

## Ethnobiological Analysis from Myth to Science, XI: *Pancha Yajnya* (Five Sacrifices) - The Philosophy of *Tantra* and Religious Ecology of India

Sachidananda Padhy

*Department of Botany, Govt. Science College (Lead), Chatrapur 761 020, Orissa, India*

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**ABSTRACT** All the *Devataas* (environmental powers) of Hindu mythology are broadly classified into five groups, popularly known as *Pancha Devataa*; the single iconic representative of each group are *Ganesh*, *Soorya*, *Vishnu*, *Ssiva* and *Durgaa*. The worship of *Pancha Devataa* has an underneath relationship with the *Pancha Yajnya* (five sacrifices) concept of *Manusmriti*, to express one's obligation for the different environmental aspects. *Ganesh* is comparable with the community activity or *Nrru Yajnya*; obligation offered to Sun God (*Soorya*) is a token of respect and remembrance to forefathers: *Pitru Yajnya*; *Vishnu*, the fostering power of the biodiversity represents *Bhoota Yajnya*; *Ssiva* is comparable with the ancient Indian sages and seers, a source of knowledge, universal teacher equalized with *Rrushhi Yajnya* and *Durgaa*, an integration of all Godly powers represents the *Deva Yajnya*.

### INTRODUCTION

In the *Kali Yuga* (Present age) the philosophy of *Tantra* and mythology has entered into Hindu religion. The word *Tantra* is derived from the basic term 'tan' – to spread; and the agential suffix 'tra' – to save, gives the full meaning that “the knowledge which is spread to save (Bernard, 1989). *Tantra* represents manifestation. The super natural power, an universal concept, got manifested to perform different functions; an ecological spread over. In the Vedic age, nature was worshiped in the form of different powers, in which a conscious energetic personality was realized, later named as *Devataa*: the sun, moon, rain, air, water, earth etc. These set of ecological factors were recognized with a mythological personality, designed scientifically and holding different weapons generally in four arms (twice powerful than man), provided with an animal vehiculum. The weapons represent the *modus operandi* of the powers and the characteristics of the animal usually express or symbolize the nature of the corresponding specific aspect of the *Devataa*; otherwise the animal is nothing but the expression of the God's personality in its animal form (Vitasaxis, 1977). Probably this is how the philosophy of *Tantra* is originated and as many as the existence of thirty three crores of *Devataas* is depicted in *Pooranic* literatures of Hindu mythology.

It is difficult to understand how this number thirty three crores came to exist; but variegated *Devataas*, with different forms, names and

powers can be observed in Indian scenario. As, a person is a father for his children and head of the family, a husband to his wife, a lovely friend in his nearer circle and an officer in his office; he plays different roles from a common man to an important personality, with different ability in holding and exercising different powers, posture and position being the same one. Similarly, a *Devataa*, with different iconic representation, associated with different vehiculum and weapons, being considered from two universal factors of time and space; emerges out as a separate individual, power or entity. Probably, the thirty three crores is the ultimate sum total of all manifestations, powers, without any of them, man would remain incomplete, dissatisfied.

All the *Devataas* of Hindu mythology are broadly classified into five groups, popularly known as *Pancha Devataa*. The single iconic representative of each group are *Ganesh*, *Soorya*, *Vishnu*, *Ssiva* and *Durgaa* (Fig. 1). This classification systematically has a root in Vedic philosophy; the reason for which *Tantra* is known as the fifth Veda. As with the change of age (*Yuga*) the human structure, longevity, knowledge and potentiality of performance changes; similarly the religious realizations also change from time to time (*Manusmriti* I/81-83). In *Kretaa Yuga*, *Sruti* (the other name of Veda) was the source of knowledge, *Smriti* (gist of Vedas as ethical law books: *Manusmriti* and others) in *Treta Yuga*, *Poorana* in *Dvaapara Yuga* and *Tantra* in *Kali Yuga*. In course of time Vedic rituals are side tracked, got

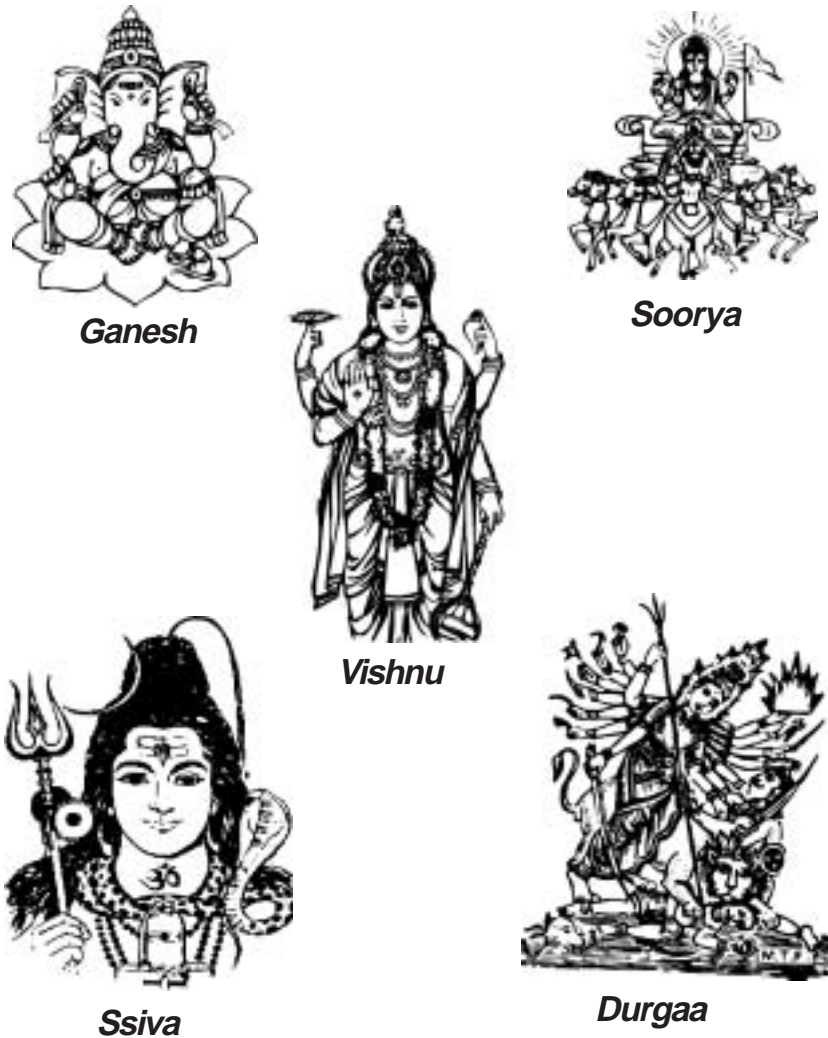


Fig. 1. Iconic representation of Pancha Devataa

replaced by worshiping of different God and Goddess according to *Tantra* Philosophy. As regarding *Pancha Yajnya*, some one's obligation for his teacher and knowledge (*Rrushi Yajnya*); to the ancestors (*Pitru Yajnya*); to the environmental powers (*Deva Yajnya*); to the biodiversity (*Bhoota Yajnya*) and for the fellow human beings (*Nrru Yajnya*) is considered as an ecological responsibility (Padhy, 2008a) as depicted in *Manusmriti*. The concept of the above *Pancha Yajnya*, which needs to be realised in a broader sense, slowly entered into the daily rituals like *Tarpana* (offering of water) and *Visswadeva*

*Poojaa* (offering of food) (Padhy, 2008b). Geeta further elaborates that, one should work with selfless motive for sacrifice (*Nrru Yanjya*) following foot prints of his ancestors (*Pitru Yajnya*) and learning the skill for the selfless work from Vedas (*Rrushi Yajnya*), thus fostering the nature (*Deva Yajnya*) would beget rains as return to proliferate the biodiversity (*Bhoota Yajnya*) (Padhy, 2006c). The aim of this communication is to explore the relationship between the *Pancha Yajnya* concept of Vedic age and *Tantra Pooja* of *Pancha Devataa* from ethno ecological point of view.

**PANCHAJANYA ≡ PANCHADEVATA****The Ganesh (Nrru Yajnya)**

The name *Ganesh* is derived from the etymological root 'Gana' which convey the idea of common followers; and 'esh' means Lord. So, He is the Lord of the *Ganas*, i.e. the Lord of the common men, represents the human population. Moreover, He is worshiped to help people to overcome all sorts of obstacles. He is considered as the guide, protector, master and worshiped as the messenger to carry the prayer of a common man to any God. This is the reason why *Ganesh* is worshiped first (*Agra Poojya*) before any other God being worshiped. The human beings claim self as (*Nara*) the descendents of the supreme God (named as *Nara – Manusmriti I/10*); represented as *Ganesh*, the eldest son of *Ssiva* and *Paarvati*, portrait with family members in religious pictures (icons). Very few Gods have this claim as son of the supreme power as *Ganesh* and a family structure as *Ssiva*. Interestingly, the God is provided with a mouse as His vehiculum; structurally being opposite in size of the master; a thought provoking association from *Tantra* point of view.

From philosophical point of view, *Ganesh* the elephant headed, huge structured man is considered to express the unity of men in microcosm; with the great being elephant as the macrocosm. From ethnobiological point of view, being elephant he passes through jungle growth, pulls out what ever stands in his way and uproots, tears to pieces the trees that bar his road; a practical symbol of overcoming obstacles. If confronted with other uninvadable barrier / difficulty, he drills hole like a mouse (His vehiculum) and slips through narrow space beneath closed doors or under thick walls. So *Ganesh* is an integrated symbolic personality (human community) with elephant like Physical ability and mouse like technical trick, always with a solution at hand for every problem. In every common ceremony *Ganesh* is worshiped first in order to accomplish the work smoothly. *Ganesh* is comparable with the community activity or the *Nrru Yajnya*.

In a Vedic classification all animals are divided into two groups: *Mukhadaana* and *Hastadaana*. The first group take hold by mouth include all animals other than man, monkey and elephant; the later three in second group take hold by *Hasta*

– Hand (the power of capturing). The word *Hasti* (elephant) has the origin (root) from 'Hasta', substituted by the tusk which performs works as the power of capturing as the hand of human or monkey. Probably due to this similarity, an elephant head and with a human body having four hands (signifies enhanced skill to exercise power) of the icon of Lord *Ganesh*, represents the human community in integrated form.

**The Soorya (Pitru Yajnya)**

The concept of *Pitru* is metaphysical; but implementing and worshiping the later as Sun God is truthful from religious and scientific point of view. We witness the existence of Sun God, more physical than mythological, as elaborated previously (Padhy, 2008c). The Solar System represents the *Pitru Loka* (Manes inhabitant). Solar energy enters to the trophic level being harvested by autotrophic system with an unidirectional flow, and can not be expected to be back. Similarly, the genome complex received from the ancestors by the present generation can not be back to them. Man has no gift to repay to Sun God, for the continuous and unasked source of energy ever since time immemorial. Only one has to offer a little water in daily ritual *Tarpan* as an obligation to Sun God and a token of respect and remembrance to forefathers (*Pitru Yajnya*).

The vehiculum of Sun God is a chariot with a single wheel (The structure of God Himself) pulled by seven horses, represent the seven colours (spectra) of the light. The red horizon of morning named as *Aruna*, is his Coach, Goddess *Ushaa* (morning is named so) and *Raatri* (name of night) are considered as His sister and wife respectively; this is how *Tantra* represents the spread of nature.

**The Vishnu (Bhoota Yajnya)**

The word *Vishnu* means *Visswabyaapee* (spread throughout the universe) points towards the life energy, the biodiversity right from the simplest unicellular to the multicellular gigantic forms of life. In Hindu philosophy *Vishnu* is regarded as the fosterer (*Paalana Kartaa*) of the biosphere. He has another name *Naaraayana*, the one who abode on waters (cosmic ocean), symbolizes that life is created in water and sustained in it (Mohapatra et al., 2001). His mount (*Vaahaana*) is *Garuda* (eagle), the bird that flies at high in the sky with a deep penetrating vision

on the earth; represents its access to every titbits of the nature, whatever the case may be. *Vishnu* sleeps on a coiled snake named *Ananta*, signifies the endless factor of the universe i.e. time; represents his self existence before the creation and continued to be even after dissolution. His consort (*Shakti*) is *Lakshmi* or *Shree*, the Goddess of beauty, good luck, wealth and food; scientifically the source of energy for the ecosystem to migrate in the food chain. She is the female power feeds (energize) the biodiversity, and supports the male power to foster, as the parents in a family. Metaphysically, *Vishnu* and *Lakshmi* together represent the biodiversity; their worship signifies the *Bhoota Yajnya*. It is prime Human responsibility, to take care of the biodiversity, spread as the nature, all through.

### The *Ssiva* (*Rrushi Yajnya*)

*Ssiva*, otherwise called as *Mahaadeva* (the great Lord) or *Rudra* (a Vedic age terminology) symbolizes the power of destruction of the cosmic ecology. He is worshiped as *Lingam*, the Phallus, being fixed on a *Yoni* (the point of creation – the female sex organ), which expresses the power of creation is ever associated with destruction. Mythology says, the Gods reside in the heaven, enjoy the unlimited resources with an immortal cosmic body. *Ssiva* is exceptional among the Gods, being *Mahaadeva* resides in the Himalayas, wears a crescent, the cobras around his neck, sits upon the skin of a tiger, his mated hair wound into a mop higher upon his head and lives being unattached to any material enjoyment and possession. He is the greatest of all Yogis, sacrificed to drink the fiery poison emerged out of the churning of cosmic ocean (Padhy et al., 2001). He is the only God with a family structure, wife *Paarvati* and children *Ganesh* and *Karteekeya*. More elaboration on *Ssiva* as the God of Himalayan ecology will be reflected in the forth coming communication.

*Ssiva* is comparable with the ancient Indian sages and seers for the qualities of his sacrifice, unattached simple life and immersed amidst the calmness of the highest state of *Yoga - Samadhi*. He is enriched with the *Samaadhi Prajnyaa* (Knowledge achieved out of the highest state of *Yoga*) and known as *Jagatguru* (the universal teacher). In many Indian *Pooraanas* knowledge is disseminated in the form of dialogue between *Ssiva* and *Paaravti*, significantly

establish the God as a teacher. *Ssiva* is the creator and master of grammar. It is said that, the great Indian sage *Panini*, who has formulated and developed the grammar and phonetics of Sanskrit language (depicted in his compilation *Astaadh-dhaayee*), could do it by following the sound vibration of *Ssiva*'s drum (*Damburu*) in Himalayas. *Ssiva* has a good name as *Aasutosh* (satisfied with little gift), a quality of true teacher; in Indian scenario a bow down (*Namaskaar*) - posture during regards by a *Sisshya* is the later's surrender before a Guru to achieve his blessings. Worshiping of *Ssiva* confers one's obligation for his teacher and source of knowledge, i.e. *Rrushi Yajnya*.

The animal vehiculum of *Ssiva* is *Nandi* (bull), famous for its calmness and procreation; but virulent when gets disturbed.

### The *Durgaa* (*Deva Jaynya*)

She is the only Goddess in the group of other four Gods, represents the *Shakti* (energy, power). Usually, in Hindu icons God and Goddess are represented with four arms (represents the super power), but *Durgaa* has either eight, ten or eighteen arms, mount either a tiger or a lion, signifies her capability of concurrence over and exercise of power. She holds various symbolic weapons as a super power to kill the demonic forces; but with one hand blesses her faithful worshippers, reassures them that they should not fear; she is just there for them.

At one time there was a demon named *Mahishaasura* with a group of powerful associates. He was enriched with boons from lord *Brahmaa* (the creator) achieved through his extraordinary austerity. The boon was regarding his death by a naked woman. *Mahishaasura* declared victory over the Gods and captured the *Swarga Loka* (Heaven), a symbolic fact that nature (all Gods) was disturbed unnaturally, ultimately called for a rescue. Mother *Paarvati*, the consort of *Ssiva*, sacrificed her veiled womanly adornment i.e. the shame for universal benefit appeared as an all powerful warrior to fight against the demon in response to the prayer of the Gods and all concerned. She received the weapons from all Gods, became most powerful and killed the demons as narrated in the epic *Chandi Pooraana*. *Durgaa* is an integration of all Godly powers, a synthetic deity; worshiping such super power is equalised with *Deva Yajnya*.

## DISCUSSION

The Indian subcontinent is a variegated field of religion. The Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, Sheikh and many other religious sects and belief live here peacefully, with mutual interaction in a common social structure. In every religion, more so among Hindus, there are enlighten elite persons designated as “Gurus” with novel approach to comprehend the system and are responsible for the formation of sub-sects with the unchanged basic theme. Hindu Philosophy is so broad and its principles are practised with multifarious ways; the division of *Pancha Devataa* and their worship is more systematic and practical oriented from *Pancha Yajnya* point of view. Amongst all religious diversity, there is ever an approach for unification of humanity as evident from ancient India till today. Hinduism believes on an independent status of a person’s religious practice, non-conversion and non-imposition of basic thoughts and have maintained its integrity ever since.

With regard to worship of *Pancha Devataa*, the sequence of worship to these Gods, should be commenced on *Ganesh* followed by *Soorya*, *Vishnu*, *Siva* and *Durgaa*. In a different interpretation, this sequence has a metaphysical relation with the sequential progress of a worshiper in the spiritual cult; the results of the worship of the former God effects on the concept of later God to realize. At first, on worship of *Ganesh* to overcome all the obstacles thereof and *Siddhi* (concurrence on the procedure) is achieved; followed by *Soorya*, symbolizes *Prakaash* (light) the resource of wisdom and self realization (Product of *Siddhi*); the worshiper realizes himself (*Aatma Bodha*) every where (*Vishnu*), feels one with all (*Visswa Vyaapee* - spreads like light) attains the highest stage of Yoga, i.e. *Samaadhi* like *Ssiva* and finally achieves all the powers of the universe (*Durgaa* – consort of *Ssiva*), becomes master.

Still in a higher concept, there are no difference between these five *Devataas*. They are one and the same representation of the supreme God (Geeta, IX/23) and the variation is according to the choice of the worshipers. As two persons are not alike on genetic basis or finger print point of view or astrological personality (Padhy et al., 2005); similarly their choice of *Devataa* and style of worship and philosophical views differ from

each other. According to one’s *Samskaara* he or she develops attraction for a *Devataa*. Coincidentally as per *Tantra* Philosophy, at the time of initiation, the Guru analyses the horoscope of the *Ssishya* to find out the astrological aptitude of the later for a *Devataa* and initiates him accordingly with the concerned *Devataa*’s *Mantra*. The worshipers are grouped as *Gaanapatya*, *Soorya*, *Vaishnava*, *Ssaiva* and *Ssaakta* respectively for their inclination for *Ganesh*, *Soorya*, *Vishnu*, *Ssiva* and *Durgaa*. The religious ecology of India is peculiar; \as the people of Bengal and Assam worship mother *Durgaa* / *Kaali*, while of Orissa are strongly *Vaishnava*, where the world famous Jagannath temple is situated. South Indian people are worshipers of *Ssiva*, and it is assumed that *Ssiva* worship is a Dravidian cult, originated in south. On the contrary, the residence of *Ssiva* is fixed at Kailash mountains and Himalaya is considered as His father-in-law (*Ssiva*’s consort *Paarvati*: daughter of *Parvata* – mountain). Two important *Ssiva* temples are at Kedaarnaath and Amarnaath, all in the Himalayan ranges, ironically the nature builds the ice *Lingam* at Kedaarnaath which was discovered way back to one and half century and worshiped by Kashmiri Muslim priests of nearby village. Worship of *Ganesh* is more prevalent in Maharashtra and Gujurat and partly in Tamilnadu; while Kerala is famous for worshipping *Kaartikeya* as *Murgan*, the later being the younger brother of the former. The whole Andhra Pradesh is dominated by Lord *Venkateswara* (*Vaishnava*), the richest God of the World. The north India is divided into two zones, the north-west, respects Sri Krishna as their God (Mathuraa, Brundaavan, Dwaarikaa) while north east at Ayodhdhyaa, where *Bhagawaan* Ramaachandra is respected the most. There is no specific zone for *Soorya* worship as He is physically present and worshiped everywhere with some sporadic temples. The world famous Sun temple is present at Konarka, Orissa, situated beside the Bay of Bengal. This spot is not only important from religious point of view, rather it has astronomical significance as there was gathering of scientists throughout the world during 1980; on the event of a total Solar eclipse to grab the sun, when the day turned completely dark for few minutes. In the epic *Mahaabhaarat* it is depicted that, one of the Son’s of *Bhagawaan* Krishna named Saamba suffered from leprosy, who was cured due to worshipping of Sun God at Konarka (known as the

'Arkakshetra'), coming from west coast to east. In remembrance of this event, the *Dassami Tithi* (10<sup>th</sup> Day) of *Pousa* month is observed as *Saamba Dassami* in Orissa, the day people worship Sun God, also observe vow to be cured from different skin diseases. Moreover, Orissa has a special religious status for having maximum number of temples of the country, about fifty percent as accounted and maintain a rich heritage of conservation of phytodiversity (Mohanty et al., 1997) in temple yards.

Among the five sects of the *Pancha Devataa*, there are again sub-sects. For example *Vishnu* is worshiped as *Jagannath*, *Krishna*, *Raama*, *Naaraayana*, *Vaamana*, *Baraaha*, *Nrusshimha* etc etc.; mother *Drugaa* is famous as *Lakshmi*, *Kaali*, *Saraswatee*, *Paarvati* and the newly emerged *Santoshi Maataa* and similarly, others have different icons accepted in different cross sections of the society. This variegation of worship is no doubt are within to the individual choice of the worshipers; but realized for unification through the thoughts of Vedaanta and Geetaa, that the self (*Aatmaa*) is one for all, the unity in diversity. There is oneness in many.

Throughout the year different days are fixed to offer special worships to each *Devataa* viz. *Ganesh* on *Bhaadraba* (Month), *Ssukla Paksha* (Bright fortnight) *Chaturthee* (4<sup>th</sup> lunar day); *Soorya* – Sundays of *Pousa* (month), *Makar Sankranti* and *Vishuba Sankraanti*; *Ssiva* – *Mahaassivaratri*: *Phaalguna* (month), *Krushna Paksha* (Dark fortnight), *Chaturdasi* (14<sup>th</sup> Lunar day) and *Drugaa* on *Mahaashtami*: *Aaswina* (month), *Ssukla Paksha*, *Ashtami Tithi* (8<sup>th</sup> lunar day). For *Vishnu*, there is no specific day as He has different incarnations, worshiped through out the year in varied form in different days. Above all, during the worship of any one of the five

*Devataa*, the other four are to be worshiped in order to accomplish the whole process. This is how irrespective of some one's liking for one *Devataa* others are equally respected and the religious harmony is maintained in India, ensures very much a national integrity amongst all diversities.

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