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Environment Stewardship and Religion

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ABSTRACT

Scientific and technological advancement coupled by the emphasis on reasoning have changed the simple ways of life where faith and religion held the utmost stature. The new world view arising as a sequel of the industrial revolution presented a different relationship with nature wherein the old order with stress on mutual dependency was rejected and replaced by the new order of control and exploitation. Mankind deliberately ignored the perennial wisdom of spirituality and made an unfortunate choice that led to self destructive tendencies like overexploitation of nature caused by rising materialism, insatiable greed for more and a declining value system.

A social apathy of the gross consequences of un-sustained economic growth supplemented by a narrow and compartmentalized vision has ultimately brought us face to face with a crisis of global magnitude. Today world leaders, scientists and academics, politicians, sociologists, psychologist, educationist, philosopher, Theologians etc. in both the developed and the developing countries, express grave concern for environmental issues. The over exploitation of natural ecosystem has caused genetic mutation, loss of biodiversity and extinction of entire species with far reaching consequences on the natural food web. The worsening ecologic crisis has been repeatedly rated as the most urgent issue and one that is not only threatening to the existence of mankind but to all forms of life on the planet.

Environmental stewardship has been an integral part of nearly all religions of the world. This paper examines some of the beliefs and practice underlying the chief religions of the world and the strategic extension of their attitude towards nature as a tool for environmental conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Scientific and technological advancement coupled by the emphasis on reasoning have changed the simple ways of life where faith and religion held the utmost stature. The new world view arising as a sequel of the industrial revolution presented a different relationship with nature wherein the old order with stress on mutual dependency was rejected and replaced by the new order of control and exploitation. Mankind deliberately ignored the perennial wisdom of spirituality and made an unfortunate choice that led to self destructive tendencies like overexploitation of nature caused by rising materialism, insatiable greed for more and a declining value system.

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After having incurred tremendous irreparable damage, mankind has finally agreed over the urgent need to save the planet and to take on a responsible stance of stewardship. Environmental stewardship is the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment. Underlying the concept of stewardship three inherent attributes of responsibility, ownership and morality leading ultimately to sustainability and growth. **The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines stewardship as the individual responsibility to manage his life and property with proper regard to the right of others.**

Researches indicate that religion humanizes and personalizes choices about environment and more importantly, underlying ethics backed by individuals' religion will help make better decisions on complex issues. Findings of a survey by Belden, Russonello and Stewart for the '**Americans and Biodiversity: New Perspectives in 2004**' project indicated that a good 26% had cited that they protect the environment due to religion based morality, 19% cited protection of balance in nature, 7% cited appreciation for beauty, 4% cited protection of natural history and 44% cited responsibility for future generations which is a manifestation of environmental stewardship. Similarly, messages that invoked values such as stewardship and respect for God's creation had strong and wide appeal. The most compelling reasons for protecting biodiversity (those ranked "extremely important") were:

- A personal responsibility to leave the earth on good shape for future generations (58%);
- Nature is God's creation and humans should respect God's work (56%);
- An appreciation for the beauty of nature (53%);
- A desire to protect nature for you and your family to enjoy a healthy life (51%).

Martin Palmer in his article '**Religion and Environment in China**' (2006) writes about a survey undertaken by the 'Daoists' with aid from the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) of the major sacred mountains. The study showed that because of the inherent sacredness of places such as Hua Shan, Tai Shan, Emei Shan or Qingqing Shan, these had survived in a better ecological state than comparable areas which were not considered sacred by the general population. This had proved to be effective, even during the worse excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Temples and shrines, statues and sacred books had been destroyed but the mountains had still survived in better environmental state than other areas. This has recently been confirmed by a study undertaken by WWF and ARC.

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RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

HINDUISM

Hinduism has been one of the most ancient religions of the world. It demonstrates an ecological awareness and great respect for the natural world. There are several principles of importance to the human future that can be drawn from teachings of Hinduism – some of the most significant ones are as follows:

- The inevitability of the consequences of one's actions,
- The linkage between past, present and future and the concept of the cycle of rebirth
- The principle of universal brotherhood
- The presence of divinity in all things
- The prevalence of the needs of the community over the egoism of the individual
- The harmony necessary between humanity and the natural order and many others.

Life is sacred

All living beings are sacred because they are parts of God, and should be treated with respect and compassion. This is because the soul can be reincarnated into any form of life. Hinduism is full of stories that treat animals as divine, such as how Krishna used to herd cows, or how the monkey Hanuman was a faithful servant of the Rama. Most Hindus are vegetarian because of this belief in the sanctity of life. Even trees, rivers and mountains are believed to have souls, and should be honoured and cared for.

Simple living

The virtue of a simple life has always been prized in Hindu society. Teachers, or brahmanas, are advised to live on the charity of others and not accumulate too much wealth. The most highly respected person in Hindu society is the sadhu, or sage who lives outside normal society, in forests or caves, or travels on foot from one town to another. Sadhus take pride in living simply and consuming as little as possible.

Inner peace

Hinduism stresses that true happiness comes from within not from outer possessions. This means that the search for material possessions, and the consumption of materials and energy it brings, should not be allowed to dominate life. Life's main purpose is to discover the spiritual nature and the peace and

fulfilment it brings. The efforts to exploit the things of this world are considered by Hindu teachers to be a distraction from this central purpose of life.

How do Hindus care for the environment?

Hindus revere sacred rivers, mountains, forests and animals, and love to be close to nature. For example, many Hindu villages have a sacred lake, and around it a grove of trees to catch rainfall and protect the banks from erosion. The lake and its grove store rainfall to irrigate surrounding fields and supply village wells with drinking water. These lakes and groves are places of tranquillity and sanctuaries for wildlife, but in recent times the neglect of these simple techniques for gathering and protecting clean water has led to serious water shortages and advancing desertification in many parts of India. This is a common story in India: traditional Hindu practices of caring for nature are being forgotten and as a result human survival is becoming more difficult.

What do Hindus believe about genetic modification?

One of the world's best-known campaigners against genetic modification is **Vandana Shiva**, an Indian scientist motivated by her native Hindu beliefs to champion the rights of rural women and farmers. She fought against the genetically modified 'terminator' seeds: seeds that produce only one crop and force farmers to buy new seeds each year from the suppliers. And she campaigns to stop the patenting of the sacred Neem tree, which Hindu stories say came from a drop of divine nectar carried to earth. Neem provides a natural and harmless alternative to pesticides, but global corporations have tried to patent it for their own use.

“Conserve ecology or perish”

This is the message of the **Bhagavad Gita**, a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna that is a clear and precise Life Science. It is narrated in the third chapter of this great work that a life without contribution toward the preservation of ecology is a life of sin and a life without specific purpose or use.

Life is sustained by different kinds of food; rainfall produces food; timely movement of clouds brings rains; to get the clouds moving on time yajna, religious sacrifice, helps; yajna is performed through rituals; those actions that produce rituals belong only to God; God is revealed by the Vedas; the Vedas are preserved by the human mind; and the human mind is nourished by food. This is the cycle that helps the existence of all forms of life on this globe.

One who does not contribute to the maintenance of this cycle is considered as a destroyer of all life here. When the Lord desired to create life, He created the Sun, Moon, and Earth, and through them a congenial atmosphere for life to come into being. Therefore the Sun, Moon, Earth, Stars and all objects in the universe jointly, not individually, create the atmosphere for the creation, sustenance, or destruction of everything in the universe. The Earth is the only daughter of the Sun to produce children. The Moon is essential for the creation of the right atmosphere for those children to exist and evolve. This we say because of the influence of the Moon on high and low tides in our rivers and oceans. This is narrated also in the **Bhagavad Gita**:

I become the moon and thereby supply the juice of life to all vegetables.

We cannot refute this influence of the Moon on life. It is proved by the movement of all liquid on this globe depending on the movement of the Moon. Therefore ecology in totality must be preserved: just a part of it would not suffice.

Hinduism and Nature

Hinduism is a religion that is very near to nature. It asks its followers to see God in every object in the Universe. Worship of God in air, water, fire, Sun, Moon, Stars, and Earth is specially recommended. Earth is worshipped as the spouse of God, hence very dear and near to God. All lives on Earth are considered as children of God and Earth.

Sri Krishna in the **Bhagavad Gita** says:

I pervade the Universe. All objects in the Universe rest on me as pearls on the thread of a garland. The Upanishads narrate that after creating the Universe, the Creator entered into each and every object to help them maintain their interrelationship. The Upanishad says “tat sristva ta devanu pravisat”: (“after creating the universe He entered into every object created”). Therefore to contribute toward the maintenance of this interrelationship becomes worship of God. Hindus believe that there is soul in all

plants and animals. One has to do penance even for killing plants and animals for food. This daily penance is called *visva deva*. *Visva deva* is nothing but an offering of prepared food to the Creator, asking His pardon.

The Hindu religion gives great importance to protecting cattle. At every Hindu house there is a cow and it is worshipped. The cow is a great friend of humans. It nourishes us through its milk and provides manure to grow our food. This it does without any extra demand—it lives on the fodder got while growing our food. Advanced countries have started to realize the harmful effects of consuming food grown with chemical manure. When we use chemical manure, the topsoil loses its fertility. This generation has no right to use up all the fertility of the soil and leave behind an unproductive land for future generations.

Humanity's contribution

There is no life that is inferior. All lives enjoy the same importance in the Universe and all play their fixed roles. They are to function together and no link in the chain is to be lost. If some link is lost, the whole ecological balance would be disturbed. All kinds of life—insects, birds, and animals—contribute toward the maintenance of ecological balance, but what is humanity's contribution toward this? Humans are intelligent animals; therefore our contribution should be the biggest. But it is not. We are nullifying the benefits of the contributions made by other species of life. We are disturbing the balance because of our greed for material enjoyment and our craze for power. We do not allow earthworms and bacteria to maintain the fertility of the soil by using chemical manures and insecticides that kill them. We destroy plants and forests indiscriminately and come in the way of plants providing oxygen essential for the very existence of life.

By destroying plants and forests we become agents for increasing the deadly carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We pollute the air by burning oil for all sorts of machines. We produce unhealthy sounds through our various machineries and instruments which cause sound pollution. By building towns and cities in the banks of rivers we pollute the water. The Hindu religion holds all rivers as holy; polluting them is a big sin. Hinduism encourages the planting of trees like Tulasi, Neem, Peepal which are rich in medicinal properties.

Rishis gave the navel to Brahma, the creator, and to the sustainer Vishnu they gave the heart as His abode. The destroyer, Shiva, was given control of the brain. By doing this they wanted us to know that the language of the heart only can sustain us—when we start speaking through the language of the mind our destruction becomes inevitable. Therefore, a thinking animal has to be very careful while it uses its mental abilities: these are to be applied only with spiritual background. Mind is to act as our friend and not as our enemy. It is to function under our control; we should not succumb to its control. "*Mana eva manusyanam karanam bandha moksayoh*": for human beings, mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation (Amrita Bindhu Upanishad 2).

Why was humanity created?

There should be a purpose for the creation of humanity. What it might be! We could be the sustainer of interrelationship among numerous life species on Earth. We are ones who can see God, and all objects, as the controller and sustainer of ecological balance. All other animals play their roles without knowing what they are doing, but humans do everything with full consciousness. God created the human mind to see His own reflection as in a mirror. The human mind can meditate on God and know him more and more.

When humanity develops consciousness of the presence of God and His continuous showering of blessings on the universe, it develops deep love for Him. To enjoy this nectar of love, God created people. Only people have a time-space conception. Therefore, only humanity can see God, pervading time-space, conserving the ecological balance which is the greatest boon bestowed on the universe by God. Though humans cannot contribute toward the conservation in the same way as other animals do, they can help all lives and other objects in the universe to play their roles effectively by persuading God through prayers of love to grant them the required energy and directions. "*Yavat bhumandalam datte samrigavana karnanam, tavat tisthati medhinyam santatih putra pautriki*": "so long as the Earth preserves her forests and wildlife, man's progeny will continue to exist." This is the Hindu approach toward the conservation of ecology.

SACRIFICE AND PROTECTION

Sacrifice

The Creator, in the beginning, created humans together with sacrifice, and said, **“By this you shall multiply. Let this be your cow of plenty and give you the milk of your desires. With sacrifice you will nourish the gods, and the gods will nourish you. Thus you will obtain the Highest Good.” (Bhagavad Gita 3:10–11)**

Sacrifice does not just mean ritual worship—it means an act that protects life. Personal health depends on eyes, ears, and other sense organs working together in harmony; human prosperity and happiness depend on a well-ordered society and nature; the universe is sustained by the cosmic powers such as the sun and moon working together in unison. Sacrifice reinvigorates the powers that sustain the world by securing cosmic stability and social order. It activates the positive forces of the universe, and protects the Earth from degeneration.

Nonviolence

God’s creation is sacred. Humanity does not have the right to destroy what it cannot create. Humans have to realize the interconnectedness of living entities and emphasize the idea of moral responsibility to oneself, one’s society, and the world as a whole. In our cosmic journey, we are involved in countless cycles of births and deaths. Life progresses into higher forms or regresses into lower forms of life based upon our good or bad karma. Kinship exists between all forms of life. Reincarnation warns us against treating lower forms of life with cruelty.

Cow protection

Man has evolved from lower forms of life. We are, therefore, related to the whole creation. The principle of cow protection symbolizes human responsibility to the subhuman world. It also indicates reverence for all forms of life. The cow serves humans throughout its life, and even after death. The milk of the cow runs in our blood. Its contributions to the welfare of the family and the community are countless. Hindus pray daily for the welfare of cows. When the cows are cared for, the world at all levels will find happiness and peace.

Earth as mother

Hindus revere the Earth as mother. She feeds, shelters, and clothes us. Without her we cannot survive. If we as children do not take care of her we diminish her ability to take care of us. Unfortunately the Earth herself is now being undermined by our scientific and industrial achievements.

The goal of human life

According to Hindu philosophy, the goal of human life is the realization of the state of peace. Dharma, loosely translated as religion, is the source by which peace can be fully realized. This peace is not the stillness of death; it is a dynamic harmony among all the diverse facets of life. Humanity, as part of the natural world, can contribute through dharma to this natural harmony.

The natural harmony that should exist in the play of energies between humanity and the natural world is now disrupted by the weakest player in the game: humanity. Although it is the totality of this game that provides our nourishment, through ignorance of our own natural limits we destroy this source of nourishment.

This awareness of ecological play or playful ecology is inseparable from awareness of the need for friendship and play as the real basis for human relationship. The family within which these relationships are nourished is not limited to its human members. Just as the human child has to be nourished by Mother Nature, and the human spirit has to be embraced and loved by beautiful nature, so the human being who has grown old or sick has to be supported by caring nature. If humans distress the mother, rape the beauty, and beat the caring nurse, what happens? The relationship collapses, and the family is broken.

The environment as our home

The Sanskrit for family is parivara, and environment is paryavarana. If we think of the environment as our home and all of its members as our family it is clear that the key to conserving nature is devotion, love—giving and serving. Nature, prakriti, as the feminine can give and serve. But the role of humanity, purusha, is then to protect. Nowadays purusha, humanity, is interested not in protecting but in exploiting, so prakriti, nature, has to defend herself. This is why we see nature in her furious manifestation—in drought,

floods, or hurricanes. If we rape the mother's womb she has convulsions, and we blame her for devastating earthquakes. If we denude her of her lush hair and beautiful skin, she punishes us by withholding food and water.

As it is through ignorance that we destroy our relationships in the family and within the environment, that ignorance becomes the root cause of our suffering. The best way to get rid of this ignorance is to unlearn what is wrong. This unlearning is shaped not only in the school but in the family and community, and it has to begin with the very young.

Traditional Hindu education covers all facets of life—economic, political, cultural, and above all religious. Whether we speak of Krishna, of Chaitanya, or of Gandhi, we see that they drew no clear division between the economic or political and the religious or cultural facets of life. The body and mind are in the service of the heart. In the same way politics and economics are rooted in and guided by religion and culture, and ultimately by spiritual experience.

JAINISM

Jainism transcends earthly concerns and seeks to grow beyond worldly existence. It is in essence, a religion of ecology, of sustainable life style, and of reverence for life. Their religion's entire emphasis is on life consonant with ecology. By seeing everything as alive and worthy of worship, Jainism decentralizes and universalize ethics, minimizes anthropocentrism, highlights the urgency of all life and evokes immediacy and care.

Ahimsa: non-violence

This central teaching of Jainism was made famous in recent times by Mahatma Gandhi, who was greatly influenced by Jain ideas. He made ahimsa the guiding principle of his struggle for social freedom and equality. Ahimsa means more than not hurting others, it means not intending to cause harm, physical, mental or spiritual, to any part of nature, for, in the words of **Mahavira: 'You are that which you wish to harm.'**

Compassion

This is the positive aspect of non-violence: to practice an attitude of compassion towards all life. Jains pray that forgiveness and friendliness may reign throughout the world and that all living beings may cherish each other.

Interdependence

This ancient Jain principle teaches that all of nature is bound together, and says that if one does not care for nature one does not care for oneself.

Self-restraint

An important Jain principle is not to waste the gifts of nature, and even to reduce one's needs as far as possible. As Gandhi said, 'There is enough in this world for human needs, but no for human wants.'

The Jain tradition emphasizes ahimsa (non violence); reveres all forms of life; requires its adherents to engage only in certain types of livelihood, based on the principle of ahimsa. Jainism is a religion of compassion- it aims at the welfare of all living beings. An important principle of Jainism is expressed in Sutrakrta-anga as follows: **"A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated."** Inflicting an injury to other beings is inflicting injury to oneself.

The 'Jiva' is to be respected. As the most highly evolved form of life, human beings have a great moral responsibility in their mutual dealing and relationship with the rest of the universe.

Jainism calls on people to respect acknowledge and protect the commonality of life in order to ascend to higher spiritual state.

In Jainism 'Karma' accounts for the existence of various life forms: each life form will eventually take on a new existence as part of the on going process of 'Samsara', to be halted only when one, as a human being, attains spiritual liberation. The rules laid out by Mahivira lead one toward liberation and minimize and eliminate karma nature. For instance he states that hardened rock can survive as a distinct life form for twenty- two thousand years. Each form demonstrates four characteristics; life, breath, bodily strength and the sense of touch. Thus, it preaches the ideal of respecting life in even the most elementary creature.

BUDDHISM

The strong connection that people felt with nature is illustrated particularly in the study of the Buddha, whose life, in which all the most significant events occurring the country side and are associated with trees: his birth at Lumbini as his mother grasped the branch of a Sal tree, his early experience of states of meditative absorption beneath the rose apple tree, his Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi-tree, and his parinirvana (death) between twin Sal trees.

Buddhist teachings require every person to consider right livelihood and the impact that would have on society and the environment.

All beings are connected

Buddhism teaches that the idea of separateness is an illusion. The health of the whole is inseparably linked to the health of the parts, and the health of the parts is inseparably linked to the health of the whole. This means that caring for the environment begins with caring for oneself: 'When our hearts are good, the sky will be good to us,' says Venerable Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia, a founding patron of ARC.

Respect for life

Buddhist practice makes one feel one's existence is no more important than anyone else's. If one treats nature as a friend and teacher, one can be in harmony with other creatures and appreciate the interconnectedness of all that lives.

Simplicity and moderation

Buddha taught people to live simply and appreciate the natural cycle of life. Craving and greed only bring unhappiness, since demands for material possessions can never be satisfied and people will always demand more, so threatening the environment. This is why the real solution to the environmental crisis begins with the individual.

Buddhists in Japan tell a story. The Buddha once received a donation of 500 new robes for his followers. So he considered what to do with the old ones. They would be used for bed-sheets, he decided. And the old sheets would become towels. And the old towels would be used as cleaning rags. Everything should be used and reused.

Right livelihood

According to Buddhism, the way you earn your livelihood – not killing, not stealing, not taking more than you need – all these are part of the Buddhist way of life. A livelihood that avoids harming others, such as trading in weapons, meat, alcohol or poisons – is in harmony with nature.

JUDAISM

The Jewish attitude to nature is based on the belief that the universe is the work of the Creator. Love of God includes love of all His creations: the inanimate, plants, animals and humans. Nature in all its beauty is created for us, and our connection to nature restores us to our original state of happiness and joy.

The Bible informs us that the earth is given to man 'to use and protect'. But the 'dominion' mentioned in the Bible is not the dominion of a tyrant. God's mercy extends to all He has created, as is written, 'the earth is founded upon mercy'.

The Sabbatical Year

This is the core conservation principle in the Bible:

Six years shall you sow your field, and six years shall you prune your vineyard, and gather in the produce thereof. But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath unto the Lord; you shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. (Leviticus 25:1-5)

According to Maimonides, one of the goals of ceasing all agricultural activity is to improve and strengthen the land. Sabbath is a return to nature.

Altering Creation

The Bible says we must preserve the natural balance of creation. Every species was created for some purpose and should not be interfered with.

You shall not let your cattle gender with a diverse kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; neither shall there come upon you a garment of two kinds of stuff mingled together. (Leviticus 19:19)

Wasteful Destruction

Jewish teachings prohibit the destruction of anything from which humans may benefit. This applies to animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. Even in time of war, the Bible forbids the destruction of fruit-bearing trees. Sages compared the death of a tree to the departure of man's soul from his body:

'When people cut down the wood of a tree that yields fruit, its cry goes from one end of the world to the other, and the sound is inaudible... When the soul departs from the body, the cry goes forth from one end of the world to the other, and the sound is inaudible.' **Based on the Windsor Statements.**

CHRISTIANITY

The central theological theme of Catholicism is to build up the kingdom of God by becoming one body, one spirit in Christ with all of God's children. It is believed that we are all essentially connected. This belief easily expands to all of God's creations. Building up the 'Kingdom' is actually rediscovering the 'Divine' order and harmony of creation and aligning ourselves to God's Plan or God's 'flow' as it were. When God was creating the world, as depicted in the 'Book of Genesis', he periodically looked back on what he had done and pronounced, "it was good". This implies certain order, harmony and complementarities which were inherently good and necessary.

"God said; let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

-GENESIS 1:26

Speaking for the Catholic Church in 1990, the Pope said, 'Christians realise their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.'

For the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate taught in 1990 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 Orthodox Church teaches that it is the destiny of humanity to restore the proper relationship between God and the world as it was in Eden.

The Protestant Churches, speaking through the World Council of Churches in 1990, committed themselves to conserve and work for the integrity of creation both for its inherent value to God and in order that justice may be achieved and sustained

Christians increasingly recognise the need to repent for what harm has been done to creation. In the words of the Orthodox Patriarchate, "This may well mean that just as a shepherd will in times of greatest hazard lay down his life for his flock, so human beings may need to forego part of their wants and needs in order that the survival of the natural world can be assured.

The challenge to all Christians 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 Galatians 6:7 says:

"God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow your own flesh, you will reap corruption... So let us not grow weary in doing what is right ... Let us work for the good of all."

This leads to the idea of environmental stewardship, holding man responsible for his fate. We all are reaping that has been, and continues to be, sown. Christianity is therefore capable of being fully in sync with environmental stewardship.

ISLAM

The Islamic understanding of the natural environment, including other things which may be called Islamic, has its roots in the Qur'an, the very word of God, the central premise of Islam. The main purpose of the Qur'an, according to M. Iqbal is "to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and universe". The holy Qur'an refers to the grand cosmic system of the creators as "al-Mizan". The Quranic perspective of environment and of man-nature relationship has been studied in recent decades by Muslim scholars. A careful study of the Qur'an from an ecological point of view brings the following ideas:

Khalifa - trusteeship

Muslims believe that Allah created humans to be guardians of His creation. In other words, nature does not belong to us to do with as we wish, but is entrusted by Allah to our safe-keeping.

'The world is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his guardian over it,' taught the prophet Muhammad.

Tawheed - unity

The central concept of Islam is tawheed, or unity. Allah is unity, and His unity is reflected in the unity of humanity and nature. We must therefore maintain the integrity of the Earth, its flora and fauna, its wildlife and environment. Our responsibility is to keep balance and harmony in Allah's creation.

Akrah - accountability

Islam teaches that we will one day be judged by Allah for how we have discharged our responsibilities following the guidance of Islam. Have we been good trustees, and have we kept nature in harmony? So there will be a day of reckoning.

Avoid waste

It is said in the Qur'an that Allah invites us to enjoy the fruits of the earth, but to avoid excess leading to waste, 'for Allah does not love wasters.'

Shariah

All these principals have been translated into practical directions for how to live, embodied in the Shariah, the laws of Islam. For example, Shariah law protects animals from cruelty, conserves forests, and limits the growth of cities.

SIKHISM

The sikh spiritual path has its origins with Guru Nanak who lived in the Punjab area of India/Pakistan during the 15th century. Guru Nanak's world was beset with challenges, which he addressed in his teachings. Nanak's teachings were preserved and developed by a succession of nine Sikh Gurus for the next 200 years until 1699, when the last living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh formalized a distinct religious identity.

The foundation to sikh thought is called the "Mul Mantra" (root mantra). It begins with "Ek Ong Kar, Sat Nam, Karta Purkh" meaning "there is one and only one creation to which all manifestation belongs; this is our true identity."

Inner truth

Sikhs teach that humans create their surroundings as a reflection of their inner state, and hence the increasing barrenness of the earth reflects a spiritual emptiness within humans. The solution according to Sikhism can be found in prayer and the spirit of humility before the divine will of God.

Sanctity of nature

Sikhs cultivate an awareness and respect for the dignity of all life, human or otherwise. Such respect is fostered where one first recognises and nurtures the divine inner spark within oneself, then sees it and cherishes it in others.

The history of the Gurus is full of stories of their love for animals, birds, trees, vegetation, rivers, mountains and sky. Many Sikhs, though not all, also have a strong tradition of being vegetarian. A simple life free from conspicuous waste is the Sikh ideal - a life that stresses mastery over the self rather than mastery over nature.

Equality and service

Sikhism places a strong emphasis on equality and service. This encourages a spirit of co-operation and an equal sharing of resources. For example, the langar, or community kitchen, is maintained by the voluntary services of the community and the donation of foodstuffs by the farmers.

In the Punjab, where many Sikhs are farmers, water is seen as a source of life, bringing food for humans and animals. The element of water is therefore a primary link in the interdependence of humanity and nature, to be used in a sustainable and fair way. In particular access to clean water is a focus for the community and the Gurdwara is often sited beside a water tank or a river.

The Sikh Gurus recognized human responsibility towards nature. They impressed upon people the necessity of studying and respecting it. Guru Nanak said: "**The earth is your mother. Respect for mother earth is the only solution to these problems (meaning destruction of forests leading to soil erosion).**"

CONCLUSION

Scientific research and development has empowered mankind with an apparent technological superiority over nature. So much so that man has been blinded by his greed and has tried to run the natural order like a presiding deity of the modern era. Lacking in the austere self discipline his emphasis has been on rights and not duties or obligations. This has led to discernable dysfunctions in the form of environmental degradation which raises serious question regarding the long term viability of modern society and the very existence of mankind.

Religion can provide a respite to this narrow mindedness. "Realigning environmental conservation with a spiritually satisfying path produces a glimpse of an unfathomable process." Treating individual behaviour, inspired by religion can lead to the development of viable and innovative regulatory instruments that have the prospect of achieving environmental protection at a relatively lower cost. Religious scholars and opinion leaders can identify and propagate information that is most likely to induce changes in environmental behaviour and can help contribute to the world at large. The abyss that seems to exist between religious and scientific factions is disappointing. Certainly, conserving and protecting our natural resources should be of as much benefit to one and all. It makes no difference whether our time on this earth is ten more years or ten thousand. We should all work together to conserve its resources and protect its beauty as judiciously and wisely as we can. All of us are guilty of selfishness in the use of the land that was created by some creator of unimaginable brilliance – a creator who made all creatures and plants dependent upon one another. By working together for the good of the earth upon which we live, we ensure our own health, wealth and prosperity. There is an urgent need to emphasize the spiritual dimension, which is lacking in our modern approaches and attitudes to all issues connected with the long-term future. **"WE ARE WHAT WE THINK; ALL THAT WE ARE ARISES WITH OUR THOUGHTS; WITH OUR THOUGHTS WE MAKE THE WORLD."**

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