

Ecological Ethics of Ancient India: A Vedic Metaphysics Approach

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Submitted: 01-07-2022

Revised: 07-07-2022

Accepted: 10-07-2022

ABSTRACT

The current research examines the significance of the environment in the world's oldest religion, Hinduism, and uncovers the environmental ethics that prevailed in ancient civilization, as well as how far we humans are now following those ancient ethics. Since the beginning of human evolution on Earth, human life and the environment have coexisted. The environment had supplied humans with clean air, clean water, and toxin-free surroundings. Since time immemorial, every religion in the world has paid proper attention to the environment. The environment has a significant place in all of the world's main religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity. Hinduism is more accurately described as a way of life. Hinduism is regarded as one of the world's oldest and most scientific religions. Environment and nature are regarded as God's gifts in Hinduism. The Hindu faith holds that human life is entirely reliant on a healthy environment. All natural forces, such as air, water, sun, earth, and fire, are referred to be gods in Hinduism, and so are suitable to be worshipped. The Vedas and Puranas, the ancient scriptures of Hindu religion, have commanded human beings to revere nature and its components during a period when environmental conservation and preservation were not even considered. According to the Vedas, Hindu rituals were ecologically benign, and if such practises are continued now, they may provide solutions to different environmental concerns.

Key words: Ecology, environmental ethics, Vedic methodology, and metaphysics

I. INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is said to be the world's oldest religion. All of the Hindu sacred texts Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagwat Gita crown the glories of Ancient Indian Literature. All of these writings revolve on the idea of Mother Earth's (Mata

Prithvi) well-being, as well as nature and life on it. The significance of the environment in Hindu literature is known as Paryavaran in Hindi, and it comes from the Sanskrit term Parvavarnam, which means avaran (covering). The significance and care for the environment may be traced all the way back to Vedic and ancient Sanskrit literature. The Hindu religion is concerned with the human-nature interaction. Hinduism's ancient books include information about the fundamental aspects of the environment (Young KK,1994). They teach in all forms to have a worshipping attitude for the entities of mother Earth and all of the natural treasures that she has to provide. Humans have a sacred obligation to safeguard Prithvi (Earth), Vayu (Air), Aakash (Sky), Jal (Water), and animals, according to all holy Hindu texts (Shastri SC, 2015). Hinduism has long emphasised the need of treating nature with respect and living in harmony with it. Many plants and animals were thought to be gods. Plant and animal conservation was seen as the highest obligation of humans, who were also regarded as God's creation (Lipner J, 2010).

Ahimsa Parmo Dharama, or nonviolence, is still considered the greatest kind of dharma. According to Saikia (2018), the Vedas provide solutions to all environmental concerns. Vedas encompass both physical and spiritual knowledge, and they are rich of life and natural ideas (Saikia P, 2018). The Manusmriti, or written record of Hindu Law, stipulates a variety of penalties for cutting down plants and trees. The destruction of trees, according to Charaka Samhita, is the most harmful and perilous act for mankind. Air pollution was also noted by Charaka as a cause of many ailments. The Charaka Samhita similarly forbids the use of unfit water (Tiwari HN, 2019). Animal slaughter was seen as a wicked act. Some animals have substantial ceremonial significance in society in addition to their economic worth (Coward H, 2003). In many regions of India, trees such as peepal (Ficus religiosa), vata (Ficus benghalensis), and banana (Musa acuminata) are still revered, as

are animals such as the cow (Lord Krishna), bull (Lord Shiva), lion (goddess Parvati), and snakes (Lord Shiva). The continuity and deep sighted link of all species on Earth was explained by Coward, 2003, and they must be handled (Priscella T, 2019).

According to Tay (2019), in Hinduism, every person's karmic repercussions are determined by their behaviour toward the environment, which implies that if good is done to the environment, that individual will earn positive karma (Priscella T, 2019). Hinduism's ancient traditions taught that humans should live in harmony with nature. It believes that all creatures were created by a single creator, and that no one has the authority to hurt another living being, whether it be a plant or an animal. However, as civilization grew, humans developed an anthropocentric mindset, believing themselves to be the masters of nature. Hinduism's social life has been based on living in harmony with nature since the Vedic era. The study of the Vedas, Puranas, and Smritis was done in the past while living in the woods, so that the student may acquire a kindly attitude toward nature and appreciate it.

II. VEDIC ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The notion of environmental conservation and preservation is not new to India. The first beginnings in environmental conservation and preservation may be traced back to the Vedic era, when nature worship is said to have begun (Sharma KN, 2019). Several prayers and hymns found in the Vedas convey the notion of honouring nature in all areas, which is comparable to modern-day principles relating to natural resource protection. The twenty-fifth Rio principle, for example, argues about how peace, development, and environmental conservation are all linked and inseparable (Rio De Janeiro, 2010). "Environment delivers blessings to humans for living their lives flawlessly," the Rigveda reads. The river blesses us with holy water and remedies, and the sun blesses us with a pleasant existence. Our cows offer us with delicious milk." (Acharya K, 2016).

There is a line in the Atharvaveda on pollution: "SarvoVaiTatraJivateGour-AsvahPurusahPasuhYatredam." Brahma KriyateParidhirJivantayakam" Brahma KriyateParidhirJivantayakam" The above stanza emphasises the value of a clean, unpolluted environment for humans and animals alike. It is necessary to preserve the sanctity of the environment in order to live and achieve one's goals. If the atmosphere is unpolluted, quiet, and pure, man on this planet can exist for hundreds of

years. The Sun, according to the Rigveda, is the primary source of all that moves and isn't static. Because rising sunrays minimise the negative consequences of pollution, the sun is the ultimate propagator of darkness. This is referenced in the Atharva Veda (KalanidhiA&Gopal TV 2002) in a shloka. "VisvadrastoAdrstaha, AdityahParvatebhyo"

In the Atharvaveda, the necessity of forest protection and preservation was emphasised. Despite the fact that India was endowed with numerous rivers and abundant rainfall, ancient Indian thinkers pushed for smart water management (Prasad JSR, 2016). The Veda instructs everyone present to worship trees in order to show respect for the environment (Coward, H., 2003). In ancient texts, the phrase 'Panchvati' seems to be fairly prevalent, where 'panch' means five and 'vati' means grove. A simple definition is a grove of five trees. Banyan, Peepal, Ashoka, Bael, and Harad were the five kinds of trees that were regarded holy owing to their therapeutic capabilities. These trees are still revered by Hindus today. Kale and Shkadwippee (2018) described the riches that mother earth had given on human beings in the shape of gold, silver, and other minerals via a passage in Bhumisukta. However, humans should not excavate the mother earth unduly. The concept of sustainable development may be found in a Hindu holy literature written hundreds of years ago (Kale A&Shakdwippee P, 2019).

"SitaBhumirAsimaPamsuh, Sa BhumihSamdhrtaDhrta" Religion has a significant impact on how people see the environment. Every religion in the world has its own set of ethics and morality when it comes to environmental issues. Dealing with the world's continuous environmental challenges is today's greatest task. The theme of environmental preservation and conservation is found throughout Hinduism's holy texts. Today's major requirement is to return to existing religious literature and embrace the concept of environmental preservation (Ramacharan CK & Vrksayurveda, 1984).

III. IN HINDU RELIGION, THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND NATURE.

Even humans are said to be made up of five natural vital components in Hinduism: Prithvi (mother earth), VarunaDevata (lord of water), VayuDevata (lord of winds), Agni Devata (lord of fire), and Aakash (lord of light) (sky). As a result, felling trees, polluting the air, water, and land were considered sins since these aspects of nature were

to be revered as gods and goddesses. Everyone has a responsibility to protect and conserve these five components. An whole song in the Rigveda is dedicated to praising the healing virtues of trees. The following are some of the trees linked with Gods and Goddesses.

"Mata Bhumi putruhan prithivya" is an important Sanskrit vedic prayer in which Earth is described as a mother and all the people on the planet are depicted as her sons. All of the earth's natural resources, such as water, air, land, soil, mountains, flora, fauna, and whatever else is naturally present on the planet, must be cared for in the same manner as a son cares for his mother. The Vedas include numerous passages related to environmental preservation and conservation (Brown W, 1984).

"Don't take down trees because they clean the air." (www.holybooks.com,1998)

"Do not damage the atmosphere or disturb the skies." (www.holybooks.com,1998)

Flora has a significant position among the people. The vedic people used to be quite good at harnessing nature's bounty. Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Vatvriksh (*Ficus benghalensis*), and Banana (*Musa acuminata*) were likened to God. In the Vriksayurveda, there is a line that says that the advantages of planting a tree are comparable to the benefits of having 10 sons.

"DasakupasamavapidasavapisamahradahDasahrada hsamahputrodasaputrasamadrumahDasahradahsam ahputrodasaputrasamadrumah"

It was forbidden to cut Vatvriksha (*Ficus benghalensis*) since it was thought that god resided in this tree and that no sickness could strike a location where Vatvriksha (*Ficus benghalensis*) was present (Debroy B & Debroy D, 2011). ShriKishna supports this in the ShrimadBhagwadgita: "asswathusarvavikhanam." According to current research, the peepal tree and the Vatvriksha tree absorb carbon dioxide from the air and release oxygen, balancing the carbon dioxide and oxygen levels in the atmosphere.

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) is still revered in Hinduism as a holy plant. Every hindu household was required to cultivate a Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant in vedic times. On their porch, every household used to have a Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant. Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant worship was deemed holy. It was formerly thought that watering a tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) plant would ensure a long and healthy life. If the Tulsi

(*Ocimum sanctum*) plant was revered and cared for, the family was thought to be affluent. Another line from the Vriksayurvedacelebrates the tulsi plant (Debroy B & Debroy D, 2011).

"JabadinanitulashirupitapijadgrihegriheTabadvarsh asahasranivaikunthesamahiyate"

"JabadinanitulashirupitapijadgrihegriheTabadvarsh asahasranivaikunthesamahiyate"

This Sanskrit Veda passage says that for every year the tulsi plant is in a person's house, he will spend the equal number of days in paradise. Yajnas were conducted by saints in the ancient Vedic era, and the main components of Yajna were ghee (clarified butter) and different dried herbs. It is commonly known that the air gets clear of pollutants following the Yajna. The germs that were causing environmental damage are no longer present (Lipner J,2019).

IV. NATURE'S IMPORTANCE IN HINDUISM

One of Hinduism's principles is that it is a person's obligation to safeguard his or her Dharma; Dharma means duty. In other words, Hinduism has made it a point to rescue the environment since it is part of their Dharma (Jain P, 2011).Hindus believe in the presence of god in nature and its biotic and abiotic aspects. All living and nonliving elements were tied to deity and goddess in Hinduism. Hindus were referred to as Dharmabhiru, which means "fearful of not practising one's dharma correctly." They think it is their primary responsibility to preserve Mother Earth and her constituents. If they do not do so, God would punish them when they die, and they will not be able to obtain Moksha.

Several Hindu groups, such as the Bishnois, Swadhayas, and Bhils, are notable for conserving their dharma via conservation measures. Bishnois have a reputation for protecting their woods and wildlife from manmade intrusions. Swadhayayis are notable for building Vrikshamandiras, which are tree temples, and nirmalnir, which are water collecting places. The Bhil community continues to conduct religious ceremonies in a woodland groove, paying respect to god for the marvellous creation of nature. In summary, whatever these communities do is not only to safeguard the environment; they see it as their dharma to honour the god's gift of nature (Agrawala V.S, 1963).

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