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Vedic Literature And Agriculture

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Introduction:

Sanskrit is recognized as one of the most ancient languages of the world. It has a rich literature and beautiful vocabulary also. Perhaps it is for this reason that Dandin named it as the language of Gods or a Divine language.

There are large numbers of ancient Sanskrit texts that includes agriculture science in them. Manuscripts like Vedas, Krishi Parahara, Kautilya's Arthashastra etc consists of valuable information about agricultural science. Selections of seeds, land preparation, water management and irrigation, pest control, storage, crop rotation and so on are the topics described in these ethic books. There is a treasure of knowledge on agriculture in ancient Sanskrit text. Agricultural can be benefited from the principles described in above mentioned ancient Sanskrit texts.

The text of the Veda is a reflection of the intellectual activity of the ancient sages. India is primarily an agriculture oriented country. Indians are said to have mastered the art of agriculture and our contribution to the economy through agriculture is enormous. Agriculture is the oldest key in development of civilization.

The word agriculture is derived from Latin word "agerigri" means field. Agriculture is the science or art of cultivation of soil, sowing and harvesting crops and raising live stock. The art of making land more productive in practical way.

The concept of agriculture in the Vedas:

The vedas, the oldest book in the library of mankind, deal amply with agriculture. The vedic word "Krisi" means the act of ploughing. Krisi also denotes agriculture in vedic times religion and farming were close and allied. When agriculture was invented the first agricultural teachers were the priests. The rural population can be roughly classified as agriculture in which the sole occupation in the cultivation of the land or postural in which tending live stocks and crops led to replacement of the hunter gather by a nomadic or semi sedentary management system. Out of 10,462 hymns in the Rigveda 24 hymns mention agriculture, the four vedas mention more than 75 species, satapatha Brahmana

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mentions over 25 species and charaka Samhita (c300BC) an Ayurvedic treatise mentions more than 320 plants. The vedas teach us to how to till the soil. A man who chooses agriculture as a profession is called a farmer. The farmer's work is not humble. It carries with it the respect of all. He holds a very important position in the society. Cultivation lands are called as "Ksetra" and fertile land are called as "urvara" He is the lord of the field. All those who live upon his produce look upon him with veneration. According to Atharva veda, the land is our mother and land her son. माता भूमिः पुत्रोऽहं पुथिव्याः . As per Yajurveda 9.22 and 4.10 sukta, agriculture is regarded as the best of all professions.

This paper intends to highlight the following aspects of agricultural practices in the vedic period.

1: soil, Land and village settlement:

First requirement of farming is fertile soil. Cultivation areas in different phases of history are thus traced to fertile soils like mountain clay, alluvial soils of river – plain and black cotton soil particularly only to Deccan trap adjoining some parts of central and western India. Farmers of the Rigvedic period were knowledgeable in recognising various kinds of soils. Soils preparation was done by repeated ploughing as in (RV 1.23.15). Soil was soaked with water after ploughing. People possessed fair knowledge of fertility of land, selection and treatment of seeds, seasons of sowing and harvesting, rotation of crops, manuring and other practices.

2: Manure and manuring:

Sweetness of atmosphere water and sweetness of soil were the two cravings of the vedic people. Sweetness is intended to mean here fertility of soil and good water resources. The plant fertility depends on three factors: a) conservation of soil, b) Replenishment of soil exhaustion and c) manuring of individual plant. Of these three, removal of soil

exhaustion was possibly considered the best way to restore soil- fertility. Two measures were adopted.

3: Irrigation system (Sincana) :

Two types of irrigation were known to the vedic people.

1) Natural Irrigation

- Rain water : vedic agriculture was essentially rain supported practice. The Rigveda contains a large number of Mantras applauding rain for "Anna", food – grain and increase of flock of cattle. Specific utilization of rain water for flowing over arable land is laid down in the Rig-veda. Small streams are stated to have formed from rain water. These streams had no flow and water for irrigation was lifted by means of bucket (Droni)

- River water: Two important river sources supporting irrigation were Sindhu, its seven tributaries and Saraswathi Sindhu (Indus) : It was snow fed river from north- west side of mount Kailasa. It was a source of perennial water. Its other stream originated from a lake, north – east to Kailasa. The two flowed north- westerly and taking south- westerly course falls in Arabian Sea. The Rigveda describes Sindhu with its associated streams in two courses, easterly and westerly. The easterly course comprises the Punjab rivers, the westerly course includes its Kabul streams. River Sindhu is described as flowing over the region rich in corn. It is described as Vajinivati (embodiment of food). All the statements show high fertility capacity of the river water. The seven rivers of Sindhu flowing on their downward path, impart fertility to field, and thus the veda states "Increase Anna" (food grain).

Saraswathi: Saraswathi, the non-perennial rain fed river, having risen in the valley of Siwalik range, according to geomorphologic investigation, and changed its course five times in its entire course from emergence to fall in the Arabian Sea. The two

sources of water of the river were i) rain-fall and ii) draining of water from the rivers of perennial water, namely Indus, Sutlej and Yamuna. Thus the shifting of course of Sutlej towards north-westwards made Sarasvathi to flow in sub-soil at Vinasana.

4) Water Management, vedic suktas and deities concerning agriculture:

In one Mantra of the Rigveda, Varuna is requested to make paths for the flowing of river water over the field. Water played a crucial role in the evolution of living organism. As the biochemical systems of organisms are all adapted to function in aqueous medium, water has become one of the vital resources for all kinds of life on this planet, indeed, the communities of life process and living economics are hinged around this vital resource. Earth and sky are referred to as the mother and father providing food and water to the entire biotic community in Rigveda. As vedic people were successful in agriculture, they knew careful planning for all their agricultural activities including utilizing the nearby water resources. Green pastures for the livestock and crops from the agricultural fields were all possible because of water from rains and the rivers get water from rains or snow. Vedic reference can be made of sources of water and waterbodies (from the smallest to the greatest). Homage is paid to the Gods or spirits dwelling in the water. "Prajanya" a subordinate deity to Indra in the vedas, is prayed for bringing rain. It appears that Parjanya is the water bearer. For obtaining abundant rainfall, the vedic seers here have addressed the concerned deities of rain to pour down water. There are prayers in the form of hymns addressed to the Gods for granting agricultural of food prosperity and plenty of water. Vedic people knew that good rainfall was needed for a good harvest. Many sacrifices have been prescribed and performed to propitiate the rain-god. Rigvedic seer prays moon for prosperous cultivation through

good rain. Cattle and man toil hard to grow barley of rain. Ksetratrapati suktam of Rigveda in praise of Ksetrapati- the lords of fields, suna, sira, sita along with pushan and Prajanya. Suma and sira are the deities representing the plough and sita is goddess of furrow. In the vedas, there are many suktas that are suggestive of different aspects of agriculture and production of food "Annam"

5) Ceremonies concerning agriculture and crop protection:

Many ceremonies have been prescribed in vedic Kalpasutras. The vedic Mantras find their application in rituals. The ceremonies are related to agricultural operations. Here are few of them- 'Halabhiyoga' the yoking of plough, Sita-yajna furrow sacrifice, Khalayajna- threshing –floor sacrifice, shunasiriya- gifting of oxen along with plough, Pravapana- at the time of sowing, Pralavana- reaping of crop- prayayana- at the time of keeping corn in the barn, and an offering is made to Akhu- raja (king of moles) at mole hills during the conclusions of these sacrifices. Fences were used as protective barriers against invasion of cattle and wild animals to the agricultural fields. Crops were to be protected from mice, birds, locusts and other creatures. Certain ceremonies and remedies have been prescribed for protection of crops.

In vedic/ Ancient times

- **Small individual** farmland to feed several times the family size was developed.
- The crops were self-fertilizing. Seeds were automatically available to the farmers in the field itself.
- Rotation of crops and sequence of cropping were followed.
- The vegetation grown was matching the type of soil.
- Natural manures were used.
- Seeds were freely available

- System was self sufficient
- Preservation of seeds, stems was followed for future use
- Farm animals were protected and dairy products developed

Conclusion:

In ancient India- vedic period, agriculture was never an Industry, nor a means to make profit. Agriculture could yield profit but it should not be profit. The basic need of human life is only for food grains. Whatever we offer to the land that is agriculture is returned to us, magnified manifold. Culture has been enriched by human beings who have their roots in the soil all over the world. Agriculture is the mainstay of living beings. Mechanized agriculture is developed in the west. India, in the modern period, has tried to imitate the west to some extent. But the ancient practice of cultivation on a large scale is even now very much popular. Veda may be regarded as the source of inspiration for agricultural practices in India. Our elders had understood and practiced it intelligently. That is the reason why they felt the presence of lord in everything at every moment. They also sang his glory and regarded every living and non-living things as part and parcel of the mighty lord. So from Vedic period to till date agriculture remains the important and major source of food supply to humans, animals and are still and continue to depend on it.

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