

REVISITING PARADIGMS OF WELLNESS THROUGH HARMONY WITH NATURE

Kulwant Singh

Research Scholar
Department of English & MEL
University of Lucknow
Lucknow.



Abstract

The concept of well being of all, as beautifully illustrated by the Vedic verse Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah requires consideration of all and for all. Ecological crisis has assumed global proportions and has become the most critical issue in the current scenario. Development at the expense of nature is disturbing the entire ecological system. The earth today is saturated with problems like green house effect, carbon and many other forms of environmental imbalance.

The present paper is an attempt to highlight the need to revisit the various scriptures from an ecological angle. The paper is a perfect blend of qualitative and quantitative research where on one hand the primary texts have been analyzed and on the other discussions with different stakeholders and experts have been held.

Keywords: Environment, Technology, Ecological Imbalance, Hazards, Scriptures.

REVISITING PARADIGMS OF WELLNESS THROUGH HARMONY WITH NATURE

- **Kulwant Singh**

Ecological crisis has become the most critical issues in the current scenario. Several conferences are held worldwide to discuss and adopt measures to resolve this crisis through policy formulations but hardly any success has been achieved. Instead, materialistic development is moving at a greater pace. Tampering with nature is still continuing in the name of development. This progress at the expense of nature is disturbing the entire ecological system. The earth today is in peril as never before. Its lakes and rivers are being choked, killing its marine life. Its forests are being denuded. A smoky haze envelops the cities of the world. First man dehumanized man, now he dehumanizes nature. In such a situation, can we ever achieve a state of well being of all? There is a need to apprise the common man of this grave situation we are faced with today and to harmonize with nature.

The continuing deterioration of our planet's ecology poses a major threat to the viability of our world. The assessment of environmental aspect involves the quality of life on earth and indeed the ability of humans to interact with nature and for both to survive in the long run. It also means that pollution, destruction of species and natural areas, and depletion of resources cannot be placed after people's desire for technological progress and hedonistic consumption.

Development should be done to the extent or the kind of development should be such which can be sustained by nature. The case of man and environment is identical here. Environment sustains man. Man must sustain environment. He must use environment to the extent environment can be afforded to be notched. Anything beyond that will result in

degradation. But a man is never satisfied, and progress and development compel him to over utilize nature. The virtue of living in harmony with nature preached in our scriptures since times immemorial is imperative for humanity's future on the planet.

Development with the sole objective of economic growth has neither brought peace on earth nor prosperity. The prevailing concept of development encourages consumerism and keeps the individual in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction. Radiation, depletion of ozone, pollution and ecological crisis are all gifts of advancement and if it goes on with the same pace, nonstop damage to the environment is immitigable and humanity will have to pay a heavy price for this development.

Hence there is a need to save our planet by emphasizing environmental stewardship. The concept denotes a balance between environment and development process. Unless we balance these two and operationalize them through personal commitment, the crisis we are facing now will not disappear. So the need of the hour is that the concept of sustainable development be linked to that of environmental stewardship.

Happiness for all does not come from development alone. Sustainability involves quality of life and it means living in harmony with everything around us. It also means sustainability of health and happiness throughout. This sustainability is all inclusive hence our values, beliefs and traditions influence how to interact with others. The sages and saints in India have apprehended all these assertions in their unique way praying for peace and prosperity of one and all. They remind us about the auspicious sermon of the Vedas, 'Om, Sarve bhavantu sukhinah / Sarve santu niramaya / Sarve bhadrani pasyantu / Ma kaschit dukh bhag bhavet / Om shantih shantih shantih.' (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad) That is, let all living beings be happy and at peace, let all beings be free from illness, may all see what is spiritually uplifting, may no one suffer.

If one realizes this and perceives goodness in all living beings, there cannot be any suffering in this world. The world needs to respect and restore the environment. To achieve this, caring of mother earth is necessary. Thus a movement to bring humanity to path

through adherence to the principle of sustainable development is needed which is an open intelligible principle for enforcing a balance between development and environment. There is a need to inculcate environmental values among human beings, and I feel revisiting our scriptures and understanding the message they hold for us is the most suitable solution for the current crisis. We need to reinterpret them.

The Indian context naturally has a spiritual root which the Hindu Mythology throughout inculcates that an imbalanced man can make the universe imbalanced. Man and nature are one and if nature breeds man in his protection, man too has a duty to keep the nature perfect.

At a time when the world is faced with serious ecological crisis, there is a need to inculcate environmental values among human beings. Humans need to revisit their respective sacred texts, which had long back apprised them of the importance of nature and had foretold the consequences that the world will have to face if they act against the laws of nature. Also, the idea of happiness and wellness of all cannot be achieved if we do not heed to or rightly interpret the message contained in these scriptures. The current global ecological scenario forces us to look creatively at the world's religious heritage and reinterpret our sacred texts and principles to our present problem. The major scriptures taken here for reference are the Vedas, the Quran, the Bible and the Guru Granth Sahib.

A religion is defined by specific elements of a community of believers; sacred books, rites, worship, moral prescriptions etc. It teaches us brotherhood, love for humanity and makes our life beautiful in this world. Religion wants to keep a keen correlation between flora and fauna and human life available on this planet. It is seen as an important cultural influence that can promote or denounce ecologically responsible behaviour. It is on this very basis that the existing religious traditions may find a new role and relevance in our current environmental predicament. Reverence for nature and its creations is the unifying ethical principle in almost all religions. Since nature is the cradle of human civilization, religions of the world have given adequate guidelines for the preservation of nature and

ecology. The paper aims at exploring the concern for ecology in scriptures of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism.

Religion talks of the omni presence of God and it includes nature also. But human beings mould religion and nature according to their convenience. They interpret the religious texts in the way that suits their needs and in the same way they use or rather abuse nature in the style that suits them best. The need today is to live in harmony with nature.

The above propositions can be substantiated with the facts that all the religions taken into account have shown the trajectories of environmental concern. A brief account is presented as follows:

Hinduism is inherently an ecological religion. It pays a lot of attention to the understanding of the role and value of nature and environmental ethics. It is the world's largest nature-based religion that recognises and seeks the Divine in nature and acknowledges everything as sacred. It honours the Earth as the mother goddess (Bhūmī-Devī) and promotes worship of the rivers, streams, trees, mountain peaks, plants, animals, birds, forests, and every kind of flora and fauna. It views the earth as our Mother, and hence, advocates that it should not be exploited. A loss of this understanding has resulted in the abuse and exploitation of the earth and its resources. The Vedas have several references in them on environmental protection, ecological balance, weather cycles, rainfall phenomena, and many such related subjects.

The Vedas, contain 1028 hymns, almost all of which are redolent with love for nature. The Atharva Veda preaches that:

Let there be peace in the heavens, the Earth, the atmosphere, the water, the herbs, the vegetation, among the divine beings and in Brahman, the absolute reality. Let everything be at peace and in peace. Only then will we find peace.

In the Atharva Veda's "Hymn to the Earth" (Bhumi Suktha), the earth is adored and respected as mother. Similarly the Yajur Veda also mentions that 'Do not poison (pollute)

water and do not harm or cut the trees.’(6.33) Hinduism, thus, has always had a deep understanding of ecology and the relationship between man and nature.

Islam provides a comprehensive model of environmental ethics where at the same time man is a consumer and beneficiary as well as a guardian and trustee of the environment. It insists that nature is respected and invites humans to learn from it and join it in harmonious coexistence. The Islamic thoughts are particularly preserved in the Quran, which is its sacred book. It glorifies nature and wildlife as an earthly heaven, a mirror to the lush forests of paradise above. The verses of the Quran mention that corruption in the land is forbidden. We are reminded of our duty as God’s vicegerent, we are to pray, establish justice, and avoid corruption of nature. By refusing to separate humanity from nature, Islam preserves an integral view of the universe and sees the flow of Divine grace in the arteries of the cosmic and natural order.

The Quran states that Allah created everything in the universe in due balance: a balance in movement, in temperature, in gravity and its forces, in magnetism and its impacts, in electrical fields, in the quantity of water found in the seas, in the earth as a whole...in the equilibrium between death and life, in the balance of the creatures on earth so that no species outnumber the others. The environment was created with utmost care and in a balanced manner. Had it not been for this harmony, existence would lose its equilibrium. Earth would not be earth, the sky would not be the sky and substances would fade away. Everything is created to serve life and nothing is accidental nor is it created without a purpose. Quranic Verses and Prophetic Hadiths enjoin for environment conservation and urge for protecting nature from all factors of pollution and devastation.

Islam underlines the importance of preserving the elements of the ecosystem and calls for using it wisely and rationally, without any change whatsoever so that the system can keep on fulfilling its function of feeding life on a sustainable basis. Allah said in this regard: ‘But if any one, after God’s favour has come to him, substitutes (something else) God is strict in punishment.’ (Baqara 211)

God ordered human beings not to do mischief on earth. He said in his Holy Book: 'Do no mischief on earth, after it hath been set in order.' (Araaf 56) All these verses warn man against doing mischief on earth after Allah has set it in order for our life and for all the organisms that live on this planet. Preserving the environment is a form of worship. Worship in its overall meaning is not restricted to performing religious rituals such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage etc. but comprises also the faithful abidance by the precepts and injunctions of Islam in all walks of life. Thus, the good use of the environment, the protection and the preservation of its riches for the sake of mankind at large, the non-pollution of water, its preservation, the non pollution of the air and the soil, the good use of public facilities and public property, and abstaining from indiscriminate hunting and grazing, all of these are forms of worship. From this perspective, any concept that defines the way one should deal with the natural and civilization components of the environment, through constructive Islamic conduct, is an order from Allah that should be met with obedience and subordination, out of gratitude for his many blessings.

Christianity believes that God's creation is a beautiful gift to humanity. Humans need to care for it. The Bible preaches that:

God created humanity in God's own image and ...said to them, "be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take care of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." (Genesis 1:27)

Christianity says that we cannot love God and ignore the earth. Jesus' love is not just for humans but for all creation equally. That is why he said to his disciples, 'Go to the entire world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' (Mark16:15)

The Bible says, 'The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those that live it.'(Psalm 24:1) The earth and its beings have all been created by God and belong to him. God has created a world that is designed to be self-replicating. He replicated himself in us and we act on his behalf when we treat his creation with benevolence and creativity.

Christianity recognizes the tension that exists between humanity's responsibility to care for God's creation, and the human tendency to rebel against God. Christians realise their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith. Christians believe that taking care of the world is not just an ecological issue, but a moral and spiritual issue. Christianity believes that humanity ought to perceive the natural order as a sign and sacrament of God, and that to respect nature is to recognise that all creatures and objects have a unique place in God's creation. The challenge here is to discover anew the truth that God's love and liberation is for all creation, not just humanity, and to seek new ways of living that restore balance and hope of life to the endangered planet.

The Guru Granth Sahib is the religious book of the Sikhs. It declares that the purpose of human beings is to achieve a blissful state and to be in harmony with the earth and the entire creation of God. The Sikh scripture emphasises the importance of the elements of environment. The importance of air, water and earth to life are emphasised over and over again in the Guru Granth Sahib. It preaches humans to respect Air as the Guru, Water as the Father and Earth as the Mother: 'Air is Guru, Water is father and vast Earth is mother.'(Guru Granth Sahib 8)

The earth is referred to as the mother and as such requires our respect. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that no damage occurs to it while the Sikh is going about in his or her daily life. The Gurbani states that: 'Air, water, earth and sky - the God has made these his home and temple.' (Guru Granth Sahib 723) These sacred places need to be protected and looked after. The pollution of these elements is against the principles laid down by the Gurus.

Sikhs work for the promotion of a sustainable and peaceful ecology. They believe that an awareness of the sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. Sikhs are told to cultivate an awareness and respect for the dignity of life, human and otherwise. Their scripture declares that the

purpose of human beings is to be in harmony with all creation and that human domination is to be rejected.

Hence, we observe from the above that all religions have deep concern for ecology. They teach us not to destroy nature. Nature and their objects are not only symbols of religion, rather tropes of religion. But humans, in the name of development are indulging in ecocide. It is a vicious trend, first man dehumanised man, now he dehumanises nature. The current deplorable environmental crisis demands a spiritual response. A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment, is very much needed. One of the measures that could help a great deal to fulfil this need is to regenerate and rejuvenate basic values incorporated in the religious texts, reinterpret them from an ecological angle and propagate them.

Furthermore, the spiritual gurus can play a big role by creating awareness and inspiring their congregations towards the formation of an eco-friendly world.. The preachers need to be visionary and use their power to talk about the relationship with the Creator and the Creation.

Rebekah Simon Peter, in her book *Green Church: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice!* states that:

Our focus for so long has been on humanity, which is a good thing, but we have not paid attention to the health of the rest of Creation. We comfort people in distress, do fabulous work with responding to natural disasters, which are actually un-natural disasters. The problem is that we are not addressing the question that why these disasters are happening with such increasing frequency. She proposes the “green” gospel with congregations, interfaith groups and community groups as a step to bring people closer to nature.

To conclude, it would be appropriate to mention here that if the people living on this planet do not take care of mother earth, all of us will face greater trouble than we have so far. We, as human beings have never hesitated to take a great deal from mother earth, but now this grave situation demands that we should put a curb on our plundering and ravaging instincts. Instead, humans should set an example of being good stewards of the planet. The environment is a human heritage. Generations upon generations inherit the permanent riches of the environment. We are not owners of the land, but we simply borrow it from the preceding generations and it is incumbent upon us to preserve it undamaged for the next generations without dilapidating or polluting its resources and potentialities.

Revisiting our scriptures and its reinterpretation can play a big role in bringing about a change in our current value system enlisting a heightened consciousness towards instilling respect for mother earth and care for all species in the creation and develop the requisite environmental ethics thereby facilitating in achieving the objective of well being of all and creation of a better world.

Works Cited:

- Bachan, Gurbachan Singh. *Guru Nanak and Ecology*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2004. Print.
- DeWitt, Calvin B. and Robert Nash. "Christians and the Ecology." *Christian Research Journal* 38.6 (2015): Web. 21 May 2017.
- "Ecology." *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2007. Web.16 May, 2017.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2016. Print.
- Ozdemir, Ibrahim. "An Islamic Approach to the Environment." *www.islamawareness.net* Web.10 May 2017.
- Peter, Rebekah Simon. *Green Church: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice!* Tennessee: Abingdom Press, 2010. Print.

Renugadevi, R. "Environmental Ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India." *African Journal of History and Culture* 4.1(2012): 1-3 Web. 28 May 2017.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Trans. Manmohan Singh. Amritsar: Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee, 1978. Print.

The Holy Bible. Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011. Print. New International Version.

The Holy Quran. Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Maddinah: King Fahd Holy Quran Press, 1987. Print.

Virk, Hardev Singh. *Scientific Vision in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Interfaith Dialogue*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2007. 76-82. Print.

White, Jr. Lynn. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cherryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens:University of Georgia Press, 1996. 3-14. Print.



Higher Education &
Research Society