

Interfaith Responses to Environmental Challenges: Exploring Contemporary Islam and Hinduism

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Abstract

Today, Environmental degradation is an alarming issue our only living planet Earth is facing on a global level. It is basically a process of destruction of a potentially renewable resource such as water, forest, animals, air, and wildlife etc. It can be seen in the form of lost living forms due to the disturbance in the ecosystem of planet Earth. The recent developments in the human worldview and civilization are the main reasons for such environmental degradation. In this present scenario of environmental degradation, Islam and Hinduism provides a holistic approach for equilibrium of Earth and its ecosystem. In this regard, the contemporary discourse is more relevant to control human's anthropogenic activities. In their interfaith efforts for the protection of environment, contemporary eco-scholars of Islam and Hinduism have revised the ecological worldview, the place and position of mankind in the hierarchy of cosmos, and the sacred quality of environment in the mind of modern man. This interfaith research presents a comparative analysis of the eco-religious understandings of contemporary thinkers of both faiths to sustain Man-Environment relationship in 21st century. Through discussion of their eco-religious views, this paper motivates



human beings to use natural resources of Earth in balance way and ensure the peaceful co-existence of all species.

Keywords: Environmental degradation, Earth, Man, anthropocentric, theocentric, nthropocosmic, peaceful co-existence, interfaith effort, Islam, Hinduism

Introduction

Environment means our surroundings that affects our ability to live peacefully on earth. Environmental degradation has become an alarming issue over the past few decades. It covers a variety of issues including deforestation, desertification, biodiversity loss, water, air, soil pollution, and climate change. It is a common concern for scientists, religious scholars, government, and policy makers. Basically, it is deterioration of the good environment through depletion of resources including accessible clean air, water, fertile soil, diversity of living organism, and non-living elements of earth. These are aspects of the natural resources of Earth that enable man to live and thrive. Therefore, the major factor of environmental degradation is the modern secular worldview that has allowed unrestrained human activities like industrialization, deforestation and modern urbanization and a lot more.

Environmental degradation began to be discussed during the end of the 20th century. Since then, a significant amount of literature has been published to spread awareness about the severity of crisis. There are some works acknowledged to play a key role in drawing academic attention to the ecological crisis and became the cause of the emergence of environmental movements in the last decades of 20th century. Such as Leopold's "*A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There*"¹ is the first systematic presentation of eco-centric approach to the environment. He talks about the healthy and self-renewing ecosystem. Carson's "*Silent Spring*"² and Hardin's "*The Tragedy of the Commons*"³ drew attention to the negative impacts of human activities on earth, human population growth, resource use, harmful effects of pesticides on our food, and the natural resources etc. Some scholars, for instance Arnold Toynbee's "*The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis: A Viewpoint*"⁴ and Lynn White's article "*The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*"⁵ blamed religions for allowing

anthropocentric view of man. Many theologians and religious scholars have tried to respond to their assertions. Then, started religious and sacred approaches to rectify the present scientific worldview of nature. They felt the need to solve the problems from a religious perspective.

In 1968, Seyyed Hossein Nāsr delivered a series of lecture on the issue of modern ecological crisis which were latter published as *“Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man”*⁶. Since 1990s, an ongoing forum on *“Religion and Ecology”* there are very welcoming series in world religions and ecology that are published by the center for the *“Study of World Religions”* at Harvard Divinity School. It includes *“Judaism and Ecology”*⁷ *“Christianity and Ecology”*⁸ *“Islam and Ecology”*⁹ *“Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth”*¹⁰ and *“Buddhism and Ecology”*¹¹. In an interfaith effort for protection of our environment, these books highlight both doctrines and actions to provide environmental conservation and sustainable development. Indeed, all religious worldviews have potential to allow principles for addressing new ecological circumstances.

Based on previous fountain of knowledge, this paper is going to explore certain questions in purely Islamic and Hindu understanding. What is the nature of Environmental crisis in understanding of contemporary eco-scholars of Islam and Hinduism? How scholars of both faiths reinterpret and revise the theologies about God, man, and earth to response the modern secular worldview? And how does their eco-religious response support or challenge the idea of nature as simply a utilitarian resource? Therefore, this present study is focused on contemporary discourse of Islam and Hinduism. It presents the eco-religious understanding of Seyyed Hossein Nāsr, Fazlun Majeed Khālid, Mahātmā Gandhi and Ranchor Prīme to eliminate environmental crisis of our home planet earth in 21st century.

Environmental Degradation and Modernity: A Historical View

Modernity is referred to as the period of the 14th century and is known as the era of renaissance. The philosophy of this period is called Humanism.¹² Northern Italy was the center of this kind of renaissance learning. People of the renaissance, after a long period of chaos and disturbance, came to believe that there was more to life than mere survival. Renaissance man was

characterized by his mental power as on a superior level and the rest of creature was humbled before him. Huizinga writes: *“Modern (Renaissance) culture has developed the idea that it is beneath human dignity to serve anyone or anything, be it God or nation, fellow man, or natural harmony.”*¹³

The historical circumstance of Europe during 15th and 16th century separated man from traditional understandings and caused environmental degradation. Man is no longer attached into a medieval hierarchy. He had self-consciously placed the separation between himself and nature. Nature was believed to be indifferent, mindless and without direction, it could not be granted sympathy. So, man is not merely one being among many, but an independent being of both the nature and supernatural worlds. This view of nature made him a cosmic destroyer and vagabond. In 18th century, the industrial revolution of United States also became main factor to bring change in human practices concerning environment. This modern industrialization was spread in everywhere in Europe, north America and then followed by entire world through colonization.¹⁴ In the views of Muslim and Hindu contemporary scholars, this new worldview of human superiority over nature cause to change traditional understanding of Man’s relationship with his physical world. The earth was considered by humanity as sacred which is now desacralized and remained as exploitable resource.¹⁵ It is important to note that the environmental degradation began in the west and spread globally when colonized countries sought to regain power and independence by adopting western practices and norms. Khālīd describes that there are two historical events that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in West, breached the outer perimeters of natural order. The first of these took place in sixteenth century when the usury was legitimized in Christian world. The second was Cartesian doctrine of dualism.

In Khālīd view, the Cartesian doctrine caused a radical change in the perception of man in relation to our home planet earth. It was triggered by the thought of Rene Descartes through his publication *“Meditations on First Philosophy”* in seventeenth century. He proclaimed a dualistic worldview by splitting the mind from body and refuted the traditional order. In previous times, religion was the most important part of the overall pattern of life in

societies. His thoughts challenged the traditional worldview through proclaiming that the man is the “*master and possessor of nature.*”¹⁶ Nāsr also agree that western Industrial Revolution is the main cause of global environmental crisis. He says: “*The environmental crisis did not, however, begin globally but locally in the West during the Industrial Revolution in such places as the Ruhr Valley in Germany, the middle part of England and Lowell, Massachusetts.*”

In Prime’s view, the environmental crises in India are the result of colonization. He writes that “*for nearly two hundred years Indians have been estranged from their own culture by English education. They have been encouraged to think in Western ways and to value the things which the West values. Their own traditional values have been marginalised...*”¹⁷ Mahatma Gandhi also criticized western industrialization and colonial education system because of secular understanding of nature. After the spread of the modern secular worldview and industrial development, humans forgot their traditional understanding of earth and the limitations of their activities. They developed a purpose in life far beyond survival. They did not remain only inhabitants on earth, but they became its master or transformer. Industrialization allowed them to exploit natural resources in the name of comfort and luxuries. These changes in human societies and modern worldview have rapidly increased the human impact on the earth. Many global environmental issues are on the rise including deforestation, desertification, biodiversity loss, water, air, climate change, and soil pollution.

Transmigration from Secular Worldview to Religious Understanding of Man and Nature

After discussing the historical progression of Man’s relationship with this phenomenal world it become clear that the modern secular worldview and industrial revolution has shifted the eco-friendly attitude of man to hostile relationship with environment. So, it is argued by contemporary eco-scholars that humanity needs a “paradigmatic shift” from the global vision of Man-Nature relationship to religious understanding of “self and surrounding.” Because religion is one of the most universal and pervasive characteristics of human society that has directed human lives since the earliest times. It guides

man in every sphere of his life and shapes the worldview of man to perceive the Absolute reality and phenomena of world. In the view of contemporary eco-scholars of Islam and Hinduism, the only solution to these crises is returning toward the traditional understanding of man and environment. As it has been realized that religions are necessary partners in the present situation of environmental degradation, and they are able to provoke environmental change in human practices. Nāsr says in this respect: *“The Earth is bleeding from wounds inflicted upon it by a humanity no longer in harmony with Heaven... The world of nature is being desecrated and destroyed in an unprecedented manner globally by both ... developed a science and technology... by those who still live within a religious universe... The role of religion in the solution... is therefore crucial...”*¹⁸

In this respect, Islam and Hinduism have a deep sense of respect and consideration for earth and its natural resources; they provide a paradigm solution for various crises our home planet earth is facing on global level. Religious traditions strongly advocate sustainability of earth and natural resources by forbidding humans from harmful activities.

Manifestation of Islamic Environmental Teaching: A contemporary Response Islamic Worldview and Relation Between Man and Environment

Islamic approach is neither Cosmo-centric nor anthropocentric, but it is theocentric or God-centered to understand the relation of human beings with earth or environment. *Sūrah Al-Ikh̄lās* describes the oneness of Creator and the unity of His creation. This concept of tawḥīd also brings value to the creation and asserts its wholeness and holiness. Allāh SWT alone is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of earth and everything in it. Al-Fārūqī defines tawḥīdic centric approach as the bases of Islamic worldview. In his vision, *“Al-tawḥīd is a general view of reality, of truth, of the world, of space and time, of human history and destiny.”*¹⁹ Tawḥīd clarifies the relationship between God, human and environment. Tawḥīd is a general view of reality which is characterized in duality, Creator, and creature. The believers must accept that Allāh SWT as only one God and He alone is the creator of the whole universe and every existing thing. His attribute “Al-Khāliq” describes that He is only creator, and His creation (Khālq) is a unified whole. The

šhahada (Lā ilaha illa al-Lāh) of Islamic faith requires its believers to affirm this unity of one Creator God and His creation.²⁰

Therefore, this view of Islam is totally against the Cartesian doctrine of dualism, and I centered culture. In Islam, the beginning of the “I” is in the act of submission, through declaration of šhahada: “*There is no God but Allāh.*” It depicts the submissive condition of human to the Creator. This submissive “I” of the man primal condition is opposite to that of the Cartesian “I.” The very first line of first chapter of Qur’an declares, (الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) “*Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the entire universe*”²¹ and the last line of last chapter of Qur’an counsels, (قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ) “*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of man.*”²² These verses of Holy Qur’an state that there is only one Lord, and the very act of submission denies the human any pretensions to this position. So, human beings do not possess anything except by the grace of the Lord Who is the Creator of everything. Hence, man is a slave of the Creator and cannot be master and possessors of something he is intrinsically a part.²³

Nāsr and Khālīd’s Theoretical Dimensions to understand Environment and Man: A Contemporary View

Nāsr and Khālīd as the pioneering thinker of contemporary Islamic environmentalism, have related Islam with present perception of man and his surroundings. They interpreted traditional understanding of both phenomena that needs to be represented in new era of environmental crisis. Their religious environmental understandings are renewal or rediscovery of an ancient wisdom that has been lost with renaissance. Thus, they have based it on the existing worldview of Islam and are not external to the tradition.

Nāsr’s Understandings of Islamic Environmentalism

In this respect, Nāsr is the first who has been speaking about the environmental crisis since the mid of 20th century in west. He tries to address the current environmental crisis from religious, philosophical, and spiritual perspective. His understanding of current crisis includes the full range of crisis that human beings are facing in their environment such as the destruction of forests, extinction of species, water and air pollution, desertification. The urgent solution to these crises is evident to him. The following citation is the root of crisis in his thought: “*the environmental*

crisis was in fact the result of a spiritual crisis within the soul of modern man and not simply a result of bad engineering."²⁴ After recognizing the global environmental crisis, he appeals to solve them collectively in the light of all major religious traditions of the world. He says: "A need exists to develop a path across religious frontiers without destroying the significance of religion itself and to carry out a comparative study of the Earths of various religions."²⁵ Nāsr took purely Qur'anic stance to define the environment. In his view, our home planet earth and all natural resources are the Āyāt or signs of Allāh SWT and are equal member of His creation along with human beings. In Nāsr view, the nature is both veils and reveals Allāh SWT because Qur'an portrays creation as being a theophany. The components of earth are so many masks that hide various qualities of divine and in the meantime also revealing these qualities to those who have developed a spiritual vision or have deep feelings.²⁶

Nāsr also interpreted al-Muhit, the attribute of Allāh SWT in a spiritual or a deeper sense of Islam. He said that Allāh Himself is the "Ultimate Environment" which encompasses or surrounds man. Because Allāh is said to be Muhit (All-Encompassing) in Qur'an. In Nāsr view, man is immersed in the divine environment as Muhit also means environment. But due to the negligence or lack of knowledge man is ignorant of this understanding of himself and surrounding or earth. Nāsr suggests a way to overcome this negligence by remembering Allāh SWT. To remember Allāh is to see earth along with all its resources and understand them as His reality as Muhit. The destruction of earthly resources is the result of modern man's attempts to view them as an ontologically independent order of reality. The Quality of Allāh as Muhit reminds human beings of the sacred quality of earth, and all components of environment as signs of Allāh. Human beings should understand the existence of natural resources as filled with divine presence which alone is the ultimate environment. Thus, the environment and man are created by Him and will return to Him.²⁷

Furthermore, Nāsr discusses the characteristics of man and his relationship with environment in philosophical way. He describes that the purpose of man's creation for Allāh is "come to know *Himself* through His perfect

instrument of knowledge that is the Universal Man.” Man by virtue of his theomorphic qualities, he was given the right of domination over earth. He was depicted as the “image of God” on earth in medieval cosmology. His dream was to establish a paradise on earth which was basically a symbolic world of inner meaning. Because he was able to observe and understand the spiritual dimension of nature and he was able to manipulate his will on earth. He turned toward the inward dimension of his being and was able to see earth and natural phenomena as a symbol or transparent reality and understand them in the real sense. This understanding of nature never allows him to underestimate the earth and its resources.²⁸ In Nāsr view, man’s active participation in the spiritual world made him as a “channel of grace” for cosmos. Nāsr called this man as pontifical who is a religious, spiritual, traditional one and is quite opposite to promethean or modern secular man. He is submissive to Heaven and caretaker of the environment. He can act as bridge between heaven and earth. In fact, his role on earth is described by Qur’an as the representative or vicegerent of God or *khalīfat Allāh-fīl-ard*. Nāsr describes that humans should remain active in protection and conservation of all resources of earth. Their role should not be restricted to the vicegerent only rather it should be based on both the khalifat-ullah and ‘abd Allāh (vicegerent of Allāh and His servant). Because the vicegerency may create feelings of superiority in their mind over nature but the other status of man as the servant of God may create humbleness in his mind toward nature.²⁹

Khālīd and Islamic Environmental Teachings

Fazlun Majeed Khālīd is another leading figure of Islamic ecology who contributed much more to conserve the natural resources of earth theoretically and practically. He has written so much to describe Islamic perspective on Man-Nature Relationship and created the IFEES organization to spread ecological awareness all around the world. Khālīd presented solution of current environmental crisis through returning toward the Qur’anic principles of our relationship with the divine order while saying that: *“A return to some form of equilibrium requires of us an understanding of our relationship with the divine order and these are four major principles*

(*tawḥīd, fitra, Mīzān, and khilafat*) in Islam which we may draw from to help us deal with the present crisis”³⁰ **Tawḥīd:** Khālīd declares that if human beings understand this concept of tawḥīd in such as God alone is the creator of earth and everything existing, and the unity of creation, then they will not destroy any component of earth. He describes the concept of tawḥīd in following words: “*Tawḥīd is the Foundation of Din al Islam. It teaches the uniqueness and oneness of Allāh Ta’ala, The Creator (Al Khāliq) and provides the starting point to the discovery of the nature of His creation (Khāliq) and the need to conserve it.*”³¹

Fiṭrah: Khālīd describes “*the natural primordial condition of man in harmony with nature.*”³² In his view, this verse indicates two messages: the first is a sense that man is originated in the bosom of creation like all other creatures and are equal pattern with the rest of Allāh’s creature. Second, it establishes the foundation of deep ecology inherent in Islamic tradition. The Holy Qur’an defines our place and relationship within this pattern which lead humanity to address the present-day ecological crisis at its root of Fiṭrah.³³

Mīzān: Khālīd also derived this principle of balance from the most popular passages of the Holy Qur’an. He describes Mīzān in the following words: “*Mīzān is the principle of balance on which all creation works and maintains itself in a stable condition. Preserving the balance and stability of both marine and terrestrial ecosystems helps us to conserve the environment.*”³⁴ The most important objects like sun and moon in the universe are performing their function rightly. And the rest of creatures like trees and stars are in the state of prostration. All of them are submissive to the will of Allāh SWT and perform their duties honestly. For Muslims, these verses remind that everything in the universe is in prostration, and that is how the earth remains in balance.³⁵

Khalifah: This principle of responsibility describes that the man has a special place in Allāh SWT’s creation scheme. He has appointed him as His vicegerent through giving the gift of intelligence. Man is Allāh’s vicegerent on earth and its protectors. Then Khālīd describes the role of man on earth in following words: “*As Allāh Ta’ala’s khalifa on earth we assume the mantle of*

guardian of His creation. We are thus obliged to protect the environment does not destroy it."³⁶

For the application form of such ethical principles of Islam, Khālīd used religion based Indigenous approach to address environmental crises that Muslim communities are facing around the world. He revised certain rules of Islamic Sharī'ah such as hima, harim and hisbah.³⁷ Then he practically applied them to marine conservation in Zanzibar and worked in Saudi Arabia for the establishment of biosphere reserved. He also worked for the implementation of Islamic environmental ethics to the spiny forest of Madagascar and in Indonesia. He tried to revise Islamic ethical foundation and give it fresh expression to solve the environmental crisis of different areas of the global world.³⁸

A Contemporary Response of Hinduism to Save the Environment of Earth against Destruction

Hindu Worldview in Understanding of Man and Environment Relationship

Hinduism describes 'anthropocosmic' worldview. The Upanishads describes the oneness of God and unity of creation. Brahman in the form of Īśvara is the creator of earth and man. The 'Nāsadīya Śukta' also describes the oneness of creator and the unity of His creation in the form of 'mysterious one.' Shankara describes the reality of this phenomenal world in following words: "*a phenomenal appearance of Brahman due to Avidyā and this creation-appearance is only as long as Avidyā lasts. When Avidyā is removed by right knowledge, God, the Ruler, Soul, the Enjoyer, and World, the Enjoyed, all are merged in the Highest Brahman.*"³⁹

This philosophy of "oneness of existence" is central belief of advaita-Vedānta that establishes the relationship between environment and man from the very root of existence. This materialistic world and man are created by God and identical with Him so earth including all resources and man are equal partner in this life cycle.⁴⁰ Hence, treated with such reverence.

Furthermore, the Purusha Śukta famous hymn of Rig-Veda beautifully describes the theory of one divine principle behind this phenomenal world and everything in it. Purusha as the first principle of creation had played a

vital role in creating everything including earth, human beings, animals, planets, air, water, mountains without any distinction.¹⁴¹

Gandhi and Prime's Theoretical Dimensions to understand Environment and Man: A Contemporary View

Mahātmā Gandhi and Ranchor Prime are considered as the pioneers of the emergence of the modern environmental movements in Hinduism. Although Gandhi did not directly talk about the nature of environmental challenges, but his concepts of environmental degradation, conservation, protection, sustainability, and survival, on which modern environmentalists are embarking upon, were inherent in the ideology of Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi and Environmental Conservation

As for the environment of earth and its protection is concerned, Gandhi's revolutionary thoughts and his practice of yogic centered way of life, spiritual understanding of self-realization, moral value of non-violence, and sustainable development of society, represent a holistic approach to save our earthly resources for future generation.

Self-Realization: Gandhi's philosophy of self-realization is very famous in the field of environmental degradation. It is based on this saying of Gandhi: *"I believe in advaita (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spirituality, the whole world gains with him end, if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent."*⁴² Haigh described that although the concept of self-realization emerged from Vedantic philosophy, but the source is Mahātmā Gandhi.⁴³ In the term of self-realization, we mean that Gandhi was speaking about the supreme or universal 'Self' the 'Atman' that is to be realized rather than the 'self' or the 'Jīva' of egocentric interest. By reducing the dominance of the jīva or narrow self, Gandhi tries to reach self-realization. Through this wider 'self' everything or every living being is connected and identified. According to Naess, Gandhi was a strong advocator of self-realization. He was very extreme about self-realization of other living beings than human beings. His Ashrams were living example of bio-spherical egalitarianism, He rightly proved the possibility of satisfactory

coexistence of other living beings with humans. He recognized a common or basic right of living and flourishing. Gandhi made manifest the internal relations between two approaches of his environmental vision as the self-realization and non-violence which has been called by Arne Naess as bio-spherical egalitarianism.⁴⁴

Non-Violence:

Parekh describes that Gandhi believed in the divinity of all animals and considered them as legitimate members of the cosmos. Human beings were not allowed to take the life of animals for food or even scientific experiments. They might take animal life with a sense of regret, and only when absolutely necessary. Hence, human being should avoid violence against animals by reducing their wants and to compensate for it by taking tender care of non-human beings.⁴⁵ In the view of Khoshoo and Moolakkattu, Gandhi believed that only an environmental movement designed to prevent violence against natural resources was not adequate. There must be a renewal of the basic principle of non-violence and its practical dimension had to become fundamental to the ethics of human civilization.⁴⁶ Naess writes that Gandhi was very extreme in his care about animals, and he did not allow to kill even poisonous insects. He let snakes, spiders, and scorpions move unimpeded into his bedroom. Animals were free to fulfill their lives. He was against keeping a stock of medicines for poisonous bites. He rightly proved the possibility of satisfactory coexistence of other living beings with humans. His Ashram was filled with such examples.⁴⁷ Naess developed his concept of deep ecology based on Gandhi's philosophy of common right of living for all creatures. He also related it to his philosophy of bio-centric egalitarianism which holds that equality of all life forms. Haigh describes that the non-violence philosophy of Gandhi is the main factor of the development of Naess's concept of deep ecology. Gandhi's concept of ahimsa is reflected in the theory of deep ecology that human beings should live on earth without harming the other living beings of earth. They should live with harmonious attitude and do as little harm as possible.⁴⁸ On the surface, non-violence and deep ecology are easily related. Deep ecology defines equality of all life forms, and their basic right of living and flourishing while 'ahimsa' provides a non-violent approach to all

living beings. Ahimsa implies that everything in our universe should be protected.⁴⁹ Thus, Gandhi's approach of non-violence "*had to become central to the ethos of human culture.*"⁵⁰

Ranchor Prīme and Hindu Understanding of Environmental Teachings

Ranchor Prīme is a prominent religious environmental scholar of Hinduism. Indeed, he is the first to contribute on Hindu concept of ecology on global level. He authored a famous book on "*Hinduism and Ecology*" and a director of "*Friends of Vrindavan*" in India and Britain.

Unity of Creation: Prīme philosophy of unity is opposite to Cartesian doctrine of dualism, and it is in stark contrast to the fragmented individualism, and materialism of modern Western thought. Prīme believes in the 'holistic' thought of Hinduism and in a 'perception' of underlying unity. Prīme sees the unity in diversity through describing the Purānic creation story and the core Hindu concept of religion as 'Sanatan Dharma.' Since the story of creation described the one essence of all life forms that lies in Vishnu, then the apparent diversity has no longer any importance. Human beings, and the mother earth including its all diversity like forests, oceans, mountains, animals, and tress all have shared the one or a single origin of existence.⁵¹ He has translated Sanatan Dharma as "*the eternal essence of life.*" This essence is an essential quality not limited to human beings only, but it unites all beings, humans, animals, and plants. This concept of underlying unity is what causes Hindus to refuse to separate their religion from their daily practices or differentiate between spirituality and materialism. Through these two arguments of underlying unity in diversity, Prime believes in the sacredness of all life forms.

Prime's Practical Dimension to Re-establish the Pre-British Lifestyle in India:

Christopher key Chapple, a professor of indict and comparative theology, admires Prīme's efforts for protection of Vrindavan forest in religious vein and considers him as a contemporary figure of modern era who has worked to re-establish the pre-British lifestyle in India through his religion based indigenous approach.⁵²

Through "*Friends of Vrindavan*" project, Prime practically saved the pilgrimage place of Vaishnavism against environmental crisis. Vrindavan is a

sacred town in the state of Uttar Pradesh in north-central India. It is important for the worship of Krishna because Krishna lived there in his early life. In the 20th century, this place was facing environmental crisis like deforestation, water, and soil pollution etc. Prīme adopted religion based indigenous approach as a way for addressing Vrindavan's ecological problems.⁵³

Conclusion

- From the preceding discussion, it is understood that the relationship between man and his environment when viewed in the light of religions like Islam and Hinduism, becomes sacred. Islam establish a peaceful relationship between man and environment under the paradigm of a theocentric worldview that governs the entire world. In Hinduism, this relationship is based on an anthropocosmic worldview which describes Brahman as the common core of all existence.
- Environment and man are equal themes of this ecological worldview, and the sacred scriptures of both faiths address the whole of creation and not only human beings. In the Islamic view, both are Khālq or creation. They are Āyāt or signs of Allāh SWT. In Hinduism, everything in this phenomenal world is created by Brahman in the form of Purusha or Ishvra. Hence, all are sacred and are not made up of inanimate matter, to be wasted or exploited rather they all share one spiritual core of existence and must be treated with respect.
- It is realized that knowing the Creator is the first step to understanding his creation. The environment is viewed in the light of human perception about their God. Nāsr calls this relationship the “hierarchical relationship model which is described as the God-man-environment relationship”. In this model, human beings are in the center between God and environment, becoming a bridge between heaven and earth, and they are bound to play their role as the vicegerent and custodian of earth for the protection of its environment.
- On the other hand, Hinduism establishes harmonious relations between them based on the ‘anthropocosmic’ worldview. According to Shankara’s philosophy of advaita “*Brahman and universe are one.*” which

describes 'oneness of existence.' When environment and man are viewed in relation to Brahman, then all this is considered real and identical to Brahman. Thus, the goal of human life is to identify oneself with Brahman and to harmonize oneself with earth to return to the transcendent source called Brahman. This 'anthropocosmic vision' indicates that the world as object cannot be manipulated by human beings as a subject, but their responsibility is to understand it and themselves so that they can live up to the fullness of their humanity.

- In Islam and Hinduism, the view of Man- Environment Relationship is quite opposite to the modern secular worldview that separates God from human beings, thus separating human beings from environment, eventually human beings are no longer accountable to God for any action. Hence, they only think of their earthly benefits and destroy earth on unprecedented level.
- In this regard, the contemporary scholars of Islam and Hinduism attempt to bring religious discourse on environmental sustainability. They deal with the current environmental issues from their religious understanding of earth and man. Although they come from different backgrounds of religious understanding and education, all are united on the common problems of our home planet earth. Based on their religious beliefs, their theoretical dimension is different from one another, but their purpose is similar; to reduce the present environmental crisis. Their contributions for equilibrium of earth and its natural phenomena in the light of their specific religious traditions are remarkable.
- In environmental contributions, Although Nāsr is not very practical in applying environmental ethics to any specific community to solve the ecological crises of earth, he has successfully integrated religious, spiritual, and philosophical understanding with our home planet earth and tried to show a potential correlation between environmental crises and religious, spiritual, and philosophical crises of modern man. He thinks that when human beings understand their worldview based on their religious tradition their actions automatically adopt harmonious attitude toward non-human beings.

- On the other hand, Khālid and Prime have contributed theoretically as well as practically towards the solution of the current environmental crises. Both have used the religion-based Indigenous approach to the addressing of environmental crises that Muslim and Hindus communities were facing around the world. They revised certain rules of their faiths and practically applied them to the most affected areas of the global world.
- Gandhi's philosophy of self-realization and his approach of non-violence can save humans from the unnecessary wants and desires of materialistic comforts. It enables them to conserve their home planet earth from destruction, protect it from exploitation, and eliminate environmental degradation.
- All these eco-scholars criticize the anthropocentric value approach of west that is insufficient to deal with present environmental problems and present their own understanding as an alternative constructive suggestion for sustaining Man-Environment Relationship. Their theoretical understanding of earth and man relates to cosmo-centric value approach. They viewed the intrinsic value of all diversity on earth including human beings, animals, plants, water, mountains. while they do not compromise the position of God and His relationship with all phenomena of the universe and not reduce the status of human beings to other non-human beings as usually described in deep ecological movements.
- Lastly, it is argued that the only solution to the crisis of our home planet earth lies in harmonious attitude toward natural resources of earth. In order to bring peace and harmony with earth, humans must be in harmony and peace with the Ultimate or Sacred who is the source of earth and all things. When humans are at peace with their God then automatically, they will be at peace and in equilibrium with His creation.

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