ABSTRACT

**Cooking the Corpse: Cremation and Funerary Ritual in the Gṛhyasūtra Literature of Early India.**

The ritual of cremation in the context of Early India provides an arena for navigating varied social and gendered identities, while also drawing on complex ideological paradigms of Vedic sacrifice. These rules, mainly written for the *āhitāgni* (male householder) were not however restricted to him. This paper is an attempt to situate the funerary ritual, as discussed in certain *Gṛhyasūtras*, (loosely translated as Brahmanical household manuals dealing with rites ranging from birth till death, c. 6th cent. BCE- 4TH cent. CE, spatially not restricted to, but generally dealing with the Ganga- Yamuna doab region) along four major themes. The first section, being an introductory one, would deal with the preliminary rites related to the funeral. The second section would discuss the various material associations drawn with the body, to create spheres of exclusion. The third would provide centre stage to the idea of the dead being the perfect final sacrifice, and the role of fire in effecting this bodily transformation. Finally, the fourth section would deal with the fertility and rebirth symbolism present in this entire ritual, as well as concluding purificatory rites. Corporeality for the dead and the debt owed to the ancestors, liminality, dis- and re-integration of the dead in other imagined worlds, and states of purification/ readiness to be the final sacrificial end in itself, would also inform a reading of my sources.

Keywords: Sacrifice, Cremation, Boundaries, Rituals, Rebirth, Fertility, Fire.