

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Religion and Nature-with Special Reference to Hinduism

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Abstract:

Religion, a deep and intimate impulse of mankind, in one way or another has been found everywhere. The historical perspective of any society shows that protection and preservation of the nature has been fundamental to the cultural and religious ethos. Almost all ancient religions had adored nature, believing that different forms of nature radiate the spirit of God.

In Hinduism, natural energies, activities and aspects are glorified and personified as deities. Different attributes are assigned to deities fit in their natural forms and activities. Hymns and prayers are eulogies to natural elements like air, water, earth, fire, sun, dawn, rain, etc. Hinduism contains numerous references to the worship of the divine in nature in the Vedas, Upanishads, Purānas, Sūtras, Smṛtis and other sacred texts. Sanskrit mantras (hymns) are recited to admire rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and the earth.

The strength of Hinduism is that nature is an inseparable part of our existence. Protecting the environment is an important expression of dharma. The highest ethical code of Hinduism is universal benevolence or Sarva Bhuta Hita. Hinduism can be considered as a twig of eco-spirituality or a representation of deep ecology. In present social milieu, the voice of Hinduism can be heard in such movements as 'Save the Planet', 'Conserve the Forests', 'Stop Cruelty to Animals', 'One World-One Family' and others.

This paper is a trivial attempt to explore Hinduism with a view to exemplify the relation between religion and nature and to evaluate ancient religious ethos of Hinduism in present day context. The current ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis. So, the need of the hour is to renovate our life style by eco-centrism, not by ego-centrism. If we examine the ecological foundation and implications of Hinduism both in principle and practice, it would be a new field of study in religion.

Keywords: Religion, nature, Hinduism, religious ethos, environment, ecology

1. Introduction

Religion is such a deep and intimate impulse of mankind which one way or another found everywhere. The internal aspect of religion is the body of ideas, convictions and emotions concerning man's relation to God, while its external aspect is the system of prayers, ceremonies and rites through which the religious feeling is manifested. Religious experience ennobles human desires, ideals and values. Dawson and Toynbee rightly said that religion is the central element in the life of civilization. "Throughout the history of humanity the religious impulse has been always and everywhere present as one of the great permanent forces that make and alter man's destiny, and the deeper we delve in the past, the more evident it is how inseparable is the religious instinct from human life and society."¹

From the time immemorial the universe has been considered as the manifestation of the Divine in Hindu religion. Religion is defined as the reference of man's life to a world governing power which seeks to grow into a living union with it. Love for one another, love for all creations and love for oneself is religion. The importance of co-ordination between all natural powers for universal peace and harmony was highly admired in Ancient Hindu tradition.

2. Objectives of the Paper

- 2.1 To show the relation between religion and nature
- 2.2 To explore Hinduism with a view to exemplify the relation between religion and nature
- 2.3 To evaluate ancient religious ethos of Hinduism in present day context

3. Methodology

The method used in this paper is descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly review based. It is purely supported by secondary and tertiary source of data, i.e. books, translation of old scriptures, journals, papers and articles and internet.