

# **Yajña: The Cardinal Principle of Sustainability<sup>1</sup>**

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It has become a fashion to talk about global recession these days. Newspapers, talk shows in TVs, business conferences and even family magazines make all out efforts to educate the masses about global recession and how it needs to be rectified and overcome at the earliest. If it gets delayed, we are told that economies will not grow, jobs will be lost, earning potential will come down, people may go without their necessities and so on. The solution to this problem is also available aplenty. The most dangerous of these is the dominant American prescription; shop till you drop. The logic is straightforward and simple. If you shop more, that will re-prime the consumption engine. Once that happens more manufacturing and more distribution of goods and services will happen. The economy will flourish and all lost jobs will resurface. One logical question that we may have is where is the money to fund this temporary consumption engine? The answer for that is also straightforward. We have the credit card industry to foot the bill for the time being.

## **Rules for running the consumption engine**

It appears that we are at last convinced of this model. Otherwise how can we logically explain the sudden surge in the number of malls and hyper-market stores in our country? The interesting question is how does this model work? In order for the consumption engine to run in full steam, we need to create conditions to throw items and buy new ones (known as obsolescence). Until ten years back *planned obsolescence* was the idea. What it means is that design an equipment or a part such that it last only for a few years and it cannot be repaired but need to be thrown and replaced. However, now-a-days there is a new trend called *perceived obsolescence*. In this method, when an item is very good and in a working condition we must throw it and favour a new product in its place. If you want to get a better clarity about this watch some of the advertisements in the TV.

In simple terms this whole idea works on an important assumption. “Mother Nature” is an endless bounty that is created for ruthless and unmindful exploitation by the human kind. Unfortunately this is the biggest flaw in this model. The height of ignorance is such that in several seminars on nature, bio-diversity etc. learned researchers and experts talk about protecting nature. Little do they realize that if wisdom prevails we need to protect ourselves. Nature does not need any helping hand from ordinary mortals like us. Natural systems have in-built mechanisms for self-correction and once they invoke it we will be nowhere.

Against this backdrop of current day model for our living, what do our ancestors have to say? Let us take a leaf out of *Gitā* to see what Lord Krishna has to advise for us.

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<sup>1</sup> **Mahadevan, B.** (2012). “Yajna: The cardinal principle of sustainability”, *Sadguru’s Blessings*, Vol. 9 (7), March, 2012, pp 16 – 17.

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## **Yajña: A model code for living**

*Yajña* is a grand concept and Lord Krishna has dealt with it in specific details in Chapters 3 and 4. However, we shall look at only a few aspects of *Yajña* that are relevant to the context of this article. Lord Krishna mentions that when *prajāpati* created the human beings and other living organisms (*prajas*) in the universe, He also co-created the concept of *Yajña*. He said that by honouring the principle of *Yajña*, the living beings can milch their cow of desires (*iṣṭa kāma dhuk*).

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।  
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वं एष वोऽस्त्वष्टकामधुक् ॥ 3.10

*sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā putovāca pajāpatiḥ*  
*anena prasviṣyadhvam eṣa vo'stvaṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*

The term *Yajña* typically invokes in our mind an altar in which offerings are made to a deity with a certain expectation of some benefits. It does not convey the full spirit of *Yajña* unless we contemplate on it a little more deeply. The critical aspect of *Yajña* is giving (or sharing) without a sense of attachment. That is why symbolically at the end of each offering the mantra ends with “not mine” (न मम). The other aspect of *Yajña* is giving back to the system. Lord Krishna says in *Gita* that consuming oneself the endowments received without a spirit of offering back amounts to behaving like a thief (*stena eva saḥ*).

तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यः यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ॥ 3.12

*tardattān-apradāyaibhyaḥ yo bhun̄kte stena eva saḥ*

Lord Krishna further says that one who cooks for oneself (*ye pacanti-ātmakāraṇāt*) eats sin (*bhun̄jate tvagham*) only.

भुञ्जते ते त्वघं पापाः ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥ 3.13

*bhun̄jate te tvagham ye pacanti-ātmakāraṇāt*

Three conditions emerge from the above *ślokas*. *Yajña* is about sharing, giving back to the system and not organizing life in a pure “selfish” or “what is in it for me to enjoy” mode. These three together play the central role of ensuring sustainability in the long run. It will ensure that milching one’s cow of desires will be a controlled exercise.

## **Yajña and Sustainability**

Developing a culture of sharing and giving back to the system will ensure sustainability at two levels. Sustainability of the natural systems will be a logical outcome of this process. This is because one-way ruthless exploitation of Mother Nature will be a blatant violation of

the spirit of giving back to the system. Resources will be consumed in a carefully thought out manner. Whenever natural resources are consumed, efforts will be made towards replenishing them in some manner. Even the resources will be consumed with minimum amount of wastage. All these practices were followed by our ancestors and these principles shaped their living style. A simple illustration is how every conceivable part of a plantain tree (the leaves, the stem, the flower, the fruit and even the dried part of the outer layers of the stem) are put to use in our daily life.

Every individual in the society must organize their life with the principle of sharing their endowments. Sharing must become a duty and an integral aspect of living. There is no constraint on what to share. It could range from sharing knowledge, wealth, resources in kind, love, kind hearted feelings, support for health and education for downtrodden and so on. Such a spirit of giving away breeds a very healthy atmosphere for social sustainability. The poor in the society can be taken care with a good safety net during periods of distress.

In contrast if we violate this principle, the divide between the poor and the rich will get wider. This can lead to social unrest, increase in crimes such as theft, murder for material gains etc. on account of frustrations. We are already seeing a pattern resembling this in big cities in the country. Let us play our tiny role in building a healthy, peaceful and a safe society that is worthy of emulation by others.