

National Seminar on Vaidik Yagyaswarup Vimarsh

Organised jointly by Shri Shankar Shikshayatan and Indian Archaeological Society

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New Delhi

What is yajna? Who created it? What are the benefits of yajna? These are some of the many fundamental questions which have evoked awe and curiosity among humanity for ages.

Yajna is seemingly a simple term but its meaning and importance is as complex as it is compelling. Yajna is the essence, act and process of Creation; it is eternal and seamless, transcending life, matter and thought.

Renowned Vedic scholar, Vidyavachaspati Madhusudan Ojha has lucidly and comprehensively explained the term, yajna, its meaning and context in several of his works. He has specifically dealt with the subject in his Yagyasaraswati.

Shri Shankar Shikshayatan, in collaboration with Indian Archaeological Society, organised a day-long National Seminar on Vaidik Yagyaswarup on April 29, 2017 in New Delhi. Several well-known scholars from different universities were invited to discuss and debate the term, yajna, in the context of adhibhautika (material world in its entirety), adhidavika (world of supraphysical energies) and adhyamtika (spiritual).

Opening the discussion, Dr Santosh Kumar Shukla, Associate Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Honorary Convener, Shri Shankar Shikshayatan, presented that there were two fundamental types of yajna—one that is happening perpetually in nature, called prakriti yajna and another is the replication of this natural process by the humans, called kritrim yajna. He quoted Bhagwad Geeta and Shatpatha Brahmana to explain the concept more deeply. He said another name for yajna was Vishnu; he was therefore known as yajnonarayan. Prajapati, the master of all beings, was yajna. Dr Shukla said yajna was the bridge between devatas (manifestations of supraphysical energies) and manushya (human beings).

Noted Vedic scholar, Acharya Jwalant Kumar Shastri laid out the importance of yajna by pointing out that the term was used 1184 in the Vedas, with 580 times in Rigveda alone. He said the term, yajna, has been misunderstood and misinterpreted over the ages. In Sanskrit, he pointed out, there are more meaning than words. Every word has several meanings and are used differently according to their context. It is therefore easy to lose the real meaning of terms like yajna. He said there was widespread misunderstandings of some key terms like soma, agni and gau. For instance, gau is understood as cow but it is only one among many definitions of this important term; gau also means the rays of sun, a supraphysical energy.

Acharya Shastri said yajna as a ritual, despite being the most commonly understood meaning, was only one of its definitions.

In her address, Dr Shashprabha Kumar, former Vice Chancellor, Sanchi University, Bhopal, said earth was the alter of yajna; yajna was happening within our bodies and

outside, in the cosmos. Referring to the popular meaning of yajna as `sacrifice`, she quoted an anecdote to explain that yajna must mean surrender of self.

Dr Ramanuj Upadhyaya, Assistant Professor, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi, clarified that it would be more appropriate to call kritrim or artificial yajna as the one which was visible. He called it pratyaksha yajna. He spoke at length about soma yajna.

Various other aspects of yajna, including the extensive use of Vedic terms and practices by Kalidasa in his works, were taken up by other speakers in their presentations.

Prof. Ram Nath Jha of Jawaharlal Nehru University, in his address as a chairperson of the first session, aptly summed up yajna as the process through which we became one with nature, tattva (essence). He explained how Vedic terms were misinterpreted by western scholars and he cited the specific instance of soma being erroneously defined as an intoxicating drink. Soma is the fundamental material from which the universe came into being.

Prof. Sudhir Kumar, in his address at the second session, explained in detail the scientific principles behind yajna. He pointed out that how the performance of yajna cleans the air, space and self. Through yajna, we draw various benefits of nature's bounties, he said.

Dr Niranjan Patel, Head of Department, Sanskrit Department, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University, Anand (Gujarat), summed up the essence of yajna as `atma samarpan` or surrender of self.
