

RELEVANCE OF THE FIVE GREAT SACRIFICES IN THE MODERN WORLD : AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

'Yagna' (sacrifice) is a ritual that has been going on since the vedic period. It is explained extensively in various scriptures such as the Brahmana, the Kalpa Sutra, the Samhita etc. Earlier, Yajna was the sacrifices towards the God of Fire. Basically it is divided into three rites- Obligatory (Nitya), Occasional (Naimittik) and Optional (Kamya) rites. The Pancha Mahayajna (Five great sacrifices), which was done occasionally by the Brahmanas is called Naimittik, and the yagnas done according to the householder's wish is called Kamya. In this paper, the five great sacrifices of the Brahmanas will be discussed.

The five great sacrifices- Deva yajna, Bhoota yajna (baliharana), Pitri yajna, Manushya yajna and the Brhama Yajna is first mentioned in the 'Shatapatha Brahmana.' In deliberation of the five great sacrifices, we find liberal, scientific, and modern aspects to an extent. So, how they are relevant in present context is endeavored to discuss.

Key words: Five great sacrifices, Liberal, Modern Aspect, Relevance

1.00

Introduction: 'Yagna' is a ritual that has been going on since the vedic period. The yajna is all about sacrificing things through Homa (Oblation) for the God Of Fire. Earlier, it was quite surfeit to do yajnas. Later on it was celebrated in a symbolic way. In the chantings (mantras), brahmanas and Kalpa sutras, there is extensive explanation of various yagnas of the vedic period. In the "Yaskacharyakrita nighantoo" fifteen words- Yajna, Ben, Adhwar, Medh, Bidath, Narya, Sajhama, Hotra, Isti, Devatata, Mokh, Vishnut, Indra, Prajapati, and Dharma has been alluded as the synonyms of 'yajna.' On the contrary, in 'Amarkosha' only seven is found. Such as- **Yahnah: Sabutdhwaru Yagah: Saptatanturkhaha: Krutaha**. The word 'Yajna' is consisted of the 'Yaj' and the suffixed element 'nya'. Exuberancy of the yajna is remarkable in the vedic era.¹

It is remarkable, that the yajnas can be divided into three rites- Nitya, Naimittik and Kamyā. The five great sacrifices performed always, is called Nitya, the yajna which is done occasionally is Naimittik, and the yajna held according to the wish of householders is called kamyā. In point 2.00 of this paper, the five great sacrifices, done by the brahmanas is discussed.

1.01

Importance of the Paper: The vedic literature is almost not practiced now a days. As the vedic customs-rituals are also considered as a large part of the literature-culture, its conceptual discussion or its implement has become limited within some scholars and the religious leaders due to various reasons. It might be, due to the expensive methods of yajna , secularism of India, Rise of neo-vaishnavism, extension and liberal policy. However, there are certain positive and useful directions for our practical life in the sacrifices (Yajnas). Especially in the five great sacrifices. Moreover, the relevance of these sacrifices can not be denied in the egoist-hedonistic society also. (But, some of them can be regarded as irrelevant for sure). In such a context, the topic 'The five great sacrifices' is favored in this paper.

1.02

Scope of the thesis: The scope of vedic yajna(sacrifice) is quite extensive. In a short period of time and in a small seminar paper, it is not possible to discuss the whole. That is why, the relevance of the pancha mahayajna (five great sacrifices) is discussed in brief.

1.03

Methodology: To prepare this paper, Analytical method is followed and the books - "Samaveda samhita" edited and translated by Kiran Sharma, "Vedaor saurabh" by Thaneswar Sharma and some other magazines and criticisms are used.

1.04

Aim of the paper: The main objectives of the paper are-

- (a) To give a basic analysis of the five great sacrifices
- (b) To discuss about some of the positive directions of the five great sacrifices
- (c) To analyse how pancha mahayajna (five great sacrifices) is relevant as modern, scientific and liberal.

2.00

Introduction to pancha mahayajna and its relevance in the modern world: According to the rule, the brahmanas has to do five types of yajnas regularly in home. The yajnas, known as the pancha mahayajna (Five great sacrifices) are- Deva yajna, Bhoota yajna (Baliharana), Pitri yajna, Nriyajna (Manushya yajna) and Brahmana yajna.

"Adhyapanang Brahmajajnah pitriyajnastu Tarpanam I

Homo Daivo balirbhauto Nriyajnohatithi Pujanam II - (Manusamhita-3/70)

That means the teaching-learning of veda is brahmajajna, sacrifice is pitriyajna, homa is devayajna, offering food etc to animals is bhoota yajna and showing hospitality to the visitors is nriyajna.

(Sharma, Kiran / Translation of Manusamhita/ page-72)

These five yajnas are first mentioned in the Shatapatha Brahmana. In that book, the yajnas are defined as satra yajna. Because, it is compulsory for the Brahmana, kshatriya, and the baishyas to do this yajna everyday 2. A brief introduction about the pancha maha yajna are mentioned below-

(i) Deva Yajna: Basically the offering of 'sacrificing fuels' to fire is called Deva yajna. According to the rule, householders offers sacrificial things every morning and eve in fire. This should be offered to Agni (fire), Soma and Prajapati(Creator of the earth). However, there is rule of offering to other deities as well. According to household rule, rice or barley should be offered.

According to the vedic law, the offerings should be made in the evening by enunciating 'Agnaye swaha' first and ' Prajapatiye swaha' later and in the morning, ' Om suryaya swaha' should be said while offering things. That is 'Agnihotra homa' which is also known as Devayajna. Here, the householders should offer boiled or raw food and it has to be cleaned.

Relevance of the prevailing 'Devayajna' in the traditional society is still remarkable. Because food is there behind nutrition of our body and to cook, purity of our mind is necessary. Food is good when it is cooked with holy mind. This thing can be taught by Devayajna. Moreover, it can be recalled by the tradition of Devayajna that to have a holy mind, religious enclosures is necessary.

(ii) Bhootayajna or Baliharana yajna: Apart from fire, to offer foods or eatables to order living beings or ghosts is bhootayajna. The Ashvalayan describes bhootayajna as baliharana.

The householders distributes sacrifices by praising namaha to the special deity and the living beings in this yajna and here also mentioned about neat and cleanliness.

According to the customs, of this yajna the first sacrifice is for the earth, the second is for air, third is for the Visvedevas (All vedic Gods) and the fourth is for prajapati 3. And offering sacrifices to various deities is also mentioned here.

In the modern world, the relevance of bhootayajna is that, it shows sympathy to all the living organism of the earth. No beasts can live without food, likewise human beings. On the other hand, from some perspectives this yajna can be considered as irrelevant. In a situation of economic crisis and inflation, to maintain such expensive rituals is not an easy task for the common people. Moreover, relevance of this yajna is already laid down in the post-sankardeva Assam as the neo-vaishnavism advocates worshiping only one deity instead of many. That is why accepting the views of Sankardeva, the founder of modern Assam, to worship only one deity will be the best.

(iii) Pitriyajna: Paying respect to father is Pitriyajna, which hold its position right after the bhootayajna. The rest of the foods prepared for viswadeva yajna should be offered in the south by enunciating - 'Pitribhyahswadha.'

Relevance of this yajna is lying behind here, that it advises to respect our parents just like the ancestors or forefathers and the worshiping deity. If someone can not do it legally, then it shall be right to do symbolically. It is seen in today's society that the prevailing secessionism hurts the pure relationship of mother-father-son-daughter. In such context, to maintain that relationship we can figure out the relevance of Pitriyajna.

(iv) Nriyajna or Manushya yajna: Traditionally, to offer foods to the brahmanas is called Nriyajna. According to its rules, the brahmanas should have to be offered first, then beggars, guests, elder-youngers of their family and at last the husband and wife should have food.

It should be mentioned here, that offering foods only to the brahmanas can not be nriyajna or manushya yajna. If the brahmana is a teacher of the householders or holding an equivalent position then there is no grumble. Just from modern perspective the objective of this yajna should be humanity.

(v) Brahmajajna: According to the scholars, the term 'Brahmajajna' is used to mean the study of the vedas or autodidaction. Worshiping deities by reciting various mantras (chantings) is explained here in this yajna. On the basis of its methodology, the householders should read gayatri mantra by omkar sound. Moreover, the customs of reciting some parts of the Rig, Yajur, Sama, Kalpa, History, Purana etc is also there along with the advises to admire prithvi (earth), Brahmana, Agni (fire), Vishnu etc.

In comparison to other yajnas , Brahma yajna is quite complex or not easily understandable . Without going to religious purview it can be said that- the 'Om' sound impacts on our mind-brain in a positive way, and it is alright.

3.00

Conclusion: Lastly, after the discussion it can be said that to perform the five great sacrifices is not an easy task. It is too expensive to perform legally. Still in some places of India ,this ritual is prevailing. So the human society should accept the positivity of this pancha maha yajna.

Decision:

- (1) Idea of pancha mahayajna is cleared from the reasearch work
- (2) Purity of mind, humanity, scientific mentality etc are reflected in the pancha mahayajna.

Footnotes:

1. '*Bedar Saurav*'. P.118-119
2. '*Bedar Saurav*'. P.108
3. '*Bedar Saurav*'. P.109

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