

# PRE-MODERN INDIAN PERSPECTIVES ON GIVING, GIFTING, AND SACRIFICES: GODS AND GURUS

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- Introduction
- *Guru* and *gurudakṣiṇā*
- Sacrifice and *dakṣiṇā*
- *Dharmadāna* (previous talk)
- *Mahādāna*
- Conclusion: Multiple Indian secularization processes

# AN INDIAN SECULARIZATION PROCESS?

Old Indian cosmology (here according to Manu) is based on the idea of an eternal cycle of what is called “Age of the gods” (*devānām yugam*) lasting 12.000 years. Within each of these, four ages (*yugas*) take turns:

4.000 + 2 · 400 (Kṛta Age)

+3.000 + 2 · 300 (Tretā Age)

+2.000 + 2 · 200 (Dvāpara Age)

+1.000 + 2 · 100 (Kali Age)

In the Kṛta Age, ... people never acquire any property through unlawful means. ... In the Kṛta Age, people are free from sickness, succeed in all their pursuits, and have a life span of 400 years. ... Ascetic toil, they say, is supreme in the Kṛta Age; knowledge in the Tretā; **sacrifice in Dvāpara**; and **gift-giving alone in Kali**.

# ROUGH OVERVIEW

BCE

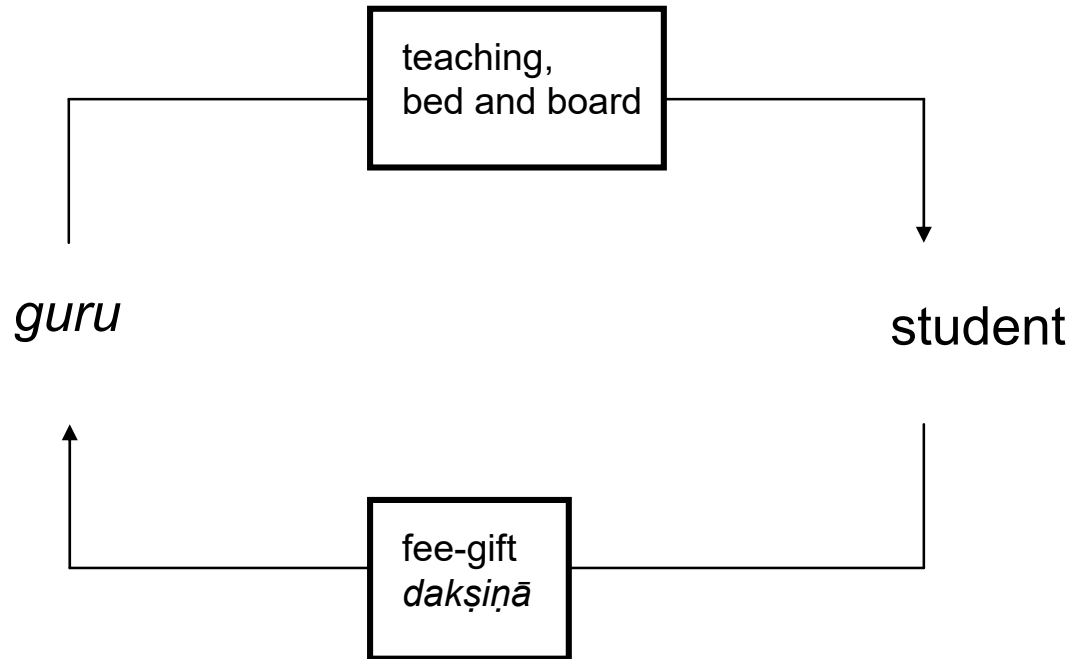
CE

teaching by *guru*  
Vedic sacrifices  
great gifts

with  
*dakṣiṇā*

dharmic giving without  
*dakṣiṇā*

# GURU AND GURUDAKṢIṆĀ: PATTERN



# GURU AND ĀCĀRYA

- *guru*:
  - heavy, weighty,
  - as in Latin *vir gravis*:
    - a weighty man,
    - i.e. a man of importance and dignity
- *ācārya*:
  - the man who teaches the right conduct
  - the man who must be approached

# DID *GURUS* WANT SUCCESS?

- Taittirīya Upaniṣad (6. to 5. centuries BCE): The teacher's prayer

Students, may they come to me!

Students, may they flock to me!

...

May I be famous among men!

More affluent than the very rich!

- Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (7. to 6. centuries BCE):

Once when Janaka, the king of Videha, was formally seated, Yājñavalkya came up to him.

Janaka asked him: “Yājñavalkya, why have you come? Are you after cows or subtle disquisitions?”

He replied: “Both, your majesty.”

# MARKETING MIX

- product instruments  
configuration of something valued
- distribution instruments  
placing the offer at the disposal
- price instruments  
determination of the compensation and sacrifices
- communication instruments  
bringing the offer to the attention and  
influencing the feelings and  
preferences about it

## PRICE INSTRUMENTS: *DAKṢIṆĀ* (FEE FOR VEDIC STUDY)

- Taittirīya Upanisad (*dhana* = valuable gift):

After the completion of vedic study, the teacher admonishes his resident pupil:

“Speak the truth. Follow the Law.

Do not neglect your private recitation of the Veda.

After you have given a valuable gift (*dhana*) to the teacher, do not cut off your family line.”

Treat your mother like a god. Treat your father like a god.

Treat your teacher like a god. Treat your guests like gods.”

- Āpastamba-Dharmasūtra:

After learning as much as he can, he should present the fee for vedic study (*vedadakṣiṇā*), a fee that is procured righteously and **according to his ability**.

If his teacher has fallen into hardship, however, he may seize it from an Ugra or a Śūdra.

[An Ugra has a Kṣatriya father and a Śūdra mother.]



# SACRIFICE AND *DAKṢINĀ* (MALAMOUD 1976)

The people involved in a sacrifice:

- the *yajamāna* or *svāmin*, i.e., the patron who has the sacrifice performed on his behalf (payment, merit)
- the *devatā*, i.e., the god to whom the sacrifice is addressed, and
- the *ṛtvij*, i.e., the officiating priest(s).

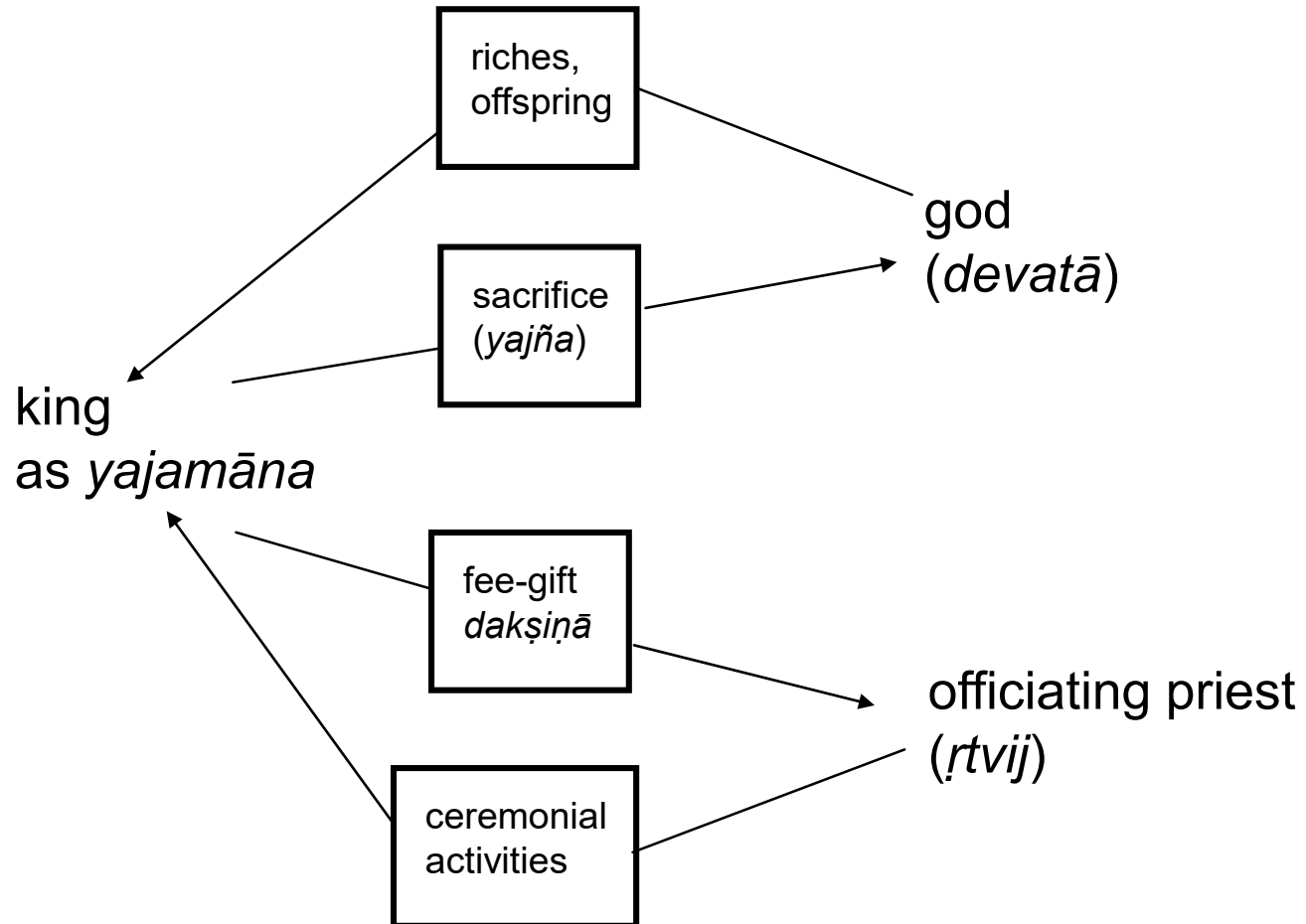
Four basic elements of a a sacrifice:

- the *śraddhā* that the *yajamāna* entertains with respect to both ritual and officiating priest
- the *dīkṣā*, i.e., the consecration of the *yajamāna*,
- the *yajña*, i.e., the sacrifice in the narrow sense, and, finally,
- the *dakṣinā*

# SACRIFICE (HUBERT AND MAUSS 1898)

- the “sacrifier”, i.e., “the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice thus accrue, or who undergoes its effects” (above: the *yajamāna*),
- the “objects of sacrifice”, i.e., “those kinds of things for whose sake the sacrifice takes place” (above: related to the merit enjoyed by the *yajamāna*)
- “consecration” of sacrificer or of objects of sacrifice, i.e., passing “from the common into the religious domain” (above, *dīkṣā*)
- the “victim”, i.e., “any oblation, even of vegetable matter, whenever the offering or part of it is **destroyed**”, and, to a lesser degree,
- the “sacrificer”, i.e., “[a]n intermediary, or at the very least a guide” who is “[m]ore familiar with the world of the gods, in which he is partly involved through a previous consecration” (above, *rtvij*)

# SACRIFICE AND *DAKṢIṆĀ*: PATTERNS



## Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa:

Verily, there are two kinds of gods:

- for, indeed, the gods are the gods;
- and the Brāhmins who have studied and teach sacred lore are the human gods.

The sacrifice of these is divided into two kinds:

- oblations constitute the sacrifice to the gods;
- and gifts to the priests that to the human gods

# SACRIFICE AND THE HYBRID NATURE OF *DAKṢIṆĀ*

To my mind, the *dakṣiṇā* taken by a guru is basically the same concept as the *dakṣiṇā* taken by a priest officiating at a sacrifice. With respect to the latter:

Max Weber (1921): The brahmin only took presents (dakshina), not a salary.

Heesterman (1959): The *dakṣiṇā* is a gift rather than a salary.

Malamoud (1976): “Les *ṛtvij* sont, pour le temps de la cérémonie, au service du *yajamāna* (ou plutôt au service de la cérémonie elle-même)”.

*Dakṣiṇā* is a hybrid form of payment, a fee-gift:

- a fee to be given
  - to a particular person who has performed a particular service
  - similar to a *vetana* (wage,) a hired man can expect in return for his services.  
See also Kauṭilya’s treatment of partnerships of officiating priests and, in particular, the context of working slaves, employees, and partnerships of agriculturists and traders.
- that shares a gift’s property of not fixing a particular amount agreed upon ex ante

# SACRIFICE AND THE HYBRID NATURE OF DAKṢIṆĀ

	payment obligation to a specific receiver	payment to any worthy receiver
fixed amount	vetana	
amount payable śaktiḥ	<i>dakṣiṇā</i> payable to Vedic priest or <i>guru</i>	<i>dāna</i>

# SACRIFICE AND *DAKṢINĀ* IN THE ṚGVEDA

Dawning today, the bounteous Dawns brighten the benefactors for the giving of largesse.  
In (a place) without brightness let the niggards sleep, unawakening in the middle of darkness.

To them bring lofty brilliance and glory, o bounteous Dawn,  
to the patrons who apportion to us benefits consisting of horses and cows - o well-born lady, liberal  
with horses.

Impelling every god to largesse, rousing liberalities in our direction, dawning widely, impart insights  
to us for our gain. - Do you protect us always with your blessings.

Bloomfield (1908) interprets in this manner: “That is to say, make our poetry so clever that it shall not  
fail to stimulate the liberality of the patron of the sacrifice!”

## PURPOSE OF THE SACRIFICE (BLOOMFIELD)

As regards its immediate purpose, or its economic aspect, it is thoroughly **utilitarian and practical**. Its purpose is

- to secure happiness and success, health and long life for man, notably the rich man, while living upon the earth;
- to secure to a very talented and thrifty (economical, flourishing, mean, HW) class of priest-poets abundant rewards in return for their services in procuring for men this happiness, success, and so on;
- to satisfy the divine powers, visible and invisible, beneficent and noxious, gods and demons, that is, to establish livable relations between gods and men; and, finally,
- to secure after death the right to share the paradise of the gods in the company of the pious fathers that have gone there before.

# VEDIC DO UT DES

Taittirīya Saṃhitā:

O ladle, fly away filled,  
And well filled do thou fly back;  
Like wares, O Śatakratu,  
Let us barter food and strength.  
**Give thou to me; I shall give to thee;**  
Bestow upon me; I shall bestow upon  
thee;  
Accept my offering;  
I shall accept thy offering.

Commentary:

O ladle, being filled with the disappearing cream, fly away, go towards Indra. Being well filled again by wealth through his favour, return to us by the power produced by him. O Śatakratu, **let us two barter** as (one barter about) prices. As someone gives his own wealth in this world and buys grain etc., in that same manner I give disappearing cream to you, Indra, and buy food and strength.



## BLOOMFIELD ON ŚRADDHĀ

There is scarcely any idea which has suffered so much from the utilitarian aspects of Vedic religion as the Vedic idea of faith.

- ❖ ... The word starts well in the Rig-Veda. It means ... the belief in the existence of the gods, and their interference in the life of man.
- ❖ Next, faith is wisdom; faith is the sister of wisdom ...
- ❖ Unfortunately, the Vedic conception of faith, at least the prominent or average conception **sinks to a much lower plane**. In the main and in the end, faith expresses itself in works, and the Brahmans who are anything but mealy-mouthed (hypocritical, HW) have seen to it that they shall be benefited by these works. In other words, he who gives baksheesh (*dakshinā*) to the Brahmans, he has faith (*śraddhā*). ...
- ❖ The frank system of **barter** of the sacrificer's *soma* and ghee for the god's good gift and protection, ...

# MALAMOUD ON BLOOMFIELD

Bloomfield ... n'as pas assez de sarcasmes ou plutôt d'ironique admiration pour ces clercs qui réclament avec astuce et insolence leur 'bakchich'. ... Cette analyse, avec le **jugement moral** qu'elle implique, ne nous apprend pas grand-chose. ... L'interprétation de Bloomfield ... est **décevante** parce qu'elle tourne court: ayant découvert, **sans grande peine**, que c'est l'intérêt des brâhmanes que de tenir des discours à la gloire de la *dakṣinā*, ils dédaignent d'étudier les termes et l'organisation de ces discours.

# HUBERT AND MAUSS ON SACRIFICES

The unbeliever sees in these rites only vain and costly illusions, and is astounded that all mankind has so eagerly dissipated its strength for phantom gods. But there are perhaps true realities to which it is possible to attach the institution in its entirety. Religious ideas, because they are believed, exist; they exist objectively, as social facts. The sacred things in relation to which sacrifice functions, are social things. And this is enough to explain sacrifice.

[...] personal renunciation of their property by individuals and groups nourishes social forces

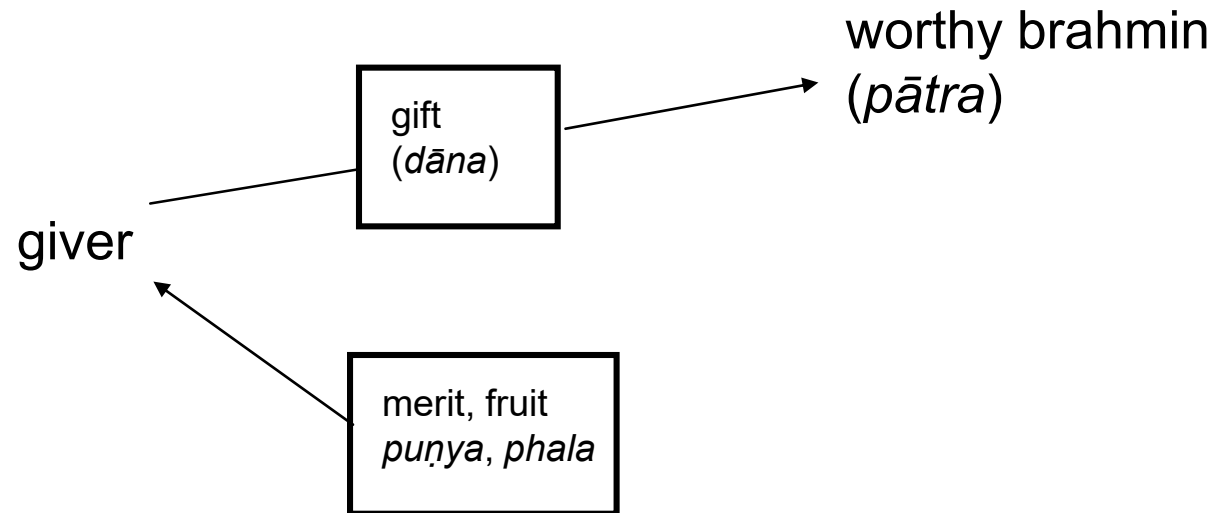
[...] individuals find their own advantage

[...] they invest with the authority of society their vows, their oaths, their marriages. They surround, as if with a protective sanctity, the fields they have ploughed and the houses they have built.

## DHARMADĀNA: DEFINITION

- One should as a matter of routine obligation painstakingly **offer sacrifices** and **donate gifts** with a spirit of generosity, for these two things, when performed with a spirit of generosity and with well-acquired wealth, become imperishable.
- When a person gives as a matter of routine obligation to worthy recipients independently of any specific purpose, it is called a Gift Based On Duty (*dharmadāna*).
- Moreover a gift becomes greater and greater in accordance with the excellence of the recipient. Thus, one should know that when a gift is given to one's teacher, one's mother, one's father, and a Vedic savant, each time the resulting merit or sin becomes increasingly a hundred-thousand times greater.
- Non-reciprocal gifts are like milking a cow whose calf has died and which is consumed with thirst. Worldly matters do not pertain to the law; a giver obtains an unseen gift and is not seen enjoying that gift, since he does not return to this world and his gift is endless.

# DHARMADĀNA: PATTERN



## SELF-SERVING BRAHMINS? YES, BUT

1. Tough requirements for a worthy recipient of *dharmadāna* or for an able officiating priest:

“Discipline, austerity, self-control, liberality, truthfulness, purity, vedic learning, compassion, erudition, intelligence, and religious faith—these are the characteristics of a Brahmin.”

“One can know a person’s virtue by living with him, his purity by interacting with him, and his wisdom by talking with him. A recipient should be tested in these three things.”

2. Functional theory of the gift

“Brahma, after performing ascetic toil, created Brahmans to protect the Veda, to bring satisfaction to ancestors and gods, and to safeguard dharma.”

## MAHĀDĀNA

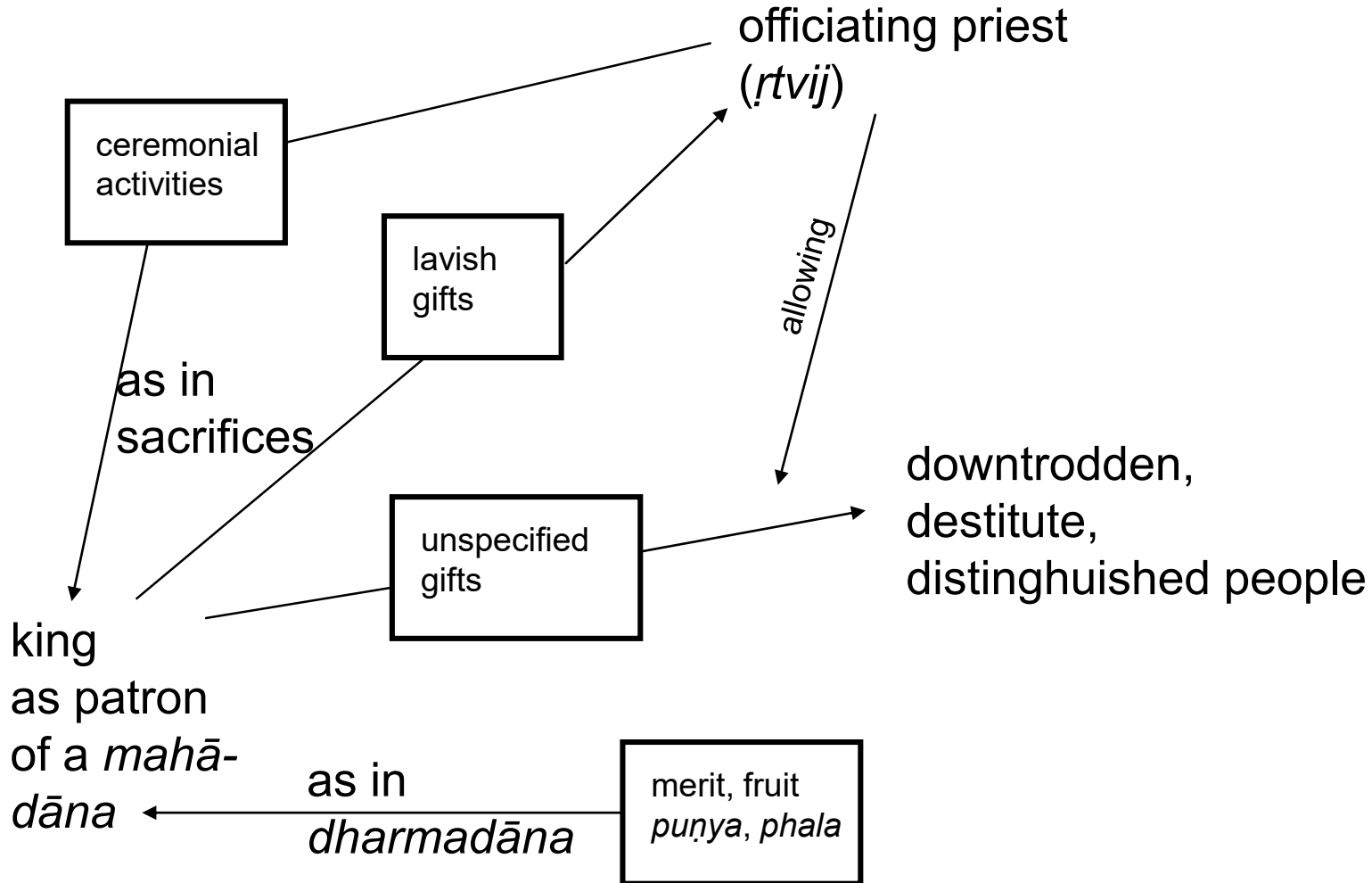
Next, I will explain the unsurpassable Great Gift called the Gift of the Wish-Granting Tree, which destroys all sins. When an auspicious day arrives, as in the Gift of the Man on the Balance, a man should have Brahmins declare the day auspicious, summon the World-Protectors, appoint officiating priests, have a pavillon constructed, and procure equipment, ornaments, clothes, etc. He should have a golden tree made that is adorned with various fruits; and on it he should place assorted birds, clothing, ornaments, and garments. He should acquire between three and one thousand *palas* of gold according to his means and have the Wish-Granting Tree constructed with half of the acquired gold. [...] When a man gives the Great Gift in accordance with the rules here prescribed, he is freed from all sins and obtains the reward of a **Horse-Sacrifice**.

# MAHĀDĀNA

Name	Objects given to non-officiating receivers	Objects given to <i>guru/dvijalṛtvij</i>
Gift of the Man on the Balance	unspecified gifts to downtrodden, destitute, distinguished people	gold and villages to officiating priests
Gift of the Golden Womb	honour many more people wholeheartedly	gold to exemplary Brahmin priest
Gift of the Brahma-Egg		gold and jewels to Brahmins officiating the rite
Gift of the Wish-Granting Tree		gold to preceptor and officiating priest gold and jewels to Brahmins officiating the rite



# MAHĀDĀNA: PATTERNS



# MAHĀDĀNA

Heim (2004):

“The ceremonialism of *dāna* also tends to make a gift a public affair rather than a private matter. ... ..  
The king displays and centralizes his own power and glory worshipping the brahmans and lavishing upon them prestigious gifts.”

Indeed, one effect or one motivation of having a *mahādāna* performed may be to produce the **common knowledge** of the king’s power. Then, not only do people see how resourceful he is, but they also see that others see and possibly interpret the event in this manner. And, they see that others observe others notice this event, etc.

# CONCLUSION: MULTIPLE INDIAN SECULARIZATION PROCESSES

Secularization is about the decline of beliefs, practices, and institutions that concern

- a) otherworldly beings (“gods”),
- b) worshipping or honouring them,
- c) catering to those beings’ needs,
- d) material consumption during “religious” ceremonies and of material investment for housing these ceremonies (temples),
- e) the material wellbeing of (officiating) priests and the respect owed to them,
- f) life after death (in “heaven”),
- g) future lives to come (brought about by “rebirth”), and/or
- h) interference of otherworldly beings on this earth (against Cartesian Deism)

**Yes.** Vedic sacrificing → to classical *dharmadāna* and *mahādāna* involves

- i. giving to gods → to humans (a, c, d)
- ii. reduced material consumption (d)
- iii. sacrifice → *pūjā* (c → b) and
- iv. thisworldly → otherworldly fruit (!) (h → f/g)

# RESTERAMPE

# THE VEDIC BRANCHES

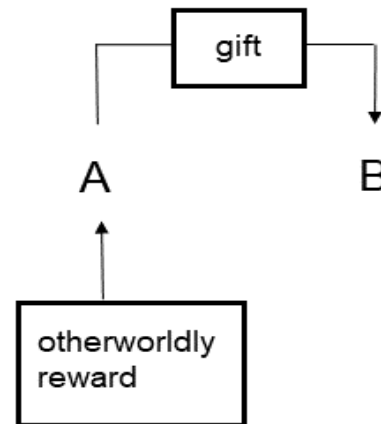
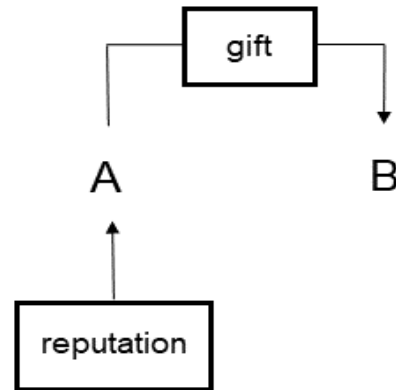
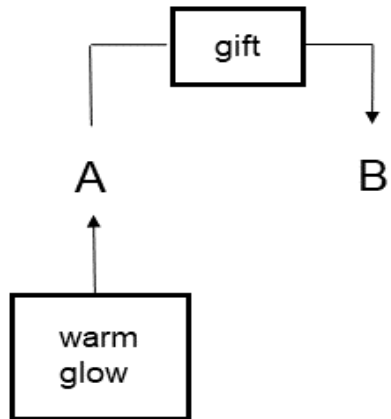
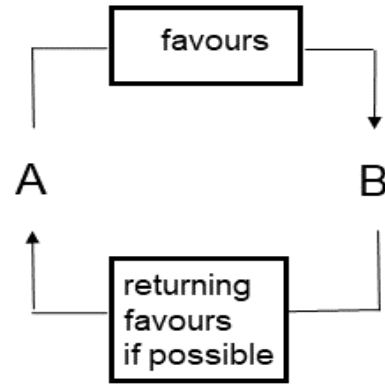
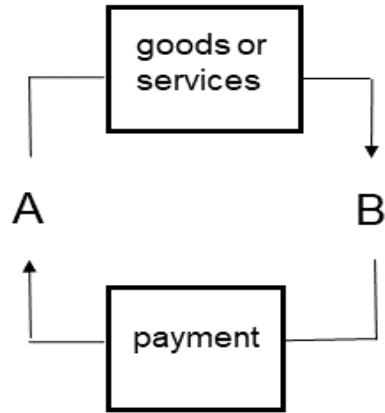
	Ṛgveda	Yajurveda		Sāmaveda	Atharvaveda
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foundational text	Ṛgveda Saṃhitā	Taittirīya S.	Vājasaneyi S.	Sāmaveda S.	Atharvaveda S.
Brāhmaṇa	Aitareya Br.	Taittirīya Br.	Śatapatha Br.		
Āraṇyaka	Aitareya Ā.	Taittirīya Ā.			
Upaniṣad	Kauṣītaki U.	Taittirīya U.	Bṛhad- āraṇyaka U.	Chāndogya U.	Muṇḍaka U., Praśna U.

# SACRIFICE

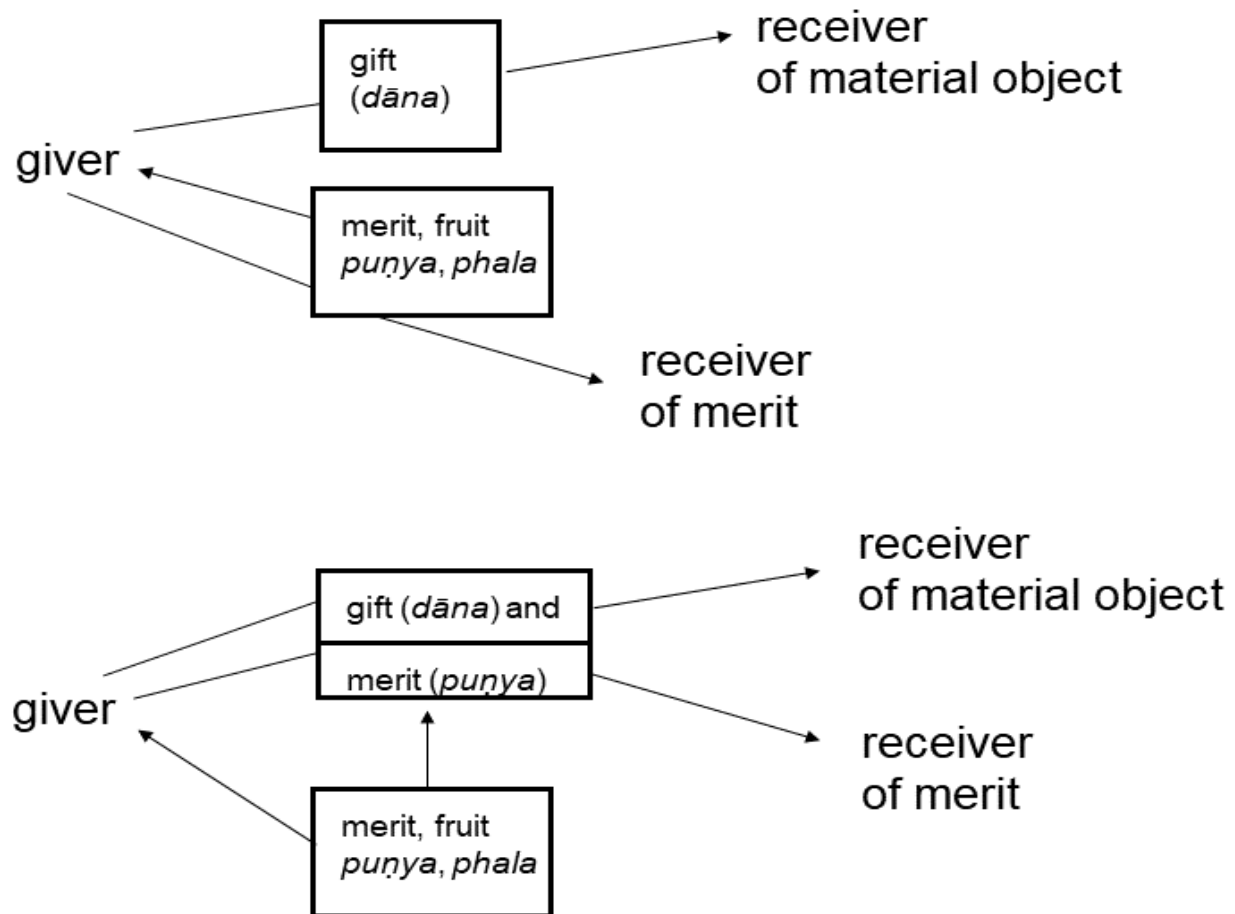
In Vedic times, the slaughter of animals could occur only in the context of sacrifices. Thus, the sacrifice need not entail economic sacrifices. In particular, the non-edible parts used to be sacrificed, the edible ones are partly sacrificed and partly eaten.

However, sacrificing ghee into the fire, surely implies the destruction of that precious substance.

# PATTERNS OF GIVING AND GIFTING

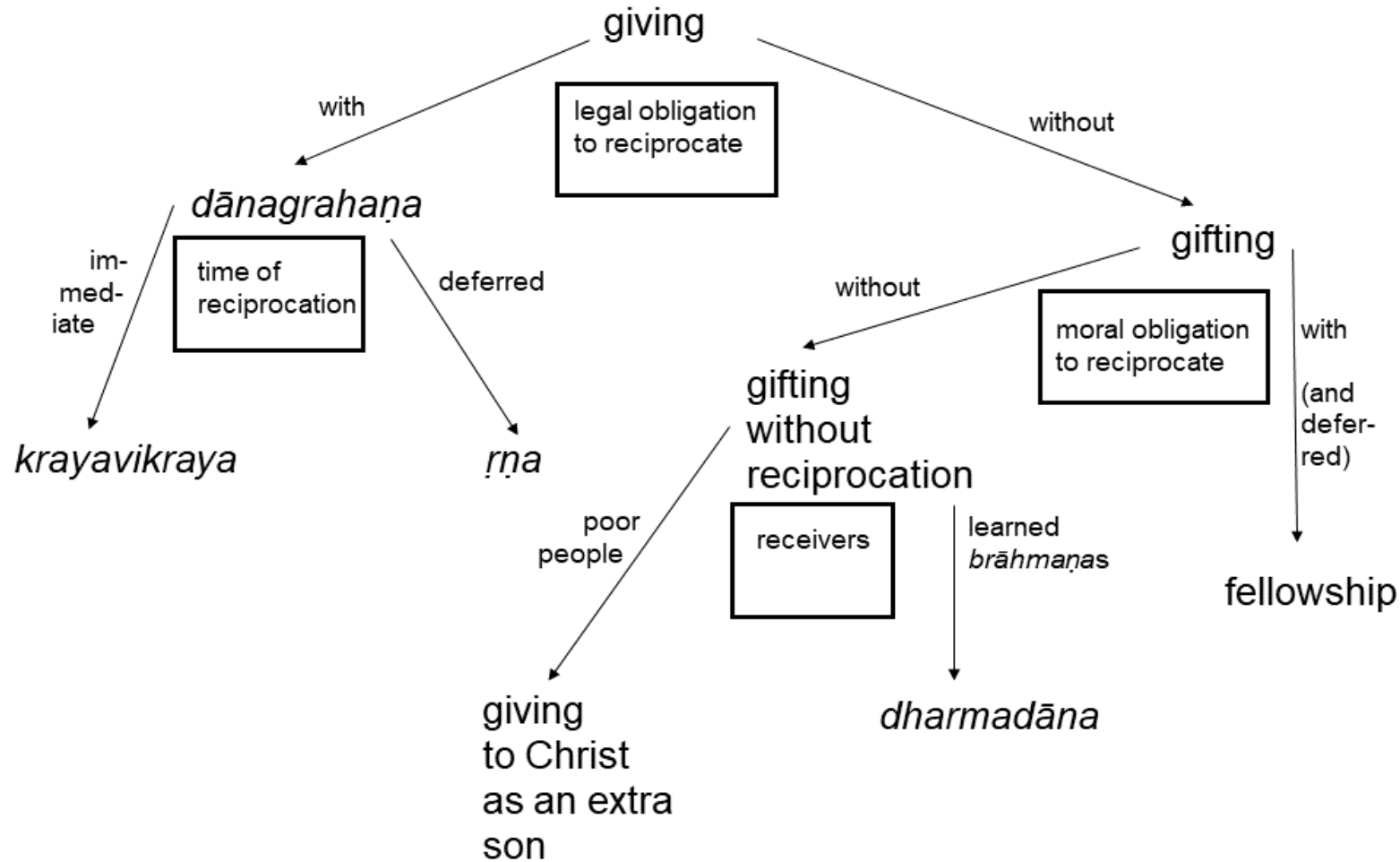


# MERIT TRANSFER

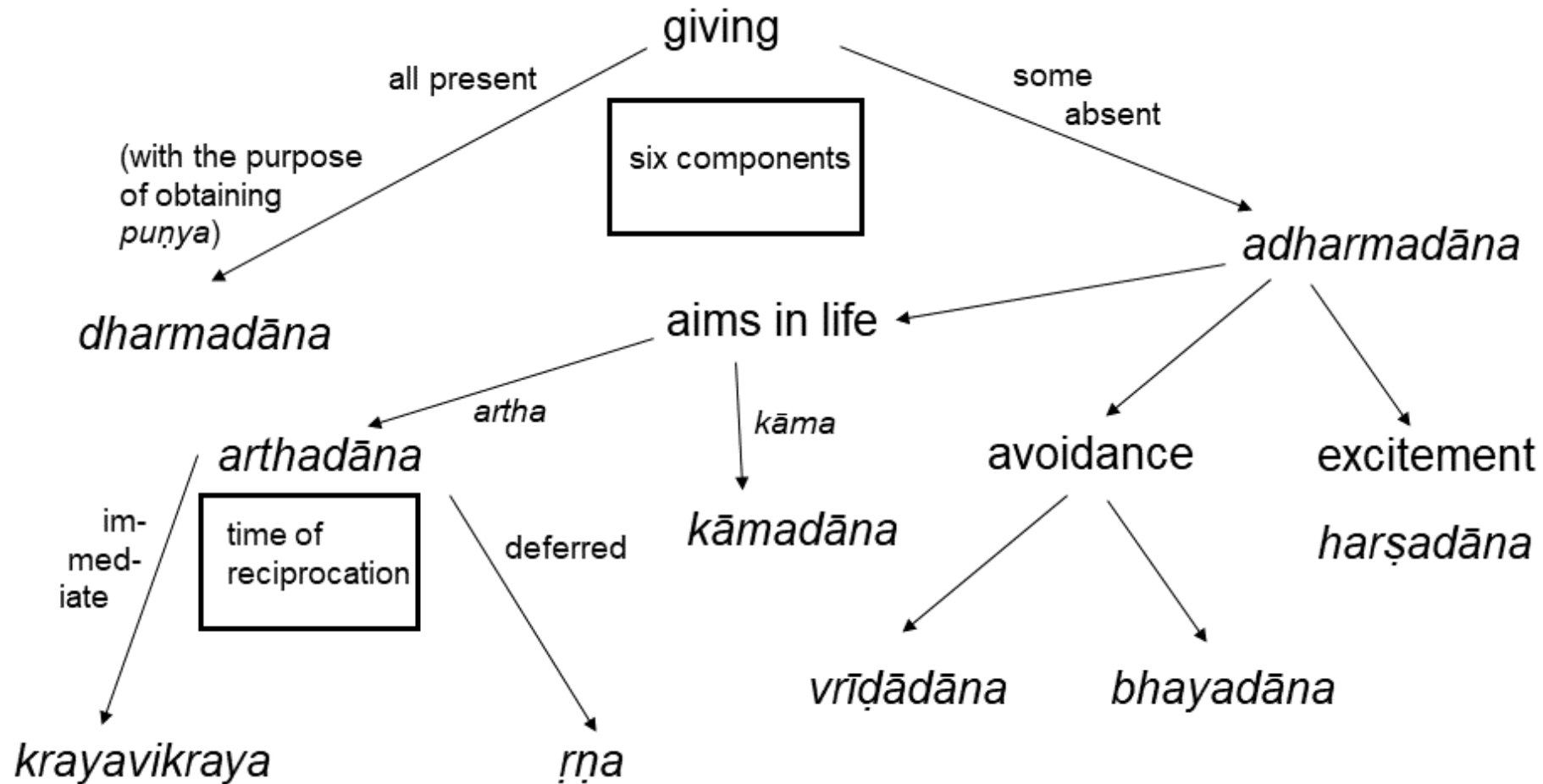




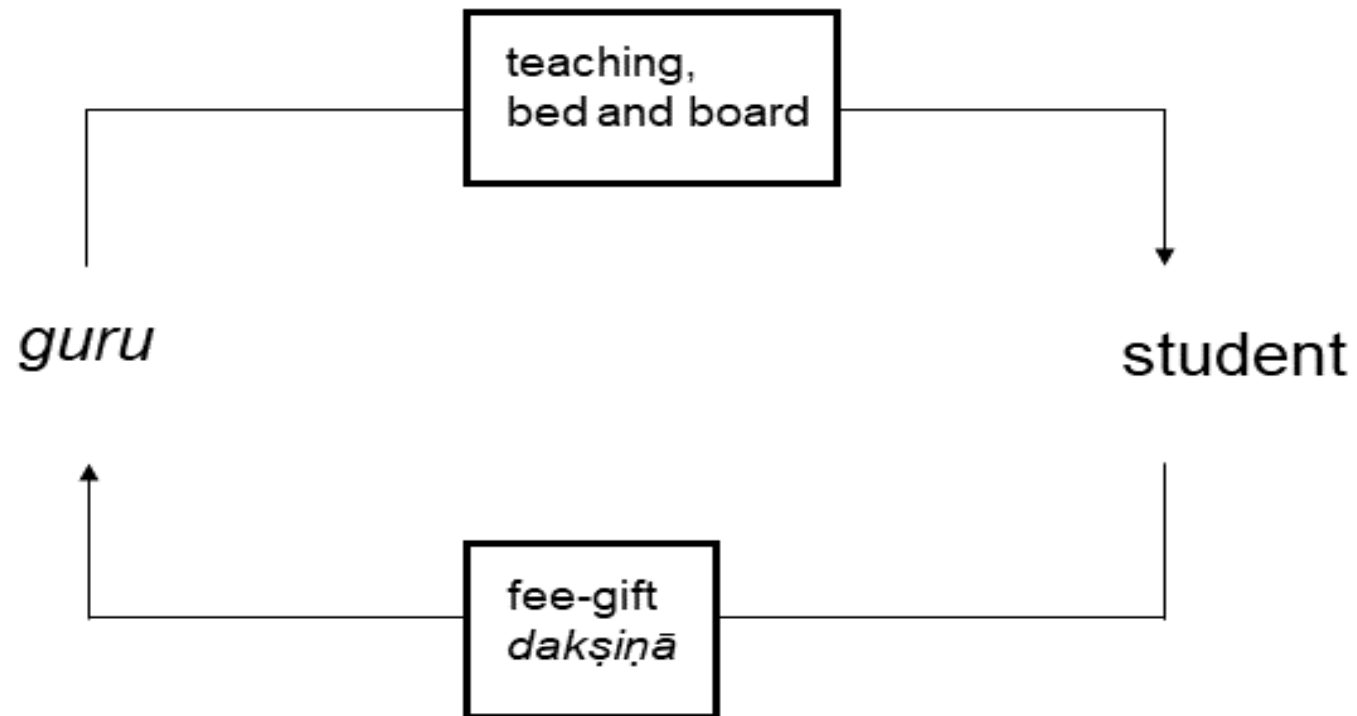
# MAIN CATEGORIES OF GIVING



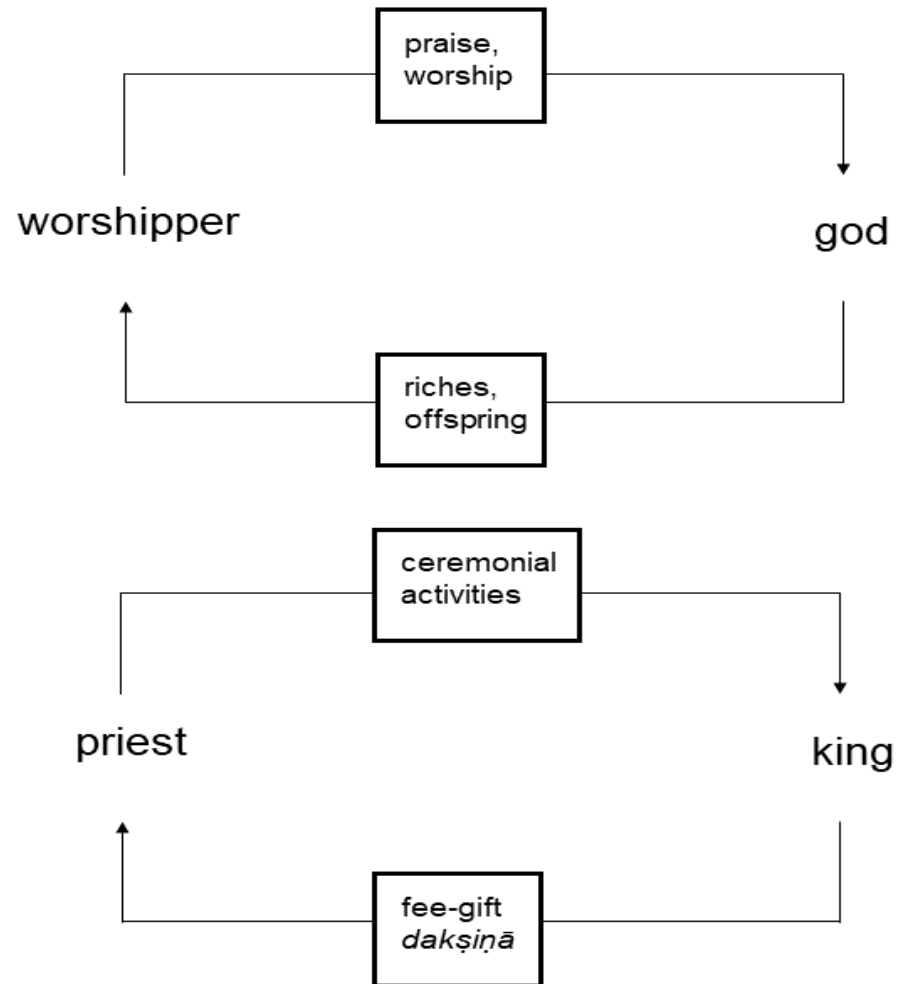
# THE SIX BASES OF GIVING



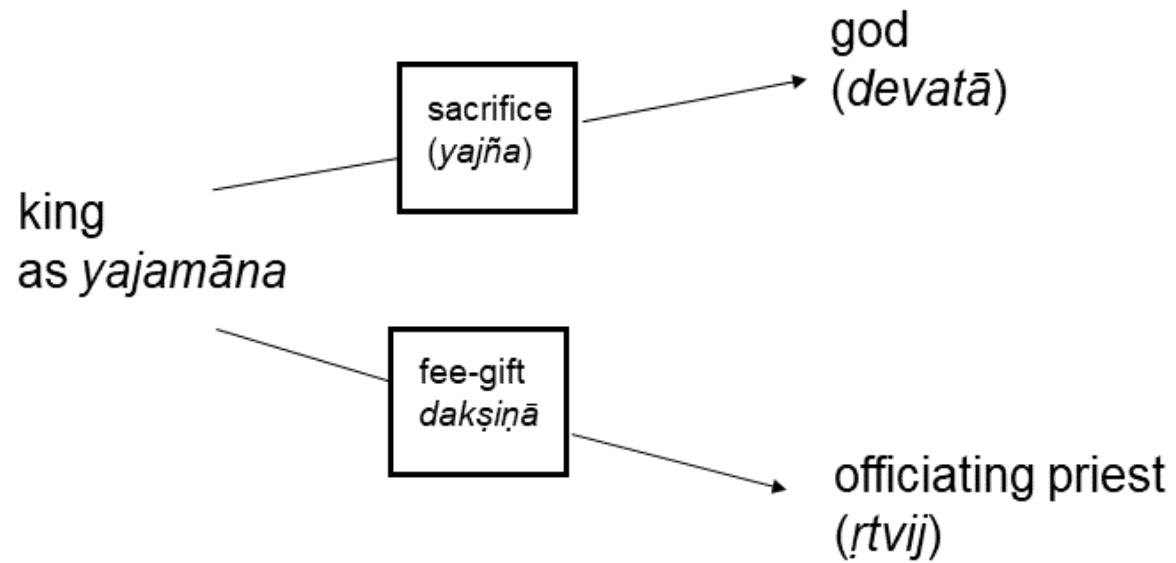
# RECIPROCITY BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT



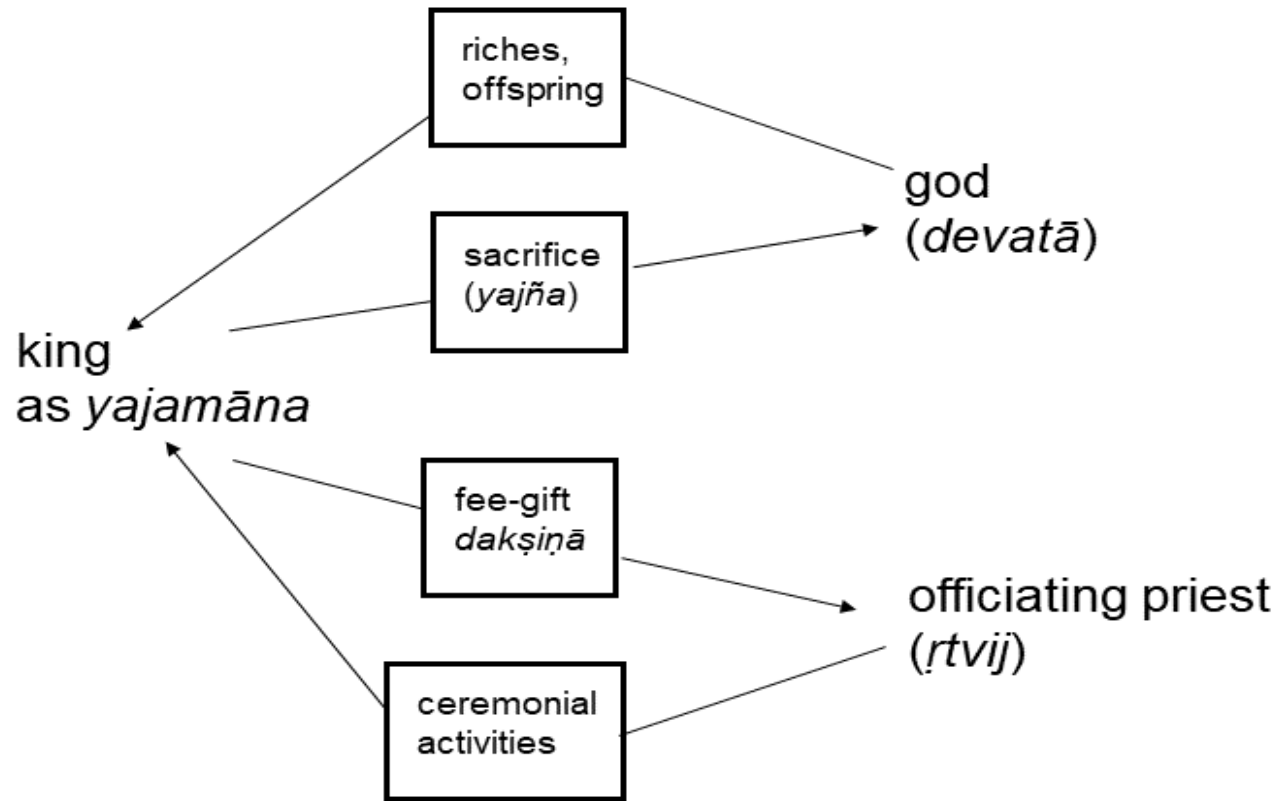
# SACRIFICIAL EXCHANGES



# KING AS PATRON OF SACRIFICE



# TWO RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS



# VEDIC WATER CYCLE

This water remains the same: it goes up and down throughout the days. Thunderstorms vivify the earth, and fires vivify heaven.

# MAHĀDĀNA

Heim (2004):

“The principles of the Vedic sacrifice rested on reciprocity [...] between the Vedic gods and humans [...]. But the *mahādāna* [...] did not appeal to reciprocity or bargaining with the gods, but rather entailed worship or honoring them. [G]ifts and *pūjās* [...] were made out of respect and honor, rather than because [the god] needed or desired them.”

Inden (1979):

*Mahādānas* seem to mirror Buddhist *dāna* and *pūjā* ceremonies.



# ŚATAPATHA BRĀHMAṆA

Verily, there are two kinds of gods:

- for, indeed, the gods are the gods;
- and the Brāhmans who have studied and teach sacred lore are the human gods.

The sacrifice of these is divided into two kinds:

- oblations constitute the sacrifice to the gods;
- and gifts to the priests that to the human gods, to the Brāhmans who have studied and teach sacred lore.
  
- With oblations one gratifies the gods,
- and with gifts to the priests the human gods, the Brāhmans who have studied and teach sacred lore.

Both these kinds of gods, when gratified, place him in a state of bliss.