

Environmental Crisis: A New Interpretation of *Ṛta*

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I

The first part of the paper includes an exposition of *Ṛta*, the Vedic principle, which stands for cosmic harmony, order of the universe. It is *Br̥hat* or *Mahāna Ṛta* i.e. extended *Ṛta*, which covers the entire creation and is itself infinite as explained in the Katha Upanishad 2.2.2. The Ṛg Veda speaks about this principle of 'order' of the universe. It is this principle which implies the order of nature as a part of the creation of the universe (Ṛg 10.190) and mentions that *Ṛta* is originated from God and is protected by God.

Ṛta, at an empirical level, is the principle which prescribes or recommends the maintenance of harmony and order through human behavior. It states that we, the human persons, are gifted with the order of nature and the universe, hence it is our moral duty to protect that order.

Ṛta as order in nature, society as well as life of a human person is further elaborated.

II

According to the Vedic tradition, the natural order is to be preserved and maintained by the human person. It is a human person who is endowed with reason and is capable of violating the order of nature. All other creations are not capable of violating it; hence a human person is given the responsibility to protect the order by doing duties towards maintaining harmony.

It is here that *Ṛta*, as moral order for society as well as for the individual human person is explained with the help of Vedic tradition. What is also explained is duty centric approach implied by *Ṛta* as moral order. The question of duty centricity and freedom of action is also raised in this part of the paper.

III

The moral order of *Ṛta* implies that man is born with a debt (*Ṛṇa*) as order of nature is given to human persons, so it is a must that the debt is to be paid back. The paying of debt is mainly of three or four types, which helps the sustenance of society along with the path of morality for the individual. The tree types of *Ṛṇa* are *mātr̥ṇa*, *pitṛ̥ ṇa*, *deva ṇa*, *ṛ̥ṣi ṇa* and *mānava ṇa* i.e. debt towards one's parents, debt towards gods, debt towards the learned and wise masters and debt towards fellow human beings. These are explained briefly in this part of the paper.

IV

The concept of debt towards 'Nature' or *Nisarga ṇa* may be systematically evolved, developed as part of *Ṛta* empirical. As a duty-centric approach, it emphasizes obligations to maintain harmony and order of nature. What is developed in this part of the paper is how the debt towards nature may be repaid in the modern world in keeping with the tradition. For the modern man, it will be a paradigm shift from right centricity to duty centricity. It will be also a shift from consumerist approach to guardian, custodian approach and even beyond that.