

The Environment and Nature in Contemporary Religious Contexts: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The natural environment of our only living planet is suffering in an unprecedented manner globally from the onslaught of human beings. The environmental crises are now threatening the very fabric of life. The problem is too evident, that has finally caused many religious thinkers to describe the religious view concerning the order of nature. Because our natural world will not only be healed by changes in technology and some kind of social engineering but by rediscovering the sacred quality of nature and the rebirth of man as the custodian of it. It implies the rejection of the modern secular view of nature and its subsequent developments. In this regard, this paper tries to reformulate the traditional views of nature and environment held by various religious traditions including Indic religions, far eastern religious traditions, and Abrahamic religions. It defines the Divine Origin of all things. Through comparative study, this research motivates human beings to find sacred nexus in creation and develop a harmonious relationship with nature. This essay also encourages them to preserve the environment for future generations.

Keywords: Nature, Environment, Sacred, Profane, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Introduction

According to environmental wisdom, renaissance philosophy of humanism promotes a radical separation of man from nature and environment. In the view of Renaissance philosophers like Rene Descartes and Pico Della Mirandola, man is the master of his destiny and nature is there to fulfil his desires. This view of human superiority over nature and environment made him a cosmic destroyer and vagabond. This western view of secular understanding of nature was spread around the entire world through colonization.¹ Furthermore, in 18th century, the Industrial Revolution of United States also cause many environmental crises like deforestation, desertification, lack of biodiversity, water, air, and soil pollution etc. These crises gradually encompassed the entire world and altered humanity.² In the current scenario of environmental crises, the eco-scholars of all religious tradition suggest revising the sacred dimension of nature and environment in the mind of modern secular man for sustainability of earth and its life bearing resources. Because we are aware that religion has played a central role in directing man-nature relationship throughout history. Almost all religious scriptures address the issue of creation of the earth and the purpose of human existence in different forms to save earth from catastrophe. As for as present environmental crisis are concerned, the responses from the world's religions were slow at first, but they have been steadily growing over the last twenty-five years of twentieth century.

In 1975, at the fifth Assembly of the “*World Council of Churches*” in Nairobi, they began to address growing environmental challenges. In 1979, a WCC conference was held at “*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*” for preservation of nature. In 1983 WCC Vancouver Assembly reviewed the theme of the previous Nairobi conference and included “*peace, justice and the integrity of creation*”. Another conference of WCC at Canberra extended these ideas with the theme of “*holy spirit renewing the whole of creation*”. After this conference, the theme of WCC became “theology of life”. It has brought theological reflection to solve ecological crisis. At the time of “*UN Earth Summit*” in Rio, the WCC facilitated a gathering of Christian scholars

and write a letter to the Christian churches to pay attention on pressing eco-justice, ecological sustainability and common good for all creatures.³

Apart from the contributions of Christian churches through organizing the major conferences, various religious movements and interreligious meetings have emerged concerning the environmental issues. In 1984, interreligious gatherings were held in Assisi under the sponsorship of the “*World Wildlife Fund*”. In 1993, the “*The Parliaments of World Religions*” was held in Chicago. In 1999, it was also held in South Africa both emphasized on global environmental ethics and human rights. Since 1995, the “*National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE)*” in United States, has organized Jews and Christian scholars around the problems of environment. A critical “*Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC)*” has been working in England. In August 2000, a historical gathering was held at the UN for the “*Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders*”, more than one thousand religious leaders participated in it to discuss the issues related with human-earth relationship.⁴

From 1996-1998, there was intensive conference series named “*Religion of the World and Ecology*” held at Harvard Divinity School to observe the different dimensions of earth-man relationship from world religious traditions. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim were organizers of these conferences. Seven hundred scholars had joined them. All of them recognized the fact that religions are pioneer of shaping the worldview of man and now religions are poised to contribute to the current environmental crisis by providing ethics that were based on the sacred scriptures of their religion.⁵

Since 1990s, an ongoing forum on “*Religion and Ecology*” there are very welcoming series in world religions and ecology that are published by the center for the “*Study of World Religions*” at Harvard Divinity School. It includes: “*Judaism and Ecology*”⁶ “*Christianity and Ecology*”⁷ “*Islam and Ecology*”⁸ and “*Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth, Buddhism and Ecology*”. These books cover several areas: beliefs and traditions, environment doctrines and practices, challenges, and responses. In general, these books highlight both doctrines and actions to provide environmental

conservation and sustainable development. Indeed, all religious worldviews have potential to allow principles for addressing new ecological circumstances of present-day. Based on sacred scripture of religions and contemporary literature, this paper is going to answer certain questions: What is the significance of nature in sacred scriptures of all faiths? And how do they relate environment to Divine reality to demolish the profane view of nature? By adopting the descriptive and comparative method, this inter-religious research presents a prismatic view of the actual and potential resources rooted in Islam and Hinduism, and to interpret the eco-religious understandings of prominent scholars of all faiths to create mutually sacred understandings of universe to sustain man-nature relationship in 21st century. This study motivates human beings to divert their negative destructive attitudes into positive constructive ones to avoid future catastrophes and to ensure the sustainability of earth and its life bearing resources.

The Indic Religions and Order of Nature

The Indic religious traditions are originated in the Indian subcontinent, sometimes also termed as 'dharmic' religions. This paper focuses on Hinduism and Buddhism, two religious traditions that constitutes the fundamental pillars of Indic religions in its classical formulation. It explores their concern about the order of nature and describes how both traditions took sacred view of universe.

Hinduism

In Hindu sacred scripture, the word "dharma" is used to describe the Hindu religious thought. It is recognized as "*religiously sanctioned ways of life and obligation*".¹⁰ More precisely, dharma can mean "*cosmic order*" or "*behavior in accord with the law of the cosmos*". Thus, Hindu religion is often referred as "Sanātana-Dharma"¹¹ the eternal religion of Hindus, it prescribes a complete code of behavior and a way of life. It organized the relationship of mankind with earth and its components to maintain ecological balance. However, there are certain fundamental beliefs in Hindu scriptures which establish sustainable relationship between man and nature. These are the following:

The “Purusha Śukta” describes the unity of creation. Purusha, as being the first principle of creation, has created everything without any distinction between animate and inanimate. Hence, all diversity on earth originated from a single divine principle which clarifies the unity of all creatures without discriminating the other.

Hinduism describes the unity of creation which sees earth, man, and Brahman as one. It does not separate them from Divine. As it is stated: *“how the one Sat became many, how what we call the creation, what they call emanation, constantly proceeds, and returns to it... the whole creation, the visible and invisible world, all plants, all animals, all men are due to the one Sat, are upheld by it, and will return to it.”*¹²

Therefore, Advaita-Vedānta’s philosophy of “oneness of existence” presents “anthropocosmic” worldview. As Shankara says: *“Therefore it must be remembered that whenever we talk of creation, we do not mean real creation; we mean only a phenomenal appearance of Brahman due to Avidyā and this creation-appearance is real only as long as Avidyā lasts. When Avidyā is removed by right knowledge, God, the Ruler, Soul, the Enjoyer, and World, the Enjoyed, all are merged in the Highest Brahman.”*¹³ This philosophy of “oneness of existence” addresses the relationship of man and nature from the very root of existence. Earth/environment or nature and man are created by God and identical with Him so this phenomenal world including all its resources and man are equal partner in this life cycle. Hence, treated with such reverence.

Hindu scripture suggests that the phenomenon of earth is extremely sacred and not profane. It is intertwined with basic religious beliefs in Hinduism. It considers earth as the manifestation of Goddess and even the Vedic gods are worshipping her as a mother: *“The mother is the Earth whose surface Agni licks.”*¹⁴

Hindu tradition describes numerous myths and rituals for the reverence of earth and its resources like mountains, oceans, rivers, forests, plants, animal species and birds etc. despite Hindu concerns for nature worship, we observe its natural resources are under exploitation. This led several scholars to

describe the man-nature relationship from sacred scriptures of Hinduism to conserve earth and its diversity against catastrophe.

Mahātmā Gandhi a prominent thinker of twentieth century India is also considered as the pioneer of the emergence of the modern environmental movements. The concept of environmental degradation, conservation, protection, sustainability, and survival, on which modern environmentalists are embarking upon, were inherent in the ideology of Gandhi. He also said: *“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.”*¹⁵ This saying of Gandhi shows his underlying philosophy behind the limits of consumerism of earthly resources. He advised humanity to adopt proper behavior toward them and not misuse them.

Vandana Shiva is a female Hindu environmentalist and working for sustaining the eco-friendly relationship between earth and man. Regarding the protection of earth, she said: *“I evolved the concept of Earth Democracy on the basis of my philosophy and practice that we are part of the Earth, and human freedom and human wellbeing depends on other species. We are not superior to other species; we are inter-beings. Anthropocentrism is a violent construct.”*¹⁶

Sunder Lal Bahuguna was another renowned environmentalist of Hinduism and leader of “Chipko Movement” in 20th century. Although the Chipko Movement was a forest conservation initiative held in 1730, but it was shaped in 1973 by Sunder Lal who inaugurated modern environmentalism in Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. His movement actively started fight against deforestation and killing of wild animals.

Dr Pankaj Jain is environmental activist of Hindu tradition, who wrote a very famous book *“Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability”*. Throughout his work, he tried to connect “religion” and “ecology” because religion in form of “dharma” is not separate from modern concept of ecology which is strongly practiced by the traditional communities of Hinduism. For them, their “dharma” implicitly includes environmentalism.¹⁷

Ranchor Prīme is a prominent religious environmental scholar of Hinduism. Indeed, he is the first to contribute on Hindu concept of ecology on global level. He wrote a famous book on *“Hinduism and Ecology”* and a director of *“Friends of Vrindavan”* in India and Britain. Through this project, he practically saved the pilgrimage place of Vaishnavism against environmental crisis. He writes about the nature of crisis that *“for nearly two hundred years Indians have been estranged from their own culture by English education. They have been encouraged to think in Western ways and to value the things which the West values. Their own traditional values have been marginalised. In many cases they no longer know what those values were or why they were held because those things are no longer taught”*.¹⁸

Buddhism

The Buddhist tradition stands on the doctrine of “non-violence”. The very first percept relates to the concept of “ahimsa” based on the idea of *“do not harm others”* including humans and all earthly objects. Buddhism also teaches human beings to care and respect earth and its entities. The relationship between Buddhism and nature originates from Buddha’s life and teachings. He spent all his life’s major events among the forest and tress became the most sacred symbol. The man-nature relationship in Buddhism originates from the insights of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment. It is described that when he sits under the Bodhi tree for meditation, he explores the cosmos within himself. It means that Buddhism also presents the ‘oneness of existence’.¹⁹

During that meditation, Mara (the king of demons), challenged Siddhartha Gautama to provide a witness to his worthiness for attaining enlightenment. Then Bodhisattva pushed forth his hand and touched the earth. He invoked the earth who observes and remembers every event that emerges on her vast body. In response, the earth personally dispersed Mara’s armies through her shaking tones. In so doing, she provided a peaceful environment to Buddha for attaining full spiritual awakening.²⁰ Buddhist scripture, Lalita Vistara narrates this event and calls earth as goddess: *“The goddess of the earth, surrounded by a retinue of a hundred times, ten million earth goddesses, Revealed the upper half of her body, adorned with all its ornaments, and*

bowing with joined palms, Spoke thus to the Bodhisattva: Just so, Great Being. It is indeed as you have declared! In truth, you are the purest of all beings”²¹

This commendation of earth shows that the enlightening progress of Shakyamuni was not solely a contemplative achievement, but it was intensely rooted in the value of his earthly journey over many lifetimes. Only one can achieve enlightenment when he has shown gratitude and compassion toward all that lives on earth. The earth-touching gesture of Buddha depicts the significance of earth and its objects, it also warns human being to adopt careless, irresponsible, and flighty attitude toward the environmental and earth. Apart from the scriptural view, religious scholars of Buddhism are also speaking for protection of human-nature relations. The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet has spoken on the importance of environmental protection from Buddhist tradition since he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.²² He said: *“Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it.”²³*

The environment and Nature in the Far Eastern Religions

The far eastern religions are including Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. These religions have direct concern for environment and nature. These religious traditions have produced the most profound doctrines about the order of nature.

Taoism

This tradition is referred to the philosophy of Lao-Tze and Chuang- Tzu. According to the Tao Te Ching, this religion has special concern with the world of nature. It is based on the idea that behind this phenomenal world and everything in it there is one fundamental principle or the way of Tao. It gives rise to all existence and governs everything. Heaven, earth, and the myriad of beings originate from Tao. As it is stated in Tao Te Ching asserts:

*“The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be defined is not the unchanging name
Non- existence is called the antecedent of heaven and earth*

*Existence is the mother of all things.*²⁴

Therefore, Tao is the principle of harmony and order. It is also an unchanging principle of all that changes in universe.²⁵ The purpose of human life in Taoism is to live according to the doctrine of Tao, harmoniously, passively, and calmly, known as 'wu wei'.

Confucianism

In neo-Confucianism, we can discover the most profound exposition of the order of nature. The I-Ching, T'ai Chi, is considered as the origin of this phenomenal world. As it is observed by Chou Tun-I,

T'ai-Chi generates yang through movement. When its movement reaches its limit, then it becomes Serene. In the state of tranquility, the T'ai-Chi (great ultimate) produces yin. After the stage of tranquility, activity started again for more production. Later, the five elements like water, wood, fire, earth, and metal are produced by the union of yang and yin. Ch'I (five material forces) are distributed in harmonious order, then the four seasons are generated...²⁶

There are two concepts that arise in neo-Confucianism during twelfth century such as ch'I and li. According to Chu Hsi, li is the order or nature of a thing while ch'I is the physical object itself structured by li. Li and Ch'i are the fundamental constitutive elements of everything. Moreover, T'ai Chi is the principle of each and everything and the li of the universe.²⁷

Neo-Confucian scholars as Chang-Tsai and Ch'eng brothers described that the principle li is one and its manifestations are diverse. Therefore, the universe being a single body, all people and other creatures are a member of a family. Because everything is governed by the same order and harmony.

Therefore, far eastern religions present unity of creation. They present several interpretations of a single divine principle that governs humans and all other objects in the universe.

Shintoism

It is the religion of Japanese, the word 'Shinto' means 'the way of kami' or spirits and the power of harmony. It is based upon the doctrine of kami, that means spirits are governing the universe or the world of nature. These spirits are responsible for the order of creation and harmony.²⁸

This tradition also emphasizes the mystical significance of beauty in nature. It identifies the order of nature with beauty. Therefore, this natural world is displaying that beauty everywhere. This spiritual understanding of Shintoism is manifested itself throughout Japanese history and in their art.²⁹

The Abrahamic Religions and the significance of Nature

Judaism, Christian and Islam are belonged to Abrahamic monotheisms. They have belief in the same spiritual universe that is created and governed by one God. Their sacred scriptures address the whole of creatures not only man and women. In this regard nature also participates in the revelation of these three religions.

Judaism

Genesis chapter one and text twenty-six one explains about dominion of mankind in following words: *“And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”* Text twenty nine explains the subservience of creation to mankind as: *“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.”*³⁰ This texts states that the earth and its resources are subservience to human beings for their comfort and nourishment. Many earthly creatures are mentioned by name to make a healthy human existence on earthly planet. Which is mostly understood as anthropocentric view of nature in Judaism. In fact, the concept of human creation on the image of God shows the principle of responsibility toward natural resources.

Psalm 24 notes in its first text that: *“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof,”*³¹

The ownership of earth is in the hand of God. The duty of human beings is to care and utilize their objects in a sustainable way and to preserve them for future generations. This dramatic assertion means that any act damages our earthly planet is offensive and forbidden against the property of God.

Rabbi Ishmar Schorsch of Jewish tradition has made numerous statements on the critical situation of environment. Since 1988, Rabbi Warren Stone tried to solve present environmental problems from religious perspective in the Washington, D.C. He is also the founder of the “*Central Conference of American Rabbis’ Committee*” on the Environment, and co-chair of the “*Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation.*” He remained very active in protecting the environment from exploitation. Norman Habel, an editor of the “*Earth Bible*” talks about severity of environmental crisis that; “*It’s very clear now that more and more people see the crisis of the Earth and the crisis for our planet as being something that we all must face. It’s not something that we can ignore.*”³²

Christianity

In some way, Christian tradition also believe on sacredness of creation, as the text of Colossians states: “*Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.*”³³ This text states that all worldly creatures are created by God through Jesus Christ, including earth and its components. It means that all creatures of this phenomenal world are sacred. It indicates that the objectives of earth should be treated with respect and utilize for human nourishment and comfort through fair means.

According to the text of “*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*” taking care of the environment makes revelation of God clear for human beings. “*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*”³⁴ This text states that observing nature is part of the revelation of God to mankind. It indicates that taking care of the earth and its resources makes God’s revelation clearer for us. In somehow, this creation is signs of God to understand accurate meaning of His revelation. It means that the Christian scripture also believe on the protection and preservation of nature and its resources.

John Cobb is a theologian from Christian tradition, he extensively spoke on ecological issues from 1969 onward. He tried to solve recent environmental crisis from theological perspective of Christian tradition.³⁵ Pope John Paul II has also spoken for environmental protection. He argued for the reverence of all creatures in the following words: *“respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of Creation”*. His student, Benedict XVI, also speaks about protection of natural resources of earth. He said: *“The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilized simply as we see fit, rather, it is part of God’s good plan.”*³⁶ Some evangelicals are also concerning the environmental dimensions of Christianity, like Luis E. Lugo, the director of the *“Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life”* also talks about the sensitive issues of environment. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, says: *“Crime against the natural world is a sin”*. He also said: *“to protect the oceans is to do God’s work, to harm them, even if we are ignorant of the harm we cause, is to diminish His divine creation”*.³⁷

Islam

Islam has explored the relationship between man and environment under its worldview “Al-tawḥīd” and favoring a balance approach (Mīzān) that permits their harmonious co-existence. The Qur’an and Hadith provide guidance for believer to sustain a respectful and healthy relationship with other creatures of Allāh SWT. Indeed, Islam is one of the most eco-friendly religions of the world. Islam describes Tawḥīdic centric worldview. Tawḥīd clarifies the relationship between God, human and earth. It is a general view of reality which is characterized in duality, Creator, and creature. The believers must accept that Allāh SWT as only one God and He alone is the creator of the whole universe and every existing thing. His attribute “Al-Khāliq” describes that He is only creator, and His creation (Khāliq) is a unified whole.³⁸ The Holy Qur’an states:

﴿اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ﴾³⁹

Qur’an depicts the human-earth relationship in following verses:

﴿وَالِىٰ تَمُوذَ اٰخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ اِلٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ هُوَ اَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْاَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تَوْبُوا اِلَيْهِ اِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيْبٌ مُّجِيْبٌ﴾⁴⁰

“And to Thamud (people We sent) their brother Salih. He said O my people! Worship Allāh: you have no other God but him. He brought you forth from the earth and settled you therein, then asked forgiveness of Him and turn to Him in repentance. Certainly, my Lord is Near (to all by His knowledge), Responsive.”⁴¹

This verse states that the earth is a temporary gift to man for his worldly living. Another verse also states that Allāh Almighty made man a custodian on earth.

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾⁴²

“Just think when your Lord said to the angels: Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent on earth, they said: will you place on it one who will spread mischief and shed blood while we celebrate your glory and extol your holiness? He said: surely, I know what you do not know.”⁴³

The Qur’an also describes the limits of human consumption of natural resources of earth. As cited in the Qur’an:

﴿كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْنُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ﴾⁴⁴

“Eat and drink of what Allāh has provided and do not spread disorder on the earth”⁴⁵

Moreover, Muslim eco-theologians of 20th century have contributed much more on the Islamic view of earth-man relationship in response to increase concerns over the future of our home planet Earth. Seyyed Hossein Nāsr, a prominent eco-scholar of Islam who was the first to address the environmental crisis from all religious traditions in general and from Islamic perspective. He has been speaking about the crisis our earth is facing today since the mid- 20th century in the west. The following citation is the core of environmental crisis in Nāsr thought: *“the environmental crisis was in fact the result of a spiritual crisis within the soul of modern man and not simply a result of bad engineering.”⁴⁶* After recognizing the earth crisis globally, he appeals to solve them collectively in the light of all major religious traditions of the world. He says: *“A need exists to develop a path across religious*

*frontiers without destroying the significance of religion itself and to carry out a comparative study of the Earths of various religions”.*⁴⁷

Furthermore, Nāsr discusses the characteristics of man and his relationship with earth in philosophical way. He describes that the purpose of creation for God is “*come to know ‘Himself’ through His perfect instrument of knowledge that is the Universal Man*”. Man by virtue of his theomorphic qualities, he was given the right of domination over earth. He was depicted as the “image of God” on earth in medieval cosmology. In Nāsr view, man’s active participation in the spiritual world made him as a “channel of grace” for cosmos. There is another leading figure of Islamic ecology who contributed much more to conserve the natural resources of earth theoretically and practically.⁴⁸ He has written so much to describe Islamic perspective on earth-man relationship and created the IFEES organization to spread ecological awareness all around the world. Khālīd presented solution of current environmental crisis through returning toward the Qur’anic principles of our relationship with the divine order while saying that: “*A return to some form of equilibrium requires of us an understanding of our relationship with the divine order and these are four major principles (tawḥīd, fitra, Mīzān, and khilafat) in Islam which we may draw from to help us deal with the present crisis*”⁴⁹

Another contemporary figure of Islamic environmentalism is Mawil Izzi Dien who viewed environmental crisis in Muslim countries as the impact of modern industrial culture. He says about the solution as: “*Industrial concepts, which have not recognized spiritual or ethical values as commercially significant, have led to a severe cultural rupture that has taken the human inhabitants away from the earth that supports them. The proposed solution is to go back to the traditional Islamic relationship between humans and the earth, and between humans and the other elements of the ecosystem.*”⁵⁰

Harfiyah Abdel Haleem is also a leading environmental activist. She says: “*Islam is one of the few world religions still strong and vigorous enough to reinstate worldwide a vital, but almost vanished reverence for creation.*”⁵¹

Conclusion

The previous discussion has explored that nature and environment is ordered and willed by Divine Principle, a view that has challenged by modern Western science and philosophy. It is replaced by them with another view of nature that has divorced from sacred dimension of universe and everything in it. Its consequences have spread over much of the globe and resulted in various crises our natural environment is facing. In this respect, the eco-religious understandings of contemporary religious scholars are remarkable to demolish modern secular view of nature. Their return to primordial or sacred scriptures for the solution of environmental crisis is more relevant to dealing with these current environmental issues.

In this regard, the above discussed religious traditions present the concept of non-duality which states that human beings and their environment are two aspects of a single reality. The Indic religious describes '*Brahman and universe*' as one, Buddhism presents '*oneness of existence*' as Buddha saw whole cosmos within himself during enlightenment. The Chinese religion like Taoism also finds unity of creation in the form of '*Tao*' the principle of order and harmony. Confucianism also speaks about T'ai Chi as the origin of this phenomenal world or the principle of natural order. Furthermore, the Shinto doctrine of kami describes that spirits are responsible for the order of creation and harmony. Indeed, Indic religions and far eastern religious traditions present unity of creation. They present several interpretations of a single divine principle that governs humans and all other objects in the universe.

Moreover, the Judaism, Christian and Islam are belonged to Abrahamic monotheisms. They have belief in the same spiritual universe that is created and governed by one God. Their stance is quite opposite to that of Indic and Far eastern religions. In Abrahamic monotheisms, nature, environment, and man are God's creation hence are not one with Him. Creation is sacred act of God; therefore, this phenomenal world is sacred and is not profane to be exploited.

The ownership of environment and nature by Divine Principle or by God states that it is the duty of human beings to care and utilize natural resources

in a sustainable way and to preserve them for future generations. This dramatic assertion means that any act damages our earthly planet is offensive and forbidden against the property of God. Indeed, all religions describe eco-friendly relationship between man and nature. They support their peaceful co-existence and their basic rights of living and flourishing.

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