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CONCEPTUALISING  
**ONE HEALTH**  
**ONE EARTH**  
FOR ĀYURVEDA



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## India entering the ‘One Health’ domain with Āyurveda

In the 9<sup>th</sup> World Āyurveda Congress (WAC) organised by the Ministry of Ayush on 11/12/2022, India put forth the vision of ‘One Earth, One Health’ before the world. To put it in the words of Prime Minister Sri. Narendra Modi;

*“Ayurveda teaches us the right way of living. It is a guide on how to maintain our mental and physical health...We have put forward a futuristic vision of ‘One Earth, One Health’ before the world. It means a universal vision for health. Be it water-dwelling animals, wild animals, human beings or plants, their health is interconnected. It is the holistic vision of Ayurveda and Indian culture.”<sup>1</sup>*

The recent G20 declaration also stressed the importance of one health approach.<sup>2</sup> This way, India highlights the need of increasing the accessibility of Āyurveda to the world, just as Yoga became popular. One of the ways in which India’s effort to make Āyurveda global is seemingly getting unfolded through the concept of ‘One Health’, a concept or domain that is already in existence at the global stage. While promoting Āyurveda to the forum, the term ‘One Earth’ gets attached to convey the universal vision Āyurveda has for ‘One Health’, as mentioned by Sri. Narendra Modi in the World Āyurveda Congress. As India enters into that domain, it will analyse what Āyurveda can contribute to the global domain of ‘One Health’, in terms of both theory and practice. At the same time, it will also have to think about where India or Āyurveda disagrees with the already existing dominant conceptual framework of One Health. Before we discuss that, a brief explanation on One Health would sound helpful.

One Health conceptualises that human health is dependent on the health of other species and nature. It realises that human health cannot sustain if the condition of nature and the life of other species are at risk. In the early years

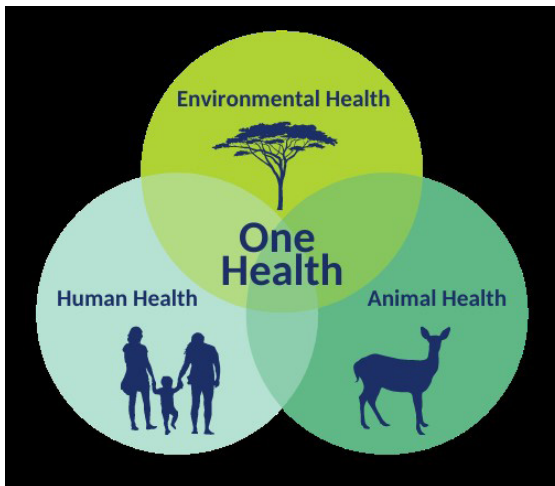
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1 “India put forward vision of ‘One Earth, One Health’ before the world: PM Modi at World Ayurveda Congress” <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/india-put-forward-vision-of-one-earth-one-health-before-the-world-pm-modi-at-world-ayurveda-congress20221211174415/> ANI. Accessed: August 16, 2023.

2 <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-health/g20-declaration-on-health-mention-of-indias-3-priorities-digital-push-8933900/>

of the 21st century, emerging zoonotic viruses that had the potential to cause pandemic disease, including extensive human mortality, created several international crises (Gibbs 2005). Governments and scientists worldwide recognised that greater interdisciplinary collaboration was required to prevent and control zoonoses, and that such collaboration should include not only physicians and veterinarians, but also wildlife specialists, environmentalists, anthropologists, economists and sociologists, among others. The expression 'One Health' was proposed as a concept to foster such interdisciplinary collaboration.

It also realises the place of human beings in relation with the larger ecosystem. Thereby, it fundamentally disagrees with the preceding dominant ideas of human health, which was rooted arguably in a *human centrality*. In other words, the concept assumes that public health cannot be seen strictly on human terms under this concept.<sup>3</sup> A graphical representation of the concept is shown below.<sup>4</sup>



3 See the strategic action plan published by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) of the United Nations. <https://www.fao.org/3/al868e/al868e00.pdf> Accessed: August 16th, 2023.

4 Alain Ratnadass, Jean-Philippe Deguine, Crop protection practices and viral zoonotic risks within a One Health framework, *Science of The Total Environment*, Volume 774, 2021, 145172, ISSN 0048-9697, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.145172>.

The emphasis on 'One Earth, One Health' approach gained its momentum in the backdrop of the increasing ecological crisis. The concrete association that we popularly make between good health and urbanisation or richer countries with heavy medical infrastructure is challenged by the ecological crisis and its repercussions. With the arrival of 'One Health' and covid crisis, this notion gets further challenged.

India is not strictly the first voice to put forth 'One Earth, One Health' to the world. But what is unique about India is that it enters into this domain with its medicinal tradition of Āyurveda. Āyurveda is not merely an 'alternative medicine'; it has a tradition that has ways to think on a wide range of things like creation, death, happiness, grief, body, Karma, illness, patients, bioethics, et al, which could be distinct from the mainstream medicine and its presumptions. Within the Indian medical traditions, which we collectively call Āyurveda, there are many Sampradāya that vary from region to region in terms of approach and practice. Such a tradition is now entering a world, a set of discussions on 'One Health', which perhaps be an unfamiliar domain to them. As it enters, there lies a task in front of Āyurveda scholars to familiarise themselves with the existing discourse on 'One Earth, One Health' so that they can think on themselves comparatively to see where it differs culturally and better know what should be done.

As mentioned, India is not the first to come up with the concept of 'One Earth, One Health'. In September 2004, a conference at Rockefeller University, New York by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) brought the term 'One World-One Health' to the discussion. The 12 Manhattan Principles published by this conference in 2004 is arguably the foundation for the global recognition of the concept 'One World, One Health'. This was followed by a series of milestones that were significant for the popularity and growth of 'One Health'. For instance, the American Medical Association's One Health Resolution (2007), One Health office established at Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is America's national public health agency (2009), The Hanoi Declaration (2010), 1<sup>st</sup> International One Health Congress in Australia and Africa was held in the year 2011 and so on. Under the larger G20 theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, India in the 9<sup>th</sup> Āyurveda Congress declares its intention to join the line. As of now, if someone alleges

that India's move on 'One Earth, One Health' is largely influenced by the stream of these events, it cannot be ignored. This will not be ignored as long as India clarifies how different their thoughts and practices are going to be from the mainstream global version of the same.

Being that said, what are the areas in which India could differ from the pre-existing idea that sounds similar to 'One Earth, One Health'? What are the subtle nuances about the concept that comes to our notice as India enters into the One Health discussion through its Āyurvedic tradition and its G20 theme, 'Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam', into the forum? This essay is an attempt to enquire on such possibilities. What is to be noted is that the role of 12 Manhattan Principles by the 'One World, One Health' conference in pioneering the global recognition of the concept cannot be undermined. Hence, this article in its attempt will take key reference to that event, its ideas, aftermath and trajectory as the key.

### **The notion of Stewardship embedded in the concept of 'One World, One Health'**

The conscious effort of India in using the term one 'Earth' instead of one 'World' is notable in this regard. The term 'World' has a connotation of 'globe', as in the globe that we see in - globalisation, human networks and technology. It effectively places humans at the centre of the discussion and narrates how humans have increasingly connected historically, especially in the last two centuries. While the term 'Earth' is more inclusive and planetary in nature, where humano-centric constructions are undermined. The 'One World, One Health' conference, which is mentioned above, placed the idea of 'Globalisation' as a precondition to discuss 'One World'. The subtitle of the conference itself was 'Building Interdisciplinary Bridges to Health in a *Globalized World*' (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, even if the concept of 'One World, One Health' aims to integrate humans with the rest of the species and nature at the outset, in effect it simply misses to get away with *human centrality*.

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5 In fact, the idea of 'One Health' itself was put forth in the wake of preventing the spread of epidemics which itself has its relation to the condition of globalisation. See in the Conference Summary given here . [http://www.oneworldonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh\\_sept04.html](http://www.oneworldonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh_sept04.html) Accessed: August 16, 2023.

Along with that, it is to be noted that in 'The Manhattan Principles', which came as a series of recommendations after the conference, highlighted that "the earnestness and effectiveness of *humankind's environmental stewardship* and our future health have never been more clearly linked".<sup>6</sup> According to this view, humans carry a *moral obligation* to take care of nature, unlike other species. Even with the realisation that human health is related to nature, wildlife and animal health, the world is not ready to completely get rid of human centrality in the form of '*stewardship*'. A steward is someone who is *authorised* to take care of something or to maintain something.

When Europe colonised the world including India, they also assumed the position of stewarding the law and order, intellectual and scientific progress of humanity by keeping the concern for civilising these populations by teaching them morality. This was not merely to 'justify' a colonial rule, but many of them truly believed so and could make many other Indians believe the same way. Similarly, the notion of 'stewardship' of nature has taught humanity to take up a central position, a position of moral obligation to manage and save other species and nature at large from extinction. If we further ask, why nature has to be saved, it is again for humanity's own survival. This view is more or less in existence in our popular response to climate change, and this notion continues even in the dominant language of 'One Health' as featured in the Manhattan Principles. A sense of human centrism continues in the form that humans are the *principal agents* who can save, protect or maintain the earth.

It might be difficult to say that in 'ancient' thought there was any 'concern' or 'movement' for humans to 'save' or 'protect' the environment. They never thought they were principally assigned for such a task. Rather, they would ask, who are *we* to save or protect Mother Earth? Certainly, there is a sense of reverence, duty and giving back to other beings but there is no principal centrality to humans as such or our ancestors didn't carry a *moral obligation* in their head to look at the world around them. Yet, they 'protected' nature

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6 See in the Conference Summary given here . [http://www.oneworlddonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh\\_sept04.html](http://www.oneworlddonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh_sept04.html) Accessed: August 16, 2023.



without being conscious that they were 'protecting' in their day to day life.<sup>7</sup> There is certainly an element of performing actions towards earth, which needs to be understood in opposition to a presumed moral obligation. The question, why do we have to protect, is not answered by traditions with terms like, '*so that humanity can survive*'. Rather, they are answered by traditions by giving experiences to individuals to empirically understand that they are part of a whole, which eventually gives them altogether an impersonal outlook on happiness, well-being, desire, et al. Human actions generated by reflecting on this knowledge in effect will be in harmony with nature and its health. In other words, The task of humanity is not to selfishly consider other species' health and existence for maintaining survival of the humans. By overcoming that ignorance, we figure out what it means to be a human and what 'nature' means to us, through our traditions. Before we get to see a glimpse of what human actions and relationship to nature means to Indian ancestors, in the next section let us focus on knowing what is the origin of this notion of *moral obligation* and *humans stewarding* the earth and will discuss how it has now become a part of our common sense, perhaps through mainstream education and media. This direction to focus the Western side is important to understand how India as a culture differs differently, rather than merely telling the world India also has an alternative to 'One Health' (just as Āyurveda is also reduced as 'alternative medicine')<sup>8</sup>.

Our actions towards the ecology depend on what we think about ourselves in relation to the things around us. Humanocentrism in a stewardship mentality continues to exist even in our response to climate change. What consequences

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7 For instance, while the majority of the megafauna became extinct globally over the last 50,000 years, Africa and tropical Asia retained them till today. The rate of extinction of large mammals is lowest in India and studies show this is because of co-evolution of humans and mammals. Sandhya Ramesh "Yale study finds why large mammals like elephants, tigers still exist in India" <https://theprint.in/science/yale-study-finds-why-large-mammals-like-elephants-tigers-still-exist-in-india/564165/> The Print. Accessed: August 16th, 2023. Also see in, A.M. Jukar, S.K. Lyons, P.J. Wagner, M.D. Uhen, Late Quaternary extinctions in the Indian Sub-continent, *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology*, Volume 562, 2021, 110137, ISSN 0031-0182, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palaeo.2020.110137>. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S003101822030585X> Accessed: August 16th, 2023

8 An alternative is a way of distancing something from 'mainstream', additionally the word alternative is often conveyed with a connotation of being 'illegitimate'.

would we face if we consider ourselves as 'stewards' or caretakers? Even as the modern Western society realises the problem of human centralism and its relation with ecological crisis and health, why humanity in modernity largely has no hesitance to assume themselves as 'stewards' of the Earth? To answer these questions, one would have to go through the notion of stewardship that has descended to humanity from the Bible.

### **The Genealogy of the Idea of Stewardship**

India's emphasis on 'One Earth, One Health' is also in line with the overarching theme that India has chosen for its 2023 G20 Presidency, which is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – One Earth, One Family, One Future*. The theme and slogan have a universal value attached, which is intended to bring in an inclusive approach. However, such slogans are empty without a conceptual understanding, they can turn towards any direction if we aren't conscious about it. In other words, in the absence of a conceptual understanding, there are chances of India reproducing enthusiastically the already existing themes, like one world, one health, one family and so on in a new package under the basket of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or Āyurveda. This is to say that, even if such themes on 'One Earth' emerges from a Western perspective, how do India intend to stand different from the pre-existing themes or slogans that sound similar? This is a question that provokes us to understand cultural differences between West and India in the way they look at the world and humans.

The effect of Semitic religions in shaping this idea of 'human' in Western modernity cannot be undermined.<sup>9</sup> The idea that humans are special has a long history that could be traced back to the idea of transcendental God and the

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9 For an instance,, this subject in relation to the ecological crisis is mentioned in an old essay titled "Historical foundations of our ecological problem" by Lynn White Jr See the essay in <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203> Accessed July 26, 2022. White's essay, which is popularly called the 'Lynn White Thesis' identified several aspects of Christian thoughts that influenced the modern understanding of 'human' and its relationship with nature. Ever since it got published this essay has become the most cited essay in the nature-religion interface. See in, Religion and Ecological Crisis: The "Lynn White Thesis" at Fifty. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016.

story of Genesis that puts humans in a special relationship with the creator.<sup>10</sup> The Story goes as *God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 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.*” – Genesis 1:27 – 1:29. According to this, man was made in the image of God and was chosen as the centre of his creation. Every other creation is reduced only to serve the needs of humans. This story put humans in a special relationship with nature and God, a speciality that was unknown to the cultures before or other than semitic religions.

The Biblical story of Genesis also left a confusion within the Christian world regarding the role that humans should assume in the world. God created the Earth and He remains as the dominus or the Lord of His creations. But as He creates and departs from His creation (Earth), what did He give to Adam and his descendants (humans)? Everyone understood that God gave them (humans) rights to enjoy whatever was there on the Earth (as though all other creation was for humans to enjoy). It means that God transferred His dominion itself to humans over the Earth, for them to rule as man was created in the image of God. But to assume that God gave man His creation to merely exploit and destroy is reductive. It is a rhetoric, especially in America among liberals, environmentalists, non-Christians to quote this particular verse of Genesis and claim that what Christians seek is nothing but total devastation of earth. It would be simply absurd even from a Christian standpoint to think that God gave man the *carte blanche* to plunder the earth. If God has created something, why would he command Adam to ruin it immediately?

Therefore the verse of Genesis has to be understood along with the parallel account of creation where an expanded command of God is maintained as

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10 In the Christian world, the story of Genesis is held as a truthful description of global history (not specific to Christians alone). Therefore, it considers this special relationship that humans possess with God and nature is not only true to Christians alone but to the entire humanity.

““Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden *to tend and keep it*” (Genesis 2:15). This modification gives a new meaning to the authority that humans possess which is also to have an implicit responsibility to tend and keep what was given to Adam. In the light of this second creation account, when we read God’s instruction to mankind to *subdue and have dominion*<sup>11</sup> on the earth, we understand the command is not to plunder and have absolute ownership. It might consider nature and other species as resources or God’s gift for human pleasure, but humans are also ‘authorised’ by God to take care and ‘steward’ the earth. The word *tend* (Hebrew: abad) means “to work or serve,” and thus referring to the ground or a garden. The word *keep* (Hebrew: Shamar) means to do great care over. The verse indeed expresses the God’s wish that mankind, ‘take care of’, ‘guard’ or ‘steward’ the garden he has created.

The sense of moral superiority and dominion of humans over other species, comes from such a presumed moral obligation that is authorised.<sup>12</sup> The assumption that humans are stewards of nature comes from a secularisation of this Biblical theory. The problem of human centralism continues to remain unresolved even after secularising the idea of human stewardship, to which ‘One World, One Health’ and Manhattan Principles appear as an instance.

One of the most venerated Catholics, St. Francis of Assisi is often regarded as a ‘patron of ecology’, as he is considered as an exemplary figure of nature preservation. As a great lover of God’s creation, he considers nature and other species as brothers and sisters to mankind. After all, in the book of Genesis itself, it is said that, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, *it was very good*” (Gen 1:31), so God himself is indifferent about the goodness in all that He has created.

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11 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. - Genesis 1:26

12 Mankind is instructed to fill the earth and subdue it. Subdue doesn’t mean to destroy something violently, but to bring something into subjection or to direct something. In Genesis 1:26 and 28, God implies that He has conferred powers to mankind not given to animals.

In the Christian world, there are many stories associated with St. Francis of Assisi that tell us about his love for nature, animals.<sup>13</sup> The association of St. Francis with nature is so strong that he is often portrayed with a bird in his hand.<sup>14</sup> In the year 1979, St. Francis was declared as the patron saint of ecology by Pope John Paul II.<sup>15</sup> The pope mentioned that Francis' love and care for creation was a challenge for contemporary Catholics and said ;

“not to behave like dissident predators where nature is concerned, but to assume responsibility for it, taking all care so that everything *stays healthy and integrated*, so as to offer a welcoming and friendly environment even to those who succeed us.”<sup>16</sup>

While reading this statement from the Pope, recall the internal debate within Christianity mentioned above and try to relate this statement with the 'One World, One Health' concept as framed in its foundational Manhattan Principles. In the contemporary world this Biblical notion is now held as common sense in modernity by the West or intellectuals, who are trained in the religious way of thinking, including the people who identify themselves as 'post-Christians' or secular.

Further on World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990, the Pope emphasised the need for an ecological balance for a peaceful society. He stressed and repeated his view that the ecological crisis is a *moral issue*, which we *as humans* should be concerned about.<sup>17</sup> He added that,

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13 Bonaventure; Cardinal Manning (1867). *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (from the *Legenda Sancti Francisci*) (1988 ed.). Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books & Publishers. pp.78-85

14 This is in reference to an account that tells how St. Francis on his way with his companions stopped at a place where he saw a tree that was surrounded by a lot of birds. Francis told his companions then, “wait for me while I go to preach to my sisters the birds.” This story is considered as a sermon to Birds by him. It is a popular practice on his feast day, 4 October, for people to bring their pets and other animals to church for a blessing

15 See the INTER SANCTOS PROCLAIMING SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI AS PATRON OF ECOLOGY JOHN PAUL [https://web.archive.org/web/20140809222858/http://francis35.org/pdf/papal\\_declaration.en.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140809222858/http://francis35.org/pdf/papal_declaration.en.pdf) Accessed: August 16th 2023.

16 See in [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pt/angelus/1982/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19820328.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pt/angelus/1982/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19820328.html) Accessed: August 16th, 2023.

17 See the Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World

“It is my hope that the inspiration of Saint Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of *“fraternity”* with all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created. And may he remind us of our *serious obligation to respect and watch over them with care*, in light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the *human family*.”

Now that this essay has demonstrated in brief the story of Genesis relating to nature-human encounter, the imagery of St. Francis as patron of ecology and the position of the Pope in response to the ecological crisis, let us ask this question. Doesn't it sound same as the Manhattan Principles by the organisers of the “One World, One Health”, which calls for a human *stewardship* by establishing “a more holistic approach to preventing epidemic/epizootic disease and for maintaining ecosystem integrity *for the benefit of humans, their domesticated animals, and the foundational biodiversity that supports us all?*”<sup>18</sup> If so, isn't the case that our dominant approach to climate change, One Health, One World and so on are in a way secularised concepts of Christian theology? If we don't realise this, aren't there chances that India would reproduce the same when conceptualising One Health for Āyurveda? Wouldn't its scholars have the tendency to speak in the language of the Pope with frames like “sense of fraternity”, “obligation to care”, etc as we try to articulate things under the umbrella of ‘Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam’? The only way to avoid such a predicament is by being able to generate a scholarship that is conscious of such cultural differences, by knowing the theological trajectory of secular concepts emerging from the West.

### **Placing One Health in the Indian Cluster of Ideas**

The cluster of ideas that guided in creating the framework of ‘One Health’ emerging from Christian theology may make complete sense to individuals who believe in the truth of the Biblical idea of God, Creation, Story of Genesis, Human Progeny, Nature, etc. But when these concepts are

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Day of Peace, 1990. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html) Accessed: August 16th, 2023.

18 See the Conference Summary here [http://www.oneworldonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh\\_sept04.html](http://www.oneworldonehealth.org/sept2004/owoh_sept04.html) Accessed: August 16, 2023.

secularised and brought to the entire world as a universal concept through formal education, conferences, policies and media, there appears to be a problem. In a subtle way, it directly inserts one culture's cluster of ideas into another culture's world. The problem is doubled when Indian intellectuals, without recognising this problem, enthusiastically attempt to appropriate 'One Health' under Āyurveda and Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam. The problem is that in such a scenario, the intellectuals neither understand the knowledge that Indian traditions offer with regards to 'One Health, One Earth' nor do they gain an understanding of the Western culture and their cluster of ideas that led to building the framework of human stewardship and 'One Health, One World'.

When we hear that the cluster of ideas that speak of moral obligation and human stewardship are essentially Biblical, it is reductive to assume that Indian traditions are immoral or prevent people from performing actions that benefit nature or other species.<sup>19</sup> The absence of *biblical morality* cannot be assumed as the absence of ideas on serving the world. There are indeed words like *paropakara*, *Śīla*, *samrakshana*, *Yajña*, etc, that come to our mind when we speak about this, which may be relatable, yet different. There are also references to 'Vṛkṣa āyurveda' (Āyurveda for plants). But does it put for the cognitive condition of moral obligation to steward? If not, how else they address this issue is a research question beyond the brief's scope.

However, let us attempt to discuss if at all India or Āyurveda is attempting to conceptualise its idea on 'One Health', how could it be? What do we know from Indian traditions that make us revere and live in harmony with nature without a sense of moral obligation? How can we visualise stewardship without recognising such moral obligation for humans?

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19 In Fact this is how many orientalist and early missionaries would describe Indians that they lack ethics, moral attitude etc. As a response, the attitude of Indian scholarship was to show that they also have Morality and Ethics taking sequences from the Indian texts, without knowing what morality and ethics would essentially mean according to the people who claimed Indians lacked them. This has often led to a cross-cultural predicament in which we have started describing and understanding Indian traditions and knowledge based on Biblical theories.

To answer these questions we will have to look at a cluster of ideas on human duties that India has inherited from its traditions. For instance, the concept of Pañcha Maha in the Vedic tradition, often translated as five main 'sacrifices'. They consist of Deva Yajña (towards Devas), Pitṛ Yajña (towards ancestors), Manuṣya Yajña (towards fellow humans), Bhūta Yajña (towards other beings) and Brahma Yajña (towards knowledge).<sup>20</sup>

If the Indian sense of performing actions towards ecology is similar to the Biblical notion, the 'five debts' or Yajña should adhere to a language of 'moral obligation' of humanity, sense of doership and human centrality. On the other hand, it constantly undermines or denounces a sense of doership and human ownership. For instance, the Gītā's emphasis on performing action without attachment, to attain the highest, precisely is distinguishable from the notions that advocate to perform actions because humans have a 'moral obligation' and steward the earth.<sup>21</sup> While doership is denounced in the former, doership is mandated in the latter.

Since some of the theological notions are now being imparted as secular commonsense, it has become unimaginable to think of a cultures like in India that denounces doership or attachment, that does not assign a moral obligation to steward the earth, yet practically living in harmony with nature and other species by performing actions. How is it possible? In order to understand that, one could revisit the word Yajña for which the Bhagavad Gītā could be one of the reference points.

The word Yajña is usually translated as 'sacrifice', this translation has a connotation of 'giving'. But this translation is not only insufficient but also leads to making sense of the term in a Biblical way. When we say that we are serving nature with the sense of stewardship, where we are ready to give and sacrifice things, it is possible that one simply appropriates it as Yajña. In such an understanding, there is an emphasis or centrality on humans as s/he

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20 These 'sacrifices' or 'obligatory duties' are done to discharge Pañcha-R̥ṇa which are often translated as five 'debts'. In short, Pañcha Yajña are duties to meet the debt that an individual has inherited by default towards ancestors, knowledge, fellow beings, other beings and gods.

21 Gītā 3.9



is the sacrificer or the one who gives/protects the earth. Gandhi describes the meaning of Yajña as;

“...any activity for the good of others... in the spirit of dedication to God. The word Yajña comes from the root ‘yaj’, which means ‘to worship’, and we please God by worshipping Him through physical labour.”<sup>22</sup>

The Gītā elucidates that in Srishti (self-creation), prajas (all of us) were created along with Yajña. Then the Prajāpati declared, by means of Yajña, the prajas would flourish and through Yajña they would gain the wish-fulfilling cow (Kāmadhenu).<sup>23</sup>

What is to be carefully recognised is that while sacrifice or ‘giving’ could be an aspect of Yajña, ‘taking’ what is required is an equally important aspect of it too. It is by being conscious about that wheel of mutual relationship that our sense of individuality and human stewardship is dissolved.<sup>24</sup> This is not to perceive giving and taking as two different acts, rather the idea is to convey that by the act of taking or consuming minimally, simultaneously, an act of giving happens naturally. It is this simple and basic understanding that a culture like India, which does not hold a *moral obligation* to *steward* the earth, suggests to us in order to lead a happy life.

It shouldn’t be confused that the consciousness of Biblical moral obligation is equivalent to the average state of ego and desire, in which most of us are (who aren’t Sthitaprajña). To avoid this confusion one might imagine the scenario of a ritual. Rituals play an influential role in creating the social behaviours, regular human actions towards fellow beings, other species and nature. Rituals could be done with Kāma (desire) and Niṣkāma (without

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22 See in, Mahadev Desai, trans., The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2009, p. 39.

23 Gītā verse 3.10

24 You nourish the Gods with this (Yajña). Let those Devas (the nature) nourish you. Nourishing one another you shall attain the supreme good. (Gītā 3.11). From food arises the things that are born; from the rain-cloud the food arises; from the sacrifice the rain-cloud arises; the sacrifices arise from action. (Gītā 3.14). Action arises from the Brahman, you should know this; the Brhman arises from what does not stream forth; therefore the all-pervading Brahman is permanently based on the sacrifice or Yajña. (Gītā 3.15).

desire). This is to say rituals as such are empty, but it is the performer who attributes *kāma* or *Niṣkāma* to it. For instance, many of us perform rituals by thinking '*if this wish becomes fulfilled (say cure from an illness), I will perform this ritual or offer this for the deity or my ancestor*'.<sup>25</sup> Such an action also has attachment and desire embedded in it, but yet they are distinct from a consciousness of *moral obligation*. How?

According to the *Gītā*, it is the deities or nature being satisfied with *Yajña* or actions done as *Yajña*, which grants us necessities of life. It further says, those who enjoy what is given by them, without making offerings in return, are verily thieves.<sup>26</sup> Therefore there is a mutual relationship of giving and taking, offering and granting taking place in the wheel. They can gratify their desire only by engaging in that wheel. In this wheel, no absolute sovereign is authorised to steward anything, neither humans nor gods. Here, the attitude is such that human beings recognise that they are just another part of nature, and not separated from it. The idea of a moral obligation to steward comes from a cognitive condition that separates humans from nature.

So taking in this sense, when India or Āyurveda conceptualises its idea of 'One Health, One Earth', one of the ways in which it can be formulated is through the understanding of *Yajña vis-à-vis* moral obligation to steward. A notion that recommends, to maintain the health of humans or for humanity's survival, we have the moral obligation to maintain the health of animals and nature, might be a language that is incompatible for Āyurveda to accommodate.

This does not resonate with the Indian way of thinking, as in the subsequent verses, the *Gītā* elaborates that one who does not recognise and act according to this wheel set in motion will indulge in senses and become a *pāpi*.<sup>27</sup> *Pāpa* is not a 'sin' in its literal sense, rather it's a demeritful condition of an unhappy or unfulfilled state of mind (opposed to *Puṇya*), born as a result of one's pastk

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25 For an Āyurvedic reference for rituals see in Nichter, Mark, and Mimi Nichter. "Revisiting the Concept of Karma: Lessons from a Dhanvantari Homa." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24, no. 2 (2010): 37-55. Accessed January 21, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368827>. pp.41-43

26 *Gītā* 3.12

27 *Gītā* 3.16

karma. If Pāpa causes unhappiness, according to Āyurveda unhappiness causes diseases and diseases causes unhappiness, just as happiness creates health. Hence, to perceive our transactions with nature in other ways, like observing 'One-Health, One-Earth' as a moral obligation of humanity to steward the earth would amount to incurring Pāpa, according to the Gītā .

In Indian traditions, knowledge (Jñāna) is also associated with the ultimate state of happiness (Ānanda). According to Charaka Samhita, Āyurveda is not concerned with curing physical ailments alone. Charaka Samhita states that, "Āyurveda gives knowledge about Āyus, with special reference to happiness and unhappiness, beneficial and unbeneficial life, long and short life spans and the material qualities and actions influencing the life span.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in the words of Prof. P. Ram Manohar, Āyurveda translates as *knowledge of life*, rather than one medicine though it does deal with health and illness in great detail.<sup>29</sup> Hence, conceptualising one health in terms that would not lead to hitam ayu (salutary life) by following a sense of stewardship, authority over earth and its resources would have its inconsistency with Āyurvedic understanding of universal well-being and health.

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28 Car.Su. 30:23.

29 Manohar PR. Subjective well-being and health: A potential field for scientific enquiry into the foundational concepts of Ayurveda. *Anc Sci Life*. 2013 Oct;33(2):79-80. doi: 10.4103/0257-7941.139246. PMID: 25284938; PMCID: PMC4171857.

## Conclusion

When India tries to enter the 'One Earth, One Health' concept through Āyurveda tradition, it may have to talk about certain concepts, which may not be agreed as 'secular' (therefore, 'unscientific').<sup>30</sup> For instance, as different from the idea of creation in the Genesis, which foregrounds human centrality and 'One World' for the West, India might have to talk about the universe as an emanation of *Brahman*, as it's one of the many expressions. In that endeavour one may have to introduce and explain certain terminologies like Yajña that might get discarded as 'religious' to demonstrate how in Indian traditions human beings do not assume the position of stewardship, or a centrality, unlike how the Pope and Manhattan Principles induce the world to do. As long as one recognises these are required for a cognitive pursuit to overcome the ignorance set by the existing discourse, hesitations to employ such concepts and terms native to Āyurveda cannot be justified.

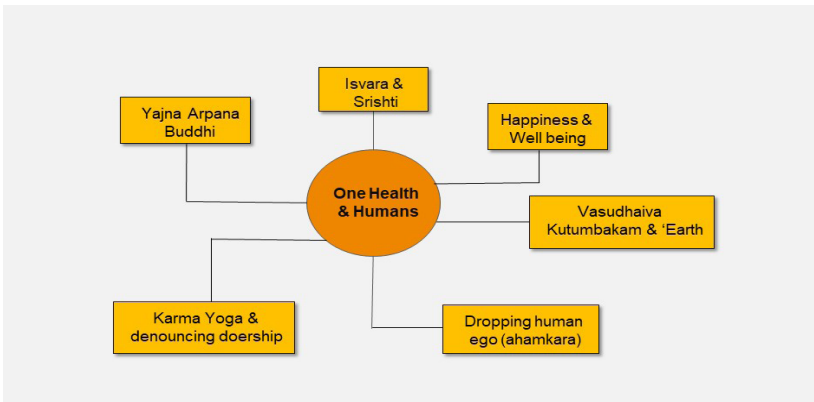
By ignoring the issue of cultural difference, there might be even possibilities of scholars coming up with secularised Christian concepts being produced in the label of Āyurveda, unintentionally. Since India has already initiated the concept of 'One Earth, One World' through Āyurveda, there indeed lies a huge amount of possibilities to narrate our experience to the world. But at the same time, there is a good amount of vulnerability, which we have to be careful about. Hence, to avoid that predicament, the scholars of Āyurveda will have to take the double task when initiating discussions and preparing content while entering the 'One Earth, One Health' domain. First, the domain could be used to boldly express their traditional experience and place 'One Health' in the Indian cluster of ideas. On the other hand,

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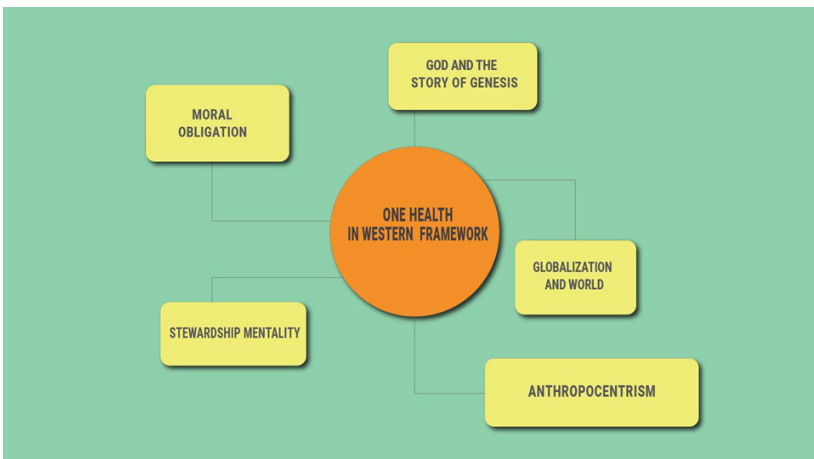
30 While referring to Āyurveda, India may even have to talk differently about things, such as how the gross body is conceived differently from mainstream modern medicine and religions. India will have to expect the criticism of Āyurveda not being secular enough to be considered as 'science'. Enthusiastically, India may tend to drop certain 'religious' factors, or find some 'scientific meaning' to tackle such problems. In that process, scholars often end up repeating the same wine in a new bottle. It is better for India to not fall in the web of secular vs religion, or science vs faith debates, which is unique to the modern condition; rather, become aware about it and attempt to figure out the theological underpinnings in the secular concepts like 'One World, One Health'.

the trajectory of Western ideas on 'One Health', its associated theological concepts, presumptions, and their origin, could also be studied to gain clarity on how Indian culture differs from the West. In that process, we may end up not re-producing merely an Indian *alternative* of 'One World, One Health'.

Based on the arguments mentioned in this essay, here is an illustration on how the concept of 'One Health' in the West is led by a number of Clusters of Ideas in the West (fig i).



The idea of one health for Āyurveda could be conceptualised in diverse ways using different clusters of ideas based on Indian traditions. However, in the subsequent image (fig ii), a particular cluster of Ideas is chosen that could be accommodated when India/Āyurveda begins to conceptualise 'One Health'.



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