A Case Study of Blood and Śarāb Thirsty Aboriginal Village Gods from Greater Magadha: An Interpretation through Polythetic Approach of McClymond

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*Sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ
Anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo 'stv iṣṭa kāmadhuk*

Bhagavadagītā (3.9)

Abstract

Bronkhorst rightly argued that the Brāhmaṇical religion and rituals were not rooted deeply in the society of Greater Magadha and maintained its tradition of local Dravidian gods due to its situation beyond the eastern limit of purely Āryan Culture. Besides famous Brāhmaṇical Gods, each village of Greater Magadha has its own local non-Brāhmaṇical Dravidian gods, situated in small rude temples or shrines. These locally originated minor village gods are almost always appeased with blood or animal sacrifices followed by offering of śarāb i.e. alcoholic drink whenever a wish (mañnat) is fulfilled. The offered small indigenous animals like chicken or bird are cooked at the shrine and served as prāsād to all. It is believed that the deity will be satisfied after drinking blood and wine and bless you anything in an intoxicated mood. The present paper will locate these village gods through the 'polythetic approach' and understand the traditional sacrifices offered. It further intends to explore the relationship between the modern theory and the contemporary indigenous practice in dynamic collaboration with seven components of sacrificial deeds.

Keywords

Sacrificer, Greater Magadha, Polythetic Approach, Aboriginal, Dravidian, Village Gods, Blood, Śarāb, Āryan Culture, Prāsād, Hindu, Hinduism, Indian, South Asian, Sanskrit

India is the land of religions and gods. Religion enters into every detail of the life of Indians. Most Hindus, even though they may at the same time worship personal, family and village deities, become devotees of either Viṣṇu or Śiva who, as preserver and destroyer of all things, have more to do with their daily lives (Luce 1957: 16). Often scholars attracted towards India for a live experience of religion and the study of religious practices. The dominant Indian religion, the Vedic religion and its rituals, modified with time sometime called Brahmanism and now popularly known, as Hinduism is the focus of the contemporary religious studies. The practices of Hinduism are vivid and incorporate basically two dominant features, may be said the Vedic and the non-Vedic that might be also pronounced as the *Dravidian* (Elmore 1984: 1-3).ⁱ One can easily witness these two categories of features within Hinduism, when starts observing the daily life and rituals deeply. The contemporary religious studies in general and ritual studies in particular show that somehow the other aspect of Hindu's life i.e. traditional and aboriginal, the Dravidian character of culture is not described seriously (Iyengar 1982: 119).ⁱⁱ The present article focuses on this particular old and local aspect of Hinduism and tries to study its religious practices in the area of Greater Magadha especially traditional sacrifice (McClymond 2008: 153)ⁱⁱⁱ offered to the village god. I will take the polythetic approach to study this folk sacrifice and try to see whether it fits in the modern theoretical narrative of rituals. In other words, it will relocate this sacrificial act of indigenous people in the terms of modern and western theory and practice.

I will focus on the typical religious behavior and life of the population of Greater Magadha through being a part of this culture and more or less a participatory of religious activities. It will be an observation from the within. If we leave aside the traditions of Brāhmanical ascetics then few questions arise like, did the common people of Magadha recognize any gods? Did they worship gods or other supernatural beings? What were the practices related to these gods? Most of these questions are likely to remain unanswered due to absence of written materials. Sometimes primarily the literary sources i.e. the canonical texts of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism reflect some information about the culture of Greater Magadha. We need to look into many beliefs and practices current in Greater Magadha, which survived in one form or another in later Brahmanism. The present study can be helpful up to an extent in provide some answer through the survived tradition, name, and character of village deity, who was recognized as such by at least part of the population of Greater Magadha. This peculiar belief distinguished Magadhi people from their Vedic neighbors, who came from outside.

It would be good to enquire about the area and the content of study i.e. Greater Magadha and village gods in the beginning. Obviously, where is Greater Magadha and why do we study this area? I accepted nomenclature of the area from Johannes Bronkhorst who refers the region east of the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā as Greater Magadha that covers Magadha and its surrounding lands where roughly Buddha and Mahāvīra lived and taught (2007: 3-4). It is this Indian region where the foundations of Mauryan Empire stood on its pillars and covered a large part of the South Asian subcontinent. It is in this area that most of the second urbanization of South Asia took place after the Harrapan Civilization. It is also in this area that a number of religious movements arose, most famous among them

Buddhism and Jainism. Magadha any by its extension Greater Magadha was not part of the land which the Brahmins considered their own right up to a time close to the beginning of the Common Era (2007: 9).

I am particularly interested in the culture and society of Greater Magadha especially the non-*Vedic* attributes. Bronkhorst showed after the extensive survey of Brāhmaṇical literature that while the Brahmins of the second century BCE looked upon the eastern Ganges valley as more or less foreign country, the Brahmins of the second and third centuries CE looked upon it as their land (2007: 2). As a matter of fact, being situated beyond the eastern limit of purely *Āryan* culture, Magadha resisted the cultural aggression of the *Āryans* for a long time during which the neighbouring kingdoms of Kośala (Oudh), Kauśāmbi (Allahabad) and Videha (North Bihar) came under the *Āryan* domination. Some of the Brahmins were living in this area but still it was not primarily Brāhmaṇical and it took long time for the Brahmins to acquire dominant social position in this region. The Brāhmaṇical religion and rituals were not rooted deeply in the society of Magadha and maintained its own culture since the beginning of political rule none of the rulers involved were especially interested in the Brahmins and their ideas. This culture was different from the culture of the authors of *Vedic* and early post-*Vedic* literature. In this way from the beginning, Magadha was a land of heterodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism, which were connected to the Magadhan culture and adopted many traits of it.

The non-*Vedic* culture of the region of Magadha comes into reference in the early Brāhmaṇical literature, when the people of Magadha are referred with little repute as demonic, barbarous language speaker, constructor of sepulchral mounds that were round, having funerary practices and other customs which distinguishes it from *Vedic* culture (Bronkhorst 2007: 5).^{iv} The writers of Brāhmaṇical literature, the immigrant Brahmins supposed the original inhabitants of Magadha as inferior to them due to different practices, priestless religion and gods. The gods of the Brahmins had not steeped into this land in the beginning. Later after the slow Brāhmaṇisation of the territory, the Brāhmaṇical gods captured the main pantheon and the *Dravidian* gods became marginalized but their worship continued in the modified form (Subramoniam 1990: 309).^v This happened interaction between the *Vedic* culture and the non-*Vedic* culture is quite interesting aspect of research which we will take up little in the later part of this.

The indigenous non-*Vedic* culture and religion often reflects in the life of villagers (Malamoud 1996: 78),^{vi} which combines both *Āryan* and *Dravidian* features. The flocks of *Āryans* came to India and settled down rapidly with their horses that led to the cultural assimilation and adoption with the *Dravidians*. The *Vedic* religion with its usual spirit of toleration and compromise would have modifies and adopted the practices then found. The *Dravidian* heroes, gods, and minor deities were then identified with the *Vedic* deities of Brāhmaṇas and a fusion should have taken place between the two religions (Iyengar 1982: 103). Today the Hindu supernatural world swarms with both *Āryan* and *Dravidian* gods resembling humans and animals, accompanied by demons, heroes, ghosts and heavenly dancing girls (Luce 1957: 15). Elmore on the basis of the Manual of Administration of the

Madras Presidency divides the deities of India into three classes (1984: 10): (i) Brāhmaṇical deities, (ii) Aboriginal deities, and (iii) Deities which are a combination of these two. The Brāhmaṇical gods are the most visible, dominant, and numerous in the society. There are three main gods with their consorts i.e. Brahmā, Viśṇu and Śiva with almost other separate gods for each aspect of life and each component of the nature. The aboriginal deities and their worship are widely different from the popular Hindu deities, Viśṇu and Śiva, and the worship that centers in the Hindu temples. In the case of the last-named gods it is not difficult to trace their origin either to Brāhmaṇical or aboriginal sources, and to discover how the other element has been added (Hopkins 1902: 537-38).^{vii} This group clearly reflects the cultural acclimatization between *Āryans* and *Dravidians* could be an interesting topic for further research.

The aboriginal gods are the gods of pre-*Vedic* India, generally referred as *asura* demons or antigods in the *Vedic* literature by the *Vedic* poets. The literature referring to the aboriginal tribes with whom the *Āryans* were in conflict when they settled in northern India came to be incorporated in the myths of *asuras*. The *Āryans* who fought for domination represented their ideals of life of goodness, the divine powers that protected as the true gods and the divinities protecting the other side as antigods or demons. The *asuras* are often grouped with different Hindu tribes such as the Kalinga, the Magadha, and the Nāgas. The word *asura* is said to have come from the root *as*, which means, “to be,” and thus the *asuras* are the forms of existence, of life (Daniélou 1991: 140). Thus these antigods are older than the gods. They were the gods of an age when the human world was still in its infancy.

The village gods fall into the category of aboriginal deities (Monier-Williams 1891: 209-210).^{viii} These gods have special significance in the village life and intimately connected to the local culture. Yet these deities receive little attention in the studies of Hinduism in general and ritual studies in particular. Often they are described with a page or two, while the remainder of the treatment is given to the Brāhmaṇical deities and the *Vedic* sacrifices. Besides famous Brāhmaṇical Gods, Indian culture possesses a series of local non-Brāhmaṇical aboriginal minor village gods. Probably each village has its own local deity. Each village god has different name, form and structure. Sometime the limit of each village deity is defined in terms of area and there is no encroachment allowed by other deity. The boundary-stone of the village lands is very commonly regarded as a habitation of a local deity, and might be called a shrine or symbol with equal propriety (Henry 1921: 35). In the thought of the people also, these *Dravidian* gods are local, a fact which has given rise to the common term of “Village Deities” (Elmore 1984: 10). Even when one god is found in many places, the people never think of it as a general god with world relations, but only as their local deity. Sometimes, they were named after the villages from which they had been imported. Interestingly, the names are far from regular *Vedic* god’s name but closer to the normal local names of villagers. Often, the deity is named on a male person of the same village (Subramoniam 1990: 472).^{ix} I came across some of the name like Goraiyā Bābā, Dāk Bābā, Māl Bābā, Chuhaḍ Bābā, Sant Bābā etc., which are prevalent in Magadha. Goraiya Bābā seems pretty common name for village deity, which is in the practice in all over the region of Magadha (See Figure 1).^x One cannot also miss the suffix *Bābā* in almost all names.

The Hindi term generally refers to elderly people and particularly to grandparent, which itself show the close proximity of the village deity to the villagers as a member of same society. Their history is contained in the somewhat confused legends recited by villagers and wandering singers. These legends and stories are always recited from memory. We know about them only through oral transmissions from generations to generations. Unfortunately, the absence of reference in written materials makes hard to trace their history.

Surprisingly, there is no definite shape assigned to these village deities. They can be male or female (clear from the name) (Sjoberg 2009: 107),^{xi} with or without body (hard to trace), with or without image, and with or without weapons and ornamentation. Bishop Henry (1921: 17) mentions reason behind this that the *Dravidian* deities were the goddesses of an agricultural people. Every village has small rude temples or shrines assigned to these gods within the limit of the village, generally either at the boundary or in the center of the village. Sometimes there is no shrine and either a tree or a stone or something unanimous thing treated as the god. Sometimes a sacred grove situated somewhere in the village also supposed as the residing place of village deity. Usually an unstructured stone or a crudely graven image is the only occupant, and to these images the people pay their devotion. There is also another class of images, which may very seldom be seen. These are temporary images, which are made for worship on a single occasion, and then are deserted or thrown away. When the *Dravidian* throws away the idol it is not because he is dissatisfied with it, but because it has served the purpose, and the deity is no longer in it (Elmore 1984: 138).

These '*Dravidian*' village deities, opposite to the *Vedic* gods are usually local in their origin (Elmore 1984: 59-75).^{xii} These village deities did not evolve from Prajāpati and also no avatar of any god like the Brāhmaṇical gods and had a human career as an ordinary person (Elmore 1984: 114). Their history commonly begins on earth particularly in the same village as a common man, lived, and worked for his life term and died herein. Their extraordinary deeds and sacrifice for the fellow villagers often turn them in a god and a venerable (Hopkins 1902: 174).^{xiii} And unlike the great gods and goddesses, the local divinities are not considered to be remote figures; they easily enter into ordinary human affairs (Sjoberg 2009: 108). Often, they also act as the ghost of some person who has, died (Elmore, 1984: 141).^{xiv} This ghost is supposed as a good one and helpful to villagers opposite to conventional treatment as bad. Particularly in the absence of image and proper temple, we can witness a sepulchral mound in the form of village deity, clear from the above picture i.e. naturally available almost round stone. This could be the burial place of the deity. Bronkhorst (2007: 55) with quoting other scholars proves that round sepulchral mounds are a well-known feature of the religions that arose in Greater Magadha according to the passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (13.8.1.5), which seems to me in close proximity with the shrine of village deities. More or less, it was the local feature of the *Dravidian* religion of Magadha visible from the practices of village deity before the arrival of the Brahmins. Later it got incorporated in Buddhism, Jainism and Ājīvikism during their historical expansion as *stūpas* but it does not exhaust.

Practically all villagers except Brahmins offer their devotion to such village deities but it is hard to find the principles of their worship. It seems there is no clear defines

principles. The Brahmins have a considerable interest in these minor gods but why they do not join actively in the worship. Rarely, the Brahmins direct some parts of the worship, and often are present, usually standing at a distance. They admit that these deities are powerful demons, and so are not to be neglected (Elmore 1984: 16-17). These are non-Brāhmaṇical gods and in the most of worship, the bloody or animal sacrifices are offered, hence it seems usually Brahmins do not act as priest. This is not the case with true Hindu gods.^{xv} Unexpectedly, one can notice that there is no performer of worship i.e. priest needed in the reverence offered to these village deities. The worshiper himself performs all activities during the sacrifice. Sometimes the villagers or wanderer singers who always stay at the shrine and attend the religious ceremonies informally assist the patron in his worship.

It seems the worship of village gods is more popular among outcastes and the lower order of the society. Also normally sometimes the oblation offered is not consumed by the upper orders of the society. As I said earlier, these gods are intimately connected to village life, so they are recalled on every special occasion of the villager's life and on normal festival time. The oblations and veneration are offered on special occasions like marriage,^{xvi} death,^{xvii} and birth.^{xviii} Villagers usually don't forget offerings on major, minor, and seasonal celebrations and festivals. Except these, whenever either a wish is fulfilled or a work is done according to expectation, villages go for reverence with offerings. Also when a person has been sick for a considerable time and other remedies have failed seems in either demon possession or shadow of evil eye (Monier-Williams 1891: 253-254),^{xix} it is common to bring him to the village deity for treatment with a sacrifice. It also links the village deity to its ghost character as the folklore mentions that the good ghost i.e. village deity will remove the bad ghost from the body (See Figure 2). I also came across a temple of village deity named Pīlīs Bābā, where snakes bite can be cured. These magico-religious healing practices could be assimilated with Bronkhorst's identification of *Vedic* tradition existed on the land of Greater Magadha (2007: 56-60).^{xx} If it is true then the village deity serve as a good example of interaction between *Vedic* and non-*Vedic* traditions especially medicine reflected through the prevailing practices.

Generally, sacrifice implies giving to the gods, who in return give to the sacrificer. Gautami Shah while studying the practices of Munda tribe residing in Bihar emphasizes the general explanation of sacrifice is as follow: (a) to appease; (b) to seek a favor; (c) thanksgiving; (d) to ward off evil spirits; and (e) communion with god (1987: 208). In the case of sacrifice offered to the village deities, it seems one of the case applies, opposite to the dominant practice of Brahmanism. The god first give to the sacrificer whatever he wished and then the devotee offers sacrifice to show his devotion. It is more or less thanking sacrifice. In other words, first the follower demands something in his favor from the village god either in his heart or at the shrine and promises a sacrifice in return. In sacrifice the offering may vary according to the nature and purpose of the ritual, the deity to be placated, and the place of the offering in the universal sacrifice thus, there are offerings of wheat or rice, of oil and butter, of seed or wine, of goats, horses, or buffaloes, or even of men (Daniélou 1991: 71).

These locally originated minor village gods are almost always appeased with bloody or animal sacrifices followed by offering of *śarāb* i.e. alcoholic drink (Henry 1921: 18).^{xxi} The small animals and birds of male kind such as chicken, pigeon, goat, sheep etc. are regularly sacrificed. The offered animals are cooked at the shrine and served as *prāsād* to all. It is believed that the deity will be satisfied after drinking blood and wine and bless you anything in intoxicated mood. It might be said while thinking historically, in the primitive stage men wished to be brothers not only to the other tribes, but also to the animals and often it happened by animal sacrifice or blood offering to the village gods (Elmore 1984: 128).

Theoretically, what were the functions of sacrifices offered to the village deities? The old and new theories of sacrifice basically practice to answer this question. Particularly, E. B. Tylor interests me when he says, sacrifice was originally a gift that the primitive made to the spirits to secure their favor or to minimize their hostility (1871: 353ff). In the case of village deities, the sacrifice looks like gift but not always offered with an intention to ward off dangers but also offered to create, sustain and strengthen friendship, to express dependence on the gods, and thanksgiving. The ritual consumption of flesh of the animal sacrificed to the village gods could explained in terms of William Robertson Smith as mystical communion with the deity; it was the ritual meal by which the ritual participants became united with the deity and with the members of their group by sharing the sacrificed animal (1894: 395). Thinking broadly and universally, George Praseed opines that the sacrifice of food to the gods has the cosmic function; the gods need food and strength to carry out their world-maintaining activity and they obtain strength from the sacrifices offered to them (2009: 24ff). Here it seems probable in the respect of the personification of god that the village deity cooperates with his brothers in doing hard jobs in returns of sacrifice, in other words he upholds the world and maintain the society in the benefit of humans. I will take up this worship and sacrifice pattern later in detail in this article.

Sacrifice is a complex universal religious phenomenon. Like religion, sacrifice is hard to define especially very much alive non-traditional sacrifice, which is associated with the primitive. Since the late nineteenth century, there are varied theoretical approaches to sacrifice in the West, which can be classified into six basic streams of thought: those that view sacrifice as myth, those that view sacrifice as exchange, those that view sacrifice as cuisine, structuralist approaches, feminist approaches and approaches that view sacrifice as death or violence. These theories and models have their own merits and demerits, which could be another topic of research. Leaving aside above theories, I will take the recent one Kathryn McClymond's polythetic approach for the study of sacrifice offered to village gods, propounded in her book *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice*. In this comparative study of Brāhmaṇical Hinduism and biblical and mishnaic Judaism McClymond considered sacrifice as a complex matrix of varied and interrelated procedures and instead of defining it, focuses on identifying basic activities that characterize sacrificial event. Several activities occur regularly during sacrificial events, and these basic 'building blocks' of activity combine in various ways to generate sacrificial events.

The question arises that why did I chose polythetic approach to describe the sacrificial behavior of Greater Magadha. There are many reasons behind this. Broadly, the sacrifice offered to village gods falls under the culture of Hinduism. McClymond also stress that an increased recognition of the polythetic nature of sacrifice will be helpful not only in studying traditional nature of sacrificial activity but also in guiding research into other practices that tap into the authoritative category of sacrifice (2008: 34). Perhaps most helpful, a polythetic approach sheds light on the connections between traditional sacrifice and the appropriation of sacrifice as a way of describing other activities. This approach honors the complexity and multiplicity of non-traditional sacrificial activity without being overwhelmed by it. Interestingly, this approach brings to light ritual substances that are frequently on the fringes of sacrificial theorizing such as vegetal (grain, soma stalks), and animals and almost completely ignored liquid (blood, wine, ghee) substances. Specially, the presence and distinctive manipulation of liquid offerings in the present sacrificial study might reshape theorizing about sacrifice in general. This practice-based approach becomes more useful in the present case where no textual materials and priestly manuals are available. This non-Brāhmaṇical tradition is absolutely based on oral transmissions over a long period of training.

McClymond identifies seven activities- selection, association, identification, killing, heating, apportionment, and consumption- to characterize sacrificial ritual primarily in Brāhmaṇical Hinduism and Judaism but also in other religious traditions. These activities may occur in different sequences. In addition sometimes all seven activities are performed; sometimes only a few occur. The presence of many or a few of these activities makes a ritual more or less sacrificial in nature. Each of these elements becomes more sacrificial in nature as it is more formally or intimately connected with other elements. Each procedure included in the matrix of sacrificial activity addresses an authoritative concern within religious practice. Sacrifice as a whole works because each element of sacrifice addresses an issue that has authoritative import for the socio-religious life of the community (McClymond 2008: 149).

Selection

It is the first step in a particular sacrifice, which is necessary for any of the other activities to occur. Selection refers to the activities involved in procuring the appropriate sacrificial/offering substance, animal or non-animal in according to prescribed specific suitable criteria and physical condition (McClymond, 2008: 29). It seems village gods like *deśī* or locally available materials as offering, so one need to keep this in mind while selecting the sacrificial substance. Generally, the products available in the village are supposed to be suitable for offering. Both animal and non-animal offerings are selected respectively from the domesticated realm of animal and plant life. According to the economic status and the level of happiness a sacrificer select either a bird or an animal for offering but of male kind.^{xxii} A bird of *deśī* breed, goat, sheep, chicken, young pigeon, turtledove, and domesticated birds would be suitable with sound health.^{xxiii} Physical criteria (including the absence of blemishes) play a role in distinguishing suitable from unsuitable (McClymond, 2008: 87).^{xxiv} A goat or a sheep of the village, purchased or raised by the sacrificer could be also a good offering substance.^{xxv} The most common sacrificial animal victim is chicken. All

animals' victims are killed in the same way, no matter what rite the animal is being used for. Then comes the selection of wine or *śarāb* that should be also locally prepared not foreign liquor.

After the selection of above-mentioned primary sacrificial substances, a worshiper selects some secondary non-animal materials like rice, grass, sweet, knife, lighter, incense stick, camphor and *humad* etc. These materials are needed for the preparation of the sacrifice. Here also before the animal sacrifice, the vegetal substances such as rice or barley grains, grass, etc. are offered to the deity during the worship. During the discussion of the *Vedic* sacrifices McClymond has observed that every *paśubandha* sacrifice includes a number of *iṣṭi* sacrifices, which vary in complexity, use as their primary offerings vegetal substances such as rice or barley (2008: 36-37). It also gets implemented in the present traditional sacrifice to village deity as integrally connected elements within a single, coherent sacrificial system.

Association

It is basically the beginning of sacrificial ritual. According to McClymond, 'association' refers to the performance of certain activities to associate an oblation with one community's preferred deity in contradistinction to the god(s) of surrounding communities (2008: 29-30). It seems that association is important in polytheistic traditions in which there are a number of deities with whom an offering might be associated but not in monotheistic traditions in which there seems to be only one possible association. It is true in the case of village deities. Although the village gods are broadly considered as the part of polytheistic Hindu tradition but they are unique and mono with their association with one village. The non-Brāhmaṇical village deity is single unit in its nature, different from dominant gods, that's why the sacrifice offered to him does not need rituals related to association. The person simply shows respect to the village deity and says that the sacrifice is yours and I am offering it you for your kindness showered on me. Particularly, the devotee shows reverence by lighting fire and incense sticks by putting camphor and incense wood (*humad*). In this case, the activity of association has not much importance in the sacrificial procedure and we can ignore it up to an extent.

Identification

Identification refers to the practice of correlating an offering with a ritual patron, the one who benefits from the sacrifice, through some actions usually early in the ritual (McClymond, 2008: 30). Act of identification vary from tradition to tradition, even from offering to offering substance. Sometimes it is very complex and involves many activities like soma sacrifice and sometimes it is simple as in *agnihotra* sacrifice. The identification process is also quite simple in the case of offering to village deity. One visible reason can mention for it that there is no priest involve in the whole process. The ritual patron performs all activities in the absence of the specialist performer of the ritual. In other words, there is no mediator between the village deity and his follower and probably due to a preexisting direct connection between them being from the same village.

In the case of sacrifice offered to village deity identification also takes place and it is practically the second stage of ritual. The ritual patron, mostly a villager establishes connection with the oblation simply by offering some food to the targeted animal such as rice, barley, grass etc. Usually, the animal stays in relaxed and natural situation for some time by unfastening if they were tied up. Then the ritual patron offers some grain (to chicken and pigeon) and grass (to goat) by his hand, and waits until the animal eats something. As soon as the animal ate something it is clear that identification has been established.

Killing

Killing refers to the intentional execution of the offering, does not mean the same thing as destruction or violence (McClymond, 2008: 30-31). Killing is related to other activities in sacrificial rituals; as it takes place after the identification of a victim with a sacrificial patron and the apportionment of the offering precede it. Killing never stands alone in sacrifice; it is always combined with other more significant actions.

Generally, killing is the focus of discussion in the studies of sacrifice. Sacrifice is not simply the killing of an offering; otherwise every murder would be a sacrifice. It is a culturally accepted killing and it is for good. It is important to ask now, what is killing for? A quick overview of the sacrifice to village deities suggest that killing is not the end of the rite but because killing makes it possible for more important subsequent activities to occur.^{xxvi} Killing makes the animal ritually available for the elaborate manipulation, division, and distribution that follow. Killing the animal makes it possible to access the meat for cooking and eating. It is bloody but it seems here the ritual killing explicitly does not equal violence. On the one hand, killing is important, and it is even central in the sacrifice; on the other hand, acts of violence are avoided, concealed and denied (Houben and Kooij 1999: 115). Specifically, killing in particular and sacrifice in general can be viewed as a constructive act, which constructs, integrates, and constitutes the real, transform a single substance (such as goat or chicken) into multiple distinct offerings (skin, head, heart, entrails, fat, blood and so forth) (McClymond, 2008: 55).

The animal sacrifice to village god is simple and generally accompanies blood offerings, almost similar to the Jewish sacrificial tradition (See Figure 3). After the worship of village deity and the identification, the ritual patron sacrifices the animal with a blade on the altar. The head of animal dissected apart by one strike. Animals have their throat cut and then slit open so their blood can flow more freely. Blood has to be distributed in the sanctuary quickly before it begins to congeal. The method used to kill animal victims facilitates the acquisition of animal's blood and flesh for subsequent ritual manipulation as distinct ritual offering substance. The head is offered to the god with blood poured on it, which is coming from the other part of body. The bird's blood is drained directly from its neck by pressing the bird against the side of altar different from the animal (McClymond, 2008: 115).^{xxvii} The blood must be distributed entirely within the sanctuary, on or near the altar. That is, blood must be handled within the sacred ritual space. Then, *śarāb* has to be poured on the head and the shrine. All blood probably the quantity predetermined indirectly by the animal size and species goes to the deity and prohibited for human consumption (McClymond, 2008:

120).^{xxviii} The remaining part of the animal and the liquor belong to the ritual patron for consumption.

Liquid substances like water, milk, clarified butter, wine, and oil also often function as companion offerings, substances that accompany principal offering before or after (McClymond, 2008: 93-96). The offering of water, milk, and clarified butter appears in almost every *Vedic* sacrifice and wine and oil appear frequently as companion offerings in Jewish sacrifice. These companion offerings do not carry the same ritual weight that the principal offering does, but they are necessary for the rite to be performed correctly. Generally, wine or liquor is not accepted, as offering in Brāhmaṇical system but interestingly, the village deities are fond of liquor or *śarāb*.^{xxix} It is not all kinds of liquor or *śarāb* offered. The locally made *śarāb* is preferred compare to foreign liquor. It is said that *śarāb* used as substitute for blood, which does not fit in the case of village deities. *Śarāb* offering accompany animal offerings, in which case there is no need for a blood substitute, since animal blood is available. It seems reasonable to say that *śarāb* libations function independently as regular accompaniment to animal sacrifice. The sacrificer does not make direct contact with liquor offering in order for the offering to accomplish ritual goals on his behalf.

Why do the village deities accept liquor libations with animal sacrifice? It is hard to provide an answer. I can put forward some observations. People say that the deity would be more pleased after drinking *śarāb* and bless you anything. Sometimes it is said that *śarāb* offered as a fragrant with animal sacrifice (McClymond 2008: 95).^{xxx} The offered liquor changes the smell and the environment of the sanctuary and makes it aromatic and pleasant. The fermentation or distillation concentrates the power of the liquid, just as incineration of the sacrificial material in a burnt offering removes the dross and concentrates the essence in smoke, the odor of which, as the Bible says, “is pleasing to God” (Jr. Stevens 2016: 25). Also the sacrifice to village deity characterized specifically as a thank offering- in other words it is an occasion of happiness and celebration- so *śarāb* accompany it and increases the level of pleasure. Also the *Dravidian* tribes used to celebrate with *śarāb* and meat, as it was part of their culture since the beginning. According to food habits, the combination of liquor and meat was always preferred in the society. The flesh of sacrificed animal has to be consumed and the served liquor would make it tastier. Here, McClymond becomes worth when she mentions generally that the culmination of most liquid sacrifices occurs when the liquid offering substance is apportioned to the appropriate parties (McClymond 2008: 126). Since blood is prohibited for consumption, the ritual participants can drink *śarāb* as sacred substance from the god.

Apportionment

The apportionment of oblations is the social aspect of every sacrifice. It plays a key role within sacrificial ritual by reinforcing the relationship between the ritual players in particular and in general between the communities. Apportionment refers to the division of a single offering unit into multiple pieces or portions and the assignation of these portions to specific ritual participants, including the ritual patron, various priests and the god(s)

(McClymond 2008: 32). Although the oblation totally belonged to the village deity after the sacrifice, but virtually a division takes place between the god and the ritual patron. First of all, it produces multiple ritual portions out of a single offering playing multiple roles with its own value: principal offering, expiatory rites and edible portions for the ritual participants (McClymond 2008: 88). The act of division distinguishes one portion of an animal offering from another- in fact it creates distinct portions where they did not exist before. The single offering animal automatically gets divided in three categories blood, meat, and head with one separate substance *śarāb*. Let us see its division between the ritual patron and the village deity, since there is no ritual performer and subsequent distribution between the ritual patron and the ritual participants. The ritual potency of an offering can be multiplied with each of parts remains equal to the whole in the ritual economy through the apportionment of the offering itself (McClymond, 2008: 149).

The god receives certain portions from the offerings, usually the choicest; at times the god is the only recipient of an offering. This is called principal offering. Blood is understood to contain the life essence of animals within Western and Eastern traditions. Probably, it is the reason that the moment the blood gushes, belong to the deity. The ritual participants are prohibited to consume it. The head of the animal also belongs to the village deity. The ritual patron and participants cannot eat it but the other persons available at shrine can take it. The other less valuable parts of the animal flesh and remaining *śarāb* go to the sacrificer and are edible portions. The sacrificer accept it as *prāsād* and he is responsible for its handling, where distribution comes into question. Since there is no role of priest in this sacrifice, the expiatory portion is not created.

The distribution of an offering simultaneously reflects and reinforces socio-religious roles, emphasizing the superiority of certain individual over other individuals (McClymond 2008: 150). In the case of sacrifice to the village deity, the later part of apportionment i.e. distribution of oblations, basically takes place after heating, so here we have little change in the sequence of ritual activities and almost consumption and apportionment is mixed up together. It depends upon the ritual patron either to keep all for himself or distribute among his family and friends as *prāsād* by chopping in small pieces. Generally, the ritual patron enjoys it with his family and friends, who most of the time accompanies him at the shrine for the sacrifice. Interestingly, sometimes the higher castes do sacrifice and veneration but do not keep offered animal and *śarāb* and give it somebody from the lower caste people, probably because they suppose the village deity as the god of lower castes. It shows that sacrifice is not always about destruction but about the construction of new elements and the redistribution of those elements, where apportion becomes more useful that makes a sacrifice available for heating and consumption.

Heating

‘Heating’ refers to placing an offering on top of a sacrificial fire to be preparation for consumption, either directly or in some kind of container (McClymond 2008: 31-32). McClymond uses broader term heating rather than cooking because it involves a number of activities, including but not limited to cooking such as boiling, baking, roasting, frying etc.

Simply she tries to encompass the different ways offerings are cooked. It is important to distinguish the different reasons for which an oblation is heated.^{xxxii}

Heating of the offerings to village gods is more or less a social activity because everybody helps in preparation of the offering. The principal offering belongs to the god; therefore it does not need to be cooked. The edible or flesh portions need to be get heated for consumption by the ritual participants. There are two options, either to cook the offering at the shrine or to take home for cooking. Generally, the offering is prepared and cooked for consumption on top of a sacrificial fire at the shrine. The Vedic texts are very specific about the sequence in which an animal offering must be cut apart, the manipulation required of each part, and the final distribution of each portion but in this non-Brāhmaṇical sacrifice there is no specific rules. The ritual patron with his family members cleans and cut the sacrificed animal into small pieces. This procedure generates multiple discrete entities where there was once a single, undifferentiated whole, which make all the subsequent ritual activity possible. The sacrificer together with family and friends completely cook the meat basically for subsequent ritual manipulation. The boiling of the meat is also done in natural way. The temporary oven is prepared with bricks and stone and fire gets started with the use of wood and dung bread. In the end, they also prepare either rice or bread to eat with meat.

Consumption

Consumption refers to the ingestion of the sacrificial offering either by the ritual's participants, priest or laity (or both) or by the god(s) involved in the sacrifice. Consumption includes but is not limited to 'eating' (McClymond 2008: 32-33). The actions involved in and rules governing consumption play a crucial rule in distinguishing certain sacrificial rites-and, in fact, entire sacrificial systems-from others.

Consumption of offering is an important social part in the case of village deities. The consumption combines with other ritual activity apportionment. I have mentioned before that sometime the higher castes of the village especially Brāhmaṇas and Kshatriyas do not consume the offerings to village deities, probable because of direct Aryan connections. It is also made clear earlier that the village deities are dominant non-Vedic god. The lower castes supposed to be original Dravidian inhabitants treat village deity as their god so they consume the offerings as *prāsād*. Here it reflects that the sacrifice to the village deity is non-Vedic in nature. After cooking of the offering, the real distribution takes place while ready for consumption. It is supposed good to give offerings to the whole community, broadly who ever wish to eat. The ritual patron is given the highest position during the consumption. First he takes whatever pieces he wants for eating. Later, he serves to all relatives and persons who are present at shrine and whoever wishes to eat. After finished serving meat and *śarāb*, the sacrificer starts eating and others follow him. The culmination of liquid offering i.e. *śarāb* happens here, when it distributed to everybody. The ritual patron carries the remaining meat to home and distribute among neighbors and friends.

Conclusion

What tentative conclusions can we come to base on the relocation of animal sacrifice to the village gods in a polythetic way? Surprisingly, this tradition sacrificial ritual involves all seven activities identified by McClymond in the organic complex of sacrifice. It was rather a simple act of sacrifice and more friendly and local in comparison to complicated rules, regulations, and manipulations of *Vedic* sacrifices. Also it can be proved by the absence of specialist ritual performer i.e. the priest. The different activities performed in sacrificial event- selection, association, identification, killing, apportionment, heating, and consumption are intimately related to one another and performed by the ritual patron only. Killing of the victim was not the end of sacrifice; instead I can say it was the real beginning. The preparation for killing an animal in the sacrifice was associated with selection of kind of victim, association with deity, and identification with a ritual patron. After the sacrifice, the oblations were apportioned, cooked over a particular fire, and consumed by all ritual participants and community members, which was more reasonably sacrificial. All activities were intertwined in a way to make the particular worship to the village deity a sacrifice. The polythetic theory better fits in the category to explain the praxis of village god. The study of sacrifice takes place in a context, and that context affects how we imagine traditional sacrifice. Our understanding of ancient traditional sacrifice is shaped by personal and social experiences of sacrifice. The prevalent monolithic approaches to sacrifice either as violent blood sacrifice or sacrifice as consumption or cuisine or gift or communion probably captures one aspect of the sacrifice and seems more focused on the aim of sacrifice. We need to understand sacrifice in its totality assimilating its practice, context, and theory where the polythetic model becomes important which truly proves sacrifice as constructive act; it creates something, generates something that was not present earlier and brings the community together.

The better understanding of sacrifice takes us towards its emergence within the religion, which is linked to its context. Once we understand the context within religion, it will lead us to better theorization of sacrifice. Insight into the sacrificial practices can illuminate the immediate context-specific circumstances, as well as the often long-term traditions surrounding their origin and transformations in a given society. Sacrifice is somewhat religious ritual and probably there is no religion without ritual. It is an offering to the god i.e. an exchange of food. Why do we offer god what we eat? It is related to the idea of the personification of god. The primitive men imagined god as a human and accordingly attributed him everything. Every human needs food for survival similarly the god has been also provided with food as offering or sacrifice both vegetal and animal and for drinking blood, wine, oil, and water. The gods of the *Dravidians* are almost universally human beings and even more than that. The *Dravidians* treated the local village gods as brothers and friends and their meeting facilitated by the precious and pleasant gifts i.e. blood and liquor. The community feast of cooked oblations in the presence of the deity served the purpose of communion and peace with the deity and aim to strengthen the bond between community members.

Endnotes

ⁱ The term Dravidian is commonly used to refer to all of the non-Aryan population and the aboriginal inhabitant in the peninsula of India. We can trace it as long as back to the age of Harappan Civilization.

ⁱⁱ The influence of the Dravidians on the culture of India has been ignored, because the literature which records the development of Hindu religion was the work of a hostile priesthood, whose only object was to magnify its own pretensions, and decry everything Dravidian.

ⁱⁱⁱ McClymond says, “Traditional sacrifice is performed with material offering substances, it is controlled by a body of ritual elite, and it is prescribed and described in the authoritative textual (oral or written) tradition.”

^{iv} Johannes Bronkhorst mentions one passage of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (13.8.1.5).

^v During Magadhan and Mauryan age, the villages underwent changes. Sometimes it is mentioned that a *grāma* consists of thirty families but the number of persons will be about 1000.

^{vi} Now in Brāhmaṇical India, the sacrifice is essentially a ‘village’ affair and, an order that involves the sacrificial fire, and the plants and animals, which constitutes offertory materials.

^{vii} For example, Vetāla worshipped in many places is said to be a manifestation of Śiva but in reality he is a native wild tribal god, without a temple, worshipped in the open air under the shade of a tree, and in an enclosure of stones.

^{viii} Whether the worship of village deities is a mere ramification of the religion of Śiva and Viṣṇu is very doubtful. It is much more probable that the village gods represent far earlier and more primitive objects of worship of aboriginal tribes and afterwards grafted into the Hindu system by the Brāhmaṇas.

^{ix} Even today in the village of Tamil Nadu, the village goddesses are differently called on the basis of the village names, some special features of the deity, tree names as well as the Sanskrit Brāhmaṇical folklores.

^x For example, the village deity named Goraiyā Bābā is famous at Nālandā and the same name village deity is also found in the region of Gayā and Bodh Gayā.

^{xi} In the *Dravidian* tradition of South India, it is said that every village has its tutelary goddess, along with a variety of other deities, male and female, with the male deities usually being subordinate to the female, which is also quite opposite to the Brāhmaṇical tradition.

^{xii} The number of local legends is almost as limitless as the list of the *Dravidian* gods. In those cases where a local story cannot be secured it is very probable that there was a local origin, the history of which has been lost.

^{xiii} In the *Veda* there is a nature religion and an ancestor-religion. Dead heroes may be gods, but gods, too, are natural phenomenon, and, again they are abstraction.

^{xiv} The spirits are always from outside the object of worship, not being the spirits of the objects themselves; and these spirits quite generally have a human origin.

^{xv} Vegetal offerings occur far more frequently than animal offerings in *Vedic* practices, even as principal offerings.

^{xvi} Villagers offer the prayer to the particular village deity before the marriage for a successful and happy married life.

^{xvii} In the event of death in the village after the completion of all *Vedic* rituals associated the close family member of dead person offer prayer to the village deity to assimilate the soul with him.

^{xviii} After the birth, the villager goes for veneration for a healthy and happy life of the baby. Sometimes when a couple had continued two-three infant deaths, they go to the village deity at the time of next pregnancy and offer the coming baby to him for fourteen years. Then if the kid survives for fourteen years in the shadow of village deity, the couple organizes a ceremony and a sacrifice and performs the rituals related to birth.

^{xix} The *Dravidian* idea of evil eye is explained by the fear of evil spirit. There are innumerable evil spirits waiting all time to do harm.

^{xx} Bronkhorst observes during the late-*Vedic* period two traditions of medicine distinct from each other according to two societies of Greater Magadha i.e. the *Vedic* tradition of healing as magico-religious and the non-*Vedic* tradition as empirico-rational (human and their relationship to environment). The non-*Vedic* tradition explains all the maladies by means of three *doṣas*- wind, bile and phlegm-either singly or in combination, which was the feature of original society of Greater Magadha.

^{xxi} Similarly, the village deities of South India are almost universally worshipped with animal sacrifice.

^{xxii} I am not sure why only male kind of animals is being sacrificed? It seems to me that it is because the female kind is symbol of fertility and reproduction.

^{xxiii} Sometimes, the color of the animal becomes important base of selection. The white colored pigeon and the black colored goat are preferred.

^{xxiv} The selection process involves conscious, deliberate, creative activity on the part of the ritual participants, not just passive recognition of physical characteristics.

^{xxv} Victims are selected from the herd or from the flock.

^{xxvi} Even McClymond suggest through the Vedic Soma sacrifice that killing does not always involve an animal death and it is neither dramatic nor bloody and not the culminating or focal point of the sacrificial activity.

^{xxvii} The specific type of blood manipulation determined by the specific rite and kind of animal blood, which is one of the identifying characteristics of each sacrificial rite.

^{xxviii} Animal blood i.e. its life is prohibited for general human consumption and reserved only for the deity probably because it returns the life of the animal to its creator.

^{xxix} Generally wine has different meaning in Indian context not like Western notions but it is referred as alcoholic drink and falls in the category of *śarāb*. *Śarāb* has more percentage of alcohol in it compare to wine. The word liquor seems more appropriate English word for *śarāb*.

^{xxx} It true for Jewish sacrifice where wine oblations offered in concert with *minha* offerings are said to generate a fragrant offering for YAWH.

^{xxxi} Since vegetal oblations must be formed to constitute a ritually acceptable offering, heating frequently occurs earlier in the ritual than it does in animal sacrifice.

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Figure1: A typical shrine of village deity named Goraiyā Bābā from Nālandā

Source: A personal visit to the site

Figure 2: Preparation for a sacrifice and treatment of a woman from the evil eye

Source: A personal visit to the site

Figure 3: Sacrifice of Chickens

Source: A personal visit to the site