

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A Spiritual Approach of Non-anthropocentrism from Religious Perspective

#### **Introductory:**

The environmental crisis brought about by the application of modern science is acute, but few have sought the intellectual and historical causes leading to the state of affairs. People are conscious and alert about the present problem of overpopulation, war, pollution of air and water, but at the same time they speak about modern development which in true sense is mal-development or destruction of nature. Human society indeed will never be in peace as long as man's attitude towards nature is based on war and aggression. Seyyed Hussein Nasr says, "To be at peace with the Earth one must be at peace with Heaven"<sup>58</sup> The role, application and function of modern science and technology has become dangerous as it leads to destruction of the sacred and spiritual value of nature.

People living in the urbanised areas of the world feel the lack of something natural due to the creation of an artificial environment by themselves. Even the religious man living in such environment has lost the sense of the spiritual significance of nature. The creation of artificial environment in the urbanized areas resulting from the domination of nature by modern man has in fact threatened his very existence. Modern man has come to realize that "the castles they are building are on sand and there is disequilibrium between man and nature that threatens all man's apparent victory over nature."<sup>59</sup> The domination of nature by modern man resulting in the present environmental crisis can be exemplified in the following manner "for

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<sup>58</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Hossein : *Man and Nature; The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, Vikash Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Kanpur, 1968 p.14.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 18

modern man nature has been like a prostitute to be benefited from without any sense of obligation or responsibility towards her. The difficulty is that the condition of prostituted nature is becoming such as to make any further enjoyment of it impossible. And in fact that is why many have begun to worry about its condition.”<sup>60</sup> The same view is also noticed in the remarks of Grahman. He says, “The sense of domination over nature and a materialistic conception of nature on the part of modern man are combined, moreover, with the lust and a sense of greed which makes an ever greater demand upon the environment.”<sup>61</sup> Such a grave situation was expressed by Mahatma Gandhi by saying that there is enough in the world to meet everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed.

It may be said that scientific development is the main cause of environmental crisis or the crisis between man and nature. “This is due to the fact” Taylor says, “that scientific knowledge of nature is secularized. This secularized knowledge of nature divorced from the vision of God in nature has become accepted as the sole legitimate form of science”.<sup>62</sup> The disharmony between man and nature is due to the destruction of harmony between man and God. For a non-modern man Universe has some sacred aspect. The very structure of the Cosmos contains a spiritual message for man and is thereby a revelation coming from the same source as religion itself. Cosmos is a divine creation, coming from the hands of God where we find the world impregnated with sacredness. Modern science that fails to accept the divine character of the world can come into existence only when the cosmos is emptied of its sacred character. Modern science propagated through its vulgarization has lead to secularization of nature. Due to vulgarisation of modern science, cosmos, which was pure and transparent has become opaque, i.e. it has lost its spiritual meaning. In the process of vulgarization of science, nature has lost its sacredness and divinity and has therefore become secular.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Graham, Dom, A. : *Zen Catholicism* , a Suggestion, New York, 1963, pg.38.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, F. S. : *The Fourfold Vision*, London, 1945, p.91.

Industrialization and modernization, the outcome of the quantitative nature of modern science has created a choking material environment in most of the urban centers today.

The quantitative sciences of nature are accepted as legitimate sciences by modern man and all other knowledge of natural and cosmic order is deprived of the status of legitimate science and accepted as something sentimental or superstitious. Therefore, it can be said that modern quantitative secularized science rejects the knowledge about the root of existence itself. Modern science, although in itself natural, has injected the knowledge of facts into modern man's mentality, but it has failed to inculcate enough knowledge of the underlying nature of existence and this limitation of modern science threatens the very existence of man with all other animate and inanimate species of the natural world.

Cosmology in its actual sense is a sacred science of the world connected to revelation and metaphysical doctrine, which has disappeared specially in the west due to general neglect of metaphysics. The negligence of metaphysics is the outcome of modern science, which is based on the principle of reduction of multiple levels of reality to a single psychological domain. Since cosmology encompasses both physics and metaphysics and modern science ignores metaphysics and is directed towards instrumental values, it therefore neglects cosmology in part. As modern science is based on reductionist principles, it takes no notice of or sets aside degrees of knowledge, the genesis of metaphysics leading to destruction of bondage or harmony between man and nature. Simplicity is the outcome of modern science where there is no place for metaphysics taken as superstition.

Many of the scientists, particularly the physicists, have realized that the quantitative character of modern science has its limitations; it cannot discover the ultimate nature and roots of things. Many agree that science deals with only one aspect of reality, and not its whole. Many of the physicists are now seriously thinking about philosophical

and religious problems and are inclined towards oriental doctrines. They admit either the existence of a real world or that all things and all consciousness are aspects of a single reality, the One.

There are scientists who are least concerned about the relation of science with reality. But many are now concerned about the limitations of science and the problem of the encounter between science, philosophy, and religion. They are conscious about the fact that such problems and complications arise due to the total lack of metaphysical knowledge. They now realize that only this knowledge can reveal the true significance, whether symbolic or spiritual, of the complex scientific discoveries and theories, and in the absence of this metaphysical knowledge the scientific theories and discoveries appear as sheer facts opaque and out of touch with truths of higher order.

The secularized world view of modern science, devoid of reality or nature, when presented before the public after taking it out from the hands of the professional scientists, places obstacle to the religious understanding of things. The scientific theories, laws and technologies of today have taken man far away from nature and the religious and metaphysical conception of the world.

In many instances it has been seen that a very facile or simplistic relationship has been established between science and religion by making superficial comparisons between the two domains. In the process of connecting religion to science, religion is made 'reasonable' by making it appear as something scientific and scientific theories have gone out of focus. A significant group of Christian theologians have opposed to the simplistic attitude prevalent in certain quarters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even some writers believe in a close relationship between Christianity and science. Some have related the problem of multiplicity and unity in nature to the Trinity in Christianity. Many even say that science has been made possible because of Christianity. In fact few theologians try to bring to life the sacramental character of all creations and to return to things 'the sacred nature of which recent modes of thought have deprived them' They believe that the world is

the creation of God. According to them either all occurrences are in some degree revelation of God, or else there is no such revelation at all.

This view of the theologians, i.e. sacramental or symbolic view of nature pertaining to the relation of man with nature is neither accepted nor properly understood by the modern man. In fact modern man fails to extend this religious or sacred aspect to the realm of nature. Secularization of nature and yielding to the dicta of science in the domain of nature has become significant to the outlook of modern man.

The school of Neo-Thomism, a branch of Christianity holds the view that the scope of science is limited by its method and such methods cannot be applied to solve metaphysical problems. The knowledge of the whole universe does not remain within the domain of science. In fact the principles of metaphysics do not coincide with the principles of science. The New-Thomist view, however, does not provide a true spiritual interpretation of nature, nor does it provide a philosophy of nature for science to show through arguments the drawbacks and limitations existing within the scientific approach. However, the school pays importance to the fact that intelligence and philosophical reasoning should not give up to or yield to the findings of an experimental science.

From the above discussion, it is evident that no such common ground exists in the field of relation between science, philosophy and religion. The metaphysical doctrine, which can be taken as a common denominator of science and religion is forgotten, as a result of which the 'hierarchy of knowledge has crumbled into a confused mass in which the segments are no longer organically united.'<sup>63</sup> The misconceptions and misunderstandings between modern science of nature and the knowledge of natural order which has a theological, spiritual and religious base has led to endless controversies. For this very reason it can be said that today there exists no philosophy of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

nature which provides a more logical explanation of scientific occurrences despite the philosophies provided by several modern thinkers like Whitehead and Maritain.

One can even say that there exists no theology of nature which provides a spiritual bridge between man and nature or explain the inner meaning of natural phenomena and make them spiritually transparent or understanding. Modern man fails to develop an intimate relationship with nature or be deeply concerned about it due to the loss of symbolist spirit which looks into symbols rather than facts. The loss of intimacy between man and nature is in fact due to the disappearance of metaphysical doctrine and its replacement by rational theology. Modern man lies in the world of phenomena, where each phenomena is expressed in terms of mathematical formulae or nature's material usefulness is explained to man who is considered as a two-legged animal whose destiny does not go beyond his earthly existence. Thus, it can be said that "there seems to be in this movement from the contemplative(thoughtful) to the passionate , from the symbolist to the factual mentality, a fall in the spiritual sense corresponding to the original fall of man."<sup>64</sup> Due to this fall, man has lost the paradise of a symbolic world of meaning and discovered a new earth, full of facts which he is able to observe, remould and manipulate in accordance to his will. In his attempt to manipulate natural phenomena according to his will, he fails to realize that he is in dire danger of being devoured by the earth upon which he tries to dominate.

The quantitative conception of nature by modern scientists has created cracks in the wall of science. In order to fill these cracks science must have a metaphysical base so that all its observations and facts gain spiritual significance. The rise of scienticism in Judeo-Christian tradition, the popularization of the concepts of survival of the fittest, the doctrine of laissez-faire, application of rationality and utilitarianism and above all growth ethic made modern man view the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

natural environment as a machine supplying resources to meet their never ending demand which brought us to the brink of world-wide catastrophe in the form of environmental degradation. Although consciousness about the environment have gained ground among the masses, yet only outer commitments, i.e. environmental laws, policies, scientific measures etc are not sufficient to block environmental degradation. If environmental problems need to be solved, then a transformation in people's dealing and interaction with the environment need to occur. The degradation of the environment is brought by the people and its solution also lies in the hand of the people, which simply means that the destruction of the environment and the restoration of the environmental balance all depend on the attitude of the individuals towards the same. A change in the values and beliefs about the environment is necessary for the treatment of the diseased environment. Restoration of the lost spiritual values which provide a strong bondage between man and nature is the need of the day. A change in the mode or way of living by curbing his unending desire for luxury and confining himself to his basic needs is essentially in bringing about a harmonious living of all species with nature.

In his book *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Lynn White Jr. remarks that the state of ecological crisis will continue or even worsen until (a) the Christian axiom that nature exists simply to serve man is ontologically rejected and (b) it is high time for man to realize that over-reliance on science and technology without metaphysical base, arising out of Christian attitudes is the primary cause of environmental disaster.

If one has to provide a solution to the present day environmental crisis then search for an alternative world view becomes imperative. This alternative world view based on the holistic approach of the world finds its parallelism with the Upanishadic statement which says, "Brahman alone exists without a second. Atman itself is Brahman. I am Brahman, so art thou, and that which is in microcosm is also in

the macrocosm. Brahman is all pervading; it is subtler than the subtlest and larger than the largest.”<sup>65</sup>

The above statement speaks about the revival of Hindu philosophy where the cosmic consciousness connects every ‘being’ with the rest of the Universe. The holistic world view may be summarized as follows:

- (a) All elements in the natural world are interdependent and are inseparable parts of the Cosmic Whole where the ‘whole’ and the ‘parts’ are constantly interacting with each other.
- (b) Consciousness is the most vital aspect of the Universe.
- (c) Each ‘part’ is contained in the ‘whole’ or in other words the whole is enfolded in each of its parts. All that which exists within the macrocosm is also in the microcosm.
- (d) The ‘whole’ is primary and the properties of the ‘parts’ can only be derived in terms of dynamics of the ‘whole’.
- (e) The essential relationship between the whole and the parts is organic. The whole is not the sum-total of the parts, it is something more.
- (f) The Cartesian division of the world into inner and outer worlds, matter and mind, body and soul, subject and object is unacceptable.
- (g) The holistic approach rejects the domination of nature by man since he is a part of nature and is inseparable. Man should learn to live in peace and harmony with nature.

A proper and a valid socio-economic paradigm can only be built through a proper understanding of the holistic world-view which is well rooted in Hindu philosophy and Hindu religion. The ancient Indian philosophers and sages long ago discovered the fundamental unity of all cosmic phenomena which is very clearly emancipated in the Upanishad. The universal acceptance of the historic world-view will help to create a society free from domination and exploitation of nature by man which will enable him to live in peace and harmony with nature. This can be achieved through an attitudinal change of

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<sup>65</sup> “In Peace and Harmony with Nature” *University News*, 40 (40), October 06-12, 2003, p.17.

individuals. Perhaps our Dharma to the environment may help us to change our behaviour.

## **The position of environment in the eyes of Dharma:**

The very term 'Dharma' is derived from the connotation *Dhr̥* which denotes 'that which holds together the different aspects and qualities of a being or an object into a whole.'<sup>66</sup> *Dharma*, in fact, a system of morality and duty which makes a person follow the path of righteousness. Dharma is very much related to the Vedic notion of *R̥ta* meaning *cosmic ordinance or law of the universe* which is impersonal in nature. *Dharma* consists of all those personal actions of righteousness which helps in maintaining the cosmic order. It does not allow *R̥ta* or the cosmic order to be violated.

A brief discussion on the different types of *Dharma*, namely, *Sanātana dharma*, *Sāmānya* or *sadharana Varnāśrama dharma* or *Svadharmā* and *Mānava dharma* is required.

*Sanātana dharma* is the eternal *dharma* prescribed for the Hindus in the Vedas and Upanishads which guide the people to follow the right path in maintaining a proper cosmic order. *Sāmānya* or *Sādhārana dharma* signifies the duties of all people irrespective of caste, creed, and sex. Such duties need to base on the four nobles virtues of truth, non-violence, self-control and purity. *Varnāśrama dharma* or *Svadharmā* is closely related to one's *karma* or activity or activities. The Hindu law-giver Manu held that the followers of the sacred *dharma* or the path of righteousness gain fame in this world and incomparable happiness and peace after death. The Hindu concept of rebirth is also associated with one's *dharma*. It is said that one who follows a *dharmic* life will surely be rewarded and take a proper rebirth in the next life, i.e. a person's form of rebirth depends on his karma of

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<sup>66</sup> Dwivedi, O.P. : *Environmental Ethics, Our Dharma to the Environment*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, p.7

present life. *Mānava Dharma* or global dharma denotes duties and moral obligations towards the totality of God's creation. *Mānava dharma* is very closely associated with the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* where all living species of the universe are taken to be the members of the large extended family. One can show respect to all the living, i.e. animate and inanimate species by thinking them to be the members of the extended large family. Thus, our *dharma* towards all species of the world is actually *Mānava dharma*. The concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* promotes welfare of all or sarvodaya which is realised through the golden thread of spiritual understanding.

Non-violence, friendship, compassion, attitude of caring, respect for all, broadmindedness and dedication to the Brahman constitute the essence of *Dharma* as enumerated in *Ġitā*. *Dharma* means the totality of one's obligation towards all forms of God's creation which binds individuals with the natural social world. As we have discussed that *Dharma* promotes welfare of all, *adharma* or imperfect performance of one's responsibilities on the other hands inflicts harm to the society and therefore the world as a whole. In the words of Dwevedi, "*Dharma* is rooted in a fundamental view of an ordered life in an ordered world. It is the cohesive ideal in society and the essential virtue of society that makes society dharmic."<sup>67</sup> He further conceives that "Dharma's precept that reward after death can be attained through actions in the world, can provide the incentive for humanity to seek peace with nature."<sup>68</sup>

The role of *Dharma* in solving environmental crisis is of extreme importance. This can be explained with the help of the Hindu concept of *Karma-phala* or the consequences of one's actions. The law of *karma* states that every action creates its own chain of consequences or reactions. Therefore, individuals dominating nature and engaged in *adharmic* activities face the consequences of environmental pollution and various other forms of ecological crisis. This crisis is faced or

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.14

confronted not only by the individuals performing the action or *karma*, but also by the future generations. Individuals need to realize that the way they are bringing about harm and destruction to the natural surroundings through their *ku-karma*, not only their children or future generations will face the adverse consequences, but they will also face it someday based on the belief that they will eventually return to earth in a subsequent birth. If this belief is strongly seated in one's mind, then he will obviously rectify his actions and restrain himself from harming the environment.

The very word *Dharma* can be used in various senses and in the present day scenario where the world is facing environmental and societal crisis human beings need to follow a dharmic way of life. *Dharma* may mean rituals or specific character of any object or simply the Religion of *Man* or *Manusher Dharma* as expressed by Rabindranath. But to be more specific *dharmā* refers to moral values. Non-violence or *ahimsa* when taken as moral value is *dharmā* (*ahimsa paramo dharmā*). *Dharma* in *Mahabharata* has the notion to bring about welfare of the whole world, not only the humans, but also the non-humans ( *mānusaṃ sarvabhūtaṅāṃ dharmāhurmanisinaḥ tasmāt sarveṣu bheteṣu manasha śivamacaret and Adroheṇaiva bhūtaṅāṃ yā sa dharmāḥ satam mataḥ*).<sup>69</sup> This sense of *dharmā* as exemplified in the *Mahabharata* is of immense importance in the context of the present day environmental crisis. If 'welfare of all' becomes the guiding principle of *dharmā* of each and every human, the environment will gradually heal itself and become the peaceful abode of all species, humans as well as non-humans. A *dharmic* man or a man guided by *dharmā* leads a disciplined and moral life which promotes harmonious living with all species within the environment. But according to the ancient Indian thinkers, *dharmā* is not fixed or static. It is dynamic and flexible changing in accordance to humans need and temperaments and societal changes.

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<sup>69</sup> Mahabharata, *Santiparva*, 193-31.

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, *dharma* is related to values. Values regulate a man's life and his activities. Among the three objectives of life – *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*, *dharma* is of greatest significance. In fact all the three – i e., *trivarga* should be in harmony with each other. Dharma needs to aim at the promotion of social welfare which corresponds to the *Vaisesika sutra* 'Yato' *bhyudaya nih sreyasasiddhih sa dharmah*.<sup>70</sup> If something is related to social well-being, it is called *dharma*. It entails that anything connected with one's well-being is *dharma*. If *dharma* is taken in this sense, it is sure to protect the environment which is very much connected with human welfare.

With respect to our *dharma* towards the environment, Dwivedi remarks "our *Dharma* to the environment can provide a new perception of reality and affirm notions of what is true for an environmentally conscious society. Also the principles upon which *Dharma* rests, such as truth, moral obligation and duty, can be used to mobilize people to take responsibility for social change thereby guaranteeing respect for nature and development on a sustainable basis."<sup>71</sup>

By leading a dharmic way of life one can overcome greed, abuse, maltreatment, exploitation and destructive tendencies towards the environment. A change in the attitudinal tendencies of the society can be brought about only by first disciplining our inner thoughts. Here *Dharma* has a major role to play. *Dharma* which is devoid of any institutional structures, rituals and other religious practices guide people to adopt the right value and the right mode of living which foster respect and reverence for nature. This will obviously enable the maintenance of the cosmic ordinance and the natural or divine law which in turn would save the world from ecological catastrophe. *Dharma* instills among the people reverence and respect for nature

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<sup>70</sup> Vaisesikasutra 1/ 1/2

<sup>71</sup> Dwivedi, O.P. *Environmental Ethics*, op. cit., p.19.

and strengthen the decision making process for environmental protection.

### **Religion and Environment:**

It has already been mentioned in the earlier paragraphs about the major causes leading to today's acute environmental crisis. The factors leading to environmental degradation may be summed up under the four headings –

- (a) Human's desire to dominate and control nature
- (b) Materialistic approach of human society.
- (c) Blind faith in science and technology lacking metaphysical base.
- (d) An unconstrained growth ethic in a limited world

Humans have become conscious about their misdeeds and feel that it is indeed difficult to survive within a diseased environment. In this situation the question which arises is how can we work up to protect, preserve and sustain our environment and create a cordial relationship with nature, while at the same time enjoy the benefits of science and technology. To develop a harmonious relationship with nature one ought to delve into the religious and cultural imperatives. In this respect Dwivedi remarks, "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."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. , p.36.

In the following paragraphs we shall try to analyze the contribution of some dominant religions of the world towards environmental protection and sustainable development.

## **Hinduism:**

Hinduism is in fact the most traditional religion of the world where we find the sanctity of all forms, animate as well as inanimate being maintained. This religion holds that God, the creator of this world is all powerful and has supreme authority over all his creations including man. It therefore follows that man; the possessor of supreme intelligence has no right to confer degrees of relative worth to the different species created by God. This further indicates that no human being can inflict any harm or damage to God's creations which makes us come to the conclusion that all living species, animate as well as inanimate, humans as well as non-humans have the equal right of existence in the world. We may thus say that Hindu religion is centered round the ethics of biocentrism.

Moreover, domination over the non-human species and all other forms of exploitation of nature was totally forbidden in Hindu religion and people were expected to co-exist in peace and harmony with nature. In various Hindu scriptures it is found that everything relating to the Cosmos, everything relating to the nature, i.e. its creation, maintenance and destruction is up to the will of God. Hence one may say that Hindus equate Nature (*Prakṛti*) with God. Human beings by no means can subjugate nature. On the contrary, they have more obligation and duties towards nature.

The incarnation of God in the form of various animals, trees and plants made people show their respect towards the natural world which ultimately lead to the preservation and conservation of nature. The basis of Hindu culture and religion is Ahimsa or non-violence and it gives rise to a system of guidelines for maintenance and conservation of nature.

The land ethic of Leopold which pleads for the preservation of natural species is found in the ecological insights of Hinduism.

### **Man-Nature Relationship in the Vedic Period:**

The first glimpses of reverence for nature or environment can be found in the excavations and findings of Indus valley civilization where Hindu religion had its predominance. The zoomorphic nature of the Hindu deities expressed reverence for animal life during the Vedic period.

The glorification of nature by the Vedic Hindus was expressed through their reverence for *Uṣā* (the Goddess of Dawn) and *Aranyāni* (tutelary goddess of the forest and wilderness). A number of sacred hymns were chanted by the people in respect for *Uṣā* and *Aranyāni*. Subbarao says, "The natural world was not understood as something apart from man, but as a reflection of his moods and passions."<sup>73</sup>

Vedic man utilized nature for his benefit and his life was totally dependent on nature. But his interrelation with nature revealed his respectful attitude towards the same. The Vedic man thought himself to be a part of nature. The history of creation according to Vedic literature states that the source of creation is *yajniya-purusa*, i.e. a person born from the sacrifice. With all natural creations human beings were also created from which it may be concluded that human beings are very much a part of nature and has no supreme status with respect to other members or species of the universe or cosmos. The Vedic man depended on nature for the satisfaction of his basic needs, but not for the fulfillment of his greed. He was indebted to Nature for fulfilling his basic needs and his indebtedness towards nature is revealed variously.

Deification of all natural elements or factors of the environment like *Pr̥thivī* (mother earth) *agni* (fire), *uṣā* (dawn), *suryā* (sun) etc reveals his respect for nature. The sun was considered to be the soul of the

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<sup>73</sup> Subbarao, S. *Ethics of Ecology and Environment*, Rajat Publication, New Delhi, 1985 p.251.

universe and was therefore revered and worshipped. All these natural elements were worshipped because of their supernatural capacities and the role played by them in maintaining the Cosmic order.

The notion of cosmic law or cosmic order is of outmost significance in Vedic religion. People believed that the universe was an ordered whole created and run by the Supreme power, i.e. God and nature had its own system of manifestation. The notion of physical order is combined with a belief in ethical order and both are brought together in the concept of *Rta*. All the components of nature move in a well-defined periphery and there is a definite order in the occurrence of the natural phenomena. Although natural phenomena or occurrences change, there remains something unchangeable behind the changing occurrence. *Rta* is in fact the unchangeable behind the changing occurrence. In *Dharmaśāstra* it says, "The concept of *Rta* was a governing or regulating principles, which stood for all regular phenomena. It shows that the Vedic thinkers believed in certain principle governing the universe, the functional energy that was manifested through certain elements which constituted the universe. It also meant the Truth order behind the phenomena." <sup>74</sup>

The genesis of Hindu ethics of environment is also witnessed in the *Upanishads*, the highest ideal of Hinduism where a harmony between Brahman and atman can be realized. According to the *Upanishads* the ultimate reality is unchangeable reality around which the exterior world is constantly changing. The essence of man is identical with the ultimate reality which can be manifested by merging Brahman with atman. According to the *Upanishads*, Brahman, the ultimate source of the external world and the atman, i.e. the inner self of the person are none the less different. The self or *ātman* is indeed Brahman, something manifested through self-realization. As Brahman is equated with *ātman* the macrocosm of Brahman is the macrocosm of *ātman*.

The doctrine of *karma* finds an important place in the *Upanishads*. The doctrine, very similar to the cause and effect theory, states that

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<sup>74</sup> Lalye, P.G. *Environmental awareness on Sanskrit literature: Gleanings from Dharmasastra*, p.252.

each and every action of man, good or evil, has its consequences. The doctrine of *karma* has an intimate relationship with the theory of rebirth. This simply means that the good or evil deed of man is reflected in his rebirth. An individual has to face the ill consequences of his misdeeds in the future. He may take rebirth in any crippled living form. On the contrary, an individual may be rewarded for his good deeds. The Vedic people had a strong belief in the doctrine of *Karma* and the theory of rebirth. In fear of punishment they revered nature due to which the environmental balance was well maintained.

As far as the non-anthropocentric approach of ethics is concerned, it can be supported from the Indian standpoint. In *Advaita Vedanta*, body is taken as the substratum of enjoyment (*bhoga-ayatanam*) of the result of *Karma*. The body is of four types, arising from mother womb (*jarāyuja-śarīra*), arising from eggs (*andaja-śarīra*), from moisture (*sredaja śarīra*) and coming through piercing the earth (*udbhija śarīra*). The first category belongs to human beings, second to birds etc., third to mosquito etc., and fourth to trees, plants and the like. From this it follows that all types of body are the substrata of the enjoyment of actions. Animals, birds, reptiles, trees, plants and all forms of living species have got their bodies, because they have to enjoy the result of action done in this birth or previous birth. They have the sense of enjoyment as well as freedom. For the sake of their own freedom, they have possessed bodies and have got existence in this earth, but not for the benefit of human beings.<sup>75</sup>

Sanctity of all forms of life is the essence of Hindu religion. God, the sole creator of the Universe has absolute sovereignty even all living species, humans as well as non-humans. God's creation is absolutely pure and divine, therefore no creature, not even the humans possess any right to inflict harm on any other species without reason. All species are therefore equal and have equal right of existence. This concept of ecological harmony is very distinctively mentioned in the *Īśāvāsya Upanishad*:

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<sup>75</sup> Vedantaparibhāṣā Visayapariśeḍha.

“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.”<sup>76</sup> (*Īśāvāsya Upanishad*, 1-2).

The principle of unity forms the essence of Upanishads. The Supreme Being is the universal creator and it is the soul which binds all together. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this soul of all things, all gods, all worlds, all breathing things, all selves are held together.

The whole world is seen to be the stage where each living creature comes and plays its part or role and then exits. One Spirit plays many parts. There is one Spirit, one God, one Creature who manifests himself in so many forms. The living creatures have their entrances and exits, i.e. as long as the Soul or Spirit is within them, they play their role on the world and their death means depart of the soul from their body, i.e. matter. We may thus say that, “Matter is in tension with the Spirit, but Spirit, step by evolutionary step, comes into its own.”<sup>77</sup>

The cosmic view of Hinduism visualizes all humans as an intrinsic part of nature. Among all creatures of the Supreme, humans are one and do not occupy any special position by virtue of their special qualities. The unitive view of Hinduism is in close tie with Deep ecology where human beings are also seen as a part of Nature. This view is quite opposing to Shallow ecology which is anthropocentric ascribing to homo-sapiens the power of dominance over nature on account of their superiority.

The unitive thinking of Hinduism is essentially holistic emphasizing the whole over the parts. According to Capra and Steindl , “ The properties of the parts can be understood only from the dynamics of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> Subbarao, S. *Hindu Ethics of Environment- Ethics of Ecology and Environment*, op. cit. p. 269.

the whole. Ultimately, there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, one can say that the micro universe is in union with the macro universe. Each individual living species of the earth is in fact a part of the distant stars.

This unitive view of Hinduism fosters respect and reverence toward all living species of the universe. Each species is a part of the whole and all are equal. This concept of unity of life prohibits one to inflict injury or harm on the other which in turn fosters *Ahimsā* or non-violence which is very necessary for the conservation and preservation of the biotic community. The Vedantic philosophy rules out the possibility of destruction and exploitation of nature by man since it leave no scope for man to think himself to be the sole possessor of nature.

The concept of unity of life is very closely linked to the principle of interconnectedness as exemplified in the Upanishads. *R̥ta* or the ‘immanence dynamic order’ which makes the universe function in a definite path links cause and effect and all species are subject to this natural order. From *R̥ta* emerges *dharma* which means the binding force and from *dharma* we find the emergence of the laws of *Karma* which states according as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become.

The doctrine of *Karma* as explained earlier clearly states that every action or every deed that an individual performs has its effects in the world which may be immediate or in the long feature. This theory generates a tendency or *vasana* within the individuals to act in a proper manner with respect to nature and all worldly creatures. In other words we may say that the doctrine of *karma* which forms an important part of the Upanishads guides individual’s action which in turn helps in the maintenance of ecological balance. Environmental crisis in fact crops up due to the two main factors, such as, (a) the tendency of humans to think themselves superior than non-humans

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<sup>78</sup> Capra, F and David Steindl: *Rast, Belonging to the Universe*, New York Harper, 1991, p.83.

and separate from nature and (b) the propensity to ignore the aftermath of his actions.

Consciousness or awareness about the environment is very prominent in many of the *Dharma –sastras* especially in *Manu-Saṁhitā*. *Manu* writes that Bhagwad Brahma, the irresistible powerful creator, first created the earth and the sky, then the family of the Universe with various stars, plants and satellites and then he himself made his appearance. Lord Brahma, the almighty creator, created water through his supreme power of creation. Into the water, he threw the spirit which appeared as a testicle with the rays of the sun. From the testicle Brahman, the father of all creation took his birth. He stayed within the testicle for the whole year till the womb became ripe and divided into two parts. Brahman created heaven in the upper portion of the testicle and world in the lower portion of the testicle. This is, in fact, the story of creation as stated by *Manu*.

The environment thus created with living and non-living objects stayed in close association and interdependence on each other in a state of perfect balance. *Manu* says that all living and non-living objects have a role in protecting the environment.

In the earlier chapters it has been maintained that human beings especially modern man look upon nature as 'a storehouse of materials' to be instrumentally utilized to fulfill his greed. Rampant feeling of trees, i.e. , mass destruction of forest has resulted in decreased rainfall which in turn has resulted in water crisis, soil erosion, lack of soil fertility, increase in carbon di oxide, global warming and many other disastrous impact on the environment. Even in the early centuries *Manu* and other *dharma Śāstrakāras* realized the importance of trees and therefore prescribed rules for preservation of forest and fresh plantation of trees.

Consciousness about pollution of water bodies is also found in *Manu Saṁhitā*. *Manu* imposed restrictions on bathing in water used for drinking and other purposes. Discharge of stool, urine, blood, mucus etc, and washing of dirty clothes in water bodies was strictly forbidden

by Manu in his scriptures which would save water from being polluted.

Restrictions against merciless slaughtering of animals and consumption of meat of birds and animals is found in *Manu Samhitā* which reveals promotion of an attitude of love, respect and care amongst humans even during early centuries.

Hence, we see that the true value of nature was well understood by Manu in the ancient period and in order to save the environment from disaster he laid a strict code of conduct to be followed by the people, some of which are discussed in the earlier paragraphs. By following the strictures laid by Manu a man becomes pure through and through which builds in him an attitude of love, sympathy and respect towards the entire environment. Thus, a revival of Manu's code of conduct and its application by humans in the present society can save the environment from further catastrophe. Manu held that there should not be any dichotomy between man and nature, animate and inanimate. The concept of *Rta* which reveals the vision of unity within diversities has made the *Samhitās* meaningful in the present day context.

The revival of *Upanishadic* teachings, especially the principle of interconnectedness is very necessary to overcome the environmental crisis of the present century. The holistic view of the world where there is no compartmentalization of the planet from the civilization should be grasped in its full sense by the people to block environmental crisis. The holistic world view based on the principle of interconnectedness is closely related to the principle of interdependence. Interdependence of man and nature was expressed in Hinduism in the earlier days in the form of sacrificial ritual or yajna. Through the preference of this sacrificial ritual people intended to secure the blessing of God, who maintained the generative properties of nature, who in turn depended on individuals to sustain them through obligation.

In the later period interdependence of the biotic species, especially man was expressed in the notion of rina or debt. The notion of rina or debt implied that one ought to return back what one has received. This principle of reciprocity was very helpful in maintaining the balance of nature.

In fact the very term 'ecosystem' reveals the notion of interdependence between the habitat or physical environment and the biotic or the living species of the world. All parts of the ecosystem are directly or indirectly dependent on each other through the food system or food web, energy flow and the biogeochemical cycles whereby the balance of the system is maintained. This is all natural and all parts of the ecosystem exist in a delicate balance of interdependency. Thoughtless human intervention into the natural system disturbs the whole balance.

From the above discussion on Hinduism, we may come to the conclusion that this religion fosters the union of individual atman with the universal Brahma. All entities are manifestations of Brahma having individual and interdependent existence. They emerge from Brahma and are ultimately reabsorbed in Brahma. This philosophical thought behind Hinduism that all is one and there can be no conquest of nature in reality needs to be instilled in the minds and hearts of modern technologically oriented mind to block environmental damage and disaster. Hindu environmental ethics thus upholds harmony between man and nature. Harmony is already there, one needs to discover it, to realize it. Subbarao says, "Since Brahman and Nature are one, we must see the Supreme Being in the whole world, and the whole world in Him".<sup>79</sup>

## **Christianity:**

Thoughts concerning nature and our duties and obligations towards the same are found both in the Old Testament and the New

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<sup>79</sup> Subbarao, S. : *Ethics of Ecology and Environment*, op.cit. p.293.

Testament. Although as said earlier, Christianity advocated absolute human control over nature, there are places where the religion also advocated human responsibility towards nature. The teaching of the Old and New Testaments further uphold that God is the sole creator of Nature and he has entrusted the human beings to take care of nature. These teachings instill in human beings a sense of responsibility towards nature which further promotes faithfulness to God and respect, honour, kind and sympathetic attitude towards non-human nature. Such teachings promote development of harmonious relation between man and environment which is conducive for the maintenance of ecological balance.

The biblical teachings also promote the belief that God is the absolute Creator of the Universe and the human beings are the stewards responsible for caring of nature, but the continuity and preservation of the same lies upon the mercy of God. God has created Nature and instilled life in it in the forms of plants, animals, humans and all living organisms. In this sense humans are not differentiated from the rest of God's creation. The Bible further states that <sup>80</sup>“every speck of the Creation has His divine hand in it; so no human being has the absolute right to destroy it.” One may thus say that environmental crisis of the present century can be solved to a great extent if man follows the teachings of Christianity.

### **Islam:**

In the holy book of the Islam, i.e. the Quran writings on the conservation of nature are found. The Quran admits that all natural occurrences take place due to the existence of natural law or natural order and human intervention into nature with the motive of artificialising it should not cross its limit. Human beings are created by God or Allah, they ought to serve the divine by taking care of God's creation, i.e. nature and thereby “serve as a mirror to reflect the

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<sup>80</sup> Dwivedi, O.P. *Environmental Ethics*, op.cit. p.48.

beautiful image of God.”<sup>81</sup> The writings of Quran uphold the fact that a delicate balance exists in nature and all natural occurrences take place in accordance to the laws of nature. The Almighty or Allah is the Creator of the Universe and human beings are nothing but his creation and are made to serve him. They are not given the absolute ownership of the natural world nor the permission to alter God’s divine creation in accordance to their selfish desire which disturbs the delicate balance of nature. The Quran prescribes punishment for such act on the part of humans, i.e. accountability before God after death. The Holy Quran further states that God has enriched the earth with all His creations meant for proper and judicious utilization. Over utilization of nature’s beautiful resources in the name of development and progress disturbing the natural balance and bringing about deterioration of the environmental quality especially on the part of man is considered as *fasad* in Islam which is a crime and is punishable.

The concept of *tawheed* in Islam meaning unity of God fosters conservation and maintenance of ecological balance. Unity in this sense means unity of mankind and nature, i.e. flora, fauna and the physical environment. Development of harmonious relationship amongst all natural entities including man obviously promotes conservation of nature and maintenance of ecological balance as said earlier.

The Quran further states that all natural occurrences take place due to *sunnah* or the natural law of God and human beings should accept this law as the will of the Creator. Any attempt on the part of the Homo sapiens to change or transform this law will create ecological imbalance or *fasad* which, as already mentioned, is punishable. Respect and reverence for all natural entities is expressed clearly in the verses of the Holy Quran. The Quran also states that God permits judicious utilization of nature without wastage, destruction, over utilization and transformation. God has permitted human beings to

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.48.

reside on earth as tenant and not as the owner and he has been entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the proper balance of nature through harmonious living and respect for all natural entities. It is the obligation on part of all individuals to respect the God-given environment.

### **Buddhism:**

Love, compassion, respect for life, mutual co-operation and understanding, non-violence are the core words of Buddhism. Various perspective regarding conservation and protection of nature are found in Buddhist literature. The *Metta-Suttam* prayer for example promotes existence of limitless goodwill in the whole world. The *Sutta Nipāta* forbids pollution of water, destruction of forest by cutting down trees, inflicting harm to animals and several other actions on the part of humans which are adverse towards maintenance of environmental balance. Holistic view of the world fostering survival of all species- humans as well as non-humans- in harmony and co-operation with nature is encouraged in Buddhism. Buddhism also prescribes that the biotic community exists and shall continue to exist through interdependence and proper interrelationship amongst the various species.

The notion of compassion forms the core philosophy of Buddhism. The Buddha is seen as an embodiment of compassion and therefore regarded as the compassionate protector of all natural entities- humans as well as non-humans. His valuable teachings spread the notion of loving kindness and respectful treatment of all living species. It is his wisdom through which he equates human beings with the other species of the universe. The welfare of humans and non-humans are very much inter-related, interdependent and inter-connected.

The present day environmental crisis is known to all of us and has been discussed vividly in many chapters of my thesis. The greedy propensity of mankind to over utilized nature in order to fulfill his

consumerist and materialistic desires has led to ecological and therefore environmental catastrophe.

In fact, the pollution of internal mind has led to pollution of the external environment. To block external pollution, the internal mind needs to be purified through proper meditation. The *Dharmapada* reveals the fact that pollution of external environment is brought about by pollution of internal mind. It is said that just as the maker of an arrow makes the end of it straight, so an individual should simplify his mind, which is wavering, fickle, uncontrolled and unprotected.

To simplify one's mind, one need not eradicate all desires, but control them and live in harmony with the society and nature. It is been observed that most of the Buddhist monasteries are found in the mountains and forests where the monks can reside in harmony with nature. The serenity and calmness of the mountains and forests help the monks to culture their inner minds through meditation. The ethics of Buddhism is a matter of understanding a practice of affirming and realising the trans-human potential for enlightenment as an effect. The deeper insight in an individual is generated through the cultivation of it in humans and trans-human species and hence it becomes potential for enlightenment. This is expressed by *Shantideva* in the following way: " Just as a body which is constituted with hands and other limbs should be protected as a single entity, the whole world is divided in so many parts should be treated as undivided one so far as its nature is concerned. If it is taken as divided, it would suffer no doubt. I should remove suffering of others because it is suffering like my own. I should help others too because they exist as I exist."<sup>82</sup>

Buddhist teaching centres around the three fold training of human mind and seven factors of enlightenment. The three fold training of human mind incorporates cultivation of ethical conduct ( *sīla* ) , meditation ( *samādhi*), and wisdom ( *paññā*) as enumerated in

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<sup>82</sup> *Budhicaryāvatāra*, V2i: 91-99, trans. by Kata Crosby and Andrew Skilton, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 96.

*Mahaparinibbanasuta* of the *Dighanikya*. Such three fold training in turn influences the seven factors of enlightenment, viz. mindfulness (sati), discrimination of principles (*dhamma vikaya*), energy in pursuit of food (virya), rapture (pitti) , tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*uppekḥā*). These seven factors of enlightenment bring about moral development of individuals. Such moral development enables one to develop an attitude of love and sympathy towards all. Greed and lust which is the sole cause behind environmental and societal crisis can be eradicated through the weapon of wisdom dependent on the seven factors of enlightenment and three fold training of mind. Only advice to follow the path of *Ahimsa* will be futile unless they are entitled by wisdom. This wisdom lifts an individual to a higher level of awareness, to a higher ethical sensibility which promotes sympathetic and loving attitude of individuals towards nature. Culture of the inner mind through concerted practice and discipline following the path of Buddhism can enable individuals to develop the noble qualities of patience, loving kindness and wisdom. With this inner tranquility alone outer tranquility , free from pollution may come into being.

## **Jainism:**

Benevolence, love, *Ahimsā* or non-violence, respect for living creatures is more deeply rooted in this religion. This religion “adheres to the universal law which states that life produces life, order comes of order, and peace can be achieved through peace.”<sup>83</sup>

According to Jainism intense desire for something in this material world is passion which is the sole cause of self injury or injury to others. This needs to be controlled through control over one’s speech, thought and movement. The noble qualities of truthfulness, honesty, chastity, charity, love, respect for all, benevolence should be developed in all individuals to live peacefully and in harmony with the natural

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<sup>83</sup> Nathanien Altman, *Ahimsa* (Dynamic Composition): Wheaton, II. U.S.A., Theosophical Publishing House, pp. 101-102.

world. Himsa or violence through battle, injury, hunting, adultery, and theft should be forbidden by all.

We thus see that the basic tenet of Jainism is non-violence or Ahimsa which is very much related to the three precepts- the right belief, the right knowledge and the right conduct. According to the Jainis environmental harmony can be achieved and maintained through benevolence and love for all creatures, respect, compassion and tolerance for the weak.

From the above discussion we may come to the conclusion that the present ecological crisis calls for promotion of eco-spirituality, a spirituality that desires a creation-centred instead of ego-centric life-style. The acceptance of a 'reverend receptive' attitude towards the natural world instead of a consumeristic and exploitive attitude by following the path of *Ahimsa* can gradually solve the present ecological crisis. Subbarao says that "spiritual responses can bring us back that harmony and wholeness between man and man, man and nature, and both with God; that is the liberation and salvation of the whole cosmos." <sup>84</sup>



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<sup>84</sup> Subbarao, S.: *Ethics of Ecology and Environment*, op. cit., p. 107.