

CHAPTER – IV

**MAJOR SACRIFICES OF THE *ŚATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA*
(*RĀJASŪYA*, *VĀJAPEYA* AND *AŚVAMEDHA*) AND THEIR
RELATION TO MONARCHY IN ANCIENT INDIA.**

MAJOR SACRIFICES OF THE ŚATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA (RĀJASŪYA, VĀJAPEYA AND AŚVAMEDHA) AND THEIR RELATION TO MONARCHY IN ANCIENT INDIA.

RĀJASŪYA :

The *Rājasūya* sacrifice is one of the principal ceremonies of royal inauguration. It consists of some animal sacrifices and also a number of various *iṣtis*. It begins on the first day of *phālguna* (February-march, the spring time of India) and spread over a period of more than two years. The word ‘*Rājasūya*’ is derived as, the *Rājan Soma* is pressed in it; therefore, it is known as ‘*Rājasūya*’¹ or the sacrifice of the king is called ‘*Rājasūya*’². Those who performed this sacrifice attained the pre-eminence sovereignty and supremacy over all the dominions. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, one becomes king by offering the *Rājasūya*³. Thus in most of the Vedic texts, the *Rājasūya* sacrifice are highly praised, as by the performance of it all the kings become subdued.

The *Rājasūya* or the royal inauguration ceremony is divided in to three distinct parts :

- a series of preliminary sacrifices.
- the *Abhiṣechaniya* or sprinkling or anointing ceremony and
- a number of post anointing ceremonies.

¹ *Jai.Brā* -XIV/4/1- (*Sabar Bhāṣya*) “*Rājā tatra suyate tasmādrājasuyah* | ”

² *Ibid*- XIV/4/1- “*Rājño vā yajño rājasūyah* | ”

³ *Śat.Brā* – V/1/1/12- “*Rājā vai rājasūyeneṣṭvā bhavati* | ”

At first, a purificatory ceremony called the *Pavitra* takes place and the four seasonal offerings (*Cāturmāsya*) follow for the next one year. After finishing the *Cāturmāsya*s, some more iṣṭis and homas are performed among which the eleven offerings known as ‘*Ratninām havīṃsi*’ take place. The king makers are known as ‘*Ratnins*’ i.e. the keeper of jewel. The king is regarded as the jewel and the king’s ministers or counsellors are termed as ‘*Ratnins*’. A king can ascend to the throne or can become a king if his *Ratnins* allow him so. But if they do not accept his sanction or disallow him, the king cannot be declared as a king. In this ceremony king goes to the house of each *Ratnins* or king makers and make an oblation in their houses in honour of a particular deity.

List of *Ratnins* or kingmaker :

The list of the king makers slightly differ according to the different *Brāhmaṇa* texts. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁴ there are eleven *Ratnins* or king makers. The lists of the *Ratnins* are presented below according to their social strata:-

- i) *Senānī* or Commander-in-Chief.
- ii) *Purahita* or family priest.
- iii) *Yajamāna* (the *kṣatra*, the ruling power i.e. king).

⁴ *Śat.Brā-* V/3/1/1-12-“*Aranyaragni samārohya | Senānyo grhānparetyā ’gnaye ’nikavate aṣṭakapāla puradāsaṃ.....Atha śvo bhute purohitasya grhān paretya.....Atha śvo bhute suyamānsya grha.....Atha śvo bhute | Mahīṣai grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | sūtasya grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | grāmanya grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | kṣatur grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | saṃgrhītur grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | Bhāgadugasya grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | akṣāvāpasya grhān paretya..... Atha śvo bhute | pālāgalasya grhān paretya.....tāni vā etāni ekādas ratnāni |*”.

- iv) Chief Queen or consecrated queen known as *Mahisī*.
- v) *Suta* i.e. Chronicler or court-minstrel.
- vi) *Grāmanī* or headman of the village.
- vii) *Kṣattr* or Chamberlain.
- viii) *Samgrahītr* or Treasurer.
- ix) *Bhāgadugha* or tax collector.
- x) The keeper of the dice and *Govikartana* or huntsman.
- xi) *Pālāgala* or Courier.

For the performance of *Ratninām-haviṃsi* offerings the sacrificer required eleven days. On the twelfth day, the sacrificer goes to the house of the discarded wife known as *Parivṛtti* and offers an oblation to the goddess *Nirṛiti*. But, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* this offering is not included in the *Ratninām-haviṃsi* offerings.

According to the *Maitrāyanī Samhitā*⁵, the king makers are regarded as the limbs of the king, because, who's *Ratnins* are vigorous his kingdoms also become vigorous. From the above mentioned list of *Ratnins* the king goes to the houses of each *Ratnins* excepting *Kṣatra* and *Akṣāvāpa* and *Govikartana* together, for whom offerings are made at the royal palace. The offerings are made to the Gods- *Agni*, *Bṛhaspati*, *Indra*, *Aditi*, *Varuṇa*, *Maruts*, *Sāvitr*, *Aśvins*, and so on. These offerings are made by the king to his *Ratnins* is very significant. As a matter of fact, this ritual was performed with the intension to

⁵ *Mait.Sam-* IV/3/8-“*Kṣatrasya vā etānyaṅgāni yasya vā etāni tejasvanti tadrāstraṃ tejasvi bhavati* | ”

win the favours of the *Ratnins*. The offerings create a feeling of attachment and loyalty in the *Ratnins* mind for the new king and they (*Ratnins*) became his (kings) faithful follower.

Consecration Ceremony :

The second part of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice is known as *Abhiṣeka* or *Mahābhiṣeka* is regarded as the main part of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice as it mainly consists in sprinkling the king with holy waters collected from various sources. This consecration ceremony consists of five days viz. one *Diksā* (initiation ceremony), three *upaśad* and one *sutyā* or *soma*-day. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁶, we get the detail description of the rites and rituals connected with this ceremony. On the first day, offerings are made to the eight Gods- viz. *Savitā*, *Agni*, *Soma*, *Bṛhaspati*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, *Mitra* and *Varuṇa*. These offerings to the Gods are known as ‘*Devāṣu offerings*’ or ‘*Divine Quickening*’⁷. Before offerings each of these gods is addressed with an epithet. The lists of these epithets are being presented below :

- *Savitā* is prayed as ‘*satyaprasava*’ for true inspiration and righteous power of the king.
- *Agni* as *Gṛhapati* for mastery of the house hold activity.
- *Soma* as *Vanaṣpati* for protection of the forests and Agriculture.

⁶ *Śat.Brā* - V/3, 5/4

⁷ *Ibid*- V/3/3/13 “ *Etā ha vai devatā savasyeśate | Tasmāddevasvo nāma tadenamata eva devata suvate tābhi sūta sva sūyate | |* ”

- *Bṛhaspati Vāk* for power of speech.
- *Indra* as *Jyeṣṭha* for supremacy or predominance in matters of administration.
- *Rudra* as *Paśupati* for protection of cattle.
- *Mitra* as *Satya* for truth.
- And lastly, offering to *Varuṇa*, the moral governor as *Dharmapati* for upholding of *Dharma* or law⁸.

The significance of these epithets is that the king designated onward as king is expected to follow all these royal duties and functions. These epithets also symbolize the various character and qualities of a king.

After that the sprinkling ceremony is performed. The king is sprinkled by the priests with various waters collected from different sources. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁹ mentions a list of seventeen (17) types of waters are as follows :

- i) The water of the river *Saraswati*.
- ii) The water of that wave which rises up behind him (priest).
- iii) The flowing water.
- iv) The water that flows against the stream.
- v) The water that flows of the main current.

⁸ *Śat.Brā-* V/3/3/2-9.

⁹ *Ibid* – V/3/4

- vi) The water from the lord of river i.e. sea water.
- vii) The water from a whirlpool.
- viii) The flowing water in a sunny area (in below the standing pool).
- ix) The waters of the rains while the sun shines.
- x) The water from a pond.
- xi) The water from a well.
- xii) The waters from dew drops.
- xiii) The honey.
- xiv) The embryonic waters of a calving cow.
- xv) The milk.
- xvi) The clarified butter.
- xvii) The moist sun-motes in the hollow of his (priests) hand.

Each type of water mixed together in vessel made of the wood of *udumvara* vessel. The sprinkling is done by the three upper classes i.e. by a *Brāhmaṇa*, a *Kṣatriya* and by a *Vaiśya*. From the *Udumvara* vessel the mixed water is again distributed in to the four smaller vessels made of the wood of *Palāsa*, *Udumvara*, *Nyagrodha* and *Aśvattha* trees respectively. The *Brāhmaṇa* sprinkles the king from the *Palāsa* bowl; a relative of the king sprinkles from *Udumvara* pot, a friend or *Mitra* of the king sprinkles from the *Nyāgradha* vessel and the *Vaiśya* sprinkles from the *Aśvattha* pot¹⁰. Each type of water actually represents some power and quality of the king. It is expected that the

¹⁰ Śat.Brā -V/3/5/11-14-“*Palāsaṃ bhavati | Tena brāhmaṇa’bhisincati brahma vai palāso | |*”
“*Udumvaraṃ bhavati | Tena svo’bhisincatyannaṃ vā.....puruṣasya svaṃ bhavati | |*”
“*Nyagrodhapādaṃ bhavati | Tena mitro rājanyo’bhisincati | |*”
“*Aśvatthaṃ bhavati | Tena vaiśyo’bhisincati | |*”

king should possess such qualities in him, such as- the flowing river stands for vigor or power of the king, the floods stand for abundance, sea for dominion and supremacy, the water of the pool or tanks stands for loyalty or attachment of the people with the king, which is harmful like the waters of a stagnant pool and so on.

This anointing or consecration ceremony is very significant, as before the consecration the sacrificer is uttered as 'he'. But just after the sprinkling or anointing ceremony is over 'he' is called as 'king' (*Rājan*). That means, after the completion of the consecration ceremony the sacrificer is empowered with the royal office, before that he is considered just as an ordinary citizen¹¹.

This consecration ceremony is regarded as a new birth of the king. As after the consecration, the king has to wear some new garments such as- *Tārpya* (an under garment), *Pāṇdvā* (a garment made of undyed wool), a mantle or Cloak (*Adhivāṣa*) and a head band (*uṣṇisa*). Actually these garments represent different parts of an embryo. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*¹² describe the significance of various garments put on to the Kings by the *Adhvaryu* are as follows :

¹¹ Chakraborty ,H, Vedic India-Political and legal institute in the Vedic literature by, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1981, Page -171.

¹² *Śat.Brā* -V/3/5/20 - 24 “*Tattārpyamiti vāso bhavati tasmin sarvāni yajñarupāni nisyutāni bhavanti.....nayati*”
“*Athainam pāṇdvam paridhāpayati | Kṣatraṣya jarāyavsīti tadyeva Kṣatraṣya Jarāyu tat evainametajjanayati*”
“*Athā'dhivāsam pratimuñcati | Kṣatraṣya yonirsī'ti tadyiva Kṣatraṣya yonistasyā evainametajjanayati*”
“*Athosniṣṭ sahritya | Purastādavaguhati Kṣatraṣya*
nābhistāmeva'sminnetaddadhāti”
“*Taddhaikē | Samantam parivestayanti nāvīrvā.....paridhāpayati | |*”

- a) *Tārpya* is identified with inner cauls of embryo.
- b) *Pāṇḍvā* with uterus or (jarāyu).
- c) *Adhivāṣa* with womb (yoni)
- d) *Uṣṇisa* or head band with navel or umbilicus.

These garments are intended to symbolically represent the various segment of the embryo and the stages of birth. Therefore, the *Adhvaryu* put on the garments to the king thinking that he sprinkles the king when he is born. Hence, the consecration ceremony is regarded as a new birth of the king. After that the *Adhvaryu* makes the king to ascend the east, south, west, north and upper regions. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives the reason as to why the *Adhvaryu* makes the king to ascend the quarter is that- “all the quarters are the forms of a season. It is the season, the year that he there by makes him ascends, and having ascended the seasons, the year, he (the king) is high, high above everything here and everything here is below him”¹³. Then the *Adhvaryu* provides the king a bow with three arrows. The bow is a symbol of strength. As the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says – “the bow is a symbol of the king’s strength or military power and I shall consecrate him after he attains strength”¹⁴.

Thereafter follows the oath taking ceremony. The *Adhvaryu* Priests who sprinkle the king with holy waters addressed him thus : “If you do me harm, in that case all the merits acquired by you from the night of your birth to the night of your death, your pious deeds, longevity and publicity will be stolen by

¹³ *Śat.Brā* -V/4/1/7 –“*Ṛtunāmevaimetadupamṛtunevaitatsamvatsara samārohayati sa rtun samvatsara samāruhya sarvamevaimetaduparyupari bhavatyarvāgeva ’smādidim sarvaṃ bhavati* |”

¹⁴ *Ibid*- V/3/5/30 –“*Vīryam vā etad rājanyaṣya yaddhanurvīryavantamabhisincānti* |”

me”¹⁵. Similarly the king also takes the oath – “If I betray you or pay you false, may I lose the merit of all my pious deeds, religious rites, my position, life and even my progeny”¹⁶. Then the king makes step upon the tiger’s skin¹⁷. A small gold plate is thrown below the king’s foot with the intention to protect him from death. As gold is the symbol of immortal life. Therefore the *Adhvaryu* encloses him on both sides with immortal life¹⁸. A throne made of *khādirā* wood is installed on the tiger’s skin for the king. Tiger is the king of all beasts; hence the tiger skin is spread bellow the throne as a mark of kingship¹⁹. The throne is symbol of royal dignity and power. It is a symbol of dominion²⁰. After the anointment the king makes three steps on the tiger’s skin representing the *Viṣṇu*’s three steps on the earth, heaven and the upper regions²¹.

The *Rājasūya* sacrifice or royal coronation has some popular rites associated with it, such as – the mimic cow raid, the game of dice and others which are briefly presented below :

Cow raid :

In the north of the *Āhavanīya*, the sacrificer (the king) places a hundred or more than a hundred cows of his relative²². The cattle is an object of respect.

¹⁵ *Ait.Brā* – VIII/15-“*Sa ha śraddhyayā yāṃ ca rātriṃjāye ’hamyāṃ ca protāsmi tadubhyamantareṣṭāpurtam me lokam sukṛtamāyuh prajāṃ brjīthā yadi te druhyeyamiti* | | ”

¹⁶ *Ibid*-VIII/15

¹⁷ *Śat.Brā* -V/4/1/11-“*Athai na Śārdulacarmmā ārohoyati* | ”

¹⁸ *Ibid*- V/4/1/14- “*Amṛtamāyurhiraṇyaṃ tadamṛtenivainam.....tasmād rukmā ubhayato bhavataḥ* | ”

¹⁹ *Ait.Brā* –VIII/8-“*Kṣatram vā etadāranyānām paśunām yad vyāghraḥ kṣatram kṣatreṇaiva tat kṣatram saṃdharyati* | | ”

²⁰ *Śat.Brā* – XII/8/3/6 –“*Rāstram vāsandī*”

²¹ *Ibid*- V/4/2/6- “*Athainamantareva sārḥula carmani viṣṇu kramān kramayati.....sarvaṃ bhavati* | ”

²² *Ibid*- V/4/3/1-“*Tasyo’sya svo bhavati* | *Tasya śatam vā param śata vā gā uttareṇāhavanīya sam sthāpayati* | | ”

As, when *Varuṇa* was consecrated, his energy, his vigor departed from him and *Varuṇa* found it in a cattle. As, *Varuṇa* found it in a cattle, therefore; the cattle is regarded as an object of respect. The *Rājasūya* sacrifice is regarded as a *Varuṇa*'s consecration²³. Therefore it is also an object of honour or respect. In the cow raid the king climbs on a chariot paired with four horses and drives the car to a place among the hundred cows of his relative and touches a cow with the end of his bow. This indicates the achievement of the right of the cattle to the king. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives the reason as to why the king stops his chariot in between his relatives is thus – “whatever is tending away from a man, be it either fame or anything else, that passes over to his relative foremost of all: - that energy or vigor, he now takes again from his relative to himself: that is why he stops amidst the cows of his relative”²⁴

After that the king looks down to the mother earth and says-‘O, mother Earth, injure me not, nor I thee’. The Earth also afraid to the king thinking that something great surely has he become now that he has been consecrated: I fear lest he may rend me asunder. The king also afraid to the mother earth thinking, ‘I fear lest she may shake me off’. Hence, by that formula he entered in to friendly relation with her; for a mother does not injure son, nor does a son injure his mother²⁵. Then he steps down from the chariot with muttering the verse -“The swan dwelling in the light, the *Vasu* dwelling in the air, the priest

²³ *Śat.Brā* - V/4/3/2-“*Varuṇasava vā eṣa yadrājasūyamiti varuṇa'karotiti tveveiṣa etad karoti* | ”

²⁴ *Ibid* - V/4/3/11-“*Tadyattsvasya goṣudyacchati* | *Yadvai puruṣātparāgbhavati yaso vā kincidvā.....goṣudyacchati* | | ”

²⁵ *Ibid* – V/4/3/20-21-“*Ṙṥhivi mātarmā mā hi sīrmo ahamtvāmiti varuṇāddha.....na putra mātaram*” |
“*Ṙṥhivyu hai tasmād vibheti mahad vā ayamabhud.....na putra mātaram* | | ”

seated on the altar, the guest dwelling in the retreat (house), the man-dwelling, the space dwelling, the law dwelling, the sphere dwelling, the water born, the cow-born, law born, rock born”. For that *atichandas* (or excessive metre) comprises of all the metres: thus evil does not descend along with him²⁶. And finally the king touches the *udumvara* branch to obtain strength. As, *udumvara* is regarded as the bestower of strength (sustenance)²⁷.

Game of dice :

The game of dice is a compulsory part of the *Rājasūya* ceremony. In which the game is played with five dice²⁸. The four dice is known as *kr̥ta* and the fifth is termed as *kāli*. If all the dice when thrown fall uniformly i.e. the dotted sides either upwards or downwards the thrower wins. This symbolizes the conquest of the elected king to over all castes and all regions.

Striking the king with sticks :

The priests take up a stick and silently strike the king with that stick on his back side. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says that –“by striking him with sticks they take him beyond the pole of judicial punishment; hence the king is exempt from or beyond the reach of judicial punishment”²⁹. But from this one cannot make any wrong statement that the king could do any wrong work or can take any wrong decisions as he was above punishment. In the Vedic age the king’s

²⁶ *Śat.Brā* -V/4/3/22-“*So’vatiṣṭhati | Ha sa śuciṣadvasurantarikṣaddhotā vediṣadatithirhuronasat..... Pāpmā nā’nvatiṣṭhati*”

²⁷ Ibid- V/4/3/26-“*Athaudumbaīm sākhāmupaspr̥ṣati | Urgasyurja mayi dehiti | |*”

²⁸ Ibid- V/4/4/6 –“*Athā’smai pañcā’kṣānā pānā vāvapatieva diṣa kalpayati |*”

²⁹ Ibid - V/4/4/7- “*Taṃ daṇḍairghanto daṇḍavadhamatinayanti tasmād rājā dandyo yadenam dandavadhamatinayanti | |*”

duty was to protect the people and work for their welfare. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives record of the kings named as *Duṣṭaritu Paumsāyana*, who was expelled from his kingdom for misconduct and maltreatment with his subjects³⁰.

The handing over of the sacrificial Sword :

The *Brāhmaṇa* hands over the sacrificial sword to the king. The sacrificial sword is regarded as thunderbolt. *Brāhmaṇa* by means of that thunderbolt makes the king to be weaker than a *Brāhmaṇa* but strong than his enemies. Thus the king hands over the sacrificial sword to his brother. Thereby the king makes his brother to be weaker than himself. In this way the king's brother hands it over to the *Suta*. Then *Suta* or the Governor hands it to the *Grāmanī* and then *Grāmanī* hands it to a tribes man. In this way the king make him stronger than other³¹.

As a matter of fact, all these rites associated with the consecration ceremony simply signify the unrivalled greatness which every king should possess.

In the third part of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice, the performance of the *Daśapeya* comes first. It is so called as during this ceremony hundred persons

³⁰ *Śat.Brā* - XII/9/3/1- “ *Duṣṭaritu Paumsāyana* | *Dasapurūṣa rājyādaparuddhāsa* | *Revottarasamu ha patavancakraṃ sthapatim Srñjaya aparurudhu* | ”

³¹ *Ibid* - V/4/4/15-19 “ *Athā'smai Brāhmaṇa sfayaṃ prayacchati* | *Adhvaryurvā yo vā'sya purohito bhavati* | ”
“ *Taṃ rājā rajabhrāte prayacchati* | ”
“ *Taṃ rājabhrātā sutāya vā sthapataye vā prayacchati* | ”
“ *Taṃ suto vā sthapatirvā grāmaṇye prayacchati* | ”
“ *Taṃ grāmanī sajātāya prayacchati* | ”

including the king drink ten cups of *soma* juice with a group of ten people³². Thus ‘*Daśa*’ means (ten) and ‘*Peya*’ means (drink, beverage). It is actually a modification of the *Agniṣṭoma*. After the tenth day of the *Abhiṣeka* ceremony the *Daśapeya* ceremony is accomplished. This ceremony has genealogical importance as *Sāyanācārya* gives its literal meaning as- during its performance the sacrificer has to call out the name of his grandfather and the grandfather of that one and so on³³. After one year the *keśavapāniya* begins. It is a period of abstinence. In this period the sacrificer does not shave his hair. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives the reason behind this- “that collected essence of waters where with he is then sprinkled (anointed) is vigor, and it is the hair (of his) that reaches first when he is sprinkled, hence were he to shave his hair, he would cause that glory to fall off from him, and would sweep it away: therefore he does not shave his hair³⁴. After that the sacrificer performs the *Sautrāmaṇī* which is an expiation rite for any excess committed by the drink of *soma*-juice. Then the closing oblation known as *Traidhātavi* is performed, which marks the end of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice.

A brief description is presented below about the coronation ceremony of different periods :

³² *Śat.Brā – V/4/5/3 - “Tasmāddasapeyo ’tho yaddasame..... dsaikaikaṃ camasamnuprasṛptā bhavanti tasmādeva dasapeya | ”*

³³ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Ed. By Maitre Deshpānde, New Bharatiya book Corporation, 2008, Page-849, foot note-2.

³⁴ *Ibid – V/5/3/1- “Abhiṣecniyeneṣṭtvā | kesanna vapatetadyadkeśāna vapatate viryam vā.....tadmāt kesānavapate | | ”*

Prithu's Coronation :

Prithu the son of *Vena* is regarded as the first consecrated king of the Hindus. This statement is recorded in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*³⁵. His coronation oath is clearly mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. The oath runs thus- “to follow the Vedic injunctions, to act according to the rules of *Danḍapati*, never to violate the rules of law, not to insult the *Brāhmaṇas* and to serve the people sincerely”³⁶. The oath administered to the king *Vena* is also found in the *Mahābhārata*. He took vow to rule righteously³⁷. The king being bound by his coronation oath had to act according to the law established. The oath brought him under the law and did not offer him any scope of arbitrary. According to *Manu* there are some divine elements in the king. The king is verily a great divinity in the form of human being³⁸. He is the protector of the people.

Harsha's Coronation :

Harsha or *Harshavardhana* was an Indian emperor who ruled North India from 606 to 647 A.D. He was the son of *Prabhākaravardhana* and the younger brother of *Rājyavardhana*. *Rājyashree*, the sister of *Rājyavardhana* and *Prabhākaravardhana* had been married to the *Maukhari* king *Grahavarman*. But after some year *Grahavarman* was killed by the king *Devagupta* of *Malwa* and *Rājyashree* had been cast in to the prison by the

³⁵ *Śat.Brā* - V/3/5/4- “*Prīthi ha vai vainnyo manuāyanām prathamō abhiṣiṣice* | ”

³⁶ *Mahābhārata, Shāntiparvan*- LIX/112-120.

³⁷ *Ibid*- LVIII/115-116

³⁸ *Manu Saṃ-* VII/7-8 –“*Sa'gnirbhavati vāyuśca so'rka somaḥ sa dharmrāt* |
Sa kuveraḥ sa varuṇḥ sa mahendraḥ prabhābataḥ | | ”
“*Bālo 'api nāvamantyabyo manuṣya iti bhumipah* |
Mahatidevatā hyeṣā nararupena tiṣṭati | | ”

victor. Then *Rājyavardhana* marched against *Devagupta* and killed him. But while returned to his capital, *Rājyavardhana* was treacherously killed by *Shashānka*, the king of Gauda³⁹. When *Harsha* heard about the murder of his brother, he promised to take revenge against the assassinator of *Rājyavardhana*.

In the mean while *Harsha's* coronation ceremony was performed by sprinkling holy waters contain in the golden and in the silver jars. He was seated on a throne covered by tiger's skin and his whole body was beseamed with white sandal paste. Likewise his whole war weapons were also beseamed with white sandal paste. Then after the coronation ceremony *Harsha* came out for world conquest⁴⁰.

Coronation rituals in the *Agnipurāṇa* :

The coronation ceremony as narrated in the *Agnipurāṇa* is almost similar with that of the Vedic literature. In the *Agnipurāṇa*, the coronation ceremony also includes in sprinkling the king with holy waters, putting the crown on his head, making him sit on a cushion made of the skin of animals (tiger), introduction of high officers and ministers to the newly crowned king, Various kinds of gifts to the priests, coronation procession and military parade through the main streets of the capital and return of the procession to the place and end of the ceremony after making gifts⁴¹. According to the said *Purāṇa*

³⁹ [http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/harsha_\(Indian_emperor\).aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/harsha_(Indian_emperor).aspx).

⁴⁰ Chaki, Jyotibhusana and Acharya, Abani, *Harshacarita*, vol-18 (*Saptama Ucchvāsa*), Nabapatra Prakasan, Kolkta, 1987.

⁴¹ *Agni Purāṇa*, 218/31-35-“*Dvipijaṃ śiṃhajaṃ vyāgrajātancarma tadāsane Amātya sacivādīnca pratihārah pradarsayet.....praācyā sarvān visarjayet. |*”

only the *Brāhmaṇas* can anoint the king but this freedom extends to the four castes i.e. *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Sudra*. Their support and loyalty to the king strengthens the position of the king elect. According to the *Agnipurāṇa* the formal coronation of the king is held within a year of his accession.

Coronation ceremony in the epic age :

The coronation ceremony is also performed in the epic age. The coronation of *Rāma* as a king of *Ayodhyā* took place when he returned to the capital city after fourteen years of exile⁴². The *Brahmins*, *Ministers*, *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśyas* and others (including the members of guilds which include all castes) sprinkled the king *Rāma* with waters bought from the seas and rivers and put crown on his head⁴³. The royal coronation of king *Yudhisthira* is also performed in the same manner. The *Mahābhārata* records that the *Brahmins*, the owners of the land, the *Kṣatriyas*, the *Vaiśyas* and the representatives of other castes were also invited in this ceremony. The imperial assembly was attended by kings from different parts of the country.

Asoka's Coronation :

The famous Mauryan king *Ashoka* was crowned after the four years of his accession. The uncrowned period of his accession was not accepted by *Hindu* law. Therefore the *Purāṇas* do not count the pre-coronation years of

⁴² *Rāmāyana*, *Yuddha kāṇḍa*, chapter 131.

⁴³ *Ibid*, *Yuddha kāṇḍa*, Chapter 131, 60-61

Ashoka's reign but they included it in the total for the dynasty⁴⁴. This highlights that the king without royal consecration is not recognized as a legal sovereign.

VĀJAPEYA :

A complete soma *yāga* consists of seven forms of *samsthās* viz. *Agniṣṭoma*, *Atyagniṣṭoma*, *Ukthya*, *Sodāsi*, *Atirātra*, *Aptoryam* and *Vājapeya*. Thus the last form of *samsthās* is *Vājapeya*. Among the seven forms of *samsthās*, the *Vājapeya* is one of the sacrifice conveying high political significance. It is however, normally performed as an independent rite. The word '*Vājapeya*' is explaining by different scholars in different ways. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* the word '*Vāja*' means food⁴⁵ and '*Peya*' means '*drink*' which is derived from the root √*pa* (to drink). The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* holds the view that the *Vājapeya* is same as *annapeya* (food and drink). He who offers the *Vājapeya* wins food⁴⁶. The *Vājapeya* is that ceremony by which the gods also obtain strength (*vājam*) and by '*drink of strength*' i.e. soma by drinking (*pitvā*) one becomes strong (*vājīn*).

⁴⁴ *Matsya Purāṇa* 272/ 22-26-“*Uddhriṣyati kautilyaḥ samairdādaśabhiḥ sutān | Bhuktā mahiṃ varṣaśataṃ tato mauryāṅgamiṣyati | | ”*
“Bhavitā śatadhanvā ca Tasya putrastu śat samāḥ |
Bṛhadraṭhastu varṣāṇi Tasya putraśca saptatiḥ | | ”
“Ṣaṭitramśattu samā rājā bhavitā śaka eva ca |
Saptānām daśa varṣānī Tasya naptā bhaviṣyati | | ”
“Rājā daśaratho 'ṣṭau tu Tasya putro bhaviṣyati |
Bhavitā nava varṣāṇi Tasya putraśca saptatiḥ ”
“Ityete daśa mauryāstu ye mokṣyanti vasundharām |
Saptatrimśacchataṃ purnaṃ tebhyaḥ śungāṅgamiṣyati ”

⁴⁵ *Śat.Brā* – IX/3/4/1- “*Annaṃ vai vājo | ”*

⁴⁶ *Ibid* - V/1/3/3- “*Annapeyaṃ ha vai nāmaitad yad vājapeyaṃ | ”*

Ibid- V/1/5/25- “*Yo vājapeyena yajet annapeya ha vai nāmaitad vājapeyaṃ | ”*

It is very difficult to enunciate the exact nature of the *Vājapeya* sacrifice. One becomes king by performing the *Rājasūya* sacrifice and by performing the *Vājapeya* one becomes *Samrāt*. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*- “by offering the *Rājasūya* one becomes king, and by the *Vājapeya* (he becomes) emperor (*Samrāt*); and the office of the king is the lower, and that of emperor the higher: a king might indeed wish to become emperor, for the office of the king is the lower, and that of emperor the higher, but the emperor would not wish to become king, for the office of the king is the lower, and that of emperor the higher”⁴⁷. The same statement is again repeated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*- “He first offers those of the *Rājasūya*, then those of the *Vājapeya*, for by performing the *Rājasūya* one becomes king (*rājā*) and by the *Vājapeya* (*Samrāt*), and the position of the king is obtained first, and there after that of emperor; hence after performing the *Vājapeya*, one could not perform the *Rājasūya*, it would be a descent, just as if one who is emperor were to become king”⁴⁸. So from the above statement it is clear that the *Vājapeya* is greater than *Rājasūya*. The *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra*⁴⁹ also makes the statement that the *Rājasūya* may be performed by the king who has not performed the *Vājapeya*. But both the authority i.e. the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* remain silent on the point about the performance of the *Rājasūya* and *Vājapeya* to be preceded or followed by each other.

⁴⁷ *Śat.Brā* – V/1/1/13- “*Raja vai rajasuyeneṣṭvā bhavanti samrād vājapeyena | Avaram hi rājyam param hi sāmrajyam | Kāmayate vai rājā samrād-bhavitum na samrāt Kāmayate rājā bhavitum |*”

⁴⁸ *Ibid*- IX/3/4/8- “*Sa vai rajasuyasya purvāni juhōti | Atha Vājapeyesya rājā vai rajasuyeneṣṭvā bhavanti samrād vājapeyena rājyam vā agneatha sāmrajyam tasmād vājapeyeneṣṭvā na rājasūyena yajate pratyavorah sa yathā samrāt san rājā syāt tadṛk tat |*”

⁴⁹ *Kāty.Śr.Sū*- XV/1/1/2

The *Rājasūya* is a sacrifice for the *Kṣatriyas* where as the *Vājapeya* is meant for both the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Kṣatriyas*. According to the *Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra*- “a king may perform the *Rājasūya* after performing the *Vājapeya*, and a Brahmin, the *Bṛhaspatisava*”⁵⁰. *Bṛhaspatisava* is a sacrifice similar to the *Rājasūya* with a little variation that the *Rājasūya* is for the *Kṣatriyas* where as the *Bṛhaspatisava* is meant for the *Brāhmaṇas*. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* lays down the fact that the *Vājapeya* is *Samrātsava* and *Rājasūya* is *Varuṇasava*⁵¹. The former is meant for the consecration to the position of *Samrāt*, while the latter is for the consecration to the universal sovereignty of *Varuṇa*. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also makes the statement, “that the *Varuṇasava* is nothing but the *Rājasūya*”⁵². Thus from the above discussion it is clear that the conception of imperial state (*Samratsava*) is distinguished from that of single monarchy.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* identifies the *Vājapeya* with the *Bṛhaspatisava* and makes the statement that the *Vājapeya* itself is the consecration of *Bṛhaspati*-“what is called *Bṛhaspatisava* is the same as *Vājapeya*”⁵³. The *Vājapeya* sacrifice is performed for the attainment of temporal power or lordship of a *Kṣatriya* and also for the spiritual power or lordship of a *Brāhmaṇa*. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* mentions that the *Indra* attains *svarājya* (self rule) and lordship (*Jyaiṣṭhya*) of the Gods by performing

⁵⁰ *Āśv.Śr.Sū* – IX/9//19-“*Vājapeyeneṣṭvā rājā rājasūyena yajet brāhamaṇo bṛhaspatisavena* | ”

⁵¹ *Taitt.Brā* – II/7/6/1-“*Yo vai Vājapeyaḥ sa samrātsavaḥ yo rājasūyaḥ sa varuṇasavaḥ* | ”

⁵² *Śat.Brā* – V/3/4/12- “*Varuṇasava vā eṣa Rājasūyaṃ* | ”

⁵³ *Ibid* - V/2/1/19-“*Bṛhaspatisava vā eṣa yad vājapeyaṃ* | ”

the *Vājapeya*; and among human beings he who performs the *Vājapeya* attains *svarājya* and becomes the chief of equals⁵⁴.

The numerous rites are performed in the *Vājapeya* sacrifice, such as: - the *Aji dhāvana* or the Chariot race, the *rohā* or mounting a post and the repetition of the number seventeen.

Chariot race :

The chariot race takes place at the mid-day pressing of the final day. A sacrificer who is a *Brāhmiṇ* or a *Kṣatriya* has to participate in a race of 17 chariots and he is allowed to win the race. The chariot itself is conceived as Indra's thunderbolt which is seized by the pole and turned from left to right addressed to *Aditi*, the great Mother. Four horses are anointed and yoked to the chariot. Then wild rice cooked and served in seventeen plates which the horses are made to smell. The *Vājīnām sāman* is sung which says: - "The fiery steeds have gathered fiery mettle, the impulse of the god *Savitṛ*; win ye the heaven, O coursers!"⁵⁵ The purpose of this rite is to secure the sacrificer the swiftness of the victorious steeds as strength. The chariot race starts with the beat of drums and war cries were raised. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is recorded that the seventeen drums were placed on the sacrificial altar and the priests had to beat those drums simultaneously⁵⁶. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also gives the reason as to why the seventeen drums were beaten – "he who offers the *Vājapeya* wins

⁵⁴ *Taitt.Brā* - I/3/2/2-3 – " (Indra) so 'agram devatānām paryaiti agacchat svarājyam; atisthāntaṣmai jyaisthyayā iti | "

"ye evaṃ vidvān vājapeyena yajate gacchati svarājyaṃ; agraṃ samānānām Paryeti tiṣṭhante asmai jyaiṣṭhyāya | "

⁵⁵ *S.V-I/435* – "Āvirmaryā ā vājaṃ vājino agraṃ devasya savituh savam | Sargaṃ arvanto jayata | | "

⁵⁶ *Śat.Brā* -V/1/5/6 – "Atha saptasaśa dundubhinanu vedyanta | "

Prajāpati, but *Prajāpati* is speech, and that doubtless is the supreme speech which is the outcome of seventeen drums : he thus wins the supreme speech, the supreme *Prajāpati*. Seventeen there are, because *Prajāpati* is seventeen fold: he thus wins *Prajāpati*”⁵⁷. The numerical seventeen reminds us of the ‘*Saptadaśa Sāmidheni*’ which is a indicator of kindling of fire. The four horses which are decorated to the sacrificer’s chariot are sprinkled with the holy waters and rice pap is prepared for *Bṛhaspati*, the winner of the race of this kind. The sacrificer (*rājanya*) shoots an arrow to fix the goal of the race. The post is fixed at the farthest limit of the race-course at the end of the measurement of seventeen arrows. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* explains thus: “As to why a *rājanya* shoots, he, the *rājanya* is most manifestly of *Prajāpati*: hence while being one he rules over many”⁵⁸. During the race, the *Adhvaryu* utters *mantras*⁵⁹ addressed to the horses of the sacrificer’s chariot. After that a *Vaiśya* or a *Rājanya*, standing on one of those race-running chariots made to exchange a cup of honey with one cup of *surā* given by the *Adhvaryu*. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*⁶⁰ and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁶¹ gives the reason behind this- “that the priests thus imbibes the sacrificer with truth, prosperity and

⁵⁷ *Śat.Brā* – V/1/5/6 – “*Yo vājapeyena yajate vāgvai prajāpatireṣa vai paramā vāgyā saptadasānām dundubhinām paramāmevaitadvācam paramaṃ prajāpatimujjayati saptadasa bhavanti saptadaso vai prajāpatistad prajāpatimujjayati*”

⁵⁸ *Ibid* - V/1/5/14- “*Eṣa vai Prajāpate prataṣṣatamām yadrājanyastasmādekaprajāpatimujjayati* | ”

⁵⁹ *R.V* - IV/40/3-4, VII/38/7-8

⁶⁰ *Taitt.Brā* -I/3/3/7- “*Vājasṛdbhyaḥ surāgrahān haranti* |
Anṛtenaiva viśaṃ saṃsrjanti |
Hiranyapātraṃ madhoḥ purnaṃ dadāti |
Madvyo ’sānīti |
Ekadhā brahmaṇ upaharati |
Ekadhaiva yajamāna āyustejo dadhāti | | ”

⁶¹ *Śat.Brā* – V/1/5/28- “*Somo ’nṛtam papmā tama surā satyamevaitadcachaidriyam jyotiryomāne dadhātyanṛtena pāpmanā tamasā* | ”

strikes the *Vaiśya* with untruth, misery and darkness”. Then the (priests) presents to the *Brāhmaṇa* in golden vessel a cup of honey. By offering this honey (in to a golden vessel) to the *Brāhmaṇa*, he imbibes himself with immortal life. As in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gold is compared with immortal life⁶². From the above discussion it can be said that the *Brāhmaṇa* texts provides enough idea of divinity of the king which become more developed in the later period.

In the chariot race other competitors with the sacrificer run up to the post round and turn and come back in such a way that the sacrificer becomes first to reach the altar. Actually, “this race like the cow raid and a dice play in other inauguration ceremonies represents a test for recognizing the ruler’s superiority in valour and physical prowess and a means of enabling him to prove himself the fittest man for kingship, as well as magical devices to achieve the defeat of his adversaries in prowess, sagacity and so on”⁶³. Indeed this ceremony of chariot race was practiced in the remote antiquity and in the later times the Vedic Indians adopted this practice.

Therefore, the Vedic Aryans utilize the chariot race originally for the selection of their king, but in later time, this race continued as a matter of formality. As in the Chariot race it is seen that the king was deliberately made to win the race.

⁶² *Śat.Brā* - V/2/1/20- “*Amṛtamāyurhiraṇyam* |”

⁶³ Gonda, J, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the religious point of view* , E.J.BRILL, 1966, Page-85.

Mounting the Post :

The sacrificer with his wife climbs upon a chariot wheel, which is a symbol of the sun and it is fixed on the top of long pole. While ascending the sacrificer addresses his wife, “come wife, ascend we the sky!”⁶⁴. The sacrificer addresses his wife, as wife is one half of his own self. Hence as long as he does not obtain her he is not regenerated and he is incomplete. But as soon as he (sacrificer) obtains her, he is regenerated and then he becomes complete. After certain libation a ladder is placed against the sacrificial post and the sacrificer in front of his wife mounts until his head overtops the post. Being ascending the sacrificer uses the formula: - “We have become *Prajāpati*’s children; for he who offers the *Vājapeya* indeed becomes *Prajāpati*’s child⁶⁵. He then touches the wheat (top-piece) with, ‘we have gone to the light, O ye gods! For he who offers the *Vājapeya*, indeed goes to the light⁶⁶. And as to why he touches the wheat: wheat is food, and he who offers the *Vājapeya* wins food, for *Vājapeya* is the same as *annapeya* (food and drink): thus whatever food he has thereby won, there with now that he has gone to the supreme goal, he puts himself in contact and possesses himself of it- therefore he touches the wheat⁶⁷. Then he rises by the measure of his head over the post, with “we have become immortal, whereby he wins the world of the gods”⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ *Śat.Brā* – V/2/1/10 - “*Jāya ehi svo rohāveti rohābetyāha jāyā* |”

⁶⁵ Ibid - V/2/1/11- “*Sa rohati | Prajāpate prajā.....yajate* |”

⁶⁶ Ibid- V/2/1/12- “*Atha go dhumānupasṛsati.....vājapeyena yajate* |”

⁶⁷ Ibid - V/2/1/13- “*Ananaṃ vai godhuamā annaṃ vā.....pṛsati* |”

⁶⁸ Ibid- V/2/1/14- “*Atha sirsnā upamatyujjihite.....no ujjayati* |”

After that the sacrificer “throw up to him bags of salt; for salt means cattle, and cattle is food, and he who offers the *Vājapeya* wins food, for *Vājapeya* is the same as annapeya: thus whatever food, he thereby gained, therewith now that he has gone to the supreme goal, he puts himself in contact and make it his own-therefore they throw bags of salt⁶⁹ up to him”⁷⁰. Then the priests touch the sacrificer with bags of salt earth in *Aśvattha* leaves⁷¹. This act is done as a mark of securing fertility⁷². The sacrificer descends on a piece of gold and steps upon a piece of skin spread out by the priests. A throne, made of udumbara wood, is placed for him in front of the *Havirdhāna* (cart shed) behind the *Āhavanīya* fire. The priest placing him on the throne says- “Thou art the ruler, the ruling lord! Whereby he makes him the ruler, ruling over these subjects of his –Thou art firm and steadfast! Whereby he makes him firm and steadfast in this world;- Thee for the tilling!- Thee for peaceful dwelling! Thee for wealth! Thee for thrift!’ whereby he means to say (here I seat) thee for the welfare (of the people),”⁷³. Being seated on the throne the sacrificer offers seven *vāja-prasavaniya* oblations. Seventeen kinds of food are brought in a vassal made of *udumbara* wood by which the oblations are made. Hymns from the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*⁷⁴ are uttered in praise of *Soma*, *Agni*, *Aryamāna*, *Bṛhaspati*, *Indra*, *Viṣṇu*, *Pusan*, *Aśvins*, *Savitṛ* and *Vāk* (sacrificer). The

⁶⁹ Williams, Monier, Sanskrit English Dictionary, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi-2002, Page-223 (The term used for salt is ‘Uṣaputa’. Sir Monier Williams takes the term ‘uṣa’ for salt.)

⁷⁰ *Śat.Brā* - V/2/1/16- “*Athainamuṣaputairnudsyanti | pasabo vā uṣā annam vai pasavo’ nnam.....dasyanti |*”

⁷¹ *Ibid* - V/2/1/17 – “*Aśvattheṣu palāṣesu panaddhā bhavanti |*”

⁷² Cahakroborty, Haripada, Vedic India political and legal institutions in Vedic literature, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1981, Page-209.

⁷³ *Śat.Brā* - V/2/1/25- “*Sa’āstrñāti | Iya te rādi’ti rājyamevā.....sādhave ttvetyevaitadāha*”

⁷⁴ *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*- IX/23-29

sacrificer then is made to sit on a black antelope skin, with his face to east and with a small gold and silver plate is placed on either side of him. Having got himself anointed in that position, he utters the formulas of the *Ujiti* Victory oblations and says: “with the word of one syllable *Agni* the breath: may I win that; with the (metre) of seventeen syllables *Prajāpati* won the seventeen fold *stoma*: may I win that”⁷⁵.

Repetition of number seventeen :

One of the major characters of the *Vājapeya* sacrifice is that the number seventeen is predominant. For instance, the 17 animals are sacrificed, 17 objects are distributed as fees, and it lasts for 17 days also⁷⁶ This number is mystically connected with *Prajāpati*, the lord of creation, who is productiveness itself, who created the sacrifice as a counterpart of himself, who is identical with the sun, and from whom the goddess *Śri* is said to have arisen. So, the king who has performed this rite aspires to the highest excellence of identity like *Prajāpati*⁷⁷.

So, after observing the various rituals attached with the *Vājapeya* ceremony it is clear that these rituals actually highlights the character of the Vedic kingship and the divinity of the king. As the ordeals like cow raid, chariot race are executed to test the physical power of the elected king.

⁷⁵ *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā* – V/2/2/17-“*Agnirekāksareṇa prāṇamudajayattamujjyeṣaṁ Prajāpati sapadasāsareṇa saptadasaṁ stomamudjajattamujjeṣaniti* | ”

⁷⁶ Saraswati, Swamini Atmaprajnananda , Nomenclature of the Vedas, by, D.k.Print world, 2012, Page- 222.

⁷⁷ Gonda, J, Ancient Indian Kingship from the religious point of view,, E.J.BRILL, 1966, Page-84.

AŚVAMEDHA :

The *Aśv amedha* or the horse sacrifice is one of the most ancient and important religious ceremonies by which the king approved his claim to suzerainty over his neighbors. It is performed by that ruler whose strength, power and wealth uphold such an aspirant undertaking. By performing this sacrifice, the sacrificer extends his empire, increases his strength and power and achieved success in new enterprises. Actually the horse is a representative of royal power and domain (*Kṣatriya*)⁷⁸. During sacrifice, both the horse and the king have to abstain from carnal pleasure in order to enhance their strength⁷⁹. Anyone who wants to secure the ‘heroic power’ should perform this sacrifice. By performing this sacrifice, “the *brāhmaṇa* becomes a *mantra* making *ṛsi*, the military man a piercing hero, the *Vaiśya* a wealthy and successful breeder and farmer, the women became pretty and faithful, the grain ripened without previous ploughing, there was no want of food, liquid was everywhere and so on”⁸⁰.

The *Aśvamedha* sacrifice is regarded as the king of all sacrifices⁸¹ and the bull of all sacrifices⁸². It is said that *Prajāpati* gave all the sacrifices to the Gods but preserved the *Aśvamedha* for himself. It is a means of obtaining all desired objects and of attaining all attainments or success.⁸³ The *Aśvamedha* is

⁷⁸ *Śat.Brā* – XIII/2/2/15-“*kṣatram vā aśva* | ”

⁷⁹ Gonda, J, Ancient Indian Kingship from the religious point of view, E.J.BRILL , 1966, Page- 111

⁸⁰ Ibid, Page- 112

⁸¹ *Śat.Brā* – XIII/2/2/1 “*Rājā vā eṣa yajñanām yadaśvamedhaḥ* | ”

⁸² Ibid- XIII/1/2/2- “*Bṛṣabha eṣa yajñanām yadaśvamedhaḥ* | ”

⁸³ Ibid- “XIII/4/1/1 “*Sarvān kāmān āpnotsarvā vyastīrvyāśtruta sarvānnaha vai kāmānāpnoti sarvā.....yo aśvamedhena yajate* | ”

actually a *soma* sacrifice with political significance which aims at the attainment of paramount sovereignty. It is considered as a victory celebration rite⁸⁴. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* has identified the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice with *Prajāpati*⁸⁵. Regarding the results of the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* declares that – “He attains everything who performs the *Aśvamedha*; it is the expiation of all crimes; it is the medicine of all”⁸⁶. The ruler who is not satisfied with *rājya* or *Sāmrājya* but to attain unrivalled paramount sovereignty should perform the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* calls it a *Kṣatriya yajña*⁸⁷. It is also mentioned that if any weak ruler performs this sacrifice he becomes defeated⁸⁸. Hence, the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice involved an assertion of power and political authority which a king of undisputed supremacy should possess.

Before the actual performance of the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, the sacrificial horse which is black in the forehead, white in the back part, and which has a mark on its forehead is let loose to roam freely over the whole country for a year. A large number of royal attendants consisting of various types of fighters go with the horse for its protection. It is the duty of the attendants to protect the horse from all dangers and calamities and bring it back uninjured to the sacrificer. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives a list of the attendants- “a hundred

⁸⁴ Keith. A.B, RPVU (Vol-II), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1989,Page- 344

⁸⁵ *Śat.Brā* – XIII/2/2/13, 13/4/1/15- “*Prajāpatiraśvamedhaḥ* |”

⁸⁶ Ibid- XIII/3/1/1- “*yo ’śvamedhena yajate sarva eva bhavati sarvasya vā eṣā prāyascittih sarvasya bhesajām* |”

⁸⁷ Ibid XIII/4/1/2-“*Kṣatriya yajña vā eṣa yadaśvamedha iti* | ”

⁸⁸ Ibid- XIII/1/6/3- “*Tasmād rāstryaśvamedhena yajet parā vā eṣa sicyate yo,balośvamedhena yajate* | ”

royal princes clad in armour; a hundred warriors armed with swords, a hundred sons of heralds and headman bearing quivers fitted with arrows; a hundred sons of attendants and charioteers bearing staves- and a hundred exhausted worn out horses amongst which, having let loose that (sacrificial) horse they guard it⁸⁹. From the list of attendants of the sacrificial horse it is clear that people from both the nobility and common men formed the complete force to guard the sacrificial steed. This passage is very important as it gives us a clear idea regarding the different classes of fighters and also the names of various missiles, weapons, armours used in that period. Actually, this large number of attendants as noted in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* bespeaks the military power of the king. While roaming if any one seizes the horse, it means that the person stands in the way of sacrificer's attaining paramount sovereignty. In such a situation, the attendants of the horse fight with the person. If they become fail to do so, the sacrificer cannot perform the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. While the horse is roaming the sacrificer performed various homas relating to different limbs and various functions of the horse. Till the return of the horse, the sacrificer appoints some *Brāhmiṇ* and *Kṣatriya* lyricists who sing song on the pious and heroic deeds of the king⁹⁰. In the day time the *Brāhmiṇ* singers sing the glory of the king relating charity, sacrifice and acts of piety. In the evening the *Kṣatriya* singers will sing his glory relating to his deeds of valour, victory in war and so on.

⁸⁹ *Śat.Brā* - XIII/4/2/5- “*Tasyaite purostād raksitara upakṛptā bhavanti : Rājaputrāḥ kavacinaḥ sataṃ rājanyā.....yasminnenamapisrjya rakṣanti* |”

⁹⁰ *Ibid* – XIII/1/5/1 –“*Vināśmai vādyate brāhmaṇau* |”

After the return of the horse the main sacrifice takes place. The chief queen *Mahisī* anoints the body of the horse and places a hundred and one gold coins in its mane and tail. At this stage a theological discussion known as *Brahmodya* (debate consisting of solution of riddles) takes place between the superintending priest and the *Hotr*⁹¹. Another such debate held before the *Sviṣṭakṛt* offerings between the sacrificer (*Yajamāna*) and *Adhvaryu*.

In the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice queens play an important role. Not only the chief queen called (*Mahisī*) but all the queens of the monarch with their full retinue and implements have to take active part in this ceremony. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it is mentioned that ‘the four wives of the king come with four hundred female attendants and a young maiden to wash the feet of the horse⁹². Each of the four queens is followed by a hundred female attendants as presented below :

- The chief queen known as *Mahisī* is attended by hundred princesses (*Rājaputrī*) of royal family⁹³.
- *Vāvāta* or the favorite queen served with a hundred females of royal descent (*Rājanya*)⁹⁴.

⁹¹ *Śat.Brā* - XIII/2/6/9- “*Hotā ca Brahmā ca brahmodya vadat* | ”

⁹² *Ibid* -XIII/5/2/1- “*Patnyaḥ pāñnejanairudāyanti catasraścca jāyāḥ kumārī pañcamī catvāri ca satāni anucāriṇām* | ”

⁹³ *Ibid*- XIII/5/2/5- “*Tasyai satam rājaputrya anucaryo bhavanti* | ”

⁹⁴ *Ibid*- XIII/5/2/6- “*Tasyai satam rājanya anucaryo bhavanti* | ”

- *Parivr̥ktā*, the childless discarded or neglected wife of the king is served with daughters of heralds (*suta*) and head man of villages (*Grāmanī*) consisting of hundred in all⁹⁵.
- The fourth wife of the king known as *Pālāgali*, who is inferior to the other three queens in social rank is attendant by a hundred females who are the daughters of chamberlain and charioteers⁹⁶.

From this passage we can learn the constitutional status and dignity of the queens in the Vedic age.

In the presence of the four queens the sacrificial horse is laid on a blanket soaked in butter and its head is kept towards the east and legs facing the north and after that the horse is choked to death. Besides slaughtering of the horse, there is a very peculiar rite performed in this sacrifice. The chief queen *Mahisī* lies down by the side of the dead horse. Then the chief queen and horse are covered in a blanket and the chief queen (*Mahisī*) try to unite with the horse. The Hotṛ abuses the crowned queen in ‘obscene’ language and she returns the ‘obscene’ along with her attendant princess. This rite is performed with the intention of facilitating the birth of a virtuous and vigorous son as indicated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁹⁷. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also records an unknown dialogue between the priests and other wives of the sacrificer⁹⁸. Then the dead horse is dissected and various limbs of its body is extracted for

⁹⁵ *Śat.Brā* - XIII/5/2/7- “*Tasyai satam sūtagrāmanya dhuhitāro ’nucāryo bhavanti* | ”

⁹⁶ *Ibid* - XIII/5/2/8 – “*Tasyai satam kṣatrasamgrahitr̥nān duhitāro ’nucāryo bhavanti* | ”

⁹⁷ *Ibid* -XIII/1/9/9, *Vāj.Saṃ*- XXIII/22-31- “*Āyasya yajamānasya viro jāyatāmiti* | ”

⁹⁸ *Ibid*- XIII/2/9

oblation. The blood of the horse is kept in vessel for *Sviṣṭakṛt* offerings. The different organs of the horse are offered in the *Āhavanīya* fire along with butter. These offerings follow the *Sviṣṭakṛt* homa where the horses' blood is offered as oblation and this homa again follows the usual *Patni-Samyāja* ceremony. On the following day a soma sacrifice having the *Atirātra samsthā* is performed followed by a *paśu yāga*.

Aśvamedha sacrifice ends with the concluding ablution ceremony known as *Avabhṛtha* rite. There is a peculiar ceremony including in this *Avabhṛtha* rite known as *Jumbaka* offering. The offering is made on the head of “the ‘white-spotted, bald-headed man with protruding teeth and reddish brown eyes’”⁹⁹ which is *Varuṇa*'s form. By this offering the sacrificer redeems himself from *Varuṇa*'s noose. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*¹⁰⁰ it is mentioned that by performing the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice one can redeem all sins. It may be mentioned here that in Vedic Period Indra with his horse in the form of thunderbolt defeats the *asuras*, especially the *Vṛtra*. Hence, the horse in the sacrifice gives the power to the earthy king to slay his foes. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is quoted: “verily, the *Aśvamedha* means royal sway: it is after royal sway that horse strives who guards the horse. Those of them who reach the end become (sharers) the royal sway, but those who do not reach the end

⁹⁹ *Śat.Brā* – XIII/3/6/5- “*Varuṇa vai Jumbaka sāksādeva Varuṇamvayajate sukklasya.....varuṇamvayajate | |*”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*- XIII/3/1/1-“*Sarvampāpmānantarati brahmahatyām yo 'śvamedhena yajate |*”

are cut off from royal sway. Wherefore let him who holds royal sway performs the horse sacrifice”¹⁰¹.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*¹⁰² records the name of the kings who performed the horse sacrifice and they are as follows:-

The priest *Indrota Daivapa Saunaka* performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice for King *Janamejaya Parikṣita*. The king *Janamejaya* bound for the Gods a black spotted, grain eating horse, adorned with a golden ornament and with yellow garlands. Three more kings belonging to the same dynasty viz. *Bhimasena*, *Ugrasena* and *Srautasena* also performed the horse sacrifice. The *Kausalya* king *Para Atnara*, son of king *Atnara*, king *Purukutsa* of *Ikṣāku* race, the *Ayogava* king *Maruttara Aviksita*, the *Pāñcāla* king *Kraivya*, *Ddhvasa Dvaitavana*, the king of the *Matyas* performed the horse sacrifice.

King *Bharata Dauhsyanti* executed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice and attained the vast territory and wide administration. Near the bank of the river *Yamuna*, *Bharata* binds seventy-eight (78) horses for the sacrifice and fifty five (55) horses near the *Gangā*. Thus in total he bound one hundred and thirty three horses and subdued the whole earth. And there is no competitor against him. There is a *gāthā* or laudatory verse attached to it as every king who performed the horse sacrifice attains paramount sovereignty. One such *gāthā* praising the glorious deeds of king *Bharata* runs thus- once the king *Bharata*

¹⁰¹ *Śat.Brā* –XIII/1/6/3- “*Rāṣṭraṃ vā aśvamedhaṃ | Rāṣṭra ete vyavacchante ye aśva rakṣanti teṣāṃ.....tasmād rāstryaśvamedhena yajate | |*”

¹⁰² *Ibid* - XIII/5/4

performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice with a thousand horses and that time there was no king who preceded him. King *Yajñatura* of *Sviknas*, *Soma satrasaha*, the *Pāñcāla* king also performed this sacrifice. We also get the reference of one king who seized the sacrificial horse loosen by other king. For example, King *Satanika Satrajita* seized the white sacrificial horse of king *Dhṛtarāstra* in the tenth month of its roaming and performed the horse sacrifice with that horse.

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*¹⁰³ records the names of various kings who ruled over in different parts of India. These kings were consecrated with Indra's great consecration by their priests. They are presented below :

- The priest *Tura Kāvāṣeya* consecrated king *Janamejaya*, son of *Parikṣita* who conquered the earth and performed the *Aśvamedha*.
- The king *Sāryāta Mānava* was consecrated by the sage *Chyāvana Bhārgava*.
- *Somaśuṣma*, son of *Vājaratna* anointed king *Satanika Satrajita*.
- *Parvata* and *Nārada* consecrated the king *Āmbāśṭhya* and *Yudhāṃśrauṣṭi Augrasenya*.
- The king *Viśvakarmā Bhauvana* was anointed by the sage *Kāsyapa*.
- *Vaiśiṣṭha* consecrated *Sudās Paijāvana*.
- *Samvarta* Angirasa consecrated *Marutta Aviksita*.

¹⁰³ *Ait.Brā* – VIII/39

- The sage *Udamaya Ātreya* (i.e. son of *Atri*) anointed king *Anga*. The king *Anga* donated golden ornaments, a hundred cores of cows and eighty eight thousand (88,000) white horses to his sage (*Udamaya Ātreya*).
- The sage *Dirghatama* consecrated the king *Bharata*, son of *Duṣmanta*. This *Bharata* king performed one hundred and thirty three (133) horse sacrifices.

These kings performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice after conquering the whole earth.

Thus from the above discussion it is clear that the sacrifices like the *Rājasūya*, the *Vājapeya* and the *Aśvamedha* are considered as the Major sacrifices of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* with high political significance. As by the performance of these sacrifices one wins the *Rājya*, *Sāmrajya* or even the paramount sovereignty. Some important features of these sacrifices are presented below :

***Rājasūya* :**

- As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the consecration ceremony of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice, seventeen kinds of liquids are collected from different sources and the accepted king is sprinkled with those liquids. Actually these different types of liquids represent the various power and quality of the king which a king should possess.

- In *Ratninām haviṃsi* ceremony, the consecrated king makes offering to the houses of the *Ratnins*. The king made offerings to his *Ratnins* (king-maker) with the intension to seek their support highlights the political significance of this ritual.
- In the *Rājasūya* ceremony, the king has to step on the tiger's skin. The tiger is a symbolic of kingship, as tiger is the king of beasts. By stepping on the tiger's skin the consecrated king gains the strength and preeminence of the tiger.
- Mimic cow raid in the *Rājasūya* ceremony is the imitation of the old practices. It is performed with the intention to test the physical strength and fitness of the king.
- The game of dice in the *Rājasūya* ceremony is compulsory part of it. The winning of this game by the sacrificer symbolizes his conquest over all castes and all regions.

Vājapeya :

- In the *Vājapeya* sacrifice, there is a race of seventeen chariots in which the sacrificer has to become victorious. The purpose of this rite is to secure the swiftness of the steed as strength.
- In the *Vājapeya* sacrifice, the sacrificer with his wife mounts on a chariot wheel, which is the symbol of the sun. This act is done with the

intention to secure the exaltation of the sacrificer. After descent from the post the sacrificer is anointed and proclaimed as victor.

- The sacrificer steps on a piece of gold after descend from the post. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* declares the Gold as immortal life. Thus stepping on the gold it is expected that the sacrificer would gain the immortal life as gold.
- In the *Vājapeya* sacrifice the *Adhvaryu* spreads the he-goat skin. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions that the goat skin is no other than *Prajāpati*. Therefore, the *Adhvaryu* by spreading the goat skin makes the sacrificer to be *Prajāpati* himself. He also spreads the goat skin with the intention to endow the sacrificer with royal power.

Aśvamedha :

- In the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, the four queens of the king take active part in the sacrificial performance. They (queens) attend the sacrifice with their full retinue. Participation of each queen with their retinue actually highlights the constitutional status and dignity of the queen in the Vedic period.
- The sacrificial horse in the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice is guarded by hundred royal attendants. These attendants include the various classes of people. Involvement of the various people as royal attendants makes it clear that the social discrimination was infrequent under the ruling monarch.

- The *Aśvamedha* is a sacrifice performed for the attainment of paramount sovereignty. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* declares the *Aśvamedha* as a *Kṣatriya yajña*. That means if any weak ruler performs this sacrifice he will be defeated.