



Indian Spiritual Life-style and Environmental Consciousness: A Study

Dr. Ranjan Borthakur

Assistant Professor,

DKD College, Dergaon

Golaghat, Assam

Introduction:

The Indian spiritual life style has a long year rich background. It flourished at least five thousand years ago from today since the Aryans. The four Vedas, their Upanishads, Brahmins and the other books reflects the rich tradition of life style which stands as a norm of environmental consciousness in Indian tradition.

Environment plays a very significant role in human civilization. Without nature or a natural environment the survival of human being is quite impossible even for a single moment. Generally, the term 'environment' denotes the physical surrounding, i.e. the surrounding where the human being live. According to the Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary, the meaning of 'environment' is (i) the surrounding or condition in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates and (ii) the natural world.¹ The other dictionaries also gives the meaning of environment in the same way. Thus, environmental consciousness means one's aware mind about his/her surrounding i.e. the air, water, plants, creepers etc and some ethical commitment towards its general health.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- (a) To highlight the ancient Indian spiritual life-style regarding the environmental consciousness.
- (b) To examine the relevance of these aspects in the present-day scenario of environmental crisis.

Significance of the study:

Today, the environmental problems become a great threat not only for the existence of human being but also to all creatures under the sun. The present century, is known as the century of science and technology and the human being enjoys the maximum comfort that are inventing by science and technology in every hour. Weakness towards these scientific inventions, and on the other hand negligence towards mother-nature by men led to a great environmental challenge to all the living and non-living creatures of this surface. Indian ancestors were well-aware of the hazards of these environmental challenges. The Indian spiritual life-style always teaches us to protect and maintain a sustainable environment. Therefore, the present study lays its significance on the need and examines the Indian spiritual life-style on creating an eco-friendly, peaceful, conducive environment in the present era.

Methodology:

Both the primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The secondary data have been collected from various books, articles etc. The primary data are mainly collected from the original books of Sanskrit literature. Besides, the observation method is also employed in due course of the study.

Major Discussions:

Environment is a norm of Indian culture and spiritual-life. From the *Rg-vedic* period, the Indian sages pray or worship to the different types of natural objects like pray to the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth etc. The first verse of the first *Mandala* of the *Rgveda* stands as a clear instance of it where the *rishi* propitiates *Agni*, the fire as deity. i.e.

agnimile purohitaṁ yajñanasya devamṛtvijaṁ /

hotāraṁ ratnadhātamaṁ //²

Thus, the deification of these objects denotes a great sense of consciousness or regard towards the natural elements.

The Indian ancestor teaches all to devote their life for the welfare of the whole universe not to limit on one's individual life. The ancient Indian sages performed some religious activities (like *yajñas*) and through it they sought well-being of all the living and non-living objects of the world. Hence they prayed:

dyauḥ śāntiḥ antarikṣaṁ śāntiḥ pṛithivī śāntiḥ

vanaspatayaḥ śāntiḥ viśve devāḥ śāntiḥ /

brahmaśāntiḥ sarvaṁ śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ,

sā mā śāntiredhiḥ //³

Also,

madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ /

mādhvirnaḥ santvoṣadhiḥ //

madhu naktamutoṣaso madhumat pārthivaṁ rajaḥ /

madhu dyaurastu naḥ pitā //

madhumān no vanaspatirmadhumān astu suryaḥ /

mādhvirgāvo bhavantu naḥ//⁴

Among the all Upanishads, the *Īsopaniṣad* takes a unique position. The *Īsopaniṣad* states that the God is present in each and every part of this creation. And we, the human being should enjoy this world by sacrifice.

īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat /

tena tyaktena bhujjithā mā grdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam //⁵

In the Vedic era, the health giving aspects of pure water, air etc. were understood and a number of *stanzas* in the *Rgveda* are devoted to the prayer for long life through purify water and clean air. According to the *Bhaviswa-Purāna* “impure water should not drink which may come down through a sharp pink-point *kuśa*-grass”. In the *Atharvaveda* alone, there are about sixty stanzas in *Bhumisuktam* (*hymns* to the earth) in praise of the beauty of this planet, where it is clearly states that ‘the earth is our mother and we, the human being are her child’. “*mātā bhumi putro ’ham prithivāḥ*”⁶. Hence, the Atharvan suggests that as her own child, no one should disturb rather take utmost care towards his/her mother world. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa*⁷, the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁸ etc. is also bears such instances.

The plant ecology has a great importance to keep the environment in balance. In the Indian life-style and myths, the tree occupies a central and reverent place. A lamp is lit and head bowed down before the *Tulshi* plant in every evening of the *Kārtika* month. Similarly, the Hindus have worshipped the *Bilva*, *Kadamba*, *Rudrākṣha*, *Champaka*, *Bakula* etc. In the *Maitrayani-Saṁhitā*, the earth has been described as ‘*devayāni*’, adorable by deities and *auśadhimulam*, the source of all kinds of medicinal plants. So the Indian sages, like *Manu* suggests punishment for them who cut down such valuable trees. c.f.

vanaspatinām sarvesāmupyogaṁ yathā tathā /

tathā tathā damḥ kāryo himsāyāmiti dhāranā //⁹

The *Mahābhārata* also alerts the people to take utmost care and protection of trees which is highly beneficial for human existence. i.e.

puṣpaṁ puṣpaṁ vicinvita mulacchedaṁ na kārayet //¹⁰

The *Vṛhatsaṁhitā* of *Barāhamihira* is known as an outstanding specimen of ancient India where we have innumerable utility of plants, the methods of plantation, its care and other valuable

information. Here, it has been prescribed that some specific trees like such as *Neem*, *Aśoka*, *Kadamva* etc. are very useful for purification of air pollution. Therefore, one should grow these trees before building one's own residence:

ariṣṭasokapumnagaśirisah sapriyaṅgavaḥ /

māngalyaḥ purvamārāme ropaṇiyā grheṣu vā //¹¹

Similarly, Indian sages prescribe to protect the different kinds of birds, and animals etc. and treat them as the brother and sister of human being. The Hindu mythology believes ten avatars (births) of God like: *Maṭṣya*, *Kurma*, *Varāha*, *Nṛsiṅha* etc. signify the divine forms in such animals and thereby making their life secure. The cobra is worship on the eve of *Nāgapañchami* and cows are offered adorations on the occasions of the *Balabhadra-pujā*. All these things show how the animals and plants, without which man cannot survive, were being respected. A respectful thing needs to be protected and preserved by all means.

In the Indian spiritual life style the five great sacrifices takes a significant place. Indian mythology considers the '*grhāsthāśrama*' as the best among the all other life-style. It has been suggested that every house-hold should perform five great sacrifices regularly. These great sacrifices are: *Brahamayajña*; the sacrifice offered to the *brahmanas* (i.e teaching and studying of the *vedas*), *piṛiyajña*; the sacrifice offered to the means (i.e. offering to water and food), *devayajña*; the sacrifice offered to the Gods (i.e. the burnt oblations), *bhūtayajña*, the sacrifice offered to men (i.e. hospitality to the guest)¹². Hence, these five sacrifices suggest all to maintain an eco-friendly world with a great respect to all from heart.

Again the Indian spiritual and disciplined life style states that the human body is made up with five great cosmic elements. These five great elements are known as *pañchamahābhūtas*. These are-the earth,water,fire,sky and wind. In this context the *Bhagavadgītā* states that the *prakṛiti* of mind is divided into eightfold thus: earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and also egoism. i.e.

bhumirapo'nalo vāyuh kham mano buddhireva ca /

aḥmāhāra itiyam me bhinna prakṛitiraṣṭadhā //¹³

In Buddhist culture, also bears the same testimony of environmental consciousness. Buddha achieved enlighten under a sacred *asvatha*-tree, later known as *Buddhidroom*. In Buddhism the

preservation of animals, birds, small creatures and plants is pointed out as essential aspects for human being. Buddhism strictly prohibits the killing of birds and wild animals. Accordingly, all species have inherent rights to exist. The *Jātakamālā* presents thirty four of Buddhas previous lives in a poetic style. Among these, ten stories are related to animals and birds in which *Buddhisattva* is shown in form of an animate or a bird. Thus, it makes an intimate relationship between man and nature which exhorts that one should follow the path of non-violence and kindness to the welfare and happiness of all living beings keeping in mind a natural and protective environment. these all reflects as consciousness of Indian spiritual life style.

Relevance of Indian Spiritual Life-Style in the Context of Environmental Crisis:

The human being and environment are to be considered as the two sides of the same coin. From the above discussion, it has been observed that the ancient Indian sages were too much consciousness and rigid towards the natural world. Indian spiritual life style dictated again and again to pray, offers ablation, to take care and great respect towards these natural objects with their day to day disciplined life style. Now, in the 21st century, the main environmental problems are mainly-the air pollution, Wildlife destruction, Ozone layer depletion etc. hazards the human being to exists in this planet. As an outcome various types of environmental laws like Wild-life Protection Act 1970, Forest Act 1972, Water (Protection and Control Pollution) Act, 1986 have been enacted for the protection and preservation of environment. So, the great teaching of Indian spiritual and disciplined life style regarding 'man-nature' relationship may help the modern society in the true sense.

Conclusion: Finally, it may be said that Indian spiritual life style has a glorious trend regarding the consciousness of natural world in its various forms such as social, religious, spiritual, believe, customs has great relevance in the present day scenario of environmental crisis. If we can follow or maintain these in our day to day life, surely may be able to live in a pollution free, eco-friendly environment in the true sense.

Notes & References:

1. The Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary, p-274
2. *Rgvda*, 1.1.1
3. *Atharvaveda*, 19.8.14
4. *Rgveda*, 1.90.6-8
5. *Īsopaniṣad*, 1
6. *Atharvaveda*, 12.1.12
7. *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 1.32.92
8. *Rāmāyṇa*, *Yadhudhyākāṇḍa*
9. *Manusāṃhitā*, 8.2.85
10. *Mahābhārata*, *Udhyogaparva*
11. *Vikṣāyurveda*, 55.3
12. *Mansāṃhitā*, 3.70
13. *Bhagavadgītā*, Ch.3

Bibliography:

1. *Īsāvāsyopaniṣad*, ed. by Dr. Shashi Tiwari, 2nd ed. Delhi; Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1997.
2. *Manusāṃhitā*, (*Aryyaśāstra*) with Bengali Translation of Śrīśrījivanyāyatīrtha, Published by Sri Ramranjan Kāvya Vyākaranatīrtha, Śrī Śrītārāmdām Omkārnath Vaidik Mahāvidyalaya, Kalikata, 1371 BNG.
3. *RgvedaSamhitā*, Trans & ed. by Svami Satya Prakash Sarasvati & Satyakam Vidyalamkar, Vol.III. Delhi; Veda Pratisthana, 1977.
4. *The Bhagavadgītā*, Trans & ed. by N.V.Thandani, New Delhi; Munshiram Monoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1981.
5. *Yajurveda Samhitā*, Trans & ed. by Svami Satya Prakash Sarasvati & Udaya Vir Viraj, Vol.I. New Delhi; Veda Pratisthana, 1994.
6. Ganguli, A & Kumar, M. *Different Perspective of Environmental Ethics*. 1st ed. Delhi; Shivalik Prakasan, 2008.

7. Grove, I.S. & Thakur, A.K. (ed.) *Environment and Development*. 5-A, New Pali Road, jodhpur-01, 1998.
8. Jha, V.V. (ed) *Dharmaśāstra and Social Awareness*. 1st ed. Delhi; Indian Books Centre, 1996.
9. Kumar, Pushpendra (ed.). *Vedic Traditions and Modern Critics*. Delhi; Eastern Book Linkers, 2002.
10. Pandey, K.C. (ed.) *Ecological perspective in Buddhism*. New Delhi-59; Read worthy Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2008.

