

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ITS APPROACHES IN OUR PRESENT SOCIETY

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Introduction

The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of the crisis of mind and spirit. It all depends on how we think and act. The strains of the ecological crisis are so apparent that the task to preserve the environment is a must. Adjusting the relationship between humans and nature is one of the most fundamental issues we face and must deal with today. With the increasing deterioration of ecological systems on which human beings rely and the aggravation of the environmental crisis, human beings have realized that we cannot rely on economic and judicial methods alone to solve the problems of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances. Only after we have adopted an appropriate attitude towards nature and have established a new ethical relationship between human beings and nature will we be able to love and respect nature automatically, and can deal with the issues of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances. In this context, environmental ethics and its approaches can play a vital role to run our life smoothly and can make a balance between man and other beings in our surrounding environment.

OBJECTIVES:

Environmental Ethics:

Environmental ethics is the philosophical discipline that consider the moral and ethical relationship of human beings to the environment. In other words it considers the ethical basis of environmental protection. Its emergence was the result of increased awareness of how the rapidly growing world population was impacting the environment as well as the environmental consequences that come with the growing use of pesticides, technology and industry. It aims to provide ethical justification and moral motivation for the cause of global environmental protection. Environmental ethics helps define man's moral and ethical obligations towards the environment. It considers the ethical relationship between people and the natural world and the kind of decisions people have to make about the environment:

- Should we cut down the main forest for the sake of human consumption?
- Should we knowingly cause the extinction of other species?
- Should humans be forced to live a simpler life style in order to protect and preserve the environment?

Thus, environmental ethics has no specific international environmental code, it simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we

should use the Earth's resources & how we should treat other species etc.

The Norwegian Philosopher "Arne Naess" is regarded as one of the founder fathers of environmental movement and he identified the environmental problems in his short paper "The shallow and the Deep: Long Range Ecology Movement", published in 1973. He argued for the intrinsic value and inherent worth of the environment. According to Naess, every being, whether human, animal has an equal right to live and blossom. He called this "ecosophy", which he define as follows: "By an ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium".¹

Naess rejected any idea that humans were more important because they had a soul, use reason or have consciousness. So nature does not exist to serve human; humans are simply a part of nature and all species have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The magnitude and urgency of contemporary environmental problems – collectively known as the environmental crisis form the mandate for environmental ethics – a re-examination of the human attitudes and values towards nature. In this respect three approaches can be taken to environmental ethics. They are – „*Anthrop-centrism*“, „*Bio-centrism*“ and „*Eco-centrism*“.

An „*Anthropocentrism*“ environmental ethics grants moral standing exclusively to humans being and considers non-human natural entities and nature as a whole to be only a means for human ends. Anthropocentrism regards human as separate form and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value of nature.

An „*Bio-centrism*“ maintains that all life forms are „moral patients“ – entities to which we should accord moral consideration. We therefore have a duty towards all forms of life. As Albert Schweitzer (1923) wrote:

“The essence of goodness is to maintain and cherish life, and the essence of evil is to destroy and damage life. All living beings have the will to live, and all living beings with the will to live are sacred, interrelated and of equal value. It is, therefore, an ethical imperative for us to respect and help all life forms.”

According to some commentators our exploitative and destructive attitude towards nature originates in an „anthropocentric“ attitude. Hence, they argue, we need a fundamentally new way of interacting with nature. More science and technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. The impact of value system on our interaction with nature has been taken over by many environmental ethicists, particularly by representative of the so-called „Deep ecology“ movement. „Deep ecology“ states that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex interrelationships in which the existence of organisms is dependent on the existence of others within ecosystems.

¹ Arne Naess, The Deep Ecology Movement, P.8 Rawat Publications, New Delhi

“Eco-centrism” is that holistic theory according to which the whole eco-system, comprising both the biotic and abiotic parts of nature, deserves moral worth. This eco-centric theory directs us to extend our moral concern to items that are non human, indeed to things that are not even animals, such as plants, forests etc.

DEEP ECOLOGY:

Environmental ethics provides moral grounds for social policies aimed at protecting the earth’s environment and remedying environmental degradation. That is why it can be viewed that environmental ethics involves ecological consciousness amongst us. Ecological consciousness is a growing spirit that speaks of tolerance, interdependence etc. It also show path to a sustainable future. Ecological consciousness makes a bond in nature creating ecological balance. Otherwise the concept of ecological imbalance will emerge. Therefore, it can be opined that we are in a chain in environment if one knot is displaced from another the whole chain will be useless. Similarly it can be asserted that nature is an umbrella of all beings under which each and every being develop forms of life according to their own nature.

Arne Naess, who proposed a theory known as “Deep Ecology” says “*modern ecology has emphasized a high degree of symbiosis as a common feature in mature ecosystems, an interdependence for the benefit of all.*” Naess listed some deep-ecology platform that may be summarized as follows:

- All life has value in itself, independently of its usefulness to humans.
- Richness and diversity contribute to life’s well-being and have value in themselves.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs in a responsible way.
- The impact of humans in the world is excessive and rapidly getting worse.
- The diversity of life, including culture can flourish only with reduced human impact.
- Basic ideological, political, economic and technological structure must therefore change.

This six fold deep ecology platform shows that it emphasises not the rights of human but the interdependence of all ecosystem and sees the environment as a whole entity, valuable in itself. This is often known as “*eco-holism*”.

The American philosopher, “Aldo Leopold”, first felt, more than half century ago, the need for eco-centric environmental ethics, an “*ethic dealing with the man’s relation to the land and to the animal and plants.*”² Thus according to Leopold’s prescription, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to otherwise.”³ Hence, it can be said that the eco-centric ethics starts from a rejection of the „man-in-environment“ image in favour of the relational, total field image.

Thus, each and every organism is an integral part of the ecosystem and has its impact over it.

CONCLUSIONS

Ecological consciousness safeguard against cruelty to all creatures. Rather it involves a safe and sustainable temperament in order to live happily with nature. Due to lack of ecological consciousness we pollute our environment.

Finally I can be opined that the importance of environmental ethics in the present day society is indispensable. In so far as we are living in harmony with nature, so apart from viable environment we cannot think of a human life possible in this eco-centric universe. To make a viable environment we have to comprehend the distinction between ecological balance and ecological imbalance. Thus, so far as environmental ethics is concerned, ecological consciousness leads to the welfare of all in our environment and nature. As it is said –

“Sarve Sukhinassantu sarve santu niramayah

Sarve bhadrani pashyantu ma kascidduka-bhagabhavat.”

(May all be happy, May all be free from disease. May all realise what is good. May none be subject to misery.)

As the „Utilitarianism“, a philosophical concept also maintains that the balance of pleasure and pain should be taken equally into consideration. In this regard the „Utilitarianism“ of J.S. Mill and Bentham has prescribe the happiness for all –

“Greatest happiness of the greatest number” – Thus, we the human beings, along with the other forms of life are a part of the food chain closely associated with each other together form our environment.

² Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethics in Ethics in Practice: An Anthology (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford,

1997) P.635

³ Aldo Leopold, A Sand Country Almanac, Oxford University Press, 1949, pp.224-225

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