

Ethnobiological Analysis from Myth to Science, VIII: *Pancha Yajnya* (Five Sacrifices), the Basic Concept of One's Ecological Responsibility

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KEYWORDS Ethnobiology. *Manusmruti*. *Pancha Yajnya* – Five Sacrifices. Ecological Responsibility

ABSTRACT The concept of *Pancha Yajnya* (five sacrifices), reflected in *Manusmruti* such as *Rrushi Yajnya* (Sacrifices: for the source of Knowledge -Teacher), *Deva Yajnya* (to the Gods – Environmental powers), *Bhoota Yajnya* (living creatures), *Nrru Yajnya* (to men) and *Pitru Yajnya* (to manes); is aimed to raise eco-consciousness amongst the human environment. Man, should be committed to show obligation to the above environmental agents as an ethical and ecological responsibility, from whom he receives unasked gifts continuously; is the basic theme of *Pancha Yajnya*; discussed in this communication from ethnobiological point of view.

INTRODUCTION

The performance of *Yajnya* has a predominant idea on a ritual oriented activity with worshiping of different God and Goddess along with chanting of *Mantra* and *Havan* (fire worship). In a wider sense *Yajnya* means any systematic sacrifice accomplished for common interest (universal) with a selfless motive. If self benefit of any sort is involved, it is to achieve a higher divine order in material or spiritual progress. In the present society commonly the following *Yajnyas* are performed such as: *Ghruta Yajnya* (worshiping Gods with addition of clarified butter to fire), *Arnna Yajnya* (feeding the needy), *Naama Yajnya* (Chanting of the sweet name of God accomplished with music), *Japa Yajnya* (silently mental recitation of any *Mantra*, upto a specific number) and *Jnyaana Yajnya* (discourse on a specific philosophical subject). Out of the above, *Ghruta Yajnya* involves Vedic rituals; *Arnna Yajnya* has direct involvement of common man; *Naama Yajnya* meant to purify the vibration of the atmosphere; *Jnyaana Yajnya* is performed by elite for development of self consciousness and *Japa Yajnya* is based on a single person's devotion to enhance the concentration of mind. The latest one is praised in Geetaa (*Adhdhaaya X, Ssloka 25*), as the best of all the sacrifices.

In the past decade, efforts are made to analyse the various scientific depictions of the epic *Manusmruti* from scientific point of view (Dash, 1998; Mohapatra, 2003). The compendium is considered to be the first ethical law book of the world, scribed in the immediate post Vedic age.

Manusmruti is an open volume of human life, deals with aspects from birth to transmigration (Padhy *et al.*, 2001) and also widely deals with the various ethnoecological aspects with scientific merit that enlighten the present day environmentalists (Padhy, 2000). The Vedic age science in *Manusmruti* is at par with the modern age, may be depicted in fanciful and coded language with a different *modes operandi*; but the basic theme is not far from the truth.

The concept and performance of various *Yajnya* is much more elaborated in *Karma Kanda* (Ritual methodologies) of Veda, which are complicated, expensive and time consuming. But, in *Manusmruti* (Manu) a *Gruhastha* (Householder) is prescribed to perform five sacrifices (*Pancha Yajnya*) as a part of routine activity in daily life. These sacrifices are very much simplified and advised to carry out the processes without negligence. The aim of the present communication is to explore the scientific merit of these sacrifices from ecological point of view. The meaning of the *Sslokas* referred in the text are followed according to Buhler, (1886); may be with little modifications.

PANCHA YAJNYA

The total life period of a human being as per the Vedic age concept is divided into four parts i.e. *Brahmacharya* (studentship), *Gruhastha* (householder), *Baanaprastha* (hermit in the forest - retirement life) and *Yattibrata* (the ascetic). This division is known as *Barnnashrama*, each order is a systematic planed period to perform one's

specific duty as per schedule following the ethical laws; responsible for self discipline and social harmony. Amongst these four, the second order 'Householder' is considered as the most excellent order (Manu-III/78). Further specified that:

As all living creatures subsist by receiving support from air, even so (the members of) all orders subsist by receiving support from the householder (Manu-III/77).

The sages, the manes, the gods, the *Bhootas* (Biodiversity) and guests ask the householder (for offering and gifts); hence he who knows (the law), must give to them (what is due to each) (Manu-III/80).

The householder is advised to perform *Pancha Yajnya*, in order to comply the demands before him as referred above.

Let him never, if he is able (to perform them), neglect the sacrifices to the sages (*Rrushi Yajnya*), to the Gods (*Deva Yajnya*), to the *Bhootas* (living creatures – *Bhoota Yajnya*), to men (*Nrru-Yajnya*) and to the manes (*Pitru Yajnya*) (Manu: IV/21).

Teaching (and studying) is the sacrifice offered to *Brahman* (alternatively *Rrushi Yajnya*), the (offering of water and food called) *Tarpanna* the sacrifice to the manes, the burnt oblation the sacrifice offered to the gods, the *Bali* offering (food) that offered to the *Bhootas*, and the hospitable reception of guests the offering to men (Manu-III/70).

Let him worship, according to the rule, the sages by the private recitation of the Veda, the gods by burnt oblations, the manes by funeral offering (*Ssraaddha*), men by (gift of) food, and the *Bhootas* by the *Bali* offering (Manu-III/81).

The five sacrifices are also called in different term viz.

Ahuta - Muttering (*Japa*) - *Rrushi Yajnya*

Huta - Burnt oblation (*Homa*) - *Deva Yajnya*

Prahuta - (food) scattering on ground (*Bali*) - *Bhoota Yajnya*

Braahmya-huta - offered in the digestive fire (*Braahmana Bhoojana*) - *Nrru Yajnya*.

Praasita - offering of water (*Tarpanna*) - *Pitru Yajnya* (Manu-III/73,74)

A deep analysis of the performance of sacrifice as per the above, symbolises a house holder's offering of obligations for the surrounding social, biological and non-biological environment, from which he receives different unasked benefits. The philosophy of *Pancha Yajnya* is aimed to create eco-consciousness in a householder and his

family through performance of *Yajnya* rituals, that ultimately reflected in the society. In course of time, the word *Yajnya* is replaced by *Rruna* (debt - as locally uttered by people), to make conscious some one that he is indebted to these five sources of benefit; should perform his duty and obligations accordingly, to be free from these debts. In fact, the concept of the sacrifice is duty oriented, while the clearing of debt is of psychological, ethical and social bindings.

Rrushi Yajnya points towards some one's duty for the sages and seers, his Guru (teacher) from whom he has received knowledge and is enlightened. The position of Guru in Vedic culture is so high that he is equalised with the supreme Gods, considered and respected as parents (Manu: II/144). A couple beget a child through mutual participatory action and some one is born out of the womb of the female partner, a process similar to all animals; but the teacher by initiating the source of knowledge (*Gaayatree Mantra*: the cream of the Vedas) performs the second birth of a *Ssishya* (pupil) which is the real birth, exempts the later from the process of ageing and death (Manu: II/147,148). A *Ssishya* is considered as *Dwija* (twice born) after his *Upanayan* (Thread ceremony) during which he receives the *Gaayatree* initiation (Manu: II/169, 170).

He, who gives natural birth and he, who adorns the Vedic knowledge, the giver of the Veda is more venerable father; than that for the birth for the sake of the Veda ensures eternal rewards both in this life and after the death as well (Manu, II/146).

As long as some one dwells with his teacher during the studentship, he should respect his teacher with utmost care and sincerity, as is the right aptitude and attitude. Further, he should carry the knowledge (Vedas) respectfully and makes its practical implementation by commencement of self study when he enters in to the second stage of life as *Gruhastha* (householder). He should convey the knowledge to the right recipient, who has a real attitude to be enlightened. This is how the knowledge flows in the society. Some one's duty towards his Guru (knowledge), is accomplished perfectly when he teaches others; opens their eyes of wisdom and carry them forward out of the darkness of illiteracy. This should be the first and foremost social obligation and responsibility of an educated citizen, let it be Vedic age or modern.

Deva Yajnya

We are indebted to the environmental factors known as *Pancha Mahaabhoota* viz. 1) *Aakaassa* (space), 2) *Vaayu* (Air), 3) *Teja* (energy), 4) *Aapa* (Water) and *Kshiti* (earth) which are indispensable to the biological world. The environment is represented in the form of climatic, edaphic, physiographic and biotic factors in modern ecology, with a basic derivation from these *Pancha Mahaabhoota*. In ancient India (as well followed now) the *Mahaabhoota* factors were recognised as Gods (*Devataa* – Natural powers) such as *Vaayu Devataa*, *Surya Devataa*, *Jala Devataa*, *Baruna* (God of the oceanic wealth), *Indra* (God of precipitation), *Agni Devataa* (Fire God) and *Vasundharaa* (mother earth) etc. The Vedic Indians were realised the presence of a conscious energetic personality in these *Mahaabhoota* factors who worships and fosters them, as the mankind receives continuously different unasked gifts from these Gods. It should be the prime duty of a *Gruhastha* not to indulge in any activity that would spoil the natural order of these factors. Otherwise, it should be one's responsibility to keep the environment clean and look forward to avoid pollution.

In ancient India every day *Ghruta Yajnya* was performed in every house as a token of *Deva Yajnya* (worship to Gods). The smoke evolved and generated due to burning of clarified butter, different medicinal herbs and specific fuel wood, used to reach (through) the high sky, trigger the clouds and act as harbinger of the rains.

An oblation duly thrown into the fire, reaches the Sun; from Sun comes rain, from rain food, there from the living creatures (derive their subsistence) (Manu-III/76).

Experiments to this effect performed by modern scientists yield positive results and from practical point of view, performance of community activity such as *Ghruta Yajnya* and mass prayer under drought conditions to bring the rains is a common feature in India. Scientifically, a house holder should remain conscious of the different ecological factors around him, restrain himself to disturb the nature's order and perform his prime duty to keep the environment clean at local (micro-ecological) level, with a perception of global activity.

Bhoota Yajnya

Man is a social animal and is primarily

biological. He is amidst the biodiversity and has to maintain an ecological homoeostasis for his self sustenance.

The 1st verse Isaupanisad says

The whole universe together with its creatures belongs to the Lord (nature). No creature is superior to any other and the human being should not have absolute power over nature. Let no species encroach upon the rights and privileges of other species. However one can enjoy the bounties of nature by giving up the greed.

A *Gruhastha* should perform his duty towards the biodiversity around him. He should be occupied with minimum of the nature and extends love and take care of the domestic and pet animals who depend on him for food and shelter and maintains too the plants around him for aesthetic, medicinal and kitchen garden purpose. In India from religious point of view, feeding grass to cows and maintenance of *Gowshaallaa* (cowshed), offering of vegetables and fruits to elephants and *Chanaa* (*Cicer arietinum* L. or *Pisum sativum* L.) to monkeys in temples, feeding the crows and dogs in the morning and grains to doves; also dropping of sugar crystals near ant shelters and throwing fish food to ponds are comprised the different *Bhoota Yajnya* activity with a basic sympathetic attitude for conservation of animal biota. Worshiping of snakes on a specific day, and to bull and elephant when ever insight, signify a common Indian's affection for animals. Even few religious avenues are specifically devoted for conservation of rats (Rajastan), Hawak (*Pakshi Tirtha* -Tamilnadu), fish (Narmada river) and monkeys (Chitrakuta, MP/ UP and many other temples in India). The association of animals as *Baahana* (Vehiculum) with different gods; the prime four incarnations of *Bhagawaan Vishnu* viz. Fish, tortoise, wild boar and lion and worshiping of different deities with animal head such as *Ganesh*, *Hayagraba*, *Panchamukhi Hanumaan* etc; significantly put forth the importance of animal world in religious activity (Padhy *et al.*, 1999, Panigrahy *et al.*, 2002). The worship of plants and their religious utility needs no elaboration. The simple maintenance of a plant *Tulasi* (*Ocimum tenuiflorum* L.) in every Hindu family throws light enough in this regard.

In a wider sense, *Manusmruti* has prescribed non-violence to the subhuman beings and

vegetation as the basic theme for conservation of biodiversity with a multiple approach from ethical, social, sympathetic, administrative, dietic and religious point of view (Dash and Padhy, 1998). In the present scenario, NGOs organised by Smt. Menaka Gandhi (People for animals), PETA (People's Ethical Treatment for Animals) and many others as broadcasted through Discovery, National Geographic and Animal Planet channels perform this *Bhoota Yajnya* by protecting the rights of the animals at the global level. From the grass root level itself a citizen should join his hands for mass plantation programmes, be a vegetarian in food habit and be kind hearted and sympathetic to animals around him. It is ascertained that unwanted human activity leads to disturbance of ecological homeostasis and environmental pollution, which is a major threat to the biodiversity today. Keeping aside the positive progressive attitude, one should minimum restrain himself from any negative activity; would be the best step for *Bhoota Yajnya*.

Let him gently place on the ground (some food) for dogs, outcasts, *Chhandalas* (a specific lowest cast), those affiliated with diseases that are punishment of former sins, crows and insects (Manu: III/92)

Nrru Yajnya has anthropological significance. Man is a social animal. Society is his niche, his relationship with other human beings is the link of the social chain and the composite interaction of human beings within themselves and with the surrounding physical and biological environment constitutes the human ecology. Various depictions in *Manusmruti* pertain to human environment are presented earlier in a wider form being divided into six categories Viz. (1) Socio-Ecological Niche, (2) Academic Environment, (3) Family atmosphere, (4) Social interaction, (5) Salubrity: an environmental necessity and (6) Ethical protection for biota (Padhy *et al.*, 2001).

Family is the micro-environment, where human interaction is initiated that complements to the scope of the society. A *Gruhastha* is advised:

Let him not have quarrel and conflict with his father, his mother, with female relations, with brothers, with his sons and his wife, daughters, with even his servants, with his domestic priests, with his teacher, with his maternal uncle, with guests and the dependent infants or aged persons or sick man, with learned elite, with his paternal

and maternal relations and with sweet relatives (i.e. relations connected by marriage) (Manu: IV/179, 180).

One's perfect inter-relationship with the family members, etiquette to guests and respect for elders in the society, are the prime activities of *Nrru Yajnya*.

Having performed this *Bali* offering (as per Manu: III/92), he shall first feed his guest and, according to the rule, give alms to an ascetic (and) to a student (Manu: III/94).

But let him offer, in accordance with the rule, to a guest who has come (of his own accord) a seat and water, as well as food, garnished (with seasoning), according to his ability (Manu: III/99).

Grass (mat), room (for resting), water, and fourthly a kind word; these (things) never fail in the houses of good men (for offering to the guest) (Manu: III/101).

Conservation of one's relationship with the members of the community to maintain social i.e. societal harmony is a must; also abundance of relationship with specific persons who are lack of social integrity is equally essential. In a wider sense, material sacrifice for others, charity and nobility with any human being have greater social implication from the point of sustainable ecology. Moreover, one should extend his services for the needy, guest, a poor, a diseased or a victim of natural calamity. The basic theme of *Nrru Yajnya* strictly concerns to sacrifice for others and obligation for society and mankind.

Pitru Yajnya

One should salute his own DNA, which codifies and control his physical, physiological, psychological and social status in micro form; gets expressed in macro-form in the phenotype. One should not forget his forefathers who conserved their self (own) genome with out being admixed to produce *Varnassankara* (Dash and Padhy, 1998a); transmitted to the present generation and expected to be transmitted to future generation under every ethical protection. It is important that, one should take care of his elderly parents and as well nourish his offspring for the sake of maintenance of the DNA, in addition to ethical and social responsibilities. Remembering the obituary elite personalities like scientists, artists, leaders, poets and writers, social workers and sacrificers by observing their birth and death anniversaries, as well rendering

service to the old age homes ensures respect to elderly persons who are the designated communities amenable for *Pitru Yajnya*.

Father is hundred times venerable than the teacher, but the mother is thousand times more than father (Manu: II/145).

In a wider sense, the philosophy of *Pancha Yajnya* can be analysed from modern human ecological point of view (Fig. 1), that focuses and emphasizes the environment in toto.

DISCUSSION

Every individual in the biosphere has its own niche: its identity, working principle and ecological position. Each one performs its own job, a major part of which is above the self motive. The plant systems as producers carryout photosynthesis, harvests the solar energy, prepares food for self, stores a substantial share for others. Food stored, enters in the form of energy to the ecosystem by the process of eating and being eaten as food

chain. Members in each trophic level sacrifice for this process. Plants exchange oxygen with carbon dioxide of the atmosphere, diminish the pollution and sustain the animal kingdom. They transpire water sucking from deep soil, restore it in the hydrological cycle; as well stabilize the edaphic system with their network of roots. The aesthetic, medicinal and multifarious economical value of plants need not be elaborated or emphasized further. From rational view point, are they not performing *Yajnya* ?

We can choose another example from the detritus food chain of the ecosystem the decomposers, quite opposite to producers the bacteria and other micro-organisms, of whom we had no record before the invention of microscope. They are the scavengers of the nature, responsible for ensuring the bio-geo chemical cycle, work silently, gain little out of their performance compared to their contribution. Unless they perform the sacrifice, life would have been impossible on earth. Every individual, from virus

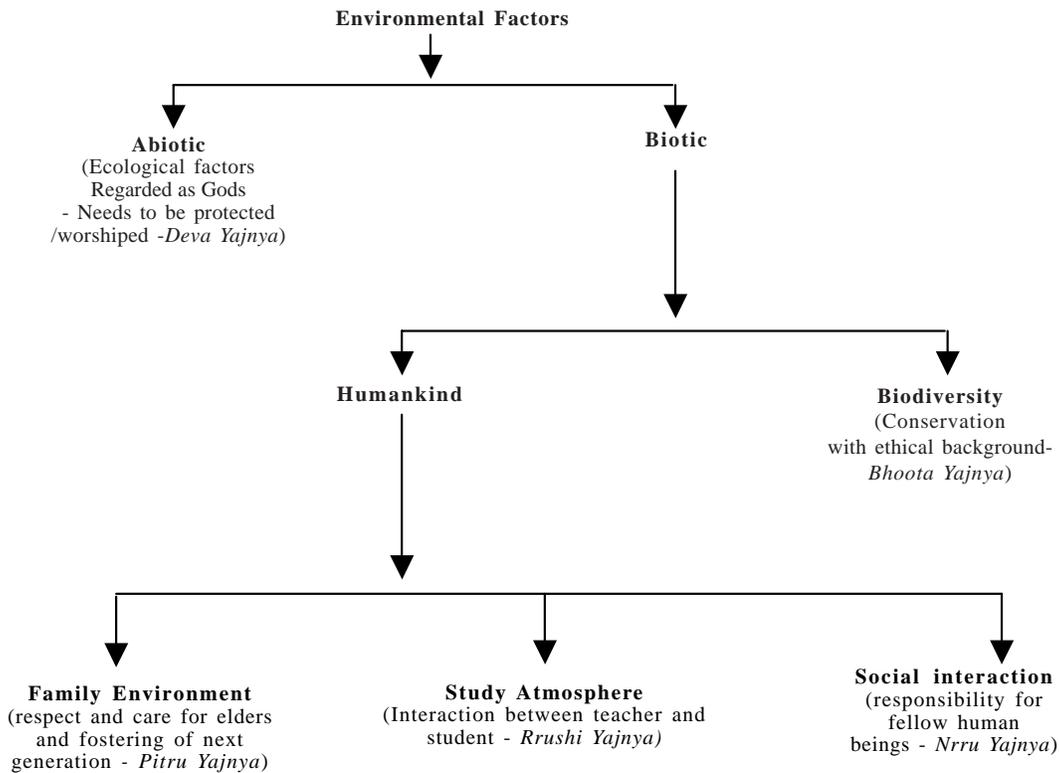


Fig.1. Relation between the philosophy of *Pancha Yajnya* and modern human ecological principles.

to whale, are potentized by the nature to accomplish their duty being interconnected and interdependent with a basic theme of sacrifice; but the integrity of human beings is questionable in this regard.

Man is so called intelligent, provided with mind to reason the best and the worst; on the contrary animals and plants express through their behavioural character. Comparatively man should be more sacrificial, rational and be the guardian of the nature. In Hindu philosophy the supreme reality is named as 'Nara' (Mohapatro et al., 2001); and the human beings have adopted that designation, with a perception that they represent God. It should be human responsibility to be with the nature; but unfortunately man's attitude of selfishness and exploitation is against the

nature's principle, that drags the whole ecosystem towards a doom, an obscurity (Fig. 2). Another important aspect needs to be focused here, that the members of the biodiversity consume only the basic needs from the environment, a *Yajnya* on sustainable ecology; the concept on which man only talks and writes in volumes, without any practical i.e. pragmatic approach. Moreover, the community activity of present day human beings, is more social, political and pseudo-religious only which needs to be renovated. The whole concept of *Pancha Yajnya* is to vibrate the theme of eco-consciousness in every human mind. The various rituals expected to be performed everyday in every elite family, are to co-ordinate the *Pancha Yajnya* concept and are reflected in the next scientific episode (Padhy, 2006).

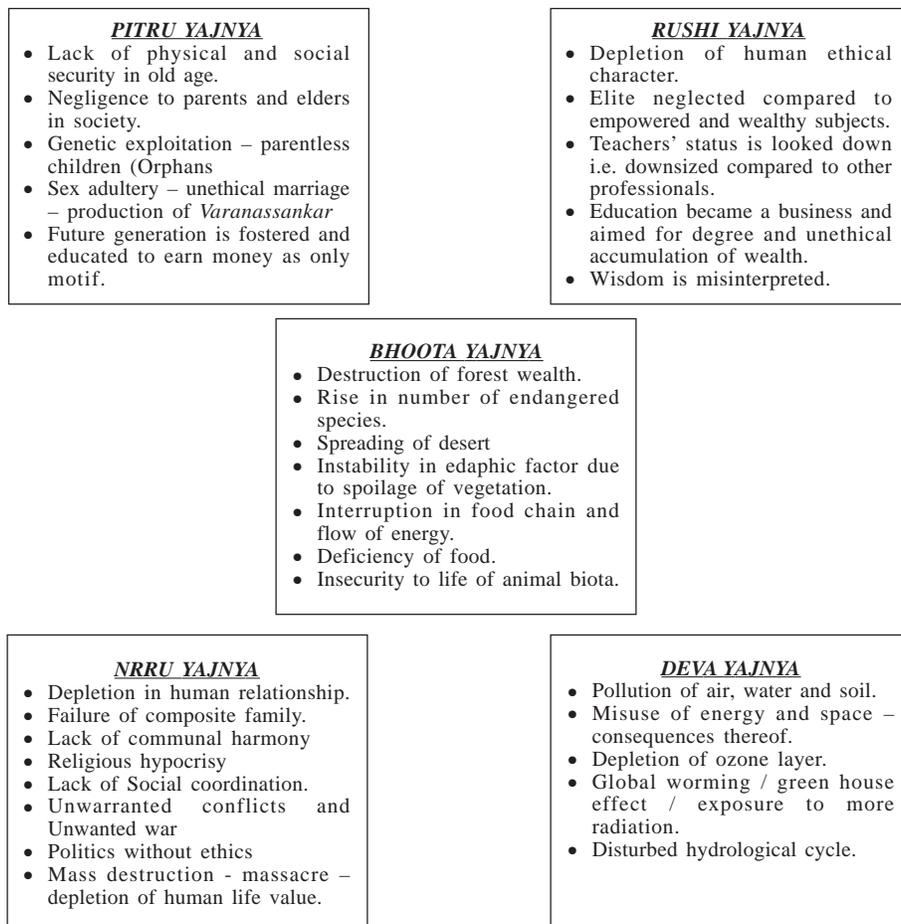


Fig. 2. Expected negative impacts in human environment caused due to lack of attitude for *Pancha Yajnya*.

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