

The Need of Implementing Environmental Ethics in the Present Society

Madhumita Das

Abstract

Environmental ethics is one of the most important modern environmental conservation and sustainable development tools that involves in the early history of human civilizations. Environmental ethics is a global issue due to its involvement in the developmental discussion. The people of underdeveloped and developed countries are not aware of its importance. To lead a sustainable development, it is important to carry out the duties and responsibilities of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is being described as a moral standard that reflects a person's commitment and responsibility to the surrounding environment. In essence, it refers to human societies living in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being. It teaches us to be healthy and friendly to the global environment and development. This study emphasizes mainly on the need of implementing environmental ethics in the present society and its protection against damage.

Keywords: environmental ethics, sustainable development, ecological consciousness, environmental awareness, human–nature relationship

Introduction:

The word “environment” is described as extremely broad. The word “environ” originates from the French word “encircle,” which implies to create surroundings. Determining the surroundings is a difficult task. “Environment” is defined as the state of being surrounded, the situation under which anything develops; the result of all the factors that affect and shape a person's life or character. As the word environment is related to surroundings, it is clear that this idea has a relation to the object it refers to. People for their livelihood live and engage in economic activity but at the cost of environmental degradation which plays an important role in human existence. The term environment is a productive system, offering the fundamental supports needed to develop for all forms of life. When it comes to the European Union, Einstein once described the environment as “everything that is not us.” In actuality, nature and culture are constantly included when discussing the environment. While nature can be viewed as peaceful and beautiful, man, who had to battle it to survive, finds it frightening.

The deep study of the environment with all its components is none other the relationship that we all humans share with the surrounding nature. In this paper, I would say that by studying Environmental Ethics we deeply establish a link, a relationship with the nature and our care for the environment becomes quite stronger. Thus, we should try to do something good for the environment and stop the exploitation of the environment.

The environmental crises depends on how we think and act. The injury of the ecological crisis is so clear that it is a must to preserve and safe the surrounding environment. To adjust the relationship between humans and nature is one of the most important issues we all should face and deal today. The degradation of ecological systems has led human beings to realize that to solve the problems of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances, we cannot only just rely on economic and judicial methods. After adopting an appropriate view towards nature and by establishing a new ethical relationship between human beings and nature one will be able to love and respect nature automatically, and deal with the problems of environmental pollution and ecological imbalances. From this standpoint, environmental ethics and its approaches play a vital role to run our life smoothly and can make a balance between man and other beings in the surrounding environment. Both sustainability and environmental issues play a significant role in human life, by understanding the significance of environmental ethics both humans and the environment are benefited. At its point, environmental ethics can be described as the philosophical study which examines the ethical relationship of humans and the surrounding environment. The philosophy also examines the moral relationship humans have with Earth, animals, and plants. To what extent, does humans have an ethical responsibility to take care of the environment? Such questions are raised by the environmentalists and other experts.

In the year 1970's, the study of environmental ethics has become an official discipline. During this period, environmentalists sought to understand how technology, commercial industries, and the growing global population had — and would continue to have — an impact on the environment we live (Rolston, 2003; Attfield, 1983). Individuals have continued to work toward understanding how these human-related factors will have a long-term impact on the environment, non-renewable resources, climate change, rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and other issues.

The study of environmental ethics analyses the moral obligations humans have to Earth; human values also play a significant role. If one does not give any value on the environment, they will not likely get involved with movements such as conservation and preservation of the earth (Arumugam, 2008). Environmental ethics can be implemented and understood only when an effort is made by the people to understand and care the matters of water and air pollution or the destruction of ecosystem.

Meaning of Environmental Ethics:

From the Greek adjective '*ethica*' the word "Ethics" is derived which comes from the substantive '*ethos*', meaning 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. Environmental ethics are also referred to as our responsibilities towards environment and living beings. A new sub-discipline of Practical Philosophy is environmental ethics dealing with the ethical problems that surrounds environmental protection (Rolston, 2003). It is the scientific looking of various issues related to the rights of individuals on the environment. It is the study of moral relationship that human beings hold with the environment. It is basically dealt with do's and don'ts of human beings towards the environment. One should hold ethical standards in environment which are necessarily a 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 tree. This is environmental ethics. It aims at providing ethical justification and moral motivation for the causes of global environmental protection. Practically it is found that environmental ethics rejects the materialistic, hedonistic and consumerist attitude of modern capitalism, and orders for a 'green lifestyle' that is balanced with nature (Attfield, 2015). With the help of a reciprocal and holistic attitude, environmental ethics emphasizes upon the development of a sustainable ecology and society where all aspects and parts of nature are preserved, protected and do coexist in a balanced state.

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. Even when human benefits are not taken into account, one should draw attention in environmental quality, protection and its preservation. Importance of environmental needs are felt as they shape the quality of human life. The different environmental problems like depletion of resources, changing weather patterns and deforestation has a great impact on future generations compared to the present. Therefore, humans have an ethical obligation to prevent such from occurring. Many of the environmental problems can be solved by environmental ethics and which saves the world. Environmental ethics makes us aware of the indiscriminate human activities. The human beings inculcate moral values towards the nature and through environmental ethics, one learns to respect the various forms of life (Rolston, 2003). Environmental ethics deals with the issue of responsible personal conduct with respect to natural landscape, resources, species, and non-human organism. It is found that with respect to persons, there is a 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 (Attfield, 1983). The need and importance of environmental ethics in the present-day society is indispensable. In so far as we are living in a balanced state with the nature, so apart from viable environment we cannot aspect a human life to exist in this eco- centric universe. Thus, from the point of view of environmental ethics, ecological consciousness leads to the welfare of all being in our environment and nature.

Approaches of Environmental Ethics:

In the broader context it is found that the approaches of environmental ethics, 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 1970's onwards. The implementation of protective environmental policies has 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 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 i.e. Anthropocentrism, Bio-centrism and Eco-centrism.

An 'Anthropocentrism' is the belief that humans are the most important entity on the planet and other beings are only valuable to the extent that they serve humans. Anthropocentrism regards human as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value of nature.

'Bio-centrism' is the ethical perspective that all living things deserve equal moral consideration. There is 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, thus, an ethical perspective for us to respect, protect and help all life forms.'

An 'Eco-centrism' is that moral or ethical philosophy that values the eco system as a whole over humanity or individual living things. This eco-centric theory extends 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, ecofeminism, 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. A growing spirit is found in ecological consciousness that speak of tolerance, interdependence etc. It also shows path to a sustainable future.

Objective:

The present study encompasses the following objectives:

1. To study the necessity of maintaining the ethical relationship between humans and the nature;
2. To find out the prevailed condition of morality and motivation for the cause of global environmental protection and ethical justification;
3. To suggest measures to prevent the massive violation of environmental ethics.

Methodology:

Descriptive research method is followed in this study. The study is based on secondary data collected from newspapers, souvenirs, journals, ancient records, and numerous publications.

Discussion:

For the sake of human welfare on Earth, the focus of this study emphasizes philosophical questions regarding various facets of environmental development and conservation. Here are a few pertinent topics that could be covered:

Man-nature Relation:

Man-nature relation forms the basis for any philosophy of life. Both from historical and evolutionary stand point, there exist three different patterns of human attitudes in relation to man and nature. 1. “Among the prehistoric and primitive tribes an attitude of Man under nature was prevalent. The primitive man regarded himself to be a part of nature, dependent on nature for his survival, lived like a slave of nature, subservient to the domineering forces of nature, survived at the mercy of hidden and immutable laws of nature, accompanied by a general inability to transform nature with the simple and rudimentary tools and technology available to him. 2. From its previous stage an attitude of Man over nature evolved gradually. Although with a rapid growth in man’s knowledge of science and technology, he conceived nature as something to be conquered and exploited for its benefit. He forced nature to work for himself and exploited it to an unprecedented extent to fulfil his ever-expanding desires and needs. As a result of man’s mastery over nature, he no longer regards himself as a slave of nature, rather a master of nature. 3. An attitude of Man with nature has evolved as a reaction to the result of the exploitation of nature in its previous stage whereby, man found himself to be an integral part of nature, that is, a member of both the animate and inanimate things of the ecological system including water, air and earth. On this planet, human beings becomes aware of the fact that they are not living alone but with a host of animals, plants and inanimate objects on earth. Thus, any irresponsible damage done to the biotic community led to disastrous consequences on the survival of human existence” (Satyanarayana, 2010).

Impact of technology on the environment:

In the history of humanity, technology played an important and active role in the development of man’s domination over nature. Science and technology in the west have grown out of the Christian attitude toward man’s relation to nature. Modern technology is an important source of environmental problems. It equipped man with an enormous power to control and exploit nature ruthlessly to satisfy his greed. Environmental deterioration due to the effects of technology can be found mainly in the form of – pollution, depletion of natural resources and over population. Industrial and mechanical waste emissions are the most obvious sources of environmental contamination. Man, assaults nature and pollutes the environment through the use of pesticides and internal combustion engines. Technology contributed much to an increased consumption of resources like food materials, minerals and fossil fuels, which are rapidly being depleted. Finally, technology has contributed

to the recent population explosion through increased food production and longevity of human life and a reduced infant mortality rate. The unlimited population growth may lead to increased resource depletion and pollution (Baruah, 2008).

Environmental ethics and Climate change:

The world community has produced some significant tools to protect the environment, and the topic of the global environment has been explored. Because of its direct effects on the environment and development, climate change is actually one of the major worldwide problems.

Environmental Ethics and Good Governance:

One of the main institutions of a democratic society that addresses environmental issues and sustainable development is good governance. Participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and compliant with the law nature are only a few of its components. It might be referred to as green governance. The way in which these components are applied in society determines how a government develops. For present and for the future, there is a demand of the society. For the benefit of society, there is direct relationship between environmental ethics and effective governance.

Concept of Environmental Awareness:

As you know Environment is all that surrounds any organism from physical and non-material components that affect organism. When God created the environment, all its abiotic and biotic components were made balanced. But the anthropogenic activities are certainly responsible for imbalance of these factors. Environmental awareness is about the awareness regarding natural environment. Environmental awareness has become an important issue at the national and international levels for protecting Plants and Trees, Water Conservation, Controlling Environmental Pollution, changes mentality of people, protect animals, enhance traditional knowledge, solid waste management and to minimize the impacts of disasters. Environmental awareness has been a requirement of life, and it must be enhanced for all, especially younger generations. Environmental awareness is the understanding of people towards environmental components. Environmental awareness is all about the thinking towards air, water, soil, flora and fauna. The procedure of attaining environmental awareness is not an easy job, but it requires urgency, determination and serenity to achieve the required results. To achieve the environmental awareness, the need is to connect the efforts of individual to Government and vice versa. Environmental awareness is about consciousness about the natural environment. Environmental awareness is about ecologically thinking or ecological consciousness. We should think Globally, and Act Locally.

Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development:

The idea of Environmental ethics is intimately related to 'environmental justice' contextually which partly looks into the equal distribution of resources among people. The approach of Environmental ethics becomes important within the context and implications of sustainable development due to its vision on intergenerational responsibility and justice. Stated by Environmental ethics that a sustainable development is

required which would be the outcome of science and ethics. It can be stated that without ethics, science has no value for us, for our future generation. Science or scientific development should be encoded with sound ethical code of conduct so that sustainable development is maintained without degrading our nature. There is a close connection of sustainable development to the carrying capacity of an ecosystem. Thus, the developments should prevent our life support systems like air, water, land and forests from further damage. It should also conserve and nurture the biological diversity, gene pool and other resources for long term food security. Between sustainable development and ethical approaches to environment, a relationship is basically founded on the concept of sustainability which binds conceptual areas of values, morality and human rights. Clearly, 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. In the heart of the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development, there is an interrelation between ethical approaches to environment and 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 which includes 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.

From the stand point of environmentalist, sustainable development aims at economic developments without sacrificing the principle of use of environmental values and natural resources 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. With its assumption that nature and environmental resources are limited and thus growth is also limited, sustainable development reflects a protective understanding towards environment. Integrating economic and social development with environmental ethics is important in terms of environmental policies. Thus, by playing an important role, environmental ethics influences the growth of ideas and opinions and also represent something new in global governance for the benefit of humans and the rest of the living world. By taking into account the environmental ethics, it is very easy for all to carry out their duties and responsibilities properly which may lead to sustainable development for a peaceful and happy environment for our future generations on this planet.

Environmental ethics entails towards the environment that humans have a moral responsibility. For life and sustainable development, it seeks an appropriate respect. With the help of a reciprocal and holistic attitude, environmental ethics emphasizes upon the development of a sustainable ecology and society 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.

Human Rights and the Environmental Ethics:

An intimate relation between Human rights and the environment are intrinsically intertwined: a safe, clean, healthy environment is essential in the enjoyment of human rights; but our human rights are violated by polluted, hazardous and otherwise unhealthy environments. Environmental rights mean any proclamation of a human right to environmental conditions of a specified quality. Human rights are not abstract, remote, irrelevant concepts; they are rather measurable, prominent and functional aspects of society and its ecology. Constitutional rights are incorporated to a healthy environment by more than 100 countries. People and the planet suffer from reduced health and well-being only when the environmental rights are violated. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on 28 July 2022, that everyone on the planet has a right to a healthy environment.

Religious Teachings about the Environment:

World religious and individual spiritual traditions can provide a framework for changing our attitudes. World religions teach us that the land, rivers, mountains, minerals, oceans are held in trust for God, but can be wisely used for the general welfare of humanity. Our religions tell us that we should consider ourselves only as trustees of the universe, and as trustees we are authorized by God to use natural resources, but we have no divine power over nature and the elements. From the perspective of many religions, the abuse and exploitation of nature for immediate gain is unjust and unethical. All religions and cultures have something to offer to conservation and environment protection. To form a code for environmentally sustainable development, several exhortations can be brought forth from each religion. No religion says that we have the right to destroy our habitat, and no religion sanctions environmental destruction. But on the other penalties are mentioned for those who harm the environment. This is amply demonstrated in the codes of all the religions. A brief review of teachings about respect of nature and conservation of natural resources as given by Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Spiritual motivation is provided by each religion for environmental action in number of its programme. "Go Green" has become ritual across the world.

Conclusion:

In the present-day society, the importance of environmental ethics is indispensable. In today's culture, the value of environmental ethics cannot be overstated. All the branches of ethics, including environmental ethics aims to value human life appropriately. For preserving the ecosystems, the complete environmental ethic requires the best naturalistic and humanistic justifications. We might be able to solve 90% of our problems or more if the human being takes proper attention about how ethical issues which are applied to all situations, including the environment. In running our lives efficiently and creating a balance between humans and other creatures in our environment, environmental ethics and its methods can be beneficial. To safeguard against cruelty to all creature's ecological consciousness takes necessary step. In order to live in a happy atmosphere with the nature, a safe and sustainable temperament is involved. Our environment gets polluted due to lack of ecological consciousness. So far, we are living in a balanced state with nature, we cannot think of a human life

in this eco-centric universe apart from viable environment. To live in an environment workable for us, we have to comprehend the distinction between ecological balance and ecological imbalance. Thus, environmental ethics implicates a state of ecological consciousness which leads to the welfare of all in our environment.

As it is said –

“*Sarve Sukhinahsantusarvesantuniramayah
Sarve bhadranipashyantu ma kasciddukkhabhagabhavet*”

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

The philosophical concept of Utilitarianism also maintains that a balance of pleasure and pain should be taken equally into account. In this context, the Utilitarianism of J.S. Mill and Bentham prescribe the happiness for all, they stated that “Greatest happiness of the greatest number”. Along with the other forms of life human beings are a part of the food chain which is closely associated with each other together form our environment.

References:

- Arumugam, E. (2008). *Principles of environmental ethics*. Sarup & Sons.
- Attfield, R. (1983). *The ethics of environmental concern*. Basil Blackwell.
- Attfield, R. (2015). *The ethics of the global environment* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Audi, R. (Ed.). (1999). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baruah, I. (2008). *Socio-cultural and environmental factors of health and economy*. Sarup & Sons.
- Blackburn, S. (2001). *Ethics: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Botzler, R. G., & Armstrong, S. J. (Eds.). (1998). *Environmental protection and sustainable development: Legal principles and recommendations*. Graham & Trotman / Martinus Nijhoff.
- Rolston, H. (2003). *Environmental ethics*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Satyanarayana, Y. V. (2010). *Ethics: Theory and practice*. Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd.