

Cosmic Person and Interdependence

ANMOLPREET KAUR

Assistant Professor

Miranda House College, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

We are living in an age where we find the ancient methods of living to be either backward or being superstitious. Today's generation possess an indifferent attitude towards religion and are disillusioned, showing mistrust in it. This appears to be the reason why our ethical/moral guidelines, rubric, praxis and duties towards other beings and nature are disregarded. For example; offering food to God is nowadays considered a mere superstition. But Vedic sages had reasons for doing this, *i.e.*, to please the mother earth-the provider of our food, shelter and fulfiller of our every need. With the help of concepts like *dharma*, *adharma*, *punya*, *pāpa*, Vedic people created a positive attitude towards nature, which is the slip off desideratum of 20th century. The paper discusses the notion of cosmic-interdependence. For this, we first discuss the cosmic person (*Puruṣaḥ*), which according to the Hindu tradition is Lord Vishnu and is described as the source of all existence: everything sprung from Him and will return to Him at the end. *Isa Upaniṣad* says that everything from a minor leaf to the whole forest, every animal, human being, and whole cosmos is God's dwelling. Hence we must respect it. The paper then discusses interdependence with reference to *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, which, talks about our relation with nature and earth, and tells us how the entire universe is mutually interdependent, proving that the entire world is coming from cosmic person (*Brahman/Puruṣaḥ*) and will return to it. There is a thorough interconnectedness. Having discussed this, it becomes significant to understand how we have gone wrong. This is so because the environmental imbalance around us testifies our failure to recognize our interdependence with nature as emphasized by *Veda*, *Puranas* and *Upaniṣad*. The paper also discusses the three ecological principles of Hindu tradition to replenish earth, *i.e.*, *yajña* (sacrifice)-the sacrifice of the self, *dana* (giving)-to replenish the society, and *tapas* (inner-self)-to replenish our inner soul, our inner spiritual environment. Further, in order to vivify the paper, a practical aspect of pilgrimage and its ramifications are also discussed. It discusses the meaning of pilgrimage and how it has now acquired the shape of environmental degradation. Briefly, it will be discussed what *Kautilya* and *Manu* has to say about the environment. An account would be presented as to how there occurred a fundamental change in the environment and would make an attempt to provide the solutions to solve the present problems.

Key Words : Cosmic person, *Puruṣaḥ*, Pilgrimage, Inter-dependence

INTRODUCTION

We are living in an age where we find the ancient methods of living either backward or superstitious. Today's generation possess an indifferent attitude towards ancient practices and are disillusioned, showing mistrust in it. This can be seen as the reason why our ethical/moral guidelines, rubric, praxis, and duties towards other beings and nature are disregarded. For instance, offering

food to God is nowadays considered a mere superstition. However, Vedic sages supported the act with a reason that offering food to God pleases the mother earth-the provider of our food, shelter and fulfiller of our every need.

Vedas evince the knowledge about us, nature, and everything else. Indeed, we are unable to find answers to the questions that hit our minds regarding nature and the environmental imbalance from which the humankind

is suffering today. This is so because the environmental problems we are facing today were not prevalent during their time to this present extent. Environmental awareness is governed by our attitude towards our surroundings, *i.e.*, our conscious concern towards our surroundings where we live in, which has changed drastically from what it was during the ancient period and what it is now, making it obvious why we don't find answer to such question from the Vedic texts. However, one may come across references, which talks about nature and how ancient people were conscious about their surroundings. They recognized the need of ecological balance and maintained it as far as it was possible. Many of their acts were guided by the motive of maintaining the human-nature-equilibrium.

The present paper aims to discuss the notion of cosmic-interdependence, something we usually ignore or are unaware of, but is indeed operative in our cosmos. The paper also delineate and evince the practical aspect of *dharma*, as to how it was supposed to be performed and the form it has acquired in the present scenario. In order to vivify the paper, the practical aspect of pilgrimage and its ramifications have also been discussed.

Let us begin the discussion with an attempt to understand who is a cosmic person.

Cosmic-Person:

Vedas says all creation is a part of the cosmic person-*Puruṣaḥ*, who pervades everywhere. In *Narsimha Purana*, trees has been personified as God-*Brahma* Himself¹. According to *Yajurveda*, *Puruṣaḥ* is omni present. *Puruṣasūkta* of *Rigveda* describes the Cosmic Person, its form, embodiment, nature, and explains how everything within this cosmos is a part of His universal form. It says:

*ōm sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākśaḥ sahasrapāt,
sa bhūmim̐ viśvato vṛtvā 'tyatiṣṭaddaśāgulam*².

Thousand-headed is the *Puruṣaḥ*, thousand-eyed and thousand-legged. Enveloping the earth from all sides, He transcends it by ten finger's length³.

It is the first mantra of the *Puruṣasūkta* of *Rgveda*. Here, the transcend unity or totality of all beings is perceived as the Cosmic person who is the universal consciousness present in all the manifold manifestations and "Earth" signifies the entire creation- world/cosmos. The *puruṣaḥ*-the universal being is described as having thousand heads, legs, eyes implies that it has innumerable eyes, legs, and thus points to the fact of its omnipresence.

He envelops the entire creation from all directions, pervading in every sphere of cosmos and extends beyond 'ten' directions, which are represented through 'ten fingers'.

It further says that the moon was born out of His mind, sun from His eyes, *Indra* and *Agni* from His mouth and *Vāyu* from His breath. Similarly, his navel became *antariksha*- the intermediate space between heaven and earth. Thus, He is the regulator of the universe.

Puruṣaḥ according to the Hindu tradition is Lord Vishnu and is described as the source of all existence. Everything sprung from Him and will return to Him at the end. Vishnu is inside every being as Super soul and outside the material realm as the creator. Vishnu-*puruṣaḥ* in order to provide material body to soul, so that the soul can enjoy the desires of this world, created *Brahma* from Himself. *Brahma* further created planets, God, stars, and assigned duties to each of them. This is called the cosmic law and order-*Rta*. Demigods are powerful enough but behind them it is always Vishnu who is the true controller and operator of this universe.

The Indo-Aryan Vedic sages elucidate God as nature. One such example could be taken from *Srimad Bhagavatam* (2.1.32-33) *i.e.*,

"oh king, the rivers are the veins of the Cosmic Person and the trees are the hairs of His body. The air is His breath, the ocean is His waist, the hills and mountains are the stacks of His bones and the passing ages are His movements"⁴.

This describes the universe as the body of cosmic person. Since it is body of Lord Vishnu it is expected to be respected.

Isa Upaniṣad says that everything from a minor leaf to the whole forest, every animal, human beings, and whole cosmos is God's dwelling. All life, nature, earth, whole creation is sacred as it is God's dwelling. Every corner of the universe is God's home and must be treated with respect and revered. For Hindus whole creation is sacred since it belongs to God and is fundamental to our relation with nature. It teaches us that the world does not belong to humanity alone; the world belongs to every species living on it.

Thus, the *Upaniṣads* teach us the value and significance of nature, veiled, hidden and covered by religion, defining every corner of it as Vishnu's dwelling which when unveiled would portray the value of nature and earth. Sages were aware of the problem of making their students learn the value of nature, hence probably,

they thought religion can serve the purpose of protecting cosmos, by associating it with God, ordaining trees, plants, birds and animals, calling them sacred.

Interdependence:

After discussing about cosmic person within Hindu tradition, let us see how the creation of cosmic person is interdependent, *i.e.*, *Puruṣaḥ* itself is the domain and fountain head of interdependence. It says that from *Puruṣaḥ* comes the earth, water, air, fire, humans, animals, plants, trees, rivers, mountains, and they are mutually interdependent.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad talks about our relation with nature and earth, and tells us that the entire universe is mutually interdependent, the entire world is coming from cosmic person (*Brahman/Puruṣaḥ*) and will return to it. The positive attitude to nature is given as:

*“Iyam pṛthivī sarveṣām bhūtānām madhu, asyai pṛthivyai sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu; yah ca ayam asyām pṛthivyām tejomayah amṛtamayah puruṣaḥ, yah ca ayamadhyātmam śārīrah tejomayah amṛtamayah puruṣaḥ, ayam eva sa yah ayam ātmā; idam amṛtam, idam brahma, idam sarvam”*⁹.

“This earth is (like) honey to all beings, and all beings are (like) honey to this earth. (The same with) the shining immortal being who is in this earth, and the shining, immortal, corporeal being in the body. (These four) are but this Self. This (Self-Knowledge) is (the means of immortality; this (underlying unity) is *Brahman*; this (knowledge of *Brahman*) is (the means of becoming) all”¹⁰.

Śaṅkara says:

“This well-known earth is the honey or effect of all beings from *Hiranyagarbha* down to clump of grass. Just as a beehive is made by a great many bees, so is this earth made by all beings. Likewise, all beings are the honey or effect of this earth”¹¹.

This means that the entire world of human-beings is honey-effect/helpful and we are honey for other and *vice-versa*. This points towards interdependence/interconnection/interrelatedness. We unite plurality into one-ness. Every other thing is honey to us because our existence is dependent upon them. This is called *Madhū-Vidyā*, the study of interdependence, where universal monism maintains plurality.

There is a thorough interconnectedness and this interconnectedness points to the idea that even a minor

event taking place here, will have an effect on the stars far away. Thus, interconnectedness is operative everywhere whether we are able to experience it or not. At times it is subtle but it does not need our approval for its existence. This is what physics has developed in 20th century, showing interconnection between the elements in this universe, which is already proved by the *Upaniṣad*.

This can be understood as a ‘mutual-supporting-system’ within the cosmos. This implies that the idea of interdependence has become a universal proposition. Similarly, examples of air, water, fire, sun, moon, quarters, light, cloud, ether, *dharma* (righteousness), truth, human-species, cosmic-body, are honey to all beings. This further implies that knowledge is the means of mortality, which gives essence and consciousness.

Vyāsa says, “let me coexist peacefully with all these beings and let me not sin against any one of these beings. This should be our motto and daily prayer of worthy humans life on earth”¹². Also the *RigVeda* highlights the potentialities of nature in controlling the climate, increasing fertility and improvement of human life¹³. So with the dislocation or disturbance of one, others would have to suffer, thereby constitute the essence of interdependence. *Vedas* provide us with the knowledge that even the five-great elements-*pañcha-mahābuta* are dependent upon each other.

However, the problems and environmental imbalance around us testifies our failure to recognize our interdependence with nature, emphasized by Hindu *Veda*, *Puranas* and *Upaniṣad*.

In the Hindu world, consciousness pervades the universe and all within it¹⁴. This implies that not only human beings, cows, ants, are conscious but mountain, plants, trees, lakes etc., *i.e.*, earth itself, are also conscious and all this exists within the cosmic person. It could be deciphered as an analogy of a group working on a project. If we work in harmony the result would be good and if we don’t we would fail to achieve our targets. Thus it is a teamwork, where every individual occupies its rightful place and is performing their assigned duties in order to achieve the greater goals. So, the cosmic person needs to be taken care of with our individual efforts towards the protection of environment.

Vedic scriptures personify mother earth as the Goddess *bhumi/prithvi* as given in *Atharva Veda* and worship “o mother, with your oceans, you give us land to grow grains, on which our survival depends” (AV.12.1)¹⁵ Earth is the mother symbol, nourishing her children,

sacrificing her own beauty. Earth is conscious in the sense that it responds to the behavior of human beings towards itself. If humans treat it with loving kindness, revere it, she would supply us with everything that we need but if she is mistreated, she would keep all her fruits.

Earth's production of food is based upon the law of *karma*, which is considered the root of the functioning of the cosmos. The law says that for our every action there is a reaction, *i.e.*, depending upon our actions there will be subsequent consequences, thus pointing how everything is linked in a seamless web.

RgVedaVII;34,23 is about the *Aranyani*- the lady of the forest-one who tills not yet has stores of food¹⁶.

na vai aranyāniḥ hantiḥ anyañ ca it na abhi'gacchati||
svādoḥ phalasya jagdhvāya yathā' kāmam ni padyate||5||

The Goddess never slays, unless some murderous enemy approach. Man eats of savoury fruit and then takes, even as he wills, his rest¹⁷. The mother-earth (forest) never hurts anyone unless someone with ill-intention misbehaves. She shares the fruits of land with those who respect her.

Therefore food grains which are the basic and greatest necessity of human existence, will be plentiful if our mother earth would be happy. One way to do this is to link it with religion and revere the earth.

Ecological - Principles:

Vedic sages created an aura among people and made them respect our divine nature calling it the body of Lord Vishnu. We also find the serious concern towards nature in *pañcatantra* and *hitopadeśa*, whereby, with simple stories of animals, men, the relation between man and nature is depicted. They followed strict rules as to what is *dharma*, *adharma*.

Dharma is a concept with multiple meanings. Within Hindu tradition it implies our behaviors in accordance with *Ṛta i.e.*, cosmic law and order which is obligatory for everyone to follow; an order which marks the possibility of life and universe. It can be understood as our duties, our moral obligations and principles, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and "right way of living"¹⁸ towards others. So preserving and respecting nature, believing it to be the body of cosmic-person was considered our *dharma*-a notion absent in modern age. Further, *dharma* emphasized and propagated the idea of three ecological principles.

There are three ecological principles in Hindu tradition to replenish earth.

1) **Yajña (sacrifice)**-it literally mean the sacrifice of the self. This would imply that we sacrifice ourselves and other precious things for God. It is an offering of oblations through the medium of fire (*agni*) prepared from specific materials like cow-dung etc. *Agni*, the symbol of purification would take the offerings to the Gods. It asks us to reduce our needs and while taking something from nature, remember to leave for others as well, thereby making us responsible towards our environment. *Bhagavad Gītā* says, "all beings live on food grains, which are dependent on rain. Rain is produced by *yajña* (religious activity) which is based upon the performance of duties as taught in the Vedic scriptures"⁵. So, for abundant rain we perform certain rituals to receive favorable salvation from God. But in today's era of consumerism, we now are in a habit of accumulating things. We are becoming materialistic with every passing day which is leading to ramifications, as with such an attitude we are exploiting mother earth, which is an insult of earth as per the Vedic teachings. Performance of *yajña* is recommended for the multisided evolution of man and manifest creation within his surrounding on mother earth.

Further, the emphasis on the creation hymns shows that this whole world is a creation of *yajñīya-puruṣaḥ*, *i.e.*, a person born from the sacrifice. It means that the Lord created from himself the entire cosmos, animals, gods, demigods, air, water, fire. Likewise, He also created human beings. So Lord did not give any special concession to humans. Hence, man has no right to control or master the world. Man is at par with other factors.

2) **Dana (giving)**-it helps to replenish the society. If we learn to give and share our money, belongings and other possessions with others, there would never be poverty or exploitation of earth. This principle helps us to maintain an ecological balance within a society. If we are able to achieve balance within our community or society we can practice it for our environment as well by sharing its produce with others.

In the Hindu tradition, the wealth was for the welfare of the society, family and community and not materialistic possessions. They considered the money a sign of regress which now has become a sigh of progress. They were always willing to share their belongings by which they were also protecting the earth. The idea of having 'less' encourages us to give away and share with others.

3) **Tapas (inner-self)**-it helps to replenish our inner soul, which is our inner spiritual environment. *Yajña* and

dana would be possible if we are able to maintain a balance between our heart and mind. A disorganized person can promote neither harmony nor balance around himself. So we need to purify our minds and then only we would be able to control our needs and be able to protect mother earth from our increasing needs. Self-realization, epiphany of the Supreme, Spirit, and Self, is the primary purpose of *Upaniṣads*.

In *kausītaki Upaniṣad* we find the description of the *Agnihotra* or the inner-sacrifice⁶, whereby we use the oblations made up of cow-dung, cow-milk. This method works as double-edged sword; when it operates outside, in the external world it leads to the purification of air and controls the air-pollution, and when it is operative within the internal system, it is helpful for our mind.

Self contentment and internal harmony among the members of a community is the root of healthy environment according to *Vyāsa*⁷. Discontentment is the heart of man, caused by jealousy and hatred is the fundamental reason for man's disruptive tendencies that disrupt the balance in nature⁸.

Thus, with these three principles we replenish the total environment. Rituals were designed as a symbol, as a means to purify mind, in order to have a healthy relationship with three environments, namely natural-environment, social-environment and inner-environment. They are the three implications of Hindu ecology, which is also emphasized in *shanti* mantra where the three times repetition of *shanti* (peace) stands for these three environments, *i.e.*, peace with nature, peace within society/community, and peace within self.

This ancient background shows us that the nature and our activities have close connection and are inextricably intertwined with each other. This can further be shown with the help of the idea of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage:

Within the practical aspect of *dharma* we find a serious issue which recently have acquired the shape of environmental degradation. It is pilgrimage, *tirth-yātra*.

We find one of the earliest mentions of the idea of pilgrimage in *Mahābhārata*, introduced by Lord Krishna to *Yudhiṣṭira*. The *Pāndavas*, after escaping from the *Lākṣāgraha*, were faced with dilemma as to what they are going to do for coming years in forest. Lord Krishna told them that it was their opportunity to explore the nature, see it more closely and understand the things in

nature. This he called the 'pilgrimage'. The motive behind pilgrimage was to know the nature and become one with it.

Years passed and the idea took the form of a religious paradigm, *i.e.*, became religious ideal/form. It was seen essential for the Hindus to go for *tirth* for the peaceful death, seeking freedom (*mukti*) from the bondage (*bandha*) of their *pāpa*. However, the hidden/veiled aim was to explore the nature. Earlier people lived in their small villages, which were enclosed and hence the scope of exposure was not much. It was because of pilgrimage that they had the opportunity to visit a new place and meet new people. It was an opportunity to know the world and learn from it, so that when they would return to their respective villages they would implement the ideas they had seen and learned from the other people during their *yātra*.

To know the cultures and heritages one must travel to different sacred places, to find out how all these different patterns are tied together-to find unity in diversity¹⁹. Pilgrimage gives us an opportunity to experience the values of a particular place and become one with its culture. When the building and surroundings speak with us and have a message for us—a message of the spirit—it is called 'pilgrimage'.

At the same time pilgrimage is an environment alternative to tourism. The idea of pilgrimage was designed symbolically to have a healthy relationship with the nature. But now the picture has changed completely. Pilgrimage is now seen as a picnic-activity and our holy places are seen as picnic-spots. The essence of pilgrimage is now lost. Earlier the journey was difficult but it has now become easy, making even the mountains easily accessible. We have air-services to visit the holy-places. The utility of the mountains increased in addition to the sight-seeing as a practical means of recreation, adventures. Tourism in the modern sense and pilgrimage of the sacred resorts in the traditional sense, became combined together²⁰. Also, our holy places are infiltrated by the vagabonds who visit the holy-places in guise of a pilgrim. Their activities are spoiling the aesthetic values of holy-places. Since the holy-places are now becoming tourist-spots, there is mass deforestation in order to construct luxury lodges to accommodate the visitors.

Earlier, when people with their aesthetic motives and spartan endurance journeyed to such places, the damages were minimum²¹. But now things are not the same. For example; in the *Hemkund* area of Garhwal

Himalaya, saplings of *Brahm Kamal* (Saussure asp.), which provides the flower of aesthetic value was uprooted and destroyed by the visitors. Similarly, there are instances of loss of rare species of insects, flora and fauna that are harmed by the visitors during their journey.

All this causes major damages to the nature, because these areas are ecologically sensitive. Thus, major concern should be shown to such issues otherwise we may lose our spiritual, cultural and natural heritages. The earlier system of issuing the inner-line permit must be revived to enable the pilgrims with their spartan endurance and those who are really interested in going to the holy places to pray and for solace²². We should never forget the original idea of pilgrimage, and that these places are held for spiritual disciplines devoid of luxurious fondlings.

Thus we may say that with the help of concepts like *dharma*, *adharma*, *punya*, *pāpa*, etc., Vedic people created a positive attitude towards nature, which is the slip off desideratum of 20th century²³.

Conclusion :

From the above discussion, we see that there is a dire need to maintain harmony with our environment. The cosmic factors such as fire, water, air, are sacred as we cannot live without them. They play the role of the 'other' for us. We cannot dispense ourselves from them; otherwise we would be independent which as a matter of fact we are not. Thus, we need to understand that we are a part and parcel of this interdependent world.

The 'Other' who is supporting us, have a part of our individuality, supports our existence, thus need to be respected, preserved and revered. It is our duty as well as our moral obligation. It is a command from the higher being *i.e.*, Vishnu. Even *Kautilya* in his *Arthaśāstra* recognizes the need of ecological balance and was driven to say that the imbalance in any part of the nature affects the life as a whole and therefore, a trial to maintain harmony among the members of the universe is a necessity²⁴. We need to follow the cosmic law and order otherwise we would have to face its ramifications and no doubt we are facing them already. Our present state is evident that we have gone against the cosmic law and thus suffering from pollution, threat of global warming.

Even *Manu* was highly concerned about nature and made important laws regarding its protection. He gave man a status, which held man to be responsible for other beings, which is very much practical as well, as we are

highly conscious beings; we have a moral obligation towards other insentient elements in the cosmos. *Manu* expects man to live in harmony with other creatures. *Manusmṛti* points the existence of rivers, mountains, uneven lands, oceans, which shows that *Manu* made laws considering all the ecological factors and that man is only one of the millions of creations of god and hence has no right of mastery.

Puruṣaḥ and its manifestations are also interdependent; it demands harmony among its various elements. Our activities on earth will have an effect on everyone, including us, our *karma*; there is a reaction for our every action-constituting good/bad *karma*. So we need to be careful about our acts.

Ancient people performed rituals with all heart and soul with the motive of pleasing earth and thereby cosmic person. This shows that even our acts of preserving protecting and respecting earth are dependent upon receiving salvation from the cosmic person but today we are not doing it even for our own salvation sake. In order to have a truly harmonious relation with nature we need to control our greed and should try to address the prime question as to what actually is our need?

For a Hindu, earth was not simply some natural object. For him Earth is mother, *kali*, *pārvati*, *sītā*, sustainer of all beings and the home of God and thereby deserves our special care and attention. Seeing oneself with nature and as a part of it is the great environmental message of Hinduism. They see life in every being, dwelling of Vishnu in every being, one-ness of life and worship it. They also place austerity on a higher ground; the one who takes less from nature is respected. But there was a fundamental change in Hinduism with the introduction of industrial revolution. The mad rush for a better economy, led to industrial expansion, which initiated the problems of poverty, exploitation of nature. Problems have increased beyond the limit of control. There is barely a solution left. We need to go back and look what our *Vedas* have to say about our earth and at least make efforts on the individual level to curb our needs and keep them under a good trim, thereby preserve our earth as much as possible for future generations.

The feeling of oneness, interdependence, all beings being conscious, universe-the body of Lord, all this would instill in people a moral obligation that would prompt us to revere nature.

It is high time for us to understand the need of having human-nature equilibrium. We need to change our

thinking, our philosophy of life, and our way of life. Only industries are not responsible for the present picture. We are also equally responsible because we use their produce, and thereby encourage them. It is true indeed that our needs have grown to such an extent that we cannot cut them off but can only control them.

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