

**UNIVERSITY OF NATAL**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRESENCE  
OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS  
IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE YAJÑA  
(SACRED FIRE ) : A VEDIC VIEWPOINT**

**H. DEBIPERSAD**

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ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE YAJÑA  
(SACRED FIRE):A VEDIC VIEWPOINT.**

**BY MISS. H. DEBIPERSAD**

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Centre  
for Oral Studies, University of Natal, Durban.

**DATE:** 30/03/1999

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Homawathee Debipersad, hereby declare that, except for quotations specially indicated in the text, and such help as I have acknowledged, this dissertation is my own original work. This dissertation has not been submitted before, for any examination in any university.

SIGNATURE: 

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated in memory of my beloved mother

**PANDITA CHUNDERWATHEE DEVI DEBIPERSAD PADARATH**

whose untimely demise has left a void in my life.



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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is accompanied by a video recording of the performance of the *yaṁna* and an audio recording of the *mantras* (sacred verses) recited during the performance.

This thesis endeavours to illustrate how oral style elements are used to accentuate the *mantras* during the performance of the *yaṁna*. The *mantras* and the *yaṁna* itself, have its roots in the Vedic scriptures which have been transmitted orally from generation to generation.

In chapter one, "Introduction", a brief description of the concept of Hinduism which forms the basis of my investigation is presented. An individual's life, according to Hinduism, is divided into four stages and the performance of *yaṁna* features prominently in the sixteen Vedic *sanskāras*.

In chapter two, the term *yaṁna* is defined and the origin of *yaṁna* as reflected in the *Puruṣa Sūkta* is discussed. The five main daily duties or *Pañca Mahāyaṁna*, presented for the welfare and progress of the individual and society are explained. It must be noted that the *Pañca*

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**Mahāyajña** are not necessarily all rituals or rites but rather social or human commitments, which are a part of the Vedic code of ethics. However, the *Deva Yajña* or *Agni-hotra* or *yajña* as it is very commonly known to Hindus, is a ritual that is performed. The *Devayajna* forms an integral part of the *Pañca Mahāyajña*.

The third chapter outlines some of Marcel Jousse's thoughts, views and ideas about oral style expressions relevant to the *yajña*. The universal anthropological laws of Formulism, Bilateralism, Mimism and Rhythmism as propounded by Marcel Jousse are highlighted. Key concepts like gesture, memory, rhythm and oral expression, used as facilitators for the transmission of knowledge are explained. This chapter forms part of the conceptional framework of the study.

Chapter four focusses on the definition of oral tradition. The Vedas, an example of Hindu literature reflecting oral tradition, are discussed. Some interesting comments tracing the authenticity of the Vedas and facts declaring the Vedas as the source head of all knowledge about human behaviour also feature in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter, the procedure, explanation and analysis of the gestural

(iii)

and oral expressions as reflected in the performance of the *yajña* are examined. The anthropological laws of Marcel Jousse are applied in the recitation of the *mantras* and the actual performance of the *yajña*. Mnemotechnical devices that facilitate memorisation, featuring in the *mantras* are discussed.

The conclusion emphasises the role of oral style elements that are evident in the *yajña* and explores the possibility for further research in Vedic literature.

**LIST OF VEDIC TERMS**

A list of Sanskrit terms and their meanings as discussed in the context of the *Yajña*.

<i>agni</i>	- fire
<i>ahuti</i>	- offering of ingredients into the fire of the <i>yajña</i> .
<i>apaurusheya</i>	- divine in origin
<i>āśrama</i>	- stage of life, place of religious learning
<i>atithi</i>	- guest, visitor
<i>ātma</i>	- soul, spirit, the self, God
<i>Aum</i>	- principal name of God
<i>bhūta</i>	- element, substance, matter
<i>Brahma</i>	- Creator
<i>brahmacarya</i>	- student life, celibacy, bachelorhood
<i>Brahman</i>	- God, Supreme Reality
<i>brāhmaṇa</i>	- one of the four classes of society, priest, man of wisdom
<i>brahmin</i>	- priestly class
<i>dāna</i>	- donation, charity, to give
<i>Deva</i>	- God, Divine or enlightened person

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<i>deva puja</i>	- prayer to God
<i>Gāyatrī</i>	- one of the most sacred Vedic mantras
<i>ghī</i>	- clarified butter
<i>grihastha</i>	- householder
<i>grihastha āsrama</i>	- the stage of the householder
<i>guru</i>	- teacher
<i>havan kund</i>	- a rectangular, hollowed receptacle
<i>havi</i>	- oblation
<i>Indra</i>	- Almighty, sun, commander
<i>jīva</i>	- the soul, spirit, life
<i>jyoti</i>	- light, flame, rays
<i>kṣatriya</i>	- warrior, one of the four classes of society, ruling or fighting class.
<i>mahā</i>	- great
<i>mahāyajña</i>	- the main yajña, great duty
<i>mantra</i>	- a verse from the Veda, sacred word
<i>manusya</i>	- human being
<i>mokṣa</i>	- liberation, salvation, release
<i>nābhi</i>	- navel
<i>Om</i>	- Principal name of God
<i>pañca</i>	- five

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<i>paramparā</i>	- relationship
<i>pitṛ</i>	- learned people, parents, aged, relatives
<i>Prajapati</i>	- Lord of the people, God
<i>prāṇa</i>	- life force, life energy, vital energy
<i>Puruṣa</i>	- God, Supreme Being, man
<i>ṛṣi</i>	- sage, seer
<i>sāmagrī</i>	- herbal ingredients used as offerings in the <i>yajña</i>
<i>saṃhitās</i>	- collections
<i>sangati karana</i>	- bringing together
<i>sannyāsa āśrama</i>	- stage of life of complete renunciation of all worldly attachments.
<i>sannyāsi</i>	- ascetic
<i>sanskāras</i>	- sacraments, ceremonies
<i>śānti</i>	- peace
<i>śānti pātha</i>	- hymn of peace
<i>śiṣya</i>	- pupil, student
<i>soma</i>	- devotional joy, moon, bliss
<i>śruti</i>	- that which could be heard
<i>śudra</i>	- a labourer, one of the four classes of society

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<i>sūkta</i>	- hymn, canto
<i>Surya</i>	- sun, God as the giver of light, Creator
<i>swa</i>	- self
<i>swāhā</i>	- oblation, offering in the <i>yajna</i>
<i>vāṇaprasthi</i>	- a recluse, a hermit
<i>vaiśya</i>	- trading and agricultural class of society
<i>Veda</i>	- revealed knowledge, authentic scriptures of the Hindus.
<i>virāt</i>	- macrocosm, cosmic intelligence, most luminous world.
<i>yajña</i>	- sacred fire, sacrifice, to put together
<i>yajña bandhu</i>	- sacrificial bond
<i>yajñopavita</i>	- sacred thread

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The Hindu religion encompasses the social, moral, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human beings and presents an integral view of life. Hinduism is thus a total way of life, a world view, a philosophy and a religion.

The aim of this study is to investigate the presence of gestural and oral expressions in the performance of the *yajña* within a Vedic context. There are basically two research questions that will be addressed in this study.

1. What is the concept of the *yajña* in Hinduism within the Vedic context?
2. How can the theory of orality as propounded by Marcel Jousse be used to interpret the presence of gestural and oral expressions in the performance of the *yajña*?

In this chapter the concept "Hinduism" is discussed with a view to illustrating its diversity of views, belief systems, faiths and ideas. The *yajña* which is perceived as a symbol and representative of the whole of the Vedic culture is also introduced.

Hinduism is concerned with the whole being in all the private and social facets. It is also concerned with the individual as one unit of life in the vast circle of not only nature but of the universe. Through a system of rules governing conduct in accordance with one's own development and one's position in society, a complex framework of duty and obligation is



formulated to take the individual to progressively higher levels of spiritual development and ultimately to liberation (*Mokṣa*) from the cycle of birth and death. (Seereeram,1994:1-3)

According to Vedic teachings, an individual's life is divided into four stages or *āśramas*. First is *Brahmacarya* (student life), when the youth lives with his teacher and receives both religious and secular instruction. The youth is trained in self-control and acquires such virtues as chastity, truthfulness, faith and self-surrender.

The next stage is *Grihastha* (married life). The chief injunction for this stage is to practise the ritualistic sacrifices (*yajña*) as explained in the Vedas. The Vedas declare that human beings owe debts, both to the world and to God and certain duties must be discharged in repayment of their five debts: viz. *Brahma Yajña*, *Deva Yajña*, *Pitr Yajña*, *Atithi Yajña* and *Bhūta Yajña*. (These five duties are discussed in chapter two). It must be emphasised that these duties must not be performed for the purpose of gaining selfish ends. They are to be performed for the sake of purifying the heart and as the obligatory duty of a righteous person.

The third stage is called *Vānaprastha* (retirement stage). Here, the individual is no longer required to adhere to ritualism, but is enjoined to follow the *Āranyakas* (symbolic meditation).

According to Vedalankar (1979:59), the relinquishing of family duties, the severing of worldly attachments and a self imposed discipline of austerity and meditation are the requirements of the *Vānaprastha Āśrama*. The important purpose in the life of the *Vānaprasthi* (person in the

*Vānaprastha āśrama*) is to be of service to everybody. He renounces all worldly attachments and finally enters *Samnyāsa Āśrama* (life of complete renunciation of all worldly attachments). As this stage is bound neither by work nor desire, but is dedicated wholly to acquiring the knowledge of *Brahman* (God). According to Vedic teaching, this monastic life is the highest stage an individual may attain.

Parenthetically, it may be said that the daily life and conduct of Hindus even today is guided by the injunctions of the *Vedas*. In the words of Professor Das Gupta, "The laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present day, are said to be but mere systematized memories of old Vedic teachings and are held to be obligatory on their authority".

Varma (1926:11) further emphasises that Indian Culture on the whole believes in the wholesome refinement of the human being through different *Sanskāras* (sacraments), which serve as reminders at different stages of life to an individual about duties and obligations towards the family and society and at the same time prepares the individual for his own upliftment. An average Hindu still believes, that the improvement and refinement in life is an incessant and continuous process and that no *Sanskāra* is supposed to have been performed, if it is done without being accompanied by *yajña*: a symbol and representative of the whole of the Vedic Culture.

The *yajña* becomes an integral component within the ambit of the sixteen Vedic *Sanskāras* (sacraments). The sixteen *Sanskāras* give direction to life at every crucial stage. The initial *Sanskāra* marks the beginning of life of

the individual and the final *Sanskāra* is performed at the time of death. Vedalankar (1979:91-94) outlines the sixteen *Sanskāras* as follows:

### 1. *GARBHĀDHĀNA*

This *sanskāra* follows the wedding ceremony when the couple decide to be blessed with a child. The couple pray for a healthy and noble child.

### 2. *PUNSAVANA*

Three months after conception, the *Punsavana sanskāra* is performed to ensure the sound development of the child in its embryo stage.

### 3. *SIMANTONNAYANA*

For the full development of the organs of the embryo, *Simantonnayana* is performed six or eight months after conception.

### 4. *JĀTAKARMA*

*Jātakarma* is performed on the day the child is born, to welcome the child into the world.

### 5. *NĀMAKARAN*

On the eleventh day after the birth, the *Nāmakaran sanskāra* is performed

and the child is given a name.

## 6. NÍSKRAMANA

After the fourth month, *Nískramana* is performed. The child is taken out in the open air for its acquaintance with nature. A prayer is performed for the long life of the child.

## 7. ANNAPRASÁNA

This *sanskāra* is performed when the teeth begin to appear between the sixth and the eighth month. It is at this stage that the child is introduced to solid food.

## 8. CHŪDAKARMA

This *sanskāra* is performed at any time from the first to the third year when all the hair from the child's head is removed for the first time. A prayer for good health and sound mental development is conducted.

## 9. KARNAVEDHA

When the child is three years of age, this *sanskāra* is performed by piercing the lower lobes of his ears and a prayer is conducted for the child's physical well - being.

## 10. UPANAYANA

*Upanayana* is performed any time from the age of five to eight years. *Upanayana* means getting closer to someone. Having performed the *Upanayana sanskāra*, the child is placed in the care of the *guru* (teacher). The child is given the *yajñopavit* (sacred thread) which consists of three separate strands. The sacred thread symbolises the vow of the child to follow a path of life as laid down by the scriptures. Celibacy is of prime importance in the life of a student. He has to exercise self-restraint and abstain from all forms of indulgence. Formal education commences immediately after this *sanskāra*. The three strands of the sacred thread represent the three letters of A U M. The three strands also denote the three disciplines of life, namely, knowledge, action and devotion. The student adopts a rigorous code of conduct for the attainment of a virtuous and noble life.

## 11. VEDĀRAMBHA

Immediately after the *Upanayana*, the *Vedārambha sanskāra* is performed. At this stage, the student commences with the study of spiritual knowledge as contained in the Vedas. The student fervently prays for the attainment of a sound intellect.

## 12. SAMĀVARTANA

*Samāvartana* is performed between the twenty-first to the twenty-fifth year, when the student has completed his studies. The student who has

now graduated, begins a new life of self-reliance and independence. The student now participates fully in the social and the economic life of the community.

### 13. VIVĀHA

After having completed the stage of celibacy, the student may decide to marry and move to the next stage in life, which is that of the householder. It is at this stage that the *Vivāha Sanskāra* is performed. Two individuals who had lived independently now form a life-long companionship. It becomes a life of unity based on perfect harmony.

### 14. VĀNAPRASTHA

At the age of fifty-one years, the householder stage (*Grihastha-Āśrama*) is completed and the renunciation stage (*Vānaprastha-Āśrama*) now begins. The individual hands over all his family responsibilities to his son and thus makes way for the succeeding generation. He is then free to follow a life of austerity and meditation.

### 15. SANNYĀSA

This *sanskāra* is performed when the individual renounces his wealth, family ties and desires for fame. A saffron robe of a *sannyāsi* (ascetic) which is a symbol of a life of austerity is worn by the individual. He renounces all worldly attachments and his outlook becomes completely universal.

## 16. ANTYES THI

After death, when the body is cremated, the *Antyesthi sanskāra* is performed. Prayers are recited for the peace of the departed soul and for the comfort of the members of the bereaved family. Cremation is the best way for the disposal of the dead body. When the body is consumed by the fire, the five elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air and ether once more become a part of nature.

*Yajña* is the sole and crucial symbol of Vedic Culture. In Vedic view, *yajña* interlinks the cosmos , the individual, the life, the origin and dissolution of creation and almost everything.

In the Rgvedic Hymn 10,90 (*Puruṣa Sūkta*), the origin and dissolution of the whole of cosmos, with all of its aspects is been explained as the result of the cosmic *yajña*. Even the presence of the Supreme Creator can be felt only if we restructure the whole of the imagery on the basis of *yajña*. According to the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, it is also this *yajña*, which is the source of origin or expression of knowledge, as represented by the Vedas, as also of the creation of animate, inanimate, botanical, human and animal life, along with that of different seasons and planets. Even the human social structure comes out of this *yajña*.

In the very first *mantra* (stanza), of the first Hymn of the Rg Veda, *Agni* (Cosmic Energy), is appreciated as the carrier of the process of *yajña* and also the instrument in performing the *Sanskāras* (sacraments). The

sacrificial fire becomes the messenger between the divine powers and the devotees as well as the representative of Supreme Divine power, i.e. *Puruṣa*. *Yajña* is performed through *Agni*, because it then becomes the instrument, the object and the performer of *yajña*.

According to Varma (1926:15), the *Yajña* and the Vedas are the two fundamental integrals of the Vedic culture. Manu, the greatest Vedic lawgiver, declared the Vedas as the source head of all the knowledge about human behaviour.

Since the Vedas were repeated by individuals or groups in an oral society, the composition had to be structured to facilitate memorisation. The Vedas contain oral style elements such as repetition, alliteration, symbolism, sound and rhythmic patterns, etc. These mnemotechnical devices were invaluable tools in the oral tradition which was the only means of transmission of the Vedic texts from generation to generation.

Any discussion on oral tradition which is associated with oral societies must include the contributions made by the great French scholar Marcel Jousse who used anthropological laws to explain the manner in which man expresses himself in the universe. In his book, "Oral Style", Marcel Jousse identified the characteristics of Anthropological Oral Global Style as "Mimism", "Rhythmism", "Bilateralism" and "Formalism". Jousse demonstrated these anthropological laws in a wide range of cultural milieus throughout the ages. He identified the memorising properties and the way in which they influence the relationships and behaviours of those living in such cultural milieus.



In the course of this dissertation, it will be seen that the principles and concepts governing oral style expressions are applicable to the study of the *yajña*.

## CHAPTER TWO

# EXPLANATION OF THE FIVE *MAHĀYAJÑAS*

### 2.1 DEFINITION OF THE WORD "YAJÑA"

The word *yajña* is derived from the root 'yaj' which has three meanings:-

1. Prayer to God (*Deva Puja*): respecting learned persons and making beneficial use of objects like water, fire and earth.
2. Unification (*Sangati Karana*): coming together for the sake of unified action for the good of all; classifying things according to their characteristics.
3. Religious Giving (*Dāna*): using one's intelligence, strength and wealth etc. in the spirit of service for the good of all.

The meaning of *yajña* therefore is to do good for all by performing actions collectively and without any selfish motive. When any action is performed with the attitude of serving, one is not bound by the fruits of such actions because they are consecrated, pure and free from the desires of the world. (Vedalankar:1986:83).

It is not easy for people to forsake their own interests and work towards the interests of others or of society as a whole. Their egocentric tendencies do not allow them to do so easily. Therefore, mankind has to be trained and inspired towards these noble ideals and the mind and intellect must

be directed towards this path. In order to bring about a total change in the whole perception of life and to provide human beings with this new enlightened viewpoint, a programme of daily contemplation and continuous study of religious scriptures is essential. Only when the individual fully understands this concept and makes a conscious effort to lead his life in accordance with these lofty ideals, would there occur a total transformation in the inherent nature and outlook of life. The individual will then renounce personal interests and become engrossed in activities that are in the interest of society. (Vedalankar:1985:133)

Hindu religion and its exponents - the enlightened *ṛsis* (sages) have devised a unique system to bring about this transformation in the individual. This system is well known in Hindu society as the Five Great Duties or *Mahāyajñas*. It is essential to understand the philosophical and social implications of these Five Great Duties and what they require of the individual.

According to Vedalankar (1985:133) *yajña* refers to a religious rite where fire is ignited and clarified butter and other herbal ingredients are offered as oblation into the fire. This kind of religious rite is however, merely an outward symbolic meaning translated into action. But its more relevant and simplistic meaning is to sacrifice one's self interest and act for the good of others. Oblations in these sacrificial rites are made to the accompaniment of the word "*swāhā*". The symbolic meaning of this word "*swāhā*" is the renunciation of personal interest and dedication to the welfare of others. At the same time the words "*idamagnaye idanna mama*" are also chanted meaning, "whatever I am doing is not for my own interest but for the fire '*agni*'. This is for *Agni*, this is not mine".

Fire symbolises the awakening of ideals in the individual, the spark that ignites the enthusiasm to attain the goals desired by individuals as a service to humanity. Thus it becomes clear that *yajña* means obligatory deeds, deeds performed as a sacred duty for the well-being of all people and without the selfish interests of the performer.

## 2.2 THE ORIGIN OF YAJÑA AS REFLECTED IN THE *PURUṢA SŪKTA*

All the universal activity from its creation to its dissolution, is portrayed as a *yajña*. Just as we gather certain ingredients to perform a *yajña*, which dissolves them and then transforms them into new forms of creation and thus, becomes the source of a continuous recycling activity. In the same way, all life and creation starts within the same element, i.e. *Puruṣa* or Self and after performing all its duties, dissolves into that, only to start the same process a fresh (Varma:1981:XXIV).

Varma (1981:1) declares in quite unambiguous terms that all creation starts from one and the only source, i.e. *Puruṣa* or the conscious element. But because of the great prowess and the many facets of this Self, it is praised or described in different ways. The Ṛgvedic *Puruṣa* as described in the "*Puruṣa Sūkta*" has been explained as *Brahman* or as God. The concept of *Brahman* represents an all enveloping phenomenon. This hymn (*Sūkta*) is the most important one from the point of view of the metaphysical speculation of the vedic seers. They looked at the whole of the universal phenomenon being born, sustained and supervised by the only one conscious element i.e. *Puruṣa*. According to western scholars the whole of the idea, as narrated in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, seems to have taken inspiration and cue from a very primitive idea about the "Giant God". This Giant

God becomes the source head of all, the universal creativity and activity (Varma:1981:24).

The concept of the Giant God is generally found in almost all the known ideologies, though acceptable in their primitive state only. The fact that the story of creation starts from darkness or mist, creating a Giant God out of it and different universal physical phenomena coming into existence from the body parts of the sacrificed or "killed" Giant God, explains the phenomenon of the creation of the universe.

The R̥g Veda accepts this mist phenomenon in two separate *s̥uktas* (hymns) though it has been recognised there in the form of chaos. The famous *Nasadiya* and *Hiranyagarbha Suktas* explain this phenomenon in detail. However, I will confine myself to the study of the "*Puruṣa Sūkta*" only.

The *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the R̥g Veda describes the Giant God as having a thousand each of heads, eyes and legs. This God is named as **Puruṣa**. The dimension of this God has been stated to be all-enveloping and still exceeding the creation's limits.

In another stanza of the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, *Puruṣa* is stated to be tied down as a sacrificed animal, waiting for his own sacrifice. In fact, this *Puruṣa* was offered in a *yajña*. This '*yajña*' *Puruṣa* was sacrificed in the flames of that great *yajña*. In the intervening and remaining hymn, it has been narrated in different ways that all the creation started out of this sacrificed *Puruṣa* God. It is stated to be at the root of all sorts of creation: physical or metaphysical. Nothing remains out of its reach - living or non living

creation, society, the universe and knowledge etc.

According to the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, "All that was past, that is present or will be created in future, whether it be mortal or immortal and whether it grows with food or even without it, comes out of *Puruṣa* as its own manifestation. Though the dimension of *Puruṣa* far exceeds that of his creation, it is only one fourth of him that engages itself in the whole of this creative phenomenon; the remaining three fourths of him is far above this creative activity. It is this one fourth, which generates the activity here and is also at the source of all the eating and non-eating creation. First of all, it was *Vīrat*, which took its birth from the one-fourth of *Puruṣa*.

But this *Vīrat*, again gave birth to *Puruṣa*, who spontaneously with its birth spread over the whole of the vast universe. And the Moon was born out of his mind, Sun from his eyes, and *Indra* and *Agni* from his mouth, and Wind and Breath from his *Prāṇa*, Space was born out of his navel, Heaven from his head, Earth from his feet and Directions from his ears. Thus, Vedic seers, imagined the various creations as all coming out of *Puruṣa* only.

The different seasons have also been described as part of this creation phenomenon. All the animate creations have been described as coming out of him, while all the Vedas and all the knowledge are said to be being born out of him.

In the last stanza of the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, the *Puruṣa* is stated to be *yaज्ञā* itself. It has been stated clearly that the gods employed *yaज्ञā* as an instrument for performing a bigger sacrifice, but this was at the beginning

only'.

It is most befitting in this context to have a look at a few selected translations of the *Puruṣa Sūkta*.

### 2.3 SELECTED TRANSLATIONS OF THE *PURUṢA SŪKTA*

1. All which is 'present' is *Puruṣa*, as is also that which was in the 'past' and which will even occur in the 'future'. He is the Lord of 'immortality' as of that which grows with or without food. In other words, 'He is the Lord of mortal and immortal elements, alike'.

2. This much is the extent of *Puruṣa* and he is far greater than this. All the beings make only one-fourth of his extent, three-fourth of it remaining in the heavens as immortal. (All the perceptible creation involves only one fourth of his totality).

3. Three quarters of this heavenly *Puruṣa* rose above, while the remaining one quarter reappeared here in the form of the creation. It was this one quarter, which spread out into all directions and pervaded into all the eating creatures (its own creations).

4. When the gods prepared for the *yajna* by making this *Puruṣa* as *Havis*; i.e. the offering, the Spring became 'ghī', the Summer as 'sacrificial wood' and Winter as 'offering'. They (the gods) put that *Puruṣa* in the flames of that *Yajña*, who was born (or became manifest) before anything else.

5. From that all-absorbing sacrifice, first of all the 'ghī' came out in the

form of drops. It was this sacrifice, which gave birth to the different species of animals, whether they live in the air, in the woods or in the villages. Here, the 'ghī' symbolises 'all the food' while different kinds of animals represent all creations (Varma:1981:29-31).

Vedalankar (1981:82) further elaborated that the whole of society was thought to be representative of *Puruṣa*. According to the gods, *Brāhmaṇa* was his mouth, the *Kṣatriya* became his arms and the *Vaiśya* became his thighs. The *Sudra* was born from his feet.

In human society the *Brāhmaṇas* were assigned the position of the mouth. In this instance, the mouth refers to the entire region above the throat. This region comprises the five sense organs. One of the chief means of acquiring knowledge is through the organ of speech, which is located in the mouth. Thus the mouth on the one hand is the means of acquiring knowledge while on the other hand it is also an organ through which knowledge is imparted. In the same way, one section of the human society acquires knowledge and also propagates it. This section of society primarily pursues knowledge. It is not the aim of this class to seek political power, wealth or to become physically strong. Thus the intellectual class which acquired and cultivated knowledge is known as *Brāhmaṇas*.

The second division of the society is called the *Kṣatriyas* which is related to the arms of the human body. The arms are characterized by their ability to hold and protect against any attack on the body and to fight back. In society, the *Kṣatriyas* are its protectors. A *Kṣatriya* is one who saves the people from suffering and calamities and protects them from fear, injustice



and cruelty. The *Kṣatriya* governs the people and affords them his protection through political rule.

The third division of the society is the *Vaiśyas*, which corresponds to the middle section, the lower and upper abdominal region where the vital organs are located, and the thighs of the body. Food and water are received by this part of the human body, then digested and temporarily stored and thereafter are distributed to supply nourishment to the whole body. The reproductive organs are also situated in this area. The *Vaiśya* division of society is concerned primarily with the production of food, wealth and goods. It accumulates these and then distributes them throughout the country. The *Vaiśyas* are merchants and traders, artisans and industrialists, agriculturalists and pastoralists. Just as man falls ill and suffers from all kinds of illnesses, likewise if the *Vaiśyas* accumulate excessive wealth wrongfully and do not distribute it justly and equitably, then social ills result and conflict and chaotic conditions prevail and rebellion erupts.

Finally the fourth division of the society is the *Śūdras*, which is the hardworking manual labourer class engaged in physical labour. This division is compared with the feet of the human body. Interaction can only occur through the movement of the feet. In an analogous way, the labouring class contributes towards social mobility and brings about economic prosperity. Without physical labour, society becomes crippled. Just as a crippled man becomes a burden to society because of immobility, society without healthy and diligent physical labourers becomes poor and decrepit. The physical labouring class is known as *Śūdra*. *Śūdra* means one who moves to alleviate the suffering of people and serve mankind.

The divisions of human society are related to the parts of the human body because these four divisions together contribute equally to make society complete and perfect in every way.

Each class is an important and integral part of society and only when there is co-operation and harmonious relationship amongst all classes can society become healthy and happiness prevail. All the parts of the body, the head, arms, stomach, thighs and feet in their respective positions perform their functions. No organ is superior or inferior to the other. If one organ becomes diseased, then its symptoms are transmitted throughout the whole body and makes it suffer from weakness and ill health. Similarly, only when the four classes of society co-operate with each other then only the society becomes happy and content. The whole of society has to suffer hardship if one class remains weak or neglects its functions.

Thus in the course of the symbolic cosmic *yajña* of the Supreme Being, the scholars and sages undertook the *yajña* of organising society. With this object they gave significance and priority to the formulation of fundamental laws and behaviour codes that promoted social stability and cohesiveness. Subscribing to these prescribed rules, man became elevated, civilized and happy and his self-esteem increased so much so, that the happiness and peace that were enjoyed by sages and great men from the beginning came within the experience of the whole society.

Vedalankar (1981:82) states that the *Puruṣa Sūkta* or hymn of the *Puruṣa* is of the greatest significance in the Vedic literature. The Hymn appears in the Yajur Veda (Chapter 31) and the R̥g Veda (Book 10 Hymn 10). This

hymn deals at length with the concept of *Puruṣa* which may be said to be equivalent to the concepts contained in the terms 'Supreme Being' and the 'Supreme Entity' and the form in which He manifests himself and his creations. It also speculates on the origin of the universe, the manner in which the human society can be organised and its prescribed goals of humanity.

The word '*Puruṣa*' is derived from the Sanskrit verb '*priy*' which means 'to fill'. The word *Puruṣa* thus means one who exists and pervades the entire universe. It could also mean one who lives in a '*pur*' or a fortified city. This city is likened to a '*pur*' in which the Supreme Being or the Supreme Entity dwells. This analogy is extended further to describe the human body as a '*pur*' or city, with the soul or *Jīva* (*ātmā*) residing within it and also referred to as the "*Puruṣa*". So *Puruṣa* is the Being or Supreme Reality which resides in the heart of all beings. (Vedalankar:1981:70).

The *Puruṣa* or the Supreme Being has countless numbers of heads, eyes and legs and not only envelopes the whole universe but also extends beyond it by ten fingers. The language is metaphorical and seeks to convey the majesty, the power and the capacity of *Puruṣa*. This really means that *Puruṣa* is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient and these attributes are illustrated in the use of the expression 'countless number of heads, eyes and legs' and further that the immeasurable power is concentrated in the one Supreme Being.

## 2.4 THE PĀNCA-MAHĀ-YAJÑĀ (THE FIVE MAIN DAILY DUTIES)

In ancient times, Hindu theologians had a passion for classification. Duty

was accordingly divided into compulsory and optional duty. Compulsory duty was again divided into five and made into daily duties which are required to be performed for the welfare and progress of society and the improvement of individual character.

Vedalkar (1985:136) states that the five great duties that transform individual self-interest into the interest of the society provide the individual with a new purpose in life. They further broaden his outlook by making him aware of his responsibilities towards all of mankind as well as the animal kingdom. In this way, these five duties represent a sacred process to bring about complete change in the individual.

The Manu Smriti, a chief source of Hindu law and Hindu ethics says, "Teaching and studying the Veda is our duty to the sages; supplying food and water our duty to our parents; offering oblations to the fire our duty to nature; giving grain and other food our duty to the animal kingdom; and treating guests honourably our duty to guests."

(Seereeram:1994:107).

This injunction was emphasised by Manu in another chapter of his Smriti as follows -

"Let a man constantly perform to the best of his ability his duty, to learned people, to nature, to animals, to guests and to his parents."

(Seereeram:1994:107)

The duties enumerated by Manu have been labelled the *Pañca- Mahā-Yajña* or the Five Main Daily Duties which are known as:-

1. ***Brahma Yajña*** : Prayer, meditation and study of the scriptures.
2. ***Deva Yajña*** : Performance of *Agnihotra (havan)*.
3. ***Pitr Yajña*** : Service to mother, father and elders.
4. ***Atithi Yajña*** : Hospitality and service to the learned ones and visitors.
5. ***Bhūta Yajña*** : Service to living beings.

#### 2.4.1. ***BRAHMA YAJÑA***

***Brahma*** symbolises knowledge and Veda also means knowledge. The alternate meaning of ***Brahma*** is Supreme Being, the Absolute Reality. This ***Brahma Yajña*** directs an individual towards his primary obligation of life, namely the acquisition of knowledge which is a prerequisite for progress in general. Without knowledge there is no progress, it is difficult to differentiate between right and wrong and there is no direction or purpose in life. Therefore the first duty of every individual is the acquisition of knowledge. Man possesses inherent animal tendencies. Knowledge is fundamental to suppress these tendencies for man to evolve beyond the animal kingdom.

Knowledge embraces a wide range of subjects and disciplines for it is multi-facted and multi-dimensional. This poses a complex problem - What kind of knowledge should an individual acquire? General knowledge of

the world and physical environment in which he lives as well as the natural physical resources upon which so much of man's progress and prosperity rests, is imperative. However, apart from this formal education covering a wide spectrum of fields and disciplines, spiritual knowledge of the Vedas is vitally important to give an individual a more balanced perception of life and existence.

Vedalankar (1985:137) describes the Veda as that knowledge emanating from the Supreme Being, the truths revealed to the holy seers and ascetics who were dispassionate and pure and who totally renounced the worldly life in favour of deep spiritual enlightenment and a search for truth. By the acquisition of knowledge of the Vedas, the intellectual becomes cleansed and the individual is inspired to seek the truth and to forsake self-interest. Thus *Brahma yajña* embraces a period of regular, sustained study of the Vedas and intense daily contemplation on the truth contained in the scriptures so that the mind does not become debased for man to succumb to selfishness and deceit in this worldly life but to forever strive to seek the Truth. The ultimate form of Truth is God, the Supreme Entity. Thus, the fundamental meaning of *Brahma Yajña* is to search for the Truth, the Supreme Being through the study of the scriptures. Therefore, it is vital to develop a habit of the study of the scriptures daily in order to satisfy the spiritual craving in addition to other categories of reading either for the purpose of knowledge or for pleasure.

An individual should daily contemplate and meditate on the Supreme Existence. Therefore *Brahma Yajña* is also described as *Samdhya*. The path of meditation and study by which man will perceive the Supreme Reality while his faith in His Existence will give him inner strength and

patience to seek the Truth is only one aspect of *Brahma Yajña*.

The Supreme Reality is an abstract intangible form and does not manifest itself. An individual has to perceive His Existence within himself. Therefore, even if one is unable to meditate on the Supreme Existence, the least one can do is fulfil the sacred duty of seeking the Truth. By this dedication someday the individual will realise the essence of the Truth.

Through daily prayer and meditation not only the mind becomes cleaned and pure but it develops inner strength and integrity. For this reason *Brahma Yajña* is a daily duty of each and every individual for a daily ritual of some study of the scriptures is imperative.

#### 2.4.2 DEVA YAJÑA

*Deva Yajña* according to Seereeram (1994:107) consists of purification of the air by the burning of *ghī*, camphor and other medicinal substances, the process being called *Havan* or *Agni-hotra* or *Homa*. This *yajña* focuses our minds on the need for a clean and healthy environment. It also reinforces the virtues of *Brahma Yajña* by enjoining upon us the need for association with those who are learned, morally pure and upright. It also assists in promoting rain which supports life. *Brahma Yajña* and *Deva Yajña* should be performed at sunrise and at sunset.

Vedalankar (1985:139) adds that *Deva Yajña* is synonymous with a symbolic sacrifice that every householder jointly with his wife and children is enjoined to perform. The principal idealistic concept of this sacrifice is '*idanna mama*' meaning 'This is not mine. Whatever I possess,

Whatever I earn, Whatever I spend and Whatever I am regarded as owner of, all this is not mine alone but is for the welfare of all. We shall all share in it for it is acquired through the will of God. In the final analysis, it is the result of the combined effort and co-operation of a number of people in addition to my labour. Even I do not enjoy the right to partake of food without my physical effort. Therefore, apart from using it myself and my family, I should also use it for the welfare of others. I am only entitled to use a fraction of my wealth necessary for my livelihood'. This is the main philosophy of *Deva yajña* or sacrifice.

*Deva yajña* is an obligatory duty, a commitment of a householder. There are two principal participants viz. husband and wife - in the life of a householder. No sooner the *Grihastha āśrama* (stage of the householder) commences then the individual's '*swa*' or ego begins to evolve. Here an individual loses his individuality and he becomes eager to accept and be absorbed in another person. In this way, a family is established. This family constitutes the smallest unit of social organisation. Before marriage the bridegroom and the bride led independent lives and their interests were primarily self-centred and divergent. They did not have any commitment in respect of each other. Marriage means the renouncing of individuality or, in another sense, it marks the stage when one is ready to embrace others within oneself. During the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom and the bride hold each others' hands and make mutual promises that 'I am you' and 'you are mine'. In this way, through marriage the '*swa*' or 'ego' develops further in that I am not one but we are two. It is indeed a great mathematical paradox of marriage that one plus one does not equal two but 'one'. This in fact signifies the unfolding of the ego of an individual.



Both the husband and the wife realise that hereforth 'I' does not refer to himself or herself exclusively but also embraces the other partner. This is the concept of 'oneness', the acme of romantic and spiritual love in which there is no room for dual existence in the sense that at the height of spiritual devotion there is total absorption - *Ātmā* and *Brahma*, although separate becomes one just as in the deep experience of love, there is no duality between husband and wife but total identity of self and oneness.

Thus upon the commencement of *Grihastha Āsrama*, total transformation in the individual begins to occur through the practical application of the concept of *Deva yajña*.

#### 2.4.3 PITR YAJÑA

*Pitr Yajña* requires us to serve learned people, eminent teachers and scholars, one's parents and the elderly. Just as our parents served us, we in turn, are required to serve them in their advanced years. The memory of one's dead ancestors may also be kept alive by suitable memorials but they no longer require physical service.

According to Dayanand (1973:150) *Pitr Yajña* is of two kinds. One is called *Tarpana*, the other *Shraddha*.

*Tarpana* is the act by means of which we seek to satisfy and make comfortable the learned, the *devas*, the *ṛṣis* and the *pitrs*.

*Shraddha* means to serve them faithfully and sincerely. These acts, *Tarpana* and *Shraddha*, are possible only when the learned are alive but

not when they are dead, for, in that case it is not possible to serve them, they being absent, and also, because the object of the act is defeated and it becomes a useless act. The teaching is that this act is to be performed with reference to the living alone because in their case only is service possible owing to both the server and the served being present at one and the same time and the same place. Those who are to be served are three - the *devas*, the *ṛsis* and the *pitṛs*.

Dayanand (1973:161) categorises two characteristics, viz. truth and falsehood which divide men into *devas* and *manusyas*. The *devas* resort to truthful acts, the *manusyas* to false speech, false thought and false action. Hence one, who renouncing falsehood accepts truth, is counted among the *devas*. One, who giving up truth resorts to falsehood, becomes a *manusya*. One should therefore, always speak the truth and act the truth. The *deva* who has taken a vow of truth becomes glorified among the glorious and the *manusya* goes down to the reverse state.

Vedalankar (1985:141) explains that *Brahma yajña* is a discipline for the development of the individual self while *Deva yajña* is for fostering the oneness and cohesion in a family unit. *Pitr yajña* on the other hand is a prescription for the inclusion of all the kinsman within your own unitary circle. Each and every householder therefore is enjoined to prescribe to this *Pitr yajña* for it is on the householder that the total responsibility and moral commitment of sustaining society rests.

In *Deva yajña* the husband and wife and their children form a small unitary circle. All their goals and interests more or less correspond thus generating a strong sense of family feeling and of belonging. The *Pitr*

*yajña* on the other hand suggests a further radial expansion of this circle of inter-relationships and interactions implicit in which is the inclusion of people other than members of your own family unit. They are not outsiders but they are also your own and share a common lineage. As such they represent a further extension of your own 'swa' or self. If you are fit and self-supporting then it is your obligation towards your aged parents now that they are unable to take care of and fend for themselves. To acknowledge this moral obligation, to take upon yourself the responsibility of their welfare is in fact *Pitr yajña*. *Pitr yajña* is the third major commitment of the householder from which there is no escape.

Today's skilled, educated and enlightened youth is the product of the combined efforts and individual contributions of many people on whom the prosperity of the society rests. For this reason, each individual should discharge his responsibility in respect of all these senior members of society. *Pitr yajña* thus defines for us this commitment. Our family members eg. parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters as well as in-law family members, all constitute elements of one large family. They all can be described as *Pitr*. It is no longer a question of two or four members of one unitary family unit but rather a large body of people. However, at the same time it is necessary to qualify that the responsibility of these large numbers of people does not devolve on your shoulders alone for, like you, there are other members within this greatly enlarged circle who more than happily share this responsibility. You also become associated with this function. Their diversified skills and combined energies are enormous. Each householder is therefore required to fulfill his duty in accordance with his specialized skills and talents. However, the care and well-being of your own immediate 'Pitr' family is your

responsibility. In addition, should an aged member within your extended circle for some reason or other become dependent, then it is your sacred duty to identify him as your own immediate family member and give him unreservedly all the physical support and loving attention that he needs. It is the sacred duty of a householder to ensure that no one is unhappy in his 'Pitr' circle, no one suffers from hunger and no one suffers disrespect, humiliation and indignities.

Aged deceased members also fall in the category of our 'Pitr'. To remember them we should think on their good deeds, follow in their footsteps and resolve to complete their unfinished tasks. All these constitute another aspect of *Pitr yajña*.

In caring for the 'Pitr' or aged people, it is inevitable that some of our self-interests will have to be renounced and some of what was perceived as personal freedom would disappear in discharging this sacred duty. However, despite this, we should happily tolerate this. This self sacrifice is *yajña* - the realization that real happiness lies in the sacrifice of your own interests for the well-being of others.

Thus this *Pitr yajña* defines the duties in respect of caring for the aged members within one's family circle. The caring of the aged should not be regarded as an awesome burden or be perceived as a bondage but rather as a sacred duty, a labour of love and a privilege. As a member of family and society one has to inevitably accept some restraints on personal freedom.

#### 2.4.4. *ATITHI YAJNA*

- *Atithi yajna* consists in receiving and entertaining appropriately, itinerant scholars, *yogis* and those who have renounced the world. By performing this duty one acquires knowledge and wisdom and bringing about understanding, peace and harmony throughout the world.

*Atithi yajna* indicates our obligations towards the entire human race. *Atithi* means those visitors who arrive at our house unexpectedly. *Atithi* also refers to an unknown visitor. That visitor may be a renowned scholar, an ascetic or a holy man, a student or even an unknown traveller from distant lands. He may even be a beggar with physical disabilities and totally dependent on your charity. To provide hospitality and shelter to these unexpected visitors and to see to their needs and comforts is a sacred duty of every householder. This is in fact *Atithi yajna*.

If an unknown person arrives unexpectedly, then we should display generosity to see to his comforts and needs. It is our duty and moral obligation to welcome unknown visitors warmly and ensure their comfort and provide them with sustenance.

Today, the socio-economic system has undergone considerable change with the result these days all activities and projects are geared primarily for profit and personal gain. In short, it is the sacred obligation of every man to ensure that no one goes hungry for this also is an important part of their *Atithi yajna* even though the provision of adequate facilities for

the care of these handicapped or poor people is regarded as the responsibility of society and government.

Thus if we examine the four *Mahā-yajñas* or duties, it becomes evident that a gradual development or maturity of the individual has been taking place in that he subjugates his own personal interests and dedicates himself for the well-being of others. In other words, the individual has unfolded himself to embrace all mankind within his own enlarged 'Swa' (Self). He is prepared to sacrifice his own comforts and happiness and is ready to give his life for others. This is the ideal concept of *yajña*. As a *Brahmachari* (Celibate) the individual was a single entity. Through marriage he embraces another individual as his own. Through *Deva yajña* he establishes the smallest social unit in the form of a family by extension of his 'Swa' (Self). By performing *Pitr yajña*, he includes his own relatives and family. However, by performing the *Atithi yajña*, he now embraces and identifies himself with the entire human race for his own 'Swa' to extend to all mankind. He now ceases to be an individual but becomes an integral member of society. By attaining this all encompassing viewpoint, it remains the inalienable duty of every householder to ensure that no human being goes hungry or is without shelter. In such a social system, there can be no cause for class struggle. All people can lead their lives in peace and harmony and mutual co-operation. Only this can be described as the ideal utopian system.

#### 2.4.5. BHŪTA YAJÑA

The first four *Mahā-yajñas* bring about a gradual step-by-step development of the individual who, by including all human beings within

the ambit of his own 'Swa' regards these as his own kinsmen. The individual has yet to take another step further for total emancipation of self. The fifth and final *Mahā-yajña* or *Bhūta yajña* helps develop a sense of identity or oneness with these creatures. *Bhūta* means animals. The care of these creatures should also be the concern of every householder.

Vedalankar (1985:147) states that of all the animals, human beings perceive themselves to be the best. Hindu Scriptures stress that the essence of life or soul inherent in human beings is also inherent in all animals. Just as man experiences happiness and suffers hunger pangs or thirst, the mute animals also experience the same happiness and pain, hunger and thirst. Just as man lives by the support and co-operation of his fellow man, in the same way mankind continues to progress through the help and contribution of these dumb creatures. For the service that man obtains from these mute animals, he should discharge his responsibilities towards them and treat them as humanly as possible. This is indeed a great and lofty vision. Thus *Bhūta yajña* is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world.

The scriptures advocate that before eating, man should take out a portion of his food for the animals and should also make arrangements that they do not suffer hunger or thirst. This is the essence of *Bhūta yajña*.

For this reason in Hinduism, the cow is widely accepted as a symbol of this *Bhūta yajña*. The cow sustains the entire human race without discrimination by giving her life-supporting milk. Therefore the Hindu religion regards the holy cow as the mother of mankind. To injure or kill a cow is therefore condemned as a sin of the highest order. There are

other domesticated animals just as useful to man as the cow. For the service that man obtains from these animals, it is the sacred duty of an understanding man to provide food and shelter for these mute animals and not to harm them.

Our scriptures declare very aptly :

"One who sees himself in all animals and sees all animals in himself does not show malice towards anybody" Yajur Veda (40-6).

"He who experiences happiness and suffering in all animals as in himself is a great ascetic." Gita (6-32).

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

Thus these five *Mahā-yajñas* namely *Brahma Yajña*, *Deva Yajña*, *Pitr Yajña*, *Atithi Yajña* and *Bhūta Yajña* change the relationship of the individual self with the whole of mankind as well as the animal kingdom. These *Mahā-yajñas* emancipate the self and direct his activities for the well-being of all. Here, a total stage-by-stage transformation takes place in the individual so much so that he is able to make the utopian ideal in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* "Mankind is one family" a reality during his lifetime. This is the ultimate success of the five great duties. It is indeed an extraordinary system expounded by Hinduism for the welfare of the whole world. For this reason they should not be regarded as duties for Hindus only. Each and every individual can subscribe to this social and philosophical viewpoint prescribed by the five great duties even though he/she prays in his/her own language and in accordance with the



precepts of his\her own religion. Anyone regardless of race, religion or country can subscribe to this noble ideal of obligation and commitment, a philosophical formula that identifies, integrates and disciplines man within a society to unite all mankind in a common goal, to promote social stability and cohesiveness and to co-ordinate all activities and generate mutual trust and respect. This is indeed a religion of mankind. If all people follow these precepts, then the turbulence and turmoil, conflicts and conflagration, revolt and revolution, oppression and aggression prevalent in the world today will cease so that each and every man and woman can live in peace, happiness, harmony and prosperity. Therefore, people should strive to make this utopian vision a reality on earth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MARCEL JOUSSE: HIS LIFE AND WORK

Any discussion on oral tradition, such as *Yajña*, which is associated with behaviour in an oral society, must include the contribution made by the great French Scholar Marcel Jousse. In this chapter, I will briefly outline the life and works of Marcel Jousse with particular emphasis on his theories of human expression, learning and memory.

This explanation of these theories will provide the theoretical framework for the identification of the presence of gestural and oral elements in the *Yajña*. (see Chapter Five).

#### 3.1 MARCEL JOUSSE: A BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

Marcel Jousse was born in 1886 in the Sarthe region, south-west of Paris, in France. He records that his earliest memories are the rhythmic rocking of his cradle to the singing of lullabies by his mother. His early childhood was strongly influenced by his mother and great grandmother, both of whom were oral people, having very little if any book learning. He records his admiration for the knowledge and wisdom of the oral community in which he first grew up. He remembers walking with the farmers who spoke knowledgeably about their crops and animal husbandry. He recalls the winter evenings spent in barns where the community gathered to sing and dance, and where the old people, especially the women, insisted on accuracy and fidelity in the reproduction of traditional songs and tales. He attended school at the local

Jesuit monastery from the age of five years, by which time he had already learned a great many things from his mother and other caretakers in his peasant community. Jousse proudly proclaimed his paysan (peasant) origins and status throughout his distinguished and erudite academic career.

Jousse entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1913 at the age of 27 years. He served in World War 1 as a captain, where his lack of concern for his own safety under fire earned him a reputation for total fearlessness. His courage and conviction were to stand him in good stead during a life characterised by academic battles during which he promoted and defended his inspired insights into the nature and function of human expression, learning and memory.

In 1925, Jousse published **LE STYLE ORALE** (Oral Style), which aroused great interest. Its novel "reconstruction and rehabilitation of orality" caused it to be named "The Jousse Bomb" (Sienaert 1990:92). Immediately after the publication of **The Oral Style**, Jousse was enthusiastically acclaimed. He was invited to give lectures in Rome. Of **The Oral Style**, Pope Pius XI said "..... it is a revolution, yet it is nothing but pure common sense". (Sienaert 1990:92).

Jousse was appointed to lecture on the Anthropology of Language at the University of Louvain in 1930, and in various institutions in Paris. In 1932, he was offered and filled the inaugural chair in Linguistic Anthropology at the Sorbonne, which he occupied until 1957, which marked the end of his teaching and academic career. It was at Sorbonne, that he created an ethnic laboratory to which students of a variety of linguistics, religious and

cultural persuasions gravitated to benefit from his unique insights and understandings.

After a life spent researching human gestural and verbal expression, it was sadly ironic that a debilitating stroke during the final four years of his life, rendered Jousse increasingly silent and uncommunicative. He died near his childhood home in the Sarthe region in 1961 at the age of 76 years.

### **3.2 JOUSSE'S ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Jousse showed early promise of a fascination with learning. At the age of seven, on a visit to the local museum in Le Mans, he records that he stood "rooted to the spot for perhaps two hours", in front of a mummified Egyptian Priestess, transfixed by the "small stiff drawings that formed a miniature procession" around the sarcophagus. (Jousse 1990:XXIV). In the light of this unusual fascination, it is not surprising that by the age of fifteen, Jousse had received a thorough grounding in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, which stood him in good stead in his later study of Philosophy, Semitics and Theology. By the time he was twenty, he was also fluent in English.

Jousse's sources for observation, verification and confirmation of his central intuition and conviction were manifold. He drew in the first instance from his youth in the oral peasant milieu of Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, and evoked his childhood memories of his near-illiterate mother who went to school for only three winter seasons, yet knew her gospel by heart and

chanted it for him rhythm-melodically. He regarded this peasant milieu as his primary laboratory, to which he returned periodically throughout his life.

His next encounter with the peasant milieu, was the study of the Amerindians while he was posted in the United States during World War 1. These experiences created life-long interest in what he called 'the ethnic laboratory'.

Jousse's formal studies included experimental phonetics and rhythmic. pathological, psychology and anthropology. These studies brought them into contact with kinetically and linguistically incapacitated patients, and stimulated and informed his interest in the teaching and learning of children.

Jousse also studied the graphic and chirographic testimonies of the past and present. All these experiences and studies revealed to him the similarities between the capacity for human memory and the devices that supported it which are deeply rooted in human language. Jousse's life-long preoccupation was to uncover the laws that govern this universal language from under its ethnic features and to identify the characteristics of the expression that flow from the universal law.

### **3.3 JOUSSE'S LAW OF HUMAN EXPRESSION: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF GESTE AND RHYTHM**

According to Jousse, the act of miming is the first expression of the human being. What humans mime - 'ex-press' - is what the world around them

`im-press' upon them. "Jousse conceives this universe as a dynamic whole in which all the parts interact constantly. They act, are being acted upon and react incessantly" (Sienaert 1990:91). Such is this interaction that humans apprehend meaning even before they are consciously aware of it. This unconscious awareness reverberates in him, which, when energised expresses itself in the form of a gesture, that which has been `im-pressed' and that which is `ex-pressed', Jousse terms `geste'. Thus Jousse identifies that "man is thus all gesture and gesture is the whole of man". (Sienaert:1990:95). As all forms of thought and expression and all human information is gestual, Jousse called this law **The Anthropology of Geste**.

Jousse further explains that those gestes follow one upon the other, energised in obedience to the innate human biological rhythm created by a series of concentrations and explosions of energy. Such was the law of the **Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm**.

A series of rhythmical gestes could constitute something akin to what we know as the grammatical proposition: `subject - verb - object', or as Jousse puts it: `the actor - acting on - the acted upon' which he identifies as the `propositional geste'.

Such `im-pressions' and `ex-pressions' can be manifest through any of the human sensory receptors and organs of expression. The `im-pressing geste' can be received through the eyes, ears, hands, skin, olfactory and gustatory senses, and can be `ex-pressing geste' can be manifest through the whole body and/or hands (corporeal-manual expression) or the speech organs (laryngo-buccal expression). Thus the laws of Corporeal-manual expression and laryngo-buccal expression were formulated.

In fact at the beginning, Jousse hypothesizes that man had at his disposal only corporeal-manual language, the capacity to express meaning with the body and the hands. This was later followed by the laryngo-buccal expression of meaning, the capacity to express meaning through the larynx and the lips. Laryngo-buccal expression prevailed because it was superior:

- \* it could be used in the dark
- \* it carried over distance
- \* it could be used while the hands were full

This insight led Jousse to posit the Anthropological Law. Corporeal-manual expression preceded and precedes the operation of Laryngo-buccal expression. Or in other terms, that signing and miming preceded and precedes speaking, even though speech seems to hold primacy.

Thereafter there were two languages in operation which were used concurrently and simultaneously, i.e. the languages of 'the body and the hands' and of 'the larynx and the lips'. Jousse perceived this dual language system in operation among the plains Indians in the USA, where meaning could be conveyed without the use of speech, and a motion of the head indicated a difference in the meaning of uttered sound. Jousse notes that spoken language is always accompanied by gestures, their role is, in such cases, naturally reduced, they become secondary, while it is voiced language that takes on the function of expressing and communicating. Manual gesticulation does however, make a contribution. It is easier to understand a person when we see his gestures. Laryngo-buccal gesticulation is accompanied by manual gestures which are not just

spontaneous expressions of emotions, but an indispensable element of language. He also observed variations of this mode of expression among children and the handicapped, and in ritual behaviours.

In all of the above, such ex-pression is immediate to the im-pression and is denoted as concrete expression in Jousse's words: "Man is gest(ur)e, gest(ur)e is man, thus putting the whole body at the disposal of thought". (1990:X1V).

In Chapter Five I will demonstrate the incident of these two languages, the 'corporeal-manual' and the 'laryngo-buccal' - the 'gestual' and the 'oral' in the performance of the *Yajña*.

### 3.4 THE CONCRETE, THE ALGEBRISED AND THE ALGEBROSED

The concrete nature of ex-pression is differentiated from the algebrised nature of ex-pression. This was another of Jousse's laws: Expression which is immediate to the human being is Concrete but that which is removed is Algebrised. Jousse coined the term 'algebrised' as a result of the insights gained from its studies in Algebra, where a symbol is used to represent, reduce and/or summarise something else. This was how Jousse perceived writing the written codified symbols of writing 'represented, reduced and/or summarised' the geste of 'the body and hands' and 'the lips and the larynx'. Jousse perceived writing as imperative and useful, but only insofar as it retained its semantic connection with its Concrete reality. Were this connection to be lost, the process would result in what was written having no meaning. This led to another of Jousse's laws: Where the connection between the concrete geste and the algebrised geste is lost.



Algebrosation results in the loss of meaning. This has particular bearing in respect of the performance of religious ritual in a linguistic form that is no longer in current use.

With the decline in the use and knowledge of the spoken vernacular among current participants in Hindu ritual, there is an increasing potential for the loss of meaning in ritual performance. This is disguised by the fact that the ritual is written down or 'algebrised'. The explanations that I provide in Chapter Five connect the meaning of the *Yajña* to its oral and gestural performance, thus addressing the potential for algebrosation.

### 3.5 JOUSSE'S LAW OF ORAL STYLE

Jousse identified the following laws of the Oral Style in his book **THE ORAL STYLE**, published in 1925. Jousse identified the Oral Style as a highly specific and specialised mode of language, the mnemonic function of which enables people who either have no writing or who favour the oral mode over the written, to keep cultural, social bureaucratic records, and recite them from memory.

The first of these laws pertains to **RHYTHMO-MIMICRY**:

Man by nature imitates others and the world in which he lives. He receives, registers and replays a multitude of im-pressions which are his actual experiences. Actions that are replayed in the individual are reflections of the universe. These actions are of necessity, rhythmic. All human gestures obey biological rhythms created by a concentration of energy, followed by a series of energetic explosions. The combination of

`Mimism' and `Rhythm' constitutes Rhythmo-mimicry.

The second of these laws pertains to **BILATERALISM**:

Man expresses himself bilaterally because of his bilateral constitution. Since man can only express himself in accordance with his physical structure, there is thus a tendency for him to favour movement from left to right, up and down, and back and forth. Jousse observed that there was a link between parallelism and bilateralism. The concept of parallelism could be grasped in the very structure of man because man is two sided.

Jousse observed that parallelism at once physiological, semantic and rhythmic, flows from the human bilateralism. It can be grasped in the very structure of man as a living mechanism and organism because man is two sided. This is the very foundation of balancing that we find everywhere in the spontaneous human being. Hence the parallelism that we find in the `Oral Style' compositions: parallelism of formulas, parallelism of recitatives, etc. all parallelism is set up by the body that oscillates symmetrically.

The psycho-physiological law of parallelism operates by making two propositional gestures balance: each element is parallel, Jousse calls it `balancing'. Each of the preceding rhythmic schemes is therefore `binary' constituted by two antithetic balancing. In other cases, the relationship between the two balancings can express equivalence or consequence. Quite often, the rhythmic schema is ternary, composed of three balancings, e.g.

**Youth staying awake**

**Old age asleep**

**Are very close to death.** (Jousse 1990:239).

This bilaterally is used co-operatively with rhythm, to further reinforce rhythmic performance of a wide range of daily tasks which require learning, understanding and memory.

He also notes that like this global and manual expression, man's verbal expression will tend to be bilateral, to balance symmetrically, following a physical and physiological need for equilibrium. Jousse mentions that the orally recorded accounts of cultural and social conventions are similarly bilaterally balanced in binary and ternary fashion.

The third of these laws pertains to **FORMULISM**:

With rhythmism and bilateralism interacting with each other, formulism is a natural progression. Mnemotechnical devices come into play arising from man's impressions, i.e. the universe playing in, so that man can replay out in expression. Formulae become structured through constant and repetitive use, e.g. parables, songs, nursery rhymes, etc.

The combination of mimism, rhythmism, bilateralism, and formulism form the base aspect of Marcel Jousse's Primary Learning Theory and the foundation of his Oral Style Expression. Oral Style Expression is profoundly rooted in the human psycho-physiological being. Hence, its great efficacy from the mnemotechnical point of view for, in it, the movement of the body, and voice contribute to the shaping of thought in

a memorizable form.

The above mentioned anthropological laws of 'Mimism', 'Rhythmism', 'Bilateralism' and 'Formulism' as propounded by Marcel Jousse are present in the *mantras* which are recited during the actual performance of the *Yajña*. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate the presence of oral and gestural elements in the performance of the *Yajña*.

It was Jousse's belief that the application of these universal laws would revitalise education and the expression of religious faith, and thus ensure a healthy and balanced society.

Jousse's insights and understandings of human learning, memory and modes of expressions are all the more valuable for his contribution to our understanding of the interaction between orality and literacy.

At this juncture, it must be emphasised that these mnemotechnical devices like alliteration, rhythmic balanced patterns, gestures, rhymes, propositional gestures, repetitions etc. have been particularly selected to assist in the explanation of the elements of orality in the *Yajña*. These devices have been used extensively to facilitate in the recitation and memorisation of the *mantras* during the actual performance of the *Yajña* which is explored in Chapter Five. However, any discussion on the *Yajña* should be contextualised in the Vedic era. It is in this light that Chapter Four embarks on a discussion of oral tradition. The Vedas, an exemplar of Hindu literature reflecting oral tradition is also discussed.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## ORAL TRADITION

### 4.1 Introduction

According to Jousse's (1990:243) apothegm :

**Man in a written style milieu  
is an eye that reads and forgets.  
Man in an oral style milieu  
is a mouth that recites and retains.**

Nkabinde (1976:269) states that oral tradition encapsulates the history, culture and social development of a people. It is often shrouded in mystery and an aura of heroism, wisdom, art, instruction, mystique, allegory or some actiological explanation of the world. "Winged words" originate in this atmosphere, and tend to be obscured by time, language and a people's self - perception. Consequently, a good knowledge of the language, history, culture and beliefs of a people is indispensable in the study of their oral tradition.

It is generally accepted that oral tradition has a didactic motivation or function. It is however, common knowledge that the didactic nature of oral tradition is not structured or formalised in any definite way.

Oral tradition that is performed like song and dance, the singing of praises, folktales and riddles also provide entertainment, recreation and it has an

aesthetic value.

Oral tradition tends to be structured linguistically and in its setting. The form and usage of idioms and proverbs are well known. It is fair to conclude that oral tradition has a fixed format and is performed in a particular context.

An important characteristic of oral tradition is that most of it transcends the cultural experience of the culture in which it occurs and is applicable to human experience in general.

Nkabinde (1976:272) elaborates that oral tradition uses the contemporary form of speech. This makes it difficult to "date" it. Nevertheless, it is common knowledge that none of the elements of this tradition are composed spontaneously during a performance, because all of them are generally well known to the community in which they are current. Each performance or narrative is, as it were, a re-enactment of something which exists in the communal heritage of a people and its historical consciousness. That is why the "minor" performers in oral tradition are continually engaged in a process of judging the authenticity of the rendition of praises, the performance of a song or the narration of a tale.

They are all active participants in a performance, both in their involvement in the action of the performance and in its evaluation. This situation obscures the history of the origin and development of oral tradition.

Tradition speaks through a myriad gestures and in different forms, eg. in

literature, in painting, in music, in dance, in ideology etc.

Mahapatra (1993:50) observes that oral traditions have not only characterized the larger part of the history of **homo sapiens** on this planet but have also been the repository of knowledge, ideas, cultural traits and information including that most vital aspect of human growth in ancient civilization, namely the sacral.

The oral word and the tradition it builds is intimately linked to ultimate questions of life and death, the intricate questions of existence and is thus linked to the world of faith and belief, in short, the sacral world. In all primary oral cultures and in most literate primary cultures, the sacral heavily depends on the utterance of the word. The village priest in most primitive societies has to recite, invoke, read aloud the enchanted words "the *mantras*", and the holy utterances. It must be noted that the strength of the sacral utterance is in the sound. Even in Christianity, the Bible, is required to be read aloud in liturgical service. God, after all, always "speaks" to human beings and never "writes" a letter to anyone. The letter kills, the spirit (breath, on which rides the spoken word) gives life.

#### **4.2. THE VEDAS - AN EXAMPLE OF HINDU LITERATURE REFLECTING ORAL TRADITION.**

Finnegan (1977:135) states that the Vedic literature of India provides a striking example of lengthy transmission. The Rg Veda itself is said to have been composed around 1500 - 1000 B.C. and was handed down by oral transmission for centuries. The religious and liturgical nature of the text has, it seems, made verbal memorisation imperative, and it is claimed

that even if all written versions were to be lost "a great portion of it could be recalled out of memory of the scholars and reciters" (Winternitz:1927:34) and "the text could be restored at once with complete accuracy" (Chadwick: 1936:463). This, if true, clearly represents an extraordinary emphasis on memory in Indian culture - for the R̥g Veda runs to about 40 000 lines (it consists of 10 books including in all over 1000 hymns) - and would comprise a most remarkable instance of lengthy oral transmission over space and time.

Organ (1974:55) states that **"from the entire Vedic period [the Vedic period begins at a rather conservative date of 2000 B.C., the time just before the first invasions of the Indo-Europeans. It is a period of the composition of the basic scriptures of Hinduism. The end of the period is the date of the birth of the Buddha, which is rounded off at 600 B.C.]** "we have not one single piece of antiquarian or archaeological material, not one bit of real property, not a building, nor a monument, not a coin, jewel or utensil; - nothing but winged words". Although this is no longer the case, the written records remain a valuable source of information about these people and their way of life. The Aryans loved storytelling and singing. They were verbal people. They sang their ancient hymns in a poetic-priestly language. Human speech was even elevated to divine status.

Even before reaching India in the second millennium B. C., the Aryans had developed hymns of praise and petition to their gods which were transmitted orally from generation to generation. It was assumed that priestly families were responsible for the preservation of the hymns. The canon of Vedic hymns was fixed by the end of the third century B. C., but oral transmission was so highly prized that as late as the eighth century



A.D., writing down the Vedas was regarded as sacrilege.

The word "Veda" means wisdom. Veda is used either to designate the entire early literature of the Hindus or only the earliest collections of hymns, sacrifices and prayers.

The vedic scriptures are said to be '*Śruti*'. This technical term is often translated as "revealed", a translation which encourages Western scholars to compare Vedic *Śruti* with the doctrine of revelation in Judaism and Christianity. This comparison must be avoided. Revelation in Judaism and Christianity assumes that a divinity has conveyed truths to man which transcend truths man can discover for himself. But *Śruti* does not imply a conveyor of truths. The word literally means that which is heard, but this must not be interpreted to mean that which was spoken by someone. The *ṛsis* (seers) were believed to have heard the eternal truths in states of ecstasy. Perhaps "become aware of" would be better than "heard" (Organ:1974:56).

When the orthodox Hindu says that the Vedic scriptures are *śruti*, he means that they have no origin either human or divine, that they were before the world came into being, that they have always been and they will never cease to be. Those Hindus who hold this view of the early literature believe that Vedic wisdom cannot be conveyed from person to person in a mundane pedagogical manner. *Śruti* material cannot be transmitted by the printed page nor by ordinary vocal methods. It can be conveyed only in the living relations of minds, one mind prepared to teach and the other prepared to receive. The criterion of fitness applies both to the *guru* (teacher) of such truths and to the *sisya* (pupil). This *guru-śisya*

*paramparā* (teacher-pupil relationship) in traditional Hinduism transcends any other relationship because so much is at stake.

The study of Vedic literature takes two forms : memorization and analysis. The goal sought in memorization in traditional Vedic study was absolute accuracy. To ensure this a *Brahmin* (priestly class) boy was sometimes expected to recite a *sūkta* backwards as well as forwards. Understanding the meaning was secondary. It must be noted that Veda memorizing was largely a village phenomenon in which the *sisya* studied alone with his *guru*.

#### 4.2.1 STRUCTURE OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas are divided into two parts - *Karma Kanda* devoted to work and *Jñāna Kanda* devoted to knowledge. The Upanisads, the latter part of the Vedas (also called Vedānta meaning the end of the Vedas), comprise the section dealing with knowledge.

The *Karma Kanda* may be roughly divided into three parts:-

- i. *Mantras* or hymns addressed in adoration of *Brahman* or God in His various aspects. A collection of these hymns are called *Samhitās*.
- ii. The *Brāhmaṇas* written in prose describing the sacrificial rites and including precepts and religious duties.
- iii. The *Āranyakas* or forest treatises which supplant the external rituals with symbolic meditations.

The Vedas consist of four *Samhitās* (collections) known as the Ṛg, the Sama, the Yajur and the Atharva.

The Ṛg Veda is the oldest, largest and the most important. It is so important that it is sometimes known simply as 'The Vedas'. The Ṛg Veda contains 1017 original *Sūktas* (hymns), to which eleven apocryphal ones are sometimes added. While all of the 1017 are generally said to be hymns to the gods, closer inspection will reveal that some are magical poems, riddles and legends.

The Sama Veda is the song book of the Vedas. Its hymns are largely selected from the Ṛg and are arranged according to their use in the sacrificial ceremonies. They are meant to be sung in fixed melodies.

The Yajur Veda also borrows heavily from the Ṛg Veda. It is a priestly handbook containing both *mantras* and prose directions for the performance of sacrifices. The Ṛg, the Sama and the Yajur are commonly referred to as the *Trayi Vidya* (Triple Knowledge) of Hinduism.

The Atharva Veda is late in development of Vedic literature. It is mainly a book of spells and incantations designed to meet the demand of people possessed with anxious dread of evil spirits. Many of its *sūktas* are to be used with magical plants, potions, lotions and drugs. The chief significance of the Atharva Veda today is that it is the basis of the form of medicine known as *Ayurveda*. The classic book of medicine and health is called the *Ayurveda* and it is added as a supplement to the Atharva.

Thus the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakas and Upaniṣads constitute the entirety of the Vedic literature. It must be emphasised that this is the literature denoted by *Śruti*.

#### 4.2.2. SOME INTERESTING COMMENTS ABOUT THE VEDAS

Prabhavananda (1938:17) cites that with the exceptions of Buddhism and Jainism, all schools of Indian Philosophy and all sects of Indian religion recognize in the Vedas their origin and final authority. Even more than the other scriptures of the world, the Vedas make a special claim to be Divine in their origin. While the Bible, the Koran and other revelations of the word of God owe their sacred authority either to Divine inspiration, or to delivery of the sacred message through an angel or other special messenger from God unto certain chosen persons, the Vedas are said to be *Apaurusheya* (Divine in origin).

According to Prabhavananda (1938:18) "*yo vedebhyah akhilam jagat nirmane*" meaning God created the whole universe out of the knowledge of the Vedas. This is to say, Vedic knowledge comes even before creation.

In the words of Sayanacharya, the learned commentator on the Vedas, to discover the date of the origin of the Vedas is like trying to discover the origin of the knowledge of God, or of God Himself. The search for the beginning of the Vedic literature is similar to the search for the origin of the universe. While it is true that the universe has undergone an evolution from primitive forms through successive stages to its present stage of development, the Vedas are themselves a completed development.

A Hindu declares that the Vedas are eternal. It is sophistry to claim that these books are eternal, what really deserves to be called eternal are the great laws of God discovered in these books by the *ṛṣis* (seers) who lived close to God in every age. These *Ṛṣis* discovered these spiritual laws by directly perceiving them while in a transcendental state of consciousness. It must be noted that these truths can be perceived again and again at all times and all ages through this same means.

According to tradition, *Brahma* (the creator in the Hindu Trinity), first received the knowledge contained in the Vedas, and from *Brahma* it descended to the *Ṛṣis*, who are at the beginning of each cycle. At the beginning of a cycle are born *Ṛṣis* with perfect knowledge, which they come to be endowed with by virtue of the high stage of evolution reached by them in previous cycles. They are therefore the special messengers of God from the transmission of knowledge of Him through the great cycles of creation. So it is the belief of all Hindus that the Hindu theory of evolution is one of a continuous birth of worlds in an infinite series, with the knowledge of God descending throughout the entire process. Therefore it is impossible to fix any date for the origin of Vedic knowledge. The Vedas contain the truly lofty metaphysical and spiritual ideas that have inspired saints and philosophers from earliest times and continue to be the source of spiritual life even today.

Varma (1981:XViii) declares that " Ultimate Truth" cannot be of two or more kinds. The truth can be one and universal only, in its natural form. The Vedas are Divine Revelations of this very Ultimate Truth, being revealed to the purest souls in the beginning of every creation, by God Himself, in the same unchanged verbal form every time. In order to

understand the "Ultimate Truth", one has to understand the nature and fundamental thought of the Vedas. It is this highest and divine truth, which has been explained by the different seers in different ways, in their own contemporary ages and languages. Due to their human origin, several variations and deviations have crept into these different expositions.

However, Varma (1981:XX) argues that believers in the Vedas proclaim that :-

i. the Vedas are the manifestations of that Supreme Truth and Eternal Knowledge.

ii. they remain in the same form and in the same words, unchanged forever.

iii they are the words of God, and that

iv they are received by the purest souls in the beginning of every human creation, in the same form of an "internal hearing" or "*Śruti*", and remain indestructible even by the factors like time and space

v as eternal knowledge, the Veda is one and indivisible. It must be noted however, in book form, it is revealed in four different *Samhitās* (collections), viz. Rg, Sama, Yajur and Atharva.

Bloomfield (1972:17) declares that the word Veda means literally "knowledge", that is, "sacred knowledge". It is derived from *Vid*, "to know". The term Veda is used in two ways: either as the collective

designation of the entire oldest sacred literature of India, or as the specific name of single books belonging to that literature. On the one hand, we speak of the Veda as the Bible of ancient India, or on the other hand, we speak of the R̥g Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda as individual books of that great collection. .

According to Dhawan (1988:1) the word "Veda" means "the knowledge par excellence", that is, "the sacred, the religious knowledge". It does not mean one single literary work, but a whole great literature, which arose in the course of man centuries ago and was handed down from generation to generation by a galaxy of enlightened sages through verbal transmission, till finally it was declared at some prehistoric period to be "divine revelation", on account of the supremely sublime nature of its contents.

Varma (1926:15) mentioned that Manu, the greatest Vedic law giver, declared the Vedas as the source head of all the knowledge about human behaviour. He was the first to give a legal code based on the Vedas.

According to Prasad (1909:XXii), Professor Max Muller admits that the Vedas are the oldest books in the library of mankind. He reiterates by saying that "there exists no literary relic that carries us back to a more primitive state in the history of man than the Vedas".

B.G.Tilak basing his calculations on astronomical data available in the Vedas as well as on the description therein of a continuous dawn, which is a phenomenon of the Arctic region, carries the date of the Vedas to 8000 B.C. (Siddhantalankar:1969:XXI)

N.B. Pavagi relying on geological data has taken his calculations to 70 million B.C. for the origin of the Vedas (Siddhantalankar:1969:XXI).

It could thus be concluded that the Vedas, "a most ancient and most wonderful body of literature, which, it is claimed, is not the production of man but the voice of God Himself and co-eternal with him". (Radhakrishnan:1958:182).

Arising from this oral tradition, the *yajña* forms one of the most fundamental rites of the Vedic culture.

In the next chapter, the description of the procedure of the *yajña* is undertaken. The explanation and analysis of the gestural and oral expressions as reflected in the performance of the *yajña* is examined.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# PROCEDURE, EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS AS REFLECTED IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE *YAJNA* (SACRED FIRE) : A VEDIC VIEWPOINT.

According to Vedalankar (1986:85) *Devayajña* is also called *Agnihotra* or *Havan*.

Seereeram (1994:107) points out that *Devayajña* consists of purification of the air by the burning of *ghī* (clarified butter), camphor and other medicinal substances, the process being called *Havan* or *Agnihotra* or *Homa*. The word *Havan* is derived from the root "*havi*" which means "an oblation". By performing the *havan*, the participant is offering an oblation into the sacred fire as a noble, selfless action which will be beneficial to all beings on earth, while the participant himself does not expect any personal gain.

Selvanayagam (1996:19) argues that *yajña* has a deeper meaning than the offering of *ghī* and other things in the sacrificial fire. " *Yajña* is sacrifice of one's all for the good of humanity and to me these offerings of *ahutis* (oblations) have a symbolic meaning. We have to offer up our weaknesses, our passions, our narrowness into the purifying

fire, so that we may be cleansed".

Vedalankar (1986:85) elaborates that when *yajña* is performed, its radiation is felt by the devotees. The spirit of *yajña* is benevolence, renunciation, sacrifice and unity. Man must shine by the burning out of anger, greed, ego, jealousy and other evil desires in him just as the flame of the *yajña* (sacred fire) shines when *ghī* and *havan sāmāgrī* burn up in the fire. The *havan sāmāgrī* is made up of sandalwood, other vegetable matter, medicinal herbs, roots and food products. The act of putting the *ghī* and *sāmāgrī* into the fire, after the chanting of the *mantras*, is called *ahutis* (oblations). *Mantras*, according to Selvanayagan (1996:59) are flashlights of eternal truths, seen and formulated by *ṛsis* of yore, that they are sacred and inherently powerful.

Vedalankar (1986:81) explains that *yajña* is not a worship to the visible fire. *Agni* (fire) is one of the most important names of GOD. It means all pervading, adorable and effulgent. Fire is an indicator of radiance and heat. The flame of the *yajña* is a symbolic representation of the victory of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance and prosperity over poverty.

In the words of Selvanayagan (1996:65), there is no *yajña* without fire. Fire (*Agni*) purifies and transforms the sacrificer and conveys his oblations to gods. *Agni*, the personification of fire, is the first to be invoked in every sacrifice because he is the heavenly high priest and the mediator. In particular, the *Agnihotra (yajña)* glorify *Agni* by giving Him the most prominent place in their rituals. The Rg. Veda says that *Agni* is the sacrificial bond (*yajña bandhu*) with human beings.

According to Pillay (1991:114) the earliest records of the performance of the *yajña* are to be found in the Vedas, which are based on the Aryan Culture that flourished in North India from about 2000 B.C. By the end of the Vedic Age, the sacrifice (*yajña*) had become a "mechanical and soulless activity". He attributes this decline to the priests who emphasised "the great magical value of the meticulous performance to sacrifices" as a means of elevating their status to one of supremacy and importance.

In reaction to this and as a result of the fusion of Aryan and Dravidian cultures, the influence of the epics and Puranas and the rise of Bhakti, the cult of image worship made its appearance from 560 B.C. From this period, the authority of the Vedas began to lose its influence and the performance of *yajña* was relegated to a position of less importance in Hindu worship. However, during the modern period of Hindu history, which Professor Sarma dates from 1750 A.D., the influence of Hindu reformists began to make an impact on the religion. One of these reformists, Swami Dayanand, founded the Arya Samaj Movement in 1875. Sarma asserts that Swami Dayanand "took his stand on the infallible authority of the Vedas". Swami Dayanand further emphasised the existence of one Supreme Spirit (GOD) rather than a number of lesser "gods" or deities. In his teachings, Dayanand maintained that these "gods" merely represented aspects of the one Supreme Spirit. Being an ardent supporter of the religion as espoused by the Vedas, Dayanand also insisted on the performance of the *yajña* (*havan* or *agnihotra*). Followers of the doctrines of Swami Dayanand and the Arya Samaj Movement, place major emphasis on the performance of this ritual. For this Hindu sect, the *yajña* is the focal point of any religious festival or ceremony (sacraments) related to the *Sanskāras* (rites of passage). It must be noted that the

performance of the *yaṁna* is important and very popular at religious gatherings, birthday celebrations, anniversaries, entry into a new home, starting of a new business and during religious festivals like *Dīpāvalī*, *Rāma Naumi*, *Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī* etc.

While performing the *yaṁna*, we pray to GOD and sing verses in praise of Him. These verses have lofty thoughts which describe the attributes and functions of GOD. The verses urge us to perform good deeds and make our lives nobler. Through the *yaṁnas*, we get an opportunity of studying the Vedas and other scriptures and in this way, the intellect and the mind become pure. One big benefit of the *yaṁna*, is that it purifies the air and the surrounding atmosphere. Germ- destroying, health-promoting and sweet-smelling ingredients are used in the oblation. It is believed by those who subscribe to the performance of the *yaṁna*, that the warm air of the *yaṁna* spreads everywhere in the home and its surroundings and thus drives out the foul air.

*Yaṁna* also has an effect on the seasons. In particular, it helps to regulate rainfall and temperature thereby minimising conditions of drought and reducing the risk of crop failure. The *yaṁna* also helps in regulating the seasons. The possibility of the *yaṁna* helping in the causation of rain is also given in the Gita (chapter 3.14) which states: "From food are beings born, from rain is food produced, from sacrifice does rain arise. The Manusmṛiti (chapter 3.76) has this to say: "The offerings made through *yaṁna* break into very tiny particles and rise towards the sun and give cause to rain". (Vedalankar:1986:81-83).

## 5.1 THE PERFORMANCE OF THE YAJÑĀ

For the purpose of this study, the *yajñā* under discussion is performed mainly by followers of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu Sect.

The following aids were produced to bring about clarity.

- i. Video recording of the actual performance of the *yajñā*.
- ii. Photographs depicting the different gestures during the performance of the *yajñā*.
- iii. Audio recording of the *mantras* recited during the actual performance of the *yajñā*.

The Aryan Prayer, a popular prayer book for Hindus in South Africa which stipulates the standard procedure, translation and transliteration of the *mantras* and performance of the *yajñā*, was used.

Pillay (1991:120) distinguishes between the ritual performed by the Arya Samaj and that performed by other Hindus. The difference is that the followers of Arya Samaj direct their prayers to GOD as the Supreme Being, whereas most other Hindu sects direct their prayers to a particular deity whose name is frequently chanted, such as *Ganēśā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Siva*.

PHOTOGRAPH 1

PREREQUISITES FOR THE YAJNA



THE ABOVE PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE HAVAN KUND INTO WHICH PIECES OF WOOD ARE ARRANGED. A GOBLET CONTAINING WATER, A BOWL CONTAINING GHĪ WITH THREE PIECES OF WOOD AND A SPOON, A BLOCK OF CAMPHOR, MATCHES AND A TRAY CONTAINING SĀMAGRI ARE PLACED.

## 5.2 PREREQUISITES FOR THE YAJÑA

The focal point of the ritual is the *havan kund*. The *kund* is a rectangular, hollowed receptacle into which pieces of wood are arranged before the commencement of the *yajña*. The priest and the participants sit along the four sides of the *kund* to make their offerings into the fire.

For the *yajña* proper, small goblets containing water with spoons in them, a bowl containing *ghī* (clarified butter) with three pieces of wood and a ladle, a block of camphor and trays containing *sāmagrī* should be neatly arranged around the *kund*, within easy reach of the participants.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 1)

It must be mentioned that on special occasions (such as *Dīpāvalī*, *Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī* and *Rāma Naumī*) specially prepared sweetmeats are added to the *sāmagrī*.

## 5.3 PROCEDURE OF THE YAJÑA

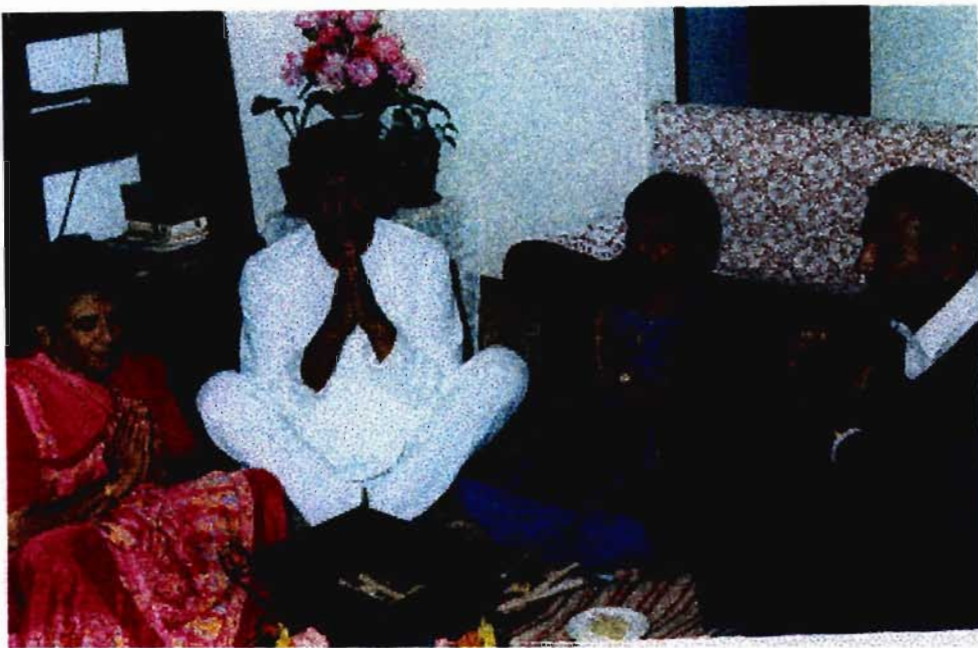
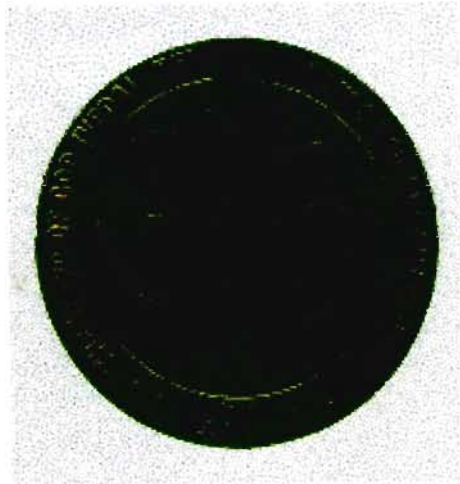
Before the commencement of the *yajña*, the priest asks the participants to compose themselves, to focus their attention and direct their thoughts to GOD. The priest and participants close their eyes, clasp their hands in the "*namaste*" mode of gesture and repeat the word *AUM* three times.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 2)



PHOTOGRAPH 2

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF AUM



THE DEVOTEES CLOSE THEIR EYES, CLASP THEIR HANDS IN THE "NAMASTHE" MODE OF GESTURE AND REPEAT THE WORD AUM THREE TIMES.



Pillay (1991:122) points out that the **AUM** sound is chanted or intoned and because of the nature of the sound, a deep resonant vibration. The objective of this is to clear the participant's mind of thoughts unrelated to the ritual. Hindus also equate the intoning of the sound to the cosmic vibration which resulted in the creation and which maintains the harmony of the cosmos. Intoning the sound in unison also unites the individuals of the congregation into a single force. One of the aims of the *yajña* is to create unity and harmony and this is achieved right at the beginning of the ritual.

#### 5.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUM

Seereeram (1994:125) asserts that the highest and the best name for GOD in Sanskrit is **AUM** which embraces all the attributes of GOD. The Mandukya Upanisads says, **AUM** is the name of the Eternal and Omnipresent Spirit. All knowledge, nay, the whole universe declares the nature and attributes of this self - same Being. **AUM** encompasses the past, the present and the future". The Mandukya Upanisad explains that **AUM** is made up of three sounds: [A:], [U:] and [M:]. [A:] refers to the wakeful phase or the material condition, that is GOD diffused in Nature. [U:] refers to the contemplative phase or the mental conditions, that is, GOD existing in design and harmony and [M:] refers to the slumbering phase or intellectual condition, that is, GOD who understands, measures out the whole knowledge of the universe and retires into Himself. Vedalankar (1986:23) declares that the three sounds in the word **AUM** express the three great attributes of GOD.

[A:] denotes the power of GOD to create the universe. [A:] is *Brahma*, the *Creator*.

[U:] denotes the power of GOD to preserve the universe. [U:] is *Visnu*, the Preserver.

[M:] denotes the power of GOD to dissolve the universe. On this basis GOD is known to us by these three names. [M:] is *Rudra*, the Destroyer.

The word *AUM* also has two special meanings. It means "omnipresent and Protector". GOD is present in every particle of the atom and there is not a place imaginable where His presence is not to be found. Being omnipresent He is protecting this universe through His power, knowledge and His laws. GOD is also the Protector of his devotees.

Kuppusami (1983:14) believes that *AUM* is the mystic symbol of Hinduism. He believes *AUM* is the cosmic sound from which the material world is evolved. The utterance of *AUM* is said to start from the *nabhi* (navel) and end at the *Brahmapur* (brain). The mechanism of the vital body is believed to be affected by the regular utterance of the *AUM* sound. A soothing feeling develops in the nervous system and psychic energy vibrates. With the compound of soothing vibrations and psychic energy, the impurity of the spirit is said to be removed. *AUM* is therefore accepted as the symbol of the technique of destroying impurities of the total personality of the human being.

Dhawan (1988:152) points out that *AUM* is representative of the Vedas. He further elaborates that with prior recitation of *AUM*, one assents to the

offering to the fire. With *AUM*, a priest begins to recite that he may attain *Brahman* (GOD). It is also to be noted that *AUM* is described not merely the supreme means of meditation, but the goal to be reached by the meditation itself.

## 5.5 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE RECITATION OF *AUM*

It must be noted that the word *AUM* or *OM* is repeatedly used in most of the *mantras*. At the commencement of the *yajna*, the devotees clasp their hands. This symbolic gesture signifies the serenity, humbleness and gracefulness that the devotees express in invoking GOD to bless them. The gesture denotes the devotee's salutations to GOD appealing to the Supreme Being to bear witness to the *yajñā*. The *AUM* sound being intoned brings about unity among the individuals and harmony is maintained.

After *AUM* has been intoned, the devotees recite the Initiatory *Mantra*, which is the *Gāyatrī Mantra*. The *Gāyatrī Mantra* is also called *Guru Mantra* or *Savitr Mantra*.

Seereeram (1994:127) explains that the *Gāyatrī Mantra* is the most significant *mantra* in Hinduism. It is the creative mother principle of the universe pervading all existence - microcosmic and macrocosmic - which is realizable only through the intellect. It is called *Guru Mantra* because the teacher initiates the pupil with this *mantra*. It is *Savitr* because it helps transform our nature from impurity to purity and from weakness to

strength. Chanting of the *mantra* must progress from the audible to the inaudible and from the mere repetition of sounds to absorption in the meanings of the words.

## 5.6 GĀYATRĪ MANTRA AND ITS TRANSLATION

*Om bhūr bhuvah swah. Tatsavitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi.  
Dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt.*

Vedalankar (1901:15) translates the *Gāyatrī Mantra* as :

O God, the Giver of life, Remover of pains and sorrows, Bestower of happiness and Creator of the universe. Thou art most luminous , pure and adorable. We meditate on Thee. May Thou inspire and guide our intellect in the right direction.

## 5.7 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE GĀYATRĪ MANTRA

The use of propositional gestures, which is a strong characteristic of oral tradition is prevalent in the *Gāyatrī Mantra*. The propositional gestures are in the form of short sentences such as :

i. *Om*..... O God.

ii. *Bhūr*..... The Giver of life.

iii. *Bhuvah*.... Remover of pains and sorrows.

iv. *Swah*..... Bestower of happiness.

Marcel Jousse's anthropological Law of Bilateralism is also evident in the above *mantra* since a balance is maintained between statements iii and iv.

The distribution of short and long vowel sounds enhances the steady rhythm during recitation and thus memorisation is facilitated. In the *mantra*, the vowel [u] in "Bhūr" and "Bhuvah" is repeated. The [a] in "Bhuvah" and "Swah" is short. This technique is prevalent in most of the *mantras* which is a characteristic of the Sanskrit language.

The use of adjectives such as *devasya* (luminous), *bhargo* [pure] and *vareṇyam* (adorable) describes some of the attributes of GOD and we hope that these qualities are instilled in us and in our thoughts, words and deeds. We ask GOD to inspire and guide our intellect in the right direction.

After the recitation of the *Gāyatrī Mantra*, the *Īśvara Upāsanā* (Communion Prayer) is recited. Before the actual commencement of the oblations of the *Agnihotra*, the following eight *mantras*, relating to eulogy, prayer and adoration of GOD are generally recited.

## 5.8 *ĪŚVARA UPĀSANĀ* (COMMUNION PRAYER) AND THEIR MEANINGS

i. *Om viśwāni deva savitar dūritāni parāsuva. Yad bhadraṇ tanna*

*āsuva.*

Pal (1993:35) translates the *mantra* as "O Self luminous God, Thou art the Producer of the universe. Every creature receives inspiration from Thee.

ii. *Om hiraṇyagarbhah samavartatāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsīt. Sa dādharma prthivim dyāmutemām kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

Vedalankar (1991:30) explains that before the creation of the universe, luminous matter was present in its primordial form. Of this, too, the master was God, the Creator of all the worlds. That God sustains this earth and the solar regions. To that blissful God, we pray with faith and devotion.

iii. *Om ya ātmadā baladā yasya viśva upāsate praśiṣam yasya devāḥ. Yasyac chāya'mrtam yasya mṛtyuḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

Vedalankar (1991:31) translates this as "Who places the soul in the body, Who is the source of strength, Who is worshipped by all learned men, Whose praise they sing, Whose grace gives immortality and to forget Whom is death; to that blissful God we pray with faith and devotion".

iv. *Om yah prāṇato nimīṣato mahitwaika idrājā jagato babhūva. Ya iśe asya dwipadaścatuspadah kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

The fourth *mantra* states : "Who, through His great power, alone has

brought into existence the kingdoms, animate and inanimate, and Who has created bipeds and quadrupeds, to that blissful God we pray with faith and devotion".

*v. Om yena dyaurugrā prthivī ca dr̥dha yena swah stabhitam yena nākah.  
Yo antarikṣe rajaso vimānah kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.*

Vedalankar (1991:31) outlines this *mantra* as : "Who sustains the solid earth, the expansive heavens, the luminous regions, all primordial matter and Who is the Creator of all the ethereal regions therein, to that blissful God, we pray with faith and devotion".

*vi. Om prajāpate na twadetānyanyo viśwā jātāni paritā babhūva. Yat  
kā māste juhumastanno astu vayam syāma patayo rayinām.*

Pal (1993 : 40) explains this *mantra* as : "O Lord God! Thou pervadest the whole universe. Thou art the Supporter and Protector of every creature. We, the worldly people, have many a desire, but lack the resources and strength to fulfil them. We pray to Thee, O Supreme Dispenser, to satisfy our righteous desires. May we possess all kinds of wealth, material and spiritual".

*vii. Om sa no bandhurjanitā sa vidhātā dhāmāni veda bhuvanāni viśwā.  
Yatra devā amṛtamānaśānastrīye dhāmannadhyairayanta.*

Veḍalankar (1991:32) explains that God is our friend. He is the Creator, Father who is the master and sustainer of all and who knows all the worlds and their regions. It is He whom sages and learned men,

enjoying bliss, reach, without obstruction, the third stage, that of liberation, free from births and deaths.

viii. *Om agne naya supathā rāye asmān viswāni deva vayunāni vidwān. Yuyodhyasmajjuhūrānameno bhūyisṭānte nama uktim vidhema.*

Vedalankar (1991:33) translates this as: "O luminous God! Lead us to the noble path of Thy devotion and grace. Lord, Thou knowest all our deeds. Remove from us all our vices and sins. We offer in all sincerity our homage and salutations to Thee.

## 5.9 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE ĪSWARA UPĀSANĀ (COMMUNION PRAYER)

Finnegan (1977:128) states that repetition whether as parallelism or in phrases called "formulae" has great literary and aesthetic effect. The recurrent familiar ring of the formulae is more than a useful device aiding the Rabbi to compose or the audience to translate a message : it is a beautiful and evocative element ..... the more so, for its repeated recurrence.

The words "*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema*" meaning "to that blissful God we pray with faith and devotion" in *mantras* ii, iii, iv and v of the Communion Prayer are repeated. The *mantras* are structured in such a way that certain words and phrases are repeated to facilitate memorisation. The extensive use of repetition of the words and phrases typifies the oral tradition established in the Sanskrit language.



The repetitive use of 'OM' or 'AUM' the divine syllable , at the beginning of each *mantra* emphasises and signifies the importance of GOD in our lives. Man in his prayer appeals, praises and asks the Supreme Being to lead him in a noble path. With devotion and sincerity, we ask GOD, who is the creator of everything, to remove from us all vices and sins so that we can be liberated from births and deaths.

Vedalankar (1985:78) points out that when we pronounce the word 'OM' or 'AUM', the vocal organs express these qualities of GOD. To say [A:] (ah) we have to open our mouths. [A:] is also the first letter of the alphabet of all languages. Thus [A:] signifies the beginning of or the creation of the universe.

When saying [U:] (oo), the mouth is still kept open and the lips are rounded. This signifies the quality of maintaining, preserving and sustaining.

When [M:] is pronounced, the lips have to be closed. This signifies the quality of bringing something to an end. Thus we know that GOD is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of this universe. By destroyer it must be pointed out that it is more a "dissolution" into the primordial state which again becomes the source of a new cycle of creation. This natural law of GOD has been in practice for an indefinite period of time.

## 5.10 SIPPING OF WATER OR ĀCAMANA MANTRA

### PROCEDURE

A little water is taken in the right palm. The first of the three *mantras* indicated below is recited and the water is sipped. In the same manner the second and third gestures of sipping are done, after the recital of the second and third *mantra* respectively. The right palm which was used is then symbolically rinsed with a few drops of water.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPHS 3 AND 4)

The following three *mantras* are recited.

*i. Om amṛtopastaraṇamasi swāhā. (FIRST SIP)*

All pervading eternal God! You protect us against the deeprooted evil desires in us.

*ii. Om amṛtāpidhānamasi swāhā. (SECOND SIP)*

Imperishable Lord! Protect us from evil thoughts that prevail on us from the outside.

*iii. Om satyam yaśah śrīrmayi śrih śrayatām swāhā. (THIRD SIP)*

Lord, you are ever existing. Your splendour is seen all over. You are most beautiful and powerful. May we by your grace attain purity and

PHOTOGRAPH 3

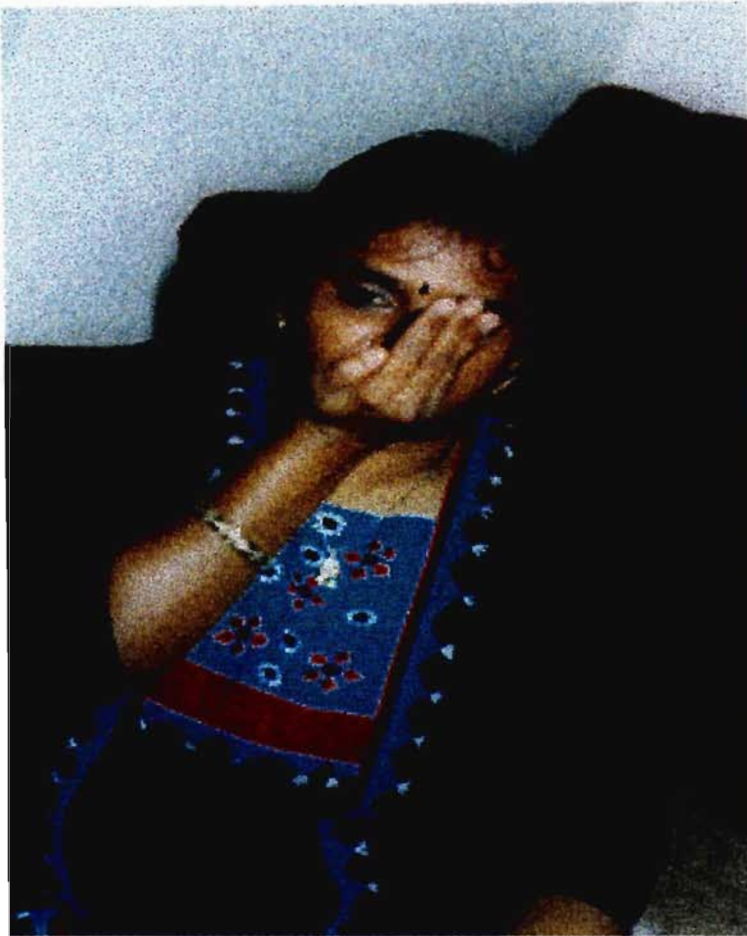
GESTURE FOR ĀCAMANA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE TAKES A LITTLE WATER FROM THE GOBLET AND POURS IT INTO HER RIGHT PALM.

PHOTOGRAPH 4

GESTURE FOR ACAMANA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE SIPS THE WATER AFTER THE RECITAL OF THE MANTRA.

serenity. In this firm conviction, I surrender myself to you.

With the chanting of the *mantras* and sipping of water, the devotees ask GOD to protect them from evil desires within themselves and from the evil outside.

Vedalankar (1991:46) explains that this water removes ailments. It is prevalent on this earth, in the regions below and in the atmosphere. It protects us from sicknesses and is the essence of life. The devotee prays : "May this water give me long life, vitality and prosperity. The sipping of the water is the symbolic purification of the inner being.

#### 5.11 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE "SIPPING OF WATER" MANTRA OR ĀCAMANA MANTRA.

Water is regarded as a symbol of purity because of its cleaning qualities. The devotee, by sipping the water, is symbolically cleansing himself or ridding himself of all evil desires and thoughts.

*Mantras* i and ii are examples of propositional gestures which constitute parallelism, since there is a balance in the meanings between the two statements. It must be noted that there are similarities in the structure of the *mantras*.

In *mantra* (i), we ask GOD to protect us from the **internal** agonies.

In *mantra* (ii), we ask GOD to protect us from the **external** afflictions.

## 5.12 ANGA SPARŚA MANTRA (TOUCHING DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY.

### PROCEDURE

In this part of the purification rite, water is again used as an agent of sustenance and remover of ailments. The devotees take a little water in the left palm. They then dip the middle and the ring fingers of the right hand into the water. With the recital of each *mantra*, the devotees touch the different parts of the body.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPHS 5 AND 6)

The following *mantras* are recited and the respective parts of the body are touched.

i. *Om vānma āsyē'stu.*

With the recital of the *mantra* devotees touch the right and left ends of the mouth. The *mantra* means, "let there be speech in my mouth".

ii. *Om nasorme prāṇo'stu.*

Devotees touch the right and left nostril meaning, "let the vital airs flow in my nostrils".

iii. *Om akṣnorne cakṣurastu*

PHOTOGRAPH 5

GESTURE FOR ANGA SPARSA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE TOUCHES HER LEFT EAR.

PHOTOGRAPH 6

GESTURE FOR ANGA SPARŚA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE SPRINKLES WATER OVER HER WHOLE BODY.



Devotees touch the ends of the right and left eye meaning, "let there be vision in my eyes".

iv. *Om karnayorme śrotramastu*

Devotees touch the right and left ears meaning, "let there be hearing in my ears".

v. *Om bāhvorme balamastu*

Devotees touch the right and left arm meaning, "let there be strength in my arms".

vi. *Om ūrvorma ojo'stu*

Devotees touch the right and left thigh meaning, "let there be sturdiness in my legs".

vii. *Om ariṣṭāni me'ngani tanūstanvā me saha santu.*

Here devotees sprinkle water over the whole body meaning, "May all the major and minor limbs of our bodies remain unhurt and free from all defects. O Gracious God, may we enjoy good health throughout our lives".

### 5.13 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE *ANGA SPARSA MANTRA*

Jousse's universal law of Mimism, is highlighted during this purification rite. The devotees imitate the priest's manual gestures by touching their lips, nostrils, eyes, ears, arms and thighs. By performing these gestures, the devotees request God to ensure the normal functioning of those organs and for the entire body to enjoy sound health throughout their lives.

Marcel Jousse's law of Bilateralism is evident when the devotee touches eg. his right and left nostrils; his right and left eyes; his right and left ears etc.; thus maintaining a physical balance. A sense of harmony is achieved by the use of Bilateralism.

Extensive use of repetition of words among the *mantras* is also evident. Each *mantra* begins with " OM " and ends with " *astu* ", thus assisting the devotees in their pronunciation and memorisation.

Water is used to symbolise purification because of its cleansing qualities. Water is prevalent on this earth, in the regions below and in the atmosphere. Water is regarded as the essence of life. It removes ailments from the body and protects us from sicknesses. The devotees ask GOD to bless their bodies by ensuring the effective functioning of the limbs and organs. The devotees appeal to GOD that "May this water give them long life, vitality and prosperity.

The above six *mantras* end in a common rhyme ie. "*astu*". Rhyme has been used in these *mantras* to make them phonologically cohesive, created

by the interaction of sounds and meanings. The efficient and effective use of the end rhymes complements the meaning during recitation.

It seems that, in order to facilitate the retention of the *mantras* in the memory, "key words" are used to trigger the sound-symbolism association, e.g.

*mantra* (i) O God, may perfect speech ever exist in my mouth.

*mantra* (ii) O God, may the vital airs ever exist in my nostrils.

*mantra* (iii) O God, may vision ever exist in my eyes.

*mantra* (iv) O God, may hearing ever exist in my ears.

*mantra* (v) O God, may strength ever exist in my arms.

*mantra* (vi) O God, may sturdiness ever exist in my legs.

The purification rite is concluded and the ritual now enters the oblation stage. It must be mentioned that the entire *yajña* has purification as one of the underlying themes. Fire according to Hindus, is a purifying agent. As a giver of light, it removes darkness, both figuratively and literally and as a consumer of matter, the fire is able to transform matter into smoke and vapours, which act as purifying agents.

The next phase of the *yajna* begins with the ignition of the fire in the *havan kund*.

## 5.14 THE AGNYĀDHĀNA MANTRA (IGNITION OF FIRE)

### PROCEDURE

This phase of the ritual begins with the ignition of the fire in the *havan kund* (fire-pan) which has wood arranged in it. The fire is usually ignited by the head of the household by placing a block of camphor on a long-handled spoon. With the uttering of the *mantra* "Om bhurbhuvah swah" the camphor is lit from the flame of an already kindled oil lamp. However, it may be ignited with a match-stick, as is prevalent these days. The above mentioned *mantra* (i) "Om bhurbhuvah swah" is translated by Vedalankar (1991:47) as "I ignite in the receptacle this fire which is a symbol of the forces of nature at work and in so doing, I commence this yajna in cognisance of my bounden duties".

With the recital of the next *mantra*, a burning camphor is placed in the middle of the small wood-sticks piled in the fire-pan beforehand.

(ii) *Om bhūrbhuvah swardyaauriva bhūmnā pr̥thivīva varimṇā. Tasyāste pr̥thivī devayajani pr̥sthe'gnimannādamannādy āyādadhe.*

Vedalankar (1991:47) translates *mantra* (ii) as :

May my obligatory duties be as resplendent as the heaven and as beneficial as the earth. I kindle this fire on the surface of the podium. This fire is a symbol of the energy of the sun and its electric force. I offer oblations of grains into this fire for nourishment and sustenance.

Such is my conviction. I initiate this *yajna* for food for the world. May it bring happiness to all beings.

After placing the kindled camphor into the fire-pan, adjust the pieces of wood with *mantra* (iii).

(iii) *Om udbudhyaswāgne pratijāgrhitvamistapūrte sansrje thāmayāñca. Asmint sadhaste adhyuttarasmin viswe devā yajamānaśca sīdata.*

Vedalankar (1991:48) explains *mantra* (iii) as :

May this fire, flaming in the fire place burn brightly. Likewise may the fire of service to man become kindled in my heart. O Fire ! through you as the means, may I, the devotee accomplish virtuous actions for the benefit of all others and ourselves. May the host and learned persons possessed of good qualities all come and sit at this *yajna* and together make offerings into this fire as a symbol of dedication and service.

#### 5.15 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE AGNYĀDHĀNA MANTRA (IGNITION OF FIRE MANTRA)

In the first *mantra*, the devotees glorify GOD with the three expressions "*Bhur; bhuvah* and *swah*" which are the three worlds, namely the earth, intermediate space and the heaven respectively. The fire, kindled by the devotees symbolises the natural energy that exists in all the three worlds.

*Bhur* which means "God, the Giver of life" is the fire that generates energy

PHOTOGRAPH 7

GESTURE FOR SAMIDĀDHĀNA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE OFFERS THE FIRE STICK DIPPED IN GHĪ INTO THE INFLAMED FIRE.

which sustains the earth is likened to the vital energy that gives life to the body. The fire kindled in the *kund* (receptacle) is symbolic of the energy of the sun and its electric forces. The *kund* on the other hand, is symbolic of the vast sacrificial ground, Mother Earth.

*Bhuvah* which means "God, the remover of pains" is the electricity that is in the atmosphere is likened to the energy that removes impurities from the body.

*Swah* which means "God the Giver of happiness" is the source of energy, the sun in the heaven is likened to the energy that pumps and circulates the blood in the body.

#### 5:16 SAMIDĀDHĀNA MANTRA (OFFERING OF THE THREE STICKS)

#### PROCEDURE

Reciting a mantra each time the devotee offers three sticks of wood, dipped in *ghī* (clarified butter) into the fire. Reciting the following *mantras*, the devotee places a stick each into the inflamed fire on the utterance of the word "*swāhā*".

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 7)

The following *mantras* are recited .

i. *Om ayanta idhma ātmā jātavedastenedhyaswa vardhaswa  
ceddhavarddhaya cāsman prajaya paśubhir brahma varcasenānnādyena  
samedhaya swāhā. Idamagnaye jātavedase idanna mama.*

This *mantra* is translated as :

O Fire ! the illuminator of all things ; the heat and light produced by you are the properties of your existence. You become manifest by these. Become intense and shine brightly, casting your lustre on all around you. O Fire, bless us with good children, useful animals, brilliance or lustre of knowledge, nourishment and other needs. I say this with a firm conviction, this offering is to the fire, the giver of life to all things. This is not mine.

ii. *Om samidhāgnim duvasyata ghṛtair bodhayatā tithim. Āsmin  
havyā juhota.*

Vedalankar (1991:50) translates the *mantra* as :

O Performer of yajña ! With the continuous use of wood keep this fire permanently alight. By means of *ghī* and *sāmagrī*, let it stay aflame and grow steadily. Make offerings of *sāmagrī* and other ingredients into this fire. This offering is for *Agni* and not for me.



*Om susamiddhāya śocise ghr̥tam tivr̥am juhōtana. Agnayē jātavedase swāhā. Idamagnaye jatavedase idanna mama.*

This fire is burning well. It is luminous. Make offerings of g̥hī into this fire.

*iii. Om tantwā samidbhirangiro ghr̥tena varddhayāmasi. Br̥hacchoṣā yaviṣṭhya swāhā. Idamagnaye'ngirase idanna mama.*

This *mantra* is translated as :

O Fire ! You, who pervades all objects, who unites all things and also separates them, shine brightly. You receive your sustenance from g̥hī, sāmāgrī, wood etc. This offering is for the "energy" present in all objects, it is not for me.

#### 5.17 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE SAMIDĀDHĀNA MANTRA (OFFERING OF THE THREE FIRE STICKS)

*Mantra* (i) and *mantra* (iii) are directed to the fire while *mantra* (ii) is directed to the participants of the yajña. The first and third *mantras* acknowledge GOD as the Creator of the universe and of all life forms. The fire and its personification *Agni*, become symbols of the creation.

The participants, by making offerings into the fire are in a sense re-enacting GOD'S cosmic sacrifice. Once the offerings come into contact with the fire, there is a change in its natural state. They combine with

PHOTOGRAPH 8

GESTURE FOR GHRTĀHUTI MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE OFFERS GHĪ INTO THE FIRE

other ingredients of the oblation and become different substances with different properties. The smoke and vapours that emerge from the fire are symbols of GOD'S creations. GOD, in his cosmic sacrifice, creates man. The smoke and vapour of the *yajña* are also beneficial to man as they act as germicides and purify the atmosphere. Therefore, the fire is regarded as a symbol of purification.

In *mantra* (ii), an appeal is made for man to "keep the fire permanently alight" symbolically urging man to continue the noble work of GOD, to maintain the rhythm of the universe and to ensure the continuance of life.

#### 5.18 *GHRTĀHUTI MANTRA* (OFFERING OF *GĪ*)

##### PROCEDURE

The following *mantra* is recited five times and an offering of *gī* is made on the utterance of the word "*swāhā*". The five offerings mark the five human needs the performer of the *yajña* seeks. They are good children, useful animals, spiritual knowledge, nourishing food and other necessities of life.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 8)

*Om ayanta idhma ātmā jātavedastenedhyaswa vardhaswa  
ceddavarddhaya cāsmān prajaya paśubhir brahma varcasenānnādyena  
samedhaya swāhā. Idamagnaye jātavedase idanna mama.*

The following is the spiritual meaning of the above *mantra*. In the *yajña*, for the attainment of GOD, it becomes necessary to light the fire of self control by means of knowledge and make offerings of the many functions of the organs and the vital airs into it. The five sensory organs are : nose, tongue, eyes, skin and the ears and these are sensitive to smell, taste, sight, touch and sound respectively.

The five elements that contribute to their sensitivity are earth, water, fire, air and ether respectively. The five organs of action are hands, legs, mouth, excretory and the reproductive. The five vital airs (*prāṇas*) are *prāṇa*, *apāṇa*, *samāṇa*, *vyāṇa* and *udāṇa*.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE FIVE PRĀṆAS

*Prāṇa* is the force that controls inhalation and exhalation of breath. The related organs are the nostrils, mouth, throat, ears and eyes.

*Apāṇa* activates the excretion of waste from the body. The organ is the region below the navel.

*Samāṇa* is the power of digestion. The organ is the stomach.

*Vyāṇa* circulates the blood from the heart.

*Udāṇa* keeps the sensory nerves under control and enables feelings of

happiness and sorrow. It operates in the cerebral region.  
(Vedalankar:1991:51-52)

#### 5.19 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE *GHRTĀHUTI MANTRA*

This *mantra* is repeated five times. The five requests made in this *mantra* mark the five human needs the devotees seek. These being good children, useful animals, spiritual knowledge, nourishing food and other necessities of life. This accounts for the five times repetition of the *mantra* and the five gestures of offering the *ghī*. The *ghī* offered to the fire is symbolically a source of nourishment for the fire. The word "fire" is used as a metaphor. Life is seen in terms of the fire's ability to grow by consuming fuel (*ghī*). As the fire grows, it produces light and heat and is regarded as being beneficial to man and nature, since without light and heat there can be no life. With this thought in mind, the devotee pays homage to the fire and make requests to the fire. At this juncture, it must be noted, that the devotees do not regard the fire as a sort of GOD, but rather as a gift from GOD. By making requests to the fire, the devotees are symbolically directing their prayer to GOD.

A common characteristic that is prevalent in this *mantra* is alliteration. The repetitive use of certain words and syllables emphasises the value of alliteration as a mnemotechnical device. In this *mantra*, the "*d* and *dh*" syllables are repeatedly used bringing about a rhythmic flow when this *mantra* is recited five times.

PHOTOGRAPH 9

GESTURE FOR JALASINCANA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEE SPRINKLES WATER AROUND THE FIRE.

The next step of the ritual involves the use of water.

## 5.20 THE *JALASĪNCANA* MANTRA (SPRINKLING OF WATER AROUND THE FIRE)

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 9)

### PROCEDURE

Recite these four *mantras* one by one. After the recital of each *mantra*, sprinkle water respectively in the eastern, western, northern sides and then all around beginning from the southern direction of the *havan kund*.

(1) *Om adite'numanyaswa*. (Sprinkle water in the easterly direction).

Pal (1993:53) translates the *mantra* as "O All pervading God, may water, which bears the property of cohesion, safe guard our sacrificial fire in the east".

(ii) *Om anumate'numanyaswa*. (Sprinkle water in the westerly direction).

Pal (1993:53) explains: O Almighty God! May water, agreeable to all, protect our sacrificial fire in the west.

(iii) *Om saraswatyanumanyaswa*. (Sprinkle water in the northerly direction).

O Gracious God! May water, full of activity, guard our sacrificial fire in the north.

(iv) *Om deva savitah prasuva yajñam prasuva yajñapatim bhagāya. Divyo gandharvah ketapūh ketannah punātu vācaspatir vācannah swadatu.* (Sprinkle water in all directions).

O Almighty God! May the sacred water actuate us to perform good deeds. May it purify our bodies directly and our minds indirectly. O Lord of Speech, may my speech be sweet.

## 5.21 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE JALASĪNCANA MANTRA (SPRINKLING OF WATER AROUND THE FIRE).

*Mantras* (i) and (ii) are examples of propositional gestures, the performance of which demonstrate parallelism. A balance is maintained when the devotee sprinkles water in the opposite direction. This technique is an example of bilateralism.

When the first *mantra* is recited, the hope is expressed that the performance of the *yajña* itself will be continued without any hindrances. The threat of the fire getting out of control is likened to the passions and emotions of man which, when out of control are destructive. For the *yajña* to be successful, it is important for all the devotees to be in control and to co - operate in a spirit of unity and harmony. The water at this juncture, becomes symbolic of temperate forces which are able to bring calmness to



a chaotic situation. Water as a coolant, is able to lower temperatures and solidify. As a binding agent, water has the ability to unite objects which have different properties.

The next phase of the *yajña* is the *Āghārāvājyāhuti Mantra*.

## 5.22 THE ĀGHĀRĀVĀJYĀHUTI MANTRA (OFFERING OF GHĪ)

After the recitation of each *mantra*, *ghī* is offered into the fire. The following *mantras* are recited.

i. *Om agnaye swāhā. Idamagnaye idanna mama.*

ii. *Om somāya swāhā. Idam somaya idanna mama.*

The above two *mantras* mean : We offer the oblations in the northern and southern parts of the fire in the name of God ; who is self-effulgent, Creator of the universe and impeller of all. We have no selfish ends in view when we perform this offering. O Almighty God, May every living being of the universe attain real happiness through our deeds.

iii. *Om prājāpataye swāhā. Idam prājāpataye idanna mama.*

iv. *Om indrāya swāhā. Idamindrāya idanna mama.*

*Mantra* (iii) and (iv) mean O Almighty God ! Thou art the master of all creatures. We offer these oblations to the fire to demonstrate

symbolically our abandonment of private ownership. In doing so, we have no selfish motive at all.

### 5.23 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE ĀGHĀRĀVĀJYĀHUTI MANTRA (OFFERING OF GHĪ)

An extensive use of repetition is evident in these four *mantras*.

"OM" is repeated in each of the *mantras*.

"Swaha" is repeated in each of the *mantras*.

In all four *mantras*, the phrase "*idanna mama*" are repeated. Repetition of words, vowels and syllables is the hallmark of oral tradition.

The words "*idanna mama*" literally means "This does not belong to me". It makes a symbolic pronouncement on the parts of the performer of the *yajña*, that "after offering all that I have, in the form of this *ahuti*, I renounce my claim towards anything remaining hereafter with me, as belonging to myself alone". The renunciation of any proprietorial claim towards anything is the real import of *yajña*.

In the four *mantras*, the offerings are directed to *Agni*, *Soma*, *Prajāpati* and *Indra*. *Agni* is the fire which exists in the heavens as the sun, in the earth's atmosphere as lightning and on earth, it is the fire. In all these forms, *Agni* plays a vital role in man's life. By paying homage to *Agni*, the devotees are expressing the hope that the seasonal changes would be

maintained, thus ensuring a good harvest.

In *mantra* (ii), *Indra*, the Vedic god of war and rain, is able to bring peace and prosperity to man. As a rain god, it is *Indra's* responsibility to ensure that water is available to man. This is accomplished when *Indra* pierces the clouds with his weapon, the thunderbolt, to release the water as rain.

In *mantra* (iii), *Prajāpati* is the lord of all creatures and of fertility. By paying homage to this aspect of GOD, the devotees appeal to GOD to make their lives prosperous.

In *mantra* (iv), the devotees make their offerings to *Soma*, another aspect of GOD. *Soma*, is an intoxicating juice which is obtained from a sacred plant. *Soma*, the God, is a personification of this juice which has the ability to heal all wounds and cure all illnesses. By making offerings to this aspect of GOD, the devotees express their desire for a useful life. This can only be accomplished, if one is prosperous and free from ailments.

## 5.24 PRĀTAHKĀLA MANTRA (OBLATIONS FOR THE MORNING SACRIFICE)

### PROCEDURE

The following *mantras* are recited in the morning. Offerings of *ghī* and *sāmagrī* are done simultaneously on the utterance of "*swāhā*".

PHOTOGRAPH 10

GESTURE FOR PRĀTAHKĀLA MANTRA



THE DEVOTEES OFFER GHĪ AND SĀMAGRĪ INTO THE FIRE.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 10)

i. *Om sūryo jyotir jyotiḥ sūryaḥ swāhā.*

ii. *Om sūryo varco jyotirvarcaḥ swāhā.*

iii. *Om jyotiḥ sūryaḥ suryo jyotiḥ swāhā.*

iv. *Om sajūrdevena savitrā sajūrusasendravyā juṣānaḥ sūryo vetu swāhā.*

*Mantras* (i) to (iv) mean, O Almighty God, the sun, created by Thee, is the source of light and energy in this world. The whole animate kingdom, sentient as well as insentient, depend upon it for its life. It is the chief source of inspiration for activity. Let us be impelled by offering the oblations. O Gracious God ! May the sun, accompanied by the bright dawn, accept our oblations that is, may the sacrificial material, offered in the fire, be disintegrated into fine particles which may be drawn up and diffused in the atmosphere by the sun. (Pal:1993:57-58)

#### 5.25 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE PRĀTAHKĀLA MANTRA (OBLATIONS FOR THE MORNING SACRIFICE).

In order to facilitate a rhythmic recitation and memorisation of the *mantras*, it is evident that certain key words has been used. The key words for the morning sacrifice are "*sūryo*" and "*jyoti*" and their

repetition emphasises the main theme of each *mantra*. *Sūrya*, in a physical sense means sun, the sustainer of life and the source of energy on earth. On a spiritual plane, "*Sūrya*" means GOD, the omnipresent, self effulgent who illuminates all things in the universe and is the support of all life.

In all four *mantras*, light is used as an image to reinforce the doctrine of Hinduism. *Jyoti* (Light) constitutes a symbol conveying the loftiest sentiments of our religion. We all desire to be in the light, not in darkness. We pray "*Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*", meaning O Lord, from Darkness lead us unto light. Darkness is symbolic of ignorance. By remaining in ignorance, one cannot see the true path in life. Knowledge, especially divine knowledge is that light by means of which we are able to perceive the highest path in life. The light implies that one should illumine the soul, the body is worthless and will return to dust, after breaking into innumerable pieces. It further implies that one should however, not allow the spiritual element of one's self to become extinguished. The message of the light remains for all times as a beacon providing inspiration.

The *Sūrya* (Sun), like the flame and fire symbolises light, advancement and progress. The sun radiates its light throughout the universe and inspires reawakening and new life in everything. The sun gives warmth. It is warmth that brings grain to maturity and it is through warmth that fruits and flowers attain ripeness.

## 5.26 SĀYANKĀLA MANTRA (OBLATIONS FOR THE EVENING PRAYER)

### PROCEDURE

The following *mantras* are recited in the evening. *Ghī* and *sāmagrī* are offered as oblations. The third *mantra* given below is only a repetition (to equalise the number with that of the morning sacrifice *mantras*) of the first one, hence, it is not recited aloud. The third *mantra* is to be repeated mentally but the word "*swāhā*" is recited loudly and the oblation is offered.

i. *Om agnir jyotir jyotiragnih swāhā.*

ii. *Om agnir varco jyotir varcah swāhā.*

iii. *Om agnir jyotir jyotiragnih* (silently) *swāhā.*

iv. *Om sajur devena savitrā saju rātryendravyā juṣāno agnirvetu swāhā.*

*Mantras* i, ii and iv mean : O Almighty God ! Thou hast created three chief sources of light and energy - the sun in the heaven, electric charges in the clouds and the fire on the earth. At night we depend upon the fire. It is an inspiring agent to us, besides its other utilities. May the sacrificial fire, through Thy grace, accept our oblations and turning them into fine particles, diffuse them in the atmosphere.

(Pal:1993:59).

## 5.27 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE SĀYANKĀLA MANTRA ( OBLATIONS FOR THE EVENING SACRIFICE)

The key words that link the four *mantras* for the evening sacrifice are "*Agni*" and "*Jyoti*".

The words "*Om*", "*Agni*" and "*swāhā*" are repeated emphasising its significance and further demonstrates that repetition is a common characteristic that is prevalent in oral tradition. *Agni* in its subtlest form is light and energy which is in heaven. *Agni* in its more fluid form is lightning which is reflected in the atmosphere. *Agni* in its more gross form is evident in the flaming fire on earth.

*Agni* (Fire) has the capacity to burn up dirt and all kinds of waste matter. Symbolically, the devotees want to purify themselves by incinerating their faults and negative qualities in the fire of self-control or self-discipline.

*Agni* (Fire) of the yajna should shine at every point and stage in our lives illuminating the way for all. The *yajña* is likened to the casting away of self interest and dedicating oneself to the ultimate good. *Yajña* is synonymous with doing deeds for the benefit of others at the cost of one's own comfort and convenience.

The flames of *Agni* always rise upwards exhorting mankind to strive towards higher goals. It is the goal of man to attain *Mokṣa* (liberation) and the performance of *yajña* is regarded as a means of attaining spiritual enlightenment which would ensure *Mokṣa* (liberation).



Jousse's universal Law of Bilateralism is clearly evident. The four *mantras* recited for the morning sacrifices balances with the four *mantras* recited for the evening sacrifice. For the morning sacrifice, the *Surya* (Sun), which is in higher heavenly regions runs parallel to *Agni* (Fire) which is a characteristic of earth, for the evening sacrifice. The common thread that interweaves these eight *mantras* is *Jyoti* (light), namely light from the Sun and light from the Fire.

#### 5.28 PRĀTAH - SĀYANKĀLA MANTRA (OBLATIONS FOR BOTH MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICE).

##### PROCEDURE

Recite the following *mantras* and offer the oblations of *ghī* and *sāmagrī* simultaneously on the utterance of the word "*swāhā*".

i. *Om bhūragnaye prāṇāya swāhā. Idamagnaye praṇaya idanna mama.*

O Almighty God ! May the oblation offered by us, reach the terrestrial fire which provides vitality for the living beings. We are not guided by any selfish motive in this performance. May all the creatures of the universe benefit by our deeds. (Pal:1993:60).

ii. *Om bhuvar vāyave'pānāya swāhā. Idam vāyave'pānāya idanna mama.*

O Almighty God ! May the oblations offered by us, reach the atmospheric air which removes the sufferings of the creatures. It is the

atmospheric wind that carries the fine particles of the oblation substances and thus makes the living organisms hale and hearty and removes their pain. This action of ours is intended for general benefit of all creatures, not for our own self. (Pal:1993:60).

iii. *Om swarādityāya vyānāya swāhā. Idamādityāya vyānāya idanna mama.*

O Almighty God ! May the oblation, offered by us, reach the heavenly sun which confers showers of happiness upon us. Let the fire particles of the oblation materials combine with the solar energy and purify the whole spatial atmosphere. We aim at the well - being of the whole animate world. We have no selfish end behind this act. (Pal:1993:61).

iv. *Om bhūrbhuvah swaragni vāyavādityebhyah pāṇavyānebhyaḥ swāhā. Idamagni vāyavādityebhyah prāṇapāṇavyānebhyaḥ idan na mama.*

O All Pervading God! Thou hast manifested Thy power in all the three regions of the universe - the earth, the middle region and the starry world. On earth it appears in the form of fire which provides vitality to each organism. In the middle region, it is experienced in the form of pure air which enliven the animate world. In the heavens, it is visible in the form of the sun which is the sole source of energy and rains essential for life. We offer the oblations aiming that Thy natural agencies would diffuse it everywhere. Thus may each and every creature of the universe receive the benefit in the form of vitality, removal of pain and attainment of pleasure. We have no intention to achieve any selfish motive. (Pal:1993:61-62).

v. *Om āpo jyotīraso' mrtam brahma bhūrbhuvahī swarom swāhā.*

O Almighty God! Thou art All Pervading, the Protector, the most gracious, the eternal, the cause of all life, the remover of all pains and the source of all happiness. We offer this oblation to Thee as a token of our spirit of dedication. As a matter of fact, everything belongs to Thee. Through this dedication, we humbly detach ourselves from the substances bestowed by Thee. (Pal:1993:62).

vi. *Om yām medhām devaganāh pitarāscopāsate, tayā māmadya medhyayā' gne medhāvinam kuru swāhā.*

O Self Luminous God ! Thou hast been gracious to furnish the learned and virtuous persons with superior discriminative understanding and retentive intellect. We pray to Thee, O most Benevolent God ! do bestow on us the similar understanding and intelligence. (Pal:1993:63).

vii. *Om viśwāni deva savitar duritāni parāsuva, yad bhadrantanna āsuva swāhā.*

Refer to *mantra* (i) of *ĪŚWARA UPĀSANĀ* for meaning.

viii. *Om agne naya supathā rāye asmān viśwāni deva vayunāni vidwān. Yuyo dhyasmajjuhuranameno bhūyisthante nama uktim vidhema swāhā.*

Refer to *mantra* (viii) of *ĪŚWARA UPĀSANĀ* for meaning.

## 5.29 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN *PRĀTAH -SĀYANKĀLA MANTRA* (OBLATIONS FOR BOTH MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICE)

During the offering of the oblations, the priest requests that the devotees recite the word "*swāhā*". As they make their offerings into the fire, the devotees imitate the priest's gestures, thus illustrating Jousse's universal law of Mimism.

In most of the *mantras* recited during these offerings, a specific distribution of short and long vowel sounds is evident. This distribution enhances the steady rhythm during recitation and in this manner memorisation is facilitated.

(Refer to the above eight *mantras* for the long and short vowel sounds).

In Vedic oral tradition there is also the use of the triads. The triads are placed in specific formulae to facilitate the recitation and memorisation of the verses.

In mantras i, ii, and iii, the triads are listed vertically. However, in *mantra* iv, the triads are listed horizontally.

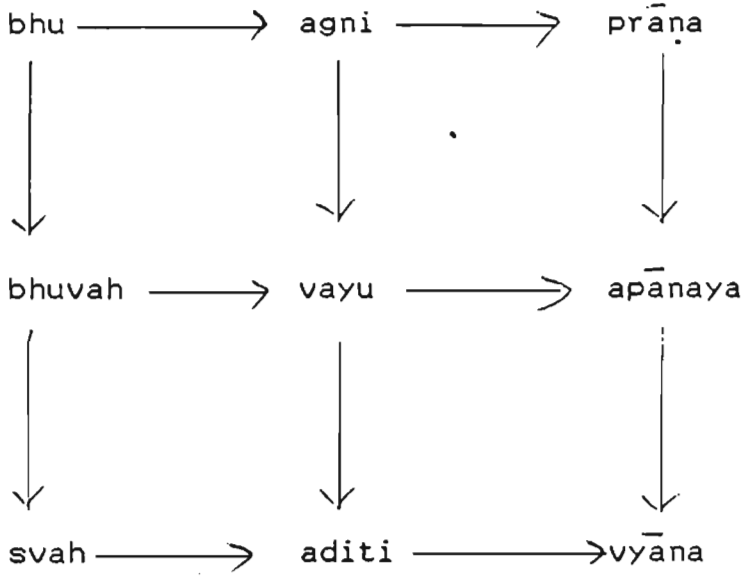
PHOTOGRAPH 11

GESTURE FOR PŪRNĀHUTI MANTRA



THE DEVOTEES STAND UP TO DO THE FINAL OFFERING OF THE SĀMAGRĪ

The diagram below illustrates the formula reflecting the triads.



### 5.30 PŪRNĀHUTI MANTRA (FINAL OFFERING)

#### PROCEDURE

The *mantra* is repeated three times while standing. The remaining *sāmagrī* should be offered in three parts, one each time on the utterance of the word "*swāhā*". Let the arrangement be made such as to finish the *ghī* and *sāmagrī* at the last offering of the oblation.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 11)

This *mantra* is recited three times.

*Om sarvaṃ vai pūrṇam swāhā.*

O God, may this yajna be complete in every way. With thy grace, may this yajna come to a successful conclusion.

### 5.31 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE *PURNAHUTI MANTRA* (FINAL OFFERING)

This *mantra*, repeated three times literally and figuratively marks the completion of the *yajna*. With the final offerings of oblation, the devotees symbolically pray to GOD to let them complete their actions in a perfect manner.

It must be noted that this final offering is a gesture that has been performed thrice. The number three is always regarded with reverence by Hindus. The word 'AUM' for example is denoted by three letters [A:], [U:] and [M:] as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This accounts for the fact that some *mantras* and gestures are repeated thrice. Sipping of water, is a gesture that is performed thrice ; offering of the three sticks dipped in *ghī* and placed into the fire, is another gesture that is performed thrice. The utterance of the word "*Santi*", three times in the "Hymn of Peace", upon the completion of the *yajna*, signifies the importance of the number three in Hinduism. It must be emphasised that the chanting of certain *mantras* in threes and the performance of certain gestures in threes is an act that has been carried down from generation to generation in the oral tradition.

PHOTOGRAPH 12

GESTURE FOR ŚĀNTI PĀTHA



THE DEVOTEES CLASP THEIR HANDS AND CLOSE THEIR EYES FOR THE RECITATION OF THE HYMN OF PEACE.



The repetitive use of "*Swāhā*", is an example of oral formulae, that enunciates the principle of reverence to GOD and His Supremacy, as well as an acknowledgement that everything belongs to GOD.

The *mantra* itself, is generally translated as "All I possess, I leave in Thy hands". But , when taken independently, it also symbolises the crucial import of *yajña*. The real sense of this *mantra* can be said as "Nothing is complete in itself. It is only a part of an all encompassing whole. Only the wholeness means completeness. Everything is incomplete, when taken individually". Therefore, the literal translation should be, "**only the whole is complete, not an individual part**".

It must be pointed out that no ritual performance is prescribed after the last oblation. To mark the conclusion of the *yajña*, the devotees recite the "Hymn of Peace", with closed eyes.

(REFER TO PHOTOGRAPH 12)

#### 5.32 *ŚĀNTI PĀTHA* (HYMN OF PEACE)

*Om Dyauh śāntirantarikṣam śāntih prthivī śāntirāpah śāntiṣṭhāyāḥ  
śāntih. Vanaspatayah śāntir viśvedevāḥ śāntirbrahma śāntih sarvām  
śāntih śāntireva śāntih sāmā śāntiredhi*

*Om Śāntih Śāntih Śāntih.*

May there be peace in the heavenly region and the atmosphere; may peace reign on the earth; let there be coolness in the water; may the

medicinal herbs be healing; the plants be peace giving; may there be harmony in the celestial objects and perfection in eternal knowledge; may everything in the universe be peaceful; let peace pervade everywhere. May that peace abide in me.

May there be peace, peace, peace! (Vedalankar:1991:44)

### 5.33 PRESENCE OF GESTURAL AND ORAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE *SANTI PATHA* (HYMN OF PEACE)

In the Hymn of Peace, it must be noted that the "*śā*" sound is repeated fifteen times and a rhythmic flow is evident when this *mantra* is recited. The "*śā*" syllable emphasises the value of alliteration as a mnemotechnical device and this key sound "*śā*" facilitates the memorisation of this *mantra*.

The repetition of "*Śānti, Śānti*" at the end of the *yajña*, has a message to convey. The repetition of peace, firmly and emphatically stress on the reciter that he is to carry on the various deliberations of his life with full equanimity, evenmindedness and peace inside as well as outside himself. He is not to be carried away by momentary reactions, but is invariably guided and led by basic human and moral considerations so that he may be a wise person in the real sense.

The word "*Śānti*" or "Peace" acts as a link word that facilitates the recitation of the *mantra* and is an aid to memorisation. The devotee asks God to symbolically transfer the peace from the heavenly regions onto him. Upon the completion of the *yajña*, peace and harmony prevails in

the environment and the devotee hopes to experience this peace and harmony within himself.

When reciting the "*Sānti Pātha*", mimism is reflected, when the devotees clasp their hands. In Hinduism, the clasping of hands, signify the devotees salutations and reverence to God during the prayer. This act of clasping the hands has been handed down from generation to generation and typifies the oral tradition. It is interesting to note that this gesture is also used as a traditional form of greeting by Hindus.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, the *yajña* has been analysed to identify gestural and oral style elements. It is evident that the *mantras* used in the performance of the *yajña* contain a wealth of oral and gestural elements. The extensive use of mnemotechnical devices such as key words, repetition, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration etc. have ensured the perpetuation of the *yajña* from generation to generation.

The fact that the Vedic sacrifices have continued to be celebrated not only centuries after the Vedic period, but even up to the present day, is unquestionable proof of the persistence of the old religion, bearing in mind that the "*yajña*" constitutes its more important element (Aguilar:1976:8).

The Vedas which were handed down by oral transmission from generation to generation is a good example of Hindu literature deeply rooted in oral tradition. It must be also noted that there are secondary Hindu scriptures like the two great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana which have their bases in oral tradition. The Vedas, according to Ong (1982:66), have thematic elements, formulaic elements and oral mnemonics as part of their structure.

The universal laws of Rhythmism, Mimism, Bilateralism and Formulism as propounded by Marcel Jousse are also identifiable in the performance of the *yajña* itself as well as in the recitation of the *mantras* during the performance. Thus, the belief that Hinduism is based on oral tradition is

reaffirmed by the fact that religious rites, rituals, ceremonies and festivals are still observed and have become the common practices of Hindus today.

This study, based on the presence of gestural and oral expressions evident in the *yajña*, will serve as an invaluable contribution in making Hindus aware of the rich cultural heritage which has its roots in Hinduism.

Although an investigation into the presence of gestural and oral expressions evident in the *yajña* has been explored, a greater scope for further research exists because of the extensive use of oral style elements.

This study could be concluded in the words of Selvanayagam (1996:19) who states : "In all times and in the most diverse traditions comprising the Hindu religious configuration, the concept of *yajña*, has been an old skin into which new wine is poured".

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**Video recording of the performance of the yajna and audio**

**recording of the mantras recited during the performance of the yajna are**

**in the possession of my supervisor Professor E. Sienaert. (Head of the**

**Centre for Oral Studies -University of Natal, Durban).**