

Relevance of Sun-Worship

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The concept of Sun-worship is nearly as old as the origin of humanity. India is the treasure house of ancient knowledge both scientific and spiritual. In the Vedic period different elements of nature were defied and prayed as gods and Goddesses. Sun had also occupied a prominent position. In societies which were primarily agricultural and depended on the Sun for life and sustenance, it is no wonder that the Sun became defied. Sun is indeed the symbol of the supreme. He is an embodiment of natural and supernatural powers. The Sun God has been identified with the vital element in man and cosmos.

Origin of the word SŪRYA

The most transparent of gods Sūrya is the luminary itself. To Yāska the word Sūrya is derived from sr(to move) or from su (to stimulate) or from suir (to promote well)¹ he is called savitr because he is the stimulator of everything: सर्वस्य प्रसवित्ता² In many pre-historic and ancient culture, the sun was thought to be a solar deity or other supernatural phenomenon. The single wheeled car of the Sun is considered to be the forerunner of the sudarśanacakra of Viṣṇu because Sun-worship of Vedic times was an aspect of Viṣṇu and Sūrya later came to be called Sūryanārāyaṇa.

Development of Sun Cult

People were aware from very early period of the beneficent nature of solar energy. This God has not only the power of dispelling darkness, but also of curing such diseases as blindness, leprosy, Jaunties, Asthma etc. and of removing poverty and of healing and illuminating the world.

The sun is the source of life to plant and animals. Biological science has proved the role of the sun for the development of the organic world. Sun is an inevitable source for photosynthesis and without photosynthesis there can be no existence of the organic world. To be more scientific and reasonable, sun is the only object responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the world. The Trimūrti image was meant for the worshipper who had faith in the triple form of the sun God. Skandapurāṇa states that the sun god is Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahma. He has combined all these three in his form.-

अयं हि रुद्र आदित्यो हरिरेष दिवाकरः ।

रविर्हिरेण्यरूपोऽसौ त्रयीरूपोऽयमयमा ॥³

The fundamental Indian spiritual concept is the concept of self-awareness and consciousness of the universe and also in the cells of living body. Sun is the Universal truth. He is the soul of all movable and immovable सूर्य आत्मा जगतस्तस्थुषश्चा⁴ The mantra ‘Suryātmanave’ explains all living beings are originated from the sun because he is Ādideva.

Sun-Worship in India

Several Temples were built for Āditya at Mārtāṇḍa in Kashmir, Konark in Orisa, Sūryanārkoil in Tanjavore, Modhere in the West Gujrath, Osia in Rajasthan, Bhumara in Madhyapradesh, Arasavally in Andhrapradesh and so on. The ruins of a large number of sun temples are found all over India proves the wide spread sun-worship in India.

All most all the cities of India were famous to sun worship of the many places in Northern India Madhura is the one where Samba, Kṛṣṇa's son established sun-shrines. Varāhapurāna explains that Sāmba worshipped the Sun God on the advice of Nārada to get cured of leprosy. According to a legend, after getting cured of leprosy.⁵ Sāmba built a temple for sun god to worship in Mulasthanpur (Modern Multan in West Pakisthan) and brought 18 families of sun worshippers called Magas from Sākadvipa (Iran) for the performance of sun worship in the temple. The place where these Magas settled was called Sāmbapura or Mulasthāna, from there the cult spread all over India. The proficiency of astrology and astronomy of Magabrāhmaṇas are depicted in Bhaviṣyapurāṇa. The worshippers or sauras from Śākadvipa are identified as arkins and those from jumbudvipa (Indian) as Maitrins. There are many legends in the early puranas which may be associated with the sun worship such as the legend of Yājñavalkya, Satrājīth, and worship of the sun-god by Brahma etc.

The chanting of Gāyatri Mantra and Sūryanamaskāra (prostration before the sun) has been practiced in India from very early period to get physical and mental relief with the blessing of Surya. In the Gāyatri Mantra sun god has been invoked to impel human intellect.

The Sun-worship in other countries

The fundamental facts connected with the Sun such as the source of light and heat and the producer of food and vegetation must have impressed the human mind since very early period. It was probably because of this fact that sun worship found a place in almost every ancient culture and civilization like Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, Roman, Iranian, Mexican, Indian etc. The sun worship prevailed in Egypt from the earliest pre-historic times. Sun have been worshipped in Egypt under many names and in many aspects such as Ra, Re, Aton, Horus, Hather Tum etc. The Assyrians worshipped him under the name Marduk and the Babylonians named him Shamasha, speaking him as the source of human life and joy. The sun god was worshipped in Greek also. According to Plato "both Hellenes and Barbarians were accustomed to greet the rising sun with prostrations and kissing of hands". In Greeco-Roman culture he was worshipped under the names of Helios and Apollo. Romans worshipped him in the form of Mithras. In early times the Iranians represented him by symbols and gave him full anthropomorphic form.

Relevance in Modern context

Sūryanamaskāra is a kind of yogic prostration since prevailed in ancient times is somewhat similar to Sun gazing programmes of modern world. Chanting of Gāyatrīmantra and Sūryanamaskāra help the worshipper to maintain mental and physical health. Nowadays sunbath occupies an important place in man's health and well-being. Sūryanamaskāra is one of the all-around yoga exercises in 12 step salute the Sun. Breathing exercise is also an important factor in the Sūryanamaskāra.

The sun-bathing craze of the people is only a modern version of sun-worship. 'During the winter or spring if we go to the South West or Hawaii or some other sunshiny area, we feel our elation, a stimulation we breathe easier, our traumatized joints stop aching, our post nasal drip stop. We may feel

so invigorated and refreshed that we lie down and go to sleep. We all feel instinctively that sun light is in general a health promoting factor,' that is why our ancient people asked आरोग्यं भास्करादिच्छेत् There are many extensive reviews of the effects of ultra violet light of different wave lengths on organisms in general and human skin in particular. The principal known effects of visible and ultra violet light on human beings are vision, heating and synthesis of vitamin D.

According to Dr. Mercole "sun bath for 30 minutes our body produces about 20,000 IUS vitamin D as much as exists in 200 glasses of milk or the equivalent of about 50 typical multivitamins". Some Australian researchers have found that sun light could reduce Asthma.⁶ Jacob Liberman,⁷ says that we potentially harm ourselves when we hide from sun light. He also explains how to utilize the therapeutic benefits of light. To him "Light is the basic component from which all life originates, develops, heals and evolves". Everything is that humans do is affected in some way by light. Scientists began to discover that vitamin D played an important role in all the cells in the body and they hypothesized that a lack of vitamin D could increase the risks of cancer. In addition to the Hardward study, two others came out to demonstrate an increased incident of breast cancer in women with low levels of vitamin D. These were presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research. The experts now recommended a minimum 1000 units of vitamin D per day we need. But we can get 1000units of vitamin D by spending 10 minutes in the sun in the middle of the day with arms and face exposed".

According to the National Cancer Institute reports, life time exposure to sun light may reduce the risk of some of the most common types of cancer. Sun bath does not cause skin cancer but chronic sun burn on skin containing free radicles leads to skin cancer. Exposure to sun-light may be the newest method of easing pain sun gazing will allow actually change the neural path ways in the brains. The yogic experiences have ample evidence for the changes created in the Brain. They could create enough endomorphins in the brain through yogic pathways especially suryanamaskāra and mantrajapa to get relief from pain, stress etc.

The contribution of the Vedic science in promoting the efforts made by the physical science is very great. In Vedic concepts of Adityopāsana is accepting in modern time; modern science has accepted many diseases which could not be cured by medicines can be remedied by sun light. A living example of solar healing and related phenomenon is Hira Ratan manak. He has surrendered his living body for observation and experiments of time. Although scientists and doctors have agreed that hunger is being reduced if not eliminated, due to the complexity of the various brain functions, they have not been able to explain how sun-gazing has such positive effects on the human mind or body. However more research is under way.⁸

Conclusion

Sun is the source of all knowledge भुवनज्ञानं सूर्ये संयातम्⁹. He is the Truth itself as in तत्त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये¹⁰ So sun-worship will help better self-awareness and consciousness of the Universe. Sun is the one manifesting Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara who are the Gods of srṣṭi, sthiti and sambhāra respectively Creation, Preservation and destruction. As he is the first born, he is the father and mother of the Universe. We are all coming from the Sun, he nourished us and finally we will go to the Sun. This thought will lead us to live here without sectarianism and will prove वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्। to be true. This kind of awareness will bring forth a holistic view of development, interconnection among all the animate and



inanimate, mutual co-operation, self-control and lack of greed. All these if we put into practice can lead a sustainable development and this world will become the best place to dwell in.

References

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