Chapter II

Vedic Rituals—Enumeration and Classification.
General features

I  General features

II  Classification of the Vedic Sacrifices, Śrauta Yajñas

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CHAPTER II

VEDIC RITUALS - ENUMERATION AND CLASSIFICATION

GENERAL FEATURES

Vedic rituals start from Agnihotra and end with Viśvaśrāṇaya. Agnihotra (the fire - god oblation), Darśapūrṇaṃāsa (The New - moon and Full - moon sacrifices), Cāturmāsa (The four month or seasonal sacrifice), Paśubandha (animal sacrifice), Ṭgrayanesti (first - fruit sacrifice), Somavāga (soma sacrifice), Ahīna (a soma sacrifice, extending from two up to twelve days), Sattrayāgas (sacrificial sessions), Gavāmayana (the way of the cows, a sacrifice of one year's duration are the basic (Prakṛti) rituals\(^1\). These serve as models to rituals.

Darśapūrṇaṃāsa serves as model to other Īṣṭis (ceremonies); Paśubandha to other Paśuyāgas; Somavāga to other Somayāgas; Ahīna to other Ahīnas; Sattrayāga gives a model to other Sattrayāgas. Gavāmayana is a model to other Ayanas. (Cayana, of course is not independent; it is only placing bricks in a particular shape in the place of Ūhavanīya). There are many cayanas of many shapes Śvēnacitī is taken as a model. Others are Viṅktis. Among Vedic rituals Vējasīya (drink of strength) is prescribed to attain priestlyhood. Rājasīya (Royal consecration) is described as a ritual for the consecration of kings only. Likewise Āśvamedha also is prescribed for kings. Of course they are connected with particular ideas; it is viṅkti of either Īṣṭi or Somavāga.

\(^1\) In the sūtras the principle is laid down that the sacrifices are to be distinguished as Prakṛtis and Viṅktis, the former being the base on which the latter are built up.
Agnihotra is a small ritual performed daily with the help of three fires$^2$ in the morning and evening. Darṣāpurāṇamaṇḍa is performed on the New moon and the Full moon days. Caturmāasya is a ritual to be conducted every year extending over four months.

Paśubandha is a ritual to be performed in the rainy season. Soma-yāga is the first yāga where offering of Somajuice plays an important role. It is done in five days.

The first day of the Soma-yāga is called Dīksanīya Ahas. Here among other things dīksaniyasti is performed. Dīksā is also taken by the yajamāna. Second day is called prāvaniya Ahas; then follows Somakraya. The Yajamāna purchases Soma plant from Soma Vikrayin (the seller of Soma), bringing Soma he performs Ātithyasti - Soma is the aśtithi (guest) here, then tanmātra śapta. This is a ritual touching the remaining Aśya of Ātithyasti. At the end of Ātithyasti the remaining Aśya is taken in another cup with mantras. This Aśya is touched by all rtvikeśas, not to quarrel among themselves till the end of the yāga. Then there are pravargya and Upasad rituals which are repeated six times, two pravargyas$^3$ (morning and evening) taken as one. The Pravargya (hot milk sacrifice) and Upasad$^4$ are continued...

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2 The three Srauta Agnis are:

i. the Garhapatyāgni connected with the family of the household, Garhapatī, representing earth.

ii the Hāvanapīyāgni connected with the deities (gods), representing heaven.

iii. Deksināgni connected with the ancestors of the family that are dead, representing Antariksa.

3 Pravargya is the rite performed on the preliminary days of the Soma-yāga. It is the offering of extremely heated ghee (ghṛta) mixed with the milk of cow and that of she-goat. It is performed twice a day after the Soma is bought. Each day after the morning pravargya, a layer of the uttaravedi is laid. It continues for five days. The rite and the pot which is used to heat the ghee in this rite are called mahāvīra. Vīra means fire, so mahāvīra is 'Great fire'.

4 Pravargya is followed by Upasad which is a performance in honour and pacification of the Mahāvīra.
to the third day also. But in the third day it is called Madhyama Ahas. In the middle of two pravargyas and Upasad preparation of Vedas and yūna are done. Fourth day is called Agnistomiya Ahas because goat-sacrifice is done to the gods Agni and Soma. In this day, as the third and last session pravargya and Upasad are done immediately in succession. Then there is pravargyodvāsana; fire is brought from the Prāgayama to the Ṭhavanīya of Mahāvedi. Till now the yāga is done only with the help of three fires existing within the Prāgayama. The Vedi also belongs to the original one (the dārsāki vedi connected with Darśapūranmāśa ritual). Now after pravargyodvāsana the fire of Ṭhavanīya is brought to the uttara vedi which is, hereafter going to serve as Ṭhavanīya. According to the rules Saumika Vedi is a broad one; 36° east west, 30° in the western part 24° in eastern part. Within this Vedi there is Ṭhavanīya, beyond that havirdhana and beyond that sadas. After Agnipранayana Ṭagnidhrīya shed is constructed, then sadas with Audambari at the centre. Then dhisnyas, of eight small altars, the front position of sadas. Then Ṭadhvaru brings fire a second time from the original Ṭhavanīya, places it on the Ṭagnidhrīya shed. He brings with him soma plant, places it at the havirdhana ṣakata; then the ritual connected with paśuyāga is done till the end. After these details the fourth day comes to an end. Vṛṣṭīvarī (water taken from rain) is brought, for mixing with Somajuice. The fifth day is the main day. It is called suṣvāhas. In the early morning the ritual starts.

Extraction and pressing of juice (Abhisava) starts. Some juice is taken in different cups or Grahas. Afterwards the Savanīya

* Audambari is the main pillar for the shed where Ugaṭṭr sits and sings saman.
The whole process of yāga is in accordance with the Yajurveda. But the rtviks follow their respective Vedas. The Adhvaryu generally follows the Yajurveda and parts of rituals prescribed in Yajur Brāhmaṇas; hotṛ follows the Rgveda and performs his duties according to Rgvedic Brāhmaṇas. His function is reciting the Rgveda mantras. On the other hand the Brahman follows either Adharva Veda prescriptions or instructions prescribed for him in the other Vedas.

The Agniḍhra simply helps the Adhvaryu, he follows prescriptions in the Yajurveda only. In the Caturmāsa, as there are two vedis, in the second day another rtvik is added as pratiprasthāṭr to follow Adhvaryu. In Pasubandha there is an additional rtvik prāśāṭr who follows the Rgveda connected with hotṛ.
Adhvarya is the main rtvik who takes care of the whole yajñavali; hotṛ comes only after the preparation of havis. Brahman sits supervising always, without doing anything.

In Soma yāga there are sixteen priests under four departments viz., Adhvarya, hotṛ, Udgāṭr and Brahman. Hota is the invoker; udgāṭa, the singer. Adhvarya, the actual performer; Brahman, the superintendent. They serve as chiefs of their respective departments. There are three subordinates for each of them. Sadasya is a rtvik who is on the model of Brahman but sits in the sadas.

Udgāṭr comes only in the Soma yāga; he comes to chant Soma. From Dikṣaṇiyeṣṭi his functions start. In pravṛgya he sings Sāman. But his main function is only on the fifth day (sūtyānas). On the main day he sings Sāman, counting the number, stotras are divided into trivṛt, Pañčadāsa, Saptadhāsa and ekavimsa. In the main day there are twelve stotras. As the main day is connected mainly with Soma offering and Sāma gāna the names of Somavāga has also become connected.

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Adhvarya, Udgāṭr and Brahman are the four main priests who have their assistants. The names of the principal priests with their assistants are given in tables below:

1. Priests of the Rgveda

   Hotṛ
   Pratipraestha
   Ācāravāka
   Grāvastut

2. Priests of the Yajurveda

   Adhvarya
   Pratipraestha
   Nēṣṭṛ
   Unnetṛ

3. Priests of the Śāmaveda

   Udgāṭr
   Pratipraestha
   Pratikēṣṭṛ
   Subalarāma

4. Priests versed in all Vedas

   Brahman
   Brahmanacchamsin
   Agricha
   Pūtr

These are the sixteen priests, and Yajamana (i.e., the sacrificer) forms the seventeenth (member) or Sadasya is the seventeenth member for the Kauśitaki School.

Ref. SB 10.2.7.19
with Śāman chanting. Jyotistoma is the name of first Somayāga; here the stotras of trivrt, panchadāsa, saptadāsa, ekavimā are called jyotis. All other soma yāgas take inspiration from Śāmans. It is interesting to note that the expansion of all Somayāgas are based on Śāmans of Śānaveda. Ahānas, sattras and Ayanas are all based on chanting of different kinds of Śāmans only.

So in Somayāga chanting of Soma is a deciding factor in naming the yāga. If the process of one-day Somayāga is expanded by two to twelve days it is called Ahāna. If it is expanded beyond twelve days upto Śāvatsara it is called Satṭra; if it is extended beyond one year it is called Ayanā.

Invariably the parts of rituals are performed with the mantras of Yajurveda. Āṭa is a verse to be recited by Hotr at the time of offering; paprayāka is a verse to be recited at the pre-offering period. Likewise in the Somayāga hotr recites Ṛgmantras which are called from the Ṛgveda in praise of a particular deity.

Normally, Āṭa is always preferred as a material for Ṛoma cakes made of flour of grain are offered in āṭa; in pasu yāgas, in the first instance, the yāga or omentum and other parts; in somayāga somajuice is offered in the fire. This is the peculiar feature of Somayāga.

8 The significance of this name of Agni is given in SB 6.1.3.1-19 Satapatha Brāhmaṇa with the commentaries of Śāyana and Harīśvarin (Bombay: Lakṣmi - Venkateswara Steam Press, 1940), cf. TB 3.10.1.4; 3.10.9.8; 3.10.10.4

9 On the basis of these āṭiyāga, Paśuayāga, Somayāga, Ahāna, Satṭra and Ayanas many such yāgas are prescribed in Brāhamanas and Kalpasutras. As the yāgas (from Somayāga onwards) depend on Śāmagāna to take shape, details of such yāgas are found in Kalpasutras and Brāhamanas of Śānaveda, Jaiminiya and Pañcabimā Brāhamanas.
Now we shall attempt a formal arrangement and classification of some important rituals.

Broadly speaking sacrifices can be classified under two main heads: they are

I Srauta
II Grhya

Srauta sacrifice has two divisions,

A - Soma sacrifice
B - Havir sacrifice, according as the material offering consists of Soma juice or other kind of oblations.

A - There are three distinct types of Soma sacrifices. This distinction is made according to the length of time occupied by the performance of the sacrifices. These are the types:

1. ekāhas - This is finished in one day
2. ahīnas - from two up to twelve days
3. sattras - from twelve days upwards

Jyotistoma is the best known form of ekāhas. It has seven varieties (Samsthā).

1. Agnistoma
2. Atyagnistoma
3. Utkhyā
4. Sodasīn
5. Vajapeya
6. Atirātra
7. Aptoryāma
Four forms of Āhīnas are important

1. Rajasūya
2. Asvamedha
3. Purusamedha
4. Sarvamedha

Sattras have two important divisions:

1. Kātri Sattra
2. Ayana Sattra (Gavām Ayana is the norm)

B - Havir Yajna has been divided into seven types\(^\text{10}\), according to Sāyana.

1. Agnyādheya
2. Agnihotra
3. Darsā-pūramāsa
4. Agrayāna
5. Dāksayana yajna
6. Gāturāsya
7. Sautrāman or Kaunda Pāyinān ayana

In the enumeration given by Dhūrtasvāmin (commentary on Ṛṣṭa-
amba Yajñaparibhāṣā Sūtra) Agnyādheya and Dāksayana yajna are not found. Instead Pinda-pitṛyajñā and Nirudhapasubandha are seen.

According to Gautama dharmasūtra there is no Dāksayana yajna.

\(^{10}\) AB with Sāyana Bhāṣya Ed. & tr. M. Haug (Bombay: AnandaSrama, Poona, 1863), V. 7
but there is Nirghapasubandha.  

1. Agnyādhāna (the establishment of Fire)

Yajñas are the concern of the Aryan householder. In the normal course, the person, after his formal education gets married. If he is desirous of performing the Vedic sacrifices he should begin with the establishment of fire. This ceremony is known as Agnyādhāna (setting up the sacred Fires). The first and the most permanent constituent of the rituals was Agni or Fire which was always kindled in the beginning of every ritual. The importance of Agni in the Aryan religion is as old as Indo-European period. Its equivalents are found in Latin Ignis and Luthianian Ugni, during the Indo-Iranian period also it was worshipped as a chief domestic deity. In the Rgveda Agni is called the "Lord of the house". Its contact with man was very congenial in cold winters of northern countries. Consequently it became the chief domestic deity that was a constant source of help in secular as well as sacred life of the householder. The family hearth was the first "holy of the holies". The fire that was kept burning in every house became a perpetual sign for all influences that bound men with family and social relations, and became the centre of all rites and ceremonies.

The ceremony of Agnyādhāna lasts for two days. On the first day two sheds are set up, one for the Garhapatvāgni, the other for the Ahavanīya. The Dakshināgni is south of the Garhapatya. The altar of

11 GCS 1.8.20
12 RV 1.1.1
13 As SS 5.1
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| 1. Agniṣṭoma                  |
| 2. Atyagniṣṭoma               |
| 3. Ukttha                      |
| 4. Sodāśin                     |
| 5. Veṣasāya                    |
| 6. Atirātra                    |
| 7. Aptoryāma                   |
| 1. Rājasūya                    |
| 2. Aśvamedha                   |
| 3. Purusamedha                 |
| 4. Sarvamedha                  |
| 1. Rētrisattra                 |
| 2. Ayena sattra                |
| 1. Agnyādheya                  |
| 2. Agnihotra                   |
| 3. Darsapūrṇamāsa              |
| 4. Tṛgrayana                   |
| 5. Dāksāyana yajña             |
| 6. Cāturmāsya                  |
| 7. Sautramani                  |
| 1. Bhūta yajña                 |
| 2. Mr yajña                    |
| 3. Pitr yajña                  |
| 4. Deva yajña                  |
| 5. Brahma yajña                |
Gārhapatyāgni is round, that of Áhavanīya is square and that of Daksīna is shaped like a half-moon. The fire is obtained for the Gārhapatya either by friction, or by being borrowed from the house of a distinguished householder. The fire is then constantly maintained in the Gārhapatya and is distributed from it to the other two fire places at the time of the sacrifice according to prescribed rules.

The Āgnyādāhana ends with a full offering of clarified butter to Agni. Afterwards homas can be duly performed with the fires.

After the establishment of fire the sacrificer is bound to observe chastity for 3 to 12 days. "He should maintain the fire, offer the Agnihotra, and sleep on the ground near the fire; he must, for all his days avoid untruthy place no bad wood on the fire, eat nothing cooked by a covered fire, drink no water from a ship.

If the Ritāgni (one who has established fires) is prosperous he is to keep up the fires all his life; if not it may be re-established, as before. This time the fire is nourished with Kusa grass, not with wood. This is known as Punarādāhana.

2. Agnihotra

The Kausitakī Brähmana says that "Light is Agni, Agni is light. The one who is light, he calls light. Agni offers itself in sacrifice to the rising sun and the setting sun offers itself in sacrifice to Agni in the evening. The Night sacrifices itself to the Day and the Day sacrifices itself to the Night."
Light is sun and fire, without light there is no life. The sacrifice is the Agnihotra continuity of sun and fire. Day and Night is thus established; the circle is completed, harmony is preserved. Agnihotra (the fire = god oblation) is the sacrifice to be performed daily, morning and evening by the Āhitāgni along with his wife. The main offering is milk besides āīva (clarified butter). At the end the sacrificer eats and offers four water libations to the gods, the fathers, the seven seers, and Agni on the earth, or to other deities also. Ṛgveda says "Agni extends the sacrifice to heaven; his forms are scattered everywhere." 15.

With the Agnihotra the ceremony of homage to the fires, Agnyupasāthāna is usually carried out at the night service only. The Āhanīya (lit "that which is to be offered") is honoured first, then the cow from which the milk was taken, then the Gṛha-pātā, and then the cow or its calf. At the end the sacrificer names his dear son who is to succeed him in the duty. Agnihotra is the quintessence of sacrifice. The Agnihotra is the ultimate, paraṇa, foundation of everything. It represents the simplest possible form of the whole vedic conception of sacrifice. The two temporal moments, saṃchva, in which this sacrifice has to be performed, are important. Saṃchva, the junction of ṛṣi and Sūrya, the brief periods when the two lights meet. Then one can no longer distinguish the two. In the morning the human heart is ready for life, while at sun set it is inclined to pour out its innermost feelings. These Saṃchva hours are considered holy by all religions of the world.

There is no break to Agnihotra except by old age or death or
when one becomes a wandering mendicant.

3. Dārśaṇāṃśa

These sacrifices form the model for all sacrifices of the āstī type. An āstī is to be performed generally once in a fortnight. As the term indicates, āstis are referred to, dārśastī or new moon sacrifice, and pūrṇamāstī, full moon sacrifice.

The process of performance of an āstī may be outlined as follows:

1. Preparation of havis (here puroḍāsā)
2. The kindling of the fire (Sāmichēni Karma)
3. Fore – offerings
4. Principal offering
5. Svistakrit homa

The first day of āstī starts with the taking of the vow by the sacrificer and making ready of the fires. The vow involved abstinence from meat, sleeping on the ground, the cutting of hair and

16 A sacrificial performance in which puroḍāsā (an oblation made of ground rice) in the chief offering is called āstī. Names of some of the āstī are:

1. Agraśāna āstī (first fruit sacrifice) 9. Pūrṇamāstī
d. Pāvana āstī
3. Mahāvairāj āstī
4. Ācīth āstī
5. Āsvit āstī
6. Mitra āstī
7. Dārś āstī
beard and so on. The ceremonies of the second day consisted in the preparation of the **Vedi**, the girding of the wife of the sacrificer, the looking at a pot of clarified butter, the covering of the altar with the grass, and the setting up of the partitioning sticks which were intended to keep off evil spirits. The real sacrifice begins only when these preliminaries are over.

The kindling of the wood is accompanied by sixteen **Samidhadi** verses, followed by two libations of butter; between them comes the **pravara**, the enumeration of the seers who were claimed as ancestors by the sacrificer. **Agni** is invoked to bring to the offering the gods in the order in which they are to be honoured. This is followed by the formal choosing of the Hotṛ by the **Adhavṛṣu**. Then comes the fore-offerings of butter to the kindling sticks, the god **Tarānāt** or **Nṛsāmanā**, the sacrificial food (idā), the gods to be honoured. Then there is the **Avya** offerings of butter for **Agni** and **Soma**. At the New moon this must be accompanied by verses containing the word **Vṛddh**, 'grow', and at the Full moon by verses referring to the slaying of **Vṛtra**. This is followed by a cake-offering for **Agni**, a butter offering for **Agni** and **Soma** at the Full moon, to **Agni** and **Indra** at the New moon. This offering comes to an end by **svistakrt home**, an offering to **Agni svistakṛt**, 'the maker of the sacrifice correct', in which all the gods are invoked. Then comes the partaking of the remnant of the **havis** by the priests. The fathers are invoked to take part, and the fees are given, in this case the **Aravārṣa** mess cooked in the Dakinā fire. This is followed by the **Aravājas**, to the strew **Nṛsāmanā**, and **Agni svistakṛt**, and the **Sūktavāka**, which concludes with an invocation of prosperity for the sacrificer and a
prayer; at the end of this prayer, the prastāra or bundle of grass, representing the sacrificer, is put in the fire. Then comes a 
Śaṇyuvāka, an invocation of prosperity, accompanied by the burning of the enclosing sticks. The remains are offered to the all - gods; this is followed by four Patnīsahvajas, offerings to the gods with the wives of the gods, to Soma, Tvāstr, and Agni Gṛhapati; the third is offered under a covering while the wife of the sacrificer touches the Adhvarvyu; the offerings are of butter and made in the Gṛhapatya fire. Then comes minor rites to accompany the burning of the strew and to make good the defects, the Rākṣases are given the fragments which have been produced in the husking of the rice; the wife's girdle is loosened and laid down, the sacrificer in imitation of and assimilation to Vism strides three steps from the south hip of the altar ground, which is made to be like the shape of a woman, to the east, pays reverence to the Anavaniya and Gṛhapatya, and then lays aside his vow.

4. Caturmaṣyas

These are the four monthly (seasonal) sacrifices. They are intimately connected with the seasons of the year. They are:

1. Vaiśvadeva (in spring)
2. The varuṇapraghāsas (in the rains); and
3. the Śaka medhas (in the autumn)

The Vaiśvadeva is conducted as an Isti to Agni Vaiśvānara and Pariṣhata (or Anvārambhaṇiya isti). In each case the sacrifice is introduced by five libations to Agni, Soma, Savitr, Saraswati

17 Ap 55 8
and Pusan. Then follow offerings of cakes to the Maruts, of a milk mess to the All-gods, and of cakes to heaven and earth. A tree with budding branches is used to indicate the season, the wood is to indicate the fire.

Varunapraghāsā is more important; and it differs from Vaiśevadeva in several ways. The pāṣu is one of the chief offerings in addition to nine other principal offerings to nine deities. Two animals, a ram and sheep, are prepared from barley. The sacrificer and his wife cover these with wool and equip these with the marks of sex made prominent; the Adhvaryu makes the one and the Pratiprastātṛ the other. The pāṣu offering function requires a special form of the sacrificial ground or Vedi. Another Vedi is fashioned to the South of the original dārsāki vedi. Varunapraghāsā requires the assistance of two more priests. There are offerings to Indra and Agni, to Varuna, to the Maruts and to Kā; the ram and the ewe are offered in the milk messes presented to Varuna and the Maruts respectively, the remainder being eaten. An interesting feature about this sacrifice is the ritual of purification of the wife of the sacrificer. She is called upon to admit what lovers she has and to offer in Daksinā fire the plates of Karambha porridge. The husband and wife then share a bath washing each other.
5. Pasubandha

This is a simple animal sacrifice. The sacrificer performs this function with the assistance of six priests. The form of the offering is that of the New moon sacrifice, the victim (the animal) taking the place of the milk offered to Indra or Mahendra. The essential feature of the rite is the use of a yupa (post) to which the victim is tied. "The function begins with an Isti (Agnavaisnar- esti). After the yupa is fixed in its place the sacred fire is carried to the principal Vedi. The pasu is tied to the yupa and sacred water is sprinkled over it. The ten Prayaajas are performed. They are eleven oblations of clarified butter offered to certain deities before the chief offering. Then the Annidra priest taking with him the sacred fire leads the Pasu and the Samitra to the Smitragyha. "There the Pasu is made to offer its life by control of breath. Then the following parts are extracted from its body: vanah (omentum), hrdaya (heart), jihva (tongue), vakasas (middle portion of the chest), yakt (liver), vykhau (kidneys), saiva-bahumala (left arm pit), nivadhava (the two sides), daksinasroni (right hip) and the third part of the gudakanda (large intestine). The vanah is

Ap SS 7  It is believed that Pasuvaja is a case of clearing off of rna. By becoming a dikaita, the sacrificer gives himself over to all devas. He becomes the 'havis', but there is the substitute in the form of pasu. With the Pasu the sacrificer clears his debt of obligation to the Devas. Pasu is the representative of the sacrificer (SB 3.3.1.21) jiva or life which is immortal, is the havis of the deities who are also immortal. Pasuvaja is the consummation of clearing off the rna that expires and stands in the way of experience of bliss and struggle for existence on the part of the person and the substitute. The yupa is the pole of a particular wood like udumbara or kumara or plaksa cut to the prescribed shape and dimensions.
brought to the vedi, eleventh pravāja is performed and the vama is offered to the deity with relevant Mantras and procedure. The purodāsa is offered to the same deity, the different organs and parts of the pānas are baked in the sāmitra fire and then these are offered. After this, the eleven Anyājas are performed. These are ājya-homas like the prayājas. While the Ahyāvyu is offering the Anyājas the Pratiprastātr offers the extracted guda-kānda cut into eleven pieces, in the sāmitra fire brought back and placed in the north west corner of the uttaravedi. Then the function is concluded like the Isti.

6. Sautrāmanī

This is a pasuyāga. After having built the fire altar, i.e., after savana, performance of sautrāmanī is prescribed. Along with the three pānas and purodāsas, surā also forms an offering.

1. Somavāna

Agnistoma is the model form of the Soma sacrifice. Agnistoma is ekāhas, lasts for one day. The last of the Āmans used on the day is addressed to ājnyā; hence the name. Somayāgas are styled according to the number of nights their principal function lasts, as tri-rātra, caturātra, and so on. The Somayāga was celebrated with great pomp by the wealthy Aryans. A beautiful pavilion was erected on the outskirts of their town (or village) and a vajnasala was prepared.

19 SB 5.5.12-7 Also see SB 12.4.1.2
20 AP SS 10.13; 14.8-12 A detailed account has been given under "general features".
21 TB 1.8.7.1 Taṅkṛīya Brāhmaṇa with Sāyana bhāṣya, 3 vols. (Poona: Anandāśrama, 1898).
Sixteen priests were engaged in the performance of the sacrifice. The prominent object of offering was Soma.

Pratyãniṣṭhī marked the beginning of Somavāna. The first four days were allowed for sunry worship and preparations; the Somavajña ceremony proper was performed on the sixth day. Somajuice, obtained after crushing Somavalli filtered and stored in a pot is offered. The worship consists of three Savanas, viz., Pratassavana (morning pressing), the Madhyandina savana (midday pressing) and the Savan-savana (evening pressing). Food, milk, clarified butter and beasts formed the objects of offering (Havis) in this vajña.

The conclusion of the ceremony and release from vow (dikṣā) are signified by an ablation of dikṣitā (avowed) in a lake, pond or a river. This ablation together with the rituals connected with it is called Avabhrtha.

The other forms of Somavāna, viz., Ukthva, Sodashi Atirātra, Atyagnistoma, Vaiṣnavya and Votaryana, differ from each other only in certain details22.

The Vaiṣnavya, a modified sacrifice of the Aynistoma, has a few peculiarities of its own. The dikṣā days are seventeen. Sura forms a chief offering besides soma; there are seventeen pasus besides those of the soma ritual (savaniva pasu); and the sacrificer has to run a chariot race.

2. Rājasvya23

Rājasvya belongs to the Ahīna type of sacrifices. This is

22 cf. TB 3.10.1.4; 3.10.9.8; 3.10.10.4 and reference to Max Muller, Apastamba-yajña paribhāṣāsūtra, (tr.) SBE 30 p.356 note.

23 PB 18.8.11 TB 1.6.8.7
performed when a king assumes the reins of government. This consists of a series of Iṣṭis and Somayajñas, which is completed in the span of about fourteen months.

Before the royal consecration, the Brahman priest takes the sacrificer (the king) by hand and introduces him to the community saying: this, the son of so and so is their king, the protector. This sacrifice has the added effect of spiritualising politics.

3. Asvamedha

Asvamedha is also called rajajña, a "stately" as well as "costly" sacrifice. In this Somayāga Asvā or horse is the pāsa; many other pāsas are also prescribed in Asvamedha. A consecrated Asvā is allowed to roam about on its own accord. An army follows in order to guard it. Several prescribed homas are performed and repeated daily for one year, awaiting the return of the Asvā.

According to Vaiṣṇava the number of pāsas tied to the yūpas of this sacrifice is 340; but it is 390 for Taïtirīya. These are domestic animals - grāhma pāsas. 360 wild animals are also prescribed. But these are left out after paryagnikarana, consecrating ritual.

4. Puruṣaṃedha

In this sūnyāna 'puruṣas' are prescribed as the pāsas. The principal performances are for five days. The pāsas are not immolated; they are released after the consecrating ritual. This fact stimulates us to see something symbolic in it. The rite of human sacrifice consists in binding representatives of all classes, professions, and types of men and women to the sacrificial stake and offering them symbolically.

24 TB 3.8-9 SB Kanda 13
25 SB 13.4.2.1 ff.
to praśanati. Collective humanity thus represents the one purusa and his primordial sacrifice.

5. Šarva-mēṣha

As the term denotes this is a sacrifice of all, or the universal sacrifice. If at the Purusamedha, according to Śarhaṇāyaṇa, the offerer gives away the kingdom with the people, at Šarva-mēṣha he gives away the earth also. That is, the king leaves the royal life for that of the ascetic; as the Buddha afterwards did.

6. The Sattra

Sattra is a series of sacrifices, or rather sacrificial sessions. All rites with more than twelve pressing days are sāstras. They may be continued up to 1000 years. The Gavāmāṇāna which lasts for 361 days is taken as the norm for the sāstras. On account of subtleties of performance the sāstras were almost out of practice.

Some important elements of the vājña system

1. Vaiṣṇava

The Vedic Vajna is performed by a sacrificer with his wife. The sacrificer is called Vaiṣṇava; and vajña includes his wife. The Agnihotra is carried on by the Vaiṣṇava and his wife only. It is enjoined that the sacrificer or vaiṣṇava is the one sole master of vaiṣṇava. He is responsible for the good or bad results that come out of the performance.

26 YV 30
27 SYY
28 PB 4.5, 24.20 Ap SS 21
2. **Dīkṣā** - Consecration or vow

The sacrificer must undergo certain sacraments before he begins to perform a particular *yāga*, and this process is called the Dīkṣā. The sacrificer with his wife becomes eligible to perform a *yāga* only after undergoing the ritual of Dīkṣā. "Yajñadū ha vā esa ṛunar-jayate yo dīksate". The sacrificer surrenders himself to the dicties by this process. According to Taikitīya Brāhmaṇas the entire universe is thought of as undergoing Dīkṣā along with the sacrificer.

Before the *soma* sacrifice Dīkṣā rite is carried out in a hut near the fire the sacrificer bathes, has his hair cut, is anointed, puts on a fresh garment, is girded with the sacred cord, and sits down on a black antelope hide, in which there resides, in the view of the tradition, holy power. His head is covered, an antelope horn is tied to his garment. He sits in this condition in silence until night, when he drinks cocked milk, and then keeps awake all the night, or goes to sleep after commending himself to Agni to preserve him from evil spirits. It is emphasised by the Brāhmaṇas that the performance is a new birth, that the performer is reduced to the condition of an embryo etc. But, Keith says that this is denied by Oldenberg as primitive. But he has no doubt in granting the possibility that the ceremony was meant by the Brāhmaṇas to convey and to have this effect, and the result of the consecration in the case of one who was not a Brāhmaṇa, was to convert him into a Brāhmaṇa, not of course permanently, but for the time being.

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30 AB 34.22
31 AB 6.3 and SB 3.3.4-21
32 TB 3.7.7-8
According to Amarakosa "Vedih pariskrta bhumiḥ"\textsuperscript{34} - vedī is consecrated earth. The spot where the different fire places (agni Kundas) are situated is called vedī, in the context of a vaṁśa. Generally there are three forms of Vedi for each of the three types of sacrifices viz., Iṣṭi, Paśubandaḥ and Somaśāga. Varunapraghāsa requires a modification in the Vedi of Iṣṭis. The Vedi for the Iṣṭi is called dāraiki Vedi. It is the model for all types of Vedas. All the Vedas lie East – West. The form of the Vedi is compared to the form of a woman "Vasā vai Vedih"\textsuperscript{35}.

The central line of the proper sacrificial compound is an East – West line. This central line is called prsthya, the constructions of the Altars in the Sulba Sūtras are given with reference to this line\textsuperscript{36}. The whole sacrificial compound or the sacrificial theatre is symmetrical with respect to this line.

According to Satapatha Brāhmaṇa the Āhavaniya fire (the principal place for offering oblations) should be to the east of the Gārhapatya fire\textsuperscript{37}. The third fire called Dakṣinagni is to the south of this central line. "The space bounded by these three fires is called the prasāvahā. The Vedi between the Gārhapatya and the Āhavaniya is called dāraiki. It is the simplest form of the Vedi. The daily

\textsuperscript{34} Amarasimha, Amarakosa ed. A. A. Ramanathan (Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1978)

\textsuperscript{35} SB 1.2.3.16 JB 1.364

\textsuperscript{36} V.M. Apte, Annals of the Bhandarkar Institute, Poona, Vol.7, 19.26

\textsuperscript{37} SB 1.7.3.22-27 TB 1.1.4.7 gives an interesting story as to why one should go from the Gārhapatya to the Āhavaniya. The Asuras in the course of the sacrifice went from the Āhavaniya to the Gārhapatya and therefore their Sri (power) declined. The gods went from the Gārhapatya to the Āhavaniya, and therefore their Sri was prāci i.e., ever rising.
Agnihetra and Darsapūrṇamasestī are performed on this Vedi. The ground between the Gārhapatya and the Ṛtvahanyā is bound by two sand bunds. The space between the bunds becomes wider towards the Gārha-patya. The eastern corners of this enclosure are called āśa and the western corners, śronis. The Vedi is sloping towards east or north. In Somaṇaṇa and Nīrūchapesubandha the chief sacrifice is to be made on a fourth fire located exactly to the East of the Ṛtvahanyā. The Vedi between this fourth fire and the Ṛtvahanyā is of different dimensions and names for the different kinds of sacrifices. Thus there is paśuki vedi for the paśubandha sacrifice, a sautrāmanikī vedi for the sautrāmani sacrifice and a sauniki or Mahāvedi for the soma sacrifice. On this Vedi there is an uttara vedi (High altar) in paśubandha. It is called so because it is a vedi upon a vedi. "The central East - West line is the axis of symmetry of all the Vedis. Śulva Sūtras give geometrical details concerning the direction and situation of these vedis with respect to the central east - west line.

4. Agni

Agni is the first and the foremost of all terrestrial devas. He is the leader of the Vasus. Agni is the lord of the earth. He is the belly of Devas. He is the sacrificer for Devas. Agni is the face or mouth of Yajña. His mythic parents are Dyaus and

39 SB 1.2.3.17
39 TB 2.4.3.3
40 TB 3.7.4.6
41 TB 3.11.4.1
42 TB 2.7.12.3
43 TB 3.3.76
44 TB 1.6.1.6
Prthivī or Tvastra and the waters. But he is also produced by the
gods whose father, however, he is; he is the son of Iḍā the personi-
fication of the sacrificial food. Agni is also born from the waters;
he is the embryo of the waters, kindled in the waters; he is a bull
who has waxed great in the waters, and he descends from the clouds.
In this aspect he may be Agnā Nāpayā.

He is all dieties. All these worlds are Agni. On earth he
is Agni; in atmosphere he is Rudra; in the sky he is Aditya. Agni
in beings is called purifying (pavanā); Agni in Iṣṭha is the puri-
 fier (pāvaka); Agni in Aditya is pure (saś). Satapatha Brāhmaṇa
suggests that all the beings and devas are Agni-cita.

Agni is of four forms; Āhitā (the established one), Uddhātā
(that which is taken upwards), Pahātā (conveyed) and Vihrātā (spread).
The world or Agni is Āhitā — this is represented by Garhapatya; the
atmosphere, Ṭasya is Uddhātā, represented by Śvāna; the sky,
Aditya is Prahrta, that which is taken towards the east and placed
on the Uttaraveda; the quarters, Caṇḍa and that which is distri-
buted and placed on several fire-places is the Vihrātā.

Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa names the seven stages of Agni as follows—

1. Agni just taken out from the Garhapatya is Vasi.
2. Agni kept in different fire-places and fuming is Rudra.
3. Agni coming in contact with a sacrificial fuel is Aditya.
4. Agni consuming all the fuel is Viśvedeva.
5. Agni burning with red flames is Indra.

45 TB 1.4.4.10
46 TB 1.1.6.1
47 TB 1.1.6.2-3
6. Agni without flames is Prajapati.
7. Agni covered by ash is Brahman.

So what is offered to Agni is received by all the devas.

Moreover, the earth and the year are called Agni Vaiśāvānara. The most usual oblation to Agni Vaiśāvānara consists of a sacrificial cake on twelve potsherds — dvādeśakapala purodāsa — which is obviously suggestive of the twelve months of the year. Taittirīya Samhitā says: Xad Vaiśāvānara dvādeśakapalol bhavati samvatsaram va agnir vaiśāvānarah. In Ṛgveda we have Vaiśāvāna represented in two forms — as the head of the heaven, mṛdha divah, and as the navel of the earth, nabhī prthivyah. Vaiśāvāna is explained as śūnya by the ancient yajñikas, and as 'this Agni' by Śakūnī. Agni svistakrt is called Rudra. Agni is the Lord and the eater of food. He is the impregnator (retodā); hence he is the generator of beings. He is also Rta.

The number seven has a special significance with regard to Agni. Agni has seven Yonis (receptacles); there are seven varieties of flames; seven abodes (śāmanas). Seven are the Mantras. The Hotṛ are seven. The Samidha are of seven kinds. He is styled lord of the house. He is the immortal who abides among mortals.

43 TB 2.1.10
49 TB 3.6.6.2; 1.7.2.5; 1.4.10.1
50 TS 2.2.5 Taittirīya Samhitā with Bhāṭṭabhāskara Bhāṣya (Mysore Oriental Research Institute, 1998).
51 RV 1.59.2
52 Nirukta 7.23
53 TB 3.9.11.3
54 TB 2.5.7.3
55 TB 2.1.1.1
56 TB 3.11.5.1 and 1.4.7.3
Aurobindo is most eloquent when he speaks of Agni. He says: "Agni is the most important, the most universal of the Vedic gods. In the physical world he is the general devourer and enjoyer. He is also the purifier when he devours and enjoys, then also he purifies. He is the fire that prepares and perfects; he is also the fire that assimilates and the heart of energy that forms. He is the heat of life and creates the sap, the "rasa" in things, the essence of their substantial being and the essence of their delight.

He is equally the will in Prana, the dynamic life-energy, and in that energy performs the same functions. Devouring and enjoying, purifying, preparing, assimilating, forming, he rises upwards always and transfigures his powers into the Maruts, the energies of mind. Our passions and obscure emotions are the smoke of Agni's burning. All our forces are assured of their action only by his support.

If he is the will in our nervous being and purifies it by action, he is also the will in the mind and clarifies it by aspiration. When he enters into the intellect, he is drawing near to his divine birth-place and home. He leads the thoughts towards effective power; he leads the active energies towards light ... He is "jata-vedas", known of all births; he knows all manifestations or phenomena or he possesses all forms and activities of the divine wisdom. The gods have established Agni as the immortal in mortals ... without him the sacrificial flame cannot burn on the altar of the soul. The flame of Agni is the seven-tongued power of the will, a force of god instinct with knowledge. This conscious and forceful will is the immortal guest in our mortality, a pure priest and a divine worker, the
mediator between earth and heaven ..."57.

5. Soma

"The poetry of the Rigveda is mainly connected with the Soma sacrifice", says Keith 58.

Soma dwells on the earth as well as in the atmosphere59. He represents Somavali as well as Candramas (the moon)60. Soma is the king and the king of kings61. He is the lord of plants and trees. The earthly origin of Soma is said to be in the mountains, on Mount Mājāvat62. His true origin is in heaven; he is "the child of heaven"63 "milk of heaven"64. He was brought to earth by an eagle65. In the Brāhmanas it is Gṛyātri (a name for agnī) who steals Soma. Soma is the vehicle of immortality. Soma is immortality66. Immortality is acquired by the drinking of Soma. Soma is pavamāna (purifying, comes from the root pū, to purify, cleanse, illumine — cf. pavitra, holy, pure). Soma possesses healing powers. "The blind man sees, the cripple walks"67. He stimulates speech and evokes sublime thoughts. He is a poet, the "soul" of the sacrifice, a sage; he is the given of all blessings. The sea are you; Seer, revealer of all things. Under your sway are the world's five regions. You transcend both earth and heaven. Yours, O purifier, are the stars and the sun68.

57 Key to Vedic Symbolism
58 The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanisads, p.166
59 TB 2.8.1.5
60 TB 1.4.10.7; SB 10.3.1.1
61 TB 2.5.7.3 SB 11.3.1.9
62 RV 10.34.1
63 RV 9.33.5
64 RV 9.51.2
65 RV 4.2.7.4
66 cf SB 9.5.1.8
67 RV 8.79.2
68 RV 9.86.29
He is Prajá 69 Soma is the nectar desired by Indra. He is the food of gods. Soma is the 'rasa' of herbs 70. As moon he was born from the mind of Purusa, there is a relation between Soma and mind. "The sun belongs to Agni, the moon to Soma, the day to Agni, the night to Soma, the waxing half-moon to Agni, the waning to Soma 71.

Soma is retas (semen), and he is the impregnator. Agni and Soma are considered to be two basic elements of which the material world is composed. They are called agnisoma (pair of Agni and Soma) Satartha Brähmana makes this point clearer when it says: "Dvayam Vē idam iṣita na tṛtyaṃstih: ārdram caiva suskan ca yaocuskan tadvayam vādāparam tatśaumyaṃ. 72. This is corroborated by the medical text of Srusti:

"Dvividhātamsa ova (lokal) Agneyah Saumvas ca 73

There is another interesting reference to Soma in Atharva Veda 74. Here hrd is referred to by a Vedic poet as the unexhausting Soma-holding vessel. Hrdah kalasah Somadhānah. There are also other Vedic passages wherein the Soma is spoken of as flowing into the depths of hrd 75. It is believed that Soma elevate the worshipper to a higher plane of human consciousness and helps him to live with the awareness of a deeper dimension. Soma is the link and sacrifice is the means of

69 JB 1.361
70 PB 1.6.8
71 Max Muller: Essays on Mythology
72 SB 1.6.3.23
73 Srusti, Srusti - Samhita 3rd ed. J. Vidyāsāgara, (Calcutta, 1889), Sutrasthāna 2.21 (22)
74 AV 9.1.6
75 RV 1.91.31; 3.42.8; 8.48.12
the divinization of Men and the humanization of the gods. Soma is the powerful symbol of this double and yet simple process.

6. *Yūpa* is the pole of a particular wood like *acūmbhara* or *Khadira* or *Plakṣa*, cut to the prescribed shape and dimension. Yūpah = yāuti misrayati it; yūpah, one that mingles. The yūpa is set to the east of *Ahavāniya* (Uttara-Vedi), the principal place of offering oblations, and just on the eastern line of the mahavedi. In *Paśubandha* the *pasyu* is tied to the yūpa and sacred water is sprinkled over it. It is the heart in the *Adhyātmika* sense.

Even at the time of Yāsaka, there was difference of opinion as regards the significance of yūpa. tatka Varaspatiḥ Yūpaḥ iti Kattiyah. Agniti Sākṣapunih tasyaaisapara bhavati. (Yūpas are in the middle region, probably the rays of the sun, in the cosmic sense).

7. Rtviks (priests)

In order to perform yajñas, except *Agnihotra*, the sacrificer and his wife require the assistance of some priests well versed in the art. They are designated as rtviks. A rtvik is a direct participant in yajña. The number of priests participating in different types of yajña varies. These priests are arranged in four groups.

1. *Aḍhvāryu-gana* (The group of the Aḍhvāryu) consisting of Aḍhvāryu, Pratipraśthātr, Nēṣṭry and Unnetr.

2. *Hotṛ-gana* (The group of the Hotṛ) consisting of Hotṛ, Praśāstr (or *Maitravaruna*), Acchāvaka and Gravastut.

3. *Uḍgāṭṛ-gana* (The group of the Uḍgāṭṛ) The members of this gana are Uḍgāṭṛ, Prastotr, Praṭinārtr and Subrahmanyā.

76 A list of Rtviks in Vaiśvāsanāyana is given in TB 3.12.9.2 and PB 25.18.4 in a different order. of TB 3.3.8.7 and SB 10.2.7.19
4. **Brahma-gana** (The group of the Brahman) They are Brahman, Brahmanacchamsin, Agnicha, and Potr. Sadasya and Upadrstr are independent priests.

During the functions of the Istis, the priests, Adhvarvyu, Hotr, Brahman and Agnicha assist the sacrificer. For Pasuvaga, two more priests, viz., Pratiprasathat and Prasast or Maitravaruna are required.

The latter ritual requires only the Adhvarvyu for the Agnihotra offering performed daily; for the piling or establishing of the fire, Agnyadheya, four priests, Hotr, Adhvarvyu, Agnicha, and Brahman; for the four months offerings also the Pratiprasathat; and for the animal sacrifice the Maitra Varuna and Savitra as aidsers of the Adhvarvyu. For the Soma sacrifice it prescribes sixteen who are arranged in the order shown earlier.

8. **Daksinā**

This term is used to denote what is given respectfully for an obligatory divine service. Daksate ha vai daksinām pratigrhya. Daksinā makes the receivers able (daksā) to do efficiently the entrusted sacrificial service. It indicates the indebtedness of the sacrificer to the priest. Daksinā pleases the priest who does the function in the yajna whole heartedly, on behalf of the sacrificer. The Brahmanas are specific, about the sort of daksinā to be given to be given to a priest on a given occasion. Later the idea of Daksinā degenerated into a demand of fee because of the greed of priests. This is a contemptuous aspect of it. This disgusting character of daksinā is found in later Hinduism.

77 See note on p.7
78 Ta 3.11.8
In Brhadaranyaka Upanisad there is a reference to the nature of Daksina. When Yajnavalkya was asked: "In what does the sacrifice abide?" he said:

In the Daksina. Further, Daksina abides in faith (Sraddha) for if a man believes, then he gives Daksina, and Daksina truly abides in faith; and ultimately, faith abides in the heart, for by the heart faith knows, and therefore faith abides in the heart.\[79\]

Even if we set aside this philosophising of the notion of Daksina it is common sense to concede that there should exist the give-and-take aspect of it. But when it encroaches upon the kingdom of greed it becomes an anti-social institution. Symbolically, "whatever the Ahitagni gives is daksina."\[80\]