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Environment and its education in the Vedas and Allied texts.

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This paper intends to present the deep understanding of environment by the Vedic seers and environmental education imparted in Vedic period. The Vedic concept of environment is many steps/ far ahead of modern environment. "Well being" is recently introduced term in the environmental parlance, but in Vedas, we find this in full length.

INTRODUCTION:—

The environment and its education enshrined/existing in the Vedas and allied Sanskrit texts have made everlasting imposition/impression on the *Bhartiya* culture from the Vedic times until today. Environmental conservation and proper utilization of natural resources has been directed in the code of conduct in many scientific Sanskrit literatures.

The concept of environment in Vedas is quite different from the modern concept. By understanding the *trigunatamak prakriti* and *purushas* of Vedas, we can readily understand the environmental concept of Vedas. The Purusha is the instrumental cause of the universe, while Prakriti is its material cause. The human body is therefore believed to be the result of the joint operation of these two principles.¹ The prakriti exposes itself in terms of –sattva, rajas, and tamas. Finite universe is the product of infinite prakriti, which has three kinds of substances and qualities. This prakriti is a substance and quality both blended in an equilibrium state. Namely, they are known as—

- 1) *Sattva* or the essence, the cause of different manifestations or phosphorescence;
- 2) *Rajas*, the energy factor constituting the principle of work, by overcoming obstacles or resistance and producing motion; and
- 3) *Tamas*, the inertia.

Some Ancient scriptures relevant to the environment:—

Vayu-tattva Prakarnam by Shaktayana: — the subject of the book was wind and its operations in atmosphere. *Viashvanar tantram* by Narada—this was concerned with the science of fire. Electricity, heat and magnetism are the subjects that come within the ambit of Vaishvanara, the fire. *Dhuma Prakarnam* by Narada: — the knowledge of smokes, flames and monsoon etc. was the main subject of the book. *Karaka Prakarnam* by Angirasa: —How the hail storms originate and how the water freezes in the cloud were dealt within this book.

ENVIRONMENT IN THE VEDAS:—

For environment, Atharvaveda has used the word '*Paridhi*'² Other Sanskrit words for the pollution are *Dushanam*, *Kalushikarnam*. Vedas speaks of life to be healthy and victorious for attaining the four-fold objective of life (*Chaturvidha*

purushartha) by understanding the Mother Nature. *Baghvad Gita* points out that five primordial elements (*Panca mahabhutas*) consist of (1) Earth (mineral matter / lithosphere), (2) Water (hydrosphere) (3) Fire (thermal energy), air (gases / atmosphere), and (5) Sky (space with subatomic particles) by all and sundry means of peace. Whatever there is in this world, terrific, whatever there is cruel in this world, whatsoever there is evil in this world; let all there be peace giving, let all that be gracious, let all that be harmless for us".⁴

The Taittiriya Samhita (4.4,10,1-3) and the Taittiriya Brahmana (3.1-1,2) mention the presiding deities of the asterisms. The Rgveda (2.32,8 1-3,20 etc.) speaks of the Moon as the measurer of time. Likewise, the Atharvaveda 19 refers to Nakshatras. The Salkalya Samhita gives the configurations of the stars. The Kausika –sutra of the Atharvaveda contains a Nakshatra –Kalpa and a Shantikarpa, both treating of the lunar mansions. Panini has many sutras bearing in the constellations, months, seasons etc. The Taittiriya Brahmana says that the 'spring is the face of the year'. The Sathpatha Brahmana speaks of six (sometimes five also) seasons (Rtus).⁵ The Vedic poets have praised the beauty of the nature in large number of sukta. One can easily get the idea that the Vedic seers unearthed the supreme truths of the natures by practicing rigorous penance in the close proximity of the environment i.e. in the dense forests with the aid of yoga i.e. controlling the bodily internal environment. Summarily, the Vedic seers directs us that without understanding the internal environment of the body one will not be able to use the external environment. The other thing that we find in the Vedas that a person will not be able to live the "*Sata vasrha aayu*" till his outer environment is not just. Therefore, the outer environment is directly proportional to the external environment and vice-versa.

It will be worth mentioning that Great poets like Kalidas, Social philosophers like Manu, Vatayayna, and Tiruvalluvar; Great lawgiver like Manu, Shukra, Yagyavalk and others have repeatedly have laid stress on the concept of environment and its education. Hence, we get impression that under the sixty-four *kalas*, learning about the environment, its preservation and using the products of nature in appropriate quantity was indispensable part of teaching. Unlike, today's students and learning institution ancients were in close proximity of nature. The description made by Kalidasa about the Ashram of Rishi Kanva is mind soothing and heart cooling. In the Mahabharata (i.70), there is description of the Kanva's hermitages. It was situated on the banks of Malini, a tributary of the Sarayu River. Numerous hermitages stretched round the central hermitage. At this Ashram, there were specialists in each of the four Vedas; in phonetics, Metrics, Grammar, and Nirukta. There were also philosophers well—versed in the science of the Absolute. There were logicians. There were also specialists in the physical sciences and arts. In this forest university, the study of every available branch of learning was cultivated. In the Ramayana (vi, 126;ii, 90-2), we have an interesting description of the hermitage of Rishi Bharadwaja at Prayaga. This hermitage was one of the biggest of the times.⁶

Living in this surrounding, our Rishis had opened up the enigmas of the nature by their subtle *Buddhi*. Rishi Kanva



composed large number of Suktas in the Veda .In Atharvaveda we find that Kanva and his descendents has composed suktas like *Krimijambhanam*, *Kriminashnam*, and *Krimighnam*. These suktas how beautifully and elaborately speaks of the Microorganisms and insects, their role in nature, about their disease producing capability, their ecological importance and ecological niche and many such similar facts, which gives an account of the understanding of the nature and its component in the manner both –subtle and gross.⁷

We are also amazed to learn that the name of many *ashnas* in the yoga is derived from the name of animals, birds and like. For example *Mayurashana*, this *ashna*(posture) is named after pea-cock .It is believed that persons who constantly do this *ashna* become poison resistant as peacock.

The great biologist of Bharat, noble prizewinner Sir J.C.Bose was inspired by the Atharvaveda hymn, and he proved to the world that plants are living beings. Continuing this Atharvaveda reiterates that plant possesses soul. In addition, other many such hymns provide deep insight into the selfless contribution of the plants in maintaining the souls enveloped by the body on the planet earth. In the 'Gita 'Yogiraj Shrikrishna boldly states that among tree I am the great Pippal

(*Ficus Religiosa*).One of the hymns of Atharvaveda states that there is an *avi*-pigment (life-saving) element, i.e. chlorophyll in the plants. It is covered by *Rta* (Tissues). Due to this pigment, the plants and herbs are green.⁸

POLLUTION:—

Amidst the fascinating achievements of the modern era of science and technology in improving our comfort levels, stress and pollution have posed the major challenges for our well-being. The world is beginning to realize that the comforts provided to us by modern science and technology do not necessarily always make life happier. In fact, apart from stress and tension, increasingly unknown diseases, untold anxiety and fear are caused by the highly polluted environment and ecological imbalances.

Pollution is of various types such as gaseous pollution, water pollution, food pollution, radioactive pollution, microbial pollution, and so on.

The environmental pollution as mentioned *Pradushana* in Sanskrit and *Vikriti* in the Charak'sense have been mentioned in several Hindu scriptures like The Vedas, the Mahabharata, Purana, Manusmriti, Kautilya's Arthashastra, and Charak Samhita. *Vikar* develops in human body as environmental pollution effects internally in the body. In The Vedas, there are sufficient statements relating to air, water, sound, food and even soil pollution. The examples can be derived in The Rig Ved, the Yajurved, and the Atharva Ved. Air is classified as pure air worthy for respiration and the polluted air harmful to living beings. Mind it, pure air is precious for our health mainly for heart disease and increases our longevity.⁹

The Mahabharata says that while it takes only a few to defoliate and cause pollution, the whole society may suffer from various diseases. It has been further mentioned that from pollution two types of diseases likely to occur in human beings.

The first one is related with the body and the other with the mind and both are interrelated.¹⁰

The importance of environment and the ecosystem in health and illness has been highlighted in the Vedas and so too in Ayurveda. Taittiriya Aranyaka (7.7.1) states: 'Earth, atmosphere, heavens, directions, fire, air, sun, moon and stars as well as water, herbs, trees and sky and soul all these influence the very existence of all life. Changes in them result in suffering' (Sambasivan, 1997).¹¹

ENVIRONMENTAL CODE OF CONDUCT IN ANCIENT SANSKRIT TEXTS:—

Through the various lessons in the scriptures, a system of code of conduct (*Maryada*) developed in the Hindu religion, which included so many norms that are prescribed for those who pollute the terrestrial and aquatic assets, because these are the integral part of Jagat, Jiva and Jagadiswar to regulate this world. ¹² Rigveda orders not to cut the trees because they remove pollution.¹³ Further, Yajurveda speaks of not to pollute water or to harm or cut trees.¹⁴ Also it says of not to disturb the sky and not to pollute the atmosphere.¹⁵ One should always strengthen the and nourish the earth and should refrain from polluting it.¹⁶

Manu, directs in Manusmriti that one should not cause urine, stool, cough in the water. Anything, which is mixed with these unpious objects, blood and poison, should not be thrown into water. Charak has written in his Charak Samhita that the polluted air is mixed with bad elements and creates diseases in the body and is polluted.¹⁷

For a clear warning to cause soil pollution, The Vishnupuran says one should not cause excrement in the ploughed field, land having crops, dwelling places of cows and public paths. In Padmapurana-Bhoomikhand, it is mentioned that a person who is engaged in killing creatures, polluting wells, and ponds and tanks and destroys garden and public land certainly goes to hell.¹⁸

The Vedas say from the point of health, we have to be safe from high sound and make your voice slow and mild while talking. While one undertakes Bhajans and Kirtanas, the sound should be low and sweet.¹⁹

The Hindu culture does not accept a superior status to human beings over their natural surroundings. This perception of man is clearly represented in Veda, where it has been said that the earth is not only for human beings to enjoy but also for all other bipeds and quadrupeds, birds and animals and other creatures—Atharvaved.²⁰

VARIOUS DIETIES AS THE LORDS OF NATURE:—

The sages found out that there are three things, which are covering the entire universe. They have different forms and aspects. They are all—beholding. They are water, air, and plants. These things are provided to every world.²¹

In our *shastras* we find description about the various deities. These deities are worshipped by the people .In the caves of Ajanta and Ellora such inscriptions are readily found where large number of Gods and Goddesses are portrayed with the nature. Many God /Goddesses are be-



lieved to be the deity of certain biotic or abiotic components of the environment. On remembering *Bhagvan Vishnu* we get the picture of ocean, and snake of hundreds of mouth; on recalling *Indra* we instantly get lightening experience of *Vajra*. Interestingly, *Bhagvan Shiva* is known as the *Pasupati*.

Heat / Agni / Surya: — *Agni* is the presiding deities in Vedas. Its chief role in creation has been recognized.²² *Mundokopnishad* speaks of seven tongues of fire.²³ The fire is pollution combater.²⁴ Sun is called as the soul of this universe.²⁵ Sun is mainly referred in the Vedas as a source of light, knowledge, fire, heat, energy, seven colours of light, killer of harmful diseases plants, human beings, animals etc. All the animate and inanimate objects in this universe depend on the sun for maintaining its status.²⁶ The sun purifies the atmosphere by his purifying rays.²⁷ The rising sun destroys all ill effects of pollution.²⁸ For the proper metabolism in the environment *Agni* / heat is indispensable. Sun is a source of knowledge both for the physical scientists, metaphysists and also for the environmentalists.

Water: — According to one estimate by World Bank the water pollution alone is causing India to suffer a loss of 19,995 crores of Rupees.²⁹

Pure water gives long life to humans, protects life and increases vitality.³⁰ Pure water is as medicine to facial beauty, softness and luster.³¹ It is essential to drink sufficient water in order to digest food. Water is the essence of life. Without sufficient water intake and use, one cannot get hearing, seeing and speaking power. Moreover, the Vedas say, water is essential to the production of cereals, various medicines³² and vegetation. So, water is taken as medicine, so one should not pollute it.³³

The Rigveda says water as a powerful media of purification, so it is prayed that the waters in the sky, the water in the rivers, and water in well whose source is ocean, may all these sacred waters protect me. According to Charak Samhita, the rivers having water polluted with soil and faeces and other pollutants having abnormal colour and taste, viscous and foul smelling is not worthy to use at any condition.³⁴

For water treatment herbal medicine like cleaning nut embelia officinalis, Indian sarasapilla are under trials for better water treatment.

Earth / Soil: — It has been said that land is the aggregation of rock, stone and soil. So many fruits, medicines, cereals and vegetation grow on soil. On them living beings depend for their food. So, one should respect the earth as our mother. The earth provides surface for vegetation for green house effect. The fire provides iron. The herbs and plants, having union with the sun-rays, provide congenial atmosphere for the creation.³⁵

The human beings should protect the earth revolving very fast like a deer by observing and following the permanent laws of social, moral and physical order ordained by God and described as *Rta* in the Vedas and other scriptures of the Hindus. Such brave people who observe and follow these *Rta* help in the preservation of land (earth).³⁶ The science of Time is also linked with the Sun and his daughter *Usha*

devi.³⁷ Each dawn reduces life span of the matter in all animate and inanimate life and it reminds the human beings to set a proper timetable from morning to night.³⁸

According to the Hindu scriptures, Hindus were also cautious about those activities, which were detrimental in any way to the quality of environment.

Indra: — In Vedas, *Indra* is regarded as the chief deities of large number of hymns. *Indra* is one of the most used environmental scientific technical terms. There lies *Indras* in our body and the other *Indra* lies outside the body in the atmosphere. *Indra* is one such brilliant example to explain the environmental concept depicted in the ancient Sanskrit scriptures. In the body, there are many *Indries*, the sensual organs. With the aid of these *Indries*, we are able to understand the outer *Indra*. In the body there are *Karmaindriya* and *jnanaindriya*.

Indra, in the Vedas, he is the foremost among the gods; he can assume any form at will; he rides in a golden chariot drawn by two ruddy horses; his weapon is the thunderbolt; his special delight is the soma juice; he governs the weather and dispenses rain; he also sends forth thunder and lightning; he perpetually at war with the demon *Vriha* who brings in drought and inclement weather.³⁹

Oushadhi (dispeller of 'doshas')

Trees like neem, vilva, pungam, purify the air. *Ruta graveolence* (*sathappu*) prevents radiation hazards. *Rgveda* 10.97 consists of 23 mantras, which describes about the utility of medicinal plants. This *sukta* is known by *Aoushadhi sukta*.⁴¹ *Maitrayani samhita* mentions about the anti-pollution activity of *kashmarya* tree. In *Rgveda* the tree *Kakambir* is mentioned as purifier of polluted air and its activity for purifying the surrounding atmosphere.⁴²

When herbs, twigs, and roots are used to kindle fires, the environment is purified by eliminating the germs. Here in the two deities — *oushadhi* (herbs) and *Agni* (fire) combines to eliminate the contaminating- and pathogenic- microbes. These deities individually as well as in collaboration sustain the nature and its component. Henceforth for the sustainable development of the environment a perfect and natural phenomenon occurs between these deities.

Vayu / Air

*Air is considered as the soul of deities for its great role in creation*⁴³. *It produces fire by friction*.⁴⁴ *Air exists in the water*.⁴⁵

In Nature, *vayu* serves as an envelope of the earth and maintains the division of seasons. In its abnormal state in Nature, it may cause storms and winds. When activated at the microcosmic level it produces physical and mental illnesses. Depression of seasonal variety described in recent years is of this category.⁴⁶

— *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* mentions about ozone layer. *Rgveda* has used the term "*mahat ulaba*" for the same and speaks about its significance.⁴⁷

Cow and Agnihotra and Vastushastra — the central tenet of Bhartiya Sanskriti i.e. Indian culture

The most sacred animal cow has been extolled in the *Veda*.⁴⁸ The *Atharvaveda* praises the cow in her various aspects in



Av. 4/21;5/18;7/82;9/7;10/9;10/10;12/4;12/5, the bull and /or bullock in 9/4, in the cowshed in 3/14, the cow breeding in 7/75;the strengthening of cow in 7/104, the marking of cows in 4/141, the cow improvement in 4/70.This amply vouchsafes about the role of cow in the maintaining of healthy environment in and around the environ of man.

The veneration of the cow as been so great that *pañcagavya* prepared five substances due to cow, viz., her milk, curds and ghee or her milk, her urine and dung mixed with water in

Eyes
Airs-inhaled and exhaled
Vision
Flesh
Blood
Ashes
Colour
Scent
His dish
Shoulders
Backbones
Entrails
Intestines
Cauldron
Ribs
Undigested contents of His stomach
His water for washing the hands
His stirring spoon
The ladle
Dresses
Resting place of God

Relationship with Nature and its component.

Cloud
Vedic knowledge
Heaven and earth
Sun and moon
Seven Rishis
Pestle
Black iron
Copper
Tin
Gold
Blue lotus flower
Threshing floor
The wooden sticks of the cart
Shaft of the plough
Stings to yoke the oxen in the cart
The straps to yoke the oxen in the plough
Earth
Furrows
Sandy soils
Truth
Vast atmosphere
Universe
Seasons
The three regions-the atmosphere, heaven and the earth

Above table projects the diverse animate and inanimate entities and process as being united and manifested as the Su-

preme Being or Param Bramha. It further ascertains the central dogma of 'Yad Brahmande Tat Pinde'.

Conclusion: — From the above discussion, we can conclude that the Vedic view point of environment and its education hails in ascending node, i.e. any individual interested to know the Vedic concept of environment has first to inquire environmental conditions of his own body, followed by observing his condition of inhabitation, then on to the society, and society to nation and then to the whole earth, followed by whole universe. Then we can get full glimpses of environment. *Idd Nan Mmam* – 'nothing for self all for society' is the underlying principle of Vedic environmental education. Also it can be understood by the vidhyas classified as para and apara. The western concept of environment has yet to imbibe many things from the Vedic valuation of environment. Maintaining the harmony in the environment has been the teachings of Vedic Rishis. "*Shatyam shivam sundaram*" –the greater the element of truth the deeper the perception of beauty. Truth discovers the permanent, the eternal and the final. Thus, it transcends the decadence and dissolution, and the decay and death. It tries to touch perfection in the domain of rational investigation and reasoned approach. The Vedic Rishis has rightly said at the end — *Neti Neti*.

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