



Environmental awareness in the vedic period and its present relevance.

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Abstract

Environmental degradation is a burning problem of the present time. Healthy environment is necessary to lead a healthy life. In the modern world environment is degraded due to excessive exploitation of natural resources. Mankind is climbing the ladder of success with the help of scientific inventions. But at the same time humans themselves are causing harm to the environment and therefore facing immense problems. Not only the mankind but also other living beings are suffering for the ecological imbalance due to environmental degradation. In the vedic period people were very much environment sensitive. They tried their best for the conservation of environment. The Vedas are full of almost all branches of knowledge. Environmental awareness is also reflected in the Vedas. The present paper aims at highlighting the environmental awareness existed in the vedic period and its relevance at present time.

Keywords : Environment, Awareness, Vedas

1. Introduction

Many references of environmental conservation and ecological balance are found in the Vedas which indicate the high level of environmental awareness of the people of that period of time. Protection of the environment is the essence of the vedic culture. In the Vedas nature and its elements are treated as gods and goddesses. Nature is treated as the mother goddess by the vedic people and the Vedas forbid mankind from exploiting nature. The Vedas persist on protecting the nature and maintaining a pollution free environment. The Vedas instruct to live in harmony with nature and to recognize that there is divinity in every element, including plants and animals. Thus a great sense of environmental awareness is revealed in the Vedas which is very relevant at the present time.

2. Discussion

The group of the five great physical elements, viz. earth, water, fire, air and ether is called pancamahabhuta : Pancamahabhuta is the basis of all cosmic creation. In ancient India these five great

elements which constitute the environment are believed to be derived from the nature. According to Ayurveda and Indian philosophy, the human body is constituted by these five great elements. Each sense organ of the human body is related to one of the five great elements. Nose, tongue, eyes, skin and ears are respectively related to earth, water, fire, air and ether. Thus the human body is directly related to the nature and environment. Natural environment is an inseparable part of our existence. The Vedas emphasise on the protection and development of the nature and environment. Natural elements are worshiped by the vedic people. A glance at the contents of the Vedas is sufficient to realize the high level of environmental awareness of the people of the vedic period.

2.1 Earth

Earth (bhumi) is worshiped as the mother goddess in the Vedas. In the Atharvaveda it is said "The Earth is the mother and I am her son". The mother Earth is urged to nourish her sons by giving them milk. the Atharvaveda also forbids people from digging the earth

and encourage to protect it from landslide. In the Yajurveda it is said that the mother Earth should not be harmed by anyone. She is the mother of the world. The sage asks to give to the earth, to make firm the earth and not to harm the earth.

2.2 Water

Water is also worshiped in the Vedas. The first book of the Atharvaveda is based on the praise of water. Here the sage seeks blessings from the water. There is nectar and medicine within water and by praising the water one becomes vigorous like horses and cows. Water gives refreshment, generates energy, gives remedy from diseases, gives good health, gives long life, it is auspicious and cleans and purifies everything. The colour of water is very beautiful and its sight provides great joy. In the nineteenth book of the Atharvaveda, the sage praises all kinds of water, viz, rain water, water falling from the snowy mountains, water of fountains, water running in the rivers, water of wastes, of marshes, of canals and of vessels. Here it is also said that the water, digging out from very deep of the earth by the Brahmins, is more healing than the healers. Water provides vigour to the people and auspicious pure water cures the disease TB. Water gives joy by removing thirst and healing diseases. Thus the Atharvaveda shows the necessity of water and emphasizes on its protection from pollution and wastage.

2.3 Air

Air is also praised in the Vedas. It is said in the Rgveda that air being the life exists in the body. Life is impossible without air. The seers of the Vedas wish that fresh air should always blow, because it nourishes us and like medicine keeps our body free from diseases. Trees are very necessary for the purification of air. So in the Yajurveda it is mentioned that one should not harm (cut) the trees. In the Rgveda it is mentioned

that one should not cut trees, because they remove pollution. Trees are worshiped in the Vedas. The Vedas prefer sacrificial oblations not only to please the gods but also to purify the air. Scientists have already proved that the smoke of the sacrificial fire can decrease sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide in the air. The sacrificial smoke can decrease the effect of the ultra violet rays.

2.4 Eather

The Yajurveda asks not to disturb the sky (eather) and not to pollute the atmosphere. the vedic people have regarded the sky as their father and earth as their mother. It reflects their respect for the nature and environment.

3. Conclusion

From the above discussion it appears that there was a high level of environmental awareness during the vedic period. The vedic people were very much aware of environmental conservation and ecological balance. They were strong defenders of growth with nature and balance in nature. For them nature is sacred, to be respected and cared for. They have respected each element of the nature and emphasized on careful conservation. The seers of the Vedas persist on not to harm the environment, not to harm the water, not to harm the flora. The vedic people were very much aware of ecology and sustainability. The golden principles of the Vedas regarding environmental awareness are very much useful at present time when the whole world is facing tremendous problems due to ecological imbalance and environmental degradation. People of the vedic period were acquainted with the scientific rules of environmental conservation which appear to be useful in solving many environmental problems at present time and maintaining a healthy environment for all.

Foot note :

Mata bhumiḥ putro'ham prthivyaḥ/AV, XII. 1/12

AV, XII. 1/10

AV, XII. 1/35

Yajurveda, 13/18

AV.I. 4/4

AV, I. 5/1-4; I. 6/1-3

AV, I. 33/1-3; I. 5/1

AV.XIX.2/1-2

AV.XIX. 2/3

AV.XIX. 2/4

AV.XIX. 2/5

Rgveda, X. 146/2

Rgveda, X. 137/2-3; X.186/1; X.186/3

Yajurveda, 6/22

Rgveda, VI. 48/17

Yajurveda, 16/17

Ibid

Ibid, 16/19

Ibid, 5/43

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