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Editor's Note: This is first issue of **Maarifa**. Maarifa means knowledge in Swahili. It's an ancient language spoken by tribe in Zulu province of South Africa. Thus this journal also endeavors to share knowledge.

This **Interdisciplinary Research Journal** aims to publish quality research papers. We invite all research scholars to publish their high quality research papers in our double blind peer reviewed journal next issue. Maarifa will publish quarterly issues with open access policy for all the published papers.

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***Energising Cultures in the Atharvaveda with
special reference to the Bhūmisūkta¹***

Kartik Pandya²

India has continuous and cumulative intellectual traditions of knowledge in many disciplines. This tradition begins with the *Veda*. As a mechanism of transfer and evolution of ideas from one generation to the next, the tradition is comparable to the perennial flow of the river Gaṅgā. The power and pertinence of knowledge systems in this tradition are attested by the existence of innumerable texts and thinkers that continue to be a subject of study in major Universities of India and world as well.

There is a need to expound major Indian knowledge systems by producing and making available authoritative statements that articulate their validity for the contemporary Indian and Western reality. Above all, we need now to look at these knowledge systems in the modern perspective. The disciplines of knowledge include logic, Philosophy of language, technology and crafts, polity and governance, ethics and sociological texts, architecture-the outer sciences, poetics and aesthetics, law and justice, mathematics and astronomy, agriculture, trade and commerce, medicine and life science as well. At this point of deliberation, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the organiser of this International Seminar for conducting such an envisioned and very important theme based Seminar which will help mass in general. What I strongly believe in this Seminar is that it will come out in the form continuous commitment to Indian knowledge systems, their validity and value in times to come.

¹ Presented in Three Days International Seminar on “Energising Cultures: The Eco-Centric Indian Experience” organized by Department of Sanskrit, Bhasha Bhavan, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad (Gujarat) during 3rd December to 5th December, 2015

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The *Bhūmisūkta* of the *Atharvaveda* foregrounds the fact that Indian thought has always been remarkably sensitive to the ecological concerns. The Vedic literature reflects so very often on the deep inter-relationship of this earth's ecology not only with humanity but with all life. There are extensive discussions on the three dimensions of ecological thinking viz. ecology as an interface of life forms, as conservation and as the equipoise between man the resources. I firmly opine that Indian thought, particularly Vedic thought, holds the right lessons for the contemporary ecological crisis. In the present state of ecological imbalance on this earth, it is necessary to draw upon this fund of ancient knowledge so that some integral path towards the goal of sustainable growth can be prepared. This paper intends the same.

Collins Reference Dictionary defines that *ecology* is the study concerned with the interrelation of living organisms and their environment while *conservation* means management, protection and preservation of the earth's natural resources and environment.³ Ecology is as old as the world itself and since time immemorial ecological speculations have dominated the language and literature of the Indian people. The two terms, Ecology and Environment, are closely associated with each other, where the latter in its wider concept denotes the maintenance of ecological balance and the conservation of the environment. The present century is marked by a serious concern for ecology and environment, but ancient India did not lag behind in so far as the environmental speculations are concerned. The Vedic seers in the dawn of early civilization have expended their energy in dealing with this subject in a comprehensive manner.

The *Bhūmisūkta* of the *Atharvaveda* is one of the oldest and the most important sources of information on the relationship of man to his environment and his duty to preserve it. In the sixty-three *mantras* of this *Sūkta*, the sage Atharvan has presented a beautiful picture of *Bhūmi* which is the source of our sustenance as also a symbol of the entire environment. The *mantras*

³ Collins Reference Dictionary, *Environmental Science*, pp. 90 & 140

reflect the symbolic significance of a sensitively comprehended ecology and conservation.

Bhūmi is invoked here as the personified Mother Goddess; she supports us with her abundant endowments and riches; it is she who nourishes us all like a loving Mother nourishes her children.⁴ These sentiments clearly denote the bond between the Earth and the human beings and exemplify the true relationship of human beings to other forms of life.

In fact the *Bhūmi* in the *Bhūmisūkta* does not merely mean the land; she rather represents all that is part of the environment. She symbolises the three principal components of the environment: the solid, the liquid and the gaseous. She is described here as born out of the waters of ocean. Surrounded by space, she is the creator and sustainer of the world.

In her solid form, *Bhūmi* is the land and abode of living and non-living beings as also the guardian and protector of all that is born and is to be born.⁵ She supports and sustains all, furnishes wealth and is the foundation of the world.⁶ Rocks, stone and dust constitute the earth; her soil is brown, black and variegated.⁷ The ascents, advances and planes of land belong to the earth.⁸

On the liquid side of the environment, *Bhūmi* is the sustainer of oceans, rivers and waters;⁹ she is wife of the clouds and is enriched by the rains.¹⁰ Various resources of water, such as the seas, rivers and waterfalls flow on the earth.¹¹

The gaseous aspect of earth is brought out through the observation that the air, “*Mātariśvan*,” blows on the earth and the light of the flame follows the wind which is blowing forward and backward. All the birds and bipeds fly to the

⁴ *Atharvaveda*, 12.1.10

⁵ *Atharvaveda*, 12.1.1

⁶ *Ibid*, 12.1.5

⁷ *Ibid*, 12.1.26

⁸ *Ibid*, 12.1.2

⁹ *Ibid*, 12.1.8

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 12.1.42

¹¹ *Ibid*, 12.1.9

earth.¹² She bears whatever lives, breathes and stirs.¹³ All the four quarters belong to her.¹⁴

Bhūmi is called *agnivāsa*,¹⁵ having fire as her covering. She also represents the energy or the element of fire in the environment. She bears with her the universal fire which is present in the herbs, waters, stones, men and horses.¹⁶ *Agni* gives heat and shine to the earth. The earth also has rich treasures of gold, gems and metals.¹⁷ She carries along with her the seasons brought by the Sun,¹⁸ her companion.

The physical aspect of the earth includes agriculture. The fertility of the earth is symbolised here through the image of the brimming vase, the bowl of plenty. Foliage and lotus emerge from the bowl. Waters flow as the life-giving forces of regeneration. The energy of the sun blossoms as vegetation which is the sap of life. She bears herbs of various varieties. Foodstuffs, such as rice and barley, come into being on the earth.¹⁹ The earth is the source of life. She is the world of living beings. The five races of men belong to her. They are her children. She has people dwelling at places, using different languages and practising diverse customs and manners.²⁰ Not only human beings, ferocious animals also are children of the same Mother Earth. Serpents and scorpions lie hidden in a torpid state. Worms too stir in the early rainy season in lively forms. Man-eating lions, tigers, jackals, wolves, scorpions and reptiles – all are on the earth.²¹

It is against this background that the land, water, air, fire, plants, animals, humans and divine beings come together in the various images of the

¹² *Ibid*, 12.1.51

¹³ *Ibid*, 12.1.3

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 12.1.4

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12.1.21

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 12.1.19

¹⁷ *Atharvaveda*, 12.1.44

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 12.1.48

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 12.1.2 & 4

²⁰ *Ibid*, 12.1.45

²¹ *Ibid*, 12.1.46

Goddess *Bhūmi*. The heaven, the earth and the atmosphere have given this vastness of vision to the seer while the fire, the sun, the waters and the gods have given him wisdom.²² Man has been given the capacities for its conservation and growth which would promote his own development also. The conception of the earth as the Mother in the *Bhūmisūkta* even goes further and prescribes that we should always recount without forgetting the glories of Mother Earth in all assemblages and meetings of the people,²³ since she prefers virtuous men of great abilities to those who obstruct the good.²⁴

The seer Atharvan of the *Bhūmisūkta* has also expressed the same feeling when he prays to the Mother Earth that we and our children may live long and be free from sickness and consumption.²⁵ The *sūkta* envisages that the whole world can be redeemed only by redeeming the character of man. This is possible only if ecological thinking, instead of being confined to the plane of expediency, delves deep into philosophical thought as well as religious sensibility. The very opening *mantra* of the hymn states that the earth is sustained by truth, by eternal order, consecration, penance, knowledge and sacrifice.²⁶ A spiritually charged and protected earth alone can bestow strength, lustre and authority on the nation.²⁷

Summary: The world today is confronted with the problems of maintaining ecology and environment. The ecological balance is dwindling day by day and the surroundings in which we live are getting polluted with the passage of time. Every right-thinking person should ponder over this burning problem which has been agitating the minds of tens of thousands of people all over the world. In order to promote relationships between living organisms and their environment a delicate balance should be maintained among the human

²² *Ibid*, 12.1.53

²³ *Ibid*, 12.1.56

²⁴ *Ibid*, 12.1.37

²⁵ *Atharvaveda*, 12.1.62

²⁶ *Ibid*, 12.1.1

²⁷ *Ibid*, 12.1.8

beings, the flora and the fauna. People living in big cities suffer from various environmental hazards which have assumed alarming proportion now-a-days.

It may be said that the *Bhūmisūkta* of the *Atharvaveda* is a lucid expression of the emotions of a true son of the soil. Mother Earth is depicted here as a symbol of natural resources bestowed upon man and it is desired that the same may remain steadfast, gracious, pure and propitious.²⁸ *Bhūmi* is worthy of homage. Never does she decay. She fulfils all our wishes.²⁹ The Prajāpati furnishes her with whatever she lacks in.³⁰ It is the duty of us, human beings that we should never trouble her whether we are sitting, standing or striding forth, with our right or left feet.³¹ May she bless us with all that is good. May God, the Lord of the Universe, make this Mother Earth of ours pleasant in every quarter.³² May that Mother Earth, thus prospering, enhance our prosperity.³³

²⁸ *Ibid*, 12.1.17

²⁹ *Ibid*, 12.1.61

³⁰ *Ibid*, 12.1.61

³¹ *Ibid*, 12.1.28

³² *Ibid*, 12.1.43

³³ *Ibid*, 12.1.13