

Puranic Thought of Planting and Protecting Trees: A Lesson to the Modern Mankind

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*angat angat sambhavasi hrdayad abhijayase |
atma vai putranamasi sa jiva saradah satam ||¹*

To make a “Green Earth” the above verse of *Agnipurana* makes a request to the mankind that, plant trees instead of cutting them and let them grow and increase. Besides it reveals the importance of trees.

Plants play an important and vital role in the human life. Directly or indirectly plants are connected with the life of man, and apart from that life cannot be imagined. From the very beginning the relationship between plants and people was very deep. It is because at the early times men were the absolute dependants on the plants for the continuance of their lives. Though they had scanty needs still then they got all of them from the plants, viz. food to eat, cloth to wear, shelter to live, ornaments to decorate body, weapons to protect themselves from the attack of wild animals etc. Gradually their brain developed and they learnt to use the plants for their multi purpose works. They learnt the way of cultivation to get plenty of foods and they also learnt the utility of roots and leaves in order to eradicate different diseases, like vomiting, irregularity of purge, head-ache and mainly of wounds etc. Thus we may say that the plants were the friends and guardian of the early- man.

Their relationship with mankind is pertinently observed in the *Puranas*. From every angle, *Puranas* have discerned and discussed the utility and importance of plant kingdom to human society. Such *Puranas* are mostly the *Agnipurana*, the *Kurmapurana*, the *Matsyapurana*, the *Brahma Vaivartta purana*, the *Garudapurana*, the *Vayupurana* etc. The *Vayupurana* clearly states that all basic necessities of a man, viz. garments, ornaments, timber for house building, fruits, dyes, honey etc. are available from plants.²

Not only the ancient people but the modern people also greatly depend upon the plants for their day-to-day life. The only difference is that in the early times men depended directly on the plants whereas the modern men use the plants both directly and indirectly. Because the needs of the modern people are uncountable and are raising higher day by day. Being cultured and literate by applying their brain they are making efforts in different researches to find out various ways of utilization of plant by each and every part, i.e. for food, shelter, cosmetics, furniture etc. for their comfortable life. They prepare medicine from the parts of the plants’ body as it is or processing them in several ways. But unfortunately the modern men are ignoring the importance of plants.

They are also forgetting the plants' contribution. Even if they forget that the plants are the only source of life existence by giving out oxygen into the air. On the other hand, the early-man could realize the importance of plants and in return they took care of them which are elaborately narrated in the *puranas* which are great lessons for modern men.

Puranas severely criticize the unnecessary cutting of trees and prescribe the punishments for this prohibited act. In *Agnipurana* it is said –

*tarumsca cchedayed yasca vrksan cchayasusitalan
asipatravane ghore pidyate yamakimkaraih* *³

In order to protect the trees from the wood cutters' hand, there is some threatening made by the authors of *Skandapurana*. According to that cutting of trees may lead one to the hell.

*nagaropavane vrksan pramadaddhi cchinnati yah
sa gacchen narakam nama jrmbhanam
raudradarsanam*⁴

Ancient people were conscious of plantation, by thinking of its preciousness. To encourage plantation *Matsyapurana* said that by planting a single tree one can reside in heaven for 30,000 years of Indra. Not only this, the planter may have the *moksha*, i.e., end of rebirth.

*yascaikam api rajendra vrksam samsthapayen narah
so' pi svarge vased rajan yavad indrayuta trayam
bhutan bhavyamsca manujams trayed drumasammitan
paramam siddhim apnoti punaravrttidurlabham*⁵

Agnipurana also glorifies in other words how: "Planting of trees brings *moksha*."⁶

Again it is said that a tree never betrays anyone rather than it always remains helpful in all times. They are never harmful even as a son,

who at times do harm to their parents out of greed for property.

"pitaram nopahimsanti druma dravinalobhatah ⁷

Agnipurana encourages becoming a lover of tree. It gives more emphasis on planting a tree by analyzing its necessity – that to have a better life, one should plant a tree and should take care of it like one's own son. Because trees are more precious and useful than a son, who are self-seekers by nature and never follow the scriptures, i.e. –

*tasmat subhavaha vrksa ropyah sreymbhivanchata
putravat paripalyasca te putra dharmatah smrtah.
kim dharmavimukhair martyaih kevalam
svarthabuddhibhah
taruputra varam ye tu pararthaikanuvrttayah* ⁸

Plantation is not the only work; care should be taken for their protection by not cutting them down. Therefore, *puranas* made some prohibitions against the cutting of some particular trees, i.e. *Asvattha*, *Vata* or banyan, *Bilva* or wood apple tree, *Udumbara* or fig etc. by connecting them with some religious ethics.

*asvattha vatavrksasca na cchettavyo kadacana
na cchettavyo bilvavrksodrum barasca kadacana
karmanyascaiva ye vrksa na cchettavya
sreyarthibhah* ⁹

The regretful factor is that the modern people are not conscious regarding the value of plants and plantation like the ancient people. Though the population and their need raising tremendously, still then they are cutting down the trees carelessly and destroying the forests with their full efforts, only to maintain their luxurious lives. Now-a-days considering the importance of trees the authorities launched some plans for afforestation, viz. plantation on the road-side and celebration of '*Vanamahotsava*' etc. but due to

lack of proper care those plants become unsuccessful. After plantation care should be taken to grow them up properly. There are so many illustrations in *puranas* in this regard. According to some passages of *Agnipurana*; planting trees is not very difficult work. But after plantation right care should be taken to allow them to grow properly by protecting them from the heat of the sun, from animals as well as from the insects. Besides plenty of water and fertilizers should be supplied at due times. *Puranas* supplied a lot of ideas about the plantation of sapplings with a right distance and the use of fertilizers for them. Those passages are:-

pravesayen nadivahan puskarinya tu karayet
(AP.282,4cd)

sayam pratastu gharmarttau sitakale dinantare
(AP.282,7cd)

*uttamam vimsatir hasta madhyam sodosantaram
sthanat sthanantaram karyam vrksanam dvadasavaram
viphalah syur ghana vrksah sastrenadau hi sodhanam
vidanga ghrtapamkaktan secayecchitavarina*
(AP.282,8cd9&10ab)

*phalanase kulatthaisca
masairmudgairyaivaisthilaih
grtasitapayahsekah phalapuspaya sarvada
matsyambhasa tu sekana vrddhir bhavati sakhinah¹⁰*
(AP.282,10cd,11ab,13ab)

*avikajaskrccurnam yavacurnam tilani ca
gomamsamudakanceti saptaratram nidhapayet
utsekam sarvavrksanam phalapuspadivrddhidam
matsyodakena sitena amranam seka isyate
prasastam capyasokanam kaminipadatadanam
kharjuranarikelader lavanadbhir vivardhanam
vidamngamatmyamansadbhish sarvesam dohadam
subham^{*11}*

(AP.247,28-31)

Therefore the people should be alert to learn from *puranas* about different aspects of the plantation and their protection and should let them

grow properly by which lives may be wholesome and comfortable on this earth, not only for the human beings but for all the living entities.

Foot Notes :

1. This has been taken from the *Mahabharata* I, 68, 62, vide the *Mahabharata Adiparvan* edited by Vishnu S. Sukthanakar, Vol.I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1993, P.309. The first two lines are found in the *Brhadaranyakopanisad* also. But there it refers to semen, vide Bh.U. (op.cit) 6.4.9.,9.457.
2. Purna Chandra Ojha, *Flora in the Bhagavat Purana*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis of Utkal University, 2010, P.159.
3. Cf. “*indhanartham asuskanam drumancaiva patanam*” – *Agnipurana*, edited by Baladev Upadhyaya, Kasi Sanskrit Series No.174. The Chaukhamba Skt. Series Office, Varanasi, 1964.
4. Vide, *SKD* Vol.IV, 1961, p.476.
5. Vide, *The Matsyapurana*, Part-I, forwarded by H.H. Wilson, arranged by Nag Sharan Singh, First edition, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1983, Ch. LIX, pp.278-280.
6. Cf. “*pratistham padapanam ca vaksye’ham bhuktimuktidam*” and “*papanasah parat siddhir vrksaramapratisthaya*”
Agnipurana of Maharsi Vedavyasa, edited by Baladev Upadhyaya, Kasi Skt Series, No.174. The Chaukhamba Skt. Series Office, Varanasi, 1964. Ch.70, Verse Nos. 1ab and 8cd.
7. Vide, *SKD*, p.476.
8. Vide, *SKD*, p.476.
9. *Varahapurana* Ch.126.
10. *AP*, p.416.
11. *Ibid* p.360.

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