CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Nature and Scope

In this thesis entitled ‘The Concept of Place in Vedic Ritual’, an attempt is made to analyse the importance of various places where different Vedic sacrifices were performed. According to the Vedic Indians, specific rites performed on specific places produce specific results.

The title of the thesis itself suggests the sources for the research. As one can infer, the basic sources of this study are naturally the prominent Vedic texts. These texts include the Vedic Samhitās (especially those dealing with the rituals), the Brāhmaṇa texts, the Śrautasūtras and the Gṛhyasūtras. These are known as ‘ritual texts’. Out of those, the YV Samhitās and Brāhmaṇas, Śrautasūtras and Gṛhyasūtras are obviously the pre-eminent sources of such ritualistic details. From these texts, the perception of any ‘place’ prescribed by the authorities and so used in any ritual can be procured distinctly. The Samhitās like the Ṛgveda, (White YV) Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā, Taittiriya-Saṃhitā and Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā are remarkably useful for this research. Moreover, the Brāhmaṇa-literature plays the most important role thereby. As MAXMUELLER has put it," the Brāhmaṇa -texts are meant for describing and explaining the sacrifices"(A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, p.388). Thite has proposed that there were various customs, practices, views etc. and the (Brāhmaṇa) texts having taken into consideration all of them tried to give a particular way of performance (SBT,p.47). Similarly, the Śrautasūtras and the Gṛhyasūtras continued the task of the Brāhmaṇas partially. They described various procedures
and provided minute details for the rituals, however excluding the arthavāda. As L. RENOU has mentioned (Vedic India, p.42), KNAUER advocates the Gṛhya rituals to be earlier than the Śrauta rituals. Therefore the Gṛhyasūtras are necessary in this study from the social and personal perspective of the Vedic people and thus are included as the source-material. Occasionally the Āraṇyakas like the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka are resorted for some more information. I have additionally studied the principal Śulbasūtras as they deal with the measurements, shapes and sizes of the sacrificial places (especially the altars and the fire-places) which do influence the results of the rites. However, J. GONDA has handled the similar study regarding the Gṛhya rites. Thence I have focused more on the Śrauta rites.

In addition to all the above-mentioned texts, I have referred to different works of western as well as Indian modern oriental scholars for this research.

2. ‘Place’ and ‘Ritual’.

It would be appropriate to consider the definitions of the words ‘place’ and ‘ritual’ to understand the actual shades of the meaning before entering the proposed study. Different well known dictionaries define both the words on similar lines. E.g. Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines the word ‘ritual’ like ‘a prescribed form for a ceremony’ or more specifically ‘an act or series of acts regularly repeated in a set precise manner’ (‘under the word ritual’). The Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary tells us that a ritual means ‘actions that are always done at a fixed time and in the same way, especially as a part of a religious or other ceremony’ (p.1015). The Webster’s New twentieth

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1 See: ‘Vedic Ritual The Non-Solemn Rites’ by J. Gonda.
Century dictionary interprets the ritual like ‘a set form or system of rites, religious or otherwise’ (p.1565).

Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary says that a ‘place’ is ‘particular area or position’ (p.879). Webster’s New twentieth Century dictionary offers the definition of the word ‘place’ like ‘a building or space devoted to a special purpose’ (p.1370). According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, a place is ‘the area or space occupied by or intended for something’ (under the word ‘place’).

M.WILLIAM’s Sanskrit-English dictionary reveals that words like ‘vidhi, šulva, kalpa’ represent ‘the religious actions or rituals. Similarly, the words like ‘sthāna or deśa’ denote any place or a holy place. Additionally, there are words in Sanskrit like sthandila or sthala which specifically mention the manmade places for sacrificial purposes. In this way, we have attempted to understand the definitions of the core terms in the title of the present study from the Indian as well as the western perspective.

2.1. Differentiation between ‘place and space’ -

In addition to this observation, we ought to know the difference between the words ‘place’ and ‘space’. All the above-mentioned dictionaries for English language define the word space more or less similarly (under the word ‘space’). It is defined as ‘boundless or continuous expanse extending in all directions or three dimensions’ or as ‘the universe outside the earth’s atmosphere’. In the Vedic or later Sanskrit language, the ‘ākāśa’ or sky is identified with the space. Occasionally, the words ‘anatarikṣa or antarāla’ are also used. The word ‘dik’ commonly accompanies the word ‘kāla’ when it has to denote the space. The space represents the place without manmade boundaries. Hence, from the aforesaid definitions, the space turns out to be an
abstract or non-physical idea connected to the region beyond the earth’s atmosphere or the solar system. Moreover, the space is not fixed for a definite purpose.

So after judging the terms space and place on the basis of their definitions, we come to a conclusion that there is an apparent difference between the place and the space. The place has a boundary while the space is boundless. The place is used for a specific intention and the space has no such intention. The space exists mentally and the place exists physically. The place plays a physical role when the humans perform the rituals on the earth. It would be appropriate here to quote what LEEUW says in this regard. According to him, "Parts of space are 'positions' by being ‘selected’ from the vast extensity of the world. A part of space, then, is not a ‘part’ at all but a place, and the place becomes a ‘position’ when man occupies it and stands on it" (REM, p.393).

Therefore, it is necessary to reflect only on the place and not the space while discussing the concerned subject.

Thus, we should take into consideration the definitions of the two key-words existing in the title of the thesis and proceed accordingly.

3. ‘Magic’ and ‘Religion’.

A ritual always was and has been a peculiar and significant part of any religion. According to the anthropologists, religion followed the prevalence of magic. The magic is classified differently by different scholars. According to FRAZER, ‘homeopathic or imitative magic’ and ‘contagious magic’ are the two main streams of it. Law of contagion is the base of the contagious magic. On the other hand, law of similarity (‘imitation of the actions and procedures procures the desired result’) is the base of the imitative magic (GB, e-book, p.21). Thus in the magic a
particular set of actions is followed by the magician. The repetition of actions is also supplemented by the repeated use of the accessories. Similarly, the ritual commonly incorporates repetitive actions and repetition of other accompanying stuff for the replication of desired outcome. Therefore, demarcation between the magic and the religion is not always clear. Consequently worldwide in different religions we can see people occasionally following a mixture of the religion and the magic. However, there is a prominent existence of a super-human power in the ritual that does not exist in the magic. Even the religious representatives like the priests, shamans and prophets were referred to as magicians because their actions can be depicted as what the modern scholars call magic. Therefore, we can observe that it is a hard task to separate the magic and the religion precisely. As a result the scholars labeled such double-natured actions and materials with a term ‘magico-religious’ which is more encompassing.

3.1. Magic and Vedic Religion-

The Vedic religion had originated from the strong feeling of awe for the order in the nature. The Vedic Indians first prayed the natural deities and then started performing the rituals for sending them some gifts. Gradually, they started begging for the fulfillment of different desires to these powerful entities through such offerings in the rituals. The entire ritual followed the old Latin dictum do ut des ("I give so that you may give"). It was commonly assumed in the Vedic ritual that if a particular set of actions produces particular results then that set of rites is the fixed miraculous structure for the generations to follow. Not only the actions but the accompanying stuff was also kept the same for the future performances. The atmosphere, the timings, the instruments and vessels, the clothing and most significantly the places were the part of that
accompanying stuff. Thus, in the Vedic religious activities, the actions were repeated for the repetitive outcome. The final goal was to possess the blessings of the divine power and consequently the earthly and heavenly prosperity ad infinitum. Naturally, the human sacrificers imitated the divine sacrificers while performing various sacrifices. This tendency of the Vedic ritualists brought the idea of ‘myth’ in the picture. Various scholars explain this phenomenon like the principal function of a myth is to provide a justification for a ritual. The thought-current following this explanation is known as ‘Myth and Ritual School’ (EB Online, ‘Myth’, JONATHAN Z. SMITH, p.26). We find the Brāhmaṇa texts like the Śatapatha and the Jaiminiya overloaded with such mythological justifications. These justifications known as the ‘arthavāda’ provide a firm basis for the homeopathic magic followed in the Vedic religion. Consequently the Vedic religion followed the principle of ‘imitative or homeopathic magic’. A.A. MACDONNEL had also categorised the Vedic ritual as ‘imitative process of magic’ (ERE Vol.8, p.318).

3.2. Magic and Other Religions-

However, the Vedic religion is not the only follower of the imitative magic. Imitation of the previously performed actions is done in other ancient and tribal religions too. A traditional African Yoruba proverb quoted by WILSON goes like this- "Let us do it the way it is usually done so that we may have the usual result". This presents the similar idea which points towards the theory of ‘like produces like’ that is the very principle of magic. Likewise, the contagious magic is incorporated in some other religions. Mass or the Eucharist celebration

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in the Catholic Christianity is nothing but the imitation of self-sacrifice of Christ only in the un-bloody manner. Moreover, a rite named communion is performed where the consecrated bread and wine are distributed to the participants. This is also done in remembrance of the body and the blood of the Christ. FRAZER has provided numerous cases depicting the imitative or contagious magic existing in different religions including the Vedic in the different parts of the world (GB, e-book, Chp.3, Sympathetic magic). As he puts it, "In magic, as I believe in Physics, action and reaction are equal and opposite" (ibid.p.36). The same can be applied to the ritualistic theory too. It would be apt to cite one or two rites performed by different communities in this regard given by FRAZER. E.g. God Zeus persuaded his wife Hera to adopt Hercules. The goddess hugged Hercules and made him to fall on the ground to imitate a real child-birth. Frazer tells us that it was imitated by the barbarians and was imitated in Bulgaria and Bosnian Turks until last century for child-adoption (ibid.p.23). In the Central Celebes, a community named Toradjas believed that things of the same kind attract each other due to the inside spirit. Therefore they used to hang the jawbones of the deer and wild pigs in their houses so that the same living creatures would be attracted towards the hunter. The author comments regarding the above-mentioned law of magic followed by the tribal hunters in the British colonies. He says "He (the hunter) thinks that if he acts in a certain way, certain consequences will inevitably follow in virtue of one or other of these laws" (ibid.p.26). In this manner, we can see how the religion and magic were interwoven and too hard to separate.
3.3. Magic and Place-

Once again to return to the precise subject of the concerned research, we observe that the Vedic religion believed in the homeopathic magic. According to KASHIKAR, "As a matter of fact, a rite can not be developed unless it resorts to elements of magic". As THITE puts it, "The sacrifice has magical powers and works, apparently, like a machine; if you perform a sacrifice correctly and carefully the result is bound to follow.... " (SBT, p. 328). Thus following the thread of magic, the Vedic people obeyed the sacrificial rules prescribing the sameness of actions and other factors carefully and correctly. Hence, ‘Repeated actions with repeated accessory on repeated places reproduce desired results ’ - this was the confirmed notion of the Vedic Indians. Accordingly, the place in the Vedic ritual is one of the important factors to be studied carefully a propos its magico-religious consequences. Gaining the coveted results depends a lot upon the prescribed ritual actions. However, the wrong choice of place can hamper the ritual gains due to lack of mystic or magical power emerging from the right place. When we consider the Vedic rituals as imitative magic, it is very interesting to find out how the concept of sacrificial place is developed in this system.

4. Significance of ‘Sacrificial Place’.

Many scholars have described the nature of the holy places. It becomes interesting to see how they have opined on the effect of the sacred or holy when it is associated with the places. E.g. According to LEEUW, in the holy place, still further, power exists: there its effects become perceptible. What once occurred is repeated at the sacred spot:

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at the altar, for example, Christ’s death is reiterated....(REM, p.401). The same can be applied to the ritual places as they are empowered because of the existence of the deities invoked in the rites performed in the sacrifice. HANS H. PENNER phrases about the rituals that all rituals are dependent upon some belief system for their complete meaning. A great many rituals are patterned after myths and can be typed as imitative rituals. He significantly explains, "Most rituals mark off a particular time of the day, month, year, stage in life or commencement of a new event or vocation. Time and place are essential features of ritual action, and both mark a specific orientation or setting for ritual"(EB Online, ‘Ritual’, p.12).

It is assumed in this regard that when the set of places is reused for the same set of rites connected to the same deities, the sacredness existing in the deities and the rituals is also bestowed upon the place and time used in the rituals. GOLDAMMER says that the holy place - a shrine, forest grove, temple, church, or other area of worship - is symbolically marked off as a sacred area. The signs, such as a stake, post, or pillar that delimit the area themselves are endowed with sacred symbolic meanings, which often can be noted by their particular designs. The ground plan of the sacred building and its orientation, walls, roof, and arches are all utilized to symbolize the sacred or holy. While discussing about the sacred places the author also adds that the sacred places are often pictorial reflections of the universe and its design and partake of its holiness (EB Online, ‘Religious Symbolism and Iconography’, p.9). According to F.J.STRENG, "sacredness is manifested in the places too along with the priests and kings". It is necessary to ponder upon some more thoughts of him about a sacred place with respect to the Vedic ritual. He thinks," In Vedic ritual, for example, the erection of a fire altar (in which the god Agni-fire was
present) was the establishment of a cosmos on a microcosmic scale. Once a cosmos is established, there are certain places that are especially sacred. Certain rivers, mountains, groves of trees, caves, or human constructions such as temples, shrines, or cities provide the ‘gate’, ‘ladder’, ‘navel’, or ‘pole’ between heaven and earth. This sacred place is that which both allows the sacred power to flow into existence and gives order and stability to life” (EB Online, ‘Sacred’, p.6). We also find a comprehensive view by HEESTERMAN on this topic. He says, "The place of sacrifice is by virtue of the code of connections identical with the cosmos or universe; the three fires are the three divisions of space or universe, the course of the sacrifice represents the year. On the place of sacrifice the cosmic drama of death and rebirth, integration and disintegration, ascension and descent, is enacted and reversely, through the same code of connections brought to bear upon the macrocosmos". He has opined this in connection with the depth of the Vedic ritualistic world (AIRC, p. 6, also p.76).

It is said that worship has its appointed place. A place of worship became sacred and suitable by the virtue of the holy’s appearing at that place. A centre for worship takes on a special character, once it has come to be recognized as the place where the holy regularly appears. In some religions it represents the center of the earth, often called the ‘navel’ of the earth, the place that constitutes the meeting place of god and man, heaven and earth (EB Online, ‘Worship’, Walter Harrelson, p.11). Any religious ritual is undoubtedly an independent form of worship of the God. Hence the same theory can be applied to the Vedic ritual while discussing the ritual-places. Additionally the Vedic altar too is regarded as the center of the earth where the mediator Agni is set up to make the celestial gods and the humans to meet.
Thus, the sacred and naturally the ritual places turn out to be the symbols of the sanctity. More importantly, they act as the foundation of the human life.

Reflecting the same perspective, the Vedic authorities have prescribed repetitively the places possessing the holiness and the mystic power for the same results repetitively in the rituals. GONDA has dealt with such places with respect to the Grhya rites (VR, Chp.11). However, the sacrificial places in the Śrauta rituals differ from the places for the Grhya rites. E.g. We find a specific prescription for the entire arena chosen for the Śrauta rituals in the ritual texts. The area used for the Vedic sacrifices (especially the Soma-sacrifices) is commonly known as sacrificial place or Devayajana. The Vedic texts including the Saṁhitās have given numerous details for selecting the right place for the Devayajana.

4.1. DEVAYAJANA

The specifications regarding the Devayajana, are handled by the ritual texts with reference to different sacrifices like Soma-sacrifice or Seasonal sacrifices or Rājasūya etc. The Devayajana is the basic sacrificial place. Variety of the grounds and cardinal points are given importance when deciding the ideal sacrificial place. According to the different traditions different factors are accepted and refuted. Occasionally, number of such factors might become a party in producing one and the same result. These factors contribute to the positive and negative results gained by performing the sacrifice on that particular place as per the thought current of the Vedic Indians. The Devayajana can be accepted as the norm to comprehend the intricacy of the rules made by the Vedic ritualists regarding all the sacrificial places. Hence we shall discuss this topic in the introductory chapter.
4.1.1. Description in the Śrauta ritual texts-

The Taittirīya-Saṃhitā (6.2.6.1-3) explains about the Devayajana regarding the Soma-sacrifice. According to it, if the sacrificial place is such that the sacrifice faces the east then the sacrificer would obtain the heaven. One can also obtain the heaven if the sacrificial place is elevated in three places i.e. two more places in addition to the previous one. It should be elevated between the Āhavanīya fire and the Havirdhāna-manḍapa and between the Gārhapatya fire and the Sadas additionally. The Āngiras went to the heaven by doing this. If a sacrificer has foes then his sacrifice should be performed on a ‘āpta’ sacrificial place. Additionally, this place should be connected to a road or a pit in such a way that no chariot or wagon should go between. In this way, he will ‘āp’ or conquer his foes. If someone desires cattle then the sacrifice should be done on a place which is elevated in one place. It should be elevated between the Sadas and the Havirdhāna-manḍapa. The similar idea is suggested by the Āp.ŚŚ (10.20.10) for gaining glory among both the gods and the men. Additionally, the sacrifice can also be done for the cattle on a place which possesses diverse intertwined plants. The Āngiras obtained cattle in this way. If the sacrificial place is firm and leveled on all sides then the sacrificer gains support. One who desires wealth should perform his sacrifice on an artificially created place. Just like that manmade place, he would also prosper. In this manner, any sacrificer performing sacrifices on such places would undoubtedly get at least one amongst the many benefits.

The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa well-known as an important ritual text, also narrates about the Devayajana in the beginning of the exposition of the Soma-sacrifice (3.1.1.1-3). According to it, the place should be high, even and firm. It should be inclined towards the east being the region of the gods or to the north being the region of the men. If it is inclined
towards the south then the sacrifice would quickly reach the yonder world but the sacrificer would live long in this world. Hence it should be slightly raised to this region. Additionally, measure of that ground should be exceeded ideally in the west so that the sacrificer would get the higher worship of the gods. It might be exceeded in the south and north. However, if it is exceeded in the east then it would be beneficial for the enemy of the sacrificer. The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa declares that the gods ascended the heaven by selecting this type of a sacrificial place so one who would select the same for his sacrifice would obtain the heaven.

The Śādvirūṣa-Brāhmaṇa(3.3.11-24) explains the topic differently. According to it, the sacrificial place is like the right palm and it should be raised compared to any other neighbouring places. Initially, the sacrificer should beg for the place to a kṣatriya. If he grants it then the sacrificer should bless him regarding the possession of a sacrificial place. However, if the kṣatriya denies it then he is cursed by the sacrificer. The sacrificer claims that he would cleave the kṣatriya on many sacrificial places like Agni, the earth, the water and the firm confidence in the infallible effect of the rites. Furthermore it is prescribed that after coming from the kṣatriya, the sacrificer should ask the priests for the Devayajana(3.3.4-8; also Bau.ŚS 2.2). Even the Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra(10.2.9-10.3.3) explains the similar procedure. Like the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, it is prescribed that the place should be inclined towards the east and the north. There should be many plants and herbs and it should have unsalted soil. It should be planned in such a way that water should flow towards the Cātvāla in the Devayajana. Moreover, there should be a variety of trees in front of it. However, piece of land should be left to the north of it sufficient for another sacrificial place. The place for offerings to the Fathers is like left palm.
The place for offering to the Fathers is like the place for cemetery. Moreover the place for Ḡīṭī, animal-sacrifice and Soma-sacrifice performed with exorcist intentions is like the place for cemetery.

The Baudhāyana-Śrautasūtra has dealt with this subject in different chapters. In (2.2) it prescribes that it should have water in the east. There should be some land sufficient for another sacrificial place to the north of it, however not in the front of it. In (6.1) it explains the Devayajana for the Agniṣṭoma with some more properties. According to the ŚŚ, it should have the havis (sacred fire, water and the rising sun) in the east. Its central beam should point towards the east, it should have openings in the corners and it should be higher towards the south. With respect to the Aśvamedha it has recommended some different features required in a Devayajana(15.1). This type of Devayajana needs a place which should have on all the principle directions as much space as a horse would traverse in a day. It should have within the arena two tanks dug or otherwise which flow together, which have auspicious names and are non-drying. To the west of the tanks and in the middle, a sacrificial place twice bigger than that of the Agnicayana is selected. In this place a shed (Śālā) is prepared with abovesaid features. To the south of it, an additional shed is prepared for the horses(Aśvasālā). Thus describe the different texts.

4.1.2. Non-favoutite sacrificer and Abhicāra-

The Āp.ŚŚ(10.20.6-7) additionally informs us that one desirous of Abhicāra or black magic should select a nirvarska place for his sacrifice. This kind of place is dug up after taking out all the trees and ant-hills from their roots. Otherwise, if black magic is being performed against the sacrificer himself, then the Adhvaryu causes him to make the
sacrifice secretly in a forest. In that case, the forest becomes a sacrificial place for him.

Additionally, if there are some non-favourite sacrificers against whom the priests might have some adverse desires then naturally the features of the Devayajana would be different. E.g. If the priests want to make the sacrificer destitute of the cattle and the offspring then they select a vicchinnna place for him. This kind of Devayajana is prepared on such a ground where a road runs just beside it (KS 25.2). If there is any doubt among the priests about the sacrificer, regarding acceptance of him to common meals or marriage then the place should be specially marked. It should be sloping to the east of the Āhavanīya and the west of the Gārhapatya. Finally, if the priest desires that a particular sacrificer should be destroyed then he chooses a place for him that has a bare patch of level ground and thus captured by Nirṛti. If the sacrificial place itself is haunted by the goddess of destruction then naturally the sacrifice would lead him towards destruction (TS 6.2.6.4). The Āp.ŚS(10.20.6-7) adds one more norm to this category. If the Adhvaryu wishes that the sacrificer would get no opportunity to perform any sacrifice anymore then he selects a peculiar place for him where a road turns between water and the place.

Thus we see a detailed description of the Devayajana in various ritual texts following diverse traditions.

4.2. Importance of a place for the Gṛhya rituals-

A place was important not only in the Śrauta but in the Gṛhya rites too. The Gṛhyasūtras cherish the place equally with the sacrificer. The Āśv.GS(3.4.7) clearly declares, "....the Vedic study is forbidden in two cases. When the person is impure himself, and when the place is....". Thus, purity of a place is as valuable equally as the purity of one’s own
The Vedic Indians esteemed it not only in the ritualism but in usual human life also. E.g. The Asvalāyana GS explains a peculiar method of finding out a suitable bride. According to this, the bride is asked to select one of the eight clay-lumps, made from eight diverse places. Some of the conclusions from this practice are directly connected to the subject of the present thesis. E.g. If the bride chooses a lump from the earth of an altar, then her offspring would be rich in holy luster. If the lump is from a gambling-place, then they would be addicted to gambling. If it belongs to the crossroads, then they would wander to different directions. If she selects the lump from a burial-ground, then she will bring death to her husband (1.5.5). Thus a very important life-making decision of selecting a spouse is based upon the qualities united with different places. The similar prescriptions are found in the other Grhyasūtras too⁴. Hence it is seen clearly how much a place was prominent for the Vedic people.

In this manner we can observe that the Vedic Indians highly valued the sacrificial place and so painstakingly specified the criterion for it. A place is thought over by the Vedic Indians through many aspects. We find it incredible to study that the scholarship which prepared the rules for the principle sacrificial places explained minute details about the minor places too. The same import is applied to the places used in the minor rites. E.g. In the Nirūḍhapasubāṇḍha, a sacrificial post is prepared out of a tree. It is prescribed that the tree should be born on an even place (Āp.ŚS 7.1.17). In this way, a place which contributes indirectly and does not participate directly was also thought by the Vedic ritualists. There are numerous such examples which make the reader astonished about the passion of the Vedic intellect for the perfection regarding the ritual-places.

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⁴ Also see:Āp.GS1.3.15, Gobh.GS 2.1.4&8.
5. Places of Ritual.

Thereupon, I have studied various references occurring in the ritual Vedic texts mentioning various ritual places. After having analysed those references we can comprehend how and up to what extent a place is significant for the success of a ritual. These places are categorized and so chapterised as follows-

- Sacrificial Fires
- Cardinal Points
- Altars and Hearths
- Miscellaneous Places

5.1 Special features of the concept of place-

We have already understood what can be called a place. Before actually entering into the chapters it is necessary to see how these ‘categories’ fulfill the criterion for being a place.

To begin with the ‘fires’ typically the fire itself is not seen as a place. However, the sacrificial fires are established separately and specially for the offerings in the rituals. They are established in the fire-places. These fire-places are prepared specially in order to perform a sacrifice. The fires symbolize the fire-places. Hence indirectly the fires are looked upon as the physical places. They do not remain merely the fires but are intended as sacrificial places for the offering activities under specific names in specified locations to achieve expected gains. One can not imagine the Vedic ritual without sacrificial offerings in the sacred fires. Hence, it is one of the most important places in the Vedic ritual. The three principal sacred fires and some minor fires are assessed as ritual-places in this thesis.

A similar explanation comes forth regarding the cardinal points commonly known as the quarters or the regions or the directions. The
quarters are distinctly specified in the performance of the Vedic ritual to produce definite effects. PENNER designates the cardinal points as ‘ritual space orientation’. Moreover he says that the shape, spatial orientation and location of the ritual setting are essential features of the semantics of ritual action (EB Online, ‘Ritual’, p.12). Moreover, lexically the terms ‘quarter’ and ‘place’ are synonyms of each other (The concise Oxford Thesaurus, p.598). In this way, the quarters are clearly transformed into physical places from being the metaphysical spaces. Mainly the four quarters and four intermediate-quarters are subject to analysis in this research.

Altar or Vedi is identically significant in the Vedic ritual as without establishing an altar, a Śrauta ritual can not be performed. Typically we find at least one basic altar in the Vedic sacrifices. However, there could be even two or three altars in addition to the first basic altar in the complicated sacrifices like the Agniṣṭoma or Sautrāmaṇi. One also finds smaller form of the altars known as the Dhiṣṇyas or hearths used for subordinate purposes.

Furthermore, some miscellaneous places within the sacrificial establishment and even outside it play a major part in this study. We find that these places too are significant for the realization of the desires of the sacrificer. Natural clefts (Iriṇa), cross-roads(catuspatha) and pits are some unique examples of the miscellaneous places. In addition, we observe that some sacrificial places do possess interactive associations in the procedure of achieving the sacrificial goal. Occasionally, pairs like a quarter and a fire or a quarter and a minor place together participate in the accomplishment of the wish behind the whole sacrificial activity. Such relationships are as well discussed in the present research.
On the basis of this presupposition, I have confined the subject of this study only to the above-mentioned places with the logical inclusion of sacrificial fires and the cardinal points.

Besides we find that some sacrificial places are associated with specific entities or deities. Sometimes the places themselves are deified. Similarly certain places are permanently regarded as auspicious and some inauspicious. According to the usual thinking of the Vedic Indians, the places that are considered inauspicious are prescribed for the abhicāra rites. Thus, in this thesis it is attempted to study the various properties of the places from the perspective of the Vedic ritual.

6. Relevance of ‘place’ in post-Vedic period -

A place has always been one of the important factors with regard to a ritual or a social ceremony also after the Vedic age. Even in the era of the idol-worship and temple erection in India, specific rules were followed regarding the building of the temples and establishment of the idols of the deities. It was done with minute care with reference to the locations and the measurements. Other than the actual religious purposes, residential construction too was done with particular prescriptions to acquire happiness and prosperity. Now also, in the age of the super-computers and nano-technology, human nature remains the same. Whether it is a house-construction or establishment of any office, one desires nothing but the success. Success and prosperity are the final aims of any activity of the modern humans too. This kind of human feeling can be traced back to the Vedic Indians who had the same thought-current. The difference might be seen in the fountainhead to which the modern Indians take resort to. Sometimes these sources are based on traditional Indian sciences like Vastuṣastra. Occasionally they belong to the neighbouring countries like China in case of Feng Shui.
It is necessary to find the roots of the strong association of a place with positive or negative outcomes in a ritual or ceremony affecting the human lives from the point of view of the ritual studies. Obviously my first choice was to trace it in the Vedic ritual literature which is one of the most ancient evidence of the human civilization. In this thesis an attempt is made to seek and analyze the above-mentioned association.

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