

Importance of Environmental Ethics and Role of the Concept of Ṛṇa and Lokasaṁgraha in Sustaining Environmental Ethics

Ratul Dutta

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Purbanchal College, Silapathar

Abstract:

Environmental Ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the moral relationship between human and nature. It emphasized the moral duties and responsibilities of human in protecting and preserving the natural resources. It is because, without nature human beings cannot survived their life. As we fulfill our needs from environment, in return we should also fulfill our duties to environment.

The duties and responsibilities of human beings to nature are very precisely mentioned in the concept of Ṛṇa in the Vedas and the concept of Lokasaṁgraha in the Bhāgawat Gitā. Five kinds of Ṛṇas have been mentioned in the Vedas of which one is called Prakṛiti Ṛṇa. According to this concept we have some debts to our nature and we have to repay the same. Air, water and foods are essential elements for surviving life and we get these from nature. So, we have some duties towards nature as like we have duties towards our parents.

On the other hand, Lokasaṁgraha is one of the prominent concepts of Gitā, which means 'welfare of the world'. As a part of the society every person has some duties to perform for the welfare of the world and the individual welfare is possible only through social welfare. The world is a combination of three elements namely Human Beings, Animals and the Nature. So, the welfare of the world means welfare of these three elements.

Key Words: Environmental Ethics, Ṛṇa, Lokasaṁgraha, Social Welfare etc.

Introduction:

Environment is everything that makes up our surrounding and affects our ability to live and survive on earth. It includes the air we breathe, the water, the plants and animals around us and much more. "Environment includes water, air, and land and the interrelationship which exists among and between water, air, and land and human beings, other living creatures, plants, microorganisms, and property," according to the Indian Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

In the present world one of the fundamental issues that we face and deal with is balancing, adjusting and maintaining the relationship between the human and nature. We must understand that earth is not only the inhabitant of human beings. We co-inhabit in the Earth along with other species. We must also realize that human beings are the self-reflective and deliberative moral agents. Everything we do has directly or indirectly impact on nature. So, we should aware about the ethical issues regarding our environment. This is the point of need of Environmental Ethics. Environmental Ethics can successfully deal with the issues of environmental deterioration and ecological imbalances, because it encourages us to adopt and appropriate outlook towards nature. This outlook is characterized by love and respect towards

all the species of the environment. Environmental Ethics based on the principle that there is a moral association between human beings and the environment. It is an amalgamation of morals, duties and responsibilities of human beings towards the environment. Environmental Ethics provides a moral framework that guides human behavior towards nature, emphasizing responsibilities beyond economic considerations (Johansson-Stenman, 1998). Environmental Ethics also plays an important role in the fields of philosophy, economics, ecology and law through providing a comprehensive approach to understanding and evaluating the moral implications of human actions.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study sets the following objectives and the researcher will try to fulfill the same. The objectives of the present study are-

- To find out the importance of Environmental Ethics.
- To find out the role of the Vedas concept of Ṛṇa in sustaining Environmental Ethics.
- To find out the role of the Bhāgawat Gitā's concept of Lokasaṁgraha in sustaining Environmental Ethics.

Methodology:

The aim of present study is to find out the importance of Environmental Ethics with the help of Vedas concept of Ṛṇa and the Bhāgawat Gitā's concept of Lokasaṁgraha. The descriptive and analytic methods of research have been adopted for the present study, and it will characterize the present study as qualitative.

The study on the topic "Importance of Environmental Ethics and Role of the Concept of Ṛṇa and Lokasaṁgraha in Sustaining Environmental Ethics" is mainly based on literature review. Both primary and secondary data sources have been used in the present study regarding the collection of data.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of the study is considered as top most relevant in present time. Because, the study will help us to realize the importance of animal as well as nature. It also helps us to realize our duty and responsibility to protect and preserve all the living and non-living elements of our environment.

Environmental ethics is crucial in addressing the growing ecological crises by guiding human actions toward sustainable and responsible interaction with nature. In Indian philosophy, the concepts of Ṛṇa (debt) and Lokasaṁgraha (welfare of the world) offer a profound ethical foundation for environmental responsibility. Ṛṇa emphasizes a moral debt towards nature, ancestors, society, and divine forces, urging individuals to act responsibly and with gratitude toward all forms of life. This sense of indebtedness fosters environmental stewardship as a sacred duty.

Lokasaṁgraha, rooted in the Bhāgawat Gitā, calls for selfless action for the collective good, aligning personal behavior with the preservation of ecological balance. It emphasizes the

importance of maintaining cosmic and social order (dharma), encouraging sustainable living not merely as a necessity but as a spiritual and moral obligation.

By integrating these indigenous ethical frameworks, the study highlights a culturally resonant path to environmental sustainability. It reinforces the need for a value-based approach that goes beyond utilitarian conservation, promoting harmony between humans and nature. Thus, R̥ṇa and Lokasaṃgraha offer timeless insights for cultivating environmental ethics in a spiritually grounded and socially inclusive manner.

Discussion and Findings:

There is a significant role of Vedas concept of R̥ṇa in sustaining Environmental Ethics. The Vedas are the earliest texts in human civilization. Vedas don't deal only with the Spiritual values, but also deal with some practical issues. The whole discussion of Vedas revolves around the concept of nature and life. Our lives are fully dependent on the environment. Every environmental change influenced our lives. In the Aitriya Upanishad it is said that universe consist of five basic elements – Earth of Land, Water, Light of Lustre, Air and Ether. Nature has provided all these necessities of our life.

One of the most unique concepts of the Vedas is R̥ṇa, where the duties and responsibilities of individuals were clearly mentioned. The ordinary meaning of the term 'R̥ṇa' means 'Debt'. But, in the Vedas the word 'R̥ṇa' was used in more precious meaning. In the Vedas it is used in deep moral sense which indicates duties, responsibilities and obligations. Five kinds of R̥ṇas have been mentioned in the Vedas. These five kinds of R̥ṇas are – Deva R̥ṇa, Pitri R̥ṇa, Rishi R̥ṇa, Manava R̥ṇa or Samaj R̥ṇa and Prakriti R̥ṇa.

In the Prakriti R̥ṇa the Vedas give us the massage of having an ethical outlook towards nature. Mother Earth has always helped each and every inhabitant and has been a constant source of fulfillment for their unending desires. The Earth or Nature has never demanded anything in return. But, as children of the Earth or Nature we have moral duties to repay the debts and give something to the nature in return. We can pay the debts towards nature by protecting and preserving the natural resources and make aware about the proper uses of it. We must understand that our actions which cause environmental degradation also virtually affect our lives. Thus every individual must live ethically on this Earth and not do any harm to the Earth.

Sanskrit hymns in R̥igveda can be divided into many parts and one of their foremost parts belongs to natural hymns, which related to nature and natural forces. These hymns addressed to deities (Devatā) are devoted to the need of giving respect to nature and all its aspects.

In the Bhāgawat Gitā Lord Krishna depicts a clear picture of the cycle of nature. He says that every individual must perform ethical duty towards the environment. Life without performing the moral duties towards nature is sinful. Lord Krishna illustrates the relationship between God and creation and inspires us to ethically maintaining a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. He says "On me Universe is strung like clustered pearls upon a thread. In water I am the flavor. In the sun and the moon, I am the light."

Bhāgawat Gitā is morally very close to the environment. The Gitā ask their followers to see God in every object in the Universe. Worship of God in air, water, fire, sun, moon, stars and earth is specially recommended. Earth is worshiped and all living beings on Earth are considered to be the children of God and of Earth.

Lokasamgraha is one of the important and familiar concepts of Gitā. In the Gitā Lokasamgraha means organization and welfare of the world. It may be defined as maintenance of world order. The preservation and development of life in one self as well as in others is a paramount duty of every man. It is not merely a physical necessity but it is also devotion to God. Humility and self-identification are the basic requirements of Lokasamgraha. Etymologically the word ‘Lokasamgraha’ is a combination of two words. The word ‘Loka’ means ‘World or Universe’ and the word ‘Samgraha’ means ‘protection’. So, Lokasamgraha means thinking about protection and welfare of the whole world. Human beings, animals and nature are the three elements of the world. So, as a responsible part of the society we should be conscious about the protection and welfare of other human beings as well as animals and nature.

In the Karmayoga of Bhāgawat Gitā Sri Krishna suggested for doing Niskāma Karma. He said that we must work for Lokasamgraha or social welfare. Lokasamgraha gives importance on following three issues.

Firstly, it is our duty to create the sense of unity and sustaining it among the people. We should show very kindness and learn to respect each other and when we get opportunity should provide our helpful hands to others. We should control our external activities and also purify our mind.

Secondly, we should also show kindness to the animal’s inhabitant in the world. They have also equal right to enjoy the natural resources. We should not harm them for the fulfillment of our narrow selfish desire.

Thirdly, we have also responsibility to keep our surrounding as free from pollution. We must be careful in use of natural resources and should not destroy them. We should keep clean our earth, water and air, that our future generation will be able to get a worthy environment for living.

The concepts of R̥ṇa and Lokasamgraha offer profound ethical foundations for sustaining environmental responsibility. By encouraging people to respect and protect the environment as a moral obligation, R̥ṇa fosters a sense of indebtedness to nature. It promotes gratitude and mindful living, discouraging exploitation of natural resources. Similarly, Lokasamgraha, the ideal of working for the collective welfare, encourages actions that maintain ecological balance and support the sustainability of the planet. Concentrating in selfless duty and universal harmony, these principles align personal conduct with environmental stewardship. By integrating R̥ṇa and Lokasamgraha into contemporary ethical discourse, we are reminded that caring for nature is not only a practical necessity but also a spiritual obligation. These ancient ideas thus remain deeply relevant, guiding humanity toward a more balanced, respectful, and sustainable relationship with the Earth.

Conclusion:

In the conclusion of the study, it can be said that it is our prime duty to protect and preserve our environment. Because, we need environment much more than environment need us. Perhaps environment can continue without human beings but, lives cannot survive without environment. Man has no power to create life, therefore has no right to take any life also. We should avoid any kind of violent activities against environment. The protection of biodiversity and ecological balance requires a strong foundation in environmental ethics, without which conservation efforts remain unsustainable (Chavan, 2009). When Mahatma Gandhi talked about non-violence, he believed that non-violence and compassion are not to be practiced only towards living beings, but also towards non-living materials. He was quite clear in his perspective that there must be interdependence and mutual respect between living and non-living components of the ecosystem. Page-5

The environment doesn't change its behavior. Environmental change happens only because of human activities. So, we have the sole responsibility of environmental degradation. The present Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi in his interaction with students through video conferencing on the occasion of Teacher's Day on 5th September 2014, he said "Climate has not changed. We have changed. Our habits have changed. Our habits have got spoiled. Due to that, we have destroyed our entire environment." World Environment Day is celebrated worldwide on 5th June of every year. There is great importance of celebrated the day, because it reminds us to look after our planet and keep it safe for future generation. At the end, the study is like to conclude through a famous slogan about environment that, **Save Earth, Save Life.**

References:

1. Attfield, R. (2018). Environmental ethics – A very short introduction. Oxford University Press.
2. Bharadwaj, N.D. (2022). Environmental ethics and Indian's perspective on environment. National Book Trust, India.
3. Chavan, B. L. (2009). Environmental ethics: An essence for environmental protection. Environmental Conservation Journal, 10(1&2), 37-41).
4. Johansson-Stenman, O. (1998). The importance of ethics in environmental economics with a focus on existence values. Environmental & Resource Economics, 11(3), 429-442.
5. Kalita, M., & Deka, P. (2004). UGC NET/SLET examination philosophy. Hatigaon, Guwahati-38.