



## A Study of the Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra with reference to Agnihotra Yāga

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### Abstract

*The Āśvalayana Śrautasūtra is one of the most important Śrautasūtras of Vedic literature which deals with different types of śrauta sacrifices. The Āśvalayana Śrautasūtra consists of twelve chapters. In the second chapter of this śrautasūtra the Agnihotra sacrifice and other sacrifices are described in details. According to the different characteristic features, śrauta rites consist of five yāgas namely – Homa, Iṣṭi, Paśu, Soma and Satra. Agnihotra is the model of all Homa sacrifices. The objective of the paper is to discuss the different aspect of the Agnihotra yāga in the above mentioned context.*

**Keywords:** *Āśvalayana, Śrautasūtra, Sacrifice, Homa, Agnihotra, Yāga*

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### **Introduction**

Śrautasūtras belongs to the vedāngas. Vedāngas are the auxiliary works to get into the meaning of the Vedas. Veda means supreme knowledge or the knowledge per excellence. The word Veda is derived from the root 'vid' with the suffix 'ghañ' means to know. Veda is defined by Āpastamba as the conjoint text of the Mantras and the Brāhmanas.<sup>1</sup> Manu defines Veda as the root of all Dharmas.<sup>2</sup> There are four Vedas - Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda, Yajurveda and the Sāmaveda. All the four Vedas have their own Saṁhitās, Brāhmanas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. The vedāngas are called the limbs of the Vedas. There are six vedāngas, such as - Śikṣā, Kalpa, Vyākaraṇa, Chanda, Jyotiṣa and Nirukta. Paṇini describes the vedāngas as the six important parts of body of the Veda like man. It is mentioned in the

Paṇiniya Śikṣā that the Chandas are the feet of the Vedas , Kalpas are the hands , Jyotiṣa are the eyes , Nirukta are the ears , Śikṣā is the nose and Vyākaraṇa is the mouth. <sup>3</sup>

Among the six vedāngas, kalpas are the most voluminous texts. Kalpasūtras have developed a unique style called the Sūtras. Sūtra means a matter which is written in a few words, but when it is explained it becomes wide and broad.<sup>4</sup> The main feature of sūtra is to give more knowledge and information in a few words. Kalpasūtras are of four kinds, they are – Śrautasūtras, Gṛhyasūtras, Dharmasūtras and the Śulvasūtras. The Śrautasūtras deal with the rule for the execution of the great sacrifices which lasts for many days. In Śrauta sacrifices several sacrificial fire burn and a large number of priests are employed. The Śrauta manuals of two schools i.e, the Śāṅkhyaṇa and the Āśvalāyana belongs to the Ṛgveda.

Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra consists of twelve books which are related to the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. Āśvalāyana is also known as the author of the fourth book of the Aitareya Āraṇyaka and according to the tradition he was the pupil of Śaunaka. The Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra consists of twelve chapters and each chapter is again divided into some kaṇḍikās. All the twelve chapters of Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra gives detail description of the various important śrauta sacrifices. The first chapter of Āśvalāyana Śrautasūtra deals with the Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga. This yāga is described first as the model of all Iṣṭi yāgas. In the second chapter Agnyadheya ceremony, Agnihotra yāga, various Kāmya iṣṭis and Cāturmāsya yāgas are described in details. The other ten chapters also deal with various śrauta sacrifices.

### **Division of Śrauta Rites**

The śrauta rites are fourteen in number. They are divided into two main groups of seven havis sacrifices and seven soma sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> The name of the seven havis sacrifices are – Agnihotra, Darśapūrṇmāsa, Āgrāyaṇa, Piṇḍapitṛyajña, Niruda, Paśubandha and Sautramani. The seven soma sacrifices are - Agniṣṭoma, Atyāgniṣṭoma, Ukthya, Ṣoḍoṣī, Vājapeya, Atirātra and Āptoryama. The havis sacrifices consist of offerings of milk, ghee, grain, cakes and purodāśa. The most common of these sacrifices is the Agnihotra, where daily morning and evening oblation of milk is given to the three fires. In the Aitareya Āraṇyaka śrauta sacrifices are divided into these five categories- Agnihotra, Darśapūrṇmāsa, Cāturmāsya, Paśu and Soma.<sup>6</sup> According to the different characteristic features, the śrauta rites consists of five yāgas namely – Homa, Iṣṭi, Paśu, Soma and Satra. Agnihotra

is the model of all Homa sacrifices. The model of all Iṣṭi sacrifices is the Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga, Niruda Paśubandha is the model of Paśuyāga. Agniṣṭoma is the model of Soma sacrifices and Gavāmayana is the model of Satra sacrifices.

### **Sacrificial Fire**

In every śrauta sacrifice, three sacrificial fires are very important. These are – Āhavanīya, Gārhapatya, and the Dakṣiṇa fire. These three fires are placed in three sides of the Vedi or alter. The Āhavanīya fire is placed to the east of the alter, the Gārhapatya is placed to the west and the Dakṣiṇa fire is placed to the south of the alter. Among the three fires the Gārhapatya fire alone is maintained continuously. The Āhavanīya and Dakṣiṇa fires are derived from the Gārhapatya but they are not always maintained. The Gārhapatya fire is used to cook the food, oblation and to warm the dishes. The Āhavanīya is the fire for offering oblation to the Gods. The Dakṣiṇa fire is placed to the south of the alter to drive away the evil spirits and souls of the dead by its flames.

### **Priests**

To perform śrauta sacrifices, presence of four official priests is essential. The four priests are – i) Hotā ii) Udgātā iii) Adhvaryu and iv) the Brahmā. Priests are the main connector between the sacrifice and the God. Generally, the brāhmaṇas well versed in the Vedas are appointed as priest.<sup>7</sup> They are also termed as the protector of the sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> Each of these four priest have three assistants with them. But the presence of all these priests is not necessary in every sacrifice.

### **Āhutidravayas**

In the śrauta sacrifices different types of dravyas are offered as āhuti. Among the āhutidravayas mik and milk products like curd, ājya, ghee, butter are the main. Purodāśa which is made with the powder of rice is also used as āhutidravaya. Beside these, in different sacrifices different types of dravyas are offered like – caru, animal fat, soma juice and many other things.

### **Instruments and Utensils**

In śrauta sacrifices different types of instruments and utensils are used which are termed as Yajñāyudhas. These are used to offer oblation in the fire and also used for keeping the dravyas of the sacrifice. Some of the utensils used in the sacrifices are – Sphya, Kapāla, Agnihotrahavanī, Sūrpa, Juhu, Upabhṛt, Sruk, Dhruva, Īdāpātra, Ājyasthāli, Prasitraharaṇa and many more.

## **Short Description of Agnihotra Yāga**

Agnihotra is the model or prakṛti of Homa sacrifices. After establishment of the śrauta agni in the home with the agnyādhan ceremony, a sapatnīk yajamāna can perform the Agnihotra yāga daily. A sapatnīk yajamāna performs the Agnihotra daily morning and evening by offering the oblation of milk, curd and purodāśa in the āhavanīya fire for the deity Sūrya and Agni. This yāga is considered as nityakarma for the three classes of people viz., Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya and the Vaiśya in the Vedic age. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa it is mentioned that this yāga must be performed by the householder till his death.<sup>9</sup> the Agnihotra yāga must be performed by the yajamāna himself. In certain circumstances this yāga may be performed by his son, brother or son-in-law on behalf of the yajamāna. In absence of these persons it may be performed by a priest.<sup>10</sup> On behalf of the yajamāna, if a priest can perform the yāga then it is only Adhvaryu who has the right to complete the yāga.<sup>11</sup> But in pūrṇimā and in amāvasyā the yajamāna has to perform this yāga.

The Agnihotra yāga is a daily performing rite for an āhitāgni yajamāna, but it is found that it should be performed for getting some desired fruit also. In that case the oblation of offering are different. The main oblation offered in this yāga are – milk, curd or yavāgu, but for some special desire, rice, anna and gr̥ta are offered. As a nityakarma, the main oblation of offering for the Agnihotra yāga is milk. To attain any animal or to attain the heaven the oblation of pāyasa is offered, to attain the indriyas milk is offered, yavāgu for attaining village and for attaining strength, curd is offered.<sup>12</sup> As milk is the main oblation of offering in this yāga, so for that purpose the yajamāna should bring a cow which is called the “Agnihotra Gābhī”. The Agnihotra ceremony starts at the evening. The sapatnīk yajamāna first kindle the āhavanīya fire and the dakṣiṇa fire from the gārhapatya fire, then milk is warmed in the gārhapatya fire taking a sacrificial utensil. For offering oblation in the fire two wooden spoons are necessary, one small spoon is called Srub and the big one is called Agnihotrahavanī. In the gārhapatya fire oblation is offered to the deity Agni Gṛhapatī and the second oblation is offered to the deity Prajāpati. In the dakṣiṇa fire the first oblation is given to Agni Annapati and the second is given to Prajāpati. After finishing the offerings the yajamāna consume the remaining havirdravayas and kindle fire in the three agnikunḍas by giving three samit’s (wooden sticks). Morning Agnihotra is also performed in the same manner, only difference is that, in morning agnihotra the first āhuti is offered to the deity Sūrya.

This Agnihotra yāga is performed by a sapatnīk yajamāna only, a bachelor or a widower cannot perform this yāga, if the widower can marry again then he becomes able to sit in the yāga. It is also mentioned that if the yajamāna is not interested to marry again, then by imagining his late wife he can perform the ceremony. The morning and the evening ceremonies are jointly called Agnihotra because the Agnihotra yāga first starts in the evening with offering oblation to the Agni. As the Agni is the main deity in the evening ceremony, it is called the Agnihotra yāga.

### **Points of Agreement Between Agnihotra and the Other Yāgas**

- i) Agnihotra which is the model of all Homa sacrifices is a daily performing rite. It is the only yāga where the yajamāna can recite the mantras at the time of offering oblation. In the Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga four official priest are required for performing the rites. In Paśuyāga presence of six priests is essential. In Somayāga, sixteen priests are required to performe the yāga. In the Satrayāgas, the yajamānas are the priests. In Satrayāga , number of priest may occur from seventeen to twenty four and one among them is called ‘Gṛhpati’. Here we find one similarity between Agnihotra and Satrayāga, that both of this yāga are performed by the yajamāna or the sacrificer.
- ii) Regarding āhutidravys the Agnihotra yāga has similarity with the Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga. In Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga also milk products are used like – milk, curd, ghee and ājya.
- iii) In all the sacrifices agnyādhān ceremony is performed. Agnyādhān means the establishment of fire in the three agnikuṇḍas.
- iv) Three agnikuṇḍas are also common in all śrauta sacrifices.
- v) The vedis of Agnihotra and Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga are also same.

### **Points of Difference Between the Agnihotra and the Other Yāgas**

- i) Regarding number of priest it has difference with the other yāgas except the Satra yāga.
- ii) In case of āhutidravys , some dravyas are common like milk products, but except milk products many other dravyas are used in other yāgas.
- iii) Agnihotra is a daily performing rite but the other yāgas are not performed daily.
- iv) The Vedis of other yāgas except Darśapūrṇmāsa yāga are different from the vedi of Agnihotra yāga.

- v) In terms of deities, only Agni is common in all sacrifices. Except Agni other deities are different from the Agnihotra yāga.

### Concluding Observations

From the above discussion it is observed that, various types of sacrifices were prevalent in Vedic period. Agnihotra homa was performed by mass people daily as a nityakarma. Another important thing is that a bachelor had no right in this yāga. A widower also had no right to perform any yāga. This shows the importance of woman in the society. Only a married person had the right to perform any sacrifice. The wife of a yajamāna also had to perform some duties in the yāga directly. From this we can assume that, women were in a good position at that time. Caste system was also present at that period because only the three caste have the right to perform sacrifices, sudras have no right in the sacrifices. From the study of the sacrifice it is also observed that the yāgas were performed for getting desired fruit. It was also a way of transition between the Gods and the human beings. People worship the Gods to get something in return. But another point is that it was also performed to pay homage to them. Beside these, it is observed that, sacrifices were performed not only for attaining something but also for sacrificing the inner sense of jealous, greed, affection and enjoyment. In upaniṣad we find that, in sacrifices the soul of a person is offered in form of āutidravya in the fire because self-sacrifice is the main aim of a yāga which gives immense pleasure and leads to the attainment of Amṛtatva “**tena tyaktena bhujjithāh**”(Īṣopaniṣad-1). That is why it is mentioned in the brāhmaṇa granthas that sacrifice or yāga is the best work in the life of a person “**Yajña vai śreṣṭhatamaṁ karma**”(Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa.3.2.1.4; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.1.7.1.5) .

### Notes and references

1. Āp.Śs.24.1.31 – “mantrabrāhmanayor vedanāmadheyam”.
2. Medhatithi's commentary on Manusmṛti – 2.6.” vedo akhilo dharmamūlam.”
3. Pāṇiniya Śikṣā 41-42 – “chandah pādau tu vedasya hastau kalpoatha paṭhyate, jyotiṣam ayanam cakṣur niruktam stotram ucyate, Śikṣā ghrānam tu vedasya mukham vyākaraṇam smṛtam.”
4. Āśv.Śs. ed. By A.K.Chattopadhyay. introd Pg 13 “ alpākṣaram asandigdham sāravad viśvato mukham; astobham anavadyaṅca sūtram sūtrabidah viduh”
5. Śat.Br.1.7.2.10 – “dve vā āhuti somāhutihirevānyājyāhutihiranyā ityādi.”
6. Ait.Ār.2.3.3 – “sa esa yajñah pañca vidho agnihotram darśapūrnāmāsau cāturmāsyaṅni paśu somah.”

7. Śat.Br.3.5.3.12 – “ye vai brāhmanah susrubamsoanūcānāste biprah.”
8. Śat.Br.1.5.1.12 – “yajñasya prāvitārah”
9. Śat.Br.12.4.1.1 – “etadvai jarāmaryam satram jarayā hyevasmāt mucyate mṛtyunā vā.”
10. Taitt.Sam. 2.3.6 – “tasyaitasyagnihotrasya yajñakratoreka ṛtvika.”
11. Kāt.Śs.4.13.1 – “udhareti yajamāno bruyā sāyam prātaragnihotre.”
12. Āśv.Śs.2.3.2–  
“yavāgurodanodadhisarpirgrāmākāmannaadyakāmendriyakāmatejaskāmān  
ām.”

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