

Ecological Concerns In Mahabharata

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Abstract: Great Indian epic of Mahabharata is told imaginatively by Sage Vyasa. He discusses contemporary and futuristic issues on religious, moral, social and other issues. The style of narration is cascading. The range of epic is wide which covers from micro to macro issues. The epic focuses on preserving culture besides entertaining with its fantasies. The nature and society are embedded in such a way that they cannot be separated. Vivid description of nature and its phenomenon entices us even today. Mahabharata discusses issues of encroachment of nature and efforts to preserve it. The Bhagvad Geeta is the worldwide famous treatise on theory of Karma, knowledge and devoutness to rise above the futility of dross world and attain self realization. The narrator Lord Krishna acquires title of Krishna Dwaipayana because of his birth on an island. Nature is not inanimate and lifeless. It is live and active actor even affecting many spheres of life of people. The deluge devastates lives and shows that ecological balance is disturbed by human intervention. This interrelationship and interdependence between human and nature paves way for new formations. Many issues which were deliberated upon in Mahabharata are even relevant today i.e. the issue of population explosion and its management in relation to ecology. The healing and curing power of nature is boon for human beings. The same nature also acquires fierce shape when harmed by human beings. The epic directly and indirectly elaborates the measures for protection of nature in form of various duties which are to be performed by human beings. It also guides human behaviour towards animals. It elaborates impact of human actions which damage and endanger environment. The path of dharma can only enables the sustainability of not only culture but environment. The epic also discusses the dilemma of continuum and change. The present paper critically examines the strains of literature which are related to affecting environment.

Key Words: Ecology, Environment, Dharma, Culture, Practices, Change

The Hindu way of life is very positively concerned towards the nature. There are various sayings and idioms which sensitize people about conserving environment. The essence can be seen in saying "One tree is equal to ten sons". Various Hindu epics and the Puranas discuss the destruction and regeneration of the world. The nature is core part of the world which sustains the life. The human actions and behaviour directly affects the nature. The degradation in the virtues and morality of human beings leads to degradation of environment. Degradation of environment consequently leads deplorable condition of the world. The hyper increase in the world population has led to increased human intervention and encroachment of nature. This has disturbed ecological balance. The human society is changing continuously in various aspects. Human beings are not conscious about their actions which would alter natural components like lakes, rivers, mountains and whether conditions. Nature is described as extension of human consciousness. The human being is said to be formed by the five elements of nature. Human beings are attributed with human qualities. The Ganga was mother of Bhishma. She had the prospering qualities of river. The five sons of Pandu were born of the elements of nature. Draupadi was born out of sacrificial fire. Vyasa describes the huge quantity of trees which formed *vana* (forest) and numerous *vanas* ultimately create healthy environment. The Bhagvad Gita describes the positive aspects of nature. Human interference may invite wrath of nature in form of deluge, famine, disease etc. These hymns restricted people from harming natural environment. Mahabharata advances visionary futuristic concerns about ecology even though at that time ecology was not a big concern. Natural world was abode of the universal God-Head.

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Bhagvad Gita advocates pantheism enumerated in various passages. The elements of nature like the moon, the sun, oceans, wind, air, river, mountains find embodiment in the overlord. The Gita presents vision of holistic society. It is spiritual fountain head which leads us to righteous path. The karma is righteous work which guides our actions towards society and also towards nature. The gyan is righteous knowledge which guides us to know ourselves. The bhakti is righteous devoutness which leads us to self realization and self actualization. The saints attained their *moksha* (liberation from cycle of birth after submerge in supreme soul through self actualization). This three pronged doctrine defines relation of man and nature and guides human action towards nature. Preservation of nature is integral part of preservation of culture while accommodating changes that become binding.

The Importance of Five Great Elements:- The epic elaborately describes the significance of five basic elements. These elements create the physical environment. These also correspond to the universal consciousness. The epic gives us understanding the place of these elements in human life. It make us aware of situation and place of human beings in universal setup. The *Adi Parva* (prologue) does classification of animal species and plant species. It also provides basic significance of these species. The kings and princes carried out hunting but the epic enumerates moral restrictions by various stories describing the evil consequences of hunting. Many animals were even depicted as reincarnation of prominent personalities. The epic gives general guideline for utilizing the available space optimally. This is evident from elaborate description of planning of cities and villages. The emphasis is laid on significance of water being the origin of this universe. The wastage of water is condemned through the moral stories. The fire's three forms described vividly. The *Aahavaneeya* is the fire used in yagna for evoking the nature gods. *Garhapatya* is the domestic fire. *Dakshinagni* is the fire in various forms in nature. The air also has five forms which are called *Panchaprana*. *Praana* is the life breath. *Apana* is the vestige air. *Vyana* is the air which is in every part of body. *Udaana* is the air which is used in uttering the communicative sounds. *Samaana* is all pervading air in nature. *Aakasha* (ether) is all-pervading.

Maintenance of Ecological Balance and Cultural Dimension of Ecology:- The epic beautifully describes the hunting scenes where the dwellers of forests and wild beasts come together to form symposium. This union of various aspects and components of nature give it a holistic stability. It indirectly describes the food chain, and traits of animals and plants. It also guides us to strike balance between need of habitation and restriction on deforestation. The importance of forests is made a part of life through various rituals which include even worship of trees. The concept of sustainable development was ingrained in daily life through the various cultural practices. It also restricts unbridled exploitation of natural resources. The dharma that is righteous conduct which puts these restrictions was the most important concern of human beings. The epic provides us the scope of rational analysis after the end of an era. It describes the various eras and their cyclic repetition. It also describes the social and forms prevalent in a particular era. It vividly depicts various aspects of life i.e. different types of marriages. The social status of progeny born out was accorded as per particular type of wedding. It also describes even eating style and habits. *Ghoshayatra* gives instruction on the maintaining balanced strength of cattle. *Khandava Vana Dahana* (Khandava forest ablazing) episode raises ethical questions concerning

sustainability of environment. The epic is proponent of concept of spiritual scientist. Purification of soul can be attained through raising consciousness for environment. The nature is also equated with the epic in terms of complexity. Multiple facets of nature are depicted through speculative narration. These consists deluge, controlling and elimination of excess population through family planning. The epic shows that ecology can be preserved through cultural practices reinforced by popular literature.

Ecological Concerns:- The epic puts forward the conflicts of the policies of the state on the matters related to environment. It sometimes gives guidelines which are contradictory in the event of eco disaster. These conflicts could be resolved by using conscience which is guided by ethical conduct. The concept of sustainable environment attains prominence. The environment consists of the sum of all surroundings of the living organisms which include natural resource and forces. Synthesis of all these generates conditions growth and development. It also makes us aware about the threats to the environment.

Bhisma advises to Yudhishtira to maintain the fruit and useful trees. The cutting of edible fruit providing trees are prohibited in Shanti Parva part of the epic. The Dice Game episode forms the base of era ending battle between Kauravas and Pandavas. The after effects of battle also take environment into its ambit. The Rajasruiyaga yagna sacrifice represents the efforts for recreation of universe in symbolic way. The epic justifies the conflict and it categorized the winners. The war led to social seism forcing all the kingdoms to take one or other side. This was like a world war situation. The social disruption led to ecological disruption in the entire region. The influx of huge population in form of refugees caused ecological imbalance. King Shantanu had formed various policies to sustain the ecology. Pandu also continued Shantanu's legacy.

Hydraulic Ecology:- This concerns sustenance of water resources especially the rives. The rivers provided base for flourishing of civilization. The Indus-Saraswati culture was formed on flooded silt. Indian civilization gave value to protection of certain animals like cow. These animals' consumption was prohibited. The evidences found by anthropology research show that these animals helped human beings in farming and other domestic activities which helped in progress of civilization. Various gods like Krishna and Balarama acted as the planners and counsellors for systemic agriculture and protection of environment.

Environment and Ethics:- The epic is treasure of Indian ethos. The enormous epic presents values and conduct weaved in form of embedded stories. These ethics include the direct and indirect instructions for protection of ecology and nature. Non-violence is one of the cardinal doctrine of Dharma. This principle not only prohibits violence against human beings and animals but also plants. Non-violence is an essence to sustain ecological balance. The concept of *Lokasangraha* dictates the collective social responsibility towards the ecology. The burning of Khandava forest is discussed at length to raise critical ethical concerns. It raises the question of righteousness in burning the forest populated with animals and other creatures by evocation of god of fire. The myth of *pralaya* (deluge) explains dissolution of the whole universe after increase of population and other condition of an era.

CONCLUSION - This paper makes efforts to bring forward the relevance of the epic in context to environment and ecology. The epic promotes life-long learning lesson through various stories. It highlights social and cultural practices based on myths which lead to protection of environment. The epic guides human actions in short term and long term for sustainability of ecology. The epic highlights the cycle of destruction and recreation. This

implies that the damaged environment can be replenished. The paper helps us understand the natural phenomenon in relation to society. The epic guides us for optimal use of natural resources for individual and policy makers. This paper sensitizes us to realize our responsibility towards environment.

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