



MYTHOLOGICAL STUDY OF ENVIRONMENT WITH REFERENCE TO MANKIND

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Abstract:

The Earth is a marvellous planet in solar system whereon is the existence of different species of animals and trees. There is a wide panorama of physical, chemical and biological factors which are co-existent and complementary to one another. The creation of this wonderful spectacle is out of *Panchamahabhuta*. In Indian mythology, they are worshipped as *Wayudevata*, *Jaldevata*, *Agnidevata*, *Akash* and *Prithvi*. All these elements play a significant role in the creation of flora and fauna around us. Air is the most indispensable entity for the survival of all living beings. The dictum *Jal hi jeevan hai* demonstrates the fact that it is an integral part of life while soil gives us food for our sustenance. Since all these factors are necessary for a better quality of life, every living generation being its trustee should imbibe the essence of Mythological literature and impart the sacred message 'Save the Environment' to the following one. If the sanctity of this message were maintained by one and all, this world would be a heaven on Earth.

Introduction:

The Earth is a marvellous planet in solar system whereon is the existence of different species of animals and trees. The origin of human history dates back to several million years and the prevalent picture is the concomitant of great many upheavals which took place on the Earth both as a natural course of things and as an outcome of man's desire to amass wealth and gain power and position. We are now living in the *Kali Yuga* that started in 3102 B.C.¹ Since then the complexities of human life began assuming a darker shade. With the growth of industrial revolution, new life-style sprang up and the ambition of modern man began soaring to such an extent that he is swayed by the idea of sky is the limit. His aim of progress or the desire to establish supremacy over Nature cannot be achieved without causing harm to environment. The concept of environment constitute a wide panorama of physical, chemical and biological factors which are co-existent and complementary to one another. The sights and sounds such as the rhythmic movement of fish, birds of variegated colors, flowers of tender hues, clouds dark and pouring, gushing waterfall, dew drops on the grass, river flowing at its will, beautiful rainbow are the integral parts of environment and they far outweigh the pleasures of material gain. Man has to be sensible and resourceful enough to make use of this nature treasure so that he would be able to maintain symbiotic relationship between man and milieu. It means that everything around the globe that needs sustenance from sun, air, water and soil is the part and parcel of environment.

Mythological Significance of Panchamahabhuta:

Everything in the cosmos is an amalgam of five elements. In Indian mythology, the elements such as air, water, fire, sky and earth are termed as *Panchamahabhuta*. Since they constitute the existence of each and every object, they are worshipped as *Wayu Devata*, *Jal Devata*, *Agni Devata*, *Akash* and *Prithvi*. It is the underlying fact that the survival of all living beings depends upon the five elements. How they are embedded in the flora and fauna around us is explicit from the physiological functions in the body. The process of inhalation and exhalation supplies adequate amount of air (*Vayu tatva*) to the body. The chemical processes, which primarily include blood circulation and glandular secretion depends upon the consumption of water (*Jal tatva*). The process of assimilation and absorption of food that takes place through digestive system is a symbol of fire (*Agni tatva*). The vacuum in the body where all these functions take place represents the (*Akash tatva*) while the material existence having kinship with the soil signifies (*Prithvi tatva*). This theory of *Panchamahabhuta* is applicable to both humans and nonhumans.

Panchamahabhuta and Environment

Air is an indispensable entity for the survival of all living beings. People living in the mountainous region are more energetic and healthier than the city-dwellers because they get abundant pristine and pure air while the city-dwellers inhale carbon monoxide and poisonous gases. The persistent intake of such impure air results in respiratory problems. People living in the metropolitan cities are facing these problems because there is a tremendous rise in trade and industry. Use of electric appliances and faster

modes of transportation is increasing at an alarming rate. Consequently, the ozone layer, which protects us from the harmful radiation, is being depleted because of the emission of toxic elements in the atmosphere. It is also worthwhile to pinpoint the necessity of water in our life. The dictum *Jal hi jeevan hai* demonstrates the fact that no living being can survive without water. It is a form of energy, which helps us produce vegetables and fruits necessary for the survival of all living beings. In other words, water is the be all and end all of our existence. In the earlier stage, man had his habitation close to the river or beside any perennial source of water. In fact, number of civilizations came into existence and flourished in the vicinity of rivers. Indus Valley civilization is a testimony to it. Similarly, soil has an important place in our life. Human beings and herbivorous animals survive on food and vegetables taken from the soil while the carnivorous animals survive on herbivorous animals. This is a food chain which is essential for the protection of environment. Unfortunately, the land in the vicinity of town and cities is being used for the construction of houses and buildings. If this practice continues for a few decades, mankind will have to face number of difficulties. Hence the governmental authorities should take apt measures for the preservation and conservation of cultivable land.

Modern-Man-Persona and Environment

The man-milieu co-ordination was quite harmonious till the close of eighteenth century. After the onset of industrial revolution, a great upheaval took place in the socio-economic sphere. Oliver Goldsmith records his dissatisfaction over this transition.

Ill fares the land, hastening ills a prey
How wealth accumulates and men decay
(The Deserted village, 51-52)

This is a pen-picture of the eighteenth century social life. When we think of the evolution of man right from the Paleolithic Age down to the Modern times, we come to know that this modern-man-persona is a transcendental figure of the earlier one. This is certainly true that man has made spectacular progress in all walks of life and has always been striving for a better quality of life. But at this juncture particularly when we are at crossroads, we should think about the pros and cons of the existing life-style. If we put a simple question to ourselves- Are you contented or dissatisfied with the present pattern of life? Those who possess myopic vision may respond affirmatively. However, a far-sighted person would be

disposed to criticize the leap of the modern man. J.J. Rousseau, a French philosopher and visionary had revolted against the prevalent phantom glory. He asserted, "Man is born free and is everywhere in chains. One thinks himself the master of others and still remains a great slave".² This version reveals how Rousseau cherished the life of simplicity and despised the modes and manners of artificial life. Such Rousseauistic ideas are perceptible in the 'Elegy' of Thomas Gray:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power
And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave
Awaits alike the inevitable hour
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.
(Elegy written in a Country Churchyard, 33-36)

These spontaneous reflections highlight the other side of human life. Although these luminaries lived long before, the message they have imparted sounds eternal. After the onset of industrial revolution, the craze for amassing material wealth suppressed rather molested the beauty of serene and peaceful rural life. By and large the present scenario bears the same character. Bishop of Rippon found it surprisingly disheartening. So he suggested a scientific holiday for a short period of time. This warning highlights the fact that while science is progressing pretty fast furnishing us with new inventions, man the user of them is not refining himself at an equal rate. Precisely speaking, the moment has come to contemplate over the human errors and blunders effecting debacle and degradation in terms of ecological balance. The meteorological survey demonstrates that every subsequent year marks the scantier rainfall. The ever-flowing rivers of the past are remaining dry during winter and summer. A beautiful proposal of weaving the network of rivers is on the anvil. Yet it has not taken concrete shape. There is before us a grave challenge of global warming. These are actually the concomitants of human eccentricities such as wanton felling of trees, slaughter of animals, manufacturing of nuclear weapons, extensive use of automobiles and above all steep rise in population.

Scientific Warfare and Role of U. N. O.

Equally serious and significant is the issue of scientific warfare. History makes us aware of the magnitude of the aftermath of the Second World War that lasted for six years and took the toll of several million lives. Later in October 1945, United Nations Organization came into existence with a view to maintain international peace and security, promoting human rights, fostering economic and social

development and protecting the environment. Now the question is how far these goals are achieved or to what extent is U. N. O. able to keep control on superpowers in the world? To our dismay, the answer to this question cannot be affirmative. The recent inventions in the field of warfare technology are so incredible and alarming that, if scientific skill is allowed to function, the human race will be exterminated. This is the reason why Bertrand Russell grieves over this situation: “A large scale nuclear war would be an utter disaster, not only to the belligerents, but to mankind, and would achieve no result that any sane man could desire.”³ Further he warns: “If we are to escape unimaginable catastrophes, we must find a way of avoiding all wars, whether great or small and whether intentionally nuclear or not.”⁴ This is the global problem. Hence this battle has to be fought both individually and collectively. All the nations in the world need to prepare an all-inclusive policy, which would deal with this mind-boggling challenge. United Nations Organization can also play a vital role in connection with World Wild Life and Environment preservation.

Conclusion

By now we have seen the gravity and magnitude of great many challenges which are a threat to environment and mankind as well. The solution to the present situation is to be sought in spirituality. Each nation in the world should forget the conflicts and quarrels and choose continual progress in happiness, knowledge and wisdom. The philosophy of *Vedanta* and *Upanishada* that aims at realization of self contains the seeds of universal brotherhood i. e. *Vasudhaika Kutumbam* (*The entire world is one family.*) This ideology has swayed the learned critics like Arthur Schopenhauer and Max Muller. While talking about the essence of *Upanishada*, Schopenhauer says: “In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of *Upanishada*. It has been the solace of my life.”⁵

The other philosophical critic Max Muller admires the efficacy of Vedanta: “I feel convinced that, placed as we are here in this life; we have lessons to learn from the Vedanta quite as instructive as the systems of Plato or Spinoza.”⁶ Similarly, the philosophy of *Karma Yoga* that preaches the gospel of attaining Brahman through work is immensely useful to come out of the desperate situation. *Karma Yoga* guides us: “to work for work’s sake, unattached and without caring who is helped and why.”⁷ Such spiritual philosophy can bring about awareness among the people that we are the trustees of the contemporary world and our foremost duty is to pass it on to the posterity in better shape. Every living generation should impart the sacred message ‘Save the environment’ to the following one. If the sanctity of this message were maintained by one and all, this world would be a heaven on Earth.

References

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