

# Vedas and Environment

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**Abstract**—*The Vedic philosophy envisages that each entity of the universe be it a stone or be it a human being, each of them is intertwined or interconnected. Nothing exists in isolation and above this background, the Vedas propound that all of us, especially the human beings, because we are the overtly conscious ones, though there is consciousness in trees too and which has been accepted and suggested but the human beings need to maintain a friendly and cordial relation with each aspect of nature. It is not only care, concern or being fond of nature like we are doing it today in the form of fashion rather it is the emotional bonding which has been emphasized. Although Vedas are associated with a particular religion that is Hinduism, when we talk about environmental awareness in the Vedas, it is not just a scripture of a particular religion. Its existence lies beyond the borders of religion, country and geographical boundaries. The paper will locate and address all those aspects which are valuable for us, for cosmic existence, cosmic harmony and also shed light in view of this current pandemic. Further, the paper attempts to explore Vedas and contextualize them with the contemporary problems that we are facing due to environmental crisis and talks about various inter-related factors. Besides this the paper also seeks to analyse one of the most important resources that we have in the Vedas i.e. Prithvisukta of Atharva Veda. Moreover, it examines the idea of Homa Therapy - the Yagyopathy as the technical term from the Vedic science of bio-energy for the process of removing toxic conditions of the atmosphere through the agency of fire.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“May the heaven in the earth Invoked from the earliest times be for our well-being; May the midspace be for our welfare with charming appearance; May the herbs and forest trees be for our welfare; May the victorious lord of different and distant regions be favourable for our felicity”.

## 2. 7TH CHAPTER RIGVEDA 35TH HYMN 5TH VERSE

It is important to explore Vedas and contextualise them with the contemporary problems that we are facing due to environmental pollution and many other factors. The definition of environment from environment protection act 1986, ‘Environment includes water, air and land and the interrelationship which exists among and between water, air and land and human beings, other living creatures, plants, microorganisms and property”.

In this background as we know that environment has been classified into several types but mainly and broadly we can

say that solid, liquid and gaseous or Lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and biosphere. The Sanskrit word for environment is Paryavaran which is different from vatavaran because vatavaran is only atmosphere; this is related to air while environment or Paryavaran is all that encompasses is covered under this but basically as we know in Hindu philosophy we have the five elements: Earth, water, air, fire and sky. Beyond these there are many aspects of nature and inter-relation with these aspects of nature has been the distinctive feature of the vedic philosophy.

As we know that the vedic philosophy envisages that each entity of the universe be it a stone or be it a human being, each of them is intertwined or interconnected. Nothing exists in isolation. And above this background, the vedas propound that all of us especially the human beings because we are the overly conscious ones although there is consciousness in trees also and that has been accepted and suggested but the human beings must have a friendly relation with each aspect of nature. It is not only care, concern or being fond of nature like we are doing it today in the form of fashion. Rather the emotional bonding with nature which has been emphasised.

“I should look at everything with a friendly eye and all the aspects of nature should also look at me with a friendly eye”.

**Yajurveda**

“Even those which I can see and beyond that which I cannot see I should have goodwill towards everything”

**Atharvaveda**

## 3. VEDIC VISION OF ECOLOGICAL HARMONY

The aspects which I cannot see, they are the subtlest aspect of nature, some things are visible some are not but I should have a goodwill towards everything around me. It’s not just selfish concern and individual progress which will lead us to happy family and healthy society; it has to be goodwill or concern for everything around me. There has been this aspect of reciprocal approach towards the cosmic existence. When we approach nature, we should approach it with reverence and not only as a resource or with an attitude of indulgence. Though this experience of indulgence and gratification is not denied in the Vedic view but this has to be restrained.

“We should enjoy the natural resources but with a feeling of renunciation”.

### 1st Verse Ishavasya Upanishad 40th Chapter Yajurved

There is this aspect of Aparigraha In various system of Indian philosophy which states that we should cultivate, collect and enjoy as much as we need not beyond that just because we are greedy about that. We should enjoy with Tyag Bhava. Bhoga and tyaga are to be practised together.

“Don’t have greed towards natural resources because the money does not belong to anybody”.

Natural resources are the form of money, natural wealth but this natural wealth is not created by us. This is not just for us we have to share it with others. Since there is interconnection amongst various forms of life therefore, we should share it with everybody around us.

Now we already know that Rigveda is the oldest available literally document of humankind and this has been accepted by UNESCO in its memory of the world register 2017. The Vedas are generally known as a scripture of Hindus however being among the first literary documents in the history of humankind, they transcend far beyond their identity as Scriptures”.

Although Vedas are associated with a particular religion that is Hinduism but when we talk about environmental awareness in the Vedas, It is not just a scripture of a particular religion. We have to go beyond the borders of religion, country, and geographical boundaries. We have to locate and explore all those aspects which are valuable for us, for cosmic existence and the cosmic harmony and also in view of this current pandemic and environmental problem. These problems have proved that there is no geographical boundary. We were proclaiming Vasudev Kutumbakam but now this pandemic has proved that the whole earth is one family and when the nature comes to its own there is no boundary, there is no distinction. Everybody will be affected. Now we have to have a broader outlook and explore such ideas which can help us in these troubled times.

The most important resource that we have in Vedas, there is one of the hymns of Atharvaveda which is often quoted and that is Prithvi Sukta of Atharvaveda. This is the 12th chapter of Atharvaveda. It has 63 verses. But Earth here is not only suggested as a geographical entity but it is symbolic of everything that grows and exists on the Earth. In this hymn, there are many many important ideas. It signifies that there are many aspects of existence.

The Vedic view in general is holistic. It encompasses all the aspects of life and the PrithviSukta of Atharvaveda is also a sample of that. The human beings, natural elements like Earth, water, air, fire, sky, insects, birds, animals, rivers, mountains, trees, forests, seasons etc. Physical as well as non-physical aspects have all been described and invoked in this verse. But what is so noble about it. The most distinctive feature of this literature is that here it is not only depiction of these aspects but the underlying emotional bonding too.

There is a verse which says that the Earth is your mother, sky is your father, moon is your brother and Aditi is your sister.

There is a personification of natural forces in these verses. Not just personification as a literary figure but as a way of life. The Vedas says that the seers had this wisdom developed only at the valley of the mountains and the confluence of rivers.

Three spheres of the universe have been enumerated in the Prithvisukta or in Vedic philosophy. These three are: the Ground or the solid Earth, the intermediary or the mid space and the upper most or the celestial. These three are not only present around us; they are also present within us, our body. That is another concept of the Vedic philosophy which is very subtle and very important.

“Yatha pinde, tatha brahmande”

“Whatever exists within this body, the same exists outside in the Brahmanda”.

There is parity between the Pind and the Brahmanda. Between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

With this background the earth is not just the locus of everything, it is also the mother of everything. It nourishes everything, nurtures and everything happens on this Earth.

We should have these basic ideas from the Vedic philosophy. There has to be a reciprocal approach. If we just go on exploiting nature and it’s resource for our enjoyment, one day the same consequence will have to be faced by humanity that we are facing today. Mere exploitation of natural resources will not work, we have to replenish the resources, take care of it. We need to take as much as we need. We don’t have to, we shouldn’t, and we cannot afford to waste these natural resources as we are doing it today carelessly. We are polluting and are not at all grateful to these divine forces of nature.

In this scenario there are two aspects of nature:-

1. Benign / Somya
2. Fierce / Ugra

The poets like Kalidas, Valmiki and Vyas describe nature’s delicate aspect but there is a fierce form of nature which we are observing today and this fierce form of nature is not natural. This is not normal. This is something exceptional. This is a warning to humanity the laws of nature have to be followed and if we disturb the benign form of nature then we have to face the fierce aspect of nature.

#### 4. PRITHVISUKTA OF ATHARVAVEDA

The very first verse of the Prithvisukta. The first verse gives us the clue for the six factors which can sustain us. Satyam Brihad, Ritam Ugram, Deeksha, Tapah, Brahma, Yagya. These are the six factors that sustain the earth. Earth is not just a geological entity; Earth is here symbolic of all the natural phenomena and all the forms of life.

1.) Satyam Brihad - Satya means truth not just truth but Brihad Satyam, greater truth. When I only deal with my own personal motive and selfish interest then it is Satyam but when I care for the others around me then it becomes Brihad Satyam. When Prithvisukta is talking of the whole earth it says consecration for cosmic Harmony is the greatest truth of all. We have to pledge ourselves to this greatest truth for the greater causes.

2.) Ritam Ugram- Ritam is the concept of Vedas which suggest the rhythm of nature; Ritam is the cosmic law which permeates through all forms of existence. Ritam is the controller of universe but as suggested earlier an adjective is added Ugram Ritam. Ugram means fierce. This Ritam that the sun rises in the east every morning, sun sets in the west every evening. There was a cycle of climatic seasons; the rains happened at a particular time, there was a cycle. They all follow the cosmic law and that is known as Ritam. But these days we are seeing violation of natural laws therefore, the Ritam has become Ugram. If we cross the line of Ritam then we reach the fierce form of Ritam. Fierce form of nature is the Ritam Ugram.

3.) Deeksha- It is the dedication for maintaining ecological balance. The word ecology was coined very recently. Then there came the deep ecology, and then came the Gaia theory. But these all are the developments of 19th or 20th century. But Vedas were written thousands of years earlier. This is not just for one particular section of humanity. These are the universal guiding principles which have been chartered and given to us. So, dedication for maintaining the logical balance is the Deeksha.

4.) Tapas- Perseverance for fulfilment of the above pledge or the above Deeksha that we have undertaken. Tapas mean concentrated effort towards a mission. When we take a mission, we have to fulfil that mission and whatever efforts are needed for fulfilling that mission comes under Tapas.

5.) Brahma- There are two words one is Brahman and the other is Brahma. But there is a difference between these two words of thousands of years. In Vedas, we find the word Brahman which is a neuter gender. Here it is an adjective of knowledge. Brahma signifies the knowledge, Veda itself signifies knowledge but the Veda is not ordinary knowledge. Brahma is not only knowledge Brahma means it is derived from the root word Bringha which grows so knowledge which grows every time with new challenges. It is not static. It is dynamic knowledge which is ever evolving and changes. When new challenges come the knowledge itself refreshes, it takes a new form and that knowledge is known as Brahma in this verse of the Vedas. This knowledge is not individual concern. This is for universal well-being because it is ever growing ever evolving knowledge so this is for whole of humanity. We should cultivate such knowledge.

6.) Yajya- By the word yajya, we usually mean that this is a religious ritual but this is not just a religious ritual. Yajya is the

most important clue. This is the key concept of Vedic philosophy for maintaining, sustaining the environment and for conservation, for maintaining ecological balance. The feeling of Yajya is offering oneself for the collective good. The word Yajya is derived from the root word which is Yaj.

Yaj connoted 3 meanings:

a.) Devapooja - Propitiating the divine natural forces that is one aspect of it and that may be taken to be a religious rite.

b.) Sangatikaran- The communitarian concept, the communitarian sharing that is also Yajya. Anything which is not concerned with an individual alone that is Yajya where the benefit of the other is taken into consideration that is yajya.

c.) Dana- Sharing of resources. If a particular country has some resources it cannot contain all the resources for itself. It has to share with others. This giving away is known as Dana.

## 5. TYPES OF YAJYA

Yajya has many broad ideas connected with it. It is not just a ritual from ritual, we have to transcend up to a spiritual. Yajya has been said by the Veda itself that it is the genesis, central point of the universe.

With this concept of yajya, we have the five types of yajya which have been prescribed for every household.

1.) Brahmajajya- Reading and gathering knowledge for the welfare of everyone that is Brahmajajya. Anything when we read, contemplate, meditate, think of others, if a scientist is working in a lab, he's doing Brahmajajya. Because he is enriching his stock of knowledge for the benefit of humanity.

2.) Devyajajya- It is what we usually understand as a ritual that is Agnihotra putting something into fire but that also has a significance it is not just a mechanical act.

3.) Pitriyajajya- Respecting and taking care of elders in the family and society. There was the system when every family has some elderly people, they had to be taken care of, they needed some reverence, some respect, some affection, some care. Every householder is obliged to do this pitriyajajya in his home.

4.) Atithiyajajya- Whenever somebody comes to your home you have to respect him. You have to offer him something. Not just offering into fire you have to offer to the living beings and not only human beings.

5.) Bhotyajajya- Which is for the birds, insects, animals. Before you start eating, you are obliged to offer food for all these forms of life. If we go back to 3rd generation in our kitchen, our grandmothers used to cook a small Chapatti for offering to the cow and people used to put some cereals for the birds, insects this is called Bhotyajajya.

All these acts were related and connected to religion with a specific motive because if you connect these ideas with religion, there were the trees of pipal, tulsi where we used to

offer water as a religious practice because even if you don't understand the significance of the logic behind it at least you are taking care of nature. In the Vedas, we have plenty of prayers where the welfare of birds, animals and a number of animals are counted there. The whole biodiversity has been enumerated. There have been many researches about this aspect but talking about the aspect of yajya, many scientific experiments have been going on around the world and this is the most important clue for meeting the challenge of environmental pollution. Even if you don't believe in the religiosity of the act simply for the care of environment this needs to be practised.

## 6. HOMATHERAPY

In the year 2006 -2007 in the environmental science school of JNU, there was a lecture by two German scholars they were talking about Homa therapy. Here in India we have a brahmopathy lab at Shantikunj, Haridwar where the integrated science of yajya is being studied. In the microbiology department of Jawaharlal Nehru medical College Ajmer, Dr Vijay Lata Rastogi in 2011 conducted a research on homatherapy-the yagyopathy.

There is this homatherapy in India propounded by Vasant V Paranjpye in 1973, he established the first fire temple Madison, Virginia. He's a disciple of Gajanan Maharaj of Akalakot.

There is a documented evidence in the newspaper Hindu of 4th and 5th May 1985 that the two families of Mr Kushwaha and Mr Rathore were saved from the side effects of Bhopal gas tragedy because they were regularly performing the Homa in their household.

V. Paranjpe pioneered the use of Homa therapy in agriculture, psychotherapy, alternative medicine, self-development and healing the environment. He has authored "homatherapy: our last chance".

The German Professors delivered a lecture on Homatherapy with reference to agriculture. They said that inverted pyramid is known as havan kund. This is made of copper. The scientific evidences have been documented that when an inverted copper pyramid is with certain specifications and when you put some cow dung cakes into it and at the moment of sunrise and sunset when you recite some mantras and ignite fire into that pyramid, there are some scientific changes across the air and around the environment. This is the vedic way or clue that for saving the environment. This is not just ecology or deep ecology. This is the deepest ecology that India has developed and it needs to be propagated and practiced.

These ideas are not just theoretical but they need to be brought into practice just like the idea of yoga was thousands of years old in India. It was a practice but it has caught the attention of world after it was propagated not only through theory but also through practice by PM Shri Narendra Modi. Now people across the world have started practising it.

Similarly there are thousands of ideas, many researches have been done and many are still being done which can take us to new frontiers of knowledge. It is our duty and obligation not only for ourselves but for the welfare of the humanity that we think seriously about these. Now the time has gone when anything Indian, anything ancient is look down upon. Now anything Indian, ancient is seen with respect. From consumerism and over indulgence we have to come to a philosophy of restraint. The word Sayama was lost somewhere. Sayama is the idea of restraint. First tyaga and then bhoga.

"We have to be proactive, for thousands of years we have to live not live just in an ideal manner we have to be proactive."

Yajurveda, Ishavasya Upanishad

## 7. NIGHANTU: VEDIC DICTIONARY

In the Vedic philosophy, the very first dictionary of the Vedas is known as Nighantu . This was authored by a Rishi called Yaska around 700 BC. Yaska's nighantu is a Vedic dictionary of terms which have been used in the Vedas. For the narration of Earth, there are 21 names of Earth but there are 101 names for water so how close to nature these people must have been they were observing water in different shades and shapes. 16 names for the midspace, 30 names for the cloud, 37 names for river, 16 names for dawn, 15 names for rays of sun, 24 names for sky and Earth. There is a dual deity Dyava Prithvi , 15 names for yajya. Yajya is known adwara. Where there is no violence where there is no negativity.

## 8. SHANTI MANTRA

May everywhere there be peace, May cosmos be peaceful, May the Earth be peaceful, May the space be peaceful, May midspace be peaceful, May the trees be peaceful, May the forest be peaceful, May the sky be peaceful, May the waters be peaceful, May the plants be peaceful, May all the bounties of nature be peaceful, May the knowledge be peaceful, May all the things be peaceful, May there be peace and peace.

That peace should come to me the problem is that everywhere around there can be peace but there is no peace within me. If there is peace with me then everything will be peaceful.

With this Shanti Path and Mantra, we not only pray for Shanti we also act for Shanti. We arise and awake for bringing this peace on Earth. we refurbish our scientific stock of knowledge but it is only the mechanical aspect which needs to be coupled with the spiritual outlook that the vedic philosophy provides. This blend of both these which the Ishopanishad very beautifully enunciates with Vidya and Avidya, sambhuti and asambhuti. This blending, complementarity is what is missing that we have to bring back. May God give us some goodwill and good intention to accomplish these goals that we are desiring and aspiring.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Many studies have been undertaken but much more needs to be done in the philosophy of vedas from the idea of this context. Peace is aspired for every aspect of nature. It is such a rich and elevating philosophy that it can inspire many of us in this doomsday or in this very difficult and desperate situation that we are placed in. We can choose whether we want to have a dominion over nature or we should live in communion with nature.

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