ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN VEDIC METAPHYSICS AN EFFECTUAL METHOD TO INDOCTRINATE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Our existence on planet earth blossom due to blessing of mother earth, she is the goddess of nature according to Hindu mythology. She is the Supreme elixir of our existence on earth. She continuously plays her role from our being to perishing on this planet she sustains our life cycle in her own accordance. But our acts are not complimentary to her sustenance, thus by abusing the earth we are endangering our own existence. Increasing natural hazards are the result of our atrocious acts of exploiting our earth. Ancient Indian texts reveal the concern for environmental issues in form of mythology and tradition. This paper examines some of the beliefs and practices underlying traditional Hindu religions’ attitude towards nature and its strategic extension as a tool for Environmental conservation. It is high time we turn to our ancestral roots because by protecting environment we shall protect the entire humanity, let us pass on the rich Vedic heritage and its teachings to our future generations and make this earth a better place for them to live in.

Key Words: Ecology, Kshiti (earth), Apah (water), Teja (light/heat), Vayu (air)

INTRODUCTION

Vedanta is the topmost scientific and philosophical treatise of the spiritual and cultural heritage of India. It is a composite Sanskrit word, combining two words - Veda and anta. Veda means knowledge and anta means end. Vedanta means the end of knowledge or the Ultimate knowledge of truth. In Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.1 it is rightly said sa brahma-vidya1

Girayaste Parvata Himavatloaranaya Te Prathivisyonamastu |
Babhrum Krashnam Rehinim Viswarupam Dhruvam Prathivimindraguptam |

Ajitoahato Akshatoadhyashtham Prathivimaham ||

Meaning: O Earth! Pleasant by the hills, snow-clad mountains and forests; O numerous colored, firm and protected Earth! On this earth I stand, undefeated, unslain, and unhurt.2

Yat te madhyam prathivi yacca nabhyam yasta urja tanvah sambabhuvuh |
Tasu no tehaybhi nah pavasva mata bhumih putro aha prathivyah |
Parjanyah pitah sa nah pipartu ||

Meaning: The treasure of minerals and of other elements that provide vigor indwells in your naval part (central core). Offer these to us. Your land and the cloud enshowering

1 S. Pratul, 2009
2 S. Pratul, 2009
upon it nurture us like a mother and father. May the shelter of these purify and strengthen us.  

Vanaspatim van asthapayadhvam, Nisu dadidhvam akhanant utsam |

**Meaning**: This hymn further teaches that it is in the interest of mankind to plant more and more plants and trees as these safeguard the water resources.

**Objective**

The concept of environment protection is not a modern phenomenon for Hindus; they inherited it from Vedic age. During the earliest, formative period of their society, Hindus first perceived God’s presence around them through nature. The motherly perception of nature is very prominent in Hindu religion. Mountains, caves, rocks, forests, trees, plants, healing herbs, rivers, streams, lakes were conceived of as prominent cipher of female power, innate in nature. Our proposition in the paper is that the descriptive, prescriptive and ecological passages on nature deities found in scriptural sources were a means of inculcating ecological awareness. Their significance lies in the fact that the metaphors provide that methodologies and strategies adopted in the past to sustain the imbalances and threats posed to the natural environment. It reveals that in Vedic science there are suggestions for building of an ecological strategy based on the concept of *Rta* the cosmic rhythm which balances the earth.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Ecological problems coupled with unequal access to resources results in human ill-being and threats to the livelihood security of the world. Humanity faces exceptional challenge of eroding natural resources and declining ecosystems services due to a multitude of threats created by unprecedented growth and consumerism. Also imperiled is the biodiversity and sustainability of the essential ecological processes and life support systems in human dominated ecosystems across scales. In Vedanta the study of consciousness is at the root of everything including the creation and purpose of the universe. Vedanta states that the Supreme Lord, Who is the Supreme among all conscious beings, manifests Himself in His various integral subjective forms for the purpose of creation.

We have abundant myths in Indian culture these myths are about nature. Hindus worship them and are reluctant to destroy them thus we were ecocritic since ages. In this paper few references of our Vedic eco-centric approach are drawn out to support the argument that our Vedic texts our most precious heritage literature and world’s oldest literature is truly Eco-centric. This discipline associated with conservation is ecological tradition as shown in Figure that follows.

![Fig. 1: Prakriti, (earth/shakti)](image1.png)
![Fig. 2: Ganga, Apah (water/)](image2.png)
![Fig. 3: Surya, Teja (light/heat)](image3.png)
![Fig. 4: Agni, Teja (light/heat)](image4.png)
![Fig. 5: Vayu, Marut (air)](image5.png)
The respect Indians have for all forms of life is well known. We protect nature with religious fervor. The sacred groves are the repositories of biological resources. Trees are protected and worshipped for their ecological, economical, medicinal and social importance. They are the representatives of the ecology, species and genetic diversity. Sustainable society is one that functions and lives in harmony with earth systems such that future generations will be able to function with equal or greater ease and the quality of life will in no way be diminished. Hindu religious traditions teach us that the earth is sacred, the fact that traditionally helps to exert control over how people interact with the natural world. The use of religion as a tool for environment conservation is justified. Firstly most lasting social change is anchored in a deep moral imperative. Secondly values based rationales for protecting biodiversity are widely held and persuasive. Thirdly religion humanizes and personalizes choices about environment and more importantly, understanding ethics backed by individuals’ religions will help us make better decisions on complex issues.

Vedic man was nature centered for him the nature and its phenomena were part of eternal divine design. The ideas of the Prakriti incorporate a countless meanings. The celebrated Prthivi-sukta (also referred to as Bhumi-sukta) in the Atharva Veda sums up the Vedic attitude towards earth. Supposition in this paper is that the evocative, authoritarian and ecologic writing on nature deities found in Vedic literature was a means to indoctrinate ecological awareness. Their significance lies in the fact that the images provide that methodologies and strategies adopted in the past to sustain the imbalances and terrorization posed to the natural environment. As no movement whether biological, natural, human or metaphysical can subsist outside the sphere of the earth, the concept of the Mother Earth assimilates a wide range of meanings.

The entire earth is continual by a harmonious cosmic principle; this principle is known as Rta or cosmic order in Vedic system. It is the self-regulative law of harmony. It is the uncongenial power, the underlying regulator of all life on earth at the natural and human level. The two functions of the earth, birth and death, are embodied in the fundamental ecological principle of interdependence. In every environment, the hilly, desert or forest, the plant and animal species that constitute the biotic community, together with the soil, air, and water are inherently organized so as to form a unified life support system. There exist elaborate and extensive networks. If even one fraction of this association is harmed, it would destroy and weaken the whole composition. There is no space for devastate in nature’s finely balanced economy. Whatever is used is recycled once again through seasonal flux. The fundamental intuition of the cyclic order of the seasons is celebrated by the seers:

Your circling seasons, nights succeeding days, Your summer, O Earth, your splashing rains, Yours winter and frosty season yielding too spring -- may each and all produce for us milk.

The Vedic literature reflects a religion of nature, where man is conceived as a part and parcel of its natural circumstances and concern for earth is hinted as follows:

Earth’s stability: The Sun never sets or rises and it is the earth, which rotates. The gravitational effect of solar system makes the earth stable.
Non-corrosive axle of the earth: The axle of the earth does not get rusted and the earth continues to revolve on its axle\textsuperscript{13}. Ashvinaus (scientists in Vedic code) have been advised to learn thoroughly about Prakriti (Nature), characteristics and various qualities of water, air, fire, electricity and heat and sound energy i.e. environment. The earth revolving and going round the Sun like a calf following the mother is mentioned in Rig Veda\textsuperscript{14}. Earth surrounded by air on all sides, revolved on its axle and measures the set path. Lightening and energy are its main manifestation; its axle does not get rusted.\textsuperscript{15} Ether is the ocean of sound waves. Sun, stars, earth, other planets and the entire Nature exist on the basis of indestructible syllable “OM” which is the cosmic Word described as shabad Brahma in the Vedas. There is a mention that human beings should spread this Word OM in the sky/ether which helps in making the earth, ecosystem, stable and free from environmental hazards, pollution and other evil effects.

The unawareness about the subtle atoms has now become the major cause of over exploitation of the earth: The “Ashvinaus” - the epithet for scientists in the Vedas, have to utilize their inner divine instruments for the welfare of mankind on the principle of Idd Nan Mnam - nothing for self all for society. The unawareness about the subtle atoms has now become the major cause of over exploitation of the earth as a quarry, leading to all kinds of pollution, environmental hazards and other moral and social degradation. Finding no divinity in matter, man’s ego exploitation continues and he finds even a sense of pride in this negativity, bereft of any spiritualism. There are a large number of hymns through which the scientists have been advised to do further research and discover various kinds of conveyances, which could move in firmament, earth and the sea.\textsuperscript{16}

The divine and brilliant Usha (Dawn): Mathematicians and astronomers are advised in the Veda that all calculations of time should start from the divine and brilliant Usha (dawn). Formless being of light Usha Devi is described as the brilliant daughter of the glorious Surya deva (Sun). She represents dawn and time in Prakriti. Even the calculation of Pralaya and Sristi (dissolution and creation) of the universe are based on Dawn and also the Sun, after taking into consideration the gravitational effect of the entire solar system.\textsuperscript{17} Rig-Veda refers to ten directions based on the rays of Sun, with four main directions i.e. East, West, North and South. Obviously, Vedic seers divided directions into an angle of 36 degrees, each which led to the discovery of the Sun watch used in ancient India. All calculations were based on ecosystem and were designed for the preservation of bionetwork and environment.\textsuperscript{18}

Nature/Mother earth = religious aspect = divine concept of Vedas = mode of environment protection to maintain ecological balance = evade entropy in ecology: It is due to the spirit of God pervading both in the Sun and the Earth and also due to gigantic Design of Brahma the only supreme Reality. The human beings should protect the earth revolving very fast like a deer by observing and following the permanent laws of social, moral and physical, ecological order ordained by God and described as Rta in the Vedas and other scriptures of the Hindus. Such brave people who observe and follow these Rta help in the preservation of land (earth).\textsuperscript{19} The science of Time is also linked with the Sun and his daughter Usha Devi.\textsuperscript{20} Each dawn reduces life span of the matter in all animate and inanimate life and it reminds the human beings to set a proper timetable from morning to night This of reduction means disorder we recognize it as entropy in modern science. Owing to its subtle nature
Time should never be wasted. All mundane, material and spiritual duties should be discharged punctually as per the timetable fixed with reference to the dawn\textsuperscript{21}.

**Understanding of all the attributes of Prakriti:** In Rig -Veda, Indra deva is an important being of light that represents power, destroys followers of non divine professions, bribe takers, adulterators of food, medicines and other evil minded persons. He represents power and strength of Prakriti. Even his name is derived scientifically from two words “\textit{Indha and Ra}.” \textit{Indha} is fuel and \textit{Ra} is transforming energy, a kind of cosmic fire. Indhra or Indra is thus power, energy and strength which provides constant fuel in the Nature and destroys those who create obstructions in his noble activities. Since Atharva \textit{Rsis} were worshippers of holy fire, in Atharva Veda, Agni deva in charge of holy fire and its attributes became the most important deva. He was also made lord of vows. Thus all promises of good conduct, behavior, protection and care of wife and children, following the path of enlightened liberalism, maintaining the air, water and atmosphere free from pollution, etc., are made before the holy fire. In this manner the Vedic metaphysicists provided divinity to Prakriti and describe her as the supreme Mother so that human beings refrain from exploiting her.

**CONCLUSION**

Nature the mother earth in its essence is not a machine. Living matter exists only by the order of the transcendent life, the one which is formless, invisible, but knowable through its effect. Nature constitutes a set of self-originating, self-organizing and self-sustaining forms. The rhythm of Vedic \textit{Rta} the earthly balance is within us. The above discussion makes clear that our Vedic texts revealed that closer our connection with the natural environment and the more aware we are about its forces and life-supporting energies, the clearer is our perception of its rhythm. From the digesting activity of our intestines to the firing of the neurons in the brain, every single function of the organs and cells in our bodies reflects the beat which mirrors the rhythm of nature so we have to be in harmony with \textit{Rta} the cosmic rhythm which balances the earth. The state of our health: physical, emotional, and mental is entirely dependent on this rhythm. When the rhythm stops beating through the vital trinity of each individual’s nature: body, mind, and soul, individual perishes.

The health of the natural environment, with all its variety of animated and non-animated entities is entirely \textit{Rta}-dependent as we humans are the part of this \textit{Rta} we have to play our role in saving the mother earth revising and following the preaching of our ancestors of worshiping the earth as diety and saving it. The self-organizing capacity of nature's dynamics is sustained through the constant interactions of the astonishing variety of the living creatures and their environment. What is crucial to be underlined in the context of wholesome ecology is that every single entity existing in nature, be this entity animate or non-animate, is equally important for the realization of the dynamic interactions of the living creatures and their environment, and therefore the Vedic texts emphasize that for the support of the self-organizing urge of nature and its all-pervading rhythm we have to be in harmony with nature and its elements.

Every single entity in nature is endowed with equal right to exist, interact, and evolve, and thus to contribute in its overall self-organization and rhythm. And \textit{vice versa}, the self-organizing urge of nature and its rhythm manifest through the motion, interaction, and evolutionary potential of every existing entity, without assigning ranks of priorities among them; they all are equally open for this urge to make them move, interact, and evolve in synchrony. If some
entities were favored by nature at the expense of others, the integrity of nature: its unity, wholeness, and interconnectedness would be immediately destroyed and this would destroy its rhythm. Nature can never act against its integrity, but we can, when we exploit nature and our minds immerse in selfish pursuits and forget that our natural environment and we are inseparably connected through the rhythm of the universe.

The ideas of inter-dependence keep us bonded with nature, Vedas provide a median for the ethics of the environment. The Vedic vision of earth considers man to be a protector of natural resources who reload the assets of the earth rather than stealing it. Preservation, of Vedic way leads to a state of harmony (Rta) with land, forest, waters and nature as a pious entity with all its mysteries. Harmony is reinstated if the link between creature and nature is constantly reinforced, in Vedas creature and nature are viewed as one biotic community the earth, therefore, is worthy of adoration. The current absurd world-view, value-system and code of ethics are inadequate for a long term endurance of our existence. It is said in that: The Earth was revealed to mankind for bliss\(^{22}\). Keeping in view this responsive approach, our ancestors founded a stratagem to protect the veracity and constancy of nature and creature. Earth is, prayed to with great modesty:

Whatever, I dig of you, O Earth, May that grow quickly upon you, O Pure One, may my thrust never pierce thy, vital points, thy heart.\(^ {23}\)

We as humans usually become aware of the rhythm when it is destroyed, often irreversibly. We are usually able to notice that the beat goes wrong when it is too late to restore it. So before it is too late let us summoned up our Vedic messages of protecting the earth so that the earth will protect us in reciprocate.

REFERENCES

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If U Protect NATURE....

NATURE will Protect U