Issues of the Environmental Ethics: Indian Philosophical View

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Abstract: The study focuses its attention on Indian philosophical concerns on environment. It will inquire into the Vedic theory (Hinduism), Buddhists understanding, Gandhi and Tagore's ideas on environmental concerns. On various ecological issues challenges and Solutions.

Environmental concerns are global issues. We need to understand each other, if for no other reason than enlightened self-interest. But a nobler motive is the quest for an international environmental ethic what takes into consideration the insights and perspectives of various cultures and points of view. Hopefully, we can learn each other in the quest to act responsibly and lovingly toward human beings and Nature. To that end a multicultural dimension is appropriate to this book. Throughout history religion has profoundly influenced people’s attitude and behavior toward Nature. Various religions look at Nature, at animals, at the Earth differently.

World religions, each in their own way, offer a unique set of moral values and rules to guide human beings in their relationship to the environment.

Environmental ethics concerns itself with these global concerns: humanity’s relationship to the environment, its understanding of and responsibility to nature, and its obligations to leave some of nature’s resources to posterity. Pollution population control, resource use, food production and distribution, energy production and consumption, the preservation of the wilderness, and of species diversity, all fall under its purview. It asks comprehensive, global questions, develops metaphysical theories, and applies its principles to the daily lives of men and women everywhere on Earth.

Philosophers tend to divide the academic approach to ethics into two domains: theoretical ethics and practical/applied ethics. Environmental ethics is a practical/applied ethic; it is a system for determining correct action with regard to the natural world, either in specific situations or in terms of a general approach to the environment. Environmental ethics is relatively a new branch in applied ethics. The term “applied ethics” is used in practical sense to find moral solutions to the problems in society and it is an attempt to solve our problems in professional ethics.

Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including environmental law, environmental sociology, ecotheology, ecological economics, ecology and environmental geography. There are many ethical decisions that human beings make with respect to the environment.

Meta-ethics is the branch of ethics that seeks to understand the nature of ethical properties, statements, attitudes, and judgments. Meta-ethics is one of the four branches of ethics generally recognized by philosophers, the others being descriptive ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

Example: What does "right" even mean?

Normative ethics is the study of ethical action. It is the branch of philosophical ethics that investigates the set of questions that arise when considering how one ought to act, morally speaking. Normative ethics is distinct from meta-ethics because it examines standards for the rightness and wrongness of actions, while meta-ethics studies the meaning of moral language and the metaphysics of moral facts.

Example: How should people act?

Descriptive ethics, also known as comparative ethics, is the study of people's beliefs about morality.[1]:26 It contrasts with prescriptive or normative ethics, which is the study of ethical theories that prescribe how people ought to act, and with meta-ethics, which is the study of what ethical terms and theories actually refer to.
Eg: What do people think is right?

**Applied ethics** is the philosophical examination, from a moral standpoint, of particular issues in private and public life that are matters of moral judgment. It is thus the attempts to use philosophical methods to identify the morally correct course of action in various fields of human life. Bioethics, for example, is concerned with identifying the correct approach to matters such as euthanasia, or the allocation of scarce health resources, or the use of human embryos in research. Environmental ethics is concerned with questions such as the duties or duty of 'whistleblowers' to the general public as opposed to their loyalty to their employers. As such, it is an area of professional philosophy that is relatively well paid and highly valued both within and outside of academia.

**EXAMPLE: How do we take moral knowledge and put it into practice?**

If one holds the entirety of the natural world as valuable -- valuable on its own, without reference to human interests -- her position could be called "ecocentrist." Probably the most famous ecocentrist was Aldo Leopold. In his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold fashions the "Land ethic." The "land" is his word for the entire ecosystem taken as a system. In the Land Ethic, the particular parts of the natural community are not unexpendable (the loss of one tree or one bird is not a problem). What is valued is the preservation of the entire natural system in balance, along with preservation of a healthy representation of all the members of that system. Leopold writes: All ethics so far evolved rest on a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts... The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land... In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.

**ENVIRONMENT:**

Environment is the sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage. Living things do not simply exist in their environment. They constantly interact with it. Organisms change in response to conditions in their environment. The environment consists of the interactions among plants, animals, soil, water, temperature, light, and other living and non-living things.

**Word Origin environment**

c.1600, "state of being environed" sense of "nature, conditions in which a person or thinglives" first recorded 1827 (used by Carlyle to render Ger. Umgebung); specialized ecology sense first recorded 1956.

**Definition of Environmental Ethics:**

Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents.

This entry covers: (1) the challenge of environmental ethics to the anthropocentrism (i.e., human-centeredness) embedded in traditional western ethical thinking;

(2) the early development of the discipline in the 1960s and 1970s;

(3) the connection of deep ecology, feminist environmental ethics, and social ecology to politics;

(4) the attempt to apply traditional ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics, to support contemporary environmental concerns; and

(5) the focus of environmental literature on wilderness, and possible future developments of the discipline.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To understand the essential features of moral or ethical thinking.
- To learn about the important and distinguishing characteristics in environmental ethics.
- Recognizing and using ethics relies heavily on language skills.
- Moral reasoning is not a substitute for science, but it provides a powerful complement to scientific knowledge about the earth. Science does not teach us to care. Scientific knowledge does not, by itself
- Provide reasons for environmental protection.
- Environmental ethics builds on scientific understanding by bringing human values,
moral Principles, and improved decision making into conversation with science.

- Environmental ethics is necessarily interdisciplinary meaning it draws on other, fields of academic inquiry. It cannot stand by itself. Often, the simple question, "what is the right thing for us to do?" can open up fresh perspectives on environmental problems.

- (Moral status) – The earth and its creatures have moral status, in other words, are worthy of our ethical concern.

- The earth and its creatures have intrinsic value, meaning that they have moral value merely because they exist, not only because they meet human needs.

- Drawing from the idea of an ecosystem, human beings should consider “wholes” that include other forms of life and the environment.

- To develop our own moral vision for living in relationship to the earth.

**METHODOLOGY:**

- The Present study follows a philosophical approach with deductive analysis, inductive analysis, synthetic and descriptive analysis.

- The researcher uses primary and secondary source materials.

- To draw the conceptual analysis of environmental ethics.

- To philosophize the need of ethics and environmental concerns an Indian perspective.

- To philosophize the need of humanities relationship to the environment.

- To adopt descriptive, analytical methods to justify the study.

**IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:**

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 landscapes, resources, species, and non-human organisms. Conduct with respect to personis, of course, the direct concern of moral philosophy as such.

**CHALLENGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:**

Suppose that putting out natural fixes, culling feral animals or destroying some individual members of overpopulated indigenous species is necessary for the protection of the integrity of a certain ecosystem.

Will these actions be morally permissible or even required?

Is it morally acceptable for farmers in non-industrial countries to practice slash and burn techniques to clear areas for agriculture?

Consider a mining company which has performed open pit mining in some previously unspoiled area.

Does the landform and surface ecology? And what is the value of a humanly restored environment compared with the originally natural environment?

It is often said to be morally wrong for human beings to pollute and destroy parts of the natural environments and to consume a huge proportion of the planet’s natural resources, of that is wrong, is it simply because a sustainable environment is essential to (present and future) human well being? Is such behavior also wrong because the natural environment and or it’s various contents have certain values in their own right so that these values ought to be respected and protected in any case? These are among the questions investigated by environmental ethics. Some of them are specific questions faced by individuals in particular circumstances, while others are more global questions faced by groups and communities. Yet others are more abstract questions concerning the value and moral standing of the natural environment and it’s non-human components.

The special relationship of ecology and environmental ethics

Ecology plays a privileged role in environmental ethics. Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson were two pioneering environmental ethicists with advanced training in ecology, and this profoundly influenced their moral vision of the natural world. Leopold was an ecologist, farmer, forester and conservationist who wrote explicitly about human moral duties to nature. He was the first to articulate a land ethic, or to describe moral responsibilities for land. His most important book was "A Sand County Almanac" (Leopold, 1949). In his chapter on a land ethic he claimed: "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." This appears to be the first explicit
ethical statement about the importance of an ecosystem. Leopold expanded the boundaries of what was morally considerable from human society to include biological communities.

The philosophy of Deep Ecology, first named and articulated by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, builds on Leopold's land ethic and the science of ecology to articulate a vision for how humans should live in relationship to the Earth. Deep Ecology begins with the proposition that humans are a part of the earth. Many Deep Ecologists assert that humans have no more rights than other forms of life, and that a radical reorientation in human society is necessary to live within the limits of what the Earth's ecosystems can provide. They reject the very notion of "natural resources" because that statement assumes that elements and organisms are important only as economic commodities for humans. Deep Ecology asserts that nature, the environment, and ecosystems have intrinsic value, meaning that they are deserving of moral consideration and protection merely because they exist. They do not have value because they meet human needs, but because they are a part of the Earth.

Humanities relationship to the environmental concerns:

A full understanding of the challenges facing humanity requires knowledge of the evolution of the roles of technology, population expansions, cultural mores, climate, disease and warfare in changing human attitudes and responses through time. This is especially the case if the past is to be used in more sophisticated ways than as a simplistic analogue of projected future conditions. We also know that assessment of the sensitivity or vulnerability of modern landscapes and ecosystems to future human activities and climate can be greatly improved by knowing the rates and directions of past trajectories in key processes such as land cover, soil erosion and flooding, observing how thresholds have been transgressed and deducing the natural or pre-impact patterns of environmental variability. Already, such knowledge is leading to the improved formulation of resource management strategies.

The present nature and complexity of socio-ecological systems are heavily contingent on the past; we cannot fully appreciate the present condition without going back decades, centuries or even millennia. As we are witnessing today with global warming, current societal actions may reverberate, in climatic and many other ways, for centuries into the future. As such, there is the real danger that our visions of the future are becoming unconstrained by knowledge of what has already occurred, at least in part because information about human-environment interactions in the historical past has not been well organized for this purpose or properly utilized. If we continue to operate in ignorance or denial of this integrated historical understanding, we run the very real risk of mirroring the paths of the Easter Islanders, the Classic Maya or the Roman Empire. But if we can adequately learn from our integrated history, we can create a sustainable and desirable future for our species.

Human societies respond to environmental (e.g., climate) signals through multiple pathways including collapse or failure, migration and creative invention through discovery. Extreme drought, for instance, has triggered both social collapse and ingenious management of water through irrigation. Human responses to change may in turn alter feedbacks between climate, ecological, and social systems, producing a complex web of multidirectional connections in time and space. Ensuring appropriate future responses and feedbacks within the human-environment system will depend on our understanding of this past web and how to adapt to future surprises. To develop that understanding, we need to look at multiple time and space scales.

Buddhist Attitude Towards Nature:

Lily de Silva is professor of Buddhist studies at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. In this essay she sets forth a Buddhist perspective on Environmental Ethics, arguing that Buddhism emphasizes simple, nonviolent, gentle living. In its doctrine of karma and rebirth (similar to Hinduism), it recognizes that all animals and humans are spiritual entities to be treated with loving kindness. Buddhism strictly limits itself to the delineation of a way of life designed to eradicate human suffering. The Buddha refused to answer questions which did not directly or indirectly bear on the central problem of human suffering and its ending. The word "nature" means everything in the world which is not organized for this purpose or constructed by man. The Pali equivalents which come closest to "nature" are loka and yathabhuta.

Nature as Dynamic: According to Buddhism changeability is one of the perennial principles of nature. Everything changes in nature and nothing remains static. This concept is expressed by the Pali termanicca.
Nature as Beautiful
The Buddha and his disciples regarded natural beauty as a source of great joy and aesthetic satisfaction.

With respect to the environment Buddhism has some elements similar to Hinduism, with its belief in reincarnation and the interconnectedness of all creatures, and some that parallel the Western view of individual development. According to Donald K. Swearer, in Buddhism, “not unlike the biological sciences, rebirth links human and animal species. One website explains the Buddhist view of interconnectedness: "The health of the whole is inseparably linked to the health of the parts, and the health of the parts is inseparably linked to the health of the whole." Furthermore, for at least some versions of Buddhism found in China, "rocks, trees, lotuses, streams, mountains—all have Buddha-nature; all are part of a great continuous cosmic ecosystem.

Because the Buddha spent six years practicing penance and meditation in the forest, the power of natural surroundings is at the religion’s foundation; indeed followers are often enjoined to make their own retreats to nature. Because the Buddha enjoins his followers to live simply and alleviate the suffering of all creatures, Buddhism has a strong ethical foundation for supporting healthy ecosystems and green lifestyles.

Gandhi views on Man & Nature Relationship:

Nature, according to Gandhi, is the expression of God, is an evidence of the all-pervasive reality. He says, “God manifests himself in innumerate forms in this universe and every manifestation commands my reverence.” This description of nature has two implications: one metaphysical and the other practical. “Gandhi perceives in the inexorable laws of nature nothing but the force or the will which maintains the world in harmony and order, and saves it from destruction. This force for him is nothing but God, and the laws are nothing but the ways of the working of that force.” That gives to the world reality. Gandhi feels that Nature provides to man a ‘Karma-sthala’ field for action, where man can discipline his soul by leading a religious and moral life.

Nature Of Man:
According to them man is essentially and basically a social creature part from society he cannot even exist. These people therefore, emphasis the importance of social factor and seek to reduce man entirely to his social condition. Gandhi feels that man a complex being. The bodily man is the apparent man, is body is natural in so far as it is akin to other objects of nature. The body grows and decays according to the laws of nature.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS NATURE & HUMAN BEINGS:

Tagore emphasized the affinity and kinship between man and nature. He defined God in terms of humanity, Nature and spirit are both real.

Tagore says that an insight into the nature of man clearly reveals the fact that there are two essential aspects of his nature, a lower one and higher one. Even self-analysis can testify to this fact. The most usual way of describing this is to say that man is finite-infinite. He combines in himself the physical nature with the spiritual nature. “He is earth’s child but heaven’s heir.”

Tagore feels that both these points of view are one-sided and narrow and, therefore, defective. The empirically oriented thinkers who react the spirituality of man by calling it imaginary or fantastic are blind to truth. They do not realize that there are many aspects of reality that are not pen to scientific insight. There are things that the scientific insight does come cross but is not able to explain.

There is another essential characteristic of man which Tagore seeks to emphasize by calling him finite-infinite man is, in fact, the individual – universal man. Every individual has his own individual peculiarities on account of which he is different from other individuals.

CHAPTERIZATION
Chapter-1: Environmental Ethics: Issues and Concerns: Vedic theory, Deep Ecology, Biocentrism
Chapter-2: Environmental Issues in India
Chapter-3: Gandhi Views on Man and Nature Relationship
Chapter-4: The Buddhist attitude towards nature
Chapter-5: Rabindranath Tagore understanding towards Man and Nature
Chapter-6: Conclusion

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY
• 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 landscapes, resources, species, and non-human organisms. Conduct with respect to persons is, of course, the direct concern of moral philosophy as such.

• Finally, environmental ethics will be informed by our scientific understanding of the environment. Whether it be changes in our understanding of how ecosystems work, or changes in the evidence concerning the environmental crisis, it is clear that such change will inform and influence those thinkers writing on our environmental obligations.

• Views on Indian philosophers:

**Environmental problems of India:**

India, a culturally rich country which has a long history of civilization and which engaged in experimenting with life in all levels is facing environmental problems which means that we committed some mistakes. What sort of mistakes are these? Is It lack of proper use of science and technology or is our cultural tradition unequipped to face present day problems? To answer these questions, a detailed analysis of ecological heritage of India is needed to be studied.

The unique characteristic of Indian cultural tradition is that it has contributed immensely to all branches of knowledge. Whether it be politics, economics, art, religion etc great care has been given to religion and philosophy because these branches stress more on mental than on material. Swamy Raganathananda says, “India has been known to other nations as a land of wealth and philosophic wisdom; both trade with India and communion with her mind and thought were much sought after. These facts go to show that the people of ancient India took keen interest in man as a member of society, man struggling to overcome external obstacles, man seeking delight in social and personal existence. This is an aspect of culture which we find prominent in India of the Rgveda, and which though relegated to second place in later ages in the way of new thought developments, was never treated as a value of no consequence in any period of its long history.”

So, Indian cultural heritage has a long history of prominence. India prided herself as a forest culture-Aranya Sanskriti, who taught to generations that the man who grows with trees and flowers are the blessed Ones. But the present industrial and technological advancement altered and compelled us to take an exploitative strategy. Man wished to have a greater and greater control over nature and nature and natural environment. Man intervened in the natural processes and created an unbalance in the original balance of nature. Such loss of natural balance started to give problems in environment.

So in order to restore the original balance of the natural environment, we need to analyze the ecological traditions of India in the background of present day context. An analysis of our ecological traditions does not mean that we are going backward. We are analyzing these traditions with the present context in mind so that we can regenerate our traditional values and thereby reducing the conflict between man and environment.

Indian cultural traditions always have provided ideological impetus to environment and environmental movements. Indian literature and religions are rich with vast traditions of experience, of which the Indian community practices throughout the ages. The great and constant use of symbols and idioms in Indian culture was mainly to prepare man’s mind to see nature as his progenitor and to follow nature with all respect.

What makes Indian culture a unique one is its treatment of sacredness towards everything. There was not distinction between sacred and secular. Tolerance of all beliefs and faiths in order to build a stable society in tunes with nature was acceptable to Indian mind. Marta Vannucci, who is engaged in the study of biological and ecological aspect of Vedas, says “the essence of Indian tradition is to live in partnership rather than the exploitation of nature: the worship of the earth mother can be traced to primeval beginnings in India, as in most cultures. The earth as a good mother can take so much insult that sometimes she is damaged beyond repair- even before man perceives the damage he has caused. One of the most popular reminders of this condition of the mother, the giver of all generous and protective, self-effacing and ever present is recreated in the persona of Sita. Daughter of earth her name means the furrow-which alludes both to the furrow of ploughed field that will receive the seeds of next season’s harvest as also the female genital organ, Sita, the generous goes unscathed through the ordeal of fire and at the end she returns to the mother earth, cleansed by water and purified by air.”
Problems related with environmental degradation started mainly because of the absence of alternative regulative mechanisms in science and technology for reducing and minimizing social and environmental costs of degradation. When science and technology systems took a major leap in advancing and modernizing industries, there was no step for regulation and Industrialists were left free to decide about minimizing environmental degradation. Industrialists, on their part were more concerned about profit than regulation.

The Bhopal disaster stands as a negative reminder to us. M.N. Buch, a pioneer in evolving an ecological approach to the design and management of urban settlements, says, “There is some evidence that union carbide has been negligent in plant maintenance. When the product can kill and in fact has done so, such negligence becomes criminal. It can become possible only where the industry is irresponsible and has no discipline drilled by effective policing.”

Therefore, a re-look into the Indian traditions reveals the fact that western model of development harmfully affected Indian society. Western communities’ call to preserve nature and gradual evolution of environmental ethics is only the natural outcome, a solution to minimize environmental degradation.

But India’s case was totally different from west. An unbiased investigation of our cultural heritage reveals the fact that we practice environmental ethics for centuries when the so called western civilization not even existed. Indian society, for centuries passed over their knowledge about nature to the future generation we observed the rules of natural resource utilization which helped Indian civilization survive materially.

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