

The Knowledge and Evolution of Deep Ecology in Hindu Paradigms

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ABSTRACT

Hindu philosophy has never only discussed human benefit. Its main objective has been the welfare of the world, which includes the welfare of human beings and all living beings in the universe. We find the roots of Deep Ecology in Hindu philosophy, which Hindus have carried forward from generation to generation through their beliefs. Hindus are trying to save the environment through their religious beliefs and philosophy; however, today we are facing various types of environmental problems. Rivers, seas, ponds, air, etc., are all getting contaminated, forests are vanishing very fast, and many creatures are almost on the verge of extinction. 'Some 484 animals and 654 plant species have been officially declared "extinct" since 1600, the record-keeping started.'¹

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In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, man was kept at the centre and emphasised that man has the first right over all the resources on earth. This idea was propagated the most. Resources necessary for human needs were exploited excessively, and as a result, an environmental crisis arose on Earth. This anthropocentric perspective is that humans are the central and most important entity in the world, and that humans are superior to non-human life because they are the only ones who have consciousness, values and moral status.² Pablo Solon writes, 'In this perspective, nature is something separate from humans; it exists for the survival and development of human society relations; it is the 'environment' of humans and a set of resources that can be used for their benefit. Anthropocentricity is deeply embedded in modern society. The logic of capital, which leads to commodification and the development of technology, is deeply intertwined with anthropocentrism, which widens the gap between humans and earth to levels never seen before in human history.'³ This ideology has given birth to an environmental crisis. Almost the entire world was affected by this new ecological crisis. Although this environmental crisis was the gift of developed countries, underdeveloped countries paid the most for its price. In the twentieth century, world conferences were held to overcome this environmental crisis in which it was believed that the environment is not the problem of any one country; it was considered a problem of the world.

Soon, the concept of deep ecology emerged in response to the anthropocentrism approach. Arne Naess was the founder of the ideology of deep ecology. In his article, "*The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*", he has described eight principles of deep ecology, mainly about the welfare of humans and non-humans. He believes that humans have no right to reduce or harm the richness of nature for their benefit. The influence of deep ecology led to the birth of social movements related to the environment. These environmental movements were called reformist environmentalism, whose main goal was to change society for better living. Between the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to compare Eastern and Western philosophies in which they began to relate modern science, technology, and the relationship between man and nature to ancient philosophies. With the emergence of the idea of deep ecology, it was felt that the old environmental thought and movement could not solve the ecological problems of the day because it had some limitations of its own. Fritjof Capra, in the article "*Deep Ecology: A New Paradigm*", argues that 'the old paradigm is no longer adequate to deal with some of the major ethical problems of today, most of which involve threats to non-human forms of life.'⁴ Deep ecology emphasises the rights and identity of humans and nonhumans. Spiritual awareness has a special place in deep ecology. Spiritual awareness is the basis of deep ecology, in which compassion for all living beings is a common element found in all religions.

Many scholars have tried to see deep ecology in Hindu philosophy based on spiritual awareness. They believe that the principles of deep ecology are described very clearly in Hindu philosophy and based on these philosophies, environmental problems can be eliminated. They have explained through the religious stories

and philosophy that are described in the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, the book of social code and law, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Govindasamy Agoramoorthy and Minna J. Hsu, in the article '*Ancient Hindu Scriptures Show the Ways to Mitigate Global Warming through Responsible Action*' have described many quotations that are found in the Vedas, Upanishad and Puranas that talk about the mitigation of the environment. Many landscapes, rivers, places and grooves in India are considered sacred. These are not only preserved but the environment is also protected by the activities carried out there. There are many religious stories related to these landscapes, rivers, grooves etc. among Hindus, with which they are bound from birth to death. Meera Baindur has done an in-depth study on this subject in her article '*Nature as Non-terrestrial: Sacred natural Landscapes and Place in India Vedic and Puranic Thought*'. She highlighted through the many religious narratives how to protect nature by the people. She pointed out many sacred landscapes of the Indian subcontinent that are revered by Hindus. Hindu philosophy has been very conscious about the environment. Using this philosophy, Gavin Van Horn has shown the relationship between Hindu culture and the natural world. Gavin Van Horn currently studies the Indian society, economic, and demographic factors' understanding of the environment. Gavin Van Horn in his article "*Hindu Traditions and Nature Survey Article*" based on many readings shows environmental awareness in Hindu traditions. Christopher Chapple has shown the relationship between religion and the environment very well in his article "*Toward an Indian Environmentalism*". Although his study is in the context of America and India, he does not explain how the philosophy of religion can solve environmental problems. David Kinsley fills this gap. David Kinsley shows the positive impact of Hindu philosophy in a chapter of his book "*Ecology and Religion*". He talks about the sacred landscapes, philosophy, and reverence for animals, especially cows. The sacred landscapes are of great significance to Hindus and stories related to these landscapes are mentioned in the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. Arvind Sharma looks for solutions to environmental problems through the Upanishads.

Many scholars have related the five elements of Hindu philosophy to the environment. O. P. Dwivedi described the Hindu philosophy and religion as an awareness of the environment. In the book "*India's Environmental Policies, Programmes, and Stewardship*", he describes the concept of Hinduism. He also discusses social, and moral duties and the harmony of man with nature through religion. The environment has been an important concept in the philosophy of Hinduism. Some scholars see the solution to environmental problems in Hindu practices rather than in Hindu philosophy. The Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Kaveri and others are the main revered rivers, but these are polluted rivers. In Hinduism these rivers are considered goddesses and bathing in them is considered very auspicious and sacred.

The most basic principle of Arne Naess's Deep Ecology is that 'humans and nonhumans have equal rights over the Earth's resources.'⁵ This idea is prominently reflected in the Hindu Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. However, the Buddhist philosophy that nothing is permanent and all are interdependent reflects Deep Ecology. This principle of Buddhism is similar to the principle described in the Bhagavat Upanishad, which states that all things have a certain end. The most prominent of the eight principles of Arne Naess's Deep Ecology, that 'humans have no authority to destroy or degrade biodiversity for their purpose'⁶, is also influenced by Hindu philosophy. Kindness and compassion towards all living and non-living things on earth, and the concept of their welfare, is the main bases of Upanishad philosophy. Upanishad philosophy emphasises that humans do not have the right to destroy any living being for their benefit. The Upanishad mentions the Pancha-tattva theory for all living and non-living things, which includes earth, fire, air, water, and space in the physical world. These five elements make up the ecology, and these five elements are interconnected. *Chandopadgya* Upanishad mentions that soil is the soul of all living things, water is the soul of the land, herbs are the soul of water, and herbs are the soul of human beings.⁷ In the Hindu holy book Bhagavad Gita, three more elements have been added to these five elements, and eight elements have been listed. These eight elements affect all living and non-living things, but the last three elements, mind, ego and intellect, affect only living things. These last three elements give rise to the feeling of protecting and destroying all living and non-living things in humans. While mind and intellect give rise to the feeling of protecting the environment, ego gives rise to the feeling of destroying the environment. In the Rigveda, many mantras are dedicated to the universe and describe maintaining balance in the ecology. The mantras in *Rigveda* (6,37.3) say that clean air can cure all diseases and advise everyone against destroying themselves or the environment.⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Govindasamy Agoramoorthy and Minna J. Hsu, *Ancient Hindu Scriptures Show the Ways to Mitigate Global Warming through Responsible Action*, *Nomos*, 2011, p. 212

² Pablo Solon, *The Right of Mother Earth* in the edit. Vishwas Satgar "*The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternative*" New York, Wits University Press, 2018, p. 107

³ Pablo Solon, *The Right of Mother Earth* in the edit. Vishwas Satgar "*The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternative*" New York, Wits University Press, 2018, p. 107

⁴ Fritjof Capra, *Deep Ecology: A New Paradigm*, *Earth Island Journal*, 1987, Vol.2, p. 27-28

⁵ Arne Naess, *Deep Ecology and Education: A Conversation with Arne Naess*, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 2000, p. 48

- ⁶ Arne Naess, Deep Ecology and Education: A Conversation with Arne Naess, *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 2000, p. 48
- ⁷ OP Dwivedi, 'Classical India' in the edit. Dale Jamieson, *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, London, Blackwell Publishers Pvt. 2001, p.39
- ⁸ F. Maz Muller, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita*, London, Trubner and Co., Paternoster Row, 1869, p. 31

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