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Saṃkalpa: The Beginnings of a Ritual[1]

Introduction

Almost all traditional rituals which follow Brahmanic or Dharmaśāstric rules, must be preceded by a formal decision or declaratory formula called *saṃkalpana* or *saṃkalpa*. When, for instance, pilgrims walk for five days on the Pañcakrośī-yātrā around Benares, they first contact the Vyāsa Brahmin at the Muktimaṇḍapa temple in order to formulate the *saṃkalpa* for the pilgrimage. Only then is it possible to acquire spiritual or religious merit. In other words, a tourist who accompanies a pilgrim on the Pañcakrośīyātrā is not a pilgrim because he has not formulated the *saṃkalpa*. In looking at these formal elements, we learn to differentiate between action (e.g. walking around) and ritual action (religious circumambulation).

In this paper I shall try to analyze basically this preliminary rite, which has almost entirely escaped scholarly attention. I shall focus on the determination of location and time called *deśakālasmṛti* (or -*smaraṇa*), which is "the remembrance of space (lit. country) and time", or *deśakālasaṃkīrtana*, "the proclamation of space and time". Basically I want to stress two points: the *deśakālasmṛti* is a particular means of reducing or expanding the religious complexity of rituals, including pilgrimages, from walking or travelling long distances to small-scale circumambulations or even verbal and inner journeys. It helps to transform religious ideas into the ritual *hic et nunc*, thus making it possible to include sectarian or political concerns within an otherwise rather fixed and stereotyped series of prescribed actions. I shall first present a description of the *deśakāla-smṛti* according to three ritual handbooks. I will then illustrate the complexity of any *saṃkalpa* by elaborating on a specific astronomical problem and its practical implications. In the final section I will try to draw some conclusions on the basis of the above materials, which would contribute to a theory of how rituals are localized and timed, or the issue of space and time in rituals.

The Features of a *saṃkalpa*

Most Sanskritic rituals require a *saṃkalpa*, and generally *saṃkalpas* imply that the ritual is localized and fixed in time, along with some other features discussed below. Thus the *Saṃkalparatnāvalī*, published in 1923 C.E. in India, is a collection of *saṃkalpas* for a great number of rituals, such as the ritual recitation of a text (*caṇḍīpāṭha*), *rites de passage* (*saṃskāra*), rites of gift-giving (*dāna*), vows (*vrata*) etc. In his "Gems of [religious] Decisions", Harinātha Śarmā, a pandit from Nepal, defines a *saṃkalpa* as follows:

> *saparikarasaṃkalpavākyaprayogaś ca nitye, naimittike, kāmye, prāyaścitte ca karmaṇi sarvatra āvaśyakaḥ | "saṃkalpena vinā vipra yat kiñcit kurute naraḥ | phalaṃ cālpālpakaṃ tasya dharmasyārdhakṣayo bhavet" iti ratnāvalīdhṛtabhaviṣyavākyāt | "māsapakṣatithīnāñ ca nimittānāṃ ca sarvaśaḥ, ullekhanam akurvāṇo narakaṃ pratipadyate"[2] iti tatraiva śātātapokteś ca ‖ (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 10)*

The use of a *saṃkalpa*-sentence along with its adjuncts is always necessary for obligatory, casual (or) optional ritual action and for an expiatory rite. "The fruits of whatever a man does (ritually), o Brahmin, without a *saṃkalpa*, will be petty and its *dharma* will diminish by half"—thus it is said in a quotation from the Bhaviṣyapurāṇa quoted by the Ratnāvalī. "Who does not completely mention the month, fortnight, lunar day and purposes (of the ritual) will fall into hell"—such is the saying of Śātātapa (quoted) there (in the Ratnāvalī).

It is not only obligatory for certain rituals to commence with a *saṃkalpa* but also for a *saṃkalpa* to be characterized by some distinctive features, which Harinātha Śarmā lists as follows (they will be listed in a more systematic form in the tables below):

> *puraścaryārṇavaratnāvalyor merutantre: tāmrapātre kṛtvā kuśatilākṣatān |*[3]
> *udaṇmukhas tu saṃkalpam kuryāt saṃvatsarādikān | kāmanāntān uccaret tu trayoviṃśatisaṃkhyakān | saṃvatsarāyane māsaḥ pakṣaḥ pañcāṅgam eva ca | navagrahasthitiṃ ghasrabhāgaṃ muhūrtakam tv iti | svadeśabhedāṃs tattulyān kāmanāsahitān vadet | dvīpe 'muke 'muke khaṇḍe 'muke varṣe ca nīvṛti | amuke cāmuke kṣetre gotrapravaram uccaret | svanāmajātināmāntaṃ dvijāccharma ca varma ca | gupto dāsa iti | puraścaryārṇave sanatkumārasaṃhitāyāṃ praṇavaṃ tatsad adyeti māsapakṣatithīr api | amukagotro 'muko 'haṃ ceti | (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 10–11)*

In the *Puraścaryārṇava*, the *Ratnāvalī* and the *Merutantra* (the following verses are given): "After one has placed in a copper vessel *kuśa* grass, sesame and

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2 In the *Śāntimayūkha*, the second half of the verse is slightly different: *samullekham akurvāṇo na tasya phalabhag bhavet* (quoted after Kane 1968ff. vol. 5.1: 650).

3 Four syllables are missing in the *pada*.

grains of rice, one should formulate the *saṃkalpa* facing north, starting with the year and ending with the wishes (regarding the ritual), altogether 23 items: the year (*saṃvatsara*), the (northern or southern course of the sun or) half-year (*ayana*), month (*māsa*), fortnight (*pakṣa*), and also the five parts of a traditional calendar (*pañcāṅga*), [i.e. lunar day (*tithi*), weekday (*vāra*), lunar mansion (*nakṣatra*), conjunction (*yoga*), half of the lunar day (*karaṇa*)] the position of the nine 'planets' (*graha*), the zodiacal sign (*rāśī*), hour (*muhūrta*). One should mention the parts of one's own country together with the suitable wishes, in such and such a (mythical) continent (*dvīpa*), in such and such a subcontinent (*khaṇḍa*), in such and such a part of the world (*varṣa*), in such and such a kingdom (*nīvṛt*), in such and such a region (*kṣetra*), one should proclaim the (name of the) clan and the clan segment (*gotra, pravara*), one's own name, up to the name of the subcaste (*jāti*), (and additionally) in the case of twice-born (men): Śarmā (in the case of a Brahmin), Varmā (in the case of a *kṣatriya*), Gupta (in the case of a *vaiśya*), and Dāsa (in the case of a *śūdra*)". In the *Puraścaryārṇava*, the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* (the following verse, which is to be formulated in a *saṃkalpa*, is quoted): "*Oṃ tat sat*. Today". Also the month, fortnight and lunar day. Also "Such is my gotra, I am such a person".

From this definition and the *saṃkalpas* as practised, it follows that a *saṃkalpa* must be formulated (a) prior to the ritual, (b) consciously, and (c) verbally; it must (d) also mention the purpose of the ritual and should be (e) accompanied by certain ritual gestures. I will now take a closer look at these characteristics.

(a) Within the sequence of a ritual, the *saṃkalpa* is part of the preliminary or preparatory sub-rites (*pūrvāṅga*). As such it can be part of pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*), oaths (*vrata*) and worship (*pūjā*), but also of sacrifices (*yajña, homa, iṣṭi*) or *rites de passage* (*saṃskāra*). A rough scheme of the ritual procedure in which *saṃkalpas* occur is the following:

1. Preparatory rites (*snāna* etc.)
2. Formal decision to undertake the ritual act, including the mentioning of its purpose (*saṃkalpa* or *saṃkalpana*)
3. The main actions of the particular ritual (*tīrthayātrā, yāga, homa, pūjā, vrata, utsava*)
4. Supplementary actions, such as fasting or night vigils (*upavāsa, jāgara* etc.)
5. Communal actions, such as feasts (*bhojana*)
6. Gifts (*dāna, dakṣiṇā, prasāda*)
7. Concluding actions, such as farewell rituals to the gods (*visarjana*)

Important in this sequence is the fact that the *saṃkalpa* precedes the core of the ritual actions, though for some ritualists it constitutes part of the preparatory subrites (*pūrvāṅga*). Benveniste (1973) has differentiated between two types of oaths: "declaratory" or "judiciary", which pertain to past events, e.g. swearing

the truth of past actions in a law case, and "promissory" which refer to future events, e.g. pacts, promises or vows. Clearly, the *saṃkalpa* belongs to the second category since it is a promissory speech-act. For this reason the future tense is generally prescribed in the formulation of a *saṃkalpa*:

prātar deva caturdaśyāṃ jāgariṣyāmy ahaṃ niśi. (Garuḍapurāṇa 1.124.12ab)
In the morning, o god, on the fourteenth, I shall keep awake in the night.

śivarātrivrataṃ deva kariṣye śivasaṃnidhau. (Puruṣārthacintāmaṇi 255: 13)
I shall, o god, keep the vow of Śivarātri in the presence of Śiva.

(b) However, the decision to take a religious vow must not only be well articulated and formulated prior to the performance of the ritual, it must also be consciously declared—usually but not necessarily in a public and explicit form. If therefore—as Śrīdatta in his *Samayapradīpa* states—"a man of weak intellect or an ignorant man observes a fast without *saṃkalpa*, it would be simply so much physical hardship but not a *vrata*".[4] Many Dharmaśāstrins stress the necessity of the mental (*mānasa*) act in ritual decisions.[5] Thus, a *saṃkalpa* for a *vrata* has to be intentional, as is stated by Śabara on *Jaiminīyasūtra* 6.2.20:

vratam iti mānasaṃ karmocyate idaṃ na kariṣyāmīti yaḥ saṃkalpaḥ. (Mīmāṃsā-sūtra 6.2.20)

A *vrata* is said (to be) a mental act, which is an intention (formulated with a phrase like:) "I will not do this" (e.g. eat during a fast).

(c) Thirdly, a *saṃkalpa* should be phrased in a certain linguistic form which leaves little space for alterations. Harinātha Śarmā who, quoting from various sources, reflects the use and importance of *saṃkalpas* in an analytical way, is also precise regarding the formulation:

ratnāvalyāṃ "kuśodakaṃ samādāya saṃkalpeta hi vākyataḥ | tiṅsuvantayutaṃ vākyam ātmanepady ucyate | madhye kāmañ ca hetuñ ca tithyādyaṃ vākyam u-ccaret ["] | [...] *saṃkalpeta vākyataḥ, mānasaṃ karma vākyena prakāśayet* | (*Saṃkalparatnāvalī* 11)

In the *Ratnāvalī* (the following verse is given): "After he has taken *kuśa* water, he should explicitly (lit. in sentences) formulate the *saṃkalpa*, he should use a sentence with finite verb forms in the middle voice (*ātmanepada*); in the middle he should proclaim a sentence (which contains) the wishes and reasons (for the ritual) and also the lunar day at the beginning". [...] "He should explicitly formulate the *saṃkalpa*". (Which means:) The mental act (or what one does by

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4   Quoted from Kane 1968ff. vol. 5.1: 30f.
5   See, for instance, Medhātithi on *Mānavadharmaśāstra* IV. 13, Mītākṣara on *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* I.129; *Amarakoṣa* 1.8.2; cf. Kane 1968ff. vol. 5.1: 28f.

thoughts in rituals) must also be proclaimed through sentences which he should formulate as *saṃkalpas*.

(d) The phrasing should contain the essence of the ritual action and its purpose (*artha*) or the wishes (*kāma*) it incorporates, as can be seen from the *saṃkalpa* formulas which follow in the next section. Traditionally, a *saṃkalpa* is regarded as an act of willing. If there is no desire, there will be no ritual and especially no fruit of the ritual. Thus, the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* says:

> *saṃkalpamūlaḥ kāmo vai yajñāḥ saṃkalpasambhavāḥ |*
> *vratāni yamadharmāś ca sarve saṃkalpajāḥ smṛtāḥ ‖ (Mānavadharmaśāstra II.3)*

Desire has *saṃkalpa* as its root, and sacrifices are caused by a *saṃkalpa*; vows and all the *dharmas* of restriction are said to come from *saṃkalpa*.

However, in this verse *saṃkalpa* is not yet a technical term but means "desire, will". The restrictive behaviour so essential in most pilgrimages, which results from a *saṃkalpa*, is imposed by the *yamas* and *niyamas*, of which various lists exist (Kane 1968ff. vol. 5.1: 29 n. 57). They can be classified as (a) ethical, e.g. non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), not stealing (*asteya*), speaking the truth (*satya*) etc., (b) purifying, e.g. bathing (*snāna*), purification (*śauca*) etc., or (c) asceticism, e.g. celibacy (*brahmacarya*), fasting (*upavāsa*), vigil (*jāgaraṇa*), silence (*mauna*) etc. It seems, then, that everyday behaviour has to be intentionally directed towards religious aims in order to be ritually acceptable. Unknowingly, unconsciously and unwillingly performed rituals have no religious result (*phala, puṇya*). This idea, common to many religions and theologies, is again *expressis verbis* mentioned in the *Saṃkalparatnāvalī*:

> *saṃkalparacanāprakāraḥ*
> *yadyapi saṃkalpo nāmāham evaṃ kariṣyāmīty adhyavasāyarūpo manaso vyāpā-*
> *raḥ tathāpi tadabhidhāyivākyam api saṃkalpaḥ | saṃkalpaṃ racayāmi, saṃ-*
> *kalpaṃ paṭhāmi, saṃkalpaṃ kuru iti vyavahāradarśanena nirūḍhalakṣaṇāṃgī-*
> *kārāt ‖ (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 10)*

The manner of composing a *saṃkalpa*: Even when that which is called a *saṃkalpa* is a mental process in the form of a resolution, "I shall act in such a way", even then, the sentence expressive of that (resolution) is also a *saṃkalpa*. This is because of the incorporation of the conventional meaning (of the term) through seeing its popular usage (in sentences such as), "I compose a *saṃkalpa*, I read (or recite) a *saṃkalpa*, You formulate a *saṃkalpa*".[6]

> *deśakālayor adhikaraṇatvāt saptamīvibhaktyā prayogaḥ | tataś ca pratipadoktā-*
> *sandarbhānusāreṇa sāmpradāyikaṃ saṃkalpavākyam | (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 11)*

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6   *Nirūḍhalakṣaṇa* is a *terminus technicus* which expresses the secondary or metaphorical meaning of a word: see Kunjunni Raja 1963: 62f.

Because of the locative sense of place and time one should use the locative. Then, the *saṃkalpa*-sentence is in accordance with tradition because it follows the connection (between the words) mentioned at the beginning.

(e) Finally, a *saṃkalpa* can be accompanied by certain ritual gestures to support the truth of the speech-act. Thus it is usual to touch a vessel filled with water or to sprinkle water with *kuśa* grass on the palms. One should also wear a ring because it is inauspicious to perform rituals with bare hands. If one does not have a metal ring one should make a ring out of *kuśa* grass:

> *śuktiśaṅkhāśmarūpyamṛnmayapātraiḥ kevalena hastena vā saṃkalpaṃ na kuryāt | atra hastaniṣedhaḥ pātrāntara-sadbhāvaviṣaya ekahastaparoveti) raghunandanīye durgākṛtyakaumudyāṃ ca | (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 11)*

One should not perform a *saṃkalpa* with vessels made of oyster pearl, stone, silver or clay or with the (bare) hand. And in Raghunandana's *Durgākṛtyakaumudi* (it is stated): "Here, the prohibition of the hand refers either to the matter of the existence of another (kind) of vessel or to the dependence on one hand".

> *tāmrapātre kuśatrayaṃ tilāñ jalañ ca nidhāya tatpātram ādāya vāmahastānvā-rabdhena dakṣahastena kuśatilajalāny ādāya vā | (Saṃkalparatnāvalī 12)*

Having placed three blades of *kuśa* grass, sesame seeds and water in a copper vessel, having taken that vessel, or having taken *kuśa* grass, sesame seeds and water in the right hand cupped in the left hand.

To be sure, not all five features of a *saṃkalpa* are found in the written sources (samples of which are given in the next section), but they can generally be observed in ritual practice. *Saṃkalpas* belong to the practical knowledge of priests that is often only orally preserved.

Saṃkalpa Formulas

Most priests follow a formula similar to one of the three following examples arranged in order of increasing complexity. However, in manuscripts one can find even longer versions especially used during marriages. P. Aithal has kindly provided me with a copy of a manuscript titled *Mahāsaṃkalpa* from the Chandra Shamsher Collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (ms. no. d. 825/4), which contains a comprehensive sacred geography and cosmology of India. It mentions the 7 *lokas*, 7 *purīs*, 7 *dvīpas*, 7 *merus*, 10 *āraṇyas*, *varṣas*, *kṣetras* and many items more.

(a) *Ṛgvedīyabrahmakarmasamuccaya* of Vāsudeva Paṇaśīkara. The *saṃkalpa* concerns the ritual morning bath (*prātaḥsnāna*):

> *gaṃgāgaṃgeti yo brūyād yojanānāṃ śatair api |*
> *mucyate sarvapāpebhyo viṣṇulokaṃ sa gacchati ‖*

ācamya prāṇāyāmaṃ kṛtvā śrīmadbhagavato mahāpuruṣasya viṣṇor ājñayā pra-
vartamānasya adya brahmaṇo dvitīye parārdhe viṣṇupade śrīśvetavārāhakalpe
vaivasvatamanvaṃtare kaliyuge prathamacaraṇe bharatavarṣe bharatakhaṃde
jambudvīpe daṃḍakāraṇye deśe (godāvaryāḥ dakṣiṇe tīre kṛṣṇāveṇyor uttare
tīre vā) śālivāhanaśake bauddhāvatāre rāmakṣetre rāmarāmāśrame asmin varta-
māne amukanāmasaṃvatsare amukāyane amukartau amukamāse amukapakṣe
amukatithau amukavāsare amukadivasanakṣatre amukasthe vartamāne caṃdre
amukasthe śrīsūrye amukasthe devagurau śeṣeṣu graheṣu yathāyathaṃ sthāna-
sthiteṣu satsuśubhayoge śubhakaraṇe evaṃguṇaviśeṣaṇaviśiṣṭāyāṃ śubhapuṇya-
tithau
śrīparameśvarājñārūpasakalaśāstraśrutismṛtipurāṇoktaphalaprāptyarthaṃ ma-
ma ātmanaḥ kṛtakāyikavācikamānasika-sāṃsargikasakalapāpakṣayārthaṃ prā-
taḥsnānam ahaṃ kariṣye || (fol. 4)

"Whoever says 'o Gaṅgā, o Gaṅgā', even (if he is) hundreds of miles away, he is released from all evil (and) reaches the world of Viṣṇu".

After ritually cleaning myself, after ritually controlling the breath, acting on the command of the Blessed One, the Great Puruṣa, Viṣṇu, today, on the Viṣṇupada (51st day) of the second, latter half of (the life of) Brahmā, in the Śvetavarāha period (*kalpa*), in the Vaivasvata period (*manvantara*), in the first quarter of the Kaliyuga, in Bharatavarṣa (India), in the Bharata part (of the continent), on the Jambudvīpa continent, in the Daṇḍakāraṇya (the jungle area of Dekkhan), in the land at the southern bank of the Godāvarī River or on the northern bank of the Kṛṣṇā River or Veṇi River, during the Śālivāhana era, during the (period of the incarnation of Viṣṇu as) Buddha, in this realm of Rāma (= Maharashtra), in the year with such and such a name, in such and such a half of the year (*āyana*), in such and such a season (*ṛtu*), in such and such a lunar month (*māsa*), in such and such a fortnight (*pakṣa*) (of the lunar month), on such and such a lunar day (*tithi*), on such and such a weekday (*vāsara*), on the lunar mansion (*nakṣatra*) of such and such a day, when the moon resides in such and such a position, when the sun is in such and such a position, when Jupiter is in such and such a position (and) when the other "planets" (*graha*) are in a proper position, in an auspicious stellar constellation (*yoga*), in an auspicious half (*karaṇa*) of a lunar day (*tithi*), on an auspicious and meritorious lunar day characterized by such special quailties, in order to receive the fruits mentioned in all the Śāstras, Śrutis, Smṛtis and Purāṇas, which are in the form of the commands of the Highest God, and for all corporeal, verbal, mental and saṃsāric evil done by me to perish, I shall perform the morning bath.

Interestingly and despite its length, neither the clan (*gotra*) nor further personalizing features have been mentioned in this *saṃkalpa*.

(b) *Saṃkalparatnāvalī* of Harinātha Śarmā. The *saṃkalpa* is formulated as a sample (*svarūpa*):

saṃkalpavākyasvarūpam
oṃ tatsat adya brahmaṇo dvitīye parārddhe śvetavārāhakalpe vaivasvatama-
nvantare 'aṣṭāviṃśatitame kalau yuge jambūdvīpe bhārate varṣe uttare khaṇḍe
āryāvartāntaragate nepāladeśe pāśupater kṣetre prabhave saṃvatsare dakṣiṇe
'yane śaradi ṛtau āśvine māse kṛṣṇe pakṣe dvitīyāyāṃ tithau śanau vāsare reva-
tyāṃ nakṣatre dhruve yoge gare karaṇe kanyārāśisthitayoḥ sūryaśukrayoḥ ka-
rkaṭarāśisthiteṣu ketuṣu mithunarāśisthitayoḥ śanibhaumayoḥ mīnarāśisthitayoś
candrajīvayor makararāśisthite rāhau tulārāśisthite budhe kauṇḍinyagotraḥ
kauṇḍinyavāśiṣṭha maitrāvaruṇeti tripravaro | harināthaśarmā sakalapāpakṣa-
yārthaṃ gaṃgāsnānam ahaṃ kariṣye iti saṃkalpya jalamaiśānyāṃ kṣipet | (Saṃ-
kalparatnāvalī 12f.)

"The essential nature of a *saṃkalpa*-sentence: *Oṃ tat sat*. Today, in the second (half of the life) of Brahmā, in the Śvetavārāha period (*kalpa*), in the Vaivasvata period (*manvantara*), in the 28th *manvantara*, in the Kaliyuga, in the Jambūdvīpa, on the Bharatavarṣa continent, in the northern part of it, in Nepal which falls under the Āryāvarta region, in the field (*kṣetra*) of Paśupati, in the *prabhava* (i.e. name of the year), in the southern part of the year (i.e. when the sun is in the southern hemisphere), in the autumn season, in the month of Āśvina, in its dark part, on the second lunar day, on Saturday, in the Revatī zodiacal sign, when the polar star is in the fifth division (*gara, karaṇa*) of the day, when the sun and Venus are in the sign of Virgin, when the Ketu is in Cancer, when Saturn and Mars are in Gemini, when the moon and Jupiter are in the Fishes, when Rāhu is in Capricorn, (and) when Mercury is in Libra, I, Harinātha Śarmā, belonging to the clan (*gotra*) of Kauṇḍinya, and to the three clan segments (*pravara*) Kauṇḍinya, Vāśiṣṭha and Maitrāvaruṇa, shall take a bath in the Gaṅgā in order to destroy all (my) evil". Having thus ritually decided, he shall throw water to the north.

(c) *Vratabandhapaddhati* of Kṛṣṇaprasāda Bhaṭṭarāī. This text is a recent hand-book for performing the *upanayana* or initiation ceremony (in Nepal generally called *vratabandha*). The formula for the *saṃkalpa* is short and modernized:

oṃ adyeha [...] gotraḥ [...] pravaraḥ [...] śarmā (varmā vā) ahaṃ mamāsya [...]
nāmnaḥ kumārasya, kariṣyamāṇacuḍopayanavedārambhasamāvartanakarma(ṇi)
tatpūrvāṅgatvena dīpakala-śādisthāpanapūrvakaṃ yathāmilitopacāraiḥ śrīgaṇa-
patipūjana-puṇyāhavācanamātṛkāpūjananāndīśrāddhagrahaśāntyādi sakalaka-
rma(ś ca) tantreṇa yathāvidhi kariṣye | etatkarmaṇi yathāvihitopayogyakarma
kartum (puṇyāhavācanārthaṃ ca) ebhiś candanapuṣpākṣatapūgīphalavāsodra-
vyādibhir yathānāmagotrān yathānāmaśarmaṇo brāhmaṇān yuṣmān ahaṃ vṛṇe |
(pp. 8–9)

Oṃ. Today and here, belonging to such and such a clan (*gotra*) and such and such a clan-segment (*pravara*), [...] I, Śarmā (or Varmā), shall perform, according to injunctions, in an abbreviated form, for my son named [...], (in the matter of) the obligatory ritual of cutting the hair (*cūḍā*), initiation (*upanayana*), first reading of the Veda (*vedārambha*) and the ritual ending of studies (*samāvartana*), through means of its preliminaries (*pūrvāṅga*), after first (doing) the rituals of lighting a lamp (*dīpa*) and setting up a vessel (*kalaśasthāpana*), with the offerings (*upacāra*) available, all the rituals such as the worship of Gaṇeśa (*śrīgaṇapatipūjā*), proclamation of the religious merit of the day (*puṇyāhavācana*), the worship of the Mātṛkās (*mātṛkāpūjana*), a (commemorative and auspicious) death ritual (*nandīśrāddha*), the ritual of appeasing the planets (*grahaśānti*) etc. In the matter of this ritual, I choose you Brahmans of such and such a *gotra* named such and such "Śarmā", in order to do the subsidiary rites as enjoined, (as well as for proclaiming the religious merit of the day) with these (things), sandalwood paste (*candana*), flowers, whole-grain rice, areca nuts, cloths, money etc.

Thus, any *saṃkalpa* has ideally the following form (in brackets the grammatical essentials, the sequence of no. 3–8 is not fixed):

1. *mantra* (e.g. *oṃ tatsad*)
2. *hic et nunc* (usually *adyeha*)
3. place-names [loc.]: see Table. 1
4. time parameters [loc.]: see Table 2
5. genealogical and kinship data [gen.]: see Table 3
6. personal name(s) [nom.]
7. aim or purpose [acc.]
8. ritual action [acc.]
9. verb [1. ps. sg. fut. Ātm. (or present tense used as future tense)].

Place, Time and the Individual

As we have seen, by means of the declaratory formula the performer of a specific ritual has to specify and identify himself in accordance with (1) spatial, (2) chronological and (3) genealogical criteria. I call these criteria respectively "localization", "timing" and "personalization". It would appear that the space and time parameters are construed in a similar way as in the dating of inscriptions. There are significant differences, however, as I will try to show in the concludeing section. The following tables list the most common criteria and divisions used in *saṃkalpas* (see *Saṃkalparatnāvalī* 23–30).

(1) Localization

The spatial criteria resemble in a way the well-known Russian Matryoshka toy consisting of a series of dolls encapsulated in increasingly larger ones. Among the geographical coordinates are:

Tab. 1: Spatial levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Supraregional Level	Regional Level	Local Level
brahmāvārta—Brahmā's region	(*sva-*)*deśa*—country: *nepāladeśa* etc.	*grāma*—village
āryāvarta—region of the Āryas	*kṣetra*—region, usually named after a god: *paraśurāmakṣetra, rāmakṣetra, -rājya, hindusthānadeśa, paśupatikṣetra* etc.	*nagara*—city
Khaṇḍa—continent, usually *bharatakhaṇḍa*	*pātha*—directions: *dakṣiṇā-, uttara-* etc. (see *ayana* in Table 2)	*nadī*—river
dvīpa—subcontinent: *jambudvīpa, puṣkaradvīpa* etc.		*tīra*—bank
bharatavarṣa—sacred land of India		

In the ritual context, the supra-regional aspect is more subject to debate than the regional or local criteria. The supra-regional level can be open to ideological arguments, since cosmographical and even political definitions of the borders of a sacred land or territory vary. Although terrestrial features, such as mountains or rivers, are mentioned early (see *Mānavadharmaśāstra* II.17–24), the sacred land in which the ritual can take place is more often defined in distinction to a foreign region or country, e.g. *mlecchadeśa* (*Mānavadharmaśāstra* II.23), which is not considered as sacred, and which the pious man should avoid. I will not elaborate here on the extensive literature on *bharatavarṣa* etc., which is mainly concerned with cosmographical and geographical details (see Kirfel 1920, Sircar 1967, Gombrich 1975, Schwartzberg 1992). Conceptually, it seems to me that only at this point can new religious and ideological concepts of space enter the formula of a *saṃkalpa*—for instance, the concept of India as a nation (*bharata*), the idea of Hindusthāna or, recently, Rāmarājya. However, sacred geography has always been political in the Durkheimian sense that religion also serves the solidarity of social groups.

The sacred space of rituals is therefore not defined by "objective", geocentric criteria but by religious concepts. In other words, sacred space in rituals is construed, not measured. A sacred place is never just out there, it is always also *in illo loco*. From this it follows that the sacred land of India is not just the territory of the nation. The sacred land of India is also beyond India. Brahmin or Hindu priests do not have any problem in reformulating and adapting the *saṃkalpa* to foreign countries, as has been observed by M. Deshpande in two Hindu weddings in the USA:

On one occasion, the priest recited the formula *bharatakhaṇḍe bharatavarṣe* etc. without any modification. After the ceremony was over, I asked the priest for an explanation. The clever priest, who had not thought of this problem before, responded by saying that all the regions of the world where Indian immigrants have settled are now included in the region referred to by *bharatakhaṇḍe bharatadeśe*. On the other hand, I have observed other Hindu priests in my state of Michigan adjusting the traditional formula of *saṃkalpa* to reflect the changed geography: *amerikākhaṇḍe amerikādeśe miśiganrājya anārbarnagare huron-nadyās tīre*, "in the continent of America, in the country of America, in the state of Michigan, in the city of Ann Arbor, on the bank of the Huron river". (Deshpande 1996: 425)

(2) Timing

In terms of chronology, the following divisions and subdivisions are made and mentioned in *saṃkalpas*.

Tab. 2: Chronological divisions mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Cosmological Divisions	Calendrical and Chronological Divisions	Astronomical Divisions, i.e. zodiacal signs occupied by the sun, moon, Jupiter and other planets
kalpa—a day of Brahmā = 1000 *mahāyugas*	*saṃvat*—era: *vikrama, śāka* etc.	*nakṣatra*—27 lunar mansions: *aśvinī, bharaṇī, kṛttikā ... uttarabhādrapadā, revatī*
	varṣa, vatsara—a year of 360 lunar days	*yoga*—27 conjunctions: *viṣkumbha, prīti, āyuṣmān, ... aindra, vaidhṛti*
	ayana—half of the year according to the position of the sun in the northern (*uttara*) or southern (*dakṣiṇa*) hemisphere	*rāśi*—12 solar mansions or zodiacal signs: *meṣa, vṛṣabha, mithuna, ... kumbha, mīna*
yuga—four ages of the world: *kṛta, tretā, dvāpara* and *kali* = 1 *mahāyuga* or 1 *manvantara* (Manu-period) = 4,320,000 years	*ṛtu*—6 seasons: *vasanta, grīṣma, varṣā, śarad, hemanta, śiśira*	Position of *sūrya, candra* and (other) *grahas* or *navagrahas*

saṃvatsara—usually
according to the 60-
year cycle of Jupiter:
prabhava, vibhava,
śukla, pārthiva, vyaya,
... *kṣaya*

māsa—12 months: *vaiśākha,*
jyeṣṭha, āṣāḍha, śrāvaṇa,
bhādra, āśvina, kārttika,
mārga, pauṣa, māgha,
phālguna, caitra

pakṣa—half of a month
according to the size and
position of the moon: *śukla,*
kṛṣṇa

tithi—15 lunar days including
full or new moon: *pratipad,*
dvitīyā, tṛtīyā, ... caturdaśī,
pūrṇimā, amāvāsyā

karaṇa—11 divisions of a day:
vava, vālava, kaulava, taittila,
gara, vaṇija, viṣṭi, śakuni,
capuṣpad, nāga, kiṃstughna

vāra, dina—7 weekdays: *ravi,*
soma, bhauma, budha,
bṛhaspati, śukra, śani

yāma—quarter of a day
muhūrta, ghaṭī, pala—
divisions of an hour (1
muhūrta = 48 minutes, 1 *ghaṭī*
= 12 minutes = 60 *pala*)

Timing a ritual can be an extremely difficult task. It therefore lies in the hands of specialists, i.e. astrologers and astronomers, even if educated Indians can read and use a traditional calendar (*pañcāṅga*). I do not deal here with astronomical or calendrical problems involved in timing rituals but with concepts of time relevant for ritual actions. From this point of view, ritual time and "real" time are not only different but may also conflict with each other. To give just one example: For most rituals, festivals or pilgrimages, the lunar day (*tithi*) is decisive; a *tithi* can cover two or even three solar days (*dina, divāsa*). What is to be done, then, if a certain natural time is prescribed for a specific ritual, e.g. the night vigil in the case of Śivarātri, but if the *tithi* happens to fall in the daytime? In this case most traditional experts refer to the *yugmavākyā*. According to this rule it is the *tithi* which lasts until sunrise or is just beginning that gives the solar day its

name and number. However, since a *tithi* can be very short, lasting only a few hours, it can happen that a lunar day does not cover the nighttime. In this case the decision has to be made whether the night vigil should be held the night before or after the *tithi* (both ways are possible: see Michaels 1996: 325). But more important is the fact that the conceptual night is independent of the natural day- or nighttime. The timing of the ritual performance must be in accordance with the bio-rhythm, the organization of the festival etc., but the religious timing can be independent of it: *in illo tempore*.

(3) Personalization

Besides localization and timing it is necessary to involve the performer of the ritual (the *yajamāna*) through using the following criteria:

Tab. 3: Personal criteria mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Genealogical criteria	Personal criteria	Educational criteria
gotra—clan names of the eponymous seers (*ṛṣi*), from which all twice-borns are believed to descend, usually *viśvāmitra, jamadagni, bharadvāja, gautama, vasiṣṭha, kaśyapa, agastya*	personal names (*nāma*) given at the naming ceremony (*nāmakaraṇa*)	Guru's name
pravara—clan segments according to legendary descendants of the *ṛṣis*	Father's name	*śākhā*—Vedic school
	Mother's name	*pāṭha*—name of the recited text
	Name of the *varṇa*: *śarmā* for *brāhmaṇa, varmā* for *kṣatriya, gupta* for *vaiśya, dāsa* for *śūdra*	
sāpiṇḍa—patri- and matrilineal male and female ancestors	Name of the sub-caste (*jāti*)	

Interestingly, personalization can be a ritual act with spatial and chronological implications. Thus, for the match-making ceremony in the selection of a suitable marriage partner, it is necessary not only to compare the genealogical criteria of bride and bridegroom, but also, for example, the names. If the name of the bride begins with a syllable that according to the usual calendars (*pañcāṅga*) is combined with the lunar mansions (*nakṣatra*) and other categories (*varṇa, yoni, gaṇa*

etc.), and if these categories do not fit with those of the bridegroom, then the marriage will not be auspicious. Similarly it can be astronomically tested whether a person corresponds well to a new settlement he has chosen (G.G. Raheja 1987: 52f.).

Personalization is therefore not individualizing but, on the contrary, de-individualizing: the individual is associated and sometimes even ritually identified with "greater" spatial and chronological criteria, which transcend the ego to culminate in a sphere beyond the human world.

Saṃkalpa as Speech-Acts and the Intentionality of Rituals

As can be seen from the material presented, a *saṃkalpa* is an *intentio solemnis* through the enunciation of which all action that is mentioned in it is recognized as sacred. This is what C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw (1994: 88ff.) have called the ritual commitment. Indeed, only if such a formal decision has been made and expressed in words, are the ritual acts religiously valid. Only then can an every-day action such as the washing of a statue be distinguished from pouring sacred water over it (*abhiṣeka*).

Moreover, with the five characteristics mentioned in section 2 above, *saṃ-kalpas* share syntactic and pragmatic structures with vows (*vrata*), oaths (*vacana, praṇidhāna, praṇidhi*), promises (*pratijñā*), curses (*śapatha*), charms (*mantra*), blessings (*āśīrvāda*), magic truth-acts (*satyakriyā*, "Wahrheitszauber") and other speech-acts.[7] In most cases, a *saṃkalpa* is both a verbal and performative utterance that evokes something immediately, that is articulated in a solemn way, referring to past or future actions, regarding which it expresses a commitment or promise, and that is often (but not always) accompanied by ritual gestures. In short, *saṃkalpas* can be characterized as performative utterances or as a variant of illocutionary acts. However, the analogy is dangerous. For Searle, all

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7   Until now the discussion of these speech-acts in Indian contexts (cf. Alper 1989, Benveniste 1973, Brown 1978, Lüders 1951 and 1959, Thompson 1998 (with further references), Staal 1989, Tambiah 1990, Wheelock 1982) has concentrated on the semantic and pragmatic aspects of *mantras*. If I am not mistaken, neither the collection of articles edited by Harvey P. Alper (which, unfortunately, has no index) nor the important publications of Frits Staal or Stanley Tambiah even mention the institution of *saṃkalpa* so essential for the study of Hindu (as well as Jain and Buddhist) rituals (cf., however, Staal 1983, vol. 1: 283 for a discussion of *ākutī* as a kind of predecessor of *saṃkalpa*). All this is regrettable since any *saṃkalpa* is very similar to the category called speech-acts analyzed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), especially "promises" as discussed extensively by Searle.

speech-acts involve intention and language is basically communicative. But *saṃkalpas* need neither be communicative nor express intention.

Prima facie, all rituals performed with a *saṃkalpa* seem to be meaningful and intentional acts. I do not wish to elaborate on the discussion which was initiated by Frits Staal with his theory on the meaninglessness of rituals[8] and which was continued, to a certain extent, in the book of C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw (1994). However, I would briefly like to address the question of whether *saṃkalpas* indicate the intentionality of ritual acts, given that they mention the intention (*artha*, *kāmya*) of the ritual to be performed: see, for example, the already quoted end of the *saṃkalpa* of the *Ṛgvedīyabrahmakarmasamuccaya*:

> I shall perform the morning bath in order to be released from all evil caused by *saṃsāra*—no matter whether it (evil) be done (by) bodily (actions), by words or mentally—and in order to receive the fruits that are mentioned by the highest god (Viṣṇu) in the Śāstras, Śrutis, Smṛtis and Purāṇas.

In this *saṃkalpa* not only the aim of the morning bath has been mentioned but also the desired fruits of the ritual. For C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw (1994: 88f.), on the contrary, rituals must be "non-intentional" (as well as "stipulated", "elemental" or "archetypical" and "apprehensible"). It is especially the argument for the unintentionality of rituals which invites criticism. Indeed, if one were to follow Humphrey and Laidlaw's admittedly brilliant theory on this point, rituals with *saṃkalpas* would not, it seems, really be rituals.

However, a closer look at *saṃkalpa* makes it clear that the intention mentioned in them are not motives. Humphrey and Laidlaw say of rituals that they are always non-intentional but not necessarily unintentional. They can be performed with a variety of motives, but whatever they are, these wishes or motives do not change the ritual acts and, even more importantly, they are not at all necessary for recognizing ritual acts as such. Whereas in the case of normal actions the intention is necessary to distinguish them from other actions or to perceive them as such, ritualized actions are not characterized by the intentions accompanying them. A *saṃkalpa* cannot be considered as a communicative or informative act because its purpose is neither to communicate nor to inform anybody about the ritual. It just signalizes that from that point in time on the sphere of existence has changed. It indicates, so to say, a change of programme, a shift to the level of ritualization, so that all actions that follow and are framed by the *saṃkalpa* and *visarjana* may be considered as being of a ritual or sacred nature, similar to plays in the theatre—where one can be sure that Othello will not really murder Desdemona. This is what C. Bell (1992) calls "ritualization" and Humphrey

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8   Staal 1979, 1989; see also Michaels 1998: 257–260; 1999 and 1999a.

and Laidlaw call "ritual stance". Thus "in ritual you both are and are not the author of your acts" (Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994: 99).

Whatever the personal motive for performing a ritual may be, it does not affect the formulation of the *saṃkalpa*, which is itself already part of the ritual. Imagine somebody changing the formula of an oath; this would make it irrelevant and invalid. Similarly, a *saṃkalpa* is not an informal promise (although it has much in common with that speech-act). Neither the priest nor the performer can alter the phrasing or add personal motives. If this were done, it would create amusement or scandal (as the sudden change of the formula "I do" in the Christian marriage ceremony).

If, then, a *saṃkalpa* in the final analysis is not a declaration of motives or desire for performing a ritual, but the indication of a change in bearing or stance, why is it necessary to mention the time and location of the performance along with its ritual purpose (*artha*)? In my view this has to do with the complexity of ritual actions.

Conclusion: Reducing and Expanding Ritual Complexity

Prima facie, localization, timing and personalization seem to be means of identifying or authorizing the pilgrim, *yajamāna* or *vratin*. The person has to show a ritual license, as it were, by affirming that the ritual will be performed in a sacred space, at a sacred time and by a genealogically admissible man or woman. By following these steps a night vigil, for instance, will be ritually effective, in contra-distinction to just staying awake at night.

However, a closer look at the processes involved has shown that the exact form of localization, timing and personalization is, to a certain extent, the opposite of formulating a custom-made license for the ritual. It de-individualizes, de-chronologizes, and de-spatializes—in other words, transforms reality. This is the theoretical point I wish to stress. Rituals cannot be conceptually reduced to the actual ritual performed, they can never be repeated, and they are thus not re-membered, but re-membered and always newly created. Seen from the religious concept behind it, a ritual is always a unique totality. Thus the space mentioned in a *saṃkalpa* of a pilgrimage is conceptually not limited to geographical criteria. It is always the space beyond the visible borders which is realized. This space is not the space within space but a singular, unique space, which is connected with myth or a primordial divine act. The borders of this space are ideative, not empirical.

In a circumambulation such as the Antargṛhayātrā in Benares (cf. Gutschow & Michaels 1993: 103–109) it is not the circumambulatory route which gives the

pilgrimage its sacred character, but the *solemnis intentio* or *saṃkalpa*. Only then are "normal" ways solemnly declared to be sacred routes. This view seems to create a problem for localizing and timing rituals, since they always happen to occur in empirical space and time. However, the religious feeling relating to space and time is absolute, not relative, it creates identities or distinctions, rather than similarities between spaces: Uttarakāśī is not similar to Kāśī; it *is* Kāśī! Thus any space is subjective or singular, but there is no space as such or *an sich*.

A space *an sich*, or a transcendental space, does not exist because such a space would not need any empirical space. The Absolute cannot manifest itself, it has no sphere of existence (*loka*). This is precisely the difference between religious and profane conceptions of space and time.

Localizing and timing rituals therefore means identifying the individual with religious forces which are regarded as absolute and singular. It is because of this that the complexity of any ritual can be enlarged or reduced, so that the Pañcakrośīyātrā of Benares, for example, can be performed either as an elaborate five-day-long circumambulation of the sacred field of Kāśī, or as a short circuit of the Pañcakrośī Temple within Benares, or else mentally, by reciting the "108" sacred *tīrthas*. From the religious point of view all these ritual acts are identical because they all have the sacred force of a "Pañcakrośīyātrā". But only when a *saṃkalpa* is formulated and declared, and only when the individual is ritually identified with this religious force through means of the formula, is the ritual potency valid and capable of providing the desired results.

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