



THE ALTER-MAKING AT CĀTURMĀSYA

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KEYWORDS :

Introduction

The *Cāturmāsya* comprises four seasonal sacrifices namely *Vaiśvadeva*, *Varuṇapraghasa*, *Śākamedha* and *Sunaśīrīya*. These sacrifices are called *parvaṇa* (= section) which means, they together are divisions of a cycle that covers a whole year, each being performed at the interval of four months. Thus, a whole year is said to be won. Each of the *parvaṇas* starts, respectively on the Full-moon day of the month *Phālguna* (or *Caitra*), *Aśāḍha* and *Kārtika* (or *Mārgaśīrṣa*).

Cāturmāsya-parvaṇas

There is no hard and fast rule about the performance of the *Sunaśīrīya*, which is added later on, and which does not fit in the scheme of the 'four-month' period. The three *Parvaṇas* correspond to the three seasons, namely *Vasanta* (Spring), *Varṣā* (Rainy season) and *Śarada* (Autumn). The *Sunaśīrīya* has no fixed period to start; and old texts like the *Maitreya Saṁhitā* (I.10.1-20) do not mention it. However, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* says that it may be performed during the four months in between the close of the *Śākamedha* and the start of the next i.e. *Vaiśvadeva*, which marks a fresh cycle. It may be performed just immediately after the conclusion of the *Śākamedha* offerings.

If the sacrificer wants to perform a Soma-sacrifice, he has to discontinue the *Cāturmāsya-parvaṇas* for the next cycle. In that case, he may perform the *Sunaśīrīya parvaṇa* on the day when the new moon is 'seen' previous to the Full-moon day of *Phālguna* as stated in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10-11).

Of these four *Parvaṇas*, the two middle ones, i.e. the *Varuṇapraghasah* and the *Śākamedha* are special, inasmuch as they require two additional altars. All the four *Parvaṇas* are well set in the Vedic ritual tradition, and the rites associated with them do not much differ. For all, the common offerings are five – a *Puroḍāsa* on eight pot sherds to Agni; a *Caru* to Soma, a *Puroḍāsa* on twelve or eight pot sherds to Savitr, a *Caru* to Sarasvatī and a *Caru* of soft rice to Pūsan. Following these are others special for that particular *Parvaṇa*. These offerings are to be cast in the *Āhavanīya* fire. If we go by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, which deals with these sacrifices quite elaborately, we get to know that there was no "filling up of" (and raising of) the *Uttaravedī* in the *Vaiśvadeva parvaṇa* (II.5.1.18) and also for the last *parvaṇa*, the *Sunaśīrīya* (II.6.3.3), while for the *Varuṇapraghasas*, there are said to be two additional altars and two fires thereon (II.5.2.5). There is no mention of the two additional altars and the fires thereon, nor is there any negation thereof, in the *Śākamedha*, at this point. This would indicate that the prescription of the double altar with the fire, thereon, holds good also for the *Śākamedha parvaṇa* as is clear from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and this is the position in the tradition, as shall be evident from what follows hereafter. Thus, in the case of the *Śākamedha*, we have to understand the 'follow-up' (*Anuvṛtti*) of the double altar and fires from the *Varuṇa-praghasah*, that immediately proceed. The pattern would be as follows-

1.	<i>Vaiśvadeva</i>	No filling of the <i>Uttaravedī</i> (i.e. the 'northern' altar or 'raised' altar', <i>uttara</i>).
2.	<i>Varuṇapraghasas</i>	Two altars; out of which filling up of the 'northern' altar; not of the 'southern'; and two fires.
3.	<i>Śākamedha</i>	(No special instruction; hence implication of the structure and fires is as above).
4.	<i>Sunaśīrīya</i>	No filling of the <i>Uttaravedī</i> .

But, there is a doubt which remains unclear in the tradition. What is the implication of the negation of the filling of the *Uttaravedī*, in the first

and the last *Parvaṇas*? The specific mention of 'two altars' at the second *Parvaṇa* (and the third) would indicate that there were no two additional altars at the first and the fourth *Parvaṇas*.

But, in these, was there at least one, was it in addition here to the *Āhavanīya* altar in the usual *Darśapūrṇamāsa* plan? If there was, this was the altar (*vedī*) that is termed 'uttara' (northern) under the influence of the *Cāturmāsya* plan, though it was not filled in to make it raised (*uttara*). It is to be remembered, that the usual *Āhavanīya* at the *Darśapūrṇamāsa* had its own altar, called *uttaravedī* (at the eastern limit) as it was 'filled in'. But, then, if there was at least one additional altar, to differentiate it from the *Darśapūrṇamāsa*, at these two (first and the last) *parvaṇas*, what was its use, if fire was never carried onto it; for the carrying of fire from the old *Āhavanīya* is restricted to the two middle *parvaṇas*. Actually, the position is that the *Cāturmāsya*s were an adaptation (*vikṛti*) of the *Darśapūrṇamāsa*, hence, ordinarily the same altar-plan as at the *prakṛti* (= *Darśapūrṇamāsa*) was to be maintained, the variation being only the deities and offerings to suit them. As the middle two *parvaṇas* were a speciality, only for them a special structure has been mentioned and ordained.

The negation of the filling of the *uttaravedī* at the first and the last *parvaṇas* does not mean that an altar has to be structured but not filled in. This negation is not a constructive negation (of the type of *Niṣedha*) but a sort of a clarification to emphasize the construction of the two additional altars only at the middle *parvaṇas*. These two altars at the middle-*parvaṇas* are to be constructed to the east of the original *Āhavanīya* and fire is to be carried to them (the rite is called *pranayana*) from the *Āhavanīya*.

Conclusion

Thus it is clear that such *pranayana* is already prescribed in the *Darśapūrṇamāsa*, where fire from the *Gārhapatya* altar, is carried to *Āhavanīya*. Hence, the *pranayana* at the middle *parvaṇas* at the *Cāturmāsya*s is a natural process from that at the *Darśapūrṇamāsa*.

References

1. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* Vol. II, Ed. & Tr. Upādhyāya, Gaṅgā Prasāda, The Research Institute of Ancient Scientific Studies, New Delhi, 1967, p. 78
2. *Maitreya Saṁhitā*, Ed. Schroeder, V., Leipzig, 1881, p. 120.
3. According to others, it may be performed on the 5th Full-moon after the *Śākamedha*, which would mean just before the *Vaiśvadeva*, on the same Full-moon day; see Eggeling, 12, p. 384. The idea is that this marks the closure of a cycle.
4. The point is clear from Jaim. Sutra VII.3.19-25; *Mitaksara* on Yajñ. Sm. II. 135-136, where the negation is termed *nityanuvada*.
5. According to a variation, fire is carried from the *Garhapatya*