

Environmental Management in Ancient Ages

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Vedas originated from the term 'vid' are not only the comprehensive source of knowledge but also an unending treasure of science. Various branches of science like Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Botany, Technology, Astronomy, Environmental science are described deeply in Veda.

Today science is confined to cause functioning and analysis of substances but actually the specialized knowledge of anything is science. As per this view, Vedas are the unending source of specific knowledge which influence various aspects of human life.

The term environment means the surroundings of an organism. It includes both living and non living components. Man and other living organisms are surrounded by non living components like plants and animals. Environment, therefore, refers to the sum total of all the forces, materials and influences around us at a given point of time and place. Unlimited exploitation of natural resources, industrialization and contamination of environment with harmful wastes arising mainly from certain human activities is described as environmental pollution.

Reference to this could also be seen in Vedic mantras which clearly states that imprudent exploitation of natural substances are paingiving¹. Deep concern regarding environment could be seen in Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and sacred texts. Ancient sages and hymn seers are equally aware or we can say much more aware about environment conservation and protection as compared to people today.

The ancient sacred literature of the Vedas enshrines a holistic and poetic cosmic vision. They represent the oldest, the most carefully nurtured, the most elaborately systematized and the most

lovingly preserved oral traditions in the annals of the world. Unique in their perspective of time and space, their evocative poetry is a joyous and spontaneous affirmation of life and nature.

The Vedic Hymn to the Earth, the Prithvi Sukta in Atharva Veda, is unquestionably the oldest and the most evocative environment invocation. In it, the Vedic seer solemnly declares the enduring filial allegiance of humankind to Mother Earth : **‘Mata bhumiḥ putro’ham prithivyah** : Earth is my mother, I am her son. Mother Earth is celebrated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation. Her blessings are sought for prosperity in all endeavours and fulfillment of all righteous aspirations. A covenant is made that humankind shall secure the Earth against all environmental trespass and shall never let her be oppressed. A soul-stirring 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, unsmitten, unwounded, unbroken and well defended by Indra.

The Hymn says in prayerful thanksgiving homage : Earth in which lie the sea, the river and other waters, in which food and cornfields have come to be, in which lives all that breathes and that moves, May she confer on us the finest of her yield. Earth, in which the waters, common to all, moving on all sides, flow unfailingly, day and night, may she pour on us milk in many streams, and endow us with luster. May those born of thee, O Earth, be for our welfare, free from sickness and waste. Wakeful through a long life, we shall become bearers of tribute to thee. Earth, my mother, set me securely with bliss in full accord with heaven. O wise one, uphold me in grace and splendour.

The Vedic seers regarded the Earth as ‘sacred space’ for the consecrated endeavours and aspirations of humankind and for the practice of restraint and responsibility. This affirmative view of the inviolable sacred space in human consciousness is integral to the Vedas and the Upanishads. On it rests the Vedic vision of a world filled with the purity of the spiritual environment and the sanctity of environmental spirituality and morality. Such a world can only be sustained by **‘Satyam Brhat Rtam Ugram**, the severely exacting discipline of truth, harmony and rectitude based on a conception of cosmic and comprehensive peace as envisioned in the famous Vedic Hymn of peace.

We invoke and imibe Aum, the primordial sound of cosmic Harmony and pray for: Peace and Harmony in Heaven; Peace and Harmony in the Sky and on the Earth; Peace and Harmony in the Waters; Peace and Harmony in the Herbs; the Vegetation and the Forests : Peace and Harmony among the People and the Rulers of the World : Peace and Harmony in Spiritual Quest and Realization; Peace and Harmony for one and all; Peace and Harmony Everywhere and in Every Thing; Peace, True and Real Peace, Let that Peace repose in my inner space, Peace of Peace, Everlasting Peace, We pray for Peace².

The real meaning of nature worship in the Vedas is the prosperity of agriculture and the protection of environment. There are several mantras devoted to agriculture and methods of farming, irrigation system and plantations. The Vedas refer to animal domesticity and cattle rearing. Domestic animals were considered faithful friends of human beings. The cow was revered as a pastoral deity. Note that the Hindus are expected to regard deer, camels, monkeys, donkeys, rats, reptiles, birds and flies as though they were their own children. Rivers have been and continue to be an integral part of Hindu religious practice. The reverence for trees has been another component.

Atharva Veda declares that, the land flourished with tree and vegetation is capable of nourishing the human beings of whole world³. The whole **Aranyayani Sukta (10.146)** of Rigveda is indicative of this fact. The sukta directs not to commit violence unnecessarily towards innocent creatures by giving ‘aranya’ or forest the divine character and expressing reverence towards it⁴. Vedic Sages were fully aware of the fact that ecological balance could be maintained only with the harmonious co-existence of human beings, animals, birds etc⁵. Animals and birds like fox, eagle, vultures, crow, pig etc. protect air and water from being polluted by eating dead bodies and contaminated substances. Rigveda directs towards the conservation of trees and its more and more plantation. Atharva Veda directs various trees and medicinal plants which are anti pollutant like peepal, banyan, neem, deodar, pine tree, wild fig. etc. It also mentions that pine tree keeps the soil free from pollution by absorbing vallerium element.

Today the abundant use of pesticides and other chemicals in the soil is the main cause of land pollution. Together with this various investigations on land and imprudent interference in nature resulted in the increase of natural calamities like earthquakes, volcanoes etc. Vedic seers were also very contemplative regarding this. They laid stress upon the use of natural manure of cowdung⁶ and ashtray of Yajnas⁷. Rishi declares himself, the son of the Earth –

‘Mata bhumi putro’ham prthivyah’ (Atharva. 12.1.12)

Amongst the various means of control and purification of environment as depicted in Vedas, the Yajnas hold an important place. Although Yajnas are of ceremonial and sacrificial character yet it is also a scientific method of purifying environment and balancing ecological system. Yajna has the divine power of purifying water, air and land. Various elements used for performing yajnas are ghee, kesar, gugglu, kasturi, apamarga, agara, tagar, sandal, sweet, sugar etc. They purify the environment and make it free from infections and disease. The smoke of sacrificial fire is capable of treating diseases like T.B. etc⁸. In Samaveda, the rishi advises to purify the air through homa⁹. Thus the performance of Yajnas not only decontaminates the atmosphere but also regulates the cycle of nature¹⁰. It ensure the timely arrival of monsoon.

Thus it is evident from the above instance that Vedic Sages and people of Ancient ages are very much concerned and aware of environmental protection. They managed to conserve it by worshipping each and every element of nature and showing reverence towards it. They laid much stress towards the use of natural disinfectants as compared to chemicals. They regulated the human behaviour through dharma and stressed the righteous use of natural elements by them. The Indic environmental ethos declares that all aspects and phenomena of nature belong together and are bound in a physical as well as metaphysical relationship and views life as a gift of togetherness and of mutual accommodation and assistance in a Universe teeming with interdependent constituents.

The Indic approach to the environment is even today a part of the living legacy of India. That legacy often seems to be embattled and imperilled all around and yet it is endowed with an uncanny and time tested resilience. In that resilience, there is hope and promise for India and the rest of the world.

Reference:-

- [1]. Rigveda – 10.86.5
- [2]. Yajurveda-36.17
- [3]. Atharva Ved. – 12.1.27
- [4]. Rigveda – 10.146.5
- [5]. Ibid – 6.48.17
- [6]. Atharva – 19.31.3
- [7]. Yajur – 6.21
- [8]. Atharva – 19.38.1
- [9]. Samaveda – 1.7.1
- [10]. Bhagvad Gita – 3.14