



THE ROLE OF 'WATER' IN VEDIC ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT Water is the part of our life. it is the most common liquid on earth. It is a liquid that descends from the cloud as rain, from streams, lakes and seas and it is a major constituent of all living organisms. It is an odourless, tasteless, very slightly compressible liquid oxide of hydrogen H₂O which appears bluish in thick layers. Water is the elixir of life, has taken today the centre stage all over the world. It covers 73.4% of the earth's surface. Human body is made of approximately 71% of water. It helps to carry out many important jobs in human body such as removes bacteria from bladder, helps in digestion, carries nutrients and oxygen to the cells and maintenance the sodium balance in the body. The health benefits being by the water. Human life is fully dependent on the five basic elements, which are earth, water, fire, wind and sky. Among them, water is considered as the most essential and vital element for the survival of all. Water provides clarity of mind. Since our brain is mostly water. It depends on proper hydration. Drinking of more water is helpful in the freshness of mind. These are the usefulness of water in the present life, in the Vedic period also, water had a special role in various activities. The Indian philosophy through its Vedas, Upanisads and Brāhmanas has given some effective statements to the importance of water. Water is considered according to Hindu religion as the source of purity. In the Vedic period, there was a method of sanctifying oneself with water before starting any funeral ceremony or any sacrificial work. Not only that, water was also used as an important component to maintain peace in the field in the sacrificial fire. In this paper, there has been discussed this necessity of water in several ways.

KEYWORDS : Sipping, Purified, Sacrifice, Obsequies**INTRODUCTION**

Human life is fully dependent on five basic elements. Among them, water and air are most important for the survival of humans. With the help of wind, people breathe, and proper watering keeps the blood circulation of the body in a right way and regulates all organ activities. So, it is a common fact that water is life. Because, every life in this earth is nourished by water. Drinking of water, bathing with fresh water has a great importance for removing the impurities from body. So, in our ancient scriptures, the usefulness of bath through freshwater is discussed very seriously.

पवित्रं वृष्यमायुष्यं श्रमस्वेदमलापहम्।

अरीस्वत्सन्धानं स्नानमोजस्करं परम् ॥ (च. सू. 5.94)

Bathing is purifying, libidinal stimulant and life-giving. It reduces fatigue, sweating and dirt. It brings about strength in the body and enhances ojas. The Indian philosophy through its Vedas, Upanisads and Brāhmanas has given some effective statements to the importance of water. Water is considered according to Hindu religion as the source of purity. It makes us pure and fresh. Our ancient Dharmasūtras literatures also established this concept in a gentle way. Boudhāyana Dharmasūtra says-

अद्भिश्शुद्धयन्ति गात्राणि। (वै. ध. 1.5.8.2)

IMPORTANCE OF WATER

Means, our body becomes fresh and clean through water. This water is very much important in sacrificial works also. In sacrifice, the first work is to pure himself through *Ācamana*, which we can be achieved through water. *Ācamana* is the way, by which a sacrificer purifies himself. Boudhāyana says- त्रिर्यो हृदयं नमः पिबेत्। (वै. ध. 1.5.8.15) that a sacrificer should sip the water three times in this way, that it reaches till his heart. This concept of sipping is clearly defined by Goutama in his *sūtra*- शुचौ देशे आसीनो दक्षिणं वाहुं जानन्तस्य कृत्वा यज्ञोपवीत्यामणि वनधनात्पाणीप्रक्षाल्य वाच्यतो हृदयस्पर्शस्त्रिधत्तुर्वास्य आचामेत्। (गौ. ध. 1.1.35) That he should be seated in a pure place, placing his arms between his knees, arranging his dress and after washing his hands silently sip water three or four times that reaches till his heart. This method of sipping is reserved for Brāhmanas. The procedure of sipping is different for different castes. The warrior caste (*Kṣatriya*) should sip the water three or four times that reaches till his throat. For *Vaiśyas* this sipping water should be tasted and a *Sūdra* should touch the water by his lips for sipping. In *Manusmṛiti*, this method is clearly defined. And through the *Ācamana* the sacrificer becomes blameless and faultless. *Haradatta* also explains this concept in *Mitākṣarā* commentary- आचमनादिना नित्यं शुचिः शक्तिविषये न सुहृत्तमाप्यप्रयतः स्यात्। But sipping is strictly prohibited at the time of walking, standing, lying down or bending forward. However, this method of sipping is not implemented only before the sacrificial work, in order to purify oneself after eating in funeral

ceremony, it is necessary to take care of it, in the *Āpastambha Dharmasūtra* we get support for this view- आचम्य चोर्ध्वं पाणी धारयेत्प्रो दकीभावात्। (आ. ध. 2.8.19.8). But the water which has been defiled with colours, perfumes or flavouring substances, and is collected in unclean places is not suitable for sipping.²

Āpastambha Dharmasūtra also mentions this idea as- भूमिगता स्वप्स्वाचम्य प्रयतो भवति। (आ. ध. 1.5.2) by doing *Ācamana* through water on earth a person becomes clean and pure. Water also helpful in sacrificial work for cleaning or scaring the fire woods and alter. *Adhvaryu* takes the sprinkling water, and sprinkles in the fire woods with this mantra- 'a black deer, living in the den, art thou. I sprinkle thee, agreeable to *Agni*' etc. Again he sprinkles in the alter, with this text- 'Thou art the alter, I sprinkle thee, agreeable to *Barhiṣ*' etc.

Again, in one *sūtra* of *Boudhāyana* seer prays to water for own purification-

आपः पुनन्तु पृथिवी पृथिवी पूता पुनातु माम्।

पुनन्तु ब्रह्मणस्पतिर्ब्रह्मपूता पुनातु माम्।।

यदुच्छिष्टमभोज्यं यद्वा दुश्चरितं मम।

सर्वपुनन्तु माम्पोऽसतां च प्रतिब्रह्म स्वाहेति।। (वै. ध. 2.5.8.11)

Means, water make the world pure, pure world make me pure, *Brahmaṇaspati* make me pure, *Brahma* make me pure, I have made which sins by eating uneatable foods and which endowment I have taken from worthless persons, water make them all faultless.

Again, in *Dāna Karma* also the water is important. *Āpastambha* says that a person should relieve some water before commenting the giving work-

सर्वाण्युदकपूर्वाणि दानानि। (आ. ध. 2.4.9.8)

Here is another statement said by *Boudhāyana* about the importance of water-

आयं गौः पृथिव्यक्रमो दिव्येतामूं त्रिस्तर्जलं पठन् सर्वमात्पापात्प्रमुच्यते। (वै. ध. 4.4.4.3)

Means, if a person utters the mantra "आयं गौः पृथिव्यक्रमो" three times standing in water, he reliefs from all sins. Gautama also declares this concept in his *sūtra*- अन्तर्जले वासद्यमर्षणं त्रिस्तर्जलं सर्वपापेभ्यो विमुच्यते। (गौ. ध. 3.6.11) that if a person goes down in the water and utters the verse of *Aghamarṣaṇa ṛṣi* three times his intentional and unconscious sins shall go away. These are the statements present that to purify himself and protect himself from any type of sins everywhere water is considered

as the vital element.

आपो यद् बस्तपस्तेन तं प्रति तपत योऽस्मान् द्रष्टिं यं वयं द्विष्मः । (अ. सं. 2.23.1)

Water plays a strong role in both life and death for everyone. After death, the norm of giving water to dead people are prevalent since ancient times. Seer *Āpastambha* has discusses the matter. he says-
केशान्प्रकीर्य पांसूनोंपैकवाससो दक्षिणामुखास्यकृदुपमज्ज्योतीर्योपविशन्त्येवं क्रिः।
(अ. सं. 2.6.15.7) That a person shuffling his hair, mixing dust, holding one garment, facing towards south gives water three times to the dead people. Thus, the soul of the deceased gets peace as a result of water donation. Not only that, the person who gives water to his forefathers, he himself also gets satisfaction. Even when a *Brāhmin*, after bathing, satisfies his predecessors with water, he obtains the whole reward for the performance of the obsequies (*śrāddha*).⁷

शान्तिरपः तदग्निः शान्त्या श्रमयन्ते (अ. ब्रा. 2.6.2.18) Water is peace, because peace can be achieved through water. Water is a means of purification; with water we accordingly purify ourselves. आपो हि वै सत्यं (अ. ब्रा. 7.4.1.6) that truth is the same as the waters or waters are the truth. Hence it is said, whereby waters flow, that is a form of the truth. It is known about the importance of water from these verses of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Like *Dharmasūtras*, there are many information about the necessity and information of water in *Brāhmin* literature. The *Brāhmanas* are a layer or category of Vedic Sanskrit texts embedded within each *Veda*. These are particularly noted for their instructions on the proper performance of rituals.

The *Brāhmaṇa* literatures have discussed the importance of water mostly from sacrificial point of view. As it is established in *Kouśītakī Brāhmaṇa*-शान्तिर्वै भेषजमापः शान्तिरेवैषा भेषजमन्यते यज्ञे क्रियते। (को. ब्रा. 5.1.4) The water is peace and herbal. By this, peace and medicines are made after the sacrifice. That is why, after the completion of the sacrifice, the sacrificer touches the water saying *Vaṣatkāra*.

यज्ञं वा आपः in this verse of *Kouśītakī Brāhmaṇa*, *yajna* is compared to water. That is, if one goes to the water, then it is thought that he is going to the object of sacrifice. The sage invites water to fulfil all the wishes of the sacrificer, as it is said that all objects of desire are the waters. Water (*Āpaḥ*) is how much important in sacrificial work, that we can conclude from this hymn of *Śukla-Yajurveda*-

देवीयापो अग्नेगुवो अग्नेपुवोऽन्न इम मय यज्ञं नयताग्ने।

यज्ञपतिं सुधातुं यज्ञपतिं देवयुतम्॥ (शुक्लयजुः सं. 1.12)

In this hymn, seer prays to the god of water, to lead forward the sacrifice, to lead forward the sacrifice's lord, take good care of the sacrificer and take him closer to god. So, it is ordered to drink water before commencing the sacrificial work, and thus the *Brahmacārin* suffers no harm of any kind. As it is declared in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*-
अमृतं वाऽआपोऽमृतमशान्तेत्येवैनं तदाह तदेनमुभयतोऽमृतेन परिगृह्णाति तथा ह्यस्य ब्रह्मवायी न कां वनातिर्मर्च्छति। (अ. ब्रा. 11.5.4.5)

Sacrifice is a sacred duty. It is said that when a man gets attracted to the sacrifices and make sacrifices, he takes his second birth- यं यज्ञं उपनमति स यज्ञायते तद्वितीयं जायते। (अ. ब्रा. 11.2.1.1) Therefore before commencing this action, the equipment needed for this work has to be purified. All the instruments of *yajna* are sanctified by the water spray. The significance of water scarcity is the sanctity of the sacrifice- तिरोहितमि वास्त्यथ प्रोक्षणस्य वनधुर्मैद्यामेवैतत् करोति। (अ. ब्रा. 3.6.1.11) Not only that, whatever obstacles or turmoil arises in *Yajna*, they are removed or cooled by water- यद्दे यज्ञस्य रिष्टं यदशान्तमापो वै तस्य सर्वस्य शान्तिरग्निरेवैतच्छान्त्या श्रमयन्ति। (अ. ब्रा. 12.4.1.5)

For this reason, seer *Adhvaryu* takes some water in a *kamandulu* and sprinkles it on the altar of *Āhavanīya Agni* with this hymn- इदं विष्णुर्विचक्रमे

Water is also used to destroy enemies at the time of sacrifice. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* declares- वज्रं वाऽआपो। (अ. ब्रा. 12.9.2.6) thus the priest matches the water with thunderbolt and throws it in that direction where there are enemies with this mantra of *Śukla-Yajurveda*-
दुर्मिन्यास्तस्मै सन्तु योऽस्मान् द्रष्टिं यं वयं द्विष्मः। (शुक्ल. सं. 20.19)

The destructive power of waters has also been prescribed in one verse of *Atharvaveda*, where seer *Atharvā* says-

The scriptures and Brahmanical texts were intimately connected with the people of Vedic period. There are instructions on religious rituals for households in the *Dharmasūtras*. On the other hand, in the *Brāhmin* texts, there are the discussions on the rules of sacrifice. Water has been identified as one of the most sacred elements in the Vedic period- पवित्रं वा आपः। (अ. ब्रा. 1.1.1.1) Before starting any action, a person has to be purified himself with water. Thus, the significance and importance of water for various Vedic activities mentioned in the *Dharmasūtra* and *Brāhmin* books. But not only in the Vedic period, but also in the present society the tradition of purifying oneself with water is prevalent before starting any good action, which is an essential part of human livelihood.

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