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HARMONY IN NATURE: The Role of Right Understanding

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Abstract: Environmental problems are due to myopic human engagement with the course of nature. Our ill-treatment of the biomes has resulted in ecological hazards of deteriorating human health, extinction of various species, global warming, and natural calamities. These problems have put a question mark on human understanding of the interconnectedness of ecological factors. The present article, in the first section, clarifies the confusions between wealth and prosperity and suggests that they are not identical. Whereas the former is understood as a substantial accumulation of physical facilities/properties, the latter relates to the feeling of having more than the required physical facilities/properties. The second section focuses on different levels of existence and their interconnectedness, following the Madhyastha Darśana propounded by Agrahar Nagraj (1920-2016). The third section surveys the relevant literature to explore and compare his perspectives with Western thinkers. The concluding section reflects on the solution offered by Nagraj to emphasise the relevancy of his viewpoints on the ecological matters discussed in the contemporary scenario.

Keywords: Agrahar Nagraj, Harmony, Interconnectedness, Madhyastha Darśana, Nature, Prosperity, Sah-astitvavāda.

1. Introduction

Human beings, due to their inventive minds, have accumulated in their basket enough of synthetic products having no counterpart in nature. Consequently, the quality of the natural environment is

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seriously impaired. In the introduction to the 20th-anniversary edition of his *Sophi's World*, the Norwegian writer Jostein Gaarder says, "If I were to write a philosophical novel today, I would have focused a lot more on how we treat our planet (xi). Ill-treatment of the biomes has repercussions in terms of global warming and natural calamities taking place every year worldwide (Horton and Horton 87-88). Gaarder's concern was coterminous with the adoption of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by all member states of the United Nations in 2015 as a necessary call of collective efforts to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity to all people by 2030. The SDG-16, *inter alia*, talks about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Only considerate people of a harmonious society could establish a mutually fulfilling and enriching relationship with themselves and the environment. The basic character of such a society is fearlessness (*abhaya*), according to Agrahar Nagraj. Fearlessness is understood as a state of society where people trust each other and recognise their natural co-existence and complementarity (Nagraj, *Vyavahārātmaka,* 41-43). Since the well-being of the people is at the centre of the SDGs, it is necessary not only to generate enough wealth so that the basic needs of everyone are fulfilled but equally important is the creation of an equitable social environment and preservation of nature so that every individual is assured of continuous prosperity. Sine qua non to such a situation is the right understanding in the people.

Understanding is foundational to every behavioural response. Human problems are primarily due to a lack of the right understanding. One of the conspicuous examples of the problematic understanding is confusion between wealth and prosperity in the minds of the people. The first and foremost objective of the present article is to clarify this confusion and show that wealth and prosperity are not identical. A person or family can be called wealthy if it possesses more physical property and facilities than it can personally utilise or consume. But there may not be a feeling of prosperity in the person or family due to the desire for further accumulation of wealth. In fact, prosperity relates to the feeling of having or being able to produce more than the required wealth. The feeling of prosperity is necessarily associated with the adequacy of resources in the environment. The second

section, therefore, explores different levels of existence to demonstrate the interconnectedness between them.

The lack of the right understanding about interconnectedness and prosperity has led to the present level of overconsumption of the world population, which requires 1.75 planet earth (www.footprint network.org); unfortunately, we have just one. The Global Footprint Network[1] declares Earth Overshoot Day (EOD), an imaginary point in a calendar year when humanity's demand exceeds what the Earth can regenerate in that year. The concept of *biocapacity* represents the productivity of ecological assets (including agricultural land, grazing land, forest land, fishing grounds, habitats, etc.). If the demand for natural resources by the people of a particular region exceeds the biocapacity of the region, it is called ecological or biocapacity deficit. Due to incremental human consumption, every year, this deficit is increasing. Depending on the socio-economic status of a country, a variegated consumption pattern and ecological impact are noticed. In 2017, the US had a biocapacity deficit of 4.6; consequently, the ecological footprint is 8.0 compared to 3.4 unit biocapacity per person of the country's soil (data.footprint network.org). India has a deficit of 0.8 units. People of these regions consume more than what can be supported by the soil of their country. To fill this gap, the additional resources of consumption must come from some other parts of the world, which would lead to disparity as well as an unsustainable pattern of consumption. The irreversible depletion of resources is a greater concern of our time; it is, therefore, essential to understand and emphasise the interconnectedness of the factors of the environment in search of a solution. This exercise is taken up as the third objective of the article.

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[1]The 1970 EOD fell on 30th December and from then onwards there has been a gradual deterioration. The last five EODs are 30th July (2017), 25th July (2018), 26th July (2019), 22nd August (2020) and 29th July (2021). On these particular days, the humanity is said to have exhausted the Nature's budget and entered in an ecological deficit in the respective years. One may notice a slight improvement in the year 2020 due to lockdown of economic activities in view of COVID19. On this Wackernagel remarks that "The goal is to move the date by design, and not by disaster" (Toussaint, www.fastcompany.com).

The conclusion proposes a solution to the problem, which lies in creating the right understanding among the populace. The basic conceptual resources are drawn from the Madhyastha Darśana propounded by Agrahar Nagraj (1920-2016). His philosophy is deeply rooted in the ethos of Indian culture, which is characteristically non-anthropocentric or holistic.

2. Wealthy is not Necessarily Prosperous

The Objective of SDG-12 is to "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns," which cannot be fulfilled unless harmony is attained at different levels of existence, that is, Individual, Family, Society, and Nature/Existence (Gaur, Sangal and Bagaria 49-50). The SDGs are necessitated by the environmental problems caused by a problematic understanding of human well-being: maximising accumulation and consumption of natural resources will ensure human well-being. This perspective effectuated a worldwide race of amassing physical facilities and exploiting natural resources, believing that such possessions would ensure happiness and prosperity. Further prevailing misunderstanding is that physical facilities are *ipso facto* the means of happiness than being the requirement of our body which is definitely limited. Such confusion leads to a wrong assessment that we require unlimited physical facilities for our continuous well-being, resulting in unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.

Physical facilities are necessary for our survival and bodily well-being. We need to take care of the nourishment for our bodies, and the nutrients come from the resources available in nature. Continuous availability of these things is necessary for the sustenance of life on the planet Earth. Nagraj in his Madhyastha Darśana or Sah-astitvavāda provides a framework to understand the human existence vis-á-vis the rest of nature with the prime focus on discovering the inherent co-existence (*sah-astitva*) and harmony (*vyavasthā*) at all levels of existence. According to this system of thought of modern India, the reality is plural, and therefore the existence of things is co-existence only. Among all creatures of the planet, only human beings can recognise the co-existence and live their lives according to such recognition (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana*, vi). The other creatures live their life on the basis of their recognition of the elements and instincts for survival;

they lack the competence of realising the co-existence of the material and living things the way humans do. People living with a confounded understanding of this matter live at the level of animal consciousness. Therefore, he defines right understanding as the capacity to recognise the co-existence of the elements of reality and live a harmonious life as per the recognition. The ultimate goal of human life is to attain harmony at all levels of existence, namely, individual, family, society, and nature (Nagraj, *Vyavahāravādī,* 21).

Sah-astitvavāda advocates that a human being, as an individual, is to be identified as the co-existence of Self (*jīvana*) and Body (*śarīra*). Both the dimensions have distinct identifying marks and requirements. Every human individual has knowledge, desires, thoughts, beliefs, imaginations, expectations, and choices. These characteristics are indicative of the non-physical dimension of an individual called *jīvana*. This proposal seems very close to the Nyāya, a classical system of Indian philosophy organised by Gotama (c. 4th century BCE), where the existence of an immaterial self (*ātman*) is accepted on these grounds because these properties are immaterial. However, there is a significant difference between these two metaphysical proposals: whereas the Nyāya system accepts the Self (*ātman*) as one of the knowable substances in reality (Gotama, *NS*, 1.1.9), the Saha-astitvavāda proposes an evolutionary model which explains the emergence of life (*jīvana-paramāṇu*) from the physical and chemical units in the process of evolution. "Material nature itself attains the conscious plane upon progress" (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana*, xxxvi). The physical dimension of a human individual is the body which is material and is sustained by the material things.

Both the dimensions (self and body) of an individual have distinct requirements for sustenance. On the one hand, human beings look for adequate physical facilities (*suvidhā*), and on the other hand, relationships with other individuals for happiness (*sukha*). The basic aspiration of every individual is to live a fulfilling life (*tripti-pūrṇa jīvana*), that is, to have the continuity of both – *suvidhā* and *sukha*. The body requires *suvidhā,* and the self requires *sukha*, which is defined as being in a favourable state of existence, an outcome of the solution-oriented approach in which the conduct is rooted in the sense of justice (*nyāyapūrṇa-vyavahāra*), and the thought process is infused with the sense of duty (*dharmapūrṇa*

ācāra). Prosperity is understood as the 'feeling of having or being able to produce more than the required physical facilities; in other words, it is a state of the absence of the absence of physical facilities, or their production is in excess of definite-needs (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana,* 66). In order to determine the requirement of physical facilities, one needs to draw first a line regarding the volume of the basic physical requirements; only then it can be decided whether the produced / accumulated physical facilities are more or not.

The Sanskrit equivalent to the expression 'prosperity' is *samṛddhi*: 'prosperity' denotes the state of 'being successful in terms of having more material wealth' and *samṛddhi* means 'the feeling of abundance'. Nagraj uses this expression to associate the *feeling* of abundance with respect to the possession of physical facilities. Given the prevailing disparity of wealth and attitude, it seems impossible to draft a universal rule for each individual. However, with the creation of a right understanding in the individuals, it is possible to enable every individual to decide and fix the basic requirements, and anything additional—so individually ascertained—would generate the feeling of abundance in the individual. This is necessary because we are busy with ourselves most of the time—making some plans, thinking about doing something to ensure the availability of physical facilities. Even in the pursuit of knowledge, this concern takes priority over the others. Very little time is spent on generating the right understanding so that every individual can ascertain his / her basic needs, a sine qua non to the feeling of prosperity. This underlies the significance of right understanding.

3. Needed Clarity about Needs

We have to start with ourselves and study ourselves, understanding our desires, wants, and behaviour. So far, we have ended up assuming things without really investigating ourselves. We have read many books, we have gone through years of silent and subtle conditioning about who we are, what we want and how we should behave, what works we should do, in short, 'how to live!' We have to begin 'knowing' ourselves and test our beliefs against what is naturally acceptable for us. Because modern life seems largely artificial, proper guidance is missing from the overall

web of modern education regarding the right understanding of the requirements of relationships and physical facilities. Children are taught to pursue their studies so as to make a livelihood. They are always alerted by their parents, teachers, and friends about it. Everyone is left alone to take care of the right understanding part for oneself.

The second level of our existence pertains to family life. The (consanguineal) family in which we are born is recognised as the first and immediate unit of relationships for each of us, and subsequently, we live in relationships with our siblings, friends, teachers, neighbours, co-workers, and others. These are the people we live with daily; to recognise someone as a family member or an outsider depends on how one recognises oneself and feels connected to the other human, another person. Nagraj claims that one's own understanding of oneself leads to understanding the other, and this understanding becomes the basis of one's relationship with the other. When we understand ourselves, we can understand the other, and this forms the basis of the relationship. He also proposes that relationship is between the non-physical dimensions of the individuals: Relationship exists between the self (in me) and the self (in the other). Any other sense of relationship would lead to intractable difficulties. For instance, if someone wants to establish a relationship between one's self and the body of the other or vice versa, sooner or later, it ends up in the problems of exploitation and disharmony (Gaur, Sangal, and Bagaria 128). In order to ensure harmony in the family, we need to recognise the fact of the relationship and understand the expectations of the relatives and whether they can be fulfilled.

Every family is part of a larger group of people; there are interdependencies among them for food, clothing, housing, services, health, education, justice, etc. Each of us lives as part of this human system. This is our society. As we understand ourselves and our relationship with others in the family, we also understand the other in society and are able to fulfil our relationship with them. A harmonious society is one where there is no social, economic, and political fear in the people. Finally, we are on this planet Earth: with plains, mountains, flora, fauna, and other humans surrounding us, and we live in this large eco-system that we call nature. This eco-system or natural habitat is surrounded by a more extensive system

of terrestrial bodies in the infinite expansion of the universe. Nagraj articulates his understanding of the plural reality as being submerged in the universally pervasive thing (*vyāpaka vastu*). There is a process of evolution of the atoms in reality; the atoms which have attained the state of fulfilment in this process are called life atoms (*jīvana paramāṇu*). These constitutionally complete living atomic units are foundational to every form of life on planet Earth (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana,* xii). The present cosmos and its order is an evolutionary outcome in which everything is connected with other things.

In the journey of evolution, the completeness of anything is measured against its "participation in the greater order of reality." In his teleological proposal, Nagraj argues that "the ultimate purpose of Cosmic order is effortlessness and its evidence is awakened human tradition only. Therefore, every human being in delusion also thirsts for effortlessness" (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana,* 58). Effortlessness may be understood as a common feature of the whole of reality to remain in the most natural state of being. Every unit in reality is, by nature, energised and evolving. Moreover, the evolutionary process has to reach its culmination.[2] In order to outline the difference between the features of the material and conscious units, Nagraj defines material things (*jaḍavastu*) as the units "without any thought-aspect, whose span of function is limited to its length, width and height" (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana,* 74). Therefore, the material units are bound by their dimensions for their activities in their expressions.

On the other hand, the conscious units (*caitanya*), which evolve from materials, are the kinds of units "whose span of function is more than its length, width and height and whose thought-aspect is active" (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana*, 74). The additional feature is understood as the revelatory feature—the ability to perceive or know things (*dṛṣṭisampannatā*) (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana*, 86-88).

[2] The Law of Conservation of Mass, as explained by Antoine Lavoisier (1743-1794), suggests that the mass is 'neither created nor destroyed in chemical reactions.' This law can be taken to be the material expression of the feature of effortlessness in the plural material reality despite a definite and observable change in the chemical compositions (Sterner, Small and Hood).

Both kinds of units—physical-chemical and life—are eternally present and active. The natural process of transformation of material atoms (*jaḍa paramāṇu*) to conscious atoms (*jīvana/caitanya paramāṇu*) is irreversible. According to Nagraj, a conscious atom is the most advanced status of Nature (*Madhyastha Darśana,* 306). But these two kinds of atoms are complementary to each other. Their complementarity is evident in the continuous process of replenishment of physical elements through the consumption of food, etc., in an individual's living body. The pattern of individual consumption is directly connected with the collective resources available to humanity. It is, therefore, necessary to ensure a responsible pattern of consumption at the individual level by the consumer himself/herself. One of the ways to ensure this is through the system of education (in the institution of family as well as society) where relevant discussions need to be regularly held with young minds to orient them towards a sustainable pattern of taste (*āsvādana*) and consumption (*bhoga*).

An individual *feels* prosperous when more consumables are at his/her disposal than is required for his/her mental and physical well-being. The question is how much accumulation of wealth will ensure such feelings in an individual and society. The present environmental problems are largely due to a wrong assessment of the nature of human beings' role and requirements of physical needs. This can be seen primarily in the consumption patterns of the relatively affluent population in purchasing clothes, shoes, toys, beauty products, electronic gadgets, vehicles, refrigerators, air conditioners, etc. They buy these not because they need them, but because they can afford them. Such affluent lifestyles result in the alarming effect of the present level of carbon emission reported in the sixth physical science Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. On the basis of cloud processes and subtle observations of the data collected over a longer period (AR5 was released in 2013) about the climate changes, the report concludes that this figure (about carbon emission) is "likely" (a two-thirds chance or greater) to lie between 2.5° and 4°C—halving the spread of 1.5° to 4.5°C in previous reports" (Sherwood and Hoskins). The present level of atmospheric CO_2 due to the industrialisation and centralised production "reached concentrations not seen for at least 2 million years."

Moreover, it is observed that "oceans, plants, and soils will become less efficient at absorbing future carbon emissions" (Sherwood and Hoskins). Even without any survey, one can confidently say that this problem is not due to the consumption pattern of the poor population of the world. Needless to mention that the ill-effect of environmental degradation is received by every individual irrespective of their individual contribution to the problem. It shows the interconnectedness of the ecological factors across the globe. It is, therefore, necessary to highlight the interconnectedness from the perspective of the Madhyastha Darśana.

4. Interconnectedness Explained

Nagraj presents the evolution in four stages: Materials, Plants, Animals and Humans. The material order (*padārtha avasthā*) includes physical and chemical units such as soil, stone, gems, and metals in the form of solid, liquid, and gaseous matter. This order has multiple compositions of various material bodies due to various compositions and decompositions of the material atoms. There is no conclusive evidence that these things happen in a controlled way, or there is something that controls them except the laws of nature. The material order supports the plant and animal life on the Earth, and plants and animals (human excluded) get decomposed in the natural material order without leaving any footprint on the environment. Similarly, the plant order (called *prāṇa avasthā* due to its respiratory activity) and the animal order (called *jīva avasthā* due to its manifest survival instinct) are in perfect harmony with each other. Thus, the interconnection between the plant order and the animal order is natural and harmonious. But when it comes to human order (called *jñāna avasthā* due to a significant role of understanding, besides survival instincts, in the behaviour of human species), we notice, *inter alia*, the question of sustainable development (Nagraj, *Mānava Vyavahāra*, 6-15).

The global ecological challenges are due to a problematic relationship between the human order and the rest of the orders. Human beings draw physical resources from nature for their existence and sustenance, but what they return to nature exceeds its recyclability. The interconnectedness between the four orders is such that excluding the human order, the remaining three orders

are in harmony in nature. It is assumed that there must be something unique that elevates human beings' status to exercise control over other forms of life. In search of an answer, Xenophon's (c. 430-354 BCE) *Memorabilia of Socrates* can profitably be used.

The dialogue is between Socrates (c. 469–399 BCE) and Aristodemus, an inquisitive dwarf. Aristodemus airs his scepticism that gods do not seem to be worried at all about human beings as is evident in the vagaries of pain in every walk of human life; if they were, he would have respected them, he said. In response to his sceptical remarks, Socrates points out gods' endowment to human beings in terms of the upright posture for effective movement and vigilance, skilled hands for industry, articulative tongue for explicit communication, ability to enjoy sexual pleasures up to old age, implantation of soul and rationality to guard oneself and the loved ones against odds, making them skilful through education, and the ability to remember what is known through different sense organs. Thus, the uniqueness of a human being is presented in terms of superior physical and mental capabilities (Xenophon 24-25). It is believed that an anthropocentric approach towards nature resulted from such classical ideas. Anthropocentrism thus became a perspective that considers humans as the most important life form. The other life forms are important only to the extent that they share some characteristics similar to human beings, or they affect humans, or they are useful to them. From this perspective, the human concern for the preservation of nature is seen as motivated by self-interest because nature plays an instrumental role in human well-being. One may be inclined to think that the aforesaid anthropocentric conception is responsible for the present environmental problems.

Some criticise the biblical account in which God declared humans as the custodian of other forms of life because such a decree appears giving license to human beings to use nature and other creatures as means. Another perspective emerging from the same biblical account of human superiority tells a different story: with unique endowments, human beings are directed to look after, not to destroy, the other forms of life and nature (Singer 266). The instrumental value of nature is still a powerful viewpoint in which the deliberations move around its utility for humans for long-term interest, aesthetic experience, or the goodness of future generations.

The American philosopher Paul Tayler extends the human-centric teleology to every sentient being in nature since they all appear pursuing their good in their own way. Such a concern enables an individual to associate intrinsic value with every form of life. The American deep ecologist Aldo Leopold and the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess would argue for the preservation of the biosphere for its own sake (Cf. Singer 279-280). But the Australian philosopher Peter Singer, as a liberal utilitarian, does not find the deep ecologists' argument convincing since he thinks that the worth of the biosphere is seen in relation to its supportive role for the existence of conscious beings only.

As discussed earlier, Nagraj clearly states that other conscious beings are in harmony with nature. The problem is only with human beings since it is their activities that lead to environmental issues. Human beings are capable of using and also misusing, nurturing as well as exploiting the cosmic order. Their ability lies in their competence in knowing the inherent characteristics of natural resources. With a deluded understanding of the interconnectedness between the units of nature (technologically skilled), human beings act without realising the long-term effect of their deeds; further crippled by the influence of fear and greed, they end up exploiting nature. Nagraj equates a deluded human consciousness (*bhramita jñānāvasthā*) with animal consciousness (*jīvāvasthā*) of here and now. He proposes that the solution lies with an awakened human consciousness (*jāgṛta jñānāvasthā*) which, in the contemporary scenario, can be created through education (*śikṣā*) and inculcation of right living (*saṁskāra*). He reinforces his analysis by alluding to the classical Indian philosophical notion of *koṣa* with his original interpretation.

Nagraj defines *koṣa* as a specific component of the reality that performs a definite activity with certain intent and purpose. It is the state of being enriched with the energy essential for making an effort by an entity. To him, the entire reality involves innumerable energised units in the space. These units are categorised into five *koṣas*: *Annamaya Koṣa* (the things with the character of composition and decomposition), *Prāṇamaya Koṣa* (the component with the ability of respiration along with the features of the first *koṣa*), *Manomaya Koṣa* (the component with the ability of selection), *Ānandamaya Koṣa* (the component which expresses the feeling of

happiness or misery), and *Vijñānamaya Koṣa* (the component with the ability to know the reasons behind any occurrence). Nagraj says that among other orders of reality, only human order involves the potential of receiving full expression of these five *koṣas* in it. In a deluded human being, only the first four *koṣas* are manifested, and the last one (*Vijñānamaya Koṣa*) lies dormant, and therefore he/she lives a life of consumption, sleep, fear, and copulation (*āhāra, nidrā, bhaya*, and *maithuna*). *Vijñānamaya Koṣa* can be developed through the process of a holistic education—i.e. the facilitator of right understanding (Nagraj, *Mānava Vyavahāra*, 13). People with the right understanding can establish a harmonious relationship with nature.

The proposal of the Madhyastha Darśana, also called Astitva-mūlaka mānava-kendrita chintana, creates an opportunity to realise the interconnectedness of units in the cosmos. In order to facilitate such reflection and feelings, it is emphasised that the tools available in the modern education system need to be harnessed in such a way that the interrelationship between different orders of existence is realised and only those patterns of production and consumption are adopted which ensure harmony at different levels of nature.

An educated and awakened human being is supposed to conduct with the less-evolved nature so that he/she realises good use and purposefulness (Nagraj, *Madhyastha Darśana*, xxxvi). The foundational proposal for discussing harmony at the level of nature is: existence is co-existence. Every unit in the space is energised (*ūrjita*), and therefore, whatever happens to any unit anywhere in the space, affects the other units. The threat to these units' interconnectedness seems to come largely from two major concerns that need to be addressed for global peace and harmony: the utilitarian conception of nature and the development and use of modern technology. The utilitarian conception of nature is said to be the most powerful of all current conceptions because it is the main philosophy of the governments in the world and people's common mentality. Most of the traditional ecological issues are outcomes of this attitude. Moreover, the American marine biologist Rachel Carson (1907-1964), in her best-selling *Silver Spring*, observes that "Today we are concerned with a different kind of hazard that lurks in our environment—a hazard we ourselves have introduced into our world as our modern way of life has evolved" (Carson

100). She indicates the hazards which are due to excessive use of chemicals and pesticides in farming and food preservation, and radiations in various forms, including emissions in research and development. According to Nagraj, the root cause of the problem is fear: fear of nature, animals, and inhumanness in humans. Human beings seek to overcome these fears by way of using and enjoying the objects made from natural abundance. Such an approach led to the exploitation of natural resources and fellow beings.

The Madhyastha Darśana proposes that the ethics of good use of available means (body, mind, and wealth) of living beings are to be determined. Each of us needs to realise and draw a line of basic minimum needs individually and be moderate in accumulation and consumption. Any excess would finally affect the course of nature since it is the only provider for all. Biospherical egalitarianism—recognition of the equal rights of every component of the environment to live and blossom—seems to be the urgent need of the hour. With respect to collective responsibility towards the environment, Naess proposes *ecosophy*—a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium, which integrates theoretical analysis with normative prescription (Naess 99). Here *Sophia* clearly indicates the wisdom which integrates knowledge with action. The prescriptive part of ecosophy needs to be reemphasised in view of the fact that there are wide disagreements, particularly among the high carbon-emitting countries, with respect to the 17th SDG, which is meant to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development" (UNDP). In this context, Jose Nandhikkara's editorial remark is conspicuous: "Realising the noble goal of SDGs is not just an economic development problem that could be solved through science and technology, market economy, and political power; it is an ethical problem and needs ethical vision and action plan,' also that 'ethics should guide our partnerships for people and planet, for peace and prosperity" (4).

Nagraj, in his *Anubhavātmaka Adhyātmavāda*, aspires to make this very planet Earth a divine place to live and humans as divine denizens (*bhūmi svargatām yātu, manuṣyo yātu devatām* 271). He observes that this aspiration is fulfilled neither by Idealism, which led our search for something beyond the planet, nor by Materialism, which reduces life to crassly material organisation. The former perspective promoted asceticism and the latter,

consumerism. The exploration of reality in human tradition has been centred on the sensation of colour (*rūpa*) and quality (*guṇa*). Human beings, with their unique ability to search for a cause behind any event, apprehending the qualities and using mathematical skills (*kāraṇa-guṇa-gaṇita*), employed their imagination and free will to develop the technology. However, technological advancement got associated with war and wealth (2-W), which could have been for peace and prosperity (2-P). Such an aberration led to the sickness of the planet Earth (Nagraj, *Anubhavātmaka,* 11). Nagraj observes that the aberration is due to a wrong understanding of the nature of reality as merely material composition. He proposes to see reality as the co-existence of matter and life. We need to understand life in order to transform human consciousness from 2-W to 2-P mode. Education is the tool.

5. Conclusion

According to the Madhyastha Darśana, everything material or conscious is submerged, encircled and soaked in the space (Nagraj 2). The units are in a mutual relationship in nature, and they keep evolving to realise their holistic nature. The constitutional principle of material and conscious things is the same, that is, attaining the constitutional completeness (*gaṭhanapūrṇatā*). Effortlessness is the evidence of constitutional completeness. It may be understood as the feature of spontaneity. Human beings endeavour to achieve natural continuity of the favourable state of existence. Since existence is co-existence, the constitutional completeness of human beings lies in the realisation of this potential in co-existence. Co-existence means there is a relationship and complementarity among all the entities in nature, including human beings. The problems associated with the behavioural transactions of human beings towards fellow beings and nature at large are related to a lack of understanding of relationship and complementarity. The institutions responsible for the creation/ inculcation of understanding in human minds are family and society. If the right understanding is ensured in individuals, they would be able to identify the basic physical requirements and true nature of their relationships. Such an identification would save an individual from an unnecessary accumulation of physical facilities giving a significant relief to the natural resources since their need is always

limited. With a collective and correct identification of the needs of a family, the members of the family would feel prosperous. Thus, Nagraj says that ensuring the feeling of prosperity in every member of the family is the sign of a harmonious family. The society comprising of such families has fearlessness as its characteristics, and such a society is called a harmonious society. And, a harmonious society always establishes a mutually fulfilling relationship with nature. The creation of such societies is essential for peace and harmony in the world.

The question is: how the above objectives can be achieved? Nagraj proposes five dimensions of human endeavour, which are based on the principle of participation of every individual (Gaur, Sangal and Bagaria 165):

(1) Education (*śikṣā*) and Right Living (*saṁskāra*)
(2) Health (*svāsthya*) and Self-regulation (*sanyama*)
(3) Production (*utpādana*) and Work (*kārya*)
(4) Justice (*nyāya*) and Preservation (*surakṣā*)
(5) Exchange (*vinimaya*) and Storage (*Koṣa*)

Education of the human mind is to develop a right understanding with respect to harmony at the four levels of existence from individual to entire existence. A continuous discourse on these matters would generate a commitment and preparedness to adopt a suitable pattern of behaviour necessary to realise harmony at the individual as well as collective level. The second dimension relates to the mental and physical well-being of an individual. Health is understood as the fitness of the body, and self-regulation is the feeling of responsibility in an individual towards taking care of nutritional requirements of the body, its protection and proper utilisation. The third dimension relates to the pattern of production of consumables and the kind of efforts required. This aspect has a direct correlation with the proper identification of our needs. Failure on this part in an individual leads to the production of goods taxing on the environment. Work is the task taken up by human beings in nature for the satisfaction of their requirements. The fourth dimension is associated with the identification and fulfilment of relationships among human individuals and between human beings and nature. A harmonious relationship between human beings is called the state of justice, and with respect to nature, it is called preservation. It cannot be called

harmonious if the human economic and other activities do not ensure the right utilisation, protection, and enrichment of the natural resources. A healthy exchange is not motivated by the madness of profit but for a mutual fulfilment of the people. Similarly, storage of produce would be better if it is related to the consumption of the individuals, and families, not for hoarding purposes.

The above solutions require that every human individual engaged in various activities with nature need to have the right understanding. To ensure the understanding, the proposal of Agrahar Nagraj seems quite convincing given his suggested criteria for the acceptance or rejection of anything. Like Lord Buddha, he says that one needs to accept anything only on the basis of one's natural acceptance and experiential validation. Similarly, one should not be carried away by the unexamined beliefs and prescriptions of one's senses only. There is no dispute that a healthy environment for sustainable development is naturally acceptable to and experientially validated by everyone.

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