

The Concept of Environmental Protection as Depicted in the *Atharvaveda*

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Abstract:

The antiquity of India is represented in the Vedic texts by the seers. Four Vedas i.e. *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* reflect the Indian society and its culture of that respective period. These texts are regarded as the treasure of Indian literature, composed in the Sanskrit language. The analysis of these texts of the Vedas brings out the concepts of environmental awareness practiced by the ancient people. Nature occupies the foremost place in the lives of ancient place, as nature is the source of their livelihood. Nature is worshipped in different forms by the people and any harm caused to nature is admitted as curse. This is the only way by which people become more conscious about saving nature and environment, and to sustain it for the future generations. Though the concept of environmental protection is becoming a very serious issue now-a-days; but ancient people of India were aware of it thousand years ago. At the very early age of civilization, people realize the necessity of protection of nature and environment. From Vedic to Classical Sanskrit literature, the great poets always make nature as the centre of their depiction. They understand the intimate relation between the people and nature. They can realize the impact of nature on human lives.

Keywords: *Atharvaveda*, nature, environment, protection, awareness.

Objectives:

The present paper tries to analyze the concept of environmental protection as reflected in the Vedas; focusing on the texts of the *Atharvaveda*. The paper discuss the relevance of the environmental protection of the Vedic age in the modern era.

Methodology:

The present paper is qualitative in nature. The secondary sources i.e. the books related to the study are collected and studied. The analysis of the facts is done with help of main texts of Vedas and reference books.

Paper:

Environment is the pivotal discussion of the Vedic literature. The elements of environment-trees, sun, moon, wind, water, river etc., are personified as the gods and goddesses in the Vedic texts. The Vedic seers understand the power of natural objects. They realize the potentialities of the nature to maintain the ecological balance. The destruction of the environmental objects can automatically bring the destruction of the human beings in this planet.

The earliest text of the Vedic literature i.e. *Ṛgveda* possesses the hymns of natural objects where those are personified as the gods. For example – agni (fire), varuṇa(rain), parjanya (cloud), sūrya (sun), Indra (thunder) etc., are the nature elements, worshipped in the Vedas as gods. In the very first verse of *Ṛgveda*, seer Madhucchandā worships the lord Agni and describes his power, cf-

agnirmīle purohitam yajñasya devamṛtvijam/

hotāram ratnadhātām // (Ṛgveda 1.1.1)¹

B.B.Chaubey states- Gods are different phenomena of nature- fire, wind, sun, moon etc. Natural phenomena, personified as gods, were endowed with powers.²

Atharvaveda mentions that there are three main elements in the environment. These are- *āpa*(water), *vāta*(air) and *auśadhi*(herbs). These three mainly constitute our surrounding environment, cf.-

trīṇi chandāṣi kavayo vi yetire,

pururūpam darśatam viśvacakṣaṇam /

āpo vātā auśadhayaḥ

tānyekasmin bhuvan ārpitāni // (Atharvaveda 18.1.17)³

The necessity of pure water is experienced by the seers, *Atharvaveda* states that air is the support of all the beings. We pray and praise the God Vāyu and Savitṛ, who protect and surround the world. May they free us from sin, cf.-

vāyoḥ saviturvidabhāni manmahe yāvātmanvad viśabhyo you ca rakṣathaḥ /

you viśvasya paribhū babhūvathustou nou muñcatamañhasaḥ // (Atharvaveda,iv.25.1)⁴

¹ *Ṛgveda 1.1.1*

² *Treatment of Nature in the Ṛgveda, p.18*

³ *Atharvaveda 18.1.17*

The above cited verse indicates the aware us the properties and operations of air and sun which penetrate and guard the living world, which become pervader of all. Air and sun are the sources of saving us from disaster. Regarding purity of air, water and herbs, in the Yjurveda also it is stated as –

madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ/ mādhvīrnaḥ santodhīḥ// (Yajurveda 13.27)⁵

In context of water purification, the restrictions on ruinous practices are strictly prescribed. In a mantra of Atharvaveda, the sage pray the mother earth as – O mother earth, flow pure water for clearing our bodies. All evil practices we shift on to the internal foe and I sanctify myself by good and virtuous dealing, cf.-

śuddhā na āpastanve kṣarantu yo naḥ sedurapriye /

taṁ na dadhmaḥ pavitreṇa prithivi mot punāmi // (Atharvaveda 12.1.30)⁶

About the importance of clean water, the sage worshipped mother earth as- May for us be auspicious and beneficial those water which yield splendid and which are bright and pure. May they give pleasure to us with splendid transparency and may they come in contact of our skin with the pleasant essence, cf.-

śiven mā cakṣuā paśyatāpaḥ śivayā tanvopa sprśata tvacaṁ me /

ghṛtacyutaḥ śucayoḥ yāḥ pāvakāstāḥ na āpaḥ śaṁ syonā bhavantu //(Atharvaveda 1.33.4)⁷

Now-a-days, excavation becomes a serious issue and restriction on it is the mandatory practice to save our problem from hazardous calamities. Due to self-centric thought people are even not thinking. But the ancient people took necessary steps to restrict the soil excavation to save nature from damage. The sage prays mother earth to fill up whatever people dig out from her. The sage advises people not to damage those parts of soil which are vital to vegetation or the interior regions where she stores rare and precious thing.cf.-

yat te bhūme vikhanāmi kṣipraṁ tadapi rohatu/

⁴ Atharvaveda,4.25.1

⁵ Yajurveda, 13.27

⁶ Atharvaveda 12.1.30

⁷ Atharvaveda 1.33.4

mā te mama vimṛgvari mā te hṛdayamarpitam// (Atharvaveda 12.1.35)⁸

Ancient people know the importance of ecological balance. Vedic literature states- Earth is our mother, the matter is the principal cause of our birth, the firmament is like our brother, the heavenly region is like our father and let them become the sources of our safety from troubles. Let each of them be the source of peace for us and attaining the company of our kindred we may not fall from the status of our parent, cf- *bhūmirmātāditirno janitram bhrātāntarikṣamamiśastyā nah/ dyournaḥ pitā pitryāccham bhavāti jāmimṛtvā māva patsi lokāt /⁹*

The seers realize the power of unity, interconnectedness between nature and human being. The lack of which can threaten the existence of mankind. The unbalance of ecological system can address the environmental calamities like global warming, air, soil, water pollution, nuclear proliferation etc. The importance of every season of nature in the lives of human being is deeply felt by the people of Vedic era. Therefore, they performed many seasonal sacrifices for the lords of seasons (fire, air and sun) for creative energy and for the fortune of prosperity to make them favorable and worship the lord of the creation.

The research work attempts to cite the thought of environmental protection as depicted in the *Atharvaveda*. The analysis of these Vedic texts can ensure many ways to maintain the eco-friendly environment in this earth. To maintain the purity of air, water and remedial herbs, we can look back to the protection mentioned in the Vedic texts. The sages of Vedic texts show us the ways to bridge between the environment and human life.

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⁸ *Atharvaveda 12.1.35*

⁹ *Yajurveda, 120.2*

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