



UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY WITH RELIGIOUS ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

My work proposes that the future of our society is uncertain till the approach towards our environment undergoes significant change. This body of work delineates the role of survey or in contributing towards evolution of society into sustainable one. This is done via the identification and promotion of sustainable practices as well as supporting it with ethical arguments.

In the last twenty years, awareness of public towards the environment as well as the anthropogenic impact has grown considerably, though in the same era dramatic decline environmental sustainability has occurred. Sustainability as a term has been so overused that it's on the verge of being rendered meaningless.

Various philosophical theories can be associated with various ongoing projects; both consequential and inconsequential theories of ethics. Increasing gross utility has been the prime concern of these projects and hence we can call them utilitarian in nature. Specifically they also talk about certain projects which include the concept of welfare, hence that can said to be associated with welfare utilitarianism as well.

Environmental ethics may be defined as the set of conduct which makes us accountable to human and non-human species, landscapes, water bodies Atmosphere and other natural reserves sustaining life on this planet. Moral philosophical theories guide this conduct of man.

The attitude of man towards nature has followed a course from synchronous behavior to stark insensitivity to reforming its approach incorporating realization of the damage he has caused as well mitigating it, it is when man stopped respecting the supporting systems of nature, things started falling apart. So, in order to preserve the pristine nature of environment a novel ethical concept need to be formulated, which would be based on commitment and accountability Sustainability is just one aspect that environmental ethics deal. This discipline covers a wide range of ideas from global governance to supporting belief systems. It represents comprehensive international view supported by the respect towards environment and not just by vested economic interests driven by technology. Accountability, transparency, economic justice, social fairness and participatory democracy form the basic tenets of this discipline.

The different views are in part based on different practical assessments but also on different conditions and pre-eminence (e.g.. concerning the future, ethical consistency at a global level, and responsibility for what one country may indirectly cause in another country). Both Christian tradition and Hinduism lays emphasis on real practices.



KEYWORDS: *evolution of society , natural reserves sustaining life, inconsequential theories of ethics.*

CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The assertion that Christianity strives to preserve environment, has been re-examined by both the church itself and outsiders. The outsiders propose that the Christian doctrine is promoting a faith which rather leads to environmental exploitation.⁵⁶

“God created man, blessed them and said, Have many children so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds and all the wild animals. I have provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruit for you to eat.” (Genesis:1: 28)

But simultaneously God ordered, “to till and keep the garden of Eden as a steward” (Genesis: 2:15) Both dominion and stewardship was done for the goodness of everything (Genesis: 9: 2-7).

Robin Attfield after a detailed study of Christian approach to environmental ethics points out that the presupposition that “God created universe” and the same exists for “God’s glory”, points to ‘the eocentrism’ more than any other ‘centrism.’

“God created the world, holds everything together, and reconciles all things through Jesus Christ. Since the days of the early church, followers of Jesus Christ have known this remarkable teaching of, and for centuries prior to the Incarnation, God had also been affirmed as Creator. Since “the earth is the Lord’s,” humanity’s responsibility to “serve and keep” God’s creation had been part of the belief and action of God’s people for millennia.”

“When he created the world, God set aside a unique place, the Garden of Eden, and placed in it the first man, Adam.

“God instructed Adam to cultivate and guard the Garden to enhance its already great fruitfulness and to protect it against the encroachment of the surrounding wilderness that made up the rest of the earth. Having also created the first woman and having joined her to Adam, God commanded them and their descendants to multiply, to spread out beyond the boundaries of the Garden of Eden, and to fill, subdue, and rule the whole earth and everything in it. Both by endowing them with his image and by placing them in authority over the earth, God gave men and women superiority and priority over all other earthly creatures. This implies that proper environmental stewardship, while it seeks to harmonize the fulfillment of the needs of all creatures, nonetheless puts human needs above non-human needs when the two are in conflict.”⁵⁷

In my opinion, natural theology does supply areas for some sort of position which make it possible to progress beyond this cessation.

Survival of material objects can be traced only by describing the presence of something of nature that is incapable to be created, changed or destroyed, and the cause of whose existence it, therefore, makes no sense to endeavor. Later the balance of the universe through time and space could have been otherwise, with some zones of time or of space differing (in the way of the matter occupying them) from others.

This system can only be defined by a cause of recurrence able to operate on all times and places and accordingly not subject to spatial or temporal conditions: and it can be best explained by a purposive means desiring of order.

The position that the Christian religion takes towards the environment is not apparent, when studying the history of a religion, there is a great degree of metamorphosis which occurs in its nature—in its beliefs and customs. Thus in Christianity, religion does not take a stand for the environment, which is universally held throughout its diverse categories and long historical development. It is because of this, one only finds a vague variety of ecological theologies when mining Christian thought for its stance towards the environment. In the case of Christianity, this veiled position towards the environment could perhaps be due to its primary attention on the relationship between God and humanity, e.g. creation and redemption, and its secondary focusing on relationships between different people, e.g. ethics.

CARE FOR CREATION

“The biblical narrative proclaims that God existed before the universe did, and is separate from it. He was not beholden to anyone or anything, and the entire natural order is, and remains, his

possession. The first verse of the Bible makes this clear: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. John gospel echoes the same truth: Through him Jesus all things were made and in case we didn't get the message, John continues: without him nothing was made that has been made.'⁶⁰

"The picture in the early chapters of Genesis is of a workman laboring hard: of honest days' work and rest at the end of the week: of satisfaction at job well done, with the repeated affirmation that God saw that it was good. God gloried in his creation, and his creation in turn reflected something of his character. 'The heavens declare the glory of God says the psalmist, and Paul comments that 'since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made... This stands in stark contrast, for example, to those Eastern religions that downplay the importance of the material world in favor of the spiritual.'⁶¹

Creation reflects God's glory: "Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made." (Romans 1:20) We honor God's creation by taking care of what he has created by being good stewards of the earth. By caring for creation, we also help protect people and the planet.

STEWARDSHIP: RESPONSIBILITY OF MANKIND

According to biblical teachings God created man on the sixth day of creation, according to this that He created man in his own image. Man is designed in the image of God and presented with the capacity and the opportunity to reflect the divine qualities that have a personal connection with the Creator God. Humanity was also endowed with the right to exercise dominion over all of God's creation.

In the beginning of Genesis, God creates everything and puts Adam in the Garden to work it and to take care of it. It is clear that man was created to work and that work is the stewardship of all of the creation that God has given him. Following the fundamental principle of biblical stewardship everything is owned by God and we are simply managing or administrating on his behalf.

Therefore, stewardship signifies our obedience regarding the administration of everything. God has planted under our control, which is all-encompassing.

Stewardship is the responsibility of one's self and possessions to God's service, recognizing that we do not have the right to control our property or ourselves.

In order to execute our duties effectively as good stewards, a clear understanding of what dominion means is imperative. While all forms have been subordinated to human beings, we should conduct over them as God himself does. This dominion does not impact us the right to "lord over" creation in a manner inappropriate with God's own manner of governance. Human dominion does not present man as an absolute ruler.

Thus, People should practice good stewardship. The word "steward" and "stewardship" is used during the Old and New Testaments. The word used for steward in the Bible can also be interpreted as administrator or servant. When the word for steward (manager, servant) is used in the Bible, it refers to a person who is put in charge of taking care of something that does not belong to him or her. This meaning is compatible with the Webster's Dictionary definition of a steward as "one employed in a large household or estate to manage domestic concerns". As stewards of nature, people have been designated by God to maintain the "domestic environmental concerns" of our planet earth home.

UNDERSTANDING HINDUISM

Hinduism applies to the Vedic custom of India. Vedic religion is a non-Semitic denomination of India, which founded itself on the Vedas. As far as the religious perspective is concerned, the Vedas are the most ancient and old scriptures available to mankind. It is understood that they were directly transferred from the God; therefore they are ascribed divine origin.

Hinduism has always been an environmentally sympathetic philosophy. It generates substantial importance on environmental ethics. Life has never been deemed an antagonistic component to be surmounted or dominated. In fact, man is motivated to remain in agreement with nature and understand the divinity that predominates in all elements, including plants and animals. The great saints & sages of the past had a great reverence for nature.

Further in my work, I will be discussing those features of the Hindu religion which establish man's respect for God's creation, and how have those features become subsumed in the comprehensive approach of the natural environment and its resources.

Vedas are considered to be the basic text of Hinduism. It holds the value of nature and its intrinsic potential. The Pattern of worship and its dignitaries are explained within the four Vedas Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Each Veda has a mantra, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishad. Mantras are Samhitas. It gives an order of rituals.

"Brahmana portrays the "Prajapati" as IshwaraorAlmighty. Aranyakas are secret spiritual advices. Spiritual wisdom and noble paths to Moksa are explained by Upanishads. "Upanishads give 'MariaMarga' while 'Bhakti Marga' significantly is explained in Gita, in the midst of Karma marga and jnanamarga." Gita is the doctrine for liberation from ajnana. Gita explains 'Bhakti Marga'as

'Karma marga'. We can review Vedas as exemplifying Sanadhanadharm rather than Vishesadharm."66i

Vedic Hinduism manifests concern for nature by implementing a metaphysical connection between the human and non-human beings, the adherence to which resembles imperative for us to establish and sustain a proper connection between the physical nature and us. In ecological terms, the Vedic hymns present us with a number of insights. Vedas talk of an incomprehensible unity of creation and a baffling interconnectedness of everything to everything else. Each thing has an interest and intent to fulfill in the web of being. This is how each and everything worthy of moral thoughtfulness.

Among the Upanishads, the ancient ritualism of Vedas addressed the metaphysical principles that participated significantly in unfolding a worldview that bestowed the highest or transcendental prominence to the supreme origin called Brahman. Brahman was considered the ultimate reality that describes the Self of all beings. In fact, Brahman as the indivisible, ultimate reality which cannot be conceived as it becomes the presupposition for all other thinking, be it intellectual, social or moral. This metaphysical outlook is called Vedanta philosophy. However in some imperative forms of Vedanta, the reality of the world and all elements and relations within them is taken to be illusory, the only reality being Brahman. Thus Advaita Vedanta talks of the world as maya, as ultimately unreal. Now one might wonder what this suggests in ecological terms.

Vedanta extends a second core idea that is the notion of "continuity of man and all physical nature". As pointed out by Deutsch, in order to actualize a proper association with nature, we have to hold a deep natural connection with nature and all life forms. The understanding of the connection of man with the rest of nature enables us to realize that in essence all life is one and everything is the reality. This, in turn, would bring forward respect for all living things. The last core idea that Vedanta presents has to do with a "doctrine of creation". The

Semitic consciousness of creation in some sense provides man with a privileged status. However, the Vedantic notion of creation talks about a spontaneous unfolding of Spirit in the world and subsequently it sees everything in nature as of intrinsic spiritual value. This means that Vedanta attests to the absolute integrity of the whole. This highlights the Vedantic position of responsibility for everything in nature. But certainly, Vedanta holds that nature does not belong to anyone. The underlying unity of everything and the spiritual alliance with everything would rule out the possibility of whole exploitation of nature and us.

Environmental ethics obtains an essential significance in Hindu scriptures. According to Naess, all Hindu scriptures have become part of the glossary of environmental ethics. "He interprets Bhagavad Gita and other texts of Hinduism as supporting Deep Ecology. Verse 6: 29 of Bhagawad Gita is very significant to Environmental Ethics. It reads: "Sarvabhuta-sthamatmanamSarva- bhutamcatmaniiksate yoga yuktatmasarvatraSamadarsanah". It means, "He sees himself is yoked in discipline, and who sees the same everywhere." It is but natural for anyone with some knowledge of the religious traditions establishing Hinduism to find the interconnectedness between man and his environment, which provides Universal Harmony. Without self-realization that the Gita instructs (6: 29), the above-mentioned harmony will be impracticable."67

However, there are several denials on the Hindu notion of the system and the idea of self-realization as essential conditions for environmental ethics.

The Hindu belief recognizes the inseparable existence of man with nature. It suggests that man is associated with nature in all respect-physical, psychological and spiritual. It encompasses the belief that divine is universally present in all elements of environment. Hindus deeply respect the spirit of life and fundamental elements of nature-the earth, the fire, the water, the space and the air. According to them, the cosmos of the life is interconnected to all forms of life.⁶⁸

REALIZING NATURE'S PROBLEMS

Rampant exploitation of the natural reserves on the earth has pushed us on the verge of disaster. Transforming man-nature relation is no more an option but an urgent need of humankind. The problems are only going to magnify multiple times in the coming time. Hindu should strive to accomplish an international religious consensus.

Humanity's endurance now relies on the capabilities to make a shift in consciousness in the similar way how mankind shifted from nomadic to agricultural and industrial to technological. Man must resort to concurrence, holism, optimization and complementariness. It serves an opportunity to move toward sustainable aware future.

With a spirit of Hinduism concept of "Vasudhaiva kutumbakam" they have understood the awareness of climate change and started ensuring that they treat the world as a family. Hindu traditions motivate the practitioner and the world with adapting the sustainable method towards environmental problems.⁶⁹

This tradition ensures that they understand the creation concept and utilize the resources efficiently. They are aware of the being that exist in all time zones which neither be created nor destroyed and this encourages them to remain positive towards earthly creation.

After we realize the potential and protective role of earth, we would be able to determine right conduct of humans towards each other and all other forms of life. Thus Hindus incorporate the concept of SarvaBhutaHita in their life. This concept means enhancing the common good of all the beings after we realize that everything surrounding us is sacred, our behavioral patterns changes. The individual's requirements of man needs to be balanced with the common good. Though devising course of actions that involves this balance is a rather challenging task.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

The time has arrived when huge steps are required saving the planet. Technology alone should not be accused for all our environmental and social issues. Many of them depend on the approaches we use to apply them. Every faction of population is somehow responsible for the poor state of affairs of our environment. Extensive studies have revealed that every phenomenon taking place is linked to other phenomena as well. Pollution is severely affecting everyone on the planet. Hence environmental preservation has become mandatory for each and every individual on the face of earth.