VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM: ONE PLANET ONE EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLE

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Abstract

India has upheld the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", since the times of Mahaupnishadas. The Sanskrit phrase means " the world is one family". This simple phrase embodies the sense of deep ecology and sustainability. One world means all sentient beings are one single being, occupying one single Earth. If education is based on this single principle, the sustainability goals are automatically achieved. This principle highlights the importance of embracing diversity and promoting peace, unity, and cooperation among all nations and cultures. The paper focuses on the argument that in the face of present crisis of climate change the world must unite and different cultures and their respective knowledge systems should partake to the sustainability debate. The indigenous systems of knowledge have evolved out of their respective eco systems and generally based on the principles of reciprocity and caretaking. These principles originate from a profound sense of unity and interconnectedness and lay a great emphasis on the importance of giving back to nature. They definitely offer an alternative perspective on sustainability that challenges the lopsided, exploitative and essentially capitalistic Western view of knowledge which is still embedded in a sense of otherization of nature. The paper points out the need of creating a laboratory for sustainability based on the concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ", that recognises the differences and plurality and celebrates the oneness. A sort of pluralist space in which multiple cultural expertise can interact and mutually enrich each other for sustainability of One Earth, yet maintaining their distinction and integrity. The world up till now has blindly followed and upheld the western knowledge system of scientific research and enquiry, but the recent climate change issues have proved to us that our knowledge system needs an overhauling.A knowledge system which is created on the principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, would be a truly sustainable knowledge system.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge System, Sustainable Knowledge, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Sustainability Goals*

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्। उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्॥

Ayaṃ nijaḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām।

Udāracaritānāṃ tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam॥

This is mine, that is his, say the small minded,
The wise believe that the entire world is a family.

During the past 75 years, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has come a long way from the pages of Maha Upanishad to the rostrum of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and to being a celebrated thought to heal a fractured world. Embracing the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam will help the world to come together as one family. The adoption of the resolution for the International Yoga day by the UNGA with the support of an overwhelming majority of 177 countries is an example of the practice of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' is a Vedantic dictum that appears in the Maha Upanisad (VI. 71- 73). The verses pronounce that it is only the narrow-minded who show prejudice between what/who is theirs' and what/who is others'; while for the upright, the entire world is a family. This exactly is the attitude that we really need to develop if we wish to achieve sustainability goals. We have only one earth as our habitat and we all belong to her. All knowledge that is disseminated world -wide vide various knowledge systems, must adhere to this single purpose of sustainability of ALL LIFE on this Earth. Sustainability is a multifaceted notion that reflects on interconnections and interactions across domains and scales, including the global and the local. It corresponds to the condition under which it is possible to uphold an enduring well-being of (human) communities and societies, by meeting "the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987: 8). New technological solutions and innovations are, of course, needed and valuable but not enough to search for or discuss environmental questions mainly at the policy level, disregarding the root causes of the problems and the complex challenges of sustainability. In fact, there is a direct relation between the current environmental crisis and specific cultural categories and values. It is therefore, important to review the entire western concept of climate crisis, western values of capitalism and indiscriminate destruction of the natural resources in the name of development and progress. Even the concept of sustainable development is a product of Western thinking, and so are the "world machine" metaphor, the dualistic notion of naturalness, and the linear-progressive view of time and history.

Presently, in a number of international bodies and initiatives, there is a growing awareness of the myriad ways to perceive and portray the human–nature relationship, depending on the plurality of cultural settings,

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worldviews, and moral ethical codes. This also amounts to saying that multiple, even non-Western perspectives on sustainability exist in the world. Some of them express ancient traditions and ways of life, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam' being one such way of life, offers a solution to the problem. West is now eagerly looking towards what they term as IK, the Indigenous Knowledge , i.e the knowledge gained by the indigenous people of the world as a result of their constant communion with nature. Many studies like the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), Mazzocchi, 2006; Mistry and Berardi, 2016; etc have brought to the forefront the knowledge of indigenous people in various parts of the globe as a model for a healthy interaction with the natural environment, arisen from a long process of co-evolution between indigenous people and their local surroundings .

We need to create a sustainable knowledge system, in order to survive. Working as independent units, as nations, as communities and as cultures, is not going to be of any use any more, because the Earth demands our attention. With up surging of Climate Change issues, global warming, and threat of mass extinction looming large , Sustainability is not only the need of the hour but the ONLY possible way of survival. In face of this crisis, it is imperative that all the people of the world should come together and create and adhere to sustainable knowledge systems that may help us to save our planet.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainability

There is an inherent treasure of wisdom and information gained over centuries from practical empirical observations transmitted from one generation to the following generations that includes multiple environmental practices, which are linked to cultural norms and social protocols, and those contribute to shaping of the indigenous cultural identity. By means of these practices, which were fully functioning especially before colonization, communities are able to soundly use the environment and to respond and adapt to external changes, while maintaining resilience and the ability to evolve (Berkes, 1999; Gadgil et al., 1993). Although the history of human on earth goes back to very many years before the colonization.

As per Britannica, the term Anthropocentric world view is rooted deep in western religions and ethics. Many ethicists find the roots of anthropocentrism in the Creation story told in the book of Genesis in the Judeo-Christian Bible, in which humans are created in the image of God and are instructed to "subdue" Earth and to "have dominion" over all other living creatures. This passage has been interpreted as an indication of humanity's superiority to nature and as condoning an instrumental view of nature, where the natural world has value only as it benefits humankind. This line of thought is not limited to Jewish and Christian theology and can be found in Aristotle's Politics and in Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. This also inspired the creation of various dichotomies, including the man–nature divide and the portrayal of nature as an "external" reality. Nature came to be conceived as a mere object of exploitation and source of potential commodities, that is, something to be controlled and transformed, with the aid of technology, for productive or progressive or developmental reasons (Haila, 2000). Today's preservationist theories, which conceive human action only as a potential disturbance factor and naturalness as necessarily linked to wilderness, still maintain or even reinforce such a dualistic view.

On the contrary, most indigenous cosmologies perceive everything in the universe as interconnected and interdependent. Nature and the human realm do not constitute separate domains, instead they are experienced with as sense a unity and mutual belonging. This human–nature relationship is usually depicted as symbiotic and based on reciprocity: from the natural environment indigenous people attain their subsistence and autonomy, at the same time contributing to its safeguarding. It may be easier to understand this relationship by focusing on a specific feature, namely the relationship between plants (e.g. sweetgrass) and humans, as described by the Potawatomi (Native North American) scholar and botanist Kimmerer (2013):

With a long, long history of cultural use, sweetgrass has apparently become dependent on humans to create "disturbance" that stimulates its compensatory growth. Humans participate in a symbiosis in which sweetgrass provides its fragrant blades to the people and people, by harvesting, create the conditions for sweetgrass to flourish. (p. 164) Reciprocity is a matter of keeping the gift [from nature] in motion through self-perpetuating cycles of giving and receiving (. . .) Through reciprocity the gift is replenished. All of our flourishing is mutual. (pp. 165–166) Kimmerer makes it clear that reciprocity involves human active participation to the natural cycles. People should learn both how not to take too much—thus exceeding the plants' capacity "to share again"—and too little. It is in the balance point that resides the possibility to achieve a sustainable harvesting, something which corresponds to "the way we treat a plant with respect, by respectfully receiving its gift" (p. 165).

Perhaps a somewhat nebulous concept on the surface, sacredness, from a Hindu perspective, stems from the idea that all of creation originates from the same Divine source, and so everyone and everything, including animals, nature, and even inanimate objects, are permeated by its presence.

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Puurnnam-Adah Puurnnam-Idam Puurnnaat-Puurnnam-Udacyate |
Puurnnasya Puurnnam-Aadaaya Puurnnam-Eva-Avashissyate ||
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||

(1: Om, That (Outer World) is Purna (Full with Divine Consciousness); This (Inner World) is also Purna (Full with Divine Consciousness); From Purna is manifested Purna (From the Fullness of Divine Consciousness the

World is manifested),

2: Taking Purna from Purna, Purna indeed remains (Because Divine Consciousness is Non-Dual and Infinite),

3: Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.)

This sense of Interconnectedness, interrelatedness and reciprocity ("returning the gift") relies on the idea of a genealogical network, where nature is not perceived in terms of resources, but as full of "relatives" (Whyte et al., 2018); where no member of the network is allowed to dominate or is the only responsible for nature—even animals, plants, and physical elements like water or rocks are agents with responsibilities and potential owners of knowledge—and everyone has instead lessons to learn (Pierotti and Wildcat, 2000); where rights and responsibilities are balanced, the latter corresponding to a sense of stewardship (or caretaking, guardianship), which also has a reciprocal nature (Whyte et al., 2016); and where even wealth is understood in terms of the number and quality of relationships one is able to maintain within the network (Wildcat, 2013).

It becomes essential to adopt indigenous knowledge systems for sustainability due to the fact that these systems are based on the principles of reciprocity, interdependence and caretaking. Sustainability discourses aim to address key challenges that the whole world is facing. However, the Western frame of reference—which is one of the main causes of the environmental crisis—still exclusively settles what counts both as a problem and as a criterion for its solution. The Western approach to sustainability, searches for a balance between the social, economic, and environmental requirements of present and future generations. However, such an approach is mainly focused on human well-being and still based on a utilitarian attitude toward nature, which ultimately depends on its being embedded in a worldview of separation. It recognizes the need of a change of direction, but it does not really question leading concepts such as development and economic growth. The main concern is, in fact, that future generations still maintain the same possibilities to exploit the natural environment, even if such exploitation needs a more proper regulation, owing to the intrinsic limits of environmental resources. Taking seriously the principles of indigenous knowledge does not imply their uncritical acceptance, as if they were inherently good. Nor it involves searching for indigenous inputs just for making the Western approach a bit more decent, namely more holistic and receptive. It involves, instead, engaging seriously with the criticism to the common portrayal of sustainability that arises from the principles of indigenous knowledge and considering their potentially groundbreaking implications.

Also, when we try to study the cultural contexts and religious orders, most of the faiths and belief systems postulate that human beings cannot be painted as completely white or as completely black. The human nature is essentially grey – an admixture of good and bad. This phenomenon of goodness admixture can be depicted in terms of innate divinity, basic goodness and intrinsic altruism. Each of the three characteristics, namely divinity, goodness and altruism, as can be noted, are not stated simply – 'not available on platter' - as such. Each characteristic is preceded by an adjective: Innate divinity; Basic goodness; and intrinsic altruism. This means that one cannot expect divinity, goodness and altruism to be manifested in the sayings and doings of human beings as a general pattern. We have, in other words, to put in effort to know what we are, what we can do and how we can do. For manifesting these values for the purpose of sustainability, we shall have to take into cognizance the entire planet and her inhabitants; adopt their sustainable belief systems and reject the non sustainable ones. To achieve this, we require the world view based on the principle of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam.

The idea of putting 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' at the centre of our knowledge system has three fold impact : to become aware that the characteristics of oneness are within us: to believe that these characteristics have potential to be effective; and, to act upon and adhere to these characteristics through suitable sayings and doings for the good of everyone, including all sentient beings on this planet and the planet itself. These three A's, Awareness, Acceptance and Adherence, thus constitute the pivot of the human interface with each other and the environment, accompanied by the consequent positive results. Our interactions for the betterment of the planet should find space in this context of three A's. The polycentric voices of sanity and entire humanity should be able to mutually agree upon a system that changes the focus from anthropocentricism to being one link the chain. The multicultural voices, must move ahead forging new ways of defining sustainability. Having understood the principle of one world , one people, we must move towards one educational Principle.

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