

Chief Editor

Dr. A. Singaraj, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Editor

Mrs.M.Josephin Immaculate Ruba

EDITORIAL ADVISORS

1. Prof. Dr.Said I.Shalaby, MD,Ph.D.
Professor & Vice President
Tropical Medicine,
Hepatology & Gastroenterology, NRC,
Academy of Scientific Research and Technology,
Cairo, Egypt.
2. Dr. Mussie T. Tessema,
Associate Professor,
Department of Business Administration,
Winona State University, MN,
United States of America,
3. Dr. Mengsteab Tesfayohannes,
Associate Professor,
Department of Management,
Sigmund Weis School of Business,
Susquehanna University,
Selinsgrove, PENN,
United States of America,
4. Dr. Ahmed Sebihi
Associate Professor
Islamic Culture and Social Sciences (ICSS),
Department of General Education (DGE),
Gulf Medical University (GMU),
UAE.
5. Dr. Anne Maduka,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Economics,
Anambra State University,
Igbariam Campus,
Nigeria.
6. Dr. D.K. Awasthi, M.Sc., Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry,
Sri J.N.P.G. College,
Charbagh, Lucknow,
Uttar Pradesh. India
7. Dr. Tirtharaj Bhoi, M.A, Ph.D,
Assistant Professor,
School of Social Science,
University of Jammu,
Jammu, Jammu & Kashmir, India.
8. Dr. Pradeep Kumar Choudhury,
Assistant Professor,
Institute for Studies in Industrial Development,
An ICSSR Research Institute,
New Delhi- 110070, India.
9. Dr. Gyanendra Awasthi, M.Sc., Ph.D., NET
Associate Professor & HOD
Department of Biochemistry,
Dolphin (PG) Institute of Biomedical & Natural
Sciences,
Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India.
10. Dr. C. Satapathy,
Director,
Amity Humanity Foundation,
Amity Business School, Bhubaneswar,
Orissa, India.



ISSN (Online): 2455-7838

SJIF Impact Factor (2017): 5.705

EPRA International Journal of

Research & Development (IJRD)

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed
International Online Journal

Volume: 3, Issue:10, October 2018



Published By :
EPRA Journals

CC License





ENVIRONMENT AND ANCIENT INDIA

Sumanta Ghosh

M.A, Former Student, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

Environment is a broad term which encompasses all natural things that surrounds us and is essential to sustain life such as air (atmosphere), water (hydrosphere), land (lithosphere), flora, fauna etc, and environmental history is the study of human interaction with the natural world. ancient Indian civilization also knows the importance of nature. Ancient Indian literatures are replete with references to different aspects of environment, its management, preservation and protection. The Vedic, Epics, Puranic, Jain and Buddhist traditions established the principles of ecological harmony centuries ago. The foreign travellers like Megasthenes, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang etc., who came to India at different times refers to various aspects of environment in their eye witness itineraries.

KEYWORDS: *environment, elements, living beings, forest, ecology, nature*

INTRODUCTION

Environment played an important role in the process of historical developments. Good or bad condition of any period or of any country primarily linked with the favourable or unfavourable environmental condition of that period or country. The history of nations and evolution of culture and civilization have greatly been influenced by environmental features because human society, like any other living organism, tries to adopt itself to natural environments. Nature not only provided man with shelter and food but also played a significant role in the making of mankind. The writing of the Indian history in proper perspective is incomplete without adequate knowledge of environment, geography, ecology and physical features through which it passed. The study of early Indian environmental history, in fact, is highly rewarding to the present generations.

The conception of the environment changes in the course of this evolution. Ecological conditions which may appear hostile to man at one stage of this evolution may prove to be attractive and inviting at another stage. The hunter and food gatherer armed only with stone tools preferred to live on the edge of forests near the plains or in open river valley by cutting the trees and developed it into fertile soil. With the rainfall

or by irrigation man started to produce the food grains. In this way man become civilized and such civilizations and empires were very much dependent on their agrarian base.

ENVIRONMENT AND ANCIENT INDIAN

The environmental history of India can be traced back to the proto-historic Harappan culture or the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3rd millennium BCE), originated in the north-western part of the Indian sub-continent which is considered the first civilization of India. From the excavated materials it is evident that it was an urban civilization and flourished mostly around cities and towns. The people of the Indus valley civilization had given emphasis on sanitation and environment. It is very interesting to mention here that during the ancient period when other civilizations were constructing buildings and monuments for their kings, gods and goddesses, the Indus people were constructing magnificent houses and buildings for their own living purposes. The house construction materials, properly planned houses, fortified citadels and public buildings, covered drainage system, wide streets, great granaries, public bath and most sophisticated urban water supply are some of the unique features of the Harappan culture which clearly suggest that the

Harappans were not only well acquainted with hygiene and sanitation but also gave emphasis for its maintenance and management. They had world's first tidal dockyard at Lothal in Gujarat. The Indus valley civilization flourished because of a conducive environment, the river Indus and the alluvial fertile soil brought up by the waters of Indus became the principal driving force for the development of this civilization.

In ancient India, protection and cleaning up of environment was the essence of Vedic (1500–500 BC) culture. The conservation of environment formed an ardent article of faith, reflected in the daily lives of the people and also enshrined in myth folklore, art, culture and religion. In Hindu theology forests, trees and wildlife protection held a place of special reverence. Cutting green trees was prohibited and punishment was prescribed for such acts. Under the Hindu culture moral injunctions acted as guidelines towards environmental preservation and conservation. For instance, to maintain the quality of water and to avoid the water pollution, Manu (In Hindu tradition, Manu is the name of accorded to a progenitor of humanity being the first human to appear in the world in an epoch after universal destruction) advised not to contaminate water by urine, stool or coughing, un-pious objects, blood and poison. Yagyavalkya Smriti (a Hindu text of tradition of 300 to 500 AD) and Charak Samhita (medical Science book of 900 BC - 600 BC) give many instructions for the use of water for maintaining its purity. A verse from Rig-Veda says, "Thousands and hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life then take up systematic planting of trees." The term pollution did not exist at that time but they call it poisoning of environment. They believe on five essential elements e.g., Kshiti, Ap, Teja, Marut, Byom (i.e., soil, water, energy, air and void, the last one being the empty space in the universe). Bodies of plants, animals and human beings are created out of those five elements. After their death, their bodies are disintegrated and converted back to those elements.

The epics like the Ramayana (c.1000/900 BCE) and the Mahabharata (c.900/800 BCE) at various places refers to environment. Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana and Veda Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata had their ashramas in the forests which allow concentration and inspired them to write such great epics. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are replete with references to forests, rivers and mountains. In Valmiki Ramayana, two Sanskrit words viz., "Vana" and "Aranya" are used while referring to forests. The term "Vana" is used to denote sub-forestation, a kind of cultivated forest with a clustering of desirable plants, conserved for a purpose. As the legend goes, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had settled down in Chitrakoota forest because of its rich biodiversity. Strangely, Lanka supported two kinds of

forests—the natural woodland of its own and the cultivated forest of the Royal Majesty. The Indian forests are enigmatically known and described as the land of "glowing" also rich in medicinal plants. The narrative style of all these forest types is supposed to evoke four predominant sentiments or "rasas" (i.e. moods) such as "Santa" (tranquility), "Madhura" (sweetness), "Roudra" (fury) and "Bibhatsa" (repulsion). The Puranas had also great concern for environment, flora and fauna. They conceptualized the trees to feel happiness and sorrow and attributed auspiciousness to plantation of trees. A tree is said to render to a sonless person the virtue of having a son. In the Padma Purana, it is mentioned that trees like, pipal, bel, ber, neem, etc., are the abode of god and are not to be cut which indicate that trees were sanctified by the people who through religion tried to conserve vegetation and forest.

The principles of Jainism and Buddhism propagated by their respective founders i.e. Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha during the six century BCE are closely related to environmental issues. Both Jainism and Buddhism advocated a gentle and non-aggressive attitude towards nature and prudent use of resources. Jain environmentalism is largely based on spirituality, non violence and equality. Jainism is a religion of kindness. It aims at the welfare of all living beings. Non-violence (Ahimsa) is one of the principal doctrines of Jainism that deals with the restriction of not harming living beings. Each life form that is plant or animal has an inherent worth and each must be respected. Jain followers can actively use their knowledge and understanding of practicing non-violence principles in meeting the present ecological needs. Jainism presents a giant view that advocates the interrelatedness of all forms of life (Jiva). Its ethics and principle, which is largely based on obligations, can easily be extended to earth ethics. It explicitly emphasized that every Jiva must be respected. It confers that every human beings which is highly advance creature of earth have a great moral and ethical responsibility with the rest of the universe in their shared dealings and associations. Jain Teerthankar Mahavira says, "kill no creature" and even avoid accidental injury to all living beings. Jains wear nose masks to stop inhalation of microbes. The vivid description is found in Jain scriptures as how plants and other living being could be saved. These are many important principles laid down by Jainism to avoid any type of harm to water, air, fire, and other forms of life. It also asserts on minimizing such evils like sound pollution, and thus helps to maintain the balance between community and ecology.

Lord Buddha's compassionate nature and the principle of adaptability teach us how to adjust and cope with the environment. Buddha, as an enlightened being saw the interdependence of nature and advocated

that there should be a proper harmony between human beings and nature. In the Jatakas, Buddha is symbolized with different trees; therefore, trees are regarded as objects of worship in Buddhism. It appears that Buddhism adopted the concept of tree worship from the contemporary Hindu (Vedic) religion to represent Buddha through symbolic trees. His holiness Dalailama highlighted the ethical and ecological vision of Lord Buddha in the following words: “Destruction of the environment and the life depending upon it is a result of ignorance, greed and disregard for the richness of all living things. This disregard is gaining great influence. If peace does not become a reality in the world, and if the destruction of the environment continues as it does today, there is no doubt that future generation will inherit a dead world”.

The Arthashastra of Kautilya also contains laws about the environment. Kautilaya Arthashastra helps in determining the Ecological sustainability in Mauryan Period. Kautilya popularly known as Chanakya was teacher of emperor Chandragupta Maurya. This book is most secular, realistic and practical in its approach as it was designed to identify the rules and regulation which could be enforced under the law made by emperor. It includes the preservation of environment and ecology. According to Kautilya it is the duty of king to conserve environment, ecology and other natural resources. It was done through assigning duties to different state official. He prescribed that suitable trees and plants should be grown to preserve dry lands. He emphasized that pastureland should be protected appropriately as it arrange the food for cattle. He was of opinion that king should conserve and preserve water reservoirs as it is the most valuable gift of nature and man can't live without water. Residential buildings, roads, commercials, cremation grounds etc. ought to be constructed in such a way that it cannot harm the ecology and doesn't have negative effect on biodiversity. As per mauryan law, every house should have proper provision for controlling fire. In addition to this there must be proper provision in every house for proper sewage and proper removal of garbage and wastes. Any sort of violation of these rules was legally liable to penalty or punishment. Kautilya recommend different fine and penalty for polluting the surroundings unnecessarily by throwing dirt. Doing urine and faeces, throwing dead bodies at public places was a punishable offence. That should be cremated at cremation ground only. Sometimes, damage to ecosystem happens due to natural disaster also. He gave a disaster management system for the same as all of the hazard can't be prevented by human endeavor. He identifies eight natural calamities i.e. disease, famine, fire, flood, rats, serpents, wild animals and evil spirits. City superintendent is liable for controlling hazard from fire. During rainy season, villages situated near the water bodies were migrated and settled to

other areas which are away from flood. They must have a proper arrangement of wooden planks, bamboos and boats to face the flood. Kautilya also laid emphasis on mass participation during rescue work. Famine management was also noteworthy. During famine king should make a store of food and seeds and distribute them to mass by constructing forts or other works with the grant of food. It is the duty of king that when disaster actually occurs, he should take quick and specific measure in order to minimize the harmful effects on community. Help of friendly foreign government can also be taken if necessary to manage the disaster. He should seek shelter with allies.

The Gupta period which is considered the golden age of the ancient Indian history marked significant developments in the arena of environment. It was an age of prosperity and is known as the classical age in the Indian history. Fa-Hien, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II made references to natural and ecological aspects of the Gupta period. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription mentions that Samudragupta, the mighty Gupta ruler conquered the forest states of central India (atavirajyas) which indicate that central India was filled with dense forests and mountains. Agriculture tremendously flourished during this period and stress was given on the importance of agriculture. The later Gupta and post Gupta periods marked the development of two significant things, i.e. growth of feudalism and the decay of urban centres which were seriously affected by the environmental factors. Feudalism led to the emergence of feudal lords and the expansion of agriculture which ultimately involved in the irrigation issues. It is believed that when agriculture extended people became more interested towards cultivation of land instead of long distance trade as a result, trade to some extent was declined leading to ultimate decline of urbanization and urban centres in ancient India. In the words of D.N.Jha “The extension of agriculture helped the process of the formation of new states by providing a stable agrarian base from the late Gupta period, when trade ceased to play a major role in socio-political transformation”. People used the water of different rivers mainly of Ganga for irrigational purposes.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the ancient Indian scholars were concerned about the balance of the environment – though, and then there were no questions of global warming or chemical or nuclear pollutions like those of today. Ancient Indians were very much aware about environment. It helps in solving specific environmental problems and the modern principles of sustainability were adopted at that time. But unfortunately we have forgotten those golden principles laid up by them.

REFERENCES

- 1) Jha,D.N, *Ancient India in Historical Outline* , New Delhi: Manohar. 2003.
- 2) Habib, Irfan, *Man and Environment - The Ecological History of India*, Tulika Books, 4th Edition, 2015.
- 3) Gupta, Vijay Kumar, *Forest and Environment in Ancient India*, google book(online), 2010.
- 4) Sagreiya, K. P, *Forests and Forestry*, NBT, 2000.
- 5) Bongard Levin,G.M , *Ancient Indian History and Civilization* , Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1998.
- 6) Chatterjee, C. D, *Forestry in Ancient India*, Forest Directorate, Govt. of West Bengal, 1964.
- 7) Roy Choudhury, H. C, *Studies in Indian Antiquities*, Calcutta University, 1958.
- 8) Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad, *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India : The Beginning*, Firma KLM. Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1986.
- 9) Sinha,Raman (ed.), *Environment in Historical Perspective*, Anamika Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2007.
- 10) Dwivedi,O.P and B.N.Tiwari , *Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion*, New Delhi, 1987.
- 11) Koshambi,D.D, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India: In Historical Outline*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1996.
- 12) R.Vijyalakshami, *Viewpoints: Environmental Awareness: The Hindu Perspective*, Journal Of Hindu-Christian Studies, Volume 6,1993, Article 12.
- 13) <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in>
- 14) www.scribd.com