



Vedas: A guide to Ecological Balance

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The word "ecology" was coined by German biologist Ernest Haeckel in 1866 to refer to the study of the relationship between living organisms and their surroundings. All the living organisms are part of the vast ecological web and human beings are also one of the species which form an integral part of nature. In the past, humans lived in harmony with nature. Their needs were few which were satisfied easily by nature. But as the development of civilization and industrialization took place, in particular, as a result of the adverse consequences of Scientific Revolution of 17th century, nature began to be viewed as a "passive object", and "exploitable resource" which can be tamed by human intellect. Humans were considered to be superior and powerful than nature. "Human beings are a part of the whole we call the Universe, a small region in time and space. They regard themselves, their ideas and their feelings as separate and apart from all the rest" (Albert Einstein). Humans, however, forget that nature does not need us to rule over it but runs itself very well without humans. The world of nature existed billions of years before the humans came on the scene. Human beings, in the name of "progress" recklessly exhausted natural resources and upset the ecological balance which led to drastic consequences. When radioactivity from nuclear power plants, toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes cause damage to ecology, our survival is threatened [1].

Recurring ecological disasters have raised the consciousness of humans to save the planet. We need to recognize our dependence on the great "life-producing matrix" in order to learn to reintegrate our

human systems of production and consumption into the ecological patterns by which nature sustains life. The life on earth is an interconnected web, and no privileged hierarchy of the human over nature justifying its domination exists. We need to think of human consciousness, not as separating us as a higher species from the rest of nature but rather as a gift to enable us to learn how to harmonize our needs with the natural world of which we are a dependent part. A Global movement founded on values of love, and care for nature, and respecting its diversity, in opposition to all forms of domination and violence against nature, must be promoted. The continuation of life on this planet demands a new understanding of our relationship with nature [2].

It is interesting to learn that our ancient Vedas so many centuries back had spread the message of environmental protection and ecological balance. Rig Veda venerates deities like Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Marut and Aditya, that are responsible for maintaining the requisite balance in the functioning of all entities of Nature whether the mountains, lakes, heaven, earth, forest, etc. There are many hymns seeking the blessings of the five basic elements namely Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Jal (water), Prithvi (earth) and Akash (sky). Rishis lived in the lap of nature and observed the forces of nature and passed on that knowledge through Vedas. When the seer of the house of Atri cries high to Agni, "O Agni, O priest of the offering, loose from us the chords (Ghosh 366) he is using not only a natural, but a richly-laden image. The hymns of the Vedas are addressed to personified powers of Nature. Agni in the

Vedas is presented in the double aspect of force and light—it defends from the powers of darkness and illuminates mind.

“Adhahyagnekratorbhadrasyadaksayarathirrtasyabrhatobabhuthasadhoh”(a Rik from the tenth Sukta of the fourth Mandala) which implies: Then indeed, O Agni ! thou become the charioteer of the happy will, the perfecting discernment, the Truth that is the vast.

In Vedic discipline, it is under the images of the Sun and its rays of Dawn and day and night and the life of man between the two poles of light and darkness that the Aryan seers represent the progressive illumination of the human soul. Surya, the Sun is the master of the supreme truth—truth of being, truth of knowledge, truth of process and act and movement and functioning. He is the creator or rather the manifester of all things. Air, rivers, mountains, trees, and so on, each has its own spirit. This is why it is important to live in harmony with nature. “Do not harm the environment; do not harm the water and the flora; earth is my mother, I am her son; may the waters remain fresh, do not harm the waters . . . Tranquillity be to the atmosphere, to the earth, to the waters, to the crops and vegetation” (Web). This Vedic prayer invokes divine intervention to bless and protect the environment. Vedic culture and Vedic scriptures reveal necessity for maintaining the balance of ecology. A verse from Rigveda states: “. . . the sky is like father, the earth like mother and the space as their son. The universe consisting of the three is like a family and any kind of damage done to any one of the three throws the universe out of the balance” (Web). In our vedas, there is a repeated mention of trees and their significance for life. Sages dwelt in forests, led simple and austere lives in search of spiritual perfection. In our ancient culture, forests have been worshipped as Aranayni, the goddess of forests. A verse from Rigveda says:

“Thousands and Hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life, then take up systematic planting of trees” (Web). Yajurveda too mentions about the necessity of planting trees for healthy survival on this planet. A verse from Yajurveda states: “Do not poison water and do not harm or cut the trees” (Web). It is sad that today trees are cut and deforestation is taking place at an alarming rate, all in the name of “development”. When we take more than we need of nature’s bounties, we are bound to suffer the ill consequences of the exploitation and oppression of the natural world. If, on one hand, nature stands for nurturance, on the other hand, it can be violent and destructive if humans go on exploiting it. It expresses its wrath through natural disasters and then the humans appear to be puny creatures in front of the forces of nature. So it is time to stop causing harm to ecology, learn something valuable from our Vedas and treat nature with profound respect to ensure our survival on this planet. This is necessary at this critical juncture.

REFERENCES

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