



Water In Ancient Indian Texts

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Abstract

This Article explores the ancient Indian Text-based knowledge systems that capture great insights into environmental concepts, especially of water. By doing a deep study of *Upanishads*, *Vedas*, *Smritis* and *Sutra* we get a sophisticated knowledge of the environmental understanding, water and the hydrological cycle. Here we see the seamless integration of spirituality and environmental consciousness, underscoring the divine reverence for nature. My objective is to provide a distinctive perspective on current water and whole environmental problems and enhances practices by connecting Ancient Indian Text's Knowledge of ecological wisdom with the contemporary environment through the decoding of ancient *Sholkas*.

Key Words

Ancient Indian Texts, environmental balance, hydrological cycle, *Apah*, water management in Indian Ancient Texts, divinity of nature, environmental balance, and *Panch Maha Bhutaas*.

Introduction

The Vedas and Upanishads, among other ancient Indian texts, offer a wealth of information regarding natural resources management, sustainable civilisation and rich understanding of the environment. Ecological life and human civilization are seen interconnected in these texts, which emphasize a comprehensive comprehension of the environment. Ancient Indian texts contain statements, ideas, coded formulas, mantras, and symbols that contain information and knowledge about water. The process of decoding this information provides crucial insight into that era's cognition about nature. First, let's know the definition of the 'environment' in these texts.

‘Environment’ in Ancient Indian Knowledge

There are three sections of our surroundings that make up the environment are referred to as "Chandamsi" according to *Atharva Veda*ⁱ Shlokas. Water, air, and plants or herbs are these three components. These are referred to as the fundamental components of the environment from the beginning of time and are cited in the *Atharva Veda*. The five fundamental components of Upanishad's environment are referred to as the "Panch Maha Bhutaas": earth (*prithvi*), light (*agni*), water (*appah*), air (*vayu*), and sky (*aakash*).

"इमानी च पंचमहाभूतानी पृथ्वी वायु आकाश आपो ज्योतिषी" || Aitar.U.,3.3 ||ⁱⁱ.

The "Panch Maha bhutaas" has preserved a state of balance among all of its constituents in its natural state. According to *Upanishads*, there is a risk to human life and a natural balance when there is a change in the proportion of these five elements in the environment. These "Panch Maha Bhutaas" are very powerful and creative. As mentioned in the *Shvetashvatara upanishad*:

"येन आवृत्तं नित्यामिदं हि सर्वाङ्गं कालकालो गुणीसरविद्यः । तैनेशितम कर्म विवर्तेत ह प्रथ्वीयाष्टेजोनिलखनि चिन्तायं ।।
" || Shv. U.,6.2 ||ⁱⁱⁱ.

The five great elements are *Brahma* in themselves, those pervades the entire world, are in charge of this creation. The whole environment is called "Paryavaran" in Sanskrit, which means "encircle of us". In another text, the environment is as follows: "The environment comprises water, air, and land as well as the relationships that exist among and between them and human beings, other living things, plants, microorganisms, and property" (*Panchamukhi*, 1998, p. 467.)^{iv}. It is evident from this that the ancient Indian texts had a basic understanding of the environment and its components. Even they understand how each element of the environment should be in balance for the life.

Hydrologic Cycle in Ancient Texts

Water is an important element among the five *Panch Mahabhutas* of the environment. Vedas and other ancient Indian texts contain many shlokas in Sanskrit describing and giving scientific explanations of the whole hydrological cycle or 'Jal chakra'. This knowledge shows deeper scientific knowledge about water's importance for the cycle of life. The Rigveda Shloka Mandala 2, Sukta 34 and Shloka 4 tell that the sun contains seven colour rays is the cause of water flow in the rivers (because of rain). After rain, it again attracts water from the earth and this cycle goes on. That's how Rigveda^v has scientific knowledge about the water cycle.

यः सप्तरश्मिर्वृषभस्तुविष्मानवासृजत्सर्वे सप्त सिन्धुः ।

यो रोहिणमस्फुरद्ब्रजवाहुर्घामारोहन्तं स जनास इन्द्रः ।। R.V., 2, 34.4 ||^{vi}

Rig-Veda mandala1, Sukta 6 and shloka 4 describe the process of cloud making. The shloka said that the water which gets divided in very small particles due to the heat of sun is carried by wind and after the conversion into clouds it rains again and again.

आदह स्वाधामनु पुनर्गर्भत्वमेरिरे।

दधानानामः यज्ञियम || R.V., I, 6.4 ||^{vii}

Another Shloka of the Rig Veda mandal 1, Sukta 7 and shloka 3 states that God has created the sun and placed it so, that the whole world gets illuminated, likewise, this is the rule of uniShloka to extract up water continuously and then convert it to the cloud and ultimately discharge as rain.

इन्द्रो दीर्घाय चक्षस आ सूर्य रोह्यादिवि।

वि गोभिराद्रिमैरयत् || R.V.I,7.3 ||^{viii}

The Rigveda, Mandala 5, Sukta 27, Mantra 23 told about the start of creation, sun, etc and said rainfall is caused by the sky and the vegetation is created by the combination of cloud, air and sun. The sun causes it to form clouds and rain. extracts water in the form of vapour & air.

देवानां माने प्रथमा अतिष्ठन्कृन्तत्रादेशामुपरा उदायन्।

त्रयरतपन्ति पृथिवीमनूषा द्वा बृबूकं वहतः पुरीषम।। || R.V.,10,27.23 ||^{ix}

The hydrologic cycle is an important domain of hydrometeorology. It is also seen in the *Varahamihira's Brihat Samhita* (550 A.D.) in which three chapters are devoted to hydrometeorology comprising pregnancy of clouds (Chapter 21), pregnancy of air (Chapter 22), and quantity of rainfall (Chapter 23). Shlokas 1 and 2 of *Dakargalam* (Chapter 54 of Vrhat Samhita) which states the importance of the science of groundwater exploration, help man to ascertain the existence of water. The Shlokas 184.15-16 of the Mahabharata^x state that the plants drink water through their roots. The mechanism of water uptake by plants is explained by the example of water rising through a pipe. It is said that the water uptake process is facilitated by the conjunction of air. The Shlokas are:

पादैः सलिलपानाच्च व्याधीनां चापि दर्शनात्।

व्याधिप्रतिक्रियत्वाच्च विघते रसनं द्रुमे || MB,XII,184.15 ||^{xi}

वक्त्रेणोत्पलवालेन यथोघ्रव जलमाददेत्।

तथा पवनसंयुक्तः पादैः पिबति पादपः || MB,XII,184.16 ||^{xii}

Similarly, Shloka I, 36.66 of the *Linga Purana*^{xiii} say that the water is never destroyed or lost, but only converted from one form to another i.e. water to vapour by sun heat, then cloud and subsequent rainfall and loss of rainfall by wind etc. viz.

अस्यैवेह प्रसादात्तु वृष्टिर्नाताभवद्विजजाः।

सहस्र गुणमुत्स्रष्टुं मादत्ते किरणैर्जलम् || Linga. P. I,36.66 ||^{xiv}

According to the *Taithiriya Aranyaka Mandal 1, Sukta 9, shloka 8.*^{xv}, there are seven different kinds of winds or air currents in the atmosphere that result in seven different kinds of clouds that go by the following names;- *Swatpas (2), Varahav (1), Vidhunamhas (3), Dhupam (4), Shwapay (5), Grihmegh (6), and Ashimividwish (7)*. Malik (2016)^{xvi} conducted a study wherein the concept of the hydrological cycle was extracted and analysed from the Ramayana Epic. The study focused on the conceptual aspects of the hydrological cycle, which were interpreted from the 28 mantra of 4 Kanda of *Kishkindha Kanda* of the Ramayana by the renowned poet *Valmiki*. The following figure displays the schematic representation of the hydrological cycle that Malik (2016)^{xvii} took from *Kishkindha Kanda* in the Ramayana of *Valmiki*. Malik (2016)^{xviii} has also drawn parallels between the idea of the hydrologic cycle in modern times and the idea found in Valmiki's Ramayana. The accompanying figure displays the comparison. He notes that after comparing the two ideas, "in the modern concept sun evaporates the oceanic water throughout the year or water from other water bodies coupled with transpiration." However, there isn't in the epic the transpiration's signature. Additionally, a striking distinction can be seen in run-off, where the current concept takes run-off, infiltration, and subsurface flow into account. It is discovered that subsurface flow and infiltration are absent from the epic concept. If these restrictions are disregarded, the idea of the Ramayana is exceptional and strikingly similar to the idea of today. These then are a few instances of the vast knowledge that is concealed in old Indian texts. However, there is still much to learn about the wealth of information on hydrology and the hydrologic cycle that can be found in numerous works of ancient Indian literature.

Divinity of Nature

There is no difference between the divine and the natural world in old Indian texts. In ancient Indian civilization, nature was holy. The Vedas say that nature is safe and preserved because it is worshipped as a god. Even *Shankracharya* in his text during interpretation of Vedas and Upanishads says that the "*Jagat, Jeev and Brahma*"^{xix} are not separate from each other. Where '*Jagat*' is referred to as the natural world, *Jeev* is referred to as 'any living being' and '*Brahma*' as supreme universal energy, which is responsible for running these uniShlokas. Too much extraction and exploitation of natural resources is destroying the balance of nature. The Vedas say that '*Brahma or Vishnu*' is in every shape and part of nature. The *Rig Veda*, which is the oldest Veda, talks about many Gods and Goddesses. The *Rig Veda*'s most devoted gods are *Surya, Savitri, and Agni*. *Surya* is seen as the centre of "all *Graha*," which gives the uniShloka the

energy and light it needs to live. 'Gayatri Mantra and Surya Namaskar' are prayers to the sun god Surya. The fact that Surya is a part of "Brahmand" makes him very important. 'Agni', the Vedic god who rules and protects the world, is thought to be the source of life. Ten groups of hymns in the Rigveda—Mantra like 1–8, 11,12,20, 21,37, 45–46–51, and so on—are all about 'Agni'. The name "Indra" In the Rigveda, the Lord of the gods and heaven (*swarg*) is talked about 289 times. People believe that 'Indra' is the god of rain and thunder (*vajra*). He is in charge of the water cycle that began in the ocean and ended with raindrops on Earth. People worship the moon as Soma or 'Chandra'. 'Vayu' is the air and an idol of an ancient god that is made up of the "Pran" (life energy) of all living things. People worship him because they see him as a clean, healthy energy to live. *Rigveda* also talks about a goddess idol named "Rita." The goddess who keeps the world running smoothly. Like the universal law of 'Surya' and 'Graha', the journey of a river to the ocean, the universal law and order of nature, and so on. It was written by Shastri Tiwari (2010)^{xx} says that no one, not even God can ignore the rules of the 'Rita'. 'Rita' is in charge of the whole first world balance running.

RigVeda mandala 10, mantra 18 calls 'Prithvi' the mother and founder of everything. A goddess named 'Aditi' is also used for 'Prithvi'. You can call her Aditi or *Vasundhara*. She is the goddess of life and harvest. "Atharva Rishi" does a great job of showing the connection between people and the earth in "Prithvi Sukta"^{xxi} of *Atharveda*. A whole chapter, and 63 Shlokas, has been written to praise Mother Earth. The Mahabharata text says that Mother Earth, the Hills, the forests, and the snowy mountains are holy. The shloka is follows:

"गिरयसत्य पर्वता हिमवंतो अरणम ते पृथ्वी स्योमस्तु। वभ्रु कृष्णाम रोहिणीम विश्वरूपम ध्रुवं भूमिम पृथ्वी मिन्द्रगुप्तम अजीतो अहतो अक्षततो अध्याषठाम पृथ्वीमहम।।" || M.B,9,30. ||^{xxii}

In old texts, the balance of the environment is based on the basic idea of "*Vasudev Kutumbakam*," which was how people behaved in the past. In other words, everything is a part of the extended family system, nature and humans. O.P. Dwivedi said that belief is what makes ancient Indian culture's knowledge of the environment last (Dwivedi, 1997)^{xxiii}. The "Prithvi Sukta" keeps that part of Earth in good shape for everyone; no one has special control over it. There are rhymes for preserving food so that it can last for future generations. Texts from ancient times show a lot of appreciation for plants and animals. Plants like 'whatvriksh', 'tulsi', and 'pipal', 'kela' are worshipped at different times and during festivals. Gods are linked to different animals in mythology, such as the cow, lion, tiger, peacock, owl, bull, donkey, dog, and so on. There is a Shloka in the "Atharva Veda" that talks about how important it is to protect biodiversity.

"यस्यम वृक्षता वनस्पतया ध्रुवा अस्तिष्ठ अंति विश्वहा।

प्रथो विश्वथ्यायस्यम द्यतामच्छावदामसि।।" || A.V,12, 27 ||^{xxiv}

oh Earth Mother! You are the one who keeps all plants alive, including medicinal plants, and all living things safe. May you, Devi *Vasundhara*, feed us as long as we live.

Rivers are revered and personified as gods and goddesses. The earliest Indian cultures and civilization developed close to rivers. In actuality, the name of the country itself comes from the name of the Indus River. The seven rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Narmada, Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri rivers are valued in the culture of India. For instance, Hindus view the Holy River Ganges as a symbol of life renewal and soul purification since it is mythologically connected to Lord Shiva. People swarm from all over India to dip in the sacred river Ganga and have their sins washed away as believed by them. After puja worship rituals, divine water is consumed in the temple; idols of worship are doused with water (*abhishekam*); and prayer and water are used to clean a plantain leaf that has been saved for a meal. Some of the most significant Sanskrit shlokas are listed in the table, and they are chanted while making prayers to water, which is regarded as God.

Apah (Water) in Ancient Text

One of the main things that makes life possible on Earth is water. Dwivedi said that in '*Shruti*' water was the basic element of the world (Dwivedi, 1997). Rig Veda says that in the beginning everything was water and there was darkness over it. Water is clean and easy to get. It is important for all living things, including plants, people, the natural cycle, and animals. It is the direct cause of all living things, including plants, animals, birds, insects, worms, and people. The first living things on Earth also grew in water (ocean) (Rig Veda, mandala 10, Sukta 129, Shloka 3.). In ancient Indian texts, many important gods and goddesses are related to water. For example, God *Indra*, the River Ganga, *Varuna*, and *Sapt Jaldevi* River *Jamuna/Yamuna*, *Saraswati*, *Shiv*, *Samudra*, and other gods and goddesses are linked to different forms of water and worshipped in ancient Indian traditions (though today too). In Hindu culture, the river Ganga is still very important. People believe that rivers are the goddess 'Shakti' and bring life to all living things. People worship glaciers and mountains as places where God lives such as '*Gomukh*', '*Tapovan*', and '*Kailasha*'. Because this is where fresh water comes from, water is life and the life giver is God/Goddess. So this whole understanding includes a feeling of Divinity. Rigveda has countless *sholka* that show this water divinity, such as:

आपो हिष्ठा मयोभुवस्था न ऊर्जे दधातन महे

रणाथ चक्षसे || R.V,10,129.1 ||^{xxv}

(Water, because of your presence, the atmosphere is so refreshing and imparts us with vigour and strength. We revere you who gladdens us by your pure essence.)

यो वः शिवतमो रसस्तस्य भाजयतेह नः।

उशतीरिव मातरः ॥ R.V, 10, 121.10 ॥^{xxvi}

(O Water, this auspicious sap of yours, please share with us, like a mother desiring to share her best possessions with her children.)

शं नो देवीरभिष्टय आपो भवन्तु पीतये।

शं योरभि स्रवन्तु नः ॥ Taitti.U,2.7.1 ॥^{xxvii}

(O Water, may the auspicious divinity which is wished for, be present in you when we drink (water). May the auspiciousness which supports you, flow to us.)

ईशाना वार्याणां क्षयन्तीश्वर्षणीनाम्।

अपो याचामि भेषजम् ॥ A.V, 2,30.4 ॥^{xxviii}

(O Water, may the divinity in Water dwell in the farmlands. O Water, I implore you to give nutrition (to the crops).)

अप्सु मे सोमो अब्रवीदन्तर्विश्वानि भेषजा।

अग्नि च विश्वशंभुवम् ॥ R.V, 9, 86.26 ॥^{xxix}

(O Water, soma told me that in water is present all medicinal herbs of the world, and also Agni (fire) who brings auspiciousness to the world.)

आपः पृणीत भेषजं वरूथं तन्वेऽमम।

ज्योक्व सूर्यं दृशे ॥ R.V, 1.23.22 ॥^{xxx}

(O Water, you are abundantly filled with Medicinal Herbs; Please protect my body, so that I can see the sun for long).

इदमापः प्र वहत यत्किं च दुरितं मयि।

यद्वाहमभिदुद्रोह यद्वा शेष उतानृतम ॥ R.V,1,23.21 ॥^{xxxi}

(O water, please wash away whatever wicked tendencies are in me, and also wash away the treacheries burning me from within, and any falsehood present in my mind.)

आपो अद्यान्वचारिषं रसेन समगस्महि।

पयस्वानग्र आ गहि तं मा सं

सृज वर्चसा ॥ R.V, 10, 190.3 ॥^{xxxii}

(O Water, today, to you who is pervaded by fine rasa (invigorating sap) I came, I deeply enter (i.e. bathe) in you who is pervaded by Agni (fire principle); may that agni produce lustre in me.)

In “Rigveda” mandala 7. Sukta 49. Shloka 2, says that water in the environment comes in five forms: *divyah* (rainwater), *sravanthi* (natural spring), *khantrimah* (wells and canals), *shyamJah* (lakes), *nadi* (rivers), and *samudra* (ocean). “Vedanta” makes the undeniable role of water in the world and in people's lives very clear. The mandala 1, Sukta 1, mantra 2 of the “*Chhandogya Upanishad*”^{xxxiii} says, "The earth is the essence of all beings." What does the earth really mean? ‘The essence of the water is herbs, and the essence of herbs is people that is the answer in “*Chhandogya Upanishad*”. This Shloka makes it clear how water fits into the environment and how it connects to the big and small worlds of the uniShloka. “Rig Veda” says that rivers cause a lot of damage when their coasts are damaged or destroyed, so Indian trees that are standing on the coasts shouldn't be cut off or pulled up. “*Athravaveda*” also says that we shouldn't pollute or add harmful things to bodies of water. Because it could cause diseases to spread. In his “*Sushruta Samhita*”, “*Sushruta*” talks about three types of poisons: those that come from herbs and minerals, those that come from animals like rats and mosquitoes, and those that are man-made (Sushruta Samhita mandala 5. Sukta 2. Shloka 24)^{xxxiv}. So at that time sages also have detailed knowledge of water pollution and prevent it in water. This detailed account in ancient Indian texts of the importance of water as a part of the environment, divinity, purity, and other things gives us a glimpse of how religious practices shape water management, conservation, and reservation.

In conclusion

The deep study of ancient Indian texts reveals a profound and sophisticated comprehension of the environment that is both spiritually profound and scientifically insightful. The Vedic and Upanishadic teachings on the *Panch Maha Bhutaas* and the hydrological cycle illustrate a recognition of the delicate equilibrium required to sustain life. Furthermore, the significance of preserving and respecting the natural world is emphasized by the reverence for nature as a divine entity.

These ancient insights provide valuable lessons in the contemporary context of environmental degradation, destructive development practice and climate change. The knowledge decoded in *Shlokas* serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving ecological equilibrium and the potential for combining scientific methods of environmental stewardship with spiritual reverence. We can create more comprehensive and effective strategies for addressing the ecological challenges of our era by integrating ancient wisdom with contemporary environmental practices. This article addresses the research gap in the comprehension of the environmental knowledge that is ingrained in ancient Indian texts and emphasizes their significance in the current environmental discourse.

End Notes

- ⁱ Atharva Veda (2014), Ganga Sahay Sharma, Sanskrit Sahitya Prakashan, New Delhi.
- ⁱⁱ Aitaraya Upnishada (1993), Gita press Gorakhour, adhyaya 3 and shloka 3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Shvetashvatara Upnishad (1995), Gita press Gorakhour, adhyaya 6 and shloka 2.
- ^{iv} Panchamukhi, A. R. (1998). Socio-economic Ideas in Ancient Indian Literature. Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan. Delhi. p.467.
- ^v Rig Veda Samhita (2016), Ganga Sahay Sharma, Sanskrit Sahitya Prakashan, New Delhi.
- ^{vi} Ibid, Mandala 2, Sukta 34, Mantra 4.
- ^{vii} Ibid, Mandala 1, Sukta 7, Mantra 3.
- ^{viii} Ibid, mandal 1, Sukta 7 and Mantra 3.
- ^{ix} Ibid, Mandala 5, Sukta 27, Mantra 23.
- ^x The Mahabharata (400 B.C. to 400 A.D.) Translated by Pt. Ramanarayana Datta Shastri, Pandeya 'Ram" Gita Press, Gorakhpur in six volumes.
- ^{xi} Ibid, Shlokas 184.15-16.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} *Linga Purana* (2014), Gita Press, Gorakhpur ,*Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive..* Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/lingapurana>
- ^{xiv} Ibid, Shloka I, 36.66.
- ^{xv} Taittiriya Aranyaka (1996), Gita Press, Gorakhpur. Internet Archive.
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xvii Ibid.

xviii Ibid.

xix Shankaracharya written texts 'Brahmasutrabhasya' has great explanation of Brahma, Jeev and Jagat.

xx Tiwari, S. (2010). Origin of Environmental Science from Vedas, Sanskrit Vimarsh patrika, pp. 157-170.

xxi Ibid 4, Prithvi Sukta.

http://books.google.ie/books?id=TF2bMwEACAAJ&dq=prithvi+Sukta&hl=&cd=1&source=gbs_api

xxii Mahabharata (2012), "Bhishma Parva", Gita Press, Gorakhpur. Internet Archive.

xxiii Dwivedi ,O.P.(1997). *Vedic Heritage for Environmental Stewardship*, Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology, Volume 1: Issue 1, 01 Jan 1997, PP. 25–36.

xxiv Ibid, endnote 28, from mandala 29, mantra 27.

xxv Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 10, Sukta 129, mantra 1.

xxvi Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 10, Sukta 121, mantra 10.

xxvii Taittiriya Upanishad, Mandala 2, Sukta 7, mantra 1.

xxviii Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 10, Sukta 129, mantra 1.

xxix Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 9, Sukta 86, mantra 6.

xxx Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 1, Sukta 23, mantra 22.

xxxi Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 1, Sukta 23, mantra 21.

xxxii Ibid endnote 12, Mandala 10, Sukta 190, mantra 3.

xxxiii Chandogya Upanishad (2021)., Gita Press Gorakhpur, Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/phAO_chandogya-upanishad-gita-press-gorakhpur

xxxiv Sushruta Samhita (1967), Khemraj Shree Krishnadas, Shreevekteshvar Mjudrallaya, Mumbai, (Uttaratantra) mandala 5, Sukta 2, mantra 24 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/SushrutaSamhita_201701/page/n5/mode/2up