

ROLE OF HINDUISM IN MAINTAINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Also known as 'Sanatan Sanskriti'; Hinduism is the world's third largest religion and enjoys the status of world's oldest religion. Because of the wide variety of Hindu traditions, freedom of belief and practice are outstanding features of Hinduism. The value system of Hinduism is full with love for nature. Earth is respected as 'mother goddess', Lessons for purity of the five elements- space, air, fire, water and earth, to take care of mother goddess is 'dharma' as a key elements of value system. There are separate teachings to protect our environment, which are considered as spiritual but with the purpose to get maximum benefit without producing any harmful impact. So, the concept of Sustainable development also speaks about the same. The paper shall deal with various practices in Hinduism to promote the concept of Sustainable development, Successful Environmental movements that progress on the basis of teachings of Hinduism and gain popularity. In the present era of race for industrialization, the paper shall also deal with suggestions to promote the practices of Hinduism to achieve sustainable development.

Key words: Earth, Environment, Hinduism, Sustainable development and Value System.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all countries are in a race to fill their country with industries with a belief that it is only through industrialization economic growth can be achieved. Industry uses natural resources base and inserts both products and pollution into the environment. In the run for rapid industrialization natural resources are exclusively being depleted. The rapid economic growth achieved after globalization by most of the developing countries, has imposed considerable social costs and has become a major threat to sustainable development. There should be Sustainable development by achieving a proper trade-off between environment and development. The term "Sustainable development" has gained currency in the last few years. From 'Limits to Growth (1972) to 'Brundtland Report' (1987) and then to Kyoto Protocol (1997) all the countries have shown their concern towards Sustainable development.

The Constitution of any country is the basic source of law and the provisions of all other laws are subject to the provisions of the Constitution itself. The Indian Constitution is amongst the few in the world that contains specific provisions on environment protection. The various provisions of the Constitution highlight the national consensus on the importance of environmental protection and improvement and lay the foundation for a jurisprudence of environmental protection.

From the earliest days of the Hindu civilization, reverence for the environment has been an integral part of Hindu society. Our ancient forefathers perceived God's presence around them through nature; they considered the natural forces which affected their lives as manifestations of the Supreme Being or God named Brahman. The far sightedness of the Hindu sages is evident in Vedic hymns, because, in ancient times, natural resources were not scarce and the capacity of nature to heal itself was much more than the harm inflicted on nature by human activity. However, Hindu sages realized that for sustainable development, preservation of nature was essential. Here is a hymn from Isha Upanishad:

"Everything in the universe belongs to the Supreme God. Therefore take only what you need, that is set aside for you. Do not take anything else, for you know to whom it belongs".^[1]

DEFINING RELIGION

"Religion is the belief in an ever-living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind."^[2] Harriet Martineau

"Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe; A particular integrated system of this expression; the spiritual or emotional attitude of one who recognizes the existence of a superhuman power or powers."^[3] American Heritage Dictionary

DEFINING HINDUISM

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion."-B.G.Tilak

(Quoted by the Supreme Court of India on 2 July 1995 as the basic definition of Hindu)[4].

Hinduism is the religion practiced the world over. The origin of Hinduism is impossible to determine, since they evolved as time and culture impacted the religious ideas of early India. The term 'Hindu' was derived from the river or river complex of the northwest, the "Sindhu". Sindhu is a Sanskrit word used by the inhabitants of the region, the Aryans in the second millennium BCE. Hinduism has a collection of sacred texts, as a whole known as *Sanatan Dharma*, "The Eternal Teaching." Hinduism firmly believes in the theory of *KARMA*, the universal law of cause and effect, and fundamentally holds that one's actions (including one's thoughts) directly determine one's life, both one's current life and one's future lives. The tradition is typically divided into four major sects: Shaiva (devotees of the god Shiva), Vaishnava (devotees of the god Vishnu), Shakta (devotees of the goddess), and Smarta (those who understand the ultimate form of the divine to be abstract and all encompassing, Brahman).

ETHNICITY OF HINDUISM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THEIR ROLE TO SAVE ENVIRONMENT

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः। सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु। मा कश्चित् दुःख भाग्भवेत्॥

May all be happy; May all be without disease;
May all have well-being; May none have misery of any
sort

— Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.14

For last thousands of years, this simple and applicable prayer has been offered by almost all people belonging to Hinduism. Even all Indians know about application of this prayer. The simple meaning is 'may all be happy and healthy'.

In previous times, Sustainability of humankind was taken for granted and did not appear as an explicit goal. It certainly was an implicit goal: no human society has ever consciously promoted its own unsustainability. Global developments now focus attention on Sustainability as an explicit goal. But, the concept has to be translated into the practical dimensions of the real world to make it operational. We must be able to recognize the presence

or absence of Sustainability, or of threats to Sustainability, in the systems under our stewardship. We need proper indicators to provide this information, to tell us where we stand with respect to the goal of Sustainability. Sustainability is a dynamic concept. Societies and their environments changes, technologies and cultures changes, values and aspirations changes, and a Sustainable society must allow and Sustain such changes, i.e., it must allow continuous, viable and vigorous development, which is what we mean by sustainable development.[5]

Our ancient seers knew and appreciate that living beings are made of five elements, namely water (jal), air (vaayu), earth (prithvi), ether (Akash), and fire (Agni) and the approach of our ancient seers was to keep the five elements pure. Vedic literature is rich in hymns that worship nature in all its manifestations. Vedas are considered the most sacred of all the Hindu scriptures. There are four principal Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda. Vedas begin with the worship of gods of nature.

Vastu Shastra, upon which the now well-known Feng Shui is based. Vastu teaches us how to place and build dwellings, according to the environment it is situated in. It is done in such a way that the surroundings are not damaged by the building's presence, and so that all the natural energies are flowing uninterrupted and freely, providing comfort, peace and prosperity for the dwellers. . *The Atharava Veda* has the magnificent Hymn to the Earth (Bhumi-Sukta) which is redolent with ecological and environmental values."The *Varah Purana* says, "One who plants one peepal, one neem, one bar, ten flowering plants or creepers, two pomegranates, two oranges and five mangos, does not go to hell." In the *Charak Sanhita*, destruction of forests is taken as destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty. The Prithvi Sukta in Atharva veda states "Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivyah" My Mother is Erath and I am her Son.

Article 21 of the constitution provides that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. Although there is no specific or express fundamental right guaranteeing the right to a pollution-free environment, thanks to the judicial activism of the Supreme Court &

various High Courts, such as a right has now acquired the status of a fundamental right under Art.21 of the Indian Constitution[6]. Nowadays, Preservation of Ecology is in fashion. World environment day is celebrated on June 5 every year. But there are so many such practices in Hinduism that are a part of saving our Environment such as worshipping Tulsi, Peepal, Amla tree as these plants purifies our environment. Ganga is sacred river. Our Government is spending crores to clean this holy river. But Hinduism has always given a message to clean rivers also.

Acc. to *Padma Purana*, *A Person who is engaged in killing creatures; polluting ponds, wells and tanks and destroying gardens, certainly goes to hell*". No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis on environmental ethics as Hinduism.[7] The main purpose of such messages is to protect our resources.

Ecological dimension is always an organic part of Hindu Dharma. Ecologically Sustainable development is the most important component of Sustainable development. Practices in Hinduism as mentioned earlier have been fulfilling this purpose. Hinduism has both inspired and grounded the most successful environmental movement '*Chipko Movement*'[8], a Hindu Ecological movement. The word Chipko is derived from Hinduism which means to hug or to embrace. To maintain our age old traditions is also a part of Sustainable development. The real meaning of nature worship in the Vedas is the prosperity of agriculture and the protection of the environment. '*Beech bachao aandolan*'[9] is an important step in this direction. For Sustainable development of hill villages a movement known as '*Raksha Sukra movement*' began in Uttarakhand. In Hinduism there is a religious practice Raksha bandhan i.e. tying a 'Raksha suktra', a holy thread on the wrist of a brother and Sisters wishes long life of his brother. Similar practice has been adopted by women of Uttarakhand as now Trees are their brothers and they tied holy thread on the tree known as 'Raksha suktra' to protect their life. '*Ahimsa*'[10] is basic religious principle to Hindus meaning non- violence. With this value most of the followers of Hinduism are Vegetarian.

Indians have successfully preserved their vegetarian habits that were laid down by their dharmic traditions several millennia ago. Interestingly, meat eating is now linked to global warming. In a groundbreaking 2006 report, the United Nations said that raising animals for

food generates more greenhouse gases than all the cars and trucks in the world combined. Dharmic traditions inspired and founded by gurus and sages such as the Buddha and Mahāvīra, Indian society had successfully moved away from animal sacrifices and killings prevalent in the Vedic era to lifestyles largely based on vegetarianism[11].

The principle thought in Hinduism is known as "*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*"- (The Earth as one Family). Based on this philosophy of '*Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*', '*Navdanya movement*'[12] protect the India's biodiversity based food heritage through *Bija Swaraj*, *Ann Swaraj*, *Bhu Swaraj* and *Gyan swaraj*. To save our Mother Earth, Navdanya also celebrates '*Bhoomi Festival*'.

'*Vandana Shiva*' has campaigned against genetic modification. She is an Indian scientist motivated by her Hindu beliefs to champion the rights of rural women and farmers. She fought against the genetically modified 'terminator' seeds, which produce only one crop and force farmers to buy new seeds each year from the suppliers. She campaigns to stop the patenting of the sacred Neem tree. Neem provides a natural and harmless alternative to pesticides, but global corporations have tried to patent it for their own use[13].

SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE THE PRACTICES OF HINDUISM TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Sanskrit for family is parivara, and environment is paryavarana. All human beings lives with family and role of a human being must be to protect our environment, to sustain our age old traditions, to sustain our sage's teachings on protection of our environment. Ancient Hindu literature strongly advocates that to protect our environment for the sake of our future generations must be assured by the Kings or Rulers. Therefore this assurance must be made by our Government, Policy makers and should do all needful in this direction Hindu philosophy encapsulate within it the modern notion of sustainable development. The '*Bishnoi movement*'[14] in 15th century is a practical example from India to Sustain the Earth's environment for the future generations. Teachings of Hindu Philosophy to preserve our environment must be propagated by our government to achieve Sustainable development. It's our tradition to submit to nature and preserve its sacredness.

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- [8] In 1973-March, a movement started in Garhwal region of Uttarakhand; where by local village women literally "hugged" trees, interposing their bodies between the trees and the loggers to prevent their being cut down.
- [9] begun here in the late 1980s, Led by farmer and social activist Vijay Jardhari, the 'Andolan' has made village Jardhargaon of district Tehri is not only a crusade to conserve traditional seeds but also to promote agricultural biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and local traditions.
- [10] forbidding the taking of life and/or causing injury to any sentient being (except in the context of a Vedic sacrifice where it is prescribed and sanctioned).
- [11] Pankaj Jain (21/5/13). The Environmental Sustainability of Indian Spirituality, The Huffington Post (8/12/15)
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