

3. e.11. Interconnectedness of Environment and Spirituality

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Environment is the natural situation around living beings which affects the existence, growth, development and activities of living beings. It includes both the living and the non-living surroundings in the world. It is the physical and biological surroundings of human species. Man is the most dynamic element in the ecosystem. Spiritually is the state of being spiritual. Spiritual is anything pertaining to God, to God's spirit, to sacred matters etc. Environmental spirituality is an experience of awareness of God's presence and the experience of God's personal love and being in contact with God. This experience is accompanied by great joy, inner happiness and peace. We need a conducive, fertile, supportive milieu in order to sustain our communication with God and to lead a spiritual life for a long time. It is difficult to live a spiritual life in a milieu where no one is interested in spiritual matters. Friends, books, churches, art, music, places are part of an environment that helps us to live a spiritual life. The non-living components of environments like land, water, sunlight; heat, pressure etc. are also supportive.

Human beings are part of the environment and are influenced by it. Certain environments are conducive to the development and enrichment of spirituality. All are, by nature, spiritual. There are hundreds of things in the surroundings, which help us to discover God. Such environments are thought of as the manifestation of God, the Creator. A gigantic river that runs by ; a vast green meadow ; a huge forest with animals roaming around ; birds that sing and fly with tiny wings ; flowers that open with variety of colors ; peaceful dawn that dispels the darkness ; light emerging gradually every morning ; brightly shining sun in the middle of the day ; radiance of the calmly descending sun in the evening spreading beauty in the horizon ; thousands of shining stars at night ; thunder that flashes across the sky ; the plants of the earth and the fishes of the sea ; cold wind in the winter and the pleasant sun in the summer ; clouds that move slowly under the sky ; the mountains, springs, trees, breeze, flood - all these enable the spiritually-minded persons to discover God in the environment. "Lord, the earth lights up as a symbol of your presence. All nature is suffused with your light and life."

For the spiritual persons, all creatures are suffused by divine love. The more they become spiritual, the more any beautiful things appear to them as symbol of God's presence. All things are mirrors of divine love and beauty. They are in reverence, adoration and awe. The beauty of environment touches them. They in turn, pervade and transform their lives, their gestures, word and dealings with others. Such persons protect the environment and keep it beautifying and enriching themselves.

Jesus often made allusion to nature to explain the mystery of the Kingdom of God. He referred to the lake, soil, field, land, farmers, pruning the plant, sowing seeds, crop maturing, harvesting, mustard seed, village, mountains, hills, fishing, asking for bread, and so on. Thus he showed how the body and spirit are interconnected.

Some Great philosophers, teachers, scientists, poets etc. were great spiritual men who discovered God in the environment. For example, the western philosopher Friedrich August Froebel believed in the law of unity that governs all things. He said that God is the ground of all things, all comprehending and the all sustaining Creator..... All things have their origin in the divine unity and the right development of religious feelings depends on the communion of human beings and realization of the metaphysical unity of the universe.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Scientist saw the Omnipresence of the divine in the 'Bread'. The Holy mass was extended beyond the cosmos. The cosmos, for him, was the physical extension of the Eucharist. God indwells in all things. He wrote, "I do indeed touch him – this God- the whole surface and in the depths of that world of matter which confines me through and beyond...All of us inescapably exist in you. The deeper the level in which one encounters you, Master, the more one realizes the universality of your influence.

Some Indian thinkers experienced the interconnectedness of environment and spirituality. For Dr. Radhakrishnan, for example, the ultimate reality was the absolute, Brahman. He said that every human individual has in him an eternal spark, a created element. "All human beings, irrespective of their race, religion, class, caste, languages, nationality, sex, ethnicity, are sparks of the divine. Hence, service to humanity is service to God." Ravindranath Tagore wanted to establish harmony between man and the universe. He looked at 'Mother Earth' as kind, benevolent and generous. As a man develops his relationship with his fellowmen he should develop his relation with nature. God is found in the midst of nature. God reveals himself through different colors, forms, rhythms of nature, God, therefore, desires a close relationship between men, God and nature. Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda believed that God is in all creatures and they also believed in the manifestation of divine perfection in man.