

Ethnobiological Analysis From Myth to Science, X: *Pancha Yajnya* (Five Sacrifices) - Geetaa Narrates Their Integration

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ABSTRACT The basic theme of sacrifice is conceptualised as *Pancha Yajnya* in *Manusmruti*, to express one's obligation for the ecological environment. Geetaa further elaborates that, one should work with selfless motive for sacrifice (*Nrru Yajnya*) following the foot prints of his ancestors (*Pitru Yajnya*), those who had achieved perfection through sacrifice. The skill for the selfless work is to be learned from Vedas (source of knowledge - *Rrushi Yajnya*) and to be implemented in practical life as well to foster the nature (ecological powers - Gods - *Deva Yajnya*); in return rain is bestowed (by gods) as gift that produces food for sustenance of life and proliferate the biodiversity. Man identifies one amongst the biosphere, should have a moral responsibility for the protection of all living beings (*Bhoota Yajnya*).

INTRODUCTION

The Upanishads are the cream of Vedas, and all the systems of philosophy in India derive their inspiration and authority from these scriptures. The Bhagavad Geetaa is equal to that of the contemporary Upanishads of Vedic age. One step ahead, in *Geetaa Dhyanam* (concentration of Geetaa) it is narrated that all the Upanishads are the cows, the milker is Krishna - the cowherd boy, Partha (Arjuna) is the calf, man of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the supreme nectar of the Geetaa. The glory of Geetaa is unlimited which embodies the Supreme spiritual mystery and secret. It contains the essence of all the four Vedas, as claimed.

The ancient Indian literature can be divided into two broad groups, *Ssruti* and *Smruti*. *Ssruti* means facts to be learned (remembered and memorised) on the basis of hearing. The Upanishads come under this category which are transmitted verbally by continuous succession of Guru and *Ssishya*. They are protected from mutilation and are preserved since thousands of years. *Smruti* means what is remembered on literary sense, but they include social laws, usages, customs, manners and moral codes. They are post Vedic and no data can be definitely assigned to these scriptures. *Smruti* are traditionally supported to be based on the Vedas. They are much more considered as applied sociology. The religio-social codes undergo changing with the changes in the order of the society as per time, place and circumstances.

Accordingly the *Smrutis* are forwarded periodically by different *Smruti* writers (like Manu, Goutama, Yagnyabalka, Sataatapa, Haarita etc.) to meet the social needs. There are twenty major *Smrutis* and still more number of minor *Smruties* about fifty are available. Out of all these, *Manusmruti* is regarded as the foremost and biggest compendium on human jurisprudence of ancient India and *Maharshi* Manu as the first law giver of the world.

Geetaa is a blending form of *Ssruti* and *Smruti*. It has collection of spiritual laws of eternal order and righteousness (*Ssruti*) and also deals with duties of man and problems pertaining to life and society (*Smruti*). The aim of this communication is to explore the teachings of *Pancha Yajnya* philosophy in Geetaa, the epitome of all the scriptures. *Pancha Yajnya* as depicted in *Manusmruti* (III/70; IV/21) says that a house holder (*Gruhastha*) should express his moral obligations for his parents and ancestors (*Pitru Yajnya*); for his teacher and source of knowledge (*Rrushi Yajnya*); for the ecological factors, exist in the form of Gods (*Deva Yajnya*); for the biodiversity around him (*Bhoota Yajnya*) and for his fellow human beings of the society (*Nrru Yajnya*). The basic theme of *Pancha Yajnya* is to consider the environment in toto and repeatedly create eco-consciousness in a person, in a family and accordingly in a community (Padhy, 2008a, b). The meanings of the *Slokas* of Geetaa referred in the text are followed according to Anonymous (2002) and Lal (1965).

CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE, ACTION AND KNOWLEDGE

The fourth Chapter of Geetaa is entitled as “The Yoga of Action and Renunciation” (*Yajna Karma Sanyasa Yoga*). The spectrum of SACRIFICES are very well elaborated in this chapter such as (IV/23-33).

- Offering sacrifice in the shape of worship to Gods (*Poojaa*).
- Sacrifice of the self (*Aatman*) through the sacrifice known as the perception of identity into the fire of *Brahma* (*Parama-Aatman*)
- Sacrifice of the senses in the fire of self discipline (*Sanyama*)
- Sacrifice of the sense objects in the fire of non-accepting them by senses (*Tyaaga*).
- Sacrifice through practice of Yoga (*Yoga Yajnya*).
- Sacrifice of the function of the senses and function of life forces in the fire of Yoga (obtained through practice) in the form of self control, kindled by wisdom (*Yoga Aarudha* – highest state of Yoga – *Samaadhi*).
- Sacrifice of the material possessions (*Daana*).
- Sacrifice in the shape of austerities (*Tapasyaa*).
- Sacrifice through observing austere vows (*Brata*: strictly moral ethics).
- Sacrifice in the shape of wisdom through the study of sacred texts (*Swaadhyaaya* – *Jnyaana Yajnya*).
- Sacrifice by offering the act of exhalation into that of inhalation or *vice-versa*; which control the process of inhalation and exhalation (both being co-ordinated) and conjoin the vital air (self life force) to the vital air (i.e. the universal life force). (*Yoga Pranidhaana* – contemplation of Yoga)
- In a final statement it is said that, sacrifice through knowledge is superior to sacrifice of material gains. Moreover, a subject, whose relentless actions are free from attachment, who has no identification with the body and does not claim it as his own; whose mind is established in the knowledge of self (*Aatman*) and who works merely for the sake of sacrifice (without any attachment), performs the best. For him, who realises *Brahma* (life centre of life force) everywhere; in his sacrifice the instruments to offer the oblation, the oblation itself, the fire to which the oblation is added, the sacrificer himself, the process of offering and as well the goal, to be reached, everything

is *Brahma*, as he performs the sacrifice being absorbed (engrossed) in *Brahma*. This is the highest order of sacrifice.

But, all the above sacrifices in true sense are possible for some one, when he realises the philosophy of ACTION (*Karma* - IV/16-23, 31) which states that:

What is action? and what is inaction?; are the questions that perplex the wisest man.

The truth of action, inaction and prohibited action must be known, because the ways of action are mysterious.

He, who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among the man.

He, who works selflessly; whose actions are pure in the fire of knowledge; who abandons greed; who is content; who is self sufficient; who forsakes hope; restrains his mind; free from craving; relinquishes rewards; satisfied with whatever comes; unaffected by extremes; free from jealousy and maintains a balance on failure and achievement - his deeds do not fetter him; he does nothing at all, though fully engaged in action. For such a man all his actions melt away as his mind is established in the knowledge of self and he works for the sake of sacrifice.

Moreover, the man who does not offer sacrifice is neither happy in this world nor in the other world (expected to be a better one).

Since all actions with no exception culminate in knowledge, the supremacy of KNOWLEDGE (IV/35-39) needs to be realised such as:

Humble yourself, serve others;

Ask questions, and you shall know;

The wise who have reached truth, will instruct you.

Knowledge will remove your bewilderment,

And you shall see all creation in yourself and in me (God).

The raft of knowledge ferries the worst sinner to safety.

As a flaming fire consumes log into ashes, knowledge consumes *Karma* (action).

There is no purifier like knowledge in this world: time will make man find himself in himself.

The devoted man, indefatigable commander of his senses, gains knowledge;

With this knowledge he finds the final peace.

PANCHA YAJNYA

The concept of five scarifies depicted in *Manusmruti* finds a special position in Geetaa. The

five obligations expected out of *Pancha Yajnya* has a great ethical value pertained to human life and their interrelationship is much more dynamic around the human community from social and scientific point of view; as the Geetaa elaborates.

Nrru Yajnya

The spectrum of sacrifices elaborated in the proceeding pages seems to be of spiritual and ethical value; but should be performed by a common man from practical and social point of view. One self is expected to perform the sacrifices being conscious of the philosophy of action and supremacy of knowledge. In the environment the sun, moon, plant world, animal kingdom, space, air, fire, water, earth etc. etc. every one perform sacrifice for each other according to the norms of action and knowledge set by the nature. For man only it is rightly pointed out:

Man does not attain freedom from action without entering upon action; nor does he reach perfection merely by ceasing to act (III/4).

None can ever remain inactive even for a moment; for everyone is helplessly driven to action by nature born qualities (III/5).

Action is superior to inaction; therefore perform your allotted duty selflessly (III/8)

All deeds are traps, except the actions performed for the sake of sacrifice. Hence there is need for selfless action (III/9).

The above narrations clearly indicate that any duty, either from the personal or community point of view, should be performed with the spirit of sacrifice. This theme of *Nrru Yajnya* is the epicentre of the other *Yajnyas*. As regard to one's duty, he is expected to perform it being unattached with the motive of sacrifice.

Pitru Yajnya

Normally we follow the standards set up by our elders, ancestors and great man to whom we regard as our *Pitru*. The aim of *Pitru Yajnya* is to express our obligation to our ancestors those who have brought up us upto this existing standard, genetically and socially. The following verses clearly indicate that the society must honour to the elders and ancestors (like Janaka, the Sage King of Raamaayana) those who have reached perfection through their unattached action and have opened paths for the coming generations to follow up it.

It is through action (without attachment) alone that Janaka and other wiseman reached perfection. Having an eye to maintenance of the world order too you should take to action (III/20).

For whatever a great man does, that every thing other men also do; whatever standards he steps up, the generality of men follow the same (III/21).

It may so happen that some one's actions today may be an example for others in future; this is how the *Nrru Yajnya* and *Pitru Yajnya* are interrelated.

Rrushi Yajnya

Veda speaks of itself (Saraswati, 1973) as the universal and perennial source of knowledge. The word Veda has an etymological origin from the word "vid", which means to know, the knowledge. The divine knowledge of Veda is applicable to all people, all places, in all times and available above the discrimination of religion and sex. The wisdoms of Veda are ever fresh, ever appropriate and ever lasting above the limitations of time, place and action, beyond the range of doubts, disbelief and danger; it is irreversible, infallible and indestructible. Vedic knowledge is flawless, stainless and spotless (Talreja, 1982).

Geetaa says:

The prescribed action has its origin in the Vedas, and the Vedas proceed from the indestructible (God); hence the all pervading infinite is always present in sacrifice (III/15).

Vedas has a special claim as *Apurusheya*, means not created by human. Conjoining of such an adjective for Veda is ever confusing to a common man. In fact, the saints have realised the Vedic knowledge in their transcendental state of mind, which is achieved under deep meditation (*Samaadhi*), scribed their perception in the form of hymn (*Ssloka*) and attributed the knowledge to the source of divinity, instead of claiming the authorship for self. Since all actions culminate in knowledge, the theme links the *Nrru Yajnya* with the *Rrushi Yajnya*.

Deva Yajnya

In ancient India the sage scientists have realised the existence of ecological factors known as *Panchamahaabhoota* such as *Aakaasa* (space), *Vaayu* (Air), *Teja* (Energy), *Aapa* (Water) and *Kshiti* (Earth) which are indispensable to the biological world (Mohapatro, 2001). Modern

ecology explains the above factors as abiotic, represented in the form of climatic, edaphic, physiographic etc. These natural powers of the environment which exist in different forms are regarded as different gods in Hindu religion such as *Surya Devataa* (Sun), *Vaayu Devataa* (Air), *Agni Devataa* (energy), *Jaladevataa* (Water), *Indra* (God of rains), *Varuna* (god of ocean) etc. A house holder is expected to worship these natural powers as a token of obligation.

Geetaa Says (III/10-12)

At the beginning of creation, the creator created the mankind along with the spirit of sacrifice, said them “you shall prosper by this; may this yield the enjoyment you seek”.

Foster the Gods through sacrifice, and let the Gods be gracious to you. Each fostering other being selfless, you will attain the highest good.

Fostered by sacrifice, the Gods will surely bestow on you unasked, all the desired enjoyments”. He who enjoys the gifts bestowed by them, without giving them in return (obligation), is undoubtedly a thief.

The interaction between the humanity and the powers of the nature, each fostering the other, is a lesson to take care of the environmental factors (not to pollute them) to get the benefits in return. Of late the present scientific man has realised their own negative commitments on nature, responsible for environmental pollution and events like global warming, acid rain, green house effect, ozone depletion etc. etc. A coordination between the *Nrru Yajnya* and *Deva Yajnya* is highly essential in the present context as directed by Geetaa to save the environment.

Bhoota Yajnya

The nature performs *Bhoota Yajnya* in the form of rainy season for the proliferation of Biodiversity (Padhy, 2008c). The hydrological cycle which triggers the biogeochemical cycle and supplies nutrition to all concerned: plants, animals and microbes; is a product of the interaction of all the ecological factors.

All begins are evolved from food; production

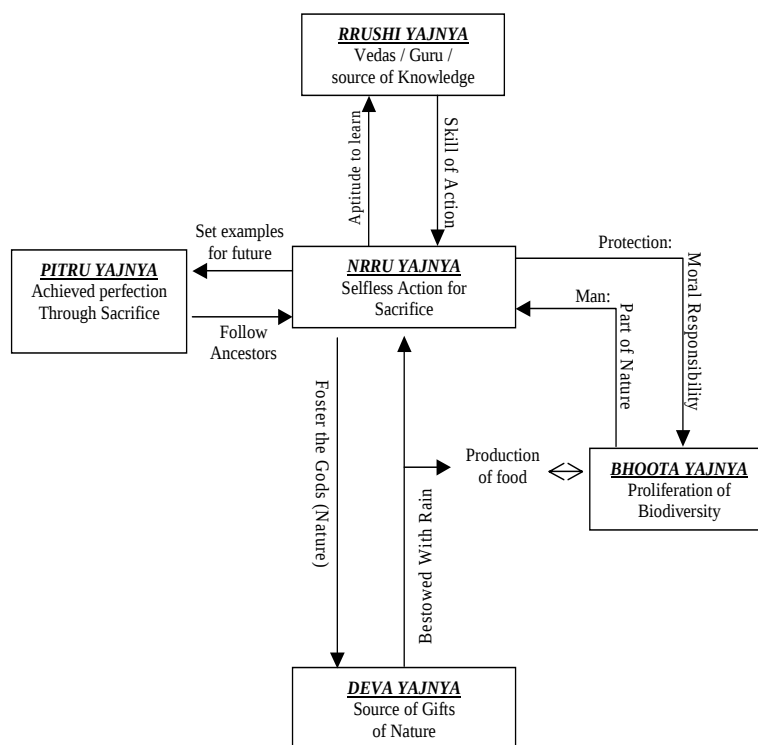


Fig. 1. The basic interactions within the *Pancha Yajnya* as depicted in Geetaa

of food is dependent on rain; rain ensues from sacrifice, and sacrifice is rooted in prescribed action (III/14).

The above narration is a link between the environmental factors (*Deva Yajnya*) and biological world (*Nrru* and *Bhoota Yajnya*) through the hydrological cycle. To commence the rains, the Sun scarifies energy; the water bodies donate the water through evaporation; plants drag the water from deep soil, enrich the environment with water vapour; 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 the nature's hydrological cycle completes its circle. The bio-geochemical cycle, an inner wheel of the hydrological cycle involves the sacrifice of the microbial world; of whom a common man is not aware. So the sacrifice for rain is a collective effort of the abiological and biological factors of the environment in which duty of man (*Nrru Yajnya*) is very much associated for agriculture and production of food. The integration of *Pancha Yajnya* as elaborated in Geetaa is depicted in figure 1.

DISCUSSION

There is hue and cry throughout the world for the protection of environment science the U.N. conference on human environment held at Stockholm in 1972 and the earth summit at Rio-de-Janera (Brazil) in 1992. The Rio submit was followed by a series of U.N. Conferences to settle up the working plan and project world over to save the depleting environment. These efforts no doubt has created eco-consciousness through out the globe. But the ancient *Pancha Yajnya* philosophy of Indians, blended with religious rituals, worshiping of icons and social functions are more scientific, pragmatic and thought provoking to make some one conscious of the environment in toto. The

retrieval of the environmental laws of Manu (Padhy et al., 2006) throws torch on the human society that to be eco-conscious is a basic principle and as if a birth right of some one, which is associated with the day to day life. If the scientific community is ready to accept religion as an great factor to protect the environment, the philosophy that originated in the Vedic age itself and later retold in the Western World (Goldsmith, 2000); the concept of *Pancha Yajnya* should be preached and practised with its true sense.

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