

Saarth

E-Journal of Research

ISSN NO: 2395-339X

“VAYU PURANA” IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENT

Dr. Suhasben Jhala*

Introduction:

Hinduism contains numerous references to the worship of the divine in nature in its Vedas, Upanishads, Parana's, Sutras, and its other sacred texts. Millions of Hindus recite Sanskrit mantras daily to revere their rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and the earth. Although the Chipko (tree-hugging) Movement is the most widely known example of Hindu environmental leadership, there are examples of Hindu action for the environment that are centuries old.

Hinduism is a remarkably diverse religious and cultural phenomenon, with many local and regional manifestations. Within this universe of beliefs, several important themes emerge. The diverse theologies of Hinduism suggest that:

- The earth can be seen as a manifestation of the goddess, and must be treated with respect.
- The five elements -- space, air, fire, water, and earth -- are the foundation of an interconnected web of life.

Dharma -- often translated as “duty” -- can be reinterpreted to include our responsibility to care for the earth. The *Vayu Purana* discusses its theories of cosmology, genealogy of gods and kings of solar and lunar dynasties, mythology, geography, manvantaras, the solar system and the movements of the celestial bodies.

In *satya yuga*, winter, summer and monsoon were unknown. All individuals' concept of *dharma* (righteousness) or *adharma* (evil) since people were naturally righteous. There were no prescribed places where people lived, there were no cities or villages. People lived freely on the shores of the oceans and in the mountains. Roots, fruits or flowers did not grow. People lived on juice that came out of the bowels of the earth. This juice was so miraculous that old age and disease were unknown. Hatred and envy did not exist. There was nothing to be envious about, since all individuals were equal. Moreover, people had the mental power to summon up whatever object they desired. There were no shortages.

As one moved from *satya yuga* to *treta yuga*, these mental powers that people possessed disappeared. The primary obsession of individuals in *satya yuga* was meditation (*dhyana*); in *treta yuga* it became knowledge (*jnana*). Thick clouds appeared in the sky and it began to rain. This rain fostered the growth of various trees. People started to live on the fruits of these trees. The trees also provided barks for clothing and honey. These trees were so wonderful that they were known as *kalpavrikshas*. That is, they provided whatever it was that one desired. But as *treta yuga* progressed, people became evil and started to fight over the possession of these trees. Consequently, the trees began to wither away.

It was then that habitations started to be built, earlier there had been no fixed dwelling-places for humans. Such habitations were built on mountain and near rivers. Villages and cities were constructed. It also became necessary to have units of measurement.

*Dr. Suhasben Jhala ,Smt. Sadguna C.U. Art College For Girls , Ahmedabad

Saarth

E-Journal of Research

ISSN NO: 2395-339X

The smallest unit of measurement was an *anguli* (a finger). Ten *angulis* made one *pradesha*. This signified the length from the thumb to the extended index finger. The distance from the thumb to the extended middle finger was *tata*; from the thumb to the extended ring *gokarna*; and from the thumb to the extended little finger *vitasti*. Thus, twelve *angulis* were equivalent to one *vitasti*.

Twenty-one *angulis* made one *ratni* and twenty-four *angulis* made one hasta (hand). Forty-two *angulis* were called one *kishku*. Four *hastas* made one *dhanu* (bow-length); two thousand *dhanus* were one *gavyuti*; and four *gavyutis* constituted one *yojana*. Thus, one *yojana* was made up of eight thousand *dhanus*. The *yojana* was the basic unit for measuring the sizes of human habitations.

The houses that men built were known as *shalas*. This is because they were modelled on trees. The branches of a tree (*shakha*) spread out in all directions. Since the houses spread out in this fashion, they were called *shalas*. The palaces were called *prasada*, the word signifying that these dwellings pleased the mind.

Any ancient text in Sanskrit containing mythological account of ancient times is called *Purana*. In non-Vedic Sanskrit studies they are considered as *Smritis*. These *Puranas* were completed between 400 to 1500 CE. There has been no one writer but many at different times of composition.

The *Purana* treats chiefly of the creation and destruction; renovation of worlds, the genealogy and deeds of gods and goddesses along with heroes and kings and lineage of Manu etc. We find that the *Puranas* deal systematically with the five subjects

1. The Creation ;
2. Genealogy of gods and *rsis*;
3. *Manavantars* or reigns of Manu; as each Manu rules over an aeon, each of which is shorter than the preceding ones ;
4. *Pratisarga* or history of humanity, destruction and construction;
5. *Vansanucarit* or history of Solar and Lunar dynasty

Among these *Puranas*, *Bhagvata Purana* and *Vayu Purana* are said to be of great value. Vishnu as Krsna is the central deity of the text in *Bhagavata Purana*. It has become so popular that it has been translated in almost all the Indian languages.

Vayu Purana is a religious Hindu text which consists of about 24,000 *shlokas* and is dedicated to God Vayu (The God of Wind). It is also known as *Shaiva Purana*. The *Vayu Purana* describes that the *Puranas* were recited by mighty Lord Brahma. According to it, a person has to properly understand the *Puranas* in order to thoroughly understand *Vedas* and *Upanishadas*.

***Vayu Purana* deals with several topics such as:**

- Creation and Recreation of our Universe
- The measurement of time (Kala)
- Origin of several gods such as Agni, Varuna, etc.

Saarth

E-Journal of Research

ISSN NO: 2395-339X

- Origin and descendants of Sages, *rakshasa*, *daityas*, *pitrs* and *gandharvas*
- Origin of birds, animals, creepers and trees
- Genealogies of several ancient kings
- Geography of earth and its seven *dvipas*
- Description of inhabitants of several *dvipas*
- Description of seven *Patalas* along with their names
- Description of solar system and celestial bodies
- Description of four *yugas* and 14 *manvantaras*
- Chapters on Music
- Several *Shakhas* of Vedas
- *Pashupata-yoga*
- Duties of people belonging to various castes
- Funeral rites

The first part of *Vayu Purana* consists of general features of *Purana* and has description of legends which glorify Lord Shiva, several Mahatma, ritual texts, *stotras*, *Pitrs* and their sect. It is believed that the *Vayu Purana* was recited by God *Vayu*, due to which it got its name as *Vayu Purana*. The *Vayu Purana* basically consists of four *Padas*, *Prakriya*, *Upodghata*, *Anusanga* and *Upasamhara*.

Environment is living things and what is around them. It can be living or non-living things. It includes physical, chemical and other natural forces. Living things do not simply exist in their environment. They constantly interact with it. Organisms change in response to conditions in their environment. In the environment there are interactions between plants, animals, soil, water, temperature, light, and other living and non-living things.

***Vayu Puran* has many places where the concern for environment can be seen. The concern may not be expressed in very obvious words, but it can be seen in the context of Houses and Dwellings.**

The sort of houses inhabited by the Aryans would be of great interest could it be reconstructed. Equations exist for door, door-frame or porch and pillar as well as the whole structure. The certainly suggest something more substantial than a nomad's tent-even perhaps a parched house..... From the series of *sala*, *cella*, *holl* ,some sort of pit-dwelling such as is common all over pre-historic Europe. Such is the information on the dwelling of the primitive Aryan. That the word *sala* should have an Indo-European antiquity is interesting from the view-point of the information available from *Vayu Puran*.

“Of the construction of the Vedic house we learn little, but the bamboo seems to have been largely used for the beams which borrowed their name from it. There is, however, a short hymn in the *Rigveda*, wherein the deity of the house, *Vastospati*, is invoked to bless man and beast, to afford protection and to grant a favourable entry. The *Grhya – Sutras* lay down rules regarding building of houses and the ceremonies to be observed in that

Saarth

E-Journal of Research

ISSN NO: 2395-339X

connection and we need not probe into the later history of this subject as the *Vayu* does not furnish such details as would justify such an attempt.

The origin of a fixed dwelling, as is explained by *Vayu Puran* is certainly very interesting as compared with the information noted above about the primitive Aryan house. It shows that a house was more or a less a wooden structure and it does not refer to any other material in this connection. It is further interesting that one manuscript omits the etymological explanation of the word 'Prasad' which occurs immediately after 'Sala', thus probably suggesting that the original tradition of the history of the dwellings of men did not know anything about a "Prasad", meaning a palatial building.

The references to cave –dwellings in our *Puran* occur in a purely mythological setting and we need not attach any historical importance to them. It is possible, however, that ascetics might have inhabited the caves, excavated by nature, for the references do not suggest any caves excavated by man.

The *Vayu Puran* has a very scanty information regarding the construction of buildings. It does not presuppose an existence of any treatise, well-known or otherwise, on the science of architecture. References to *Visvakarman* occur in the Vedic literature and almost the same functions are assigned to them in the *Vayu Puran*. But the later mentions Maya who is not referred to in the Vedas. The *Mahabharat*, however, gives us more information on this Maya, but there he is recorded to be a brother of *Namuci*. The epic calls him *Visvakarman* and his cleverness in building cities and palaces is often alluded to. He is there the son of "Diti" and was spared by Agni in the famous incident of the burning of the *Khandav* forest. It will at once be obvious that the *Vayu* information about him is comparatively earlier than that of the great Epic.

The description found in *Vayu Puran* with regard to the same topic is really very striking. The emphasis on climate which, according to our text forced man to resort to fixed dwelling is certainly interesting. It should be noted again, that the rise of civilisation, according to the theory of *Vayu Puran*, has taken root in the *Treta Yuga*. This is how the pre historians tell us about the origin of the fixed habitation of man and the rise of the village organisation.

REFERENCES

1. *Vayu Purana*, Published in Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, 1905.
2. *Vayu Purana*, Edited by R. Mitra, Bibliotheca Indica Edition.
3. *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 3, Ramakrishna Centenary Vols.
4. *History of Dharmastara*, Vol.2 by P.V.Kane.
5. *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, Harvard Oriental Series, by Keith, Vol. 31-2.
6. *Vedic Mythology* by A A Macdonell. , *Epic Mythology* by E.W.Hopkins