CHAPTER - II

THE TREATMENT OF NATURE IN ANCIENT LITERATURE: ECO-AESTHETIC CONCERNS

Introduction

India is a big country blessed by nature. In the North there is the Himālayan ranges covered by snow and thick forests. It is followed by many valleys and the great northern plains, which is crossed by great rivers, flowing from the Himālayas like Sindhū, Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Brahmaputrā. In the south there is deccan plateau and rivers like Narmadā, Kāverī, Kṛṣṇā, Tapatī and numerous other rivers originating from the western ghats. The whole Indian peninsula is surrounded by seas. The various parts of India come under different climates. India is home of different species of plants and animals.

In the Vedas, which is the oldest literature available in India, the life of the ancient people who lived on the banks of the Indus rivers and its tributaries, and on the banks of the river Sarasvatī which disappeared from the surface long before, is described. Especially the nature and the life they led on its lap is reflected in a profound manner. The attitude of the Vedic people towards the natural forces and their thrilling life with
nature caused the concepts of Vedic Gods and Vedic rituals. Nature influenced the religion and philosophy of Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. After the Vedic period as this civilization moved on with changes and modifications, there were both continuity and break in the traditional attitudes towards nature and environment. Changes in religious outlook and urbanisation brought forth changes in the relationship between man and nature.

This chapter examines the various aspects of ecological and environmental knowledge of the ancient people of India and the delineation of the relationship of the living beings especially that of man with the surrounding nature as described in the ancient literature.

The Concept of Nature in Vedas

In the Vedic period people believed in nature and natural phenomena. In those times the area of forest was large and the land available for cultivation was less. Agriculture was not developed and the people were mostly fully depended upon the natural resources around them to fulfill all their necessities. They could not explain the natural phenomena around them, and hence tried to understand the natural with mythical interpretations. They were impressed by the arrival of rain, the appearance and movements of the celestial bodies and the mountains
and rivers and the natural elements like fire, air, earth and water etc. Their awareness of the environment was coloured by mythology but they were successful in linking their life with the natural surroundings and maintaining patterns of the relationships with them.

The Vedic deities are considered as the personification of the natural forces. The Ṛgveda which is the most ancient of the four vedas contains mantra (prayers), addressed to deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, Soma, and others who are obviously the religious transformation of different natural phenomena. The empirical and meta-physical aspects of Vedic deities are clearly observable in their descriptions. The concept of deities has two dimensions, the natural or physical aspect that could be realized through senses and the personified aspects that are imaginative or mythical. A brief description of important natural forces personified in the Vedas are given below.¹

Agni

Agni or fire occupies an important role in man’s life. It gives heat and light. Agni is found in nature and it could be created by man’s power. Primitive people all over the world once worshipped Agni. It is no wonder that a considerable number of mantras in Ṛgveda are addressed to Agni. In the Vedic religion it was a custom to burn the offerings in the fire. Vedic
people believed that Agni acts as a messenger between men and God. It is through Agni that Gods accept the offering made by the devotees. He has three forms, his fire on earth, the lightning in the air, and the sun in the heaven. He is said to have been produced by Indra between the two stones or is generated from the sacred fire sticks (Araṇīs). He is very young, being born in every morning. He disperses darkness, frightens away the demons of the night and brings light.

Agni shines like the rising sun and when he blazes near like gold, his form is a good sight. His brightness comes out of the environment in the form of lightning (Ṛg.7.1). Ṛgveda also refers to forest fire. The forest fire spreads on the trees, which stand thick in the woods. It makes sounds like a horse eating grass. In the flames of the burning trees in the forest he moves according to the direction of the wind and he leaves the path he had traveled marking it with the black colour (Ṛg. 7.3)

**Indra**

Indra is the most important deity in Ṛgveda. He is the rain God who destroys the demon named Vṛtra who represents the dry weather or summer season. His weapon is vajra or thunder bolt. Indra is the most powerful Vedic God. He is a great warrior and benefactor of the tribe.
Indra is an environmental deity and he is near to living beings and a friend of all who loves him. He travels on a chariot driven by horses. He contributes everything for the well being of living beings.

The horses of Indra get grass from the forest. Indra breaks the clouds and releases the water for the growth of plants and other properties on earth. (Rg. 10.23)

**Varuṇa**

Varuṇa is the great maker of the laws of nature. He established heaven and earth. He is the lord of waters. He fills strength in horses, milk in cow. He upholds moral order symbolised in the concept of Ṛta, the universal order. Varuṇa is the witness of the world and he punishes the wrong doers.

He is white as water drop. He makes waters and controls oceans without allowing it to submerge the shores and lands (Rg.7.17). He made the environmental path for sun who is the waker of the living beings. He freed the waters in the atmosphere and gave it to the rivers. He parted nights from the days (Rg. 7.88).
Sūrya

Sūrya is solar deity. He is the son of heaven and Aditi, husband of dawn. He travels across the sky drawn in a cart by seven horses. He awakes the people to work and at sunset, he gives rest to the living beings. Sun creates rain clouds and brings rain on the earth which is very vast and where high mountains exist. (Ṛg. 7.36)

Some hymns mention certain powers of Sun. It is said that the rays of sun have the power to cure dangerous skin diseases and heart diseases. One of the hymns prizes Sun God to give the greenish colour of the diseased skin to parrots or green plants. The colour is a beauty for them, but for the human body it is ugliness (Ṛg. 1.50)

Mitra

Mitra represents the beneficial side of the sun's power. He stimulates people to activity and holds fast heaven and earth. He is the friend of Varuṇa and along with him an old deity going back to the Iranian mythology.

Uṣas

Uṣas is dawn personified. She is like a dancer clothed in light who appears in the east and unveils her charms. She drives away the darkness as she comes with the light. She is ever young being born again
and again—when she shines the birds fly up from their nests and seeks nourishment.²

Maruts

Maruts are basically storm gods accompanied by rain and wind. As they are storm gods so they are bright, noisy full of anger, fearful and they are like swans with black backs. Their mother is Prṣṇī - the mottle cloud, and the fearful Rudra is their father. Rodasī lightning, is their female associate and their chariot is drawn by spotted deer (prṣatīs) which represents clouds tinged with lightning. They are being dressed and decorated with golden ornaments, carrying weapon in their hands, shaking heaven and earth, forest, mountains and evoking fear in the minds of the earthly people.

The Maruts are shining like lightning and travels with rains, beating the clouds with their weapons and pouring water. They shake earth and sky, make the clouds rain and travel everywhere with force (Ṛg. 7.57)

Earth and Sky

The vedic seers viewed Earth and Sky together as a single principle (Dyāvapṛthivī) that gives life to all beings. Sky is the father and earth is the mother of all. Both are shinning and the base for all the creation.
They are very well known, beautiful and eminate water. They are eternal and specially held by Varuṇa in their proper places. (Ṛg. 5.70).

Another mantra in Rgveda prays earth and sky to provide food, force and wealth. Father sky produces rain and mother earth bears all beings. They know everything and are always active. They are happy to co-operate with each other and treat every body equally.³

Rta and Rña

A glimpse of the lives of ancient people indicates that they were living in good harmony with nature. They were very closely related to the environment where human beings, animals, trees, earth, sky etc lived together. They tell that there is something ‘unchangeable’ on the background of the changeable. The unchangeable regularity of nature was termed as ‘Rta’ by Vedic thinkers.

The concept of ‘Rta’ and ‘Rña’ is very important in Vedic literature. These concepts are very much related to the balance to the cosmic order.

It is told that not only the natural phenomena, but the deities controlling them are produced by ‘Rta’. The word ‘Rta’ is used in different meaning like truth in general, a settled rule or law sacred custom, divine law and divine truth.
There are some R̄nas or debts to Gods, to the spirit of dead etc. Man should perform different rites like 'yāgas' to free from the debts of Gods. He should perform the rites like 'śrāddha' to get free from the debt of spirits. He should give water to the trees and plants and food to the birds and animals around his house. All these are for keeping friendship with them and for maintaining the balance between man, animals and other creatures. 

Forests

The R̄gvedic seers were aware of the importance of forest in maintaining the balance of nature. They believed in the Goddess of forest. She is not at all afflicted with fear and is always happy. (R̄g.10.140). Different creatures in the forest produce the sound 'ci - ci' in the night, other creatures also produce the same sound imitating them. The Goddess of forest hearing the melody of music gets delighted. The animals like cows wander freely and confidently eating grass and live in the forest. Bowers shine forth like dwelling places or houses. People from Villages who come to the forest for collecting firewood, return in the evening with sufficient pieces of wood in their hands. All these descriptions indicate that Vedic seers had great concern about the forests and they believed that they should be there for a peaceful life on Earth.
Plants

*Rgveda, X.97* contains 23 hymns that praise the ouṣadhis or medical plants. Various thoughts on the patient, disease, doctor and the medicine are seen in those hymns. Ancient Indians believed that all kinds of plants had some medical power. We have story of 'jīvaka' who was directed to fetch a plant that has no medicinal value. He failed in his mission which hints to the fact that all plants and trees are having some kind of medicinal value. The 'Ouṣadhisūkta' in *Rgveda* gives some meaningful hints to these aspects. "The medicinal plants are like horse that take the disease to the other side of the ocean of fortune. They shining forth with flowers and fruits, cure diseases. Let one medical plant reach the other and act for the cure of diseases".

Thus the plants, combined together, help to eradicate all the diseases. Each medical plant has its own power. At the same time, they have special effects when they combine together with others.

Atharva Veda’s love for mother earth is outstanding. One of the hymns known as Bhūmi Gīta, praises earth as the giver of all desired things. Mother earth loves all creatures living on it. We should not unnecessarily dig the earth. The earth is cow, Agni is her calf, she through the calf gives food, strength, best life, progeny, nourishment and wealth
(AV.4.39). The earth is our mother, is cause for birth, and space is our brother. (AV.6.120). Our environment is a blessing for us as it provides the basic necessity of life. We should know well the mother earth with her manifold designs and lead a balanced life in harmony with the environment.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan points out the impact of ecological concerns reflected in AV. The AV hymns directs people to maintain equilibrium of Bhūloka, Sūryāloka and Antarīkṣa lokas i.e. earth and other astronomical objects. Mind of human beings is always restless, the more it gets the more it wants resulting into a vicious circle of greed and temptations without any need. People go on cutting trees, do excessive mining, kill animals causing polluted environment. Vedic Ṛṣis had always stressed the need for planting of trees and avoiding the cutting of trees.⁵

The AV is aware of the importance of pure water. According to seers the waters are medicinal and water destroys diseases. The waters are the foremost divine medicine. There is nectar in the waters. According to AV, man becomes wise by intellect in the vicinity of mountains and conjunction of the rivers.
The Concept of Nature: Brähmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads

**Brähmaṇas**

The *Brähmaṇas* are texts written in Sanskrit prose that deals with detailed description of sacrifices and other rituals. They give proper rules for the conduct of yajñas in which vedic mantras are used in order to propitiate Gods like Indra, Agni, Soma etc. In addition to the ritualistic material, the *Brähmaṇas* also contain religious philosophy, stories etc. which support the yajña mode of worship. Each Veda has its own *Brähmaṇa*. Some scholars include *Brähmaṇas* also under the title of *Veda*. The Brähmaṇa portions are traditionally followed by *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*. The *Āraṇyakas* explain the various forms of Upāsana and the *Upaniṣads* are philosophical treatises.

The authors of the *Brähmaṇas* understood that Sun is actually nothing else than fire. Rituals were done to praise the Vedic deities who in turn protected the living beings and fulfilled their desires. Rain was essential for a prosperous life. The Vedic people knew that rain is produced from clouds, clouds from smoke, smoke from fire.

At the same time they recognise that fire and water has mutual enmity.⁶
Importance of rainy season is that it has the capacity of the fulfilling of one’s desires. Plants are the result of the swelling of waters. Because the plant grow whenever the water swells. According to the Brāhmaṇas sea is the womb of waters. समुद्रो वो अपां योः। तद्। The waters have their own light. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa says that lightning is the light of water विद्युत् वातश ज्योति:।

Āraṇyakas

The authors of these texts believe that the water is born of fire. Water is the nectar. Cosmic waters are the rains. All these world are established in cosmic waters. Clouds, lightning, thunders and rains are the four forms of water. Cosmic waters are there in all directions. Herbs are produced from earth.
According to Āraṇyakās Agni is the nourisher, Agni is the abode of waters and Agni is the sun. Agni is verily, the lord of food grains. Water are born of fire अग्नेरापि। Agni is the lightning. As is the sun in the heaven so is the eye in the head. Lightning is placed in the sun. Sun is the soul of movable and immovable world सूर्य आत्मा जगतसत्सुभ्य।

Sky is established on the earth and everything is installed in the sky.

Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads which keenly observe the truth, considers the essence of the elements like earth, air, time, sun, and stars have come out from the imperishable Brahman. From Brahman are produced the vital force as well as the mind, all sense, space, air, fire, water and earth that supports everything.

एतमाज्जायते प्राणो मनः सर्वात्मा रोगिणि च। [Munḍakopaniṣad. 1.13]

The earth was born form water. The earth is honey to all beings.

इति पृथिबी सर्वात्मा भूतानां मधुः।
Of all created beings earth is the essence and from the earth the herbs are produced. The importance of water, and plants to live on earth is being taught in the Uapniṣads.

In Aithareyopaniṣad, the Vāyu is the deity that never sets. (अनस्तमिता देवता यद् वायु:) From ether was born air (आकाशाद् वायु). This prāṇa is vāyu (तद्धोऽध्य प्राणः स वायुः). The air entered into the nostrils assuming the form of breath. (वायुः प्राणो भूत्वा नासिके प्राविशत्).

The Upaniṣad’s injunction with regard to kāla (time) is “Do not decry the seasons”, ज्ञतृत्व निन्देताम् न्यूर्तम्. Time, nature, necessity, chance, the elements and the Puruṣa should be regarded as the causes. These must be pondered upon. कालः स्वभावो नियतिवस्तुः भूतानि योनि: पुरुष इति चिन्तयः। The month, verily is Prajāpati. Its dark half is indeed food or matter.

Critical Remarks

In the Samhitas we can observe that people established a direct connection with nature. Personification of natural phenomena is clear. They prayed natural forces and sought their help to have a prosperous life. In the Brāhmaṇas man’s relation to nature is mediated by rituals. Through yajñās the priests wanted to control the natural forces. During the
Upaniṣad period knowledge became the ultimate aim and the truth of nature was a subject of study for the seers.

The Itihāsas:

The Concept of Nature in Rāmāyaṇa

The author of Rāmāyaṇa, Vālmīki was a son of nature. According to the legend Vālmīki was a hunter in his early life. He turned to asceticism advised by the saptarṣis and lived in the forest in his āśrama and he became a great sage. In his Rāmāyaṇa, which is the first kāvya, it is no wonder that nature is a main subject of description. The inspiration for Vālmīki’s writing of Rāmāyaṇa was given from a tragic experience he had accidentally in the forest. In the morning while he was on the banks of the Tamasā river, a hunter came there and killed one of the Kraunca bird couples. The cry of the he-bird at the death of his mate deeply disturbed Vālmīki’s mind. He felt compassion towards the bird and anger towards the hunter. At that time from his sorrowful mind the first poetry was produced.

Ma niśāad pratiṣṭāṁ tvaṁgaṁ: śåsāvati śama:

yatnājañjaṁśuṇaṁdekarvaṁchi: kāmāṁśhitaṁ. [VR. 1.2.15]
This verse is indeed a caution against the greed of humans who interfere in the forest and destroy its living beings. Vālmīki’s attitude towards nature is clearly visible in his first poem.

In Ṛāmāyahā most part of the story is taking part in the forest. Vālmīki gives the first forest experience to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa when they were young boys. Viśvāmitra comes to the palace of Daśaratha and requests to send Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and they went to Viśvāmitra’s hermitage which was far away from Ayodhyā. On the way they had to cross rivers, forests and valleys by foot. They had to first cross the Sarayū on the banks of which Ayodhyā existed. They watched the place where Sarayū meets Jāhnava.

Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Viśvāmitra spent the day on the banks of the Šonā river. The Šonā river joined Jāhnavaḥ the holy river worshipped by ascetics. Having seen that Šonā river furnished with sacred water and frequented by swans and cranes, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa were very delighted and they took up their quarters on the bank of that river. Where the two holy rivers become one, there they spent that night. 8

Next morning they were crossing the river then they heard a thunderous noise. Then the sage told the story about the cause of that noise.
Brahma once created out of his mind a lake, which is named Mānasa Sarovara. This river Sarayū comes out of it and flows all along the edge of Ayodhya city. In this spot Sarayū blends with the golden water of the river Gaṅgā.

After a while they reached a dark forest. No light from the Sun could filter into the forest. So thickly were the tree branches intertwined. There the beetles were making shrill music and the wild animals were roaring and making their characteristic noises. Even the birds seemed to cry harshly and there was no music emanating from their throats. Thus the forest was so dark to see anything.

Viśvāmitra was pleased with the natural curiosity of the young brothers. Then he told the story of that forest. Once that forest was a country named Malada and Karuṣa. There lived a terrible demoness Tāṭakā by name. She was ugly, horrible to look at and cruel by nature. This demoness had occupied the place of entrance to the countries and no human beings dared to enter there. She was extremely fond of human
flesh. Thus that country became a horrible forest and it is known as Tāṭakāvana.


dर्षनीयं मृणाकोणं मनोहरमलीकं च।

नानाप्रकोः: शकृनेवल्गुभावैरलंकृतम्।। [VR. 1.28.18 ]

The forest was very beautiful, full of deers nice to watch, decorated by several kinds of birds singing sweetly.

Rāma entered the forest, then Tāṭakā attacked him, he killed her obeying the order of the sage and made the forest free from her cruelty. Then they continued their journey.

They reached Viśvāmitra's āśrama during the day and night Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went round the yajñaśāla guarding it. Five days and five nights passed, on the last day there was a noise like the clap of thunder at the coming of monsoon. The flesh eating rākṣasas came, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa using Āgneyāstra and Vayavyāstra killed them.

The next morning at the conclusion of the yāga with the proper rituals, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa said that they were waiting for further commands from Viśvāmitra. The sage replied that in Mithilā King Janaka was performing a yāga and to see that yāga they could go there.
Birds and deers dwelling in Siddhāśrama followed the high souled Viśvāmitra having asceticism for wealth.

On the way to Mithilā they entered the hermitage of Gautama. There Ahalyā who was turned to a rock by Gautama’s curse was waiting for the touch of Rāma’s blessed feet to purify her and to sanctify the āśrama. After liberating her from the curse Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa saluted her and flowers rained from the heavens on them.

On their way to Mithilā they spent that night on the banks of Šona river. In the morning the music of the birds and the rustling of the river woke them up. After morning ceremonies they walked fast towards the north. They saw the sacred river Gaṅgā. They were thrilled at the sight of the river with swans and lotuses floating on its surface. Then Rāma wants to hear the story of the sacred river Gaṅgā, the tripathagā. How the Gaṅgā was flowing in three directions and embracing the three worlds, falls into the lord of streams and rivers.

Viśvāmitra started the story, 'There is a mountain by name Himavān. Himavān is the lord of all mountains and he had two daughters
who were unrivalled in beauty. Their mother was Mena, also known as Manoramā. Gaṅgā was elder of the two daughters and the younger is known by the name Pārватī and also name by Umā. The devas wanted Gaṅgā for themselves. They went to Himavān and asked him to make a gift of his daughter to them. Himavān agreed and Gaṅgā who converted herself into a river flowed in the heavens and her waters purified whatever it touched. She was famed as Manḍākinī in the heavens and is also known as Akāśagāṅgā. The other daughter Umā performed severe tapas and her devotion was rewarded. Her father gave her to Lord Mahādeva. These two daughters of Himavān are worthy of the worship of the three worlds.\(^9\)

After this Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa went with Viśvāmitra to Mithilā where Janaka's yajñā was conducted. They reached the yajñāśāla of Janaka. Rāma was staring with wondering eyes at the elaborate arrangements of Yajñā. Janaka welcomed them, Viśvāmitra introduced that they are the sons of Daśaratha and he then recounted the king about the yaga of Siddhāśrama and later journey to Mithilā. They were eager to see the Śiva's bow which is famed the world over.

Janaka brought the Śivadhanus. Then Rāma walked towards the bow and as he lifted and bent the bow, the great bow of Mahādeva broke
into two. Then Janaka told that “This Rāma is the greatest among men. My dear daughter Sītā is fortunate to become the bride of the house of the Ikṣvākus. After their marriage they returned to Ayodhyā.

In Ayodhyā, King Daśaratha wants to make Rāma the Yuvarāja. Mandharā’s poisonous words affects Kaikeyī and her mind changed, she wants to make Bharata as Yuvarāja. Hearing Kaikeyī’s words Daśaratha fell down unconscious. Rāma did not like to break father’s words given to Kaikeyī as boon that he should be exiled to forest for fourteen years. Rāma said to Sītā that “You have made up your mind to live with me in the great and fearful forest Daṇḍaka and I am certain that I will take you with me”.

Kaikeyī gave Valkala (Barks of trees) to Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā. They wore them and said farewell to everyone. Daśaratha said to Kausalyā that they would spend that night on a bed made up of twigs and leaves. Janakā’s daughter who is as delicate as a flower will walk on the ground and thorns will hurt her dainty feet.

The men of the city walked with Rāma. They reached the banks of the Tamasā river. They spent the night there on the banks of Tamasā. Rāma said to Lakṣmaṇa “as night draws near, the animals and birds are coming back to their dwelling places. Listen to the noises they are
making. I am spending the night here with just water to quench my thirst. I do not need any fruits or roots to eat. I do not feel like eating”. The sun was almost setting and Rāma sat on the bed of leaves prepared by Lakṣmaṇa. Rāma with Sītā by his side slept without any worry. His face was calm and peaceful as that of a child which was sleeping.10

From there they traveled fast and went further away from his beloved Kosala. They reached the river by name Vedaśruti. The river was famed for its cool sweet water. They crossed the river and went on their journey. After a long while, they reached the banks of the river Gomatī. Cows were grazing on either banks of the river which was crossing fast towards the ocean. They crossed Gomatī also and another river Syandikā lay across their path.

Rāma was overcome with sorrow when he reached the banks of Syandikā. Then Rāma said "Hunting in the forest has been sanctioned even by Rājarśi. It is a past time allowed to kings. But it must not harm innocent animals. Hunting on the banks of the river Sarayū was very dear to me”. Then they had reached the limits of the kingdom of Kosalā. Rāma stood with folded palms facing Ayodhyā and said that he conclude his stay in the forest and come back to Ayodhyā and live happily with my father and mother."11
They reached the banks of the river Gaṅgā, the divine river, known by the name Tripathagā, since she flowed in the heavens, on the earth and in the nether world also. Āśramās were found in the neighborhood and even apsaras from the heavens would often frequent the waters of Gaṅgā. The waves made sweet music along the banks and at places, the white foam of the waves seemed to be the smile of the river, so beautiful was the sight. On the banks of the river was a country by name Śringiberapurā ruled by the tribal king Guha. There they spent that night.

The song of the birds woke up Rāma and soon they were standing on the banks of the Gaṅgā. The birds were making such sweet music that heart felt uplifted with joy. Soon they reached the southern banks of the Gaṅgā. From here the paths were difficult to follow. They entered the forest Lakśmaṇa in the lead, Sītā in the middle Rāma bringing up the rear.

When evening approached the three travelers reached a big tree whose shade seemed to be large enough to accommodate all three of them. They watched the sunset and then sat down under the tree. That day they slept under the tree and they looked like lions in the caves of a mountain; noble looking and fearless.¹²

After spending a night peacefully under the shade of the tree Rāma, Lakśmaṇa and Sītā rose up early in the morning. There was holiness in
their minds. They walked fast entering the very heart of the forest. They were feasting their eyes on the scenery of beautiful trees and flowers. They travelled towards the sacred region of Saṅgama, where the river Yamunā entered Gaṅgā. Close to the sacred spot ‘saṅgama’ where the golden waters of the Gaṅgā merge with the midnight blue of the Yamunā the āśrama of the great sage Bharadvāja was situated.

Rāma went to the vicinity of the āśrama. For a moment the birds and the deer in the āśrama were startled by the arrival of strangers. They entered the āśrama, and they introduced themselves to Bharadvāja. He was a Ṛsi so rich in tapas that he was able to know the past, the present and the future. The great sage was extremely happy to have them as his guests. Ṛsi told them that if you so desire you can spend your time here. Hearing this Rāma honoured his invitation and said Ayodhyā is not far away from here, so the people of Ayodhyā will come here often to see me. So please suggest to us a place where we can be away from people.¹³

Bharadvāja was convinced of what Rāma spoke and he said that ten kośās from there stood a mountain by name Citrakūṭa. It is as beautiful as the Gandhamādana mountain. All around this Citrakūṭa are trees and waterfalls and lakes, which will please the eyes. Once a man sets his eyes on the peaks of Citrakūṭa his mind will never dwell on unholy
thoughts. So Bharadvaja considered this mountain as the ideal place to stay.

Very soon they reached the beautiful mountain Citrakûta. Bharadvaja said that there were a thousand different types of birds. Flowers and fruits could be seen everywhere and waterfalls made music all around them. They came across the aśrama of Vālmīki and they visited him. After spending some time there they took leave of him.

Rāma sings the glory of mountain:

न राज्यंशनं भद्रे न सुहिम्यावनभवः।

मनों में बाधते हस्तव रमणीयाञ्च गिरिम्।  [VR. 2.94.3 ]

Rāma forgets his sufferings and feels no pain for his separation in Citrakûta.

Going out of the Citrakûta mountain, Rāma showed Sītā the charming stream Mandākinī of excellent waters. It was delightful with its picturesque beauty attended on by swans and other water birds and lotus flowers. Many kinds of trees were standing on its banks bearing fruits and flowers and the stream shone like a lake of the Gods.

क्षितिन्मणिनिकाशोऽक्षितू पुलिनशालिनीम्।

क्रीडितो सिद्धजनाकौण्येन मन्दाकिनिः नदीम्।  [VR. 2.95.9]
Mandākinī, has its waters, resembling pearls banks filled with persons who have attained emancipation.

Rāma says to Sītā:

सखीवच्च विगाहस्य सीते मन्दाकिनिः नदीम्।
कमलान्यावज्जती पुष्करणिः च भामिनि।। [VR. 2.95.14]
त्वं पोरजनवद् व्यालानयोध्याभिनव पवंतम्।
मन्दस्य वृन्ते नित्यं सरसुविदिमां नदीम्।। [VR. 2.95.15]

O! Sītā, perform your ablutions in the Mandākinī scattering at the sametime O! girl, red and white lotuses. Do you, my wife always consider the wild animals as citizens, the mountain as Ayodhyā and this stream as the Sarayū. They worshipped all the Gods in the forest. Thus they spent very happily in the forest, so peaceful was their life in Citrakūṭa.

After six days of their departure, King Daśaratha fell ill because of great sorrow and he passed away. After the funeral ceremonies Bharata and Śatrughna decided to go to the forest to see Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to inform fathers death and request for his return to Ayodhyā. They met Rāma. Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa at mount Citrakūṭa. Rāma performed his father's funeral rites but refused to return to Ayodhyā. Bharata took Rāma's foot wears and carried them to Ayodhyā with respect.
Dressed in tree-bark and deer-skin, Bharata lived in Nandīgrāma. He worshiped Rāma’s sandals kept on the throne and reported to them about the happenings in the kingdom as though they were alive. There was nothing he did without consulting them. Dedicating all to the Pādukas he ruled the kingdom.

In the Āraṇyakāṇḍa, the sad and worried sages inform Rāma that a rākṣasa by name Khara was killing all the sages. He was cruel and he ate human flesh. He had begun to attack the āśramās in Citrakūṭa. Hearing this Rāma was unhappy and he decided to leave Citrakūṭa. Then the three began their journey again.

After some distance Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa reached the āśrama of the renowned sage Atri. After the conservation between Sītā and his wife Anasūyā and accepting gift from her they continued their journey and entered the dense forest like the sun enters a mass of dense dark clouds.

When Rāma entered the Daṇḍaka forest his eyes lighted on a group of āśramas belonging to the sages there. Wherever he turned his eyes they were greeted with the sight of bark garments hanging from the branches of the trees. The place was the refuge of all animals. Deers and birds were all over there. The floor was literally strewn with darbha, samith
and all the many things to be found in the āśramas of ṛṣis. The forest was full of trees favoured by the holy men and they bore fruits and flowers which were needed by the dwellers there. The air was filled with solemn music of vedas.\textsuperscript{14}

They spent a night there and proceeded on their journey. There were wild animals everywhere tigers, wolves and wild buffaloes. Some trees had creepers clinging to them and these creepers were sucking the lives out of the trees. There were lakes which were so deep that the water looked dark and fearful.

In the forest Rāma had a number of encounters with the Rākṣasas like Virādha. They met Jaṭāyu the vulture King who was the friend of Daśaratha and following his advice they went to Pañcavaṭī.

Jaṭāyu told that the forest was very fierce and dangerous. So he could guard Sītā whenever they have to go out. The three of them travelled towards Pañcavaṭī guided by Jaṭāyu.

They arrived at Pañcavaṭī, filled with various animals and beasts of prey. It was furnished with blossoming woods. There were a lot of flowers, kuśa and water. This place was level, graceful and surrounded
with blossoming trees. There was a beautiful pool embellished with lotuses, resembling the sun, breathing balmy perfume.

Sage Agastya showed them the graceful Godāvari, boardered by flowering trees swarming with swans delighted with Cakravākas. The hills are covered with trees in full flowers, and they are shining like elephants painted with diverse colours by persons with the utmost care. This spot is sacred, it is charming and abounds in beasts and birds. There Sītā enjoyed herself collecting flowers and making friends with birds, deer and peacocks.

Once when they were seated, Sītā by the side of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa some distance away, a rākṣasi, Śūrpaṇakhā by name came there. She was the younger sister of Rāvaṇa, the widow. She was attracted by Rāma's handsome figure. She requested him to take her as his wife. But he rejected her. The angered Śūrpaṇakhā attacked Sītā and was deformed by Lakṣmaṇa. Śūrpaṇakhā went to Khara the king of Rākṣasas and complained about the atrocity done by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. Khara and his armies fought with Rāma and in the end they were all killed by Rāma alone. Śūrpaṇakhā reported these things to Rāvaṇa the emperor of Rākṣasas living at Lanka. He decided to abduct Rāma's wife and take revenge on Rāma.
To abduct Sītā Rāvana went to Mārica, to think about the ideas. Rāvana was impatient to reach Daṇḍaka and to see Sītā. Mārica changed himself into a golden deer. The deer was wandering about on the grass-covered frontage of the āśrama.

At that time Sītā came out of the āśrama to gather flowers for worship. She walked round the karṇikāra trees and the asoka trees. The deer came very near where she was collecting flowers. Seeing the beautiful deer, she wanted to get it. Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma looked at the deer. Lakṣmaṇa suspects that it is not a deer. But Sītā wants the deer.

Rāma chased the golden deer and was away from the āśrama. Later Lakṣmaṇa also joined him by the treachery of Mārica. Rāvana approached Sītā in the disguise of a Samnyāsi and abducted her.

When Rāma came back to Sītā’s āśrama he did not find her there. Rāma asks everyone in āśrama about her wife.

चूतनीपमहासालनू पनसानू कुर्यानू धवान्।

दाडिमानिष तानू गतवा दृष्टवा रामो महावशा:। [VR.III. 60.21]

बकुलनाथ पुष्पवारसंवदनानू केतकांसतथा।

पृच्छन् रामो वने भान्त उन्मत इव लक्ष्यते॥ [VR. III. 60.22]
The highly famous Rāma asking about Sītā nearing the various trees such as mangoes, nīpa, mahāśāla, pānasa, kuravakā, bakula, punnāga, sandal, and ketaka began to traverse the forest like a maniac.

He asked the diverse animals, O deer! Do you know for certain about Jānakī having the eyes of a doe? O elephant, do you know about the daughter of Janaka having thighs resembling your trunk, tell me if you have beheld her.

दद्दर्शं फरणशालगं च सीतमा रहितं तदा
श्रीया विरहितं धवस्तं हेमन्ते पदिणीमिव III [ VR. III.60.5]

He then found it empty of Sītā, like a tank in evil plight and bereft of lotuses during the winter.

Seeing the cottage empty, with its trees as if sorrowing and its flowers faded and its beasts and birds sunk in gloom, forsaken by the sylvan deities, stewn with deer-skin and kuśa and twists of kāśa, he wept again and again. The timid one has been carried off, or is she dead or has anyone eaten her up or has she vanished from the earth, or has she gone to cut flowers and fruits? He searched his beloved one carefully. He rushed from tree to tree and bewailing.
Oh! Arjunā, she was very fond of you, tell me of that daughter of Janaka. Oh! Kakubha, you stands beautifully that being enveloped with creepers flowers and leaves and filled with the hum of bhramaras. Oh! Karṇikāra, you appear very beautiful with this blossoming flower.

On the way Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa found the Jāṭāyu and understood that Rāvana has taken Sītā towards the southern direction. They moved to the south and reached distant parts of the forest visiting the hermitages of sages. They arrived at the āśrama of Śabari on a hilltop and appreciated the beautiful sight of Pampā lake. Vālmīki describes the natural beauty of Pampā lake like this. It was filled with red and white lotuses, with transparent water like vaiḍūrya. There were trees around the lake and the cool water was pleasant and graceful with various flowers. The banks of the lake were covered by fallen flowers from the various trees and creepers as if covered with a blanket of diverse bees. The trees were showering flowers like clouds pouring forth. The clear wind blowing from the mountain was making a melodious sound, as if it was singing and making the trees dance accompanying the musical notes of the delighted cuckoo. The wind was perfumed of sandal and it was cool to touch. Bees and birds of melodious notes who were rejoicing with their mates, were flying on the banks of the lake. Peacocks and peahens unfurling
their wings like crystal lattices were dancing hither and thither. Rāma laments that the flowers and the richness of spring were of no avail to him. The cool breeze carrying the fragrance of flowers appeared to him full of fire. He could not tolerate the beauty of the mountain because of the separation from his wife. The prince of mountains beautiful with various metals has been throwing up dust of different colours driven by the wind.

Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa met Hanūmān on the way and made an alliance with Sugrīva the younger brother of Bāli, who was expelled from the country and living on the mount Rṣyamūka. According to a treaty Rāma killed Bāli and coronated Sugrīva as the king of Kiśkindha and Sugrīva in return employed thousands of monkeys in search of Sītā. During the rainy season in Kiśkindha, Rāma suffers pain when he thought about Sītā who was living in the captivity of Rāvaṇa.

In the rainy season the sky, after drinking the liquid contents of the ocean through the rays of the sun, like a wound covered with a form cloth, is enveloped with cool clouds. The hill having blown Arjunās and ketakās has been bathed with showers. The lightning, shining by the violet clouds, is appearing like the poor Sītā at the lap of Rāvaṇa. The quarters are covered by clouds and therefore the Moon and stars stay hidden.
In the rainy season, the dust is watered, the air is saturated with dews, all the evils of the summer are stopped. The kings no longer proceed on royal marches and those journeying in a foreign land return to their native homes. The river Sarayū is now brimful with water. The birds having their wings discoloured and being wet with water are delighted and drinking the drops of clear water.

The contingent of monkeys lead by Aṅgada and Hanūmān reached the Southern sea. Hanūmān decided to jump to Laṅkā which was at the other side of the sea. Vālmīki gives a highly imaginative account of the jump of Hanūmān from the Mahendra Mountain.

The mountain at once shook and flowers began to drop down from the trees. Having discharged, that fragrant flowers from trees covered all the sides of the mountains. Beasts and birds shivered in fear and ran in every direction. The water lashed up to the clouds by the force looked like autumnal clouds overspreading the sky.

As he was leaping the sun did not burn him, and the wind ministered to him for the success of Rāma’s work. Then the ocean send Maināka, who is hued in gold and situates in the waters. The great mountain, Maināka covered on all sides with water, immediately brought forth his peak and asked him to sit and rest.
He refreshing himself in Citrakūṭa cast his eyes on Lanka there covered with showers of blossoms pounded down by the trees. The trees were bearing flowers and fruits at all seasons and gardens were exceedingly beautiful to behold.

Vālmīki describes the beauty of Aśokavanikā as seen by Hanūmān. Hanūmān leapt from the wall of Rāvaṇa’s mansion over to that aśoka tree garden. There he saw various kinds of trees. They had their tops furnished with flowers through spring and the other seasons. Hanūmān saw the place surrounded with various species of trees, having fruits and flowers, with creatures expressing happiness by their movements, birds and beasts overflowing with spirit, echoing with the cries of peacocks and furnished with various species of fowls.

There Hanūmān saw beautiful pavements in silver and gold. There were a thousand of aśoka trees, some of them gold, some were like the flame of fire and some were like dark blue collyrium. It was like the garden of 'Nandana' or like the garden of Kubera.

**Critical Remarks**

Vālmīki’s aim of writing Rāmāyaṇa was to tell the story of a perfect man who was truthful and heroic. At the same time Vālmīki shows the
quality of Rāma as a lovable hero who is always ready to co-operate and live in harmony with other people. This quality of Rāma helps him in his long forest life where he has to live like a forester.

Vālmīki gives importance to the narration of story of Rāma in the work. He goes on telling episodes after episodes of Rāma’s life. Elaborate descriptions have no place in such epic. However at some places descriptions are unavoidable especially in the war scenes. The descriptions of nature also are a welcome feature.

The description of forests and trees occurs repeatedly as Rāma travels through the forest facing difficulties on every step. But these passages are brief and do not show much diversity. Often same type of description are given about flowers rivers, trees, etc. The description of trees and flowers in 'Daṇḍaka forest' and 'Aśokavanika' are surprisingly similar. It shows that Vālmīki was not so much interested in expressing subtle differences of nature and was satisfied with some sort of abstract or generalised description.

Another feature is that Vālmīki has not given enough examples of Rāma's life on the laps of Nature. He is not giving the details of Rāma's day today life. Because of this the harmonious life of Rāma with the nature is lacking sufficient information that we expect.
Although Vālmīki does not give detailed ecological description of the forest etc., and other natural phenomena, he had a total view of nature, its coherent and harmonious way of existence, which always work for a synthesis of conflicting forces and interests. Rāma experiences different faces of nature like villages, deep forests, rivers, hills, valleys, mountains, lakes, caves, sea, mainland, beach, island, sky, etc. His friends in the forest were the hermits who live in complete harmony with nature, apes, bears, like Jāmbavān, Vulture like Jaṭāyu and good rākṣasa like Vibhīṣaṇa. Rāma was able to unite them and achieve his purpose through them. Vālmīki through the story of Rāma gives an instance of how an exiled human being achieves his goal through a harmonious life with different forces of nature.

In this context life of sages in the forest in calm and cool āśramas where even the wild animals behave friendly towards them is also important.

**The concept of Nature in the *Mahābhārata***

Nature is an essential subject in *Mahābhārata* which contains hundreds of stories. The Pāṇḍavas were banished to the forest by the treachery of their cousins Kauravas. They have to suffer a miserable life in the forests. In Vanaparva the life of Pāṇḍavas in the forest is described in
At first Pāṇḍavas lived in the pramāṇavāna and later they moved to the Kāmyaka forest situated on the banks of Sarasvati basins where many great sages were doing penance. Vyāsa describes the forest entered by the Pāṇḍavas in this manner. The Pāṇḍavas entered the forest at the end of summer where many trees like mango trees, madukas, nīpas, arjunas, and karṇīkāras were filled and clothed with flowers. Peacocks, Cakoras and kokilas sat on the top of the highest trees and emitted their sweet notes. They saw many ascetics of accomplished piety in that forest staying in the hermitage of pious souls and who were wearing bark and matted-locks. Seeing the Pāṇḍavas, many cāraṇas and siddhas approached them. The huge tree bent down with the weight of creepers. With those five illustrious bow men sitting under that tree, it appeared like a mountain with the five gigantic elephants resting at its side.

Pāṇḍavas lived in the Kamyaka forest for some time. That forest was terrible during the night because of the attack of the man-eating rākṣasas. There Bhīma fought with Kirmīra, brother of Bakāsura and killed him. Kṛṣṇa came to meet them and Yudhiṣṭhirā decided to quit the forest and they entered the Daitya vana which was full of salva tress,
beautiful lakes and grand elephants. They decided to live in that forest for the remaining twelve years.\footnote{17}

Yudhiśthirā advised Arjuna to meet Indra and get his mighty weapons. Indra advised him to worship Śiva. When Arjuna traveled towards Himālaya for penance he saw a beautiful forest. It abounded in various flowers and fruits, it was inhabited by birds of various species. It was full of various animals and was frequented by the Siddhas and Carakas. When Arjuna entered that forest, which was destitute of human beings, conchs and drums from heaven were sounded.

Great showers of flowers fell on the earth, and the clouds spreading out covered every place with a shade. There he saw many trees blooming in green and resounding with the sweet notes of the birds, abounding in great rivers and currents of the colour of vaiḍūrya jems.

Echoing with the sweet notes of the swans, ducks and cranes, the bank of those forest rivers were resounded with melodious strains of males Kokilas, of peacocks and of cranes. Seeing those rivers of sacred, pure and delicious water and also their charming banks, Arjunā became very much delighted.
Arjuna became engaged himself in asceticism in that charming forest. Clad in cloth made of grass and with deer skin and holding the stick he ate withered leaves fallen on the ground.

At the end of Arjunā’s long penance Śiva appeared before him in the form of a hunter. After a fierce fight with Arjunā that destroyed his pride Śiva gave him the great Pāśupatāstra.

In the story of Nala, Damayantī was abandoned by the King in the forest. She cries and appeals the animals and trees and mountains, to give information about her lost husband. "Oh Lord of the forest! If you know nothing of Nala, endure me up and there by relieve me from this misery". But the lion hearing her lament in the wilderness returns to its cave. The forest and the sides of the mountain were haunted by lions, tigers, elephants, bears and deers. The wild valley sounded the various notes of birds and the meadow was full of Kimśukas, Aśokas, Bakulas, and bright karṇikāras and plakṣas bearing blossoms. There searching Nala in the forest she roamed towards the northern direction and found a charming hermitage inhabited by ascetics. That hermitage was abounding with various species of animals and swarming with monkeys. She was comforted by the sight of the calm and beautiful āśram.
During the absence of Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhirā his brothers and Draupadi conducted a pilgrimage towards holy places which were on the banks of rivers Sarāṣvatī, Gomatī, Gaṅgā, and so on. They visited many hermits of great status. They crossed the mountains like Calasailam Mandharā, Mainākam and Śvetham and reached the valley of Gandhamadana mountain. They climbed the Gandhamadana and reached the Badarikāśrama. While they were staying in the beautiful forest area, once a strange flower with great fragrance fell before Draupadi. It was the ‘Saugandhika flower’ brought by the wind from the other side of the Gandhamadana mountain.

As Draupadi wanted such flowers Bhīma went in search of it towards the direction of the wind and reached a beautiful lake which was near the Kailāsa mountain. On his way he happened to meet Hanūmān and get his blessings. The forest where Hanūmān lived was full of plantain trees. From that forest he entered a forest full of flowering trees and which was named ‘Saugandhika vana’. That forest was protected by Kubera. The beautiful lake was filled with water and was booming with golden lotuses. Bhīma wanted to drink the cool and clear water of the lake. He entered the lake drank water and took bath in it but the Rākṣasas who were employed by Kubera to protect the lake stopped him.
After a fierce battle Bhīma defeated them and enjoyed the water of lake and collected plenty of golden lotus flowers and with blessing of Kubera returned to Draupadī.

Pāṇḍavas lived in the Nārāyaṇa āśrama for some times. Then they went to svetaparva expecting the return of Arjuna from heaven. Arjuna was staying in heaven because of Indrā's invitation. Pāṇḍavas climbed the śvetaparva with the help of Ghaṭotkaca. The experiences of that forest were extra-ordinary. The trees were bearing fruits and flowers in all seasons. There was the humming of bees, lakes decorated by lotuses, the branches of trees perched by peacocks.

The Pāṇḍavas lived in the forest for 12 years, but Vyāsa doesn't show that Pāṇḍavas had deep respect and love towards the forest, that they depended for their daily life. Pāṇḍavas, including the wise and calm Yudhiṣṭhirā were not interested in developing friendly and harmonious life style suitable in the forest, not having much violence towards the birds and animals and other living-beings. They always thought that the forest was their rightful resources that could be used to fulfill their selfish needs. Vyāsa reveals the selfish and cruel mentality of Pāṇḍavas and the sufferings of the living-being of the forest by narrating a dream that Yudhiṣṭhirā had one night.
Once when Yudhiṣṭhirā was sleeping at night some animals of forest, filled with tears, appeared in his dreams. Joining the hands in salutation the animals told him "we are the remaining ones who have survived the continuous hunting by you. We will be completely wiped out if this hunting continues further. You have killed all animals in this forest. A few animals remain here who are only sufficient to keep the species go on. So you please select any other forest to save us". Hearing these words and seeing them trembling and afflicted with fear Yudhiṣṭhirā became very pity towards them. He said, "Don't worry! I will do as you wish". 

Waking up in the morning after the dream the king told his brothers about his dream. For the sake of those animals, they must go to the charming forest of Kāmyakā, abounding with animals. The Pāṇḍavas thought that they had left the Kāmyakā long ago, so there must be many animals. Then they started their journey to Kāmyakā forest with brāhmins.

The country called Khāṇḍavapraṣṭha was once the capital of Kurus. In that country nothing would grow. Not even animals could exist there. Such a terrible waste of land was given to Yudhiṣṭhirā as his share of the kingdom. For the reconstruction of that place, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna started
to destroy the Khāṇḍava forest, they burned the forest and no animals were allowed to escape from that fire.

**The story of Śakuntalā**

King Duṣyanta with his soldiers having killed thousands of animals entered another forest to hunt in it. Fatigued with hunger and thirst and accompanied by only one follower, he came to a large desert at the end of the forest. Having passed over this herbless desert, the king came to a large forest full of holy hermitages. There was no tree without fruits, there were no shrubs with prickles on them, and there was no plant that had no bees swarming around it. The whole forest resounded with the sweet songs of the birds, and it was decked with all the beautiful flowers of all the seasons. The place looked very impressive with tall trees with large trunks. The river was charming with ascetics and abounded with every species of water flows.¹⁹

Duṣyanta saw the hermitage which was situated on the banks of the river Mālinī. Milk white waves played on her water. Cakravākas sported on her banks. Then he wanted to enter into that sacred place. He desired to see the great ascetic, the illustrious Kaṇva. The king forgot his hunger and thirst with pleasure as soon as he entered that forest. Then a maiden in the dress of ascetics came out of the hermitage. She
honoured him, from her, he knew that Kaṇva had gone away from the hermitage to collect fruits. The king wants to know about her. Then the daughter of Kaṇva started her story: when Visvāmitra started his asceticism, Indra thought that by his great ascetic penance he would hurl him from his high seat in heaven. To prevent his tapas he sent the Menaka the celestial maid. Seeing her beauty and accomplishments, he was filled with desire and wished for Menaka's company. He invited her to come to him, and the beauty accepted his invitation. They passed many days in each other's company.

Menaka went to the banks of the river Mālinī, which passed playfully through the beautiful valley of the Himālaya Mountains and there she gave birth to a daughter. Then she left the child and went away. In the deep solitude of the forest surrounded by the vultures the child grown-up. Seeing this Kaṇva brought the child to the Kaṇva's hermitage and he made her his daughter. Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā fell in love and they married according to Gandharvā form. Then the illustrious king returned to his country.

The great ascetic Kaṇva, possessed of spiritual knowledge, knew all with his spiritual sight. Śakuntalā gave birth to a boy of immeasurable energy. Seeing the great strength of the boy Kaṇva sent him with his
mother to Duṣyanta’s palace. There the king rejected them. Śakuntalā says many words about Duṣyanta but he did not accept them. At last they heard a voice from the heaven Duṣyanta recalls his memory and he accepts his wife and his son.

**Critical Remarks**

Let us conclude this section with these observations.

1. In *Mahābhārata* we can see a lot of references to the Himālayas, its forest and valleys, its rivers, lakes and countryside are described. But the south Indian landscapes are rare. But *Rāmāyaṇa* considers the geography and the people of the south like Kīśkindha, rivers like Godāvari, island of Lankā, etc.

2. *Mahābhārata* has got fewer description of rivers but in *Rāmāyaṇa* there are a lot of descriptions of rivers.

3. In *Mahābhārata*, Pāṇḍavas were driven to live in the forest, afraid of Dhārtarāṣṭras. Later they happened to live there for 12 years. In *Rāmāyaṇa* the hero goes to the forest and he lives there for 14 years. Both have long sections of forest life.

4. In *Mahābhārata* Pāṇḍavas killed the animals using their weapons. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma lived with nature and did not do harm to the forest life.
5. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā the daughter of earth lived with nature. She was as patient as the earth. But Draupadī in *Mahābhārata* appears as a courageous women always at odds with her surroundings.

6. In *Mahābhārata*, we can see the cheating, diplomacy, politics and administration given importance. In *Rāmāyaṇa*, the depiction of hermitages and the forest environment are given prominence.

**Purāṇas**

According to tradition, purāṇas propagate the teaching of the Vedas. A purāṇa is defined as follows:

सर्गसं प्रतिसर्गसं वेणो मन्वन्तराणि च।

वेणानुचरितं चैव पुराणं पञ्चवल्क्षणम्। [Amarakośa]

(1) The creation of universe (2) Its destruction and fresh creation (3) The genealogies of Gods, sages and Kings (4) ages of different Manus and the history of the dynasties that originated from the Sun and the Moon are the contents of Purāṇas. Our ancestors have built a culture with deep understanding of nature’s laws and never allowed to destroy the ecological integrity. They were able to maintain a perfect balance of eco-system.
The perceptions of natural law were reinforced by mythology and religion. They were also able to identify the sophistication and amazing perfection in biological functions. Knowing these values they insisted to retain the biological integrity, as they were fully conscious that human survival depends on eco-system in which he lives.

The wilderness provides the integrity for evolutionary processes of plants and animals. Human beings lived with them not only as members of the system but as great friends developing ultimate intimacy with all animals, plants and birds. They seem to have the awareness of beautiful spirit that is the universal mother hidden in nature which is bloodless, fleshless bodiless and endowed with ultimate wisdom of governance. This deep understanding must have made them to prohibit the concept of hunting animals. They allowed them to move freely and they were able to communicate silently with every animate and inanimate component in their settings.²⁰

During the Vedic period, there were no laws to protect the fauna and flora against injudicious human use of the environment. Just an appeal motivated people to respect the life. They chose to impart education in the forest to give holistic education to humans.²¹
All our activities are transforming our earth into a desert and all our rivers and oceans have become dumping grounds of most hazardous garbage. The tragedy is that everyone is helplessly watching, thinking that, earth and her components are no more a mother to them. Our ancestors believed that there are many planes of existence and they should be accepted. That is the essences of our Vedas, Purāṇas and Upaniṣads. They fully believed and understood that pañcabhūtas are governing the material life. So they must understand the laws of nature and to respect and abide the mother Earth’s wisdom.

In purāṇa there is a remarkable statement that even if one tree is planted it brings good results as a son would bring. Purāṇas glorified the rivers mountains and forest etc., as sacred ones. Huge tree like Aśvathā and tiny plants like Tulsī became sacred in the purāṇic legends. [Ma. Pu.3-27]

Each god was offered a flower or a leaf or a twig etc. which was considered favorite to him or her. Many animals and birds including tigers and Lions became Vehicles of Gods: Indra- elephant, Gaṇapati- rat, Subrahmaṇia- peacock, Mahāviśṇu- garuda, Brahma- swan, Durga- tiger, Agni- goat, Śiva- bullock. The purāṇic legends brought men closer to the
eco-system in the context of ritualistic life. The out-come of all this was preservation of the eco-system through religious beliefs.

**Animals in Purāṇas**

Indian Purāṇic literature reveals that our ancestors had evidenced keen interest in nature and they were aware of the importance of the environment, animal behaviour and nature.\(^{22}\)

The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* informs us that the gods, men animals and birds are but the various forms of the creator Brahma. [VP 15.46] The sages who wrote or edited purāṇas gave a list of animals, wild, semi-domesticated and domesticated and made an attempt to classify them on the basis of their habits and habitats. *Matsyapurāṇa* classified birds and animals as Divācarā, Ratrigocarā and Uabhayacarita.

*Viṣṇupurāṇa* mentions grāmyapaśus, animals living in towns and animals living in forests. Aranya paśus (wild animals) are further divided into several categories. *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* gives details regarding poisonous and non-poisonous snakes.\(^{23}\)

*Brahmapurāṇa* says that a chance of meeting an alligator, horse, tortoise, hawk, bear, deceased bull, crying fox, owl, dog and donkey are omens that would bring bad luck to a traveler or a person on an
auspicious journey. If a person sees a deer, serpent, monkey, cat, dog, pig, birds on his right side it would bring him good luck.

According to Agnipurāṇa [264,27] Dogs are said to be destroyers of sin and auspicious in nature. In Skandapurāṇa, she-goat is considered as an important animal in the ritual for manes. According to Kūrmapurāṇa a place should be strewn with sesame seeds and goats should tread all over the place, thereby polluted and haunting evil spirits could be cleared away from the site.24

Animals played a significant role either directly or indirectly in the preservation of environment around them. Various species of birds while collecting their daily food scattered the seeds and fruits all around the place helping in the pollination and growth of herbs, shrubs, trees and creepers. The waste of animals became a good manure and fertilizer for plants to grow.

Whenever the population of one of the species of animals was on the rise, leading to an apparent threat, the nature came out with a counter check, resulting in the ecological balance. The matsuṃṇyāya has helped in the maintenance to moderate population of animals in the jungles. The inhabitants of the jungles and forest practiced the philosophy of mutual fear like "live and let live" thus preserving the eco-system.
Sages and seers lived in association with flora and fauna harmoniously, without disturbing the eco-components of nature. The animate and the inanimate objects of nature were a part of microcosm. The Gurukulas instructed the pupil to respect the objects of nature. The denizens of the forest draw the minimal food from nature for their survival, thus allowing the periodical growth of forests and jungles. They lived respecting flora and fauna as a part of the common wealth.

In the description of earth, mountains and forests are given great importance. Some purāṇas divide earth two-four continents and some others to seven continents.

Each continent have one mountain, one river, one beautiful forest, one big tree. From these we can understand that we must look after the forest and it will give us good health.

Purāṇas gives importance to forest, rivers and mountains. In purāṇas the description of mountain are divided into three (1) The Gods were living in mountains (2) The people considers the mountain as their God (3) Copper, Sugar, Gold, etc if donated in huge quantities are referred to as Merudāna (donation of mount Meru).\textsuperscript{25}
Forests in Purāṇas

In Purāṇas, we can see the description of forests. They are Dandaka, Puṣkara, Naimiṣa, Dharmāraṇya, Vṛndāvana and Khāṇḍava.

We must give importance to the trees than our sons. In Skandapurāṇa:

दशकृपसमा वापी दशवाणि समस्ते सरः
दशसि-समा कन्या दशकन्यासमा: क्रतः
दशक्रुतिसं: पुषो दशपुत्रसमो हुमः।। [Māheśvarakhaṇḍa]

In Skandapurāṇa the tree aśvatha is considering as the kalpavṛkṣa in earth. So it must be cared as a son

पितृणं गुप्तं तेन स्थायोधर्मं समाधिन।
पुत्रवत्परिपत्त्वच निविषयं नराधिप।। [Nāgaḥaṇḍa]

In Varāhapurāṇa the planting of a tree is more effective than donation of land or donation of cows.

भूमिदाननें ये लोका: गोदाननें च कौटिता:।
ते लोका: प्राण्यते पृष्ठं पादपानं प्रोहिणे।।

According to Vāstuśāstra we must keep estates and gardens near our house, in order to maintain and sustain good environment on this earth. The proper use of the natural materials, prescribed by Vāstuśāstra in reducing the use of man made materials, consequently reducing the environmental problems and improving the health. Most of building results
in lesser and lesser space inside the house, restricting the availability of fresh air. It is, therefore necessary to cultivate trees and make gardens, which will not only serve as a relaxing place but will also improve the environment quality and the quality of the air that we breath. Then we can use Vāstuśāstra concepts to create gardens with beautiful fountains, wells etc.. in and around the housing colonies. One of the most important things that we can learn from the ancient science is the art of growing or planting medicinal trees. Such plantations not only improve the environment but also improve the health of the community. Vannucci says “The seers formulated the hymns describing the human as inseparable from his cosmic environment, he is not distinct from it but imbued in it. The deep sense of communication of human and god (the nature) is to be understood as friends, revered as mother, object as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it, because of this everything is sanctified including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself such as glaciers storms etc.. has to be taken as they are Rṣis saw harmonious movement everywhere, they saw constant changes within the harmony of nature and interpreted as the law and order of the universe. They saw the active and effective principles in agni, pṛtvi, ākāśa, vāyu, jala and devised the notion of mahābūta. The basic tendency to look at
environment as God helped in developing their life-style as well as spiritual advancements.\textsuperscript{26}

The treatment of nature in ancient Sanskrit literature as noted above shows that in the religious, philosophical and literary fields man’s attitude towards the world surrounding him had a basic importance. There were diverse ways to treat the nature. The Vedas worshipped the nature and Upaniṣads wanted to reach at the reality of the nature. The Itihāsas and Purāṇas show how man interferes with his surroundings and underlines the necessity of leading a harmonious life with nature. The ancients also stressed the need for the protection of nature. The classical poets like Kālidāsa carried forward these traditions.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have briefly examined the eco-aesthetic concern of ancient literature in Sanskrit. The pantheism of the Vedas reflects the intimate relation between men and deified natural forces. Agni, Indra, Varuṇa and other vedic deities clearly shows that they are personified natural forces. They were most powerful. In the Brahmaṇas there is a desire to subjugate nature by magical powers. During this time the external nature were studied extensively and the ancient science like Ayurveda began to flourish. After the Vedic period the yajñā cult became weak and the worship of personal Gods became popular. In Vālmīki
The description of nature is given importance. Nature is presented as a coherent and harmonious system of existence. The seers in the tapovanas are portrayed as examples of the natural life. *Rāmāyaṇa* is always supplied with the energy of nature and Sītā is the true daughter of nature. When compared to *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* is more friendly towards forests. The two epics together draw an ecological map of India from Himālayas to Śri lankā. Kālidāsa has followed the style of Vālmīki in describing nature and human life.
Notes:


2. Ibid., p.28.


5. Ibid., p.48.


11. Ibid., p.242.

12. Ibid., p.446.

13. Ibid., p.419.

    BORI Poona, Rpt.1942.

    Mohit Publications New Delhi, 1997.


    BORI, Poona, Rpt., 1942, Vide Mṛgasvapnobhavaparvam,
    3.244.2-16.

    BORI, Poona, Rpt., 1997, Vide Śākuntalopakhyanam, 1.64.1. to
    1.69.45.

20. Pandurangi ’Puraneśu Nisargaparissarvarnamam’,
    Dvaitavedantadyayama Samśodha Pratistanam, Bangalore.

21. Ibid., p.74.

22. Ibid., p.78.

23. Ibid., p.77.


25. Ibid., p.77.

26. Rahul Vishwas Altekar, *Vāstuśāstra*, D.K Print World (P) Ltd., Delhi,
    2004, p.252.