ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS
ENSHRINED IN THE
ANCIENT WISDOM

Prof. K. V. Suresh, Dr. T.G. Sreekumar

Environment plays a very significant role in human civilization. It is a matter of great pride to the Indians that no other jurisprudence in the world over has expressed so much consciousness towards environment as that of the Vedic Indians. One can see that ancient people belonging to various cultures had shown much concern to the environment in which they breathe in. Vedic literature, among other things is a collection of thoughts and ideas that enable us to formulate a fairly clear image of ancient man, his culture and environment. It is our prime duty to unearth the cultural past of Indian treasures, and to unveil the hidden forgotten pristine concepts of environment, ecological, folkloristic, Vedic and Post Vedic sources and traditions. The volume comprises of articles highlighting Ecological awareness in relation with the Upanishads, the Epics and Puranas, the Classical Literature, the Non- Vedic Traditions, Contemporary Issues etc., in Sanskrit, Hindi, Malayalam and English media.

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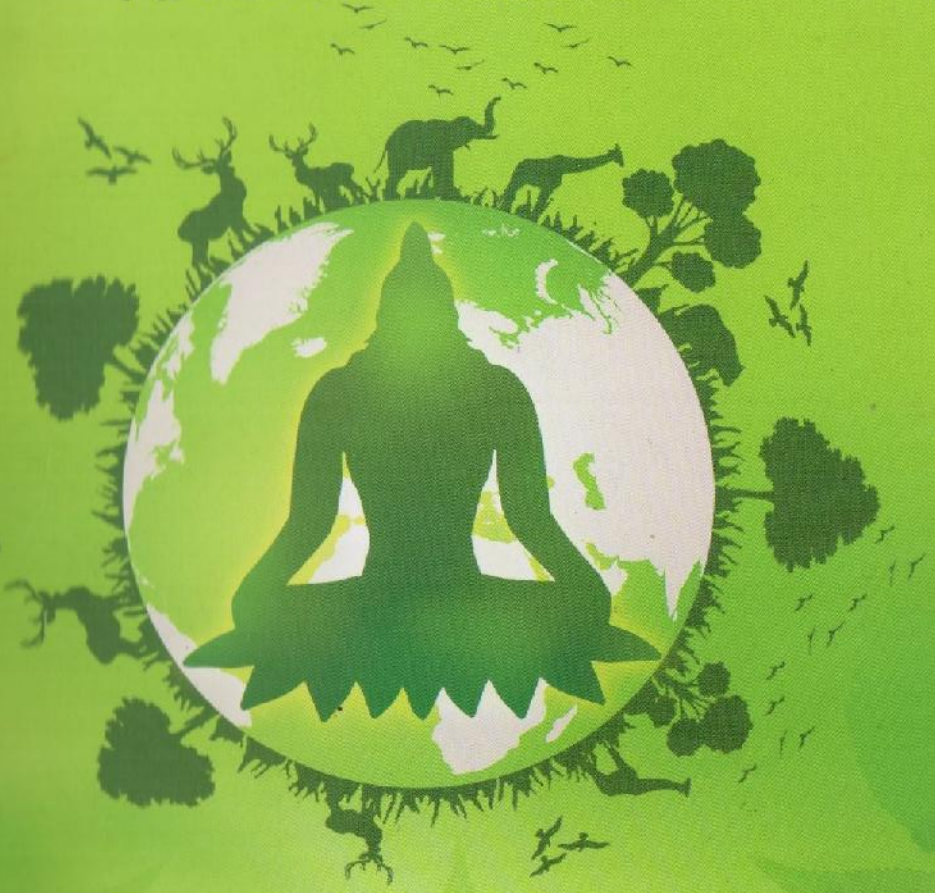

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ECOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON PAÑCABHŪTA AND HUMAN BODY

Prof. K. G. Kumary

The relationship between human beings and nature attracted the seers of the Vedic period in a manner incomparable to any other religious and cultural tradition. The Vedic seers contemplated over mysterious of the creation. Vedic seers and some western ideologists and Indian scholars were equally interested in the mystery of creation and the establishment of this universe. Through their deep thinking, guesses, conjectures and postulations they came to acknowledge that the material causes of this creations happened to the Panchabhūtas. They are earth (Pṛthivī), water (*āpaḥ)*, fire (tējaḥ), air (*vāyuḥ)* space *(ākāśa)*. The Ithereyopaniṣad also names them -there exist, the five elements-earth, air, space, water and fire. The Upaniṣads represent the profound thinking of early Indian seers to solve the problem of the origin, the nature and the destiny of human beings and of the universe.

These five mahabhutas are cosmic elements which create nature and sustain all forms of life and after death or decay, they absorb what was created earlier. They play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment, it should be noted that all those mahabhutas have been defined in the Vedic and later in the puraṇic literature.

Pṛthivī

Ṛgveda describes Pṛthivī as a divinity as well as one of the bhūtas. Earth is mother and upholder to all. It is identified with the Goddess Aditi, a mother and protector of the holy cosmic law. She is also regarded as a divingship full of life sustaining harvest along with the four other mahābhūtās. She sustains our universe. This relationship between earth and humans is superbly depicted by *Ṛṣyadharva* in *Pṛthivisūkta*.

Vāyuḥ

Vayu is the bond and the thread to keep the universe together. In Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad Vāyu is also linked to Prāna. Without Prāna nothing survives.

Ākāśa

The word ākāśa denotes space as mentioned in some translated literature. It is not a material or physical element. The word has appeared more in the Upaniṣads than in the Ṛgveda.

Āpaḥ

In vedas water was the first of the cosmic elements. The Rig-Veda hymns consider water as the reservoir of all curative medicines and of nectar. Water is the mother of all beings and the foundation of all in the universe.

Agni

Agni is considered in Vedas as the spring of our life because it creates life on earth. In later Vedic description Agni is known as the sun and light. Agni is regarded as the soul and also as the ruler and preserver of the world. It is almighty primordial nature is depicted as both non-existent and existent first cause and the first effect of creation.

In the philosophical thinking man and his body in Vaisesika philosophy besides the soul, there stands only the gross body. It is composed of earth. In old epic the qualities of five elements namely allowing space, movement, heat, fluidity and firmness. All these qualities are firmly established in the bodies of men, animals as well as plant, it follows there from that all the elements also must be present in them. This was the authoritative proof of the doctrine in the epic and it has remained so in the later period. Vaisesika decided for another doctrine that the human body is formed only out of earth[1].In Sāṅkhya view human body is constituted out of all the five elements, five elements are earth, water, light, air and space. The existences of all these qualities are very indistinguishable in the human body. The

existence of smell in the human body makes it necessary to assume earth as one constituent of the human body. The existing of other remaining elements would also be assumed in the same way earth is the main constituent of human body. Therefore the body was explained as consisting of earth only. There appeared other elements in human body. In Nyayadarsana body is the site of gesture, senses[2] and sentiments (चेष्टेन्द्रियार्थाश्रयः शरीरम्।). Sentiments compose pleasure and pain, are also located in the body nose, tongue, eye skin and ear are the sense produced from elements, nose is the same nature as earth, tongue as water, eye as light, skin as air, and ear as space[3] (घ्राणचक्षुस्त्वग् श्रोत्राणि इन्द्रियाणि भुतेभ्यः) Earth, water light, air, apace are the elements regarding the origin of the body and its function. Vaiśeṣika considerably participates in the views usually customary in Indian Philosophy. Medical doctrines of three saps are playing its part occasionally in the vaiśeṣika. Human body contains three juices or saps (*doṣa*), *vāda* (wind), *pitta* (bile) *śleṣma* (phlegam) on their right distribution and mutual relation or behavior depends the health of the body. We can see the idea of the sense organs arouse gradually out of the doctrine of the different life forces in the human body.

Ecology is the study of the relation of organism or groups of organism to their environment. This study involves consideration of the structure and function of various organism and groups of organism with in the environment. Thus ecology consists of the study of eco-systems. An eco-system is defined as the abiotic, physiochemical and biotic assemblage of the plants animals and microbes in which an ecological relationship is demonstrated. The characteristics of an eco-system include abiotic (non-living) and biotic (living) components, interaction of the community and the environment and exchange of materials (energy and nutrients) between non living and living parts. Energy flow and nutrient cycling involve interaction between the physic chemical environment and biotic assemblage thus contributing the keys to eco-system dynamics.

Environment is surrounding Social environment is people surrounding human being and their products, their property, their groups, their influence, their heritage such are the surrounding of almost any under taking socio economic environment represent a composite of numerous integrated and non-related items. This category represents a catch all group since it includes factors associated with the physical, chemical, biological or cultural environments. This category is the one most descriptive of human relationship and interactions.

Water of high quality is associated to human life and water of acceptable quality is essential for agricultural, industrial, domestic and commercial uses in addition most recreation is water based. Water pollution can be defined in a number of ways; the basic elements to most definitions are the concentrations of particular pollutants in water for sufficient periods of time to cause certain effects. If the effect are health related such as those caused by pathogenic bacterial intrusion, the term contamination is appropriate, effects that have to do with limitations on water availability due to certain water quality requirements related to usage can serve as a basic for defining a condition of water pollution. It refers to aesthetically displeasing effects created by oils, grease, or other floating materials. Water quality can be described in term of physical, chemical and bacteriological attributes. Bacteriological parameters include coliforms fecal coliforms specific pathogens and viruses. There are two main sources of water pollution; in surface water cause- namely points sources and non-point sources. The total coastal land in a stream represented by the sum of all point and non-point pallatant sources. Some of the major individual sources of water pollution are municipal waters, industrial waters, Agricultural waters solid erosion accidental spillage of oil and other hazardous substances acid mine, drainage mine, sediments and water craft waste.

The water pollution control provides only for controlling pollution caused by industries or communities. It provides only for prohibitive and restrictive measures and does not empower the regulating agencies to instruct development authorities to reduce pollution. The regarding agencies are development authorities to reduce pollution. The regulating agencies are responsible only for qualitative aspects of Pollution where as quantitative aspects are left out. This gives -very restricted scope for the developments of strategies and policies for achieving the objectives of the act. In short there are no provisions for controlling the developmental activities which may affect water quality. Control and state boards are unable execute actual projects required for the prevention and control of pollution granting consent letters and launching legal action against the defaulters hardly adequate.

Noise is one of most pervasive environmental problems. A recent report on noise indicates that between 80-100 million people are bothered by environmental noise on a daily basis and approximately 40 million are adversely affected in terms of health relative to the occupational environment, hearing loss primarily due to noise., it is considered to be the leading occupational disability .

Second is the quality of akasa or earth. Noise is by product of human activity, the area of exposure increases as function of population growth mobility and such and sound in the wrong place at the wrong time. Noise can also be defined as any sound that is undesirable because it interferes with speech and hearing, is intense enough to damage hearing or is otherwise annoying. The definition of noise as unwanted sound implies that it has an adverse effect on human being and their environment including land structures and domestic animals. Noise can also disturb natural wild life and ecological systems.

A variety of sources produces noise potentially hazardous to hearing depending upon the intensity and duration of exposure. These include transportation systems, construction equipment, industrial

activities and much common application. In addition speech communication interference problems are common in the environment and community annoyance is increasingly precipitated by noise generating activities, particularly in populated areas. We can see that noise may effect human health and land use integrity. Noise has effect on human physical and mental health. It is likely that the eco-system is also being affected. Chronic noise annoyance and distraction may lead to human error in handling and disposal of hazardous materials.

The air pollution increases the rock of stroke, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, chronic respiratory diseases and possibly lung cancer[4] outdoor air pollution can affect agricultural products and buildings scientists have established six common air pollutants dangerous to human health and environmental condition. Carbon monoxide, lead nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter and sulfurdioxide. These are referred to as criteria pollutants.

All form of life depend on water about seventy percentage of human body weight is water health problems can arose by ingesting contaminated water as well as through airborne exposures from materials than can outgas during showering, swimming, or cooking. It can also absorb through the skin. Contaminated water can lead to many disease waterbone diseases are infection diseases that are spread primarily through contaminated water. Diarrhea, hepatitis, cholera and typhoid are more common waterborne disease[5] .Several chemicals both human made and naturally existing dissolve in water, polluting the water and producing disease among those exposed. Sources of high-energy radiation also contribute to our quality of life. They include nuclear power which reduces the stresses to the environment form producing power, X-ray to improve diagnosis and monitoring of disease and radiation to control insects and preserve food.[6] High energy radiation is also harmful effects on human health.

A relation between environment and human health has been observed for centuries on air, water and places made a connection between disease and environmental conditions, especially in relation to water and seasons different disease occurred in different places. A primary goal in environmental epidemiology is to understand how human health problems may rise from environmental factors, health problem is related to environmental exposures. It may derive the multiple sources, they may enter the body through multiple routes and elements in the environment can change overtime because of constant interaction they are harmful. Understanding the source and nature of environmental contaminates ways people are exposed.

Endnotes:

1. *Vaiśeṣikasūtravṛtti* - 4 - 2- 4 page 66.
2. *Nyāyadarśana* of Goutama -1-1-11 page 20.
3. Ibid. 1-1-12 page 21.
4. *Environmental Epidemology principles and Methods* page 226.
5. Ibid. page 286.
6. Ibid. page 105.

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2. *Nyāyadarśana* of Goutama Satishchandravidyabhushana Newbharatiya Book corporation-Delhi-2
3. *Environmental epidemiology -principles and methods* Ray. M. Merrill Jones and Barrlett India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
4. *Controversial issues in Environmental Policy* Kent. E Porteny-Sage publications New Delhi.
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6. The *Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣad* Swami Sivananda.
7. *Upaniṣads* F.Maxmuller

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