

Awareness Of Environmental Protection In Brahman Literature: In The Context Of Vedas

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The Vedas contain ample references to environmental protection. Although the problem of environmental pollution was virtually nonexistent during the Vedic era, the visionary Vedic sages paid significant attention to it. Today, the issue of environmental pollution has assumed a particularly severe form in India. The Vedic sages had prior knowledge of this problem taking a dire shape. Therefore, extensive mentions of solutions to mitigate the severity of this issue are found scattered throughout the Vedic Samhitas and Vedic literature.

When humans excessively tamper with or pollute nature (earth, water, fire, air, and space), the problem of pollution begins. The primary cause of this problem is the excessive increase in population. Due to population growth, urbanization of forest lands, destruction of trees in forests, contamination of natural water sources, scarcity of breathable air, widespread filth, excessive emission of smoke from modern means of transportation, and unchecked pollution of the environment by industries are among the many causes of environmental pollution in the modern era.

In the modern age, along with environmental pollution, the crisis of noise pollution is also escalating. The Vedas provide various measures to protect against all these types of pollution. If we wish to escape the deadly grip of pollution, we must adopt the solutions outlined in the Vedas.

In the Vedic era, the protection of the environment, closeness to nature, and the essential practice of performing Agnihotra at home were integral to human life. In the Vedas, various forms of nature are considered divine.

There is a law to worship and honor these forms of nature. Earth, water (in the form of rivers), air, sky and light (in the form of Sun, Moon, constellations and dawn etc.), vegetation, mountains and six seasons etc., almost all the forms of nature were accepted as deities and all of them were worshipped. In such a situation of belief, it was not possible to harm, pollute or destroy these forms of nature. It is never possible to pollute or harm someone whom we worship or whom we consider a deity.

There is also a clear provision in the Vedas for maintaining natural balance. The importance of the uninterrupted functioning of the six seasons at the right time in the balance of nature is expressed. The sequence of seasons and their characteristics should remain intact. Trying to make any changes in these, tampering with nature, is to destroy the natural balance. The sequence of seasons and the process of seasons have been termed as Yagya in Atharvaveda.

yajñīyo yajati yajñīyām ṛtūn¹ (18|1|18) There is a law to perform havan in every house along with the continuous yagya of nature. If Yajna (Havan) is organized every day in every season, in which aromatic and medicinal substances are offered along with ghee, then pollution can be made ineffective even today. It is said in Atharvaveda that the purity and safety of the environment depends on water, air and vegetation. Purification and balance of these three will automatically solve the problem of pollution –

**trīṇīchandaṃsi kavayo vi yetire pururūpaṃ darśataṃ viśvacakṣaṇam | āpo vātā ośadhayastānyekasmin
bhuvana ārpitāni** ||² (18|1|17)

In the said mantra, the word medicine means vegetation (trees and creepers). Therefore, purification and protection of the environment is possible only by keeping water, air and vegetation pure and safe. For this reason, it is essential that forests remain safe in adequate quantity. For human life, protection of animals and birds in forests and gardens is also

necessary. As a result, a healthy life will be possible due to the purification of the environment. Therefore, Tapovans have an important place in Indian culture. In Tapovans, where trees and creepers flourished and grew, the process of Yagya-Havan etc. also went on continuously. Along with monthly and annual Yagyas, Havan was performed daily. In this way, Tapovans had an important role in protecting the environment.

water purification and protection -

Water purifier has its own importance in environmental purification. Water is not only used for our drinking, but it is also the main reason for the production of food, vegetation etc. Therefore, water is a very useful and essential element for life. It is also essential for the water to be pure. Impure water is not only the cause of suffering and fatal diseases for humans, it will also prove to be destructive for food and trees. Therefore, in Rigveda, pure water has been called a medicine for diseases and like nectar -

**apsu me somo abravīdantarviśvāni bheṣajā |
agniṃ ca viśvaśambhuvamāpaśca viśvabheṣajīḥ ||³ (1|23|20)**

**āpa id vā u bheṣajīrāpo amīvacātaniḥ |
āpaḥ sarvasya bheṣajīstāste kṛṇvantu bheṣajam ||⁴ (10|137|6)**

apsvantaramṛtam, apsu bheṣajam ||⁵ (1|23|19)

Pure water has been said to be essential for agriculture, vegetation and medicines, it has been mentioned in Rigveda-

**tasmā araṃ gamāma vo yasya kṣayāya jīnvatha |
āpo janayathā ca naḥ ||⁶ (10|9|3)**

In Yajurveda, the matter of preserving, observing, maintaining balance of the entire nature and not causing any harm to nature is clearly stated in a mandatory form.

It is also said there that the vegetation will blossom and flourish a hundred times and will benefit us a thousand times

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**dyām mā lekḥīrantarikṣaṃ mā hiṃsīḥ pṛthivyā sambhava |
ayaṃ hi tvā svadhīstetijānaḥ praṇināya mahate saubhagāya |
atastvaṃ deva vanaspate śatavalśo viroha
sahastravalśā vi vayaṃ ruhema ||⁷ (5|43)
...taṃ tvā juṣāmahe deva vanaspate devayajyāyai |
oṣadhe trāyasva svadhite mainaṃ hiṃsīḥ ||⁸ (5|42)**

In Atharvaveda, the order to keep water pure and to build a lake full of pure water near the house is clearly given -

**imā āpaḥ pra bhārāmyayakṣmā yakṣmanāśaniḥ |
gṛhānupa pra sīdāmyamṛtena sahāgninā ||⁹ (3|12|9)**

Throwing light on the importance of pure water, there is a medicine in Atharva Veda. Pure water is as nutritious as aloe vera, it is the digestive juice of food and provides life, strength, radiance and virility.

It is also said elsewhere that water (pure water)

**āpo bhadrā gṛtamidāpa āsannagnīṣomau bibhratyāpa it tāḥ |
tīvro raso madhupṛcāmaramgama ā mā prāṇena saha varcasā gamet ||¹⁰ (3|13|5)**

In the mantras of the above mentioned Vedic codes, where it has been said to observe, protect and not harm nature, along with the protection of nature, all-round development of human beings has also been given a prominent place, that is, the progress, welfare and health of human beings has been linked with the protection and growth of nature. If there is protection and development of nature, then only humans will also be protected and development.

There is definitely a direct relationship between the security and prosperity of human beings with the safety and purity of nature, The basic feeling is relationship. The basis of human life is the balance and conservation of nature. Therefore this fact should not be neglected.

Purification and protection of air-

Along with water, purification and protection of air is also essential for our life. Air is life, without life life is not possible. Some days can be spent without water, not even some moments can be spent without air. In Rig Veda, air has been called 'Amritaka Kosh'. Air has been said to be the only medicine for all diseases-

yadado vāta te grhe'mṛtasya nidhirhitah |
tato no dehi jīvase ||¹¹ (10|186|3)
vāta ā vātu bheṣajam śambhu mayobhu no hr̥de|
praṇa āyūṁṣi tāriṣat ||¹² (10|186|1)
ā vāta vāhi bheṣajam vi vāta vāhi yadrapah |
tvam hi viśvabheṣajo devānām dūta iyase ||¹³ (10|137|3)
dvāvimau vātau vāta ā sindhorā parāvataḥ |
dakṣam te anya ā vātu parānyo vātu yadrapah ||¹⁴ (10|137|2)

In the above mantras, pure air has been described as a medicine, a health enhancer, a cure for all diseases and a provider of longevity. Therefore its conservation is essential. This is possible only when we give highest priority to purification activities. Similarly this Yajurmantra -

dyām mā lekhīrantarikṣam mā hiṁsīḥ ||¹⁵ (5|43)

The idea of keeping the air pure and not polluting it by doing any kind of mischief in the sky has also been expressed.

Protection and purification of land, food and vegetation-

Bhumi is considered mother and deity in the Vedas. There is also a tradition of worshipping the earth. Who can have the audacity to pollute someone who is worshipable, a mother and a god? By saying 'Prithivya Sambhava' in Yajurveda (5.43), in all 63 mantras of Prithvisukta (12.1) of Atharvaveda and at many other places -

Sa sā no bhūmirvi sṛjatām mātā putrāya me payah |¹⁶ (12|1|10)
mātā bhūmiḥ putro aham pṛthivyāḥ |
parjanyaḥ pitā sa u naḥ pipartu ||¹⁷(12|1|12)

- Earth has been called the mother and Parjanya (cloud) has been called the father. In the Prithvi Sukta itself, a wish has been made for the earth to be fragrant and for the earth itself to be as sweet and fragrant as the earth -

yaste gandhaḥ bhūme tenāsmām api sam sṛjā|
yaste gandhaḥ pṛthivi tena mā surabhiḥ kṛṇu ||¹⁸ (12|1|24, 25)

In every mantra of Prithvi Sukta, considering the earth as the basis of all living beings, the basis of human life, mother, nourisher and steward, a prayer has been made for all kinds of welfare -

tvamasyāvapanī janānāmaditīḥ kāmādughā paprathānā ||
...upasthāste anamīvā ayakṣmā asmabhyam santu pṛthivi prasūtāḥ |
dīrgha na āyuh pratibudhyamānā vayam tubhyam balihṛtaḥ syāma ||
bhūme mātarni dhehi mā bhadrāyā supratīṣṭhitam|
samvidānā divā kave śriyām mā dhehi bhūtyām ||¹⁹ (12|1|61-63)

In the Vedic period, the Indian people who considered the earth as their mother, themselves as its son and the Parjanya (cloud) situated in the sky as their father, could not even imagine polluting the earth or the sky. Today we have polluted the earth so much. We have filled the sky with polluted air. The solution to this problem is possible only by controlling the population, preserving forests, controlling pollution and completely banning the emission of impure substances and by propagating havan and using it more and more in the society. In this way we can make the society healthy and happy. Only when the earth and climate are pure, plants, medicines, grains and forest foods can be healthy and restorative. In Atharvaveda, clean land and clean environment etc. have been addressed with honorary adjectives like 'Vishwabheshji' –

yāvatiṣu manuṣyā bheṣajam bhiṣajo viduḥ |
tāvātīrviśvabheṣajīrā bharāmi tvāmabhi ||
puṣpavatīḥ prasūmatīḥ phalinīraphalā uta|
sammātara iva durhāsmā ariṣṭatātaye ||²⁰(8|7|26-27)

Vegetation grown in pure land, irrigated with pure water and growing in a pure environment makes the environment pure and fragrant and destroys the impurities. Plants provide life force to living beings.

It is stated at many places in the Vedas that certain medicines purify the environment. That is why in Yagya or daily Havan, liquids with medicinal properties and fragrant and nutritious things are offered, due to which the environment becomes healthy, fragrant and pure. Therefore, Yajna-Havan has special importance in protecting the environment. In Yajurveda, sun rays are considered as purifier of the environment and are accepted as purifier of polluted elements. Similarly, fire has also been described as a purifier of the environment and a destroyer of polluted elements.

devo mā savitā punātvacchidreṇa pavitreṇa sūryasya raśmibhiḥ ||²¹ (4|4)

In the Yajurveda itself, the importance of plants and their consumption as cure for diseases has been said –

**taṃ tvā juṣāmahe deva vanaspate devayajyāyai |
atastvaṃ deva vanaspate śatavalśo vi roha |
sahastravalśā vi vyaṃ ruhema ||²² (5|42-43)**

In the above mantra, it is said that with the hundredfold growth of vegetation, human health increases thousandfold. Thus, there is a close relationship between the spread of vegetation and human health.

The great importance of Ashvattha tree (Pipalka tree) is shown in the Vedas. It provides vital air every night. Apart from being a rejuvenating factor, this tree is also an ultimate healer. It is said to be the abode of the gods. Kashmary (Gambhari) and Gulgulu (Guggul) have been accepted as air purifiers, environment protectors and health promoters.

aśvattho devasadanastṛṭiyasyāmito divi ||²³ (5|4|3)

śamī aśvatthamārūḍhastatra puṃsavanaṃ kṛtam ||²⁴ (6|1|1|1)

na taṃ yakṣmā arundhate nainaṃ śapatho aśnute |

yaṃ bheṣajasya gulguloḥ surabhigandho aśnute ||²⁵ (19|38|1)

kāśmaryamayāḥ paridhayo bhavanti rakṣasāmapahatyai ||²⁶ (3|7|9)

At all these places, Ashwattha (Peepal) Guggulu and Kashmiri tree have been described as environmental protectors, purifiers and destroyers of Rakshas (worms). Therefore, such trees should be planted and protected in maximum quantity.

Although the problem of environmental pollution was completely absent in the Vedic era, the Vedic sages were aware of this potential problem. Therefore, in the Vedic literature, adequate attention has been paid to the cleanliness of earth, water, air, sky and fire (fire). Keeping the environment pure is our religion.

Noise pollution is also increasing in the modern era. It is necessary to immediately control this by religious institutions, government and common citizens. All types of pollution must be controlled as soon as possible, otherwise human life will continue moving towards destruction.

References -

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2. Atharvaveda, 18/1/17
3. Rigveda 1/23/20
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5. Rigveda 1/23/19
6. Rigveda 10/9/3
7. Yajurved 5/43
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9. Atharvaveda 3/12/9
10. Atharvaveda 3/13/5
11. Rigveda 10/186/3
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