

Evolving Interactions: Man, Environment, and Socio - Religious Dynamics in the Face of Global Challenges

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Abstract: *In the 21st century because of global warming, an environmental concern has become the focus of all nations and communities. But hundred years back it this very relationship between man and nature, now more holistic called 'the environment' was very different premised. Since the heydays of the industrial revolution and the emergence of capitalism as systemic appropriation of resources for development, the face of the world have changed and continues to do so. The 'blame game' and 'responsibility sharing' that is being played out between nations of the world, developed and developing, over protection and exploitation of resources have raised and brought forward the conflicting and contentious history of resource sharing into focus. The relationship of people/communities and environment have always been tenuous and based on understanding and tolerance and also aggression. It is also based on our notions of civilization and progress. The study of environmental history therefore has also become a history not only of forests, rivers, but also of agriculture, climate, economic practices and human culture. But the study of religion and environment help the development of human civilization. The central problem specific to thinking about the environment, is the independent value to place on such things as preservation of species, or protection of the wilderness. Balance between man and environment is essential if we like to save our civilisation from ultimate demolition. My effort will be to show that a large portion of the environment depends on socio - religious, ethical - religious values etc.*

Keywords: global warming, environmental history, resource sharing, socio - religious values, preservation

The traditions and stories of a country or community became part of family folklore. The cultural heritage of Tripura also teaches us to respect the nature and environment. There are 19 (nineteen) tribal communities residing in Tripura. They are living innermost parts of our hilly area. In order to their livelihood consists on forest and its respect.

One of the universal features of tribal faiths in North - Eastern region is that all beings are supposed to be endowed with a living spirit. Animals and plants, rivers and mountains are no exception to this rule. What is significant in the tribal region is that the whole world peopled by spirits is thus rendered holy. They worship the elements, such as the god of water, the god of fire, the god of forests, the god of earth, etc. Sacrifices form an important part of their religion; buffaloes, pigs, goats and fowls, pigeons, ducks being the animals ordinarily uses for the purpose. Worship in temples must be of the purest form. While offerings of flowers and incense may be permitted, sacrifices of animals should be forbidden. Even in the Rig Veda it is said that devout offerings of praise, or fuel sticks or cooked food are as good as sacrifice. The wise man does not cause injury to any creatures except in the case of sacred rites. (ahimsan sarvabhutani anyatra tirtebhyab - Chandogya Upanishad., viii.15.1.). The traditional belief of local tribes is very enchanting. The cosmological belief is interesting. It is believed that the Sun and the Moon are couples and the Stars are their children. Deities are also supposed to have family - life. The Earth stands on a big tortoise. The tortoise shakes its body. This causes earthquake. Although, it is an inquisitive mixture animism, the old gods or deities. It is primitive religion.

Looking over the changing life patterns for centuries, it seems to be an optical instrument in which we see an endless

variety of beautiful colours and forms. As with generation, life follows the same old routine. It explores the expressions of how tribal people interact with environment through their age - old religious activity or rituals. Plains and hills occur here almost alternatively. Nature has worked here mightily. Its rainfall is heavy, and climate is temperate. Last few years, we are looking rainfall in Tripura was not sufficient in respect of previous climatic history. Human activities are liable for these kinds of environment degradation of Tripura. Indiscriminate cutting of trees, soil erosion from Jhum cultivation, Rubber plantation and the like. It has six seasons. The flora and fauna of Tripura are very rich in number and variety. It implies that the geographic environment of Tripura is much more favourable than that of the Polar Regions. To lavish religious rites are also due to the bounties of nature in Tripura. The primitive beliefs are still prevailing in the local tribes.

In the primitive period of our history man's physical dealings with the external world were most important for the maintenance of his life, the life which he has in common with other creatures and therefore the first expression of his religion was physical, it came from his sense of wonder and awe at the manifestations of powers in nature and his attempt to win it for himself and his tribe by magical incantations and rites. In Tripura today also religion is so intermingle in tribal life that it is impossible to separate it from his other field of activities. From the birth to the death every important occasion of his life is connected with some rituals. Even today, his religion consists of nature worship and offering to the ghosts of his ancestors and his rites are numerous. Most of the tribal people have their own tribal customs and beliefs, but in the broader sense of religion they are believed to be the followers of Hinduism. The Mogs and

the Chakmas are Buddhists. Some people of Lusai, Kuki and Garo communities accept the Christianity.

Hinduism plays a vital role in tribal religion of Tripura. Tribal religion very much modified by Hinduism, when Bengali people and tribal people doing their socio - economical activity, religio - environmental activity and cultural activity. There are some similarities in both religions. Although some dissimilarities. Hence, regard for similarity, modification occurs by the rule of natural evolution.

What measures are liable for whole world it will also be liable in the North - Eastern region of India about environment. In North - East there are regions where human beings can directly interact with the nature. For example, in Assam there is Kajiranga biosphere reserve. In any bio - sphere reserve, human beings are an indispensable part of. We see in national park or sanctuaries human beings are not allowed to enter freely but in bio - sphere reserve human beings are themselves a part of that.

The cultural heritage of India teaches people to respect nature and its bounty. The Indian philosophy and even religions advocate to respect all forms of life plants, animals and even human beings, since disturbance in the balance of one form can disrupt the balance in other forms as well. The gradual discursion of environment with religious ideals begins through Bible, Saint Augustin, Aquinas and after independence through industrialization, the social pattern tends to change much faster.

The study on Religions and Environments help the development of human civilization. The religio - environmental structure is the framework intended to give expression to the passionate loyalty and allegiance of the people to the vision and values of life which they accept. Every civilization is the expression of a religion, for religion signifies faith in absolute values and a way of life to realise them. Most ethics deals with problems of human desire and needs; the achievement of happiness, or the distribution of goods. The central problem specific to thinking about the environment, is the independent value to place on such things as preservation of species, or protection of the wilderness. Though it is a controversial matter whether we must stress on employment and development neglecting the degradation of environment or we must keep us the balance between man and environment from the practical point of view. Balance between man and environment is essential if we like to save mankind from diseases, ill health, lack of nutrition and ultimate destruction. The degradation of environment should not be allowed by any way. The area of research chosen in this study is dealt with reconstruction of human mind and behaviour in the light of ethical ideals, for the protection of the quality of environment which seems to me of great importance in these difficult times.

Religion is based on the discovery of the essential worth and dignity of the individual and his relation to a higher world of reality. Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, save us from greed, lust and hatred, release moral power, and impacts courage in the enterprise of saving the world.

As a discipline of the mind, it contains the key and the essential means of coping with evil which threatens the existence of the civilised world. To restore the lost relationship between the individual and the eternal is the purpose of religion. The essence of religion is not in the dogmas and creeds, in the rites and ceremonies which repel many of us, but in the deepest wisdom of the ages. St. Augustine observes: From the beginning of the human race until Christ came in the flesh, at which time the true religion which already existed began to be called Christianity. The Biblical story of creation, in Genesis, makes clear the Hebrew view of the special place of human beings in the divine plan.

Human life has no meaning if it is not inspired by an unquenchable yearning for contact with the eternal. The story of life on earth goes back more than a thousand million years. In each geological period have appeared creatures which might have been represented as the highest types of creation. Yet those forms of life have been suspended by others. In the mythology phrase, there was a privileged position of wilderness protection through religious myth and sentiments. King Pandu in Mahabharata being cursed by the doe for shooting her stag in mating; Kalidasa's hunted deer flying through the air to the safety of the rishi's ashram; Hanuman helping Rama against Ravana; Indra's elephants guarding the eight celestial points of the compass: all these have secure a place for her wild life in the very wrap and woof of Indian thought. Kautilya's ' Artha Shastra ' refers to the Abhayaranya or forest Sanctuary where animals could roam about without any fear. The most pious river of the Hindu's is Ganga, the God of air Pawana, the God of water Varuna, the Goddess of Earth Vasumati, the goddess of strength is Durga, kali, the goddess of wealth is Laxmi, the goddess of learning is Saraswati, and numerous other examples are there about God.

From the mythological period various animals have got religious importance in many countries. Our ancestors used to worship animals. The lion, rat, duck, elephant, cow, monkey, camel, garial are associated with the different Gods of Hindus. Writers and poets were always attracted towards animals which got a place in literature. During religious ceremonies models of different birds and other animals are sold. These show the beauty of our religious feeling. Thus from animals we get religious inspiration and thus it becomes necessary to preserve them. In these places religious ideals helps us to protect wilderness or environment.

The word ethics has its root in the Greek word 'ethikos' (ethos) and the Latin word 'ethicus' which mean manner or asset of codes of conduct. If the words 'environment' and 'ethics' are combined together, we obtain the concept of environmental ethics. Creating a moral sense of environmental conservation, in each person, is called environmental ethics. In other words, the term environmental ethics refers to an approach to be developed in each person, a force from within, to make decisions and take actions on different aspects of the environment, which are not harmful to the local, national and international communities. It is the study of how human beings should interact with the environment.

In the 1930s, environmentalists and scientists began to worry about the degradation of the environment due to human activities and thus emerge the concept of environmental ethics. It is an important aspect because it forces people to consider how their actions would affect the environment. Once people begin to realize their effects, they are more likely to take steps for their un - called for behaviour and may decide to recycle things, become compassionate towards animals and become advocates of environment protection.

There is an urgent need to spread awareness regarding various environmental issues, for instance, tobacco kills is a commonly used phrase in the medical world but an important aspect of tobacco which people are not aware of is that tobacco production damages the environment such as tobacco consumption.

According to Dr. J. Mackey, Director of Asian Consultancy on Tobacco control in Hong Kong, there are many adverse effects on the land from the tobacco production. A lot of word is required to cure tobacco leaves. Moreover, tobacco needs more water and more pesticides are added which affects the composition of the soil. Tobacco plantation requires more and more of forest land to be cleared and to counter this act of deforestation, the tobacco industry encourages plantation of fast-growing eucalyptus trees little realizing that these trees are water thirsty and will further deplete the groundwater levels. Dr. Mackey is of the view that for governments of developing countries, the net economic costs of tobacco are profoundly negative - the cost of treatment, disability and death of the consumers far exceeds the economic benefits to the producers by at least US \$200 billion annually with one - third of this loss being incurred by developing countries. But an environmental ethics rejects the ideals of a materialistic society in which success is gauged by the number of consumer goods one can accumulate.

Thus, the principle of environmental ethics expects that human beings behave like other animals on this planet and not as masters. The industrial society must hold moral responsibility and not promote a culture of utilitarianism by viewing trees as source of logs for fire and river as a drainage or hydro - electricity opportunity.

However, even as environmental ethics emerges as a new concept, there are two contrasting views regarding this (utilitarian justification and ecological justification). Utilitarian concept is also known as individualistic ethics. The supporters of this concept believe in exploiting natural resources for economic prosperity. They have known the price of everything but value of nothing. Everybody run after more and more. It is not life. Happiness is not the end of man but dignity. Ecological concept is also known as moral justification. It rejects overconsumption and considers each living organism as an equal member of biotic community; and thus, all living organisms have the right of equal respect. The main negative aspect of this view is the fact that it is impossible to respect all nature otherwise humans will not be able to survive. This view is also called environmental barbarism. Mankind is meant to be a unit. Men are not separate from biotic community like so many

grains of sand. We are organically bound into a living unit, which only the spirit of love can energise. We are now in a period of the unity of civilisation.

According to Aristotle, equity requires that we treat all beings equally. Since human beings are considered superior to other species owing to their intellectual abilities, the environmental equity principle states that always respect all nature except in cases where strong human rights are at stake. Human dignity, health and survival are strong human rights, while the right to property etc., are weak human rights. "Land ethic would enlarge the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively, the land ", said American ecologist Aldo Leopold.

Probable Solutions: the following are some of the probable solutions—

- 1) One should respect the power of environment and apply it for the benefit of mankind.
- 2) One should place the highest priority on health, energy, safety and environmental protection while using natural products.
- 3) One should be sensitive to ethical values and social issues regarding the environment.
- 4) One should be rational to reverence for life on Earth.

Every human being has a right to lead a healthy life. Earlier, basic human rights were not recognized, but along with time, the relationship of humans with nature and society has changed. The first draft on human rights and the environment was declared on 16th May, 1994 at Geneva. It offers every human being the right to enjoy a healthy, secured and ecologically sound environment. A sustainable society should affirm equity, security and environment justice to all the people.

The 21st century is witnessing a tremendous growth of scientific knowledge and its impact on various social, environmental, cultural and economic aspects of the human society. It is being observed that humans are using their advanced scientific and technical knowledge to exploit the natural resources to fulfil their desire and aspirations, causing severe and irreparable damage to the planet. Reckless use of natural resources is causing depletion of these valuable resources that are available in limited amounts of Earth. Combined with this, there are other problems such as increase in world population, industrialization, social and economic development all of which have contributed to increase in the types of pollution, exerting severe pressure on the planet. The world today is charged with technocratic individualism which ignores the fact that natural resources are under tremendous pressure. The result of the fast development in various fields is leading towards environmental and economic destruction. It is an act of violence against the natural world.

Swami Vivekananda was a visionary and original thinker of educational ideas. He prescribed value-oriented education, man making and character building education. His educational views are similar with writings of ancient scriptures like the Vedas, the Upanisads etc. and coined with the vision of educationists and philosophers like Dewey, Sri

Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, R. N. Tagore etc. value education ensures the availability of natural resources such as air, water, energy, forest etc. for the future generations for successful as well as sustainable survival of human beings. There can be no good life without life; but mere life does not account for the values we cherish. The forces of economic necessity and religious idealism may interact and mould the future of history. Our social life has given us means but denied us ends. The defeat of the human by the material is the central weakness of our civilisation. For this we need re-education of the mind, an improvement in faith and imagination. It is important to bring about certain behavioural changes in the human society so that the natural resources are preserved for the use of human race for as long as possible. It can only be made possible by having certain well-defined rights and duties. Therefore, human beings should consider the following duties to prevent further environmental degradation:

- 1) Human beings should act as custodians of all natural resources and their possible uses must be planned for the present as well as future.
- 2) Peaceful co-existence of all the living organism should be ensured.
- 3) Necessary precautions to avoid hazardous effects of various technological developments must be worked out and listed so that human race can be made aware of all detrimental outcomes.
- 4) To meditate the importance of the priceless and timeless values of wilderness.
- 5) To restore the lost relationship between humans and natural world.

Aristotle taught us long ago that we must live before we can live well. We must eat, shelter and clothe ourselves before we can draw, paint or speculate. The distinction between life and good life is taken up by M. K. Gandhi. Gandhiji has rightly said, nature has enough for man's need but not for his greed. The relation between nature and man is one of reciprocal modifications. The interplay between the geographic factors and the human efforts is an eternal and universal process. The environmental history of Tripura as well as N - E region is no exception to this generalization. Man is the creator, benefactor and destroyer of resource. Man is engaged in many types of activities—hunting, fishing, cultivating and the like. Thus a change occurs in the biological component of environment. This exploitation of resource of nature is exploitive stress on environment.

There are many evidences of destruction of nature by man. Such as deforestation which disturbs ecological balance, soil erosion resulting into reduction of nutrients and like. These kinds of human activity are liable for degradation of global environment.

Any serious pursuit of ideas, any search after conviction, any adventure after virtue, arises from resources whose name is religion. The search of the mind for beauty, goodness and truth is the search for God. The test of all truth is practical. The child nursing at the breast of its mother, the illiterate savage gazing at the numberless stars, the scientist in his laboratory studying life under a microscope, the poet meditating in solitude on the beauty and pathos of the world, the ordinary man standing reverently before a starlit sky, the

Himalayan heights or a quiet sea, or before the highest miracle of all, a human being who is both great and good, they all possess dimly the sense of the eternal, the feeling for heaven.

When the circumstances change of themselves through the inexorable laws of history, individuals will change also. Social factors determine human behaviour. Spinoza had observed that if a stone falling through the air could think, it might well imagine that it had freely chosen its own path, being unaware of the external causes. Even so, ignorance of the nature causes of our behaviour leads us to think that we are different from the falling stone. But everything occurs as the result of the unalterable process of nature.

Over the first few decade's countless words have been deliberated at seminar, conferences etc. Relating to environmental degradation and sustainable preservation and protection of environment across the globe but we were truthfully to answer the question whether environment worldwide are in a better position today than they were in the middle of the 20th century, the answer would have to be 'not much'.

If civilization is to survive, we must accept that its essence does not consist in power, glory, strength, wealth and prestige, but in the free activity of the human mind, in the increase of moral virtue, in cultivating of good taste and skill in the art of living. Science reveals identical cosmic elements as the basis of human life. Philosophy visualises a universal consciousness at the back of nature and humanity. The reason and will of the universe work through the human individual, who can understand the forces of the environment, foresee their operation and regulate them. The protection of environment is no longer a destiny implacable as the stars in their course. Its instrument is the human mind and will. A new generation requires to be trained in the ideals of the sacredness and supremacy ethical life, the sense of the brotherhood of mankind and love of peace. Regard for ethical values, love of truth and beauty, righteousness, justice and mercy, sympathy with the wilderness and belief in the brotherhood of man, are the qualities which will save modern civilisation. All great achievements are born of suffering and sacrifice.

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