

The Concept of Creating And Regulating Time In Vedic Ritual

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Time is an important factor that governs the life of man. Numerous speculations have been put forth by various thinkers about 'time'. These speculations are based upon numerous philosophical systems. 'Time' is interpreted differently by a Physicist as compared to an Archaeologist or even a Philosopher. Thus attempts have been made in each field to interpret and understand this very important factor. They all interpret time according to their *Weltanschauung*. There also have been numerous theories about the creation of time.

In this paper an effort is made to show how time could be created and regulated with the help of vedic rituals.

Time is often accepted to be created by Prajaapati by many ritual texts. Shatapatha Braahmana (S B) (XI.1.6.12ff) explains the two terms samvatsara and prajaapati. It says Prajaapati created the deities and he thought that he had obtained everything (atsaarisham). Therefore he became *sarvatsara*, which is doubtless the same as samvatsara. Also there are four syllables in the word 'samvatsara' as well as in the word 'prajaapati'. Therefore samvatsara is the image of Prajaapati. (S B) (VI.1.2.18), while referring to the creation of the year, says that Prajaapati who became relaxed is the year, and his five bodily parts too became relaxed and they are the seasons in a year. In (SB) (XI.1.6.1ff), regarding the creation of seasons by Prajaapati, we read as follows : In the beginning there was water. The waters toiled and became heated and then a golden egg was produced. At that time the year did not exist. The golden egg floated about for as long as the space of a year. In a year's time a man who was Prajaapati was produced. After one year he desired to speak and he uttered the words bhooha bhuvaha svaha. These three words consist of five syllables which Prajaapati made into five seasons.

Jaimineeya Braahmana (JB) (III.I) says that all this was Prajaapati in the beginning. He desired to be many. He saw seasonality (*ritviya*) in himself and out of it he created the three seasons which are the three worlds. What he created from the ritviya, that is the ritu-ness of the seasons (yad ritviyaad asrijata tadritoonaam ritutvam). From the first penance he created greeshma. Therefore it is very hot (in summer). From second he created varshaa and therefore in it there is both heat and rain. From the third he created *hemanta* and therefore it is very cold (in winter). He practiced penance over these three and divided them. They became six. From greeshma he created vasanta, from varshaa he created sharad and from *hemanta* he created shishira. JB (III.I) too says that Prajaapati, who was alone, with a desire to become many, practiced penance and created the seasons. From seasons he created months. He further divided months into half-months. Having practiced penance over half-months he divided them into seven hundred and twenty days and nights. According to SB (X.1.1.2f) Prajaapati who became relaxed is the year and his joints which became relaxed are the days and nights. Thus we learn that Prajaapati is the creator of the various time factors.

We also come across many references which declare that Prajaapati created time with the help of vedic rituals. S B (VI.7.4.7) says that Prajaapati created the day with the help of the Vishnu -strides and the

night with the vaatsapra rite. According to Taandyamahaa Braahmana (*TMB*) (IV.1.13-14), Prajapati procreated the twenty-four half-months by means of the four six-day periods. In *SB* (VIII.4.3.81) it is mentioned that in the agnicayana rite Prajaapati sang thirteen verses and created the months (see also Taittireeya Samhitaa (TS) IV.3.10). In *TMB* (IV.1.11-12) it is said that by means of the two six-day periods (shadaha), Prajaapati procreated the twelve months. In Maitraayaneey Samhitaa (MS) (1.8.2) it is said that from the offering by Prajaapati in the agnihotra rite, he created *vasanta* from the eighth offering, *greeshma* from the ninth offering, *varshaa* from the tenth, *sharad* from the eleventh, *hemanta* from twelfth and *shishira* from the thirteenth offering. Thus were the various time factors like seasons, months, half-months, etc. created through vedic ritual by Prajaapati.

There are many more instances to show that time has its origin in vedic ritual but without any connection with Prajaapati. Kaathaka Samhitaa (KS) (VI.I) declares that earlier there were no day and night. By means of the evening *Agnihotra* they were produced. According to Jaimineeya Upanishad Braahmana (*JUB*) (I.35.2f) the saaman is in the year. Of it the hinkaara is spring and therefore the animals come together in spring continually uttering hi'. The prastaava is the summer. The prastaava is indistinct and also the summer is indistinct among the seasons. The udgeetha is the rainy season. The rainy season sings up (*ud+* root *gai*) as it were. The pratihaara is the autumn, for verily most herbs ripen in autumn. The nidhana is the winter. In the winter creatures are put to an end (nidhanakrita) as it were. Thus the two ends, the winter and the spring combine together and consequently the year becomes endless (cp. Shadvimsha Braahmana (Sa dB) III. 1.23). Here we see how the seasons and thereby the year were created and their close connection with the ritual details.

The above mentioned example from *JUB* (1.35.2f) also indicates how the ritual¹ regulates time. According to *JB*, (III.361) in the beginning the day and night were joined together and were unseparated. On account of *agnihotra* ritual they became separated or distinct. Shaankhaayana Braahmana (*Shaang B*) (II.2) says that in the *agnihotra* ritual, the adhvaryu in the evening rubs the offering ladle on the north side as it points to the west. Thus he makes the sun to set. In the morning he rubs it on the south side as it points upwards, thus he leads the sun upwards to rise. Here the movement of the sun and thereby the occurrence of day and night is controlled with the help of ritual. In the sautraamanee ritual the six officiating priests who symbolise the seasons drink the twelve draughts of liquor which symbolise the months. The priests drink again and again by turns. As a result the seasons and months succeed one another by turns (*SB*, XII.8.2.30). Further it is said that the invitatory and offering formulae are made continuous and relate to the same deities for the sake of continuity and uninterruptedness of seasons. Due to the invitatory and offering formulae the seasons pass onwards and return. All the formulae are first, all of them intermediate and all of them last, whence all the seasons are first, all of them intermediate and all of them last (*SB*, XII 8.2.35). In a *Soma* sacrifice in the ritual of dvidevatya -*grahas* the adhvaryu and Pratiprasthaatr cross each other and neither interferes with the other. Therefore a season does not interfere with another season (Gopatha Braahmana (*GB*) II.38). In a sacrificial session when six Svarasaamans are used the performers engage the sun in the seasons and therefore the sun goes to the south for three seasons and to the north for three seasons (*JB* II.386). Thus we see that ritual not only controls and regulates time but also plays an important role in avoiding confusion in time.

It is very important to note that a certain ritual is to be performed in a specific manner only. Else it can lead to confusion of time. *Shaang B* (VIII.9) says that on the third *upasad* day one should take milk only once because the night is one. If the sacrificer were to take milk twice, then there would be two nights and this is not desirable. At the end of the *annahomas* in the Ashvamedha, two offerings are to be offered to vyushti (dawn) and *svarga*. If both the offerings are offered either during the day or during the night

there will be confusion between the day and night. Therefore the offering to vyushti is to be made before sunrise as dawn is night and offering to *svarga* is to be made after sunrise as heaven is day. Thereby there is no confusion between day and night (*SB*, XIII.2.1.6f). The seasons too are put in order through ritual. In the sacrificial session consisting of thirty-five days there are three five day periods. By the fact that the periods of five days are undertaken, the sixth day is lost and the six seasons do not arrive in their regular order (as there is no sixth day so there is no sixth season). In that however there is a six-day period with the *prishtha* (-saamans). Thereby the sixth day is not lost and then the six seasons arrive in their regular order (*TMB*, XXIV.1.4). According to *Maitraayane Samhitaa* (*MS*) (IV.3.6) one who gets diseased, his year is confused (*samvatsaro hi vaa etasya mugdhothaitasyaamayati*).² Thus we see how important it is for the time to not get confused about.

Time may however be got confused about, during the performance of aabhaara rituals. Order or *krama*³ is of great significance in the performance of vedic rituals. Such order too is an important aspect of time especially in aabhaara. In the context of the *Prauga Shaastra*; *AB* (III.3) describes the power of the Hotr to ruin the sacrificer. If the Hotr (priest) desires to deprive the sacrificer of expiration then he should recite a triplet to Vaayu for him in confused order. If he desires to deprive the sacrificer of expiration and inspiration then he should recite for him the triplet to Indra and Vaayu “in confusion”. If he desires to deprive the sacrificer of the eye then he should recite for him the triplet to Mitra and Varuna in confusion. If he desires to deprive the sacrificer of strength then he should recite for him a triplet to Indra in confusion. If he desires to deprive the sacrificer of limbs then he should recite for him a triplet to All Gods in confusion. And if he desires to deprive the sacrificer of speech then he should recite for him a triplet to Sarasvatee in confusion. Here “in confusion” means that he should pass over a verse or a line. Thereby it is confused. *AB* (III.3) further adds that if however the Hotr desires of the sacrificer, “With all his members, with all the self, let me make him to prosper”, verily then he should recite for him in due and proper order the triplets to the various deities. Here we see that proper order leads to good results and if inadvertently or otherwise the order is confused it leads to harm the sacrificer. So any deviation from the proper order is significant from the point of view of priestly aabhaara against the sacrificer.

We have seen till now that time can be created and regulated through ritual. The vedic ritualists indeed seem to be aware that man cannot actually control or revert time. So they recommend creation of time symbolically or artificially. This can be observed during the performance of the *agnihotra* ritual. If the *aahavaneeya* fire is not taken out before the sun has set, then one has to indirectly create day by binding a piece of gold to the *darbha* grass and then take out the *aahavaneeya* fire. Here the piece of gold stands for the sun and the sun is the representative of the day. So though the sun has set, mystically it is still day and so it is proper time for the rite (*SB*, XII .4.4.6; cp. *JB*,1.62). This is also seen in the case of *aahavaneeya* which has not been taken out even when the sun has risen. Here one has to indirectly create night by binding a piece of silver to the *darbha* grass and then take out the *aahavaneeya* fire. The piece of silver stands for the moon and moon represents the night. So though the sun has risen, mystically it is still night. Thus is the rite performed at the proper time (*SB*, XII .4.4.7; cp. *JB*,1.63). In the *agnicayana* ritual too a gold plate is used which symbolises the sun. The *adhvaryu* lays Agni on the gold plate (*SB*, XII .4.1.17). Thus mystically, the sun is incorporated into the ritual. As a part of the preparatory rites for a *Soma* sacrifice, the *vaasateevaree* water is to be collected. This water is to be collected before the sunset. If the sun were to set before the water is taken out, then the sacrificer will not be able to take a firm hold over the sacrifice. In that case water should be taken out either in some other light (such as holding a fire) or having put a piece of gold in the pot (*TS*, VI.4.2 1f; *MS*, IV.5.1). Here the light or gold both symbolise the day. In a *Soma* sacrifice the sacrificer in whose case the sun does not rise at the time

of the recitation of the Aashvina Shaastra, should offer a he-goat of many colours to Aditi. Thereby one causes the sun to come up. Also the many colours of the he-goat symbolise the rays of the sun (MS II.5.11). In the *Atiraatra* sacrifice, the recitation concludes at sunrise. If however the sun is not visible due to clouds, the rite is concluded considering clouds as auspicious. This is done with the help of the discretionary power of the Hotr himself. In such a case, the libation should be offered to the sun when it cannot be discerned (*Shaang B*, XVIII.41). Thus we observe that punctuality is important but if it is not possible, then the ritualists recommended creation of time artificially for maintaining punctuality. Thus here the spirit of performing the ritual is more important than merely sticking to the letter.⁴

Conclusion

Time though is often said to be created by Prajaapati, according to the vedic people time can be created and regulated with the help of vedic rituals. The regulating of time includes not confusing time. Confusion may however be resorted to for gaining results in an *aabhicaara* ritual. Time can be created to suit one's needs too. This may be done symbolically.

References And Notes

- 1 Even the regular succession of days and nights and the cosmic order is believed to be assured by vedic ritual. cf. L. Silburn, *Instant et Cause*, Paris, 1955, p.19.
- 2 Cf . G.U. Thite, *Medicine: Its Magico-religious Aspects in Vedic and later Literature*, Pune, 1981, p.916.
- 3 See, *The Arthasamgraha of Laugaakshi Bhaaskara*, edited by A.B. Gajendragadkar and R. D. Karmarkar, Delhi, 1984, (Reprint), p.30.
- 4 G.U. Thite, *Sacrifice in the Braahmana texts*, Pune, 1975, p.280 ff.