By performing the sacrifice, man achieved all comprehensive welfare in his life. Everyman has desire to accomplish his own well beings; hence it is natural that everybody has right to perform sacrifice; but in reality all were not entitled to perform Vedic sacrifices. It is not definitely ascertained as to whether, in the beginning of the

Vedic age when the class-distinction was not rigidly applicable, any difference was there in the Vedic society regarding right to perform sacrifice. But in the later period when the four classes viz. *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śudra* were clearly differentiated in the society, then the law makers debarred *Śudras* from the right to sacrifice. Women also did not perform sacrifice separately; but they along with their husbands used to participate in the sacrifice in some definite tasks. Therefore, only the three upper classes, *Brāhmaṇa*, *ksatriya*, and *Vaiśya* have the right to perform sacrifices. The person who was unmarried and not learned in Vedic lores also has no right to Vedic sacrifice

Nitya, Kāmya, Naimittika and Niṣiddha Karma :

Śrauta yāga is again classified into four classes viz. *Nitya*, *Kāmya*, *Naimittika* and *Niṣiddha* sacrifices. These should be performed without any fail. The performance of those rites may not produce any tangible result but their non-performance will bring disaster. Sacrifices like *Agnihotra* are styled ‘*nitya*’ because they must be performed daily as a compulsory lifelong sacrificial session. The *yajamāna* should perform this obligatory *nityakarma* like *Agnihotra* sacrifice otherwise he would be condemned in the society.

Thus goes the rule ‘*Jāvajjivamgnihotraṃ juhoti*’. On the other hand, *Kāmya Karma* or Wish – yielding sacrifices are to be performed for the fulfillment of various desires of the sacrificer, otherwise not. Again, *Naimittika karma* or occasional rites are those which are performed for redressing calamities or misfortunes. The performance of *ksamāvati iṣṭi* illustrates *Naimittika Karma*. When house is burnt by fire, *ksamāvati iṣṭi* should be

performed by way of remedy; otherwise he will incur sin. Like *Nitya karma*, *Naimittika Karma* or occasional *iṣṭi* must be performed else it brings disaster. *Niṣiddha Karmas* are those which are forbidden at the time of rituals.

Use of Replica :

In the bulk of the Vedic portion, there predominates the context of the Vedic rituals. The main feature of the ritual is the offering of the oblation to different deities. Though in the sacrificial rite all rules of the ritual are to be followed in toto, nevertheless, in the absence of any prescribed rule its substitute may be used to serve the purpose. In Vedic age too, the practice of appointing replica was in vogue. In *Somayāga* if the *soma* creeper is not available, the juice of *Putikā* creeper may be used for offering oblation in the fire. Thus runs in the *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* ‘*Yadi Somaṃ na vindeyuh putikān abhiṣunuyāt*’¹⁵. But in the *Kāmya Karma* generally no deputy was appointed. *Kāmya karma* or wish yielding sacrifices are performed for the fulfillment of various desires. But without the definite substances the desire may not be fulfilled. Nevertheless, if the prescribed thing is spoiled for any reason whatsoever, after the commencement of the sacrifice, the replica may be used to complete the rite. Though there was the practice to apply the substitute thing in place of the definite one, but there was no such rule to appoint the representative of the house holder (*yajamāna*) or his wife. But in case of the *Satra-Yāga* if any *yajamāna* dies during the performance of sacrifice, other person may be appointed in his place to complete the rite. In the *Rāmāyana*

¹⁵ *Tāṇḍy.Brā- IX/5/3*

also we have come across that *Rāma* while performing the sacrifice used the golden image of *Sītā* as the substitute in her absence.

Expiatory rite :

In the Vedic sacrifice, importance is given, generally, in the simplicity of the work. The priests consider the trifling mistakes as the impediments of the sacrifice. But at the same, time they suggest the remedy for removing the blemishes. From this the expiatory rites originate. But expiation was not so difficult. Sometimes a particular hymn was pronounced or particular substance was offered to the fire as expiation for removing the sins or if the sacrificial substance was spoiled or unavailable, its substitute was used to complete the sacrifice. In that case, the acceptance of the substitute is considered as the expiration.

A Brief note on the sacrifices of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* :

***Darśapurṇamāseṣṭi* :** The *Darśapurṇamāseṣṭi* is the pattern or model of all *iṣṭi* type of sacrifice¹⁶. The word ‘*Darśa*’ means the copulation of the sun and the moon (*suryendu sangamaḥ*) i.e. the new moon is known as *Amāvasyā* and the *Purṇāmāsi* means the full moon day (*Purnimā*).

The *Darśapurṇamāsa* sacrifice comprises two performances- one on the new moon day (*Amāvasya*) and the other on the full moon day i.e. *Purnimā*. This includes the two days in the full moon and two days in the new moon days. In the full moon days, the ceremony starts in the morning of that day and ends in the forenoon of the following day i.e. *Pratipada*. Similarly in the new

¹⁶ *Āpa.Śr.Su-* XXIV/3/32- “*Darśapurṇamāsābiṣṭinām prakṛtiḥ* |”

moon days the rite begins in the morning of that day and terminates in the forenoon of the following day. One who wants to perform this sacrifice for the first time should initiate with the full moon rite and follow it up with the new moon rite. One should not begin this ceremony in the new moon rite.

A person who is neither a bachelor nor a widower and belonging to three higher castes i.e. (*Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya*) and one who has performed the *Agnyādheya* ceremony (i.e. the ceremony of establishing the sacred fire) has the right to perform the *Darśapurṇamāsa* sacrifice which starts on the full moon day. Four priests are necessary for this sacrifice. They are- *Hotṛ*, *Adhvarju*, *Agnidhra* and *Brahmā*. These four priests have equal power and importance in this sacrifice.

The procedure of performance of the *Darśa* and *Purnamāsi* is more or less identical. The rituals performed on the first day are mainly preliminary. These includes the preparation of the fire, the formal taking of a vow by the sacrificer which involves him abstention from certain kinds of food, specially meat and from all sensual pleasures, sleeping on the ground, the cutting of hair and beard, maintenance of silence and so on. In the second day, the performance begins with the fetching of the sacred water and the utensils necessary for the performance, preparation of the rice pap, preparation of the altar, girdling of the sacrificer's wife with cord, her looking down upon the sacrificial butter, covering of the altar with the grass and laying three enclosing sticks around the fire. All these preliminary details are done along with the

utterance of proper mantras. After the completion of these preliminaries the real sacrifice begins.

There are many ancillary oblations both in the new moon and full moon rites. Among them the three oblations are regarded as principal oblations.

The major three oblations of the full moon day are as follows –

- The first oblation comprising rice pap (*purodāśa*) is offered to the fire god *Agni*.
- The second oblation named as *Upāmsū yāga* is offered to the four deities i.e. *Prajāpati, Viṣṇu, Agni and Soma*.
- The third oblations consisting of rice pap offered to the couple of *Agni* and *Soma*.

Oblations of the new moon days :

- In the new moon days the first oblation of rice pap is offered to fire god *Agni*.
- The second oblation making with curd offered to *Indra*.
- The last oblation i.e. the third oblation of milk is offered to *Indra*.

The rites named as *Prayāja, Anuyāja* and *Patni Samyāja* are regarded as essential parts of this sacrifice and performed both in the new and full moon ceremonies. An offering to the fire god called *Agni Sviṣṭakṛt* marks the end of this offering. In *Sviṣṭakṛt* offering all Gods are invited. Then follows the *iḍābhakṣaṇa* or the tasting of the remaining oblations by the priests. Among all the priests the *Brāhmaṇa* or the Superintending priest has the special share. While collecting the sacred oddment the priests touch the sacrificer. Then the

rice cakes are distributed among them and everyone share the *idā*. After the performance of some preliminary rites, the sacrificer stride three steps in to the sacrificial ground and the sacrifice turns to an end.

The *Darśapurnamāsa* is either (*Nitya*) obligatory or (*Kāmya*) wish yielding. It is *Nitya* for those who execute this in every new moon and full moon in all respects of their lifetime without any interval. In this respect, if any one breaks the performance he has to face some disaster called *Pratyavāya*. It is wish yielding or *Kāmya* for those who performed it only once or twice for the attainment of some desire.

In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the *Darśapurnamāseṣṭi* is mentioned first and it is the model of all sacrifices.

Agnyādheya Sacrifice : *Agnyādheya* sacrifice is also known as *Agnyādhāna* sacrifice. There are seven *haviryajña samsthā*¹⁷ and among them the *Agnyādhāna* occupies the first place. *Ādhāna* means to establish the fire with the chanting of mantras; that rises out of the *araṇi manthan* in to the designated *kuṇḍa*. *Agnyādhāna* is an *iṣṭi* sacrifice which accomplished by a *yajamāna* and his wife with the help of four priests' viz. *Adhvarju*, *Agnidhra*, *Hotā* and *Brāhmaṇa*. In the introduction to the *Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sutra* by *Ācārya Nārāyaṇa Agnyādhāna* is narrated as “the placing of burning coals for lightening the *Gārhapatya* and other fires, at a particular time and place by a particular person accompanied by certain specific mantras¹⁸. The *Brāhmaṇa*,

¹⁷ *Gau.Dh.Sū-I/8/20* - “*agnyādheyamagnihotraṃ darśapurnamāsābāgrāyanam cāturmāsyāni niruḍa paśubandhaḥ sautrāmaṇī iti sapta haviryajña samsthā | |*”

¹⁸ *Āśv.Śr.Sū- II/1/9*- “*Bisiṣṭa kāle bisṣṭa deṣe bisṣṭa puruṣena bisṣṭa mantrainarhirpatyā agnyutytythaṃ yadio 'gārānām nidhānam tadagnyādheyamucyate |* .

the *Kṣatriya*, the *Vaiśyas*, the *Rathakāras* and some others have the right to set up the sacred fires. There are four proper season for the performance of sacred fire viz. *Vasanta ṛtu* for *Brāhmaṇ*, *Griṣma* for *Kṣatriya*, *Śarat ṛtu* for *Vaiśya* and *Varsā* for *Rathakāra*.

The *Yajamāna* brings in his house two *araṇi* woods of an *Aśvattha* tree produced in a *Sami* tree, under the assistance of *Adhvarju*. And *Adhvarju* recites the *mantra*-‘*yo aśvatthaḥ samigarbhaḥ āruroha tve sacā*’¹⁹. After that the *Yajamāna* prepares the *araṇi* wood and make ready other necessary material for several days before the actual setting up of the sacred fires. For worship or *Deva yajña*, the *Yajamāna* chooses a proper place and prepares five holes for the fires and constructs *Mahāvedi*. The *Yajamāna* performs the act of taking bath, purification, sipping of water (*ācamana*), sprinkling of water and the announcement of *Punyahavirvacana* on the *upavastha* day. After that the *Yajamāna* along with his wife seats on the *darbha* grass and set up sacred fires formally with the help of four priests and honours them by offering *madhuparka*. In the afternoon he (*yajamāna*) ignites the *Brahmaudanika* fire and cooks the *Brahmaudana*²⁰. The *Yajamāna* takes some quantity of cooked *Brahmaudana* in spoon and a spoon and offers it in to the fire and the residual *Brahmaudana* are taken by the priests after offering plenty of *ghṛta* in it. After that the *Yajamāna* offers three *samidhās* in the fire and performs the *Gopitra*

¹⁹ *Āpa.Śr.Sū*- V/1/2

²⁰ *Taitt.Brā (Sāyaṇa Bhāṣya)*- I/1/9 –“*Brāhmaṇaṃ devamuddiśya homartha brahmanānām ṛtvijām ca prāsanārtha ca pacyamāna odano Brahmaudanaḥ* |”

yajña. The *Yajamāna* has to stay awaken whole night and to put the fuel sticks (*samidhās*) in the *Brahmaudanik* fire.

In the morning the *Adhvarju* heats the two *araṇi* woods on the fire and hands over these woods to the *Yajamāna*. The *Yajamāna* after receiving these *araṇi* woods prays the Gods with specific mantras. The *Adhvarju* then arranges the material for sacred fires according to the rules. The *Agni manthana* or the rite of churning out of the fire is performed when the first rays of the sun spread in the sky. The fire is invoked by the *Adhvarju* and the *Yajamāna* produced it by churning. After that the *Adhvarju* accepts a cow which is presented by *yajamāna*. When the *sāmas* are being chanted viz. –‘*Rathantara and yajña yajñia sāman*’, the *Adhvarju* establishes the *Gārhapatya* fire on the *sambharas* and strews *darbhas* around it²¹. He lights some fire sticks from the *Gārhapatya* fire and formally sets up the *Āhavanīya* fire. The fire for installation of the *Dakṣhināgni*, is taken from the house of the richest person of the city or the village, belonging to any of the four *varṇas* or it may be produced by *manthan*. The fire by name ‘*Sabhya*’ and the ‘*Aśvathya*’ are also placed from the domestic or the *Āhavanīya* fire. The *Yajamāna* distributes ‘*Dakṣinā*’ among the priests according to his ability. After installation of the sacred fire the *Yajamāna* has to keep some specific observances for a specific period²². If the *Yajamāna* is a *Kṣatriya*, he plays the game of dice.

²¹ *Āpa.Śr.Sū-* V/12/2

²² *Kāty.Śr.Sū-* IV/10/16- “*brahmacāryagni nityadhāri ksoarahosyagnimupasāyi dvādasa rātraṃ sadrātraṃ triratrāmntataḥ* |”

Punarādheya Sacrifice : *Punarādheya* means the renovation of the sacred fires or the second setting up of the sacred fires, which takes place when it appears that the sacred fires, set up in the *Agnyādheya* sacrifice have not brought good luck to the *Yajamāna*. Besides *Punarādheya* sacrifice is performed, if there is any lapse takes place after the establishment of *Agnyādheya*. If the *Yajamāna*, due to any unavoidable circumstances dissolves the fires within a year, then he performed the *Punarādheya*. The *Yajamāna*, in proper time and season can re-establish the fires as the same method as applied in the *Agnyādheya* with a few modifications in it.

The *Agnyādheya* or the re-establishment of the sacred fires takes place in the *punarvaśu nakṣatra* of the rainy season in the mid-day. Instead of being using the *munja* grass, the bunch of *darbha* grass is used for *Punarādheya*. The oblations of this sacrifice are ‘*aṣṭakapāla-purodāsa*’ to *Agni*, ‘*ekādaśakapāla-purodāsa*’ to *Agni-Viṣṇu* and ‘*pañcakapāla-purodāsa*’ to *Agni Soma*. These oblations are offered in additions to the offering of *Agnyādheya*. The priests are again also given *Dakṣinā* for the *Punarādheya* sacrifice.

There is also a rule of setting up of the sacred fires even for third time known as ‘*Trtiyādhāna*’. If a person who has re-establishes the sacred fire can set up the sacred fire again, after one year in the manner of original setting up of the sacred fires known as ‘*Agnyādheya*’²³.

Agnihotra : Among the seven *haviryajñas*, the *Agnihotra* sacrifice comes to the next. The word *Agnihotra* is etymologically explained in the

²³ *Baudh.Śr.Sū-XXV/3*

Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa as the rite in which *homa* is offered to *Agni*. The word *Agnihotra* is explained by *Sāyanāchārya* by means of ‘*bahuvṛhi*’ and ‘*tatpuruṣa*’ compounds. When *Agnihotra* is interpreted as a ‘*bahuvṛhi*’ compound, it gives the meaning as offerings are made for *Agni* and when interpreted as a ‘*tatpuruṣa*’ compound it indicates the meaning as the offerings for *Agni*²⁴.

The *Agnihotra* is a very simple but most significant sacrifice performed twice daily in the evening and in the morning by the *Yajamāna* and his wives who have to set up the sacred fires. A bachelor has no right to perform the *Agnihotra*. The *Agnihotra* is the model for the *homa* type of sacrifices. In the Vedic ages, only the three higher castes i.e. the *Brāhmaṇa*, the *Kṣatriya* and the *Vaiśya* have the right to perform the *Agnihotra* daily in the evening and in the morning. Later on, the *Kṣatriyas* and the *Vaiśyas* initiated their *Brāhmiṇ* priests to execute it on their behalf. A *Brāhmiṇ* has to perform the *Agnihotra* everyday in the morning and in the evening with his wife throughout his life time. According to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Agnihotra* is called ‘*Jarāmarāṇa satra*’²⁵ because one may be exempted from its performance due to old age or death.

On the basis of Achievements or rewards, the *Agnihotra* sacrifice is divided in to two kinds viz.

- i) The General *Agnihotra*
- ii) The *Kāmyāgnihotra*.

²⁴ *Taitt.Brā- Sāyan Bhāṣya- II/1/2* “*agnaye hotraṃ homo sminkarmani iti bahuvṛhi | byutpatyāgnihotramiti karmanām. Agnaye hotramiti tatpuruṣa byutpatyā havirnām |*”.

²⁵ *Śat.Brā – XII/4/1/1* “*Etad vai jarāmarāṇaṃ satraṃ yadagnihotraṃ jarayā vā hyevāsmāt mucyante mṛtyunā vā |*”

The General *Agnihotra* is performed by the *Yajamāna* or by his officiating priest, before the sunset in the evening and before the sunrise in the morning²⁶ as a sacred duty and not for a particular reward. The main oblation of the general *Agnihotra* is Cow's milk.

The *Kāmyāgnihotra* is performed by the *Yajamāna* for special rewards such as- to achieve the heavenly position for attaining long life, village or cattle, wealth, fame, food grains, brahma-varcas, strength or powerful organs. In the *Kāmyāgnihotra*, various kinds of oblations are mentioned in accordance with their special desire. The *Yajamāna* who desires of heaven or cattle should perform the *Agnihotra* with milk, or who desires for owing of a village with barley-gruel of strength should perform the *Agnihotra* with rice grains or one who wishes to obtain powerful organs offers with curd, again one who wants to obtain 'teja' offers with *ghṛta*²⁷.

In the *Agnihotra* sacrifice oblations are offered to the Sun-god in the morning before sunrise and in the evening after the sunset. There is a controversy regarding the oblations. As to whether these oblations are offered before the rising of the sun in the morning and after the sunset in the evening. The followers of the *Bahvṛca* and *Chandoma* schools offer oblations before the rising of the sun; therefore, they are designated as 'Anuditahomin'. The followers of *Katha*, *Taittirīya* and *Maitrāyaṇiya* schools offer oblations after the sunrise; hence they are 'Uditahomin'. There is also another controversy

²⁶ *Kāty.Śr.Sū-* IV/13/2 “ *Gārhapatyād āhvaniyasoddharaṇa manastamitānuditayo* | ”

²⁷ *Ibid-* IV/15/20-25 “ *Payasā svargakāmo pasukāma vā | yavāgvā grāmakamaḥ | tandulair valakāmaḥ | dadhendriya kāmāḥ | ghṛtena tejakamāh | |* ”

regarding the time-element of the *Agnihotra* in the Vedic age; as to whether this *Agnihotra* sacrifice is a one day sacrifice or two day sacrifice. As the *Agnihotra* starts with the evening oblation, the time is counted from the evening offering and not from the morning offering. Due to the absence of the sun in both the oblations, the time covered from the previous evening to the following dawn is counted as one day.

In the *Agnihotra*, the oblations of milk are boiled in an earthen vessel, and this oblation is offered to the *Āhavanīya* fire with the help of a ladle, known as *Agnihotra* havani. For this purpose a separate milch cow is cherished which is called as *Agnihotri gābhi*. The two major oblations are offered in the evening and in the morning rite. In the morning rite, the first oblation is offered to *Agni* and the second one to *Prajāpati*. Similarly, in the evening rite the first oblation is offered to *Surya* and the second to *Prajāpati*. These four oblations are the most important oblations in the *Agnihotra* sacrifice. As the starting time of the sacrifice should be evening and the oblations offered to *Agni* first, therefore the whole sacrifice goes by the name of *Agnihotra*. If the *Yajamāna* has to go abroad, he performs specific rites before leaving the home and prays to fire to protect his progeny and cattle. While staying in abroad, he has to maintain certain rules and observances and the *Adhvarju* offers the *Agnihotra* at his house daily on his behalf.

Soma Sacrifice / Agniṣṭoma : *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice is the model for all *soma* sacrifice. It is also known as *Jyotiṣṭoma*. There are seven types of

*Jyotiṣṭoma*²⁸ viz. *Agniṣṭoma*, *Atyagniṣṭoma*, *Ukthya*, *Sodāsin*, *Atirātra*, *Vājapeya* and *Aptoryama*. Among them the *Agniṣṭoma* is regarded as an integral part of the *Jyotiṣṭoma*. Therefore, *Agniṣṭoma* and *jyotiṣṭoma* are often regarded as identical. The juice of the *soma* creeper is the main oblation in this sacrifice. Like *Upanayana* ceremony, *Agniṣṭoma* is obligatory rite for all the ‘*dvijātīes* i.e. the *Brāhmaṇa*, the *Kṣatriya* and the *Vaiśya*. The *Soma* sacrifices are divided in to three categories viz. the *Ekāha*, the *Ahina* and the *Satra* according to the duration of time. The sacrifices which are completed in one day are named as ‘*Ekāha*’. The sacrifices which takes the duration of more than one but not more than twelve days are termed as ‘*Ahina*’ and the sacrifices goes more than twelve days to thousand years are termed as ‘*Satra*’ sacrifice.

In *Agniṣṭoma* twelve stotras or *Sāmavedic* chants are sung and the last *stotra* goes by the name of *Agniṣṭoma*. As the sacrifice ends with the *Sāmavedic* chant *Agniṣṭoma*, hence the sacrifice goes by the name of *Agniṣṭoma*.

Every year in the spring this sacrifice is to be performed by twice born caste with his wife. As mentioned in earlier paragraph that *soma* juice is the main oblation in this sacrifice, but now a day *soma* creeper is very rare. Therefore, the creeper named as *Putikā* is used as replica. For the performance of *Agniṣṭoma* all the sixteen priests are required. Some other considers the *Yajamāna* or sacrificer as seventeenth.

The important rites of the *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice are at a glance :

²⁸ *Taitt.Saṃ Sāyana Bhāṣya* – I/2/1 –“ *Yadyapi saptasamsthoyotiṣṭomaḥ – agniṣṭomo’tyagniṣṭoma ukathyaḥ sodascatirātroptoryāmā vājapeyaśceti |*”

- i) Selection of priests (*Ṛtvija Varāṇa*)
- ii) Building of the *Prācinavaṃsa-vedi* (*Sāla-Nirmāna*)
- iii) Taking of the *Dikṣā* by the *Yajamāna* (*The Dikṣaniya-iṣṭi*)
- iv) The opening Sacrifice or the initiation of the sacrifice (*The Prāyaniya iṣṭi*)
- v) The purchasing of the *Soma* (*Soma-krayāṇa*)
- vi) The welcome of the *Soma* quest (*Atithyeṣṭi*)
- vii) *Pravargya*, *Gharma* and *Upaśada iṣṭis*.
- viii) Construction of the *Mahāvedi* or the *Uttaravedi*.
- ix) The *Uparavas*
- x) The *Agniṣṭoma-Paśuyāga*.
- xi) The *Soma-savanas* (pressing of *soma* herbs) and the principal sacrifice.
- xii) *Dakṣinā*, *Samstiyajus-homa*, *Avabhṛtha* and *Udayaniyeṣṭi*.

In the *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice, the ceremony begins with initiation or *Dikṣā* of the sacrificer. The sacrificer welcomes the priests and appoints them for the performance of sacrifice with the promise of giving sufficient sacrificial fees (*Dakṣinā*). This is named as *Ṛtvik-varaṇam*. The *iṣṭi* called *Dikṣaniyeṣṭi* is performed in which an offering is made to *Agni* and *Soma*.

On the second day, the *Prāyaniyeṣṭi* is performed in the morning which marks the beginning of the soma sacrifice. In *Prāyaniyeṣṭi*, five deities are invoked viz. *Pathyā Svasti*, *Agni*, *Soma*, *Savitā* and *Aditi*. Then follow the ceremony of purchasing *Soma* creeper (*Soma kraya*). *Soma* is regarded as the king of Gods and *Brāhmaṇas*. *Soma* is purchased from a *Sudra* in alternation of

ten substances viz. – one year old cow, gold, she goat, milch cow and her calf, an ox, a bullock fit to draw cart, a bull calf, a she-calf and clothes. After that the king *Soma* is placed on a cart and the sacrificial rite called the *Atithyeṣṭi* is performed in honour of the *Soma*. After that follows the *Pravargya* ceremony which is again followed by the sacrifice known as *Upasad iṣṭi*.

On the third day, the great altar known as *Mahāvedi* is created confronting the eastern part of the sacrificial campus. And on the fourth day an animal sacrifice is performed in respect of the deities *Agni* and *Soma* jointly following the method of *Nirudha-Paśu-bandha*. After that follows the ceremony relating to the sacrificer's wife known as *Patni-Samyāja*.

After the performance of all preliminary rites, the actual *soma yāga* begins on the fifth day i.e. the ceremony of extraction of *soma*-juice. Before the chirping of the birds, the *hotṛ* performs the *Prātaranuvāka* and then begins the *soma* pressing with two stones. After the erection, the juice of the *soma* is put in a vessel called *graha* and strained by a strainer, which is made by the hair of ram or goat. This strainer is termed as *Dasa-pabitra*. *Soma* is pressed thrice in a day. The morning pressing is termed as '*Prataḥsavanaṃ*', the mid-day libation is goes by the name of *Mādhyandina savana* and the evening pressing is known as '*Tritiya savana*'. After all the libations over, the remaining *soma* juice is partook by the priests along with the sacrificer. The sacrificial fee in the form of gifts is offered to the priests after the mid-day libations. The four kinds of sacrificial gifts are mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* viz. – Gold, Cow,

Cloth and Horse²⁹. After the third and last oblation of *soma*, *avabhṛtha* rite is taken place by the sacrificer and his wife. This sacrifice is performed in the water and all the priests along with the sacrificer go for bath which marks the end of the *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice. The two deities *Varuṇa* and *Agni* are invoked in this ritual, and the oblations are also offered to them in water instead of in the fire. The sacrificial receptacles are also dip in the water. The sacrificer and his wife after having the baths wear new garments and return to the sacrificial ground and performed the concluding rite *Udayaniyeṣṭi*. As *Prāyānyeṣṭi* marks the beginning of the sacrifice, likewise *Udayaniyeṣṭi* marks the end of the *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice. This is only a short description of the *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice which is the model of all *Soma* sacrifices.

Sodāsīn : In this *yajña*, a sixteen *stotra* (*sodāsa*) is used and above the 15 *stotras* is *Ukthya*. It is not an independent sacrifice like *Agniṣṭoma*; rather it is only the part of the *Atirātra* sacrifice. The *Atirātra* sacrifice is performed over night, therefore it is known as *Atirātra yajña*. In the night ritual, three repetitions of a group of *stotras* are done and at the end of each cycle an oblation of *soma* is offered. The ritual is ended before dawn. In all, 29 *stotras* are chanted in *Atirātra* sacrifice.

Dvādasāha : *Dvādasāha* is the model for both *Ahina* and *Satra* type of sacrifice. It is similar to *Ahina* type of sacrifice and also from the aspects of number of priests and details of ceremony it is also uniform to the *Satra*

²⁹ *Śat.Brā* – IV/3/4/24-27-“*Catasra vai dakṣiṇa | Hiraṇyamāyurrevai.....hiraṇyaṃ diyate | |* ”
 “*Atha gau | Prāṇamevaitayā ātmana strāyate.....adatāt | |* ”
 “*Atha vāsa | Tvacamevaitenā ātmana strāyate..... adatāt | |* ”
 “*Athāśva | Vajro vā aśvo vajramevaitatpuragāṃ.....brahmane'dadāt | |* ”

sacrifice. Like *Satra* sacrifice, *Dvādasāha* also begins and ends with an *atirātra* ritual. As *Agniṣṭoma* is the model for all *Ekāha* sacrifices, likewise *Dvādasāha* is the model for all *Ahina* and *Satra* sacrifices. For the performance of *Dvādasāha* sacrifice thirty six days are required. The *Dikṣā* ceremony is performed on the first twelve days then on the following twelve days the performance of *Upasad* rites goes on. On the twenty fourth days after the completion of *Upasad* rites, a *Paśu Yāga* is performed in the name of *Agni* and *Soma*. The last twelve days cover the twelve *sutyās*. As mentioned earlier, the *Dvādasāha* sacrifice also ends with *Avabhṛtha iṣṭi*. Like *Agniṣṭoma*, the first day of the sacrifice is known as *Prāyaniya* and the last day goes by the name *Udayaniya*.

Gavāmayana : The *Gavāmayana* is a sessional sacrifice. It is the model for all *Satra* type of sacrifices. The word ‘*Gavāmayana*’ literally means the course or way of the cows i.e. the rays or days. The word ‘cows’ means the *Āditya*’s months or days and night³⁰. For the execution of the *Gavāmayana* sacrifice needs 361 days i.e. near about a whole year. It is divided in to three parts. In the first part it covers 180 days. In the second part it consists of one day known as *Viṣuvant* days. In the third or in the last part it consists of 180 days. The last part is just reverse order of the first part. In the first part it starts with *Atirātra* and ends with *Svarasāman* where as in the last part it starts with *Svarasāman* and ends with *Atirātra*.

A table is presented below to clear this idea :

³⁰ Mehra, B.S, Śrauta sacrifice in the Atharvaveda, Sanjay Prakashan, Delhi, 1994, Page no-196.

First six months

Names of sacrifices	Number of days
<i>Atirātra</i>	1
<i>Ukthya</i> having <i>caturviṃsa</i> <i>ṣṭoma</i>	1
4 <i>Abhiplabasadaha</i> (4x6) 1 <i>Prsthya-sadaha</i> (1x6)	24 (repeated 5 times) $30 \times 5 = 150$ 6
3 <i>Abhiplabasadaha</i> (3x6)	18
1 <i>Prsthya-sadaha</i>	6
<i>Abhijit</i>	1
3 <i>Svarasāman</i>	3
Total	180

Last six months

Names of sacrifices	Number of days
<i>Viṣvant</i> day; also called <i>Ekaviṃsaha</i>	1
3 <i>Svarasāman</i>	3
<i>Visvajit</i>	1
1 <i>Prsthya</i>	6
3 <i>Abhiplava</i> (3x6)	18

1 <i>Prsthya</i> and 4 <i>Abhiplava</i> repeated four times	120
3 <i>Abhiplava</i> (3x6)	18
1 <i>Goṣṭoma</i> and 1 <i>Āyuṣṭoma</i>	2
<i>Dasarātra</i>	10
<i>Mahābrata</i>	1
<i>Atirātra</i>	1
Total	181

Grand Total 180+181=361

Thus the *Gavāmayana* is a *satra* sacrifice and requires a year for its completion. The ceremonies performed in both the six months are same only with little variation that they are reverse order of the first half.

Rājasūya : The *Rājasūya* is the royal ceremony of consecration, which comes under the purview of *Soma* sacrifice and is a very complex ceremony extending over more than one year. It also consists of *soma* sacrifices, animal sacrifices and a number of *iṣṭis*. The performer of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice attains sovereignty and supremacy over all dominions. It is generally performed by a *ṅsatriya* king who has not performed the *Vājapeya* sacrifice. This sacrifice was also in vogue in ancient India and in the post Vedic era also.

Vājapeya : The *Vājapeya* is the last of the seven *soma* sacrifices and usually performed as an independent rite. ‘*Vāja*’ means strength and ‘*Peya*’ means drink. *Vājapeya* is a *Soma* rite and drinking of *soma* is a part of it. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says that *Vājapeya* is similar to *annapeya* (food and

drink).³¹ One who offers *Vājapeya* wins food. The Gods when wish to obtain strength, they drink ‘the drink of strength’ i.e. *soma* and becomes strong (*vājin*).

By the *Rājasūya* one becomes king and by the *Vājapeya* the emperor. *Rājasūya* is the sacrifice meant only for the *Kṣatriyas*, whereas *Vājapeya* is performed by both the *Brāhmiṇs* and the *Kṣatriyas*. An important feature of this *yajña* is the chariot race. The *Yajamāna* has to win the race and the victory is celebrated by playing the seventeen (17) drums. In another important ritual the *Yajamāna* with his wife climbs the tall *yupā* using a ladder. This is the concept of symbolic walk to heaven. The importance of this ritual will be discussed further in the fourth chapter of this research work.

Aśvamedha : The *Aśvamedha* which is actually a *soma* sacrifice is performed by a consecrated king, who is assisted by his four wives, the *Mahisī* (the senior queen), the *Vāvāta* (the favourite), the *Parivṛktā* (neglected wife) and the *Pālāgali* (who is inferior to the other three queens in social rank). The *Mahisī* is addressed by the *Brāhmiṇ*, the *Vāvāta* by the *Udgātr*, the *Parivṛktā* by the *Hotṛ*, and the *Pālāgali* by the *Kṣattr*. These four queens are served by hundred daughters each of the *rājās*, the *rājayas*, the *sūtas* and the *grāmanīs*, and the *samgrahitṛs* respectively. The main object of this sacrifice was to attain political supremacy. But this ceremony was also undertaken to achieve wealth, strength, male progeny and freedom from sins and so on. This ceremony aims at the attainment of paramount sovereignty. In this ceremony a

³¹ *Śat.Brā* – X/3/4/1 “ *Annam vai vājo ’nna prasavīya* | ”

horse was let loose (who is protected by 400 soldiers) to roam over the whole country from place to place. The king or the sacrificer does not accompany the horse but stays his capital near the sacrificial campus for performing certain ritual till the return of the horse. If anyone seizes the horse it means that he stands in the way of the sacrificer's attaining paramount sovereignty. Therefore it is the duty of the soldiers to protect the horse from all dangers and calamities and to bring it back unscathed to the sacrificer.

After the return of the horse, the main sacrifice takes place. The *Aśvamedha* sacrifice terminates in the concluding ablution known as the *Jumbaka* offering at the time of the *avabhṛtha* (or the final bathing at the end).

Sautrāmaṇī: The *Sautrāmaṇī* sacrifice is an expiatory rite executed for any excess committed by the drink of *soma*. It is not a *soma* sacrifice. But it comes under the seven *haviryajña* and it is specially related to the animal sacrifice. The word '*Sautrāmaṇī*' is derived from '*Sutrāmaṇī*' means a good protector, an epithet of *Indra*³². In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is mentioned that the word '*Sautrāmaṇī*' is derived as one who was well saved by *Aśvins*³³.

The major offering used in this sacrifice is *surā*, but now a day the substitute is used as milk. This sacrifice is divided in to two forms- one is independent named as *Kaukilī Sautrāmaṇī* and the other is performed at the end

³² R.V- X/131/6-7“*Indraḥ sutrāmā svavā abhobhiḥ sumṛṅko bhavatu viśvavedāḥ |*
Vādhatām dveṣo abhayaṃ kṛnotu subiryasya patayaḥ syām | |”
“*Tasya vayaṃ sumatau yajñiosyāpi bhadre saumanse syām |*
Sa sutrāmā svavā indra asme ārāccidveṣaḥ sanutaryurotu | |”

³³ Śat.Brā- V/5/4/12-“*Te devā avruvan | Sutrā tvam vaitanaṃatrā'āsatāmiti tasmād sautrāmaṇī*
nāma | |”

of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice known as *Caraka Sautrāmaṇī*. *Surā* is prepared from numerous types of plants in a special and in a very interesting way. Three animals are offered as victim in this sacrifice viz. a grey coloured goat to *Aśvin*, a ram to goddess *Saraswati* and another ram are offered to the Moon God. The numbers of animals offered as victims are vary from that *Caraka Sautrāmaṇī* to the *Kaukilī Sautrāmaṇī*. Though the *Sautrāmaṇī* is praised as bestowing prosperity, cattle and food; but its principal significance seems to be seen in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* as “curing”.

Puruṣamedha : The *Puruṣamedha* or the human sacrifice is also a slightly different form of *soma* sacrifice like *Aśvamedha* which is described in the *Brāhmaṇas* of the *Yajurveda*. It consists of five days, therefore, it is neither *Ekāha* nor *satra* type of sacrifice. Hence it comes under the category of *Ahina* sacrifice.

The performance of this sacrifice consists of various rituals like *Soma*-sacrifice. As the very name ‘*Puruṣamedha*’ signifies that the human beings are offered as oblations, but this offering is only symbolical and not actual. The men were bound to the sacrificial posts, but it does not mean that the men were actually killed. After the *Paryagnikaraṇa* performance i.e. after the fire has been carried round them, all of them are set free. Besides human beings, goats are also offered as victims. After (sanctification) *Paryagnikaraṇa* human victims are regarded as holy souls that have attained union with godhead. The famous *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda* is recited when the victims are regarded as the supreme God.

Sarvamedha : The *Sarvamedha* sacrifice is one of the *Ahina* types of *soma* sacrifice. This sacrifice is performed by the person who wants to fulfill all his desires or achievements. It is accomplished in a special *vedi* known as ‘*ekavimsatividha*’. This *vedi* is specially meant for the *Sarvamedha* sacrifice. The *Sarvamedha* sacrifice consists of ten pressing days. The skins of the animals are offered as oblation without omentum, followed by the throwing of grass, pieces of woods in to the *Āhavanīya* fire. After that the grains of all kinds are also offered. The sacrificial fees as mentioned in the *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice are given to the priest along with the settlement of land acquired by the king from various quarters.

As a matter of fact, the *Sarvamedha* sacrifice is performed for the purpose of attaining all types of food.

Agnicayana : The *Agnicayana* or the fire building ceremony is an additional rite of *Soma* sacrifice. The importance of this ritual has dealt with in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* from *kāṇḍa* VI to X. The reason behind such importance is the mystic nature attributed to this rite in the *Brāhmaṇa*. The meaning of the term *Agnicayana* can be expressed in two ways –

First – it simply indicates fire building ceremony.

Secondly – The ceremony has importance in another way, as the ceremony deals with cosmogonic ideas in the performance of this sacrifice. The ritual procedure for building up of the fire altar of the *Agnicayana* ceremony will be further discussed in the chapter – V.

Cāturmāsya : The *Cāturmāsya* sacrifice is the amalgamation of four seasonal sacrifices. It also comes in the category of *Haviryajña Samsthā*. As these four seasonal sacrifices takes place after four months; therefore it is known as *Cāturmāsya* sacrifice. These four sections (each containing four months) are termed as *Parvas* Viz.

- a) The *Vaiśvadeva*.
- b) The *Varuṇapraghāsa*.
- c) The *Sākamedha*.
- d) The *Sunāsirīya*.

A *Āhitāgni* has to perform it either once or periodically every year. One can perform this sacrifice throughout his life. Actually, the *Cāturmāsya yajña* is an adaptation (*vikṛti*) of the *Darśapaurṇamāsa* sacrifice. The only variation is in the deities and in offering. The main reward of this sacrifice is to attain heaven.

Here a brief discussion is made on the sacrifices of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Some sacrifices like *Rājasūya*, *Vājapeya*, *Aśvamedha*, *Agnicayana*, *Puruṣamedha*, *Cāturmāsya* and *Sautrāmaṇī* which are the subject matters of the chapter IV and chapter V will be discussed further on those chapters with the significance of afore mentioned sacrifices.

Significance of Sacrifice :

The Vedic seers used to remain deeply absorbed in sacrifice and hence, we find in their narratives that even the conscious or unconscious substances were engaged in sacrifice. In accordance with their conception, this universal

creation is a big sacrifice. In this sacrifice all are invited. Before creation, there was none except the creator. There was only creator alone. Wishing to create he becomes many. Creation was as if, his self sacrifice. Prior to creation he was the bestower of oblation, himself the oblation substance, the deity of bestower of oblation and the substratum of oblation³⁴. That sacrifice was the first *yajña*; the other sacrifices are its imitation only. He was at first alone, but subsequently became many for getting delight by sacrificing himself. We are his offspring, his parts. It is our duty also to perform sacrifices constantly following primeval sacrifice and from the self sacrifice we derive eternal peace, satisfaction and bliss. It is our obligatory duty to continue the sacrifice which is originated by our supreme father. In the life of the followers of the *Vedas* therefore, the sacrifice is the supreme duty.

Every work of our life is a *Yajña*, so small or trifling it may be. We are to perform all our works considering them as the sacrifices, being influenced by the ideal of sacrifice. The great sacrifice in one's life is the self sacrifice. But man cannot offer himself completely in the fire-cavity of sacrifice; hence, the thing which the *Yajamāna* offers as an oblation in the fire is the substitute of him. This is the self sacrifice or self-abnegation by means of replica. All works of human life, so trifling it may be, are the sacrifices. Thus, we eat daily is also a kind of *Yajña* or Sacrifice. In that sacrifice we offer oblation in the fire of the belly for the sake of lord *Prajāpati* or the deity of lives (*Prāṇas*). This deity stays in the stomach. Taking food is a kind of *Agnihotra* *yāga*, and

³⁴ R. V- X/90/16-“*Yajñena yajñaṃ ajajanta devāstāni dharmāṇi prathamānyāsan* | ”

therefore, named as ‘*Prānāgnihotra*’. The entire life of ours is a sacrifice , childhood, youth and old age are, as though, the three *savanas* of *Somayāga* and the death is the ‘*Avabhṛtha*’ *iṣṭi* of that *yāga* or taking ablution after the end of sacrifice. In the philosophy of Vedic life man is indebted to three types of debts, viz. *Ṛṣi-ṛna*, *Deva-ṛna* and *Pitr-ṛna*³⁵. With these three debts, he is also attached to another one or two debts³⁶. Thus, a man becomes indebted to all total five kinds of debts- such as, *Bhuta-ṛna*, *Manuṣya-ṛna*, *Pitr-ṛna*, *Deva-ṛna* and *Ṛsi-ṛna*. The means of redemption of these five debts are *Bhuta yajña*, *Manuṣya yajña*, *Pitr yajña*, *Deva yajña* and *Brahma yajña*. Giving food to birds and beasts, hospitality to guests, offering water and food to the manes of the fore fathers, self – sacrifice to gods and continuation of Vedic studies are the means of getting release from these five debts. So these are the obligatory duties to be performed daily. If the human being realizes the purport of these great tasks, his every work will be a sacrifice and his whole life will be a field of whole *Satra*.

³⁵ *Śat.Brā-* I/7/2/1-“*Ṛna ha vai jāyate yoaṣṭi | Sa jāyamāna eva devebhya ṛsibhyo manuṣyebhya | |*”

³⁶ *Ibid-* XI/5/6/1-“*pañcaiva mahāyajñā | Tānyeva mahāsatrāṇi Bhutayajño manuṣyayajño pīṛyajño devoyajño bhahmayajño iti | |*”