A note on Pañcamahāyajñas in the modern perspective

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Abstract

The Pañcamahāyajñas are observed from the Vedic period till today in our Hindu society. The Devayajña, the Bhūyajña, the Pitiyajña, the Brhmayajña and the Nyāyajña are collectively known as the Pañcamahāyajñas. These Mahāyajñas begin daily and end daily. They are performed in the Gṛhyāgni. It is a prime duty of a householder to perform these sacrifices regularly. The nature of these five great sacrifices may be changed in time but its importance remains same. The aim and objective of this present paper is to highlight upon the ethics and philosophy of the Pañcamahāyajñas by householders in ancient Indian society.

Keywords: Pañcamahāyajña, Devayajña, Bhūyajña, Pitiyajña, Brhmayajña, Nyāyajña.

1. Introduction

The Pañcamahāyajñas are observed from the Vedic period till today in our Hindu society. The earliest description of these is found in the Satapathabrāhmaṇa (XI.5.6). They are stated in details in the Gṛhyaśūtras and the Śānti-texts. The rites connected with these sacrifices were short and simple in the Brāhmaṇic age, which grew complicated in the sūtra literature.1 These Mahāyajñas begin daily and end daily.2 They are performed in the Gṛhyāgni, the sacred domestic fire.3 It is a prime duty of a householder to perform these sacrifices regularly.4

2. Analysis

The Devayajña, the Bhūyajña, the Pitiyajña, the Brhmayajña and the Nyāyajña are collectively known as the Pañcamahāyajñas.6 The Devayajña consists of offering ahūtis to devas. The Bhūyajña consists of offering Bali or food to all creatures. The Pitiyajña consists of offering libations to ancestors or pīṭras. The Brhmayajña consists of reciting of Brahman, i.e. the stanzas of the Vedas, viz. the Rgveda, the Yajurveda, the Śānveda and the Atharvaveda. The Nyāyajña or the Manusyajña consists of feeding guests.7

They are also known as Huta, Prahuta, Prāṣit, Ahuta and Brahmyahota. Huta stands for homa, i.e. Devayajña. Prahuta for the Bali offered to the Bhūtas, i.e. Bhūyajña. Prāṣit for Tarpāra, i.e. Pitiyajña. Ahuta for the recitation of Vedic texts, i.e. Brhmayajña and Brahmyahota for the respectful hospitality shown to Brхmanas, i.e. Manusyajña.8

According to Prof. Stenzler, the Devayajña, the Bhūyajña, and the Pitiyajña are known as Vaisvadevayajña. Most of the Gṛhyaśūtras which do not use the expression Pañcamahāyajñas, describe these Vaisvadevayajñas.9

2.1. Devayajña

Daily offering of a piece of wood to the gods in the Gṛhyāgni is known as Devayajña.

According to Satapathabrāhmaṇa, one should offer with Śvabhā up to the log of firewood to perform this sacrifice to the gods.10 The
Taitta$_{y}t$ra$_{y}t$aka also states the same description of this yaj$_{\ddot{a}}$na.$^{11}$

The Gautama Dharmas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra prescribes that the householder should offer into the fire to Agni, Dhanvantari, Vi$_{\ddot{s}}$vadevas, Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati, and Svi$_{\ddot{s}}$tak$\ddot{a}$t with Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$.$^{12}$

According to the Bh$_{\ddot{a}}$skara G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra, one should offer barley or rice in the G$_{\ddot{h}}$hya fire throughout his life in the morning as well as in the evening. In the morning, he offers with the words: “To Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!” and in the evening “To Agni Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!”.$^{13}$ The M$_{\ddot{n}}$ava G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra, the _{$\ddot{A}$}p$\ddot{a}$stamba G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra, and the Hiranyakesi G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra also prescribe the same rules for this sacrifice.$^{14}$

The _{$\ddot{A}$}p$\ddot{a}$stamba G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra lays down that the householder may offer food like rice, barley, or sesamum excepting meat into the fire. He should sacrifice with the words: “To S$_{\ddot{a}}$ry$_{\ddot{a}}$ Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!" in the morning and in the evening “To Agni Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!" then sacrifices silently a second oblation both the times.$^{15}$

According to the P$_{\ddot{a}}$raskara G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra, he should offer curds, grains, or fried grains into the Au$p_{\ddot{s}}$sana fire daily after sunset and before sunrise. He should sacrifice in the morning with the words: “To S$_{\ddot{a}}$ry$_{\ddot{a}}$ Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$! To Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!” and in the evening “To Agni Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$! To Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!”.$^{16}$

Similarly, the S$_{\ddot{a}}$ndh$_{\ddot{a}}$ky$_{\ddot{a}}$yana G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra states that he should offer rice or barley into the fire to S$_{\ddot{a}}$ry$_{\ddot{a}}$ in the morning and to Agni in the evening. Then he should sacrifice a second oblation to Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati silently.$^{17}$

The Gobhila G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra lays down that the householder should worship the domestic fire with the oblation of cooked or raw food. In the evening, he should offer the first oblation with the words: “To Agni Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!” and the second in the northeastern part of the fire silently. In the same way, the first oblation should be offered in the middle of the fire with the words : “To S$_{\ddot{a}}$ry$_{\ddot{a}}$ Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$!" in the morning and the second one silently in the northeastern part of the fire. The householder’s wife may also offer the morning and evening oblations into the G$_{\ddot{h}}$hya fire if she likes it.$^{18}$

In this way, the householder should perform this sacrifice over the sacred domestic fire daily till the end of his life.

The pure smoke of the sacrifice helps to produce cloud for rain.$^{19}$ It is the scientific reason to perform this yaj$_{\ddot{a}}$na daily. In this way, the householder protects the environment of the earth.

Therefore, one should perform this sacrifice in his day-to-day life.

2.2. Bh$_{\ddot{a}}$tayaj$_{\ddot{a}}$na

Daily offering of food to all the beings is called the Bh$_{\ddot{a}}$tayaj$_{\ddot{a}}$na.

It signifies the distribution of food in various places outside the G$_{\ddot{h}}$hya-fire.

The householder should offer these Balis in particular places to particular deities and beings with the word ‘namah’.

According to Satapatha$\ddot{b}$r$_{\ddot{a}}$hmana, one should offer an oblation to beings to perform this yaj$_{\ddot{a}}$na.$^{20}$ The Taitta$_{y}t$ra$_{y}t$aka also states the same rules for this sacrifice.$^{21}$

According to Gautama Dharmas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra, one should offer Balis in the individual direction of the individual deities. The householder offers Bali to respected one with the words : “Mahadbhyah Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$” on all the doors of his house. He offers to G$_{\ddot{h}}$hadevat$\ddot{a}$s with the words : “G$_{\ddot{h}}$hadevat$\ddot{a}$bhyah Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$” inside of his house. In the middle of his house he offers to Brahm$_{\ddot{a}}$ with the words : “Brahm$\ddot{a}$re Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$”. He offers to $\ddot{A}$k$_{\ddot{a}}$$\ddot{a}$s$_{\ddot{a}}$ with the words : “$\ddot{A}$k$_{\ddot{a}}$s$_{\ddot{a}}$a Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$” in the atmosphere and in the evening he offers with the words : “Naktamcarebhya Sv$_{\ddot{a}}$h$_{\ddot{\ddot{a}}}$” for night walkers.$^{22}$

The Gobhila G$_{\ddot{h}}$yas$_{\ddot{a}}$tra prescribes that he should offer Balis outside or inside the G$_{\ddot{h}}$hya$\ddot{g}$ni. The first Bali offers to the P$\ddot{h}$hiv$_{u}$, the second to the V$_{\ddot{a}}$yu, the third to the Vi$_{\ddot{s}}$vadevas, and the fourth to Praj$_{\ddot{a}}$pati. Then he should offer a Bali to the waters near the water-pot, a Bali to the herbs and trees at the middle supporting-pillar, a Bali to the sky at the door, a Bali to K$_{\ddot{e}}$ma or to Manyu in the bedroom, and a Bali to the R$_{\ddot{k}}$shasas on the heap of sweepings.$^{23}$
According to the Śāmkhya-yana Ghyasūra, he should offer Balis to Vṛstospati in the centre of
the floor with the Rgvedic (VII.54.1) stanza i.e.

\[
\text{pra dyāvā yajñāt i praḥiv, namobhiḥ sabādha le bẖatā yajatre / te cidhīḥ pīrve kavayo gṛnantah puro mahī dadhīre devaputre} \hspace{1em} \text{Then he offers Balis to Indra and his men in the west, in the south to Yama and his men, in the west to Varuṇa and his men, in the north to Soma and his men, and in the north-east to Brhaspati and his men. He should offer a Bali to Viṣṇu on the millstone, to the Vanaspati in the mortar, to the Osadhis at the place of herbs and to Parjanya near the water-pot. He throws a Bali into the atmosphere with the words: “To the night-walkers” in the evening and in the morning with the words: “To day-walkers” and with the Rgvedic verse (I.139.11), i.e.}

\[
ye deviṣo divyekṣadaśa stha praḥivyam-adhyekṣaśī stha /apsukṣito mahinaikṣadaśa stha te deviṣo yajñāminam juspadhvam il\]

The Mānava Ghyasūra and the Kṣṭhaka Ghyasūra prescribe this offering of Bali to Dharma and Adharma at the door of the householder.

According to Yājñavalkya, the householder should throw food on earth for the dogs, the cāndīlas, the crows, etc.

2.3. Pītyajña

An offering to the Manes is called the Pītyajña.

The Satapathabṛhmaṇa says that the householder should offer water to the Fathers with the word svadhā. The Taittirīyāranyak also prescribe the similar way for this sacrifice.

In the Gautama Dharmasūtra, it is stated that one should offer water and also food, fruits etc. (if it possible) to the pits to perform this yajña.

According to the Śāmkhya-yana Ghyasūra, this offering should be with the words: “Svadhā to the pits!” or with a Rgvedic verse (X.15.14), i.e.

\[
ye aṅgīdṛghā ye aṅgīdṛghā madhye divah svadhāyā mādayante / tebhīḥ svarāt sunīmetām yathāvasam tanvam kalpayasvall\]

This offering in the form of pindas is prescribed by the Kṣṭhaka Ghyasūra.

The Bhāskara Ghyasūra and the Hiranyakesī Ghyasūra lay down that he should always satisfy the deities, the rṣis, and the pītrīs with libations of water.

Manu defines this yajña in his Manusmṛti as Tarparā, i.e. the offering of libations to the pītrīs.

Yājñavalkya also lays down that food and water should be offered to the departed Manes and human beings daily.

We should perform this yajña daily to remember our departed Fathers and to inspire from their idealistic life.

2.4. Brhmaya-jña

Daily recitation of at least one hymn or anuvāka is called the Brhmaya-jña or Svādhyāya.

According to Satapathabṛhmaṇa, the Brhmaya-jña or the sacrifice to the Brahman is one’s own daily study of the Veda. One who studies the Rk-texts daily he satisfies the gods with milk offerings. In this way, he satisfies the gods with ghee offerings by the yajus-texts, by the saman-texts he satisfies with soma-offerings, he satisfies with fat-offerings by the Atharva-texts and by the Vedāngas, Philosophical systems, the Dialogue, the Iīrīṣa-Purāṇa, Nṛṣamsi Gāthās he satisfies with honey offerings and being satisfied they satisfy him by security of possession, by life-bread, by seed, by his whole self, and by all auspicious blessings and rivers of ghee and honey flow for his departed Fathers.

The Gautama Dharmasūtra prescribes simply that one should study the Vedas regularly to perform this sacrifice.

Most of the Ghyasūtras comment on this sacrifice but the Gobhila Ghyasūra, the Hiranyakesī Ghyasūra, and the Āpastamba Ghyasūra are silent on this.

The Baudhāyana Ghyasūra lays down that the householder should take a seat in the west of the Ghyāgni and request the domestic fire with the words: “Recite, sir!” after that he should
perform three Prāṇāyamas and repeat the Śāvitr, a thousand times, or a hundred times, or any number of times but not less than ten. Then he should recite the first verse of the each Veda, and the Vedic mantras known as kūṣmāndas. The Bhāskara Ghyasūtra also prescribes the similar rules for the performance of Śvādhyaṇa.⁢

The Sāṅkhya-yāna Ghyasūtra lays down that he should recite certain mantras of the Rgveda in the morning daily.⁢

The Āśvalāyana Ghyasūtra describes this yajña in a different way. According to this Ghyasūtra, firstly he should recite the Vyāhrits preceded by the syllable Om. Then he repeats the Śāvitr and recites the Rcḥ, Yajus, Sāmans, Atharva-texts, Brāhmaṇas, the Kalpas, the Gāthās, the Nṛṣamsis, the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas. After that he should conclude the Śvādhyaṇa with the verse: “Adoration to Brahma! Adoration to Agni! Adoration to the Earth! Adoration to the Herbs! Adoration to Vāky! Adoration to Vīcaspats! Adoration I offer to Viśnu.”⁢

With the perform of Brhmayajña one can meditate himself as well as grow the knowledge of Vedas automatically.

2.5. Nyājña

Generally, hospitality to a guest is called the Nyājña or Manuṣayajña.

The Hindus from very ancient times welcome a stranger who comes to seek hospitality at a householder’s door with the act of peace offering. It has been the custom among them to consider a guest as god and to worship him as such. The first thing that a householder should offer him is water by which he should wash his feet, then a seat; next, he should worship him with a respectful offering called arghyam, consisting of rice, flower, dīrṇa, water etc. and then he should be satisfied by food and other gifts.⁢

This yajña also revealed in the Aitareya-brāhmaṇa in the context of welcome the purohitā by the king.⁢

According to Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, the householder performs the sacrifice to men by giving him a cupful of water everyday.⁢

The Taittāryāryaṇyaka says, “He gives food to the Brāhmaṇa daily for this yajña.”⁢

This sacrifice is described in a little different way in the Ghyasūtras.

The Pṛśakara Ghyasūtra stated that the householder should give food to a Brāhmaṇa with the words: ‘Well! This is thee!’ and to beggars and guests. Then the members of the family, young and old, should take their food. After that the householder and his wife take their meal or the householder may eat first.”⁢

The Māyava Ghyasūtra lays down that he should offer meal to the guest after having washed his hands and having sipped water. Then he takes his food.⁢

According to the Sāṅkhya-yāna Ghyasūtra, he should offer food to a learned Brāhmaṇa and a Brāhmaṇarīn to perform this yajña and to a female under his protection, a pregnant women, children, and old people. He should neither eat alone nor eat first. In this connection we find in the Rgveda (X.117.6) as –

The Gautama Dharmasūtra also states the same procedure to perform the sacrifice to men.⁢

Manusmṛti also states that he should take food after feeding the Brāhmaṇa guest, newly married daughters and daughters-in-law, the other family members and servants.⁢

Yajñavalkya lays down that the husband and wife should partake food after having fed the child, the woman who lives in her father’s house after being married, the aged, women in family way, the diseased, the guests and the servants. If a guest comes uninvited even in the night then he should treat him with gentle words, grass, and water.⁢

According to Gṛhā, the householder should cook for not only himself but also others.⁢

As a whole, the householder should give food to a guest and his fellow beings daily to fulfill this sacrifice. If he is not able to serve his
guest with food then he should offer him a seat, water, and gentle words.51

We should respect our guests by remembering this simple sacrifice in present day society.

The Government also understands the utility of the Nyajña and use the idea52 to develop the tourist department for better attraction of the tourists (guests).

3. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is seen that to protect the environment, to do well for all the creatures, to remember our Fathers, to develop our knowledge and to respect our guests we should perform Pañcamahāyajñas regularly without fail. As human beings, we like to live in a society. Therefore, everyone has some duties to do on fever of the society.

Endnotes

1. India of the age of the Brāhmaṇas, p. 220
2. Taittirīyārṣṭastra II.10 paṛca vi ete māhīyajñō satati pratīyante satati samtiṣṭhante.
3. Paṛaskara Gṛhyastha I.2.1. The Gṛhyagni is that which the householder sets up at the time of his wedding.
4. Gautama Dharmasūtra I.5.6-8
cf. Manusmṛti III.67
vaivṛtihe aṣṭau kuruva gṛhyam karma yathā vidhi/
pancayajñavidhānaṁca pariṣṭi cīnvṛtiḥ kim gṛhyam.
5. Āyavajñana Gṛhyastha III.1.4
tanetanyajñanaharahah kuruva.
6. Satapathabṛhṛṣṭastra XI.5.6.1
7. Manusmṛti III.70, Yājñavalkyaṁśṭi I.102
8. Manusmṛti III.73-74
9. India of the age of the Vedic Kalpasutras, p.387
10. Satapathabṛhṛṣṭastra XI.5.6.2
11. Taittirīyārṣṭastra II.10
12. Gautama Dharmasūtra I.5.9
13. Bhūṣkara Gṛhyastha I.18
14. Māṇava Gṛhyastha II.3.1-2, the Āpastamba Gṛhyastha III.7.19-21, Hiranyakesi Gṛhyastha I.23.8-9
15. Āyavajñana Gṛhyastha I.9.5-8
16. Paṛaskara Gṛhyastha I.9.1-4
17. Sānkhyajñana Gṛhyastha I.3.14-15
18. Gobhila Gṛhyastha I.3.6-16
19. Gṛhyastha I.14
20. Satapathabṛhṛṣṭastra XI.5.6.2
21. Taittirīyārṣṭastra II.10
22. Gautama Dharmasūtra I.5.12-18
23. Gobhila / Gṛhyastha I.4.5-11
24. Sānkhyajñana Gṛhyastha II.14.5-17 cf. Manusmṛti III. 87-91
25. Māṇava Gṛhyastha II.12.7, Kṣṭhaka Gṛhyastha 54.6
26. Yājñavalkyaṁśṭi I.103
27. Satapathabṛhṛṣṭastra XI.5.6.2
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