

CONCEPT OF AGRICULTURE AS REVEALED IN THE AGNI PURĀṆA-A STUDY

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[The Purāṇas are an unfailing source of information which help us to reconstruct the history of Indian culture and civilization. The Purāṇas go back undoubtedly to a very distant past and have their roots in the Vedic literature. The Purāṇas are composed in conformity with the Vedas.

The Vedic word '*kṛṣi*' is used to denote agriculture, which literally means the act of ploughing. The system of agriculture started from almost the beginning of the Vedic period in India. In the Vedic and Purāṇic society, agriculture was a means to produce food grain so that human beings and other living creatures can sustain their life. Plenty of information is available in the Purāṇas regarding agriculture, which reveals that ancient Indians had intimate knowledge on all agricultural operations. The *Agni Purāṇa* too provides us a lot of knowledge regarding ancient agriculture. This paper is a modest attempt to find out about the agriculture as revealed in the *Agni Purāṇa*.]

Introduction

The Purāṇas are an unfailing source of information which help us to reconstruct the history of Indian culture and civilization. The word "*Purāṇa*" means "*Purāṇam-ākhyānam*" i.e., "old story". The etymology of the term *Purāṇa* is furnished by the *Vāyu Purāṇa* itself: '*Yasmāt purā hi anati idaṁ purāṇam tena tat smṛtam*'¹ i.e. that which lives from very remote times. The Purāṇas go back undoubtedly to a very distant past and have their roots in the Vedic literature; many a legend, from Ṛgvedic hymns and from the Brāhmaṇas, reappear in the Purāṇas.² "*Purāṇam Vedasanmatam*"- The Purāṇas are composed in conformity with the Vedas. The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that the great sage Vyāsa has condensed the sense of the Vedas in the Purāṇas.³ The knowledge of the Purāṇas helps us to understand the Vedic mantras.

The Avesta mentions that the person enjoys the earth with greatest of joy, who cultivates the fields for food grain and fruit

bearing trees because proper cultivation of the farms causes material prosperity.⁴ In the Vedic and Purāṇic society, agriculture was a means to produce food grain so that human beings and other living creatures can sustain their life. Of the four castes, the Vaiśyas were specially connected with agriculture. The main profession of the Vaiśyas was to carry on business (*Vārtā-Vṛtti*). *Vārtā* comprises of tending cattle, tilling agricultural fields, carrying on trade and lending for profit.⁵ It is described that the agricultural fields rich with the wealth of crops yielded pleasure to the peasants.⁶ The *Agni Purāṇa* states that by making the gift of a field in full harvest, to a *Brāhmaṇa*, a man attains everything.⁷ Some of the well known ancient treatises on agriculture of ancient India are namely, *Arthaśāstra*, *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, *Kṛṣi-Parāśar*, *Vṛkṣāyurveda* and *Amarakośa* etc.

The Vedic word 'kṛṣi' is used to denote agriculture, which literally means the act of ploughing. The system of agriculture started from almost the beginning of the Vedic period in India. Agriculturists in ancient India were quite aware of the nature of soil and its relations to the production of a particular crop of economic importance. Agriculture was an important part of Vedic economy. The Vedas attach great importance to agriculture. In the *Ṛgveda*, the gambler, is advised by the Sun god to stop gambling and engage himself in agriculture to improve his condition.⁸ The *Atharvaveda* associates *Prthī Vainya* with the origin of ploughing.⁹

Appropriate time for commencing agriculture

The *Agni Purāṇa* (A.P.) too provides us a lot of knowledge regarding ancient agriculture. According to the A.P. agriculture should be commenced under the auspices of the asterisms *Punarvasū*, *Uttarā*, *Bhaga*, *Mūlā* and *Varuṇa*, which should be done on Thursdays, Fridays, Mondays and Sundays or when the sun enters the sign of Taurus, Virgo and Gemini respectively.¹⁰ Regarding the sowing of seeds it is suggested there that the seeds should be sown on the second, fifth, seventh, tenth, third or the thirteenth of a fortnight or on days marked by the asterisms of *Revatī*, *Rohiṇī*, *Indra*, *Agni*, *Hasta*, *Maitrī*, *Uttarā*, *Mūlā*, *Śravaṇa* and *Bhaga*.¹¹ Again, harvests of rice should be reaped on the appearance of the asterism *Mṛga* or of those presided over by the Piṭṛs or under the auspicious influence of *Hasta*, *Citrā*, *Aditi*, *Svātī*, *Revatī* or the three asterisms beginning with the

*Śravaṇa-pitṛdaive tathā saumye dhānyacchedam mṛgodaye/
hastacitrādītisvātīrevatyām śravanatraye/*¹²

and these rice should be gathered in on Thursdays, Fridays, Wednesdays or in the *Sthira* Lagnas under the influence of the asterisms of *Maghā*, *Jyēsthā* and *Uttarās*.¹³

Offering oblations before cultivation

Before cultivating his field, a farmer should offer oblations to the gods of the elements, as follows "I offer oblation to Indra" (the god of thunder), "I offer oblation to Marut" (the god of wind), "I offer oblation to Parjanyā" (the god of rain) and "I offer oblation to Bhaga," the sun-god.¹⁴ Then the plough-man should drive his plough and worship the aforesaid gods for a good harvest of paddy, with garlands of white flowers and perfumes and other articles of offering, after which the god Śunāsīra (Indra) should be invoked and worshipped.¹⁵ Moreover, it is stated there in the *A.P.* that a man by casting oblations of vessel full (Droṇas) of barley, soaked in clarified butter, into the fire and by repeating the mantras *Vāta Āvātu*, etc., is enabled to cast off all charms.¹⁶ Again, a man by performing a *homa* ceremony with oblations of sesamum and by repeating the mantras known as *Pradeva Dāsa* followed by *Voṣaṣ*, become an expert in all trades.¹⁷

Sowing of seeds during feasts

References of various agricultural products are met with in the *A.P.* Describing the nature of the feast which are to be celebrated after the consecration and installation of the images of all gods and spiritual beings it is stated there that the feast should be celebrated with the sowing of auspicious seeds, which comprise barley, *Śālirice*, sesamum, *Mudga*, *Godhūma* and white mustard, *Kulattha* and *Māṣa*. These should be well washed before sowing.¹⁸ A *śarāva* (earthen saucer), a small water-pot and a small raised bank or embankments are the most convenient post or places for growing on the above seeds.¹⁹

Planting various trees and shrubs around a residence

In the *A.P.* Dhanvantari deals with the hygienic effects of planting various trees and shrubs around a residence.²⁰ He points

out that the trees known as the Plakṣas, should be planted in the east of a dwelling house, the Vaṭas in the east, the Mangoes on the south and the Aśvatthas on the west –

*vṛkṣāyurvedamākhyaśye plakṣaścottarataḥ subhaḥ/
prāgvaṭo yāmyatastvāmra āpye'śvatthaḥ krameṇa tu//²¹*

According to A.P. the aforesaid trees planted and grown in those particular directions bring good luck to its master.²² On the other hand, the thorny shrubs should be planted so as to edge the Southern boundary of the ground of a house.²³ The garden should be laid out on the left side of a residence²⁴ and blooming plants of sesamum orientate should be cultivated in the flower gardens.²⁵ The trees should be planted after having worshipped the Brāhmaṇas and their sovereign, the moon-god and under the auspices of the asterisms presided over by the wind god, Prajāpati and the god Viṣṇu respectively or of those known as the *Mūlā*, the *Hasta* and the *Dhruvas*.²⁶ Trees planted in rows, twenty cubits apart, should be considered as the best planted, while those having a space of sixteen or ten cubits left intervening between them, should be considered as ranking second best in respect of fruitfulness.²⁷ Trees should be transplanted twelve times, they should not be planted too close and if the branches touch one another, they should be lopped off with a chopper, as otherwise they would bear no fruits.²⁸

Procedures for watering the trees

Usually the trees should be sprinkled with cold water, containing a solution of *Viḍaṅga* (a medicinal plant) and clarified butter.²⁹ Trees watered with the washings of fish, grow to a larger size soon.³⁰ To make a barren tree heavily loaded with fruits and flowers it is suggested there in the A.P. to sprinkle a mixture of *Kullattha*, *Māṣa*, *Mudga*, sesamum or barley and cold water saturated with clarified butter over it.³¹ It is advised there in the A.P. that trees such as *Ariṣṭa*, *Aśoka*, *Punnāga*, *Śirīṣā*, *Jambu*, *Bakula*, and Pomegranate or any other trees which are carefully planted in a garden, should be watered each morning and evening during the summer months, on each alternate day during winter months and at the break of dawn during the rains, when the earth would be dry and require watering.³² Normal salt is the best manure for palms and coconut trees, while manure composed of powdered

Viḍaṅga and washings of meat or fish, suit all trees extremely well.³³ The *A.P.* also speaks about the rites of consecrating trees and fruit-gardens, which imparts enjoyment in this world and salvation in the next.³⁴ Moreover the chapter '*Bhūmivanaauṣadhyādivargāḥ*'³⁵ in the *A.P.* describes about forests.

Conclusion

India is known to be a land of agriculture. Agriculture made real headway during the Ṛgvedic age, although the practice of ploughing can be traced to Indo-Iranian times.³⁶ Agriculture is ranked as the topmost among all the professions, since it is the foundation for health, prosperity and culture of the people of a nation. Even in the modern times the real basis of national wealth and national economy in India is agriculture. The *Yajurveda* enjoins to practice agriculture so as to reap good crops.³⁷ The *Ṛgveda* too assures that a farmer is bound to obtain immense wealth and profuse crops.³⁸ Again, the seer in the *Ṛgveda* prays to the god Indra, for a son, who would be the owner of cultivated lands.³⁹ In the Vedic and Purāṇic society, agriculture was a means to produce food grain so that human beings and other living creatures can sustain their life. Thus, since ancient times in India, agriculture was considered to be a real source of wealth, prosperity, cattle and happiness. Plenty of information is available in the Purāṇas regarding agriculture, which reveals that ancient Indians had intimate knowledge on all agricultural operations.

References :

- 1 *Vāyu Purāṇa* 1.203.
- 2 Vide. Winternitz, M, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, p. 495
- 3 *lakṣeṇaikena yatproktam vedārthaparibṛṅhitam// Matsya Purāṇa*, 53.70
- 4 Vide. Roy, Brajdeo Prasad, *The Later Vedic Economy*, p. 118
- 5 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X. 24. 20-21
- 6 *ibid.* X. 20. 12
- 7 *Agni Purāṇa* 211. 28
- 8 *Rgveda* 10.34.13
- 9 *Atharvaveda* 8.10.24
- 10 *Agni Purāṇa* 121.46-47

¹¹ *ibid.* 121.47-49

¹² *ibid.* 121.50

¹³ *ibid.* 121.51

¹⁴ *indrāya ca marudbhyastu parjanyaṃ bhagāya ca/
yathāliṅgam tu viharellāṅgalam tu kṛṣṇivalah// ibid.* 259-45

¹⁵ *ibid.* 259.46

¹⁶ *ibid.* 261.19

¹⁷ *ibid.* 261.20

¹⁸ *yavāñśālīmstilānmudgāngodhūmānsitasarṣapān/
kullatthamāṣaniṣpāvānkṣālayitvā tu vāpayet// ibid.* 68.4-5

¹⁹ *ibid.* 68.4

²⁰ *ibid.* 282

²¹ *ibid.* 282.1

²² *Cf. uttareṇa śubhaḥ plakṣo vataḥ prākṣyadgrhāditaḥ/
udumbaraśca jāmyena paścime'śvattha uttamaḥ// ibid.* 247.24

²³ *ibid.* 282.2

²⁴ *ibid.* 247.25

²⁵ *ibid.* 282.2

²⁶ *grhṇīyādrupayedorḥṣāndviḥjam candram prapūjya ca/
dhruvāṇi pañca vāyavyam hastam prājeśavaiṣṇavam// ibid.*282.3

²⁷ *ibid.* 282.8

²⁸ *ibid.* 282.9

²⁹ *varṣākāle bhuvah śoṣe sektavyā ropitadrumāḥ/
viḍaṅgaghṛtasamyuktānsecayecchītavāriṇā// ibid.* 247.26

³⁰ *ibid.* 247.28

³¹ *ibid.* 247.27

³² *ariṣṭāśokapunnāgaśirīśāḥ sapriyaṅgavaḥ/
aśokah kadali jambustathā bakuladāḍimāḥ//
sāyam prātastu gharmānte śītakāle dināntare/
varṣārātrau bhuvah śoṣe sektavyā ropita dromāḥ// ibid.* 282.6-7

³³ *ibid.* 247.31

³⁴ *ibid.* 70

³⁵ *ibid.* 363

³⁶ Vide. Majumdar, R.C., *The Vedic Age*, p. 398

³⁷ *Yajurveda*, 4.10;9.22

³⁸ *Rgveda*. 7.93.2

³⁹ *ibid.* 6.20.1

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