

Coronation Ceremony

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The coronation ceremony in ancient India formed an Integral part of the polity. In course of time, it became elaborate ritualistic and technical. The coronation ceremony marked a step forward in the development of Indian Polity. The **Rajasuya**, **Vajapeya** and the **Sarvamedha** ceremonies formed an integral part of the system. The **Devasuhavimsi** ceremony expresses different kinds of authority out of which Kshatra Janarajaya are important, where territorial sovereignty was absent. It might indicate the tribal state and had practically nothing to do with the territorial state. The **Rajasuya** is the most important ceremony and in this ritual the king is sprinkled over by the representatives of the three upper classes and the Janya, identified with Shudra. The most noticeable feature is the express recognition of Shudra as a part of society and from the constitutional point of view, this is a great change. The Sprinkling ceremony is followed by investiture ritual in which the prince is invested with a strong bow with three arrows (by the priests) to protect the people. The bows and arrows represent the strength and when invested the prince becomes fit for consecration. The Kshatra becomes the symbol of Power. By the performance of the this sacrifice, the king attains sovereignty. In the Vedic period the tribal character of the state persisted. By offering the **Rajasuya**, he becomes a Raja. It has been said in the **Shatpatha Brahmana** “to the king (Rajan) doubtless belongs the Rajasuya for by offering the Rajasuya, he becomes king and unsuited for the kingship is the Brahmana”.

The Rajsuya consisted of a long succession of sacrificial performances, starting on the first day of Phalguna and spreading over a period of two years. The details of the sacrifice are preserved in the **Shatpatha Brahmana**. The main features of the sacrifice were.....

- (i) **The Ratinamahavimshi-** presents to the divinities of the bejewelled ones viz the chief queen and court officials.
- (ii) The **Abhishechniya-** besprinkling ceremony

- (iii) The **Digvijasthapana**- King's symbolical walking towards the various Quarters as an indication of his universal rule.
- (iv) Treading upon a tiger skin- i.e. gaining the pre-eminence of the tiger.
- (v) Narration of the Hotri priest of the story of Sunahshepa.
- (vi) A mimic cow raid against the relatives or a sham fight with the member of the ruling aristocracy or Rajanya.
- (vii) Enthronement.
- (viii) A game of dice in which the king is made the victor.

The **Ratinamhavimshi** included the **Senani** (Troops commander), the **Purohita** (Royal Chaplain), the **Mahishi** (chief Queen), the **Suta** (charioteer) the **Gramani** (Leader of the village), the **Ksharti** (Chamberlain), the **Sangrahitri** (Treasurer), the **Bhagadudha** (Collector of the Royal share), the **Akshavapa** (Keeper of dice), the **Govikarttana** (King's Companion in the chase) and the **Palagal** (the courtier). The Ratnamahavimshi formed an integral part of the Rajasuya Ceremony. The Sacrificing king had to go to the house of each Ratnin and offer Oblations. The ratnins constituted the different functionaries of the state and their political importance has been discussed threadbare in the contemporary literature. The king regards them as sustainers of his realm and they are described as givers and takers of the kingdom. They made the kingdom vigorous and energetic. The king is consecrated for the sake of Ratnin and he makes the ratnin his faithful follower. They sustained the kingship. **Dr.K.P. Jayaswal** describes them as high functionaries of the state and the king is required to secure their support. The allegiance of every functionary is considered to be equally important for the king. Besides the performance of the Rajasuya Sacrifice in the kuru- Panchal region, it is likely that the custom was also prevalent in the territory of Videha, where the number of Ratnins seems to have been twelve. Sthapati is mentioned in the **Shatapatha Brahmana** in connection with the concluding ceremonies of the Rajasuya. The sacrificial sword (**sphya**) given by the priest to the king is passed on successively to the king's brother, the **Suta** or the **Sthapati**, the **Gramani** and finally to a tribesman (**Sajata**). We have further reference to **Pariveshtri**, the **Kshatri Sabhasadas** in connection with the horse sacrifice.

The **Ratinins** may be compared with the organised bureaucracy of Kautilya. The list gives an idea of the highly developed administrative system of the later Vedic period. The growing expansion of the Aryans necessitated the reconstruction of administrative machinery

and the territorial character of the state came to be fully recognized. **Dr. K.P. Jayaswal** describes his opinion that the Ratnins were recruited from different castes and classes.

The most essential part of the Rajasuya was the Abhisheka or besprinkling ceremony. The sprinkling was performed by a Brahmana Priest, kingsmen or brother of the king elect, a friendly Rajanya and a Vaishya. The consecration water was made up of seventeen kinds of water collected from river Saraswati, ocean etc. The ceremony began with offerings to various deities. The King was consecrated after his election or succession with an elaborate ritual which is described in the Brahman Texts. Those who aided in the consecration of the king were called Rajakartri or Rajakrit or King Makers, In the **Shatapatha Brahmana**, the persons meant and specified are the Suta (minstrel) and the Gramani. Both officials and non- officials were represented in the function. The principal ceremonies or sacrifices of royal inauguration were the vajapeya, Rajasuya, the Punar- Abhisheka and Aindra- Mahabhisheka.

The vajapeya bestowed on the performer, a superior kind of kingship, called **Samrajya**, while the Rajasuya conferred the monarchical dignity. The Punarabhisheka made the king- elect eligible for all sorts of royal dignity and the object of **Anidramahabhisheka** was to attain pre- eminence or supremacy over all kings. The Vajapeya rites included a race of seventeen chariots, in which the sacrificer is allowed to carry off the palm, and from which the ceremony probably derives the name. According to **Hillebrandt**, it reminds us of a relic of an old national festival. After the chariot race, the next interesting item is the mounting of a pole from which homage is made to the mother earth. He is then offered a throne seat with a goatskin spread thereon and is addressed by the priest as follows-“Thou art the ruler, the ruling lord- thou art firm and steadfast, here I seat thee for the tilling, for peaceful dwelling, for wealth, for prosperity, of the welfare of the people and the common weal.” The supreme power is vested in the king for the promotion of agriculture.

The Punarabhisheka is described in the Aitareya Brahman. It was intended for Conquering Kshatriya monarchs. The interesting part of the ceremony was the king’s ascent to the throne, made of Udumbara wood interwoven with the Munja grass. While besprinkling, the king said – “Do thou become here the overking of kings- the superme ruler of the earth or the peasantry.” He, then, had to make obeisance to Brahmana. The Aindra Mahabhisheka Consisted of the following five ceremonies –

- I. Oath, administered by the priests

- II. Arohana (Enthronment)
- III. Utkroshana (Proclamation)
- IV. The king makers declare him “Kshatriya”i.e king
- V. When he is proclaimed king, he is annointed (abhishechana)

Closely connected with the Aindra Mahabhisheka is another important ceremonial, called the Ashwamedha or horse- sacrifice. In the Aitareya Brahmana, it is said that all the kings, consecrated with Indra’s great functions, should go round the earth completely conquering on every side, and offering the horse in sacrifice. A paramount king performed the Ashwamedha Sacrifice.

In the Rajasuya sacrifice there are the following ceremonies which are very important and remarkable-

I. The priest silently strikes the king with sticks on the back, According to the Shatapatha Brahmana the king is made exempt from judicial punishment through this process. K.P Jayaswal believes that by this method, the king is brought under laws. It marked the authority of the priests over royalty.

II. In the ceremony of cow raid, according to the **Shatapatha Brahmana**, the king takes more than a hundred cows. The significance of this ceremony is not very clear from the text. The ceremony might have indicated his ability to assert royal power over others. Professor **R.S. Sharma** says- The whole ceremony means defeating the relative and then reinstating the vanquished in his position by doing him an act of grace.”

III. The game of dice disclosed the political sagacity of the ruler.

IV. The chariot race in the Vajapeyi is reminiscent of such earlier practices among the Indo-Aryans. Though it aimed at winning the race before being consecrated, in the long run, the king was deliberately made to win. Sarvamedha indicated a sacrifice for universal rule. It was an exceptional ceremony performed by Emperors who were already consecrated to rulership.

V. Oath-the coronation oath played a very important part in the constitutional history of ancient India. The king elect is unanimously regarded to have taken a vow before he is seated on the throne. He is also known as Dhrita- Vrata. The coronation Oath is as follows- “ Between the night I am born and the night I die, whatever good I might have done, my heaven, my life and my progeny may I be deprived of, If I oppress you” According to the **Aitareya Brahmana**, the Oath was common to all constitutions. After the king ascends the throne, he is addressed with

these words- "To thee, this state is given, thou art the director and regulator, to thee this is given for agriculture, for well being, prosperity, and for development". It is by virtue of the above formulae that sovereignty is vested. The king is declared the strength of the whole people and this makes him legally and constitutionally superior to all classes and castes. According to the **Aitareya Brahmana**, the coronation Oath should be repeated with faith. The king promises- "I will never be arbitrary." It appears that the Oath originated with the kingship. An analysis of Oath discloses the following points.

- a. That the trust in king's hand is his foremost solemn obligation.
- b. That the country put under him is to be regarded as nothing less than God.
- c. He is not to be arbitrary and to act according to the established law.
- d. To offend against the country was to offend against God.

If a monarch failed to keep his coronation Oath, he would be false in his vow and would forfeit claim to the throne. The charge of breaking the Oath was at times constructively extended. If the Monarch failed to maintain the integrity of the state, he was considered guilty of breaking his vows. If a king acted unlawfully he would be considered to have broken faith. Coronation laws were strictly complied with. Any dereliction of duties, on the part of the king amounted to the breaking of vows taken at the time of accession. A code of conduct was to be observed. **K.P. Jayaswal** is of opinion that the coronation Oath was Contractual in nature but there is nothing to support the view. The consecration was a form of initiation. By an oath, the king bound himself not to do harm to the priest in view of the sacred powers which he was invoking at the time of the coronation for the prosperity and safety of the king. The pledge was not given to the people as a whole.