

ENVIRONMENT CONSCIOUSNESS VERSUS ANCIENT HISTORY

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Abstract: Environment means 'that which surrounds'. In the broadest sense this includes energy and matter, capable of influencing man and other organisms. In practical terms, it is the medium, which interact with the organisms for their adaption. Man is concerned about his surroundings since his existence. The Rivera adulates(worships) deities like Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Marut, Aditya that are responsible for maintaining the necessary balance in the functioning of Nature. In ancient times people were careful to abstain from those activities that could cause harm to nature bounties. It was considered that wellbeing of Mother earth depended on the preservation of the environment. In this paper, an effort is made to understand the environment awareness that was domineer in ancient India and to bring its pertinence to present scenario.

IndexTerms - Environment, Energy, Existence, Nature, Bounties, Preservation, Awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the man appeared on the earth's surface, he has been dependent on gifts of nature for his existence. He needed Land to live, plants and animals to get food, water to drink and wash, sunshine to get heat and energy. Forest life and wild life to get so many things for his sustenance. Continuous increase in human population and unending desires of Man has resulted into increasing demand for natural resources hence these resources are rapidly depleting day by day and the environment is getting degraded by human activities. In pre-historic days, by and large, man lived in harmony with nature, but presently man is exploiting nature and the environment is changing steadily with the passage of time. Since 1960, activity of environmental movements has created awareness of various environmental problems.

Indus Valley Civilization

Environment includes living and Non- living things around us. The non-living components of environments are Land, Air and Water. The Living components are Germs, Plants, Animals and Human beings. The history of Environment in India is very old. The ancient Indians had a great respect for environment and worshipped different objects of nature with utmost devotion and sincerity. They worshipped Neem, Pipal and Banana trees not only as having religious importance but also of medicinal value. It shows that early Indian thinkers attributed religiosity to plant for the ecological balance. They also worshipped mountains, land, soil, water, rivers, animals, birds etc.

Among the world's earliest civilizations, Indus people were incredible builders. Even the smallest house at the edge of each town was linked to that town's central draining system. The Great Bath is one of the best-known structures among the ruins of ancient Indus valley civilization at Mohenjo-daro in Sindh, Pakistan. The Great Bath of Mohenjodaro is called as "earliest public water tank" of the ancient world. A hole was also found at one end of the Bath which might have been used to drain the water into it. The Harappans were great city planners. They based their city streets on a grid system. Streets were oriented east to west. Each street had a well-organized Drain system. The Harappans were familiar with several other methods to control and preserve water for Irrigation.



Hinduism

The Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and other scriptures of Hindu religion gave a detailed description of Trees, Plants and wild life and their importance to the people.

Yajnavalkya samriti warms

“The wicked person who kills animals which are protected has to live in hell fire for the days equal to the number of hairs on the body of that animal”

The Rigveda regarded trees and plants as possessing divine healing properties and it is still popularly believed that every tree has a Vriksha Devta, a tree deity. Ecological wisdom is discernible in the vedic text and Vedas in fact, reflect a remarkable awareness of Primal ecology. They were nature loving and preferred to live in the rural villages instead of Towns and cities. The Rivers were so vital and sacred to the Aryans that Punjab, during the Rigvedic period was known as the Land of Seven Rivers.

The Puranas had also great concern for environment. They conceptualized the trees to feel happiness and sorrow and attributed auspiciousness to plantation of trees.



Buddhism, Jainism And Sikhism

Mahavira and Gautam Buddha are closely related to environmental issues. Both advocated a gentle attitude towards nature and prudent use of resources. The principle of Jainism was practiced not only towards human beings but towards all living creatures like animals and plants. Both got their supreme knowledge under the trees. Buddha is symbolized with different trees; therefore trees are regarded as objects of worship in Buddhism.

The Bodhi Tree, also known as Bo, was a large and very old sacred Fig tree(FICUS RELIGIOSA) located in Bodh Gaya(about 100 km) from Patna in the Indian state of Bihar, under which Siddhartha Gautam, the spiritual teacher, later known as Gautam Buddha, is said to have achieved enlightenment . or Bodhi.

The entire jain philosophy revolves around the principle of Ahimsa that is Non-violence. According to Lord Mahavira, plants are also a part of living organism. One should not hurt human beings, plants and animals in any form. In Sikh tradition also great concern and regard has been shown towards nature and environment. Guru Nanak Dev ji got enlightenment in Kali Bai. In the bani of Sikh Gurus we can see the love, affection and respect towards nature and environment.

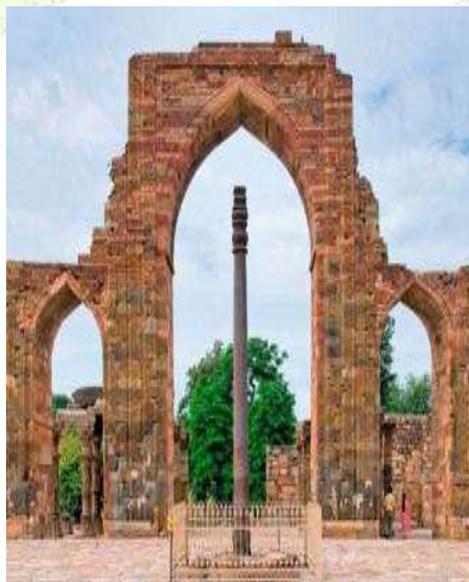


Ashoka

The Mauryan empire had a clear policy of protecting natural resources with specific officials tasked with protection duty. Ashoka brought about significant changes in his style of governance which included providing protection to fauna. He was perhaps the first ruler in history to advocate conservation measures for wildlife. Reference to this can be seen from his edict on fifth pillar according to which many animals were declared protected and forest were not to be burnt. In pillar edict number seven Ashoka was mentioned, *“Along roads I have had banyan trees planted so that they can give shade to animal and men and I have had mango groves planted.”*

Gupta Empire

Gupta age was an age of prosperity and is known as the classical age. Gupta rulers showed their concern towards environment. The art and architecture of this age gives many examples of this. On their coins Gupta rulers engraved the images of various trees and plants. In the caves of Ajanta and Ellora we can see the beautiful painting of this age and their affection towards natural elements like trees, animals, birds etc. Fa-hien visited India during the reign of Chandragupta 2nd made references to natural and ecological aspects of Gupta period. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription mentions that Samundragupta, conquered the forest states of Central India which was filled with forests and mountains.



Medieval Period

Near about 1000 AD, The Muslim started their invasions over India. In the beginning of 13th century, Muslim rule was established in India. The Muslim rulers and the authors of this age showed their love and concern towards the environment. The buildings constructed by the Muslim rulers are the best examples on this point. They planted trees on road sides, built beautiful gardens and their buildings were surrounded by Lakes and Gardens. E.g. Firoz Tughlaq built a number of Gardens in and around Delhi. Akbars Tomb at Sikandara was constructed in Char Bagh formula (Four- quatered garden layout), is set in the midst of Gardens with fountains and Canals. The tomb can be entered through the elegant southern gateway, which leads into the huge enclosed garden. Akbar only drank water from the Ganga and his food was cooked in waters of Yamuna and Chenab.

Another example of it can be seen in Taj Mahal. Taj Mahal was built by mughal emperor Shahjahan in the memory of his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal. This beautiful structure is surrounded by beautiful gardens and was constructed on the banks of river Yamuna.



British Period

British Indian rulers were not only mere exploiters of natural wealth. They had recruited a dedicated group of foresters who sacrificed their health and sometimes their life to preserve nature. Lord Dalhousie's Forest charter of 1855 decisively changed the status of waste land into government property. Mr. JD Hooker, director of the royal Botanical Garden at Kew in London, had alerted Dalhousie to the potential economic and climate effects of deforestation. Lord Canning carried forward the work of Lord Dalhousie. Reserved forests were constituted under the forest act of 1865. Indian Forest Act was passed in 1878.

In the modern age, the scenario is different. Though we are aware and concerned about the issues related to pollution and environment and government has passed various acts and regulations like Environment Protection Act 1986, Water Prevention and Control of Pollution Act 1974, Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act 1981, Wild Life Pollution Act 1972, Forest Conservation Act 1980, Costal Regulation Zone Notification 1991 etc. In order to check the rising pollution levels in air, water and Land but the situation is deteriorating day by day. India's increasing population is a great challenge. The process of Urbanization, industrialization have created a number of problems like air and water pollution which is responsible for the occurrence of natural calamities like floods, famine, and droughts , spread of dangerous diseases like cancer, asthma, hypertension etc.

II. CONCLUSION

The need of the hour is to bring the “Environment” back into focus and that’s where the environment awareness of ancient India helps. Ignored environmental traditions of ancient Indians should be invigorated to give the modern man much needed direction to care for nature. The goals of environmental education as pointed out by the UNESCO are to create environmental awareness in the world population. While efforts are being made at the National and International level to protect our environment. It is also the responsibility of every citizen to use our environmental resources with care and protect them from degradation. The most important need of the hour is to its protection conservation and proper use otherwise the living world will be endangered into inevitable dangers. Man has to adopt the Nature.

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