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ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE SAMHITĀ PARTS OF FOUR VEDAS

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Abstract:

The Vedas are the oldest examples of religious literature in ancient India. The hermits of the Vedas realized the importance of various elements of nature through their general needs in day to day life. The imbalances and pollution of the environment due to the problems of urban development, huge population growth and huge demand for natural resources in the present world were not present in the Vedic age in ancient India. As a result, awareness to prevent population was not required at that time as it is now. But there was a consciousness to protect the environment at that time. They prayed nature as deity and also prayed for worldly wealth. From their devotion to nature it is not difficult to understand that they had not lack of awareness for nature and environment.

Key-words: Environment, sun (sūrya), air(vāyū), earth(pr̥thivī), forest, livestock.

Introduction:

The Vedas are the oldest examples of religious literature in ancient India. The Vedas refer to Mantra and Brahman. Another name of this 'Mantra' section is Samhitā. Therefore, the Samhitā of the Vedas means Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. In this part of the Vedas there are many hymns of various deities. Through that religious hymns, there are found various problems of the simple life of the people of the Vedic age and the solution for that. Through the general needs of the people of the Vedic age, they realized the importance of various elements of nature. However, the imbalances and pollution of the environment due to the problems of urban development, huge population growth and huge demand for natural resources in the present world were not present in the Vedic age in ancient India. As a result, awareness to prevent population was not required at that time as it is now. However, it would not be appropriate to think that they had no idea about the

earthly nature and environment. Although the people of the Vedic age did not have complete success in unraveling the mysteries of world nature, they prayed nature as deity and also prayed for worldly wealth. From their devotion to nature it is not difficult to understand that they had not lack of awareness for nature and environment.

Environment as a Nature in Vedas:

In the Vedic era, people had to depend on nature to survive and they knew how to use nature. After some time this dependence and practical necessity helped to imagine various natural substances as deities. There are three divisions of deity in Nirukta in response of the dignity like as earth space (Pṛthib sthān ya), (antar kṣasthān ya) (dyulokasthān ya) Namely - Agni, Aph, Prithvi and Soma - are the deities of the earth space, Indra or Vayu, Rudra, Marut, Matrishva, Parjanya - are the deities of the cosmic space and Surya, Mitra, Varuna, Pusha, Sabita, Aditya, Ashvinyugal, Usha, Ratri etc. is the space of Heaven. In the ṚgVeda, the deities are praised as worshipers of nature through various mantras. There has been an appeal to nature to be in favor of man. For example, there is a prayer to the sun to protect from the trouble of the heaven, the wind (vāyu) from the trouble of the sky and the fire (agni) from the trouble of the earth.

SUN(sūrya):

One of the elements of nature is the sun. The existence of animals is impossible without the rays of the sun. The Vedas also mention the preparation of tree food in the presence of sunlight. The sun is the sender of all actions, the benefactor of all and the protector of all.¹ It is true that when the earth is very hot from the heat of the sun, clouds are formed and that cloud rains, which gives life to other living things on earth.² Sometimes that sun is imagined as the determinant of day and night,³ sometimes as the destroyer of darkness.⁴

AIR(vāyū):

The hermits of Ṛgveda realized the importance and glory of air. The Vedic hermits realized the ultimate truth that man breaths oxygen and leaves CO₂ and plants take CO₂ and leave oxygen in the air.⁵ The oxygen is called purified air in the Vedas. This beneficially, pleasant and longevity pure air (O₂) should be beared as medicine among us.⁶ In the Vedas, man had a very close relationship with nature. There, Vāyu (Air) is addressed as father, brother and friend. The life-enhancing herb of the organism is air.⁷ Air is for the welfare and happiness of the people. Air is the life of an organism.

The scarcity of oxygen which is a burning problem at present was realized by erstwhile hermits of ancient Vedas. At that time the environment was not as populated or pollution free as it is now. However, they were not indifferent to the protection of the environment.

WATER:

Water is an important element of the natural environment and the main source of that water is cloud and rain. Parasitic creeper, very large trees, shrubs (gulmas) and herbs- all these are revitalized in this water and the human lives also get their livelihood by this water. Not only does water quench thirst, but also acts as medicines. The ultimate truth of its medicinal properties was first learnt by the sages of R̥gveda.⁸ That is why water is also called nectar. Water is life-giving as ambrosia.⁹ This water has multiple properties such as- vigour energizing and manna and life-saving.¹⁰ This water is remedial and health enhancer.¹¹ So the Atharva-Vedic sages realized that the effect of water is to keep people healthy forever. .¹² The water fosters us like mother. This water is the Lord of the living, the mother, the benefactor of the world.¹³ So the saints realized that there was an infinitely beneficial essence of juice in water as it contains in breast milk of mother.¹⁴ Water is so important in our day to day life that even its conservation is mentioned in the Vedas. Owing to its importance water pollution was strictly banned in Yajurveda- which is also a significant measured in relation to water conservation.¹⁵

Earth (pṛthivi) :

The relation between the earth (bhūloka) and the heaven (dyuloka) is very intimate and the embodiment of both is like a pair of vedic deity 'Dyāvyaṛṇthivi'. This 'Dyāvyaṛṇthivi' which is the base of all lives and seems to contain all human beings. The word 'Dyuloka' is imagined as father and the earth (Bhūloka) is imagined as mother. There is also prayer for the dyuloka to be favorable to all.¹⁶

In the Bhūmisūkta of Atharvaveda, the earth is imagined as Kāmadhenu. The earth is imagined as the mother and everyone else as her son.¹⁷ There is more emphasis on the earth. The earth sustains our lives and life span by providing food.¹⁸

Although the bhūmi is worshiped there for gaining wealth, prayers are also made to the earth for the protection of domestic animals and wild animals, gandharvas, monsters, etc.¹⁹ The prayer to be a benefactor for life is also seen in this earth.²⁰

Forest Conservation:

In the Vedic period, a lot of material was collected from plants for human life and healing. Although plants were used for life's needs, but naturally there was awareness of plant protection. But the destruction of plants for no reason or greed for wealth was not like to days. So there was no direct awareness or reflection of the destruction of plants.

Forests and wildlife are one of the biological components of the plant environment. One of the duties of modern society is to protect the forest resources. R̥gveda lays importance of forest conservation. The forest never kills life. Moreover, the forest gives the creature delicious fruits that can be eaten and lived happily. In the Vedas, nature is considered a friend of plants.²¹

In the Vedic era, especially in the R̥gvedic age, there was no advanced treatment system like today for the treatment of various diseases. So at that time plant-derived substances were used for treatment. The plants that had the ability to prevent this disease were called herbs (Oṣadhi). As medicines (herbs) were used to cure people from several deadly diseases, special emphasis was given on its conservation in Vedas. These drugs were also important for the eradication of chronic diseases like tuberculosis.²² Not only that, people also had to depend on these plants for the treatment of hemorrhoids, body-building disorders and stomach ailments²³ and so the medicines are also called Mother (Janani).²⁴

This medicine derived from the soil cures everyone.²⁵ As the scientist of modern era have hoped for the utmost cooperation of common man in protecting the environment, similar concern for protecting environment was found among the Vedic hermits. There had to appeal to live non-violently was also found in the minds of hermits in Vedas. They invoked to all the medicinal plants to be together for fighting ancient diseases. However, the idea of protecting these valuable medicines was found in the Vedas.²⁶

The necessity of protecting medicinal plants is also mentioned there. All these medicines are needed to protect people from diseases or evils. So its preservation is also important.²⁷

Now there is a general question that if all these drugs were cut off for the prevention of the disease, is there no need to protect them? The answer may be that there is a discussion regarding the conservation of such medicinal plants is also found in the Śuklayajurveda.²⁸ There is also awareness of the need for preservation and longevity of medicine.²⁹ The R̥gveda also states that the destruction of medicines for curing diseases was inevitable, but their destruction was unjustifiably forbidden. That is why even though people destroy them, there is also a prayer for everyone to be healthy.³⁰

From all these discussions it can be inferred that the Vedic people used nature for their needs, but their efforts to protect that nature were not less.³¹

Livestock preservation:

Animals are another important part of the earthly environment. In the Vedic era, the Aryans considered animals as wealth. Agriculture was one of the main livelihoods of the people of the Vedic period. And they needed a lot of cattle for this farming. There were also prayers to deities for cattle.³² Cows are required for barley cultivation.³³ The custom of sacrificing cattle, horses, camels etc. was prevalent in the Vedas.³⁴ Therefore, due to agriculture and charity, livestock was needed in R̥gveda and it needed to be maintained. There are two types of animals such as rural and forest areas mentioned in Yajurveda. There are 328 rural and 272 forest animals mentioned. Not only this, there are also mentioned herdsmen to look after the rural animals such as cowherd, keeper of an elephant, equerry, goat-keeper etc.

The practice of animal sacrifice was prevalent in the Vedas. Animal flesh was also served for hospitality. Therefore, even if the animals were slaughtered for livelihood or for sacrifice or for food, there was also mentioned the awareness about the protection of animals in Veda.³⁵

In the Vedic period, prayers for cows as wealth and foodstuffs are found and on the other hand, examples of prayers for the recovery of these animals are also found. There was a wish for good health for the bipedal and quadrupedal animals as well as prayer for each and every village.³⁶ Such activities of the people for protecting animals from the hands of ferocious animals is also an exemplary incident to the greedy people who are willing to kill animals and to destroy the environment.³⁷ Therefore, in the Vedas, their positive role in the protection of animals can be noticed.

Conclusion: -

It is evident from the hymns of all these deities that the ancient Indians had the power to observe the natural environment. Among the earthly things that are most important to human beings, they promoted them to deities. In this way, by improving the natural environment to the level of deities, they have unknowingly given a special status to the environment.

This earthly environment is conducive to life and needs to be protected. Prayers for the protection of the environment are seen in the Yajurveda. The pleasant air may flow, the sun may shine in a pleasant way and the roaring deity 'Parjanya' may rain in a pleasant way.³⁸

Prayers are also seen in Yajurveda for the environment to be peaceful. There is prayer for the earth to be peaceful, for the universe to be peaceful, for the earth to be peaceful. May the water be peaceful, may the herbs grow, may the vegetation grow. Let everything be peaceful, let this peace be for all on earth.³⁹

The Vedic hermits were always aware of the fact that the environment on earth should be conducive for all to live. So their prayer is that the medicines, the world, the heaven, the cosmos, the water become honeyed for everyone.⁴⁰ So it is also prayer to all that everything in this environment, air (vāyu), river, medicine (oṣadhi), night, earth, sky, etc. would be favorable.⁴¹

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¹ yenamā viśvā bhuvanānyā viśvakarmaṇā viśdevyāvātā — Ṛgveda 10/170/4

² yadā khalu asāvādityo nyanraśmibhiḥ paryāvarttate tha varṣati – Kṛṣṇayajurveda, 2/2/10

³ vi dyāmeṣi rajasprthvā simāno aktubhiḥ — Ṛgveda 1/50/7

⁴ udihyudihi sūrya varcasā mābhyudihi – Atharvaveda, 17/1/6

⁵ tvam hi viśvabheṣajo devānām dūta īyase – Ṛgveda, 10/137/3

⁶ vāta ā vātu bheṣajam śambhu mayobhu no hṛde – Ṛgveda, 10/186/1

⁷ uta vāta pitāsi na uta bhrātota naḥ sakhā – Ṛgveda, 10/186/2

⁸ apasvantaramṛtamapsu bheṣajamapāmuta praśastaye – Ṛgveda, 1/23/19

- ⁹ tā jīvalā jīvadhanyāḥ pratiṣṭhā – Atharvaveda, 12/3/25
- ¹⁰ mṛtyoḥ pāhyojo si saho syamṛtamasi – Śuklayajurveda, 10/15
- ¹¹ tā asmabhyam ayakṣmā anamīvā – Śuklayajurveda, 4/12 & aripṛā āpo apa ripramasmāt – Atharvaveda, 10/3/1/24
- ¹² āpaḥ punīta bheṣajam varutham tanve mama jyok ca sūryyam dṛṣe – Atharvaveda, 1/6/3
- ¹³ āpo asmānmātarah śundhayantu’ & ‘āpo devīrvṛhatīḥ viśvaśambhuvah’ – Śuklayajurveda, 4/2 & 4/7
- ¹⁴ yo vaḥ śivatamo rasastasya bhāyateha naḥ
uśatīriva mātaraḥ’— Atharvaveda, 1/5/2
- ¹⁵ mā apo mauṣadhīrhimsīḥ – śuklayajurveda, 6/22
- ¹⁶ dyāvāpṛthivī anu mā dīdhīhām – Atharvaveda, 2/3/2/5
- ¹⁷ mātā bhūmiḥ putro haṁ pṛthivyāḥ – Atharvaveda, 12/1/12
- ¹⁸ sā no bhūmiḥ pṛṇamāyurdadhātu – Atharvaveda, 12/1/22
- ¹⁹ ‘ye ta āraṇyāḥ paśvo mṛgā vane hitāḥ simhā vyagrāḥ puruṣādaścatanti’ - Atharvaveda, 12/1/49
‘ye gandharvā apsaraso ye cārāyāḥ kimdinaḥ | piśacānsarvā rakṣāmsi tānasmad bhūme yāvaya ||’ – Atharvaveda, 12/1/50
- ²⁰ svasti bhūme no bhavaḥ - Atharvaveda, 12/1/32
- ²¹ na vā aranyāni rhyantanyāścennābhigacchati | svādoḥ phalasya jagdhāya yathākāmaṁ ni padyate || – Ṛgveda, 10/146/5
- ²² yadimā vājayannahamoṣadhīrhastā ādadhe | ātmā yakṣmasya naśyati pur jīvagrbo yathā || – Śuklayajurveda, 12/85
- ²³ nāśayitṛi valasyārśasa upacitāmasi | atho śatasya yakṣmāṇām pākarorasi nāśanī || – Śuklayajurveda, 12/97
- ²⁴ ‘śataṁ vo amva dhāmaāni sahasramuta vo ruhaḥ | adhā śatakratvo yūyamimim me agadam kṛta ||’ &
‘oṣadhīriti mātaraśtadvo devīrūpa bruve’ – Ṛgveda, 10/97/2 & 4
- ²⁵ oṣadhīr iti mātaraś tad vo devīr upa bruve |
saneyam aśvaṁ gām vāsa ātmānam tava pūruṣa || - Ṛgveda, 10/97/4
- ²⁶ anyā vo anyāmatvatvanyānyasyā upāvata | tāḥ sarvāḥ saṁvidānā idam me pṛvatā vacaḥ || – Ṛgveda, 10/97/14
- ²⁷ yāḥ phalinīryā aphaḥ apuṣpā yāśca puṣpiṇīḥ | vṛhaspatiprasūtāstā no muñca ntvamhasaḥ || – Ṛgveda, 10/97/15
- ²⁸ ‘mā vo riṣat khanitā yasmai cāhaṁ khanāmi vaḥ’ & ‘dīrghāyusta ośadhe khanitā yasmai ca tvā khanāmyaham’ – Śuklayajurveda, 12/95 & 12/100
- ²⁹ tvam deva vanaspate śatavallo vi roha – Śuklayajurveda, 5/43
- ³⁰ mā vo riṣat khanitā yasmai cāhaṁ khanāmi vaḥ | dvipaccatuśpadasmākaṁ sarvamastvanāturam || – Ṛgveda, 10/97/20
- ³¹ mūlebhyah svāhā, śākhābhyah svāhā, vanaspatibhyah svāhā,
puṣpebhyah svāhā, phalebhyah svāhausadhībhyah svāhā. – Śuklayajurveda, 22/28

³² 'tvam naḥ puñīhi paśubhiḥ', & 'ya īse paśupatiḥ paśūnām catuspadāmuta ye dvipadām | niṣkrītaḥ sa yajñīyaḥ bhāgametu rāyaspoṣā yajamānaḥ sacantām ||' – Atharvaveda, 17/1/6, & 2/6/3/1

³³ gobhi ryavaḥ na cakṛṣat – Ṛgveda, 1/23/15

³⁴ 'tā me aśvinā sanīnām vidyātaḥ navānām | yathā cic caidyāḥ kaśuḥ śatam uṣṭrānām dadat sahasrā daśa gonām ||'- Ṛgveda, 8/5/37 & 'ud ānaḥ kakuho divam uṣṭrāñ caturyojo dadat | śravasā yādvaḥ janam ||' - Ṛgveda, 8/6/48

³⁵ 'yajamānasya paśūn pāhi', 'śaṃsya paśunme pāhi' & 'ghṛtenāktau paśūnstrāyethām' – Śuklayajurveda, 1/1, 3/37 & 6/11

'gomāñ agne vimāñ aśvī yajño nṛvatsakhā sadam id apramṛṣyaḥ | ilāvāñ eṣo asura prajāvāñ dīrgḥo rayiḥ pṛthubudhnaḥ sabhāvāñ ||' - Ṛgveda, 4/2/5

³⁶ imā rudrāya tavase | yathā śamasaddvīpade catuspade viśvaḥ puṣṭam grāme asminnanāturam || – Ṛgveda, 1/114/1

³⁷ idaḥ su me jaritarā cikiddhi pratīpaḥ śāpaḥ nadyo vahanti | lo pāśaḥ siṃhaḥ pratyāñca matsyāñ kroṣṭā varāhaḥ nirataktakakṣāt || – Ṛgveda, 10/28/4 &

ye ta āraṇyāḥ paśavo mṛgā vane hitāḥ siṃhā byāghrāḥ puruṣādaścaranti | ulam vṛkaḥ pṛthivi ducchunāmīta ṛkṣikāḥ rakṣo apa vādhayāsmāt || – Atharvaveda, 12/1/49

³⁸ śaḥ no vātaḥ pavatām śaḥ nastapatu sūryaḥ | śaḥ naḥ kanikradaddevaḥ parjanya abhi varṣatu || – Śuklayajurveda, 36/10

³⁹ vanaspatayaḥ śāntirviśve devāñ śāntirbrahma śāntiḥ sarvaḥ śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ sā mā śāntiredhi | – Śuklayajurveda, 36/17

⁴⁰ madhumatīroṣadhīrdyāva āpo madhumanno bhavantvantarikṣam – Ṛgveda, 4/57/3

⁴¹ 'madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ | mādhvīrṇaḥ santvoṣadhīḥ ||' 'madhu naktamutoṣaso madhumat pāṛthivaḥ rajaḥ | madhu daurastu naḥ pitā ||' & 'madhumānno vanaspatirmadhumāñ | mādhvīrgāvo bhavantu naḥ ||' – Ṛgveda, 1/90/6-8

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