

Dr. Kamla Chowdhry on the function of 'Vedic Hymns Offered to the Earth'

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The Environment Education Council for Children (EECC) was established in 1994 and was inaugurated by Maurice Strong, the Secretary General of the U.N. Commission on Environment and Development. This was a major event of the 20th Century, where over 150 heads of Government and thousands of other organizations participated in reviewing what we had done to the Earth and its resources and jointly worked out an Agenda 21 for appropriate action.

The Principal, the teachers, the students of D.P.S. have been actively associated with environmental and ecological issues through the EECC. They have taken an active part in analyzing air and water samples from different parts of Delhi; they have introduced vermi composting to deal with kitchen waste in schools; a campaign against firecrackers, and a campaign against polythene bags. They have done an excellent job in sensitizing shopkeepers in markets, in sensitizing their parents and neighbours, and above all are doing what they are preaching.

The EECC is not just an awareness raising, sensitizing of people to Environment and Development issues, but is attempting to change the inner core of a person's needs and satisfaction.

Today's function of our offerings to the Earth via the Vedic hymns, and hymns from the Muslim and Christian faith has deep meaning for us at many levels. It means that if we as humanity are to survive in the 21st Century, we need to restore our relationship with the Earth, and our relationship with nature and other living beings. The over emphasis on scientific and technological knowledge in the 20th Century and on rational analytical attitudes are profoundly anti-ecological. Rational thinking is linear, whereas ecological and environment thinking is profoundly holistic - as is spiritual awakening.

We all know that our society is in a mess, in spite of (or is it because of) all our scientific and technical advances. We are losing our forests, our soils, our pastures, we are polluting our rivers and lakes and oceans. We are exhausting our underground water and other resources such as oil, copper, coal, gold etc.

We must teach our students, our teachers, the importance of the Earth, the important of spiritual concerns, the importance of moral and ethical behaviour, the importance of tradition and culture, and the importance of holistic, intuitive relationships.

We need to relearn that the Earth is our home, and is home to all living beings. We need to learn to see the beauty of the Earth, and learn to have a sense of reverence for it. The Vedic hymns that you will hear are our offerings to the Earth, as they have been for the last 5,000 years. The message is that we need to respect and care for the Earth, to use it with reverence, to share it with others with a sense of equity and justice. The Vedic

hymns to the Earth, underline our need to make the Earth Charter a living guide for us in our life.

What is the Earth Charter? It is a document, which first emerged in the Rio Conference in 1992. Subsequently, an Earth Charter Commission was established to develop an Earth Charter, which could be adopted by the UN on similar lines as the Human Rights Charter.

The teacher and students of DPS, and many other organizations across the world have discussed the Earth Charter Draft to provide their inputs to it.

The Earth Charter is a short, inspirational document containing a timeless expression of a bold, new global ethics by the peoples of the Earth! The Earth Charter draws not only on the scientific knowledge but also on the wisdom of world religions and on global, universal ethics, as well as international law.

If we are to survive in the 21st Century, we must restore our relationship with Earth; we need a perspective that is holistic and spiritual in nature, which will lead us to profound changes in our social and political structures, and in our education policies and curriculum. This function of Vedic hymns to the Earth is our first step in this direction. And I hope we will have the encourage to take the next step with confidence and vigour.

1. AN EVENING OF VEDIC HYMNS OFFERED TO THE EARTH

The Environment Education Council (EECC) of the Delhi Public School Society (DPS), dedicated an evening of Vedic Hymns in praise of the Earth on Saturday, 6th Feb 1999, under the guidance of Dr. Kamla Chowdhry, Chairperson EECC. Fifteen hundred parents, students and teachers gathered together to give expression to an integrated ethical vision for our common future.

Spearheading the discussions on the Earth Charter with teachers, students and parents of DPS, Dr. Chowdhry hoped to raise awareness among the younger generation and provide an understanding of ecological and development issues, relevant to our nation, culture and tradition. The Earth Charter was important to achieve these objectives, she said.

When the school children sang from the ancient Vedic texts, they realised that they must care for the Earth as their ancestors did. Ecology was a sacred science for the Vedic Man. The Vedic attitude towards the Earth was of being, on one hand, a guest and on the other, an offspring of the Earth. The Earth is an object of worship and not of exploitation, of veneration of the highest value in the hierarchy of existence. Vedic Man would find any attempt at dominating or subjugating the earth incomprehensible.

In their selection of the chants, the children sang of the Earth as Mother, the basis out of which emerges all that exists and on which everything rests. The earth is the basis of life and, when considered as a divine being, she always occupies a special place among the Gods.

Further they sang of Man being of the earth and earthly. But the Earth is not simply nature, is not merely geographical or material; it is part of Man himself, so that Man can no more live without the Earth than he can live without a body.

The chants depict the Earth as rich and the owner of treasures. Man's work is to enjoy the blessings of the earth, because the earth is his home, his own family, his body. She is, a cosmic giant, a cosmic power, the receiver of prayers and the bestower of blessings, the protector and the inscrutable judge. These chants and others from the famous Prayer to the Earth - one of the most beautiful hymns of the Veda, the children rendered to almost perfection.

Listening to approximately 200 students chanting beautifully in their traditional white and saffron clothes was a visual delight, and a soul stirring experience that would be memorable for all those who attended the function.

The Earth Charter

- a Promise by students of Delhi Public School, R K Puram, Sector XII, New Delhi - 22

I. General Principles.

1. Respect Earth and all life.
2. Care for Earth, ensure the well being of humanity and all life upon it in its diversity.
3. Ensure that the future generation will live in a peaceful and cleaner world.

II. Fundamental Guidelines.

4. Protect the Earth's beauty and integrity of its ecological systems.
5. Avoid damage to the environment, prevent activities which cause serious harm and undertake to heal existing damage.
6. Establish justice which ensures dignity, health and well being to all persons equally.
7. Live sustainably so that Earth's regenerative capacities are not harmed by our consumption, production patterns.
8. Promote economic development keeping in mind humanity's fundamental social, ethical and ecological values.
9. Practice non-violence.

III. Areas of Special Concern.

10. Conserve the bio-diversity of the ecosystem on Earth and maintain genetic stock of each species.
11. Use resources efficiently and sustainably.
 - a. Reduce, reuse and recycle.

- b. Minimise usage of non-renewable resources and use alternative sources of energy like sun, wind water, biomass.
 - c. Use renewable resources judiciously within the regenerative capacity of the eco system.
12. Eliminate pollution and hazardous water such as toxic & chemical substances that endanger all living beings.
 13. Encourage eco-friendly technologies.
 14. Establish price-levels taking into account the socio-economic, ecological costs.
 15. Follow a policy of disarmament & curb military activity.
 16. Provide education & health care without any gender bias to all communities.
 17. Start educational programmes that enable the young to acquire knowledge, skills & values needed for sustainable development.
 18. Ensure universal access to information, democratic participation in decision making & enhance accountability.
 19. Provide equitable access to resources, eliminate discrimination in exposure to pollution & hazardous waste.
 20. Protect the rights of indigenous people to their culture & resources.
 21. Treat all life with compassion to prevent cruelty, wanton destruction and suffering