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Uses of ghee (*ghṛta*) in the vedic sacrifices and its impact on the environment

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Abstract

Ghee (ghṛta) is the essential offering to Agni in all the sacrifices. Agni is the mouth of the Gods and *Ghee* is the food that feeds them. The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata (Parva-13)* says that *Ghee* is sacred because of its use in sacrifices. As *the Ghee* is burnt in the fire its smoke and fragrance covers the entire environment and the medicinal values embedded on it goes to all. It purifies the environment. Experimental studies show that the incidence of physical ailments, sickness and disease are reduced in the houses, where the *Yajña (Agnihotra)* is regularly performed because it creates a pure, nutritional and medicinal atmosphere.

The observation of some distinguished scientists is note-worthy in this regard. Dr. Hafkine has mentioned that --- “mixing ghee and sugar and burning them creates smoke which kills the germs of certain diseases and secretion takes place from some glands relate to the wind-pipe, which fill our heart and mind with pleasure.”

Sugars present in *Haviṣhya* have great power to purify the atmosphere. It kills the germs of T.B., measles, smallpox and cow-pox --- remarks Prof. Tilward.

This paper is an attempt to highlight the scientific values of oblations specially *Ghee* and its effect on environment.

Key words: ghee, *yajña*, *veda*, environment

Introduction

Ghee is the most important substances amongst the various substances used in *Yajña*. Ghee is essential because it helps in rapid combustion of cellulose of wood and keeps the fire burning. The smoke comes from the wood, where ghee is given as oblation; covers the whole atmosphere and reduces the pollution level. Two offerings of unbroken raw rice with ghee are offered during each *Agnihotra*. According to *Āyurveda*, cow's ghee is a tonic and cardiac stimulant. The gases produced by the burning of cow ghee helps in balancing the cycle of the nature. Ghee removes all pathogenic bacteria and works effectively in purification of the atmosphere making it sufficiently fit for mankind, plant and life on the earth.

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Methodology

The study is basically an analytical one. It is based on descriptive method of research. This study is also based on secondary sources like books, journals etc.

Objectives of the study

The following are the main objectives:

1. To highlight the uses of ghee in the vedic sacrifices.
2. To highlight the effect of the sacrifices.
3. To highlight the impact of sacrifices on the environment.

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The Vedic Sacrifices (Yajña)

The word *Yajña* is derived from the root 'Yaj' with the suffix 'ghay'. 'Yaj' expresses three senses – *devapūjā*, i.e. glorification of the deities, *Saṅgatarāṇa* i.e. establishing a connection between man and the gods and *dāna*, i.e. offering of oblations to the gods. In the *Śrautasūtra* of Kātyāna, *Yajña* has been defined as '*dravyam devatā tyāgaḥ*' *Yajña* is made up of three factors I) *dravya* i.e. materials meant for offerings (*haviḥ*) such as *vr̥thi*, *yava*, *paśu*, soma etc. II) *devatā* i.e. the vedic deities like *Agni*, *Indra*, *Vāyu* etc and III) *tyāgaḥ* i.e. the act of offering to the deities. In the *Vedas* the sacrifice is often referred to as *dāśvān* i.e. the giver of *haviḥ*.

The Vedic *Yajñas* are primarily of four types i.e. *Agnihotrahoma*, *Somayajña*, *Iṣṭi* and *Paśuyajña*. The *Karmakāṇḍa* has prescribed these four types of rituals for attaining the three primary goals of material existence viz. *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. The deity is invoked by the singing of Stotras by the *Sāma* Vedic Udgāṭṛ. Then the Ṛgvedic priest Hotṛ invites the deity to the sacrificial ceremony by reciting the Śāstras. The Yajurvedic Advaryu performs the *Yajña* on behalf of the *Yajamāna*. The Atharvedic priest Brahmā acts as the supervisor of the entire ritual. The *Yajamāna* seeks to establish a connection between himself and the deity through the combined efforts of these priests. The need of the *Yajamāna* is placed before the supernatural forces i.e. the deities through the act of *Yajña*. It is found in the *Aitareyabrāhmaṇ* [2] that in reality the *Yajmāna* himself becomes the *paśu* to the deity whose blessings he seeks. However as this cannot be done, he offers an animal in his stead and frees himself from his debts towards the deities.

Ghee and its importance

Ghee or *ghṛta* comes from the root *ghṛ* means to shine, which comes from the milk of cow. It is a nourishing and healing element. It normalises the *vāta*, *pitta* etc. It increases intelligence, memory power energy etc. Also it improves our digestive system and considered as the best form of fat which maintains our cholesterol level. The usages of ghee improve the immunity of a person.

The *Anuśāsana Parva* of *Mahābhārata* [3] mentions that it is sacred because of its uses in sacrifice. Ghee brings excess of goodness to our life. So it is rightly said that "Ayurghṛtam" i.e. ghee is our life.

Bhopal Gas Tragedy and Agnihotra

The harrowing incidence of Union Carbide plant's gas leak tragedy took place on the deadly night of December 3, 1984. Hundreds of people died and thousands were hospitalised due to inhaling the poisonous gas. There were, however, two families ---Shri. Sohan Lal S Khushwaha and Shri. M.L. Rathore, which lived in the worst affected area, one mile away from the plant, came out unscathed. In these families, no one died. The common thing observed in these two families is that both the family regularly performed *Agnihotra* (*Havan*). Nobody was even hospitalized despite of being present in the area worst hit by the toxic gas. This observation proves that *Agnihotra* is a powerful antidote to pollution [4].

Ghee and sacrifices

The great theme of the *Vedas* is *Yajña* and ghee is an essential offering to *Agni* in all the *Yajñas*. *Agni* is the mouth of all the Gods. Whatever we offer to *Agni*, it directly goes to the other gods also. Ghee is the food of all the Gods. Experiments say that 10 grams of ghee used in the fire (sacrifice) produces one ton of oxygen. As the ghee is burnt in the fire it covers the

entire environment and purifies it. The smoke comes from this fire strengthens the lung of the body and makes the person healthy. The Ethyle oxide and formaldehyde crated from it gives immunity against bacteria those spreading all over the air [5]. The gas generated from *havan* cures the wounds.

Purification of environment

The industrialisation, rapid urbanization, deforestation, and modernisation of agriculture have disastrously affected our ecological balances. Air and water pollution, disturbances in the ozone layer -formation, radioactive waves etc., have destabilized the human, animal and plant life cycles. Experimental studies show that the incidence of physical ailments, sickness and disease are reduced in the houses, where the *Yajña* (*Agnihotra*) is regularly performed because it creates a pure, nutritional and medicinal atmosphere. It renews the brain cells, revitalizes the skin, purifies blood etc. According to Dr. Shirowich, a Russian scientist has remarked that (i) Cow's milk contains great power of protection from atomic radiation; (ii) Houses having cow-dung covered floors enjoy complete protection from atomic radiation; (iii) If cow's ghee is put into *Yajña* fire, its fumes lessen the effect of atomic radiation to a great extent.

Conclusion

In simple words, *Yajña* is a process of give and take. Offerings are made to the deities and they bestow blessings in turn to the *Yajamāna*. This is how the cosmic balance and order is maintained.

Ghee is one of the most important elements used in the sacrifices. By the usages of ghee the environment is benefited. Lord Kṛṣṇa also mentions in the Gita [6] that *Yajña* is the source of all that causes rain and it purifies all vegetations and herbs. It is said in the *Ṛgveda* [7] that *Yajña* solves all the problems. *Yajña* done with cow ghee reduces the pollution level. Thus we get pollution free environment.

The medicinal fumes emanating from *Agnihotra* have been observed by researchers in the field of microbiology to be clearly bacteriolethal in nature. These eradicate bacteria and other micro-organisms, which are the root cause of illness and diseases. This must be the reason why the incidence of physical ailments, sickness and diseases becomes less in the households, where *Agnihotra* is regularly performed. Even without going into detailed chemical bacteriology, it can be stated that performance of *Yajña* leads to purification of air by removing foul odours, removing harmful insects, killing bacteria and creating a climate conducive for the growth of plant and vegetations.

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