

Taking Care of Environment: The Vedic Way

Neeta Azad^a, Anwar Jahan^b, Chayannika Singh^{c*} & Meenakshi Gupta^a

^aAtma Ram Sanatan Dharma College, University of Delhi-110021

^bRamjas College, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007

^cDeen Dyal Upadhyaya College, University of Delhi-110078

E-mail: neetaazad@arsd.du.ac.in, anwarjahan@ramjas.du.ac.in, chayannika@ddu.du.ac.in

Abstract — Presently, modern world is dealing with a lot of environmental problems. Humans are responsible for all these problems. Polluted air, clean water crisis, land fill due to garbage etc. are the ultimate consequences of not taking care of environment the way it was supposed to be. Human greed has no end and that's the reason, we are blindly using the resources on earth and polluting it even more without coming up with a solution to this. Rise in diseases, epidemics and pandemics are the consequences of harming the environment. We cannot escape from breathing in the polluted air, drinking polluted water and dying of serious diseases until unless we take responsibility of cleaning the environment. This article focuses on the practices in our daily lives, which were popular in ancient times. These practices take care of all living, non-living things and all resources around us. In ancient times people were sensible towards all creatures on earth. They used to keep in mind how their deeds can affect other creatures and environment. Ultimately human are social animals, entire ecosystem is connected. If we keep on harming environment, the day is not far away when humans will also get extinct. This is the high time; we must go back to our old traditional ways of living as much as possible. We must cut down on blind use of resources and keeping environment clean must be our top most priority.

Keywords: Vedas and Ecosystem, Environment, Pollution, Natural resources, Ancient daily life practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's biggest challenge is to cater with the environmental issues created by humans [1]. Environment comprises of air, water, land, plants and all living and non-living creatures around us [2]. All these are important for life. Without air one cannot survive for more than a minute. Without water we cannot survive for more than few hours. And without other living creatures, which includes birds, insects, cattle, wild animals etc. we cannot survive more than a few years. Everything in this world is connected [3]. As all natural resources are being polluted and exhausting, we are heading towards our destruction. The reason for all this destruction is human greed. Humans are more focused to fulfil their personal needs and are hardly thinking about its impact on our surroundings. Collecting materialistic things and earning more and more money is the only aim of today's generation. Sustainable development is confined to papers only. At grassroot level no one is actually concerned about the degradation of environment due to human actions. Products

made of plastics especially one-time usable plastic items are being produced beyond their consumption limits. The ultimate impact of all this is reflecting in deteriorating condition of the environment. Excess use of chemicals as food preservatives is also a big cause of concern. Today's fast lifestyles don't allow one to cook freshly prepared food rather people depend on stored or frozen food items containing preservatives which leads to many health issues. The food packings of stored or frozen food items are mostly made out of plastic which is often not segregated for recycling while collecting garbage hence it gets dumped into landfills, which keep on lying there for years. We want a sustainable solution to all this. The only way out is to learn from our ancestors and adopt lifestyle which was followed during ancient times. Although time has changed a lot and everything is not relevant now a days but, whatever we can do as an individual, one must do to preserve sanctity of the environment for our future generations.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Environment in Ancient Times

If we look back at our Indian culture, only a century ago, the way people of India used to live was so simple and environment friendly that there was hardly produced any waste material produced and dumped into the earth [4]. All the waste products were reused or recycled for feeding cattle, using cow dung as fuel, etc. Every household used to domesticate cattle in their houses. Cattle were not treated less than family members. This culture used to generate a sense of responsibility in children towards animals since childhood. Cattles used to help humans in their farming and other laborious activities. They were used to produce milk. Cow dung waste was used to make 'uplas', which were used as fuel for cooking. Also, cow dung was used for 'Lipai' (process of sweeping earthen floor with diluted cow dung). Cow dung has antibacterial properties and hence used to keep insects like flies and mosquitoes away. There was no use of chemicals. Food was grown in their own fields. Natural ways were used to preserve food for longer times, without using chemical preservatives. Regional and seasonal food were consumed by people because nature grows food according to the season and requirements and that is best for every living creature

including humans. There was no need of unnecessary packaging and storage of food in any refrigerators or with the help of any preservatives as everything prepared and consumed was fresh. Packaging industries now a days are responsible for harming the environment by manufacturing one time use packaging materials like plastics whose disposal is a big problem for today's society. People use it once and through it into garbage without any segregation of such materials from the biodegradable waste products. Most of these items are non-recyclable. Apart from environment the packed food has chemical preservatives which lead to many health issues in future when they enter into our food-chain and lead to biomagnification.

Another practice in ancient times was making every village self-sufficient within its own geographical boundaries to fulfil all needs of its natives. This aspect was very important for the environment. People used to travel very less to faraway places hence the consumption of fuel like diesel, petrol was not required as these small distances were either covered on foot or with the help of bullock or horse carts. Our air was not polluted by various emissions of carbon from vehicles run by fuel which is responsible for many allergic and respiratory ailments in today's world.

Every temple of the villages was associated with school. Education was provided to all in these schools. Pupils did not need travel to faraway places for education.

Some rules used to be followed for different weather and environmental conditions in the past which had many scientific importance. Travelling was supposed to be inauspicious during rainy season. The reason behind was during rainy season many plant saplings grow. Also, that is the reproductive time for many tiny creatures in soil. Walking or moving on them could harm these tiny creatures and kill the budding saplings. So, this ritual was made and people were taught not to walk or travel unnecessarily during rainy season. This was purely to maintain a balance of ecosystem. Rivers were worshiped so that these can be kept clean and people don't litter them.

In Vedic times people used to treat environment and nature as goddess and used to act responsibly towards it by keeping their consumption needs minimum. People used to show their gratitude towards environment and treated earth like mother. Whenever and wherever necessary people used to pray 'Whatever I dig from the, O Earth, may that have quick recovery again. O purifier, may we not injure thy vitals or thy heart', (Hymn No- 12, slok No.- 34, Atharva Veda, Prithvi Sukta) [2].

The architecture of the villages was very well and scientifically planned. There used to be a pond at the entrance of every village. The purpose of this pond was rain water harvesting. Pond water was used by animals, cattle and villagers for different activities. There was no concrete flooring, which was good for sipping of rain water into

ground. Also, there was sufficient greenery around. The level of ground water was quite high. There were wells and handpumps in every locality of village. People used to draw water as per their need and the wastage of water was quite low. Every handpump and well was connected to a water tank made up of cement. So that the unused water gets filled into that pond and can be used for drinking by cattle or stray animals.

Trees were always given supreme importance in our Vedas. People were taught to worship trees to show gratitude towards nature. Trees provide us the most important thing, oxygen-without which life cannot survive. Without air no life is possible on earth. People used to plant at least one tree having medicinal properties in their courtyards. Most popular trees for households were Neem tree, pomegranate tree, Guava tree etc. These trees have medicinal properties and it is proved by modern research as well [5]. Tulsi (*ocimum sanctum*), due to its medicinal properties is found in every house of India [6]. Nowadays due to the industrialization and the lack of proper scientific reasons conveyed to modern generation, people have stopped following their old traditions. Population explosion has played an important role in destroying Indian legacy of scientific traditional rituals. People have lost values and have become short sighted and selfish post modernization.

2.2 Environment in Modern Time

In olden times it used to be a social responsibility of the people to feed stray animals. But modern times stray animals and cattle are seen surviving on garbage thrown by the people. Humans have become so insensitive that they have forgotten that all living and non-living creatures are connected to each other and they have responsibility towards them. Due to all the irresponsible human activities like deforestation, wastage of water, no plantation of trees, excessive digging out of minerals from earth, overuse of fuels (coal, petrol etc.), non-segregated and poor disposal of degradable and non-degradable wastes, urbanization, sedentary and lethargic life styles etc. environment is in very bad shape today which is ultimately, affecting all of us. Clean and non-polluted environment is important for healthy living. We are producing tonnes of plastic waste every day. Most of which is non-recyclable, and when it goes to landfill, it creates many environmental issues [6,7]. Most of the drinkable water is polluted, so even water of rivers is not suitable for drinking [8]. But even after all this we are not ready to improve upon our bad habits. Despite of spending so much by the governments on advertisements about recycling, reusing and reducing the usage of plastic waste, we have hardly learned anything. In today's time, the increased world population has increased the consumption of resources to many folds in addition to this, people keep on wasting resources out of negligence. Our houses are full of unnecessary stuffs, which keep on lying for years unused and ultimately increase the burden on land by going into waste. Young minds are watching this every day in their houses and they are learning the same thing. Today's world is based on increasing consumption day by day. All companies are

focusing on increasing consumption and hardly providing any way out to green disposal of these used products. That is the reason we are spoiling our future day by day in the light of modernization.

In modern lifestyle we are more focused towards beautifying our houses rather than making them environment friendly. In ancient times houses were made of mud which was most suitable for all seasons. Soil being bad conductor of heat used to keep houses cool during summers and warm during winters. Surroundings of the houses were full of greenery. Now a days we hardly have any tree or green area around our houses. Concrete buildings absorb heat and make houses very hot in summers. Also, it emits heat rapidly hence, during winters houses are cold. To tackle this problem, we have to use air conditioners for summers and heaters for winters. Which is again increasing a burden on environment through emission and utilization of energy. Modern houses also do not have any arrangements for rain water harvesting. The concrete flooring doesn't allow rain water to percolate or sieve through ground due to which the level of ground water is falling with every passing year.

We have given up the habit of walking and use vehicles for even small distances. That is the reason world is facing shortage of coal and petrol. The other impact of this habit is major health issues. Walking is supposed to be a best exercise, but due to easy life styles, bad eating habits and no exercise various new and incurable lifestyle related diseases are affecting human life span. Organic methods of farming were used in ancient times to preserve the nutritional value of soil. Now a days various synthetic chemicals as fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides are being used by farmers to increase yield of the crop. Most of the vegetables are given chemical injections for early ripening to shorten the span of the crop (from sowing to selling in the market) which is also reducing crop's nutritional content while increasing concentration of harmful chemicals in it. Apart from direct consumption of these chemicals in food chain, these chemicals also sieve into soil with rain water or irrigation water which will stay there for years and will pollute our soil and ground water.

Cattles in ancient times were treated very well just like family members. Their health was taken care of because their milk was an essential food for all. they were given green grass to eat and proper nutritional diet was given to them as per their needs. But now a days in order to produce more and more milk animals are given hormone injections and the milk obtained from them is used for commercial purposes. To fulfil the need of population and earn money all unfair means are being used. This type of milk has no nutritional content rather it is not even fit for drinking. But people have no other choice, this also adds on to fatal diseases.

Hawans were an important part of all ancient rituals. During various festivals or family functions like weddings, births or any other auspicious or inauspicious occasions like deaths etc,

people used to do Hawan. The 'Hawan samagri' was used to made up of various herbs and pure cow milk. The reason for doing Hawan and yagna was to purify environment. Now a days it is considered as wastage but the fact that it ultimately goes to environment and used by us through breathing is totally ignored. At small scale the ritual of spreading camphor fumes in houses was also popular. This has now been scientifically proven that the camphor has antibacterial and anti-microbial properties. All these habits were very important for a healthy environment.

2.3 Solution to the Problem

The solution to environmental problem lies in Vedas. Environment must be given top most priority. Everyone should lead a life which is environment friendly. We must adopt the idea of simple living. Minimize the use of natural resources. The growing population must be controlled and every individual should cut down on their needs so that there is less burden on environment [9]. The biggest threat to environment is from single use plastic materials as their disposal is still a problem as they cannot be reused or recycled. Big industries are not ready to compromise over their profits as single use plastic materials are cheap. Government should take proper actions to ban or limit the manufacturing of such products. Packaging industries should manufacture reusable and recyclable materials for their use. It should be the responsibility of the industry to recycle an equivalent amount of plastic waste as much they have produced every year. These industries should keep an account of how many items have been created and how many have been recycled. Industries should also maintain green areas around their manufacturing units and made sure the nearby water resource are clean and their standards or purity are maintained. Governments should implement strict norms so that every industry should submit a report on how much trees they have planted every year as industries are responsible for maximum damage to the environment.

Every individual should play an important role is minimizing the use of plastic and must avoid throwing it in open.

Children should be taught values to be responsible towards the country and sensible towards their surroundings and sensitive towards all living creatures on this earth. Rain water should be harvested in cities, wherever it is possible. People should take responsibilities of keep their localities clean and take care of stray animals by feeding them with leftover vegetables and foods items. Polybags should not be thrown in open so that animal don't die or fall sick by consuming it. Green methods should be adopted like use of cloth, paper or biodegradable material carry bags for shopping, judicious use of water, planting more and more trees, minimum use of vehicles, reduction in unnecessary shopping of clothes and other items, minimize wastage of food and use of disposable utensils in functions. With the modern techniques, domestication of animals should be promoted.

This is the right time to reverse the damage which have been done to the environment so far. We are still in a situation where things are under control and can be managed. New generation has a huge responsibility on their shoulders. The best way is to teach them about environment and to impose environment friendly policies leading to an eco-friendly lifestyle. Because children learn more from their life experiences than from books.

The idea of sustainable development should not be confined to conferences and seminars. Every individual should play their role towards environment.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The solution to every environmental problem is available in Vedas. We must learn ancient techniques of taking care of environment from the Vedas and change our habits for the betterment of the future. Value based education should be given to the future generations to make their bond stronger with nature.

Single time usable plastic should be banned by the Government. Use of other type of plastic should be reduced and its disposal should be managed by segregation in the garbage. As much as possible waste products should be recycled or reused. Recyclable items should not be thrown in garbage.

Rain water harvesting should be given prime importance and arrangements should be made wherever possible. Everyone must work towards conservation of ground water. The three R rule (Reduce, Recycle and Reuse) should be adopted. Crop and soil should not be adulterated with synthetic chemicals like pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers. Hormonal treatment of animals should be avoided to give more milk. These efforts will be effective only when every single person take pledge to contribute towards environment. Citizens must understand that this is not the job of government only but we all are part of this family called earth.

4. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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