



Impact Factor : 7.109

ISSN 2349-364X

वेदाञ्जलि Vedanjali

अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय विद्वत्समीक्षित षाण्मासिकी शोधपत्रिका

(International Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal of Multidisciplinary Research)

वर्ष- १०

अंक- १९, भाग- २

जनवरी-जून, २०२३

प्रधान सम्पादक

डॉ० रामकेश्वर तिवारी

सह सम्पादक

श्री प्रभूज मिश्र

प्रकाशन : वैदिक एजुकेशनल रिसर्च सोसाइटी, वाराणसी

Vedic Yajña : Its contemporary relevance

Dr. Ratul Bujar Baruah*

Yajña, a ritualistic performance endowed with sacrificial ceremonies, was very popular among the Vedic Aryans. They performed it offering oblation to the gods by chanting Vedic mantras. The people in the Vedic period took it as a form of worship which centered round the propitiation of Vedic Gods. It was performed to gain heavenly bliss as well as other worthily prosperities. Through *Yajña* link between God and the performer of sacrifice is established. Because through *Yajña*, prayers are made to the Gods with a view to offer them desired objects.

Among the important duties of a house holder is to perform the five daily sacrifices¹. Among them *Pitryajña* is performed to show respect to our ancestors. *Nṛyajña* or *Atithiyajña* reminds us our duty towards elders, parents and guests. The householder must show courtesy and hospitalities to one's inferiors or to an individual at one's house. *Bhūtajajña* shows that house-holder should have some sort of responsibilities towards all beings. The sacrifice reflects the great dedication on the part of the performer of the sacrifice since the materials for the propitiation are offered. One has to give up his ownership on the offered materials. This sense of utmost dedication inspires others too to look beyond them. That is why, in Vedic period it is highly encouraged to take part in sacrifice. Those people were socially neglected who did not take part in the sacrifice². It was held at that time that oblations thrown into the fire reach the Sun. The Sun again becomes the cause of rains; rain again causes corn which is the basis thing of all beings. A *Brāhmaṇa* who has vast knowledge in the Vedic studies is entrusted with the responsibility of performing sacrifice. In the sacrifice he is honored with presentation of fee. Of course there was not any bargaining on the sacrificial fee. The greed of the priest for the sacrificial fee is also discouraged in the Vedic times.

The Vedic seers underlined the need for performing daily *Yajnas* for protection of ecology. Many types of *Yajña* were performed to purify air. Fire was regarded as the best purifier. The pure air brings welfare and happiness to all living beings. The *Brahmayajña* contains daily recitation of hymns of the Vedas. The *Gautam Dharmasūtra* holds that one should study the Vedas regularly to perform this sacrifice. Thus through the performance of it one can acquire the knowledge of Vedas easily. The *Devayajña* contains daily offering of a piece of wood to the Gods in the *Grhyāgni*. The householder offers oblations into the *Grhyāgni* in the morning and evening. The element of science here is evident since the pure smoke of the sacrifice helps to produce cloud for rain. Thus a householder contributes much towards the protection of the environment of the earth.

In recent days, everybody needs to maintain the environment and its proper ecological balance. The development of science and technology, trade and industry, the economic growth etc. have caused a significant change in the living pattern of the people of today. These, in turn, have caused the environmental problems like excessive deforestation, wildlife depletion, global warming, air and water quality deterioration etc. Thousands of years ago the Vedic seers have provided us solutions of these problems very seriously.

The concept of Sacrifice or '*yajña*' is regarded as an important concept of Vedas which seems to be a part of Vedic environmental science. *Yajurveda* and *Rgveda* describe it as the '*navel*' (nucleus) of the whole world. It says as –

"*ayam yajño viśvasya bhūvanasya nābhiḥ*"³

"*ayam yajño bhūvanasya nābhiḥ*"⁴

It indicates that *yajña* is regarded as a source of nourishment and life for the world, just as navel is for the child. Vedas speak elaborately about '*yajña*'. Through the vedic '*yajña*' seers were able to understand the true meaning of the mantras. In *Rgveda* it says as – '*yajñena vācaḥ vadavīyamāyan*'⁵ Again it says that all sorts of knowledge were created by '*yajña*'; i.e., *tasmāt yajñāt sarvahuta ṛcaḥ sāmāni jayñire*..⁶

*Associate Prof, Department of Sanskrit Sahitya, KBV Sanskrit and AS University, Nalbari, Assam

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, it is considered as the noblest action i.e. – *yajño vai śresthatam karma*⁷. The sacrifice simply has three aspects; these are viz., *Dravya* (material), *Devatā* (deity) and *Dāna* (giving). When some material is offered to a deity with adoration then it becomes *yajña*. Pleasing deity returns desired material in some different forms to the devotee. This *yajña* is going on in the universe everywhere for production and also for keeping balance of the world. Even the creation of the universe is explained as *yajña* in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*. Thus, the concept of sacrifice (*yajña*) seems to be a major principle of environment in Vedic period.

Environment consists of five elements; viz., air, water, earth, ether and fire. Ancient people were taking utmost care of these elements of environment. In Vedic hymns we find the prayers for certain natural elements such as air, water, earth etc. All these elements are inter-related and affect each other. Sun is drawing water from ocean through rays. Earth gets rain from sky and grows plants. Plants produce food for living beings. The brightness of the sun, the blaze of the sacrificial fire, the sweep of the rain-storm across the sky, the recurrence of the dawn, the steady currents of the winds, the violence of the tropical storm and other such aspects are glorified and personified as divinities. The whole process of nature is nothing but a sort of *yajña*. It is essential for maintenance of balance among the environmental constituents. *Yajurveda* states that sacrifice (*Yajña*) cleans atmosphere through its medicinal smoke and provides longevity, breath, vision etc.⁸

The Vedic seers knew the importance of air for life. The concept and significance of air is highlighted in the *Rgveda* – ‘O Air! You are our father, the protector.’⁹ ‘Air has medicinal values.’¹⁰ ‘Let wind blow in the form of medicine and bring me welfare and happiness.’¹¹ During the Vedic age, *yajñas* were conducted for purification of air. However, there was not much problem regarding air pollution in ancient times. It says in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, as follows;

‘apam dhārm dhārm bhindhi-puro vāto Varṣan janvarāvṛtam svahā.’¹²

Here, the Vedic seers prayed for fertility of soil, purity of air and purity of water through the *yajñas* for achieving the well being of all kind of lives. In the *Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad*, we can find the description of *Agnihotra* sacrifice as the best known means to protect this world from air pollution.¹³ Thus, the Vedic seers were aware of the unpolluted air which is a boon to good health and happiness.

Water is the vital natural resource which is essential for all. According to *Rgveda* the water as a part of human environment occurs in five forms; Rain water (*Divyah*), Natural spring (*Śravanti*), well and canals (*Khanitrimah*), Lakes (*Svayamjah*) and Rivers (*Samudrārthah*).¹⁴ There are some other classifications also in the *Taittirīya Āranyaka*,¹⁵ *Yajurveda*,¹⁶ and *Atharavaveda*¹⁷ regarding drinking water, medicinal water, logged water etc. The concept of water was held in high esteem in ancient India. It has been found in many places in the Vedas indicating the importance of rain water in our life as the a main source of water Vedic Ṛṣis have conducted various *yajñas* to bring water.¹⁸

The significance of water for every life was well known to Vedic seers. They consider water as the source of all plants and giver of good health.¹⁹ Water destroys diseases of all sorts,²⁰ water is meant for purification.²¹ Thus, the ancient people were very particular to maintain its purity and to free it from any kind of poll

The ancestors in old age were well aware about the environment. They desired to live a life of hundred years²² and this wish can be fulfilled only when environment will be unpolluted, clear and peaceful. They knew that preservation of ecological balance in nature is for the good of the entire community. The importance of environment in the scriptures can be put here by quoting a partial *Mantra* of *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*- “One should enjoy with sense of renouncement.”²³ This clearly says that environment belongs to all living beings; therefore it needs protection by all for the welfare of all.

When most of the countries were plunged in darkness of ignorance, light of wisdom was cultivated by the age-old Vedic seers. The foundation of Indian culture is rooted in the ancient Vedic lore and tradition. The values incorporated in the Vedas carry a powerful

message for entire humanity. That is why the Vedic era was the golden era in the history of human civilization. The universal message of the Ṛgveda, the oldest scripture of the world, towards mutual co-operation, fraternity and unity is really relevant even today for maintaining a harmonious collective life. It may be concluded that, Vedic *yajña* is beneficial to both individual and the community. *Yajña* can help in minimizing air pollution, increasing crop production, in protecting plants from diseases as well as in providing a disease free but pure environment for all, offering peace and happiness. Besides, the Vedic sacrifices played a significant role in shaping moral and spiritual life of the people.

References:

1. *devapitṛemanucyabhūtarcipūjako nityasvādhyāyaḥ - Gautamadharmasūtra-V, 3-4*
2. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I.5.2.4*
3. *Yajurveda, 13.62*
4. *Ṛgveda, 1.146.35*
5. *Ibid., 10.71.3*
6. *Ibid., 10.90.9*
7. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1.7.1.5*
8. *āyuryajñena kalpatām prāṇā yajñena kalpatām cakṣur yajñena kalpatām - Yajurveda, 9.21*
9. *uta vāta pitāsi naḥ - (SB, I.5.2.4). Ṛgveda, 10.86.2*
10. *ā vāta vahi bheṣajm. Ibid., 10.37.2*
11. *vāta ā vātū bheṣajam sambhu mayobhu nau hr̥de. Ibid., 10.86.3*
12. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2.4.7*
13. *athāto sayomanam prātardanamāntara bhagnihṛta cācakṣa - Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad, 11/5*
14. *samudrārtha yāḥ sucāyaḥ pavakāstā āpo devīrīḥ māmanantu - Ṛgveda, 7.49.2*
15. *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 1.24.1-2*
16. *Yajurveda, 22/25*
17. *Atharvaveda, 1/6/4*
18. *Yajurveda, 18/36*
19. *āpaḥ viśvabheṣajīḥ - Ṛgveda, 1.23.20*
20. *bheṣajīrāpo amivacātaniḥ. Ibid., 10.87.6*
21. *pavitram vā āpaḥ - Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1.9.3.7*
22. *jivema śaradaḥ śataḥ - Atharvaveda, 19.67.1*
23. *tena tyaktena bhuñjīthāḥ - Iśāvāsyopaniṣad, 1*