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Environmental conservation in ancient India

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Abstract

This article is based on the idea of ancient Indian environment. We know that India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. His education, literature, culture, heritage is astonishing to the world. At present, the Earth is endangered by the pollution of the environment. Now people have been aware of this. But in ancient times, efforts have been made to protect the environment in Indian literature, society and culture. The impact of ancient Indian environmental thought is not less in present-day environmental thoughts. The introduction of this article to highlight the greatness of ancient Indian literature, culture and society and to make the present society aware about the environment by the idea of ancient Indian environmental thoughts.

Key Words: Environment, ancient India, ancient Indian literature

Introduction

At present our environment is deeply entrenched with our social life. Life is the greatest asset of the earth. And for this life needs environment. There may be life-threatening conditions, but the existence of an environment without life is impossible. And the necessity of the environment is only for life. There may be lifeless environment, but environmentless life is impossible. In Sanskrit, the equivalent word for environment is Paryāvarana. This word is constituted as- pari + ā + √ṛ-anaṭ in which the earlier prefix means 'fully', the second means 'completely' and the root have the sense of 'covering'. Thus, it refers to the environment which entirely surrounds the living creatures, especially the human being, whose existence depends upon it. The environment is surrounded by peoples, trees, creepers, animals, insects, soil, water, stars, air, wind, moon, sun, planets, stars, mountains, ocean, factories etc. Our environment is made up by these elements. The balance of various elements of the environment is very important for the survival of the organism. But at the present time, our Unrestrained lifestyle has interrupted the balance of various elements of the environment. As a result, many environmental issues arise. Chiefly growing poverty, farming, industrialization, urbanization, lack of education, lack of traditional natural energy and raw materials, scrupulous environmental policy, complex and long-term jurisdiction etc. are responsible for reducing the environment.

The first attempt was made at the international level to preserve the environment in 1972, through the Stockholm Conference. Then the conference held in Rio in 1992 and the conference held in Johannesburg in 2005 was a significant step in preserving the world environment. These environmental conferences are unanimously agreed to conserve the environment and use natural forces for developmental purposes. About 4 years after the Stockholm conference in 1976, the issues of conservation of environment by the 42nd amendment of the Indian Constitution were enclosed in article 48 (a) of the Constitution and Article 51 (a) of the fundamental duty of the constitution. Article 48 (a) of the Constitution says that 'the Protection and improvement of environment and safeguarding of forests and wild life The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country.

The concept of environmental protection and awareness has also been published in Article 51 of the Indian Constitution. 51A. Fundamental duties It shall be the duty of every citizen of India. (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures.

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In addition, central legislation was enacted such as Water Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1974, Air Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1981 and Environment Protection Act 1986. The role of the Indian judiciary is also important for the protection and improvement of the environment. It is a very commendable endeavor to make international environmental decisions by making slight changes in central law and giving the healthy environmental right as the basic right. But it can not be said that in ancient India there was no attempt at this. Maybe Indian civilization, literature Culture is the world's first sign of this. Today, we are bothered by the behavior of the righteous conduct of the ancient monk, sage or the scriptures. As a result, today the bad effect of nature continues to pollute our environment.

Environmental conservation in ancient India

India is one of the oldest civilizations of the world. When the other civilizations of the world did not see the light of dawn, then only Indian civilization reached its peak. Ancient Indian civilization surprised the people of all matters, including education, literature, culture, science, medicine, sports, politics etc. Today, in the twenty-first century, the world has become aware of the horrors of environmental pollution. But ancient Indian literature, culture, society long ago directly or indirectly has expressed the idea of environmental preservation and awareness on environmental pollution.

Soil conservation and soil pollution control in ancient India

The nature has been given great importance in Indian civilization literature culture and tradition. We know that India is one of the ancient civilization of the mankind. And from the Vedic era, the Indian monks, the sages, found new ways to survive by establishing relationships with nature. In Indian tradition, the land which is the main reservoir of nature is worshiped as a Mother. In Vedic literature, the word 'land' and 'earth' is considered as synonymous. This land contains our lives and port by giving foods- 'सा नो भूमिः प्राणमायुर्दधातु जरदष्टि मा पृथिवी कृणोतु। (Paippalāda samhita-17.3.3). This land is like a Kāmdhenu (cow of heaven)- 'अदितिः कामदुघा पप्रथाना।' (Atharvaveda, 12.1.61). She is continuing to shower his blessings on thousands of people as milk. For this reason, Vedic literature has been commemorated with respect to the various elements of the environment such as planets, stars, space, sea, water, land, fire, and the whole universe—

ओं द्यौ ! शान्तिरनोबिक्शं शान्तिः।
शान्तिरायं शान्तिशेषधयःशान्ति वनस्पतयः।
शान्तिर्विश्वतेदेबा शान्तिर्वह्नाशान्तिः सर्व शान्तिः।
शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सामा शान्तिरेधि। (Shuklayaju-36.17.1)

This thought of our ancient literary, culture is the best example of our environmental awareness. In this context it has been said in the Rigveda- 'महीद्यौः पृथ्वी यच्छात्रः शर्मप्रमथे' and 'देवोर्भियजते'. The earth holds us. May this earth give good, happiness, strength to all- शिबा चासि सोन्या चासि, सुखदा चास्यर्जस्वती चासी (Shuklayaju-1.27).

In the Bhūmi hymn of the Atharvaveda, the world has been praying to maintain consistency with nature. In Vedic literature, it is more explicitly said that there should be no unnecessary work with the earth or land, sky, water, and forestry- 'पृथिवीम मा हित्रसेः अनिरक्षमा हित्रसेः आपो महोषधिरहित्रसेः'. The Goddess Bhūmi has also been praying for not only seeking wealth, but also for the protection of Livestocks and wildlife, Gandharva, cannibal etc. (atharvaveda-12/1/1/49-50). The

Goddess Bhūmi has been praying for the welfare of the creatures- 'स्वस्ति भूमे नो भव' (Atharvaveda-12.1.32).

Our homage to the Earth as food giver or protectress (observer) is probably the outcome of ancient Indian monks' worships to Nature. In modern times environmental conferences are being warned about the environment, but it has been mentioned in our Vedas Upaniṣad long ago. But it is unfortunate that in our ancient literature, things that have been mentioned about environmental pollution or conservation, by ignoring them, we are destroying human civilization.

Water conservation and water pollution control in ancient India

Water is one of the main sources of survival for living beings. Without water life is impossible. That's why water has been termed as 'life'. We should be aware of this water conservation. Our predecessors in this regard have demonstrated enough discretion. In the R̥gveda water is said to be nectar- 'अपस्वन्तरमृतमप्सू भेषजमपामुत प्रशस्तये' (Rig-1.23.19). This water contains food for us as a source of happiness. In the R̥gveda water is referred to as- 'शत् पवित्रा समुद्र ज्येष्ठा समुद्रार्था या सूचयः'.

Water is like our mother because it bring up us- 'आपो अस्मान् मातरः सूदयन्तु' (Atharvaveda-6.5.5.5). In Viṣṇupurāna, the need for rain has been acknowledged for the protection of the world. It has also been said in Viṣṇupurāna that the rain is the source of water which produces food and the world is obeyed by that food-

विवस्वानष्टभिमसैरादायापो रसात्मिकाः।
वर्षत्यमु ततश्चात्रमनादप्यखिलं जगत्।। (Bishnupurana-2.9.8)

Lord Manu said that the water pollutant should be punished (Manu-4.56). Kauṭilya also made similar statements in Arthasāstra. Even in the Arthasāstra, to Protection the waterbodies like rivers, cisterns etc were considered as the duty of the citizens 'नित्यमुदकस्थाने मार्गभ्रमच्छत्रपथवप्रप्राकाररक्षावेक्षणं' (Arthasastra-2.36.43).

So we can say that, there is a sufficient awareness of the importance and necessity of water in our ancient literature, traditions and society. Water pollution prevention and pollution control act made in 1978, which have been said to control water pollution, may have been influenced by our ancient Indian water treatment.

Air conservation and air pollution control in ancient India

Air is one of the main components of living organisms. The surface of the earth is the atmosphere. This air is currently being polluted in many ways and it is threat to human civilization. Modern society has become aware of the bad effects of air pollution. And various programs are being taken at the public and private level to raise awareness.

But our ancient Indian literature and society have long ago felt the importance of environment and air pollution. In Vedic literature, the Vāyu or Indra is the God of air. The rotation of the oxygen and carbon di oxide cycle in the atmosphere may have been known to the Vedic sages. Therefore, in the R̥veda, R̥ṣi prayed to the wind- 'Hither, o Wind, blow healing balm, blow all disease away, thou Wind; For thou who hast all medicine comest as envoy of the Gods.' (Rig. 10/137/3). More prayers have been made for the wind in R̥veda- 'Filling our hearts with health and joy, may Vāta breathe his balm on us May he prolong our days of life' R̥g-10.186.1). Even the most famous God of R̥gveda Indra is the symbol of the Vāyu(wind).

In the epic 'Raghuvansam' of Kālidāsa, while the king Dilipa traveled to Vasistha's hermitage then the breeze of the road was not just pollution free but it was also smooth, cool and filled with lotus smell. That's why it was suitable for breathing-

सरसीष्वरविन्दानां वीचि-विक्षोभ शीतलम्।
आमोदमुपजिघ्रन्तौ स्वनिःश्वासानुकारिणम्॥ (Raghuvansam-1.43)

From the mythical era in India, there was a tradition of worshipping the wind as Pavana-

पवनः पवतामस्मि रामःशस्तभृतामहम्।
झषाणां मकरश्मास्मि स्तोतसामास्मि जाह्ववी॥ (Gitā, karmajoga-3.11)

Plant and forest conservation in ancient india

One of the biological components of the environment is the plant. The oxygen needed for living organisms is collected through plants. Even as medicinal plants, the importance of trees or shrubs is more than that. So perhaps in ancient India the tree has been promoted to the level of divinity. In Shukla Yajurveda, the tree was conceived as God, and its harm was deeply prohibited-

नमो वृक्षेभ्य (Shukla Jaju-16.17)
वनानां पतये नमः (Do-16.18)
अरण्यनां पतये नमः (Do-16.20)
नमो वन्याय च (Do-16.34)

In the Aranyaṇi hymn of the R̥gveda, it has been said to protect the forest. There it has been said that, The Goddess Aranyaṇi is not dangerous, if there is no other wild animal, then it is possible to live happily after eating delicious fruit-

‘न वा अरण्यानिर्हन्त्यन्यश्चेन नाभिगच्छति ।
सवादोःफलस्य जग्ध्वाय यथाकामं नि पद्यते॥’ (Rigveda-10.146.5)

Aranyaṇi is the sanctuary to deers and all other animals and like mother to all- ‘प्राहं मृगानाणां मातरमरण्यानिमशंसिषम’ (Rig.-10.146.5). In the 97th hymn of the tenth mandals of the R̥gveda, sages pray to the herbs and asked to protect them. Human body has conceived as a metaphor for the tree In the Mundaka upaniṣada- ‘द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते’ (Mundaka Upaniṣad-3.1.1). In the Bṛhadaronyaka Vanaspoti (tree) has compared with human being. This parallelism of human life with the tree is the introduction of the consciousness about the forest of that time. In Rāmāyana the dependence of human beings on floral resources was well established in this incident when Hanumāna had lifted and carried a mountain containing a huge number of medicinal herbs and shrubs to save Lakṣmana who became senseless by the śaktishela, the weapon of Rāvana.

Kautilya has said in his Arthaśāstra that the king will make the infertile land to forest. Beside through forestry, the resident of the brahmins who read the Vedas will be created as a forest (tapavana). As a shelter of animals, Mṛgavana can also be created through forestry. Yājñabalka has prescribed punishment for those people who destroy tress without any reason. Lord Manu has compared tree destruction as the iniquity and he told about the atonement for the tree destroyer

फलदान्तु वृक्षाणां छेदने जयमृकशतम्।
गुल्पवल्लीलताञ्च पुष्पितानाञ्च वीरुधाम्॥ (Manu-11.143)

These extensive references of trees or forestry in ancient Indian literature and society and the thought has indirectly reflected the thought of environmental protection.

Animals and wildlife conservation in ancient India

In order to maintain the balance of ecosystem in the environment, the importance and necessity of the animals are immense. A large part of animal world is the animal and wildlife. In Vedic literature and in post Vedic literature, many valuable discussions are observed about the maintenance and protection of animals and wildlives.

Farming was one of the main livelihood of Vedic civilization. The cattle were prayed for this farming. In various mantras of the R̥gveda found that cow, horse and raft were given as donatation. There are two types of animals mentioned in the Yajurveda, rural and wild. According to Bṛhadāranyaka grass and water donation to the animal and birds have been considered as the household duty- ‘यत् पशुभ्यस्तृणोदकं विन्दति तेन पशूनां यदस्य गृहेषु श्वपदा वयास्या पिपीलिकाभ्य उपजीवन्ति तेन तेषां लोको ।’ (Bṛhadāranyaka -1.4.16)

But it is true that Vedic literature provides many evidences of animal sacrifice. There is a description in R̥gveda about the preparation of Puradāsa, one kind of food with mutton and meat of horse for the worship of God-

एष छागः पुरो अश्वेन वाजिना पूषो भागो नीयते विश्वदेव्यः।
अभिप्रियं यत् पुरोच्छाशमर्वता तवष्टेदेनं सौश्रवसाय जिन्वति॥ (Rig-1.162.3)

In the society of Vedas beef and buffalo meat were consumed as edible one. It was said in the R̥gveda-

त्री यच्छता महिषाणामघो मास्त्री सरांसि मघवा सोम्यापाः।
कारं न विश्वे अहन्त देवा भरमिन्द्राय यदहिं जघान॥ (Rig.-5.29.8)

Even in the Vedic yajña there was also a custom of animal sacrifice.

In the Śatapata Brāhmaṇa of Yajurveda there were the ritual norms for slaughtering bulls, goats and infertile cows

अतिथिर्वा एष एतस्यागच्छति यत् सोमः क्रीतस्तस्मा एतद्यथा राज्ञे वा ब्राह्मणाय वा महोक्षं वा महाजं वा पचेऔदहं मानुषं हविर्देवानामेवमस्मा एतदातिथ्यं करोति। (Śatapata Brāhmaṇa -3.4.1.2).

There are instructions for sacrificing bulls or goats or infertile cows in the Śatapata Brāhmaṇa. Generally in the Vedic period cattle were slaughtered for sacrifice and for food. But there was also awareness about the protection of animals. In a hymn of Atharvaveda, there has been shown respect for cow and there also been said that if there is any other reason for cow slaughtering other than sacrifice, the slaughterer will be punished by death.

To protect animals there was a lot of awareness in the post-Vedic Indian society. In the first Shloka of the Rāmāyana, the huntsman's slaughtering of couple of birds has been depicted as the impediment to the Huntsman's establishment. Probably for the reason that killing of birds was considered as a despicable act in that society. In the Aranya kānda of the Rāmāyana, in a statement of Sitā towards Rāma where the matter of animal protection has been published- ‘अपराधं विना हन्तुं लोकान् वीर न काम्यय’ । (Rāmāyana, Aranyakānda-9.25). That is, no animal should be killed without reason. In the Mahābhārata, cow fostering is described as a household duty. Cow's greatness has also been described in the Anuśāsana

parva of the Mahābhārata. In those societies, eating of beef or killing of cow (cattle) was extremely prohibited.

In this context, it has been said in the Anuśāsana parva of the Mahābhārata that, cow slaughter, beef eater or the person who gives permission to slaughtering cow, will be punished in the hell for the same number of years as the number of hackles in the body of that cow-

घातकः खादको वापि तथा यश्चानुमन्यते।
यावन्ति तस्य रोमाणि तावद्वर्षाणि मज्जति॥ (Mahābhārata,
Anuśāsana - 59.66)

Through this prohibition to slaughtering, the idea of protecting the cows and keeping the balance of environment has been found. The idea of protecting animals has also been clearly reflected in the mythologies (Purāna) literature. It has been said in the Agni Purāna- 'प्राणिहत्या क्षुरथरे' (Agnipurāna-59.66). That is to say that if you kill animals then you have to go to hell. The idea of animal protection has also been reflected in the books of ancient Indian Smṛti śāstra or Dharmaśāstra. It has been said in Manusamhitā that if someone kills cat etc, then he will have to make atonement as well as the Śūdra killings. (Manu-11.132). In the Arthaśāstra there is also awareness about the conservation of animals has been published. For the protection of animals, Kauṭilya said to recruit various principals (Adhyakṣa) and guards.

It is hereby seen that in ancient India though there was an ordinance to kill a few animals for ritual ceremony and food yet in the matter of protecting birds the ancient Indian were enough concerned.

Conclusion

The existence of biosphere depends on the fulfillment of the living conditions of life on earth. Any harm of the environment brings a crisis to the living creatures. Therefore, the need to protect the environment. Due to the increase in population, factories, vehicles, decrease in forest land, and above all, due to lack of imprudence of common people, pollution in the world's water, air, atmosphere has become very extensive. For this reason, efforts are being made to conserve the environment by increasing awareness of the environmental degradation through various legislation, publicity, conference in national and international level. In the entire Vedic literature, in the classical Sanskrit literature even in the books of Smṛti śāstra, the concept of ancient Indian environmental thoughts has been expressed. But it is true that the idea of preserving the environment in ancient Indian literature and society has not been directly said to conserve the environment. At that time, people might not have thought of the pollution-free environment, since if there were pollution, the question of purification could have been relevant. However, the way in which the respect for the environment has been shown in ancient Indian literature and culture, it is the introduction of positive thoughts about the environment of any society and civilization. Today the existence of the earth is in danger by the effects of environmental pollution. Therefore, to make the environment sustainable for future generations, we should go ahead with the idea of ancient Indian environment.

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