

Understanding Vedic Texts Through the Lens of Eco–Spiritualism

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Abstract

Eco–spiritualism is not a new idea; in fact, it has a long history in the Vedic tradition. ‘Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam’ in the mantra of Mahā–Upaniṣad of the Sāmaveda tradition presents us with a thought–provoking message, namely, that every being or entity on this earth is one family [अयं बन्धुरयं नेतगिणना लघुचेतसाम् । उदारचरतानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥७१॥]. In the Vedic civilization the realm of ethical thinking was extensive. The Vedic science of ecology addresses eco–spiritualism from the perspective of the cosmological and the ontological unity of nature. However, the ethics of natural laws, such as ṛta, satya and dharma, plays a very vital role in the human being’s environmental actions. Firstly, this paper intends to trace and identify the ecological divinity of the Vedas. Secondly, the paper shall endeavour to apply and evaluate ancient scriptures and their understanding of the environment in terms of its intrinsic value and its relation to human beings. We conclude with the discussion on the problems of eco–spiritualism in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *Vedic–eco–spiritualism; Ṛta, Satya; intrinsic value; reverence*

Introduction

The Vedic tradition offers a vision of the harmony among the earth’s ecosystems and demonstrates the urge to maintain the equilibrium and stability of all life force. The *Vedas* have explained the integrity of nature–culture through the philosophy of eco–spiritualism. The *Vedas* strive to convey the eco–spiritual notion of ‘nature, ultimate reality, and the human being.’ The Vedic hymns deal with the environment and use metaphors such as creativity, power, essence, and

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purity to signify the ultimate reality. Firstly, this paper will endeavour to identify the environmental notions in Vedic tradition. Secondly, it will undertake to apply and evaluate the ancient scriptures which seem to be plausible in our contemporary understanding of the intrinsic value of nature and its relation to the human being.

All four ‘*Rg, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva*’ Vedas and many other scriptures recognize the importance of maintaining the cycle of the seasons which is likely to become altered due to climate change which, in turn, is the result of inappropriate human actions (Sarmah, 2015, 6). The *Vedas* urge us to live in harmony with nature in a more stable way and equitably, not only for the sake of future generations, but because we are an integral part of nature. Thus, this leads to two non–anthropocentric views of eco–spiritualism. Firstly, we should always attribute intrinsic value to nature. Secondly, nature is divine and sacred, and we should have reverence for nature. Our aim is to discover whether Vedic texts and traditions entail a reverence for ecology alone, or accord intrinsic value to it only, or both. In Vedic texts, we find extensive discussions on eco–spiritualism because at that time everything was considered to be a part of nature, and nothing could be viewed as being apart from it. We will endeavor to explore the relevance of the *mantras* so as to evaluate their role in eco–spiritual discussions.

1. *Understanding eco–spiritualism in Vedic tradition*

Human beings are not fully independent beings in terms of the ecosystems, and we should not treat nature as something which is apart from us. Humans are not over and above nature, but rather are within it and an integral part of it. If nature is affected by something, human beings are affected as well. ‘Everyone has their natural rights, whether we recognize them or not, but nature is an excellent creation where everyone has a place and has values.’ This thought of the *Īsopaniṣad* presents the non–anthropocentric intrinsic value of nature (*Īsopaniṣad*, 1958, 10–13). For a better understanding of Vedic ecology, we need to look into eco–spiritualism together with the physical aspect of nature.

1.1. *What is eco–spiritualism?*

Valerie Lincoln defines eco–spirituality as ‘an intuitive and embodied awareness of all life.’ This engages »a relational view of the person to the planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to the soil« (Lincoln, 2000, 227). There is a thin line of difference between spiritualism and spirituality: spiritualism is a belief system required to understand the interconnectedness of all life, whereas spirituality is a quality or a way to attain it. However in the Vedic context both can be used interchangeably. In order to understand eco–spiritualism, it is crucial to realize and be conscious of oneself as being united with nature, and this unity and integrity shows that we are engaged with nature. In accordance with Lincoln’s understanding we can say that the intuition of eco–spiritualism in Vedic texts can

be seen as inseparable entities endowed with consciousness, and these principles of ecospiritual consciousness are dwelling, reverence, and interconnectedness, just to name a few (Lincoln, 2000, 227). In order to understand these intuitions we will look into the eco-spiritual *mantras* of Vedic texts. However, the concept of eco-spiritualism is not the equivalent of the renowned term ‘religious environmentalism’ (not as *dharma*) which is trendy in contemporary times.¹ Still the metaphysical foundation of Creation and Sustenance Religions and eco-spiritualism seem to be almost identical. However, spirituality is a kind of experience of divinity and sacredness which moderates the notion of the correct way of living and escalates the integral connection between all organisms. Thus, every action should emerge as a spiritual action. On the other hand, religion has become the institutionalization of beliefs and customs, and it has interpreted some texts in a dogmatic way. It is not possible for it to be free from dogmatic political and social phenomena, whereas spiritualism is the purity of the transcendental unity of experience with things and beings.

The Vedic scriptures were not only a reflection of the philosophical conceptions of the classical era but also had the potential to revolutionize power to make changes in society. As Sri Aurobindo (1997, 182–83) says, »Truth of being was not seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his studies, but otherwise void of a practical bearing on life. It was not a mystic sublimation which could be ignored in the dealings of man with the world and Nature. It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to the degree of their capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life... the Infinite alone justifies the existence of the finite and the finite by itself has no entirely separate value or independent existence.« Thus, it was all living spiritual experience where everything is in an integral relationship with nature and is given the freedom to realize its own way. We can say that even in contemporary times, a new dimension of spiritualism has been proposed, but at the core of spiritualism is the unity and firm belief of the integration between soul and soil. Similarly, the spirit, *māyā*, *śakti* and *prakṛti* were presented in the form of the natural world in the Vedic traditions. The existence of *ṛta* as cosmic order unites the all-pervading *satya* and *beings* in the world. These philosophical concepts, in principle, also show the spiritual depth of Vedic tradition and its vision of integral unity in nature.

1.2. *The role of satya and ṛta in eco-spiritualism*

Ṛta is a cosmic and moral order defined in the Vedic tradition which advocates the idea of the non-duality of *satya-ṛta* and the moral obligation of human beings. It includes the whole of existence and the desire-less performance of

1 This paper does not aim to employ the terms ‘eco-theology’ and ‘religious’ or ‘Hinduism eco-spiritualism’ in a strict sense. Instead, the paper addresses the contemporary eco-crisis, noting that the term ‘theology’ may convey a Western or Christian-centric approach.

duty in the right *yajña*. There is a distinctive concept that the whole of existence is the expression of *satya*. However, human ethicality depends on the fact that they attain the *satya* through *ṛta* because the sustenance of *ṛta*, which creates all of existence, is the *satya* at its base, which is eternal, infinite, uncaused, and indistinguishable. When *satya* manifests itself in the form of *ṛta*, it manifests itself as the limitless limit. Therefore, we sense the knowledge of the infinite in the finite. The ultimate *satya* expresses itself as a natural phenomenon.

Etymologically *ṛta* in the Vedic tradition is formed by the addition of ‘*ta*’ *hantalant* to the root ‘*r*’, which means stability in motion. One of the meanings of *ṛta* is moral and cosmic equilibrium (Ganesh, 2020). Vedic tradition proposes that the ideal of human life is to perform actions while maintaining the equilibrium in nature. The world is not a machine that operates according to a mechanical law, but is maintained through the existence of *satya* which pervades the entire existence by *ṛta* as a moral and cosmic law. It has been classified that there is no duality between *satya* and *ṛta*, *satya* is *ṛta* and *ṛta* is *satya* “ऋतं च सत्यं च” (*Rgved Samhita*, Hymn 10/190/1). I shall call you *ṛta* or I shall call you *satya* “ऋतं वदषियामि सत्यं वदषियामि” (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Verse 1.1). It is not like God is Nature or Nature is God, but *satya* is one supreme truth that expresses itself in many forms. Therefore, it is the basis of all creation, sustenance, and destruction. *Satya* in the *Vedas* is law, whereas *ṛta* is the moral, social, natural, or ultimate cosmic order and execution of the law. *Ṛta* upholds law, justice, and harmony. So, it presents nature in terms of spiritual phenomena.

Again, *Atharvaved* held that the non-duality of *satya* and *ṛta* includes the non-duality of *ṛta* and *dharma*, which uphold all of existence. *Ṛta* is *dharma*, and human *dharma* or duty is to act in accordance with the idea of non-duality which means to uphold the perfect divine harmony in nature. Similarly, the concept of the *Virāṭ purusa* of *Rgved* advocates that there is nothing other than the *Virāṭ purusa*. Only this could explain whence the earth, water, air, and cosmos come. Yet again, the concept of *Yakṣa* as nature’s spirit was created to protect from and restrain the poison in nature. It gives humans the chance to perform and participate in maintaining order and harmony in nature. *Adharma* or unethicity is to go against harmony. Vedic traditions for nature contain the notion of *bhūtādi ṛna* to show our obligation to natural phenomena. So, it is a human being’s duty to repay through *dharma*. Therefore, all *ṛta*, *ṛna*, *dharma*, and *satya* are connected. We can say that *ṛta* combined with *satya* has a very dynamic power and represents natural-spiritual consciousness in Vedic tradition, and this consciousness leads us towards the divinity of nature.

1.3. The notion of eco-divinity in the Vedas

In the Vedic tradition, the exploration of consciousness serves as the foundation for all aspects of existence, which include the genesis and purpose of the cosmos. According to the *Vedas*, the ultimate *satya*, the supreme conscious entity, takes on various inherent subjective forms to facilitate creation and manifests through nature. In philosophical discussion, *prakṛti* has two forms — subtle and

gross — as the primary condition of all things, which requests reverence from every form of nature and is also present in Sāṃkhyan philosophy. The *Vedas* speak extensively about the sanctity of rivers, mountains, forests, and so. The text on *dharma* earnestly encourages people to practise non-violence towards all entities and enjoys a harmonious relationship in ecology (Narayanan, 2001, 183).

Vedic tradition has unique spiritualist ethics whereby every natural entity has rights. The ideas of deep ecology and *Gaia* theory² conceive the oneness and symbiotic relationship between biotic and abiotic. However, we should not misconstrue deep ecology with Vedic eco-spiritualism. The *Vedas* gave authority to the higher transcendent cosmos and have regarded nature as a power which maintains and preserves all entities. It would not be truly justified to say that the *Vedas* are only a sacred text of rituals, rules and sacrifices but rather metaphorical and symbolic language on nature, open to multiple analyses and interpretations. We are an integral part of nature, and our conscience acknowledges the fact that we are all part of green spiritualism. Pancavati Banwari (1992, 7–8) interprets this as follows: »that we never have thought of nature as inanimate, and never did we make the mistake of over-exploiting it for our own benefit... That is why an average Indian has always had an inclination to worship everything in nature... This knowledge of the divinity of nature which has been with us as part of our nature and tradition ought to be protected.«

The above philosophical idea can be compared with *Bhūmisūkta* of *Atharvaveda* which narrates a story of how a sage implored forgiveness from the *mātā bhūmi*, as human activities in regard to agriculture had greatly disturbed the earth. The sense of respect towards nature and the performance of ethical duty are explained in 11 and 12 of *Bhūmisūkta*'s mantra (*Atharvaveda Saṃhita*, Verse 12.1).

गरियस्ते पर्वता हमिवन्तोऽरण्यं ते पृथ्विस्स्योनमस्तु ।
बभ्रुं कृष्णां रोहिणीं वशिवरूपां ध्रुवां भूर्मापृथ्वीमन्द्रगुप्ताम् ।
अजीतेऽहतो अक्षतोऽध्यष्टां पृथ्वीमहम् ॥११॥

Mother earth, your snow-clad mountains, the green forest should be a source of delight. Mother in your multifarious variations you are a firm pillar and are protected by Indra. Please let us be undefeated and flourishing under your shelter.

यत्ते मध्यं पृथ्वि यच्च नभ्यं यास्त ऊरजस्तनवःसंबभूवुः ।
तासु नो धेह्यभिनिःपवस्व माता भूर्मापुत्रो अहं पृथ्वियाः ।
परजन्यःपति स उ नःपिस्तु ॥१२॥

Much like the *Gaia* theory, this verse states that it is you (earth), whose upper part, middle part, and lower part have been transformed into different forms of existence — you are self-regulating and we are all your children. Please fulfil and purify us. Nature has always been the one, eternal and divine in Vedic tradition which has transmitted a spiritual ecology.

2 Originally the term comes from Greek mythology and means Mother Nature or Earth; Lovelock defines the idea of a self-regulating earth, which is maintained by the community of all biotic-a biotic natural organisms.

In the *Vedas*, green spiritualism is discussed, and the rights of the land are spoken of. The saints had a vision that the land should be protected from great destruction in the case of a war. Furthermore, *Bhumisukta* (Verse 1) states that every *cit* and *acit* is the child of *matabhumi*. This *sukta* also explains that people who are prideful and selfish cannot sustain and conserve nature. Hence, it bespeaks the unity and duty of humans towards nature. The importance of conservation in terms of *bhutadi ṛna* and *pañcamahābhūta* namely, *Kṣitiḥ*, *Ap*, *Teja*, *Vyoma*, and *Maruta*, and the obligation towards biotic and abiotic members of the ecological community are discussed. The importance of eco-conservation is underlined, and it said that the land in which vast bodies of rivers and seas exist should be revered and conserved.

1.4. Concepts of nature conservation in Vedic spiritualism

Numerous Vedic hymns celebrate the world and encourage us to protect and glorify the fundamental constituents of nature. *R̥gveda* advocates that the environment gives joy to humans and non-humans when they lead their life ideally, as the rivers with their sacred waters, the night, the morning, and all of natural vegetation, as well as the sun bless us with a peaceful life. They gave much importance to the mountains and placed an emphasis on humans living with nature as an integral part of it, rather than being isolated from it.

तरीणच्छिन्दांसि क्विवयो वर्यैतरि पुरुरूपं द्रशतं विश्वचकषणम् ।
आपो वाताओषधयस्तान्येकस्मान्भुवन् आर्पितानि ॥18.1.17॥

‘refers to three things covered everywhere — water, air, and herbs or flora. And since these things are present everywhere in divine form, we should conserve, revere and admire them (*Atharvaveda Samhita*, Hymn 18.1.17).

शतं वो अम्बु धामानसिहस्रंमृत वो रुह । अधां शतकर्त्वो यूयमामि मे अगदं कृत ॥10/97/2

The *Osodhi sukta* of *R̥gveda* refers to vegetation, as O Mother! Hundreds of your birthplaces and thousands of your young plants please take shelter from all entities. They pray for the forest to be alive always (*R̥gveda Samhita*, Hymn 10/97/2).

उभे इति दयावांपृथिवी इति विश्वमऽङ्गुवे । अर्युमा । देवः । अदतिः । वऽिधाता । भगः । नऽशंसः । उरु । अन्तरिक्षम् । विश्वे । देवाः । पर्वमानम् । जुषन्त ॥ 9/81/5

Diulok, *Prithviloka*, and *Antarikṣaloka* are all the *loka-lokantars* of ultimate reality, and all these world-lokantars are also the glory of that reality. This universe is very pure, and we should maintain this purity. Hence, the verses discussed above present the concept of bio-divinity and an appeal to people not to poison any natural phenomena.

मधु वाता ऋतायते मधु कषरन्तसिनिधवः । माधवीरनःसन्त्वोषधीः ॥ 1/90/6
मधु नक्तमृतोषसो मधुमत्पार्थिवि रजः । मधु द्यौरसत् नःपति ॥ 1/90/7
मधुमान्नो वनस्पतरिमधुमा असत् सूर्यः । माधवीरगावो भवन्त नः ॥ 1/90/8

In the context of environmental protection and sustainability, one can convey the meaning of the above verses of *Rgveda* as follows: do not harm any entity of the ecological systems, do not poison the water and flora. Since you are a part of every tiny atom of the earth, bless us, as there is sweet delight in this. In such a coming together of plants, animals and clouds, all is worthy of protection. The sun in the universe, or the soul residing in the body, which emits the light of sweet qualities, blesses us with the same knowledge as the light and the rays of the sun. Let us together do *puruṣārtha* which is beneficial to all, and may tranquillity be upon the atmosphere, water, crops, and vegetation.

Moreover, the verses do not praise animals for their usefulness only, but they speak of animal ethics and morality. “तस्मात् । युञ्जात् । सर्वदुःखतः । समभूतम् । पृषत्स आज्यम् । पशून् । तान् । चक्रे । वायव्यान् । आरण्यान् । ग्राम्याः । च । ये ॥ 10/90/8”. Every animal and every creature has a specific environment, but the *Vedas* propose that animals and all creatures should be safe and protected from all harm, and also that humans should not use them anthropocentrically. Animals have their rights and their integrity in nature.

Vedic texts offer knowledge which can prevent humans from succumbing to ignorance, by providing insight into our interconnectedness with nature. The essence of environmental ethics and sustainability in the *Vedas* is encapsulated by a verse from the *Īsopaniṣad* (Verse 1) emphasizing unity in cultural and environmental diversity.

“ईशा वास्यमदिं सर्वं यत्कञ्चि जगत्यां जगत् । तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्वदिधनम् ॥ 1”

‘One should enjoy renouncing or giving up others’ One should embrace only what is essential and allocated to one, and refrain from taking what does not belong to one. Furthermore, one should avoid causing harm or contamination. Live harmoniously with nature, devoid of arrogance as the dominant force within it. Humans are not the pinnacle of the environment.

2. *Applications of Vedic eco-spiritualism in the contemporary world*

Contemporary eco-spiritualists contend that the escalating global crisis is not the result of a cosmic anomaly, but rather it arises from our declining moral values and the destruction of our natural environment which issue is raised by a vast majority of climatologists, as well (see Myers et. al. 2021; Cook et. al., 2016; Powell, 2019). Does the Vedic tradition, in its ideas about creation, time, and moral accountability, offer a teleological framework that could potentially encourage a favourable environmental ethic or ignite ethical eco-activism? What correlations do they establish between human ethics and the degradation of the environment, and how might these perceived correlations impact environmental activism?

It is not enough to merely acknowledge the environmental crisis in the world, but more importantly, it is necessary to understand how individuals and commu-

nities are affecting the crisis and taking action to end it. The remedies to environmental problems demand a radical shift in our thought, values, perceptions, and understanding. Modern scientists and the quantitative notions of industrialization create a massive gap between nature and culture. A discussion on eco-spiritualism in the form of religious environmentalism received significant recognition in the 20th century. Lynn White Jr. argued that religion is both a cause and a potential solution to environmental problems (White, 1967). This conceptualization of the environmental crisis as a religious problem, both in terms of its cause and its remedy, has become an element in contemporary environmentalist discourse. When combined with contemporary perspectives such as profound environmentalist ideals, the fundamental essence of Vedic wisdom implies that the primary objective of bridging the ancient and the modern is to highlight the alignment between the predominant ideologies of ancient eco-spiritualism and the contemporary concept of intrinsic worth. Furthermore, these two viewpoints intersect closely, converging at a specific juncture when contemplating the fundamental questions of existence and survival. Now, this paper intends to deal with Vedic eco-spiritualism as a plausible environmental ethics.

One fundamental question emerges when dealing with environmental ethics and that is man's place in nature. The way in which humans see themselves in nature defines the relationship and interaction between humans and nature. The emergence of anthropocentrism has led to the realization that our relationship with the world around us has been self-centered and one-sided. Thus, philosophers and eco-ethicists have attempted to reconceptualize our ethical relationship with the world around us in a more holistic and non-anthropocentric manner. It was initially done through the concept of sacred-intrinsic value, the meaning of living as an integral part of nature.

The survival issue is not relevant for humans only in the anthropocentric form but for the whole of ecology. We must discover the ethical relationship which should not be instrumentalism ensuing from pragmatism. Metaphorically *Rigved* says that earth is like a mother, the sky is the father, and everything in this space is like a child: this constitutes a whole family, and nothing exists beyond these. Nobody wishes harm upon his family since any damage that may be done will lead to an imbalance in the universe. *Atharvaved* mentions that humans should maintain a relationship as that of a child to its mother earth, but should also act as a custodian of nature. Furthermore, *Yajurveda* mentions plants and animals and the ill effects of cutting down trees and the poisoning of the atmosphere. "No person should kill those animals which are helpful to all" (13.37). "O King, you should never kill animals such as oxen which are useful in agriculture, nor cows which give us milk, nor any other helpful animals, and you must punish those who kill or do harm to such animals" (13.49). "The oceans are a treasure of wealth, protect them" (38.22); "Do not poison (pollute) the water and do not harm or cut down the trees" (6.33). "Do not disturb the sky and do not poison the atmosphere" (5.43).

According to the above, one can claim that the *Vedas* try to protect nature for human prosperity only, and that Vedic environmentalism was mainly motivated by the fear for survival and for the pursuit of joy. Natural supremacies were glorified as this contributes to human utility. In some way the verses refer to the use of the environment for the benefit of humankind. The traces of sacrificing various animals and birds can be attributed to seeking to appease different natural forces in Vedic culture and civilization. In later Vedic tradition the sacrifice of animals took place while performing *yajña* for human sustenance and well-being. Hence, despite ascribing considerable moral significance to all in the cosmic order, the practice of offering various creatures in order to obtain favour from different natural forces was a regular feature of some ancient traditions (Bilimoria, 1998, 6).

The *Vedas* did not have an anthropocentric approach, but later, with the development of society, humans gradually started using nature for the human *teleos*. However, Vedic tradition believes that for a *jīvātma*, to be a human being among the myriad species of life is a blessing along the arduous journey of countless births. Vedic ontology presents the inseparable unity with reality, whereby humans cannot be over and above nature (Nath, 2019). We need to again bring an egalitarian approach, not only to humans but to the whole of ecology. For any inadvertent action leading to the earth's excessive exploitation, the seers prayed for forgiveness as in, *Atharvaveda's Pṛthvi Sūkta* (Verse 12.34) which says, 'Whatever I dig up from thee, O Earth, may it be recovered again quickly. O purifier, let us not injure thy vital organs nor thy heart'. Current ecological movements take the lead from empirical sciences, data collection, and external socio-political actions. We need to re-develop care for the soul with soil. Emma Tolmin suggests, what is substantively 'new' about modern environmentalism is its vital ideological and identity component (Tolmin, 2009, 78). There is a strong moral content that transcends material aspects (it is moreso ecocentric than anthropocentric). This does not mean to say that expressive or post-materialist environmentalism has no material dimension, but that it is more-or-less trumped by a moral vision as to how one should treat nature ethically.

2.1. *Can eco-spiritualism be applicable in environmental ethics?*

In contemporary times thinkers argue that ecology and environmental studies are basically scientific in nature. How then can these be related to something such as ethics? It would plainly be a scientific catastrophe; however, when we deal with the nature and structure of the environment, we are concerned with facts, things, and events. In a way, we deal with what things are and what they ought to be, and this is a fundamental concern of ethics. There are several problems related to nature, and these are not only practical problems but also value-loaded practical problems. Furthermore, other moral thinkers had a conception of the inherent value of nature. Inherent value is implicit in an object or a thing irrespective of the evaluation of an evaluator. In this sense, inherent values are transcending values which are beyond evaluation. If moral agents never evaluate the value of nature, nature will still be valuable because of the value inherent in it

or the very idea of the value that is attributed to it. In 1986 “The Assisi Declarations” state that in ancient spiritual traditions, humans were seen as being integral components of nature, connected to the elements by means of unbreakable spiritual and psychological bonds. This is evident in India, one of the world’s oldest living religious traditions. Ancient scriptures also placed a great emphasis on the natural environment and considered forests and blooming trees to be sacred. The Vedic tradition’s deep respect for nature and all life forms, whether plant or animal, is a strong heritage which should be revived and applied in our modern context.³

In regard to the above passage, whereby attempts are made to reapply eco-spiritualism, the question of plausibility becomes important. If we are treating nature as divine or intrinsically valuable, the true meaning and implication of intrinsic value are vague. In order to evaluate whether the Vedic tradition entails a plausible environmental ethics or not, interpretations are possible to the effect that human agents have a moral obligation towards nature. They could show this by performing actions suggesting that they can treat nature in a way in which they want to manipulate, destroy, degrade and use it. If rivers are sacred in the Vedic tradition, we can use it to decide what should be done: either pollute them more or preserve them more. However, another idea similar to Leena Gupta’s argument that moral agents ought to look upon nature for its own sake — as intrinsically valuable — in deciding what action to take (Gupta, 1993, 113). It shows a contrasting view to the first one, as we speak of removing toxic industrial and other waste from rivers due to the fact that nature is valuable in itself. In this context, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* says that all parts of nature have an intrinsic or sacred value, therefore nature should be treated with dignity, kindness, and righteousness.

Indian eco-spiritualists attribution of inherent worth to animals and plants entails the rights of nature, and all moral agents have the corresponding duty to respect those rights (Findly, 2009, 343). If we view nature as sacred and believe that humans should inherently value the environment, why do we still witness its degradation and depletion? One reason could be that the concept of the intrinsic value of nature is not necessarily implied by the examples in the scriptures only. Elements of the environment could also be considered sacred without explicit consciousness about the relevance of textual knowledge in regard to nature conservation. Tribal communities live in a very close relationship to the natural environment and are an integral part of nature. The existence of eco-spirituality is evidence that certain communities were eco-friendly. The reason why religious

3 This was said in 1986, during the Assisi Declarations, delegates from five of the world’s prominent religions (namely, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism) convened statements regarding the environmental aspects embedded within their respective religious beliefs. This gathering was a collaborative effort between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Consultancy on Religion, Education, and Culture (ICOREC), headquartered in Manchester, UK. This information can be found in more detail on www.arcworld.org pg. 17–19.

environmentalists tend to confuse nature religion with conscious spiritual environmental protection is the unquestioning acceptance of ‘primitive ecological wisdom’ (Tolmin, 2009, 5).

Vedic eco–spiritualism, in its own way, proposes or elaborates a unique set of moral values and reverence for the environment so as to guide humans in easing their relationship with the environment. A problem emerges when people start following blindly without getting into the rationality behind certain insights. In Rabindranath Tagore’s (1933) view ‘the actual quality of life emerges from a respectful and co–operative attitude toward nature.’ He believed that by imparting this understanding through early education, the profound richness of the natural world would naturally reduce the craving for unnecessary material possessions. Children would grow up as an integral part of nature, as ancient traditions teach. In contemporary times the consumerist model of development has created a gap between humans and nature. Vandana Shiva’s book, *Staying Alive: Women Ecology and Development* (1988) contributed to world environmental theory, acknowledges the indigenous environmentalist resources available deep within the Indian psyche, but prefers a more political and pragmatic approach to the various problems that India faces. She criticizes the Western model of mal–development and argues that the fashionable consumerist model, enhanced by technology, disrupts traditional practices (Shiva, 1988, 6). Therefore, by comparing Vedic eco–spiritualism to the contemporary consumerist approach, we can say that the Vedic period understood nature as being intrinsically valuable, sacred and divine in itself, and that it does provide a plausible eco–spiritualism.

Conclusion

There are aspects of Vedic eco–spiritualism that are certainly valuable, and the ecology presented in Vedic tradition is significant for us today. There is a need, however, to reinterpret textual sacredness into ordinary everyday language and implement it in a consciously practical way. People have been interpreting and practising it for centuries without inquiring into the wisdom of textual knowledge, albeit unwisely, and instead of cleaning and preserving the environment, they are polluting it increasingly through unreasonable rituals. Theory without practice does have an impact, but practice without reason is the more dangerous and it leads to degradation. We need to re–establish the relationship between human beings and natural phenomena. People respect nature because they are influenced at an early stage by certain belief systems and practices. In contemporary times, the emphasis on eco–friendliness and nature preservation within Vedic traditions represents an interpretation of the tradition rather than the traditional interpretation itself. The *Vedas* ascribe holistic and intrinsic life to every entity in the eco–system. Hence, the concept of the sanctity of nature or bio–divinity and symbiosis exists in Vedic traditions. However, the intrinsic and sacred value of nature in a truly applied sense is difficult to find in the industrial and scientific realm, especially in developing countries where people cannot be

forced to afford ‘earth or nature as first’ for both individual and common reasons. The Vedic texts were not written to address contemporary environmental issues such as pollution, habitat destruction, or climate change. Hence, they may not offer explicit solutions. Nevertheless, this does not imply that people do not care. They have different value-based reasons for engaging in activities related to the environment, and Vedic eco-spiritualism provides a moral framework for the interconnectedness of all entities.

Based on the preceding discussions, this paper arrives at the viewpoint that the transition towards an environmentally sustainable future can draw significant inspiration from the worldviews of ancient Vedic civilizations and various cultures that have endured sustainably for centuries. In terms of Shiva, ancient traditions were based on the ontology of the feminine as the living principle and on an ontological continuity between society and nature — the humanization of nature and the naturalization of society. Not merely did this result in an ethical context which excludes possibilities of exploitation and domination, but rather it allowed the creation of an earth family (Shiva, 1988, 6–7). With the depletion of land or ecology, we are undermining the life-support system. The deterioration of the environment is occurring under the guise of progress. Yet, it is evident that there is a fundamental flaw within the concept of development that poses a threat to our existence. Our actions are causing harm to nature, a consequence deeply embedded in prevailing models of progress. Vedic tradition shows us the direction which we should take in living with nature as an integral part thereof and maintains the balance in ecology.

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*Razumijevanje vedske ekoduhovnosti kroz prizmu etike okoliša**Akanksha Prajapati**, *Rajakishore Nath****Sažetak*

Ekoduhovnost nije nov pojam te ima dugu povijest u vedskoj tradiciji. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam u mantri VI–72 Maha–Upanishada, koji pripada samavedskoj tradiciji, nudi poruku koja tjera na razmišljanje, a to je da je svako biće ili entitet na ovoj zemlji jedna obitelj. U vedskoj civilizaciji domena etičkoga razmišljanja bila je vrlo opsežna. Vedska znanost o ekologiji pristupa ekoduhovnosti sa stajališta kozmološkoga i ontološkoga jedinstva prirode. Međutim, etika prirodnih zakona poput rta, satya i dharma igra ključnu ulogu u ljudskim postupcima prema okolišu. Cilj je ovoga rada u prvom redu ući u trag te identificirati ekološko božanstvo Veda. Kao drugo, ovaj rad primjenjuje i ocjenjuje drevne spise te njihovo shvaćanje okoliša u pogledu njihove suštinske vrijednosti i odnosa prema ljudima. Rad završava raspravom o problemima ekoduhovnosti u modernom svijetu.

Ključne riječi: vedska ekoduhovnost; Rta, Satya; suštinska vrijednost; poštovanje

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