

The Vedic View of the Environment

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Abstract: *The Vedas provide a holistic view of the environment by acknowledging nature as interconnected aspect of human existence and cosmic order. The earth, water, air, fire, space, the sun, the moon, rivers, mountains, forests, plants etc. are all considered sacred manifestations of the divine. The interdependence of human beings and the environment is emphasised throughout the Vedas. They teach that maintaining ecological balance and the using resources responsibly are essential to society's well-being. Numerous hymns praise the beauty, charity and life sustaining qualities of nature. Such expressions demonstrate a strong sense of environmental awareness and ethical obligations. The Vedic perspective on the environment is based on the concept of Rta. It represents the Universal order that upholds balance in both nature and society. Living in accordance with the principle promotes the relationship between human beings and the environment.*

Keywords: Vedas, Environment, Rta, Nature.

Introduction:

The environment seems as the basis for all life since it provides the materials required for living beings to survive and thrive. This holistic view is most profoundly expressed in India's oldest surviving literary and spiritual heritage, the Vedas. The universe is viewed as an interrelated totality under the principle of harmony in the comprehensive worldwide found in the Vedas. Rivers are recognised as life giving forces, trees and woods are adored as sources of prosperity and the sun, wind, fire and rain are celebrated as fundamental cosmic powers. These viewpoints show that the Vedic sages highlighted necessity to maintain ecological balance and acknowledged the interdependence of all living species. The Vedic idea of Rta or the cosmic order emphasises how crucial it is to preserve balance between nature and humanity. Instead of undermining this universal order, human actions are supposed to uphold it. Numerous hymns found in the *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* promote appreciation for the natural world, the sustainable use of natural resources, and the fulfilment of obligations that maintain environmental equilibrium. These teachings demonstrate how deeply ingrained environmental preservation was in Vedic culture and ideology.

This paper examines how nature is portrayed in the Vedas and the tenets that guide human interaction with the natural world in order to understand the Vedic perspective on the environment.

Concept of Environment in the Vedas:

Ecology is the study of the interactions between all living beings and their environments. It investigates the natural cycles of both living and non-living organisms. A cycle refers to the periodic repetition of natural processes. Through the balanced exchange of things, the living and non-living worlds continue to interact. Wherever this equilibrium is disturbed, the imbalance is addressed in terms of time, place and space. This universal concept is known as Rta by the Vedic people. It serves as the controlling and sustaining force of nature. The *Rgveda* portrays Rta as the concept that keeps the sun in the sky.¹ The Vedic seers believed that Rta is the primary cause of the universe. The sky, fire, earth, air and other

elements are created by it. The *Rgveda* states that *Tapah* is the source of both *Rta* and *Satya*. After that, *Rātri* and Watery fluid are created.² This statement suggests that *Rta* comes into existence first. It gives rise to all gross objects while remaining stable. Being omnipresent and omniscient it affects every aspect of the universe. Everything in the cosmos exists in accordance with order. Whenever this order is disturbed, chaos results, and phenomena cease to obey the law of *Rta*. The *Rgveda* mentions that the gods follow *Rta* and also born from it. *Agni* is born of *Rta* (*Rgveda*. I.189.6), sun is born of *Rta* (*Rgveda*.IV.40.5), *Brhaspati* is born of *Rta* (*Rgveda*.III.54.13). These references demonstrate that *Rta* is the creative force that gives origin to gods.

As the principle of nature, *Rta* includes all the constituents of the universe, such as the sun, the moon, the earth, the air and other elements. The *Rgveda* depicts the rising sun as the pure and lovely face of *Rta*.³ Depending on the season, nature takes on various forms. *Rta* is connected to these seasonal manifestations. As a result, the seasons are referred to as *ṛtus*. The *Rgveda* shows the years as the wheel of *Rta* with twelve spokes. It moves continuously and eternally.⁴ Everything that living beings needs to survive is provided by nature. A person is considered righteous if they employ these gifts appropriately. On the other hand, disobeying the natural order is seen as immoral and punishable. The melodious voices of birds, the wonderful aroma of flowers blooming in gardens and lawns, and the soothing evening wind all inspire humans to enjoy the calm and beauty of nature via their senses. These are nature's treasures.⁵

The people of Vedic age have a strong regard for the mountains. They live in the mountain valleys as excellent locations for settlement and lived in high mountains regions throughout the early Vedic era. They describe these valleys as ancient, remote and abundant in flora and fauna. The *Rgveda* states that they make heaven and earth hear them with their voices.⁶ Rivers have regarded by the Vedic people as one of the most important geographical elements. They build their communities along riverbanks because rivers provide the necessary conditions for life. Rivers are essential to the survival of all living beings including humans, animals and plants. As a result, they play a major role in the Vedic ecological perspective throughout the years. There is an abundance of water flowing from the perennial rivers. Such rivers are a priceless for those who live in rather arid environments. Consequently, rivers are frequently praised in the *Rgveda*, which also views water as a sacred purifier. The conversation between *Viśvamitra* and the rivers in *Rgveda* III.33 identified with *Vipāśā* and *Śutudrī* convey both sense of ingenuity and reverence for the natural world. The hymn also describes how water is continuously circulated through evaporation, cloud formation, rainfall percolation and the river formation. They evaporate again and flow into the seas.⁷

Every holy forest has a ruling deity who acts as its protector across India. In the past, woodlands are typically considered as sacred places. Despite the different regions have different names for those. They are most often represented as female divinities. Before entering into the forest, people worship the deity to ask for her protection and permission. The fate of those who disregard these customs is described in a number of folktales. Hunters, gatherers, and woodcutters who disregard the deity are sentenced to harsh punishment in the form of attacks by elephants, tigers, snakes or other natural hazards. On the other hand, individuals who follow the prescribed rituals are safe and prosperous. Seasonal factors, regional customs and the nature of the materials being gathered all influence the necessary procedures. Grasses, leaves, honey, medicinal plants, edible fruits and seeds, wax, oils, gums, fish and animals are some of these resources. The traditional code dictates that all resources be har-

vested sparingly and with regard for nature. It also highlights the importance of leaving adequate resources for renewal and conservation. This principle serves as the moral code that controls ecosystem of the forest.⁸

By personifying the forest as *Āraṇyānī*, the Vedic tradition emphasizes the value of the environment. This illustration offers a concrete way to convey expression of the complex and interrelated nature of the forest ecosystem. The forest is portrayed in the hymn dedicated to *Āraṇyānī* as both generative and powerful. In addition to providing food, shelter and other necessities, it safeguards the natural order. The hymn teaches that people shouldn't overuse the forest. They should treat it with respect and appreciation. This viewpoint promotes a peaceful coexistence of human society and the natural world. *Āraṇyānī* is associated with a woman of a household, who ensures the stability and prosperity of the family through her wisdom and fortitude. In a similar way, the forest sustains the survival of all living beings and preserves ecological balance. As a result, the hymn presents environmental preservation as a shared obligation founded on appreciation, respect and sustainable cohabitation.⁹

The environment is portrayed in the Vedas as vital sacred aspect of human existence. The sun, fire, water, wind, rivers, mountains, trees, earth and other natural elements are honoured as divine forces. These natural forces continue to have a close relationship with a human life. The intimate connection between people and the environment is reflected in this devotion. Therefore, the Vedic worldview emphasises harmony with nature and respect for it.¹⁰

Conclusion:

The Vedic perspective of the environment provides a holistic and highly spiritual knowledge of the interaction between humans and nature. The sacredness of the Vedas, the natural environment and interconnectedness of all living and non-living entities are emphasised in the Vedas. Every component of creation, earth, water, fire, air and space plays a vital role in maintaining the cosmic order and manifestation of the divine. This idea of *Rta* controls harmony, balance and order in the universe. Human beings are supposed to live in accordance with this cosmic order by righteous behaviour, temperance and respect for it. In conclusion, the Vedic perspective on the environment offers a holistic and moral vision of nature. It acknowledges the interdependence of all living things and the natural world. It promotes harmony, balance and responsible use of actual resources. Its ecological lessons are still applicable today. The Vedic heritage is still guiding people toward a healthier and more sustainable future.

Endnotes

1. *Rgveda*, X.85.1
2. *ṛtaṁ ca satyaṁ ca cābhiddhātāpasō'dhyaṇyayata tataḥ rātryajāyata tataḥ samudro arṇavaḥ*// *Ibid.*, X.190.1
3. *idam tyatpurutaṁ purastājyotistamaso vayunāvadasthāt/nūnaṁ divo duhetaro vibhātīrgātum kṛṇavannuṣaso janāya*// *Ibid.*, VI.51.1
4. *dvādaśāraṁ nahi tajjarāya varvarti cakraṁ pari dyāmṛtasya/ā putrā agne mithunāso atra sapta śatani viṁśatisca tasthuḥ*// *Ibid.*, I.164.11
5. *ṛtasya hi śrudhaḥ santi pūrvīrtasyarṛtasya dhītirvrjināni hanta/ṛtasya śloko badhirātatarā karnā budhānaḥ śucamāna āyoḥ*// *Ibid.*, IV.23.8
6. *Ibid.*, X.94.123
7. *pra parvatānāmuśatī upasthādaśceiva viṣite hāsamāne/gāveva śuvre mātārā rihāṇe vipāṭchutudrī payasā javete*// *Ibid.*, III.33.1
8. *Human Ecology in the Vedas*, pp.262-263.
9. *Ibid.*, p.267.

10. *Change and Habit*, p.171.

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