

ECOLOGICAL ETHICS OF ŚAIVISM: A SURVEY PAPER**Satyamev Bharteey^{1*}**

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Abstract

This paper proposes that moral and ethical values of ecology are rooted in the Hindū tradition, with a particular reference to Śaivism. Śiva is one of the most important deities in Hindūism. This paper, divided into four sub-titles, draws a conceptual framework to capture ecological values embedded in Shaivism. First, it explains how ecological ethics are linked to Indian spiritual culture, focusing on Shaivism. Second, Indian ecological wisdom is related to Indian philosophy focusing on Śaivism. Third, Śaivism, its ecological expression associated with the worship of Shīvā, indicates environmental harmony, and last, it explores the anthropogenic connection in an eco-ethical way.

Keywords: Śiva, Nature, Ethics, Ecology, Culture, Śaivism

Introduction

Human culture is shaped by its environment, molding beliefs and imaginations. The beliefs about Śiva in Hindu myths are closely related to the environmental aspect, which offers an exciting dimension to the historical relationship between religion and ecology, which is crucial to study in India. The origins of Śaivism can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization, one of India's longest and most enduring histories. It was believed to have been founded by the Dravidian people, who, after coming into contact with the beliefs of the Aryan race, turned their devotion to Śiva into a religion (Pathak, 1980). Sir John Marshall quotes findings from the excavations at the Mohenjadarō-Harappa sites, saying, "There appears at Mohenjadarō a male god, who is recognizable at once as a prototype of the historic Śiva." The excavator believed that the seal's figure represented the prototype of Śiva because of its many unique characteristics (Srinivasan, 1975). Śiva is often depicted in his Ādiyogī, form with three faces and two horns surrounded by animals, suggesting the shape of Śiva's emblem (Shunmugam, 2019). The animals surrounding the figure also elude Śiva's later aspect as Pasupati, 'Lord of Beasts' (Sharma, 2006), which shows him promoting fertility and oneness with nature. In the Vedic texts, Śiva was referred to as Rūdra, a minor cattle-protecting deity connected to the howl of the wind-healing herbs. This study hypothesizes that Śaivism is a religious sect that promotes ecological harmony in the relationship between man and nature.

Ecological Ethics

Various religious perspectives are included in environmental ethics, often emphasizing the moral status of the environment and its non-human contents (Grim et al., 2013). In India, religious concepts are always associated with natural ethics, which provides a moral and ethical framework for the environment and humanity. The aim of revering nature in ancient times was to protect natural resources by worshipping deities. It was believed that it would not be ruined if nature was given sanctity (Krishna, 2017). However, in the name of rationality, religious taboos were violated, leading to our current suffering. The principle of ahimsa, or non-violence, is a critical aspect of this philosophy, which encourages treating all living beings with kindness and respect. Śiva is the main deity who is worshipped by different names across India. Our moral or ethical values dictate that we should not harm or destroy trees of religious significance. If we assume the entire character of Śiva is a symbol of culture and ecology in Indian religion, which can be presented in society as a role model. Its character is always one of discipline, serious posture, meditation, and concentration, which sets it apart from other Hindū gods. Śiva depicted as meditating in Snow Mountains is a popular image (Eck, 2012). The appearance of mountains, rivers, trees, the moon, and animals creates ethical interactions with environments and indicates that they preserve all ecological elements.

The followers of Śaivism use plants, animals, and water to preserve nature, considered pure and pious in Hindūism. The Hindū literature on ethics and the environment is vast, increasing human cognition in the environmental context. Literature has used God to express the natural world ethically, but modern evolution has probably failed. It is a well-known fact that literature provides pleasure and teaches. Therefore, various religions' mythological literature and spiritual scriptures can become valuable tools to raise ecological awareness and teach eco-ethics (Handique & Bhattacharya 2021). Furthermore, the described deities therein emit positive values, and the portrayal of their deeds and ideologies impart moral ethics.

Indian Tradition, Culture, and Ecological Wisdom

The Indian culture is one of the world's oldest living cultures, and it believes in balancing the environment through the integration of customs, rituals, beliefs, and values deeply ingrained in the society. This land of India is blessed with mountains, rivers, forests, grasslands, deserts, and seashores, as evidenced by ancient and medieval texts, which suggest a symbiotic relationship between nature and its people. These customs have played a significant role in safeguarding the environment and its biodiversity for generations. Furthermore, these models for India's environment have often been articulated through religion and enforced by rituals. Theology worked to connect natural elements in rituals that we consider sacred and the material world. Most authors, often patronized by rulers, religious leaders, or communities, studied and described selected aspects of the environment and recorded observations in its oldest surviving holy texts (Fisher, 2018). Over time, these models for India's environment have often been articulated through religions and enforced by rulers. Vedic hymns and their after-holy text, like the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and Purāṇas, mention the cultural attitude towards interacting with the land, plants, and animals. Most Natural Resources, such as mountains, rivers, trees, animals, flora, and fauna, transform

into religious forms considered sacred in India. Prithvī (Earth), Agnī (Fire), Jal (Water), Vāyu (Air), and Ākās (Space) are revered as essential elements in Indian culture which represent 'Panchamahābhūtās' erupted from Lord Vishnu's body, creation, and the sustenance of life (Handique & Bhattacharya 2021). Finally, they considered all manifold manifestations of the one God, called by different names.

Śaivism

The image of Śiva and its symbols and values are linked to its ecological significance. Shiva Purānas are full of descriptions of myths and stories of environmental importance. The depiction of Śiva as an Ādiyogī from being affiliated with yoga practice, Natrāj dance, dreadful, repulsive being, with fear being a masculine feature, mountain deity, and natural wearing, which reflects a specific manifestation, created a radical image compared to other gods. However, Śiva is often portrayed as a calm and meditative figure surrounded by animals such as bulls and tigers. These depictions aim to highlight its connection with nature. It is also important to note that yogā is seen as a form of worship within the Śaivite tradition, which makes Śaivism significantly impact the world.

The holy Gangā River originated in the Himalayas, and its territory dwells around Bhagirathi from the Gangotri Glaciers at Gaumukh in Uttarkāśī Himalayas. Similarly, in visible Vedic culture, the worshipers of Rudrā Śiva in the hilly region were dressed in the skins of wild animals. They carried iron clubs in their hands, which is the specialty of Pāshūpāt (Nirmal, 2020). His perception is to preserve ecology and the universe as well. His emblem is Agni and deer. Sarnath is one such place that is depicted holding a deer in the left hand of Lord Śiva (Bhattacharya, 1924). Śaivism has the most prolonged and continuous history in India, with archaeological and literary shreds of evidence of its pre-Vedic origins dating back to approximately 5000 years ago. The depictions of Śiva can be seen as early as the Indus civilization, for example, lingams and ring stones with probable fertility values, the tree spirit as a prototype for the door guardian, and a seal showing a god in a yoga position, also called Ādyogī surrounded by two nāgas or serpents. Due to Śaivism's pre-Vedic origin, many rituals and beliefs are seen as anti-Vedic and follow different laws. The pre-Vedic Shiva is often depicted in his Ādyogī form, with three faces and two horns surrounded by animals that are also indicated as Pasupati or the lord of animals. This depiction of Śiva is not found in any scriptures and raised questions about whether it could be understood as Śiva. Many traditions and rituals appear to be of non-Aryan origin. Phallus or Līnga worship is a sexual emblem and a cosmic substance (Kramrisch, 1981). Its worship was a non-Aryan tradition that appears primarily to have been obtained amongst the Indus civilization. It found specific polished stones, probably two feet or more in height, and stone emblems have been identified with the Līnga form (Darian, 2001). However, Vedic Orthodox condemns those who worship the phallus (Darian, 2001).

In South India, whole mountains are regarded as lingams (Eck, 2012). Śiva is also associated with the cosmic mountain dwells in the mountains. His wife, Pārvatī, and Vāmā Haimavatī, both signifying the daughters of the mountain, the Ganga, also known as Haimavatī, are visually depicted in his portrayal. The hills around Kailāsa are believed to symbolize various deities like Pārvatī, Skanda, Ganeshā, and Nandī - the bull who serves as Śiva's mount and

protector. According to the legend, Kāilāsā is a physical representation of Śiva's lingā of light that pierced the earth at the beginning of time. The depiction of Śīva meditating on the Snow Mountains is famous (Krishna, 2017). In India, Śīva is a mountain deity known as Badrināth, Kedārnāth and Amarnāth. The notion of the mountain is also an emblem of art and rituals. The mountain of Elephanta caves is the most vital example of the Śīva-Mahesa figure in ancient times (Chakravarti, 2022). In Vedic times, the mountain (Mūjvant Himalaya) is the source of Somā Rasa, a vital drink of Aryan with spiritual importance in Vedas.

Symbiotic Relationship between Human Beings and Nature

Vedic religion was pantheistic, concerning nature as divinity (Krishna, 2014). Values and faith are interpreted in Hindu spirituality to imply divinity ethically with nature, which encourages human-nature relations. In ancient times, sages manifested their experiences and observations through religion. After some time, these ideas and imagination transformed all-natural elements into a sacred form of visualized gods and goddesses. The depiction of Lord Śīva is adorned by all elements of nature. The concept of Śīva proposes a reciprocal relationship with nature, which is reflected in Śīva's personality and image and can be seen in his rituals and beliefs that promote Śīva's values. Nature has been revered as Pārvatī, wife of Śīva (Kurma Purana, 1998). To whom Lord Śīva is concerned, another name, Ardhanāriswar, or a conjunction of females, the Himalayas are called the home of Śīva and also called the father-in-law. At the same time, the lord's son, Ganesa, with an elephant head, symbolizes the harmonious co-existence of the human and animal world. Śīva Purāna mentions a version of the eight forms of Śīva dedicated to the different incarnations of Lord Śīva (Shiva Purana, 2002). Eight named idols are associated with the eight gross material elements: land, water, fire, air, sky, soul, sun, and moon (Shiva Purana, 2002). In the ritual tradition of Śīva, these elements were considered deities and defined as sacred, thereby maintaining a balance between these elements in the environment. Religious symbols can also be saved from environmental degradation and damage and from being disrespected and neglected.

Conclusion

India has a rich history of religious traditions with long-enshrined values motivating people in their relationship with nature. Śaivism represents an emblematic representation of spiritual environmentalism by presenting an organic relationship between the human and natural worlds. The concept of Śīva always imbibes natural cohesion, as described above, displayed by his rituals and worship methodology, working on holding an ecological balance on the earth. It proposes that the human world exists within the structure of the natural world; hence, care for ecology is an intrinsic part of human existence. This paper attempts to highlight the conceptualization of human ecology in the tradition of Shaivism.

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