

Research Paper

Vedic Ethics for the World Facing Ecological Challenges

Nisha Zairu¹ and Singh Rasal¹

¹ Ramanujan College, University of Delhi, Kalka Ji, New Delhi, India-110019.

Abstract

The modern Western ethical discourse has been mainly anthropocentric, individual-centric and rights-centric. In contrast, most of the traditional Indian ethical discourses, for example, India, have been non-anthropocentric, community-centric and obligation-centric. These two contrasting ethical discourses represent alternative ideologies relating to the relative primacy of rights and obligations. The discourses about the rights of individuals will lose their meaning if these discussions are not supported by obligation-centric discourses, focusing on human finitude and obligation towards future generations and contemporary living beings, including plants, forests, rivers, mountains and oceans. Thus, we have to recognise the urgency of making decisions at the global level to work together to save the planet Earth from disasters. This paper is an attempt to work out the ways in which the Vedic Ethical ideals can be used to make the world a less dangerous and less insecure place for humanity to live. In doing so, the paper will focus on the need of revisiting traditional Indian ethical discourse for facing and meeting the increasing complexity of ecological challenges for the very survival of various forms of life on our planet earth and attempt to give a solution for it from Vedic ethical perspectives expounded in Vedas such as Dharma, four Purusharthas, Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam, Rita, Tri-Rin etc., essential for a harmonious world..

Keywords: Right Centric morality, obligation centric ethics, human finitude, ecological challenges, Vedic ideals..

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1. Introduction

The modern Western ethical discourse has been mainly anthropocentric, individual-centric and rights-centric. In contrast, most of the traditional Indian ethical discourses, for example, India, have been non-anthropocentric, community-centric and obligation-centric. These two contrasting ethical discourses and approaches represent alternative ideologies relating to the relative primacy of rights and obligations. The western individualistic, liberal ethical philosophy distinguishes between instrumental and intrinsic values but does not provide any appropriate criteria for reconciling the dilemmas of choice between intrinsic and instrumental values. As a result, there is no systemic check on the unrestricted use or arbitrary exercise of increasing freedom, which has become available with the spread of new forms of technology during the last two centuries. It is evident that the unbridled use of new technologies has resulted in a serious threat to human life, biodiversity, and the Earth's ecosystem as a whole. An unprecedented increase of greenhouse gases and carbon levels, spread of viruses and bacteria such as COVID-19 in the environment, is a serious challenge in the form of global pandemics, warming, pollution, infodemics etc., to the very survival of life on the planet. This alarming situation demands from us the need of rethinking about the modern value system, which promotes an unprecedented consumerist and opportunist approach in our thinking about the so-called quality of life.

There are various International and national level conferences,

seminars and workshops organised by government and non-governmental institutions dealing with such ecological issues, and problems in order to raise community awareness regarding the environmental crisis, and our obligatory moral responsibility towards life. For instance, United Nation Climate Change Conferences and Paris Conference for arriving at an international consensus on protecting the environment from global warming and the impending crisis of the life support systems demands from us that we replace the anthropocentric ethics by an eco-centric ethics and take note of human obligation for future human generations, other living beings and life supporting eco-systems. In other words, the discourses about rights of individuals will lose its meaning if these discussions are not supported by obligation-centric discourses, focusing on human obligation towards future generations and contemporary living beings including plants, forest, rivers, mountains and oceans.

The present paper is an attempt to understand the significance of obligation-centric ethics and Vedic ideals for all living beings. Such ethical imperatives are essential to regulate human action and life in time of modernisation and technology, causing serious ecological threat in front of humanity. In doing so, the paper comprehends social conditioning of human's as a member of a cultured and moral society in relation with other fellow beings. We are born with imperfections and certain limitations, but we always try to overcome such conditions by escaping from it, ignoring it or accepting it as our destiny, I try to examine various forms of existential crisis that force us to escape from our finitude, and how we can deal with it by adopting Vedic approach of morality. It is crucial to explore the meaning of being human, human finitude and the transition from natural world/ animal reality to ethical reality and necessity of Vedic perspective. Thus, there is an urgent need of revisiting traditional Indian ethical discourses for

Author for correspondence: Zairu Nisha; zairunisha@gmail.com.

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facing and meeting the increasing complexity of ecological challenges for the very survival of various forms of life on our planet earth. It can be said that the obligation centric morality in the form of Vedic ideals is a significant step to resolve human crisis the world is going through, and is able to preserve human life by perceiving other fellow being as humans, not as tools or means to an end. In doing so, paper explores and employs Vedic ideals such as, *Dharma* i.e., assigned duties, *Vasudhaiya Kutumbhakam*, meaning world is one family, unity in diversity, *Purusarthas*; the four ultimate goals of life and *Rit* meaning universal principles of morality; *Tri-Rin* meaning three debts of human life are essential order to present suggestions for the achievement of a “good” life and, harmonious and peaceful relations among fellow human beings. In Vedic literature, it is clearly underlined that humans are finite in their cognitive capacities and therefore not able fully comprehend cosmic mysteries and, violation of such limitations have resulted in serious critical consequences. In this way, Vedic ideals can show the way to resolve rapidly increasing ecological problems being faced at the global level. By following the Vedic Dharma, i.e. doing rightful and obligatory actions and duties, it may become possible to save humanity and the world from impending disasters.

2. Human Actions and Finitude

Being born, in the biological species known as ‘human species’ is the natural reality or a fact of nature. In this manner, becoming human as a member of a cultural and moral community is an achievement. This transition from natural world to moral community is a distinctive human feature, the very condition which makes us human and separates us from animal world. Animals live their lives immersed in the flow of river of life without awareness of their finitude. These two realms of realities are distinct from each other. The difference between man and animal is aptly stated by Prof. Bhuvan Chandel in her book, *Marxian Ethics: Some Primary Considerations* in these words:

Man proves himself to be a conscious species being by creating an objective world by means of his practical activity. He works up the inorganic nature to prove his conscious species character. Animal also produces but only that which is required immediately for itself or its young. The animal produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. Whereas, therefore, animal produces even when he is free from physical need and only “truly produces freedom.” The animal produces only itself, whereas man transforms and reproduces the whole of nature. (1979, 52-53).

Prof Chandel further quotes, “The animal is immediately identical with its activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness” (52). They are directed by their natural instinct or natural/animal desire and reluctant to move beyond or transcend from their natural or givenness. Alexander Kojève calls it “animal reality” or “thingish Desire” which confines humans into the realm of nature, and seems sufficient for them for their worldly satisfaction. Kojève mentioned that:

The Desire is directed towards a “natural” non-I, the I, too, will be “natural.” The I created by the active satisfaction of such a Desire will have the same nature as the things towards which that Desire will have the same nature as the things towards which that Desire is directed: it will be a “thingish” I, a merely living I, an animal I. And this natural

I, a function of the natural object, can be revealed to itself and to others only as Sentiment of self (Kojève (1969))

Animals satisfy their immediate instinctive needs and wants without reflecting upon their meaning or significance for them. In contrast, humans are governed not only by their animal desire but also they have a capacity to go beyond ‘here’ and ‘now’ and be guided by ‘there’ and ‘then’ in terms of their learnt and acquired ability to articulate their memories of the past and imagination of the future that creates human reality. Kojève pointed out that “the human reality can be formed and maintained only within a biological reality, an animal life... animal desire is the necessary condition of Self-consciousness [autonomous Being], it is not the sufficient condition” (1969, 4). Further he says, “all action is “negation.” Far from leaving the given as it is, action destroys it; if not in its being, if not in its being, at least in its given form” (1969, 4). In this manner, human being is not a fixed reality, but always in the process of becoming, a maker of his destiny. Interestingly, human beings became aware of the various facets of their finitude through their gradually increasing competence for rational reflection on the human condition. As humans, perhaps we are the only living creatures on this planet, may be in the whole universe, who are aware of our mortality, and our imperfections rooted in human lack of omniscience and omnipotence. Simone de Beauvoir in her work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, has talked about the vulnerability and ambiguity of human existence. She has mentioned:

The continuous work of our life ... is to build death. Man knows and thinks this tragic ambivalence which the animal and plant merely undergo. ... As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to mask it (1948, 7).

Beauvoir tries to capture the glimpses of our finitude and its unacceptability in our lives. It is not wrong to say that we want to escape from our conditioning under the cover of immortality and salvation. Beauvoir claimed that “they [philosophers] have denied death, either by integrating it with life or by promising to man immortality. Or, again they have denied life, considering it as a veil of illusion beneath which is hidden the truth of Nirvana” (1948, 8). Sartre called it “*bad faith*”, and Beauvoir named it “ambiguity of human condition”, that coerce us to live an unauthentic life. Likewise, in India, thinkers have realised the fragility and futility of human life and they appeal humanity to transcend from it. Buddha argued for the momentary and transitoriness of the world in these words, “*Sarvam Kshnikam, Sarvam Anatmakam*”. In a similar vein, Adhi Shankara declared the reality of illusory world by saying, “*Brahma Satyam, Jagad Mithya*”, meaning only Brahman i.e., the supreme being, is real and the world is an illusion. We always have to think and act in partial ignorance, weakness and fragility of our will. No wonder, we have to live with the dissonance of the human condition manifested in sickness, untimely deaths and unwanted partings and suffering, betrayals and disappointments, failures and frustrations, successes and achievements, conflicts and harmony, ego centrality, greediness and selfishness, humility and altruism that leads humanity towards consumerism and opportunisticism. The above dimensions of human life, both at the individual and collective levels, make us aware of the need of reciprocal care, love and mutual respect and understanding for coming to terms with the fragility of our life.

Evidently, across cultures and civilisations in ancient times, human

being became aware of the need for morality and moral reflection both prospectively and retrospectively in view of the fact that there are unforeseen and unintended consequences of human actions. It is never possible for us to undo what has already been done, whether intended or unintended, anticipated or unanticipated. Therefore, we need to take responsibility for our actions as they are the result of our choices and decisions. Sartre has also mentioned in his work, *Being and Nothingness* that “man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into this world, he is responsible for what he does”, even if we don’t expect or know it, he is free to make choices in any situation and responsible for what we are. Thus, it is crucial for us to take to responsibility of our actions instead of ignoring them.

In moral reflections, we have to confront and answer two basic questions: i) What should I do?, and ii) Could I have done otherwise? It may be noted that though the first question is a prospective (futuristic) question, and the second is a retrospective (past-oriented) question, both of these questions presuppose an awareness of the possibility of our free choice, i.e. availability of alternative courses of action. With the increasing growth of human knowledge and skills, the advancement of science and technology, the man-nature relationship has got transformed beyond recognition. As we know, in ancient times, human beings were dependent upon nature for their needs and wants, and live their life at its mercy and products for survival. Uncontrolled and powerful forces of nature dominated human affairs into high extend. Almost all cultures created mythological accounts to make sense of the strange ways of working of nature. Various cultural codes and practices, rituals, mythologies, religious scriptures are inundated with mystiques and mysterious methods in view of pleasing nature in the form of supernatural entities as God and Goddesses. In India, the concept of *Shakti* and *Trideva* i.e., *Brahma* the creator, *Vishnu* the preserver and *Shiva* the destroyer are exemplars of such mythological narratives who have the power to regulate and control the cosmos. These powerful iconographies of nature create a sense of fear in human kind. Our human ancestors were aware of it and were keen to avoid the wrath of nature which they experienced in the form of disastrous natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, volcanic eruptions, epidemics and so on. They understood the truth that happiness is transitory and all such calamities would bring misery and suffering for humankind. As Buddha emphasised the inevitable suffering of the world by saying these immortal words, *Sarvam Dukham*. Consequently, the principle of living in harmony with nature was articulated in different ways in various religious traditions to avoid the wrath of nature. *Buddhism* emphasised in the practice of *Panchsheel* in which *karuna* i.e., compassion has a vital role. *Jainism* talked about *Triratna* and gave extra value to *Ahimsa* i.e., non-violence and *Aparigraha* i.e., non-possessiveness of material objects. Islam termed it “Brotherhood” and *Hinduism* announced it *Dharma*. Efforts had also to be made to find ways of reconciliation of conflicts between competing desires in the same individual, conflicts among individuals, conflicts between individuals and the community, and conflicts among communities. This was necessary as the same individual could have various conflicting interest and desires, different individuals having mutually conflicting interests and desires, individuals may not share or accept the goals and / or ideals of their community, or it could be the case that the traditions, life styles and aspirations of different communities were in conflict with one another.

3. Nature of Universal Vedic Perspective

The Vedic seers had propounded the ideals for “harmonious” life by viewing the whole ‘World as one’s own extended family which is mentioned in *Mahopnishad* as “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam*” (6.71-73) that consists of several words: “*vasudhā*”, the earth; “*ēva* - indeed is and “*kutumbakam*”; family (Warrier, 1953). It is further elaborated in the *Mahopnishad* as: Means “one is a relative, the other stranger say the small minded. The entire world is a family, live the magnanimous. Be detached, be magnanimous, lift up your mind, enjoy the fruit of Brahmanic freedom.” (Warrier, 1953, 71-75). Following this, in *Atharvana Veda* (Bandhu, 1960), chapter, Mother Earth – *Maathru Bhoomi* considers the Earth as a living entity, a mother, a Devi or Goddess that serves and protects lands, waters, animate and inanimate elements of the environment. Sanaathana dharma scriptures emphasise giving maximum respect and safety to the environment. Earth is “*Vasu-dhaa*” – one who bears all the elements and beings (*vasu*); Mother Earth is compassionately called as *Mata* (mother) in the *Prithvi sukta* of *Atharva Veda* (12.1.1 to 12.1.63). At another place, *Atharva rishi* (the *drushtaa*-seer of this *sukta*) declares: “This Earth is our Mother and we are all Her children (*maata bhoomih putra aham prithivya*)”. (Warrier, 1953, verse 21) The Vedic rishi prays further to Mother Earth to give him the strength not to hurt Her even when using Her for his living: “Oh, Mother Earth! when we plow your body for cultivation, please let the plants grow well! (*yatte te bhUme vikhanaami ksipram tadapi rohatu*), (thus, Rishi urges to the everyone to not to harm the vitality when we are utilising to serve our lives. (*maa te marma vimrugvari maa te hrudayamarpipam*) ||” *Ruthaavaree* (*n.d.*). In contemporary era, Gandhi has given deep value to nature vs. human relations and the way we need to save and use nature in a balanced proportion. He supported the notion of the world as one family in different words:

We are in new age, an age of emerging world society—one society, that is what is beckoning to us on the horizon. Prophets and seers have spoken to us of one family on earth. We are children of the same parents and therefore, we belong to one family (Subhash C. Kashyap and Abhaya Kashyap, 2007,21).

He further critiques the consumerist nature of man by emphasising that “the earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs but not every man’s greed (Gandhi).” This quote highlights Gandhi’s view that nature has sufficient resources to sustain all of humanity, but unchecked consumption driven by greed will lead to shortages and inequality in the world (Gandhi (1993). In western world, Thomas Malthus has warned society on the issue of consumption in his theory of *Malthusian Crisis*, as he points out that “the earth cannot sustain too many people and that resources will run out unless population growth is brought under control” (Malthus (1798). In this way, it is high time to think about how to balance nature with humans’ consumerist attitude and replace it with limiting our greed with curious responsibility to fulfil our needs. We can find solution in Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya’s idea of “Integral Humanism”, which talks about the significance and importance of “*Sayamit Upbhog*”, i.e., moderate or necessary consumption, which is opposite to the necessary Western materialist and unlimited consumerist approach towards life and social welfare (Sharma, 2024). In this way, these lines of the hymn show that the Vedic seers did not confine their vision to a particular locality or any specific community or individual. They had the vision of treating the entire humanity and the whole world

as a family. In a family, the members see their well-being in the well-being of the entire family. A careful reading of this Vedic Hymn makes it abundantly clear that the Vedic ideals encompass not only the present generation but also the future generations, not only human life but all forms of life, not only the animate world but inanimate nature as well. This insight is reiterated in various Vedic prayers in which natural forces such as water, fire, wind, space, earth, moon, planets, sun, stars, and so on are invoked to bless humanity, and humans are advised to live in harmony and peace with these natural and supernatural forces. The Vedic message is that 'human pursuits of wealth and pleasure must be regulated by *Dharma*, principles of righteous actions and duties, in order to live in harmony with nature and to live in peace with fellow human beings. The classical Indian doctrine of four *Purushartha*, i.e. goals of human life, values pursued consciously by individuals and communities, includes *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha* taken together, it clearly indicates that the doctrine does not neglect or ignore the significance of pursuit of wealth (*Artha*) and pleasure (*Kama*). These two are included among the four goals of human life. However, in contrast to the unbridled pursuit of these goals in the modern consumerist capitalist culture, these two goals do not exhaust the sphere of human activities in the classical *Vedic Purusharthas*. The Vedic seers cautioned that an exclusive pursuit of these two important goals of human life can be a major source of disappointments, frustrations, conflict and violence among individuals and communities. My wants and desires can be in generating conflicts with others and their wants and desires.

To avoid such conflicts, there has to be some method or way of avoiding or resolving possible conflicts. *Dharma* is postulated as a primary pursuit as it regulates the pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama*. It may be underlined that *Artha* and *Kama* are self-oriented and other oriented pursuits for human individuals and communities. *Dharma* is a normative pursuit for regulating the pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama* in order to avoid and resolve possible conflicts which may arise in these pursuits. In a way *Dharma* is the set of principles of conflict - resolution to maintain peace and harmony. It is said that initially there were only three *Purusharthas*, i.e. *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*, which was called *Trivarga*. The fourth *Purushartha*, i.e. *Moksha*, was added later on.

It is worth asking as to why *Trivarga* was considered insufficient and incomplete as a result of which the need of adding the fourth *Purushartha* was recognised. Imagine that an individual or a community recognises the three *Purusharthas* as exhausting the goals of human life. Let us say, I have pursued and achieved my desires for wealth and pleasure to my

complete satisfaction, and that too in accordance with the normative regulations stipulated by moral principles (*Dharma*). Will it make me completely satisfied and to be at peace with myself? A careful reflection on this question will make it clear that the answer will be in the negative. The reason is that I may have many curiosities about myself and the world, not pertaining to production of wealth and pursuit of pleasure, which may remain unsatisfied and be a source of my discomfort with myself and about myself. The Vedic seers had recognised the vital significance of the questions such as How do I know myself? How do I know the world? for understanding the purpose and meaning of human life. In the *Ishavasya Upanisada*, Verse 7, it was pointed out that "He who sees unity in all diversities, he who knows the self as the universal soul is beyond all illusions and sufferings, beyond all losses and gains" Olivelle (1996). For the Vedic seers, the gateway to self knowledge is also the gateway to the knowledge of the

world. They proclaimed that " Knowledge of the Self gives the knowledge of everything !" Perhaps the addition of *Moksha* as the fourth *Purushartha* served to meet this significant human need. As long as I do not know or understand myself, I cannot lead a meaningful life. Self- knowledge is a prerequisite for liberation of the Self from ignorance about itself. It is for this reason that *Moksha* is considered as the highest *Purushartha*.

In contrast to this view of hierarchical order of *Purusharthas*, many interpreters of classical Indian philosophy are of the view that the four *Purusharthas* cease to be *Purushartha* if they are taken not as a constellation but in separation from one another. This is illustrated by pointing out that pursuit of *Kama* alone is lust, pursuit of *Artha* alone is greed, pursuit of *Dharma* alone is mere ritualism and pursuit of *Moksha* alone is escapism. According to this view, these four become *Purushartha* only when they are pursued not in isolation but jointly and coherently. Pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama* along with *Dharma* and *Moksha* is a way of living a harmonious life, without coming in conflict with fellow human beings or damaging nature. But this path is not an easy and a simple path as the possibility of

conflict between *Sanatana Dharma* (universal eternal principles), *Yug Dharma* (principles for an age/ era), *Varnashrama Dharma* (principles for the various classes and stages of life), *Svadharmas* (principles for the Self) and *Aapada Dharma* (principles for a crisis situations) is a constant possibility. It is for this reason that the ethics of *Purushartha* requires to be reviewed and reinterpreted to understand its relevance for the contemporary pluralist world. We also need to consider whether the *Chaturvarga* (i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) of the classical Indian theory of *Purushartha* is adequate to meet the demands of contemporary social life or do we need to think of some new *Purusharthas* for the globalising world.

The classical Indian theory of *Purushartha* has a distinctive feature. It encourages respect for differences and diversity in opinions and perspectives. This is evident from the above mentioned typology of various kinds of *Dharmas*. Instead of seeing moral relativism or moral scepticism in such a typology, as some of the critics of Indian ethics have alleged, it would be better to see a respect for plurality of perspectives in this framework. This framework can be seen to be drawn from another crucial Vedic insight "*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*" which means that Truth is one but wise men say it differently. Perhaps this insight is grounded in an acknowledgement of the cognitive limits of our being human. We can attempt to comprehend the Truth but our comprehension will always be incomplete and partial, hence the diversity or plurality of views. In a pluralist world we have to learn to appreciate that the diversity of ways of life, languages, practices and traditions, foods and garments, technologies and arts is an evidence of richness of human creativity manifested in response to the challenges presented by diversity of nature. We have to learn to preserve this rich human heritage by protecting and promoting it. The greatest threat to this heritage comes from the universalisation of the modern consumerist lifestyle and technology transfers from the so called developed countries to the

allegedly 'developing' countries. The prevailing paradigm of development needs to be questioned from the perspective of *Purushartha* in order to develop an authentic ecological and humanist ethics to guide our lives. We shall learn to treat our planet earth with respect only when we stop seeing it merely as a resource to be used for increasing our wealth and to serve our quest for instant pleasures all the time. We need to come out of

the virtual world and return to the real world which is a moral universe, guided by cosmic moral principles, called Rit by the Vedic seers. The basic difference between the classical Indian Vedic philosophy and the modern capitalist philosophy is that instrumental rationality guides the modern life whereas the Vedic seers laid stress on intuitive moral choices. The intuitive moral choices become possible through a rigorous practice of learning to see the structures of interconnections in the various elements of what we call our cosmos. We have to learn to relate with our fellow human beings and our social and natural world from a holistic perspective instead of dealing with our problems merely in bits and pieces. For this paradigm shift, the Vedic vision of reciprocity can be a useful guide for the contemporary pluralist global world.

4. Ethical Reflections on Ecological Challenges

Problem of human finitude is an inevitable and unavoidable challenge on the face of humanity. The problem sorting out differences and resolving conflicts at different levels has been a perpetual intractable problem with humanity at large. The traditional Indian ethics of *Purushartha: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha, theory of Karma and rebirth, and immortality of Soul* can be seen as moral theories for resolution of the above mentioned conflicts and limits of human life. Although, it is difficult to justify these theories at practical ground, they are valuable for moral engagements. It may be said that the *Principle of Reciprocity* was developed to resolve the perennial problem of conflict resolution as a moral issue. Vedic

ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam* meaning the world is one family is one of the vital steps in this direction. This principle seems to be common to most religious and ethical traditions in India and west; though it has often been articulated differently. All moral imperatives come with huge responsibility. In this way, reciprocity principle can be seen as a principle of moral responsibility, an articulation of moral sensibility which is the very condition for the very possibility of our becoming human and surviving as humans with dignity. The principle of reciprocity stipulates that we take responsibility for our fellow human beings and care for them in the same way, or at least in a similar way, as we would like them to care for us and be responsible for our well-being. In the modern era, this principle was best articulated by Immanuel Kant in his categorical imperatives by saying that human beings can not be used a means to achieve some goals but an end in itself. The reciprocity principle provides the basis and a framework for ethics of obligations. An acknowledgement or recognition of human obligations demands from us that we lead our lives in pursuit of human well being, truth and justice by cultivating the virtues of love, care, generosity, compassion and wisdom. Ethics of obligations is inherently *community-centric* instead of individual-centric as it aims at the well being of the entire humanity. Such a well being is possible only when the collective needs of humanity are given primacy over individual greed, lust and desire. Thus, it can be said that the ethics of obligations is an altruistic and selfless form of ethics in which the other(s) are as important, if not more, as one self. This is an ethics of sharing and caring in contrast to an ethics of acquisition and possession. In India, this ethics of obligations was articulated in terms of *Rinas Trayi* (three debts). The concept of 'self', as articulated and interpreted in the Indian philosophy of mind and morals, was that of a 'relational self' or 'being with other' i.e., a composite self in relation with others. This idea is contrary to the modern western idea of an autonomous,

self- sufficient, isolated, independent, solitary, atomist self. Indian customs and scriptures instruct

that the self has to clear its debts by performing prescribed duties for acquitting it self from the three specific *Rinas* , namely *Deva Rina* (towards gods), *Pitra Rina* (towards ancestors), *Guru Rina* (towards teachers). The discourse of obligations, in terms of acquitting one's debts, takes care of the collective as well as the individual well being without requiring any focus on the rights of individuals and communities.

With the emergence of modern science and technologies in Western Europe, there was a radical transformation in believes and attitudes towards the relationship between nature and human beings, among human beings themselves as communities and individuals. With the new scientific discoveries about the working of nature, particularly in the fields of astronomy, physics and chemistry, and with advancements in new technologies as result of innovations in engineering, chemicals and medicine, there was an increase in the self confidence and self awareness of Europeans regarding human capacities to manipulate and control nature. It is evident that the old Judaic-Christian tradition, though not comfortable with these developments, contributed to the emergence of an instrumentalist view of nature. The secular modern humanism or we can say technological humanism placed man at the centre of the universe. Man was seen as the most superior/ powerful living being in the cosmos. It was as if the 'secular man' or 'technological man' had replaced God. The arrogances of modern humanism was reflected in the mid/ nineteenth century hope and confidence that science has a capacity and is able to will provide answers to all possible questions and technology will provide solutions to all practical problems. However, unfortunately, this strong hope and confidence were misplaced as they transgressed the limits of human finitude.

Methods and tools of measurement, quantifiable observations of qualities and objects had played a very significant role in the emergence of modern scientific studies of nature, both animate and inanimate. Measuring and counting mattered as they pertained to the realm

of tangible and concrete. Human being started seeing and guiding their lives in terms of the scientific and technical ways of dealing with the world. Human wealth and possessions could be counted, measured and accounted for. The objects of human needs, wants and desires could be quantified and enumerated like the incomes, profits and losses in the economic sphere of human life. Individuals were seen and valued in terms of what had or possessed, earned and gained rather than in terms of their abstract spiritual and moral qualities. This new world view resulted in a competitive mode of life in which every individual and community aspired to be free, without any hindrance, to peruse their own interest according to the best of their abilities and skills. If there were any constraints, these were rooted in the ethics of obligations practised in religious traditions or from the policies of the feudal state. To overcome these limitations the new capitalist class articulated the ethics of individual rights which is also a major part of human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights . These individual rights are articulated in terms of i) right to life, ii) right to property, iii) right to liberty, iv) right to equality of opportunity, v) right to practice one's religion, vi) right to equality before law, vii) right to freedom of association, viii) right to freedom of movement, ix) right to freedom of expression of thought, and so on. This *right centric* ethics impose only a singular constraint on the freedom of individuals. An individual has to exercise his rights in such a manner that his activities do not interfere with or infringe

upon the rights of others.

This ethics of rights generated unbridled aspirations among individuals for pursuing and fulfilling their wants, desires and interests. For serving or meeting such aspirations, the methods of production were developed and expanded to meet the ever-growing quantities of objects required to meet the increasing needs of people. Natural Resources were exploited in an unprecedented manner. The Capitalist mode of production, committed to valorisation of capital through maximal profits on investments, encouraged the consumption of new goods for serving its own vested interests. Increase in profits through a continuous increase in

production and consumption became the logic and ethics of capitalist market economy that Karl Marx has indicated in his philosophy of capital. This logic brushed aside all such considerations which the principle of reciprocity demands from us. Presently, we are facing an acute ecological crisis in terms of impending exhaustion of natural resources, acute pollution, global warming, extinction of bio-diversity and increasing inequalities in the use of energy and other natural resources at the global level. During the last few decades, there have been massive famines and natural calamities which are indicative of a serious threat to the very survival of life on the planet earth. The uneven technological, economic and cultural developments have created new areas of conflict among different communities in the world. As a result, there is a critique of consumerism and libertarian individual-oriented right centric ethics from a communitarian perspective. It's being claimed that communities have rights of their own which must be preserved and respected. Community- Rights are articulated in terms of rights of communities over their individual members, and rights of communities to protect themselves from interference or domination by other communities.

The communitarians believe that this shift from the individual centric perspective to communitarian perspective will provide a solution to the critical issues faced by humanity at the global level today. In our view, this is a misplaced hope. The ethics of rights developed in a specific socio-political and historical context. The rise of modernity and celebration of individuality took place at a time when feudal political culture imposed severe restrictions on individuals. During the last two and a half centuries, the struggles for freedom and dignity of individuals have brought about great changes in social life in many parts of the world. People have started raising voice against injustices and violation of their rights and values. However, much remains to be done on this front in many developing countries. But the enormous crisis confronting us today is the unforeseen result of giving primacy to rights over obligations. The rights of future generations will be neither preserved nor respected if we leave a planet for

them without any bio diversity, without any natural resources, with pollution which makes their life impossible. It needs no emphasis that the rights of future generations impose obligations on us to preserve our natural resources, protect the bio diversity from extinction, reduce pollution, check global warming in such a manner that our future generations can live as well as us, if not better than us. If rights of future generations can be protected and preserved only through an acknowledgement of our obligations, and our commitment to respect these obligations, then it would be appropriate to move from a right centric ethical discourse to an obligation centric ethical discourse. We may not have an obligation to preserve our lives, but we do have an obligation not to endanger the life of future generations and other forms of life on earth. We have to relearn to live in harmony with nature and other forms of life to preserve the rights of future generations.

5. Conclusion: Searching for Holistic Perspective of Morality

To that end, it can be said that pre-modern and non-modern cultures and civilisations, particularly Indian and European had rightly understood that pursuit of individual excellence was not possible in isolation. We need to understand the genuine conditions of our lives which is always possible in relation with other. Individuals can grow and develop only with the support and cooperation from others in society. To make it possible, we must acknowledge our obligations centered ethics and obligation towards other fellow human beings rather than indulging in a mere reiteration or assertion of our individual rights. We have an obligation to help and support one another in pursuing our creative potential, talents and skills without any arbitrary discriminations and exclusions. Our primary human obligation is to respect the dignity, autonomy and freedom of each and every human being, preserve biodiversity and protect the planet earth from pollution and ecological crisis. In the present age of science, technology and capitalist culture of consumerism, when spirituality

and morality of Vedic literature is considered as religious dogmas, superstitions and fetishism, we need to understand the true sense of spiritual reasons behind its fundamental ideals. The truth indicates the journey from 'I' to 'We', the extension of man towards perfection and fulfilment as self in relation to others. This highest self-realisation of ego 'I' into 'We' can enable us to open our individual space for the use of collective welfare. Only in such a holistic environment, can human beings learn to exercise their freedom and make their choices fearlessly and righteously. In this way, despite our differences, we will be able to live together harmoniously, peacefully and with cooperation within this pluralistic global world.

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