

The Feminine 'Nature' in the Indian Texts and Tradition

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Abstract

This article is an endeavour to bring forth the the ancient wisdom of Integral Vision. The Ancient Vedic wisdom imparts teachings to care for the ecology. Indian society grew beside the grooves of the nature of earth, it worshipped them considered everything essential for a holistic growth of the human species. The river Ganga cleaning movement has since then taken lives of many intellectuals of the tradition in modern India, who should have been regarded as the nurturer of the civilisation. The Indian intellectual text and tradition has been regarded as an Ecotheology centred around the Eco-feminist perspective of Nature. There is a feminine in the nature and any harm to either of them is a harm to both of them.

Women in Indian tradition has been compared and seen as Nature, owing to the feminine attributes contained in it, that is, the ability to procreate. The Indian tradition conceives women as the first God and calls it as 'Shakti', that is, "power, ability, strength, might, effort, energy, capability" more appropriately as energy or the force behind creation, almost all the definitions and meanings of 'Shakti' points to the very fact of the ability to procreate. In many states of South India, there is a practice that is still alive and is preserved till this date called Raja festival or the Raja Parba. The practice is centered around the perception of seeing the feminine in the Nature that is pronounced as Prakriti in Sanskrit language (James G. Lochtefeld (2001), p. 224, 265, 520) [1], it

refers to the feminine aspects of all life forms. A woman is seen as a symbol of Prakriti, one who holds the capability to procreate in the human genus (Knut A. Jacobsen 2008, p. 1299-1300) [2]. Raja Parba signifies the beginning of the solar month of Mithuna from which the season of rains starts. The earth is called Prithvi (which is also a feminine word of Sanskrit grammar) who is also deified as bhudevi (anthropomorphic deification of earth as goddess) one who produces, creates and nourishes all the creatures and non living things, all the existence, like a mother and is the provider of the food for all living in her reach (David Kinsley 1986, p.8-9) [3]. The Durga saptashati points to the very feminine character of nature-

So long as the earth is able to maintain mountains, forests and trees until then the human race and its progeny will be able to survive. (Durga Saptashati, 'Devi Kavacham', 54).

Such identifications are brought forth to make clear that the nature and the women in the human genus are identical in attributes and must be identified together as one and the same. The Continuity and oneness of nature and human originated out from the Vedic Sanskrit's rta (Sanskrit रत rta "order, rule; truth") which is the principle of natural order or the cosmic order of things. The word shares close

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connotational relations and meaning with nature, the word *rta* means 'cosmic order of things' (Holdrege 2004, p.215) [4]. *rta* is the timely functioning of the natural, moral and sacrificial orders. It is the principle of the natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it, from this *rta*, comes the words *Ritu* and *Ritual* itself. *Ritual* means the correct order of performance, it comes from Roman "*ritus*", *ritus* is the root word which moves from *rta* to *ritus* for *ritual*. The word *Ritu* meant seasons, it is derived from the Vedic Sanskrit word *rltú*, a fixed innate- cosmic time, this is cognate with the word *rta* (ऋत), that is, "order or course of things", a proper time for sacrifice (*yajna*) or ritual in Vedic Sanskrit. *Ritu*, in the words of Sandhiya Ramaswamy [5] is ritual that sets in motion the rhythm of life, the dance of the seasons and the occurring of the menstruation in the lunar cycle that is how came the word *Ritu kala samskara*. In fact the word menstruation or menses comes from Latin word *mensis*, whose meaning is month, which is cognate with the Greek word *mene*, that is, moon, hence the rhythm of months which average around 29.5, that is, the period from one new moon to the next, days reflect on the reproductive cycle of marine plants as well as on the menstrual period (Subhash kak 2002, p.9) [6]. The Knowledge of this *Rta* and *Ritu* had highly impacted on the speculation on the knowledge contained within the body itself and unraveled the science of body and its relations with nature or the *Prakriti*. The speculation resulted in the identification of biological footprints of life in "Nature" in the mirror image of human body and was marked by the celebration of *Raja Parba*, which falls on the mid June is celebrated to mark the femininity of the nature (nature is attributed with femininity and has been personified as

goddess, who has the ability to nourish and procreate), folks in many parts of south India and specially in Orissa believed that in these days mother earth, that is 'Nature', is undergoing menstruation and must be left alone for the first three days from the onset of the festival. Another such festival is celebrated in Assam during mid-June, that is, *Ambubachi Mela*. As *Kapila Vatsyayan* states this ancient wisdom in her words-

Man's life depends upon and is conditioned by all that surrounds him and sustains him, namely, inanimate, mineral and animate, aquatic, vegetative, animal and gaseous life. It is, therefore, Man's duty to constantly remind himself- in individual and collective life- of the environment and the ecology (*Kapila Vatsyayan*, 1992. p. 160) [7]. This way the celebration or the festivals in the hindu society moves from a mere gathering of euphoria to celebration of consciousness of the body and to care the nature and the Nature/world due to the relation of interdependent existence shared by both of them, a similar practice is observed in a different ceremony for girls called *Ritu kala samskara* or *Ritushuddhi*, which is a rite of passage for the coming of the age for young girl and is called by different names in different parts of india, *Half sari function* or *Langa Voni* in Telugu: లంగ వొని, *Pavadai Dhavani* in Tamil: பாவடாலை, *Langa Davani* in Kannada: ಲಂಗ ದಾವನಿ.

Such celebrations or rites of passages are praxis of the Vedic teachings that the nature and human body are one and the same and share the attributes of composition or an impression in the mind to reflect upon the organism as the cosmic whole or the cosmic whole as an organism and locating the body in time and space as the interconnected whole, such that the feminine and nature are identical wholes

operating in domains of fluid identity as the cause of existence. The body and nature are in intimate interconnection to each other, the body is the expansion of the ether that had expanded after the Big Bang for the procreation of this existence, hence we all share the Nature in our bodies. The foundations are rooted in the Rigveda, nature is "One that manifests in all"(Rig Veda, I.164.46).

The body and Nature are the continuity of the symphony of cosmic rhythm. It is through the body that this universe and its existence is perceived. As noted by Jaideva Singh

The Universe is nothing but an opening out (unmesa) or expansion (prasara) of the Supreme or rather of the Supreme as Sakti. (Pratyabhijnahrdyam by Jaideva Singh, 1980, p. 8) [8].

The body and universe are seen as complimentary to each other's evidence of existence. It is because the universe exists that the body exists and vice versa. In the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Phenomenology of Perception the body and world share intimate interconnection with each other and are in a single system of interconnected relation

In the same way, we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in as far as we are in the world through our body, and in as far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1981, p. 206) [9].

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