

Ethno-ecological Introspection into *Bhagawatgeetaa*: 4. Ecological Responsibility of Humanbeings

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ABSTRACT The *Geetaa* teaches: Nature and its inhabitants should live together with reciprocity, which has been the prime principle since the beginning of creation. The mankind should protect the environment with the spirit of *Yajnya*-sacrifice.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of *Yajnya* (sacrifice) is the basic theme of Indian Culture and heritage. The concept and performance of various *yajnyas* is much more elaborated in *Karma Kanda* (Ritual methodologies) of veda, which are complicated, expensive and time consuming. The *Yajnya* activities have a predominated idea on ritual oriented activity with worshipping of different Gods and Goddess alongwith chanting of *Mantra* and *Havan* (fire worship). *Manusmruti*, the first ethical law book of the world has simplified the *yajnya* philosophy and has prescribed to perform five sacrifices (*Pancha Mahayajnya*) as a part of routine activity in daily life of a house holder. These five sacrifices elaborate one's socio-ecological responsibility such as :1. *Rrushi yanjna* (sacrifices for the source of knowledge-teacher), 2. *Pitru Yajnya* (responsibility for the parents, ancestors and self genetic system), 3. *Deva yajnya* (protection for the environmental powers as Gods), 4. *Bhoota Yajnya* (Care for the protection of biodiversity) and 5. *Nrru Yajnya* (positive interaction with fellow human beings of the society). The scientific merit of these sacrifices from ecological point of view are presented elsewhere (Padhy 2009). In a wider sense *Yajnya* means any systematic sacrifice accomplished for common interest (universal) with a selfless motive. In the present Hindu socio-religious scenario the following *Yajnyas* are performed such as: *Ghruta Yajnya* (involves vedic rituals-worshipping Gods with addition of clarified butter to fire), *Arnna Yajnya* (feeding the needy with direct involvement of common man), *Naama Yajnya* (Chanting of the sweet name of God with music to purify the vibration of the

atmosphere), *Japa Yajnya* (recitation of any *mantra* to enhance the concentration of mind) and *Jnyaana Yajnya* (discourse on a specific philosophical subject for development of self consciousness). In the fourth chapter of the *Geetaa* (*Jnyaana Karma Sanyasa Yoga*- The Yoga of Action and renunciation) Srikrishna widely elaborates the *Yajnya* philosophy and includes *Pooja* (worship), *Sanyama* (self-discipline), *Tyaaga* (Non-accepting), *Yoga* (Practice of Yoga), *Daana* (Sacrifice of material possessions), *Tapasyaa* (austerities), *Brata* (observing moral ethics), *Swaadhyaaya* (self study of sacred texts) and realisation of *Brahma* (All mighty-every where) as *Yajnya*. The third chapter of *Geetaa* (*Karma Yoga*-The Yoga of action) presents the *Yajnya* as human ecological responsibility, the theme which is discussed in the present paper. The methods of study for this work are elaborated earlier (Padhy 2013abc).

YAJNYA: THE ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Geetaa says:

- At the beginning of creation, the Lord created mankind alongwith the spirit of *Yajnya* (sacrifice), and said “you shall prosper by this; may this yield the enjoyment you seek” (*Geetaa* 3/10).
- Foster the Gods through sacrifice, and let the Gods be gracious to you. Each fostering other being selfless, you will attain the highest good (*Geetaa* 3/11).
- Fostered by sacrifice, the Gods will surely, bestow on you unasked, all the desired enjoyments. He who enjoys the gifts be-

stowed by them, without giving them in return (obligation), in undoubtedly a thief (*Geetaa* 3/12).

To understand the *Yajnya* philosophy from scientific point of view some of Nature can be discussed. Every individual in the biosphere has its own niche : its identity, working principle and ecological position. Each one performs its own job, a major part of which is above the self motive. The plant systems as producers carryout photosynthesis, harvests the solar energy, prepares food for self, stores a substantial share for others. Food stored, enters in the form of energy to the ecosystem by the process of eating and being eaten as food chain. Members in each trophic level sacrifice for this process. Plants exchange oxygen with carbon dioxide of the atmosphere, diminish the pollution and sustain the animal kingdom. They transpire water sucking from deep soil, restore it in the hydrological cycle; as well stabilize the edaphic system with their network of roots. The aesthetic, medicinal and multifarious economical value of plants need not be elaborated or emphasized further. From rational view point, they are also performing *Yajnya*.

We can choose another example from the detritus food chain of the ecosystem the decomposers, quite opposite to producers, the bacteria and other micro-organisms, of whom we had no record before the invention of microscope. They are the scavengers of nature, responsible for ensuring the bio-geo chemical cycle, work silently, gain little out of their performance compared to their contribution. Unless they perform the sacrifice, life would have been impossible on earth. Every individual, from virus to whale, are potentiated by nature to accomplish their duty being interconnected and interdependent with a basic theme of sacrifice; but the activities of human beings is questionable in this regard.

Aiming to men *Srikrishna* says:

- Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds for me to do, nor in there anything worth attaining unattained by me, yet I continue to work (*Geetaa* 3/22).
- Should I not engage in action, scrupulously at any time, Arjuna, men follow my way in all matters (*Geetaa* 3/23).
- If I cease to act, these worlds will perish; may, I should prove to be the cause of

confusion, and of the destruction of these people (*Geetaa* 3/24).

Man is so called intelligent, provided with mind to reason the best and the worst; on the contrary animals and plants express through their behavioural character. Comparatively man should be more sacrificial, rational and be the guardian of nature. In Hindu philosophy the supreme reality is named as '*Nara*' (Mohapatro et al. 2001); and the human beings have adopted that designation, with a perception that they represent God. It should be human responsibility to be with nature; but unfortunately man's attitude of selfishness and exploitation is against nature's principle, that drags the whole ecosystem towards doom, an obscurity. Another important aspect needs to be focused here, that the members of the biodiversity consume only the basic needs from the environment, a *Yajnya* on sustainable ecology; the concept on which man only talks and writes in volumes, without any practical i.e. pragmatic approach. Moreover, the community activity of present day human beings, is more social, political and pseudo-religious only and these need to be reconsidered. The whole concept of *Yajnya* is to vibrate the theme of eco-consciousness in every human mind.

NATURE: THE DEVATAA FACTOR

Nature was worshipped during the vedic age. The aim of this worship was to express obligation to nature. In course of time the presence of a divine power was realized within the components of the nature. This divine power was named as *Devataa*: the sun, moon, stars, planets, heaven (sky), air, water (rivers and sea), earth (mountains) and the biodiversity (plants and animals). All the *Devataas* of Hindu mythology are broadly classified into five groups, popularly known as *Panchadevataa* (Padhy 2009). The single iconic representative of each group is *Ganesh*, *Soorya*, *Vishnu*, *Ssiva* and *Durga*. The word *Vishnu* means *Visswabyaapee* (spread throughout the universe) points towards the *Aakash*, the principle of vacuity. *Ganesh* is the principle of air with a long trunk; the longest nose represents the community respiration. *Soorya* is the source of energy for the solar system, [the *Agni* (fire) factor]. *Ssiva* is satisfied with *Jala Abhiseka* (water treatment), represents

the ecological factor-water. The mother earth is worshiped as the Goddess *Durga*, the earth factor. In integration these *Panchadevataa* are the representatives of the *Panchamahaabhoota* (*Kshiti, Aapa, Tejas, Vaayu, Aakaasa* : Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether) discussed earlier (Padhy 2013b). The *Panchadevataa*, are also interpreted in a different manner, as the iconic representatives of *Pancha Mahayajnya* (Padhy 2009).

In a different presentation *Aakash* is the first ecological factor among the *Panchamaahaabhoota*, where heaven is imagined. The *Devataas* live there. The king of the *Devataas* is *Indra*, the authority of the hydrological cycle of the nature. He co-ordinates with the other *Devataas* (ecological powers) to commence rain. The second *Mahaabhoota* is *Vaayu* (air) flows as life energy (*Praana*) in every organism. *Vaayu* is compared with the supreme God in veda. The *Praana* is the vital force in every living being (*Bhoota*) when considered from biodiversity point of view. The third factor is *Agni* (energy), *Devataa* who has a respectable position next to *Indra*. *Agni* is also considered as the father of all *Devataas*, as food is offered to all concern through Him during *Havan* (fire worship). The fourth factor is *Jala* (water) with an alternative name *Jeevana* (life). Life was created first in water medium, the philosophy is supported by both, vedic science and modern science (Mohapatra et al. 2001). *Varuna* is the *Jala Devataa* Lord of the Ocean. His daughter is Goddess *Laxmi* (the consort of *Naaraayana*) the power of wealth, beauty, nature, production and fostering. The fifth *Mahaabhoota* factor is earth, worshiped as mother for her holding, fostering and tolerating virtues.

Similar to the abiotic factors discussed above, nature's biodiversity is widely worshiped by Indian people. Some of the animals like monkey, cow, bull, elephant, rat, birds, tortoise, snake, fish are worshiped directly. Almost all *Devataas* are found associated with one or the other animal as their mount called *Vaahana*. The *Vaahana* is specific for each *Devataa*, representing the God in animal form. The characteristics of the animal usually symbolize the nature and personality of the *Devataa* (Vitasaxis 1977). Some of the *Devataas* like *Ganesh* (elephant head), *Nrusingha* (Lion head), *Varaha* (wild pig head), *Hayagreeba* (Horse head), *Garuda* (Eagle head) are having animal heads with a human body. The Fish and Tortoise incarnations

of Lord *Vishnu* have an animal body with a human face. The *Panchamukhee* form of *Hanumaan* has five animal heads (on a monkey body), is an empirical representation of ancient animal classification as reported earlier (Padhy et al. 1999). Animal worship, even though is symbolic, it plays a vital role in conservation of animals. In many instances particular animals associated with the *Devataas* are ordinarily not killed (rather conserved) by the sect of worshippers. The cow as the mother, is protected in our country. *Srikrishna* himself was great lover of cows and preferred to be called as *Gopaalakrishna* (*Gopaala* : Cowherd). We are ever hospitable to Ox. People are reluctant to kill a snake, a rat or a cat. Feeding the crow in the morning before onsetting the hotel business, grass to Ox and cows in pilgrim places, *Channa* to monkey in temples or taking care of (black) dogs in the streets are the outcome of the influences of conservation attitude. Even in the day to day ritual of the Hindus like *Vaishvadeva Pujaa*, a special share of food is dedicated to dogs, crows and insects, which shows the highest philosophical thought for conservation of animals (Dash and Padhy 1998). Moreover the Black buck (*Krushnasaara Mruga-Antelope cervicapra*) known since the vedic age as an ecological indicator, is protected in different areas of our country by local people from aesthetic and ecological point of view (Padhy et al. 1997) and conservation of fishes, rats, monkeys and birds in various religious places is not uncommon.

The *Pujaa*, *Havan* and different spiritual and religious rituals in India can not be performed without the involvement of plant diversity. Some of the plants like :*Bara* (Banyan tree : *Ficus benghalensis*), *Asvattha* (Pipal tree: *Ficus religiosa*), *Nimba* (Neem tree : *Azadirachta indica*), *Tulasi* (Holy basil : *Ocimum sanctum*), *Baila* (Bael tree : *Aegle marmelos*) and *Amla* (Indian Gooseberry : *Emblica officinalis*) are worshipped directly as the representative of *Devataas*. The reference to different flowers and leaves used for worshipping are innumerable. Each God has a specific choice of flower which is mostly offered to Him. In *Havan* (fire worship) different types of wood are used, specific for a particular ritual. One can not think of a Hindu *Puja* in absence of the leaves of Mango (*Mangifera indica*), *Tulasi*, *Duba* (*Cynodon dactylon*) and *Baera* (*Ziziphus jujuba*). More-

over, to overcome the negative effects of the planets and bad omen, one is asked to worship a specific plant. There are ancient literature depicting the *Bastu* design of plants in the premises of dwelling houses and public places. Aayurveda has prescribed to worship the plants and pray them before the collection of medicinal parts from their bodies. The plant world lives with us, understands us and communicates with us (Tompkins and Bird 1973), the facts which are revealed by modern science recently, was known to Indians as *Brukshya Deevataa* (Plant God) since the vedic age. More to say, the world famous deities of Sri Jagarnath, Sri Balabhadra, Sri Subhadra and Sri Sudarsana at Puri, Odisha are made up of the wood of Neem tree and the woods are changed in every twelve years (*Navakalevara* : New Body).

From the above discussions it is clear that in the *Geetaa* (3/10-12) *Srikrishna* narrates about the *Devataas* (powers) which are the various abiotic and biotic ecological factors around us ("I am being and non-being both" 9/19). For an example from nature : to commence the rain, the sun sacrifices energy; the water bodies donate the water through evaporation; plants drag the water from deep soil, enrich the environment with water vapour by transpiration; the sky provides space and ideal conditions for precipitation; the force of wind waves the cloud in right direction; the high mountains obstruct the monsoon and finally nature's hydrological cycle completes its circle. The biogeochemical cycle, an inner wheel of the hydrological cycle involves the sacrifice of the microbial world; of whom a common man is not aware of. So the sacrifice for rain is a collective effort of the abiological and biological factors of the environment in which involvement of man is very much associated with agriculture and production of food. Every activity is performed with a *Yajnya* spirit. The *Geetaa* rightly says : "the human society should perform sacrifice with a selfless attitude to protect the environment (not to pollute them) and in return they are expected to get the unasked gifts bestowed by the environment. It is a fact that, the energy of the sunlight, coolness of the moon, water of the rains, touch of the cool breeze, the heat of fire and fostering power of

the earth and the service of biodiversity are available to man without asking as the bounties of nature. The nature and its inhabitants should live together with reciprocity, was the prime principle since the beginning of creation. Some one, who enjoys nature without rendering thanks and obligation, is undoubtedly a thief, as declared by *Srikrishna* (3/12). Of late, the present scientific man has realized his own negative commitments on nature, responsible for environmental pollution and events like global warming, acid rain, green house effect, ozone depletion, etc. The *Geetaa* shows the torch to humanity to realize their own responsibility towards the environment with the spirit of *Yajnya*.

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