



Faith Communities and Ecological Crisis: The Pedagogical Role of *Brahma Kumari* in Environmental Action

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is one of the most serious problems faced by humanity in the twenty-first century. The state-centric approach to address climate change primarily focused on positive legal instrumentalities. This approach did not achieve its set goals. Under the Paris Agreement of 2015 on Climate Change, a bottom-up approach was adopted and States were given the right to make their own choices to determine the greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. The new approach shifted the focus in the international climate change negotiations from external legally binding caps to self-determination. This provided an opportunity for the researchers to study the possible role of ethics and religions in modifying the behavior of individuals along with the state in matters of environmental degradation and climate change. In this paper, we are examining the work and program of Brahma Kumari, which is a women-centered spiritual organization to analyze its role in environmental protection. The paper further attempts to analyze whether or to what extent the values and morals popularized by Brahma Kumari have been practically implemented and followed by their devotees.

Keywords: Faith Community, Women, Brahma Kumari

Introduction

One of the leading issues of the twenty-first century is the ecological crisis, predominantly caused by climate change. This problem is the result of unbridled economic growth through unchecked industrialization and the mindset and ideology that supports this trend. The roots of environmental problems, therefore, are deep into history and date back to the nineteenth century when the Western World first experienced the taste of Industrialisation.

It is the Western World that first experienced the heat of industrialization and all the industrial hubs located all over the Western World witnessed colossal environmental destruction. The voice for protecting the environment, therefore, also emerged first in the Western World and numerous environmental organizations, Green parties, and environmental activists became popular with their green agenda. Green concepts like environmental conservation, environmental preservation, Deep Ecology, etc. emerged out of such popular voices, and throughout Europe and North America, environment protection became a subject of management.

However, with some relative success, the Western approach to environmental protection has largely failed to address one of the most pressing issues of the present century – climate change. In the last decade of the 20th century, the western States coordinated their efforts to deal with the problem of climate change and created the United Nations Frame Work Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) under the auspices of the United Nations. The Conference of Parties (COP) under UNFCCC adopted the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 which was predicated on the idea of using managerial and marketing strategies to solve the issue of climate change.

The Kyoto Protocol, however, did not produce the desired results. In 2015 the COP adopted the Paris Agreement which differed significantly from the Kyoto Protocol. It employed a bottom-up strategy, essentially distinct from the Kyoto Protocol's top-down approach. It necessitated that each party must choose its own goal for cutting greenhouse gas emissions depending on the level of its development. This brought morality into the picture since the onus was on individual States to determine their targets for emission reduction. All the States were free to choose their preferred level of development, but as a result of the Paris Agreement, each must come up with efficient plans to cut its greenhouse gas emissions.¹

The success of the Paris Agreement would, however, depend on how well States coordinate their efforts at the international level and encourage individual roles at the local level in climate action since the reduction of emission level of greenhouse gases is largely linked to the rationalization of individual's choices for energy consumption. The individual is to make a moral choice to reduce his/her carbon footprint and determine appropriate strategies for a sustainable way of life. A significant body of academic literature suggests adopting ethical and all-encompassing approaches to combat climate change in the post-Paris Agreement. According to Hulme, climate change is not restricted to being an environmental predicament that can be solved quickly. It encompasses cultural, political, and ecological factors that influence our understanding of the natural world, our way of life on this planet, and our shared goals.²

To fulfil India's commitment under the Paris Agreement, India also embraced a holistic and ethical approach to address the issue of climate change. Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, introduced Mission LIFE at COP26 in 2021, intending to signify the role of individuals in global climate action. LIFE envisioned a circular economy, characterized by thoughtful and purposeful utilization, to replace the dominant "use-and-dispose" economy, which was driven by irrational and harmful consumption. The Mission aimed to encourage people to make small everyday changes that, when adopted globally, could have a substantial impact on reducing climate change.³ The moral values, ethics, and religion are some of the drivers that guide individual's actions both in the personal and public sphere and therefore it is a matter of investigation to understand how these drivers govern individual decision-making with respect to climate change.

Although the present-day secular state keeps itself absolved of the issue that emerges out of religion but states do use moral values as a tool to regulate individual behaviour in some issue areas. According to Dasgupta and Ramanathan "Finding ways to develop a sustainable relationship with nature requires not only engagement of scientists and political leaders but also moral leadership that religious institutions are in a position to offer"⁴. Today several researchers argue that religion can knock at the conscience of individuals and instil the intrinsic value of self-discipline.⁵ The importance of religion in developing the moral consciousness of individuals has also been highlighted by the Economic Survey of India 2019 by referring to the "Hindu doctrine of pious obligation that implies the moral duty of the son to pay off the debts of his father or grandfather".⁶

India is a multi-religious country and the largest section of society follows the Hindu religion. Hindu religion is more a tradition than religion as it does not fit within the conventional definition of religion. While Islam and Christianity have a single authoritative text that presents their respective worldviews, the Hindu religion is a conglomeration of diverse religious ideas and faith traditions. The principal sources of these religious ideas and traditions are Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas. Though many Hindu scriptures contain diverse information regarding the environment and nature, it is largely accepted that Hinduism discusses the sacredness of nature and the preservation of the environment. Hinduism includes a wealth of information and awareness about environmental challenges since it establishes the link between nature, religion, and morality.⁷ The rise of faith communities within Hinduism also helped in the emergence of ecological activism in India in the last few decades.

In this paper, we are analysing the role of faith communities in general and Brahma Kumaris in particular to answer the question: What role do faith communities play in developing a positive relationship between Man and Nature? The present research paper attempts to explore inferences of this relationship between man and nature by undertaking an analysis of whether the preachings of a Hindu faith community i.e. Brahma-Kumaris can be used as a tool to regulate individual choices and moderate the individual action towards the environment. Brahma Kumari is a movement that originated in Hyderabad and Sindh in the 1930s; it is not a religion. Lekhraj Kriplani started the movement. It gained wide recognition due to the significant roles that women played in it. It is against this background the present paper will attempt to study the role of women and faith communities in advocating the development and implementation of efficient and long-lasting climate-resilient policies. The paper tries to analyse the role of Brahma Kumaris in transmitting ecological values and morals to their devotees and followers.

Faith communities and environmental issues

Religion offers a valuable perspective for comprehending human attitudes and behaviours towards environmental issues. There is a growing awareness that religious communities have a special and significant role to play in society and that they must act. The diverse moral and ethical stances that different religious traditions have on environmental issues have been extensively studied in literature by Grim and Tucker⁸; Jenkins et al.⁹, Berry¹⁰, Haluza-DeLay,¹¹ and Veldman.¹² Within numerous communities worldwide, religion serves as a distinct prism through which we evaluate human worldviews, attitudes, and behaviours about significant challenges including social as well as environmental transformation.¹³ The reason for the same can be attributed to the fact that most people identify with one type of religious tradition or another.¹⁴ Religious beliefs and perspectives on the natural world continue to impact people's behaviour and their relationship with the environment.¹⁵ Tucker writes: "Religions can encourage values and ethics of reverence, respect, redistribution, and responsibility for formulating a broader environmental ethics that includes humans, ecosystems, and other species. With the help of religions, humans are now advocating for a reverence for the

earth.”¹⁶ Thus, by tapping into the values, ideals, and guidelines from various religions and cultures, we can constructively inform our response to environmental problems and work towards a more sustainable future. However, supplementary research is vital to comprehend the literal role of faith communities in mobilizing people to adopt environmentally friendly practices. It can be argued that faith-based actors contribute much more than only encouraging and inciting action or a response to climate change. A growing body of research is available for assessing the faith actors' ability, such as their capacity to use moral frameworks to mobilize and inspire people on climate change.¹⁷ According to Kearns, faiths communities provide a broad ethical outline to policymakers and civil society advocates for understanding the significant issue of climate change¹⁸. The Faith-based actors correspondingly influence perceptions of climate change and the actions that should be taken in the policy and civil society sectors, locally and globally.¹⁹ According to Beyer²⁰ and Bolotta²¹ et al., faith actors are intermediaries or translators between local communities and policymakers. The focus on advocacy is one instance of how faith actors use their position and power to engage with decision-makers "upward" and push for changes to environmental and climate policies. Faith actors are engaging with the problem of climate change in a much more complex way and building on Grim and Tucker's work they are trying to seamlessly integrate the intellectual and practical framings of climate change suggestion of “retrieving, re-evaluating, and reconstructing religious teachings.”²² A growing number of faith-based projects in recent years aim to discuss the environmental benefits of different faith traditions, inspire religious adherents to lead eco-friendly lives, and actively participate in international environmental discourse and policy. Some academicians argue that a global "greening of religion" is taking place as a result of these and related initiatives.²³

Faith traditions additionally have a critical role to play in sustainable development discussions. Faith-based actors contribute more fundamentally than just encouraging and instigating an action or a response to climate change. Both the Eastern and Western faith traditions offer alternative models for production and consumption, promotion of ethical values, development of novel forms of ecological activism, and inspiring pro-environmental behaviours. Since the notions of materialism, consumption, and the pursuit of a good life are central to each religion, we anticipate that those who act on behalf of faith-based organizations would integrate these ideas with sufficiency and fulfilling life during their environmental engagement endeavours. By doing so, new directions can be achieved, further strengthening the efforts to maintain ecological balance and harmony. The integration of these faith traditions can furnish a unique perspective on the realm of sustainable development, emphasizing the crucial role of religious as well as cultural values in shaping contemporary environmental discourse.

Considering the above-stated arguments the current research aims to investigate the contributions of women and people of faith to the creation and execution of effective, long-lasting policies that address climate change. For undertaking this task, we will look into the policies and programmes of Brahma-kumaris: a faith community managed by women.

Understanding the Women and Environment Relationship

Millions of households rely on the labour of women to sustain their livelihood. Compared to males, they have a wider range of duties and work for longer hours. It is argued that the role of women is very important for sustainable development. Therefore, recently women have been given more responsibilities in almost all walks of life. Women are also in a good position to contribute to the livelihood plans that synchronize with the ever-changing environmental realities. Women are playing the roles of custodians of household and natural resources in their homes and communities. As most women are in charge of ensuring food security for their families, they are crucial to the management of ecological diversity in the majority of nations. They create a variety of farming system strategies. They are the true experts on biodiversity. In tribal societies and rural places, women gather firewood and other forest materials for building houses, making medicine, and preparing food. In addition, women work in the agricultural field in different capacities. They weed, prepare, fix, and plant the stems. Their knowledge of different medicinal plants that are available in the forest is very crucial. It helps in the treatment of various illnesses and improves health outcomes. The age-old experience of women brings unique insights into regional species and ecosystems, shaping their understanding of biodiversity. Women have a wealth of knowledge about forests and forest products, and it is essential for the protection of biodiversity that this knowledge be preserved.

Women are key players in the management of natural resources and significantly contribute to the preservation and restoration of ecosystems, as several studies on women and the environment have shown. Vandana Shiva, has contended that the country's progress is a reflection of a conflict between two ideologies. The commercial forestry system, which views forests as a resource to be exploited for their financial worth and establishes private property in forest wealth, is considered from a life-destroying and masculinist perspective on the one hand. While the feminist life-conserving principle is reflected in the understanding of the forest as a complex, self-reproducing system that is utilized as a common by a range of social groupings²⁴. Bina Agarwal developed an alternative framework for the study of ecology and sustainable development and termed it 'environmental feminism'. She argued that women of poor rural households most affected by environmental degradation are the ones who participate most actively in ecology movements²⁵.

In tackling certain environmental issues, women occupy a prominent position. For instance, a protracted campaign was launched in 1974 by women in India's Garhwal region of Himalayas against the government contractors for trees cutting. Women started the movement since the forest was essential for their daily lives. Women have a direct connection with their local environment as they were mostly involved in activities like farming, water and firewood collection. They often take the brunt of environmental degradation because of their direct dependency on forest resources. Using traditional Indian dances like Bharata Natyam, women are also involved in conveying the tragedy of ecological disasters. Renowned dancer and feminist activist Mallika Sarabhai tells the Chipko movement's story in her dance, *Shakti: The Power of Women*.²⁶ Therefore, women can effectively function as change agents when it comes to adaptation and mitigation measures of climate change. When it comes to efforts aimed at mitigating climate change, disaster relief, and adaptation, women often have a wealth of expertise and experience to offer.

Brahma Kumari: A Feminist Face of Faith Community

Hinduism is a broad term that embraces a wide range of religious traditions, both ancient and modern.²⁷ Moreover, it is not a uniform tradition. Hinduism is a vibrant tradition which also include distinct network of followers and believers who are initiated into the sect or faith community by their respective religious head called guru. One such prominent faith community founded on the broad principles of Hinduism is Brahma Kumari²⁸. This religious movement, which takes its spiritual inspiration from Hinduism is led by women.

The Brahma Kumari²⁹ represents a religious movement that originated within Hinduism and incorporates innovative teachings derived from its founder, Dada Lekhraj³⁰ who was a devoted follower of Vishnu, adhering to the tradition of Vallabha, with the Bhagavad Gita serving as his guiding principle in life. It is believed Dada Lekhraj got his teachings called murlis from the incorporeal soul. The teaching of Dada Lekhraj had its basis on Bhagavad Gita where Om was a central focus of satsangs. These meetings became known as Om Mandli and were the beginnings of what is now the Brahma Kumari movement³¹. The movement later change its name to Brahma Kumari in 1945. According to Pitashrik Brahma, women are kind, selfless and tolerant creatures possessing special qualities. In India, women are identified with Saraswati who represents strength; hence this makes sense. Consequently, there are several Indian rivers named after women's virtues such as Kaveri, Saraswati and Yamuna indicating that women are extremely valuable in society. Therefore, the founder of this institution envisioned women as custodians of moral values that can transform societies through their priceless knowledge impartation³².

Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Madhya Pradesh-central India represents all denominations of religion and accepts them as genuine religions in respect of faith and worship. The objective of the organization is inspired by divine vision and it has always tried to live up to divine principles while teaching others. Their core principles stem from Hinduism which espouses the belief in four Yugas: the Golden, Silver, Copper, and Iron ages. They view the current period as the culmination of the Iron Age, and thus see their mission as a noble endeavour to usher in a new era of unity and purity and peace among humankind. Yet they realize that true metamorphosis can only come about through individual effort and commitment. As Dadi has wisely said, "The change must start from within us, and we must not wait for others to change. Once we gain control over our minds, we can overcome all sorrow. Love has the potential to transform anyone, but it takes a strong soul to offer it."³³

The Brahma Kumari follows four different paths in their attempt to live as spiritual beings in the world. Gyan (knowledge), yoga (meditation), dharna (virtuous inculcation), and seva (service) are these four disciplines. They establish a spiritual connection with God, whom they refer to as Shiv Baba, the Supreme Soul, via the practice of soul consciousness. It is crucial to grasp the underlying principles of each of these four disciplines and their associated practices to gain a comprehensive understanding of Brahma Kumari's life choices. A comprehensive view of self-worth, God, time, reincarnation, karma, the world, and social behaviour is encompassed by the Brahma Kumari philosophy.³⁴

The global reach of Brahma Kumari extends to millions of individuals who benefit from the gentle discipline of Raja Yoga meditation. The Raja yoga course covers topics such as the human soul, the divine, and the connection between the two. It helps individuals develop their minds to the highest level and establish a communication channel with the Supreme Being through Raja yoga Meditation. The Brahma Kumari organization upholds the principles of Raja Yoga, founded on four pillars: celibacy, vegetarianism, Amrit vela meditation, and the inculcation of values. Their teachings place great emphasis on the soul, the supreme soul, and the law of karma. According to their philosophy, humans are pure consciousness, manifested in the form of souls. Yoga and meditation practices help one to shift focus from body consciousness to soul consciousness. Through meditation and establishing a connection with the Supreme Soul, one can attain inner peace and spiritual strength— which are much needed in life. Brahma Kumari Raja Yoga points out that suffering arises due to an uncontrolled mind driven by the forces of desire, anger, or ignorance; it also stems from not acknowledging our true spiritual identity and essence. In their meditative practices, Brahma Kumari aims at liberating themselves from past karmic debts by visualizing themselves as souls and recollecting divine energy— an act through which they seek forgiveness for all wrongdoings committed³⁵.

Moreover, the course delves into the idea of karma and rebirth and how it applies to us in our day-to-day lives. Karma is a complex dual system— a debtor and creditor relationship where the soul, as the architect of its own existence, creates both its dues and bonuses. The law of karma highlights the importance of personal

responsibility and ethical living. They believe that past actions have led us here, and present actions will determine the course of tomorrow. It is argued that when one acts with a heightened level of awareness or altruistic intent, they attract similar positive energy in return.³⁶ One's mindfulness and outlook play a pivotal role in reshaping the world we inhabit today which is marked by poverty, inequality, and degradation.

Brahma Kumari and Climate Change

The Brahma Kumari's conceptualization of climate change and the role of individuals in combating it was convincingly presented by Sister Jayanti Kriplani on the eve of COP 22 on November 9th, 2016. She argued, "Without Spirituality and faith, I don't think we can reverse the effect of climate change. When we look at personal responsibility, it is not a question of government actions anymore, but it is about my own conscience"³⁷ Brahma Kumari's philosophy on the environment is all about highlighting the individual's ability to make a positive impact on the world. They believe that each individual has the power to make a difference. They consider that there is a close connection between the physical world and our internal world of thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. The self is viewed as the starting point, with the soul being considered the most valuable aspect of a human being. The body is seen only as the chariot for the soul and should be treated with respect. The first point of contact with the environment is through our bodies as we interact with the world's natural resources by way of eating, drinking, and bathing. Brahma Kumari believes that everything that each person does affects others and that small actions over time amount to big societal changes. They assert a basic spiritual principle—longing for something will never satisfy us. What satisfies us is being kind and feeling sorry for others rather than what we crave or desire. When attitudes of elegance and concern are nurtured, mindfulness, empathy, and an association with nature can be more fully developed leading to behaviour that supports positive relationships between people in their surroundings. This leads to behaviours that promote positive, harmonious relationships with our surroundings.

Brahma Kumari suggests that a change in individual's perception of nature can be accomplished by prioritizing soul consciousness. Soul consciousness means being humble and having respect for all living things; this is different from body consciousness which encourages egocentric qualities and selfishness. This approach emphasizes spiritual outlook, aiming at creating a sense of responsible environmental stewardship thereby encouraging eco-friendliness. Therefore, Brahma Kumari argues that change of attitude is the best means for changing an individual's relationship with his/her external surroundings while meditation is the best way of empowering one's mind. They advocate for people to develop inner strength and follow spiritual rules through Raja Yoga meditation. This can help restore balance and harmony in the world. According to Brahma Kumari all aspects of existence are governed by universal spiritual laws, and thus, a change in one's lifestyle would have a changing effect on the world. Brahma Kumari says that apart from avoiding pollution, nature can be preserved only by practicing resource conservation, and watchful use natural resources as well as acquiring virtues like compassion for others. These values transcend human beings in their physical existence.

The Brahma Kumari Raja Yoga practice of meditation shows how humanity can improve its relationship with the environment. It emphasises a shift from materialistic attitudes to environmental values by changing their inner selves. They believe that the practice of Raja yoga helps promote within individuals the pristine value of love for all forms of life. It urges people to see themselves as co-owners of the earth to be cared for. It assists in putting our lives into perspective and appreciating that it is important to balance the needs of individual with the demands of the world.³⁸ The Raja Yoga prepare the individual for environmental stewardship and it is best explained in the words of Chander, "By changing our own mental environment, we shall change the face of the earth itself. The replenished earth shall give birth to a new society, technologically advanced yet also completely virtuous. This is not a dream, but a revealed reality. This is Raja Yoga. This is the pure path to planetary transformation."³⁹

Besides meditation, the Brahma Kumari aims to foster and support the much-needed paradigm shift by embracing innovative ideas and technologies. The Brahma Kumari Environment Initiative's (BKEI) attempt to spread awareness about the value of environmental protection through dialogue, discussion, partnership with other organization and UN conferences on the environment.⁴⁰ The Brahma Kumari has collaborated closely with the United Nations for over four decades and have been granted consultative status due to their outstanding contributions to environmental protection. From 2009 to 2020, Sister Jayanti effectively led the Brahma Kumari delegation to the Conference of the Parties (COP), under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. She shared her insights with audiences worldwide on the positive impact of human consciousness in tackling climate change. She argued that insightful spiritual teachings may have positive influence on individuals. Sister Jayanti at COP21 in Paris 2015, said:

Everything starts with the individual. Things are happening across the world—it's as if humans have forgotten to stay in touch with their own hearts. But it has to start with myself. The shift in my consciousness means I don't need to take so much from outside. When you turn inwards and connect with the happiness and joy within, your lifestyle becomes a simple one. There's a spirit of generosity and care and you can share it with others. It's one planet and one home.... We are one family... We all survive together or we all sink together... We all have to work together in a spirit of cooperation, not competition with each other. There's no other way...(Let each one) make a conscious choice knowing that your decision about what you buy, eat, or wear is going to have an impact on your carbon footprint and is going to have an impact on others.⁴¹

The Brahma Kumari emphasises the need to address the physical environment in a responsible and respectful way with spirituality as a central idea. It believes that government and international organizations like the UN and individuals should contribute equally to responsible environmental action. The five guiding principles⁴² proposed by BKEI for individuals include:

1. To live with simplicity, individuals should opt for a vegetarian or vegan diet, exercise mindfulness when consuming services and resources, and aim to minimize waste and pollution.
2. To buy compassionately, one should prioritize purchasing locally sourced products and environmentally friendly goods and services, as feasible within budgetary constraints.
3. Living economically necessitates carefully using resources, avoiding wastefulness, and being mindful of product lifecycles. Such principles are founded on respect and gratitude.
4. Continuous learning is key to progress, and individuals and organizations alike should strive to work in partnership with one another and share best practices.
5. Lastly, sharing information generously and encouraging an inclusive mindset in initiatives and projects is essential. By doing so, individuals can promote sustainability and make a positive impact on their surroundings.

Environmental Initiatives by Brahma Kumari:

Through free seminars, workshops, and conferences, the international Brahma Kumari organization seeks to awaken people's consciousness and improve their lives for the better. Brahma Kumari employs meditation, innovation, and clean technologies for a sustainable future. According to Brahma Kumari, it is essential for ecologically sensitive development that due care should be given to adopting Sustainable Yogic Agriculture, harnessing solar energy, and prioritizing biodiversity restoration.⁴³ The several initiatives undertaken by Brahma Kumari exhibit their commitment to sustainable energy solutions and highlight their innovative approach to address energy challenges.

Vegetarianism:

The Brahma Kumari community adheres to the principle of consuming vegetarian (Satvik) food, which is characterized by its purity, positivity, and absence of negativity. As per the teachings of the Gita, a vegetarian diet is characterized by its lightness, ease of digestion, and high pranic content, which encourages positive thoughts, joy, and contentment. It is a source of emotional and spiritual comfort and comprises naturally grown vegetarian foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts, which can purify the mind and body, promoting optimal health. Careful preparation and the use of ingredients that are free from violence are essential components of this dietary approach. It is consumed according to individual needs, with a focus on minimizing waste and remembering God. This diet is believed to promote positive thoughts, foster spiritual growth, and inspire love and respect for the Supreme Father. A vegetarian diet is also reflective of humanity's values of compassion, care, peace, and reverence for nature.⁴⁴

Solar Thermal Plant:

Brahma Kumari and its sister organization, the "World Renewal Spiritual Trust"⁴⁵ have been pioneers of renewable energies in India since the mid-90s. They are leading the way in renewable energy research and implementation in India. In 2014, WRST was chosen to pioneer an Awareness & Training Centre focused on Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST) Technologies, as part of the UNDP-GEF-MNRE initiative. Ever since then, they have been conducting routine training sessions on CST. Near the Brahma Kumari's Shantivan Campus in Abu Road, the "India One" solar thermal power plant was started in 2017, generating 1 MW of power. The Om Shanti Retreat Centre of Brahma Kumari in Gurugram also has a 1 MW hybrid solar power plant that employs Lead-Acid and Lithium-Ion batteries to guarantee a consistent power supply. This endeavour has garnered backing from the German Government (BMUB/GIZ) and the Indian Government (MNRE), as well as technical collaboration from the Fraunhofer Research Institute in Germany. The organization also manages over 350 photovoltaic battery systems across India, boasting a combined peak capacity exceeding 1.4 MW.⁴⁶

Brahma Kumari has also installed six large concentrating solar systems that are designed to produce steam for various process applications such as cooking, laundry, and sterilization. Over the past several decades, solar water heating plants have been installed as a means of meeting the hot water demands at numerous campuses nationwide.

Tree Plantation:

The Brahma Kumari organization has planted around 14 million trees in India. Besides that, under the visionary leadership of Dadi Prakashmani, the Gyan Sarovar project was initiated that focused on environmental preservation. Despite the land being deemed infertile, the project was strategically developed around the existing trees and mountains. The decision to experiment with fruit trees proved to be fruitful, resulting in a wide variety of produce, such as plums, apricots, bananas, grapes, and mangoes.

Kalp taruh, another unique initiative undertaken by the organization seeks to integrate the sacred act of nurturing a plant with the principles that nourish the soul. It is the harmonization of two distinct goals, represented by the fusion of kalptaru and ruh. In Hindi, taru means tree, while ruh represents the spiritual essence that animates the body. Through an innovative app, the project aims to offer sustenance to both the tree and the planter.⁴⁷

Sustainable Yogic Agriculture:

It is a project that brings together people with similar beliefs, allowing them to meditate for “Yogis for Future”⁴⁸ and also think positively and right about the betterment of humanity and the planet. It insists on the importance of a sound mind as well as a healthy planet. This is so, because it emphasizes mindfulness and meditation in agriculture that helps to create an environment where people can relate harmoniously with nature and other living things.

Sustainable Yogic Agriculture, also called "Sashwat Yogic Kheti,"⁴⁹ is a novel method of farming that combines aspects of yoga philosophy with traditional agricultural practices to establish an eco-friendly sustainable system. It entails using organic inputs such as cow dung, urine, etc., coupled with other practices like crop rotation, composting, intercropping, etc. to improve soil fertility thereby reducing chemical fertilizers or pesticide use.

The Brahma Kumaris teachings have been accepted by almost 1000 farmers who are now practicing “sustainable yogic agriculture”. Inclusive in this innovative model are practicing vegetarianism adopting traditional organic farming techniques, and implementing ethical animal husbandry practices among others while engaging in constant meditation.⁵⁰

The suggested type of farming will result in several benefits for farmers including lowering of costs, better environmental practices, improved mental well-being, and enhanced community sustainability. By adopting this approach, farmers can minimize expenses associated with their agricultural activities while reducing their carbon footprint and environmental degradation. Additionally, the strategy's emphasis on sustainable practices and community engagement can contribute to improved mental and emotional health outcomes for farmers, as well as the development of more robust and interconnected local communities.

Waste Management

The Brahma Kumari have developed a Clean Park that combines technology and spirituality to manage waste sustainably and thus benefit the community. Biodegradable waste is processed using a biogas digester to generate biogas and fertilizer. Dry waste is repurposed or recycled. They plan to start the plant in 2024.⁵¹

Concluding Remarks:

The anthropogenic contribution to environmental degradation is one of the biggest external challenges that people are currently facing as a group. The environmental movements are always influenced by an individual's perception with respect to his/her relationship with the environment and how he/she perceives his/her responsibility and calls to an action. The global political and non-state movements against climate change are currently expanding. Accordingly, along with the formal institutions of the state, non-state actors such as religious groups are also emerging to share the responsibility of protecting our planet from environmental degradation and climate change.

According to the UNEP Report, more than 80% of people's behaviours are driven by spiritual values.⁵² People are deeply connected with their surroundings and this relationship is largely conditioned by the respective faith system of the individuals., Thus, religious groups influence the way the individual thinks, feels, believes, and behaves, about their surroundings and environment. The indigenous cultures, religious leaders, and faith communities offer various viable practical solutions when addressing the challenges of environmental degradation and climate change. Many studies suggested that faith communities have the potential to safeguard our planet by openly addressing environmental concerns and exerting unwavering influences on corporations and governments, both financially and socially. Given their hand in addressing the issues of moral responsibility, these communities possess the necessary resources and resilience to effect real change. The Brahma Kumari, a faith community, has tried to successfully invoke moral consciousness among its followers by insisting that the environment must be protected through the idea of ‘world transformation through self-transformation’⁵³. Without going after personal change, an external change will not be inspired and we will not be able to rise above our limited egos. They maintain that an internal link exists between the inner mind and the external world. Their teachings hold that the condition of our surroundings is not solely dependent on our actions, but is also influenced by our spiritual state. They posit that when we disregard the essential understanding of the eternal nature of our souls and succumb to materialistic wants and self-absorption, it leads to the decline of our environment. Therefore, the members of the Brahma Kumari community engage in a continual process of self-reflection and personal growth, drawing on their teachings and practices to preserve a soul-conscious condition in a society that frequently gives priority to material needs.

Brahma Kumari gains the inner strength necessary to effect meaningful change in themselves and their surroundings through their pursuit of spiritual knowledge and regular meditation. They strive to cultivate a

harmonious and sustainable relationship with the environment by prioritizing this practice. Brahma Kumari believes that our thoughts form the foundation of our character and life. With a positive mindset, they believe that the individual can make a positive impact on the world.

The environmental programs and values advocated by the Brahma Kumari for its followers are commendable. However, it is pertinent to conduct ethnographic studies of Brahma Kumari to examine the scope of practical implications of their values. This is a future research agenda that may address some of the unanswered research questions.

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