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Cātvāla in Myths and Rituals

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Abstract: Present paper attempts to analyze the significance of a minor sacrificial place named Cātvāla in Vedic Śrauta rituals. Place is one of the five significant factors required for Śrauta rituals. Sacrificial field includes places of major importance and minor importance. It can be decided on the frequency of usage of such a place and myths interwoven thereby. Activities performed in or nearby Cātvāla and myths related to it throw light on its ritualistic as well as magico-religious value.

Key-words: Śrauta ritual, sacrificial place, Cātvāla, ritualistic value, magico-religious value.

I. INTRODUCTION

One can find concept and descriptions of Śrauta rituals right from the *Samhitās* to the *Śrautasūtras*. These rituals were performed by establishing three sacred fires by an *āhitāgnī*. They were generally divided as *Somayajñas* and *Haviryajñas*. Vedic Indians had a strong belief that the rituals represent the cosmos and hence the events and actions in both spheres are inter-related. Hence Śrauta rituals were an inseparable part of Vedic religion and culture. Naturally, study of these rites has been always a highly significant area while studying ancient Indian religion, society and culture.

Five elements essential in any Vedic ritual include deity, mantras, offering material as well as time and place. One finds ornate discussions about these factors in the ritualistic texts. Regarding the place, initially Vedic ritualists regarded entire earth as sacred place where gods could be worshipped. Thus, the earth was equated with an altar. For instance, in *VājasaneyiSamhitā* 1.22 or 3.5 the earth is mentioned as 'devayajanī vedih.

More specifically, one comes across a concept of *Devayajana* which refers to the sacrificial field. It is elaborately explained in *TaittirīyaSamhitā* 6.2.6.1-3 and especially in *ŚatapathaBrāhmaṇa* 3.1.1.1-3. The ritualistic texts offer all minute details of such an establishment where elaborate *Somayajñas* or *Haviryajñas* were performed. According to these descriptions, *Devayajana* consisted of certain prominent and

subordinate places. In a Śrauta ritual altar, fire-places, *Uttara-vedi*, *Agniciti* can be illustrated as prominent places. While places like *Cātvāla*, *utkara* etc. are some examples of subordinate places. Though subordinate the Vedic ritualists considered such places crucial for success of the ritual. Similarly, myths surrounding these places further highlight their significance.

Present paper focuses on role of *Cātvāla* in Śrauta rituals, myths related to it and its magico-religious significance.

II. LOCATION, MEASUREMENTS AND RITUALISTIC PURPOSE OF CĀTVĀLA

Since *Cātvāla* is one of the subordinate sacrificial places it is less known. It would be helpful to have a look at certain prominent references to know about the nature of the place called *Cātvāla*. The term is commonly translated simply as 'pit'.

While preparing the sacrificial field, *Cātvāla* is dug at the depth of length of a knee by digging into the ground. It is said in *KathakaSamhitā*

...*dhiṣṇyānyupyante'nayorlokarvidhṛtyai.....anirukto'gnirva idevebhyo'pākramat sa pṛthivīmprāviśat tam jānudaghne'nvindattasmāt jānudaghnaṁkheyamanuvidyai-vaitān nivapati....*[1]. Once, Agni concealed himself from the gods. He was found only after digging the earth at knee-length. *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of Agni. Hence it should have this depth. The soil which is dug out will be further used for

preparing the *dhiṣṇyas*. Due to this Agni will be united with his birth-place.

Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa informs us about the exact location and measurement of *Cātvāla*. *Sa Samudra prājvalatbhūmyantena veṣa vāvasasamudrahyatcātvālahveṣa u vevasabhūmyantaḥ.....tasmātrivitatamkhanantiḥsasavarīnaraj atābhyāṅkuśābhyāṅparigrhītaāsīt..... tasmādādityaḥ* [2]. It says that the *Samudra* which was shining at the end of the earth is nothing else but *Cātvāla* at the end of the altar. Since the ocean is three *puruṣa* deep *Cātvāla* should have a depth of three *vitastis*. One meaning of the word *Samudra* is mid-region as per *Nighaṅṭu* (I.3). Hence it can be said that *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* has suggested that *Cātvāla* is the mid-region. Further the text has also added that while preparing *Cātvāla* small pieces of gold and silver shall be inserted into it. Thus, it becomes as if *āditya*.

Satapatha Brāhmaṇa has mentioned its shape and has underlined the importance of that shape ...*tāmvaicatuḥśraktercātvālātharaticatasrovai diśamsarvābhyāivaenāmetaddigbhyoharati* [3] | So, one shall use the soil from quadrangular *Cātvāla* for preparing *Uttara-vedi* because these four angles are as if the four regions. Thus, one uses soil as if from four regions and makes it all-pervading.

Later ritualistic texts like *Śrautasūtras* and *Sulbasūtras* have added some more details in this matter. BSS explains following while describing animal sacrifice *uttareṇa vedim...sphyenodhatyā'vokṣya'śamyayācātvālamparimimīte | at hādhyaryu cātvālāt purīṣam uddhanti* | [4]. One shall use soil or *purīṣa* from *Cātvāla* for preparing the *Uttara-vedi*. A quadrangular pit shall be dug at the distance of two or three *prakramās* on the north or north-east of the main altar for this purpose. Sides of this pit i.e. *Cātvāla* shall measure one *śamyā* each. However, it does not mention its depth. *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra* 5.3.19-24 mentions that *Cātvāla* should be located on the north-east of the *Uttara-vedi*. Its depth should depend upon the quantity of soil required for the *Uttara-vedi* and *nābhi*. The text defines *Cātvāla* as '*cātvālapurīṣam*'.

All the above discussion implies that *Cātvāla* is a pit prepared in the north or north-east corner of the location of *Uttara-vedi*. Soil extracted from it is used to create *Uttara-vedi* and *dhiṣṇyas*. Naturally *Cātvāla* is prescribed for the performance of *Somayajñas*, animal sacrifices and *Varuṇapraghāsaparva* where *Uttara-vedi* and *dhiṣṇyas* are required.

III. MYTHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

It is necessary to contemplate on the myths about a certain place to understand the real importance of that place and actions done on or nearby that place. It will throw light on the significance of that particular place in the ritualistic world and the cosmos. The outcomes indicated by these myths add to the worth of such places.

Therefore, we should now discuss about the actions and myths related to *Cātvāla*. Some myths are already included in the initial part of this paper. On the basis of the myths, following can be observed in case of *Cātvāla*.

1. Equivalence to womb or birth-place: It is interesting to know that *Cātvāla* is considered as birth-place of various sacrificial substances.

a) Birth-place of the sacrifice: According to *Taittirīya Samhitā*, *cātvālātdhiṣṇiyānupavapatiyonirvaiyajñasyacātvālam* .. [5] *dhiṣṇyas* are made by using soil from *Cātvāla*. So it is the womb of the sacrifice. As per *Bhaṭṭabhāskara*'s comment, it is also used for preparing the *Uttara-vedi*. Hence, *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of the sacrifice. *Cātvālātpurīṣam ādāya hotriyādi dhiṣṇiyām upa vapati sthālīkaroti. vataḥpurīṣam uttarvedyāḥ karaṇātcātvālamyajñasya yonihkaraṇam* [6] |

In the rite of *kṛṣṇājīnadīkṣā* it is said that a horn of black antelope should be used for scratching purpose. After having brought the gifts of priests, this horn shall be disposed of in the *Cātvāla*. Horn of black antelope is the birth-place of the sacrifice and *Cātvāla* is also the birth-place of the sacrifice. *yatpurādakṣiṇābhyonetoḥ ... kṛṣṇaviṣāṇāmavacrtet ...syānnīṭāsu dakṣiṇāsu cātvāle kṛṣṇaviṣāṇām prāsyati yonirvai yajñasya cātvālam kṛṣṇaviṣāṇā yonāveva yoniḥ dadhāt i yajña-sya sayonitvāya* [7]. So when the two birth-places come together then magico-religiously the sacrifice becomes fully united with its birth-place. This union enhances the effects expected from the sacrifice.

b) Birth-place of water: It is told in *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* that *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of waters. Therefore, in a Soma-sacrifice, sacrificial water named *Vasatīvarī* from *Maitrāvaruṇa*'s pitcher is poured into *Hotr*'s pitcher above *Cātvāla*. So the water and its birth-place become unified. *maitrāvaruṇasyacamaseyās ca nigrābhyāstāubhayīrupariṣmāt cātvālasya samanakti saṅjñānam ābhyāḥ k-roti...cātvālān nir grhyanta eṣa vā apām y onih svād eva yoner nigrhyante'skannatvāya* [8].

According to another text this action is done so because this was the place wherefrom the gods left for the heaven. When *Adhvaryu* does this for the sacrificer then the sacrificer as if, looks at the path for heaven. ... *atha hotrcamasevasatīvarīr grhṇāti nigrābhyābhyas tad upari up ari cātvālam saṁsparśayati ato vai devā divam upodakrāma n tad yajamānameva etat svargyaṁ panthānamanu saṅkhyā payatī* [9]. Regarding the very same action T.S. opines that *Vasatīvarī* is the sacrifice and *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of sacrifice. So when the *Vasatīvarī* and *Cātvāla* come together then the sacrifice is as if placed in its birth-place.... *yonirvai yajñasya cātvālam yajño vasatīvarīr hotrcamasam ca maitrāvaruṇacamasam ca saṁsparśya vasatīva rīr vi ānayati yajñasya sayonitvāya* [10].

c) Birth-place of Agni: The ritualistic texts considered the *Cātvāla* as the birth-place of Agni or equated it with the Agni himself.

For instance, a legend in *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* regards *Cātvāla* as the birth-place of Agni ... *cātvālāthriyante eṣa vāagnnīnām yonihsvādevayonervihriyante'skannatvāya* [11]

. One shall spread the soil taken out from *Cātvāla* for making the *dhiṣṇyas* in order to obtain completeness. Since *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of the sacrifice, one obtains completeness of the sacrifice. The same treatise prescribes that a sacrificial animal should be taken around the *Cātvāla* thrice since it is the birth-place of sacrifice.... *cātvālamapiparyaityaisā vāagnināmyoniḥ...* [12].

Circumspection of the sacred fire is a common practice in Vedic rituals. It is done to purify the being or substance. Oneness of Agni and its birth-place is emphasized here by this particular action.

- d) Equivalence to *Agni*: Being the womb of *Agni*, *Cātvāla* is sometimes equated with *Agni* himself. That is why it is prescribed in *Śatarudriya* sacrifice the *arka*-leaf used for offering to *Rudra* should be thrown into the *Cātvāla*. This leaf might prove dangerous for others so it should be thrown in the *Cātvāla*. *Cātvāla* which is nothing but the *Agni* would destroy the leaf. *atha tad arkaparnaṃcātvāleprāsyati| etat vā enena etat raudraṃ karma karoti tad etat aśāntaṃ tad etat tiraṃ karoti net idam a śāntaṃ kaścī abhiṣṭhāi taṃ net hinasad iti tasmāt cātvāle y adveva cātvāle'gnir eṣa yat cātvālaḥ tatho hainad eṣo'gniṃ sandahati athātaṃ sampad eval* [13].

2. *Cātvāla*'s equivalence to *Āditya* and attainment of heaven: *Cātvāla* appears to be closely connected with the heaven. To instantiate, in *Vājapeya* sacrifice, a *caru* is offered to *Bṛhaspati* and then it is kept inside the *Cātvāla*. Since *Cātvāla* is *Āditya*, by doing this the sacrificer would obtain the heaven. This idea is found in two different *Samhitās*... *atha eṣa naivāraḥ saptadaśaśarāvo... tamadhas cātvālam harantītha vā asā āditya āsīt tamito'dhyamuṃ lokam aharan tadyato'dhyamuṃ lokam aharan yat cātvāle'vadad hati yajamanānameva svargaṃ lokam haranti.....* [14] and ... *cātvāle'vadadhāti iha asā āditya āsīt taṃ devā ābhyaṃ p arigṛhya amuṃ lokam aḡamayan svargasya lokasya samaṣṭ yā* [15]. A legend from *JaiminiyaBrāhmaṇa* informs us that initially there was *Āditya* in the place of *Cātvāla*. The gods were scared of his heat. So, they sent one third part of him to the earth, mid-region and heaven each. It resulted into creation of *Agni* on the earth. A sacrificer desirous of the heaven shall prepare the *Cātvāla*. *ādityāetadatrāgraāsīd yatrai ca cātvālam|sa idaṃ sarvaṃ prātapat| tasya devā ḥ pradāhād abibhayaḥ| tam atas tiṣṭbhīr ādadata tiṣṭbhīr a ntarikṣāt tiṣṭbhīr divam aḡamayan|* [16]. *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāh maṇa* prescribes that in *Agniṣṭoma*, *Bahiṣpavamānāstotra* shall be sung while looking at the *Cātvāla*. Since the gods started for the heaven from this very place, even the sacrificer would also attain the same. ... *cātvālamavekṣyabahiṣpavamānaṃ stuvantyatra asā āditya ā sū taṃ devā bahiṣpavamānena svargaṃ lokam aharan yat c ātvālam|* [17]. The same text (5.4.5) mentions that if *Cātvāla* is praised with *Vasiṣṭhanihavaprayer* in *Mahāvratā* ritual, then one attains prosperity and the heaven.

Thus, can be summarized myths related to the *Cātvāla* occurring in prominent ritual texts.

IV. MAGICO-RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CĀTVĀLA

All ancient religions like Vedic religion regarded magic important. Actually, it is observed that there is a thin borderline in magic and the ancient religions.

One can see both imitative and contagious types of magic applied to the *Cātvāla*. E.g. when it is prescribed that depth of the *Cātvāla* should be equal to the depth where *Agni* was found then it is imitative magic. Similarly, when it is said that the gods started for the heaven from *Cātvāla* and so the sacrificer should perform certain actions near the *Cātvāla* and he would reach the heaven, then it is another example of imitative magic. However, when it is said that because *Cātvāla* is the birth-place of *Agni* and so certain actions should be performed there, then it indicates contagious magic.

Thus, can be analyzed the importance given to the *Cātvāla* by Vedic ritualists.

CONCLUSION

Preparation of a quadrangular pit i.e. *Cātvāla* is prescribed by Vedic ritual texts in rituals where *Uttara-vedī* and the *dhiṣṇyas* are required. Ample references to *Cātvāla* and myths woven around it prove the importance bestowed upon the *Cātvāla*. *Cātvāla* is a remarkable example of magico-religious value conferred even upon the subordinate places. It is found that gods performed many sacrificial actions around the *Cātvāla*. It has different counterparts in the divine world so it possesses divinity. Since its soil is used for important sacrificial actions and sacrificial things are disposed of into it, it had practical usage too.

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