Chapter VII

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We have been making an exposition of the concept of yajña in all its details with reference to the original sources of ritualistic tradition of Vedic India. This investigation into the extensive nature of the concept, though by no means exhaustive, points towards areas so remote, and illustrative of great human endeavour and wisdom of life at once so complicated and so deeply buried in the gulf of time. In the course of our investigation we have seen that the concept of yajña is central to the vedic view of life, and all other concepts are organically related to it. It is also found that there is no real antagonism between Jñānakānda and Karmakānda in the real vedic tradition, as the Brahman of the Upanisads – we may call it by any name Sat, Atman, or tat – is the object of all rituals, Upāsanā and Jñāna. A perusal of the Brāhmaṇas show that Yajña is a fundamental concept in the Universe and that it is not confined to mere rituals. There is reason to believe that what we get as poetry and rituals in the Saṁhitā and the Brāhmaṇas are records relating to a far later stage in the development of Indian civilization, with a long antecedent period of progress and achievements. It is in the structure and design of these sacrifices that the Rais have displayed their knowledge and understanding of the world process and human nature.

The most important feature of the concept of Yajña is the way in which it comprehends and correlates the manifold aspects of human experience with a view to direct them through the history and mystery of life towards the core of being and the unity of all existence.
The present study distinguishes three phases in the Upanisadic treatment of sacrifice. There is first, the transient phase in which the ancient style sacrifices still predominate. It may be called the anthropocosmic sacrifice. Here the place of man is central and his dispositions are considered to be of the utmost importance.

The second phase may be called the anthropocentric. It underlines the meaning of sacrifice for human life. Man becomes the centre of the sacrificial act.

The third phase may be called the  
 identifies the external  with the internal  of a perfect mind reenacting within itself the whole dynamism of the outer world. The whole fabric of Vedic thinking is woven round three important images of life viz.,  , a journey and a battle. It is also confirmed that the idea of sacrifice is made use of in revealing or explaining some of the deep philosophical and spiritual experiences of the Rsis. Moreover, the creation of cosmic consciousness by ordering the structures of experience is the aim of rituals. The differentiated manifoldness is sacrificed for realising the source of things and the root of one’s being.

Each material object contains a consciousness involved or absorbed in the form and driven by an unknown and unfelt inner existence, the  of the Upanisads. After the human stage is reached, evolution differs from what has been in two important respects. Firstly, it is henceforward conducted by conscious efforts. Secondly, it is not confined to the progression of surface nature, for it goes inward into the cosmic being as well.
as upward towards a higher principle. But still mental nature and mental thought are based on the consciousness of the finite. The mind always sees and feels with separateness as its starting point, and has only a constructed understanding of unity. So it cannot effect a complete harmony in the world. It cannot even integrate man's own being. It is too powerless, for instance, before the subconscious and the unconscious in him. It is only when the reins of government are handed over to the yogic mind of unitive understanding that an integral transformation can take place. So the salvation of humanity lies not in simply transcending the world but in transfiguring as well. It is a question of integration and transformation. It is to this effect that the sacrificer is persuaded to a unitive understanding and the repeated awareness of the mystery of cosmic life and to the creation of cosmic consciousness that apprehends the root and the fruit of his being. "Yo vai bhūma tat sukham nālpe sukhamastī."¹

The discovery of Rta is the pivot of yajña - consciousness. The cosmic order revealed by Rta is not a fixed physical or a mathematical law, but a "sacrificial" order. The cosmic order is maintained by the sacrificial order; that is, Rta is upheld by yajña. It is through Rta that varuna governs the universe. Rta is the ultimate foundation of everything. From Rta comes the first born (the Word), or Prajāpati or Agni - Rta is not a "substance" or a "thing". It is rather the "law" or universal order embodied in sacrifice. It is the expression of the primordial dynamism that is

¹ CU 7.23.1
inherent in everything and also possesses its own internal coherence; it is a unifying "force" or "field" that could be said to be very soul of sacrifice. Rta is, in point of fact, the actual functioning or rather the proper rhythm of the sacrifice, while sacrifice is that which causes things to be what they are.

In short, it is found that the concept of yajña is not limited to mere external formalities of rituals; yajña is a universal frame of reference that co-ordinates the structures of experience and the sensorium complex of man; The vision of sacrifice awakens us from the illusion of ontological self complacency. The self subsistency of reality harbours its own absolute contingency. This may be paradoxical intuition. The whole of reality "stands on its own feet". It depends on itself. The ultimate structure of reality is not to be regarded as "another" or "deeper", "thing" or substance it is in fact sacrifice; it is the internal dynamism of the universe. Since the Vedic religion is connected with myths, a satisfactory understanding of sacrifice is impossible without an exploration into the field of mythology and mythological cosmogony. The Vedic literature abounds in myths with hidden spiritual visions. The demythologizing and translating them into existential terminology has not been successful. So the mythological dimension of sacrifice is also to be taken into account. It can be seen even for a casual observer that some of the well known myths bring to light certain facts that hint at the scientific background of Vedic thinking. Though no evidence of systematic scientific treatment of phenomena is available in the Samhitas there is considerable justification in holding the view that there are traces of scientific ideas fused with and moulded into poetic diction. The Vedic state-
ments have a cosmic background. This again discloses the fact that the Vedic thinkers have the mental make up more of post-philosophers than of philosopher-scientists. It is also felt that the Brāhmaṇas contribute much to the history of sciences in the world.

From a social point of view, these yajñas and their source books, the Brāhmaṇas present a picture of only a section of the Aryan Society. Though they confine themselves to the description of religious and the intellectual life of this section, as their picture is perfect their study is of immense help to students of sociology who desire to reconstruct the life in general in the Vedic society as a whole and to account for the sudden and drastic changes that it has undergone in the subsequent period.

The religious speculations of the early Vedic Indians manifested themselves in two forms—mythology and cosmology. Like many other primitive communities, the Vedic Aryans believed that the creation of the universe and the procreation of the human race were the result of a primeval sacrifice which was of the nature of the self immolation of a cosmic being. This cosmic being is represented in the Rgveda as the Virāt purusa. This concept of the primeval cosmic sacrifice is considered the starting point of creation. It also signifies the supra-temporal dimension of sacrifice. Besides the mythology, the cosmogony, the theosophy and the ritual of the "classes", embodied mainly in the Rgveda, there might have existed what may be called the religion of the "masses", mainly represented in the Atharva Veda, a combination of less logic and more magic.

In the course of the cultural history of the Vedic Aryans
their religion, naturally enough, tended to become increasingly complex. Out of a primitive form of ritual they now developed a very elaborate system of sacrifice. As a consequence of this, there arose, of necessity, a new class of priests who alone could master the many and highly complicated details of the sacrificial procedure given in the Brahmana texts which they produced for that purpose. Besides much priestcraft the Brāhmanic system of sacrifice did make a certain distinct contribution to the speculative wisdom of India. For instance, it sought to discover all kinds of symbolic ties or mystic bonds between the various details of the sacrifice on the one hand and the different aspects of the cosmos on the other, and thereby tried to establish a kind of magico-ritualistic advaita.

Turning to human life as such, two aspects of man’s life and their sacrificial implications are important. They are Ista and Pūrta; i.e., fulfilment of desires and social obligations. The Yajña provides scope for both; it is a grand synthesis of both. Theory of rā is based on social obligation. Two other important aspects of yajña are service and sacrifice. The pāñcamahāyajñas reveal the secret of these two aspects of social life. The Ancient Indian law-giver Manu is just to look upon them as Sāmkāras, as ennobling the soul by freeing it from mere selfishness and elevating the body to become a fit vehicle for higher things. It is constantly taught in the Vedas that sacred science consists in the knowledge of sacrifice and that sacrifice is the ultimate principle.

Regarding the sentiments that prompted the performance of these five observance P. V. Kane, in his "History of Dharma/Śāstra"
Every man could not afford to celebrate the solemn Srauta rites prescribed in the Brāhmaṇas and Srauta Śūtras. But everyone could offer a fuel-stick to fire that was deemed to be the mouth of the great gods of Heaven and thus show his reverence and devotion to them. Similarly everyone could show his reverence for and gratitude to the great sages that had bequested a glorious heritage of sacred literature by repeating at least one verse and one could propitiate his deceased ancestors by offering in loving memory and filial devotion a mere handful or vesselful of water (which costs nothing). The whole world human and nonhuman is one creation and there must be a spirit of live and let live or give and take. Therefore one must offer what one can afford to a guest and also have something for all beings (including even such shunned animals as dogs, crows, and insects. These feelings of devotion, gratitude, reverence, loving memory, kindliness and tolerance seem to have been the springs that prompted the Aryans of old to emphasise the importance of the five daily yajñas.

Moreover the Five Yajñas are distinguished from the Srauta sacrifices in two respects. In the first place the householder can perform them without the help of a professional priest. In the second place, in the five Yajñas the central point is the discharge of duties to the creator, to the ancient sages, to the Manes, and to the whole universe with myriads of creatures of various grades of intelligence. In the Srauta sacrifices the main spring of action is the desire to secure Heaven or some object such as prosperity, a son etc. Therefore, we can agree with Kane when he says that "the institution of the five sacrifices is morally and spiritually more progressive and more ennobling than that of the Srauta Sacrifices". And this is in perfect accord with the Vedic view of life, the sages final realisation of the unity of all existence.

It also exemplifies the important feature of the Vedic view
of all encompassing experience, which proceeds neither by accumula-
tion nor by elimination, but by integration. There is no separa-
tion between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the
secular, the cultic and the political. All is integrated into one
insight which allows for the tension and struggles of the human
condition and incorporates them all into the structure of the total
sacrifice.

The attitude of the Vedic Indian is not anthropo-centric or
individualistic. The Man is regarded as just a part of the cosmic
whole in the same way as an animal or a tree. The Man is just one
of the many forms in which the supreme Being becomes manifest in
this universe. The Co-ordination of the various aspects of crea-
tion, including man, and no subordination to man of other things is
found to be the guiding principle of the Aryan thought. But the
social organization of the Indians seems not in accordance with the
above point of view. It may be found that there is a kind of dicho-
tomy between the spiritual ideology and the social actuality of the
Indians. No unique position is ascribed to man in the cosmic scheme
of things. The Vedic Indian, therefore, never assumes any domineer-
ing attitude in life. He is ever eager to sink his individuality
in the ocean of cosmic totality. Humility or surrender before rea-
ality comes naturally to him. He realizes that what is called life
is after all a state of temporary and, from the ultimate point of
view, apparent disintegration or standing apart. He, therefore,
seeks to achieve re-integration through योगा or yoga.

There is a remarkable point which brings to light some traits
of similar lines of thought found in the Vedic seers and the exist-
tentialist thinkers of the world; two paths of life, देवयाना and
पित्रयाना, are mentioned. Most of us live others life, the life of
our Forefathers, think as they thought, do as they did ..... etc. This will lead us to a life of inauthenticity, and we will meet their fate. But if we want to live a life of authenticity or to find out a new path of illumination, enlightenment and freedom we should be prepared to deviate from the beaten track and to effect necessary modifications in our life, in the very thought pattern itself. This and similar affinities in different levels of thought deserve closer study. Here the point is simply introduced.

An interesting observation connected with the philosophy of yajña is that the rational comprehension of the Actual principle of the empirical world of the Vedic thinkers reaches only up to Prāṇa, while the spiritual apprehension of the Real goes up to Brahma. This Prāṇa being Prajapāti is the supreme commander of that which moves and that which does not move, the lord of the Actual, the realm of duality and sex, the bestower of reward for the Yajāmāṇa, even though he was aware of the ekam Sat that is Brahma. The idea of the ekam Sat is not the product of or the monopoly of the Upaniṣads but it was the building, binding and the cementing force of the Samhitās, Brahmanas and the Upaniṣads, and all other systems of thought derived from them.

The details of the performance of yajña emphasises the fact that the primary object of life both private and public shall be the same. The principle of yajña served the Vedic thinkers as a frame of reference which holds good to all the functions including individual, social and cosmic. This universal possibility of comprehension and correlation is the unique aspect of yajña emphasised again and again in Vedic literature.
In fine, this study of yajña confirms the view that the distinction of the ancient Indian civilization consists in the power of giving life a spiritual direction and the high and profound wisdom and skill with which, while basing society, ordering the individual life, encouraging and guiding human nature and propensity, it turned them all towards the realization of its master idea, and never allowed the mind it was training to lose sight of the use of life as a passage to the infinite and a discipline for spiritual perfection.