

# Kalpa

Kalpa (Sanskrit: कल्प) means "correct, appropriate" and is one of the six disciplines of Vedānga or subsidiary science associated with the Vedas - the scriptures of Hinduism. This field of study is focused on the procedures and ceremonies associated with the practice of Vedic rituals.

The main texts of the Kalpa Vedanga are called the Kalpa Sutras in Hinduism. The scope of these texts includes Vedic rituals, rites of passage associated with significant life events such as birth, marriage and death in the family, as well as personal conduct and proper duties in an individual's life. Most Kalpasutras have experienced interpolation, alteration and subsequent corruption throughout their history, and the Apasthamba Kalpasutra as a supplement to the Yajurveda may be the best-preserved text in the genre.

The Kalpa Sutras can also be found in other Indian traditions such as Jainism.

## Origin

Kalpa is a Sanskrit word meaning "proper, suitable, competent, sacred precept" and also refers to one of the six Vedanga branches of study. In the context of Vedanga, the German Indologist Max Muller translates it as "Ceremonial".

The word is widely used in other contexts, such as "cosmic time" (one day for Brahma, 4.32 billion human years), as well as for regulations or practices that are "correct, appropriate" in medicine or another profession.

## History

The Kalpa field of study has its roots in the Brahmanical layer of texts in the Vedas, however its texts are focused, clear, short and practical for ceremonies. The Kalpa Sutras are related to the karma kanda or ritual parts of the Veda, as opposed to the Upanishads which are the jnana kanda or knowledge part.

This field of study emerged to serve the needs of priests when they performed domestic ceremonies such as weddings and baby naming rituals so that the rituals were efficient, standardized, and looked consistent across events. They also helped the audience and individuals to integrate into the customs and cultural practices, the state of Winternitz and Sarma, from "the moment he was received in his mother's womb until the hour of his death", and onward during his cremation.

## Texts

Ancient texts related to rituals are of two types: (1) Śrautasūtras, which are based on śruti, and (2) Smārtasūtras, or rules based on smṛiti or tradition. The first versions of the text of the Kalpa Sutras were probably composed in the 6th century BCE and were attributed to famous Vedic sages out of respect for them in Hindu traditions or to gain authority. These texts are written in the style of aphoristic sutras and are therefore taxonomies or brief guides rather than detailed manuals or handbooks for any ceremony.

Scholars such as Monier-Williams classified only the Shrautasutras as part of the Kalpa Vedanga, stating that the Smartasutras did not refer to Shrautas or Vedic ceremonies, but instead focused on domestic events such as rites of passage when a child is born and Samayachara or "conventional daily practices" that are part of every person's life. However, other scholars include both.

## **Srauta Sutras**

The Śrautasūtras (Shrauta-sutra) form part of the corpus of Sanskrit sūtra literature. Their topics include instructions regarding the use of the śruti corpus in ritual ("kalpa") and the proper performance of these rituals. Some early Śrautasūtras were composed in the late Brahmanical period (such as the Baudhyana and Vadhula Sūtras), but most Śrautasūtras are roughly contemporary with the Gṛhya corpus of household sutras, their language being late Vedic Sanskrit, dating to the mid-19th first millennium BCE (generally pre-Pāṇini).

## **Shulba Sutras**

The Śulbasūtra (or Shulva-sutras) deal with the mathematical methodology for constructing altar geometries for Vedic rituals. The Sanskrit word "Shulba" means cord and these texts are the "rules of the cord". They provide, says Kim Plofker, what in modern mathematical terminology would be called a "surface preserving transformation of planar figures," succinctly describing geometric formulas and constants. Five texts of the Shulba Sutras have survived throughout history, the oldest surviving of which is probably the Baudhayana Shulba Sutra (800-500 BCE), while that of Katyayana may be chronologically the youngest (~300 BCE).

## **Smarta Sutras**

The Gṛhyasūtras "household sutras" are a category of Sanskrit texts prescribing Vedic rites, primarily relating to rites of passage such as wedding rites, birth celebrations, naming and coming of age (puberty). Their language is late Vedic Sanskrit and they date to about 500 BCE, contemporary with the Śrautasūtras. They are named after Vedic shakhas.

## **Vedic sacrifice rituals at a wedding**

West of the (sacred) fire, a stone (for grinding corn and condiments) is placed and northeast a water jar. The bridegroom offers an oblation, standing, looking towards the west, and taking hold of the bride's hands while she sits and looks towards the east. If he wishes only for sons, he clasps her thumbs and says, "I clasp thy hands

for the sake of good fortune"; the fingers alone, if he wishes only for daughters; the hairy side of the hand along with the thumbs if wishes for both (sons and daughters). Then, whilst he leads her towards the right three times around the fire, and round the water jar, he says in a low tone,

"I am he, thou art she; thou art she, I am he,

I am the heaven, thou art the earth; I am the Saman, thou art the Rig.

Come let us marry, let us possess offspring,

united in affection, well disposed to each other,

let us live for a hundred years".

— Āśvalāyana Kalpa sutra, Book 1.7, Translated by Monier Monier-Williams

## **Dharmasūtras**

Dharmasūtras are texts dealing with customs, rituals, duties and law. They include four extant written works of the ancient Indian tradition on the subject of dharma, or rules of conduct accepted by the community. Unlike the later dharmasāstras, the dharmasūtras are composed in prose. It is generally believed that the earliest Dharmasutra was the Apastamba Dharmasutra, followed by the Dharmasutras of Gautama, Baudhayana and an early version of Vashistha. It is difficult to determine the exact dates of these texts, but dates between 500 and 300 BCE have been suggested for the earliest dharmasūtras.