



Smithsonian
National Museum of Natural History

Guide to *The Agnicayana Ritual in India, 1975-1976*

Cataloging supported by Smithsonian Institution Women's Committee.

Human Studies Film Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Human Studies Film Archives
Title:	<i>The Agnicayana Ritual in India</i>
Date:	1975-1976
Identifier:	HSFA.1976.02
Creator:	Gardner, Robert, 1925-2014 Staal, Frits
Extent:	Film reels (color sound, 22,000 feet; 16mm)
Language:	Narration in English.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Received in 1976.

Processing Information

Titles are supplied by the archivist for untitled films.

Preferred Citation

The Agnicayana Ritual in India, Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The collection is open for research. Please contact the archives for information on availability of access copies of audiovisual recordings. Original audiovisual material in the Human Studies Film Archives may not be played.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Scope and Contents

Full film record of the twelve-day Nambudiri Agnicayana ritual performed in Panjal, India, the world's oldest surviving ritual, a Vedic sacrifice to Agni, the god of fire. Filmed in Kerala, southwest India, this 12-day ritual was performed in 1975 for perhaps the last time. Footage documents the material and spatial preparations for the event and ritual rehearsals for the ceremony which was staged as a way of reviving an important observance in Nambudirir Vedic tradition. Shots include: construction of ritual implements and materials by carpenters, potters, and brickmakers; surveying and preparation of the ground for the sacrificial enclosures and for the main enclosure (salsa) in which the ceremony is performed; gathering of soma vines; and the complex enactment of the Agnicayana ritual itself which features extended and repetitive sequences of Vedic textual recitation and chanting. Detailed documentation of ritual phases featuring consecrations and construction of altars, oblations of ghee and various symbolic sacrifices upon the altars by priests and assistants; the preparations of soma and the rite of soma drinking; and the five-day construction and consecration of the main altar (Agni) accompanied by prescribed recitations of Vedic texts and the chanting

of mantras. Various interviews with Vedic scholars and local authorities attending the event. Ritual concludes with the ceremonial burying of the ritual compound. The edited film ALTAR OF FIRE was produced from this film project.

Collection contains supplementary materials, namely, associated texts and annotations (recorded narratives).

Legacy Keywords: Ceremony India ; Liturgies recitation of vedas ; Chanting mantras as part of liturgy ; Ritual oblations Vedic ; Sacrifice goats Vedic ritual ; Priests ritual Vedic ; Religious structures consecration of sala ; Garb ceremonial dhoti priests ; Tradition Vedic revival of ; Acolytes religious Vedic ; Kilns ceremonial pottery making of Vedic ritual ; Pottery ceremonial use of Vedic ritual ; Carpentry Vedic ritual ; Baths ritual purification Vedic ; Temples Vedic Hindi ; Bricks use of in ritual Vedic ; Horses use of in ritual Vedic ; Turbans ritual use of Vedic ; Plants ritual use of soma vines palasa leaves ; Incense ritual use of Vedic ; Firemaking ritual aspect of Vedic ; Prayer in Vedic liturgy ; Milk ritual use of Vedic ; Prostrations in ritual Vedic ; Language and culture

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or Anthropology Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

CAMERAMAN: Burke, Kevin

PRIEST YAJAMANA: C.V. Neelakanthan Somayajipad

PRIEST: Cherumukku Vaidikan Shridharan Nambudiri; Erkkara Raman Nambudiri; Nellikat Neelakanthan Akkitirpad; Cherumukku Vaidkan Vasudevan Akkitirpad

HOTAR: Naramangalath Narayanan Nambudirirpad

MAITRAVARUNA: Cherumukku Vaidikan Shridharan Nambudiri

ACCHAVAKA: Tekku Cherumukku Parameshvaran Nambudiri

BRAHAMANACCHAMSIN: Tekkamparampattu Narayanan Nambudirirpad

AGNIDHRA: Kunnam Padmanabhan Nambudiri

UDGATAR: Muttathukath Itti Ravi Nambudiri

PRASTOTAR: Thottam Narayanan Nambudirirpad

PRATHIHARTAR: Nellikat Vasudevan Nambudiri

ADHVARYU: C.V. Krishnan Nambudiri

PRATIPRASTHATAR: Kavapra Marath Sankaranarayanan Nambudiri

NESTAR: Cherumukku Vaidikan Vallabhan Nambudiri

UNNETAR: Kavapra Marath Neelakanthan Nambudiri

SADASYA: Erkkara Raman Nambudiri

Local Numbers

HSFA 1976.2.1

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Agnicayana (Hindu rite)

Types of Materials:

Sound films

Places:

Kerala (India)
South Asia