

A VEDANTIC PERSPECTIVE OF ECOLOGY

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1. Introduction

In this paper I intend to concentrate on one particular school of Hindu religion and philosophy, namely, the Srivaisnava religion, the philosophy of which is Visistadvaita, the Vedanta of qualified non-dualism. The founder of this branch of Vedanta is Sri Ramanuja [1017-1137].

1.1. Some Premises

When we speak of ecology from the perspective of Hinduism, and for that matter of all Indian religions, we may have to start from some important general premises: (i) God, individual selves and matter: these three great principles (*tattva-traya*), are eternal. When Hindu scriptures and philosophies speak of creation and dissolution at beginning and end of each cycle of time, it only means the projection or re-presentation of the subtle elements into gross elements and reduction or return of gross elements into subtle elements respectively. Therefore, creation *ex nihilo*, from nothing, and total annihilation of matter, are not admissible. (ii) Man is not a supernatural being incarnated on this earth to conquer, dominate and exploit it, but is an integral part of this planet and is intimately related to all the beings of this earth in an unbreakable and inseparable existential bond and is moving towards a common destiny¹. (iii) Not only human

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¹The Vedic worldview was that gods, men and nature formed one organic whole. None was superior and none inferior. All these three categories of beings were corporately responsible for maintaining and promoting the cosmic harmony (*rita*), a very vital concept of Vedic culture and religion. All the three were equally eternal and mutually dependent. There were gods for heaven, mid-space and earth. Most of these were personifications of the powers of nature. It is a matter of fact and truth of history that all ancient cultures and religious traditions, not only Indians, being stupefied by the wondrous and mighty powers of nature, venerated and praised

beings, but also animals, plants, trees, and for some Indian traditions even inanimate objects, have soul or self, and therefore, hurting these for selfish motives is a sin. (iv) For most of the philosophical schools and sects of Indian religions life is one (please see below). (v) The principle of *ahimsa* proposes and promotes universal love and respect to all beings animate and inanimate (please see below). (vi) Hurting or injuring a life for self-interest will have to be retributed in kind in this life or in the life to come. There was also the belief, especially in the Vedic and Puranic periods, that the animals or trees hurt or killed on earth by a person, for example by the sacrificer in the context of a sacrifice, will hurt or kill that person, who committed the violence, in the coming world in the same way. That means, if he has eaten the animal here, the animal will eat him in the coming life. Therefore, incantations and magical formulas were uttered and symbolic rituals were performed before killing to appease the animal or tree and to transfer the pain and suffering of the killed animal or tree to some inanimate objects, like water, earth, etc.². An example will illustrate how careful the Vedic man was in the ritual of cutting a tree for making the sacrificial post. He places a blade of grass on the spot where the axe falls and this blade of grass is invoked to protect the tree and take upon itself the pain of the tree³. The axe with which the tree is cut is commanded not to inflict injury on the tree. The tree is praised as a beautiful creation and life-giver, and the woodcutter begs pardon of the tree for the sin he is committing. The tree is also prayed not to hurt the sky by its upper part when it falls down, not to hurt the mid-space by its middle part and not to hurt the earth when it lies down⁴.

these powers in humility as gods or as manifestations of the divine. But, I think, the life of ancient Indians was inseparably united to the nature and its powers, not only because they wanted nourishment and protection from the nature, but also because they intensely felt themselves as inseparable part and indispensable members of the huge family of the cosmos.

²Cf. *Mait.Sam.* III.9.3 in B.Bhatt, *Ahimsa in the Early Religious Traditions of India*, (Rome: CIIS, 1994), 19.

³Grass, being extremely small and insignificant, was considered as lifeless.

⁴Bhatt, *Ahimsa*, 19.

1.2. The Principle of *Ahimsa* (Non-violence)

One of the greatest contributions Indian thought has offered to the world at large is the concept of non-violence *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is not a negative concept signifying non-killing, non-injury or non-violence, but is a radically positive principle connoting universal selfless love. This love is to be exercised boundlessly and is to be extended to the entire creation. We may view *ahimsa* as Christian charity expanded to the entire universe. The horizontal dimension of charity should include not only the humans, but also every entity, conscious and non-conscious, animate and inanimate, of this cosmos. The commandment 'love your neighbour' is to be interpreted generously in an all-embracing wider context. Every life, in whatever form it may exist, is a mystery and therefore sacred. Every being, for the Indian mind, enshrines in itself the eternal, changeless and pure self, caused and conditioned, of course, by the inviolable law of *karman*. A reverential awe before this mystery of life and an inner urge to safeguard the autonomy of life are essential elements of the inner dynamics of all the ancient religions of India, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Non-violent and reverent attitude to and protection and promotion of all life are the finest expressions of religiosity, morality and spirituality. This holistic attitude to life and nature unequivocally condemns all violence, damage or pollution done to life and elements as sinful.

⁵The ancient history of India, especially the period of Epics and Puranas, in fact, is a long story of the interdependence and mutual respect between gods, men, animals, birds, plants and trees. Natural phenomena were deified or personified to project their importance to the life of man and society. Thus the Himalaya Mountain was conceived as a great god and his daughter Parvati is one of the most popular deities of Hinduism even today. River Ganges is a goddess who came down to the earth by the relentless efforts of a king called Bhagiratha and her son Bhisma was one of the greatest heroes of the Epic *Mahabharata*. Earth is goddess, and Sita, the heroine of *Ramayana*, is her daughter. The king is considered to be the husband of the earth, and his greatest duty and obligation is to protect this earth and all that grows and lives on it. The Epic *Ramayana* in fact, is a story of the intimate friendship between human beings, animals, birds and fauna and flora. The monkey hero Hanuman was the son of god wind. The bird hero Jatayu was the son of goddess dawn.

inseparable modes are together conceived as the body of Brahman. Although the individual selves and matter are true realities, and not illusory or phenomenal as Advaita advocates, they are absolutely dependent on God for their existence and functions and are constantly controlled by God for his own purposes. These two realities may be conceived logically as independent and separate, but ontologically and functionally they are totally dependent on and inseparable from the ultimate Being, God. It is like the relation between human body and soul. The material body is absolutely dependent on the spiritual soul for its existence as body and for bodily functions. Without the soul or self, the body is dead and valueless. In the same way, Brahman is the Self and inner Controller of the individual selves and of the world of matter, both of which together form the attributive body of Brahman. This relationship between cosmos and God is known as the 'body-soul relationship' (*sarira-sariri-bhava*). It would be useful here to recall Ramanuja's definition of body: "Any substance which a conscious self is capable of controlling and supporting for its own purpose, and which stands to the conscious self in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that conscious self" (*Sribhasya* II 1. 9).

Could the imperfections, impurities, permutations, limitations and finiteness of this attributive body affect Brahman, who is all perfection, unchangeable, supreme, eternal and infinite? They cannot, because the individual selves and matter form only the attributive body of Brahman and not his real body. The real glorified body of Brahman as well as of the liberated selves are made up of *suddha-sattva*, the eternal, changeless, pure and luminous *sattva* substance. This real body or form of God is to be explained in terms of non-materiality, transcendence and self-sufficiency. It is this body or divine form that inspires love, admiration and adoration in the hearts of the devotees. The direct experience of God of the mystics is in this form of God. It is this form that Arjuna sees in Krsna in the *Gita* chapter XI, which is a symbolic description of the Lord's body. Ramanuja and other theistic Vaisnava saints are never tired of describing the beauty and splendour of this divine form. The changes, impurities, etc. of the attributive body never affect or influence the nature and essence of God, just like the changes and qualities of the human body in childhood, youth,

old age, in health and sickness, etc. never affect the human self. "In the heart of all beings who constitute my body, I am seated as their Self. To be the Self means that I am entirely their supporter, controller and master" (*Gita-bhasya* of Ramanuja 10.20). Thus theologically speaking this vision of reality in soul-body model furnishes a framework which synthesizes and integrates the extreme forms Vedanta, namely, the non-dualism of Sankara and the Vedanta of difference. Brahman is the only one Reality; but this Brahman is qualified by individual selves and matter, which are also real, but not independent.

2.1. Evolutionary and Involutionary Movements

This attributive body of Brahman has two forms, namely, subtle and gross. In its gross form, this body of Brahman is the effect, that is the cosmos and every object in it that we see and experience. The attributive body of God in its subtle form is the cause. In this causal form, the elements of the universe exist in Brahman in their indivisible and invisible atomic size as his subtle body. The evolution of Brahman's subtle body into his gross body, that is, the cause becoming effect into different names and forms, is called the creation. The dissolution of cosmos is the movement in the reverse order, namely, the gross body of Brahman assumes its subtle state. Therefore, the cosmos, which comprises inanimate matter, animate and conscious beings, in all its states and forms constitutes the body of God.

God is the creator, sustainer and saviour of the cosmos which is his own attributive body. As far as the individual conscious selves are concerned, who also constitute part of the attributive or cosmic body of God, there are two types of movements: one is the evolutionary movement, which is the process of creation or re-creation or re-projection. The other is an involutionary movement, which is the return of selves to God in the final and total liberation, which is called the salvation.

It is at the will of God that his subtle body, the causal elements, evolves into different beings and objects of the world. The *Chadogya Upanisad* uses a beautiful simile to explain this creation process. From the one and same lump of clay the potter produces innumerable objects like

plates, vases, pitchers, jugs, jars, pots, etc. But the clay, the essence and material cause of all these objects, is the same. Differences are only in names and forms. The products are given distinctive names suited to their forms and functions. In the like manner God's attributive body assumes in creation numerous forms and names. But the body is the same. God then allows the individual selves to enter into these objects and animate them. Finally God himself enters into the animated beings as their innermost Self and inner Controller. Thus, he is the Self of selves and the Self all material objects. One should not forget here the vital role the doctrine *karman* plays. The nature, shape and characteristics of the body of an individual self are determined by his past *karmans*.

2.2. The Macrocosm and the Microcosm

The pilgrimage of the individual self back to God is the involutory movement. The seeker of perfection by spiritual *sadhanas* purifies his/her mind and sheds all the results of *karman*, and consequently its contacts with matter and material world. A spiritually mature soul transcends and discards its name and bodily form and unites itself with divine. The *Taittiriya Upanisad* explains this pilgrimage of the soul in a meaningful metaphoric model. The cosmos which is the attributive body of God has four concentric sheaths or encasements (*kosas*). The outermost sheath is that of inert, imperfect, changeable and non-conscious matter (*annamaya*). The second sheath is that of life (*pranamaya*). All that has life, starting from the vegetative life, are included in this. These two sheaths are composed of two material elements, namely, earth and air. The third sheath is that of senses and mind (*manomaya*). All that has animal life belongs to this sheath. The next sheath is that of consciousness and intelligence. Human beings, the apex of creation, belong to this category. God, the supreme Being, is in the centre of all these who is identified in this concentric model as the supreme pure Bliss (*anandamaya*). A spiritual aspirant has, by force and due to the exigencies of bodily life, to use these sheaths in his embodied existence; but for sake of the total liberation he has to transcend them also. We may call it an inclusive transcendence.

The cosmos, which is made up of matter, life, senses, mind, consciousness and the divine centre is the macrocosm. At the very bottom

is the inert, changeable and non-conscious matter. Then comes the world of life. All the vegetation, fauna and flora are accommodated in this sphere. The next stratum is more subtle and consists of life with senses and mind. The kingdom of animals and birds belongs to this domain. Over and above this comes the sphere of consciousness and intelligence, the *homo sapiens*. The supreme Lord, the unmoved Mover, the source, sustainer and goal of all beings, is on the top of all and controls and dominates all other lower contingent entities.

Man is the microcosm. Man too is a harmonious combination of all these sheaths. In his embodied existence, he is composed of matter, life, senses and mind and consciousness and self. And in the centre of man, in his innermost self, in the cave of his heart resides God as his inner Controller (*antaryamin*). Therefore, the structure of human person, the microcosm, corresponds exactly to the structure of the cosmos, the macrocosm. The Indian thinkers went further and said that each part and each member of human body has corresponding entities or realities in the cosmos. Thus the breath of man corresponds to the element wind; the flesh, bone and marrow of man corresponds to the element earth; the blood of man corresponds to the element water; the eyes to sun and moon; the ears to the ether; the blood vessels to rivers; the hairs on the body to herbs and trees, etc.

This paradigm of creation and explanation of the universe are related to, and perhaps also indebted to, the *Purusa-sukta* of *Rg Veda*. One fourth of the eternal cosmic Purusa becomes an incarnated Purusa, who is sacrificed by gods for the sake of creation. From this sacrificial act the universe is created. The breath of the sacrificed Purusa becomes the wind, his eyes become sun and moon, his blood becomes rivers, his belly the earth, back the firmament, etc. As is well known, the origin of the four castes of Indian society is to be sought in this sacrificial act of Purusa. From his mouth the Brahmanas/priests were created, from his arms the Ksatriyas, the warrior caste, came out, from the thighs of the sacrificed Purusa the Vaisyas, farmers, traders and artisans, were created and from his feet emanated the Sudras, the servants of the three higher castes.

2.3. The Pre-Ramanuja Concept of God as the Inner-Controller

This in short is the vision of reality proposed by the qualified non-dualism and by Ramanuja, its founder, a philosopher-saint. However, the conception of universe as God's body is not Ramanuja's invention. *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* narrates a debate between Yajnavalkya and another Upanisadic philosopher named Uddalaka, the son of Aruna. Uddalaka asked Yajnavalkya about the inner Controller of all beings. Yajnavalkya replied by enumerating a long list of things and said that Brahman is the inner Controller of all and that all these things form the body of Brahman. He begins with the earth and says: "He who dwells in the earth and is within it, but whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth and who controls the earth from within, He is the inner Controller; He is your Self, the Immortal"⁶. The philosopher then repeats this sentence and says that God is the inner Controller and inner Self of water, fire, mid-space, air, heaven, sun, all the directions, moon and stars, ether, darkness, light, all beings, vital breath, speech, eye, ear, mind, skin, intellect and semen. Yajnavalkya concludes his long discourse with the following statement:

He is never seen, but is the Seer; He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never thought of, but is the Thinker; He is not known, but is the Knower. There is no other hearer than He, there is no other thinker than He, there is no other knower than He. He is the inner Controller - your own Self and the Immortal. Every thing else besides him is sorrowful" (*BrhUp.* III.7.22).

In short Yajnavalkya was saying that all the great elements by which the universe is constituted, all the sense organs of knowledge, all the organs of activity, and finally all the individual selves, all these things, form the body of God⁷. God is the inner Self of everything, beginning from the

⁶*BrhUp.* III.73.

⁷In the following section of the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* (III.8.3-12), Yajnavalkya answering a question of Gargi states that this God pervades everything in the universe.

non-conscious, changeable matter and ending in the conscious, immutable individual selves.

I am tempted to quote a beautiful passage from *Mahabharata*, the great Epic poem of India:

The father of all creatures, God, made the sky. From the sky he made water and from water he made fire and air. From fire and air the earth came into existence. Mountains are his bones, earth is the flesh, sea is the blood, sky is his abdomen. Air is his breath, fire is his splendour, rivers are nerves. The sun and moon which are called Agni and Soma, are the eyes of Brahman. The upper part of the sky is his head. The earth is his feet and directions (*disa*) are the hands⁸.

Therefore, the concept of the cosmos as God's body is not an invention of Ramanuja or Visistadvaita. Ramanuja's predecessor and teacher Yamunacarya proposed this body-soul relation between world and God as a reasonable and balanced worldview and a sound theological framework to situate a spiritual seeker in his pilgrimage to the ultimate goal of his life.

2.4. A New Vision of Spirituality

Ramanuja took up this line of theological thought and developed it into a solid system of Indian philosophy and into a very popular branch of Vaisnavā religion. The very foundation of this system of thought and religion is the concept of God as the Self of all entities and all entities as the attributive body of God. The spiritual path advised by Ramanuja and his school of Vedanta for liberation also is based on this fundamental understanding of God and world. Ramanuja said that the basic awareness and acceptance of the fact that one is part of God's body, and therefore is radically dependent on him, is the beginning of real spiritual life. It is the key to the doors of total liberation. His vision of cosmos as God's body is not just a means for a philosophical or metaphysical or ontological

⁸*Mahabharata, Moksadharmaparva*, 182.14-19 in O.P.Dwivedi & B.N.Tiwari, *Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion*, (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1987),126.

understanding of the structure of the cosmos. It is above all the motive force for the *sadbana*, the spiritual means, for liberation. Body-soul doctrine should not be reduced to a mere cosmological metaphor or an allegorical way of explaining the dependence of the universe on God. For Ramanuja it is very much real. All philosophers have tried to unveil the mystery of human existence, meaning of life, origin of the world and the ultimate destiny of all these. Some perceived man and world as totally different and independent from God. Some others ascertained a non-differential relationship between God and universe. Ramanuja struck a middle path and advocated, as has already been explained earlier, a 'dependent-independent-relation' of the universe to God. This worldview provides, according to Ramanuja, a rational, reasonable and a theologically sound model to apprehend the supreme Reality and our existence in the world as psycho-physical beings and the eschatological goal of all contingent realities. The meaning, dignity and destiny of nature and all entities of nature are also eminently safeguarded.

3. Spiritual Implications of this Worldview

What are implications of these considerations

3.1. We form part of the divine body, and therefore, we are strictly related to every animate and inanimate objects, conscious and non-conscious beings of this cosmos, even to a speck of dust. All these constitute one organic whole, the attributive body of God. Consequently, we are responsible for the wellbeing of the body, namely, of this cosmos with all its wonderful varieties of beings, living and non-living, moving and stationery.

Hinduism on the whole, when speaking about spirituality and means for liberation, does not give adequate importance to the social dimension of spiritual life. Spiritual *sadhana* is viewed more as a personal matter. This is true in the case of Ramanuja too. He does not speak in terms of social responsibility, but he does strongly suggest that the real knowledge of Brahman involves the perception of world's unity in terms of his body. A person who knows Brahman as the inner Self of all, cannot, therefore, harm a living being knowingly. Cosmos is not only the locus where man

lives, but he is part of this cosmos. Individual selves and world of matter are to be perceived as ontological extension of the supreme Self. Body of God is understood in terms of relations, relation between God, conscious selves and non-conscious matter. The body-definition of Ramanuja discloses the nature of these relations. (i) body is something that is possessed by a conscious being; (ii) the conscious being controls and supports this body; (iii) the body serves the purposes of the conscious being; and (iv) the essential nature of the body consists in the fact that it is a mode of the conscious being, and therefore, always dependent on the conscious being. This worldview and this awareness should radically influence our understanding of and rapport to the world and objects of this universe. We will no more evaluate the created world good and positive, simply because it is useful to humans, but because the world and humans are equally the integral constituents of the body divine.

3.2. This relatedness has further theological and spiritual implications. Unless and until every member of this body, every life, including the life of plants and trees, is happy, my own happiness is incomplete. I am responsible for the wellbeing of all the things in the universe, including the elements. Unless and until every being is liberated my own liberation lacks its fullness. If any member in this body suffers, be it animate or inanimate, it is also my own suffering.

3.3. Abuse of earth and nature is associated with and accompanied by abuse of persons, especially poor persons. Justice to persons is very often related to justice to nature. Justice is one of the cardinal and basic virtues which is conspicuous today more by its absence and violation than by its presence and practice. Justice is definitely a promoter of life and is universally life-enhancing and life-reinforcing. This moral virtue and supreme value is brutally breached when unjust violence is meted out to the earth and environment. The devastation and pollution of the earth and elements are perpetrated predominantly by the potentates of this world at the expense of the sustenance, conditions and quality of life of the poor and marginalized persons and nations. The virulent and fatal results of ecological disasters are borne also mainly by the poor people. This man-made injustice is irreconcilable in the body-divine paradigm of Ramanuja.

3.4. It has already been mentioned above that the consciousness of being the body of God is the beginning of the path for liberation. 'Body of God' symbology was developed by Ramanuja as tool for God-realization. Ramanuja proposed *bhakti*, loving devotion to God, as the surest means for total liberation. *Bhakti-yoga* is ultimately the supreme knowledge of the Divine. For Ramanuja the path of knowledge (*jnana-marga*) denotes the true knowledge of one's own self and its nature (*atma-jnana*), and this knowledge consists in the radical awareness that one is mode of Brahman and therefore, totally dependent on him. This is the starting point of *bhakti*, which should ultimately lead to direct seeing, which is the highest form of knowledge, the direct, intuitive, experiential knowledge of the divine form in liberation. We may compare these two with the *apara* and *para vidya*, the lower and higher knowledges, of *Mundaka Upanisad* (II. 4-5). *Apara vidya* in this case is the knowledge of the fact that one is part of the attributive body of Brahman and *para-vidya* is the direct perception of the real body of Brahman in his eternal abode, which is the ultimate aim and supreme good of our embodied existence.

What is the essential nature of the individual self or soul? For non-dualism it is pure consciousness without any attributes, and it is identical with Brahman itself. For Ramanuja the essential nature of self has several characteristics, the first among them is the fact that it is *sesa*, a dependent of God as his mode or body. The fact that it is atomic in size, its essence is consciousness, bliss, infinitude, etc. are also characteristics of the essential nature of individual self.

3.5. If the universe is the attributive body of God, then it is to some extent divine. Of course, attributing divinity to nature may not be easily reconcilable with Christian theology. However, universe as the body-divine scheme necessarily assign and attribute certain amount of sacrality and sacramentality to nature. Violence to it, therefore, is an act of sacrilege and desecration.

3.6. For a follower of Ramanuja the divine-body worldview is the real ontological structure of the cosmos. Some may see in this conception of the cosmos, however, a symbol of God-man-nature relationship. Symbols represent and denote something other than themselves. Symbols in the

religious context function in relation to things divine and reveal, at least partially, knowledge that is regarded as sacred, secret and salutary. Religious symbols are also a powerful language, which communicates and instructs and thus very often are means for spiritual transformation. The body-divine symbol very emphatically communicates our utter dependence on God for our ultimate salvation.

3.7. God demands from us personal sanctity by purifying our mind and heart of all impurities and by the diligent use of the spiritual paths or *sadhanas*. But this has to take place in a cosmic context. We live, move and have our being in this cosmos. We make use of body, matter and elements to bring about our eternal salvation. Therefore, spirituality is to be viewed not as bi-dimensional, that is, God-man relationship, but tri-dimensional, God-man-nature relationship. Thus personal sanctity and cosmic responsibility go hand in hand.

3.8. This leads us to another consideration. I said that the body is entirely and totally subordinate to the soul for its existence and functions. But at the same time I also said that man has to use matter and body in his pilgrimage to the Divine centre. A seeker has to use it, at the same time transcend it for his final liberation. Therefore, body and matter is an important instrument for salvation. Poet Kalidasa therefore, says, *sariram adyam khalu darma-sadhanam*, 'body is indeed the first instrument (*sadhana*) for performing the dharma' and thus for liberation. Therefore, body, on the one hand is seen as the result of *karman* and as something negative and as evil to be renounced. On the other hand body is the vehicle through which the seeker of spiritual perfection has to attain the final liberation. Violence done to body in asceticism is to be explained in this light.

4. Conclusion

Every civilization is rooted in nature. Every life is supported, sustained and nourished by nature. Prosperity, progress and happiness of every person, every society and every nation depend heavily on the bounty of nature. There is an undeniable and irrefutable mutuality and reciprocity between nature and human kind. An old saying in Sanskrit advises: "If

you protect dharma, dharma will in turn protect you" (*dharma raksati raksitah*). This is very much true in the man-nature relationship. If you protect, nourish and promote nature, nature will do the same to you; if you disregard, demolish and destroy nature, nature may pay you back in the same coins. Perhaps we may find the reason for the ever-increasing catastrophes of nature in this light.

The sacred writings of religions and the teachings of great religious prophets and teachers of old should inspire and encourage us to build up a positive rapport and a close friendship with nature. Ramanuja's understanding of the universe as God's attributive body is definitely capable of awakening in us a spiritual world-vision and can encourage us to use this vision of the world to our own spiritual perfection. However, when speaking about ecology in the perspective of religions, there is also a lurking danger. 'We are tempted to quote profusely scriptural passages that promote and propagate love of and friendship with creation, and continue to live contented in the false conviction that the particular religion has done its role to solve all problems related to the ecological crises. Citing scriptural passages is of no use unless they can stimulate us to initiate concrete deeds towards the amelioration of environmental conditions. We should remember that the scriptures of all the major world religions were composed and preached in a distant past, and were immediately addressed to peoples who were inextricably bound to the earth for their sustenance and survival, and whose social, cultural and religious customs and practices, feasts and celebrations were inseparably linked with and deeply rooted in nature. The earth, with its mountains, rivers, trees, animals, birds, flowers and fields provided them the stage and settings where they could with ease and poise celebrate the life. It is only natural that the religious scriptures exhorted the faithful to be gentle and kind, sweet and civilized to the mother earth, which is the source of all life, the matrix of growth and the promoter of prosperity'. This bond and belongingness of human kind to the earth were lost in the wake of industrialization, mechanization and urbanization. Industrialization in itself is not an evil development; it has in fact, contributed immensely to improve the quality of human life. But this success enticed man into a maniacal intoxication and cast over him a magical spell that he lost control

over his own creation. He now tries to eliminate the evil effects of technology with more technology. And with that began also the sad story of the eco-destruction and environmental deterioration. 'Religions and religious leaders today, taking stock from their respective sacred scriptures and holy traditions, should earnestly instruct, and encourage their followers to protect and enhance the environment and unequivocally condemn every act of abuse and violence against nature. They should examine their conscience objectively, admit the sins they committed against nature in humility and chalk out an action-plan to save and safeguard the environment with courage and commitment. Above all they should teach the faithful to recognize God's grace and presence, his power and love, his hand at work in nature and in every entity of nature.'

Let me conclude this paper by greeting the nature with a Vedic hymn. The peace chant of *Sukla Yajurveda* [ca.1000 BCE] runs like this:

*OM santir, antariksam santih, prthivi santir/
apah santir, osadhayah santir, vanaspatayah santih/
visvedevah santih, brahma santih, sarvam santih/
santir eva santih, sa ma santir edhi/
om santih santih santih//*

Om peace! May there be peace unto heaven, unto the sky let there be peace, unto the earth may there be peace, peace unto the waters, peace unto the herbs and trees. May there be peace unto all gods, and unto Brahman may there be peace, may there be peace unto all beings. Peace verily the peace. May that peace also come to me Om peace, peace, peace (*Sukla Yajurveda*, XXXVI.17)

EPILOGUE:

THE HYMN TO THE EARTH

Atharva-Veda, section twelve contains a very long hymn with sixty-three verses known as *Bhumi-sukta*, the Hymn to the Earth. A few verses are quoted here:

The earth that has mountains, slopes and great plains, that supports plants of manifold virtues, that is free from violence which comes from men, she shall spread out for us and equip herself for us. (XII.2)

The earth upon which the sea, the rivers and the waters exist, upon which food and tribes of men have arisen, upon which all breathing and moving lives exist, she shall give precedence to us in drinking from her. (XII.3)

O earth, may thy snowy mountains and forest be kind to us. You are brown, black, red and multi-coloured. You are firm and are protected by Indra. I have settled upon thee not suppressed, not slain and not wounded. (XII. 11)

The mortals born on thee live on thee; thou supportest both bipeds and quadrupeds. Thine, o earth, are these five races of men, the mortals, upon whom the rising sun sheds undying light with his rays. (XII.15)

Upon the firm, broad earth, the oil-begetting mother of the plants, that is supported by the divine law, upon her who is generous and kind, may we ever pass our lives. (XII.17)

Upon the earth men give to gods sacrifices and prepared oblations. Upon the earth mortal men live pleasantly by food. May this earth give us breath and life. May she cause me to reach old age (XII.22)

O earth, what I dig out of thee, may that grow there quickly again. O pure one, may I not pierce thy vital spot and hurt thy heart. (XII.35)

To the earth upon whom grow food, rice and barley, upon whom live these five races of men, reverence to that earth, who is the wife of the clouds, and who is fattened by the rain. (XII.42)

The earth that holds people of different languages, of different customs according to their habitations, may that earth, who is like a reliable milk-cow that does not kick, milk for us a thousand streams of wealth. (XII.45)

Gentle, fragrant, kind, and with the sweet drink in her udder which is rich in milk, that broad earth together with her milk shall give us courage. (XII.59)

O mother earth, kindly set me down upon a well-founded place. O thou wise one, with the co-operation of heaven, give me happiness and prosperity. (XII.63).⁹

⁹For the translation of this hymn I have used the corresponding text prepared by Maurice Bloomfield, *The Hymns of Atharva-Veda*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.XLII, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), 199-207.