HINDUISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Hinduism is not a single religion. It is more a family of religions, and their concomitant cultures, which share certain features. This common ground is mostly derived from an acceptance of the Vedic scriptures. These Sanskrit writings of ancient India deal with all aspects of human life and are relevant to the more recently developed sciences of ecology and environmental care.

The Vedic scriptures state, “Human prosperity flourishes by natural gifts and not by industrial development. If human civilisation has sufficient grains, cotton, minerals, jewels and water, why should we hanker after terrible industrial enterprises so that the few can live lavishly at the cost of the many?” The scriptures further explain that such artificial endeavours are a result of godlessness whereby man remains ignorant of any higher supervision. According to the law of karma, (action and reaction), the more we selfishly exploit the earth’s resources, the more we become victimised by scarcity, pollution and catastrophe. Hindus believe that nature’s gifts are dependent on the grace of God and that obedience to His laws maintains the natural ecological balance, ensuring a life of peace and prosperity.

In practice, the Hindu society is village-orientated and stresses a simple life based on an agrarian economy supplemented by cottage industry. Wealth is ascertained not in terms of paper-money, or unnecessary luxuries, but in terms of real requirements, and natural commodities such as land and animals.

For this reason, cattle are important. The cow, from simply grass and water, provides mankind with milk, yoghurt, butter and a range of other dairy products, essential for those who follow a vegetarian diet. Since non-violence is a tenet basic to Hinduism, the bull is not sent for slaughter but is trained for use in agriculture – for ploughing, milling and transport. Today he has been superseded by the tractor. This has created not only a need for factories, with their filth and fumes, but an over-dependence on maintaining distant fuel supplies.

According to Vedic scripture, the extraction of crude oil from the planet destroys her orbital symmetry, creating ecological imbalances. Taking these points into consideration, it may be easier to understand the importance given to the cow, the bull and other productive animals.

Land is also protected by Vedic injunction. The use of artificial fertiliser is specifically banned. The unnecessary cutting of trees is prohibited and the planting of saplings is considered an act of considerable piety. From birth, Hindus are taught to offer respect to the river which supplies their life-sustaining water.
In an Indian village today we still find biodegradable cups of sun-baked earth and plates of banana leaves. These, like other basic commodities, are all produced locally. All in all, we could well imagine that if, in such a village, all connection with the outside world were severed, life could still continue, as it has for thousands of years.

Such a society, however, is not that of the primitive, the barbarian or the uncultured cave-dweller. The Vedic culture is one of refinement and responsibility. It encourages restraint of the animalistic propensity that compels modern man to the vain and unending pursuit of sensual pleasure and his avarice for mass-produced luxuries. The Vedas stress the need to control the lust, greed and anger that threaten to annihilate today's complex societies.

The simplicity of Hindu society is therefore maintained by spiritual culture and by the conviction that time, energy and resources should be used for that purpose. The scriptures maintain that everything belongs to God and should be used in His service. We should accept for ourselves only that which has been set aside as our quota and not transgress the rights of others. Thus economic development is stabilised by the systematic culture of man's finer sentiments.

**Hindu & Creation & Climate Care**

God does not create the world out of nothing. The world, God and the soul are inherent aspects of the same Eternal Being. Thus there is a need to protect nature as one would any other creature and for the Hindu it is possible to honour nature as their own greater life and expression.

Climate change creates pain, suffering, and violence. Unless we change how we use energy, how we use the land, how we grow our crops, how we treat other animals, and how we use natural resources, we will only further this pain, suffering, and violence.