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Block -02

Brahmana Literature

UNIT- 1 BRAHMANA LITERATURE

UNIT- 2 BRAHMANA LITERATURE

UNIT- 3 BRAHMANA LITERATURE

UNIT- 4 BRAHMANA LITERATURE



MASK PROGRAMME

EXPERTS COMMITTEE

Prof. Prafulla Kumar Mishra, Former Vice-Chancellor, North Odisha University

Prof. Raghunath Panda , Retd. Prof, Utkal University

Prof. Gopal Krishna Dash, Retd. Prof. , Utkal University

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CONVENOR

**Dr. Dillip Kumar Nayak , Reader in Odia ,
Officer In Charge, Regional Centre, B.J.B Auto. College Bhubaneswar**

COURSE WRITER

Dr. Madhusudan Mishra , Associate Professor in Sanskrit , B.J.B Auto. College , Bhubaneswar

PROGRAMME COORDINATOR

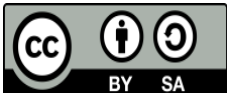
Dr. Sareeta Pujari , Senior Academic Consultant, OSOU, Sambalpur

Mr. Pratap Kumar Meher , Academic Consultant , Sanskrit , OSOU, Sambalpur

MATERIAL PRODUCTION

**Dr. Manas Ranjan Pujari
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UNITS-I-IV BRAHMANA LITERATURE

- 1.1. Introduction to *Brahmana* Literature.
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1.1. INTRODUCTION TO *BRAHMANA* LITERATURE

In this Unit, we shall discuss about the broad features of the *Brahmana* literature which constitutes an inseparable component of the Vedic literature.

Sage Apastamba, in his *Yajnaparibhasa* (31) defines the Vedas as: *mantra-bharmanayor vedanamadheyam* meaning *mantra* and *brahmana* together constitute the *Veda*. *Mantra* generally refers to those by which sacrifices conducted and in which the deities

are invoked / praised (*mananat mantrah*). The word *Brahmana* stands for a definite type of texts. The Vedic texts have their impulse in the supramental responses of the seers to the supernatural powers or power constituting the ultimate reality. In terms of expression such responses took two forms, word and action, i.e. prayers and ritual actions. Whereas the prayers/invocations are compiled in the section called *Samhita*, the rituals are dealt with in the section called *Brahmana*. These mostly voluminous prose works are essentially digests or, in a final redaction, collection of a floating mass of views and discourses on the ritual ceremonial.

The extent of the *Brahmana* literature was quite vast. Their number was many times more than what is available to us at present. In the *Asvalayana Grhyasutra* (*Adhyaya-1: Khanda-3*) we notice a concept like *acarya-tarpana* along with *rsi-tarpana*. In that context, Asvalayana makes a distinction between the *rsi-s* and the *acarya-s*: those who visualise the *mantra-s* are *rsi-s* and those who visualise the *Brahmana-s* are *acarya-s*.



We notice a clear cut distinction between the *Samhita-s* and *Brahmana-s* so far as their form / structure and contents are concerned. Most of the *Samhita-s* are metrical. However, some portions of the *Samhita-s*, as in the *Taittiriya* and *Atharva-Samhita*, are prosaic in nature. On the other hand, *Brahmana-s* are always prosaic in form. Similarly, there is also difference with regard to the subject matter of both the literature. Whereas the *mantra-s* of the *Rgveda* principally deal with praises and invocations of the deities, the ones in the *Atharvaveda* discuss about subjects, both worldly and transcendental. *Yajurveda* chiefly discusses in detail the sacrifices of various types. The subject matter of the *Brahmana* literature is quite different from all these. *Vidhi* (orders/prescription) is the primary subject of the *Brahmana-s*. Before going to conduct a sacrifice, generally the following questions appear in our mind: When, how and with what objects the sacrifice is to be conducted? Who is eligible to perform a sacrifice? Therefore, with a view to solving all questions relating to the conduct of sacrifices, Brahmanic literature was created.



In addition to the *vidhi*-s, some other subsidiary subjects are also available in the *Brahmana*-s. But, those subsidiaries are complementary to the main objective, i.e. *vidhi*. Those subjects are categorised under the generic title: *arthavada*. *Arthavada* consists of both *ninda* (condemnation) and *prasamsa* (praise/eulogy): *ninda* of the articles/objects the use of which is prohibited in the sacrifices and *prasamsa* of the articles/objects that are useful in rituals. All prescriptions in the *Brahmana*-s are supported by certain logic/rational arguments. Thus, behind every prescription, a reason (*hetu*) has been advanced. Sometimes, many ancient episodes and anecdotes are given in the *Brahmana*-s to supplement through eulogies the sacrificial objects and activities, which create predilection in the mind of the sacrificer to conduct the sacrifice. This is called as *arthavada*. With a view to showing the etymology of the words used in the *vidhi-vakya*-s (sentences making certain orders / prescriptions), the science of etymology has been discovered in the *Brahmana*-s. Thus, whereas *vidhi* is the pivot, subsidiary subjects like *nirvacana* (etymology), *arthavada* (praise), *hetu*

(reason) and episodes and anecdotes (*akhyana-s*) revolve around it in the *Brahmana-s*.

1.2. *BRAHMANA*: DEFINITION, DATE OF COMPOSITION, SALIENT FEATURES, NUMBER OF *BRAHMANA* TEXTS:

The oldest reference to *Brahmana* as a component of Vedic literature is seen in the *Taittiriya Samhita* (3.7.1.1: *etad brahmanany eva panca havimsi*). The word has also been attested in a number of ancient texts in the same sense such as the *Satapatha Brahmana* (4.6.9.20), *Aitareya Brahmana* (6,25,8,2), *Nirukta* of Yaska (4.27) and *Astadhyayi* of Panini (3.4.36). *Brahmana-s* are the explanatory texts of the *mantra-s* meaning *mantra-s*. Accordingly, the *Brahmana* texts explain the *mantra-s* of the Vedic *Samhita-s* and thereby enlarge their meaning. As we have seen above, since *Brahman* also refers to sacrifices, the *Brahmana-s* also present the proceedings and explanation of the *karmakanda* (sacrificial actions) part (of the sacrifices) as their main subject matter. In this way, we observe the explanation of *mantra*, *karma* (sacrificial action) and *viniyoga* (application of *mantra-s* in sacrifices) in the *Brahmana-s*.



1.2.1. DEFINITION OF *BRAHMANA*:

The term *Brahmana* signifies its pertinence to *Brahma* (neuter-first letter accented: *ady-udatta*). *Brahmana* being derived from the root *Brh* meaning to expand (*√brh bardhane*) means “that which makes an expansion”. The term *Brahmana* is very closely associated with the term *Brahman*. Out of the many meanings of the word *Brahman*, one is sacrifice. Therefore, *Brahmana* is the generic designation of the texts that speak about the various activities of the rituals. As an extension, it also signifies a type of literature which extensively deals with Vedic sacrifices in a comprehensive, meticulous and methodical manner. From an internal examination of the *Brahmana*-s, it is manifest that those are the encyclopaedia dealing with the *vaijnanika* (scientific) *adhibhautika* (material / worldly) and *adhyatmika*(spiritual) aspects of ancient Indian sacrificial tradition. We don't notice any other parallel religious literature in the world in which a complete treatment of all sacrificial observances of a homeland is presented, as in the *Brahmana*-s.

The very aim of the compilers of the *Brahmana-s* was not to describe, but to explain the origin, meaning reason d'être of the ritual acts to be performed and to

prove their validity and the significance and suitability of the *mantra-s* and chants used as well as the mutual relations of the acts and their connections with the phenomenal reality.

1.2.2. DATE OF COMPOSITION OF *BRAHMANA-S*:

While making any attempt to decide the date of composition of any component of the Vedic literature, it must be kept in mind that there are different layers in each component and their date of composition differs from each other by centuries rather than decades. This is also applicable to the date of the Brahmanic literature. From the geographical references found in the *Brahmana-s*, it is evident that most of the texts coming under that literature were composed in the ancient Indian Sarasvati valley and Kuru-Pancala regions of North-West India. The Aryans advanced to these regions in their second phase of migration / expansion which most probably happened after the *Samhita* period. However, it must be kept in mind that some times the



Brahmana-s also constitute an indivisible part of the *Samhita-s*, e.g the *Taittiriya Samhita* which is a combination of both *mantra-s* and *brahmana-s*. Thus, the exact date of composition of the *Brahmana-s* as a whole is not possible. And it would be prudent to assign different dates of composition to different *Brahmana-s*, even their different parts. Baladeva Upadhyaya prefers to assign a date to the *Brahmana-s* which is at least one thousand years before the time of composition of the *Upanisads*. He substantiates his argument with the fact that since the entire *Satapatha Brahmana* is accented like the *Samhita-s*, it must be assigned a comparatively more ancient date. Similar is the case with the *Taittiriya Samhita*, wherein we notice an amalgamation of *mantra-s* and *brahmana-s*. On the basis of the astrological evidences found in the *Satapatha Brahmana*, Shankar Balakrushna Dikshit is inclined to assign a date that is three thousand years before the Vikrama era to *Satapatha Brahmana*. Baladeva Upadhya is of the opinion that the *Satapatha Brahmana*, being the oldest of all the *Brahmana-s*, was written during 3000 B.C and the *Gopatha Brahmana*, being the latest,

was written in 2000 B.C. Thus, there was a vast period of one thousand years during which the *Brahmana-s* were composed.

1.2.3. SALIENT FEATURES OF THE *BRAHMANA-S*:

Sabarabhasya (2.1.33) quotes this *samgrahasloka* (collected verse) enumerating the ten subject matters dealt with in the *Brahmana-s*:

hetur nivacanam ninda prasamsa samsayo vidhih /

parakriya purakalpo vyavadharana-kalpana //

upamanam dasiate tu vidhayo brahmanasya tu /

We have already discussed *hetu*, *nirvacana*, *ninda* and *prasamsa* above. *Samsaya* refers to the doubt that might arise in the mind of a sacrificer with regard to an article/object or action and that is clarified by the *Brahmana-s*. With regard to the meanings of the words *parakriya* and *purakalpa*, we don't have any unanimity of opinion. *Brahmanda Purana*(Part-II,34/63-64) provides the meaning of these two words as follows:

anyasyanyasya caktir ya budhaih prokta purakrtih /

yo hy atyantaparokarthah sa purakalpa ucyate //



(The precedents or the achievements of others as recorded by the wise are called *purakrti* and the most ancient incidents are called *purakalpa*). As a whole, both of them are included under *akhyana* (episode).

However, *vidhi* is accorded the prime position and others being its subsidiaries are naturally given a secondary one. The contents of sacrificial performances assumed such great proportion in the Brahmanic literature that it became practically impossible to comprehend their real nature and execute them as per their prescriptions. As a result, with a view to making these activities easy to learn and perform, the *Srautasutra-s* were composed at a later period. It would suffice here to give some examples of *vidhi* and *arthavada* at this point.

Vidhi (Injunctions/Orders): It refers to the instructions on the conduct of sacrifices along with their subsidiaries. According to Apastamba(*Srautasutra:24.1.32ff.*) ,*vidhi* comprises the Brahmanical sentences which contain an order expressed in the optative - with the rules or modes of conducting sacrificial ceremonies. Many *vidhi-s* are found in the *Tandya Brahmana*



(6.7). Similarly, the *Satapatha Brahmana* presents a huge quantity of materials on *vidhi*. In the first *kanda* itself, we come across detailed discussion on the conduct of the principal and auxiliary parts of the *Darsa* and *Purnamasa isti-s*. Along with the *vidhi-s*, the *hetu-s* (reasons/justifications/ logic) behind the conduct of the sacrifices is also given.

Viniyoga (Application): The first trace of application of *mantra-s* is seen in the *Brahmana-s*. The logic behind the application of a *mantra* in a particular ritual performance is seen therein.

Hetu (Reason): Appropriate and correct reasons behind the conduct of various activities of Vedic sacrifices are given in great detail in the *Brahmana-s*. This, in fact, creates adequate esteem for Vedic institutions.

Arthavada (Eulogy): The contents of the *Brahmana-s* rose to greater proportions because of the praise of the deities, ritual actions and substances used in ritualistic performances. *Arthavada-s* are utilised for supplementing the faith in the *vidhi-*



s. These Arthavada-s are threefold: something contradicting everyday evidence (*gunavada*), something known from other sources of knowledge (*anuvada*), something unknown and uncontradicted stated authoritatively (*bhutarthavada*).

Nirukti (Etymology): Occasionally, etymology of words is found in the *Brahmana*-s. It is so scientific in nature and content that from the linguistic point of view it proves to be of exceedingly high significance. The origin of the etymological analysis of the words given in the *Nirukta* is found in the *Brahmana*-s. For example, the etymology of water (*udaka*) is given in the *Atharvaveda* (3.13.1) in the following way: *udanisur mahir iti tasmad udakam ucyate* (It is called *udaka* as it makes the earth wet: compare the relationship between the words “wet’ and “water”). This clearly proves that the Brahmanical trend of finding the etymology of the words owes its genesis to the *Samhita*-s.

Akhyana (Episodes): The *Vidhi*-s and *Arthavada*-s are so extensively dealt with in the *Brahmana*-s that the patience of a



general reader is often tested. He finds it extremely difficult to keep his interest intact. In such a situation, the occurrence of the *Akhyana*-s works like an oasis in the literary desert that the *Brahmana*-s are. The literary worth of the *Akhyana*-s is so much that it can hardly be overstated.

Many a time, we see that these episodes have blossomed in the form of spectacular literary outputs in later periods. In this connection, the example of Pururava and Urvashi, Sunahsepa, ancient deluge (*ogha/jalaplavana*) may be cited.

Number of *Brahmana* texts: The extent of Brahmanical literature was indeed very vast. However, in the long course of time many *Brahmana* texts are lost to us for ever. Their names or quotations from those texts are found in some *Srauta* texts. The *Samhita*-wise *Brahmana* texts that are available to us at present are enumerated below.

Rgveda: 1. *Aitareya Brahmana*, 2. *Samkhayana* (or *Kausitaki*)
Brahmana

Sukla-Yajurveda: 1. Satapatha Brahmana

Krsna-Yajurveda: 1. Taittiriya Brahmana

Samaveda: 1. Tandya (or Pancavimsa or Praudha) Brahmana, 2. Sadvimsa Brahmana 3. Samavidhana Brahmana, 4. Arseya Brahmana, 5. Daivata Brahmana, 6. (Mantra) Upanisad Brahmana, 7. Samhitopanisad Brahmana, 8. Vamsa Brahmana, 9. Jaiminiya Brahmana

Atharvaveda: Gopatha Brahmana

1.3. Subject matter of the individual *Brahmana-s*

1. *Aitareya Brahmana:*

Sage Mahidasa Aitareya is believed to be the author of this *Brahmana* text, which is one of the most noteworthy *Brahmana-s* of *Rgveda*. Sayanacarya in his commentary adduces a story behind this name. According to that, Aitareya was the son of Itara, a Sudra lady. However, there is no historical truth behind that. However, the name Aitareya has a very close proximity with the Avestan priest Aethraya.



The language of *Aitareya Brahmana* is not very far from that of the *Samhita-s* and its style is in consonance with the Brahmanical one. Since there is symmetry with regard to the language and style all along the text, there is hardly any possibility of interpolation in the available text. This *Brahmana* comprises forty chapters. Each five chapters taken together are named as *Pancika*. Accordingly, there are 40 chapters, 8 *Pancika-s* and 285 *Kandika-s* in it. Since the *Brahmana* text is related to the *Rgveda*, it contains all the important ritual actions that the Hotr priest is required to perform in a given sacrifice. Accordingly, in the first and second *Pancika-s* we come across details of the actions of the said priest in Agnistoma sacrifice. Since Agnistoma is the base of all Soma sacrifices, it is described in minute detail in this *Brahmana*. In the third and fourth *pancika-s* description of the *sastra-s* (*mantra-s* that are not sung: *apragitamantrah*) that are employed during *pratah-savana*, *madhyandina-savana* and *sayam-savana* is found. In addition, brief description of Ukthya, Atiratra and Sodasi sacrifices (which are *vikrti-s* of Agnistoma) is also available. In the fifth, we come across extensive narration of Dvadasaha sacrifices. Narration of the duties of the Hotr and



his associate priests in Soma sacrifices extending over several weeks constitutes the subject matter of the sixth *pancika*. Description of the Rajasuya sacrifice is the main subject matter of the seventh *pancika* and, in this context, we come across vivid description of the well-known Sunahsepa episode. The eighth *pancika* is extremely important from the historical point of view, as we first come across *aindra-mahabhiseka* and thereafter the coronation ceremony of the undisputed monarchs in it in great details. The religious and political significance of the priests constitutes the subject of discussion of the final *adhyaya*. In this way, the *Aitareya Brahmana* is immensely important so far as the description of the various types of Soma sacrifice and their history is concerned.

From the religious point of view, any discussion on this *Brahmana* presents before us a number of new and authentic facts. One such significant fact speaks about the exalted position that Visnu was occupying during that period. This *Brahmana* is well remembered for the episode of Sunahsepa. From the literary perspective, this episode is a unique example of the



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pathos sentiment. King Hariscandra was blessed with a son, named Rohita by the blessings of Varuna to get rid of the state of issuelessness. However, he had promised to sacrifice this son afterwards. On attaining youth, Rohita went to the forest. Due to the failure of the promise in giving the son as sacrifice, king Hariscandra suffered from stomach ailment. Having heard this news, Rohita returned from the forest. However, Lord Indra obstructed him from returning to home. Though Rohita finally returned home, he got Sunahsepa, the middle son of Ajigarta Sauviyasi, purchased in lieu of some cows and offered him as the object of sacrifice in honour of Varuna. However, Sunahsepa became able in rescuing himself by means of prayer to a number of deities. Finally, sage Visvamitra adopted him as his son. Since the fifty sons of Visvamitra refused accept this adoption, they were pushed to the peripheral region of the Aryan settlement such as, Andhra, Mutiva, Pulinda and were treated as Mlecchas. Most of the western commentators try to find out a trace of human sacrifice in this episode. However, Indian commentators dismiss such a proposition and explain it as a mere symbolic one in nature. Thee commentaries are available on this *Brahmana*, 1.



One by Sayana, 2. The other by Sadguruisiya and the third by Govindasvami.

2. Samkhayana Brahmana: The second Rgvedic *Brahmana* is known as *Samkhayana Brahmana*. It is divided into thirty chapters, which is again sub-divided into *khandas* the number of which differs from five to seventeen. The total number of *khandas* in this *Brahmana* is 226. Long prose passages are found inside the *khandas*. It is more harmonious, uniform and systematic in nature and less discursive and descriptive in the treatment of its subjects than the companion text. The main subject of this book is the same as that of the original part of the *Aitareya*. The first six chapters are devoted to the establishment of the fires(*agnyadheya*), the *agnihotra*, the Full and new Moon offerings, special sacrifices, the seasonal rites and the part to be played by the *Brahman* priest. The regular exposition of the *Soma* sacrifice begins from the seventh chapter. From an intense study of this *Brahmana*, one gets some significant informations ,such as, knowledge of Sanskrit of the Northerners was praise worthy, Rudra and Visnu were occupying an exalted position

among the Gods, there was an aversive attitude of the public towards animal sacrifice, etc. are brought to the lime light.



The *Brahmana-s* of the *Yajurveda*

1. *Satapatha Brahmana*: To the White *Yajurveda* belongs the *Satapatha Brahmana*,” the *Brahmana* of the Hundred Paths”, probably so called because - in the *Madhyandina* recension- it consists of one hundred chapters. It is not only the most extensive and the best known of all the works of this class, but also one of the highest achievements in the whole range of Vedic literature. Being more elaborated than the other *Brahmana-s* it is, also in passages of smaller compass, a mine of important information and richest in discussions and narrative, part of which are recounted in detail, though always fitted in the ritual framework. As in the case of *Samhita* of the *Vajasaneyin-s*, there are two recensions extant, that of the *Madhyandina-s* and of the *Kanva-s*. Both the recensions are very closely related. In the *Madhyandina* recension the 100 *adhyaya-s* -which are numbered consecutively-are distributed among fourteen *kanda-s*; they are subdivided into *brahmana-s* and *kandika-s*.



The first nine books of the Madhyandina deal with the fundamental elements of the liturgy and the ancient nucleus of the *Yajurveda*: Full Moon and New Moon sacrifices, establishment of the sacred fires, agnihotra, seasonal sacrifices and other *haviryajna*-s, the soma sacrifices and the construction of the sacred fireplace. Many new subject matters, such as *upanayana*, *svadhyaya*, *aurdhadehika* rites, which generally do not constitute the matter of the *brahmana*-s are seen discussed in the last four *kanda*-s (i.e 11th to 14th). In the last part of the *Satapatha*, we come across the *Brhadaranyakopanisad*. This *Brahmana* is believed to be the ancient most *Brahmana* among all the available *Brahmana*-s.

From a number of reasons, this *Brahmana* is of enormous importance. As has been told above, a complete and comprehensive account of Indian liturgical tradition is available in this *Brahmana* text. In the course of discussion and description, even minute details of insignificant ritual acts are not forgotten. The reasons behind every ritual act, anecdotes and episodes related to them, the spiritual importance of



different divinities also add to the worth of the text. It is a significant historical record to ascertain the spread of the Aryans in the Aryavartta region.

2. *Taittiriya Brahmana*: The *Taittiriya Brahmana* is the only available *Brahmana* of the Black *Yajurveda*. It emulates the Rgvedic tradition so far as the fact of possessing a separate *Brahmana* is concerned. In a natural continuation or supplement to its *Samhita*, it contains *mantra*-s as well as prose. Thus, only the special methods of building the fire place are dealt with in the *Brahmana*, because the normal form has been abundantly treated in the *Samhita*. This *Brahmana* sometimes describes or enumerates ritual acts in a way reminiscent of *sutra* style.

The work, a mere agglomeration of material, consists of three books. These are called *astaka* “consisting of eight (“lectures”, chapters: *prapathaka*”. In order to protect the text from corruption, the smallest divisions are subdivided into ten clauses, the final words of which are repeated at the end of a section. The following is a brief survey of its main contents (I)



agnyadhana, gavam ayana, vajapeya, royal consecration, ;(II) *agnihotra*, the so-called dasahotra sacrifices; *mantra-s* for subsidiary sacrifices; sautramani ,*sava-s* (a type of rites for special purposes lasting one day);special animal sacrifices(*kamyesti*);(III)sacrifices to the constellations or so-called lunar mansions(*naksatresti*); the important explanations of the rites of New and Full Moon as well as part of the *mantra-s* belonging to it; the human sacrifice(with symbolical human victims); offering of butter, cakes etc.(*isti*) , animal sacrifice, expiations ,acts to be performed on the first and on the second and third days of the horse sacrifice; the elaborate ceremonies connected with the piling of a fireplace for the adoration of the sun; the so-called naciketa fire; the Caturhotra ceremonies. The number of legends contained in this *Brahmana* is comparatively small.

The *Brahmana-s* of the *Samaveda*

In comparison to the number of *Brahmana-s* of other Vedas, to the *Brahmana-s* of the *Samaveda* is more. Sayanacarya

enumerates the names of the Samavedic *Brahmana*-s in the following verse:

*astau hi brahmanagranthah praudham brahmanam adimam /
sadvimsakhyam dvitiyam syat tatah samavidhir bhavet //
arseyam devatadhyayo bhaved upanisat tatah /
samhitopanisad vamso grantha astav itiritah //*

Accordingly, we have the following eight *Brahmana* texts of the *Samaveda*: 1. *Praudha* (also known as *Tandya / Pancavimsa*) *Brahmana*, 2. *Sadvimsa*, 3. *Samavidhana*, 4. *Arseya*, 5. *Devatadhyaya*, 6. *Upanisad-Brahmana*, 7. *Samhitopanisad Brahmana*, 8. *Vamsa Brahmana*. It is interesting to notice that Sayana, while enumerating the eight *Brahmana*-s, does not mention the most important *Jaiminiya*.

1. ***Tandya Brahmana***: The *Tandya Brahmana* derives this name because of its relation with the *tandi* branch of the *Samaveda*. It is also called the *Pancavimsa Brahmana* as it contains twenty-five chapters. It is also known by the names *Talavakara Brahmana* and



Praudha Brahmana. The importance of this *Brahmana* lies in its exhaustive treatment of the acts of the Udgatr priest in the sacrificial performances. Further, this great Brahmanical text deals with varieties of sacrifices, beginning from one-day-sacrifice to the sacrifice that runs for thousand years. In the third and fourth chapters, we come across the gavam ayana sacrifice

which is the basic sacrifice (*prakrtiyaga*) for all the *sattra-s* and it runs for one year. The treatment of Jyotistoma, Ukthya and Atiratra, Ahina and Soma sacrifices constitutes the significant contents of this text.

2. *Sadvimsa Brahmana*: This *Brahmana* is available with two types of divisions: 1. *Prapathaka* and *Khanda*, 2. *Adhyaya* and *Khanda*. As is evident from its name, it is a supplement to the Pancavimsa Brahmana and its subject matter is complementary to it. Whereas the first five chapters of the text deal with different rituals, the subject matter of the last part is completely different. The fifth *Prapathaka* is names as Adbhuta

Brahmana as it discusses matters relating to earth quake, untimely blossoming of flowers, pregnancy of Asvatari (she mule), actions to get rid of natural calamities etc.

3. *Samavidhana Brahmana*: The subject matter of this *Brahmana* is quite different from that of other *Brahmana*-s. Adoption of Sorcery as a tool to drive away an individual from the village, destroy the enemy, accumulate wealth etc. constitute some such subjects of this *Brahmana*. As regards the style of this *Brahmana*, it does not suffer from the fault of repetition which is usually noticed in the *Brahmana*-s. Nor is it pithy in nature as with the sutra-s. It adopts a intermediary path.

This *Brahmana* has three *prakarana*-s. In the first, we come across different types of *vrata*-s (vows) like *krcchra*, *atikrcchra* etc. which are abundantly found in the *Purana*-s. Elaborate description of the action of bringing the ashes from the funeral pyre and throwing them in the house or on the bed of an enemy to drive him away from the village is seen in this text. Similarly, subject matters like flesh

oblation in honour of the Yaksha (a type of demi-god) Manibhadra, his worship by chanting different *Saman*-s with a view to getting gold, pacifying the followers of Rudra etc. are no less curious in it. In the third chapter, we come across different s being undertaken with the chanting of *Saman*-s to attain material prosperity, long life etc. From the topics of this *Brahmana*, it appears to be the precursor to *Dharmasutra*-s, as it elaborately deals with subjects like offences, sins, atonements etc. which generally constitutes the subject matter of *Dharmasutra* literature.

4. ***Arseya Brahmana***: This *Brahmana* is divided into three *prapathaka*-s and eighty-two *khanda*-s. As is obvious from its name, it is an index of the names of the seers of the Samaveda. It is a useful aid so far as a scientific study of the Saman chants is considered. During the description of the Samaveda, it shows the difference between the Saman-s and the *rk*-s considered as the *Samayoni*-s.



5. *Devatadhyaya Brahmana*: This is the smallest one among the Samavedic *Brahmana*-s. It has only three *Khanda*-s: 1. the first one containing twenty-six *kandika*-s describes different deities, 2. the second one containing eleven *kandika*-s illustrate the deities of different metres and 3. The third one having twenty-five *kandika*-s gives the etymology of different metres. Yaska in his *Nirukta* has accepted most of the etymologies given by this *Brahmana*. This is of immense significance from the point of view of linguistics.

6. *Upanisad Brahmana*: This *Brahmana* divided into ten *prapathaka*-s comprises two texts, namely, Mantra Brahmana or Chhandogya Brahmana and *Chandogyopanisad*. The *Mantra Brahmana* has two *prapathaka*-s and each *prapathaka* is further divided into eight *khanda*-s. It is a nice collection of the *mantra*-s used in domestic rites (*grhya -samskara*-s). The total number of *mantra*-s in this *Brahmana* is 257. In the first *prapathaka*, *mantra*-s dealing with domestic *samskara*-s like *vivaha*, *garbhadhana*, *simantonnayana*, *cudakarana*, *upanayana*, *samavarttana* etc. are given. In the second, we come across



mantra-s relating to bhutabali, agrahayanikarma, pitrpindadana, devabalihoma, darsapurnamasa, adityopasthana, navagrhapravesa, svastyayana, prasadaprapti etc. The last eight *prapathaka*-s of this *Brahmana* is known as the Chhandogyopanisad.

7. Samhitopanisad Brahmana: This *Brahmana* text is of great significance so far as the description of *Samagayana* is concerned. It is so named as it establishes the secrets (*upanisad*) of the *Samhita*(collection of the *samagayana*-s). It has five *khanda*-s and each *khanda* is further sub-divided into *sutra*-s. In the first *khanda*, the form and fruits of the three types of *gana-samhita*-s are described. *Samhita*-s are of three types: 1. *Devahu-samhita*, 2. *Vaksabahu-samhita* and 3. *Amitrahu-samhita*. Whereas the first *samhita* is favourable, the last two are harmful. In the second and third *khanda*-s, the rules regarding the *gana-samhita*-s, stoma, anuloma and pratilomasvara etc. are exhaustively dealt with. In the last part of the third *khanda*, the eligibility of the preceptor and the disciple along with the praise of giving gifts to the deserving ones



is given. The fourth and fifth *khanda*-s are supplements to the subjects discussed in the earlier *khanda*-s.

8. ***Vamsa Brahmana***: This *Brahmana* text is very small in size and comprises three *khanda*-s only. The lineage of the Samavedic teachers is given in this *Brahmana*. It is quite useful to know the history of the ancient seers.

9. ***Jaiminiya Brahmana***: This *Brahmana* belonging to the *Jaiminiya* branch is not available in its entirety till date. In form, it is extremely large which is comparable with the *Satapatha Brahmana* and it is highly beneficial to know the secrets of different ritual performances. The *Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana* also known as *Gayatryupanisad* constitutes a part of this *Brahmana* text.

The Brahmana of Atharvaveda

1. ***Gopatha Brahmana***: The only *Brahmana* of the *Atharvaveda* that is available to us is the *Gopatha Brahmana*. It has two parts: 1. *Purva-Gopatha* and 2. *Uttara-Gopatha*. In the first, there



are five chapters (*Prapathaka-s* or *Adhyaya-s*) and in the second there are six. The chapters are further divided into *kandika-s* and their total number comes to 258. From the point of view of composition, this *Brahmana* is of very recent origin. As expected, this text sings the eulogy of the *Atharvaveda* in a most vociferous manner. It acclaims that the other three Vedas have sprung from the *Atharvaveda* and therefore, it is essential to read the *Atharvaveda* before reading the other three Vedas.

In the first *Prapathaka* of the *Purva-Gopatha* there is a very nice description of the glory of Om-kara and Gayatri. The second one narrates the rules to be followed by a Brahmacarin. In it, twelve years of time has been earmarked for the study of each Veda. However, this duration can be decreased depending upon the capability of the student. The third *Prapathaka* describes the duties and actions of the four different Vedic priests. Initiation (*diksa*) given by the priests constitutes the topic of discussion in the fourth *prapathaka*. In the fifth, we come across description of the rites like the Samvatsarasatra, Asvamedha, Purusamedha, Agnistoma etc. Though the description of the subject matter in

the *Uttara-Gopatha* is not so systematic, it is no way less interesting considering the narration of various sacrifices and the related anecdotes and episodes. Traditionally, seer Gopatha is the author of this *Brahmana* text. It is believed that this text was composed in the central Indian region, as places like Kuru-Pancala, Anga-Magadha, Kasi-Kosala, Salva-Matsya etc. are mentioned in this *Brahmana*. The etymologies of different terms given in this *Brahmana* are very significant from the point of view of linguistics.

1.4. Indian Ritual Tradition and the importance/ significance of the *Brahmana*-texts:

The history of man shows that there has been no primitive community which has not developed some kind of religion or another. It further shows that the basic form of most of these primitive religions had been sacrifice. The following definition of sacrifice brings out quite adequately its essential nature and purpose: “Sacrifice (Latin *sacrificium*; *sacer*, ‘holy’, and *facere*, ‘to make’) may be defined generally as a rite in the course of which something is forfeited or destroyed, its object being to establish relations between a source of spiritual strength and one

in need of such strength, for the benefit of the latter. This relationship may be one of communion , that is, one by which strength is conceived to be imparted to man(communal type); or, conversely, it may be one whereby a human weakness is held to be withdrawn and neutralised(peculiar type). An instance of the first type occurs whenever the victim is consumed in a sacred meal, of the second whenever it is treated as unclean and cast away to beasts of prey.”

1.4.1. Origin and Purpose of Sacrifice:

Various theories have been put forth regarding the origin of sacrifice. There is, for instance, the theory that sacrifice has developed out of magical practices of the primitive tribes. Another theory traces the beginnings of sacrifice to totemism. It was believed that the eating of the flesh of an animal- which, according to one opinion , was already held sacred, while, according to another, was made sacred by certain rites- gave the eaters superhuman strength or led to the removal of their sins. This was supposed to happen as the result of the passing of the *mana* of the totem into the totemite through flesh and blood.



According to this theory, the act of sacrifice also helped to establish direct contact with god. A third theory seeks the origin of sacrifice in man's natural desire to ensure the continuity of vegetation which was achieved by means of the periodical offering of the old corn-spirit. A fourth theory regards the institution of sacrifice to god as just an offshoot of the custom of making offerings to the dead by leaving food and drink by the side of their graves. It is further suggested by some scholars that the custom of ceremonial offering of food and drink to gods originated from the belief which had been current among the primitive people that the gods suffered from hunger and thirst in exactly the same manner as the human beings. Still another theory regards sacrifice as a tribute offered to a supernatural being with a view to winning its favour or removing its anger. It may be presumed that, in common in most of the primitive types of sacrifice , the Vedic sacrifice also had for its conceptual basis the various elements indicated in the foregoing theories , though its ritual and ideological superstructure was peculiarly its own.

The main purposes of primitive sacrifice, as adumbrated in the various theories regarding its origin which have been enumerated



above; seem to have been four, namely, (i) conciliation of the deity in order to avoid its anger which might otherwise result in serious disorders in the community ;(ii) communion, which was considered necessary for the obtainment of the divine strength or the removal of sins on the part of an individual;(iii) propitiation of god, which secured for the sacrifice material prosperity in this life and heaven after death; and (iv) thanks giving at some fixed periods during a year for the yield of good crops and maintenance of healthy cattle.

1.4.2. Orthodox View about Sacrifice:

This question regarding the origin of sacrifice has, however, no relevance from the orthodox Indian point of view, such as is, for instance, represented in the Purva-Mimamsa. According to the Purva- Mimamsa, the Veda is essentially *kriyārtha*, that is, its main purpose is to lay down injunctions relating to the performance of sacrifice(*amṇayasya kriyārthatvad anarthakyam atadarthanam tasmad anityam ucyate: Jaimini Sutra-I.2.1*).The nature of sacrifice, which is, indeed, the only true Dharma, can be adequately comprehended only through such Vedic



injunctions(*codanalaksano'rtho dharmah: Jaimini Sutra- I.1.2*;also cf. *Vedapratipadyah prayojanavad artho dharmah- Laugaksi Bhaskara*). The Veda, in its turn, is claimed to be *apauruseya*. No human agency is believed to have been responsible for its creation. The *apauruseyatva* of Veda is by far the most basic tenet of orthodox thought. It was pointed out that the designation of certain Vedic texts, like the *Kathaka Samhita*, after human personages did not by any means imply that those texts were composed by human authors. Such names only indicated the tradition of teachers through whom those texts were transmitted. Once this *apauruseyatva* of the Veda is conceded, it naturally follows that sacrifice, which is the principal subject matter of the Veda,must also be *apauruseya*. Accordingly, one cannot speak of the institution of sacrifice having been devised by any human agency. It is, verily, as immortal as the Veda itself.

The study of the *Veda* is obligatory on all persons belonging to the first three social orders. So too is the performance of sacrifice which is enjoined by the Veda. According to the *Purva-Mimamsa*, only human beings- both male and fe,ale- are entitled



to the performance of sacrifice. The Purva-Mimamsa further lays it down that the most essential item in connection with a sacrifice is the fruit which is expected to accrue from it. The sacrifice as such is subservient to that fruit. It is also suggested that the main purpose of various sacrificial rites is not necessarily to propitiate the sacrificial deities; it is rather to acquire the *apurva*. This concept of *apurva* is peculiar to the Purva-Mimamsa. In the Vedic texts certain fruits like *svarga* are asserted to result from the performance of certain sacrifices like Jyotistoma. In actual practice, however, we find that the attainment of *svarga* does not follow immediately after the performance of the Jyotistoma sacrifice in the same way as satiety follows immediately after a full meal. One, therefore, feels rather reluctant to put in faith in the statements occurring in the Veda. It is with a view to controverting a charge like this that the Mimamsaka-s have promulgated the concept of *apurva*. *Apurva*, according to them, is a certain latent condition intervening between the actual performance of a ritual act and the inevitable emergence of its result. It is that unseen virtue- a super-induced relation- which is not already possessed but



which, on being produced , has the inherent power to connect the cause with its effect by bringing the latter about At a distant period or in another world. It is somewhat of the nature of a draft which has to be encashed at some later suitable date. Though, therefore, the performance of the Jyotistoma sacrifice may not result in the immediate attainment of *svarga*, it certainly invests the performer with the potentiality for attaining *svarga* after death.

It may be incidentally pointed out, at this stage, that even in the evry early period, ritualists laid great stress on the magical efficacy (*adrsta*) of the Vedic mantra-s employed at different sacrificial rites. Some of them even averred that it was not the actual meaning of the words in a *mantra* which really mattered; it was the peculiar magical aura created by the sound of the letters in those words which was ritualistically potent. Such an assumption alone would, according to them, account for the insistence on the reciters of the Vedic *mantra*-s not being entitled to change the fixed order of the words in a *mantra* or to substitute any synonyms for those words, even though doing so might not materially alter the meaning of the *mantra*.

1.4.3. Indo-Iranian Ritual:

A critical study of the early Vedic and the Avestan texts would so that some common form of sacrificial ritual had been evolved in the Indo-Iranian or the Aryan period. As is indicated by the striking similarities in procedure and terminology, many of the ritual practices recorded in ancient Indian literature must have been common to both the early Vedic Aryans and the ancient Iranians. Thus Vedic *soma* is Iranian *haoma* and Vedic *barhis* is Iranian *baresman*. As for the priests, Indian *hotar* corresponds to Iranian *zaotar*, and the Indian *Agnidh* and *potar* have duties similar to those of the Iranian *atarevakhsa* and *asnatare* respectively. It may, however, be pointed out at this stage that the early Vedic and the ancient Iranian sacrifices also showed certain significant points of divergence. One such point, for instance, related to the animal sacrifice. In the ancient Iranian sacrifices, the animal was never offered in the sacred fire; it was kept on the vegetable altar for some time and then taken away for human consumption. As against this, fire played a very vital role in the Vedic sacrifices. It acted not only as a messenger invoking the gods to the sacrifice, who were supposed to come

and take their seats on the spread-out *barhis*, but also as a carrier of oblations to them. As a matter of fact, the ritual s developed in India saw the emergence of three sacred fires out of the original one.

1.4.4. Sacrifice in the *Rgveda*:

It would appear from the references occurring in the *Rgveda* (and, to some extent in the *Atharvaveda*) that the Vedic Aryan entered India with a more or less simple form of ritual which they had already developed during the Indo-Iranian period and which represented a distinct stage in the evolution of the later *srauta* sacrifice. The *Rgveda* refers to several sacrificial priests like the Hotr, the Potr, the Nestr, the Agnidh, the Prasastr, the Adhvaryu and the Brahman (*Rgveda*: II.1.2; 2.5) and alludes in a general way, to the duties of some of them (X.71.11).It further contains such sacrificial formulas as *astu srausat*(I.139.1),*vasat*(VII.99.7), and *svaha*(II.3.11), which are of frequent occurrence in the performance of the later *srauta* ritual and which are connected with the most vital items in a sacrifice, namely, the recitation of *mantra*-s,and the offering of oblations



on the sacred fire. The *Rgveda* knows the *vedi* and mentions by name one of the three sacred fires of the later ritual, namely, the *garhapatya*. The most common materials used for oblations in the *Rgvedic* period seem to have been milk, butter, grains, animals like goat, cow or bull, and undoubtedly, Soma. As for the Soma-sacrifice, the *Rgveda* obviously knew it in some details with its three pressings and libations etc. That Veda also alludes to the custom of offering *daksina* to the officiating priests.

Though some ritual practices are thus reflected in the *Rgveda*, the *Rgveda-Samhita* as such cannot be said to have been brought into being with any specific ritualistic purpose in view. The arrangement of the *Rgveda*, for instance, bears no direct relation to the duties of the *Hotr*, who, among the priests of the later ritual, belonged specifically to that *Veda*. The *mantra*-s in that *Veda* are collected together in accordance with their authorship, which is traditionally ascribed to the various families of seers; and, within such collections too, they are arranged on the basis of their contents and external form. However, such is not the case with the *Yajurveda* and the *Samaveda* which as patently

ritualistic collections. In summing up our discussion, we can safely conclude that the Rgvedic sacrifice is the earliest form of sacrifice known to India.

1.4.5. Ritual Literature:

Among the early Vedic texts, the *Samhita-s* of the *Yajurveda* and the *Samaveda* may be regarded as concerning themselves exclusively with sacrificial ritual. The *Yajurveda* is, indeed, a collection of prayers and formulas which were specifically intended to be employed in various sacrifices. In addition to such prayers and formulas, the *Samhita-s* of the Black *Yajurveda* contain discussions on several details of the sacrificial ritual, which, as a matter of fact, would properly form the subject of the *Brahmana* texts. The *Samaveda* too is a collection of hymns- mostly derived from the *Rgveda* and set to melodies-which are prescribed for being chanted at the Soma-sacrifices and certain other rituals.

The next stage in the development of ritual literature is represented by the *Brahmana-s*. The *Brahmana-s* may, indeed, be characterised as the earliest, properly organised text- books



on the theory and practice of the *srauta* ritual. Their avowed purpose is to explain the relationship which is supposed to exist between the ritual act and the *mantra* recited while performing that act (*rupasamrddhi*), and to give directions regarding the actual performance of the various rites. They also include a large number of interesting legends, which are narrated mainly with a view to explaining the genesis of a particular rite or emphasising the significance of a particular aspect of a sacrificial procedure. The contents of the *Brahmana-s* are accordingly divided into two essential parts, namely, the *vidhi*, which prescribes the details of sacrificial procedure, and the *arthavada*, which aims at rationalising and glorifying that procedure. The *Aranyaka-s*, which are more or less of the nature of appendages to the *Brahmana-s* , have very little importance from the point of view of ritual practice, for, they deal with sacrifice mainly in its symbolic aspects. As a matter of fact, they mark a stage of transition from the *Brahmana-s* to the *Upanisad-s* , which latter not only do not deal with sacrificial ritual but which actually represent a sort of reaction against the extreme sacerdotalism of the former. But the Vedic texts, which really give us a

complete idea about the procedure of various sacrifices, having been presumably composed as practical aids to the sacrifice and the priests, are the *Kalpasutra*-s.

1.4.6. Classification of Sacrifices:

It is possible to classify sacrifices in various ways. One may, for example, speak of *prakrti-yaga*-s (or sacrifices which serve as norms for other sacrifices) and *vikrti-yaga*-s (or sacrifices which are modifications of a given norm). Or one may distinguish between sacrifices which are *nitya* or obligatory and those which are *kamya* or optional. Then there is the usual classification into three categories, namely, *pakayajnasamstha*, *haviryajnasamstha*, and *somayajnasamstha*. Out of these three categories, only the last two are said to comprise the proper *srauta* rites. It is interesting to note here that all the three categories comprise of seven sacrifices. The sacrifices included under the term *pakayajnasamstha* are: 1. Aupasanahoma, 2. Vaisvadeva, 3. Parvana, 4. Astaka, 5. Masisraddha, 6. Sarpabali and 7. Isanabali. Similarly, the sacrifices included under the term *haviryajnasamstha* are: 1. Agnyadheya, 2. Agnihotra, 3.



Darsapurnamasa, 4. Agrayana, 5. Caturmasya, 6. Nirudhapasubandha and 7. Sautramanai. The sacrifices included under the term Somayajnasamstha are: 1. Agnistoma, 2. Atyagnistoma, 3. Ukthya, 4. Sodasi, 5. Vajapeya, 6. Atiratra and 7. Aptoryama. The *Srautasutra-s* , accordingly, treat of the *isti-s*, of which the Darsapurnamasa is the norm; the animal sacrifices, of which the Nirudhapasubandha is the norm ; and the Soma sacrifices ,of which the Agnistoma is the norm. Basically, however, there are several things common in these different types of sacrifices, such as, the rite of initiation, the use of three sacred fires, the employment of several officiating priests (the *saman*-chanters being required mainly for the Soma-sacrifices), invocations to different deities to receive the oblations, and the offering of oblations which generally consist of cakes (*purodasa*) and clarified butter for the *isti-s*, cake and animal offerings for the animal sacrifices and cake, animal offerings and Soma for the Soma-sacrifices.

1.4.7. The *Brahmana-s* as Historical Sources:

A few words may be said about the importance of the *Brahmana-s* from the point of view of history of Indian civilization. They



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ODISHA STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY, SAMBALPUR

supply us with some information on their geographical background: their *terra cognita* was broadly speaking Brahmavartta or Madhyadesa and some adjacent areas; the *Satapatha* belongs to the Ganges valley and the east Bihar. Although mention is made of various places and tribes unknown to older texts, some Brahmanic passages mix up ethnic names based on historical reality with mythological peoples beyond the Himalayas. Legendary matters and allusions to events which might reflect historical facts have in modern times been interpreted as sources of information on eastward migration of the Aryans. The social system was in a state of transition between the flexibility of the older period and the rigidity of the post-Vedic age: we hear of the four classes (varna), viz. Brahmins, nobility, vaisyas and sudras; of their duties, ambitions and functions and privileges; we witness the growing importance of the two higher classes, their relations and prerogatives, and the propagation of the ideal of their cooperation and complimentary relationship. Despite the fact that little attention is paid to the lower strata of society we become informed of many particulars concerning the social, political and military aspects of the

ancient Indian communities. Social order and social behaviour are justified in religious terms. There are of course many references to social and family life - to marriage, to education and study of the Veda, daily events and pursuits, food and drink, games, tools and utensils, dress and decoration, sexual relations, diseases and medicine, customs, agriculture, pasturage and other occupations, , as well as various forms of popular belief and intercourse with aborigines. That there is an almost inexhaustible wealth of information on sacrificial rites is self-evident.

Model Questions

1. Discuss the salient features of the Brahmanical literature.
2. Give an account of the Brahmanical literature attached to the four Vedic *Samhita*-s.
3. Write an essay on Indian ritual tradition and the importance of the *Brahmana*-texts.
4. Discuss the religion and philosophy of the *Brahmana*-s .

Further Readings

1. Relative chronology of Brahmanical texts, 2. Myths, legends and narrative episodes in the *Brahmana*-s, 3. The style and



structure of the *Brahmana-s*.4. Religion and Mythology of the *Brahmana-s*.

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