Ecological Cosmology in Hindu Tradition for the 21st Century

Rana P.B. Singh
Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, U.P., India. Email: ranapbs@gmail.com

Perspective

Much has of course been written about ecology, environment, and their cultural interlinings during the last quarter of the 20th century, but little attention has been paid to its intrinsic roots that lie deeply embedded in human thought. The Second World War tells us the sad story of the consequences of industrial revolution and the heavy destruction caused by human greed. In the span of time, human beings realized that they failed to follow the right track of progress. This resulted in raised consciousness among individuals and organizations concerned with research and reflection about the deteriorating environmental situation. The Club of Rome, a group of concerned people and scientists, met in 1968 in Rome and produced a report on the predicament of mankind titled \textit{The Limits of Growth}.\footnote{This book reminded the world that the resources of the earth were not unlimited; they recommended “the limit to growth.” The report stated that five basic factors determine and limit growth on this planet: population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution.} This book reminded the world that the resources of the earth were not unlimited; they recommended “the limit to growth.” The report stated that five basic factors determine and limit growth on this planet: population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution.

Contrary to this report, the Hudson Institute, the internationally recognized think tank, had a different view: the sky is the limit to growth. They refuted all the arguments of the Club and stated that the earth’s resources were unlimited.\footnote{The views of the Hudson Institute helped industries to unscrupulously exploit and exhaust natural resources for unlimited profit. This led to further disastrous consequences. After 20 years, the Club of Rome released the sequel to the earlier study, named \textit{Beyond the Limits}\footnote{—sending a message of hope as well as of warning, and further supporting the results and consequences concluded in the earlier study. That message is: The future of humankind is in its own hands if it changes its lifestyle with a view to saving the earth, consequently saving itself. Humanity has been depleting the resources of the earth and that has led to an ecological crisis, which in turn has endangered world peace. \textit{The 30-Years Update to Limits of Growth} further stressed the need for reducing humanity’s total ecological footprints through integrating balance among technological advance, personal change, and longer planning horizons in the way that allows respect, caring, and sharing across political boundaries.\footnote{The problem is therefore an ethical one—understanding our intrinsic values, practicing co-sharing, and envisioning interrelatedness.}}—sending a message of hope as well as of warning, and further supporting the results and consequences concluded in the earlier study. That message is: The future of humankind is in its own hands if it changes its lifestyle with a view to saving the earth, consequently saving itself. Humanity has been depleting the resources of the earth and that has led to an ecological crisis, which in turn has endangered world peace. \textit{The 30-Years Update to Limits of Growth} further stressed the need for reducing humanity’s total ecological footprints through integrating balance among technological advance, personal change, and longer planning horizons in the way that allows respect, caring, and sharing across political boundaries.}\footnote{The problem is therefore an ethical one—understanding our intrinsic values, practicing co-sharing, and envisioning interrelatedness.}}

Recent debate suggests that “religion has the capacity to form intentional groups and communities as well as to mobilize agents to work for certain noble goals.”\footnote{In the debate for understanding the formation of “new publics in the 21st century,” “publics” may be conceived as individuals and/or groups who attempt to create knowledge and/or achieve certain actions using religious ideals, beliefs, and/or symbols. Here, some clues from the ancient Indian (Hindu) traditions are worth taking into consideration. Religion (\textit{dharma}) plays a vital role in the Hindu quest for understanding and practicing harmony between nature and humanity, which results in the formation of a cosmological awakening, i.e., “transcending the universe.” This new ecospiritual consciousness (ethical conscience) has also proved its capacity to}}
mobilize common masses and resources. However, it also sometimes turned to superstition, fundamentalism, and has been used as a political tool for emotional blackmailing. The message of “transcendence” may be taken as a call of “deep awakening” in the 21st century, and an onward march to ecospirituality may be taken as a “way.”

Ecospirituality is a manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment. It incorporates an intuitive and embodied awareness of all life and engages a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to soil. It is a process and lifestyle of thought and realization that we belong to the universe, we are home in it, and this deep experience and revelation of belongingness can make our lives profoundly meaningful—as well as make the world more humane.

The question of moral duty of a human being to save community and nature is a subject involving inherently deep thought, or ethical values. According to environmental philosopher Rolston: “The prescription of an ecological morality is ‘mutual coercion, mutually agreed on’ in which we limit freedom to grow in order to stabilize the ecosystem to the mutual benefit of all.” Imposition of value appears as a human response to the world, in association with nature, in the realization to the cosmic interrelatedness. This is an issue of human duty and a wish to promote cultural interrelatedness. Another environmental philosopher Callicott, who has examined a variety of religious traditions for their ecological insights, opines that Hindu tradition entails an understanding of reality that is essentially hostile to environmental concerns. He writes: “From the Hindu perspective, the empirical world is both unimportant, because it is not ultimately real, and contemptible, because it seduces the soul into crediting appearances, pursuing false ends, and thus earning bad Karma.” The claim by Callicott has to be considered in the light of the fact that it lacks knowledge of Sanskrit philosophical literature, and in no way conforms to field experiences in India. Advaita Vedanta is similarly blamed for encouraging attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe, and for advocating that nature is to be feared, despised, and transcended. One should also take note of the mosaics of culture, traditions, transitions, interdependencies, and, above all, the varying lifestyles and differing philosophies that exist in every part of India distinctively and sometimes desperately.

In spite of tremendous scientific and technological innovations and their application, humankind today faces a crisis at several levels. The main idea of “progress and development” was conceived in the light of positivistic-reductionist, empiricist, and anthropocentric enterprises introduced in Europe in the 17th century. However, the alternative worldview of interconnectedness and holism is considered more relevant today. Modern science, like new physics, is recapitulating, in many ways, the ancient spiritual worldview of integral living, where sacrality had been the prime source to realize the spirit of place or power of nature. The ethical domain is based essentially on foundational values, which for Gandhi was ahimsā (nonviolence), for Albert Schweitzer reverence for life, and for Aldo Leopold the sacredness of land. Schweitzer, a Nobel laureate and humanist philosopher, rightly said: “A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help.”

Hindu thought, which has survived from the remote past (at least since 3000 BCE), subscribes to the unity of life and to psychic attachment and sympathy with nature in different forms at various levels, through a variety of rituals and sacrifices. Callicott states approvingly that, “The Hindu tradition of monism and mysticism, no less than the theism and human supremicism of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, has ambivalent implications for environmental ethics.” The central monistic philosophy of Hindu tradition, Vedanta, recognizes that “fundamentally all life is one, that in essence everything is reality, and that this oneness finds its natural expression in a reverence for all things.” In the Bhagavad Gītā, the world is depicted as a unified world: “This entire universe is pervaded by My subtle presence” (9.4). Additionally, the ultimate goal is to attain a state of “functional nature with deity” (14.2).
This ethical message is a call for environmental sensitivity leading to the domain of sustainability. Here, an attempt is made to present some of the selected viewpoints to understand the cultural-historical roots of Indian thought, especially Hindu tradition. Hindu tradition is a congregation of several sects, groups of adherents, monastic traditions, kathenotheism (worshipping many gods, one at a time), and variety of belief systems and rituals. This religious tradition represents over 14 per cent of the world population of 7 billion people.

**Ecological Cosmology: Life and Five Gross Elements**

According to Hindu cosmogony, the five gross elements (*pañca mahābhūtas*) are responsible for the life substance in the cosmic creation. These “elements create, nurture and sustain all forms of life, and after death or decay, they absorb what was created earlier; thus they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment.”\(^{15}\) The *Mahābhārata* (12.198.14–19) states that the Supreme God created primordial man, who first made sky; from sky, water was made and from sea of water, fire and air—these latter two together made the earth. Hence, in a metaphysical sense, these elements are not separated from earth other. These elements are related to one another by means of their intrinsic nature leading to a bond among creatures.\(^{16}\) In the Puranic theory of creation, the Svyayamvahu God Brahmā (self-born creator), being desirous of progeny, created water first. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.3.2–5) says that primordial man was lying down in the waters of the universe.

**Water (Āpah)**

Water is regarded as the primary materialization of Viṣṇu’s māyā (energy), and therefore known as a visible manifestation of the divine essence.\(^{17}\) In most of the ancient cultures, it is mythologized as the primal substance, from which all forms came and to which they will return.\(^{18}\) In Hindu mythology, it is considered as the first sacred fluid for purification ritual. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.10.1), it is described as an attribute linking subtler fire and grosser earth in different forms. The *Rg Veda* (10.129.3) says that “in the beginning, all was water, and there was darkness which engulfed it.”

The environmental ethics and crisis of water pollution have been realized in Hindu thought in the ancient period. One of the hymns of the *Rg Veda* states: “The waters in the sky, the waters of the rivers, and the waters in well whose source is ocean, may all these sacred waters protect me” (7.49.2). To maintain the sacred power of water, norms have also been suggested: “one should not cause urine, stool, or cough in the water. Anything which is mixed with these impious objects; blood and poison should not be thrown into the water” (*Manusmṛti*, 4.55). The importance of water is fully elaborated in the *Mahābhārata*: “The creator first produced water for the maintenance of life among human beings. The water enriches life and its absence destroys all creatures and plant life” (12.18.4). But in the course of time, the implications drawn from the textual ideals and practice by the masses followed antipodal paths, which produced a scarcity of drinking water and a critical level of availability of pure water. A proverb says, “binu pānī, sab sun” (without water, everything gets deserted).

**Air (Vāyu)**

In the later Vedic mythologies, *prāṇa* (breath of life) is identified as the superior vital force represented with the wind god (Vāyu), who is responsible for the breath of the universe and of life, thus forming a cosmic integrity with nature. The *Rg Veda* (10.186.1) prays to Vāyu as Vāta, who is able to prolong our life and brings well-being. A later text, the *Manusmṛti* (4.77) says that the life of all creatures depends upon the air. Furthermore, it is said that the body of all organic beings can be sustained only as long as the *prāṇa* inhabits it: “All these creatures
enter with the breath (into the body), and with the breath they again depart out” (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 1.11.5).

**Earth (Prithvī)**
The earth is perceived as mother and upholder of all (Ṛg Veda, 1.155.2). The narratives that feature the earth goddess describe her as being offended by immoral, unethical, or criminal activities:

> Although the idea of polluting the earth does not seem to arise in these texts, there is the idea that human beings must act in ethically suitable ways or risk the wrath or discomfiture of the earth itself. That is, there is the idea of reciprocity between humans and the earth. The earth bears and feeds human beings, and in return they are responsible for behaving in ways that are inoffensive to the earth.  

It has been of immense symbolic significance in Hindu mythology, particularly with respect to identification, security, and maintenance of existence and continuity of human beings. Since ancient times, Hindus have been attached to agrarian life; the sense of attachment to the earth had led to the idea of it as goddess, mother, and overall “generator of natural life.” The Prithvī Sūkta of the Atharva Veda (12), consisting of 63 verses, integrates most of the basic thoughts of Hindu sages concerning perceiving nature, the human dependency on the earth, and the resultant care and respect required.

**Fire/Light (Agni/Tejāḥ)**
Fire has played a major role in many mythologies. Agni, the fire god in the Vedic period, stood as a powerful deity and as a cosmic principle that pervades creation. It is also accepted as the source of rain. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa says: “From Agni is born steam, from steam the cloud, from the cloud rain” (5.3.5.17). In Vedic cosmology, Agni is said to exist in the three cosmic realms: the heaven, the earth, and the under worlds (Ṛg Veda, 3.22.2). Wherever there is being, there too is Agni as the principle of life and growth. He is referred to as the ultimate being with various kinships (Ṛg Veda, 10.7.3).

**Space/Sky (Ākāśa)**
The Ṛg Veda (1.90.7) describes sky as the father and the earth as mother. Sky and space are referred to as synonymous with one another in the Vedic texts. Space is also conceived as a dwelling place of the forces of nature (water, air, earth, and fire), where the embryo of the universe was developed (Atharva Veda, 1.11.2). According to Upaniṣadic dialogue, it is the space out of which all beings (their souls) came from, and it is where they go back after death, because space is the final refuge of all beings (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 1.9.1).

Each of the above five elements, according to Hindu mythologies, is symbolized as some part of the body of primordial man, and the divine being is the inner soul of all. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes the cosmic form of Viṣṇu: “You are everything, earth, water, fire, air and space, the subtle world, the Nature-of-All (pradhāna) and the Person (puruṣa) who stands forever aloof” (3.17.14). Additionally, the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad states:

> Fire is his head, his eyes the moon and sun; the regions of space, his ears, his voice, the revealed Vedas; wind his breath; his heart, the whole world, out of his feet, the earth. Truly he is the inner soul of all! (2.1.4)

This verse metaphorically illustrates harmonic integration in nature, and acknowledges the importance for human peace, happiness, and tranquillity with respect to the human quest for self-identity in the universe. The version has also been described with respect to the incarnation
of Lord Viṣṇu, the protector god among the Hindu trinity. According to the mythology, 10 incarnations of Viṣṇu exist, the first 5 of which are considered fundamental, referring symbolically to the body and symmetrically balancing the origin of the human being with his cosmic relationship (see Table 16.1).

The five incarnations of Viṣṇu symbolize the creation and evolution process that interconnects man and nature. According to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1.8.1.1–6), the first incarnation, fish, symbolizes the origin of life in water. In this form, Viṣṇu had saved organic life-seeds from the great cosmic flood. The tortoise form refers to the life form, which equally enjoys water and land. The third form of boar, symbolizing the life of forest and land, helped to save earth from submergence in the cosmic flood. The man–lion refers to the phase of cooling earth, through which human power was established over demons. The fifth form, dwarf (a symbol of primitive man), attempted to control over the three realms of the world. According to the Hindu timescale, the kalpa (initial time) of life substance started around 432 million years ago and Viṣṇu took the form of a fish. The five later incarnations (not included in the table) present the growth of vivid cognition of the human psyche, like victory over the world (Paraśurāma), ideal social rule (Rāma), the model of karma (Kṛṣṇa), message of peace and synthesis (Buddha), and the era of falsehood (Kalkī, yet to be born).

Table 16.1: The Five Incarnations of Viṣṇu: Symbolism and Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incarnation (Avatāra)</th>
<th>Gross Element Symbol</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Nature Symbol</th>
<th>Body Symbol</th>
<th>Textual Reference</th>
<th>Pūjā Day in Practice (Dvādaśī)</th>
<th>Main Item for the pūjā</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matsya (fish)</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Saving organic life-seeds from the great cosmic flood</td>
<td>Origin of life in water</td>
<td>Blood</td>
<td>SB 1.8.1.1–6</td>
<td>Mārga-śīrṣa S.12</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kūrma (tortoise)</td>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Providing a base for creation from water</td>
<td>Life in water and land</td>
<td>Breath</td>
<td>SB 7.5.1.5</td>
<td>Pauṣa S.12</td>
<td>Copper or ghee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varāha (boar)</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Getting submerged earth out of the cosmic flood</td>
<td>Life in forest and land</td>
<td>Proper substance</td>
<td>SB 14.1.2.11</td>
<td>Māgha S.12</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narasiṁha (man-lion)</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Getting established human power over demons</td>
<td>Phase of cooling the earth</td>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Mbh 12.339.77–102</td>
<td>Phālunga K.12</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vāmana (dwarf)</td>
<td>Sky/Ether</td>
<td>Getting control over the three realms of world</td>
<td>Origin of primitive man</td>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>SB 1.2.5.1</td>
<td>Caitra S.12</td>
<td>Icon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Notes: VP, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 4.2; SB, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; Mbh, the Mahābhārata; S, the Śukla Pakṣa, light-half; and K, the Kṛṣṇa Pakṣa, dark-half (both in the Hindu lunar calendar)].

The cyclical process of evolution in the Vedic and Puranic literature recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena, or ecological awareness, even in sequence. Physicist Capra believes that “ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest sense, . . . [and]
the new vision of reality is in harmony with the visions of spiritual traditions.\textsuperscript{21} The paradigm shift in new physics concerning the unified theory projects the Earth as a “self-organizing organism”—metaphorically the Earth as Mother.

**The Spirit of Place**

In ancient Indian thought, “sacrality” (devatva) was described as a manifesting force to understand and to experience the deeper insights. In visiting a sacred place (tīrthasthāna), we are not dealing with an unending journey back and forth across a piece of territory of land solely in pursuit of experiencing awe and wonder. Instead, we are looking at a sacred journey (tīrthayāṭrā), in which each stage has sacred significance—an inherent message and in-depth meaning. We certainly need new maps for another type of geography, another worldview\textsuperscript{22} that is rooted in and starts from emotional and spiritual connections to place (tīrthabhūta)—an inherent reality of humanity. Whenever human beings feel close to the subtle and powerful force of the place or land, “spirit of place” (genius loci) is experienced by human sensitivity. Of course every place has some potential power, nevertheless some places have special power and possess deeper intensity (e.g., sacred place). By manifestation of this power (pavitrībhū), these places become the points of “geographical sanctity” (bhū-pavīṭrīka). A sacred place is a place that symbolically represents the world, ultimately reflecting the order and wholeness like a mystic web of the cosmos. Its very own layout encloses a world, and to man it becomes, at a deeply sensual level, the cosmos.\textsuperscript{23}

By the realization of the manifesting sacrality in the place and landscape, the associated territory converges to sacredscape (tīrthakaśetra). The spatial level of territorial exposition starts from kin–clan sacred ties and reaches to the higher psychic level of ethical values for mankind. There always exists a “spirit of place” that interconnects the varying niches of level and intensity. Of course, at present, perhaps due to the increasing pace of individualism, this unifying spirit is now suppressed. However, by the ethical revival of the deeply rooted old values, a healthy tradition of making a balance is being promoted. Pilgrimage (tīrthayāṭrā) is the strongest and oldest tradition in Hindu civilization, with an aim to cross this materialistic world and experience the higher realm. The variety of a rich, vibrant, and diverse physical landscape has contributed spiritual insights to their corresponding geographies of visionary wisdom and enlightenment.\textsuperscript{24}

According to the Atharva Veda (18.4.7), one can obtain relief from all forms of suffering the moment one reaches the territory of sacredscape. In the cosmogonic frame of sanctifying environment, the whole of India is portrayed as sacredscape and symbolized as Mother (Bhāratā Mātā) consisting of holy spots (pīṭhas) as represented by her body. There are 51 Śakti Pīṭhas in India, where some part of Sati’s body (corpse-form of goddess Pārvatī, wife of Śiva) fell down. Among the 51 pīṭhas, 2 are not yet identified and 9 are out of India (cf. Fig. 16.1). In fact, location of these sites refers to the concept of Greater India, Bhāratavarṣa. These pīṭhas are identical to the number of Devanāgrī/Sanskrit alphabets, i.e., “51.” Each of the alphabets is associated with a pīṭha in a systematic manner.

Since ancient times, the act of pilgrimage has been the most popular way to fulfil human beings’ quest for a divine connection between man and the environment—an experience of the “spirit of place.” Of course, this is a hallmark of religious devotion; this is also an act of cleansing, healing, and revelation of geographical sanctity.\textsuperscript{25} Pilgrimage is an act of crossing; to cross is to be transformed. Sacredscape is the place (and territory) of transformation. Such a place becomes holy where “wholeness” is preserved. Pilgrimage is a spirit—a guiding force unifying the divinity and humanity, i.e., a search for wholeness. Ultimately, the overall wholeness of landscape, and its sacred and symbolic geography, converges to a faithscape that encompasses sacred place, sacred time, sacred meanings, and sacred rituals, embodying both
symbolic and tangible elements of the psyche in an attempt to realize man’s identity in the cosmos.

Fig. 16.1. The 51 Śakti Pīṭhas in India

Hindu tradition places a great emphasis on correct conduct and on fulfilment of duty, which often includes obligations of involving environmental preservation. That is how Hindus regard rivers as sacred, and in the concept of līlā, the creative play of the gods, Hindu theology engages the world as a creative manifestation of the divine. In Hindu mythologies, the sacred Gaṅgā flows through the three realms of the heaven, the earth, and the underworlds (tripathagā)—respectively as the Mandākinī, the Gaṅgā, and the Bhogavatī. The Gaṅgā manifests the spirit of sustainability as the primordial fluid serving as the savior of life and as a divine energy interlinking the three realms. That is how the Gaṅgā is a liquid axis mundi, a pathway connecting all spheres of reality. She is also known as the Mother Ganga (Gaṅgā Māī), bringing life in the form of sacred water.
The above two examples are representative of the environmental sensitivity to the Mother Earth and her power of manifestation. This is a process and search for ecological roots through understanding the foundational value of life, i.e., the sacredness of land and spirit of
place. At present, the unified way, “to approach social and cognitive environment is to encourage geography to accept salience of place as a great potentiality.”

**The Spirit of Sustainability**

The ethics of “sustainable development,” to which almost everyone subscribes today, requires this generation to use the world’s environmental resources in ways that do not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To be successful, this principle requires another dimension—reverence and revelation (ecospirituality). Development should preserve, not destroy, those assets of the natural and spiritual power of our own cultural heritage, which future generations would also wish to enjoy and cherish. The spirit of sustainability can be thought of as the ethic to behave in ways that help others and to realize the deeper nature of things—the cosmic integrity that is ultimately the sanctity of life. This involves a way of life and action determined by the deeper principle of realizing the intrinsic value one’s actions serve. This is the call of the time—“Care the Earth, care ourselves,” as proclaimed by Rolston: “A century ago the challenge was to know where you were geographically in a blank spot on the map, but today we are bewildered philosophically in what has long been mapped as a moral blank space. Despite out scientific and cultural taming of wild nature we will wander, confused as how to value it.”

Obviously, “since the roots of [ecological] trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether that or not. We must re-think and re-feel our nature and destiny.” Ethical values are the moral force in the sustainable existence, progress, maintenance, and continuance for the human being.

The disappearing presence of Hindu thinking about the man–nature–cosmos relationship is one of the basic causes for the present environmental crisis that India is facing today. Mahatma Gandhi warned us that “Nature has enough for everybody’s need, but not for everybody’s greed.” During the past 700 years of foreign cultural domination—beginning with Islam and followed by European Christianity—the ancient Hindu value system has lost many of its facets. Nevertheless, the seeds of this ancient system of spiritual wisdom are still preserved in religious ethics found in ancient writings and surviving rituals. A mass awakening of awareness in context of old cultural values would promote a new spirit of sustainability. Let us raise the general consciousness and awareness to interlink the concept of sanctifying Earth and community development. If there should be a moral imperative for sustainable development, we need a sense of sanctifying about the Earth.

The Gandhian view of nonviolence (ahimsā), vegetarianism, and karma (right action) is based on the idea of total spiritual interconnectedness of all life, of the divine within all life. One has to realize that “the living Earth has a right to life, and that right is the primary moral argument for sustainable life.” Gandhian thought is more relevant today and well suited to the soul and society of India. Gandhi gathered strength and inspiration to promote the sense of self-realization from the Bhagavad Gītā: “He whose self is harmonized by yoga seeth the Self abiding in all beings and all being in the Self; everywhere he sees the same” (7.29). We need to make development sustainable, both environmentally and culturally. The Padma Purāṇa prescribes punishment for the persons involved in acts of environmental pollution: “A person, who is engaged in killing creatures, polluting well, and ponds, and tanks and destroying gardens, certainly goes to hell” (Bhūmikhaṇḍa, 96.7–8).

The minimal core of intrinsic values for right conservation and preservation of the spirit of sustainability is formed by the following: Reverence, the deeper vision of the sanctity of life; responsibility, connecting link between ethics and rationality; frugality, grace without waste; and ecojustice. The idea of reverential development is, in fact, an exposition of integration between dharma (moral code of conduct) and karma (right action). This idea, in another way, is unitary in the broadest and deepest sense, combining reverence and sanctity of life with contemporary socioeconomic, moral, cultural, and traditional premises to bring about peace.
and harmony with nature. Peace and poise are narrated by the Vedic seers as the precondition of orderly and sustainable ecospiritual development. A hymn in the *Yajur Veda* (10.17.1), a text of the 10th century BCE says:

- There is peace in heavenly realm
- There is peace in the environment
- The water is cooling; herbs are healing
- The plants are peace-giving
- There is harmony in the celestial objects and perfection in knowledge;
- Everything in the universe is peaceful
- Peace pervades everywhere.
- May that peace come to us!

In the spirit of the deeply rooted sense of attachment of inner spirit and human awakening, Rabindranath Tagore, in his *Gītānjali* (1913), has composed a book of lyrics that preserved the essence of the Indian view of mankindness and perfection of dharma, and the vision of divineness that acquired universal appeal. He received the Nobel Prize for literature as a token of the recognition of his vision. He soars high among its 103 stanzas, which include the following:

- Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
- Where knowledge is free
- Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
- By narrow domestic walls
- Where words come out from the depth of truth
- Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
- Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
- Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
- Where the mind is led forward by thee
- Into ever-widening thought and action
- Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake!

The spirit of sustainability is also related to ecological identity, and refers to “all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions and sense of self.” Following the Vedic reflection, sustainability refers to the maintenance of a unified sensibility in search for wholeness and interrelationships among matter, life, and mind. This viewpoint is the essence of ethics behind the development and maintenance of Indian heritage—for which the Sanskrit/Hindi word “dharmohara,” which is derived from “the mother earth” (*dharā*) and “endeavor of identity through time” (*ihara*), is explained in terms of roots—and “our” deep glories of the past.

Modernization and messages contained in ancient wisdom should be allowed to coexist to help realize humanity’s link with nature. This ideology should be taken as an environmental ethic having sacrality and deep attachment at the core. One may also hope for a revival of the sense of belongingness in the light of “ecoethics,” preserving the age-old intangible spirit of sustainability and recognizing our ecological identity in the cosmic web of interconnectedness of all beings—a message of ecospirituality.

**Epilogue: The March Ahead**

In the course of the acculturation process, the ideology of materialism, consumerism, and individualism, which was always negated in traditional Hindu thought, has been accepted by contemporary society. At the other end, the movement to revive ancient cultural values is
turning to fundamentalism as promoted by some groups. The old principle satyameva jayate (only truth triumphs) is now replaced by arthameva jayate (only wealth triumphs). The foreign cultural domination of India during the past 700 years and the influence of imported culture have played a major role in this transformation.

It seems that by encouraging politicians and bureaucrats to take a more holistic view of the global ecosystem, based on self-realization and an awareness of deep human values, many of the complexities and obstacles in sustainable development may be resolved. The need of spirituality-oriented education should also be accepted as an alternative strategy. The physicist and ecophilosopher Capra feels that spirituality will ultimately lead to profound change in our social and political structures. Let us promote the attitude to humanity (say, moral ethics) by balancing and reconciling the rational-scientific and the intuitive-spiritual viewpoints in our society and ourselves. For Mahatma Gandhi, “right” comes only through the realization of truth. He says: “God is the means and Truth is the end.” For him, ahiṁsā is linked with notions of karma (right act). The earliest mention of the ethical importance of karma in the Hindu context is found in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad that states: “One becomes good by good action, bad by bad” (3.2.10.113). This ethic constitutes the norm of dharma (moral code of right conduct). The Mahābhārata says: “One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma” (13.113.8). Similarly, concepts such as the dao (underlying law of universe) of Daoism, li (social propriety) of Confucianism, and the Greek concepts of dike (the order of justice) and logos (the orderly principle of the universe) also suggest, in the broadest sense, that human development takes place within limits. This is the prime duty of human beings to realize, that for the constant perennial flow of water (life) in the river of progress in the 21st century, a lifeway and a life philosophy that integrate ecological interconnectedness and human well-being have to be accepted as a process through deeper understanding, mass awakening, and self-realization.

Gandhi’s life and work do hold possible implications for the postmodern approach to environment, mostly based on his principle of ahiṁsā (nonviolence) and aparigraha (non-possession). He says: “I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and, therefore, sinful.” His theory of ahiṁsā was not strict like a sectarian rule; he says: “whoever believes in ahimsa will engage himself in occupations that involve the least possible violence.” Without any political propaganda, Acharya Tulsi’s Anuvrat movement is promoting the process of self-purification and self-control, in many ways akin to Gandhism, since 1949. In support of this movement, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan says: “A civilised human being must be free from greed, vanity, passion, anger. Civilisations decline if there is a coarsening of moral fibre, if there is a callousness of heart. . . . It requires strict adherence to the principles of good life.” Think of what Brook said: “If spiritual teaching and practice is meant to enable us to be fully aware of our own mind, yet doesn’t enable us to see this ‘splitting’ process when it happens, maybe we need to look more deeply at the way we are applying the practice.”

In ancient Indian thought, we “find a way to bring our scientific understanding of nature’s organic complexity an integral harmony with a spiritual understanding of reality’s simplicity.” The Bhagavad Gītā (4.8) states laconically: “He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men, and he does all action harmoniously.” Gandhi’s whole life and his movement are the messages to justify the viewpoints and worldview he experienced and practiced. It is with such conviction that Gandhi always hopes for peace between religions as they all are grounded and inspired by an indwelling lure toward deeper wisdom relevant to salvation, however understood. The close connection forged with organic philosophy by Whitehead and Gandhi in terms of “ecotheology might be relevant to the larger context of the many world religions and to the better hopes of the world as a whole.” He further adds that the five challenges relative to our social locations and historical situations
Singh, Rana P.B. 2013. Ecological Cosmology in Hindu Traditions…in, Sharma & Khanna (eds.) 256

need serious engagement for the sake of interconnectedness and ecological cosmology: compassion (reverential/moral concerns), repentance (cultural reconstruction/self-critical), simplicity (frugality/Geltung), ecological outlook (eternal vision/sustainability), and diversity (befriending/pluralistic). All together, they call and promote divine love as it beckons human beings to live compassionately and creatively.

Mills concludes his promises of “sociological imagination” by his future-oriented and firm exposition:

It is now the social scientist’s foremost political and intellectual task—for here the two coincide—to make clear the elements of contemporary uneasiness and indifference. It is the central demand made upon her by other cultural workers—by physical scientists and artists, by the intellectual community in general. It is because of this task and these demands, I believe, that the social sciences are becoming the common nominator of our cultural period, and the sociological imagination our most needed quality of mind.

This is comparable to the provocative statement by Callicott: “As citizens of one planet and as denizens of its many cultural worlds, we hold the fate of the earth in our hands. And of all the means available to save it, none are so powerful or so resourceful as our collective stock of traditional ideas and ideals.” After all, if a mutually enhancing relationship between human civilization and the natural environment is to evolve, all our thinking and lifeways must be supplemented by environmental moral sensibility what six decades earlier American conservationist Aldo Leopold called an “ecological conscience.” On the line of Gaian worldview, it is strongly argued that “we need to establish a right relationship with the planet as a living entity in which we are indissolubly embedded—and to which we all accountable.” Dupré’s proclamation that “spirituality is of world affirmation” and there is no separate realm is a message of surrounding interconnectedness of the cosmological web, where we experience and live together with ecospiritual reality. Mazis adds rightly that “the surround, of which we are part, is the source of spiritual inspiration and the object of reverence, the gift-giver to all living and nonliving beings and the necessary focus of our care.”

If I am not for myself, who will be? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

So, Rabbi Hillel asks: If not now, when? Now is the time for repentance: for learning about and acknowledging the harm we have done, and for changing our views and lifestyles and our attitudes toward global, national, and local issue.

Change is the law of nature. Humanity’s progress is transformation. Evolution is gradual change. Revolution is accelerated change. Revelation is eternal change. We should meet to discuss moving from evolution in the roots, passing through the revolution of contemporary understanding, and reaching to the destination of revelation in creating the world of harmonious brotherhood where peace and happiness become the ultimate reality of life. One of the crucial crises that Hindu tradition faces today is misconceived idea that ritual frame of performing religion and the life philosophy and eternal quest of spirituality are complementary, and in many ways also identical. In the textual tradition, however, in course of transformation of thought-and-practice, it took an unusual turn as accepted by the masses.

As opposed to traditional intellectuals, whose concern derives from the self-enclosed realm of elite cultural life, let us cut across the disciplinary boundaries in making “civic” environmentalism and ecospirituality a way of life and concern for humanity. Think universally, see globally, behave regionally, and act locally but insightfully. This is an appeal for cosmic vision, global humanism, and self-realization. Altogether, it promotes an
ecospiritual worldview, a spirit of wholeness, and a sense of holiness grounded on an evolutionary cosmology—by the core of which lies the sanctity, the faith, and the vision of ecospirituality.

**Notes**

6. Ibid., ref. 5.


34. Ibid., ref. 32, p. 32.


36. Ibid., ref. 32, p. 103.


44. Ibid., ref. 41, p. 35.

Singh, Rana P.B. 2013. Ecological Cosmology in Hindu Traditions…in, Sharma & Khanna (eds.) 259


48. Ibid., ref. 47.


55. Anne Primavesi, “Can Gaia Forgive Us?,” in Midgley, Earthy Realism, ref. 46, p. 73.


Abstract.

In Indian thought the sense of intrinsic value is posed in the basic quest of knowing the place and role of man with respect to interrelatedness of ecological cosmology, i.e. ecospirituality, receiving more attention today under New Age Movement. The question of moral duty of human being to the community and nature is the subject of imposition of inherent deep thought, i.e., ethical values, since ancient past in Indian thought. Imposition of value appears as human response to the world, in association with nature, and in realization to the cosmic interrelatedness. This is an issue of human duty, a sense of realization, a wish to promote culture and civilisation for human development. The idea of nature and human integrity in Hindu thought depends upon ways in which people see and experience themselves, their sense of attachment to nature, and their ways of maintaining this. It is through symbolism, the main expression of mythological understanding, that one can gain insight into the relationships of humanity to nature. Religion (dharma) plays a vital role in the Hindu quest for understanding and practicing harmony between nature and humanity that result to the formation of a cosmological awakening, i.e. ‘transcending the universe’. The importance and applicability of such new consciousness is a good sign in promoting global humanism in the 21st century. The central monistic philosophy of Hindu tradition, Vedanta, recognizes that ‘fundamentally all life is one, that in essence everything is reality, and that this oneness finds its natural expression in a reverence for all things’. This essay attempts to present ecospiritual contextuality and its vitality concerning environmental sensitivity in India, illustrated with myths, traditions and symbols that evolved in the past and continued in the passage of time, and is on the way to critical appraisal.

Keywords: Ecospirituality, Hindu tradition, Gross elements, spirit of place, dharma, new vision.
The Author

Contact & Corresponding Address:
Prof. Dr. RANA P. B. SINGH
Professor of Cultural Geography & Heritage Studies,
& Head, Dept. of Geography, Banaras Hindu University
# New F - 7, Jodhpur Colony; B.H.U.,
Varanasi, UP 221005. INDIA.
Tel: (+091)-542-2575-843. Cell: (+91-0)- 9838 119474.
Email: ranapbs@gmail.com; ranapbsingh@dataone.in