

Value Systems of Religions and Environmental Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Due to socio-cultural traditions it happens many times that women are not accepted to attend public meetings or be involved in decision-making. The empowering process that public participation might facilitate, have been neglected. An improved methodology of how public participation can be integrated in project planning is compulsory, why more practical experience and continuous project evaluations is needed. Naturally occurring arsenic in ground water is currently threatening millions of people. It has emerged as one of the world's largest water pollution and environmental disasters. Various studies have been conducted in order to find a solution to the problem. Since technical solutions appear to be hard to transform into practical implementation many professionals are advocating the use of public participation in sustainable project planning and implementation. This Study focuses on how an environmental problem can be managed through social processes.

Keywords: *Ecology, Environmental Ethics, Environmental Movement, Groundwater, Human activities*

I INTRODUCTION

The term environmental ethics came in the early 1970's, when the world started realizing the dangers of human actions on the environment. Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy that considers the ethical relationship between human beings and environment. It exerts influence on a large range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, theology, economics, ecology law, and geography (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2009). Environmental ethics is the discipline that studies the moral relationship of human beings with components of environment (Dhama *et al.*, 1998). Main reasons of such concerns were the issues, which impacts were changing the global environment. These issues are:

- 1) Our exploitation of natural resources
- 2) Concentration of CO₂ and other green house gases in atmosphere
- 3) Reduction in purification capacity of atmosphere due to increased deforestation
- 4) Increasing particulate matters in atmosphere due to burning of fuels and fossil fuels
- 5) Deterioration in quality of environmental ingredients due to industrialization and urbanization

II ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

The contemporary environmental movement arose primarily from concerns in the late 19th century about the protection of the countryside in Europe and the wilderness in the United States. The impact on human population and problems such as air and water pollution are historical. Pollution was associated with the spread of epidemic disease between the late 14th century and the mid 16th century. The health consequences of pollution noticed during the Industrial Revolution. In general, however, such concerns did not give rise to public activism (Dhama *et al.*, 1999). All social problems, including environmental ones, could be solved through the free market. In opposition to the dominant political philosophy of the time, liberalism which held that most early environmentalists believed that government rather than the market should be charged with protecting the environment and ensuring the conservation of resources (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2008).

An early philosophy of resource conservation was developed by Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, for whom conservation represented the wise and efficient use of resources. Almanac (1949), had a significant influence on later biocentric environmentalists (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2010). In United States at about the same time, a more strongly biocentric approach arose in the preservationist philosophy of Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), a professor of wildlife management. It was pivotal in the designation of Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924 as America's first national wilderness area (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2011). Leopold introduced the concept of a land ethic, arguing that humans should transform themselves from conquerors of nature into citizens of it.

2.1 Hinduism and Ecology

Hinduism has long revered the tree. Early seals from the Indus Valley cities (ca. 3000 BCE) depict the tree as a powerful symbol of abundance (Dhama *et al.*, 1999). India has a long history of forest protection, from the edicts of *Asoka*, to the individual work of various Kings. Certain practices followed by the people in the past like throwing of dead bodies and throwing of dead animals into the Ganges has seriously contaminated the water. Such practices are still being followed and people drink water directly from the river because it is considered pure (Dhama *et al.*, 1998). There is an increase in epidemic diseases and bacterial growth effecting the aquatic ecosystem as well as human beings. Traditions practiced by the Indians in the past kept them away from cutting the trees as it is considered as a powerful symbol of abundance. The sacred grooves are the habitat of many wild animals. These animals are rare species and are not killed because they were considered as forms of God. In a way these beliefs helped in maintaining the food chain and overall the ecological balance. Although some practices were eco-friendly, other practices were not ecologically friendly (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2007).

The doctrine of *Dharma* emphasizes a need to act “for the sake of the good of the world.” Particularly concerning such issues as the building of dams in the Narmada River Valley, this requires taking into account social ecology. It also desires to integrate environmental policy with the daily needs of tribal and other marginalized peoples. Arvari River in the Alwar district of Rajasthan was started by constructing a small water harvesting structure called “Johad”. This has increased the ground water level by almost six meters and there

has been a 33% increase in the forest cover (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2011). The river Arvari is flowing once again. Rivers have been continued to be an integral part of Hindu religious practice. More than fifty Vedic hymns praise the Saraswati, a river (now dry) associated with the Goddess of learning and culture (Pushpendra *et al.*, 2008). Hinduism offers a variety of cosmological views that may or may not suit the whole world in ecologically friendly manner. Other spiritual paths advocate renunciation of all sensual attachments to the world. However, that relegates worldly concerns to a status of secondary importance.

2.2 Growth of Environmental Ethics

During the mid-twentieth century, environmental degradation reached crisis proportions after technologies implementation. The growth of environmental ethics was heavily influenced by cultural factors. Particularly implementation of developed technologies for war became redirected to peaceful uses. High compression internal combustion engines designed to power military aircraft and tanks, were redesigned to power automobiles, trucks, tractors, crop dusters, and bulldozers. In the spirit of beating swords into plowshares, atomic weapons technology was adapted to generate electricity. DDT, originally manufactured to delouse soldiers, was indiscriminately broadcast as an agricultural pesticide. Through the testimony of distinguished states persons, writers, and scientists regarding landscape had become unbalanced, and the biota had become insolvent. These developments contributed to the dramatic rise in the postwar standard of living in industrialized countries, but at terrible cost toxic radioactive wastes were produced. Due to this non-targeted organisms were killed and formerly clean air and water were heavily polluted (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2009). People were alerted to the insidious dangers of postwar technologies. Through the testimony of their senses—the air and water were palpably befouled.

III TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF ETHICS

1. The consequences of actions, values, or behaviors are difficult or impossible to know.
2. These problems involve entities, such as ecosystems and “dying cultures,” that are not easily accommodated by ethics that value people, utility, sentient beings, or communities of people.
3. They involve forms of moral agency that are diffuse and far-reaching, and that rarely involve direct rational choice.
4. These problems involve past and future generations, and therefore the cultivation of a sense of responsibility on the part of people.
5. Options are severely limited, or over determined, by forces beyond our control
6. These are not directly responsible for post colonialist (although those people contribute, in large and small ways, to oppressive regimes).

IV CONCLUSION

Our Vedas has glorified each component of nature as Gods or Goddess so that people have a feeling of reverence for them. Our religion and culture rituals make us perform such actions that would help in the conservation of nature and natural and natural resources. The late twentieth century faced a ‘population time

bomb' and a serious environmental crisis. If we critically go through a vision for earth and reflect upon the same. One can find that various religions teach us the same things in one form or the other. Although nature was the focus of much, nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, contemporary environmental ethics only emerged as an academic discipline in the 1970s. The questioning and rethinking of the relationship of human beings with the natural environment over the last thirty years reflected an already widespread perception in the 1960s. The concept of 'ahimsa' (non-violence) in Buddhism and Jainism ensure protection and conservation of all forms of life, thereby keeping the ecological balance of the earth intact. Our teaching on "having fewer wants" ensures to put "limits to growth" and thus guide us to have an eco-centric life style.

An anthropocentric or a biocentric perspective, more adequate environmental values need to be formulated and linked to areas of public policy. Scholars of religion can be key players in this process. Clearly, religions need to be involved with the development of a more comprehensive worldview and ethics to assist in reversing this trend. Moreover, there are calls from other concerned parties to participate in a broader alliance to halt the loss of species, topsoil, and natural resources. It is our hope to expand this alliance of scholars and activists by creating common ground for dialogue and creative partnership in envisioning and implementing long-range solutions to some of our most pressing environmental problems. This is critical because the attitudes and values that shape people's concepts of nature come primarily from religious worldviews and ethical practices. The moral imperative and value systems of religions are indispensable in mobilizing the sensibilities of people toward preserving the environment for future generations.

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