

Hinduism and its Attachment to Mother Earth

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Introduction

Hinduism is a diverse pattern of religion, within which most elementary mythologies can be found including the faith of inanimate objects like stones, rivers, stars, planets to animate objects like trees, animals, birds, plants, ancestors and spirits. It also presents itself as a fruitful field for most elevated beliefs that seek to reach not only the joining of the soul with a personal God- the creator of the universe, but also to overcome this dualistic approach by realizing one's identity with the holy spirit. Hinduism is a universal expression of the religion and philosophy of Indians; thereby rightly pointed as a museum of humanity.

According to Dr. Pankaj Jain, Assistant Professor of South Asian Religions and Ecology, University of North Texas- Hinduism contains numerous references to the worship of the divine in nature in its Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Sutras, and its other sacred texts. Millions of Hindus recite Sanskrit mantras daily to revere their rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and the earth.

Hinduism recognizes that the human body is composed of five elements (panchattva) and connects each of the elements to our senses. The human nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air, and ears to wind/ vayu. This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with the natural world.

The paper is an attempt at giving knowledge on Hindu religion and its beliefs segregating various elements and creatures (sankhya) on this Earth- Water (jal), Air(vayu), Fire(agni), Land (prithvi). It also covers Hindu religion beliefs and its relationship with the living creatures on this earth- birds, animals, trees and plants.

In Hindu cosmology, a universe endures for about 4,320,000,000 years (one day of Brahma- the creator) which is then destroyed by fire or water elements. It is believed that Brahma rests for one night, just as long as the day. This process, named pralaya (Cataclysm), repeats for 100 Brahma years (311 trillion, 40 billion human years).

- A. Hindu texts mention the **cycle of creation and destruction**. This continuous cycle of action, reaction, birth, death and rebirth is called samsara. It includes process of passing from one body to another throughout all species of life. The notion of reincarnation and karma is a strong premise in Hindu thought.
- i. According to the **Upanishads** rebirth or reincarnation of the souls can take place in a series of physical bodies (normally in human bodies but also in animals and even plants) or in a series of astral and preternatural bodies (sun, moon, planets, stars, angels or demons), depending on one's karma.
 - ii. **Mundaka Upanishad** 2.1.1 states: "The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart. O Arjun, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities."
 - iii. According to **Shatapatha Brahmana** the current human generation descends from Manu, the only man who survived a great deluge after being warned by the God.
 - iv. According to Part 3, Chapter 4 verse 1 of **Aitareya Upanishad** only the "Atman" (the Self) existed in the beginning. This Self-created heaven, sky, earth and the world beneath was formed. He then formed the Purusha from the water. He also created the speech, the fire, the prana (breath of life), the air, various senses, the directions, the trees, the mind, the moon and other things.
 - v. The **Kaushitaki Upanishad** (Kaushitakishakha of the Rig-Veda) under chapter I.2 expresses that: 'He (whoever depart from this world) is reborn here either as a worm, or as a butterfly, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a serpent, or as a tiger, or as a person, or as some other being in this or in that condition, according to his works, according to his knowledge.'
 - vi. According to **Chandogya Upanishad** Brahman is the ground of all reality and existence and states that Brahman is uncreated, external, infinite

and all-embracing. It is the ultimate cause and goal of all that exists. It is One and it is All. All beings emanate from Brahman; all beings will return back to the same source. Brahman is in all things and it is the true Self (atman) of all beings.

- vii. **Shvetashvatara Upanishad** states God is the eternal Reality, and the ground of existence. Those who perceive him in every creature, Merge in him are released from wheel of birth and death.
- viii. **Rig Veda** Chapter 10 hymn 16 verse 3 is addressed to the funeral fire- Agni expresses: 'Do not burn him entirely, Agni, or engulf him in your flames. Do not consume his skin or his flesh.' It expresses the desire and hope that, after the purification through fire, Agni, the dead person receives his body back, made perfect, so as to enjoy the life of the fathers.
- ix. The **Bhagavad Gita** Chapter 2 Verse 22 states that - as a person puts on new clothes and discards old and torn clothes, similarly an embodied soul enters new material bodies, leaving the old bodies. Verse 13 states that - Just as in this body the embodied (soul) passes into childhood, youth and old age, he also passes into another body and the firm man does not grieve at that event.
- x. In Chapter 10, Verse 20 of **Bhagvat Gita**, Shri Krishna reveals that He manifests immortal soul (beginning, middle and end) within each and every living entity.

B. Hindu Beliefs on Form of Creatures due to reincarnation and its worship to animate objects:

Hindus see divinity in all living creatures. They believe that consciousness is present in all life forms, even birds, animals and plants and treat them as a part of family.

- i. Earth popularly known as MITTI (mother) in Hindu religion is treated as dhartimaata. It is also believed that every individual soul falls from heaven

located in the moon to the earth through rain. From earth it enters the earth through human or animal body and finally becomes a part of semen (retas). It is said that this life starts on mother earth and will be destroyed back in Mother Earth.

- ii. According to **Vedas and Bhagavad Gita**, there are 8.4 million yonis (form of life or a species) total with Manushya Yoni (Human form/human species) as one of them. A manushya yoni is obtained on the basis of good deeds before which a human goes through various forms of yonis (for example insect, fish, deer, monkey, crow etc.).
- iii. The **Bhagavad Gita** Chapter 8 verse 6 states that the most prominent thought of one's life occupies the mind at the time of death and determines the nature of the body to be attained in the next birth. A human who achieves Mokshya breaks the cycle of reincarnation and adjoins Brahma.

Hence Hindus believe in reincarnation - a belief that the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes, in one body after the other. The soul is sometimes born in a human body, sometimes in an animal body and sometimes in a plant body, etc. Hindus believe that all forms of life contain a soul, and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms.

- iv. According to **Ramayana** by Valmiki, One should never harm the wicked or the Good or even animals meriting death.
- v. Another belief states that on one's death on earth, the God of death and justice Yama, tallies the person's good/bad deeds while on earth and decides if the soul should go to a heaven and/or a hell. The soul acquires a body (of any creature) as appropriate to the worlds it enters. At the end of the soul's time in those worlds, it returns to the earth (is reborn as a life form on the earth).
- vi. Hindu creationists claim that species of plants and animals are material forms adopted by pure consciousness which live an endless cycle of

births and rebirths. According to Ronald Numbers, Hindu creationists have insisted on the antiquity of humans, who they believe appeared fully formed as long may be trillions of years ago.

Practices by Hindus to reflect their attachment towards animate objects:

- Animals and birds are worshipped and considered as vehicle of Hindu Gods;

Associated God	Vahan (form of transport)
Lord Ganesh	Rat/ mouse
Lord Shiva	Nandi (bull)
Godess Laxmi	Elephant
Lord Indra/ Surya	Horse
Vishnu/Krishna	Garuda
Lord Shani	Vulture/ Crow
GodessDurga	Lion/Tiger
GodessSaraswati/ Lord Kartikeya	Peacock
Lord Khandoba	Dog

- To the Hindu, cow symbolizes all other creatures. The cow is a symbol of the Earth, the nourisher, the ever-giving and an undemanding provider. She is believed to be very dear to Lord Krishna and so Krishna devotees considers Cow as the holy animal. The slaughter of Cow is banned throughout India. It is the most worshiped animal in India, she treated as the Gods in the shape of animal.
- Nag Panchami, is a Hindu snake festival dedicated to the worship of snakes including Cobra (most sacred snake) and serpent deities. People offer milk, perform puja, and worship the snake.
- In Hinduism the monkey is worshipped as a Hanuman deity. He is also treated as reincarnation of Lord Shiva.

- Bull is worshipped on the new moon day of Shravan by the farmers.

A. Hindu Beliefs on Form of Creatures due to reincarnation and its worship to inanimate objects:

- i. According to **Katha Upanishad** Chapter 6, Tree of eternity has its roots in the sky, and its branches reach down to earth. It is God; an immortal soul;

The entire universe comes from God; his energy burns like fire, and his power reverberates like thunder, in every part of the universe. In honor of God the sun shines, the clouds rain, and the winds blow. Death itself goes about its business in fear of God.

- ii. According to Chapter 9 verse 26 of **Bhagavad Gita**, Lord Krishna states that he accepts a leaf, flower, fruit or water or whatever is offered with devotion.
- iii. The **Mahabharata** says that even if there is only one tree full of flowers and fruits in the village, that place becomes worthy of worship and respect.
- iv. In **Garuda Purana, Uttara Khanda** Vyasa Muni mentions that – ‘When he (human being) leaves the body, dharma alone follows him; if he has dharma he goes to heaven, but if he has adharma he goes to hell. Earth, wind, space, water, light, mind, intelligence, and the self (atman) - these are the witnesses that watch constantly over the dharma of creatures that breath on earth; together with them, dharma follows the jiva. The body is burnt by fire, but the karma he has done goes with him.’
- v. The **Padmapurana -Bhumi Khand** (Book of the Earth) while giving description of prithvi – earth warns: ‘A person who is engaged in killing creatures, polluting wells, and ponds and tanks, and destroying gardens, certainly goes to hell.’

- vi. **VarahPurana** mentions that one who plants one peepal, one neem, one bar, ten flowering plants or creepers, two pomegranates, two oranges and five mangos, does not go to hell.

Practices by Hindus to reflect their attachment towards inanimate objects:

Forests and groves were considered sacred, and flowering trees received special reverence. Just as the animals and birds are associated with Gods and Goddesses, different trees and plants were also associated with worship of Deities.

- Vedas centre on the worship of deities such as *Indra*, *Varuna* and *Agni*, and on the Soma ritual. Fire-sacrifices- yajna is performed by chanting Vedic mantras. These vedic rites of fire (offerings to God) are observed during practices like Hindu wedding and burial ceremonies.
- Hindus consider celestial objects like Sun, moon, planets (graha), comets, constellations, stars, as deities and worship them regularly.
- Water has been an object of worship from time immemorial. It has diverse socio-religious uses and plays a central role in many religious ceremonies and rites. Rivers are usually believed to be indication of God. They are given a divine status and have been worshipped since ancient times. Ganga, Godavari, Kaveri, Narmada, Saraswati, Yamuna and Sindhu Rivers are the holy rivers of India. It is said that taking bath in the holy rivers, gives freedom to man from all the sins of his life.
- All plants and flowers have medicinal value in the Hindu system of medicine –Ayurveda. It is believed to be brought by Dhanvantari -the divine medicine man during Samudramathana (churning of oceans).
- Among these, Tulsi is considered as a venerated plant and Hindus worship it every morning and evening. The presence of tulsi plant symbolizes the religious bent of a Hindu family. Generally, tulsi is planted in a specially built structure, with images of deities installed on all four sides, an opening for a small earthen oil lamp.

Sacred Trees/Plant in Hinduism	Apart from medicinal properties used for
Banyan (Vat/ Kalpavriksha) tree	Worship on Vat Savitri festival, believed to provide the growth, a long life and strength of their families
Pipal tree or asvatta (Ficus religiosa)	Worship as is believed to have astrological connotations. It is linked with the planet Jupiter.
Neem Tree	Offered to God
Bilva tree (Aegle marmelos)	Sacred for Shiva worship
Tulsi (sage) plant	Used by Vaishnavas for worship of Lord Krishna, preparation of ornaments
Fig (Ficus glomerata)	Used to worship of Dattatreya, the son of Trimurty
Coconut Tree, Mango tree, Banana plant	Used for various puja and fruits are offered to God
Sandal wood	Oil and paste are used for worship of God

- Vastushastra, widely accepted by Hindus gives direction to people for placing and building dwellings according to the environment in which they stay. It guides people to maintain surroundings without damaging environment and allow natural energy to flow uninterrupted and free thereby provide comfort, good health, peace and prosperity to the dwellers.

Conclusion

As mentioned in Hindu scriptures- ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ means - The entire Universe is one Family. Hindus regard all living creatures like mammals, animals, fishes, birds etc as sacred since our souls have gone through these creatures to arrive at birth of human being. Hinduism has been coined as an environmental friendly religion.

From the above findings, it is observed that Hindus (being keen observers of nature) regard everything around them is pervaded by an unidentified divine presence. It

may it be rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, birds, flowers, minerals stars and planets. It is so because the Divine reality is present as prana (soul), energy or power in every electron, particle, atom, cell and in every indication of matter. Hinduism is distinguished by its belief in reincarnation (samsara) determined by the law of karma and its idea on salvation- freedom from this cycle of repeated birth and death.

The rishis of the past have always had a great respect for nature. They perceived that all material manifestations are a shadow of the spiritual. Hindus believe that our sages meditated in natural environment on the hills, mountains, trees and plants whereby making these inanimate objects auspicious place for worship showering blessings to future generations. Hence popular Hindu pilgrimage places (where Gods may have appeared on earth) are rivers, temples, mountains, and other sacred sites in India. Hindu devotees daily worship at dawn after bathing in family shrine, lighting a lamp, agarbatti, dhoop and offer Prasad with reciting prayers from religious scripts, singing devotional hymns, meditation, chanting mantras, reciting scriptures etc before the images of deities.

Rightly remarked by a practitioner of Ayurveda medicine Dr. David Frawley, -‘No religion lays much emphasis on environmental ethics as Hinduism. It believes in ecological responsibility that the Earth is our mother. It considers all animals having soul and champions their protection. It has a strong tradition of non-violence or ahimsa. It believes that God is present in all nature, all creatures and in every human being regardless of their faith.’ The Bhagavad Gita advises us not to try to change the environment, improve it, or wrestle with it. Rather if you feel it seems hostile (at times) tolerate it.

From the above findings it can also be observed that Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagvad Gita and Purana aim at spreading messages for preservation of environment and ecological balance since long time. Nature, or Earth, can never be a hostile element nor it can be conquered or dominated. To conclude, Hinduism forbids man from exploiting nature and is taught to live in harmony with nature recognizing that there is a divine power in every element present on this earth.

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