

Nature Conservation as Reflected in Hindu Theology and its Deviation in the Modern Days: A Discourse

Rekha Ojha

Dept. of Philosophy & Comparative Religion
Visva- Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal, India
E-mail: drrekha3@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Nature conservation is considered as a key factor to save the essence of nature and protecting the species from destruction and it always includes the maintenance as well as restoration of the habitats which led to the enhancement of the eco system services to protect the biological diversity. It helps to maintain a healthy and functional eco system. The religion of Hinduism has always cared for the protection of nature which is clear from the Vedic principle of not harming the environment which include nature, water, flower, fruits etc. In Hinduism the earth is considered as the holy mother. In the opinion of the Vedic sages the body is composed of earth, water, fire, ether, air believing in the sanctity and purity of them. Rig Veda teaches us to respect and revere everything that the God has created. The central theme of Hinduism is that they believe that nature cannot be destroyed without human also being destroyed as we need the natural world in order to survive and every atman is a part of Brahman which is an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent and all-embracing principle containing in itself both being and non being and it is the sole reality which is the ultimate cause, foundation, source and goal of all existence. The theology of Hinduism believes that the world is made up of two things – spirit and matter. The spirit is considered as the thing that can neither be seen nor touched whereas matter could be seen and touched as well as can be destroyed. The Hindu sacred texts contain many references of divinity which are related to nature such as rivers, mountains, trees, animals, earth showing the caring of Hindu philosophy towards the conservation of nature. But in the modern days we have seen the people distancing themselves from the religious discourses of religious studies making it a fashion in the modern day which ultimately led to the people not caring for the nature conservation. As they were not unaware of the Sastric notations regarding the conservation of nature so they played a key role in the destruction of nature. Proper study of religious discourses from the childhood will enable the people to develop the ecofriendly mindset which will help in the conservation of nature in the modern days.

Keywords

Nature, Conservation, Ecology, Urbanization, Hindu, Philosophy, Religion, Discourses, Sastra, Education, Plants

INTRODUCTION

Critics may argue but the philosophy of nature conservation come under the domain of morality and the movement regarding nature conservation which focused on not only protecting the species from extinction but also maintaining and restoring the habitats enhancing the eco system services protecting the biological diversity. The nature conservation is such a movement that focusses on protecting the natural resources and the wild life from extinction while also slowing down the rate of climate change along with other detrimental effects. The main theme of environmental conservation is to protect the wildlife and promotion of bio diversity which helps to maintain a healthy and functional eco system leading to the prevention of the extinction of certain animal species. It is seen that if the environment is destroyed it will make the animal to come out of their habitat making it hard to survive elsewhere. The seven lenses of nature are as follows like nature knows best, all forms of life are equally important, everything is connected to everything else, everything changes, everything must go somewhere, ours is finite earth, nature is beautiful and we are the stewards of the creation of God. The advantages of nature conservation are like it offers fresh air and clean water, maintains the outside temperature, preserves nature, bio diversity and eco system, gives growth to more plant species for better medicine building a healthy planet with a healthy life. The environmental protection is the practice of protecting the natural environment by individual, organizations along with

governments whose objectives are to conserve natural resources and the existing natural environment and where possible to repair the damage and reverse the trends. The conservation of nature can be done by reducing water consumption, electricity usage, restricting usage of paper, using new agricultural methods and spreading the awareness regarding this issue.

The three major types of pollution are air pollution, water pollution and land pollution. Sometimes air pollution is visible like the person can see the dark smoke pouring out from the exhaust pipes of large trucks or factories but generally the air pollution is invisible. The six pollutants are carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, ground level ozone, particle pollution, Sulphur oxide. We can reduce the pollution by reducing the number of trips in car eliminating the fire place, avoiding burning leaves as well as avoiding the use of gas powered lawn. It is seen that the humans have the tendency to pollute the air, land, sea by burning fossil fuels, over using the chemicals pesticides which led to the sewage run off. The tendency of growing energy requirements led to the clearing of vast area of land for solar energy, wind energy and power plants. It is seen that increasing forest fires cause more loss of forests cover decreasing the air moisture due to the effect of climate change which led to the decline of the plant growth which is the greatest threat to not only the wild life, wild places but also the entire community.

Hinduism is such a religion which always cares for the preservation of the nature. Vedas is of the vision of not

harming the environment, water, flora, fauna as the earth is considered as the mother. The Vedas deal with the knowledge of all sorts of both physical and spiritual. Moreover, the Vedic views revolves around the concept of nature and life making the Vedic philosophy for environment so relevant. According to the Vedic seers the body is composed of earth, water, fire, ether, air believing in the sanctity and purity of them. Rig Veda teaches us to have respect and reverence for everything God has created. Generally, Hindus believe that nature cannot be destroyed without humans also being destroyed because we need the natural world in order to survive and also because every atman is a part of Brahman which is an uncreated, eternal, infinite, transcendent and all-embracing principle containing in itself both being and non being and it is the sole reality which is the ultimate cause, foundation, source and goal of all existence. In modern Sanskrit the word Paryavarana is used for environment meaning which encircles us which is all around in our surroundings. The theology of Hinduism believes that the world is made up of two things – spirit and matters. The spirit is considered as the thing that can neither be seen nor touched whereas the matter is the thing that can be. Hindus believe that the spirit is more important than matter as the matter can be destroyed but the spirit cannot be whereas Maya means the world is an illusion. Hinduism is the religion which is deeply rooted in nature. The sacred texts like Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, epics contains many references of divinity which are related to nature such as rivers, mountains, trees, animals and earth. The Bhagavad Gita is of the opinion that the human community need to protect the environment for their own survival as well as for the bio diversity around.

The sacred soil of ancestors into which one is born is the part of one's fundamental experience of life which is the part of its spiritual dimension. The earth, land, village enter into and are secured in recital memory and it is an imperative to worship the earth Goddess as the mother earth. In Hinduism the earth is worshipped as Goddess Bhooma Devi, a consort of Lord Narayana. It was to rescue Bhooma Devi from a demon that the Lord took the Varaha Avatara and the person with patience is compared to her. Water is very important for all the rituals in Hinduism which is used for cleansing the deity and the water offered to the deity and the water collected after bathing the deities are considered as sacred.

In Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna told Arjuna that the Prakriti created by him conceives of three gunas – Sattva, Ragas, Tamas and Krishna said that the association with Prakriti is the Maya that keeps us for knowing him. In Hinduism the protection of the environment is an important expression of Dharma and the understanding of the environment as separate from the other spheres of activities in their lives which is seen that the community carry out the conservation practices not only as environmental acts but as expression of Dharma. The Hindus believe that all living beings are sacred because they are the part of the God as in the natural world. Generally, Hinduism believes in nonviolence showing the respect for all life, human, animal and the vegetables as they believe in Karma to which all actions believe consequences. Generally, as they believe in Karma so they wish to be mindful of how they are treating the earth as they believe that their actions will bring consequences.

The Hindu Declaration on Climate Change states that "Hindus hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature – the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space – as well as the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forest and animals are bound to each other within life's cosmic web. However, centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. The Declaration calls upon Hindus to take the lead in earth friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumptions, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism as well as in evolving the technologies that positively address our shared plight"(Hindu Declaration,2009).The Hinduism believes in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam which means that the whole world is one family. If we look at the Upanishad it is seen that ecological consciousness towards environment can be traced. The Vedic people have worshipped the natural phenomenon and celestial as Gods like Agni (fire),Ap(water),Vayu(wind),Maruts(storm winds),Soma(moon),Dyaus(sky),Prithibi(earth),Usas(dawn), etc. in hope of their belongings to uphold the natural or celestial phenomenon regularly. Deifying natural phenomenon in form of their association to various Gods such as Indra, Mitra, Varuan,Pusana,Aditi,Rudra was common eco religious practices of the society (Radha Krishnan 2006).So here it is seen that every aspects of nature are considered as God which helps in maintain the order of the earth. Even it is seen that during Shraddha a Hindu ritual is performed by the members of the deceased family where one gives water to the trees and plants and food to the birds and animals around his abode which is an epitome of not only mutual love and careness that the primitive society adhered to but also maintaining the cosmic order among eco system.

The Upanishads not only enlightened the people about maintaining the relationship between human beings and physical environment but also among various inheritance of ecology. In the Hindu principle of Advaita the world is impartible with ultimate reality like the true spiritual self of all beings showing the reverence of Hinduism towards nature as sacred. The Upanishad believes that the self is the world of all beings and Brahman is the self in each of us promoting nonviolence for the safety of all. If we look at the proposal of deep ecology their need to be a shift from anthropocentrism i.e. human at the center to eco centrism i.e. the ecology at the center which once existed in the ancient world. If we look at Aitrey Upanishad it is seen that earth, air, ether, water, light is considered as the five basic elements of the universe (Ait U 3.3) predicting disharmony among these five elements affecting the lives of living creatures as the bodies of all living beings are the composition of five elements.

Many Hindus are of the opinion that in no other country of the world vegetarianism has such a huge predominance of what is seen in India though the country is not an absolute vegetarian state. India has according to figures collected by United Nations Agency, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO),the lowest per capita meat consumptions of any country in the world, less than to take one measure,2% of meat consumption in the United States (FAO 2012).But perhaps the more germane considerations is that meat consumption in India has grown significantly in recent years, the demand being fueled by the growing middle class, rising

disposable incomes and meats symbolic significance as a marker both of conspicuous consumption and of virility (New York Daily News, 2013). Even in Manu Smriti we have seen strict adherence to vegetarianism. Gandhiji was in favour of vegetarianism and told that ransacking of earth resources is like the selective genocide. The economic imperialism of England is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of three hundred millions took to similar economic exploitations, it would strip the world bare like locusts. (Gandhi 1928). It is seen that in some communities sacred groves were respected which is common in Hindu texts which is seen through the maintenance of forest management but when later replaced by colonial forest management it led to the destruction of the groves. The conception of the sacred productive like the cow, tulsi, neem and many places where God dropped ambrosia are always worshipped. In Hinduism the mountains are considered as the abode of God and many pilgrimage centers but were there like Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath which spread through the majestic Himalayas. The personification of rivers as Goddess was done with the aim to keep the purity which shows the Hindu way of environmental conservatism. But the industrial modernity had laid to the destruction of the river. Ganges is considered as so sacred that many Hindus keep the holy water at home to be given to the sick and the dying person keeping the purity of the Ganges beyond anything else. But an article points out that two thousand and nine hundred million liters of sewage are pumped into the daily but the sewage treatment pumps have an existing capacity of only one thousand and hundred million liters (Hindustan Times 2012). As the cleaning of the river has become almost impossible the pollution rise is evident.

It can be said that Hinduism from the very dawn of civilization are quite ecological and the climate change have highly affected the Hindus to greater extent as the majority of the pilgrimage sites are connected with the aspects of nature. Shiva Lingam at Amarnath required artificial cooling, happened due to climate change hurting the sentiments of Hindu faith. The ill effects of modernity laid to the melt of glaciers, ruining of the villages, industrial pollutants, chemical ruining the rivers. Gandhi Ji told in a public gathering that "I want you to be superstitious enough to believe with me that the earthquake is a divine chastisement for the great sin we have committed and are committing against those whom we describe as untouchable, panchamas and whom I describe as Harijans" (Gandhi 1934). He believed that due to the lowering of the morals of the people droughts, floods, earthquakes happened. He is of the vision that no rain happened due to adharma showing the keen of Gandhi Ji to relate the destruction of nature with that of the religion. He may not have known the extent of the Hindu tradition's philosophical probing of man's relationship to nature but he was ecological in his life style, abstemious in his habits, caring towards animals and the environment around him and though this is not understood by those whose own view of ecology is extremely circumscribed, hospitable to those who had been nurtured in other traditions. His own vegetarianism for example did not permit him to insist that guests at his Ashram who were accustomed to meat had to follow a strict vegetarian diet (Lal 2000 :205). So this showed that Gandhi Ji caring about nature in his daily affairs. Gandhi Ji always have

the idea to relate the nature conservation with Hinduism depicting the stand of Hinduism in the area of conservation of nature.

In the modern era we have seen that generally people are distancing themselves from religious discourses and it has now become a fashion for the urban classes to prove their modern mindset. Majority of the modern day youth are unaware of Sanskrit language making them unable to read the Sastras and religious texts which always cared for nature conservation. In the recent days we have seen that Sanskrit education get replaced by modern western schools taking them far away from their own scriptures of Hinduism. As a result in the last two to three decades we have seen that how the nature gets destroyed by the people in the name of development. We have seen that the small houses getting replaced by apartments, rivers getting polluted by the industrial wastages, cutting of the forest etc. We are also seeing that the villages get replaced by the towns and the towns gets replaced by the cities and the cities gets replaced by the metros. The development of ultra-urbanization led to the disappearance of the villages as seen in Bolpur area in West Bengal during the recent years. Even the shopping malls are the new trends which led to the ultra-urbanization hampering the nature. We have seen the houses; resorts being built in Mandarmani very close to the sea hampering the natural beauty. Even we have seen that during depression many resorts in those areas were swept away by the sea. Even in Darjeeling we have seen many resorts on the hill top absolutely ignoring the nature. As we have destroyed and over use the nature so naturally we have seen many calamities like earthquake, tsunami, high storms etc. Due to mobile towers some sort of some birds like sparrows decreased to a huge level. The tendency of the over cutting of the trees led to a mode of decrease of the forest land influencing the life of the forest animals.

CONCLUSION

It is seen that the religion of Hinduism and the philosophy of nature conservation is inter related which is seen from the texts of the ancient past. Starting from the Vedas, Upanishads, Smriti texts, Classical Sanskrit literature all have proposed the conservation of nature as equivalent to service of God which is a very humanistic stand regarding the conservation of the ethics of ecology. In Hinduism every aspects of nature were not only honoured to a highest level but even respected as divine showing the mindset of how the religion of Hinduism cared for the conservation of nature. All these showed that how the Hindus looked at the conservation of nature which is clearly traced from various religious texts of Hinduism. If the people of India are properly educated in accordance with the Hindu ideology definitely it will led to the concept of preservation of nature according to the Indian way of life and not from the models of western counterpart. Hinduism believes in reverence and respect to nature which is seen that the plantation of trees was given immense importance and even the trees were regarded as Gods in the Vedas. So the deviation from the dharma which is different from the English word religion ultimately caused the destruction of nature in India. The respect for the conservation of nature is the inherent and inseparable part of

the Indian philosophy specially of Hinduism which is reflected in the views of Gandhi Ji who always believed in the ideology of non-violence and strict vegetarianism and by his strong will power he challenged the might of the British Empire with his most powerful weapon of nonviolence which believes in not harming anyone. The father of the nation Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi always cared for the nature conservation which is the inherent part of the philosophy of Gandhi school of thought. The trees have high medical values which is seen through the indigenous way of medical treatment termed as Ayurveda which has the ability to cure most dangerous diseases of the universe showing the effectiveness of nature conservation. Proper adherence to the religion of Hinduism and maintaining the life according to the religious wisdom and doctrines will help not only India but the entire world to preserve the nature and save the greenery, save the waters from the curse of destructions. It showed that nature conservation is the inherent part of Hindu philosophy and deviation from these ideals is the result of the destruction of nature which is true matter in the modern days. So leading the life according to the ideals of Hindu philosophy will ultimately lead to the nature conservation which is essential in the modern day world to save the ecology and the environment.

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