Upaniṣads, Sūtras

SOCIAL CONDITION

Family life

The family life was the framework on which society rested, and the Gṛhya-sūtras that deal with the domestic sacrifices and other duties performed by the householders supply valuable information regarding it. As in the age of the Later Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas, the family was normally a joint one with the most senior married member or householder as the head. But partitions often took place as the rules in the Gṛhya- sūtras regarding the kindling of the domestic fire show. The fact that a rite is prescribed for one desirous of a large family shows that the people liked to have many children. Male additions to the family were preferred to female ones. An interesting formality in the family life of these days is the manner in which the father greeted the children in the house after his return from a journey, the mode of greeting being different for male and female children. The high sense of responsibility and duty expected to be shown by the head of the family towards the other members is seen in the Gṛhya - sūtra rule that he was to take his food only after feeding all the children and old persons, as well as any female residing under his protection, and any pregnant lady in the house. The heartless conduct of the father in the story of Sunahsepa is condemned in the Śāmkhāyana Śrauta-sūtra. The spiritual succession from father to son is almost taken for granted by the Upaniṣads. The gradation of the relations in a family is given, as it were, in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where father, mother, brother, and sister are mentioned in succession.
The caste system

The period of the sūtras witnessed the gradual hardening of the caste-system in general and the deterioration of the position of the Vaiśyas and Śūdras in particular. We can trace this process step by step if we follow the evidence of the three broadly distinguishable chronological strata in the sūtras, namely (1) the Śrauta- sūtras with which may be conveniently considered the evidence of the sūtras of Paṇini also; (2) the Gṛhya- sūtras; and (3) the Dharma- sūtras.

The power of the Brāhmaṇas is growing, they are exempt from taxes and could, on occasions, be kings, but Kṣatriyas could hardly become priests. The prestige and influence of the Purohita in the state are high. Paṇini's division of the Śūdras into niravasita and aniravasita shows that certain degraded Śūdras were forced to reside outside the limits of the village or town. The rāṣtra or nation consisted only of the three higher Castes, the Śūdras being excluded from it. Although some Caste-sections were degraded, it is not quite certain if the Mixed Castes had arisen in this period.

A different age is prescribed for each of the three higher castes for the various sacraments, such as the Chudākaraṇa and the Upanayana (initiation) ceremonies. Different seasons are also prescribed for the different castes. The differentiation extends even to such minor things as the girdle, the staff, the skin, and the garment to be used by the student, and the Upanayana mantra to be recited by him. The story is the same with regard to most of the sacraments such as the naming of the child, the building of a house, marriage, and even
such unessential matters as anulepana or salving which is part of the snāna ceremony signifying the completion of the period of studentship. Even in the giving of gifts, the Caste determined the nature of the gift as much as the financial condition of the giver.

Marriage and the position of women

The anuloma system of marriage prevailed in this period. The low status of the Śūdra wife is reflected in the directions given in the Śrauta- sūtras that a sacrificer is allowed to cohabit with a savarṇa wife (of the same caste as his own) but not with the Śūdra one.

"The various stages of the marriage ceremony are as follows: (1) the wooers formally go to the girl’s house; (2) when the bride’s father has given his formal consent, the bridegroom performs a sacrifice; (3) early in the morning of the first day of the marriage celebrations the bride is bathed; (4) a sacrifice is offered then by the high priest of the bride’s family and a dance of four or eight women (not widows) takes place as part of the Indrāṇi karman; (5) the bridegroom then goes to the girl’s house and makes the gift of a garment, ornament, and mirror to the bride who has been bathed; (6) the Kanyā-pradāna or the formal giving away of the bride now takes place, followed (7) by the Pāṇi-grahaṇa, the clasping of the bride’s right hand by the bridegroom with his own right hand; (8) the treading on stone; (9) the leading of the bride round the fire by the bridegroom; (10) the sacrifice of fried grains; and, the most important ceremony of all, (11) the saptapadi (the couple walking seven steps together as symbolic of their lifelong concord) follow in due order. Finally the bride is taken in all ceremony to her new house. It must be
taken for granted that the offering of oblations to the fire and the feasting of Brahmānas take place at every important stage in this as in other ceremonies. 1

Education

The Upaniṣads are a living testimony to the high intellectual attainments of the age. 2 We find, for instance, that the highest position in society is willingly yielded to the intellectual aristocracy. Kṣatriya kings like Janaka were famous for their learning, and all including the Brāhmaṇas paid respect to them. There are many instances on record where even the Brāhmaṇas learned the sacred knowledge, particularly philosophy, from the Kṣatriyas. But the most pleasing feature is the frequent reference to women teachers, many of whom possessed the highest spiritual knowledge. The famous dialogues between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī and Gārgi Vāchaknavi shows the height of intellectual and spiritual attainments to which a woman could rise. The stories of these noble and gifted ladies stand in sad contrast to the later age when even the study of Vedic literature was forbidden to women violation of which resulted the most severe penalty.

That physical training was an integral part of the educational scheme is clear from the unmistakable trend of the numerous prayers seeking for vigour and strength that form part of the upanayana ceremonial. The recitation of the vedic texts was a strenuous vocal exercise. But the prāṇāyāma or control of breath, which formed part of the daily sandhyā (morning, noon, and evening prayers) adoration, was not only an ideal exercise for the lungs, but also one that penetrated to all parts of the body and mind as any careful student of Yogic asanas can testify.
Manners and morals, habits and customs

Great insistence is laid on moral purity. Self-restraint is the keynote of the ethical code prescribed for the householder. Human nature, of course, is the same in all times and climes, and warnings against the faithlessness of companions, pupils, servants, and wives are conveyed indirectly through rites prescribed for their prevention. Purity of mind is as much inculcated as purity of body. Abstinence of all kinds and respect for elders and for self are valued qualities.

Amusements and Entertainments

As in the preceding age, dancing, and both vocal and instrumental music, were well cultivated. In the Simantonnayana ceremony mentioned above, the wife is asked to sing a song merrily and in the marriage ceremony the bridegroom sings a gatha after the treading on the stone by the bride. The musical recitation of the Sāmaveda being in vogue was responsible for the rule in the Gobhila Grhya-sūtra that the Vamadevya gana may be sung, by way of a general exiation, at the end of every ceremony. The lute players also performed. The restrictive rule that a snātaka is not to practice or enjoy a program of instrumental or vocal music or dance shows their popularity.

Food and Drink

Milk and its products were very liberally used. The various forms of butter (due to its varying temperature) were distinguished for purposes of the ritual as: clarified (sarpis), melted (djya), and solid (ghṛta) butter. In spite of being condemned in earlier texts and severe penalties laid down in the Dharma-
śūtras regarding its consuption, *sura* continued to be a favorite intoxicating drink. The four or eight women who perform a dance at the marriage ceremony are to be regaled with food and *surā*. In the *Anvashtakya* ceremony, *surā* is to be offered along with the *pinaḍa* offerings to female ancestors. The Śrauta ritual is naturally full of references to the *Soma* drink in the numerous *Soma* sacrifices, on the other hand the *Grhya* ritual in the fitness of things ignores it.
Upaniṣads

RELIGIOUS CONDITION

Introduction

There is an unbroken continuity between the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. At the decline of the Vedic Age after its full vigor of life, there was an inevitable encrustation of the mystic tradition. Soon, however, there followed a movement of revival and this took two paths of development. One took the form of the spiritual knowledge gained by the ancient seers. The other was concerned with the preservation of the ritualistic aspects, the externals of the Vedic Religion. The later took shape in the Brāhmanas and the former in the Upaniṣads.

The first and the earliest self-expression of the Vedic spirit in its progressive evolution is the Upaniṣad. The Vedas are the creation of the spiritual mind expressing itself directly through the sensational mentality of the physical being of man. For in the Vedic Age the knowledge was intuitive and revelative. When the intellectual mind started developing, the spiritual consciousness, which inspired the Vedas, expressed itself through this newly developed faculty. The Upaniṣad is the expression of the Vedic spirit through the intellectual thinking mind in the form of a compact, luminous and intuitive thought. In this process the thinking mind of the community opened itself to the influence of the spiritual consciousness and this influence remained as one of the firmly-implanted features of Indian civilisation and culture. Intellectual clarity of expression in the Upaniṣad is a sign of spiritual superiority. We tend to forget the fact that Upaniṣadic sages held the vedic revelation in highest es-
teem and frequently quoted the Vedas as the highest authority for supporting their own intuitions. The essential experiences, the central spiritual intuitions and the seed-ideas of the Vedas are nowhere denied in the Upaniṣads but only re-experienced, rediscovered, clarified, developed and re-expressed in a different form and through a different mentality. So between the Upaniṣadic and Vedic age there is no radical change in the spirit but only a change in forms of self-expression and in the psychology or mentality through which it is expressed.

The spiritual minds of the age, in making use of this faculty to express their intuitions and experiences, open the possibility for this part of the human consciousness to receive and express the light of the spirit. So the Upaniṣadic spirituality represents the taking up of the intellectual Mind and Will, and creating in it the capacity to receive and express the spiritual truth. This gave birth to a new type of spiritual man; the sage-philosopher replaced the seer poet of the Vedas.

**Essence of Upaniṣadic thought**

The first major achievement of the Upaniṣadic movement lies in the total inner spiritual freedom from ego, desire and mortality. For the experience of the infinite unity of the self leads to a total release from all bondage formed by ego and desire.

The second intuition of the Upaniṣad is the identity of the individual self with the universal self, or in other words.
"The Individual I and the universal I are one."1

The third great intuition of the Upaniṣad is that the essential nature of this supreme and eternal existence or self is an eternal Consciousness with an eternal Force. Thus an infinite and eternal Being whose nature is an infinite and eternal consciousness - force-delight is the Upaniṣadic intuition of the nature of the supreme Reality.

Here comes the most optimistic and hopeful note of the Upaniṣadic thought that has a living relevance for the future of religious thought and practice. "From Delight we come, in Delight we live, to Delight we return and none can live or breathe even for a second without this delight"2 says Taittiriya Upaniṣad. If we accept this Upaniṣadic intuition that the essence of all the experiences of life, whether pleasurable, painful or neutral is delight, and base our thought and practice on this intuition, then our whole life acquires a positive, optimistic and hopeful motivation.

The fourth great intuition of the Upaniṣad is the psychological and spiritual evolution of man. In fact, the modern theories on evolution, the scientific theory of biological evolution are foreshadowed in the Upaniṣads. The parable of Aitareya Upaniṣad hints at the theory of form evolution of Darwin. This parable says that when the consciousness of the divine self in Man, Puruṣa differentiated itself into various faculties like speech, hearing vision, mind etc and was trying to find a suitable material form to inhabit, first he was asked to choose from some animal forms like the cow, the horse, etc. But the gods—representing the various faculties of consciousness – refused to enter into them because they are not suitable. And finally when the form of Man is shown, the
gods are pleased and enter into it. This *Upaniṣadic* parable also hints at one of the central ideas of spiritual evolution that it is the evolution of consciousness which determines the evolution of outer material form and not vice versa.

These are the central intuitions of the *Upaniṣad*. Not all these ideas are entirely original. For as we have already said most of these ideas are already there in seed-form in the *Vedas* concealed behind images and symbols.

**Fundamental Concept of the *Upaniṣad***

**Brahman**

In the *Taitriya Upaniṣad Bṛigu*, the sage guides the disciple, who is his own son, step by step towards the highest truth. First, he asks his son to do *tapas*, which means to concentrate or energies the consciousness on the idea of *Annam*. Food or Matter is *Brahman*. For from matter everything is born, by it everything lives and into it everything returns. After the disciple has realised this idea in his consciousness he was again asked to do *Tapas* on a higher principle, the life-force or *Prāna* as *Brahman* and then again successively on the ideas of Mind, *Manas* as *Brahman*, supermind or *Vijñāna* as *Brahman* and finally Bliss or *Ānanda* as *Brahman*. The last two principles *Vijñāna* and *Ānanda* belong to the world of the spirit. They correspond to five cosmic principles, which constitute the world existence.
Neti, Neti

The ancient sages spoke indeed of Brahman negatively— they said of it, neti, neti, it is not this, it is not that, but they took care also to speak of it positively; they said of it too, it is this, it is that, it is all: for they saw that to limit it either by positive or negative definitions was to fall away from its truth.

Ātman

“Ātman, our true self, is Brahman; it is pure indivisible Being, self-luminous, self-concentrated in consciousness, self-concentrated in force, self-delighted. Its existence is light and bliss. It is timeless, spaceless and free. Ātman represents itself to the consciousness of the creature in three states, dependent in the relations between puruṣa and prakṛti, the Soul and Nature. These three states are ākṣara, unmoving or immutable; kṣara, moving or mutable; and parā or uttama, Supreme or Highest. In the physical consciousness Ātman becomes the material being, annamaya puruṣa. In the vital or nervous consciousness Ātman becomes the vital or dynamic being, prāṇamaya puruṣa. In the mental consciousness Ātman becomes the mental being, manomaya puruṣa. In the supra-intellectual consciousness, dominated by the Truth or causal Idea, Ātman becomes the ideal being or great Soul, viññānamaya puruṣa or mahat Ātman. In the consciousness proper to the universal Beatitude, Ātman becomes the all-blissful being or all-enjoying and ānandamaya puruṣa.
In the consciousness proper to the infinite divine self-awareness, which is also the infinite all-effective Will, Ātman is the all-conscious Soul that is source and lord of the universe, Caitanya puruṣa. In the consciousness proper to the state of pure divine existence Ātman is sat puruṣa, the pure divine Self.”

Divine Life

Enjoyment of the universe and all it contains is the object of world-existence, but renunciation of all in desire is the condition of the free enjoyment of all. The renunciation demanded is not a moral constraint of self-denial or a physical rejection, but an entire liberation of the spirit from any craving after the forms of things. Therefore by transcending Ego and realising the one Self, we possess the whole universe in the one cosmic consciousness and do not need to possess physically.

ANTAR ĀTMA

“The rest childishly follow after desire and enjoyment, kāma, and walk into the snare of Death that gapes wide for them. But calm souls, having learned of immortality, seek not for permanence in the things of this world that pass and not.”

So the force that prevents the psychological energies of the ordinary man from turning inward is kāma, the vital desire of the life force in man for the enjoyment of the outer world of perishable objects. This may be necessary up to a certain stage in human evolution. But the spiritually mature soul awakened to
the eternal Self within him conquers attraction and attachment for the transient objects of the outer world, turns his gaze within and directs his Tapas or energy of his consciousness towards the external and internal Self. The capacity to do this comes not by killing desire as such, but by conquering the attraction and attachment of the energy of desire to outward forms and objects and turning the same energy towards the immortal inner Essence.

Renunciation

The first set of discipline which is constantly emphasised in the Upaniṣadic Yoga is Renunciation and Discrimination.

"Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man."

The other early Upaniṣads like Taitṛia and Kena also preach Karma or work as an integral part of the spiritual discipline. But the Upaniṣadic discipline insists with an uncompromising firmness on the renunciation, the inward movement of yoga is extremely difficult if not impossible. One of the major obstacles to the inward movement in Yoga is the irresistible attraction and obstinate attachment of the vital and sensational being to the glamour and enjoyment of the names and forms of the outer world. So an uncompromising renunciation of the attractions, attachments and enjoyments of the vital desire kāma is the first inescapable discipline imposed on the seeker of the inner path.
But how to renounce? We must remember here that this inner renunciation is much more difficult than an outer abandonment of the world; it cannot be done by a mere wish or by a mere vital or mental disgust for the world and its enjoyments though they may sometime lead to it. The inner renunciation is a positive psychological and spiritual process, an act of higher will and knowledge which brings inner freedom and peace. It requires Viveka and vairāgya, discrimination of knowledge and the determination of will.

Om:-

"Om is the bow and the soul is the arrow, and that, even the Brahman, is spoken of as the target. That must be pierced with an unshattering aim; one must be absorbed into that as an arrow is lost in its target."6

The first verse give the method of the first stages of contemplation which in the later vedāntic schools of jñāna Yoga is called as nidyasana constant dwelling of though on the object of contemplation.

The second verse is an imaged description of the final stage of contemplation in which the consciousness of the contemplator is absorbed totally in the object of contemplation as an arrow is lost in the target. The psychological principle behind the Indian method of concentration is two-fold: the first idea can be used as a means to enter into the truth behind the idea; the second is that "one becomes what one thinks", or in other words the mind takes on the form image and nature of the thing which it constantly contemplates.
The Koṣhas

The individual Man is a microcosm of the Macrocosm. The five cosmic principles – Anna - matter, prāṇa - life, Manas - Mind, Vijñāna - supermind, and ānanda - bliss – forming the five planes, worlds or lokas of the cosmic consciousness of the transcendent self express themselves in the microcosmic individual human being as five distinct Koṣhas, each presided over by a unique poise of the divine self in man. They are Annamaya Puruṣa, prāṇamaya the physical sheath presided over by a physical being Annamaya Puruṣa, prāṇamaya Koṣha vital sheath presided over by a prāṇamaya Puruṣa it being. Monamaya Koṣha mental sheath presided over by a Manomaya Puruṣa mental being and finally the spiritual dimension in man made of the vijñānamaya and ānandamaya Koṣhas presided over by corresponding Puruṣas.

1. Prāṇamaya Koṣha: The Self of Life

In the hierarchy of selves within the human being is the prāṇamaya Koṣa, the Self of Life. Prāṇa in the Upaniṣads conception is the Life-force which animates both our physical and psychological being that is our body, mind and senses. The prāṇamaya Koṣa is the seat of the Life-force, of Prāṇic energy in man which is the source of all power, strength, energy, enthusiasm, dynamism and the realizing force. It is the Prāṇic energy which gives the effectuating force to our will and the power and strength to realise our ideas in our inner and outer life. This is the reason why Upaniṣadic culture gave great importance to Prāṇa. Thus extols the Praśna Upaniṣad the glory of Prāṇa. A verse in the Prāṇa Upaniṣad says “By knowing the origin of Prana, his coming and his staying and his lordship in the five provinces and his relationship to the
spirit, one shall taste immortality." The Upaniṣadic religion is not a life-killing asceticism. The Upaniṣadic sages like the vedic seers aimed at the spiritual fulfillment of life.


The exact nature of the Manomaya Kośa and Vijñanamaya Kośa is a matter of controversy among commentators. But most of the ancient as well as modern commentators equate Manomaya Kośa with the Manas of Rajayoga and the fifth sheath Vijñanamaya, with the Buddhī, the thinking mind.

"Now there is yet a second and inner self which is other than this that is Prāṇa, and it is made of mind. And the self of Mind is made in the image of man; according, as is the human image of the other, so it is the image of the man. Yajur is the head of him and the Rig- Veda is his right side. Sāma Veda is his left side the Adesha is his spirit which is the self of him Atharvan is his lower member, whereon he rests abidingly."  


And the description of Vijñanamaya Koṣa runs like this

"Now there is yet a second inner self which is other than this which is of Mind and it is made of Vijñana. Now this Vijñanamaya Puruṣa is made in the image of Man. Śraddhā is the head of him. Ṛta is his right side; Yoga is his spirit which is the self of him; Manas is his lower member whereon he rests abidingly."
So a first preliminary analysis of the imaged description of the Manomaya and Vijñanamaya Kośas in Taithria Upaniṣad gives the impression that these are respectively the centres of lower and higher knowledge, aparā and parā vidya as they are called in Munḍaka Upaniṣad. Manomaya is the centre of parā vidya, of lower knowledge, that is knowledge acquired through the intellect, the scientific, intellectual and analytic knowledge. It includes all the sixty arts and sciences listed in the Indian tradition and also the intellectual and verbal knowledge of the Vedas. Vijñanamaya is the centre of Parā vidya intuitive knowledge by identity by which the supreme Reality or Self beyond mind is know, not intellectually through the abstract idea, but becoming one with it through inner communion, experience and realisation.

**Six Mahāvākyas from the Upaniṣads**

The basic teachings of the Upaniṣads are summed up in six great sayings (Mahāvākyas). These are:-

"I am Brahman" (Aham Brahma āsmi). This states the identity of the inmost consciousness of the individual with that of the supreme Divine. The ultimate truth of Vedic knowledge is not that some great savior is God or the Lord or that such and such a God or name and form of God is the supreme. It is not the worship of a person, book, image or idea. It is not even the worship of God. The Upaniṣads say that whatever we worship as truth apart from ourselves destroys us. They teach that our own Self is the true Divinity, that it is the presence of the absolute within our heart and all the universe.

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“The Self is Brahman” (*Ayuṃ Ātmā Brahma*). This also states the identity of the soul with the Absolute but in a more objective and less direct manner. Not only is our Self the Divine. It is the same Self in all beings that is the same Absolute truth.

“That thou art” (*Tat tvam asi*). Whatever we see or think about we are that. Not only is the I That, the You is also That. We are that ultimate I and Thou in all. The consciousness in the other is also the Divine.

“Intelligence is Brahman” (*Prajñanaṃ Brahma*). Our discernment of truth is the truth itself. It indicates that the Divine intelligence is present within us and has the power to return us to the Divine. Our inmost intelligence is that supreme intelligence through which we can merge into the Absolute.

“The Universe is Brahman” (*Sarvaṃ Khalvidaṃ Brahma*). The entire universe is the Divine, which includes our self. The Divine is not only the consciousness principle in you and me, it is also the being principle in all things. It is the ultimate object as well as the inmost subject in all beings. It is one and all and all in one.

“He am I” (*So’ham*). This shows the identity of the self with the Divine Lord inherent within the natural movement of our breath. “So” is the natural sound of inhalation, “ham” of exhalation. These are statements of the identity of the individual consciousness with the Absolute or Divine reality. They all derive from and merge into *Om* (*AUM*), the Divine Word of “I am all”.

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Upaniṣadic story

The Upaniṣads give us a clear idea of the ancient society. Some of the examples that are given here clearly indicate that the pupil was supposed to approach the teacher and seek instruction from him, that the good teacher judged the pupil by his truthfulness and the earnestness of his seeking, and that the good pupil was the one who chose the path of the good rather than that of the pleasant. The Upaniṣads also point out that the knowledge sought by the teachers and pupils was the knowledge that transcends appearances and seizes upon Reality through direct experience.

In the story of Satyakāma, we have an illustration of a young student who has an ardent aspiration to learn and study. His first quality is truthfulness, and the teacher rightly accepts him, convinced that his truthfulness is sufficient evidence of his qualification to be admitted.

In the next story, taken from the Kaṭha Upaniṣads, we have Naciketas, a young brahmacārin, who is offered by his father to Yama, the god who controls and governs the kingdom of death. We are told that Naciketas, seeing his father giving away old cows as offerings to Brahmins, feels that his father ought to give something valuable and asks his father to whom he (Naciketas) should be given as a sacrifice and offering. Thrice he asks his father, and his father, annoyed with his insistence, pronounces that he is offered to Yama. The young Naciketas visits the abode of Yama, where he waits for three days for Yama’s arrival. When Yama comes, he is pleased with Naciketas for his patience and sincerity, and offers him three boons. Naciketas first asks for his father’s appeasement and his well-being, which Yama grants readily. Next, he
asks for the knowledge of the secret of the fire of austerity. And, lastly he asks for the knowledge of the secret of death, of what happens to man after death and what really is the secret of immortality. Yama does not intend to give away this secret and offers him the choice of worldly happiness in the form of riches and progeny and success. However, Naciketas is firm in his demand and rejects the choice offered by Yama. Yama is pleased with the steadfast adherence of Naciketas to his noble search, and grants him the secret knowledge. The short extract presented here in this book is a dialogue between Yama and Naciketas, in which Yama explains the distinction between the good and the pleasant, and points out that since Naciketas chose the good in preference to the pleasant, he considers Naciketas choice indicates him to be worthy pupil who deserves to be given the secret knowledge.

The third story, taken from the Chândogya Upaniṣad, contains a famous dialogue between Ārûṇi and his son Śvetaketu. There are three important elements in the extract. In the first place, we have here an illustration of the method of teaching by dialogue and personal experimentation. Secondly, the central question raised by Ārûṇi is one of the most striking questions that every good teacher and pupil should raise: “What is that knowing which everything is known?” Thirdly, the answer provided to the question is perhaps the quintessence of India’s entire approach to the problem of knowledge. In brief the answer is that the knowledge of essence gives us the foundation of all that is manifested, and that the quintessence of all phenomena is the inner self which is identical with that which transcends all and manifests all. Tat tvam asi, ‘thou art That’, is one of the great pronouncements of the Upaniṣadic knowledge, and Ārûṇi explains this knowledge by various examples, so that the pupil can grasp it. In modern times, science, after its triumphant discover-
ies and inventions, is slowly returning to the realization that knowledge de-
pends very much on the knower, and that the most important object of knowl-
edge is the self that is seeking knowledge.

In the fourth story, which is also taken from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, we
have a dialogue between Nārada and Sanatkumāra. When Nārada approaches
Sanatkumāra, Sanatkumāra says: ‘Tell me what you already know; then I
will impart to you what lies outside it.’ Nārada replies enumerating a large
number of disciplines of knowledge that he has already learned. Sanatkumāra
points out that what Nārada knows is only the name and that there is some-
thing greater than the name. This brings out the real distinction between learn-
ing and knowledge. The aim of the good teacher is to help the pupil liberate
himself from the cobwebs of learning and to lead him to the luminosity of true
knowledge.

In connection with the story of Nārada and Sanatkumāra, it may be worth
noting that ancient India had developed a wide variety of disciplines of the
sciences and arts. It is difficult to say whether these disciplines developed
during the Upaniṣadic age, but to some extent they surely did, and we have
some information about the curriculum followed in Taxila, the most important
seat of learning in ancient India. It is said that Taxila was founded by Bharata
and named after his son Takṣa, who was established there as the ruler. (Taxila
was situated about twenty miles west of modern Rawalpindi.) Apart from the
Vedic knowledge, grammar, philosophy, and the eighteen śilpas were the prin-
cipal subjects of specialization. It is surmised that these eighteen śilpas were
as follows: vocal music, instrumental music, dancing, painting, mathematics,
accounting, engineering, sculpture, agriculture, cattle-breeding, commerce,
medicine, and law administrative training, archery and military art, magic, snake-charming and poison antidotes, the art of finding hidden treasures.

Later literature mentions sixty-four Kalās, which a cultured lady was expected to master. These included the art of cooking, skill in the use of body ointments and paints for the teeth, etc., music, dancing, painting, garland-making, floor decoration, preparation of the bed, proper use and care of dress and ornaments, sewing, elementary carpentry, repair of household tools and articles, reading, writing and understanding different languages, composing poems, understanding dramas, physical exercises, recreation for utilizing leisure hours, and the art of preparing toys for children. In the Upaniṣadic literature we come to know of a large number of good teachers and good pupils. In the selection presented here, there are Satyakāma Jabala, Naciketas, Shvetaketu and Nārada. We may also refer to the traditional story of Uddālaka Āruṇī, the son of Aruṇa Gautama and father of Śvetaketu. Most of the important works of the period refer to him as an authority on rituals and inner knowledge. As a pupil, he is often cited for his devotion to his teacher. He was asked by his teacher to prevent the inundation of the Āśram farm during a rainy day. Unable to plug a crack in the dam, he used his own body to plug the breach and thus prevented the inundation of the farm. The Chandogya Upaniṣad makes reference to Krishna Devakiputra who received initiation and knowledge from his teacher, Ghora. He is indeed the one declared later to be the Lord Krishna. The Upaniṣads describe him as a student eager in his pursuit of knowledge. We may also mention Pippalāda, a great sage in the Praśna Upaniṣads. Raikva is the name of the cart driver whom the King Jānaśruti approached for instruction. In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, we have a vivid account of the supremacy of Yājñavalkya. According to the story, Yājñavalkya’s guru,
Uddalaka Āruṇi, could not hold his own in a disputation with him in a vast assembly of scholars from the entire Kuru Pāncāla country which had been summoned by King Janaka of Videha. The Upaniṣads contain other great names of teachers and pupils, such as Āsvala, Jarat Karava Artabhiga, Bhujyu Lahyayāni, Usāsti Cakrāyaṇa, Kahuoda Kauśitakeya, and Gārgi Vachaknavi. We should also mention Maitreyī, a learned wife of Yājñavalkya, ‘who was conversant with Brahman’. One of the famous dialogues in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad is between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī. This dialogue occurs when Yājñavalkya is about to renounce the life of a householder for that of a hermit, and he proposes to divide his wealth between his two wives, Kātyāyāni and Maitreyī. But Maitreyī insists on his giving her instruction in spiritual wisdom.

Brief Summaries of the Major Upaniṣads

Īṣa Upaniṣad, Kena, Muṇḍaka, Kaṭha, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Praśna, Brhadāranyaka, Chāndogya, Śvetāsvatara, Kaivalya and Nilarudra Upaniṣads are the twelve great Upaniṣads. All these great Upaniṣads enters into the kingdom of the Brahma vidyā by their own gates. They have their own aim, path and way. Īṣa and Kena mainly deal with the same grand problem, the state of immortality, the relation of the divine, the divided self, ignorance and suffering, the truth. But they are not identical. Īṣa mainly deals with the problem of human destiny and man’s relationship with the Brahman. In its brief eighteen verses it deals with the idea of the fundamental problems of Life.
The secret of immortality is to be found in the purification of the heart, in meditation, in realization of the identity of the Self within and Brahman. This Upaniṣad is one of the most popular ones. The legend of Yama-Naciketas is one of the milestones of Upaniṣadic thought. So the Kaṭha Upaniṣad declares:

“Arise, awake, find out the great ones and learn of them; for sharp as a razor’s edge, hard to traverse, difficult of going is that path, say the sages.”

“What appears here as man is an individual being of the Divine; the divine extended in multiplicity is the Self of all individual existence, eko vasi sarvabhuṭāntarātmā.

“Like two golden birds perched on the selfsame tree, intimate friends, the ego and the Self dwell in the same body. The former eats the sweet and sour fruits of the tree of life while the latter looks on in detachment. As long as we think we are the ego, we feel attached and fall into sorrow. But realize that you are the Self, the Lord of life, and you will be freed from sorrow. When you realize that you are the Self, supreme source of light, supreme source of love, you transcend the duality of life and enter into the unitive state.”

“When all desires that surge in the heart are renounced, the mortal becomes immortal.”

“Brahman is the first cause and last refuge. Brahman, the hidden Self in everyone, Does not shine forth. He is revealed only
To those who keep their mind one-pointed
On the Lord of Love and thus develop
A superconscious manner of knowing.
Meditation enables them to go
Deeper and deeper into consciousness,
From the world of words to the world of thoughts,
Then beyond thoughts to wisdom in the Self.”

Not only the Brahman or Ātman but the whole problem of the world and life and works and the human destiny in their relation to the supreme truth of the Brahman also have been the subject matter of the Upaniṣads. When Isa Upaniṣad declares:
“Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years.”

It reveals the fundamental problems of human life and gives clues for overcoming them when it declares:
“Lust not after any man’s possession.”

“The supreme Self is neither born nor dies. He cannot be burned, moved, pierced, cut, nor dried. Beyond all attributes, the supreme Self is the eternal witness, ever pure, indivisible, and uncompounded, far beyond the senses and the ego… He is omnipresent, beyond all thought, without action in the external world, without action in the internal world. Detached from the outer and the inner, This supreme Self purifies the impure.”
The *Kena Upaniṣad* concerns itself with the relation of mind consciousness to *Brahman* consciousness that has been another prominent thought of the *Upaniṣad*. The world is for us what our mind and senses declare them to be; life is what our mentality determines that is shall become. The question is asked by the *Upaniṣad*, what then are these mental instruments? Is mind all or is this human existence only a veil of something greater, mightier, more remote and profound than itself? How to seek it is the one question that matters; to follow after it with all one’s being is the only truth and the only wisdom. *Kena Upaniṣad* declares:

"He by whom It is not thought out, has the thought of It; he by whom It is thought out, It not. It is unknown to the discernment of those who discern of it, by those who seek not to discern of It, It is discerned. When it is known by perception that reflects it, then one has the thought of It." ¹⁸

"The ignorant think the Self can be known by the intellect, but the illumined know he is beyond the duality of the knower and the known." ¹⁹

Man is composed of such elements as vital breath, deeds, thought, and the senses - all of them deriving their being from the Self. They have come out of the Self, and in the Self they ultimately disappear - even as the waters of a river disappear in the sea. It deals with the creation of the universe, the origin of the life-breath, the superiority of *Om*.

"Whasover be the mind of a man, with that mind be seeks refuge with the breath when he dies, and the breath and the upper breath lead him with the Spirit within him to the world of his imaginings." ²⁰

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The word *Munḍaka*, derived from the root Mund, "to shave", might have meant that the *Upaniṣad* was addressed to the shaved ones or that it shaved away ignorance. Since the manifold objects of sense are merely emanations of *Brahman*, to know them in themselves is not enough. Since all the actions of men are but phases of the universal process of creation, action alone is not enough. The sage must distinguish between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is of things, acts, and relations. But wisdom is of *Brahman* alone; and, beyond all things, acts, and relations, he abides forever. To become one with him is the only wisdom. So the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad* says:

"Twofold is the Knowledge that must be known of which the knowers of the *Brahman* tell, the high and the lower knowledge. Of which the lower, the *Rg Veda* and the *Yajur Veda*, and the *Sāma Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*, chanting, ritual, grammar, etymological interpretation, and prosody and astronomy. And then the higher by which is known the Immutable."\(^{21}\)

"They live and move in the Ignorance and go round and round, battered and stumbling, like blind men led by one who is blind."\(^{22}\)

"It is Truth that conquers and not falsehood; by Truth was stretched out the path of the journey of the gods, by which the sages winning their desire ascend there where Truth has its Supreme abode."\(^{23}\)

*Brahman*:

"All this is *Brahman* immortal, naught else; *brahman* is in front of us, *Brahman* behind us, and to the south of us and to the north of us and below us and above us; it stretches everywhere. All this is *Brahman* alone, all this magnificent universe."\(^{24}\)
"The mantra is the bow, the aspirant is the arrow, and the Lord the target. Now draw the bowstring of meditation, and hitting the target be one with him."\textsuperscript{25}

The life of man is divided between waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. But transcending these three states is super conscious vision — called the Fourth. It also identifies the \textit{om} with the four-fold \textit{Brahman}.

"\textit{Om} is this imperishable Word, \textit{Om} is the Universe, and this is the expositon of \textit{Om}. The past, the present and the future, all that was, all that is, all that will be, is \textit{Om}. Likewise all else that may exist beyond the bounds of Time, that too is \textit{Om}."\textsuperscript{26}

Man, in his ignorance, identifies himself with the material sheaths that encompass his true Self. Transcending these, he becomes one with \textit{Brahman}, who is pure bliss. It mainly deals with the art of pronunciations and the relationship between the teacher and the student. \textit{Taittiriya Upaniṣad} declares:

"Together may we attain glory, together to the radiance of holiness."\textsuperscript{27}

"May the brahmacharins come unto me. Svāhā! From here and there may the Brahmacharins set forth unto me. Svāhā! May the brahmacharins attain to peach of soul. Svāhā! May I be a name among the folk! Svāhā! May I be the first of the wealthy! Svāhā! O Glorious Lord, into that which is thou may I enter, Svāhā!"
Do thou also enter into me, O shining One. Svāhā!
Thou art a river with a hundred branching streams, O Lord of Grace, In thee may I wash me clean. Svāhā!
As the waters of a river pour down the steep as the months of the year hasten to the old age of days, O lord that cherisheth, so may the Brahmacharins come to me from all he regions. Svāhā!
O Lord, thou art my neighbour, thou dwellest very near me. Come to me, be my light and sun."28

In the beginning Ātmā alone was there. It created the worlds and their presiding deities. They were pervaded by hunger and thirst and were allotted their respective places in the human and thirst by partaking of food. The Apāna breath could only grasp food. Ātman then created the human body and made the heart its abode. The second book contains the ideas of Vāmadeva- that when a man is conceived that is his first birth, when he is born, that is his second birth, and when after reaching a ripe old age, he leaves for the other world that is his third birth. The third book contains a specific definition of Ātman and Brahman.

"He has mansions in His city, three dreams wherin He dwells, and of each in turn He says ‘Lo, this is my habitation’ and ‘This is my habitation’ and ‘This is my habitation’."29

Its subject is Brahman, but the Brahman as symbolised in the Om, the sacred syllable of the Veda. The Upaniṣad says, with the syllable Om one begins the chant of the Sāma Veda, by means of the meditation on Om one makes this soul-ascension and becomes master of all the soul desires. The Chāndogya
Upaniṣad is thus the summary history of one of the greatest and most interesting ages of human thought.

Brahman is all. From Brahman come appearances, sensations, desires, and deeds. But all these are merely name and form. To know Brahman one must experience the identity between him and the Self, or Brahman dwelling within the lotus of the heart. Only by doing so can man escape from sorrow and death and become one with the subtle essence beyond all knowledge.

The first chapters deal with the glorification of the Udgitha. And the fourth narrates the stories of janaśruti-Raikva and of Satyakāma-jabala. The fifth one deals with Śvetaketu-Āruni. The famous formula “tattvamasi Śvetaketo!” (That thou art, O’ Śvetaketu!). The seventh chapters describe the story of Nārada by Sanatkumāra.

“Speech is the essence of man.”

“A person is what his deep desire is. It is our deepest desire in this life that shapes the life to come. So let us direct our deepest desires to realize the Self.”

“The Self desires only what is real, thinks nothing but what is true. Here people do what they are told, becoming dependent on their country, or their piece of land, or the desires of another, so their desires are not fulfilled and their works come to nothing, both in this world and in the next. Those who depart from this world without knowing who they are or what they truly desire have no freedom here or hereafter. But those who leave here knowing who they are and what they truly desire have freedom every-

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where, both in this world and in the next.’”

“As the rivers flowing east and west
Merge in the sea and become one with it,
Forgetting they were ever separate rivers,
So do all creatures lose their separateness
When they merge at last into pure Being.’”

The Self is the dearest of all things, and only through the Self is anything else dear. The Self is the origin of all finite happiness, but it is itself pure bliss, transcending definition. It remains unaffected by deeds, good or bad. It is beyond feeling and beyond knowledge, but it is not beyond the meditation of the sage. This Brhadaranyaka Upanishad describe the story of Yajnavalkya - Maitreyi & Prajapati.

“From the non-being to the true being, from the darkness to the Light, from death to Immortality.’”

“He who has the knowledge 'I am Brahman' becomes all this that is; but whoever worships another divinity than the one Self and thinks, 'Other is he and I am other,' he knows not.’”

The sage who by faith, devotion, and meditation has realized the Self, and become one with Brahman, is released from the wheel of change and escapes from rebirth, sorrow, and death. Kaivalya Upanishad says:
“He has renounced all selfish attachments and observes no rites and ceremonies. He has only minimum possessions, and lives his life for the welfare of all. He has no staff nor tuft nor sacred thread. He faces heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour with equal calm. He is not affected by calumny, pride, jealousy, status, joy, or sorrow, greed, anger, or infatuation, excitement, egoism or other goads; for he knows that he is neither body nor mind...

The Lord is his true home ... for he has entered the unitive state. Having renounced every selfish desire, he has found his rest in the Lord of Love... He offers no ancestral oblations; he praises nobody, blames nobody, is never dependent on anyone. He has no need to repeat the mantram, no more need to practice meditation. The world of change and changeless Reality are one to him, for he sees all in God.”  

Meditation can be learned, and it must be practised according to accepted rules. By its means it is possible to realize the personal Brahman, who, in union with Māyā, creates, preserves, and dissolves the universe, and likewise the impersonal Brahman, who transcends all forms of being, who eternally is, without attribute and without action. Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says:

“Smaller than the hundredth part of the tip of a hair, the soul of the living being is capable of infinity. Male is he not nor female nor neuter, but is joined to whatever body he takes as his own.”

‘Meditate and realize this world is filled with the presence of God.’

“The Lord of Love is one. There is indeed no other. He is the inner ruler in all

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beings. He projects the cosmos from himself, maintains and withdraws it back into himself at the end of time. His eyes, mouths, arms, and feet are everywhere. Projecting the cosmos out of himself, he holds it together. He is the source of all the powers of life. He is the lord of all, the great seer who dwells forever in the cosmic womb. May he purify our consciousness!"\(^{39}\)

"He is fire and the sun, and the moon and the stars. He is the air and the sea, and the Creator, Prajāpati. He is this boy, he is that girl, he is this man, he is that woman, and he is this old man, too, tottering on his staff. His face is everywhere. He is the blue bird, he is the green bird with red eyes; he is the thundercloud, and he is the seasons and the seas. He has no beginning, he has no end. He is the source from which the worlds evolve. From his divine power comes forth all this magical show of name and form, of you and me, which casts the spell of pain and pleasure. Only when we pierce through this magic veil do we see the One who appears as many."\(^{40}\)

**THE CENTRAL SIGNIFICANCE**

This is in essence the story of the inner psychological and spiritual evolution of the Vedic spirit. The central significance of this evolution will be clear to all those who have followed this survey of Indian spirituality. It is the fixing of, establishing and generalising the spiritual possibility in the various parts of the human nature not only in the individual but also for the whole of human race. The *Upaniṣadic* movement brings the possibility to the intelligent will *Budhi*; *Gītā* into the higher vital will and emotion. *Vaiṣṇavism* into the lower emotions; *Tantras* into the physical being. The great attempt of the *pūrāṇo-
tāntric religion in the diffusion of spirituality to the masses; their equally innovative attempt to bring down a spiritual power into human life through the institution temple worship, the Mahāyāna ideal of the Buddhist and a somewhat simple idea of Avatārs who come down from higher spiritual regions from time to time for the moral and spiritual upliftment of the humanity; all these indicate the methods by which this spiritual possibility can be generalised for the whole race. The future of Indian spirituality must follow this curve and the tendencies inherent in its evolution and move towards the perfect fulfillment of these tendencies, which means spiritualisation of the whole of human nature and the generalisation of this spiritual possibility for the whole of humanity.

The emphasis is on the realisation of the Truth and living it here only, ihaiva, not somewhere beyond after death. The world to them is a manifestation of the Divine, the Brahman, with the gods as so many Powers and Personalities entrusted with the task of governing the universe and helping the creation – at all levels of its life – to evolve into the image of the creative Divinity and fully participate in the glory of the Manifestation.

The Upaniṣads mark a major turning point in the development of Indian thought. They place meditation and mystical experience and the philosophical interpretation of its significance at the heart of the religious quest. There are passages of sophisticated philosophical analysis and argument in the Upaniṣads, but in the end it is not intellectual conviction but lived realisation that is the aim of Upaniṣadic teaching.
The *Īśa Upaniṣad* begins with the declaration that *All* this is for the habitation of the Lord. It describes how the universe is a Becoming of the Divine Being in His mood to manifest. It concludes emphasising the identity between man and God and shows the *"straight way of the Truth"* to realise it in life. The *Kena Upaniṣad* asks what it is that impels the eye to see, the ear to hear the mind to hit its mark? In a word, what makes the senses reach out to and grasp the world in their experience? And it answers that there is a Master-Sense that operates through all these external faculties. This Master-Sense is a function of the Divinity manifest in the universe and it should be worshipped as Delight. Delight is the key-note of creation and life is intended to participate in this Pure Joy by eliminating from its course all the obscuring, deflecting, depraving elements of ignorance, inertia and falsehood. The *Taittirīya* celebrates the pervasion of the Divine Reality at all the levels of creation from gross Matter, ānām brahma to the Blissful Spirit, ānna braham. It describes the multiple being of man, relates it step by step to the corresponding planes of universal Existence and calls upon the seeker to concentrate his consciousness and realise this Reality integrally in the universe.
SUTRA

RELIGION CONDITION

Introduction

Sūtras are essentially a religion of sacrifice accompanied by varied rituals. But these rituals are not the inventions of one day or one period. They are rather the result of a constant process of evolution. We have reasons to believe that in the beginning the rituals were very few and simple, but with the passage of time they became large in number and complicated in their execution. The rituals in the Sūtras show alterations as compared with the texts on which they are based. In the ancient Brāhmaṇa literature several individuals are mentioned as objecting to or rejecting or modifying a prevalent ritual. The reasons for modifications or alterations or new inventions with regard to the rituals seem to be following: -

1) The climate and life under new conditions; all these elements might have opposed the stereotyped rituals with more or less success.
2) The clash of clans, the welding of different traditions might account for such changes.
3) The advancing ethical sense or a more intelligent mind also might have been the factor bringing modifications in old rituals.
4) The priests were restless personages, far from content with merely following out a traditional ritual, they were given to reflection on the ritual and to discussions of its meaning.
5) Social expansion amalgamates rituals or brings in new rituals. Any ritual, instead of becoming vague, may be diverted into the expansion of a new idea; a later ethos may interpret the old rite in modern terms.

In the beginning when man became conscious of his contact with nature he personified the phenomena of nature. He attributed the qualities of human beings to them. He endowed them with desire and feeling including the propensities to take offence and to be pleased — the characteristics of the human species. Creation, sustenance and destruction were also assigned to them. They were elevated to the rank of gods. They became supernatural. As long as man believed in his own strength he did his work himself. But as he doubted and undermined his own power, especially in contrast with the supernatural powers, he bowed down before the stronger to get his work done. He established various relations with the supernatural powers. He relates to them as father, mother, brother and friend. He begins to worship them with a view of getting their blessings in forms of good progeny, wealth, sound health and so on. These supernatural powers were called *devas*. In order to get their blessings it was imperative to pacify their wrath first and express his thankfulness to them in the form of prayers. For this, he might have started giving some portion of his possessions in the same way as a man gives something to the man whom he wants to please. This was the beginning of a ritual. A prayer or worship now became associated with offerings of things to the powers. Now the question was where to place the offering for the deity to accept it. In the beginning people would place the offering at a considerable distance. With this might have arisen the notion of not getting that thing back. This can be conjectured from the spoken formula, viz. इदम् न मम *idam na mama* ‘this is not
‘mine’ at the ritual of offering oblations to the gods. Had it not been the case
the prose formula \( \text{idam na mama} \), would not have been prevalent.
This ritual was called hautra ritual, as this was an invocation for the gods.
But whether the deity accepted the oblation or not, was open to doubt. If
perchance he happened to see the oblation sometimes being eaten up by an
animal or a bird or a man other than the deity, it must have created doubts in
his mind about the acceptance of the oblation by the deity. Now he must have
indulged in finding out some solution about how the oblations could be ac-
cepted by the deity. At this stage Agni the fire-god appeared to solve this
problem. He saw that it is Agni, which devours everything thrown into it. This
was the beginning of giving offerings to Agni which was preserved at a com-
mon place with due care, for, it was difficult to find Agni once extinguished.
When the Bhrgus first invented Agni by rubbing of the two fire sticks, the
problem was solved and now it became a ritual to produce Agni by the friction
between two fire-sticks on all religious occasions. At this time the idea might
have developed in the minds of the worshippers that Agni could bring the
oblations to the other deities too. With this idea, they might have named Agni
as ‘vahni’ ‘the bearer’. There remained no doubt as to whether the deities had
accepted the oblations or not. Now a new formula Amuk devay Svaha अमुक
deवाय स्वाहा ‘amuka— devāya svāhā ‘ began to be employed at the time of
offering to all gods. With the introduction of svāhā, the ritual which was once
called hautra karma, was now begun to be called svāhākāra.”
Yajamāna

In the beginning the process was not very complicated. The sacrificer could himself make the offerings in the fire reciting the names of the deity. Seldom did he get it done with the assistance of others. But gradually as the rituals got more and more intricate it became difficult for the individual to perform the sacrifice himself. Hence he began to patronize a seer who might help him in performance of the rites and in return the Yajamāna suitably rewarded the seer with wealth and cattle. The Rgveda is full of such references where the patrons have been commended by the seers. As time passed on, the descendants of the seers became priests of the descendants of the patrons of their fathers. They helped the Yajamāna in the performance of all their religious duties. But when the Vedic sacrifices became an elaborate ceremony the family priests alone was not able to perform entire rituals. So on the occasion of performing the sacrifices, other priests were invited and chosen. These occasional priests were called Rtviks. They were appropriately rewarded. Thus there became two groups of people involved in performing the sacrifice: the first group being represented by the yajamāna and his family members, and the second group by the official priests. The former met the expenses incurred in performing the rites. When one performed the rituals oneself, there was no need of giving fees to anybody. But when it became an elaborate affair and began requiring services of the priests the yajamāna had to offer them Dakṣinā. Thus, the ritual of giving largesse called Dakṣinā came into vogue. In the beginning Dakṣinā was a kind of reward which the yajamāna used to give to his priest who prayed for his well being and prosperity. But with the establishment of a priestly class, gradually Dakṣinā became a source of livelihood. The Brāhmaṇas were supposed to earn their livelihood through Dakṣinā. It was
the duty of the sacrificer to give Dakṣiṇā in full. Nobody could escape from Dakṣiṇā, so it became an imperative. If the sacrificer wanted to obtain the fruit of sacrifice in full, he must give Dakṣiṇā. Dakṣiṇā began to be given not with a view of making it a means of livelihood for the priest, but with a view to making oneself prosperous. The intention was to remove the sins caused by imperfections in the performance of the sacrifices, because it was thought that Dakṣiṇā alone could eradicate all sorts of imperfections. If Dakṣiṇā was not given to the priests, it was thought that the sacrifice would render no fruit. With the passage of time, the rituals gradually developed to a considerable extent. Everyone performed it either themselves or with the help of others thinking of it as a religious and sacred duty. These rituals were once performed in a very simple and unsophisticated way. But gradually they began to be performed with great pomp and show. The officiating priests were instructed by the yajamāna to perform the rituals with great pomp and show. This tendency is still in vogue in the performance of certain rituals in Hindu society. The main reason for performing the rituals with great pomp and show was that people might witness them and consequently the fame of the sacrificer and the officiating priests would spread around. The official priests, too, wanted to display their deep knowledge and efficacy in the rituals so that their glory as the best priest spreads through society. Moreover, the yajamāna by giving good things in plenty to the priests wanted them to eulogize him and spread his glory by praising him everywhere. In the Rgveda there are a considerable number of verses in which the bountiful patrons have been eulogized.
Fulfilling Desires

With a view of getting their different desires fulfilled people began to please the gods by offering many things in a most regulated manner. At this stage, they developed the notion that in order to get a particularly desired thing, an offering of that very thing should be made to the deity. If a man wanted to gain cattle he should offer an animal. This was the beginning of animal offerings in the sacrifices. However, the offering of animals in the fire was thought of as an act of killing. This is evident from the fact that the word *adhvarya* etymologically meaning ‘not killing’ (*a* + *vadhur* ‘to kill’) was used exclusively for the animal sacrifice. When the word *adhvarya* became a conventional term for the sacrifice, the performer of the latter began to be called *adhvarya*. Preparing the altars, bringing the fuel (*samidha*), placing of sacrificial utensils at *vedi*, producing *Agni* by the rubbing of two fire-sticks (*aranis*), bringing of animals, killing and making offerings of them into *Agni* - all these rituals were to be performed by the *adhvarya* priest. In this way, gradually the offerings of many other things, such as milk, butter, grain and *purodāsa* came into vogue aiming at fulfilling the various desires.

In the beginning there was no strict rule regarding the order and sequence of the performance of the rituals, but gradually the rules regarding the order and sequence of the rites became strict. In order to observe the sequence it was necessary to repeat the rites. Some words expressing the feeling of the sacrificer and glorifying the gods to whom the offerings were offered were recited. These words known as *Nivid* were the first *mantras* to be employed in the early Vedic sacrifices. But gradually, a large number of verses were composed and employed in the sacrifices to accompany the varied rituals. At a later
stage, many hymns or the mantra, which were not originally composed for the purpose of ritual, began to be employed in the rituals. Consequently mantra became one of the essential requirements of the sacrifice. With a very few exceptions each and every act was to be accompanied with certain mantras. The yajus mantras collected in the samhitās of the Yajurveda in both its-Kṛṣṇa and Śukla - recensions bear this fact. A mantra became so closely associated with a ritual that its mantratva verily depended on its being used in the ritual. A large number of stanzas of the Rgveda are not employed in any of the ritual but to retain their mantratva Śāyaṇa had to accept that they were mantra because they were employed in the Brahmajajña, Svādhyāya, i.e. daily study of one’s own Śākhā.

**darbha**

In the performance of Vedic rituals a sacred grass known as darbha is invariably used. Although apparently there is no connection between darbhas and the rituals as they were used neither in enkindling the Fire nor in making offerings into Agni, yet their importance was so great that no religious act could be performed without the help of darbha. How darbha took the place of honour in Vedic rituals is very interesting to note. Previously the Gangetic Pradesh was covered with darbha. No agriculture was possible without digging them out.

But how could they be dug out? The Brāhmaṇas who were well known for their intelligence spread the news that when Indra killed Vṛtra the latter was drowned in waters, making them polluted. The sacred and divine element of the waters came out from the waters in the form of darbha. Since they had
sprung out from the sacred and divine element of the waters, they began to be regarded as most sacred and divine, and hence their use in all religious rituals. While performing the religious ceremonies it was necessary to sit upon a mat of darbha (darb ‘asana’), the yajamāna had to wear a ring of darbha (pavitra) on his finger; darbhas were spread around the altar; gods, invited to the sacrifices, were given seats of darbhas; the sacrificial utensils were placed on the darbhas; the kurci ‘the cleanser’ used for cleansing the altar was made of darbhas. When the use of darbha increased in the performance of all religious acts, the land covered with darbhas was cleansed and became fit for cultivation. Ultimately, it so happened that darbhas became rare and then it began to be brought and preserved by the priests for a year. Finally it became a ritual to dig out darbhas on an amāvāsyā day which is called kuśotpātini amāvāsyā.

The origin of the Ritual of Soma-kraya:

The Āryans knew the use of Soma as a drink. It was a very invigorating drink. With the coming of the idea into their minds, that if a man wanted to attain vigour he should offer the oblation of Soma, soma-sacrifices began. The soma-valli from which the soma-rasa was extracted was found at Mūjavat Mountain. But when they moved far away from Mūjavat, it became very difficult to get soma-valli; and when it became very rare its importance increased. Now it was bought from the lower class people who used to collect it and sell it for their livelihood. The dialogue between the purchaser and the seller of the Soma has been recorded in Śrautasūtras as a ritual in the soma-rites. After purchase the soma was brought with great honour to the house of the sacrificer. It was pressed and its juice was kept in a wooden pot called droṇa-
kalasha, and from there it was offered to the deities. With the introduction of the soma-rites a new class of Ritviks, known as udgâtra, came into being, who chanted mantras while offering soma to the deities. Songs known as Sâmans were also chanted at the time of preparation of somarasa.

Rituals in bath

In Vedic rituals, and even throughout the entire range of Hindu rituals, waters play very important role. From the beginning to the end of the sacrifices and in all sorts of religious activities water is employed. Before entering into any sort of religious activity a Hindu has to take bath. How the ritual of bathing started can be surmised by seeing the stanzas addressed to the waters in the Rgveda itself. Waters are pure and they wash and purify everything. In a hot country like India taking bath was pleasant to cool one’s body. Due to excessive sweating in the hot climate the body smells which may give rise to many diseases. By taking a bath one becomes fresh. When people wished to worship their deities or enter into any religious act they thought that they should do this with washed and fresh bodies. For purity sake they often use to wash their hands during the performance of such acts. This may indicate about the material reason for bathing, but water symbolizes consciousness and to bathe in pure consciousness before undertaking any sacrifice is the esoteric significance. At the end of the soma-sacrifice a ceremony called Avabhûtha was performed. In this ceremony various things, which were to be disposed of after the offering, were carried to the waters and cast into them. The sacrificer and his wife took bath, which was believed to result in the removal of sin. ‘But these forms’, says A.B.Keith, ‘are obviously mere cloaks for the fact that the washing is the chief thing, and that it concerns itself with the removal of the mysterious po-
tency, which has clung since the dikṣā to the sacrificer and his wife, rendering them unfit for normal human life’. That the priests realized this is, clearly proved by the language used for the rite: the waters are distinctly said to remove the consecration and the Tapas, and it is stated that the sacrificer takes the consecration with him into the bath. In support of this A.B.Keith, refers to the rite of the under-taking of a vow of study by a Brahmacārin who assumes a girdle, an antelope skin, and a staff. At the end of the vow all these things are solemnly laid aside and the Brahmacārin takes a bath. Thus there is no doubt that the ritual of the bath certainly started with the idea of purifying the body.

Purification

Gradually it also began to be thought that waters purify not only body but also the mind. In the beginning, taking a bath was sufficient for both purposes. That is, outer and inner purification. But gradually the sprinkling of waters on the body and also at the place where worship was to be performed began in addition to bathing. Subsequently, sprinkling, touching and sipping of water became a sort of ritual, symbolizing the outer and inner purification.

From the above observations we come to the conclusion that all Vedic rituals were in the beginning very simple, devoid of any complicated injunction or commandment and sophisticated rigidity in their performance. With the passage of time they became more and more complicated and rigid in the hands of the priestly class which had become ignorant of the original meaning of the ritual. If one explains the correct meaning and significance of the Vedic rituals they may prove fruitful even today.
What is Vedic Ritual?

The Ritual is a part of the artistic and aesthetic dimension of Religion; the Vedic ritual is the extension of the logic behind the concept of Mantra to the most physical plane. What Mantra does or is supposed to do at the psychological level, a ritual can do or is supposed to do at the physical level.

A ritual is a symbolic expression, in the physical plane, of a spiritual, cosmic or psychological truth, process, event and mood. (has already been explained in brief) The symbolic significance of the vedic rituals. The Vedic ritual is a symbolic representation of the inner sacrifice, the offering of all our inner and outer activities as oblations into the upward flaming fire of Aspiration Agni, ignited at the altar of our heart along with the chanting of the sacred Mantra. Not only all the activities but also the fruits of the inner sacrifice, ghṛta and soma, illumined mind and the delight of being are poured into the inner Agni who carries them to the gods and bring their increasing bounties to man or to use the terminology of the vedic sages, make them (the gods)"increase" in man. As Sri Aurobindo, explains the inner significance of the vedic ritual:

"The principal features of the sacrifice are the kindling of the divine flame, the offering of the ghṛta and the soma-wine and the chanting of the sacred word. By the hymns and the offering the gods are increased; they are said to be born, created or manifested in man and by their increase and greatness here they increase the earth and heaven, that is to say, the physical and mental existence to their utmost capacity and, exceeding these, create in their turns the higher worlds or planes ... the ghṛta of the sacrifice is the yield of the shining cow; it is the clarity or brightness of the solar light in the
human mentality. *The soma is the immortal delight of existence secret in the waters and the plant and pressed out for drinking by the gods and men. The word is the inspired speech expressing the thought illumination of the Truth which rises out of the soul, formed in the heart, shaped by the mind".*¹

The outer ritual is primarily intended for the uninitiated masses who live predominantly in their physical being. But this does not mean that ritual is a concession given to the laity. The Vedic ritualistic system is based on profound psychological truths and aims at giving even to the masses who live in the physical consciousness some opening to the spiritual truth. For a properly designed ritualistic system, truly and faithfully expressive of a psychological or spiritual truth or idea along with the chanting of the *Mantra* can, under right conditions, open even the physical being of man to some intuition or experience of a deeper psychological and spiritual truth. The ancients were well aware that the energies of body, mind and spirit do not function in distinct and isolated compartments but interact with each other. All energies, physical or psychological are expressions of the one indivisible creative energy of the Spirit. Not only does the mind influence the body but certain bodily and physical gestures or acts influence the mind and can induce distinct psychological moods. Just as a spiritual state of consciousness can express itself spontaneously in the psychological plane, in the form of an inspired *Mantra* and the repetition or chanting of the *Mantra* can induce the corresponding spiritual mood, so also a psychological or spiritual state of consciousness can express itself in the physical plane in the form of spontaneous physical gestures and the reproduction of the gestures can induce the corresponding psychological or spiritual mood.

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The point we are trying to emphasise here is that Vedic rituals are neither meaningless superstitions nor mere concessions thrown at the masses. They are based on sound psychological principles and a clear understanding of the law of interaction, interdependence, parallelism and correspondence which govern the energies in man and the universe in the various levels of their interwoven existence.

The Vedic ritual is always accompanied by the chanting of the *Mantra*. We have already discussed the philosophy behind the Vedic *Mantra*. The creation of the *Mantra* is primarily a psycho-spiritual process. But the affect of chanting and hearing the *mantra* is predominantly psycho-physical. The *mantric* vibrations, work in the physical-nervous system of the human being and prepares in his physical consciousness a state of receptivity to the spiritual truth. Thus the Vedic ritualistic system is an attempt to give a spiritual direction to the physical life of man. The purpose of the Vedic ritual is to constantly remind man, in every act of his physical life, the existence of some higher invisible cosmic and spiritual forces. This gave a religious stamp to the entire life of the society and implanted in the consciousness of the people a tendency to make every act of life sacred—a symbolic gesture of prayer, offering and sacrifice to the higher powers. But since the system was based on psychological truth, it must have been an effective force in the vedic age for the diffusion of the spiritual influence to the masses and probably helped even the common man to have some intuition or glimpse of higher powers. The method used may be primitive and elementary. This is probably the only way to bring some spiritual influence to the physical and vital life of man. And the psychological principle or insight behind the vedic ritual system is still valid and its intended aim is part of the future evolutionary destiny of the human race.
Here there is an altogether new world to discover and explore. Modern psychosomatic medicine is busy exploring the effects of Psyche on the body but not sufficient attention is given to discover the effect of bodily movements, rhythmic repetitions and vibrations on the psyche. The wise men of ancient cultures had this intuition. They knew that rhythm, harmony and beauty in the organisation of the outer physical environment tend to create harmony in the mind. This is the reason why ancient Greek culture gave the highest importance to music and the development of the aesthetic sense through art.

We must remember here that ritual is always a part of the artistic side or aesthetic dimension of religion. All advanced religions have such a rich aesthetic culture - rich in mythology, rituals and other artistic expressions like architecture etc. Perhaps some form of ritual is needed for the fullness of the religious being in man and its integral self-expression. To express the inner aspiration and adoration spontaneously in an outer symbolic form of beauty is the meaning and significance of a ritual. Like any art, the ritual should also be the expression of the inner truth and beauty of religion. It must be an act or gesture which is a living symbol of an inner truth of the religion expressed in a beautiful, harmonious and rhythmic outer form which is appealing to the aesthetic being in man. For the advanced spiritual seeker it is a potent means for concretising his inner adoration in and through his physical being. And for the ordinary religious man it can be a first point of entry through the physical and aesthetic being to the spiritual.

So the systems of worship and ritual developed in the Indian religious tradition from the vedic period with its sacrificial altar to the latter elaborate, complex and sophisticated systems of worship developed in the Tantras are not a
concession thrown to the inferior category of seekers but answers to some concrete psychological and evolutionary needs of the religious being in man.

The higher spirituality and those few who have realised the higher spiritual consciousness go beyond the realm of religions, rituals and worship. But for the immense majority of human beings, who are not yet ready for the higher spiritual life, religion was until now the only means for their spiritual development. The situation may change in the future. The emerging trends indicate a non-religious and psychological approach to inner development. But even then, for a long time to come and for an immense majority of humanity a religious approach to spiritual life may still be relevant and valid. So until the human consciousness as a whole becomes ready for a higher psycho-spiritual approach to inner evolution, it will not be wise to dispense with the religious approach through systems of rituals and worship and faith, unless we can find something better to replace them. But to prevent the system from becoming a mechanical and formal thing, it must be a living and progressive outer expression of a living and progressive inner spiritual and aesthetic culture.

Gṛhya Sūtra

Along with the high philosophy of the Upaniṣads, stressing knowledge and meditation as the means to liberation and emancipation, there is a continuance of the old sacrificial rituals of the Brāhmaṇas during the Vedic period. Our basic information regarding the ritualistic religion is from the Gṛhya- Sūtras; some important features of the rituals described in them are noted below.

This is the essential nature of the Vedic sacrifice. This divine help and the
power of magic were both invoked through the sacrifice, in the inevitable struggle with the forces of evil or the demons. Magic and religion are never confused in the Vedic religion. The fear of the living for the dead plays an important part in the cult of the dead, but it must be remembered that there is no direct fear of the spirit of the dead to whom no hostile nature is attributed. It is rather the fear of death—the fear of the great change—that has affected them. This explains why the whole cult of the dead in Vedic ritual is marked by love and deep regard for the dead ancestors, and why providing nourishment for them is a matter that claims respectful attention of the living all his life.

Gradually, however, the belief in the magic power of the sacrifice grows to such an extent so as to overshadow and ultimately eclipse the belief in the efficacy of the good will of a deity. In the organization and elaboration of sacrificial ritual, during this and the Brāhmaṇa age, a particular mental outlook is noticeable, which construes the sacrifice as a potent weapon of magic.

The power of confession publicly made had its psychological effect on the minds of the individuals and this practice shows the psychological awareness of the people of the time. The purifying power of a public confession and the usefulness of a warning to others of the identity of the sinner may be the elements of belief in some strange and peculiar practices connected with the removal of sin, such as the proclamation by the husband of his sin against his wife while begging for alms clothed in an ass’s skin. The murderer drinks out of the skull of the murdered man, puts on the skin of a dog or an ass, and lives on alms, confessing his guilt before all. These practices are mentioned in the Dharma-Sūtras of Āpastamba, Gautama, and Baudhāyana, as also in the
Pāraskara Gṛhya -sūtra.

The fire being the purifier had a very special place in the performance of the sacrifice. The fire is the intermediary who conveys the sacrifice to the gods and at the same time an effective means of chasing away evil spirits. Fire symbolically meant the aspiration which a householder had to keep alive and in case of the fire being extinguished he could revive it.

The polytheism of the Samhitās had narrowed down to the Upaniṣadic monism. At one end was sacrifice and ritual, at the other was the profound philosophy of the Upaniṣads. Spiritual barrenness of the people at large was the natural result. No wonder formulae, observances, and sacraments became the order of the day.

The word sūtra, by which a special class of literature is designated, originally means “a thread.” Secondarily it denotes that type of literature, which is made up of short sentences running through a topic like a thread. A sūtra has thus come to mean a short rule, in as few words as possible, giving a clue to the learning stored in a particular topic forming a part of a particular book. Both by their form and object the Śūtras form a class by themselves. The system of oral instruction, which formed the basis of education in those days, very probably necessitated this peculiar fashion of summarizing the entire exposition to help in easily committing it to memory. It is also not improbable that the intricacies of Vedic ritual, which were to be scrupulously observed in every small detail, contributed to a certain extent to the development of this form of literature. If, therefore, a non-initiate finds here clarity sacrificed at the altar of brevity, it is only natural. But the definition of a sūtra clearly says that a sūtra
should be brief in form but at the same time unambiguous in its meaning
(svalpākṣaram = asandigdhām).

The class of literature, which comes under the lead, does not form part of the
Vedic literature, but is in close association with it. It is not the Veda, a divine
revelation, but the Vedāṅga, “the limbs of the Veda,” constituting works of
human authorship. Though these Vedāṅga include a number of exegetical sci-
ences like Śikṣa (phonetics), Kalpa (ritual), Vyākaraṇa (grammar), Nirukta
(etymology), Chhandas (metre), and Jyotiṣa (astronomy), all of them have
come down to us in the sūtra style. These six Vedāṅga refer to the six subjects
that help with the proper understanding, recitation, and sacrificial use of the
Vedas. Taken as a whole, therefore, the Sūtra form of literature is post-Vedic
as is also shown by its language. In contents, however, they may be traced
back to the period of the Brāhmaṇas which occasionally deal with etymology,
grahmanas, and astronomy alongside the ritual.

Śikṣā

The traditional list enumerating the six Vedāṅga assigns the first place to Śikṣā
or the science of phonetics. The word originally means only “instruction,” and
then specially such instruction as is imparted for the correct pronunciation,
etc., of the Vedic texts. These works are therefore closely related to the Saṃhitā
texts, but in a way they are related to the ritual also; for in the performance of
a sacrifice the correct recitation of the mantras is as important as the correct
order of the sacrificial acts themselves. The Taittiriya Upaniṣads (I. 2) men-
tions this Vedāṅga for the first time, and the Sūtra texts belonging to it are at
least as old as the Kalpa- Sūtras.²
Of later origin and of much less importance are some short treatises on phonetics ascribed to such important persons as Bharadvāja, Vyāsa, Vaśiṣṭha, and Yājñavalkya. The Vyāsa - Śikṣā, which is directly connected with the Taittirīya Prātiṣākhya, is comparatively older than the other works of similar nature. The Pañinīyaśikṣā may be old in its contents though its present form is rather late.

Kalpa

The oldest Śūtras works are the Kalpa- Śūtras which deal with the ritual and are thus directly connected with the Brāhmaṇas and the Āranyakas. According to the subject-matter dealt with they are divided into two branches, the Śrauta- Śūtras and the Grhya Śūtras. The former deal with the great rites taught in the Brāhmaṇas and involving the services of a number of priests, whereas the latter teach the domestic sacrifices and other duties in the daily life of a householder. The former are so called as they are based on Śruti, but both the Grhya - and the Dharma- Śūtras are called Smārta, as they are based on Smṛti (tradition).

The Śrauta- Śūtras on the other hand covers a comparatively wider field, since they give instructions regarding the various ceremonies that are to be performed at different stages in the life of a person. The order of arrangement in the Grhya – sūtra is determined by its subject matter which refers to the ideal life of a householder. Most of them begin with the marriage ceremony and then go on to describe those that are connected with the birth of a child, beginning with the ceremonies performed at the time of conception. The various other ceremonies such as Annaprāśana (first taking of rice), Cudākarana
(tonsure), *Upanayana* (initiation), etc., are then described in the order of their natural sequence, the funeral rites naturally coming at the end. There are thus described a large number of domestic customs and usage, and in this respect the value of the *Gṛhya - Sūtras* to the student of ancient folk-lore can never be over-estimated.

The *Gṛhya - Sūtras* also describe the five “great sacrifices,” i.e. the daily sacrifices to the gods, demons, fathers, man and the Brahman. The first three of these comprise the simple offerings of food and a libation of water, whereas the “sacrifice to man” is nothing but hospitality shown to a guest, and the “sacrifice to the Brahman” constitutes the daily study of the Veda. Further, these texts also deal with the customs and ceremonies connected with such occasional and seasonal functions as house building, farming, gardening, and digging of tanks and wells. Connected with the funeral rites are also the ancestral sacrifices (*Śrādhā*) which by their importance soon developed into special texts known as the *Śrādhakalpas*. A continuation of the *Gṛhya - Sūtras* are the *Dharma- Sūtras* dealing with the customary law and practice. The fourth allied group of the *Sūtras* is that of the *Śulba- Sūtras* which are directly attached to the *Śrauta- Sūtras*. The word *Śulba* means “a measuring string,” and these texts give minute rules regarding the measurement and construction of the fire-altars and the place of sacrifice. They may thus be regarded as the oldest books on Indian geometry.

The *Śrauta- Sūtras* and the *Gṛhya - Sūtras* are also of great value from the point of view of the correct understanding of the Vedic passages. These *Sūtras*, besides giving instructions for the mechanics of the ritual, also enjoin the use of certain Vedic mantras for recitation.
Vyakarana

The only representative that has come down to us of this Vedāṅga is the Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, which belongs to a later period. The Vedic grammar in this work receives only a sectional treatment at the hands of Pāṇini, his principal object being the description of the “bhāṣā,” the ordinary language of the people and not the sacred language of the “seers.” The earlier exegetical works in this field are lost to us. The Uṇādi Sūtras teaching the formation of nouns from roots, and the Phiṭ Sūtras dealing with accent, are the representatives of the earlier treatises in the field of grammar before Pāṇini.

Nirukte

Of this Vedāṅga connected with etymology we have the sole representative in Yāska’s Nirukta. It appears that some centuries after the composition of the Saṁhitās, these texts began to be unintelligible, and to facilitate their understanding it was deemed necessary to have lists of rare and obscure words. These lists were styled the Nighañṭus, and Yāska’s treatise is a commentary on such lists, prepared not by himself but by his predecessors. But none of their works is available now.

Chhandas

The literature comprising this Vedāṅga on metre is equally meager. The Nidānasūtra in ten Prapāṭhakas belongs to the Sāmaveda and deals with metre as also with the component parts of the Sāmaveda. It has been ascribed to Patañjali by some ancient teachers.
Jyotisha

There is no work available at present dealing with ancient astronomy in the sūtra style. The Jyotiṣa- Vedāṅga is a later work of a practical utility. It gives some rules for calculating and fixing the days and hours for the different sacrifices. It is really unfortunate that the earlier works of this Vedāṅga are lost to us. Some of the astronomical theories and mathematical calculations worked out by the Vedic people are really startling, considering the age and surroundings in which they originated. But at present the only source is the Vedic Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇs, particularly of the Yajurveda, from which we derive our knowledge.

The Sūtras

The fire is the centre around which the Grhya is evolved, fire that is established and maintained by the householder. It is among the duties of the householder, his family and pupil to keep the fire burning constantly. In case of the fire being extinguished it had to be rekindled ceremoniously, or borrowed from the house of a wealthy person or of the performer of many sacrifices. Normally establishment (with proper ceremony) of the domestic fire took place on a marriage, the division of property, the Sāmavartana (“the return of the student after the completion of his period of studentship”); the death of the head of the family (when the eldest son kindled a new fire) and a continuous break of twelve days in the maintenance of the fire. The householder himself had to maintain the fire and perform the domestic sacrifices and his wife was given the privilege to act for him, if necessary, at the morning and evening libations. The employment of a Brahman is optional, though he must be req-
uisitioned at the *Sulagava* (spit-ox) and *Dhanvantari* sacrifices. The householder at times installed a straw puppet or an umbrella and clothing as a symbol instead of inviting the Brahman to perform the sacrifice. During the marriage ceremony the bridegroom himself muttered the marriage formulas if he were a *Brāhmaṇa*, otherwise the *Brāhmaṇas* did so on his behalf. The position of the sacred thread varied according to the performance of the rituals - in the offerings to the gods the position of the sacrificer’s sacred thread was over the left shoulder and under the right armpit but exactly the reverse in the offerings to the *Pitris*. The food offerings offered were referred as “pāka” which meant “cooked food” or “simple.” The term is comprehensive enough to include offerings of milk, curds, melted butter, rice, barley, sesame, barely-gruel, porridge, and even the flesh of animals, though this were offered on very rare and special occasions. Varieties of butter (butter at various degrees of temperature) are used, the butter offering being of a simple type. The fore-offerings and after-offerings, the kindling-verses or instruction-formulae (*nigadas*) and the invocation of the *Iḍa* which are well-known features of the *Śrauta* offerings are conspicuous by their absence in the *Pāka* (“simple” or “baked”) offerings. The few occasions for an animal sacrifice are marriage, offerings to the masses and the guest-reception. The only special animal sacrifice is the *Sulagava* (spit-ox), which inclines more to the *Śrauta* type.

Keith thinks “*In the Ṛgveda and in the later period alike, the absence of any temple or house of the god marks the cult of the gods, even of the simplest kind.*” This view may however be justly questioned. If by “temple” we understand “*A sacred place set apart for purposes of worship and devotion to a deity.*” A god’s house is mentioned in the *Grhya - Sūtras* along with a forest
as the place where a student observing the Mahanamnivrata is to fast. It seems that temples existed, but did not play such an important role as in the modern times, because they did not have any role to play in the sacrifices, the essence of which lay in an invocation to the god to come to the place of the sacrifice and to partake of the food and drink there kept ready for him.

Offerings are made in the hope of favour expected from the deity. The god accepts the offerings and grows, and the prosperity of the sacrificer grows in proportion to the prosperity of the god. This theory of the sacrifice results in an exchange of gifts, but the initiative in this exchange generally comes from the worshipper rather than from the god. That is to say, there are only a few thank-offerings (comparatively speaking) in the ritual of this age or the earlier ones.

**The Śrauta ritual- Its relevance today**

Examining the relevance of the Vedic ritual in twentieth century life is a fascinating subject. Attempts have so far been made to trace the modifications in the rituals, which took place during the last three thousand years. These mainly are of academic interest. The question of relevance cannot be answered without considerable study. The problem needs to be studied in a historical perspective. Such a study will help us in finding a correct answer to the question. The relevance will have to be considered with reference to the followers of the Vedic religion. Buddhism and Jainism have reacted to certain tenets of the Vedic religion. In order to find out the relevance it is essential to define the character of the present-day Hindu. Let us take the life of an average Hindu, who has faith in the Almighty, who respects the Veda, who inspite of his
meager means of livelihood honour the true religion and who aspires to lead a moral life.

The First Stage

Obviously the Śrauta ritual was fully relevant in the Mantra- Brāhmaṇa period. Man believed in numerous divinities, offered prayers to them and tried to get his desires fulfilled through śrauta and domestic performances as prescribed in the scriptures. His life was mainly a religious life, which was almost in concurrence with the scriptural injunctions. Even then it cannot be presumed that each and every householder of the first three social orders were maintaining the sacred fires or even the Aupasana fire. It also cannot be that every member of a Brāhmaṇa family was capable of officiating as a priest. It is really difficult to draw a complete picture of the life of the society in the Mantra- Brāhmaṇa period. Even then there is no harm in presuming the full relevance of the śrauta ritual in that society.

The Second Stage

The next period which marks a transition in the religious and philosophical life pertains to the composition of the Upaniṣads. The teachers of the Upaniṣads believed in the Ultimate Reality designated by the word Brāhman. This conviction automatically placed the Vedic deities like Agni, Indra, Varuṇa in a subordinate position. As a matter of fact, the belief in numerous divinities had begun to falter in the later Rgvedic period and the Yajurveda period. As a consequence of the subordinate position of the divinities the śrauta rituals lost their prominence. The references to the rituals simply exhibit the respect shown
towards the things of the past. The terms and items related to the rituals were interpreted on a different plane. This aspect is already met with in the Āranyakas. Consequently the relevance of the śrauta ritual to the life of the society in the Upaniṣadic period must have been reduced to a certain extent.

The Third Stage

The next stage to be considered pertains to the period in which the Kalpa Sūtras were composed. It is rather difficult to consider this stage in terms of definite chronology because the chronology of the Kalpa Sūtras including the śrauta Sūtras cannot be said to have been fixed. The gross upper and lower limits can however be mentioned. The śrauta Sūtras of Baudhāyana, and Vadhula belonging to the Taittiriya recension of Ṛṣṇa Yajurveda mark the upper limit, namely, sixth century B.C., and the Vaikhānasā Śrauta sūtra belonging to the same recension may be said to belong to the fourth century AD. Thus a span of one thousand years will have to be taken into account. While the degree of relevance in the period of the Baudhāyana, Śrauta sūtra would be comparatively higher, that in the period of the Vaikhanāsā Śrauta sūtra would be lower. It would however be feasible to contemplate such a period in consideration of the character of the Kalpa Sūtras.

The deviation in the ritual in the Śrautasūtra period in certain respects has already been pointed out. A few instances may be given. There was a tendency to make the ritual simpler. In the Full moon and New-moon sacrifices paddy was allowed to be poured out of a basket instead of from a bullock-cart standing near the Gārhapatya fireplace. A twig of a Sami tree instead of a Palasa tree began to be procured for driving away calves in the New-moon
sacrifice. In the Pravargya rite the earth required for preparing the Mahāvira was allowed to be collected at a prior time near the Āhavaniya fire for convenience. If a milch-cow and a she-goat was not available for milking for a gharma, previously procured milk was allowed.

The Śrauta Sūtras are expected to prescribe rites to be performed by an Āhitāgni. Sometimes however they refer also to an Anāhitāgni. The authors of the Śrauta Sūtras had begun to say that by performing a simple sacrifice, one could acquire the same credit which is acquired by performing a complicated and extensive ritual. The Brāhmaṇas have prescribed certain expiatory rites in respect to deficiencies that occur in a ritual. On comparison one finds that the Śrauta Sūtras have mentioned many more contingencies in which expiations are to be gone through. All these facts go to show that in the period of the Śrauta Sūtras circumstances had changed, as a result of which certain modifications had to be resorted to. The practice of ritualistic religion had decayed and the relevance of the Śrauta ritual was further reduced.

There was also another point perhaps more important - which speaks of the reduced relevance of the Śrauta ritual. A Kalpaśūtra comprises, besides the Śrauta Sūtras, the Gṛhya, Dharma, Prāyāscitta, śulba and Pravara Sūtras. There are four Kalpa Sūtras: Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, Satyāśādha and Vaikhānasa; all these belong to the Taittīrya recension. Whether each of these was composed by one and the same person is in question. There are opposing views in this regard. Here we are not concerned with this problem. It may be argued that the component parts of each of these Kalpa Sūtras were composed within the range of the period under discussion. Dharma Sūtras attach importance to the moral life. They profess that nothing is greater than the
knowledge of the soul. They also say that people belonging to all castes attain the highest heaven by performing their religious duties. Thus the Dharma Sūtras are clearly under the influence of the Upaniṣadic philosophy. It may, therefore, be said that people belonging to the Kalpasūtra-period believed in the Supreme Reality and primarily respected the ritualistic religion because it had reached them traditionally, not necessarily because they believed in the Vedic divinities and the ritualistic religion. This leads to the conclusion that the relevance of the Śrauta ritual was still more reduced in the period of the kalpa Sūtras.

The Fourth Stage

The next period of ritual activity comprises a wide range beginning with the post-Kalpasūtra period, that is to say from the fifth century A.D. Even though the ritualism cannot be said to have held a fixed proportion throughout this long period, it would be convenient to compare the ritual-practices of this period with those prescribed in the Mantra-Brāhmaṇa. Persons belonging to the first three social orders were entitled to study the Veda and observe the ritualistic religion. It might, however, be said that and a few ruling princes resorted to the Śrauta ritual practices during this period. This period is marked by the composition of Bhāsyas and Paddhatis on the Kalpa Sūtras; digests like Trikandamandana, Vajnaparsva, Karmapradipa and also the Kalivarjiya were produced. Bhāsyas and Paddhatis restrict their explanations to the Sūtras; they can hardly be expected to refer to the modifications. Works like Trikāṇḍamāṇḍana composed round about the eleventh century A.D., record and, in a way, sanction the modifications. When the Kalivarjiya prohibits the performance of certain Śrauta and Gṛhya rites, it really transgresses the higher
authority of the *Sruti*. That it does so indicates that those rituals had gone out of practice, each one perhaps for a different reason. It further went to the length of assuming religious authority and prohibits their performance. That the *Kalivarjya* prohibits the offering of *Agnihotra*, the basic *Śrauta* rite, shows that it had practically gone out of general practice and was not relevant to the religious life of the times. In *Kaliyuga* only one-fourth religion remained in practice thus restricting the relevance of the *Śrauta* ritual.

Works like *Yajñaparsva* eulogize the performance of *Śrauta* rites in such a way that one is tempted to set up the sacred fires and perform these rites. Thus the *Yajñaparsva* says that "*Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa, Indra and other gods reside in the residence of an Agnihotrin.*" It further says that centres of pilgrimage, the *Tarpāṇa* rite, *Tāpas*, *Japa* do not stand comparison with *Agnihotra*. One may compare here the attitude of the *Purāṇas*, which, while describing the various *Tirthas*, go to the length of saying that by having a dip in such and such a *Tirthas*, one would obtain the credit of having performed a thousand *Aśvamedha* sacrifices. All this points to the conclusion that not only big sacrifices but also ordinary *Śrauta* rites had gone out of practice in the days of the *Purāṇas*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* (11.27.7) points out three types of sacrifices *Vaidika, Tāntrika* and combined.

Attention may be drawn to the so called Hinduisation of the *Śrauta* ritual. Certain rituals imitating the character of *Śrauta* rites were incorporated into the Hindu religion. Concrete examples of the Hindu rites are the various types of *Caṇḍihoma*, *Viṣṇuyuga* and the worship of *Rudra* (*Laghurudra, Mahārudra, Atirudra* etc.). Such religious practices mixed with *Tantric* elements formed the substitutes for the *Śrauta* rites; they clearly indicate that the number of
Ahitagnis was fast decreasing, that big Śrauta sacrifices were almost extinct and that primary Śrauta rites and a few Soma-sacrifices were all that could be performed by a limited number of Āhitāgnis. Temple-worship which was a popular form of religion took the place of Śrauta and Śmārta practices.

Prayoga-manuals of different types were composed during this period. They indicate minor modifications in the rites here and there. They are however, not useful in finding out the relevance of the Śrauta ritual.

The Fifth Stage

The fifth and last stage begins with the nineteenth century A.D. and continues even today. The relevance of the Śrauta ritual in the life of Hindu society which was reduced at every stage, continued to do so even more vividly in this stage. The reasons for the reduction in the relevance during the periods represented by the earlier stages were of the same nature, and became more and more vivid in course of time. The nineteenth century brought in a new revolution — political, social and cultural. The British entered India in the seventeenth century AD, initially for trade-purposes, and gradually expanded their activities which took a political turn and ultimately brought the whole of India under their control in the nineteenth century A.D. A new wave of thought representing the western culture came over here along with them, and introduced a totally new outlook to the people of India both in their external and internal behavior. It gave a blow to the faith in religion. The new liberal education system moulded a new society breaking the barriers of social inequality. The economic revolution agitated the society particularly in urban areas. Consequently the religious practices suffered a great shock. At present there
are only a few hundred Āhitāgni who are somehow trying to keep alive their Śrauta practices. The tradition of learning the Veda by rote is fast disappearing. As a result, the priestly class essential for the conduct of ritual practices is becoming obsolete. The social and economic pattern of society which formed the base of the ritualistic religion is shattered making it difficult for an Ahitagni to pursue his activity. The animal - offering which is a part of the sacrificial procedure is being opposed by the conscious public.

Conclusion

The question of the relevance of the Śrauta ritual today requires to be answered in the light of the review of Śrauta ritual practices in India during the last three thousand years. The review was based on the literature produced in the different stages. There is very little historical evidence to ascertain the position of Śrauta ritual - practices in the past. On the other hand the present position is quite clear to us. As stated at the beginning, the relevance is to be considered for those who have a respect for India’s past and wish to preserve it as far as possible, to those who aspire to lead a moral life, but who cannot observe the religious practices and perhaps have lost faith in them. A materialist will totally protest against this tradition. One who has full faith in the Veda would say following the scriptural injunctions like ‘agnihotram juhuyāt svargakāmaḥ’;6 ‘vasante vasante jyotiṣomena yajeta’7 etc that a twice born should follow the Śrauta ritualistic religion. We should honour the belief of such persons. However, in consideration of the present Hindu life in general it may be concluded that in the twentieth century the Śrauta ritual practice has no relevance at all. It is enough if one believes in God, has respect for the Vedic lore and leads a moral life.
There is, however, the danger of the Veda and Vedic tradition a treasure not only of India but of the whole world, being lost for ever. The Veda came down intact without the loss of a syllable or accent for thousands of years by oral tradition. This is regarded as a wonder. Side by side, the ritualistic religion grew which gave birth to Upaniṣadic philosophy. The truth of the sacrificial performance apart, a careful witnessing of such a performance renders valuable help in understanding the Vedic texts. It is therefore essential to see that the tradition of the Śrauta ritual is preserved. At present there are some Āhitāgniṣ in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, who are, somehow trying to maintain the tradition, There is the risk that the next generation may not be able to continue the same. The sure way to preserve the tradition is to bring into existence a centre somewhere in South India where the Vedic Pandits would stay together to preserve the Vedic recitation and Vedic ritual and at the same time impart instructions to their sons in those subjects. The centre would serve as a model of Vedic life as far as possible, and also as a medium which would provide information to scholars in the subject. It is the duty of the lovers of Vedic lore to point out the urgency of this matter to the Government and philanthropic Trusts. Now is the time to take immediate steps towards this end because there are a few Vedic Pandits even now whose collaboration may become available.