

Vedic sacrifice and the ritual practices

Religion



Vedic Sacrifice and the Ritual Practices and number: submitted: Vedic

Sacrifice and the Ritual Practices Historically, Vedic religion refers to the ancient religion that Indo/European people served especially in India.

According to the evident written documents, the approximate period of Vedic religion is 1500 BC to 500 BC. Although, Vedic religion is the precursor of Hinduism; unlike Hinduism, Vedic religion is based on believing Vedas and neglects the secondary or corollary scriptures. Moreover, Vedic worshipers perform the ritual practices by offering sacrifices to their gods for materialistic and agricultural aspiration such as gaining fortune, sustaining healthy conditions, enjoying longevity, having male descendants, raising large number of cattle, flourish agriculture, and many other benefits and profits. Throughout the ritual ceremonies, the worshipers ignite consecrate fire with ghee and grains and it is important that the fire symbolizes the messenger between the worshipers and their gods. Thus, in Vedic religion, sacrifice and ritual practices by worshipers are valued and essential to demonstrate their devotion to gods In Vedic religion, there are four priests and a sacrificer that are Hotar, Udgatar, Adhvaryu, Brahman, and Yajamana. Each of the priests is associated with different rituals and functions.

According to the article by Jamison and Witzel, there were three priests who were tasked with three types of sacral utterances. These three were the priest of the Rg Veda, the Sama Veda, and the Yajur Veda. Once they undertook this sacral utterance together, a verbal sector of Vedic ritual is said to have been performed. This ritual was always made up of “ the loud recitation of verses of the Rg Veda, the elaborate and very intricate singing of the melodies (saman) of the Sama Veda, and the mumbling of the sacrificial formulas (yajus) of the Yajur Veda” (Jamison and Witzel). Hotar was <https://assignbuster.com/vedic-sacrifice-and-the-ritual-practices/>

the chief priest who represented Rg Veda, as well as Sema Veda the Udgatar and Yajur Veda the Adhvaryu. Hotar, Udgatar, and Adhvaryu assimilate as one during the ritual ceremony and that each person participates in unique role. For example, the Hotar denotes to the chief priest who leads the sacrifice ceremony and fundamentally invokes the gods. The Udgatar chants the hymns for the Hotar. The Adhvaryu is responsible for actual and physical elements of the sacrifice such as measuring ground, building a table, preparing the sacrificial container, making wood and water, igniting the fire, and bringing the animals. In addition, Brahman manages the entire operation of ritual ceremony in silence and he involves authorizing for any omission that occurs during the performance. In Vedic religious context, there are several dimensions from which Yajamana is seen by the religious followers. Some of these include the embodiment of Yajamana as a worshipper, another is Yajamana as a sacrificial lamb, and another is Yajamana as the sacrificer. In all, an important context that prevails is that Yajamana has a central role in sacrificing, of which some modern reviewers have associated as merely being the sponsor of the sacrifice (Watkins, 1979). With this argument, other parts of earlier description are covered because the one sponsoring could either be a worsshipper or the sacrificer. Offerings Offerings are generally seen as a presentation from a worshipper to his god. The use of vegetables in offerings comes under fire offering, which is a type of offering meant to be offered to the Lord (Jamison and Witzel). With such offering to the Lord, the specification is that the material for offering must be a leaf, which also consists of nourishments (annahoma). Vegetables are therefore used because most of these are leafy and with fine nourishment. Bali is the term that has been used for animal sacrifices. These forms of

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sacrifices are performed not as offerings to the Lord but as sacrificial victim purposes (Jamison and Witzel). In other words, the blood of the animals are used as atonement for consequences that should have been suffered by human. Sin is a typical example of such consequences. It is believed that the drinking of soma gives a person immortal powers. This means that it gives humans to live on for ages without tasting death. Soma in itself was however a plant with origins to Mount Mujavant. The origin was however surrounded with pond and so the practice of dipping the plant into water and drinking become common. The Ambition of Performing the Rituals At every point in a person's life, key rituals are considered necessary to seek for the following of the Lord and the direction of his gods. Vedic followers have a believe that birth and death were the sole prerogative of the Lord Maker and so for a person to have birth or to die was in the hands of the Lord. Rituals were therefore performed for the newly born and the dying. Those who wanted to give birth also consulted the Lord through rituals so as for him to look unto them with his gift of childbirth. Adulthood is considered a very important time of a person's life. This is because at point in a person's life, the person is deemed major to know the difference between good and bad. The product of adult life, be it good or evil was a determining factor as to whether or not one will be successful in life. Initiation rituals were therefore performed by a Veda teacher as an admonition on good behavior in adulthood. Marriage is seen as an important moment in the life of men and women but with much focus on the women. The importance of the bride in marriage is exemplified with the presence of a god of marriage, Aryaman, who was responsible for the exchange of bride. Sacrifices to this god were therefore necessary to seek for her blessings, especially for the gift of the womb. As far as weather

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is concerned, two major supernatural authorities are identified. These are the god of the sky and the god of the earth. Since the earth produced food crops, some of which were used in sacrifices, it was always important that the earth would flourish. To make this happen, rituals were performed to invoke the sky to let down rains on the earth. In vedic, cattle is seen as a sacred creature. Various body parts of the cattle thus represent different significant religious meanings. For households to own cattle for instance was seen as a blessing. Rituals are therefore made to Siva who is the lord of cattle for blessings on cattle farms. Individual Rituals In Vedic, the relationship between the maker and humankind is one that is considered as mutual, making it possible for creatures to approach the maker through individual rituals. Haviryajnas is considered as one of the simplest categories of sacrifices in Vedic rituals. It is an individual ritual that is made up of the oblations of vegetable and dairy products. Even though it is possible to include animal sacrifices as exclusive part, it is always preferred that these two are kept separately. Agnihotra may also be seen as a simple category of ritual, especially with its demand on priest. As most rituals require three to four priests, Agnihotra is performed as an individual ritual with only one priest. It is offered as a fire offering made up of offering of milk, twice a day. This sacrifice, performed in morning and evening is done to make personal household requests. Darsapaurnamasa is a ritual that started as a strictly priestly affair but would change with time to individual the populace. The beginning of the ritual was therefore not an individual ritual. Three major entities come to mind when this ritual is performed and these are the King, the country, and wish for rain (Vogel, 1926). Once individualized, this became a new moon ritual. Caturmasyani is a seasonal sacrifice that is

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performed in a four month interval. The essence of the four month interval was to ensure that it represented one each of the major seasons as spring, rainy, autumn, and New Year. With this distribution, a year round blessing was sought for the people. AgrayanaPasubandh could be said to be a somewhat high level individual ritual because as an animal sacrifice, the killing of animals was suspected to be associated with inauspiciousness. Instead of undertaking it at an individual level therefore, it would be taken in association with ritual machinery and participants. Conclusion From the discussions above, a number of conclusions can be drawn. The first of these is the fact that the act of religious worship is a practice that has long lived with humanity. Even though there are sectional differences in the way the worship of the Supreme Being should be approached, there is a general realization and consensus that there is the existence of a Lord and He alone must be worshipped. As far as Vedic worship is concerned, the dependence of humankind on the Supreme Being is exemplified with the number of sacrifices and rituals that are performed with the mediation of gods unto the Lord. Finally, Perfection before the Lord must always remain a facet of life so as to ensure that the ways of the Lord are always followed and exemplified to gain favor from him, and not just through rituals and sacrifices.

References Vogel, J. Ph. 1926. Indian serpent-lore. London. Watkins, C. 1979. "Is tre fir flathemon: Marginalia to Ardacht Morainn." Eriu 30, 181-198.