

# Environmental Ethics and its Relevance with Reference to Hinduism

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**Abstract**—Earth is the only planet, so far known to have an environment that can sustain life. The protection of environment and conservation of resources had emerged as an issue of utmost importance for each and every nation. The task to preserve and protect the environment has become the primary requisite for development. In this context, environmental ethics can play a vital role to run our life smoothly and can make a balance between man and other beings in our surrounding environment. Human centric perspective can be converted into eco-centric one through environmental ethics where people's perspectives towards environment can be changed positively.

Thus the focus attention in this paper has been on understanding 3 major points. Firstly, the concept of environmental ethics has been taken. Secondly, its relevance in present society and thirdly an attempt has been made to describe how Hinduism can prove to be helpful in building a model of environmental ethics.

**Keywords:** Earth, Environmental ethics, Eco-centric, Environment, Hinduism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of environmental exploitation has been a cause for concern now not merely for India but for the entire world as well. The environmental crisis is an outward manifestation of the crisis of mind and spirit. 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 be able to love and respect nature automatically. In this context, environmental ethics can play a vital role to run our life smoothly and can make a balance between man and other beings in our surrounding environment.

## 2. 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.

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. According to *Leopold*, "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". (Leopold Aldo, 1949). He has tried to open a new subject which will deal with the relation between man and nature and he called it "Land Ethics", issue of "Environmental Ethics".

## 3. 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' (Arumugam.E, 2008)

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.

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:

'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.

"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." (Eliot Robert, 1995) 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.

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

#### 4. VIEWS OF HINDUISM:

A universal holistic approach which draws from religious or cultural values and beliefs to environmental protection is imperative if we desire to give to ourselves and to future generations an opportunity to enjoy their lives in peace and harmony with nature. There are many religions, scriptures and sayings which can prove to be helpful in building a model of environmental ethics. So it could be beneficial to instigate an

analysis of these religious views in order to adopt a suitable approach for assisting in sustainable development.

One of the oldest schools of thought, Hinduism believes in the principle of sanctity of all kinds of life. "Hinduism has often been coined as an environmental friendly religion". Hinduism regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle Divine presence, may it be rivers, mountains, lakes, animals as well as stars and planets. It is so because the Divine reality is present as shakti energy, power in every electron, particle, atom, cell and in every manifestation of matter. Thus Hindu philosophy has always had a humane and dignified view of the sacredness of all life and in this nature are not seen as disconnected but as being closely interlinked with each other in the symbiotic chain of life and consciousness. The whole universe is looked upon as an unity and the course of nature is seen to be determined by the operation of immutable laws. This laws of unity in nature is the Hindu law of Rta which literally means 'course of things'. Rta denotes order in the world. The world is no mere chaos, but had an inner order, a unity with an inexorable law and purposes (rta). According to Atharva-Veda, "the earth is not for human being alone, but for other creatures as well." (Atharvaveda, 12.1.15).

Thus, it has been clearly enunciated that Hindu rishis of the Vedic and Upanishad era perceived the value of maintaining a harmonious relationship between the needs of man and spectacular diversity of the universe. Consequently "Hinduism is not war with nature". ( Ghosh, Subodh 1963).

#### 5. 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. So, to make life better and worth living for present and future generation a minimum ethical code for good environment is essential (Leopold, Aldo 1997). As it is said –

*"Sarve Sukhinassantu sarve santu niramayah*

*Sarve bhadrani pashyantur ma kascid dukha-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

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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.( Sarma, Chandrakanta 2011).

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