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Review

# Agnihotra in the Kali Yuga: A Study of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa's Kāṇva Recension and Its Ritual Adaptation

Running Title: *Agnihotra Preference in the Kali Yuga*

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## Abstract

This study integrates *Vedic* philology, ritual history, and philosophical hermeneutics in a multi-layered analysis of *Agnihotra*. Particularly in the *Yajurveda*, where its exterior performance is linked to *varṇa* and *āśrama*, it elucidates *Agnihotra*'s technical structure and *śākhā*-specific methods by drawing on *Śruti* sources. The conceptual extension of ritual eligibility when *dharma* declines is explained by an analysis of *Purāṇic* and *Smṛti* depictions of *Yuga* decline, however retaining its normative foundation in *Śruti* remains authoritative. Then, passages from the *Upaniṣadic* and *Bhagavadgītā* are considered to demonstrate how *Agnihotra* is internalized as *niṣkāma-karma* and *jñāna-yajña*, creating a continuum between philosophical insight and ritual practice leading to *mokṣa*. Lastly, the *Mādhyandina* and *Kāṇva* recensions of the Śukla *Yajurveda* are compared to see whether they are appropriate for *Agnihotra* during the *Kali Yuga*. The latter maintains earlier, more intricate ritual levels, while the former provides systematic clarity. This study concludes that the *Kāṇva* recension offers greater scope for robust analysis *śākhā* for *Agnihotra* practice in *Kali Yuga*.

**Keywords:** *Agnihotra*; *Kāṇva* recension; *varṇa* and *āśrama*; *Bhagavadgītā*; *Yajurveda*; *mokṣa*

## 1. Introduction

*Agnihotra* is a major *Vedic* rite, although its textual foundations, social eligibility, and philosophical reinterpretations vary across *Śruti*, *Smṛti*, and epic traditions. The *Yajurvedic* corpus presents *Agnihotra* as a formally structured fire ritual governed by *śākhā*-specific procedures and embedded within *varṇa-āśrama* frameworks (Macdonell 1900; Staal 1983). *Purāṇic* and epic sources, however, reflect evolving interpretations of ritual practice in the context of *Yuga* theory, often associated with the decline of *dharma* and ritual competence (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*; *Mahābhārata*, *Śānti Parva*; Kane 1962-1975). These developments suggest a tension between the normative authority of Śrauta tradition and later reinterpetive frameworks.

A complementary internalization of *yajña* is developed in the *Upaniṣads* and further elaborated in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where ritual action is reinterpreted as *niṣkāma-karma* and oriented toward *self-knowledge* and *liberation* (*Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*; *Bhagavadgītā*; Olivelle 1998; Gambhirananda 1998). Ritual and intellectual dimensions within the *Yajurvedic* tradition are increasingly understood in contemporary scholarship as interrelated rather than strictly separate trajectories, as reflected in the works of Staal, Heesterman, Witzel, Bronkhorst, and Olivelle.

This study examines the development of *Agnihotra* in various ceremonial and philosophical arenas by combining textual philology, hermeneutics, and historical analysis. In order to ascertain which *śākhā* offers the most logical basis for *niṣkāma Agnihotra* in the *Kali Yuga*, it also assesses the structural differences between the Śukla and *Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedas* and conducts a thorough comparison of the *Kāṇva* and *Mādhyandina* recensions.

While the *Mādhyandina* recension is employed as the primary reference for philosophical and *Upaniṣadic* interpretation due to its standard transmission and availability in modern editions, the *Kāṇva* recension is evaluated for its greater textual depth and ritual elaboration, which are central to the present study's focus on *Agnihotra*. The study argues that *Agnihotra's* significance today rests on the *Kāṇva* sources offer considerable textual depth advantages due to their better textual traditional perseverance and interpretive complexity analysing how they are adapted for *Kali Yuga* communities.

## 2. *Agnihotra* and *Śrutis*

### 2.1. *Śrutis*

*Śruti*, regarded in the *Brahmanical* tradition as *apauruṣeya* (authorless) and revealed to the *ṛṣis* rather than composed by human agents, constitutes the foundational layer of *Vedic* revelation. This principle is systematically articulated in the *Mīmāṃsā* tradition, especially in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* and *Śabara Bhāṣya*, and is presupposed in *Dharmaśāstra* literature such as the *Manusmṛti*, as well as in epic sources (*Mahābhārata*).

Modern scholarship likewise recognizes the centrality and normative authority of *Śruti* within the *Vedic* tradition (Macdonell 1900; Kane 1962-1975; Bronkhorst 2007; Staal 2008). The corpus is traditionally divided into four complementary branches: *Ṛgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*; each associated with distinct ritual functions: invocation (*Ṛgveda*), chant and intonation (*Sāmaveda*), ritual procedure (*Yajurveda*), and broader speculative, cosmological, and applied dimensions (*Atharvaveda*) (cf. Macdonell 1900; Staal 1983; Witzel 1997). While praxis is mediated through *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, and *Śrauta Sūtras* specific to individual *śākhās*, this study treats *Śruti* as the operative canonical basis for *Agnihotra*.

### 2.2. *Agnihotra* in the Context with *Śrutis*

*Agnihotra*, although is recorded in all of the major *Vedic* branches, each tradition uses different textual contexts for its formation. The *Ṛgvedic*, *Yajurvedic*, *Sāmavedic*, and *Atharvavedic* surveys that follow identify representative passages in the *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, and *Śrauta Sūtra* layers. When combined, these loci demonstrate that although *Agnihotra* is pan-*Vedic* in scope, its mantras and procedural details differ greatly depending on the ritual systems of the *śākhā*.

Across the *Vedic* corpus, *Agnihotra* is attested in multiple textual strata, with variations reflecting the ritual systems of different *śākhās*. In the *Ṛgvedic* tradition, references to *Agnihotra* occur in *Brāhmaṇa* and *Śrauta* contexts, such as the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, which outline its oblations and procedural structure (see Keith 1920; Caland 1959).

The *Yajurvedic* corpus provides the most systematic treatment, with mantras preserved in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* and detailed ritual expositions in *Śrauta* texts such as the *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra* and the *Āpastamba* and *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtras* (see Nene and Dogra 1939; Garbe 1882; Caland 1904). The *Taittirīya Samhitā* further reflects the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* tradition's treatment of the ritual (see Keith 1914-1916).

In the *Sāmavedic* tradition, the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* associates ritual performance with chant structures that may accompany rites such as *Agnihotra* (Raghu and Lokesh 1954). The *Atharvavedic* perspective, represented by the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, emphasizes cosmological and symbolic interpretations of ritual practice (Asiatic Society of Bengal 1872). Taken together, these sources demonstrate that while *Agnihotra* is widely attested across the *Vedic* corpus, its ritual articulation varies according to the textual and procedural frameworks of individual *śākhās*. This variation is mandated within the *Śrauta* tradition itself, where the *Śrauta Sūtras* require a sacrificer to employ the mantras and rites of their own *Vedic* branch (*svāśākhā*), expressed in the principle *kalpaḥ svaśākhā-vidhānena*, i.e., "according to one's own *śākhā*" (*Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra*; cf. *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*).

Epigraphic evidence further supports the geographical distribution of *Vedic* traditions, with inscriptions attesting to the regional presence and continuity of *Brahmanical* communities and ritual practices (e.g., Fleet 1960; Archaeological Survey of India (1888–present); Archaeological Survey of

India (1890-present), Vols. II-IV; Regmi 1971). These attestations suggest the regional diversity of *Vedic* traditions, indirectly supporting variation in *śākhā*-based ritual transmission and the broader, pan-*Vedic* dissemination of *Agnihotra*.

### 3. *Agnihotra* as an External Ritual

In the *Yajurvedic* tradition, *Agnihotra* is transmitted and codified as a *Śrauta* (external) *yajña*. Mantras associated with the rite occur in canonical *Samhitā* texts, including the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (*Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*; Keith 1914-1916) and the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* (*Śukla Yajurveda*, Mādhyandina recension; tr. Griffith 1899). These are elaborated within lineage-specific *Śrauta Sūtras*, which prescribe the mantras, intonation, sequencing, materials, and priestly responsibilities for the ritual, such that each *Yajurveda śākhā* performs the rite according to its own tradition. Modern scholarship further notes that only a limited number of *Yajurveda śākhās* survive in the present day.

Witzel (1982, 1997) demonstrates that the originally numerous branches of the *Yajurveda* have largely disappeared, with the *Mādhyandina* and *Kāṇva* recensions representing the extant *Śukla Yajurveda*, while the *Taittirīya*, *Maitrāyaṇīya*, and remnants of the *Kāṭhaka* tradition constitute the surviving *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda śākhās*. These traditions are historically associated with particular regional *Brahmin* communities and systems of transmission. Staal (1983, 1996) further shows that extant *Śrauta* traditions, especially those of the *Taittirīya Yajurveda*, are preserved within geographically limited ritual communities in South India. Taken together, these studies indicate that surviving *Yajurvedic* lineages are no longer maintained as a uniformly pan-Indian ceremonial system, but persist through localized transmission networks.

#### 3.1. *Agnihotra* and *Mokṣa* (*Upaniṣadic* and *Bhagavadgītā* Perspectives)

*Agnihotra* is regarded, in subsequent philosophical and exegetical traditions, as a preparatory discipline (*pūrvasamskāra*) for *vidyā*, in addition to its exterior procedural form. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* associates sacrificial practice with ethical and mental discipline, while the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (*Mādhyandina* recension) reinterprets ritual activity within a broader framework oriented toward the attainment of *self-knowledge* (*ātma-vidyā*). These developments reflect a wider tendency in early Indian thought to subordinate ritual action to knowledge, while retaining its preparatory significance (cf. Olivelle 1998; Staal 1983, 2008; Smith 1989; Heesterman 1985; Radhakrishnan 1953; Nakamura 1950; Deussen 1906).

The *Bhagavadgītā* (Gambhīrānanda 1998) does not prescribe ritual procedures, but reinterprets the concept of *yajña* within a broader soteriological framework. In his commentary on 3.9, Śāṅkara glosses *yajñārthaṃ karma* as encompassing *Vedic* ritual acts such as *agnihotrādi*, thereby conceptually subsuming *Agnihotra* within the *Gītā*'s teaching. While the text does not explicitly describe the rite, it integrates ritual action into the discipline of *niṣkāma-karma*, in which *yajña* functions as a means of purification (4.30), is ultimately subordinated to knowledge (4.33), and culminates in liberating insight (4.38). *Agnihotra*, as a paradigmatic *Vedic yajña*, is presented in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*Mādhyandina* recension; Eggeling 1882-1900) as a foundational ritual, thereby reinforcing its canonical centrality within the *Vedic* tradition.

The early *Upaniṣads* associated with both the *Śukla* and *Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedic* traditions such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Taittirīya*, and *Maitrī Upaniṣads* frequently reinterpret *Vedic* ritual categories in internalized and symbolic terms. As demonstrated in studies by Olivelle (1998) and others, elements of sacrifice are recast in relation to the *self* (*ātman*), *breath* (*prāṇa*), and knowledge, thereby extending ritual meaning into a contemplative and soteriological domain. While this does not constitute a complete rejection of ritual practice, it reflects a significant reorientation within *Yajurvedic* literature from the primacy of external performance toward interiorized discipline and knowledge (cf. Bronkhorst 2007; Deussen 1906; Nakamura 1950; Flood 1996; Heesterman 1985).

#### 4. Agnihotra and Yugas in the Lens of Varṇas

##### Methodological Note

In this portion, *Purāṇic* and *Smṛti* elements are used not as direct Śrauta commands directing Agnihotra practice, but as reception-historical and normative discourses reflecting changing ideas of dharma and ritual accessibility throughout the Yugas. Therefore, references to increased eligibility in the Kali Yuga are not seen as explicit ritual prescriptions, but rather interpreted as implying broader accessibility extrapolations based on Yuga philosophy.

According to *Purāṇic* and *Dharmaśāstra* traditions, ritual practice is frequently associated with *varṇa*-based roles and is interpreted, in later exegetical contexts, as becoming more widely accessible across the four Yugas. In *Purāṇic* descriptions of *Satya Yuga*, *Brāhmaṇas* are portrayed as the primary custodians of *yajña*, reflecting the centrality of ritual order in that period (*Saṅkṣipta Brahma Purāṇa*; *Śrī Liṅga Mahāpurāṇa*; Gita Press n.d.-a; Gita Press n.d.-b). The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes a progressive changing conditions of *dharma* across the Yugas of *dharma* across the Yugas (Gita Press n.d.-d). Similarly, the *Manusmṛti* (cf. Olivelle 2005) associates access to *Vedic* ritual with the twice-born *varṇas*-*Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, and *Vaiśya* within a normative and hierarchical framework.

Later exegetical traditions have interpreted *Purāṇic* descriptions of the *Kali Yuga* as reflecting a weakening of ritual structures and a shift toward more accessible forms of religious practice. However, primary texts such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* emphasize the decline of *dharma* and the increasing prominence of devotional practices, rather than explicitly extending *Vedic* rites such as *Agnihotra* to all *varṇas* (Gita Press n.d.-d; Gita Press n.d.-c).

As part of the broader *Dharmaśāstra* tradition, texts such as the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, the *Śukla Yajurveda* (Mādhyandina recension), and the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* are situated within the *Śruti* corpus, which serves as the primary authority for *dharma*. Within later juridical and exegetical traditions, however, *ācāra*, the established practice and transmitted understanding of the learned is recognized as a secondary but legitimate source of *dharma*, provided that it remains consistent with *Vedic* teaching (cf. Kane 1962-1975; Lingat 1973; Olivelle 1999; Olivelle 2005; Derrett 1973; Jha 1916). This framework allows for the interpretive incorporation of evolving religious ideas, though its application to *Purāṇic* Yuga models and questions of ritual eligibility, such as *Agnihotra*, remains a matter of later hermeneutic extension rather than explicit textual prescription.

The widening of access can be compared to the *Purāṇic* notion that, as the Yugas advance, *dharma* progressively declines in strength and purity (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*; Gita Press n.d.-d). This decline is associated with a reduction in the capacity to sustain complex ritual practices, including those requiring disciplined learning and precise observance. *Agnihotra*, as a form of *yajña*, is situated within the *Śruti* tradition as part of the broader framework of *Vedic* ritual order, which is treated as central to *dharma* in texts such as the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (cf. Staal 1983; Macdonell 1900; Keith 1914-1916; Heesterman 1985). In contrast, *Purāṇic* narratives emphasize the weakening of ritual structures in the later Yugas, without explicitly extending *Vedic* rites such as *Agnihotra* beyond their traditional framework.

This collapse is articulated philosophically in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where Arjuna observes that the rise of *adharmā* leads to *varṇa-saṅkara*, or the disruption of established social order (*Bhagavadgītā*; Gambhīrānanda 1998). The deterioration of *dharma* thus destabilizes both *varṇa* and *āśrama*, which function as interdependent elements of the *Vedic* social framework. As these structures weaken, the conditions necessary for the maintenance of complex ritual practices including disciplined learning and observance are likewise affected. At the same time, even as *dharma* is interpreted with increasing flexibility in response to changing conditions, its textual foundation in *Śruti* remains authoritative and normatively authoritative (cf. Kane 1962-1975; Olivelle 2005; Lingat 1973). This perspective is broadly consistent with *Dharmaśāstra* scholarship. In his historical synthesis, Kane (1962-1975) emphasizes the evolving and context-sensitive nature of *dharma* across time, while the *Mahābhārata* (Śānti Parva) similarly presents *dharma* as responsive to changing circumstances (Sukthankar et al., 1933-1966).

When considered collectively, these viewpoints show that the weakening of *varṇa* and *āśrama* based hierarchies inevitably results in a wider, more inclusive notion of ritual participation, increasing access to rites like *Agnihotra* as part of the adaptive continuity of *dharma*.

## 5. Internalizing *Agnihotra*: The *Bhagavadgītā*-*Śukla Yajurveda* Link

### Methodological Note

This study evaluates *śākhās* in terms of textual authority and ritual applicability using three criteria: (1) evidence of continuous oral transmission or living community practice, (2) manuscript attestation and textual integrity, and (3) internal textual richness for reconstructing ritual and philosophical development, including the presence of critical apparatus, *Brāhmaṇa* layers, and *Śrauta Sūtra* elaboration. Where these criteria are in tension, textual depth is prioritized for historical reconstruction, while living transmission is given precedence in considerations of present praxis.

*Vedic* and epic studies have long debated the relationship between the *Bhagavadgītā* and broader *Vedic* traditions (Brockington 1998; Hildebeitel 2001; Fitzgerald 2003). Modern scholarship generally follows two main interpretive paths. The first is a philosophical-hermeneutic approach that emphasizes the *Bhagavadgītā*'s continuity with late *Vedic* doctrinal developments, particularly the metaphysical and interiorizing tendencies of the *Upaniṣads* (Macdonell 1900; Bronkhorst 2007; Olivelle 1998). The second examines the *Bhagavadgītā*'s terminology, cultural lexicon, and conceptual borrowings from the *Vedic* sacrificial milieu through a ritual-linguistic and philological lens (Staal 1983; Heesterman 1985; Witzel 1997).

Linguistically and culturally, scholars have noted that the *Bhagavadgītā* preserves numerous echoes of *Vedic* idiom and terminology, reflecting its engagement with earlier ritual and poetic traditions (Brockington 1998; Hildebeitel 2001). Philosophically, however, its conception of *yajña* aligns more closely with the interiorizing tendencies of late *Vedic* thought, especially as articulated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (Olivelle 1998). At the same time, the *Brāhmaṇa* literature exhibits symbolic and interpretive reconfigurations of ritual, which later developments, such as those found in the *Bhagavadgītā*, carry forward in a more fully internalized form (Burrow 1977; Bronkhorst 2007).

The spiritual and philosophical dimensions of the two branches of the *Yajurveda* are articulated in different ways. While the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* integrates interpretive and symbolic elements within its predominantly procedural and ritual-oriented textual framework, the *Śukla Yajurveda* presents more extended and systematic *Brāhmaṇa*-style expositions that elaborate the inner meanings of ritual with greater analytical clarity (Macdonell 1900; Witzel 1997). In this context, the *Bhagavadgītā*'s internalized conception of *Agnihotra* framed through *jñāna-yajña* and *niṣkāma-karma* can be seen as more closely aligned with the interpretive tendencies characteristic of the *Śukla Yajurveda*, particularly as developed in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Accordingly, in assessing the role of *Agnihotra* in the *Kali Yuga*, especially in relation to *mokṣa*-oriented practice, the present study adopts the *Śukla Yajurveda* as the primary analytical framework.

## 6. Choosing the Best *Śākha* of the *Śukla Yajurveda* for *Niṣkāma Agnihotra* in the *Kali Yuga*

The *Mādhyandina* and *Kāṇva* recensions of the *Śukla Yajurveda* provide the primary textual framework for the present study's analysis of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s interpretation of *Agnihotra*. Within this tradition, ritual (*karma*) and philosophical (*jñāna*) dimensions are articulated in an interconnected manner across *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, and *Upaniṣadic* layers (Macdonell 1900; Witzel 1997; Staal 1983; Olivelle 1998). Despite differences in mantra construction, ritual sequencing, and historical transmission, the various *śākhās* preserve a broadly coherent sacrificial structure (Macdonell 1900; Burrow 1977).

Within a shared *Vedic* framework, the *Mādhyandina* and *Kāṇva* traditions preserve distinct approaches to the performance and interpretation of *Agnihotra*, differing in textual preservation,

procedural detail, and regional transmission (Heesterman 1985; Witzel 1997). These variations, however, do not undermine the ritual's legitimacy but instead reflect the internal diversity of the *śākhā* system. In the present study, this diversity provides a basis for evaluating which recension is most suitable for understanding *Agnihotra* in the context of the *Kali Yuga*, particularly when the rite is considered both as an external yajña and as an internal discipline oriented toward *liberation*.

In order to assess each recension's strengths textual, ceremonial, philosophical, and pedagogical in directing a practitioner toward *niṣkāma Agnihotra* and the quest of *Mokṣa* in the modern era, a comparative analysis of the two *Śukla Yajurveda* recensions is required.

The following table below compares the textual, procedural, and pedagogical distinctions between the *Kāṇva* and *Mādhyandina* recensions, which directly impact *Agnihotra*'s scholarly study and practical deployment in *Kali Yuga*.

Category	( <i>Śukla Yajurveda</i> ) <i>Kāṇva Recension</i>	( <i>Śukla Yajurveda</i> ) <i>Mādhyandina Recension</i>
<b>Mantras and Textual Preservation</b>	The <i>Kāṇva</i> recension can be seen as preserving relatively more conservative linguistic and ritual features, reflecting broader patterns of transmission history, editorial variation, and regional development across <i>śākhās</i> (Witzel 1997; Staal 1983).	The <i>Mādhyandina</i> recension reflects a later stage of editorial organization, with a more systematic arrangement of prose and mantra material characteristic of developed <i>Vedic</i> textual traditions (Macdonell 1900; Witzel 1997).
<b>Ritual Variants and Procedural Detail</b>	Other ritual variations and more extensive procedural descriptions, differing in emphasis from the <i>Mādhyandina</i> recension, are preserved in the <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> ( <i>Kāṇva</i> recension) (Macdonell 1900; Burrow 1977).	The <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> ( <i>Mādhyandina</i> recension) reflects a more systematized ritual structure, with a relatively consistent arrangement of prose and procedural material (Macdonell 1900; Witzel 1997).
<b>Sequencing and Technical Instructions</b>	The <i>Kāṇva Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> presents detailed procedural descriptions of ritual performance, including aspects of sequencing, timing, and the arrangement of ritual space and implements (Staal 1983; Macdonell 1900; Witzel 1997).	The <i>Brāhmaṇa</i> texts organize ritual material in a sequential, step-by-step manner corresponding to the stages of performance, though their exposition is often expansive and not always systematically arranged (Macdonell 1900; Burrow 1977).
<b>Śrauta and Grhya Sūtra Traditions</b>	The <i>Kāṇva Śrauta</i> and <i>Grhya</i> traditions preserve detailed and elaborate ritual prescriptions, reflecting the broader technical complexity of <i>Vedic</i> ritual systems (Caland 1904; Keith 1908).	According to Witzel (1997), <i>Vedic śākhās</i> preserve distinct ritual and textual traditions shaped by regional transmission, reflecting variation in ritual structure and practice across schools.

<p><i>Agnihotra</i> Description in <i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i></p>	<p>Includes detailed procedural descriptions of ritual performance, including sequencing, timing, and the arrangement of ritual space and implements (Staal 1983).</p>	<p>Provides a more systematized and general description of <i>Vedic</i> ritual practice, reflecting the structured presentation of ritual traditions in later textual sources (Macdonell 1900).</p>
<p>Analytical Depth</p>	<p>Particularly useful for studies requiring textual depth, including the examination of interpretative layering, the historical development of ritual forms, and the technical elaboration and structural complexity of <i>Vedic</i> ritual systems (Staal 1983; Heesterman 1985; Witzel 1997; Macdonell 1900; Burrow 1977).</p>	<p>Helpful for comprehending the redactional development and structural formation of <i>Vedic</i> ritual texts, particularly within the <i>Yajurvedic</i> tradition, as well as their broader cultural and historical context (Witzel 1997; Bronkhorst 2007).</p>

### Methodological Note

The above discussion acknowledges the *Bhagavadgītā*'s involvement with *Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedic* ritual idioms, but adopts a functionally separate approach that analytically distinguishes ritual-linguistic inheritance from soteriological reconfiguration. The study investigates how the *Gītā* transforms sacrificial logic into an internalized, liberation-oriented paradigm through *niṣkāma karma* and *jñāna-yajña*, without assuming direct textual dependency or ritual continuity. The *Śukla Yajurveda* is used as a comparative framework due to its extended symbolic and interpretive exposition, which facilitates the analysis of ritual interiorization processes. This does not contradict intellectual continuity within the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, nor does it presuppose a fundamental theoretical distinction between the two traditions. Rather, the distinction is methodological and remains independent of debates concerning historical discontinuity or redactional complexity, since the analysis is grounded in identifiable exegetical patterns preserved in the textual record.

### 6.1. Synthesis and Implications

The comparison shows that while both recensions maintain genuine *Śukla Yajurvedic* ritual structures, they serve distinct tracing and practical purposes. While *Kāṇva* maintains older ritual levels, prolonged *Brāhmaṇa* exegesis, and procedurally rich variants, *Mādhyandina* provides standardized transmission and pedagogical accessibility. The *Kāṇva* materials offer considerable advantages for practitioners pursuing a liberation-oriented, historically based practice in *Kali Yuga*, as well as superior textual depth and interpretive nuance for a study focused on tracing *Agnihotra*'s developmental continuum from "karma" to "jñāna".

## 7. Conclusion

*Agnihotra* serves as both an exterior *yajña* and an interior preparation for *vidyā* to all *varṇas* in *Kali yuga*. This transition is supported by the *Yajurvedic Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā* stating textual importance remains the same while inclusivity increases as per the ages, in addition reinterpret sacrifice as *niṣkāma-karma* and *jñāna-yajña*. The internalizing tendencies significantly coincide with the interpretive framework of the *Śukla Yajurveda*. Comparing the two surviving recensions of the *Śukla* tradition- *Mādhyandina* and *Kāṇva* shows that the *Kāṇva* recension preserves older textual layers, greater procedural detail, and preserves earlier ritual layers, providing a more nuanced understanding of *Agnihotra*'s developmental continuum from *karma* to *jñāna*. The *Mādhyandina* ritual system is extensively transmitted, whereas the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*Kāṇva* recension) preserves older symbolic frameworks and technical instructions for understanding *Agnihotra* within a *Mokṣa* oriented framework. From the standpoint of Textual reconstruction, textual depth, and ritual-philosophical study, the *Kāṇva* recension gives the most ideal framework for examining *Agnihotra* practice in the *Kali Yuga*, offering the intellectual coherence, depth, and accuracy needed to pursue *niṣkāma Agnihotra* as a route to *Liberation*.

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