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Disaster Management In Vedic Literature With Special Reference To Arthashastra Of Kautilya

Bini Saikia,

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sanskrit,

DHSK College (Autonomous), Dibrugarh, India

Abstract: Disaster is such a word which is cannot be acceptable and welcomed for any age and any race. It is always lead to an unpredictable situation. There are so many causes which may lead to disaster. It is a harmful act of nature caused by living being or it may happen by non-living object. There are evidences where discussions are made by the ancient seers on some of the disasters with its management system which has been recognized at the time of Vedic people. But it was not technical based as well as systematic at that time. Later on at the time of Kautilya the discussion on disaster and its management becomes more organized than the time of Vedic India. In this present paper a modest attempt has been made to highlight the causes and solutions found in Vedic literature with special reference to Kautilya's Arthashastra.

Key words - Vedic literature, Arthashastra, Disaster, nature, management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Present time environmental science and ecology are the two individual branches of knowledge of modern science under which study of environment and its constituents has been done. In recent century they are established as science but origin of these branches of knowledge can be traced to the Vedic literature. The nucleus of the Vedas is pregnant with various types of knowledge. All the four Vedas viz., the *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* have several references on environmental protection, ecological balance, weather cycles, rainfall phenomena and related subjects which highlight the awareness of the seers regarding the environment and natural phenomenon. Vedas have personified the natural phenomenon for the sake of protection. In Vedas natural objects have been praised recognizing them as deity of personification. The main Vedic views resolve around the concept of nature and life.

Thus the Vedic people were very much conscious about basic principles of nature. The Vedic people never agreed to sacrifice the whole natural environment in exchange of satisfaction of their needs. The Vedic seer had a great respect for nature.

Later Sanskrit literatures also have given importance on nature. Among them Arthashastra of Kautilya is an encyclopedia of polity of ancient India. In this book one has got the discussion of different element related to the state. With reference to this Kautilya has advised the authorities of the state about different conditions of a state which may be occur disaster for nature and habitants of the state.

2. Significance of the study:

The earth has always been described in the Vedic literature as the mother who nourishes and sustains the human race and all the living beings. Animal and birds are considered as a part of nature and environment. As stated in the *Rigveda* domestic animals as well as wild animals along with human being should live in peace under the control of certain deities like Rudra, Pusan etc. *Yajurveda* 13.37 states that no persons should kill animals as they are helpful to all and in the *Yajurveda* 13.49 it is stated that those who kill or do harm such animals which useful in agriculture must be punished. It also mentions about plants and animals,

the ill effects of cutting of trees, the poisoning of the atmosphere and also discusses about energy relations of the global ecosystem. *Bhumi-sukta* or *Prithvi sukta* indicates the environmental consciousness of Vedic seers. Reference to this we may consider the Vedic concept *Ṛta* which the rules of nature. Every element of the universe follows a certain rule for which every component of the universe has made a harmonically balance.

Disaster may occur naturally. But if everybody follows the path of *Ṛta* i.e. the principles of nature then it may be of less harmful for nature and for the habitants of the earth. Here in this paper the disaster management will be highlighted in the perspective of Vedic literature as well as discussed in Kautilya's Arthashastra.

3. Objective:

Objective of this study is to highlight the ideas of Vedic seers and to study the awareness of the Vedic hymn poetry towards environment and also to highlight the thought of Kautilya on disaster management keeping view on the relevance of the present time.

4. Methodology:

Both descriptive and analytical methodologies have been used for this study. The present paper is based mostly on primary data.

5. Discussion:

5.1 Disaster management in Vedas: The human race has been facing the disasters from time immemorial. From the Vedic period to the present era of technology it is considered to be the most effective cause which affects our normal day to day life. Vedas are the most ancient literary evidence of Indian culture and sciences and thus the ancient sources of human knowledge of all kind. The word *veda* itself means knowledge. Though one gets the knowledge regarding disaster is in a seed form yet the concept of disaster management is found in the Vedic literature.

In the Vedas one has get the words *duḥkha*, *piḍana*, *āpatti*, *vipatti*, *vyasana* for denoting the disaster or calamity. Vedic seers have believes on harmony between nature and human being. Though the Vedic seers did not study environmental or ecological science as its present form yet they were very much conscious of its basic principles. They felt the necessity of preserving the nature as far as possible. Thus the Vedas attach great importance to environmental protection and purity. In the twelfth book of *Atharvaveda* the earth is described as *vasudhā* for containing the wealth. She is not for the different races of men alone but for other creatures also.¹ She is called *viswambharā* as she is representative of the universe. At that time earth is considered as mother-'*mātā bhumiḥ putroham prithivyāḥ*'.²Hence as offspring of mother earth, it becomes a duty of human not only help her to sustain but also to protect and enrich her. Therefore, it should be obeyed to practice truth, righteousness and austerity in their day to day life. This *Bhumi sūkta* is concerned about those human actions that may turn to be harmful to nature. There is a reference in this hymn where it is clearly stated about the misuse of natural resources and its harmful effect on the environment.³ It gives advice human to renounce greed and utilize the resources given by the mother earth in such a useful way that it does not harm the nature. The current activities such as unregulated and harmful mining and other such activities are clearly against these tenets expressed in this hymn.⁴This hymn of the earth ends with a prayer asking the mother earth to stabilize life and fill it with grace and splendor.

In the Vedic society people considers disasters as the act of god. At the Vedic period all type of natural phenomena are signified with personification of god and pray them to protect the people. Vedic seers give importance on preserving the nature. In the *Rigveda* it is stated that the earth and the space around it are instinct with life and are our nourishers and protectors. If they are harmed through our activity then it will cause global disasters.⁵ *Atharvaveda* also states that if one digs the earth then he must also fill it up. It prescribes that one should not harm the soft and sensitive parts of the mother earth for extraction of minerals etc. as it may lead to imbalance of earth's equilibrium and may cause natural calamities like earthquakes, depression of land, drying of water resources etc.⁶

Thus the concept of disaster management is as old as the history of disasters in India. In this regard one can take up the story of Manu as an example.⁷ According to this story the all creatures of the world of that time destroyed due to a flood which is stated as *mahaugha* but Manu was the only person who was survived by taking the plan of preparedness as advised by a mysterious *matsya* i.e. fish. It is really a wonderful management system recognized by the fish found in a very ancient period which is also relevant to the present time of technology.

5.2 Disaster management in Arthashastra:

Kautilya one of the greatest thinkers of ancient Indian polity also has dealt with the concept of disaster and its management. Though the word disaster management is quite new but the concept through different efforts among the administrative members have been prescribed in the Arthashastra by Kautilya. According to him a calamity constituent of a divine or human origin, springs from ill luck or wrong policy.⁸

Kautilya divides disasters into two categories, one is *daivam* i.e. natural and other is *mānusam* i.e. manmade. He deals with effective management of both natural and manmade disasters. It is noteworthy in this context that India due to its geographical location always victimized to natural as well as manmade disasters. From Vedic time to the present time of technologies one has found many wars fought between kings. During the time of Kautilya manmade disasters are only limited to war and agitation. But gradually as time passing some other elements of technological movement like chemical and biological weapons, urban structure, nuclear power etc. come into force and take place of manmade disasters. In this regard Kautilya not only mentions these two types of disaster but also he suggests various preventive measures and instructions for the king, existed governance system of that time, to deal with all types of disasters occurring at that period of time.

Kautilya used the term *Vyasana* for disaster.⁹ His work Arthashastra deals with the management of eight types of natural disaster, viz. *agni* (fire), *udaka* (flood), *vyadhi* (disease), *durbhiksha* (famine), *musaka* (rats), *vyala* (wild animals), *sarpa* (snake) and *raksamsi* (evil spirit).¹⁰ Kautilya has in belief that prevention is better than cure. Therefore he gives importance to prescribe various preventive methods and rules as one can deal with the disasters.

5.3 The disasters discussed by Kautilya:

5.3.1

Fire:

It is considered as hazard if it goes beyond control. According to Kautilya the disaster caused by fire may be of two types one may caused by naturally or may be caused by human being. In this regard Kautilya prescribes that various indigenous devices to extinguish fire should be kept in every house.¹¹ The city superintendents are to take preventive measures against fire by compelling people to remove inflammable matters from their housed and he should also take initiative in setting up fire extinguishing devices in various public places. He also states that every house should be constructed strictly on the basis of the rules preserving environment prescribed by the authorities.¹² It is stated in the *Arthashastra* that violation of rules, prescribed by Kautilya, is punishable with fines which is depending on the state of the offence. According to Kautilya if the owner of the house is not running to save the house on fire then he has to be punished with a fine of 12 panas and six panas for the tenant. In case if the fire is caught for the negligence of the owner then the punish of fine raised into fifty four panas.¹³

5.3.2

Flood:

Kautilya considers flood as the worst disaster because it can affect many villages in a moment and can destroy the mass. In this regard Kautilya has stated that a fire may destroy half of a village area.¹⁴ but a flood can destroy many villages in a very small period of time. Therefore, he prescribes various measures for prevention from flood situation which will be take place in near future. According to him in the rainy season, villages situated near water should move away at highland areas above the level of the floods and should keep a collection of wooden planks, bamboos and boats.¹⁵ This indicates that keeping a constant view on the water on the water level as an important preventive management which was taken care of during the period of Kautilya and can be compared with the early warning system of today's disaster management. These types of preventive measures have also been taken by the authority of disaster management in present time.

5.3.3

Disease:

Kautilya stated diseases are also a form of natural disaster which really affects the life of victims.¹⁶ Regarding we may take an example of Covid-19 recently faced by world-wide. It becomes pandemic for its harmful nature for which world has faced a large number of lost in the term of property of human being and economical lost.

5.3.4

Famine:

The role of the state in this regard prescribed by the Kautilya is very significant. The ruler should have prior preparation for expected famines so that it can be controlled with a minimum affect. Preserving food and distribution of crop seeds are prescribed to king to minimize the problem. In this context Kautilya also states that if it is not possible to manage the disaster by the efforts of the government itself then they may seek the help of friendly foreign country for controlling the disaster.¹⁷ This strategy also applied in modern disaster management.

Kautilya also give importance to the preparation of a king in case of drought like situation with the storage of food, water storage etc. so that state can overcome with the problem facing in the time of disaster.

5.3.5

Rats:

India is the country of agricultural productivity from the Vedic period. It is a common factor that crops are very much fond of Rats. Today also people face the problem caused by rats. It may also cause the disease like plague. Especially flood affected areas have faced the problem for these rats. For these reasons rats are also recognized as natural disaster by Kautilya.

5.3.6

Wild Animals:

Wild animals are also natural calamities as stated in the *Arthashastra* which also can be interpreted with present day situation faced by the people of several areas like Numaligarh of Assam for the group of elephants coming out of the forest and harm the human beings and also destroy agricultural products. According to Kautilya they can be stop to come in human inhabitant areas.

5.3.7

Sarpa i.e. snakes:

Kautilya also recognizes *sarpa* as a natural calamity. For this Kautilya has suggested two remedies; one is in a group *sarpa* can be dealt with or by the help of anesthetic medicines they can be dealt with.

5.3.8

Evil spirits:

Kautilya has said that only well versed in magic practices can deal with the evil spirit.

5.4

Manmade Disaster:

Kautilya discussed only two types of disasters viz. war and agitation as a manmade disaster.¹⁸ For eliminate the war like situation Kautilya has given the four means called as *caturvidyā upāya*; viz., *sāma*, *dāna*, *danda* and *bheda*. He has also mentioned six foreign policies to avoid war like situation. He has suggested these policies to the one who wishes to be a king.

6. Conclusion:

Vedas are generally regarded as the initial stage of Indian way of life and thought. Here one comes across with the concept of disaster management in a small seed form which is grown and become a tree in the time of Kautilya. Vedic literature has given emphasizes on the preservation of natural component and to protect the earth. Vedas gave importance not to harm the nature and always to follow the principles of nature. On the other hand from the foregoing discussion it can be stated that Kautilya's *Arthashastra* has a good approach to the disaster management with very effective ideas and still holds a relevant space. He gives importance on the planning on prevention and preparedness as disaster management.

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