

Vedantic Explanation of Environmental Protection in Hinduism

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INTRODUCTION

Humans were considered to be superior and powerful than nature. Human beings are a part of the whole we call the Universe, a small region in time and space. They regard themselves, their ideas and their feelings as separate and apart from all the rest. Humans forget that nature does not need us to rule over it but runs itself very well without humans. The world of nature existed billions of years before the humans came on the scene. Human beings in the limelight of progress recklessly exhausted natural resources and upset the ecological balance which led to drastic consequences. When radioactivity from nuclear power plants, toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes cause damage to ecology, our survival is threatened. We need to think of human consciousness not as separating us as a higher species from the rest of the nature but rather as a gift to enable us to learn how to harmonize our needs with the natural world of which we are a dependent part. The continuation of life on this planet demands a new understanding of our relationship with nature. It's time to stop causing harm to ecology, learn something valuable from our Vedas and treat nature with profound respect to ensure our survival on this planet

VEDANTA IN HINDU RELIGION

Hinduism as a faith, being non-dogmatic takes many forms and perspectives linked inquisitive, devotional, spiritual and academic to that of missionary and iconoclastic. Hinduism also known as Vedic Dharma understands five primordial elements of nature; earth, water, fire, air and space. Thus, religion is not confined to only few ideas, practices, holy men, sacred objects or shrines. The basis of Hinduism has

been challenged with many questions even those with most intelligent minds couldn't find any definite answers to those. According to Hinduism scriptures are unique in ability to rural truths by average impure minds. Hinduism recognizes four goals of human life: Kama, Artha, Dharma, Moksha. Among these four, Kama is considered the lowest as this urge is common to both man and animals. On the other hand, Artha is mainly noticeable in human beings and is considered superior to Kama. Dharma is nothing than a training in self-sacrifice. Kama and artha are rooted in selfishness, dharma is not. Dharma is superior to kama and artha. Even in order to acquire worldly possessions or to satisfy his passion a Hindu must hold on to dharma. Moksha meaning "liberation" can be achieved only through the realization of God. Hinduism believes in God's omnipresence and talks of the presence of Divinity in every human being.

Vedas are the revealed Divine Truths. Veda means knowledge in Sanskrit. The Hindu sages considered the truths so sacred that for a long time and they did not put them in writing. They preserved them in their memory and taught them to deserving students through oral instruction. Sage named Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa collected from different sources and recorded them in a book called Vedas. Vedas are divided into four parts- Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. Most important message of the Vedas is that everything and every being is divine; there are four important statements in the Vedas. They are known as Mahavakyas or "great sentences". Out of these four, three great sentences speak of the divinity of every soul, the fourth speaks of the nature of God:

- *AhamBrahmasmi*- I am Brahman (God)
- *Tat tvamasi*-You are that (Brahman)

- *Ayamatma Brahma*- This indwelling Self is Brahman
- *Prajnanam Brahma*- Supreme Knowledge is Brahman.

Besides the Vedas, Hinduism has several other scriptures where the Vedas being the revealed scriptures are considered the most authentic. Validity of the Vedic texts are never under any question. Vedas also contain some philosophical parts known as Upanishads. The Upanishads are Vedanta, the culmination of knowledge. Among the 108 Upanishads the most popular are: Isha, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Prashna, Shvetashvatara and Brihadaranyaka.

The six different types of philosophy called Darshanas were developed by Hindu sages at different periods of time. They are religious philosophical systems as their foundation is in the Vedas. Six systems of Indian Philosophy are:

- The *Sankhya* school founded by Kapila.
- The *PurvaMimamsa* school founded by Jaimini
- The *Uttara Mimamsa* or *Vedanta* school founded by Vyasa
- The *Yoga* school founded by Patanjali
- The *Nyaya* school founded by Gotama
- The *Vaisheshika* school founded by Kanada.

The tradition of not eating beef came to Hinduism which was believed that it was an influence of Jainism. Besides in rural areas where most of the people in India live, every Hindu home has at least one milk cow. Indian cows are very gentle by nature; they are members of the family. Apart from the religious taboo in not consuming beef they treat the cows as same way as the pet dogs as western countries. Hindus try to avoid slaughtering the females of any animal species as far as practicable. He is least manifest in non-living objects like rocks or stones. Hindus never consider a cow superior to human beings the manifestation of God in a cow, an animal is much less pronounced than in human beings.

The foundation of Hindu ethics is the Vedic teaching that God and the indwelling Self of man are one and the same. *Ayamatma Brahma*- This Self is Brahman is a fundamental teaching of the Hindu scriptures. The Self forms the core of man's being; it is different from his physical body, vital energy, senses and mind. Man's ego is not this Self. The Self of man is

called Atman in Sanskrit. The spiritual goal of Hinduism is to experience this divine Self within and without.

The word Dharma plays an important role in Hindu ethics. Dharma means religion and also means moral and ethical duty. The Divine Self is the very foundation of our being and it is that which sustains us. The practice of morality and ethics, dharma has relatively lower meaning in Hinduism. The different types of Dharma are *vyakti dharma*, *parivarika dharma*, *samaj dharma*, *rashtra dharma* and *manava dharma*. The moral and ethical principles sustain and individual's mind. Individuals make up family and for the well-being of individual the family has to be sustained. Codes of conduct to be observed by individuals to prevent disintegration of the family are *parivarika dharma* or family dharma. The basis of family dharma is mutual self-sacrifice and respect. Upanishadic statements such as "Treat your mother as a god" and "Treat your father as god" are included in the codes of family-dharma; if families do not survive, individuals cannot survive. Families make up a society. If society disintegrates families cannot survive.

The practice of non-violence, non-stealing, truthfulness, refraining from speaking truth which hurts, control of hunger, control of lower passions, practicing charity and kindness to all refraining from backbiting, practicing hospitality constitute *samaj dharma*. If the nation disintegrates, society cannot survive. Individuals have to make some self-sacrifice for their nation in order to sustain its existence. Individuals have to behave in a manner which will be conducive to the sustenance of mankind. This is nothing but *manava dharma*. An ideal Hindu is supposed to observe all these dharmas. By pursuing a high ideal alone can make life noble and meaningful. Self-sacrifice is common denominator among all these dharmas. Self-sacrifice is the way of survival of an individual; it is nothing but self-sustenance and self-preservation but not self-deprivation.

The Vedanta preached by Sri Ramakrishna has always been an enigma to all. While Sri Ramakrishna incarnated on this earth to preach synthesis and harmony; there has been dissections among the students of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature regarding the Master's and the disciple's elucidation of Vedanta. TotaPuri, a sannyasin of the Naga sect, who was an adept in Advaita Vedanta and who as a

symbol of his having overcome body-consciousness went naked from one holy place to another. As Rani Rashmani's temple extended hospitality to all wandering ascetics, TotaPuri also halted there on his return journey from Gangasagar. In the brand of Advaita Vedanta which Tota Puri professed was not much room for a personal God or Divine Mother who had been a part and parcel of Sri Ramakrishna's life. After sannayasa, Tota imparted the teaching of Advaita Vedanta, the purport of which is that Brahman alone is real, that the world is a mere appearance projected by ignorance and having no ultimacy and that the jiva in his real nature is Brahman Himself.

Education is manifestation of perfection already in us and religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already within us. Vedanta holds that the Ultimate Reality is One. The whole existence is unbroken, there is no division anywhere in the physical realm, the intellectual realm, the spiritual realm. That supreme reality holding this multiplicity is not affected by that multiplicity. It penetrates everything, but nothing can penetrate. Nothing in this world that we perceive by the senses has absolute existence. In the absolute sense That alone exists. Everything else has conditional existence. Vedanta holds that the goal of life is the realization of God, the Supreme Reality. Vedanta has Supreme Reality. Vedanta has set down a course of life consisting of moral principles, social duties and religious practices. None of these is considered to be the all and end all of life. The goal of life is neither intellectual comprehension nor austerity, neither charity, nor ceremonial worship or devotional practice. All of these have their due places in the scheme of life, according to Vedanta but all these are subservient to one ultimate goal of life, God realization. A person is supposed to follow the path of outgrowing the sense desires and gradually developing the spiritual sense and ultimately reaching the Supreme God.

Dharma means moral life, moral law and that is first thing necessary to build character to distinguish between right and wrong and to follow the path of righteousness. Dharma, moral law ensures inner understanding, inner strength and at the same time creates a favourable situation for us with our fellow-beings. This is the reason why a great Hindu Codifier of social and religious laws, Manu, who codified the Vedic rules of conduct has mentioned in his institute

of laws that there is one universal duty to all human beings and that is to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness, kindness, and forgiveness and to control vices.

ENVIRONMENT AND HINDUISM

Religion and ethics are two autonomous systems of thought to uphold human behaviour in a greatest good for a largest number of people. Religious foundations of environmental ethics are some ethical in a nutshell. Religion riddles are faith based. Religion has been invalid if it losses ethical standard. Most Hindus understand 'environment' to mean the natural world - everything around us that is part of the earth and nature. Hindus believe that all living things are sacred because they are part of God as is the natural world. Hindu ethics and environmentalism do not neglect the need of universal harmony. In Hindu religion the Supreme God has absolute sovereignty overall creatures including humans.

According to Hindu scriptures all lives have the same right to existence. Human beings have no dominion over other creatures. They are forbidden to exploit nature; instead, they are advised to seek peace and live in harmony with nature. The Hindu religion demands veneration, respect and obedience to maintain and protect the Harmonious unity of God and nature. General ethics can be confirmed with concerned theories. But religious Ethics as is always obligatory to their respective scriptures. Vedas are the basic text of Hinduism. It contains the value of nature and intrinsic capacity. The four Vedas- Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva explain the patterns of worship and its dignitaries. Vedic Hinduism expresses concern for by providing a metaphysical union between the human and non-human beings, the adherence to which seems necessary for us to establish and sustain a proper relationship between the physical nature and us. In ecological terms the Vedic hymns provide us with a number of insights. Vegetarianism is a Hindu, Jain and Buddhist ideal but in practice is mainly imposed when little meat is available except possibly for village feasts. It may have originated in part as a response to environmental constraints. With the dense population levels in the Gangetic plain, it makes little sense to raise cows for slaughter, when their milk is a staple, and even more, their dung is needed for fuel.

Hinduism and Environmental ethics do not neglect the need of universal harmony. Environmentalism once more disagrees with Hindu ethics in the self-realization methodology. In Hinduism, particularly in Advaita, self-realization stands for the negation of plurality between beings while environmentalism defines self-realization as realization of the non-difference of oneself and the processes of the natural world without sacrificing plurality. A perusal of Hindu religious scriptures called the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, mythological literature including stories, social and moral codes, and political rules reveal that the following were the general guiding principles to be observed by all in their daily life:

- Respect nature.
- Life in living is dependent on various components of nature.
- Keep harmony with nature.
- Protect natural environment.
- Utilise natural resources only to satisfy the need of the people.
- Presence of the divinity of nature in all living and non-living objects.
- Destruction of nature means destruction of mankind.
- All must have compassion for animate objects; for example, trees, animals, birds, aquatic life, etc.
- Air, water, land, sky, trees, animals are the creation of God and he dwells in all of them. Therefore, to worship them is to worship Him-the creator of the universe.
- Man, being one of the creations of God, has no special privilege or authority over other creatures on the other hand he has more obligations and duties to protect and improve them.
- Ahimsa ParmoDharmah (non-violence) is the dharma of the highest order one should be non-violent towards animals, trees, and other micro-organisms a like. Hinsa (violence) was considered as a sin. Therefore, "not eating of meat in Hinduism is considered both an appropriate conduct and a duty".
- Drought, fury of floods and storms, heavy rains, cloudbursts, lightning, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, heavy tides are the violent forms of anger manifested by the gods and goddesses.

- Purity of thought and expression and cleanliness of the environment around us should be observed.
- All lives, human and non-human including trees, are of equal value and all have the same right to existence. It shows that the principle of sanctity of life is clearly ingrained in the Hindu religion.

The sanctity of all life on this planet and elsewhere is clearly ingrained in the Hinduism. The Supreme God has absolute sovereignty over all creatures including humans. According to Hindu scriptures all lives have the same right to existence. Human beings have no dominion over other creatures. They are forbidden to exploit nature; instead, they are advised to seek peace and live in harmony with nature. The Hindu religion demands veneration, respect and obedience to maintain and protect the harmonious unity of God and nature.

Hindu philosophy provides a solid foundation for the doctrine of Ahimsa (non-violence) and this presupposes the doctrines of karma and rebirth. The Hindu belief in the cycle of birth and rebirth, wherein a person may come back as an animal or a bird, means that the Hindus give other species not only respect, but also reverence. This provides a solid foundation for the doctrine of *ahimsa* - non-violence (or non-injury) against animals and human beings alike, and Hindus have a deep faith in this doctrine.

Gandhian theory of non-violence has been a great influence in keeping social and political moral values sincerely. The practice of ahimsa is not at the level of an abstract, intellectual, plane but is an experiential fact that has significance throughout our life. Also, Hinduethics and Environmentalism do not neglect the need of universal harmony. Environmentalism once more disagrees with Hindu ethics in the self-realization methodology. In Hindu ethics, particularly in Advaita, self-realization stands for the negation of plurality between beings while environmentalism defines self-realization as realization of the non-difference of oneself and plurality.

Prakriti or Mother Nature is composed of the three Gunas

Gunas means quality but in the context of Hindu philosophy the source of the word comes from Sankhya school of philosophy. According to this school, the word has two parts: spirit and matter. The matter part of the world has its source in Prakriti or

Mother Nature from where this world evolves. Concept of Gunas plays very important role in Hinduism. Prakriti is composed of three subtle and intangible substances called sattva, rajas and tamas. The substances constituting Prakriti has three strands. A strand or string is called Guna in Sanskrit. These substances are called sattva-guna, rajo-guna and tamo-guna. The spiritual domain of the world, contains innumerable sentient entities, each one infinite and perfect. Such an entity is called purusha. Soul in Sankhya philosophy is called purusha

Animal sacrifice in ritualistic worship

In some forms of Hindu ritualistic worship especially influenced by the disciplines of Tantra, animal sacrifice is permitted. Not only animals rather all forms of life are sacred to Hinduism. It does not encourage violence towards anything. Hinduism considers every food impure as it is directly or indirectly connected with violence. Hindus offer whatever they consume, first to God either mentally or ritually in order to purify that food. According to Hinduism, any food offered to God with love and affection is sanctified by Him. It becomes free from defect or impurity. A Hindu is supposed to eat only sanctified food for his physical and spiritual well-being. In ancient times majority of the Indo-Aryans ate meat with certain restrictions about which animals could be killed and eaten. They used to believe that rather than recklessly butchering animals and eating their meat it was considered better to sacrifice that as an offering to God and then eat that sanctified meat. Any meat from any animal not offered to God was treated as inedible. Animal sacrifice in the presence of God was supposed to be interpreted as killing the animality or lower nature of the worshiper in order to manifest the worshiper's higher nature or inherent divinity. Despite animal sacrifice, Hinduism never encourages it. Even the scriptures of Tantra allow other symbols as pumpkin, ash gourd, squash or any other fruit to represent worshiper's animality. In India, animal sacrifice is rare; majority of Hindus are vegetarians and they do not want animals to be killed for any reason. The small number of Hindus who eat meat buy it from butcher shops as is done in the West

Practice of non-violence in Hinduism

Although Hinduism considers non-violence the greatest virtue. Thousands of microscopic lives are

destroyed every time we breathe. It is impossible to completely avoid committing violence; all Hinduism expects violence. Hinduism expects its followers to do is to consciously minimize violence as much as is practicable to get rid of the violent attitude of mind. Violence justified by a noble cause may sometimes be condoned by Hinduism. Such justification comes from the dictates of the scriptures. A truly non-violent person experiences the God as the essence of everything and beings including himself. Even a person loves his enemy as he can't see enemy anywhere, it is the manifestation of God.

The idea of the harmony of religions is inherent in Hinduism

The spirit of religious tolerance in Hinduism is rooted in the Rig-Vedic statement *Ekam sad viprabahudhavadanti*- this means One God alone exists. Sages call that by different names. The idea that God can be realized through different spiritual paths has been taught through the ages by many saints and godman of India. Bu the idea that all religions lead to the same God is mainly the contribution of the 19th century Hindu saint Shri Ramakrishna

VEDANTA AND ITS WAY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE

The concept of environmental preservation as sense of greed and fear. The concepts see the environment and animals to be distinct from the self and effort to preserve them is made only under fear and compulsion to avoid situations like exertion of natural resources, preserving animals for the sake of tourism and economy, entertainment and pleasures. This is not only nature centric but human greed centric. Contrary to western thought, Indian philosophy and especially Advaita Vedanta seems no distinction between man and nature in its very essence. The Earth, animals, birds, trees and others have never been as objects to be dominated or exploited. The supreme reality in Advaita Vedanta is the ground of the entire universe from the heavenly bodies like the sun, moon and earth to the minutest of species like the ants, snakes and tortoise. It is the base of the elements of earth, water, fire, sky and ether to birds that fly, the puppies that play and the flowers that bloom audaciously.

The individuals and groups who work in India and are committed to halting and reversing the ecological genocide in the subcontinent look into Advaita Vedanta for guidance as to the nature's problem and solution. AdiSankaracharya's system of non-dualism has been dominant for over thousand years in India and it's the forefront of Hindu Renaissance. It is quite crucial to realise that a society's action will be governed by dominant metaphysical belief system of that society. Advaita Vedanta affects as a religious dimension which is indigenous to India to the ethical perspectives of Deep Ecology and Social Ecology both. The ethical positions of the unity of all and egalitarianism between species in Deep Ecology has a firm underpinning in Advaitin metaphysics. Social Ecologists can also point that there is no place for the mindsets that lead to hierarchy within the Advaitin way of life and belief system. The dynamics of the relationships that shape the interaction between the organic and synthetic world in India must be changed if the subcontinent to remain a hospitable environment. It is crucial for the activists, educators and policy makers to understand that resource that Advaita Vedanta is in the fight to save India from ecological destruction.

Animal cruelty includes a wide range of behaviours includes animal hoarding, neglect, abandonment, animal fights, animal rape and deliberate acts of cruelty. Animal cruelty tends to be the starting point for a wide range of problems from domestic violence, environmental issues, dipping morals and spiritual values to terrorism, social unrest, rapes and a variety of social evils. From cutting down trees and building sky scarpers to harming the flora and fauna in the most inhumane way are nothing but harming our earth. Advaita Vedanta philosophy is rich and all embracing certainly end all ecological issues and cases of animal cruelty provided it is understood in the right light. Children must be introduced with this philosophy at an early age in order to make sure that they grow to be environmentally conscious and sensitive citizens. Advaita Vedanta is a philosophy that believes in complete socio-cultural harmony.

Reverence for nature and unity of all is the bonum of Advaita Vedanta. Advaita Vedanta is one of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy that considers the Vedas to be only authority. Advaita Vedanta considers the Brahman to be only reality. Brahman considered to be indescribable; it is beyond names,

forms, time, space and thought. Any effort to describe is merely trying to bring it down to the level of human interpretation. Shankara popularly known said to be born in 8th century BC was a philosopher and a metaphysist of the higher order. By the time he was 12, he became an Acharya and was called Shankaracharya. At the age of 16, he wrote Brahmasutrabhashya, he travelled bare feet 4 times across India including Nepal in order to spread the light of Advaita-Vedanta. He also reformed the society by establishing the authority of Jnana over mindless rituals. Knowledge must not be confused with education or gathering of information. Knowledge refers to realization of self as the non-dual, ultimate reality. Liberation Advaita Vedanta is a state where one realizes the self through Jnana as the supreme reality.

Advaita Vedanta doesn't consider human to be particular it sees him as a general part of nature that is supposed to function as per Dharma. Dharma in Indian philosophy means to act in accordance to Rta or the cosmic order. It involves a sense of duty, right, responsibility, conduct, virtues and discipline of existence within the entire creations. Indian philosophy refuses to discriminate human, animals, trees, insects, birds and nature in their essence. Most of the Vedic hymns, shlokas and prayers are not particular to any specie, religion, nation, caste or sex. Advaita Vedanta represents a profound spirituality, in addition to the interest of ecology it fosters values as simplicity of life, frugality, non-violence, kindness and discarding duality as there exists no two ways as per Chandogya Upanishad.

CONCLUSION

In the concluding portion, we can say that, Vedantaplays a pivotal role in the protection of environment through Hindu religion. Hinduism is not just a way of life it's a way to the highest conceivable spiritual attainment-the growth of consciousness. It integrates and brings together the diverse insights of God intoxicated souls under religious canopy. The Hindu way of life consists in the performance of a series of religious duties or dharma as dictated by the scriptures. Hinduism like other theistic religions of the world believes that God is present everywhere. He is equally present in every being and everything but not equally manifest everywhere. God is most

manifest in a Divine Incarnation or a saint. He is not as manifest in ordinary human beings and even less manifest in animals, plants and other lower forms of life. Environmental ethics refer to the moral relationship between human beings and their natural environment, more specifically it refers to the value that mankind places on protecting, conserving and efficiently using resources that the earth provides.

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