

AŚVAMEDHA YĀGA

A Vedic Process For Purifying The Environment

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The sun is described as *Aśva* in the Vedas. Seven rays of spectrum are known as seven horses of the sun.

Rgveda (1.163.2) compares sun with *aśva* (horse). *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.9.23.2) describes *aśva* as *āditya*. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (6.35) more emphatically mentions radiant sun as white *aśva* - *atha yo'sau (suryaḥ) tapatī eṣo'svaḥ śveto rūpaṁ kṛtvā'svābhīdhānyapihitenātmanā praticakrāma*. *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (Second part 3.19) also calls sun as *aśva* - *sauryyo vā aśvaḥ* [Sun is verily *aśva*].

AŚVA: THE SUN

The *Aśva* in the Vedas is described as one among the 4 *grāmya paśus*, energies responsible for the creation. *Aśva* here is nothing but the sun which is the biggest source of energy in our universe. *Rgveda* (1.163.2) compares sun with *aśva* (horse). *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.9.23.2) describes *aśva* as *āditya*. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (6.35) more emphatically mentions radiant sun as white *aśva* - *atha yo'sau (suryaḥ) tapatī eṣo'svaḥ śveto rūpaṁ kṛtvā'svābhīdhānyapihitenātmanā praticakrāma*. *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (Second part 3.19) also calls sun as *aśva* - *sauryyo vā aśvaḥ* [Sun is verily *aśva*]. In Vedic and Paurāṇika allegories, the sun has been described as a chariot yoked with seven horses. These seven horses of sun are nothing but the seven- vibgyor- rays of the sun.

In *Yajurveda*, (23.53), following query has been raised.

kā svid āsīt pūrva-cittiḥ. kiṁ svid āsīd bṛhad vayaḥ.

kā svid āsīt pilippilā. kā svid āsīt piśāṅgilā.

[Meaning] What is the first storehouse (of energy)? What is the biggest source of energy in the observer space? What object is pilippilā (protector) and what object is piśāṅgila (devourer)?

The answer given in the next *mantra* (*Yajurveda*, 23.54) is as under:

dyaus āsīt pūrvacittir aśva āsīd bṛhad vayaḥ.

avirāsīt pilippilā, rātrir āsīt piśāṅgilā.

[Meaning] Celestial space is first altar/ *vedī* (store house of energy). *Aśva* (sun) is the biggest source of energy in our solar system system. *Avi* (intermediate space or magnetosphere) is the protector and *ajā* (unborn energy in *tamas* or black holes) is the devourer of everything.

AŚVAMEDHA: PURIFICATION BY SUN

The word *Aśvamedha* is formed of two words, *Aśva*+*medha*. The meaning of *aśva* has already been elaborated as sun. *Medha* is derived from root *medhṛ* 'to achieve' or 'to kill'. The process of *medha* involves the gain of energy and destruction of pathogens. *Aśvamedha*

is a process to harness solar energy for the sustenance of life on the earth and purifying the atmosphere of pathogens or harmful elements. The *R̥gveda* (2.167.1), speaks about harnessing the energy from the sun for useful technical applications. It also highlights earth receiving energy from the sun as:

yamena dattaṁ trita enam āyunag indraṁ prathamō adhyatiṣṭhat
gandharvo asya raśanām agrbhṇāt sūrād aśvaṁ vasavo nirataṣṭa.

[meaning] (*vasavaḥ*) The scholars (*nirataṣṭa*) harness (*aśvaṁ*) energy from (*sūrād*) sun (*yama*) in a controlled manner (*ayunak*) and utilize for various technological purposes. The energy was first transformed into *Indra* (electricity) for its applied use. *Gandharva* (magnetosphere of the earth) (*agrbhṇāt*) captured/obstructed the (*raśanām*) ultraviolet radiation from (*sūrād*) the sun.

Śatapatha Brahmaṇa (9.4.2.18) says that *Aśvamedha* is the sun - *asāvā'ditya'svamedhaḥ*. At another place *Śatapatha Brahmaṇa* (10.6.5.8) says that *Aśvamedha* is performed by the radiation heating from the sun- *eṣa vā aśvamedho ya eṣa (sūryaḥ) tapati*. *Śatapatha Brahmaṇa* (11.2.5.4) also says that *Aśvamedha* is to be performed year after year.

Following rituals are involved in performance of *Aśvamedha yāga*.

Year long ritual

Aśvamedha yāga is performed for a duration of one year, which symbolizes Earth's revolution around the sun.

Emperor (Cakravrti Samrāt)

Aśvamedha yāga can be performed only by an Emperor (Cakravrti Samrāt). Here Cakravrti Samrāt is symbolic of the sun, because sun alone is the emperor of the Solar system.

Requirement of Horse

Such a horse is required for the ritual whose forepart is black and back part is white which has a cart shaped mark on its forehead. The horse of *Aśvamedha* with above features is symbolic of a solar day and night since out of 24 hours of a solar day, first 12 hours are covered by night and second 12 hours are covered by day. The night is represented by dark part of the horse and day by white part of horse. The cart sign on the forehead of the horse of *Aśvamedha* represents the twilight hours when the rays of rising sun in the eastern horizon gives an impression of a cart.

Rein of Horse

Aśvamedha horse is supposed to have a rein measuring 12 to 13 *aratnis* (units). This measurement 12 to 13 *aratnis* symbolizes 12 months or 13 months (in the case of an intercalary month) of a year. Clarified butter is applied to the rein of the horse, which symbolizes the luminosity of the sun.

Four queens of Emperor

The *Aśvamedha yāga* is performed by a consecrated king, who is accompanied by four queens. Here four queens of the king are symbolic of four directions. Mahiṣī (queen

dowager) symbolises Eastern direction. Sun rises in this direction. That is why it is figuratively said in *Śatapatha Brahmana* (13.5.2.2), that the phallus (creative organs) of horse is placed in the lap of Mahiṣī queen- *nirāyatyāśvasya śiśnaṁ mahiṣyupasthe nidhatte vṛṣā vājī retodhā reto dadhātvi*. Queen Vallabhā or Vāvātā (favourite) is symbolic of western direction. As the sun sets in the west, so it is allegorically mentioned that the sun takes rest or sleeps in the western direction. Due to this reason, the host of *Aśvamedha yāga* is advised to take a nap resting his head in the laps of Vallbhā or Vāvātā queen. Similarly, queens named Avallbhā or Parivṛktā (unfavourite) and Dūtapatrī or Pālāgalī (daughter of envoy) represent north and south directions respectively because these directions can have their contact with the sun only during *Uttarāyana* (winter solstice) and *Dakṣiṇāyana* (summer solstice).

Horse's year long wandering

Year long wandering of the horse is symbolic of the earth's period of revolution around the sun.

Body guards of the horse

Sun rays are the representative of bodyguards of the horse. *Ṛgveda* (6.47.18) mentions tens of hundreds of rays of the sun -*yuktā haryaś śatādaśa*.

Fastening of horse with ropes

In *Aśvamedha*, the horse is fastened with ropes from all sides. This is symbolic of the sun being surrounded by rays. Some other animals are also tied to the rope surrounding the horse which symbolises the planets attracted to the sun due to gravitational pull.

Thus it is proved that *Aśvamedha* is nothing else but a process to harness solar energy for the sustenance of life on the earth. The *Ṛgveda* (2.167.1), speaks about harnessing the energy from the sun for useful technical applications. It also highlights earth receiving energy from the sun.

*yamena dattaṁ trita enam āyunag indraṁ prathamō adhyatiṣṭhat
gandharvo asya raśanām agrbhñāt sūrād aśvaṁ vasavo nirataṣṭa.*

[Meaning] The scholars (*vasavaḥ*) harness energy from sun in a controlled manner (*yama*) and utilize (*ayunak*) for various technological purposes. The energy was first transformed into *Indra* (electricity) for its applied use. *Gandharva* (magnetosphere of the earth) restrained the ultraviolet reins (radiation) from the sun.

The RV. (3.2.3) talks about the multiple technologies developed from solar energy for long-term benefits, as

*kratvā dakṣasya taruṣo vidharmaṇi devāso agniṁ janayanta cittibhiḥ
rurucānaṁ bhānunā jyotiṣā mahāmatyaṁ na vājam sanīṣyannupa bruve*

[Meaning] The scholars (endowed) with intelligence, harness solar energy powerful like a steed for multiple technological uses in order to get efficiency in accomplishing their tasks.

The *mantra* clearly points out to the development of affordable, inexhaustible and clean solar energy technologies which will have huge long-term benefits. It will increase the countries' energy security through reliance on an indigenous, inexhaustible and mostly

import-independent resource, enhance sustainability, reduce pollution, lower the cost of mitigating climate change.

As per modern estimates, the total solar energy absorbed by Earth's atmosphere, oceans and land masses is approximately 3,850,000 exajoules (EJ) per year. In 2002, this was more energy in one hour than the world used in one year. Photosynthesis captures approximately 3,000 EJ per year in biomass. The amount of solar energy reaching the surface of the planet is so vast that in one year it is about twice as much as will ever be obtained from all of the Earth's non-renewable resources of coal, oil, natural gas and mined uranium combined. The scripture says- "*Sūrya ātmā jagatas thuśaś ca*" [The Sun is the soul of this world, animate and inanimate].

AŚVAMEDHA YĀGA

(VEDIC PROCESS OF PURIFYING THE ENVIRONMENT)

Having explained the allegorical meaning of *Aśva* and the *Aśvamedha*, now it is not difficult to understand the meaning of *Aśvamedha Yāga*. *Aśvamedha Yāga* means performing yajña daily in the presence of sun, i.e. after sun-rise and before sun-set. There is no provision to conduct yajña during night. Here one may ask a question as to why the yajña is performed in the presence of sun technically called 'Aśva'.

Agni, the terrestrial fire, is the only agent which is capable of sending properly the particular oblations (*āhutis*) to their respective deities. This is why, Manu (3.67), the first lawgiver of humankind, says at one place:

agnāv prastāhutiḥ samyag ādityamupatiṣṭhati

That is the oblation (*āhuti*) released to the fire goes properly to the sun.

This when the oblations of cow ghee and other herbs is offered in the fire in the presence of sun, sun carries their essence to the whole atmosphere.

According to the Rigveda, the herbs are the *amba*, mother of mankind. The mantra goes like this:

'kraoksvEc /lekfu l gl ɹɹ oks #gA v/kk 'krɔɹoks ; wfeeaes vxnadɪr~

Meaning: O *Amba* (herb, the mother of mankind), hundreds are your locations, let you grow in thousandfold; do you who fulfil a hundred functions, make these people and me free from disease.

For the sake of purification of the environment, three types of herbs (*ambas*) are used in the Yajña. They are known as '*amba*' (herbs which provide fragrance), '*ambika*' (herbs providing nourishment) and '*ambalika*' (healing herbs). The use of these three types of herbs in Agnihotra leads to the purification of the environment, resulting in prolongation of age. Mahamritunjaya Mantras speaks about the agnihotra with these three types of herbs to get the relief from an early death. The mantra goes like this

«; Ecda; t legs l ɹfUkai f'Vo/lɹeA

Meaning: We perform agnihotra with three types of herbs-amba, ambika, ambalika which produce fragrant environment having a healing and nourishing effect on our bodies.

Yajurveda (8.62) says that due to sun Yajña has its influence in all directions:

यस्य दोहो विततः पुरुत्रा

Atharvaveda (6.106.3) says that Yajña acts as a healing herb.

यस्य दोहो विततः पुरुत्रा

According to the Rigveda (10.80.2), Agnihotra removes all polluting substances and viruses from the environment.

यस्य दोहो विततः पुरुत्रा

Samaveda (1.63) gives express directions to human beings to offer purifying agents/herbs in the fire of Agnihotra to purify the environment.

आ जुहोता हविषा मजर्यध्वम्

Yajurveda (3.2) talks about offering the oblation of purified ghee in the burning fire of Agnihotra.

सुसामिद्वाय शोचिषे घृतं तीव्रं जुहोतन

According to the Samaveda (1.82), every human being must perform Agnihotra individually.

यस्य दोहो विततः पुरुत्रा

Atharvaveda (3.30.6), enjoins to perform Agnihotra collectively as well

सम्यञ्चोऽग्रं सपयर्त

According to the Atharvaveda (19.55.3-4), the time of Agnihotra is morning and evening. Agnihotra performed in the morning keeps your surrounding environment clean and purified till evening, likewise Agnihotra performed in the evening keeps the environment clean and purified till morning.

सायं सायं गृहपतिनः प्रातः प्रातः सौमनसस्य दाता।

प्रातः प्रातः गृहपतिनः सायं सायं सौमनसस्य दाता॥ Atharvaveda, 19.55.3-4

According to Yajurveda (18.29), Agnihotra prolongs life, keeps vata in harmony, all sense organs are energized by Agnihotra, it purifies mind and soul.

आयुः कल्पतां, प्राणो ; कल्पतां, चक्षुः कल्पतां श्रोत्रं ; कल्पतां, वाग् ; कल्पतां, मनो ; कल्पतामात्मा ; कल्पताम्॥

Rigveda (3.10.3) says that a person who performs Agnihotra, he becomes very healthy and nourished.

सो अग्ने धत्ते सुवीर्यस पुष्यति Rigveda, 3.10.3

Modern scientific experiments have proved that when something is burnt into the fire it transforms into its gaseous form increasing in volume. This increase in the volume of liquid substances on being changed into the gaseous state due to heating has been calculated by modern scientists (particularly in the context of the transformation of liquid waters into vapours) by a factor of nearly 1000.¹

It has been proved that yajña renders pathogenic bacteria (disease-producing) polluting air and water to non-pathogenic ones.¹

The antiseptic and antibiotic effects of the smoke of yajña have also been examined by conducting laboratory experiments. It has been found that the smoke emitted by yajña is a powerful antibiotic in nature. Nautiyal et. al (2007)³ conducted a study on Agnihotra. He found the elimination of the aerial pathogenic bacteria due to Agnihotra smoke. It was observed during an experiment that one-hour treatment of Agnihotra smoke on aerial bacterial population caused over 94% of the decrease in bacterial counts and ability of Agnihotra to disinfect the air and make environment cleaner was maintained up to 24 hours in the closed room. It was also found that pathogenic bacteria remained absent in the open room even after 30 days of performing Agnihotra which indicates the bactericidal potential of the Agnihotra.

A preliminary experiment was carried out to study the effect of Agnihotra on the bacterial population in a room where Agnihotra was performed. For this study, two rooms of equal dimensions (13½ x 8 x 11) were selected. In both rooms, the fire was prepared from dried cow dung cakes in copper pyramids and the basal reading of several microorganisms in both the rooms was taken by exposing blood agar plates at four corners of the room for 10 minutes. This was done exactly half an hour before Agnihotra time. Agnihotra was performed exactly at sunset in one of the rooms. Bacterial counts were taken again in both the rooms in a similar manner at half-hour intervals. Thus, readings were taken in both the rooms up to two hours after the performance of Agnihotra. It was quite interesting to note that microbial counts in the room where Agnihotra was performed were reduced by 91.4% whereas the room where the only fire was generated did not show appreciable changes in the microbial counts. This leads one to think that it was the process of Agnihotra that was responsible for the reduction of bacterial counts and not the mere presence of fire.⁴

Similarly, Some medicinal tests on **Agnihotra** Ash were also carried out (M.S. Parkhe, Agnihotra: 93). Some of them may be illustrated as under:

¹ For details see, Vedic Prayers, p. 10-12, by Ravi Prakash Arya, published by Amazon, Books, USA.

A rabbit infected with scabies was selected for the experiment. The animal had a white hard crust on its nose, eyelashes, and ear margin. An ointment, was prepared by mixing Agnihotra ash and cow-ghee and was applied on the lesions only once. Three days after the application, a crust got detached and the rabbit showed improvement. With routine anti-scabies treatment using benzyl benzoate and salicylic acid, it would have taken at least 8 to 10 days for complete cure and that too after applying the lotion daily. Secondly, this lotion is toxic to animals if licked. The side effects are eliminated if Agnihotra ash and cow-ghee are used. The desired result is available just after one application.

An experiment was also conducted on patients suffering from conjunctivitis. While performing Agnihotra, besides normal oblations of rice smeared with melted butter, twigs of Ficus Bengalensis, Vata and Ficus Glomerata, Audumbara and Mellia Azadirachta, Neem, were used as offerings. Those are the trees whose wood is to be used for offering into Agni. The ash, which remained as the residue was powdered to a fine mesh. It was then poured into distilled water in a ratio of 1:10. The solution was boiled for half an hour and filtered to obtain a crystal clear solution. It was used as eye drops for two or three days. Over seventy per cent of patient reacted to the medicine successfully. If patients affected by conjunctivitis perform Agnihotra, with the above-mentioned ingredients and stay in that atmosphere for some time, the reaction would be even faster. The Maha Yajnas performed with special oblations, just when the epidemic is detected, proves that a preventive environment is created by the release of medicinal gases.