CHAPTER - III

CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE IN THE RKSAMHITA

The Rgveda is the foremost literature of the Hindu civilization. The hymns of the Rgveda supply us the ample materials for tracing a true picture of the Rgvedic age. The Vedic Aryans believed that various natural phenomena like the rain, the cloud, the storm, the fire, the lightening and the wind etc. are the visible manifestations of different gods. For the welfare of the society and the human beings it is essential to satisfy these powers. For this reason they have to take help of fire, which often takes an important place in domestic and social life. By offering oblation on fire they prayed the gods to bless and protect them. Thus this process acquired a religious
significance. The Rgvedic Aryans were the optimistic people. They had to work out in struggle. They started to believe that human would get the divine blessings if they are to physically and spiritually developed. A sense of renunciation and self-purification was developed among them in this way. They tried to know about the universe and the Supreme Truth by which the whole cosmos is moving on for the benefit of the creation. This inquisitiveness made their life full of knowledge. To get a pleasant and charming life the poet seers of ancient time engaged themselves in honouring the beneficial elements in nature and dishonouring the evil elements. Thus a sense of sacrifice grows gradually among them. Later on, it spreads as an institution in their life. Thus the sacrifice became the nucleus of the Vedic
Aryans. The different seers have given different concepts of sacrifice in
the *Rgveda*.

**Sacrifice in the *Rgveda***

The term *yajña* is mostly used in the *Rgveda* for sacrifice. In the
revelations of the *Rgveda* we come across the natural powers are being
personified as gods. These gods became the inseparable part of the *yajña*

Thus the *yajña* is attached with the whole universe in different aspects.

1. *Ṛta* as Sacrifice

In the Vedic religion the law of nature is seen to be followed up
everywhere. It was the Divine law to which the gods are related. Due to
this law water flows, the fire becomes lustrous, rainfall takes place, the Sun
shines and seasons are being changed. Thus this law governs the entire operations of the cosmos. This was the motion that led to the performance of the cosmic yajña. To indicate it the term Rta is revealed in the Rgveda.

This term being derived from the √r - ‘to go’ is revealed with a view to showing that the phenomenon of nature that is characterized of moving, constantly follow the ‘Universal law’. This regularity is observed in the realm of nature which is obviously necessary to keep it balance. In the Rgveda it is stated that gods like Agni, Soma, Indra, Maruts, Ādityas all are the subjects of ‘Rta’ (ntasya praṇām R.V.,8.6.2). Their growth and nourishment happen with the help of Rta. The same idea has been expressed in the Rgveda verse 10.85.1 also where Ādityas are said as being subsisted by
Thus in this universe different powers become united and work accordingly due to Rta. Thus both Rta and yajña are interrelated. In many verses of the Rgveda, yajña is regarded as Rta. Here it is expressed that Rta in the sense of sacrifice is said to be performed previously and at later time. Thus the entire world is based on the sacrifice where the different forces of nature being assimilated and work together. Hence the yajña and Rta became vice-versa in the Vedic religion.

2. Sacrifice as the navel of the Earth

Every object in this Earth is produced by the assimilation of some
small atoms. Even this universe is created with the various elements of nature. For the creation and preservation these elements are interdependent. The sense of self-consecration for the benefit of the universe helps to move it in a proper way. Likewise the body of a living creature is fully dependent on the nature. The speech, mind and life are the vital spirit of the creatures. The inner spirit is co-related with the outer spirit of nature. In the hymn of the ‘Usas (R.V.,1.48.10) it is mentioned that the energy and life of the creatures of this universe are dependent on the various functions of the gods. Thus the yajña accomplish in the field of the creation, preservation and regulation of this universe. Hence from the view point of creative aspect,
the poet seers of the *Rgveda* justified the sacrifice as the ‘navel’ of the Earth. Here the word ‘navel’ is used by the seers almost as a synonym of the creator. Sacrifice has been identified by them as the primary principle of life. This can be justified in a way where the *nābhi*, being the cardinal point of creation of the earth is the same as the sacrifice, which is also the cause of creation of many things in the universe in the form of food, water and so forth. Thus all the creatures are amalgamated in the *yajña*.

3. Sacrifice as the milch cow

In the Vedic age the cow occupies a prominent position in the society. It is the symbol of respect and prosperity. It is essential for the production

2. *ayāni yajñō bhuvanasya nābhīḥ* /

ibid., 1.164.35
of crops. In the *Rgveda* the sacrifice is regarded as the milch cow. That is just as a she cow produces milk which is very sweet and nourishing so also the sacrifice is very productive and wish yielding aspect of human being.

Here it is stated that the sacrificial fire i.e. Agni has the quality to bear the whole world.

### 4. Sacrifice as *Devayā* and *Miyedha*

Self-consecration is one of the most important powers of sacrifice. In the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* (*RV.*, 10.90) it is mentioned that the *Virāṭ Puruṣa* offered himself for the benefit of the creation taking the form of an animal i.e. *Paśu*.

So, sacrifice is like the victim of the gods. It reaches the gods and gives

3. *iṣāni duḥant sudughāṁ viśvadhāyasaṁ yajñapriye yajamāṇāya sukrato / agne gṛtāṁ triṭāṁ dīdyat vartir yajñāni pariyant sukratūyase //*

ibid., 10.122.6
strength to them. Here it is noticed that the self immolation of the Primeval

_Puruṣa_ became the cause of origination of various creatures. So, the sacrifice

is called as ‘Devayā’ and ‘Miyedha’. ‘Devayā’ means that one which goes
to gods and ‘Miyedha’ means animal. Hence, the seer expresses that gods

reaches sacrifice, their victim. There they eat whatever they want.4.

5. Sacrifice as the source of good deeds

To run the universe smoothly and for the creation of the desired object

the unity among the nature, the creature and the Divine powers are essential.

Desiring the benevolence in entirety, the seers invoked the gods and offered

oblation to them. They realised that the material oblations help to increase

the strength of the gods so that they in return can be productive for human

4. _ayam yajño devayā _ayam _miyedha ima brahmāṇyamindra somah /
stirṇāṁ barhīrā tu śakra pra yāhi pibā niṣadya vimucā hari iha //

_ibid., 1.177.4_
and animal beings. In the *Rgveda* the sacrifice is therefore called as the source of good or noble deeds (i.e. *sukṛtasya yōnau*). Here the seer invokes the god Agni to come and sit in the respective place of the *yajña* which is the source of good deeds and protector of gods.

### 6. Agni as Sacrifice

Agni is regarded as one of the most prominent gods of the sacrifice. The elements of nature where Agni exists in different forms brings forth the *yajña* to this creation. It helps to assimilate the power of energy and matter in nature. As the Agni takes the foremost part in performing the sacrifice, hence, the Agni is said to be the sacrifice and sacrificer both.

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5. *sīdahotaḥ sva u loke cikitvāntśadayā yajñarṁ sukṛtasya yonau /
   ibid., 3.29.8*
The duties of the priests during the performance of the *yajña* are based upon Agni. All the wealth can be attained from it, when the Agni performs the sacrifice well.

### 7. Sacrifice as driving chariot

The Vedic Aryans considered the sense of *ṛta* or *yajña* as a driving force in the form of a chariot that majestically courses through the universe.

Every type of *yajña* of the earth and heaven is co-related. Hence, the term ‘*dyāvā prthivi*’ is used for both of them (R.V.3.8.8). To make this relation uninterrupted, Agni plays the vital role. In the three worlds the Agni plays the role of co-ordinator of the different yajñas of the cosmos taking the

6. *agnimīle purohitāni yajñasya devamṛtvijam /

*hotārāni ratnadhātamam //*

ibid., 1.1.1
form of Sun, air and fire. Thus, the yajña becomes the means of communi-
cation between the gods and creatures. Both of them are delighted in it.

Hence yajña is called as a chariot i.e. ratha (R.V.2.18.1) where the chari-
oteer is Agni. It is that type of chariot that is made only with the knowledge
of the Rk and sāman hymns (R.V.10.114.6).

8. Sacrifice as the ship of rescue

The circuit of worldly life is like a river which is moving forward. In
this process every creature has to face different types of miseries. People
can cross this river with the help of yajña. The performance of yajña

enlightens the wisdom of the sacrificer, with which he can cross these

miseries. In the hymn 1-140-12 of the Rgveda, the seer Dīrghatamā
addressed the god Agni to bring forth the yajña, which is in the form of a ship. In the *Rgveda*, the seer addressed the god Varuṇa to make their sacrifice energetic so that they can cross this miserable world.

9. Sacrifice as cloth

It is to be noticed that in the *Rgveda* the earthly sacrifice is mentioned as a cloth made of thread. The seven metres applied in the sacrifice are regarded as the fabrics or threads of this cloth. With the help of the activities of the priest *Adhvaryu* these threads are woven. There is a continuous relation among the supreme, heavenly and earthly sacrifice. The priests tried to weave this cloth in the form of sacrifice since ancient time.

7. [Verse](https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/veda/rks42.htm)
Here in it Agni is asked to spin out a thread in the form of sacrifice. Besides
the seers reflect variously on the spinning of thread in the form of sacrifice
by gods (R.V, 8.13.14; 10.130.1).

10. Sacrifice as *Devatata*

It is obvious that Vedic sacrifices are associated with the gods. With
their power the gods act behind the phenomena of nature. The Vedic Aryan
thought that the gods are inseparable from the sacrifice of nature. The nature
of *Rta* is endowed with them. The gods who are personification of nature
are known best by the sacrifices. Therefore the sacrifice is called as

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8. *tāntuni tanuṣva pūravyani sūtasomāya dāṣuṣe*

ibid., 1.142.1
‘Devatātā’ which means spreaded by the gods⁹. Here the word ‘tātā’ denotes ‘being spreaded’.

11. Sacrifice as *Adhvara*

Agni with its mighty power takes the *yajña* everywhere in the universe. Nobody can obstruct or injure this. It protects the sacrifice from all sides. It is uninterrupted by the fiends. Without killing or injuring anybody the *yajña* is attached with the divinities. In the hymn of the *Rgveda* the seer expressed that the Agni being the sacrificer, lead the sacrifice which is unharmed in nature towards gods. (*R.V.1.1.4*). Here the word ‘*Adhvara*’ is

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⁹. *urdha uṣu no adhvarasya hotaruge tiṣṭha devatātā yajīyān /
tvam hi viśvamabhyasi manma pra vedha saśvittirasi maniṣām //

ibid., 4.6.1
used for yajña. The term ‘Adhvara’ is derived from the root ‘dhvr’- ‘to kill’

with the prefix ‘a’. So, ‘Adhvara’ means ‘not to be killed’ or ‘not to be

destroyed’. Etymologically it means ‘na vidyate dhvaro asyeti adhvaram’

(Pāṇini sūtra; 6.2.172). So, from this view point the Vedic seers used the

‘adhvaram’ for yajña because it does not harm anybody.

12. Sacrifice as Makha

Sacrifice has been called as makha in this Veda. As because the sacri-

fice brought many things for the worshippers, therefore, the seers took this

to be praiseworthy. This word has been derived from the maha, to worship

or to praise, Sāyaṇa, explains it as ‘mahanīya’ (Sāyaṇabhāṣya on R.V.

3.34.2), As the sacrifice is worippable by everybody, so it is called as the makha.
13. Sacrifice as Vidatha

Although the word ‘Vidatha’ has different meanings such as scholars etc. yet in the Veda, specially in the Rgveda it means a sacrifice, battle and knowledge. Of these three meanings vidatha as a sacrifice has been revealed more than once. Yāska, derived the word ‘vidatha’ from the root vid, to know. He thereby means it as direction or instruction\(^\text{10}\). However Sāyana remarks that it is the means to know the gods which are to be worshipped or where the priests are engaged in their respective duties is called the vidatha. He also takes the word to mean gaining things through it. (Śāyaṇabhāṣya on RV.,10. 122. 8; 10. 110. 7; 3. 54.7).

\(^{10}\) Nirukta, 6.7
14. Sacrifice as the first ordinance of creation

All the benevolent actions are created due to yajña. The creation of the objects has become possible through sacrifice. In the hymn 10-90 i.e. the ‘Puruṣa Sūkta’ of the Rgveda a detail description is given how the various elements were created when the gods performed the sacrifice. As this sacrifice was performed before the dawn of creation so, the Puruṣa or creator God offered his own person for that cosmic sacrifice as oblation. Thus He Himself became the oblation of that yajña. The creation of the whole universe including the four Vedas, four castes, animals and many other things sprang forth from this self sacrifice of Puruṣa i.e. the ‘Primeval Being’.

Thus the whole universe sprang from the mental sacrifice of the
Puruṣa. This self immolation of the Puruṣa thus became the very basis of creation. All the animate and in-animate objects are the manifestations of that supreme sacrifice. Thus the yajña was accomplished by yajña. This is expressed in the revelation of the seer Nārāyaṇa. The seer thought that at the beginning of creation of the universe, the gods performed the sacrifice with the help of sacrifice. These were the first ordinances

15. Sacrifice as the protector

The Vedic sacrifice appears at the same time as the protector also. It rescues the sacrificer from the enemies and destroys them for ever. It gives

11. yajñena yajñamayajanta devaśtaṇi dharmāṇi prathamaṇyāsan /
te ha nākam mahimāṇah sacanta yatra pūrve sādhyaḥ santi devaḥ //

ibid., 10.90.16
strength to the gods and in return the gods protect the performer of the sacrifice. Thus the yajña embraces the human beings as the father or protector. It increases the intellectual qualities with which the sacrificer can feel the happiness. Hence, the sacrifice is called the father of human beings i.e. pità (RV, 10.100.5).

16. Sacrifice as Viṣṇu

In the Veda sacrifice is connected with the idea of pervading. Viṣṇu is often said as all pervasive. In the form of Viṣṇu containing three daily libations in the sacrifice it pervades every where (RV, 1.61.7). Here it denotes the rays of the sun. So also the sacrifice seemed to be pervade in all the regions of the earth. Hence, sacrifice is called as Viṣṇu (RV, 1.156.4).
17. Sacrifice as Savanam

*Soma* juice was one of the main offerings of the sacrifice. Extracting the *soma* juice, libation is offered three times in a *yajña*. Here Agni and *Soma* are the two fundamental entities. In it Agni is the consumer of food and *Soma* itself is the food. Here, *Soma* represents the plants that produce fruits. To move on the life cycle on the earth, these two entities are most essential. Without this process any object will not be able to stay, to move, to grow or to create another object. Hence, *Soma* is called as the soul of *yajña* (RV., 9.6.8). As it has the relation with sacrifice, so the sacrifice is also known as ‘*savanam*’. This word is derived from the root ‘*su*’ with the
suffix ‘lyuf’. It means to produce or to extract etc. In many places of the

_Rgveda_, sacrifice is regarded as _savanam_, where the seers invoke the gods
to come to their sacrifice (RV., 1.21.4).

18. Sacrifice as _Kratu_

The sacrifice crosses all directions. It is so vast and encompassing

that it can be termed as _Kratu_. Here, in the _Rgveda_, sacrifice is called as _Kratu_, that spreads everywhere and at the same time it is unsurpassable\(^\text{12}\).

The term ‘_Kratu_’ is derived from the root ‘kr’ means ‘to do’ with the suffix

‘_katu_’ (Unādisūtra; 1.77). Sāyana expresses it as the best activity related

with wisdom (Sāyaṇabhāṣya on RV., 1. 1.5).

\(^{12}\) na hi devo na martyo mahastava kratuṁ parah /

marudbhiragna ā gahi //

ibid., I.19.2
19. Sacrifice as ploughing

The Aryans considered farming as important as the sacrifice. As they could not lead their lives without farming so also they could not do so without sacrifice. Sacrifices thus became essential part of their lives. To show its importance, Vedic seers figuratively spoke of sacrifice as ploughing, sowing and reaping (R.V.,10.101.3;10 .101.4). The priests are the farmers of this sacrifice. From the revelations made by Vedic seers it appears that just as the ploughing lead to good crops so also sacrifice leads people to acquire good harvest in the form of good virtues in life. So, sacrifice seems to be a good means of life.
20. Sacrifice as Prajāpati

It is the Prajāpati for whom the sacrificer offers oblation. The activities of Prajāpati for creation with the help of austerity i.e. *tapah*, *kāma* and wisdom are clearly depicted in the *Rgveda* (R. V; 10.129). As the creation has been considered as the results of sacrifice so the sacrifice is called the Prajāpati. This sense is clearly expressed as follows:

Prajāpati, the creator of the universe created *yajña*, in the form of modifications. That Prajāpati leads all the gods. Who are responsible for the sacrifice\(^{13}\).

\(^{13}\) *yaścidāpo mahinā paryapasyaddakṣaṁ dadhānā janayantīryajñam / yo deveṣvadhi deva ekaā sītkasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema //*

*ibid.*, 10.121.8
21. Sacrifice as holy Pilgrimage

Sacrifice is extended to all directions together with its various supplements. Due to its power of purification all sins are destroyed. Being the supreme one the majesty of the sacrifice attached with the moral or religious law. Hence, the Vedic seer expresses the *yajña* as a holy pilgrimage where the Supreme Being resides (R.V.; 10.114.7)

22. Sacrifice as the heart of gods

*Yajña* destroys the different things, present in the nature and human beings. Through it the harmful elements of nature are destructed. Similarly through it the physical and mental condition of the sacrificer becomes improved. Thus the spiritual upliftment leads one towards the divinity, where
all the gods exist. The RK uttered in the sacrifice make the sacrifice divine

(R.V.10.93.8). The gods have raised the sacrifice which in turn is asked for

protection (R.V.,I.112.2), acceptance and confirmation (R.V.,1.141.11) by

the worshippers. Hence, *yajña* is called as the heart of the gods, which is

attached with the divinity (R.V.8.18.19). When spiritual upliftment occurs

, the sense of introspect arises and it leads the sacrificer towards heavenly

bliss. Thus the *yajña* moves towards the consciousness and sense organs

and makes them reform (R.V.,3.12.2) for ever.