

Ecological Concerns In Mahabharata

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Abstract: Vyasa the story teller of the great epic Mahabharata has disclosed a wide range of topics through his embedded narratives. His kings in the epic have addressed in a very cosmic and holistic manner the acceptable social practices and policies. This attitude of the scribe has resulted in a culture survive and has given rise to speculative retelling of one of the core texts of the world with a new approach which is current and relevant. The poet born on an island and fondly called Krishna Dwaipayana has discussed multitudes of events like floods which resulted in ecological imbalance and short term strains. Through various illustrations and upakhyanas the poet has discussed incidents which make sense even to the current day readers. Family planning, elimination of excess population, hydraulic empire, management of flora and fauna, protection of cattle, famine insurance, guaranteed jobs all envelope themselves into the epic with concrete dramatic elements. The policies for the protection of the environment and sustenance of ecological balance as discussed in the epic had in themselves the core element of dharma, the right behavior by a common man. The awareness ensured cultural survival and sustained practices. Unchanged practices would definitely lead to culture endanger and pose multiple threats. The world is ridden with ecological and environmental catastrophe may be due to the actions of humanity. Survival chiefly depends on Dharma the postulated Indian experience which is a test for change and contemporary morality. The paper examines the role of literature in educating people on ecology which is a strong catalyst for sustenance of Dharma. Sources and references would be drawn from various texts on ecology, Vyasabharata, various editions on Mahabharata, and also from the research papers and journal articles published on the topic of presentation. The paper would also include images on ecological concerns as raised in the text .

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

The Hindus have responded in a very positive way for the concerns of ecology. They say” One tree is equal to ten sons”.

In the Hindu traditions the epics and puranas have given a detailed description of periodic and cyclic destruction of the world. The decline in virtue and behavior at the end of each aeon would bring the world to a deplorable condition. One of the reasons is the geometric increase in the world population which would cause an ecological inequilibrium.

A human being is a constant traveller. This travel of his caused multitudes of changes to the surrounding. Sometimes he is ignorant of how he would make a difference to rivers, mountains, weather conditions, nature and the like.

In Mahabharata nature is viewed as an extension of the same consciousness. Every human being is a product of the main elements of nature. River Ganga was the mother of Bhishma. All the sons of pandu were born of the main elements of nature while Draupadi was the product of the sacrificial fire. While describing gandhamadhanavyaasa has mentioned multitudes of trees which crated a healthy environment.

The literature in Mahabharata has also described in the gita certain positive responses to ecology. However ecology was not a very big concern during that time. The universal God-Head is perceived within the natural world and vice-versa. Several passages of the gita remind us of universal panentheism. The overlord identifies himself with elements of nature like the sun, moon, ocean, mountain, wind and river. The gita has a static social vision which has been told in several of its verses. It offers a spirituality which is profound and awe-inspiring. The embryo of universal consciousness is made to search for question about our most cherished beliefs, a kind of ecologically mandated meditation till they lead us to new directions along with maintainance of continuity with the old.

The Five Great Elements:- The epic has given paramount importance to the five great elements and almost reached to the point of conclusion that these elements create environmental consciousness. i.e. a kind of ‘Be Aware Of’ situation. The Adi-Parva has described multitudes of flora and fauna as also given a hint at prohibiting hunting of animals which of course was a favorite pastime of the royals. Optimum utilization of space is seen in planning of village and cities. Emphasis is laid on importance of water as origin of universe.

The three forms of fire Aahavaneeya, Garhapatya and Dakshinagni are discussed while air is recognized as Panchaprana comprising of Praana, Apana, Vyana, Udaana and Samaana. Ether (aakasha) is discussed as all-

pervading. Dr. Romila Thapar discusses about this in chapter-II of 'The narrative from the Mahabharata' in Sakuntala.

Maintainance of Ecological Balance and Cultural Dimension of Ecology:-

There is a beautiful description of hunting scene where forest dwellers and beasts are brought together and it appears more like a reunion of various components of nature in an amicable atmosphere. There are certain verses which point out that deforestation was curbed. There is a concerned cry for the development and sustenance of flora and fauna and positive exploitation of natural resources. Right conduct driven by dharmic background was the primary concern. Cultural ecology was transactional, transcendental, empirical and personal. (Anushasana -113-8).

The reinterpretation of the epic leads to a rational enquiry with a post navigational effect (Yugantha- Dr. Iravati Karve). Society and Societal references describing eating habits, status of children born out of wedlock all describe eco-philosophy. The balancing of cattle is seen in Ghoshayatra where cattle are counted. Ethical concern for environment is seen in Khandava Vana Dahana episode. Mahabharata can be described as 'spiritual Scientist'. Environmental consciousness led to purification of mind.

Through his embedded narratives Vyasa the story-teller has given a kind of culture survive and speculative retelling, multitudes of events like flood, short term strains, family planning, elimination of excess population, hydraulic empire, protection of flora and fauna, famine insurance are all discussed elemented by dharma. Dharma is a postulated Indian experience which is a test for change for contemporary morality. Mahabharata has shown that ecology through literature is a strong catalyst for survival of human race and sustenance of dharmic practices.

Ecological Concerns:-

Mahabharata reflects a conflict over social policy in the face of an environmental/ecological disaster. The conflict was resolved by constructing a 'Dharma' for the new age that became a point of sustenance.

Environment:- "The sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth; as well as of danger and damage". (WWW.businessdictionary.com)

Mahabharata has various verses advising protection of trees and forest.

Bhisma to Yudhishtira, "Let not such trees as yield edible fruits be cut down in thy dominions". (Mbh. Shanti Parva, Sec 89, Page.194).

Dice-Game:- Apocalyptic battle between two clans. The dice game can be identified in the larger part of tradition as a conflict between chaos and order, fueds and stability destruction and stagnancy, unpredictable and certain.

Rajasuyaga-Place of sacrifice a recreation of cosmos in miniature.

Cosmogomical rite intended to bring about the recreation of universe and the birth of the king.

A reader of the great epic will describe it as the quarrel between paternal cousins and their struggle to win over the kingdom. The epic Mahabharata has a trivial beginning but proclaims that it contains everything. The episode takes place in the gangetic heartland. While the west is well watered, the other side has the Thar Desert. The conflict takes place in this gate way.

The epic proposes a rigorous rationale for the conflict and categorization of the winners. The war had disagreements as the entire region suffered ecological disruption. Much earlier to this the refugees infiltrated into this kingdom causing much of the disturbances. However Santanu had laid and created certain policies to support the ecology. Pandu had a mindset to continue this policy. However he met a premature death and would not pursue his interest. Dhritarashtra the regent for Pandu could not completely adhere to this policy. However they did not call it as 'policies' but followed them or discounted them.

Infanticide:-Santanu and Ganga were cursed to be born as human beings. The king sees right before his eyes, the seven male entities killed by his own wife.

The events which happened naturally appears like a draconian rule. From a narrative perspective, it lays the foundation for the future happenings.

Hydraulic Ecology:- This refers to the people who settled in Indus-Saraswati culture that had relied on flooded silt.

Indian tradition has valued cow protection and they did not consider it appropriate for consumption. Anthropological evidences show that the cow is a long term requirement for a farmer and at best it should not be consumed. Agricultural settlements is feasible and a long-lasting culture in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Krishna and Balarama stand as counsellors, planners, initiators and finishers with their roles developing the plans of cow protection and ploughing.

Environment and ethics:-

Mahabharata embodies the Indian ethos, values and code of conduct. It is a depository of Indian ethos. The epic is an enormous drama that populates the story drama, pathos and thrills abound. The text teaches important lessons on environment and ethics.

One of the cardinal duties of a human being prescribed by Dharma is non-violence. We find the most refined expression of this term in the great epic Mahabharata. This has been much described in the Bhagavadgita. The gita has found a prominent place in Western ecological deliberations as well. The epic takes the due cognizance of moral principle of 'Lokasangraha' which makes it implicit to find a way-out for the cyclic implication of the processes. Ahimsa as advocated by Mahabharata maintains ecological balance. The real reason behind the burning of Khandava forest is at times discussed at length. It discusses its relation with environmental ethics. Lord Krishna and the master archer Arjuna had asked agni to destroy the forest populated with animals and other living beings. This is a reflection of the myth of a deluge (pralaya) a condition which leads to periodic dissolution of the universe at the end of an epoch. However it is also true that the end of an aeon, the population increases.

I. CONCLUSION

The paper is an exercise to make a sensible attempt to bring out the relevance of epic which has many historical evidences. Mahabharata embodies in itself many life-long learning lessons social policies which can be put into action are defined. Application of the embedded principles in the epic is possible through deconstruction and reconstruction of the text within the permissible limits. Policy makers, scholars and researchers should realize that a lot of wisdom on various issues of social concern existed and it is the responsibility of one and all to recognize these thoughts of wisdom and align them into proper, application-oriented policies. Many of these concerns are central to ecological concerns.

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