

Eco-oriented economic management in Indian philosophy

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Abstract - Indian civilisation is one of the oldest in the world. It has had a rich philosophical past that is now being brought out of obscurity. Environment and ecological concerns are important considerations in the modern period. A study of India's ancient and medieval literature shows that these were topics of concern even during those times. Indian philosophers and thinkers had provided numerous nuggets of wisdom pertaining to the need for care and respect of environment, plants and animals. This article examines the environment oriented thinking in Indian philosophy in context of economics and management of resources. The sources of information used are secondary sources such as books and articles published in various journals.

Keywords - India, ancient period, ecology, Economic philosophy, environment, history, Medieval period, Modern period

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INTRODUCTION

The word Ecology means the study of relationships between living organisms and the environment in totality as well its individual components, moving gradually from organism to population, then community, then ecosystem, and finally biosphere. Clearly ecology entails in itself diverse and complex interrelationships that have a bearing on different aspects of human life.

Indian philosophy relates to the thinkings of numerous scholars starting from the dawn of Indian civilisation down to present times. India is regarded as the cradle of civilisation, so the various aspects of life associated with higher scholarly interests develop early on in India as compared to other parts of the world. This development was reflected in advances in fields of knowledge like medicine, astronomy, mathematics as well as political and social development. This era is regarded as the ancient period of Indian history. The next period, called medieval period, pertains to various smaller dynastic rules leading eventually to Muslim conquests and establishment of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Dynasty. The weakening of the Mughal empire and advent of Europeans eventually led to the rule of British in India, which initiates the modern period of Indian history.

Clearly a country with such a long and varied past witnessed numerous events that affected its social fabric and left an indelible mark on the conscious thinking of the people. Further, economic affairs have been accorded an important place in Indian thought over the ages. The pursuit of material well-being was, while not outright rejected, expected to follow certain

rules or norms that would prevent exploitation of either living or non-living components of the environment.

This article attempts to trace the orientation of Indian economic philosophy in terms of environment and ecology. For the purpose of this study, various secondary sources of information like books and scholarly articles published in reputed journals have been accessed.

Before commencing a discussion on Indian economic philosophy, it is relevant to point out that the Indian concept of environment differed greatly from the occidental concept. While western thinkers tended to consider man as the central entity who was allowed free run of various resources like land, water, air and nature for the fulfilment of human needs, they Indian thought took an entirely different approach. The environment in Indian thought is regarded not as a lifeless physical entity but as a living mechanism where humans are one of many living creatures. In the Indian thinking, man was just one component of the environment along with plants, animals, birds and other organisms as well as the different constituents of the physical world. This line of thinking encouraged human beings to act as protectors of the environment instead of greedy appropriators.

Thus the eco-oriented thinking of Indian philosopher highlighted the important role of man as an intelligent creature with regard to protection of environment. It emphasised the fragility of environment and its components and considered care of the environment as a fundamental duty of humanity. Further,

environment in Indian thinking was said to consist of various elements – earth, water, fire, air, sky, time, directions, mind and soul. These elements were said to have originated in phases. So that, water, earth and sky came first, followed by aquatic animals and birds second, land third, air or wind fourth and finally fire. This eventually led to the creation of the environment as we know today. Environment is a given entity which is transcendental in nature. (IGNOU)

Ecology focuses on how organisms interact among each other and their surrounding environment. The objective of this paper was to analyse the existence of environmental consciousness in Indian philosophical thought focusing mainly on its economic orientation. This discussion has been divided into three major divisions similar to historical division of Indian history, that is ancient period, medieval period and finally the modern period.

Philosophy can be viewed as a doubting process of the human mind hence regarded eternal with no beginning of its own but as a structure of thought philosophy emerges as conscious, views of individual thinkers. – It was the fruitful result of reflections on the riddle of existence (Barua 1998). no doubt peaceful times following struggle for existence is favourable to such reflections. – as a doubting process of the human mind attempting to find answers of questions when how whether philosophy becomes as old as mankind and Indian philosophy can be said to be present in the utterances of Indo Aryan sages that continue to survive in the form of hymns and sounds.

Ancient period

Some famous sage philosophers of vedic period of Aghamarsana (doctrine of time) Visvamitra, Prajapati Paramesthin - considered water cellular as the fundamental or original substance from which all things are formed, Bruhaspati or Brahmanaspati, Durghatamaas who considered sun to be origin of life , Hiranyagarbha and Viswakarman.

Vedic and post-vedic philosophy

Vedic literature of India encompassed not just religious and other worldly concerns but also practical observations, societal laws and thoughts on economy, ecology *et cetera*. The broad divisions of Vedic literature and also philosophy pertained to *Astik* and *Nastik* viewpoints believing in the existence or non-existence of a Supreme power or God respectively. The astik thought found coherence in the Vedas and six main streams of thought that can be said to have emerged from the vedas, namely, *nyay*, *vishishik*, *shastra*, *mimansa*, *aranyak* and *vedanta*. The nastik views found lucidity in Buddhism (Ajeevika) and Jainism (Charvak). Rigveda, the foremost of four Vedas dates back to 1500BC (Violatti, 2013 ,Vinod 2013). The other three are the *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. Most hymns of the Vedas were orally composed in the third millennium BC

before being written down between 1500BC and 600 BC. Deodhar (2019) suggests that India's tropical climate, want of good writing materials and lack of durability in those times encouraged oral compositions using terse metrical verses that were then passed on to future generations through memorisation. This literature is referred to as *Apaurushya* and *Shruti* literature. The inherent implication is that there is no single author to the Scriptures. The compositions were the collective knowledge of many sages as was revealed to and by them.

Apart from the *vedas*, Vedic literature consists of epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, both composed before 500 BCE and *Dharmashastras* considered as *Smriti* that were written by different persons to serve as manuals of behaviour for society. *Manusmriti* is a famous and more orthodox *Smriti* followed by others like the liberal *Yajna Valkya Smriti* and Lakshmi Devi's *Vivadchandra*. These books were written as guides for smooth functioning of the society.

There were theistic and non-theistic treatises focusing on *anvikshiki* that is the philosophical expositions on logic, reason and enquiry of the soul (Vidyabhushan, 1921). Indian literature includes six theistic *Darshans* (philosophical systems) and five non-theistic ones including Buddhist and Jain thoughts. The treatises over the first millennium BCE also focussed on performing arts like *Natya sutra*, *Natya Shastra* by Bharat Muni, linguistic and grammar texts such as *Ashtadhyayi* by Panini, texts on mathematics, science and technology, *Arthashastra* by Kautilya in fourth century BCE. There is also proof of existence of 18 *Puranas* that were a blend of history and mythology narrating stories as well as imparting knowledge to the common folk in easily understandable form. Post-vedic or later vedic period Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads presented an intermingling of the earlier thoughts. The emphasis shifted from Geocentrism of vedic speculations towards anthropocentrism in the post-vedic period. This change implied that from nature worship and extra-important role given to agents of nature like sun, earth, fire, wind and water extra, the emphasis shifted to man as the central force for all philosophy.

The above discussion brings out the diverse philosophical systems prevalent in ancient India. Philosophical thinking of the period tended to follow an open structure and was not bogged down by a particular dogmatic *ism*. There were plethora of views on various topics some of which were even in conflict with each other. However, the basic thread of harmony among living beings and a duty towards others was common to all these views. Much of vedic literature attempted to convey the abstract idea of philosophical literature to the common folks in easily discernible form and stressed on living life as per guiding principles.

An important feature of vedic philosophy was the general acceptance of material gain to be necessary part of human life. However, the vedas, smritis and Puranas all stressed on righteous lifestyle with respect for both living and non-living component of environment.

India's Saraswati Sindhu civilisation (vedic civilisation) flourished in the region of Gujarat, Punjab, Sind and parts of Afghanistan and was at its peak between 2300 and 1700BC. The civilisation had reached heights of development which is evident from trade and commerce relations with other civilisations of the period like Mesopotamian sites, Israel around 1000 BC, and Egypt. Cities followed planned architecture with clear standardisation and economics of city planning. Cost and quality considerations were kept in mind while using cost-effective mud bricks with straw in homes for thermal insulation and sound insulation, and expensive baked bricks with high compressive strength and water resistance were used for drainage system, baths, citadels, city walls and granaries (Khan and Lemmen, 2014).

The importance of rivers during the period is clear from the *Nadistuti Sukta* (Hymn 75, book 10 of Rigveda) which is a hymn in praise of rivers Saraswati and Sindhu around 3500 years ago. The river Sindhu was referred to as Hindu by Persians, Indos by Greeks and Romans and finally Indus by the British. In Book 9 of Mahabharata a discussion between Sage Vaisampayana and King Janamajaya pertains to disappearance and change of course of river Saraswati. Modern day satellite imagery shows buried tracts of river Saraswati in Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat with water still stored under the Thar desert (Danino, 2010). The discussion clearly shows Indian understanding of river conditions, meanderings and changes in course as well as effect of deforestation on the earth and its environment.

From the early to later vedic period, one can discern a subtle shift from nature worship to anthropomorphic development. What is strongly evident during the period is the use of *mantras* in worship. These were powerful phonetic constructions that were used to connect to the cosmic energy for the betterment or benefit of the individual and the world. Through a combination of cosmic and human energy, Indian vedic philosophy suggested a means of controlling the environment. While modern economic theory focuses on pursuit of material wealth and pleasures alone as an end in itself, Indian texts considered economic well-being as one of the four *purusharthas* or life's objectives— *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *moksha* (righteous conduct, acquisition of wealth, pleasure and love and salvation (Deodhar, 2019). While acquisition of wealth was not looked down upon, the importance given to righteous conduct and salvation as the ultimate goal of life encouraged a positive concern for the environment and its living as well as non-living constituents.

A very brief mention of Kautilya and Valluvar is necessary when considering the economic thought of the ancient period (Hajela, 2001). Kautilya's *Arthashastra* like other vedic literature regarded economics as a continuous process. He wrote extensively on the theory and practice of economics as a part of state's role. Planning and management of resources, rights of women, maintenance of old and helpless, public finance and concept of welfare state all formed a part of his discussions. Valluvar was a sage and seer, poet and a scholar whose *Thirrukural* is an important piece of work. It is a classic and a work of ethics where he posited that an orderly and prosperous society should be based on faith in God, economic resources, spiritual leadership and observance of the moral law.

Buddhism

Darlington (2019) in 'Contemporary Buddhism and Ecology' investigates the relation between ecology and Buddhism emphasising the intention and behaviours of practitioners of Buddhist religion. The book examines contemporary interpretation of content of interdependence, activities of monks in the Thai forests and certain rituals to understand factors influencing Buddhism. Activities in conformity with the precepts set out in Buddhism were seen to have positive impacts on environment in line with ecological principles and consequences as opposed to abstract labelling of environmental friendliness. Kumar Gautam (2018) in an article 'Leadership and management theories in Indic traditions' focuses on rediscovering the key aspects in ancient Indian context. Sumit (2020) points out that Buddhism believes that life is not fixed or permanent and is a more transitory form of nature. The Buddha stated that human beings were temporary beings and form, consciousness, perception, feelings and conceptual formulations are part of human nature.

Buddha's teachings also called the *Dharma* are said to begin with the four Noble truths:

- All form of life is suffering.
- Desire is the cause of suffering.
- The sufferings can be ended.
- Nirvana is the end of these sufferings.

According to Buddhism suffering is part of life and occurs as people attach themselves to life and other people and can only be ended by extinguishing it or reaching Nirvana. This can be attained using the eight fold path. The eight fold path is right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and finally right concentration. Buddha's way of life can be likened to a wheel which has all its spokes functioning effectively. Similarly, the path to achieving Nirvanamust involve proper thinking, no

harmful deeds to others, no over indulging nor harmful intentions or thoughts, mind fullness of every action and practice of meditation or mental concentration (Harvey, 2019)

Five precepts of Buddhism are abstinence from destruction of life, abstinence from stealing, abstinence from any form of sexual misconduct, abstinence from false speech and finally abstinence from intoxication. These five precepts form the foundation for the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Buddha's teachings were centred on knowledge and understanding of the true nature of reality, meditation and compassion for all living creatures. Buddhism encourages introspective and reflective manner of thinking in order to inculcate respect for all forms of life around the person.

Jainism

Jainism, the religion developed on the teachings of Lord Mahavira in 510 BC set out a number of values directing Jain society and economy. Alka Jain (2020) examined the principles laid out in one such book the *Awashyak Sutra*. According to it, Jainism lay down a set of five prohibitions *Atichaar* as given in the *pratikraman* or five vows to be observed by the followers. For each of these five vows, there are five prohibitions that is five times five equal to 25 prohibitions. These prohibitions relate to the interactions of a person with the immediate surroundings and encompass the whole lifestyle of the person. The five vows pertain to partial vow of non-violence, vow of truth, vow of non-stealing, vow of celibacy and finally vow of limiting one's possessions. Each of these vows when followed in its entirety, leads to favourable considerations for the surrounding ecology and environment. Further, while Jainism does not promote complete altruism, there are at least 15 kinds of businesses that are prohibited for Jain followers.

Ancient Jain values based management finds its origin in ancient Jain literature. Its purpose is harmony in the world and life balance for world peace not just for economic benefit. The vow of non-violence (*pranatipat virman vrat*) applies to non-violence towards all living things. Followers of Jainism respect the sanctity of life for all organisms. This translates into active protection of the various ecological constituents as part of duty of the human beings. The *mrishavaad virman vrat* or the vow of truth encourages truthful living. This reduces chances of submitting to avarice and selfish concentration of wealth. The vow of non-stealing (*adattadaan*) also encourages the people to not resort to illegal means of livelihood while the vow of celibacy (*maithun virman vrat*) supports a life of self-control. Finally, the fifth vow, *parigrah pariman*, pertaining to limiting one's possessions advises followers to live within their means with resorting to conspicuous consumption and greedy accumulation of wealth. While scope of values based management is the entire economy, it works through the heart of the

individual not just the organisation. This implies that sum total of individual actions leads to a positive impact on the whole economy. Similarly, individual action to protect the environment will transpose to betterment of the environment as a whole. Further, moral uplift of individual and society are regarded as the main non-financial gains while the financial gain comes at a byproduct of social behaviour Jainism (Jain, 2020).

Most modern philosophical studies use western standards of comparison. In light of this, it is interesting to note that values-based management system is intrinsic innature in Jainism while modern Western thought is extrinsic by nature. The values promoted by Jainism make care for living beings a part of life for the individual. The stress on non-violence and truthful living encourages a simple lifestyle that has least repercussions on the environment.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Medieval period covers the centuries between the end of the last of the major ancient states and the rise and growth of the mammoth Mughal empire in the 16th century. Medieval period saw the advent of Islam and Christianity in India. After the decline of the Gupta empire in early 6th century, Different kingdoms emerged in various parts of Northern, Central and Southern India. During early seventh century, Northern India witnessed numerous raids by the barbaric Huns followed by a relatively stable period under the rule of Harsh Vardhan from Kannauj. His death led to the disintegration of his empire. Between seventh to ninth century, three dynasties struggled for eminence- the Pratiharas and Palas in Bengal and the Rashtrakutas in Deccan region. Meanwhile, Islam had emerged as a new religion in Arabia in the seventh century. As the Arabs conquered Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt and Northern Africa, its reach spread to Multan and Sindh regions. The establishment of Islamic Caliphate had a profound impact on the subcontinent with far reaching effects on social and economic life. In Central India the Chalukya dynasty dominated from sixth to eighth century followed by supremacy of Rashtrakutas. Southern India witnessed three rival kingdoms in the sixth century - the Cheras, the Pandyas and the Cholas. From seventh to ninth century, the Pallavas, and Pandyas gained eminence for sometime then the Cholas dominated from tenth to thirteenth century.

By the end of tenth century India was subjected to a number of aggressive muslim attacks culminating with the establishment of the slave dynasty by Quutub-ud-din Aibak in late twelfth century. After various muslim rulers, the Mughal empire came into existence by the end of fifteenth- early sixteenth century. The period also saw the rise of Rajput rulers who established a number of kingdoms in Northern India.

The medieval period witnessed numerous political changes and the volatile atmosphere affected the social, philosophical and economic thinking of the period. While literature, architecture and arts flourished under royal patronage, foundation of land revenue and tax collection was also laid down during this period. Hinduism resurfaced as a major religion transposing Buddhism and Jainism. It also witnessed reformist movements in the form of Bhakti movement and the Sufi movement. These movements brought around a change in the way religion, God and philosophy were viewed by the masses. From the polytheist thinking of Vedic period, there was a clear shift towards monotheism with emergence of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Islam and later Christianity.

An analysis of prevalent thinking of the period shows that even during the Medieval period the Bhakti and Sufi saints stressed the importance of nature and environment the life of people. These agents had an important role in continuity of life so scholars stressed the need for protecting the environment and its constituents. However, Dr Ganeswar Nayak (n.a) has avered that during the 18th century, nobility of any and all creeds (Mughal, Marathas, Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs and Bundelas) tended to sway towards selfishness and lack of devotion to the state. This led to a situation where they tried to get the maximum income from their jaguars at the cost of the welfare of the people. The peasantry was the worst affected. It also led to a situation where peasants preferred to give up their lands and agriculture to avoid paying taxes. Not only agriculture, but trade and industry also suffered bringing about a stagnation that further weakened the country. An important counter-result of the situation was that environmental consciousness that had been an inherent part of the social fabric began to fade away. Increasing ignorance and fatalism became defining features and the illustrious philosophical and educational awareness that described India in the Vedic period began to fade from popular memory.

MODERN PERIOD

At the cusp of nineteenth century, India continued to be an important centre of world trade and industry. While Indian villages were largely self-sufficient with little import requirements, Indian exports of cotton textile, silk and silk fabrics hardware, indigo, salt, petre spices and precious stones etc were extensive. This led to Peter the Great of Russia to say that "*bear in mind that the commerce of India is the commerce of the world and ... he who can exclusively command it is the dictator of Europe*" (Nayak, n.a). The most distinctive incident of contemporary history of India is the colonisation by the Europeans, mainly the British who ruled India for nearly 200 years followed by India's independence in 1947. This period is characterised by gross exploitation of Indian resources by the Colonisers. Most intellectual thinking during that time concentrated on inculcating feeling of nationalism and patriotism. The misuse of Indian resources and eventually the need for conservation of

natural resources and protection of environment was inherent in the thinking of all important public figures of the time. Writings and speeches of Mahatma Gandhi, M G Ranade, B R Ambedkar all reflect this need to protect Indian resources.

The 19th century economic and philosophical thought in India underwent radical changes under the prevailing political conditions, educational system and social economic situation of the country. The brutal exploitation by British colonisers and the rise of Indian nationalistic thinking combined with increased integration with rest of the world brought forth a more nationalistic pattern of thinking. Eminent statespersons and thinkers like Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, R C Dutt and Gokhale pointed to the exploitative policies of Britishers as the cause of Indian poverty. Leaders like Ambedkar, Gandhi, M Visvesvaraya, B G Kale helped develop Indian economic thought. Dada Bhai Naoroji regarded widely as the Grand Old Man of India and Father of Indian Nationalism, put forth his 'Drain theory' to explain that the appalling poverty of the Indian people was due to the British rule under which heavy taxes were imposed on the people which was a heavy drain on the resources of the country. Pointing out that the wound inflicted on the body of India by the earlier invaders was widened by the British administration he said, "*the former rulers were like butchers hacking here and there, but the English with the scientific scalpel cut to the very heart... there is no wound to be seen and soon the plaster of the high talk of civilisation, progress and what not covers up the wound*" (Hajela, 2001). He also said that it would be wrong to say that poverty of India was due to the vagaries of nature. He felt that the British were the cause of the ruin of the country. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, whom Rabindranath Tagore gave the epithet Mahatma, was a political and social reformer whose philosophy shaped the national movement to a marked extent. While he was not a trained economist, to him, economics was a part of life and his economic ideas were a part of his general philosophy of life. His entire philosophy was based on four cardinal principles of *truth, nonviolence, dignity of labour and simplicity*. He followed the basic principle of Hindu religion and philosophy, "*simple living and high thinking*". As a practical idealist, he averred that the remedy of the ills of modern civilisation was following this ideal. To him economics and ethics couldn't be separated from each other and life must be studied as a whole. His main contribution to Indian economic thought was his insistence on establishment of social, economic and political order based on philosophical foundations. His advocacy of charkha, khadi, village self-sufficiency all point to wards the need to assimilate modern science with needs of people and living life in tandem with nature instead of influencing it adversely for selfish human wants.

Another important economist in the modern period is M Visvesvaraya, who is known as the Architect of

Indian Industrialisation of 20th century India and founder of the idea of planned economy for the country (Hajela, 2001). He pointed out that “a planned economy is required to ensure the rapid advance in industry, agriculture, commerce finance and particularly, for increasing production and earning power, reducing unemployment and encouraging self-sufficient and closer independence between various parts of India. It should provide for the profitable utilisation of the material resources and manpower of the country and the application of the latest inventions and discoveries to economic interest to the fullest extent.”

Many other economists and thinkers of the period such as B R Ambedkar, VG Kale, Gyan Chand and V K RV Rao have all asserted the need for proper utilisation of India's economic resources and prevention of exploitation of the same.

CONCLUSION

With passage of time, ecological concerns have gained greater importance in mainstream economy thinking. Faced with the conditions of global warming depleting resources and increasing pressure of population, proper management of limited economy resources has become paramount. Increasingly environmental consciousness and ecological management has gained importance in popular thinking as well as academic discourse. Current events have demonstrated that ancient Indian conviction and harmony with nature is essential for human survival. Current economic thought has tended to pay tribute to this Philosophy and now research pertaining to ancient knowledge on economics, ethics and society is being ardently pursued.

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13. Schumpeter 1954–3 distinct ways in which we can profit from the study of history – without some history students may lose direction and meaning to their current studies – second minds can derive new inspirations from the study of history brackets futility and fertility of controversies as well as about deters vested efforts and blind alleys – thirdly study of disciplinary history provides insight into the working of the human mind.

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