

Ethnobiological Analysis from Myth to Science: XII. *Pancha Yajnya* (Five Sacrifices) - A Welcome Episode of the Human Community for Rainy Season Exhibited through Festivals

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ABSTRACT The doctrine of *Pancha Yajnya* (Five sacrifices) with the basic theme of some one's socio-ecological responsibility towards his source of knowledge (*Rrushi Yajnya*), for parents and ancestors (*Pitru Yajnya*) for environmental factors as Gods (*Deva Yajnya*), towards the biodiversity (*Bhoota Yajnya*) and for fellow human beings (*Nrru Yajnya*); in course of time has turned to a community activity and celebration instead of an individual commitment. The whole scenario is systematically celebrated through festivals of the rainy season in India as a welcome episode to rains and expression of gratitude to the environment, exhibiting through festive functions.

INTRODUCTION

Manusmriti, the legendary compendium formulated during the immediate post Vedic period, regarded as the first ethical jurisprudence of human beings, is devoted to guide the society in right prospective says that, man should remain obliged to the five rich resources of the environment (Manu III/70; IV/21). The basic concept of all these obligations are conceptualised as *Panch Yajnya*, the aim of which is to express moral duty to the surrounding environment, that constantly extends its support to the mankind. Any one is obliged to his parents from whom he has received the genetic system and the beautiful human body (*Pitru Yajnya*); to his teachers who has enlightened his knowledge and opened the vista of self realisation (*Rrushi Yajnya*); to the biodiversity which is the source of food, cloth, shelter and medicine (*Bhoota Yajnya*); to the humanity with whom he has formed society and social bondage (*Nrru Yajnya*) and to the powers of nature called as *Devataa* (Gods), responsible for the very existence of life on this earth (*Deva Yajnya*).

The philosophy of *Pancha Yajnya* which originated in the Vedic age as a basic concept of ecological responsibility (Padhy, 2008a), performed insignia through daily rituals (like *Visswadeva Poojaa* and *Tarpana*) as an applied composite principle to make conscious to some one of his environment (Padhy, 2008b), further

got tagged with the *Tantra* philosophy and concentrated for the worship of five Gods (*Pancha Devataa*) such as Ganesh, Soorya, Vishnu, Ssiva and Durgaa as power symbols of nature (Padhy, 2008d). In course of time with the growth of the society the activity of *Pancha Yajnya* entered into social functions and turned into a community activity instead of personal responsibility. The author now traces out the operation of *Pancha Yajnya* at the community level through the social functions during the rainy season, and the total scenario is a welcome episode for the rains, that nurses the whole biodiversity throughout the year. The aim of this communication is to explore the socio-scientific merit of various social functions observed during rainy season, which has an underneath co-ordination with the *Pancha Yajnya* culture of Vedic age.

CHATURMAASYAA (RAINY SEASON IN INDIA)

As per Christian Calendar, the rainy season in India comes during the months July, August, September and October. This coincides with the months part of Aashaadha, Ssraavana, Bhaadraba, Aasswina and part of Kaartika months of Hindu calendar. The month counting as per Hindu system in north India is from one full moon day (*Poornimaa*) to next full moon day, while the South Indian consideration is reverse i.e. no-

moon day (*Amaabasyaa*) to no-moon day. In a solar basis, the sun moves apparently from one zodiac house to another on *Sankraanti* day after a gap of thirty days, considered as the astrological month, completes the whole zodiac belt in one year (360 days). The word *Sankraanti* is derived from a Sanskrit root *Sankramana*, means migration (of sun). However, all these three types of calculations (month) referred as above do not vary much in time and duration of occurrence from each other; may be few days earlier or later and ever referred as local observations, should be accepted without confusion.

The rainy season for four months as a single unit is referred to as *Chaturmaasyaa*. In a different calculation of the month other than as referred above the *Chaturmaasyaa* period starts from the *Ekaadasee* day (11th day of the bright or dark fortnight) of the bright fortnight of *Aashaadha* till the similar *Ekaadasee* of *Kaartika*. This period comprises a sum total of 120 days includes nine *Ekaadasee*, each comes with a gap of fifteen days. The importance of *Ekaadasee* needs to be highlighted from religious point of view, as they are 24 in number in a year and a day considered as the most auspicious day for the devotees of *Vaishnava* culture (worshippers of *Vishnu* - *Naaraayana*). A true *Vaishnava* is expected to observe a vow under fasting on this day. Scientifically, a fasting in fifteen days interval moderates the metabolic system and many such rituals with a scientific basis are associated with religion in Hindu culture. Interestingly, four *Ekaadasee* (s) in a year is considered as *Bada Ekaadasee* (i.e. very special ones), out of that three come during the *Chaturmaasyaa*; their importance is discussed later.

PANCHA YAJNYA

Bhoota Yajnya

Ecologically, the rainy season is the feeding season for the whole year. The cumulative action of the ecological factors of nature, through the active hydrological cycle, pours the rain water to the environment, triggers the earth's biogeochemical cycle and nurses the biodiversity (*Bhoota Yajnya*). The biodiversity which in turn responsible for the existence of human ecology, proliferates during this time. The water accumulated and food produced during these four months is consumed by the whole ecosystem

throughout the year. The total activity of the environment is such that, the nature performs the *Bhoota Yajnya* during this time and the human race efficiently joins its skill and hand to it; gets a major share for its food, existence and maintenance.

From a mythological point of view, *Bhagawaan* *Naaraayana*, who is considered as the *Paalaka* (the power of maintenance of nature) of the biodiversity along with his divine consort *Mahaalaxmi* (the goddess of food, wealth, nature and beauty) is responsible for the sustenance of life on this earth (universe).

"If, I cease to act, these worlds would perish; may, I should prove to be the cause of confusion and of the destruction of these people (Geeta III / 24)."

It is mythically expressed that *Naraayana* is ever on his *Ananta Ssayana* (endless sleep). As the epics narrate, all the times 'Thy' is transfixed in *Yoga Nidraa* (yogic slumber posture), the highest state of yoga (*Samaadhi*). Incidentally the first *Ekaadasee* of *Chaturmaasyaa* is named as *Hari Ssayana Ekaadasee* (*Hari* = *Naraayana*; *Ssayana* = sleeping - entering to *Samaadhi*) and the last (9th *Ekaadasee* is named as *Deva Utthaapana Ekaadasee* (The supreme God gets up). During *Chaturmaasyaa*, 'He' specially enters into *Yoga Samaadhi* to channelise his divine powers for the commencement of rain and simultaneous proliferation of biota. The mid *Ekaadasee* (5th) in between the above two is named as *Paarswa Paribarttana* (change of posture) which can be coordinated with the raining pattern of India; as the monsoon moves from South-West corner (Kerala state) to north direction in the beginning, gets obstructed by Himalayas and flows in opposite direction. These three *Ekaadasee* referred as above, are the special days during *Chaturmaasyaa*, which remind some one through the religious vows of his ecological responsibility during in the rainy season.

The whole scenario is such, that the supreme power (nature) concentrates for the proliferation and maintenance of the Human ecology during the rainy season and directs the mankind to work for their own sustenance by performing *Bhoota Yajnya* in the form of agriculture. Accordingly, the human community in India remains devoted to agriculture during this period insignia of performing *Bhoota Yajnya* and all the other *Yajnya*(s) are tagged with the later. Moreover, the five *Yajnya*(s) are interrelated with each other

from their internal philosophy to practical point of view (Padhy, 2008c) and performance of one *Yajnya* needs the active supplementation of other *Yajnya*(s); this is the reason why all the social functions in *Chaturmaasyaa* has a coordination with *Pancha Yajnya* (Table 1).

The other point of speciality of *Chaturmaasyaa* is that during this period personal oriented social functions such as marriage, *Upanayanaa* (sacred thread ceremony), *Gruha Pratishthaa* and *Gruha Pravesaa* (establishing and entry rituals of a newly constructed dwelling) etc are highly restricted. Even mutual discussion for a marriage match or negotiation is also not taken up almost a ban. The scientific basis behind such astronomical prohibition in that, people are busy with their cultivation work and as well road communications get distributed (as the situation in earlier days) during the rainy days; cut-off one region from another. This prohibition supports a common man to concentrate (*Yoga*) on agriculture during this period without being disturbed for any other purpose; more so a socio-ecological phenomenon. Mythically, Naaraayana, who is also known as *Yajnyesswara* (the prime to be worshiped in any sacrifice), remains busy for universal upliftment through his yoga, should not be invited for a personal cause that disturbs his greater concentration amenable for community activity. Similarly, the nomadic communities do not move during rainy season and the roaming saints observe *Chaturmaasyaa Brata* (the vow of rainy season), settle themselves at specific places.

In Puri (Orissa, India), the place (*Dhaama*) of the world famous Sri Jagannath Temple, the Lord is considered as the divine form of *Bhagawaana Naaraayana*. The most important function of the lord is *Ratha Yaatraa* (Car festival), which is celebrated in the month of Aashaadha during commencement of the rainy season every year, witnessed by more than ten lakh of people arrived from world over. The Lord, comes out of his temple, joins with the common people and becomes one with them irrespective of caste, creed and sex, accepts their prayer; as if the greatest interaction of humanity with the divine power is essential to celebrate the *Bhoota Yajnya*. By the by, the full moon day of Aassweena (comes after *Dassaharaa*) is named as *Kumara Poorneemaa* (a day devoted for youngsters) is the birth day of Goddess Laxmi (the power of wealth, beauty, nature, production, fostering), the

day she is specially worshiped. Being the consort of Naaraayana, she is the symbol of the Biodiversity, spread everywhere (Padhy et al., 2001). In fact the second part of cultivation period (October, November, December) is for the proper growth of the corn plants, seed production and harvesting which can be equated with the glory of mother Laxmi and she is worshiped and greeted accordingly before the commencement of the above agriculture events; a festival devoted for *Bhoota Yajnya*.

Rrushi Yajnya

Man is considered as human, because of his intellectual power; otherwise no way different from other animals; to acquire the power of knowledge the importance of teacher (in any form he may exist) can not be ignored. In Hindu cult the teacher (*Guru*) is equalised with the three supreme Gods of nature i.e. *Brahmaa*, *Vishnu* and *Siva* (*Maheswara*). Showing obligation for his teacher and the source of knowledge, is an essential duty of a man, that comes under the category (*Rrushi Yajnya*). Since in the ancient times the *Rrush*(s) devoted selflessly to gain the knowledge for the upliftment of all concerned, they are regarded as *Guru* of the society.

Maharshi Vyaasa; originally known as *Krushna Dwaipaayana* also *Badaraayana*, was a great saint of *Dwaapara Yuga*, 5000 years ago. He inscribed eighteen *Puraana*(s), *Mahaabhaarata* and the great *Bhagawata Mahaapuraana* in Sanskrit language. He is the authority who compiled all the Vedic hymns preserved and practised by different schools of thought and divided the Vedas into four parts *Rig*, *Saam*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*. The very Sanskrit word *Vyaasa* means the divider the name which was offered to him as a token of respect (nick name) for his Vedic work. He has also compiled the *Vedaanta Darssana* which narrates the cream of the knowledge of Veda i.e. inquiry into the nature of the ultimate principle (*Brahman*), is regarded as one of the six *Darsaan*s (basic philosophical system of India Viz: *Nyaaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimaamsaa* and *Vedaanta*). The knowledge of *Geeta*, a part of *Mahaabhaarata* epic, has assumed an important position of universal interest; is the greatest contribution of *Vyaasa* for the mankind. This great saint is called as the 'Jagat Guru' the teacher of the universe (world).

The *Poorneemaa* of Aashaadha month is the

Table 1: The calendar of Chaturmaasya depicts the events of community festival to offer Pancha Yajnya

Month (Maasa) →		Aashaadha		Sravaana		Bhaadraba		Aasswina		Kaartika	
Fortnight (Pakshya) →		Dark	Bright	Dark	Bright	Dark	Bright	Dark	Bright	Dark	Bright
Lunar day	↓										
1	Pratipada							Pitru Pakshya, Sradha is offered to Pitru for Fifteen days	Devi Pakshya, Goddess Durga is worshiped for 10 days		
2	Dwitiyaa										
3	Trutiyaa										
4	Chaturthi						Ganesh Puja, Common man's God is worshiped, Nrru Yajnya				
5	Panchami										
6	Sasthi										
7	Saptami										
8	Astami								Maha Astami, Special Puja for Mother Durga, Deva Yajnya		
9	Navami										
10	Dasami								Dasahara farewell to Mother Durga		
11	Ekaadasee		Hari Sayana Ekaadasee, Chaturmaasyaa Starts, Pancha Yajnya Begins				Paarswa Parivartan Ekaadasee				Deva Uthraapana Ekaadasee, Chaturmaasyaa Ends, Pancha Yajnya completes
12	Dwadasi										
13	Trayodasi										
14	Chaturdasi										
15	Purnima	X	Guru Purnima, Rrusi Yajnya (Teacher is worshiped)	X		X		X	Kumara Purnima, Laxmi Puja in North India, Bhoota Yajnya - Biodiversity worshiped	X	
16	Amaabasya		X		X		X	Mahalaya Amaabasyaa, Pitru Yajnya Ends, Worship to Manes in North India		Deepaabali Amaabasyaa, Laxmi Puja in South & West India, Bhoota Yajnya , Good bye to Pitru with illumination	X

X = Purnima / Amaabasyaa absent

birth day of Vyaasa Deva is named after him as *Guru Poorneema*; a day specially offered to express some one's obligation for the great teacher. An Indian is expected to worship his own Guru on this day as a token of his respect for the source of knowledge which has enlightened him. Probably, this philosophy has encouraged the first president of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan to declare his birth day (September 5th) as 'Teacher's Day'. The *Guru Poorneema* is the first social function during the rainy season, a celebration of the *Rrushi Yajnya* by all concerned.

Pitru Yajnya

The first half of the Aasswina month (coincides with September) is known as the *Pitru Pakshya*, the fortnight of the manes (*Pitru Purusha*). This dark fortnight ends with the no-moon day named as *Mahaalayaa Amaabasyaa*. The word *Mahaalayaa* can be defined as *Mahaa* + *aalayaa*, which means great habitat. The earth turns to a great habitat for these fifteen days; because the manes are invited from the upper space to the human habitat to be worshiped. During these fifteen days every family is expected to offer *Tarpan* (offering water) to the *Pitru* as a token of obligation (Padhy, 2008b). Also any day within the fortnight according to suitability of the family, is fixed to offer *Ssraaddha* (ceremonial offering of food) for the *Pitru*. This period is considered as the community *Pitru Yajnya* period above caste and creed. The *Pitru(s)* are expected to stay on the Earth in super face upto *Deepaavalee*, the day they are again worshiped with *Deepa Daana* (offering of light path) and are shown torch by every family to lighten their pathway to move upwards upto their manes habitat. This is how the *Pitru Yajnya* is celebrated through *Maahaalayaa* and *Deepavalee* on the basis of social functions.

Deva Yajnya

Following the *Maahaalayaa* the second part of Aassweena month, is known as *Devi Pakshya/ Maatru Pakshya* (fortnight of the mother). During this period the universal mother Durgaa is worshiped for 10 days upto *Dassaharaa* (10th day of the bright fortnight). Mother Durgaa (a synthetic deity) is an integration of all natural powers of Gods. According to the epic Chandi

Poorana (a book devoted to realise the glory of mother Durgaa), to smash the evil power of Mahisaasura all the Gods worshiped and devoted their weapons (powers) to the great mother (*Mahaamaayaa*). This is the reason why Durgaa represents the universal power, the undefined energy which ultimately defined to various forms to perform different functions. The worship of Durgaa is equalised with the *Deva Yajnya*. All details of this concept are discussed earlier (Pady, 2008d). Moreover, the Aassweena month is the end period of rainy season; the sky usually remains clear with a balanced weather. This period is called as *Sarat Rrutu* (a sub season of rain), the most pleasant time every where and people enjoy the worship of mother Durgaa as *Ssaaradeeya Poojaa*. The scenario is such that the human community in India, expresses its heart felt obligation to the Gods (the powers of nature) through mother Durgaa for the adequate supply of rain and successful cultivation during the past four months.

Nrru Yajnya

This *Yajnya* is mostly aimed for human interaction. The mutual understanding among the members of a society, their interaction with a positive attitude and community living comes under the *Nrru Yajnya*. In fact the *Nrru Yajnya* plays a central key role (Padhy, 2008c) and continuously commence along with other *Yajnya(s)*. Moreover, Agriculture (*Bhoota Yajnya*) is not a single man's activity, rather a community effort from every angle. Similarly, during the *Pitru Yajnya* period, *Mahaalayaa* the related families invite each other to their *Ssraaddha* celebration and also people feed to the elite (*Braahmana*) and poverty stricken poor on that day, as if the community celebrates mass *Nrru Yajnya* during that period. Following *Maahalayaa* the Durgaa Poojaa, Mahalaxmi Poojaa and Kaali Poojaa are celebrated throughout India can be interpreted as collective and collaborative community activity of celebration, a token of *Nrru Yajnya*.

On the other hand, Ganesh specially represents as the Lord of common man (*Gana* = Common + *esh* = Lord). This concept is elaborated earlier (Padhy, 2008d). Ganesh represents as the integrated symbolic personality of human community. The 4th lunar day of *Ssukla Pakshya* of *Bhaadrabaa* is known as *Ganesh*

Chaturthee, the day is specially celebrated as the birth day of the Lord throughout India. It is considered as the highest community function of the year in Maharastra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Worshipping to Lord Ganesh depicts a great community activity, as celebrated subjects of all educational profiles, urban or rural, is the symbol of *Nrru Yajnya* that falls during rainy season.

DISCUSSION

India is famous for the world's oldest school of thought i.e. Veda. The word Veda is originated from the Sanskrit root *Vid*, means knowledge. The *Smrutis* (*Manusmruti* prime among them) are post Vedic compilations which mostly carry the Vedic thoughts in the form of ethical laws. The *Pancha Yajnya*, concept reflected in *Manusmruti* is the highest ethical feelings of an individual / society towards the environment. May be the philosophy of sacrifice which used to remind a common man of his environment in the form of daily rituals in the ancient days, further entered to *Tantra* and turned on to worship of *Devataa(s)* and finally thousands of years after its origin, has taken the shape of community activity and social functions. It is rightly uttered that "*Sangha Shakti Kali Yuga*", which means community activity is the power in *Kali Yuga* - the present scientific age. Since during this period, selfish motifs of man would not allow him to progress to achieve any common goal with personal efforts: a

community approach to perform any *Yajnya* is essential. Even though the original Vedic thought is metamorphosed, it is still in touch with a common man's life through the social functions. The ecological philosophy of *Pancha Yajnya* is simple, basic, scientific, pragmatic and easily approachable, needs a re-entry into the environment curriculum from class room to society in the present context; if we want to motivate our future generation for ethical protection of the environment.

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