

Environmental Ethics for Sustainable Development

In present days our world is facing an ecological crisis. The unsustainable development patterns, increasing industrialization, boundless burning of fossil fuels, colossal deforestation, unprecedented erosion of biodiversity and severe environmental degradation are adversely affecting the ecological integrity and natural balance. Hence the current environmental crisis stem for human population explosion, prevailing power-powered ethos, anomic individualism and unlimited consumption of material and energy. Human activities motivated by an attitude of rampant consumerism and unsustainable pattern of production and consumption have been so appalling and insensitive towards nature and environment. Human society is overshooting earth's carrying capacity and environmental resources with drastic consequences if checks and balances are not made. The foundations of global security are threatened as wounded nature backlashes on the human future. Therefore, Urgently needed is to develop a culture of ecological consciousness, duty and responsibility comprising tasks to preserve the ecosystem on which all life depends, to abstain from polluting and poisoning the air, water and soil which sustain life, to minimize depletion and to maximize efforts to replenish and include all life in our view of the universe. In this context, environmental ethics must inspire us and offer lessons on adopting a holistic ecocentric approach for the wellbeing of the Earth as a whole and human in particular for sustainable development.

Meaning of Environmental Ethics

The word 'Ethics' is derived from the Greek adjective 'ethica' which comes from the substantive 'ethos', which means customs. The other meaning of ethics is 'Set of moral principle', and it teaches us that, what is right and what is wrong. All of us know that ethics is beliefs, attitudes or norms that form the basis of customs. Not only in India but all over the world, there is a growing concern for ethical norms in all spheres of human activities. Our duties towards the environment and living beings are also referred to as environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics is a new sub-discipline of Practical Philosophy that deals with the ethical problems surrounding environmental protection. It is the scientific looking of various issues related to the rights of individuals on the environment. It is the moral relationship of human beings with the environment. It is concerned with do's and dont's of the human beings to

the environment. It deals with ecological rights of all creatures present today as well as those which will come next to live on the Earth. Ethical standards are necessary for long-term conservation and maintenance of nature and its resources. A mango tree bears mango fruit to propagate its kind. Man plucks the fruit and eats it. But we should do justice to the tree. After eating the flesh of the fruit, don't throw away the seed. Sow it in a safe place and nurse it to grow into a tree. This is environmental ethics. It aims at providing ethical justification and moral motivation for the causes of global environmental protection. At the practical level, environmental ethics criticizes the materialistic, hedonistic and consumerist attitude of modern capitalism, and demands for a 'green lifestyle' that is harmonious with nature. Environmental ethics emphasizes upon the development of a sustainable ecology and society with the help of a reciprocal and holistic attitude, where all comprehensive aspects and parts of nature are preserved, protected and do coexist with harmony.

Importance of Environmental Ethics

A healthy environment ensures quality in the lives of humans which underscores the need for preserving the environment at all costs. Environmental quality, protection and preservation should be emphasized even when human benefits are not put into consideration. Environmental needs are of more importance because they shape the quality of human life. Several environmental problems like depletion of resources, changing weather patterns and deforestation have been identified to have impact on future generations more compared to the present. Therefore, humans have an ethical obligation to prevent such from occurring. Environmental ethics can solve environmental problems and save the world. Environmental ethics makes us aware of the indiscriminate and nefarious human activities. We inculcate moral values towards nature and learn to respect various life forms through environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics is concerned with the issue of responsible personal conduct with respect to natural landscape, resources, species, and non human organism. Conduct with respect to persons is, of course, the direct concern of moral philosophy as such. It simply tries to answer the questions of how humans should relate to their environment, how we should use the Earth's resources and how we should treat other species. The need and 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 a viable environment we can not think of a human life possible in this eco-

centric universe. Thus, so far as environmental ethics is concerned, ecological consciousness leads to the welfare of all in our environment and nature.

Approaches of Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics approaches, in its broader context, takes into consideration of relationships between human beings and nature as a whole. Governments, states and international organizations have started to propose solutions to environmental problems as they become perceived and evoke awareness from the 1970s onwards. The implementation of protective environmental policies have been begun to be implemented. These developments which inform the cognition of environmental problematic have been differentiated among themselves. The magnitude and urgency of contemporary environmental problems; collectively known as the environmental crisis from the mandate for environmental ethics a reexamination of the human attitudes and values towards nature. In this respect three approaches can be taken to environmental ethics i.e. Anthrop-centrism, Bio-centrism and Eco-centrism.

An 'Anthropocentrism' environmental ethics grants moral standing exclusively to human 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 from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value of nature.

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

An '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 direct 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.

Eco-centric ethical approach comprises various movements such as deep ecology, eco-feminism, social ecology, eco-fascism. Aldo Leopold from the U.S., Hans Jonas from Germany and deep ecology approach has been effective in the emergence of eco-centric ethical approach. Deep ecology states that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex interrelationships in which the existence of organism is dependent on the existence of others within ecosystems. Ecological consciousness is a growing spirit that speak of tolerance, interdependence etc. It also show path to a sustainable future.

Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development

Environmental ethics concept is closely related to 'environmental justice' contextually which partly looks into the equal distribution of resources among people. Environmental ethics approach becomes important within the context and implications of sustainable development due to its vision on intergenerational responsibility and justice. Environmental ethics state that we do require a sustainable development which would be the outcome of science and ethics. It has been claimed that science without ethics has no use for us, for our future generation. Science or scientific development must be encoded with sound ethical code of conduct so that we can maintain sustainable development without degrading our nature. Sustainable development is closely linked to the carrying capacity of an ecosystem. So these developments should prevent further damage to our life support systems like air, water, land and forests. It should also conserve and nature the biological diversity, gene pool and other resources for long term food security.

The relationship between sustainable development and ethical approaches to environment is basically founded on the concept of sustainability which binds conceptual areas of values, morality and human rights. Cleary, what relates these conceptual areas in sustainability concept is the idea of sustaining natural environment for the next generations and the acceptance of responsibility for the next generations as a moral attempt. The interrelation between the ethical approaches to environment and sustainable development lies at the heart of the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. Although taken into consideration as a technical concept based on carrying capacity, the social dimension of sustainability has been built upon adaptation and balancing of individual expectations and social demands whose dynamics also comprise concepts such as human dignity, autonomy and justice. In fact, this

statement clearly puts the emphasis on the relationship of social dimension in sustainability with human rights which are at the very core of moral and legal common context of compromise.

Sustainable development is defined as the environmentalist world view that aim economic developments without sacrificing the principle of use of environmental values and natural resources through rational methods so as not to lead splurge them and by taking into account of the rights and benefits of current and next generations. In Stockholm Conference, sustainable development has firstly been introduced as a concept in Brundtland Report in 1987. According to the report, sustainable development is compensating today's necessities without sacrificing next generations opportunity to meet their own necessities. Sustainable development with its assumption that nature and environmental resources are limited and thus growth is also limited reflects a protective understanding towards environment. Integrating economical and social development with environmental ethics is important in terms of environmental policies. Environmental ethics may play an important role in influencing the growth of ideas and opinions, representing something new in global governance for the benefit of humans and the rest of the living world. Considering the environmental ethics, it is very easy for all to carry out their duties and responsibilities properly that may lead to sustainable development for a peaceful and happy environment for our generations on this earth.

Environmental ethics entails the human moral responsibility towards the environment. It seeks an appropriate respect for life and sustainable development. Environmental ethics emphasizes upon the development of a sustainable ecology and society with the help of a reciprocal and holistic attitude, where all comprehensive aspects and parts of nature are preserved, protected and do coexist with harmony. Therefore, the human society should take the moral responsibility of protecting the environment so as to maximize the welfare of both the present and future generations.

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