



## Spiritual consciousness: A potent means of environmental protection

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### Abstract

The indiscriminate exploitation of ecological resources such as earth, air, water, space and vegetation by human beings has created serious ecological crisis and environmental degradation. The situation has become so chronic and alarming that if appropriate measures are not taken, it may exterminate and devastate human race from the earth very shortly. Knowing the fact, many kinds of measures have been taken and implemented to protect the environment but no effective result has evolved so far. In fact, the root cause of the problem lies in the human mind. Hence, attitudinal change and behavioural modifications through the achievement of spiritual consciousness may be the potent means of environmental protection.

*Key words: Ecological Resources, environmental degradation, spiritual consciousness, behavioural modifications.*

### Introduction

The unremitting degradation of environment is related to problems of pollution- earth, air, water, space; deforestation, solid waste disposal, increasing level of global warming, loss of biodiversity along with gradual depletion of ozone layer. The rapid progress of science and technology and the pressure of increasing population placed burden on the naturally occurring and sustaining processes of ecosystem. As man is the dominant organism of most of the ecosystem, so, to fulfill self-need, they indiscriminately exploited ecological resources such as air, water, space, vegetation and other non-human species and thereby created serious ecological crisis and environmental degradation. The growing environmental concerns has made everyone aware and consequently, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held on Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and World Summit on Sustainable Development held at Zoharbex in 2002. Now, the situation has become so chronic and alarming that the management of environmental degradation and prevention of pollution has become urgent need and if sound measures are not taken, continuous deterioration of environment may shortly arises the condition of extinction, extermination and devastation of human race from the earth.

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However, man has now realized the vital role of ecological virginity and environmental purity for his healthy and happy existence. Consequently, various measures like policy of sustainable development, environmental education, mass awareness programs, protection policies and legislation have been introduced and implemented to conserve and protect environment.

### Efforts of Environmental Protection through the Ages

Human beings have been interested in environmental protection since the beginning of civilization and it goes back to the prehistoric period. The efforts to protect environment may found to be deeply rooted in the spiritual practice of religious traditions of India. Interpretation of the seals of Indus Valley Civilization unravels the fact that animals were considered as sacred and they were worshiped (Parpola, 1988). A meditative proto-yogin surrounded by a great number of animals might suggest the coexistence of men with animals which declares the close harmony of man with nature and reverence for all living beings (Chapple, 1995, P.6) in prehistoric Indus Valley Civilization. The Yajur Veda proclaims "May all beings look at me with a friendly eye, May I do likewise and may we look on each other with the eyes of a friend (36.18). In Mahabharata, it is mentioned that one should not behave to another in such a way, which one regards as injurious to oneself (XIII: 113.8). In yoga philosophy,



Maharishi Patanjali advised to observe non-violence in order to alleviate enmity (Yoga Sutra, II: 35) because it develops the feeling of friendliness to all living and non-living objects. Buddhism upholds the idea that animal life should be protected (Schmithausen, 1991).

Great Emperor Ashoka (274 BC-232 BC) implemented several laws for kind treatment to animals by restricting meat consumption, curtailing hunting and establishing hospitals and roadside watering stations (Sen, 1956). Jainism established the idea of "non-injury" as a great vow. The saints of Digambara sect observe no digging, bathing, lighting or extinguishing of fire and fanning to protect earth, water, fire and air bodies respectively (Acharanga Sutra, 1:1).

In the mediaeval period, Mughal Emperors, especially Akbar exhibited great interest in the protection of natural resources (Verma and Agrawal, 1993, P. 538-39). According to Akbarnama, Akbar enacted laws to protect mice, oxen, leopards, fish, horses, sheep etc. (Abul Fazal). But the British rulers and many Indians rulers caused ruthless destruction of natural environment during 18th and 19th centuries (Verma and Agrawal, 1993, P. 539). Though, in India serious ecological hazards have been noticed since 1950, environmental management and conservation was given important attention only after 1972 (Garg, Bishnoi and Malik, 2002, P.1). Many Articles of Indian Constitution envisage environmental protection directly or indirectly. Through the light of these articles, many policies and legislation have been made and implemented to manage environmental problem. At global level, the Stockholm United Nation Conference on Human Environment in June 1972 identified the problem and stressed to save domestic environment. World Tourism Organization (WTO) held its conference at Manila in 1980 to harmonize between tourism development and environment management. In 1987, the 'Commission on Environment and Development' coined the term "Sustainable Development". To save the depletion of ozone layer, Montreal Protocol was signed in 1987. Convention on climate change and biodiversity were signed at the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. (Kumar,2001). But it is to be regretted that despite the enactment of hundred of laws and introduction of environmental education

and mass awareness programs, graveness of the problem has not yet been solved. Consequently, the problem of environmental degradation still exists as a serious concern.

### **Philosophical concept of Spiritual Consciousness**

In fact, attitudinal change and behavioural modifications through awakening of spiritual consciousness of human beings is an essential means to protect environment. Spiritual consciousness means one is aware of oneself as a spiritual entity and there is no difference between the individual and other living and non living entities of this world. Everything of this world is spiritual entities but due to obscurity caused by the layers of ignorance ( avidya), human being confined to individual consciousness and tend to identify themselves in terms of the body, mind , intelligence and ego . But at the level of spiritual consciousness, the mind operates at a higher level of consciousness and one understands that everything is derivation of one or single consciousness with varied appearances and it is the absolute truth. Spiritual consciousness is a striving for wholeness in the midst of our inescapable brokenness and fragmentation of this world. This idea of wholeness emergent as it is manifested in an individual with spiritual consciousness. It involves a transformation in the conceptualization and realization of of God. (Giri, 2006). What the spiritual consciousness stresses is that the knowledge that one is divine, one is part of universal being, facilitates this mode of relationship with the world. Therefore, spiritual consciousness is not antagonistic to human well-being or well-being to any living entity of this world, rather it is a feeling alone which will save us and our environment. But to achieve the state of spiritual consciousness, an individual must be free from worldly consciousness which is coupled with greed, vanity, violence and thirst for self-satisfaction and over consumption. Until these deep-rooted negative traits are replaced by positive ones, mere legal aspect and intellect building education and pretend awareness programs will not be evolved as an ideal solution to environmental protection. Yogic practices along with inculcation of yogic ethical values can only bring forth higher level of spiritual consciousness by the transmutation of human psyche.



Yogic practices, directly regulates and control the functions of 'body-mind equipment'. Flow of bio-energy and body fluids become smooth and normal; mind becomes tranquil and steady. Consequently, individual achieves good understanding and sound judgement capacity from which he acts rightly and becomes luminous. From luminosity, he develops total awareness of the every core of his being and achieves spiritual consciousness. (Yoga Sutra, II - 28). By virtue of spiritual consciousness one can experience the state of 'Yoga' or 'Union' with life around oneself. Individual feels that all the animate and inanimate objects around him are one. Spiritual consciousness can easily be accessible to anyone through devoted practice of yogic processes along with yogic ethical lifestyle. It brings forth a perfect body-mind coordination as it is correlated with maximum coherence, maximum orderliness and integration of body-mind functioning. (1)Yogic psycho-ethical practices, (2) Yogic psychophysical practices and (3) Yogic psycho-meditative practices along with yogic ethical lifestyle are enough to neutralize the negative thoughts patterns and attitudes and able to promote and developed many positive social, ethical and spiritual values within the individual. These ethical and spiritual values lead an individual to move from individual consciousness (consciousness of diversity) to unified consciousness (consciousness of uniformity). Therefore, the objective of this theoretical research paper is to examine the effectiveness of spiritual consciousness in the protection of environment.

### **Spiritual consciousness and Environmental Protection**

The yogic process developed by the spiritual geniuses aimed to break through negative habit patterns of ordinary consciousness by liberating human beings from suffering and distress which is a product of unconscious conditioning of mind (Feuerstein, 2002). Yogic process is a psycho-spiritual means of achieving elevated level of consciousness. Depending upon the nature of practice and effectiveness, yogic medicines can be categorized in to three broad types:

(i)**Yogic psycho-ethical practices:** Man's selfish nature and bestial urges like cruelty, violence, covetousness etc. give him an inherent propensity to exploit others. These negative traits of personality detach an individual from attaining the

knowledge of 'oneness of life'. Subjugation of these negative traits requires self-discipline and self-mastery. According to Shukla (1971, P.7), key to self-mastery lies deeper in the sub-conscious strata of mind rather than conscious one. Hence, any change and reformation of behavioral traits should emanate from the depth of subconscious mind. Yogic ethical practice is such a conscious psychotherapeutic technique, which follows the principle of autosuggestion. Application of autosuggestion, Sankalpa and therapeutic thinking are very ancient techniques for acquisition of desirable virtues and eradication of irrational personality traits (Mahaprajna, 1992, P.P- VIII-IX). Through yogic ethical practices, effort is made to sow the seeds of positive values of 'Yama and Niyama' in the deep bed of subconscious mind. These seeds will eventually manifest themselves at the conscious level and bring about changes in personality. Hence, in this section efficacy of yogic ethical values (yamas and niyamas) are evaluated in the modification of behavioural traits and thereafter achievement of spiritual consciousness.

Violence is the most painful act done by human beings. Through violence one destroys environmental balance by felling of trees and vegetation, killing of wild animals and polluting the whole environment- air, water, and earth. But the practice of 'non-violence' when firmly established, a person displays peace in words, thoughts and deeds and behaves with good will and love towards all. Through the practice of 'truthfulness' one discovers the thread of, 'oneness' or 'unity of life'. Here, truth is the unity of life' and by the practice of this ethical value, one starts believing that all the creations are divine and is meant for adoration, not for destroy or killing. 'Non-stealing' is against the indiscriminate looting and plundering of natural resources. When this value is firmly practiced, it brings forth the idea that like man, an animal, a tree and even a stone have equal right of living and they are equally important in the ecosystems.

'Sexual continence' as a yogic value bears divine connotation. It helps to accumulate psycho-physical energy within the individual which gives higher thoughts, values and spiritual consciousness. Through the practice of sexual continence, one experiences "Divinity in all creatures". 'Non acquisitiveness' is the non-hoarding of wealth. This ethical value advocates that one should keep his



requirements to the minimum and when firmly established, it enables a person to remain satisfied with whatever he possesses. This enhances mental peace and equilibrium. This relaxed state of mind is the breeding ground of spiritual consciousness.

Now five ethical values under 'Niyama' are categorically examined to see their appropriateness for the development of spiritual consciousness. 'Purity' of body and mind is essential to achieve spiritual consciousness. Purification of physical body, mind and intellect brings the state of benevolence (saumanasya) which banishes mental pain, glumness, sorrow and other emotional thought waves. This brings forth morality which forbids the gathering of garbage here and there which creates pollution of the earth, air and water. The value 'contentment' signifies that one should feel happy in whatever condition one is living and whatever wealth one possesses. A person with dissatisfaction and discontent nature normally indulges himself to illicit acts like looting and plundering to fulfil his greediness. 'Austerity' burns away impurities of mind and body and ignites and sparks of divinity (Yoga Sutra, II- 48). If the virtue of austerity is practiced honestly, body, mind and senses are perfected, consciousness functions freely and the person achieves the qualities of compassion, non-possession and non-attachment. 'Self-study' is the study of the self. Through the practice of this value, one begins to realize that all creations are meant for admiration rather than utilization (bhoga), because one experiences divinity within himself as well as in other creations. This type of self realization becomes the basis for achieving spiritual consciousness. 'Complete surrender to God' is the complete reverence to God. Devotion to God enables an individual to proceed in right direction of knowledge and conduct because 'I'ness or 'ego' is alleviated and one's mind fills with thought of God. Through the practice of this ethical value, individual begins to believe that all creations of this universe belong to the God and hence, they are not to be subjects of violence and killing. In this way, yogic psycho-ethical values under 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas' establish ethical and spiritual values and heightened spiritual consciousness which ultimately enhances ecological and environmental sensitivity.

**Yogic Psycho-physical Practices:** These practices includes asana, Pranayama, Bandha,

Mudra and Cleansing Processes and they act as an integrated system for complete development of physical health along with vital (pranic), mental and intellectual aspects of personality. This group of practices acts unconsciously over the 'body-mind equipment' and produce complete homeostatic balance within the body. As an immediate effect, it regulates and harmonizes the neuromuscular, neurohormonal and other biochemical functions and thereafter coordinates the 'body-mind equipment'. Because of neurophysiological disturbances, individuals are incapable of orderly and effective adjustments. Normally they are found to be chaotic, impulsive and inadequate. But through the administration of this group of yogic practices, these neurophysiological problems can be removed. They activate and tone up the whole nervous system; the electrical impulses through the nerves and the neuro-transmitter system of the brain are equipoise and function at their optimum level. It is claimed that psycho-physical group of yogic practices facilitates the production of human growth hormone within the body. Yogic psychophysical exercises bring forth a unique coordination at physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels. As an immediate effect, it regulates and harmonizes the neuro-muscular, neuro-hormonal and other bio-chemical functions and thereafter calms down the turbulent state of mind.

The state of spiritual consciousness cannot be gained unless the nervous system become completely peaceful and mind goes into deep relaxation. Yogasanas are special physical postures congenial for calming down the mind and for developing stability of nervous system (Nagrathna, 2004). Pranayama, through slow and deep breathing, smoothens the flow of prana in nadis(channels). When the flow of prana(vital energy) becomes smooth and regular, mind also attains the state of tranquility (Hathapradipika, II-2). In fact, the uncoordinated and disharmonized physiological functions are the basic cause of human illness. But this group of medicines brings about a harmonious coordination among body, mind and consciousness. Breathing exercise (pranayama) lowers and regulates the emotional upsurges and irrational feelings and consequently, stress response is minimized which helps to develop the immune capacity of the cells.



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Pranayama rectifies the dysfunctions of mitochondria and thus regenerate the process of cell division. Thus this group of practices provides a good physical as well as psychophysical health by eradicating all kinds of psycho-physiological maladies (Betal and Nayak, 2006, p.63). Bandha and Mudras are also an integrated systems of yogic psycho-physical practice which regulates the flow of bio-energy and control and calm down the turbulent state of mind (Satyananda, 1990).

If the mind is more steady and calm, it is in a better position to experience higher thoughts and ideals. As on the calmer surface of water the sun reflects more clearly, so a calmer mind receives a clearer reflection of bliss-consciousness. Calm mind fathoms finer fields of thinking and the metabolism is markedly reduced. This establishes the nervous system in a degree of ever changing peace. In this peaceful state, the conscious mind becomes more powerful because it turns the attention from the surface of the conscious mind to the inner core and self-realization becomes easier. Thus, appropriate and integrated practices of yogic psycho-physical exercises provide an elevated state of spiritual consciousness.

**Yogic psycho-meditative Practices:** Meditation, Yoga Nidra, Relaxation and Japa are the direct techniques of calming down the mind. During meditation, the mind enters into the sphere of subtle level of thought, naturally it becomes more collected and more steady. The relaxation training helps to break the vicious cycle of emotional stress and anxiety by de-conditioning and lowering the arousal of sympathetic component of Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), and also reduces the secretion of nor-adrenaline which initiates excitement (Philip et al., 1972). Through the administration of this group of yogic practices, mind enters into the sphere of subtle level of thought and it gradually becomes steadier, more collected and more tranquil. This calm and tranquil state of mind helps to break down the vicious cycle of emotional stress, conflicts and anxiety by reconditioning the arousal of hypothalamo-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) and sympathetic nervous system and also regulating the secretion of nor adrenaline which initiates excitement (Betal, 2015p.383). They provide a calm and tranquil mind after removing all the emotional upsurges and irrational fear. They offer a feeling of well being,

leading to better emotional adjustment. Because they lead to heightened the arousability of higher cortical area and lessened limbic arousability (traditional seat of emotion) simultaneously. When the arousability of limbic system is reduced, emotional reaction is automatically reduced. The situation brings forth rational thought process (viveka chetna) in the mind along with a mature responsive behaviour to emotive stimulus. Consequently, one becomes more accommodating, internally more controlled, more relaxed and steadier. Thus, the yogic psycho-meditative group of practices, elevate the level of spiritual awareness and understanding by which one experience that the whole universe is the manifestation of a single unified consciousness and all the creations are divine and life is meant for adoration but not for violation and destruction.

### Discussion

This theoretical research paper aims to examine the role of spiritual consciousness in the protection of environment. An individual adorned with 'spiritual state of consciousness' begins to understand the mystery of infinitely diverse multiplicity of all the material creations i.e., entire universe. He perceives them as a 'single whole body' and also feels their close and eternal connectedness with the unified source i.e., the unmanifested 'Supreme Self'. This psycho-spiritual upliftment abstain an individual from destruction, violence and killing of both non-living and living objects and thereby he acquires the preservative and conservative tendency to natural and cultural resources as well. Keeping in view these potent attributes, spiritual consciousness was hypothesized as a unique means to protect environment. The theoretical data incorporated in this paper, confirmed that yogic psycho-ethical practices through its ethical values under 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas' contributed in producing desirable moral and spiritual values by eradicating psychological distortions which ultimately facilitates the reformation of positive mental states, behaviour and attitudes within the practitioner. Yogic psychophysical exercises regulate and harmonize physiological and psychological functions by effecting neuro-muscular and neuro-endocrinal and other systems of body. These harmonized functions of 'body-mind



equipment' helped to get freedom from physical disabilities and mental distractions. Consequently, the passionate internal vibrations are removed and individual attained freedom from anguish and infatuations. Consciousness detached it from irrational thought waves and emotional upheavals and now assumed the quality of reasoning consciousness (viveka chetna) which is devoid of personal and material identity. Now all the three i.e., body, mind and consciousness are blended into one and the individual achieves spiritual consciousness which is adorned by the qualities of non-attachment, non-violence, non-acquisitiveness, friendliness. After acquisition of ethical and spiritual consciousness, one feels that one's Self (Atma) abide in all beings and beings are in his own Self - "Atmanam Sarva Bhutesu". Individual is now filled with serenity, insight and truth and experiences 'Yoga' or 'Union' with all lives around him. This altered state of understanding or consciousness broadened the vision and makes a man see beyond the mundane and limited sphere of life and one rises above the selfish end. This growing universal outlook enriched by ethical and spiritual values like universal friendliness, love, and kindness made him a man of 'spiritual consciousness' who always feels the whole universe as one. Individual begins to deal with each and every creature with outmost care and love because currently he realized that nature is just like an essential part of his own body without which he cannot survive. This gracious and responsive outlook paves the way of conservation. (Das, 2006).

### Conclusion

Yogic practice is predominantly a psycho-spiritual technique of achieving spiritual consciousness which considers both human being as well as non-human beings as a 'single whole entity' and thereby moderates the concept of anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism approaches of environmental ethics. Through the practice of Yogic psycho-ethical, psycho-physical and psycho-meditative processes, all the ripples of thoughts and irrational instincts are removed and man's level of understanding changed. This purified state of consciousness makes an individual more sensitive, kind and preservative to all living and non-living

objects of this universe. Therefore, spiritual consciousness can be suggested as a very congenial model for protection of environment. However, this present study is not free from limitations, as it is entirely based on philosophical concept and hence it is need to be experimented scientifically for generalization.. Despite this, if this psycho-spiritual technology is honestly followed, it may evolve as a most potent means towards the solution of current environmental degradation and thus may enrich the newly emerging field of environmental ethics.

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