



Environment conservation in 21st century through traditional knowledge

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Abstract

We have entered in the 21st century, known as “*The Age of Science and Technology*”. With the knowledge of science and technology, whole world developing by leaps and bounds. But in the lieu of advancement, the so-called modern society ignores the ever-increasing environmental problems. The environmental problems include pollution, climate change, shortage of potable water, crop failure etc. Science and Technology is providing various solutions to this problem (use of photovoltaic cells, wind turbines etc). But these solutions are not enough.

To counter this problem, all we need to do is combine the knowledge of Science and Technology with Traditional Knowledge. Traditional knowledge is nothing but local knowledge, one gets from his forefathers, community and surroundings. The idea of environmental conservation and sustainable development are not new in India. The culture of conservation of nature dates back to the ancient Vedic Period. The four Vedas – Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda, Atharav-Veda, are full of hymns dedicated to the supremacy of the natural entities. Along with Vedas, Upanishads, PURANAS, Mahabharata and Ramayana – gives the message of living in harmony with nature. By learning and applying the Traditional knowledge, we can conserve the nature in the best possible way. And approach a step forward towards sustainable development.

Keywords: environmental problems, pollution, climate change, shortage of potable water, crop failure etc.

Introduction

The 21st century commonly known as “*Age of Science and Technology*” purely acknowledges western scientific knowledge. This scientific knowledge has answers to almost all questions, whether it is exploration of universe, or getting knowledge about the core of the earth etc. By using the scientific knowledge, the world is developing by leaps and bounds in spheres of space research, mineral exploration, use nuclear power etc. Along with these, there is another very important issue to address i.e. “*Environment Conservation*”. The modern world is very much aware of this issue and science and technology has provided with some solutions for this problem, such as using renewable sources of energy, (photovoltaic cells, wind turbines etc.) Instead of non – renewable resources. But is this enough, or we have to look backward towards our indigenous knowledge?

To conserve environment, all we have to do is combine western scientific knowledge with “*Traditional Knowledge of Sanskrit*”. There is a strong link between traditional knowledge of Sanskrit and environment conservation. Sanskrit texts portraits earth as ‘Mother’ and teach us to live in harmony with nature. The idea of environment conservation is not new for India. Vedas, BHAGWAT GITA, and Upanishads – all believe in the supremacy of nature and are full of messages of preservation of environment – ecological balance. Hence, to tackle the major environmental crisis, along with scientific technology, preservation of traditional knowledge and its application is the need of the hour.

Objective

Environment Conservation and Sustainable Development are

the most relevant matters of 21st century. This paper focuses on Environment conservation and its need. Secondly, it discusses how modern scientific technology is effecting environment conservation. What does traditional knowledge of Sanskrit means, and how can we apply it for sustainable development. At last, it elucidate how can we combine traditional knowledge of Sanskrit with western scientific knowledge in order to conserve our environment and move towards sustainable development; for a better tomorrow.

Sources and Methodology

For this study, only secondary data has been used. The secondary data has been collected from various sources such as different previous works, articles and online sources. The methods used in this study are – historical, analytical and descriptive.

Environment Conservation and Its Need

The term ‘Environment’ refers to everything that surrounds us and Environment Conservation is the protection, preservation, management and restoration of natural environment and the different communities that inhabit it. We have only one planet to live on, and it’s our duty to wisely use its resources for our own development and also conserve them for next generations to come. This is what Sustainable Development is all about. But, it is very unfortunate to note that, the quality of our environment is depleting day – by – day, due to various anthropogenic activities. These anthropogenic activities include – reckless deforestation, burning of fossil fuels as energy source, use of plastic bags, ever increasing use of vehicles etc.

Hence, there is a need to conserve environment in order to

- Save biodiversity.
- Tackle the problem of climate change.
- Ensure food security.
- Lead a healthy life.
- Overcome the scarcity of potable water.
- Develop sustainably.

Science & Technology and Environment Conservation

It can be correctly remarked that Science & Technology is both 'friend and foe' of environment. It is friend of environment, as it has addressed various issues regarding environment degradation. For example, it has provided alternates to conventional sources of energy (coal, petroleum etc). These alternates are renewable sources of energy, such as, use of photovoltaic cells and solar-thermal systems (solar energy), wind turbines (wind energy), high temperature steam driven turbines (geothermal energy) etc. Another example is electricity driven vehicles which reduces air pollution to phenomenal level. Hence, in this age of rapid industrialization these modern eco-friendly sources are boon for environment conservation.

Science & Technology is also, on the other hand, the foe of the environment As the non – renewable sources of energy have not been developed up to required level and moreover, their initial cost of installation is very much high. Therefore, conventional sources, appears to be more economical for use. By using technology, modern man is exploring deposits of fossils fuels, all over the earth. Due to this, every part of the planet is now reached by pollution. Nuclear and biological weapons powered wars leads to great damage to human life and the natural world. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy 1984 and many such examples all over the world show evils of mismanaged technology on human beings and environment. Hence, from the above discussion it can be concluded, Science and Technology can be both boon and curse for environment, depending upon its use. It is duty of mankind, to judiciously use technology for betterment of environment and him.

Environment Conservation and Traditional Knowledge

The term Traditional knowledge, Indigenous knowledge or Local knowledge generally refers to the knowledge systems embedded in the cultural traditions of regional, indigenous and local communities. Traditional knowledge includes types of knowledge about traditional technologies of subsistence, ecological knowledge, traditional medicinal knowledge and climate etc. When it comes to traditional knowledge of Sanskrit, we generally refer to knowledge systems embedded in our ancient Sanskrit texts such as; all four Vedas, Purans, Upanishads, Mahabharata and Ramayana.

The idea of environment conservation is not new in India. Sanskriti of India depends, upon its environment, climatic conditions and human behavior. Our Sanskrit texts reveal that, during ancient times, people used to worship sun, wind, land, trees and water; as these elements were thought to be the baseline of human survival. Along with these elements, wildlife conservation was also given equal importance. These texts shows that, people believed in the sayings "Religion protects and nature nurtures".-For, instance, the scripture 'Vishnu Samhita' contains some direct dealing with the

biodiversity conservation.

In India, the relationship between human beings and nature attracts the seers of Sanskrit texts in a unique way. The Vedas, Purans, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagwad Gita – are full of messages for environment conservation and ecological balance. These texts disclose the adverse effects of environment depletion on human life. The ancient Sanskrit texts usually relate the concept of environment conservation with religion and way to live life happily on this earth and in the next world also. For instance,

- Vedas the most precious Indian heritage, and universally accepted; emphasizes that there are five elements – space, air, water, fire and earth that make environment and are most important for human life. A verse from Rig Veda says that "*Thousands and hundreds of years, if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life then take up systematic planting of trees*". Hence, in this verse tree planting has been depicted as key to happiness. The earth was like Mother to Vedic people and they believed in protecting it.
- A quote from Vishnu Puran states that "*As the wide-spreading Nargodha tree is compressed in a small seed, so that the time of dissolution, the whole universe is comprehended in thee as its small germ; as the Nargodha germinates from the seed, and becomes just a shoot and rises into loftiness, so the created world proceeds from thee and expands into magnitude.*" Here the Nargodha (Banyan) tree has been personified as God.
- The Varaha Puran says "*one who plants one peepal, one neem, ten flowering plants and creepers, two pomegranates, two oranges and five mangoes, doesn't go to hell*". Here tree plantation has been related to the next world, and it has been emphasized that tree plantation can save a person from the curse of hell.
- In the epic Ramayana, when Ravana realizes that his end was near he cries "*I have not cut down any tree in the month of vaisakh, why then does this calamity befall me*"? This dialogue reveals that cutting trees during month of vaisakh (April) was a sin.
- In Bhagwad Gita, lord Krishna stress upon use of natural resources in sustainable manner.

Environment Conservation: Using Traditional Knowledge of Sanskrit and Modern Western Sciences

Traditional knowledge of Sanskrit and modern western sciences, both are equally important for environment conservation. Whatever is the approach, whether scientific or traditional; our aim should be to conserve environment and step forward towards sustainable development. While, science is developing various new technologies to counter the problems of environment pollution; the importance of the traditional knowledge for the protection of biodiversity and sustainable development is slowly being recognized internationally. For example,

- **Article 8 of the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity)** urges to "*...respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovation and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of*

biological diversity....”(United Nations 1992).

- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Rio Earth Summit,1992 also recognized the importance of ‘traditional knowledge’ in environment conservation by stating:

“Indigenous people and their communities have an important role in environmental conservation and management because of their knowledge and traditional practices”.

Our Sanskrit texts contains full knowledge about how can people and their communities play an important role in environment conservation and management of available natural resources.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that; although, we are living in 21st century “An Age of Science And Technology” and can make best use of Science and Technology to tackle problem of environment pollution and degradation (e.g. Use of photovoltaic, wind turbines etc. as energy sources) and but we can also learn a lot from our traditional knowledge of Sanskrit texts regarding:-

- How to respect nature.
- Importance of tree plantation.
- How to live in harmony with other creatures.

How to make best use of natural resources without over-exploiting them.

Government’s Initiative to Preserve Traditional Knowledge

- India is counted among ‘Megadiverse’ countries under the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992) due its innumerable genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. Article 48(A) enforces a constitutional obligation on the state to protect and improve the environment and safeguards the forests and wildlife of the country; and Article 51(A)(g) imposes a constitutional obligation on the citizens of India to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife. So, it is the duty of every citizen and our national government to conserve biodiversity. In order to conserve biodiversity through traditional knowledge, our government has taken following measures:
- Biodiversity Act,2002 (conservation of bio-resources and related traditional knowledge)
- National Biodiversity Authority, 2003 [supported the creation of State Biodiversity Boards (SSBs) and Biodiversity Management Committees.
- Inclusion of ‘Environment Conservation through Traditional Knowledge’ in academic syllabus at school level and in various competitive exams; in order to generate interest regarding traditional knowledge among youth.
- Establishment of Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL).

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