



ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS : AN ESSENCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT:

The human society is facing different environmental problems due to variety of destructing activities with the rapid and unplanned industrialization. There is an urgent need to stop further degradation of nature or at least keep it under control. We have to decide and chose the right code of conduct. It calls for the human conscience and environmental ethics. Environmental ethics are our beliefs about our social, moral and scientific behaviors towards the nature concerning what is right or what is wrong. These facts give equal opportunities to compete for the comfort and richness of the world for all life forms including human being. There are several spiritual approaches to environmental ethics.



Present paper deals with certain ethical principles which are related to environmental protection and conservation. To support certain facts on moral basis, the ethical thoughts in the form of ethical theories are formed. Some ethical justifications are discussed with reference to moral sense, spiritual thinking and practical utility on the grounds of present need and the future of our next generation.

KEYWORDS: *Environmental degradation, Environmental ethics, Ethical theories, Global problems, spiritual approaches.*

INTRODUCTION

The human society has entered in the third millennium. News reports, scientific investigations and reports are pointing us regarding our fragile environment, vanishing forests, depleting resources, dwindling floral and faunal diversity and endangered state of the planet earth. In last five billion years of existence of our green planet earth, it has witnessed bombardments by meteors, sudden changes in its magnetic fields, drifting of landmasses, abrupt changes in the continents, reshaping of ice caps and glaciers and other variety of changes. The life appeared three and a half billion years ago on the earth has proved flexible. Many individual species appeared and vanished but the life has persisted without much interruption, against many powerful physical and chemical forces and interactions (Silver and Defries, 1991).

The activities of human being are exploiting the nature and disrupting the natural rhythms of earth's ecosystems. Though these destructing activities cannot get completely suppressed and we can't avoid them, certainly can affect significantly through various modes and ways like energy use, release of pollutants, exploitation and overexploitation of natural resources and other industrial activities. Due to drastic and dramatic increase in various such regular and repeated polluting and destructing activities, many local, regional and global environmental problems are experienced. The consequence of such

activities are expanding to a global scale in the form of global environmental problems like ozone depletion, loss of biodiversity, acidification of rain, global warming and green house effect. The cumulative effect of all these problems is catastrophic for certain species and making the life of mankind miserable on earth (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2003).

There is an urgent need to control the consequences of all these adverse activities. We need to stop degradation of nature or at least keep under control. But the question is how to bell the cat? Who is to bell the cat? Certainly, if do not do it today, we will have to suffer. The question is whether to flourish the nature or perish the nature. Anyway, we have to control the degradation by limiting our activities and damaging trends of development (Agarwal and Dubey, 2002). We have to decide and chose the right code of conduct and regulate human activities including our behaviors towards the nature so that the quality of life will not deteriorate further. The future generations will live without compromised lifestyle. The only way is to call the human conscience and the device and follow environmental ethics.

Concept of Ethics

A set of guiding principles appeal human conscience about our ethical convictions about good and bad. The right and wrong is often and effective way to control unmanageable environmental problems. According to a naturalist Aldo Leopold (1949) any decision of a conscious human mind is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the nature preferring the biotic community and any decision of a conscious human mind is wrong when it tends contradictory to it, even after understanding it. We care the nature for better human health, welfare and our concern about the environment. The environmental ethical principles are practiced with self imposed restraints by human being. These are therefore the morally acceptable behaviors or mannerisms. Environmental ethics are our beliefs about our social, moral and scientific behaviors towards the nature concerning what is right or what is wrong. These are acceptable codes of conduct. Such moral reflects feelings and ethics reflects actual activity.

Environmental ethics is the branch of knowledge concerned with moral principle. It is a branch of philosophy dealing with right and wrong with nature regardless to cultural attitudes. It is the philosophical concern about the nature with moral and values and the relationship between human being and world around it. According to Bala Krishnamoorthy (2005), environmental ethics is a subject without definition and without consensus.

Some facts concerning Environmental Ethics

Human being is one of the moral agents to judge the situation as he is capable of acting morally or immorally. The capabilities of human being to form moral judgments include deliberation, which are to carry out the decisions and responsibilities to answers rights things and actions. It emphasizes that the other species of plants, animals and microorganisms have certain rights associated with environment. There are certain facts concerning the environmental ethics (Chavan, 2008). These are related to distribution of resources of the world. These facts give equal opportunities to compete for the comfort and richness of the world for all life forms including human being. These are

1. Earth has adequate resources to support unlimited economic growth.
2. Nature is production unit and store house for all human needs.
3. Human progress is the satisfaction of his real needs and availability.
4. Technological progress helps to sustain human needs and comfort of life.
5. Human being has a strong sense of judging the need and responsibilities to act as a care taker or custodian of resources.

Classification of ethical issues

There is definite relationship between the ethical feelings and environmental issues providing the scope for worth of actions. Based on such actions, such issues can be classified into following three classes (Khan, 2006).

- **A. Progressive ethics:** These are the issues of developmental activities governing the actions. It believes that the nature is for the pleasure of human being. But such pleasure should be without disturbing the natural rhythms. (Social & Economical progress)
- **B. Preservative ethics:** These are the issues related to recreational, real, aesthetic feelings for nature preservation. These involve reverence for the nature and oppose overexploitation of nature and natural components. It desires the care for nature. Ultimately, if we care for environment, it will care us.
- **C. Conservation ethics:** These are the issues related to maintenance and preservation of environment. These stresses on the expectation of unpolluted, clean and pious environment with balance of resources. Conservation ethics recognizes the desirability of decent living standard with justified, proper and most reasonable use of natural resources (Subba Rao, ,2001). Exploitation beyond certain limits is not permitted for insuring the natural balance harmony of human society with the nature. It suggests for the suitable balance between development and preservation of natural resources.

Historical Development of Environmental Ethics

The history of environmental concern dates as long as our primitive ancestors (Carson, 1960). The Book Sand County Almanac-“The Land Ethic” wrote in 1949 by Aldo Leopold (1949) claimed that roots of ecological crisis were philosophical. But the consciousness in developed world was invoked by Lynn White in March,1967 through his paper ‘The historical roots of our ecologic crisis’, and another paper ‘The tragedy of the commons’ by Garrett Hardin published in Dec. 1968. Those were published in *Science*.

The first philosophical conference was organized by William Blackstone in 1972 at the University of Georgia. “Philosophy and Environmental crisis”, a paper by Pete Gunter in the proceedings of conference held at Georgia in 1974 caught the attention. Another book ‘Is it too late? A theory of ecology’ written by John B. Cobb on theology and religion based on philosophical roots of ethics. An Australian philosopher Richard Routley-Sylvan contributed his thoughts in a paper ‘There is a need for a new environmental ethic’ presented at 15th Congress of philosophy in 1973. In 1979 Eugene C. Hargrove started special journal ‘*Environmental Ethics*’. These are a few milestones in the development of Environmental Ethics. Thereafter, many philosophers, environmentalists contributed the subject making it more popular and triggered public thinking.

Ethical Theories

To support certain facts on moral basis of nature protection the ethical thoughts in the form of ethical theories are formed. These are being shaped with the contributions from philosophers, environmental scientists and naturalists. Following are the major theories on environmental ethics.

- A. Consequential Theories:** The consequential theories supports that A right action is one that overall has good consequences, a wrong action is one that in general has bad consequences. These theories are useful to evaluate human acts, policies, practices and traditions.
- B. Deontological Theories:** Deontological theories suggest that certain actions are right or wrong regardless of their consequences, like the universal truth. Criminal deserves to suffer solely as broken the law. These are the truths which are always required
- C. Other Theories:** There are other few ethical theories which make the attempts to specify the matters related to environment. Following are a few of these.
 1. Situation ethics: It is based on ethical responsibility. It follows that any action is right or wrong depends on situation.
 2. Virtue ethics: Virtue ethics emphasizes that bringing about good consequences does not matter, development of a particular character matters.
 3. Feminist ethics: Feminist ethics is based on emotional and spiritual living of women with nature. It assumes that women are inherently co-operative and caring rather than aggressive and competitive than men.

4. Existentialists: Existentialism is based on the responsibility of individual to make his own choices with his unique choice in environmental matters. Willing acceptance of pollution in return of consumer product as cost and benefit is best example of this kind.

Spiritual Approaches to Environmental Ethics

There are several spiritual approaches to environmental ethics. This list includes transcendentalism, deep ecology, eco feminism, Judeo-Christian, Islam and Asian religions. Most of these spiritual approaches are ultimately afford an opportunity to construct a useful and satisfying environmental ethics. Trancendentalists learn the truth from the facts in Universe. According to their thoughts, nature was there before human being started spoiling it and it will be there but we have to find spiritually where we could find ourselves in it. Self realization and bio-centric equality evolved the sense of deep ecology. Recognition of oneself not just an individuals identity or as a member of limited human society but as a member of universe. Deep ecology says that human beings must eat and use other creatures may include non-vegetarian too for his survival but should not exceed the limits of vital needs. Judeo-Christian tradition considers that God created nature for human life and comfort. Nature is creation of God. Saint Francis of Assisi says that the nature is important to God and human being should take care of God's creation those also exist in the form of creatures. Oriental religions consider the Ahimsa as an essence. Buddhism expresses the compassion for all forms of life. Central theme of Hinduism is on the care and compassion for all life forms in the nature. Hinduism has elevated many plants and animals to god and goddess. The prophet Mohammed was very sensitive to the sufferings of living creatures.

People and Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics are based on based on Knowledge, belief and faith. Environment is more important than you, me and all of us. Reality status of all environmental components and their status is concern of matter for the future. Destruction of nature results in spread of diseases, pollution, soil erosion, desertification, acid rain, loss of biodiversity and number of problems which are difficult to tackle and control. If the nature is healthy, pure, clean and without much deteriorated form then human existence is comfortable for many years.

Attitude governing relationship to Environment

Human concern for the environment is of the obligatory nature. Human being has not to destruct the nature but to preserve it for the future generations with fulfillment of present needs. Attitude of killing, slow killing. Negligence towards the living creatures need to be controlled and nurturing of nature should be promoted. Attitude of saving eco-centrism and consciousness should be given priority than the anthropocentrism of human race. Human centric thinking (anthropocentrism) is to be controlled. If it is continued without control, it may lead to slow killing of the world. Environmental responsibility and animal rights and obligation towards nature should be recognized. Because, the direct responsibility of nature protection (Eco-centrism) lies on the head of human being more than any other organisms on the planet earth.

Environmental ethics and population Control

We know that the world comfortable for the life-forms is finite, space as habitat is finite, many natural resources are finite hence needs must be finite. The needs can be finite only if growth is controlled and stopped. Therefore, human population should be kept finites by adopting different means and ways to limit the needs and restrict the excess exploitation and overexploitation. To insure such ecological stability in future, present population growth rate must tend to zero.

Candidates for Environmental Ethics

The concept of sustainable development is a representing the core of new environmental ethics. Some ethical justifications are challenged by new moral sense, spiritual thinking and practical utility on

the grounds of present need and the future of our next generation. But the thinking convergence emphasizes that we have to stop the damaging trend and prefer the path of sustainable development. We should not infringe the rights of future generations. It is necessary for healthy sustenance that the needs should be fulfilled without any major conflicts due to the activities of the present generation and short supply of needful resources. There are some suggested candidates of environmental ethics to act in this direction. These are as follows.

1. Integrity for the infusion of ecological percepts and ethos in lifestyle.
2. Humanity for shearing of resources on the basis of equality for today and tomorrow.
3. Determination to arrest pollution, stop degradation and promote quality of life.
4. Promotion of green consumerism in a controlled manner.
5. Judgment for environmental components to with humility for nature to promote trusteeship.
6. Nourishment of nature by taking care for present and future generations.

CONCLUSION:

The comfortable world for the existence of life is finite in space as habitat and natural resources. We must keep our needs finite not to infringe the rights of future generations for their healthy sustenance. We must regulate our conducts by adopting certain ethical principles for healthy environment with zero population growth rates.

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