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 H\textsubscript{2}O 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, Upaniṣads and Brāhmaṇas 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: water, Vedic activities, functions, sipping, purified, sacrifice, obsequies

Methodology
This work is mainly based on secondary sources of information such as published documents, books, journals, etc. The paper makes use of previously published works in addition to citing from original vedic texts, etc. Data are collected through the overview of previous works and related texts. These primarily include Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Brāhmaṇas and Śātras. In this approach, the data collection begins with specific observation of the previous literatures and then I analyse the data collected. For interpretation I follow current trends of...
research methodology on Indology.

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 िृष्यमायुष्यं श्रमस्िेदमलापहम्।
शरीरिलसन्धानं स्नानमोजस्करं परम्।। (च. सू. 5.94)

Bathing is purifying, libidinal stimulant and life-giving. It reduces fatigue, sweating and dirt. It provides strength to the body and enhances ojas. The Indian philosophy through its Vedas, Upaniṣads and Brāhmaṇas 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

अद्वितुकुत्त्वानि गायमि। (वी. ध. 1.5.8.2)

This 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 purify himself through Ācamana, which we can be achieved through water. Ācamana is the way, by which a sacrificer purifies himself. Boudhāyana says- नित्यो हृदय गमन: निवेद्या (वी. 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 देश आस्थिो दक्षिण वाहु जातन्त्र कृत्वा प्राणोन्नतीमणिक-नामानंगीक्षर्वम् जागरो यथायपुरुतिवर्तनं अवज्ञां (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 Brāhmaṇas. 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 Śūdra should touch the water by his lips for sipping. In Manusmṛti, this method is clearly defined.¹ And through the Ācamana the sacrificer becomes blameless and faultless.

Haradatta also explains this concept in Mitākṣarā commentary - आचामनावदना वनत्यं शुभचाः
शविवषये न मुदर्मान्यप्रयतः स्वातः।। (भी. 2.62)

¹ हरादत्त: पुस्ते विषयः कन्तकमिश्रस्वयम्।
वेदात्त्वक: प्राणिस्वयम् नान्ति: स्वयमिश्रस्वयम्।। (भूर. 2.62)
lying down or bending forward. However, this method of sipping is not implemented just before the sacrificial work. In order to purify oneself after eating in funeral ceremony, it is necessary to take care of it. In the Āpastamba Dharmasūtra we get support for this viewpoint:  (A. Dh. 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

Āpastamba Dharmasūtra also mentions this idea as पूणिवलसर्वस्याचनभ प्रमेयो भवति । (A. Dh. 1.5.2).

By doing Ācamana through water on earth a person becomes clean and pure.

Water is also helpful in sacrificial work for cleaning or scaring the firewood and alter. Adhvaryu takes the sprinkling water, and sprinkles in the firewood with this mantra: ‘a black deer, living in the den, art thou. I sprinkle thee, agreeable to Agni’3 etc. Again he sprinkles in the alter, with this text - ‘Thou art the alter, I sprinkle thee, agreeable to Barhiś’4 etc.

Again, in one sūtra of Boudhāyana, seer prays to water for his own purification - आपाः पुनन्िु पृवििी पृवििी पूिा पुनािु माम । (B. Dh. 2.5.8.11)

This means, water makes the world pure, pure world makes me pure, Brahmaṇaspati makes me pure, Brahma makes me pure. I have committed sins by eating uneatable foods and the endowment I have taken from worthless persons. Water makes them all faultless.

Again, in Dāna Karma also the water is important. Āpastamba says that a person should have relief of some water before commencing the given work.

सर्वायूक्तपूवाण्ण दामानि । (A. Dh. 2.4.9.8)

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

आयं गौाः पृविरक्रमो वदत्येिामृचं वत्ररन्िजालं पठन् सिास्मात्पापात्प्रमुछयिे । (B. Dh. 4.4.4.3)

This means, if a person utters the mantra आयं गौाः वत्रराििायन्सिापापेभ्यो विमुछयिे । (G. Dh. 3.6.11). He says that if a person goes down in the water and utters

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2 न कर्णप्राणस्रुतांति यांक्ष स्युमनामगमः। (B. Dh. 3.36)
3 कृति न यात्जातिः स्याखरेष्ठो स्नये तिष्टं प्रोक्षाभि िेभदरभस बभहणषे तिष्टां प्रोक्षाभि बभहणरभस स्रुग््यस्त्िा जुष्टं प्रोक्षाभि।। (Yaj. Sah. 2.1)
4 ibid.
the verse of Aghamārṣaṇa rṣi three times, his intentional and unconscious sins shall go away.\(^5\) These statements present that to purify oneself and protect oneself from any type of sins everywhere, water is considered as the vital element.

Water plays a strong role in both life and death for everyone. After death, the norm of giving water to dead people is prevalent since ancient times. Seer Āpastambha has discussed this matter. He says - केशान्प्रकीया पांसूनोप्यैका ससो दवििास्सकृदुपम ज्ज्योत्तीयोपविशन्त्ये (अ. ध. 2.6.15.7) This means that when a person is shrugging his hair, mixing dust, holding one garment, facing towards south, giving water three times to the dead people, 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.\(^6\) When a Brāhmin, after bathing, satisfies his predecessors with water, he obtains the whole reward for the performance of the obsequies (śrāddha).\(^7\)

Water is peace, because peace can be achieved through water. Water is a means of purification; with water we accordingly purify ourselves. आपो वह िै सत्यं (रा. 7.4.1.6) that truth is the same as the waters or waters are the truth. Hence it is said, where waters flow, that is a form of the truth. We come to know about the importance of water from these verses of Šatapatha Brāhmaṇa.

Like Dharmasūtras, there is a lot of information about the necessity and information of water in Brāhmaṇa literature. The Brāhmaṇas 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 Kouṣṭikī Brāhmaṇa - शावन्ििै भेषजमापाः शावन्िरेिैषा भेषजमन्यिे यज्ञे वक्रयिे (कौ. 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 िा आपाः' in this verse of Kouṣṭikī 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

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\(^5\) उदकस्यान्तभनणिग्नभििद्रात्रिघिषणर्ं भत्रर्यस्य सिण स्िात्पापात् ज्ञानकृ तादज्ञानकृ ताश्च िुच्यते। (पुनु. 4.229)

\(^6\) वायुस्निधिनिथति (मू. 4.229)

\(^7\) यदेव तर्चयकीः निकृष्णनाः निकृष्णन। तेवेच वृक्षरत्नातीति विकृष्णनामकता॥ (मू. 3.283)
We can conclude from this hymn of Śukla-Yajurveda that water (Āpaḥ) is very important in sacrificial work.

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 that the sacrificer drink water before commencing the sacrificial work, and thus the Brahmācārī suffers no harm of any kind as it is declared in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa - “अमृतं या आपे सत्मशाले तदाद लदेनमुभयो मूलन परिसज्जति तथा हास्य प्रहचारी न को चनातिमाचरिति” (श. 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 उपनमवि स यज्ञायिे िवद्विीयं जायिे। (श. 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 - तिरोहितम वास्तव प्रोक्तग्राहम कन्युष्मादावेतृत करोति। (श. ब्रा. 3.6.1.11) Not only that, whatever obstacles or turmoil arises in Yajna, they are removed or cooled by water - “यद्वे यज्ञस्य ररष्टं यदशान्िमापो िै सिास्य शावन्िरविरेिैनत्तछिान्त्या शमयवन्ि। (शुक्ल. सं. 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 विष्िुविाचक्रमे।

Water is also used to destroy enemies at the time of sacrifice. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa declares वजन जाSआपो। (श. 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-दुम्बिक्षालमयेन सन्तु योSममान् हेश्य यं च वर्ग हिम्य। (शुक्ल. सं. 20.19)

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

आपो यद्व बस्तधापनेन त प्रति तपत योSममान् हेश्य यं च वर्ग हिम्य। (अ. सं. 2.23.1)

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 discussions on the rules of sacrifice. Water

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8 आपो ये सर्वे कामाः स एषोSनामः सत्यविवाहो न हेतुं कामचय मनमानः (श. ब्रा. 10.5.4.15)
has been identified as one of the most sacred elements in the Vedic period- पवित्रं िा आपः। (श. ब्रा. 1.1.1.1) Before starting any action, a person has to purified himself with water. The significance and importance of water for various Vedic activities are 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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Select Bibliography


