

The Environmental Concerns in India

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Abstract

If we look into our Shastras then we would find that there are much concerns for our environment. The Prakriti is the material cause of the entire existence; sometimes Indian Philosophy considers it as consciousness. If it exists then we exist. Thus it has a primordial importance. So it has from all aspects talked about measures for its sustenance, and never ever about its destruction. Hence time has come now to get back to our roots to make the world a better place to live in. Where Science fails, there our Shastras have to be re-visited by us once again.

WRITE-UP

KEYWORDS: environment, shastras, sustenance, science, destruction

India is known for embracing all, --be it varied rights, rituals, customs, religions over and above that, the land not only is concerned with the species of man but also other lower species to the extent that they are worshipped here with great reverence. As it is believed here that the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient; named Allah, Ishwara or God is present in all His creation. Thus the inanimate mountains, rivers as well as species inferior to man such as trees and animals are also worshipped here. Krishna a form of Vishnu (The God of Hindus) is a cowherd boy thus cows are respected. Cows give milk, they help in ploughing lands for crop plantation and thus they have great worth here. On the other hand trees like banyan, tulasi, neem and others which either have medicinal values or are very old to protect people from heat and give them shelter are considered Divine here. Anything that has a scientific hence practical value is very wittily conserved in the land of India through the name of religion. So is Giri Govardhan, a piece of hill preventing the natives from infiltration and cold north winds, favourable for gazing, cattle rearing and irrigation; finally rescuing Vraj from heavy rainfall, flood and erosion.

Being a student of Philosophy I would try to reveal the worth of Mother Nature from the perspectives of different schools of Indian Philosophy. As Indian Philosophy has, various views about Nature which can be obtained through the writings of Satish Chandra Chatterjee in his book *An Introduction To Indian Philosophy* and also in writings of other scholars too.

Nature which is annihilated today by progress of science and technology was once worshipped with great reverence in Indian tradition as found in the Vedas¹. Rig Veda talks of worshipping Varun, Arun, Marut each of whom represent either sea, sun or air and other such essences of nature. Sama Veda is a collections of hymns and melodious chantings of deities appeasing them in order to avoid natural calamities. Yajur Veda dealt with rites and rituals performed in front of fire, the basic component of our existence. The youngest layer of Yajur Veda includes collection of primary Upanishads where the characters are birds, insects and animals personified, teaching us moral lessons. This once again reminds us that Nature does not comprise merely of

human form of life. Last but not the least the Atharva Veda directly talks of herbs and nature derived potions as medicines curing even fatal diseases.

Jainism is another and in fact the most vital school which indeed protected nature not only by its theoretical philosophy but also did so by its practical application of Non-violence or Ahimsa. By non-violence they meant not only harming another being but also absence of harm to be emphasized on one's self which naturally comes while harming another. Here harm means physical, mental as well as verbal harm which ought to be controlled against not only humans but also against other plants, animals, insects, microorganisms and also against land water and other natural components which have life in them in dormant form.

According to Jainism there are six types of Substances or Dravyas, of which Jiva and Ajiva are two main divisions. Jivas are the sentient or conscious beings, whereas the Ajivas comprise 1. Dharma (motion), 2. Adharma (rest), 3. Akasha (space), 4. Pudgala (matter) and 5. Kala (time). The Jainas stressed on the preservation of even these Ajivas as life is found even in them in suppressed form. In fact Kala, Dharma, Adharma are eternally conscious as they are imperishable witnesses of all actions. Pudgalas are matters formed of atoms or Skandhas of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. The atoms combine with one another to form such matters. If these atoms were inert or unconscious then such meaningful combination would not have been possible.

Thus Jainism through their theory of Ahimsavada taught us to respect all forms of life sentient or non-sentient as we do not know what we were and what we would be in our previous and future lives. Hence a kinship ought to be maintained amongst different species².

Another important rationale of Ahimsa is, I am one but the rest are many. When I am injured I suffer. Now if others are injured then since they are many, their sufferings are much more than me. So I being a conscious being cannot let others suffer for me, as the law of nature says every action has an equal and opposite reaction. The Jainas have talked of violence only in cases to defend one's life and that of the person in my custody.

The Sankhya school of Indian Philosophy believed ultimately in two realities—The Purush and the Prakriti³. The former is conscious and makes the material nature of Prakriti conscious once it comes in contact with it. And then at once the equilibrium of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas gunas or qualities portraying knowledge, activity and lethargy is disturbed hence, creation begins. Thus Prakriti creates as its evolutes Buddhi and Ahankara and from Ahankara springs Manas or mind, Pancha Gyanendriya or the five senseorgans, Pancha Karmendriya or the five organs of activities, Pancha bhutas or the five gross elements and finally the Pancha Tanmatras or the five subtle elements which comprise the entire nature and its creation. Thus in the entire process the Sankhyas admit of the Purusha who produces consciousness to get transferred to Prakriti for the rest to occur gradually. Thus nature acquires consciousness hence is a life form if not potent at all times but no doubt dormant. Hence that dormant life form should be respected and never terminated. So to the Sankhyas Purusha is conscious not the Prakriti; thus it is the life force of Prakriti, which reminds me at once of the idea of ecofeminism where males are observed superior from females in all spheres.

The term Ecofeminism was first coined by Françoise Eauborne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort (1974)*. The term ecofeminism links feminism with ecology. Capitalistic or paternalistic society has led to a harmful split between nature and culture that can only be healed by the feminine instinct for nature and holistic knowledge of nature's processes. The main notion of ecofeminism lies in the fact that both nature and women have traits like reciprocity, cooperation and nurturing which the males see as their weakness. Thus they take such nurtures and care givers for granted forgetting that if they rebel then tsunamis and other destructions are inevitable.

Vedanta Philosophy talks of Brahman the One consciousness which makes all other things conscious. The Advaita Vedantins believed in the existence of only One substance in this manifold world and that is Brahman from which everything emanates and to which everything rests. They give an analogy of milk and milk products stating that curd, paneer, cheese, sweets are products made out of the same milk. Thus insects, animals, plants, and even the non-living objects are nothing but Brahman. Brahman to them is like the sea, the Really real or the Eternally real but we are all Temporarily real as the waves of the sea. Thus harming any of these consciousnesses would be to injure the Ultimate Reality since all are a part and parcel of that same truth. Thus we ought to be careful in our actions.

The Mimansakas at one occasion in the Vedas talk of not harming animals under any circumstance what so ever, but it is only they who on other occasions have written about slaughtering animals and offering them to Yajnas or sacrifices. At this the Prabhakaras come to a solution that is they say, that normally animals should not be killed but in order to balance nature's ecology they have to die. So it is better that they are killed for a pious purpose. For each of us God has made arrangements. In forests the rule is naturally maintained and ecological balance also sustained thereby, but in cities today we are found to be in a need of excess thus nature is overtly paying the cost.

The Mimansakas have also used two very important terms, Rina and Rita. The former means duty and the latter means law of nature. It further says that the nature can work in harmony only if we perform our appropriate Dharmas or duties. This perhaps explains the cause of natural disasters which occur today especially in areas where sins and slaughtering are common. Such consequences have also been cited in Jaimini's *Mimamsa Sutra*. The Mantras used in Mimansaka texts are said to be the 'powers of Gods' each representing an element of nature be it earth, water, fire, air or ether. Thus they were chanted bold to please and bribe nature for allowing us to utilize its own powers.

The Carvakas who are known as the Lokayata school of Indian Philosophy meaning that which adheres to the material nature of world⁴ also gave importance to the spontaneous nature of our creation, which itself proves how belittle we are in front of nature which cannot be controlled as such by us. They explain it by Svabhavavada which says that the atoms of earth, water, fire, air combine not by maintaining any law but by their own characteristics or Svabhava, where humans really have no role to play⁵.

The Naiyaikas or the Nyaya-Vaisesika school of Indian Philosophy believe that the nature is created of atoms of khiti(earth), ap(water), tejas(fire), marut(air) and

vyom(ether). These atoms combine to form dyads then from dvanuka they become tranuka , thereafter chaturanuka and finally become visible gross elements by the Will of God. So God's vision and guidance is evident even here in formation of Nature. And no God of any religion would want harm of His guided creation. We forget this and misuse nature at the cost of annihilating it. Thus both in cases of Carvakas and Nyaya-Vaisesika it is either the elements of nature or God who decides on creation; which is purusha as per Sankhyas and the Pure consciousness or Brahman as per the Advaita Vedantins. Since men can't create thus they have no right to destroy.

Buddhism and Jainism go hand in hand as far as the discussion of conservation of nature is concerned. Both talk of Ahimsa or non-violence. As per them destruction and causing harm should be used as last resort when nothing else works. Buddhism clearly states that world is a suffering ground where people suffer due to their unending desire to achieve the unachievable or to achieve at the cost of many great sufferings. When we start performing Karmas only for the sake of duty without expecting its result then we will not have to take birth again and again in this world as we have nothing to gain, nothing to lose. It is only when we understand that we are all subject to Avidya or Ignorance, then we would also understand that the object which we hanker for can only give us momentary pleasure as it would then be of no use or would lead to more of its craving which would further destroy our peace of mind and make us only to run after it. In West, J.S Mill calls this The Paradox of Hedonism. Thus the more we become detached to worldly objects as they only make us suffer, more are we close to nature as being very much a part and parcel of it without harming and disturbing it in any way. The Buddhists also believe that men can only have self realization when they start staying amidst nature coexisting with other species, following their rules letting them live as they themselves are living. Nature as per Buddhism grounds us, soothe us. Unspoiled natural locations they believe enhance our natural energies in us which are peace, righteousness, harmony etc. The Eighth of 12th or 13th ascetic practices recommended by the Buddha is dwelling in the forest. As we also found in case of Buddha that Enlightenment can be achieved only amidst the green, helping us to be more focused and concentrated. Through the peaceful coexistence amidst nature; compassion can also be learnt along with the other Brahmaviharas such as Mudita or praising others' success, Bhavana or maintaining integrity and Upekkha or being indifferent to both extreme pleasure and pain⁶. Thus to them Nature teaches us the natural principles of Harmony. Moreover, Lord Buddha believed that the deep reality of Nature is not separate from our fully enlightened Nature that is the Buddha Nature.

Conclusion

So although we think that humans are the seat of all intelligence hence, supreme of all species thus we can rule over everything, but originally it is Nature or God's will which can control its creation. Thus perhaps Spinoza equated Nature with God whose power we can understand only when we are wiped out once and for all in devastating earthquakes or in other natural disasters. Men today are creating global warming, whereby melting the ice and snow of glaciers flooding the lower water bodies disturbing thereby the marine life with the heinous use of technology which in this case acts only as a curse and in no way a boon. If we take the views of all Indian Philosophical schools in creation of Nature and its matters, then we can see that we would survive if and only if we can sustain nature as we are tiny particles embedded

in it being directed by it like puppets in the hands of the Ultimate—you call it God, Substance or Nature.

In the book *The Journey Home* His Holiness Radhanath Swami Maharaj writes his own experiences while he was leading a life of austerity amidst forests up hills, where he gives us a very important lesson of life. He shares that the snakes and other wild beasts of forests would never harm humans if they are getting enough space for their existence. But what we see in the outer world is that we the humans want to survive by leading the most comfortable life by sweeping out everybody else even other humans who come in the way of comforts or those selfish motives. Unless this mentality of ours is changed we can neither endure nature nor can we alone survive without it. The ancient teachers and sages of Indian Philosophy perhaps taught this lesson of 'Live and let live' to us, which in order to survive we must follow one day if not today.

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