

Environmental Conservation in Indian Culture and Vedic Philosophy: A Contemporary Approach

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Abstract

Environment conservation, the most vibrant and relevant issue of contemporary modern life, is now calling for sincere attention and awareness among society, ensuring a prosperous and thriving future. The multiple issues raised with the development of humankind, along with the rapid increase of the establishment of industries, motor cars, scientific research, chemical fertilizers, and chemical and medicinal wastes, are harming humanity and proving hazardous to the environment. The prosperous Indian culture and the Vedic philosophy impart knowledge and highlight the interconnectedness and the divine importance of plants, vegetation, trees and the five elements comprising earth, water, fire, air, and the sky for the sustainable preservation of the environment and saving humanity. The amalgamation and assimilation of the principles of culture and philosophy in the way of life honours heritage while undertaking meaningful steps towards leading to a salubrious and prosperous world. However, the connection between ancient wisdom and contemporary efforts is still not strong. Thus, the current paper attempts to evaluate the contemporary approach to environmental conservation in Indian culture and Vedic Philosophy through the Vedic teachings and rituals that safeguard nature.

Key Words: Environment, Conservation, Sustainable, Indian Culture, Tradition, Heritage,

Vedic Philosophy, Interconnectedness, Contemporary.

In today's world, people must be sensitized and considerate of environmental concerns for a prosperous and healthy life. Now, it is long overdue for the world to be determined to enhance and conserve the environment, and there is a sparkling urge for society to change or foster their viewpoint regarding the consumption of materials inflicting the least harm to the

environment. Environmental conservation demands individual and community promotion and requisition of endorsing sustainable *modus operandi* like waste reduction, recycling of products, employing renewable energy sources, and encouraging local or domestic and eco-friendly products. In addition, fostering the methods and ideas and the importance of sustainable environmental protection would help save the environment through sustainable development. Today, the translation of Vedic philosophy into practical environmental practices by emphasizing a sustainable approach to nature would be able to conserve the environment.

In addition, the concern should acquire a space for an awakening of a noble desire for environmental purification. It is said that a spick and span and picturesque environment constitutes such a setting in which the thriving of sublime and benignant human qualities like concord, unison, and congeniality develop extemporaneously. Esteeming the classical and sacred text of our Indian culture, the Vedas play an important role in displaying the cultural traditions of Indian lifestyle for environmental conservation. Rigveda quotes that the combination of the seven sons of the corporeal nature, viz. mind, soul and five elements, creates the whole world. All these elements fulfil their duties specifically by the omnipotent creator. They are pervading the whole world through their knowledge, prevalence and conation. These five elements comprise the earth, water, fire, sky and air. For their smooth functioning, prosperousness, and conglomeration, society has always been conscious.

The Indian culture, religion, spirituality, philosophy, astrology, and Ayurveda all value plants and the environment the most. The Vedas consider these five elements of nature as celestial beings and pray to make the world prosperous, enhanced and upgraded. Vedas have greatly emphasised expressing immense respect for water, earth, fire, air, vegetation, sky, and space. Living life following the Vedic sages erases the problem of environmental imbalance. The

sage of Vedas prays to Mother Earth that O! Mother Earth, may the mountains be blanketed in snow and the forests be soothing to us, and may they be devoid of enemies. May the human be established as decayless, indomitable, and unscathed on the Lord Indra-protected kaleidoscopic mother Earth. Thus, this hymn develops, nurtures and ensues the national concept and the feeling of Vaisudaive Kutrubkam. Further, the Agnidev of Agnisukta (Rigveda) prays, O ligneous Agnidev! Rise high and protect our lives by bestowing nutritious food.

Vedic literature, specifically Rigveda and Atharvaveda, classifies plants as Vanaspati, Vanaspatya, Virudh, and Anushadhi. The word Vanaspati is relatively classified for bigger trees. Based on this, Sayana, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and commentator on Vedas, has commented on these as “*Vansaspatih vanasya palayita vriksh samuh*”. The word Virudh has appeared many times in Rigveda. According to Sayana, Virudh comprises all the medicine, vegetation and creeper. The Atharvaveda categorizes a plant as a goddess, which is corroborated by the goddess Mother Earth. Vedic texts have explained the plants and drugs well.

In Indian traditions, customs and rituals, Vanaspati, vanaspatya, virudh and aushadhi are all used, utilized and worshipped for protection. The importance and reverence of trees like Peepal, Tulsi, Neem, Banyan, Mango, Banana, etc. is evident in cultural traditions. The Ramcharit manas by Tulsidas also clearly displays the importance of trees in the Vedic era. In one picture, his worshipper is planting trees in panchvati. Although the Vedas have been alerting humanity about the serenity of Prithvi and Dhyu, Aushadhi, the present scenario still reveals agitation in the sky, space and Earth. The irony is that despite every kind of alertness inculcated in life through classical and sacred rich texts of Indian culture, society has failed to save the environment sustainably, and the environment is continuously polluting. Therefore, this is a matter of concern, and all kinds of efforts are being made to deal with this concern.

The Indian cultural traditions and customs place vegetation, water and trees on par. Upanayana and other rituals are performed on the banks of rivers, considering the water is pure. The Himalayas have given us cultural diversity along with biodiversity. The wisdom of sages and scholars has been inspired on the slopes of mountains and in the holy confluences of rivers. The great texts of Indian culture have been written; the merit of the scholars and sages has been inspired on the slopes of the mountains and in the holy confluences of rivers. India is opulent in vegetation, particularly in the Himalayas.

The Rigveda reputed Vandevi as Arayayani. “Aushadhiriti maatast Duoyo Deviroop Bruve”. Vandevi, the mother of all living beings and the one to enrich with wealth is cognizant of Annapurna. In Rigveda, pure water is the abode of nectar and medicine; when consumed in pure form, it is life-enhancing and life-nourishing. However, contemporary society greatly pollutes the water, causing multiple diseases. Thus, every living being should worship the rivers embedded with mountains and try to keep them pure always for a safe and healthy environment. Classical and traditional sacred texts edify that the one who gazes worships the sun daily and offers respect, the deity of water, bestows the power to cure the disease. The Indian cultural rituals and auspicious deeds opine the worship of water and all water sources. However, today, in the glare of modernity, people are leading in exploiting vegetation, which results in multiple changes in nature.

Earth is Mother in the Vedas, and the Vedas avow to preserve Mother Earth from pollution because Mother Earth produces vegetation and trees. Mother Earth, similar to the lotus flower and its stem, is devoid of flaws even after being mud-yielded. *Santiva surabhih syona kilalodhni payasvati*. (Atharvaveda, Kanda-12 Sukta- 1 Mantra 59) means this Earth is tranquil, bestows Amrit and is sumptuous. In Atharvaveda, Kanda-12 Sukta- 1 Mantra 6 quotes

Vishambhara Vasudhani Patishtha HiranyaVaksha Jagato Nivesshini means this Hiranyavaksha, Vishambhara, provides shelter to the world and is glorious and prosperous.

Furthermore, Veda phrases that tutelage and protect Mother Earth, like nurturing a cow, offer fame, prosperity, and offspring over and above, and increase the fertility of the Earth, coating nature with beautiful flora. Contemporary humans are subjected to selfishness by pruning down plants, forests, and vegetation. It is seen precisely on the one hand that the wildlife selflessly and properly adequately protects the forests. On the other hand, humans exploit valuable substances for their welfare to become wealthy and grandeur quickly. In the Vedas, it has been said that protecting the plants, trees, and vegetation would automatically save the Earth. Polluting the Earth would undoubtedly lead to the destruction of the entire world.

In the absence of vegetation in the world, life forms cannot survive because the process of respiration, photosynthesis in plants, and the reaction of oxygen production all flourish from vegetation only. The Earth is endowed with vegetation, which is not just a nutritional factor for all creatures but also holds all the wealth and minerals. The Earth bears all creatures in its womb, from which many medicines and vegetation are discovered and obtained. This Earth nourishes us with food, water, air, and vegetation, but to make agricultural land more fertile, humans are poisoning the prolificacy of the Earth with pesticides and chemicals released from industries, thereby inviting numerous diseases into the world.

The Nasadiya sukta of Rigveda posits that the nature of creation is the environment. Due to large-scale urbanization, the globe is encountering a scarcity of agricultural land, and years of deforestation are ensuing the dearth of fresh air and the scantiness of rainfall. The Hindu belief inspires worshipping trees and vegetation, quoting various gods residing in the tree's roots,

branches, leaves and trunks; hence, the Vedas place tree conservation above child. According to Hindu belief, the most pious Peepal tree provides oxygen to living beings for twenty-four hours with medicinal and spiritual significance. It is said in the Atharvaveda that humanity is sustained in the land full of vegetation because the mountain ranges covered with vegetation provide a comfortable life to all living beings.

Thus, the paper concludes with the message and idea of urgent need to change humanity's collective thought process for environmental conservation with a sustainable approach. It relates a serious tie-in between Indian traditional culture, classical texts, Vedic philosophy, and environmental conservation. The contemporary environmental situation suggests establishing a congruous existence with the environment. The Vedas, Puranas and others have left no stone unturned to impart the precious knowledge of sustainable development methods and the conservation of the environment, showcasing the importance of each element of Mother Earth. However, contemporary society is still tussling with environmental challenges, highlighting the individual and communal exigency to adopt sustainable practices. The Indian culture, tradition and sacred texts have played their role in conveying the priceless value and role of Mother Earth and its elements for human life, their interconnectedness, and the necessity of environmental conservation. Humanity must diligently adhere to classical principles, honour the path inculcated in classical texts, pursue sustainable development, and preserve the environment.

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