



Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The Vedic Philosophy Of Living With Nature

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ABSTRACT: We are abandoning our ancient traditions and imitating the West. By immersing ourselves in the world of consumerism, we are extracting natural resources and pushing nature to the path of destruction. But our forefathers have talked about people living in harmony with nature. Environmentalism has always been deeply ingrained in Hindu society, even from the earliest stages of the Hindu civilization. The natural elements that impacted their life were seen by our ancestors as manifestations of the Supreme Being or God, known as Brahman. They were aware of God's presence around them. The current environmental problem deserves a spiritual approach. Now the time has come to bring out those lost cultures and nature and people will live together.

KEYWORDS: Environment, Pollution, Hinduism, Vedic Philosophy, Awareness

INTRODUCTION

In India, philosophy arose from our intimate understanding of nature. We have the idea of *vasudhaiva-kutumbakam*, which is how we relate to nature rather than using a utilitarian perspective. Our relationship with nature was founded on mutual cooperation rather than exploitation. We utilized nature for survival rather than exploitation because we had the appropriate guidance in the form of philosophy, as philosophy means 'knowledge for life.

Indian culture existed in a world of harmony. Our literature, culture, and religion are all united in their support for the preservation of nature. The spirituality practiced in India is often referred to be nature-based.

Indian philosophical traditions promote a balanced and comprehensive relationship between man and nature. From ancient times to the present, Indian literature is full of vibrant descriptions of nature. Nature has never been purely utilitarian to us. In India, the concept "nature" refers to much more than only the physical world or the world of plants. We have viewed nature as a cosmic system, which is why we have always attempted to be natural in all of our actions.

It is stated that Hinduism is an eco-friendly religion. The major reason for this sensitivity is that everything is a part of the Supreme Being. So, we saw nature as something to be experienced rather than exploited.

There is not a single instance of animosity towards nature in any of the Indian philosophical theories. The Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas all preach about the divine relationship between man and the environment. Everything, from a stone to an animal, is sacred to an Indian. Modern Western civilization attacked Indian attitudes toward nature as animism because they could not see any value in nature and believed that only man has worth.

They are now exploring alternate methods of environmental preservation and have discovered that only Asian traditions, particularly Indian traditions, provide a full philosophy of ecological outlook. This ecological perspective is not restricted to abstract concepts, but each Indian's day begins with a respect for nature. Indians have practiced application-oriented philosophy, particularly applied environmental philosophy, for generations.

The modern man is taking on a new path in order to find solutions to the environmental crisis. This long-lasting environmental problem includes several levels, including pollution, species loss, ecological imbalance, and overpopulation, among others. Man began to recognize that scientific solutions are not the final answer to the problem, and the situation remains unresolved. Therefore, it is largely focused on how people think and behave, which led to environmental ethics as the end result in connection to the environment.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN ECOLOGY

The core of Indian philosophical tradition is that it teaches us to live in cooperation rather than exploitation. The earth has a holy function in all indigenous Indian traditions, similar to that of a mother who nourishes and protects. Our great rishis wish that

"Saptadbveepa Nivasinam Praninam akshaiyamupanistatu"

"Let all the living creatures in the seven continents be blessed"

According to Indian philosophical tradition, elements made of everything in this world, are similar. This idea speaks for the core ecological principle of the peaceful coexistence of all living things. These are the earth's systems for sustaining life.

Therefore, a study of old Indian philosophical systems uncovers two important environmental concerns.

1. All traditional systems advise a deep relationship between humans and their natural surroundings as a means of ensuring their survival and material well-being.
2. This advice is essential for maintaining a harmonic balance among all living things. This also contributes to social harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Over many years, the indigenous peoples of India have evolved sophisticated land and water harvesting systems. They owe much of their knowledge and experience to the cultural philosophy they adhered to for many years. Such indigenous peoples retain unique wisdom about natural resource use by maintaining a symbiotic relationship with ecosystems such as forests.

Ancient people had a respectful attitude toward nature because they believed that civilization was created and evolved in forests and that forests now serve as a resource for human existence. The forests had an important role in the evolution of India's cultures and traditions.

Most ancient texts, such as the Vedas, Puranas, Brahmanas, and Aranyakas, were written by rishis who lived in forests. There are references to the three main varieties of vana used in ancient times: Mahavana, Tapovana, and Srivana. Thus, even in the distant past, Indians developed the notion of social forestry.

INDIAN VS WESTERN:

When environmental crises and problems began to multiply in the west, academics there began to consider environmental ethics. Therefore, the environmental crisis has given rise to western environmental ethics.

In contrast to the west, Indian environmental culture is not a result of the ecological problems, rather, it is the genuine result of man's connection with nature. Nature was viewed as an experiment by the Western culture. However, the Indian people considered nature as something to be experienced. Nature lost its balance and harmony as a result of Westerners' exploitative mentality toward it.

Indian culture is rich in environmental ethics, and Indians do not need to go to modern environmental prophets for guidance. The only things they are meant to accomplish are to provide a fresh reading of their own philosophical writings and a reevaluation of their own cultural and religious practices.

Indian philosophical traditions present an environmental philosophy founded on ethics as well as a cultural system that cares for all-natural elements. Even when there is no anarchy, our great seers predicted the risks of environmental crisis. They established guidelines for environmental preservation in relation to religion so that people would abide by them out of respect for God. However, due to the influence of the west, we criticized such customs as dogmatic.

When a nation achieves freedom, it no longer counts as a dependent nation, yet we continued to have an internal dependency on Westerners and stick to Western planning practices. Nature exploitation was at the basis of Western history, religion, and culture. However, Indian history, religion, and culture are based on peaceful coexistence. We need to re-discover Indian wisdom immediately.

The ancient Indian concept of ecology is rich in environmental sensitivity. It is preventive awareness since there was no environmental crisis as there is now. They were still worried about the environment. Their major source of worry was their attitude toward nature. Attitudes are largely influenced by the environment, and Indians have cultivated a "fellowship" with nature. In contrast, westerners established a master-slave relationship with nature. Westerners wanted power in order to rule the world. However, ancient rishis desired wisdom in order to be free of life-disturbing elements.

VEDIC TIME:

At this time when we are pleading for a better environment, the Vedas educate us for the first time how to safeguard our pristine environment. All four Vedas, the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva, understand the need of maintaining the seasons' cycles, which are likely to be disrupted due to climate change caused by improper human behavior. It is wonderful how the people of the Vedic era adored all of nature's elements and beings by carefully protecting them. They viewed nature and the environment holistically.

“mātā bhūmih putruahan pṛthivā:”

This vedic prayer invokes divine intervention to bliss and protect the environment.

“madhu vātāḥ ṛitāyate madhu kṣaranti

sindhavaḥ mādviḥ naḥ santuṣadhi.

madhu naktamutusāsu madhumatpārthiva rajah

madhu kṣorastu suryah

mādhirgābo bhavantu naḥ'' (Rigveda,1/90/6,7,8)

(Environment provides bliss to people leading their life perfectly. Rivers bliss us with sacred water and provide us health, night, morning, vegetation. Sun bliss us with peaceful life. Our cows provide us milk).

Plant ecology has great importance to keep the environment in balance. The Vṛkṣāyurveda says that planting a tree is equally beneficial as having ten son-

“dasakūpa sama vāpi dasa vāpi sama hradaḥ

dasahrada samah putro dasaputra sama drumah'' (Vṛksayurvedah-5).

Tulshi, Pippala, and Vatavrksa are all very important in our culture. Many slokas in the vedic literature discuss the significance of Tulshi and Vatavrksa. Some of them are as follows: ---

“jābadināni tulashi rūpitāpi jad grihe grihe.

tābadvarṣha sahasrāni vaikunthe sa mahīyate'' (Vṛksayurvedah -9).

(He will live in Heaven for so many years as the Tulsi Plant will be in his house for the equal number of days).

About the Pippala and Vatavrksa, Atharvaveda says, ---

“aśwatthu devasadanastritiyashamityo divi.

tatramṛitayasyo śakhan deva kushthamavanwat'' (Atharvaveda, 5/4/3).

(It was forbidden to cut Vatavṛkṣha because gods reside in this tree and there is no disease where this tree is present.)

This is also supported by Shrikrishna in the Shrimadbhāgavadgītā—

“asswathu sarvavṛikhanam”.

Modern scientists claim that the pippala and Vatavrikhya now balance the atmosphere by consuming carbon dioxide from the air and supplying humans with oxygen. The Oshodi sukta of Rig-veda addresses to plants and vegetables as mother, ‘O mother! Hundreds are your birth places and thousand are your shoots.

“śatan bu ambā dhāmoni sahashramutta tu ruhaḥ'' (Rig-veda,10/97/2).

Similarly, the Hindus worshipped Bilva, Kadamba, Rudraksha, Champaka, Bakula, and other deities. According to the Maitryani Samhita, the earth is referred to be "devajayani," endearing to gods, and aushadhinam mulam, the source of several therapeutic plants. As a result, Indian sages such as Manu proposed punishment for anybody who cut such important trees. During the Vedic period, yajnas were performed to purify the atmosphere. These yajnas included the use of ghee and fragrant haven material.

The vedic sages also know that mountains cause rains and fresh air and also provide medicines.

“parvateṣu bhesajam'' (Rig-veda-8/20/25).

Therefore, they gave importance to save mountains and said that it is better to live in the forests or mountains than the villages—

“iman jibebhyah paridhin dadhāmi meshaṇ nu

gādaparu arthametat.

satana jibantu saradaḥ puruchirantamṛstun

dadhatan parvatena''.

tuje nastane parvataḥ santu svaitavo na virah.

panita aptyoada no vardhannah sansan naryo ahistou''. (Rig-veda,5/81/9).

All three categories of living animals present in the world have distinct surroundings, and each living species has its unique environment. However, when seen from the viewpoint of man, they all make up his environment. According to the Vedic texts, creatures should be secure, sheltered, and healthy—

“bhūrbhūvah svaḥ suprajabhiḥ svasthya subese viraiḥ suposaḥ posaiḥ

nārya prajān me pāhi sacchya paśunme

pahyartharya pitun me pāhi

tubhyamaranyaḥ paśabo mṛga vane hita haṇsa

suparnah śakuna vayansi

tava yakṣa paśupate apsantastubyan kṣaranti divya abo vṛdhe” (Yajurveda, 3/37)

In Hinduism, it is customary to protect animals and birds. According to Hindu mythology, the god's fourteen avatars (births), which include Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisingha, and others, represent the divine forms in these creatures, ensuring the safety of their lives.

On the day of Nag Panchami, the snake is worshipped, and cows are adored on the occasion of Balabhadrapuja.

According to the Vedas, it is forbidden to kill some animals and birds that behave as scavengers by eating dead animals and trash. It is necessary to retrace the steps of the ancient period—

“kincideva tu vipryāya dadyadasthimatan vadhe.

Anasthanancaiva himsayah pranayamena śudhyati.” (Manu -samhita-11/142)

"Feeling of love and attachment towards environment, expression of belief, gratitude and sacrifice in special circumstances for environmental conservation are true human sentiments. If we feel oneness with all the constituents of environment of a particular area, feel happy if it prospers and feel sad if it degrades; this is the best of our environmental consciousness. This is the vedic concept towards environment and its constituents".

There is a wonderful verse in Ishavasya upanishad

That there is no need for hatredness between each other beings.

“yastu sarvāṇi bhūtānyātmanyevānupaśyati

sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṃ tato na vijugupsate ”

One who perceives in the Atman everything, and in the same way Atman in everything, does not hate.

CONCLUSION:

Ancient Indian literature discusses the divine connection between materialism and spirituality. In today's society, the concept of satisfaction is confined only in materialism. However, this was not always the case. We lost our spiritual peacefulness and became immersed with consumerism. Reading ancient texts is the only way to return to the past state.

Indian philosophical systems provide an environmental philosophy based on ethics and a cultural system which cares for all natural entities. Our great seers foresaw the dangers of environmental crisis even when there is no chaos. They established guidelines for environmental preservation in relation to religion so that people would abide by them out of fear for God. However, with the influence of the West, we criticized such traditions as fanatical.

Therefore, it is everyone's fundamental responsibility to re-discover and re-acquire the lost wisdom of ancient India. No, it doesn't imply that we ought to return to the Vedic era. Additionally, it does not imply that we should propagate religious doctrine. Wisdom is superior to all religions.

Indian spirituality is based on wisdom, and this wisdom is not restricted to texts and rules. It is within all of us. We are following it whether we're aware of it or not. We have a unique relationship with nature, worshipping plants and creatures in all forms. Everything should adopt a strategy like this that takes everything into account. Metropolis and modernized societies have forgotten this wisdom.

Modernization should also take place in our minds. Discovering the past does not require us to adopt the cultural practices of the past. Custom changes throughout time. When an old custom does not work in the present, it should be abandoned. Wisdom consists in making the right choice.

Indian philosophical traditions treat all objects with the same attitude. Even while we acknowledge that the five elements are material, we also see divinity in Panchamahabhutas. The same divinity is sensed in trees, mountains, lakes, and so on. India has the knowledge to see the divine in everything in the natural world. This assisted us in maintaining a peaceful relationship with all components of nature. This perfect interaction promotes balance and harmony in nature. This everlasting wisdom was present in all the civilizations that emerged in India, and it has enabled them to flourish for many centuries.

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