

VEDIC RITUAL TRADITION OF KARNATAKA

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India has a great tradition of knowledge. This treasure of knowledge is called as 'Vedas' which are given to us by our ancient seers obtained by them through their great effort and penance. The word Veda is derived from the root 'Vid-Jnane' (to know), hence it is rightly called as "*Sarvajnanamayo hi sah*". This Vedic wisdom of our ancient seers has contributed immensely to our ancient Indian culture, tradition and development. The four Vedas viz; '*Rgveda*', '*Yajurveda*', '*Samaveda*' and '*Atharvaveda*' with their divisions namely '*Samhithas*', '*Brahmanas*', '*Aranyakas*' and '*Upanisads*' contribute Vedic literature. (*Mantrabrahmanayoh Vedanamadheyam*). The '*Samhithas*' and '*Brahmanas*' mainly deal with Vedic Rituals and hence they are grouped as '*Karmakanda*' while '*Aranyakas*' and '*Upanisads*' deal with knowledge of ultimate reality: '*Parabrahma or Paratattvavicarah*' and hence they are called as '*Jnanakanda*'.

The history of Vedic rituals is quite ancient and can be traced to the period of Vedic Samhithas. Most of the '*Haviryajnas*', '*Agnihotra*', '*Darsapurnamasa*' and '*Caturmasya*' sacrifices, the basic '*Somayajnas*', '*Agnistomas*' and its varieties, and some culturally and historically important sacrifices like '*Vajapeya*', "*Asvamedha*", '*Sarvamedha*' etc are found in '*Yajurveda*' (*Adhvaryuveda*). Later in '*Puranas*' the references to Vedic rituals and practices are found. In classical Sanskrit literature some references to Vedic rituals and practices are mentioned. This shows that the Vedic ritual tradition is continued to modern period too without any interruption.

'*Vedanga Kalpa*' mainly deals with Vedic rituals. The very name itself means '*Kalpyate Samarthyate Yaga Prayogo Atra*' which means "*The practice*

of Vedic ritual traditions are explained here". This Vedanga has four parts namely, 'Sulvasutras', 'Srautasutras', 'Dharmasutras' and 'Grhyasutras'. The 'Sulvasutras' and 'Srautasutras' directly deal with the performance of Vedic rituals. These texts provide guidance for the performance of Vedic sacrifices. The performance of Vedic rituals is being continued even to modern period especially in South India. There has been a tradition of 'Ahitagnis' and 'Srauta priests' in South India and have continued to perform Vedic rituals as and when possible. These priests inherited the tradition of Vedic ritual practices from their ancestors and perform Vedic rituals even today. Some 'Srauta priests', 'Agnihotris' keep 'Agni' in their houses and protect it even today. The 'Agni' usually transferred from father to son and the tradition is continued without any break. The rituals are conducted in the same ancient procedures with some modifications according to the convenience for the modern society and availability of required materials.

Characteristics of Yajna (Vedic Rituals):

'Yajna' (Vedic Rituals) is the most important feature of Vedic literature. It occupies very important cultural position in the literature and life as well. The word 'Yajna' is derived from the root 'Yaj' – to Worship or offering an oblation to a deity and paying one's respect to it. Its meaning is further drawn signifying devotion in different ways. The materials offered to 'Yajna' are called 'Havis'. The performance of offering, the dedicated 'Havis' into the principal of universal fire is 'Homa'. 'Adhvava', 'Kratu', 'Makha', 'Yaga' and 'Medha' are other words used as synonyms for the term 'Yajna' in general sense though there are many features which differ among themselves. These play a great role in shaping our civilization order and peace. The Yajna is classified into three types viz. 'Nitya' (Daily), 'Naimittika' (Occasional) and 'Kamya' (Optional) based on the practice. 'Nitya' is that which is performed daily, 'Naimittika' is

attended to on particular occasion and '*Kamya*' is that which is performed to attain some special object.

A '*Yaga*' is made up of several rituals which has its own principal part (*Pradhana*). Those that form subsidiary or supplement to this are called '*Angas*'. Some of the rituals may be common to several '*Yagas*'.

The different modes of classifications of Sacrifices are

1. '*Prakrti*' (Model) and '*Vikrti*' (Modified)
2. '*Pradhana* (Principal) and '*Anga*' (Auxiliary)
3. '*Isti*', '*Pasubandha*' and '*Saumika*'
4. '*Nitya*', '*Naimittika*' and '*Kamya*'

'Yajnas' and their salient features:

There are seven '*Havir Yajnas*', namely,

1. '*Agniyadhana*'
2. '*Agnihotra-Homa*'
3. '*Darsa-purnamasa Istis*'
4. '*Agrayanesti*'
5. '*Caturmasya*'
6. '*Nirudha Pasubandha*'
7. '*Sautramani*'

In these '*Yajnas*', '*Havis*' are offered to the sacred '*Agni*' and hence it is called as '*Havir Yajnas*'.

1. **'Agnyadhana'**: The Vedic sacrifice requires three sacred fires namely 'Ahavaniya', 'Garhapatya' and 'Daksinagni'. 'Adhana' is a special function of entertaining the three sacred fires. There is a regular procedure for this function. Then the fire is constantly maintained in the 'Garhapatya' and is distributed from it to the other two fire places at the time of sacrifice according to the rules (Vidhi) laid in the 'Srautasutras'. All 'Homas' except a few are performed in the 'Ahavaniya Agni'. From the day of 'Adhana', the sacrificial 'Agni' will be called as 'Ahitagni'.

'Punaradhana' is a process to be carried out if the fire in the 'Garhapatya' gets extinguished for some reason or other. The 'Ahitagni' has to go through the process of 'Adhana' again.

2. **'Agnihotra-Homa'**: It is the daily sacrifice to be performed both at the twilight by 'Ahitagni' along with his wife. The offerings are made to 'Agni' with prayers. The 'Havis' may be either rice or milk besides 'Ajya' (Ghee). This is carried out on 'Darsika Vedi'. 'Agnihotra' is called a lifelong 'Sattra'. It will never be closed on any account. Break comes only by old age or death.

3. **'Darsa-purnamasa Istis'**: It is performed once in a fortnight on every full moon day (Purnamasa Isti) and new moon day (Darsa Isti).

4. **'Agrayanesti'**: It is performed twice a year when the fresh corns are brought from the fields. The 'Prayanesti' is performed at the time of 'Somayaga'. It marks the beginning of 'Somayaga'.

5. **'Chaturmasya'**: Once in four months in a year on the full moon day certain sacrifices are performed. Hence called as 'Chaturmasya' namely 'Vaisvadeva', 'Varunapraghasa' and 'Sakamedha'.

6. 'Nirudha Pasubandha': The sacrificer performs with the assistance of six priests where '*Pasu*' is offered. In modern days, the '*Pasus*' are not offered instead the produce of those '*Pasus*' like milk or ghee is offered.

7. 'Sautramani': It is the seventh '*Havir Yajna*'. It is of two types '*Kaukila Sautramani*' and '*Caraka Sautramani*'. The former is for the happiness in this world and the later is for getting the '*Svarga*' (Highest abode in the next world).

There are seven '*Soma Samsthas*' to be performed at the time of '*Somayaga*' namely,

1. '*Agnistoma*'

2. '*Atyagnistoma*'

3. '*Ukthya*'

4. '*Sodasi*'

5. '*Vajapeya*'

6. '*Atiratna*'

7. '*Aptoryama*'

The above seven '*Yajnas*' are called as '*Jyotistomas*'. In these there are mainly 16 priests grouped into four namely, '*Hotrgana*', '*Adhvaryugana*', '*Audgatrgana*' and '*Brahmagana*'. '*Hotrgana*' constitutes four priests called as '*Hota*', '*Prasasta*', '*Acchavakah*' and '*Gravastutah*'. Their main duty is to praise the Gods and invoking them through '*Rgveda*'. '*Adhvaryugana*' constitutes '*Adhvaryu*', '*Pratiprastata*', '*Nestha*' and '*Unneta*'. These four priests responsibility is the preparation of '*Havis*' and offering them properly to the Gods. '*Audgatrgana*' constitutes '*Udgata*', '*Prastota*', '*Pratiharta*' and '*Subrahmanya*'. These four priests recite '*Samaveda*' with different tones and

musical note to please the Gods. '*Brahmagana*' constitutes '*Brahma*', '*Brahmanacchamsi*', '*Agnidhra*' and '*Pota*'. '*Brahma*' is the chief observer of the sacrifice. '*Brahmanacchamsi*' and '*Pota*' are priests assisting the '*Hotrgana*'. '*Agnidhra*' is assisting the '*Adhvaryugana*'.

Apart from these there are sixteen priests, there is one member, four '*Upagatr*' members, '*Samita*', '*Somavikrayi*', ten '*Camasadhvaryus*' and seventeen helpers who take part actively in a sacrifice. The member mentioned above who is well versed in the sacrifice lore is working as all round observer and coordinates the performance. He will rectify the lapses and takes corrective measures. The seventeen helpers will assist and work for the successful completion of the sacrifice. These assistants also should have fair knowledge of sacrifice. The '*Agnistoma Somayaga*' is performed continuously for seven days.

In modern days, sacrifices are performed according to directions given in the Vedic texts. The priests are performing the rituals according to the '*Srauta Sutras*' to which they belong. In South India especially in Karnataka, '*Srauta Sutra*' text of '*Baudhayana*', '*Apastamba*', '*Asvalayana*', '*Bharadhvaja*', '*Hiranyakesin*' etc are followed. They are to some extent similar but in certain cases differ according to the availability of '*Dravyas*' or '*Samits*' in that particular region. They follow their Vedas to which they belong.

There are instances of sacrifices performed in different places in Karnataka in recent days too like Gokarna, Sringeri, Bengaluru etc. There are priests in Gokarna, Shivamogga, Mysuru, Mangaluru etc. These priests even today protect the ritual '*Agni*' unextinguished; perform daily rites and '*Yajnas*'. Nowadays the '*Yajnas*' are performed by some temples or institutions with the aid of many organizations and society for the welfare of the entire universe. In present days '*Prakrti Yajnas*' mentioned in the Vedas are rare. '*Vikrti Yajnas*' like '*Candika Homa*', '*Veda Samhita Svahakara Yagas*', '*Rudra Yaga*' etc are

performed. The same general rules stated in the ‘*Srauta Texts*’ are followed here too. The aim of the sacrifices is mainly for the welfare of society and universe. The main object of the rituals is to pay our gratitude and respects to the Gods who are bestowing good to us and the universe.

In Karnataka, throughout the state, the Rigvedins follow Asvalayana Shruta Sutra texts in their Vedic rituals, almost uniformly without much difference. But Yajurvedins (Taittiriya Shakha) have Baudhayana, Apastamba, Hiranyakesin, Satyasada, Bharadvaja –Srauta Sutras. So there are some regional and sectional differences while performing Vedic rituals. There are mainly three versions viz., Shimoga – Mattur, Hangal near Dharwad and Sringeri-Bangalore-Mysore (southern region). The priests follow their tradition while performing the Vedic rituals. Southern region is mainly influenced by Tamilnadu because several priests of Karnataka studied Veda either in Tamilnadu or in Kerala. Because of these priests and many traditionalists’ encouragement, the traditions of Vedic rituals and its practices are still remained in modern days. Thanks for all those concerned who kept our Vedic traditions perpetual.

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