SPIRITUALITY IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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In the contemporary times the rate of environmental degradation and the need to maintain its proper balance have become topics of great importance. Man is running after science, he has invented many things, but all these developments in Science and Technology has led him away from nature. Again, the natural imbalance caused by cutting trees and hunting wild life has long term serious effects. The greediness and carelessness of the few has threatened some species leading into extinction. A disturbed ecological balance is threatening the whole world, which would become fierce in the future if not properly heeded upon.

The concept of sustainable development received tremendous interest in the United Nations Conference on 'Man and Environment' which focused on the impact of unregulated economic development on a deteriorated global environment. The outcome of this conference and conventions on Biodiversity and climatic change gave way to a better future for mankind. Sustainable development is a mode of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs " meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs"

Man and Environment is inseparable. From the spiritual point of view this is so because both of them are the same product of God.

From the material out look every thing in nature is made of matter. So the body of man is an "epitome of nature', a microcosm. The major causes of the environmental problems we face today are traceable to the human mind. The environmental pollution is harmful to both who are being exploited and those who are exploiting. The teachings contained in Bhagavadgīta are a rich source of knowledge about self and the environment in which the self operates. The environment required for the survival of human beings consists of two aspects. ie.- The external and the internal. The external aspects contain the Panchabhūtas where as the internal aspects include mainly the mind, which should also be free from pollution. Says Lord Krishna: This Prakṛti of mine is divided into eight as earth, water, fire, air space, mind, intellect and egoism.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायु खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहंकार इतीयं मे भिन्नाप्रकृतिरष्टधा।।१

Nobody has accepted mind or intellect as a component of the environment except Bhagavadgīta. Gīta elucidates a clear, definite and scientific interconnection between the mind and the environment and interdependence between two in the whole cosmos. Prakṛti is the mother and God is the father of all living forms. As Prakṛti is also of the nature of the God, God is the father and mother of the universe, he is the seed and womb of the universe.

सर्वयोनिषु कौन्तेय मूर्तयः सम्भवन्ति याः।।
तासां ब्रह्म महद्योनिरहं बीजप्रदः पिता।।२

Spirituality is the state of mind which understands that the truth is beyond the barriers of worldliness, caste, race of geographical boundaries. It is universal in nature, and a great spiritual thought connects us to universal consciousness and gives a certain perspective

in life. Eco-spirituality evolves positive feelings to nature and ethics grounded in an understanding that all life belonging to nature shares a common ancestor and the same struggle for existence. From this originates a spiritual belief that all species should be treated by all others with love, respect and reverence and we should live by simplicity on the earth. Sustainable development will only take place when we use the resources for our needs only and not for our greed; once Mahatma Gandhi said that spirituality also helps us have compassionate view of nature. He states that ' Nature produces enough for our wants and if every one took enough for himself and nothing more there would be no pauperism and starving in this world'. As we evolve spiritually we become more tuned to things around us and start enjoying the beauty of nature, appreciating it and this develops awareness about the need for preserving it as much as possible and hence certainly it is a step for sustainable living. One of the main causes of the unsustainable mode of development in the global issues is the lack of balance between the inner and outer developments. It is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the human mind and the spiritual principles that govern the inner development of man. Our ancestors were keenly aware of it, and they have expressed their views on it, with reference to the conditions of life which prevailed in then. The Vedas are the most ancient spiritual literature In the world. The Veda warns us about the sustenance of ecological balance as the first and foremost duty of man since then only the cosmic order ie., 'Ṛta' can be sustained. The idea of 'Ṛta' has much to do with the law of ecological balance as envisaged by the vedic seers. There is something 'unchangeable' on the background of the changeable. The rivers flow following Ṛta (ऋतस्य धारया, ऋतमर्षन्तिसिन्धवः।). Several passages in the Veda reveal that the human existence itself depends

upon the regular and rhythmic processes in nature. Bhūmisūkta of the Atharvaveda needs special attention in this regard. Here, the seer says that there are seven principles which sustain this mother earth.

They are truth, cosmic order, Consecretation, Penance, Knowledge and Sacrifice. It is suggested that the human world should follow these principles.

The Philosophy of Veda is contained in the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and epics. Mahābhārata has an important place among our ancient Śāstras for its historical, ethical, religious and spiritual values. The key word of Mahābhārata is

सर्वभूतहित। सर्वभूतहितेतिष्ट धर्मं चैव प्रतिस्मरन्.३
हितं यत्सर्वभूतानामात्मनश्च सुखावहम्।
यत्कुर्यादीश्वरे ह्येतत् मूला सर्वार्थसिद्धये।।४

Mahābhārata promotes holistic approach to life in the physical, psychological and spiritual spheres. A spiritual economy which promotes selflessness and service to the society will acquire a positive change. In Bhagavadgīta Sri Krishna is warning people that greed and lust are the doorsteps to the hell. The interaction between environment and sense of an individual has played an important role in evolution

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः
अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते।[५]

All the living creatures are the embodiment of His own nature.

According to the śrutis Ether is the first of five elements and is the cause of other four. Prakṛti or primordial matter is the ultimate cause of ether; and it is prakṛti which brings forth the endless creation

under the supervision of God. This prakṛti is nothing but a potency of God and is therefore identical with God. The whole of the universal creation including the creatures is evolved from God. So He is the final cause of the entire creation. The Lord Himself says : "I am the source of all creation, everything in the world moves because of me".

One of the significant aspects of the living beings is that they wish for the continuity of their species. For this 'will' to survive and continue their race in nature, they interact with the nature every time, says Gīta:

नहि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत्।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः।।६

"Not even a moment passes remaining without work; for every one is helplessly driven to action by nature born qualities".

This progressive interaction of living beings with nature leads to their evolution and also results in bio-diversity; however, if the interaction is towards the retrogressive side then there is a possibility of extinction or their very existence may be threatened by the very functioning of the ecological cycle of nature. The impact of pollution and deforestation has led to the release of toxicants in the atmosphere leading to the green effect and ozone depletion. The damage being caused in the nature cannot be overlooked for long it is high time that serious attempts should be made to rectify the mistakes. Gīta has the right answer to the serious environmental problems facing the world today. The need is to change the attitude of the people. Gīta confirms the living entity to be only one of the multi energies and when this energy is freed from material contamination, it becomes fully conscious and liberated.

The major cause of environmental pollution is greed, lust and endless desires of people to become rich. Sri Krishna explains Yoga as the 'balance of mind'

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय
सिद्ध्यसिद्धोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते।।[7]

There is nothing to divert him from the righteous path at the same time, all thoughts of obtaining personal benefits are banishing from his mind and in a spirit dedication to the Lord is what is meant by Karma-yoga. Thus the efforts to the conservation of nature can only be achieved through sacrifice. The man at this stage feels that he is a part of nature. The scriptures state that, one should perform this sacred act according to one's qualification or the requirement of the recipient.

All these act of sacrifices should be carried out intelligently and without any feeling of possession and desire for fruit. This mode of sacrifices has been named as 'scarifies in the shape of wisdom'.

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः।
सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते।।[8]

"The Karmayogi who has fully conquered his mind and mastered his sense, whose heart is pure and who has identified himself with the self of all beings (viz. God) remains untainted even though performing actions".

The act of sacrifice is performed along with the path of action.

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ
ज्ञानयोगेन सांख्यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम्।।९

In chapter III through the ślokas 10, 11, 12 and 13, the Lord

tells that the development is based on mutual co-operation and not individualism thereby protecting environment safety and avoids its degradation.

योगी युञ्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः।
एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः।।[१०]

'Living in seclusion all by himself, the yogi, who has controlled his mind and body and is free from desires and void of possessions, should constantly engaged his mind in meditation'.

Upon the realization of self, ego ends out the whole universe of things and becomes your one essential body.

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानां सर्वभूतानि चात्मानि।
ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः।।[११]

So the human beings must worship all creatures which is the real self realization. Gīta stresses that God created mankind to perform their duties in the form of offerings to God, charities, austerities and personal services in the form of svadharma.

सहयज्ञा प्रजा सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः।
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेषवो ऽस्त्विवष्टकामधुक्।। [१२]

Mankind and the sacrifice is twin born. Gīta says through the ślokas 13 to 18 of Chapter III; Creation represents the primordial renunciation or the sacrifice of the creator (जापति) for the good of the cosmos and mankind that has to be sustained by the continual offerings of men for the welfare and happiness of all in the cosmos. The supreme moral ideal of the Gīta is ceaseless work for the protection of the Integrity of the society, mankind and the cosmos (Loka Samgraha). Man and all other creatures and even Gods are bound to one another in a cosmic chain of mutual reciprocities and

obligations. Man must perform actions not for the gratification of egoistic sense pleasure, but as an integral part of the whole cosmos with its unending chain of give and take.

Gita's model of development is based on mutual help and cooperation with ultimate goal on spirituality. As stated in the chapter IV, śloka 22, human beings must lead a simple life based on contentment and self control. Greed is lust for wealth prompted by which man is ever busy devising means of multiplying his wealth, refuses to part with them, seeks even to usurp the rights of others minding not what is right and what is wrong. His mind becomes restless. Gīta invests every action with the status of sacrifice (यज्ञ) dedicated to Krishna. According to Gīta the roots of perfection and Universality of man's moral action lie in his identification with paramātman or puruṣa that embodies a living communion with mankind and cosmos, an exhaustible sharing of the universal life of paramātman. Due to man's inaction and wickedness' the 'cosmos wheel (जगच्चक्र) set in motion is not kept revolving for the maintenance of world order. Therefore every man like Arjuna, ought to be a yogi and seek the divine reality and fulfill cosmic will and purpose in disinterested action (निष्कामकर्म) for man kind and the world.

Lord Krishna manifests his cosmic form in chapter XI of Gīta.

इहैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नम् पश्याद्य सचराचरम्।
मम देहे गुडाकेश यच्चान्यद्द्रष्टुमिच्छसि। [13]

He is the existence of the entire cosmos with all its animate and inanimate objects in it.

अनेकबाहूदरवक्त्रनेत्रं पश्यामि त्वां सर्वदोऽनन्तरूपम्।
नान्तं न मध्यं न पुनस्तवादि पश्यामि विश्वेश्वर विश्वरूपं।।[14]

He is the Supreme indestructible upholder of the eternal

Dharma.

पश्यामि देवांस्तव देव देहे सर्वां स्तथा भूतविशेष संघान्।
ब्रह्माणमीशं कमलासनस्थमृषींश्च सर्वानुरगांश्च दिव्यान्।[५५]

All beings including sages, semi divine beings etc.. are a part of it. As everything in the world is a part of the divine life as manifested by Lord himself, we are bound to be in turn with the cosmos. The devoted person ceases to have any trace of selfishness and he does not claim anything in the world as personal. To him everything belongs to God and he carries out his duty in a disinterested spirit with reverence and affection. Krishna says to Arjuna : 'Dedicating all your works to me with your mind resting on self, free from desire and egoism, fight, banishing your mental illness'

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि सन्यस्यध्यात्म चेतसा
निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः।।[५६]

Mahābhārata has a holistic view of development and shows the close interconnection among all the animate and inanimate, mutual co-operation, contentment, self control, lack of greed and sacrifice. All these principles, if put into practice along with spiritual aptitude, can transform the world resulting in the awareness about the environment and development of values. Such a change is the background of sustainable development.

References:

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