



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN RĠVEDIC PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Environment is an un avoidable part of human life. The are Vedas gives various references in the environmental protection, ecological balance, weather cycles, rainfall phenomena, hydrologic cycle, etc. The protection of the environment was understood to be closely related to the protection of the heavens and earth. Many of the Ġvedic hymns therefore vividly describe the Heaven and Earth together. The Ġveda venerates deities like Mitra, Varu a, Indra, Maruts and Aditya, that are responsible for maintaining the requisite balance in the functioning of all entities of Nature, whether, mountains, heaven, earth and lakes, the waters and the forests. The Vedic Seers have recognised that the changes caused due to indiscreet human activities could result in imbalances in seasons, rainfall patterns, crops and atmosphere and degrade the quality of water, air, and earth resources. There are many Ġvedic hymns are seeking the blessings of the Pañca mah bh ta or five gross elements of Nature: Ak sa, V yu, Agni, Āp , and Prithvi. The People were careful to refrain from activities that could cause harm to Nature's bounties. It was understood that the well-being of Mother Earth depended on the preservation and sustenance of the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Environment is a very significant role in human civilization. Human beings have close relations with the earth in which they live. Environmental humiliation is a most important problem of the present world. Each and every countries of the world have showed a deep concern in the protection of the nature. But this concept was already presented in Vedic literature. In Vedic literature we find that during the Vedic period the society was extremely concerned about the protection of the environment.

The Concept of Environment in Ġveda: The Vedas are the first text in the library of humankind. They are universally acknowledged to be the most valuable for Indian heritage. The Ved s deals with the knowledge, knowledge of all sorts. They cover knowledge both spiritual and physical. Especially the Vedic views revolve around the concept of nature and life. "The environment protection act, 1986 defines the environment includes water, air, land and the inter relationship which exists among and between water, air, and land and human beings, other living creatures, plants, microbes and property"¹. From the above definition, it can be briefly said that the environment consists of two sections. Namely living organism and non- living materials. The living organisms can be grouped in to three types. Those living mainly on land, in water, and in air. The non- living materials of the environment are land, air, water, property etc.

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The Vedas are the first text in the library of mankind. They are universally acknowledged to be the most precious Indian heritage. The Vedas deals with the knowledge of all sorts. They cover knowledge both spiritual and physical. Especially the Vedic views revolve around the concept of nature and life. The Vedic Aryans were children of nature. They studied natures drama very clear and minutely. Thunderstorm and cyclone, lightening, the heavy rush of rain in monsoon, the swift flood in the stream that comes down from the hills, the scorching heat of the sun, the cracking red flames of the fire, all witness to power beyond men's power. The Vedic sages felt the greatness of these forces. They adored these activities. They appreciated and worshipped these forces. They realised instinctively that action, movement, creation, change and destruction in nature are the result of forces beyond men's control. And thus, they attributed divinity to nature. Ġvedic S kt s could be divided in too many parts, but their main part belongs to natural hymns, the hymns related with natural forces. The hymns addressed to Devatas (deities) are under the influence of the most impressive phenomenon of nature and its aspects. The word Devatha means divine, dignity, which is bright, strong, donor, and powerful. In these hymns we find prayers for certain natural elements such as Air, Water, Earth, Sun, Rain, Dawn etc. the glorious brightness of Sun, the blaze of sacrificial fire, the sweep of the rain storm across the skies, the recurrence of Dawn, the violence of tropical storm and other such natural energies are glorified and personified as a Devata. Attributes assigned to deities fit in their natural forms and activities, as Soma is green, Fire is bright, Air is fast moving, and Sun is dispenser of darkness. The characteristics of these forces described in the verses prove that Vedic seers were masters of natural science. The Vedic seers pray boldly to these natural forces and aspects for bestowing plenty and prosperity on them.

¹ A.R. Panjamukhi, Socio economic ideas in Sanskrit literature, p 467

Aditi is praised as Devam tha, the mother of all-natural energies and she symbolizes the nature. gveda mainly states about environment on several occasions. The S kt of gveda that “the sky is like father, the earth like mother and the space as their son². The Vedic seers have a great vision about universe, the universe consists of three intertwined webs. They are earth, areal, sky. Means Prithvi the earth, Antarīkṣa the aerial, Dayu the sky, is very well explained in the Vedic literature. The universe as the most important concept of the Vedas. Vedic culture and Vedic scriptures express the clear concept about the earth’s ecosystems and the necessity for maintaining their balance. Another S kt from gveda says “Thousands and Hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life, then take up systematic planting of trees”³. These S kt s convey a message to desist from inflicting any injury to the earth and embark upon constant a forestation for survival or else the ecological balance of the earth would be jeopardized.

gvedic peoples were well aware of the fact that destruction of the trees and forest would result in disease and pollution of the atmosphere. Soma was the master of plants. The ninth Mandala of gveda was prised to Soma. Soma was the juice of plants⁴; it was a divine drink. Vedic Rishis realized that plants are important for the survival of mankind so they were included in religion so that they can be preserved and protected by man. Several types of trees were worshipped by the gvedic peoples, e.g. Tulsi, Pīp l, Vata, Kada ba, A oka, Mango, Bel, Banyan⁵ etc. This is showing the level of awareness and concern about environment. The gvedic peoples considered as animals are the part of religion. So, Prevention of animals was also advocated in the gveda⁶. It has been mentioned in the gvedic S kt s to preserve and protect animals. cow worship is most familiar of this period. Several animals have been named as vehicles of Gods.

The gveda denoted the deities’ viz. Mitra, Varu a, Indra, Maruts and Āditya that are responsible for maintaining the balance in functioning of all entities of nature like hills-mountains, lakes, heaven and earth, forest or the waters. The Indra, S rya and Agni are the personification of the Watery atmosphere. Vedas observe that any change in the nature caused due to indiscreet human activities could result in imbalance in weather, rainfall patterns, and crops and may pollute earth, air and water. There are so many hymns seeking the blessings of the five gross elements of life or the Pañca mah bh ta of nature: Ak ā or space, V yu or air, Agni or fire, Āp h or water and Prithvi or earth. People were careful to refrain themselves from any activities which could cause harm to the nature’s bounties. It was understood that the well-being of Mother Earth dependant on the sustenance and protection of the environment.

Now when air is unfit for breathing, water is unsuitable for drinking; soil is inapt for agriculture and so on ... Vedic philosophy for environment has become very significant and relevant. Vedic Ri is says that the body is composed of Prithvi, Āp h, Agni, V yu, Ak sa, i.e. Pañca mah bh ta. So, they believed in the purity and sacredness of them. gveda teaches us to have respect and reverence for everything god has created. It deals with respectful conservation of the environment. They maintained a well-balanced life free from pollution by obeying the rural and religious norms. They realized the dependence of human welfare on the nature. Thus, environment and man were deeply knitted in the gvedic period.

Conclusion

Above detailed discussion some light is thrown on the awareness of our ancient seers about the environment. It is clear that the Vedic vision to live in harmony with the environment was not merely physical but was far wider and much comprehensive. The Vedic people desired to live a life of hundred years, and this wish can be fulfilled only when environment will be unpolluted. The knowledge of Vedic science is meant to save the human beings from falling in to an utter darkness of ignorance. The unity in diversity is the message of Vedic physical and metaphysical sciences. The Vedic message clear that environment belongs to all living beings, so it needs protection by all, for the welfare of all.

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² gveda, 1.89

³ www.iosrjournals.org Environmental conservation in ancient India, Dr: Renu Thanwar

⁴ gveda, 8.91.1

⁵ Vedas and weather science in India. P. 183.

⁶ gveda, 10.95.6