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ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND RELIGIONS

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1. Introduction

There is a close linkage between ecology and religions.[1] The crisis in our ecosystem endangering the life of humans and other living beings is one of the most frightening problems of the present time. This crisis is very much a religious and spiritual issue and demands a befitting response through scientific outlook and religious approach.[2] Creating a healthy and wholesome environment involves restoring the innate health of the cosmos that has been tarnished because of various causes.

The philosophical and theological perspectives of the Hindu and Christian traditions enable us to perceive the basis for an ethical imperative for the need of nurturing a cordial relationship with Nature.[3] The ancient Indian traditions had scientific study and meticulous calculations of the cosmic phenomena, which resulted in well-developed branches of science: astronomy, astrology, mathematics, etc.[4]

In the following pages, I examine first the extent of the ecological crises today. In the second part, I examine the perspectives and potentials in Hinduism and Christianity with special focus on understanding the concept on life in relation to cosmos in each of these traditions thereby to affirm the harmonious interface of ecology and religions and the need to preserve ecology for a healthy universe.

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[1]For a general discussion on Hinduism, see Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India* (1893), Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi and Company, 1978, 313-350.

[2]For further discussion, see O. P. Dwivedi, ed., *World Religions and the Environment,* New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1989.

[3]For a philosophical treatise on ecology, see Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism,* Indian ed., Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1996, 97-146.

[4]See Ishwarbhai Patel, *Sciences and the Vedas,* Bombay: Somaiya Publications, 1984.

2. Environment and the Crisis

The Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences defines environment as "the aggregate of all external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism."[5] Environment means the entire ecosystem of a place where living beings and non-living beings exist. The term *environment* comes from the French word '*environner*'; from *environ*, around and from *virer*, to turn round, together meaning, external conditions or surroundings influencing development or growth of people, animals or plants, and concern about their preservation from the effects of population.[6]

Our environment has three components: physical, biological, and cultural. The physical environment consists of areas as geology, topography, surface, and ground water resources, and other mineral wealth. Physical environment is essential for the existence of life of various organisms. The biological environment refers to flora and fauna and exists to support mutual survival of all organisms by providing nourishment. Cultural environment includes human population distribution, population trends, historic and archaeological sites, the economic indicators of human welfare, value system, and other aesthetic, moral, and spiritual dimensions.

The ecological relationship among plants, animals, and environment must be maintained for smooth functioning and survival of the biosphere, maintenance of atmosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere. The ecological equilibrium must be preserved at any cost if life on the planet earth is to survive. Our problem arises due to disturbed and upset equilibrium of the natural environment either by human activities or other causes, exerting, in turn, pressure on the biosphere. The imbalances on the biosphere create structural and functional changes in atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere. The following actions tilt the 'natural equilibrium': 1) mono-culture agriculture, deforestation, land development, creation of manmade lakes, dams, and other activities which change the structure of the earth, 2) extraction of minerals, discharge of various substances into atmosphere, water bodies, and on land, which change the composition of the biosphere, and 3) changing of the energy balance.

The present exploitative mode of development of society population-wise, production-wise, and consumption-wise will have negative effects

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[5]*International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, 1968 edition, vol. 9, s.v. "Environment."

[6]*Promotio Justitiae* (April 1999), §70.

which might result in irreversible changes and depletion of resources in biosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere creating fatal ecological crisis. Unfortunately, however, these intricacies of nature were given a goodbye during the last hundred years of economic development world over. The phenomenal increase of human population, necessitating an accelerated production rate and the consequential onset of consumer culture has contributed to the eco-crisis of the present age. As a result, humans have begun to face dwindling of natural resources, fossil fuels, raw materials, and decline of the bio-diversity, besides the erosion of fertile land, and the depletion of water so vital for human sustenance and survival. The rapid advance in technologies has made the situation all the more alarming and the risks involved in the production process are heightening day by day.

2.1. Global Warming and Climate Change

An immediate impact of environmental degradation is global warming. Global warming means rise in temperature due to build up of atmospheric green house gasses and the negative effects of rising temperature like melting glaciers, higher level of oceans or changing precipitation patterns. The surface temperature of the earth is kept at an average of 15 degrees Celsius, giving a temperature range, which is ideal for life, by a combination of gases in the atmosphere which produce a natural greenhouse effect. The warmth of the sun's rays is reflected off the earth's surface and trapped in the atmosphere and the air, and the earth itself is warmed. Scientists call this natural construction Green House Effect, which results in climatic changes.[7] Global warming has become a major scientific, economic, and political issue in the present context. Today droughts and floods have become a common phenomenon in most of the developing countries including India. Global warming is a consequence of the rapid process of globalization. This phenomenon creates an imbalance in the whole environment.

Also, Nitrogen Oxide and Sulphur Dioxide gases are causing acid rains in various parts of the globe. CFC (Chlorofluoro Carbon) present in the upper layer of atmosphere leads to the depletion of ozone layer and cities like Los Angeles and Tokyo are hard hit. Carbon Dioxide is the main contributor of Green House Effect, raising the level of temperatures all over the world. Almost 14% of Carbon Dioxide comes from the burning of fossil fuels.

[7]S. Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 3.

Similarly, lead pollution from industry causes serious environmental hazards.

Climatic change is another major threat facing humankind with extreme weather events, droughts, and rise in diseases. It is recorded that "over the last 400,000 years, the earth's climate has shown very significant temperature changes, going from a warm climate to an ice age in as rapidly as a few centuries."[8]

2.2. Environment and Globalization

Ecological and socio-economic systems are already under tremendous pressure in the wake of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth in the present globalised scenario. One of the major factors precipitating environmental crisis is the commodification of nature and resources which entailed the introduction of market economy, rise of the world economic system and its evolution into European industrialism and its eventual diffusion to every region on the planet. Today, with the advancement in science and technology, nature is reduced to the status of material bank and human living space. Nature was perceived in the classical scientific paradigm as 'unproductive' and meaningless. Early modern scientists, such as Francis Bacon, could speak of "putting nature to test" – a figure of speech for torture. Globalization with its Western model of development has caused irreversible and irreparable damage to the environment.

Globalization exploits the environment to the maximum for profit by treating all aspects of environment as mere commodities. In our age of globalization humans still consider other living creatures to be mere objects, to be manipulated genetically, patented and sold like any other commodity. With globalization many consequences are seen which are detrimental to the environment in general.

India is one of the top 12 countries, which has the richest biodiversity in terms of varieties of species, land, and other resources. With the Western dominant model of development propagated by globalization tendencies, most of the resources like, land, forest, mineral, water, fisheries, and animals are on the verge of extinction. In short, our air, water, rain, forest, fauna and flora, rare species of animals and birds are threatened with extinction.

[8]Ajay Ghosh, "Global Warming: Consequences for Humanity," in *Indian Currents*, August 31, 2003, 34-37.

In the context of globalization and its impact on environment, it could be said that many developmental activities turn out to be disastrous. In the name of development, for example, World Bank has funded projects like Narmada Dam, which resulted in tremendous ecological disaster displacing thousands of people. The industrial and nuclear waste and refuses are being dumped in and around the developing and undeveloped nations by the prosperous nations, causing health hazards on an unprecedented scale. For instance, almost 10% of industrial and atomic waste reaches Guinea every year. In many countries of Africa, the poisonous dioxine gas has spread notoriously, causing dreadful disease like cancer. The UN agency on environment has estimated that almost every year about 487 tons of nuclear waste is unleashed in the world and the greatest share in this unleashing of waste is that of America.

The poor countries, in the context of ever-rising need of economic aid from the rich countries, cannot resist the diabolic game of the highly industrialized countries. Unfortunately, here also monetary gains supersede the risk caused to the humankind living in developing and undeveloped countries. It has been calculated that in destroying one ton of waste of any kind – industrial or nuclear – involves in America and Europe an expenditure as high a sum as 500 dollars but if a ton of waste is thrown in the vicinity of Africa it incurs a paltry expenditure of only 2.5 dollars. Thus, if, on the one hand, the countries lagging behind in development are being treated as sacrificial goats the prosperous and developed nations have been overtaken by their lust for development on such a scale that they are insensitive to the damage that they are causing to humanity at large by destroying the ecological balances.

2.3. Man-made Crisis

Examining further, it can be seen that 90 percent of the present environmental crisis is man-made. The excessive use of nitrogenous fertilizers has considerably increased concentration of nitrates in the soil and the food that we consume gets poisonous. As a result of their concentration in the river water and the water that we drink, stomach ailments have become endemic. A UN agency has calculated that by 2025 more than 48 countries of the world will be facing acute water shortage and availability of safe drinking water will be scarce. Continuous use of pesticides has affected ground water through seepage. Our rivers, ponds and streams have become polluted because the concentration is toxic. It is horrifying to note that the

level of accumulated DDT in the body tissue of an average Indian is the highest. The use of petroleum as a fuel in over 650 million automobiles in the world is causing large scale pollution. Fifteen millions of Carbon Monoxide, one million ton of Nitrogen Oxide, and 1.8 million tons of hydrocarbons are added to the environment each year. The amount of Carbon Dioxide pumped into the atmosphere due to the burning of the fossil fuels comes to billions of tons. Developed countries account for 70% of the atmospheric pollution.

The destruction of the diversity of life is not only adding to the volume of social tension but also heightening the ecological crisis. Unfortunately, in this age of mad race for development which knows no winning post the clash between development and nature is inevitable and not to be halted easily. Washington based World Watch Institute has clearly indicated and warned that there is the beginning of an unparalleled biological collapse worldwide because 3/4th of the world's birds species are threatened with extinction. Many animal species are already extinct. Air pollution of not only the mega cities but even the medium and minor cities has been forcing the government to upgrade fuel quality and run vehicles with compressed natural gas. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are badly affecting the fauna and flora and accumulating harmful chemical substances in food causing dreadful diseases like cancer and carcinogens. Pesticides enter the human population primarily through consumption of adulterated fish and other food products. World Health Organisation (WHO) studies reveal that Indians carry the greatest body burden of pesticides.[9]

If the energy crisis is further aggravated, deforestation continues unchecked and unhindered, bio-diversity is allowed to diminish, erosion of soil goes on unhampered, our air, water, sound are allowed to be polluted more and more especially to fulfil the demands of globalisation and market economy with the aid of ever accelerated scientific inventions humankind will be heading towards the doomsday. The situation on the environmental plan is ultimately to land up to a potential dystopia or the New Dark Ages Scenario in which our natural resources are wholly ruined and society totally broken down. In this dark view, the few remnants of society would be hopelessly wandering the barren earth searching for sustenance. Environmentalists and nuclear alarmists fear such a world. "If we ignore the signs of times, and go on exploiting nature, the consequences will be greater and future generations will hold us accountable for the degradation of Earth

[9]"The Politics of Poison," *Indian Currents*, August 31, 1999, 15.

and the wealth we are given to utilize and not to exploit."[10]

2.4. Voices of Concern

Voices against the alarming ecological imbalance were raised even at the outset of the Industrial Revolution which had unleashed unbridled tapping of natural resources. At that time, however, it was argued by scientists, anthropologists, and social activists that development itself will take care of ecological imbalance. But this proved to be a misnomer and a cry in the wilderness. Credit goes, however, to Berry Commander and Rachel Carrs who, in their path-breaking publications, *The Closing Circle* and *Silent Spring*, respectively, pinpointed first of all that economic development is not an unmixed blessing. At the one end it leads to worldly prosperity, but at the other, it unleashes destruction, depletion, and disfigurement of natural resources causing environmental crisis. Since then hundreds of publications have come out all over the world bringing home the fact that the patterns of production and consumption that we have adopted are not only drawing perilous divide between the rich and the poor but causing widespread and overburdened ecological crisis.

People's consciousness has been brought to focus globally on environmental crisis since year 1986, when the 'Save Earth Fund' was founded. Several charters have been signed by nations on containing environmental degradation. One of the recent charters was the Earth Charter of the United Nations, approved and released by its Earth Charter Commission in March 2000 at Paris. These attempts to check environmental degradation, though laudable, are not powerful enough to take the problems by the horns.

There have been campaigns at the community and individual levels too. Anthropologists, sociologists and environmentalists, both at individual and group levels, are exerting their nerves not only to bring the ecological crises on focus but also to combat it. Sunder Lal Bahuguna, Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy, Blue Wexter, Rudolph Rich, Karen Silkwood, etc., have done their bits in their own ways not only by highlighting the problem but finding some tangible solution. The pressure groups like the UK-based 'Corporate Watch', the US-headquartered 'Inter Faith', besides several centres on corporate responsibilities dispersed all over the world, are doing commendable works to make trans-national companies and corporations eco-

[10]Ghosh, "Global Warming: Consequences for Humanity," 37.

friendly. Green campaigns are being organized. Eco-friendly societies like 'Friends of the Earth', 'The Green Peace Movement', 'Chipko Movement', *Taru-mitra* (Friend of Trees) 'Save Earth Day', 'Narmada Bachao Andolan', etc., are all propagating the maxim that economics devoid of ecology is losing its market rationale.

3. Ecology and Religions

A silver line in the dark cloud engulfing the environment and ecological imbalances can be seen in the realm of religions. The glimmer of hope is keeping through the precepts and pronouncements made by religious scriptures of various faiths and their accredited messengers who have solemnly affirmed that nature exists in balance and it does not tolerate any husbanding of that balance by any external agency except its own. This brings us naturally to the discussion as to how religions and their massages conveyed by their messengers can provide effective tools for combating environmental degradation and ushering in any age that will free from eco-scare. The messages conveyed by all religions, if grounded in developing the concept of eco-spirituality, it can be asserted, can cure the cancer of eco-crisis of the present age effectively and positively and for all these we have to build a new relationship with the Earth by slowing down population growth, by using our natural resources more frugally and efficiently to achieve a sustainable economy. Christian and Indian cultural heritage is rich enough to strike a balance between developmental activities and environmental equilibrium.[11]

3.1. Ecology and Hindu Traditions[12]

The Hindu view of the human is essentially linked up with its holistic view regarding the entire cosmos. Human being is the microcosm and has the macrocosm as its prototype. It is essentially the divine life, the life immanent in and, at the same time, transcending the universe. The life of the individual self is viewed as a reflection of the Divine animating the whole cosmos. The sanctity and value of human life in the Hindu traditions consists not so much in a belief in the unique dignity of the human person as an individual and

[11]For a discussion, see Binay Kumar Pattnaik, "Ecological Bases of Indian Traditions: Search for an Indigenous Vision," *The Eastern Anthropologist* 58, 3-4 (2005), 419-439.

[12]For a discussion on Hinduism and ecology, see Ranchor Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996.

immortal being as in the belief that human life, like life immanent in all creation, is an expression of the divine, eternal, infinite life which is identified with the Brahman, or the Ultimate Reality. Thus, the Hindu traditions, in general, acknowledge life as a great reality, which enjoys close affinity with the sacred and the mysterious power underlying the material universe.[13]

3.1.1. Ecology and Vedic Tradition

The Vedic seers were greatly impressed by the scientific and philosophical bases of the phenomenal universe as well as the order of the events and things in the cosmos. They believed spontaneously that there exists a correlation between the cosmic and the human order of ethical, social, and religious life. The order of human life depended on the maintenance of the cosmic order.[14]

The Vedic man believed that the best way of ensuring the cosmic order and, thereby, the human order (that is, the macro and micro-cosmic levels) was by reproducing the cosmic order of things and events in his own thought forms and actions through sacrifices and other religious ceremonies. The Vedic hymns indicate the primitive belief of the human in personified supernatural powers that presided over the natural phenomena. Sacrifices were also attempts to please the deities and, thus, to ensure the good order of the universe. The *Rgveda* presents Manu, the first human ancestor of human race, as the first sacrificer. Manu's sacrifice became the prototype and model of all other sacrifices.[15]

The famous hymn of the *Purusasukta* (hymn of the cosmic person) traces the origin of all that exist in the universe, including the human, to *Purusa*, the Supreme Person.[16] The creative act is symbolically presented as the sacrifice in which the *Purusa* was offered as the victim. During the

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[13]See J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, eds., *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, Delhi: Indian Books Centre, 1991.

[14]Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976, vol. 1, 95-200, 252-401. Also see vol. 2, 433-535.

[15]*Rgveda*, 1,2,4,8; *Atharvaveda*, 1,3,7,8,12,19; *Satapada Brhamana*, 1,7; *Svetasvetara Upanisad*, 1,3; *Chandogya Upanisad*, 1.9.1;2.23.2; 3.14; *Mandukya Upanisad* 5; *The Upanisads*., trans., Juan Mascaro, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.

[16]J. Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984, 270.

course of the sacrifice *Purusa* was dismembered and the entire universe came from the different parts of the *Purusa* victim. Thus, creation is the product of a ritual sacrifice. Since creation is the result of a sacrifice, every religious sacrifice performed on earth is a repetition of the primordial *Purusa* sacrifice and can act as a renewal of the original creative act and, thus, contribute to the maintenance of the cosmic order.[17]

The individual human beings (microcosmic human) have their origin in the macrocosmic *Purusa* and, hence, the latter is the image of the primeval human. This explains the divinity of the individual human being. In fact, three fourths of the primeval human (the prototype) are said to be spiritual, immortal, or divine and only one fourth is mortal or material.

Creation has two parts – *asu* (life) and *manas* (mind). *Asu* signifies the vital force, the principle at the basis of breath, even of animals. *Manas* is the seat of thought and emotions, and was believed to dwell in the heart (*hrdaya*) of the human. In the *Rgveda*, we read a hymn addressed to *Agni* (Fire), praying that he (*Agni* god) may convey the 'unborn part' to the world of righteousness. This unborn part is understood as the inner human, devoid of birth and of psychosomatic parts. It is the same as the immortal soul, although the term '*atman*', denoting the immortal soul, was of later origin.

During the period of the *Brhhmanas*, the sacrificial rites acquired cosmic significance: the rites were regarded no more as propitiatory acts but as something identical with the cosmic process. The supreme task of the human was to be a sacrificer so that he could maintain the order of the cosmic phenomena by timely and faithful performance of all prescribed sacrifices. In many *Brhmana* texts,[18] *Purusa*, *Prajapati*, *Narayana*, and *Brahman* are identified or associated and signify the primordial image or prototype of the human. It is *Purusa* that ensouls the cosmos and creates the universe and is the source of time and space.

In brief, *Purusa* consists of all the creation: one fourth of him is all creatures, and three fourths are the world of the immortals in heaven. Thus, the individual human is at the same time an image of both the divine and the material world. Through human performance of the sacrifice on the microcosmic level he can ensure the continued and orderly existence of the universe where he himself finds his home.

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[17]Raimundo Pannikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*, Pondicherry: All India Books, 1977, 113-132, 191-312, 613-640.

[18]For instance, *Satapada Brhamana*, 1,7.

3.1.2. Agricultural Ecology in the Vedas

The Vedic seers had a very thorough acquaintance with agricultural ecology[19] and purity of environment. Living in hermitages amidst the natural surrounding of forests, they acquired first hand knowledge of Nature. Thus, Vedas deal with not only philosophy, worship, rituals but also fundamental principles of the natural phenomena and practical science and secular *mantras*. The material prosperity has not been ignored while engaged in spiritual activities. Agriculture was a well-developed practical science. The Vedas have several *mantras* devoted to agriculture and method of farming, irrigation systems and plantation. The Vedas refer to Nature and forms of land and its measurement and management. The Vedas also offer useful information on some farming equipments and domestic implements. Agriculture ensured prosperity and was, hence, considered the best profession and was glorified (*Adhyatmika purusrtha*: the spiritual goal of human life). The earth has been proclaimed as the foster mother. Farming is the worship of Mother Earth,[20] who showers her children with all blessings such as various forms of food, fruits, drinking material, medicines, etc. The Vedic seer recommends farming which provides all things needed for human sustenance.

Earth is also called a cow that gives milk which is nourishing. The Vedas also refer to animal domesticity and cattle rearing. Domestic animals were considered faithful friends of human beings, who were supposed to pray for the safe return and welfare of the cattle, cows, horses, sheep, goats, etc. Among all the animals, the cow was revered as a pastoral deity.

3.1.3. Ecology and Upanisadic Tradition

The Upanisadic seers continued to ask questions about the ultimate origin and nature of the universe and of the human. Through a process of introspective meditation combined with rational speculation they arrived at a clear intuition that the self of the human is an expression of the universal self, or the world spirit, and is even identical with it.[21]

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[19]Dhabi Singh Mal, "Agricultural Ecology in the Vedas," *Jnanatirtha: Journal of Sacred Scriptures* 2, 1 (January 2002), 97-105.

[20]For a discussion on this theme, see Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989.

[21]Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1962, 177-293, 366-377, 391-411.

The *Svetasvetara Upanisad*[22] says that from *Purusa*, the Supreme Deity, the entire creation originates. In the *Katha Upanisad* we read that the *Purusa* abides in the individual self. *Purusa* is the highest metaphysical reality, the ultimate ground of the objective world. The same *Purusa* is the animating principle of the subjective structures of the human.

The absolute, the *Atman* (world-soul) or Brahman has the universe as its body or manifestation. The multiplicity of objects of the world does not affect the inner unity of the absolute reality, albeit it is immanent in all forms of manifestations. Nevertheless, the human occupies a special place among the manifold manifestations of Brahman. The human can reach Brahman by entering into his own heart through intense meditation.

According to *Svetasvetara Upanisad*, this planet does not belong to humanity. Everything in the universe belongs to the Lord. *Upanisad* teaches that the whole world is permeated by God.[23] The harmony and relatedness with nature is expressed in *Chandogya Upanisad*, where it is said "All this universe is in truth Brahman. He is the beginning and end and life of all."[24] In brief, the vision of the human in classical Hinduism is that of a pure spiritual self (*Atman*) without any intrinsic or substantial connection with the material body in which it is incarnated. The embodiment of the self is like an imprisonment necessitated by the law of karma that works itself out through the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*).[25] The nature with its three constitutive qualities (*trigunic prakriti*) binds the soul to the body and causes rebirth.

3.1.4. Ecology and Orthodox Traditions

The six orthodox systems of Hinduism differ considerably in their understanding of the human and environment. The *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika* schools (systems) developed a pluralistic and theistic vision of reality and admitted the existence of a plurality of human souls, eternal, spiritual and distinct from one another. The *Sankhya* School developed a dualistic metaphysics that admits, along with the reality of nature (*prakrti*), a spiritual co-principle named self or *Purusa*. The *Purusa* is all-pervasive, eternal, and uncaused. It transmigrates in the *samsara* (world), in bodily form and

[22] *Svetasvetara Upanisad*, 1,3.

[23] *Svetasvetara Upanisad*, V, in *The Upanishads*, trans. Juan Mascaro, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1965, 93.

[24] *Chandogya Upanisad*, 3.14, in *The Upanishads*, trans., Juan Mascaro, 114.

[25] *Mandukya Upanisad*, part 1, in *The Upanishads*, trans., Juan Mascaro, 75-83.

temporality is acquired. *Purusa* is the final cause and end of the cosmic process. The plurality of selves will merge with the *Purusa*, ultimately, according to the *Samkhya* and the *Yoga* schools.[26]

3.1.5. Ecology and Vedanta Traditions: *Advaita* School

The Advaitic School identifies human sprit with the Divine Spirit: it is one and the same spirit who is present in human beings and the material universe.[27] Sankara uses two terms to understand reality of life: *jiva* (that which breathes) or the biological aspect is part of the *Purusa* (that which dwells in the citadel of the heart), indicating the soul. The Sankara School accepts the plurality of selves (*jiva*) in the phenomenal level. But, on the level of the noumenon, there is only one Self who is identical with the innermost self of the human being.

The Individual Self has five layers of structure: the material body (*anna*), the principle of breath (*prana*), principle of consciousness (*manas*), the seat of ego or individuality (*buddhi* or *vijnana*) and the principle of universal consciousness (*Atman*, corresponding to *Ananda*) which serves as the background for the whole structure. The human is part of the universe, through whom the whole universe seeks to reach up to the Divine. The point to be stressed here is that the whole of cosmos, the eco-sphere is related to human beings as both are parts of the One Brahman, the Divine Self. The *jiva* (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm) are only expressions of the objectivization of the Universal Self or the Ultimate Consciousness.

3.1.6. Ecology and Vedanta Traditions: *Visistadvaita* School

The Visistadvaitic school stresses the unity of cosmos in the following manner. Brahman is a synthetic whole in which both the plurality of individual souls and of the material world finds their place as real moments or modes. The individual self and the Supreme Self are intimately related like part and the whole, sparks and the fire, etc. The soul with its individual mode of existence is attached to the body during its bondage in *samsara* (physical life). However, the indestructible soul has consciousness as essential nature and maintains its identity through the process of births and deaths. It will retain its individuality throughout the samsaric (worldly)

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[26]Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads,* vol. 31, 95-200, 252-401; vol. 32, 433-535.

[27]Paul Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*, Leipzig: Brockhaus (1897), 1979, 219-254.

existence and also after death. In brief, the souls and the world constitute the eternal and distinct but inseparable modes of the non-dual Brahman.

In the *Gita*, we find: "The motivation for karma yoga is the 'integration of world' (*lokasamgraha*, *Gita*, 3,25) and even more, 'a passionate concern for the well-being of all things in nature' (*sarvabhutahiteratah*, *Gita*,12,4; 5,25)." Thus, the *Gita* affirms the stewardship expressed in the Bible.

Overall, the Hindu traditions acknowledge the reality of life, which is identified with the sacred and mysterious power behind matter and empirical experiences. The life of the individual self is viewed in general as a reflection of the divine life animating the entire cosmos.[28]

The correspondence and correlation between the microcosm and the macrocosm remained a parameter for the Vedic thinking of life. The reflections are couched in religious categories. The Upanisadic seers intuited the life principle in the human as the Atman and identified it with the Brahman that animates the individual selves and the entire spectrum of beings in the cosmos. The final destiny of the human is to realize this truth of all truths. This has significant implications in our understanding of ecology and its relatedness to life in general and human life in particular. In the orthodox schools, except in the *Advaita* school, strong value is attached to the individual self. What is obvious in the Hindu traditions is the relatedness between life and matter in the cosmos and the ethical imperative for the individual humans to preserve this unity.[29]

4. Ecology and Christianity

4.1. Biblical View of Ecology

The Bible has a clear vision of God, because everything in His creation is stamped with intrinsic goodness and beauty as we repeatedly read in the first chapter of Genesis. There is also a special stress on the integrity and excellence of the whole creation after the creation of humankind (Gen. 1:31). When God sees everything good, His intention is that everything continues to be good.

In Genesis we see that God created the world and humankind and blessed the human community by asking it to multiply, fill the earth, subdue

[28]Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, 313-350.

[29]For a discussion on the Indian traditions see relevant articles in Priya Ranjan Trivedi, ed., *Eco-Philosophy and Eco-Dharma*, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Ecology and Environment, 1996.

it and have dominion over the creatures of the sea, etc. (Gen. 1:26). Hence, humankind is endowed with special authority and responsibility to relate to every being on the earth with love as God's representative. The human community has to relate to the world in a responsible and harmonious manner by making use of the resources of the earth and, at the same time, preserving the earth and, with it, the other creatures on the earth (Gen. 2:15). The domination of the earth by few nations or few individuals is against God's will and it opposes God's design.

In Genesis 6:6-8, we read about Yahweh grieving at heart and warning because the earth was full of lawlessness with atrocities towards humans and nature. In today's context of globalization and its disastrous impact on environment, we find ourselves in the same situation. The relationship of humans with the environment is explained as follows: both human being (*Adam*) and the trees have been created out of the same substance, *adama*, that is, soil or ground (Gen. 2:9). Similarly, the wild animals (*hayyaat-hassadeh*) too and the bird of the air have been made from the same substance (Gen. 2:19).[30]

We can see in the Old Testament that the Lord, by establishing the Sabbath for the land (Lev. 25:2-5) and by giving so many other eco-friendly laws to the humans, protect animals (Ex. 21:33-34), protect plants (Ex. 22:6), carefully handle bird's nest (Deut. 22:6-7), and used varieties of seeds in the fields (Deut. 22:9). It is a fact that the world in and around us is filled with diverse species from small to big, possess innate goodness and beauty.[31] The opening chapter of Genesis clearly describes how God took six days to fashion this world. God by nature created everything, including humans, in His own image (Gen. 1:26), revealing his creativity and love. At the end of all creation, God found that everything was good and beautiful. Every being on earth finds meaning in God's goodness and beauty. The book of Proverbs would say that He created the earth by His wisdom (Prov. 3:19). The Psalmist has full praise for God for the beautiful creation (Ps. 136).

The creation is, therefore, precious to God and to us. The preciousness of earth is a central theme of the Bible and of all tribal traditions. God was the first to appreciate the worth and the wonder of the earth. God saw that the earth was good (Gen. 1:10, 12); therefore, the earth may not be slighted,

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[30]R. L. Sarkar, *The Bible, Ecology and Environment*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, 1.

[31]"The Challenge of an Eco-Just Society" (Editorial), *Vidyajyoti* 65, 3 (March 2001), 163.

abused, wasted, conquered, plundered, privatized, or destroyed. It deserves to be treated with reverence and tenderness.[32] Therefore, the earth is a symbol that sums up all the gifts of life and love, which God shares with human kind, and all living beings.

4.2. The Earth is of God

Everything the earth contains belongs to God. This is the jubilant proclamation of Psalm 24. This aspect is mentioned in the Bible in many places (Ex. 9:29; 19:5; Lev. 25:23; Deut. 10:14; 1 Sam. 2:8; 8:6-9; 47:8; 65:6-14; 50:10-12; 89:12; 95:4-5; Acts 14:15; 17:24-26). In Lev. 25:23, again, the Lord himself affirms that the earth is His. As a fundamental doctrine, this truth was familiar to every Israelite. The earth is the Lord's, because he called the whole world into being. God fashions and names it. The name "earth" is mentioned more than 15 times in the opening chapter of the Bible. The earth is central to God's purpose. The earth is God's cherished bride (Rev. 21:2). "The earth is the Lord's for it is Lord's self manifestation."[33]

Genesis teaches us that the lord God formed us "out of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7, 3:19). Psalm 139 thanks God for fashioning us fearfully and wonderfully "in secret," again "in the depths of the earth."[34] The Old Testament shows nature's link with God who created it, blessed it, and shows him through it. He appears in fire, in wind, and in water. God also uses nature to bring humans closer to him and to punish them when they go astray. Everything in the world, therefore, remains sacred since it is linked with God and leads to him. Various texts in the Psalms (19:1-7, 98:7-9, 104:1-5, 148:3-13) show that all things on the earth are seen as God's handiwork which bring honour and praise to him by their very existence.

4.3. The Earth is Ours

The relation between the earth and the humans is one of respect and love. The earth and the things it holds are not to be taken for granted. The natural resources of God's creation – land, water, air, animal, and plant life are given

[32]Samuel Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," in David G. Hallman, ed., *Eco-theology: Voices from South and North*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, 139.

[33]Samuel Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," in Hallman, ed., *Eco-theology: Voices from South and North*, 130.

[34]L. Stanislaus, "Ecology: An Awareness for Mission," *Vidyajyoti* 63, 8 (August 1999), 576-587.

to humans to give glory to God. They are not to be treated as if they have no identity of their own, rather they deserve to be recognized, acknowledged, and respected.[35]

In Genesis, God said: "till it and keep it" (2:15); this should be understood not as dominion over the whole world but as stewardship on the creation. Stewardship entails bringing "into play those abilities and gifts which distinguish the human being from other creatures."[36] It involves the caring and responsible management of the sources of the earth. As tenants rather than owners, we humans have a responsibility from and accountability to God – a Theo-centric framework.

God places humans in the garden (Gen. 2:15) and walks in the garden suggesting human divine intimacy in the cosmic family (Gen. 3:8). This biblical vision of harmony is to be realized continuously. All the beings can fulfil God's vision only through co-existence, mutual dependence in harmony and communion, thus, perpetually upholding the single vision of the creator forever. That type of an existence is sustainable development and this is an important element in the Kingdom of God.

Land is one of the most important natural resources of God's creation enhancing life. In the Old Testament, land is a blessing and promise from Yahweh. Therefore, it is sacred and covenantal. It was a free gift given by God to the chosen people in sacred trust to be passed on as a precious inheritance (Lev. 25:28). The land was understood to be a good in itself, not just as a property or a commodity. The prophets railed against those who coveted the land and[37] who ruthlessly exploited it (Mic. 2:1-5; Is. 5:8-10)

Psalm 115 speaks of the earth being given to human beings. We celebrate the earth and in her celebrate her God, our God. Therefore, with all these we are called to reflect on selfishness and greed, which come in our way as a hindrance in praising God and the earth. The recent World Council of Churches reflected on the need for considering creation as a gift of God.

Yahweh through his prophets condemns the rich who oppress and destroy the nature (Amos 4:13; 5:10-12; Mic. 2:1-3; Is. 5:8-10). Representing the people the prophets have stood for an eco-just society and critiqued false

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[35]Judit A. Dwyer, "Questions of Special Urgency," *Theology toward the Third Millennium,* ed., Schulteneuer, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, 103-123.

[36]Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's," 134-35.

[37]Marjorie Keenan, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg, 2002,* Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2002.

ideology and corrected oppression. In Micah 4, God promises the people to create them into a new people. In the Old Testament, we see Joel as a prophet of environmental awareness (Joel 1:2-4, 6-7, 9-12, 17-20; 2:2-10). Thus, through the prophets God has upheld an eco-just society in history.

In particular, the Torah refers to duties to the eco-system which sustains life. The land's neglected need for Sabbath is represented as a major reason for the exile of the Hebrews. As we read in Leviticus, "Your land will be deserted…While you are in exile among your enemies, your land will enjoy its Sabbath to the full" (Lev. 26:32-35). Unlike what man does today by polluting, poisoning and raping the earth, God wants humans to mend their ways and consider land as worthy of and in need of God's tender care. Any ecological degradation, any form of imbalance in nature created by humans, discrimination and inequality in human relationships, injustice, and wanton destruction of the ecosystems or depleting the ozone layer, is a destruction of God's creation.

4.4. Jesus Christ, the Ecologist

A serious reflection on the life events of Jesus Christ, his teaching, and his miracles from an ecological point of view is very inspiring. If we can read the gospels from the ecological perspective we can see Jesus as an 'ecologist'. He referred to ordinary creatures such as birds, ravens, sparrows, lilies, grass, etc., to effectively convey his message of concern for the world. He also shared his experience of a loving God dynamically present in the world. He encourages his listeners to have eyes that see and ears that hear the movement of God in the world. Jesus was passing on to his listeners what he had discovered about God's reign in the natural things around him.[38]

The forty-four miracles of Jesus in the gospels reveal His concern for the world as such. Through the miracles Jesus destroys the "domination" of Satan over created realities and establishes the "dominion" of God, which is liberating. In this sense, all the miracles have ecological resonance.[39] The nature miracles (Mk. 4:35-41, 6:45-62) invite us to trust in the absolute power of God in the midst of ecological disasters. The feeding miracles (Mk. 6:32-44, 8:1-10) tell us about the abundant resources of nature, which provide us with food and drink, which need to be evenly distributed according to the needs of the people. The miracles of exorcism (Mk. 4:35-

[38]Stanislaus, "Ecology: An Awareness for Mission," 580.
[39]Stanislaus, "Ecology: An Awareness for Mission," 580.

41) reveal that the cosmic ecological harmony is on the agenda of God who routs the forces of ecocide. The healing miracles (Mk. 5:25-34) call us to be God's stewards in the restoration of the disfigured images of God in creation especially human beings. The resurrection miracle (Mk. 5:21ff., 35-43) challenges us not to be silent spectators of the worldwide ecological holocaust that is taking place but to be active agents in the creation of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1-4). We see in Jesus a champion of restoration, recreation, reformation, and transformation of the universe. In him we are invited to have a new look at creatures; with him we are called to commit ourselves to their defence.[40]

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* on human development, argues that the development of human life through economic and technological progress must be tempered and ordered by a new moral concern both for justice and for ecological limits.[41] Among many other voices, he constantly stressed on the Christian duty of ecological concerns. The Christian community is exhorted to become an ecologically sensitive community.

An illustrious model of ecologically-oriented life was of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. He loved the creation because in it he found God. Assisi appreciated every creature and viewed created beings as a network of relationships. In a globalised context, we are invited to be prophets of deep ecology like Francis.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion amply demonstrates that if humanity is to survive on this planet, humans have to be very cautious in their relation to nature and environment. He has to live in harmony with all of God's creation. Unfortunately, in the name of religion heinous crimes are being committed. According to Einstein, true religion is concerned with men's attitude towards nature at large.[42] Indeed, as religion exists in nature and nature sustains

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[40]I am indebted to Siji Norokariyil in sharing his notes and for discussion on the theme. See his book *Children of the Rainbow: An Integral Vision and Spirituality of our Wounded Planet*, Delhi: Media House, 2007.

[41]John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Encyclical Letter), reprinted in Daniel J. O'Brian and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992, 411.

[42]See Albert Einstein, *Cosmic Religion, with Other Opinions and Aphorisms*, New York: Covici-Friede, 1931.

human life, both religion and nature should be inescapable parts of human existence. Life is un-navigable without the malt, sail, and flag of religion and, as life depends on environmental equilibrium, the teachings of religions can be fairly used for developing a concept of eco-spirituality grounded by various religious faith of the world.[43]

The pollution of human mind prejudicial to nature can go only by embedding the precepts of religion; for, religion is a symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment promising a homogenised and congenial ambience. Indeed, if humanity has to survive, it has to draw sustenance of spirituality from religion for assuring eco-friendly universe. This will be the most scintillating ode or tribute to Vyas, Buddha, Mahabir, Confucius, Christ, Mohammad, and Guru Nanak.

A beautiful phrase in Hinduism tells it succinctly: *Satyam*, □*ivam*, and *Sundaram. Satyam* stands for development based on ground realities perused primarily on affordable tapping of natural resources conditioned by geographic, economic, and socio-cultural factualities of earth society. □*ivam* may stand for development for all, more especially of the poor, indigent and deprived sections of humanity. It will prove to be the real solution of the problems of social, economic, political injustices that have divided nations into warring camps and human beings into soulless agents of development seeking survival at the cost of others. The dimension of *Sundaram* may encompass promotion of beauty, environmental quality, and peace, both mentally and materially.[44] Development devoid of these attributes has reduced human beings to soulless mechanical agents intent on causing decline of environmental equilibrium.

The materiality of the modern world causing eco-crisis can be conquered only through discarding lust for amassing unbounded wealth and riches, banishing hatred and ugly competition and adopting love and compassion instead, and by doing good to others, including nature. This was also the *summum bonum* of the Christ's assertions and the exhortations of the sages and seers of Hinduism.

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[43]Rajdeva Narayan and Janardan Kumar, eds., *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Concepts in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2003, 25-37.

[44]Narayan and Kumar, eds., *Ecology and Religion*, xxxi.