

CHAPTER –V

CONCLUSION

One of the challenges of this new decade is that of changing people's behaviour and attitude towards environment. A prerequisite for such change is the promotion of public awareness and understanding of environmental issues. People need to realize that they are part of the whole community of life that depends on earth's environmental resources for subsistence and sustenance. People need to understand that all living and nonliving things are interdependent and interrelated and upsetting the balance of nature will threaten their very own survival as well as nature. All these depend upon the proper recognition of intrinsic value in nature. One need to investigate the role of human beings as such in environmental ethics and in preservation of the environment, and how scientists and non-scientists alike can contribute towards ameliorating the environment for the present and future generations. What we need in this endangered period is not so much a new environmental ethic but a new environmental ethos i.e. an outlook, which is as fully appreciative of the natural world as, is consistent with our need to survive in it, and which registers horror at any activity which causes the needless or unnecessary destruction of non-human nature.

Everyone wants clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and carcinogen-free food to eat. It can be said that, this attitude is simply an enlightened form of self-interest. Human population is increasingly satisfied when it comes to the rest of creation, and when it comes to issues such as the extinction of non-human species. On a practical level, the possibility has been put forward that environmental protection and economic growth may be incompatible, due to the fact that some environmental indicators, such as carbon dioxide emissions and solid waste, seem to be positively linked to economic growth. However, this issue is open to a significant debate with reference to sustainable development.

Our moral responsibility towards nature and future is of unprecedented significance and urgency, and it is a responsibility that we cannot escape. The natural environment, species and the generations that will succeed us lie in the fate of our hand. In this respect, environmental ethics represents a kind of ethical approach, which considers intrinsic value not only in the interest of individual sentient creature, but also living creatures in the world. We need to understand that we humans are complex

beings and we make decisions about what to do, about what is right and wrong through thoughts and feelings, rational arguments and intuitions, head and heart, data and gut instinct. These varieties in human nature compel us to think and do accordingly in a responsible manner.

Human beings need to understand that they live in one world along with the rest of nature. On the one hand, uncontrolled human behaviour and absolute despot like attitude might lead to the destruction of environment and thus lead to the extinction of human beings. Absolute preservation on the other hand, is impossible. By supporting weak anthropocentrism we can say that human interest in survival is the best ground on which to argue for an ecological balance which is good both for human and for the whole biological community, can be established. A cat does not distinguish between good and bad, but we rational beings do. We are gifted with rationality; therefore, we need to use that gift in a rational manner to save our environment. Thus, to a certain extent anthropocentrism in a weak sense as discussed in the second chapter can be acceptable, if human beings' survival is at stake.

So far as the Rolston III, is concerned, nature is intrinsically valuable in itself, apart from its contributions to human well-being. All created things are equal and should be respected as ends in themselves having rights of their own without human interference. Animals, plants, rocks, land, water, etc. are all said to possess intrinsic value by their mere existence without their relationship to individual human beings. According to Aldo Leopold and Holmes Rolston wild nature and healthy ecosystems have intrinsic value, prior to and apart from their instrumental value as resources for humans, and therefore should be preserved.¹⁶³ We can't say that nature is intrinsically valuable in the absolute sense. What we can say is that valuing or evaluating nature is anthropogenic i, e. human-generated but not human-centered. Such kind of value is neither self-regarding nor human-regarding, though it is human-generated. It doesn't satisfy human beings' desire, passion and longing.

So far as future generation is concerned, rapid population growth, excessive consumption, climate change, ozone depletion, and loss of biodiversity revealed the fact that humans are destroying Earth's biosphere and thus making both present human life and the lives of future generations at risk. If we are not prepared fundamentally to change our life style, i.e., our way of producing and consuming, we will irreversibly

¹⁶³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_theory

damage our foundation of life in a very short time. We need to be careful in not inflicting irreparable losses on the generations to follow us. Most of us would say that we have a duty not to destroy, not only that conservation is morally required but also that it is something due for our descendants, something to be done for their sake that supports the doctrine of sustainable development. We have a duty to conserve the resources of nature because they are essential to all human lives both now and in the indefinite future.

One may say that a baby who is to be born tomorrow is a future person. A baby yet conceived but is very much likely to be conceived is also a future person. A generation to be born constitutes future generation. We may think of generations which might possibly exist centuries ahead of ours and so on. Thus the moral status of future generation may appear that it involves nothing more than a simple extension of or indirect duty to our moral community to include family, animals, ecosystems and persons who will be born after we have departed. Our present actions, decisions may not only have bearing on the well-being of future generation, but also determine whether future generation would exist at all. Our actions may help the proliferation of life in future, as well as help the proliferation of good life for such future beings.

If we have no moral reason to consider the interests of future individuals, then we have few compelling reasons to conserve the environment. This is because the present generation, will not be harmed very much if we continue to destroy the environment. So, if we only consider the interests of the present generation in our moral calculations, we will fail our posterity. In order to advocate environmental protection, we must have moral reasons to look out for future individuals. It is imperative for environmental reasons that we find a way to justify our moral obligations to future generations. The question remains is whether or not we have any obligations to future, and what these obligations are. This may seem like a simple question with a clear answer. Yes, we do have obligations to future generations, including an obligation to leave behind a clean environment. This obligation is expressed in the concept of sustainable development which refers to the development that meets the need of present without compromising the need and interest of future generations.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴The Brundtland Commission Report, World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.8.

In modern times human beings are alienated from nature and one of the causes behind this alienation is the development of science and technology. Today science is necessary in our life and without science we are immobile. But due to the scientific development nature is also degraded. The real fact is that nature was there before human beings arrival and it will remain so even after humans' extinction. So, Environmental ethics suggests that if we want to live in earth, we must take care of nature. Question may be raised that, if science is responsible for natural diseases, then does it mean to say that science has no value in our life? One may say that without science modern life cannot survive. At the same time, it is also true to say that science undoubtedly brings environmental degradation, for which we witness an apparent dilemma. To overcome it a proposal has been given by environmental philosophers stating that we do require a concept of sustainable development which is an outcome of science and ethics. It is claimed that science without ethics has no use, for future generation. Science or scientific development must be encoded with a healthy ethical code of conduct so that we can maintain sustainable development without degrading our mother Earth.

The notion of sustainable development is one of the most influential outcomes of interaction between environmental ethics and development ethics. It has important implications for social justice, especially with respect for future generations. Its core idea is that of a kind of development 'which so treats the natural environment that the process of development, or at least the products or benefits of that process, can continue into the future in a sustainable way, both for ourselves and our children, and for future generations'. It teaches us to be healthy and reciprocal to the global environment and development.

The concept of "sustainable development" as we have described in Chapter-3 (three) is an attempt to balance two moral demands. The first is for "development," including economic development or economic growth. The second is for "sustainability," for ensuring that we do not mortgage the future for the sake of gains in the present. It arises from the interests of people in future generations, who will need, if they need a reasonable quality of life, non-renewable resources, access to unspoiled wilderness, and a healthy biosphere. Though both can conflict, the two moral demands behind the concept of sustainable development have a parallel basis. The needs of other place moral demands on us. Say for example, if someone is ill or in pain, or, more

generally, has a low quality of life, and we are able to improve their quality of life and we have a moral duty to do so. We need to think that we have a duty to produce good outcome for human society, or to prevent bad outcome. Henry Sidgwick held it as a moral axiom and says that “the mere difference of priority or posteriority in time is not a reasonable ground for having more regard to the consciousness of one moment than to that of another.”¹⁶⁵ Jeremy Bentham opines that, “each is to count for one and no one for more than one ,”¹⁶⁶ in the sense that a unit gain in quality of life for one person counts no more nor less than a unit gain for another. Our moral goal should always produce the greatest total of such gains, no matter by whom they are enjoyed.

Thus, a satisfying version of sustainable development needs an ethics of limits. It holds that no one has any claim to more than a reasonable supply of resources, at least so long as the more pressing demands of others are not satisfied. This ethics of limits is very much essential to Brundtland Commission’s belief that the basic needs of the present and the future generations in its ideal are compatible. We can satisfy the needs of both people in the developing countries and of future generations, once we realize that people in develop countries or at least the wealthiest among them have no legitimate claim to share of their resources that is not needed for a reasonable life.

It can be said that one should investigate the role of human beings as such in environmental ethics and in preservation of the environment, and how scientist and non-scientist alike can contribute towards ameliorating the environment for the present and future generations. What we need is not so much a new environmental ethic but a new environmental ethos i.e. an outlook, which fully appreciative of the natural world as, is consistent with our need to survive in it and which registers horror at any activity that causes the needless or unnecessary destruction of non-human nature.

When we have a fruit from the tree for food, or a branch from the tree to make fire, we need to be responsible and dutiful towards the tree, even if we don’t verbalize and articulate it. If we have that sense of gratefulness from the core of our heart, then it is called Spirituality. If we have that sense because of our attitude of reverence, then we will never be able to pollute or destroy or deface nature. The modern industrialized society doesn’t have that sense of reverence for nature, and it results in the pollution and degradation of the Earth. The crisis of environment comes out of a utilitarian,

¹⁶⁵ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, London: Macmillan, 1907, p.381.

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/bentham/>

materialistic, non-sacred, non-spiritual world-view. As a consequence we have taken from nature without knowing its limits. When we have a sense of reverence, we shall take from nature only what meets our vital needs. And when we take something, we show gratitude like we take milk from the mother's breast; the mother is very happy to give her milk in the same way as the Earth is happy to give its fruits as long as we take only what we need. When the baby is full, he or she stops sucking and doesn't go on sucking. Unfortunately, we humans go on sucking the Earth. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There is enough for everybody's need in this world, but not enough for anybody's greed." Therefore, need and greed has to be differentiated. How can we differentiate them? Government cannot legislate for it. A dictator cannot force it. It has to emerge out of our own individual heart, from a sense of beauty, a sense of the divine. When we have that, then we take things from the Earth and always replenish her for what we have taken.¹⁶⁷

From Indian philosophical tradition what we have seen in Chapter-4 (four) that every citizen was required to plant five trees and see them to maturity; take care of them, nurture them, look after them, and worship them. That was the *pañcavati* of India. Those five trees were seen as a contribution every citizen was making as an act of replenishment, an act of *yajña*. They were for the children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, and for posterity. The Earth provides enough essence for the humans, animals and birds to eat, but also enough to return to the Earth; the peels, the straw, the pips, the skin, the fruits and vegetables have plenty of good for us to eat and plenty to put back into the compost which goes back into the earth. Thus, the Earth is replenished. A tree stands out naked, there all winter without leaves; the tree is now replenishing the Earth with its leaves; all the leaves have gone back into the Earth; they are rotting, making the soil fertile, so that the roots are nourished which in turn gives life to the leaves and to the fruits, a beautiful cycle of replenishment. Nature is our great teacher, and we must learn how to replenish and not to waste. There is no greater teacher than nature. Even the Buddha and the Christ and Tagore learned wisdom from nature¹⁶⁸.

It can be said that environment is a great value to human beings as well as to other living organisms. A proper environment is essential to sustain life and regain all

¹⁶⁷ Kumar, Satish. Five Elements of Ecology in *Man in Nature* Vol. 5, edit. Baisyanath Saraswati, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995. P.166.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the renewable sources such as food, fires, wood, fossil fuel, water and land. Therefore, it is the prime duty of every citizen of the world to think and engage in environmental friendly activities.

The following are the most important steps to be undertaken for a proper environmental awareness:

- ❖ Environmental education is required to improve understanding among general public about the environment.
- ❖ The awareness must be given to understand the relationship between human and their environment. Understanding of basic ecological concept and current environmental issues will help in solving environmental problems.
- ❖ Make the people understand environmental protection and resource conservation are the main advantages to lead a better life.

Environmental Philosophers feel that environmental degradation cannot be blocked by scientific resolution of environment. Deteriorated nature cannot be revived in its natural or original form. Artificial resolution what science actually does cannot rebuild nature when badly damaged. Environmental ethics therefore, tries to change human's attitude towards nature. Science without morality, without metaphysics causes serious damage of natural environment. Western traditions and communities now feel, though it is too late, that excessive torture on nature is detrimental and they are now very much eco-sensitive at least theoretically. But there is a serious problem in the third-world countries, particularly, in the developing and under-developed countries. Because they do require scientific development in order to mitigate the cry of needy people whose per capita income is excessively low. As the third world countries being developing or under-developing are the followers of the west, people of the third world countries adopt modern scientific technologies which alienates them from nature. Thus, environmental degradation stands as a global phenomenon which must be resisted globally for maintaining peace and harmony within the globe. Without proper environment no human peace as such can be sustained.

Gradually a world of civilization is being born, and it has to be born if mankind is to survive in this nuclear age. Although science and technology have given us tremendous power but at the same time we never forget that the worship of power of science is not enough, we also need to recapture wisdom, compassion and understanding. We can now survive only if we have an alternative ideology to the one

which has led mankind to this position and we boldly stand at in harmony with that ideology. The rich tradition of Indian Philosophy provides such an alternative worldview. If at this late hour we can imbibe some of its universal truths, we can perhaps reverse the mad rush towards destruction and begin with a fresh mind in relation to our mother earth. These values provide the basic framework to tackle the problems of current challenges and in the context of globalization. We can develop an ecological paradigm and strategy which is based on the concept of *Vasudheiva Kutumbakam* to formulate a global environmental ethics and sustainable development for future generation.

Environmental ethics can solve environmental problems and problems for future generations and save the world, if we recognise the essential normative nature of environmental problems and their possible solutions. We need to contribute to our comprehensive and effective response to the urgent environmental problems. Humanity will not be able to save the world from environmental catastrophe unless and until the normative nature of environmental problems is recognised. Environmental problems are essentially and irreducibly normative in nature because for the following reasons.

1. Environmental problems are the result of human behaviour, and human behaviour is the result of human values which is usually socially inculcated.
2. Our detrimental behaviour to the natural environment in modern industrial society is the result of the specific modern values, such as, limitless economic growth and competitive materialism, so that changes in these values will be necessary if we are to resolve our environmental problems.
3. Science alone will not be sufficient to solve environmental problems since they involve more than empirical causation and consequences, the foci of science.
4. Since technology applies scientific knowledge without examining or arguing about existing social values, the community's public political process of discussion, debate and decision-making among value alternatives will be necessary to lead to the solution of environmental problems according to such political values as: justice, fairness, equality and democracy.
5. Political theorists who study political values have an important role to play in environmental studies despite the latter are domination by environmental scientists producing the misleading impression that our environmental problems are purely empirical. The other elements of normative discourse environmental

ethics, aesthetics and theology will also be important to the value changes needed to the mitigation, or amelioration of our environmental problems, let alone, their solution.

6. Finally, environmental problems, producing the widely admitted global environmental crisis, will be the catalyst for the transformation of the current hegemonic modern social values, practices and institutions, making normative discourse with its critical and prescriptive functions vitally important to both environmental studies and the aim of saving the world.

We must respond to people's needs however those needs were created, or promote good and prevent evil whenever we can do so effectively. We must think that we are not bound to solve all the problems of the world; our duty is only avoid creating problem. We must not be responsible for evil of others: we must not harm others, and if we have harmed them then we must repair the damage. This is called "Ethics of Responsibility."