



## THE USEFULNESS OF MANUSMṚTI IN RESOLVING THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

The main aim of this article is to reveal the view of the ancient Indian tradition- bearer Manusmṛti towards the environment. By investigating one of the main causes of the current environmental crisis, it is shown how the Vedic tradition- following Manusmṛti which is one of the religious scriptures, has advised to adopt a conservative and respectful attitude towards various elements of nature. This Indian philosophical tradition has always given due value to all natural things and has always strived to make people respectful towards nature by attributing divinity to many things in the natural world in order to convey their importance to the common man. But being obsessed with western ideology and scientific progress, the people of India have also forgotten the rules and restrictions prescribed by their ancient tradition and have considered nature only as one of the subjects of their aggressive policy. As a result, in the present era the natural environment, is so excessively polluted, damaged and devastated that it is gradually carrying the message of existential crisis for all living beings. In this extremely adverse situation worldwide, this article is based on Indian traditional thoughts. One of the nineteenth saṃhitā is the Vedas-based Manusmṛti which is ancient India provided advice on the restrictions of behavior of people living in society and set the criteria for judging them. With the aim of finding a way to solve the current stage of the environmental crisis, the world has begun to search for a way out, and the teachings advice on behavior towards the environment in the ancient Indian memoir Manusmṛti will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *Ahiṃsā (Non – Violence), Pañchamahāyajña, Sacred groves, Interconnectedness, Ethical responsibility*

#### Introduction

One of the most important problems facing the world today is the environmental crisis. Global efforts are underway to find a way out of this catastrophic situation. The natural environment is currently so devastated that it is giving out danger signals every moment. The entire world is now plagued by the ever-increasing human desires and the ruthless tyranny of science and Technology, which ultimately brings death to all existence. In an attempt to find a way out of this natural disaster, it is very relevant to examine the wisdom of ancient Indian tradition. Ancient India wisdom can be divided into two parts- Śruti and Smṛti, of which Śruti is the knowledge of being of spiritual knowledge that helps people move towards liberation, on the other hand, Smṛti is the behavioral knowledge in the human social system, Smṛti includes the Śrimad Bhāgavad Gītā, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, purāṇas, Arthaśāstra, Manusmṛti, Yājñavalkya Saṃhitā, etc. Among the nineteenth Saṃhitās, Manusmṛti is the most popular and authoritative book among the Vedic community and Hindus in ancient India as a criteria on and standard of judgment for the code of human behavior. The purpose of this article is to reveal what kind of attitude and behavior human should show towards various parts of the natural environment as described in the Manusmṛti, written according to the Indian Vedic School of thought, and to judge the usefulness of that view.

#### Nature in Indian Vedic and philosophical perspective

Indian spirituality can be characterized as nature based. Ancient Indian writings indicate a wonderful combination of materialism and spirituality. In the modern society, we follow the path of materialism as a means of achieving happiness of satisfaction and that is why people of the present age are deprived of mental and spiritual peace. Since Manusmṛti is well established on Vedic foundations. It is very important to know the perspective in which nature is taken in the Vedas.

Most Indian philosophical schools have described man as a divine being or an inseparable part of him. Nature and the divine being are bound by a close relationship; therefore, Indian philosophical schools have given the message of a sacred, harmonious and complementary relationship between man and nature. 'The relationship between man and nature is not only a utilitarian

relationship. The relationship with nature is not only for its beautiful environment and comfort. Because in ancient Indian literature and philosophy, 'nature' does not only mean trees or the surrounding material world, 'nature' refers to a cosmic system. That is why Indian thought always encourages us to follow that natural simplicity through our actions'<sup>1</sup>. 'Just as Indian traditional thought has taught people to be compassionate towards each other, it has also taught a respectful attitude towards other elements of nature, such as the sun, moon, sky, earth, fire, wind, trees, and animals. In the Vedas, fire, wind, Sun, moon, etc. have been given the status of Gods by assigning personalities and are called worship able. In Vedic thought trees have sometimes been given the status of mothers, and sometimes have been given divinity'<sup>2 & 3</sup>.

'The Rigveda, one of the four Vedas, who is the foundation of Indian philosophy, acknowledges an infallible and order everywhere on earth, in space in the world of humans, in the world of gods, and in the world of stars, this law is called 'Rta' or 'dharma'<sup>4</sup>. Just as ritual regulates human behavior, the entire animal, plant, and material world is governed by the same law. This shows that in Vedic thought, there is only one principal as a natural law to which all humans, animals, and material nature are equally valuable and are governed by the same principal. For this reason, Indian philosophy, unlike the west, has taught humans to accept all aspects of the environment with respect and the protect them appropriately. Indian spiritual philosophy and thought are the bearers of a sensitive attitude towards nature. Since everything is included in the supreme being, no example of teaching conflict or exploitative behavior with nature is found here. The Vedas, Upaniṣads Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata or Purāṇa's, everywhere the message of a sacred relationship between man and nature has been given. The indication of this relationship is not confined to theoretical scope only, moreover, through the daily ideal practice, the statement that nature and all parts of the environment are fundamentally the same, this statement stimulates the sense of unity of man with nature. As a result, just as this sense of Unity between man and nature is helpful for the happiness and comfortable personality of all people, on the other hand It is suitable for peaceful and harmonious co-existence among all living beings, including human society. 'In the Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad sage yājñavalkya calls trees great and asks people to be strong according to trees'<sup>5</sup>. 'In the 12th chapter of the 'Atharva-Veda' the usefulness of plants is mentioned and the need for expanding trees is mentioned'<sup>6</sup>. Even arranging food for domestic animals is considered a duty of the householder. Since organic Fertilizer are prescribed for cultivation, it is evident that this advice has been given to prevent indirect damage to plants, i.e., all living being. The 'Atharva-Veda' mentions animal forests for the wild animals mentioned and hunting forests for domestic animals. There is also a provision of punishment in the Arthaśāstra for any kind of damage to any tree or animal, even for destroying the environment of water bodies.

### **Causes and consequences of human domineering attitude towards the environment**

While the human society has crossed the long path of these glorious century, it has brought human civilization to the peak of progress, on the other hand, it has pushed its surrounding nature towards immeasurable disasters. These natural disasters have made the existence of not only trees and animals, but the entire world in danger. Just as scientific progress has given people development, due to the increasing control-oriented attitude of people, the nature Kingdom has become extremely unprotected and humiliated. Due to the harmful effects of advanced scientific Technology, many animal and plant species have become extinct, the range of flora has been drastically reduced and as a result, many animals and birds are losing their habitat and food. This aggressive attitude of people towards the environment has caused irreparable damage to the overall natural environment. Although ancient Indian ideology never thought aggression and a sense of authority towards the environment. Indian thought and code of conduct have always taught respect, tolerance and a conservation attitude towards the environment. That is why in ancient India, the balance of nature was maintained through the moderate use and maintenance of various parts of the environment, but in western culture and religion, humans are considered the only ones with Intelligence and authority and have described the environment as a mere consumer item. Therefore, the inhabitants of the waste do not recognize any value of the environment and believe themselves to be the best, so they do not consider themselves to be one with the environment. But after India, education in the tradition of Unity with nature, became a Colony of England, the people of India came into direct contact with western ideology and as a result of the long 190 years of colonial rule, the people of India were influenced by the western authoritarian attitude towards the environment and forgetting the traditional customs, thinking, culture, etc. Of their Homeland, they adopted the aggressive attitude of the ruling class ideology. This authoritarian aggression has become not only harmful to the nature of the entire world, but also has made people hateful and disrespectful towards each other. As a result, this attitude of people has proven to be dangerous for human society, animals, plants, and nature as a whole.

One of the main causes of environmental problems is that values are associated with philosophy or spirituality and practical aspects are associated with material knowledge or Science. Without considering any value, only select material progress as its goal, is ultimately proves to be harmful to the overall environment. But now a day's realizing the importance of the environment, modern environmentalists talk about adopting some scientific or some unscientific methods to solve environmental problems. Mahatma Gandhi Inspired by the teachings of Indian philosophies advised a simple unpretentious life for the benefit of human society and the entire environment. 'Even modern Indian economist Amartya Sen also spoke about the need to care for our environment for the wellbeing of society as a whole'<sup>7</sup>.

### **Environmental thoughts in Manusmṛti**

Just as the Manusmṛti prescribes the principle of behavior of an individual as a member of human society, so too does this book prescribe various rules of conduct for determining the relationship of an individual with the environment. Dividing human life into four ashram, sage Manu prescribed the pañchamahāyajña as one of the daily rules of conduct that must be followed by a householder. A person's existence is the result of the contribution of all the resources and organs of the surrounding environment,

and the person is indebted to them for his development. To pay off these debts, the householder is required to perform Ṛṣiyajña or Brahmajajña, Pitṛiyajña Devayajña, Nṛiyajña and Bhūtajajña every day, thereby repairing the debt of the sages, God, ancestors, the human community and other living beings. Ṛṣiyajña or Brahmajajña is the study and teaching of Brahman or the Vedas. Through this scientific, the debts of the sage the seers of the Vedic mantras are forgiven, since we are indebted to them for the education we have received. The importance of the environment has been mentioned in the context of the debt to the Gods. Every human being is dependent on natural elements like sun, wind, fire, rain, etc. Nature is ruled by various Gods. The debt to the Gods is paid through sacrifices offered to the Gods and the maintenance of plants and animals. The debt to the ancestors is paid off by offering water and continuing the lineage by producing children. The debt to human is paid off by serving guest, planting trees for the rest of the traveler, digging a well for the public, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the houseless, and serving the needy. It is considerate a duty to maintain the social welfare and harmony of the environment of the householder. In order to pay off the debt to plants and other living beings other than humans, it is the duty of the householder to provide them with proper care and food. The incarnation of this pañchamahāyajña clearly reflects that since humans are only a part of the entire creation and their existence is due to the gift of nature, therefore the relationship of the individual is not only limited to his family, relatives or friends, but he is closely related to every part of this entire creation. For this reason, a person love, care, and care should not be limited to only his loved ones but should also be extended to other parts of the entire environment, which will result in a unified and harmonious environment.

‘Manusmṛti has given considerable importance to trees as part of the environment. Here to explain the importance of trees, cutting down trees without proper care or damaging tree parts is considered sinful. The punishment for cutting down trees is three parts is described according to the extent of damage’<sup>8</sup>. This shows that in ancient Indian traditions, the principle of preserving trees was determined by understanding their usefulness. Encouraging tree plantation and labeling unnecessary cutting of trees as a crime proves even to that even two Millennia ago the visionary sages of the Vedic era were aware of the possible evils of cutting down trees and the possibility of their destruction by humans. Moreover, by dividing a person’s life of life in into four stages, if it is prescribed to live the entire period of life in the peace and serenity of forest areas full of trees and to be one with nature. In this nature, man, by eschewing narrow self-interest and desires, realizes his small being as a greater being. Through this, the forest area is identified as the habitat of the people of the Vanaprastha Ashram indirectly advising the conservation of forest land.

Apart from these, ‘Manu also attaches great importance to the conservation of water bodies, polluting water bodies with excrement, waste dead bodies, washing clothes, etc. is considered a punishable offence’<sup>9</sup>. ‘In the context of environmental pollution by living experiment, it is also said that such acts are prohibited in places such as cultivated land, ponds, mountains, gardens, etc. Manu says that living excrement in the home of insects living in soil or water bodies is prohibited’<sup>10</sup>.

‘Manusmṛti also shows sensitivity towards animals. Manu opposes the eating of animal flesh. He has identified animal killing as a crime’<sup>11</sup>. ‘Manu has elsewhere called eating meat a sin’<sup>12</sup>.’ He has called the avoidance of these as a higher religion’<sup>13</sup>. According to Manu, ‘one who does not cause pain to any living being or does not wish to cause the suffering of bondage or slaughter, attains supreme happiness’<sup>14</sup>. In this context, it is worth nothing that, he has prescribed a lesser punishment for killing small animals and the greater punishment for killing large animals. According to him ‘who kills the animal, the one who cooks it, the one who serves it and finally the one who eats it are all criminals and are punishable’<sup>15</sup>. While prescribing punishment, ‘Manu has prescribed punishment for the person who intentionally hurts humans and animals according to the extent of the suffering caused to the living being’<sup>16</sup>. ‘This shows that just as humans are conscious animals are also conscious and therefore suffer from injuries. In Indian thought, animals are also considered to be conscious and sentient beings and causing them suffering is also considered punishable. If a large animal such as a cow, elephant, camel, horse etc. .is killed due to negligence or carelessness in driving a vehicle, then a fine of five hundred pence is imposed and a fine of two hundred pence is imposed for killing a small animal’<sup>17</sup>. ‘In addition, if a person kills a large animal such as a cow etc. by any other means a fine of two hundred pence is imposed and a fine of five ‘Masha’ is imposed for killing a small animal such as calf, fawn, lamb, kids, etc. In this way, different types of fines have been prescribed according to the type of animals. Manu has considered if the duty of the King to protect all living beings whether movable or immovable i.e. trees, animals and humans during the period of giving. Not only that in fulfilling this duty the king gains the same amount of merit as performing a thousand sacrificial offerings, otherwise he becomes a partaker of sin or retribution’<sup>18</sup>. This shows how important environmental protection is in the ancient Indian Vedic tradition. Manu also separately mentions that it is the duty of the King also.

## **Conclusion**

Now days, people have engaged themselves in a new way of thinking and action. They are searching for ways to overcome and get rid of the environmental crisis that has arisen in the world. This environmental crisis has various aspects. Namely pollution at all levels, pollution growth destruction of the balance of the environment, extinction of many species of plants and animals etc., which are causing immense damage, which is pushing the entire world towards destruction of every moment. Innumerable environmental movements and environmental conservation programs are being taken up in search of solutions to this multifaceted problem. Moving forward on the path to solving this problem people have realized that scientific solutions alone are not enough, that is, they are not capable to solving it completely, it is necessary to bring about a change in people’s thinking and behavior, and from this, environmental ethics was born. Modern day environmentalist in environmental ethics realize the importance of the environment and give various advice for its conservation, which many centuries ago, Indian sages, anticipating the possible unpatriotic behavior of people towards the environment and the resulting overall disaster, attributed divinity to

various parts of the environment and taught people to respect them. Not only theoretically but also with the intention of making conservation practical, various religious and moral codes of conduct have been codified. Provisions have been made for environmentally friendly behaviors or policies such as planting and preserving trees, digging Ponds, preserving and providing food to animals and birds and showing respect to fire, Sun, Varūṇa, (the god of the water or rain) through worship or sacrifice. Indian culture is so rich in environmental conservation norms that they do not need to Resort to modern environmental experts to solve current environmental problems but rather to learn the true meaning and importance of religious and cultural norms of behavior as taught by their ancient philosophical writings.

Indian philosophical thought, by introducing the close relationship between religion and nature has presented the principles of environmental conservation in such a way that people follow them out of respect for fear of God or religious rules. But later influenced by western science and culture all those principles have been considered as superstitious and discarded. Western thought religion and philosophies do not recognize any intrinsic value of nature and consider humans as the only valuable thing. Therefore, although they need to find new ways to solve the current environmental problems, the seeds of eliminating this problem lie within Indian tradition following Vedic environmental thought, Manusmṛti has described the behavior towards the environment in a simple easy to understand and clear manner. It has presented animal cruelty and the methods of their conservation in a very simple and realistic way. Through the Pañcamahāyājña prescribed in Manusmṛti, it has been explained that a person is morally independent of nature. Nonviolence towards animals and encouragement to plant trees and punishment for cutting down plants help in preserving the environment and in establishing harmony between the different parts of the environment. Although eating animal flesh as food is not said to be sinful, nonviolence has been called the general religion that must be followed by all people. As a result, abstaining from eating meat by killing animals is called a religion and it has been advised to change the attitude of people towards eating animal flesh or it has been proven to be very effective in protecting the existence of the animal world. The main teaching of the Śrūti is the integration of humanity with the entire creation, the entire world and every part of it is identical with every other part. Keeping this goal of the Śrūti or Vedas in mind. It is the duty of all Indians and the people of the world to rediscover this ancient Indian wisdom of the Manusmṛti and reconsider our attitude and behavior towards nature to be conservation and bringing sensitivity. Therefore, if we can conduct our lives in the way prescribed by Manusmṛti in this current situation we will not only be able to prevent future environment degradation, but we will also be able to restore the lost beauty and harmony of the environment to a large extent and will be able to pass on a healthy beautiful environment to future generation.

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