CHAPTER - IV
NATURE OF VEDIC SACRIFICES REVEALED IN
ŚRAUTA SŪTRAS WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
KĀTYAYANA ŚRAUTASŪTRA

The Śrautasūtras are related to the Vedāṅga literature. The Śrautas sacrifices are dealt with elaborately in these texts mainly. In the Āpastambaśrautasūtras it is stated that these sacrifices are twenty one in number. These are termed as Pākayajñasaṁsthā, Haviryajñasaṁsthā, Saṁsthā; and Somasaṁsthā’ which are seven in numbers respectively1.

Among these the Pākayajñas are performed in general fire i.e., ‘laukikāgni’. Except these all the yajñas of the Haviryajñasaṁsthā and Somasaṁsthās are performed in the Śrautāgni i.e., the fire acquired with

1. Āpastambaśrautasūtra, 24.1.1
the *agnyādheya*. It is an essential preliminary of all the yajñas. In its performance the necessity of producing the sacred fire is very essential.

This process is called the *adhanam*. In it, the *Śrāutāgni* is produced by churning two sticks of the *Āsvattha* tree i.e., the *aranī*-wood. Then these are placed in the respective places. From the point of view of *yajña*, it has the great significance. It symbolises that the sacrificial fire is the source of energy. It shows that the energy is created only with the attachment of two objects, where the movement is needed. This may exist both in the visible and invisible forms. In these sacrifices, the *Gārhapatyāgani, Dakṣināgni* and *Āhavanīyāgni* are established with the help of fire produced from *aranī*. The *Sabhya* and *Avasathyāgni*
are established either with the general fire of any source or the fire got by churning arañis.

The Śrauta sacrifices are mainly divided into two sections according to their nature. The Prakṛtiyāgas and the Vikṛtiyāgas. The Prakṛtiyāgas serve as norms for other yāgas. All the ‘aṅgayāgas’ i.e., sub-rituals are included here. But the Vikṛtiyāgas serve as the modification of the given norms. It is connected with only some of the special sub-rituals. According to this, ‘Agnihotra’ is the model of ‘Homa’ sacrifice and ‘Caturhotra’ is the modification of it. The ‘Darśapūrṇamāsa’ is the model of all iṣṭiyāgas and Prāyanīya, Dikṣaniya etc. are the modifications of it. The Niruḍhapāśubandha is
the model of all Pasuyāgas and the Cāturmāsya is the modification of it. The Agnistoma is the model of all Somayāgas and uktha, sōdhasi etc. are the modifications of it. The Gāvamāyana is the model of the satrayāgas. Among the Śrāutayajñas the Agnihotra is considered to be performed for life time by the yajamāna. The Vedic seers are careful not only in promoting healthy life, but also they involve to develop the spiritual life also. In it the oblations are offered in the name of deities viz., Agni, Prajāpati and Sūrya. These gods are immortal. They want to shine their daily life with the divine lustre of these gods. Regarding the recitation of the uddharana mantra, in the Agnihotra yāga Agni is worshipped with Vāk, Prāṇa, eyes, mind and ears by the five priests
on behalf of the yajamāna. It is supported by the sage Āpastamba. So, a sense of inner sacrifice is also included in this yāga. Here, the yajamāna tries to get the immortality with the power of the Sun. This idea is reflected in the verse where the yajamāna establishes the fire in the morning at the respective place of Āhavanīya. The daily performance of the Agnihotrayāga bears great significance. It was thought that by the sacrifice performed in the morning, any untowered event may be avoided. Also pollution in the atmosphere could be avoided by the performance of sacrifice in the evening. So also the morning libation was thought to make the air free from germs. Another sacrifice took

2. Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra, 2.2.4
place after the burning fire. i.e., a gift was offered to the ‘Adhvaryu’
priest by the yajamāna. The yajamāna offers this after giving a cow as
a gift which is called as ‘Vara’. It reflects the sense of charity and
honour to the learned being³. These yajñas are to be performed by the
three castes Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya and Vaiśya. The Yajamāna should
perform these along with his wife. The Darsā pūrṇamāsayañja is to be
performed both as the obligatory and optional. This is performed in the
‘New Moon’ and the ‘Full Moon’ day. Here in the modified rituals i.e.

‘nariṣṭhahoma’ the yajamāna offers the āhuti in the name of deities
pronouncing the term ‘idam na mama’ iti. Here humble offerings from

³. Āpastambaśrautasūtra, 5.11.4
the side of sense of consecration of the *yajamāna* is reflected. The

*Paśu-yāga* is to be performed every year. Slaughtering a goat with the

process of *sahijñapana* takes place in the fire. Symbolically it represents

the offering of the physical body of the *yajamāna* in the inward fire for

further purification. In the Somayāgas the libations made of *Soma* juice

are offered to the Agni. The *Soma* juice are offered three times in a day.

Here the *Soma* was considered as the deity. One thing is to be noticed

that most of the *yāgas* are performed in the juncture of two seasons or

sessions. These are related with the movement of the earth, the moon

and the sun according to their nature. For example, the *somayāga*

namely 'Ekāha' is performed within a day; whereas the 'Gavāmayana'
is performed within three hundred sixty one days. The activities for purification of mind, the preliminary expiatory rituals are mostly essential in every sacrifice. The priest Brahmā performs the expiatory homah by pronouncing the word ‘bhuḥ svāhā’ in the Gārhapatyāgni, the ‘bhuvah svāhā’ in the Dakṣiṇāgni and the ‘svah svāhā’ in the Āhavanīyāgni. Hence, it gives an idea that three types of energies pervading in the three worlds i.e., the earth the mid air and the heaven.

These are associate themselves to perform the sacrifice in the whole universe. These Śrautayajñas are thus performed not only for living being but also for paying a homage to the ancestors through the yāgas like Pindapitryajña etc. Even some of these yajñas like Rājasūya,
Vājapeya and Aśvamedha etc. control the kings character by taking oath that helps to administer the kingdom properly. The Cāturmāśya yajñas i.e., Vaiśvadevayajña, Varunapraghāsa and Sākamedha are performed on every four months periodically. These are started from the month of Phālguna i.e., spring season. These sacrifices indicate that the nature itself is sub-ordinate to the creator. The different seasons of the year are the different characteristic features of the creator. The performing of these yāgas in between the time of change of seasons help to keep up the environment of nature in an hygienic condition.

The īṣṭi yāga like Āgrayanesti is related with the production of new crops. According to Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra as this sacrifice is
related with the first fruits of the year, so it is known as the

Āgrayanēṣṭī. Here the production of the various crops according to sea-

son are offered first time to the creator. This shows that the yajña is a

kind of religious festival based on agriculture.

So, it is here worth noticing that the Śrauta yajñas are performed

for the welfare of the society. These are extensive in nature. These ritu-

als strictly follow the various injunctions related to it. The Yajamāna

with his wife was to resolve with some special austerities which help to

keep their probity. It is a team work, where the spiritual rebirth is pos-

sible by the performer of it. In the Somayāga the avabhṛtheṣṭi is

4. agre ayanani bhakṣaṇani yena karmanā tadāgrayaṇam /

Āśvalāyanaśrautasūtra, 2.9.1
considered such type of auspicious work. For performing these yajñas

the seers have given much importance for the act of reformation. Not

only the *yajamāna* but also the place of performing the yajñas and the

various materials including the fire-sticks, utensils are also purified in it.

These sacrifices are the process of conjugation between the material en-

ergy of earth and the heavenly spirit. Hence these sacrifices seem to be

considered as the integration of science and spirituality. These signifies

that yajñas are the continuous process not only for the welfare of the

human life but also for the nature to keep up this creation.

**Nature of Sacrifice in the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* :**

Almost all the Šrautasūtras hold specific concepts of sacrifice.
Among these the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* possesses a good number of concepts, as it deals, at length, with almost all the Vedic sacrifices.

These concepts come out in the process of discussing minute detail of sacrifice. The *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* related to the *Śuklayajurveda* is very important to know about the nature of *yajña*. Nobody can deny that the activities which are mentioned in the *Veda* are fruitless. It may be mysterious but it has extensive results. The result of any activity is mostly related with its nature. So, the performance of any activity means the getting of results. In the world of nature we see that the activities are often followed by their results. Thus the universe itself also depends on actions. This conjunction of results with every action is
looked upon everywhere. All the natural phenomena, the activities of
life cycle and all other incidents belong to some kind of action in
accordance with their nature. This co-relation of consequence with
activity brings the qualities of philanthropy. Considering it, all the Vedic
activities have been performed maintaining due rules which are
favourable for these. Supporting this view, in the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra*
it is mentioned that every Vedic activity has the capacity to possess the
result or outcome. Generally a state of being united is possible in most
of the yajñas. It may be materialistic or spiritualistic by nature. In the
Vedic age, people were mainly impressed by nature. So, they expressed

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5. *phalayuktāni karmāṇī / Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra, 1.1.2*
their gratitude to nature through their activities. The divine power has
been pervading everywhere to move this universe. The phenomenal
world along with the heavenly bodies is the physical manifestation of
*yajña* The divine powers are existed in it in different forms. Those who
possess it called the Devas. They are pertaining to the divine and noble
virtues which are beneficial for the nature. Some of these are in subtle
form and some other comes in our vision. The five mahābhūtas, the dif-
ferent energy of nature and some other elements which are helpful to
sustain the life like the trees, rivers and cattle etc. bear the qualities of
devas. Besides these the father, mother the preceptor and other respected
persons who are doing good to others without self interest are also
called the devas. They guide the society by imparting different beneficial knowledge and collaborate among themselves at the time of problems of the society. The sense of generosity arises in their activities.

Their noble and virtuous deeds bring both the spiritualistic and materialistic upliftment to the society. So, it is the duty of the common people to pay homage to them with due respect and honour. The Vedic people thought that what they have earned should not be enjoyed only for themselves, but also for the others who are needy and worthy. In this regard people offered both materials and spiritual objects to those deities maintaining due rules and esteem. This notion of giving arises
the sense of sacrifice in human mind. Hence in the *Kātyāyanasrautasūtra* it is mentioned that the offering oblations to the deities is called the *yajña*. It may happen in any form or mode relating to any divinity. But this must be performed with the sense of devotion and consecration.

This helps to vanish the egoism from the mind and establish a means of close proximity with the divinity. In this regard there is a difference between the *yajati* and *juhoti*. In the *yajati*, offerings are accomplished in a standing position with the *Vasāt-call*. The *yājyā* and *puronuvākyā* are needed in it. Whereas in the *juhoti*, the libations are offered in a

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6. *dravyam devata tyagah* / 
   *ibid.*, 1.2.2

7. *tisthadhoma vasatkarapradanā yājyā puronuvākyāvanto yajatayah* / 
   *ibid.*, 1.2.6
sitting position with the word Svāhā. The word juhoti is derived from the root ‘hu’ meaning ‘to call’. Three objects are necessary in both of them. These are to whom oblations are offered i.e., uddesyānśaḥ, what objects are offered i.e., tyāgānīsah and the kind of sacred fire where the oblations are offered i.e., prakṣepānśaḥ. But sometimes the necessity of the sacred fire becomes secondary in performing some sacrifices. Many works related to social services if performed without self-interest though possess the nature of sacrifice, yet these are not related directly with the fire. Here mainly body, wealth, mind and emotions are surrendered for the welfare of the society. Hence the secondary

8. uṇāsāḥ śadās parāśāḥ śāhāḥ svāhāḥ /
   ibid., 1.2.7
necessity of the sacred fire in some kind of sacrifice is also supported by the commentator Karka in the commentary of Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra.9

So, the term yajña is used in a broad sense generally rather than homa.

For example the Agnihotra is a kind of homa activity. Here offering ob­lations on fire takes the prominent place. But in a yajña three aspects like the process of worshiping, union and offerings or dāna are essential. It may happen at any sphere or at any mode in this universe.

Generally in performing the sacrificial activity, the sacrificer has to chant the mantras which are mainly related with mind which again is related with consciousness. In performing ritual activities the sacrificer

9. ibid ., 7.1.1
has to give equal attention to the subtle forms of speech which dwells in the psyche in the form of sentiments, wisdom and aspiration. It remains in the core of the heart. When it is expressed with specific rhythm in the form of mantra then it vibrates the air and generate unique sound waves. These have infinite effects in the outer space to activate the divine energy. Hence in the Kātyāyanasūtrasūtra\textsuperscript{10} it is mentioned that though the sacrificer has to keep sacred fire in their respective places pronouncing the mantras yet he has to repeat the mantras keeping silence immediatly after that. It indicates that the performance of sacrifice is happening at the sametime in the inward

\textsuperscript{10} mahāvyāhṛtibhirvā prāksaṁstham /

ibid., 2.1.6
feelings of the individual in subtle form. This activity can only be imagined or realized. In it the Adhvaryu tries to keep himself self purified by touching himself where the heart exists. A sense of inner sacrifice is reflected in it. In a *yajña* an object or matter is connected with the divine power or energy. It is enjoined with any object given as a gift to a god or deity in a sacred heart. Thus when the matter is submerged in energy with due rules then the sacrifice is happened. This relationship may be varied according to nature of action, substance and place but it must possess the nature of a sacrifice or *yajña*. Hence in the

*Kātyāyanashautasūtra*¹¹ it is said that the activity used for the term

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¹¹. karmaśabdo dravyadevatāyukto yajatīḥ

ibid., 4.3.1
yajati reflects the fusion between matter and energy.

This Earth is covered with a large course of air. Due to the gravitational force of the Earth, this course of air is attached with it. Including the ray of the Sun all the divine energy is connected with the air. The growth of the tissues of the living being is possible with the union of various natural elements like air, water etc. The different foods for the animals are growing only with the help of these elements. Thus a connectivity arises between the divinity and the animals. This connectivity keeps up the life cycle of the universe. The deities are immortal and life givers. They are pervading in the aerial region. The life wind or vital air is also enjoined in it. In this biosphere, when the creatures
take inhalation of fresh air, then a little portion of it enters the body and
spread its action in the whole organs of it. It helps to possess the life
and makes active the creatures. Again in the respiration a little portion
of inner air goes outside mixes with the large portion of air pervading
the whole universe. Thus the individual gets only a little portion of vital
air for the vivacious life. The Vedic seers noticed this process through
the viewpoint of *yajña*, which helps to make connection between the
individual energy and the universal energy. They visualised the activity
of respiration as a means of acquiring the immortality, where there is
the power of ability to sustain life. In the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra*¹², this

¹². tasyābhisvāsaḥ prāṇamāṃrte dadha iti /
    ucchasoamṛtaṁ prāṇa ādadha iti //
    ibid.,4.8.26,27
process of inhalation and exhalation of the living being is supposed to take place as an act of *yajña*, where there is the immortality. Generally the sacrificial activities are collaborative efforts where different priests and sacrificers are related. It should be performed in a clean atmosphere with a clean mind and physique. So, they have to obey some code of conduct and procedure for ceremonies related to sacrifice. The practising of the self-restraint is obviously needed for it. All the sense organs including the mind are kept under control in these activities. This leads the sacrificer and the priests to that position of mental upliftment, where a person may be eligible for taking the vow that is related to gods for
the whole life journey. Hence, in the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra*¹³, it is mentioned that all should be refined in a sacrifice. This helps to see oneself with proper mental ability and teaches to avoid all bad habits.

Two main objects are necessary in a sacrificial ritual activity i.e., *Agni* and *Apa*. Both of these are helpful to purify something. Hence both the physical and mental reformation is possible through these code of ceremonies. This helps the sacrificer to transmute himself into divinity.

In this universe the planets are moving on their own specific orbits. They are also moving around another particular planet or an object from where they are created or get energy to sustain. Similarly the Earth

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¹³. sarve saṁskārāt /

ibid., 12.1.11
moves round the Sun. The movement of the Earth on its own axis is
directed from left to right. As the sacrifice is an auspicious work related
to different natural energies, hence the performer of it always should try
to follow this inherent qualities of the nature. Agni is regarded as the
representative of the Sun for its divine lustre. Hence in the activity of
any ritual the formality of walking around the sacred fire from left to
right direction is observed, This is called the pradakśiṇa. Generally the
term ‘pra’ is an adjective. It means ‘very much’. It is also used as a
prefix to a verb taking the meaning onward. Hence onward to Dakṣiṇa
or South is called the Pradakśiṇa. A sense of homage towards the
divine power and an inward feelings of divine adoration and
reverence arise through it. Hence the *kātyāyana śrautaśūtra*, mentions that the activity of circumbulation is performed in the sacrifice with reciting the mantras properly. It helps to avoid the unnecessary thoughts and connect the devotee with divine thinking. It signifies that god is the centre of the existence of the creation. No one can go forward neglecting this power. In every step of life the human being should remind and follow their nature with a meditative mood. It centralises the thought and action of the life cycle of the mankind towards luminous direction. It helps to lead a righteous life in an uniform nature. Hence the sacrifice may be regarded as an act of reverential salutation to the supreme being. It is an act of spiritual bonding with the divinity.

14. ॐ वृत्त सामान्तेशु प्रदक्षिणम् /
ibid., I.7.25