



PERSONAL HYGIENE AND SANITATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Hygiene is a very important part of life as it keeps each one of us healthy both physically and mentally. Some people have a tendency to believe that modern man knows best and that our ancestors were unaware of the hygiene practices. Ancient Indians took very much care to care for their skin, cleanliness and hygiene has been imbibed into the Indian culture since the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro times. Cleanliness is equally important when it comes to food and it's preparation. One of the ancient civilizations of the world is Indus Valley Civilization in India. The drainage system was one of the most remarkable features of the Harappan city.

KEYWORDS: 1. Ancient India. 2. Indus Valley. 3. Sanitation. 4. Hygiene. 5. Civilization.

INTRODUCTION

The concern for environmental health and maintenance of proper public hygiene was deeply embedded in the ancient Indian customs and traditions. The traditional Indian life is based on the subtle and silent relationship with nature. The ancient sages identified man as an integral part of nature and stressed the importance of maintaining harmony with all the living and non-living components of earth. The ancient masters advocated leading a healthy and happy life which later evolved as customs and value-oriented traditions. Ancient Indians took very much care to their skin. They used many herbs to maintain skin health, turmeric, Tulasi, Neembark and leaves, lotus petals, Sandalwood paste, besan, wild berries, non-acidic fruits, etc. where the common ingredients in these skin care creams. Oil bath is one of the ancient techniques in bathing. Coconut oil, cow ghee, castor oil or sesame oil with special home made bath powder are used in this special bath. Cleanliness is equally important when it comes to food and its preparation. We have great Ancient Ayurvedic works 'Caraka Samhita', 'Susruta Samhita', 'Astanga Sangraha' 'Bhavaprakasham' etc. Many verses in these works deal with the relationship between equality of water and health.

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Sanitation had been a key priority in India from the ancient times. Ancient Indian civilization always believed to live in harmony with nature and traditionally toned hygienic environment as described in Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Dharmashastras. Worshiping nature as deity and recognizing earth as mother as they

are the basic necessities of humankind to exist on the earth shows a kind of conservation ethics that comes through History, culture, religion and vedic philosophy. From our ancient literatures and Kautilya's Arthashastra, it was mentioned that maintaining sanitation of habitat was essential and inevitable. In the vedic period, India was rural and pastoral and even in Rig Veda there is no mention of urban life.

However gradually the concept of urban areas started coming into practice and some examples are seen in Mohenjo-Doro and Harappa. The Indus Civilization is noted for its cities built of bricks, roadside drainage system and multistoried houses. The sewage and drainage system developed and used in cities throughout the Indus region were far more advanced than any found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle east, and many areas of Pakistan and India today. Individual homes drew water from wells while waste water was directed to covered drains in the main streets. Houses opened only to inner courtyards and smaller lanes, even smallest homes on the cities outskirts where believed to have been connected to the system. The drains were mostly covered and hidden underground, they were covered by a layer baked bricked which was laid flat across the side walls of the drain. Wider drains were covered with limestone blocks. Small settling poles and traps were built into the system of drainage to allow sediments and other material to collect while the water and smaller particles flowed away.

Recent excavations at Harappa have shown to have flushed toilets in almost every house and were linked to the respective city's central drainage network and the

solid soak-pit for collection. The waste management techniques used in ancient India successful enough to recycle the household to dug a small hole in the backyard to collect daily household waste and covered it with mud/sand till the pit got leveled. After a few months, this land was used in the farms as compost.

The Indus people were fully aware of the principals of health and sanitation. Towns people bathed in a bath located in the center of the quadrangle in the middle of the valley. The baths were around 49 feet long, 28 feet wide and 8 feet deep. Walls of the pool were made up of burnt brick to prevent the leaking of water. The pool was regularly drained to ensure cleanliness, this was done by draining off used water into a large pipe that led to the outside of the valley. The bath had 6 entrances and all contained stairs that led into the water. The building reflects the engineering genius of these in Ancient days.

CONCLUSION

From this we can understand that our ancestors were very much aware of perfect sanitation method. There is now an urgent need to reinvoke and form or in the modified form to suit the changed conditions of modern living. Lets us follow and promote concepts like 'Reduce', 'Reuse' and 'Recycle'.

“The day every one of us gets a toilet to use I shall know that our country has reached the pinnacle of progress.”- Jawaharlal Nehru.

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