

## Religion and Environment

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### **Abstract**

*It may be said that the basic reason behind the present ecological crisis is rapid increase of science and technological development and its excessive application. The twenty first century is marked by scientific and technological advancement on the one hand and it is diseased by ecological crisis on the other. The global environmental crisis confronted today is rooted in negative implications of scientism, materialism, individualism under anthropocentrism which recognizes the mastery of humans over non-humans. Nobody can deny that modern science and technology together human's unlimited and unwanted intrusion and interference with nature for his endless desires and luxurious need is said to bring serious destruction to the environment. The world needs to be saved from this catastrophe not for nature itself but for ours. In this respect we think that there is a need of a metaphysical or religious base of life. Science without metaphysical insight brings degradation of nature. By contrast, religious way of life inviting spiritual bridge between man and nature. Thus, instead of empirical solutions, it claims equal moral respects for all species of the universe. The sole objective of this paper is to examine and explore a second order activity, i.e., religious or metaphysical way to overcome global ecological crisis.*

### **Key words**

*Man, moral, nature, religion, science.*

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## **Introduction**

It is true to say that there is disequilibrium between man and nature which results in environmental crisis. Scientific and technological development is the main cause of the crisis between man-nature relationships as modern man speaks about development which invites severe environmental degradation. Unless modern men are conscious and alert about ecological crisis, there will never be peace. Ecological crisis is not for nature itself but for ours as well as for future generation. According to Hussain Nasr, "To be peace with the Earth one must be at peace with Heaven" (Nasr, 1968: 14). What it reflects that human beings ought to protect nature for ours, not otherwise. To maintain peace in human society we ought to establish harmonious life with nature. Human being makes this possible by not to inflict harm the nature for his/her luxurious need. If this be so then there is peace here and hereafter. Thus, humans ought to realize that God has created both man and nature and he is a part of the biotic community. In the same vein of human beings, every member of the biotic community, i.e., be they animals, plants etc. have right to survive. Equally every member of the biotic community deserves respect from every other member of the community. This is where the relevance of religion. Religion brings out the interconnectedness between man and nature. For religion, all living communities are members of the earth's community of life and are integral part of nature. Even religion denies subjugation of one community by another, especially by man and thereby advocates coherent association of all biotic species. It explores different ways and means through which humans' domination or mastery over non-humans can be regarded as morally unjust. Thus, in the eye of religion human beings are by no means superior to non-human beings. Nobody can deny that the whole nature is a single family without any subjugation and exploitation of one community by another is a true message of religion. The universal acceptance of the holistic world view which echoed in most of the religious thought, i.e., **Hinduism, Christian, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism** etc. will help to create a society free from moral unjust by humans which will enable live in peace and harmony with environment. We may therefore say that most of the world religions try to build spiritual or metaphysical bridge between man and nature. We think that this is an amicable solution to overcome the present day ecological crisis. Because all the first order or empirical solutions, i.e., environmental laws, media communication and mass education on environment and environment protection acts of different social groups like NSS of School, Colleges

and Universities have proved futile. In other words, empirical solutions are not enough to revive the lost of ecological balance (Mohanta & Ahmed, 2017:8f). In this context we have proposed the role to be played by religion which claims a philosophy of life based on symbiosis, i.e., friendliness relations between man and nature.

### **Dharma**

In India the term *religion* used in the sense of *Dharma* 'is derived from the connotation *dh*' which denotes 'that which holds together the different aspects and qualities of a being or an object into a whole' (Dwivedi, 1994: 7). *Dharma* favours nature both positively and negatively. From the negative point of view *Dharma* never permit the cosmic order to be despoiled or violated. From the Positive point of view *dharma* hinges duty and moral obligations towards all forms of God's creation. Thus, following *dharma* one can show respect to all living communities of the universe and thereby overcome greed, abuse, exploitation and destructive tendencies towards the nature. Dharma denotes welfare of all and harmonious relationship with nature. Here is what Dwivedi said: "World religions can provide a framework for changing out attitudes. Our religion teach us that the land, rivers, mountains, minerals, oceans and other species should be held in trust for God, but can be used for the general welfare of humanity. Our religions tell us that we should consider ourselves only as trustees of the universe, of course as trustees, we are authorized by God to use natural resources, but we have no divine power of control over nature and elements. Moreover, from the perspective of many religions, the abuse and exploitation of nature for immediate gain is unjust, immoral and unethical" (1994:36).

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From the above statement, it seems clear that domination of nature by human and subjugation of non-human species by men is bad according to *Dharma*. We think in this regard the role of *dharma* (religion) in solving ecological problem is of extreme importance. The relation between religion and environment, role of religion to solve or minimize ecological crisis can be explained with the help of some dominant religions of the world as under:

#### **I. Hinduism**

There is no question of doubt that Hinduism is the most traditional religion of the world in general and India in particular. According to Hinduism, God is the creator of this world. God is absolute powerful and has supreme authority over all his creations, i.e., human and non-human species. Hinduism, therefore, denies human superiority

over non-human nature. For Hinduism humans as well as non-human have the equal right of existence. Instead of anthropocentrism or human centred ethics that tends to extinct a harmonious life within the biotic community, Hinduism encourages the intrinsic value of all entities of the environment and thereby envisages that all entities deserve due moral respect and consideration. *Ahimsa* is the main principle of Hinduism which ultimately lead to the preservation and conservation of all entities of the natural world. In short, Hinduism claims ecological harmony or harmonious life with our surroundings. The genesis of Hindu ethics of nature is witnessed in the Upanishads. *Isavasya Upanishad* states, “The universe is the creation of supreme power meant for the benefit of all; Individual species must therefore learn to enjoy its benefits by forming a part of the system in close relationship with other species; Let not any one species encroach upon the other’s right.” (*Isavasya Upanishad: 1-2, Vedantaparibhasa Visyapariccheda: 82*). What it reflects that Hinduism favours biocentrism in many ways. In Hindu religion it is found that Hindus equate nature with God and respect the incarnation of God in the form of animals, trees and plants, for example, Hindu love Tulshi etc. which pleads for preservation and conservation of nature. Here it is important to note that Manu and other Hindu *dharma Sastrakaras* realized the importance of trees in that rampant feeling of trees has resulted in decreased rainfall which in turn has resulted in water crisis, soil erosion, increase carbon di oxide, global warming and many more. This is the reason why Hindu religion hinges preservation of forest and fresh plantation of trees as well. Therefore one can say that in Hinduism there is no place of human propensity to conquer nature. Rather, they have more obligation and duties towards natural world.

## **II. Christianity**

Though Christianity favours anthropocentrism, there are places in the Old Testament and the New Testament that the religion supported human liability towards nature. In Old and New Testament it is considered that God is the sole creator of Natural world and He has entrusted the rational beings to take care of natural world via reverence, love, honour, kind and sympathetic attitudes towards natural entities. In this regard Christianity denies humans compartmentalization or separation or detachment from nature. For Christianity humans are the stewards responsible for caring of nature. In the holy Bible it says that “every speck of the creation and His divine hand in it; so no human being has the absolute right to destroy it” (Dwivedi, 1994: 48). We may thus say that the Biblical teachings promote development of

harmonious relation between human beings and non-human beings which is really helpful for continuation of ecological balance.

### **III. Islam**

It would not be an exaggeration if we claim that Al-Qur'aan, the holy book of Islam, provides a spiritual bridge between man, society and nature. Unlike modern Science, the holy Qur'aan explains the inner meaning of natural phenomena and makes them spiritually understanding. Al-Qur'aan says, "Behold! In the Creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of Night and Day- there are indeed Signs for men of Understanding" (3: 190). The Qur'aan as a book of *Signs* calls man to realize the real purpose of his life on the earth, and to lives in harmony with Nature. According to Qur'aan, natural events take place in accordance to natural order (*sunnah*). If human breaks up of the natural law or interference into nature with the motive of artificialising it, disturbs the delicate balance of nature. It is a considered as *fasad* which means crime. Al-Qur'aan prescribes punishment for such crime before Allah at the Day of Judgment. Sanctity of all form of life is the essence of Islam religion as it denies the tendency of humans to think themselves higher than non-rationales and separate from nature. The Almighty or Allah created humans and so humans should serve the divine by taking care of Allah's creation, namely, Nature and thereby "serve as a mirror to reflect the beautiful image of God" (Dwivedi, 1994: 48). According to Qur'aan, Allah has enriched the earth with all His creations not for over utilization, but for proper and judicious utilization. Instead of proper utilization, over utilization disturbing the ecological balance and resulting out ecological crisis. Over utilization or misuse and any misdeeds by man with natural resources is bad and punishable after death. Thus there is no question of doubt that Islam advocates **unity** (*tawheed*) of mankind and nature, i.e., *flora, fauna* and the *physical environment*. The unitive thinking of Islamism is essentially holistic emphasizing the whole over the parts. Even this view of Islamism fosters respect and reverence towards all living entities.

From the above discussion on Islamism, we may come to the conclusion that this religion fosters the harmonious relation of man and nature. This philosophical thought behind Islamism that all is under one umbrella, i.e., under Allah and there can be no conquest of nature by man. The Qur'aan admits that Allah permits good utilization of natural resources without over or luxurious needs and transformation. Humans reside here in this earth as tenant, but not as owner. Instead of subjugate

nature, humans ought to reverence for nature according to Islam. By following the Qur'aan a man becomes pure through and through which builds in him an attitude of love sympathy and respect towards the nature or natural world. This is, in brief, the ecological crisis of the present century can be solved to a great extent if man follows the writings of the Qur'aan.

#### **IV. Buddhism**

Buddhism as a religion encourages development of harmonious relationship amongst all natural communities when the world is facing ecological crisis. Through Pali literature Buddha propounded harmonious living of humans with rest of the biotic communities. The Buddha's teachings are related to true love, sympathy, respect and care for nature. Buddha expresses his respect, love towards nature by prohibiting cutting down of trees, plants etc. The Buddha and his disciples envisage the view that the present global environmental crisis can be saved through protective utilization of nature will be possible if human beings follow the path of how bees accumulate nectar from flowers and convert it into sweet honey without harming the beauty and fragrance of the followers. Thus, in a nutshell it can be said that Buddha's teachings have clear indication of maintenance of nature.

#### **V. Jainism**

In the same vein of other religions, Jainism also advocates ecological harmony. For Jainism ecological harmony can be achieved through benevolence, love, non-violence etc. for living entities. Jainism "adheres to universal law which states that life produces life, order comes from order, and peace can be achieved through peace" (Nathanien, n.d.: 101-2). The basic tenet of Jainism is *ahimsa*. According to this religion desire is passion is the main cause of self injury and injury to others. Therefore one needs to be controlled over speech, thought and movement. Instead of himsa or violence, Jainism declares truthfulness, honesty, love and respect for all creatures. By means of these noble qualities Jainism calls for promotion of spirituality, i.e., the spiritual bridge between man and natural entities and thereby develops interrelationships amongst the different communities of natural world.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

From the above discussion on different religions, we may come to the conclusion that a revival of religious code of conduct and its application by rational beings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can save the environment from further catastrophe. Most of the religions held that there should not be any dichotomy between man and

environment. They uphold harmony between man and natural world. In fact, harmony is already there, one needs to discover it or realize it. The harmony between man and nature is a matter of realization, not otherwise. We think in this regard that only thoughtless intervention into natural system will create ecological imbalance. To overcome this environmental catastrophe, one need not throw out all requirements, but control them and live in harmony with nature. Human beings as active members of the biotic community should save from harm or care for nature through love and respect according to most of the religions of the world. The question which now arises is that how the community expresses the love, respect or care for nature? It can be said that changing of human attitudes towards nature from an *ego-centric* to *eco-centric* is necessary. This attitude can be expressed in conduct and character of moral agents. The attitude of respect for nature can be expressed via certain moral norms. Here it important to note that when a person is concerned about the existence of any natural living being and acts in accordance to consideration, he express the attitude of respect for that living being. This point can be explained with the help of an example. If a person value a tree or plant, if he wants its existence to continue and if he possesses a feeling of love for the tree or plant and starts watering, pruning etc. for the tree or plant then his act expresses the attitude of respect for the tree or plant. Thus, nobody can deny that a protective utilization of nature will only be possible via a change of human attitude towards nature based on love (*ahimsa*), compassion, kindness etc. True respect for nature is the most fundamental kind of moral commitment that one can make. This is, in short, all about how many ways ecological harmony can be attained and preserved via certain ethical systems, i.e., benevolence and love for all entities according to some of the world religions discussed above.

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