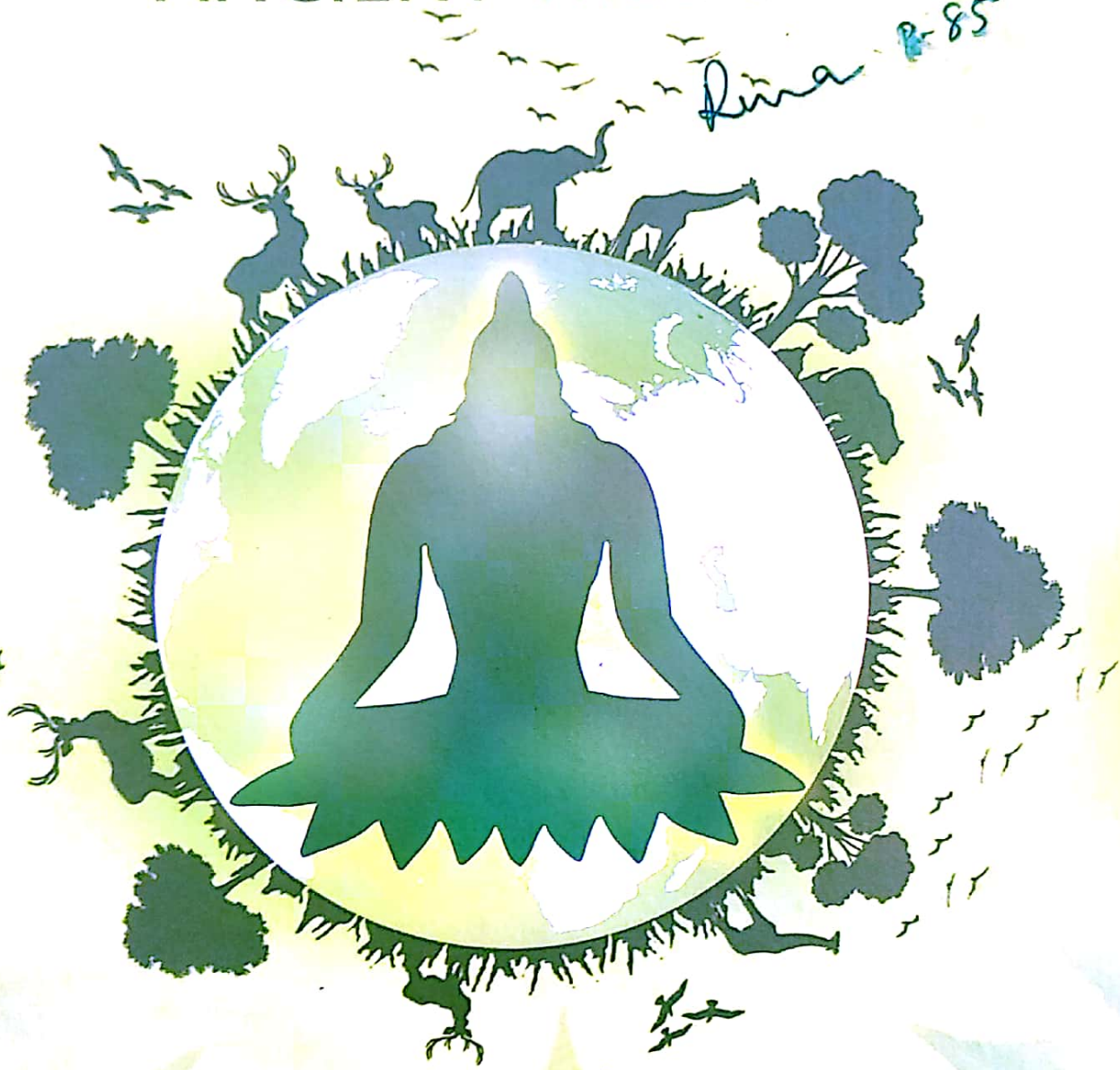


ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS ENSHRINED IN THE ANCIENT WISDOM



Divya B-85



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**Ecological Aswameem
Enshrined
in the Ancient Wisdom**

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ANCIENT CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENT

Prof. K. Remadevi Amma

The five great elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space), constitute the environment. The primal energy and our human body is composed of these. The five senses are related to the five elements. The human nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air and ears to space. This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our relationship with the natural world. For Hinduism, nature and the environment are not outside us. They are an inseparable part of our existence, and they constitute our very bodies. The vedas stress the need for protection and development of forests. Human beings have to safeguard the trees. The Vedas emphasize that the plants and trees are the treasures for generations. It is amazing that the people in Vedic times regarded nature and the environment in a holistic manner and revered each of its constituents and entities by carefully preserving them: '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 cut trees, because they remove pollution.'¹ 'Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere.'²

Ancient seers were fully acquainted with the importance of plants in one's life. Apart from many other things they are also necessary for maintaining ecological balance. As plants are required for healthy environment, thoughts for plant conservation were given prominence in ancient India. If those thoughts are practiced in modern era too, problems of environment pollution could easily be met. For promoting conservation of plants, our ancient seers and poets developed a unique idea of tree worship. As a token of this each tree is mentioned for each stars beginning with Aswathy.³ This aspect was given prominence in ancient India. Our thinkers were of the view that by doing so thoughts for conserving plants would develop among common citizens.

In ancient India, nature was considered to be an inseparable part of human existence. There is a relationship between plants and

human beings. Plants provide food, cloths, medicines, dwellings and many other things indispensable for survival. The Vedic seers have praised the forces of nature. The attitude towards nature reflected in our scriptures shows the inter-relationship between human being and elements of nature. Plants have played a vital role in the important gradient of nature. Plants have played a vital role in the development of human civilization since time immemorial. The person who observes prescribed rites in dedicating the plantation of trees, obtains all his desires and attains to endless felicity. Padmapurāṇa says that- A wise man who celebrates the tree festival according to the prescribed rites, obtains all his desires and an endless position. The trees alone make a sonless person have a son.

Besides Vedas, Upanisads and Purāṇas, other sacred texts of Hinduism contains a number of references of the worship of the nature. Our Sanskrit mantras daily remind us that our rivers, mountains, trees and animals and the earth deserve respect and dignity.

Trees and certain other plants are considered sacred and are worshipped regularly. This shows the importance of plants and trees. It is inauspicious to urinate or spit on a tree; even plucking flower leaf or a branch of a tree after sunset is a taboo. Planting of trees is religious activity. In Rgveda, the trees are regarded to have divine powers due to their medicinal properties. A full hymn having 23 verses is devoted in their praise.⁴

Hindu sages realised the importance of the forest and trees in reducing pollution and therefore people were advised not to cut trees or destroy forests. Rgveda says that one who destroy the tree will destroy him.⁵ To conserve the environment, Rgveda warns against polluting space and air, advising to be in harmony with environment and permitting forests grow as much as possible.

In Carakasamhitā also it is stated that the destruction of forest is equivalent to destruction of the state and the reforestation is an act of rebuilding the State and advancing its welfare. Mahābhārata there are various verses advising protection of forest. At one instance Bhīṣma Piṅmaha says to Yudhishtira, "If such trees as yield edible fruits be cut down in thy dominions"

Hindu philosophy puts great importance on the sustainability of environment since they realised that for a balanced growth of humanity, protection of our environment is important and said that people polluting the environment were cursed. Accordingly, a code of conduct (*Dharma*) was framed to define the ethical relationship with environment. Padmapurāṇa says that A person, who is engaged in killing creatures, polluting wells and ponds and tanks, and destroying gardens, certainly goes to hell.⁷ According to Matsya Purāṇa, planting of trees was a pious action. According to it, he, who plants even one tree, goes straight to the heaven and obtains the highest perfection.

Discussing the importance of planting trees, Padmapurāṇa says that it is not possible to know or to narrate the meritorious fruit earned by that man who plants auspicious trees all around. The fruit that a man would get by planting trees near water is a lakh crore times more than the fruit that he would get by planting them somewhere else. By planting even one tree a man does not fall from heaven. The Varāha Purāṇa Says, 'One who plants one Aśvath (Peepal), one Picunda (Neem), one Nyagrodha (Bar), ten flowering plants or creepers, two Dadima (pomegranates), two Matalinga (orange) and five mangos, does not go to hell.'⁸

All ancient Indian literature shows us the way to live in harmony with the nature and not to kill other creature and follow the policy of live and let live. Not only plantation was promoted in ancient times, felling or cutting of trees was highly discouraged and condemned. Atharvaveda says that the earth will destroy that person who disturbs the earth by felling trees. In the Purāṇas felling of tree is linked with calamities, disorders and sin, so that people would fear to destroy a tree. The Bhavisya Purāṇa says the felling of tree results in the destruction of the family of the person concerned. He also becomes dumb and suffers from diseases.⁹

Vāyupurāṇa says that whenever people on this earth become greedy and cut off the plants for self use they suffer a lot. It adds that various types of natural calamities occur whenever man starts felling trees. Vāmanapurāṇa says that if the trees, which protect all living

human beings. Plants provide food, cloths, medicines, dwellings and many other things indispensable for survival. The Vedic seers have praised the forces of nature. The attitude towards nature reflected in our scriptures shows the inter-relationship between human being and elements of nature. According to the Vedic concept, plants are an important gradient of nature. Plants have played a vital role in the development of human civilization since time immemorial. The person who observes prescribed rites in dedicating the plantation of trees, obtains all his desires and attains to endless felicity. Padmapurāṇa says that- A wise man who celebrates the tree festival according to the prescribed rites, obtains all his desires and an endless position. The trees alone make a sonless person have a son.

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beings like mother, are cut then the Earth becomes like a hell.¹⁰ Cutting a green plant for the sake of fuel is considered as sin. Varaha Purāna says that trees should never be cut. If even by mistake or unknowingly one cuts the tree grown in the garden of a city, he will certainly fall into hell after his death.¹¹ According to Matsya Mahāpurāna if the trees that give shelter to the travellers are cut by a person, he will fall into a hell called 'Asipatravana', wherein he will be tortured by the servants of God.¹² Manusmṛti says that if the plant parts are cut and utilized for self use then the amount of punishment depends upon the value of the plant part utilized.¹³

In Ancient India, protection and cleaning up of environment was the essence of vedic culture in Hindu philosophy forests, trees and wildlife protection held a place of special respect. Cutting green trees was prohibited and punishment was prescribed for such acts. The Vedas attach great importance to environmental protection and purity. They persist on safeguarding the habitation, proper afforestation and non-pollution. In fact, man is forbidden from exploiting nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognize that divinity prevails in all elements, including plants and animals. The Ṛṣis of the past have always had a great respect for nature. Ṛgveda says 'Thousands and hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life then take up systematic planting of trees.'

Endnotes:

1. Ṛgveda, 6:48:17

2. Yajurveda, 5:43

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|---------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 3. 1. Aśvati | : Kanjiram | (Strychnine) |
| 2. Bharanī | : Nelli | (Gooseberry) |
| 3. Kārtikā | : Atthi | (Ficus Glomerata) |
| 4. Rohiṇī | : Njaval | (Blackberry) |
| 5. Makayiram | : Karingali | (Black wood) |
| 6. Tiruvātira | : Karimaram | (Terminalia Alata) |
| 7. Puṇartam | : Mula | (Bamboo) |
| 8. Pūyam | : Arayal | (Pipal tree) |
| 9. Āilyam | : Narakam | (Lemon plant) |
| 10. Makam | : Peral | (Banyan) |
| 11. Pūram | : Plash | (Butea Frondosa) |
| 12. Utram | : Itthi | (Ficus Infectoria) |
| 13. Attam | : Ambazham | (Spondiasmangifera) |

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 14. Cittira | : Koovalam | (Aegla Marmelos) |
| 15. Coti | : Neermaruthu | (Tenninalia Arjuna) |
| 16. Viśākham | : Vayyankatha | (A Thorn Tree) |
| 17. Anizham | : Ilanji | (Silk- cotton tree) |
| 18. Ṭṛkkeṭṭā | : Vetti | (Useless tree - pazhumaram) |
| 19. Mūlam | : Payin | (Pine) |
| 20. Pūrādm | : Vanchi | (A Jungle tree) |
| 21. Utrādam | : Plavu | (Jack tree) |
| 22. Tiruvoṇam | : Erukku | (Calotris Gigantea) |
| 23. Avitṭam | : Vahni | (Plumbago - zeylanica) |
| 24. Catayam | : Kadambu | (Eugenia Racemosa) |
| 25. Pīruruṭṭāti | : Thenmavu | (Mango tree) |
| 26. Utraṭṭāti | : Karimpana | (Palm) |
| 27. Revati. | : Irippa | (Bassia Longifolia) |

4. Ṛgveda 10.97

5. Ṛgveda 06.48

6. Mahaābhārata, śānti Parva, Sec 89, P 194

7. Padmapurāna, Bhūmikhāṇḍa 96.7-8

8. Aśvatthaamekam picuṇḍamekam nyagrodhamekam daspuṣpajātiḥ
Dve dve tatha dadimāmatulinge pañcamravāpi narakam na yāti.

9. 'Mūlacchedena viprendra kulapato bhavedanu
Vṛkṣācchedi bhavetmṛka adhityadhisatam bhajet'.

10. 'Cedanam vṛkṣajātīnām dvitīyam narakam smṛtam'.

11. 'Nagaropavane vṛkṣān pramadātthi chinatti yaḥ
Sā gacchennarakam nama jṛm̄bhanam raudradarśanam'

12. 'Taruśca chedayedyastu vṛkṣān chayamuṣitalān
Asipatravane ghore pidyate yamkiṅkaraiḥ'

13. 'Vanaspatīnaḥ sarveṣāmupabhogo yathā yathā
Tathā tathā damaḥ kāryo himsāyāmiti dhārana'.

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