

## Environmental awareness in Indian religious scriptures

<sup>1</sup> Sandeep, <sup>2</sup> Shamshir Singh Dhillon

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, Punjab, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, Punjab, India

### Abstract

The compatibility between man and environment has been both tender and sacred since time immemorial. It existed long before the word 'Environment' buzzed at Stockholm and Rio. This bond was not because our progenitor envisaged any pragmatic exigency or perceived any overburden of human population over nature but simply due to the guiding principles enshrined, meditated and practiced deftly in our religious scriptures. The environmental concern was part and parcel of their diurnal not as a discrete entity of cognizance as being dealt at present. The earth was hailed not as a habitat for flora and fauna but mother of all animate and inanimate objects. With course of time, the rapacious hordes of invader not only desecrated the purity of mind of the victim but also through a conspiracy blown off the basic tenet attached with nature as a display of ignorance resulting into disbelief in own religion. Still, before the falling of Indian empire in the Britishers hand, the population inhabited largely in the villages still survived by their dependency over the natural resorts of water like well, pond and Bawadi (a place in sandy areas where rainy water collected) and mutual exchange of commodities for survival without any mercenary purpose. But the Englishman more materialistic than Indians surpassed every invaders as they were never satisfied only by exploiting the natural resources of the country but had been successful to shake the religious belief that was mandatory to look at the earth as mother and sky as father. Thus, leaving the first paragon of exploitation for Indians. Even today, after ten decades of independence, the deteriorating condition of environment raises numerous questions over the activities wildly exercised by men in the garb of development. The promptly untying of this affinity in the disguise of environmental crisis in its gigantic shape is ahead of us blocking our way to advancement and trailing us to the perilous situation with no solution other than resorting to the ethical and religious dimension of the impediments.

**Keywords:** Religion, Religious Scriptures, Environmental Crisis, Proposition

### Introduction

Man is no other than environment with a little difference that he is only being who enquires into the self. He himself is the composition of five elements e.g. earth, water, fire, ether and air. If all five components are perfectly balanced the body remains salubrious. Any imbalance causes malfunctioning in human body. Despite it man is effected by other elements for example, type of his food, water, environment and his cerebration. All could he do to working out the well-functioning of this body as per required is living a homely life in harmony with environment inside and outside following the minimum harm policy to environment. Involvement of inner-self is essential. It is easy to travel into one's self and begin pushing a little and effective step at own level without blaming others. Because all you do is the manifestation of your brain working inside. How it is possible most probably through living a plain life, devoid of any demonic atrocious desire to overcome the nature as excess backfires man himself. Mahatama Gandhi ji manifested it throughout his life. He was nettled at man supercilious manners with his surrounding and reflected, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." He was nurtured upon Indian Scriptures quoted several time the verse from "Ishopanishad".

Om is a vasyam idam sarvam yat kinca jagatyam jagat |  
Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma grdhah kasya sviddhanam ||

God resides in all the atom of this world and controls everything in this world. One must renounce all that is unfair

and take all that is sacred. We must eschew from grabbing the wealth of other creature existing.

### Religion

Religion is not merely preaching of some sermons nor a system of doctrines that is taken as a yardstick for human activities. Religion is the service of humanity and the realization of God in His creation. It is practicing of all those activities that are rewarding not only for one person but for the whole society. Religion is not to be used as a tool to divide people but it is the way of combining people and serve them selflessly. All the Indian religious scripture instructed the man to follow his Dharma. There is no equivalent word to Dharma in any languages. The word duty is taken as synonym in English. But it is more than merely performing our duty and it is the root of all the good deeds of a human beings. For example, in the following verse Sita Mata ascribes to Dharma something more than duty or righteousness"

Dharmd arthah prabhavate Dharmat prabhavate sukham  
Dharmena labhate sarvam Dharmasaram idam jagat-3.9.30

Wealth arises from Dharma, happiness emerges from Dharma. Everything is obtained by means of Dharma, for the world has Dharma as its essence. In the word of Vivekananda, "The real is God; and they (Indian) must cling unto that God through thick and thin. In the midst of their degradation, religion came first. The Hindu man drinks religiously, sleeps religiously, walks religiously, marries religiously, robs religiously....."

the mission of the race is religion and because that has not been touched the race lives on.” (Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. VIII)

It is the sacred duty of every Indian to follow his dharma and dharma is sufficient to act as a savior for the protection of nature. How could religion help in catering those conventions which help in managing every trifles and huge complications in life? Mahatma Gandhi once said, "A religion that takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion." Mahatma Gandhi (Young India, 07.05.25)

### Indian Religious Scriptures

Every religion admire its sacred book; Islam holds the Qur'an in high esteem, as does Hinduism the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita and Buddhism the sutras. In contemporary English usage, the term "scripture" describes any religious sacred text. But Hinduism has no single founder or prophet no single scripture and teaching. It is a way of living life truly. "Unlike Judaism, Christianity or Islam, which may be linked to a magnificent edifice built by an architect, Hinduism is like a gigantic tree, developed from the seed of reflective and sentient Higher Knowledge or paravidya of the sages and nourished by nature" (Ajai Mansingh) Hinduism is eco-friendly. The concept of environment is not new for Hinduism. Our ancestors lived with nature harmoniously. Great sages used to spend all their lives among deep forests to get inner knowledge. They observed the nature red in tooth and claw be it the cloud bursting, the ravage wild-beast bloody fight, earth quake and the dark stormy night. It is through these direct experiences they treated invincible nature friendly. Hinduism is full of ecofriendly examples. The trinity of God be seated on naturalist objects as Bharama on lotus, Vishnu on serpent named Sheshnag amidst the sea and Shiv on Kailash mountain. Hinduism even respects monkey and snakes; for them they are adorable. Hindu gods ride over animal such as Shiva on his bull Nandi, Lord Indra rides on Elephant, Ganesh on rat, Durga Mata on lion and Bhagwan Vishnu on Eagle named Garuda. Even the great lyrical epic Ramayana is narrated by the crow Kaagbhusundi to Garuda on the Kailash Mountain.

Indian religious scripture is full of practical guidance for preservation of environment. One of the basic features of Indian scripture is that it never differentiated human from non-human objects and emphasized to see the image of Maker in every atom of the earth.

Sarva bhuta stham atmanam sarva Bhutani chatmani |  
Ikshate yoga yuktama sarvatra samadarshanah ||

(Bhagwad Gita 6.29) A true yogi observes me in all beings and also sees every being in me. Indeed, the self-realized person sees me, the same Supreme Lord, everywhere. In Bhagwad Gita (10.26) Lord Krishna compared Himself with sacred fig tree.

Ashavth sarvavrikhanam

In Ramayana, Ram while entering into his newly constructed cottage at Chitrakut adored the whole nature:

O, deities of the forests  
O' trees and creepers  
O' holy Mandakini  
O forest beings, visible and invisible

I, Ram, son of Dasarath  
With my wife and brother enter the cottage  
Bless me with your  
Gracious kindness always!

Strengthening the tie further in Ramcharitmanas, Lakshman left Sita Mata under the protection of god of forest and directions in Arayankand,

Marm bachan jab Sita bola | Hari prerit Lachiman man dola ||  
Ban disi dev sonpi sab kahu | chale jahan Ravan sasi rahu ||

With the complaining tone lord Ram asked the birds, trees and thorny bushes about Devi Sita when she was abducted by Ravana,

Hey khag mrig hey madhukar sreni | tum dekhi Sita mrignayni ||  
Khanjan suk kpot mrig mina | madhup nikar kokila parbeena ||

### Protection of Animals

All the Indian religious scriptures instruct us to have mercy on the animals. Kamadhenu, the sacred cow is an integral part of the entire Indian culture. The Indian bow to the sacred cow which grants all wishes and desires. The slaughtering of animals in Indian scripture is prohibited.

Yajurveda warned against not killing animals.

Imam ma himsirekashafam pashum kanikradam  
vaajinam vaajineshu

(Yajurveda 13.48) Do not slaughter this one hoofed animal that neighs and who goes with a speed faster than most of the animals.

Dwipaadava Chatushpaatpaahi (Yajurveda 14.8)

Protect the bipeds and quadrupeds!

Breehimattam yavamattamatho maashamatho tilam  
Esha vaam bhaago nihito ratnadheyaaya dantau maa  
hinsishtam pitaram maataram cha

(Atharvaveda 6.140.2) O teeth! You eat rice, you eat barley, you gram and you eat sesame. These cereals are specifically meant for you. Do not kill those who are capable of being fathers and mothers.

Anago hatya vai bheema kritye  
Maa no gaamashvam purusham vadheeh

(Atharvaveda 10.1.29) It is definitely a great sin to kill innocents. Do not kill our cows, horses and people.

Manusmriti is the first book of law for humanity. It covers the each and every aspect of human transcendental and non-transcendental life. Various verses directly and indirectly stressed the need of preserving natural environment. In chapter 5<sup>th</sup> verse 48 reads

Nakritva paraninam hinsam mansamutpadyte kwachit  
N ch paranvadhya swargyatasmad vivarjayet.5.48

It is impossible to get meat without inflicting laceration to living creature and infliction of laceration is impediment to the attainment of paradise boon. So we must shun the use of meat. In the context of meat-eating there is tally of 8 types of sinners

Anumantaa vishasitaa nihantaa krayavikrayee  
Samskartaa chopahartaa cha khadakashcheti ghaatakaah  
Manusmriti 5.51

Those who allow slaughtering of animals; those who bring animals for slaughter; those who slaughter; those who sell meat; those who purchase meat; those who prepare dish out of it; those who serve that meat and those who eat are all murderers. In Manusmriti, (4/68) the use of tamed animal for transport purpose is recommended but beating them bitterly with whip is strictly prohibited.

Vinityeetu Varajayetnityamaasugaalakshanavanvaeta  
Varnaruppsampnae protedenatudanbrisham

### Place of Trees

Nature has been always adorable for Indians. To brighten their skin they worship the Sun, to get rain they revere lord Indra the god of rain, the wife praying the long lives for her husband encircle Peepal trees, to get our wishes fulfilled we tie the sacred thread around the trees. Kalpavrikha is also known as Kalpataru is the wish fulfillment tree in Indian scripture and has a high place in Indian heart. Reverence for trees is deep rooted in our culture. After crossing the river Yamuna Sita Mata with Ram and Lakshman bowed in deep reverence to Syamvat tree (Sacred Banyan) praying:

“I bow to you, “O Great Tree”.  
“So I may gain the merit of wifely devotion.”

In the Bhishma Parva of the great epic Mahabharata trees are tagged with the means of fulfilment of all desire

Sarvakam flah vriksha

The oldest of all the four Vedas Rig-Veda presumed the origin of our earth from trees

Bhurjgay uttan pado ....(Rig-Veda)

### Place of Earth

We regard earth as our mothers. Earth is our mother and we are its sons.

Mata bhumih putroaham prithiviyaah | Namomatre  
prithiviyah (Atharva Veda Bhumi Sukta)

The day's beginning for an Indian starts with asking forgiveness from his motherland.

Samudrasne Devi parvastana manadde |  
Vissnupatni namastubhyam paadasparsham kssamasyame ||

O! Mother Earth, who has the ocean as clothes and mountains and forests on her body, who is the wife of Lord Vishnu, I bow to you. Please forgive me for touching you with my feet. The earth is compared with cow and the protection of cow is the symbolic protection of the whole earth. Lord Ram carried the sacred earth of his motherland throughout his stay in exile that showed his deep reverence to his motherland.

### Place of Water

In Hinduism, water is believed to have a spiritual cleansing power. Sixteen ceremonies called Sanskars are performed from conception to cremation in Hinduism. In all these Sanskars water is used as a purifier. At the religious ceremony, even sprinkling of holy water is believed to have brought purity. Water carries healing capability.

Waters contain  
All diseases-dispelling medicaments,

Useful for the upkeep of our body,  
So that we may live long  
To enjoy the bright sun. (RigVeda.1.23.2)

In Rig Veda 7.49.2; is a prayer: “The waters in the sky, the waters of rivers and water in the well whose source is the ocean, may all these sacred waters protect me.” It is prescribed in Hinduism that everyone should begin his daily routine after offering Tarpana to the rising sun as a religious duty. Tarpana is the libation of water and milk to the sun. Hinduism believes that all water, especially of rivers is sacred. Lord Krishna defeated the serpent Kaliyah as he was polluting the river Yamuna. While taking bath in this water, I invoke the presence of holy waters from the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri

Gange cha yamune chaiv Godavari saraswati |  
Narmade sindhu kaveri jalasminsnnidhim kuru ||

### Environmental Crisis

Blessed with so much vast knowledge why this environmental crisis persists in India? As they say the repeated lie usually starts looking like truth. The slavery of hundreds of years not only changed us outwardly but internally also. The Englishman put into our mind that what is indigenous and Indian is inferior to Europe whether it be the religion, science, and education and social structure, we are still living under this fake impression. We don't bother taking our religious knowledge seriously. In reality, the attitude of dealing with environment is created by the religion one belongs to. In 1967, the historian, Lynn White, Jr., wrote an article in Science on the historical roots of the ecological crisis. White asserted that the exploitative view that has generated much of the environmental crisis, particularly in Europe and North America, is a result of the teachings of late Medieval Latin Christianity, which conceived of humankind as superior to the rest of God's creation and everything else as created for human use and enjoyment.

The cause for the problem is the vicious circle in motion first resulting in conspicuous wasteful expenditure on luxurious items ignoring Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) and second exploitation of scarce natural resources and emission of more heat trapped greenhouse gases in the environment. The modern man firm belief that technology can solve every problems of humanity and consumerism also lead to environmental crisis. The root cause is the loss of faith and negligence of religious text. The important question here is where from all the knowledge came? Of course, from the direct observation and intuition. At both sphere, ancestor superseded us as they lived among the serene scenery of nature and whatever they observed, recorded in religious scripture. If we initiate the fresh and exact interpretation of our religious texts they may provide us ample opportunities and required outlook to conserve the environment. But the problem is that we are not ready to read to take a bit of our prestigious cultural scripture even though they are more scientific and reasonable than any present literature on the environment as they prefer intuition to science which tries to find out finite in infinite based on evidence. The present literature look at the nature through objective perspective whereas religious scripture never separated it from the subject or Parma Brahm.

### Proposition

We have a bulk of reasons about not to plant a tree, but have only one unavoidable and sufficient reason to plant a tree i.e. we cannot live without them. Knowledge assisted by passion for protecting the environment can do well to the present age. To save a dove king Sibhi (lord Ram's ancestor) quartered his own body. The kind of passion for all living being is only way to save the further degradation of nature. Second, no argument can be facilitated against the fact that every civilization in the world has a code of ethics called religious text that they live by. No civilization survived without their own religious text. And it is the text which brought revolution time and again in the history of the world. Indian religious scripture is full of practical guidance for preservation of environment. So the revival of religious scripture can be called a renaissance as the revival of Greek literature in England in the 15<sup>th</sup> century flamed the very core of heart for patriotic zeal and they saw everything that was theirs -great and incomparable. The renaissance of Indian religious scripture is also much needed and our scripture can only directs us perfectly to sort out the problem of environmental crisis.

### Conclusion

Religion is not static since it is ever vibrating. It helps man to understand what it means to be a human being and how he is interconnected with other and the rest of nature. It provides us with a set of moral values and rules to maintain healthy relationship with God and His creation. Environmental awareness is incomplete if it excludes the religious values and ethics. Religion is a powerful source of inspiration for environmental protection. To confront the root cause of natural exploitation, Indians have to revitalize the most fundamental belief about the nature. The biggest problem is how to combine the old rich knowledge enshrined in religious text with the modern draconian viewpoint of contemporary age. Once this rift is negotiated, and the concept of simple living and high thinking is rejuvenated all the problem may vanish slowly. Only through taking the help of religious scripture the entire world can be persuaded for following the essence of the verse.

Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah Sarve Santu Nir-Aamayaah |  
Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantu Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-  
Bhavet ||

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