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## Contents

Editors Note	5
A Study on the Separate Legal Identities of the Jains	
Dr. Anindya Bandyopadhyay	7
Śaivism in the Undivided Balasore District of Odisha	
Dr. Anil Kumar Acharya	19
Gender Taxonomy in Select Sanskrit Texts	
Dr. Priya Jose K	28
“The Tragic Fate of Katerina”- A Study Based on Alexander Ostrovsky’s ‘The Thunder Storm’	
Dr. Jimly.P	39
Vedic Agriculture and its Implementation in Modern Farming: A Review	
Garima & Namita Joshi	46
Thematic and Psychological Aspects of the Curses in the light of the Mahābhārata- An Analysis.	
Pratiksha Goswami	57
Śoḍaśāṅgahr̥dayam - Essentials of Ayurveda in a nutshell	
N Pooja, A Arhanth Kumar, K. Vidyalakshmi	73
Humanism in the <i>Bhagavadgītā</i>	
Dr. K.K. Abdul Majeed	80
Script, Language and Writing Technics of Manuscript Tradition in Kerala	
Dr. Manju P.M	90
Beyond Silence: Empowering Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in English Language Learning through Multimodal Approaches	
Sherin Rahman, Dr R Jinu	96
Veda and the social life of women: A thorough study	
Dr. Moumita Bhattacharya	107
Ontological Conception of Anekantavada: The Realativistic Interpretation of Jainism	
Dr. Savithri.A	113
A Representation of Women Subjugation in K.R.Meera’s <i>Hang Woman</i>	
Meera A S, Dr R Jinu	120
Revisiting Law and Order in the rule of king Mattakala as depicted in Dasakumaracaritam	
Muthuselvi. A	132
Conservation and Management of Forests in The Hindu Vedas	
Neetu Joshi, Dr. Namita Joshi	137
Lord Rama as a communicator: Excerpts from Shriramcharitmanas	
Mayank Bharadwaj	144
Hospitality in the light of Indian culture and Sanskrit Sahitya	
Dr. Hemant Sharma	161
Exploring the Relationship between Translation and Social Behavior: An Investigation of Bible Translation in Malayalam	
Dr. Pratheesh Peter	172

Pūrva Mīmāṃsa Vs Śaṅkara's Advaita – A Reading of Śaṅkara's Gītā Upasaṃhāra Bhāṣya	Vishnupriya Srinivasan	177
Does Jaina Epistemology Indicate a Many-Valued Logic	Dr. Sabeena P S	185
जगन्मिथ्यात्वस्य चित्सुखप्रतिपादितं लक्षणम्	डा. सन्तोष .सि.आर्	193
महाभारते सूचिताः जीविकाः – एकमध्ययनम्	डा. के. रतीशः	199
अध्यासस्वरूपविचारः शारीरकमीमांसायां सिद्धान्तबिन्दौ च आशङ्कितविरोधपरिहारश्च	डा. अजिकुमार् पि. वि	203
व्युत्पत्तिवादोक्तदिशा कर्माख्यातार्थविचारः	डा. अजिमोन् सी. एस्	209
शब्दार्थचिन्तविनिर्माणे श्रीहर्षस्य कृतित्वम्	ड. साधन-कुमार-पालः	213
चटुम्बिस्वामिनः दर्शने वेदान्तयोगदर्शनयोः समन्वयः	डा. आनन्द् . एस् , डा. मिधुन्. पि	219
वैशेषिकदर्शने सन्निकर्षविचारः	डा. एस्. शिवकुमारः	225
धर्मशास्त्रदिशा शिक्षायां संस्कृतेः मुख्याङ्गत्वविमर्शः	डा. श्रीजित् टि. जि	230
श्री-अरविन्दस्य अद्वैतवेदान्ततत्त्वानुशीलनम्	डॉ. लक्ष्मीकान्तषडङ्गी	234
सद्योवर्षणम्	डा. ईश्वरः	238
विविधशास्त्रेषु प्रतिपादितस्य गुणतत्त्वस्य पर्यालोचनम्	रिया दत्ता	244
काव्यकारणविमर्शः	डा. कृष्णगोपाल पालः	251
मनुसंहितायां प्रतिफलितं सांख्यतत्त्वम्	लाल्दु रुइदास	257
पुरुषार्थानामुत्सनिरूपणम्	डा. वाणेश्वरजाना	262
आत्मस्वरूपम् – कठोपनिषदि श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतायां च	डा. बिन्दुश्री. के. एस्	269
स्वामिविवेकानन्दस्य जीवनमधिकृत्य प्रणीताधुनिकसंस्कारकृतकाव्यलयेषु सामाजिकमूल्यबोधः	डॉ. सुनीतावर्मन	272
मुख्योपनिषत्सु कर्मविचारः	मोलि एम्	278
रामरायकवेः अद्वैतान्यमतखण्डने जीवेश्वरस्वरूपविमर्शः	विजिता विजयन्. ए	281
वैदिकपरम्परासंरक्षणे श्रीमदनान्तर्तीयभगवत्पादाचार्याणां परमोच्चस्थानत्वम्	डॉ गुरुमध्वाचार्य तिरुमलाचार्य नवली	284
Concept of Ātman in Ayurveda and Tarkaśāstra	Dr. Devan E. M	287
Submission & Subscription		292

# *Conservation and Management of Forests in The Hindu Vedas*

Neetu Joshi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Namita Joshi<sup>2</sup>

## ***Abstract***

India is a country famous for several religious groups, including Hinduism which follows all social and culture aspects with peace. Nearly all Indians have the core values to respect nature and its creatures. They continue to place nature before human. Our ancestors have worshipped the five elements of nature i.e., earth, water, air, light and ether (akasa) are known to survive with them. The texts in the ancient Indian treaties and literatures, the Vedas and the Upanishads are all major religions practised in India, provide us with a wealth of knowledge about the interactions between humans and nature as well as human behaviours and our debt to nature.

## ***Introduction***

India is a country famous for several religious groups, including Hinduism which follows all social and culture aspects with peace. Nearly all Indians have the core values to respect nature and its creatures. They continue to place nature before human. Our ancestors have worshipped the five elements of nature i.e., earth, water, air, light and cosmos and are known to survive with them. The texts in the ancient Indian treaties and literatures, the Vedas and the Upanishads are all major religions practised in India, provide us

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with a wealth of knowledge about the interactions between humans and nature as well as human behaviours and our debt to nature.

Every religion and custom teach to conserve and nourish nature and its resources. Regardless of the dominant religion in India, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, or Christianity all emphasise protecting the environment and maintaining peace with nature in their rich sacred scriptures.

The sacred books warn against overusing natural resources, caution against polluting rivers, ponds, and wells, define nature as a source of divinity, and declare that an imbalance between any components of nature can result in a major collapse. Therefore, they recommend to keep the environment as healthy as possible because failing to preserve harmony between humans and nature may cause humankind to lose its connection to the God and nature. These sacred texts also promote environmental harmony by being kind to all living things and teach that it is against the law for humans to exploit nature for own profits. Instead, they are advised to live in harmony with nature and uphold peace.

In order to respect, defend, and preserve nature, the Vedas attribute God and Goddesses to the water, air, birds, animals, plants, sky, land, mountains, and every other aspect of nature. The over exploitation of nature and natural resources is condemned in Vedic Indian culture.

The primary sources of human existence and wealth are natural resources like land, water, soil, forests and wildlife. However, it has been noted that they have been continuously deteriorating since 5000 B.C., and the current environmental uncertainties are a direct result of extraordinary rate of their depletion. With a population that is always expanding, overusing natural resources has led to a number of issues, including pollution, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity. Traditional wisdom mentioned in holy texts over a past history is a proven asset for managing natural resources, has to be the basic foundation for addressing such issues.

The concepts of forest protection and sustainable management were established in Prehistoric India. The Indian religious scriptures have long references including forestry. For instance, the Vedas have several explanations of how to use and protect trees. The Vedic

civilisation is estimated to have existed between 4500 and 1800 BC. Environmental awareness was entrenched in Hindu religious ceremonies and practises from the Vedic era and persisted until the post-Vedic and Puranic periods (200 BC to 100 AD), in addition to the conservation of natural resource and biodiversity.

The oldest texts in the human library are the Vedas. They are regarded as the most valuable aspect of Indian heritage. The Vedas discuss knowledge, all kinds of knowledge. They encompass both material and spiritual knowledge. According to Manusmriti, they are the origin of all knowledge. The Vedic viewpoints, in particular, centre on the idea of nature and life.

The phrase Paryavarana, which in contemporary Sanskrit means that which surrounds us or that which is everywhere in our surroundings, is used to describe our environment. However, the Atharvaveda uses terms like Vritavrita, Abhivarah, Avritah, Parivrita, etc. that are comparable to this notion. In one passage of the Atharvaveda, three coverings of our surrounds are referred to as Chandamsi, providing a clear definition of the Vedic perspective on the environment. “Wise use three elements in various combinations that are diverse, obvious, and full of qualities.” Water, air, and plants or herbs are those three elements. They have always been a part of the planet. They are referred to as “coverings available everywhere” or “Chandansi”. It demonstrates Vedas are familiar with the fundamental components of the environment.

The equilibrium between and among these components or elements and living things has been preserved by nature. The natural balance is disturbed by an increase in any environmental component's proportion over a particular point, and any alteration to the natural balance poses serious challenges for the planet. Different environmental components have established interactions with one another. Humans and the environment have a very natural relationship since they have interdependency on each other.

### ***Role of Hinduism in Forest Conservation***

Hindu religious philosophy provides the foundation for the environmental conservation themes found in the Vedic and Puranic literatures. The fundamental concept of Hindu religious philosophy, which was also carried over into Jainism and Buddhism, is “non-

violence,” or refraining from harming both living and non-living creations of nature, such as plants, animals, air, water, land (earth), hill, and forest.

In Hinduism, all social and cultural interactions have some environmental implications. Hindus see rivers as their mother goddess, forests as gods, totemic creatures as brothers, and prey species as mortals, extending their link from the social and natural surroundings. Hindu tradition holds that trees may help humanity find serenity, wealth, and comfort. Even pruning the branches is considered as a sin. Coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*) is seen to be a sign of fertility, therefore Hindu women who have the wish to have a son worship coconut tree and consume coconut fruits as a “divine gift” (Das Gupta, 2003).

The tribal people of ancient Hindu society in India, who live in the mountains and woods, have made a substantial contribution to the protection and preservation of various virgin forest sections that are rich in biodiversity. (David, 1980). The locals don’t disturb these “sacred groves” (Forest of God). Such patches of forest may be found all across India, but are most prevalent in the Western Ghats and north-eastern Himalayan areas. They have joined India’s “Biosphere Reserves,” which protect some of the country’s unique and endangered plant and animal species.

### ***The Vedic Era***

The holy Sanskrit books of Hinduism are known as the Vedas. As per the studies, during the start of the Kali Yuga (3102 BC), the great sage Ved Vyasa codified and wrote down the Vedas. Furthermore, Vedas are classified into four types i.e., The Rig Veda (Wisdom of the Verses), Sama Veda (Wisdom of the Chants), Yajur Veda (Wisdom of the Sacrificial Formulas), and Atharva Veda (Wisdom of the Atharvan Priests).

Vedic religion and literature make it clear that maintaining the stability of ecosystems in earth is essential. A passage in Rig-Veda passage states, “Thousands and Hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life, then take up systematic planting of trees.” (Dwivedi and Tiwari, 1987). These verses serve as a warning not to harm the environment in any way and to engage in continuous forestation in order to survive, otherwise the ecological



stability of the planet will be compromised. The Rig-Veda has spoken extensively on the many ecological components and their significance. One Aranyani sukta in the Rigveda is addressed to the God of forests. The sage praised Aranyani, the queen of the forest, highly for both her beauty and her gifts to men and it is forbidden to clear forests.

Furthermore, the *Atharva Veda* talks about the necessity of air, water, and greenery for human survival. Although there was no such thing as “pollution” in those days (Dwivedi, 1990), it was referred to as the “poisoning” of the environment. The “Avi” ingredient mentioned in the Atharvaveda as the reason why trees are green is commonly understood by Vedic experts as “Chlorophyll.” Since the word “Avi” comes from the root “Av,” it has the immediate sense of “protector.” Thus, plants were investigated as a component of the ecosystem, and the Vedic seers recommended protecting them.

The *Atharva Veda* reminds us that three things; air, water, and plants cover the universe and are necessary for the survival of all living beings on earth. The herbs and plants along with sun rays build up the fundamental requirements for existence. Through the process of photosynthesis, which uses the sun’s energy, the green plants (forest) act as a “natural sink,” absorbing all the carbon dioxide and contributes in decreasing the warming impact. During photosynthesis, green plants emit a lot of oxygen, and during transpiration, they immediately absorb solar heat radiation from the atmosphere to release water vapour. Hence, this makes all life possible in the planet. The *Atharva Veda* also states that plants and herbs destroy pollutants (poisons); some plants clean the air. Regarding the environment, the peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) has many significant values. About 150 plants and herbs, including peepal, have been identified by the National Botanical Survey of India (NBRI) Lucknow as being effective pollution fighters. They have the ability to capture a variety of harmful gases and dusts while also providing an abundance of oxygen in the air (Rabindra, 1985).

The *Yajurveda* too explains the role of plants and animals and the negative impacts of forest deforestation in deterioration of air quality.

### ***Concept of Forestry in Vedic Period***

According to the Vedic traditions, a community cannot be

considered complete unless particular types of forest, such as Mahavan, Shrivan, and Tapovan, are conserved on its land (Prime, 2002). Mahavan, also known as “the great natural forest,” which is adjacent to the village and offers a space where all species may survive, is possibly similar to “protected areas.” The Vedic culture also required that a different type of forest be created in its place once some of the original forest had been removed (Banwari, 2002 in Prime, 2002). This is comparable to “production forests” and offers the basic needs of people and animals, such as food, shelter, and access to fodder, wood, roots, and herbs. It also maintains the quality of the land, the air, and the water. These are referred to as Shrivan or the “forest of prosperity” or “forest of wealth” traditionally. The Shrivan may take the shape of single-species stands (plantations) or groups of several species (agroforests). The Tapovan, or “forest of religion,” which is the residence of sages, belongs to the third category of forests. No plant or animal could be harmed in these forests because they were sacred. This type of forest is unmanaged and naturally occurring, yet it has been set aside particularly as a location for religious practise.

Each village during the Vedic era was also accountable for looking after the forests on its land through its panchayat, or council of five elders. (Banwari, 2002 in Prime, 2002). It suggests the purpose of participatory forest management which is a key idea in the current paradigm for forest management. A village wouldn't be complete without its surrounding forests. The panchavati, which stands for the five basic elements of earth, water, fire, air, and “ether” (the sum of all things), must be present in every community as well.

The Vedic people also participated in the conservation of medicinal plants as nature is considered to be a healer for mankind because of its medicinal uses. Since the Vedic era, the Himalayas have been considered as a great treasure of medicinal plants. That is illustrated in the Vedic writings of Charaka, Susruta, Dhanwantri, Nagarjuna, Parashara, Valmiki, and several other wise men. It was essential to plant medicinal plants and trees during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, in addition to shade trees along the roadways and fruit trees on the wastelands.

### ***Conclusion***

The following thorough discussion sheds some insight on the

understanding of the environment and its components among our ancient seers. It is obvious that the Vedic concept of living in harmony with the nature and natural resources was considerably broader and more complete than just physical harmony. The Vedic people wanted to live for hundred years, and this ambition can only come true in a tranquil, unpolluted atmosphere.

Hinduism has long been a religion conscious about the nature. Nature or Earth has never been viewed as a hostile force that has to be controlled or exploited. In fact, it is unlawful for man to abuse nature. He learns to coexist with the natural world and to acknowledge the presence of divine in all things, including plants and animals.

The goal of learning Vedic sciences is to prevent people from sinking completely into ignorance. The philosophy of Vedic physical and metaphysical sciences is the concept of unity in variety. One might summarise the essence of Vedic environmental studies by stating a portion of the Ishavasyopanishad Mantra, “One should enjoy with renouncing or giving up others part.” The unambiguous message of the Vedas is that the nature and its components belong to all living things and must be protected for the sake of everyone. The research demonstrates that the Vedas are where forest management and conservation first began.

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