

Environmental Awareness Reflected in the Yājñavalkya Saṃhitā

Kousik De

M Phil Scholar, Department of Philosophy,
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Howrah, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

A new branch of ethics named 'Environmental Ethics' has emerged recently, but a search of ancient Indian literature reveals that environmental awareness was widespread in ancient Indian human society and that people at the time thought about it. However, due to the low level of environmental pollution at that time no smṛtishastrakar has expressed any thought about the environment like the thinkers in the modern environment, but it cannot be said that ancient India was not aware of the protection of the natural environment at all because ancient India thought of environment in its own way. The name of Yajñavalkya Saṃhitā is especially significant as Smṛtishastra. Like Manu, Yajñavalkya is also known as a philosopher and spiritual guru. Although the various social and state provisions are the subjects of discussion in the Yajñavalkya Saṃhitā. The statements he makes about the environment in the context of the various social issues are not insignificant. In this article, I want to draw the attention about the reflection of all these thoughts in Maharshi's discussion.

KEYWORDS: Environmental Ethics, Yajñavalkya Saṃhitā, Pollution, Plants, Animals

Modern ideas about the environment originated mainly after the Industrial Revolution. Excessive pollution is at the root of the current environmental awareness. The disturbed ecosystem today has alarmed the entire world. As a result, all the environmentalists of the world are making a concerted effort to conserve the invaluable resources of nature. Philosophers are no exception. A new branch of ethics named 'Environmental Ethics' has emerged recently, but a search of ancient Indian literature reveals that environmental awareness was widespread in ancient Indian human society and that people at the time thought about it. But one thing to keep in mind is that in ancient times when these Smṛti-shastras were being written, there was not as much natural pollution as there is today. The mass explosion did not happen then, so the population was limited. There was no shortage of land for human habitation. The people of that time were mainly dependent on hunting and agriculture. That agriculture was also normal. Just as high-yielding seeds were not used in agriculture, there was no use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for such high yields. The industry may have had something to meet their needs because of the small population. The mode of transport was horse-drawn carriages or chariots. As a result, there was no pollution caused by vehicles, so none of the authors of Smṛtishastrashas expressed any thoughts about the elements of the environment like the thinkers in the modern environmentalists. But in ancient India there was no awareness about the protection of the natural environment at all - that is not to say. Because ancient Indians thought of the environment in its own way. The name of YājñavalkyaSaṃhitā is especially significant as Smṛtishastras

in terms of popularity after Manusāṃhitā in Smṛtishastras. Like Manu, Yājñavalkyais also best known as a philosopher and spiritual guru. Although the various social and state provisions are the subjects of discussion in the YājñavalkyaSaṃhitā. The statements they have made about the environment in the context of the discussion of various social issues are not insignificant. I notice the reflection of all these thoughts in Maharshi's discussion, which is mentioned below—

Protection of the plant:

The elements of the environment can be divided into two parts, biotic and a biotic elements. We will fast discuss about the biotic ingredients, and then the A biotic ingredients. Plants are one of the living natural resources. In the context of sīmāvivādaprakaraṇa, Vyavahārādhyāya of YājñavalkyaSaṃhitā sacred fig also used as a border along with elevated lands, charcoal, chaff, bridges, anthills, ditches, etc.

nayeyuretesīmānamsthalāngātuṣadrumahī

setuvalmīkanimnāsthicaityādyerupalakṣitām¹

Yājñavalkya has introduced awareness about plants. He is also against the destruction of plants by the organic matter of the environment. He has given punishment for someone who destroys the tree unnecessarily. The meaning of all these punishments is to stop everyone from doing wrong. The provision of Yājñavalkya is that if anyone cuts of the

¹Panda, R. K.(edited), Dutt, M. N(translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛith; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse- 2/151

How to cite this paper: Kousik De "Environmental Awareness Reflected in the Yājñavalkya Saṃhitā" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-5 | Issue-2, February 2021, pp.570-573, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd38469.pdf



IJTSRD38469

Copyright © 2021 by author(s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



branches, and trunks and to the entire destruction of huge trees (like fig, etc.), and those which yield livelihood (to the owner, such as mango, jackfruit etc.), the penalty is double the twenty paṇas (i.e., twenty, forty and eighty paṇas) in order. Double is the penalty laid down for cutting trees grown near a monument, a cremation-ground, a boundary line, a sacred place, or a temple and half of what has been laid down before, is the penalty for cutting down groves, bushes, creepers, plants and medicinal herbs grown in places mentioned before.

prarohiśākhināmśākhāskandhasarvavidāraṇa
upajīvyadrumāṇām ca vimśaterdviguṇodamaḥ.
caityaśmaśanasīmāsupuṇyasthānesurālaye
jātadrumāṇāmdviguṇodamovṛkṣe ca viśrute.
gulmagucchakṣupalatāpratānausadhivīrūdhām
purvasmṛtādardhadāṇḍaḥsthānayukteṣukartane.²

In the Prāyaścittādhyāyaḥ, Maharshi also says that the punishment for unnecessarily cutting a shrub or a plant, a hush, a creeper, or a huge tree, [one should] recite the Ṛk (i.e., the sacred verse of the Gayatri) for a hundred times. [And for a ruthless] destruction of a medicinal herb, one should live on milk and follow a cow for a day.

vṛkṣagulmalatāvīrucchedanejapyamṛkśatam
syādoṣadhivṛthācchedekṣīraśīgoyṇugodinam.³

By prohibiting the mutilation or destruction of trees, vines, shrubs, etc., and by providing for the atonement for crimes committed as a result of mutilation or destruction. Yagnavalkya seeks to protect a living element of the environment, the plant. Protecting plants means protecting the environment. The similarity between section 17(a) of the letter wildlife conservation act, 1972, and Yājñavalkya's idea of protecting the environment is particularly striking. So, the ancient Indian smṛtiśāstrakāras were not at all indifferent to the protection of the environment.

Protection of the Animals:

Like plants, animals are very important in a living environment. Yājñavalkya also mentioned types of animals. These are frogs, monkeys, cats, dogs, snakes, rats⁴ foxes, donkeys, bears, owls, etc.⁵

It is a human duty to protect all kinds of animals. Torture or killing of all these animals is prohibited. For striking small animals (as goats, etc.), shedding their blood, cutting their horns, and severing their limbs, one should be made to pay a penalty of two paṇas and others in order.

duḥkhe ca śoṇitopādeśākhāṅgacchedanetathā.
daṇḍaḥkṣudrapaśūnāmtudvipaṇaprabhṛtiḥkramāt.⁶

In the next verse, Maharshi also says for cutting off their organs of generation of killing them, [one should be punished with] the second form of punishment and made to pay the owner the price [of the same]. Double is the penalty in offenses relating to big animals (like bulls etc.).

liṅgasyachedanemṛtyaumadhyamomūlyameva ca.

mahāpaśūnāmeteṣusthāneṣudviguṇodamaḥ.⁷

Although Maharshi provided various kinds of atonement for animal slaughter, he seemed to be against the slaughter. In the Prāyaścittādhyāyaḥ, Maharshi has made provision for atonement for the slaughter of cats, alligators, frogs, elephants, five dark-blue bulls, an ass, goat, or a lamb, sheep, monkeys, foxes, pigs, camels, horses, etc.

mārjāragodhānakulamaṇḍūkāncapatatṛiṇaḥ
hatvātryahampibetkṣīramkṛcchramvapādikaṁ caret.
gajenīlavṛṣāḥpañcaśukevatsodvihāyanaḥ
kharājameṣeṣuvṛṣodeyaḥkraouñcetrihāyanaḥ.
hāmsaśyenakapikravayājjalasthalaśikhaṇḍinaḥ.
bhāsam ca hatvādadyātḡgāmakravayādastuvatsikām.⁸

If an animal is lost due to lack of care herdsman, then there is talk of punishment for that herdsman. [the owner should give, as a duty to the king,] four paṇas for an animal whose hoof is not cloven (such as horse, an ass, etc.); two each for a buffalo, camel and a cow; and one, for a goat or a lamb

Protection of Birds:

Like plants and animals, birds are an important element of the natural environment. Maharshi Yājñavalkya forbade the killing of any kind of bird. Of all these birds, many are extinct or nearly extinct today. The birds mentioned in the Yājñavalkya-Saṁhitā which are forbidden to be killed and eaten are carnivorous birds, chātaka (a bird which lives on rain drops.), parrot, pratuda (such as hawks, crows, etc.), tiṭṭibha (a kind of bird), crane, swan, heron, water-fowl, cakravāka, balākā, viṣkīra, sparrow, droṇakāka, osprey, fowls living on trees, geese, wag-tail, cāṣā, and the birds having redfeet, etc.⁹ If any one of these birds and animals is killed, the provision of atonement for it is also given in the Yājñavalkya-Saṁhitā.

urageṣvayasodaṇḍaḥpaṇḍaketrapusīsakam.
koleghṛtaghatodeyaustṛeguñjāhayemyaśukam.
tittiraututiladroṇamgajādīnāmaśaknuvan.
dānamdātum caret kṛcchramekaikasyaviśuddhaye.
phalapuṣpānnarasajasattvaghāteghṛtāśanam.
kiñcitsasthivadhede Yamprāṇāyāmastvanasthike.¹⁰

Maharshi Yājñavalkya has instructed to protect the mentioned animals and birds. If someone kills in any way, he has expressed his views on the protection of organic matter in the environment, both directly and indirectly, with the provision of atonement by punishment. This thought is reminiscent of the letter wildlife (conservation) act and the animal protection act of 1972.

Care of land:

We can know about the land system of that time from Yājñavalkya-Saṁhitā. We see that individual ownership was

² Ibid. -2/227-229

³ Panda, R. K. (edited), Dutt, M. N. (translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛitiḥ; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse- 3/276

⁴ Ibid. -1/147

⁵ Ibid. - 1/148

⁶ Ibid. - 2/225

⁷ Ibid. -2/226

⁸ Panda, R. K. (edited), Dutt, M. N. (translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛitiḥ; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse -3/270-272

⁹ Ibid. - 1/172-175

¹⁰ Ibid. - 3//273-275

prevalent at that time, but all immediate land ownership in the state was the hands of the king or administration. Agriculture had to be done on land suitable for farming. In this case, if a farmer took land from the landowner for cultivating the land and left it without cultivating it himself or with someone else. Then the landowner would take away the land from the aforesaid farmer and cultivate it with another farmer. And damage caused by such negligence was recovered from the aforesaid farmer as punishment—

phālāhatamapikṣetraṁnakuryādyonakārayet
saprādāpyaḥkaṣṭhaphalamṁkṣetramanyenakārayet¹¹

On the other side, the thought has been given on how to use unsuitable land for agriculture. This type of land is mentioned to be used for planting trees and grazing land. The grazing land will be determined according to the will of the villagers and with the permission of the king. A distance of a hundred dhanus (in length and breadth) will be fixed for grazing land between two areas of the village. That space cannot be used for any other purpose. [that of] two hundred between a village covered with thorns [and fields]; [and that of] four hundred dhanus between a city, will be reserved for grazing—

grāmyecchayāgopracārobhūmīrājavaśenava
dvijastṛṇaidhaḥpuṣpāṇisarvataḥsarvadāharet.
dhanuḥśataṁparīṇāhogrāmekṣetrūntarambhavet
dveśatekharvaṭasyasyānnagarasyacatuḥśatam.¹²

Care of non-living world:

Abiotic or non-living objects are just as important to the environment as living things. Of these strange elements, Agni (fire) Jala (water), etc. are particularly significant. Agnidivya and Jaladivya are discussed during the discussion on the Devine tests in the divyaprakarana. In dharmashastra, ula (weighing in the balance), Agni (Fire), Jala (Water), Visa (Poison), and Kosa have been accepted as Devine proof. Maharshi Yājñavalkya has mentioned these five as Devine (Dibya). These five are the ordeals [laid down for establishing the innocence of an accused]; but these [are applied] in [cases of] serious crimes, when the accused agrees to accept himself the punishment [if his complaint is not proved].

In the case of Agnidivya, it has been said that the Devine lord will invoke Agni (Fire)—

tvamagnesarvabhūtānāmantaścarasipāvakaḥ
sākṣivatpuṇyapāpebhyobrūhisatyamkave mama.¹³

That is, “O Agni (Fire), O Pavak (Purifier), you do range in the hearts of all creatures. You are, O kavi,¹ (Meaning sage, intelligent.) the witness of virtue and sin; do you speak out the Truth relating to me.” so it is known that there were still thoughts about Agni (Fire)

After the discussion the Agnidivya, rules of Jaladivya have been mentioned. Praying to the god Varuna has been said—

satyenmābhirakṣatvaṁvaruṇa¹⁴

That is, “O Varuna, protect me with truth.” this verse is said to invoke water. The idea of polluting this water and its remedy was also in ancient times. It is discussed below—

Water pollution and its remedies:

Water is one of the most important elements of the natural environment. Pollution of this water is strictly prohibited. One of the causes of environmental pollution is human waste. Water is also particularly polluted by human waste. There was no drinking water system like in modern times. People used open water like ponds, rivers, springs, etc. as drinking water. We also find in the YājñavalkyaSaṁhitā to prevent this water from being contaminated in any way. Yājñavalkya has forbidden saliva, blood, excreta, semen, and urinate in the water. (ṣṭhīvanāsrkśānmūtraretāmsyapsunanikṣipet.¹⁵) To prevent water pollution is reminiscent of the present water Pollution prevention and control act 1978.

In the ManuSaṁhitā we find almost the same type of verse—

nāpsūmūtrampurīṣaṁvaṣṭhīvanāṁvasamutsṛjet
amedhyalīptamanyadvalohitaṁvaviṣaṇiva.¹⁶

Behind the making of this control law may have been the initial thought of maharishis like Manu, Yājñavalkya, etc. on the prevention of water pollution.

Social responsibility of an individual human being:

Yet, it is clear that Maharshi Yājñavalkya expressed his great insight and intellect by ensuring the well-being of every aspect of nature (living and living) through the provisions concerning the law. Thus, imposing a greater moral responsibility on human beings to display reasonable behavior towards the outside world. As we rely on nature for survival and growth, we must perform certain duties to protect it. In the Manusāṁhitā we also see how Manu had certain rules to remind a householder of his duty to the whole world. This Saṁhitā also expresses in clear terms the promises that any person had to make a social being. We have come across a verse in which Maharshi says –

balikarmasvadhāhomasvādhyātithisatkriyāḥ.

bhutapitramarabrahmamanuṣyāṇāṁmahāmakhāḥ.¹⁷

The above verse depicts the same concept of Panchamayajna which we find in Manusāṁhitā the discharge of duties by an individual householder is indeed a way to honor the entire creation of which he is a part. This significantly undermines the prospect of any sort of human dominion and lordship over nature. Since the execution duties is considered by both the seers to be a process whereby man can come out of the narrow shell of self-centeredness to extend his concern for the rest of nature. He realizes that he does not tolerate any isolated existence. Every object of nature ensures its well-being. Therefore, he fulfills his duty as a citizen of this world. It creates a strong sense of friendship between man and nature which eventually leads to the development of an eco-community. This approach is crucial to restore the ecological balance and maintain peace and harmony on earth. Other verses in this Saṁhitā that also reminds of commitments of a social being.

¹⁴Ibid. -2/108

¹⁵Ibid. - 1/137

¹⁶Bandopadhyaya, Manabendu (edited & translated); Manusāṁhitā, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, First Edition:-1410; verse- 4/56

¹⁷Panda, R. K. (edited), Dutt, M. N. (translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛith; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse-1/102

¹¹Panda, R. K. (edited), Dutt, M. N. (translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛith; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse-2/158

¹²Ibid. - 1/166-167

¹³Panda, R. K. (edited), Dutt, M. N. (translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛith; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse-2/104

atithitvenavarnānāmdēyamśaktyānupūrvaśaḥ.
apraṇadyotithiḥsāyamapivagbhūtrnodakaiḥ.¹⁸

[The people] should provide all the nations [arriving] as guests according to his power [food, etc.]. If a guest [even] faints at night, [with him] treat with sound, earth, grass and water (Grass here means preparing the bed for the guest). Maharshi further said—

satkr̥tyabhikṣavebhikṣādātavyāsubratāya ca.

bhojayeccāgatankālesakhisambandhibāndhavān.¹⁹

Begging should be given after the beggar is well received; (Similarly) to a Brahmacarin; [One] Friends and relatives present at mealtime should be fed. All the above verses reflect a hospitable behavior that a person should display towards other beings. This is one of the most important reasons for building friendly relationships with others and offering useful services to them. Only when a man removes his self-centered tendencies will he be able to increase his concern for other co-animals and the rest of nature. The following verses also convey the same idea.

annaṁpitṛmanuṣyebhyodeyamāpyanvahaṁjalām.

svādhāyāmsatataṁkuryānnapacedannamātmane.²⁰

Food and water should be provided to the disembodied manes and human beings every day; One should study and teach vedas daily, [but] never cook food for oneself. It seems clear that our viewers were already aware that man's selfish motives could never encourage him to spread moral considerations towards other co-creatures on this planet. Thus, our ancient seers had framed laws in such a manner that humans were obliged to show a certain amount of responsibility to other animals as well. As a result, cruelty, hatred towards other beings will fail to impress people. This will indirectly facilitate the development of a harmonious and peaceful society. Yājñavalkya has clearly stated that—

ahimsāsātyamasteyamśaucamindriyanmigrāhaḥ.

dānamdamodāyākṣāntiḥsarveśāmdharmasādhanam.²¹

Cruelty, truthfulness, not stealing, authenticity, control of the senses, charitable compassion, self-restraint, and abstinence from forgiveness are all religious practices. This verse specifically mentions all the qualities that an individual should develop not only to be a better human being but also to be a responsible citizen of this society.

Conclusion:

From the previous discussion, it is clear that there is a need for everything in the creation of Almighty. Protecting that environment is the main duty of human beings as intelligent beings. Otherwise, human life will be endangered and men are the main polluters of the environment. Therefore, he has given various punishments and atonements to the people as the main culprits for the destruction of the environment. Maharshi has shown awareness about the protection of kṣīti, ap, tej, especially in the five Mahābhūtas, the main constituents of the environment. He also spoke of the

protection of all living things on earth, including plants. So, Maharshi Yājñavalkya was also aware of the need to protect the environment for the survival of the people. Although not like modern environmentalists, he has shown environmental awareness like him.

¹⁸Ibid. - 1/107

¹⁹Ibid. - 1/108

²⁰Ibid. - 1/104

²¹Panda, R. K.(edited), Dutt, M. N(translated); Yājñavalkya-Smṛitiḥ; Bharatiya Kala Prakasan, Delhi, First Edition: 2011, Verse- 1/122