



Role of Environment in Vedic Literature

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ABSTRACT: Environment is surrounding the whole gamut of diverse. It includes the land, water, vegetation, air and the whole range of the social order and covers all the disciplines, such as chemistry, biology, ecology, sociology etc. that affect and describe these interactions. Environment would automatically be protected through ethical and spiritual life of the people. Indian life rotates around Indian literature contained in Vedas, Upanishads, Epics and the puranas with dharmashastras in the background. Veda is considered the main source of knowledge.

The Vedic literature gives us the genuine principles to adjust with our environment and lead a spiritual life full of bliss. The Veda specially has dealt in detail about various aspects of environment and showed more concern for ecology. Most of the environmental problems of the present day are essentially man made. The role of man is therefore important for shape the environment in perfect harmony. So the proper following of the Vedic techniques, methods and principles and the new knowledge generated through science and technological research should be employed to save the human beings from environmental degradation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Environment is surrounding the whole range in which we observed, experience and react to event and changes. Environmental Science in its broadest sense in the science of complex interactions that occur among the terrestrial, atmospheric, aquatic, living the anthropological environments and includes all the disciplines such as chemistry, biology, ecology, sociology etc. that affect or describe these interactions. It also includes the land, water, air, vegetation. Environment is dynamic and the changes occur due to human meddling. Therefore, the role of man is important for shape the environment in perfect harmony. Environment and its protection has been the hottest topics of discussion for the last decade, with various group – developed countries, scientists, NGOs, foretelling their own theories. But our Indian life rotates around Indian literature contained in Vedas, Upanishads, Epics and the puranas with dharmashastras in the background. The Vedas are the first texts in the library of mankind. All the Vedic writings can be classified in two great divisions, exoteric and esoteric: “the karma-kanda, “the department of works” the ceremonial, and the Jnana-kanda, department of knowledge. The Vedas deal with the knowledge of all sorts. They cover knowledge both physical and spiritual. Especially the Vedic views revolve around the concept of nature and life.

The objectives of the research paper:

1. To find out the environmental preservation reflected in the Vedic literature and
2. To highlight the relevant of these thoughts in present time.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Rg, Yajur, Sama and Atharva samhitas with the commentary of Sayanacharya have been studied for formulating the research paper. In addition to these some Brahman literature have been consulted.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

For data, we propose to rely on the text of Vedic samhitas, their commentaries, Vedic literature and relevant primary and secondary literature. For methodology, we propose to follow the analytical method.

In modern Sanskrit, the word Paryavarana is used for environment, which etymologically formed as Pari-Aa-Bri-Lyut, which is all around in our surroundings. The Vedic literature gives us the genuine principals to adjust with our environment and lead a spiritual life full of bliss. The four Vedas have propounded sermons and methodology to keep the environment in its pure form and showed more concern for ecology. Hence, through this paper it is a humble attempt to highlight the environmental preservation in Veda specially.

In the Atharvaveda we find holy magic for securing wellbeing, and spells for causing various types of harms to the adversary. There are eight groups under which the matter of this Veda can be classified – Bhaisjyani, Aayusyani, Abhichikani, Strikarmani, Rajakarmani, Sangmansyani, Poustikani, Prayachittan. There are hymns for the glorification of the Sun, to Kal (i.e. time) to Pran i.e. the life principle. In the AtharvaVeda for paryavarana many

equivalent words and used; such as Vritavrita[1], Abhivarnah[2], Avritah[3], Parivrita[4] etc. Vedic view on environment is well defined in one verse of the Atharvaveda where three coverings of our surroundings are referred as Chandamsi: “Wise utilize three elements variously which are varied, visible and full of qualities. These are water, air and plants and herbs. They exist in the world from the very beginning. They are called as Chandamsi meaning Covering available everywhere[5]”. It proves the knowledge of Vedic seers about the basic elements of environment.

In the Bhagavad Gita, lord Krishna says that “this Prakriti of mine is divided eight fold thus: earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and also egoism

*Bhumir apo'nalo vayuh kham mano buddhir eva ca
ahaikara itiyam me bhinna prakrtir astadha*[6,19].

The environment required for the survival of human beings consists of two aspects, i.e. external and internal. The external aspects include earth, water, Air, fire and space whereas internal aspects include mainly mind.

The nature has maintained a status of balance between and among these constituents or elements and living creatures. A disturbance in percentage of any constituent of the environment beyond certain limits disturbs the natural balance and any chance in the natural balance causes lots of problems to the living creatures in the universe. Different constituents of the environment exist with set relationship with another. The *relation of human being with environment is very natural as he cannot live without it.*

Atharvaveda's love for earth is outstanding (Prithivisukta) as mother earth bestows love on all creatures living on it. In it, the Vedic seer solemnly declares the enduring filial allegiance of human kind to Mother Earth: “mata Bhumih Putrohom Pririhivyah” [7], Earth is my mother, I am her son. “Mother Earth” is deliberated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation. Her blessings are sought for prosperity in all surroundings and fulfillment of all righteous aspirations. A convenient is made that human kind shall secure the Earth against all environmental trespass and shall not let her be oppressed. A soul-string prayer is sung in one of the hymns for the preservation and conservation of hills, snow-clad mountains, and all brown, black and red earth, unhurt, unwounded, unbroken and well defended by India.

Today, we need a communion, that our heart be wide enough so that no one is excluded as all of them have a well defined subtle role to build up ecological capital and to maintain the balance in nature.

*Sita Bhumir Asima Pamsuh,
Sa Bhumih Samdhrta Dhrta*[8].

Earth bestows on us with minerals, gold, silver etc. We bow in reverence to mother earth. We should not unnecessarily dig the earth as laid down in 35th Mantra of Bhumisukta. (Yat me Bhume Visvanabhi Tadepi Sohata Ma Te Marma Vinmgvadi Ma te hrdeyanapimam). Purity of atmosphere checks pollution. In this reference there is a Mantra in Atharvaveda

*Sarvo Vai Tatra Jivate
Gour – Asvah Purusah Pasuh
Yatredam Brahma Kriyate
Paridhir Jivantaya kam*[9].

“Everyone, whether a human being or an animal, lives safely, where the purity of atmosphere (Bhahman) is maintained all around for the purpose of life.” The Vedic people desired to live a life of hundred years and this wish can be fulfilled only when environment will be unpolluted, clean and peaceful[10].

Water has been defined as that which naturally possesses cold touch. Water is essential to all forms of life. In Atharvaveda the water is classified as drinking water, medicinal water, stable water etc. In this Veda the cycle of water is described that from ocean waters reach to sky and from sky come back to earth[11]. In Yajurveda it is strictly advised not to pollute water ‘ma apo himsir’[12]. In ancient India, water was considered as an inexhaustible gift of God and water was pure because the affluent at that time were limited. In the Satapatha Brahmana waters are regarded as nectars[13]. Acharya Sushruta has written that water is best among all food articles, and pure water is life-giving and always helpful to human body. In the Paippalada Samhita of Atharvaveda, (1.1) there is a prayer for water which states that water is good and useful for the universe.

According to Rgveda Sun is the soul of all which is moving and also of which is not moving. It is the dispenser of darkness Vedic seers pray boldly to this natural forces and aspects for bestowing plenty and prosperity on them, because the rising sun destroys all ill-effects of pollution. The Sun destroys injurious effects of pollution which is found in an AtharvaVedic Mantra –

*Adityah Parvatebhyo,
Visvadrasto Adrstaha*[14].

The rising sun destroys visible and invisible injurious effects of pollution. The sages found three things which are covering the entire world i.e., water, air, plants. The ancient Indians knew the importance of air for human life and also for the atmosphere. No life on earth can exist without oxygen. The breathing exercise in the human and animal life is going on every time. So, the Vedic seers, emphasized that the unpolluted, pure air is source of good health, happiness and long life.

Akasa is the fifth physical substance which is the substratum of the quality of sound. Modern environmentalists discuss sound or noise pollution. There is a relation between ether and sound. Sun shines in Dyuloka and we get light from sky. The sunrays strengthen our inner power and are essential for our life. Thus importance and care for the ether is openly mentioned in the Vedic verses.

Mind has been defined as an internal sense-organ. The mind is most powerful and unsteady. Mind is the only factor which distinguishes one Jiva from another. As to the nomenclature of five gross elements of the nature is completely considered since no scientist has accepted mind or intellect as component of environment except the exponents of Sanskrit literature. Today the human beings are great stress which has engulfed their whole personality. This has affected the society and polluted the environment because of last and greed. The modern mind is alienated from the society and he is in quest of peace. We must train our mind to avoid greediness to maintain proper balance in environment. This is possible if mind is trained to follow ethical values enshrined in our Sanskrit literature.

The knowledge about the origin and significance of plants can be traced out from Vedic literature. Plants are savior of humanity. They possess qualities of all deities. The plants and herbs destroy poisonous effect of the atmosphere. There is a Mantra in the Atharvaveda that some herbs cure diseases and purifies the air.

*Na Tam yaksma Arundhate
Yam Bhesjasya Gulgulah,
Surabhin Gandho asnute*[15].

One of Rgvedic hymn says that don't cut the trees, because they remove pollution 'ma kakambiram ud vrho vanaspatim,as astir vi hi ninasah[16].'

The sacrifice "Yajna" is considered as an important concept of Vedic philosophy. The Vedic sages had mentioned the need of performing daily Yajnas for protecting the ecology. Yajna is regarded as a source of nourishment. Through it, seers were able to understand the true meaning of the Mantras. Mantra is a mystic syllable with esoteric meaning. It is extremely efficacious when it is pronounced properly with clear awareness of its esoteric meaning. It produces certain vibrations which alter the organic and mental states of an individual. It is even capable of producing changes in the environment. According Vedic thought, Yajna is beneficial to both individual and the community. Yajna helps in minimizing air pollution, in increasing crop yield, in protecting plants from disease, as well as in providing a disease free, pure and energized environment for all.

In the Atharvaveda, the earth is described in one Mantra of 63 verses. The famous hymn called as Bhumisukta indicates the environmental consciousness of Vedic seers. Earth is called vasudha for containing all wealth, Hiranyavaksha for having gold bosom and jagato Niveshani for being abode of whole world. She is not for the different races of men alone but for other creatures also[17]. From these verses we guess the knowledge of Vedic seers about various aspects of environment, about cosmic order, and also about the importance of co-ordination between all natural powers for universal peace and harmony. Most of the environmental problems of the present day are essentially man made. The role of man is therefore important because it is his attitude and values which shape the environment. Dr. Abdul Kalama said, "Ancient India was a knowledge society that contributed a great deal to civilization. We need to recover the status and become a knowledge power. Spirituality must be integrated with education. We should ignite our dormant inner energy and let it guide our lives. The radiance of such minds embarked on constructive Endeavour will bring peace, prosperity and bliss to the nation." Proper following of the Vedic techniques, methods and principle and the new knowledge generated through science and technological research should be employed to combat the menace of environmental degradation. Peace should remain everywhere in the world. Because all natural powers dependent on each-other. Hence Vedic sages pray for peace at all levels in the Shanti Mantra – "Let there be peace in the space, peace in the sky, peace on the earth, calmness in waters, peace of trees, peace of plants, grace in all Gods, bliss in the Brahman, peace in everything, peace and peace, peace be with everyone of us"[18].

We may conclude our discussion considering the references relevant to the Vedic literature that the Vedas are the store of knowledge concerning environmental concepts. Our saints knew the truth that the harmonious connection of living beings with the whole environment is very beneficial for the entire world. Environmental forces are not to be meddled with because any imbalance can cause devastating effects upon human race. The absence of ecological balance will certainly brings untold troubles for living beings. The knowledge of Vedic sciences is meant to save the human beings from falling into an utter darkness of ignorance. Our ancient scriptures are much more relevant today because science alone cannot be successful to safe human beings from the horrible impact of environment pollution.

REFERENCE

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