



An Analysis of Healthy Environment Awareness in the Vedic Era

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Abstract : Natural elements are important in the Veda, but the global ship of creation always existed in the context of its relationship with the creator. Everything in this universe, according to the Vedic sages, is a result of divine knowledge that was first given to a group of seers and then passed down through subsequent generations of Vedic seers. According to the Galapagos hypothesis, for 3.5 billion years, microorganisms, plants, and animals have co-evolved with the environment as a single, fully integrated super organism. Planet Earth is a living entity that regulates and modifies itself like any other organism. In a similar line, deep ecology affirms the ecological equality of all species, including elephants, earthworms, and mice. Each component is equally important to the next in an ecosystem that is interrelated and unbreakable. The function of nature, the principle of sustenance, life, intelligence, and immortality have all been explicitly explained by the Vedas. The Vedas also describe the Earth, the constellations, and their functions. Since the sun and moon are celestial deities, the air, water, and sky are deities of the skies. The three earthly gods are earth, river, and fire. Earth, sky, water, wind, and fire are the five elements that make up the cosmos. The philosophy of ecological economics for sustainable development is in line with the advice given by Vedic science, which encourages people to pursue the path of an ethical and sustainable economy. According to conventional economics, increasing material wealth is always preferable so that people can live better. All 8,40,000 species on the world, with the exception of one, live for each other, according to the Vedic tradition, which makes it abundantly evident that each species' life is intended for the welfare of all other species.

Key Words: India, Vedas, Environment, Human Life, Earth.

Introduction

Humans and the environment are intimately connected and dependent on one another, like two sides of the same coin. The human being grows in its lap and ultimately rests there for all eternity. From the Vedic through the Classical periods of Sanskrit literature, nature and the environment play a crucial role in the advancement of human civilisation.

The environment has a huge impact on human civilisation. Humans and the ecology in which they live have tight ties. Earth, air, water, plants, and animals make up the ecology as a whole and offer the required and sufficient conditions for supporting human life.

The current environmental disaster is a major issue for the entire world. Both developed and developing nations experience the effects of environmental pollution. As a result, environmental issues have been discussed today in every setting, from the village to the legislature. The issue that the modern, technological civilization is experiencing with the greatest rate of growth is pollution. India's situation is quite critical. The grave state of India's environmental issues can no longer be ignored. In India, 70% of the water that is available is polluted¹.

Blood cancer and lymph node cancer incidence have increased five-fold during the past ten years. Almost 53% of Indian territory is affected by significant environmental deterioration.

Deforestation, siltation, water, air, and noise pollution, insanitation—all of these pose a severe threat to India's standard of living as well as to the country's fundamental survival. There are numerous illnesses that can spread through water. Typhoid, cholera, jaundice, etc. are some examples. An estimate states that more than 80% of Indians are afflicted with water-borne illnesses.

Every nation's Sanskriti (culture) is influenced by its surroundings, climatic circumstances, and inhabitants' actions. Readers take into account their own culture, surroundings, and geographic, climatic, and environmental factors. In light of this, the Vedic literature is very helpful to us and the global community as a whole. As a result, studying the environmental circumstances in our society and the rest of the globe will be extremely beneficial to our quality of life. The Indian Saints outlined actions to prevent contamination of the environment. But we disregarded the directions found in the scriptures, sometimes because we had no idea what they said and other times because we were unable to understand the authors' intended meanings. In this article, we'd like to give a brief overview of the Vedic literature's treatment of the awareness of maintaining environmental balance and concern for actions that harm the ecosystem.

Discussion

India's oldest literary tradition is in Sanskrit. Sanskrit has aided the entire globe in its pursuit of humanistic goals like harmony, peace, unity, and prosperity. The message "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" for the human society is spoken by Sanskrit scholars instead of caste, creed, and regional sentiments; this message is not found in any other language in the world. In the tumultuous and violent world of today, there are similarities to this. The Vedas are the only repository of knowledge that exists today. With the help of the old iron pillar, also known as our ideas, the current generation above is able to improve every day in all facets of life. Sanskrit is more than just a language; it is a body of knowledge that encompasses a wide range of fields, including linguistics, mathematics, astrology, architecture, and the natural sciences, including physics, chemistry, biology, botany, and medical science, as well as engineering, agriculture, horticulture, cosmology, ecology, aeronautics, navigation, and others. The Vedas educate us to take action to defend our clean environment for the first time at a time when we are pleading for a better environment. All four Vedas—the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva—acknowledge the significance of preserving the seasonal cycles, which are susceptible to alteration due to improper human behaviour and climate change. It is amazing how the people of the Vedic era cherished all of nature's elements and beings by carefully protecting them. They viewed nature and the environment holistically.

"Do not hurt the environment, the water, or the flora. The earth is my mother, and I am her son. May the waters never run foul. Peace be upon the air, the waters, the crops, and the plants."²

The environment brings happiness to those who live morally upright lives. Rivers bless us with holy water and give us vegetation, night, and dawn. Sun makes life peaceful for us. We receive milk from our animals. The ecology of plants is crucial for maintaining the equilibrium of the environment. Utilising the Indian mind to its fullest, the Rig-vedic people carefully and subtly exploited nature by equating trees with humans, gods, and other supernatural beings. Indra (God) was begged to not separate the boys from their fathers and the trees from the forests.³

Similar to how the Buddhists worshipped the Bilva, Kadamba, Rudraksha, Champaka, and Bakula, among other deities. The soil is referred to in the Maitryani Samhit as "devajayani," endearing to gods, and aushadhinam mulam, the source of several therapeutic plants. Manu, among other Indian sages, prescribed punishment for the person who cuts down such priceless trees. Yajnas were performed during the Vedic era to purify the atmosphere. These yajnas included the use of ghee and fragrant haven material.⁴

The cleaning of the environment is mostly accomplished by the sun and fire. Animals and birds are a component of the ecosystem and nature. The Vedic seers discussed their traits and

pursuits, and they wished for their welfare. They are divided into three types by the Rig-Vedic seers: sky creatures like birds, woodland animals, and animals found near human settlements.

“tasmat yajnat sarvahutah samvrtan pṛsadaḥ
pasuntansakre vayabyanaranyan grāmyasca
ye.”⁵

The three different forms of living things that can be discovered in the universe each have their own unique surroundings. However, when viewed from the viewpoint of man, they all make up his environment. Vedic literature generally hold the view that animals should be secure, well-cared-for, and—

“bhūrbhūvah svaḥ suprajabhiḥ svasthya subese
viraiḥ suposaḥ posaiḥ nārya prajān me pāhi
sacśhya paśunme pāyartharya pitun me pāhi
tubhyamaranyaḥ paśabo mṛga vane hita haṇsa
suparnah śakuna vayansi tava yakṣa paśupate
apsantastubyan kṣaranti divya abo vṛdhe”⁶

Hinduism upholds the principle of animal and bird protection. According to Hindu mythology, the god's fourteen avatars (births), which include Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisingha, and others, represent the divine forms in these creatures, ensuring the safety of their lives. On the eve of Nagpanchami, the snake is worshipped, while on the occasion of the Balabhadrapuja, cows are praised. According to the Vedas, it is forbidden to kill some animals

and birds that behave as scavengers by consuming dead animals and trash. Following the fundamental procedures from the ancient era is necessary today –

“kincideva tu vipryāya dadyadasthimatan
vadhe.

Anasthanancaiva himsayah pranayamena
śudhyati.”⁷

Environment

The term "environment" refers to the totality of a living thing's surrounds, including natural forces and other living things, which create conditions for growth and development as well as for danger and harm. For our purposes, it is reasonable to say that the elements of our environment are Earth, Air, Water, Flora, and Fauna (Vegetation, and Living Things). Natural resources are his gift to all living things, including humans. Since all of these resources belong to all of the people who live on this planet, large and little, no one has the right to abuse, exploit, or render them useless through pollution in order to increase unethical company profit or personal gain.

We are all aware that the human species has overused these resources and produced a lot of trash throughout time, which has led to the unprecedented environmental issues that are endangering the ecological equilibrium. There may not be enough resources for our offspring's generation to continue living normally on our planet. The Panch Mahabhutas school of Indian philosophy says that the web of life is made up

of the Five Great Elements of Earth, Air, Space, Water, and Fire (Energy). In respect to Brahman, the ultimate reality, which they all originate from, the Upanishads describe how these elements are interdependent: "From Brahman arises space, from space arises air, from air arises fire, from fire arises water, and from water arises earth."⁸ These components are a component of the environment, and according to Indian sages, there is a connection between the Panch Mahabhutas, or five basic elements, and the five senses. The human tongue, eyes, skin, ears, and nose are all connected to the elements of earth, water, fire, and air, respectively. The connection proves that they should be given the same weight as the sensory organs, according to individuals. These five cosmic elements, known as the Mahabhutas, play a crucial role in maintaining and conserving the environment since they generate, nurture, and sustain all kinds of life, and after death or decay, they absorb what was previously created.⁹ Vedic texts affirm the divinity of the world we live in, including the Sun, Moon, mountains, rivers, land, sea, birds, animals, air, and water. All things were made by the All-Powerful and bear His imprint. The Rig Veda gives the following account of the universe's creation: From fervour flared to its height, Eternal Law and Truth were formed. Then the Night was created, and last the billowing sea flood ascended. The Year, who is the creator of the days and nights and the Lord over everyone

who closes their eyes, was later created from that same billowing sea of water. The great Creator Dhatar then created the Sun and Moon in the proper order. He created the areas of the air and light, as well as Heaven and Earth, in that sequence. All must coexist for the sake of everyone, and it is forbidden to use any of these for selfish gain. No one has the right to hurt, take advantage of, or misuse any of God's creation.

The Bhagwad Gita affirms that the entire cosmos is His creation, that He is present in everything in it, and that ultimately everything in the universe will merge into Him. My Nature is separated into eight parts: egoism, mind, intellect, water, fire, air, and ether. Recognise that the womb of all creatures is comprised of these two (My higher and lower Natures). I am the universe's beginning and ending, therefore. Know that all beings rest in Me, just as the powerful wind, which travels everywhere, does. I repeatedly put forth all of these many beings, rendered powerless by nature, by animating My Nature. According to Hindu texts, Atman is immortal and experiences rebirth via a variety of species (Yoni). Depending on our past lives' choices, Atman might take the form of an animal, bird, or human when it returns to this world. As a result, every species must be treated with respect, and nothing should be done to cause harm to any living thing. As long as we don't achieve Moksh, or the union of the Atman and the Brahman, which is conditioned on our good deeds in this life, we will continue to

experience birth and reincarnation. Because God is everywhere,¹⁰ As it is said in the Yajurveda (16.34), "Homage to him in woods and to him in bushes, Homage to him as sound and to him as echo." And if our goal is to perform good deeds in order to reach Moksh, we should show respect for all of God's creatures on this planet. To ensure that future generations have no difficulties enjoying their lives on this world, we should assess if our actions are in harmony with the environment. Hinduism places a strong emphasis on environmental preservation, and many rural groups, like Bishnoi and Swadhyaya, continue to do so out of a sense of duty rather than as "environmentalists." In the Vedic Literature, Earth is given significant weight and is referred to as Mother.

Earth

I am Earth's son, and Earth is my mother, says Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivya. In this region of the world, it is customary to begin construction projects with a Bhoomi Puja in order to worship the earth and beg pardon for excavating and starting the project. One hymn from the Atharvaveda, the 63-verse Boomi-Sukta, is sung in praise of the planet. The hymn highlights the earth's majesty and outlines our obligations to protect its sacredness. It asserts that there should be harmony among all life forms on earth and notes that not just people should live there. Jains draw their lead from "the bee that sucks honey in the blossoms of a tree

without hurting the blossom and strengthens itself" when it comes to how they use the planet's resources. Reduced wants, restrained desires, and realistic consumption caps should be the goal.¹¹

Water is employed in rituals because it is seen to be a powerful energy source and purifying medium. Numerous verses have been written about water, demonstrating its significance in our daily lives. Let the waters that descend from heaven, or those that stray from the soil, or those that flow freely in nature, be bright and purifying as they rush to the ocean. Goddesses, guard me. Blessed are the snow-covered streams, sweet are the spring waters to you, swift-moving waters are sweet to you, and rainwater is sweet to you. Waters from the pool and the waste are sweet to you, as are water brought in jars and water dug out of the ground. But over time, we have lost sight of the fundamentals and have continued to contaminate our water supplies by diverting industrial waste to lakes, rivers, and the ocean. Even we have not been able to protect the subsurface water, whose level is steadily declining and becoming unsafe to drink. We need to reconsider whether or not our acts are morally correct.

According to the Brahadaranyaka Upnishad, air serves as the universe's connecting link and thread. In addition to being the life-sustaining breath, vayu is also pran. When Charaka wrote

on Vikrti (pollution) and ailments in around 200 BCE, he notably emphasised air and water pollution as a source of many diseases. But the air is severely contaminated as a result of unchecked industrial growth. Reports of acid rain in several regions have surfaced. The prevalence of respiratory disorders is increasing in urban areas, and now it is beginning to impact rural communities as well.

Many people regularly worship trees and other plants because they are regarded as sacred. This demonstrates how significant plants and trees are in Hinduism. Spitting or urinating on a tree is unlucky, and it's forbidden to remove a branch, bloom, or leaf from a tree after sundown. A religious practise is tree planting. Due to their therapeutic qualities, trees are revered in the Rig-Veda as having divine powers. They are praised in a whole hymn (Rgveda 10.97) with 23 verses.¹²

Hindu sages understood the value of the forest and trees in mitigating pollution, hence they counselled people not to clear forests or cut down trees: Do not uproot the Kakambira tree by the roots; rather, exterminate all evil (Rgveda 06.48.17).¹³ The destruction of the forest is equated to the destruction of the state, and vice versa, the act of reforestation is an act of restoring the State and furthering its welfare, according to the Charak Samhita.

To conserve the environment, Rig-Veda warns against polluting space and air, advising to be in

harmony with the environment and letting forests grow as much as possible.

Graze not the sky. Harm not mid-air. Be in accordance with the earth.

For this well-sharpened axe hath led thee forth to great felicity.

Hence, with a hundred branches, God, Lord of the Forest, grow thou up.

May we grow spreading with a hundred branches. (Rigveda 5.43)

Conclusion

The preceding thorough explanation sheds some light on the awareness our forefathers' seers had of the environment and its components. It is obvious that the Vedic vision of living in harmony with the environment was considerably broader and more complete than just physical harmony. The Vedic sages understood that clean water, air, and other elements are the foundations of good health and happiness; as a result, they revered all of these as deities. The Hindus aspired to live for one hundred years.

And only when the environment is unpolluted, pure, and tranquil can this request be granted. Today, a number of environmental laws have been passed for the conservation and preservation of the environment, including the Forest Act of 1972, the Wildlife conservation Act of 1970, the Water Protection and Pollution

Act of 1980, and the Environmental Protection Act of 1986. However, the sages uttered the poem below some 3000 years ago:

“dyauḥ śāntirantarīkṣaṇ śanti prīthivī
śāntirāpaḥ śāntiṛoṣadhayaḥ vanaspatayaḥ
śāntiviswadevaḥ śāntibrahma śāntiḥ sarva
śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ sā mā śntiredhi”

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