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VEDIC SCRIPTURES AND ECOSPIRITUAL VOICES

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ABSTRACT

The Planet, Earth is on the edge of eternal destruction. Either the entire humans have to do something creatively to save the planet or get ready to perish along with the Planet. The ecological devastations have topic of global discussions and debates at present. It is at this juncture that the world has to think of reviving and revalidating the ecological wisdom voiced by the Oriental scriptures. The paper is a brief and humble attempt to bring to the fore the ecological foresightedness of the Vedic scriptures with special reference to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Key Words: Environmentalism, Deep Ecology, Egocentricism etc.

Introduction

Ecological concerns are escalating every day. The problems related to our planet are not confined to a particular area. They are global issues demanding immediate attention of all human beings who have initiated and promoted the present ecological breakdown. Humans have inflicted limitless destructive activities upon nature and as a result the planet has become an endangered one. The egocentric attitudes of the humans have reduced the planet to a mere source of exploitation. This attitude has been established and promoted by the colonial masters who considered nature an enemy of human beings.

Discussion

The world has started discussing the green issues seriously since the last decades of the 20th century. The issues like Ozone Layer depletion, Green House Effect, Global Warming, Acid Rain etc. have become household terms. Unfortunately all these issues have been looked upon from an anthropocentric stand point. The contemporary extensive conversations on ecological degradation are human oriented as well as ego-centric. Ecological issues become sensitive, at present, as we have realized the reality that unscrupulous ecological destruction will take a heavy toll on human lives also. Now, wide spread propaganda as well as activities form the major agenda of ecological discussions across the world.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of two streams of ecological thought. One stream focused its attention on reformist activities like controlling environmental pollution, exploitation, and unwise use of land as well as natural resources. The reformist environmentalists have been keen on protecting the existing green patches of wilderness in urban areas. Committed to the cause of public health and safety, they protest against the indiscriminate use of chemicals, insecticides and pesticides. They are averse to unscientific development programs like construction of big dams, factories and atomic reactors.

Arne Naess, the Norwegian eco-philosopher is dissatisfied with the ecological attitudes promoted by the reformists. While accepting most of the reformist ideals, Naess and other green thinkers introduced and

promoted the concept of deep ecology, a term coined by Arne Naess. The U.S environmentalists, Bill Devall and George Sessions, further developed the idea of deep ecology. The terms “fundamental ecology” and “new natural philosophy” are also used to denote the concept of deep ecology. This newly evolved ecological paradigm has become radical as it aims at redefining the existing Western environmental ethics by making it value-based. It goes beyond the narrow economic motives of mainstream environmentalism. The revelation that there exists an inseparable, organic and profound interrelatedness and interdependence among all beings on the planet renders spiritual dimensions to the new ideology of deep ecology. The emergence of the new ecological philosophy was the inevitable outcome of centuries-old incessant and unscrupulous exploitation of nature by humans. Naess emphasizes the need for deep ecology, as the ecological issues in the contemporary world necessitate an in-depth analysis. He puts his ecological anxiety thus: “There are deeper concerns which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness” (EKC120). Deep ecology is an alternative ecological thinking to mend the shortcomings of the reformative ecology. Unlike reformative ecology, deep ecology focuses mainly on the conservation of nature for the sake of nature itself, not for the benefits of humans. The deep ecologists raise their strong reservations against the patriarchal attitudes towards nature and they offer refreshing hope to people who are concerned about the environment. “Earh First” is the basic dictum of radical deep ecologists. They aim at “...a philosophical and cultural revolution in human attitudes toward nature.... It proposes a militant defense of ‘Mother Earth,’ an unflinching opposition to human attacks on undisturbed wilderness” (Guha, EKC 281).

The concept of deep ecology is mainly inherited from and inspired by the ancient Oriental religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism as well as by Spinoza’s eco-spiritual ideologies. Deep ecology, thus, has its base in spiritualism. The Oriental traditions, with their robust spiritual foundation, kept alive the green wisdom for thousands of years. The ecological wisdom of the Orient emerged out of the world-view based on politeness, compassion and love to all beings in nature. The thinking of the East had been highly ecological and it highlighted indivisibility of nature and humans. The following lines from *Atharva Veda* categorically uphold this non-duality of nature and man.

Agni [fire] is in the earth, in the herbs
The water bear Agni, Agni is in the stones
Agni is within men
Atharva Veda XII. 19

Thus the Vedic vision very clearly conveys the message that human life is not distinct from nature.

The Indian tradition never thought of the happiness and well-being of isolated nations and individuals. It envisages and prays for the perfect happiness and peace of all in the world. Indian cultural heritage has never separated nature from human life. Forest was, in fact, the cradle of ancient Indian culture. The great Indian visions originated in forests where saints spent many years in penance, listening to nature’s wise messages. It was an age when saints who had lived close to nature were respected and protected by the rulers. The rulers had the foresight and wisdom to take advice from the saints of forests. The Indian tradition teaches people to see forest not merely as a collection of trees, herbs, animals and birds but as a deity, who is the protective power of all beings that depend on it. The people during the Vedic age accepted all things gladly offered by Mother Nature. Use of natural resources did not come down to the level of exploitation in the past. Instead of exploiting forest resources unscrupulously, the ancients worshipped and fed the forest deity every day. Also, they willingly spent half of their lives in forest, after spending two stages of life- that of a celibate student and householder in villages and towns. “Aaranyaka”, one of the sections of the Vedas, refers to this stage of human life. Nature had been interlinked to the indigenous culture of India.

It is in this context that a revalidation of the age Oriental scriptures become highly meaningful and relevant. It is high time that we made use of ecological wisdom manifested in the holy scriptures of India

Like other Indian classics viz. *The Mahabharatha* and *The Ramayana* as well as the Vedic scriptures, *The Bhagavad Gita* also offers valid insightful thoughts of nature care. The present paper focuses mainly on two key ecological concepts of the *The Bhagavadgita* with special reference to the Third and Seventh Chapter, each contains 43 and 30 *slokas* (verses) respectively. The *slokas* of the third chapter emphasises the necessity of leading a life of sacrifice and the Seventh one stresses the philosophy of indivisibility.

The modern world has almost lost the sense of sacrifice. In the third chapter, Krishnana reminds Arjuna that in the beginning of the world, Brahma created human beings along with sacrifice. The Lord reminds people that sacrifice is something which is part of human life. Without this man is incomplete *Srimad Bhagavatgita*.III.(77). The root cause of the present ecological degradation is the loss of the human sense of sacrifice.

The philosophy of *Advaita* or non-duality also adds to the green hue of *the Bhagavatgita*. The basic principle of ecology, as Barry Commoner says, is the interrelatedness of everything in this universe (qtd. in Glotfelty xix). The first verse of *Isa Upanisad* also highlights the same. The root cause of the present ecological devastation is the lack of the sense of indivisibility between Nature and Humans. Along with this, lack of an attitude of sacrifice also contribution to the contemporary ecocrisis. *The Bhagavadgita* repeatedly underscores the necessity of realising the indivisibility of all lives and upholding the sense of sacrifice. On many occasions Krishna reminds Arjuna that the apparent diversity of the universe is just an illusion. In the Seventh Chapter, through many *slokas* Krishna categorically says that He is everything.

The 4th *sloka* of this chapter says: "Earth, water, air, fire, ether, mind, Buddhi, egoism, are the either, forms of *Prakriti* are controlled by Me" (176).

He further says that everything is me or controlled by me. "I am the life of all souls by being immanent in their bodies and supporting this world as well" (177).

Lord Krishna also says that all souls with the bodies have their origin in the intelligent and non-intelligent *Prakriti* and He is the original cause or Prime Mover of the entire creation and dissolution (end) of the whole universe.

"There is nothing whatsoever higher than Myself All this is strung as it were on Me as rows of pearls on a String" VII.7. "I am the cohesive essence in water and radiance Sun and Moon, *Pranava* in all the Vedas, sound in ether and manliness in men" VII.8.178.

"I am pure fragrance in earth and heat in fire; I am life in all beings" VII.9.(179).

"O Partha, know Me the eternal as the seed of all things; I am the wisdom in the wise and splendor in the splendid" VII.10.179.

"Know that, whatever be the products of Satva, Rajas and Tamas, all of them have originated only from ME and are resting wholly on Me. Know that they are in Me but not I in them" VII.12.

Conclusion

The Bhagavadgita as well as the Vedas provides insightful ecological observations and messages to lead a life of sacrifice and unity. The people of the past accepted this message and as a result they had a feeling of oneness with nature making them care nature and in return nature cared them.. The scientific and technological advancement have detached people from nature. It is this "dissociation" that leads to the unscrupulous exploitation of nature by humans, leaving her a mere commodity for exploitation.. A revalidation of the eco-spiritual messages of *the Bhagavadgita* will certainly help people reduce the alarming rate of the human instigated destruction of the "Oikos", our Home.

Abbreviation: *EKC- Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*

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