

## ESSAY

# Religion, Education, and Ecology in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

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### ABSTRACT

*The foundation of Indian culture, which embraces all religions, is spirituality. The basic faith of India is Sanatan, which means that is eternal cannot be destroyed. Sanatana teaches the ultimate aim of human life is self-realization through four-fold means: Dharma (religion), Artha (finance), Kama (worldly pleasure), and Moksha (liberation). In Bharat, 'vidyalaya' was begun at religious foundation with enriched natural environment. This essay explores the relationship among religion, education, and environmental wellbeing from the perspective of the Hindu tradition. The author believes that the teachings found in the ancient scriptures of this tradition can greatly help to address the modern-day ecological crisis. However, to do so, religious education must lead to development of spirituality for human transformation. It is through spirituality that not only the problems of the environment, but other social problems can be adequately addressed.*

**Keywords:** religion, education, ecology, COVID-19 pandemic

## 1. Introduction

“ॐ पूरणमदःपूरणमदिं पूरणात्पूरणमुदच्यते ।  
पूरणस्य पूरणमादाय पूरणमेवावशिष्यते ॥  
ॐ शान्तिःशान्तिः॥”

*Om, the world is full of Divine Consciousness. The world is manifested from the fullness of Divine Consciousness. Taking*

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*whole from Whole, the whole remains, because Divine  
Consciousness is infinite. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!*  
- Ishopanishad

The original name of India is Bharatbarsha because here the year has six seasons with their various distinct characteristics. It is a young country but with old traditions and a rich culture. It is the largest democratic country in the world with multiple faiths among the population. For a long time, Mother India has embraced all religions in her lap. The foundation of Indian culture is spirituality. Religion is the gateway to delve into spirituality. The basic faith of India is ‘Sanatan’ i.e., ‘*abinyastu binasyaatam*,’ meaning that is eternal cannot be destroyed. It was firmly rooted in rich traditions, an awakened culture benefiting from the visions and wisdom of sages. At different times, invaders came to this country for commerce and became powerful rulers, exploiting the country’s resources. Still, it has survived with its ‘*swabhava*’ and ‘*swadharma*.’ The West has developed extensively with its focus on matter, but India has developed through the spiritual route. What is needed for perfection is the blending of both matter and spirit. Now India is growing enormously as self-dependent Bharat, combating challenges with the means of its own experiences, ancient wisdom, and conscious vision. The COVID-19 pandemic affected it like a jolt, and it had to turn to its farsighted visionary ideas and spiritual consciousness to successfully combat the crisis. In this worldview, the ultimate aim of human life is self-realization through four-fold means: *Dharma* (religion), *Artha* (finance), *Kama* (worldly pleasure), and *Moksha* (liberation). Most people are idealistic in nature. They believe in ‘*ishavasyamidam sarvam*’<sup>2</sup> or ‘*ishvarah sarva-bhutanam*,’<sup>3</sup> and ‘*sarvam khalvidam brahma*’<sup>4</sup> – concepts that mean God exists everywhere: in human beings, plants, animals, in water, space, soil, and even inanimate objects.

COVID-19 was a serious pandemic which affected the whole world. Despite all the efforts to fight the coronavirus, the beautiful earth lost innumerable human beings. As it continued, the pandemic impacted

<sup>2</sup> Isa Upanishad, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 1.61.

<sup>4</sup> Chandogyopanishad, 3.14.1.

the environment and all the living beings on the earth. Moreover, the earth is trembling due to misdeeds of human beings, leading to various sufferings such as natural disasters, pandemic, pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, production of nuclear weapons, use of harmful chemicals, ecological imbalance, loss of biodiversity, harmful politics, terrorism, and war, etc. God created the beautiful world with vast nature, animals, and humans endowed with wisdom for the wellbeing of all. If people threaten God's creation, the consequence is great dissolution. Today's pandemic is human-made – may it be in ignorance or knowingly. Neither science, modern technology nor any advanced innovative thinking was able to thwart the crisis. In this circumstance, it is the right time to ponder the cause and effect of this pandemic. Moreover, it is important to examine whether religion, education, and ecology have any impact on the COVID-19 pandemic. This essay seeks to: 1) Find the foundation of Indian education; 2) Examine the relation among religion, education, and ecology; and 3) Analyze the impact of religion, education, and ecology on the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

## **2. The COVID-19 Pandemic in India**

The COVID-19 pandemic was a global pandemic which emerged in 2019 due to the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) identified as acute respiratory syndrome. This virus was first detected from an outbreak in the Chinese province of Wuhan in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared it an International Public Health Emergency on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. To date, hundreds of millions of people have suffered from COVID-19 with millions of confirmed deaths, making this pandemic one of the deadliest in history.<sup>4</sup> The pandemic brought about severe social and economic disruption including the largest global recession since the Great Depression (1929-1939).

Some of the numerous memorable effects of the pandemic included supply chain disruptions, global lockdowns, social distancing, constant handwashing, mask wearing, temporary closing of educational institutions, and the cancellation or postponement of numerous events and programs around the world. India is the largest democratic country

with a population of nearly 1.4 billion people. The country is rich in culture and traditions with diverse religions. Undoubtedly, while the whole world was gripped by COVID-19, India was no exception. During the pandemic, tens of millions of Indians were infected with COVID-19 with deaths in the hundreds of thousands.

### **3. The Impact of the Pandemic on Indian Education**

Regarding the state of education in India, the UNICEF (IHD) in a study entitled “Assessing Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Socio-Economic Situation of Vulnerable Populations through Community-Based Monitoring” observed that in 2020, the pandemic had greater impact on vulnerable families, especially those who had less access to digital technology and the internet. Students in urban areas had better access to online classes than those in rural areas. The primary means that students used to attend online classes were mobile phones. However, some children did not attend classes even though they were offered by their schools because of lack of access to the necessary gadgets. Despite these negative impacts, the report states that “an encouraging finding was that despite the threat of the COVID-19 infection, most respondent mothers reported in December (Phase 4) that they were willing to send their children to school when the schools would re-open.”<sup>5</sup>

### **4. Foundation of Indian Education**

The ancient education system of India was started through ‘*Gurukulas*’ in the midst of floras and faunas and the beautiful features of nature. The foundation of education itself was spirituality. At that time the physical world was considered illusory. Learning by doing was the essence of education in Indian thought. There was a good relationship between teacher and pupil which helped the pupil to be fully acquainted with all the cherished social traditions. The pupil

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF (IHD), “Assessing Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Socio-Economic Situation of Vulnerable Populations through Community-Based Monitoring,” xxiii.

was eligible for admission based on his fitness, peaceful and patient demeanor, perseverance, good character, and committed faith in preceptors. The entire educational structure was pervaded by sacrificial rituals and religious ceremonies. The primary aim of education was to train and prepare the individual for the struggle of life. The learner was to follow an austere life that molded his personality. The austere practices of an academic career made them capable of supreme realization. The external imposition created inner discipline in the pupils. They had to overcome certain passions, negative habits like sex, extravagant desires, taste of fragrance, and love of physical adornment, etc. 'Simple living and high thinking' served as the motto of their life. Education, considered as an end in itself, preached unity and concord of humanity. It was not confined to religion only, but it illumined all obscurities and darkness of life.

Indian education was called '*vidya*.' It is said '*Saa vidhyaa yaa vimuktaye*' (Vishnupuran, 1.19.41), meaning it is the *vidya* which liberates human beings from spiritual bondage. It was divided into two types of learning – '*paravidya*' and '*aparavidya*.' The former is learning related to the self or spirit, and the latter is related to matter. The disciples learned *vidya* at the *vidyalaya* (school) considering it as an abode of the deity of learning to achieve the four goals of *Dharma* (religion), *Artha* (finance), *Kama* (worldly pleasure), and *Moksha* (liberation) through the four stages of life comprising of *Brahmacharya* (learner has to maintain celibacy), *grhastha* (householder), *vanaprastha* (doing penance in forest), and *sannyasa* (detached life). Self-realization was the ultimate objective of life, which education attempted to support. Unfortunately, in the course of Indian history, invaders destroyed the Indian education system and culture, and the *vidyalaya* was converted to a school. The root '*vidya*' of Indian culture has been converted to the type of education which emphasized matter and eliminated the dimension of spirit. This development represented the deterioration of Indian education. In the contemporary age, India faces the challenge of reestablishing its own culture and education.

## **5. Relation among Religion, Education and Ecology**

There is a unique relationship among religion, education, and ecology. In world history, the first education center was begun at a religious

place which was located in a harmonious environment. The concept of ecology, advocated by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, implies the harmonious living of organisms in a good physical environment. It was developed with Carl Linnaeus and his work with the economy of nature. Nonetheless, these facts were already developed thousands of years ago in Vedic texts. Education in ancient India was established upon a religious foundation and took place in a natural environment such as the forest. Hence, religion, education and ecology are integrally related and essential for achieving the same goals.

In ancient times, people worshiped, respected, protected, and worked with nature peacefully and harmoniously. They revered nature as mother. At present this relationship has been diluted. Living in harmony with silent nature was put into practice in ancient India, where the earth was worshipped as mother and nature as a deity. In the Upanishad, it can be seen that a good relationship existed between human beings and the natural environment. According to Chandogyopanishad text, “The earth is the essence of all beings. Water is the essence of the earth. Herbs are the essence of the water and man is the essence of the herbs” (1.1.2). The Bhagavad Gita says, “This Prakrti of Mine (supreme reality) is divided eight-fold thus: earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect and also egoism” (7.4). According to Prasad (2015), the Rigveda calls for “mankind be of one mind, have a common goal, and the hearts with united love and the mind and soul be one and the same for all to live a life of happiness. Vedas always related to all biotic and abiotic entities on the earth, and did not relate to any particular geographical region.” In the PrithviSukta of Atharva Veda, an environmental invocation of humankind to the Mother Earth coined by ancient sages of India proclaims: ‘*Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivyah*’ (Earth is my mother, I am her son).

In traditional Indian culture, Mother Earth was celebrated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation. Her blessings were sought for prosperity in all endeavors and fulfillment of all righteous aspirations (Ibid). Signs of warning about future disasters appeared in the form of environmental and natural degradation. In the Vedic age, people were more conscious about nature. The Ayurveda, a natural system of medicine produced by Indian sages, helped save millions of lives and represents the great contribution to the world in the field of

medical science. Fruits, flowers, leaves, and roots were widely used as medicine. Forests served as chief resources of these natural medicines. The Himalayan range was well known for the lifesaving medicinal herbs from where the *Sanjeevani* (used in Ramayana), a kind of herbs, could be obtained. The ancient people understood protecting plant biodiversity and natural resources was essential to maintaining ecological balance. Fresh air, beautiful sunlight and blowing wind, the open sky, green fields, colorful flowers, presence of birds, and the presence of different creatures created a charming atmosphere. In the third century text *YajnavalkyaSmriti*, deforestation and killing of animals were strictly forbidden. Fines and punishments were exacted on tree fellers and animal poachers. During that period, home waste was decomposed in soil, and there were no air, water, and sound pollution. There was also no package food, drinking water bottle and magnesium paper.

Of course, there was an awareness of poison in ancient India. According to the Atharvaveda, “Foods like raw/cooked rice, fruits, water, milk and clothes, vessels, living space are liable to be contaminated due to their contact with three types of poisons” (Ibid, 8.2.19). Sushruta in his ‘*Sushruta Samhita*,’ refers to three types of poisons: those that originated from plants and minerals, those that were of animal origin, and those that were artificial or man-made (Sushruta Samhita, 5.2.24). Regarding cow urine, the Atharvaveda declares, “O go arka (cow urine), you are the destroyer of all germs and toxins. You wage war against hereditary diseases. You are the giver of long life” (6.44.3).

What can be seen from examining these scriptural religious texts is that in ancient times, there was a natural lifestyle in which people believed that the divine existed in nature. People followed nature, lived in nature, worshipped nature, played in nature, and took rest in nature. The five great elements (*pancha mahabhuta*) of soil, water, fire, air, and sky are fundamentals of all things existing in nature. These five great elements are compared to five important organs of the human being. “These Five *Mahabhutas* are cosmic elements which create, nurture and sustain all forms of life, and after death or decay they absorb what was created earlier; thus, they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment.” People depended on the twittering of birds and the rising sun to awake from bed and pray to God so that their day

would be peaceful, harmonious, and blessed. Then they did their daily activities in nature, taking a bath in natural water to have a pray and wash the body so that it would remain healthy and free from all aberrations. They took natural food having prayed that this 'anna' brahma would provide them with energy to remain healthy, free from all diseases, and to be a suitable instrument of Thyne (God). They also offered all the work of the day to the divine. Children played in nature with natural play instruments. In the evening young people prayed in various means like meditation, singing songs, and chanting, etc. The old people did 'kirtan' and 'bhajans' (reciting the songs of God and Goddesses). The rhythm of their lives was in accordance with the proverb, "Early to bed, early to rise, keeps the body healthy, wealthy and wise." At night they slept on a wooden mat or on the floor. In the community, different festivals were observed to maintain a peaceful, harmonious, pleasant, and holistic environment. The plants, animals, and other aspects of nature were revered and worshiped in traditional Indian culture. The people were happy due to this simple and natural lifestyle. They believed in helping others in need. Social life was enjoyable, holistic, and happy. When humans acted against nature, they had to face natural disasters like tsunami, flood, droughts, diseases, and other calamities.

Viva Kermani (2016) in her article "Hindu Roots of Modern Ecology" writes:

What the western discourse in general and the western academia and its textbooks in particular forget to inform us is that the roots of ecology lie in Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism and no other religion pays as much attention to environment and environmental ethics, and to the understanding of the role and value of nature. Hinduism is inherently an ecological religion. It can quite easily be said that Hinduism is the world's largest nature-based religion that recognizes and seeks the Divine in nature and acknowledges everything as sacred. It views the earth as our Mother, and hence, advocates that it should not be exploited.

Ancient Indian scriptures preaches respect to animals, plants, and other creatures as to humans. They are considered to have consciousness. This wisdom of care and reverence towards the environment is common

to all Indic culture. In the Upanishads it is mentioned that loving nature and all creatures in the mother Earth is one of the core principles of spirituality followed in Bharatbarsha. In the Vedas, which contain 1028 hymns, there are many verses which mention love for nature. Kermani points to the following verses which illustrate this point:

Plants are mothers and Goddesses. (Rig Veda Samhita x-97-4)

Trees are homes and mansions. (Rig Veda Samhita x-97-5)

Sacred grass has to be protected from man's exploitation (Rig Veda Samhita vii-75-8)

Plants and waters are treasures for generations. (Rig Veda Samhita vii-70-4)

We invoke all supporting Earth on which trees, lords of forests, stand ever firm (Atharva Veda 12:1:27)

Do not cut trees because they remove pollution. (Rig Veda 6:48:17)

One should not destroy the trees. (Rig Veda Samhita vi-48-17).

Bharat is blessed with a rich biodiversity, which was able to be sustained because of the spiritual consciousness that Hindus maintained towards nature. According to Kermani, "There exists *sthala vriksham* shows that trees were intimately associated with spiritual tradition (In Sanskrit, *sthala* is a place, especially a sacred place, and *vriksh* is tree). Every temple is associated with a tree and every tree is associated with a deity and a story." There are many trees that are considered sacred and worshiped in Bharat, namely, peepal, neem, bel, banyan, asoka, amla, arjuna, and tulsi, etc. It is indicated in Indian mythology that some trees are favourite dwelling places for various deities. For example, for Lord Shiva Rudraksh, Bel, and Lord Vishnu, it is the peepal and tulsi trees; for Hanuman, it is the mango tree. Each Hindu temple is surrounded with trees. The leaves of the bilva, neem, tulsi, mango, various fruits and flowers are used in many rituals. These examples illustrate the deep connection that Indians have to nature. Likewise, the banyan tree is considered as a *kalpavriksh* (wish fulfilling tree) and is held as sacred by followers of the Jain religion. Planting this tree is considered auspicious; its leaves are used in some rituals and its fruits can be used as medicine. The peepal tree or *asvatta* (*ficus religiosa*) is very important in Indian civilisation. Lord Buddha achieved enlightenment under a peepal tree and was born in a sacred grove in the area of Lumbinivana, which was full of sal trees. In the Atharva Veda

(V.4.3), it is referred to as the dwelling place of gods.

The scripture ‘*Vrikshayurveda*’ (an ancient Sanskrit text on the science of plants and trees) was written by Acharya Surapala around the 10th century. It contains information about trees and their benefits, as well as instructions for how to plant seeds and care for the plants and trees. In addition, it provides details regarding soil conservation, sowing, propagating, eliminating pests, and treatment of diseases, etc. It also provides knowledge about the sides or direction of planting different trees. The extent of information in this text symbolizes the depth of ancient Indian ecology. These examples show the Indians’ love, understanding and respect for nature. They also illustrate the profound knowledge of ancient Indians about the role of trees and forests in the ecosystem. Sanatan dharma preaches about conservation of nature and living in harmony with nature without any destruction.

Further, Kermani (2016) writes, “For Hindus, nature is a manifestation of the Divine. Brahman exists as the innermost Self (Atman) of not only humans, but also of all forms and beings in nature. Hence, a large number of pilgrim centres in India are the sacred rivers, mountains, trees, forests and groves themselves.” Moreover, in Indian tradition, animals are also considered as ‘*vahanas*’ (vehicles) of the gods and goddesses, and hence, they are worshipped. The list includes for example, Garuda (eagle) is the *bahan* of Vishnu, the bull is of Shiva, the mouse is of Ganapati, the peacock of Kartika, the lion is of Goddess Durga, the *hans* of Goddess Sarasvati, and the *thowl* is of the Goddess Lakshmi, etc. It is written in the Yajur Veda that “no person should kill animals helpful to all and persons serving them obtains heaven” (13.47). According to the Atharva Veda (12.115), the earth was created for the enjoyment of all – human beings, bipeds, quadrupeds, birds, and all other creatures. Such respect to animals and protection of forest shows the great significance of biodiversity and ecological balance in ancient Bharat. Regarding the approach of Hinduism towards animal it is appropriate to quote the verse from the Bhagavad Gita (5.1): “*vidya-vinaya-sampanne brahmane gavi hastinisuni caiva sva-pake capanditah sama-darsinah*” (Wise and humble men treat equally the Brahmin, the cow, the elephant, the dog, and the dog-eater).

## 6. The Ecological Crisis

In his discussion on climate change, Roger S. Gottlieb (2009) points out the wide-ranging impacts on the ecosystem due to misuse of natural resources and other human activities. These negative effects include species extinction, degradation of habitats for animals and plants, loss of water supplies, and extreme and unpredictable weather patterns. Gottlieb remarks, “Unsustainable patterns and quantities of consumption deplete natural resources and contribute to global warming and the accumulation of waste. In the underdeveloped world, overpopulation relative to existing technological resources and political organization decimates the landscape.” Frederick Buell (2003) also asserts, “It should be stressed that the environmental crisis is not just a problem ‘out there.’ It has decisively changed people as well, inscribing itself in our bloodstreams, our breasts and prostates, our very mothers’ milk, all of which carry unhealthy amounts of toxins. It also taints our sense of what is to come, as we realize, perhaps only subliminally, that the future is likely to be worse than the past.” In the face of the environmental crisis, many individuals have called for developing an environmental consciousness based in religion. Sallie McFague (2001, 176) comments,

Theologies have been created which stress the spiritual value of nature, our kinship with the nonhuman, and our ethical responsibilities to the earth. New concepts of the divine, holiness, spiritual life, and sin are being forged. Innovative liturgies and rituals are being practiced, and a unique sense of moral responsibility that stresses the interdependence of our treatment of nature and our treatment of other people has emerged as the strikingly new concept of ‘ecojustice’.

According to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin... to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation... to degrade the integrity of the Earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands... to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances—these are sins” (Quoted by Gottlieb 2004, 229-30). He further stated that there needs to be “ethical, legal recourse where possible, in matters of ecological crimes.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Pergamon, “Orthodoxy and the Ecological Problems: A Theological Approach,” on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople website: <http://www.>

Historian Michael P. Nelson calls for preservation of wilderness as “a site for spiritual, mystical, or religious encounters: places to experience mystery, moral regeneration, spiritual revival, meaning, oneness, unity, wonder, awe, inspiration, or a sense of harmony with the rest of creation—all essential religious experiences” (1998, 168). Gottlieb (2009) writes, “It is my firm belief that religion’s response to the environmental crisis, as well as to the social forces of industrialization, globalization, militarization, and consumerism which give rise to the crisis, will be the single most important factor in determining whether religion will be a vital part of humanity’s future or sink into increasing irrelevance... (H)umanity can somehow learn to live without destroying other species and poisoning itself, religion will have been one of the forces teaching us how to do it and encouraging us to do so.”

## 7. Religion, Education, Ecology, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

In the scriptures of Sanatana Dharma, there were many instructions given regarding healthy body, mind, and spirit. These instructions went back 5,000 years ago when no advanced science and technology existed. Using Vedic knowledge, insight, experience, and wisdom, the saints of India forewarned about the importance of maintaining personal hygiene through ‘*Sadaachaaram*’ (good behavior), which are more useful to prevent diseases.

“लवणं व्यञ्जनं चैव घृतं तैलं तथैव च ।  
लेह्यं पेयं च विविधं हस्तदत्तं न भक्षयेत् ॥”  
-धर्मसन्धि ३ पू आह्निक

(Certain food items like salt, ghee, oil, rice, and others should not be served with bare hand. It is advised to use spoons for serving.)

“अनातुरःस्वानि खाननि सपृशेदनमितितः।”  
-मनुस्मृति ४/१४४

(Unnecessarily touching one’s own ‘*indriyas*’ (organs) like eyes, nose, ears, mouth, etc. is forbidden.)

“अपमृज्यान् च स्ननातो गात्राण्यम्बरपाणभिः।।  
-मार्कण्डेय पुराण ३४/५२

(Clothes already worn should not be worn again without washing and drying first.)

“हस्तपादे मुखे चैव पञ्चादरे भोजनं चरेत् ॥”

-पद्म०सृष्टि.५१/८८

“नाप्रक्षालति पाण्णपिदो भुञ्जीत ॥”

-सुश्रुत संहिता चिकित्सा २४/९८

(Before taking food, washing hands, feet and mouth is necessary.)

“सन्नानाचार वहीनस्य सर्वाःस्युःनषिफलाःकर्याः॥”

-वाघल स्मृता ६९

(To do any work (*karma*), one has to take a bath and prayer for *suddhi* (purity). Otherwise, the work will be fruitless.)

“न धारयेत् परस्यैवं सन्नानान्न वस्त्रं कदाचन ॥”

-पद्म० सृष्टि.५१/८६

(One should not dry other's using cloth after a bath.)

“अन्यदेव भवद्वासःशयनीये नरोत्तम ।

अन्यद् रथ्यासु देवानाम् अर्चयाम् अन्यदेव ही ॥”

-महाभारत अनु १०४/८६

(In the Mahabharata, it is advocated to use different clothes during sleeping, while going out, and during worship.)

“तथा न अन्यधृतं (वस्त्रं) धारयम् ॥”

-महाभारत अनु १०४/८६

(One should not wear clothes worn by others.)

“न अप्रक्षालति पूरवधृतं वसनं बभ्रियाद् ॥”

-वर्षिणुस्मृता ६४

(Clothes once worn should not be worn again before washing.)

“न आदरं परदिधीत ॥”

-गोभसिगृह्यसूत्र ३/५/२४

(Wearing wet clothes were prohibited.)

“चिताधूम सेवने सर्वे वर्णाःसन्नानम् आचरेयुः।

वमने श्मश्रुकर्मणा कृते च ॥”

-वर्षिणुस्मृता २२

(It is advisable to take a bath upon returning from cremation ground and cut hair to purify the body.)

These verses demonstrate the close relationship among religion, education, ecology, and physical wellbeing. Religious

education promotes ecological and human flourishing by: a) Promoting environmental consciousness; b) Inspiring an inner spiritual journey; c) Bridging matter and spirit; d) Encouraging a lifestyle free from greed and selfishness; e) Teaching detachment from sex, money and power; f) Promoting understanding about communalism, religion, and spirituality; g) Aspiring always the welfare of humanity; and h) Teaching respect and reverence for nature, both living being and non-living objects.

## **8. Conclusion**

The world is grappling to find solutions to multiple problems pertaining to the environmental crisis. This problem cannot be resolved simply through scientific or intellectual means. The Hindu traditions have much to contribute to address this crisis. As Kermani asserts, “For ecology to be truly saved and revived, we have to return to the meanings and practices that infuse sacredness and reverence towards nature as in Hindu traditions, re-awaken our relationship with nature and not view religion and ecology as separate. For Hindus, the environment is not protected because of the selfish urgency to save biodiversity and hence save human future, but because it is the Dharmic way of life and hence a righteous duty that all humans are obliged to perform.” However, all religions have immense positive values and serve as the gateway to spirituality. Ultimately, developing a proper spirituality will be essential to resolving not only the ecological crisis but other social issues as well. A new consciousness will lead to human, social and global transformation, characterized by a healthy ecology, world peace, and human flourishing.

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