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Ritual, Reality, and Meaning

The Vedic Ritual of Cremating a Surrogate Body

Introduction

Reading religion through the perspective of rituals involves the corporeality of religious phenomena, as ritualized acts are consciously articulated physical functioning. Finding meaning in a ritual, due to its physicality, necessitates the recognition of physical awareness, sensation, and feelings as integral to meaning. This study, an analysis of a cremation ritual of a surrogate body found in the ancient Vedic literature and still practiced by many Hindus, explores the meaning of ritual, bringing the 'body' into discourse. Just as performing ritual is not possible in the absence of a body, finding the meaning of ritual cannot abnegate physical movement and bodily-felt emotions. This analysis explores the meaning of a ritual where the cognitive and emotional aspects are united, suggesting in conclusion the possibility of 'non-dual' meaning. The concepts that the body is an altar where the sacred is found and that the body is a miniature of the cosmos, are commonly found in various Asiatic traditions. The traditions of Yoga and Tantra support the concept that the body is the universe, with its parts corresponding to various geographic sites and constellations. This study of the surrogate body explores the earliest references for such a concept.

Two dissociative and associative factors come into play when death occurs: the physical 'body' and the subtle body or '*prāṇa*' (can be addressed as the 'spirit' for comparative understanding) of the deceased and the physical presence of the person in his society are sundered from each other, whereas the subtle body of the deceased is reunited with 'fathers' or with 'gods' and the constituents of the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and sky return back to their correlates. The event of death, at this point, becomes maimed by cultures, shaping the experience of 'death' within its cultural horizon. As Hindus believe in reincarnation that accepts the cyclical nature of life, the ritual recognition of death invokes this understanding of the body, or 'bodies' in this case, as Hindus consider the spirit in the journey to the abode of fathers or of gods as the 'subtle body' (*sūkṣma śarīra*).¹ This rare ritual,

¹ Many thanks go to Professors LINDA HOLLER and FREDRICK SMITH, and Ms. MARY HICKS for valuable suggestions, corrections, and meticulous revisions through many drafts of this essay. The examples of this ritual come from my direct knowledge of Hindu society: when someone is taken away by a flood and the body could not be found, in the case when a plane crashes and the body-parts are not recovered, or in the case of mountain climbing when someone falls from a cliff and no one can recover the body. If not mentioned otherwise, the description of this ritual relies upon *Karmakāṇḍapradīpa* following the *Śukla-Yajurveda*. Suggested reading for the Hindu death ritual include DIANA ECK: *Banaras: City of Light*. Princeton 1983; GHOSH SHYAM: *Hindu Concept of Life and Death*. New

the consequence of a misfortunate event, functions as a recognition-in-absence, by which the significance of the lost body is acknowledged through the ritual of a surrogate reconstruction.

A secular function of cremation, removal of the decomposing body, becomes extraneous to the social sphere when there is no corpse to be removed, for example when the kin dies in a distant battle or unrecovered shipwreck. The ritual of constructing a surrogate body places the ‘ritualized body’ in an open theater, exposing the inner contradiction between a ritual body and the corporeal body.² At first glance, the ‘real’ and ‘constructed’ are apparently the lost body and its effigy; however, at the exalted level, the ‘real’ from the ritualistic perspective is the ritually articulated body. Bearing a certain degree of identity and of difference, the corporeal body thus mediates contrasting attributes. In those cases wherein a surrogate body replaces the physical body, the deceased is identified with the effigy, as the ritual performed upon it and in its construction, this effigy assists the deceased in his or her afterlife journey. The construction of this surrogate body is a complex and highly significant process which, when completed, enables the priests to accomplish the paramount duty of guiding the spirit to its new home. This essay is primarily focused on the creation and significance of the surrogate body. The study of this complex ritual unveils a deep structural Hindu understanding of ‘body’,³ in which this body-for-the-sake-of-ritual is identified with that very cosmic Puruṣa whose dismemberment allows the world to become manifest. This ritual reconstruction of a body, which then is identified with the cosmos, demonstrates that a physical body, at its core, is the cosmos itself with the physical limbs the condensed ecosphere.

As noted above, death is not only an ontological event, but also a cultural phenomenon, with the ritual event exposing a repressed awareness of death. The cremation ritual is a formal affirmation of death, surrendering to its reality, with an acknowledgement that death cannot be denied any longer. In the absence of a body, however, denial becomes possible and classical Hindu literature demonstrates such a dilemma.⁴ As there are legal as well as

Delhi 1989; RAJBALI PANDEY: *Hindu Samskaras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*. Delhi 1969; B. N. SARASWATI: *Brahmanic Ritual Traditions*. Simla 1977.

² For ‘ritual body,’ see CATHERINE BELL: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York 1992, pp. 94-117. For specific discourse on the ‘body’ from the perspective of Hinduism, see BARBARA HOLDREGE: “Body Connections: Hindu discourses of the body and the study of religion.” In: *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2,3 (1998), pp. 341-86.

³ There are some other instances of making an effigy, like in the special calendar events of *pañcaka* and *tripuṣkara* yoga, five and three effigies are respectively made. This concept of representation follows the early concept of the representation of the lost by cremating an effigy.

⁴ The time limit to declare someone lost as dead is 12 years in general, although there is some variation. *Bhaviṣyapurāna* mentions this time period as being less than 15 years. In practice, when the lost one becomes of the age of hundred years, his effigy is cremated. In

cultural consequences, it is then impossible to permanently deny death, and the ritual with a surrogate body becomes unavoidable. The focus of this essay is not those consequences but rather a thorough examination of how the cremation ritual functions in the absence of a body and what that negotiation with absence signifies in a broader context. The identity-in-difference of different bodies necessitates that ritual constitutes its own reality, with several mutually maimed bodies consequently vibrating as functionary cosmos, being synthesized by a series of rituals within a single ritual of death.

The Cosmic and the Physical Bodies

Following the Vedic myth, the world is the fragmented body of the Puruṣa. This fragmentation can be found in corporeality, bodily awareness, ritual-body, surrogates, and the cosmos seen as the expanded mode of bodily awareness. While in the process of identifying a corporeal body with the cosmos, a structure of conceptual bodies emerges. As this body functions ‘in between’, connecting the cosmic and the physical bodies, it can be considered as the mesocosmic body.⁵ This dreamlike body connects the visible and the invisible, the corporeal and the spiritual, the form and the formless. The cremation ritual performed with a surrogate body not only articulates a ritual body but also confirms this mesocosmic body that has been maimed through rituals occurring during the life of the person who maintained those rituals. The earliest documentation of such ritual is that of a fire-holder (*agnihotrin*).⁶

Nepalese tradition, I have generally observed that to establish one as lost, the family has to wait for the lost individual to reach one hundred years of age. The most prominent issue connected with this concerns legacy. The text by SHRĪ SUBHADRA SHARMA: *Dharma-śāstrīyavyavasthāsaṅgraha*. Varanasi: 1957, addresses issues related to the rights of the wife of the deceased when her husband has been lost and is being declared as dead. The issue is discussed in letter 175 (S. SHARMA 1957, pp. 518-523). Further discussion can be found in Ed. PADMAPRASADA UPADHYAYA: *Śuddhiprakāśa*. Varanasi 1994, and Ed. LUDO ROCHER: *Dāyabhāga*. New York 2002. There are also religious issues if the supposedly deceased returns. An early scripture that addresses this is Ed. GOPINATHA DIKSITA: *Satyāśāḍha-śrautasūtra*. Punyapattana 1907-1932. The later texts, Baudhāyana's *Pitrmedhasūtra* found in Ed. W. CALAND: *The Pitrmedhasūtras of Baudhāyana, Hiraṇyakeśin, Gautama*. Leipzig 1896, and *Garūḍapurāṇa* (Ed. Tr. MANMATHA NATH DUTT: *Garūḍapurāṇa*. Varanasi 1968), also deal with this problem. According to these, in the case when the man declared dead returns, he should be purified by immersion in a pond of purified butter. He is later bathed and all *samskāras*, starting from the *jātakarma* (birth ritual) are performed; he is considered to be newly-born. He must marry again the wife with whom he was previously married and if his wife is dead, he is permitted to marry again and resume performing the *Agnihotra*. For discussion, see G. DIKSITA 1907-1932 29:4, 41; W. CALAND 1896; and M. DUTT 1968, 2:4, 169-70.

⁵ I am using the term ‘mesocosm’ as it has been applied by DAVID GORDON WHITE: *The Alchemical Body*. Chicago 1996, and ROBERT I. LEVY: *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*. Berkeley 1984. This term is used in general to refer to a conceptual framework that functions as an interface between microcosm, the body, and macrocosm, the cosmos.

⁶ *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (hereafter ŚB). Delhi 1990 2:5.1, pp. 13-14.

Since he is the one who continues the rituals that regard fire as Vaiśvānara, the immanent self that incorporates the world and the sentient beings within it, the cremation ritual of a fire-holder supposedly allows him to manifest in the form of his deity, Vaiśvānara, as the collective body.

Offering the body of the deceased to the fire is similar to other fire-offerings except that, in this case, the body itself is the object offered, transforming the one who had maintained the fire into yet another sacrificial offering. Explicitly in the case of the fire-holder, fire is his deity and his transformation from a corporeal body is into the body of fire that permeates the cosmos. The vital breath (*prāṇa*) of the individual that is identified through rituals and visualization with fire while alive, has to merge with the Vaiśvānara through this cremation ritual.⁷ Transformation of the life-force into fire in post-Vedic culture appears to have been internalized and generalized, manifesting in various meditative techniques in Asiatic traditions.⁸ The surrogate body, in this specific context, becomes food for the fire, with specific rituals and mantras creating the ritual-sphere where the deity and the deceased can communicate.

In cases in which there is partial recovery of a body, bones are wrapped in deerskin and the fire-holder is cremated along with his ritual-instruments, with the deerskin explicitly representing the skin of the deceased. Accomplishment of this ritual facilitates the pacification of fire in the case of the death of the fire-holder.⁹ *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* (AB) is one of the earliest sources to explain that an effigy is made in order to perform a cremation ritual when the body is lost. This effigy is made out of 360 stalks, which, following Caraka, is the number of bones in a human body and which in turn represents the days of a year.¹⁰ This consonance highlights the degree to which the body is a mini-universe, containing within itself the same cyclic

⁷ See HARRY FALK: “How the Śrauta-fires save the life of an Āhitāgni,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122,2 (2002) pp. 248-251.

⁸ BENTOR argues that the Vedic fire ritual is found in pan-Asian culture in internalized forms. See YAEL BENTOR: “Interiorized Fire Rituals in India and in Tibet,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120,4 (2000), pp. 594-613.

⁹ Ed. KASHINATH SASTRI AGASE: *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa*. *Punyapattana* (1930-1977), 32.1 explains that the fire is kept as long as bones are not brought back to the village. This is elaborated in *Smṛtis* as well: ed. VIDYADHARA SARMA: *Kātyāyana-śrautasūtra*, Varanasi 1990 25.8.9; *Baudhāyanapitṛmedhasūtra* 3.8; *Gobhīlasmṛti* in *Āṅgīrahprabhṛti-Baudhāyanaparyantam Saptaviṃśatisaṅkhyāmitānām Smṛtīnām Samuccayah*. *Punyapattana* 1929 3.47; ed. tr. PATRICK OLIVELLE: *Vaśiṣṭhadharmasūtra* in *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vasistha*, Oxford 1999, 4.37.

¹⁰ See chapter 4, “Śārīrasthāna” in Ed. BRAHMANANDA TRIPATHI: *Carakasamhitā*. Varanasi 1983.

properties and precise mathematical relationships that are exhibited by the sun and its celestial counterparts.¹¹

According to *Śuddhiprakāśa* (ŚP), these 360 twigs should be from a *palāśa* tree, which is considered to be pure for fire rituals or other initiatory rituals. These stalks are wrapped in the skin of a black deer and bound by wool. The effigy is smeared with barley pastry dough. Even though ŚP does not specify whether human shape is given to the effigy, *Yajñapārśva* explicitly mentions that. While the distribution of twigs is not always the same in the different scriptures that address this ritual, their semiotic value remains largely unchanged. In fact, a comparative study of the various Vedic passages on this ritual unveils a kind of semiotic identity-in-difference in which multiple textual reflections upon the body are unified through their shared understanding of the deep structure of the body and what that structure tells us about the holographic nature of the Vedic cosmos.¹² For detail of the limbs of the body and the number of correlating twigs, based on various classical Hindu texts, see Index I.

Semiotics of the Ritual Body

The ritual body is obviously different from the physical body in that it lacks the capacity to perform physical activities. However, this body is understood by its creators to be no less endowed with the very spiritual qualities that are essential to the human body. This absence becomes explicit when one examines the passages describing the process by which the surrogate ritual body is constructed.

The ritual begins with the person who performs the ritual placing a deerskin facing east, the direction of sunrise. The effigy faces to the south, the direction of Yama, the lord of death. This symbolic body under construction ritualistically embodies all the aspects that an individual possesses. To give the effigy the same symbolic and metaphysical value as a real body, it must first receive the primary life cycle rites (*saṃskāras*) that are provided within the culture. This process starts with *garbhādhāna*, the ritual per-

¹¹ The distribution of stalks is: 150 in trunk, 140 in thighs, 50 stalks in legs and the remaining 20 stalks on head. See Ed. P. UPADHYAYA 1994, p. 187.

¹² *Vīramitrodaya* cites a reference to Manu which does not exist anymore in the available redactions of *Manusmṛti*. This presents a totally different concept from what is presented here: the number of stalks used are 700. The whole tradition does not follow this, as seen in the Brāhmaṇa texts; therefore, this article is not much concerned with this description P. UPADHYAYA 1994, pp. 185-186. If day and night are counted separately, there may be 720 which still requires 20 additional stalks, but the number of the bones will still not be matching in any respect. Instead of reading *daśa kaṇṭhe tu vinyaset* the reading as *śataṃ kaṇṭhe tu vinyaset* is more confusing; this must be a mistake, because otherwise even the number given for limbs does not match the total.

formed when a baby is conceived, which is highlighted by the recitation of the mantras for the five faces of Śiva.¹³ The remainder of the rituals are administered after the completion of the *garbhādhāna*. During an important stage in this process, a deerskin is purified with the sixteen *Rgvedic* mantras central to the ritual of installing life in an image.¹⁴ This process transforms the body made of twigs into a mantra-body that effectively represents the dead person for all the required *post mortem* rituals. While placing forty stalks for the head, gold, the symbol of glory and prosperity, is envisioned (*Śukla-Yajurveda* (hereafter ŚY) 34.50) as the golden Puruṣa residing within the sun. The mantra of the horse sacrifice is then read while placing ten stalks in the neck region, summoning Vāyu, Agni, and the moon to protect the body (ŚY 23.13). The Rudras are invoked (ŚY 16.1) while placing fifty stalks in each hand, symbolically representing the hundred Rudras who abide in all directions. Aśvin, Pūṣan, and Savitar, respectively related to the hands, fists, and physical movements, are summoned (ŚY 1.10) while placing ten stalks as symbolic of fingers in the effigy. Twenty stalks are placed for the chest while invoking Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya, the deities considered as the heart of Rudra (ŚY 16.46). This ritual identifies the deceased with Rudra, placing the deities that constitute the heart of Rudra as the heart of the spirit made present in the effigy. Thirty stalks are placed in the belly while again reading the mantra of the horse sacrifice. In this way the surrogate body is segmented into various parts correlating with numerous Vedic deities (ŚY 25.8). Deities of water and waves are then invoked, with the placement of four stalks for the penis (ŚY 6.25), representing bones as firesticks and semen, the oblation. Six stalks are placed to represent the testicles, along with recitation of the mantra that summons Indra with his thunderbolt with six spokes (ŚY 20.54). For the effigy of a woman, ten stalks are used to signify the vulva, accompanied by an invocation to Bhaga (ŚY 34.36). Fifty stalks are placed for each thigh while summoning Yajamāna, who, in turn, is identified with Rātr̥ and Uṣas, the deities of night and dawn at the gate of the sacrificial altar (ŚY 29.6). Fifteen stalks are placed in each knee while invoking Rāṣṭr̥. Next, the back and other limbs are identified with Rāṣṭrajana (ŚY 20.8). Fifteen stalks are placed in the legs while reading the mantra that equates the mind with the navel and bliss and fecundity with the genitals (ŚY 20.9). Savitṛ is again made present while ten stalks for the ten toes are placed. In this way, a total of 360 stalks are ritually placed as a complete representation of the bones in the human anatomy, identical with all the deities.

¹³ These are the mantras from Ed. Tr. ARTHUR BERRIEDALE KEITH: *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*. Delhi 1995, 17.1-5.

¹⁴ *Puruṣasūkta* in *RgVeda* 10.90. This *Sūkta* also occurs in *Śuklayajurveda* 31.1-16.

Running parallel to the statement, ‘Whether I live or die, I am barley,’¹⁵ the Vedic ritual of cremation identifies the corporeal body with vegetables and plants that sustain the body. The Vedic myth of Puruṣa reinforces the same concept that ‘food’ and the ‘enjoyer of the food’ are essentially interlinked. With detailed analysis of the mantras read and the rituals performed while constructing the effigy, the ritual in the context presents the body as a collection of food-substances. This body on one hand is the surrogate of the individual, while on the other hand it is the representative of the ecosphere that has been in dialogue with the person while he was alive, specifically being ritual objects in order to perform the sacrifice. These mantras derive from the *Puruṣamedha*, while the ritual activities are culled from the *Sarvamedha* ritual. This composite ritual thus summons the potency of Vedic fire-rituals in multiple aspects utilized during the formation of a single effigy. After the 360 stalks have been situated, the surrogate body is given a fleshy appearance by first smearing it with barley paste while repeating a mantra from the *Puruṣasūkta* (ŚY 31.16) and then with application of a mixture of *māṣa* flour placed while chanting the mantra of *graha*-consumption (ŚY 20.13). Ointment of purified butter is then applied while reciting the *dyāvāprthivī*, praising the rain god who governs the aspect semen-formation (ŚY 34.45).

A coconut is placed as the head, while invoking heaven and earth, considered to be the fatherly and motherly aspects that gave birth to ‘fire’ (ŚY 7.24). An alternative is prescribed: placing a gourd fruit for a skull, while reading the mantra for a sacrificial cake (*puroḍāśa*) (ŚY 29.60). Pig-hair is used to approximate the missing human hair and beard, and the individual constructing the effigy reads a mantra that asks wolf hair to approximate pubic hair, tiger hair to become the missing man’s beard, and lion’s-hair to represent that found on the head (ŚY 19.92). While the practitioner reads a mantra that summons the eyes of Viśvakarman (ŚY 17.19), two cowries are placed as eyes, with the jujube fruit placed as pupils while reciting a mantra invoking Indra’s eyes (ŚY 19.89). While addressing Vāyu, the wind-god, (ŚY 27.28) cotton fruit is placed for nose. Camphor is placed for life-force (*prāṇa*) while the practitioner recites the mantra of making sacrificial altar (ŚY 17.15). In the place of the ears, two pearl oysters are placed while summoning Rṣabha. Barley grass is placed for eyebrows, while jujube suggests saliva (ŚY 19.91). The palm leaf is placed in the ‘mouth’ as a tongue, to the sounds of the mantra that relates sacrificial instruments with Indra’s body-parts (ŚY 19.88). While the practitioner recites a mantra of the *Sautrāmaṇi* ritual (ŚY 11.25), five jewels such as diamond are placed in mouth. Pomegranate seeds suggest teeth, with the practitioner invoking the Puruṣa as one whose body-parts gave birth of sky, heaven, and worlds (ŚY 31.13).

¹⁵ Coffin texts, cited in MIRCEA ELIADE: *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions*. New York 1967, p. 193.

A mantra praising the speed of the sacrificial horse (ŚY 9.14) is read while the sacred thread is given. A mantra that states that Indra's heart is made by Savitar of the sacrificial cake, lungs by Varuṇa, bones of the side of heart (*matasnā*) and bile are made with the sacrificial objects of north-west direction (ŚY 19.85), is read while placing *haritāla* in the heart. *Msanahśilā* is placed in the limbs and sulfur for three *dhātus* (wind, gall, and phlegm), which summons Indra for protection (ŚY 20.50). Placing wool for hair, one *Aśvamedha*-mantra is read that offers ten constituents of body, hair, skin, blood, fat, flesh, nerves, bones, marrow, semen, and anus (ŚY 39.10).

A radish is placed in navel (with chanting ŚY 20.9); *lac* is used for the joints while another mantra of horse sacrifice (ŚY 39.8) is read. These mantras considering reformation of a body resonate with that of the horse sacrifice, in which 42 body-parts are identified (ŚY 39.8-13). Two citrons are placed for breasts, along with recitation invoking fire (ŚY 17.87). Fire is addressed (ŚY 3. 37) while placing talc in forehead. Liquor is used to summon the properties of *soma* (ŚY 20.27) while placing fragrant root *uśīra* in the place of fingernails. Turmeric is sprayed throughout the whole body while invoking *soma* as herb to cure (ŚY 12.96). *Kamalākṣyā* is placed in the location of entrails while the practitioner reads the mantra that identifies sacrificial instruments with body parts (ŚY 19.86). For penis, a carrot is placed along with recitation of a mantra from the *Puruṣasūkta* that makes present Prajāpati (ŚY 31.19). Two eggplants are placed as testicles while reading the mantra for bringing fire (ŚY 5.2); for vigor, the mantra of offering sheep to Sarasvatī, the mother of *vyāna*, (ŚY 19.90) is read while placing mercury in the place of semen. In the case of a woman, the leaf of *ficus indica* is placed as vulva while summoning Sarasvatī and Varuṇa (ŚY 19.94).

A covering of green cloth is given with the recitation of a mantra (ŚY 20.8) while the head-garb is placed silently.¹⁶ Fire is invoked in the manner of the seers of the Aṅgirā clan from water and plants (ŚY 15.28) while the practitioner places *pittala* as anus, and Śrī is summoned while placing a cutting of borax in anus. Clay symbolizing stool, and cow-urine for urine are placed while reciting a mantra (ŚY 19.76). Two radishes are placed as thighs while a reading the mantra of *Sarvamedha* invokes fire (ŚY 33.9). Two bananas are placed for hands with the mantra that identifies heart to the self (ŚY 20.7). Sugarcane is placed as the hollow leg bones, glorifying the all-pervasiveness of Viṣṇu that reminds one of the myth of Trivikrama (ŚY 34.43). For feet, rice grains are placed with a mantra from the *puruṣasūkta* (ŚY 31.3); honey is given as blood by reading a mantra that is used in rituals to soften *kūrma* with curd, honey, and butter (ŚY 13.27).

¹⁶ There are some silent rituals here, several occurring while cremating an *agnihotrin*. For elaboration, see *Karmakāṇḍapradīpa*.

Sticks are placed as shoulders with the mantra summoning mind to be of virtuous will (ŚY 34.1); glass is placed in palate while making a vow to the seers of Sautrāmaṇi who milked the prosperous nectar by obtaining the light of the beings (ŚY 19.95); betel-nut is placed as ankles¹⁷ in the process of invoking fire for protection (ŚY 19.39); with recitation a mantra, *utati* is placed as nails on toes (ŚY 20.6); on the back of feet two mango fruits are placed simultaneous with the reading of one mantra from *Puruṣasūkta* (ŚY 31.21).

In place of ligature, *aegle marmelos* is placed while the practitioner chants a mantra praising Indra's mighty thunderbolt (ŚY 17.33). *Moha* is placed for *jīva* (soul) while reading the mantra used when installing pillars demarking the cremation ground (ŚY 35.15). The mantra of *sarvamedha* sacrifice that praises Mitra and Varuṇa to bring prosperity (ŚY 33.46) is recited while placing *piper longum* in the place of bile. The fragrant *uśtra* root is placed as *vāta*, one of the three *doṣas*, while summoning Varuṇa (ŚY 33.46). A mantra read in the context of horse sacrifice to awaken the wife of the sacrificer so that he is purified and thus prevented from speaking vulgar words (ŚY 23.32) is used while placing curd as phlegm. The effigy is sprinkled three times with saffron and purified butter to recitation of the mantra of sacrificing fat for various directions (ŚY 6.19). Finally, a bath is given with five cleansing substances¹⁸ while reading the mantras.¹⁹

The body is then covered with white garb and sprinkled with sandalwood. A rosary of the *tulasī* plant is placed around the neck, and curd and honey are smeared over all the body. The body is then offered fragrant resin incense and a lamp of purified butter is lit. The life is installed, and in the process, the mind and life-breath are asked to return. Fire is invoked to provide protection from vice and injury (ŚY 4.15). While the practitioner reads one *anuvāka* that expresses the glory of the consecrated one (ŚY 20.5), all the limbs are joined and a vase is placed over the head, while a fruit and copper coin are placed as Varuṇa is summoned.²⁰ The effigy is consecrated with sprinkling of the vase water while mantras are chanted.²¹ The mantra for *āpyāyana*, a preparatory ritual for an animal, is read in order to pacify mind

¹⁷ The book reads *phalgvoḥ*, which I could not find consonant with the context, and so I suggested this as *gulphvoḥ* meaning ankles.

¹⁸ The name of the five substances from the cow is known as *pañcagavya*: milk, curd, purified butter, urine, and dung.

¹⁹ The mantras applied in *pañcāmṛtasnāna* are the Gāyatrī mantra for urine, *gandhadvārām*. . . for cow dung, *āpyāyasva*. . . for milk, *dadhikrāvṇa*. . . for curd, *tejosi*. . . for purified butter, *payah prthivyām*. . . collectively for the five ambrosias.

²⁰ The mantra for this is *imam me Varuṇa*.

²¹ The mantras used here are the first mantras of the four Vedas: *agnimīde* (*R̥gveda*), *iṣetvorjetvā* (*Yajurveda*), *agna āyāhi*, *śan no devī*, and *vācaṃ te śundhāmi*.

and senses (ŚY 6.15). Finally, the effigy is given a name and a *gotra*, the specific clan-identity that connects the deceased with Vedic seers.²²

This ritual construction of the body cannot be simply reduced to ‘making an effigy’. The complex ritual of assigning body parts with mantras and the deities in order to transform the concept of the body from the mortal, limited-in-space being bound in flesh and blood to the cosmic one demonstrates the interpenetration of the cosmic being and individual being. This interpenetration is the meaning found in the process of performing the ritual, as this meaning is not merely conceptually constructed but also physically felt.

The branches, vegetation, and herbs that re-create the body which has been lost are also part of the process of reinventing the body by expanding the meaning of the body beyond its corporeality. Consistent to this understanding is a process of sacrifice, in which *palāśa* twigs that are used for skeletal parts suggest firewood, and the herbs and plants used to reconstitute the body represent sacrificial objects. Death, in this depiction, reestablishes the relationship between the agent and the means of sacrifice. This ritual reconstruction of the body parallels the death ritual performed for a fireholder (*agnihotrin*), in which the fire ritual comes to an end with the death of the agent.²³ In this ceremony, the objects used redefine the body of the deceased, with the instruments of the fire-ritual being placed in the pyre alongside the corpse. This is when the instruments of oblation and the agent of oblation present in his body transform into objects of oblation.

The Vedic texts that correlate the ritual instruments with the body of the sacrificer do not agree on what specific instrument relates to what par-

²² The objects used to constitute the effigy are not always the same. *Yajñapārśva* mentions that a coconut is placed as a head, a gourd as the forehead, five jewels in mouth, a banana as the tongue, two cowries for eyes, *kālaka* as the nose, *brahmapatra* as ears, the roots of *ficus indica* are placed as hairs, lotus stalks for entrails, clay for fat including *haritāla* and sulfur, mercury for semen, *pittala* for stool, a paste of *māṣa* cereals for joints, barley paste for flesh, honey in the place of blood, deer-skin as skin, citron for breast, *śatapatra* for nose, lotus in the navel, *brinjal* as testicles, for the penis, a red radish. *Dukūla* is given as cloth covering the effigy, cow urine and dung are mixed with turmeric and sprinkled over the body. The list given by NITYĀNANDA suggests a gourd as the head instead of a coconut, a banana leaf for the forehead, the sesame flower for the nose, *manaḥśilā* for wind, and for phlegm, the foam of the sea. See NITYĀNANDA PANT PARVATIYA: *Antyakarmadīpaka*. Varanasi 1952, 1983, p. 24.

These variations indicate that these objects are for representation of body limbs. There is even variation in the use of *palāśa* stalks. NITYĀNANDA prefers the use of *kuśa* grass citing Brhaspati. (*yasya na śrūyate vārtā yāvad dvādaśavatsaram | kuśaputtaladāhena tasya syādavadhāraṇā || Antyakarmadīpaka 24.*) Several priests known to the author abide by these variations.

²³ For a detailed treatment on the issue of the cremation ritual of a fire-holder, see RAM GOPAL: *India of Vedic Kalpasūtras*. Delhi 1983, pp. 353-369.

ticular part of the body (See Index II, which links the limbs of the sacrificer's body with the sacrificial instruments). The crucial point is, whether or not the instruments always represent the same body-part, they are nonetheless parts of the body and become one with the sacrificer in his journey to another world. Based on this depiction, the ritual instruments are extensions of the body of the sacrificer. As the body represents the agent of fire ritual in this last rite, along the same lines, the body here is an extension of the self.

Yet another way of cognizing this ritualized body is examining the process of offering rice-cakes (*piṇḍa-dāna*). This ritual offering of rice balls for the deceased is performed in three parts, with each consisting of offering sixteen rice balls.²⁴ The first set of offerings is supposed to reconstitute the subtle body of the deceased for his journey to the land of Yama. This occurs as ten of the sixteen rice balls are offered during the ten days of mourning. This number approximates the months from the conception to the birth of a baby. The second set is offered to the gods, except for one which is reserved for the deceased. The third set of sixteen balls is offered as food for the journey of the deceased. This third set is offered within the cycle of the year following death, again constructing corporeality as being parallel to the cosmic cycle. The next striking similarity is of the number of the cakes that are offered three times in this ritual. This order demonstrates a connection to the sixteen phases of the lunar cycle. The path and land of the forefathers are often connected to the moon, and this numeric connection suggests the same concept.

Ritual Purification of the Body

Mantra recitation and vegetation applied in the process of constituting the body reflect two distinctive features of the cosmic Puruṣa and a mortal being. This body receives the ritual-purification given to a human being while going through life-cycle rituals. The effigy is considered to be alive, and all the rituals are performed for the prosperity of the now-living being. After completing the installation of different ingredients that represent the body-parts, all the sixteen purifying rituals are performed with mantras, starting from the ritual given when conception has occurred (*garbhādhāna*), suggesting that the ritualistic validity of this effigy is equal to a real person alive in the world. The naming ritual is performed, giving one of the twelve names

²⁴ For discussion, see *Dharmaśāstrakā itihāsa* 3 Lucknow 1975, pp. 1153-1156. See also ed. tr. ERNEST WOOD and S. V. SUBRAHMANYAM: *Garuḍapurāṇa: Sāroddhāra* Allahabad 1911. AXEL MICHAELS discusses this ritual in his book, AXEL MICHAELS: *Handling Death: The Dynamics of Death and Ancestor Rituals Among the Newars of Bhaktapur, Nepal*. Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 186-190.

of Viṣṇu.²⁵ Donations are offered, just as performed prior to the person's death; this allows him to cross the mythical river *Vaitaraṇi* that connects heaven and the world. These eight, highly significant types of donation, such as sesame seed, purified butter, and so forth are performed to atone for the sins that the effigy-person may have committed during his lifetime. In the navel of this effigy, a small lamp is placed and the *Brahmavidyā* (the supreme knowledge) and mantras from *Upaniṣads* are read to the effigy as instruction before the lamp is extinguished. At the time of the funeral, the rosary of *tulasī* plant is removed from the neck. The son or whoever is the direct heir of the dead shaves his head as part of the accepted mourning practice; he offers six rice-balls (*pinḍa*) that would have been given during the funeral. All these rituals are the same as for the deceased whose body is present.

This purifying ritual plays two functions: 1.) The purification of an individual body that represents the cosmos purifies the cosmos. The procreative cosmos comes to the reversed state when a death occurs, and the reordering of the cosmos, finding its natural balance so that it can continue to be progenitive, is confirmed through this ritual. 2.) This purificatory ritual reorganizes the social order in the absence of its member. This emergence of new form is possible through ritual-purification, which can be compared with the initiation ritual of *dīkṣita*, where the person being initiated receives a new birth through ritual.²⁶ Here the surrogate body has to come *back* to life, in ritualistic dimension, so that the effigy can replace the real body, and the effigy has to die so that it can receive the death ritual. As these acts are conscious representative forms, one cannot analyze these as unconscious acts. This ritual can be compared with that of Japanese dolls that traditionally received formal cremation.²⁷ In these rituals of surrogates, the message is clear that 'life' is deeper than the body and can take greater form in absence of corporeality. For the observers of the ritual, the acts of making an effigy, collecting the necessary herbs and various substances, and chanting the mantras, lead to the mental dimension where he momentarily identifies the deceased or 'real' person with this effigy. This death ritual, in its deeper sense, therefore, plays the role of giving life back, momentarily granting the life of the deceased in his surroundings. The cosmos, along these lines, is the 'pure' body, and the incompleteness or limitations of corporeality are overcome with rituals that identify the body in its cosmic form. The initial concept of

²⁵ In the sequence, the name Śrīdhara is missing in the available list. As this *nyāsa* is borrowed from the Āgama literature following the Vaiṣṇava pantheon, this must be complete in the original list.

²⁶ For the ritual of *dīkṣita*, see M. ELIADE 1967, p. 293; F. B. J. KUIPER: *Ancient Indian Cosmology*. Delhi 1983, p. 116.

²⁷ JANE MARIE LAW: *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*. Bloomington 1995, pp. 220-221.

Puruṣa and individual beings as its replication can be confirmed in these purificatory acts.

The Mesocosmic Body

Two significant aspects of the surrogate body are that 1) the bones are considered to be the inner structure, and deities are invoked to relate to different parts of body; and 2) herbs, metals, and stones collectively constitute the different limbs of body. In each case, the related mantras from the principal Vedic rituals such as *Sarvamedha*, *Puruṣamedha*, and *Sautrāmaṇi* are chanted. To examine these two aspects separately allows an understanding of the complete concept of body and its cosmic representation.

AB is one of the earliest sources to attribute 360 bones to the human body. This numbering seems arbitrary, with debate in the relevant field whether or not to count particular parts as separate bones. This recognition carries with it a semiotic value that aids in understanding ‘body’ from its relatively very early reference. To reveal the inner structure of the symbol of body, it is noteworthy to mention that the body of a sacrificial-animal (*Agniṣomīya paśu*) is divided into 36 parts, identifying to whom the parts belong.²⁸ Each of these parts is considered to have aspects of ten deities, constituting 360 aspects in a complete body.²⁹ These deities, according to the Atharvaveda, assumed the form of fire-stick for bones and the butter oblation for semen and thus entered into the human body.³⁰ This body, in the Brāhmaṇa literature, appears related with a year (*samvatsara*).³¹

This surrogate body with *samvatsara* as its cosmic correlate summons several conceptual issues. The explicit intention of this death ritual is to release the spirit from the body that it craved while alive into the cosmos. The implicit result, however, is the eternal return of the soul, finding his body on earth in cyclical manner. Through this ritual, the desacralization of the body comes to an end with the body being the food for the cosmic divinity, fire. ‘The annual repetition of creation’³² is further confirmed by demonstrating

²⁸ The parts and the owners are mentioned in *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* 31.1. Sāyaṇa cites one verse referring to Pūrvācārya (the early masters), commenting that this divides the body of an animal into thirty-six, as found in the *Ṣaḍguruśiṣya* as well.

²⁹ The ten deities invoked here are: *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *caḥsus*, *śrotra*, *akṣiti*, *ḥṣiti*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, *vāñ*, and *manas*. The entire section of the *Atharvaveda* 11.8 is relevant to this discussion. Particularly for this reference, see *Atharvaveda* 11.8.3-4.

³⁰ *Atharvaveda* 11.8.29.

³¹ ŚB 12.1.10.3-8.

³² Here, I am borrowing this phrase from MIRCEA ELIADE: *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion: The significance of religious myth, symbolism, and ritual within life and culture*. New York 1957, 1961, p. 77.

that the body, in its deep structure, resembles the year (*samvatsara*). In this sense, the ritual of death brings the conviction of the return of the self to its cultural members. The rituals that organize a singular ritual of death into meaningful form grant this very conviction of eternal return.³³ Cremation ritual, in essence, plays the role of another birth, which can be considered as the third birth, with the corporeal birth as the first and initiation considered to be the second birth.³⁴ Explicitly, the year is time, which in itself is cyclical in the Vedic concept; however, what is implicit is the year as the fire-altar, with 360 enclosing stones referring to the days and nights of a year. This numeric identification not only confirms eternal return of the life but also stresses the body as the fire-altar.³⁵

However, as discussed above, the texts do not agree upon 360 as the number of stalks to be used to construct a body. This 360 constitutes an ideal circle, a yearly mandala, and the difference found in numbers of bones, such as 362 or 363, further supports different measurements of a year. Sometimes, the difference in measurements follows different systems for the measurement of time emerging from the Vedic rituals.³⁶ This is furthermore attached to the ritual-calendar rather than with actual calendar.³⁷ The specific calendar for this ritual purpose is the *sāvana* calendar, which the *Smṛti* texts prescribing the ritual are following. This division also fits with the division of a *yuga* into five years. In every sixth year, or in completion of each *yuga*, an additional month is inserted, making a year of 13 months that adjusts for the variation within rotational cycles of the earth around the sun.³⁸ This

³³ See MIRCEA ELIADE: *The Myth of the Eternal Return The Cosmos and History*, New York, 1954, Princeton, 1974.

³⁴ See RICHARD DAVIS: "Cremation and Liberation: The Revision of Hindu Ritual", *History of Religions* 28,1 Chicago 1988, p, 41.

³⁵ ŚB 10.5.4.10 is explicit in identification of *samvatsara* as the fire-altar. This is conceptually closer to the discussion found in ELIADE 1954.

³⁶ P.V. KANE, *Dharmaśāstrakā Itihāsa* 4. Lucknow 1960-65. Page 243 gives a list of the different orders of time measurement. This leads to a different length of a year.

³⁷ For instance, the number of days mentioned in the *Vedāṅga-jyautiṣa* is 366 days. Varāhamihira admits a year of 365 days.

³⁸ This thirteenth month is separate from the lunar month that is added in each 30 months to fit the lunar and solar calendars. (See the *pāraṃparika samvatsara* chapter of *prācīna bhāratīya kālagāṇanā evaṃ pāraṃparika samvatsara*). In the context of explaining *puruṣa* as *samvatsara*, ŚB divides the days as *parāñci* and *arvāñci* in which 360 days are in the first group and six days are in the second. This indicates that ŚB is aware of this division of 366 days, and this division supports the ritual calendar of 360 days and solar calendar of 366 days, as found in the *Vedāṅgajyautiṣa*. The division of bone-numbers as 360 is Vedic, occurring additionally in the Ayurveda texts as an alternative opinion. The Ayurveda system seems divided on whether or not to accept the Vedic numbering. Caraka seems aware of the other tradition, as when he mentions 360 bones, he clarifies that it includes nail and teeth-pestle. Modern anatomy accepts generally 206 bones. *Pratyakṣaśarīra* mentions 200 bones, which is closest in number.

nonetheless highlights another aspect, namely, the change in ritual over the span of time. The death ritual under consideration is Vedic, and most likely, the Vedic texts record rituals that have already existed for a long time. Although most of the nuances of this specific ritual can be observed unchanged, nonetheless, different texts referring to slightly different numbers can be explained as versions changed from the original structure.³⁹

In the context of *gavāmayana*, the *Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa* (hereafter: JB) elaborates upon the connection of the days with sacrifice. According to this, the parts of sacrifice are identical to the segmentation of a month into thirty days.⁴⁰ A day is reflected here as *prāyaṇīya*, ‘shorthand’ for the heaven. Therefore the prayer is repeated 360 times, which is the number of days or nights in a year.⁴¹ In this context, the *ukthya* hymn is compared with the sacrificial animal, further identifying the body of sacrificial animal with days.⁴² In the sequence of explaining the manifestation of *ṛtvik* and *ṛtu*, JB connects the householder with time and compares him with *saṃvatsara*, including his wife.⁴³ In another place JB mentions that Puruṣa is Prajāpati, who, in turn, is *saṃvatsara*.⁴⁴ The 360 *sāvanas*, or squeezings of the *soma* juice for ritual-sacrifice in a year, carries the ritualistic aspect of the *sāvana* year, the year whose number of days dovetails with the numbers we are dealing with.

The cosmic world in which gods and fathers reside functions in the two poles of the northern and southern hemispheres. Throughout the *Smṛtis* (including BG), the belief that the six months of *uttarāyana* is related to the gods, light, and knowledge, while the six months of *dakṣiṇāyana* is the world of the fathers, of smoke and actions, which refers to rituals.⁴⁵ This concept of two worlds of the gods and of the fathers comes from Vedic times, and can be found in the *Ṛgveda*.⁴⁶ The rays of the sun, according to the texts dividing the year into two, pass through both worlds,⁴⁷ leading the soul to a distinctive land by following the solar-rays: the practices of inner sacrifice of faith and truth bring the soul after death to day, the bright half of the lunar month, and

³⁹ For the change of cremation ritual in Hindu culture, see R. DAVIS 1988, pp. 37-53.

⁴⁰ JB 2.376.

⁴¹ JB 2.377.

⁴² *paśavo vā ukthāni-paśūnām evāvarudhyai* JB 2.377.

⁴³ *saṃvatsaro vāva grhapatir iyam eva grhapatnī* JB 3.4.

⁴⁴ *puruṣo vai prajāpatiḥ; prajāpatis saṃvatsaraḥ* JB 2.56.

⁴⁵ *Chāndogyopaniṣad* 4.15.5-6; 5.10.1-2; 5.10.3-7; 5.10.8; *Brhadāranyakopaniṣad* 6.2.115-116; *Bhagavadgītā* 8.23-25.

⁴⁶ See *Ṛgveda* 10.85.15.

⁴⁷ See *Chāndogya* 8.6.2

ultimately to the abode of the god of creation where the soul achieves liberation, while those who practice external sacrifices join the ‘smoky path’, night, and the dark half of the moon, ultimately returning as human beings. Those unaware of both of these paths are thought to return as insects and flies.⁴⁸

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (hereafter: ŚB) presents Prajāpati as having both mortal and immortal natures, with the *prāṇas* being immortal. With performance of these prescribed rituals, he finds himself immortal. This exposition of rituals reveals that with a sacrifice, one intends to achieve immortality.⁴⁹ Considered to be within the immortal body are the five life-forces,⁵⁰ and *vāc* (speech), collectively counted as six, whereas elements of the mortal body, the marrow, bone, nerves, flesh, fat, blood, and skin are considered to be the altar (*citi*) upon which the sacrifice occurs. The text dealing with this detail also mentions that the sacrificer becomes immortal, while identifying himself with Prajāpati, experienced in terms of a year in 360 *savanas*.⁵¹

The *Brāhmaṇa* texts suggest that Prajāpati, the Brahman, is in human form, performing worldly duties and experiencing birth and death. According to ŚB, all creatures are produced through the sacrifice of the cosmic Puruṣa.⁵² This Puruṣa envelops all that exists. Prajāpati allows this Puruṣa to manifest in all forms of gods and humans.⁵³ He is himself the constant dynamic force of creation, the lord of sacrifice, and the sacrifice itself. The immolation of the human body into fire is his identification with the procreative divine force, with revivification of the body occurring through the process of reconstruction.⁵⁴

The identification of human body with the sun replicates the identification of the cosmic Puruṣa with the sun.⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that the mantras

⁴⁸ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 3.6.2.15-16.

⁴⁹ ŚB 10.1.4.1.

⁵⁰ *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, and *samāna* are identified as five life-forces.

⁵¹ ŚB 10.1.4.8.

⁵² ŚB 10.2.2.1.

⁵³ ŚB I.7.4.4; II.2.4.1; VI.1.1.5; VII.5.2.6; AB X.1.5; Tr. W. CALAND: *Pañcaviṃśa-brāhmaṇa*. Calcutta 1982 XVI.1; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* VII.7; Ed. MAURICE BLOOMFIELD: *Gopathabrāhmaṇa*. Varanasi 1964, II.2.18.

⁵⁴ UMA MARINA VESCI: *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas*. Banaras 1985, p. 40. This identification also explains the Upaniṣadic statements such as “after making that he entered to that” (*Chāndogya* 6.2.1; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 1.4.10) or “this very self is *brahma*” which is in the parallel lines in *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* as “I am all of this, this whole is located in me” (JB 3.372).

⁵⁵ *ādityavarṇam ūrjasvantam brahma - Maitrāyaṇyupaniṣad* 6.24. This is expressed in *Taittirīyopaniṣad* as *sa yaś cāyaṃ puruṣe yaścāsāvāditye sa ekaḥ* “that which is in this

from the *puruṣasūkta* are those that are chanted mainly throughout the ritual of forming the second-body. The meditation projecting the golden Puruṣa into the sun further aligns the notion of the cosmic embryo with *Prajāpati*, who is the source all creation. The *Brāhmaṇa* texts that highlight meditation upon the sun support the visualization of the sun in the form of *Prajāpati*, the god of creation with whom the sacrificer intends to identify.⁵⁶ The sun is the cosmic Puruṣa, while *Nārāyaṇa* is commonly meditated upon, and whose realization is considered to be the attainment of immortality.⁵⁷ The one who meditates upon himself as the sun throughout his whole life transforms himself into the sun in the final ritual in which he is himself presented as the sacrificial *paśu*.⁵⁸

Understanding the Ritual Body

The issue of ‘what it means to have a body’ can be explained by this ritual which deals with ‘what it means to not have a body’. The absence of the body, explicitly, reveals its meaning. The ritual for the ‘real’ body would generate the same emotional result, perhaps in an even greater sense, but the creation of a surrogate body reveals its conceptual aspects, in which the body as the functioning cosmos is found in ritual act. A ritual cannot be performed in absence of the body or of the cosmos. This ritual invention of the body completes the otherwise inconceivable task, the regeneration of the cosmos. The purificatory rituals, specifically the sixteen *saṃskāras*, are carried out for the sake of the physical body, while the rituals such as *Sautrāmaṇi* are carried out by corporeal instrumentality that establish the harmony of the physical with the cosmic and revive the living aspect of the cosmos. As death ends the specific chain of corporeal rituals, the body becomes both the instrument for performing the ritual and the locus of the ritual at the event of death. If compared, the mantras and the substances prescribed in the formation of an effigy and those in the context of the *Sautrāmaṇi* ritual, their relationship becomes clear. This identification makes the Vedic ritual of cremation even more complex, as the common form of the cremation ritual is

puruṣa and in the sun, that is the one” (2.8.5; 3.10.5). *ya eṣo 'ntar āditye hiraṇmayah puruṣa drśyate* - *Chāndogya* 1.6.6.

⁵⁶ The meditations mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature as ‘this sun is the Brahman; this is the explicit Brahman’ as *asāv ādityo brahma. . . . etat pratyakṣaṃ brahma* – *Jaiminīya-brāhmaṇa* 2.78; and the Upaniṣads as ‘one should meditate the sun as Brahman’ *ādityo brahmetyādeṣaḥ* – *Chāndogya* 3.19.1; ‘one meditates the sun as *Brahma ādityaṃ brahmetyupāste* – *Chāndogya* 3.19.4; ‘I meditate [upon] the *puruṣa* in the sun as *Brahma*’ *āditye puruṣa etam evāhaṃ brahmopāste* – *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 2.1.2.

⁵⁷ ŚB identifies *puruṣa* with *nārāyaṇa* as *puruṣaṃ ha nārāyaṇam . . .* ŚB 12.2.1.3.1.

⁵⁸ The recitation of the *Savitṛ* mantra found in *Sandhyā* is the lifelong practice of oneself as the sun.

linked with the horse sacrifice.⁵⁹ Besides the similarity in mantras, the next remarkable aspect is in relationship of the body and of the *Sautrāmaṇi* ritual with *samvatsara*.⁶⁰

Next, and in striking confirmation of the relation of the second body with the *Sautrāmaṇi* ritual, is the detail of this ritual found in ŚB (12.4.3.1-17), that mentions it as a *brāhmaṇa-yajña*. The ritual itself is envisioned having a body, with hairs compared with grass, skin with young shoots, flesh with parched grain, bone with the vessel that filters liquor, marrow with *māsara*⁶¹ beverage, fluid with *pariśrut*,⁶² *nagnahu* (a drug used for fermenting liquor) with blood, milk with semen, urine with liquor, undigested food (*ūbadhya*) with sediments (*balkasa*), heart with sacrificial cake offered to Indra, liver with the cake for the sun, lungs with the cake for Varuṇa, the bones close to heart with the ritual objects made of *ficus*. This list continues, identifying bile with the objects made of *udumbara*, entrails with plates, anus with one of the posts used to bind the sacrificial animal, spleen with the eagle's feather that is used in this sacrifice, navel with chair, *vaniṣṭhu* (entrails) with vase, one of the intestines with *śatatrīṇā*, mouth with *satam*, tongue with *pavitra*, anus with *cappa*, bladder with *vāla* hair (of horse tail used in this sacrifice); limbs are the sacrificial animal for *Aśvin*, the self with the animal for Sarasvatī, beauty with the animal for Indra, life with gold. Similarly, the eyes are compared with *graha*-s of *Aśvin*, eyelashes with wheat flour and jujube flour. The nose is compared with the *graha* of Sarasvatī, and the nostril hairs with Indra and are represented by grain flour and jujube flour. Ears are compared with Indra *grahas*, and the hairs of ears and eyebrows with barley and jujube flour. Pubic hairs and the lower hairs are compared with wolf hairs, while chest and *nikakṣa* hairs are compared with tiger hairs. Cranial hair and beard are compared with those of a lion. Three sacrificial animals are identified with three parts of the body, three sacrificial cakes with three phases of life, six *grahas* with six life forces. During the process of burning this effigy, the mantras play two distinctive roles, 1) mantras enliven: they bring back the deceased one to the effigy in order to receive the final ritual, the ritual of being offered for *Vaiśvānara*, and 2) mantras dissolve: transforming the mesocosmic body into the cosmic body. It is explicit that all the entities can be altered, as the very body can be replaced by other substances; what remains unchanged is the mantras. What essentially is the

⁵⁹ HERMANN OLDENBERG: *The Religion of the Veda*. Tr. SHRIDHAR B. SHROTRI, Delhi 1988; VESCI 1985, p. 40.

⁶⁰ ŚB 12.4.2.36.

⁶¹ MONIER MONIER-WILLIAMS: *A Sanskrit English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with special reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, Delhi: 1995. MONIER-WILLIAMS describes *māsara* as the mixture of yeast, grapes, etc., with the water in which rice and millet have been boiled.

⁶² According to Harisvāmī, *pariśrut* is a kind of container holding liquor.

body that a ritual constitutes is the body of the mantras that remains unchanged during the change of substances. This ritual identification with *Sautāmaṇi* allows this author to argue that, just as the surrogate body stands for the real body, so does the cremation ritual ‘stands for’ the Vedic *Sautrāmaṇi* ritual. This ability of a ritual to signify another, greater ritual, supports our investigation of its meaning: if it ‘stands for’ something else, it has the power of signification.

Conclusion

Comprehending Vedic rituals rests upon an understanding of its exegetical tradition, specifically the position of the Mīmāṃsakas who systematized and analyzed these rituals. Classical Mīmāṃsā exegetes have defined *dharma* primarily as the performance of the Vedic rituals. Along these lines, rituals bring *dharma* into function, as they manifest in physical, aural, or mental acts in accordance with the Vedic injunctions. Following Jaimini, ‘*dharma* is the meaning indicated by [Vedic] injunction’.⁶³ This interpretation of *dharma* brings the functional aspect to the forefront, that *dharma* is found in ritual action, as specified by the Brahmana sentences. Sabara, while interpreting the aforementioned aphorism, identifies *yāga* (Vedic ritual) with *dharma*. The ritual addressed in this paper relies on the presupposition of something as ‘real’ and the other, the ‘surrogate’. The surrogate body functions as an interface to bridge the body that is the flesh and the body that is the cosmos, the totality. And this process of signification presupposes meaning inherent to this ritual. This position contradicts that of FRITZ STAAL.

STAAL argues that rituals are essentially meaningless. Two of his main arguments that support this conclusion are first, that asking a practitioner about the meaning of ritual is similar ‘to ask(ing) elephants about zoology or artists about the theory of art’, and second, that ritual does not refer to something else, as it is a ‘primary activity’.⁶⁴ The first argument bluntly rejects the meaning classical Indian exegetes have proposed, where theoreticians emerging from within the culture may include engaged practitioners. Analysis from a linguistic perspective also addresses STAAL’s first premise. In any language, meaning is internally determined by the users of that language, and is not established by non-speakers of that language. In response to the second argument of STAAL, the ritual of cremating a surrogate body, the topic of study in this essay, *does* refer to something else, the cremation of a real body. Construction of the body, using twigs, leaves, and herbs, further demonstrates a deeper meaning embedded within the performance of this ritual, that the body being constituted is not only the body of the deceased indi-

⁶³ *codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah* Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.2.

⁶⁴ FRITZ STAAL: *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences*. New York 1990, pp. 116-117.

vidual but also a replica of the cosmos, a complete body. In this ritual, every element signifies something else, while nonetheless retaining intrinsic meaning.

While this case study demonstrates the symbolic aspect of ritual, it is not the contention of the author that ritual meaning, or any meaning, is essentially derived by adopting the framework of the dichotomy of signifier and signified. The argument that signifier and signified are essentially different, proposed to be a universal maxim, ignores the methodology adopted by classical Indian exegetes which allows for deep structures of meaning. Speech, along these lines, has multiple levels, the expressed or audible speech being the most extrinsic, where the duality of signifier and signified is found. At its inner core, in the *paśyantī* or *parā-paśyantī* level, meaning and language together form a cognitive structure where they are indivisibly experienced. Following this non-dual model of meaning, ‘to mean’ is not essentially ‘to mean something else’. Adopting this doctrine, it is not required for a ritual to mean something else in order to possess meaning.

In an effort to discover the meaning of ritual, what has been overlooked is the recognition of what exactly occurs while performing a ritual. If the ritual of cremating a surrogate body is analyzed, what warrants consideration is the transformation of the awareness of physical body to the body as a functioning cosmos and in this process, the internalization of pain and the sense of loss felt by the relatives of the deceased shifting to a recognition of eternity and interconnectedness. The meaning here is not merely what is cognized but prominently, what is felt. In order to interpret feeling as an integral part of meaning, the functioning or act cannot be separated from the meaning of the ritual. Along these lines, the meaning of ritual is not merely conceptually grasped, but rather it is bodily felt, and is not merely informative, but rather, transformative.

The surrogate body made for the purpose of cremation is ‘real’ for the sake of the ritual, and the result of performing the ritual is similarly considered to be real. This ‘reality for the sake of ritual’ is constituted by the injunction of mantras. This description allows the space for another premise, that rituals constitute reality. The Mīmāṃsā position that ‘*svarga* is brought into being through the *homa* called *Agnihotra*,⁶⁵ with the interpretation of *bhāvayet* by Kṛṣṇa Yajvan as ‘should bring forth’ (*utpādayet*) or ‘should perform’ (*kuryāt*) suggests textual support in the argument that reality is forged through rituals. This ritual construction of reality brings the position of BRIAN SMITH to the forefront, according to whom ‘reality is not given but made.’ In the course of analyzing Vedic rituals, SMITH argues that for the

⁶⁵ *agnihotrahomena svargaṃ bhāvayet...* Tr. SWAMI MADHAVANANDA: *Mīmāṃsā-paribhāṣā* of Kṛṣṇa Yajvan. Calcutta 1987, p. 8.

Brahmin ritualists, ‘the ritual was the workshop in which all reality was forged.’⁶⁶

However, in addition to ‘bringing something into being’, *bhāvayati* can also mean to ‘manifest’ or ‘reveal’ something that is not apparent. The phenomenal reality, the creation of the sense of purity, may have been constituted in the ritual, but the absolute reality of the individual as the cosmic presence, is not ‘made’ but rather ‘found’. In the case of the ritual examined here, the ritual of creating a surrogate body constitutes a functional body for performing the ritual. Yet at another level, this ritual has revealed a process in which the mourners may transform their grief to bliss and their sense of loss into recognition of eternal presence. At yet another level, just as the limited body bound within the chain of birth and death ‘becomes’ the cosmic body, the individual transcends the cycle of time, giving rise to the sense of eternal presence of the cosmic being. This transformed awareness, in the sense of both a bodily-felt emotion of the transformation of pain, and the cognitive awareness of death giving rise to an understanding of eternal presence is not creating something new, but rather, revealing what is already in the mind of the agents performing the ritual. This recognition fits with the understanding of ‘ritual as the functioning cosmos’ in a sense that, as the cosmic Puruṣa performs its cosmic ritual of emission and contraction of the cosmos, so does an individual *puruṣa*, recognizing his cosmic presence. This recognition is transformative in both changing the sense of loss to the sense of eternity and by transforming bodily emotions.

One of the major problems of identifying a specific meaning of ritual or mantras applied in ritual is that the same mantra is used in different rituals, often with its meaning shifted to accommodate the new ritual. In this study, the mantras of *Puruṣamedha* and *Sautrāmaṇi* are the mantras applied in the constitution of a surrogate body. LAURIE PATTON, with the observation that ‘while mantras may not change, their *viniyoga* do change, and the same mantras are used in different circumstances,’⁶⁷ supports the argument that *viniyoga* is ‘an associational or metonymic principle’.⁶⁸ The ritual under investigation has multiple nuances that allow the application of the cognitive theory of metonymy, because the constructed body refers to some other body, and the ritual, to some other ritual.

As the very title *Bringing the Gods to Mind* suggests, *viniyoga*, according to PATTON, is a frame for summoning the deities, and ‘the frame of

⁶⁶ BRIAN K. SMITH: *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*. New York 1989, p. 50.

⁶⁷ LAURIE L. PATTON: *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice*. Berkeley 2005, p. 191.

⁶⁸ L. PATTON 2005, p. 87.

the Vedic ritual is important as it is in metonymic thinking'.⁶⁹ However, the reduction of rituals to metonymic thinking, while linking the human agent with the deity, creates a duality between the mantra and the deity, the ritual and its exalted meaning, and the performer and the deities summoned. Furthermore, this duality emphasizes the target, because, in metonym, the source or language used refers to something else and is therefore subordinate. Furthermore, this understanding undermines what is immediately felt while performing a ritual, attributing *viniyoga* as a metonym that refers to something else. The position of the *Mīmāṃsā* tradition that *mantra vai devatā* (the deity, indeed, is the mantra) identifies mantras with the deity. As rituals are manifest only in the sphere of performance, so are mantras in their utterance. Rituals or mantras are not the manuals or books but rather, the performance itself with the active physical engagement that brings the abstract concept alive. In this case, the ritual cremation of a surrogate body has its transformative dimension manifest while in performance, while the abstract concepts of the body or of mantras framed for a specific ritual are not phenomenally present at the moment of ritual performance. The experience of the presence of the deity, or in this case, the presence of the deceased in the cosmic form, is not found elsewhere; it is not conceptually cognized, but rather, emotionally felt by the agents. The metonymic experience of ritual, where something uttered or performed is not the target-in-itself, establishes dichotomy, in this case, the dichotomy between the cosmic body and the body of the agent performing the ritual. If the ritual performance is not able to transform the awareness of the performer at a physical level, changing a sense of sorrow to a sense of relief, then the goal of the ritual has not been achieved. Ritual meaning, along these lines, can be immediately felt as well as cognized, transcending this dichotomy. This proposed understanding of ritual meaning as non-dual does not contradict the classical Indian hermeneutics that identifies a mantra with its deity. This understanding supports the ritual under investigation, where the ritual body replaces the corporeal body and the ritual itself embodies elements of other rituals with the reinforcement of the sense of oneness and continuity.

⁶⁹ L. PATTON 2005, p. 54.

Index I: Bones and Structures in the Anatomy of the Sacred Body

	<i>Sūtras</i> ⁷⁰	<i>Hārīta</i> ⁷¹	<i>Yajñapārśva</i>	<i>Smṛti</i> (Cited in <i>Aparārka</i>)
Head	40	40	40	32
Neck	10	10	10	60
Hands	100	100	100	40
Hand-fingers	10	10	10	10
Chest	20	30	20	80
Belly	30	20	30	20
Penis ⁷²	8	8	4	4
Testicles	12	5	6	6
Thigh	100	100	100	60
Knee & leg	20	30	30	knees 20, legs 20
Toes	10	10	10	10
Total stalks	360	363	360	362

⁷⁰ Here the *sūtras* refer to *Baudhāyanapīṭṛmedhasūtra*, *Gautamapīṭṛmedhasūtra* and *Satyāśādhāśrautasūtra* as cited by P. KANE 1973, p. 1133. The numbers KANE accepts there is rather confusing. These aphoristic *Sūtras* require explanation as in the case of AB explaining *viṃśe* and *pañcāśate* by Sāyaṇa in AB 32.1. As long as these accept the total number as 360, counting just fifty for both hands and just 70 for both thighs including the legs cannot be accurate. If interpreted according to the *Smṛtis*, the total numbers are as given. The number mentioned in *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* is identical as well.

⁷¹ *Hārītasṁṛti*, as quoted in *Śuddhiprakāśa*. See P. UPADHYAYA 1994, p. 286.

⁷² This description of the male body also includes the female body, with the number of twigs given to represent either male or the female genitalia.

Index II: Ritual Instruments Correlated with the Limbs of Sacrificer

ĀGS ⁷³		KGS ⁷⁴		VGS ⁷⁵	
Ritual instruments	Body Parts	Ritual instruments	Body Parts	Ritual instruments	Body Parts
<i>juhū</i> spoon	right hand	<i>juhū</i> spoon	right hand	<i>sphya</i> and <i>juhū</i>	right hand
<i>upabhṛt</i> spoon	left hand	<i>upabhṛt</i> spoon	left hand	<i>upabhṛt</i>	left hand
<i>sphya</i> (wooden sword)	right side	<i>dhruvā</i> (big ladle)	throat	<i>dhruvā</i>	breast
<i>havanī</i> (ladle)	left side	<i>havanī</i> (ladle)	mouth	<i>aranī</i>	breast
<i>dhruvā</i> (big ladle)	breast	<i>sruva</i> (in two)	nostrils	<i>Havanī</i>	mouth
<i>kapāla</i> (dishes)	head	<i>prāśritra</i> (plates for Brahman)	forehead	two <i>sruvas</i>	nostrils
(pressing stones)	teeth	<i>idā-camasa</i> (a plate)	head	<i>ājya-sthālī</i>	throat
<i>sruva</i> (in two)	nostrils	<i>puṛoḍāśa</i>	breast	<i>Prāśitra</i>	ears
<i>prāśritra</i> (plates for Brahman)	two ears	<i>sphya</i>	right side	mortar and pestle	jaws
<i>pātrī</i> (a plate) and <i>camasa</i> (cup)	belly	<i>upaveśa</i> (a stick)	left side	stones for pressing	teeth
<i>śamyā</i> (staff)	genitals	<i>pātrī</i>	belly	<i>soma</i>	
two <i>aranī</i> (kindling sticks)	upper thighs	mortar and pestle	knees	<i>kapālas</i>	head
mortal and pestle	legs	<i>śakaṭa</i> (cart)	hips	plates for mixing meal with butter	belly
two baskets	feet	other instruments	thighs	Basket	sides
		basket	feet	<i>saṃnāyya</i> pitcher	stomach
				two millstones	testicles
				plates (<i>agnihotra</i> milk and <i>āhavanīya</i> -offering)	back
				<i>upāvaharaṇī</i> bundle	feet
				Veda bundle	top lock
				plate for <i>idā</i>	head
				remaining instruments	thighs

⁷³ *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* (ĀGS) 4.3.1-18. For discussion, see R. GOPAL 1983, pp. 358-359.

⁷⁴ *Kauṣītakiṅgrhyasūtra* (KGS) 81, 4-19. For discussion, see R. GOPAL 1983, pp. 358-359.

⁷⁵ *Vaikhānasagrhyasūtra* (VGS) V.4. For discussion, see R. GOPAL 1983, pp. 358-359.