

ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE IN ANCIENT INDIAN TEXTS : A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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Abstract

In ancient India there were several instances regarding environmental significance. The Aryans thought of every natural activity for the causes of god or goddess. The Upanishad focused on the protection of environment. In the post Vedic age, different personalities, writers, poets mentioned different natural ethics and perspectives. 'Arthashastra' and other books enlightened on the consciousness and protection of environment and mentioned several causes of the pollution of the environment. Today we have to get lessons from the ancient tradition of environmental history.

Keywords: ancient India, environment, classical texts

In today's scenario, environment becomes an important issue in Indian history because of its important contribution in surviving healthily in our society. Though the environment is going to be degraded and destroyed due to unlimited misuses by man, everybody knows we have to depend on the environment for rain, water, oxygen, soil, vegetation etc. But the polluted elements of the environment make the life unhealthy. In this short paper, we are briefly outlining on the history of environment and this trend traced back to the earlier period, the period of Vedic culture, Upanishad even Ramayana and Mahabharata. (1,2)

The Aryans thought of every natural activity as an act done by the god or goddess. Classical literature is full of references to four basic elements – fire, air, earth, water. They were the worshippers of Nature. The Hindus, intellectually expanded the idea to **Kshiti, Op, Tej, Marut and Byom**, the five fundamental constituents. The ancient holy persons (Rishi) felt the mighty power of an existence beyond the natural activity. It was necessary to keep the

balance of the environment. There was reason behind the lightning and thunder and also rains. In the Upanishad it was said that there was a link between the biological and living world. (3) The Vedic literature did not only suggest to cooperate towards the environmental elements but also to protect it. The plantation of trees, its nurturance and protection are well-known to us. (4) They introduced punishment against the destruction of trees and deforestation.(1)

In the post Vedic age the famous poets like Kalidas, Banabhatta very consciously explained the environment perspective in their writings. Kalidas wrote 'Abhigyan Shakuntalam' where he considered the central character 'Shakuntala' as daughter of nature. He emphasized in the interrelationship between people, birds and vegetation in the 'Tapaban'.(2) Nature blessed the couple Raja Dushyanta and Shakuntala during their marriage and the natural environment tumultuous during their separation.(1) In 'Meghdutam' he sketched the geographical path in India for 'Meghmala,' (the cloud). Kalidas mentioned the six seasons and their distinguished natural features in 'Ritusamhara'. The writings of Banabhatta reflected his interest and love towards nature. In 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' some evil characters like Kaikeyi, Manthara, Ravana, Shakuni, Dushyasan and others polluted the social environment.(2)

The 'Arthashashtra' written by Kautilya made some progress for the protection and conservation of the environment. (1,2) People were inspired for protection of plantations and water-bodies. It had also emphasized on the punishment against the cutting of trees or destruction of vegetation. It identified the causes of pollution from the industries and manufacture. The book referred to the role of the state during natural calamities. It mentioned the punishable offence for the destruction of the forests and drainage system.(1)

Charaka , Jivaka and Nagarjuna had stated the importance of planting medicinal trees and their conservation.(2) In 'Brihat Samhita' Varahamihira emphasized the natural movement while trying to identify the causes of environmental destruction.(3)

The present condition of the environment indicates that no lesson was learnt from the past scenario. The ancient history had distinctly shown the importance of the environment for the existence of people. Today we have to think deeply to save nature from unnecessary misuses made by the people. The activities may be harmful for future survival and sustenance.

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