

ENVIRONMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES



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ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND AN APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HINDU PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Mayuri Barman

INTRODUCTION: -

The problem of Environmental exploitation has been a cause for concern now not merely for India but for the entire world as well. In the present century, environmental degradation has emerged as a major global concern for human survival. Environmental degradation is a result of socio-economical, technological and institutional activities. Degradation occurs when Earth's natural resources are depleted. The resources which are affected include water, air, soil, wild life, plants, animals etc. Our land, water and soil are compromised when people exhaust resources or release harmful chemicals into the air. Deforestation, wasting resources and population growth all add to the demise of an environmentally sound and safe planet. When trees in forest are cut down in large quantities and burned, that not only destroys forests but all that live in them.

The North-East India, popularly known for its pristine beauty, lush greenery and rich biodiversity, is observed to suffer from a gradual degradation of its environment and shrinkage of genetic resources. The people of the region who live in close proximity with nature is seen to get alienated from nature and natural resources and experience a threat to its environment and livelihood associated with the nature. Extreme weather events, such as severe flood, increase the spread of water borne diseases, such as malaria and diarrhoea. Diseases are also spread by uncollected garbage and blocked drains.

PROBLEM: -

The environment is an integrated system in which all its elements act and react in such a way that a balance is always maintained. Man is a user of the environment for his developmental activities and always disrupt this natural system and creates a background for environmental degradation. When this degradation is lesser, nature recovers it by its own system of recovery, but whenever its quantity is more it creates an imbalance in nature. In general there are two main categories

of environmental degradation. Natural environmental degradation such as floods, droughts, thunder, storms etc and environmental degradation due to human actions such as deforestation, construction of big dams, pollution through industrialization, transportation, population growth etc.

The strains of the ecological crisis are so apparent that the task to preserve and protect the environment has become the primary requisite of the economies of development. Now, the peak time has come when it is mandatory to step forward to save our mother earth from all human activities which degrade our environment. Only science and technology cannot be blamed for the environmental degradation. Every individual are responsible for environmental degradation.

APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS:

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. In modern time, the degradation of environment demands the application of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including human to non-human world. It is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to its environment and also the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents. Environmental ethics refers to the issues, principles and guidelines relating to human interaction with their environment. It has an important role to protect the nature. Human beings are a part of the society and so are the other living beings. 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, comparison, interdependence and voluntary simplicity. Therefore it can be opined that we are in a chain in environment, if one knot is displayed from another, the whole chain will be useless. If some creatures exhibit excessive power over others, then ecological imbalance comes into light. That is why, "Ethics constitute the basic codes of civilised behaviour, without which our environment would be impossible. The man-made environmental problem cannot be solved by technologies alone. Changes in human behaviour are necessary hence the need for codes of

conduct based on 'basic change of values' in connection to the environment reflected a need for the development of environmental ethics. Thus, environmental ethics is an, internalized code of behaviour which regulates man's relationship with nature.

VIEWS OF HINDU PHILOSOPHY:

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.

One of the oldest schools of thoughts, Hinduism believes in the principle of sanctity of all kinds of life. "Hinduism has often coined as a environmental friendly religion". To a Hindu, the flora and fauna and even inanimate objects were part of the same supreme being of which he himself was a part. Starting from the Vedas, all the way to the present respect for the animal kingdom, mountains, rivers etc is capsuled in the concept of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam'. That we should live together in peace should be the basic ethics of all ethics. The source of all ethical values is the principles like: Life is endless and life is interdependent. "Hinduism regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle Divine presence." Thus Hindu Philosophy has always had a humane and dignified view of the sacredness of all life and all in this nature are not seen as disconnected but as being closely interlinked with each other in the symbiotic chain of life and consciousness. Here, all sentient and non-sentient beings possess intrinsic value, having moral right to respectful treatment. Hence they are not means to other ends. Even in 'Atharva-veda' nature has been described as 'O Mother Earth!' In Upanisad, it refers to all species on earth as members of the same extended family of Devi Vasundhara.

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 purpose. Thus, this whole order was supposed to be under the guardianship of one God who is characterized as the self of all beings.