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ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN OF SIKHISM: A SHIFT FROM INSTRUMENTAL TO INTRINSIC VALUE

KEY WORDS: Sikhism, Environment, Ethics, Intrinsic value, Instrumental value

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ABSTRACT

Why Sikhism? This paper aims to offer a rudimentary map of the subfield of religion and ecology by describing two distinct scholarly responses to the challenge levelled by Sikhism. Unlike "Judeo-Christian" theology which is inherently anti-ecological, Sikh religion backs the preservation of the environment for its own sake. The non-anthropocentric approach which accentuating intrinsic value of the environment is receded by the environmental philosophy of Sikhism. The religious and secular practices of Sikhism directly or indirectly endorses the value of the material life for its own sake. In Sikhism the material world is important not as long as it is a way to the other world but it is a world where the Sikhs consider as real and authentic which needs human conscious acts and careful moral deeds. Sikhism values purifying the environment for humans as purifying as his soul by serving God's creation. The teaching of Guru Nanak and his successors including Guru Granth Sahib are determined to compacts with the value of nature as they did for human to realize the ultimate truth. As Sikh's scriptures described reality is one, God as self-existing, just full of love and mercy, it is only God who can destroy and give life for his creation. Hence, human just simply has to serve his creation. They have to extend their service to the natural environment too. Sikhism teaches that if humans become greedy and selfish, they will destroy the environment for utilitarian reason. And it is only human have clean air and environment that they can practice and attain their self-realization and the ultimate truth by contemplation and meditation. Guru Nanak affirms that virtuous living towards the environment would be of indispensable value in itself.

Introduction

The value of non-human environment for its own sake backed by the environmental outlook of Sikhism. And it would be important to evidently scrutinize the possible relationship between the philosophy of Sikhism and the environment so that we can have a critically apprehended circumstance of human life and to redeem the extinction of species and the destruction of natural environment as a whole. The dominant perspectives in environmental ethics mainly lies in either of the two major ethical school of thought known as anthropocentric (utilitarian version) and non-anthropocentric (deontological version) of ethics. Approaching the natural environment from the anthropocentric (utilitarian) perspective implies treating and care for the environment as long as it is useful for human life. But this kind of approach to the environment is destructive and partisan which is blamed for the causes of contemporary global challenges such as global warming, flooding, and tsunami, hurricanes etc. However; "Anthropocentric ethics claims that people are both the subject and the object of ethics. Humans can have no duties to rocks, rivers, nor to wildflowers or ecosystems, and almost none to birds or bears. Humans have serious duties only to each other" (Bunnin & James, 2003:3). But cherishing nature to its own sake is an overbearing in environmental ethics but the human perspective is in eliminable, Gerhold Becker argues. He points out that, in rejecting anthropocentrism, people think that it would neither be reasonable nor justifiable to understand and value nature from the human perspective. However, such a position fails to credit the proper and unique role of humankind in nature. Environmental philosophy in the contemporary times starting from its inception is getting out of the sole anthropocentric approach to recognize the appropriate concern for, values in, and duties regarding the natural world. As a result non-anthropocentric (deontological) ethicists determined to emphasize considering the natural environment for its own sake or its intrinsic value. As human beings have the right to exist, so do have the natural environment. They believe trees and animals have the right to exist which is implicitly deduced from the moral worth of giving priority for intention or motive of an action.

Deontological ethical perspective focus on the promotion of intrinsic value and offer duty that do not reduce to function over value. Deontological theories sustain a distinctively environmental ethics with its scope extending beyond the interests and concerns of humankind. Yet these theories run into problems of justifying

duty toward those entities that lack consciousness or desire; weighing up, balancing, adjudicating, and ranking conflicting rights; and rendering impermissible actions that seem obligatory in certain situations.

Sikh philosophy underline the oneness of reality which has an implicit extension towards the environmental ethics and defined the environment on the basis of equality which is the most important subject of deontological ethics. The environmental concern of Sikhism underscores the value of non-human environment, too. It claims that since God is immanent to his creation human beings have to protect their environment. One can realize universal soul by remembering God where he is also in non-human environment. For instance non-material things have potential to be conscious beings. Human beings are higher conscious beings and it is the duty of human beings who are responsible to protect the non-human things. Hence, Sikh ethical teaching towards the environment is based on deontological perspective that implies it is the duty of human beings to protect the environment no matter what kind of utility the environment could produce.

Care of the environment without social justice is not possible. Environmental concerns have to be viewed as part of the broader issue of human development and social justice. Many environmental problems, in both developed and developing nations have the greatest impact on the poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalized populations. Therefore an integrated approach is necessary. Sikhism opposes the idea that the human race's struggle is against nature and its supremacy lies in the notion of 'harnessing' nature. The objective is harmony with the eternal - God - which implies a life of harmony with all existence. Striving for a life of harmony, therefore, also implies a life of supporting human rights, social and cultural rights, and the environment – a life that works against injustice towards anybody and anything. (Rajwant, 2011). All life is interconnected. A human body consists of many parts, every one of them has a distinct name, location and function and all of them are dependent upon each other. In the same way, all the constituents of this universe and this earth are dependent upon each other. Decisions in one country or continent cannot be ignored by others. Choices in one place have measurable consequences for the rest of the world. It is part of the same system. The central belief for the concerns of the environment in Sikhism ultimately lies in the preservation of the

environment for its intrinsic values. And environmental Sikhism could be a unique environmental approach which deals with the third option by not objecting both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric approach rather it concerns for the environment by supporting both of them.

In the traditional western ethics the question of value greatly determined to emphasize the behaviours, interest and value of only human beings. It is only for humans who are sentient and rational beings, the subject who can justify and give meaning for moral values. But at the very beginning the philosophy of Sikhism reveals the unreserved and equal value for the non-human environment in the same degree as human beings. However, later in the 1970s when environmental ethicists in USA, western Europe and Australia produced dozens of books, articles along with strong and sound arguments to justify the necessity of ethical concern towards trees, animals, the ecosystem in general, then ethics once made a paradigm shift to give attention for environmental challenges indeed resulted from the recent crisis caused by technological reasons, colonial histories, development practices among others. Hence, I argue that environmental philosophy of Sikhism is a clear shift for environmental ethics from instrumental value to intrinsic value of the environment.

Environmental Philosophy

Environmental ethics is the field in an applied ethics motivated by contemporary environmental crises such as air and water pollution, the degradation of ecosystems, the extinction of species, and soil erosion and became more prevailing field of environmental philosophy as of the 1970s. The basis of environmental ethics is an opposition to the historical anthropocentrism (also called speciesism or human chauvinism and fascism) of traditional ethics, which takes non-human living things and nature as objects of exploitation and as means only to human ends, rather than as ends in themselves. Environmental ethics tries to establish human moral responsibility toward these entities and nature as a whole. It is not simply a branch of applied ethics, but involves establishing a new and distinctive theoretical framework.

In an intention to solve all disputes in the field, there are of course various perspectives to environmental ethics. For instance, weak anthropocentrism accepts that human interest is still primary, but argues that human beings should cultivate an attitude of noble obligation toward the environment. On the other hand, animal-centred ethics, also called the animal liberation movement or zoo centrism, claims that we must extend the scope of ethical consideration from human beings alone to members of all animal species, on the grounds that animals are sentient beings (Singer, 2002) or "subjects-of-a-life" (Regan, 1997). Based on this view, rationality is rejected as the criterion for membership of the moral community. Life-centred ethics or biocentrism, represented by Goodpaster and Paul Taylor, argues that all classes of living beings, including plants as well as animals, should be included in the moral community. For weak anthropocentrism, animal-centred ethics, and life-centred ethics all hold that traditional human ethical theory is sound and with alterations can be applied to areas other than human society. So in this strand of thought human beings have serious responsibility to protect the extinction of animals, species and the natural environment broadly so long as it is vital for the well-being of humans themselves. However, these anthropocentric justification for the concern of the environment looks instrumental. But the most radical perspective to the environment is non anthropocentric which accentuates the intrinsic value of the environment. No matter what would be its use the environment is valuable in itself. Plants, animals, species and mother earth would not ask a permission from human for their value to be maintained. In this respect John Dewey reinforces the necessity of intrinsic value of the environment as; "The goal of a properly environmental ethics is to argue for the preservation of the environment, including other species apart from their resemblance, utility, benefit, recreational value, or other instrumental value to humans" (McDonald, 2004: 26). The other account of environmental ethics argue against the extension of

human ethics to non-human beings and claim that we need a new ethics because human ethics is always shielded with anthropocentric rationale. Furthermore, traditional human ethics is individualistic, while an adequate holistic ethics need to have a concern with the ecosystem as a whole and with relations amongst entities within the ecosystem. Accordingly, the integrity, diversity, and stability of the ecosystem should be the primary standard by which the morality of an action is judged. This holistic approach, and ecocentrism, is sometimes accused of being an environmental fascism. Its major schools include land ethics, represented by Aldo Leopold, J. B. Callicott, and H. Rolston III, deep ecology, represented by Naess, and ecofeminism of Shiva, which argues that the subjection of nature to human beings corresponds to the subjection of women to men and that see the liberation of nature and the liberation of women as aspects of the same process (Bunnin & Yu, 2004).

Sikhism and the Environment

As a religion Sikhism is the very sweeping and inclusive towards the cultures, religions, and in general philosophy of human. Essentially this lenient principles of the philosophy of Sikhism emanates from the teachings of the prominent Guru and founder of Sikhism known as Guru Nanak. When Guru Nanak speaks for the whole of humanity in such a way that 'am not asking you to be a Sikh, but to be a true follower of any religion' implies that Sikhism considers not the actuality of different thoughts but its emphasis is on their potentials to be truthful and selfless to any "community".

Sikhism is the youngest of the major world religions, strictly monotheistic in its fundamental belief, was born in the Punjab in the revelation of Guru Nanak. Again Sikhism is not only a philosophical system but is also a discrete cultural pattern, a way of life designated by the term Sikh path. Sikh now almost universally signifies a follower of Guru Nanak, his nine successors and their teachings embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of Sikhism. Sikhism as a philosophy and way of life hence encompass the religious, social, economic, political and environmental realm of human beings and their life. In not less than the dogmas and doctrines of the religion, the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors directly emphasizes the unreserved concern for the intrinsic value of environment. As the teachings of Guru Nanak is inclusive in its essence, includes question from epistemology to metaphysics and from social and political life to natural environment. Environmental ethics in Sikh philosophy does include both the living and non-living aspects of nature. Guru Nanak's spiritual theory includes all of these aspects of life. All of his social, political and ethical theories emanates from his belief of one God and his nature of omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient. Sikhism determined to the equal treatment of every material and non-material realities of the universe since God sees all of these realities in equal eyes. According to the belief of Sikhism even the material realities are the potential sources of living things of the environment. Therefore, everything in the universe are intertwined and interconnected each other in a way that one does not make sense without the other and this environmental perspective of Sikhism looks religious version of the concept of community as illustrated in Leopold's work the land ethic. God is immanent in his creation. Hence, one has to remember God by being determined in treating the environment so that he can realize universal soul and self-realization. One should serve God by serving nature since he is immanent in his creation. The central belief in Sikhism is that the, one creator permeates all creation. He created 'kudrat' or nature, which is sustained and totally infused by nam. So, the Creator observes creation, and inhabits within it. Both are interconnected. You will find this is something tense especially by the eastern faiths. One cannot help but live in gratitude and respect for the gifts of nature which are marks of God's grace. As a result, the view of anthropocentric ethics culminates and lost its ground in the environmental philosophy of Sikhism. The concept of environment includes not only the physical landscape, but the people and creatures around us. We must upkeep for it, not simply in a mechanical way, but through an assertiveness of love based on 'sarbat da bhalla' or seeking the 'well-being of all'. We must think about the 'ecology' like of our relationships and attitudes towards

each other. Industry creates toxins that pollute the earth, but we also create toxins which pollute the environment of our minds and bodies, through our selfish and ignorant tendencies. And Sikhism underlined on the view that environmental destruction and crisis begins in the mind of human self. When human lost a morally tolerant mind, soon he will began war against nature. Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a generous nature. A human being needs to spring sustenance from the earth; not to deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn or destroy it. Sikhism believes that an awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. A new 'environmental ethic' dedicated to conservation and wise use of the resources provided by a bountiful nature can only arise from an honest understanding and keen application of our old, tried and true spiritual heritage. For God dwells in all creation, including the oceans, mountains, plants, animals, humans, and the universe, we should make an honest friendship and membership to maintain all of the creations. Our purpose on earth is to unite with our creator, by first respecting his creation. Rather than coexisting in harmony with creation, we as mankind have brought corruption and destruction to what was originally considered "wonderful" by God (Atwal, 2002:13-14). Throughout the scripture of Sikhism, we are frequently reminded of God's close relationship to the environment. A concern for the environment is an important part of an integrated approach to life and nature. Because all creation is united by the same beginning and ending, we as believers must have concern for a healthy relationship with the rest of creation. Earth, the sanctuary of the universe, is increasingly being deprived of her value. Although God exclusively created this world for mankind to run-through spirituality, we have drifted away from the ideal to preserve the earth, which is our very temple for salvation. The ultimate goal in Sikhism is to achieve harmony with God, while remaining earth-conscious. Thus, supporting environmentalism is a necessity in order to maintain this world as a spiritual place. To attain a harmony with the creator, you must first achieve harmony with the earth and creation (Ibid, 24).

Hence, the environmental concerns of Sikhism want to address closely the most important questions on the human and non-human environment interactions; for instance how does a Sikh inhale fresh, deep breaths during meditation with increasing haze and pollution in our air? Meditation and other spiritual activities are constrained in a polluted environment. To purify ourselves, we must first purify the environment. Therefore, protection of the air is a necessity. We must diminish pollution so that we may continue on our lane to God. All of creation is charming. Humans need to derive nourishment from the earth. Economic benefits and individual needs are depleting the earth's resources. A sacred relationship with the environment is vital in maintaining a spiritually healthy and ecologically balanced planet (Ibid, 24). God resides within every aspect of his own creation, both material and non-material. By misusing creation, we are destroying that which is sacred. Like Sikhism, concern for animal suffering can be found in Hindu thought, and the Buddhist idea of compassion is a universal one, extending to animals as well as humans; but nothing similar pejorative concept of natural environment is to be found in traditional western morality. This interpretation was accepted by Thomas Aquinas, who stated that the only possible objection to cruelty to animals was that it might lead to cruelty to humans - according to Aquinas there was nothing wrong in itself with making animals suffer (Singer, 1985). Human duty towards animals need not to emanate from universal principle of human dignity and values. However, Jeremy Bentham pointed out "the question is not, can they reason? nor, can they talk? but, can they suffer?" (Ibid). Aquinas argument is merely an account of anthropocentric moral perspective of the west which is imbedded and can be traced even back in classical sophists' thought that value nature is as a means, not an end in itself. In this regard Protagoras used to debated, man is the measure of all things.

The environmental voice of Sikhism is not confined only to human surroundings. In a moral holistic conception of the environment, animals are also have worthy treatment as they are part and parcel

of creation. As a typical holistic environmental perspective, Sikhism deeply concerned with the well-being of animals, too. Killing animals is irreligious. By eating meat, you are killing a soul who is in the process of evolving towards God. Sikhism states that, only he who can give life, has the right to take away a life. So, the person who cannot give a life has no right to kill an animal. It is only God who has the power to grant and end a life as he will. God is the primary connection between all existences. The Earth and universe are sacred elements. Since God dwells in everything, all of creation has intrinsic value. Sikhism defends, safeguards, and fight for the rights of all creatures, for it believes they are living, breathing creatures, trapped and existed in the cycle of rebirth.

By the same token, David Millar makes a similar point when he argues that in some traditional world views, people did not see the earth or nature as individual property or commodity that they can dispose of at will and as they please or wish. This moral view, based on deontological non-anthropocentrism would be found as dominantly a common understanding in many traditional African world views the same as the environmental outlook of Sikhism. The indispensability of intrinsic environmental unease can be accounted by reconstructing the customary and traditional world views of other cultural and religious communities transversely the word like Africa outside the belief of Sikhs.

As Workineh Kelbessa argued out the Oromo peoples of Ethiopia think that the value of the environment lies in intrinsic line. Trees are a source of capital, investment and insurance against hard times. Even though, trees provide the supply of timber, wood and food, peasant farmers and pastoralists are conscious that, when their environment deteriorates their life and future generations of humans will be harmed. In addition to this utilitarian moral boldness, the Oromo peoples also have non-anthropocentric moral defiance, bestowing to Workineh. He argues that, for Oromo people, land is not only a resource for humans' utilitarian ends, but also it has its own inherent value given to it by Waaqa (God). Since God is the guardian of everything in nature, people do not have the freedom to destroy nature simply to satisfy their needs and interests (Workineh, 2014). He also argued that when we look at African world view it encompass environmentally responsive practices and equivalent beliefs. But we do not find indigenous African environmental ethics in written form. So in order to understand indigenous African environmental philosophy, we need to consider their narrations, sayings, riddles and their beliefs so that we can renovate their environmental ethics. When we look at the environmental philosophy of Africans, it is also potential to draw that there is a liable use of environmental resources as an inherent cultural principle as their cultures give a recognition for the right to life of animals as they do for their fellow humans. Here, the fundamental deduction is the African indigenous thought or Asian, primarily the Sikhs of India, both of these accentuates in their traditions and religious views accounts for the intrinsic values of non-human environment, too, as a radical shift from instrumental and anthropocentric environmental philosophy is witnessed as inevitable to all creations of God. Hence, giving deontological emphasis for environment is also advocated by the traditional African environmental ethics. The African tradition is bold to accept the right of the natural species to exist. In addition to the African cultural environmental ethical perspective which placed highest role to ecological conservation such as Sikhism and Buddhism of the dominant Eastern religious tradition are determined cultural resources truly played indispensable role and affirmed the views of intrinsic value of Sikhism in the discourse of environmental ethics. As its closeness to nature, Buddhism also can be described as an ecological religion. Scholars cite many examples from the literary texts in support of this belief. For instance, the first precept which represents nonviolence is repeatedly invoked. The practice of aggressiveness makes all harming and killing a transgression; thus it appears to leave an indelible mark on the treatment of animals and nature in general. Harm to animals and vegetation is viewed by these scholars as objectionable according to the dictates of this precept. According to John Diodo, the 'First Grave Principle is affirm life – do not kill'. What does it mean to kill the environment?

It is the worst kind of killing as with a sick environment would be impossible to adhere a healthy and peaceful life. We are annihilating many species. There is no way these life forms can ever return to the earth once human extinct them. Scholars have noted that the practice of non-violence and compassion are additionally expressed in the Buddha's resistance to the sacrifice of animals. They cite the many occasions depicted in the Nikāyas (Buddhist text/collection) where such sacrifices are severely condemned; alternate sacrifices done with oil, butter and molasses are praised. The practice of non-violence thus serves to reconfirm for them that Buddhism could be regarded as accustomed to environmental concerns in a wholly positive way. Several stories in the collection also convey their discontentment for animal sacrifice and severe punishment for those who indulge in such practices are liberally portrayed. This story ridicules the religious sacrificial practice, carrying the message that misguided notions and greed lie at the heart of such behaviour, the non-violent practice headed for creation rejoices that the life of animals must be protected (King-Tak, 2009). It has been remarked that the detailed list of precepts includes one that forbids injury to seeds and crops. Many scholars draw attention to the major events in the Buddha's life being associated with trees or groves and in this they trace Buddhism's deep connection with and respect for vegetation, too. To use Guru Granth Sahib's interpretation; all of these plants, animals, species are the parts of one body, God.

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh has pointed out that; when we look at the Buddha's pronouncements on water conservation, it is astonishing to see that he actually set down rules forbidding his disciples to contaminate water resources. For example, monks were discouraged from throwing their waste or leftover food into rivers and lakes, and they were urged to guard the lives all living being abiding there. This water is also life giving for wild animals too. The ecological crisis resulted from a spiritual crisis and human moral deterioration that demands that persons question the way they live. Batchelor implies that removing these three poisons would positively contribute to environmentalism. If we accept the thesis that the pollution of nature and the pollution of the mind are facets of one problem, exploring a viable environmental psychology becomes a significant venture. The psychological roots of ecological disaster and recovery are factors very much in the Buddhist context to the search for an environmental ethic. Both these writers imply that by cleansing the mind the environment would be purified (Ibid).

Conclusion

The instrumental value of the environment abandoned by the philosophy of Sikhism resolutely can be reconstructed as a radical theory of environmental philosophy parallel with that of non-anthropocentric environmental ethicists. For Sikhism, humans need to have thoughtful responsibility towards the environment not because it is valuable for humans rather creation is one and God is immanent in his creation. Hence, environmental concern is part and parcel of respecting God's will and that implies purely creation means the creator. Sikhism pays close attention and presumes practical life crises for poor environmental management and conservation. Humans are the highest being with reason and responsibility and aware of the immanent nature of God in his creation. As a result, they have also a responsibility to attain the highest form of self by serving God's creation which obviously includes the non-human factors of the environment, too. Non-violent and responsible approach towards the natural environment is the central argument of environmental concerns of Sikhism. Destructing the environment is the worst kind of irresponsiveness. Authentic humanity and responsibility which excludes the appreciation and service of the other creation of God, the natural environment would be nonsense.

Furthermore; environmental philosophy of Sikhism can transcend the possible refutation regarding the individualistic ethics by its appropriation of holistic type of ethics towards creation. However, traditional human ethics is individualistic, while Sikh ethics concerned with the ecosystem as a whole and with relations amongst entities within the ecosystem as one creation. Sikhism

values purifying the environment as purifying as his soul in service of God and his creation. The teaching of Guru Nanak and his successors remain vigorously active to compact with the value of the natural environment as they did for human to realize the ultimate truth. Sikh's scriptures described God as self-existing, spirit and light, omnipotent, omnipresent, formless, creator and destroyer, just full of love and mercy, it is only God who can destroy and give life for his creation. Hence, human just simply has to serve his creation like only one member of the environment. Sikhism teaches that if humans become greedy and selfish, they will destroy the environment for utilitarian reason. And it is only when human have clean air and environment that they can practice and attain their self-realization and the ultimate truth by contemplation and meditation. Guru Nanak declares without virtuous living there can be no devotional worship and virtuous life. Hence, morality is the basis of spiritual life holiness and altruistic action goes together. The perfect ethical man will always try to care for the environment and help others. In a nutshell, environmental philosophy of Sikhism sought value shift from instrumental to intrinsic which is also backed by some other traditions like the African indigenous environmental ethics and to a strict sense the non-anthropocentric environmentalist.

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