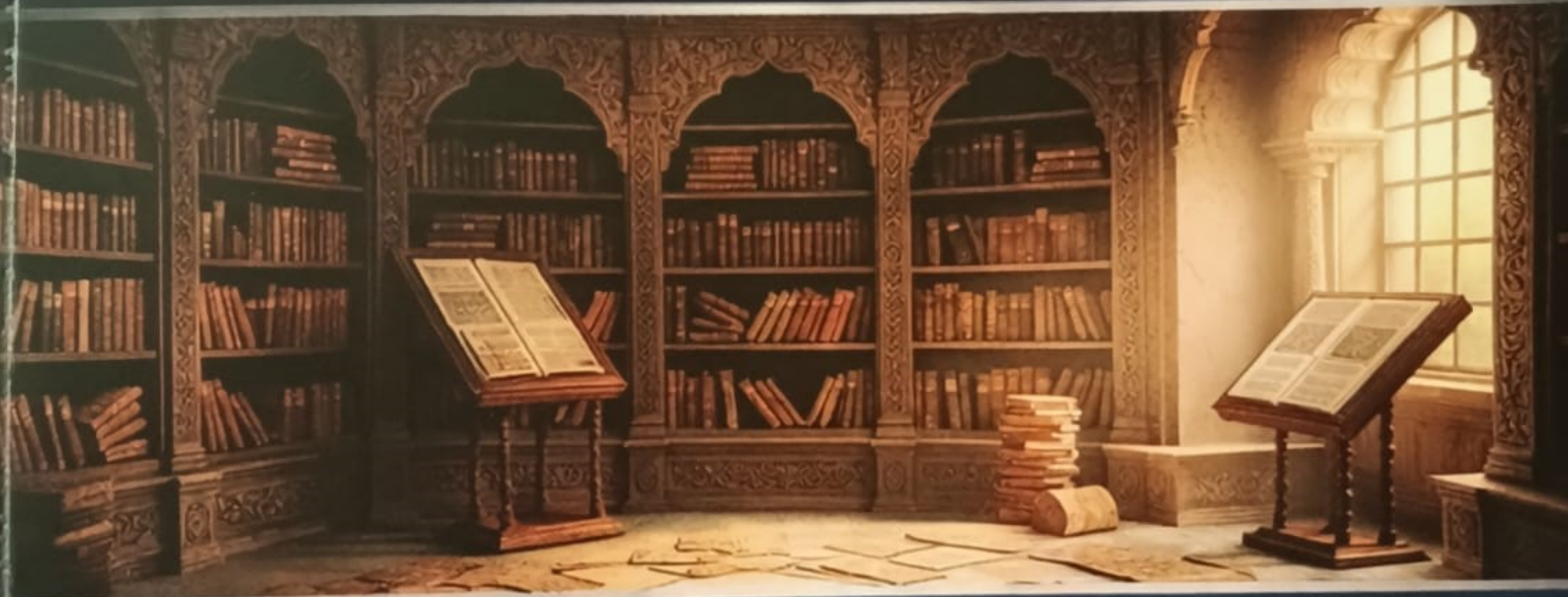


*Indian Knowledge System
A Comprehensive Exploration*



EDITORS

Prof. Ratul Bujar Baruah

Dr. Nurima Yeasmin



Indian Knowledge System: A Comprehensive Exploration

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Contents

- থলুৱা খেল-ধেমালি আৰু জ্ঞান পৰম্পৰা : এটি টোকা
অধ্যাপক অজিত ভৰালী/1
- Fostering Peace Values: A Synergy of Indian Thoughts and Contemporary Education
Prof. Alaka Das/9
- আদिरन्त्येन सहेता (पा.सू. 01.01.71)
डॉ. सुधाकरमिश्र:/20
- शिलालिपि आरु ताम्रलिपित कामरूपर बाजवन्शर सांस्कृतिक आरु सामाजिक प्रभार
ड° नीलारुक्षि देरी/25
- Dharma, Karma and Autonomy: Reconstructing Moral Agency in Hindu Bioethics and Western Medical Ethics
Dr. Papori Boruah & Ms. Priya Mishra/37
- Concept of *Bhakti* in the *Bhaktirasataranginī* of Śrīharideva
Dr. Bornali Borthakur/47
- Role of Upanisadic Thought in Holistic Development of a Child
Dr. Ali Bordoloi/50
- संस्कृतभाषाविज्ञाने तथा व्याकरणे प्राचीनभारतस्य योगदानम्।
डा. मिलनमाजी/58
- Concept of *Bhakti* as Rooted in the *Rgveda*
Dr. Pranabjyoti Deka/65
- Awareness of Teachers on Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection
Nibedita Kalita & Dr. Krishna Kalita/70

Awareness of Teachers on Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection

Nibedita Kalita

Research Scholar, Department of Education,
Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University, Nalbari

Dr. Krishna Kalita

Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University, Nalbari

The ancient Indian perspective is mainly comprised of the Vedic and Buddhist philosophy. Vedic period is believed to exist around 2500-6000 BC (Radhakrishnan) and Buddhist period around 600 BC. The ancient Indian traditions reflect a deep, intrinsic reverence for nature in philosophical, religious, spiritual and even in day-to-day life activities. The greatest role model of how nature and human beings should live together is exhibited in the ancient Indian traditions. The ancient Indian practices towards environment uphold the value of sustainable living. The significance and care for the protection of environment may be traced all the way back to Vedic and ancient Sanskrit literature. Ancient Indian practices serve as vast reservoirs of knowledge related to everything about the environment. The Vedas as well as the principles of Buddhism attach great significance to environmental protection, conservation and purity.

The salient feature of Vedic period was that the people regarded nature and the environment in a holistic manner and revered each of its constituents and entities by carefully preserving them. There are lots of Mantras in all the four Vedas which bound the hands of people not to pollute and degrade the environment. From the ancient Indian perspective, earth is revered as the mother for everyone. The traditional practices of organic farming, rainwater harvesting, waste reduction, conservation of natural resources, eco-friendly cooling system etc. are rooted in a philosophy of living in harmony with nature. These traditional environmental practices teach people to respect the environment which is very much important in the present-day scenario.

The cutting of trees, polluting air, water and land were regarded as sins. The elements of nature were to be respected and treated as gods and goddesses according to Vedic literature (Chandra, 2010). Vedic culture and scriptures also reveal a clear concept about the earth's ecosystem and the necessity for maintaining their balance (Renugadevi, 2012). All the four Vedas recognize the importance of maintenance of the season's cycles that are likely to get altered due to the climate change owing to inappropriate human actions (Sarmah, 2015). To create environmental awareness among common people for the preservation of the environment; the *rishis* taught that earth has the same relationship with man as a mother with her child. The tree symbolized the various attributes of God. To the Rigvedic seers, planting trees was a religious duty. The Atharvaveda is a testimony that documents how nature possesses healing components, that all the plants have medicinal value. In Vedic period, it was believed that any harm caused to any living being will backfire to them which was called as the 'doctrine of *Karma*' (Shyamala & Swetha, 2018).

Buddhism is another philosophy that inspires ecological mindfulness to address the loss of biodiversity. It believes nature to be the teacher who needs the respect from human beings; nature is the way of life, nature is a spiritual force. Environmental solutions can be achieved by cultivating ethics or moral concerning the environment, cultivating an environmental consciousness and mind, non-harming to any form of life, investigating and understanding the cause of environmental crisis, developing wisdom and understanding for the truth ruling the relationship between man and environment etc. (Sai, 2016). Buddhist culture has moral potential for the formation of ecological stereotypes of modern behaviour. Some basic concepts of ecological ethics of Buddhism like *Karma* implies the expression of human environmental responsibility, *Ahimsa* implies the principles of non-violence, *Bodhichitta* implies kindness and compassion for all living beings (Dorzhigushaeva & Kiplyuks, 2020).

Thus, it can be said that ancient Indian environmental practices carries the essence to protect and preserve the environment in the modern period. Because, these ancient practices towards environment are the best means to develop environmental ethics as well as awareness among all. In modern times, all developing countries and developed countries alike are suffering from environmental crisis. So, to save ourselves from this crisis and to preserve the environment, people need to be aware about these ancient Indian practices. In developing environmental awareness of ancient Indian practices among the individuals, teacher's role is the most prominent, because teachers are the re-creator of the society. They are responsible for shaping the environmental behaviour of generations of learners. Therefore, this is an endeavour to delve into the awareness among the teachers about

ancient Indian practices of environmental protection. Through this a comprehensive solution may be envisaged by following it in the modern period. To provide the knowledge of environmental practices of ancient India teachers play a vital role. For this, the teachers need to be aware about it. In this context, it is essential to study how much the secondary level teachers are aware about the ancient Indian practices on environmental protection for delivering and applying its knowledge effectively, because secondary stage is the bridge between primary and higher education. Therefore, the present study focuses on the awareness level of the higher secondary level teachers of Nalbari district on ancient Indian practices on environmental protection. The fast industrialization and urbanization in Nalbari district has led to losing of its greenery, devastating flood, river bank erosion, pollution, etc. Besides, no study has been found in the field of awareness on ancient Indian practices for environmental protection and conservation among higher secondary teachers of Nalbari district.

Objectives of the Study

With a view to lead the study in a systematic manner, the following objectives have been framed—

- To study about the ancient Indian practices of environmental protection in the light of Vedic and Buddhism philosophy.
- To find out the level of awareness on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection among Higher Secondary level teachers of Nalbari district.
- To find out the difference between awareness on ancient Indian practices environmental protection of Higher Secondary level Science and Arts teachers.

Method of the Study

The method applied for conducting the present study is descriptive survey method. The researchers have used both qualitative and quantitative approach. The ancient Indian practices or environmental protection have been studied using content analysis while the level of awareness on ancient Indian practices on environmental protection of the teachers and comparison between the awareness levels has been statistically analyzed. The study has been conducted on higher secondary teachers of Nalbari district. The population of the study comprises of 328 higher secondary teachers in Arts and Science streams of 31 Government Higher Secondary Schools of the two educational blocks of Nalbari district namely Paschim Nalbari Block (12 HSS) and Pub Nalbari Block (19 HSS). The total number of teachers in Arts stream is 205 and in Science stream is 126. (Source: IS Office,

Nalbari). In Pub Nalbari Block there are total 198 Higher Secondary level school teachers (110 Arts teachers and 88 Science teachers) and in Paschim Nalbari Block there are total 133 Higher Secondary level school teachers (95 Arts teacher and 38 Science teachers). Out of these, the investigators have randomly selected 60 teachers (30 Arts and 30 Science) from Pub Nalbari Block and 40 teachers (20 Arts and 20 Science) from Paschim Nalbari Block as sample using stratified random sampling. So, the sample comprises of total 100 Higher Secondary school teachers (50 Arts and 50 Science).

The researchers have used a self-developed questionnaire namely 'Awareness Test on Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection'. This test is a multiple-choice tool containing 26 items related to Vedic practices on environmental protection. The questionnaire was found to be highly reliable. For content validity the opinions of the experts from the field of education were obtained.

Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection during Vedic Period

The Vedic period was profoundly guided by the four Vedas—Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda. They are considered as the oldest literature in the world. The Vedas have several references on environmental protection, ecological balance, weather cycles, rainfall phenomena, hydrologic cycle and related subjects that directly indicate the high level of awareness of the seers and people of that time. In Rig Veda, it is mentioned that universe consists of five basic elements namely Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Space (Ether), which provide basis for life in everything and man is ordained to conserve them. The Yajur Veda explains about the propitiation and peace of all components of earth. The Atharva Veda considers earth as the Mother and the creations as her offspring. It commands against degrading the resources of Mother Earth. Earth fosters the growth of its entire offspring and makes them pure in hundred ways. Water is also considered as the milk of the Mother which nurtures and heal us. Rivers are also the source of power for life and water is the symbol of dignity according to Atharva Veda. The Vedas command to keep the environment free from all impurities, which can be done by the way of 'Yajna' or 'Sacrificial Fire'. The 'Yajna' contains the key to ideal maintenance of the ecosystem and environment of life. The Manusmrti states that 'Yajna' refines the body, mind and inner-self. It also cleans the atmosphere through its medicinal smoke, and provides longevity, breath, vision etc., which are established in Yajur Veda (Sarma, 2015). The Vedic prayer "*mata bhumih putruaham prthivya*" invokes and postulates divine intervention to bliss and protect the natural environment. For the protection of the environment, Rig Veda says that "*madhu vatah ritayate madhuksaranti sindhavah madvirnah santusadhih. madhu*

naktamutisasi madhumatparthivarajah madhuksorastu suryah madhvirgabo bhavantu nah" (Rigveda, 1/90/6,7,8). It means environment provides bliss to people leading their life perfectly. Rivers bliss us with sacred water and provide us health, morning, night, vegetation. Sun bliss us with peaceful life. Our cows provide us milk (Krishna, 2016). The people from Vedic period prayed to *Indra* (God) not to separate trees from the forests and sons from their fathers because, the *Vrksayurveda* says that planting a tree is equally beneficial as having ten sons. The Vedic literature also says that animals should be safe, protected and healthy. According to Veda, killing of certain animals and birds was forbidden even for such creatures which acted as scavengers. In Vedic period, conservation of plants and animals was considered as the top most duty of human who was also considered the creation of God. Trees were associated with religious faith of people. According to Veda, felling of trees, cutting down of trees, polluting air, water and land were considered as sin because they were considered as the abode of gods and goddesses. Not only trees, but different birds and animals were also considered having religious importance as scriptures mentions that several gods and goddesses have animals and birds as their mounts. The Vedic sages believed that pure water, air etc., are the roots of good health and happiness and therefore they considered all these elements of nature as Gods.

Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection during Buddhist Period

In Buddhism, people find themselves in harmony with nature by acknowledging the interdependence of all forms of life. The concept of nature and environment is seen in the concept of 'Dependent Origination' which is similar to the concept of ecology. It denotes spatial and time relations. The ethics for humans to nature would be able to examine from the perspective of 'Dependent Origination'. Yamamoto and Kuwahara, 2008 states that maintaining a balanced ecosystem with biodiversity is very important from the viewpoint of the concept of 'Dependent Origination' in Buddhism.

In Buddhism, simplicity and ahimsa are the basic tenets. The principle of simplicity teaches that man should not over exploit the natural resources. Another principle, *ahimsa* or non-violence implies the love and respect towards all living beings. All the devotees of Buddhism were aware of nature and its influence on meditation and the solitary life. According to Buddhism, people need to live simply and respect the cycle and balance in nature so everything can continue for future generation—a concept known as 'sustainability' in modern times. The teaching of Buddhism believes on the theory of Karma and the theory of Cause and effect. According to Buddhism if people harm the environment and its elements, the environment or nature appropriately reverts. In Buddhism, the Lord Buddha set down

rules forbidding the pollution of rivers, ponds, lakes and wells in *Sutta-Nipata*. The rivers, forests, mountains got high respect and were regarded as bliss bestowals. Buddhism inspires ecological mindfulness to address the loss of biodiversity. Solving and contributing to the eradication of environmental problems and issues is itself part of its practice. It believes on the practices of six *paramitas* to reduce environmental problems. These are composed of *Dana Paramita* (generosity), *Sila Paramita* (keeping precepts), *Kshanti Paramita* (patience), *Virya Pramita* (effort), *Dhyana Paramita* (unwavering) and *Prajna Paramita* (wisdom). Here *Dana Paramita* means giving a fortune, preaching a law or removing fear, i.e., doing something good without regret for a person and nature, *Sila Paramita* means keeping precepts such as not hurting or killing living entities and not stealing, *Kshanti Paramita* means enduring sadness and pain, *Virya Paramita* means doing your best and always making effort to do better, *Dhyana Paramita* means being unwavering or steadfast in all endeavors, and *Prajna Paramita* means obtaining true cognition of wisdom from the concepts of 'Dependent Origination' and the 'Middle-Way'.

Awareness of Teachers on Ancient Indian Practices of Environmental Protection

To find out the awareness level of the higher secondary teachers on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection, the statistical values of mean and standard deviation were calculated. The mean and SD for the same are found to be 14.2 and 2.38 respectively. It was found that most of the teachers (74%) have average level of awareness on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection while only 15% teachers have high awareness and 11% show low level of awareness.

The comparative analysis of the data shows that only 8% of science teachers possess high level of awareness whereas 22% of Arts teachers possess high level of awareness. The data also reveal that 76% of science teachers show average level of awareness compared to 72% of Arts teachers, and 16% of science teachers have low level of awareness whereas only 6% of Arts teachers show low level of awareness towards ancient Indian practices of environmental protection. The mean of the awareness level on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection of Science teachers is found to be 13.68 and standard deviation 2.15 and that of Arts teachers is 14.78 and 2.6 respectively. The comparative analysis shows that their awareness levels are significantly different with t value 2.21.

Discussion

The ancient Indian practices of environmental protection were purely value-based.

The ancient Indian literature or scriptures of Vedic and Buddhist periods prescribe various actions to follow for preserving the geographical, climate and environmental condition, preventing pollution and to live a healthy life. In ancient India the protection and conservation of nature was the art of living human life. These traditional practices teach to control human actions, respect the earth and maintain non-violent relations with the environment and also inspire ecological mindfulness to address the loss of biodiversity.

It was found that majority of the teachers have average level of awareness on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection. This indicates that there is a lot of scope to increase the awareness level on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection among HS level teachers.

An interesting fact is that though there are more Science teachers with average level awareness than Arts teachers, more number of Arts teachers are found at the high level of awareness than the Science teachers. It can be implicated that there is a necessity of increasing the awareness on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection among the higher secondary teachers of both Science and Arts streams.

Environment, its protection, preservation, and the broader realm of environmental education have become central topics of global discourse in light of the current ecological crisis. It is a matter of pride that Indian traditions recognized the significance of the environment in human life long ago. Both the Vedic and Buddhist systems embody a profound reverence for nature, evident in their philosophies and practices. Reviving this consciousness and appreciating how ancient Indian wisdom can guide us through modern environmental challenges requires deliberate educational efforts—an area where teachers play a very crucial role. The NEP 2020's focus on Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) offers significant promise, provided it is effectively implemented in areas related to environmental knowledge. Moreover, to expand and develop the awareness and knowledge related to ancient Indian practices among all teachers, provisions should be made for inviting spiritual leaders and scholars, keeping ancient environmental content-based books in the library, implementing the ancient Indian environmental and ecological conservation practices in the curriculum, conduction of teacher training etc. If the teachers are effectively trained, they can effectively deliver environmental knowledge, awareness and ethics among the students. Thus, awareness of the teachers on ancient Indian practices of environmental protection is indispensable for sustainable future.

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