

Plant Conservation in Ancient India

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Abstract

In ancient India, natural resources were considered to be an eternal part of human life. The Vedic seers have admired the energy of nature. The attitude towards nature revealed in our scriptures. They show the inter-relationship between human being and natural resources. According to the Vedic literature, plants are essential elements of nature. The existence of this living being without plant is not possible. Entire ecosystem depends on plants so they have played a fundamental role in development of living being. Plants are the pillar of the whole ecosystem, because plants provide food, cloths, medicines, and many other things crucial for survival. Plants have been integral part of human being. Ancient seers were fully aware with the importance of plants in one's life. For maintaining ecological balance, plants conservation is most important for ancient time and forever. For this they practiced in different manners, as they worshiped plant as a God for their conservation. It's a unique idea to protect them by worshiping. Our seers thought that by doing worship of tree, their conservation would do easily. We can say without an exaggeration that tree worship has occupied an important place in the religious emotions of Indian people. In Sanskrit Literature, one can easily notice that trees were worshiped as a God. For conserving plants, seers established the fact that plants were quite valuable for mankind from medicinal point of view. According to ancient seers plants were sources for medicines. Therefore, both forest and medicinal plants were brought into religious categories so that they could be saved from the destructive activities of human being. In this paper I want to draw attention to our ancient knowledge and practice of environment conservation which may be become helpful today

Objective of the Study:

- To explain the importance of plant found in Vedic literature.
- To explain scope of implementing the Vedic knowledge to protect plants.

Ancient concept to protect environment:

The present day universal concerns for supportable development and conservation of natural resources are the important for human being. It is motivating to know that the Vedas have several references in them on environment preservation, natural balance, climate cycles, rainfall phenomena, water cycle etc. indicates that high level of awareness of seers and people of that time better than today. The Vedas described the worship of God in natural components like Air, Water, fire, wind etc. By worshiping them they try to express gratefulness for existence of creatures. The Vedic prayers requested to divine engrossment to bliss and protect the environment. The people in Vedic times regarded environment in a holistic manner and valued each of its elements by carefully preserving them.

An ancient tradition always teaches us to protect our nature because nature always gives us all necessary things for our existence. Without natural resources our life is not possible although without human being nature become safer, not only non living but also other living being apart from man, exist without human being on the earth but human being can't exist without all other living and non-living natural components.

Worship of trees:

Tree plantation in our country is a tradition with psychological aspects in old days. From childhood we are taught that we should worship trees means we should plant it, give it water regularly like worship of God daily. Give manure & digging to grow it and protect it, these all activities are involved in worship of plants.

Most important thing is that according to human psychology if a person worships of God or a tree or any other object than he/she never think to damage it. By heart he/she tries to protect it anyhow. He/she never cut down it, it is taught to us by our traditions. In ancient time people were using natural resources with proper maintenance of them, they balanced it. They always worship natural elements like earth, water, fire, air, and light as God/Goddesses which are giving us life. So, we can say that thoughts for plant conservation were well discussed in ancient Indian literature. Seers touched each and every aspect to conserve and preserve trees for ensuring

ecosystem balance. Today we can also implement such types of steps in our life and conserve our mother Earth and by doing this we can save ourselves from natural as well as manmade calamities like COVID-19.

Our seers thought that by doing worship of tree, their conservation would do easily. We can say without an exaggeration that tree worship has occupied an important place in the religious emotions of Indian people. In Vedic Literature, one can easily notice that trees were worshiped as a God:

Namō vṛkṣēbhyō harikeśēbhyaḥ (YajurVedā(YV.)16-17)

Namō vanyāya ca (YV.)16-34)

As well as a person who was doing plantation and protect trees were also worshiped as a God:

Vanānām patayē namḥ (YV.)16-18)

Vṛkṣaṇām patayē namḥ (YV.)16-19)

Vedic seers knew the necessary elements of plantation and uses or benefits of plant for human being especially for better health which are protecting us from diseases :

Trāyantāmimṃ puruṣam yakṣmāddēvēṣitādadhi

Vāsām dyauspitā pṛthivī mātā samudrō mūlaṃ vīrudhaṃ babhūva

(AtharvaVedā(AV.) 8-7-2)

Vedic seers had offered respects to the trees saying that it is not possible to imagine life without trees. One should have respect and attachment towards all eatables, grains, forests, medicinal herbs, trees and vegetation. The *vṛkṣam* (tree) is the symbol of life and growth. It stands for eternity and selfless wellbeing. Trees are considered as *devatās* (deities). *Devatā* means one who keeps giving incessantly. Trees have always been beneficial to us and they possess the divine qualities that qualify them to be addressed as *devatās*. *Trees* in Indian mythology and folklore are widely considered as sacred and worshipped across the country for their benevolence. Indians believed that certain trees are the abode of Gods and Goddesses. The worship of trees in India can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilization, as clearly indicated in the Indus Valley seals. The hymns of the Vedas also contain references to such sacred trees and plants on account of their being associated with certain deities and also because of their potent medicinal properties (Dymock, Warden and Hooper, 1893, pp. 5-6).

Protection of trees/forests:

Not only plantation was encouraged in ancient time but cutting of trees was extremely discouraged and condemned. Scriptures have also prescribed punishments and penitence for cutting trees. This thought developed only to conserve and preserve plants. Vedic seers explained that the Earth will destroy that person who cutting the trees and it is linked with natural calamities, sin, disorders etc. so that human being would fear to destroy trees. Our scriptures have prescribed various penalties and atonement for cutting trees. These thoughts developed only to protect and save plants.

In a Vedic mantra seer said that:

Mā'pō auṣadhīḥ hiṃsī (YV.)6-22)

“Don't spoil water and medicinal plants.”

Abhiśōcīḥ mā vanaspatīn (YV.)11-45)

“Don't disturb or destruct trees.”

Mā kākambīramudvahō vanaspatimaśastūrvi hi nīnaśaḥ

(RugVedā.(RV)6-48-17)

“Don't dig the plants like banyan trees which are shelter for crow (birds) and animals and stay away from wrong action towards plants.”

For protection of forests seer said that -

Na vā arāṇyānihantyanyaścēnnārmigacchati

Svādōḥ falasya jagdhvāya yathākāmṇ ni pdyatē (RV)10-146-5)

“People who love forest never cut down them, others also didn't do that. Human being consumes the best fruits and lives with the best quality of life.”

According to Manusmṛiti -

Vanaspatīnām sarvēśāmupabhōgaṃ yathā yathā

Tathā tathā damḥ kāryō hiṃsāyāmiti dhāraṇā (Manusmṛiti- 8-285)

” According to the qualities and uses of plant like the best, better and good, a person who cut down the tree also punishable in view of these uses of plants.”

Apart from this at the time of a Vedic sacrifice in the Vedic society it was the custom to cut a branch of these sacred trees and bring it home with proper ceremony.

Tree Plantation & Conservation lessen the impacts of COVID-19:

In these days of pandemic, we should aware people about importance of different types of medicinal plant which can protect us from diseases like COVID-19 & others. There are many traditional plants which are useful to increase our immune system. In our country we traditionally use many plants like tulsi, ginger, black paper, fudina, lemon and many more.

We should aware people about value of our natural resources in our daily life and protect them as a routine of our life. We must not forget to value of them & protect them as possible as we can. If tree plantation is increase and especially medicinal tree plantation is increase, we will get benefit for environmental balance and can use for our health also. If our environment is balanced than we become more compatible to fight with calamities like COVID-19 & others.

The plant is the pillar of entire ecosystem so without plant we, human being and other living organism can't exist, but on the contrary without human being all other living being can exist happily, fearlessly, and sustain for long time too. If a person indulges in activity like tree plantation, he or she concentrate in it and feel happy, this mental condition create peaceful state of mind and it improves our overall health mental as well as physical. Person involve in interesting activities than stress, anxiety, fear high per tension will be disappeared. If our mind is in a peaceful state than healthy mind holds healthy body, it also busts immunity.

Conclusion:

So the Vedas put emphasis on that the plants and trees are the assets for generations. It is amazing that the people in Vedic times considered nature and the environment in a divine manner and revered each of its elements and entities by carefully protecting them. The Indian culture is mainly based on forests. The various religious beliefs related to the nature has been a beneficial tool for conservation of bio diversity not only in ancient time but it holds a promising greenery in present scenario of technological development and habitat loss due to destruction of ecosystems. In ancient India, we find a number of trees and plants of therapeutic value. Khadira, Nyagrodha, Bilva, Neem, and many more were also worshipped in the Vedic period due to this reason. This way, we find that the trees are intimately associated with the life of all living being. Hence, it can be said that the trees played a vital role to provide all type of pleasures to the human beings in various occasions. However, without the help of trees no human-being will live in the society in a healthy atmosphere. Therefore, it can be said that in a true sense, the trees are the real life and soul of human being.

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