



Hindu Ecology and Climate Change: A Philosophical Inquiry

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Introduction

This paper tries to understand how ecological philosophy helps us think about climate change today, and what ethical lessons it offers for dealing with the crisis. Hinduism has many different schools of thought and practices, but this paper looks at some common themes, such as interconnectedness, cosmic order, self-restraint, and respect for nature, that together form a Hindu ecological perspective. Instead of treating these ideas as unchanging traditions, the paper places them in the context of today's climate debates to show their ongoing significance. The paper has two major objectives. First, it explores the philosophical roots of Hindu ecology by looking at scriptures and key ideas that express an ecological way of life. Second, it connects these insights with today's climate ethics, which links them to issues like sustainability and global responsibility. It offers a clear philosophical framework that emphasises interdependence, ethical responsibility, and respect for the natural world. These values are significant today, as climate change requires not only new technology but also moral change and a new way of thinking about humanity's relationship with the Earth.

Ecological Worldview

Ecology deals with 'the web of life' that entangles every species with the lives of others and each species with its non-living environment as a whole and each element or factor of that environment. Odum (1959) has preferred to define ecology as the 'study of the structure and function of nature'. Parts of the biosphere that are directly or immediately important to the organism make up the "effective environment." The biosphere is the entire physical environment of any living thing. Today, an ecosystem is a complex that consists of the physical environment and the organisms. Ecology is therefore the study of how ecosystems interact with one another. Because matter and energy are always moving between neighbouring ecosystems, the agroecosystem is the setting dedicated to crop plants and where both animals live. It has also been made abundantly evident by the ecosystem principle that the "whole"



is more than the “sum of its parts.” Moreover, living things ought to be capable of effectively adjusting to their environment. However, it must be acknowledged that environmental natural factors still affect living things, and ecological studies focus on how they react to these changes or pressures, either individually or collectively. Natural extinction of many species from the earth's surface is the result of their incapacity to adapt to their environment. A fundamental component of population ecology is the ability of animals to disperse from their original location to a new location. Because of environmental changes, many animal populations would have eventually been exterminated without adequate dispersal mechanisms.

Issue of Climate Change

Climate change has become the most critical global issue of the twenty-first century. The rise in global temperatures, melting glaciers, loss of forests, decline in biodiversity, and frequent extreme weather are signs of a severe global crisis. Although scientific research has been vital in revealing climate change's causes and effects, technological advancements alone cannot ensure sustainable solutions. The crisis is deeply rooted in human values, moral perspectives, and underlying philosophical views regarding the connection between people and the natural world. (Gardiner, 2011). To tackle climate change effectively, it is necessary to rethink our worldviews and ethical principles. Darwin's theory of natural selection, centred on the idea of “survival of the fittest,” further encouraged humanity not only to struggle against nature for survival but also to assert dominance over it. Freud (Freud, 1984, p. 11) later proposed that human society should actively challenge nature and, with the help of science, compel it to serve human purposes. G.P. Marsh's *Man and Nature* (Marsh, 1967, p. 43) was the first significant work to highlight how human beings, through neglect of natural laws, have caused serious environmental destruction

This awareness urges us to create a new kind of ethics that is both ecological and spiritual. It should be based on values that guide humans to take responsibility for themselves, for other people, for nature, and for God (Velasery, 2010).

Hindu Philosophy and Ecology

Hindu philosophy presents a profound source of ecological wisdom. It does not see nature merely as a resource for human use but as something sacred, connected, and filled with divine presence. The Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and the Bhagavad Gita present a worldview where humans, animals, plants, rivers, and mountains live in mutual dependence and harmony. (Chapple, 2000). Such sacred texts emphasises



humanity's ethical and moral obligation to protect and nurture the environment. The concept of *ṛta*, or cosmic order, stresses balance and harmony. Principles like *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *aparigraha* (non-possession) teach compassion, self-control, and responsibility toward all living beings. These ideas connect closely with today's calls for sustainability, ecological justice, and climate ethics. The Hindu view of ecology is based on sacred texts and ideas that see the universe as holy and connected. Important scriptures like the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* explain how humans should relate to nature. Along with values such as *ṛta* (cosmic order), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *dharma* (duty), they provide the framework for an ecological philosophy that teaches living in balance, with self-control and responsibility toward the environment.

Hindu Texts and Environmental Insights

The Vedic hymns, regarded as some of the earliest sacred scriptures of Hinduism also reflect ecological consciousness and respect for nature. Although their primary emphasis lies in rituals and spirituality, the texts highlight the close relationship between the Vedic people and their natural surroundings. Many hymns are devoted to elemental forces such as Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), Varuna (water), and Prithvi (earth), expressing reverence for their vital role in sustaining life (Dey, 2020). The *Ṛṥvhi Sukta* in the *Atharva Veda* praises the Earth as a caring mother, highlighting the close relationship between people and the land (Chapple, 2000). The ecological wisdom in the Vedic hymns highlights the close link between humans and nature, reminding us to care for and protect the environment for the well-being of all living beings (Ratnabali, 2020).

The Bhagavad Gita offers significant insights into harmony and responsible stewardship in relation to nature. (Maharana & Behura, 2024) Although its central focus is on spiritual and ethical principles, its teachings can be meaningfully applied to environmental interactions, encouraging a sense of accountability and sustainable care for the natural world (Sumati, 2017). The Gita teaches the value of balance in life, which also applies to our relationship with nature. It asks us to respect ecosystems, be aware of how our actions impact the environment, and protect the natural balance (Krishnananda, 1980). The text also guides us to care for the environment with a sense of duty, avoid exploitation, live with moderation, and practice sustainability, reminding us of our connection with nature and our responsibility for its well-being (Kar & Tripathy, 2022).

The Upanishads are ancient Indian writings that provide the philosophical foundation of Hinduism (Borah, 2012). They deal with deep spiritual ideas, especially the oneness and interconnectedness of all existence. The texts introduce the concept of Brahman, the infinite and



unchanging reality that is the source of everything. Since all creation comes from Brahman, it shows that everything is connected. The Upanishads teach that the same divine essence (Brahman) exists in every being, beyond caste, creed, or species, pointing to the unity of all life (Renugadevi, 2012). This idea also includes nature, as its elements and ecosystems are seen as part of the universal order and linked to the same divine source present in all living beings (Ratnabali, 2020).

The teachings of Vedic texts, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads together present a timeless framework for environmental sustainability, emphasizing respect for nature, balance, duty, interconnectedness, and the unity of all life. Their teachings promote harmony with the environment through responsible stewardship, ecological balance, and sustainability, offering enduring wisdom relevant to addressing today's ecological challenges (Pai Vernekar, 2008).

Hindu Reflections on Climate Change

The ecological insights of Hindu philosophy, particularly the principles of *ṛta*, *ahimsā*, *dharma*, and *aparigraha*, offer valuable perspectives for contemporary climate ethics by linking responsibility, sustainability, and global justice. The concept of *ṛta* emphasizes the cosmic balance sustaining all life, a balance disrupted today by deforestation, biodiversity loss, and global warming; viewing climate change as a violation of *ṛta* situates environmental care within a moral and spiritual duty rather than a merely practical necessity, echoing the ancient *ṛṣis* who lived in harmony with the cosmic order (Velassery, 2010). Similarly, *aparigraha*, or non-possession, critiques modern consumerism and its culture of excess by promoting simplicity, moderation, and the principle of taking only what is necessary, thereby providing a philosophical foundation for sustainability. The principle of *ahimsā* extends beyond human relations to encompass all living beings and ecosystems, underscoring that climate change disproportionately harms vulnerable communities and fragile environments that contribute least to the crisis (Shue, 2014). Taken together, these principles reinforce the vision of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which situates humanity and nature within a single interconnected family, compelling a collective ethical response to climate change through respect, compassion, and shared responsibility for the planet.

Global Sustainability and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, regarded as one of the most significant guiding principles for humanity, is found both in the *R̥g Veda* and in verse 72 of the sixth chapter of the *Mahā Upaniṣad*. The term *Vasudhāiva Kutumbakam* is composed of *Vasudhā* (earth), *eva* (alone), and *kutumbakam* (family). It is generally interpreted as “One Earth – One Family” or “the whole world is one family,” implying that



all beings on earth are members of a single family. The inclusion of the word *kutumba* (family), a social concept, highlights that the expression not only signifies the biological or anthropological unity of humankind as a single species but also emphasizes the need to realize and uphold this oneness at the social level (Kar, 2023; Ranganathan, 2015). In Hindu philosophy, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* embodies a profound recognition of the intrinsic interconnectedness of all living beings. It conveys the notion that, regardless of distinctions in culture, religion, or nationality, humanity constitutes a single extended family bound by a shared existence and destiny. The concept advocates for mutual respect, compassion, and a sense of universal kinship, while also fostering values of peace, cooperation, and understanding. Ultimately, it underscores that the well-being of each individual is inseparably linked to the well-being of all, resonating with the contemporary vision of “One Planet, One Health, One Future” (Shelley, 2021).

The philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, though rooted in Hindu thought, transcends religious boundaries and articulates a universal vision of oneness, interconnectedness, and shared responsibility. Its central message is that the entire world constitutes a single family resonates strongly with the principles of global sustainability. In an era of transnational challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion, this philosophy underscores the urgent need for international cooperation and collective action. By presenting the world as an interdependent web that surpasses cultural and national divisions, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* advocates for sustainable lifestyles, ethical consumption, and policies that ensure ecological balance and social justice (Wieland et al., 2023; Sikarwar, 2023).

Critical Appraisal and Limitations

Hindu ecological ideas offer valuable insights into how humans can relate to nature, but they need to be examined carefully to avoid idealizing or oversimplifying them. A key problem in discussing Hindu ecology is the tendency to over-idealize India’s religious and cultural traditions as eco-friendly. Some scholars and activists describe Hinduism as a “green religion.” It suggests that respect for rivers, mountains, and forests leads to sustainable practices (Dwivedi, 1990).

When Hindu ecology is discussed, it is often seen as being either romanticized or seen only as symbolic rituals. This ignores its deeper philosophy and its ability to deal with today’s ecological problems. (Nelson,1998). This shows the need to study Hindu ecology in a systematic way as a philosophical approach to address climate change. On the other hand, Hindu culture does honour nature, but the reality is often different. It may be stated that sacred rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna are among the most polluted in the world (Alley, 2002). Similarly, deforestation and habitat loss have occurred even



in areas where nature is considered sacred. Romanticizing Hindu ecology can hide the real social and political causes of environmental damage, like urbanization, industrial growth, and population pressure. Therefore, Hindu ecological ideas should be viewed as useful philosophical resources that need careful thinking and practical application, rather than as perfect solutions. Despite its limitations, Hindu ecological philosophy provides profound insights for addressing climate change

Conclusion

Hindu ecological philosophy offers a profound moral and spiritual vision for addressing the climate crisis. Rooted in concepts such as *ṛta* (cosmic order), *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *dharma* (duty), and *aparigraha* (non-possession), it emphasizes harmony, restraint, and respect for all forms of life. These principles encourage a rethinking of humanity's relationship with nature from domination to coexistence. The idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("the world is one family") extends this vision to a global ethic of compassion and shared responsibility, aligning with the goals of sustainability and ecological justice. While Hindu ecology must be understood critically rather than idealized, its philosophical insights provide enduring guidance for cultivating ecological consciousness and moral responsibility. Ultimately, it reminds us that the solution to climate change lies not only in technology or policy but in transforming our values and way of living in harmony with the Earth.

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