

Chapter IV

Conclusion

Yajña plays very noteworthy role in Indian culture and tradition. We find the reference of Yajña everywhere in Sanskrit literature whether it is Vedic or post vedic. That is why Yajña has been selected as the topic of research with special reference to its role in the contemporary era. The present research work embodies description of Yajña in vedic era, post vedic era and its position in present time.

The first chapter gives general introduction of the Yajña, its importance and how the concept of Yajña is evolved and changed in due course. Agni is the centre point of all vedic sacrificial practices. Since the sacrificial fire was the centre of the Vedic ritual, Agni comes to be celebrated and praised as the divine counterpart of the earthly priesthood. Agni is mentioned in the beginning of the very first mantra of the R̥gveda as ‘purohita’. The Purohita is mentioned very frequently and the epithet is associated with Agni as being the most important in the sacrifice. Agni is described as instrumental in bringing the gods to the sacrifice. The number of hymns gives an indication of the importance of a divinity in the sacrificial system. Agni is the god most often referred as a dual divinity. In R̥gveda, Agni promises Indra that he would grant strength to him if the later offers him a portion of the sacrifice. Indra come to an agreement with him. He thought that Agni would become his friend and destroy the enemies. Agni is considered as being a ‘chaplain’. A purohita is not ordinary priest but the purohita is a kind of military priest. Agni used ‘spiritual’ weapon in the battle. Indra is a warrior god and the god Agni’s particular task is to slay the enemies of the community. Both are intimate friends. This fact is remarkable as we have examples exhibiting a common activity of both gods in the R̥gveda. Indra slew and Agni burned the Dasyus. In the R̥gveda the god of fire is said to be on the same chariot with Indra. Macdonell opines that it is doubtless from his lightning aspect that Agni is so often joined with Indra in his conflicts against the demons. It cannot

be refuted that both gods fight with dasyus of unfriendly powers. That's why Indra constitutes with him a dual deity in more hymns than with any other deity. Agni is moreover the only deity who receives the epithet Vrtrahan 'slayer of vrtra' which is the chief and specific characterization of Indra. The god of fire is in seven passages, conjointly with Indra, called 'Vrtra'.

The first chapter also incorporates the history of Fire and Fire Sacrifice. Fire was the first source of power discovered by man, which was useful in many ways, for example keeping ferocious beasts away from human habitations at night, providing light and warmth etc. It was also used in cooking. It is for sure that fire should have been held in great fear and respect from very early times. The fire in early man's life, builds up as a valuable symbol in his family life and religious rituals. Fire was worshipped both for light as well as heat giving properties.

Here the discussion on similes used for God Agni in the R̥gveda by sages is given. The worship of fire, due to its sacrificial importance, forms an essential theme of almost all the social and religious rites and ceremonies of the R̥gvedic society. It is a sign of the esteem of fire worship in the early Vedic period. In that period Agni has the dignity of a great god because he represented some dominant aspects of nature and was equally important for the purposes of rituals. Agni was the centre of domestic life and produced an intimate relationship with humans, this kind of intimacy is not easily found in the worship of other gods.

The worship of Agni and his various characteristics continued in the later Vedic age. In the Yajurveda the worshipper prayed to Agni to keep themselves away from sin. There were hymns sung in praise of Agni which represent the friendly and beneficent nature of fire that was given divine status to be adored in the Vedic literature. The

belief in these powers may take the form of god like Agni, which is implored by devotees to favour them with prosperity of wealth, cows, horses etc. by means of offering sacrifice along with the recitation of prayers. According to the Samaveda the gods who occupy important positions in *Arcikas* include god Agni, are addressed in 134 stanzas.

The Brahmanas are generally supposed to be the works mainly dealing with the cult of sacrifice, in which the god Agni played an important role. In the earliest reflections of the Brahmanas all the gods are said to be the different aspects of Agni. The later Vedic literature contains a number of references which give an idea of the image of god Agni. A critical study of the features of Vedic gods will reveal that the nature background is a marked feature of Vedic mythology but at the same time anthropomorphic concept of the gods has also been developed.

No doubt sacrifice occupies a very important position in the religious system of the Vedas and the Brahmanas. It is used by means of both propitiation and compels the deities for securing prosperity, for removing undesirable elements such as enemies, evil spirits, demons, as well as, securing the seat of heaven also. There is not much difference in the Ṛgvedic, Yajurvedic and Atharvavedic sacrifices. The extract of the sacrifice is enkindling the fire and offering oblations in it while recitating mantras for the achievement of prosperity, happiness and ultimate goal of heaven. After the Vedas, we come to the Brahmanas as the source of our information. Sacrifice is highly praised and highly recommended in the Brahmanas. The Aranyakas and the Upaniṣads are mainly philosophical and regard the rituals as inferior. But the Vedic sacrifices and rituals were still very popular in their times and they have found frequent mention, here and there, in them. Yajña or sacrifice is often described as a boat that carries the offerings to the heaven.

In the Vedic religious philosophy fire worship played an important role. In spite of the fact that fire represents his physical aspect which is seen by the eyes but the Vedic seers refer to the power behind this material form.

The worship of fire forms an important and essential part of almost all the social and religious rites and ceremonies of the Vedic society. It is a sign of the popularity of fire-worship in the Vedic period. The order of social life depends on right conduct and friendliness between men and the god.

The second chapter deals with the Philosophical and practical importance of Yajña and its Nature. There are numerous references to persons engaged in performing sacrifices. Agni is the support of the sacrifices, and drinks soma at the sacrifices and consumes oblations. The sun, the moon, the gods and the demons are said to please him with the oblations and obtain their desired things. Hindu writers divide the various kinds of sacrifices into two principal classes – nitya (regular) and naimittika (occasional or special) karmaṇi. First one follows the course of the year or the duties imposed upon man during life. The other supplementary offerings are occasioned by special wishes of the sacrifice. This chapter incorporates discussion on different sacrifices like Satrayāga, Aśvamedha, Rājasūya, Naramedha, etc.

The Vedic tradition of sacrifices mentions three fires, Gārhapatya, Āhavanīya and the Dakṣiṇa. The RV does not show acquaintance with these three names. The only doubtful name that it mentions is Gārhapatya; but it is very clear, that it does not indicate the Gārhapatya fire-altar. The word Gārhapatya in RV indicates the household duties of the householder, and nothing else. The rite of the establishing of the fires (agnyādhana) mentions the affinity among the three fires, all right; and there is also the legend of Ida, mentioned in the second chapter, showing which of the

three are to be established first, whence fire could be taken to other alters in a specific order.

After the rite of Agnyādhana and prior to the starting of the Agnihotra, there is an important rite of offerings that are called the Pavamāna-havimsi. The rite of the establishing of the fires comes to a close, technically, after the ‘full offering’ is cast into it not supposed to be yet fit for the sacrifices that follow, the Agnihotra, being the very first in the long chain. The name Pavamāna given to the whole lot of the three offerings is due to the fact that the first starts with Agni Pavamāna. The two more to follow are for Agni Pāvaka and Agni Śuci. Commenting on the three offerings Sāyana remarks that Pavamāna is pure in himself; Pāvaka is the one that purifies others, and Śuci is one that is shining.

This chapter further discusses the Yajna in religious texts, Shastric texts and Brahman texts; Fire worship in the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata; Vedic methods of worship in Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra; fire worship in the Puranic texts, concept of double alters and ultimately the need of for worship in present time.

The third chapter is entitled as Yajña: then and today. As the title suggests, this chapter presents a keen observation on the changed form of the fire worship. How methods of fire worship have been changed as per the need of the time, etc have been discussed here. It begins with the discussion on Caturmāsa. The Caturmāsa comprises four seasonal sacrifices namely Vaiśvadeva, Varuṇapraghāsa, Śākamedha and Sunaśiriya. These sacrifices are called parvaṇa (=section) which means, they together are divisions of a cycle that covers a whole year, each being performed at the interval of four months. Each of the parvaṇas starts, respectively on the Full-moon day of the month phālguna (or Caitra), Aṣāḍha and Kārtika (or

Margaśirṣa). There is no hard and fast rule about the performance of the Sunaśiriya, which is added later on, and which does not fit in the scheme of the ‘four-month’ period. The three parvaṇas correspond to the three seasons, namely Vasanta (spring), Varṣā (Rainy season) and Śarada (Autumn). Different epithets are bestowed upon Agni which are also listed in this chapter. Moreover, God Agni in relation to other gods, etc have been discussed with length.

Thus, in the present thesis I have tried my level best to provide all the information on the Yajna and Fire worship of different era. I have not confined my research work to traditional texts, but I have quoted, examined and incorporated thoughts of western scholars as well. Therefore, I think that methods and techniques used for the research work are unique and innovative. I have given pictures of various yajnas performed by me in different parts of the country and abroad as well. Thus the Yajna was not only popular and practiced in Vedic times but it is practiced even in today’s times. The sanctity remains the same. The methodology may differ but philosophy remains the same. The vibrations that mantras generate, the effect of each Satra or Yaga on the environment is definitely worth noting. The practice and performance of Yajna is what matters. The tradition is not long gone. It still exists via performers like us all over. The effects of each Yajna and its importance can be studied further as a practical aspect or field work. It is being told and practiced but the practicality needs to be checked and evaluated from time to time. This can be the further extension or future direction of the said work.