

Old mantra to combat modern menace

Ancient alchemy using cow dung is answer to air pollution, believes Institute for Studies in Vedic Sciences

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IN the time of global warming and growing pollution, saving the environment seems to be the cause celebre of a lot of people. However, while most people might advocate fixing your faucet and turning off your lights, not many would tell you that a *yagna* could help.

This is what the Institute for Studies in Vedic Sciences believes. According to its followers, the ancient vedic practice of *Agnihotra* releases into the air chemicals that absorb pollution and kill harmful bacteria.

In fact, they are celebrating the "World Agnihotra Day" on March 12 to popularise the notion. However, far from asking you to believe it on face value, the members of the Institute insist that the theory is based on sound scientific principles.

"*Agnihotra* is burning of cow dung along with *ghee* made from cow's milk and rice in a pyramidal copper altar at sunrise and sunset while chanting specific *mantras*. We believe that through *Agnihotra*, certain

chemicals are released into the air which absorb carbon and harmful chemicals. Also the fumes have been proven to be pathogenic killing harmful germs. The ash is considered to have medicinal properties," says Dr Purshottam Rajanvale.

To most rational and critical minds, the first question is how can burning cow dung help the environment?

Dr Rajanvale answers, "Our institute scientifically re-

searched the theory and I must admit though we are convinced of the effects, we don't really understand the reasons. For example, we conducted an experi-

ment at a junction in Pune in which we took air samples on a day without doing a morning and evening *Agnihotra* and a day after doing the *Agnihotra*. We noticed reduced levels of air pollution."

"In the case of killing germs, burning of *ghee* and dung is known to give out formaldehyde which is known to kill pathogenic bacteria. Along with

this, the ashes have cured skin problems by application in experiments in the hospital we

have in Shivpuri, Solapur, where we are based," adds Rajanvale.

Rajanvale further states, "We are actively conducting research into the concept and don't ask people to blindly believe but to see the evidence we come up with."

Answering another finger pointed at it saying it is solely a Hindu practice, Rajanvale explains, "This is not true. Even in the *mantras* it is only the word God that is used. He is not being named. In fact, the *Vedas* belong to no specific religion. They are just a tome of knowledge for all of mankind.

"This method of cleansing the air and the environment is popular amongst the younger generation," says Shilpa Polekar who runs a center where she supplies people with the materials necessary for *Agnihotra* called White Flower in Dadar. "Around 130 families in my area practise this and most of them are young nuclear families. I have also noticed that this practice is more common abroad than in India," she adds.

On March 12, the institute plans small local level events to tell people about *Agnihotra*.

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