

# Environmental Ethics and Its Development with Respect to Indian Philosophy and Culture

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## Abstract

Environmental ethics instil a precious code within individuals and societies, and every person should work to deepen this within themselves in order to become empowered with the strength to act and make decisions from within on environmental issues that are not harmful to their community, country, and the world. Environmental ethics needs to focus on sharpening the opinions of the individual so as to not endanger the well-being and security of other living creatures. Ethics forbid us from endangering the health of an individual or the well-being of a community; it calls on us to serve our communities proudly and honestly. Environmental ethics consists of an internecine brawl between caricatures—the simplistic, ill-informed “Greens” against calculating, uncaring businessmen and innovators known as “Technocratic individualists (reflecting Anthropocentric worldview). Extreme proponents of different ideologies often fail to consider the implications of their stances. In order to find a route to sustainability and long-term permanency, a balance between several practices is recommended. In this case, the study's emphasis is focused on Indian philosophical considerations about the environment. It will investigate the Hindu concept (Hinduism), Buddhist principles, and the beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore on environmental issues. On ecological problems, different difficulties and solutions are required.

**Keywords:** *Environmental Ethics, Philosophy, Nature, Ecosystems, Culture.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the significance of environmental ethics benefits both people and the ecosystem. Environmental ethics may be described as the study of how people interact with the environment. Earth, animals, and plants are all evaluated according to their moral position in respect to humanity. The scientists and others who study environmental issues and sustainability attempt to find out whether we have an ethical duty to look after the environment, and to what extent?

Environmental ethics emerged as a distinct field of study in the 1970s. Researchers attempted to understand how technological, commercial, and the global population's increasing effect on the environment affected each other. Although scientific and technical understanding of the human factors has increased, individuals are working toward further understanding how these factors will have long-term consequences for the environment, nonrenewable resources, climate change, rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and other issues.

Environmental ethics emphasises our ethical duties to the environment, but the needs of people also have to be considered. People will not become engaged in environmental initiatives such as conservation and preservation unless they put a high value on the environment. Ethical practises are something that individuals become interested in and concerned about only after they have learned about and understood the issue of water and air pollution or the extinction of ecosystems.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ashok Kumar Verma (2019) Meeting the demands of the present while also allowing future generations to fulfil their own is known as sustainable development. The idea is wide, spanning topics like economy, ecology, and society, while also including the following principles: (a) long-term economic sustainability, (b) long-term ecological sustainability, (c) long-term social sustainability, and (d) long-term cultural sustainability. Intra-generational sustainability includes children and future generations, whereas inter-generational sustainability incorporates all future generations. It includes a number of other significant provisions to be addressed here as well.

Martina Keitsch (2018) In terms of interpretations, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the idea of sustainable development (SD) may be seen as diverse, and the same is true when it comes to the ethical implications. Despite the general acceptance of SDG ideals, there are significant ethical disagreements on how to view and value nature. The aim of this article is to provide a clearer and more systematic approach to ethical perspectives on the environment by incorporating the concepts of anthropocentrism and biocentrism into a theoretical framework of environmental ethics. The goal is to give an overview of SDG viewpoints and to place them in the larger area of environmental ethics, where we examine how humans relate to nature as a recurrent theme across the SDGs. By reading this paper, scholars will get a better understanding of ethical perspectives while considering the SDGs.

CHOY Yee Keong (2017) A new ethical-ecological order based on value pluralism and environmental ethics is being proposed. In conclusion, the Brundtland Report's assertion about the sustainability problem starts with a discussion about the failure of the report, which is addressing the foundational assumption for sustainability, which is a discussion about adopting non-anthropocentric views towards nature. Once the environment is repaired, the main thing will be to repair our relationships with the non-human natural world. From research done in the jungles of Borneo, the study finds that in order for sustainable development to be a useful concept, it must take ethical sustainability into consideration.

K. Sivaramakrishnan (2015) In this essay, we discuss the emergence of moral and ethical worlds in India, looking at contemporary case studies. An analysis of how affect and worship influence attitudes to being in a given landscape may aid in environmental history, and a thorough study of how affect and worship form attitudes to being in certain landscapes is valuable. An study of many recent research provides factual grounds for the development of this synthesis, review, and conceptual expansion of Indian ethics with regard to nature. In the essay, the author examines ethical concepts and ideals related to the management of natural resources, as well as projects related to rural development, conservation, legal issues, and environmental preservation in India.

## 3. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

Environmental ethics is the study of how humans and their natural environment interact. Humans must learn to live in peace with nature, as previously said. Ecosystem balance is maintained by many mechanisms, including absorption and recycling. In addition, population growth overuse of resources has disturbed the natural equilibrium. Technology and economic development have created issues with the environment. Advancement in the economic sector has come at an extraordinary cost to the environment in the form of increased pollution, biodiversity loss, and a looming scarcity of key resources. Because ethics plays a significant part in evaluating developmental operations, such as deforestation, dam construction, mining, or drainage of a wetland, it becomes especially relevant. There are numerous issues in regard to the environment that need human ethical choices. One such example is whether or not one should keep cutting down trees. How long is it possible to keep expanding the usage of fossil fuels? To what extent is it ethical for humans to cause the extinction of other species? We must take care of the environment to keep it safe for future generations.

## 4. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND OLD TRADITIONS

Our long-standing traditions tell us to live in peace and harmony with the environment and to conserve it, as we are all part of the same creator. We have no right to cause harm to any living thing, whether they are alive or not, because they are also one of the creations created by the almighty. This is something we've been taught since the beginning of our civilization, but as time progressed we disregarded it and believed we were in control of everything and that everything in the world exists to serve us.

The most important goal of society since Vedic times has been to live in harmony with nature. The great sages, saints, and Indian instructors all lived in woods, used Sanskrit, Upanishads, Smritis, and Dharma to express themselves, and eventually passed away in forests. Thus, it may be inferred that all of the heavenly ideas and writings that guided people on how to conduct their lives arose when these great philosophers and saints came into contact with the natural world. Some ancient writings taught that we should honour the land, plants, trees, mother earth, the sky (akasha), air (vayu), water (jal), and animals. It was thought that it was everyone's holy duty to safeguard others. In Hinduism, nature, environmental balance, and conservation are valued highly. To guide people in how to honour the gods, it taught men to respect nature. For this reason, trees, animals, hills, mountains, rivers are seen as an example of respect to the things in nature that embody that particular value. The basic tenets of Hinduism may be found in many texts, writings that provide a glimpse into Hindu religious philosophy.

- to treat nature with respect and care
- Animals, trees, and other creatures are part of the web of life, and it is the dharma of highest order to not damage them.
- In Hinduism, the act of abstaining from eating meat was regarded both as behaviour and a religious obligation.

We should observe purity of thinking and speech, and keep our surroundings tidy. All life, including human and non-human life, is valuable, and everyone has the right to exist. This reveals that Hinduism upholds the concept of sanctity of life, as is plainly shown in the law. In Hinduism, the religion is more than five thousand years old and of divine origin. Although we don't know where it began, we may make educated guesses that it would have evolved through time by moving slowly from generation to generation. Since time immemorial, men have recognised the need of nature, with which they advance themselves and if they want to continue to grow, they connect them to God, with whom they gradually begin to accept it as a practise.

Due to these variables, there are many names for various environmental elements:

Lord Surya- Sun,

Vayu Devta -Lord of Winds,

Agni devta - Lord of fire,

Prithvi mata-Mother Earth,

Vanya Devi-Goddess of Forests, etc

Trees were deemed sacrilegious because they were to be treated with respect and given reverence like the gods and goddesses.

The Rig Veda, Manusmriti, and Charak Samhitaha speak of the importance of water as a source of cleanliness and healing, and of water as having therapeutic value. Because of the system of maryada implemented in Indian society to maintain everything clean and healthy, these injunctions hold true.

When it comes to today's society, people have largely lost their longstanding history of harmoniously coexisting with the natural environment and preserving natural resources. Environmentalism has been lost in the drive to industrialise and industrialise. Primitive man lived alongside nature, like other animals, but through time he came to believe that the whole world was there for him, and that he was the lord of it all. In the past, his thoughts about the environment in which he lives centred around his connection to everything, and he cared for other organisms because he was sensitive. However, as civilization progressed, man's feelings for nature started deteriorating. He totally forgot the importance of nature, and he thought that pollution from industry is unavoidable.

## 5. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS PHILOSOPHIES

Sustainability sometimes baffles those who are unfamiliar with environmental ethical ideas. No matter what sector or industry a debate about the environment occurs in, they are very common. Understanding environmental ethics, anthropocentrism, and libertarian extension philosophies can help since it allows one to comprehend conservation ethics, anthropocentrism, and extension philosophies that support liberty.

### Conservationism and Conservation Ethics

The act of conserving and safeguarding what currently exists in the environment is known as conservation. A person who studies how environmental conditions, ecosystem structures, human society, the utilisation of resources, and human health interact is called a conservation expert.

While environmental ethics primarily focus on human respect for the environment and ecosystems, conservation ethics depends on how much humanity has or hasn't for the environment and ecosystems. An essential aspect of conservation ethics is working to improve human communities and ecosystems while also preserving valuable resources that will be used in the future. This philosophical perspective takes a holistic view of nature, appreciating the way that people and the environment affect one another.

### Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans are the most significant creatures in the universe. In accordance with this ideology, humans are considered to be superior to other living creatures, plants, and natural resources. The human/nonhuman interaction enables people to utilise natural factors for their own advantage or gain.

### Libertarian Extension Philosophies

Whereas anthropocentrism asserts that only people deserve respect, the Libertarian extension philosophies recognize the rights of humans and extend these rights to animals and the environment. In the case of human/nonhuman rights, the libertarian extension proposes a more biocentric paradigm, equalizing rights across the two beings. For example, libertarian extension theories are endorsed by philosopher Arne Naess and Peter Singer in their professional pursuits. In their philosophical work, these moral philosophers argue on the significance of animal rights and welfare.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

- In order to do this, a scientific research will use a variety of strategies such as deductive, inductive, synthetic, and descriptive analysis.
- Primary and secondary resources are used by the researcher.
- to depict environmental ethics' conceptual analyses
- In order to explore the significance of ethical and environmental issues from the Indian viewpoint, one must philosophise.
- To ponder the significance of the humanities' place in the environment.
- to provide a rationale for the research

## 7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Because of the environmental crises, it is imperative that the human attitude and values toward nature be reexamined. Environmental ethics may be approached in three different ways. This concept is best explained using the term "Anthropocentrism", "Biocentrism", and "Eco-centrism".

According to "Anthropocentrism" environmental ethics, human beings are given the right to moral standing and the rest of the natural world exists solely as a tool to achieve human goals. Humanity and nature are seen to be distinct entities, and human life is deemed to have worth independent of nature.

In Bio-centrism, it is maintained that all living forms are “moral patients.” As such, we have a responsibility to all life-forms. Albert Schweitzer (1923) It is scientifically known that all living creatures have the desire to live, and it is also believed that all living beings with the will to live are holy, interconnected, and of equal worth. To further that goal, it is critical that we do all in our power to protect and respect all living forms.

As some critics have said, our destructive and exploitative attitude towards environment seems to be due to our “anthropocentric” thinking. Therefore, they conclude, we need a whole different approach to how humans engage with nature. It will be difficult to escape the current ecological disaster unless we discover a new faith, or reform our old religion. There are many environmental ethicists, especially members of the “Deep ecology” movement, who hold that the impacts of value systems on human interactions with nature have been taken over by us. According to “deep ecology,” the natural world is a complex equilibrium of intricate interrelationships in which all living things exist as a result of and are reliant on one another.

The view according to which the whole of the ecosystem, comprised of both biotic and abiotic elements of nature, merits moral consideration is referred to as “ecocentrism.” According to this ecological ethics theory, we should extend our moral care to non-human objects, including flora and fauna, such as forests and parks.

### **The Buddhist Attitude towards Nature**

Buddhism is exclusively dedicated to teaching a way of living that helps people lead better lives without suffering. To inquiries that did not relate to the fundamental issue of human suffering and its resolution, the Buddha declined to respond. Furthermore, the modern-day issue of environmental contamination has not been noticed by previous people, such as the Buddha. Because there is no particular discourse that treats our subject, we will have a tough time locating anything about it. It is feasible to discover enough information in the Pali canon to identify the Buddhist view of nature.

To indicate everything in the world that is not arranged or created by humans, the term "nature" denotes everything. "Nature" has the closest Pali translations in Pali terms as loka and yathabhuta. "Things as they actually are" is typically rendered as "the world," while "the world" is literal. Natural law or method is sometimes referred to as Dhammata and Niyama in the Pali Canon.

### **Hindu Environmental Ethics**

Baha'ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Bishnoism, and Zoroastrianism are all religions that have significant belief systems that are supportive of environmental preservation. The Indians have an old practise of always making sure their environment was protected. Even in ancient Bharat, each person had to follow dharma and worship nature for protection and worship (Jariwala, 1992). Forever unchallenged, sacred woods have remained untrammelled and unspoiled (Vartak et al., 1986). It was felt that doing damage to these groves insulted the forest spirit and deity entities. Trees were regarded deities in the past (Battacharya, 1968). (Agarwal, 1985). Trees are regarded as sacred by the rishis; they think that deforestation and chopping of trees results in bad rainfall (Agarwal, 1985). In Vedic cultures, yagnas were done to cleanse the surrounding air by placing focus on environmental cleanliness. Everyone in the past has had the right to life, freedom of movement, and a healthy environment. The fact, however, is that nature was exploited throughout the time of Aryan civilization in order to meet the rapidly growing societal requirements such as making chariots and carts, and constructing houses of wood (Agarwal, 1985). In the tradition of Kautilya, he considered a method of managing forests. For every tree that was felled, the amount of penalty was proportional to the usefulness of the tree. Constrained by the need to promote forest-based manufacturing in crafts, the exploitation of forest resources in producing household items, and defense-related functions, management of forests has remained (Kangle, 1972).

The protection and care of nature is safeguarded by religion. One might say that the fundamental aspect of Hinduism is that it honours many different aspects of nature, including the sun, wind, land, trees, plants, and water. The traditional practises of respect and protection of animals, including Garuda, Lion, Peacock, and Snake, have been in place for millennia. The great majority of God Ram and Goddess Sita's whole life was spent in or around nature. A further reason old writings written in Sanskrit, Pali, or other languages may be relevant is that they may include a wealth of information. When you look for Vishnu Samhitā in a Sanskrit dictionary, you will find many statements on biodiversity conservation (Chhibber, 2008). Hinduism holds to a strong version of the equal sanctity of all life

and for thousands of years practiced sustainable agriculture and nonviolence (ahimsa) toward animals and nature (Dwivedi, 1990).

### **Environmental Ethics in Islam**

There are chances that Muslims might make a positive contribution to the environmental problem. To continue to help rebuild the relationship between Muslims and the environment, it is essential to first establish among the Muslim community the importance of nature or the environment. Muslims believe that nature is able to respond to spiritual and material needs. Humans are intended to serve the Creator, which, in the Qur'anic viewpoint, implies serving one's own greatest benefit (the community, and the environment), whereas subservience is inherent in animals. A large portion of Islamic environmental ethics is derived from this viewpoint. The notion of appreciation also serves as the foundation for an ecologically conscious stance. Based on Islamic teachings, a Muslim is capable of rejecting unhealthy and wasteful behaviours which may frequently translate into a consumption of resources which are detrimental to the environment. There is a natural order and structure in Islam, similar to that of the environment, in which the many components rely on one other for their various purposes. Every disruption will influence the overall equilibrium, and damage at least one component. Preserving and sustaining the health of environment and bringing peace to its people are fundamental principles of Islamic worldviews. Like the Qur'an and hadith, the main sources of guidance for Muslims, such abiding principles are found in the Islamic legal system's goal (maqasid al-shariah) and may be found in the Qur'an and hadith. Environmental ethics must be enforced in light of Islamic scientific and/or empirical knowledge on "what and how" of nature, as well as the explanation of human duties with respect to nature.

### **The Chipko Movement**

Villagers created a human chain around the designated trees in the town of Gopeshwar in Chamoli district (Uttar Pradesh, India) and embraced them to protect them from being cut down to supply a sports equipment factory nearby. In the following years, the same scenario happened again in another town when foresters requested permission to chop trees under licence from the Federal Department of Forests. This happened again in 1974, when the villagers of Reni, located near Joshimath in the Himalayas, had the loggers leave their forest by clinging trees and blocking construction crews. The Chipko Andolan (sometimes referred to as the Chipko Movement) was formed in response to widespread deforestation.

When Mahatma Gandhi shared his observations, he cautioned, "People, nature has plenty for everyone, but not everyone's greed. Gandhi was a big supporter of India's cultural and spiritual legacy. This is an excellent illustration of how to stand up to an unfair and insensitive authority that has an advantage over you. Today, the Bishnois, Chipko, and Appiko tribes, all called "Appiko," are also engaged in a similar "forest satyagraha." Their activities might simply be combined into a single, straightforward campaign for environmental preservation—called 'satyagraha for the environment'—and be utilised to combat big government and large business.

According to Hindu religious texts and prophets, environmental ethics was followed not just by ordinary people, but also by kings and emperors. These basic principles were seen as religious responsibilities, as norms of administration, or as obligations for law and order, depending on the individual. Human beings in Hinduism have the authority to utilise natural resources, but they have no divine sovereignty over nature and its components. Abuse and exploitation of nature for personal gain considered unfair in Hindu culture..

### **Rabindranath Tagore understanding towards nature & human beings**

The connection and kinship between mankind and nature was stressed by Tagore. God is seen as a combination of mankind, nature, and spirit.

Tagore states that understanding humanity clearly exposes the fact that the two main elements of his nature are, on the one hand, a base level and, on the other hand, a superior level. One's own observations verify the notion that even introspection may be insightful. It may be said in many ways, but the most common expression is man is finite-infinite. As a person, he has both the bodily and spiritual natures. He is both earth's offspring and heir to heaven.

Bengali author Tagore claims that both points of view are one-sided and narrowly focused, which means they are flawed.

Scientific philosophers who attempt to explain spirituality by arguing that it is illusory or fantastic are overlooking the facts. They fail to see that there are a wide range of things that cannot be understood only via science. There are things that the scientific insight does come across but is not able to explain.

Another distinctive feature of human beings that Tagore wants to draw attention to is that they are individuals who may also be universal. Every person has their own unique traits that set them apart from other people.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Ecological consciousness safeguard against cruelty to all creatures. Rather it involves a safe and in order to live peacefully with nature, one must have a sustainable temperament. Ecological awareness is lacking, which means we are polluting our environment.

Now I may be quoted as saying that environmental ethics in today's society is very essential. Our relationship with nature is symbiotic: aside from the environment, it's impossible to conceive of a human existence in this eco-centric world. We have to understand the difference between ecological balance and ecological imbalance if we want to create a balanced ecosystem. Environmental awareness promotes the wellbeing of all those living in and around the environment. As it is said –

“Sarve Sukhinassantu sarve santu niramayah

Sarve bhadrani pashyantu ma kasciddukha-bhagabhavat.”

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

It is also associated with “Utilitarianism”, which emphasises the need of balancing pleasure and suffering evenly. Bentham's “Utilitarianism” includes Mill's prescription of a universal “highest happiness for the greatest number” as the ideal. Thus, we are part of the food chain which is intimately linked with other kinds of life, along with our surroundings.

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