

Environmental Conservation Through Yoga Practice and Its Relevance to Contemporary Society- A Stud

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, environmental conservation is being discussed in various platform considering the endanger of environmental pollution and hazards to the human community and other beings. Environmental impact is increasing by natural disaster as well as human activities in the contemporary society. Every religion in the society has very much environmental concerns and ecofriendly philosophy in their doctrine through describing cosmology, creation theories, interconnectedness of the gods and the nature, creatures and human. Moreover, yoga has eight ethical principles to stimulate human activities and safeguard the environment. By this means religions and yoga preserve the natural environment. Humankind is spiritual, their negligence, failure of following the religious faith rightly and busy with their day to day activities also triggers them to exploit and pollute the natural environment. The yoga is one of the ancient religious wisdom. now practicing yoga has been becoming viable means to console human mind, physical fitness and happy life in the busy society. Protecting environment, in the sense of yoga, has not been communicated to the present world by the researchers even many research carried out regarding the environmental conservation in various dimensions. Therefore, this research aims at identifying the yoga practice and demonstrating the yogic perspective of the environmental conservation and recommending the basic principle of yoga to stimulate and to simply observe the yoga in their life. Thus yoga practices will lead the individual for the attitude and behavioral change and control the adverse effect of human activities on environment. This research hypothetically analyzed data related to the literature on yoga sutra, textbooks, journals, research articles on environmental issues, and reached the conclusion that practicing yoga comparatively would be a useful mean to minimize the environmental hazards due to the human activities and optimizing the environmental conservation through changing the individual mind set.

Keywords: Yoga Practice, spirituality, environmental conservation, humankind, nature, ecofriendly, cosmology, creation theories. hazards.

1.Introduction:

Environment is itself includes various components such as non-living organs and living organs including the human beings. Today what we understand as environment is biological and ecological environment. The natural environment has plants, animals, human being and microbes as their living things- the organism- the biota. It includes every aspect of the universe. It will explicit through the definition as “Environment is sum total of water, air, and land interrelationship among themselves and also with the human being other living organism and property. Environment is the combination of all physical and organic factors that act on a living being, residents, or ecological society and power its endurance and growth” (Bron Taylor, (2005).

The above mentioned environment as a whole must be protected by the people for the betterment of the future generation therefore United Nations declares as “the natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate” (Steven C. Rockefeller (1996).

Conservation is defined as the “management of human use of the biosphere” (IUCN (1970). Thus conservation is positive, embracing preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization restoration and enhancement of the natural environment. Therefore, conservation has become as one of the prominent issues in the global trends. Organizations, such as World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) worldwide, are working in a systematic way to face the environmental challenges. And the United Nations declares many declarations and policies to safeguard the environment such as environmental and sustainable development law field, including the Stockholm Declaration (1972), World Charter for Nature (1982), Rio Declaration (1992). In addition, there are a lot of conventions made to protect the environment, such as International Trade in Endangered Species (1975), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), and The Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). Those conventions still in force for the protection of environment and sustainability. (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index>). In the meantime, the environmental concerns in Sri Lanka have been started in 1980 and the organizations such as the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources prepared and working with the National Environmental Policy and Strategies and it came along with the latest in the series of NEAP named “Caring for the Environment 2003 – 2007 (CFE-I) - Path to Sustainable Development” The National Environmental Policy for the environmental conservation. (http://www.environmentmin.gov.lk/web/pdf/annual_reports/Book-1.pdf)

At the same time the environmental pollution, in the present society, has been increasing by the human activities such as cultivation, industrial development, new settlements, urbanization, deforestation etc. Money economy and the capitalistic ideology are also directly influencing and increasing the consumerism. Human values and the ethics have declined in the society. Greedy leads to consumerism and it causes for over exploitation of natural environment. Almost other means for overcoming the global challenges except spirituality are merely helpless. It is believed by the scholars that the religious and ethical means are reliable rather than the modern scientific and socio economic means to control the environmental exploitation and eventually the pollution.

2. Research Problem

Spiritual teaching, in the society, have emphasized the environmental conservation idea through their own creation theory, cosmological ideology and the faith, ethical code, and morality, interconnectedness of human and nature, some have identified the nature with God, human, as part of the nature, has moral obligation to preserve the nature. Nature is endowed with spiritual value. But the human activities caused for hazards and its effects on the environment instead of conserve.

3.Objective of The Research

The main objective of the research is:

To identify the ethical limbs of Astanga yoga

To demonstrate the code of practices of yoga

To relate and interpret the yoga limbs and environmental conservation

To motivate the yogic ideas and practices in the day to day life.

To create the environmental conservation awareness especially among the younger generation.

To suggest the authority to incorporate the yogic ideas in their system

3.Research Methodology

Primarily resource has been obtained from the relevant religious texts, books, encyclopedias, and the data from the Scholarly research articles, environmental conservation reports and others and e- resources also included in the research. The research is intended to carry out through related literatures. Textual analysis is made.

4.Background of The Research

Among the god's creatures, human is only created with virtue and human have free will and freedom, therefore, the human is only one challenge the God designs (creation), when human do so nature also will be affected by the human weakness and consequently the ideal equilibrium between human and nature vanish.

The science and technological development and human centered/ anthro- centric domain attitude towards the environment leads the human to exploitation in the environment. That self-motive is increased by the industrial and technological revolution. Thus the man has become as self-centered, selfish, and greedy. The United Nations' Millennium Ecosystem Assessment revealed that human activities in the past 50 years have led to more rapid and extensive changes in the natural environment (e.g., conversion of land to cropland, increasing atmospheric CO₂ levels, and loss of biodiversity) (United Nations Environment Program, 2005). Therefore, natural resources have been systematically exploited to meet and satisfy the man greed and ambition. Due to this behavior he has lost balance with nature. At this point, restoring the balance between the man and nature is necessary today.

Environmental concerns, in Sri Lanka, include "deforestation, soil erosion, wildlife populations threatened by poaching and urbanization; coastal degradation from mining activities and increased pollution; freshwater resources being polluted by industrial waste and sewage runoff; waste disposal; and air pollution in urban and suburban areas like Colombo and other cities due to emissions from motor vehicles and factories and other industrial establishments" (<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/07/08>). These are the main ways of the pollution in Sri Lanka. Most of them are created dur to the careless human activities.

The forests in Sri Lanka have been removed to make way for agricultural land and plantations and to provide fuel and timber. Population pressure is also a significant factor as is the removal of forested areas to make way for irrigation networks, roads, settlements. For example: Deforestation is one of the most serious environmental issues in Sri Lanka. In the 1920s, the island had 49 percent forest cover but by 2005 this had fallen by approximately 20 percent. Between 1990 and 2000, Sri Lanka lost an average of 26,800 hectares of forests per year. This amounts to 1.14 percent of average annual deforestation rate. Between 2000 and 2005 the rate accelerated to 1.43 percent per annum. (<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/07/08>). Apart from the environmental implications deforestation in Sri Lanka has caused ill effects such as flooding, landslides and soil erosion from exposure of the deforested areas. It is also the primary threat to the survival of Sri Lanka's biodiversity. For example, Sri Lanka has 751 known species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles of which 21.7 percent are endemic, and over 3314 species of vascular plants, of which 26.9 percent are endemic (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deforestation_in_Sri_Lanka)

Man-made disaster into environment such as polluting, burning and arbitrary use of fire, emission green house and ozone layer depletion and the natural environment is adversely affected as a result of over exploitation of biological resources such as land degradation, pouching of wild life in reserves, dumping of toxic wastes, illegal mining, grass flaring and damage in various forms to aquatic life among several others. Those affect the environment very seriously. In this background the research is intended to propose the spiritual mechanism (yoga) which is becoming a suitable mean for consoling and recovering the human from stress and aggressive activities in the present society.

4.1. Yoga And Its Principle For Environmental Conservation

The word 'Yoga' comes from the root 'yuj' in Sanskrit means to unite. In the Vedic Sanskrit yoga means "to add", to join, unite or to attach. Yoga as a practice to control the senses and ultimately the mind. Therefore, the yoga in the ordinary sense is defined as balance in Sanskrit its 'samata'. Yoga is defining in Bhagavad-Gita as 'samatavam'. It means if one has achieved that states every creation is in the planet will be equal.

Yoga is grounded in an understanding of interconnection and developed in the context of a closed relationship with the earth and cosmos and a profound reverence for animals, plants, soil, and water and air. Specially in Hinduism, the concept of yoga initiated before the *patanjali rishi*, it goes back to Hindu Veda period but after the *patanjali* contribution yoga become as popular through the *patanjali's* yoga sutra was compiled around 400 CE. The grate treaties of yoga have eight major components such as *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *Samadhi*. That is why the yoga is called as '*ashtanga yoga*'. "eight components of yoga are external discipline, internal discipline, posture, breath regulation, Concentration, meditative absorption, and integration" Chip Hartranft (2003). In those eights components *yama* and *niyama* are very much relevant for pursuing the environmental conservation. Because *yama*, *niyama* consists basic disciplines of human attitude change by adding value and ethics to the human life. Hindu yoga related to the wellbeing of the individual and society. It includes social, economic and environmental sustainability.

There are ten ethical code of practice under the Yama (,akk;) Niyama(epakk;) in the yama there are five principles: ahimsa(not killing or hunting), satya(truthfulness),asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (sexual continence or chastity) and aparigraha(freedom from greed). Other five cardinal principles of niyama are shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (contemplation), svadhyaya (self- study) and isvara pranidhana (devotion to the lord). Those ten limbs of yoga motivate the human ethical behavior and control the destructive activities.

Firstly, let's look at the Ahimsa. it is the first moral principle of the yama. Ahimsa is non-violence in thought and deeds. It opposite to the violence. One who wish to follow the yoga, they must follow this precept. It really denotes the attitude and the behavior towards all living creatures based on the recognition of the underlying substance of the creatures, that substance is same to all. That brings the unity among the creatures including human. In the background of the Hindu yogic ahimsa emphasis the reverence for all forms of the life without discrimination. Yogi recognizes the principle of the life force that flows. Through strictly observe the non – violence the living being in the environment (flora and fauna) will be conserved and poaching and hunting wildlife will be avoided and eventually threat too biological environmental would be ceased. From an environmental point of view, nonviolence has another dimension. For example, producing meat for human consumption not only involves killing of other forms of life but also causes harmful effects on the environment. It comes with far greater environmental costs than producing food grain and vegetables. Ahimsa strictly prohibit the meat consumption because the meat consumption cause for increasing the methane gas in the environment then it leads to global warming. Methane is one of the greenhouse gases known to global warming. Meat consumption very closely link with climate change through producing the methane gas, greenhouse effect and global warming. To mitigate the global warming ahimsa should be practices. Ahimsa motivates non killing in the ethical sense directly motivate the vegetarianism.

Second principle of the *yama* is *asteya* (non -stealing) it implies that which does not belong to us belong to nature. It is also requiring honest. It refrains us from the misappropriation what does not belong to you. Taking not belonging to us is theft or exploitation. Exploitation is kind of robbing or stealing. so the *asteya* is checking the exploitation or abstaining from stealing. Thus it helps to refrain from misappropriation of all kinds. This principle helps to restores balance of nature and make aware the public not to exploit the natural resources. For example, it is taken place in the resources consumption. this determine the consumption ratio when a person consume excess it will exploit indirectly others resource so when *asteya* is followed excess consumption will be avoided than the environment will be safe.

Third principle of yama is *aparigrahha* (greedlessness) of the greed but non possessiveness perhaps give the underlying idea better. One of the root causes for the environmental destruction is greed. It implies exploitation which is turn deprives the right of others to share the resource of our planet. When this is practiced attitude of the people will be changed to protect the planet for example people may consider the planet is common for all being not only for the human being alone.

The fourth principle is *satya* (truthfulness) checks pollution in the environment. It means strict avoidance of all exaggerations, equivocation and pretense. Satya implies simple and honest living which does not imply breaking promises and making unnecessary promises beyond man's limits that if fulfilled will leads to exploitation and destruction. Satya pave the way to self- determination not to break the rules and environmental norms.it motivates the

public in a positive way to protect the environment. Satya could be explained by this instance in our country getting approval from Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for any development activities is in practice. At the same time, there are opportunities for malpractice also taken place to push forward the development project without considering the harmfulness of the environment. At that point if a person in the authority is applied the yoga concept 'of *satya*' malpractices would be avoided and the environment will be preserved.

Fifth principle of the *yama* is *brahmachrya*(celibacy). It means control of all sense and extolling the practices of *chastit* and being faithful in thought, word and deed. It abstinences when in youth at the individual level and moderate indulgence when married. The practitioner conserves the excess and utilizes it for *lokakalyana* (well-being of the world). Here austerity is thus a necessary part of the yogi discipline. The excess energy is utilized for the social reconstruction and not for the social destruction. If fail to follow *brahmachrya*, it will lead to sexual power and increased the population. If let the population grow up it will demand for existing natural resources which is under the pressure consuming ratio and exploitation will increased. Then the environment will be affected. If the *brahmachrya* is observed population growth will be reduced and environment also safe.

As we have observed the sub limbs of the *yama* and those limbs how control the human destructive activities to protect the environment. When the people simply observe and practice these five yoga thoughts they control the activities. Self-control will be enhanced by yoga practice. Greedy mind also will vanish from the people.

Now let's look at the 'niyama'. Niyama is maintaining ecological balance. It consists the five moral disciplines. Those must be strictly followed by the yoga practitioner. The first component is purity (*shaucha*). Based on the yogic philosophy whole of the universe seen or unseen is a manifestation of divine life. Therefore, all life is pure and divine. Purity is very essential for ecological cleaning. Yogic purity is covering purity in thought and deeds of the human. Pure mind easily and naturally thinks pure thoughts and feels pure emotions and it becomes difficult for it to entertain undesirable thought and emotions in the same way as it is difficult for an impure mind to entertain undesirable thought and emotions. The pure mind eliminates pollution in our own life. All pollution outside is linked with our surroundings. Every evil thought is self-destructive and if translated into action, it will destroy the outer environment. Therefore, purity with us leads to pollution free environment.

Next principle is "*santosh*a" (happiness) is the second principle of the *niyama*. It implies that the happiness or contentment and not in dissatisfaction. Satisfaction is understood as absolute sates. The drive to satisfy our cravings leads to exploitation and destruction. Contentment describes that the being happy with whatever is given by the nature and not craving for that which is either given or nor yours. Thus the contentment maintains the balance between the man and nature. *Santosh*a also brings peacefulness and happiness. *Santosh*a or contentment refrain from greedy

In the same way the '*tapas*' (contemplation) is another principle of making the human mind ecofriendly. According to yoga it gives the spiritual development of the person rather than the religious. so here citing the "to be spiritual is more personal and empowering and has to do with the deepest motivations in life (Roof 1993: 76-7) yoga ideology is motivating a person in a spiritual way. When a person experiences the happiness he/she never involve in hurting other beings for example lord Buddha's Nirvana. So the balance of nature will be restored. *Tapas* is increasing the conservation through perseverance and persistence. It leads

the individual to take a determination that not to pollute the environment. Not throwing the domestic waste in the public place, don't arbitrary burning the, not using the plastic and dumping the plastic in soil.

Another limb is *Sadhyaya* (self -study) it means self-introspection and meditation. Understand our self-looking inwards. It means being aware of the effects of our action on other fellow human being as well as other form of life. Through the self-evaluation person can understand the effect of action on environment and striving to reduce what is called our 'ecological footprint' on the planet.

Ishwara pranidhan, (devotion) this *niyama* brings the religious connotation to the practice of yoga, this is only because of the world *Ishwar* meaning god. It does not refer to a specific god- god here refers anything that we consider above ourselves for some people it may be god, for some it may be mother nature for some it may be mother earth that is a more powerful force than ourselves. This may make feel human complacent about the serious effect of their action on the environment. Ecofriendly thinking will be developed through the *ishvara pranidhana* because this implies recognizing the supreme power behind the creation and surrendering oneself to it. This recognize and respect for all forms of life flows from within, thereby the yoga practitioner will stop harming anything in the creation, even a small ant that creeps on our body.

Pranayama encourages to train our breath because it is believed that by training the breath we can train the mind and manage our emotions and overcomes stress. Today world is very busy with long working hours. People are running with mental stress and become aggressive. It directs to uncontrolled and unethical behavior that eventually leads the human activities damaging the environment. So when the people follow the pranayama their mind will be trained and their activities also controlled.

Pratyahara is another important limb of yoga. Which motivates the individuals to become more and more introspective, more aware and control of their emotions. This practices help to keep absent from six evils *kama*(lust), *krodha*(anger), *loha*(greed), *mada*(pride), *moh*(obsession), *matsar*(hatred). Pratyahara leads to positive outlook towards life, towards contentment, satisfaction and happiness. Man is driving some benefit from the natural environment. The derivation of these benefit leads him to exploit the nature. At this juncture yoga thought and practice will help the public to make self- control and awareness not to harm to the environment. Ultimately make the check and balance with the environment.

In the general perception man has three qualities such as physical, social, and spiritual. Who he maintains those three he is a balance person. When yoga practices it helps the human to maintain those three qualities and balance the personality. Yoga thought empower the man to improve the quality and value. And balancing the personality thus prevent the pollution and safeguard the environment. Further the environmental conservation depends on the behavioral change therefore "environmental education, first defined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in 1970, includes the element of behavior; the idea that through knowledge, changes in behavior at a personal, societal and global level will occur (IUCN, 1970). This indicates that the behavioral change is very important for the environmental conservation.

5.Recommendations

Yoga provides sound principles for attaining a certain ethical or moral behavior, it is clear that yoga principle could be very important in supporting new attitude towards the environment. The connection between yoga and the environment is also related to the sphere of personal behavior. Solving the current ecological problem is not only a matter of technology but also implies deep changes in way of living which is in turn affected by our ethical or moral value. So the attitude of the people could be changed by the yogic thought and practices are strictly followed in the community level especially among the younger generations.

Except the natural disaster, all the other environmental destruction is caused by the human activities and mind set. The human activities and mind set are to be changed by the spiritual practices. That will pave the way to minimize the human activities. Here the statement of Toynbee is applicable to quote that “the present threat to mankind’s survival can be removed only by a revolutionary change of heart in individual human being. This change of heart must be inspired by spirituality in order to generate the will power needed for putting arduous new ideals into practice (porrit 1984:211. Arnold Toynbee). The mindset of the human can be changed by the yogic practice.so if the public are motivated to practice the yoga it will be useful in the conservation.

Yoga ideas can shape environmental behavior, has also inspire many efforts to revitalize or invent nature religions, all of which in one way or another is considering the nature to be sacred and deduce from this perception a reverence for life ethic. This is enhanced by the yogic practice of purity (shaucha)

Yoga promotes individual and collective physical and mental fitness by providing values that promote cooperative behavior that in turn enhance the prospects for survival and cultivating of the supreme contentment and consequent tranquility of mind will have positive impact on the environment. Yoga equips the individual to enlighten the inward balance and it leads the individuals to have a harmonious relationship with other creations. The yoga ideology will help to maintain the ecological balance through the yogic practices in the human behavior towards the environment effect would be reduced.

If the yogic practices are included in the school’s education or curriculum will be very effective for the younger generation. Religious and other organizations must include the yogic practices in their day to day activity agenda. Here remembering the greatest non -violence practitioner Gandhi statement is more suitable. “Mahadma Gandhi has repeatedly said that practices of Ahimsa are enough to transform the world”. The study is suggesting the authority of the state and non-state organizations, local and religious organizations to incorporate the yoga practices(principles) in their activities. and their policy frame work. In addition to that through practicing yoga limbs people can revitalize their role and contribute the environment as stated Steven and Rockefeller “All persons have the right to protection and preservation of the air, soil, water, sea-ice, flora and fauna, and the essential processes and areas necessary to maintain biological diversity and ecosystems (Steven C. Rockefeller (1996).

6. Conclusion

Imparting the yogic spiritual values to the community is very much essential for facing the environmental challenges. At the same time controlling the other way of pollutions such as industrial, emission, natural disasters still challenging the environmental conservation. So starting from the individual attitude changing to environmental conservation approaches would be a viable means for saving the environment because most of the environmental pollution caused by the human activities than to control the human activities, yoga limbs are simple and liable in carrying their day to day life.

When the public practices yama and niyama, they affirm to refrain from the activities such as poaching, global warming, effluents, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, further environmental pollution is caused by environmental sanitation and its impact. Here the purity (shaucha) under the niyama is practiced pollution through environmental sanitation will be avoided and healthy and clean environment will be safeguarded for the future generation.

Other limbs of the yoga asana dhyana, Bramachrya, prathyagara, samathy also motivate the ecofriendly attitude. Finally, the world environmental conservation charter establishes in 1996 also includes the prime rule of environmental protection stating as “national resource of the earth including air, land, flora fauna must be safeguarded” but aforesaid yoga clearly says how to protect the environment through practicing the yoga treaties in the day to day life activities and stimulating the individual’s attitude change. Contemporary society is very busy with the technological world and rush. Therefore, the research recommends ease method of practicing the ethical conduct yoga is viable means. So ultimately practicing the yoga ideology in the day to day life is very much relevant approach to minimizing the environmental hazards and conserve the environment today community’s busy life.

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